

Cyberbullying affects rich and poor alike

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A study by Michigan State University's Thomas Holt suggests cyberbullying affects kids in affluent areas and poor areas alike. Credit: Michigan State University

Cyberbullying isn't just a problem in middle class and affluent areas. Teenagers in poor, high-crime neighborhoods also experience online bullying, finds new research led by a Michigan State University

criminologist.

The study suggests the "digital divide" – the gap between people with access to online technologies and those without – may be nonexistent, at least when it comes to [cyberbullying](#), said Thomas J. Holt, MSU associate professor of [criminal justice](#).

"We found neighborhood conditions that are indicative of poverty and crime are a significant predictor for bullying – not only for physical and verbal bullying, but cyberbullying as well," Holt said. "This is a very unique and somewhat surprising finding."

About 30 percent of American youth have experienced a bullying incident, either as victim or bully, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Victims are at greater risk for academic and [mental health problems](#) and even suicide.

While still less prevalent than traditional bullying, cyberbullying is a growing problem. An estimated 2.2 million students in the United States were harassed or threatened online in 2011, up from about 1.5 million in 2009, according to the Cyberbullying Research Center.

For their study, Holt and colleagues analyzed the survey results of nearly 2,000 middle- and [high school students](#). The researchers found that living in poor, crime-plagued neighborhoods was a significant predictor of physical, verbal and online bullying – over and above individual characteristics like self-control.

Holt said engaging teachers and school officials to discuss bullying prevention in real and virtual spaces could help reduce the risk in low-income communities.

Public campaigns specifically targeting cyberbullying should also be

stressed in schools and libraries. "Such a message is vital to ensure all forms of bullying are given equal emphasis," Holt said.

The study appears online in the *Journal of Criminal Justice*.

Provided by Michigan State University

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