

# The Impact of Maternal Parenting Styles on Adolescent Depression: The Mediating Role of Cyberbullying

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**Abstract:** Globally, the number of individuals with depression reaches a staggering 340 million, with a growth rate of 18.4% in the last decade. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of individuals with severe depression increased by 28%, and there was a surge of 53 million new depression cases worldwide, with 30% of these being adolescents under the age of 18, indicating a trend towards a younger age of depression onset. A report released by the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, showed that in 2020, the prevalence of depression among Chinese adolescents was 24.6%, with severe depression at 7.4%. The main factors influencing adolescent depression include interpersonal relationships, family relationships, and academic pressure. Parental parenting styles have a significant impact on children's mental health, with overly strict demands potentially leading to adolescent depression. With the widespread use of the internet, adolescents have become the primary users, but they also face the threat of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying can easily trigger emotional issues such as depression and anxiety in adolescents, and even lead to self-harm and suicide. Therefore, studying the relationship between cyberbullying and depression is of great significance for promoting the physical and mental health development of adolescents.

**Keywords:** Cyberbullying; Depression; Adolescent; Maternal Parenting Styles.

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## 1. Maternal Parenting Styles

### 1.1. The Concept of a Parenting Style

Parents play an important role in children's growth, and parenting style (Parenting style) directly affects the development of adolescents. There is no uniform definition of parenting style both at home and abroad. Nancy Darling and Laurence Steinberg (1993) believe that parenting is the collection of attitudes, behaviors and non-verbal expressions of parenting, which reflects the stable pattern of interaction between parents and children, and this stability is cross-situational. Zhang Wenxin (1997) also defined the parenting style, believing that the parenting style is a way for parents to raise their children, which is relatively sustainable and stable. In recent years, Chinese scholars Cheng Zaohuo and others have summarized the previous concepts of parenting style, believing that parenting style reflects the overall family atmosphere of parents through their own emotional attitude, behavior, speech and non-verbal expression in the process of raising and educating their children.

Therefore, although there is no accurate definition of parenting style, according to the definition of previous researchers, we can find some common characteristics: parenting style includes two aspects: teaching and raising, which is the embodiment of parental behavior, and is relatively stable for a long time. In this study, we believe that parenting style is a unique and stable parent-child interaction mode formed during the long-term education and parenting process, including behaviors and attitudes towards children, which are closely related to the development of children.

### 1.2. The Concept of a Parenting Style

Regarding the classification of parenting style, foreign scholar Baumrind (1978) proposed authoritative, autocratic and indulgent. Maccoby And Martin et al., according to the requirements of parents for children, namely, control,

supervision, requirements and responsiveness to children, the parental support mode is divided into four types: democracy, autocracy, doting and neglect. This type of division is the most commonly accepted one. Domestic scholars do not make their own division of parenting style, but generally draw lessons from the division method of foreign scholars. The study still follows the most widely accepted division method, that is, examining the parenting style from four dimensions: democracy, autocracy, doting and neglect.

### 1.3. Research on Parenting Style

The research on parenting style started early abroad, and the research on parenting style was deeply explored in psychoanalysis, learning theory and ecosystem theory. Research by foreign scholars Catsambis S and Johari Talib Z M shows that parenting style is related to children's academic performance. Parents' positive parenting style can stimulate their children's creativity, make them feel warm, and think that the environment is safe, so they can be more focused on learning. Some foreign studies have also found that parenting style has an impact on teenagers' living habits. Chen B found that under autocracy, indulgence or neglect, preschool children will be more unhealthy in terms of weight (obesity) and dietary intake. Teenagers who grow up under the authoritative parenting mode tend to have better academic performance. On the contrary, teenagers with autocratic education mode, due to huge external pressure and excessive intervention by their parents, will produce children with inferior academic performance than the authoritative parenting mode. In addition, parents' parenting style will affect the behavior of teenagers when they grow up. Bad parenting style will lead to the road of illegal crime, and they are more likely to be involved in cyberbullying incidents.

Domestic studies have also found that parenting affects their children's academic performance, behavior habits, mental health and creative development. Authoritative parenting style can positively predict their children's

academic performance, and is conducive to the improvement of their children's academic performance. A meta-analysis of 70 studies of 33,089 Chinese students found that children who experienced negative parenting were more aggressive, while children who experienced positive parenting were less aggressive. Negative parenting practices such as despotism are positively associated with suicidal ideation, in a too strict or indifferent family environment, Adolescents may struggle to express their thoughts or face difficulties and tend to choose more aggressive ways to solve problems.

## **2. Depression**

### **2.1. The Concept of a Parenting Style**

Depression is a state of low mood and aversive activity. It can influence a person's thoughts, behavior, motivation, feelings, and sense of happiness (de Zwart et al., 2019). According to the performance and degree of depression, depression can be divided into depression mood, depression syndrome, depression or depressive disorder. In adolescents, studies generally define adolescent depression as depression, focusing on the physical symptoms of adolescents, which is fundamentally different from studies focusing on psychiatry. Depressed is a mood that makes individuals feel sad or unhappy (Graber, 2009). Therefore, the present study focused on depression, which refers to depressed mood.

### **2.2. Factors of Depression**

There are many factors affecting depression. Depression is the result of social factors, psychological factors and physiological factors. The first is the physiological factors, depression may be the result of heredity, parents have depression may be inherited to their children to cause children born depression. Then, there are psychological factors, which are deviations in individual cognition of things. Negative cognition leads to individuals to look at things with the color of depression, arbitrary inference, or even overgeneralization. Finally, social factors. Individuals are in the society and face all kinds of pressure. Each of us has to face the unhappiness from study, work, family and other aspects, these pressure is inevitable, and negative emotional reactions in the face of pressure will lead to depression. For teenagers, pressure from family and school is the main problem they face. Family parenting style is an important factor affecting depression, and the man-machine relationship with teachers and classmates in school is an important factor.

### **2.3. Research on Depression**

Previous studies have shown that depression is the most common problem in teenagers. With the gradual growth of youth, depression becomes more and more prominent, and affects the daily life, perception of events and cognition of things. Early adolescence is the critical period for depression, when the incidence and severity of depression begin to increase significantly (Avenevoli et al., 2015; Hankin, 2015). Depression is not only related to the personal growth of the teenagers, but also related to the harmony of the family relations behind the teenagers, and even related to the development of the society. Natsuaki, A longitudinal study by Biehl & Ge showed that the peak of depression appeared in the middle and late stages of adolescents, and was partially accompanied by depressive symptoms, and even developed depression in severe cases.

Chinese scholars believe that the peak of depression occurs

in the middle and late period, and is partially accompanied by depressive symptoms, and even develops depression in severe cases. A longer duration of depression can cause physical discomfort, such as the most common insomnia and anorexia. In Adolescents, long-term depression can induce psychological and physical discomfort and increase the risk of depression. Chinese scholars Zhang Guangjian and Qian Mingyi (1998) found that depression and adolescent interpersonal relationship were significantly negative correlation, especially parental relationship and peer relationship. Other studies have shown that the family relationships and attachment levels of junior high school students are also important factors affecting their depression (Zhang Yingying, 2010). The variable parenting styles and cyberbullying explored in this study are important components of parental and peer relationships.

## **3. Cyberbullying**

### **3.1. The Concept of Cyberbullying**

Cyberbullying is derived from the term bullying. The term bullying first comes from the Norwegian psychologist Olweus, who defined bullying as the repeated harm of the subject on the victim, which can cause physical or psychological harm to the victim. With the rapid development of modern science and technology and the popularization of intelligent devices, cyberbullying has gradually replaced the traditional bullying as the most common way of bullying among young people.

Cyber bullying, also called cyberbullying, is a new form of injury based on the development of the Internet. It is defined as an aggressive and intentional behavior repeatedly committed by groups or individuals over a period of time.(Smith, 2010) Smith classifies the forms of cyberbullying, with phone calls, email messages, and MMS messages as the main ways. Some researchers believe that cyberbullying is a form of traditional bullying, including within the traditional bullying. Whether cyberbullying or traditional bullying can do great harm to the victims. Although cyberbullying has many things in common with traditional bullying, cyberbullying, compared with traditional bullying, is mainly implemented on the Internet, which causes indirect rather than direct physical harm. Cyberbullying is anonymous for most people, so it is difficult to effectively regulate and curb it.

### **3.2. Characteristics of Cyberbullying**

Although cyberbullying has its similarities with traditional bullying, it also has its unique characteristics.

#### **3.2.1. Anonymity.**

The network can hide the identity and protect the identity of most people. It is difficult to trace the attack on the network. Patchin and Hinduja (2011) argue that the impact of this anonymity is why cyberbullying occurs more frequently and hurts victims more deeply than traditional bullying. Because anonymity can produce a de-personalization effect, the phenomenon of human attacks on others on the Internet often occurs, but it is difficult to stop.

#### **3.2.2. Not Subject to Space-time Constraints.**

Cyberbullying can happen anytime and anywhere, anytime. There is no need to communicate face to face with the bully, and the bullying may be in school or at home, as long as there is the Internet, you can be bullied, and the bully can not get rid of it.

### **3.2.3. Power Inequality.**

In cyberbullying, power imbalance is replaced with proficiency in the Internet and communication devices. Studies have made students who know more skills to use the Internet participate more frequently in abnormal Internet or mobile phone activities. This means that individuals who are more skilled in communication technology have an advantage and are more likely to practice cyberbullying.

### **3.3. Research on Cyberbullying**

Regarding the emergence of cyberbullying, Kowalski et al. propose a general attack model of cyberbullying to explain the mechanism of cyberbullying (Kowalski, 2012). Anderson and Bushman proposed the general attack model in 2002, which is why the general attack model of cyberbullying is derived from it, and one of the aggressive behavior during cyberbullying can also be explained by this theoretical model. Based on this model, many scholars at home and abroad have studied the factors affecting cyberbullying. Festl & Quandt longitudinal research shows that individuals experience cyberbullying with age, and Mitchell studies also showed that more cyberbullying occurs in older adolescents compared to younger ones. In addition, gender is related to cyberbullying, but this study has not been unanimously agreed by studies. Some studies confirmed that the frequency of cyberbullying and gender, with boys showing more cyberbullying (Calvete, 2010) (Sourander, 2010; Chen Honghua, 2013).

Some studies have also shown that cyber bullying is related to gender. Due to the different forms of traditional bullying between men and women, boys use more physical aggression, while girls use more words to attack. Cyberbullying uses more indirect aggression, so girls are more likely to have cyber bullying than boys. Li Yajun (2015) found that boys were more likely to experience cyberbullying than girls. The above study shows that male students have a more positive attitude towards online bullying and may be more involved in online bullying.

## **4. Relationship between Parenting Style, Cyberbullying and Depression**

### **4.1. Relationship between Parenting Style and Depression**

Previous studies have found that there is a relationship between parenting and depression. Family is an important place for individual growth and socialization, and it is the first background environment for children to grow up, and everything in the family may affect children. Irons et al. have found that the effects of negative parenting practices on children may increase their susceptibility to depression. Loghman Ebrahimi et al found that parenting practices predict children's future mental growth, health, and behavioral problems. Domestic researchers have similar findings Liu et al. (2006) in the study of 62 cases of depression disorder, the results found that depression disorder teenagers coping with parents bad parenting style, more father interference, refusal and denial will lead to teenagers take more bad coping style, and warm parenting is conducive to teenagers take more positive coping style. Peng Biao et al. (2021) conducted a survey of middle school students in three middle schools and found that parental refusal of parenting style can directly predict the depression of middle school students, and that parental refusal in childhood is directly and indirectly related to depressive symptoms after growing up.

In conclusion, parenting style can affect depressive mood in adolescents, depression disorder, and psychiatric depression, and negative parenting style can positively predict depression in adolescents. This study mainly focuses on the influence of parenting style on depressive mood in adolescents. Therefore, parents are in the process of raising children with warmth, care and encouragement, which is conducive to prevent the occurrence and development of depression (Ma Heng, 2020).

### **4.2. Relationship between Parenting Style and Cyberbullying**

A number of studies have found that Makir-Botsari and Karagianni (2009) suggest that negative parenting practices like autocracy and neglect make significant positive predictions of cyberbullying; Rosen et al. (2008) showed that authoritative parenting is associated with low level of risky online behavior. Georgiou (2008) showed that parental refusal and overprotection were significantly and positively associated with adolescent cyberbullying. Leung and Lee also believe that cyberbullying is a problem behavior in an online environment that is also closely related to parenting style. Domestic studies also show that parenting style is related to cyberbullying. Hu Yang and Fan Cuiying (2013) indicated that the lack of parental care may also increase the possibility of adolescent cyberbullying; He Dan indicated that parental emotional warmth had significant negative correlation between parents and online bullying; and research results showed that maternal rejection and neglect significantly positively predicted depression and cyberbullying, while parental emotional warmth was negatively associated with depression and cyberbullying.

To sum up, there is a correlation between parenting style and cyberbullying. If parents adopt authoritative parenting style and give more love and warmth to their children, the possibility of cyberbullying will be greatly reduced. Instead, parents may be more likely to control their children or ignore the needs of the family and not love and warm them, who may be more prone to cyberbullying.

### **4.3. The Relationship between Cyberbullying and Depression**

The cognitive theory of depression proposes that negative cognition is one of the important causes of depression. Research on bullying both at home and abroad is quite mature. Zwierzynska et al. (2013) showed that bullying was a significant predictor of depression, and early bullying events were a significant positive predictor of depression in adolescence and even adulthood. In China, there are also a lot about the effects of bullying on depression. The study by Li Hailei and Zhang Wenxin (2012) shows that verbal bullying, relationship bullying and physical bullying can significantly increase the depression level of teenagers. And the more the number of bullying, the more the depression. However, cyberbullying, summarized in this study as a kind of bullying, has also shown that cyberbullying is related with depression. When an individual is subjected to cyberbullying from a group or strangers for a long time, it can lead to negative emotions and bring such emotions to other events, which in turn leads him to lose hope for the future and lead to depression. (David, 2016) Studies found a correlation between online bullying and depression, and the more frequent the bullying, the more likely the occurrence of depression. Schneider (2012) and others found that depression and the

frequency of network bullying, due to the uncertainty of cyberspace and anonymity, lead to network bullying is not limited by time and space, can happen at any time, this makes the bully may not recover from the last bullying behavior, then into another bullying, it will bring serious psychological trauma, eventually cause depression.

In conclusion, the effect of cyberbullying on depression is less studied and not mature enough, and the relationship between cyberbullying and depression in adolescents needs to be further explored.

#### 4.4. Relationship between Parenting Style, Cyberbullying, and Depression

The family is the most important place for individual development. In the process of individual puberty development, the influence of family factors on individuals has been supported by many theoretical and empirical studies. The influence of parenting style on individual physical and mental health cannot be ignored. Studies have found that in poor family relationships and parents, individuals may change from being bullied to bullies (Fanti, Demetriou, Hawa, 2012). On the other hand, whether parents have bullying when dealing with others will have an impact on how individuals deal with cyberbullying (Fang Wei, 2015). Therefore, teenagers undergoing cyberbullying have an intimate relationship with their parenting style.

Negative parenting styles such as autocracy and neglect can lead to more cyberbullying among teenagers. Teenagers who grow up in autocratic education methods are controlled by their parents in their families, are facing great pressure, and lack a window to vent their emotions. The convenience and anonymity of the Internet provide convenience for teenagers to carry out cyberbullying. Adolescence is a special sensitive period, and teenagers are particularly concerned about how others think of them. Individual teenagers who practice cyberbullying are worried about their own bad behavior, and they are afraid that their behavior will be discovered by their parents and be criticized by their parents. Afraid of things exposed, isolated by classmates, labeled by the teacher "poor students", "bad children".

### 5. Conclusion

The negative effects of depression on adolescents have consistently attracted the attention of researchers, and scholars at home and abroad have also done a lot of related research on this, but there are many factors that affect depression in adolescents, and there are still some shortcomings. Teenagers are in a special stage of life development, and the adolescent period is the second critical period of life development. They have undergone great physiological changes, their psychological level is not mature, and their emotional fluctuations are large. A review of the literature found that the research on adolescent depression and its influence mechanism need to be improved. As an important external factor affecting adolescent depression, -- parenting style and cyberbullying are not well developed. About parenting style and depression, the relationship between online bullying and depression, existing research is to explore the relationship between the two, therefore, this study will parenting style, depression together, explore the network bullying mediation between parenting style and depression, enrich the scope of research on depression. Although researchers have conducted many studies on the

relationship and mechanism between parenting style and adolescent cyberbullying, the discussion of the mechanism of action mainly focuses on personal characteristics, and more research is needed. Cyberbullying behavior has an influence on adolescent depression, and it has theoretical and practical significance to explore the relationship between cyberbullying behavior and depression. Domestic research on the relationship between cyberbullying and depression is not paying enough attention. Therefore, further discussion should be done. Reduce cyberbullying, and correspondingly reduce the depression resulting from cyberbullying.

In this study, we investigated the teenagers to understand the relationship between parenting style, cyberbullying and depression, provided some theoretical support.

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