Like other offenses, cyberdeviance and cybercrime seem to start and peak in the teen years

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Tech-y teens, often more curious than criminal, are likely to start turning their talents to cyberdeviance and cybercrime at about age 15, with such activities peaking at about age 18.

That's according to a snapshot [survey](#) by University of Cincinnati researchers who will present their findings Nov. 21 at The American Society of Criminology annual conference in Atlanta.

Researchers Mark Stockman, UC associate professor of [information technology](#); Thomas Holt, associate professor of criminal justice at Michigan State University; and UC criminal justice doctoral students William Mackey and Michael Holiday participated in a survey of 274 university students in both computing-oriented majors and non-computing majors to ask them about their teen activities related to 25 specific cyberdeviance activities or cybercrimes.

In that survey, 71 percent of all respondents reported having engaged in at least a cyberdeviance activity as a teen.

Said Stockman, "The most-common form of what we call cyberdeviant behavior consisted of guessing at a password to gain access to a wireless network, followed by guessing at another's password, and knowingly accessing a wired network without authorization."

And, he added, this cyberdeviance might not be such a bad thing, as these are just the types of activities – as well as many others – that information technology programs teach and government and business-sponsored cyber competitions encourage and even reward talented students for. The ultimate goal, after all, is to prepare students for high-paying IT jobs in tech security in order to fight off bad-guy hackers, many of whom are based overseas.

The survey also asked respondents about their motivations when it came to any of these activities. According to Stockman, the motivation tended to be curiosity or a joke on a friend: "The respondents reported wanting to test out software or to solve a computer logic puzzle or to play a joke on a friend. Sometimes, they wanted to help improve a system's security, or they felt it was wrong for a hotel to charge $15 for wireless access."

Stockman and his fellow researchers plan to expand their survey's numbers and to conduct it annually because he believes that the onset age for computerdeviance and cybercrime will trend downward in years to come.

He explained, "In this first survey, we asked about the teen activities of those who were now, on average, 20 years old at the University of Cincinnati. When they were 15, today's 20-year-olds did not have all the easy-to-use tools that are available to today. I would not be surprised if future surveys show that the onset of computerdeviance begins at younger and younger ages, simply because the tools are becoming easier and easier to use."

Code-cracking details: Further findings from the cyber survey

- Overall, 71 percent of all respondents reported having engaged in

a cyberdeviance activity as a teen: 80 percent of those in computing majors reported having had done so, while 58 percent of students in non-computing majors reported having had done so.

- Overall, there was no statistical difference between men and women when it came to having tried at least one cyberdeviance activity as a teen. Among students in non-computing majors, 62 percent of women reported participating in a cyberdeviance or cybercrime activity vs. only 55 percent of men. For those in computing majors, 81 percent of men reporting having engaged in cyberdeviance as a teen vs. 66 percent of women. (These findings are distinct from those of more-traditional delinquent or crime activities, where men are far more likely to commit offenses.)

- However, on average, men had made more teen attempts at cyberdeviance or cybercrime. Men reported an average of five cyberdeviance or cybercrime activities among the 25 listed possibilities, while women reported an average of three cyberdeviance or cybercrime activities among the 25 listed possibilities. Computing majors reported having tried, on average, six cyberdeviant or cybercrime activities vs. three such attempts by non-computing majors.

Most common and least common cyberdeviance/ cybercrime activities reported in the snapshot survey

The most-common forms of cyberdeviance engaged in by the surveyed students were

- 52 percent of surveyed students had guessed at a password to gain access to a wireless network.
- 42 percent had guessed at another's password to get into his/her

computer account or files.
- 30 percent had knowingly accessed a wired network without authorization.

The least-common forms of cyberdeviance and cybercrimes engaged in by the surveyed students were

- 4 percent of those surveyed reported having used "a man in the middle" attack in order to direct users to altered sites. (This involves intercepting data going across a network and then rerouting it elsewhere. For instance, traffic could be rerouted to a website to sell something, or, a hacker could even redirect you from going to your bank's website to a fake website.)
- 3 percent of those surveyed had knowingly sent out phishing emails as teens.
- 3 percent of those surveyed had knowingly sent out SPAM emails as teens.

Provided by University of Cincinnati