

By Brian Womack - May 10, 2011 11:59 PM

Facebook Inc., the world's most popular social-networking service, had 7.5 million U.S. users who were younger than 13 in the past year, a violation of the site's policies, according to a survey by Consumer Reports.

More than 5 million of the users were under age 11, according to the Consumer Reports "State of the Net" survey. In addition, Facebook exposed more than 5 million U.S. households to some type of "abuse," including virus infections and identity theft, the survey showed. About 1 million children experienced bullying on the site, Consumer Reports said.

"Despite Facebook's age requirements, many kids are using the site who shouldn't be," said Jeff Fox, technology editor for the Yonkers, New York, magazine. "What's even more troubling was the finding from our survey that indicated that a majority of parents of kids 10 and under seemed largely unconcerned by their children's use of the site."

Facebook, which has more than 500 million members, has faced criticism that it doesn't protect the privacy of users, especially young people, and can be used to bully teens. Last month, the company announced additional safety tools, including a redesigned "Family Safety Center" that has videos and articles for teens, parents and teachers.

Facebook said it encourages communication between parents and kids about using the Internet safely.

Age Restrictions

"Recent reports have highlighted just how difficult it is to implement age restrictions on the Internet and that there is no single solution to ensuring younger children don't circumvent a system or lie about their age," the company said today in an e-mailed statement. "We appreciate the attention that these reports and other experts are giving this matter and believe this will provide an opportunity for parents, teachers, safety advocates and Internet services to focus on this area."

Facebook requires users to be at least 13 -- and older in some jurisdictions. The site also lets users report accounts registered to members who are under 13 so they can be deleted.

In March, Facebook said it's expanding an existing reporting system that lets users flag content they consider bullying to a parent or teacher. The site also lists tips on preventing cyberbullying, including using a "block" feature to stop abusive behavior.

In all, Palo Alto, California-based Facebook has 20 million American users under 18, Consumer Reports said.

Source:

<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-10/facebook-had-7-5-million-users-under-13-years-old-in-past-year.html>