The Impact of COVID-19 on Cyber-victimization Experiences Among Middle School Students
Jessica Batierra, Sarah Aronson, Madisyn Welsh
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract
Adolescents’ frequent use of social media and other forms of electronic communication has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and adolescents are using these platforms for schoolwork and socialization. Researchers have yet to explore a possible consequence of this increased usage: an increase in cyber-victimization among adolescents. To date, most research has examined adolescent cyber-victimization in international spaces during the pandemic, but not as much research has been conducted in the United States. Additionally, it is nearly impossible to find research that focuses on cyber-victimization rates in the United States before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is what this research aims to address.

Participants were two cohorts of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students from an urban middle school. Both cohorts’ self-reported rates of cyber-victimization were examined before (spring and fall 2019, early spring 2020) and during the pandemic (spring of 2021). Results indicated a large number of adolescents experienced cyber-victimization, but these rates were similar before the pandemic to current rates of cyber-victimization. This research aims to inform those working and living with adolescents of the risks associated with excessive social media use, including experiencing cyber-victimization. These results can be used to support students who have experienced cyber-victimization before and during the pandemic, and to help practitioners strategize ways to inform and enhance future prevention programs. It is crucial to understand the
consequences of this digital world during a global pandemic, and future researchers should consider the associations between cyber-victimization and adolescent mental health concerns.

**Keywords:** cyber-victimization, middle school, COVID-19 pandemic, social media

---

**About the Authors:** Jessica Baltierra is a junior majoring in Social Work and minoring in Psychology. She plans to graduate in December 2022. She is interested in research involving the foster care system, child welfare, and child abuse and neglect.

Sarah Aronson anticipates graduating in Spring, 2022. Her major is Social Work, with a minor in Anthropology. Her research interests revolve around children and schools.

Madisyn Welsh is a Senior majoring in Social Work with a minor in Criminology, Law, and Society, graduating in May 2022. Her research interests include violence prevention, criminal justice, and juvenile social-emotional well-being. Specifically, she is interested in learning more about the experiences of juveniles within the criminal justice system as well as programming available for adolescents and families affected by the criminal justice system.
INTRODUCTION

- Cyber-victimization is defined as any type of bullying or harm done using electronic sources (Snakenborg, Van Acker, & Gable, 2011).
- This type of bullying is more volatile and harmful due to the protection of anonymity, limited adult supervision, and larger possible audiences to victimize (Dempsey et. al., 2009).
- In 2017, 23% of youth in middle school had experienced some form of cyber-victimization (CDC, 2017).
- 32.7% of cyber-victimization victims stated the perpetrator was someone that they thought was a friend.
- 25.7% of cyber-victimization victims stated
References


Victims stated from their law, 2015). on the al bullying alski and

emic e impact of al media usage as we are comparing cyber-victimization rates among middle schoolers from before the pandemic to current rates in 2021

Our study has specified the different types of perpetrators of cyber-victimization among students

There have not been many studies that have done this

Breakdown of cyber-victimization from friend, dating partner, someone at school, online

The Journal of Undergraduate Social Work Research, Volume 5 (September 2021)
friend, dating partner, someone at school, stranger, family, or other