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Chapter

THE EU KIDS ONLINE PROJECT: THE IMPORTANCE OF LARGE SCALE CROSS-NATIONAL RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying or the use of online or electronic forms of communication to harass, threaten, and otherwise inflict harm has become one of the most talked about negative consequences of young people's use of Internet technologies. With ever increasing and diversifying online platforms, policymakers have sometimes struggled to find the right balance to support youthful adoption of social media and the need for protection and/or redress when things go wrong. Crucially, policymakers require evidence to support decision making and to target solutions to problems that have sometimes been the subject of heightened public concern and anxiety.

Since 2007, EU Kids Online has sought to contribute on a pan-European basis a body of research and evidence regarding young people's experiences with Internet technologies. EU Kids Online is a multinational research network that seeks to enhance knowledge of European children's online opportunities, risks, and safety thereby lending greater understanding of the online landscape that increasingly frames children and young people's experiences. Through large scale survey research, EU Kids Online offers an insight into children's online lives across Europe and provides a baseline on which to assess trends in the situations that children find problematic. Uniquely, this project has, through its close relationship with the Safer Internet Programme of the European Commission, sought to contribute to policy debates as well as solutions and to play a role with other stakeholders on some of the key problematic issues affecting young people.

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The harmful effects of bullying and harassment on children and young people have long been of concern to parents, educators, and policy makers, long before the Internet became such a feature of contemporary life. That the online world presents a new environment in which vulnerable children can be victimized and a space where perpetrators find new ways to perform acts of harassment has been acknowledged by educators and online safety experts as one of the most complex issues facing children's online participation. Yet, the extent to which this is a risk identified by children and the manner in which they respond to experiences of bullying and harassment remains a challenging research question. Bullying and online harassment feature as one of the risks asked about in the EU Kids Online survey, and while not the most prevalent of negative experiences that children describe, it is the one that was found to have the most severe impact. Key findings from EU Kids Online and the wider contribution of cross-national large scale studies to cyberbullying research are the subject of this chapter.

SAFER INTERNET RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

The rapidity with which the Internet has been embraced by young people and the speed at which it has impacted young people's approach to communication and access to information and entertainment is remarkable. Young people have been to the fore in embracing new Internet technologies (Rice & Haythornthwaite, 2006), adapting them effortlessly to new modes of social interaction (Boyd, 2008), and forging new and often unexpected opportunities for learning (Ito et al., 2008). Yet, a dual discourse counterpointing the diverse multiple opportunities that the Internet affords with attendant risks and concerns with how best to manage young people's engagement with a complex amalgam of technologically-mediated content and contact risks has preoccupied policy makers, almost since its inception (Gill, 1996).

The first phase of policy interventions towards dealing with potentially harmful effects of the Internet downsides may be said to have been largely founded on the assumed risks it posed to children, based variously on intelligence from industry, law enforcement, and child welfare experts supported by limited forms of research alongside political concerns regarding child protection. Much of this was framed at an international level with the EU and the US playing leading roles in framing the principal themes of risks and safety online (European Commission, 1996; Internet Safety Technical Task Force, 2008). The European Commission's Safer Internet Programme acted on a pan-European level to support efforts to combat illegal uses of the Internet, principally the use of Internet technologies to exploit children and disseminate child abuse images, and to raise awareness, especially among parents and educators of the risks, predominantly content-based, that the Internet might pose to young people (European Commission, 1999).

The rise of social media and the explosion of young people's active participation in online social networking gave the lie to this policy approach. Egregious as online child abuse or exploitation is, the framing of education and awareness approaches around risks of exposure to online predation appeared increasingly irrelevant to the real experiences, positive and negative, that young people encountered. The absence of an adequate evidence base to inform such policy led to the development of the EU Kids Online as a Europe-wide research

network committed to producing reliable evidence of children's online opportunities, risks, and safety. Preceded by a number of international comparative studies such as the Safety Awareness, Facts and Tools or SAFT survey (Staksrud, 2005), and a series of Eurobarometer studies on Internet safety (Eurobarometer, 2005, 2007), EU Kids Online was the first project to propose a robust and comparable, survey-based investigation of children's (and their parents') access and use of the Internet as well as approaches to dealing with problems encountered online.

EU Kids Online originated as a so-called "knowledge enhancement" project for the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme in order to support policy decision making processes related to online services used by young people. In its first phase (2006-09), EU Kids Online created a network of European researchers and a body of knowledge based on comparative analysis of the existing evidence base on children and online technologies conducted in Europe. A key contribution was its classification of the typology of *content*, *contact,* or *conduct* risks and opportunities that arise in the context of young people going online (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). Going against the popular rhetoric of "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001), it was argued many children still lacked the resources to use the Internet sufficiently to explore its opportunities or to develop vital digital literacy skills (Helsper & Eynon, 2010), highlighting the importance of encouraging and facilitating children's confident and flexible Internet use.

An overriding priority was the need for reliable comparative data with which to assess the extent of the challenges facing young people in Europe when using the Internet. With 75% of European children regularly going online, many observers celebrated children's youthful expertise while others worried about their vulnerability to new forms of harm. Policies to balance the goals of maximising opportunities and minimising risks require an evidence based approach. Therefore, with funding from the EC Safer Internet Programme from 2009-11, EU Kids Online proceeded to design and conduct a major quantitative survey of 9-16 year olds experiences of online use, risk, and safety in 25 European countries (Livingstone, Haddon, Gorzig, & Ólafsson, 2011a). The underlying aim of the survey was to enhance knowledge of European children's and parents' experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the Internet and new online technologies in order to inform the promotion among national and international stakeholders of a safer online environment for children. The approach adopted was child-centred, comparative, critical, and contextual and informed by a socio-ecological perspective to better understand individual children's experiences within the diverse and varied contexts that constituted the wider European landscape (O'Neill, 2015).

THE EU KIDS ONLINE SURVEY

The EU Kids Online survey (2009-11) was a unique research endeavour in terms of breadth and scope of its investigation of online risks for children aged 9-16. A random stratified sample of 25,142 children aged 9-16 who used the Internet, plus one of their parents, was interviewed during Spring/Summer 2010 in 25 European countries. 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. Although a quantitative approach by

theoretical and methodological design, the survey also collected free form responses to open-ended questions of what pre-occupied and bothered children on the Internet.

A number of features of the methodology for EU Kids Online stand out to distinguish it from earlier cross-national studies such as Eurobarometer. In the first instance, the research is child-centred and reports incidence based on accounts provided by children themselves. Both children and their parents were surveyed as part of the research but it is the child's account that is reported in cross-national analysis. Secondly, a robust methodology was used to ensure representativeness of the sample on the national level and standardisation of sampling methods to ensure appropriate comparability across all countries included in the study. Thirdly, every effort was taken to ensure the reliability of children's responses through an ethically-sensitive approach. Children were interviewed in their own homes by specially trained interviewers. Self-completion sections were included for sensitive questions, with care taken to ensure that children were enabled to provide responses to sensitive issues without any adult interference. An optional open-ended question was also included to allow children to describe any situation they had experienced in which they were made to feel uncomfortable or which had bothered them. The question path in the survey was one in which initially all children were asked about incidence of exposure to risks. For those who did experience any of the risks asked about, this was followed by questions which asked them about impact and how it had made them feel. This was then subsequently filtered such that only those who had been adversely affected were then asked what they had done about it or to whom they turned for help and support.

Previous research indicated that the patterns and social contexts of general Internet use are key factors shaping children's online activities and online risks encountered (Livingstone, Haddon, & Görzig, 2012). Online experience is defined as a pathway composed of the online activities engaged in by children and the online and offline factors (e.g., family, social and cultural environment) that shape children's behaviours toward the technological world. This approach, based on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, offers a re-conceptualization of the child's ecology as a multi-layered set of nested and interconnecting environmental systems, all of which influence the developing child but with varying degrees of directness (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). The perspective has evolved since its early inception and today acknowledges the role of the child's own characteristics, hence the model is now referred to as the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The framework recognizes the complex interdependencies between the institutions and structures that support or constrain children's opportunities and their agency in making choices and decisions online while negotiating these possibilities and constraints. While limited demographic data was collected from parents to determine socio-economic status (SES), independent variables relating to national context were used to examine cross-country differences and are discussed further below (Lobe, Livingstone, Ólafsson, & Vobed, 2011).

Four main areas of risk were at the core of the investigation as set out by EU Kids Online: (i) exposure to sexual images online, (ii) sending and receiving sexual messages, (iii) bullying and harassment, and (iv) meeting strangers. The range of risks was selected based on a review of the available evidence derived from empirical studies that had been conducted across Europe (Hasebrink, Livingstone, & Haddon, 2008) and a classification of risks identified in the literature (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). A typology of risks according to content, contact, and conduct was developed, recognising children as actors and participants as well as consumers of content, in need of protection (Table 1).

Table 1. EU Kids Online Classification of Risks

	Content Child as receiver (of mass productions)	Contact Child as participant (adult-initiated activity)	Conduct Child as actor (perpetrator/victim)
Aggressive	Violent / gory content	Harassment, stalking	Bullying, hostile peer activity
Sexual	Pornographic content	"Grooming", sexual abuse or exploitation	Sexually harassment, "sexting"
Values	Racist / hateful content	Ideological persuasion	Potentially harmful user-generated content
Commercial	Embedded marketing	Personal data misuse	Gambling, copyright infringement

Source: EU Kids Online.
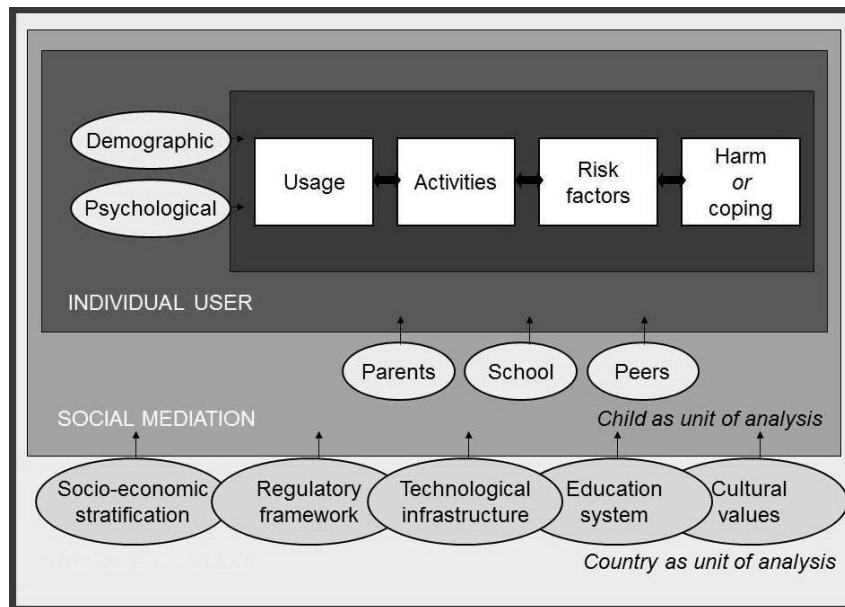
Source: The EU Kids Online framework (2011).

Figure 1. Relating online use, activities and risk factors to harm to children.

Much initial policy activity, as discussed above, was focused on content risks, drawing on well-established tropes of child protection in media contexts, seeking to provide "safer" forms of access for children to content in online, largely unregulated spaces. Accordingly, filtering tools were proposed as an important technology-enabled step towards restricting access to mass-produced content that may be unsuitable for children (Staksrud & Kirksæther, 2013). Children as participants in contact risks (adult-initiated) similarly is well-represented in the literature of online risks with children vulnerable to online predation (Gillespie, 2008), forms of ideological manipulation (Rogan, 2006), and online harassment by strangers (Peter, Valkenburg, & Schouten, 2006). Importantly, the typology recognises the increasingly active role of children in use of the Internet and in contexts in which they may be at risk of being the victim or even the instigator of acts that threaten or endanger others. It is in this context that

EU Kids Online has created a comprehensive evidence base across 25 countries in Europe regarding the incidence and response to bullying and other risks encountered through Internet technologies.

The EU Kids Online model explains adolescents' online risks and opportunities within a specifically adapted socio-ecological framework (Görzig & Machackova, 2015) (see Figure 1). Guided by this model, the EU Kids Online survey captured variables on the level of the individual as well as their parents, peers, and teachers. In addition, the survey data allows linkage with country level data, thus enabling the ability to capture the *cultural level* of the socio-ecological system by using country as a proxy.

In the following sections, we discuss findings relating to cyberbullying from the EU Kids Online survey and map the factors that emerged from the survey to the three distinct levels of the *individual,* the *family,* and the *country* level. Cyberbullying is usually defined as a form of bullying that uses electronic means such as email, mobile phone calls, text messages, instant messenger contact, photos, social networking sites, and personal web pages, with the intention of causing harm to another person through repeated hostile conduct. This can include forms of aggression such as humiliation, harassment, social exclusion, mockery, and unpleasant comments (Smith et al., 2008). In terms of the classification of risks above, cyberbullying is one of several conduct risks that may harm children through online contact with others. While a familiar term in English-speaking usage, "bullying" proved to be a difficult term to translate. Therefore, for the purposes of the survey, bullying was defined as follows:

> "Sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone and this can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time, for example. This can include: teasing someone in a way this person does not like; hitting, kicking or pushing someone around; leaving someone out of things."

During the interview, children were asked if this had happened to them either in person face-to-face, by mobile phone calls or texts, or on the Internet – e.g., via email, social networking sites.

Individual Level (Child as Unit)

Focussing in the first instance at the level of the individual child, data from the EU Kids Online survey allows us to describe the overall incidence of cyberbullying as reported by children aged 9 to 16 years. The survey found that 19% of children from across the 25 participating European countries, or one in five, reported that someone had acted in a hurtful or nasty way towards them. These children were then asked how it happened. The most common form of bullying reported was in person face-to-face at 13%, compared to 7% who reported that this happened to them on the Internet. The survey also found that for teenagers who experienced being bullied, this was more likely to be accompanied by online bullying and/or by bullying on mobile devices (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011b).

Drawing on the full survey findings, individual level factors may be further elaborated as follows:

- Age and gender: There is little consensus in the literature on how various socio-demographic factors influence cyberbullying behaviour. Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippet (2006), for instance, find no effect of age among children aged from 11 to 16 years in the prevalence of cyberbullying, whereas Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) found that older pupils (15 years old and above) were more often Internet aggressors than a younger children's group (10-14 year-old). EU Kids Online, likewise, found some association of both age and gender with cyberbullying. Overall, as noted above, more bullying occurred offline than online: while 19% of children said they had been bullied either online and/or offline, just 6% of respondents reported being a victim of online bullying, while 3% said they had bullied others online. Within these findings, girls and older adolescents reported being cyberbullied more often than boys or younger children (Livingstone, et al., 2011b). Furthermore, bullying others online or via mobile phone was found to increase slightly with age. The data also showed that there was a link between offline and online bullying: 56% of online bullies said they had bullied others face-to-face and 55% of online victims of bullying also claimed to be victims of face-to-face bullying. Although being bullied online was generally more common among older children, no particular age trend in forms of bullying was evident (Görzig, 2011; Lampert & Donoso, 2012).
- Psychological factors: EU Kids Online included items adapted from the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) using items measuring psychological difficulties only, examining children's level of self-efficacy, sensation seeking, experiences of ostracism, and psychological difficulties. Generally, both cyberbullying victimisation as well as perpetration showed a positive relation with psychological difficulties, self-efficacy, and sensation-seeking (Lampert & Donoso, 2012; Laurinavičius & Zukauskiene, 2012). Moreover, it also appears that those involved in online bullying showed overall a higher level of psychological vulnerability than those not involved in online bullying (Hasebrink, Görzig, Haddon, Kalmus, & Livingstone, 2011).
- Cyberbullies compared to face-to-face bullies were more likely to engage in risky online activities, spend more time online, and find it easier to be themselves on the Internet – a pattern that remained stable across countries suggesting that it is individual level factors rather than the country level that are generally more important in explaining cyberbullying (Görzig & Ólafsson, 2013).

Family Level (Household as a Unit)

Socio-economic status was the principal variable used by EU Kids Online to detect possible differences at the level of the household. This was included primarily to examine questions of digital advantage or disadvantage, following on from previous research on the so-called "digital divide" (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Findings from the survey showed that the risk of being involved in either online or offline bullying increased slightly with higher levels of socio-economic status, although differences were small (Livingstone et al., 2011b). However, among youth who were involved in online bullying, those with a higher SES were more often involved as a bully, while those with a lower SES were more often

involved as victims (Görzig, 2011). Young people from lower SES households also indicated more and a higher intensity of harm than those from a higher SES background. Lower levels of SES were related to a less likely occurrence of some coping responses, specifically changing Internet settings, responding by deleting a message, or trying to fix the problem (Vandoninck, d'Haenens, & Smahel, 2014). Furthermore, young people from families classified as a minority group reported higher experiences of being bullied online as well as subsequent harm (d'Haenens & Ogan, 2013). Moreover, youth more often sought support upon being victimised if they belonged to a discriminated against group or spoke a minority language at home (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, & Staksrud, 2014).

- Socio-economic status (SES): Some SES variation was found among those who responded to at least one of the questions regarding bullying and/or bullying others. However, the differences were minor. Among those who have experienced online bullying, girls, younger children, and those from a low socio-demographic background were more likely to be victims of bullying (and less likely to bully others) than boys, older children, and those with a higher socio-demographic background (Livingstone et al., 2011b). Overall, these differences suggest that those socio-demographic groups that are in some way or other more vulnerable are also more likely to report being victims than perpetrators of online bullying (Lampert & Donoso, 2012).
- Parental factors: Some differences were also found between parents' awareness of their child's experience of cyberbullying compared to more general awareness of their child's Internet activities. Overall, both 6% of children and 6% of parents reported that the child had been bullied on the Internet. Slightly more girls than boys (7% vs. 5%), and slightly more older teenagers (7% of 15-16 years) than younger children (3% of 9-10 year olds) said they had been bullied. There was a high level of agreement between children and their parents regarding whether or not the child had been sent hurtful or nasty messages on the Internet or bullied online. At the same time, there are some small, but noticeable, country differences in relation to the child/parent gap in perceptions. The child/parent agreement is a little lower in countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden, and Norway in that parents are more likely to think their child has been bullied online even when the child says they have not. By contrast, in Romania, Estonia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, children are more likely to say they have been bullied online than are parents.

Cross-Cultural/Cross-National Perspectives (Country as a Unit)

A powerful feature of the EU Kids Online survey was its combination of a pan-European survey interviewing some 25,000 children about their online experiences whilst also incorporating representative samples in each of the 25 participating European countries, thereby enabling detailed analysis at a national as well as the European level. Differences in Internet usage among European countries can have several explanations: for instance, how well established the infrastructure for the Internet is, the degree to which Internet safety awareness is disseminated, or more widely cultural factors that impact on parenting styles

(Livingstone, Mascheroni, Dreier, Chaudron, & Lagae, 2015). All of these aspects constitute cultural differences that can be explored via quantitative or qualitative approaches. For instance, opportunities, risks, harm, as well as parental mediation can be analysed and provide detailed information in terms of cultural as well as national contexts (Helsper, Kalmus, Hasebrink, Sagvari, & Haan, 2013).

Assessment of cultural differences remains a complex problem requiring a combination of approaches for identifying and discussing cross-cultural differences. The cultural level, for instance, may comprise abstract influences such as economic, social, educational, legal, or political systems which, in keeping with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, can elicit indirect influence upon individuals and other levels of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1997). For explanatory purposes, EU Kids Online developed a classification of countries according to the amount and types of Internet use and risks (Lobe, Livingstone, Ólafsson, & Vobed, 2011). This approach was underpinned by the underlying trend consistent in all instances of the more Internet use, the more risk was found. As such, participating countries were classified into the following four groups:

- "*Lower use, lower risk*" countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Hungary) – here children made the lowest use of the Internet, and they were below average on all risks apart from meeting online contacts – online and offline; still, it may be expected that as levels of use rise in these countries, so too will risk.
- "*Lower use, some risk*" countries (Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey) had the lowest Internet usage, although there was some excessive use of the Internet and some problems with user-generated content.
- "*Higher use, some risk*" countries (Cyprus, Finland, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, the UK) made high use of the Internet but were high only on some risks, possibly because of effective awareness-raising campaigns, regulatory strategies, or strategies of parental mediation of children's Internet use.
- "*Higher use, higher risk*" countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Sweden) include both wealthy Nordic countries and Eastern Europe that have the highest Internet usage across Europe as well as Eastern European countries with lower income but through more recent broadband investments experience "new use, new risk."

Country differences for experiences of being bullied both face-to-face and online are noteworthy. Findings from EU Kids Online show that cyberbullying appears to be more common in countries where bullying in general is more prevalent rather than in countries where the Internet is more established. For example, in Romania and Estonia, more than four in 10 children report having been bullied, twice the average across all 25 countries included in the survey. Online bullying in these countries is also more than twice the average, at one in seven children who use the Internet. As such, levels of all forms of bullying, and experiences of victimisation and perpetration of cyberbullying go hand in hand. Variance at the country level represents a more complex issue. According to Görzig (2012), 7% of the variance in cyberbullying victimisation can be explained by aspects located at the country level. Gender differences (i.e., girls) were found to be the most important predictor of cyberbullying victimisation in Spain, the Netherlands and Finland. Higher Internet usage was found to be

more significant in Greece, Hungary, Italy, and Slovenia. Then, risky online activities were the most relevant predictor in Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden and the lowest in Turkey, Hungary, and Lithuania. Reviewing the evidence for the variation in cyberbullying and its correlates across countries, Görzig and Machackova (2015) conclude that the cultural or country level does play a role in cyberbullying even if it is one of an array of factors within a socio-ecological system.

OFFLINE VS. ONLINE VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Two key questions within the literature on bullying which were explored further by EU Kids Online are the relation between traditional offline bullying and online bullying, and the relationship between victims and perpetrators of online bullying, including the psychological profiles of those who have experienced both.

EU Kids Online findings show that across Europe, 6% of 9 to 16 year-olds who use the Internet report having been bullied online while only half as many (3%) admit to having bullied others. Since 19% have been bullied either online and/or offline, and 12% have bullied someone else either online and/or offline, clearly more bullying occurs offline than online (Görzig, 2011). There is a link between offline and online bullying however. Fifty-six percent of online bullies said they had bullied others face-to-face and 55% of online bullying victims also claimed to be victims of face-to-face bullying. As such, bullying and being bullied tend to go together. Among those who do not bully others, being bullied is relatively rare – 8% offline only, and 4% online. But, among those who have bullied others offline, nearly half (47%) had also been bullied offline (and fewer online). On the other hand, among those who had bullied others online, nearly half (40%) had been bullied online (and fewer offline) (Görzig & Machackova, 2015; Hasebrink et al., 2011).

Findings from EU Kids Online also show how the odds for a child to perpetrate bullying online compared to offline increase when one of the factors is changed by one unit. Specifically, it is shown that the odds of being an online bully as opposed to an offline bully increased by 48% when the child was a girl compared to a boy; by 28% when the child's belief in his or her Internet abilities increased by one point (of three); by 36% when the child's score on the "online persona" scale increases by one; by 30% when the child spent an additional hour online; by 31% when the child engaged in one additional risky online activity, and by 5% when the child engaged in one additional risky offline activity (Hasebrink et al., 2011).

Additionally, offline bullies were more likely to be boys rather than girls. However, when it comes to online, the likelihood of girls being bullies increased more than for boys. The consequence is that boys and girls are equally likely to bully online (but not offline). In sum, these findings suggest that online bullies can be differentiated from offline bullies on the basis of their behaviour and attitudes associated with the Internet as well as their gender rather than on the basis of their offline behaviours.

Online bullies and those being bullied online are those children who are mostly also vulnerable offline. This supports previous findings that those children who already face problems offline are not only in need of support in their offline lives but also in their online lives. This includes children who have psychological difficulties, are socially excluded

(ostracised), engage in unhealthy sensation-seeking behaviours or are in some way or other members of a vulnerable group (Hasebrink et al., 2011).

Children who are bullied and/or bully others online have similar demographic and psychological profiles to those who are bullied and/or bully offline, suggesting that those children bullied or bullying online are not very different from those bullied or bullying offline except in that they make use of the affordances of the Internet (for example, the chance to meet new people online or to network with peers).

Those children who are causing harmful experiences online to others in the form of bullying are often the very same ones being bullied online by others, some of them known and some unknown to them offline. It is possible that being bullied by others online can sometimes be the response to having bullied others online, and vice versa, bullying others online can sometimes be the response to being bullied by others online. Although we cannot determine which is the cause and which the effect, providing more support for children who are victims of bullying might simultaneously decrease the occurrence of online bullying. Similarly, working to prevent children from engaging in online bullying behaviours might reduce the chance that they themselves will be bullied online by others. On a positive note and to keep these findings in perspective, it was shown that 93% of European children have neither been bullied nor bullied others online.

TRENDS OF BULLYING ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Following completion of the EU Kids Online survey in 2011, a new project called Net Children Go Mobile was undertaken in 2014, also supported by the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme. Closely modelled on the original EU Kids Online survey, Net Children Go Mobile provides time-series data for experiences of online risks and safety in a subset of countries allowing for the identification of trends (Livingstone, Mascheroni, Olafsson, & Haddon, 2014). With new data from seven of the original 25 countries, Net Children Go Mobile shows that while overall incidence of bullying has not increased since the EU Kids Online survey, cyberbullying is now more prevalent than face-to-face bullying and occurs most commonly on SNS. This shift in experiences from bullying offline to online is most noticeable for girls and for early teenagers and is markedly a feature of increased use of mobile technologies such as smartphones and tablets (O'Neill & Dinh, 2015).

Overall levels of bullying have risen marginally from 21% to 23% (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014). However, the number of children who report being bullied online or through any form on the Internet or mobile phones has nearly doubled from 7% to 12% in the period from 2011 to 2014. An increase in bullying among girls, and a slight decline among boys, is noteworthy. This is especially the case in relation to girls' reports of cyberbullying, where almost a doubling of online bullying from 8% to 15% is reported. Age variations are also significant in this sense. There are increased reports of bullying among young children, 9–10 years of age, and among 13–14 year olds. Older teens aged 15–16 years as well as 12–13 year olds reported a slight decline in experiences of being bullied. However, reports of cyberbullying have increased among all groups. The most substantial increase is in fact among younger users, aged 9–10 years old, where reports have tripled from 3% to 10%

between 2011 and 2014, and doubled among 13–14 year olds, from 8% to 15% (O'Neill & Dinh, 2015).

The proportion of children who have been bullied at all (on and/or offline) has remained fairly stable at under a quarter of 9-16 year olds – except that it rose markedly in Denmark, and was already very high in Romania. But, cyberbullying has increased in the past four years – from 8% to 12%, especially among girls, and among the youngest age group (aged 9-10 years, followed by teenagers aged 13-14 years old). The biggest increase from 2010 to 2014 in the percentage of children who have been cyberbullied is in Denmark (a rise from 12% to 21%) and Ireland (from 4% to 13%) (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying remains one of the most discussed forms of harmful behaviour resulting from young people's extensive participation online. High profile examples of threatening aggression and harassment of vulnerable young people, sometimes with tragic consequences, continue to dominate public discourse, especially in popular media, resulting in repeated calls for more direct intervention. Against this, EU Kids Online has, in common with other international reviews (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012), cautioned against the conclusion that cyberbullying has reached epidemic proportions. On the contrary, cyberbullying represents a subset and is best treated as a variant of unwanted, anti-social behaviour that can have damaging and sometimes devastating consequences for victims.

The value of large scale, multi-national studies such as that undertaken by EU Kids Online is that findings can provide a solid baseline for policy development and where necessary targeted intervention. As discussed, EU Kids Online has at its origins a commitment to evidence-based policy recommendations and over the course of the project has contributed to findings for policy making at both the country and European levels. Indeed, it is this combination of detailed socio-ecological data on the full range of young people's experiences, positive and negative, that has enabled the generation of significant discussion of policy responses that are measured, informed by evidence and addressed to the multiple stakeholders involved in supporting better Internet experiences for young people (Livingstone, Ólafsson, O'Neill, & Donoso, 2012; O'Neill & Staksrud, 2012).

Arising from findings of EU Kids Online is evidential support for the general proposition that individual level factors highlighting the needs of vulnerable populations, victim support and specific groupings more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviour merit more targeted policy measures. The multiple cultural factors notwithstanding, there remains a universality to the experience of bullying behaviour which, as more recent data shows, is migrating on an increasing basis to online platforms. This is a timely reminder of the need to maintain a strong evidence base and to continue to monitor on a pan-European basis the diversity of issues that impact young people's online experience.

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