Is big brother more at risk than little sister? The sibling factor in online risk and opportunity

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Wellbeing
* Risks and harms
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

A random stratified sample of approximately 1000 Internet-using children aged between 9–16years was interviewed in each of 25 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom). These countries were selected to represent the economic, geographic and cultural diversity of European Union countries (including all large and most small countries in the EU) plus Norway (the earliest adopter of the Internet in Europe) and Turkey (a culturally diverse, late- adopting, aspiring member of the EU).

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Creating a safe environment for children online

## Implications For Stakeholders About

# Abstract

This article uses data from the 25,142-child study EU Kids Online to investigate the impact of sibling status on a child’s experience of online risk and opportunities. In general, the effects associated with having a sibling appear to be comparatively small. The presence of older siblings slightly increases use and skills, while younger siblings are associated with slight reductions. These dynamics are particularly visible in the use of social networking sites. Older siblings have the effect of increasing the range and number of online activities pursued by their younger siblings. Patterns around concerning exposure to risk and possible harm are not straightforward but younger children with an older sibling are not at an increased risk. Where younger aged children have even younger siblings, this is associated with a slight reduction in risk, whereas older-aged children with a younger sibling, and only children, appear to experience slight increases in risk.

# Outcome

Sibling effects as observed in our data are small. The reason for this might be that it is difficult to differentiate these effects from those caused by other processes in the family. In this respect, we do not have, for example, a measure- ment for the quality of relationships between the siblings. Nor do we have a way of indicating whether the siblings are of the same or different genders. But we do see that in terms of use and opportunities, the presence of older siblings seems to slightly increase use, whereas the presence of younger siblings is correlated with a slight reduction. This impact is most visible in the use of SNSs.
As for children’s online use, activities and skills online (RQ1), our results show how having siblings seems to put some limitations on access, perhaps caused by competing with siblings to use a device, and this might limit the time spent online. Having older siblings increases the number of online activities claimed, possibly through additional support in skill development, and that perhaps compensates to some extent for the reduced access.
The results in terms of risks and harm (RQ2) are not straightforward and merit further research. For risks, the age interactions are more nuanced, so for younger children, the presence of younger siblings can be associated with a slight reduction in the probability of encountering risks, whereas for older children, the presence of a younger sibling can be related to a slight increase in risks. For younger children, the presence of an older sibling is NOT, it seems, associated with any increase in risks.