

Risky Connections: Dangers of Cyberspace

There's a troubling new dimension to the nation's bullying problem.

While tools such as cell phones and computers can aid students' learning, they can inadvertently put students in harm's way. For starters, the widespread availability of electronic devices and social media means bullies can now target their victims around the clock.

"Most cyberbullying occurs outside of school," says EDC's Shari Kessel Schneider, who led a large-scale study that showed cyberbullying is associated with psychological distress and poorer school performance. "Perpetrators can post messages anonymously, to a wide audience, at any time of the day. Victims don't get a break when they leave school and enter their homes."

More than 20,000 high school students in the MetroWest Boston area participated in the study, which was funded by the MetroWest Health Foundation. Overall, 16 percent reported being victims of cyberbullying, and 26 percent reported being victims of school bullying. One in 10 students reported being targets of both kinds of bullying.

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Health, the study provides valuable insights to patterns of cyberbullying and its association with school performance and mental health problems:

- More girls than boys reported being the victims of cyberbullying.
- Youth who did not identify themselves as heterosexual were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than heterosexual youth.
- Victims of cyberbullying were more likely to report lower grades in school and a lower sense of connection to school than nonvictims.
- Students who were victims of cyberbullying, either alone or in combination with school bullying, were more likely to report depressive symptoms and suicide attempts than students who were only bullied at school.

"Technology and teens' use of social media continue to evolve," Kessel Schneider says. "This study underscores the need for schools and families to work together to address both school bullying and cyberbullying and their associations with mental health problems and school success." —*H.L.*

Notable

Caring for the Elderly

EDC's **Chronic Care Community Corps (4C)** was awarded a grant by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation to support its work on healthy aging and caregiver support. 4C uses interactive seminars to educate adults caring for elder family members.

Programs for Veterans

EDC's **IntegratedEthics**, developed with the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Center for Ethics in Health Care, was 1 of 25 programs to receive the Innovations in Government award from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation.

Under a new five-year contract from the Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD, EDC will develop new educational materials to address **posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries**.

School Injury Prevention

Ellen Schmidt contributed the chapter "Partnering with Schools to Prevent Injuries and Violence" to *Injury Prevention for Children and Adolescents: Research, Practice, and Advocacy*, which emphasizes the need for researchers and practitioners to work together to make schools safe.

New Substance Abuse Prevention Website

The **Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT)** launched its new website (captus.samhsa.gov) to assist states, tribes, and communities in strengthening their substance abuse prevention systems. CAPT is operated by EDC and funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.