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# Exposure to Online Sexually Explicit Materials among Youth: Comparison across Europe

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# Introduction



- Exposure to sexually explicit materials as one of possible risks for children in internet usage (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006)
- There are different types of exposure (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007), i.e. wanted / unwanted
- Different types of exposure may have different impact on children and adolescents

## Research questions:

- What are most important predictors of online exposure to sexual materials?
- To what extent the exposure is affected by factors related to country specifics? Can we explain higher exposure in countries by country indicators?

## *Predictors of exposure to sexual contents*



- Gender differences – more boys report exposure to online sexual materials than girls, and this holds true especially for wanted exposure (Mesch, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006)
- Older adolescents tend to consume sexual contents online more often than younger internet users (Mitchell et al., 2003; Wolak et al., 2007)
- Psychosocial characteristics: depression (Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), heightened sensation seeking (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006), impulsiveness (Wolak et al., 2007).
- Lower capacity to control one's impulses could be related to excessive internet use (Shapira et al, 2003), we hypothesize that having a problem with excessive internet use might be a relevant predictor of frequent exposure to online sexual contents.

# Cross-country variability (?)



- Role of psychosocial challenges in exposure to online sexual materials should not be overestimated (Mitchell et al., 2003; Wolak et al., 2007)
- Exposure to sexual materials online might be a common experience that occurs in the internet usage (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009)
- Several cross-national comparative studies report that the extent of exposure to online sexual materials among children differs across countries (see Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon, & Ólafsson, 2009; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, Ólafsson, 2010; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009)
- Czech Republic as country with highest or very high exposure across countries .. why?

# Country indicators



- Higher religiosity is linked to delays in sexual development (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003)
- Lower religiosity is linked to greater exposure to online sexual materials (Mesch, 2009).
- Czech Republic is at least religious country in Europe
- High speed internet connections allow access to a relatively large amount of data in a short time, which consequently may influence the amount of viewed sexual images (broadband penetration)
- The effects of gender on sexual behavior and sexual attitudes may also vary across Europe. In countries with liberal sexual norms women might be more sexually empowered and thus more active in seeking sexual stimulations (see Clement, Schmidt, & Kruse, 1984)

# Methods & Sample



- Data come from the project EU Kids Online II: Enhancing Knowledge Regarding European Children's Use, Risk and Safety Online has been funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme (contract SIP-KEP-321803).
- Survey administration at home, face to face with children, with a self-completion section for sensitive questions.
- The final sample will contain representative subsamples of at least 1,000 youth aged 9 to 16 years from 25 European countries (N = 25,142).
- This paper: early adolescents aged 11 to 15 years, N = 12,472 ; 20 countries because of accessibility of country indicators

# Measures



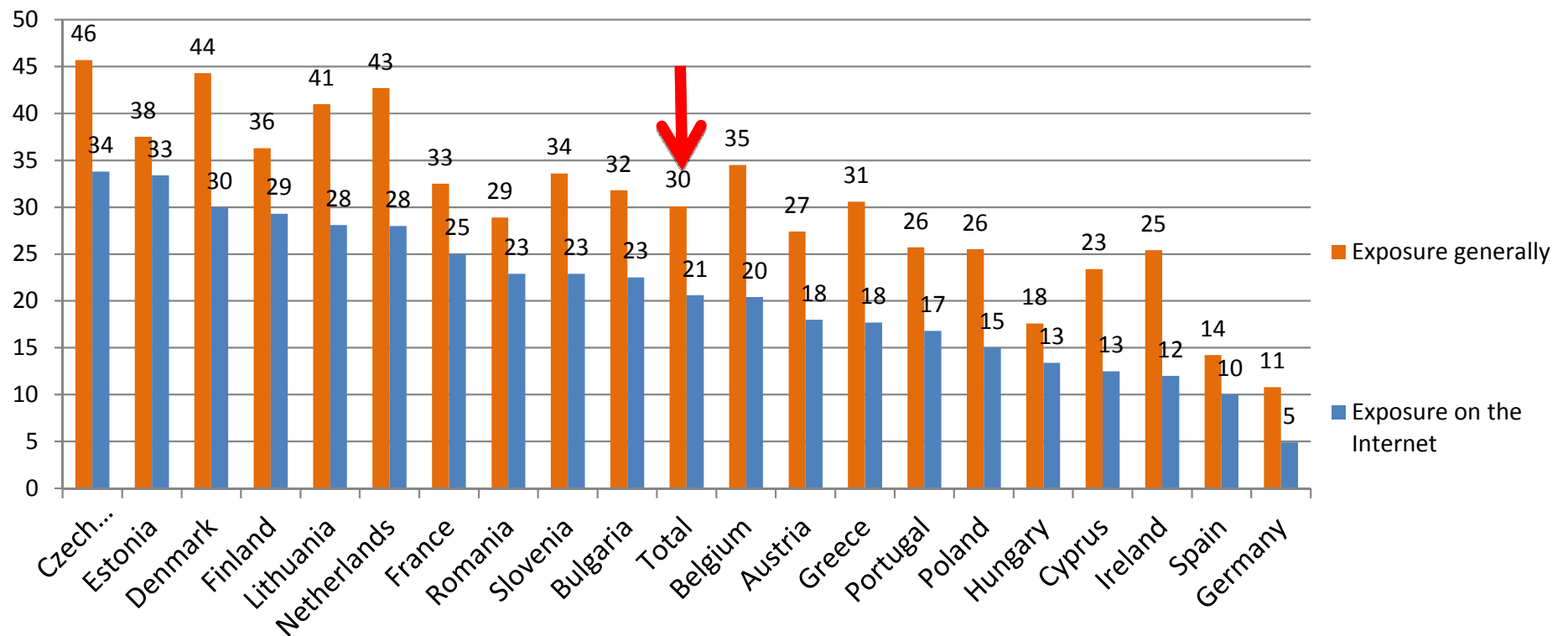
Exposure to sexually explicit materials in general and on the internet was measured using two filter questions: (1) “In the past year, you have seen lots of different images. Some of these might be sexual. Have you seen anything of this kind in the past 12 months?”

Other variables: The frequency of internet use, Emotional problems (5 items, i.e. „I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness“), Sensation seeking, Excessive internet use (5 items)

Country-level indicators: *Broadband penetration (EUROSTAT)*, *Religious faith* (indicates the percentage of religious people within the European countries that was assessed within the European Value Study in 2008)

For details on Measures see: [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net) – Reports and the upcoming book

# Results





# Results



<i>Multilevel regression with Exposure to sexual materials as the dependent variable</i>						
	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
<b>Fixed effect</b>						
<i>Level-1 variables</i>						
Intercept	-2.56(.16)**			-2.56(.16)**		
Gender (male)	.32(.06)**	1.38	(1.23-1.55)	.32(.06)**	1.38	(1.23-1.55)
Age	.37(.02)**	1.45	(1.40-1.52)	.37(.02)**	1.45	(1.40-1.52)
Frequency of internet use	.39(.06)**	1.47	(1.30-1.66)	.38(.06)**	1.47	(1.30-1.66)
Emotional problems	.39(.08)**	1.47	(1.26-1.73)	.39(.08)**	1.47	(1.26-1.73)
Sensation seeking	.37(.03)**	1.45	(1.38-1.53)	.37(.03)**	1.45	(1.38-1.53)
Excessive internet use	.73(.05)**	2.07	(1.86-2.30)	.73(.05)**	2.07	(1.86-2.30)
<i>Level-2 variables</i>						
Broadband		-		-.01(.01)	.99	(.96-1.02)
Religiosity		-		-.01(.01)	.99	(.97-1.01)
<b>Random effect</b>						
$\sigma_{u0}^2$		.41**			.42**	
$\sigma_{u1}^2$		-			-	

*Note.* B = unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = standard error. OR = odds ratio. CI = confidence interval for OR.  $\sigma_{u0}^2$  = inter-country variance.  $\sigma_{u1}^2$  = random slope variance (gender). N = 9,664.

\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .01$ .

# Multilevel regression analyses



- The country-level factors accounted for 11 % of the variation in exposure within the European sample.
- None of the country-level predictors were able to explain the inter-country differences, we tested also : internet usage (Eurostat), percentage of young people who have had sexual intercourse (Unicef), ICT Development Index (ITU), percentage of young people living in single-parent family structures (Unicef).
- The countries with higher rates of exposure indicated lower gender differences in exposure to ESM than countries with low rates of exposure.

# Discussion / conclusion



- Higher exposure among older children - developmentally-driven experience
- Relations between excessive internet use and exposure to sexual explicit materials .. what was first?
- Psychological variables: emotional problems, sensation seeking – in line with prior research
- Cross-culture differences – country indicators as problematic variables (?)
- Gender differences differ across countries – females are more interested in online sexual materials in liberal countries (?) (Czech Republic is liberal with less restrictive sexual attitudes)
- Future research – longitudinal, cross-cultural differences