

Parental mediation and adolescents' disclosure, secrecy, and lying about online activities

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PARKA: Parental Knowledge of Early Adolescents' Online Social Lives: The role of Parental Mediation
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Family communication about online world



Awareness of adolescents' whereabouts, activities and relationships is linked to adolescents' **positive psychosocial adjustment** (Kerr et al., 2010).

While there is a lot of research on adolescents' offline whereabouts, little attention has been paid to their online lives and digital usage.



Disclosure builds parental **knowledge about online** lives (Beyens et al., 2024). Telling a parent about cybervictimization appears to be an **effective coping strategy**, with longitudinal findings that it **helped reduce later cybervictimization** (Salton et al., 2023).

Especially **risky** activities or experiences tend to be **under-estimated** by parents (Caivano et al., 2020; Symons et al., 2017). More harmful experiences seem to be more under-estimated than less harmful ones (Geržičáková et al., 2023).

Why don't parents know much about their children's online lives?

Many parents do not talk to their children about their online activities.

EU Kids Online IV: between 17 % (France and Croatia) and 56 % (Czechia) of 11-16 year old children report their parents never or hardly ever talk to them about what they do online (Smahel et al., 2020). Around 70 % of Dutch adolescents (13-15) report their parents never or almost never initiate a conversation about social media and what they do there (Beyens et al., 2024).

Many adolescents do not voluntarily share the information.

Around 60 % of Dutch adolescents (13-15) report they never or almost never voluntarily disclose what they do on social media (Beyens et al., 2024). More adolescents voluntarily disclosed unenjoyable (70 %) experiences than enjoyable ones (51 %).

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Parental
mediation
strategies

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Adolescents'
information
management

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Parental mediation as a knowledge-generating practise?

Parental mediation = strategies that parents use to regulate their children's digital usage to maximise positive and minimise negative outcomes
(Clark, 2011)

- **Active**: discussions with children about their online activities, active encouragement and explanations
- **Restrictive**: rules and bans limiting online usage
- **Monitoring**: keeping an oversight of what children do online
- **Technical monitoring/restrictions**: using parental control software

information management - children as active agents

- When it comes to understanding their children's lives, **parents rely heavily on what their children tell them** (Kerr et al., 2010)
- Adolescents act as active agents and **consciously decide** which aspects of their activities to share or conceal or lie about (Darling & Tilton-Weaver, 2019)
- Deliberate and intentional hiding - **secrecy** - is a **stronger predictor of poor adolescent adjustment** than **non-disclosure** - effortless not telling (Frijns et al., 2020)

OUR STUDY



Focus on **early adolescents** (11-14 years old)
→ starting to use digital media more socially as they grow
(Smahel et al., 2020)



We examined how **parental mediation strategies** (active, restrictive, monitoring, technical monitoring, technical restrictions) relate to the **adolescent information management** strategies (disclosure, secrecy and lying) of their online social activities.

Active mediation is associated with greater adolescent disclosure, whereas restrictions may reduce it (Cerna et al., 2016). Effects of monitoring and technical mediation as well as links with secrecy or lying are **rarely explored**.

METHOD

data

— online survey collected May 2025

quotas

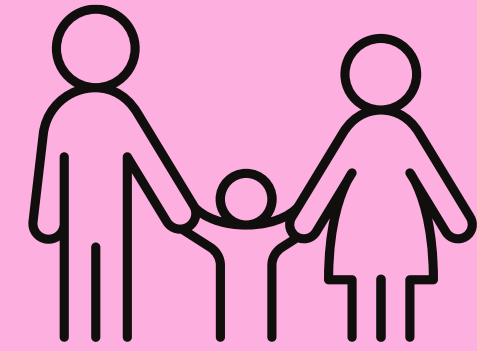
— proportional to Czech households with children:
household SES (parent education), region, municipality size
— balanced: adolescents' age and gender, at least 40%
fathers

analysis

— structural equation modeling
— Robust maximum likelihood estimator (MLR)
— Full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) to handle missingness

IRB approval + preregistration

— approved by the Masaryk University Research Ethics Committee
— the study is preregistered



1,562

adolescents

adolescents

11-14 years old

($M = 12.51$, $SD = 1.13$)

51.4 % boys



MEASURES

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	ω	no. of items	type
Parental Mediation strategies (Shin & Lwin, 2022; Livingstone, 2017; Steinfeld, 2021)					
Active Mediation	5.16	1.29	.93	7	latent variable
Restrictive Mediation	4.76	1.54	.91	6	latent variable
Monitoring	4.25	1.57	.91	3	latent variable
Technical Monitoring	0.99	1.05	-	3	index - sum score
Technical Restrictions	1.52	1.54	-	3	index - sum score
Family Information Management (Beyens et al., 2024 + adapted lying)					
Adolescent Secrecy	2.14	0.97	.92	4	latent variable
Adolescent Lying	1.73	0.84	.92	4	latent variable
Adolescent Disclosure	2.76	1.00	.92	4	latent variable

RESULTS



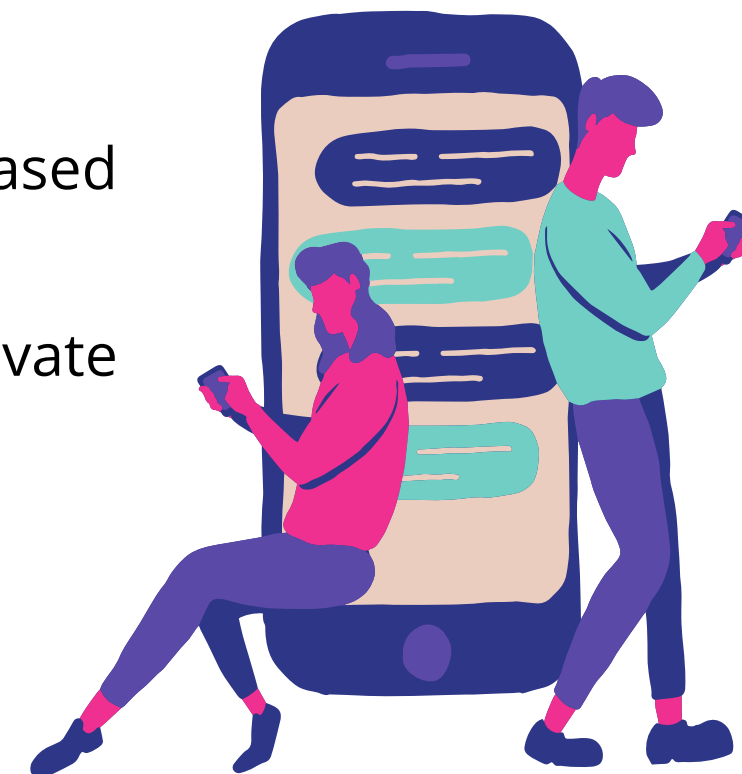
	disclosure			secrecy			lying		
	<i>B(SE)</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>B(SE)</i>	<i>p</i>	β	<i>B(SE)</i>	<i>p</i>	β
Active Mediation	0.32(0.02)	< .001	.45	-0.11(0.03)	< .001	-.16	-0.10(0.02)	< .001	-.16
Restrictive Mediation	-0.14(0.03)	< .001	-.22	-0.02(0.04)	.551	-.03	0.01(0.03)	.832	.01
Monitoring	0.21(0.03)	< .001	.36	0.10(0.03)	.001	.19	0.08(0.03)	.006	.16
Technical Monitoring	0.04(0.03)	.237	.05	0.09(0.04)	.016	.10	0.07(0.03)	.037	.10
Technical Restrictions	-0.03(0.02)	.215	-.05	0.00(0.03)	.904	.01	0.00(0.02)	.969	.00
Adolescent’s Gender	-0.06(0.04)	.127	-.03	-0.07(0.05)	.133	-.04	-0.02(0.04)	.604	-.01
Adolescent’s Age	-0.00(0.02)	.880	.00	0.06(0.02)	.009	.07	0.05(0.02)	.007	.07
Parent’s Gender	-0.13(0.04)	.002	-.07	0.05(0.05)	.305	.03	0.10(0.04)	.026	.06
Parent’s Age	-0.00(0.00)	.599	-.01	-0.00(0.00)	.269	-.03	-0.01(0.00)	.005	-.08

$X^2 = 2923.41, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .06$ with 90% CI [.06; .06], SRMR = .09

DISCUSSION

Main takeaway: The findings suggest that **communication-based** mediation may foster adolescents' **openness**, whereas more **control-oriented** strategies may encourage their **secrecy**.

- **Active mediation** consistently predicts higher disclosure (Cerna et al., 2016); and lower secrecy and lying
- highlighting that open dialogue about online activities is essential for child's voluntary disclosure about their online lives
- **Restrictive mediation** is associated with lower disclosure, but not with secrecy or lying
- showing that rules and bans about online use discourage voluntary sharing without necessarily driving active deception
- **Monitoring** showing an ambivalent pattern, positively associated with disclosure, yet linked to increased secrecy
- might prompt strategic/compliant disclosure and at the same time defensive secrecy of some very private aspects to preserve autonomy = children as active agents
- **Restrictive/Technical** means showing weak or minimal associations
- restrictions and technical controls might regulate access, but do not shape the trust or communication



IMPLICATIONS

Understanding these dynamics is crucial since disclosure during adolescence may predict both the absence of negative behavior and the presence of prosocial behavior (Padilla-Walker & Son, 2019).

Practical implications

— Parent interventions should shift focus from digital surveillance to promoting active mediation skills to foster voluntary openness.

Theoretical implications

— Extends parental mediation theory beyond direct risk engagement to adolescent information management (disclosure, secrecy, lying).

Thank you for your attention.

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