Cross-national comparison of risks and safety on the internet: initial analysis from the EU Kids Online survey of European children

# Keywords

* safety
* internet
* online skills
* risk and harm
* excessive use
* bullying
* sexting

# Details

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Wellbeing
* Risks and harms
* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

A random stratified sample comprised 25,142 children aged 9-16 who use the internet, plus one of their parents, interviewed during Spring/Summer 2010 in 25 European countries

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

This report examines the cross-national differences between the 25 countries included in the EU Kids Online project. The core of the project is a rigorous and detailed in-home, face-to-face survey with 1,000 children aged 9-16 in each country. In countries where children have more mobile and/or private access to the internet, average time spent online is generally higher. Children report the highest levels of digital literacy and safety skills in Finland, Slovenia and the Netherlands. Their digital skills are reportedly the lowest in Romania, Italy and, especially, Turkey. The term ‘excessive internet use’ describes
problematic behaviour associated with use of the internet or related digital technologies. In Estonia and Portugal around half of all children report experiencing at least one form of
excessive use ‘very’ or ‘fairly often’. The lowest percentage of children reporting one or more
forms of excessive use is in Italy, followed by Hungary and Germany (around or below 20%). In general, countries with high levels of internet use also have the highest percentage of children who have encountered risks on the internet. Across Europe, 14% of 9- to 16-year-olds have in the past 12 months seen images online that are ‘obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex’. In relation to online bullying, 6% of 9- to 16-year-olds have been sent nasty or hurtful messages online, and 3% have sent such messages to others. Over half of those who received bullying messages were ‘fairly’ or ‘very
upset’.
The report is based on a new and unique survey, designed and conducted according to
rigorous standards by the EU Kids Online network. A random stratified sample comprised
25,142 children aged 9-16 who use the internet, plus one of their parents, interviewed during Spring/Summer 2010 in 25 European countries.
In this report, ‘children’ refers to internet-using children aged 9-16 across Europe. ‘Using the
internet’ includes any devices (fixed or mobile) by which children go online and any places in
which they go online (at home or elsewhere). The pan-European findings are weighted by
population statistics.
The survey investigated key online risks: pornography, bullying, receiving sexual
messages, contact with people not known face-to-face, offline meetings with online contacts, potentially harmful user-generated content and personal data misuse.

# Outcome

-"The common pattern across Europe is for children to spend more time online on a typical day the more years children in that country have been online. Or, to put it differently, as children gain access to the internet at younger and younger ages, the time they spend online is rising." (Lobe et al., 2011, p. 7)
-"Self-reported digital literacy and safety skills are generally related to diversity of online activities. It was found that at the country level there is a positive correlation between the self-reported skills and diversity of online activities (r=0.47), and the correlation between skills and activities is even stronger at the individual level (r=0.55). In general, countries where children report a higher level of digital skills also display a wider repertoire of online activities, and vice versa." (Lobe et al., 2011, p. 8)
-Across Europe, 15% of children aged 9-16 agree that ‘I have caught myself surfing when I am not really interested’.
-The highest percentage of risks experienced by children is found in North East Europe (Estonia and Lithuania), closely followed by Sweden and Norway. Countries with the lowest risk encountered online are West and South European countries, the lowest percentage being in Turkey, Portugal, Greece and Italy.
-Across Europe, 14% of 9- to 16-year-olds have in the past 12 months seen images online that are ‘obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex’.
-In relation to online bullying, 6% of 9- to 16-year-olds have been sent nasty or hurtful
messages online, and 3% have sent such messages to others. Over half of those who received bullying messages were ‘fairly’ or ‘very upset’
-"In general, the European average is low, meaning that few children across Europe had
experienced any kind of online bullying. The majority of countries are below that average,
Portugal and Italy having the lowest level. The highest level of bullying is experienced in
Estonia and Romania, followed by Denmark and Sweden." (Lobe et al., 2011, p. 9)
-In most countries, between 70 and 90 percent of children who have encountered bullying on the internet say that they have been a bit, fairly or very upset by this experience.
-Fifteen per cent of 11- to 16-year-olds have received peer-to-peer ‘sexual messages or images [meaning] talk about having sex or images of people naked or having sex’, and 3% say they have sent or posted such messages.
-Thirty per cent of European children aged 9-16 who use the internet have communicated in the past with someone they have not met face-to-face before, but only 9% of children have met an online contact offline in the past year. One per cent of all children (or one in nine of those who went to a meeting) were bothered or upset by such a meeting.
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