

Survey: 4 in 10 US adults have experienced online harassment

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In this, Monday, Dec. 12, 2016, file photo illustration, a person types on a laptop, in Miami. A new Pew Research Center study says a whopping 41 percent of U.S. adults have experienced online harassment, ranging from offensive name-calling to stalking and sexual harassment. (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee)

A new survey says a whopping 41 percent of U.S. adults have experienced online harassment, ranging from offensive name-calling to stalking and sexual harassment.

That's up from 35 percent in 2014.

The Pew Research Center said Tuesday that 66 percent of respondents have witnessed other people being harassed. While some people's experiences could be "shrugged off" as a nuisance, Pew said, some 18 percent said they were subjected to "severe" forms of harassment. This included physical threats, stalking and harassment over a sustained period.

The vitriol of the 2016 presidential election has brought the issue to the forefront for many people. In fact, 14 percent of respondents said they have been harassed online specifically because of their political views.

Twitter and other online companies have promised to crack down on abuse.

On Monday, for example, Twitter introduced new controls aimed at curbing harassment—or at least preventing the targets of abuse from seeing what is said about them. Now, users can disable notifications when someone they don't know tweets about them. Still, this doesn't necessarily remove the abuse from Twitter—just hides it from those who are targeted.

Pew's report called social media an "especially fertile ground" for online harassment and found that 79 percent of respondents think online services have a "duty" to step in when abuse occurs on their platforms.

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