

Facebook hack attacks: The threat is closer than you think, says UBC researcher

'People do trust each other way too much,' said report's author

By Jane Armstrong, [CBC News](#) Posted: Jan 19, 2017 5:12 PM PT Last Updated: Jan 19, 2017 9:11 PM PT

Facebook snooping is more widespread than you think and the main perpetrators aren't unknown hackers.

They're likely living in your house, according to a new study by University of British Columbia researchers.

More than one in five survey respondents — all Facebook users — had gained access to the accounts of friends, romantic partners or family members, said Wali Ahmed Usmani, the study's author and a computer science master's student.

- [Protecting your privacy online: How to manage what you reveal](#)

The motivation ranged from curiosity to mistrust, said Usmani, adding he was shocked at how careless Facebook users are about securing their accounts.

"People are super uninformed about how they should be protecting their Facebook from hacking," he said,.

His master's thesis surveyed 1,308 U.S. adult Facebook users and found 24 per cent — or more than one in five — had snooped through the accounts of friends, partners or family members, using the victims' own computers or cell phones.

Another 21 per cent were victims of hacking, the survey found.

The study, entitled [Characterizing social insider attacks on Facebook](#), was a collaboration with researchers from the University of Lisbon.

Drunken breach

The hacking ranged from harmless pranks such as changing a friend's status update to premeditated — and ethically dodgy — invasions of privacy,

In one example cited in the study, a woman got her partner so intoxicated he passed out. While he was unconscious, she used his fingers to unlock his phone, which was secured using touch identification.

She then admitted to snooping through his telephone messages.

Most breaches weren't that elaborate. One person admitted to sneaking a peek at a partner's phone while he was in the shower.

Many transgressions occurred because victims were logged onto their Facebook accounts and left their devices open for viewing.

In the study, many snoopers described their transgressions as pranks, but researchers found that prying eyes harmed relationships.

The breaches, if discovered, end friendships and marriages, Usmani said,

Too much Facebook trust?

Usmani said he launched the study because he was intrigued by the limitations of digital security. He was surprised to learn that many people share their passwords with family members or partners.

"People do trust each other way too much," he said. "People are bad at risk assessment. They should be more careful."

The study used Amazon Mechanical Turk, a survey platform commonly used by academics, to contact random respondents who lived in the United States. The survey was conducted between February and March 2016. Approximately 51 per cent of respondents were male, 49 per cent were female. They ranged in age from 20 to 60 but the majority were aged 20 to 29.

The study, entitled [Characterizing social insider attacks on Facebook](#), was conducted along with researchers at the University of Lisbon.

It was peer reviewed and is to be published at the Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems in May in Denver.

Explore CBC

CBC Home	Music	Documentaries	Digital Archives
TV	Life	Comedy	Games
Radio	Arts	Books	Contests
News	Kids	Parents	Site Map
Sports	Local	Indigenous	

Stay Connected

Apps	RSS	Podcasts	Newsletters & Alerts
------	-----	----------	----------------------

Services and Information

Corporate Info	Reuse & Permission	CBC Shop	Jobs
Public Appearances	Terms of Use	Help	Doing Business with Us
Commercial Services	Privacy Policy	Contact Us	Renting Facilities