

Study: Cyberbullying and cyberstalking among Internet users aged 15 to 29 in Canada

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Nearly one in five Internet users aged 15 to 29 reported having been cyberbullied or cyberstalked. Some population groups were more at risk than others to experience these forms of online victimization.

According to data from the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization), 17% of Internet users in this age group said they had been victims of cyberstalking or cyberbullying in the previous five years. Nearly 100% of youth aged 15 to 29 were Internet users during that period.

The results come from a new study entitled "[Cyberbullying and cyberstalking among Internet users aged 15 to 29 in Canada](#)", the first Statistics Canada study of its type to examine the factors associated with cyberbullying and cyberstalking among youth, and their relationship with various indicators of trust, personal behaviour and mental health.

Cyberbullying was measured by asking respondents whether, in the past five years, they received threatening or aggressive emails or instant messages; were targeted by threatening or aggressive comments spread via the Internet; felt embarrassed or threatened by pictures posted online; or had someone using their identity to send out or post embarrassing or threatening information.

Cyberstalking was measured by asking respondents whether, in the past five years, they had been the subject of repeated and unwanted attention that caused them to fear for their safety or the safety of someone they know as a result of unwanted messages or pictures shared electronically.

Of young Internet users aged 15 to 29 who experienced at least one of these forms of online victimization, 36% were cyberbullied but not cyberstalked, 33% were cyberstalked but not cyberbullied, and 31% experienced both.

Factors associated with cyberbullying and cyberstalking

Internet victimization among 15- to 29- year olds was more prevalent in younger age groups. For instance, among those aged 15 to 20, about one in five experienced cyberstalking, cyberbullying or both, compared with 15% of those aged 27 to 29.

Another group more at risk of experiencing cyberbullying/cyberstalking was the young homosexual and bisexual population. More than one-third were cyberbullied or cyberstalked, compared with 15% of the heterosexual population.

Past experiences of assault during childhood, witnessing parental violence, and discrimination were among the most significant factors associated with an experience of cyberbullying or cyberstalking.

For example, among young Canadians who experienced a physical or sexual assault before the age of 15, 31% reported having been cyberbullied or cyberstalked, compared with 13% for those who did not experience assault.

Also, young Canadians who reported a recent experience of discrimination were more likely to report that they had experienced either cyberbullying or cyberstalking (37%), compared with those who had not been a victim of discrimination in the past five years (12%).



Cyberbullying and cyberstalking are associated with various indicators of trust, personal behaviour and mental health

Cyberbullying and cyberstalking are associated with an increased probability of reporting a mental health condition and having a low level of trust, particularly among those who experienced both types of online victimization.

It is, however, important not to interpret cyberbullying or cyberstalking as causing the issues listed above. Such links must be interpreted as associations.

For example, 41% of young Internet users who experienced both cyberbullying and cyberstalking reported an emotional, psychological or mental health condition, whereas 14% of those who had not been cyberbullied or cyberstalked reported such a condition.

Similarly, among young Internet users who reported experiencing both cyberbullying and cyberstalking, more than 40% had a low level of trust in people from work or school, whereas the figure was 28% for those who had not reported cyberbullying or cyberstalking victimization.

Among those who responded that they had been cyberstalked but not cyberbullied, more than one-quarter took measures to protect themselves from crime in the past year (such as changing their routine, installing new locks or burglar alarms, or taking a self-defence course), compared with 15% among those reporting no cyberstalking or cyberbullying victimization.

Accumulation of negative life events affects mental health

When combined with other stressors, the impact of cyberbullying and cyberstalking on mental health can be especially detrimental.

The study provides information about the extent to which mental health is affected when cyberbullying and cyberstalking are combined with other stressors: past experience of physical or sexual assault before the age of 15; and recent experience of discrimination.

Among young Canadians who reported none of the three stressors— cyberbullying/cyberstalking, experience of sexual or physical assault, recent experience of discrimination—9% reported having a mental health condition.

The rate was 20% among those who experienced one of the three stressors, and rose to 38% when cyberbullying or cyberstalking and childhood assault occurred, or when cyberbullying or cyberstalking and discrimination occurred.

Lastly, among those who experienced all three stressors, nearly half (47%) reported having an emotional, psychological or mental health condition.

Note to readers

This is the first Statistics Canada study to examine the factors associated with cyberbullying and cyberstalking among young Canadian adults aged 15 to 29.

The study is based on the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization). The target population consisted of the non-institutionalized population aged 15 and older, living in the provinces. In the study, the victims of cyberbullying or cyberstalking were those who answered positively to a series of questions designed to identify people who experienced these two phenomena in the five years prior to the survey—that is, from 2009 to 2014.

The links mentioned in this paper must be interpreted as associations rather than as cause-and-effect relationships. Thus, it is important not to interpret the behavioural indicators as consequences of cyberbullying/cyberstalking. As a result, this paper assesses the strength of relationships, not the causal relationship.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4504](#).

The article "[Cyberbullying and cyberstalking among Internet users aged 15 to 29 in Canada](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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