Children worldwide gain benefits, face risks online

The Global Kids Online project, launched today at the Children's Lives in the Digital Age seminar held at UNICEF Headquarters in New York, aims to build a global network of researchers investigating the risks and opportunities of child internet use. The Global Kids Online website makes high quality, flexible research tools freely available worldwide.

On average, 8 in 10 children surveyed in the report accessed the internet on smartphones. This supports their independent access to the internet, again bringing opportunities and risks.

> Speaking at the New York launch event Professor Sonia Livingstone from LSE observed: "As the internet reaches more children in more countries, it is vital to extend the evidence base to guide policy makers as they balance children's rights to participation, provision and protection online."

A substantial minority of children have also had contact with unknown persons online. Most children do not go on to meet with such persons face to face, and they often have some prior connection with the person, however, more education around the issue is needed, the study shows.

In some countries, up to two thirds of children have seen sexual content online and others reported harmful or hurtful experiences online. The main causes of harmful or hurtful experiences according to the children were internet scams, pop ups or harassment.

The number of children reporting upsetting experiences online ranged from a fifth in South Africa to three quarters in Argentina.

When children experienced something troubling online between a third and two thirds of them most often turned to their friends for support. Only five to ten per cent sought help from a teacher, and even fewer sought help from other professionals.

> "When we discuss policy related to child internet use, it is essential that children's voices and opinions are taken into account," said Sarah Cook, Director of UNICEF Innocenti. "Research with children allows us to create a more realistic portrait of the significant opportunities as well as the safety concerns for children online. Hearing children's aspirations and concerns is vital for translating this knowledge into messages for policy makers."

Other findings reveal how a majority of children value the internet as a learning tool, yet, they rarely are able to use it at school or to receive guidance from their teachers on how to use the internet. Parents want to help their children but don't feel they know enough about how to use the internet to guide them.

Jasmina Byrne, child protection specialist at UNICEF Innocenti shared why it was important to take into account children's digital experiences.

> "At the global level, evidence and research on child internet use can help build a consensus among international actors on international standards, agreements, protocols and investments in order to make the internet a safer and better place for children."

For more information

See Global Kids Online Research Synthesis Report

#GlobalKidsOnine

Read Sonia Livingstone and Mariya Stoilova's post on The Conversation

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