

# The Amplification of Cyberhate Victimization by Discrimination and Low Life Satisfaction: Can Supportive Environments Mitigate the Risks?

*Anke Görzig, Catherine Blaya,  
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# What is cyberhate?



**Hate speech expressed on the internet** (incl. bullying, insults, discrimination):

- Xenophobia, and other forms of hatred based on intolerance (Council of Europe, 2003)
- Skin colour, supposed race, ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation or political or religious beliefs - also refers to anti-Semitism and historical revisionism (Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism)
- Online denigration, harassment, and advocacy of violence against specific social groups because of assigned or selected characteristics (i.e., sexual orientation, race, gender) (Hawdon et al., 2017; Wachs & Wright, 2018)
- Identity-based cyberbullying (Blaya, 2018)

Cyberbullying = intention to harm, ICT-related cyber aggression;  
Cyberbullying ≠ group related, single incident



# Prevalence



EU Kids Online IV, 2017/2019, 11-17 yrs, 7 European countries (Machackova et al. 2019)

## Exposure

■ 29%-59%

- *Seen hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people. (This could for example be Muslims, Migrants, Jews, etc.)*

## Victimisation

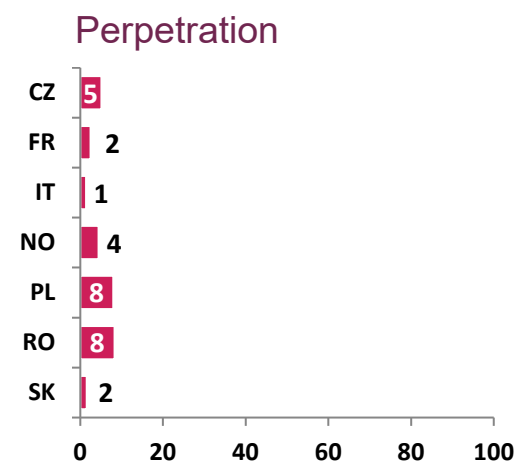
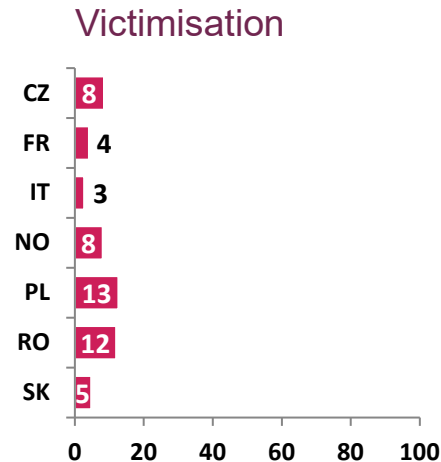
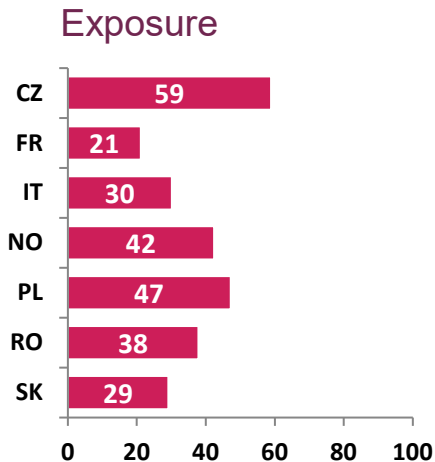
■ 3%-13%

- *Received hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against you or your community?*

## Perpetration

■ 1%-8%

- *Sent hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against someone or a group of people?*



# Cyberhate and Discrimination



- Cyberhate **focused on** the community or **social group**; hence, those from **discriminated** against backgrounds **more likely targets**
- Exposure to cyberhate associated with **offline victimization and hate crimes** (Oksanen et al., 2014; Räsänen et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2020).
- **Ethnic minority** young people are targeted by cyberhate (Blaya, 2019; Oksanen et al., 2019).
- Amongst **discriminated against adolescents**, those from **ethnic or religious groups most at risk** of victimization by cyberhate (UK Safer Internet Centre, 2016)

# Cyberhate and Life Satisfaction



- **Life satisfaction** = global judgement of subjective well-being composed of three parts:  
**positive affect, negative affect, domain satisfaction** (Diener et al., 1999).
- **Greater life satisfaction** allows for greater social advancement, coping resources and buffer against negative behavioural reactions (Diener et al., 1999; Lazarus, 1991)
- **Lower life satisfaction** associated with being victimised (i.e., threatened or injured; Valois et al., 2001).
- Low life satisfaction associated with **victimisation due to “being an easy target”** (Kowalski & Limber, 2013) - perceived otherness, lack of fit with normative expectations, lack of agency (Valois et al., 2001; Wachs, Görzig et al., 2020).
- Aspects of life satisfaction (positive / negative affect) **associated with cyberhate victimisation** (e.g., Tynes et al., 2008; Wachs, Gámez-Guadix et al., 2020)

# The Buffering Effect of Supportive Environments



- **Social support by families, peers and schools** have generally found to be crucial protective factors for online aggression (e.g., Fanti et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014; Zych et al., 2019).
- Offline social support has also shown to affect the risk for **cyberhate victimization** (Räsänen et al., 2016).
- **Family** attachment and parental support associated with exposure to cyberhate and religious and ethnic based cyberhate victimization (Oksanen et al., 2014; Wachs, Costello et al., 2020)
- **Peer** support decreased victimisation and were strongest protective factor for online aggression (Kowalski et al., 2014; Zych et al., 2019) as well as effective in interventions against cyberhate (Regan, 2020).
- A positive **school** climate shown to be protective for online victimization (Hinduja & Patchin, 2017; Kowalski et al., 2014; Smith & Steffgen, 2013).
- Amongst those from **discriminated against groups**, social support and enhanced sense of belonging are particularly relevant (Austin & Craig, 2013; Klein & Golub, 2016; Roche & Kuperminc, 2012)
- Adolescents **low in life satisfaction** have shown to benefit strongly from social support and belonging (Frison et al., 2016; Kaakinen et al., 2018; Oberle et al., 2011)

# Cyberhate: The Buffering Effect of Supportive Environments



- Online denigration, harassment, and advocacy of violence against specific social groups (i.e., sexual orientation, race, gender) (Hawdon et al., 2017; Wachs & Wright, 2018)
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## Vulnerability factors

- Discrimination: focus on the community or social group an individual belongs to
- Life satisfaction (low): perceived otherness, lack of fit with norms, lack of agency

## Protective factors - resilience

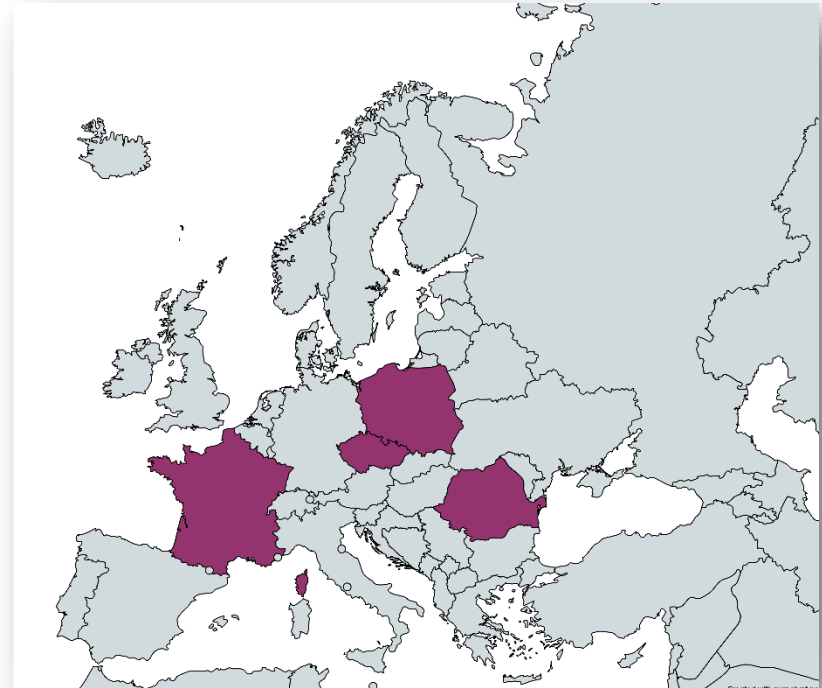
- Social support: Peers, Family, School (key socialisation agents; Bandura, 2005)

# Cyberhate: The Buffering Effect of Supportive Environments



## EU Kids Online IV (2017-2018):

- $N = 3.396$ , 4 (of 18) countries
  - Czech Rep, France, Poland, Romania
- Age 11 to 17
  - ( $M = 14.00$ ;  $SD = 1.91$ , 51.0% girls)
- CASI/CAWI



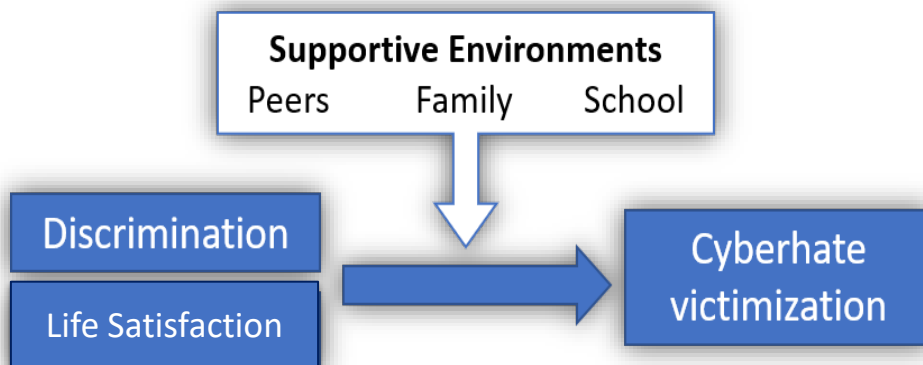
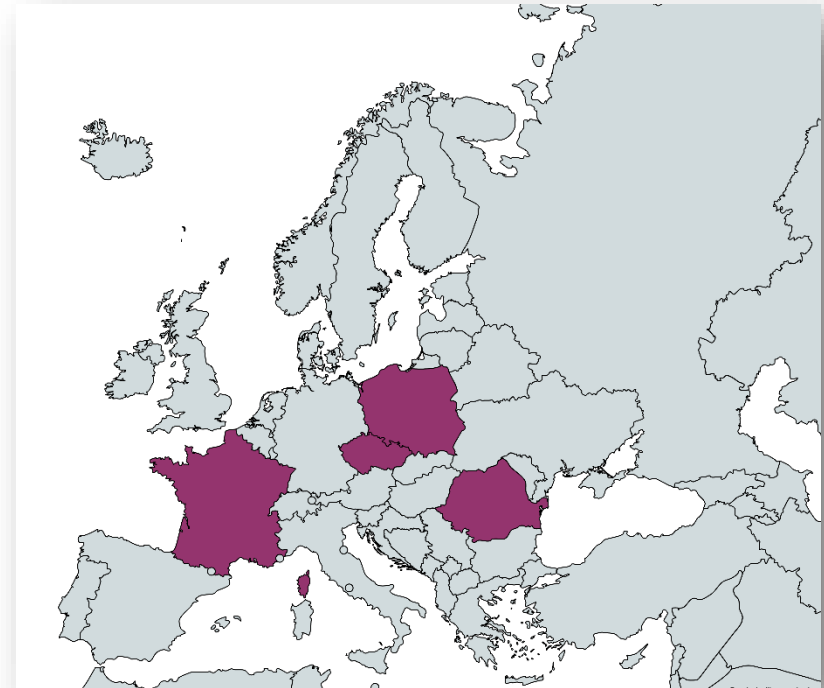


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Görzig, Blaya, Bedrošová, Audin, & Machackova (under review).

# Research Instruments: Cyberhate



FEATURE	ITEMS	ANSWER OPTIONS	REFERENCES
<p>“cyberhate...hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against people or certain groups of people. This could for example be Muslims, Migrants, Jews, Roma, etc.”</p> <p>“In the past 12 months, <b>have you ever received hateful or degrading messages or comments online, against you or your community?</b>”</p>			
Cyberhate	1	No (0) – Yes (1)	Audrin & Blaya, 2020 Zlamal et al., 2020
<p>“In the past 12 months, <b>how often did this happen?</b>”</p>			
Cyberhate	1	a few times (1) – daily or almost daily (4)	Audrin & Blaya, 2020 Zlamal et al., 2020
<p>→ 5-point scale of cyberhate victimisation: Never (0) - Daily or almost daily (4)</p>			5

# Research Instruments: Discrimination & Life Satisfaction



FEATURE	ITEMS	ANSWER OPTIONS	REFERENCES
Discrimination	“Do you sometimes <b>feel that you are treated badly because of the following?</b> ” – “where my family is from”, “my skin colour”, “my religion”	0 = no, 1 = yes	Williams et al., 1997, 2020
Life Satisfaction	“Here is a picture of a ladder. Imagine that the top of the ladder <b>‘10’ is the best possible life for you and the bottom ‘0’ is the worst possible life for you.</b> In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?”	Bottom(0) – Top (10)	Currie et al., 2010



# Research Instruments: Support



FEATURE	ITEMS	ANSWER OPTIONS	REFERENCES
<b>Family Support</b>	3 ( $\alpha = .77$ ) – e.g., “My family really tries to help me”; “When I speak someone listens to what I say”	1 = not true, 4 = very true	Zimet et al., 1988
<b>Peer Support</b>	3 ( $\alpha = .90$ ) – e.g., “My friends really try to help me”; “I can count on my friends when things go wrong”	1 = not true, 4 = very true	Zimet et al., 1988
<b>School Support</b>	5 ( $\alpha = .84$ ) – e.g., “Other students are kind and helpful”; “Teachers care about me as a person”	1 = not true, 4 = very true	Currie et al., 2010 (HBSC)

# Data Analyses



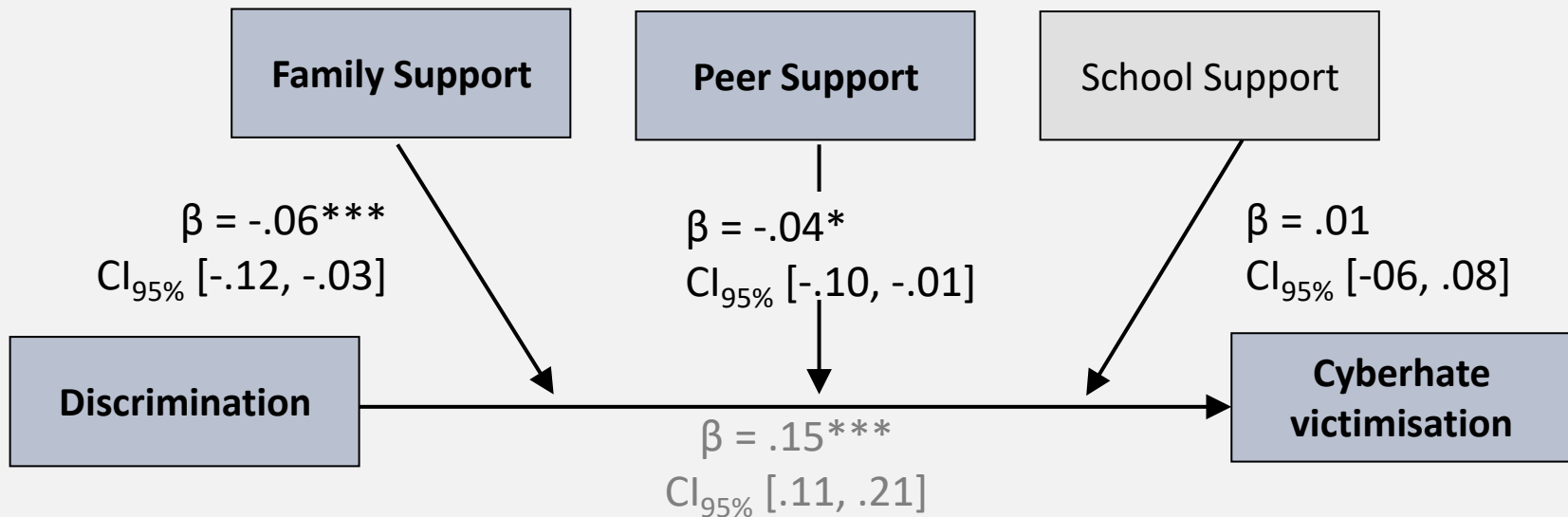
→ Discrimination and life satisfaction affect cyberhate victimization

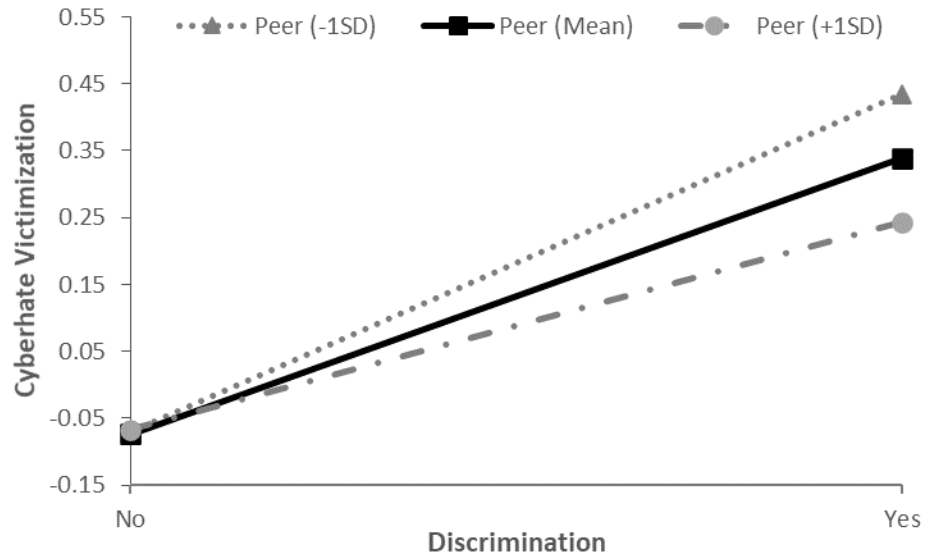
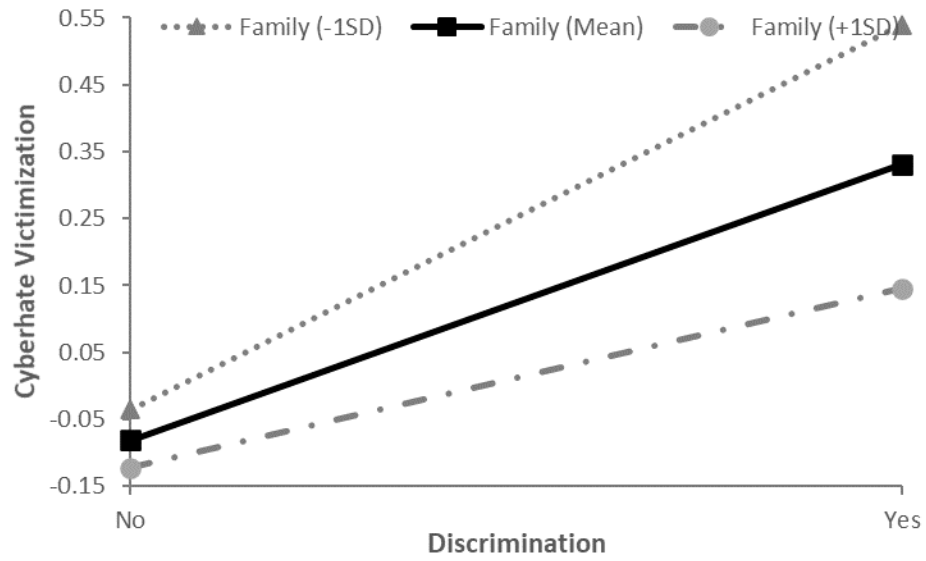
INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Moderators (Support)	OUTCOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discrimination</li><li>• Life satisfaction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family</li><li>• Peers</li><li>• School</li></ul>	Cyberhate victimisation

- controlled by age, sex and country

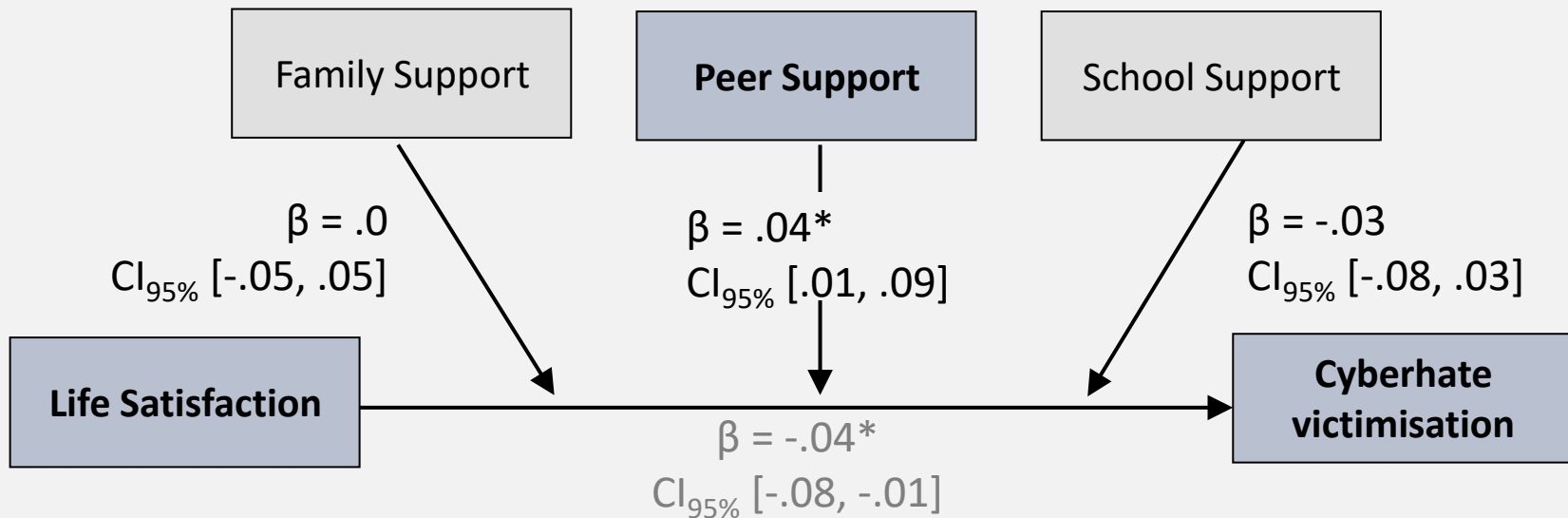
- Moderation analysis was conducted with PROCESS (Hayes, 2018)
- All continuous variables were z-standardized

# Moderation effects for Discrimination





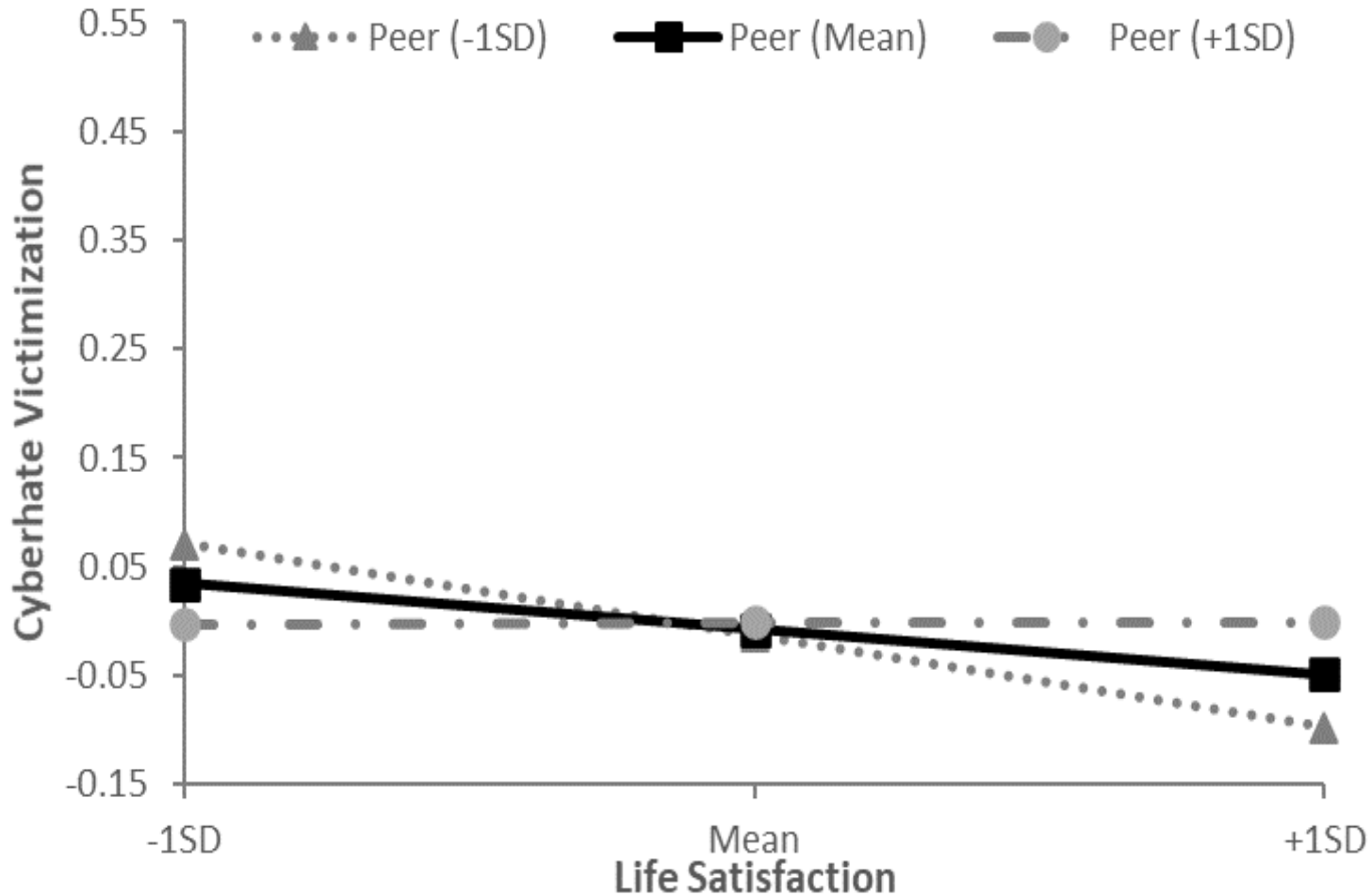
# Moderation effects for Life Satisfaction



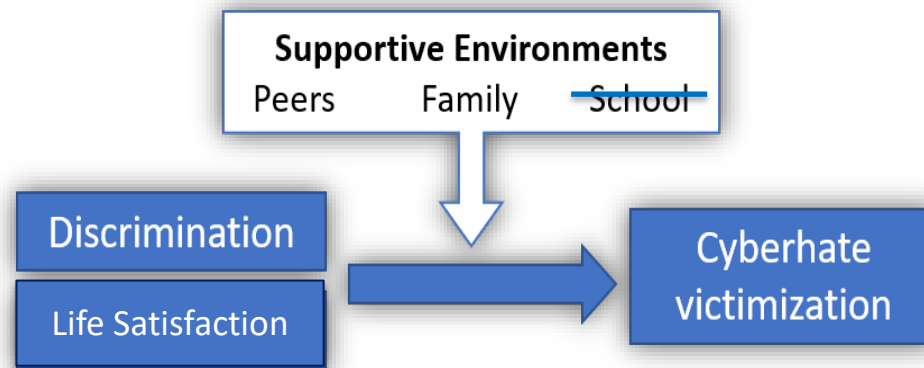


**Figure 3**

*Simple Slopes for the Regression of Life Satisfaction on Cyberhate Victimization at Different Levels of Peer Support (Standardized Scores)*



# Discussion



Görzig, Blaya, Bedrošová, Audin, & Machackova (under review).

- **Cyberhate victimization associated with perceived discrimination**
  - reduced by **family support** ↓
  - reduced by **peer support** ↓
- **Cyberhate victimization associated with low life satisfaction**
  - reduced by **peer support** ↓
- **No effect of school support** on either of the risk factors

# Theoretical Implications



- **Minority groups** are more vulnerable to cyberhate victimization
- Those with **lower life satisfaction** are more prone to be targets of aggression
- Different **environmental levels (i.e., family, peers and school)** need to be considered separately as well as their interactions with individual characteristics
  - Amongst discriminated against groups strong **family bonds** are particularly important (Austin & Craig, 2013; Klein & Golub, 2016)
  - **Peers support** becomes increasingly important in the period of adolescence, conveys a sense of belonging, buffers against adversity (Frison et al., 2016; Oberle et al., 2011; Hymel & Swearer, 2015)
  - A positive climate within a group (i.e., **school or classroom**) may affect cyberbullying but perhaps not cyberhate -> online aggression towards another group

# Applied Implications



- Educate/support **parents and families** in relation to cyberhate as well as empathy towards adolescents in general
- Encourage particular support for those from discriminated against backgrounds in terms of **family as well as peers**
- Educate/support **peers** re the importance of empathy and support of those who show lower life satisfaction or are from other minority groups.
- Specifically those from **disadvantaged backgrounds** may benefit from support
- By social services, schools or youth clubs where **vulnerable groups can be reached and supported**

# Limitations & Future Directions



- Cyberhate victimization and discrimination measures focus on examples of a **specific set of group identities**
- **Weak effects** -> additional factors at play explaining cyberhate victimisation
- Cross-sectional design limits the possibilities of **causal interpretations**
- **Longitudinal and more complex models** with a greater number of explanatory variables may be investigated in an intersectional approach
- **More inclusive measures**



# Thank you!

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