

Bullied children excluded from digital communication forums

November 15 2016

There is a conception that bullied children with few friends can find new ones online.

"Our research doesn't support that idea at all," says Ylva Bjereld, PhD student at the Department of social work, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

On the contrary, a new study reports that bullied children are excluded from new communication forums that have developed as a result of the digital transformation.

Along with fellow researchers from Sweden, Iceland and Finland, Ylva Bjereld has studied the use of text messaging, telephone communication and Internet - so-called technology mediated communication (TMC) – among children in the Nordic countries during 2001-2010. The researchers also studied the use of TMC among bullied children. Approximately 66 000 children ages 11, 13 and 15, were included in the study.

The result of the study shows that 81 per cent of the children used TMC with [friends](#) more than three days a week in 2010; an increase by 11 percentage points compared to 2001. However, among bullied children with either few or no friends at all, there had been no increase in use of TMC during the time period.

"They were left at the same levels of use as in 2001. This is remarkable

considering the vast development that have occurred in the last ten years as far social media and the use of cell phones," Ylva Bjereld says.

The result indicates that bullied children have an even more vulnerable life situation than before.

"It used to be that these children could find breathing space during off-school hours. Now, they continue to be excluded from friendships even after school hours but in new digital forums. This is especially concerning since such a big part of children's every day lives is spent online participating in social networks," Ylva Bjereld says.

The study also reports that bullied children, who had several friends despite being bullied, had increased their use of TMC somewhat during the time period.

"Previous research on bullying victimization shows that bullied children suffer from [mental health problems](#) more frequently than other children. When being included in the use of TMC with friends, these children are able to both strengthen their current friendships and developing new ones. This could potentially protect them from developing mental illness problems.

One of Ylva Bjereld's conclusions is that in order for the most vulnerable group of bullied children to be included in TMC, continued work and efforts against bullying in general are required.

"We already know that bullied children are a vulnerable group in society. Now that we also know that they are excluded from new communication forums that allow children to meet new friends, we need to pay extra attention to this group," she says.

More information: Y. Bjereld et al. Time trends of technology

mediated communication with friends among bullied and not bullied children in four Nordic countries between 2001 and 2010, *Child: Care, Health and Development* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/cch.12409](https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12409)

Provided by University of Gothenburg

Citation: Bullied children excluded from digital communication forums (2016, November 15)
retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-bullied-children-excluded-digital-forums.html>

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