



SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Social engagement refers to relationships or involvements – both positive and negative – with family members, peers, community members, local institutions, and at the broadest level, with society.

KEY INDICATORS:

- Relationships with parents
- Relationships with friends
- Youth crime rates

YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS

Two recent Canadian studies show that positive relationships with family, friends and other people in the community are important to healthy youth development.

Higher levels of family connectedness and more positive relationships with parents are associated with higher levels of self-rated health, lower anxiety levels, and lower rates of smoking and alcohol use. As young people get older, friendships become increasingly important and they provide youth with an opportunity to develop social and emotional skills.

Relationships within families

A primary feature of a good parent-child relationship is effective communications.

A Health Canada study found that both boys and girls confide more easily in their mothers than their fathers. This declined with age for both genders.

The study also found that most youth reported having a happy home life in 2001, but this also decreased as they got older. By Grade 10, 15% fewer girls said they were happy with their lives at home than was the case in Grade 6. The majority of students across the grades felt trusted by their parents, valued what their

parents thought of them, and desired parental approval. Again, these feelings declined with age.

There are clear gender differences in relationships with parents. For example, more boys than girls in Grades 6 to 10 said they were understood by their parents. Older girls – those in Grades 8 and 10 – were less likely to say their parents understood and trusted them. They were less satisfied with their home life, had more arguments, and more desire to leave home. Conflict with parents appears to be a normal part of development as youth move towards independence. Gender differences in this area may simply reflect different approaches to parenting sons and daughters.

The Health Canada study found that overall, Grade 10 students who had a more positive relationship with their parents were more likely to be satisfied with their lives.

Friends are important

Establishing friendships is fundamental to youth development, and children with close friends tend to have better social and academic outcomes. Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby says, “It would be difficult to overestimate the role of friends in teenage lives.”

When high school students were asked to indicate what was very important to them, 85% put friends at the top of their list, along

with “freedom.” Young women were more likely than men to identify friends as being very important – 90% compared to 80%. When asked what gave them a great deal/quite a bit of enjoyment, friends again topped the list (94%), followed by music (90%).

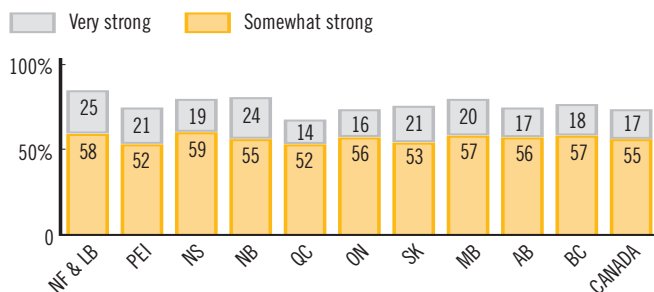
According to the Health Canada study, most students in Grades 6 to 10 said they had three or more close friends, although slightly fewer Grade 10 students had that many close friends. Talking to a best friend about things that really bothered them was easier for girls than for boys, but increased with age for both groups. More girls than boys – at all ages – found it easier to talk to same-sex friends about things that bothered them. In 2002, slightly more young men than women found it easy to talk to opposite-sex friends.

Time spent with friends is a good indicator of youth involvement with their peer group. The amount of time boys spent with friends was relatively stable from Grades 6 to 10. For girls, however, it decreased in Grade 10. This could be the result of self-imposed or parent-imposed limits. And there seems to be a downward trend in the proportion of students who spend five or more evenings per week out with friends.

Community matters

According to a CIHI study, a sense of belonging to one’s community is associated with higher levels of health. And data from the Canadian Community Health Survey indicate that almost three-quarters (72%) of youth aged 12 to 19 felt a sense of belonging to their community. There was some variation among the provinces.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY BELONGING AMONG YOUTH AGED 12 TO 19, 2003



Source: Canadian Population Health Initiative. Improving the Health of Young Canadians. Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2005.

Aboriginal children & friends

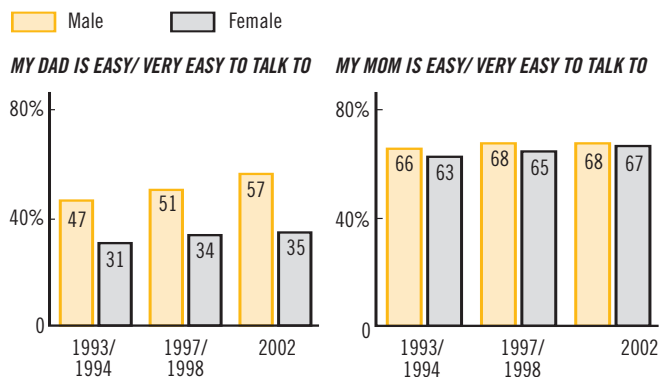
The vast majority of Aboriginal children living in non-reserve areas have harmonious relationships with their friends, according to the Aboriginal Peoples Survey. Only 3% of Aboriginal children aged 6 to 14 living off reserves didn’t get along well with other children. The majority (58%) got along “very well, with no problems.” Among those aged 6 to 9, 81% reported a positive relationship with other children, as did 91% of Canadian children generally.



KEY INDICATORS

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS:

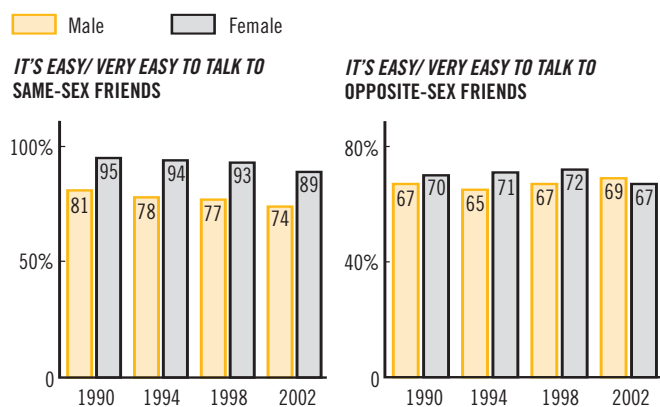
GRADE 10 STUDENTS TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT REALLY BOTHER THEM



Source: Health Canada. Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children: A World Health Organization Cross-National Study, 1989/90, 1993/94, 1997/98, & 2002.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH FRIENDS:

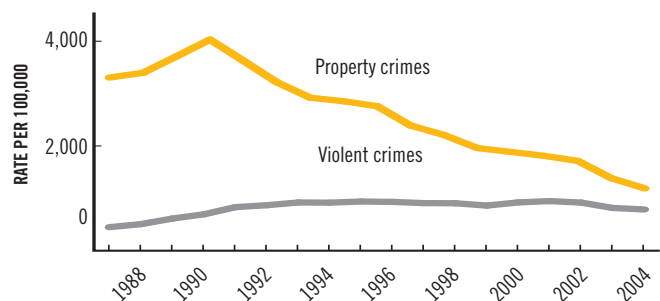
GRADE 10 STUDENTS TALK TO FRIENDS ABOUT THINGS THAT REALLY BOTHER THEM



Source: Health Canada. Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children: A World Health Organization Cross-National Study, 1989/90, 1993/94, 1997/98, & 2002.

YOUTH CRIME RATES

YOUTH AGED 12 TO 17



Source: Statistics Canada. “Crime Statistics,” in The Daily, July 21, 2005.

YOUTH CRIME

Between 2003 and 2004, the overall youth crime rate declined by 4%. About 78,000 youth aged 12 to 17 were charged with a Criminal Code offence in 2004 – down 6% from the year before. A further 101,000 young people had their cases handled by means other than the laying of formal charges, down 2% from 2003.

In 2004, the rate of violent crime among youth fell by 2% from the previous year. Since 1995, the highest rate for violent crime occurred in 2001, but the rate has been dropping since then. Most categories of youth violent crime declined in 2004, including a 30% drop in the homicide rate and a 2% drop in robberies.

The youth property crime rate has also been falling, dropping by 8% in 2004. Most types of property offences decreased, including an 11% drop in motor vehicle thefts and an 8% decrease in break-ins.

RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN & YOUNG TEENS

Lots of friends

In 2000, 93% of young teens aged 10 to 15 said they had many friends. Girls were slightly more likely than boys to feel this way, and family income made no difference. The majority of young people also said they got along easily with their peers. Younger teens were more likely than older youth to feel that way. There has been no significant change in these survey results since 1994.

Who can they turn to?

In 2000, 83% of young teens aged 10 to 15 said they had someone other than friends they could talk to about their problems. Younger children – those aged 10 and 11 – were more likely than the older teens to feel that way (90% compared to 78%), and girls were more likely than boys (86% and 78% respectively). Family income made no difference to these results. Again, these proportions have remained relatively stable since 1994.

Youth aged 10 to 15 said they were most likely to talk to their mothers about problems. Eighty-three per cent said they would speak with their mothers, while 62% identified their fathers. As teens get older, they are less likely to feel comfortable speaking with a parent, which further accentuates the importance of the other relationships in their lives.

Getting along

About 32% of young people aged 10 to 13 said they had no problems with their friends. Forty-three per cent said the same about their mothers, and 45% said they had no problems with their fathers. Only 20% said they got along very well with their siblings. These proportions have remained consistent over time.

Girls were less likely than boys to say that they got along with their mothers “without problems” – 41% compared with 46%. Older teens were less likely than younger teens to get along with their parents.

In 2000, almost two-thirds of parents of young children aged 4 to 9 reported that their children got along very well, without problems, with their friends – an increase of five percentage points since 1994. Parental reports indicated that girls were more likely than boys, and younger children more likely than older children, to get along very well with their friends.

GETTING ALONG VERY WELL WITH FRIENDS, 2000 PARENTAL REPORTS ON THEIR CHILDREN AGED 4 TO 9

BY GENDER		BY AGE GROUP			
GIRLS	BOYS	4-5 YRS	6-7 YRS	8-9 YRS	4-9 YRS
67%	61%	69%	62%	61%	64%

Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata from the NLSCY, 2000.

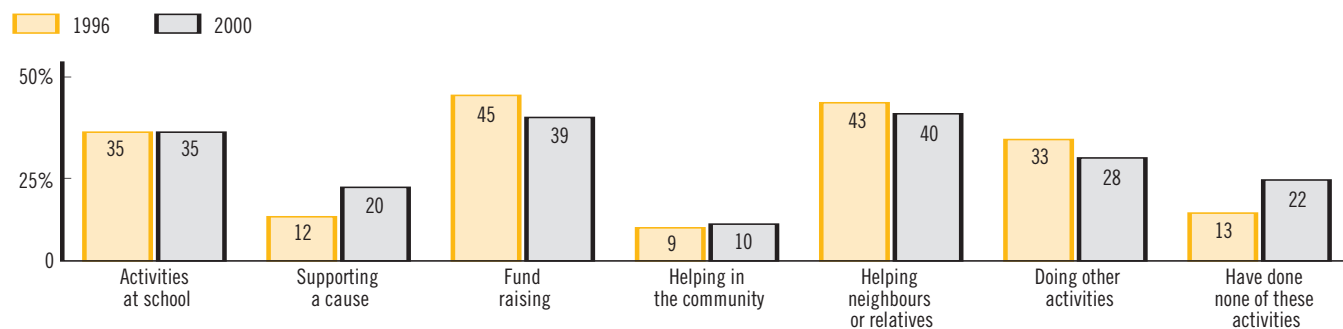
YOUNG VOLUNTEERS

Children aged 12 and 13 are engaged in a variety of volunteer activities at school, in their neighbourhoods, and their communities.

While most children in this age group are involved in some type of volunteer activity, the proportion who said they were not rose from 13% in 1996 to 22% by 2000.

Girls were more likely than boys to volunteer at school (40% compared to 30%). Children in higher-income families (over \$40,000 per year) were more likely than those from lower-income families to volunteer at school (37% compared to 29%). Of the 12- and 13-year-olds who volunteered, more than half (59%) did so a few times a month, and one-quarter volunteered less than once a month.

VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES* AMONG 12- & 13-YEAR-OLDS



* Over previous 12 months

Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata files from the NLSCY, 1996 & 2000.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

Substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect increased by 125% between 1998 and 2003, according to the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect.

This is the second national study conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada which examined investigations by child welfare services. The enormous increase in substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect is attributed to three key factors:

- An increase in cases of children's exposure to domestic violence and emotional maltreatment (identified as the most important factor).
- A shift in the way child welfare workers classify cases, with a much smaller proportion being classified as suspected. The introduction of structured assessment tools and new competency-based training programs may account for this.
- Better identification of victimized siblings. The number of investigated children has increased at a faster rate than the number of investigated families.

An estimated 217,319 child investigations were conducted in 2003 – or 46 investigations per 1,000 children aged 0 to 15. Of these investigations, 47% (103,297) were substantiated, which translates to 22 cases of substantiated maltreatment per 1,000 children. (These data are based on all Canadian jurisdictions except Quebec.) In another 13% of investigations (28,053), there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the abuse or neglect, although it was suspected by the investigating worker.

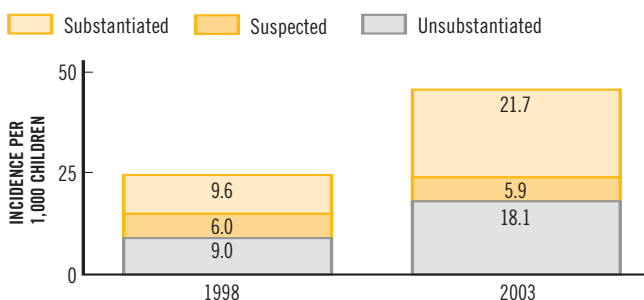
Of the 40% of investigations that were unsubstantiated, most involved reports made in good faith. The researchers estimated that only 5% of reports tracked by the study were considered to have been made with malicious intent.

Neglect was the most common form of substantiated maltreatment, accounting for 30% of the cases. Twenty-eight per cent involved exposure to domestic violence, 24% concerned physical abuse, 15% were emotional abuse, and 3% were sexual abuse.

Girls made up 49% of victims. They constituted a larger proportion of victims of sexual abuse (63%) and emotional maltreatment (54%). Boys were more often victims of physical abuse (54%), neglect (52%), and exposure to domestic violence (52%).

In 10% of substantiated cases, the children were physically harmed, and in 3% of the cases they required treatment. In 27% of cases of physical abuse, the abuse continued for more than six months.

CHILD MALTREATMENT INVESTIGATIONS IN CANADA, EXCLUDING QUEBEC



Source: Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, 2003: Major Findings, 2005.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Overall rates of physical and sexual assault against children by family members rose between 1998 and 2002, then declined in 2003. These data were collected from 71 police services across Canada, representing 46% of the national volume of crime.

According to this study, nearly one-third (32%) of all sexual assaults against children and youth in 2003 were perpetrated by family members, as were one in five physical assaults (21%).

Children are more likely to be victims of family-related assaults as they get older. For sexual assaults, the victimization rate was highest among girls aged 12 to 14, and for physical assaults, the rate was highest for 17-year-old women – about 2.5 times greater than for 17-year-old men. Among children under age 12, family-related physical assaults were higher for boys than for girls, but females aged 13 to 17 suffered higher rates of physical assaults than males in that age group.

It is widely understood that these data underestimate the problem because they represent only the incidents that were reported to police. Youth aged 15 and older – and particularly those aged 15 to 17 – were the least likely of all age groups to report their victimization to police. The most common reason given by youth for not reporting the incident was that it had been “dealt with another way” (47%), while 15% “feared revenge by the offender.”

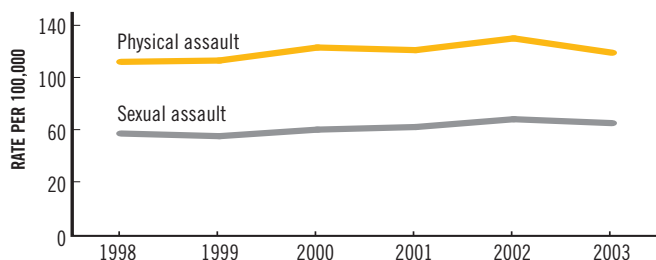
Witnessing family violence

According to the 2004 General Social Survey, 394,000 victims of spousal violence – 33% of all such victims – said their children saw or heard the abuse. Among these victims, 40% said they feared for their lives and 44% said they were physically injured.

Living in shelters

According to a survey of Canadian shelters which provide residential services for female victims of abuse, more than 95,000 women and children sought refuge in 2004. In 1998, 91,000 had come to the shelters; the numbers rose between 1998 and 2002, then declined slightly. According to Statistics Canada, the 7% decrease in admissions between 2002 and 2004 was largely due to a 12% drop in the number of children being admitted with their mothers. “Snapshot” surveys are conducted to see how many women and children are admitted to shelters on a given day. On the day of the survey in 1993, about 3,100 women and children were admitted to shelters for reasons of abuse; in 2004, that number had grown to 5,009 – a 62% increase.

CHILD VICTIMS OF SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ASSAULT BY FAMILY MEMBERS



Note: Children under age 18; reports to a subset of police departments.

Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada's Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile 2005.

EXPOSURE TO TV VIOLENCE

Research over the last decade has shown a clear correlation between watching violence on TV and childhood or teen aggression – establishing a short-term effect of TV violence on children’s behaviour.

Researchers from the University of Michigan have now found a correlation between viewing television violence in early childhood and aggression in young adulthood. The study concluded that “overall, these results suggest that both males and females from all social strata and all levels of initial aggressiveness are placed at increased risk for the development of adult aggressive and violent behaviour when they view a high and steady diet of violent TV shows in early childhood.”

In 2000, about one-quarter of Canadian children aged 2 to 11 watched television shows or movies in which there was a lot of violence – about 4% did so often and 21% sometimes watched. About one-third never saw such shows. Since 1994, the proportion of children who sometimes or often watch violent programs has decreased slightly, with more children reporting that they never or seldom see violent shows.

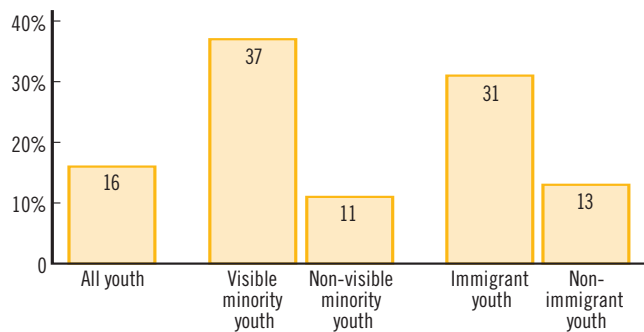
Teens are much more likely to be exposed to violence on the screen. Almost one-quarter of 14- and 15-year-olds said they often watched violent programming.

FACING DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination limits young people’s opportunities and their feelings of inclusion in society. Visible minority and immigrant youth are far more likely than other youth to experience discrimination, according to the Ethnic Diversity Survey.

Visible minority youth aged 15 to 24 were more than three times as likely to experience discrimination as non-visible minority youth. And immigrant youth were more than twice as likely to experience discrimination as non-immigrant youth.

DISCRIMINATION AMONG YOUTH AGED 15 TO 24, 2002



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada’s Ethnic Diversity Survey, 2002.

BULLYING

Bullying is increasingly recognized by parents and school authorities as a serious problem. Incidents of bullying at school have declined since 1998 among students aged 10 and 11, but they are still no lower than in the mid-1990s. In 2000, 75,000 children aged 10 and 11 were bullied “at least some of the time,” and another 122,000 (20%) said they were “rarely” bullied.

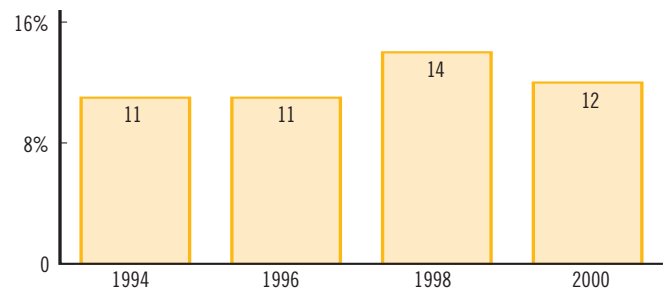
Boys are more likely than girls to be victimized. Fourteen per cent of boys and 10% of girls said they were bullied at school at least some of the time.

Children in low-income families are particularly vulnerable. In 2000, 20% of 10- and 11-year-olds in families with incomes under \$40,000 per year said they were bullied at least some of the time at school, compared to 9% of children in higher-income families.

According to leading Canadian researchers Debra Pepler and Wendy Craig, bullying is about asserting power through aggression, and repeated bullying consolidates the power relationship between the bully and the victim. Bullying in the playground is an indicator of future sexual harassment, dating aggression, workplace harassment, marital aggression, child abuse, and elder abuse.

Bullying can take many forms, with the most common being teasing, excluding, or spreading lies about the victim, according to the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* survey. Among students in Grades 6 to 10, girls were more likely to report being teased and having rumours spread about them. Boys were more likely to report physical victimization. For both boys and girls, the reported rates of physical victimization decreased with age. Sexual harassment increased with age for girls, but not for boys.

**YOUTH AGED 10 & 11 WHO WERE BULLIED AT SCHOOL
“AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME”**



Source: Calculations by the Canadian Council on Social Development using microdata from the NLSCY, 1994, 1996, 1998, & 2000.



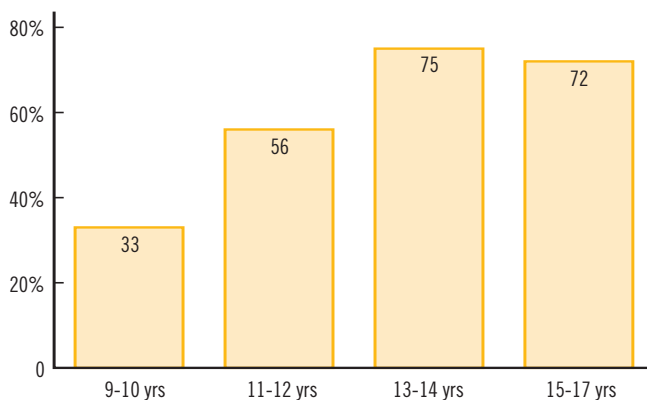
INTERNET DANGERS

Chat rooms

The Internet has become a major part of young people's social lives. They send e-mails, chat with friends and family, download music, and play games. In a 2004 Ipsos-Reid survey of teens aged 12 to 17, 43% said they used the Internet for e-mail every day and a further 30% used it a few times a week. Almost half (48%) used chat rooms daily, while 29% chatted several times a month. Another 23% said they only chatted on-line once a year or never.

Chat rooms provide an interactive medium where young people can have live, real-time conversations with several people at once. Some chat rooms have moderators, while others do not. Teens are attracted to chat rooms because they can talk with others about topics of interest. According to a 2001 study by the Media Awareness Network, 60% of Canadian youth aged 9 to 17 have used chat rooms. As age increased, so did the likelihood that young people were accessing chat rooms.

USE OF INTERNET CHAT ROOMS, BY AGE GROUP, 2001



Source: Media Awareness Network of Canada. Statistics on Canadian Youth and Chat Rooms, 2001.

A dark side

While chat rooms can provide a quick and easy way for youth to communicate, they can also have a darker side. Because of the anonymity they offer, chat rooms can be used for inappropriate sexual discussions and harassment. They can also be used to promote violence, hateful attitudes, or offensive activities. More than any other place on the Internet, chat rooms can be used as a cruising ground by sexual predators.

According to the Media Awareness study, a majority of young Canadians are using chat rooms, but only 12% of parents say their children do so. Of children using chat rooms, 85% said they chatted from home, but were unsupervised. When asked about their experiences with chat rooms, 43% said they had encountered someone on the Internet who had requested personal information about them, such as their photograph, phone number, or address. Only 8% had told their parents about the request. Close to half (46%) of the children surveyed said that someone had made unwanted sexual comments to them while in a chat room.

Cyber bullying

While most interactions on the Internet are positive, there are many cases where it has been used to ridicule, humiliate or intimidate others. This is called cyber bullying or electronic bullying.

The 2001 Media Awareness study found that one-quarter of young Canadian Internet users had received e-mails containing hateful messages about others. A 2002 British survey found that one-quarter of youth aged 11 to 19 had been harassed via computers or cell phones. A recent U.S. study found that 57% of students in Grades 4 to 8 had someone say hurtful or angry things to them on-line, and 13% said that this happened frequently. The latter study also found that 35% of students had been threatened on-line and 42% had been bullied while on the Internet. Unfortunately, however, 58% of those surveyed had not informed their parents about the Internet bullying or threats against them.

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