Unwanted Online Sexual Exposures Decline for Youth, New UNH Research Finds Improving Online Environment May Be Result of Greater Public Awareness

Lori Wright
UNH Media Relations

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/news

Recommended Citation
https://scholars.unh.edu/news/3833

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administrative Offices at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Relations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.
Unwanted Online Sexual Exposures Decline for Youth, New UNH Research Finds
Improving Online Environment May Be Result Of Greater Public Awareness

December 15, 2011

DURHAM, N.H. – A new study from the University of New Hampshire Crimes against Children Research Center finds declines in two kinds of youth Internet sexual encounters of great concern to parents: unwanted sexual solicitations and unwanted exposure to pornography. The researchers suspect that greater public awareness may have been, in part, what has helped.

The study found that the percentage of youth receiving unwanted online sexual requests declined from 13 percent in 2005 to 9 percent in 2010. Youth experiencing unwanted pornography exposure declined from 34 percent to 23 percent over the same period.

On the other hand, youth reports of online harassment increased slightly from 2005, up from 9 percent to 11 percent.


“The constant news about Internet dangers may give the impression that all Internet problems have been getting worse for youth but actually that is not the case,” said lead author Lisa Jones, research associate professor of psychology at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center. “The online environment may be improving.”

Jones pointed out that unwanted sexual solicitations are down more than 50 percent since 2000, when attention first was drawn to the problem.

“The arrests, the publicity and the education may have tamped down the sexual soliciting online” said author Kimberly Mitchell, research assistant professor of psychology at the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center. “The more effective safety and screening features incorporated into websites and networks may have helped reduce the unwanted encounters with pornography.”

Jones said harassment may not have fallen because attention to that online problem has been more recent. “Hopefully, the new focus on online harassment will produce some of the same improvements in this problem that we have seen in sexual solicitations,” she said.

The authors cautioned that unwanted sexual solicitations should not be understood as necessarily communications from adult online predators. Previous research has found that while youth do not know the source of all the unwanted sexual solicitations they receive, when they did know, half were believed to come from other youth.

Created in 1998, the UNH Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) works to combat crimes against children by providing high-quality research and statistics to the public, policy makers, law enforcement personnel, and other child welfare practitioners. CCRC is concerned with research about the nature of crimes including child abduction, homicide, rape, assault, and physical and sexual abuse as well as their impact. 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 against children. Visit the center online at http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/index.html.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship...
public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

-30-

Lisa Jones can be reached at lisa.jones@unh.edu and 603-862-2515. For a copy of the full journal article, contact Lori Wright at lori.wright@unh.edu.

Media Contact: Lori Wright | 603-862-0574 | UNH Media Relations

UNH Experts available for comment:

- David Finkelhor
- Lisa Jones
- Kimberly Mitchell

Copyright © 2012 UNH Media Relations, 15 Strafford Ave, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

UNH is part of the University System of New Hampshire.