

Parental controls and Internet filtering: Some useful facts

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Findings from the EU Kids Online Project

- "The UK is near the top of ranking of countries in terms of parents actively mediating their children's safety." ("National Perspectives"¹ report, page 70)
- "54% of parents say that they block or filter websites at home or and 46% track the websites visited by their children. These findings are far higher than in Europe generally, with the UK topping the country ranking for use of filters." ("National Perspectives"² report, page 70)
- "Technical mediation shows no effect on reducing risks online....Technical mediation has no significant impact between 9 and 14, and is associated with more harm for 15-16 year olds." (From the 'How can parents support children's internet safety?'³ report (2012), page 3)
- "The evidence also shows, disappointing to some, that using filtering tools is not associated with a reduction in children's exposure to online risk." (From Professor Sonia Livingston's article "Should children's internet use be filtered? Multi-stakeholder prudishness impedes open deliberation"⁴)
- 'The problem is real, but it is not overwhelming'. (From Professor Sonia Livingston's article "Should children's internet use be filtered? Multi-stakeholder prudishness impedes open deliberation"⁵)
- "Estimates for exposure to pornography online are lower than many anticipated – a quarter saw sexual images in the past year online or offline, and one in seven saw them online, rising to a quarter of older teens. Even assuming some under-reporting, it seems that media hype over pornography is based on unrepresentative samples or just supposition." (EU Kids Online final report⁶ page 42)

Findings from "Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report"⁷ (Ofcom, October 2012)

- "46% of parents whose child goes online at home have any of the four specific types of online controls asked about installed on their PC, laptop or netbook at home."
- Of those who do not have parental controls installed, Ofcom found one in ten (10%) parents say they do not have parental controls installed on the PC / laptop / netbook either because they don't know how to do this, or are not aware that it is possible. This is comparable across each of the three age groups of children." (page 181)

1 <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/PerspectivesReport.pdf>

2 <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/PerspectivesReport.pdf>

3 <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/ParentalMediation.pdf>

4 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2012/10/25/should-childrens-internet-use-be-filtered-multi-stakeholder-prudishness-impedes-open-deliberation/>

5 <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/2012/10/25/should-childrens-internet-use-be-filtered-multi-stakeholder-prudishness-impedes-open-deliberation/>

6 [http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20\(2009-11\)/EUKidsOnlineIIReports/Final%20report.pdf](http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20II%20(2009-11)/EUKidsOnlineIIReports/Final%20report.pdf)

7 <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/oct2012/main.pdf>

- Of those who do not have parental controls installed, 2% of the parents of children aged between 5 and 7 said they did not know how to install parental filters, with 6% of the same age group saying they did not know this was possible. The figures stand at 7% and 5% respectively for parents of children aged 8-11, and at 5% and 5% for parents of children aged between 12 and 15. (page 183)
- There are no differences in reasons for not having internet controls in place by household socio-economic group. (Page 181)

Public opinion from recent polling data.

In two YouGov polls on this issue, a majority supported the idea that people should be offered a choice to use filtering tools, rather than seeing them turned on by default.

- **YouGov, April 2012⁸**: 57% said they thought someone's internet service should only be filtered if they ask for it. 36% thought the filters should be turned on by default.
- **YouGov, May 2012⁹**: 52% of responders said they thought someone's internet service should only be filtered if they ask for it. 35% thought the filters should be turned on by default.

Open Rights Group / LSE Media Policy Project Mobile Internet filtering report (May 2012)

- Mobile networks all offer a filtering services on their Internet connections. This is normally turned on by default. In late December 2011 Open Rights Group launched the website Blocked.org.uk, through which people could report when sites and services are incorrectly blocked on their mobile network. Working with a small group of volunteers, we collected over 60 reports of incorrectly blocked sites on mobile networks between 1st January and 31st March 2012. This is the number of blocked sites our volunteers encountered during normal browsing over that period, rather than the total number of blocked sites.
- In a joint publication with LSE Media Policy Project, we reported that we found local community websites, bars and restaurants, political campaigners, and personal blogs blocked by mobile networks¹⁰. Since the report, we have found websites for the political party the BNP, tech news site GigaOM, lifestyle magazines and discussion forums with no adult content blocked on mobile networks¹¹. It can be time consuming to get a site unblocked.
- Blocking services often catch the 'wrong' content. Further, blocking often extends well beyond adult sexual content, into categories such as 'alcohol', 'forums' or 'esoteric practices'¹². Further, what is 'appropriate' is not at all easily defined, with subjective judgements required about what is appropriate for different families or individuals.

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8 http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/bkmm9p70rl/YG-Archives-Pol-SundayTimes-results-27-290412.pdf

9 http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/eiy9720btf/YG-Archives-Pol-ST-results-11-130512.pdf

10 See <http://www.openrightsgroup.org/ourwork/reports/mobile-internet-censorship:-whats-happening-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>

11 <http://www.openrightsgroup.org/blog/2012/new-reports-of-overblocking-on-mobile-networks>

12 <http://help.orange.co.uk/orangeuk/support/personal/480591>