

Online or off, bullying proves harmful

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A study led by Thomas Holt, Michigan State University, found that kids who are cyberbullied are just as likely to skip school and consider suicide as kids who are physically bullied. Credit: Michigan State University

Children who are bullied online or by mobile phone are just as likely to skip school or consider suicide as kids who are physically bullied, according to a study led by a Michigan State University criminologist.

The findings, published in the *International Criminal Justice Review*, suggest parents, school officials and policymakers should consider bullying experiences both on and offline when creating anti-bullying policies and procedures.

"We should not ignore one form of bullying for the sake of the other," said Thomas Holt, associate professor of criminal justice. "The results suggest we should find ways to develop [school policies](#) to combat bullying within the [school environment](#) and then figure out how to translate that to the home, because the risk goes beyond the schoolyard."

The study is one of two new research papers from MSU scholars dealing with cyberbullying. The

[other study](#), led by Saleem Alhabash in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations, suggests positive online comments are an effective way to fight cyberbullying.

Holt and colleagues, using survey data from more than 3,000 third- through 11th-grade students in Singapore, analyzed the relationships between physical bullying, cyberbullying and mobile phone bullying on skipping school and suicidal thoughts. The study, one of the first to explore bullying in Southeast Asia, echoes research findings from the United States and Canada.

According to the study, 22 percent of students who were physically bullied skipped school or thought about skipping. By comparison, 27 percent of students who were bullied online (which includes email, blogs and chat rooms) and 28 percent who were sent bullying text messages on a mobile phone skipped school or thought about skipping.

Similarly, 22 percent of students who were physically bullied reported [suicidal thoughts](#), while 28 percent of those who reported cyberbullying and 26 percent who were bullied via cell phone said they considered suicide.

In addition, females and younger students were more likely to consider suicide, which reflects other research findings.

Holt said parents should pay attention to [warning signs](#) of bullying such as [mood changes](#), sadness, school failures, [social withdrawal](#) and a lack of appetite.

When it comes to cyberbullying, he said "careful supervision of youth activity online, including the use of filtering software, can help reduce the likelihood that the child is targeted by bullies via the Web."

Managing the child's mobile phone use is encouraged, Holt said, although there is evidence kids are less likely to report this type of bullying for

fear of losing their phone.

"Thus," he said, "parents must carefully educate their children on the risk of bullying victimization via mobile phones and ensure that they can speak to one or both parents about negative experiences."

Provided by Michigan State University

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