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Pokemon GO - Staying Safe

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Pokemon GO, a modified version of the classic Pokemon games, has taken the world by storm and changed the game of gaming. Once only able to be accessed through gaming systems located in the comfort of players' homes or through handheld devices that limited them to that reality, this version gives players incredibly strong incentive to take their recreation outdoors and interact with their communities—even ones beyond their own. However, through the augmented reality of this game, a cross between concentrating on a screen and venturing out into the world can lead to some dangerous situations for players. Addressing these problems is a big step toward finding solutions to making this game safer and thus more enjoyable for all players.

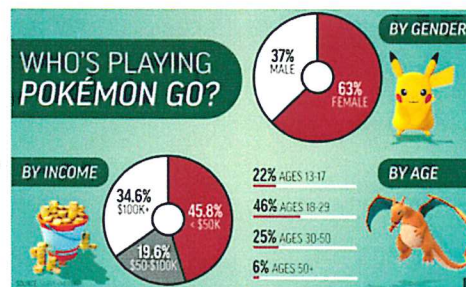
Please read this news story. (<http://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/174404972-story>)

While stories like this are recent (as well as the game itself), there are not many statistics regarding criminal actions and reports of perpetrators utilizing the game's location tracking and social component of meeting users face-to-face; mostly, there are stories like this with vague and incomplete information concerning their cases. However, in regards to this story, sexual assault is already one of the most underreported crimes, so it is important to address issues related to this with players to prevent major outbreaks of related crime and violence that can be associated with social apps in general.

What we do know:

The statistics here show that the majority of players consist of young women, who are more likely to be targeted for sexual assault-related crimes as well as other violent crimes.

(Graphic by Nick DeSantis/Forbes)



Now we will look into the general obstacles Pokemon GO players may face in regards to their safety as well as solutions to tackling these obstacles.

Change Blindness

Contrary to many beliefs that we are capable of multitasking effectively, we are not. Please watch the video below:

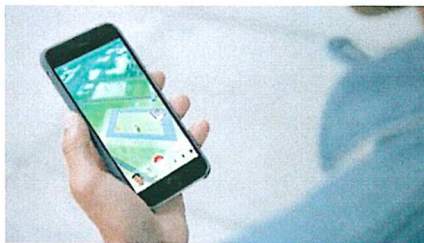


This study demonstrates the concept of change blindness and how it applies to our interactions with the world around us. Change blindness "is a phenomenon in visual perception in which very large changes occurring in full view in a visual scene are not noticed. (<http://nivea.psych.univ-paris5.fr/ECS/ECS-CB.html>)" This can be applied to users playing Pokemon GO, but instead of looking at a map, they are looking at a phone. (See news story. (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/15/health/pokemon-go-players-fall-down-cliff/>)) Especially if players are exploring unfamiliar territory, not paying close attention to their surroundings can have detrimental effects (like falling off a cliff). This is hard to challenge, however, when it comes to dealing with augmented reality.

How can we handle this?

Although the app will display a disclaimer upon opening it, like most agreements people make online, it will likely be ignored. Here are a few things to consider when playing Pokemon GO out in the community:

- For app designers: Consider flashing reminders for players to pay attention to their surroundings while the app is running.
- For players: Make a habit out of focusing strictly on your environment in particularly dangerous areas such as roads. Get to know the terrain before wandering on it. If you are playing with someone, take turns having someone look out for you both while the other focuses on the game. Do NOT play while driving.
- For bystanders: If you see someone focused on the app that might be in a dangerous situation, intervene if it does not pose a risk to yourself! Look out for one another.



Location and Luring

(See news story. (<http://www.cbsnews.com/news/robbery-suspects-using-pokemon-go-to-target-victims-police-say/>))

Along with location tracking, there are features in Pokemon GO that allow perpetrators to target young people as victims of crimes such as armed robbery. Because players are also putting most of their attention into the game rather than their surroundings, as mentioned previously, they are also becoming

vulnerable to such crimes.

How can we handle this?

- For app designers: Integrate a feature that allows easy access to emergency services.

- For players: Understand that this is just a game and no one's life is worth risking for it. Be aware of your surroundings, not just in terms of dangerous objects, but in terms of people. Use the buddy system! In addition, be careful about the personal information you release in the app.
- For bystanders: Be open to accessing emergency services if you see a player in danger.

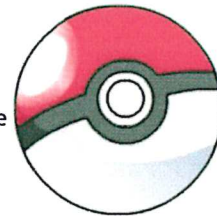
Meeting Strangers Face-to-Face

Pokemon GO has a social component to it in which players not only encounter other players unintentionally in their travels, but they also arrange to meet each other for the sole purpose of playing the game together. Like meeting a stranger in any other context for any other purpose, there are risks associated if the proper precautions are not taken.

How can we handle this?

We can take the same approach as using general Internet and stranger safety principles when meeting a stranger face-to-face:

- For app designers: Give players general tips on how to be safe when interacting with people they have not met before.
- For players: Do not give away too much personal information to someone you have not met. Meet in a public place. Let someone you trust know that you will be meeting someone and possibly arrange a signal in case you come across a dangerous situation. Trust your gut if someone seems a little off. Feel free to bring a friend.
- For bystanders: If you see suspicious activity and your safety is not at risk, intervene.



Despite a few obstacles, Pokemon GO has been shown to have many benefits, such as a sense of community, mental and physical health improvements, and stronger support with local businesses. As long as we continue to make steps toward ideal safety for ALL players, this game can continue to grow and reap many benefits for players and for businesses.

Sources:

http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf (http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf)
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Services at The Women's Center

The Women's Center offers educational trainings on sexual assault. To schedule any of our trainings please contact the Education Department at 570-784-6632.

If you are a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault and want to know the resources that are available to you, then you can always reach out to The Women's Center at 570-784-6631 or toll-free at (800) 544-8293. All of our services are free and confidential.