Research Profile
David Finkelhor – Research to Promote Safer Children and Families

As Director of the Crimes against Children Research Center (CCRC) at UNH, David Finkelhor credits the worldwide success of the CCRC’s cutting-edge research to the tremendous support UNH provides. Since coming to UNH in 1976, Finkelhor has conducted research and published on the subjects of child maltreatment, family violence, sexual abuse, child homicide, and missing and abducted children, establishing him as a leader in these fields. The recipient of many grants and awards, he finds much pride in the growth and success he’s seen in the CCRC, which he attributes to the fact that he is surrounded by incredibly passionate and hard-working colleagues and collaborators.

In particular, he notes that the CCRC is pioneering research on an issue of increasing concern: youth and the Internet. Finkelhor acknowledges that it is a complicated topic. “It’s about learning skills in discrimination,” he says. “We’re in a very alarmist phase in the development of Internet citizenship skills. People haven’t figured out yet what works, what it is safe. That’s where social sciences come in. We’re trying to help provide awareness.”

Approaching youths and their relationship with the Internet from a social science perspective is helping to shed a new light on the issue. Some common misconceptions are that many children fall victim to sexual assault through the Internet, or that there is a high occurrence of “sexting” and sending explicit pictures, which raises concerns about child pornography. CCRC research has shown that cases of these events are lower than one might think. Kids these days are more conscious than they are given credit for, and social media has come to play an important and valuable role in healthy relationships. By shifting focus from alarmist views, Finkelhor hopes to address more relevant concerns.

There are many other problems that, until recently, have been relatively unexplored. Currently, the CCRC is focusing on peer victimization. Finkelhor mentions that there is a distinct difference between bullying and peer victimization. There is a whole world that is not encompassed by the term bullying. “Kids are assaulted by their dating partners, they are sexually assaulted in school, there’s gang violence, property crimes. Our sense is that school officials know this, and we want to help ensure that these other risks are also being evaluated and considered.” CCRC data are helping raise peer victimization awareness.

Finkelhor and his colleagues also are hoping to improve court involvement regarding crimes against children. One of the hidden tragedies in the U.S. legal system is that many cases take 2-3 years to resolve, cutting into influential periods in a child’s life. The glacial pace at which assessments are done and evidence evaluated often takes its toll on a child. Finkelhor gives UNH’s Wendy Walsh credit for spearheading the CCRC initiative to expedite resolution of these cases.

Through an ongoing grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Finkelhor and the CCRC are the lead researchers in tracking children exposed to violence in the U.S. The recently-released “National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence” highlights data showing that many forms of violence are declining.
The long-term goal of the CCRC is to provide information about children safety topics to practitioners, policy makers, and the public that will enable positive decisions and changes to current practices. The CCRC already has established strong alliances with the Navy, the Air Force, and various hospitals for conducting clinical studies. CCRC’s strategy is to collect data from larger survey populations to broaden and deepen understanding of the nature of the problems which then will support development of effective prevention methods.

In addition to directing the CCRC, Finkelhor is Co-Director of the Family Research Laboratory, Professor of Sociology, and University Professor at UNH. He has received grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and others. He is the editor and author of 12 books and over 200 journal articles and book chapters. In his most recent book, *Child Victimization* (Oxford University Press, 2008), he has tried to unify and integrate knowledge about the diverse forms of child victimization in a field he terms “developmental victimology.” The book received the Daniel Douglas Schneider Child Welfare Book Award in 2009.

Over the years, Finkelhor’s work and leadership have been acknowledged widely. He is sought out as an expert by the media, frequently being quoted in print and appearing on broadcasts by CNN and other networks. In 2013, Finkelhor was recognized for his lifetime achievement in research at the 18th International Conference on Violence, Abuse, and Trauma when he was awarded the William Friedrich Child Sexual Abuse Research, Assessment, and/or Treatment Award for his substantial contributions to the field of research on child maltreatment, especially child sexual abuse. In May 2014, Finkelhor was named the first recipient of the National Kempe Scientific Impact Award. This award from the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect will be given annually to a research scholar who has made leading and sustained scientific contributions during the past decade to the field of child abuse and neglect.

**To learn more...**

**Crimes against Children Research Center**
http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/

**National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence**
https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/227744.pdf

**Watch** David Finkelhor receive the first annual National Kempe Scientific Impact Award, with his acceptance remarks and a song!