EU Kids Online II Final Report

Aims

The EU Kids Online II project aimed to provide a rigorous evidence base to support stakeholders in their efforts to maximise online opportunities while minimising the risk of harm associated with internet use.

Key Findings

- Internet use is increasingly individualised, privatised and mobile: 9-16 year old internet users spend 88 minutes per day online, on average. 49 per cent go online in their bedroom, 33 per cent go online via a mobile phone or handheld device, and most use the internet at home (87 per cent) and school (63 per cent).

- Efforts to increase opportunities may also increase risks, while efforts to reduce risks may restrict children's opportunities. A careful balancing act, which recognises children's online experiences "in the round", is vital. Risky opportunities allow children to experiment online with relationships, intimacy and identity. But risky opportunities are linked to vulnerability as well as resilience, depending on both the design of the online environment, and on the child and their circumstances.

- Children vary in which activities they take up earliest and they vary in the combination of activities they practise, resulting in a ladder of opportunities in which only a quarter, and few younger children, reach the most advanced and creative step. Inequalities in digital skills persist in terms of SES, age and, to a lesser degree, gender, so efforts to overcome these are needed; part of the solution lies in the improved design of end-user tools and interfaces.

- Parents recognise that it is valuable for them to engage with their child's internet use, and they employ a wide range of strategies, depending partly on the age of the child. Children are generally positive about their parents' actions, although a third says they sometimes ignore what their parents say about using the internet. Parents who practise more restrictive regulation have children who encounter fewer risks and less harm – but also fewer online opportunities.

- 12 per cent of European 9-16 year olds say that they have been bothered or upset by something on the internet – but most children do not report so. Public anxiety often focuses on pornography, "sexting", bullying and meeting strangers, especially for young children. But there are other risks that worry children, including many teenagers, especially those associated with user-generated content.

- Exposure to sexual images occurs offline as well as online, but for some children and in some countries it is spreading online; more children who go online via a personal device have seen sexual images or received sexual messages.

- Half of online bullies say they have also bullied people face-to-face, and half of online bullying victims have been bullied face-to-face; also, among those who have bullied others online, nearly half have themselves been bullied online.

- 50% of 11-16 year olds 'find it easier to be myself on the internet", helping to explain why 30% have contact online with someone they haven't met face to face. But only 9% have met an online contact offline, and very few found this a problematic experience.

- Children who are older, higher in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do more online activities and who have more psychological problems encounter more risks of all kinds online. But children who are younger, lower in self-efficacy and sensation seeking, who do fewer online activities, have fewer skills, and who have more psychological problems find online risks more harmful and upsetting.

- A country's socio-economic stratification, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure and educational system all shape children's online risks. High internet use in a country is rarely associated with low risk; high risk is rarely associated with low use; rather, across countries, the more use, the more risk.

Policy Context

Policies for the promotion of a safer internet are based on an understanding of risks and risk-taking behaviour. The EU Kids Online network has generated a substantial array of quantitative data relating to the online behaviour of children and young people in Europe. An understanding of broad trends in patterns of risky use of the internet and new online technologies is essential for the development of evidence-based policies for the promotion of safer internet use.

Methodology

In this large-scale quantitative study, a survey was administered face-to-face at home to a random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 who use the internet, plus one of their parents, during Spring/Summer 2010 in 25 European countries. Sensitive (risk-related) questions were asked in private.

Background

The *EU Kids Online* survey was funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme. See www.eukidsonline.net

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www.education.gov.uk/ukccis/