Excessive internet use among European children

# Details

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## Language

English

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## Type

Short report

## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Risks and harms
* Wellbeing

## Sample

EU Kids Online conducted a face-to-face, in-home survey during 2010 of 25,000 9- to 16-year-old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods for sensitive questions.

# Abstract

This report presents new findings and further analysis of the EU Kids Online 25-country survey regarding excessive use of the internet by children. It shows that while a number of children (29%) experienced one or more of the five components associated with excessive internet use, very few (1%) can be said to show pathological levels of use.

Time is not necessarily a problem
Spending a lot of time online is not necessarily a sign of a child having problems related to internet use. The term ‘excessive use’ was chosen to indicate a pattern of use that is repetitive, compulsive and uncontrolled. The results suggest that those children who are most vulnerable to excessive internet use and its negative consequences are those who are older, with emotional problems and high levels of sensation-seeking. To prevent excessive internet use, it is recommended that parents be actively involved in their child’s online activities through support and discussion, especially, but not only, when a child has been bothered by something online.

European differences
The percentage of children who responded positively to at least one of the items related to excessive internet use ranged from 17% in Italy to 49% in Estonia. This was mostly ‘surfing the internet when not really interested’ and responding positively to this item does not mean that children are at risk. The highest level of pathological use was found in Cyprus
where 5% of children experienced all five components of excessive internet use.

Children most at risk
The results suggest that those children who are most vulnerable to excessive internet use and its negative consequences are those who are older, have emotional problems and exhibit high levels of sensation-seeking. Spending more time online might lead children who are already psychologically vulnerable to reach pathological levels of excessive use.

# Outcome

-17% reported to have gone without eating or sleeping because of the internet
-"At age 11 only 22% indicated one or more experiences of excessive use occurring ‘very’ or ‘fairly often’, while at age 16 this rose to 37%" (Smahel et al., 2012, p. 3)
-Estonia was where children weren most likely to indicate that they had experienced at least one aspect of excessive use
-5% of children in Cyprus reported to have experienced all five indicators of excessive internet use
-Italy was the country in which children were least likely to indicate any experience related to excessive use
-Results show that excessive internet use is not only associated with risky offline activities but also with a variety of risky online activities (cyberbullying and sending sexual messages)
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