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Psychosocial correlates of Internet harassment among youth: An update

Michele L Ybarra MPH PhD[1], Kimberly Mitchell PhD[2],
Janis Wolak JD[2], David Finkelhor PhD[2]

[1]Center for Innovative Public Health Research.; [2]Crimes Against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire

* Thank you for your interest in this presentation. Please note that analyses included herein are preliminary. More recent, finalized analyses can be found in: Ybarra, M., Mitchell, K., Wolak, J., & Finkelhor, D. (2006). Examining characteristics and associated distress related to Internet harassment: Findings from the Second Youth Internet Safety Survey. Pediatrics, 118(4), e1169-e1177..

YISS-2 Methodology

The Youth Internet Safety Survey-2 was a national telephone survey of young Internet users (ages 10-17) [1]. Households were randomly identified via random digit dial. Surveys were conducted when youth felt they could talk freely and interviews were rescheduled if necessary. A target sample size of 1,500 households was pre-determined based upon a desired maximum expected sampling error of +/-2.5% at the 5% significance level. The AAPOR-calculated response rate was between 38%-45%. Interviews took place March to June 2005.

Because the focus of the current investigation is targets of Internet harassment, we included for detailed analyses only those respondents who were either victims of Internet harassment or non-bully involved youth (n=1,405).

Sample characteristics (n=1,405)

- 51% female
- 75% White, 9% Hispanic
- 39% annual household income of $75,000 or more
- 22% lived with an adult with a postgraduate education

Background

Data from the 2000 Youth Internet Safety Survey suggest that 6% of youth Internet users between the ages of 10 through 17 years have been victims of Internet harassment in the previous year, one-third of whom report feeling emotionally distressed because of the incident [4]. As with traditional bullying [5-8], youth who report being victims of Internet harassment are significantly more likely to also report clinical features of major depression and interpersonal victimization (e.g., having something stolen) in the previous year, and this seems especially true for boys [3]. Similar to traditional bullying [5, 9-11], groups of youth who are both online aggressors and victims have emerged. These harasser-victims report concurrent personal challenge including depressive symptomatology, substance use, problem behavior, and low school commitment [2].

These findings suggest that being the victim of Internet harassment may be a significant factor in the psychosocial development of some youth. How these findings translate to today's online youth is unknown.

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Defining Harassment

"Feeling worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing youth online."

OR

"Someone used the Internet to threaten or embarrass the youth by posting or sending messages about the youth for other people to see."

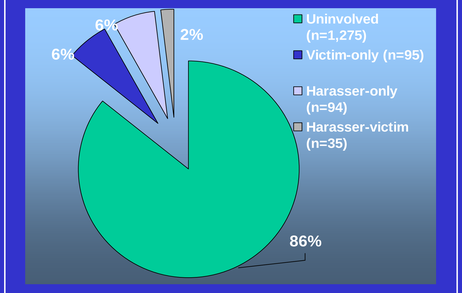
What Youth Said

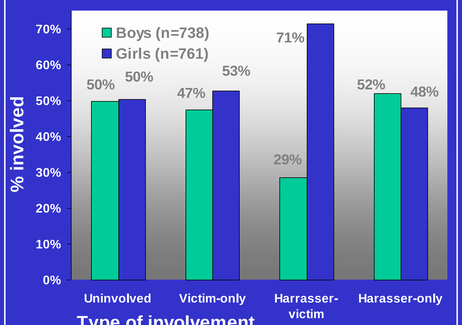
"I got an instant message from some girl from school and she was telling me that she wanted to beat the living crap out of me and talking badly about me at school in front of my friends."

"They just kept telling me that they wanted to see me and they thought that I was cute. They kept telling me information that described me and was true about me and I didn't know where they were getting that information from."

"He basically threatened to come and beat me up and hurt my family and my friend…he did some things to my friend that really hurt and I was talking to him about it and he spazzed out."

Frequency of involvement (n=1,499)





X2(3)=6.5, p=0.09

Psychosocial Characteristics of Youth Targets of Internet Harassment (n=1,405)

Psychosocial characteristics	Uninvolved (85%, n=1,275)	Victim-only (6%, n=95)		Harasser-victim (2%, n=35)	
	% (n)	% (n)	COR (95% CI)	% (n)	COR (95% CI)
Interpersonal victimization	36 (464)	47 (45)	1.6 (1.0, 2.4)	63 (22)	3.0 (1.5, 5.9)
Physical / sexual victimization	2 (30)	4 (4)	1.8 (0.6, 5.3)	17 (6)	8.6 (3.3, 22.2)
Borderline / clinical behavior problems (CBCL)					
Social problems	5 (66)	11 (10)	2.2 (1.1, 4.3)	17 (6)	3.8 (1.5, 9.4)
Rule breaking problems	5 (58)	6 (6)	1.4 (0.6, 3.4)	29 (10)	8.4 (3.9, 18.3)
Aggression problems	5 (61)	6 (6)	1.3 (0.6, 3.2)	29 (10)	8.0 (3.7, 17.3)
Withdrawn / Depressed	4 (47)	11 (10)	3.1 (1.5, 6.3)	0 (0)	NC

Replicating previous reports [3], indications of depressive symptomatology are significantly related to Internet harassment, and this is especially true for victim-only youth. As expected [2], harasser-victim youth report serious externalizing behavior problems, specifically borderline or clinically significant rule-breaking as compared to uninvolved youth. Harasser-victim youth also are significantly more likely to report physical and sexual abuse, as well as interpersonal victimization (e.g., having something stolen) versus their uninvolved peers. These findings further support the notion that Internet harassment is associated with concurrent psychosocial challenge and is an important child and adolescent health issue.

Distressful harassment experiences (n=130) [12]

Characteristics	Not distressed (62%, n=80)	Emotionally Distressed (38%, n=50)	Statistical comparison	
	% (N)	% (N)	OR	95% CI
Event characteristics				
Repetitive (>=3 times)	25% (20)	44% (22)	2.4	1.1, 5.0
Internet use				
Instant messaging	94% (75)	84% (42)	0.4	0.1, 1.1
Chat room	58% (46)	34% (17)	0.4	0.2, 0.8
Perpetrator characteristics				
Age				
Pre-adolescent (10-12 years)	5% (4)	12% (6)	3.2	0.8, 12.6
Adult (18 years or older)	16% (13)	34% (17)	2.8	1.2, 6.8
Adolescent (13-17 years)	56% (45)	42% (21)	1.0	Reference
Unknown to respondent	23% (18)	12% (6)	0.7	0.2, 2.1
Asked victim to send picture online	14% (11)	38% (19)	3.8	1.6, 9.0
Aggressive offline contact	19% (15)	36% (18)	2.4	1.1, 5.5
Personal characteristics				
Harasser-victim	35% (28)	14% (7)	0.3	0.1, 0.8
Pre-adolescent (10-12 y.o.)	8% (6)	20.0% (10)	3.1	1.0, 9.1
Female	51% (41)	68% (34)	2	1.0, 4.2

Characteristics of distressed youth

Almost two in five (38%) youth who are victims of Internet harassment report resulting emotional distress. Distressed youth are significantly more likely to be pre-teens as opposed to teenagers and to have less experience with chat rooms and instant messages. This is in contrast to victims overall, who are more likely to be teenagers and to report instant message and chat room use. It is possible that pre-teens as opposed to teenagers receive the greatest number of prevention messages (e.g., do not go to chat rooms) or they give more credence to such messages. They then may be unprepared for harassment when it occurs outside of the identified risk activities. It also is possible pre-teens lack the coping skills developed by teenagers. Chat rooms may have coarser language, thereby inuring frequent users with a higher threshold for what they find upsetting. If true, this might explain why chat rooms are protective. Further inquiry is needed to better understand these nuances.

Limitations

- Cross-sectional data preclude temporal inferences
- Data reflect youth's most distressing event so we cannot evaluate the influence of multiple different harassers on emotional distress
- Low response rate (45%), which is similar to many recent national telephone surveys
- Differential definitions of victim and aggressor (Aggression: using the Internet to harass or embarrass someone they were mad at; and making rude or nasty comments to someone else online).