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**EFFECTS OF GUARDIANSHIP ON RECEIVING ONLINE  
UNWANTED MATERIAL**

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**Abstract**

The objective of this study is to measure the relationship of online guardianship with the chances of receiving online unwanted material (OUM) that faced by the universities students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).The guardianship' conceptis adopted from Routine Activity Theory (RAT). It is a descriptive and survey analytical research. All universities students of KP are the population of the study. 800 students are selected from the 6 HEC top ranked public sector universities of KP. The collected data are processed, tabulated, explained and interpreted through some statistical tools i.e. tables and Multiple regression analysis. The results of the studies reveals that the guardian's restriction of online activities and guardian's monitoring of online activities by checking the websites their children have visited and they

review their internet use decrease the likelihood of receiving OUM measured in the current study. In order to attain maximum benefits from the current study, some key recommendations are made in the light of the findings.

## Introduction

An individual may be harassed through online tools e.g. receiving some unwanted material (OUM) via e-mail, different social websites, and social contacts. Such OUM may contain political, religious and sexual contents. Unwanted solicitations are defined as “any content that contains sex picture, sex videos, text or sex offer” (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2007). Internet user may feel bothered by receiving online unwanted messages or images from other online individuals and it is serious and growing problem, especially among young adults (Henry & Powell, 2018). According to Sethi and Ghatak (2018), the use of the internet to make uninvited interactions with another person or entity can be in numerous forms such as comments on social networking sites, unwanted posts, instant messaging, emails, graphic images, texts, and posts directed at the victim, etc. (Sethi & Ghatak, 2018).

It is difficult to establish as such, the exact prevalence rates of receiving OUM among new generation (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2014). However, Finn (2004), focused on receiving of online unwanted lewd images, he studied the students of college at the New Hampshire University and found that, half of the respondents had received obscene images. Similarly, Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2003) study revealed that, 25% of the adolescence who regularly used internet had one or more exposures to unwanted materials in the previous year, 73% of these exposures happened during surfing or searching while using internet, and 28% occurred while clicking on links in e-mail or opening e-mail or instant messages. 67% of the respondents faced unwanted materials while using internet at home, at school 15% happened and 3% occurred in libraries. The remainder occurred at other locations (Mitchell et al., 2003).

In Australian survey, by Crofts, Lee, McGovern, and Milivojevic (2016) found that only 6% of respondents had received pictures and political motivating messages through SNS without their will. While study conducted in Spain by Gámez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, and Calvete (2015) found that, almost 70% of the sample (age 18 to 60 years) reported having received online unwanted content at least one time in the past. Similarly, Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, and Zimmerman (2013) also found, 43% of the respondents aged 18 to 25 year olds had received or sent OUM. Similarly, study by Reyns, Burek, Henson, and Fisher (2013) found that, students of college (n = 974) over 38% stated that they had either received or sent messages without recipient will. Similar survey conducted by McAfee (2014) revealed that, 54% of the sample stated that, they had received or sent photos, intimate video, e-mails, or text messages.

The EU Children online survey, a representative sample of kids from aged 9 to 16 years in twenty five European countries, explored the commonness of seeing and receiving online unwanted messages and found that, fifteen percent of the respondents had seen or received online unwanted messages, and four percent of the respondents stated being bothered by these unwelcomed messages (Kerstens & Stol, 2014). According to Digital Rights Foundation's survey, more than two thirds of the sample have been approached by complete strangers with messages that they did not ask for. Digital Rights Foundation's survey further revealed that, more than half the sample received unwanted lewd messages that they most likely did not know how to react to, or what to do with (DRF, 2017). Study by Swigger (2014) found that 59 % respondents received sex related material through emails, in chat

rooms or in community discussions, 40 % received political persuading messages/videos, 36% respondents received video related to religious through social media. Previous study revealed that, approximately 10% of the survey respondents reported that they had received most of the uninvited material from spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend (Finn, 2004). In the same study, 10 to 15% of 339 students reported receiving unwanted instant messages, 50% had received unwelcome pornography images. Other studies have found much lower incidences. For example, in one study, nearly 4% of 756 students faced unwanted material (Alexy, Burgess, Baker, & Smoyak, 2005).

Most of the studies tend to agree that distribution and receipt of images, unsolicited text, audio or video is relatively common among youth (Crofts et al., 2016; Patrick, Heywood, Pitts, & Mitchell, 2015). Gámez-Guadix et al. (2015) further found that, online victimization through sending or receiving unwanted material is more common among young people, women and middle-aged adults from age 24 to 35 years old. Although study suggested that men are more likely to share or distribute unwanted images, messages, videos through different social media platforms with others without their will (Crofts et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2015). Study conducted by Drouin, Ross, and Tobin (2015) which was based on undergraduate students, found that 1 out of 5 respondents received unwelcome images through social media messenger (Drouin & Tobin, 2014). By way of contrast, a comprehensive study on “technology based coercion” suggested a little higher percentage (17%) that shared with the representative sample a suggestive picture or message without his/her will (Thompson & Morrison, 2013). In relation to comprehensive studies on intimate relationships, and technology, the McAfee (2013) Relationships, Love and Technology Study of U.S. grownups between the age of 18 and 55 found that 1 in 10 exposed to unwelcome images online. Goodson, McCormick, and Evans (2001) conducted a study on online users’ attitudes, and behaviours finding revealed that, sixteen percent of the sample of undergraduate students stated that, during online chatroom interactions they received sexually harassing messages from unknown online user. However, Ballard & Welch, 2017 stated that, the present study does show that women may be subjected to more such lewd and harassing messages than men in online environments (Ballard & Welch, 2017). This study does not limit unwanted material only to sexual material but includes all those religious and political material as well which are intentionally searched by the internet user and was received by him or her against their will.

### **Theoretical approach**

Online victimization can be easily comprehended by Routine Activity Theory (RAT) which was developed by criminologists Cohen and Felson (1979) where they coined three tenets that is a target suitability, motivated offender, and lack of capable guardianship, and they further stated that, when the three tenets converge in time and space then crime occurs. Guardianship is one of the major concept of RAT. Theoretically, effective guardianship is expected to disrupt opportunity structures, while absence of effective guardianship is expected to increase the possibility of online victimization and, such as the other two principles of RAT. The existing literature mostly supports these principles (Spano & Freilich, 2009).

Preceding study of routine activity and online victimization result emphasize on further investigating guardianship as a person based concept. Therefore, the current research uses the earlier discussed rationale to measure the guardianship effects on online victimization. Specifically, the researcher focus on the effects of the parent/guardian restriction on the dependent online activities by restricting online activities on only specific days of the week,

to use recommended websites, filtering software to protect from receiving OUM and by regularly checking the websites they visited. These activities are linked with varying levels of responsibility for guardianship among guardians, as described by Felson (1995).

This study investigates the effect of guardianship on individual victims of receiving online unwanted material (OUM) of six top ranked universities (i.e. Gomal University, D.I.Khan, Khyber Medical University Peshawar, University of Peshawar, University of Engineering and Technology Peshawar, University of Agriculture, Peshawar, and Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan) students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan by applying RAT. The concept of guardianship which adopted from RAT is the parent/guardian restriction on online activities to protect their dependent from receiving OUM.

### **Objective of the study**

To measure the relationship of guardianship with the chances of receiving online unwanted material (OUM) students face.

### **Methodology**

Cross-sectional survey research design is adopted to investigate the current phenomenon. The students enrolled at the time was 51886 and data obtained from the six leading universities of KP province of Pakistan. 800 students as a representative sample are selected while using stratified sampling method. A well-structured close-ended questionnaire are distributed among the representative sample to measuring the concepts of the study. Each questionnaire is administered separately and requested the respondent to fill it on spot, so that the respondents fill the questionnaire appropriately, if any difficulty the respondents face during questionnaire filling process, the researcher will assist them to sort it out.

### **Measures**

Receiving online unwanted material (OUM) (adapted from Akbulut, Sahin, and Eristi (2010)) is measured through seven (7) statements, which includes statements about unintentionally receiving material of sexual, political or religious nature. All these seven questions mean score is treated the score of an individual receiving OUM. Chronbach Alpha of receiving OUM .72.

Guardianship variable are measured through two questions. The first question was how often your parent/guardian restricts your online activities, having three statement which included (a) Restrict your online activities on only specific days of the week (b) restrict you to use recommended Websites (c) Using filtering software to protect you from OUM? While the second question was how often your parent/guardian monitor your online activities by regularly checking the websites you visited? The statements of receiving OUM and questions of guardianship are answered through five response options of ordinal categories, where 1 means never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 often and 5 very often.

### **Hypothesis**

It is more likely that students who use internet under higher level of guardianship will receive significantly lower level of online unwanted material.

### **Data analysis**

The collected data is analysed by using statistical procedure in order to understand receiving online unwanted material (OUM) faced by internet users. To test the hypothesis, multiple regression is used. No collinearity is seen between the independent variables. The alpha level

is .05. The results is presented in one table of receiving OUM with various independent variables.

**Table: Multiple regression analysis for effects of guardian's restrictions and monitoring on receiving OUM**

	Mean	SD	SE	$\beta$
Guardian's restriction of online activities	2.03	1.01	.03	-.23***
Guardian's monitoring of online activities	1.67	1.06	.03	.09*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = .08				
F= 33.94				
p= .000				

n=800; \*\*\*p< .001;\*\*p< .01;\*p< .05

Multiple regression was performed to predict the effects of guardian's restriction of online activities and monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited on receiving online unwanted material. F (2, 797), = 33.942, p= .000 shows significant relationship between the variables. Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>= .076 suggested that the overall model explains 07.6% of the variation in the receiving online unwanted material due to guardian's restriction of online activities and parent/guardian monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited. One unit increase in guardian's restriction of online activities will decrease receiving online unwanted material by .23 unit, and parent/guardian monitoring of online activities by regularly checking the websites respondents visited will increase receiving online unwanted material by .09 unit.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Guardian's supervision is a key factor for protecting the young users of internet against online victimization. Like the other two constructs (motivated offender and target suitability) of RAT, protective measures taken during online interaction have significant effect on the chances of online victimization measured in the study. The analysis found support for the statement that online restriction would decrease the chance of victimization. Those students of higher education institution who had such nature of constraint were less likely to face OUM. This study indicated that the guardian's restriction of online activities and guardian's monitoring of online activities by checking the websites their children have visited and they review their internet use decrease the likelihood of receiving OUM measured in the current study. Result also accepted the research hypothesis that "It is more likely that students who use internet under higher level of guardianship will receive significantly lower level of online unwanted material (OUM)".

Previous studies also reached at the same conclusion. For example Meier and Miethe (1993) stated that student's bonds with their family or their social association might be able to proactively prevent the said victimization. In regard to measures guardianship, findings from the research of Marcum, Higgins, and Ricketts (2010) indicated that protective software (like antivirus or software that filters or blocks websites etc) had no significant effect on such kind of online victimization. However, Marcum et al. (2010) research further showed that, use of internet during the presence of any person in the room have significant effects on students and Marcum et al. suggested that more active monitoring of young people might allow guardians to be proactive in preventing victimization.

While in the study of Navarro, Serna, Martínez, and Ruiz-Oliva (2013) indicated that, no effects were found for inspection online web pages that young people visit or software that blocks or filters websites. However, findings obtained for the association between parental intervention and online victimization suggest that, the effect of restrictive mediation, supervising and checking the software shows a moderate protective effect on online victimization (Navarro et al., 2013). This is in line with current results showing a significant effect of monitoring practices on precluding to face OUM.

For instance, Parents will identify through checking the installed software in computers that what type of interactive technologies their dependents use, as a result they can assist and recommend about its appropriate use. Parental monitoring may also prove worthy to intervene and identify timely if their Parents notice that their dependents may be online targets, thus they advising how to cope with situation.

### **Policy implications and research suggestions**

Hopefully more effective programs and policies can be introduced from the knowledge gained through this study, for educating internet user and their families about protecting themselves from online victimization. In this regard some of the suggestions and recommendations are given below.

It would be more beneficial to educate adolescence about online threats so they are aware of the possible victimization than to encourage adolescence to decrease their use of the Internet. In online interaction people should communication with peoples they already know and trust. If youths limit online communication to already known peoples, than the risk of victimization should be lesser. Awareness raising seminars should be held on a regular basis to inform internet users about what is available for them to deal with online threats and how they can access it. To stop online victimization of users, than educational institutions should establish a separate offices to deal with such kind of offenses. There is a need for more discussion and education about Internet issues commonly addressed in cyber law.

For future researchers, it is suggested that causes and prevention mechanisms of other types of online threats which are related to institution and organizations should also be investigated. In order to establish causal relationship between various independent variables used in this study, it is suggested that future researchers should adopt longitudinal methods of research. As this study was limited to few universities of KP, province of Pakistan, studies with same variables can be carried out in other areas of the country. Research is necessary to identify the prevalence of receiving OUM in other age groups as well. Particularly, study about younger generation studying in schools and colleges could add new information in our knowledge of the phenomenon that how this age group is impacted by such kind of online victimization, and what coping strategies are utilized.

**Note:** This research paper is part of Ph.D. thesis of Dr. Asghar Ullah Khan.

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