



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2011

14 Facebook: Friend or Foe? Cyberbullying, Stalking, and the Practical and Forensic Applications of Social Networking Sites and Technology Facilitated Crime

*Karen B. Rosenbaum, MD**, 262 Central Park West, Suite 1A, New York, NY 10024; *Katherine M. Brown, PhD**, Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice & Forensic Sciences, 300 Boston Post Road, West Haven, CT 06516; *Amanda L. Farrell, MSc**, Old Dominion University Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice, BAL 6000, Norfolk, VA 23529; and *Leila Dutton, PhD**, Henry C. Lee College of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences, University of New Haven, 300 Boston Post Road, West Haven, CT 05616

The goal of this presentation is to review the criminal justice literature on social networking and other internet facilitated sites to gain a better understanding of the uses and dangers of these internet sites from a forensic psychiatry and criminal justice perspective. Cases on

cyberbullying will be reviewed; sexual misuses of these sites especially among teenagers will be discussed, along with cases involving stalking. Finally, the potential uses of social networking in forensic cases to solve crimes will be discussed, along with the risks vs. benefits and ethical dilemmas of professionals in the forensic disciplines and medicine using these sites for their own personal and professional networking.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the growing importance of internet sites on multiple forensic disciplines and the relevance for all forensic scientists to have a basic understanding of social networking and other internet sites.

Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites (SNS) have become a central aspect of the social life of many teenagers as well as adults. An estimated 14 million children ages 12-17 used social networking sites in 2006. An additional 35% of American adults had a profile on a social networking site in 2008 (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, Wolak, 2010). With the growing popularity of these sites, there has been significant media attention to crimes and other dangers that may be associated with them. The number of social networking site continues to grow, yet there is little research on exactly how or if these social networking sites may be facilitating criminal activity. There is a need for more data on the actual relationship between SNS and crime.

The literature and cases in the media pertaining to the relationship between social networking sites and sex crimes, child abduction cases, stalking, and other types of online predation will be discussed. Recent media attention to prominent cases of suicide as a result of cyberbullying will also be discussed. The potential dangers of online victimization will be reviewed from a psychiatric and criminal justice perspective. The importance for those in the forensic sciences to have a basic understanding of the internet when investigating criminal activity related to the internet or evaluating victims and predators involved with social networking sites will also be discussed.

The use of SNS in criminal investigation will be discussed. While advances in technology and the increasing amount of information which can be recovered through that technology may aid investigations in some circumstances, there is little empirical research on the role of the internet and technology in investigations. Another investigational challenge is the wide range of crimes that may be technology facilitated, and how to effectively link the offender to the victim. In addition, the importance of recognizing the special nature of the internet when performing forensic evaluations pertaining to internet related offenders and victims will be addressed.

Finally, the risks and benefits and ethics of the personal and professional use of SNS by those working in healthcare and the forensic sciences will be discussed. The role that social networking may play professionally in communications and collaborations in business and in higher education will be discussed. The problems and special considerations that these internet sites may create for forensic evaluations will also be discussed. Because of the fluid, ever changing nature of the internet and social networking sites, it is vital that law enforcement and forensic professionals come together to effectively explore the role we play both personally and professionally in cyberspace.

Additional and continued research in this area is needed. In particular, careful attention should be placed on online harassment prevention programs, parental education on how to keep children safe online, the changing nature of social dynamics online, better reporting mechanisms for victims to report technology facilitated crimes to police, and increasing the public accountability for behavior on the internet. Finally, further training on the internet and SNS should be made available to law enforcement personnel to assist them in their investigation and response to technology facilitated crimes.

Social Networking, Internet, Crime