

# Two-thirds of young people victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying, study suggests

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The study examined cyberbullying among 16-19 year-olds (Pic posed by model).  
Credit: Nottingham Trent University

Two-thirds of young people have been a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying in the last year, new research suggests.

The study, led by [psychologists](#) at Nottingham Trent University, also found little evidence of individuals who were purely bullies – with most cyberbullies also finding themselves on the receiving end.

Researchers asked 16-19 year-olds the [extent](#) to which they had engaged in or received nasty, insulting or threatening communications, or violent and unpleasant images, across a range of media.

As a result, the team – writing in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* – was able to group young people into one of four categories relating to their experiences of cyberbullying by frequency and type.

They found that 26% claimed to have been victims on a regular basis, while a further 40% said they had both received and engaged in small amounts of cyberbullying during the previous year.

The smallest group, relating to just one percent of participants, had the highest involvement in all forms of cyberbullying. This comprised individuals who both engaged in and received cyberbullying behaviour at a similar level – and at a much higher level than the other groups.

A third of participants (33%) in the study – led by the university's School of Social Sciences – said they had experienced no cyberbullying in the last year.

The researchers argue that the reason for young people filling the role of both victim and bully could be the result of them engaging in similar behaviours as a way of dealing with their own experiences.

"Young people may retaliate to reduce negative emotions associated with being a victim of cyberbullying, or to demonstrate to peers that they are not an easy target," said lead researcher and psychologist Dr Lucy Betts.

She said: "The anonymity that digital technology affords individuals who engage in cyberbullying may also prompt those who are victims to engage in bullying behaviour. Cyberbullies can be anonymous to the consequences of their actions online, which isn't the case with face-to-face bullying.

"Cyberbullying doesn't typically end with the school day, unlike face-to-

face bullying, and the potential for constant connectedness also means it's harder for victims to escape their bully."

The study, which involved 440 young people, found that the most frequently reported forms of cyberbullying were nasty and insulting communications. Participants said they spent an average five hours a day online.

The findings could have implications for the development of anti-cyberbullying interventions, the researchers believe – for example helping [young people](#) to avoid entering a cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation online.

**More information:** L. R. Betts et al. Examining the roles young people fulfill in five types of cyber bullying, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0265407516668585](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516668585)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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