Findings indicate that youth who experience peer harassment that includes both in-person and technology components are at higher risk for suicidal ideation.

These findings highlight the complexity of relationships between peer victimization and suicidal ideation.

Media stories linking cyberbullying and suicidal ideation or behavior may be oversimplifying the relationship by suggesting that bullying directly causes suicidal behavior.

Examples of peer harassment that includes both in-person and technology components:

**Male, 18**: "I got into a disagreement with one of my friend’s girlfriends and she continued to tell me off with text messaging afterwards."

**Female, 15**: "I got in a fight last year and people keep posting it on Facebook. The comments made on there are ridiculously rude. I get cut down and called fat, told fat people should not fight a skinny person, that I should be ashamed of myself."

Recent media stories have focused on teens who have committed suicide with cyberbullying victimization histories, suggesting a causal link.

What does the research show?
Is Peer Harassment Related to Later Suicidal Ideation?

- Youth who experienced both in-person and technology-based peer harassment within the past year were 5 times more likely than those without this type of victimization to report suicidal ideation.

- Youth who experienced in-person only peer harassment were 4 times more likely than those without this type of victimization to report suicidal ideation.

- Experiencing only technology harassment did not significantly predict suicidal ideation.

- Youth with suicidal ideation were 9 times more likely than those without to have such thoughts two years later.

- Youth with high depressive symptoms were 7 times more likely than those without to have suicidal ideation two years later.

What can we do?

Given the multi-layered relationships among these variables, schools, medical and mental health professionals might screen youth who are involved in higher-risk peer victimization situations, (i.e. those that involve both in-person and technology elements), for suicidal ideation to improve their access to appropriate mental health services.

How the study was conducted

We conducted two telephone interviews, about 2 years apart, with a national sample of 791 youth and young adults, ages 10 to 20 at follow-up. Follow-up data was collected in 2013-2014.

What to look for

Our data indicates that “mixed” incidents, those that involve harassing communications in-person and through technology, appear to be representative of higher-risk situations. These incidents appear to be marked by more intense, personal, and complex negative interactions that have high emotional salience for those involved.

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For more information about this study, contact Dr. Kimberly Mitchell at Kimberly.mitchell@unh.edu