UKCCIS
UK COUNCIL FOR CHILD INTERNET SAFETY

CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN RESEARCH CENTER

Online Harassment in Context: Trends from Three Youth Internet Safety Surveys (2000, 2005, 2010)

Aims

The YISS studies examined the online harassment experiences of youth in the U.S. over the last decade and the changing characteristics of these incidents during this period of time. It specifically examined: the extent to which online harassment victimization and perpetration behaviours have changed across the three survey points (2000, 2005, 2010); whether demographics and Internet use patterns changed for all youth Internet users compared with harassment victims; and the extent to which online harassment incident characteristics and outcomes changed between 2000 and 2010.

Key Findings

Trends in Online Harassment Victimization and Behaviour
- The proportion of youth who were victims of any online harassment increased across the three YISS administrations (6% in 2000 to 11% in 2010). This was driven by a greater proportion of youth in 2010 who indicated that they were threatened or embarrassed by someone posting or sending messages about them online (2% in 2000 to 5% in 2010).
- There was no significant increase in youth being bothered or harassed online in the direct harassment question. Harassment incidents in which the youth was upset or embarrassed as a result, or the behaviour happened more than once, increased in similar proportion to overall harassment. Distressing harassment increased from 3% in 2005 to 5% in 2010. In addition, repeated harassment increased from 2% in 2000 to 5% in 2010.
- The percentage of more serious harassment, either repeated harassment or incidents that caused victims distress, were experienced by only 5% of youth in 2010.
- The YISS studies also showed a steady increase in the percentage of youth who reported harassing behaviour toward others between 2000 and 2010. The majority of this behaviour took the form of making rude or nasty comments online, which increased from 14% in 2000 to 40% in 2010.

Changes in Demographics and Internet Use for Harassed Youth
- The rates of female versus male victims of online harassment changed significantly across the three YISS samples. In 2000, the sample of harassed youth was equally split between males and females, but by 2010 69% of harassed youth were female. This difference stands in contrast to the lack of significant changes in respondent gender in the full YISS samples. There was no change, however, in age distribution of harassment victims, with 13- to 15-year-olds making up the largest proportion of harassed youth in all three cohorts.

Changes in Online Harassment Incident Characteristics
- The percentage of female aggressors increased from 20% in 2000 to 48% in 2010.
- An increased percentage of aggressors were also identified as friends from school (23% in 2000 to 58% in 2010) and, decreasingly, persons that the youth had met online.
- In all three waves, most victims either knew or believed the harasser was under the age of 18 years, though 16-20% of reported that they did not know the age of the harasser.

Disclosure
- The proportion of online harassment incidents that were disclosed overall did not change across the three time points. The majority of online harassment incidents were disclosed, and the trend

increased in the direction of more disclosure. Disclosure to school staff increased from 2% in 2005 to 12% in 2010. Disclosure to a parent or guardian decreased between 2000 and 2005, but then increased from 32% to 40% in 2010.

- Overall disclosure of distressing harassment incidents significantly increased from 68% in 2000 to 87% in 2010, with an increase in disclosures to school staff driving the overall increase (from 11% in 2000 to 21% in 2010).
- There were also changes in how the harassment incident was resolved. In 2010, youth were significantly less likely to end harassment by removing themselves from the situation (e.g., blocking the harasser, leaving site or the computer). In 2010, the incident was also more likely to end without the youth doing anything. Reporting the harassment to an authority (i.e., Internet service provider, CyberTipline, police) initially declined from 21% in 2000 to 9% in 2005, but increased slightly to 13% in 2010.

Policy Implications

Many education programs are untested and rely on educational strategies such as single-session, lecture-only assemblies that have been shown by well-designed prevention research to be ineffective (Jones & Finkelhor, 2011). Even if schools were able to identify research-based online harassment prevention interventions, it is unclear whether a unique focus on online harassment or cyberbullying is advisable, given increasing requirements on schools during an era of decreasing resources. One of the key critical components of prevention is a focus on building relational and social skills (e.g., perspective-taking, emotional regulation, communication skills, effective bystander intervention).[1] These are skills that would translate to any environment or communication modality, and minimizes the concern adults have about predicting which websites or technologies are going to be the next popular trend among youth.

Methodology

The YISS surveys (YISS-1, YISS-2, and YISS-3) were detailed and structured telephone questionnaires designed to quantify youth experiences with unwanted sexual solicitations, harassment, and unwanted exposure to pornography on the Internet. This method was used to collect extensive data from a large, nationally representative sample in a way that maximized respondent privacy. Respondents were aged 10-17, who had used the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months, and a caregiver. Data collection for YISS-1, YISS-2, and YISS-3 occurred between August 1999 and February 2000, March and June 2005, and August 2010 and January 2011 respectively. For all three YISS studies, a sample size of 1,500 was predetermined based upon a maximum expected sampling error of < 2.5% at the 5% significance level.

Source Jones, L. M., Mitchell, K. J., & Finkelhor, D. (2013). Online harassment in context: Trends from three Youth Internet Safety Surveys (2000, 2005, 2010). *Psychology of Violence*, 3(1), 53–69.
http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/Online%20Harassment%20in%20Context.pdf

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[1] Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-32.