

Box 4.2 Exploitation Over the Internet

Sexual exploitation of children can also occur as a result of Internet interactions, a form of exploitation described in the research literature in recent years as **cyberexploitation** or online crimes against children. Researchers examining this issue have described the variety of ways in which children who use the Internet may be at risk (Kreston, 2002; Malesky, 2005; Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2003; Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 2014). First, children and adolescents may be propositioned online for sexual activity. Such propositions may be explicit proposals, or perpetrators may take a more indirect approach, using an online version of the grooming process just described to establish and maintain contact with children. Some children may provide their names, addresses, and telephone numbers to individuals they correspond with online and may even agree to meet with them. Second, children may be exposed to various forms of sexually explicit material on the Internet via links that come up when they use search engines, through their own misspelling of web addresses, or through unsolicited e-mails and pop-up ads. Third, children may experience online **sexual harassment**. This can include a variety of behaviors, such as "threatening or offensive behavior targeting the child or sharing information or pictures online about the targeted child" (Kreston, 2002, p. 13). The risks of these activities are promulgated by a number of different Internet facets including newsgroups, e-mail, websites, and chat rooms.

Researchers at the Crimes Against Children Research Center conducted three administrations of the **Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS)** in an attempt to determine the magnitude of online exploitation of children (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000, 2005; Priebe, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2013). The YISS-1 was administered to a national U.S. sample of 1,501 children and adolescents aged 10 to 17 years in the year 2000 (Finkelhor et al., 2000). The respondents were asked about their experiences online with unwanted sexual solicitation, exposure to pornography, and harassment within the past year. Of the children in this sample, 1 in 5 reported having experienced an unwanted sexual solicitation (e.g., received an online request to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or to give personal sexual information to an adult), 1 in 4 had experienced unwanted exposure to sexual material, and 1 in 17 had been threatened or harassed. Adolescents in the sample (aged 14 to 17 years) were more likely than younger children to have had these experiences online. Subsequent administrations of the survey in 2005 and 2010 showed decreases in both online sexual solicitation and pornography viewing, but slight increases in harassment (Priebe et al., 2013; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2006).