



Online Victimization of Youth:
Five Years Later

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Foreword

The Internet holds tremendous potential for our nation's youth; however, the misuse of the Internet to prey on them is a serious problem requiring action by legislators, families, communities, and law enforcement. While we have made some strides in helping to prevent such victimization, the results of this survey, *Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later*, shows we have not done enough. Exposure to unwanted sexual material, sexual solicitations, and harassment were frequently reported by the youth interviewed for this study. While we are encouraged by the smaller proportion of youth who received unwanted sexual solicitations, we are disturbed by a new trend of solicitors asking youth to provide sexual pictures of themselves. These results call for a more aggressive prevention plan. While we strongly believe in the power of the Internet to provide valuable information for those of all ages, we also believe children need extra attention and guidance as they venture online, because they, more than any other group of the population, are most vulnerable to risks found on the Internet.

The U.S. Congress has already taken action through legislation such as the Child Online Privacy Protection Act (Public Law 105-277) to help safeguard youth from unsavory advertising practices and the registration of personal information without parental consent. The enactment of the Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to end the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act (Public Law 108-21) enhanced the ability of law enforcement to investigate and prosecute cases of child sexual exploitation on the Internet. Additionally, numerous private and public organizations have implemented Internet safety campaigns including pamphlets, web sites, and public-service announcements, to educate youth about safer Internet use. The growing evidence of the criminal misuse of cyberspace to target and physically victimize children, however, is alarming to us as grandparents and legislators. As detailed in this report, the risks to children, particularly teenagers, in cyberspace include exposure to

- Unwanted sexual solicitations (1 in 7 youth)
- Unwanted exposure to sexual material (1 in 3 youth)
- Harassment – threatening or other offensive behavior directed at them (1 in 11 youth)

As chairmen of our respective subcommittees, and with the support of our colleagues, we have been working with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to address these threats through a three-pronged strategy that helps to

- Prevent child victimization in cyberspace through aggressive education programs directed toward families. NCMEC has reached into millions of homes and classrooms with NetSmartz, its Internet safety education program. This program includes a message to parents and guardians focusing on strong involvement in their children's lives and increasing knowledge and awareness about computers and the Internet in this generation, which did not grow up with the Internet.

- Advocate for assistance through the development of technology tools and access controls. Parents and guardians should make informed decisions about utilizing these blocking, monitoring, and filtering software tools in their homes.
- Support aggressive law-enforcement efforts directed against those who use the Internet for criminal purposes. In addition to being reprehensible, child pornography and the enticing, luring, or seducing of children online is unlawful and strict enforcement of our laws is necessary to deter these crimes.

The U.S. Congress has implemented this strategy by enhancing federal law-enforcement resources such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Innocent Images Task Force and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Cyber Crimes Center, both of which have successful records of investigating and arresting those who use the Internet to harm children. On the state and local level, law-enforcement officers are able to receive specialized training, in investigating online crimes committed against children, at NCMC's Jimmy Ryce Law Enforcement Training Center. Additionally, through the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Congress has increased the funding for the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force agencies. Spread throughout the country, there are now 46 of these agencies set up to focus on the prevention and investigation of child sexual exploitation online.

One of the most important tools for law-enforcement personnel and families is NCMC's CyberTipline. Launched in March of 1998, it provides a simple way for individuals to report child sexual exploitation to the people who know what to do with the information. This online reporting resource bridges the gap between those who wish to report crimes online and the law-enforcement agencies needing this information. This year we have seen the number of reports made to the CyberTipline soar past 400,000, resulting in numerous investigations and arrests. In addition, the CyberTipline takes in the mandated reports from Internet service providers of suspected crimes committed against children when they encounter such activity in the course of providing their services.

Although the U.S. Congress has responded with a strong message of intolerance of online victimizers, we cannot be effective unless we have the most current information about the ways children are harmed on the Internet. As a follow-up to the previous *Online Victimization: A Report on the Nation's Youth (YISS-1)*, this study identifies today's threats, incidence rates, and victim responses to online exploiters and illegal content. This second survey takes another look at this problem and gauges whether the risks have changed for our youth, for the

better or worse. The choice of David Finkelhor, PhD; Kimberly J. Mitchell, PhD; and Janis Wolak, JD, at the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire to conduct this second survey is vital to maintaining the consistency of research methods in order to get the most accurate interpretation of the results. Dr. Finkelhor has been a well-known national authority on child sexual abuse. The conclusions from *YISS-1* have formed the basis for many educational initiatives. The work of Dr. Finkelhor and his colleagues represents a valuable addition to our knowledge and awareness of this difficult and complex problem.

We thank staff members at NCMEC and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention along with representatives of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces for their work on this much-needed report and their leadership in helping to safeguard all youth. Our sincere appreciation is also extended to David Finkelhor, Kimberly Mitchell, and Janis Wolak. Their efforts will help legislators, families, and law-enforcement personnel better understand and address this threat to children in an effective, appropriate manner.

The best way to preserve the positive uses of the Internet is to help ensure it is not a sanctuary for pedophiles, child pornographers, and others who prey on children. We are committed to assisting law-enforcement personnel fight these crimes and inform families about available resources to help them better protect children. By helping to ensure law-enforcement personnel and families have the necessary tools and knowledge to counter misuse, the Internet will continue to be a powerful source of education, entertainment, and communication. Together we must aggressively enforce a "zero tolerance" policy regarding online victimization of children.

There is still much work to be done as we seek to learn more about what youth are encountering on the Internet today. This report provides a critical base of knowledge so we can act, doing far more to ensure we make the Internet the safest it can be for every child.

Richard C. Shelby
Chairman
U.S. Senate Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies

Frank R. Wolf
Chairman
U.S. House Appropriations
Subcommittee on Science,
State, Justice and Commerce
and Related Agencies

Introduction

In 1999 and 2000 we conducted the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-1)* prompted by a number of factors including

- The enormous growth of youth Internet use in the 1990s
- Concern about adults using the Internet to sexually solicit youth
- Worry about the amount of sexual material online and youth exposure to such material
- Questions about **how** youth Internet users might be exposed to sexual material
- Reports of youth being threatened and harassed via the Internet

The findings from *YISS-1* confirmed what many suspected — large numbers of youth who used the Internet were encountering sexual solicitations they did not want, sexual material they did not seek, and people who threatened and harassed them in a variety of ways. Many of these incidents were relatively mild and not very disturbing to youth, but some were serious and distressing.

Information from the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* has been widely used in education and prevention campaigns and discussions about how to make cyberspace a safer place for youth.¹ Several years have passed since the first survey results were published, making it time to ask whether and how the online environment has changed for youth. We conducted the second *Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2)* to reassess the extent to which youth Internet users were encountering problems in 2005, gauge whether the incidence and characteristics of these episodes have changed, explore new areas of interest, review emerging technologies, ascertain the effect those technologies have on the issue, and assess threats to youth.

¹ Examples of education and prevention campaigns include the NetSmartz[®] WorkshopSM (www.NetSmartz.org), Web Wise Kids (www.webwisekids.com), SafeTeens.com (www.safekids.com), Ad Council (www.adcouncil.org/issues/online_sexual_exploitation), Florida Computer Crime Center Parent's Guide to Internet Safety (www.fdle.state.fl.us/Fc3/childsafety.html), and ProtectKids.com (www.protectkids.com).

YISS-2 Report Statistical Highlights

In most cases the YISS-2 interviews took place somewhat more than 5 years after YISS-1. (YISS-1 interviews were conducted from August 1999 to February 2000 and YISS-2 interviews from March to June 2005). Both surveys asked youth about events occurring in the year before the interview.

- In YISS-2, compared to YISS-1, increased proportions of youth Internet users were encountering unwanted exposures to sexual material and online harassment, but decreased proportions were receiving unwanted sexual solicitations.²
- In YISS-2 more than one-third of youth Internet users (34%) saw sexual material online they did not want to see in the past year compared to one-quarter (25%) in YISS-1.
- The increase in exposure to unwanted sexual material occurred despite increased use of filtering, blocking, and monitoring software in households of youth Internet users. More than half of parents and guardians with home Internet access (55%) said there was such software on the computers their children used compared to one-third (33%) in YISS-1.
- Online harassment also increased to 9% of youth Internet users in YISS-2 from 6% in YISS-1.
- A smaller proportion of youth Internet users received unwanted sexual solicitations in YISS-2 than in YISS-1. Approximately 1 in 7 (13%) was solicited in YISS-2, compared to approximately 1 in 5 (19%) in YISS-1; however, **aggressive** solicitations, in which solicitors made or attempted to make offline contact with youth, did **not** decline. Four (4) percent of youth Internet users received aggressive solicitations — a proportion similar to the 3% who received aggressive solicitations in YISS-1.
- In YISS-2 there were also declines in the proportions of youth Internet users who communicated online with people they did not know in person (34% down from 40% in YISS-1) or who formed close online relationships with people they met online (11% down from 16%).
- Four (4) percent of all youth Internet users in YISS-2 said online solicitors asked them for nude or sexually explicit photographs of themselves.³
- As in YISS-1 only a minority of youth who had unwanted sexual solicitations, unwanted exposures to sexual material, or harassment said they were distressed by the incidents. The number of youth with distressing exposures to unwanted sexual material increased to 9% of all youth in YISS-2 from 6% in YISS-1.
- Acquaintances played a growing role in many of the unwanted solicitation incidents. In YISS-2, 14% of solicitations were from offline friends and acquaintances compared to only 3% in YISS-1. The same was true of harassers.

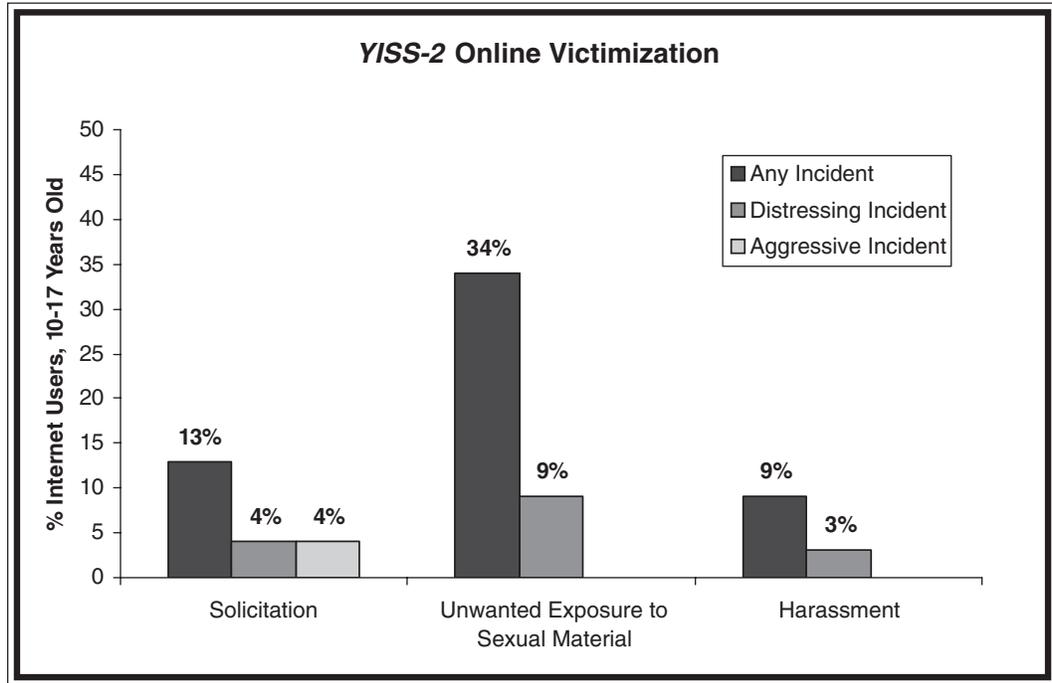
² Differences between the first and second *Youth Internet Safety Surveys* have been tested for statistical significance based on rates of occurrence within the full samples. The significance tests determine whether an apparent increase or decrease in the proportion of youth reporting a specific behavior is reliable or possibly attributable to chance. In the text of this report, when we refer to increases or decreases, we mean those that are statistically significant. When we state there is no change, we mean there is no statistically significant change.

³ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

Forty-four (44) percent were offline acquaintances, mostly peers, compared to 28% in *YISS-1*. In addition a portion of these unwanted incidents happened when youth were using the Internet in the company of peers – 41% of solicitations, 29% of exposures, and 31% of harassment.⁴

- As in *YISS-1* few overall incidents of solicitation or unwanted exposure (5% and 2% respectively in *YISS-2* and 9% and 3% respectively in *YISS-1*) were reported to law enforcement, Internet service providers, or other authorities.

Figure 1



Youth Internet users surveyed in 2005 continued to encounter offensive episodes, some of which were distressing and many of which went undisclosed. Some *YISS-2* findings, however, are encouraging, such as the smaller proportion of youth receiving solicitations and the smaller proportion interacting online with people they did not know in person. And other *YISS-2* findings suggest new directions are needed for safety and prevention education. For instance the increase in unwanted sexual solicitations and harassment from people youth know offline suggests the focus should not be simply on the danger from people youth do not know in person. And the proportion of unwanted incidents happening when youth are with peers suggests families need to be sensitized to what may happen when youth use the Internet in groups with other youth.

The increase in unwanted exposure to sexual material is particularly disquieting. Currently families, schools, and libraries⁵ are responsible for taking measures to screen out unwanted sexual material when youth go online. In 2005

⁴ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

⁵ In 2000 the U.S. Congress passed the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) 114 Stat 2763A-335. CIPA requires schools and libraries receiving federal assistance in the form of reduced rates for Internet access to certify they are taking steps to prevent access to sexual material on library computers including installing filtering software.

more parents and guardians were using filtering, blocking, and monitoring software on the home computers their children used most often, but even so youth exposure to unwanted sexual material increased substantially from what it was when *YISS-1* was conducted. It may be time to rethink the approach to the problem. Broader efforts to prevent unwanted exposures to sexual material among youth Internet users are needed. Technology industries are realizing this is an issue of concern, and many have begun to implement change in an effort to reduce the risks to youth. These changes include providing a reporting tool for users in the event of an incident, offering various settings to allow users increased privacy, and working cooperatively with law enforcement to follow legal procedures during investigations. Still all electronic service providers should do more to protect youth from unwanted exposure to sexual material.

The increase in online harassment is also unsettling. These episodes are particularly disturbing to youth. Families and schools that have begun to mobilize to reduce offline bullying and harassment in schools may need to extend their concerns to what happens online. The number of incidents involving peers and the descriptions youth gave of these incidents suggest an amount of online harassment stems from confrontations that began in school.

What Is Online Victimization?

People may be victimized online in many ways. In both *Youth Internet Safety Surveys* we asked about three kinds of victimization prominent in discussions of youth and the Internet — sexual solicitation and approaches, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment.

Sexual solicitations and approaches: Requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or give personal sexual information that were **unwanted or**, whether wanted or not, **made by an adult**.

Aggressive sexual solicitation: Sexual solicitations involving **offline contact** with the perpetrator through regular mail, by telephone, or in person or attempts or requests for offline contact.

Unwanted exposure to sexual material: Without seeking or expecting sexual material, being exposed to pictures of naked people or people having sex when doing online searches, surfing the web, opening E-mail or instant messages, or opening links in E-mail or instant messages.

Harassment: Threats or other offensive behavior (not sexual solicitation), sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see.

Not all such incidents were distressing to the youth who experienced them. **Distressing incidents** were episodes where youth rated themselves as very or extremely upset or afraid as a result of the incident.

How the *Youth Internet Safety Surveys (YISS-1 and YISS-2)* Were Conducted

- Telephone surveys of representative national samples of 1,501 youth Internet users in *YISS-1* and 1,500 youth Internet users in *YISS-2*, ages 10 through 17
- Different groups of youth were interviewed in each survey (cross-sectional samples)
- "Internet use" was defined as using the Internet at least once a month for the past six months at home, school, a library, or some other place
- Parents or guardians were interviewed first for about 10 minutes
- With consent of parents or guardians, youth were interviewed for about 30 minutes
- Care was taken to preserve privacy and confidentiality during youth interviews
- Youth participants received \$10 checks and information about Internet safety
- The *YISS-1* interviews took place from August 1999 to February 2000
- The *YISS-2* interviews took place from March to June 2005

Topics covered in the interviews included

- Experiences of sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment via the Internet **in the past year** and reactions to those experiences
- The nature of friendships formed over the Internet **in the past year**
- Knowledge of Internet safety practices among youth Internet users and their parents or guardians
- Assessment of factors that might make some youth more vulnerable than others to sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment via the Internet

YISS-2 youth survey participants were

- 49% boys, 51% girls
- 76% White, 13% African-American, 3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3% Asian, 1% other, 3% did not know/answer
- 9% Hispanic or Latino⁶

Because we used the same methods and asked most of the same questions in *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*, we are able to compare many results to see what has changed since *YISS-1*.

⁶ According to page 5-2 of *Design and Methodology* published by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Department of Commerce's Economics and Statistics Administration within the U.S. Census Bureau issued in March 2002, "[R]ace and ethnicity are distinct categories. Thus, individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin may be of any race."

Table 1. YISS-2 Youth Internet User and Household Characteristics* (N=1,500)

Characteristics	All Youth
Age	
10	5%
11	8%
12	10%
13	13%
14	14%
15	17%
16	17%
17	17%
Gender	
Boy	49%
Girl	51%
Race	
White	76%
African-American	13%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3%
Asian	3%
Other	1%
Didn't Know/Did Not Answer	3%
Ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latino (May Be of Any Race)	9%
Parent/Guardian Marital Status	
Married	76%
Divorced	10%
Single/Never Married	8%
Living With Partner	3%
Separated	1%
Widowed	2%
Youth Lives With Both Biological Parents	
	62%
Highest Level of Completed Education in Household	
Not a High-School Graduate	2%
High-School Graduate	20%
Some College Education	23%
College Graduate	32%
Post-College Degree	22%
Annual Household Income	
Less than \$20,000	8%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	27%
More than \$50,000 to \$75,000	24%
More than \$75,000	33%
Don't Know/Refused to Answer	8%

* The data in this table are based on questions asked of parents or guardians with the exception of the information about race, which was asked of youth.

Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Key YISS-2 Findings

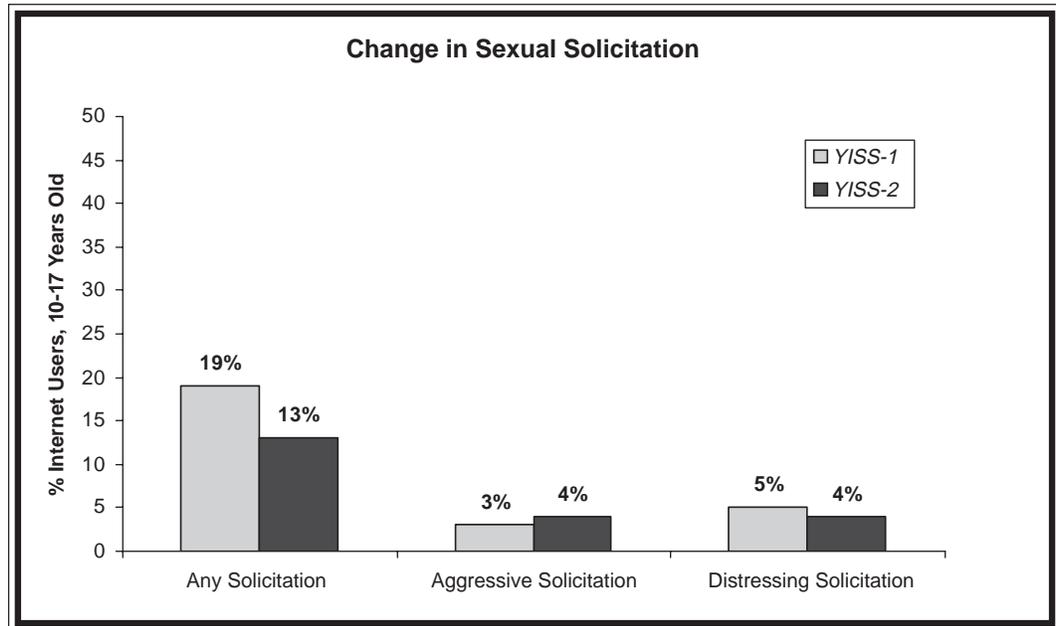
The second *Youth Internet Safety Survey* shows life online has changed for youth in a variety of ways, both positively and negatively, since *YISS-1* survey results were released in 2000. There have been changes in the proportion of youth Internet users reporting unwanted incidents and changes in the characteristics of incidents, as well as indications of some new problems emerging. Some of the news is reassuring because a smaller proportion of youth received unwanted sexual solicitations. At the same time these findings reveal some growing problems where we need to strengthen efforts to help make the Internet a safer place for youth.

A Smaller Proportion of Youth Received Unwanted Sexual Solicitations

According to *YISS-2*, there was good and bad news about sexual solicitations to youth in 2005. The good news is a smaller proportion of youth Internet users received unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches.⁷ Approximately 1 in 7 youth (13%) were solicited, compared to approximately 1 in 5 (19%) in *YISS-1*. There are reasons to believe at least some of this reduction is due to youth being more cautious about interacting with people they do not know offline. A smaller proportion of youth overall were communicating online with people they did not know in person. In *YISS-1*, 40% of youth used the Internet to chat, E-mail, or exchange instant messages with people they did not know in person, but in *YISS-2* only 34% of youth used the Internet this way. Further there was a dramatic decline in the proportion of chatroom visitors in *YISS-2*, from more than half (56%) of youth Internet users in *YISS-1* to less than one-third (30%) in 2005. These changes were consistent with what we observed in focus groups with youth Internet users conducted before *YISS-2*. Many youth described chatrooms as unpleasant places attracting unsavory people. Many were aware of individuals frequenting chatrooms hoping to meet youth for sexual reasons.

⁷ See "How Many Youth Had Online Episodes?" beginning on page 71 for a discussion of how this smaller percentage of youth receiving online solicitations relates to the overall number of youth Internet users who may have received such solicitations.

Figure 2



The bad news is while a smaller proportion of youth overall received unwanted sexual solicitations, the proportion who received **aggressive sexual solicitations**, the ones most likely to evolve into crimes, did not decline. Aggressive solicitations were those threatening to spill over into “real life” because the solicitor asked to meet the youth in person; called the youth on the telephone; or sent the youth offline mail, money, or gifts. Four (4) percent of youth received aggressive solicitations in YISS-2, similar to the 3% who had aggressive solicitations in YISS-1. The proportion of aggressive solicitations actually increased among girls, from 4% in YISS-1 to 7% in YISS-2 (Mitchell, Wolak, & Finkelhor, in press).

Further two-thirds or more of the solicitations youth told us about in both *Youth Internet Safety Surveys* were not particularly distressing to recipients, specifically 75% in YISS-1 and 66% in YISS-2. We did not find, however, more youth were brushing off these incidents. Even with a smaller proportion of incidents, there was no statistically significant decline in the proportion of youth who received **distressing sexual solicitations** that left them feeling very or extremely upset or afraid. In YISS-2, 4% of youth had distressing solicitations. In YISS-1, 5% did.

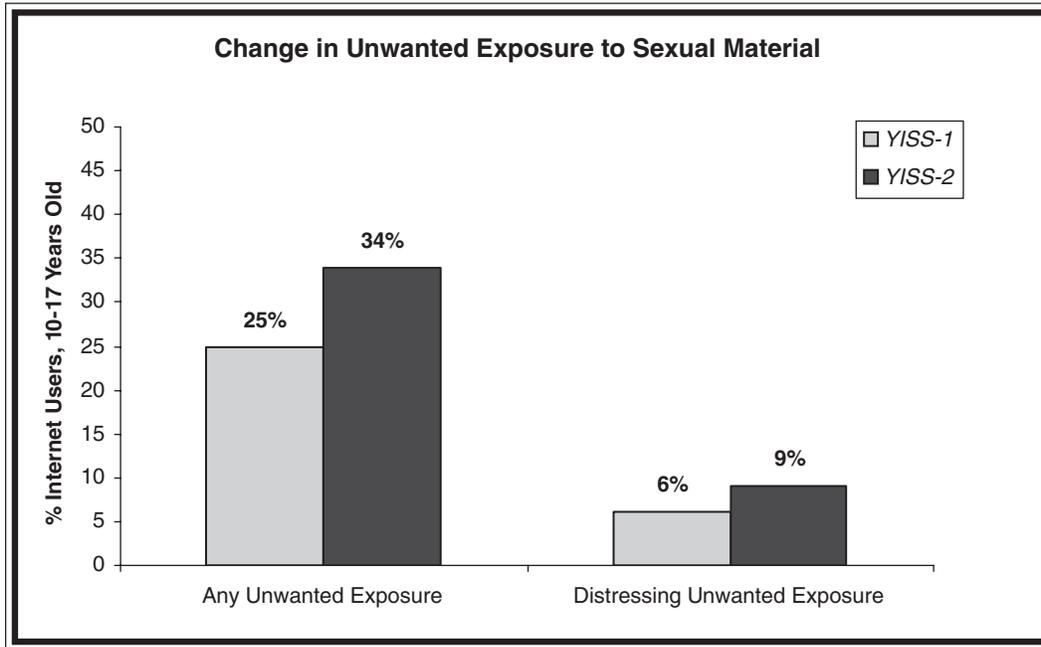
More Youth Were Exposed to Sexual Material They Did Not Want to See

There was a large increase in the number of youth Internet users who had unwanted exposures to sexual material. In YISS-2 about one-third of youth (34%) said they had an **unwanted exposure to sexual material** in the past year, compared to the 25% in YISS-1.⁸ Increases were seen across every age group, including preteens (10 to 12) from 9% to 19%; early teens (13 to 15) from 28% to

⁸ This increase in exposure occurred after the adoption of 18 U.S.C. § 2252B on April 30, 2003, which made it a criminal offense to use a misleading domain name on the Internet with the intent of deceiving a minor into viewing harmful sexual material.

35%; and late teens (16 to 17) from 33% to 44%, and among both girls (from 23% to 31%) and boys (from 27% to 37%) (Mitchell, et al., in press). We also looked at whether youth came across unwanted sexual material by using the world wide web or E-mail. In *YISS-2* a larger proportion of exposure incidents happened when youth were surfing the web, 83% compared to 71% in *YISS-1*. Exposures related to E-mail use did not change significantly.

Figure 3



Exposure incidents that were very or extremely upsetting to youth — **distressing exposures** — also increased. In *YISS-2*, 9% of youth Internet users told interviewers about distressing exposures to sexual material, compared to 6% in *YISS-1*. This may not seem like a big number, but it constitutes a 50% increase.

We identified three key reasons for the increase in unwanted exposure to sexual material. First, levels of youth Internet use, in terms of number of days online per week and number of hours online per day, increased considerably between *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*. The number of youth who had used the Internet in the past week rose from 76% in *YISS-1* to 86% in *YISS-2*. The number who used the Internet more than 2 hours at a time when they went online rose from 13% in *YISS-1* to almost one-quarter (23%) of youth in *YISS-2*. Further in *YISS-2*, almost half of youth (49%) used the Internet 5 to 7 days a week — or almost everyday — compared to less than one-third (31%) in *YISS-1*.

Youth also had more access to the Internet. Ninety-one (91) percent of the youth we interviewed in *YISS-2* had home Internet access, compared to 74% in *YISS-1*. There was a similar increase in the number who had access at school, from 73% in *YISS-1* to 90% in *YISS-2*.⁹ In addition there was a 45% increase in

⁹ These figures do not mean 90% of youth overall had home or school Internet access. We only interviewed youth who had used the Internet at least once a month in the past six months. Youth with lower levels of Internet use or those who do not use the Internet probably had lower levels of home and school access.

youth who had Internet access in three or more places, from 51% in *YISS-1* to 74% in *YISS-2*.

The increases in time spent online and places of Internet access, however, do not fully account for the increase in unwanted exposure to sexual material. For instance the proportion of sexual solicitations **declined** during this same period despite these increases in time online and Internet access.

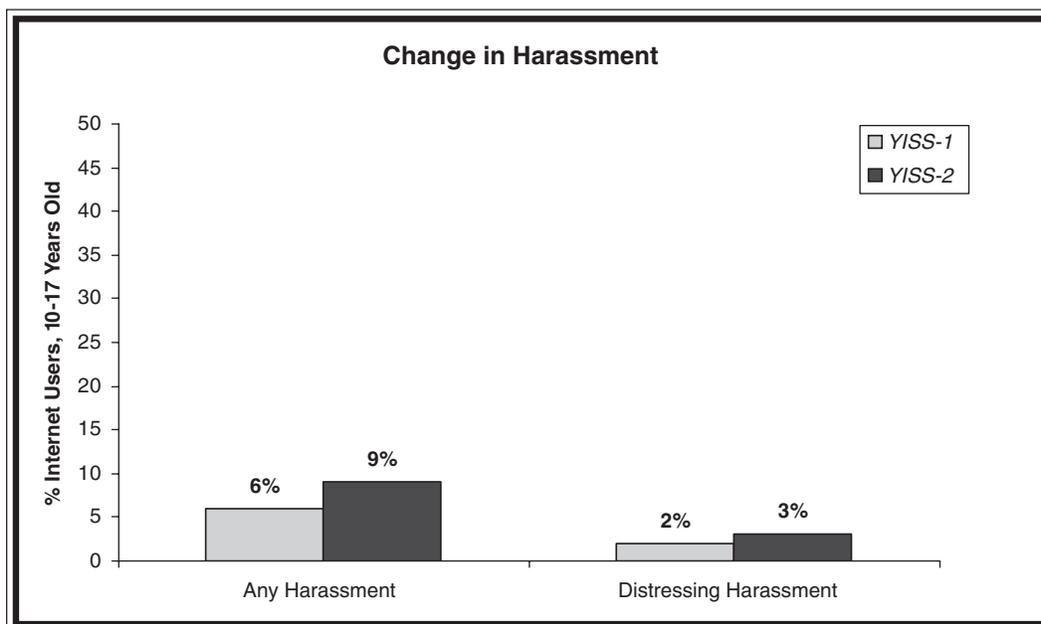
A second factor that may have contributed to the increase is technological change. For the most part, in 1999 and 2000 computers used by youth did not have enough speed and capacity to download and show graphic files efficiently. These limitations may have provided some safeguards against exposure to sexually explicit images that have been wiped out by new technology, which has made ready access to graphic images standard features on home computers. Since the *YISS-1* interviews there have been large increases in the capacity of computers to receive and transmit images; increases in speeds of Internet access; increases in the availability of inexpensive, sophisticated digital cameras, web cameras, camera cell phones, and media players; and the development of new technologies such as peer-to-peer file sharing, all of which may have contributed in different ways to unwanted exposures among youth.

The third factor that may have contributed to the increase in unwanted exposure to sexual material is the aggressive marketing of sexual material via the Internet. There are seemingly large profits to be made from online sexual material, and web sites featuring sexual material appear to have proliferated. Pornography marketers use methods such as pop-up ads, adware, and various other sorts of hidden and malicious software, which do things such as hijacking browsers and directing computers to pornography web sites. Unethical marketers install these programs on computers without the permission or knowledge of Internet users by, for example, bundling them with game demos and music youth may download or disguising download links as patches or upgrades. These types of aggressive marketing techniques were not as prevalent in 1999 and 2000.

More Youth Were Harassed Online

Awareness of **online harassment** has increased since the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* was published. Stories about people using the Internet to threaten, embarrass, harass, and humiliate youth have been widely reported in the media. *YISS-2* saw a 50% increase in online harassment. One in 11, or 9% of youth said they were harassed online, compared to approximately 1 in 17, or 6% in *YISS-1*.

Figure 4



Increased time spent online among the youth population could account for at least part of this increase; however, we suspect a considerable portion of the increase reflects a real rise in online incivility among youth. In addition to the youth who said they were harassed, we found a marked increase in the number of youth who admitted to being rude to and harassing others online. The number of youth who said they had “made rude or nasty comments to someone on the Internet” increased from 14% in *YISS-1* to 28% in *YISS-2*. The number who said they had “used the Internet to harass or embarrass someone they were mad at” increased from 1% to 9%. These behaviors are highly related to being harassed online (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). The Internet is apparently being used more and more for the bullying and harassment widespread among many youth peer groups.

The Internet Remained a Fluid Environment for Youth

One of the conclusions to be drawn from *YISS-2* is the Internet is still a fluid environment for youth Internet users as technology continues to change rapidly. Thus while the increases in exposure to sexual material and harassment and the stability in rates for aggressive solicitations are a cause for concern, this fluid environment offers opportunities to create awareness of safe Internet practices and change risky online behaviors not yet entrenched in youth online culture.

Table 2. Youth Internet Use Patterns (N=3,001)

Description	YISS-1 All Youth (N=1,501)	YISS-2 All Youth (N=1,500)
Location(s) Youth Spent Time on Internet in Past Year*		
Home	74%	91%
School	73%	90%
Friend's Home+	68%	69%
Cellular Telephone	-	17%
Other Place (Includes Library)	37%	43%
Last Time Youth Used Internet		
Past Week	76%	86%
Past 2 Weeks	10%	6%
Past Month or Longer	14%	8%
Number of Hours Youth Spent on Internet on a Typical Day When Online		
1 Hour or Less	61%	45%
More Than 1 Hour to 2 Hours	26%	31%
More Than 2 Hours	13%	23%
Number of Days Youth Went on Internet in a Typical Week~		
1 Day or Less	29%	8%
2 to 4 Days	40%	42%
5 to 7 Days	31%	49%
How Youth Used Internet*		
Went to Web Sites	94%	99%
Used E-Mail	76%	79%
Used Instant Messaging	55%	68%
Went to Chatrooms	56%	30%
Played Games	67%	83%
Did School Assignments	85%	92%
Downloaded Music	-	38%
Kept Online Journal or Blog	-	16%
Used Online Dating or Romance Sites	-	1%
Who Youth Talked to Online^		
People Youth Knew In Person Offline	73%	79%
People Youth Knew Only Online	40%	34%

* Multiple responses possible.

+ In YISS-1 we asked if youth used the Internet in "other households," which included friends' homes. In YISS-2 we specifically asked all youth if they used the Internet at friends' homes.

~ Based on youth who used the Internet in the past week or past 2 weeks.

^ Answers not mutually exclusive.

Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Table 3. Trends in Online Victimization by Age and Gender

Youth Internet User Gender/Age	YISS-1 Rate per 100	YISS-2 Rate per 100	Change in Rate %~
Sexual Solicitations			
All Youth***	19	13	-6%
Boys Ages 10 to 13	8	5	-
Boys Ages 14 to 17*	15	10	-5%
Girls Ages 10 to 13*	15	9	-6%
Girls Ages 14 to 17***	34	23	-11%
Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material			
All Youth***	25	34	+9%
Boys Ages 10 to 13*	16	24	+8%
Boys Ages 14 to 17***	33	45	+12%
Girls Ages 10 to 13**	12	21	+9%
Girls Ages 14 to 17*	29	36	+7%
Harassment			
All Youth**	6	9	+3%
Boys Ages 10 to 13	6	7	-
Boys Ages 14 to 17	6	8	-
Girls Ages 10 to 13	4	7	-
Girls Ages 14 to 17	9	11	-

* p<.05, ** p<.01; *** p<.001

~ Only statistically significant changes are included.

Note: Rates represent % of youth Internet users in each gender/age category who had sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure, or harassment incidents. See each n noted below.

All Youth N = 3,001 (YISS-1 n = 1,501 and YISS-2 n = 1,500).

Boys Ages 10 to 13 n = 544 (YISS-1 n = 276 and YISS-2 n = 268).

Boys Ages 14 to 17 n = 984 (YISS-1 n = 514 and YISS-2 n = 470).

Girls Ages 10 to 13 n = 546 (YISS-1 n = 280 and YISS-2 n = 266).

Girls Ages 14 to 17 n = 922 (YISS-1 n = 428 and YISS-2 n = 494).

Gender is missing for 3 cases in YISS-1 and 2 cases in YISS-2.

Sexual Solicitations and Approaches

The dangers posed from people who use the Internet to make inappropriate and sometimes criminal sexual overtures to youth remain a primary concern of families, law enforcement, and others concerned with the welfare of youth. The second *Youth Internet Safety Survey* shows a smaller proportion of youth who said they were sexually solicited online. Further, the fact a smaller proportion of youth said they went to chatrooms, talked to people they did not know in person online, and formed close online relationships with people they knew only online suggests at least some of this decline may be due to youth being aware of the risky nature of online encounters with such people. Despite the decline in the proportion of youth who received solicitations, however, the number of youth receiving the most dangerous sexual overtures, aggressive solicitations that move, or threaten to move, beyond the Internet into real life has not declined. The percentage of youth who said they felt very or extremely upset or frightened because of a solicitation also did not show a statistically significant decrease.

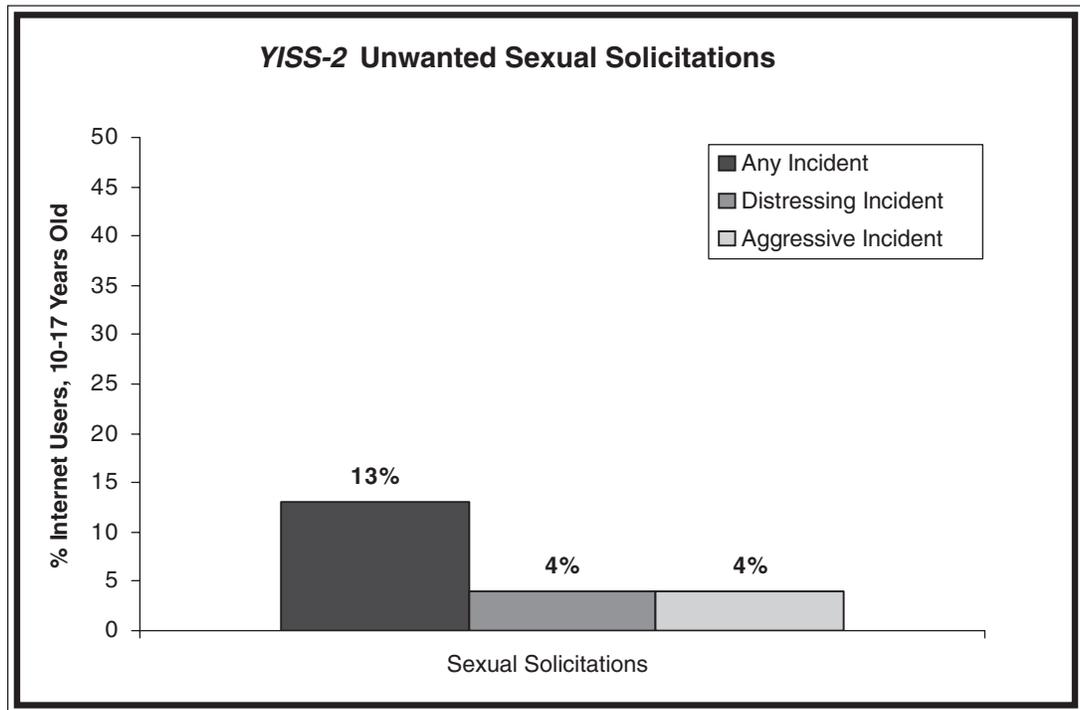
How We Assessed Sexual Solicitations and Approaches

As in *YISS-1*, *YISS-2* assessed the problem of online sexual exploitation by asking youth four kinds of questions, the results of which were aggregated under the category of sexual solicitations and approaches. The four kinds of questions were about

- Sexual approaches made to them in the past year — situations where someone on the Internet attempted to get them to talk about sex when they did not want to or asked them unwanted sexual questions about themselves
- Sexual solicitations they had received in the past year from persons over the Internet who had asked them to do sexual things they did not want to do
- Close friendships they had formed in the past year with adults they met over the Internet that involved sexual overtures
- Invitations from people they met online to help them run away, a ploy apparently used by some individuals looking for vulnerable youth

In *YISS-2* approximately 1 in 7 youth Internet users (13%) received unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches in the past year. Close to half of the solicitations were relatively mild events that did not appear to be dangerous or frightening. Four (4) percent of all youth Internet users, however, received aggressive sexual solicitations, which threatened to spill over into “real life” because the solicitor asked to meet the youth in person; called them on the telephone; or sent them offline mail, money, or gifts. Also 4% of youth Internet users had **distressing sexual solicitations** that left them feeling very or extremely upset or afraid. Two (2) percent of youth had solicitations that were both aggressive and distressing.

Figure 5



Findings About Solicitations

Who were the youth targeted for sexual solicitations and approaches in YISS-2?¹⁰

- Seventy (70) percent were girls and 30% were boys
- Eighty-one (81) percent were ages 14 or older
- No 10 year olds and only 3% of 11 year olds were solicited
- Aggressive and distressing solicitations were also concentrated among older youth with 79% of aggressive incidents and 74% of distressing incidents happening to youth ages 14 and older

These findings point to another piece of good news from YISS-2, which is few pre-teen youth interviewed (ages 10 to 12) experienced sexual solicitations. The concerning news, however, is 90% of solicitations happened to teenagers (ages 13 to 17). There are several possible reasons for this. Teenagers may be less supervised when they are online than younger youth. They may spend more time online, use the Internet in more places and have different patterns of Internet use. Developmental differences may also be a factor. A study of Internet-related crimes found sex offenders who met their victims online were targeting young teenagers by using their developmentally driven desire for romance and interest in sex to manipulate them into meetings for sexual purposes (Wolak, Finkelhor, &

¹⁰ Also see Table 3 on page 13, which shows trends in sexual solicitations based on youth age and gender for YISS-1 and YISS-2.

Mitchell, 2004). This approach may not work with younger youth who have not reached the stage of adolescence where such interests are triggered by sexual development.

Who were the perpetrators of sexual solicitations and approaches in YISS-2?

- The perpetrators were largely male (73%). Females made 16% of aggressive solicitations. Of the females who made aggressive sexual solicitations 64% were younger than 18 and 36% were 18 to 24.
- In YISS-2 a larger proportion of youth (39%) said solicitors were adults (age 18 or older), compared to the results reported in YISS-1, in which 24% said solicitors were adults. Thirty (30) percent of the solicitors were described as being between 18 and 25.¹¹
- Those younger than 18 were identified as solicitors in a substantial number of incidents — 43% of all solicitations and 44% of aggressive solicitations.
- Youth met 86% of solicitors online, but 14% were people youth knew in person before the solicitation.

As in YISS-1 many of the YISS-2 solicitors did not match the stereotype of the older male “Internet predator.” Many were identified as other youth and some were female (19% in YISS-1 and 16% in YISS-2). While a larger percentage of youth identified solicitors as adults in 2005 (39% in YISS-2 versus 24% in YISS-1), this could be due to more youth being aware of adults using the Internet to meet youth. Most youth readily admitted they were not certain of the ages of solicitors they met online.¹² Eighty-five (85) percent of youth whose contact with perpetrators was limited to the Internet said they were not at all or only somewhat certain of the solicitor’s age.

An important difference between the first and second *Youth Internet Safety Surveys* is an increase in the proportion of solicitors who were personally known to youth. In YISS-1 virtually all perpetrators (97%) were persons youth met online. In YISS-2, 14% were people youth had known before solicitations occurred and these solicitors were mostly other youth (82%). This is consistent with our finding that a smaller proportion of youth were using the Internet to talk online with people they did not know in person, but it may also signal a lowering of civility among peers online. High rates of rude sexual comments have been documented among peers in middle and high schools (American Association of University Women, 1993) and the Internet may have become another forum for this type of behavior.

What happened?

In YISS-1 and YISS-2 youth were asked to describe the unwanted sexual solicitations they received. Examples of their responses include accounts of

¹¹ All statistics referring to ages, genders, or other characteristics of people youth met online and did not know in person are based on youths’ perceptions. In 85% of solicitation cases in which the youth only knew the solicitor online, youth said they were not at all or only somewhat certain of solicitors’ ages.

¹² We did not ask youth how certain they were about a solicitor’s age in YISS-1, but 27% of YISS-1 solicited youth answered “Don’t know” when we asked them how old the solicitor was.

solicitations starting with personal questions about physical appearance and sexual experience and of propositions for “cybersex” in live chat or instant-messaging sessions. (“Cybersex” means online encounters during which participants engage in explicit sexual talk and sometimes disrobe and masturbate.) In *YISS-2*

- Most solicitation incidents (79%) happened on home computers.
- A smaller proportion of incidents happened while youth were in chatrooms, 37% compared to 65% in *YISS-1*. Forty (40) percent of *YISS-2* solicitations began with solicitors sending instant messages.
- Many unwanted sexual solicitations, including aggressive and distressing ones, happened when youth were with “friends or other kids [they] knew” — 41% of all solicitations, 45% of aggressive solicitations, and 42% of distressing solicitations.¹³

What Youth Said About Solicitations

Boy, 11, who was playing an online game with a 20-year-old man: “He asked me something personal, something about a man’s privates.”

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.”

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).”

Findings About Aggressive Solicitations

In *YISS-2* close to one-third of the solicitations (31%) were aggressive meaning the solicitors made, or attempted, offline contact with youth. Some of the aggressive episodes (26%) involved solicitors youth knew offline, but most did not. In aggressive solicitation incidents

- Seventy-five (75) percent of solicitors asked to meet youth in person
- Thirty-four (34) percent called youth on the telephone
- Eighteen (18) percent came to youths’ homes
- Twelve (12) percent gave youth money, gifts, or other items
- Nine (9) percent sent offline mail to youth
- Three (3) percent bought travel tickets for youth

In *YISS-1* none of the solicited youth were sexually assaulted as a result of an online sexual solicitation. This was not true in *YISS-2*, although the number of youth who were assaulted was small — two girls. In 1 case a 15-year-old victim formed a close online relationship with a man in his 30s. He urged her to run away from home and stay with him. She stayed with him for several days and was sexually assaulted. In the other case a 16-year-old girl was at a party with a man she met online. He tried to rape her. (Both of these cases were reported to law enforcement.)

¹³We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

Other Aspects of Solicitations

Solicitations for Sexual Photographs

In more than half (56%) of solicitation incidents solicitors asked youth for photographs of themselves.¹⁴ In more than one-quarter (27%) of incidents solicitors asked youth for **sexual** photographs of themselves. In addition, in 15% of the incidents where solicitors requested sexual photographs, solicitors sent sexual photographs of themselves to youth. We left the definition of “sexual” open, but youth gave descriptions of what happened in a number of these instances.

What Youth Said About Being Asked for Sexual Photographs

Girl, 12: A man in his 30s “asked me to describe myself and to stick a pen in my private parts and set up a digital camera and show the parts of my body.”

Boy, 15: A girl in her teens “asked me to get naked on ‘cam’ but I just ignored her.”

Girl, 16: “I was...instant messag[ing] and the boy, who was a friend that I had known for a long time, asked me to finger myself in front of the web cam. I just told him that if he ever asked me that again, I would never talk to him again.”

Girl, 17: A man in a chatroom “offered me \$1,000 to expose myself to him. I recorded [what he wrote] and gave it to the police.”

What Youth Said About Solicitors Sending Sexual Photographs

Girl, 11: A man who said he was 19 “was showing his body parts.”

Girl, 15: An 18-year-old male had “a web cam. I wanted to see what he looked like. He was naked. Then I clicked off and blocked him. He was being perverted. I was tricked.”

Girl, 16: A man, age 35, “kept taking nude pictures of himself and sending them to me. He was writing stuff like how big his cock is.”

These requests for sexual photographs may be a new development since *YISS-1*, although we cannot say this for certain because we did not ask questions about this in *YISS-1* when we asked about unwanted sexual solicitations.¹⁵ Web and digital cameras were not in wide use at the time that study was conducted, and the youth we consulted in focus groups for *YISS-1* did not talk about people online asking them for sexual photographs or sending sexual photographs to them. In contrast the youth who participated in the *YISS-2* focus groups were familiar with web and digital cameras and a number of them spoke about being asked for sexual photographs and seeing live web-cam videos or other types of pictures of solicitors exposing themselves.

¹⁴ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

¹⁵ In *YISS-1* we asked youth whether they had sent a picture of themselves to someone they had met online as part of a series of questions about risky online behavior. In that context 12% of youth said they had sent a picture of themselves to someone they met online, but we did not gather additional details or ask whether the pictures sent were sexual.

Under federal child-pornography¹⁶ laws it is a crime to take, distribute, or possess sexually explicit images of children younger than 18.¹⁷ As can be seen from the descriptions youth gave, some of the solicitors were clearly asking youth to take sexually explicit photographs that would constitute child pornography. In addition, if youth complied with a request for sexual pictures, a solicitor could easily circulate the images online and the youth pictured would have no way of retrieving the images. This is a situation some youth might not have the foresight to understand.

One youth in *YISS-2* admitted to sending a sexual photograph to a solicitor. (This number is too low for us to be able to draw a reliable conclusion about how many in the population of youth Internet users have done this.) The youth was a 16-year-old boy who sent a sexual picture of himself to someone he described as a 23-year-old woman. He told the interviewer his relationship with the woman had ended and he never met her in person.

How did youth respond to the episodes?

In *YISS-2* most youth (66%) handled unwanted solicitations by removing themselves from the situation, by blocking the solicitor, or leaving the web site or computer. Other youth told the person to stop, confronted or warned the solicitor (16%), while others ignored them (11%). Very few incidents were reported to law enforcement or other authorities (5%) or handled by parents or guardians (12%) or teachers or other school personnel (2%). In more than half of cases (56%), youth did not tell anyone about solicitations.

How did the incidents affect youth?

In *YISS-2* most youth (66%) were not particularly upset or frightened by the solicitations they told us about; however, 28% of solicited youth said an incident left them feeling very or extremely upset and 20% felt very or extremely afraid. Thirty-four (34) percent of **aggressive incidents** left youth feeling very or extremely upset, and 28% left youth feeling very or extremely afraid. Also youth were very or extremely embarrassed in 19% of aggressive solicitations and 49% of distressing incidents. Further in one-quarter of all solicitation incidents, youth had one or more symptoms of stress, including staying away from the Internet or a particular part of it, being unable to stop thinking about the incident, feeling jumpy or irritable, and/or losing interest in things.

Close Online Relationships With Adults

One source of sexual solicitations people remain concerned about is youth forming close online relationships with adults who might exploit or take advantage of them. In addition to asking youth about unwanted sexual solicitations, we asked

¹⁶ The term "child pornography," because it implies simply conventional pornography with child subjects, is an inappropriate term to describe the true nature and extent of sexually exploitive images of child victims. Use of this term should not be taken to imply children "consented" to the sexual acts depicted in these photographs. We have, however, retained the term because there is a history in the United States of court decisions and statutes that have used and developed the term, and it is the term most readily recognized by the public, at this point in time, to describe this form of child sexual exploitation. "Child pornography" is used in this report to refer to visual depictions of the sexual exploitation of a child under the standards developed by statute, case law, and law-enforcement-agency protocols. It is hoped a more accurate term will be recognized, understood, and accepted for use in the near future.

¹⁷ 18 U.S.C. § 2256.

them about close online relationships they had formed with adults they met online. (Close online relationship was defined as a relationship with “someone you met online who you didn’t know in person...that you could talk online with about things that were real important to you.”) These questions were aimed at finding out about relationships that could violate criminal laws against sexual relationships between adults and underage youth but that youth might consider consensual romantic or sexual relationships. Research has shown that many of the sex crimes committed against minors that develop from online meetings follow this scenario (Wolak, et al., 2004).

In YISS-2, 4% of youth had formed close online relationships with adults (age 18 or older¹⁸) they met online, and of those youth, 29% had face-to-face meetings with the adults they met online. Most of these relationships seemed benign, however, of the 58 youth who had close online relationships with adults, 8 told interviewers about **relationships that had sexual aspects**. These included the adult asking the youth for sexually explicit photographs of themselves, sending the youth sexually explicit photographs, having some degree of sexual physical contact with the youth, or acting in some other way that showed a sexual interest in the youth. All of these close online relationships involved adults who were 5 or more years older than the youth. Four (4) youth (7%) had “physical contact [they] would call sexual” during face-to-face meetings with adults they met online. These youth were all 17 years of age, and the adults were all in their early 20s. All 8 of these cases were counted as solicitations because of the sexual component, whether or not a youth was disturbed by the sexual aspect in the relationship.

YISS-2 Close Online Relationships With Adults

- A 16-year-old girl met a 23-year-old man in an online game site. He asked her to send him a sexual picture of herself and wanted to meet her in person. (She did neither.) The girl became very afraid when the man told her he had found out a lot of personal information about her. She said, “When he told me all the things that he knew about me, [it] was enough to make me stop going to that site altogether. He tried to contact me after this happened and I wouldn’t send a reply back to him. He hasn’t bothered me since.” She never told her parents.
- A boy, 17, developed a romance with a woman, age 24, who he met in an online dating site. She lived near him. They talked on the telephone, and he went with a friend to meet her where she worked. She had been to his house and he to hers. She had bought him clothes. His parents knew about the relationship. He said yes when asked, “Did you have physical contact with this person that you would call sexual?”
- A 16-year-old girl met a 26-year-old woman in a chatroom. They exchanged mail and photographs. Her parents knew about the relationship. The girl said, “I can talk to this person very easily.... I never felt obligated to give her more information than I wanted to.”

¹⁸ All statistics referring to ages, genders, or other characteristics of people youth met online and did not know in person are based on youths’ perceptions. In 85% of solicitation cases in which youth only knew the solicitor online, youth said they were not at all or only somewhat certain of solicitors’ ages.

- A 16-year-old girl met a man in a teen chatroom who said he was 17. They exchanged pictures and talked on the telephone. She met him in person in a public place and one of her parents went with her. Later he took her out to dinner; however, she became quite uncomfortable when, after the meal, he admitted he was 22. There was no sexual contact between them, and the relationship ended.
- A 12-year-old girl met an 18-year-old man online through instant messaging. They had no offline contact, but he wanted a picture of her and wanted to meet her. She became uncomfortable about the relationship when he asked her to have cybersex. She never told her parents about it. She said, "I never gave him my E-mail. I would never give [out my] address, city, or anything."
- A boy, 16, formed a relationship with a woman, 40, in a chatroom about psychic phenomena. They exchanged pictures and telephone calls. They met face-to-face in a public place. One of his parents and a friend went along. She bought him a CD and acne medication. The relationship did not appear to be sexual. He commented, "She's really nice."

Overall, in *YISS-2* a smaller proportion of youth said they had formed close online relationships with people they did not know in person (adults and other youth) — 11% compared to 16% in *YISS-1*. This is consistent with our finding that a smaller proportion of youth Internet users interacted online with people they did not know in person. Also the youth who had close online relationships in *YISS-2* were older — 82% were ages 14 to 17 compared to 75% in *YISS-1*.

Most close online relationships (62%) in *YISS-2* were with other youth, age 17 or younger, and most (71%) were with people who were close in age (no more than 4 years older). Boys and girls had close online relationships in similar numbers (53% of girls and 47% of boys). About one-third (32%) of close online relationships involved face-to-face meetings. In most of the cases with face-to-face meetings (73%) parents and guardians knew about the meetings before they occurred, and most youth (75%) were accompanied when they went to meetings.¹⁹

Runaway Episodes

Because of reports some youth have been sexually victimized after being persuaded to run away from home by adults they met online, we asked youth about such incidents.

In *YISS-1* and *YISS-2* we asked youth, "In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever ask you or encourage you to run away from home?" In both surveys only a few youth — 0.4% or 7 youth in *YISS-1* and 0.9% or 13 youth in *YISS-2* — answered this question affirmatively. Three cases in *YISS-2* involved adults who solicited youth to run away. In 2 of those the youth did not respond to the suggestions. In a third case, however, a 15-year-old girl did run away to be with a man in his 30s. We counted this case as a sexual solicitation. It was described earlier in the section about sexual assaults.

¹⁹ These findings are consistent with findings based on *YISS-1* data (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2002).

Summary

In *YISS-2* unwanted sexual solicitations or approaches happened to approximately 1 in 7 youth Internet users during the past year. Close to half of these incidents (49%) were neither aggressive nor distressing. Further, there was a smaller proportion of unwanted sexual solicitations in *YISS-2* since the 1 in 5 when *YISS-1* was conducted. This is good news.

Unfortunately, however, there was no decline in the proportion of youth who experienced the most serious incidents, aggressive solicitations in which solicitors tried to make offline contact (4% of all youth). Also there was no reduction in the proportion of youth who were distressed about a solicitation they received (4% of all youth).

We also found a disturbing trend. A considerable number of solicitors (27%) asked youth to take sexual pictures of themselves to send to solicitors. Four (4) percent of all the youth Internet users surveyed experienced solicitations for sexual pictures in the past year. We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*, so we cannot say whether this is an increase. We expect, however, that solicitations for sexual pictures are related to recent advances in digital picture-taking that have made technology, such as digital still and video cameras, increasingly available in recent years. We cannot say with any certainty who these solicitors of sexual photographs were. Some may have been sexual predators who were soliciting photographs to lower the inhibitions of potential victims, use for their own sexual gratification, trade in the child-pornography market, or ascertain whether targeted victims were undercover law-enforcement agents. Not all of those who solicited photographs, however, may have been seeking face-to-face contact with victims. Researchers who work with sex offenders have noted the Internet has drawn an audience of voyeurs, some of whom get sexual pleasure from observing nudity and sexual acts but may not wish for physical contact with victims (Galbreath, Berlin, & Sawyer, 2002). Some of the solicitors of photographs may have been such voyeurs who were seeking photographs for sexual gratification and possibly to distribute as child pornography. Other solicitors may have been misguided youth or adults whose motives were harassment and insult, rather than sexual gratification. Whatever their motives, those who ask youth for sexual photographs are committing serious crimes when they solicit minors to produce child pornography. Clearly we need to educate youth and their families about how the Internet may allow and encourage these incidents. We also need to educate them about how to handle these incidents including promptly reporting them to law enforcement through use of the CyberTipline®.²⁰

²⁰ On March 9, 1998, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children launched the CyberTipline initiative to serve as the national **online** clearinghouse for tips and leads about child sexual exploitation. The CyberTipline, www.cybertipline.com, was created by Congressional mandate 42 U.S.C. § 5773(b)(1)(H) to allow persons to report **online** (and via toll-free telephone) specific sexual crimes committed against children. During the *YISS-2* study reporting period, March 1, 2004, through June 30, 2005, the CyberTipline received 111,686 reports of child pornography; 3,755 reports of online enticement; 2,067 reports of child sexual molestation; 882 reports of misleading domain names; 719 reports of child victims of prostitution; 663 reports of unsolicited obscene material sent to a child; and 302 reports of child sex tourism. Since its creation through December 2005 the CyberTipline has received 365,683 reports. The CyberTipline is a part of NCMC's Exploited Child Unit, which was established by the U.S. Congress in 1996.

Another important finding is that 90% of the sexual solicitations happened to youth ages 13 and older. This reinforces what previous research has found — online sexual solicitations to youth are concentrated among teenage Internet users. Research based on interviews with law enforcement about Internet-related sex crimes similarly found sex offenders who met their victims online largely sought out young teenagers, and rarely targeted those younger than 13.²¹ The research also found offenders rarely used deceit or violence. Rather they appealed to adolescents' interest in romance and sex (Wolak, et al., 2004). Internet safety programs need to take this into account and make sure they are targeting the appropriate audience and giving them accurate information.

YISS-2 also uncovered a considerable degree of peer involvement in unwanted sexual solicitations, in two ways. First, there was an increase in the proportion of solicitors youth knew in person (3% in *YISS-1* and 14% in *YISS-2*). The great majority of solicitors known in person (82%) in *YISS-2* were other youth, age 17 or younger. Second, in *YISS-2* we found 41% of incidents of unwanted solicitations happened when the recipients were with friends or other peers. This is an area of online dynamics we know little about. It may be that some youth tend to ignore Internet safety guidelines when they are in groups. They may be more likely to do things such as going to questionable chatrooms or engaging in risqué conversations with people they know only online, situations in which solicitations may be more likely to occur. We need to learn more about sexual solicitations between known peers and those that happen when youth use the Internet together in groups and fashion prevention messages aimed at these situations.

²¹ There are cases of individuals who use the Internet **indirectly** to meet and sexually exploit young children. These individuals seek adults online who could give them access to young victims. The dynamics of these cases, however, may differ from the dynamics of cases in which individuals use the Internet to meet youth directly.

Table 4. *YISS-2* Internet Sexual Solicitation of Youth (N=1,500)

Individual Characteristics	All Incidents (n=200) 13% of Youth	Aggressive Incidents (n=63) 4% of Youth	Distressing Incidents (n=67) 4% of Youth
Age of Youth			
10	0	0	0
11	3%	1%	5%
12	7%	5%	10%
13	9%	14%	10%
14	15%	14%	18%
15	23%	27%	15%
16	24%	16%	25%
17	19%	22%	16%
Gender of Youth			
Girl	70%	79%	81%
Boy	30%	21%	19%
Episode Characteristics	All (n=216)	Aggressive (n=68)	Distressing (n=73)
Gender of Solicitor			
Male	73%	84%	86%
Female	16%	16%	7%
Don't Know	11%	0	7%
Age of Solicitor			
Younger Than 18 Years	43%	44%	40%
18 to 25 Years	30%	34%	31%
Older Than 25 Years	9%	15%	15%
Don't Know	18%	7%	14%
Youth Was Very or Extremely Certain of Solicitor's Age+	15% (n=186)	24% (n=50)	17% (n=63)
Relation to Solicitor			
Met Online	86%	73%	86%
Knew in Person Before Solicitation	14%	26%	14%
Location of Computer When Incident Occurred			
Home	79%	79%	74%
A Friend's Home	13%	12%	16%
School, Library, or Other Similar Place	8%	9%	9%
Place on Internet Incident First Happened			
Chatroom	37%	32%	33%
Using Instant Messages	40%	54%	42%
Other	21%	13%	23%
Don't Know	1%	0	1%
Youth Was With Friends or Other Kids When This Happened	41%	45%	42%
Forms of Offline Contact*			
Asked to Meet Somewhere	23%	75%	33%
Sent Offline Mail	3%	9%	4%
Called on Telephone	11%	34%	5%
Went to Home	5%	18%	7%
Gave Money, Gifts, or Other Similar Things	4%	12%	5%
Bought Plane, Train, or Bus Ticket	1%	3%	3%
None of the Above	69%	0	62%
Solicitor Sent Picture of Self			
Picture Was Sexual	21%	35%	22%
Picture Was Not Sexual	6%	7%	7%
Solicitor Requested Picture of Youth			
Wanted a Sexual Picture	56%	76%	60%
Wanted a Non-Sexual Picture	27%	44%	38%
Youth Sent a Sexual Picture	<1%	1%	0

Episode Characteristics	All Episodes (n=216)	Aggressive Episodes (n=68)	Distressing Episodes (n=73)
Youth Met Solicitor in Person	3%	7%	1%
Sexual Contact at Meeting	2%	7%	1%
How Situation Ended*			
Removed Self From Situation (Blocking or Leaving Site or Computer)	66%	44%	71%
Told Solicitor to Stop/Confronted or Warned Solicitor	16%	23%	16%
Changed Screen Name, Profile, or E-Mail Address	6%	7%	8%
Apologized, Made-Up, Smoothed Over	2%	4%	3%
Ignored Solicitor or Incident	11%	15%	8%
Parent/Guardian or Teacher Handled Situation	<1%	1%	1%
Stopped Without Youth Doing Anything	3%	3%	3%
Called Law Enforcement or Other Authorities	1%	1%	3%
Other	4%	9%	1%
Installed Filtering or Blocking Software After This Happened	29%	19%	31%
Incident Known or Disclosed to			
Friend or Sibling	26%	29%	26%
Parent/Guardian	12%	18%	23%
Other Adult	2%	3%	3%
Teacher, Counselor, or Other School Personnel	2%	6%	3%
Law Enforcement, ISP, or Other Authority	5%	7%	8%
Someone Else	4%	6%	4%
No One	56%	35%	44%
Of Youth Who Did Not Tell Anyone, Why Didn't Youth Tell	56% (n=120)	35% (n=24)	44% (n=32)
Not Serious Enough	69%	71%	41%
Afraid	13%	8%	28%
Thought Might Get in Trouble	9%	8%	13%
Other	6%	13%	13%
Distress: Very/Extremely*			
Upset	28%	34%	83%
Afraid	20%	28%	60%
Embarrassed	21%	19%	49%
Youth With No/Low Levels of Being Upset or Afraid	66%	59%	0
Stress Symptoms (More Than a Little/All the Time)~			
At Least One of the Following*	25%	37%	51%
Staying Away From Internet or Particular Part of It	17%	23%	37%
Being Unable to Stop Thinking About It	13%	21%	29%
Feeling Jumpy or Irritable	8%	16%	22%
Losing Interest in Things	8%	9%	19%

* Multiple responses possible.

+ Only youth who did not know the solicitor prior to the incident were asked this question.

~ These items are based on standard research measures of stress responses used to assess post-traumatic stress disorder. The items measure avoidance behaviors, intrusive thoughts, and physical symptoms.

Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Table 5. YISS-2 Close Online Relationships (N=1,500)

Individual Characteristics	All Close Online Relationships (n=164) 11% of Youth	Close Online Relationships With Adults (n=58) 4% of Youth	Close Online Relationships With Meetings (n=53) 3% of Youth
Age of Youth			
10	2%	2%	0
11	3%	3%	4%
12	4%	2%	2%
13	10%	5%	11%
14	17%	5%	21%
15	21%	19%	21%
16	22%	29%	17%
17	22%	35%	25%
Gender of Youth			
Girl	53%	57%	57%
Boy	47%	43%	43%
Relationship Characteristics			
Gender of Online Person			
Male	54%	72%	51%
Female	45%	28%	49%
Don't Know	1%	0	0
Age of Online Person			
Younger Than 18 Years	62%	-	68%
18 to 25 Years	28%	79%	26%
Older Than 25 Years	7%	21%	6%
Don't Know	2%	0	0
Youth Knew Where Person Lived			
Person Lived Near Youth (1 Hour Drive or Less)	76%	71%	91%
Location of Computer Used to Communicate With This Person			
Home	87%	90%	91%
A Friend's Home	6%	3%	7%
School	2%	2%	0
Library or Some Other Similar Place	5%	5%	2%
Where Met Online			
Chatroom	35%	38%	26%
Using Instant Messages	36%	29%	49%
Specific Web Page	4%	7%	4%
Online Dating or Romance Site	2%	3%	2%
E-Mail	2%	3%	4%
Game Room or Other Game Site	6%	10%	2%
Online Journal or Blog	2%	2%	4%
Other	11%	7%	9%
Don't Know	1%	0	0
Forms of Offline Contact*			
Met or Asked to Meet In Person	49%	50%	100%
Sent Offline Mail	8%	7%	17%
Called on Telephone	36%	40%	68%
Went to Home	12%	12%	38%
Gave Money, Gifts, or Other Similar Things	12%	14%	30%
Bought Plane, Train, or Bus Ticket	1%	0	2%
None of the Above	40%	36%	0
Parent/Guardian Was Aware of Relationship			
	65%	60%	87%
Individual Sent Picture of Self			
Picture Was Sexual	2%	5%	0

Relationship Characteristics	All Close Online Relationships (n=164) 11% of Youth	Close Online Relationships With Adults (n=58) 4% of Youth	Close Online Relationships With Meetings (n=53) 3% of Youth
Individual Requested Picture of Youth	49%	60%	49%
Wanted a Sexual Picture	5%	10%	4%
Youth Sent a Sexual Picture	1%	2%	0
Individual Made Youth Feel Afraid or Uncomfortable in Any Way	7%	14%	7%
Met Online Contact In Person	32% (n=53)	29% (n=17)	100% (n=53)
A Parent/Guardian Knew About Meeting Beforehand	73%	71%	73%
Someone Went With Youth to Meeting	75%	76%	75%
Physical Sexual Contact at Meeting	4%	7%	11%

* Multiple responses possible.

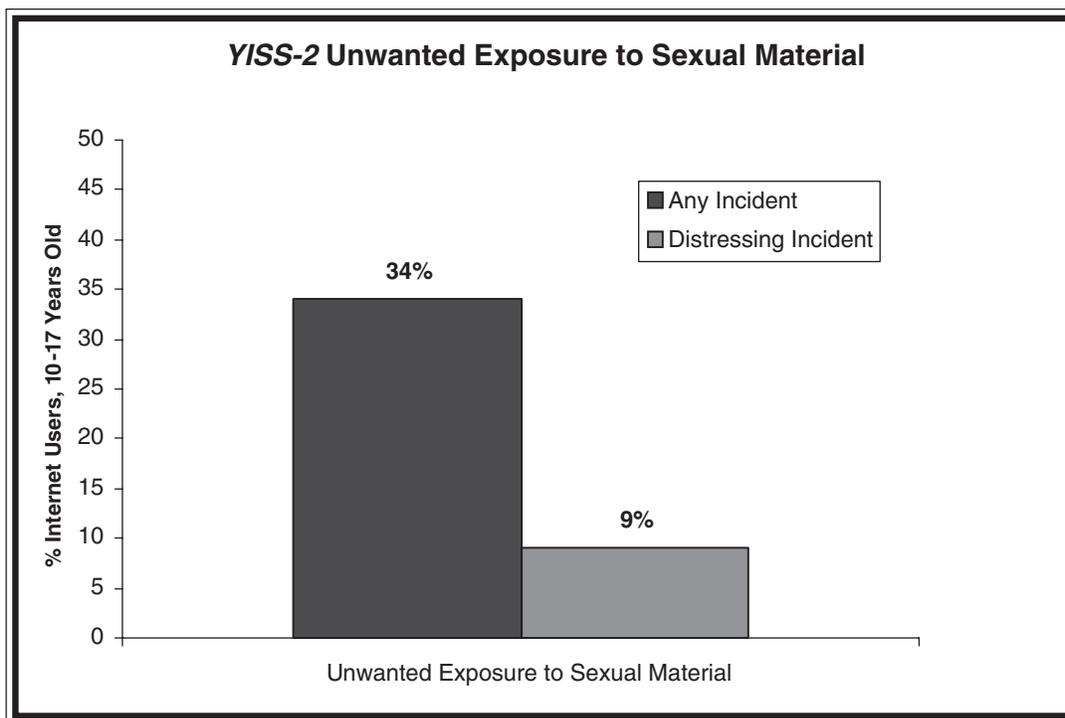
Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material

The Internet has become a very public and aggressive marketplace for sexual material. The first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* found 25% of youth came across sexual material they did not want to see when they went online to do searches, surf the world wide web, or use E-mail or instant messages.

We asked youth about unwanted exposures to sexual material occurring when they were not looking for such material. (Sexual material was defined as pictures of naked people or people having sex.) In *YISS-2* slightly more than one-third of youth Internet users (34%) received **unwanted exposures to sexual material** in the year prior to their interview. Most of these exposure incidents (83%) happened when youth were surfing the web. Another 17% were related to E-mail or instant-message use.

Figure 6



Exposure to unwanted sexual material is not necessarily upsetting. To quantify upsetting incidents, we designated a category of **distressing exposures to sexual material**, which left youth feeling very or extremely upset. Nine (9) percent of youth Internet users in *YISS-2* said they had a distressing exposure to unwanted sexual pictures on the Internet in the past year.

Findings About Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material

Which youth had the unwanted exposures in YISS-2?²²

- Boys had 54% of unwanted exposures and girls 46%
- Most of the unwanted exposures (76%) happened to teenagers ages 14 to 17
- About one-quarter of the **distressing** exposures (24%) happened to youth who were 10 to 13 years old

What were the sources and content of unwanted exposure in YISS-2?

Most incidents happened while youth were surfing the web (83%). More than one-third of surfing exposure incidents happened when youth were doing online searches (40%). Clicking on links in other web sites led to 17% of exposures. Misspelled web addresses led to 12%, and 14% were from pop-up ads. In 13% of surfing incidents the exposure happened in various other ways, and in 4% of incidents youth did not know how the exposure happened.

Most youth (86%) saw images of naked people and more than half saw more explicit pictures.

- In 37% of incidents youth saw pictures of “people having sex.”
- In 13% of incidents youth saw pictures of “sexual things that were violent.”
- In 10% they saw pictures of “sexual things that involved animals or other strange things”²³ (deviant images).
- Overall in 57% of incidents youth saw pictures of “people having sex” or violent or deviant images. (Some youth saw more than one type of more explicit image.)

Rates of unwanted exposure increased with age. We found that in the past year of

- 10- to 12-year-old youth Internet users, 7% saw pictures of naked people and an additional 11% saw more graphic images
- 13- to 14-year-old youth, 15% saw pictures of naked people and an additional 18% saw more graphic images
- 15- to 17-year-old youth, 20% saw pictures of naked people and an additional 26% saw more graphic images

We did not specifically ask if youth saw child pornography because we did not believe youth could reliably assess the ages of the people shown in photographs. Two boys, however, spontaneously mentioned seeing child pornography. An 11-year-old boy said he saw pictures of “naked men with young boys” while he was doing an online search from a computer in the living room of his home. A 17-year-old boy was looking for video games online from a computer in his bedroom. He said, “I clicked on a link, and I did not know what it was. It took me to an underage porn site, which is illegal.... I know you’re not allowed to go to those. It was disguised as a different link.” Neither boy had told anyone what happened prior to the survey interview.

²² Also see Table 3 on page 13, which shows trends in unwanted exposure to sexual material based on youth age and gender for YISS-1 and YISS-2.

²³ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

What do we know about how these exposures occurred in YISS-2?

- More than three-quarters of the unwanted exposures (79%) happened at home. Nine (9) percent happened at school, 5% happened at friends' homes, and 5% happened in other places including libraries.
- About 1 out of 3 unwanted exposures (29%) happened when youth were "with friends or other kids [they] knew."²⁴

We asked youth open-ended questions about why they thought specific instances of unwanted exposure happened. Many of the youth seemed to view the Internet as strewn with sexual material that could only be avoided with constant vigilance. These youth seemed to attribute their exposures to letting their guard down. They said

- Boy, 12: "I spelled a word wrong."
- Boy, 13: "I was not clear enough doing the search."
- Boy, 15: "I didn't read the information underneath the link."
- Girl, 17: "I was typing too fast, not paying attention."
- Girl, 17: "There's a lot of that out there. Unless you're careful, it's bound to happen."

Some youth had more sophisticated views of how sexual material was being marketed on the Internet. A girl, 14, said of a misspelling, "[I made] a simple mistake. I'm sure there are people out there who want those types of things to come up if you do make a mistake like a spelling error." Several 17-year-old boys commented

- "I think people falsely label web sites on the Internet."
- "People who run porn sites purposely buy old domain web sites, and they change the web sites to what [they're] not supposed to be."
- "I go to web sites about racing dirt bikes, and when I'm on there pop-up ads come up with naked pictures of girls and guys.... Some of the sites have swimsuit calendars on them and it kind of opens the door for other pornographic images to appear."
- "Whoever put it on there wanted someone to get interested. Someone who wanted to see those kinds of pictures would click on it, and it would spark an interest."
- "The porn market is really big.... I think they just want young people to go there."

A small number of topics popular with youth were mentioned over and over as sources of unwanted exposures to sexual material. One topic was "gaming" including video games; online gaming sites; and "cheat codes," which are available at certain web sites and allow knowledgeable players to skip levels or gain advantages in other ways when playing particular online games. A boy, 15, said, "I was searching a web site [for cheat codes] and I misspelled [a word] and a nude site came up. There were pictures of people having sex, and I clicked out."

²⁴We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

Another topic was searches for cartoons resulting in sites displaying cartoon pornography, such as anime or caricatures of well-known mainstream cartoon figures.

Overall youth named a wide range of topics as subjects of web searches that brought up unwanted sexual material. Virtually all of these topics seemed quite appropriate — cars, cheerleading stunts, drum beats, hairstyles, skate-board tricks, song lyrics, and software patches were some. Youth mentioned seeing sexual material while doing searches for school projects including research for papers about famous poets; fire prevention; Benjamin Franklin; the Odyssey; Romeo and Juliet; and science projects about deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), diseases, forensic serology, liquids, and squid. Based on the wide variety of search terms that led youth to unwanted sexual material, it appears even innocent search terms may lead to material that is inappropriate for minors. It is easy to conclude sexual material is so pervasive almost any kind of search will bring it up. The fact that web sites are paid for by advertisers based on the number of “hits” to the site may encourage those who operate pornography sites to use a wide range of search terms and links to help ensure their sites come up often during web searches.

In addition pornography sites are sometimes “mousetrapped” or programmed to make them difficult to exit. Clicking an exit button takes viewers into another sexually explicit site instead of allowing them to leave. In *YISS-2*, 18% of youth with unwanted exposures while surfing online said they were brought to another sex site when they tried exiting the first site they were in. This happened in 15% of distressing incidents.

In 21% of *YISS-2* exposure incidents, youth said they knew a site was X-rated before entering. This was more than the 17% of youth in *YISS-1* who said they knew a site was X-rated before they entered. These were all encounters youth described as unwanted, while not necessarily unintentional, and they were not distinguishable from the other incidents of unwanted exposure. Nineteen (19) percent of those who knew a site was X-rated were very or extremely upset about the images they saw, 23% were very or extremely embarrassed, and almost one-third (32%) told their parents or guardians. We did not ask why youth entered these sites, but for many it could have been simple curiosity. These youth may have heard terms such as “X-rated,” “adults only,” or “pornography” without fully understanding what they meant until after they saw the sexual material.

What Youth Said About Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material

Girl, 10: “I was looking for a song on the Internet and a web site just came up. I clicked on it, and it was a site with naked pictures of girls on it.... I just closed it really quick.”

Boy, 12: “I was going to a... site [about cereal].... It took me to this weird web site. I saw people with half sex changes who looked part male and part female and who were naked. I spelled [the name of the cereal] wrong.”

Boy, 13: “It was a picture of [cartoon characters]. [They were] naked and you can probably guess the rest.”

Boy, 14: “For [a] school project...I typed in ‘Say no to drugs’, and [it] showed naked people using drugs.”

Girl, 14: “I was just very bored. ...I typed in [my dog’s name] and pictures of naked girls just kept popping up. I tried closing the screen and the pop ups kept coming.”

Boy, 14: "I opened a link. It took me to a site, and there was a pop up [of] a huge orgy, and there were other things. Someone sent me [the] link, and I guess there was a virus on his computer because he didn't mean to send it."

Boy, 15: "I was [online], and my friend sent me a link through [an instant message] and told me to click on it. It was pornography with naked pictures of girls on it. I told him that it wasn't funny and to never do that to me again. I think he thought it would be funny if I got in trouble with my parents for looking at it."

How did youth respond to exposures in YISS-2?

- The great majority of youth (92%) simply removed themselves from the situation by blocking or leaving the site or computer when they encountered unwanted sexual material.
- Few youth (2%) who encountered sexual material while surfing said they went back to that site later.
- About one-third (32%) said they or a family member installed some type of blocking, filtering, or monitoring software on their computer after an exposure incident.²⁵
- In more than half of incidents (52%), youth did not tell anyone about the sexual material they saw. Youth kept 39% of distressing exposures to themselves.
- When youth did tell someone it was usually a parent or guardian. More than one-quarter of episodes (27%) were revealed to parents or guardians, and youth told parents or guardians about 42% of distressing exposures.
- Very few exposure incidents were reported to authorities. School authorities were notified about 3% of incidents. Internet service providers, law enforcement, or other authorities were notified about 2% of incidents.

We asked youth who did not disclose exposures why they did not tell.²⁶ Seventy-five (75) percent of youth who did not disclose incidents of exposure said the incidents were not serious enough. They said, "I didn't think it was a big deal. I handled it responsibly." "[I was] barely on the site for 30 seconds." "It was just a random thing;" however, 12% of youth who did not disclose exposures said they were afraid to, and 9% said they thought they might get in trouble.

How did exposures affect youth in YISS-2?

- Almost three-quarters of all exposure incidents (74%) were not at all or only a little upsetting to youth
- Youth rated 26% of all exposure incidents as very or extremely upsetting and 26% as very or extremely embarrassing
- In 19% of incidents youth had one or more symptoms of stress, including staying away from the Internet or a particular part of it, being unable to stop thinking about the incident, feeling jumpy or irritable, and/or losing interest in things

²⁵ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

²⁶ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

Summary

A large proportion of youth Internet users continue to be exposed to sexual material they do not seek and do not want to see. This problem has not abated since *YISS-1*, in which one-quarter of youth revealed unwelcome exposures to sexual material in the past year. In fact the problem has increased. In *YISS-2* more than one-third of youth (34%) had unwelcome encounters with sexual material. Further not all youth have become accustomed to these incidents. Twenty-six (26) percent of exposures left youth feeling very or extremely upset. This translates to 9% of youth Internet users surveyed in *YISS-2* having distressing exposures to unwanted sexual material. While 76% of youth with distressing exposures were teenagers, 24% were ages 10, 11, and 12. We are not certain why most of the unwanted exposures happen to teenagers, but exposure could be closely related to the kinds of interests youth pursue online and searches they conduct. Teen interests in celebrities, music, romance, and sports may put them in greater proximity to web sites that purveyors of sexual material target for marketing their wares.

Also no progress has been made in convincing more youth to tell adults about incidents of unwanted exposure to sexual material online and the problem of lack of disclosure may have gotten worse. It could be there is a disconnect between the online experience of youth and that of parents and guardians, with youth accepting sexual material as an inevitable part of the cyber-landscape and parents and guardians not realizing the extent to which their children see these images. On the other hand, some youth who did not disclose exposure incidents to parents or guardians said these incidents happened all the time. They may have had conversations with their parents or guardians about past incidents and devised strategies for handling exposures, but did not feel it was necessary to talk about every instance. At the same time, the descriptions youth gave of how these incidents occurred suggest youth may blame themselves for exposures that happen when they do things like misspell words or enter overly broad search terms. Education could help both youth and parents and guardians understand that stumbling onto sexual material is hard to avoid on the Internet and youth should be able to tell parents or guardians about such incidents without fear they will be blamed.

Even when youth told parents or guardians, exposure incidents were rarely reported to Internet service providers or law enforcement. This could be because few of these episodes appeared to involve crimes. While it is a crime (often called corruption of a minor) for an adult to knowingly expose a child to pornography, 83% of unwanted exposures occurred when youth were surfing the web, and in the 17% of incidents that originated with E-mail, senders were unknown in most instances (89%). We did not find any cases where adults who were known to youth had sent them sexual material. There were two instances in which youth appeared to stumble across child pornography online. Neither of these was disclosed. In fact the 17-year-old who came across child pornography said he did not tell anyone "because of the illegality of it."

It is discouraging only 1 incident out of more than 500 was reported to an Internet service provider. Many youth indicated they quickly closed the pornography sites they unwittingly entered. This means the details an Internet

service provider would need to follow up on a case may be lacking in many instances. There also may be a sense such reporting would be futile given the ubiquity of sexual material and considerable publicity about its presence online. Another possibility is youth do not know how to make reports to Internet service providers in many cases.

In 2000, when the findings of the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* were released, we noted there had been virtually no research about the impact on youth of viewing pornography, either voluntarily or — more relevant — involuntarily. There is still no research that sheds light on whether, how, or under what circumstances involuntary exposure to pornography may trigger adverse responses in youth. Clearly the extent of exposure is great enough that even if adverse effects occur to only a small fraction of youth, the numbers in absolute terms could be fairly large. Researchers in the field of sexual development do not know whether there are important “primacy effects” relating to early exposure of youth to sexual material or what the effects of such exposures might be on anxieties, normative standards, or patterns of arousal in some youth (Escobar-Chaves, et al., 2005; Rich, 2005). The widespread exposure to unwanted sexual material should make these issues more of a priority.

But there is a greater and more basic concern. How many people would argue with the premise that youth should be able to use a public forum like the Internet without running across sexual material they are not looking for and do not want to see? The solution that seems to have emerged is that parents/guardians, schools, and libraries are responsible for taking measures to prevent exposure, but there is no one easy solution for protecting youth from unwanted exposure to sexual material. For instance one tool in this effort is filtering programs. And, while a number of different filtering programs exist, it is important for parents/guardians, schools, and libraries to select products wisely to adequately address their needs such as filtering out sexually explicit spam, sexually explicit web sites, and inappropriate key words. At the same time more of the families with home Internet access (55%) in *YISS-2* had installed filtering, blocking, or monitoring software on the computer their child used, yet unwanted exposures to sexual material increased. Some may argue more effective software and more education in how to choose and use it is in order, but others may view this increase as a sign the current approach is not working and we need to look for other solutions. Obviously we need to look more closely at this problem to identify additional tools to decrease unwanted exposures.

Table 6. *YISS-2* Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material (N=1,500)

Individual Characteristics	All Incidents (n=512) 34% of Youth	Distressing Incidents (n=136) 9% of Youth
Age of Youth		
10	3%	7%
11	4%	7%
12	6%	10%
13	11%	13%
14	14%	10%
15	19%	20%
16	20%	18%
17	23%	15%
Gender of Youth		
Girl	46%	57%
Boy	54%	43%
Episode Characteristics	All (n=538)	Distressing (n=139)
Location of Computer When Incident Occurred		
Home	79%	78%
A Friend's Home	5%	6%
School	9%	10%
Library or Some Other Place	5%	3%
Youth Was With Friends or Other Kids When This Happened	29%	31%
Type of Material Youth Saw*		
Pictures of Naked People	86%	85%
Pictures of People Having Sex	37%	31%
Pictures That Were Violent	13%	17%
Pictures That Involved Animals or Other Strange Things	10%	7%
How Youth Was Exposed		
Surfing the Web	83%	85%
Opening E-mail or IM or Clicking on Link in E-Mail or IM	17%	15%
Youth Could Tell Material Was X-Rated Before Entering		
Surfing Exposure	All (n=444)	Distressing (n=123)
How Web Site Came Up		
Link Came Up as a Result of Search	40%	39%
Misspelled Web Address	12%	13%
Clicked on Link When In Other Site	17%	16%
Pop-Up	14%	14%
Other	13%	12%
Don't Know	4%	6%
Youth Has Gone Back to Web Site	2%	1%
Youth Was Taken Into Another X-Rated Site When Exiting the First One		
	18%	15%
E-Mail and Instant Message Exposure	All (n=94)	Distressing (n=21)
Youth Received E-Mail or Instant Message at a Personal Address		
Sender Unknown	69%	67%
	89%	100%

Episode Characteristics (Surfing and E-Mail/Instant Message)	All (n=538)	Distressing (n=139)
How Situation Ended*		
Removed Self From Situation (Blocking or Leaving Site or Computer)	92%	87%
Told Sender to Stop/Confronted or Warned Sender	<1%	1%
Changed Screen Name, Profile, or E-Mail Address	1%	1%
Stopped Without Youth Doing Anything	1%	1%
Called Law Enforcement or Other Authorities, ISP	<1%	0
Parent/Guardian or Teacher Handled Situation	3%	5%
Apologized, Made-Up, Smoothed Over	<1%	0
Installed Software	1%	2%
Ignored It	1%	0
Still Happening	<1%	0
Other	6%	9%
Installed Filtering, Blocking, or Monitoring Software After This Happened	32%	37%
Incident Known or Disclosed to*		
Friend or Sibling	18%	17%
Parent/Guardian	27%	42%
Other Adult	1%	1%
Teacher, Counselor, or Other School Personnel	3%	3%
Law Enforcement or Other Authority, ISP	2%	2%
Someone Else	1%	1%
No One	52%	39%
Of Youth Who Did Not Tell Anyone, Why Didn't Youth Tell		
	52% (n=282)	39% (n=54)
Not Serious Enough	75%	50%
Afraid	12%	31%
Thought Might Get in Trouble	9%	17%
Other	1%	0
Distress: Very/Extremely		
Upset	26%	100%+
Embarrassed	26%	64%
Youth With No/Low Levels of Being Upset	74%	0
Stress Symptoms (More Than a Little/All the Time)-		
At Least One of the Following*	19%	42%
Staying Away From Internet or Particular Part of It	12%	27%
Being Unable to Stop Thinking About It	8%	21%
Feeling Jumpy or Irritable	6%	17%
Losing Interest in Things	3%	7%

* Multiple responses possible.

+ Degree of upset was used to define this category of youth.

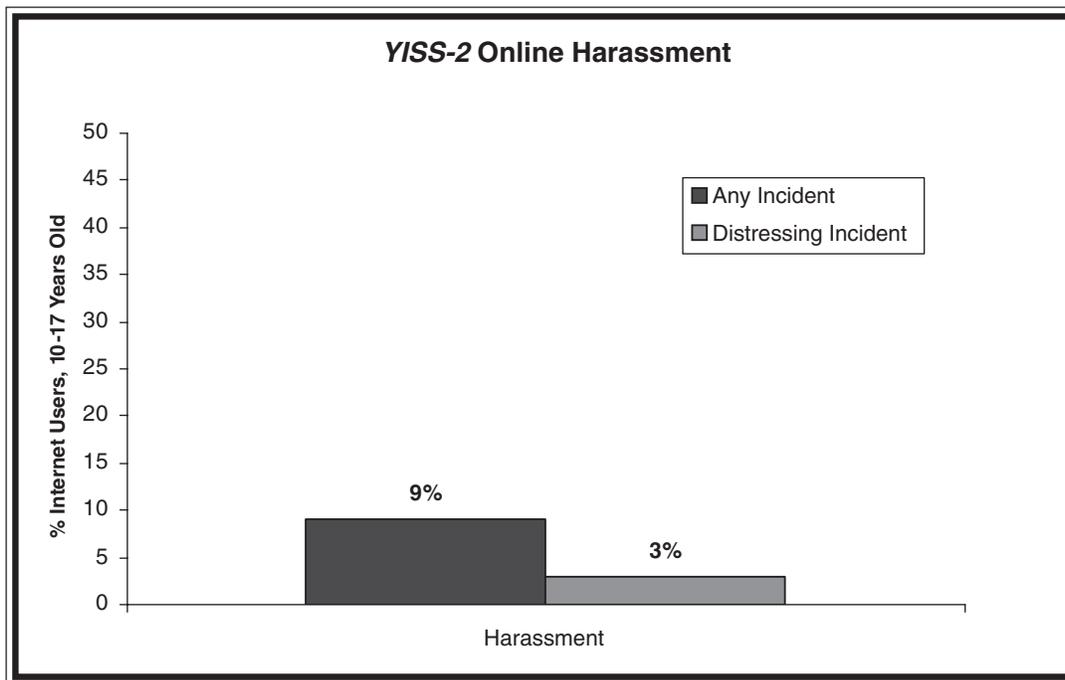
~ These items are based on standard research measures of stress responses and represent avoidance behaviors, intrusive thoughts, and physical symptoms.

Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Online Harassment

Online harassment has received increased attention since the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* was published. Stories about people using the Internet to spread rumors about individuals or threaten or frighten them in various ways have been widely reported in the media. In both *YISS-1* and *YISS-2* we asked youth whether two kinds of situations happened in the past year. The first was feeling “worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online.” The second was someone “using the Internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending messages about you for other people to see.” In *YISS-2*, 9% of youth Internet users said they were **harassed online** in the past year. Six (6) percent said someone was bothering or harassing them online and 3% said someone had posted or sent messages about them for other people to see. Also 3% of youth described an incident of **distressing online harassment**, which left them feeling very or extremely upset or afraid.

Figure 7



Findings About Online Harassment

Who were the youth targeted for harassment in *YISS-2*?²⁷

- The targets were 58% girls and 42% boys
- Girls were more likely than boys to experience distressing harassment (68% compared to 32%)
- The majority of harassment episodes (72%) happened to teenagers ages 14 to 17

²⁷ Also see Table 3 on page 13, which shows trends in harassment based on youth age and gender for *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*.

Who were the perpetrators of harassment in YISS-2?

- Youth said half of the harassers (50%) were male and 28% were female. In 21% of instances youth did not know the gender of the harasser.
- Forty-four (44) percent of harassers were offline friends or acquaintances of youth.
- Fifty-eight (58) percent of harassment perpetrators were other youth. Only 2% were older than 25; however, age was unknown in 19% of incidents, and only 18% of youth who met their harassers online were very or extremely certain of the harasser's age.

What happened?

- Most harassment incidents (85%) happened when youth were logged on at home.
- The harassment primarily first happened when youth were communicating in instant messages (47%), E-mails (13%), and chatrooms (11%). It started in online journals or blogs in 3% of cases.
- Close to one-third of youth (31%) were "with friends or other kids [they] knew when this happened."²⁸
- One-third of the harassment episodes (33%) included contact or attempts at contact by telephone, offline mail, or in person. When we excluded cases where youth knew their harassers in person, this proportion remained similar (31%).

What Youth Said About Harassment

Boy, 10: " This person, she gave me her address and told me to come over. I said no, and then she started typing in bad words. [It happened because] there are a lot of people out there that do a lot of stuff.... I think they were trying to make me come over there to kidnap me."

Boy, 12: " I was at my cousin's house on his computer, and we were playing games. A pop-up came up, and it said, 'I know where you live,' and it showed a map of the area we lived in. It scared me."

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, 14: " I have my own...web site, and I have my own page on it, and someone posted something bad about me on it."

Boy, 15: " My cousin had my password and went into...a blog...and pretended to be me and wrote that I [laugh] liked to smell people. He put it in my...profile too. [It happened] because I did it to him."

Girl, 16: " Someone that I go to school with started spreading rumors about me by posting things in chatrooms and sending E-mails that were talking about me doing sexual things with all these different guys that were not true at all. I didn't even know the guys. [It happened] because at one point I got mad, and we had a confrontation. [She was] doing these things to get back at me — for revenge."

²⁸ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

The details provided by some youth revealed certain harassment episodes had sexual aspects, although we do not have an exact percentage. In some cases the harassers were ex-boyfriends or girlfriends or rivals of the youth who were the targets. In some cases the harassment took the form of spreading sexual rumors as the descriptions in the box on the prior page show. Also some of the episodes included sexual solicitations, but they were classified as harassment because the episodes were threatening and youth described them as harassment. In a small percentage of these cases harassers sent sexually explicit photographs to youth (1%) or asked youth for sexually explicit photographs of themselves (8%).

How did youth respond to harassment in YISS-2?

Many youth (49%) dealt with harassment incidents by removing themselves from the situation such as blocking the person or leaving the site or computer. Some youth simply ignored harassers (8%), while others told the harasser to stop, confronted, or warned the harasser (17%); however, parents/guardians or teachers handled 5% of harassment incidents, and law enforcement or other authorities were called in 5% of incidents.

Youth told someone about two-thirds (67%) of the harassment incidents. This was in contrast to the solicitation and exposure episodes, more than half of which were undisclosed. Many youth (45%) told friends or siblings about harassment, but they told parents or guardians about 31% of all incidents and 42% of distressing incidents.

One-third of harassment incidents (33%) were undisclosed. Of the youth who did not disclose, 63% viewed the incidents as not serious enough, but 19% said they did not tell anyone because they were afraid and 14% because they thought they might get in trouble.

How did harassment incidents affect youth in YISS-2?

More than half of the incidents (62%) were not at all or only a little upsetting to youth. Youth rated 30% of harassment incidents as very or extremely upsetting and 24% as very or extremely frightening. Twenty-two (22) percent were very or extremely embarrassing.

Slightly more than one-third of youth (34%) had one or more symptoms of stress including staying away from the Internet or a particular part of it, being unable to stop thinking about the incident, feeling jumpy or irritable, and/or losing interest in things. In distressing incidents, close to two-thirds of youth (64%) said they had at least one symptom of stress.

Summary

Harassment still does not occur as frequently as sexual solicitation or unwanted exposure to sexual material, but it was encountered by an increased number of youth. Further, in many instances, it may have had a harsher effect on the youth who endured it, especially when it occurred among friends and schoolmates. More than one-third of harassed youth (38%) found the incident distressing and a larger proportion were driven to disclose what happened than youth with unwanted sexual solicitations or exposures to sexual material. The Internet allows bullies to spread rumors to a large audience. Thus some youth may be using the

Internet to extend the everyday bullying that is widespread among youth into online venues (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004b; Nansel, et al., 2001). Nasty comments and sexual innuendos are no longer confined to a bathroom wall or small groups of peers. Now bullies have an “electronic bathroom wall” that allows for widespread distribution of gossip. The results of the study suggest developing school-based, anti-bullying programs and strong policies against online harassment among students could help reduce this behavior. Involving School Resource Officers and other law-enforcement agents who work with youth in education and prevention campaigns could support effective prevention and intervention.

Table 7. YISS-2 Online Harassment of Youth (N=1,500)

Individual Characteristics	All Incidents (n=130) 9% of Youth	Distressing Incidents (n=50) 3% of Youth
Age of Youth		
10	2%	6%
11	5%	8%
12	5%	6%
13	17%	16%
14	14%	10%
15	20%	16%
16	19%	20%
17	19%	18%
Gender of Youth		
Girl	58%	68%
Boy	42%	32%
Episode Characteristics	All (n=131)	Distressing (n=50)
Gender of Harasser		
Male	50%	56%
Female	28%	24%
Don't Know	21%	20%
Age of Harasser		
Younger Than 18 Years	58%	54%
18 to 25 Years	21%	28%
Older Than 25 Years	2%	6%
Don't Know	19%	12%
Youth Was Very or Extremely Certain of Solicitor's Age*	18% (n=72)	21% (n=29)
Relation to Harasser		
Met Online	55%	58%
Knew in Person Before Incident	44%	40%
Location of Computer When Incident Occurred		
Home	85%	86%
A Friend's Home	3%	0
School	3%	4%
Some Other Place	6%	8%
Place on Internet Incident First Happened		
Chatroom	11%	14%
Using Instant Messages	47%	36%
Game Room or Other Game Site	7%	8%
Online Dating or Romance Site	0	0
E-Mail	13%	20%
Online Forum	4%	0
Online Journal or Blog	3%	6%
Other	13%	10%
Don't Know	2%	6%
Youth Was With Friends or Other Kids When This Happened	31%	26%
Forms of Offline Contact+		
Asked to Meet Somewhere	19%	26%
Sent Offline Mail	2%	0
Called on Telephone	23%	34%
Went to Home	10%	14%
Gave Money, Gifts, or Other Things	11%	16%
Bought Plane, Train, or Bus Ticket	0	0
None of the Above	67%	60%

Episode Characteristics	All Episodes (n=131)	Distressing Episodes (n=50)
Harasser Sent Picture of Self	10%	14%
Picture Was Sexual	1%	4%
Harasser Requested Picture of Youth	23%	38%
Wanted a Sexual Picture	8%	16%
Youth Sent a Sexual Picture	0	0
Youth Met Harasser in Person[^]	2%	2%
How Situation Ended⁺		
Removed Self From Situation (Blocking or Leaving Site or Computer)	49%	54%
Told Harasser to Stop/Confronted or Warned Harasser	17%	18%
Changed Screen Name, Profile, or E-Mail Address	4%	4%
Parent/Guardian or Teacher Handled Situation	5%	6%
Apologized, Made-Up, Smoothed Over	9%	8%
Ignored Harasser or It, Stopped Talking to Harasser	8%	6%
Still Happening	1%	0
Stopped Without Youth Doing Anything	5%	6%
Called Law Enforcement or Other Authorities	5%	4%
Other	8%	10%
Don't Know	3%	6%
Installed Filtering, Blocking, or Monitoring Software After This Happened	29%	40%
Incident Known or Disclosed to⁺		
Friend or Sibling	45%	42%
Parent/Guardian	31%	42%
Other Adult	1%	0
Teacher, Counselor, or Other School Personnel	2%	2%
Law Enforcement or Other Authority, ISP	9%	10%
Someone Else	7%	4%
No One	33%	30%
Of Youth Who Did Not Tell Anyone, Why Didn't Youth Tell	33% (n=43)	30% (n=15)
Not Serious Enough	63%	40%
Afraid	19%	33%
Thought Might Get in Trouble	14%	13%
Other	0	0
Distress: Very/Extremely⁺		
Upset	30%	78%
Afraid	24%	64%
Embarrassed	22%	42%
Youth With No/Low Levels of Being Upset or Afraid	62%	-
Stress Symptoms (More Than a Little/All the Time)⁻		
At Least One of the Following ⁺	34%	64%
Staying Away From Internet or Particular Part of It	15%	28%
Being Unable to Stop Thinking About It	17%	40%
Feeling Jumpy or Irritable	17%	38%
Losing Interest in Things	8%	16%

* Only youth who did not know the harasser prior to the incident were asked this question.

+ Multiple responses possible.

- These items are based on standard research measures of stress responses and represent avoidance behaviors, intrusive thoughts, and physical symptoms.

[^] None of these youth were sexually assaulted.

Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

Education, Prevention, and Risky Online Behavior

Concerns of Parents and Guardians

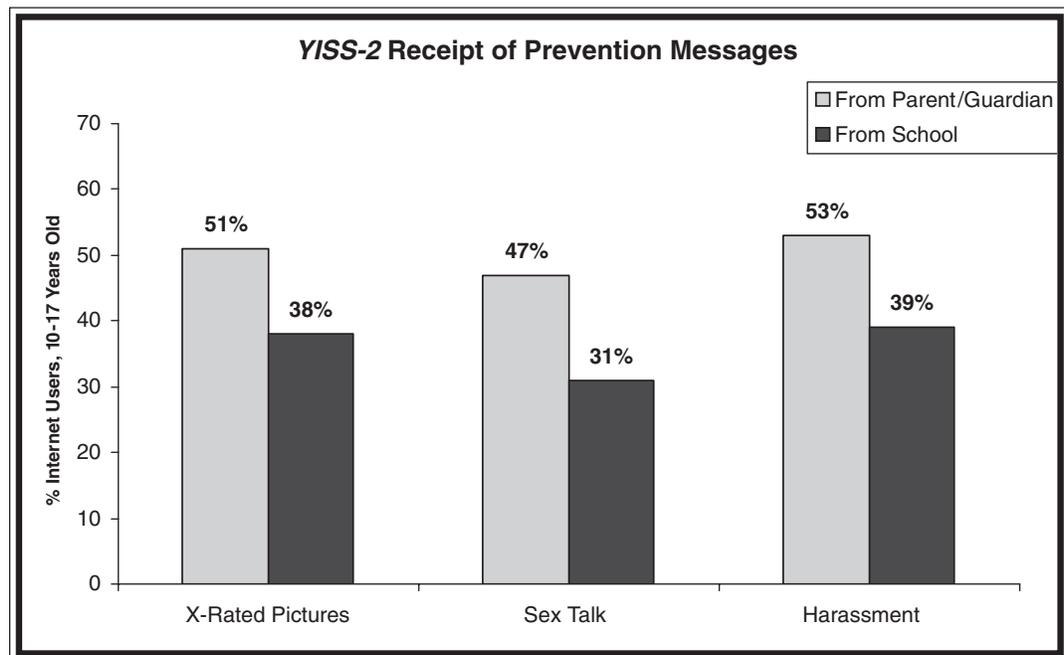
How concerned are parents and guardians about online safety?

Concerns of parents and guardians about Internet safety have not lessened since *YISS-1*. In both *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*, more than 90% of parents and guardians were very or extremely concerned about their children being exposed to sexually explicit content on the Internet. In addition most parents and guardians believed their children were responsible Internet users. Only about 5% of parents and guardians had a low degree of trust in their children to use the Internet in a responsible way. Eighty-eight (88) percent of parents and guardians interviewed in *YISS-2* said they had talked to their children about giving out personal information online. The great majority of parents and guardians had also spoken with their children about the dangers of chatting online with people they do not know in person (86%); responding to offensive, nasty, or mean messages (77%); talking online about very personal things such as sex (76%); and dealing with X-rated, pop-up ads or spam E-mail (76%).

What kinds of prevention messages are youth receiving?

Compared to the responses of parents and guardians, a smaller proportion of youth, but still a considerable proportion, acknowledged hearing these types of prevention messages from their parents or guardians. About half of youth said their parents or guardians had spoken with them in the past year about seeing X-rated pictures on the Internet (51%); people on the Internet who want to talk to them about sex (47%); and people on the Internet who might threaten, harass, or bother them (53%). Also between 31% and 39% of youth interviewed in *YISS-2* said someone at school had talked to them about these matters, depending on the topic. We do not know, however, what kind of details were included in these talks. For example some parents/guardians or schools may have offered technical information about how to use software for filtering pornographic web sites or discussed how to report possibly illegal sexual solicitations, while others may have just conveyed rules about not visiting X-rated sites or chatrooms on school computers.

Figure 8



Twenty-one (21) percent of youth surveyed in *YISS-2* had attended a presentation about Internet safety hosted by law enforcement. Younger youth had more exposure to law-enforcement Internet safety presentations. Of the 1,500 youth surveyed, 23% of those ages 10 to 12 and 29% of those ages 13 and 14 had attended law-enforcement presentations compared to 17% of youth 15 and older.

Were families surveyed in *YISS-2* using filtering, blocking, and monitoring software?

Since more than one-third of youth Internet users surveyed in *YISS-2* revealed unwanted exposure to sexual material (34%), we were somewhat surprised to find there was a substantial increase in the number of parents and guardians who said there was software on their children's computers to filter or block X-rated sites or monitor their children's behavior online. Fifty-five (55) percent of parents and guardians with home Internet access surveyed in *YISS-2* had such software currently installed on the computer their child used, compared to 33% in *YISS-1*.

In *YISS-2* we asked parents and guardians with home Internet access what kinds of software they used on their children's computers.²⁹ More than half (53%) used software that blocked pop-ups/spam or filtered sexually explicit material, and most had some combination of such software.

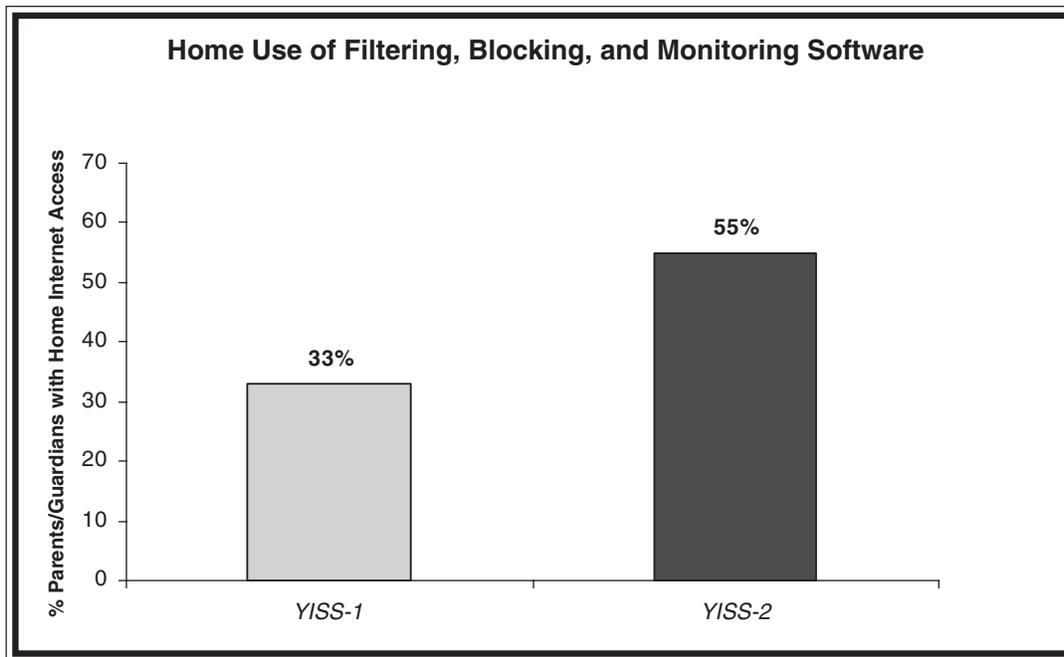
- 47% had software to block pop-up ads
- 47% had software to block spam
- 47% had software to filter sexually explicit images or web sites

²⁹ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

Almost half of parents and guardians (48%) used software that monitored or controlled how their child used the Internet in other ways. The software parents and guardians used

- Monitored youths' online activities (35%)
- Blocked or controlled use of chatrooms (31%)
- Blocked personal information from being posted or E-mailed (30%)
- Included a browser or search engine just for kids (22%)
- Limited the amount of time youth could spend online (11%)

Figure 9



We also asked youth who had home Internet access (91% of YISS-2 youth) whether there was any software on the computer they used most that blocked pop-up ads or spam E-mail or filtered, blocked, or monitored how they used the Internet in other ways. More youth than parents and guardians said they used filtering, blocking, or monitoring software — 81% versus 50% of parents and guardians. Most of the difference was attributable to youth saying they used pop-up and spam blockers their parents or guardians may not have known about. Youth can easily download such blockers, which may offer some protection from exposure to sexual material but are mainly designed to prevent annoying advertisements in general, rather than to block sexual material.

We asked parents and guardians who said they used filtering, blocking, or monitoring software why they installed it.³⁰ Five (5) percent mentioned specific incidents that prompted their actions, such as something disturbing happening to a child or a child doing something inappropriate online. About half (51%) mentioned a general desire to protect their child from possible online harms. Thirteen (13) percent mentioned concerns about blocking pop-ups, spam,

³⁰ We did not ask about this in YISS-1.

pornography, and viruses without mentioning their children. Fifteen (15) percent simply said they installed software that came with their computer or was supplied by their Internet service provider.

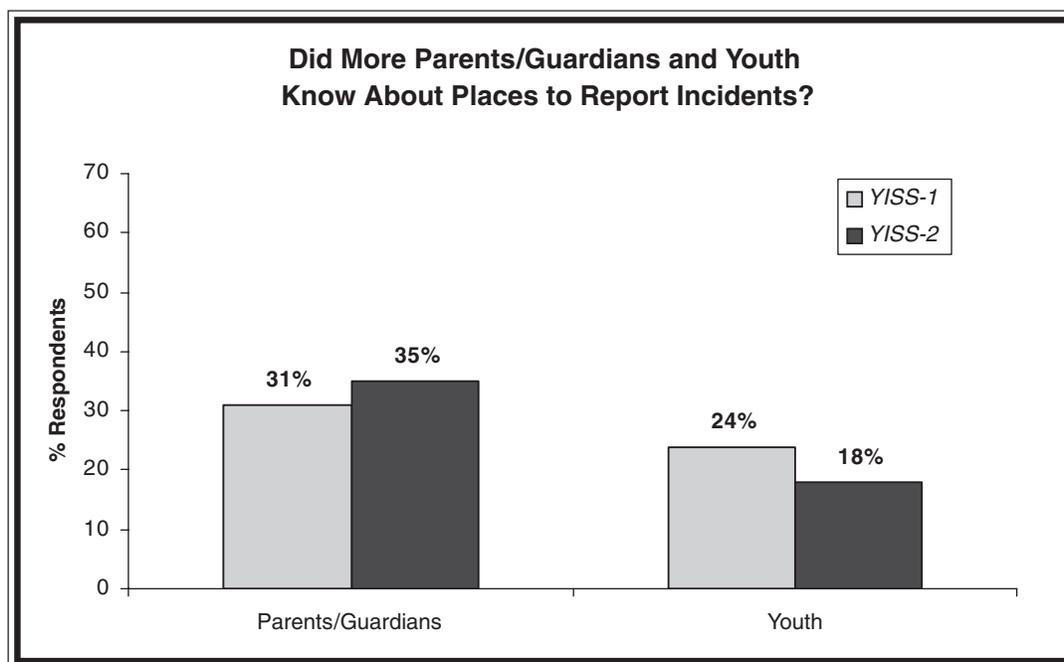
There are several possible explanations for the increase in the use of filtering, blocking, and monitoring software since *YISS-1* was released. Prevention programs and publicity may have made both parents/guardians and youth more aware of problems related to Internet use and more likely to take action to avoid those risks. If youth are more conscious of the risks of Internet use, more of them may agree with their parents or guardians that such software is helpful, reducing family conflict around the issue. Current versions of software may work better than previous versions. Some types of filtering, blocking, or monitoring programs come with computers or are provided free through Internet service providers, making it easy for people to install them. Also new problems that have erupted since *YISS-1* was published, such as pop-up ads, may prompt the use of blocking software for more than one reason. Not only are pop-up ads sources of sexual material, they may also interfere with how computers operate. Also spyware, adware, and other stealth programs not only force sexual material on Internet users, they interfere with computer performance and make programs and computers crash. Youth and parents/guardians may be frustrated by these problems with computer performance, as well as with unwelcome intrusions of sexual material.

Do parents/guardians and youth know where to report unwanted Internet experiences?

We asked parents and guardians if they had heard of places where they could report cases of children being exposed to sexual material or illegal or offensive sexual solicitations. More parents and guardians had heard of such places in *YISS-2*, 35% compared to 31% as reported in *YISS-1*. Most of these parents and guardians (68%), however, could not name a specific reporting place. The proportion of youth who said they knew of places to report declined, going from 24% in *YISS-1* to 18% in *YISS-2*. Half of youth who said they knew of places (50%) could not come up with a specific place to report unwanted Internet incidents.

More youth who had attended presentations about Internet safety given by law enforcement, however, knew about places to report incidents (23% versus 17%) and more were aware of the CyberTipline (8% versus 5%) than youth who had not attended law-enforcement presentations. Youth who said their parents/guardians or schools had talked to them about solicitations, exposure to sexual material, or harassment on the Internet were also more likely to say they had heard of places to report (20% of youth whose parents or guardians had talked to them versus 12% whose parents or guardians had not and 23% of those who said someone at school had talked to them versus 13% who said someone at school had not).

Figure 10



Also the CyberTipline is still not well known among parents/guardians or youth, although knowledge increased among youth. Knowledge of the CyberTipline by parents/guardians remained about the same — 9% in *YISS-2* compared to 10% in *YISS-1*. Youth knowledge was low in both surveys, but it had more than doubled since *YISS-1*. When we asked youth, “Have you ever heard of the CyberTipline?” 5% said yes in *YISS-2* compared to only 2% in *YISS-1*.

In general people may not be aware of resources until something happens prompting them to look for help. In *YISS-2*, however, we found few youth told parents or guardians about unwanted sexual solicitations (12%), about one-quarter told parents or guardians about exposures to sexual material (27%), and slightly less than one-third told about a harassment incident (31%). Only 7% of solicitations were disclosed to authorities such as law enforcement, Internet service providers, teachers, or other school personnel; only 5% of unwanted exposures were disclosed to that group; and 11% of harassment incidents. So even when problems occurred parents/guardians and youth often did not look to law enforcement, Internet service providers, or schools for help. Most youth who did not disclose incidents (69% of those with undisclosed solicitations, 75% with undisclosed exposures, and 63% with undisclosed harassment) said it was because the incident was not serious enough. Even when youth did tell someone, often no one took the next step of contacting an outside resource for help.

Risky Online Behavior

In *YISS-1* and *YISS-2* we asked youth whether they engaged in several kinds of risky behaviors that could possibly increase the chances they would experience unwanted sexual solicitations, exposure to sexual material, or harassment. We asked about three types of behaviors, although because of time constraints we

were not able to gather detailed information about the contexts of these behaviors. The behaviors were

- Posting personal information or pictures online or sending personal information or pictures to someone the youth knew only online
- Engaging in online sexual behaviors such as going to X-rated web sites on purpose, using a screen name with sexual connotations, sending sexual pictures online, or talking to people youth knew only online about sex
- Saying rude or nasty things online or using the Internet to harass or embarrass others

Posting or Sending Personal Information or Pictures

Most Internet safety information directs youth not to post, send, or otherwise share personal information via the Internet with people they do not know in person. At the same time it is not always clear in this information how risky it is to reveal personal information online. Further, it is not clear what kinds of information are particularly problematic, or exactly what the risks are with respect to the different situations in which youth disclose personal information online. For example youth may disclose different types of information in a variety of venues such as in online journals, blogs, and profiles; web sites requiring registration; or online shopping venues.

In *YISS-2* there was a large increase in the proportion of youth who posted personal information and pictures online. Thirty-four (34) percent had posted their real names, telephone numbers, home addresses, or the names of their schools online where anyone could see; 45% had posted their dates of birth or ages; and 18% had posted pictures of themselves. In contrast, in *YISS-1* only 11% of youth had posted any such personal information and only 5% had posted pictures. Unfortunately we did not have time during the interviews to gather details about the contexts of these postings. These increases may be at least partly related to the popularity of blogs, online journals, and profiles allowing youth to create elaborate web sites about their lives. These types of web sites were not a part of youth culture when *YISS-1* was conducted. Postings, however, could have been at other places such as web sites run by schools and youth organizations that post information about and pictures of youth events. We do not have enough information to evaluate the risk that postings at different types of web sites pose in terms of unwanted sexual solicitations or harassment.

Compared to those who **posted** information online, a smaller proportion of youth in *YISS-2* had sent personal information to people they had met online. Eleven (11) percent of all youth said they had **sent** their real names, telephone numbers, home addresses, or the names of their schools to someone they met online. Twenty-three (23) percent had given their ages or date of birth to someone they met online. Again, we did not have time to gather details about the contexts in which youth sent this information. It is common for chatroom participants to ask each other “a/s/l?” meaning “age/sex/location?” by way of introduction, so this could be one reason youth admit to giving their ages more than other information. Also they may feel age is a less sensitive piece of information than the other identifiers we asked about.

The questions about sending personal information to people met online were not asked in *YISS-1*; however, we did ask about sending pictures to people youth met online in both *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*. While the proportion of youth who **posted**

pictures online increased, the proportion who **sent** pictures to people they met online and had never met in person remained about the same. In *YISS-2*, 9% of youth had sent a picture online while 7% of youth in *YISS-1* had done so.

Sexual Behavior

In both *YISS-1* and *YISS-2* only a small proportion of youth said they went to X-rated Internet sites on purpose or talked online about sex with people they did not know in person. In *YISS-2* we asked some additional questions about what youth were doing in these situations.

In *YISS-2*, 13% of youth said they had gone to an X-rated site on purpose in the past year, compared to 8% in *YISS-1*. In both surveys we found smaller proportions of youth going to these sites on purpose than were exposed to sexual material involuntarily. It is possible youth are so inundated by sexual material that much of any curiosity they have is satisfied through unwanted exposures. Boys and older youth were more likely to have viewed sexual material on purpose than girls or younger youth. Also many youth (44%) did this when they were “with friends or other kids.”³¹

We asked youth how they found out about the sites they visited.³² More than half of the youth (52%) said they found out about sites through a peer. Other youth found sites through online sources, for example, online searches that were not about sex (33%), pop-up ads in web sites (27%), or spam E-mail (14%). One (1) percent of youth said someone they met online told them about a site. Two youth said the person online who told them about an X-rated web site was an adult.

In *YISS-2*, 5% of youth told us they had talked about sex online with someone they had never met in person. This is similar to the 4% of youth who had done that in *YISS-1*. Of the youth who did this, 45% were boys and 55% were girls. The great majority of *YISS-2* youth (88%) who had talked online about sex were high school age — 14 and older. Forty-three (43) percent of the youth who had talked online about sex had done so when they were “with friends or other kids.”³³

We also asked about a few behaviors very small numbers of youth admitted to participating in.³⁴ Two (2) percent of youth said they had used a file-sharing program to download sexual pictures on purpose, and 1% said they used a screen name they considered “sexual in any way.” Only 0.1% of youth said they had posted or sent a sexual picture of themselves online.³⁵

Rudeness and Harassment

In *YISS-2* we found large increases in the numbers of youth who admitted to behaving rudely online and harassing others.

More than one-quarter of all youth (28%) said they had made “rude or nasty comments to someone on the Internet,” compared to 14% in *YISS-1*. In *YISS-2* boys and girls did this in about equal numbers (49% versus 51%). Most were 14

³¹ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

³² We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

³³ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

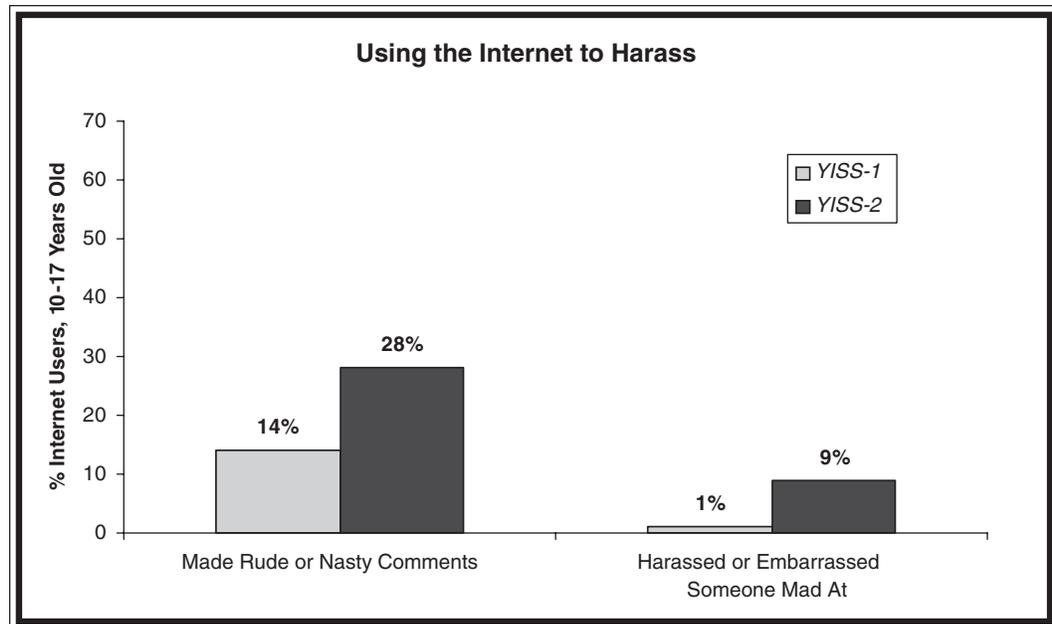
³⁴ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

³⁵ We did not ask about this in *YISS-1*.

and older (80%). Youth who did this were often with other youth (44%) and most youth (71%) said they had done this to people they knew in person.

The number of youth engaging in online harassment of others also increased substantially. In *YISS-2*, 9% of youth said they used the Internet to harass or embarrass someone they were mad at, compared to only 1% of youth in *YISS-1*. The youth who harassed or embarrassed others were similar in terms of gender and age to those who admitted to being rude and nasty online.

Figure 11



Summary

In the years since the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* was published, parents and guardians remained concerned about what their children might encounter online, and most were acting on their concerns by talking to their children and taking steps to limit exposure to sexual material. Youth seemed to concur that families were having conversations about Internet safety. Youth also may have been taking action on their own to reduce exposure to unwanted sexual material and other types of unwelcome advertising by using pop-up and spam blockers their parents or guardians may not have known about.

Some parents/guardians and youth, however, may feel they are alone in their efforts to deal with online problems, based on how much was undisclosed and how little was reported to law enforcement, Internet service providers, and other authorities. There still seems to be a tremendous lack of knowledge about what help sources are available when disturbing or offensive things happen online. Many of the incidents youth told us about were mild, but even the most serious events generally were not reported to any authority.

Another concern is the segment of youth Internet users who are doing potentially risky or offensive things online. We found fairly small proportions of youth engaging in online sexual behavior, such as going to X-rated sites on purpose

(13%) and talking online about sex with people they did not know in person (5%). Close to half of those youth were with friends or other youth they knew when they visited X-rated sites (44%) or talked online about sex with people they did not know in person (43%). We need to learn more about the dynamics of these situations.

We also found worrisome increases in the number of youth who admitted to being rude to and harassing others online (14% in *YISS-1* versus 28% in *YISS-2*). Most youth who admitted to rudeness (72%) and harassment (75%) said these behaviors were directed at people the youth knew offline. We did not gather detailed information about these incidents so we do not know who those offline acquaintances were. Forty-four (44) percent of youth were with friends or other youth when they were harassing others.

We also found 34% of youth in *YISS-2*, as opposed to 11% of youth in *YISS-1*, posted their real name, telephone number, home address, or school name online where anyone could see them. Revealing personal information online may be happening more often as the Internet is becoming more integrated in the lives of youth. We need more information about the circumstances under which youth are disclosing such information so we are able to better assess the risks and inform youth, parents/guardians, and educators about which disclosures are risky and which are safer.

Table 8. *YISS-2* Online Risky Behavior (N=3,001)

	<i>YISS-1</i> Youth (N=1,501)	<i>YISS-2</i> Youth (N=1,500)
Risky Online Behavior in the Past Year		
Posting or Sending Personal Information or Pictures		
Posted Personal Information Online Where Anyone Could See It		
Real Name, Telephone Number, Home Address, or School Name	11%	34%
Age or Date of Birth	–	45%
Picture	5%	18%
None of the Above	–	44%
Sent Personal Information to Someone Met Online*		
Real Name, Telephone Number, Home Address, or School Name	–	11%
Age or Date of Birth	–	23%
Picture	7%	9%
None of the Above	–	39%
Online Sexual Behavior		
Talked Online About Sex With Someone Youth Never Met in Person	4% (n=63)	5% (n=77)
Gender		
Boy	62%	45%
Girl	38%	55%
Age		
10 to 13 Years Old	8%	12%
14 to 17 Years Old	92%	88%
With Friends or Other Kids	–	43%
Went to X-Rated Sites on Purpose	8% (n=123)	13% (n=199)
Gender		
Boy	87%	83%
Girl	13%	17%
Age		
10 to 13 Years Old	13%	13%
14 to 17 Years Old	87%	87%
With Friends or Other Kids	–	44%
Downloaded Sexual Images Through File-Sharing on Purpose	–	2%
Used Screen Name that Was “Sexual in Any Way”	–	1%
Posted or Sent Sexual Picture of Self	–	0.1%
Rudeness and Harassment		
Made Rude or Nasty Comments to Someone Online	14% (n=215)	28% (n=425)
Gender		
Boy	52%	49%
Girl	48%	51%
Age		
10 to 13 Years Old	17%	20%
14 to 17 Years Old	83%	80%
With Friends or Other Kids	–	44%
Used Internet to Harass or Embarrass Someone Youth Was Mad At	1% (n=19)	9% (n=129)
Gender		
Boy	84%	46%
Girl	16%	54%
Age		
10 to 13 Years Old	21%	16%
14 to 17 Years Old	79%	84%
With Friends or Other Kids	–	44%
Other Behaviors		
Downloaded Pictures, Videos, or Movies Through File-Sharing Program	–	15%
Had People on Instant-Messaging “Chat List” Youth Did Not Know In Person	–	35%

* Only asked of youth who said they talked online with people they did not know in person (*YISS-1* n=839, *YISS-2* n=645). For purposes of comparison, youth who did not talk to unknown individuals online were coded as not having this behavior in the current table.

Note: Table percentages for gender, age, and being with friends or other kids are based on the number of youth who admitted to each behavior.

Major Findings and Conclusions

- 1. The smaller proportion of youth Internet users who received unwanted sexual solicitations since the first *Youth Internet Safety Survey* is heartening news.**

A smaller proportion of youth Internet users received sexual solicitations. In *YISS-1*, 19% received such solicitations, and in *YISS-2*, 13% received such solicitations. Plus a smaller proportion of youth Internet users were visiting chatrooms and communicating online with people they did not know in person. These findings suggest youth Internet users may be more aware of the risky nature of online encounters with such people.

- 2. The Internet remains a source of disturbing and offensive solicitations for many youth.**

Even though a smaller proportion of youth Internet users received sexual solicitations, the proportion with the most serious incidents, aggressive and distressing solicitations, did not decline.

- 3. A disturbing new trend: Solicitors who ask youth for sexual pictures of themselves.**

Four (4) percent of all the youth we spoke with said someone online had asked them for a sexual picture of themselves in the past year. It seems clear increasing bandwidth and the digital-photography revolution mean the transmission of still and moving imagery will continue to be a growing part of Internet activity, which can be turned to illegal sexual purposes. These technological developments have happened quickly. Parents/guardians, youth, educators, youth-service workers, and prevention professionals have not had a long time to think about all the ramifications of these developments. Solicitations for sexual pictures will certainly remain a serious threat to youth. New prevention messages need to be crafted with this development in mind.

- 4. Sexual solicitations remain a phenomenon of the teen years. Younger children rarely reported solicitations.**

YISS-2 findings reinforce earlier findings that online sexual solicitations primarily affect teenagers (Wolak, et al., 2004). Ninety (90) percent of youth who experienced unwanted solicitations were ages 13 and older. Preteen youth may be less likely to receive solicitations because they may use the Internet differently than older youth. For example more of them may confine their online communications to people they know well. And normal teenage development may be an important factor. Developmental literature has long noted teenagers are naturally concerned with forming intimate relationships and curious about sexual matters (Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Petersen, 1988; Steinberg & Sheffield, 2001; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002). These aspects of adolescent development may make teenagers more vulnerable than younger youth to online sexual solicitations if they use the Internet to pursue such interests.

5. The extent of unwanted exposure to sexual material among youth is extraordinarily high and grew between the times YISS-1 and YISS-2 were conducted.

Approximately one third of youth Internet users (34%) had an unwanted exposure to sexual material in the past year, an increase from 25% in YISS-1 that occurred despite increases in the number of families using filtering, blocking, or monitoring software. This suggests such software, as used by families, is not meeting the challenge. Several reasons for this are possible. It may be that families tend to install such software only **after** incidents of unwanted exposure. Youth may be turning off or removing the software if it interferes with things they want to do online. Also youth may have Internet access in so many places that software on home computers provides only limited protection. Or it may be such software cannot deal with the sheer volume and rapid replenishment of sexual material online. Further much of the new software adoption may consist primarily of pop-up blockers, which may help reduce the problem somewhat but are not tools designed to eliminate unwanted exposure to sexual material.

Both YISS-1 and YISS-2 found more youth were exposed to sexual material they did not want to see than to material they sought on purpose. Unfortunately efforts to protect against unwanted sexual material have not been as successful as hoped. New means to reduce the intrusion of sexual material into areas of the Internet commonly used by youth need to be found.

6. Close to 1 in 10 youth Internet users had a distressing encounter with unwanted sexual material in the past year.

Much of the debate about youth and online sexual material discusses the volume of such material and ease with which it can be accessed (Ashcroft v. ACLU, 2004; Thornburgh & Lin, 2002; Ashcroft v. ACLU, 2002). The policy and practical discussion has focused considerably less on the issue of unwanted exposure. The findings of this study suggest involuntary exposure needs to be a much greater focus of attention.

7. Online harassment grew by 50%.

There are signs youth are increasingly experiencing, committing, and tolerating hostile and aggressive behavior online. This could have major consequences for the online experiences of youth and future role of the Internet. Norms about standards of behavior in a new domain are much easier to change while they are still being established, rather than after they have become entrenched. It is important to identify and reverse this trend of online harassment before it becomes pervasive.

8. Some of the unwanted experiences and risky Internet use were not solitary.

Some of the unwanted incidents happened when youth were together with friends or peers. Similarly some of the bad behavior youth engaged in online happened when youth were together with friends. It should be a priority to find out more about how young people are using the Internet when they socialize in pairs and

groups and determine if and how risky Internet behavior is being generated in such groups.

9. Many youth are still not telling parents/guardians and authorities when victimized.

One reason people may not understand the extent of offensive experiences youth encounter online is many youth do not disclose their experiences to parents/guardians and authorities. Parents/guardians, law enforcement, and those managing the Internet cannot help when these incidents occur if they do not know about them.

10. The Internet remained a fluid environment for youth.

When comparing *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*, changes in experiences and behavior were evident. This is a sign of how much the Internet environment is changing and how norms and behaviors have yet to become fixed. The migration of youth away from chatrooms and into instant messaging and online journal and networking sites is a good example. This poses a challenge to make sure yesterday's remedies are not superseded by tomorrow's realities. But it is also encouraging, because it means opportunities to change behavior and better protect youth are not yet confronting entrenched patterns.

Limitations of the Survey

Every scientific survey has limitations and defects. Readers should keep some of these important things in mind when considering the findings and conclusions of this survey.

- We cannot be certain how candid our respondents were. Although we used widely accepted social-science procedures, our interviews involved telephone conversations with young people on a sensitive subject, factors that could contribute to less than complete candor.
- The young people we did not talk to may have been different from the youth we talked to. There were parents and guardians who refused to participate or refused to allow us to talk to their children, and there were youth who refused to participate and those we could never reach. Our results might have been different if we had been able to talk to all these people.
- Our numbers are only estimates, and samples may be unusual. Population sampling is intended to produce groups representing the entire population, but sometimes samples are randomly skewed. For most of our major findings, statistical techniques suggest estimates are within 2.5% or less of the true population percentage in 95 out of 100 samples like this one, but there is a small chance our estimates are farther off than 2.5%.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations seem plausible in light of the findings from the first and second *Youth Internet Safety Surveys*.

1. Expand solicitation prevention messages.

The second *Youth Internet Safety Survey* suggests the proportion of youth Internet users receiving unwanted sexual solicitations has declined, and a smaller proportion of youth seem to be communicating online with people they do not know in person. It is important to continue with the kinds of prevention messages that may be encouraging this safer online behavior.

But we should also think about honing and developing even more effective prevention strategies based on matters such as developing technologies and new approaches used by solicitors, especially those youth knew in person and not just online. *YISS-2* gives us some pointers.

2. While prevention should be aimed at youth of all ages, it should particularly focus on preteens and teens.

While law enforcement does receive reports of younger children being sexually solicited online, none of the 10 year olds and few 11 and 12 year olds in *YISS-2* received such solicitations. The concentration of risk among older youth means online protection requires an approach tailored to adolescents because, when we talk about online sexual solicitations of youth we are mainly talking about youth in middle and high school. We need approaches acknowledging their independence and developmental interests including their natural curiosity about and interest in sex and romance. We cannot rely on simply urging parents and guardians to control, watch, or educate their children, because youth this age are more independent and less supervised than younger youth. We recommend talking directly and frankly with youth, starting in the preteen years. And we should not ignore older youth, ages 16 and 17, who have begun to see themselves as part of the adult world.

3. Focus on adolescent desires for love, romance, and companionship.

In addressing the teens who are vulnerable to sexual solicitations, moreover, it is not sufficient to simply emphasize the dangers of assault, abduction, and rape. Internet exploiters know many teens are susceptible to romantic fantasies, illusions of love, and desires for companionship. Unfortunately exploiters also know how to take advantage of this susceptibility when they form close online relationships with youth (Wolak, et al., 2004). Prevention messages about sexual solicitation need to address this vulnerability. Such messages need to remind teens about how adults who use the Internet to meet and form sexual relationships with young teens are often committing crimes and likely to get themselves and their partners in serious trouble.³⁶ Youth need to understand how some adults “groom” youth to allay anxieties and encourage sexual activity. Moreover youth need to

³⁶ This discussion should not be limited to relationships formed online. Youth need to be alerted about how adult acquaintances they know in person may also use the Internet to promote inappropriate and illegal romantic relationships or set youth up for victimization (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2005).

hear about how relationships between teens and adults they meet online are doomed to failure and disappointment if not worse, and, despite what teens may be imagining, are usually more about sex than enduring love.

4. Be frank with youth about online sexual activities.

Prevention messages also need to be frank with teens about the potential risks of sexual activities on the Internet including going to X-rated web sites, talking online about sex with people they do not know in person, and engaging in cybersex. Teens need to know more about what is against the law. They also need to learn the ways exposures to sexual material could negatively impact their sexual development and that some people develop compulsions about looking at sexual material (Carnes, 2003; Carnes, 2001).

5. Address youth involvement in the making and transmitting of sexual photographs.

YISS-2 notes a potentially burgeoning trend of people who try to involve youth in sexual photography. We need to publicize the risks of posing for sexual pictures. We need to clearly inform youth that taking sexually explicit photographs of people younger than 18, including taking such photographs of themselves, is a crime under federal laws against producing child pornography.³⁷ We need youth to understand the widespread circulation these images may receive and their permanence and irreversibility once in circulation online. Youth need to understand the risk of being exploited by sexual predators and people who have sexual perversions involving voyeurism and exhibitionism. We need to clearly inform youth that people they know in person and consider to be “real-life” friends as well as people they meet online could try to involve them in this activity (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2005). We need to extend this education to parents and guardians as well, so they understand the unsuspected and risky uses web cams and digital cameras may be put to and the magnitude of this problem.

More research and testimony is needed from youth who were enticed into creating such sexually explicit photographs (Eichenwald, 2005). As a point of reference, on September 18, 2002, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children launched an intensive effort to identify child victims exploited through pornographic images circulated online. Through December 31, 2005, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children’s Child Victim Identification Program has reviewed seized images from 4,264 cases of perpetrators arrested for child pornography involving 591 identified victims and reviewed more than 3 million images/movies in an attempt to identify and assist victims and stop the perpetrators who victimize these children.³⁸

6. Use prevention to discourage adolescents from soliciting acquaintances.

YISS-2 identified a growing trend of unwanted sexual solicitations coming from people youth already knew — acquaintances, not just people they only knew online. Thus a solicitor may be someone such as a schoolmate, the friend of a

³⁷ 18 U.S.C. § 2256.

³⁸ NCMC’s *Child Victim Identification Program, Weekly Activity Report #171 (December 26, 2005 – January 1, 2006)*. Alexandria, Virginia: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

friend, or the volunteer who is organizing a school trip. Youth get “hit on” all the time by acquaintances when offline so there is no reason why this would not be happening online. Moreover, solicitations from acquaintances were not less distressing or aggressive than those from people youth did not know in person. This means prevention messages need to be generalized enough to include dangers from this source too, rather than just using a stereotype of the unknown person as the Internet threat.

This study highlights how threats may come from peers. This means some of the youth who are hearing prevention messages are at risk of becoming solicitors themselves. Thus prevention messages also need to be tailored to create awareness about the problem of youth solicitors and constructed to discourage and deter youth who might be inclined to use the Internet to make unwanted sexual advances.

7. Take on the harassment issue in prevention programs.

There are worrying signs in this survey about the increasing numbers of youth experiencing online harassment, including threats and other offensive behavior. That harassment has increased, while the proportion of youth receiving sexual solicitations decreased may reflect the fact we have mobilized to warn about solicitations, but not done much yet about threats and harassment. It may not be too late to decrease threats and harassment too.

We need to do more to head off this trend. We need to describe the harassment problem effectively and in detail so youth, parents/guardians, and other authorities understand and identify it when they see it. We need to make sure existing anti-bullying and other prevention programs include discussions about Internet harassment as part of their content. We need to create and publicize codes of conduct that include Internet behavior and get these codes adopted through Internet service providers, schools, clubs, and organizations as well as on web sites. Then we need to encourage Internet service providers, schools, and other youth-serving organizations to have strong sanctions against Internet harassment. Because much bullying and harassment, both off- and online, occurs in school or arises from events that occur in school, School Resource Officers could be an important component in prevention and intervention programs.

8. Address the group dynamics of Internet use.

Some of the unwanted solicitations, exposure, and harassment happened when youth were using the Internet in groups, and a lot of youth were not alone when they engaged in risky sexual behavior and rudeness and harassment of others. We need to learn more about the dynamics of these situations and address prevention messages to include situations where youth are using the Internet with friends or other peers.

9. Focus on the unwanted part of Internet exposure to sexual material.

YISS-2 found a growing exposure of youth to sexual material they did not want to see. The pornography issue is complicated and controversial. Nonetheless, whatever one’s views on restricting voluntary adult access to adult pornography, we think there is a consensus that youth, using a modicum of care, should be able to use the Internet without coming across unwanted sexual material. The

data from *YISS-2*, however, suggest more youth are exposed to unwanted sexual material (34%) than seek it out voluntarily (13%). We need to explore ways to allow individuals to fight back against unwanted exposure.

This means targeting those who use aggressive and deceptive methods to market sexual material and increasing the legal, financial, or accessibility costs of such marketing practices. Certainly we need to educate youth about the ways sexual material and links to it may be downloaded to their computers without them knowing, so they are more adept at avoiding that material. We also need to prepare youth for what they might run into, so it might be less distressing when they do. Information about this could be made available on web sites educating people about Internet safety, in brochures and pamphlets, and in school-based sexual education programs. We have to make Internet security easier, more built into systems, and less reliant on individual initiative, technological skill, and personal financial resources. We also need to increase the sophistication of youth about protecting the privacy of Internet communications and electronic information since privacy awareness may decrease unwanted exposure to sexual material.

10. Promote reporting.

One of the most discouraging findings in this study is so few youth told authorities such as law enforcement, schools, and Internet service providers about episodes of all types. The proportion of youth who said they knew where to report actually declined. This may be due to a combination of factors — from desensitization about offensive online events to cynicism — or discouragement that anything will be done, not being taught what to do, minimizing the seriousness of what they encounter, or blaming themselves for these incidents.

11. Teach reasons to report.

We need to develop and implement educational programs to motivate youth and their parents and guardians to report. It is too easy in the automated world of cyberspace just to log off and let it go. Youth and parents/guardians need to understand the seriousness of these situations. They need to know when crimes are being committed. They need to think about this as part of a “fight for the neighborhood.” They need to see it as part of their responsibility to other families and the quality of the Internet to file complaints about offensive episodes. It is imperative to instill a sense of civic responsibility among the community of youth Internet users. Simply turning off the computer does not do anything to prevent future incidents other youth may encounter.

12. Increase the number and visibility of reporting options.

People need to know where to report suspicious incidents, where to find law enforcement online, and where to find other administrative authorities who may take action. The CyberTipline is an important resource. It was created by Congressional mandate³⁹ to allow persons to report online and via toll-free telephone the enticement of children for sexual acts including online enticement,

³⁹ 42 U.S.C. § 5773(b)(1)(H).

child sexual molestation not in the family, child pornography, sex tourism of children, and child victims of prostitution.

We need more visible public- and private-reporting options. Of course not all or even most of the offensive incidents youth encounter online qualify as illegal or criminal behavior. Much of the harassment and unwanted exposure to sexual material is not. But as we know from law-enforcement experience with the “broken windows” concept — the idea combating minor disorder and offenses may lead to decreases in more serious crime — there should be options to allow the reporting of offensive but noncriminal behavior. Perhaps these reports should not go to law enforcement, but rather to other authorities in a position to address them such as Internet service providers, chatroom moderators, and school officials. Of course, people also need to be educated so they know when online behavior has crossed the line and become criminal.

13. Enhance reporting mechanisms.

We need to make reporting of all sorts easier and more automatic. For example in some gaming sites there are buttons for reporting mischief. When some E-mail programs crash, windows come up asking users if they want to report the event. These kinds of visible mechanisms need to be there for reporting the offensive online incidents youth are encountering. In addition it would be helpful to see ready mechanisms to log previous transactions leading to a problem, which would be of assistance in tracking online solicitors and harassers. There could, however, be some downsides if these responses brought about a tidal wave of reporting no one could respond to and led to cynicism among reporters. But we may also think about such reporting icons as similar to the crime-watch neighborhood street signs. They are reminders to criminals that people are on the alert.

14. Enhance Internet accountability.

In striving to enhance responsible behavior on the Internet, we should consider ways to build in incentives for enhancing community and prosocial behavior and establishing positive norms. In cyberspace people are not just operating in unclaimed territory. There is organized turf, and there are jurisdictions in cyberspace. The question is, are the administrators of these jurisdictions doing everything they can to promote civility and deter offensive behavior? A good example of a norm-promoting and offense-discouraging system is the one eBay uses. It promotes feedback about sellers and allows buyers and sellers to see the reputation of the person with whom they are dealing. eBay knows they have to create confidence and trust in their territory or people will not use it.

There are not enough of these trust-enhancing systems. Wouldn't it be interesting to know before signing up with an Internet service provider how it compared to other providers in rates of offensive behavior or customer satisfaction for following up on complaints? Wouldn't it be good, before going into a chatroom, to know how many complaints there had been by participants? More online businesses may come to recognize the competitive advantages of helping to ensure safety in and around their environments. A positive step would be for electronic

service providers to develop internal, yet publicly visible “trust-enhancing systems” to increase public confidence in the services they provide.

15. Evaluate and improve filtering, blocking, and monitoring software solutions.

YISS-2 found increased numbers of youth had filtering, blocking, and monitoring software on their systems, 55% of those with home computers compared to 33% in *YISS-1*, yet exposure to unwanted sexual material increased. It appears the pornography merchants are reaching more youth. Filters may have become more modest. More of them may be just aimed at blocking spam, viruses, or pop-ups. It appears there is still a big gap between what consumers want and need and what they end up using. This could be because the available software is poorly designed or too complicated or ineffective, but it is also possible families are selecting inappropriate products or not using the products properly.

Consumers would benefit from more research and better evaluation about families’ needs, Internet use patterns, and how filters operate in the context of youth Internet use.

16. Train mental-health, youth-service, and education professionals to recognize and respond to Internet problems.

Something else we need to do is broaden the coalition of people promoting Internet safety. It takes time before problems in one institutional sphere get understood and taken on by people in another. Take for example, drugs. Law-enforcement agencies became aware of the problem before mental-health and school professionals did. We are at the stage now where law-enforcement agencies have seen the problems experienced by some youth Internet users, while other professionals are just becoming aware of such problems and may need information about how to respond. We need more professionals who work with children to be aware of Internet safety issues and promote Internet safety. School, youth-service, and mental-health professionals need to be motivated to take part in this campaign. They need to see its relevance to their work and find places where they are able to pass the message along, look for problems, and reinforce a communal effort.

17. Continue to conduct research.

A great deal of additional research would be helpful because youth Internet safety is a new field without much prior research on which to base its policy and practice. We suggest in particular research be organized to focus on some of the issues listed below.

- How youth view the Internet and the norms and standards they see as applying to themselves and other people in their Internet interactions and what they view as authoritative sources of information and advice about Internet activity
- The characteristics of youth — family features, personal attributes, developmental histories, social networks, prior Internet activity profiles — who are most likely to encounter online victimization, the characteristics of

those most likely to engage in potentially risky Internet activities such as solicitation and sending/posting pictures online, and reasons why youth may hesitate to report online incidents

- Whether and how exposure to sexual materials online is affecting the sexual development of youth, more about the nature of the distress some youth express over unwanted exposure, how technology may be contributing to the problem of unwanted exposure, and how to lessen unwanted exposure
- The impact of different types of prevention messages and strategies

Methodological Details

The second *Youth Internet Safety Survey* was a telephone survey of a national sample of 1,500 youth Internet users, ages 10 to 17, and their parents or guardians. The goal of the survey was to quantify and detail youth experiences with unwanted sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment on the Internet. The sample was created using random digit dialing to identify eligible households. The research was approved and supervised by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board and conformed to the rules mandated for research projects funded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

Sampling Method

The sample for *YISS-2* was drawn from a national sample of households with telephones, which was developed by random digit dialing. Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., a national survey research firm, conducted the interviews. Interviewers dialed a total of 54,842 telephone numbers to identify households with children ages 10 through 17 who had used the Internet at least once a month for the past six months. Standardized definitions developed by the American Association for Public Opinion Research (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2006) were used to code the final dispositions for the telephone numbers used to create the sample. Of the 54,842 numbers, 24,363 were not active residential phone numbers at the time of the interview, including 3,523 business numbers; 2,512 computer/fax numbers; 17,571 other non-working numbers; and 757 other. In addition, 3,626 numbers yielded non-interviewable households because there was no answer including 565 busy on all attempts; 2,986 no answer; and 75 other. Among the 26,853 eligible households that were contacted for household screening, 12,537 did not interview including 6,638 refusals to complete the initial household screener, 3,937 on callback, and 1,962 for other reasons. Among the 14,316 cooperating households 10,360 were not eligible, including 9,616 households with no children in the eligibility age range; 722 households with no or limited Internet access; and 22 households with an incapacitated child.

Initial interviews were conducted in 3,956 households with children ages 10 to 17 who had used the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months. Among these, families with eligible children refused to complete the survey in 1,839 households including 960 adults completed the initial screener but refused to continue the interview, 829 adults completed the parent portion of the survey but refused to allow their child to be interviewed, and 50 adults completed the parent portion of the survey but their child refused to be interviewed. Eligible children in 617 households did not complete the survey during the field time. Families with eligible children in 1,500 households completed the survey. The sample size of 1,500 was pre-determined based upon a maximum expected sampling error of +/- 2.5% at the 5% significance level.

Data Collection Methods

Upon reaching a household, interviewers asked to speak with an adult and then determined whether there was a child in the household who met the inclusion criteria (age 10 to 17 and used the Internet at least once a month for the past six months). Interviewers then asked to speak with the adult who was most familiar with the youth's Internet use and after receiving informed consent, asked a series of questions about Internet use. At the close of the parent/guardian survey the interviewer asked for permission to interview the child. Interviewers told parents and guardians the youth interview would be confidential, it would include questions about "sexual material your child may have seen," and youth would receive \$10 checks for participating. In households with more than one eligible youth, the one who used the Internet the most often was chosen to participate in the interview. After receiving permission from parents or guardians, interviewers spoke with the youth and asked for permission to conduct an interview. Interviewers assured youth their answers would be confidential and they could skip any question they did not want to answer and end the interview at any time.

The youth interview was scheduled at the convenience of the youth and at a time when he or she was able to talk freely and confidentially. Youth participants were mailed \$10 checks upon completion of the survey. Youth who revealed previously undisclosed sexual or physical abuse or who had thoughts of suicide as determined through answers to questions about mental health were contacted after the interview by a clinical psychologist associated with the study for evaluation and follow-up. The average youth interview lasted 30 minutes, and the average adult interview lasted 10 minutes. Interviewing for *YISS-2* took place between March 4, 2005, and June 12, 2005.

Sample

Participants were youth ages 10 to 17 who had used the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months from a computer at their home, school, a library, or any other place; and one parent or guardian in the household self-identified as the one most knowledgeable about the youth's Internet practices (71% female). This broad definition of Internet use was used to ensure the inclusion of youth respondents who had a range of Internet use, from relatively low to high use. Youth participants ranged from ages 10 to 17 ($M = 14.24$, $SD = 2.09$). Fifty-one (51) percent were girls, and 76% identified as White. Well-educated, prosperous families, and white individuals were over-represented in the *YISS-2* sample compared to the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005) but we believe these households reflected the population of youth Internet users at the time of data collection (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005; Cole, et al., 2004).

Response Rates

The American Association for Public Opinion Research has created standardized formulas for response rates of surveys, to help ensure comparable measures are used (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2006). These standardized formulas were used to determine response rates for *YISS-2*. Response

rates range from minimum to maximum depending on factors such as how partial interviews and cases of unknown eligibility are calculated. Response rates from *YISS-2* ranged from a low of 0.38 to a high of 0.45.

The response rates are reflective of a general decline in response rates for national telephone surveys (Curtin, Presser, & Singer, 2005) which face the challenges of caller ID, confusion with telemarketers, and survey saturation among the public. National telephone surveys continue to obtain representative samples of the public, however, and provide accurate data about the views and experiences of people living in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2004). Our survey was additionally challenged because of its broad inclusion criteria; targeting a more select population likely would have increased the response rate but decreased the generalizability.

Statistical Significance

Differences between *YISS-1* and *YISS-2* were tested for statistical significance based on the rates of occurrence of specific incidents and experiences within the full samples. The significance tests determined whether apparent increases or decreases in the proportion of youth reporting specific behaviors were reliable, rather than possibly attributable to chance.

Instrumentation

The incidence rates for sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment were estimated based on a series of screener questions about unwanted experiences while using the Internet in the past year. ("Past year" refers to the year prior to the interview.) Two of the screeners concerned harassment, three involved unwanted exposure to sexual material, three focused on sexual solicitation, and one question asked if anyone online had encouraged the youth to run away from home. (Episodes revealed in response to the screeners were not counted as "incidents" unless they met additional definitional criteria.) More extensive follow-up questions were asked about the unwanted incidents and used to further classify the episodes into the categories discussed in this report.

Follow-up questions were limited to only two incidents because of time constraints. Consequently, some incidents that young people told us about were not the subject of follow-up questions, and these incidents were omitted from incidence rates. If a youth had incidents in more than two categories, runaway incidents were given first priority for follow-up questions, harassment incidents second priority, sexual solicitation incidents third priority, and unwanted exposure incidents fourth priority. If a youth had more than one incident in a particular category, the follow-up questions referred to the "most bothersome" incident or, if none was "most bothersome," the most recent incident. The limits on follow-up questions probably led to some undercounting of incidents, particularly episodes of unwanted exposure to sexual material.

Youth who reported a close online relationship with an adult which had a sexual component were also counted as having a sexual solicitation or approach ($n=0$ in *YISS-1* and $n=8$ in *YISS-2*) in order to capture instances of potentially illegal relationships between youth and older adults. Due to a change in the selection criteria for following-up on a close online relationship, there is the

possibility that youth who met these criteria for sexual solicitation were overcounted in *YISS-2*. Specifically, in *YISS-1*, one close online relationship was chosen for follow-up based on the criteria of (in order of priority) a person met on the Internet you later met in person; had a romantic online relationship with; and had a close online relationship with. Alternately, in *YISS-2* one close online relationship was chosen for follow-up based on the criteria of (in order of priority) an online romance with an adult with a face-to-face meeting; a close online relationship with an adult with a face-to-face meeting; some other relationship with an adult with a face-to-face meeting; an online romance with an adult who wanted a face-to-face meeting; a close online relationship with an adult who wanted a face-to-face meeting; some other online relationship with an adult who wanted a face-to-face meeting; an online romance with an adult without wanting or having a face-to-face meeting; a close online relationship with an adult without wanting or having a face-to-face meeting; a close online relationship with a minor with a face-to-face meeting; some other online relationship with a minor who wanted a face-to-face meeting; any online romance, not with an adult; and any close online relationship, not with an adult. These selection criteria were changed for *YISS-2* in order to try and capture more details about online relationships between youth and adults. This change in criteria for close online relationship follow-ups, however, does not alter the overall findings regarding sexual solicitations since excluding the 8 youth in *YISS-2* who met the criteria for sexual solicitation based on having a sexual relationship with an adult still results in 13% of youth overall revealing sexual solicitations or approaches (n=192).

Screener Questions

1. In the past year, did you ever feel worried or threatened because someone was bothering or harassing you online?
2. In the past year, did anyone ever use the Internet to threaten or embarrass you by posting or sending messages about you for other people to see?
3. In the past year when you were doing an online search or surfing the web, did you ever find yourself in a web site that showed pictures of naked people or of people having sex when **you did not want to be in that kind of site**?
4. In the past year, did you ever receive E-mail or instant messages **that you did not want** with advertisements for or links to X-rated web sites?
 - a. Did you ever **open** a message or a link in a message that showed you actual pictures of naked people or people having sex **that you did not want**?
5. In the past year, when you were online, did you ever find people talking about sex in a place or time when **you did not want this kind of talk**?
6. In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever try to get you to talk online about sex when you **did not want to**?
7. In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ask you for sexual information about yourself when you did not want to answer such questions? I mean very personal questions, like what your body looks like or sexual things you have done.
8. In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever ask you to **do** something sexual that you did not want to do?
9. In the past year, did anyone on the Internet ever ask you or encourage you to run away from home?

Note: Episodes reported in response to the screener questions were not counted as incidents unless they met additional definitional criteria.

How Many Youth Had Online Episodes?

Estimations of the Number of Youth Internet Users

We used data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau (2005) to derive estimates of the **prevalence of Internet use** by youth ages 10 through 17. This data included the calculation of numbers and ages of children in U.S. households who used the Internet in 2003.⁴⁰ National estimates of Internet use are listed by age in Table 9. The second column of the table gives the percentage of youth in the U.S. in each age group who used the Internet in 2003. The third column gives the estimated numbers of youth Internet users in 2003.

Table 9. National Estimates of Youth Internet Use by Age*

Age	%Youth Internet Users	Estimated # Youth Internet Users+
10	61%	2,430,000
11	66%	2,780,000
12	70%	2,870,000
13	72%	3,190,000
14	75%	3,300,000
15	80%	3,320,000
16	81%	3,380,000
17	79%	3,510,000
Total		24,780,000

* Confidence intervals were not calculated for these figures.

+ Estimates are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

Estimations of Youth Internet Users With Unwanted Sexual Solicitations, Exposures to Unwanted Sexual Material, and Online Harassment

The sample of youth interviewed in YISS-2 was designed to represent all youth Internet users ages 10 through 17 in the United States. Because of this, it is tempting to try to translate the percentages of youth who reported unwanted sexual solicitations, unwanted exposures, and harassment in this survey into actual numbers or population estimates. For example the 13% of the sample who experienced a sexual solicitation or approach in the past year may be multiplied against the census estimate that 24.78 million youth between the ages of 10 and 17 are Internet users to yield a population number of 3.22 million youth who might have had such an episode.

This precision, however, may be somewhat misleading. Sample surveys have margins of error, which are described in scientific terms as "95% confidence intervals." These confidence intervals express the range of numbers within which

⁴⁰ The U.S. Census Bureau data provides estimates of any Internet use, which is slightly different from our eligibility criterion of Internet use at least once a month for the last 6 months.

the “true” number is likely to fall in 95 out of 100 attempts to estimate it with a sample of this size. So in this sample of 1,500, it is 95% likely that the true number of youth experiencing a sexual solicitation or approach in the past year falls in a range that could be almost half a million youth more or less than our estimate of 3.22 million.

We have provided ranges of estimates for seven of the major episode types in Table 10. Unfortunately in this case the imprecision of such estimates is compounded by the fact the numbers of youth Internet users are **also** estimates with their own margins of error (not calculated for this report). In addition, while these estimates were obtained from an actual census count, they were based on data from 2003, a full year prior to the time frame the youth in this survey were responding about.

Thus, because the parameters needed to make a population estimate have large elements of imprecision and population estimates may take on an aura of exactitude that is sometimes misleading, in this report we have followed the convention with most social-scientific surveys of this size and reported the results primarily in terms of percentages (in this case of youth Internet users). We recommend this approach to other interpreters of this survey.

Estimates of Unwanted Sexual Solicitations Between *YISS-1* and *YISS-2*

There is an additional issue with respect to the decline in the proportion of youth who had unwanted sexual solicitations between the first and second *Youth Internet Safety Survey*. While we can say the proportion of solicited youth Internet users declined, we cannot say with certainty fewer youth were solicited. This is because the proportion of youth in the general population who became Internet users rose at the same time the proportion of solicited youth fell. While the estimate in Table 10 suggests a decrease in the actual number of youth Internet users who were solicited, we do not have a precise estimate of the increase in youth Internet users, so we cannot calculate the exact numerical dimensions of the decline in solicitations in relation to the increase in youth Internet use. For this reason, throughout this report we have referred to a decline in the percent or proportion of youth Internet users solicited, but we have not stated fewer youth were solicited.

Table 10. Population Estimates and Confidence Intervals for Online Victimization of Youth*

Online Victimization	% Youth Internet Users	95% Confidence Interval	Estimated # of Youth Internet Users+	95% Confidence Interval
Sexual Solicitations and Approaches				
Any	13%	12%-15%	3,220,000	2,970,000-3,720,000
Distressing	4%	3%-6%	990,000	740,000-1,490,000
Aggressive	4%	3%-5%	990,000	740,000-1,240,000
Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material				
Any	34%	32%-37%	8,430,000	7,930,000-9,170,000
Distressing	9%	8%-11%	2,230,000	1,980,000-2,730,000
Harassment				
Any	9%	7%-10%	2,230,000	1,730,000-2,480,000
Distressing	3%	2.5%~4%	740,000	620,000-990,000

* Estimates and confidence intervals are based on an estimated number of 24,780,000 Internet users between the ages of 10 and 17.

+ With one exception, estimates and confidence intervals are rounded to the nearest ten thousand.

~ This percent was not rounded so the lower bound of the confidence interval could be shown.

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Internet Safety Resources and Information

The Crimes against Children Research Center has a web site at www.unh.edu/ccrc. This site has descriptions of CCRC research projects and copies of reports and journal articles. Papers using data from surveys about topics related to the Internet are available including copies of papers using data from

- The first *Youth Internet Safety Survey*, available at http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/youth_internet_safety_survey_publications.html
- The *National Juvenile Online Victimization Survey*, available at http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/national_juvenile_online_victimization_publications.html
- The *Survey of Internet Mental Health Issues*, available at <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV92.pdf>

Papers using data from the second *Youth Internet Safety Survey* will be posted as they become available.

Helpful Internet safety web sites include

- <http://www.isafe.org>
- <http://www.missingkids.com>
- <http://www.NetSmartz.org>
- <http://www.Safekids.com>
- <http://www.Safeteens.com>
- <http://www.webwisekids.org>

If you have information to help in the fight against child sexual exploitation please visit www.cybertipline.com or call 1-800-843-5678.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children[®], established in 1984 as a private, nonprofit organization, serves as a clearinghouse of information about missing and exploited children; provides technical assistance to the public and law-enforcement agencies; offers training programs to law-enforcement and social-service professionals; distributes photographs of and descriptions about missing children worldwide; creates and coordinates child-protection education and prevention programs and publications; coordinates child-protection efforts with the private sector; networks with nonprofit service providers and state clearinghouses regarding missing-child cases; and provides information about effective legislation to help ensure the protection of children per 42 U.S.C. §§ 5771 *et seq.*; 42 U.S.C. § 11606; and 22 C.F.R. § 94.6.

A 24-hour, toll-free telephone line, **1-800-THE-LOST[®] (1-800-843-5678)**, is available in Canada and the United States for those who have information regarding missing and exploited children. The “phone free” number is 001-800-843-5678 when dialing from Mexico and 00-800-0843-5678 when dialing from other countries. For a list of other toll-free numbers available when dialing from specific countries visit www.missingkids.com, and from the homepage click on the link to “More Services” and then on the link to “24-Hour Hotline.” The CyberTipline[®] is available worldwide for online reporting of these crimes at www.cybertipline.com. The TTY line is 1-800-826-7653. The NCMEC business number when dialing in the United States is 703-224-2150. The NCMEC business number when dialing from other countries is 001-703-522-9320. The NCMEC facsimile number is 703-224-2122. The NCMEC web-site address is www.missingkids.com.

For information about the services offered by NCMEC’s other offices, please call them directly in California at 714-508-0150, Florida at 561-848-1900, Florida/Collier County at 239-566-5801, Kansas City at 913-469-5437, New York/Buffalo at 716-842-6333, New York/Mohawk Valley at 315-732-7233, New York/Rochester at 585-242-0900, South Carolina at 803-254-2326, and Texas at 512-465-2156.

A number of publications, addressing various aspects of the missing- and exploited-child issue, are available free of charge in single copies by contacting the



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Crimes against Children Research Center

The Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) seeks to combat crimes committed against children by providing high-quality research, statistics, and program evaluation to the public, policymakers, law-enforcement personnel, and other child-welfare practitioners. CCRC maintains a publication list of articles concerning the nature and impact of crimes such as child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, property crimes, and physical and sexual abuse of children written by researchers associated with the CCRC. Current activities funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice include developing questionnaires to assess juvenile crime victimization, evaluating children's advocacy centers, assessing barriers to greater reporting of crimes committed against children, and studying the incidence of and factors related to child abduction. The CCRC also draws on funding from grants, individual gifts, revenues from publications and programs, and state and federal sources.

The Crimes against Children Research Center was created in 1998 at the University of New Hampshire. It grew out of and expands upon the work of the Family Research Laboratory, which has been devoted to the study of family violence, child victimization, and related topics since 1975. Associated with the CCRC is an internationally recognized group of experts who have published numerous books and articles concerning the incidence and impact of violence committed against children.

More information about CCRC publications and activities is available from the Program Administrator and at www.unh.edu/ccrc.



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Online Victimization of Youth: Five Years Later

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