

## Girl Trouble in Cyberspace:

### Protecting the Mental and Physical Health of the Internet Generation

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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.



## Background

- An estimated 97% of youth use the Internet in USA (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin, 2005; USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2005).
- Tales of child and adolescent sexual exploitation occurring on the Internet is commonly reported in the media.

## Background: the Media

- The media suggests there is an epidemic of Internet-related sex crimes against children
- 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

## Background: Youth

- Youth (and parents) are familiar with the media-predator. They talk about the 'creepy old man' lurking somewhere online.
- The reality is different.

## Background: the Truth

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.

## Motivation for current study

- In order to accurately and effectively protect girls and foster safe Internet behavior however, an accurate picture of the online world is needed.
- Other negative experiences online are more common, and need to be recognized and understood by child health professionals.

## Background: Unwanted sexual solicitation

- Unwanted sexual solicitation measured by the Youth Internet Safety Surveys (YISS) has decreased from 19% to 13% (Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006).
- 1/3 of YISS-2 youth were distressed by the incident (Wolak, Mitchell, Finkelhor, 2006)
- Behavior and psychosocial problems have been noted for youth targeted by unwanted sexual solicitation.
  - Troubled (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2001)
  - Physical and sexual abuse (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2007)

## Background: Internet harassment

- Internet harassment measured by the Youth Internet Safety Surveys (YISS) has increased from 6% in 1999 to 9% in 2005 (Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006).
- 39% of YISS-2 youth who are harassed report feeling very/extremely upset or afraid because of the incident (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006)
- Behavior and psychosocial problems have been noted for youth involved in Internet harassment.
  - Social problems (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006)
  - Interpersonal victimization (Ybarra, Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006)
  - Depressive symptomatology among boys (Ybarra, 2004)

## Today's discussion

1. What are the different types of solicitation and harassment?
2. How often does it occur online? Via TXT messaging?
3. What are the characteristics of girls targeted?
4. What does this accurate picture tell us about prevention and treatment?

## Growing up with Media Methodology

- 1,591 households (one caregiver, one child) were surveyed online (794 of whom were female)
- 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
- On average, the adult survey took 5 minutes and the youth survey took 20 minutes
- Study was conducted between August and September, 2006

## Harris Poll On Line

- We use propensity weighting to adjust for one's propensity to be online and addresses the sample bias.
- HPOL data is consistently comparable to data that has been obtained from random telephone samples of general populations when sampling and weighting is applied.

## Youth characteristics

### Demographic characteristics:

- 48% Female
- 71% White, 13% Black, 9% Mixed, 7% Other
- 19% Hispanic
- Mean age: 12.6 years (SE: 0.5)
- Median time spent online / day for activities other than email: 31 minutes – 1 hour

## 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.

## Frequency of unwanted sexual solicitation on the Internet

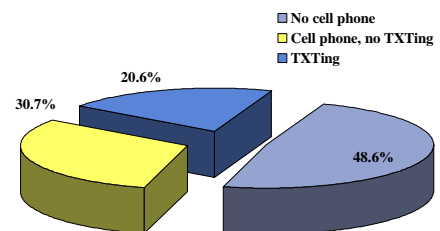
- 18% of girls and 11% of boys report at least one unwanted sexual solicitation in the last year ( $p=0.006$ )
- 3% of girls report monthly incidents

## Frequency of unwanted sexual solicitation among females (n=794)

| Frequency         | Type of solicitation |                                     |                     |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                   | Talk about sex       | Provide personal sexual information | Do something sexual |
| Daily             | 0.3%                 | 0.3%                                | 0.3%                |
| Weekly            | 1.0%                 | 1.3%                                | 1.1%                |
| Monthly           | 1.1%                 | 0.9%                                | 0.2%                |
| Less Frequently   | 11.8%                | 12.4%                               | 6.5%                |
| Never             | 84.4%                | 83.6%                               | 90.5%               |
| Decline to answer | 1.4%                 | 1.5%                                | 1.4%                |

Data are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables

## Cell phone use among girls



## Defining sexual harassment on cell phones

- Received a text message that was sexual in any way that you did not want to receive.
- Received a picture text message that was sexual in any way that you did not want to receive.

## Frequency of sexual harassment via TXT messaging

- 13% of girls and 11% of boys who TXT message report at least one unwanted sexual TXT in the last year ( $p>.05$ )
- 6% of girls who TXT message report monthly incidents

## Frequency of sexually harassing TXT messages among females (n=247)

| Frequency         | Type of solicitation |                    |
|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                   | Sexual TXT message   | Sexual Picture TXT |
| Daily             | 1.8%                 | 0.6%               |
| Weekly            | 0.2%                 | 0.2%               |
| Monthly           | 4.0%                 | 3.5%               |
| Less Frequently   | 6.1%                 | 2.5%               |
| Never             | 87.6%                | 92.6%              |
| Decline to answer | 0.4%                 | 0.5%               |

Data are weighted for demographic characteristics and attitudinal variables

## Defining Internet harassment

- Someone made a rude or mean comment to me online.
- Someone spread rumours about me online, whether they were true or not.
- Someone made a threatening or aggressive comment to me online.

### Frequency of Internet harassment

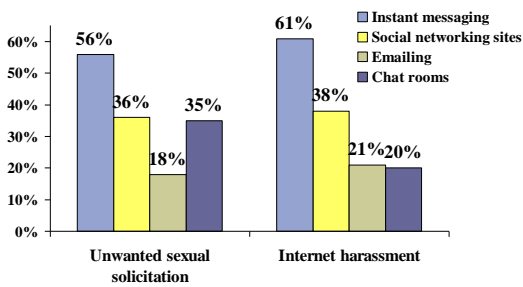
- 39% of girls and 31% of boys report being targeted for Internet harassment at least once in the last year (p=0.04).
- 8% of girls report being targeted monthly or more often

### Frequency of Internet harassment

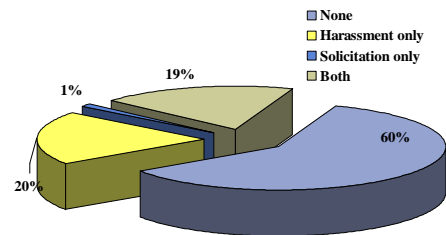
| Frequency         | Type of harassment         |                        |                                  |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                   | Made rude or mean comments | Spread rumors about me | Threatening / 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

### Location of victimization



### Victimization overlap



## Associations between victimization and psychosocial characteristics

## Associations with school indicators

| School indicators                       | All girls | Ever      |          | Monthly or more often |          |
|---|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
|   |           | Solicited | Harassed | Solicited             | Harassed |
| Detention/<br>Suspension                | 17%       | 31%***    | 23%**    | 34%*                  | 31%*     |
| Poor grades (C's<br>and D's or worse)   | 4%        | 6%        | 5%       | 9%                    | 6%       |
| Carrying a<br>weapon in last 30<br>days | 1%        | 4%***     | 2%*      | 17%***                | 6%***    |

Data 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 Caregiver-child relationships

## Associations with substance use

| Aspects of relationship     | All girls | Ever      |          | Monthly or more often |          |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
|                             |           | Solicited | Harassed | Solicited             | Harassed |
| Poor emotional<br>closeness | 30%       | 42%*      | 35%      | 48%                   | 45%*     |
| Poor monitor                | 26%       | 44%***    | 35%**    | 53%**                 | 47%**    |
| Frequent yelling            | 8%        | 11%       | 8%       | 7%                    | 13%      |

| Type of substance | All girls | Ever      |          | Monthly or more often |          |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|
|                   |           | Solicited | Harassed | Solicited             | Harassed |
| Alcohol           | 12%       | 39%***    | 24%***   | 49%***                | 37%***   |
| Marijuana         | 5%        | 17%***    | 9%**     | 29%***                | 17%***   |
| Inhalants         | 3%        | 10%***    | 6%**     | 21%***                | 11%**    |
| Other drugs       | 1%        | 3%*       | 2%       | 12%***                | 7%***    |

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## Summary

- Girls are more likely than boys to be solicited online, but they are equally likely to be sexually harassed via TXT messaging.
- 18% of girls report unwanted sexual solicitation online, 3% report frequent experiences.

## Summary

- Girls are significantly more likely than boys to report harassment online.
- 38% of girls have been harassed online in the past year
- 8% are harassed monthly or more often.

## Summary

Targeted girls are significantly more likely to concurrently report:

- Problems at school
  - Weapon carrying
  - Detention and suspension
- Problems with caregiver
  - Poor emotional closeness
  - Poor monitoring
- Substance use

## Limitations

Respondents were not observed during the data collection process.

It is possible that:

- Children were monitored by their parents, or
- Parents completed the youth survey.
- 22% of youth reported that someone was in the room close enough to see the screen when they completed the survey.



## Limitations

- Findings are relevant to households where both the child and the adult use the Internet. General population findings may yield different frequencies.
- Data are cross-sectional – we are not implying causality or temporality in data comparisons

## Implications

- Talk to girls about online molesters – who they are and who they aren't.
- Talk to girls about statutory rape – why it is wrong, what the potential consequences are.
- Educate colleagues about the data.

## Implications

- Be aware that the majority of girls who are solicited also are being harassed.
- Talk with them about what they are doing online and identify harm reduction strategies.
- Talk with them about what else is going on in their life (i.e., school, parents, substance use) and provide intervention if necessary.

## Implications

- Parents matter: Poor monitoring and emotional closeness are more frequently reported by victimized youth.
- Substance use matters. Using all types of illegal substances are more frequently reported by victimized youth.
- Reducing these negative influences may reduce the risk of Internet victimization.