

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying victimization and associations with mental health problems among Canadian middle and high school students

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Cyberbullying; School Bullying; Mental Health; Psychological Distress; Suicidality

POPULATION GROUP

All Youth; Youth Workers

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health & Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

Academic

“The results of this study are important because they demonstrate that: (a) victims of both cyberbullying and school bullying have the greatest risks of experiencing mental health problems; (b) middle school students are more likely than high school students to be victims of both forms of bullying concurrently, and (c) middle school students who are victims of both forms of bullying have elevated risks of mental health problems than their high school counterparts.” (p. 684).

1. What is the research about?

Bullying is a public health issue, with consequences for victims, families, schools, and communities. Most schools and public health organizations focus on addressing bullying at the school level. Fewer programs target bullying on electronic media platforms, despite evidence showing that cyber bullying is pervasive in these spaces. Cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in that it affords the bully anonymity, a larger audience of observers, and access to the victim anywhere and at anytime. Single experiences of school bullying or cyberbullying have been associated with depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation, with victims of both forms of bullying presenting with the highest risk of depression and suicidality. This study explored associations between co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying with poor self-rated mental health, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.

2. Where did the research take place?

This was an Ontario province-wide research study administered throughout classrooms between November 2012 and June 2013.

3. Who is this research about?

The sample consisted of 5,478 students between grades 7 – 12 from 42 school boards, 198 schools, and 671 classes across Ontario.

4. How was the research done?

This is a cross-sectional study using data from the 2013 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS), a biennial province-wide survey examining trends in student drug use, mental health, physical health, gambling, and other risk behaviors. The survey also identifies risk and protective factors in 7th to 12th grade students.

5. What are the key findings?

Nearly 1 in 8 students were victims of both cyberbullying and school bullying within the previous year. Being a victim of any form of bullying was associated with greater odds of poor self-rated mental health, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, with the strongest associations being between co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying. High school students were more likely than middle school students to report mental health problems; however, middle school students presented elevated odds of poor self-rated mental health, psychological distress, and suicidal ideation. Being female and younger was related to greater reports of co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying victimization. Students from families with lower socioeconomic status and those with lower parental education were more likely to be both cyberbullied and school bullied.

6. Why does it matter for youth work?

The findings from this study showcase that victims of both cyberbullying and school bullying, particularly middle school students, are the most vulnerable group and there is a need to address both forms of bullying simultaneously. The timing of bullying intervention and prevention efforts needs to begin in middle school and perhaps as early as elementary school. Additionally, parents, schools, and communities need to work together to reduce and prevent bullying among young children. Interventions should focus on teaching youth empathy, promoting prosocial behaviours in school, and providing them education programs on cyberbullying and cyber safety.

This study recommends that a suicide prevention and intervention component is essential when creating comprehensive bullying response programs. For youth workers working outside of the school system it is important to be knowledgeable on the signs and effects of co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying. Youth workers should be mindful of incorporating suicide prevention and intervention components into their youth programs and agencies.



Sampasa-Kanyinga, H. (2017). Co-occurring cyberbullying and school bullying victimization and associations with mental health problems among Canadian middle and high school students. *Violence and Victims*, 32(4), 671-686. doi:10.1891/0886-6708.vv-d-16-00031