

The Current State of Cyber Bullying

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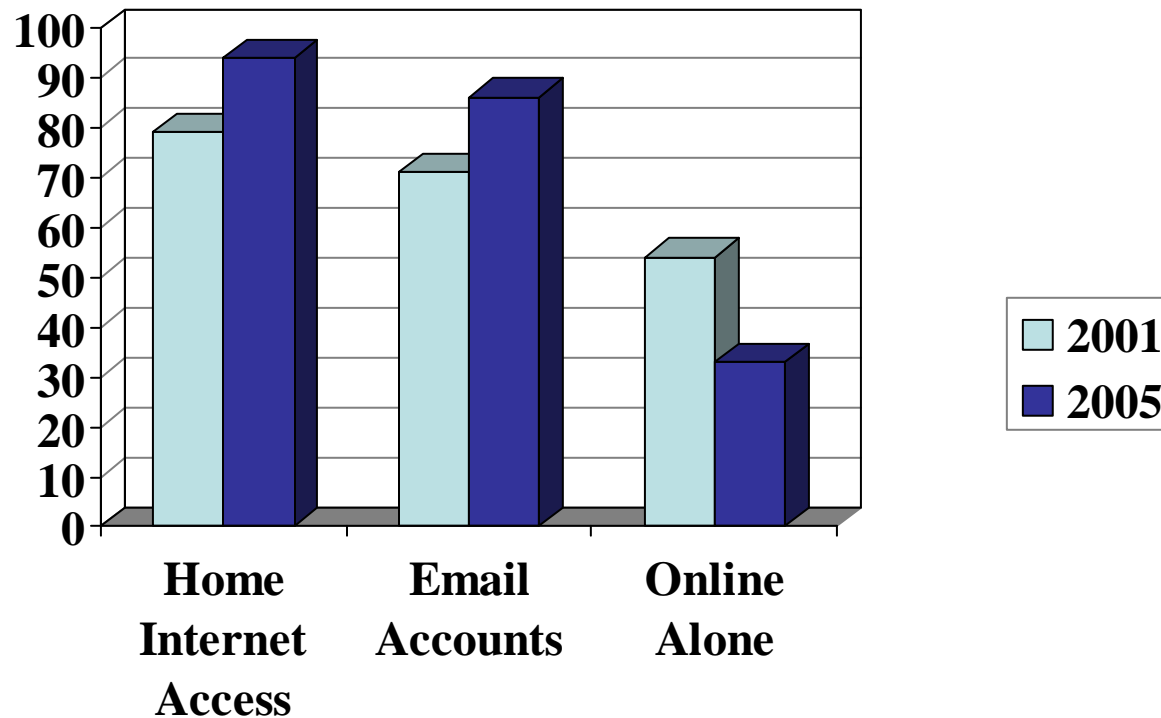
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Overview:

Youth & Technology in Canada

- **Technology as New Social Environment**
- **Benefits of Online Social Environment**
- **Risks of Online Social Environment**
- **Focus on Cyber Bullying**
- **Analysis of Kids Help Phone postings**
- **Responses to Cyber Abuse**

Trends in Youth & Technology in Canada 2001 Versus 2005 (grades 4-11)



Youth & Technology in Canada (Grades 4-11)

- **22%** of youth have their own webcam
 - In grade 11: **31%**
- **86%** of youth have email accounts
 - Compared with **71% in 2001**
- **30%** of youth have personal websites

*Source – Young Canadians in a
Wired World, 2005*

Youth & Technology in Canada (grades 4-11)

- **23%** of youth have their own cell phone
 - 44% have Internet capability
 - 56% have text messaging
 - 17 % have cameras
 - ❖ 6% in grade 4
 - ❖ 46% in grade 11
- **28%** of grade 4 students use instant messaging on an average school day
 - 43% in grade 5
 - 86% by grade 11

Source – Young Canadians in a Wired World, 2005

Youth and the Internet

- Real time communication
 - Instant Messaging → mostly friends from school
 - Chat rooms → discuss same issues online & off
 - Anonymity
 - Opportunity to discuss sensitive issues
 - Lack of information about physical appearance

(Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2006)

The Intention of Technology in Schools

- Internet connectivity was encouraged in schools throughout Canada in the 1990s
- Thought to enrich education & create future employment opportunities (Shade et al, 2005)
- Children seen as innate computer users & natural adapters (Shade et al, 2005)

The Reality of Technology in Schools

- Children & youth overwhelmingly use the Internet for socializing & entertainment rather than educational purposes (Media Awareness Network, 2005)
- Children who use the Internet for school work do so in lieu of, rather than in addition to, traditional sources of information (e.g., the library) (Shade et al, 2005)
- For many children & youth, the ease of access to information is valued more than the credibility or accuracy of the information (Shade et al, 2005)

Youth & New Technology

- The Internet is a new social environment, constructed by youth through the use of email, instant messaging, text messaging, & social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace)
- Norms are developed & transmitted to new generations of users, creating a new, dynamic system
- Norms for new technology evolving quickly as greater access & technological innovations develop

Technology as New Social Environment

- Technological norms develop & evolve to compensate for lack of visual cues
- Contact through technology lacks
 - Facial expressions
 - Body language
 - Tone of voice
 - How we dress/present ourselves to others
 - especially important for children & youth

Unique Attributes of Technological Contact among Children & Youth

- Reduced visual & auditory cues
- Potential for anonymity
- Potential to assume another identity
- Conversations & photos can be made public
 - intentionally or unintentionally
- Conversations & photos can leave a lasting record

Benefits of Technological Interaction among Children & Youth

- Online exchange decreases social isolation & promotes identity exploration
- To extent that the Internet can reduce social isolation, normalize feelings of distress through self-disclosure & social comparison, & serve as a venue for social support, it may provide a positive coping **resource** (Whitlock et al., 2006)

Additional Potential Benefits for Marginalized Youth

(Whitlock et al., 2006)

- Opportunity to explore identities & roles that might not be supported in school context
 - Particularly for children & youth in “marginalized” or “vulnerable” groups
 - e.g., who identify as LGBTQ, or who have chronic illness, or an “invisible disability”
- These students may not feel they can embody these identities at school but can feel free to do so online
- Safe & anonymous participation to find support & understanding can be very positive for youth

Implications of New Technology

- Impact of technology on children & youth is a developing field
- Child & youth engagement with technology, evolves much faster than parental or school understanding of the technology or meaning associated with its use
- The risks of new technology are heightened by this disparity in knowledge

Risks of Technology: Online Identity & Connections

- 50% of adolescents indicate they have experimented with their identity online (Valkenburg et al, 2005)
 - Most commonly cited identity experiments:
 - pretending to be older
 - pretending to be real-life acquaintance
- Identity play can be risky
 - Younger children (age 9-12) more likely to experiment with their identity online than adolescents & more likely to use the Internet to meet strangers

Risks of Technology: Online Identity & Connections

- Identity play can be risky
 - Girls more likely than boys to pretend to be older (Valkenburg et al, 2005)
 - Anonymous online settings have been found to have strong norms towards gender-stereotyped behaviour (Jacobson, 2002)
 - May create situations where adolescent girls are exposed to negative gender-identity constructions informed by adult content & expectations
 - Adolescent girls may be more likely to be solicited

Risks of Technology: Online Identity & Connections

- Online relationships
 - Girls with high levels of conflict with their parents & who are more troubled are more likely to form close online relationships (Wolak et al, 2003)
 - Boys with lower levels of communication with parents & who are more troubled more likely to form close online relationships (Wolak et al, 2003)

Risks of Technology

- Reinforces negative or unhealthy views of self
- Glamorizes unhealthy identities through a subculture that normalizes & encourages deviant behaviour
- Promotes negative behaviours through modeling & social contagion
- Promotes ineffective or destructive coping strategies
- Provides a pool of participants with low self-worth who may be vulnerable to exploitative relationships
 - e.g., sites for anorexia, self-injury, pedophilia, violence/terror, etc.

(Whitlock et al., 2006)

Risks of Technology: Cyber Abuse

- Cyber Abuse, enabled by the use of the Internet & other forms of technology, of children or youth
 - Bullying
 - Stalking
 - Sexual solicitation
 - Child pornography
- From the perspective of the child or adolescent as victim or perpetrator (Finkelhor et al., 2000; Magid, 1998)

Unique Attributes of Cyber Abuse

- **Anonymity / false identities**
 - Heightens impact & risk to youth
 - Offenders may do things they would not do in 'real life'
- **Sense of inescapability**
 - Students vulnerable wherever they use computer
 - Can't be avoided
- **Technology ensures easy access**

Unique Attributes of Cyber Abuse

- Occurs when child feels safe (home, room)
- Speed with which technology is evolving & penetrating society
- Those affected (**youth**) know much more about technology use than those who should protect (**parents, educators**)

Risks of Technology: Online Stalking & Solicitation

- 9% of youth Internet users reported being stalked online (Wolak et al, 2006)
- 13% of youth Internet users reported unwanted sexual solicitation (Wolak et al, 2006)
 - Only 5% of unwanted solicitations were reported to authorities (Wolak et al, 2006)

Risks of Technology: Exposure

(Wolak et al, 2007)

- Over 40% of children & youth reported exposure to online pornography
 - 66% reported only unwanted exposure
- Unwanted exposure rates were higher for youth who were harassed or solicited online or victimized offline, & for youth who scored significantly on CBCL depression subscale
- Wanted exposure rates higher for boys, & youth who used file-sharing programs, talked online to strangers about sex, used the Internet at friends' homes, or scored significantly on CBCL subscale for rule-breaking

Similarities: Cyber vs. Traditional Bullying

- **Power differential**
 - Traditional: age, size, intelligence, number of kids, popularity
 - Cyber: anonymity, dissemination all over Internet, unable to stop it
- **Often occurs in context of the peer group**
- **Many children/youth don't tell adults**
 - Adult interventions can help
- **Significant effects on victimized kids**

Differences

Cyber vs. Traditional Bullying

Traditional

- Direct or indirect
- Mostly on school property
- Usually know who is bullying
- Fear
 - Retribution by person who bullies

Cyber

- Indirect
- On & off school property
- Likely doesn't know who is bullying
- Fear
 - Loss of technology
 - No one can stop it
- Further under the radar

Risks of Technology: Cyber Bullying in Canada

- 25% of youth have been upset by something said to them in chat rooms (Ipsos-Reid, 2001)
- 70% heard of cyber bullying incident (Beran & Li, 2005)
- 21% had been bullied several times (Beran & Li, 2005)
- 59% say they assumed a different identity online (Media Awareness Network, 2005)
 - Of those students, 17% pretended to be someone else so “I can act mean to people & not get into trouble” (Media Awareness Network, 2005)

Risks of Technology: Impact of Cyber Bullying

- Can affect many area of child's life
- Cyber bullying linked to difficulties:
 - Emotional: anxiety, low self-esteem, sadness & fear (Beran & Li, 2005)
 - Academic: affects concentration (Beran & Li, 2005)
 - Psychosocial: affects ability to engage with & have needs met by friends (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999)

Megan Meier

- Megan Meier made a new friend in cyberspace when Josh, a teenage boy, contacted her on MySpace & began exchanging messages with her.
- Megan, a 13-year-old who suffered from depression & attention deficit disorder, corresponded with Josh for more than a month.
- Megan's parents said she received a message from him on Oct. 15 2006, saying he didn't want to be her friend anymore, that he heard she wasn't nice to her friends.
- The next day, as Megan's mother was going out (to take another daughter to an appointment), she knew Megan was upset about Internet messages. She asked Megan to log off . [Users on MySpace must be at least 14, though Megan was not when she opened her account].
- Someone using Josh's account was sending cruel messages. Megan later phoned her mother, saying electronic bulletins were being posted about her, saying things such as, "Megan Meier is a slut. Megan Meier is fat."
- Megan's mother, who monitored her daughter's online communications, returned home & was "shocked at the vulgar language" her own daughter was sending.
 - She told Megan how upset she was about this
 - She told Megan to log off
- Implications for messages to parents about responding

Scope of Cyber Bullying: Focus Groups

- Contribute to beginning knowledge base on cyber bullying
 - 48 grade 5-12 students
 - Greater Toronto Area
- In partnership with
 - Toronto District School Board (TDSB)
 - UJA Board of Jewish Education (BJE)

Scope of Cyber Bullying: Focus Groups

- **The children were eager to talk & very articulate about cyber bullying**
- Children embracing technology at younger ages
- Computer children's dominant medium
- Cyber bullying seen as daily occurrence
- Due to anonymity children bully through cyber who might not otherwise bully

What kids had to say...

- Not just the “big bullies” who are engaging in cyber bullying as the aggressors but now individuals who are more insecure can, in one child’s words, **“hide behind the keyboard”**
- A child coined the term **“non-stop bullying”** to indicate that children can be bullied at school and then they can continue to be bullied online at home

What kids had to say...

- There is a fear that the person who cyber bullies **“can be anyone, even someone next door”**
- **“What the bully says may only last a second, but the hurt lasts forever as it stays in your heart”**
- Friends who know secrets about each other leverage knowledge for sexual content: **“If you don’t flash, I’ll tell your secrets”**

Cyber Bullying Focus Groups

- Cannot stop distribution of private photos & communication
- Online sexual coercion between youth (webcams)
 - Girls typically pressured to send pictures
- Friends use password to bully others
- Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism & homophobia rampant online
- Believe it is **impossible** to find out who is cyber bullying or to stop or address it

Cyber Bullying Focus Groups

- **Do not** tell parents
 - Fear losing computer privileges
- **Do not** tell teachers
 - Don't believe they can help if it occurs at home
- **Do not** tell in general
 - Convinced they cannot identify who is bullying

**Kids Help Phone
Analysis of Posts:
“Ask a Counsellor” Web Page**

Kids Help Phone

Themes

- Cyber bullying
- Cyber stalking
- Exposure to pornography
- Sexual solicitation, online sexual acts & displaying of nudity
- Kids having online 'contact,' at risk & struggling

Kids Help Phone: Cyber stalking

- Unwanted emails & instant messages
- Can be a precursor to individuals being watched & followed in “real life”
- Stalking behaviours that start in “real life” can escalate into cyber realm
- **Terrifying** for the children & youth

Kids Help Phone: Cyber Stalking

- Very difficult (terrifying) to challenge stalker on own
 - “Don’t just hope it goes away. Get help.”
- Peers reluctant to tell an adult out of “loyalty”
 - “I really want to tell someone about the stalking, but my friend will be really mad.”
- When they told sometimes didn’t have much help
 - e.g., one child’s mother knew but was “also scared” & didn’t know what to do
- Some teenagers threatened the stalker that they were going to inform the police

Kids Help Phone: Cyber Stalking

- A girl, 17, was sent a message from an older man, in which he said he would come to her house & kill her. She became very scared in the next couple of days while walking her dog, as she thought a guy was following her.
- Another girl, 15, wrote that a “creepy” guy from school sent her an email in which he wrote that he “sees” her at the shopping mall.
- A 16 year old girl wrote that “after 2 days of stalking me around the school he sent me an email.” He said “perverted” things through email & she was afraid he would not heed her wishes to leave her alone.

Cyber Bullying: Exposure to Pornography

- Unwanted “pop ups” advertising pornography
- One child wrote that these “pop ups” encourage him to look for such websites
- Children as young as 12 reported purposefully looking for pornography
- The kids feared being punished & getting into trouble with the law for viewing the material
 - May prevent them from reporting unwanted exposure to pornography

Kids Help Phone: Exposure to Pornography

- Online perpetrators may use child pornography as a grooming mechanism
- One young teenager wrote, “I was chatting with this guy & we were kinda fooling around online, so he gave me a porn site. I went on it, thinking it will be normal but it turned out to be young boys and it didn’t seem legal.”

Kids Help Phone: Sexual Solicitation, Online Sexual Acts & Displaying Nudity

- Youth pressured to engage in sexual activities (“cybering”), “flash” on webcam or to provide digital pictures of themselves, or to **meet**
- Men they didn’t know & **men they knew**
 - Pressured the kids, who sometimes “gave in”
 - Rewards (e.g., money, gifts, higher grade)
 - Coerced & threatened (e.g., sending their parents pictures)

Kids Help Phone: Sexual Solicitation, Sexual Acts & Nudity

- What was thought to be a private picture of nudity to boy/girl friend is reposted on Internet
 - Can damage “reputation” of person who flashes
 - Typically girls, often labeled “web cam whore”
- **Tremendous** regret, remorse, shame
 - Some felt “unclean”
 - Some engaged in self-harm
 - Some cried for nights
 - Some felt nauseous that the picture could surface anytime & be seen by anyone

Kids Help Phone: Sexual Solicitation, Sexual Acts & Nudity

- **Afraid to tell parents**
 - Worry their parents will “hate” them
 - Worry parents will revoke computer
 - ❖ **Feels worse than living with the abuse**
- Do not contact police or other supports because of the lack of anonymity
 - Worry parents will be informed

Kids Help Phone: At Risk & Struggling

- Demonstrate knowledge of online risks, yet engage in risky behaviour
 - Provide personal information / addresses
 - Lie about their own age to appear older
 - Feel the online relationship is “real” & state complete trust in other person
 - Engage in online sexual interaction
 - Meet online ‘friends’ in real life, sometimes leading to sexual relationships

Kids Help Phone: At Risk & Struggling

- **Struggle**

- Between what they **'know'** & what they **'need'**
- Often experience isolation in “real life”
- Unwilling to give up these relationships which they consider emotionally fulfilling
- Particularly teenagers who are isolated with few friends & supports
- May then continue with online relationship regardless of risks
 - Balance of risk

Kids Help Phone: Kids Don't Tell their Parents

- Even if they regret actions & want help
- Fear parents will make them end the relationship, remove technology privileges
- Think parents won't understand because they do not understand or use the Internet
- Based on their knowledge, youth try to protect selves online
 - **Unable** to without support & understanding from adults

What kids had to say...

- One teen cannot tell her parents about sending photos of herself to a man because “they’re always lecturing me about Internet security & how i should never give out personal information.”
- Another teen noted that she told a 40 year old man where she lived. She wondered if she should tell her parents even though she would “probably get in trouble” or if she should just “wait and see if he does anything?”

What kids had to say...

- **Their belief in their online relationships**
 - “He’s not a fraud i know it for sure cuz I’ve talked with him on webcam and stuff”
 - “We seem to be really close friends now. There’s no way he can be ‘fake’”

What kids had to say...

- **The importance of these relationships**
 - “i was upset and in need of love....so when he asked me if i wanted to go out with him....i said yes.....that’s when he told me he is 21.....so i go ‘I’m 14’.... He just said ‘so?’”
 - “i would never go out & meet him but...i love him.....& no guy has ever loved me 4 me”

Current Responses to Cyber Abuse

- More house rules for Internet use than in 2001
- **13%** of students supervised by parent (**7% - 2001**)
- **74%** of households have rule about meeting online acquaintances (**54% - 2001**)
- Boys have fewer rules than girls
 - Even though boys are more likely to intentionally seek out inappropriate content

Source – Young Canadians in a Wired World, 2005

Current Responses to Cyber Abuse: Educating Youth

- Current Ontario initiatives include Government of Ontario funded CYBERCOPS – Air Dogs
 - Interactive software for grades 7 and 8

Current Responses to Cyber Abuse: Technological Advances

- Evidence shows increase in knowledge regarding online risks, but there may be **little to no change in behaviour** (Crombie & Trinneer, 2003; Chibnail, Wallace, Leicht, & Lunghofer, 2006)
- Block access to unapproved sites & filter graphic descriptions & images
 - **Reduce but do not eliminate inappropriate content** (Schneider, 1997; Hunter, 2000; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2003)
 - Block & filter benign as well as inappropriate content
- Youth find ways around blocking programs

Response to Cyber Abuse: Bullying, Stalking, Sexual Solicitation, Pornography

- **No Simple Solutions**
- **Must understand from children's & youth's perspectives**
 - Effect on them
 - Unique issues related to the different forms of cyber abuse
 - Effective strategies to prevent cyber abuse

Pink T-Shirts

- After a new student was bullied for wearing a pink polo shirt to their high school in Nova Scotia, two 17-year-old students bought **75 pink T-shirts**
 - Convinced students to wear them as a show of support against kids who bullied this boy
 - Several hundred students showed up in **pink**
 - Tremendous media attention, etc.
- Both youth had been bullied
 - Travis Price said he was “pushed around all through elementary school” because he wore the wrong clothes & wasn't the richest kid on the block. “It was hard. I hated going to school every day, having nobody to talk to, never having the experience of a girl friend.”
 - David Shepherd fought back, believing it was the only way to survive at school. “As you mature, you realize there are better ways to handle this & this is what we've done, we've found an alternate way without violence.”

Moving Forward

- **Internet not fully ‘monitorable’**
 - e.g., % of children/youth who use Internet in private room
 - e.g., % of children/youth who access Internet via cell phone
- **Ineffective to deny access** - to protect or punish
- **Continually & rapidly changing**
 - Faster than we can identify etiquette, risks, strategies, etc.

Moving Forward

- Must be creative to protect / encourage youth to talk to adults
- Must provide strategies
- Recognize these are “ideal” & may not be followed
 - e.g., don’t give out passwords
 - e.g., monitor Internet use
- Education to help students & adults (parents/teachers) problem solve as issues arise
- Awareness of legal issues / rights
- Goals:
 - Help kids talk to adults
 - Help adults respond effectively