

Cyberbullying and bullying are not the same: research

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University of British Columbia research comparing traditional bullying with cyberbullying finds that the dynamics of online bullying are different, suggesting that anti-bullying programs need specific interventions to target online aggression.

"There are currently many programs aimed at reducing bullying in schools and I think there is an assumption that these programs deal with [cyberbullying](#) as well," says Jennifer Shapka, an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at UBC who is presenting this research at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting in Vancouver.

"What we're seeing is that kids don't equate cyberbullying with traditional forms of schoolyard bullying. As such, we shouldn't assume that existing interventions will be relevant to [aggression](#) that is happening online."

Shapka is presenting a study that involved 17,000 Vancouver, B.C. students in Grades 8 to 12 and a follow-up study involving 733 Vancouver, B.C. [youth](#) aged 10-18.

Results of the studies show that about 25-30 per cent of youth report that they have experienced or taken part in cyberbullying, compared to 12 per cent of youth who say they've experienced or taken part in schoolyard bullying. However, "Youth say that 95 per cent of what happens online was intended as a joke and only 5 per cent was intended

to harm," says Shapka. "It is clear that youth are underestimating the level of harm associated with cyberbullying."

According to Shapka, the findings suggest that in cyberbullying [adolescents](#) play multiple roles - as [bullies](#), victims, and witnesses - and "downplay the impact of it, which means that existing education and [prevention programs](#) are not going to get through to them."

"Students need to be educated that this 'just joking' behaviour has serious implications."

Being victimized online can have consequences for a person's mental health, developmental [wellbeing](#), and [academic achievement](#), according to Shapka. In extreme cases, there have been reports of suicide.

Traditional bullying, or schoolyard bullying, is often associated with three main characteristics: a power differential between bully and victim, a proactive targeting of a victim, and ongoing aggression.

Shapka says, research is beginning to show that cyberbullying does not necessarily involve these three characteristics. Traditional power differentials - size and popularity - do not necessarily apply online. There also seems to be more fluid delineation between the roles youth play; it is not unusual for an individual to act in all capacities - bullies, victims, and witnesses - online.

Previous work by Shapka and her colleagues has shown that in contrast to traditional bullying, cyberbullying is rarely associated with planned targeting of a victim.

A number of Internet safety campaigns suggest parents keep an eye on their children's online activity but Shapka says this kind of micro-managing can undermine healthy adolescent development.

"An open and honest relationship between parents and children is one of the best ways to protect teenagers from online risks related to cyberbullying, Internet addiction, and privacy concerns related to disclosing personal information online."

Provided by University of British Columbia

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