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Internet experiences and exposures of children and adolescents: implications for mental health

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Growing Up With Media

* 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.

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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 teenagers 12-17 have a profile on a social networking site (Lenhart, Madden, McGill, Smith, 2007)

Background

As with other environments, emerging evidence suggests that exposures and experiences online have

BOTH

positive as well as potentially negative influences on youth.

Background

Our understanding of these influences has moved beyond simplistic questions

such as, 'does internet use cause depression' (A: No)

to a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of the online world.

Roadmap for today's discussion

- Review the fundamentals of online communication (e.g., what is Instant Messaging?)

- Examine how young people use and experience the Internet in positive ways as well as how the Internet is sometimes used in negative ways (e.g., Internet harassment, exposure to violent material).

- Discuss emerging evidence that links some of these behaviors and experiences with concerning psychosocial health indicators concurrently reported by youth.

Online communication: Chat rooms

Online communication: Chat rooms

A chat room is a place online where people gather to "chat".
- Communication occurs real-time – messages are visible as soon as the 'enter' key is hit
  - Most rooms are open to anyone who wants to participate
  - Chat is viewed by all participants in the room
  - Chatters can pair off and talk in a private space
- Content
  - Often centered on specific subjects (e.g., depression)
  - Some rooms have rules and are monitored, but talk of sex in unmonitored teen chat rooms is common (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2004)
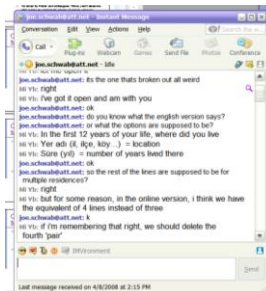
Online communication: Chat rooms

- Personal expression
  - Many allow users to post profiles (e.g., photos, personal information), send photos, and use web cameras
  - Users create screen names, which can be a real name or made-up name

Online communication: Chat rooms

- Victimization concern:
  - Youth can be targeted in chat rooms either publicly (i.e., with all other participants in the room), or privately with someone inviting the youth to a private "room".
- Usage by teens (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, 2006)
  - Chat rooms appear to be losing popularity among teenagers since 2000
    - 30% of 10-17 year olds reported having been to a chat room in the previous year (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2006)
    - 3% of 10-15 year olds reported they spent the majority of their time online in chat rooms (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008)
  - As noted by Wolak and colleagues: "Many youth describe chat rooms as unpleasant places attracting unsavory people" (pg. 7).

Online communication: Instant Messaging

Online communication: Instant Messaging

- Occurs real-time (like chat rooms)
  - 2+ people who are using the same IM service can 'talk'
  - Senders type messages which appear in windows on the computer screens of both senders and receivers.
  - (Unlike chat rooms) IM messages are sent through screen names so the sender must know the screen name of the recipient in order to send the message.
- Personal expression
  - Some IM services have a Member Directory, where users can create profiles that can include pictures and other information.
  - These directories are searchable and anyone with the same IM service can find a person's screen name and send them a message.

Online communication: Instant Messaging

- Victimization concern
  - Privacy settings can be set to prevent messages from unknown people.
  - Can be harassed by people known to youth
- Usage by teens:
  - Although more teenagers use e-mail, IMing is the Internet tool used most often to communicate with friends (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin, 2005):
    - 68% of youth between the ages of 10 - 17 used IM at least once in YISS2, as compared to 55% in YISS1 (Wolak, Finkelhor & Mitchell, 2006).
    - 23% of 10-15 year olds said they spend the majority of their time online IMing (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

Online communication: Blogs

Online communication: Blogs

- Blogs (short for 'web logs') are online journals
- A-synchronous – people post their text for others to see
- Content
  - People use them as diaries or to comment on specific topics.
- Personal expression
  - Can include detailed descriptions of personal experiences and feelings.
  - Some include contact information

Online communication: Blogs

- Victimization concern:
  - Many allow for readers to post responses, thus allowing for contact from both known and unknown people.
- Usage by teens
  - 16% of youth between the ages of 10 - 17 report using a blog or online journal (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2006).
  - 1.2% of 10-15 year olds said blogging was what they spent the majority of their time online doing (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

Online communication: Social Networking Sites

Online communication: Social Networking Sites

- ■ Integrate all of the above tools, so communication is both:
  - ■ Real-time (using chat rooms or IM capabilities) and
  - ■ A-synchronous (using message boards or email)
- ■ Content
  - ■ People use them as diaries or to comment on specific topics.
- ■ Personal expression
  - ■ Can create profiles that display personal information, upload pictures and video

Online communication: Social networking sites

- ■ Victimization concern:
  - ■ Can set profile to private or public.
  - ■ Public profiles are searchable on name and key word
  - ■ Some sites have user restrictions
    - ■ MySpace requires users to be at least 14, and automatically sets profiles of users under 17 to 'private'.
- ■ Usage by teens
  - ■ Social networking sites are fast becoming a favorite among teenagers.
    - ■ 55% of youth 12-17 years of age use social networking sites (Lenhart et al., 2007).
    - ■ 17% of 10-15 year olds said it was the activity they spent most time online doing (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008).

Using the Internet in positive ways: Social connectivity

- ■ Allows young people to connect with friends who live near and far.

- ■ Form new relationships with people with similar interests

- ■ A great source of social support for people who are isolated (e.g., home bound because of illness) or marginalized (e.g., gay man living in a rural area).

Using the Internet in positive ways: Self-expression and exploration

- Express who you *are* using pictures, videos, and music

- Can 'try on' identities before you're ready to share them with others (e.g., same-sex attraction)

Using the Internet in positive ways: accessing healthcare 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).

The Internet used in negative ways

- Experiences
  - Internet harassment and cyberbullying
  - Unwanted sexual solicitation

- Exposures
  - Exposure to pornography / x-rated material
  - Exposure to violent material (e.g., hate sites)

Youth Internet Safety Surveys

- 1,500 households were surveyed
- 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 by Dr. David Finkelhor and colleagues at UNH

Growing up with Media Survey

- 1,588 households
- Online Survey conducted between August and September, 2006
- 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
- Funded by the CDC (U49/CE000206)

Internet harassment
&
CyberBullying

Internet harassment
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)

Frequency of Internet harassment: Victimization: YISS data

- 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%

- Internet harassment has increased from 6% to 9% since 2000.

Mitchell, Wolak, Finkelhor, 2006; Ybarra, Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2006

Frequency of Internet harassment: Victimization: GuwM data

	Type of harassment		
Frequency	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

Impact of Internet harassment

About one in three youth targeted by Internet harassment report feeling very/extremely upset (or afraid) because of the incident:

- 30% in YISS-1
- 38% in YISS-2
- 39% in GuwM

Concurrent psychosocial problems

	Odds of psychosocial problems given report of victimization		
Type of psychosocial problem	YISS1	YISS2	GuwM
Caregiver-child relationships			
Poor emotional bond with CG			1.3 ***
Coercive discipline			1.6 *
Poor monitoring			1.5 ***
Peer problems			
Interpersonal victimization / offline bullying	3.1 *** +	1.5 *	5.6 ** - 17.3 ***
Social problems		2.4 **	
Behavior problems			
Depression	3.6 * +		
Substance use			
Alcohol use			9.4 ***
Other drugs (inhalants, stimulants)			10.3 ***
School problems			
Behavior problems at school			2.1 *** - 8.0 **

Ybarra M, Mitchell KJ, Wolak J, Finkelhor D. Examining characteristics and associated distress related to Internet harassment: Findings from the Second Youth Internet Safety Survey. Pediatrics. 2006. 118A(4):e1169-1177.
Ybarra ML, Diener-West M, Leaf PJ. Examining the overlap in Internet harassment and school bullying: implications for school intervention. J Adolescent Health. 2007 Dec;41(6 Suppl 1):S42-50.
Ybarra ML. Linkages between depressive symptomatology and Internet harassment among young regular Internet users. Cyberpsychol Behav. 2004 Apr;7(2):247-57.

Characteristics of instigators of Internet harassment

Frequency of Internet harassment: Perpetration

Type of harassment	% affected
▪ Rude or nasty comments[1,2]	18-28%
▪ Spread rumors (whether they were true or not)[2]	11%
▪ Used the Internet to harass or embarrass someone[1]	9%
▪ Threatening or aggressive comments [2]	5%

[1]YISS-2
[2]Growing up with Media Survey

Concurrent psychosocial problems

Type of psychosocial problem	Odds of psychosocial problems given report of perpetration	
	YISS1	YISS2
Caregiver-child relationships		
Poor emotional bond with CG	2.6 ***	
Coercive discipline	2.2***	2.0 **
Poor monitoring	1.8 ***	
Peer problems		
Interpersonal victimization / offline bullying	1.7 ***	1.8 * - 3.0 ***
Behavior problems		
Symptoms of depression	3.1 ***	
Aggression		2.1 * - 9.3 ***
Rule breaking		3.4 ** - 7.1 ***
Substance use	4.2 ***	
Delinquent behavior	2.7 ***	
School problems		
Academic challenge	1.3 *	
Violence in the family		
Physical / sexual victimization	5.1 ***	

Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ. Youth engaging in online harassment: associations with caregiver-child relationships, Internet use, and personal characteristics. J Adolescent. 2004 Jun;27(3):319-36
Ybarra M & Mitchell K. Prevalence and frequency of Internet harassment instigation: Implications for adolescent health. Journal of Adolescent Health. 2007. 41(2): 189-195

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.

Defining unwanted sexual solicitation on the Internet

- Someone tried to get me to talk about sex online <u>when I did not want to.</u>

- Someone online asked me for sexual information about myself <u>when I did not want to</u> tell the person, e.g., really personal questions, like what my body looks like or sexual things I have done.

- Someone asked me to <u>do</u> something sexual when I was online <u>that I did not want to do</u>.

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)

Frequency of unwanted sexual solicitation

- YISS1: 20% (one in five) 10-17 year olds reported being the target of unwanted sexual solicitation

- YISS2: 13% (one in seven)

- GuwM: 15% 10-15 year olds reported being targeted by unwanted sexual solicitation

Impact of unwanted sexual solicitation

Across studies, about one in three youth report feeling very/extremely upset (or afraid) because of the incident:

- YISS1: 26%
- YISS2: 31%
- GuwM: 43%

Where is victimization happening?

	Unwanted sexual solicitation		Internet Harassment	
Location online	Ever in the last year (n=217)	Monthly or more often (n=42)	Ever in the last year (n=484)	Monthly or more often (n=114)
Instant messaging (IM)	42.5% (99)	25.2% (14)	56.4% (270)	48.7% (63)
Chat rooms	31.7% (71)	28.4% (16)	19.2% (95)	27.% (34)
Social networking site	27.1% (66)	33.6% (14)	30.9% (144)	31.2% (35)
Emailing	21.6% (38)	49.6% (17)	21.2% (101)	27.9% (30)
Playing games	17.9% (44)	10.0% (4)	24.4% (126)	34.6% (42)
Blogging	5.5% (13)	14.1% (7)	8.2% (48)	16.4% (19)

Ybarra M, Mitchell KJ, Wolak J, Finkelhor D. Examining characteristics and associated distress related to Internet harassment: Findings from the Second Youth Internet Safety Survey. Pediatrics. 2006. 118A(4):e1169-1177.

Concurrent psychosocial problems

	Odds of psychosocial problems given report of victimization
Type of psychosocial problem	YISS1
Peer problems	
Interpersonal victimization / offline bullying	1.8 * - 1.9 *
Behavior problems	
Symptoms of depression	3.0 ***
Troubled (e.g., negative life event, depression, child abuse)	1.7 **
Substance use	2.6 ***
Delinquent behavior	1.8 **
Violence in the family	
Life challenge	2.9 * +

Mitchell KJ, Finkelhor D, Wolak J. Risk factors for and impact of online sexual solicitation of youth. JAMA. 2001;285(23):3011-4.
Ybarra ML, Leaf PJ, Diener-West M. Sex differences in youth-reported depressive symptomatology and unwanted internet sexual solicitation. J Med Internet Res. 2004 Feb 6;6(1):e5.
Mitchell K, Ybarra M, Finkelhor D. The relative importance of online victimization in understanding depression, delinquency, and substance use. Child Maltreatment. 2007; 12(4): 314-324.

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Intentional exposure to pornography

Defining Exposure to X-Rated Material

In the last 12 months have you watched an X-rated movie at a friend's house, your house, or in the theatre where the main topic was sex?

In the last 12 months, have you looked at an X-rated magazine, like Playboy, on purpose where you knew that the main topic was sex?

In the last 12 months, have you gone to or seen an X-rated or "adult" website where the main topic is sex?

Frequency of intentional exposure

- YISS1 (10-17 year olds, 2000):
    - 4% reported seeking x-rated material online
    - 7% reported seeking x-rated material offline
    - 5% reported seeking x-rated material online + offline

- GuwM (10-15 year olds, 2007)
    - 2% reported seeking x-rated material online
    - 10% reported seeking x-rated material offline
    - 8% reported seeking x-rated material online+ offline

Concurrent psychosocial problems

	Odds of psychosocial problems given report of purposeful exposure	
Type of psychosocial problem	YISS1	GuwM
Caregiver-child relationships		
Poor emotional bond with CG	2.0 *	
Coercive discipline	1.7 *	
Peer problems		
Bullying of others		2.4 *** - 3.7 ***
Behavior problems		
Substance use	2.1 * - 2.6 ***	
Alcohol use		11.4 ***
Other drugs (inhalants, stimulants)		8.8 ***
Delinquent behavior	4.0 ***	
Violence in the family		
Exposure to violence in the family		2.5 ***

Ybarra ML, Mitchell KJ. Exposure to internet pornography among children and adolescents: a national survey. Cyberpsychol Behav. 2005 Oct;8(5):473-86.

Exposure to violence online

Defining Exposure to violence online

Based upon the YISS1, youth were asked whether they had viewed each of the following five types of websites in the last 12 months:

1. A "hate" site (promoting hatred of a group of people because of who they are, how they look, or what they believe);
2. A website showing pictures of dead people or people dying, or a "snuff" site.
3. A website showing satanic rituals;
4. A website, including news-related sites, showing pictures of war, death, "terrorism"; and
5. A website (not an online game) showing cartoons, like stick people or animals, being beaten up, hurt, or killed.

Frequency of intentional exposure

Web site type	YISS1	GuwM
Hate site	1%	3% *(57% don't know)*
Death site	1%	5% *(64% don't know)*
Satanic site	0.5%	2% *(58% don't know)*
Site showing war, death, terrorism	NA	24% *(31% don't know)*
Cartoons engaged in violence	NA	21% *(42% don't know)*

Concurrent psychosocial problems

Type of psychosocial problem	Odds of psychosocial problems given report of exposure
	GuwM
Caregiver-child relationships	
Poor emotional bond with CG	1.1 *
Peer problems	
# of Delinquent friends	1.2 *
Behavior problems	
Aggression	1.1 **
Alcohol use	2.6 - 4.2 *
School problems	
Behavior problems at school	2.0 ***
Violence in the family	
Exposure to violence in the family	1.7 *

Ybarra, Diener-West, Markow, Leaf, Hamburger, Boxer. Linkages between Internet and other media violence and youth seriously violent behavior. Pediatrics. In press, 2008.

Summary

Type of psychosocial problem	Harassment victims	Harassment perpetrators	Unwanted sexual solicitation victims	X-rated material	Violent web sites
Child-caregiver relationship					
Poor emotional bond with CG					
Coercive discipline					
Poor monitoring					
Peer problems					
Interpersonal victimization / offline bullying					
Perpetration of bullying					
Delinquent friends					
Social problems					
Behavior problems					
Depressive symptomatology					
Aggression					
Rule breaking					
Substance use					
Delinquent behavior					
School problems					
Academic challenge					
Behavior problems at school					
Violence in the family					
Physical / sexual victimization					
Exposure to violence in the family					
Life challenge					

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?

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.

There are several things youth can 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
  - Boundaries matter – don't go overboard with Internet monitoring without cause

- Talk to your kids about Internet safety
  - Educate yourself about the Internet
  - Discuss appropriate online etiquette
  - Have clear rules and expectations

Final thoughts

- The **majority** of youth who use the Internet have **positive** experiences and report that none of these types of exposures occur.

- There are many similarities in the types of problems youth are reporting across types of Internet experiences and exposures. In general, those having problems online are more likely to have problems offline.

- We need to focus on the child, not the online application.