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Online Pornography Exposure Among Youth Focus of UNH Study

By [Erika Mantz](#)
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603-862-1567

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DURHAM, N.H. , Youth who go to chat rooms, use computers in other people's homes and engage in risky online behavior tend to encounter more unwanted online pornography, according to a new study by University of New Hampshire researchers. In contrast, youth in households with filtering and blocking software are exposed to pornography somewhat less.

These findings are published in the March 2003 issue of the journal Youth and Society by researchers Kimberly Mitchell, David Finkelhor and Janis Wolak of UNH's Crimes against Children Research Center.

The study was unable to show that parental supervision was associated with any reduction in exposure. But the authors cautioned that parents may have exaggerated the level of monitoring and supervision they engaged in.

In their article, the researchers expressed disappointment that the acrimonious public debate about children, pornography and the Internet has not been informed by more social science research.

They point out that most of the debate has proceeded around the assumption that most youth who are exposed to pornography are doing so voluntarily. Yet, in their findings, a quarter of youth said they had been exposed to pornography involuntarily over the course of a year. The authors contend that public policies for preventing unwanted exposure may entail different approaches and garner more general agreement.

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