Cyberbullying Prevention and Intervention

Key Findings from the Literature Review on the Role of the Family

Introduction

Drawing on the findings of the literature review, this placemat considers the **impact** (both positive and negative) that **families can have on cyberbullying in children and youth**. It explores current research on the potential **influence of families on acts of cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**, and ends with **key takeaways** from the literature about **protecting children and youth from online harm**.

Key concepts

Cyberbullying

Any **behaviour** performed through **electronic or digital media** by individuals or groups that repeatedly **communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort** to others.

Cyberperpetration

The use of **information and communication technology**, such as instant messaging, e-mail, text messaging, blogs, and social media, by children and youth in the **victimization** or **bullying** of their peers.

Cybervictimization

Intentional and **repeated** harm inflicted through the **use of technology**; individuals who are at the receiving end of cyberbullying behaviors are considered **cyber victims**.

Instructive mediation

Discussing online content and strategies/management with children and youth; **co-developing** and setting rules about usage; **setting expectations** and **providing guidance** on appropriate online behaviours.

Restrictive mediation

Preventing children and youth from accessing certain online content, i.e. through restrictions, time limits, website blocking, removal of Internet privileges, etc.

Protective factors

Protective factors are the **positive influences** that may **decrease the incidence of cyberbullying experience or behaviours**. These factors improve the lives of children and youth and make them more resilient to risk factors.

Risk factors

Risk factors are the **negative influences** that may **increase the incidence of cyberbullying experiences or behaviours**.

Families can mitigate the risk of cyberbullying in children and youth

According to the literature, **families** can play a role in **increasing or decreasing the incidence of cyberbullying** in children and youth.

Studies suggest that parental neglect and rejection and poor/avoidant communication with families **increase the incidence of cybervictimization**. Meanwhile, parental ignorance and lack of awareness of online behaviours **increase the incidence of cyberperpetration**.

By contrast, positive, expressive communication **decrease the incidence of cybervictimization while restrictive mediation decrease the incidence of cyberperpetration**.

Factors that may <u>increase</u> the incidence of cybervictimization and cyberperpetration

Cybervictimization-specific
- Neglect
- Parental rejection
- Poor/avoidance communication with caregivers

Common to both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration
- Inconsistent or lack of parental mediation
- Low-income families
- Living in single-parent families or stepfamilies
- Family violence and conflict
- Low social support
- Poor parental attachment
- Loneliness with caregivers
- Authoritarian parenting styles
- Laissez-faire parenting styles

Cyberperpetration-specific
- Parental ignorance/lack of awareness

Factors that may <u>decrease</u> the incidence of cybervictimization and cyberperpetration

Cybervictimization-specific
- Positive, expressive communication

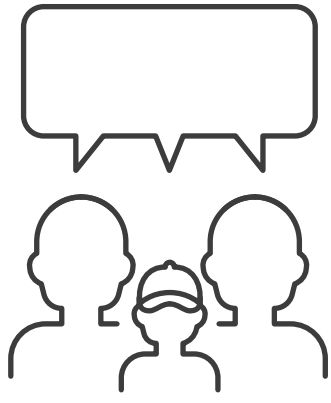**Common to both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**
- Parental awareness of online behaviours
- Perception of support from families and broader social structures (i.e., peers, schools)
- Instructive mediation
- Positive parental attachments
- Authoritative parenting styles

Cyberperpetration-specific
- Restrictive mediation

Families have a role to play in cyberbullying prevention

The literature also tells us that **family traits and interactions** can **increase** or **decrease** the incidence of cyberbullying in children and youth. For example:

Caregiver-child relationships and family dynamics

Many family factors **increase the incidence of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**, including family violence, dysfunction, and conflict; neglect; poor parental management; loneliness with family; and family rejection.

By contrast, there are many factors which **decrease the incidence of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**, including secure bonding; family attachment; family cohesion; and positive communication and expressiveness.

Parental mediation

Instructive mediation **decreases the incidence of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**. By contrast, restrictive mediation **decreases the incidence of cyberperpetration**. The literature revealed **mixed findings** about the effect of restrictive mediation on cybervictimization.

Family demographics

The literature suggests that there may be a relationship between **family demographics** and the **prevalence of cybervictimization**. Specifically, certain demographic characteristics such as stepfamilies, single-parent families, divorced families, and low-income families may **increase the incidence of cybervictimization**.

Broader social structures

The literature identified a **relationship between children and youth's broader social structures** and the **prevalence of cyberbullying**. Poor school involvement and negative relationships with teachers may **increase the incidence of cybervictimization**. Meanwhile, attachments to peers engaging in poor online behaviours and poor peer relationships **increase incidences of cyberperpetration**.

By contrast, strong school support and learning coping mechanisms from peers **decreases the incidence of cybervictimization**. Positive and supportive peer attachments also **decreases the incidence of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**.

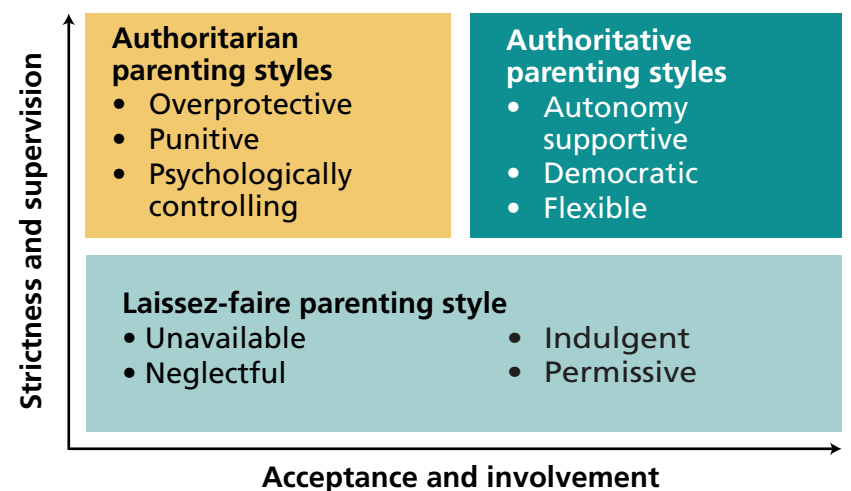## Cyberbullying awareness, knowledge, and understanding

Evidence suggests that **families who are aware of cyberbullying behaviours are more likely to provide timely interventions** and support children and youth in developing **proactive coping and help-seeking behaviours**.

Parenting styles

Parenting styles can **increase or decrease the incidence of cybervictimization and cyberperpetration**. There are **three main types of parenting styles** that range in levels of strictness/supervision and acceptance/involvement.

Authoritarian and **laissez-faire** parenting styles **increase the incidence** of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration.

Authoritative parenting styles **decrease the incidence** of both cybervictimization and cyberperpetration.

Strictness and supervision (y-axis) / **Acceptance and involvement** (x-axis)

Authoritarian parenting styles
- Overprotective
- Punitive
- Psychologically controlling

Authoritative parenting styles
- Autonomy supportive
- Democratic
- Flexible

Laissez-faire parenting style
- Unavailable
- Neglectful
- Indulgent
- Permissive

Key takeaways

Families and **caring adults** can take the following steps to **reduce the likelihood** of children and youth experiencing **online harm**:

Promote a **family dynamic** that facilitates:
- Secure **bonding,**
- Family **attachment,**
- Family **cohesion,** and
- Positive **communication** and expressiveness

Increase **parental awareness and mediation** of online behaviours

Encourage **positive and supportive peer attachments** for children and youth

Adopt an **authoritative parenting style**

Enroll children and youth in **supportive schooling environments**