

# Study finds nearly half of school social workers feel unequipped to handle cyberbullying

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Instances of cyber bullying continue to make news nearly every day, and while it's recognized as a problem among most school-aged children, a new study published this month in *Children & Schools* and coauthored by Temple University social work professor Jonathan Singer finds that nearly half of school social workers feel they are ill equipped to handle it.

"[School](#) social workers provide more crisis intervention services than any other school staff member – more than counselors, nurses, teachers, or psychologists," said Singer. "As a result, school social workers are a very important component to school-based mental health services, yet there is little research that looks at their perceptions of cyberbullying."

In a survey of nearly 400 school social workers at the elementary, middle and high school levels who were members of the Midwest School Social Work Council, the researchers found that while all respondents felt that cyber bullying can cause psychological harm, including suicide, about 45 percent felt they were not equipped to handle cyber bullying, even though they recognized it as a problem. Further, only about 20 percent thought their school had an effective cyberbullying policy.

"If there's no policy in place to guide them, staffers are flying solo in this area, and that can be a liability," said Singer.

In addition, respondents felt that instances of cyberbullying were much more severe in middle school than in either elementary school or high school, leading researchers to call for training that differs in content and approach based on school level.

"These findings show a clear need to account for grade level when designing cyberbullying trainings, and for the inclusion of [social workers](#) in developing cyberbullying policies that are accurate and effective," said Singer.

Most bullying prevention programs rely on school staffers actual seeing or hearing bullying prior to intervening, but Singer notes that this approach can't work with cyberbullying because it is obscured by personal technology. Therefore, he says trainings need to include ways that school staff can effectively educate students and their colleagues about cyberbullying, and learn new ways to intervene.

"The good news is, many schools have started a conversation between staff and administrators as to what their role should be in these instances," he said. "Things like holding in-service trainings or bringing in experts to talk about the issue can lead to an increase in information and knowledge on how to handle instances of cyber [bullying](#)."

Provided by Temple University

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