

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media has raised controversial questions asking if children especially but not limited to ages eleven to sixteen, are at greater risk to be victimized by the dangers of the Internet such as the current threat of online predators. There needs to be longer conviction, increased public awareness and strict parental involvement in order to inform and protect the youth of our nation from online predators. Online sexual predators sexually approach or solicit one in five children on the Internet. The public, the youth and the government lack knowledge on online safety in regard to sexual predators therefore leading to an advantage for predators to target children. Without public awareness, longer jail conviction and strict parental involvement each day more children will be victimized and abused by predators.

PROBLEMS

Online predation first became a problem in 2000 when the use of the Internet was just emerging. Instead of sexual predators finding their victims on the streets or at the playground they could now sit behind a computer screen and search through thousands of children to begin chatting with online. Predators have one main intention and that is to solicit sex with minors. During the rise of online predators from 2000-2007 chat rooms and instant messaging were the main means of communication between adolescents and predators. With the rise of social media predators now mainly use chat rooms and social networking sites to target their victims.

According to research conducted by NCMEC, sixty one percent of children ages 13 to 17 have personal profiles on social networking sites. While many social networks have minimum age requirements as part of their terms of service, many children lie about their age in order to use popular social networks. One in five minors who use the Internet are subjected to unwanted sexual solicitation over the course of a year; of those incidents, twenty-seven percent involve requests for the children to give nude pictures of themselves. Of all cases of online sexual solicitation, one in four involves children under the age of 14. (Van Der Heide 2010) This is a problem because younger adolescents are not developmentally prepared to deal with online sexual solicitations that may occur when online. Younger adolescents are also more naïve and easier for a predator to take advantage of. By the age of 15 adolescents are more aware of the dangers of the Internet but still fall for the tricks of online predators.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the emergence of social media negatively effects the youth of our nation by putting them at risk for many online dangers, most importantly online sexual predators. The advancement in technology has led to children as young as eleven using social media without any regard for safety. The lack of knowledge about online predators by the public leads to a disadvantage to protecting children from falling victim. Online predators use the grooming process to target and seduce their victims. Once a child falls victim, the perpetrator can easily convince them to have sexual relations that are both harmful and illegal. The public continues to do nothing to make children, parents and educators aware of the current threat online predators pose. This paper examines the legal aspect on the conviction of online predators, along with parental and public solutions to limit the amount of predators out roaming the Internet. As a society it is our duty to protect the youth from such dangers. At age eleven kids should be out playing with their friends not being sexually and mentally abused by online predators. If society as a whole does not try to prevent this issue it is only going to become more of a threat as technology and social media progress. By having longer conviction time, more legal resources to track predators, increased public awareness and stricter parental involvement online predators can finally be stopped.

THE GROOMING PROCESS

Online predators are master manipulators with skills that can cripple any child's sense of awareness. Children look for friends on the Internet to talk to but most of the time they have no clue who they are really talking to. Predators use children's peeked interest in strangers to reel them in into an initial conversation this is called the grooming process. After initial contact is made then the process of building trust, setting up a meeting and manipulation and seduction begins.

Building trust:

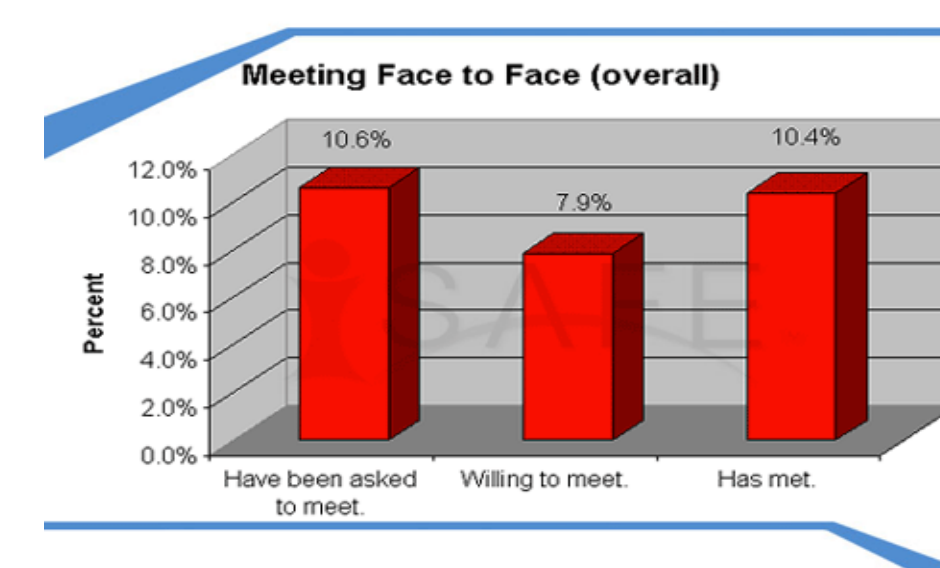
First predators build the trust of their victims, they do this by looking for children that are emotionally vulnerable which can be related to personal issues derived from problems at school or home. They use these issues to befriend the victim and empathize with them while building a friendship and trust.

Setting up a meeting:

After a predator gains the trust of their victim they usually try to set up a meeting. At this time in the process the adult has usually talked to the victim on the phone, phone calls typically lead to an attempt to set up a face-to-face meeting somewhere away from parents and school. In some cases predators even give their victim a train or airplane ticket.

Manipulation and Seduction:

Once the predator has met the child he can easily manipulate them into having sexual relations that are both harmful and illegal (Family Safe Computer).



SOLUTIONS

Three Step Solution:

Conviction:

The federal law states that it is unlawful for an adult stranger to contact a child online in a number of circumstances:

- It is illegal for an adult with sexual motives to attempt to seduce a child online or to arrange a meeting. Just having a meeting scheduled is a misdemeanor and can result in up to a year in jail.
- An adult is not allowed to send sexually explicit material to a child in order to seduce those convicted can face up to a year in jail.
- If the meeting actually occurs the adult could face four years in a state prison.
- If the adult offender is over 21, and has sexual intercourse with someone younger than 16, a sentence of two to four years in state prison is possible.

Public Awareness:

- Online safety in regard to online predators added into the health curriculum.
- School wide assemblies and information sessions for parents on protection.
- Anonymous student surveys.
- Increased awareness in social media.

Parental Involvement:

- Monitoring systems
- Know the warning signs
- Be up to date on technology, know what sites your kids are using frequently.

CONCLUSION

Online predators thrive off of the lack of awareness in children, parents, educators and the general public. If the public does not suspect that it is a current problem then it is just easier for predators to roam the Internet. Right this second sex offenders, pedophiles and child molesters are out there using the Internet to find their next victim, yet the public still denies the danger they pose to the youth. Online predators pose a series of problems not just to children but also to the public. Many of these problems include the absence of awareness on how children should be protected and what they are even being protected against. Adolescents frequently post personal information not even thinking twice about it and if parents do not think that there is any threat their child is up against then, they are not going to be monitoring their online activity. This is where public awareness and parental involvement play a key role in solving the issue of sexual predators that use social media. By making the public aware and involving the parent's, predators will have significantly decreased access to victims.