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Bullying and threats via Internet and social media: The perspective of European children

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Our approach/conceptual decisions



- Sensitive questions on risk, parental mediation and items where privacy should be respected were presented to children using a **self-completion format** so that neither the interviewer nor any family member present could oversee the child's response
- Rather than using emotive terms ('bully', 'stranger'), descriptions were provided using **child-friendly language** to ensure that children understood what was being asked of them.
- Questions focused on children's reports of what had **actually happened to them within a set time period**, or the last time something happened, rather than inviting general statements of opinion or response.
- Every attempt was made to phrase questions neutrally, **avoiding value judgements**. Children were asked if a specific experience had bothered them without assuming that it had indeed been problematic (experienced as harmful) by all children.
- 'Bothered' was defined thus: *'for example, [something that] made you feel uncomfortable, upset, or feel that you shouldn't have seen it'*.
- Thus **harm was measured subjectively in terms of the child's perceived severity and duration of their upsetting experiences** (that is, harm).
- **Detailed follow-up questions** on what children have experienced online, how they felt and how they may have coped were asked for four main risks of harm to the child's safety: bullying, pornography, sending/receiving sexual messages ('sexting') and meeting online contacts ('strangers') offline.
- It was recognised that children may either be **victims or perpetrators** of certain harmful events (or both). This was explored for bullying and sending/receiving sexual messages.
- An effort was made to **keep online risks in proportion** by comparing the incidence of online and offline risk experiences where appropriate.
- For sensitive questions, **children could always answer 'don't know' or 'prefer not to say'**, rather than being forced to provide an answer when uneasy. In general, few children selected these options but ethically it was important to give children the option.

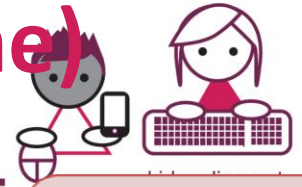
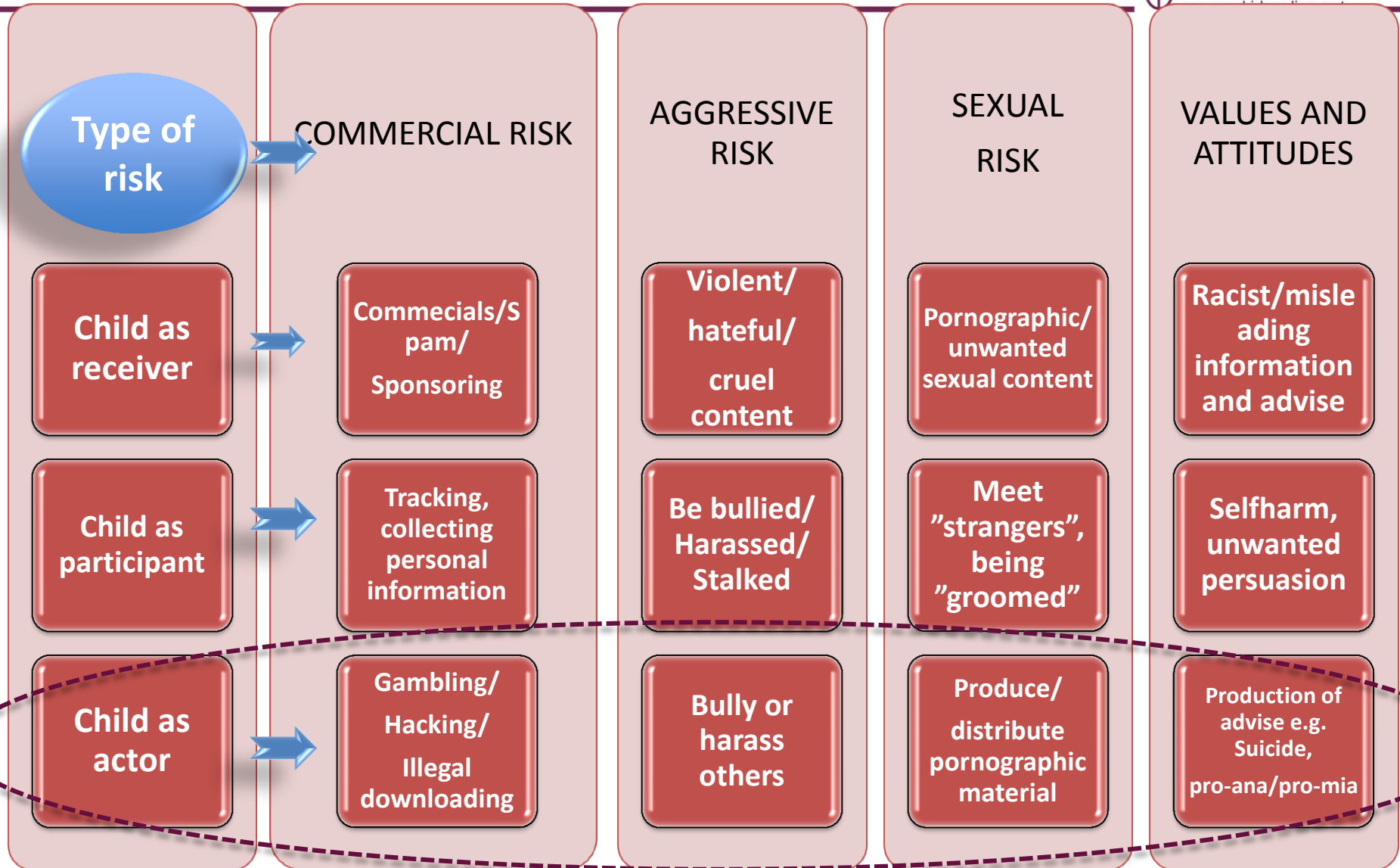
Surveying Internet risk in 'Europe'



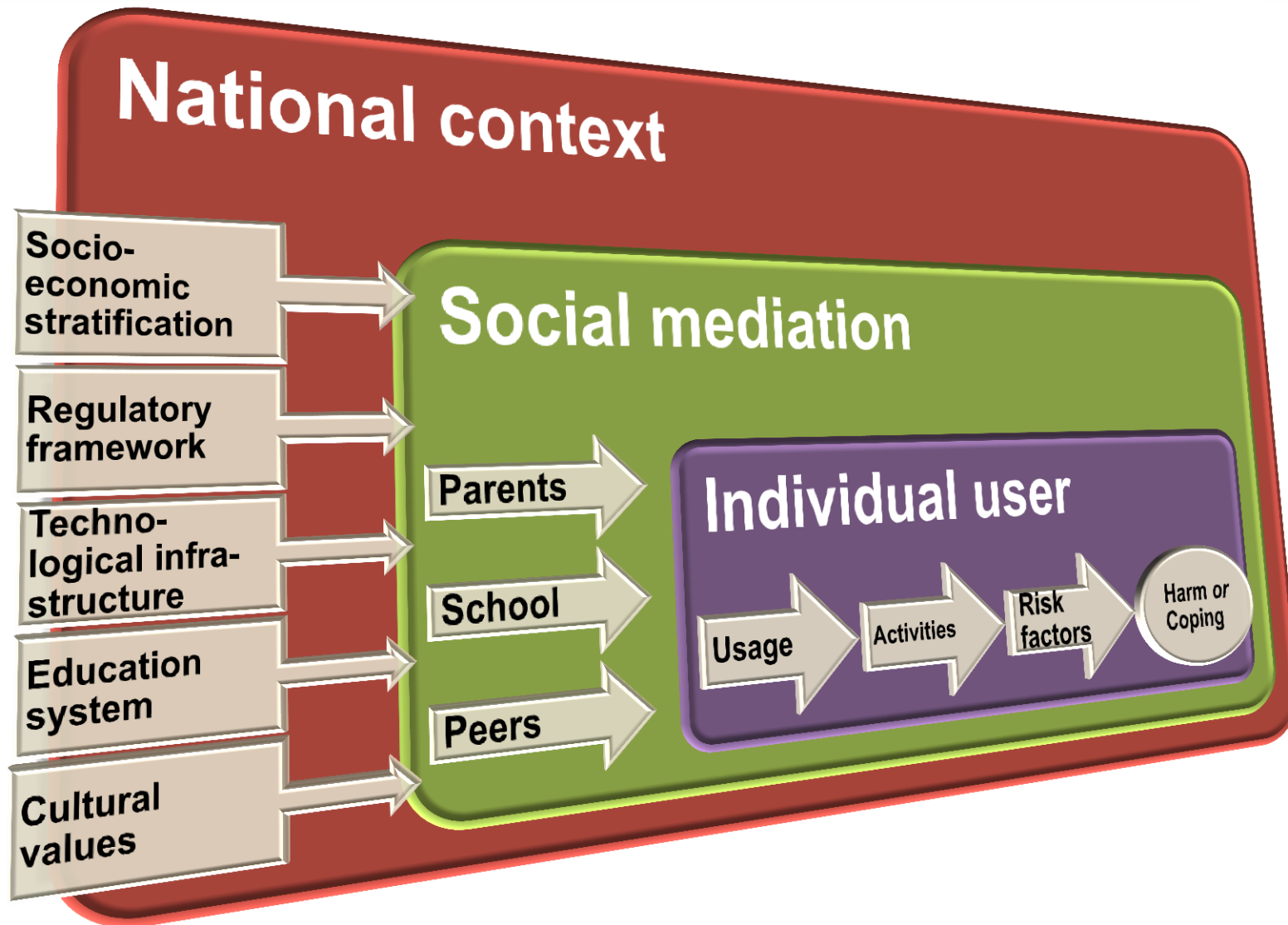
- Random stratified sample: ~ 1000 9-16 year old internet users per country
- Fieldwork in summer/fall 2010
- Total: 25.142 internet-users, 25 countries
- Interviews at home, face to face
- Self-completion for sensitive questions
- Indicators of vulnerability and coping
- Data from child paired with a parent
- Directly comparable across countries
- Validation via cognitive/pilot testing
- National stakeholders consulted
- International advisory panel
- Ethical and technical report available



Typology of Internet risk (Eukids Online)



Analytical model of factors shaping children's online engagements



Some key aims

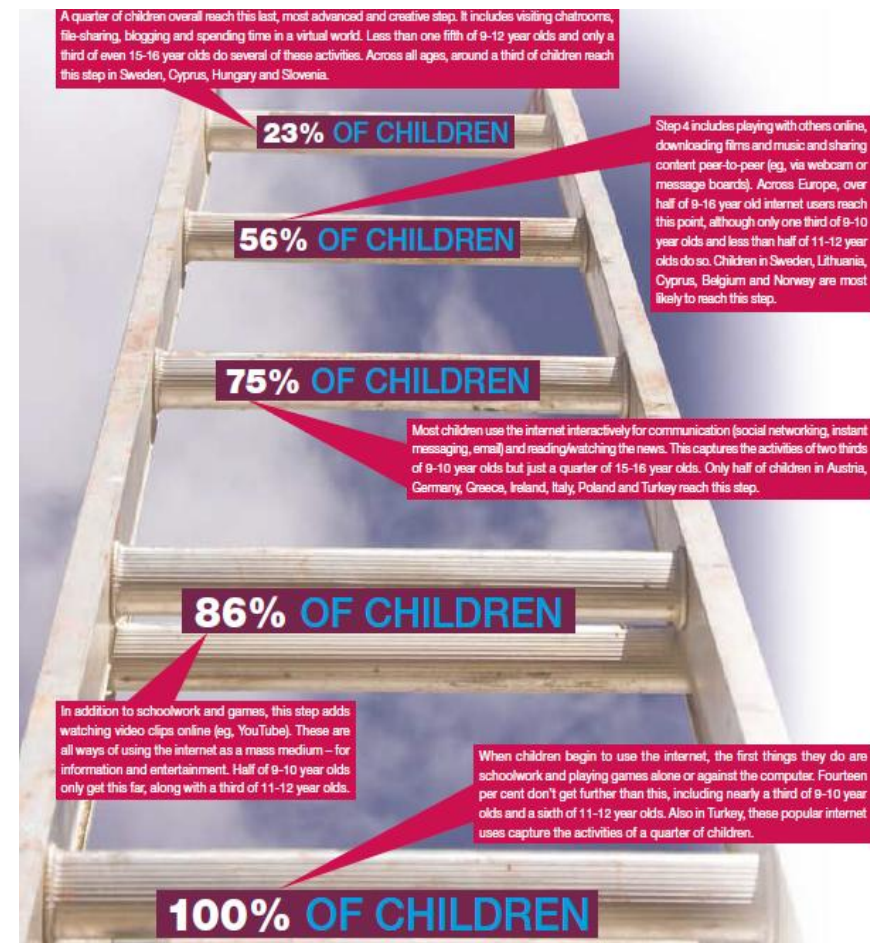


- Child centered approach
- Inform policy development and awareness work
- Methodological innovation
- Created (2007) and will now update database on existing research
- Comparative qualitative research to complement the survey

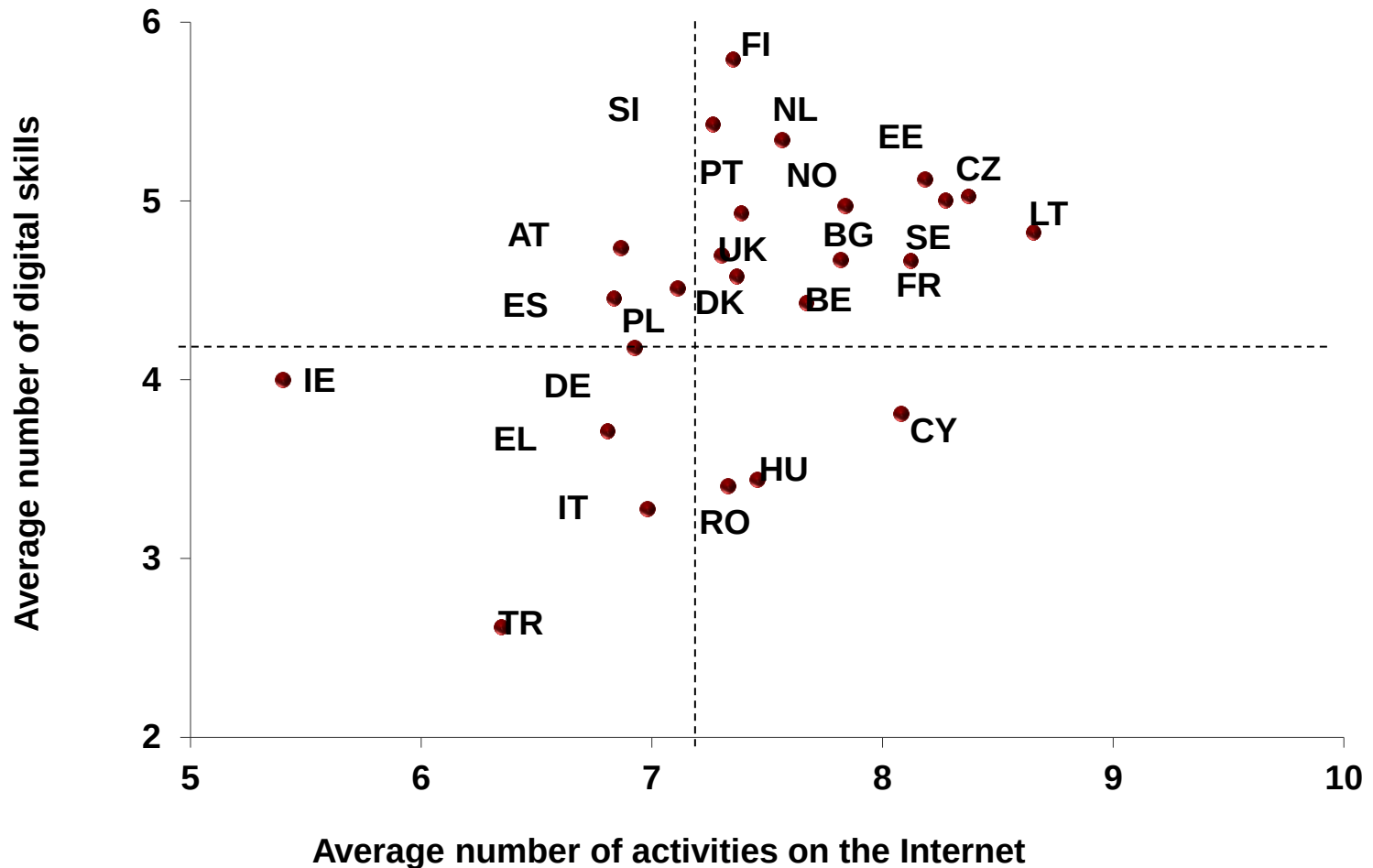
Digital skills – the ladder of opportunities



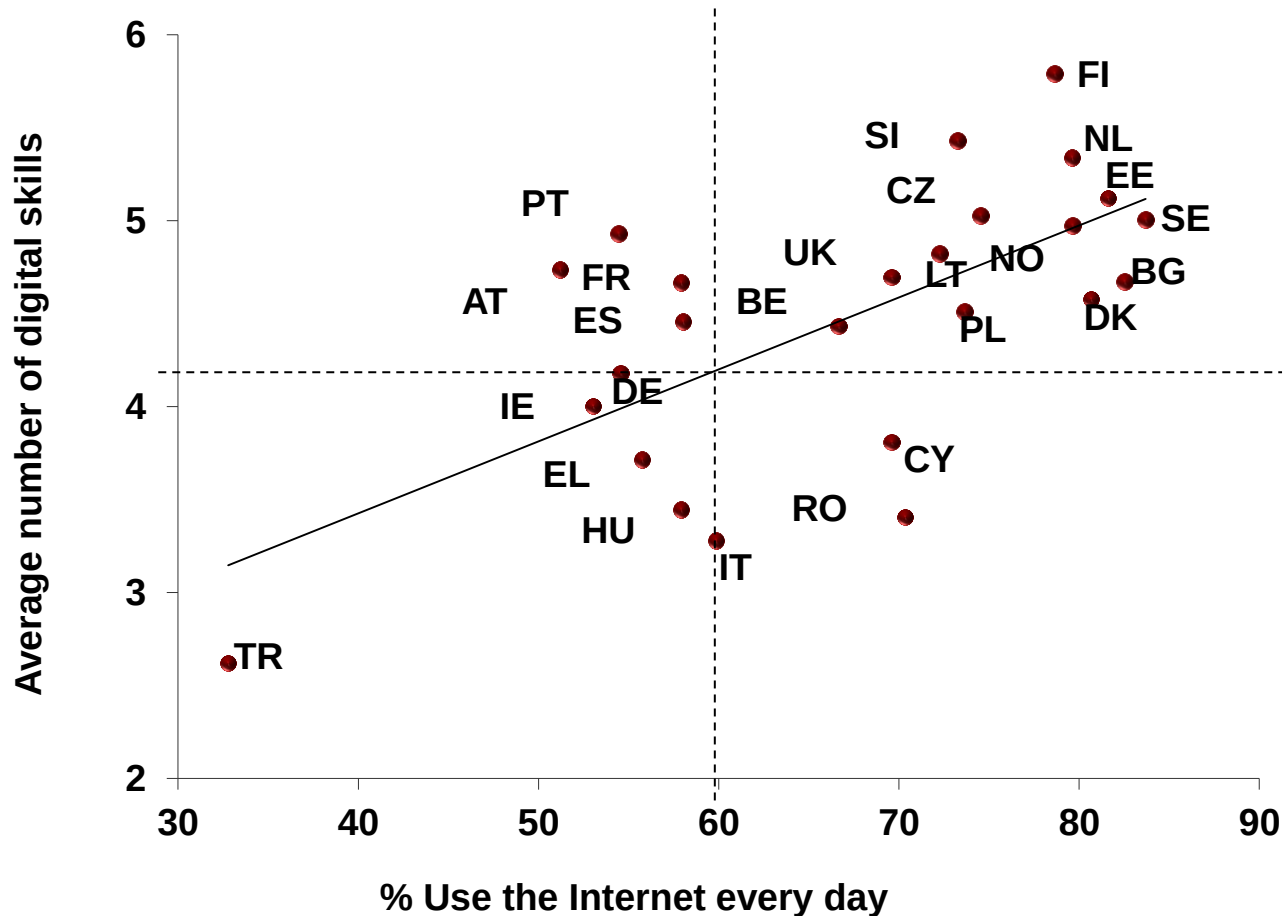
- 100% - schoolwork and playing games.
14% don't get further up.
- 86% - using internet as a mass medium, for information and entertainment.
- 75% - use internet interactively for communication and news.
- 56% - playing with others online, downloading film and music, sharing content p2p. Over half of 9-16 year olds in Europe reach this point.
- 23% - Includes chatting, blogging, file-sharing and spending time in a virtual world.



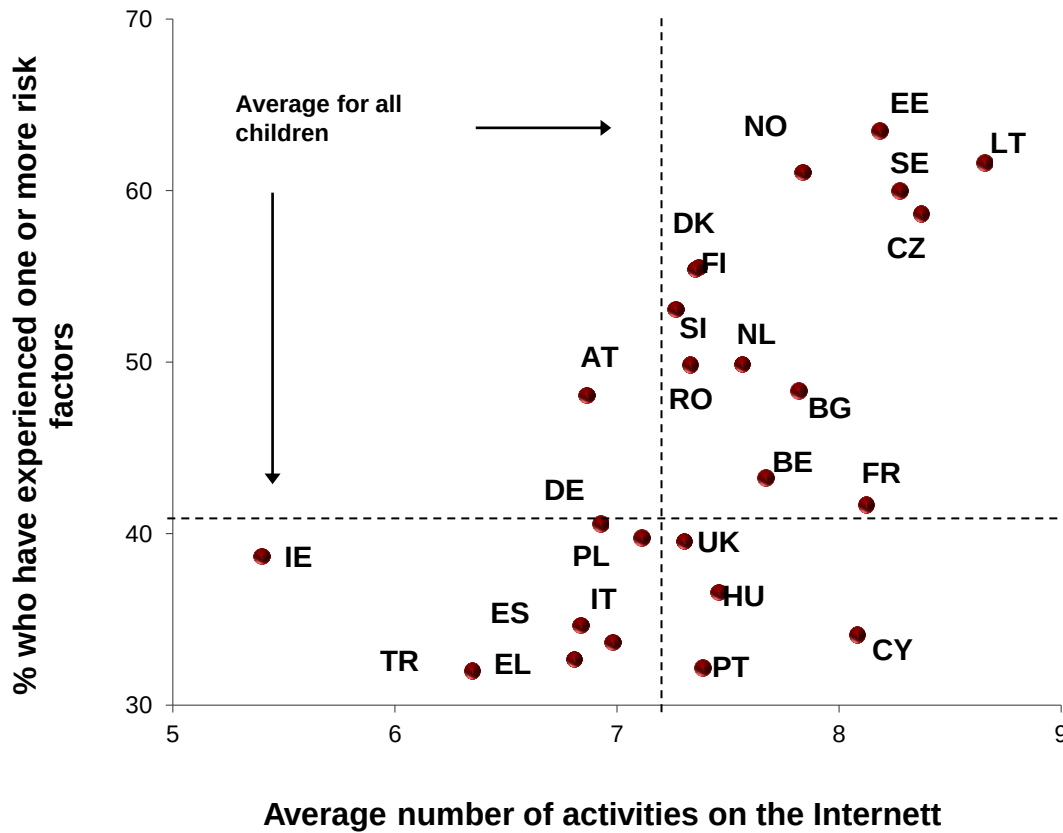
Correlation between activities and skills



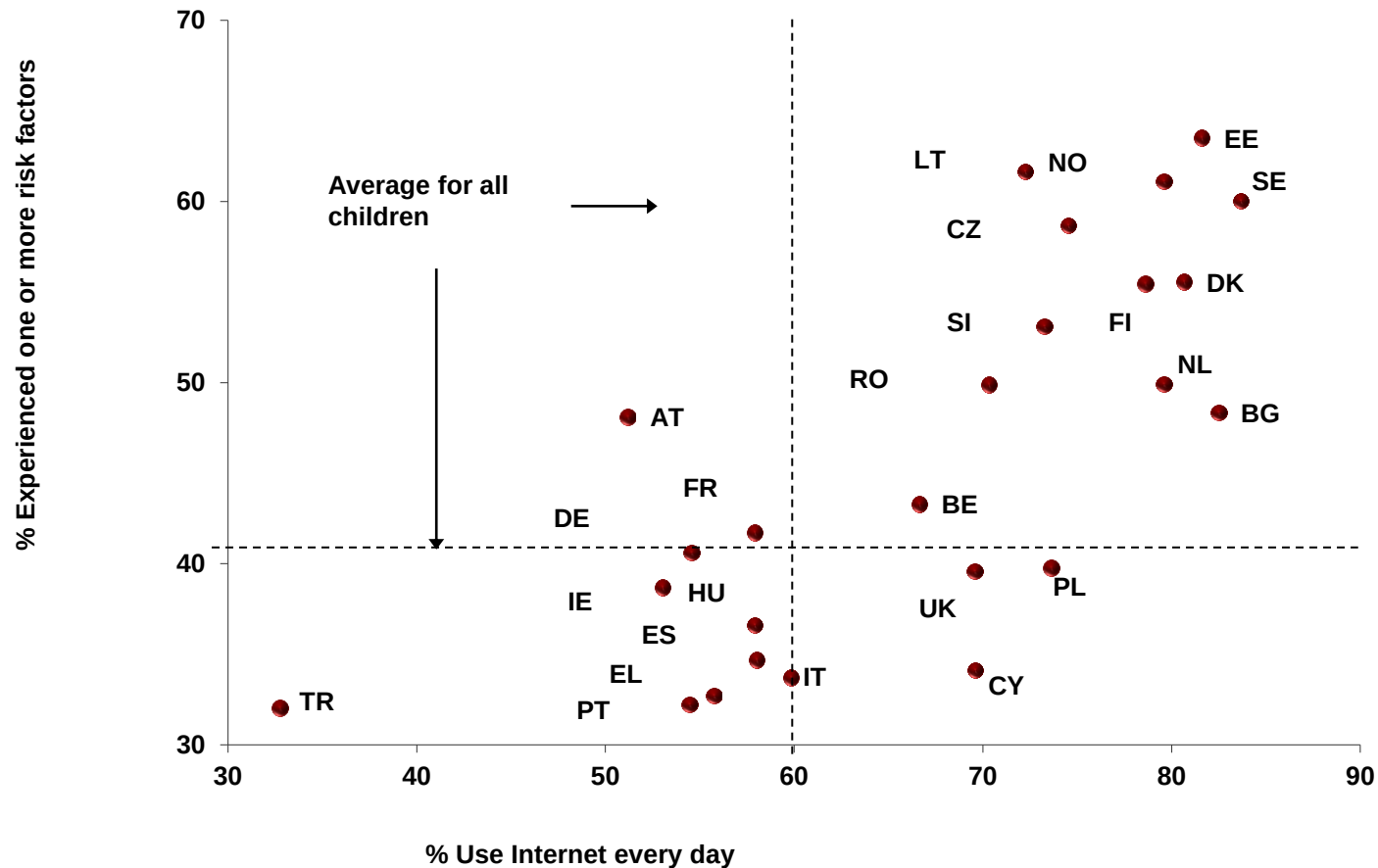
Correlation between use and skills



Correlation between activities and risk



Correlation between risk and use



Clear connections



High use

- More activities

More activities

- More risk
- More skills

More skills

- More resilience

More resilience

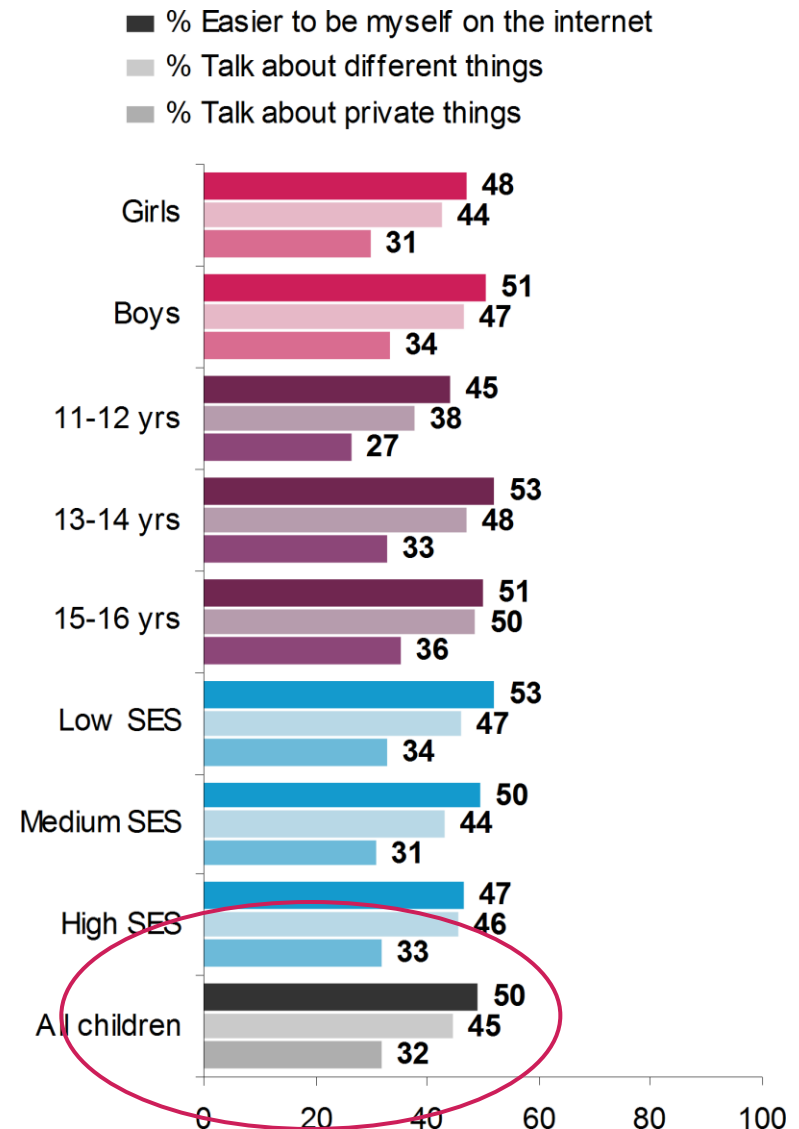
- More risk

Less harm

Online communication



- 87% use at home
- 49% have in bedroom
- Privatised use s growing
- 60% use every day or almost daily, 93% use at least weekly
- 88 minutes spent online in an average day
- SES and age matter more than gender
- SES matters especially for daily use:
67% high SES vs. 52% low SES
- Age matters also for daily use:
33% 9-10 yrs vs. 80% 15-16 yrs
- Children first go online at 9 yrs old:
at 7 for 9-10 yrs, at 11 for 15-16 yrs



(...but does not mean “countries”/“cultures” are the same)



“Lower use, lower risk”

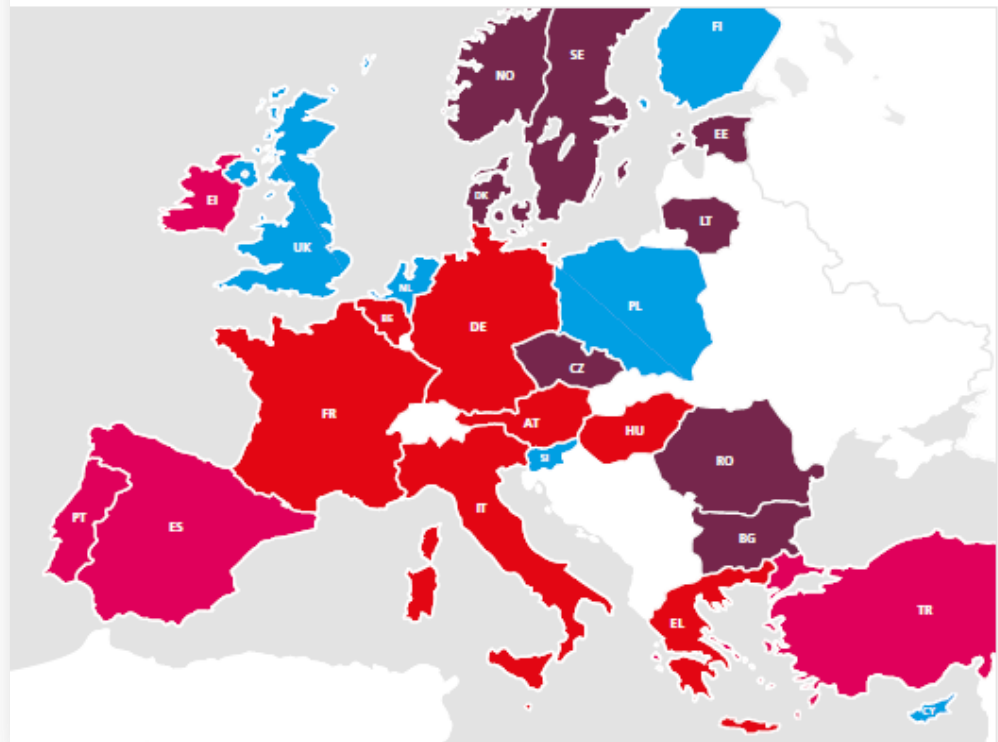
“Lower use, some risk”

“Higher use, some risk”

“Higher use, higher risk”

A country's socio-economic stratification, regulatory framework, technological infrastructure and educational systems all shape children's online risks.

Country classification based on children's online use and risk (from EU Kids Online survey)



Selected findings from Eukids II

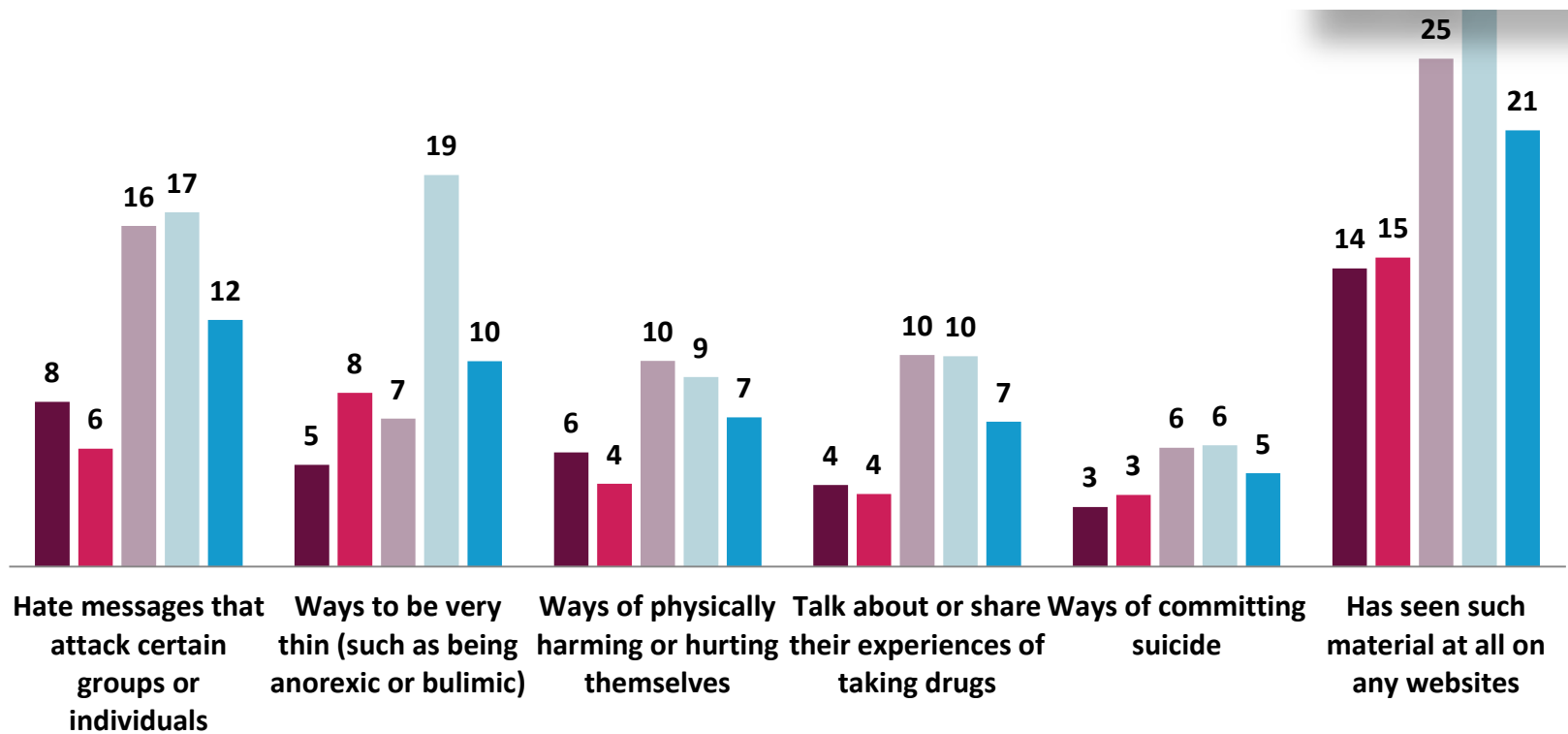
HARMFUL USER GENERATED SERVICES (HUGS)

Child has seen potentially harmful user-generated content on websites in past 12 months (age 11+)



■ Boys 11-13 years ■ Girls 11-13 years ■ Boys 14-16 years ■ Girls 14-16 years ■ All

Experiences ranging from 43% (CZ) and 42% (NO) to 14% (FR) and 15% (PT)



Selected findings from Eukids II

DIGITAL BULLYING

How we define bullying



“Sometimes children or teenagers say or do hurtful or nasty things to someone and this can often be quite a few times on different days over a period of time. It can include teasing someone in a way the person does not like; hitting, kicking or pushing someone around; leaving someone out of things. Has someone acted in this kind of hurtful or nasty way to you in the past 12 months?/ Have you been treated in a hurtful or nasty way on the internet?”

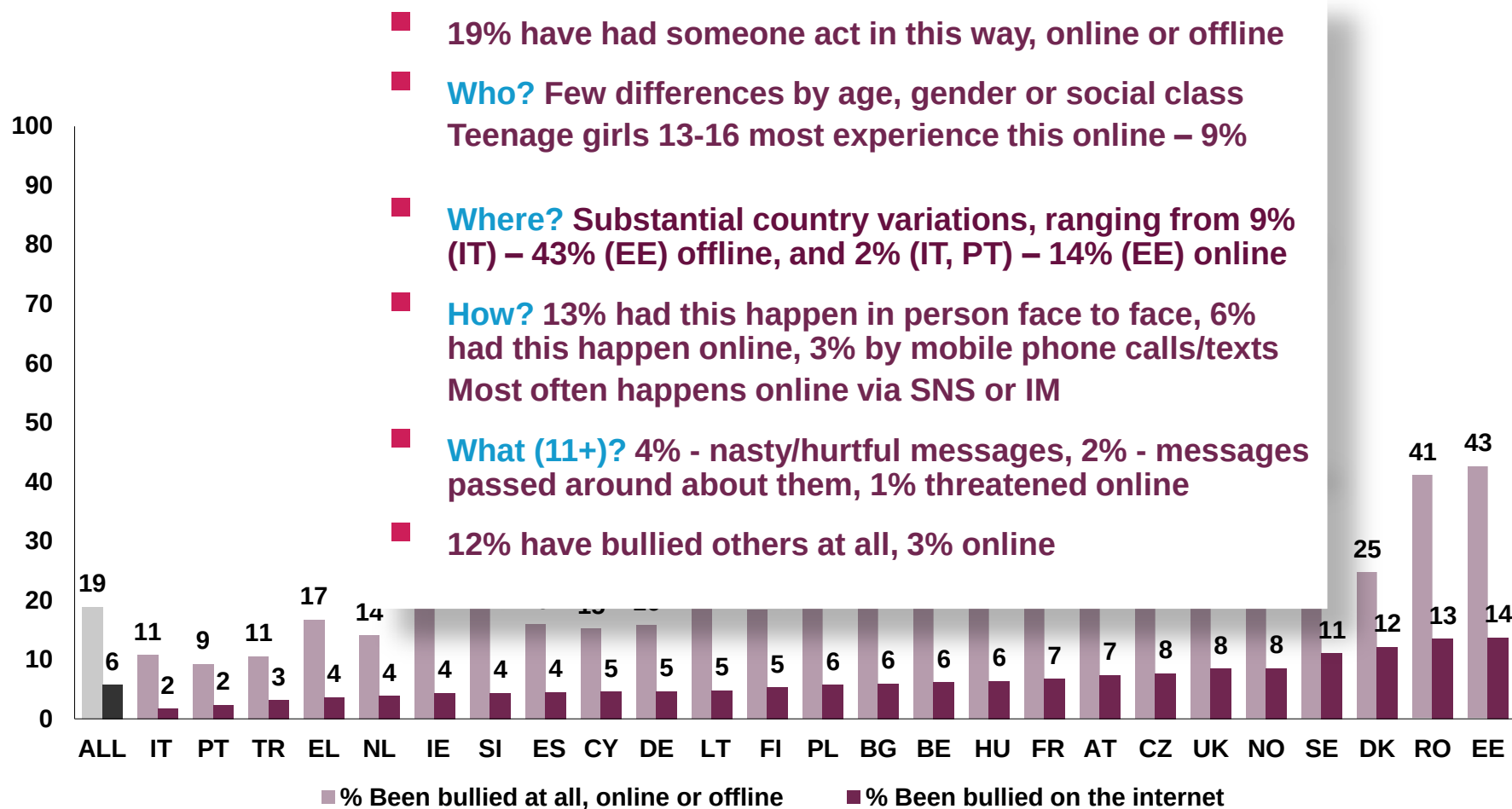
- In a private, self-completion part of the questionnaire, children were also asked whether they had ever bullied (i.e., “acted in a way that felt nasty or hurtful [a few times, over a period of time, teasing, hitting, or excluding] to someone else”) and whether this has happened face-to-face, on the internet or by mobile phone.

What is so special with digital bullying?



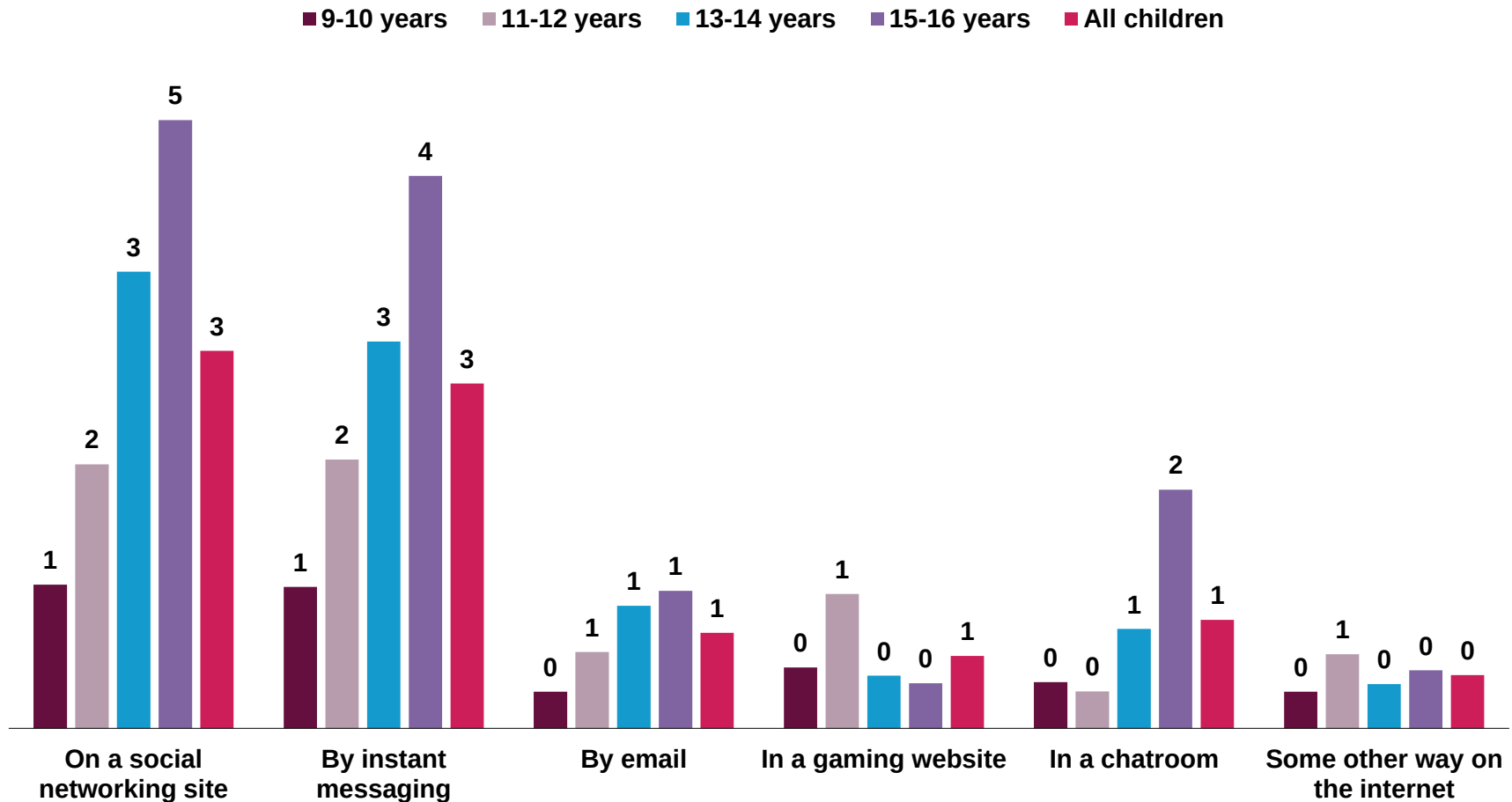
1. Potential use of audiovisual material
2. Might be easier for the bully to remain anonymous
3. Bullying can be documented
4. New forms of social exclusion in the form of digital isolation
5. Bullying becomes more publicly visible
but, paradoxically
6. Bullying might be less visible to adults

Child has been bullied online or offline in past 12 months, by country



Base: All children who use the Internet

Online services of which children have been bullied online in the past 12 months, by age



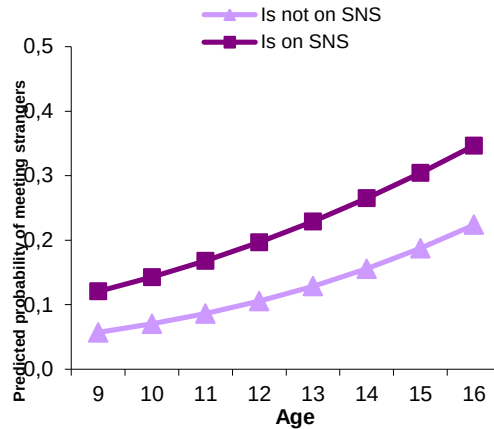
Base: All children who use the Internet

SNS use and risk, by age

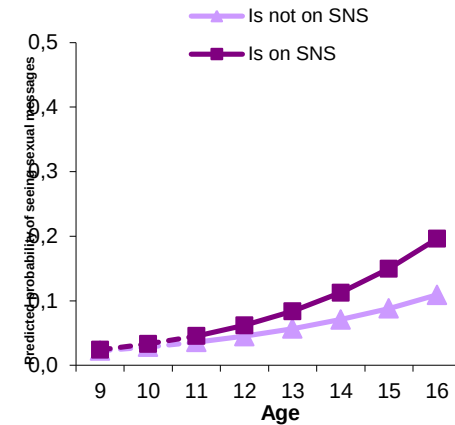
(controlling for gender, internet use, parental rules, SNS and country)



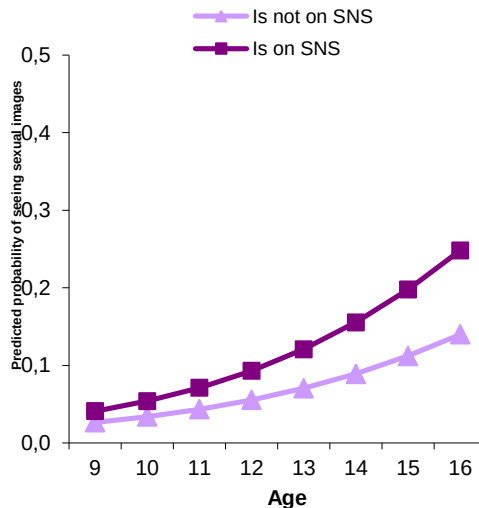
Meeting strangers



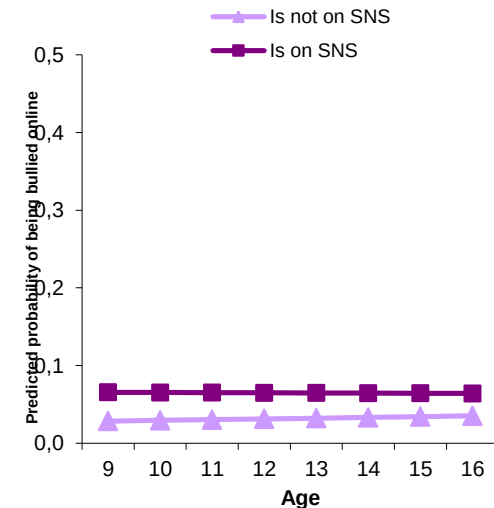
Receiving sexual messages



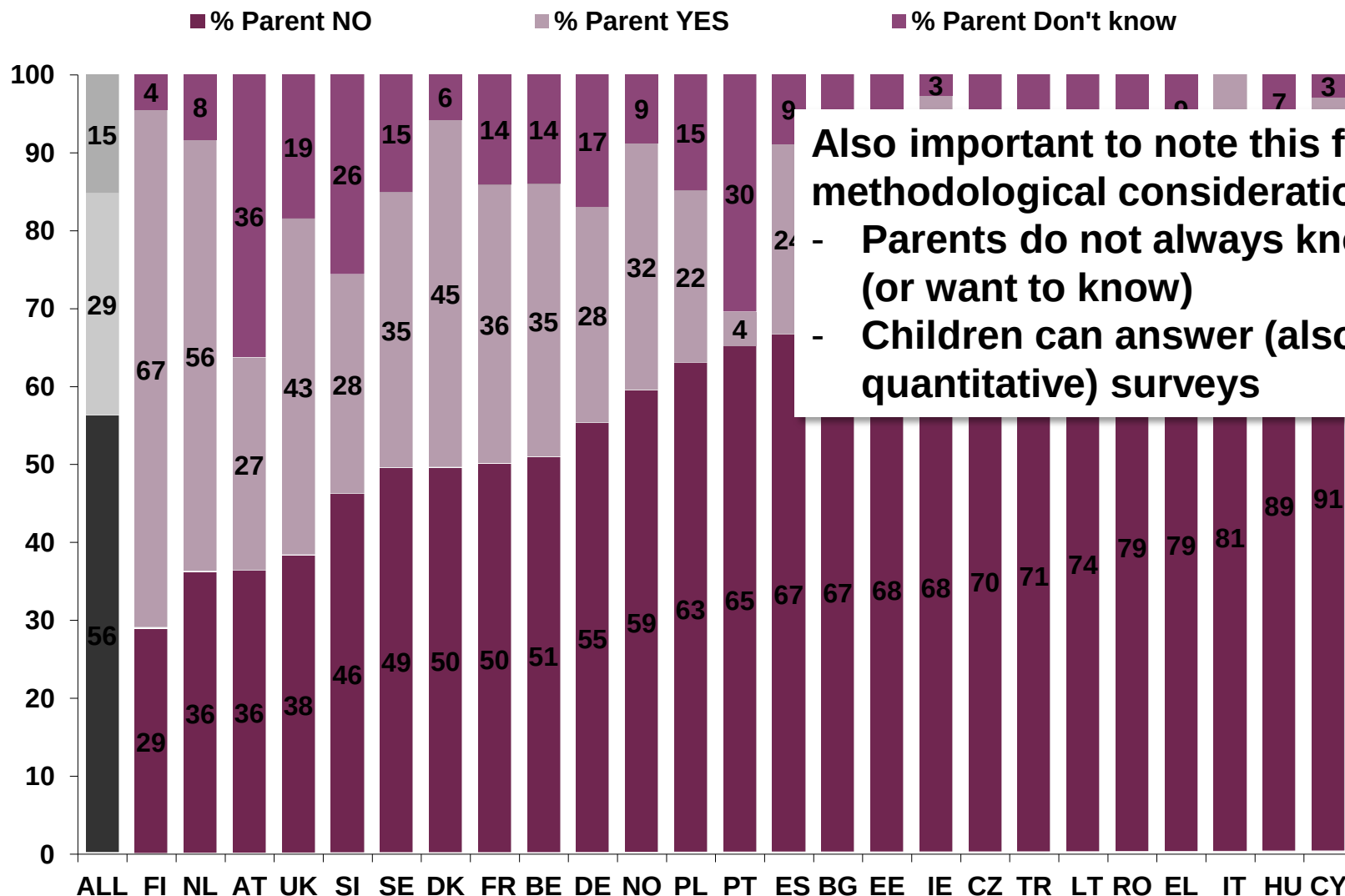
Seeing sexual images



Being bullied



Parents' accounts of whether child has been bullied online (only children who have been bullied online) by country



Also important to note this for methodological consideration

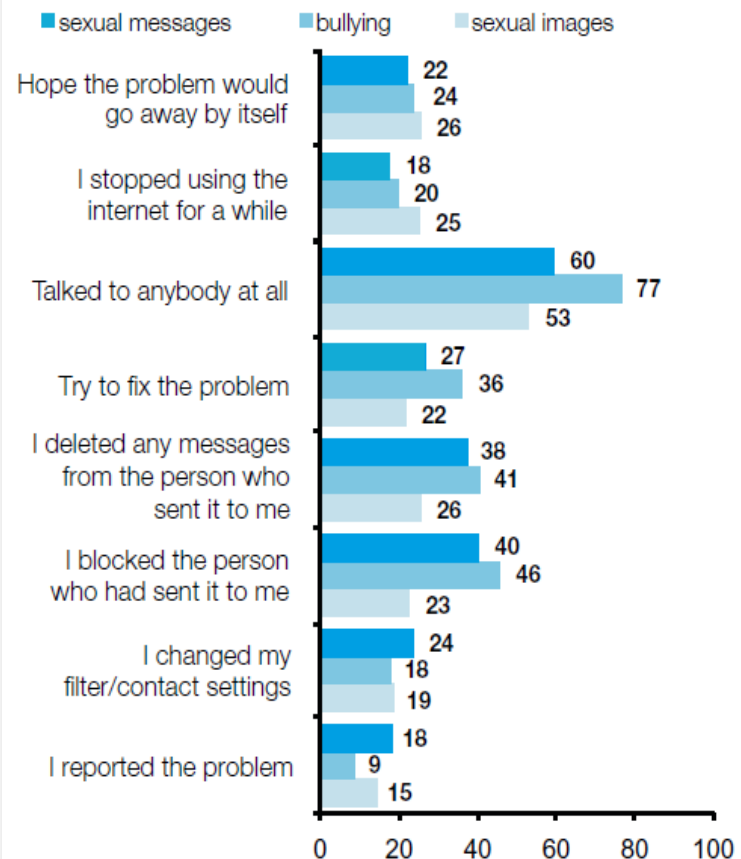
- Parents do not always know (or want to know)
- Children can answer (also quantitative) surveys

Disintegration of social ties: Distrust in expert systems



- 12% of European 9-16 year-olds say that they have been bothered or upset by something on the Internet.
- Overwhelmingly, children tell a friend, followed by a parent, when something online upsets them. Rarely do they tell a teacher or any other adult in a position of responsibility. Their apparent lack of trust in those who may have more expert solutions is a concern.

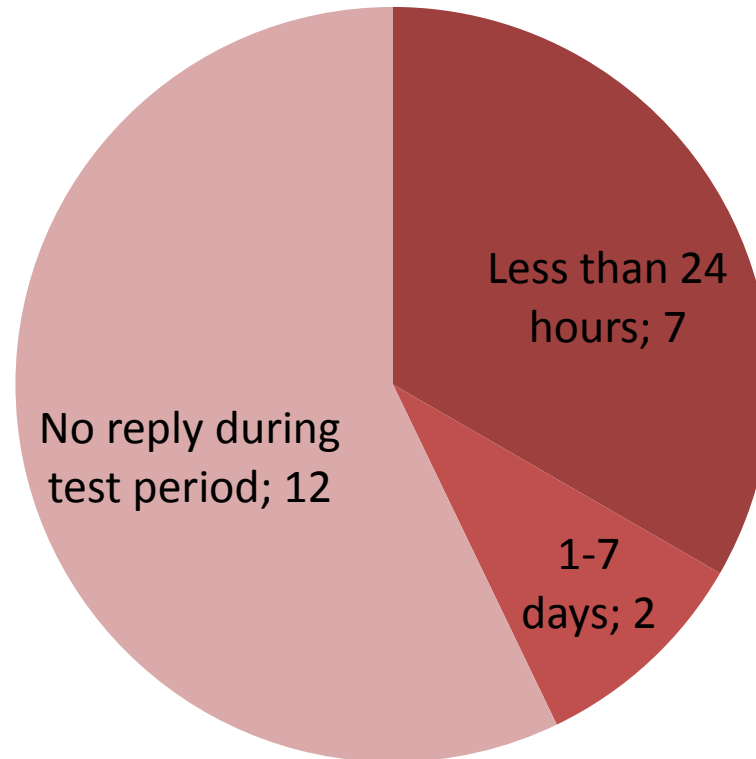
What children do when upset by online risks



“I am writing to you because someone is sending me scary messages. What should I do about this? Please help me.”



Response time to minor user asking the major social networking services of Europe for help



Source: Staksrud, E., & Lobe, B. (2010). Evaluation of the Implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU Part I: General Report. Luxembourg: European Commission under the Safer Internet Programme.

Selected findings from Eukids II on online bullying

HARM & COPING

From risk to harm?

Online bullying

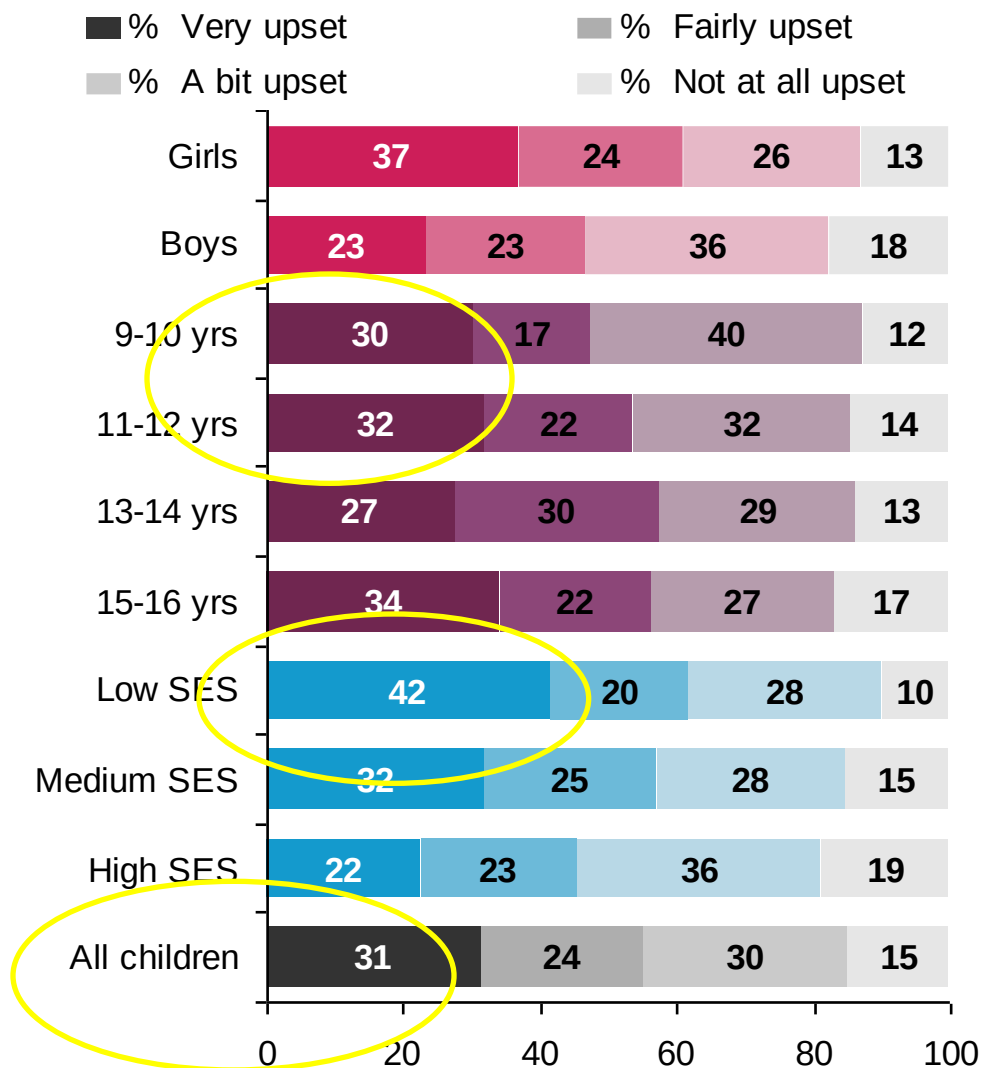


Among the 6% who have been bullied online, on the last time this happened:

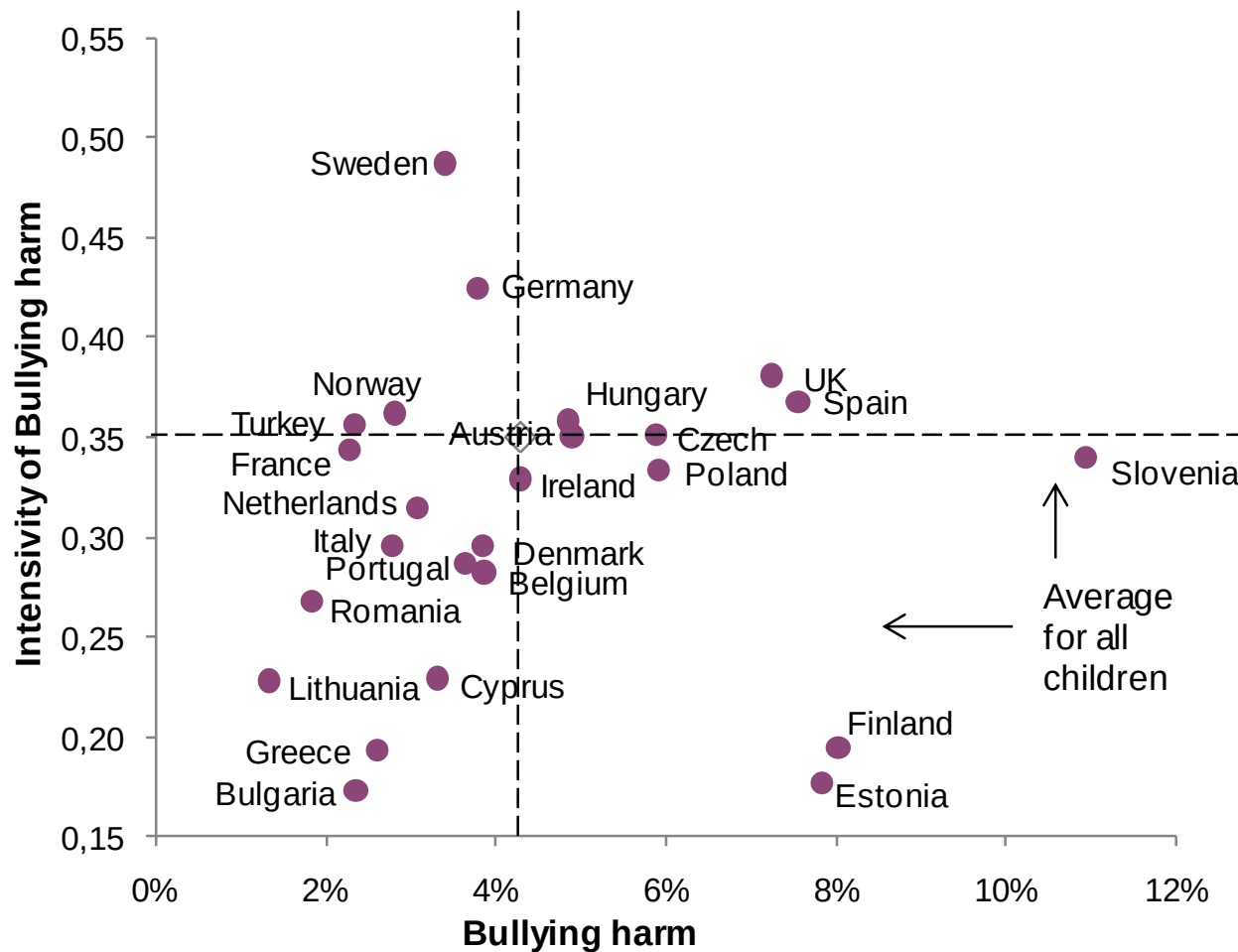
- 30% were a bit upset, 24% fairly upset, 31% very upset

- Who was more upset?
Younger, girls, low SES homes

- How long did this last?
Most (62%) got over it straight away, 31% still upset a few days later and 6% still upset a few weeks later



Intensitivity* of harm, by country



*Intensity of harm consisted of questions: Thinking about the LAST TIME you were bothered by something like this, how upset did you feel about it (if at all)?/How long did you feel like that for? Values were multiplied and divided by its maximum (scale 0-1).

Base: % children at least a bit bothered

Coping strategies

Just those who encountered the risk and were bothered by it



Who did they tell?

77% talked to somebody

52% talked to a friend

42% talked to a parent

14% talked to a sibling

9% talked to another adult they trust

7% talked to a teacher

2% talked to someone whose job it is to help children



What did they do?

24% hoped it would go away

36% tried to fix it

16% felt guilty



Online help?

46% blocked person

41% deleted messages

20% stopped using Internet for a while

Parental mediation – what works?



- By active mediation of use, we mean: parents talk to their child about the internet, stay nearby or sit with them while they go online, encourage them to explore the internet, and share online activities with them. These activities, our findings show, tend to reduce children's exposure to online risks without reducing online opportunities, and they also reduce young children's (9-12 years) reports of being upset when they encounter online risks.

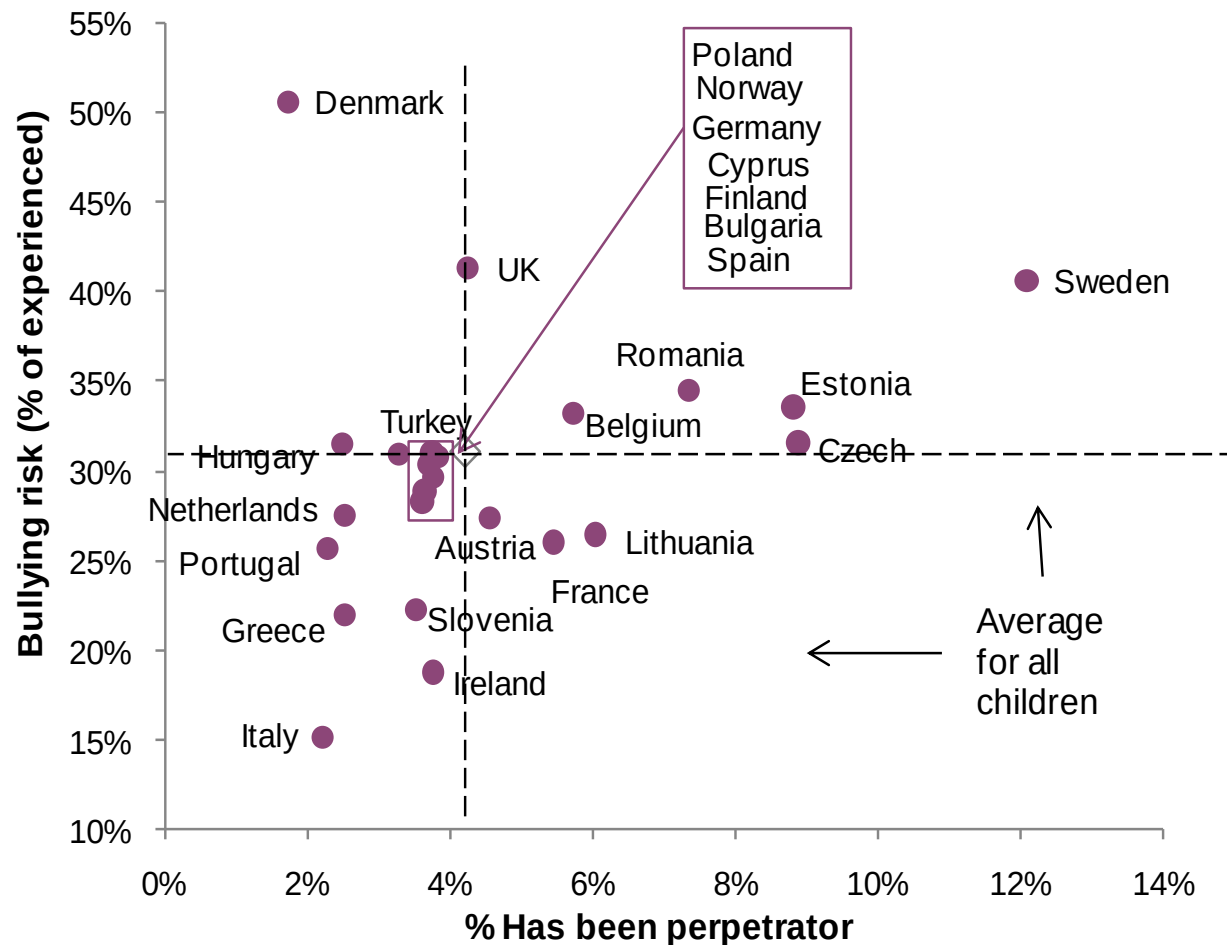
Most important predictors of being bullied, by country



Variables	Has done either of the two things associated with being a perpetrator	Risky online experiences	Child gender	Time spent on the internet (minutes)	I get very angry and often lose my temper*
Austria	1	2	3		
Belgium	1				
Bulgaria	3	1	2		
Cyprus	1				
Czech Republic	1				
Germany					
Denmark		1	3	2	
Estonia					
Greece				1	
Spain			1		
Finland			1		
France	1		3		2
Hungary				1	
Ireland	1			3	2
Italy				1	
Lithuania	1				
Netherlands		2	1		
Norway	1		3	2	
Poland		1			
Portugal		1			
Romania	1	2			
Sweden	2	1			
Slovenia			2	1	
Turkey		2			1
UK					

- Being a bully yourself predicts being bullied

Most predictive variable and level of bullying risk.



Base: All children who experience bullying

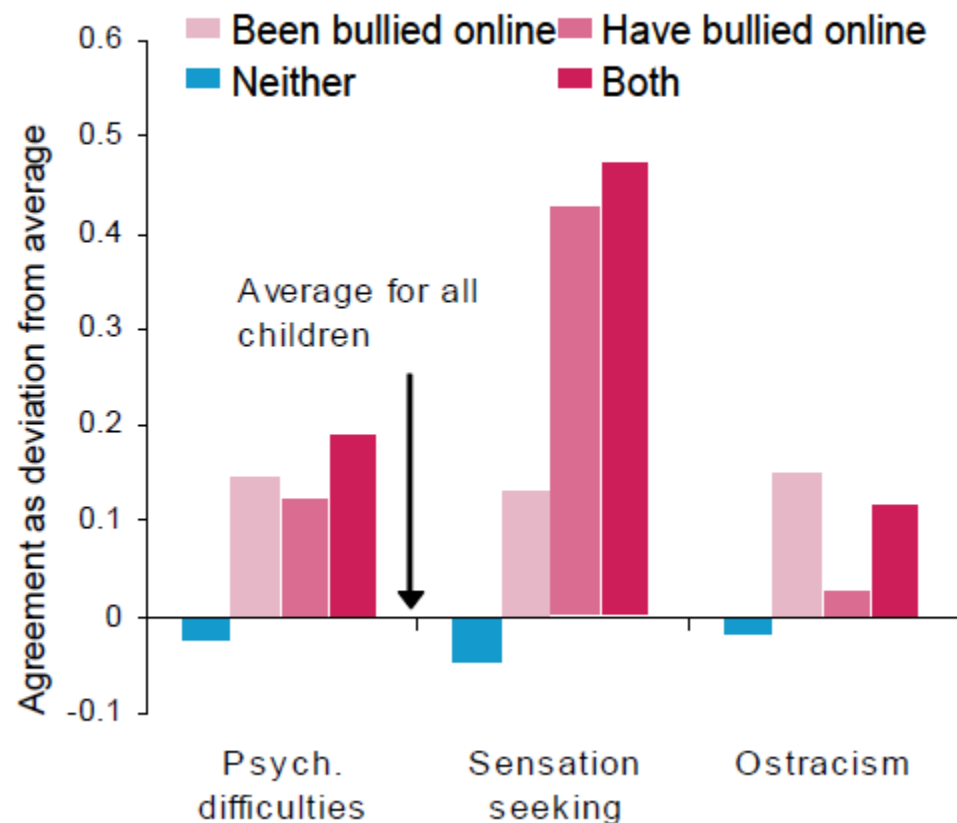
What makes a bully a cyberbully?



Those children who bully others via the internet or a mobile device differ in several ways from those who bully others face-to-face only. In particular:

- cyberbullies (all else being equal) are at least four times as likely to engage in risky online activities, ($OR=4.24$, $p<.001$),
- twice as likely to spend more time online and to find it easier to be themselves online, *time online* ($OR=2.05$, $p<.001$), *online persona* ($OR=2.05$, $p<.005$)
- almost 1.9 times more likely to have a higher ICT ability self-concept ($OR=1.88$, $p<.005$),
- 1.6 times more likely to be female ($OR=1.57$, $p<.001$)
- Online bullies differ from offline bullies in their internet behaviors and attitudes, but not in their offline behaviors.

Online bullying and psychological vulnerability

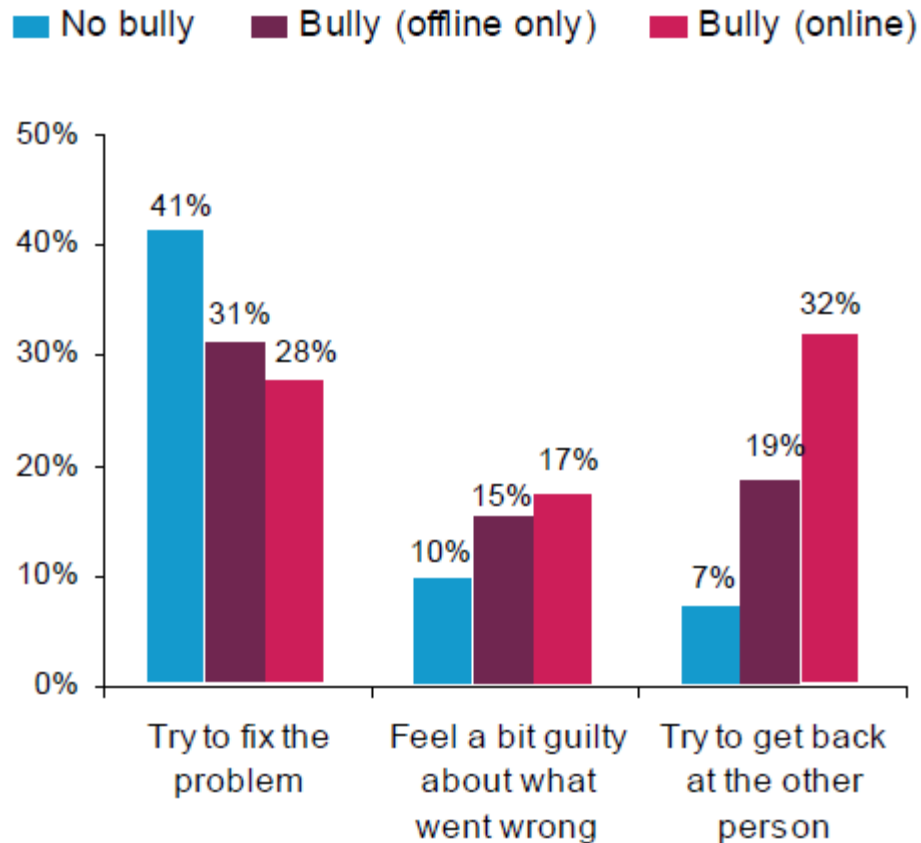


- The three bullying groups show higher psychological difficulties compared to those neither having bullied nor having been bullied online.

- The three bullying groups show higher sensation seeking compared to those neither having nor having been bullied online.

- Those who have been bully victims or both (bullies and victims) show higher ostracism than those who experienced neither.

How do children respond to being bullied online?



1 in 3 who had bullied others online said that they try to get back at the other person when being bullied online

Revenge might be motive for bullying.

When bullied online, bullies are more likely than others to say they «feel guilty» or «try to get back at the other person», but they are less likely than others to say they «try to fix the problem»

The mode of bullying others – on- vs. offline – seem to correspond with the mode of being bullied by others.

Note: All differences were statistically significant ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 6.8$ to 55.5; all $ps < .05$)

Bullying – or just kidding around?



«It is sooo easy to fight with someone online. If I am mad at someone and she logs on to chat and she is nagging and lost of stuff like that, I can just suddenly say like – why don't you just leave? You just type it straight out. Your just write – i do not want to talk to you, so just leave. – you are so needy and lots like that. You just write – you are an ass – and – I really hate you – and lots like that. Sometimes it is not like you mean it, like, it just comes out that way. If you are really pissed, like, then you can just say what ever you want. It is not like you mean it, like you can just write like «you fucking whore, leave!!!» and just be like really bitchy. You can just really say it online»

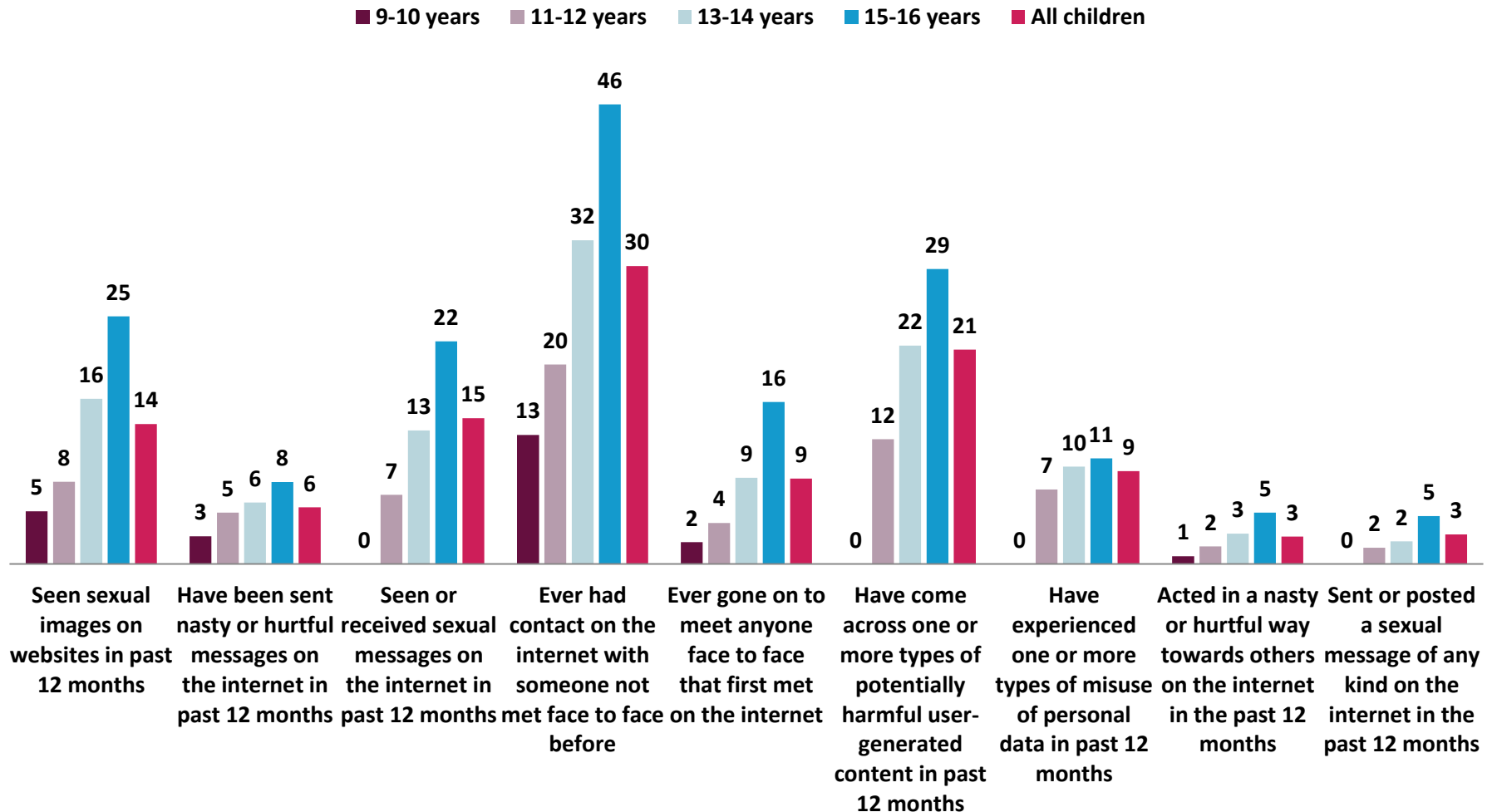
Girl, 15 years

Summary



1. Offline bullying is more prevalent than online bullying
2. Of all online risks we study, bullying is less likely to be experienced, but has the highest intensity of harm
3. Parents are not likely to know their child is being bullied
4. Children who are bullied online are more likely than not to bully others
5. Cyber bullies are different from offline bullies, being more risk takers, spending more time online, have high ICT ability self concept, and are more likely to be girls
6. Level of digital skill is vital for children to cope and avoid harm

Comparing bullying and HUGS to other online risk



Parental awareness



Among those children who have encountered the particular risk online ...

- **Seeing sexual images online:**

40% of parents are not aware of this, 26% say they don't know

Parents are least aware when daughters (46%) and

younger children (54% 9-10 and 11-12 year olds) have seen sexual images online

- **Being bullied online:**

56% of parents are not aware of this, 15% say they don't know

Parents are less aware when this involves their 9-10 year olds (65%)

- **Receiving sexual message online:**

52% of parents are not aware of this; 27% say they don't know

Parents of younger children, and in higher SES homes, are least aware

- **Meeting an online contact offline:**

61% of parents are not aware of this, 11% say they don't know

Parents of younger children, of boys, and in higher SES homes, are less aware

Specific recommendations



- Parents - awareness-raising to alert them to the risks their children may encounter online whilst encouraging parent/child dialogue and understanding.
- Parents' preferred sources of information on internet safety are the child's school, so greater efforts should be undertaken by the education sector.
- Schools - digital skills training is vital for coping, thus needs continued emphasis and updating to ensure all children reach a minimum standard and to promote creative, positive uses.
- Government (and others) – target resources and guidance where particularly needed: on ever younger children/newer users and those who are vulnerable.
- Industry - efforts are needed to support awareness, usability and take up of internet safety tools to support blocking, reporting and filtering of other users if needed without jeopardizing children's access and participation.
- Children, civil society - encourage children to be responsible for their online behaviour/ safety if possible, promoting empowerment and digital citizenship.
- The absence of clear country differences in characteristics of those children who bully others online suggests that pathways across European countries to tackle cyberbullying could be similar – perhaps also global
- We are very worried about the many children seeking out suicide, hate and self-harm content

Coming up....



- Policy book (Nordicom)
- Sibling status vs. Risk taking
- HUGS
- Children's own warnings
- + + +

Contact information and references



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■ Information about the project and signing up to our newsletter www.eukidsonline.net

■ Twitter Estaksrud #Eukidsonline

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Thank you 😊

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