

# Parental Supervision, Personality Type and Peer Rejection as Predictors of Online Grooming of Adolescents in Secondary Schools

Emeh A Udoh \*, Franklin C. Ezechi, Abdul-Rahman A. Ajibola, Enwongo A. Okediji and Gabriel Umoh

Department of Psychology University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding Author: Emeh A Udoh, Department of Psychology University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

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## Abstract

In recent times, online grooming has been discovered to be a developing societal problem with adverse impact on adolescents. This study investigated parental supervision, personality type and peer rejection as predictors of online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools. Three hundred and thirty-four students made up of 102 males (30.5%) and 232 females (69.5%) selected from a population of Senior Secondary 2 students in secondary schools in Uyo Metropolis participated in the study. The participants were drawn using purposive sampling technique. The ages of the participants ranged between 12-24 years, and their mean age was 15.07 years. The study was a survey, and the design of the study was a cross sectional design. Parental Awareness and Monitoring of Adolescent Internet Use, The Big Five Inventory, Social Peer Rejection Measure, and the Multidimensional Online Grooming Questionnaire were the instruments used in the study. Data was analyzed using multiple regression. The results of the study revealed that parental supervision independently predicted online grooming of adolescents ( $\beta = -0.17$ ,  $t = 3.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Results also showed that personality type independently predicted online grooming of adolescents ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $t = 2.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In addition, the result of the study revealed that peer rejection independently predicted online grooming of adolescents ( $\beta = 0.26$ ,  $t = 4.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ). It was also found that parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection jointly predicted online grooming of adolescents ( $R^2 = 0.14$ ,  $F(3,446) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In conclusion, parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection are predictors of online grooming of adolescents. It was recommended that behavioral and psycho-educational interventions be established for adolescents with specific risk factors (high openness to experience and high peer rejection).

**Keywords:** parental supervision; personality type; peer rejection; online grooming; adolescents

## Introduction

Advances in cyber technology and the cyberspace has resulted in unusual concerns especially regarding the safety and protection of children. One of such concerns is online grooming. According to Madigan et al. (2018), one in 9 adolescents experiences online grooming. Also, Calvete et al. (2021) revealed that the rate of online sexual solicitation of adolescents by adults ranged between 13.9% to 17.8%, and the percentage of adolescents who interacted with adults sexually in response to online solicitations ranged between 5.4% to 7.6%. In addition, Omiumu (2020) reported that 60-80% of female secondary school students in Oyo State, Nigeria have experienced online sexual grooming. Online grooming has been defined as the process through which an adult manipulates a minor

via the cyberspace for the purpose of abusing the minor sexually (Chiu & Quayle, 2022). Gamez-Guadix et al. (2022) also defined online grooming as the process by which an adult through the internet obtains access to a minor, gains trust of the minor, and engages in some forms of sexual interaction with the minor. According to Ainsaar and Loof (2011), online grooming is characterised by the minor not being of the age of sexual consent in the country in which the abuse is perpetuated, coercion or some form of threat, and the abuse being committed from a position of trust, superiority, or authority. Ecological systems theory by Bronfenbrenner (1979) provides the theoretical basis for this study. The basic assumption of this theory is that the development of a child is impacted by various

influences from his immediate environment including his family, friends, schooling, the wider societal and cultural values, and the interaction of these ecosystems. This theory recognizes the complex layers of influences over time as factors influencing the vulnerability of young persons. By this theory, family factors such as parental supervision, and intrapersonal factors like personality type, and social factors like peer rejection are important determinants. Also, the interactions of the offline and online world influence a young person's behaviour and the degree of risk taking. Online grooming of adolescents is of interest in this study. This is because adolescence is an important stage of development during which adolescents like to explore and also engage in risky behaviours. Also, little or no attention is being paid in Nigeria to the issue of online safety for adolescents. This study was therefore centered on this area, it has assisted students, and members of the public in understanding the factors that are related to online grooming of adolescents in Nigeria, as well as the effects of online grooming. Research has shown that online grooming leads to adverse effects. Online grooming is associated with depressive symptoms, anxiety, suicidal ideation and posttraumatic stress (Donmez & Soylyu, 2020). This background necessitated the investigation of parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection as predictors of online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools. Studies have implicated parental supervision in online grooming. For example, Ali et al. (2021), reported a negative correlation between parental supervision and online grooming. Also, Lahiri et al. (2021) revealed that parental supervision is negatively associated with online grooming. In addition, Ali et al. (2019) found that parental supervision is more effective in protecting adolescents from online grooming. In relation to personality type, Mehari et al. (2021) revealed that adolescents with the trait of openness to experience are more vulnerable to online grooming. Carpenter and Coyne (2011) also found that openness to experience is positively associated with online grooming. Furthermore, Stammers et al. (2015) reported that openness to experience is positively associated with susceptibility to online grooming. Peer rejection has been documented as a factor associated with increased online grooming of adolescents. Fardous and Raza (2022) revealed that peer rejection is positively associated with online grooming. Also, Li et al. (2022) State that adolescents who experience more peer rejection are more likely to be victimized by online groomers. In addition, Hindija and Patching (2017) found that peer rejection is more likely to lead to online grooming. This study therefore investigated parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection as predictors of online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools. It was hypothesized that Parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection will independently and jointly predict online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools.

## Method

### Design

The study is a survey because questionnaires were administered. The design of the study was cross sectional.

### Participants

Participants comprised 334 students made up of 102 males and 232 females selected from a population of Senior Secondary 2 students in Uyo Metropolis. The ages of participants ranged between 12-24 years, and their mean age was 15.07 years.

### Sampling Technique

Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were used in this study. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the secondary

schools, while purposive sampling method was used to select the actual participants for the study. Only SS2 students participated in the study.

### Settings

Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom state is located in the South-South region of Nigeria. It lies between latitudes 4°58'N and 5°04'N and longitudes 7°51'E and 8 01'E. Uyo is bounded in the North by Ikono, Itu and Ibiono Ibom local government areas. It is bounded in the East by Uruan local government area, in the West by Abak local government area, and in the South by Ibesikpo Asutan and Nsit Ibom local government areas (Ekpeyong et al., 2019). Uyo capital city covers an area of about 214.31 square kilometres, and Ibibio is the indigenous language of the Uyo people. Uyo is the headquarters of Akwa Ibom State.

### Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire contained five sections:

Section A contained demographic information such as Age, Gender, Educational level, and Educational level of Parents. Section B contained the Parental Awareness and Monitoring of Adolescent Internet Use Scale (PAMAIU) developed by Liau et al. (2008). The PAMAIU is a 93-item instrument that was designed to measure the amount of parental monitoring of adolescents' internet use and the reports of behaviours related to the use of the internet. The items on the scale were adopted from items on the Safety, Awareness, Facts, and Tools Project (SAFT) national survey of Singapore youths and parents regarding internet safety at home. In this scale, parental supervision of online activities was measured using four subscales namely parental monitoring, parental communication, parental tracking and adolescent's disclosure. However, only the parental monitoring subscale was used in this study. The parental monitoring subscale is made up of 4 items. The instrument has a response format ranging from 1 = never to 3 = often. The scores of the instrument range from 4 to 12, and the norm of the instrument is 6.14. Convergent validity was established between PAMAIU and other measures of online parental monitoring and measures of adolescent adjustment (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Section C contained the Big Five Inventory developed by John et al. (1991). This instrument is a 44-item instrument that was designed to assess personality traits from a five-dimensional perspective namely openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The subscales are made up of the following number of items: Extraversion 8 items, agreeableness 9 items, conscientiousness 9 items, neuroticism 8 items, and openness to experience 10 items. The instrument has a Likert type response format ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The scores for items on each subscale are summed to derive the total score, and the total score is divided by the number of items on the subscale. The scores range from 1-5, with high scores indicating a higher level of the trait. The norms of the instrument are 1-2 = very low, 2-2.5 = low, 2.5-3.5 = average, 3.5-4 = high, 4-4.5 = very high. John et al. (1991) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.80 and a 3-month test-retest reliability of 0.85 while Okoye (2022) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.63 to 0.78. Akinbode (2011) reported a convergent validity coefficient of 0.75 for the Big Five Inventory.

Section D contained the Social Peer Rejection Measure developed by Ilev-Wiesel et al. (2006). The social peer rejection measure is a 21-item instrument that was designed to measure perceptions of peer rejection. This instrument was developed from Asher et al. (2001) conceptual model of peer rejection that identifies six types of peer rejection namely

preventing relations, preventing access, aggression, bossiness, blaming, and involving a third party. The social peer rejection measure has a Likert type response format ranging from 1= not at all to 5 = severely. Scores range from 21-105. The norm of the instrument is 63. Lev-Wiesel et al. (2006) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.90 and a test-retest reliability of 0.70. Discriminant validity was established with measures of constructs such as social acceptance and loneliness. Section E contained the Multidimensional Online Grooming Questionnaire developed by Gamez-Guadix et al. (2021). The multidimensional online grooming questionnaire is a 20-item instrument that was designed to assess each of the strategies used by adults to establish a trusting relationship in order to get minors to accept their sexual requests and maintain a relationship. This instrument comprises five subscales namely the use of deception, gift giving, interest in the victim's environment, sexualization, and aggression. This instrument has a 4-point response format ranging from 0 = never happened to 3 = 5 or more times. The norm of the instrument is 30. Scores higher than 30 indicate a higher prevalence of grooming. Gamez-Guadix et al. (2021) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.87 and a split half reliability of 0.64.

**Procedure**

The study was conducted in two phases namely the pilot study and the main study.

A pilot study was conducted to determine the reliability of the Parental Awareness and Monitoring of Adolescent Internet Use Scale, Social Peer Rejection Measure, and the Multidimensional Online Grooming Questionnaire using a Nigerian sample. Twenty-Eight Senior Secondary School 2 students drawn from a population of SS2 students at Tower of

Ivory Secondary School Ediene Abak, Abak local government area participated in the study. All the instruments were found to be reliable. After the pilot study, a Cronbach alpha of 0.46 and a split half reliability of 0.42 was obtained for PAMAIU Scale. A Cronbach alpha of 0.94 and a split half reliability of 0.89 was also obtained for the social peer rejection measure. In addition, a Cronbach alpha of 0.87 and a split half reliability of 0.64 was obtained for the multidimensional online grooming scale. The second phase of the study was the main study. Before the main study, a letter of introduction issued by the Department of Psychology, University of Uyo, Uyo was presented to the principal of the five secondary schools used for the study in order to obtain permission to assess the students. Permission was granted by these principals, after which the participants were addressed and the purpose of the study explained. Informed consent was obtained verbally, participants were told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time during the study. They were also assured of the confidentiality of information provided. A total of 342 copies of questionnaire were administered, out of which 335 copies were retrieved, and 1 copy was discarded because it was not completely filled. Data was analysed with only 334 copies of questionnaires.

**Statistic**

Multiple regression was the statistic that was used to analyse data.

**Result**

The study tested the hypothesis that parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection will independently and jointly predict online grooming of adolescents in secondary school using multiple regression, and the result presented in Table 1 below.

Criterion	Predictors	β	t	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P
Online Grooming	Conscientiousness	0.02	0.40	>.05	0.38	0.14	7.78	<.01
	Agreeableness	-.01	-0.14	>.05				
	Neuroticism	0.02	0.42	>.05				
	Openness	0.12	2.33	<.05				
	Extraversion	-.06	-1.2	>.05				
	Parental Supervision	0.17	2.26	<.01				
	Peer Rejection	0.26	4.82	<.01				

**Table 1:** Multiple Regression Summary Table Showing Parental Supervision, Personality Type, and Peer Rejection as Predictors of Online Grooming of Adolescents in Secondary Schools

Table 1 reveals that parental supervision is a significant predictor of online grooming of adolescents ( $\beta = 0.17, t = 2.26, p < .01$ ). Observations of the beta values ( $\beta = 0.17$ ) revealed a positive correlation between parental supervision and online grooming. This implies that as parental supervision increases, online grooming increases. Table 1 above also shows that among the five dimensions of personality tested, only openness to experience independently predicted online grooming of adolescents ( $\beta = 0.12, t = 2.33, p < .05$ ). Observations of the beta values ( $\beta = 0.12$ ) revealed a positive correlation between openness to experience and online grooming. This implies that the more adolescents are open to experiences, the higher the possibility of experiencing online grooming. Furthermore, Table 1 above reveals that peer rejection independently and significantly predicted online grooming ( $\beta = 0.26, t = 4.82, p < .01$ ). Observations of the beta values ( $\beta = 0.26$ ) also shows a positive correlation between peer rejection and online grooming. This implies that the more adolescents experience peer rejection, the higher the possibility of experiencing online grooming. In addition, Table 1 above reveals that parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection jointly predicted

online grooming of adolescents ( $R = 0.38, R^2 = 0.14, F = 7.78, p < .01$ ). Collectively, parental supervision, personality type and peer rejection accounted for about 14% variance in online grooming. Also, of all the predictors tested, peer rejection had the most significant Independent predictive influence on online grooming ( $t = 4.82, p < .01$ ). Hypothesis one was confirmed, and therefore accepted.

**Discussion**

The result of the study revealed that parental supervision independently predicted online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools. In this study, parental supervision correlated positively with online grooming. The findings of this study is inconsistent with the findings of Ali et al. (2021) who found a negative correlation between parental supervision and online grooming. The findings of this study also contradict the findings of Lahiri et al. (2021) who revealed that parental supervision is negatively associated with online grooming. This finding further contradicts the findings of Ali et al. (2019) who reported that parental supervision is more effective in protecting adolescents from online grooming. A plausible

explanation for this finding is that is that during adolescence, adolescents like to explore, and they also engage in risky behaviours. This exposes them to online grooming. The result of the study also showed that personality type independently predicted online grooming of adolescents. In this study, only openness to experience was a significant predictor of online grooming. This finding is consistent with the findings of Mehari et al. (2021) who found that adolescents who possess the trait of openness to experience are more vulnerable to online grooming. This finding is also in line with the findings of Stammers et al. (2015), who found that openness to experience is positively associated with susceptibility to online grooming. A plausible explanation for this finding is that individuals with the personality trait of openness to experience are curious in nature, and are more open to novel ideas. This makes them prone to online grooming. Furthermore, the result of the study revealed that peer rejection independently predicted online grooming of adolescents. In this study, peer rejection correlated positively with online grooming. This finding is consistent with the findings of Fardous and Raza (2022), who found that peer rejection is positively associated with online grooming. This finding is also in line with the findings of Li et al. (2022), who revealed that adolescents who experience much rejection by peers are more likely to be victimized by online groomers. This finding is also consistent with the findings of Hindija and Patchin (2017) who found that peer rejection is more likely to lead to online grooming. A plausible explanation for this finding is that the online environment provides a temporary relief to adolescents who experience peer rejection. Also, adolescents who experience peer rejection are more desperate for friendship and acceptance. This desperation results in them being more trusting and more susceptible to the attention and kindness of shown by online groomers.

In addition, the result of the study revealed that parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection jointly predicted online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools.

## Conclusion

This study examined parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection as predictors of online grooming of adolescents in secondary schools. A total of 334 senior secondary 2 students participated in the study. Results of the study revealed that parental supervision, personality type, and peer rejection are independent and joint predictors of online grooming. The implication is that parental supervision, personality type, and online grooming increase vulnerability to online grooming.

## Recommendations

1. It is recommended that behavioural and psycho-educational interventions be developed for adolescents with high risk factors such as high openness to experience, and high social rejection.
2. It is also recommended that adolescents be enlightened on the emotional and psychological impacts of peer rejection. They should also be educated on the need to be more empathetic towards their peers.
3. It is recommended that schools and educational institutions develop policies and strategies that are aimed at addressing online safety concerns. Support should also be provided for students who experience online grooming.
4. Adolescents should be encouraged to report incidences of online grooming at its onset for early intervention.

5. Adolescents should be educated on online grooming and how it occurs, for easy identification of groomers, in order to reduce its prevalence.

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