More than 70% of UK parents concerned over children's online exposure during the pandemic

December 3 2020

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

A new poll conducted by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham has found that over 70% of parents worry

about the risks as well as the physical and mental health implications of their children spending an increased amount of time online during the coronavirus pandemic. However, parents' views on the Internet were conflicted as more than eight of out ten parents (85%) believe that the Internet has been a "helpful tool" in ensuring that their children continue their lives as normal during lockdown or when self-isolating (e.g., when it comes to studying or meeting with friends).

Undertaken by Yonder (formally Populus) and surveying 1,515 UK parents of children aged 13-17 years, the poll was conducted during a period of heightened restrictions across the UK. Almost a fifth of parents (16%) reported that having to use the Internet by default during the pandemic has been a problem for their families because of limited internet access or issues with their WI-FI. More problematically, almost 60% overall, and almost 80% of younger parents aged 18-34 years, worry that their children may be exposed to more online risks as a result of spending more time online during the pandemic, with mothers more concerned by this than fathers (62% versus 55%).

Parents were most concerned that their children are at risk of being exposed to violent, hateful or racist content or activities online, which show a lack of compassion and respect for others. More than half (51%) indicated that this was one of their top three concerns for their children being online. Meanwhile, 41% of parents reported that one of their top three concerns is that their children may become socially isolated or addicted to the Internet because of limited self-control of their technology use.

Commenting on the findings, Dr. Tom Harrison, Director of Education at the Jubilee Centre, said: "In many ways, the Internet has been the unsung hero of the pandemic. It has helped many teachers and parents to continue to provide an education for their children when many pupils were learning remotely. It has enabled people to reach out to those in

their community to ask for help getting food and medicines. At the same time, the Internet also has a darker side. That parents worry about balancing the opportunities and risks of being online is clear in the results. Parents understand that teachers, governments, [tech companies](#), as well as parents themselves, have a responsibility to help their children develop character and wisdom that will make it more likely that they will flourish online."

These findings also suggest that, especially in times of crisis, it is important for children to develop good character so that, when it comes to using the Internet, they are better equipped to use this both wisely and responsibly. Indeed, the ability to make wise decisions is the most desirable quality that the majority of UK parents (56%) most want their children to show online.

The task of helping children cultivate good character, however, does not lie solely in the hands of parents themselves, but also in those of educators and the education system more broadly, with 77% of parents reporting that schools should make greater efforts to teach about good character, wisdom and virtues in relation to the Internet.

Other notable findings include:

- Almost half of parents (48%) agree or strongly agree with the statement that "Internet and social media companies run search engines and online platforms in ways that contribute more to online risks than to opportunities."
- Three quarters of parents (75%) think that Internet and social media companies put profits ahead of promoting social good.
- Nearly two thirds of parents (62%) think that search engines and online platforms should be redesigned to make it easier for users to interact with each other in ways that are more compassionate and respectful.

- Eight of out ten parents (80%) think that search engines and online platforms should be redesigned to make it easier for users to stay safe online.
- Only 22% of parents trust Internet and social media companies to self-regulate the digital environment. Meanwhile, almost 80% think that the government should make more efforts to tackle online risks.

Provided by University of Birmingham

Citation: More than 70% of UK parents concerned over children's online exposure during the pandemic (2020, December 3) retrieved 11 July 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-uk-parents-children-online-exposure.html