Some Contrarian Hypotheses about the Internet and Youth Safety

David Finkelhor

University of New Hampshire
Crimes against Children Research Center
University of New Hampshire

ROBERT Conference
May 23-4, 2012
Berlin, Germany
Your children are in danger! Do you want to protect them from pornography and stalkers online?
Not the Same:

The Internet has dangers

The Internet increases dangers
**Dominant Risk Amplification Hypotheses**

- Makes kids more vulnerable to predators
- Promotes and aggravates bullying
- Sexualizes
- Empowers and emboldens offenders
- Aggravates impact of abuse

**Engines of Amplification**

- Anonymity
- Access
- Normative vacuum

The Internet as a new form of urbanization
Contrarian: Internet might reduce *offline* sexual victimization

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000 – May 2010

**Internet Adoption Trend**

*The percentage of Americans who use the Internet 1995-2010*

*Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Surveys, March 2000 – May 2010*
**FBI Forcible Rape Rate & NCANDS Sexual Abuse Rate**

*1990-2009*

![Graph showing the comparison between FBI Forcible Rape Rate and NCANDS Sexual Abuse Rate from 1990 to 2009.](image)

*Source: FBI, Crime in the United States Reports and NCANDS*

---

**Juvenile Victimization Trends, Sex Assault**

*1993 – 2008 (NCVS)*

![Graph showing the trend in juvenile victimization for sex assault from 1993 to 2008.](image)

*Note: Age 12 – 17 years; 3 year averages except 2008 which is a 2 year average. 2006 data excluded.*
Canadian Incidence Study:
Sexual Abuse Trend

ENGLAND
Trend in Sexual Abuse Registrations
1997 - 2009

Germany: Trend in Child Sexual Abuse
Police Crime Statistics, 1994 to 2010

Reducing sexual assault?
- Substituting for offline risk-taking
- More time at home
- Earlier danger detection
- Improved law enforcement detection of offenders at earlier stage of career

Sources: Stadler, L. & Bieneck, S. (2012)
Contrarian: Internet may reduce *offline* delinquency and bullying

Percentage of Students ages 12-18 who Reported Criminal Victimization at School during the Previous 6 months

1995 - 2005

Percentage of Students Ages 12-18 who Reported Being Targets of Hate-Related Words at School During the Previous Six Months


Percent of Students in Grades 9 through 12 who Reported they were in a Physical Fight in the Past Year

*Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Marijuana Use in the Past Thirty Days Among 8th Grade Students
1996-2008

*Source: Monitoring the Future data, Selected Years

International Trends – Bullying Victimization

✓ Health Behavior in School Aged Children Surveys
✓ WHO – sponsored
✓ Nationally representative samples of 11, 13 and 15 y o
✓ Classroom self administered questionnaire
✓ “How often have you been bullied in school in the past couple of months
✓ Chronic = 2 or more times this month

### International Trends in Chronic Bullying Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>-70.2*</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-67.3*</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>-66.8*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Flemish)</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>-46.5*</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>-50.2*</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>-50.5*</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>-52.7*</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>-51.6*</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (French)</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>-44.9*</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenland</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>-41.9*</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>-42.4*</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>-19.1*</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>-18.5*</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>-15.6*</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>-31.4*</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>-34.1*</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>-11.4*</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>-27.0*</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>-33.2*</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>-16.4*</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>-16.4*</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>-10.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>-6.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P<0.05, based on initial Confidence Intervals by 1.8 to account for design effect.

---

**Reducing offline delinquency?**

- Alleviating boredom and alienation
- Alternative sources of mastery
- Increased surveillance and reduced isolation
- Increased detection
Contrarian: The Internet may have helped law enforcement more than it helped criminals

NJOVS: Trends in Arrests
Net advantage to law enforcement?

- Undercover impersonation
- Large networks identified
- Improved evidence

Conviction rate (% of arrests):
- Internet involved victim: 85%
- CSA: 55%

Sources: Wolak, Analysis of N-JOVS-3
          Finkelhor, Cross & Cantor (2005)
Contrarian: Child abuse image production may paradoxically benefit some victims

Benefits to image production?
- Can facilitate detection
- Can facilitate prosecution
- Can obviate need for child to testify
- We do not know yet under what conditions image production exacerbates the impact of sexual abuse itself.
Contrarian: Do youths take more risks than adults?

Negative Outcomes from SNS Site Use

% of SNS-using adults and teens who have had these experiences because of things that happened on SNS

- Gotten into trouble at work/school
- Gotten into a physical fight
- Caused a problem with the family
- Resulted in face-to-face argument
- Ended a friendship

Source: Adult data come from the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 25 – August 26, 2011 Summer Tracking Survey (n=1,716 adults social networking site users and Twitter users). Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.

Teen data come from The Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Teen-Parent survey, April 19-July 14, 2011. N=799 for teens 12-17 and parents, including oversample of minority families. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones.
Which of the following, if any, have you personally ever done? Please mark all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Description</th>
<th>Teens (13-19)%</th>
<th>Young Adults (20-26)%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sent a nude or semi-nude picture/video (of yourself) to someone (via email, cellphone, etc.)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted a nude or semi-nude picture/video (of yourself) online (like on MySpace, Facebook, in a blog, etc.)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NET sent/posted a nude or semi-nude picture/video of yourself</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received a nude or semi-nude picture/video from someone (of him/herself)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared a nude or semi-nude picture/video with someone other than the one(s) it was originally meant for</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a nude or semi-nude picture/video (originally meant to be private) shared with me</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just Thinking
Only Hypotheses
Don’t Panic
Implications

- Look at online risks in context of total online and offline risk and harm
- Study and mobilize protective factors
- Be careful about extrapolating from high profile cases or clinical cases
- Particularly in inferring risk from high profile cases
- Consider normative changes

Contrarian: Much of the educational messaging about Internet safety is likely ineffective
**This is your brain on drugs**

*Partnership for a Drug-Free America*

---

**Warnings from Prevention Science**

- First generation programs often fail
  - Drug, auto safety, suicide, smoking
- Popular approaches (warnings, movies) frequently ineffective
- Prevention works best with simple clear cut messages
- Repetition crucial
- Message from multiple sources
Prevention Safety Education Successes

- Wear a bicycle helmet
- Don’t use illegal drugs
- Put on your seat belt
- Don’t smoke cigarettes
- Eat fruits and vegetables
- Use a condom

Features of Successful Education

- Specific and easily interpreted
- Widespread consensus
- Not age related
- Stable behavioral context
- Clear connection to harm

Internet safety education and messages LACK these attributes.
Internet Safety

Don’t give out personal information
- What is personal information?
- Are there situations where a youth would have a good and positive reason to talk to give out personal information?
- Policies change with age
- Context changes
- Do adults give out personal information?

Internet Safety

Don’t talk to strangers online
- Who is a stranger?
- Are there situations where a youth would have a good and positive reason to talk to stranger?
- Do adults talk to strangers?
Internet Safety

- Don’t send out sexual images
  - What is a sexual image?
  - Does this apply to adults?
  - Does problem vary with age?
  - Is there consensus that this is bad or harmful?
  - Are there situations where a youth would have a positive reason to share a sexual image

Internet Safety

- Don’t go to pornography sites
  - Is this a danger or a moral issue
  - Do we know what the harm is
  - Is this applicable to all age children
Internet Safety

- Don’t cyber-bully
  - What is cyber-bullying?
  - Difference between joking, teasing, playing a trick and cyber-bullying
  - What is a power differential?
  - When does a discussion about a third person become hurtful?
    - “Joaquin’s a terrible football player”
    - “Joaquin is fat and dumb”

Internet Safety

- Boils down to
  - Observe “golden rule”
  - Avoid criminals and exploiters
  - Make responsible sexual choices

These are complex problems that we have had questionable success in teaching despite Moses and Jesus and Muhammad
Implications

- Incorporate Internet safety into broader, evidence-based educational programs on personal safety, sex education, socio-emotional education and decision-making

- Focus attention on generic skills that improve online (and offline) decision-making, health and safety
  - Emotion management
  - Risk assessment
  - Impulse control
  - Perspective taking
  - Refusal skills
  - Bystander skills
  - Help-seeking
Implications

- Evaluate as much as possible
- Apply “logic model analysis” to programs
- Disseminate Internet safety education cautiously without evaluation
- We need much more agreement about what are the evidence-based safety messages

Logic model example

1. Youth send out sexual images of another youth because they do not know it can hurt
2. Seeing a movie that shows a child being badly hurt by the distribution of sexual image will teach youth that it can hurt
3. Youth will be deterred from sending images by the realization that it could cause harm
Logic Model Critique

1. Youth send out sexual images of another youth because they do not know it can hurt
Research: intention to cause hurt may be more frequent motive
Are youth unaware that image distribution causes harm?

2. Seeing a movie that shows a child being badly hurt by the distribution of sexual image will teach youth that it can hurt
Is a movie sufficient? Can youth generalize from movie to their environment?

3. Youth will be deterred from sending images by the realization that it could cause harm
Could some youth be inspired to send images by dramatization of the pain it inflicts?

Science in the Service of Safety

Science has brought us the technology of electronic communication. We need to use the same scientific methodology to craft social institutions and policies that promote well-being in the utilization of this technology.
The End

david.finkelhor@unh.edu

www.unh.edu/ccrc