

Teens who think their parents are loving are less likely to be cyberbullies

September 2 2020



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Adolescents who perceive their parents to be loving and supportive are

less likely to engage in cyberbullying, according to a new study by researchers at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing.

The findings, published in the *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*, are especially relevant given changes in [family life](#) created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With remote learning replacing classroom instruction for many [young people](#), and cell phones and social media standing in for face-to-face interaction with friends, there are more opportunities for [cyberbullying](#) to occur," said Laura Grunin, a doctoral student at NYU Meyers and the study's lead author. "New family dynamics and home stressors are also at play, thanks to higher unemployment rates and more [parents](#) working from home."

More than half of U.S. teens report having experience with cyberbullying, or online behavior that may involve harassment, insults, threats, or spreading rumors.

"Understanding what factors are related to a young person's cyberbullying of peers is important for developing ways that families, schools, and communities can prevent bullying or intervene when it occurs," said Sally S. Cohen, clinical professor at NYU Meyers and the study's senior author.

Gary Yu, associate research scientist and adjunct associate professor at NYU Meyers, coauthored the study with Grunin and Cohen.

Using data from the World Health Organization (WHO) Health Behavior in School-Aged Children survey, the researchers analyzed responses from 12,642 U.S. pre-teens and teens (ages 11 to 15 years old) surveyed in 2009-2010, the most recent WHO data on [school-aged children](#) collected in the United States. The adolescents were asked about their

bullying behaviors, as well their perceptions of certain family characteristics, including their relationship with their parents.

The researchers found that the more adolescents perceived their parents as loving, the less likely they were to engage in cyberbullying. When asked if their parents are loving, youth who said "almost never" were over six times more likely to engage in high levels of cyberbullying than those who answered that their parent is "almost always" loving. Other types of emotional support, including how much teens feel their parents help and understand them, also contributed to the likelihood of whether young people engaged in cyberbullying behavior.

"Our findings point to the importance of parental emotional support as a factor that may influence whether teens cyberbully—and more importantly, it is how teens perceive the support they receive from their parents," said Grunin. "I would stress to parents it is not necessarily if they think they are being supportive, but what their adolescent thinks. Parents should strive to discern their [teen](#)'s perception of parental emotional support as it might be associated with youth cyberbullying behavior."

Certain demographic factors were also related to teens' likelihood of cyberbullying. Girls were much less likely than boys to exhibit high levels of cyberbullying. Race also played a role: Asian American adolescents were the least likely to be cyberbullies, while African American teens were less likely than white teens to engage in lower levels of cyberbullying and more likely to engage in higher levels.

Cohen added, "Since 2010, when the survey was conducted, technology and social media have become increasingly ubiquitous in teens' lives; the increase in screen time during the current pandemic poses new challenges. Online access and anonymity in posts create widespread opportunities for cyberbullying."

The researchers note that educators, health professionals, [social media](#) experts, and others working in youth development should take family dynamics into account when creating programs to address cyberbullying.

"While our study doesn't prove that a lack of parental support directly causes cyberbullying, it does suggest that children's relationships with their parents might influence their bullying behaviors. These relationships should be considered when developing interventions to prevent cyberbullying," said Grunin.

More information: Laura Grunin et al, The Relationship Between Youth Cyberbullying Behaviors and Their Perceptions of Parental Emotional Support, *International Journal of Bullying Prevention* (2020). DOI: [10.1007/s42380-020-00080-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-020-00080-5)

Provided by New York University

Citation: Teens who think their parents are loving are less likely to be cyberbullies (2020, September 2) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-teens-parents-cyberbullies.html>

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