NSPCC

Livestreaming and video-chatting

Snapshot 2

The NSPCC and LGfL[1] recently conducted the largest ever UK survey of children's experiences online. We received almost 40,000 responses from children aged 7-16 who shared their experiences and understandings of the risks they face online. Our second snapshot, exploring the findings of this survey, focuses on children's experiences of livestreaming and video-chatting. These new online tools have exploded in popularity in the past couple of years, but their live and unpredictable nature can pose risks to children.

Key points

- **Children livestream in far larger numbers that previously understood.** 24% of all children (19% primary-aged children and 29% of secondary-aged children) have done a livestream broadcast.

- **Of those that have livestreamed, 6% of all children have received requests to change or remove their clothes.** Primary-aged children were proportionally more likely than secondary-aged children to be asked to change or remove their clothes when livestreaming.

- **12% of all children have video-chatted with someone that they do not know in person**; 8% of primary-aged and 17% of secondary-aged children.

- **During those video-chats, 10% of primary-aged and 11% of secondary-aged children have been asked to take off or remove their clothes.**

- The NSPCC is concerned about the scale of risk to children on livestreaming sites and to children video-chatting with people that they do not know in person, which is why **we are calling on government to introduce robust regulation for social networking sites; including mechanisms to proactively identify livestreams and video-chats where children may be being abused.**

Introduction

Social media is woven into the fabric of children's lives. Every moment, every experience, can be captured and shared with an audience of followers. Livestreaming and video-chats open up a whole new medium through which children are able to share ever more intimate details about their lives. Despite the popularity of livestreaming, we know relatively little about how it is changing the ecology of risk children face online, but it is clear that its inherently live and visual nature carries risks that can leave children vulnerable to online harms, particularly online grooming.

For the purposes of this snapshot, livestreaming refers to the broadcast of a video to an audience of people.[2] Video chat refers to one-on-one conversations that would typically occur through apps such as Facetime. In recent years, livestreaming apps such as TikTok (formerly

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1 London Grid for Learning.
2 In other circumstances, livestreaming may be used to refer to children watching other people's livestreams rather than broadcasting their own.

Musical.ly) and Yubo have become very popular; although the clearest indication that livestreaming has become mainstream is through its incorporation into established platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

This snapshot considers the scale of children livestreaming and video chatting with people that they do not know in person, and proposes robust regulation for social networking sites. The survey was conducted between February and March 2018. We asked children to tell us about their experiences of going online and almost 40,000 children aged between 7 and 16 shared their stories with us. Surveys were completed by children at school as part of their school day. A high proportion of children were from the South East of England (25,987) but the whole of the UK was represented: England (exc. South East) 10,957; Scotland 2,365; Wales 435; and, Northern Ireland 83.

How many children livestream and video chat?

Our survey found that the proportion of children who livestream is far higher than previously thought. Ofcom's most recent report of children's social media use estimated that 10% of young people aged between 12 and 15 have livestreamed.[3] However, our results, outlined here, indicate that rates of livestreaming are actually far higher amongst both primary-aged and secondary-aged children. Although this cannot be inferred from the data itself, these higher rates of engagement may be a result of their recent inclusion as a core part of the design of most major social networks.

There is less existing research on the use of video-chat features amongst children and young people, although feedback from children participating in this survey indicated that apps such as Facetime have become popular because they allow young people to keep in contact with family and friends. However, our research illustrates the ways that children are using it to speak to people they have not met before: 1 in 8 children of all ages have video-chatted with people that they have not met face-to-face.

Have you ever livestreamed or video-chatted with someone you have not met face-to-face?

	% Children livestreamed		% Children video-chatted	
Stage	No	Yes	No	Yes
Primary	81%	19%	92%	8%
Secondary	71%	29%	83%	17%
Total	76%	24%	88%	12%

What do children and young people enjoy about livestreaming and video-chatting?

Children love the fact that video-chatting allows them to keep in contact with friends and family, particularly those that live far away:

> *The best thing that I have experienced online is video chatting with my friends and family that make me happy [Girl, aged 9-10]*

Building communities based on similar interests also attracted many young people to livestreaming:

> *The best thing that has happened to me online is talking to a livestreamer who I knew I could trust and talking to other people watching (on YouTube). I also became a moderator of his streams. [Boy, aged 10-11]*

However, a number of children told us that the best thing about being online was when "I hit 550 fans on musical.ly" [Girl, aged 9-10] or when "I got 1030 hearts on music ly" [Child, aged 9-10]. We are concerned that such comments indicate that chasing 'likes' on social media could leave children exposed to risk. Previous research by the NSPCC has demonstrated that the immediacy and intimacy of livestreaming platforms might also make children more vulnerable to inappropriate or grooming behaviours.[4] For example, when a child livestreams from their bedroom it can offer groomers considerable insight into the child's favourite activities or

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3   *Children and Parents: Media use and attitudes report 2017*, Ofcom (2017) p. 100.
4   Hamilton-Giachritsis, *'Everyone deserves to be happy and safe': A mixed methods study exploring how online and offline child sexual abuse impact young people and how professionals respond to it*, NSPCC (2017).

hobbies; which can then be used to build trust and advance the grooming process.[5]

What risks do children face when livestreaming?

Livestreaming remains an under-researched field, but the most significant contribution to date is the Internet Watch Foundation's recent report on livestreaming published earlier this year. Their analysis of over 2,000 indecent images of children, taken from livestreams, found that 98% showed children that appeared to be under the age of 13.[6] These findings may, partially, be a consequence of prioritisation of cases by the police, as well as the take down arrangements with bodies such as the Internet Watch Foundation, which tend to prioritise images of abuse featuring younger children.

The NSPCC is concerned that the live, visual, and unpredictable nature of livestreaming presents clear risks for children and young people. In our survey, we found that 6% of children that had livestreamed (and over 1% of all children) had been asked to take off or change their clothes. 8% of primary school children, and 7% of secondary school children, had seen someone else who wasn't wearing all their clothes while they were livestreaming.

> *My friend was doing a livestream and a [sic] adult man was asking for her to video request him, so she did and he showed his private parts. [Girl, aged 10-11]*

> *On Omegle this man was pulling, touching, and showing his privates. [Girl, aged 11-12]*

> *I was on a livestream and a boy asked me and my friend for a threesome and nudes. [Girl, aged 14-15]*

It is particularly concerning that primary-aged children were proportionally more likely to have been asked to take off or remove their clothes. Such findings illustrate that we are only just beginning to understand how the ubiquity of livestreaming services on major platforms is changing the landscape of online risk.

What risks do children face when video-chatting?

The NSPCC defines online sexual grooming as a preparatory stage of sexual abuse. Grooming occurs when a known or unknown perpetrator, or member of their peer group, uses online technology to communicate with a child or young person with the intention of encouraging or manipulating them to engage in sexual behaviour. Although children can be groomed by people they know, these questions focused on the risks posed to children by video-chatting with people that they do not know in person.

Our findings about the risks posed by video-chatting are also concerning. Of those that have video chatted with someone that they have not

When livestreaming have any of these things happened?

	Someone wasn't wearing all their clothes	Someone asked you to change or take clothes off	Something else happened that made you feel uncomfortable
% of total primary school	2%	1%	5%
% of total secondary school	2%	1%	3%
% of primary school children that have livestreamed	8%	6%	24%
% of secondary school children that have livestreamed	7%	5%	11%

5 Information from the National Crime Agency has outlined that groomers will look for signals of hobbies, such as trophies for sports competitions, as a way of introducing topics that they know the child will be interested in.

6 *Trends in Online Sexual Exploitation: Examining the distribution and capture of livestreamed sexual abuse*, The Internet Watch Foundation, May 2018.

met face-to-face 10% of primary-aged children and 11% of secondary school children have been asked to take off or remove their clothes. This represents 1% of all primary school children, and 2% of all secondary-aged children, that participated in our survey.[7] It may be that the intimacy of a one-on-one conversation in a video-chat emboldens perpetrators, particularly as a video-chat leaves no permanent evidence that can be used by law enforcement.

Conclusion

For a number of years, the NSPCC has raised concerns about the wide-spread adoption of livestreaming media by young people, due to the inherent risks of platforms that are live, visual, and unpredictable. Our survey demonstrates that, although livestreaming and video-chatting are by no means ubiquitous, those children that are using these platforms are at significant risk of being asked to commit sexual acts, such as being asked to take off or remove their clothes.

Policy Recommendations

Some livestreaming sites have developed innovative approaches to tackling the risks associated with livestreaming. Yubo, for instance, has introduced real-time moderation and nudity-detecting algorithms, which are able to flag streams where inappropriate, or potentially abusive, behaviour might be occurring. However, sites that take pro-active steps to monitor potential livestreaming of abuse remain very much in the minority. Despite the risks that children

face while livestreaming and video-chatting, many social networks have failed to take appropriate action to keep children safe while using these features on their platforms. That is why the NSPCC is calling for the government to introduce an industry regulator that will have the powers to fine and sanction those companies that fail to take the most basic steps to help keep children online.

Most livestreaming platforms have failed to introduce moderation practices, or 'safety-by-design' features to keep their child users safe. It is therefore essential that livestreaming platforms are included in the Government's forthcoming legislation to tackle online harms.

To tackle the risks associated with livestreaming, the NSPCC is calling for the following:

- **Livestreaming sites to be required to adopt specific standards** to keep their child users safe, for instance: children should only be able to livestream to their approved contacts; and, sites should introduce real-time moderation, using algorithms to detect nudity and other behaviours that may place children at risk.

- **A regulator must be able to hold non-compliant sites to account**, with appropriate powers to investigate platforms, impose regulatory conditions on companies, and issue financial penalties to sites that fail to take proportionate measures to keep children safe.

- Platforms should face a regulatory requirement to adopt **mechanisms that will allow them to proactively detect grooming** on their sites.[8]

When video-chatting with someone you have not met face-to-face have any of these happened?

	Someone wasn't wearing all their clothes	Someone asked you to change or take clothes off	Something else happened that made you feel uncomfortable
% of total primary school children	0.5%	1%	2%
% of total secondary school children	1%	2%	2%
% of primary school children that have chatted with someone they haven't met	5%	10%	29%
% of secondary school children that have video-chatted with someone they haven't met	7%	11%	14%

7   This survey did not distinguish between whether the person making these requests was an adult or another young person.
8   An example of type of action includes analysis of meta data that indicates accounts that might be engaging in phishing behaviour towards children's accounts.