

Study finds that 15 percent of sixth-grade students commit cyber abuse

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Fifteen percent of sixth-grade students reported they had perpetrated at least one form of abuse toward a dating partner through technology, according to a new study from The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health. The study results were published recently in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*.

The researchers analyzed [survey results](#) from 424 sixth-grade students in Southeast Texas who had a boyfriend or girlfriend and had just been enrolled in a trial for the study Me & You: Building Healthy Relationships. The Me & You program is a classroom- and computer-based curriculum to teach youth the importance of having healthy relationships and how to make good decisions in their relationships with peers, friends, family and future dating partners. The survey was taken at the beginning of the trial, before the students received the curriculum.

The most common forms of cyber dating abuse among students were using a dating [partner's](#) social networking account without permission and making a dating partner afraid of not responding to their partner's calls or messages.

The students who were more likely to perpetrate cyber dating abuse had participated in bullying before and believed it was more normative for a boy to perpetrate violence against a girl.

"We still don't know if cyber dating abuse is really a distinct form of dating violence or if it's just dating violence being perpetrated through a

new avenue. The literature has shown that there's a lot of overlap," said Melissa Peskin, Ph.D., lead author of the study and associate professor in the Department of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences at UTHealth School of Public Health. "In this study, we did find that many of the factors associated with cyber dating abuse are also factors associated with traditional forms of dating violence."

Peskin stressed that interventions are needed to educate students about the dangers of dating violence.

"We need interventions that focus on reducing dating violence but that also include lessons on how to have healthy relationships in the online environment," said Peskin, who is also a member of the Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research at the School of Public Health.

In future research, Peskin hopes to evaluate how participating in the Me & You program affects rates and perceptions about cyber dating [abuse](#) among students.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

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