



# The influence of strain factors, social control factors, self-control and computer use on adolescent cyber delinquency: Korean National Panel Study<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

This study examined how cyber delinquency changes over time and we identified how predictors influence these changes. We analyzed Korean Youth Panel data collected by the National Youth Policy Institute over five years for 2844 Korean adolescents living in 7 metropolitan cities and 8 provinces, using hierarchical linear modeling. The results are as follows. Cyber delinquency linearly increased over time. Greater computer use and perceived stress were related to more cyber delinquency, while greater self-control ability and community attachment were associated with less cyber delinquency. More computer use and offline bullying victimization were related to an acceleration of the increase of cyber delinquency over time. While, greater self-control ability was associated with a deceleration of the increase of cyber delinquency as time passed. The strongest predictor was amount of computer use, followed by self-control, and then by offline bullying victimization.

## 1. Introduction

Adolescent delinquency is recognized as a major social issue and is an important influence on the developmental tasks of adolescence such as academic achievement and interpersonal relationships. Delinquency is commonly used to refer to illegal behavior of adolescents (e.g., alcohol consumption) and is used distinctly from crime, which refers to illegal behavior of adults (Lee & Ahn, 2005). Recently, due to the development of the Internet, offline delinquency has extended to cyber delinquency. Cyber delinquency (or crime) can be defined as illegal behaviors such as verbal violence, hacking, and illegal copying of software in online environments (Hong & Kim, 2011).

According to a survey of cyber delinquency conducted by the Korea Internet and Security Agency (KISA) in 2014, 14% of 3000 elementary, middle, and high school students reported experiences of cyber delinquency during the past year. Additionally, 19% of students reported experiences of cyber bullying victimization (KISA, 2014). In addition, studies has shown that cybercrime (or delinquency) is beyond the scope of traditional crime (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013), and cybercrime is likely to develop into an international social issue. Especially, Korean society is a dangerous environment of cyber delinquency (or crime) due to the world's best high-speed internet network.

There have been a number of studies that try to conceptualize online delinquency using self-control (Cheung & Cheung, 2008), general strain theory (Agnew, 1992) as well as social control theory (Holt, Burruss, & Bossler, 2010), which were most often used to explain offline delinquency. Especially, based on general strain theory and social control theory, this study assumes offline bullying victimization as a strain factor, community attachment and supervision as a social bond factor, and will verify the effect on cyber delinquency.

General Strain Theory suggests that major strain factors (loss of positively valued stimuli, negative or noxious stimuli, and failure to achieve goals) can cause negative emotions (e.g., anger, depression), and these in turn may cause delinquency (Agnew, 1992, 2001). Based on this theory, the level of perceived stress (negative stimuli) that youths experience in daily life such as conflicts with parents or peers, and academic stress, may be important in predicting delinquency. Adolescents who perceive high levels of stress due to daily hassles (stressors) are likely to feel negative emotions, specifically anger, and these negative feelings can lead to delinquency (Baron, 2004).

Numerous studies (e.g., Booth & Anthony, 2015) showed that daily stressors including family, peer, and school hassles were related to delinquency. Additionally, several studies have identified the impact of perceived stress on cyber delinquency (Hong & Kim, 2011; Wright, 2014). General strain theory can also be applied to explain the

<sup>☆</sup> This study utilized the data derived from Korean Youth Panel Survey (panel data for 4th grade of elementary school) collected by the National Youth Policy Institute.

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relationship between perceived stress and cyber delinquency. In other words, cyber delinquency can be one of the ways to cope with negative emotions cause by perceived stress (Agnew, 1992, 2001).

Offline bullying victimization can be classified as strain factor in accordance with General Strain Theory. Agnew (1992) suggested three major types of strain and an offline bullying victimization can be included in the type of negatively valued stimuli (Hay, Meldrum, & Mann, 2010). Specifically, Agnew (2001) stressed that this variable is a core strain factor that causes delinquency. Although offline-bullying victimization can be included as a strain factor, most previous studies have not considered an offline bullying victimization as a strain factor, unlike conflicts with parents and peers, academic stress, and appearance stress (Hay et al., 2010).

On the other hand, a few studies have confirmed the effect of offline bullying victimization on cyber delinquency (Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009; Hemphill et al., 2012). Especially, Jang, Song, and Kim (2014) analyzed national panel data and found that the effect of offline bullying victimization on cyberbullying is greater than other independent variables (study strain, parental strain, financial strain, self-control, and delinquent peer). However, the effect of offline-bullying victimization on cyber delinquency was not clear in the longitudinal view.

Social Control Theory hypothesizes that weak bonds with parents or society (e.g., school, church) and low levels of control by parents and society are related to a greater possibility of delinquency or crime (Hirschi, 1969). Numerous studies have found that parental involvement and control decrease adolescent delinquency (Lippold, Coffman, & Greenberg, 2014; Veronneau & Dishion, 2010). Youths with positive attachments to parents tend to cope effectively with daily stressors, and consequently, may commit delinquency less often.

Specifically, parental supervision that educates about the negative outcomes of illegal or criminal behaviors and restrains delinquent behavior in advance may be important to decrease teenager delinquency (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013). Furthermore, national studies imply that parental attachment and supervision can alleviate cyber delinquency (Kong & Lim, 2012; Low & Espelage, 2013). Meanwhile, parental involvement and control may have less impact on cyber delinquency than offline delinquency, because parental involvement and control for children's online activities are more difficult to achieve than for offline activities (Udris, 2016).

Academic achievement can be regarded as a form of commitment that represents one of the social bonding factors that social control theory stresses (Jang, 2011). Adolescents with poor academic achievement are likely to become isolated from school and society, and as a result, are more likely to commit delinquency (Park, Kim, & Tak, 2006). In a cross-lagged longitudinal study with national samples (Lee, 2012), academic achievement negatively affected adolescent delinquency. Recently, Udris (2016) has identified the negative effects of academic achievement on online and offline deviant behavior among Japanese adolescents. However, more studies are needed for young people from various countries.

Although, social control theory emphasizes the role of society as well as parents in controlling delinquency and crime (Wada, Longe, & Danquah, 2012), previous studies have mainly stressed parental affection and control, but there was little consideration of community factors. Community attachment and supervision can be defined as emotional intimacy with one's neighborhood, and community institution's (e.g., police station) involvement with adolescents who commit delinquency. Especially, Korean society has characteristics of collectivistic culture (Tyson & Hubert, 2002), so neighborhood attachment and supervision may be important for the offline and cyber delinquency of adolescents. Recently, the study of Bae (2016) using national panel data found that community involvement and control decrease offline delinquency. A few studies have identified the impact of community factors on cyber delinquency (e.g., Udris, 2017) but other studies have not identified the effect of community factors (e.g., Udris,

2016).

Social Control Theory stresses external control factors, while the general theory of crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) emphasizes internal control. According to the latter theory, adolescents with low self-control tend to be impulsive and shortsighted; hence, they are likely to choose the immediate gains of delinquency even though this leads to poorer long term outcomes (Holt, Bossler, & May, 2012). Numerous studies show that self-control negatively affects offline delinquency (Pratt et al., 2009; Tittle, Ward, & Grasmick, 2003). Several studies with Western samples found that self-control negatively influences cyber delinquency (Holt et al., 2012; Moon, McCluskey, & McCluskey, 2010). However, more studies with Eastern samples are needed to confirm that self-control decreases cyber delinquency.

In addition, opportunity plays an important role in the occurrence of delinquency and crime. That is, despite high motivation for delinquency, the possibility of delinquency is reduced when the opportunity is lacking (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Based on this theory, the more computer (or Internet) use increases, the more the chance of cyber delinquency increases. Relevant studies have verified that more computer use was related to more cyber delinquency (Joo, Lim, Cho, Jung, & Choi, 2013).

Finally, gender is strongly associated with offline delinquency. According to previous research, boys commit delinquency more often than girls (Cheung & Cheung, 2010). Numerous studies have reported that internet use time and problematic internet use are higher in male students than in female students (Ha & Hwang, 2014; Lachmann, Sariyska, Kannen, Cooper, & Montag, 2016), and that more internet use or problematic internet use may cause cyber delinquency (Yeum, Kim, & Lee, 2014).

In summary, researchers need to consider together strain factors, external/internal control factors to better understand cyber delinquency. In addition, most studies have verified the impact of predictors on cyber delinquency with cross-sectional designs. However, these study designs do not clearly verify causal relationships between the independent variables and cyber delinquency.

The research questions for this study are as follows. First, how does cyber delinquency change over time? Second, how do control factors (self-control, parental attachment and supervision, and community attachment and supervision) and strain factors (perceived stress and offline bullying victimization) influence changes in cyber delinquency over time?

## 2. Material and methods

### 2.1. Participants and survey

The data analyzed in this study derived from the Korean Youth Panel Survey (panel data for 4th grade of elementary school) collected by the National Youth Policy Institute (NYPI). This survey was conducted for five years repeatedly with 2844 students living in 7 metropolitan cities (e.g., Seoul, Pusan, Daegu) and 8 provinces, except Jeju Island. Participants were randomly sampled in stratified multi-stage cluster sampling. A trained interviewer visited the school, and the interviewer directly recorded the students' responses to the questionnaire. In the first year, 2844 4th grade students of elementary school (male: 1524, female: 1320) participated in the survey. The success rate of the survey for each year for the initial sample was as follows: the success rate of the first year was 96.4% (2707 persons), that of the second year was 93.9% (2670 persons), that of the third year was 94.0% (2672 persons), that of the fourth year was 88.3% (2511 persons), and that of the fifth year was 86.1% (2448 persons).

### 2.2. Measures

All of the scales used in this study were developed by the NYPI; I

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