

Online harassment a problem for many U.S. teens: survey

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Britain's Prince William holds a cardboard hand with the names he wrote down of five people he would turn to in the event of bullying: Catherine, Harry, Father, Grandmother and Grandfather. He took part in a group exercise during his visit to Hammersmith Academy to support the Diana Award's #Back2School Anti-bullying Campaign in London, England. Photo: Matt Dunham/AP

A majority of U.S. teenagers say they have been victims of online harassment or bullying, and that social media companies aren't doing enough to fight the problem, a survey showed Thursday, September 27.

The Pew Research Center survey found that 59 percent of U.S. teens reported being bullied or harassed online, and 63 percent said it was a major problem for people their age.

The most common type of harassment cited was name-calling, cited by 42 percent, while 32 percent said someone had spread false rumors about them on the Internet and 16 percent said they had been the target of physical threats online.

Among teens surveyed, 1 in 4 said they had received unwanted explicit images, received queries about their whereabouts from people other than a parent or had explicit images of them shared without their consent.

"Name-calling and rumor-spreading have long been an unpleasant and challenging aspect of adolescent life. But the proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media has transformed where, when and how bullying takes place," said Monica Anderson, the lead researcher for the Pew report.

According to Pew, similar shares of boys and girls have been harassed online, but girls are more likely to be the targets of rumor-spreading or nonconsensual explicit messages.

Teens from lower-income families are more likely than those from higher-income families to encounter certain forms of online bullying, Pew said.

Most young harassment victims feel that teachers, social media firms and politicians are doing a poor or fair job in addressing the problem of cyberbullying – an issue which has drawn the attention of U.S. first lady Melania Trump and Britain's Prince William.

The teens believe parents are doing better – with 59 percent saying that parents are doing a good or excellent job in addressing online harassment.

One of the factors fueling online harassment is that many teens are on their phones or online so frequently. A previous Pew study showed 95 percent of U.S. teens had a smartphone and nearly half were online "almost constantly."

The latest report showed two-thirds of teens who say they are online almost constantly have been cyberbullied, compared with 53 percent of those who use the Internet several times a day or less.

Pew said that 59 percent of parents interviewed during the research were worried about their teen being harassed or bullied online, and a similar percentage were concerned about their teen sending or receiving explicit messages.

The researchers surveyed 743 teens between the ages of 13 and 17 and 1,058 parents between March 7 and April 10. The estimated margin of error is 5 percentage points for the teen group and 4.5 points for the parents.