

Trends in Unwanted Sexual Solicitations: Findings from the Youth Internet Safety Studies

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This is the first of four bulletins highlighting the results of the 3rd Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS). This bulletin documents overall trends in unwanted sexual solicitation between YISS-1, conducted in 2000, YISS-2, conducted in 2005, and YISS-3, conducted in 2010; as well as details about the 2010 sexual solicitation episodes.

HISTORY OF THE YOUTH INTERNET SAFETY SURVEY

There has been considerable and growing concern voiced by schools, parents and the public about what youth experience while using the Internet and other electronic technologies. The last decade saw significant and rapid changes in youth online activity: Internet use has now expanded to encompass almost all youth¹. Moreover, the nature of youth Internet use changed during this time with an increase in the use of cell- and smart-phones, and the migration of adolescent social activity to social networking sites². However, this rapid expansion in technology use has occurred during a period of time in which child victimization has declined significantly³⁻⁶.

In 1999 and 2000, the first Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-1) was conducted to address concerns about adults using the Internet to sexually solicit youth, young people encountering sexual material online and youth being threatened and harassed through the Internet. While YISS-1 found that many youth who used the Internet encountered such episodes, most of these incidents were relatively mild and not very disturbing to youth. However, some were serious and distressing.

We conducted the second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2) in 2005 to reassess the extent to which young Internet users were encountering problems five years later, gauge whether the incidence and characteristics of these episodes had changed, explore new areas of interest, review emerging technologies, ascertain the effect those technologies have on the issue, and assess threats

to youth. Compared to YISS-1, the results of YISS-2 showed that a smaller proportion of youth had received unwanted online sexual solicitations and a smaller proportion had interacted online with strangers. However, larger proportions of youth reported being exposed to pornography they did not want to see and were being harassed online.

In 2010, the third Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-3) was conducted to continue to track existing trends in the number and types of threats youth encounter using technology; assess risks of new behaviors and activities, including youth creating and distributing explicit images of themselves and/or peers; assess benefits and utilization of safety programs and technologies; and identify activities and behaviors most closely associated with risk. This document reviews key findings from YISS-3.

DEFINITIONS

- **Sexual solicitations:** Requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk, or give personal sexual information that were unwanted or, whether wanted or not, made by an adult.
- **Aggressive sexual solicitations:** Sexual solicitations that involved offline contact with the solicitor through mail, by telephone or in person – or attempts or requests for offline contact.
- **Distressing sexual solicitations** were episodes where youth rated themselves as being very or extremely upset or afraid as a result of the incident.

How YISS-1, 2 & 3 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

Topics covered in the 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.

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

	2000 (n=1501) %	2005 (n=1500) %	2010 (n=1560) %	p value
Gender (male)	53	49	50	.08
Age				
10 to 12 years old	23	23	21	.02
13 to 15 years old	48	43	45	
16 to 17 years old	29	34	34	
Race				
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	
Parental marital status				
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	
Youth lives with both biological parents	63	62	66	.04
Highest level of edu- cation in household				
Not a high school graduate	3	2	3	<.001
High school graduate	21	20	14	
Some college education	22	23	19	
College graduate	32	32	37	
Post college degree	22	22	28	
Annual household income				
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	

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
Location(s) youth spent time on the Internet in past year^a				
Home	74	91	97	<.001
School	73	90	89	<.001
Friend's home ^b	69	69	70	.71
Cellular telephone	–	17	47	<.001
Other place (includes library)	5	43	38	<.001
Last time youth used Internet				
Past week	76	86	94	<.001
Past 2 weeks	11	6	3	
Past month or longer	13	8	3	
Number of hours youth spent on Internet on typical day when online				
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	
Number of days youth went on Internet in a typical week^c				
1 day or less	18	8	4	<.001
2 to 4 days	47	42	27	
5 to 7 days	36	49	69	
How youth used Internet				
Went to chat rooms ^d	56	30	48	<.001
Social networking sites	---	---	80	---
Who youth talked to online^e				
People youth knew in person offline	81	87	93	<.001
People youth knew only online	46	43	40	.004

^a Multiple responses possible.

^b 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.

^c 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).

^d 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) & chat rooms that do not include video separately. For the purposes of these analyses these two categories were combined.

^e Answers not mutually exclusive.

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

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 and 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.

SEXUAL SOLICITATION OF YOUTH

When we conducted the first Youth Internet Safety Survey in 2000 there was a great concern about "online predators" using the Internet to find, meet and assault children. Our findings indicate that the risk from online predators is relatively small; most solicitors are other youth and many of the solicitations were very casual. Still, we identify some potentially more concerning solicitation episodes – those we call "aggressive" (those that involved offline contact, or an attempt at offline contact by the solicitor) and "distressing" (those where the youth said the incident made them very or extremely upset or afraid). Ten year trends across all these types are reported here.

Solicitation Trends

In 2010 approximately 1 in 11 youth Internet users (9%) received an unwanted sexual solicitation in the past year (See Figure 1). This continues a decline from 19% in 2000 to 13% in 2005. Overall, reports of unwanted sexual solicitations declined 53% over the past decade.

What youth said about solicitations in 2010:

“He asked me for a naked picture of myself and I kept saying no.” - Girl, 15

“I was on ChatRoulette with my friends because we thought it would be funny, and someone asked us to take our shirts off, and so we just hit next.” - Girl, 17

“A person wanted pictures and stuff and she got mad when I didn’t send them and I blocked her, it was someone I didn’t know before our internet interaction.” - Boy, 13

“My uncle was asking for inappropriate pictures.” - Girl, 15

Aggressive solicitations decreased slightly between 2005 and 2010 – 4% to 3% (See Figure 2). The overall ten-year trend in reports of aggressive sexual solicitations was 0%. However, the proportion of solicitations which were aggressive in nature increased slightly between 2005 and 2010 after a large increase from 2000. In 2000 the proportion of solicitations that were aggressive in nature was 15%, 31% in 2005, and 34% in 2010.

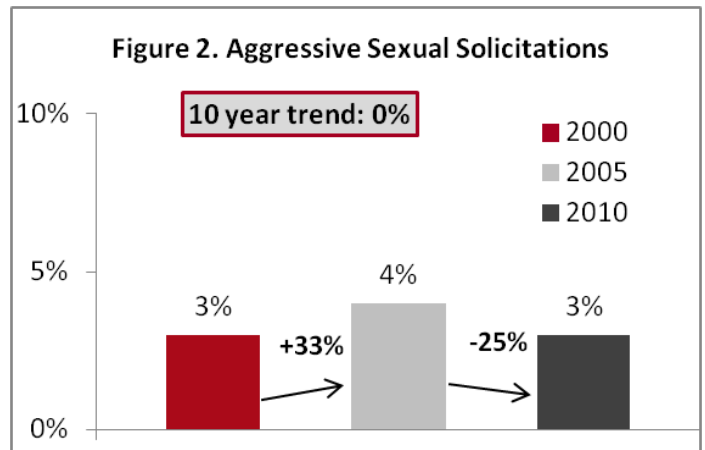
What youth said about aggressive solicitations in 2010:

“Well they just asked for photos and my number.” - Boy, 16

“He was just wanting to know what I’ve done so I can meet to have sex with hm.” - Girl, 15

“Well he showed up at my job, and he was a nice enough guy, and he asked for my number, and we were texting throughout the 2+ weeks, and he would ask me if I wanted to hang out in the middle of the night and if I would be willing to meet him someplace.” - Girl, 17

“My friend was just irritating me and he wouldn’t leave me alone. I kept saying no I’m too young, I don’t want to. Basically I had to stop talking to him.” - Girl, 11



Distressing sexual solicitations continued to decline, from 5% in 2000 to 4% in 2005 to 2% in 2010; indicating a 60% decline over the past decade (See Figure 3). The proportion of sexual solicitations that was distressing went from 25% in 2000 to 34% in 2005 to 27% in 2010.

What youth said about distressing solicitations in 2010

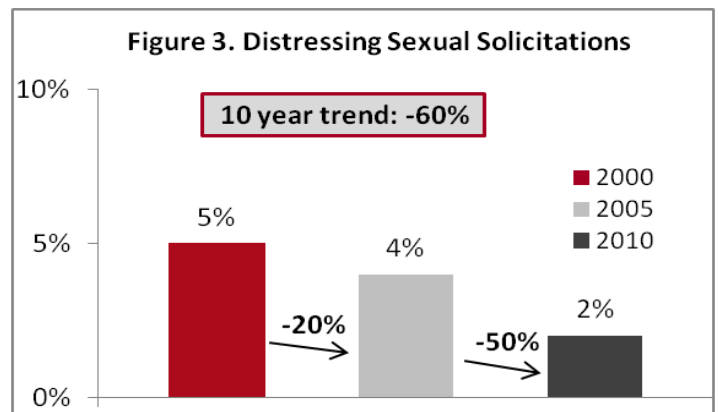
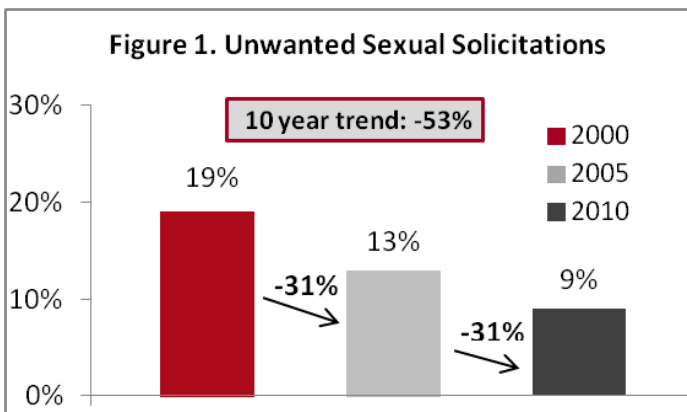
“Man asked me what my body looked like and I said I didn’t want to tell him. He proceeded to ask my age.” - Girl, 13

“I was on a chat site and he was just a friend and he started posting comments on my profile page asking me and telling me what he has done with girls and if I had done anything with guys. The first time I didn’t respond and the second time I deleted him.” - Girl, 17

“There was a guy in a game. He invited me to his house in the game and tried to take my shirt off in the game.” - Girl, 14

“Sort of like a chat room the person asked a question. Asked if you moon me would you have sex with me. Don’t know if it was male or female that sent it.” - Boy, 16

“I was on facebook, a guy asked me if I was a virgin, and if I wanted to have sex. Also, this guy asked me to send a picture of my breast, and this really bothered me.” - Girl, 14



Key Trends in Unwanted Sexual Solicitations (Tables 3 and 4)

- Declines were greatest among the youngest children (ages 10-12) who may be less equipped to handle such solicitations.
- The proportion of youth receiving multiple solicitations declined.
- The main source of unwanted sexual solicitations was other youth and young adults under the age of 25, not older adults stereotyped as “Internet predators.”
- There was an increasing percentage of solicitations from prior offline acquaintances and a decline in those from people met online.
- Most sexual solicitations were occurring in social networking sites by 2010 compared to mostly chat rooms in 2000.
- There was an increasing number of youth disclosing the solicitation – to both friends and parents.

Table 3: Characteristics of Youth Experiencing Unwanted Sexual Solicitation—2000, 2005 & 2010

Youth & Household Characteristics	2000 (n=286) %	2005 (n=200) %	2010 (n=134) %	P value
Youth sex				
Male	34	31	25	.15
Female	66	69	75	
Youth age				
10-12 years	12	9	5	.004
13-15 years	53	47	41	
16-17 years	35	44	54	
Youth race/ethnicity				
White	72	65	62	.26
Black	10	16	15	
Hispanic	9	11	14	
Other	6	6	8	
Missing	2	2	1	
Household income				
Less than \$20K	7	11	13	<.001
\$20K to \$50K	39	34	21	
\$51K to \$75K	25	25	13	
More than \$75K	23	23	41	
Missing	5	8	12	

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

Table 4: Online Sexual Solicitation Incident Characteristics & Outcomes between 2000, 2005 and 2010, %

Incident characteristics	2000 (n=286)	2005 (n=200)	2010 (n=134)	P value
Gender of solicitor				
Male	67	69	72	.81
Female	19	17	16	
Don't know	14	15	12	
Age of solicitor				
Under 18	48	43	43	.15
18 to 25 years	20	27	24	
Older than 25	4	7	7	
Don't know	28	21	27	
Relation to solicitor				
Met online	97	83	68	<.001
Knew in person prior	3	14	32	
Don't know	< 1	3	0	
Number of people who did this				
One	64	59	76	.05
2-3	16	19	12	
4 or more	15	15	7	
Don't know	5	7	5	
Where on Internet this first happened				
Using an email account	2	3	4	<.001
Chat room	64	36	16	
Instant messaging	24	40	5	
Social networking	0	0	58	
Texting	0	0	6	
Other	7	17	10	
Don't know	3	4	1	
Soliciting behaviors occurred more than 1 time during year	67	70	52	.003
INCIDENT OUTCOMES				
Incident disclosed to someone^a	39	43	53	.03
Friend	26	25	37	.05
Sibling	2	3	5	.47
Parent/guardian	25	11	19	.001
School staff	1	2	1	.69
Ever reported to or found out by ISP, Cyber Tipline, or police	9	5	6	.19
How situation ended^a				
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
Any distress: very/extremely upset or afraid	25	33	28	.13
Upset	20	29	22	.08
Afraid	13	20	16	.14
Very/extremely embarrassed	17	21	20	.53

^a Multiple responses possible Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

2010 Data Only

Who were the youth targeted for unwanted sexual solicitations in 2010? (Table 5)

- Sexual solicitations were concentrated among older youth: overall 54% were ages 16 or 17; 47% of youth reporting aggressive solicitations were older. Distressing incidents were more frequently reported by younger youth – 38% were ages 16 or 17 and 52% were ages 13 to 15.
- No 10 year-olds reported a sexual solicitation and few youth ages 11 or 12: 6% overall, 6% of aggressive, and 11% of distressing episodes.
- More girls reported an unwanted sexual solicitation – 75%. Girls were even more likely to report an aggressive (81%) or distressing (84%) solicitation.

Table 5: Characteristics of Youth Reporting an Unwanted Sexual Solicitation in 2010, %

Youth Characteristics	All Incidents (n=134) 13% of Youth	Aggressive Incidents (n=47) 4% of Youth	Distressing Incidents (n=37) 4% of Youth
Age of youth			
10	0	0	0
11	1	2	3
12	5	4	8
13	13	13	27
14	15	15	22
15	13	19	3
16	29	28	19
17	25	19	19
Gender of youth			
Girl	75	81	84
Boy	25	19	16

Who was soliciting youth in 2010? (Table 6)

- Solicitors tended to be male: 72% overall, 79% of aggressive and 74% of distressing episodes; the remaining solicitors were almost equally likely to be females as unknown to the youth.
- Nearly half of all solicitations were committed by other youth (42%) as well as 59% of aggressive solicitations. Over half (54%) of distressing solicitations were known or thought to have been committed by an adult; as well as 37% of aggressive and 45% of solicitations overall.
- Solicitors were both people youth met online and those they knew in person before the incident: 32% of all, 53% of aggressive and 23% of distressing solicitations were committed by someone the youth knew in person prior to the incident.

Who was soliciting youth in 2010? (Table 6) - Continued

- About one-quarter of solicitations were committed by more than one person.
- Approximately one-fourth of solicitations were committed more than once by the same person or group of people.

Table 6: Solicitor Characteristics in Unwanted Sexual Solicitation Episodes in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
Gender of solicitor			
Male	72	79	74
Female	15	16	10
Don't know	13	4	15
Age of solicitor			
Younger than 18	42	59	36
18 to 25	23	27	23
Older than 25	7	4	8
<u>Don't know</u>	<u>27 (39)</u>	<u>10 (5)</u>	<u>33 (13)</u>
Thought person was 18 or older ^a	15 (21)	6 (3)	23 (9)
Youth was very or extremely certain of solicitor's age ^b	55	72	50
Relation to solicitor			
Met online	67	45	77
<u>Knew in person before solicitation</u>	<u>32 (n=46)</u>	<u>53 (n=26)</u>	<u>23 (n=9)</u>
Friend/acquaintance—school	87	100	100
Friend/acquaintance—somewhere else	7	0	0
Romantic partner (or ex-partner)	2	0	0
Adult family member	2	0	0
Other / Don't know	4	< 1	0
Number of people who did this			
One	74	71	72
2 – 3	13	16	8
4 – 6	5	0	10
7 – 10	0	0	0
11 or more	2	0	3
Don't know	5	2	5
Happened series of times (same person/people did this more than once)	24	39	26

^a Asked of the 39 who did not know the specific age of the solicitor (all incidents), n=13 for distressing incidents, n=5 for aggressive incidents.

^b Only youth who gave the solicitor's actual age were asked this question (n=104 for all incidents, n=43 for aggressive, n=26 for distressing) Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

How often and where did solicitations occur in 2010? (Table 7)

- Over half of youth experienced more than one sexual solicitation in the past year; aggressive solicitations happened most frequently with two-thirds of youth reporting 2 or more incidents.
- Most incidents were short in duration (59%) with aggressive solicitations occurring for longer lengths of time – 16% lasted one month or longer.
- The majority of solicitations took place when the youth was at home on a desktop or laptop computer; a notable minority occurred through cell phones.
- Over half of solicitations took place in social networking sites.

Table 7: Length and Location of Unwanted Sexual Solicitations in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
Number of times this happened in past year			
One time	45	33	51
2 times	22	22	13
3 to 5 times	19	31	28
6 or more times	12	12	8
Don't know / not ascertainable (NA)	1	0	0
Length of time incident went on for			
One day	59	39	46
2 – 6 days	20	24	28
7 – 13 days	5	8	8
14 – 29 days	3	6	5
One month or longer	10	16	13
Don't know / NA	3	4	3
Type of technology used most to access Internet when this happened			
Desktop computer	46	49	51
Laptop computer	33	29	31
Cell phone	13	20	10
Portable gaming device	1	0	5
Other	4	0	3
Don't know / NA	1	0	0

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

Table 7 - Continued: Length and Location of Unwanted Sexual Solicitations in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
Location incident usually happened			
Home	88	90	90
School	1	2	0
Public library	2	0	5
Friend's home	7	6	5
Some other place	1	0	0
Don't know / NA	1	0	0
Where on Internet this (first) happened			
Social networking site	56	57	56
Using an email account	3	4	3
Cell phone	3	0	0
Online video chat room	11	10	10
Chat room with no video component	5	0	8
Using instant messages	6	10	10
In game room or other game site	6	4	8
Text messaging	6	12	3
Some other place	5	0	3
Don't know / NA	1	0	0

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

How often was an aggravating feature part of the Solicitation in 2010? (Table 8)

- Solicitors made or attempted to make offline contact with the youth in 34% of all episodes and 43% of distressing episodes – typically asking to meet somewhere or calling them on the phone.
- About one in four youth gave the solicitor their cell phone number – this was more common in aggressive episodes.
- The solicitor sent the youth a sexual picture in 12% of all, 24% of aggressive and 15% of distressing episodes.
- Many solicitors wanted sexual pictures of the youth – 45% of all, 65% of aggressive and 54% of distressing solicitations.
- Most youth did not send a sexual picture.
- Few youth met the solicitor in person; even less (1%) had sexual contact at the meeting.

Table 8: Aggravating Features of Unwanted Sexual Solicitations in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
Forms of offline contact^a			
Asked to meet somewhere	22	67	21
Sent offline mail	1	0	3
Called on telephone (including cell phone)	22	65	33
Went to home	5	16	5
Gave money, gifts, or other items	2	6	3
Bought plane, train, or bus ticket	1	2	0
Any of the above	34	100	43
Gave solicitor cell phone number			
Gave solicitor cell phone number	27	45	28
Not applicable (no cell phone)	15	14	15
Solicitor sent picture of self			
Solicitor sent picture of self	20	39	31
Picture was sexual	12	24	15
Solicitor requested picture of youth			
Solicitor requested picture of youth	59	77	72
Wanted a sexual picture of youth	45	65	54
Youth sent sexual picture	2	8	0
Youth met solicitor in person			
Youth met solicitor in person	3	4	3
Sexual contact at meeting	1	2	0

How did solicitations end and who did youth tell in 2010? (Table 9)

- Over half of youth handled the solicitation on their own by removing themselves from the situation, telling the solicitor to stop or confronting him or her, or changing their personal information.
- Slightly more than half (53%) of youth told someone about the solicitation; more disclosure occurred in aggressive (69%) and distressing (61%) episodes.
- Disclosure was typically to a friend; about one in five episodes resulted in disclosure to a parent/guardian.
- Few solicitations were reported to or otherwise known to an authority (law enforcement or Internet Service Provider).
- The most common reason youth did not tell was because the solicitation was not serious enough.

Table 9: Ending the Situation and Disclosure of Unwanted Sexual Solicitations in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
How situation ended^a			
Removed self from situation (blocking or leaving site or computer)	50	24	43
Told to stop/confronted or warned solicitor	24	29	23
Changed screen name, profile, email, or phone number	3	8	5
Parent/guardian or teacher handled situation	2	4	0
Still happening	1	2	0
Stopped without doing anything	6	4	0
Called law enforcement or other authorities	1	2	3
Other (not specified)	19	29	26
Don't Know	1	0	0
	<u>53</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>61</u>
	(n=76)	(n=34)	(n=24)
Incident disclosed^a			
Friend	68	63	31
Brother or sister	4	4	8
Parent/guardian	19	20	33
Other adult relative	2	2	0
Teacher, counselor, or other school personnel	1	4	3
Law enforcement or other authority, ISP	1	2	3
Someone else	3	4	8
Ever known to or disclosed to ISP or police			
Ever known to or disclosed to ISP or police	6	4	15
Of youth who did not tell, why didn't youth tell			
Of youth who did not tell, why didn't youth tell	<u>46</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>38</u>
	(n=66)	(n=14)	(n=15)
Not serious enough	57	50	33
Too scared	3	7	13
Too embarrassing	9	14	20
Thought might lose Internet access	1	0	0
Happens all the time	3	0	0
Other (not specified)	24	21	40
Don't know / NA	3	7	0
Blocking and filtering software			
Software on computer to block pop-up ads or SPAM email when this happened^a			
Software on computer to block pop-up ads or SPAM email when this happened ^a	51	48	54
Other software to filter, block or monitor Internet use when this happened^b			
Other software to filter, block or monitor Internet use when this happened ^b	26	23	37
After incident, family installed any software to keep from happening again^b			
After incident, family installed any software to keep from happening again ^b	18	18	40

Both Tables: ^a Multiple responses possible. ^b Only asked of youth with Internet at home (n=126 for all, n=44 for aggressive, n=35 for distressing). Note: Some categories do not add to 100% because of rounding and/or missing data.

How distressing were the solicitation episodes? (Table 10)

- Overall, about one in four youth reported being very or extremely upset or afraid as a result of the solicitation.
- One in five youth were embarrassed over what happened.
- For youth reporting some distress, 41% reported at least one stress symptom more than a little or all of the time following the solicitation; more so for aggressive (67%) and distressing (64%) incidents.

Table 10: Distress Related to Unwanted Sexual Solicitations in 2010, %

Incident Characteristics	All (n=143)	Aggressive (n=49)	Distressing (n=39)
Distress: Very/extremely^a			
Upset	22	33	79
Afraid	15	16	56
Embarrassed	20	33	54
Youth with no/low levels of being upset or afraid	72	63	0
Stress symptoms (more than a little/all the time)^b			
At least one of the following^a	25	37	64
Staying away from Internet or particular part of it	16	22	46
Being unable to stop thinking about it	14	27	36
Feeling jumpy or irritable	10	12	31
Losing interest in things	5	8	15

^a Multiple responses possible.

^b 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. Youth were asked these questions if they said they scored a 3, 4 or 5 (on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely)) about being upset, afraid, or embarrassed about the solicitation.

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

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 1. The continued decline in sexual solicitations is good news.** We found a continued decline in reports of unwanted sexual solicitations – from 19% in 2000 to 13% in 2005 and 9% in 2010. Most of the solicitors in 2000 and 2005 were people the youth met online, less so in 2010. Our Internet safety messages over the 2000 decade targeted the potential dangers of talking with people met online. Today's youth may be more aware of the potential dangers online and monitoring their activities and behaviors accordingly.
- 2. Most unwanted experiences occurred in social networking sites in 2010.** In 2010, over half of the sexual solicitation incidents (58%) were occurring on social

networking sites and increasingly involved communication with school friends. This is true even though unwanted sexual solicitations actually decreased during this same period perhaps because social networking sites allow for restricting access to friends and also allow people to identify where solicitations are coming from. One hypothesis is that as youth have migrated to social networking sites like Facebook for their online interactions, they have gravitated away from more open access sites like chat rooms and confined more of their online interactions to people that they know. This might explain some of the overall decline in solicitation, and might mean that rather than making youth more vulnerable the social networking revolution may have provided an additional measure of protection, at least against unwanted contact from online strangers.

- 3. The percentage of youth reporting distressing incidents remains small.** Even with the dynamic changes in technology, distressing sexual solicitations occurred to only a minority of youth and there is no indication, even across the technology developments of the last decade, that this type of victimization is something significantly different from the peer victimization problems that have always been, and continue to be, a concern for youth. In fact, whether online or offline, the degree of distress caused by a solicitation incident is likely influenced by a number of possible factors: believable physical threat, sexual taunts, a sense of powerlessness, or a greater number of perpetrators or witnesses, for example. There may be ways the online environment could increase the likelihood of certain highly negative features such as more witnesses, or perhaps greater powerlessness in some conditions. On the other hand, the online environment may ameliorate distress by making it easier for victims to get support and prove their mistreatment to parents and others. Such hypotheses should be the focus of future research. Overall, the conditions causing distress are not new; therefore the focus of prevention and education efforts can apply to many different environments, including shifting and even unpredictable online settings.
- 4. More of the offensive and unwanted experiences are coming from people youth know in person, usually other kids.** We detected an increasing percentage of solicitations from prior offline acquaintances and a decline in those from individuals met online. This change is consistent with the hypothesis that as youth have migrated to social networking sites like Facebook for their online interactions, they have gravitated away from more open access sites like chat rooms and have confined more of their online interactions to people they already know. This might explain some of the

overall decline in solicitation, and could mean that rather than making youth more vulnerable, the social networking revolution may have provided an additional measure of protection, at least against unwanted and inappropriate contact from online strangers. However, the increasing number of solicitations coming from prior offline acquaintances provides some cause for concern. Such individuals may have more opportunity to pursue their targets beyond technological avenues, including at school and other in-person environments. This may complicate the experience of in-person sexual harassment by youth—youth may now be harassed in multiple ways by peers, more frequently, and more publicly, factors that might increase distress experienced by victims.

- 5. Unwanted sexual solicitation still remains mainly a phenomenon of older kids (13+); the youngest kids (ages 10-12) still report few of these experiences.** This is encouraging news. Not only do the youngest youth in our study report the lowest prevalence of unwanted sexual solicitations, the declines in unwanted sexual solicitations were greatest among the younger children, who may be less equipped to handle such solicitations.
- 6. Reporting to school authorities remains low but is increasing slowly; friends are still most likely to hear about these incidents.** Although still low, it is encouraging to note that more youth receiving a solicitation talk about it with others, 53% in 2010 vs. 39% in 2000. Friends are generally the people youth go to when they want to tell someone about what happened. This is a positive finding suggesting that there has been growing willingness by youth to share uncomfortable online sexual requests or questions. This may reflect some positive effect of internet education efforts that YISS data also showed as being widespread in 2010. While there is some debate about the efficacy of these typically brief educational programs,¹⁰ it is possible they do result in youth feeling more comfortable talking about strange or concerning online experiences. It is also possible that in 2010 compared to ten years prior, youth felt more comfortable talking about sexual topics in general. This would be a positive advancement for those who want to encourage youth help-seeking about a range of issues that may trouble them.

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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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