



September 20, 2006

Online Contact by Strangers Common on Adolescent Social Networking Websites

About 40 percent of adolescents ages 14 to 22 who use social networking sites such as MySpace report that they had been contacted online by a stranger not known to them or their friends, according to a national survey released today. This rate is about twice as high (20 percent) as the reported contact among Internet users who go online for other purposes, such as instant messaging or to search for information.

Few of the social network users (3.3 percent) reported actually meeting strangers offline.

The survey was conducted by the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The results come amid soaring popularity of sites such as MySpace and Facebook, and growing concerns among parents and lawmakers about the privacy of users.

“Young people need to be educated about the hazards of stranger contact on the Internet and how to respond to such solicitations,” noted Dan Romer, director of the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute. “But the risks of offline meetings appear to be present whether young people use social networking sites or not. Restricting access to social networking sites will not solve potential problems of stranger contact.”

Nearly 60 percent of the adolescents surveyed use social networking sites. More than 80 percent of that group said they visit the sites on a weekly basis. Use of the sites is evenly spread across gender, age, region of the country, race/ethnicity, academic performance and neighborhood income.

Social networking sites differ considerably in the rate at which contacts from strangers occur. Facebook users were 40 percent less likely to experience unsolicited stranger contact than MySpace users, according to the survey.

View the full report at www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org.