

30 percent of teen girls report meeting offline with someone they met online

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A new study highlights the risk that female teenagers face when they go online – a risk heightened for teen girls who have been victims of abuse or neglect.

The study, published in the eFirst pages of the journal *Pediatrics*, shows that 30 percent of teenagers reported having offline meetings with people they have met on the Internet and whose identity had not been fully confirmed prior to the meeting.

"These meetings may have been benign, but for an adolescent girl to do it is dangerous," says Jennie Noll, PhD, a psychologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and the study's lead author.

Moreover, abused or neglected teenage girls were more likely to present themselves online in a sexually provocative way than other [teenage girls](#). Research shows that high-risk, online profiles are more likely to lead to offline meetings, according to Dr. Noll, director of research in [behavioral medicine](#) and [clinical psychology](#) at Cincinnati Children's.

"If someone is looking for a vulnerable teen to start an online sexual discourse, they will more likely target someone who presents herself provocatively," she says. "Maltreatment poses a unique risk for online behavior that may set the stage for harm."

Dr. Noll and her colleagues studied 251 [adolescent girls](#) between the ages of 14 and 17. About half were victims of abuse or neglect.

If families installed [Internet filtering software](#) at home, it made no difference in the association between maltreatment and high-risk Internet behaviors, says Dr. Noll. These behaviors included intentionally seeking adult content, provocative self-presentations on [social networking sites](#) and receiving sexual advances online. On the other hand, "high quality parenting" and parental monitoring helped reduce the association between adolescent risk factors and these online behaviors, she says.

The new study is part of a larger body of Dr. Noll's work on high-risk Internet behaviors. In a previous, [pilot study](#), she asked girls whether they have ever met anyone offline after meeting them online and heard some "chilling" stories," she says.

"One patient told a story about a guy who started texting her a lot, and he seemed 'really nice.' So she agreed to meet him at the mall, she got in his car, they drove somewhere and he raped her."

Provided by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

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