

Study: Online harms faced by youth and young adults: The prevalence and nature of cybervictimization

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Canadians aged under 30 years represent the first generation born into a society where Internet use was ubiquitous. While parental controls and robust privacy settings can reduce online threats, visiting social media sites, texting and online gaming can still pose cybervictimization risks for youth and young adults.

Today, in conjunction with the upcoming Pink Shirt Day/Anti-Bullying Day (February 22), Statistics Canada is releasing an article that sheds light on the prevalence and nature of cyberbullying and cybervictimization among young people aged 12 to 29 years.

Based on multiple data sources, the study found that in 2019, one in four youth (25%) aged 12 to 17 years reported experiencing cyberbullying in the previous year. An equal share (25%) of young adults aged 18 to 29 years also experienced some form of cybervictimization in 2018, with receiving unwanted sexually suggestive or explicit messages and aggressive or threatening emails, social media or text messages being among the most common.

Non-binary youth at increased risk

While boys (24%) and girls (25%) aged 12 to 17 years were equally likely to experience cybervictimization, non-binary youth had a significantly higher risk. Over half (52%) of youth who reported a gender other than man or woman said that they were cybervictimized in the past year. The higher prevalence among non-binary youth was seen across all types of cybervictimization.

Besides gender, the likelihood of being victimized online was greater among sexually diverse youth (sexual attraction other than the opposite sex), First Nations youth living off-reserve and youth with an educational accommodation. Other factors that increased risk included frequent social media use, using electronic devices before bed and having lower levels of parental knowledge of online activities.

In addition, youth that have greater difficulty making friends have a greater risk of being cybervictimized than their peers without any difficulty. Specifically, 23% of youth who had no difficulty making friends had been victims of cyberbullying in the past year. This proportion climbed to 35% if youth had a lot of difficulty or were unable to make friends.

Young women most often the target of cybervictimization

Among young adults aged 18 to 29 years, young women (32%) were more often the target of online abuse, with a prevalence almost double the rate of young men (17%). This gender difference was especially pronounced for receiving unwanted sexually suggestive or explicit material, where young women (22%) were almost three times as likely to be targeted as young men (8%).

In response, young women sometimes took additional measures to protect themselves online. Almost one-third (31%) of women aged 18 to 29 years blocked someone because of harassment, and 17% restricted their own access. A smaller proportion of men did the same, with 13% blocking people and 10% limiting their access.

Overall, young adults who have been cybervictimised were more likely to be victims of fraud, more likely to have been stalked and more likely to have been physically or sexually assaulted in the past year.



Note to readers

Data from the 2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth, the 2020 Canadian Internet Use Survey, the 2019 General Social Survey on Victimization and the 2018 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces are used in this study.

The study, sponsored by Public Safety Canada, examines the prevalence and nature of online victimization separately for youth aged 12 to 17 years and young adults aged 18 to 29 years.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [4432](#), [4504](#), [5233](#) and [5256](#).

The article entitled "[Online harms faced by youth and young adults: The prevalence and nature of cybervictimization](#)" is now available in Insights on Canadian Society ([75-006-X](#)).

The infographic "[Cyberbullying among youth in Canada](#)" is now available in the series Statistics Canada – Infographics ([11-627-M](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).