Cross-national perspective on risks facing children online

Findings from EU Kids Online at “Protecting our Children in the Modern World”
Northamptonshire Police and Crime Commission

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The EU Kids Online network has been funded by the EC Better Internet for Kids programme*

From **2006-09**, as a thematic network of **21 countries**, EU Kids Online identified and evaluated the findings of nearly **400 research studies** to draw out substantive, methodological and policy implications.

From **2009-11**, as a knowledge enhancement project across **25 countries**, the network surveyed **25,000 children and parents** to produce original, rigorous data on online opportunities and risk of harm.

From **2011-14**, the network expanded to **33 countries** to conduct targeted analyses of the quantitative survey and new qualitative interviews with children.

*Originally, Safer Internet Programme*
Surveying ‘Europe’

- Random stratified sample: ~ 1000 9-16 year old internet users per country; total of 25142 internet-users, 25 countries
- Fieldwork in spring/summer 2010; child + parent interviews at home, face to face
- Questions validated by cognitive/pilot testing; self-completion for sensitive questions; care with research ethics
- Informed by national stakeholders and an international advisory panel
- Survey covered access, use, activities, risks (sexual images, sexual messages, bullying, meeting strangers), parental mediation, coping, vulnerability
Risks and opportunities go hand-in-hand

Figure 105: Children who have encountered one or more online risk factors by children’s average number of online activities, by country

Figure 106: Children’s average number of online skills by children’s average number of online activities, by country
# Experiences of risk and harm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Sexual images</th>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Sexual messages*</th>
<th>Meeting new people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced the risk at all</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced the risk online</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online perpetrators</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt bothered</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt bothered (%)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Fairly) upset (%)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All children, n=25,142

*) only 11-16 years
Explaining experiences of risk and harm

Sexting: Risk and Harm

**Risk**
The occurrence of an event which is associated with a probability of harm.

**Harm**
Actual physical or mental damage as reported by the person concerned.

- In relation to sexting, what can known offline factors that influence adolescents’ well-being tell us about the likelihood
  A. of encountering risk (15%)
  B. that the risk is experienced as harmful (4% - ¼ of those at risk)
Hypotheses

Demographic factors:
- Age
- Gender

Psychological factors:
- Sensation seeking
- Psychological difficulties
# Key Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Risk of seeing or receiving sexual messages online</th>
<th>Harm resulting from seeing or receiving such messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>older</td>
<td>younger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>boys</td>
<td>girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological difficulties</strong></td>
<td>higher</td>
<td>higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensation seeking</strong></td>
<td>higher</td>
<td>lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risky online and offline behaviour</strong></td>
<td>higher</td>
<td>no effect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Harm across risks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Very</th>
<th>% Fairly</th>
<th>% A bit</th>
<th>% Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual images</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual messages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More **online risks** are experienced by children who are:
- older, higher in self-efficacy and sensation seeking
- do more online activities
- have more psychological problems

Online risks are found more **harmful and upsetting** by children who are:
- younger, lower in self-efficacy, and sensation seeking
- do fewer online activities, have fewer skills
- have more psychological problems
Inequalities in risk and resources to cope

Educational/economic disadvantage
- 27% have parents with lower secondary education or less
- 25% have parents who do not use the internet
- 7% of children use the internet less than once per week
- Experience fewer risks but more harm – less resilient
  → Build digital skills and resilience given a relative lack of experience of the internet at home

Psychological and social disadvantage
- 34% have more psychological difficulties than most
- 6% of children have a mental, physical or other disability
- 4% of children belong to a discriminated-against group
- Experience more risks and more harm.
  → Providing targeted guidance for coping and ensuring a wider range of sources of safety information
  (eg, online sources for parents of disabled children, government sources for parents of discriminated-against children)
What bothers children online?
Here’s what the children told us bothers them online

- When strangers message me on the internet, sex sites that open without me clicking on them. (boy, 10, Austria)
- Violence against women and children and perverted humiliations and cruelty. (girl, 14, Germany)
- Showing images of physical violence, torture and suicide images. (girl, 12, Slovenia)
- To take a photo of me without my knowledge and upload it to an inappropriate website. (girl, 10, Bulgaria)
- See people having sex or naked people. (boy, 10, Portugal)
- Propositions to meet from people whom I do not know. (boy, 12, Poland)
- Facebook shows scary things even if you click on something that does not look or sound scary. (girl, 9, UK)
- Animal cruelty, adults hitting kids. (girl, 9, Denmark)
- A mate showed me once a video about an execution. It was not fun, but insane. I get scared. (boy, 15, Sweden)
- Scary things - I saw something at my friend’s house and I can’t get it out of my head. (boy, 11, Ireland)
- Those things that show other people’s suffering or torment as a funny thing. (boy, 14, Hungary)
- I was shocked seeing a starving African child who was going to die and a condor waiting to eat him. (girl, 13, Turkey)
What bothers children online?

We asked the children to tell us in their own words what bothers or upsets people their age on the internet, if anything. Nearly 10,000 children told us of their concerns and their responses were very diverse.

5 key findings

1. Pornography tops children’s online concerns.
2. Violent, aggressive, cruel or gory content came a close second – although violence receives less public attention than sexual material. What particularly upsets them is real (or realistic) rather than fictional violence, and violence against the vulnerable such as children or animals.
3. Children see video-sharing websites as most linked with violent, pornographic and other content risks.
4. Boys express more concern about violence than girls, while girls are more concerned about contact risks.
5. Children’s concern about online risks rises markedly from 9 to 12 years old. Younger children are more concerned about content risks, and as they get older they become more concerned about conduct and contact risks.

Base: N=9,636 children who identified one or more risks online.
Implications

- Predictors of risks are also predictors of opportunities (e.g., use and digital literacy)
- Predictors of risk are not predictors of harm
- Some children are more vulnerable – across risks, offline and online
- Policy initiatives should focus on those likely to experience harm:
  - girls, younger children
  - psychological and social disadvantaged
- Design the online environment to build in safety considerations
- Increase children’s digital skills, coping and resilience
  - address socio-demographic groups differentially
Towards evidence-based policy

It’s important that policy developments are firmly grounded in evidence. It’s also important that policy makers and practitioners should seek to maximise children’s opportunities to benefit from the internet as well as trying to minimise harm.

Based on our research findings, we offer evidence-based recommendations for each of the following groups:

- **Families** – for children and for parents
- **Educators**, awareness raisers and media
- **Government and industry**

See our full policy report for how these recommendations are evidence-based. See [Video](#).

See also our report on policy influences and country clusters for the different policy contexts across Europe.

The book can be obtained [here](#).

All the chapters are summarised [here](#).
Compared with 2010, European 11- to 16-year-olds are now:

- more likely to be exposed to hate messages: 13% to 20%
- more likely to be exposed to pro-anorexia sites: 9% to 13%
- more likely to be exposed to self-harm sites: 7% to 11%
- more likely to be exposed to cyberbullying: 7% to 12%

13% to 17%

European 9- to 16-year-olds say they are now more likely to say they were upset by something seen online in 2014.

EU Kids Online recent research findings, methods and recommendations

- Updating and analysis of our 25-country, pan-European survey.
- In-depth interviews with 9- to 16-year-olds in nine countries.
- Expansion of the open access, searchable European evidence database.
- Research toolkit of our methods to guide researchers and research users.
- Active dialogue with stakeholders to ensure policy has a robust evidence base.

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THANK YOU!

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