

Teenage cyberbullying: A toxic side effect of online socialization

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Teenagers fall prey to bullying while using the internet—a platform that provides relative anonymity to bullies—according to a questionnaire-based study published in *Medicine*.

Teenagers, in general, are vulnerable to cyberbullying. Unfortunately, the associated risk factors and persistent ramifications remain more or less underexplored. This observational study effectively bridges the gap by surveying a group of teenage participants from Romania.

"Cyberbullying represents a major concern worldwide, especially among teenagers. Moreover, it has an extremely negative psychological impact. We performed a prospective online questionnaire-based study on 316 teenagers to assess the prevalence of cyberbullying in Romania, evaluate its psychosocial consequences, and examine the factors that may predispose them to bullying," says lead author Reka Borka Balas, MD, Ph.D., of the University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology from Târgu Mureș, Târgu Mureș, Romania.

What does the Romanian survey reveal about teenage cyberbullying?

The study reveals an important facet of cyberbullying: that victims are mostly bullied on Facebook (~75%), Instagram (~41%), and while gaming online (~18%). "Nearly 50% of the responders stated that they had been previously bullied, with females having a higher risk of being harassed than males. More than half (53%) of the victims included in our study benefited from support," Dr. Balas and co-authors report.

The survey underscores the importance of maintaining healthy and nurturing environments at home. A finding shockingly reveals that teenagers witnessing [domestic violence](#) have a more than two-fold higher risk of committing cyberbullying than teenagers hailing from healthier family backgrounds. Quite interestingly, the study authors also discovered a statistically significant association between various edible or consumable items (coffee, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, and energy drinks) and the initiation of aggression. The data suggest that [teenage](#)

[boys](#) are more likely to be involved in bullying others than teenage girls.

The study also shows that introverted individuals are less likely to get cyberbullied (8%) than their extroverted counterparts (34%). Whereas most of the surveyed teenage victims (59%) were unaware of the perpetrator's identity, nearly 23% identified the bully as an acquaintance, 11% as a boyfriend/girlfriend, and 8% as a classmate. Moreover, the data shows that nonvictims had fewer friends who had fallen prey to cyberbullying (22%). The study also notes that victims were more than 2,100 times likely to have friends who were also bullied.

Teenage cyberbullying: Psychosocial impacts and plausible fixes

Quite surprisingly, the study reveals that bullying not only impacts the victims, but also the perpetrators. In fact, nearly 5% of the respondents deeply regret their involvement. The [survey results](#) also indicate that teenagers who are bullied are five times more likely to bully others than teenagers who have never fallen prey to the nefarious act. Whereas 66% of the respondents draw parallels between cyberbullying and [physical violence](#), 23% consider cyberbullying to be less harmful than physical violence. 11% of the survey participants consider cyberbullying to be worse than physical violence.

Although more than 47% deny any impact on physical or mental wellness, a significant number of victims feel otherwise. For instance, more than 30% of the respondents report feeling upset, nearly 4% report suffering from insomnia, and almost 8% experience depression.

On the positive side, the study notes that support from home and school has been shown to drastically minimize the adverse effects of cyberbullying among teenagers. Unfortunately, such coping strategies are

rarely implemented by the victims of cyberbullying.

Although continued research seems necessary to mitigate the effects of teenage cyberbullying, this study nevertheless sheds light on the pervasiveness, determining factors, and negative impacts associated with this detrimental and inhuman act.

Dr. Balas and co-authors conclude, "The impact of cyberbullying on adolescents' emotions and well-being consists of somatic, depressive, and stress symptoms. Parents and teachers need to promote dialogue about [cyberbullying](#), aiding adolescents to find effective ways to deal with these situations and to develop their empathy, communication, and social skills."

More information: Reka Borka Balas et al, Cyberbullying in teenagers—a true burden in the era of online socialization, *Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1097/MD.00000000000034051](https://doi.org/10.1097/MD.00000000000034051)

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