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## Internet harassment and bullying behaviors: Implications for youth development

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\* Thank you for your interest in this presentation. Please note that analyses included herein are preliminary. More recent, finalized analyses may be available by contacting CIPHR for further information.



## Acknowledgements

The majority of the data we will discuss today comes from:

- The Youth Internet Safety Surveys 1 and 2 (Dr. David Finkelhor and his colleagues at the University of New Hampshire's Crimes Against Children Research Center)
- The Growing up with Media Survey, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U49/CE000206)

## Background

- **More than 9 in 10 youth use the Internet** (Lenhart, Madden, McGill, Smith, 2007; USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2006).
- **55% of teens ages 12-17 have a profile on a social networking site** (Lenhart, Madden, McGill, Smith, 2007)

## Background: The positive side of the Internet

- **About one in four adolescents have used the Internet to look for health information in the last year** (Lenhart et al., 2001; Rideout et al., 2001; Ybarra & Suman, 2006).
- **41% of adolescents indicate having changed their behavior because of information they found online** (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002), **and 14% have sought healthcare services as a result** (Rideout, 2001).

## Background: The negative side of the Internet

- Internet harassment has increased from 6% to 9% since 2000 (Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006).
- About one in three youth targeted by Internet harassment report feeling very/extremely upset or afraid because of the incident (Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor, 2006; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006; Finkelhor, Mitchell, Wolak, 2000)

## Internet harassment / cyberbullying

Recent media reports highlight the impact that Internet harassment and cyberbullying can have on some youth. In extreme cases, it has been identified as a reason for a child's suicide.

But, how reflective of typical experiences is this?

- How often does harassment occur online?
- How common is it to have these very serious consequences?

## Roadmap for today's discussion

- Characteristics of Internet harassment
  - What is it
  - Who is being targeted
  - Who is doing the harassing
- A quick aside about unwanted sexual solicitation
- Legal implications of Internet aggression
- Implications for public policy and for professionals working with youth

## Youth Internet Safety Surveys

- 1,500 households (one caregiver, one child) were surveyed (794 of whom were female)
- Random digit dial telephone survey
- Eligibility criteria:
  - Youth:
    - Between the ages of 10-17 years
    - Use the Internet at least once a month for the last 6 months
    - English speaking
  - Adults
    - Equally or most knowledgeable about youth's Internet use
- YISS-1 conducted 1999-2000; YISS-2 conducted in 2005

## Growing up with Media Survey

- 1,588 households (one caregiver, one child)
- Online Survey
- Eligibility criteria:
  - Youth:
    - Between the ages of 10-15 years
    - Use the Internet at least once a month for the last 6 months
    - English speaking
  - Adults
    - Member of the Harris Poll OnLine
    - Equally or most knowledgeable about youth's media use
- Study was conducted between August and September, 2006

## Defining Internet harassment

How would you define Internet harassment  
(sometimes also called cyberbullying)?

## *What Youth Said...*

- **Boy, 14:** "I have my own ... website and I have my own page on it and someone posted something bad about me on it."
- **Boy, 15:** "I was playing a first person shooter game and unintentionally offended this person who became very serious and began to threaten me by saying if this was real life he would physically harm me. [It happened because he] was unable to accept this was just a game."

Quotes taken from the Youth Internet Safety Survey – 2 report (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, 2006)

## *Youth in the audience..*

How does this compare with the online experiences of you and your friends?

### Frequency of Internet harassment: Victimization

- Felt worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing them online: 9%
- Someone has used the internet to threaten or embarrass them by posting or sending information for others to see: 4%

Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2006

### Frequency of Internet harassment: Victimization

Frequency	Type of harassment		
	Made rude or mean comments	Spread rumors about me	Threatening / aggressive comment
Daily	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%
Weekly	1.6%	0.5%	1.1%
Monthly	5.0%	1.9%	1.8%
Less Frequently	26.0%	13.8%	12.4%
Never	65.8%	82.8%	83.6%
Decline to answer	0.9%	0.8%	0.9%

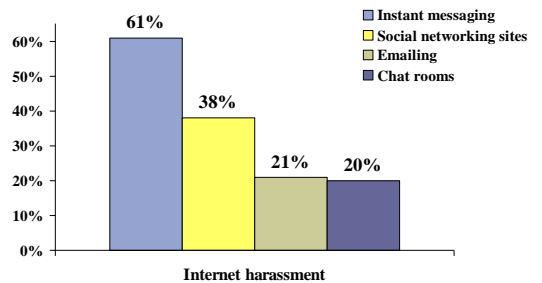
Data are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables

### Frequency of Internet harassment: Perpetration

- Rude or nasty comments<sup>1,2</sup>: 18-28%
- Spread rumors (whether they were true or not)<sup>2</sup>: 11%
- Used the Internet to harass or embarrass someone<sup>1</sup>: 9%
- Threatening or aggressive comments<sup>2</sup>: 5%

<sup>1</sup>YISS-2 Survey (Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2006)  
<sup>2</sup>Growing up with Media Survey

### Location of Internet harassment



## Snapshot summary

- Between 9% - 35% of youth report being targeted by Internet harassment (7% monthly or more often), depending on the measure used
- Between 9-28% of youth report harassing others
- Harassment occurs most frequently in Instant Messaging environments
  - It also occurs on social networking sites, emailing, and chat rooms

## Characteristics of victims of Internet harassment

## Demographic characteristics

- Boys and girls appear to be equally likely to be targets of harassment online.
  - There is some indication that girls might be more likely than boys to be targeted infrequently (once or twice), but just as likely to be targeted frequently (monthly or more often).
- Older teens seem to be more likely to be involved than younger teens. (Among 10-17 year olds, the average age of a teenager involved in cyberbullying is 15 years old.)
- No significant differences by race or ethnicity.

## Associations with substance use

Type of substance	All youth (n=1,588)	Not ever harassed (66%)	Harassed at least once (34%)
Alcohol***	11%	6%	23%
Marijuana***	4%	3%	8%
Inhalants*	2%	1%	3%
Other drugs	1%	1%	1%

Data are from the Growing up with Media survey and are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables  
 \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001  
 Each column sums to 100%. Statistical comparisons are made against all other youth (e.g., ever solicited vs. all others)

## Associations with school indicators

School indicators	All youth (n=1,588)	Not ever harassed (66%)	Harassed at least once (34%)
2+ Detentions/ Suspensions***	13%	10%	20%
Ditched/skipped school***	9%	4%	17%
Poor grades (C's and D's or worse)	9%	9%	9%
Carrying a weapon in last 30 days***	2%	<1%	5%

Data are from the Growing up with Media survey and are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables  
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Each column sums to 100%. Statistical comparisons are made against all other youth (e.g., ever solicited vs. all others)

## Characteristics of instigators of Internet harassment

## Characteristics of Youth Harassers

- Boys and girls are equally likely to be harassers
- Older youth are more likely to be harassers (among 10-17 year olds, average age if 15 years)
- There is some suggestion that harassers are more likely to be White than minority race (YISS-2), but no differences are noted in (Hispanic) ethnicity.

## Characteristics of Harassers (based upon reports of harassed youth)

- 44% were offline friends or acquaintances
  - Compared to 28% five years ago
- Half (50%) male, 28% female, 21% unknown
- Most under 18 (58%)
  - 63% in 2000

Data are from the Youth Internet Safety Surveys 1 & 2

## Associations with substance use

Type of substance	All youth (n=1,588)	Never harassed (79%)	Harassed at least once (21%)
Alcohol***	11%	7%	29%
Marijuana***	4%	3%	10%
Inhalants***	2%	1%	4%
Other drugs	1%	1%	2%

Data are from the Growing up with Media survey and are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables  
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## Snapshot summary

- Boys and girls are equally likely to be involved in harassment either as a victim or aggressor
- Older youth are more likely to be involved either as a victim or aggressor
- Psychosocial problems are apparent for both victims and aggressors, specifically in areas of substance use and school behavior problems
  - Especially concerning is weapon carrying at school reported by victims of harassment

## A quick aside: Unwanted sexual solicitation

There is a significant overlap of victims of Internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation.

13% of all youth in the Growing up with Media survey reported being victim of both types of internet aggression.

- 21% report only Internet harassment
- 1% report only unwanted sexual solicitation

## The perception

- Tales of child and adolescent sexual exploitation occurring on the Internet is commonly reported in the media.
- The media suggests there is an “epidemic” of Internet-related sex crimes against children

## The perception

- A common media profile of the ‘predator’
  - Use deception to hide age and sexual intentions
  - Entice unsuspecting youth into meetings and sometimes abduct and/or rape them
- Youth (and parents) are familiar with the media-defined predator. They talk about the ‘creepy old man’ lurking somewhere online.
- The data suggest something different...

## The Data

Based on data collected in 2000 (Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2004):

- Violent sexual crimes that begin online are very rare.
- Most victims are aware that they are talking with adults.
- Most offenders do not lie about their sexual intentions.
- Victims who meet their online molester in person are likely to do it again (73% met in person multiple times).
- Only 5% of cases were charged with a violent crime.

## A quick aside: Unwanted sexual solicitation

How many of you have heard of the statistic:

*1 in 5 children are sexually solicited online*

What does it mean to be ‘sexually solicited’ in this statement?



## Defining unwanted sexual solicitation on the Internet

- Someone tried to get me to talk about sex online when I did not want to.
- Someone online asked me for sexual information about myself when I did not want to tell the person, e.g., really personal questions, like what my body looks like or sexual things I have done.
- Someone asked me to do something sexual when I was online that I did not want to do.

## What Youth Said...

- **Girl, 14:** "I was chatting on the Internet and this guy just popped up in an Instant Message and started talking really dirty to me and saying things that I had never heard of before. He told me he was 30 years old and then he said, 'LOL' (laugh out loud)."
- **Girl, 12:** "I went into the chatroom and they asked me if I wanted to have cybersex. I was asking them what kind of music they liked and stuff."
- **Boy, 11,** who was playing an online game with a man, 20: "He asked me something personal, something about a man's privates."

Quotes taken from the Youth Internet Safety Survey – 2 report (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, 2006)

## Youth in the audience..

How does this compare with the online experiences of you and your friends?

## Snapshot summary

- 'Unwanted sexual solicitation' as measured in our surveys (and used by the AdCouncil)
  - Does not always mean 'being asked to have sex'
  - Rarely leads to an offline sexual encounter
- Based upon the data, most incidents of adult-child sexual relationships that begin online and move offline involve:
  - A willing child who knows the person they're talking to is: 1) an adult; and 2) interested in sex
  - A very different crime than is typified by the media

## What can be done?

What can we do legally?

As individual professionals working with youth?

## What the law says: Internet Harassment

Legislation varies state by state. For example:<sup>1</sup>

- Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Washington have laws that require school districts to set up policies and procedures to address cyberbullying.
- Minnesota and Oregon have bills pending.
- Twenty other states are investigating and drafting proposals to address bullying and cyberbullying, but do not have official legislation drafted or pending.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.socialsafety.org/law\\_enforcement\\_cyberbullying.html](http://www.socialsafety.org/law_enforcement_cyberbullying.html)

## What the law says: Internet Harassment

- Only Washington state has legislation that goes beyond the school ground (occurs off-campus but affects the student's ability to learn in school)
- What standards should apply to "off campus" speech?
  - There is incomplete overlap; not all youth harassed online are harassed at school.
  - Four in five youth harassed online do **not** report also being harassed at school by the same or different people (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007).

## What the law says: Sexual-related incidents online

### Unsolicited Obscene Material Sent to a Child

It is a violation of criminal law for any person to knowingly or attempt to send or transfer obscene material to another individual who has not attained the age of 16 years (18 U.S.C.A. 1470).

### Possession, Manufacture, and Distribution of Child Pornography

Child pornography has been defined under federal statute as a visual depiction of a minor (child younger than 18) engaged in sexually explicit conduct (18 U.S.C. 2256).

- Implications for pictures shared/sent by/to youth online
- This material can be attached as an image(s) or hyperlink(s) sent to a child in an unsolicited E-mail or "spam."

Reference: [www.CyberTipline.com](http://www.CyberTipline.com)

*What the law says:*  
*Sexual-related experiences online*

**Online Enticement of Children for Sexual Acts**

Use of the Internet to entice, invite, or persuade a child to meet for sexual acts, or to help arrange such a meeting, is a crime (18 U.S.C. 2425).

Reference: [www.CyberTipline.com](http://www.CyberTipline.com)

*What the law says:*  
*Sexual-related incidents online*

**Misleading Domain Name**

It is a federal offense to use a misleading domain name on the Internet with the intent to deceive a minor into viewing material that is harmful to minors, regardless of whether the material meets the legal definition of obscenity (18 U.S.C. 2252B).

Reference: [www.CyberTipline.com](http://www.CyberTipline.com)

**Snapshot summary**

- Greater protections for sex-related offenses compared to harassment/bullying online.
- Currently nothing protecting against aggressive acts that do not occur/affect the school environment
- Federal vs. state protections
- Issues of free speech

*What individuals can do..*

### *There are several things youth can do...*

- **Ignore the person.** Sometimes the easiest thing to do is to ignore the person and go on about your business.
- **Log-off** if the harassment is bothering you.
- **Block or delete the person.** If it is happening on Instant Messaging or some other place online that requires a 'buddy list', you can block certain users based upon their username, or delete them if they are in your buddy list. You can also block emails that are being received from specific email addresses.

### *What can individuals do?*

- **Change your information.** If someone has hacked into your profile, **change your password.** If someone repeatedly sends you messages (like, 'add me to your buddy list' over and over), **consider changing your username or email address.**
- If there is a profile that was created about you without you knowing, **contact the company who runs the site** to have the profile or language taken off.
- If you are upset about what is being said, **talk to someone you trust.** Don't feel like you're alone.

### *Parents can...*

- **Monitoring matters:** Talk about who they hang out with and where they go online
- **Talk to your kids about Internet safety**
  - Educate yourself about the Internet
  - Discuss appropriate online etiquette
  - Have clear rules and expectations

### *Youth in the audience..*

What do you think we should do to help prevent Internet harassment and other forms of aggression?

## Final thoughts

- The majority of youth who use the Internet are not involved in Internet harassment.
- The majority of youth who are harassed are not upset by it.
- An important minority are, and we need to wrestle with what we can do individually as well as maybe legally to protect these youth.

## Implications for public policy

Internet aggression raises several issues related to public policy:

- What is the role of legislation in protecting youth from Internet aggression?
  - When does individual safety trump free speech, and how do you know where to draw the line?
- When is regulation of specific applications or web sites (e.g., social networking sites) warranted?

## Implications for professionals working with youth

- Arm yourself with the facts about Internet aggression. Question media portrayals.
- We need to do more to provide support and intervention for youth who are targeted by peer aggression, both online **and offline**.
- Most youth do not operate in a 'vacuum'. What are we doing to treat children more globally and provide services that address all of their needs?