When adolescents receive sexual messages on the internet: Explaining experiences of risk and harm

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## Sample

A random stratified sample of approximately 25 000 internet-using European children aged 9-16 years were interviewed at home during spring and summer 2010. Interviews were conducted face-to-face for questions about internet access and use, with private completion for sensitive questions, including those on sexual messages. This was managed either via a
pen-and-paper questionnaire which the respondent put into a sealed envelope, or using a portable computer handed to the respondent so that neither interviewer nor parent could see their answers, depending on the technology available to fieldworks in different countries. Questions about sexual messages were posed only to 11-16 year olds, with a core sample size of 18 709 (50% girls/boys)

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

# Abstract

This article reports new findings on the incidence of risk and the associated experience of harm reported by children and adolescents aged 11-16, regarding receipt of sexual messages on the internet (known popularly as sexting). Findings showed that the main predictors of the risk of seeing or receiving sexual messages online are age (older), psychological difficulties (higher), sensation seeking (higher) and risky online and offline behavior (higher). By contrast, the main predictors of harm resulting from receiving such messages were age (younger), gender (girls), psychological difficulties (higher) and sensation seeking (lower), with no effect for risky online or offline behavior. The findings suggest that accounts of internet-related risks should distinguish between predictors of risk and harm. Since some exposure to risk is necessary to build resilience, rather than aiming to reduce risk through policy and practical interventions, the findings can be used to more precisely target those who experience harm in order to reduce harm overall from internet use.

# Outcome

The risk of receiving a range of sexual messages increases with age from 11 to 16, but there is no notable gender difference. ". How adolescents behave on and offline also makes a difference: those engaging in more risky offline and online activities (controlling for internet usage in general) were more likely to receive sexual messages online" (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014, 12).
"Adolescents who are older as well as those with psychological difficulties and with sensation seeking tendencies are more likely to take risks offline and online and, in consequence, they are more likely to receive sexual messages online" (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014, 12).
"among those who receive sexual messages, whether
or not it upsets them depends mainly on their age and gender as well as their psychological
make-up, and is largely unaffected by their level of online or offline risky behaviors" (Livingstone and Görzig, 2014, 12).