Introduction

Background
The rapid rise in children’s use of the internet affords not only opportunities but also risks, such as online bullying, exposure to harmful content, inappropriate contact and disclosure of personal information.

The EU Kids Online project aims to enhance knowledge of European children’s and parents’ experiences and practices regarding risky and safer use of the internet and new online technologies, and thereby to inform the promotion of a safer internet environment for children. EU Kids Online network is a collaborative two-year effort among some 70 researchers in 25 countries across Europe.

In EU Kids Online I previous findings and theoretical approaches have been reviewed and compared. A complex array of online opportunities and risks experienced by children were identified.

Risks in a Cross-national Context
EU Kids Online II looks at children’s risky online experiences by:

- Conducting a cross-national comparative study
- Disentangling individual and contextual variables
- Using a theoretical approach (see Figure 1)
- Identifying country differences

Sample and Procedure

- A matched survey of one child aged 9-16 and one parent in 1000 households in each of 25 countries.
- The survey was subject to cognitive testing and translated into 27 languages.
- A stratified random sample design
- Survey administration in homes, combining face-to-face and self-completion.

Survey Measures

- Parent’s and child’s account of child’s: Internet use and skills, risks and responses to risks, mediation by parents, teachers and peers, psychological variables socio-demographics.

Challenges in Cross-national Standardisation

- Translation: No exact translation into all languages possible. Translations of subjective expression such as “feeling bothered or upset” can have a different valence attached in different languages skewing actual country differences. Examples of difficult terms: upset, bothered, pop-up, sexual image, get back at someone.
- Education: Different educational systems need to be transferred into one scale: ISCED.
- Unbalanced distributions of variables such as SES, education, questionnaire length between countries can have a different valence attached in different languages skewing actual country differences.

Fieldwork

Ethics
- Interviewers are briefed, informed consent is obtained from children and parents, anonymity is assured, parents will not see child’s answers.
- Exception for anonymity rule: if a child seems at risk/has experienced harm, actions in line with national regulations will be taken.

Respondent Selection
- One child who uses the internet per household / random selection.
- Parent who knows most about that child’s internet use.

Field Work Steps and Respondent Mortality

Sources of Cross-national Variation

- The number and profile of ineligibles and refusals will vary between country for each of the steps shown in Figure 4. In addition countries vary on the following parameters:

Impact

The EU Kids Online project is seeking to raise awareness and give policy recommendations concerning safer internet use and new online technologies through various national and international activities, such as:

- Website (~50,000 visitors)
  - Introducing and describing the project and its work packages.
  - Access of project outputs such as publications and presentations, partly to be downloaded.
  - Overview of the questionnaire, information for parents.
  - All in English and national languages and with the possibility to join a mailing list for receiving updates.

Press Releases
- To announce the start and later the outcomes of the project deliverables.

Stakeholder Meeting (~230 participants)
Before the start of fieldwork in almost all of the countries a meeting was launched with key national stakeholders (from governments, child welfare agencies, safety advisors, educators, industry, parent groups, etc.) to:
- Obtain guidance for important issues to pursue in the project.
- Produce policy recommendations of national relevance.
- Raise awareness of the project.
- Participation varied across countries (see Figure 6).

Discussion

Methodological Challenges of the cross-national research project:
- Country variations in population profiles and location density.
- Difficulties to standardise procedures and measures between countries.
- Uncontrollable differences in non-response composition.
- Country differences on unknown or not measurable variables.
- National approaches to dissemination and impact.

Implications
- Differences in outcomes as a function of individual level variables (e.g., education, self-efficacy etc.) might be due to variation of these variables across countries.
- Differences in outcomes as a function of countries might be due to individual level variables that vary between countries.

Proposed Approaches
- Controlling for variables known to make a difference.
- Possible problem: standardised variables are not always available.
- Analysing individual and country level variables simultaneously (i.e., multilevel modelling).
- Centralised international management of a cross-national network to dissemination.

Contact: a.s.goerzig@lse.ac.uk
EU Kids Online website: www.eukidsonline.net