

Pew says online harassment levels high in US

WASHINGTON, USA: About 40% of US internet users say they have been harassed online, and nearly three-quarters have seen this problem, according to a survey released this week.



More than 75% of US youngsters have either been a victim of online abuse or have witnessed it through social media according to research from Pew Research Centre. Image: [TechClones](#)

Harassment ranged from mild - such as name-calling - to stalking or physical threats, according to the Pew Research Centre survey.

"We know from previous research that people see both kindness and cruelty online," said Pew Lead Researcher Maeve Duggan.

"It was striking to see how different varieties of harassment impacted different groups on different platforms, and the range of reactions online harassment elicited," Duggan said.

Among the Internet users surveyed, 27% said they had been called offensive names, 22% had someone try to purposefully embarrass them and eight percent had been either stalked or physically threatened. Six percent reported being sexually harassed online.

In terms of being aware of harassment of others, 53% had seen efforts to purposefully embarrass someone. One in four knew of physical threats and nearly one in five reported being aware of someone being sexually harassed or stalked.

"Those aged between 18 and 19 were the most likely to both witness and experience online harassment. About 65% of these young internet users reported being a target of online harassment and 92% had witnessed it," the report said.

Young women face sexual harassment

Men were more likely to experience name-calling and embarrassment, and young women more frequently victims of sexual harassment and stalking.

Among women aged between 18 and 24, one in four said they had been stalked online or were the target of online sexual harassment.

Many of the offensive actions came through social media - two-third of incidents were said to occur on these platforms - with the comments sections of website cited in 22% of cases and online gaming communities in 16%.

Of those who had experienced online harassment, 60% chose to ignore their most recent incident, with 40% taking steps to respond. Some of the steps including "unfriending" or blocking, while others changed their user name or withdrew from the forum or social network. Five percent reported the matter to law enforcement.

The harassment took an emotional toll on its victims, according to the researchers: one-third of victims said the actions were "extremely" or "somewhat" upsetting, and 15% said it impacted their reputation. An overwhelming 92% said the online environment allows people to be more critical compared with the offline world, but 68% said the internet helped people be more supportive of one another.

The research was the first by Pew on this subject, and was based on an online and mail survey of 3,217 US adults, including 2,849 internet users. The margin of error was estimated at 2.4 percentage points.



About 92% of US people believe that social media networks give people the right to be more abusive than they would be in a social environment. Image: [Holla Back!](#)

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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