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What bothers Australian kids online? Children comment on bullies, porn and violence

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The Australian report adds to, but does not replace, the findings of the 20-page discussion around *In their own words: What bothers children online?* The main purpose of: *What bothers Australian kids online? Children comment on bullies, porn and violence*, is to place Australian findings in the context of findings from the EU Kids Online research. It should be noted here that the Australian research was conducted in parallel with the research in Europe by the same international market research company, and according to the same stringent protocols. Consequently, it also involves a random selection of participants, although the sample size is 400 children (aged 9-16), rather than the 1,000 children per country in the European data. The Australian study was funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation. The full AU Kids Online report can be accessed at: <http://cultural-science.org/journal/index.php/culturalscience/article/view/49/129>

Summary of EU Kids Online ‘In their own words’ report findings

There were 9,636 children aged 9-16, or 39% of the participants, who responded to the question ‘What things on the internet bother people about your age’. Together these kids raised a long list of different issues, and a number were bothered by more than one thing. In Europe, 22% of the children who responded to this question (about 1 child in 12 of the overall study) were most concerned about pornography; in that it was the only risk listed, or the first in a list of risky topics. Eighteen percent of the children were worried about violent content (7% of the total cohort). Violence was more of a problem for boys: girls worried about people using the internet to contact them against their wishes or in ways that disturbed them. This included people they knew pretending to be someone else, as well as unwelcome interest from strangers.

The violence that bothers children is not necessarily related to films and games. Children’s comments showed that they were worried by stories they see on the news, including gory war footage and cruelty to animals. The pornography and violence they saw was often carried on video-sharing websites such as YouTube. While many children did not say where on the internet they saw unsettling images, of those that did, 32% saw them on video-sharing sites, 29% on websites, 13% on social networking sites such as Facebook and 10% were bothered by what they saw while playing videogames. If children are bothered by something they see online they run the risk of harm in that they might experience emotional or psychological distress or feel that they have to avoid the internet for some time.

Although the youngest respondents, aged 9, were least likely to mention something that bothered them, the proportion of children identifying risks rose quickly between the ages of 9-13. After this the percentage of 13-16 year olds mentioning bothersome things was generally stable at 45-46%. Younger children were more likely to talk about troubling content, with older children more concerned about what others do and say online (conduct risks), as well as being contacted in ways that made them uncomfortable. Conduct and contact risks are frequently linked to activities on Facebook and other social networking sites. The appendix contains the coding protocol which includes a list of coding categories which were assigned to the broad classifications of Content-related risk; Contact-related risk; Conduct-related risk; and Other specific risks.

Some countries which have had widespread access to the internet for the past generation (15-20 years) have generally been described as ‘high use, high risk’ nations. Australia fits this

profile, and children from these countries were more likely than other children to mention online risks.

How does the Australian research compare with the European findings?

Prevalence of responding

Children from Australia were more likely than children from almost all of the 25 nations in the EU Kids Online study to respond to the question: ‘What things on the internet bother people about your age?’ Responses were entered on a laptop computer into an open box and children had the choice whether to respond or not. While the interviewer was in the room, she (all the interviewers were women) could not see the screen into which the child typed and the child submitted their response before handing the computer back. This protocol was in line with the one used in Europe. Out of 26 nations, Australian children were the second most likely to make a response in this situation.

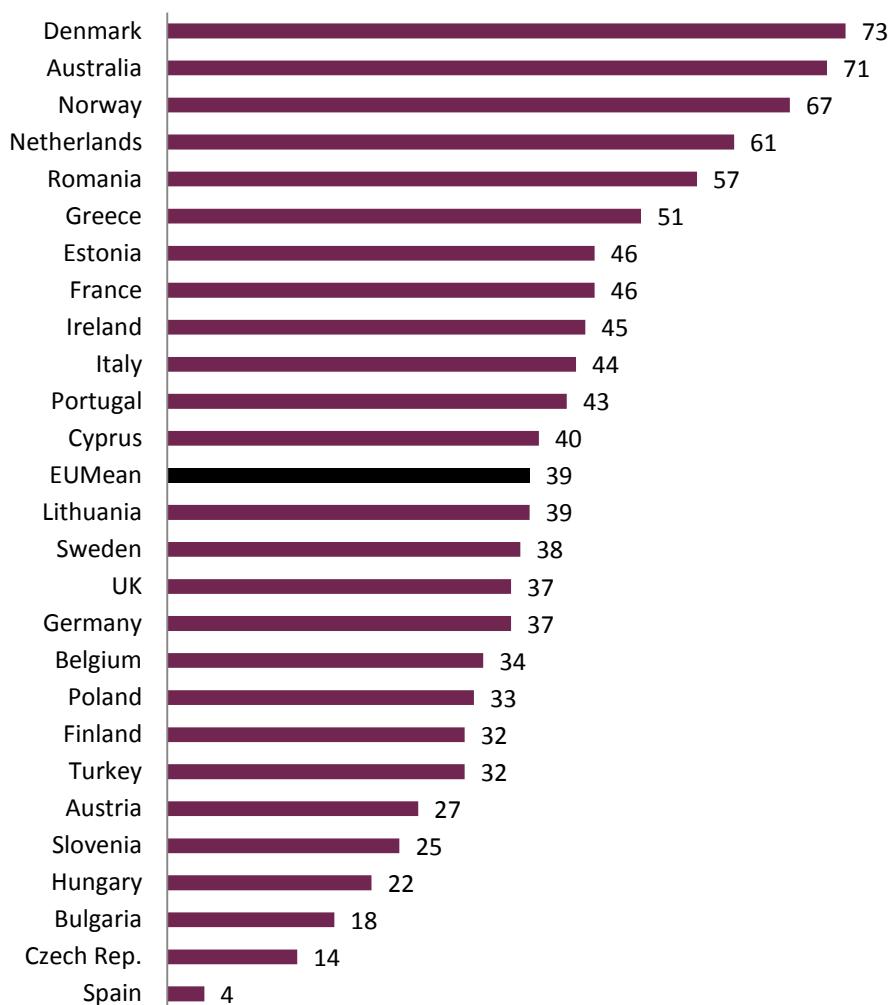


Figure 2: Percentage of children who answered the open-ended question, “What things on the internet would bother people about your age?” in each country?

As can be seen, while the mean response across the 25 European nations is 39%, the response of Australian children at 71% is much higher. This places the Australian response alongside those of Denmark (73%) and Norway (67%). This finding aligns with quantitative results from the main AU Kids Online report, where Australian children were more likely than children in 25 other nations to say that they had been bothered by something online. Thirty percent of Australian children say this (that they are bothered by something) compared with 28% in Denmark (2nd), 23% in Norway (=4th) (Green et al 2011, p. 61).

When we looked into the quantitative data more deeply it became clear that some risks were more likely to bother Australian kids than European ones. This table ranks the likelihood of an Australian child or a European child being bothered by each of six risk areas.

Table 1: Australian/European comparison of risk-rankings, with relevant % of cohort.

| Risk | Ranking out of 26 countries | % of Australian kids saying this | % mean across 25 European nations | References |
|--|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Personal data misuse | 2 | 17 | 9 | Green et al 2011, p. 38 Livingstone et al 2011, p. 101 |
| Bullying online | 3 | 13 | 6 | Green et al 2011, p. 64 |
| Seeing sexual images online | 4 | 28 | 14 | Green et al 2011, p. 62 |
| Potentially-harmful user-generated images | 6 | 34 | 21 | Green et al 2011, p. 65 |
| Sexting: seeing/receiving sexual messages online | 16 | 15 | 15 | Green et al 2011, p. 64 |
| In-person meeting with new people first met online | 21 | 5 | 9 | Green et al 2011, p. 65 |

This data was gathered after children told us about the things on the internet that bothered people of about their age. When they volunteered the risks charted in Figures 3a (European data) and 3b (Australian data), children had not already been asked about specific risk exposures. However, there are evident differences between Australian and European responses.

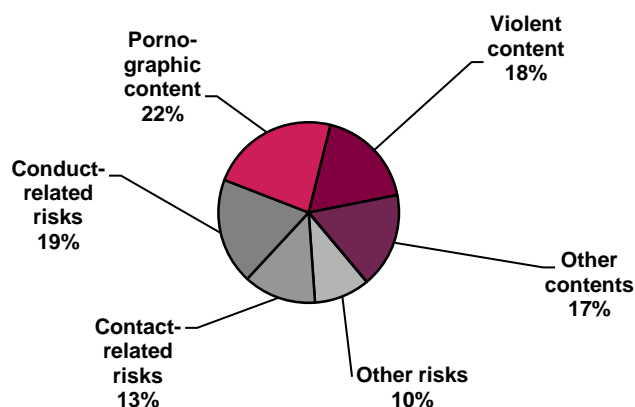


Figure 3a: What risks did children tell us about in Europe?

Base: N=9,636 children who identified one or more risks online.
(Livingstone et al 2013, p. 2)

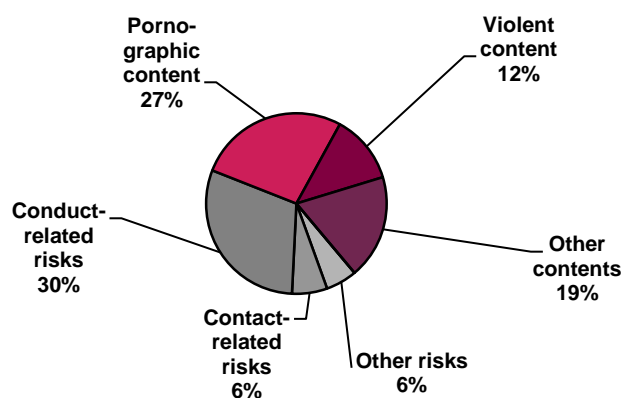


Figure 3b: What risks did children tell us about in Australia?

Base: N=285 children who identified one or more risks online.

Note: First mentioned risks only are included here. Risks are grouped as shown in the Appendix. Additionally, the category of pornography includes children's comments coded as 'pornography' and 'violent pornography'; the category of violence includes children's comments coded as 'aggressive/violent content' and 'gory content'.

The largest concern for Australian children, with 30% referring to it as their only or first-mentioned concern, is other people's conduct online. This includes concerns around bullying. Codes responses that cover this category include: 'bullying', 'unwelcome conduct in general', 'other mean or aggressive conduct' and 'people saying bad things about you/damage to your reputation'. Whereas pornographic content was the most significant risk in the EU Kids Online data, and second in the Australian data, there was a higher proportion of Australian children making a comment about pornography (27%) compared with the 22% in Europe. "Other content" was the third largest category in Australia at 19% and includes hate sites, anorexia and suicide sites and other potentially harmful user-generated content. The equivalent European category accounted for 17% of comments, which was just behind 'violent content', with 18% in Europe and, 12% in Australia. A major difference is the comparatively small proportion of Australian children mentioning 'contact related risks' and 'other risks'; 6% for both in Australia, 13% and 10% respectively in Europe.

Thus, the first four categories of unprompted concern to Australian children are: conduct-related risks (30%), pornographic content (27%), other contents (19%) and violent contents (12%), compared with the more even spread, and slightly different order in Europe of: pornographic content (22%), conduct-related risks (19%), violent content (18%) and other contents (17%).

In their own words: Conduct on the internet

- ✚ *I think that some people write bad things on the internet about other people and that makes them feel uncomfortable. (Girl, 13, Australia)*
- ✚ *On club penguin/ a guy came and said / get out of here you f..ing person/ I was very terrified. (Boy, 9, Australia)*
- ✚ *People can say harmful things. People can hear or see something that is inappropriate. People can log into your account if they have your password. If they have your email address they could make you an account and say harmful things. (Girl, 9, Australia)*
- ✚ *On facebook people can write offensive things about other people also there are sites were you can write things about someone and it can be written without the person knowing. (Boy, 14, Australia).*
- ✚ *Posting giving people bad images about people which are not true and meant to be nasty so they lose friends. (Girl, 15, Australia)*
- ✚ *Rumours. Girls who steal peoples boyfriends and just silly things like calling someone fat or talking badly about their parents/family etc. (Girl, 11, Australia)*
- ✚ *Cyber bullying and gossiping on the internet where everyone can see it. (Girl, 15, Australia)*

When all the responses given by Australian children were considered, pornographic content was the specific risk most frequently cited (Figure 4). That is where children included more than one risk in their response, pornography was the most frequently cited followed by violent /aggressive content and bullying. Figure 3 shows only the first risk mentioned. Taken together these data suggest that although risks related to bullying (conduct risks) spring first to mind, many Australian children suggest pornography as a risk which would bother children their age. Figure 4 also shows more detail of the specific risks mentioned by Australian children in their responses. A listing of the categories used to code open-ended comments made by children in both the AU Kids Online and EU Kids Online studies is shown in the Appendix.

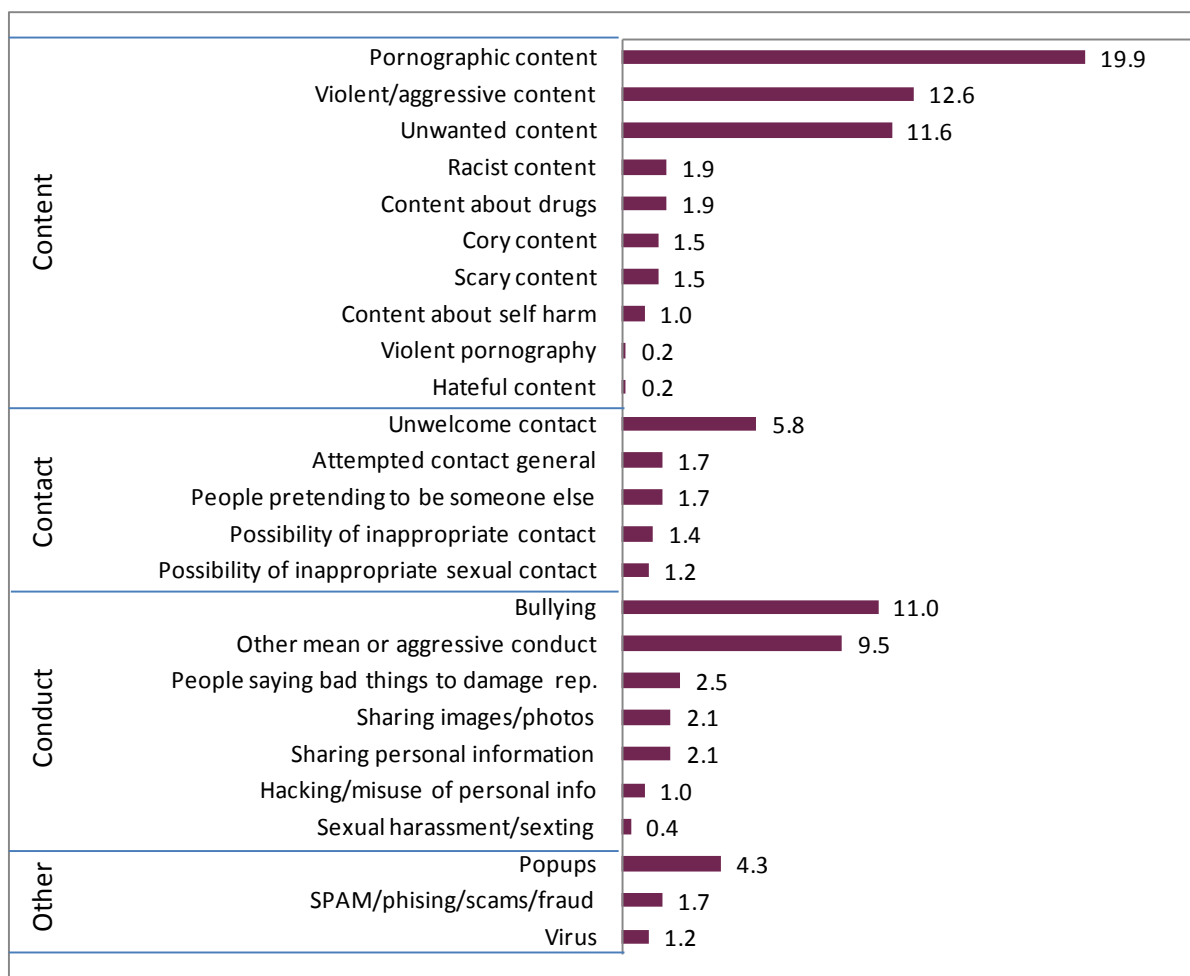


Figure 4: What were all the online risks Australian children mentioned? (% of all risks)

Note: This figure shows, for all the risk types coded, the percentage each risk represents out of the total of all the 517 risks mentioned by children (i.e. it does not show the percentage of children who identified each risk). While 285 Australian children (of the 400 involved in the study) responded to the question about what online content bothers people of about their age, many listed more than one risk area, resulting in the 517 total risks listed.

In their own words: Pornography

- ✚ *Sex things that you are not happy and angry. Some other bad things that I do not know how to say because it is so so bad. I wish I don't see it in my computer and my games I play it is bad. (Girl, 11, Australia)*
- ✚ *Pornography, video chat rooms with people who feel the need to expose themselves, inappropriate comments on websites. (boy, 16, Australia)*
- ✚ *I have seen a nude picture and sexual stuff. I was at a friends house and we were on a website and it just popped up, I never told mum and dad and don't know if the friend did. I think there is a lot of kids that have seen stuff like that while browsing on the internet. I heard of someone in year 4 at school even with the nannys and stuff they saw boobs when looking for a project. (Girl, 12, Australia)*

- ✚ *The websites that you may go on to then a disgusting section of ads come up and bad things like nudity and sexual pictures. I hate to go on the internet and see all the children are abused, raped and stalked like one of my friends. (Girl, 11, Australia)*
- ✚ *Sexually inappropriate things eg. videos, images of sexual acts, naked people. (Boy, 12, Australia)*
- ✚ *People showing private parts. (Girl, 14, Australia)*

Figure 5 highlights the increasing awareness of risks by age, with 48% of Australian 9 year olds volunteering something that bothered people of their age, peaking at 85% of 15 year olds doing this. These proportions are of all the 400 children surveyed.

Although awareness and exposure to the internet by younger children might be less, the potential impact (harm) of younger exposure appears to be greater. In the AU Kids Online report we demonstrated that that the proportion of 9-10 year olds who had seen sexual images online and been bothered by this was much greater than the proportion of 15-16 year olds. Eleven percent of 9-10 year olds had seen sexual images and 91% (of this 10%) had been bothered as a result. This compares with the 56% of 15-16 year olds who had seen sexual images and the 21% of this group who had been bothered by it (Green et al 2011, p. 31). For example, while most Australian children (72% of all respondents) had **not** seen sexual images online in the 12 months preceding the research, and younger children were the least likely to see risky content, they were also the most likely to react negatively to it.

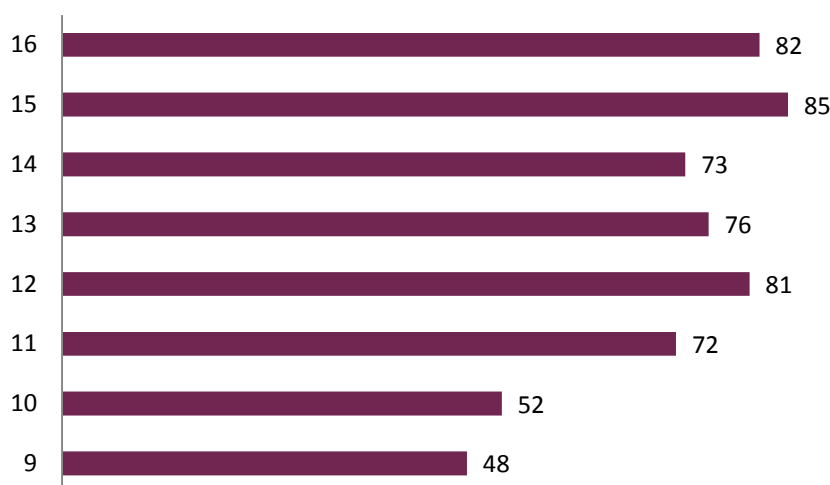


Figure 5: Percentage of Australian children who mentioned one or more risks by age

Base: 9-16 year olds who use the internet (N=400)

In the EU Kids Online study awareness of online risk also changed as children got older. The percentage of children who mentioned one or more risks rose steadily from 24% of 9 year olds to a peak of 46% in the 12-13 age group, and remained high at 45% for 15 and 16 year olds (Livingstone et al 2013, p. 9).

In Australia girls were more likely than boys to volunteer one or more risks when asked to do so. Figure 7 describes the broad risk areas identified by girls and boys and shows that girls are particularly concerned by contact-related risks. There is a suggestion that boys are particularly concerned about violent content and other unwanted content. In the EU Kids Online study these same gender concerns were reproduced in the much larger dataset across 25 countries. Girls were also more likely than boys to volunteer that things online bothered people of about their age and were similarly concerned with contact-related risks (Livingstone et al 2013, p. 9). Boys more frequently cited violent and other unwanted content than girls. In both Europe and Australia there did not appear to be a difference between genders in their concern about pornography. In Europe 22% of both boys and girls mentioned pornographic content, while in Australia it was 27% of both boys and girls.

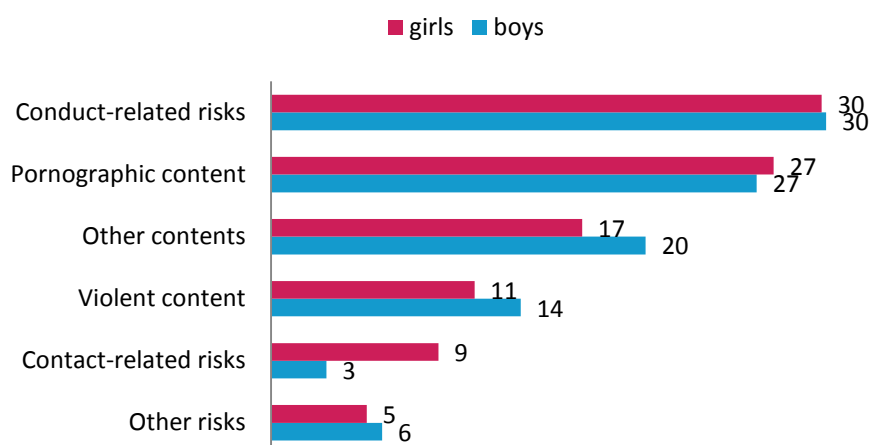


Figure 7: Which risks are mentioned by which gender (%) in Australia?

Base: 153 girls (54%) and 132 boys (46%) who mentioned at least one risk (first mentioned risk only).

In their own words: Violence

- ✚ *Horror videos Gruesome videos. Videos of people harming them self. Inappropriate languages used. Inappropriate scenes of body parts. Dissection of body parts.* (Girl, 14, Australia).
- ✚ *Seeing pictures of animals being killed for meat.* (Girl, 11, Australia)
- ✚ *Explicit and real life violence (not acted or scripted).* (Boy, 16, Australia)
- ✚ *Show how they kill animals like cutting them in half while there still alive.* (Boy, 12, Australia)
- ✚ *People's heads getting cut off or being stabbed.* (Boy, 10, Australia)
- ✚ *Videos of people fighting and scary things that might not be appropriate for them or something that they have never seen before.* (Girl, 12, Australia)

As these comments demonstrate, some of the images of violence are sourced from mainstream news reports. It is notable here that news and current affairs are traditionally exempt from the National Classification requirements, but parents and caregivers should remain aware of the impact these programs, and their online equivalents, can have.

In their own words: Contact risks especially concern girls

- ✚ *Having older people talking to them about things that they shouldn't.. like older people preying on the younger... pedofiles.. etc. (Girl, 16, Australia)*
- ✚ *Things that will bother people of my age my include: -strangers asking about private life -strangers asking about the places we go -strangers showing/writing unsensible messages/pictures. (Girl, 15, Australia)*
- ✚ *If someone is asking them for their personal information on where they live and if they could like maybe go meet them. if someone searched something on youtube or something like that and they saw something that they don't want to see. or if someone asked for something like a dress on a virtual world and they keep on asking for it after you have already said no. (Girl, 11, Australia)*
- ✚ *People that will stalk you and try and get u to send pictures. (Girl, 13, Australia)*

Although the contact-related risks reflected in these comments do appear to be of greater concern to girls, the number of children citing this risk area is lower than for all the other major risk areas: pornography, bullying, violence and general unwanted content. Despite media attention on 'Stranger danger', when Australian and European children were asked directly about what bothers them they did not spontaneously put this first in their list of concerns (Figures 3a and 3b).

Conduct risks concern teens most

Relevant to the theme of Safer Internet Day 2013, “Connect with Respect”, we can see that questions of online conduct are particularly on the minds of older teens. Figure 9 shows that:

- The youngest groups are more concerned about content and other risks. Then, as children get older they become more concerned about conduct and contact risks.
- Children become more concerned about pornographic content as they enter their teens, and then their level of concern declines.
- Concern over violent (including aggressive and gory) content, along with other content-related risks, declines with age.
- Concern over conduct-related and, especially, contact-related risks increases with age.

It would seem, therefore, that experience of the internet alters the balance of risks that concern children, but does not eliminate them. Experience brings resilience and the ability to cope, on the part of many. But it also enables children to do more online, pursuing more opportunities. Insofar as these include peer to peer networking opportunities, this brings new challenges as well.

- Detailed findings show that although concern over other contents (e.g. self-harm/ suicide, bulimia/anorexia, drugs, racist and commercial content) is low, it increases with age.
- Further, concerns about inappropriate conduct is most common among the 9-10 year olds; concern about bullying increases with age and peaks at 13-14 years, while concerns with unwanted sharing of personal information, images or photos increase with age, becoming most common among the oldest group. All these changes seem to be an effect of increasing internet activity and enriching social and online experience in young people.
- Last, concern about inappropriate contacts in general decreases with age, to be replaced by concern about inappropriate sexual contacts and people who pretend to be someone else online. These changes seem to result from widening social circles among teenagers (from Livingstone et al 2013, p. 11).

Broader scope of the European report

This extract from the European report, released for Safer Internet Day 2013, indicates the strength of the full study involving 25,142 children and the parent or caregiver most involved in monitoring their internet use. The full report includes discussion of the platforms linked to the risks of concern to children (e.g. video-sharing sites such as YouTube; social networking sites, such as Facebook). It also examines children’s emotional response, such as when a child expresses disgust, fear or annoyance as part of their comment. The larger report is readily available from the link noted on the first page. Similarly, while European nations are interested in divisions between New use-new risk countries, Higher use-higher risk countries, Higher use-some risk countries, Lower use-some risk countries and Low use-low risk countries; these are of less concern to an Australian audience – apart from the fact that we align with High use-high risk countries such as Norway and Denmark – and interested

readers are referred to the European report, and to the much larger account of the full study: *Risks and safety on the internet: the perspective of European children* (Livingstone et al 2011).

Policy considerations

1. Australia's children differ from those in Europe in being more likely to mention conduct related risks. The children's perspectives featured in this report reinforce previous findings and may relate to Australia's ranking of 2/26 countries for personal data misuse and 3/26 countries for children saying they are bullied online. Although online bullying and other instances of child-related social aggression are already a high priority for parents, teachers and policy makers, children's voices make it clear that we still have some way to go to address these problems adequately.
2. The recent (2012) review of Australia's National Classification System recommends the processes to be adopted for classifying media content. News and current affairs are traditionally exempt from classification regulations (ALRC 2012, p. 141), even though the ALRC *National Classification Scheme Report* cites a paper by Professor Stuart Cunningham regarding the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's research on media violence in the early 1990s, to say that the study participants "were more likely to be disturbed by violent scenes witnessed on television news broadcasts than by fictionalised portrayals of violence in feature films or television dramas" (ALRC 2012, p. 98 citing Cunningham 1992, p. 91). Parents and teachers should be aware that children's comments make clear that they differentiate between "Explicit and real life violence (not acted or scripted)" (Australian boy, 16) and monitor exposure to violent content and the child's capacity to deal with what they encounter in the same way that families and schools monitor exposure to pornography.
3. Although much policy reflects a focus on children's internet education, and skills development in digital literacies, there should be two-way communication between children and adults. Children's opinions and emotional reactions to what they encounter online may be as critical to their future engagement with the digital world as their formal curriculum. More attention should be paid to children's concerns and priorities: by policy makers, as well as parents and teachers.
4. Parents' use of household-level filtering tools could address some of their children's concerns, especially in the case of younger children where the impact of unwanted exposure to challenging content can be greatest. The full Australian report (Green et al 2011, p. 46) indicates that 45% of parents say they do this, while only 35% of children say their parents filter or block some sites. Even so, with children increasingly using handheld devices to accessing the internet away from home education, discussion and open communication remain important protective and harm minimisation strategies. Australian parents are active mediators (Green et al 2011, pp. 39-51), although almost one in five children (18%) would like their parents to do more (Green et al 2011, p. 51).
5. Inevitably, and increasingly, the online world reflects the positive and the challenging aspects evident in the offline world. Further the two are increasingly interrelated, with the online/offline distinction fast moving towards redundancy. While keeping children safe poses a challenge at all stages of development and in a wide range of circumstances, it is important to remain aware of what it is that children wish to be protected from, or

supported through. Much research focussing upon the protection of children involves consultation with parents, teachers and advocacy groups. This report is a reminder that children also have voices and deserve to be considered in these discussions.

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Appendix

Detailed codes

A. Type of response (choose ONE):

1. Does not answer (space blank)
2. Does not know/doesn't want to answer
3. No problems online, nothing is upsetting
4. Many problems online, everything is upsetting
5. Gives an irrelevant or invalid response (e.g. *Power off. My mum needs to go on*)
6. Reports a problem of any kind

For responses 1-5, **END** coding now. For response 6, **CONTINUE** coding as below.

B. Type of platform (or technology or format) (choose ONE – the first or main one):

1. None mentioned
2. Email
3. Instant messaging
4. Chat/chat room
5. Facebook, Hi5, other SNS
6. Twitter (or similar)
7. Games/gaming
8. Video-sharing sites (incl. YouTube)
9. Images
10. Websites
11. Mobile phones
12. Other (e.g. *'the computer'*)

C. Number of risks mentioned (Choose ONE):

0. None (JUMP TO CODE G)
1. One (CODE UNDER D)
2. Two (CODE UNDER D & E)
3. Three (CODE UNDER D, E & F)
4. More than three (CODE FIRST THREE RISKS ONLY UNDER D-F)

D. Code first risk mentioned (if applicable) using codes 1-40 as below:

E. Code second risk mentioned (if applicable) using codes 1-40 as below:

F. Code third risk mentioned (if applicable) using codes 1-40 as below:

Content-related risk (on sites, in mass messages, images, etc.)

1. Unwanted content in general (not further specified – e.g. *inappropriate images*)
2. Violent/aggressive content (e.g. *Violence, torture, killing animals*)
3. Gory content (blood, pain, etc.)
4. Scary content
5. Pornographic or sexual content (including 'adult content'/ 'inappropriate content'): (E.g. *see naked people; pornography; private images*)
6. Violent pornography (e.g. *violation, rape*)
7. Commercial content (e.g. *advertising to make money; sites that promise money*)
8. Racist content
9. Hateful content
10. Content about drugs
11. Content about self-harm or suicide or anorexia/bulimia
12. Content harmful to self-esteem (e.g. *sites for us to feel badly about our body*)

Contact-related risk (usually from adults):

13. The possibility of inappropriate contact in general (e.g. *nasty/bad people, strangers*)
14. The possibility of inappropriate sexual contact in general (e.g. *paedophile, grooming*)

15. Actual or attempted inappropriate contact – general
16. Actual or attempted inappropriate contact – sexual
17. Face-to-face meetings following online contact (e.g. *meeting strangers*)
18. Ideological or religious or fundamentalist persuasion
19. Other people accessing your data/ being tracked/ cookies
20. People pretending to be someone else (e.g. *can't tell who someone is, people lying about their identity, impersonation, fake identities*)

Conduct-related risk (usually from other young people):

21. Unwelcome conduct in general (e.g. *bad behaviour, vulgar language or swearing*)
22. Bullying (usually repeated aggression)
23. Other mean or aggressive conduct (e.g. *receiving nasty messages; threats, Insults that lower our self-esteem and affect us psychologically*)
24. Sexual harassment or unwelcome 'sexting'
25. Sharing images or photos
26. Sharing personal information
27. Hacking or misuse of personal information or data, specific violation of privacy
28. People saying bad things about you/damage to your reputation

Other risk-related mentions:

29. Rules on safety (e.g. *don't out give information*)
30. Gambling
31. Pop-ups (*unspecified, or commercial/marketing/advertising*)
32. Spam, phishing, scams, fraud (e.g. *false companies, fraudulent information*)
33. Illegal downloading
34. Spending too much time online (e.g. *missing homework, sleep, meals etc; addiction*)
35. Health related risks (*muscular, eye-sight etc.*)
36. Lack of internet safety in general
37. Related to hardware/software (e.g. *computer breakdown, slow internet, hard to install*)
38. Related to search (e.g. *hard to find things, difficult to evaluate, unreliable information*)
39. Virus (e.g. *sites that show us issues of our interest and then come with virus*)
40. Other – any other risk not coded above

G. Emotional reaction (if discernible in the respondent's account - choose ONE):

0. No emotion conveyed in the response
1. Fear (e.g. *scary, worrying*)
2. Disgust (e.g. *gross, nasty, offensive*)
3. Annoyance (e.g. *annoying, irritating*)
4. Positive reaction (e.g. *exciting, curious, cool, funny*)
5. Other – any other emotion not coded above

Recent reports from EU Kids Online

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As a major part of its activities, *EU Kids Online* conducted a face-to-face, in home survey during 2010 of 25,000 9-16 year old internet users and their parents in 25 countries, using a stratified random sample and self-completion methods for sensitive questions.

Now including researchers and stakeholders from 33 countries in Europe and beyond, the network continues to analyse and update the evidence base to inform policy.

For all reports, findings and technical survey information, as well as full details of national partners, please visit www.eukidsonline.net