

Parental psychological control and cyberbullying tendency in adolescents from the perpetrator side

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the contributions of parents' behavior to adolescent cyberbullying. It tests the role of parental psychological control and adolescent cyberbullying behaviour using a quantitative design with the selection of samples in the form of accidental sampling. Furthermore, the participants comprised 383 adolescents aged 13-17 years who live with both parents and have committed cyberbullying. The respondents filled out the questionnaires containing the Psychological Control – Disrespect Scale (PCDS) to measure the parent's psychological control and the Cyber-Aggression Scale (CYB-AGS). A multiple regression analysis showed that the control predicts adolescent cyberbullying behavior ($R^2 = 0,053$, $F = 10.619$, $p = 0.000$), and as a predictor variable, it contributes 5.3% to cyberbullying behavior. According to the model, the father's psychological control predicts adolescents' cyberbullying behavior. This research reveals the significance of parental psychological control in adolescent cyberbullying behaviour.

Keywords

adolescents, cyberbullying, father, mother, parental psychological control

Introduction

Due to the negative impact on the development of children and teenagers, cyberbullying research has been examined in scientific literatures. Furthermore, cyberbullying experienced by children and adolescents is also associated with negative consequences similar to traditional bullyings, such as lowering academic achievement, causing anxiety, and promoting suicide in victims (Foody *et al.*, 2015). It is even worse than traditional bullying because the perpetrator acts anonymously and can connect with the individual who will be affected (Hutson *et al.*, 2018). In the traditional model, bullying can occur in the form of physical and verbal attacks involving an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim, characterized by repeated intentions and acts of hurting the victim (Casas *et al.*, 2013).

As the digital world evolves, bullying is transferred to cyberspace utilizing digital technologies (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Cyberbullying uses digital technology or the internet to harm, threaten, and intimidate others (Ortega *et al.*, 2012). It is a deliberate and repeated aggressive act in which a person or group of people uses electronic devices, such as the internet and smartphones, to bully individuals who cannot defend themselves (Buelga *et al.*, 2019). In addition, it has a negative impact on various aspects of adolescents, such as personal privacy, which is open to the public to cause psychological disorders (Hutson *et al.*, 2018).

One-third of internet users are children and adolescents under the age of 18 years (Keeley & Little, 2017). As a population with significant users, adolescents are a vulnerable population who can become perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying. Various media reported that adolescents bully and hurt their peers using digital technology, and some are victims of bullying in cyberspace. A 2005 survey in the United

Kingdom showed that nearly 20% of 770 respondents aged 11 to 19 reported receiving threats through e-mail, internet, or chatroom media. Another form of bullying on social media is harassment (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). In recent years, other forms have emerged, such as cyberstalking and violence in online dating (Pereira & Matos, 2016; Reed *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, the Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII) and Polling Indonesia reported that the number of internet users had experienced bullying on social media was 49% (Pratomo, 2019). Various empirical data showed that cyberbullying occurs in various forms and is an increasingly common problem. It can occur directly and indirectly (Langos, 2012). Direct cyberbullying is conducted by controlling the victim's digital communication platform, while indirect is carried out by disturbing the victim through public forums on virtual media. The perpetrators seek pleasure by treating others badly and are reported as individuals who good at using electronic media and digital technology to harass victims. The perpetrators' intention depends on the context of the behavior, words, images, or audio used.

Adolescents' involvement as perpetrators can be caused by their distinctive characteristics. The adolescence period is synonymous with risky behavior, and individuals within the age bracket do not fully understand the consequences of their behavior (Ang, 2015). This period is characterized by impulsivity, sensation seeking, and stressful challenge. The traits promote adolescents to engage in dangerous behavior (Reyna & Farley, 2006), including bullying in cyberspace.

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Research on cyberbullying tries to find profiles of individuals who tend to bully in cyberspace (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008). A person's internal motivation can include the desire to feel better, recognition, self-protection (Nettley, 2014), the desire for revenge, jealousy, and trying new personas (Varjas et al., 2010). However, situational factors, such as internet use frequency and intensity, play a role. The use of the internet by adolescents increases the tendency to become cyberbullying perpetrators (Mishna et al.; Setiawan et al., 2020). The anonymity of individual identity in cyberspace is also a factor that makes it easier to carry out bullying, specifically when no complaints or feedback is given (Heirman & Walrave, 2012).

However, it should be noted that ecological factors such as family and parents also strongly influence adolescent development. Research on the effect of family and parental variables on cyberbullying perpetrators has increased in recent years, specifically related to the issue of family such as parent-child relations (López-Castro & Priegue, 2019). For example, Livazović & Ham (2019) stated that low-quality family relationships would promote someone's involvement in cyberbullying. Li et al. (2013) reported that psychological control provided by parents to children is positively related to problematic internet use. According to Katz et al. (2019), individuals acting as perpetrators often accept their parents' overly controlling parenting style. This controlling behavior causes children to practice social aggression against the environment as a form of rebellion, making them feel powerful. Research in Taiwan by Hsieh (2020) stated that the psychological control exercised by parents promotes children to take revenge through bullying others in cyberspace. This is in line with Geng et al. (2020), which stated that parental psychological control is related to cyberbullying by adolescents in China.

Based on various previous research, the psychological control obtained by adolescents from their parents promotes them to treat others similarly even in different behavioral settings, such as controlling one's psychological condition through bullying. Parent psychological control is conducted by parents on children. This is when parents provide control by forcing, blaming, and controlling children's expressions, affecting psychological and emotional development (Barber, 1996). In collectivist cultures, such as in China, parents often practice psychological control on their children because they believe the saying, "My child is my report card" (Geng et al., 2020). Therefore, the psychological control practice may be carried out unconsciously to control children's behavior in accordance with the demands of the environment.

Building warm and pleasant interpersonal relationships with peers, the opposite gender, parents, and siblings is an important developmental task in adolescents. Overly controlling treatment from parents causes them to feel annoyed or angry. This anger arises from parents who still consider adolescents as "little children" or are treated unfairly (Santrock, 2011). Therefore, adolescents at the age of 15-17 years begin to negotiate with their parents about independence. They protest when parents interfere or hinder their desire to be independent (Teipel, 2014). Previous research stated that strong parental control over adolescents could risk externalizing behavior problems. Children who perceive that they receive higher psychological control will

tend to have emotional problems and externalizing behaviors such as aggression, hostility, and disobedience (León-Del-Barco et al., 2019).

Research on parental psychological control and cyberbullying behavior has been conducted in China (Geng et al., 2020) and Taiwan (Hsieh, 2020) but not in Indonesia. According to Geng et al. (2020), research on the effect of parental psychological control on cyberbullying behavior should also be reviewed in populations with different cultural backgrounds. Based on empirical results from previous research and theoretical research regarding the relationship between parental psychological control and cyberbullying, this research investigates the contribution of both actions. It examines the effect of parental psychological control on fathers and mothers. The hypothesis formulated is that parents' psychological control contributes to adolescent cyberbullying behavior.

Method

Participants

This research involves 383 adolescents aged 13-17 years in Indonesia ($M = 15.74$ years, $SD = 1.244$) consisting of 84 males (21.9%) and 299 females (78.1%). Accidental sampling was used, and the criteria for the participants are (1) adolescents aged 13-17 years, (2) have conducted cyberbullying on social media, determined from the contents of the behavior screening questionnaire, as well as (3) live with their father and mother.

Instrument

Parental psychological control of father and mother is measured using the Psychological Control – Disrespect Scale (PCDS) developed by Barber et al. (2012) and translated into Indonesian. PCDS as a unidimensional psychological construct consists of 8 items with a reliability value of $\alpha = 0.830$ and 0.860 for father and mother, respectively. Respondents are asked to respond to their father and mother's behavior by selecting one of the 3 available responses, including 1 (not like them), 2 (somewhat like them), and 3 (very much like them).

Cyberbullying behavior in adolescents is measured using the Cyber-Aggression Scale (CYB-AGS) developed by Buelga et al. (2020) and translated into Indonesian. This measuring tool has 2 aspects: direct (10 items) and indirect cyber-aggression (8 items). After testing the validity of the items, the cyberbullying scale obtains a reliability value of $\alpha = 0.822$. Respondents are asked to respond to cyberbullying behavior from 5 available answer options ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Data Analysis

Two assumption tests are performed on the data before the multiple regression analysis. First, the normality test is carried out through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, with a p -value = 0.000. Hence it can be concluded that the data is not normally distributed, and a linearity test is conducted to analyze the linear relationship between the father and mother's psychological control with cyberbullying. Based on the linearity test, parents' psychological control has a linear

relationship with cyberbullying ($p = 0.00$). All data analysis uses the SPSS 21 statistical program for windows.

Result

Based on the cross-tabulation analysis results, 42.3%, 37.9%, 10.2%, and 9.7% of respondents have fathers with low, moderate, high, and very high psychological control, respectively. The level of the mother's psychological control is low (39.7%), moderate (42%), high (10.4%), and very high (7.8%). Therefore, it can be concluded that most adolescents have parents with moderate to high levels of psychological control. The level of cyberbullying behavior is partly in the low category (51.7%), and some others are in the moderate (28.2%), high (11.2%) and very high (8.9%) categories (Table 1).

The multiple regression analysis results show the coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.053$, which means that the parent's psychological control effectively contributes 5.3% to cyberbullying behavior. In comparison, other variables contribute to the remaining 94.7%, and Table 2 shows the value of $F = 10,619$ and $p = 0.000$. Therefore, parents' psychological control has a significant effect on cyberbullying behavior (Table 2)

The results showed that fathers contribute more to the role of parental psychological control on cyberbullying behavior by adolescents. Cyberbullying behavior is significantly influenced by the father's psychological control ($\beta = 0.156$, $t = 2.524$, $\rho = 0.012$) when the parents' psychological control is present simultaneously in adolescents. However, it does not mean that the mother's psychological control does not affect cyberbullying behavior. Psychological control has a role in adolescents' cyberbullying behavior, but this role does not significantly predict the act ($\beta = 0.100$, $t = 1.608$, $\rho = 0.109$) (Table 3). Based on the statistical calculation results, the regression model obtained from the three variables is $Y = 18.442 + 0.264X_1 + 0.152X_2$.

Based on the cross-tabulation analysis results, the gender of the respondents is associated with the level of cyberbullying behavior ($p = 0.006$). Female adolescents more dominantly show low (33.9%) to moderate (31.9%) levels, while most males show moderate (11%), high (2.1%), and very high (3.1%) levels.

Discussion

This research aims to determine the contribution of parental psychological control to cyberbullying behavior by adolescents. In line with the hypothesis, the results showed that the control contributes to cyberbullying acts carried out by adolescents. Most participants have direct and indirect cyber-aggression levels in the low category. This is also in line with the parents' low psychological control level. Furthermore, the results showed positive relationships between parental psychological control and cyberbullying behavior. This means that the level of psychological control carried out by parents is directly related to the level of cyberbullying conducted by adolescents. These results are consistent with previous research in China (Geng *et al.*, 2020) and Taiwan (Hsieh, 2020), which stated that cyberbullying was influenced by the level of psychological control provided by parents.

Cyberbullying by adolescents is more contributed by fathers. Partially, when the mother's psychological control level is controlled, the father's control plays a more important role in predicting cyberbullying behavior. However, when the father's psychological control level is controlled, the mother's control has no effect. This means that even without the mother's control, adolescents with high psychological control from their father will tend to engage in cyberbullying. Meanwhile, without the father's psychological control, the mother's control does not play a significant role. In other words, the psychological control given by the father to children has a more significant effect in predicting the tendency of adolescents to become cyberbullying perpetrators. It does not mean that the mother's control does not affect cyberbullying behavior. The control still has a role, but not as significant as the father.

This finding indicates that parents who do not value adolescents as individuals are more likely to promote children to engage in cyberbullying. Adolescents who often receive treatment of ridicule, neglect, invasion of privacy, and compared to other people, will be easier to bully than those who do not receive such treatment. Limitations cause this in expressing emotions, hence, they will vent it by performing cyberbullying. Cyberbullying perpetrators can be motivated by negative emotions such as anger (Walrave *et al.*, 2016). This research can be used as a negative externalization coping strategy in line with why participants perform cyberbullying activities. Most participants become perpetrators because they feel angry or upset with the person concerned. Furthermore, the majority have accounts with pseudonyms for reasons of identity confidentiality or anonymity. A positive attitude toward cyberbullying can be developed because of the anonymous nature (Barlett *et al.*, 2016).

Children can receive parental psychological control through intrusive or disruptive parenting because they are too protective, possessive, and very directing (Schaefer, 1965). Parents who exercise psychological control are characterized by disrespect for individuality by not respecting children as individuals in the form of mocking, violating their privacy, comparing with others, ignoring, and humiliating them in public (Barber *et al.*, 2012). The behavior raised towards these children makes them adopt the same relationship pattern when interacting with their peers. They use aggressive strategies when interacting with others (Nelson & Crick, 2002). Therefore, this act of aggression is easily channeled in the online medium when interacting with others to express emotional conditions limited by various forms of bullying in cyberspace.

Parents often carry out psychological control to regulate their children's behavior, hence, it can fulfill the standards or expectations of their children. However, various research stated that parental supervision and monitoring that is too restrictive, regulating, and controlling psychologically predicts cyberbullying behavior (Nocentini *et al.*, 2019). One of the aspects of adolescents that is limited when they obtain excessive psychological control from their parents is the sense of autonomy. Meanwhile, a person's psychological need for autonomy is needed to develop healthily (Ryan, 1995), including in adolescents, which is reflected in the various positive behaviors.

Table 1. Levels of Parental Psychological Control and Cyberbullying Behavior Based on Group Norms

Variable	Category <i>n</i> (%)				
	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Father's Psychological Control	0 (0)	162 (42.3)	145 (37.9)	39 (10.2)	37 (9.7)
Mother's Psychological Control	0 (0)	152 (39.7)	161 (42)	40 (10.4)	30 (7.8)
Cyberbullying behavior	0 (0)	198 (51.7)	108 (28.2)	43 (11.2)	32 (8.9)

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Regression Test Results

Model	ΣY^2	<i>df</i>	M^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	678.208	2	339.104	10.619	0.000
Residue	12134.31	380	31.932		
Total	12812.52	382			

Note: $R=0.230$; $R^2 = 0.053$; Adjusted *R* Square = 0.048, Std. Error of Estimate = 5.651

Restricted autonomy creates frustration in adolescents, strongly associated with cyberbullying. Various research stated that autonomy frustration is related to anti-social behavior, for example, someone who feels his autonomy is restrained often acts aggressively, is filled with anger, tries to dominate others, and develops prejudice (Fousiani et al., 2016). This behavior is identical to bullying in cyberspace and can be in the form of direct and indirect behavior. Buelga et al. (2020) stated that cyberbullying includes acts of aggression in verbal attacks such as insulting others on social media networks or attacks such as isolating people. These verbal and social attacks are included in direct cyber-aggression. Meanwhile, indirect cyber-aggression aims to harm people, such as creating a fake account on behalf of the victim or hacking the account.

Furthermore, when children perceive parents as supportive figures while giving space to develop their autonomy, they will feel more self-determined, have positive relationships with others, have better psychological well-being, and produce effective behavior (Inguglia et al., 2015). Children's engagement in bullying is less likely when their parents' psychological control is warmer and filled with positive emotional reactivity (Bowes et al., 2009).

This research also finds the contribution of the father's psychological control, which is more dominant in cyberbullying. This is consistent with other research that the father's control is more associated with aggression-related actions (Kawabata et al., 2011). The control is more related to the children's tendency to engage in aggression that is not visible, such as other forms of aggressiveness in relational relationships. Meanwhile, the mother's psychological control is more related to aggression that looks like physical bullying (Robinson & Roper, 2000). The practice can cause children to be limited in expressing and managing negative emotions, becoming irritated and imitating the behavior. Relational aggression includes a variety of hurtful behaviors such as spreading rumors or gossip or excluding others from the group of friends (Kawabata et al., 2011), such as behaviors seen in bullying.

The specific contribution of the father's psychological control to cyberbullying can also be understood from the perspective of gender. Murray et al. (2014) stated that when one parent provides psychological control, the low quality

of the relationship with adolescents will increase the risk of aggressive actions. Most participants are female adolescents, hence, it can be expected to explain the father's psychological control effect, which is stronger in explaining cyberbullying behavior. Nelson & Crick (2002) found differences in the effects of parents' psychological control on physical and emotional aggression. Daughters are more sensitive to the effect of their father's control, which makes them develop more aggressive relationships. Therefore, the greater the father's psychological dominance, the more likely the daughters will exhibit forceful, aggressive conduct when dealing with other people, such as cyberbullying.

The mother's psychological control role without the father's presence does not significantly predict cyberbullying. Typically, the mother is viewed as a source of nurturing akin to a feeling of love and affection, which can be a protective factor against the propensity for disruptive and violent conduct. Droppleman & Schaefer (1963) stated that the mother is perceived as an individual who provides nurturing behavior in the form of loving and caring. In guiding children, the father is more authoritarian than the caring mother (Syakarofath & Subandi, 2019). Therefore, the mother's psychological control role does not contribute significantly to cyberbullying without the father's presence.

Conclusion

The findings showed parents' important role in understanding adolescents' cyberbullying through psychological control provided. In line with the hypothesis, parental psychological control contributes to adolescent cyberbullying behavior by 5.3%, while other variables contribute the remaining 94.7%. Positive relationships exist between parental psychological control and cyberbullying behavior. Therefore, the level of control carried out by parents is directly proportional to the cyberbullying conducted by adolescents. The contribution of the father's psychological control plays an important role.

Based on the results, various practical suggestions can be given to optimizing their role in preventing the manifestation of cyberbullying. To create a more positive psychological environment, parents provide more autonomy-supportive control to ignore adolescent individuality. In addition, they should apply more appreciation to adolescents' daily actions by reducing the level of protective and possessive behavior, which is too high. This is conducted considering the contribution of parental psychological control, which promotes adolescents to become cyberbullying perpetrators.

Suggestion

This research has several limitations considered for further research. First, respondents are individuals who have committed cyberbullying acts; hence, they cannot be

Table 3. Summary of Multiple Regression T-test Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized		
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta	t	p
(Constant)	18.442	1.063		17.356	0
Father's Psychological Control	0.264	0.104	0.156	2.524	0.012
Mother's Psychological Control	0.152	0.094	0.100	1.608	0.109

Dependent variable: cyberbullying

categorized as active perpetrators. Further research can pay attention to the duration or frequency of cyberbullying to focus on respondents as active perpetrators. Second, there is an effect of gender in explaining the variation in the level of cyberbullying behavior. Further research needs to consider the perpetrators' effect on the parents' psychological control role. Third, considering that other variables determine 94.7% of cyberbullying acts, further research can consider other variables as predictors of the behavior carried out by adolescents. Other variables can also be mediators and moderators, including personal variables such as a sense of autonomy. There are processes used to explain the relationship between parental psychological control and cyberbullying behavior by adolescents.

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