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## Youth Internet Victimization: Myths and Truths

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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

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## Technology use in the US: Prevalence rates

- More than 9 in 10 youth 12-17 use the **Internet** (Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, Rankin Macgill, 2008; USC Annenberg School Center for the Digital Future, 2005).
- 71% of 12-17 year olds have a cell phone (Lenhart, 4/10/2009) and 46% of 8-12 year olds have a cell phone (Nielson, 9/10/2008)

## Technology use in the US: Benefits of technology

- Access to health information:
  - 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).

## Technology use in the US: Benefits of technology

- **Teaching healthy behaviors** (as described by My Thai, Lowenstein, Ching, Rejeski, 2009)
  - Physical health: Dance Dance Revolution
  - Healthy behaviors: Sesame Street's Color me Hungry (encourages eating vegetables)
  - Disease Management: Re-Mission (teaches children with cancer about the disease)

## Technology use in the US: risks

Behavior and psychosocial problems have been noted concurrently for youth involved in **Internet harassment** and **unwanted sexual solicitation**

- **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 (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007)
  - Poor caregiver-child relationships (Ybarra, Diener-West, Leaf, 2007)

## Technology use in the US: risks

- **Perpetrators of Internet victimization:**
  - 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)

## Objectives

1. Have a working definition for internet harassment and sexual solicitation
2. Be aware of the annual prevalence rate of youth affected by internet victimization
3. Be able to identify the characteristics of youth more likely to be victimized online
4. Understand the research supporting and refuting assumptions about internet victimization.

## Growing up with Media survey

- Longitudinal design: Fielded 2006, 2007, 2008
- Data collected online
- National sample (United States)
- Households randomly identified from the 4 million-member Harris Poll OnLine (HPOL)
- Sample selection was stratified based on youth age and sex.
- Data were weighted to match the US population of adults with children between the ages of 10 and 15 years and adjust for the propensity of adult to be online and in the HPOL.

## Eligibility criteria

- Youth:
  - Between the ages of 10-15 years
  - Use the Internet at least once in the last 6 months
  - Live in the household at least 50% of the time
  - English speaking
- Adult:
  - Be a member of the Harris Poll Online (HPOL) opt-in panel
  - Be a resident in the USA (HPOL has members internationally)
  - Be the most (or equally) knowledgeable of the youth's media use in the home
  - English speaking

## Youth Demographic Characteristics

	2006 (n=1,577)	2007 (n=1189)	2008 (n=1149)
Female	50%	50%	51%
Age (SE)	12.6 (0.05)	13.7 (0.05)	14.5 (0.05)
Hispanic ethnicity	18%	17%	17%
Race: White	70%	72%	72%
Race: Black / African American	15%	13%	14%
Race: Mixed race	7%	9%	9%
Race: Other	8%	6%	6%
Household less than \$35,000	25%	24%	25%
Internet use 1 hour+ per day	47%	49%	52%

## Internet harassment

## Working Definition of Internet harassment

As of yet, there is no generally agreed upon definition for harassment.

In general, "Internet harassment" is obnoxious behavior directed at someone with the intent to harass or bother them. It:

- Occurs online.
- It can, but does not necessarily include text messaging.
- Can occur once or more often.
- Can occur between people of equal power.

## Working Definition of Internet harassment

Harassment is different from bullying, which (usually) is defined to be repetitive, over time, between people of unequal strength.

Why does the lack of definition matter?

- Different questions / behaviors queried
  - No distinction between 'harassment' and 'cyber bullying'
- As a result, we have different prevalence rates (6% - 72%)

## Working definition of Internet harassment

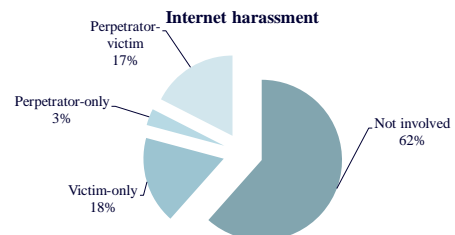
Does the lack of consensus mean all is lost?

No –

...As long as you understand the differences in methodologies

Note too: because even with these differences, we're seeing concurrence on psychosocial 'profiles' (more later..)

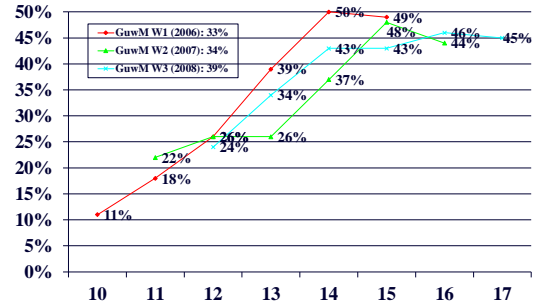
## Involvement in Internet harassment



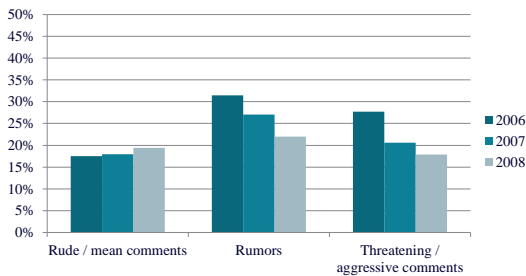
### Annual prevalence rates of youth victims of Internet harassment

Type (Monthly or more often)	2006		2007		2008	
<b>ANY</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>9%</b>
Someone made a rude or mean comment to me online.	29%	7%	31%	8%	35%	8%
Someone spread rumors about me online, whether they were true or not.	12%	2%	17%	3%	19%	3%
Someone made a threatening or aggressive comment to me online.	14%	3%	14%	3%	15%	3%
<i>Someone my age took me off their buddy list because they were mad at me</i>			26%	3%	30%	4%
<i>Someone posted a picture or video of me in an embarrassing situation</i>			1.5%	0.7%	3%	0.6%
<i>"Revised" total</i>			41%	10%	45%	10%

### Internet harassment victimization by age across time



### Very / extremely upset by the harassment – age constant (12-15 y.o.)



### Characteristics of youth more likely to be victims of Internet harassment

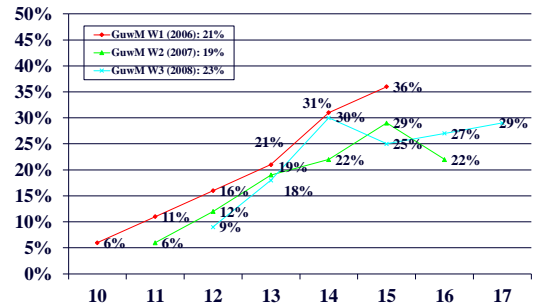
Youth Characteristics	OR (95% CI)
<b>Demographic characteristics:</b>	
Internet use 1 hour+ per day	2.1 (1.7, 2.7)
Age	1.2 (1.2, 1.3)
White (vs. non-White)	1.9 (1.4, 2.7)
Income: >\$75,000 (vs. <\$35,000)	1.5 (1.1, 2.2)
<b>Psychosocial characteristics:</b>	
Perpetrator: Internet harassment	8.6 (6.4, 11.6)
Perpetrator: Relational bullying	1.3 (1.0, 1.7)
Victim: Relational bullying	3.2 (2.4, 4.4)
Victim: Physical harassment	1.7 (1.2, 2.4)
School: Weapon past 30 days	3.7 (1.2, 11.6)
Caregiver: emotional closeness	1.1 (1.0, 1.2)

Above characteristics are in one multi-variate, population-average (GEE) model. Odds ratios are therefore adjusted for all other characteristics shown, as well as the following characteristics, which were not statistically significant: youth sex, Hispanic ethnicity, alcohol use, marijuana use, poor grades in school, the number of suspensions or detentions in school, physical harassment perpetration (offline), propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, caregiver monitoring, caregiver coercive discipline, and time

## Annual prevalence rates of youth perpetrators Internet harassment

Type (Monthly or more often)	2006		2007		2008	
<b>ANY</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>4%</b>
Made a rude or mean comment to someone online.	18%	3%	17%	3%	21%	4%
Spread rumors about someone online, whether they were true or not.	11%	2%	10%	0.7%	11%	0.7%
Made a threatening or aggressive comment to someone online.	5%	1.5%	5%	0.4%	8%	1%
<i>Took someone your age off their buddy list because I was mad at them</i>			25%	3%	26%	2.3%
<i>Posted a picture or video of someone in an embarrassing situation</i>			1%	0.6%	2%	0.3%
<i>"Revised" total</i>			31%	4%	35%	5%

## Internet harassment perpetration by age across time



## Characteristics of youth more likely to be perpetrators of Internet harassment

Youth Characteristics		OR (95% CI)
Demographic characteristics:	Internet use 1 hour+ per day	1.4 (1.0, 1.9)
	Age	1.2 (1.1, 1.3)
Psychosocial characteristics:	Victim: Internet harassment	10.0 (7.4, 13.6)
	Perpetrator: Relational bullying	4.0 (3.0, 5.4)
	Perpetrator: Physical harassment	1.9 (1.4, 2.7)
	Alcohol use	1.6 (1.1, 2.4)
	Propensity to respond to stimuli with anger (STAXI)	1.1 (1.0, 1.1)
Time 2 vs. Time 1		0.7 (0.5, 0.99)

Above characteristics are in one multi-variate, population average (GEE) model. Odds ratios are therefore adjusted for all other characteristics shown, as well as the following characteristics, which were not statistically significant: youth sex, race, Hispanic ethnicity, household income, marijuana use, poor grades in school, the number of suspensions or detentions in school, carrying a weapon to school in the past 30 days, physical harassment and relational bully victimization (offline), caregiver monitoring, emotional closeness with caregiver, and caregiver coercive discipline

## Assumptions about Internet 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) than 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

## Other things to note:

- Few young people experience persistent (monthly or more often) harassment
- There seems to be strong overlap between bullying offline and harassment online.
  - This is true for perpetration and for victimization
    - If you are involved online, you are likely involved offline
  - This is particularly true for relational harassment offline
    - Perhaps because online harassment is more amenable to relational versus physical harassment / bullying behavior..?

## Other things of note:

- These kids are experiencing a multitude of problems aside from being involved in harassment:
    - Victims: bringing a weapon to school in the past 30 days; poor caregiver emotional relationship;
    - Perpetrators: alcohol use, anger management issues
- Kids don’t operate in a vacuum. If they’re having problems online, it’s likely they’re having problems offline too.

## “Cyberbullying”

## Working definition of cyberbullying

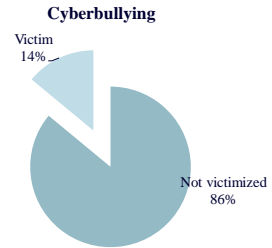
As of yet, there is no generally agreed upon definition for cyberbullying

Some use Olweus' definition; other use a list of definitions

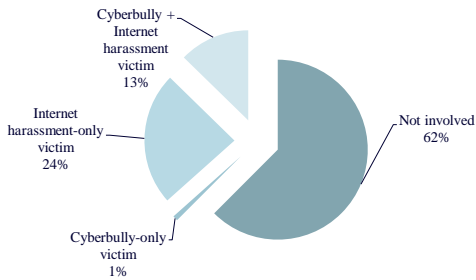
We define it as:

- Being online
- Differential power
- Repetitive
- Over time

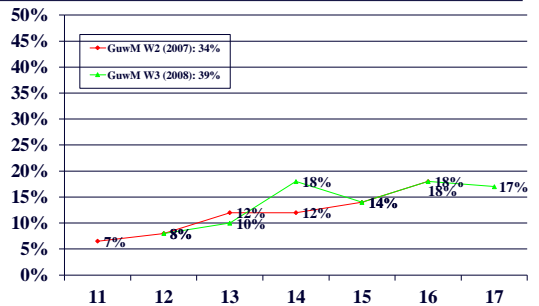
## Cyberbullying victimization



## Overlap of cyberbullying and Internet harassment victimization

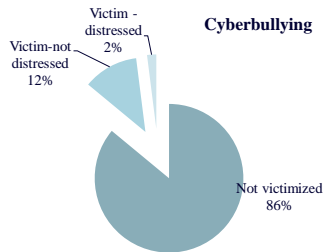


## Cyberbully victimization by age across time





## Distressing cyberbullying victimization\*



Data available for Wave 3 only

## Characteristics of youth more likely to be victims of cyberbullying

Youth Characteristics		OR (95% CI)
Demographic characteristics:	Internet use 1 hour+ per day	1.6 (1.0, 2.5)
	White (vs. non-White)	1.8 (1.1, 3.0)
Psychosocial characteristics:	Victim: Internet harassment	15.5 (8.5, 28.3)
	Perpetrator: Internet harassment	2.2 (1.4, 3.3)
	Victim: Physical harassment	2.7 (1.5, 4.7)

Above characteristics are in one multi-variate, population-average (GEE) model. Odds ratios are therefore adjusted for all other characteristics shown, as well as the following characteristics, which were not statistically significant: youth sex, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, household income, alcohol use, marijuana use, poor grades in school, the number of suspensions or detentions in school, carrying a weapon to school in the past 30 days, caregiver monitoring, poor caregiver-child emotional relationship, caregiver coercive discipline, and time

## Assumptions about cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying is the same as Internet harassment
- Cyberbullying is more common as Internet harassment
- Cyberbullying is more damaging than Internet harassment

## None of these assumptions are supported by the data

- Cyberbullying is the same as Internet harassment
  - If you accept that bullying must be: repetitive, over time, and between two people with differential power; THEN any measure that does not delineate this is not measuring cyberbullying
  - Due to a lack of consensus in measurement, this is not necessarily an agreed-upon assertion however
- Cyberbullying is more common than Internet harassment
  - On average (between 2007-2008): 37% were harassed, 14% were bullied online in the past year
- Cyberbullying is more damaging than Internet harassment
  - Among those cyberbullied, 15% report being very / extremely upset
  - Among those harassed, between 17-34% report being very / extremely upset

## Unwanted sexual solicitation (unwanted sexual encounters)

## Working Definition of Unwanted Sexual Solicitation

Unwanted sexual solicitation was first studied by Dr. David Finkelhor and colleagues at the University of New Hampshire in response to concerns from government and non-profit agencies that youth were being “solicited” online

Like harassment, it:

- Occurs online.
- It can, but does not necessarily include text messaging.
- Can occur once or more often.

## Working Definition of Unwanted Sexual Solicitation

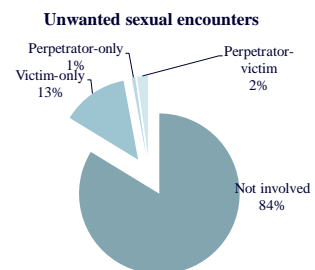
It usually refers to the following:

- Being asked to do something sexual when you don't want to
- Being asked to share personal sexual information when you don't want to
- Being asked to talk about sex when you don't want to

NOTE: It does **not** mean that you are being **solicited for sex**.

→ For this discussion, we call it ‘unwanted sexual encounters’

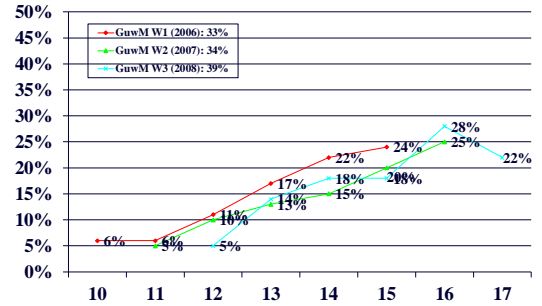
## Involvement in unwanted sexual encounters



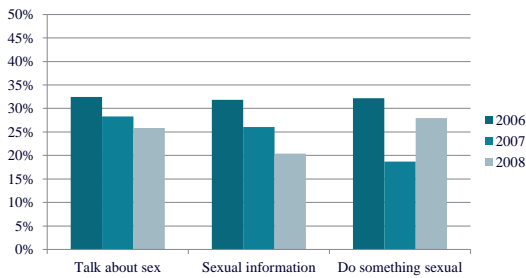
### Annual prevalence rates of youth victims of unwanted sexual encounters

Type	2006		2007		2008	
<b>ANY</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Someone asked me to talk about sex when I did not want to	11%	2%	13%	3%	14%	3%
Someone asked me to provide really personal sexual questions about myself when I did not want to tell them	11%	2%	12%	3%	13%	3%
Someone asked me to do something sexual when I did not want to	7%	2%	8%	2%	9%	3%

### Unwanted sexual encounters victimization by age across time



### Very / extremely upset by the encounter – age constant (12-15 y.o.)



### Characteristics of youth more likely to be victims of unwanted sexual encounters

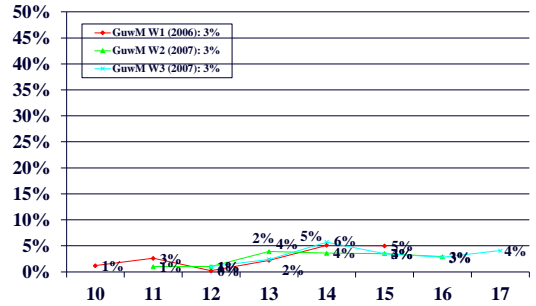
Youth Characteristics	OR (95% CI)
<b>Demographic characteristics:</b>	
Age	1.3 (1.2, 1.5)
White (vs. non-White)	2.3 (1.5, 3.5)
Female	2.0 (1.5, 2.8)
<b>Psychosocial characteristics:</b>	
Perpetrator: unwanted sexual encounter	6.5 (3.9, 10.9)
Perpetrator: Relational bullying	1.8 (1.4, 2.4)
Victim: Physical harassment	2.6 (1.6, 4.0)
Victim: Relational bullying	1.7 (1.2, 2.5)
School: Poor grades (Avg: C's or lower)	1.7 (1.2, 2.6)
School: # of suspensions / detentions at school	0.96 (0.93, 0.99)
Alcohol use	1.7 (1.2, 2.4)
Caregiver: Poor monitoring	1.1 (1.0, 1.2)
Caregiver: Coercive discipline	1.1 (1.0, 1.2)

Above characteristics are in one multi-variate model. Odds ratios are therefore adjusted for all other characteristics shown, as well as the following characteristics, which were not statistically significant: Hispanic ethnicity, household income, internet use, marijuana use, carrying a weapon to school, physical harassment perpetration (offline), propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, emotional bond with caregiver, and time

### Annual prevalence rates of youth perpetrators of unwanted sexual encounters

Type	2006		2007		2008	
<b>ANY</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
Asked someone to talk about sex when they did not want to	2%	1%	2%	0.6%	2%	0.3%
Asked someone to provide really personal sexual questions about themselves when they did not want to tell them	3%	1%	2%	0.5%	2%	0.4%
Asked someone to do something sexual when they did not want to	1%	0.5%	2%	0.4%	2%	0.3%

### Unwanted sexual encounter perpetration by age across time



### Characteristics of youth more likely to be perpetrators of unwanted sexual encounter

Youth Characteristics		OR (95% CI)
Demographic characteristics:	Internet use 1 hour+ per day	2.2 (1.1, 4.4)
Psychosocial characteristics:	Victim: unwanted sexual encounter	8.6 (4.8, 15.2)
	Perpetrator: Physical harassment	2.1 (1.1, 4.0)
	School: Weapon past 30 days	3.8 (1.3, 11.3)
	Alcohol use	4.1 (2.0, 8.4)
	Caregiver: Coercive discipline	1.2 (1.0, 1.5)

Above characteristics are in one multi-variate, population-average (GEE) model. Odds ratios are therefore adjusted for all other characteristics shown, as well as the following characteristics, which were not statistically significant: youth race, age, and sex; Hispanic ethnicity, household income, marijuana use, poor grades in school, the number of suspensions or detentions in school, physical and relational bully victimization (offline), relational bully perpetration (offline), caregiver monitoring, emotional closeness with caregiver, propensity to respond to stimuli with anger, and time

### Assumptions about unwanted sexual encounters

- It means being solicited for sex
- It's increasing over time
- It's getting scarier / kids are more affected
- Everyone's a hapless victim

## None of these assumptions are supported by the data

- It means being solicited for sex
  - The definition is very broad; while it includes solicitations for sex, it also includes solicitations for other things
- 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 the encounter now (in 2008) than 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
  - Definitely, there are more victims (16%) than perpetrators (3%)
  - BUT the odds of victimization increase about 6.5 fold if you are a perpetrator and vice versa

## Other things to note across harassment and unwanted sexual encounters:

- Girls are more likely to be victims BUT there is no difference by sex among perpetrators
  - Girls are statistically equally as likely as boys to sexually aggress upon others online
- These kids are experiencing a multitude of problems
  - (Again) Kids don't operate in a vacuum

## Limitations

- Findings need to be replicated – preferably in other national data sets
- Data are based upon the US. It's possible that different countries would yield different rates
- Non-observed data collection
- Although our response rates are strong (above 70% at each wave), this still means that we're missing data from 30% of participants...but we are statistically adjusting for non-response

## Recap: Working definition

There is no accepted definition of **Internet harassment**  
In general: it is obnoxious behavior directed at someone with the intent to harass or bother them.

**Cyberbullying** occurs over time, is repetitive, and between people of differential strength

### **Unwanted sexual solicitation / encounter**

Being asked to do something sexual, talk about sexual things, or provide personal sexual information when you don't want to.

→ It does not necessarily mean being solicited for sex

## Recap: Prevalence rates (average across 2006-2008)

- Internet harassment (ever in the past year 06-08):
  - Uninvolved: 62%
  - Victim-only: 18%
  - Perpetrator-only: 3%
  - Perpetrator-victim: 17%
- Cyberbullying (ever in the past year 07-08):
  - Non-victim: 86%
  - Victim: 14%
- Unwanted sexual encounter (ever in the past year 06-08):
  - Uninvolved: 84%
  - Victim-only: 13%
  - Perpetrator-only: 1%
  - Perpetrator-victim: 2%

## Recap: Characteristics of involved youth

Characteristics	Harassment victim	Harassment perpetrator	Cyber-bullying victim	USE victim	USE perpetrator
Internet use	↑	↑	↑		↑
Age	↑	↑		↑	
White race	↑		↑	↑	
Income: >\$75,000 (vs. <\$35,000)	↑				
Female				↑	
Victim/perpetrator: Internet harassment (respectively)	↑	↑	↑↑	↑	↑
Perpetrator: Relational bullying	↑	↑		↑	
Perpetrator: Physical harassment		↑			↑
Victim: Relational bullying	↑			↑	
Victim: Physical harassment	↑		↑	↑	

## Recap: Characteristics of involved youth

Characteristics	Harassment victim	Harassment perpetrator	Cyber-bullying victim	USE victim	USE perpetrator
School: Weapon past 30 days	↑				↑
School: Poor grades (<=C)				↑	
School: # detentions / suspensions				↓	
Propensity to respond to stimuli with anger		↑			
Alcohol use		↑		↑	↑
Caregiver: emotional closeness	↑				
Caregiver: coercive discipline				↑	↑
Caregiver: poor monitoring				↑	
Time		↓			

## Recap: Research supporting and refuting assumptions about Internet victimization

- Assumption: Victimization is increasing
  - Rates of victimization appear to be holding steady (and maybe in some cases decreasing) from 2006-2008
- Assumption: Victimization is getting nastier
  - At least as measured by rates of distress – victimization distress rates appear to be holding steady (and maybe in some cases decreasing) from 2006-2008

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## Takeaways

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As professionals we need to be able to sit with these two “competing” realities:

- Like other forms of victimization, bullying and unwanted sexual encounters online can be distressing for youth who experience them.
  - We need to do a better job of identifying these youth and getting them into services (e.g., therapy).
- We need to recognize also that:
  - The majority of youth are not being victimized online,
  - The majority who are, are not seriously upset by it..