

Girls report more harassment amid rise in U.S. cyberbullying

Three times as many girls reporting being harassed online or by text message than boys

By SALLY HO
Associated Press

SEATTLE — Rachel Whalen remembers feeling gutted in high school when a former friend would mock her online postings, threaten to unfollow or unfriend her on social media and post inside jokes about her to others online.

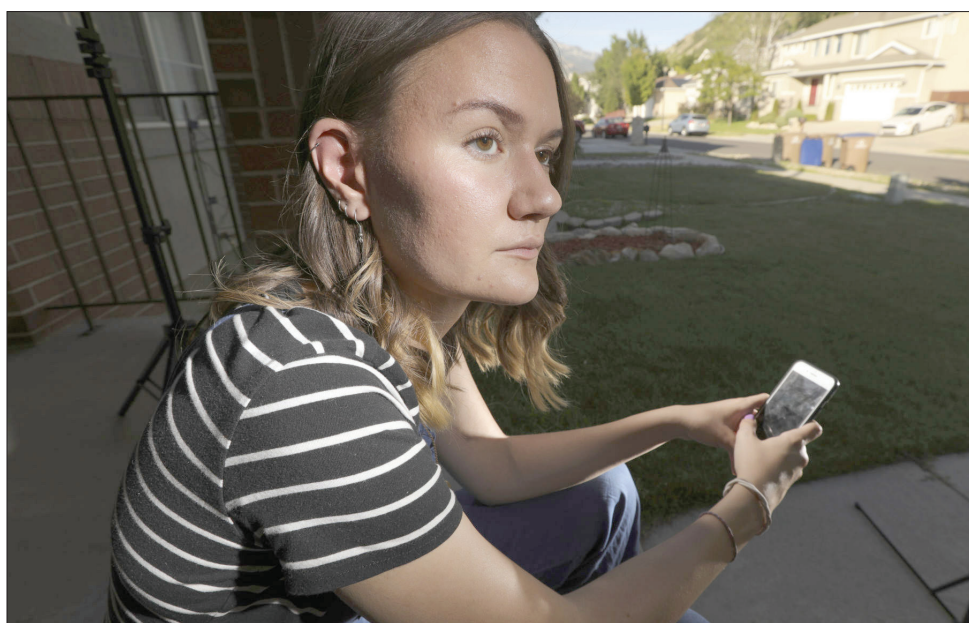
The cyberbullying was so distressing that Whalen said she contemplated suicide. Once she got help, she decided to limit her time on social media. It helps to take a break from it for perspective, said Whalen, now a 19-year-old college student in Utah.

There's a rise in cyberbullying nationwide, with three times as many girls reporting being harassed online or by text message than boys, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

The U.S. Department of Education's research and data arm this month released its latest survey, which shows an uptick in online abuse, though the overall number of students who report being bullied stayed the same.

"There's just some pressure in that competitive atmosphere that is all about attention," Whalen said. "This social media acceptance — it just makes sense to me that it's more predominant amongst girls."

Many school systems that once had a hands-off approach to dealing with off-campus student behav-



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer

Rachel Whalen, 19, was so distressed about the cyberbullying she suffered in high school that she contemplated suicide. Whalen is now a college student in Utah.

ior are now making rules around cyberbullying, outlining punishments, such as suspension or expulsion, according to Bryan Joffe, director of education and youth development at AASA, a national school superintendents association.

That change partly came along with broader cyberbullying laws, which have been adopted in states like Texas and California in recent years.

The survey showed about 20%, or one in five students, reported being bullied, ranging from rumors or being excluded to threats and physical attacks in the 2016-17 school year. That's unchanged from the previous survey done in 2014-15.

But in that two-year span, cyberbullying reports increased significantly, from 11.5% to 15.3%.

Broken down by gender, 21% of girls in middle and high school reported being bullied online or by text message in the 2016-

17 school year, compared with less than 7% of boys.

That's up from the previous survey in 2014-15, the first time cyberbullying data was collected this specifically. Back then, about 16% of girls between 12 and 18 said they were bullied online, compared with 6% of boys.

The survey doesn't address who the aggressors are, though girls were more likely to note that their bullies were perceived to have the ability to influence others.

Lauren Paul, founder of the Kind Campaign, said 90% of the stories she hears while working in schools are girls being bullied by other girls. The California-based nonprofit launched a decade ago to focus on "girl against girl" bullying through free educational programming that reaches about 300 schools a year.

Paul recalls meeting one girl who was obsessive about her social media accounts because a group of girls excluded her if she

did not get enough likes or follows in any given week. She went so far as to painstakingly create fake profiles just to meet her quota.

"Most of the time — if not almost all the time — it's about what's going on with other girls," Paul said. "It's this longing to be accepted by their female peers specifically and feeling broken if they don't."

Though Paul primarily hosts assemblies and workshop exercises at middle and high schools, she said there's been more demand to help younger and older students in recent years. The Kind Campaign has gotten more requests for elementary school presentations and now also regularly gets called to universities to work with sororities.

The latest national data may spark new conversations about "Mean Girls" behavior, Joffe said, referring to 2004 movie starring Lindsay Lohan.

"It's a school issue, but it's just a reflection of broader societal issues," Joffe said.



AP Photo/Dave Collins

Supporters of immigrant Sujitno Sajuti rally outside the federal courthouse in Hartford, Conn.

As Trump expands deportation powers, immigrants prepare

A sweeping expansion of deportation powers has sent chills through immigrant communities

By SOPHIA TAREEN
Associated Press

CHICAGO — A sweeping expansion of deportation powers unveiled this week by the Trump administration has sent chills through immigrant communities and prompted some lawyers to advise migrants to gather up as much documentation as possible — pay stubs, apartment leases or even gym key tags — to prove they've been in the U.S.

But the uncertainty about how the policy might play out has created confusion and made it harder to give clear guidance to immigrants. Attorneys and immigrant rights groups gave conflicting advice about whether to carry these documents.

The new rules will allow immigration officers nationwide to deport anyone who has been here illegally for less than two years. Currently, authorities can only exercise such powers within 100 miles of the border and

only target people who have been here less than two weeks.

Critics say the new policy will embolden Immigration Customs and Enforcement officers to indiscriminately round up immigrants, depriving them of a chance to make their cases before a judge or consult with a lawyer. Some have called it a "show me your papers" trope on a national scale, and roughly 300,000 immigrants living in the country illegally could be affected by the expansion, according to one estimate by the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute.

Attorneys immediately began advising immigrants to start compiling documents that prove they had been in the country for at least two years — anything showing a consistent presence in the United States. But they don't have to necessarily carry it with them.

"We're operating absolutely blind at the moment," said David Leopold, an immigration attorney in Cleveland.

For years, immigrant rights groups have advised people without legal status to not carry any identification with a place of origin on it so it doesn't come back to hurt them in immigration court.

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