

ETHICS REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCHERS

Researchers should consider the following questions when devising research proposals involving human participants, personal, medical or otherwise sensitive data or methodologically controversial approaches. N.B. not all of these questions will be relevant to every study. These questions provide pointers to direct researchers' thinking about the ethical dimensions of their research. It is expected that researchers will already have addressed the academic justification for the project in their proposal; the guidance questions set out below aim to help researchers address specific ethical issues in so far as they relate to participants or data.

In particular, consideration of risks to the research participants versus benefits need to be weighed up by researchers. It is important to think through carefully the likely impact on participants or vulnerable groups of any data collection methods. Certain groups are particularly vulnerable, or will be placed in a vulnerable position in relation to research, and may succumb to pressure; for example children or people with learning disability, or students when they are participating in research as students. Some participants will have diminished capacity to give consent and are therefore less able to protect themselves and require specific consideration (see further guidance given on the RPDD web pages regarding informed consent). The Research Ethics Committee (REC) recognizes that it is not only research with human participants that raises relevant ethical concerns. Researchers may be assessing sensitive information, the publication or analysis of which may have direct impact on agencies, communities or individuals. For example, collection and use of archive, historical, legal, online or visual materials may raise ethical issues (e.g for families and friends of people deceased), and research on provision of social or human services may impact user provision. Similarly, use of other people's primary data may need clearance or raise concerns about its interpretation. The Research Ethics Committee will assess whether the relevant questions have been adequately addressed when it scrutinises proposals. Please ensure that each answer provides the Committee with enough information to make an informed decision on the ethical dimensions of the proposal.

The LSE Research Ethics Policy and guidance will be reviewed annually and may be subject to further development.

The completed questionnaire should only be returned to Michael Nelson in the Research Division where specific issues have been identified and the supervisor/researcher would like the Research Ethics Committee to consider the application. Where you have considered questions to be irrelevant please indicate this on the form.

I. Project Details

Project Title: EU Kids Online III: WP4 Exploring children's understanding of risk

II. Applicant Details

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III. Research Aims

Please provide *brief* details of the research aims and the scientific background of the research. A full copy of the proposal should be attached to this document.

EU Kids Online III is a thematic network to stimulate and coordinate investigation into the use of new media by children. It is funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme and co-ordinated by the LSE. The general aim of this *third phase (2011-14)* of the *EU Kids Online* network is to provide a focal point for timely findings and critical analyses of new media uses and associated risks among children across Europe, drawing on these to sustain an active dialogue with stakeholders about priority areas of concern for child online safety. In its *second phase EU Kids Online II* successfully conducted a survey of children in 25 countries, with the approval of the LSE Research Ethics Committee. One of the specific aims of this *third phase* is to conduct equivalent and nationally comparable qualitative research. Hence this research ethics proposal is focused on Work Package 4 of *EU Kids Online III*, which is entitled 'exploring children's understanding of risk'.

In a research field faced with considerable methodological, technical and ethical challenges, a nuanced account of children's own understandings of risk online has yet to emerge, particularly in a manner that permits comparisons across countries. While qualitative comparative methods remain difficult, this work package will explore the meanings of risk online for children. Researchers from 15 countries expressed an interest in carrying out this qualitative comparative research: the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Norway, Slovenia, the UK, Belgium, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Romania, Turkey, and France, with a comparable study being conducted in Australia (matching the parallel survey that was conducted in *EU Kids Online II*). This proposal stipulates the ethical requirements for each country, with researchers from all participating countries being responsible for any specific additional national ethics requirements.

ONLY COMPLETE THE RELEVANT PARTS OF THIS DOCUMENT. THESE WILL HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AFTER COMPLETION OF THE RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLIST.

1. Informed consent.

1.1 Will potential participants be asked to give informed consent in writing and will they be asked to confirm that they have received and read the information about the study? If not, why not?

All children participating in the research will be asked to give informed consent in writing and to confirm that they have received and understood the information about the study.

In addition consent will be obtained at following levels:

School consent from head teachers (in some countries called the 'director' or 'principal'). Research teams will contact the Heads/Directors of those school being asked to take part in advance, in order to obtain written permission to do so.

Class consent (teacher of the participating children). Teachers will first be informed about the project through the school system. Researchers will then provide teachers with details in advance, once it is determined in which classes the research will be carried out, and obtain their permission. If in some countries the research will be carried out after school classes, then the person responsible for after school care will be informed and permission obtained.

Parents of participating children. Parental consent will be requested in countries where this is needed to meet national ethical guidelines.

The information sheet and consent forms for children (and parents if required) will be distributed and signed copies of the consent forms will be collected before focus groups and interviews are held.

Consent forms (in English) are included in the Annex to this questionnaire. They have been designed to be readily comprehensible, clear and informative, and they will include the contact information of the national research team.

1.2. How has the study been discussed or are there plans to discuss the study with those likely to be involved, including potential participants or those who may represent their views?

The proposed focus groups and interviews have been discussed at meetings of the EU Kids Online network. Its International Advisory Panel (IAP) ensures that the research benefits from the best research practice internationally and includes Professor David Finkelhor and Janis Wolak (Crimes against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire, USA), Amanda Lenhart (Pew Internet & American Life Project, USA), Janice Richardson (INSAFE/European Schoolnet), Knut Sørensen (Save the Children Denmark), Lelia Green (Edith Cowan University, Australia), Natasha Jackson (GSM

Association, UK) and Maria José Cantarino (Telefonica, Spain).

As explained in section 1.1, national researchers will discuss the study carefully with all those participating in the research.

1.3. Has information (written and oral) about the study been prepared in an appropriate form and language for potential participants? (see Informed Consent guidance which lists questions to be considered). At what point in the study will this information be offered?

As described in section 1.1, information about the study has been prepared in an appropriate form and language for potential participants (children, parents and teachers).

Information about the study will be provided orally and in written form for all children (and in written form for parents if national ethical guidelines require this). The national research teams across the 15 participating countries will ensure the translation of materials into their local languages.

As explained in section 1.1, we will first contact the school director (head of school), and then approach teachers, parents if appropriate and child participants.

1.4 How will potential participants be informed of whether there will be adverse consequences of a decision not to participate? Or of a decision to withdraw during the course of the study?

There will be no adverse consequences for children (or schools, teachers or parents) if they decide not to participate in the project or if they wish to withdraw at any point during the conduct of the study.

A few children will be chosen from classes and it will be made clear that the selection is random and that there are neither benefits to being selected nor costs to those not selected.

Children will also be periodically reminded that there will be no negative consequences if they decide not to participate or if they decide to withdraw at any point, or if they prefer not to answer specific questions.

1.5 What provision has been made to respond to queries and problems raised by participants during the course of the study?

All researchers from national countries are experienced in this field and are sensitised the kinds of queries and problems likely to be raised by participants – including school directors, teachers or parents. The researchers have met once (to design the study) and will meet further to discuss the conduct of the study in detail.

If any child participant raises a problematic or sensitive issue, researchers will be ready to speak with her/him individually and confidentially at the end of the focus group or interview. They will also be ready to provide him or her with contacts for relevant

persons, such as school counsellors, school psychologists, clinical psychologists – the appropriate choice of contact may vary for different countries and researchers from national teams have sufficient experience to choose appropriately.

In addition, each child (and the school) will be provided with a leaflet with national points of contact and help regarding internet-related risk and safety matters.

If a child reveals his or her involvement in any illegal or harmful activity (for example, the distribution of extreme or child pornography) then the researchers will inform the Head/Director of the school. Researchers will also inform the child that they are taking this step.

2. Research methodology.

2.1. How does the research methodology justify the use deception?

Not applicable

2.2. If the proposed research involves the deception of persons in vulnerable groups, can the information sought be obtained by other means?

Not applicable

2.3. How will data be collected during the project? Please provide details of data analysis.

Focus groups and interviews will be recorded and transcribed by researchers in every participating country. Any potential contact details or names mentioned by participants during the research will be anonymised after transcription. Country data will be coded by researchers from the same country in their national language using a commonly developed coding frame. Researchers will work with the English translation of codes and examples, but will code in the national language. Each team will be responsible for anonymising the national dataset.

2.4. How have ethical concerns arising from data collection been addressed?

Ethical issues relevant to this project have been addressed elsewhere on this form. All participating countries will follow their own national ethical guidelines, plus the guidelines which are described in this form. The researchers will obtain consent from directors of schools, teachers and children, in some countries from parents or indeed, other local authorities if required. Data will be anonymised after data collection, with researchers from different countries having access only to their local transcriptions of interviews and focus groups. There will be debriefing for children and teachers after all focus groups and interviews.

3. Research design.

3.1 What concerns have been taken into account with regard to the design of the research project? If agencies, communities or individuals are directly affected by the research (e.g. participants, service users, vulnerable communities or relations), what means have you devised to ensure that any harm or distress is minimized and/or that the research is sensitive to the particular needs and perspectives of those so affected?

Schools will be selected individually in every country, in order to include diverse regions and socio-economic contexts. As noted above, formal requests will be made to school heads to access the selected sample of schools and classes. Furthermore, consent of class teachers will be requested, while parental approval will be sought where required. Children will be chosen from different classes for the focus groups. Children's consent to participate will be explicitly asked, and children will be made aware of their rights in relation to withdrawing from the research at any given moment without negative consequences and of their rights in relation to confidentiality. This will be reiterated throughout the research process whenever needed. Confidentiality/anonymity will be guaranteed provided there is no disclosure of risk of harm or identification of an illegal or harmful activity that threatens the child's welfare. Children will also be provided with information about the project and the contact details of the lead researcher should any queries arise.

Teachers will be asked to remain available but not in close vicinity to the children in order to avoid inhibiting the child participants or leading the children to give socially desirable answers. The researcher will take note of teachers' involvement (e.g. if they say anything that could have a bearing on children's responses) and the nature of their presence (e.g. in the same room, in a neighbouring room) throughout interviews/ focus-groups.

Collecting data from children implies that extreme care should be taken to ensure that no distress/ harm will occur to them as a consequence of participation in the research project. The flow of questions will aim to ensure that the researcher does not introduce to a child for the first time any ideas or material that may be ethically problematic.

Regarding the treatment of data, the researchers will ensure that no information disclosed by the child during the individual interview is subsequently revealed to the teacher or to other children and that no casual personal remarks made in one interview are repeated in another. In the case of focus groups, the researcher will strive to ensure a harmonious conversational climate and facilitate free and open communication, especially with the less outgoing and talkative children. When appropriate, the researcher will politely ask children to refrain from remarks that might be offensive/ upsetting for the others. In extreme cases of inappropriate conduct of some children, the researcher will enlist the help of teachers/ other school personnel.

Where there is a disclosure of a child being at a risk of serious harm that 'no reasonable person could ignore,' or where the child reveals to the researcher their participation in an illegal activity (e.g. distribution of sexual images of minors), steps will be undertaken, as appropriate, by the researchers, in consultation with each other, and the school's Head/ Director of the school or other persons specifically in charge of safeguarding children. In

such cases, the researcher will also tell the child that they are concerned and talk to them about the action that they will be taking.

After each interview, the researcher will thank the respondent and provide debriefing to them. Contacts for possible school psychologists, help lines or school counsellors who may help to solve potential problems will be provided as appropriate.

3.2. How has the methodology addressed how sensitive information, data or sources will be handled?

All participants will be advised during the introductory stages that data will be held securely and kept confidential, and that the final data will stored, analysed and reported in a completely anonymised format.

Researchers will not collect any information identifying children (e.g. home address) because the data will only be collected in schools. After the completion of the fieldwork, all other personal identifiers will be removed. The details of each interview case/ focus group will be fully anonymised so that anyone analysing that data will not be able to trace the participants.

3.3. Have you been able to devise a timetable of research?

The project timetable is set out below:

November - December 2012: each country participating in the research will conduct the pilot study consisting of 1 focus group, and 2 interviews in every country.

November 2012 – January 2013: coding of the pilot study and producing a first draft of the code book.

January 2013: Network meeting to include thorough discussion and revision of the research design and code book.

February - June 2013: fieldwork in all participating countries – at minimum 6 focus groups and 12 interviews per country, transcription, analysis of data.

July 2013 –April 2013: work on analysis, academic articles and a report to the EC Safer Internet Programme for EU Kids Online III.

4. Ethical questions arising from financial support/the provision of incentives

4.1 Are there any real or perceived conflicts of interest which could compromise the integrity and/or independence of the research due to the nature of the funding body?

No, none

4.2 Have any incentives to the investigator been declared?

No, none

4.3 Are there any restrictions on the freedom of the investigator(s) to publish the results of the research?

No, none

4.4 Are any incentives being offered to participants?

No, none

5. Research Subjects

5.1 Who do you identify as the participants in the project? Are other people who are not participants likely to be directly impacted by the project?

The primary participants are children taking part in 6 focus groups (6 single-gender groups of 5 children each, aged 9-10, 11-13, 14-16,) and 12 interviews in each of the 15 countries. In summary, 15 x 42 children aged 9 to 16 years will participate.

The interviews will be conducted separately from the whole class, ensuring on each occasion that the child or children know(s) that an audio recorder is being turned on in order to record an interview. Children will be reminded that they need not answer particular questions or may leave the project at any point but in addition but it is important for researchers to be sensitive to signs if 'unwilling' children make it fairly clear that they wish to be elsewhere. However, the researchers conducting the interviews and focus-groups have experience of working with children, they know to maintain a friendly and encouraging setting and to stress the general and specific benefits of participation.

Although they are not primary participants, Heads/Directors of schools and teachers will be provided with extensive information in order to obtain their support. Throughout the interviews/ focus-groups, some teachers might be in the vicinity. However, they will not be invited to participate or influence in any way. In extreme situations (e.g. incidents of verbal or physical violence among children), they might be requested to intervene.

Given the public nature of the school setting, other people in the school might inquire about the nature of the activities (since the relation between researcher and research subject may be visible). In that case, the researcher will briefly explain the research

process to them, answer any questions and, if appropriate, provide them with project information and contact information for any later queries.

No other impact is envisaged for persons who are not participants.

5.2 What arrangements have been made to preserve confidentiality for the participants or those potentially affected?

This has been addressed in detail in sections 3.1 and 3.2 above.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed for participants in the focus groups and interviews, except in cases where a young person makes a disclosure of risk or harm (see above and below). Participants' names will not be retained once fieldwork is complete so it will not be possible to link responses to individual children.

It may be that the research process will uncover a child in some way at risk. As noted above, our agreement with the school is that such cases will be reported to the Head/Director of the school or other school authority charged with safeguarding children who will then consider whether follow up action is appropriate, in the light of her or her deeper knowledge of each child's circumstances.

5.3. What are the specific risks to research participants or third parties?

It is not anticipated that the research process itself will occasion any risk to the children, school or families.

5.4. If the research involves pain, stress, physical or emotional risk, please detail the steps taken to minimize such effects? Explain why this is reasonable within the context of the project?

Not applicable.

6. Risk to researchers.

6.1 Are there any risks to the researcher(s)? Please provide details if risk identified.

No, none – research will be carried out in schools.

7. Confidentiality

7.1 Explain the mechanisms in place to ensure confidentiality, privacy and data protection.

As stated above, several actions will be taken to ensure confidentiality, namely:

- All data will be kept private, both from other participants and when reporting findings, the only exception to confidentiality being if a child is at risk or participating in an illegal activity.
- The project will adhere to the requirements of data protection rules in terms of data labelling, storage and security relevant for each country.
- Notes from the research session and accompanying data will be stored indefinitely in locked filing cabinets and on password protected computers.
- Data will be shared throughout the EU Kids Online WP4 research team; however, steps will be taken to ensure protection of confidential data at all times.
- Only data without identifiers will be shared with other researchers in the larger EU Kids Online network.

8. Dissemination

8.1 Will the results of the study be offered to those participants or other affected parties who wish to receive them? If so, what steps have been taken to minimize any discomfort or misrepresentation that may result at the dissemination level.

The project is designed to inform multiple stakeholders, including the academic community, but also children and parents as well as educators, awareness raisers, child welfare workers, governments and industry.

In addition to the usual academic publications, all participants in the study will be offered access to the findings and resulting recommendations, via the school, in a form appropriate to their interests and status (child, parent, teacher, others). Most likely this will be in the form of a short and accessible report providing an overview of findings and noting conclusions and any recommendations. The introductory forms will provide details of the URL where this will be posted and a date by which it will be made available.

No discomfort or misrepresentation is anticipated as a consequence of the dissemination process. However, the researchers will take care to present the material in a manner that treats the reported experiences with respect.