

Study finds youth who are cyberbullied are 10 times as likely to bully others

New report looks at results of survey of 30,000 BC students

In BC, cyberbullying, sexting, and the use of the Internet for sexual exploitation have become major areas of concern for young people. A new McCreary Centre Society report published today found that not only were youth who were victimized online more likely to victimize others, but also that over a fifth of students who had been cyberbullied in the past year had attempted suicide during the same time frame.

The report entitled ***Untangling the web: Online safety and sexting among BC youth*** looked at cyberbullying, meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe, and sexting among BC students aged 12-19. It found about 1 in 5 female students and 1 in 10 males had met someone online who made them feel unsafe, with similar percentages reporting being cyberbullied in the past year. As well, 11% of males and 6% of females sexted on the school day before taking the survey.

Students who had met someone unsafe online, had been cyberbullied, or who engaged in sexting were more likely than students who did not report these cyber-experiences to report poorer mental health, fewer hours of sleep, and avoiding extracurricular activities and missing school for fear of being bullied.

The more different online activities youth participated in and the more time they spent online, the more likely they were to report cybersafety issues. However youth who had positive relationships and other supports were less likely to experience online victimization or engage with technology in ways that put them at risk. Also, among youth who were victimized online, 20% of those who had a supportive adult in their family seriously considered suicide compared to 50% who did not have this type of support.

Annie Smith, Executive Director, McCreary Centre Society, commented: *“When we took these results back to young people, they told us that for the most part they really don’t know how to protect themselves online or what to do when they have a bad experience. They are looking to the adults in their life to support and guide them through this, but often feel that adults don’t know what to do either, other than telling them to turn their computer off, which is just not realistic for most teenagers.”*

“I think the report also clearly shows us it is often much more complicated than being either a victim or a perpetrator, and that we need to increase young people’s awareness about how their online behaviour might affect others.”

A copy of ***Untangling the web: Online safety and sexting among BC youth*** is available at www.mcs.bc.ca.



McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of BC youth through research and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

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BACKGROUNDER

This report used data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey, which was completed by almost 30,000 youth aged 12-19 in 56 of the 59 BC school districts.

The survey provides decision makers and others with an interest in youth health with information on the health picture of young people in BC, as well as essential information about health trends, and about risk and protective factors that can influence young people's healthy transitions to adulthood.

The survey is designed to consider emerging youth health issues and to track trends over time. It includes 130 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their physical and emotional health, risky behaviours, and health promoting practices. It also asks about broader issues such as feelings of safety, relationships, and engagement in a variety of activities.

A SELECTION OF KEY FINDINGS

Nineteen percent of females and 9% of males had ever met someone through the Internet who made them feel unsafe, and similar percentages had been cyberbullied in the past year.

Seven percent of males and 6% of females reported they had used technology to bully or pick on someone in the past 12 months. Youth who had been cyberbullied themselves were about 10 times as likely to be perpetrators as those who had not been cyberbullied (29% vs. 3%).

Online safety problems affected youth's participation in school and community life. For example, victims of cyberbullying were three times as likely as those who had not been cyberbullied to plan to leave high school before graduating. They were also more likely to skip school and to report that they did not participate in extracurricular activities for fear of being bullied (18% vs. 3% who had not been cyberbullied).

In addition, for both males and females, engaging in more activities after they were supposed to be asleep was associated with greater risk. For example, 11% of youth who engaged in one online activity after their expected bedtime reported being a victim of cyberbullying, compared to 21% of those who engaged in four online activities after bedtime.

Youth who engaged in sexting were more likely to engage in sexual activity and in risky sexual behaviour. For example, 36% of 13-year-olds who had sexted had also had oral sex, compared to 3% of those who had not sexted.

Some youth appeared to be at greater risk for experiencing cybersafety issues. These included youth who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; had a health condition or disability; had experienced abuse or other types of in-person violence; had poor self-image; and youth who were online a lot.

Youth who reported receiving support from family, school, peers, or adults in their community were less likely to experience online safety problems or to experience negative consequences if they were victimized.

Youth who felt highly connected to their families (i.e., their family understood them, paid attention to them, and had fun together) were less likely to have met someone unsafe online, sexted, or been bullied online. For example, while 7% of those who were highly connected to their families reported meeting someone online who made them feel unsafe, 24% of those who were least connected did so.

Students were half as likely to have met someone online who made them feel unsafe if they felt their teachers cared about them (12% vs. 24% who felt teachers did not care).

Among youth who had been cyberbullied, those who had turned to a teacher for help and found the experience positive were less likely to skip school due to fears about being bullied (11% vs. 26% who did not find their teacher helpful). Also, those who had a helpful school counsellor were less likely to report extreme stress in the past month (24% vs. 45% who approached a counsellor for help but did not find this helpful, among those who approached a counsellor for help in the past year).

Students who had helpful sources of support in the community such as sports coaches and friends also had fewer online safety problems.

The attitudes of youth's friends were also important. For example, youth with friends who would be upset with them if they were involved in a pregnancy were less likely to have sexted (8% vs. 13% with friends who would not be upset).

Finally, being involved in extracurricular activities where they felt listened to and valued was protective for youth who had been bullied through technology. For example, 28% of those who felt listened to quite a bit or very much in their activities reported self-harming in the past year, compared to 39% who felt somewhat listened to and 52% who felt they were listened to very little or not at all.

Webinar presentations of the findings are scheduled for Tuesday, February 2 at 9:30am and 2:00pm, Thursday, February 4 at 8:00am, and Tuesday, February 9 at 12:00pm.

Webinar details: www.mcs.bc.ca/upcoming_webinars

As part of this project young people are creating resources to engage other youth in the findings. Please see www.mcs.bc.ca for more details.

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