

## Trends in Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material: Findings from the Youth Internet Safety Studies

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This is the third of a series of four bulletins highlighting the results of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS). This bulletin documents overall trends in unwanted exposure to sexual material between YISS-1, conducted in 2000, YISS-2, conducted in 2005, and YISS-3, conducted in 2010; as well as details about the 2010 exposure episodes.

Worry about the possible harms to youth of being exposed to online pornography have been expressed by the medical establishment<sup>1-4</sup>, psychologists<sup>5,6</sup>, the public sector<sup>7</sup>, Congress<sup>8,9</sup> and even the U.S. Supreme Court<sup>10,11</sup>. Fueling this concern is knowledge that many youth are exposed to online pornography<sup>12-18</sup>. Some of this exposure is voluntary. In a 2005 survey, the authors found that 13% of youth Internet users ages 10 through 17 visited X-rated web sites on purpose in the past year<sup>12</sup>. But even more youth, 34%, were exposed to online pornography they do not want to see<sup>12</sup>. This degree of unwanted exposure may be a new phenomenon, since prior to the Internet there were few places youth frequented where they might regularly encounter unsought pornography.

While there is evidence that most youth are not particularly upset when they come across unwanted pornography on the Internet<sup>12,15</sup>, unwanted exposure could have more of an impact on some youth than voluntary encounters with pornography. Some youth could be psychologically and developmentally unprepared for unwanted exposure, and online images may be more graphic and extreme than pornography available from other sources<sup>7,12</sup>.

### DEFINITION OF UNWANTED EXPOSURE TO SEXUAL MATERIAL

- **Unwanted exposure:** 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 email or links in email.
- **Distressing unwanted exposure:** episodes where youth rated themselves as very or extremely upset as a result of the incident.

### How the Youth Internet Safety Surveys were Conducted

- ◆ Telephone interviews with unique nationally-representative samples of young Internet users, age 10 to 17: 1501 in YISS-1, 1500 in YISS-2, and 1560 in YISS-3 (See Table 1 for youth demographic characteristics).
- ◆ "Internet use" was defined as using the Internet at least once a month for the past 6 months at home, school, a friend's home, a library, a cell phone, or some other location.
- ◆ One parent or guardian was interviewed first for about 10 minutes.
- ◆ With consent of the parent or guardian, youth were interviewed for about 30 minutes.
- ◆ Care was taken to preserve privacy and confidentiality during interviews.
- ◆ Youth participants received \$10 checks and information about Internet safety.
- ◆ The YISS interviews took place from:
  - ◇ YISS-1: Aug. 1999 to Feb. 2000
  - ◇ YISS-2: March to June 2005
  - ◇ YISS-3: Aug. 2010 to Jan. 2011

**Table 1: Youth & Household Characteristics for 2000, 2005 & 2010 Samples**

<b>Youth and Household Characteristics</b>	<b>2000 (n=1501) %</b>	<b>2005 (n=1500) %</b>	<b>2010 (n=1560) %</b>	<b>p value</b>
<b>Gender (male)</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>.08</b>
<b>Age</b>				
10 to 12	23	23	21	.02
13 to 15	48	43	45	
16 to 17	29	34	34	
<b>Race</b>				
White, non-Hispanic	73	71	67	.002
Black, non-Hispanic	10	11	13	
Hispanic or Latino, any Race	7	9	10	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	1	3	
Asian	3	2	3	
Other (includes bi-racial)	2	3	2	
Don't know/not ascertainable	4	3	2	
<b>Parental marital status</b>				
Married	79	76	78	.01
Living with a partner	1	3	2	
Separated	3	1	2	
Divorced	10	10	10	
Widowed	2	2	2	
Single, never married	5	8	6	
<b>Youth lives with both biological parents</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>.04</b>
<b>Highest level of education in household</b>				
Not a high school (HS) graduate	3	2	3	<.001
HS graduate	21	20	14	
Some college	22	23	19	
College graduate	32	32	37	
Post college degree	22	22	28	
<b>Annual household income</b>				
Less than \$20,000	8	8	12	<.001
\$20,000 to \$50,000	38	27	18	
More than \$50,000 to \$75,000	23	24	16	
More than \$75,000	23	33	45	
Don't know/missing	7	8	9	

**CHANGES IN YOUTH INTERNET USE PATTERNS OVER TIME**

Between 2000 and 2010 a number of changes occurred in terms of how youth were using the Internet (Table 2).

- By 2010 almost all youth (97%) were using the Internet from home, up from 74% in 2000. Almost half of youth (47%) were using the Internet from cell phones.
- Frequency of use also increased – 76% of youth said they used the Internet in the past week in 2000; 86% in 2005; 94% in 2010.
- Intensity of use also increased – 32% of youth said they used the Internet for more than 2 hours per day in 2010, up from 13% in 2000 and 23% in 2005.
- Many youth (69%) also said they used the Internet 5 to 7 days per week in 2010 (36% did so in 2000 and 49% in 2005).
- More youth were using the Internet to talk with people they knew in person offline, like friends from school (93%) and less with people they met online (40%) by 2010.

**Topics Covered in the YISS Interviews**

- ◆ Experiences of sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and harassment via the Internet in the past year and reactions to those experiences.
- ◆ Involvement in sexting in the past year, including the content of the images and the context in which such events occur (YISS-3 only).
- ◆ The nature of friendships formed over the Internet in the past year.
- ◆ Knowledge of Internet safety practices among young 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.

Because we used the same methods and asked most of the same questions in all three studies, we are able to compare many results to see what has changed over the past decade.

**Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material Trends**

In 2010 approximately 1 in 4 youth Internet users (23%) reported an unwanted exposure to sexual material in the past year (See Figure 1). This presents a decline from 34% in 2005 after an initial increase from 24% in 2000. Overall, reports of unwanted exposure declined 4% over the past decade.

**What youth said about unwanted exposure in 2010**

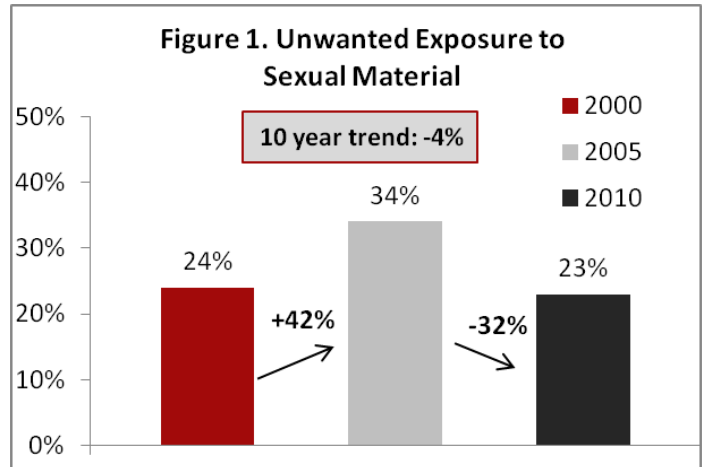
“Just this thing popped up and it was like hot sexy lesbians now and had naked girls on it.” – Girl, 17

“It showed naked people and a girl sucking a guy’s penis. That’s about it because I turned it off after that.” – Girl, 13

“I was looking for a site at school and I typed in one wrong letter and it brought up this porno site.” – Boy, 14

“My friend sent me an email and it contained naked pictures.” – Boy, 16

“I was trying to go to DicksSportingGoods.com and I ended up at dicks.com.” – Girl, 11



**Table 2: Youth Internet Use Patterns Between 2000, 2005 & 2010 (N=4,561), %**

Internet Use Characteristics	2000 (n=1501)	2005 (n=1500)	2010 (n=1560)	p value
<b>Location(s) youth spent time on the Internet in past year <sup>a</sup></b>				
Home	74	91	97	<.001
School	73	90	89	<.001
Friend’s home <sup>b</sup>	69	69	70	.71
Cellular telephone	–	17	47	<.001
Other place (includes library)	5	43	38	<.001
<b>Last time youth used Internet</b>				
Past week	76	86	94	<.001
Past 2 weeks	11	6	3	
Past month or longer	13	8	3	
<b>Number of hours youth spent on Internet on a typical day when online</b>				
1 hour or less	61	45	38	<.001
More than 1 hour to 2 hours	26	31	31	
More than 2 hours	13	23	32	
<b>Number of days youth went on Internet in a typical week <sup>c</sup></b>				
1 day or less	18	8	4	<.001
2 to 4 days	47	42	27	
5 to 7 days	36	49	69	
<b>How youth used Internet</b>				
Went to chat rooms <sup>d</sup>	56	30	48	<.001
Social networking sites	---	---	80	---
<b>Who youth talked to online <sup>e</sup></b>				
People youth knew in person offline	81	87	93	<.001
People youth knew only online	46	43	40	.004

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses possible.

<sup>b</sup> In YISS-1 we asked if youth used the Internet in “other households,” which included friends’ homes. In YISS-2 & 3, we specifically asked all youth if they used the Internet at friends’ homes.

<sup>c</sup> Based on youth who used the Internet in the past week or past 2 weeks (n=1284 for YISS-1; n=1264 for YISS-2; n=1491 for YISS-3).

<sup>d</sup> In YISS-1 & 2 we asked one general question about using chat rooms, in YISS-3 we asked youth whether they used video chat (ChatRoulette, Omegle, Skype) and chat rooms that do not include video separately. For the purposes of these analyses these two categories were combined.

<sup>e</sup> Answers not mutually exclusive.

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

**Distressing exposure** followed a similar up and down pattern, from 6% in 2000 to 9% in 2005 to 5% in 2010; indicating a 17% decline over the past decade (See Figure 2). The proportion of unwanted exposure episodes that were distressing remained relatively stable: 23% in 2000, 26% in 2005, and 22% in 2010.

**What youth said about distressing exposure in 2010**

“Surfing the web and came across website that had X-rated movies. Looked at the website and was shocked.” – Boy, 13

“My brother and his friends opened and made me watch it.” – Boy, 13

“I was looking for a vocab word and accidentally typed in ‘I feel lucky’ in Google and was like woah!” – Boy, 14

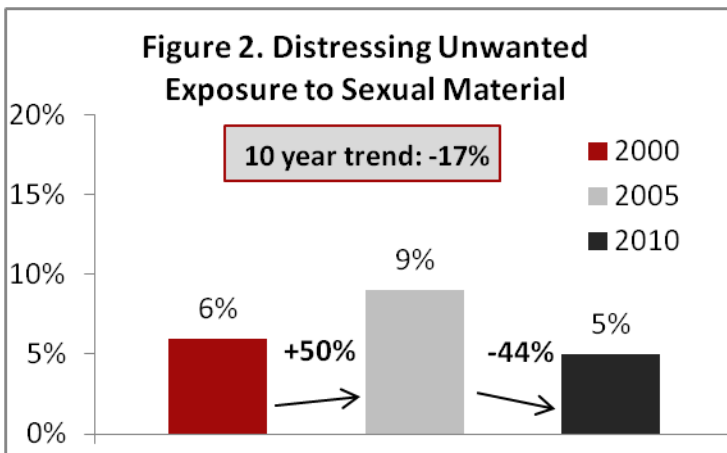
“I was going to an all-girls website where you play games. I typed in the website and it was just people having sex and kissing and stuff.” – Girl, 13

“I clicked on the link and it was two people naked. They were touching each other, It bothered me because I didn’t know it was just going to pop up like that.” – Girl, 15

**Table 3: Characteristics of Youth Experiencing Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material between 2000, 2005 & 2010**

Youth and Household Characteristics	2000 (n=95) %	2005 (n=130) %	2010 (n=176) %	p value
<b>Youth sex</b>				
Male	58	54	51	.34
Female	42	46	49	
<b>Youth age</b>				
10-12 years	8	13	14	.01
13-15 years	53	44	45	
16-17 years	39	43	42	
<b>Youth race/ethnicity</b>				
White	74	74	67	.28
Black	10	9	13	
Hispanic	9	11	11	
Other	6	5	7	
Missing	2	2	1	
<b>Household income</b>				
< \$20K	6	6	11	<.001
\$20K to \$50K	35	24	17	
\$51K to \$75K	25	24	17	
> \$75K	29	37	44	
Missing	6	10	12	

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



**Key Trends in Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material (Tables 3 & 4)**

- Much of the change in reports of unwanted exposure occurred between 2000 and 2005 when examined by age. The youngest youth (ages 10-12) still report minimal exposure.
- Between 2005 and 2010 we saw a decline in exposure to all types of sexual material including naked people, people having sex and sexual images that were violent.
- We saw a decline in exposure while surfing the web but an increase in exposure by clicking on links in email or instant message.
- In 2010 fewer youth said they could tell the site was X-rated before entering and fewer youth were exposed on more than one occasion.
- There was no change in overall rates of disclosure over time; but declines were noted between 2000 and 2005 for disclosure to specific types of individuals – friends and parents or guardians. No change was noted in these categories between 2005 and 2010.

**Table 4: Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material Incident Characteristics and Outcomes between 2000, 2005 & 2010**

Incident characteristics	2000 (n=376) %	2005 (n=512) %	2010 (n=361) %	p value
<b>Type of material youth saw</b>				
Pictures of naked people	95	85	65	<.001
Pictures of people having sex	32	36	24	.001
Pictures that were violent	8	13	8	.03
Pictures that involved animals or other strange things	0	9	5	<.001
<b>How youth was exposed</b>				
Surfing the web	73	87	71	<.001
Opening e-mail or IM or clicking on link in e-mail or IM	27	18	33	<.001
<b>Youth could tell material was X-rated before entering</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>.04</b>
<b>Exposure occurred more than one time</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
<b>INCIDENT OUTCOMES</b>				
<b>Incident was disclosed to someone <sup>a</sup></b>				
Friend	44	47	40	.21
Sibling	26	15	16	<.001
Parent/guardian	4	2	1	.03
School staff	39	27	24	<.001
Other	3	3	1	.07
<b>Incident ever reported to ISP, Cyber Tipline, or police (or found out some other way)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>&lt;1</b>	<b>.004</b>
<b>How situation ended <sup>a, b</sup></b>				
Removed self from situation (blocked sender, left site or computer)	---	90	77	<.001
<b>Any distress: very/extremely upset</b>				
Upset	24	27	22	.28
<b>Very/extremely embarrassed</b>				
Texting	21	27	26	.11
Other	0	0	6	
Don't know	7	17	10	
	3	4	1	
<b>Soliciting behaviors occurred more than 1 time during year</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>.003</b>
<b>INCIDENT OUTCOMES</b>				
<b>Incident disclosed to someone <sup>a</sup></b>				
Friend	39	43	53	.03
Sibling	26	25	37	.05
Parent/guardian	2	3	5	.47
School staff	25	11	19	.001
Other	1	2	1	.69
<b>Ever reported to or found out by ISP, Cyber Tipline, or police</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>.19</b>
<b>How situation ended <sup>a</sup></b>				
Removed self from situation (blocked solicitor, left site or computer)	62	65	49	.006
Told solicitor to stop	13	16	22	.09
Changed screen name, profile, email, or phone number	4	5	2	.45
Called police	1	1	1	.93
Stopped without doing anything	4	3	7	.23
Situation still happening	1	0	0	.31
Other	20	20	25	.37
<b>Any distress: very/extremely upset or afraid</b>				
Upset	25	33	28	.13
Afraid	20	29	22	.08
Very/extremely embarrassed	13	20	16	.14
	17	21	20	.53

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses possible<sup>b</sup> Not asked in 2000

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

## 2010 Data Only

### Who were the youth reporting unwanted exposure? (Table 5)

- Unwanted exposure was reported by youth of all ages: overall 42% were ages 16 or 17; 45% were ages 13-15 and 14% were ages 10-12. Distressing incidents similarly covered the age spectrum but was reported by more of the younger youth (25% of 10-12 year olds).
- About equal numbers of girls and boys reported unwanted exposure; this was also true for distressing exposure.

**Table 5: Characteristics of Youth Reporting Unwanted Exposure to Sexual Material in 2010, %**

Youth Characteristics	All Incidents (n=361) 23% of Youth	Distressing Incidents (n=79) 5% of Youth
<b>Age of youth</b>		
10	3	6
11	4	9
12	7	10
13	12	15
14	18	24
15	15	5
16	21	11
17	21	19
<b>Gender of youth</b>		
Girl	49	51
Boy	51	49

### How often and where did unwanted exposure occur? (Table 6)

- Over half of youth said unwanted exposure happened more than once over the course of a year.
- Virtually all exposure happened on a desktop or laptop computer (92%); only 1% happened through a cell phone.
- Most exposure (81%) happened on a computer the youth was using at home.
- 66% of youth saw pictures of naked people; 24% saw people having sex.
- A minority (8%) of youth saw pictures that were violent; 13% of distressing exposure involved violent sexual pictures.
- Most youth were exposed while they were surfing the web (68%); 32% when opening and email or clicking on a link in an email.
- 15% of youth could tell the material was X-rated before entering the site or clicking on the link.

**Table 6. Type, Length and Location of Unwanted Exposure in 2010, %**

Incident Characteristics	All (n=376)	Distressing (n=82)
<b>Number of times happened in past year</b>		
One time	44	50
2 times	26	21
3 to 5 times	16	16
6 or more times	8	6
Don't know / not ascertainable	6	7
<b>Type of technology using the most to access Internet when this happened</b>		
Desktop computer	59	63
Laptop computer	33	29
Cell phone	1	1
Video game console	1	0
Portable gaming device	0	0
Other	1	2
Don't know / not ascertainable	5	4
<b>Location where incident usually happened</b>		
Home	81	80
School	5	2
Public library	1	1
Friend's home	6	10
Public place (e.g., mall)	0	0
On the way to or from school	0	0
Some other place	1	2
Don't know / not ascertainable	5	4
<b>Type of material youth saw</b>		
Pictures of naked people	66	61
Pictures of people having sex	24	21
Pictures that were violent	8	13
Pictures that involved animals or other strange things	5	4
<b>How youth was exposed</b>		
Surfing the web	68	74
Opening e-mail or IM or clicking on link in e-mail or IM	32	26
<b>Youth could tell material was X-rated before entering</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>

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



## 2010 Data Only

### Surfing exposure (Table 7)

- Of the exposures that happened as when surfing the web, 39% happened during an online search, 12% while doing research for school, 25% did not know.
- In 38% of episodes the link came up as a result of a search, 16% through a misspelled web address, 14% when the youth clicked on a link when in another web site.
- 3% of youth said they went back to the site after the unwanted exposure occurred.

**Table 7: Surfing Exposure in 2010**

Incident Characteristics	All (n=256)	Distressing (n=61)
<b>Where on Internet this (first) happened</b>		
Social networking site	13	5
In a video chat room	1	0
Doing an online search	39	46
Using instant messages	1	0
On a website	3	3
Downloading something from a file sharing program	1	0
YouTube	4	3
Doing school research	12	18
Somewhere else		0
Don't know / not ascertainable (NA)	25	25
<b>How web site came up</b>		
Link came up as a result of search	38	33
Misspelled web address	16	20
Clicked on link in other site	14	13
Pop-up	8	7
Other	5	3
Don't know / NA	19	25
<b>Youth has gone back to site</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>

### E-mail and instant message exposure (Table 8)

- Of the youth who reported unwanted exposure while opening an email or clicking a link in an email or IM, a little over half said this was a personal address.
- Few youth knew the sender of the email (17%) Of those who did, over half (62%) were male and 86% were younger than 18 years old.
- All senders in distressing episodes were males under the age of 18.

**Table 8: Email and Instant Message Exposure in 2010**

Incident Characteristics	All (n=120)	Distressing (n=21)
<b>Youth received e-mail or IM at a personal address</b>	55	48
<b>Sender known</b>	<b>17 (n=21)</b>	<b>14 (n=3)</b>
<b>Sender sex</b>		
Male	62	100
Female	38	0
<b>Sender age</b>		
Younger than 18 years	86	100
18 to 25 years	14	0
Older than 25 years	0	0

### How did the unwanted exposure end and who do youth tell? (Table 9)

- Most youth (78%) removed themselves from the situation to end it.
- 40% told someone about what happened – usually a parent (59%) or friend (41%).
- More youth reporting a distressing exposure told a parent (73% of those who disclosed).
- Virtually no unwanted exposure were known or disclosed to police or and Internet Service Provider.
- Of the youth who did not disclose, most said it was not serious enough; 32% of youth who did not disclose a distressing exposure said it was too embarrassing.
- Almost half (47%) of exposure that happened on computers in the home had software that blocked pop-up ads or SPAM email; 26% had other software that filtered, blocked or monitored how you use the Internet.
- One-third of families installed some kind of software to keep this from happening again.

### How distressing were the unwanted exposure episodes? (Table 10)

- Most youth (75%) were not upset as a result of what happened.
- 16% reported at least one stress symptom as a result.

**Table 9. Ending the Situation and Disclosure of Unwanted Exposure in 2010, %**

Incident Characteristics (Surfing and E-Mail/IM)	All (n=376)	Distressing (n=82)
<b>How situation ended <sup>a</sup></b>		
Removed self from situation (blocking or leaving site or computer)	78	83
Told sender to stop/confronted or warned sender	1	0
Changed screen name, profile, or e-mail address	2	0
Stopped without youth doing anything	1	0
Called law enforcement or other authorities, ISP	1	1
Parent/guardian or teacher handled situation	1	2
Still happening	< 1	0
Other (not specified)	15	15
Don't know / not ascertainable	3	0
<b>Incident known or disclosed to <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>40 (n=152)</b>	<b>49 (n=40)</b>
Friend	41	27
Brother or sister	3	5
Parent/guardian	59	73
Other adult relative	6	10
Teacher, counselor, or other school personnel	1	3
Law enforcement or other authority, ISP	0	0
Someone else (not specified)	4	7
<b>Ever known to or disclosed to ISP or police</b>		<b>0</b>
<b>Of youth who did not tell anyone, why didn't youth tell</b>	<b>55 (n=209)</b>	<b>50 (n=41)</b>
Not serious enough	63	46
Too scared	2	5
Too embarrassing	12	32
Thought might get in trouble	5	10
Thought might lose Internet access	1	0
Happens all the time	2	0
Other (not specified)	14	15
Don't know / not ascertainable	3	0
<b>Blocking and filtering Software</b>		
Software on computer to block pop-up ads or SPAM email when this happened <sup>b</sup>	47	46
Other software on computer to filter, block or monitor Internet use when this happened <sup>b</sup>	26	26
After this happened, family installed any kind of software to keep this from happening again <sup>b</sup>	33	39

**Table 10. Distress Related to Unwanted Exposure in 2010, %**

Incident Characteristics (Surfing and E-Mail/IM)	All (n=376)	Distressing (n=82)
<b>Distress: Very/extremely</b>		
Upset	22	100
Embarrassed	25	69
<b>Youth with no/low levels of being upset or afraid</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Stress symptoms (more than a little/all the time) <sup>c</sup></b>		
<b>At least one of the following <sup>a</sup></b>	<b>16</b>	<b>46</b>
Staying away from Internet or particular part of it	6	18
Being unable to stop thinking about it	9	27
Feeling jumpy or irritable	6	18
Losing interest in things	3	10

<sup>a</sup> Multiple responses possible.

<sup>b</sup> Only asked of youth with Internet at home (n=306 for all incidents, n=66 for distressing incidents).

<sup>c</sup> 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.



## MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. **After an initial increased in unwanted exposure to sexual material between 2000 and 2005, it declined again by 2010.** Twenty-four percent of youth in 2000 reported unwanted exposure to sexual material; this increased to 34% in 2005, but declined again to 23% in 2010. The decrease in exposure could be due to two factors. First, spamwares and filters have been increasingly present on networks and individual computers, and their detection capacities have become more refined. Second, young people may have become better educated and more savvy about opening unidentified e-mail or clicking unidentified links.
2. **15% of youth could tell the sexual material was X-rated before entering the web site; 3% returned to the site.** This is likely due to some degree of adolescent sexual curiosity. It is part of normal adolescent development to be interested in and curious about sex. Even though these situations initially stemmed from an unwanted situation, youth may be curious enough to explore what is popping up on the screen in front of them, some even chose to go back and explore it further. Still others may return to show the site to their parents.

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### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

More information about the Youth Internet Safety Surveys and other youth victimization is available on the Crimes against Children Research Center web site:

<http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/internet-crimes/>



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