Public Safety Canada   Sécurité publique Canada

Cyberbullying Public Awareness Research 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for Public Safety Canada

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Canada

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Executive Summary

Prepared for Public Safety Canada by Environics Research

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1. Background and objectives

Public Safety Canada (PS) wants to better understand how to effectively prevent and address cyberbullying. In Spring 2019, Cyberbullying Public Awareness Research was conducted to serve as a baseline measurement of Canadian youth and parents of youth in terms of their knowledge, experience, awareness, attitudes and behaviours with respect to cyberbullying. That information was used to develop and implement a multi-year public awareness campaign on cyberbullying. In March 2021, Public Safety developed a website and other communication materials that included resources on cyberbullying and information about where to get help if someone was experiencing cyberbullying. Starting in FY21-22, the campaign combined its resources with the Online Child Sexual Exploitation initiative due to interchangeable topics and a shared youth audience. The aim was to establish a lasting approach, leading to the creation of an in-person and virtual school roadshow for grades 7 and 8.

During the fourth year of funding in FY21-22, PS conducted a second program of Public Opinion Research to assess changes in Canadians' knowledge, awareness, and behaviors regarding cyberbullying. This aimed to compare results to the 2019 baseline and measure the impact of the marketing campaign over the preceding years.

This research study conducted in the Fall of 2024 aims to measure the extent to which there have been any shifts in Canadian youth's and parents of youth's knowledge, awareness and behaviours about cyberbullying, in comparison to the findings from the survey conducted in 2019 and 2022. POR findings will also determine if Canadian youth and parents of youth are now more aware of where to get help if they are dealing with cyberbullying. In this case, the two target audiences are Canadian youth aged 14 to 24, as well as parents of youth between the ages of 10 and 24.

Research findings will support future policy and communications plans and activities regarding public awareness, and will help determine where the cyberbullying campaign could potentially shift focus in coming years.

2. Methodology

Environics Research conducted two online surveys of Canadians between September 30 and October 14, 2024. The first survey was with 801 youth aged 14 to 24, and the second survey was of 604 parents with children between 10 and 24 years of age. Quotas were set by age, gender and region and the data were weighted to ensure the sample is representative of these populations according to the most recently available Census information.

As an online survey is a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error is reported. This size of sample provides robust data to understand behaviours, opinions and attitudes within the total population and sub-groups of interest for parents and youth. More information about the methodology for this survey is included in Appendix A.

3. Cost of research

The cost of this research was $90,371.75 (HST included).

4. Key findings

Youth and their parents are feeling increasingly less safe online as the years progress. Parents and youth are not always aligned about which social media applications and communication tools youth are using, or where cyberbullying is occurring.

Safety and technology. The proportion of youth who consider themselves safe while online has decreased over the years, with just over one-quarter of youth feeling this way. A similar pattern is emerging among parents, who have always been more likely to deem various locations unsafe compared to their children. This is especially true when it comes to their children being online, where just over one in ten parents personally feel their children are safe.

While perceptions of safety are shifting, the amount of time youth spend online has remained unchanged since 2022. On average, youth continue to spend about six hours online, with one-third reporting that they use the internet for social interaction at least once an hour. YouTube and Instagram remain the most commonly used social media platforms among youth, though usage of YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitch has increased since 2022. While these trends are reported by youth, parents do not seem to align with this increase in usage of these specific platforms.

Majorities of youth continue to report mostly positive experiences with online social activities such as texting, messaging, gaming, and using social media. Youth who play video games are particularly more likely to view the activity as a positive experience, following a sharp decline in 2022.

Perceptions of cyberbullying. General awareness of cyberbullying has remained consistent since 2022, though in 2024 more youth report being very aware of cyberbullying, with nearly seven in ten expressing this. Among youth, being very aware of cyberbullying is associated with more frequent internet use and being in the older age cohort of 18-24. Anglophone youth are more likely than Francophone youth to say they are very aware of cyberbullying, while Francophone parents are more likely than Anglophone parents to express awareness of the issue.

Although a majority of youth (seven in ten) report learning about cyberbullying from their school or teachers, this proportion has declined since 2022. Similarly, youth are less likely to learn about cyberbullying from ads or PSAs. Racialized youth are among the most likely to have learned about cyberbullying through news stories.

The perception that cyberbullying is a serious problem for young people in Canada has stayed statistically consistent with 2022 levels but has declined compared to 2019.

- Girls (youth) and women (parents) continue to be more likely than boys and men to view cyberbullying as a very serious issue.
- Notably, Francophone parents continue to express more concern about cyberbullying compared to Anglophone parents, though this pattern is not reflected among youth

Large majorities of both youth and parents continue to believe that cyberbullying is widespread and affects many young people. They also continue to believe that victims of cyberbullying are most often perceived as physically unattractive, gay/lesbian, transgender/gender diverse, or are racialized or female. However, since the

first wave of research in 2019, both youth and parents have become increasingly likely to mention young men and boys as probable victims of cyberbullying.

Most youth and parents continue to believe that cyberbullying is at least mostly illegal in Canada, a perception that has remained steady across previous waves. Both Francophone youth and parents, as well as those in Quebec, are more likely to say that cyberbullying is illegal.

Experiences of cyberbullying. The proportion of youth who report being cyberbullied has increased over the past two years, with nearly four in ten now saying they have experienced it. Despite this rise among youth, parents are generally less likely to report that their children have ever been cyberbullied. When asked about the age at which their child was first cyberbullied, more parents now indicate that their child was between 14 and 17 years old. Equal proportions of parents (about four in ten) say they learned about their child being cyberbullied either when their child came to them right away or when they were told long after the bullying had begun. Parents whose child came to them immediately are more likely to be female.

Regarding where cyberbullying occurs, youth are increasingly likely to mention Snapchat, Discord, and TikTok as platforms where it happens. However, despite youth reporting such, parents do not appear to be more aware that cyberbullying is taking place on these platforms.

The most common types of cyberbullying continue to involve name-calling and negative comments about physical appearance. Compared to 2022, the proportion of youth reporting name-calling has decreased, while negative comments about physical appearance have increased. The occurrence of receiving sexually explicit messages as a form of cyberbullying has also risen since 2022. It is important to note that while both negative comments about appearance and sexually explicit messages have increased, parents of cyberbullied youth are not more likely to report these forms of bullying.

Additionally, cyberbullied youth are now more likely to report that the person who bullied them was a stranger on the internet or an anonymous individual.

The impact of being cyberbullied has remained steady compared to previous waves, as have the actions taken in response. Youth who sought support or reported their experience are most likely to say they felt 'supported,' 'like someone was on their side,' and 'understood.'

Concerns about being cyberbullied in the future have increased among youth since 2022, with nearly twice as many youth who have never been cyberbullied expressing strong concern about it. This trend has not changed among parents.

While seven in ten parents say that none of the top-used social media apps and communication methods are safe from cyberbullying, over two in ten youth consider YouTube and text messaging/WhatsApp to be safe.

Witnessing cyberbullying. Almost half of youth have witnessed cyberbullying directed at someone else, a trend that has increased since 2022. Youth who have witnessed cyberbullying are significantly more likely to say the perpetrator was a stranger on the internet.

When reflecting on the incidents they witnessed, half of youth report that name-calling was involved, although this has decreased since 2022. They are now more likely to mention witnessing negative comments about a physical disability. Youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are more likely than younger youth to have witnessed negative comments about race or ethnicity, gender identity, health conditions, and physical, cognitive, or sensory disabilities.

Perpetrating cyberbullying. Over one in ten youth admit to having cyberbullied someone or being accused of cyberbullying, a proportion that has increased since previous waves. Notably, youth who have been cyberbullied themselves are more likely to say they may have engaged in cyberbullying in the past compared to those who haven't experienced cyberbullying. Similarly, parents of children who have been cyberbullied are more likely to believe their child may have cyberbullied someone themselves. This pattern also holds when parents are asked about their concerns regarding their child potentially cyberbullying someone, with those expressing greater concern often having children who have cyberbullied in the past.

Youth who may have cyberbullied, along with their parents, are more likely to report the bullying was directed at a stranger on the internet or an anonymous person, a trend that has significantly increased since previous waves.

Responding to cyberbullying. When youth are asked what they would do in a hypothetical situation if they were being cyberbullied now, they are more likely to say they would block the cyberbully or talk to a parent. Compared to 2022, fewer youth say they would block the cyberbully or talk to a friend about it. Significantly fewer youth also say they would ignore it and not respond. At the same time, the proportion of youth who say they would contact the police to report it has increased, with over one in ten who say they would do this.

- Youth who have been cyberbullied before say they would directly confront the cyberbully, while those who have never been cyberbullied say they would talk to a parent or school authorities about it.

While concern is slightly greater among parents, majorities of youth and parents feel that cyberbullying can have long-term consequences for victims and that it is a growing problem. Compared to 2022, fewer parents say that we do not take cyberbullying seriously enough. Despite this, they also are less likely to think it would be taken very seriously if they reported cyberbullying to the authorities.

The vast majority of parents and youth continue to be unaware of any specific helplines or websites to turn to for support on cyberbullying, regardless of whether the family has experienced cyberbullying or not.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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