

# Cyberbullying puts teens at risk

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Teenage victims of cyberbullying, defined as the use of the internet or cell phones to send hurtful and harassing messages, are more likely to develop symptoms of depression, substance abuse and internet addiction, reports a new study in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Conversely, teens who are depressed or who abuse drugs are also often targets of cyberbullies.

Understanding the link between [cyberbullying](#) and [health behaviors](#) in adolescence is critical, said the study's lead author, Manuel Gamez-Guadix, Ph.D. of the University of Deusto in Spain. "A number of adolescents are both victims of cyberbullying and perpetrators of cyberbullying, but victims are at higher risk for psychological and

behavior health problems, like substance abuse, after six months of bullying."

Gamez-Guadix and his colleagues surveyed eight hundred and forty-five students (498 girls and 337 boys) between the ages of 13 and 17 years-old. They found that 24 percent had been a victim of one cyberbullying behavior, such as someone sending a threatening or insulting message, 15.9 percent said they experienced two bullying behaviors and 8 percent were victimized by three cyberbullying behaviors.

Cyberbullying, say the researchers, is a growing problem, especially among adolescents. Hurtful and harassing messages, rumors, inappropriate or fake photos and videos can be easily and frequently posted anonymously in text messages, emails or on [social networking sites](#) making them hard to avoid. Messages from cyberbullies are often hard to trace and difficult to delete.

Robert D. Sege, M.D., Ph.D., professor of pediatrics at Boston University noted, "This is an important study because it contributes to what we already know about cyberbullying. It's pretty clear if you are cyber bullied, you are more apt to be vulnerable to a cluster of non-adaptive behaviors. I found it particularly interesting that if teens are cyber bullied, they are more apt to become depressed, and conversely, if they are depressed, they are more apt to be bullied."

"[Adolescents](#) are living their life on the Internet today," noted Sege. "This includes societal experiences and non-adaptive behaviors that are often clustered together during their teen years."

Gamez-Guadix added "It is important to include strategies to prevent cyberbullying within interventions for behavioral problems during adolescence. Mental health professionals should pay special attention to these problems in the treatment of victims of cyberbullying."

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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