Chapter 7
Predictors for online unwanted sexual solicitation: a cross-sectional study of Swedish boys and girls in years 6–9

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The Internet has opened up opportunities we could not have imagined some decades ago. Children and adolescents can communicate with friends, connect with new friends online, seek information, or visit civic or political websites, as well as create their own websites, and it is thus a forum for increased and active participation in society (Livingstone et al. 2005). It is also a forum for the development of social subjecthood, where children present themselves through, for example, Facebook and MySpace, which can function as enablers and mediators of positive sexual relations (Brickell 2012).

However, the Internet has also opened up for different forms of Internet interaction, in the shape of victimization such as cyber bullying (Wang, Iannotti et al. 2009), online sexual harassment (Helweg-Larsen, Schutt et al. 2012), Internet harassment, and online unwanted sexual solicitation (USS) (Ybarra, Espelage et al. 2007). This paper will mainly focus on online USS among children and adolescents.

There have been several recent stories worldwide of girls who have committed suicide after being victims of online USS. In a recent case in Sweden, a 13-year-old girl committed suicide after being manipulated and sexually abused by an adult who pretended to be a 15-year-old boy. After this went public, more than twenty-five girls, all aged between 11 and 15, have since reported to the police that they have been the targets of the same man (Expressen 2013). One of his methods was to use a photo of his target that he manipulated with pornographic photos and then threatened to publish them online if they did not give him what he wanted. It is also suspected that he met two of the girls offline.

The opportunity for groomers to find victims has increased through the Internet, and they are skilled in building trust in children and gradually exerting power and control before ensnaring them in sexual interactions (Berson 2003). There are increasing concerns about online USS, and it has become an additional harassment problem for young people, on top of offline victimization as well as other forms of harassment online (Helweg-Larsen, Schutt et al. 2012).

An American study on trends in youth Internet victimization shows that there was a decrease in USS between 2005 and 2010 (Jones et al. 2012). Yet, the frequency of exposure to any sexual solicitation was still high in 2010 (13 per cent for girls, 4 per cent for boys), and thus remains a topic for increased mobilization. In general, girls are more likely to be exposed to online victimization than are boys. They are
more exposed to cyber bullying (Wang, Iannotti et al. 2009), Internet harassment, sexual harassment, as well as USS (Helweg-Larsen, Schutt et al. 2012), while boys are perpetrators to a far greater extent than girls (Wang, Iannotti et al. 2010).

There are some studies that show that race/ethnicity is a predictor for victimization. While a study by Jones et al. (2012) shows that fewer white adolescents are online victims than both Hispanic and Black adolescents, Mitchell et al. (2007) only found an increased risk for young black people. Living with only one biological parent is not associated with an increased risk (Helweg-Larsen & Boving-Larsen 2003; Mitchell, Finkelhor et al. 2007). Having parents with low education is associated with online limited solicitation, but not aggressive solicitation (suggestions to meet offline) (Mitchell, Finkelhor et al. 2007).

Children who are victims of online USS have weaker emotional bonds with their parents and a lower degree of parental monitoring compared with those with little or no experience of online USS (Ybarra, Espelage et al. 2007). Even if many victims of online USS not see themselves as victims, and have developed skills and can deal effectively with potential perpetrators by blocking them, parents are important in talking about risks and also supporting those who are affected negatively (Rosen 2006).

Earlier studies show that there is co-occurrence of different forms of victimization. Espelage and Holt (2007) found that bullying victims report a high amount of peer sexual harassment and more physical dating violence. There is a co-occurrence between different forms of online harassment such as Internet harassment and USS (Ybarra, Espelage et al. 2007), but another study did not find support for an overlap between being bullied at school and Internet harassment (Ybarra, Diener-West et al. 2007). Although Mitchell, Finkelhor et al. (2011) found that there are co-occurrences between many forms of victimization, they did not find an elevated risk for online USS for those experiencing sexual harassment or peer/sibling victimization offline.

Sweden is one of the computer-densest countries in the world and most Swedish children have access to a computer (Statistics Sweden 2004). Despite the positive possibilities that the Internet offers, we have to know more about risks that children and young people face when they are online, in order to develop online literacy among young users. To my knowledge, there is no previous Swedish study on the prevalence of or predictors for USS in this age group.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the prevalence of online USS and predictors for victimization in a sample of Swedish pupils in years 6–9.

**Methods**
The study is based on a web-based questionnaire distributed to pupils in ten schools in a medium-sized municipality in the north of Sweden. The study
population comprised 1,527 pupils (728 boys, 799 girls) in years 6-9 (about 12-16-year-olds). The response rate was 80 per cent.

The questionnaires were distributed via their school email addresses and were answered during school hours in computer rooms at the schools. All schools were given extra resources so they could each have at least one member of staff supervising the pupils in order to answer any questions and to make sure that all pupils could complete the questionnaire in privacy.

**Online unwanted sexual solicitation**

The prevalence rate for online USS was estimated based on four questions referring to the last six months and having the answer alternatives never, once, a few times, many times. The questions read as follows:

Many pupils are exposed to harassment of different kinds on the Internet. Have any of the following happened to you when using a computer in the last six months:

1) Has anyone tried to get you to talk about sex when you did not want to?

2) Has anyone asked you personal questions when you did not want to, such as what your body looks like or sexual things you have done?

3) Has anyone asked you to do something sexual that you did not want to do?

4) Has anyone you don’t know asked you to meet offline?

It was counted as online USS where the children answered ‘at least once’ or more to any of the four questions. The questions were derived from questions used in earlier studies (for example, Mitchell & Jones 2011).

**Demographics**

Family structure was measured using a question about whom they lived with. Those who answered that they not live with both their mother and their father (in other words with separated or single parents, or other) were coded as risk = 1. A proxy for family affluence was measured by asking whether they had had enough money to do the same things as their friends the last three months. Not having that ‘always’ or ‘often’ were scored as risk = 1.

The pupils were categorized as being of foreign extraction if their father, their mother or both were born abroad = 1.

As Sweden is a country where most children have access to a computer, having more than two computers in the family was scored as a risk for online USS.
Parental support
A low degree of parental support was scored as 1 if they not talked about almost
everything ‘always’ or ‘often’ with either their mother or their father.

Friend/sibling support
A low degree of friend/sibling support was scored as 1 if they not talked about
almost everything ‘always’ or ‘often’ with a friend or a sibling.

Teacher support
An index of teacher support was constructed from five questions: whether their
teachers gave them support and help when they needed it; whether their teachers
would notice if they not enjoy school; whether they felt their teachers were fair;
whether their teachers gave praise and encouragement at school; and whether
there was an adult at school they could talk to if they had problems. The answer
alternatives were always, often, sometimes, seldom, and never. The index was
dichotomized at the upper quartile = low teacher support and scored 1.

Parental rules
An index for parental rules was constructed from four questions regarding how
important it was at home that they did their homework; that someone at home
knew where they are; that they came home on time at night; and that they helped
out at home. The answer alternatives were very important, fairly important, not
very important, and not important at all. The index for a low degree of parental
rules was dichotomized and scored as risk when it was not very important or not
important at all to follow the rules asked about in all four questions.

Bullying
If a pupil answered that it had happened (once or more often) in the last six
months that one or several pupils had teased, fought or shut them out, they were
scored as being bullied = 1.

Sexual harassment
The sexual harassment index was derived from Gruber & Fineran (2007) and
consisted of fourteen questions of experiential behaviours relating to sexual
harassment the last six months. If a student answered that it had ever happened to
them they were scored as being sexually harassed = 1.

Data analysis
Comparisons between boys and girls were conducted with chi-square analysis. A
p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. To analyse the association
between online USS and predictors for victimization, a logistic regression model was fitted to the data. A confidence interval of 95 per cent for odds ratio was used. All independent variables were significant in the crude analysis, although sometimes not both for boys and girls. All variables that were either significant for all students or among either boys or girls were included in the adjusted model. The adjusted logistic regression analysis was developed in three steps (Models 1–3) in order to analyse the relative impact of socio-demographics, social support, and offline victimization. Model 3 shows the contribution of each variable independently while controlling for all other predictors.

Results
Table 7.1 shows that about one-third of the pupils were not living with both their parents and one-fifth of both boys and girls did not always or often have as much money as their friends. Two-thirds of the pupils had more than two computers in the family. A greater number of boys reported low parental and low friend/sibling support compared with girls, and boys also reported that it was less important to follow rules at home compared with the girls. One-quarter of the boys and one-third of the girls reported being bullied the last six months, and about half of both boys and girls reported experiencing sexual harassment, a slightly higher proportion of girls compared to boys.

Table 7.1 Socio-demographic characteristics, social support/parental monitoring, and offline victimization (N= 1,527). P-values from chi-square tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys % (n)</th>
<th>Girls % (n)</th>
<th>p-values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-demography</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.9 (152)</td>
<td>19.9 (159)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>24.6 (179)</td>
<td>26.2 (209)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.0 (175)</td>
<td>27.7 (221)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.5 (222)</td>
<td>26.3 (210)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not living with both parents</td>
<td>36.5 (266)</td>
<td>36.1 (287)</td>
<td>0.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not having as much money as friends</td>
<td>19.2 (139)</td>
<td>19.7 (156)</td>
<td>0.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental foreign background</td>
<td>12.5 (91)</td>
<td>15.9 (126)</td>
<td>0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two computers in the family</td>
<td>71.7 (517)</td>
<td>67.6 (537)</td>
<td>0.085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social support/parental rules</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parental support</td>
<td>41.0 (245)</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low friend/sibling support</td>
<td>53.5 (324)</td>
<td>31.4 (237)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low teacher support</td>
<td>24.7 (147)</td>
<td>28.2 (205)</td>
<td>0.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parental rules</td>
<td>39.9 (255)</td>
<td>34.0 (256)</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offline victimization</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any bullying</td>
<td>26.8 (175)</td>
<td>36.9 (282)</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual harassment</td>
<td>44.2 (297)</td>
<td>50.1 (385)</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exposure to online unwanted sexual solicitation

Table 7.2 presents data from the responses to the four different questions regarding online USS and the prevalence of experiencing any of these four forms. Girls reported they were victimized to a significantly higher degree than boys for all forms except for being asked to do something sexual that they did not want to. The most common form of solicitation for both boys and girls was to be asked to meet offline by an unknown person. This happened to one boy out of seven, compared with more than every fifth girl. One-fifth of the boys and one-third of the girls reported they had been victimized at least once in any of the four forms in the previous last six months.

Table 7.2 Prevalence of exposure for online USS among boys and girls in years 6–9 in the last six months (per cent). P-values from chi-square tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Boys %</th>
<th>Girls %</th>
<th>p-values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone tried to get you to talk about sex when you did not want to?</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone asked you personal questions when you did not want to ask such as what your body looks like or sexual things you have done?</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone asked you to do something sexual that you did not want to do?</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has anyone you don’t know asked you to meet offline?</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any of the above one or more often</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predictors of online unwanted sexual solicitation

Tables 7.3 and 7.4 present the results of the unadjusted and the adjusted logistic regression analyses of predictors associated to victimization for online USS of boys and girls, respectively. The unadjusted analyses show that socio-demographic factors, social support, following parental rules, and being victims of bullying and sexual harassment offline are associated with online USS. For girls, low parental and teacher support increased the odds of being victimized, while a low degree of friend/sibling support decreased the odds.
### Table 7.3 Logistic regression analyses of predictors for any exposure to online USS—boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unadjusted OR (95% CI)</th>
<th>Adjusted OR (95% CI)</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced parents</td>
<td>1.09 (0.73–1.64)</td>
<td>0.86 (0.56–1.32)</td>
<td>0.81 (0.48–1.36)</td>
<td>0.86 (0.49–1.50)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not as much money as friends</td>
<td>1.97 (1.24–3.11)</td>
<td>2.00 (1.24–3.24)</td>
<td>2.07 (1.16–3.68)</td>
<td>1.63 (0.88–3.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign extraction</td>
<td>2.65 (1.58–4.43)</td>
<td>2.56 (1.51–4.34)</td>
<td>2.71 (1.39–5.30)</td>
<td>2.50 (1.23–5.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two computers at home</td>
<td>1.51 (0.95–2.40)</td>
<td>1.66 (1.02–2.70)</td>
<td>2.01 (1.07–3.79)</td>
<td>1.60 (0.82–3.11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.058</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parent support</td>
<td>1.62 (1.06–2.46)</td>
<td>1.20 (0.71–2.04)</td>
<td>1.22 (0.71–2.12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low friend/sibling support</td>
<td>0.76 (0.50–1.14)</td>
<td>0.84 (0.50–1.40)</td>
<td>0.74 (0.53–1.27)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low teacher support</td>
<td>2.64 (1.68–4.15)</td>
<td>1.62 (0.93–2.82)</td>
<td>1.45 (0.80–2.61)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parental rules</td>
<td>2.59 (1.71–3.90)</td>
<td>1.91 (1.14–3.20)</td>
<td>1.70 (0.99–2.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any bullying</td>
<td>4.10 (2.71–6.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.33 (1.95–5.69)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual harassment</td>
<td>5.63 (3.58–8.56)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.13 (1.78–5.49)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7.4 Logistic regression analyses of predictors for any exposure to online USS—girls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unadjusted OR (95% CI)</th>
<th>Adjusted OR (95% CI)</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divorced parents</td>
<td>1.53 (1.12–2.11)</td>
<td>1.54 (1.11–2.14)</td>
<td>1.47 (1.03–2.11)</td>
<td>1.44 (0.98–2.13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not as much money as friends</td>
<td>1.26 (0.86–1.84)</td>
<td>1.16 (0.79–1.72)</td>
<td>0.90 (0.58–1.41)</td>
<td>0.68 (0.42–1.10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign extraction</td>
<td>0.86 (0.55–1.33)</td>
<td>0.82 (0.52–1.30)</td>
<td>0.91 (0.54–1.51)</td>
<td>0.74 (0.43–1.28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two computers at home</td>
<td>1.44 (1.03–2.03)</td>
<td>1.39 (0.99–1.96)</td>
<td>1.37 (0.93–2.02)</td>
<td>1.27 (0.84–1.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parent support</td>
<td>2.14 (1.53–2.98)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.66 (1.14–2.41)</td>
<td>1.44 (0.96–2.14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low friend/sibling support</td>
<td>0.58 (0.41–0.82)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.38–0.82)</td>
<td>0.68 (0.45–1.04)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low teacher support</td>
<td>2.25 (1.60–3.15)</td>
<td>2.10 (1.44–3.07)</td>
<td>2.01 (1.33–3.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low parental rules</td>
<td>1.98 (1.44–2.74)</td>
<td>1.56 (1.08–2.26)</td>
<td>1.49 (1.00–2.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any bullying</td>
<td>1.51 (1.10–2.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.04 (0.70–1.54)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual harassment</td>
<td>6.17 (4.32–8.81)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.30 (3.54–7.94)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.263</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In the adjusted analysis, where all variables are controlled for one another, another pattern appears. For boys, the full model shows that the most important predictors for online USS were having a foreign-born mother and/or a father and being victims of offline bullying and sexual harassment. For girls, none of the socio-demographic variables were predictors for victimization, while low teacher
support and a little importance attached to following parental rules were associated with victimization, and also offline sexual harassment.

The full model explains a fourth of the variance in victimization among both boys and girls, and half of the variances are related to offline victimization.

**Discussion**

The results show that it was common for pupils in years 6–9 to be victims of online US, girls to a greater extent than boys. The odds of being victimized seem to be evenly distributed among the pupils from different social backgrounds, with the exception of boys with a foreign background. The most significant factors associated with online victimization seem to be offline victimization. Sexual harassment was strongly associated with victimization among both boys and girls, while bullying was significant for boys only.

The higher proportion of girls among the victims is in line with previous studies in the US (Jones, Mitchell et al. 2012) and in Denmark (Helweg-Larsen et al. 2012). Even if girls were more exposed to online US, the frequency with which boys were victims should not be disregarded. There is a risk that the focus on girls as victims in the media, together with a gendered stereotype of girls as weaker and less able to handle abuse, could increase the risk of boys becoming online targets and victims (Davidson & Martellozzo 2008), particularly if prevention programmes only target girls. The gendered pattern of the phenomenon, however, is important to consider, as the literature shows that it is boys and men who are perpetrators to a far greater degree than girls and women (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2007).

The prevalence of online US in the present study is much higher compared to other studies (Jones, Mitchell et al. 2012; Helweg-Larsen et al. 2012), but an earlier report by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2007) presents similar figures, although the report just presents the prevalence for 15-year-old boys and girls, and only concerns victimization from perpetrators more than five years older than the victims. The present study did not ask about who had harassed them, as it in most cases must be difficult to know.

As the studies by Jones (2012) and Mitchell (2007) not separate their results for boys and girls it is difficult to compare the results that boys with a foreign background were more victimized than Swedish-born boys, and that it not was a predictor for girls. It could be possible that boys with a foreign background are regarded as easier targets compared with boys with Swedish-born parents, while girls are thought vulnerable and easy to reach regardless of their background.

For all other socio-demographic variables, it seems as if victimization in online US is equally distributed; belonging to a privileged group in society does not
protect boys or girls when they are using Internet. That is in line with previous
research from Denmark (Helweg-Larsen et al. 2012), which found that not living
with both biological parents was a predictor in the crude analysis, but not in the
adjusted. Mitchell (2007) found that 10–17-year-olds were less likely to be the
victims of online limited solicitation if they had parents with a higher education,
while they were equally vulnerable for aggressive solicitation (being asked for
offline contact by the perpetrator by mail, telephone, or in person, or attempts or
requests for offline contact).

If there are many computers in a family, the likelihood that a young person has
their own increases, as it does if there is a high Internet use in the home. This has
been shown to increase the risk for Internet sexual solicitation in a study by
Mitchell (2001) and Helweg-Larsen (2012), but the number of computers in our
study might be a limited predictor for the frequency of Internet use. It is probably
more important to know if they have their own computer, but the question was not
posed in that way.

The greatest odds for online USS in this study were associated with offline
victimization. Helweg-Larsen et al. (2012) use a wider definition of online
victimization than the present study, including any type of harassment, and find
that those exposed to parental violence or child sexual abuse were associated with
being online victims. This supports the theory that more vulnerable children
display different Internet behaviour compared to less vulnerable children, and
thus put themselves at risk for unknown people who approach them on Internet or
other social networking sites. The result that being bullied at school (for boys) and
being sexually harassed offline was such a strong predictor for online USS in the
present study can have a slightly other explanation. It is possible that most of the
online victims are harassed offline by peers at school, and that Internet has given
harassers a possibility to continue to harass pupils when they are at home. Jones et
al. (2012) think that a high prevalence of online harassing behaviour mirrors the
fact that the possibility of harassing others has increased with the new techniques,
and that the harassing and bullying behaviour have migrated online in the same
was as other forms of adolescent communication have developed. It is not possible
to analyse the characteristics of the perpetrators in this study, which is a
disadvantage, but the strong association to offline victimization means that schools
need to look hard at the co-occurrence of different forms of victimization.
However, although Mitchell et al. (2011) find that there is co-occurrence between
many forms of victimization, they did not find an elevated risk for online USS
among those experiencing sexual harassment or peer/sibling victimization offline.
They included questions on other forms of sexual victimization such as rape, and
when that variable was included in the multiple regression analysis the association
between sexual harassment and USS became insignificant.
Even if some of the perpetrators are the same age as the victims, and possibly even schoolmates, we also have to be aware of the likelihood that some of them are groomers who can manipulate the children and slowly become more and more aggressive (Berson 2003). The fact that as many as 30 per cent of Swedish 15-year-olds have been contacted by a person they think is an unknown adult (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2007) shows that the high prevalence in this study must be taken seriously, and that we have to know more about the perpetrators and also how to protect children from victimization. It is possible that the decrease in online USS in the US are due to an extensive preventive work as reported by Jones et al. (2012), and it is thus of great importance that schools in Sweden work to increase Internet literacy among pupils, even at younger ages.

The concept of online USS is open to discussion. The same questions in an offline situation would be called sexual harassment or sexual abuse, and I think there is a risk of diminishing the problem if it just called ‘solicitation’. If some of the perpetrators offline are the same students who are the online perpetrators it is not a ‘migration’ of sexual offensive treatment, but an extended forum for such behaviour, and should be named as such.

Also, the gendered aspects of online USS should be highlighted. It is apparent that the Internet both reflects and refracts the broader pattern of unequal social power in society, and that practices online follow the same axes of social stratification as offline (Brickell 2012). The higher degree of victimization among girls and boys with a foreign background can probably be a part of the power order in society, where people with less social power and status are more likely to be the victims of sexualization, objectification, and harassment.

**Methodological considerations**

As this study is cross-sectional, findings should be interpreted with caution, as we cannot infer evidence of causal relationship between data. Answering questions about sexual solicitation can be sensitive, and it is possible that the prevalence of victimization in this study is underestimated. The high response rate is an advantage, however, as is the data collection method. Our definition of online USS is different from Mitchell’s, who says that they have to be victimized by an adult (2001). It is complicated to say anything about the perpetrator, and it is assumed that the pupils would have difficulties doing that too.

**Conclusions**

This study shows that online unwanted sexual solicitation was common among Swedish schoolchildren in years 6–9, particularly among girls, and that there is a co-occurrence with offline victimization such as sexual harassment, and for boys
also bullying. It is of vital concern that children become Internet literate and that schools commit to combating both offline and online victimization.

**References**


