

Press release 05.02.2013 [EMBARGO TILL 05.02.2013, 00:01]
From EU Kids Online III, London School of Economics and Political Science

Video-sharing sites top the ranking of risky online platforms for children

Video-sharing sites like YouTube are considered by children to be more risky than any other online platform, with pornography and violent content topping the list of their concerns about use of the web.

These are among the findings of a report launched on Safer Internet Day 2013 (Tuesday 5 February) by the EU Kids Online project, led in the UK by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Nearly 10,000 children between 9-16 years old from 25 European countries were surveyed for the report, and were asked 'What things on the internet would bother people about your age?'. The report presents, for the first time, a detailed analysis of how children view the risks associated to the online world 'in their own words'.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, LSE, who is responsible for the survey, explains: "The EU Kids Online survey found that 55% of 9-16 year olds think that there are things online that bother children their age. This new report now goes to the heart of what concerns children - and the results give reason to reflect on policy and educational priorities. It is vital for us to address children's concerns about violent, aggressive or gory content on the internet, among the many other things that bother them."

Over half the children who responded (55%) spontaneously included a platform or technology in their answer. Video-sharing sites such as YouTube were the most commonly mentioned in terms of risk (by 32%), followed by websites (29%), social networking sites (13%) and games (10%).

Video-sharing websites were shown to be associated with violent and pornographic content, along with a range of other content-related risks. Replies indicate that YouTube content could be considered upsetting because it is real (or highly realistic), conveyed by powerful moving images, and can be readily shared among the peer group. Of the risks associated with video-sharing websites, most were related to violent (30%) and pornographic (27%) content risks. Other content-related risks given include viewing unwanted, scary or hateful content and content harmful to self-esteem.

When we asked children to write what bothers people their age, they said things like this:

"YouTube. The things that come up straight away as soon as you search for the website. Facebook shows scary things even if you click on something that does not look or sound scary" (Girl, 9)

"People ganging up on me and going to beat me up and threaten me. Making things up about me which are not true" (Boy, 12)

"Dead bodies, blood, sexual images/videos. Dying people" (Girl, 13)

"Abusive sites. Abusive to humans and animals - should be found and blocked. Disturbing websites" (Boy, 14)

"Eating disorder websites. Suicide/self-harming websites. Bullying" (Girl, 14)

Children express disgust and fear

Fear was most often expressed in relation to scary content (23% of those who mentioned scary content also expressed fear). Only 5% of those who mentioned pornographic content expressed disgust (but, put differently, of those who expressed disgust in response to online risks, 28% linked this to pornography). Commercial content were mostly described as “annoying” (15% of those who mentioned commercial content seemed annoyed). Interestingly, other risks mentioned (hate, racism, violence, self-harm etc.) generated little expressed emotion.

Commenting on the results, Dr Leslie Haddon said: “Children are not all the same. Risk perceptions vary by country, age and gender, and much of what is considered risky by one child will be considered not problematic by others. So, the most important recommendation is to ask children what bothers them online, listen to what they have to say and help them accordingly.”

At the same time, traditional media-related challenges, most notably violent images, is very much present in children’s minds and generate fear and concern. Thus, Internet is a new way of delivering old challenges and concerns. Just as in the offline world, it seems that many problems can be identified online; indeed, for children especially, the online/offline distinction is of ever less relevance. The challenge for policy makers in addressing these risks is therefore considerable.

Other findings:

- Conduct-related risks (19%) are more of concern than contact-related risks (13%), doubtless because of the rise in cyberbullying and sexting linked to the widespread use of personal and networked devices.
- The 10% of children who told us about other risks should also be heard, as the very diversity of online risks makes it difficult for them and their parents to deal with.
- Some risks of concern to adults were very rarely mentioned by children. Less than 1% mention some of the risks much in the headlines (e.g. self-harm content or the danger of sharing personal information), though a few are concerned about reputational damage or other violations of privacy.
- Also, few mention commercial content, spending too much time online, other people accessing personal data or gambling.
- ‘Stranger danger’ is only rather vaguely mentioned (as forms of inappropriate contact), despite considerable public anxiety over this risk in the mass media.
- Overall, boys appear more bothered by violence, girls by contact-related risks.

About the report:

The report *“In their own words: What really bothers children online?”* is written by Sonia Livingstone (UK), Lucyna Kirwil (Poland), Cristina Ponte (Portugal) and Elisabeth Staksrud (Norway), with the EU Kids Online network. It presents qualitative findings so as to understand: What do children think are the worrying risks online, and how do they describe them? Are they concerned about risks that have been neglected from the policy agenda? Do their concerns vary by age, gender, culture or experience? The report is based on interviews with 25,142 children across 25 European countries using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods in the case of sensitive questions.

For the full report, see:

<http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/Intheirownwords020213.pdf>

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All our reports and full methodology are at www.eukidsonline.net

Information about the project and survey:

- **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. The project is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme (SI-2010-TN-4201001).
- **Countries included** in the survey 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. In addition the project includes research teams from Croatia, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Russia, Slovakia and Switzerland.
- **Safer Internet Day** is organised by *Insafe* each year to promote safer and more responsible use of online technology and mobile phones, especially amongst children and young people across the world. The theme of Safer Internet Day 2013 is "Connect with respect" <http://www.saferinternet.org/web/quest/safer-internet-day>