



## Backgrounder – Online sexual exploitation

As early as 1998, here in British Columbia, youth outreach workers in Prince Rupert reported intercepting a youth on her way to a ‘modeling’ job offered to her by a pimp in Burnaby. The workers were able to approach her at the local bus stop where she was picking up the bus ticket paid for by her Burnaby ‘friend’ and convince her that the person who was inviting her to a supposed life of glamour and wealth was indeed an identified pimp and recruiter well known to streetworkers in the Burnaby area and convinced her to remain in her community. This case illustrates the need for remote and isolated communities to receive information and training on this trend. Unfortunately, many workers, parents and teachers in smaller communities are neither technically competent enough nor trained in their workplaces to understand the evolving youth behaviours and culture associated with online activities. British Columbia’s children and youth, even its remotest villages, are online, via phone, cable and satellite and are as much at risk as any child of the new millennium.

The concerns of parents, teachers and professionals regarding the safety of their children on the Internet have been growing for the last several years. Anecdotal stories of youth lured out of their homes, of young people exposed to increasingly graphic examples of pornography online, and examples of the new technologies being used abusively, such as in the case of death threats via text messaging on cell phones have begun to raise the awareness of parents and professionals about the emerging issues associated with young people’s use of technology.

The latest, Vancouver Based, McCreary Centre Society, Adolescent Health Survey 2003 reported that “about 15% of students (surveyed) said they had been in contact with a stranger on the Internet who made them feel unsafe.” (pg. 35) Girls were 3 times more likely to report feeling unsafe, (23% girls, and 7% boys).

Also illustrating this issue are the concerns of organizations such as the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children in the United States. In February of 2004 they reported that reports of child sexual exploitation have increased 750 percent in a five year period. These reports include cases of child molestation (outside of the family), child pornography, child prostitution, online enticement of children, child sex tourism, unsolicited obscene material sent to a child, and the federally mandated reports of child pornography from Internet Service Providers (ISPs).  
(Source:[http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/NewsEventServlet?LanguageCountry=en\\_US&PageId=1531](http://www.missingkids.com/missingkids/servlet/NewsEventServlet?LanguageCountry=en_US&PageId=1531) )

Compounding concerns around internet use, is the speed that it has been integrated into our homes, schools and communities; the lack of understanding of the technology by parents and adults in general; and the lack of reliable instruction that all parties are receiving regarding safe and responsible internet use. Youth are often unsupervised in their online activities simply because there are very few adults available to them who have any idea about the Internet and the risks it poses.

Specific crimes associated with internet use include; child pornography, (production and possession of child pornography), child sexual exploitation, online enticement of children (luring), child sex tourism, and unsolicited obscene material sent to children, recruitment into the street sex trade, and exploitive uses of the Internet that affect youth (i.e. online bullying, fraud, identity theft).

