

Online Victimization of Youth: Observations and Proposals

David Finkelhor
Crimes against Children Research Center

June 1st, 2006
Stockholm, Sweden

Funded by the
National Center for Missing & Exploited Children and US Department of Justice, OJJDP

1

Modern anxiety and fears induced by new technology



2

Assessing Impact of New Technology

- Guard against alarmist reactions
- Look for deeper patterns
- Rely on scientific evidence

3

Benefits of Internet for Youth

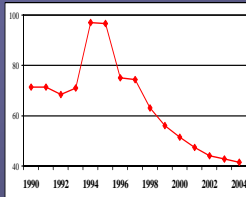
Education, Information, Recreation, Communication

- Helps adolescents feel less isolated
- Helps them pursue individual interests
- Lets them interact more as equals with adults

4

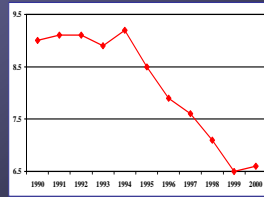
Declines in Teen Problems

Teen Runaways



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigations: Crime in the United States 1991-2004.

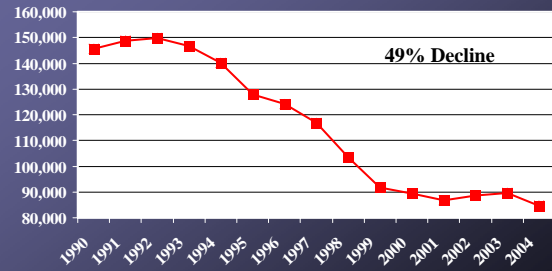
Teen Suicide



Source: Center for Disease Control: WISQARS (fatal suicides, all types)

5

Sexual Abuse Substantiations 1990-2004*: Extrapolated to U. S. Child Population



*Source: NCANDS

6

Internet Enhances Law Enforcement

- Police can impersonate youth
 - Arrest offenders before a youth is harmed
- Police can find networks of offenders
- Strengthens prosecution of offenders
 - Better evidence

7

Internet-initiated sex crimes target teenagers, not younger children

8

Next Steps for Prevention Programs

- Prevention should be aimed at teens – Few younger kids being targeted
 - Kids in middle and high school
 - Acknowledge teen interests & independence
 - Acknowledge teen interest in sex
 - Different messages for different ages
 - Don't leave out older kids – those 16 & 17

9

Next Steps for Prevention Programs

Focus on teen desires for love and romance

- Illusions of love
- Romantic fantasy

10

Next Steps for Prevention Programs

Be frank with youth about online sexual activities

- Going to x-rated chatrooms
- Talking about sex with people they meet online
- Looking at pornography
- Cybersex

11

Prevention of Sexual Photos

- Possibly increasing youth involvement in the making and transmission of sexual photos
 - Teach what is illegal
 - Dangers of permanent dissemination of pictures
 - Understanding of voyeurism and exhibitionism as perversions
 - Educate parents about misuse of webcams and digital cameras

12

Teens may use the Internet to "hit on" other teens

Sexual requests are made between adolescents who know each other from school and other places

- No evidence these incidents are less harmful or disturbing
- Much sexual victimization among youth is perpetrated by peers
- Use prevention to discourage adolescent offending

13

Next Steps for Prevention Programs

Deal with online bullying

- Harassment, threats and other offensive behavior

14

Preventing online bullying

- Describe problem effectively for kids, parents and officials
- Include online bullying in anti-bullying programs in schools
- Propose codes of conduct
- Urge strong sanctions by schools and youth groups for online bullying

15

Promote Reporting of Offensive Behavior

- Reporting is low and knowledge about reporting declined
- Desensitization, cynicism, discouragement, ignorance

16

Motivate People to Report:

Teach reasons to report

17

Increase the number and visibility of reporting options.

18

Enhance Reporting Mechanisms.

19

Enhance Internet Accountability.

20

*Train mental health, youth service
and educational professionals to
recognize and respond to Internet
problems.*

21

The End

22