Get Schooled: Kids and Cyber Security Event
Department of State – Harry S. Truman Building
12:30 PM, May 3, 2011

**Bullying and harassment in the context of emerging technologies**

**Michele Ybarra MPH PhD**

Center for Innovative Public Health Research

* 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.

**CiPHR**
Center for Innovative
Public Health Research

---

## Roadmap

- Exactly what is cyberbullying?
- How do I talk to my children about it?
- How can I help children who are victims of cyberbullying?

---

## Exactly what is cyberbullying and Internet harassment?

There is wide variability in the definition of harassment and bullying among researchers.

Generally, it refers to an act of intentional aggression (e.g., "mean things") towards someone else via technology (i.e., Internet, cell phone text messaging)

Bullying:
- Is between (at least) two people with differential power
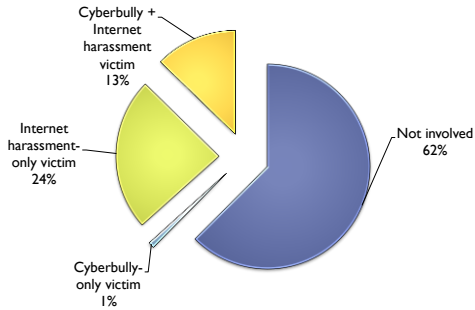- Occurs over time
- Is repetitive

Harassment:
- May be between two people of equal power
- May happen once or many times

---

## Context

- **Girl, 12**: "These people from school were calling me a prostitute and whore … and saying I was raped. [It happened] because I'm an easy target. I didn't let it bother me until about a month ago and [then] I started getting physical with people."

- **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 from participants of the Youth Internet Safety Survey -2 (Finkelhor, Wolak, Mitchell, 2005)

## Overlap between harassment and bullying



Cyberbully + Internet harassment victim 13%

Internet harassment-only victim 24%
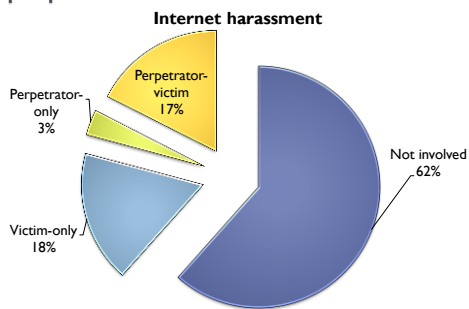
Cyberbully-only victim 1%

Not involved 62%

Average across Waves 2-3 of the Growing up with Media study (PI: Ybarra)
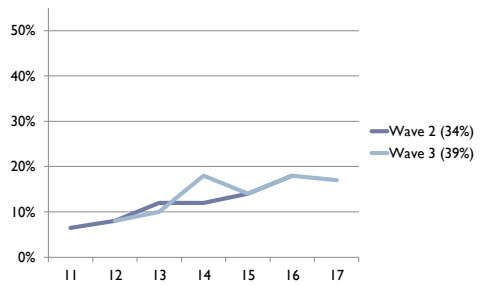(Cyberbully questions were added in Wave 2)

## Involvement

Depending on the measure used, most studies report between 20-40% of youth are targeted by bullying or harassment online and via text messaging (see Tokunaga, 2010 for a review).

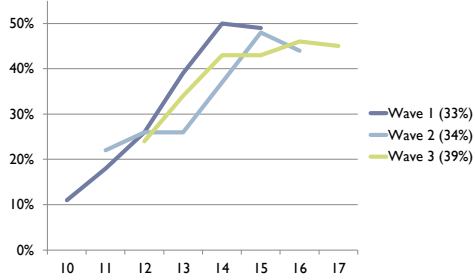## Overlap between victimization and perpetration

**Internet harassment**



Perpetrator-only 3%

Perpetrator-victim 17%

Victim-only 18%

Not involved 62%

Average across Waves 1-3 of the Growing up with Media study (PI: Ybarra)

## Cyberbully **victimization** by age across time

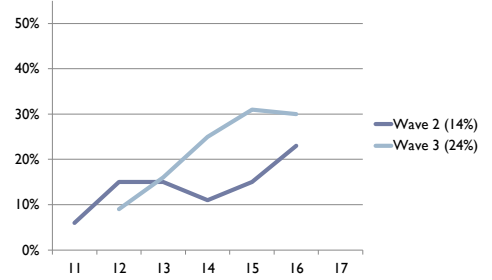

Wave 2 (34%)
Wave 3 (39%)

Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra
(Cyberbully questions were added in Wave 2)

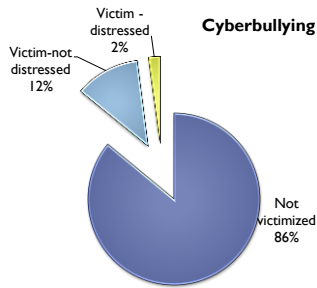## Internet harassment **victimization** by age across time



Wave 1 (33%)
Wave 2 (34%)
Wave 3 (39%)

Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Text messaging harassment **victimization** by age across time
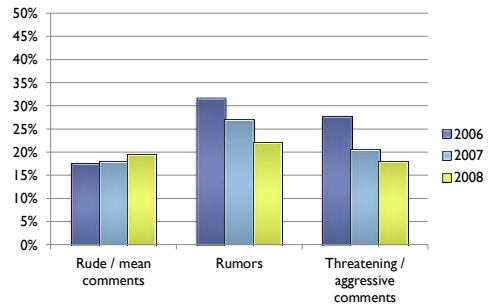


Wave 2 (14%)
Wave 3 (24%)

Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra
(Text messaging-based harassment questions were added in Wave 2)

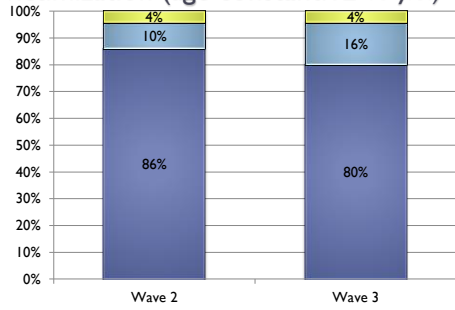## Distressing cyberbullying victimization



**Cyberbullying**

Victim - distressed 2%

Victim-not distressed 12%

Not victimized 86%

Data from Wave 3 of the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Distressing Internet harassment victimization (age constant:12-15 y.o.)



2006
2007
2008

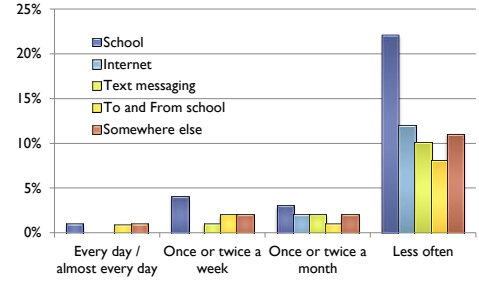Rude / mean comments | Rumors | Threatening / aggressive comments

Distress = very or extremely upset by the experience
Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

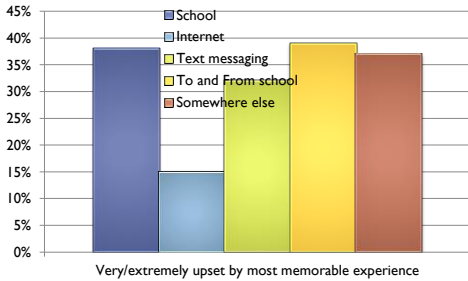## Distressing text messaging harassment victimization (age constant: 12-15 y.o.)

Wave 2: 86%, 10%, 4%
Wave 3: 80%, 16%, 4%

Data from Waves 2 and 3 of the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Bullying victimization rates by environment

Legend: School, Internet, Text messaging, To and From school, Somewhere else

Categories: Every day / almost every day, Once or twice a week, Once or twice a month, Less often

Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Distress related to bullying victimization rates by environment

Legend: School, Internet, Text messaging, To and From school, Somewhere else

Very/extremely upset by most memorable experience

Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Cyberbully **perpetration** by age across time

Wave 1 (21%)
Wave 2 (19%)
Wave 3 (23%)

Ages: 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
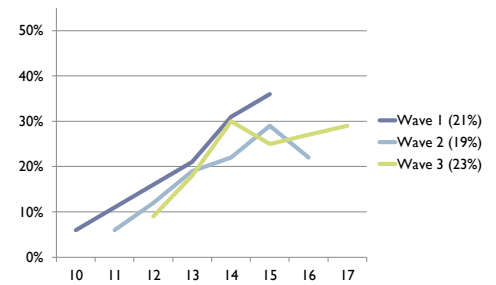
Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra

## Text messaging harassment **perpetration** by age across time
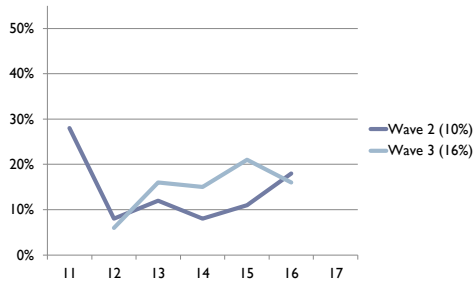


Data from the Growing up with Media study, PI: Ybarra
(Text messaging-based harassment questions were added in Wave 2)

## Concurrent psychosocial problems for **perpetrators**

- Interpersonal victimization and perpetration (bullying) offline (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)
- Aggression / rule breaking (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007)
- Binge drinking (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007)
- Substance use (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007)
- Poor caregiver child relationship (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2007)
- Low school commitment (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004)

## Concurrent psychosocial problems for **victims**

- Interpersonal victimization / bullying offline (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007; Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006; Ybarra, 2004)
- Alcohol use (Ybarra, Mitchell, Espelage, 2007)
- Social problems (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006)
- Depressive symptomatology and suicidal ideation (Ybarra, 2004; Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2000; The Berkman Center for Internet & Society, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, in press)
- School behavior problems – including weapon carrying (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007)
- Poor caregiver-child relationships (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007)

## Assumptions about cyberbullying and harassment

- Everyone's doing it
- It's increasing over time
- It's getting nastier / kids are more affected
- Everyone's a hapless victim

### None of these assumptions are supported by the data

- "Everyone's doing it":
  - 38% (about 2 in 5) are involved in harassment
  - That means that 62% (3 in 5) are NOT involved in any way
- It's increasing over time
  - Neither perpetration nor victimization rates appear to be increasing from 2006-2008
- It's getting nastier / kids are more affected
  - There is no indication that young people are more likely to be upset by harassment now (in 2008) then they were 2 years ago (2006). If anything, there's some indication that youth are *less* likely to be upset now.
- Everyone's a hapless victim
  - 17% of all youth are BOTH victims and perpetrators of harassment
  - The odds of victimization increase about 8 fold if you are a perpetrator and vice versa

---

### How do I talk to my children about cyberbullying?

Make it an **ongoing** conversation. Ask your children what they do and who they hang out with online in the same way you talk to them about what they do and who they hang out with offline.

---

### How do I talk to my children about cyberbullying?

- Share your expectations for 'cyber etiquette' and why it is important to you.
- If you have a specific concern, address it directly.
  - Practice with a friend first what you want to say.
  - Listen more than you talk

---

### How do I talk to my children about cyberbullying?

Make the discussion (and any restrictions) developmentally appropriate; and behaviorally appropriate.

Older youth and those who demonstrate responsibility should be given greater freedom than younger youth and those acting irresponsibly.

### How do I help a child who is being bullied or harassed online?

- Put them in control: Ask how you can help them
- Recognize that many children – especially older adolescents – may be able and wanting to handle this on their own. If so, support and empower them in their endeavor.
- Stay calm; recognize that your feelings might somewhat be related to your anxiety about the technology itself as well as your child's situation

### How do I help a child who is being bullied or harassed online?

- Resist the temptation to restrict the victim from the technology; this is a punishment
- Be open to the possibility that the child is a perpetrator as well as a victim; listen
- If appropriate, help the child reach out to mental health professionals for more intensive support

### Final musings

- The majority of youth are not being harassed or bullied online
- The majority who youth who are harassed or bullied online are not seriously upset by it.
- An important minority are bullied or harassed, and are seriously affected by it.

➡ We need to do a better job of identifying these youth and getting them into services (e.g., therapy).