Cyber abuse interventions increase knowledge on internet safety but do not decrease risky online behaviour

The prevalence of cyber abuse is a growing problem. Cyber abuse interventions are intended to develop knowledge and awareness among children, youths and their parents to reduce risky behaviour online. Participation in cyber abuse prevention increases knowledge about internet safety yet does not decrease risky online behaviour.

What did the review study?
While there are many benefits from the internet, it is a potential site for abuse and victimisation. The prevalence of cyber abuse – that is activities such as cyber bullying, cyber stalking, cyber sexual solicitation, and cyber pornography – is a growing problem.

This review examines the effectiveness of cyber abuse interventions in increasing knowledge about internet safety and decreasing risky online behaviour.

What studies are included?
Included studies reported on prevention intervention programs administered to children and youths between the ages of 5 and 19. Outcomes related to children and youths exposed to the internet or cellphones. Effectiveness studies had to employ an experimental or two-group quasi-experimental research design.

Three studies were included from Canada and the United States of America. The primary outcomes were cyber abuse of children and adolescents, risky behaviours by children and adolescents, knowledge related to cyber abuse, and negative impact on the psychological state among those who have been victimized by cyber abuse were.

What are the main results in this review?
Cyber abuse interventions and preventions are associated with an increase in internet safety knowledge but do not decrease risky online behaviour.

Plain Language Summary
Crime and Justice Coordinating Group

Cyber abuse knowledge may not always lead to behaviour change

U.S. Air Force graphic/ Tech. Sgt. Benjamin Wilson

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What are the main results in this review?
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knowledge. Despite the increase in knowledge, students who received the intervention did not become less likely to engage in inappropriate online behaviour, such as disclosing one’s name, participating in open chat rooms, or emailing strangers.

The three studies were evaluations of the following cyber abuse interventions: I-SAFE cyber safety program, the missing cyber safety program, and the in-school cyber bullying intervention (HAHASO). The I-SAFE cyber safety had the largest effect on internet safety knowledge. Both the missing program and HAHASO suggests that intervention did not significantly change internet-related safety attitudes or reduce the number of reported cyber bullying experiences.

Given the low number of studies available for rigorous cyber abuse prevention and intervention evaluations, the evidence base for these conclusions is weak.

What do the findings in this review mean?
The review provides consistent evidence of cyber abuse interventions having positive effects in increasing internet safety issues but shows that cyber abuse knowledge may not always lead to behaviour change.

The poor quality of current evidence about the efficacy of cyber abuse prevention and intervention in increasing internet safety knowledge and decreasing risky online behaviour prevents drawing strong inferences from the analyses. Additional research is necessary to explore the link between internet safety generation and risky online behaviour.

More studies, particularly those that explore the impact of these forms of interventions on younger children as well as older adults, should be carried given that the studies in this review focused only on middle school children in grades five to eight. The effectiveness of the study would also benefit from a larger sample size.

How up-to-date is this review?
The review authors searched for studies published until July 2009. This Campbell Systematic Review was published in August 2009.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?
The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in the social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary
This summary was prepared by Ada Chukwudozie and Howard White (Campbell Collaboration) based on the Campbell Systematic Review 2009:2 Interventions for children, youths, and parents to prevent and reduce cyber abuse: by Faye Mishna, Charlene Cook, Michael Saini, Meng-Jia Wu, and Robert MacFadden (DOI 10.4073/csr.2009:2). Tanya Kristiansen designed and edited the summary. Financial support from the American Institutes for Research for the production of this summary is gratefully acknowledged.