Protecting Youths’ Wellbeing Online: Studying the Associations between Opportunities, Risks, and Resilience

# Details

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## Topics

* Wellbeing
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* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

1436 adolescents between 13 and 20 years old that are enrolled in secondary schools in Flanders—the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. To gather a sample that was representative to the Flemish adolescent population, we aimed at an even distribution of age, gender, and education option.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

As youths engage in different activities on the Internet, it is inevitable that they are exposed to risky online contents that might bother or upset them. Previous research has shown that online resilience, or the ability to effectively cope with online risks and to deal with their negative consequences, protects youths against these feelings of harm that sometimes emerge after a risk experience. However, knowledge about the role of resilience in protecting youths’ overall wellbeing seems rather limited. The current study analyzes new EU Kids Online data using structural equation modeling to fill this gap. The findings corroborate earlier findings that the more opportunities youths take up online, the more they are exposed to risky content. These risk encounters are negatively associated with wellbeing. Online resilience moderates this association and protects youths’ overall wellbeing from being harmed by online risk exposure. Implications for further research and practice are discussed.

# Outcome

"The more opportunities youths take up on the Internet, the more they are exposed to potentially harmful online content. On the one hand, online opportunities have direct positive value for youths’ wellbeing. On the other hand, they are inevitably exposed to risky online content damaging their wellbeing. Youths should protect their wellbeing by successfully balancing both the opportunities they take up and the risks they encounter on the Internet. As long as youths actively engage in activities that they find beneficial, their wellbeing is less endangered by potential risk experiences that they might encounter along the way. Youths should therefore have their own agency over their Internet use and should develop the necessary skills to deal with potential negative consequences of this Internet use. However, parents should remain alert about exposure to online risky content when their child is less resilient to feelings of harm that result from these risks, as the wellbeing of young users will be affected by it the most." (Vissenberg d’Haenens, 2020, p. 181)