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From EU Kids Online III, London School of Economics (LSE)

[new report for Safer Internet Day 2014]:

Children and adults don't see eye to eye on online risks and opportunities

Children's perceptions of online risks and problematic situations may greatly differ from those of adults, with the line between positive and negative online experiences being very thin. This can lead to teenagers participating in risky pursuits, such as sharing sexual pictures with friends.

These are some of the conclusions of a new report from EU Kids Online, a research project based at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to mark Safer Internet Day (Tuesday 11 February).

The report, based on qualitative research coordinated by the Czech Republic (Masaryk University), paints a disturbing picture of how teenagers view the online risks related to posting sexual content online, with the majority of the male and female teenagers surveyed suggesting that it is up to the girls to take responsibility to avoid sexual pictures being shared.

The researchers held 57 focus groups and 113 personal interviews with children aged 9 to 16. In total, 349 participants from nine European countries[1] were invited to explain what they perceive as problematic or harmful online, and what they do to prevent this from happening.

Researchers revealed that youth's online problematic experiences are related almost to all contexts of their development, such as exploring their identity and sexuality, building relationships with peers or romantic relationships, but also to moral and ethics development.

Researcher Sofie Vandoninck, Catholic University of Leuven, said: "*The teenage years are key times for young people to explore their identity and sexuality, and this, of course, filters into their online use. While parents, teachers or other adult caregivers may feel that exposure to certain online content or communication is risky, youngsters perceive this very differently. For example, posting sexual pictures and receiving flirty comments can be flattering and exciting. If these receive negative comments or are shared between too many people, however, this previously 'positive' experience can become traumatic.*

Lead researcher David Smahel, Masaryk University, said: *"The line between online positive and negative experiences is very thin. The outcome depends on the context of the situation and the children's awareness of problems they may encounter on the internet. Even the same situation can be perceived differently by different children. While some children are very cautious about, for example, their personal information, others believe that nothing bad will happen to them, regardless of what they disclose online."*

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[1] Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Romania, and UK.

As one boy said: *"I have pictures on my Facebook profile, they are visible for everyone. I don't post anything wrong, so I don't really care."*(15-year-old boy, Belgium)

The researchers also found that teenagers do not consider limiting their online activities when unpleasant situations around sexual issues occur. Instead they tend to click away from the unpleasant webpage, or stated that those upset should not have gotten involved in the first place.

The research also reveals that most of problematic situations experienced by children and teenagers occur on social networking sites.

The majority of interviewed children expressed a range of concerns and online issues that sometimes bother them. Clearly, the worst risks in children's eyes are online bullying and harassment, misuse of personal information, unwelcome or sexualized contact from strangers, but also commercial content. Looking at the media platforms where these incidents occur, about half of unpleasant online experiences happen on social networking sites such as Facebook. This shows that children acknowledge the potential risks of social networking sites, which does not necessarily mean they will do something to avoid the risk. Even if they are aware, some children simply do not care much about potential risks.

Ends

For more information:

For the full report, *Preventive measures – how youngsters avoid online* risks by Sofie Vandoninck, Leen d'Haenens & David Smahel see: http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/Preventivemeasures.pdf

Notes for editors:

Selected quotes from the children interviewed

Boy (16-year-old, Greece): "My news feed was full of posts about this sexting incident, I could see posts saying 'look at her naked'. I was wondering what happened and started scrolling down, and found the photograph further down. The girl might have had 500 friends and there were 2000 comments on the photograph. People were saying 'we'll kill the girl who took the photograph. Isn't she ashamed!'".

Girls (15-year-old, Belgium):
Girl1: "My sister's friend showed me naked pictures from a classmate, and I was like 'ooooh', I was totally shocked! I didn't know Jennifer would do such things…"
Girl 2: "Yeah, I was really shocked…"
Girl 3: "And then someone asked 'why does Jennifer make naked pictures from herself', and then a friend said 'Yeah, Jennifer has no self-respect at all'. And we thought they were best friends…"

Girl (11-year-old, Belgium): "Well, I wouldn't post anything important on the internet…because I don't trust the internet for 100%... When I start a profile, I just complete my name, but I don't fill out phone number and such things".

Boy (10-year-old, Czech Republic): "I post photographs online, but I don't post anything private, for example, of our home and us watching television, so that people would not know

where we live. If we take pictures in front of the house on the playground and they see our house behind us, they would find out straightaway where we live."

Boy (10-year-old, Greece): "When some stranger sends me a friend request, I reject it, because I don't know him or her. They may pretend they are 10 years old, like I am, and intend to get together to play. But it could be they are a lot older, like 20, 30 or 40 years old."

Boy (9-year-old, Belgium): "We reported a girl. She was a bully, so on the Ketnet website one could report things, for example one could report messages as 'acts of bullying'. So we did this with all her messages".

Girl (14-year-old, Belgium): "I look at, for example, the place where the person lives…if I know that the person lives in the same town, I would add him as a friend. But when I see that the person lives in a different city, I won't add him…because I don't really know the person. You can also look at mutual friends. When my classmates or friends are mutual Facebook-friends with this person, then I add the person".

Girl (15-year-old, Czech Republic): "I have allowed my pictures for friends that I have known for a long time, or from school, or we go to class together and stuff. It's not for everyone".

Information about the project and data collection:

- **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).

- These new findings result from the **qualitative phase** (EU Kids Online III), including 57 focus groups and 113 personal interviews with children aged 9 to 16. In total, 349 children and adolescents from nine different European countries participated in this qualitative phase.

- **Countries included** in the analysis of qualitative data are: Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, UK.

- **More elaborate findings will be available in the extended report on the qualitative data analysis, expected in April 2014.** Other reports on EU Kids Online data are available at www.eukidsonline.net.

- **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 2014 is "**Let's create a better internet together**" **http://www.saferinternetday.org/web/guest/home**