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Rise in hate messages online shown by new survey on children's exposure to online risk

An increasing number of children in the UK aged 11-16 are reporting seeing hateful or racist messages online, including those that attack individuals or groups, new research from EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile shows.

Twenty three per cent of all 11-16 year olds who use the internet say they have come across such messages, a sharp rise from the 13% who said this when interviewed by EU Kids Online in 2010.[1]

Professor Sonia Livingstone of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) who directs the EU Kids Online project, will present the survey's findings at the annual conference of The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health in London tomorrow (Friday 14 March).

These latest survey findings also reveal an increase in the percentage who themselves received nasty or bullying messages online (from 8% of 9-16 year olds in 2010 to 12% in 2013) and in those who have seen pro-anorexic sites (from 8% of 11-16 year olds in 2010 to 14% in 2013).

Other findings including the following:

- More encouragingly, given the public policy efforts to address 'sexting' (the receipt of sexual messages online), there is a decrease in the proportion who report receiving these (from 12% to 5% of 11-16 year olds).
- There is no change over this period in the percentages who say they have encountered sexual or pornographic images online, or in the percentages who have gone to a meeting offline with someone they first met online.
- Importantly, not all risks online upset children. In 2010, 13% of 9-16 year olds said they had been bothered or upset by something online in the previous year. In 2013, 15% said this – there is no substantial difference in these figures.

Professor Sonia Livingstone, LSE, said: "These findings for children's encounters with risk online suggest that greater efforts are particularly needed to address the apparent rise in hostile and hateful messages of different kinds online.

"This might be achieved through e-Safety and Digital Citizenship initiatives, though the efforts of parents, teachers, industry and policy makers are all needed to address the changing forms of risk of harm to children on the internet

"The figures also show that the picture is complex, neither simply getting better or worse. The internet continues to change, and so does the experience of our children. That's why all concerned with children's welfare must stay alert to the important role of the internet in children's lives today."

What kinds of content are children really talking about? In 2010, we asked them what upsets their age group online. Here are some answers from UK kids:

11 yr old girl: Fighting/people fighting with each other. Animal cruelty/people being cruel to animals/hitting them.

12 yr old boy: Hate groups on Facebook being created about them.

14 yr old girl: Bullying, racism, fighting, unknown links, rude messages, rude pics, weird voice clips, too many webcam requests!!

13 yr old boy: Winding people up. Cyber bullying. Threatening.

15 yr old girl: To do with being skinny, talking about weight loss and what you can do to lose weight.

15 yr old boy: On Facebook, others can be nasty. Comments on YouTube can be hateful.

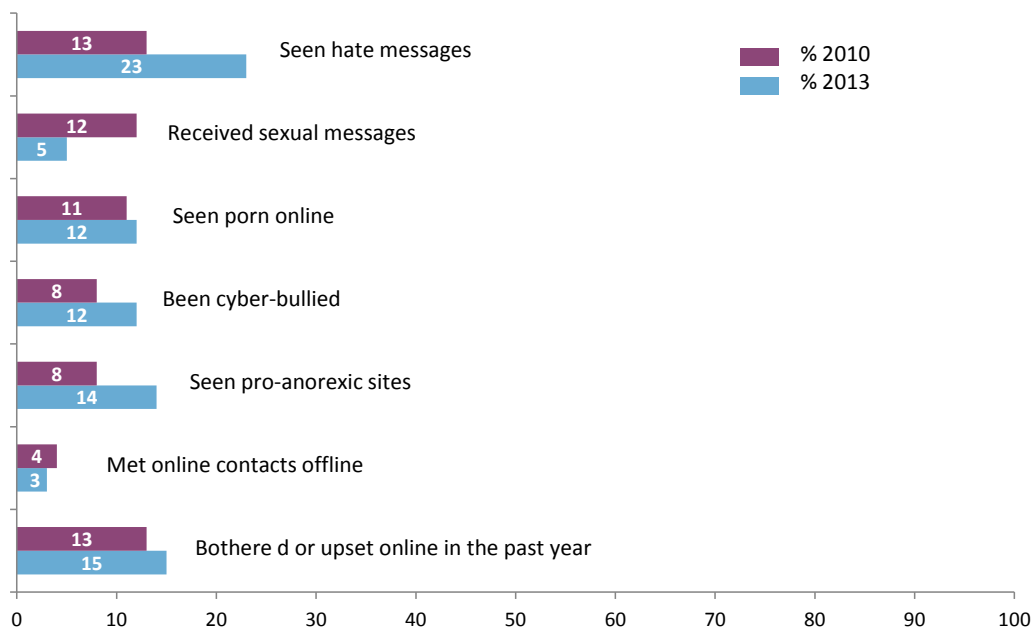
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Contact

For more information, or copies of Professor Livingstone's presentation, please contact the LSE Press Office (Pressoffice@lse.ac.uk) or report author Professor Sonia Livingstone, (s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk)

Notes for editors

1: 2010 and 2013 survey comparison:



Note: All percentages refer to internet-using children aged 9-16 except for seeing hate messages and pro-anorexic sites, which refer to children aged 11-16 years only.

EU Kids Online will release a major new report based on qualitative research with children and young people in nine European countries, including the UK, in May 2014.

Information about the project and survey:

EU Kids Online is funded by the EC Safer Internet Programme. It 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. See www.eukidsonline.net. *The UK survey of EU Kids Online interviewed a sample of 1,032 young people aged between 9 and 16, and one of their parents or carers, in May-July 2010.*

Net Children Go Mobile is co-funded by the Safer Internet Programme to investigate through quantitative and qualitative methods how the changing conditions of internet access and use – namely, mobile internet and mobile convergent media – bring greater, lesser or newer risks to children's online safety. See <http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu/> *The UK survey of Net Children Go Mobile interviewed a sample of 516 young people aged between 9 and 16 in May-July 2013.*

In both surveys, findings are based on an in-home, face to face interview with a random stratified sample of children across Europe. Questions about risk were asked confidentially, without the parent able to see the child's answers. Not all risk questions were asked for the 9-10 year olds, for ethical reasons.

For exact phrasing of questions, see the table below.

Seen hate messages: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen websites where people discuss ... Publish hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals (e.g. racism or attacks against a religion)

Received sexual messages: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you received sexual messages of this kind (this could be words, pictures or videos) and if so, how upset were you about happened?

Seen porn online: If you have seen images [showing people naked or people having sex] how did it happen?

Been cyber-bullied: If someone has treated you in this kind of way, how did it happen?

Seen pro-anorexic sites: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen websites where people discuss ... Promote ways of being very skinny, anorexic or bulimic

Met online contact offline: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you ever gone on to meet anyone face to face that you had first met on the internet and if so, were you at all upset by what happened or wish that you had not done it?

Bothered or upset online in the past year: In the PAST 12 MONTHS, have you seen or experienced something on the internet that has bothered you in some way? For example made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it.