

The West Midlands Cybersurvey Executive Summary

By Adrienne Katz of Youthworks with statistical analysis by Catherine Dillon.

(NB % are rounded up)

About the survey

The survey was undertaken in the autumn term of 2009 in Birmingham, Solihull, Dudley and Oxfordshire.

The sample is made up of 3348 young people, 53% female, 47% male, plus 29 people who did not answer this question.

Ages 10 -15 comprised the bulk of the responses, with the highest number coming from the 12 -13 age group, (40%).

ACCESS to computers and mobile phones without adult help or supervision is widespread.

92% have a mobile phone and 89% have a computer they can use on their own at home. Further independent access venues include clubs, libraries, cafes or friends' homes. Social Networking is popular with over two thirds of all the young people and more than three quarters of the girls.

Experiences Online

48% of respondents had experienced at least one of the forms of cyber abuse described in the question. Half of them reported receiving a message from 'someone who was not who they said they were'. While one upsetting or abusive message does not necessarily denote bullying is taking place, it can easily escalate. The abuse may be part of an ongoing bullying campaign in the real world. More than a third said they received a message which showed that 'people were talking about you nastily online' and more than a quarter had a message from a stranger asking them 'to meet up' or trying to make them 'do something they did not want to do'.

* calculated from responses from people who had experienced at least one of these forms of cyberbullying. These respondents form 47.6% of the total sample. 1753 missing.

Gender and age patterns tell us that it will be vital to address the needs of girls and boys with a more nuanced approach when addressing cybersafety. Girls are markedly more likely than boys to experience 'people talking about you nastily online' (43% vs. 28%). Girls also receive more messages with unwanted sexual suggestions, jokes or threats (29% vs. 25%) and messages from strangers asking to meet up (32% vs.22%).

Boys on the other hand are more likely to receive a message 'with insults calling you gay' (35% vs. 24%). Boys are also more likely to receive a message that tries to 'make you do something you don't want to do.' (33% vs.27%).

There is a large increase at age 14 -15 in most of the types of abusive message discussed. However one or two types of message were frequently experienced by the youngest age group including racist comments and 'messages that showed people were talking about you nastily online.'

Worryingly, over a third of the youngest age group had received a message 'trying to make them do something they did not want to do'. One in five had received a message with unwanted sexual suggestions, jokes or threats and 31% had received homophobic insults. More than one in five had received a message from a stranger suggesting they meet up.

The peak age for unwanted sexual jokes and threats is 14 -17.

Experiences on Mobile phones

28% of respondents had experienced at least one form of phone abuse described in the questionnaire. The experiences of these people included a variety of ingenious, manipulative or humiliating messages sometimes including images. Some messages demonstrated the total lack of inhibition shown by the sender shielded by this indirect medium.

Similar gender differences to those described in online abuse were found in reports of mobile phone bullying. For example, boys are almost twice as likely to experience homophobic bullying as girls (36% vs. 19%). Girls were more likely to suffer name calling by text (57% vs. 45%) and to have humiliating photos of them sent to others (22% vs. 17%).

More than one in four of 10 -11 year olds report cyberbullying carried on from their lives in school.

Deliberately making and changing social arrangements in order to humiliate or exclude the target child appears to be fairly common among all age groups..

Indirect bullying

Cyberbullying does not have to be directly received by a young person in order to hurt or create a climate of fear. 16% of all respondents say others have deliberately sent round messages spreading rumours about them and as many as 37% know someone this has happened to. It is markedly more common for girls to know someone this has happened to than for boys (44% vs. 30%).

Among the youngest age group (10 -11) only 6% of respondents report that rumours are being spread about them, but by the age of 12-13 this increases to 15.5%. This suggests that work should be done among the 10-11 year olds before this behaviour takes hold.

Cyberbullying others

Seventy five boys (5%) and seventy six girls (4%) admitted cyberbullying others.

Reporting and getting help

38% of the total sample answered this question. Of these: 48% did tell someone but the majority did not. Asked whether they got help to stop the cyberbullying, fewer than half (48%) said they did. The younger age groups were far more likely to ask for and to receive help for cyberbullying they had experienced.

How did it make you feel?

26% of the sample described their reactions.

Of these:

37% felt upset and angry. Girls were more likely to give this answer than boys. 25% felt 'a little upset and down'.

22% were 'not bothered'. A few said they were 'OK with their friends' and 11% took it as a joke.

E-safety education

87% of the participants received e-safety education in school. 63% were taught by their parents. Smaller numbers learnt from their siblings, a website or at a youth club. Young people suggested a wide range of further sources which they were using to inform themselves with a strong thread of autonomy.

The quality of the e-safety education given was rated positively by 92% and it was generally thought to have been given at the appropriate time by 82%. Younger age groups are more likely to approve than the older ones, reflecting both recent improvements in the teaching of e-safety and the more independent views of older adolescents with experience.

Those most likely to say they were taught 'too late' are the oldest age group, for whom e-safety education may not have been as developed when they were ten as it is today for the 10-11 year olds.

However despite this near universal approval, large numbers said they did not follow these guidelines all the time. Just over 40% said that they *always* followed the guidelines, leaving a majority who at least occasionally do not follow what they have been taught. A hard core of 12% do *not really* follow these guidelines while as many as 46% only *sometimes* do so.

36% try to get round blocks at least occasionally and 6% have either a friend or sibling who gets past blocks.

These findings vary according to age and it is important to note that 19% of 14-15 year olds do *not really* or *never* follow the guidelines they have been taught to keep safe online. Only 29% of the 14-15 year olds say they *always* do so.