

## Insafe Helplines: Operations, Effectiveness and Emerging Issues for Internet Safety Helplines

### Aims

This research was commissioned by European Schoolnet (coordinator of the Insafe network of Safer Internet Centres) with the support of the Kaspersky Helpline Fund. The report presents research which was undertaken to assist Insafe helplines to develop their effectiveness and demonstrate their impact. It also recognised that helplines are in a unique position to be able to identify new and emerging trends in internet safety.

### Key Findings

For the period October-December 2015:

- A total of 9,274 contacts with helplines relating to online issues were received.
- 12-18 year olds continue to be the group which contact the helplines most often, with this age group accounting for almost half of all calls.
- Only 40% of calls came from males during this period. This shows a marked reduction on the 57% which were received from males during the previous reporting period, reinforcing the more usual trend of more females contacting the helplines. 21 out of the 28 helplines that submitted data had more calls from females than males.
- Telephone is still the main contact platform, with 66% of contacts made via phone.
- Cyberbullying remains the most common reason for contacting a helpline with 17% of all contacts being categorised as cyberbullying, an increase of 3% compared to the previous reporting period (14% vs. 17%).
- The second most frequent issue in calls to helplines related to privacy. 16% of calls concerned abuse of privacy or how to protect one's privacy.

### New and emerging risks

Helplines were also asked to identify the issues which were most likely to be of concern in relation to internet safety in the future. The vast majority of helplines believe that bullying/cyberbullying and online hate speech will continue to be major concerns for internet safety into the future (22 and 21 respectively of the 24 who responded to this item). 18 of the 24 helplines stated that sexual content was a cause of ongoing concern, while abusive communication and racism was cited by 15 of the 24 helplines.

## Sextortion

A relatively new type of risk is sextortion. This refers to young people who are approached online and asked to engage in sexualised behaviour (e.g. masturbate in front of the webcam). The perpetrator then captures the images and then blackmails the victim requesting an amount of money by threatening to share the video. Victims of sextortion are frightened about their reputation and may panic. In many cases the perpetrator is located in another country making it additionally difficult to help the victims. Helpline staff indicated that they do not have the necessary resources or tools to handle sextortion cases effectively.

## Most calls from children and young people contain some online element

Feedback from helplines suggests that the internet and online communication plays an ever-increasing role in the lives of children and young people with one helpline counsellor noting: *Internet problems are now an increasing feature of issues presented to the helpline by children. Almost every call or contact from children now has some online or digital aspect.*

## Policy Context

Insafe is a network of 31 Safer Internet Centres (28 of the EU member states, plus Iceland, Norway, Russia and Serbia). Supported by the European Commission's Better Internet for Kids Programme, each national centre carries out educational and awareness raising campaigns, runs a helpline to support internet users and works closely with youth to ensure an evidence-based, multi-stakeholder approach to creating a better internet. Each centre also has a hotline where members of the public can report illegal online content. Helplines form an integral part of the Safer Internet Centre (SIC) in each country within the network, playing a key role in responding to calls from young people (and other stakeholders) linked to their experiences online.

## Methodology

The research was carried out by EU Kids Online. It comprised of a detailed comparative qualitative study of four helplines combined with a survey of the Insafe network of helplines. A total of 18 interviews and focus groups were conducted with key helpline personnel and national stakeholders between October and the end of November 2015. An online questionnaire was also distributed to the Insafe network and remained open for four weeks (until mid-December 2015).

Source [www.betterinternetforkids.eu](http://www.betterinternetforkids.eu)

<https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/web/portal/practice/helplines/statistics>

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