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Internet safety, online radicalisation and young people with learning disabilities

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Accessible Summary

- A lot of people with learning disabilities enjoy using the Internet every day and use social media on their mobile phones. Staying safe online is important.
- This research used interviews and focus groups to find out what children, young people, their parents and teachers thought about Internet safety, extremism and online radicalisation.
- Extremism is when people have strong and dangerous views about laws or religion. Radicalisation is when people support extremism in a dangerous way. People can be targeted on the Internet to talk them into supporting extremism.
- The young people said they knew a lot about staying safe online, but parents were concerned about risks.
- When people with learning disabilities learn about staying safe online, they should be given information about online radicalisation and grooming for terrorism.

Abstract

Background: Young people with learning disabilities are increasingly using the Internet but can be vulnerable to being victimised online. As learning disability services develop guidance on how to support Internet use, it is important to explore what support is necessary.

Methods: This research used interviews and focus groups to explore what children, young people, their parents and teachers thought about Internet safety, extremism and online radicalisation.

Results: Results showed that the students were active Internet users and were confident about online safety but parents were concerned about the risks associated with Internet use. Following taking part in a peer education project that focussed on Internet safety and specifically about risks of online radicalisation and extremism, the students understood possible links between grooming and online radicalisation and their teachers increased their understanding of the importance of digital engagement for their students.

KEYWORDS

digital inclusion, intellectual disability, Internet, learning disabilities, radicalisation, training

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Many people with learning disabilities have access to Internet-enabled devices, often owning their own digital devices, primarily mobile phones and tablets (Alfredsson Ågren et al., 2020a; Chiner et al., 2017). However, Lough and Fisher (2016) have identified that Internet use is often taking place with little or ill-informed support meaning that people with learning disabilities might be vulnerable to being victimised for online crime and/or grooming. Despite increasing availability of online safety guidance for people with learning disabilities, there is currently no guidance available to support young people with learning disabilities to develop knowledge and resilience to online radicalisation. This paper reports on the Internet safety knowledge of young people, their parents and teachers in the context of a project that introduced education and training about risks of online radicalisation.

In the absence of published literature on this topic, the section that follows explores research that explains the rationale for the project and research.

1.1 | Internet safety

Research has demonstrated growth in smartphone and tablet use amongst people with learning disabilities (e.g. Chiner et al., 2017; Lough & Fisher, 2016) but with this comes complex issues around balancing the right to make choices with concerns about vulnerability and safety. Both the risks and benefits of being online can be greater for people with learning disabilities compared with those without learning disabilities (Chadwick et al., 2017). Benefits to Internet use include the following: access to information, developing identity, social connectedness and enjoyment (Bannon et al., 2015; Caton and Chapman, 2016; Jenaro et al., 2018).

A number of studies have discussed risks such as cyberbullying, financial and sexual exploitation and unwanted messages for people with learning disabilities online (Bannon et al., 2015; Holmes & O'Loughlin, 2012; Molin et al., 2015; Normand & Sallafranque-St-Louis, 2016). In the presentation of composite case vignettes based on actual cases, Buijs et al. (2017) refer to risks around financial and sexual exploitation as well as grooming. It has been suggested that people with learning disabilities who lack understanding of risks engaged in more risk-taking behaviour (Bannon et al., 2015) and Lough and Fisher (2016) found that people with learning disabilities may agree to engage in socially risky behaviours (e.g. meeting in real life). Engagement in these risky behaviours could be due to difficulties differentiating between fact and untrustworthy information online (Delgado et al., 2019).

Perceptions of risk by family members, professionals and paid carers are also important to understand because as Chadwick (2019) points out, these perceptions can lead to gatekeeping restrictions. Ramsten et al. (2019) demonstrated that concerns about Internet use are prevalent amongst family members, carers or supporters of people with learning disabilities. Chiner et al. (2020) found that

education and social work students perceived different online risks for people with learning disabilities compared with non-disabled people and considered people with learning disabilities more at risk of cyberbullying, providing too much personal information, communicating with strangers, being exposed to pornographic content and being threatened and being harassed.

Research in this area has also highlighted a discrepancy between the views of young people with learning disabilities and their parents and/or professionals who work to support them. Research carried out by Löfgren-Mårtenson (2008) found that young people experienced the Internet as a positive arena where they could experiment with social and romantic relationships. However, people around them tend to worry considerably and focus on the risks involved in using the Internet for relationships.

Conversely, two more recent studies, Löfgren-Mårtenson et al. (2015) and Alfredsson Ågren et al. (2020b), have suggested that while parents have concerns about risks online, they also acknowledge the more important role that connections online play in the lives of their adolescents. If young people with learning disabilities are to benefit from online connections, Internet safety materials need to be thorough and readily available. Recently, organisations that support people with learning disabilities have started to produce guides to Internet use, social media and Internet safety. However, existing resources do not address a broad range of risks including grooming for serious offences such as terrorism.

1.2 | Online radicalisation

The term "cybercrime" is widely used to describe the crimes or harms that result from opportunities created by networked technologies (Wall, 2008). Types of cybercrime have been divided by Wall (2001) into four category cybercrime typologies: (a) cyber-trespass, (b) cyber-deception = theft, (c) cyber-porn and obscenity, and (d) cyberviolence. The fourth category, cyberviolence, includes the various ways that individuals can cause harm in real or virtual environments. Under-reporting and a lack of knowledge about victims of cybercrimes means that evidence is not strong (Wall, 2007), but estimates of online harassment and bullying appear to have increased due to greater access to technology and the social importance placed on virtual communications (Holt & Bossler, 2014). Acts of cyberviolence include the use of technology in support of social unrest and prospective acts of terror (Wall, 2001). Although there is a growing body of research on cyberbullying, harassment and stalking, generally little research on the phenomena of cyberterrorism and online extremism has been conducted (Holt & Bossler, 2014).

Online grooming is commonly associated with sexual predators but the same pattern of an intentional development of emotional links to gain trust has been seen in grooming for terrorism. The risks associated with online radicalisation have increased, and in response, the UK Government's White Paper, Online Harms (HM Government, 2019) highlights the risk of terrorist groups using the

TABLE 1 Project sessions

Week	College			School		
	delivery	Content	Attendance	delivery	Content	Attendance
1	Author 1 and Author 2	Research Focus Groups	6 students 5 college staff	Author 1 and Author 2	Research Focus Groups	7 students 6 parents 2 school staff
2	Author 2	Group rules Project background and plan Presentation of examples of radicalisation Setting questions for visiting speakers Discussion: life online v. "real" life	5 students	Author 2	Group rules Project background and plan Presentation of examples of radicalisation Discussion: why do people perpetrate terrorism?	8 students 1 learning support
3	Author 2	Watched & discussed funder's video interview with previous senior member of extremist organisation. Discussion: How radicalisation happens, what stops people acting on extreme ideas.	4 students 1 learning support	Author 2 Local Police Prevent Lead	Discussion: What makes people vulnerable to radicalisation, why people get radicalised, indicators of radicalisation, police understanding of learning disability and autism	8 students 1 learning support 1 visiting speaker
4	Author 2 Representative from funder	<u>Funder discussion:</u> Our life online, how extremists operate online, online recruitment, creating "in" and "out" groups	4 students 1 visiting speaker	Author 2 Teacher responsible for in-house safeguarding	Watched & discussed funder's video interview with previous senior member of extremist organisation. Discussion: how radicalisation happens <u>Teacher discussion:</u> The grooming process, indicators, In-school response	6 students 1 learning support 1 visiting speaker
5	Author 2 Local Police Present Lead	Discussion with <u>Police Prevent Lead</u> Grooming, The Prevent programme, What makes us angry?, Being bullied Why people join radical groups, Indicators of radicalisation. Starting to think about student teaching plan: what people need to know.	5 students 1 learning support 1 visiting speaker	Author 2 Funder representative	<u>Funder discussion:</u> Our life online, how extremists operate online, online recruitment, creating "in" and "out" groups Starting to think about student teaching plan: what people need to know	6 students 1 learning support 1 visiting speaker
6	Author 2	Writing the student training plan	3 students	Author 2	Writing the student training plan	6 students 1 learning support
7	Author 2	Writing the student training plan	3 students	Author 2	Writing the student training plan	6 students 1 learning support
8	Author 2	Students practise training material	3 students	Author 2	Students practise training material	5 students 1 learning support
9	Author 2	Students practise training material	3 students	Author 2	Students practise training material	6 students
10	Author 2	Students deliver training to peers	3 students	Author 2	Students deliver training to teaching staff.	5 students
11	Author 1 and Author 2	Teaching debrief, Research interviews and focus groups	8 students	Author 1 and Author 2	Teaching debrief, Research interviews and focus groups	6 students

Internet to spread propaganda designed to radicalise vulnerable people.

People with learning disabilities may have particular vulnerabilities to such risks such as having few support mechanisms, a tendency to acquiesce, misinterpreting social cues and often a need for friendships that can make them potential victims (Landman, 2014; Petersilia, 2001). Chadwick (2019) has extended these suggestions and has identified factors that may be associated with online victimisation such as higher levels of sociability, loneliness, anxiety and depression, poorer insight, judgement, discrimination and ability to detect deception online and reduced experience and life opportunities.

Concerns have recently increased regarding people with learning disabilities and/or autism being vulnerable to grooming (Buijs et al., 2017) for a range of criminal activities, including terrorism, via social media (Allely, 2017; Faccini & Allely, 2017). Allely (2017) suggests that people with traits of autism spectrum disorders could be at more risk of being radicalised, and Faccini and Allely (2017) have presented several cases where people with learning disabilities and/or autism have been involved in making either naïve or serious and serial terroristic threats. The cases presented by Faccini and Allely (2017) are largely focussed on autism spectrum disorders, and the significance of an additional learning disability is unclear. Their work has been the subject of contestation, and Chown et al. (2018) have provided an argument that the concurrence of autism and terrorism is likely to be significantly less than Faccini and Allely suggest.

In the UK, the anti-terrorist legislation, Prevent Duty (DfE, 2015) aims to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism. Awareness and concern about “home-grown” terrorists have led to several new policies, including the school-based “Promoting Fundamental British Values” (DfE, 2013, 2014a, 2014b) whereby teachers are required to identify, monitor and report students considered as vulnerable to radicalisation to the authorities. Prevent Duty aims to make schools responsible for identifying children who may be vulnerable to radicalisation stating that “schools and childcare providers should be aware of the increased risk of online radicalisation, as terrorist organisations such as ISIL seek to radicalise young people through the use of social media and the internet” (DfE, 2015, p. 6). Critics of this approach suggest that teachers lack the knowledge, language and concepts to discuss what undermining British Values might look like in their classrooms (Winter & Mills, 2018).

Bringing these areas of enquiry together, the existence of little or ill-informed support for people with learning disabilities using the Internet when considered alongside the possibilities of particular vulnerabilities to risk raises questions around vulnerabilities and knowledge of being victimised for online crime and/or grooming. This research took place in the context of young peoples’ participation in a project that introduced education about the risks of being targeted for online radicalisation. The research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What do young people with learning disabilities and their family members know about Internet safety?

2. To what extent do young people with learning disabilities, teaching staff and family carers feel that learning about online radicalisation and extremism is beneficial for young people with learning disabilities?

1.3 | The project

The project funded by the ISD and Google.org Innovation Fund was led by Author 2. It ran for eleven half-day sessions at one school and one college in SW England between April and October 2018. The funding was aimed at supporting communities to deliver innovative solutions to hate and extremism across the UK. The school provided education for students aged 11–16 who have learning, social and emotional difficulties. Participants from the college were from a supported learning department within a mainstream college aimed at providing courses for students aged 16 + with learning disabilities. At both sites, agreement to participate in the project was agreed with the senior leadership team and individual teachers at both sites were appointed as “project liaison teachers” who communicated information about the project to the students and parents. The project liaison teachers knew the students well and were able to invite students who they considered would benefit from taking part in the project. The weekly sessions consisted of discussions around Internet use and safety; extremism, online radicalisation and terrorism; and invited expert speakers (from the funding organisation, local Police Prevent leads and in-house safeguarding officers). The students then developed their own training materials which they used for training peers (at the college) and teaching staff (at the school). The project concluded with a session in which the students delivered a training workshop to their peers or to members of staff. The sessions were flexible in content depending on issues that the young people introduced but contained largely similar content. Details of weekly sessions and attendance can be seen in Table 1.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Participants and methods

An exploratory, qualitative design utilising focus groups and interviews was used to explore experiences of Internet safety and online radicalisation. Data collection utilised six exploratory focus groups:

- Students at the school during the first week of the project ($N = 7$). This focus group was largely exploratory with the young people being asked questions around ways that they used the Internet, preferred activities, where they use the Internet, what devices they prefer to use and perceptions of Internet safety;
- Students at the college ($N = 6$). This followed the same focus group schedule as focus group 1;
- Students at the school ($N = 6$). This focus group took place at the end of the project period and explored in more detail what the

students knew about Internet safety, risk, grooming and online radicalisation and their perceptions of the value of learning about such risks. Participants were the same participants who had taken part in the first focus group.

- Students at the college ($N = 8$). This focus group followed the same focus group schedule as focus group iii. Three of the participants had taken part in the initial college focus group, five had not (a change of school year and sporadic attendance had led to changes in the cohort taking part).
- Parents and teachers at the school ($N = 8$). This focus group explored perceptions of Internet safety, perceptions of risks and benefits of Internet use;
- Staff at the college ($N = 5$) following the same interview schedule as focus group v.

A single semi-structured interview also took place with one student at the college who was unable to attend the focus group. Additionally, individual semi-structured interviews were carried out with the teachers who had co-ordinated the participation of the students at their school or college in the project. These interviews explored teachers' perceptions on the value and risks to young people with learning disabilities engaging with the Internet and social media; their perceptions of young peoples' knowledge about Internet safety (including knowledge and understanding of grooming, terrorism and radicalisation); and their perceptions of the value of teaching young people with learning disabilities about these issues.

Details of participants can be seen in Table 2.

2.2 | Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis specifically following Braun and Clarke's six-phase guide (2006). This method involved becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts. Coding was carried out in a deductive way whereby codes were generated in relation to the research questions. By following this deductive approach, coding was selective as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013). From these codes, initial themes were generated to identify broader patterns. Themes were then reviewed and finalised.

2.3 | Ethical consideration

The research had approval from the University Faculty Ethics Committee and took place with the co-operation of the Senior Leadership Teams at the school and college who acted as gatekeepers. Easy-read information sheets and consent forms were developed by the researchers using "easy on the I" picture symbols (www.easyonthei-leeds.nhs.uk) and easier to understand language, and these were approved by the University ethics committee. Participants were given easy-read information sheets to ensure that they understood the purpose and nature of the research and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Written consent was taken from participants by the researcher and additional consent obtained through the school from parents for participants who

TABLE 2 Participants

Data collection method	Participants	Recruitment	Age	Gender	Duration
Focus group	School students ($N = 7$)	Students were selected by the school to take part in the project and focus group based on their known interest in social media use.	11–15	4 males, 3 females	34 min
Focus group	College students ($N = 6$)	Students were invited by their teachers to take part in the project and research. Those with an initial interest took part in the focus group.	16–20	4 males, 2 females	31 min
Focus group	School students ($N = 6$)	Students who had taken part in the 11-week project were asked by their teacher to take part	11–15	3 males, 3 females	30 min
Focus group	College students ($N = 8$)	Students were asked by their teacher to take part	16–20	4 males, 4 females	28 min
Focus group	School parents ($N = 6$) School staff ($N = 2$)	Parents of the project student group were invited by the school to attend. Staff opted in from professional interest.	N/A	All female	42 min
Focus group	College staff ($N = 5$)	All staff at the supported learning centre were invited to take part during their lunch break.	N/A	All female	15 min
Interview	Student $N = 1$	Asked to take part by teacher	17	M	19 min
Interview	Staff $N = 1$	Direct contact with researcher	N/A	F	27 min
Interview	Staff $N = 1$	Direct contact with researcher	N/A	F	19 min

were under 16. Participants were invited to take part in the project by teachers who knew them well and who were able to determine capacity to consent. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw their involvement from the study at any time and that if the researcher felt that their safety was at risk by anything that they discussed in their participation, this would need to be reported to the appropriate member of the teaching staff at their school or college. All documents were written in easy-read format and were also read aloud to participants. As part of the consent process, students understood that if they raised an issue that the researcher considered to be a safeguarding concern, this would be referred to the school or college safeguarding processes.

3 | RESULTS

The thematic analysis generated three themes: "Student Internet Use and Safety Knowledge," "Online Radicalisation" and "Increasing Teacher Awareness". Verbatim quotations from participants have been included to provide examples made by participants. Quotes have been attributed to "student," "teacher" or "parent", M or F to indicate gender and "school" or "college" to indicate the project site.

3.1 | Theme 1: Students internet use and safety knowledge

The students discussed how much and for what purpose they used the Internet. At the college, all student participants had a mobile phone, all used the Internet and were everyday social media users. Most of the students also had other ways to access the Internet such as tablets or computers at home. A discussion around the types of activities or apps that were most commonly used showed that Instagram and Facebook were most commonly used, followed by Snapchat. Similarly, at the school site with the slightly younger students, all participants said they use the Internet every day, most had mobile phones, but a few used a PC, laptop or iPads. There was discussion at this focus group about popular Youtubers and gaming (Minecraft and Fortnite). Participants also talked about using other platforms that mainly require people to be interactive with other users (e.g. Xbox, Facebook, Snapchat, Skype, Messenger, Musical.ly and Instagram). At both sites, students discussed a preference for accessing the Internet in a location where they had privacy.

"I feel a bit like awkward if I do it around everyone because I don't really want them to see what I am doing if you know what I mean." (F, college).

Parents highlighted how Internet use for their children with learning disabilities has specific benefits. The parents explained that formal after-school activities were rare because the children often travelled some distance to get to the school which meant the logistics of attending clubs was difficult. This meant that using the Internet was seen as

an attractive way to spend free time after school. Additionally, the social barriers that young people with learning disabilities may encounter can be minimised online.

"The internet can be such a good thing and it can help them grow and help them gain knowledge and it can help them experience things and see things that they might not be comfortable going face to face for." (parent, school).

"I think there's a massive potential for people with autism to become part of a community, to become part of something much bigger than themselves on the internet and....they don't have all those horrible tensions that they have in real life, like, they can't make eye contact, they find that really difficult, that doesn't apply online so you've got a lovely freedom being online." (parent, school).

Most of the students at the focus groups said they were confident that they knew how to be safe online.

No, I just block them straight away if I didn't know them, I would block them (School, F).

I blocked him because he was being horrible, (College, F).

I am very safe online (College, M).

On Snapchat, there is this button that you can press, it's called Ghost, and when you are pressing and it goes blue, your location goes.....So, people don't know where you are.....There is my friend have theirs on and I will tell "them guys turn it off", but they were like "no". And you could see exactly where they are, when they are at home at night, you can see where they live. I turn mine off. (School, F).

However, despite the students' assertion of knowledge around Internet safety, parents disagreed:

"...they know the rules around internet safety but when they're in that moment, when they're on that game, it's different." (parent, school).

The majority of parents said that their children communicated with strangers online and that they were concerned about it. One parent explained that a family friend had discovered that her daughter was looking for a boyfriend online. Parents also raised concerns about how having learning disabilities may mean that the young people do not have the scepticism to question the motives of people they encounter online, thus making them vulnerable.

"He wouldn't absolutely have a clue. Not at all. He'd just be, 'no but it's my friend, it's my friend, they're my friend now'. It's like but no, you don't know them, you know but no he's so trusting, he's so wants the friendships, he wants people to like him, he wants to talk to people that he'd take anybody, anybody at all and that's scary." (parent, school).

Staff said that knowledge around Internet safety for the students was a "huge problem." Indeed, parents identified a difficulty in lacking the digital skills themselves to be able to fully supervise and support the safety of the children.

"I do want to lock down the internet a lot more than what I have but it's having those skills myself to do it." (parent, school).

"It's so that you know, I can do the basics but it's the things that slip through that I don't know how to ban that and he knows I don't know so he sits there laughing at me because he's like "ha, ha" and when he's going on something he shouldn't because he's not allowed upstairs on his, he sort of turns round and tries to sit in the corner of the sofa sort of with his iPad up high so that I can't see what he's doing." (parent, school).

"It's just modern technology, it's moving so fast and it's knowing how to keep up with it." (parent, school).

3.2 | Theme 2: Online radicalisation

Despite concerns about safety online, the teachers reported that they had not had any experience of having to intervene in a situation involving extremism or online radicalisation amongst their students. The parents all agreed that their children understood what grooming is following education from both themselves and the school e-safety officer. However, parents did not think the children would make a connection between grooming and extremism and radicalisation. After taking part in the project, all students who took part in the project were able to join in focus group discussions around online radicalisation demonstrating a developing awareness.

F. "Yes, special needs is what I am trying to say, special needs like us because when that happens and they don't know what they are doing, they could end up doing something serious like bombing or stuff like that and it's to stop that from happening, and letting them be in control of themselves, but not let anyone else control them." (school).

"...people tell you that this is right and they are trying to tell you to be, like, religious or something like that and then they're saying things that's wrong and you just believe it." (school, M).

"...grooming is when there's loads of teenagers that have special needs and/or not special needs and they isolate themselves away from family, friends and that's how they can get groomed because if they isolate themselves they have no friends, family to help them through...that's when a person on a game could convince them to be a bomber or something... I think it's because they go on the internet a lot and they search other stuff like religious stuff as well and when they search religious stuff that's when people get to know the bombings and Syria and stuff like that and sometimes they would say, oh, we need you on our side, we need you to be a good person, but they are really manipulating them to become a bomber." (college, F).

While these quotes from the students demonstrate an awareness of online radicalisation, they also highlight the complexity of the material that was presented to them as part of the project. The final quote presented below demonstrates that although the material was complex, the students did understand the crucial elements of keeping safe online:

M. And you shouldn't accept someone you don't know, or talk to anyone you don't know.

F. And how they can groom other, other kids that have special abilities like us.

F. "Special needs."

3.3 | Theme 3: Increasing teacher awareness

While the focus of the project was on student education and analysis was carried out in a deductive way to generate codes in relation to the research questions, an important theme that arose from coding related to research question 2 was that involvement in the project also increased awareness of both the benefits of Internet use and the risks for students of online radicalisation amongst the teaching staff.

The teachers explained that their involvement in the project had increased their understanding and awareness of the importance of digital engagement for their students.

"...we do live in such a rural area, you know we do see lots of students who are incredibly isolated. You know

and that's a way of you know communicating with their friends and peers." (College, tutor).

"I've worked with autistic young people for a long time but what they were saying about how important it is to feel that sense of belonging and to be part of a community-- and how- when you can be anyone you want online. And for them that's an incredible positive." (teacher, school).

"And it's easy for us to say... 'don't go on this site, don't play that game, or if this game makes you feel like that, don't play it'. You know? But, actually, it's really important to them. And maybe we're missing a trick sometimes because it's a great way of them learning to regulate their emotions. It's a great way of them learning to be part of a community. And if we were scared of IT opportunities and if we try and limit that or we've got a fear factor, I think we're limiting opportunities for our young people with additional needs..." (School, teacher).

However, mirroring the parents' views the teaching staff also raised some concerns about the young people being active Internet users and being exposed to potential risks without adequate support:

"I think one the fact that they are often, they are often accessing these sites in such isolation and they won't discuss that with parents or carers." (College, tutor).

Staff had existing knowledge following compulsory training around Prevent and local training around safety and social media. However, the project put the previous training in context:

"...what was quite enlightening was to hear about it from the kids' point of view and to hear about how important their online world is to them. Because we can very often, you know, I missed out on being the generation that's grown up with computers. Most of our staff are of my age - maybe slightly younger - but it's not the sea that we swim in. For them it's their life; it's the world. And I think sometimes we have this view that, ooh, technology, you have to be so safe, you have to be so careful around it, yes, you do, but you've also got to take on board that it opens up a lot of worlds and opportunities for those young people." (teacher, school).

This quote suggests that a greater understanding of the importance of the digital world for young people by their teachers is likely to mean that any Internet safety training provided within schools would take place with a positive risk-taking approach allowing the young people to benefit from online connections.

4 | DISCUSSION

All of the student participants used the Internet every day and almost all had their own mobile phones. The young people used their mobile devices primarily for communicating with friends, gaming with friends and strangers and for entertainment. Looking back to the first research question exploring what young people and their families know about Internet safety, the young people reported concerns about other people they encountered online, but expressed well-informed views about Internet safety and guidelines. However, an important finding in this research was that there was a gap between the young peoples' online safety knowledge and their parents' perceptions of their online safety knowledge and behaviour. The parent participants expressed strong concerns about the safety of the young people online, saying that when they were engrossed in social media or gaming, safety rules were quickly forgotten or ignored. The parents' concerns aligned with research that has suggested that people with learning disabilities have a tendency to acquiesce, often having a naivety around danger and having a need for friendships (Landman, 2014; Petersilia, 2001). These findings mirror the findings presented in the introduction whereby people with learning disabilities and their family members or carers have differing perceptions of risk and online safety measures. One reason for this could be as Lough and Fisher (2016) found that few parents provide supervision whilst the individual with learning disabilities and are therefore possibly not aware of the digital skills that the young people possess.

In the present study, the third theme highlighted ways that by taking part in the project the teachers became more aware of the benefits of Internet use and the skills that the young people had online. This correlates with the study by Löfgren-Mårtenson et al. (2015) who found that despite parents viewing young people as being at risk when accessing the Internet, they viewed the risk of their adolescent being lonely as greater than the risk of being abused or misled. Indeed, recent research by Alfredsson Ågren et al. (2020b) found that a higher proportion of parents of adolescents with learning disabilities perceived opportunities associated with Internet use for their adolescent than the parents of non-disabled adolescents and a lower proportion of parents of adolescents with learning disabilities perceive negative consequences and have concerns about online risks. The conflicting views held by parents and professionals are an area that would be interesting to explore further in future research.

Some predisposing factors identified by Chadwick et al. (2019), such as loneliness or difficulty discerning deception, might put people with learning disabilities more at risk but this is tempered by digital exclusion with the actual prevalence of risk being difficult to discern. As the benefits of online participation appear to be becoming increasingly clear to parents, teachers and professionals who support people with learning disabilities, it is important to support the development of digital competencies. In developing digital competencies and rejecting risk-averse approaches, digital inclusion will increase alongside online skills and resilience. This

highlights the importance for those supporting people with learning disabilities to deepen their own digital knowledge to support positive risk taking in Internet use to enable people with learning disabilities to gain increased digital competencies (Alfredsson Ågren et al., 2020b).

Looking again at this study's second research question that explored the extent to which young people, teaching staff and family carers feel that learning about online radicalisation and extremism is beneficial, the concerns of the parents suggest that their perception was that young people with learning disabilities may be susceptible to becoming victims of criminal activity online. The young people enjoyed the social aspects of communication online but, despite knowing the "rules" of Internet safety, the parents stated that they could easily get caught up in the moment and put themselves in a vulnerable position. The participants in this study commented on preferring to use the Internet in private, their family members commented that they spent considerable time using the Internet and that they themselves felt ill-equipped to deal with some aspects on online safety. These factors combined provide a potentially dangerous situation for opportunities for young people to be targeted online for grooming for online radicalisation. While the students were able to participate in discussions around online radicalisation following taking part in the project, this is a complex area to learn about and without that knowledge could be considered to be vulnerable to being victimised.

Concerns about digital safety skills need to be considered alongside views such as those of Wall (2008) who points out that negative media, fiction and science fiction conceptualisations of cybercrime have shaped our expectations of them. It is likely that the expectation that young people with learning disabilities could be vulnerable and should be protected feeds into what Wall (2008) identifies as prevailing myths about Internet use such as that it is unsafe and that users cannot be trusted and need to be protected from themselves. Wall (2008) asserts that the evidence suggests that the majority of individuals tend to take their (good) social values with them online. Indeed, surveys of individual victimisation show very low levels of overall victimisation that individuals consider serious enough to warrant action (Wall, 2008). This is also to be considered alongside the fact that the teaching staff participants stated that they had not had to intervene in an instance of suspected online radicalisation among their students.

The results of this research need to be considered in the context of "Prevent Duty" (DfE, 2015) and "Promoting Fundamental British Values" (DfE, 2013, 2014a, 2014b) and raise questions around the likelihood of teachers being about to follow the guidance and identify pupils who are vulnerable to online radicalisation. The teacher participants increased their understanding of their students' involvement in their digital worlds while taking part in this project. With limited understanding of the potential importance of online communities, teachers may be placed in a position of unnecessary and unwanted surveillance of their pupils. Indeed, Winter and Mills (2018) suggest that the Prevent and British Values policies "contribute to racial governance under neoliberalism through the continued targeting of certain racialized community groups for surveillance, management and containment." (Winter & Mills, 2018, P.6). With

this in mind, care needs to be taken around work linking learning disabilities and/or autism and terrorism.

Students and teachers agreed that taking part in the project increased student knowledge and awareness of the risks of extremism and online radicalisation. In addition, the involvement of school and college teaching staff in the project led to increased awareness of the importance of supporting young people with learning disabilities to take part in the digital world.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

This research has demonstrated that children and young people with learning disabilities are regular users of interactive and social Internet. Young people feel confident in their knowledge of online safety but their parents have concerns about online risks. Parents, teachers and young people articulated benefits to including material to increase knowledge of risks of online radicalisation and extremism to existing online safety education materials currently use for people with learning disabilities.

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