

Chapter 10

Identifying Risk Factors and Enhancing Protective Factors to Prevent Adolescent Victimization on the Internet

Megan E. Call

University of Utah, USA

Jason J. Burrow-Sanchez

University of Utah, USA

ABSTRACT

The Internet is widely used among adolescents. Although the Internet is a beneficial tool for youth, some children and adolescents are at risk for being victimized online. Media reports portraying online predators and their victims have received increasing publicity. However, some information in these stories can be inaccurate or misleading. Therefore, it is important that mental health professionals and parents receive accurate information about online victimization in order to protect youth from harm. The purpose of this chapter is to provide research-based information on adolescent Internet use and the risk factors associated with online victimization. Further, recommendations for increasing protective factors are provided as a means to keep youth safe while using the Internet.

INTRODUCTION

A large number of adolescents in the United States use the Internet. In a recent survey of 935 youth, who were between 12-17 years old and lived in

the United States, 93% of the sample reported using the Internet (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). More specifically, 89% of the sample stated that they used the Internet at least once a week and 61% used the Internet daily. Parent salary and education mediated Internet behavior among the youth in this study. Youth were more likely to use the Internet if

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-926-7.ch010

Identifying Risk Factors and Enhancing Protective Factors

their parents had a college education and a higher income in comparison to their counterparts whose parents had less education and earned a lower income. These youth reported using the Internet for a variety of reasons including educational, social, and entertainment purposes. Other research suggests that most parents view the Internet as a helpful tool for their children, believing that it is associated with academic success (Turow & Nir, 2000). However, despite the benefits the Internet provides for children and adolescents, there are negative aspects and risks associated with going online (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008).

The Internet has been described as a misleading medium because it provides a sense of privacy and anonymity to users but in reality, the Internet is a public entity where complete strangers can contact anyone via e-mail, SPAM messages, chat rooms and advertising (Gross, 2004; Jordan, 2002; Turow, 2001). Youth are not immune to this type of interaction. In their study, Lenhart and Madden (2007) found that 30% of their sample reported being contacted by or receiving messages from a complete stranger while using the Internet. Approximately 20% of these adolescents stated they were curious about these messages and replied to the sender for more information. Prior research has reported similar online behavior among teens and inferred that some online relationships are formed through these types of interactions. For instance, in a study of 1,511 youth and parents from the United Kingdom who were surveyed about their Internet use, 30% of participants reported that they had met a person online, 46% had given personal information to someone they met online, and 8% had face-to-face meetings with someone they met online (Livingstone & Bober, 2005). Similarly, the first Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS) evaluated the online behavior of 1,501 youth from the United States who were between 10-17 years old and reported that 14% of their sample had formed close relationships with individuals met online (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000).

Some adolescents report finding solace in forming online relationships stating that it is more comfortable to share personal information via the Internet than in a face-to-face conversation (Gross, 2004). Unfortunately, a proportion of online relationships result in victimization where youth are solicited and groomed by sex offenders to participate in sexual and other harmful acts either on- or offline. Prior research indicates that certain factors place some youth more at risk for being victimized online in comparison to their peers (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2001). Professionals in school or health settings are likely to encounter adolescents who have been victimized online; however, not all of these professionals routinely assess for risky online behaviors or previous victimizations when working with teens (Wells, Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Becker-Blease, 2006). In addition, these professionals may feel unprepared to address issues related to online victimization and Internet safety (Finn & Kerman, 2004) as there is limited information available in general on how to assist youth and their families with Internet safety issues (see Rosen, 2007; Wolak et al., 2008). The purpose of this chapter is to review the risk factors associated with online victimization as well as describe the protective factors that promote Internet safety and prevent online victimization from occurring.

BACKGROUND

There are three types of online victimization (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000). The first is sexual solicitation, where teens are requested to engage in wanted or unwanted sexual talk or sexual behavior with an adult. Unwanted exposure to sexual material is the second type of victimization. Sexual material includes images of naked individuals or people having sex that appear in conjunction with conducting online searches or opening e-mail messages.

The third type of victimization is Internet harassment, which is defined as aggressive or

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/identifying-risk-factors-enhancing-protective/39296

Related Content

E-Signature Use in China: Four Case Studies

Zhonghao Liu (2012). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 73-83).

www.irma-international.org/article/signature-use-china/75173

Internet Use and Psychological Well-Being

Chiungjung Huang (2012). *Encyclopedia of Cyber Behavior* (pp. 302-314).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/internet-use-psychological-well-being/64763

Identifying Risk Factors and Enhancing Protective Factors to Prevent Adolescent Victimization on the Internet

Megan E. Calland Jason J. Burrow-Sanchez (2010). *Adolescent Online Social Communication and Behavior: Relationship Formation on the Internet* (pp. 152-166).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/identifying-risk-factors-enhancing-protective/39296

Digital Natives

Sue Bennett (2012). *Encyclopedia of Cyber Behavior* (pp. 212-219).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-natives/64755

Interest and Performance When Learning Online: Providing Utility Value Information can be Important for Both Novice and Experienced Students

Tamra B. Fraughton, Carol Sansone, Jonathan Butner and Joseph Zachary (2011). *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/article/interest-performance-when-learning-online/54060