

# Worried about hackers? Look to your Facebook friends, UBC study says

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A survey of 1,308 U.S. adult Facebook users by UBC researchers found that 24 per cent — nearly one-quarter — had snooped on the Facebook accounts of their friends, romantic partners or family members, using the victims' own computers or cellphones. *PHOTO BY JUSTIN TALLIS*

Worried about someone hacking your social media accounts? Take a closer look at your friends.

That's the finding of a University of B.C. study that concluded while most people are concerned about their accounts being hacked, it's actually people they know who frequently access personal accounts without permission.

"It's clearly a widespread practice," said Wali Ahmed Usmani, study author and computer science

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master's student, in a statement. "Facebook private messages, pictures or videos are easy targets when the account owner is already logged on and has left their computer or mobile open for viewing."

A survey of 1,308 U.S. adult Facebook users by UBC researchers found that 24 per cent — nearly one-quarter — had snooped on the Facebook accounts of their friends, romantic partners or family members, using the victims' own computers or cellphones.

The survey found that people admitted to spying on people they knew out of simple curiosity or fun — for example, setting a victim's status or profile picture to something funny.

However, there were also darker motives including animosity or jealousy.

"Jealous snoops generally plan their action and focus on personal messages, accessing the account for 15 minutes or longer," said computer science professor Ivan Beschastnikh, one of the study's senior authors. "And the consequences are significant: in many cases, snooping effectively ended the relationship."

Another author, Kosta Beznosov, said their findings highlight the shortcomings of passwords and device PINs. "There's no single best defence — though a combination of changing passwords regularly, logging out of your account and other security practices can definitely help."

The study, called Characterizing Social Insider Attacks on Facebook, was funded by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada in collaboration with University of Lisbon researchers.

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