

Teachers and fathers play key roles in protecting young people from cyberbullying

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Young people who say they have strong relationships with their teachers and positive attitudes towards school are significantly less likely to report being cyberbullied, according to a University of Hertfordshire analysis for Public Health England.

Cyberbullying and self-harm

Authored by the University's Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) England team, the report, published on Thursday, highlights that supportive teacher-student relationships are associated with a lower risk of [cyberbullying](#) in children.

It follows earlier findings by HBSC England researchers, published in the journal *Youth and Society*, that [young people](#) who do not feel supported by their teachers are more than twice as likely to be a victim of cyberbullying as those who do.

The cyberbullying report also says fathers can play an important protective role. HBSC England research has suggested young people who find it difficult to communicate with their father are 50 per cent more likely to be cyberbullied compared with those who say they can talk easily.

Cyberbullying, the online aspect of bullying, can take many different forms, including sending abusive or threatening messages, uploading

embarrassing photographs, sharing personal information, or exclusion from online groups.

The cyberbullying report is one of three published by Public Health England. The others cover self-harm and the [wellbeing](#) of [adolescent girls](#). Together the reports explore the rising trend in poorer emotional wellbeing of young people.

The analysis of self-harm data found that one in five 15-year-olds in England have self-harmed. In addition, young people who reported positive family communication, and positive perceptions of their school and local neighbourhood, were less likely to report self-harming.

The report on wellbeing in adolescent [girls](#) highlights that adolescent girls scored lower for life satisfaction than boys. They were also three times more likely than boys to report self-harming.

Promoting young people's mental wellbeing

The three reports are based on in-depth analyses of the most recent HBSC study for England, led by University of Hertfordshire and part of a collaborative World Health Organisation study across 42 countries. The England data draws on survey responses from 5,335 students aged 11-15 years.

The reports support a range of stakeholders that work to promote children and young people's mental wellbeing, including headteachers and school nurses, local public [health](#) specialists, NHS [mental health services](#) and local councillors.

Dr Ellen Klemra, a Senior Research Fellow in Adolescent, Child and Family Health at University of Hertfordshire, said:

"While more traditional forms of bullying are often restricted to the school grounds, cyberbullying continues beyond the school environment and school hours. Despite this, our analysis emphasises the crucial role schools can play in preventing cyberbullying and it is important they are able to work closely with members of local communities, including parents and carers, to reduce the risk of online victimisation among young people."

"We found young people who felt important issues were regularly spoken about in their family, and that someone listened to them when they spoke, were less likely to say they had experienced cyberbullying in the past two months. Our findings support the idea that family communication and support, particularly communication with the father, protect against cyberbullying."

Increasing awareness

She added: "Our reports on cyberbullying, self-harm and wellbeing in adolescent girls identify the extent to which the three key domains of young's people environment – family, school and local neighbourhood – can protect their health. The interaction between all three domains needs to be considered when designing and delivering mental health interventions to prevent cyberbullying and self-harm, and improve emotional wellbeing in young girls."

Eustace de Sousa, lead for child and adolescent health at Public Health England, said:

"Increased access to the online world brings new concerns for child wellbeing, such as cyberbullying, which can often happen without parents knowing. Parents, teachers and public health professionals can all help to prevent these issues by knowing what works."

"These reports are designed to increase awareness of the risks associated with these serious [public health](#) issues, and help all responsible adults promote healthy behaviours and mental wellbeing amongst children and adolescents."

Key report data

Cyberbullying

- 17.9% of 11-15 year olds reported being cyberbullied in the two months prior to being surveyed
- Girls were twice as likely as boys to report being cyberbullied
- Rates of cyberbullying at age 15 were almost double those for 11 year olds
- Young people from more affluent families were more likely to [report](#) cyberbullying

Self-harm

- 22% of 15 year olds reported that they had ever self-harmed
- Nearly three times as many girls as boys reported they had self-harmed
- Over the past decade self-harm among adolescents has been increasing
- Incidence of self-harming is associated with lower family affluence

Wellbeing in adolescent girls

- Girls reported poorer emotional health and wellbeing outcomes than boys, and the gap widened from age 11 to 15 years
- Fewer than half of 15 year old girls said they had felt full of

- energy or were able to pay attention in class in the last week
- A fifth of 15 year old girls said they had felt lonely in the last week, compared to 7% of boys
 - Girls were less likely to participate in protective health behaviours than boys such as eating breakfast and taking regular exercise
 - Girls find communication with parents less easy than their male peers

More information: [www.gov.uk/government/publicat... n-hbsc-data-analysis](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/n-hbsc-data-analysis)

K. L. Chester et al. The Mitigating Role of Ecological Health Assets in Adolescent Cyberbullying Victimization, *Youth & Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1177/0044118X16673281](https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X16673281)

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