

Longer hours on social media may increase teens' risk of cyberbullying

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Cyberbullying may be linked to higher use of social network sites by school children aged 14-17 years, rather than to simply having a social network profile, according to a study published in the open access

journal *BMC Public Health*, which examined data from several European countries.

Researchers at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece found that [school children](#) in Romania, Germany and Poland were more likely to experience cyberbullying, such as aggressive and threatening messages, social exclusion, spreading rumors and sharing private, inappropriate or humiliating information, if they used social network sites for more than 2 hours a week day.

Co-author Professor Artemis Tsitsika said: "This is an important finding which challenges past research suggesting that simply having, rather than excessive use of, a social network site profile increases the risk of becoming a victim of cyberbullying."

The researchers found that a relatively high proportion of school children in Romania (37.3%), Greece (26.8%), Germany (24.3%) and Poland (21.5%) have been bullied online whereas a fewer proportion experience cyberbullying in the Netherlands (15.5%), Iceland (13.5%) and Spain (13.3%).

Professor Artemis Tsitsika added: "We found multiple factors, in addition to the time spent on social media, which may impact cyberbullying frequency and explain the differences between countries. In Greece and Romania higher cyberbullying may be due to a lack of digital literacy and relevant legislation, as well as sudden rise of [social media](#) use and a large technological gap between parents and the younger generation. Promotion of internet safety strategies and teaching digital skills in education may contribute to lower rates of cyberbullying in the Netherlands. In all cases higher daily use with no monitoring and [digital literacy](#) background may lead to teenagers posting private information and meeting strangers online".

The researchers call for educational settings to integrate ICT education into their curricula, especially in countries where use of the Internet has risen abruptly.

The authors undertook a school-based study across Germany, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Spain. Anonymous questionnaires about internet use, social factors and cyberbullying were completed by 12,372 students aged 14—17 across the seven countries.

They caution that the observational nature of the study limits conclusions about the direct causes of cyberbullying. As five years have passed since the data used in the study was collected, its ability to represent the current picture of [cyberbullying](#) may be limited.

More information: Kalliope Athanasiou et al, Cross-national aspects of cyberbullying victimization among 14–17-year-old adolescents across seven European countries, *BMC Public Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-018-5682-4](#)

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