



THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF THE INTERNET

Alice Hawkins

I undertook my placement with the national charity, The Children's Society at a project called Check Point in Torbay, which is a service that 8-17 year olds can access. Check Point offers a range of services for young people. There is an open access drop-in with additional specialist services which include an under 18s' drug and alcohol service, youth homelessness prevention, independent visitors and advocacy, sexual exploitation and counselling services. The drop-in offers a range of advice on housing, benefits and sexual health to name just a few. In undertaking my placement, it was sometimes hard keeping my emotions to myself when I was listening to what some young people are going through, and it really made me think about my own family and how I hope I can always keep them safe from any form of harm.

In creating my work based learning poster, I focused upon the dangers of the internet, after shadowing a piece of work at Check Point. One of my observations when shadowing practitioners undertaking sexual exploitation work was that of young people talking about friends they had made on social networking sites and their ignorance of the risks that may face them. I discussed this observation with the workers who informed me how common this has become in light of how readily available the internet is for young people.

With technology ever advancing many children and young people have regular access to mobile phones, tablets and laptops, Xboxes or Playstations. There are many social networking sites and online games where young people can have contact with complete strangers who can conceal their true identity. One important issue that the sexual

exploitation team has identified is the lack of awareness parents have regarding the internet, they believe that because their child is at home they are keeping them safe. If the devices young people use to access the internet have not had parental controls set up, then they may have access to websites that are not suitable for their age. Since 2011 children aged 12-15 are more likely to use the internet in an unsupervised way, such that parents may not know what their child is doing, who they are talking to and how long for.


Social media sites are becoming increasingly used by young people, the most common being Facebook, Bebo and MySpace. For all of these sites the minimum age requirement is thirteen yet children as young as eight have their own profiles. This means that sex offenders and paedophiles have an additional and easier way to target younger children by creating fake profiles, posing as children themselves in order to befriend and gain trust. In fact, between 2007 and 2009 MySpace deleted 90,000 accounts that had been created by registered sex offenders. CEOP (the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre) in their annual performance review of 2010-2011 identified that 414 children were subject to safeguarding or protection, a rise from 278 from the previous year. CEOP also identified that 513 arrests were made, also noting that this figure had risen.

Exploitation and grooming are not the only dangers of the internet, cyberbullying is at an all time high. In 2010 over 30,000 young people called Childline in relation to cyberbullying. Whereas once bullying took place in the playground, it has now moved into the safety of young people's homes where it can take place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Seven out of ten children knew the person who was cyberbullying them, but often young people will not speak up about bullying. Furthermore the danger of cyberbullying is that it is happening out of sight.

To tackle this issue multi-agency work is important. Promoting internet safety, gaining awareness and prevention techniques have been incorporated into all areas of work at Check Point where advice is offered to young people about safe use of the internet. For example privacy settings and being careful who they accept as 'friends'. Working together with schools, youth workers and parents will help to educate children and young people, and the more educated they are on this hidden issue, the safer they will be.

References

CEOP (2011) *Annual Review 2010-11 and Centre Plan 2011-2012*, http://ceop.police.uk/Documents/ceopdocs/Annual%20Rev2011_FINAL.pdf



The Children's Society
making childhood better

Our Children's Digital World: A Hidden Danger

**CRIMINOLOGY
AND CRIMINAL
JUSTICE
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

Cyberbullying... 11-18 year olds in the UK

- 61% have witnessed some form of cyberbullying.
- 7/10 knew the person who was cyberbullying them.
- Girls are most likely to be cyberbullied as well as to cyberbully.
- Almost a third of cyberbullying incidents start offline. (Beatbullying, 2009).

'Simply because a young person is within the family home does not mean they are not at risk of harm' (Whittle et al, 2013).

Whittle et al (2013) state that 'There are a variety of techniques used by internet groomers to manipulate young people (e.g. flattery, bribes, and threats)'.

In 2010-2011 132 high sex offender networks were disrupted and dismantled (CEOP, 2011).

91% of children live in a house with internet access (Ofcom, 2012).

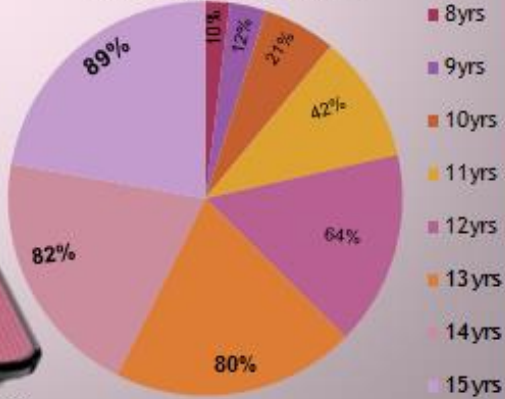
Since 2011 children aged 12-15 are more likely to mostly use the internet in their bedrooms (Ofcom, 2012).

97% of 11-16 year olds own a mobile phone (Thomas, 2011).

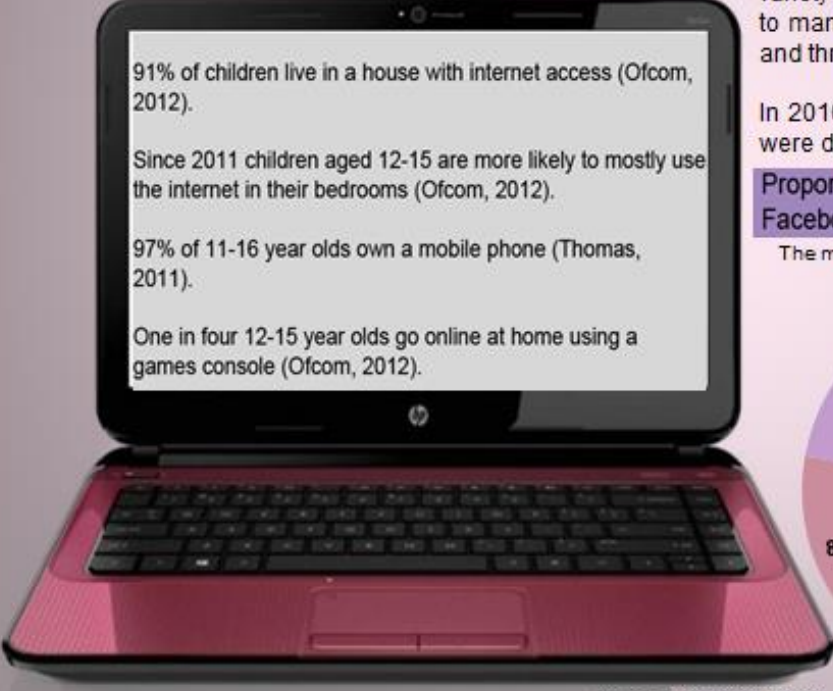
One in four 12-15 year olds go online at home using a games console (Ofcom, 2012).

Proportion of children with an active profile on Facebook, Bebo & Myspace (Ofcom, 2012).

The minimum age requirement to have an account on these websites is 13 years old.



Age Group	Proportion
8 yrs	10%
9 yrs	12%
10 yrs	2%
11 yrs	42%
12 yrs	64%
13 yrs	80%
14 yrs	82%
15 yrs	89%



Alice Hawkins 10336462

