



Physical Anthropology Section - 2013

I38 Cyber-Sexual Harassment and Adolescents

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The goals of this presentation are to: (1) understand definitions of cyber-sexual harassment; (2) learn the prevalence of adolescent Internet usage and online media as well as prevalence and effects of cyber-sexual harassment on adolescents; and, (3) become familiar with methods of risk assessment and intervention strategies to reduce cyber-sexual harassment among adolescents.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by outlining the scope and effects of adolescent cyber-sexual harassment and suggest methods of risk assessment and intervention strategies for this important and widespread problem.

Recent attention to cases of suicide among youth victims of cyber-sexual harassment has generated interest in its prevalence, correlates, and psychological impact. While face-to-face sexual harassment is a well-known problem, understanding of the scope and implications of online or cyber-sexual harassment is emerging. Cyber-sexual harassment also is a widespread problem among youth. Adolescents have wide access to the Internet. Pew Research Center reports indicate that 93% of teens have access to the Internet and 75% have their own cell phone.¹ According to a recent survey of internet-using 10 to 15-year-olds, 33% reported online sexual harassment in the prior year, 15% reported an unwanted sexual solicitation online in the same time period, and 4% reported a sexual solicitation incident on a social networking site specifically.²

Cyber-bullying, generally, and cyber-sexual harassment, specifically, affect youth negatively in multiple domains. Cyber-bullying has been associated with poor school performance and psychological distress. Recent studies of cyber-harassment among middle and high school students have found that cyber-bullying is associated with poor grades in school, lower odds of planning to attend a four-year college, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and self-injury as well as suicide attempts.³ Being a victim of cyber-harassment was also associated with hardcore and softcore drug use and drunk driving, skipping school, and school suspension, as well as gang membership and carrying a weapon.³ Non-heterosexually identified youth appear to be victims of cyber-bullying more frequently than heterosexually identified youth, girls more frequently than boys.¹ In offline harassment among adolescents, victimhood can predict later perpetration, or they may co-occur.⁴ It is not known whether the same pattern exists in cyber-harassment or cyber-sexual harassment.

This presentation will focus on cyber-sexual harassment with respect to adolescent offenders and victims. Definitions of cyber-sexual harassment, prevalence data, and comparison with offline bullying will be discussed. Similarities and differences between offline bullying/sexual harassment and its cyber counterpart will be considered, including whether the latter may be considered a category of sexual offending. An overview of offline sexual harassment, including landmark legal cases, will be given.

Prevalence of adolescent internet usage and online media most relevant to cyber-sexual harassment (e.g., social network sites like Twitter, Facebook, postings on YouTube, communication via email/texting) will be covered. There will also be a discussion of developmental aspects of this behavior, methodologies for assessment of risk, and intervention strategies to reduce cyber-sexual harassment among adolescents. Case studies will be used to illustrate examples.

References:

1. Schneider KS, O'Donnell L, Stueve A, et al. Cyberbullying, School Bullying, and Psychological Distress: A Regional Census of High School Students. *Am J Public Health* 2012;102(1):171-77.
2. Ybarra ML and Mitchell KJ. How Risky Are Social Networking Sites? A Comparison of Places Online Where Youth Sexual Solicitation and Harassment Occurs. *Pediatrics* 2008;121:e350.
3. Sinclair KO, Bauman S, Poteat P, et al. Cyber and Bias-based Harassment: Associations With Academic, Substance Use, and Mental Health Problems. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 2012; 50: 521–523.
4. Hemphill SA, Kotevski A, Tollit M, et al. Longitudinal predictors of cyber and traditional bullying perpetration in Australian secondary school students. *J Adolesc Health* 2012; 51(1):59-65.

Adolescents, Sexual Harassment, Cyber-Sexual Harassment