

Cyberbullying may call for new prevention tactics

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Existing anti-bully programs won't get through to online aggressors, researcher says.

(HealthDay) -- Cyberbullying is different than traditional bullying, and anti-bullying programs need to use specific measures to combat online aggression, a new Canadian study says.

Cyberbullying is aggression that takes place online and through text messages.

"There are currently many programs aimed at reducing bullying in schools, and I think there is an assumption that these programs deal with cyberbullying as well," Jennifer Shapka, an associate professor in the education faculty at the University of British Columbia, said in a university news release.

"What we're seeing is that kids don't equate cyberbullying with traditional forms of schoolyard bullying," Shapka said. "As such, we shouldn't assume that existing interventions will be relevant to [aggression](#) that is happening online."

Shapka and colleagues looked at 17,000 [students](#) in grades eight to 12 in Vancouver and found that 25 percent to 30 percent of them reported they had experienced or taken part in cyberbullying, while 12 percent said they had participated in or experienced schoolyard [bullying](#).

According to the students, however, "95 percent of what happens online was intended as a joke and only 5 percent was intended to harm," Shapka said.

"It is clear that youth are underestimating the level of harm associated with cyberbullying," she added.

The findings suggest that students play multiple roles -- as bullies, victims and witnesses -- in [cyberbullying](#) and "downplay the impact of it, which means that existing education and [prevention programs](#) are not going to get through to them," Shapka said.

"Students need to be educated that this 'just joking' behavior has serious implications," she said.

The study was presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, which ended April 17 in Vancouver.

Data and conclusions presented at meetings should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

More information: The National Crime Prevention Council has more about [cyberbullying](#).

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