

Bullied victims' experiences differ by their ability to handle their own emotions

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It is well-known that victims of bullying can have higher risks of future

health and social problems. However, different victims experience a broad range of responses and some may not suffer at all. Researchers felt this implied there might be factors that could protect against some consequences of bullying. In a study of over 6,000 adolescents in Japan, they found a strong candidate in the moderation of what is known as emotional competence.

Online bullying, or cyberbullying, is not a new phenomenon, but as the world becomes more dependent on online communication, it does become a greater threat. Lead author Yuhei Urano, Associate Professor Ryu Takizawa and Professor Haruhiko Shimoyama from the Department of Clinical Psychology at the University of Tokyo and their team investigated protective factors for the adverse effects of cyberbullying victimization. They analyzed data from 6,403 adolescents aged 12 to 18 (1,925 male, 4,478 female) for their study.

"We chose users of a social networking app as participants of the study, because they were likely to experience more online interactions than others," said Urano. "The surveys explored instances of cyberbullying victimization and a cross section of other personal and social information. These allowed us to investigate whether the ability to handle emotions, called [emotional](#) competence, correlated with the severity of the repercussions of cyberbullying."

What the researchers found may at first seem counterintuitive, but after careful analysis, their results showed that higher emotional skills were not always associated with better [mental health](#); they may actually make things worse depending on the social context. It depends on the individual's specific emotional competence, defined as the ability to identify, understand, express, regulate and use emotions. There is intrapersonal emotional competence, the ability to handle one's own emotions, and interpersonal emotional competence, the ability to handle others' emotions.

"We thought that intrapersonal emotional competence showed buffering effects against [cyberbullying](#), because the ability to handle one's own emotions is known to have a [positive impact](#) on our mental health," said Urano. "On the other hand, we thought interpersonal emotional competence showed the opposite effect. Because the ability to understand [emotional states](#) in others may encourage individuals to dwell on the bully's intentions."

The researchers hope this study could pave the way to investigations about the different roles of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional [competence](#), both the positive and negative effects they may have. However, given the inherent complexity of the topic in question, they suggest that in order to correctly determine the causal relationships behind their results, more longitudinal studies should be conducted in the future.

More information: Yuhei Urano et al. Cyber bullying victimization and adolescent mental health: The differential moderating effects of intrapersonal and interpersonal emotional competence, *Journal of Adolescence* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.02.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.02.009)

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