

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: Cyber Deviance in Adolescents



Cyber deviance is a modern concept brought to the fore by the rise of the internet. Hence, little historical research to deduce its causation exists. But this is changing. The Cyber Security Cooperative Research Centre (CSCRC), together with researchers from the University of Adelaide, are researching ways to develop more effective interventions, particularly for young people.

A South Australian secondary school was the subject of a cross-sectional study, with a sample of more than 300 students aged 14 to 17. The study assessed factors associated with how adolescents engage in eight forms of cyber activity, including cyber-deviance, cyber-hate, cyber-violence, digital piracy, unauthorised access (hacking), cyber-bullying and abuse, online fraud, sexting, and image-based sexual abuse.

The research found a correlation between behavioural function and cyber-deviance. For example, hyperactivity and inattention were found to be associated with an increased likelihood of participants engaging in hostile online conduct. Emotional problems were also associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in cyber-bullying and sexting, as well as passive forms of cyber-hate and cyber violence. Additionally, peer problems were associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in cyber bullying and fraud.

Furthermore, parenting practices were linked to an increased likelihood of adolescent engagement in some forms of cyber deviance. In particular, higher levels of parental autonomy were associated with an increased likelihood of engagement in sexting but a decrease in cyber-bullying and online fraud. Similarly, strict parental discipline was associated with an increased likelihood of engagement in hacking and passive forms of cyber-hate. With the role of parenting complicit in the behavioural effects of adolescent cyber-deviance - both positively and negatively - it is important intervention programs seek to include parents in the design of programs.

For more information, contact the CSCRC.