

Children's online risks and safety – review of available evidence

Aims

The UKCCIS Evidence Group serves to establish an evidence base for the council and maintain oversight of UK and international research relevant to children's online safety. The UKCCIS Evidence Group commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to compile a comprehensive summary of existing research on child internet safety.

Key Findings

The evidence base can be summarised according to distinct themes – sources for original research can be located in the complete NFER report:

Access and Use

- More than four in five young people aged 5–15 are now able to access the internet in their own homes
- There is a growth in using alternative portable devices (including mobiles and portable media players) to access online content in a variety of places and without parental supervision.

The characteristics of children accessing the internet

- There is some evidence that children with special educational needs may be more likely to be cyberbullied than other children.
- However, there is no clear link between the characteristics of children and other online risks

Online risks for children and young people

- Parents and teachers regard accessing inappropriate content on the internet as one of the main online risks for children.
- A quarter of children aged 14 have arranged to meet an online contact face to face, while 15% of those aged eight and 12 have done so.

Safeguarding children's online experiences

- While children are generally aware of how they should behave to stay safe online, they often do not use these strategies.
- Some schools do not appear to have sufficiently comprehensive e-safety policies in place to ensure all children use the internet safely while at school.

Evidence Gaps

- There is very little evidence on the links between using more portable devices and the online risks young people face in using such devices.
- We do not know much about the ways and extent to which younger children aged 11 and below use social networking sites to share personal information.
- More research is needed to explore whether certain types of young people are more likely to be exposed to different types of online risks
- There is very little research on the online risks faced by younger age groups accessing the internet, particularly those 66% aged 5–7 who use the internet at home.
- More evidence is needed to quantify the extent to which children encounter online risks, rather than just focusing on young people's and adults' perceptions of such risks.
- More research is needed to explore what specific strategies work best in ensuring that young people use the internet safely

Policy Context

The comprehensive review of available research evidence (i) points to gaps and limitations in available evidence; and (ii) illustrates the full range of available and relevant evidence in the development of internet safety policy.

Methodology

A broad literature review was conducted in order to map existing research evidence relevant to child internet safety. Research evidence was collected from a variety of sources, including a literature search of relevant databases (including the Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), the British Education Index (BEI) and the British Education Index Free Collections and ChildData); web searches using appropriate search terms; personal discussions with the UKCCIS Research Panel; and an email request circulated among UKCCIS members.

Background

The UKCCIS Research Panel commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to map available evidence concerning child internet safety and online risk. It was intended to compile available research evidence to inform policy making and highlight gaps in the evidence base.

Sources <http://www.education.gov.uk/ukccis/download-link.cfm?catstr=research&downloadurl=UKCCIS.pdf>

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