Overuse of the internet is very high among UK children says new online study

Excessive use of the internet is very high among children in the UK with one in five admitting they have gone without food or sleep to stay online.

A study of online habits from the London School of Economics and Political Science also shows that more than half of young people confess they spend less time than they should on family, friends or schoolwork because of the internet.

In all categories, the survey found 43 per cent of British children agreed they used the internet too much. For Europe as a whole, the figure was just 30 per cent.

Use of social network sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) is also high for young people in this country – 65 per cent of 9-16 year olds have their own profile on one or more sites compared to 57 per cent across Europe.

However the report from the EU Kids Online team, based at LSE, also found that children in the UK are among the most web-savvy, with a good understanding of how to negotiate risky activity on the internet and to protect themselves. As a result, the project now classifies the UK as a high-use but low-risk country (where it had previously been ranked high in both categories).

This suggests, concludes the report, that: ‘the considerable efforts towards safety practices have indeed reached their targets. For example, UK children especially appear to have learned that it is unwise to post their address or phone number on their profiles.’

Professor Sonia Livingstone, who heads the EU-funded research project, said: ‘It is encouraging to see that young people here in the UK are learning how to get the best out of the internet without putting themselves at risk. We shouldn’t be complacent though, because our report shows they are using it in increasingly diverse ways and we need to keep new risks – such as anorexia and suicide websites – under scrutiny.

‘Children themselves say they are often spending too much time online. We still don’t know whether it’s possible to be addicted to the internet in the same way as
you can to drugs or alcohol, but excessive online activity is clearly worth studying further.'

EU Kids Online is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme. The UK study interviewed a sample of 1,032 young people aged between 9 and 16, along with one of their parents or carers. It was part of a wider cross-Europe survey, which looked at the experiences of 23,000 children in 25 European countries.

Full findings from this and all the reports of the EU Kids Online project are available at www.eukidsonline.net

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For more information, to interview one of the authors, please contact LSE press office on +44 207 955 7060 or email Pressoffice@lse.ac.uk

Notes to editors

1. The EU Kids Online project aims to enhance knowledge of European children’s and parents’ experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, and thereby to inform the promotion of a safer online environment for children.

2. Countries included in EU Kids Online are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the UK.

3. The survey findings are based on an in-home, face to face interview with a random stratified sample of children across Europe, and full methodological details can be found in the report and on the project website at www.eukidsonline.net

4. Fieldwork, data processing and weighting were carried out by Ipsos on behalf of the EU Kids Online Network. Analysis, interpretation and reporting were carried out by the EU Kids Online Network.