

Grade School Students Who Own Cell Phones are More Likely to be Cyberbullied

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Editor's note: *The 2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Sept. 16-19 in Chicago.*

Most research on cyberbullying has focused on adolescents. But a new study that examined cell phone ownership among children in third to fifth grades finds they may be particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying.

The study abstract, "Cell Phone Ownership and Cyberbullying in 8-11 Year Olds: New Research," will be presented Monday, Sept. 18 at the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition in Chicago.

Researchers collected survey data on 4,584 students in grades 3, 4 and 5 between 2014 and 2016. Overall, 9.5 percent of children reported being a victim of cyberbullying. Children who owned cell phones were significantly more likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying, especially in grades 3 and 4.

"Parents often cite the benefits of giving their child a cell phone, but our research suggests that giving young children these devices may have unforeseen risks as well," said Elizabeth K. Englander, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Bridgewater State University in Bridgewater, Mass.

Across all three grades, 49.6 of students reported owning a cell phone. The older the student, the more likely to report cell phone ownership: 59.8 percent of fifth graders, 50.6 percent of fourth graders, and 39.5 percent of third graders reported owning their own cell phone. Cell phone owners in grades three and four were more likely to report being a victim of cyberbullying. Across all three grades, more cell phone owners admitted they have been a cyberbully themselves.

According to the researchers, the increased risk of cyberbullying related to phone ownership could be tied to increased opportunity and vulnerability. Continuous access to social media and texting increases online interactions, provides more opportunities to engage both positively and negatively with peers, and increases the chance of an impulsive response to peers' postings and messages.

Englander suggests that this research is a reminder for parents to consider the risks as well as the benefits when deciding whether to provide their elementary school-aged child with a cell phone.

"At the very least, parents can engage in discussions and education with their child about the responsibilities inherent in owning a mobile device, and the general rules for communicating in the social sphere," Englander said.

Englander will present the abstract, available at <http://aapexperience.org/aap-conference-planner/>, on Monday, Sept. 18, from 5:10 p.m. to 6 p.m. CT in McCormick Place West, Room S106.

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