

# CYBER-AGGRESSION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

responded to a survey asking about their experiences as a victim, a witness and a perpetrator of cyber-aggression. An additional 31 students participated in focus groups or interviews.

A definition of Cyber-Aggression: “Intentional harm delivered by the use of electronic means to an individual or a group of individuals of any age, who perceive(s) such acts as offensive, derogatory, harmful or unwanted.”

Examples of cyber-aggression include: Hostile behaviours such as name-calling, threatening, stalking, sexual harassment, revealing personal information, sharing a sext without permission and cyberbullying.

**STUDY DETAILS** The study was led by Dr. Faye Mishna, Joanne Daciuk, Ashley Lacombe-Duncan, Gwendolyn Fearing and Melissa Van Wert. Data come from a tri-campus random sample of 5,000 students, 1,350 who

**Overall, 55 per cent of students experienced one or more acts of cyber-aggression.**

## Forms and Frequency of Cyber-Aggression Reports

Received angry, rude threatening message	Had private video or photo shared without permission	Intentionally excluded from text message or online event	Had false rumours spread by text message or online	Was impersonated by text message or online	Publically posted hurtful text messages or online comments
<b>11%</b> Victim once	<b>9%</b> Victim once	<b>9%</b> Victim once	<b>7%</b> Victim once	<b>5%</b> Victim once	<b>4%</b> Victim once
<b>18%</b> Victim twice or more	<b>16%</b> Victim twice or more	<b>9%</b> Victim twice or more	<b>7%</b> Victim twice or more	<b>4%</b> Victim twice or more	<b>4%</b> Victim twice or more

## WHAT STUDENTS DID TO OTHERS

**77%**

of the time they shared a private video or photo

**50%**

of the time they spread false rumours

**35%**

of the time they sent angry/rude/threatening messages

**The most common perpetrator was “a friend”**

“ I think if I honestly asked my male friends if they have ever received a photo from someone... from the person who wasn't in that photo, they would have to say yes ”

- Student feedback

## WHAT STUDENTS WITNESSED HAPPENING TO OTHERS

**64%**

of students have witnessed one or more acts in the last six months

## WHAT STUDENTS SELF-IDENTIFIED AS COMMITTING AGAINST OTHERS

**34%**

of students perpetrated 1 or more cyber-aggressive acts

## WHAT RESOURCES/SUPPORTS STUDENTS WANT

“ I think one of the supports we don't have here is education for cyber-aggression because people don't really know if there's cyber-aggression or not, or if this is just a friend trolling us ”

## IMPACT OF CYBER-AGGRESSION

“ I think it can be extremely detrimental to one's mental and physical health ”

“ Once again, in the past, I've seen my fellow classmates engage in terrible behavior over the internet. I once saw someone start a chain of lies and rumours that ended up in the person breaking down ”

**Only three per cent** of survey respondents had accessed or were aware of resources related to cyber-aggression.

## Sexting

Our findings point to the need to separate consensual sexting from experiences that involve violations of privacy, trust and consent (Burkett, 2015). Education on these differences is needed among students, faculty and university administration.

## WHY STUDENTS THINK IT HAPPENS

“ It is a means of aggression, it's a means of ranting out about anything and everything possible. That could be just bullying, that could be being anti-religious, that could be about racism, that could be about sexuality, that could be as simple as a hatred to anyone... A means to use cyberspace as a weapon or a means to relieve your emotions like in the most negative way possible ”

## WHAT ACTION THEY TOOK

The most common response was to **ignore** the cyber-aggression, followed by making a **joke** of it, or **telling a friend**.

For more information about the study please contact Dr. Faye Mishna [f.mishna@utoronto.ca](mailto:f.mishna@utoronto.ca)

# CYBER-AGGRESSION RESOURCES

**1.** **If you see something, say something.** When you see someone receiving angry, rude, or threatening messages, privately check in with the person. Use the reporting function of your social media application to report cyber-aggression. Tell the person of whom a private video or photo has been shared. Do not forward or re-post a message or photo of someone without the person's consent. Reach out to an on-campus service if you are concerned your safety is at risk:

**Community Safety Office**  
[communitysafety.utoronto.ca](http://communitysafety.utoronto.ca)

**Safety at the University of Toronto**  
[safety.utoronto.ca](http://safety.utoronto.ca)

**2.** **Practice good netiquette.** Most cyber-aggression is perpetuated by friends. Netiquette involves communicating with others online respectfully and responsibly.

**3.** **Do your part to create a non-discriminatory online space in which for you and your classmates can interact.** This means treating others how you want to be treated and standing up for others who are victimized. Some students are more vulnerable than others based on race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, among other characteristics.

**4.** Educate yourself – learn how to enhance your cyber security:

**Stay Safe Online**  
National Cyber Security Alliance  
[staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/](http://staysafeonline.org/stay-safe-online/)

**5.** **Seek help** - if you are experiencing cyber-aggression and associated consequences such as mental health concerns. **Remember that interpersonal violence doesn't just happen in person. It also happens online.**

**University of Toronto Sexual Violence Prevention and Support Centre (tri-campus):**

[416-978-3908](tel:416-978-3908)

**University of Toronto Mississauga Health & Counselling Centre**

[www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/](http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/health/)

**University of Toronto St. George Health & Wellness Centre**

[www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc](http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc)

**University of Toronto Scarborough Health and Wellness Centre**

[www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/)

**Examples of programs that support student mental health include:**

Good 2 Talk:

[www.good2talk.ca](http://www.good2talk.ca)

SafeTalk:

[studentlife.utoronto.ca/cld/safetalk](http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/cld/safetalk)

More Feet on the Ground:

[utoronto.morefeetontheground.ca](http://utoronto.morefeetontheground.ca)

Flourishing Project at UTSC:

[www.utsc.utoronto.ca/projects/flourish/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/projects/flourish/)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CYBER-AGGRESSION STUDY,  
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