

Press Release

Professionals Online Safety Helpline release analysis of 2020-2021 data exploring the problems professionals faced in tackling online issues affecting young people

National service gives unique insight into professionals' experiences regarding online safeguarding concerns in the UK.

- 43% of cases involved problems relating to content posted on social media platforms
- Significant trend of fake online accounts made impersonating teachers and schools often containing abusive comments directed at staff, potentially affecting the reputation of schools and their staff
- The majority of concerns from school settings during lockdown related to the use of online platforms for delivery of lessons and professional/safeguarding risk when using these.
- Media concerns around the perceived prevalence of grooming during lockdown do not correlate with the case data from the helpline; little difference has been seen in cases relating to grooming pre and during the pandemic.

Today, the [Professionals Online Safety Helpline \(POSH\)](#), a free service for professionals and volunteers working with children and young people, launches its 2021 state-of-the-nation analysis exploring the problems professionals face when tackling online issues affecting young people.

POSH provides signposting, advice and mediation to resolve online safety issues staff face about themselves, such as protecting professional identity and online harassment, or problems affecting young people, for example cyber-bullying or sexting issues. The helpline has been in operation for 10 years; during this time the helpline has handled over 10,000 contacts and helped with over 7000 online safeguarding issues. As part of the UK Safer Internet centre, the helpline is operated by SWGfL.

A social dilemma

A large portion of cases (43%) involved content published on commonly used social media platforms with a significant number of these relating to fake accounts created to impersonate and embarrass. Whilst the majority of these were regarded as 'low level' complaints, some contained abusive comments targeting staff affecting theirs, and their schools' reputation.

On a more positive note, of the cases logged with POSH, over **90% of the content escalated to social media platforms was successfully removed**, indicating the right tools do exist to report and resolve the issues professionals face.

Wider findings from the analysis include:

You're still on mute!

The majority of concerns from school settings during lockdown related to the use of online platforms for delivery of lessons and professional/safeguarding risk when using these. Enquiries ranged from technical difficulties and operating online platforms to privacy concerns. The storing of personal data and the uncertainty of which platform to use were recurrent themes that resulted in the creation and continued addition to SWGfL's collection of Safe Remote Learning advice and resources.

Lockdown life

With the COVID-19 pandemic causing a move to schools closing and online delivery twice during the reporting period (March to June 2020, and then in early 2021). There were concerns from a lot of agencies that the move to lockdowns and online delivery might result in young people being at more risk of online abuse. Professionals contacting the helpline, in general, have not reflected these concerns and there is little data to support this premise, with the analysis of the cases responded to by the helpline showing little evidence of increased risk of serious harm.

Instead, significant differences between media literacy education (increased during lockdown), online reputation (decreased during lockdown) and an increase in cyber bullying concerns were seen. However, concerns around grooming are not borne out with the case data from the helpline, with little difference detected between data collected before the pandemic and data collected during in this and other criminal categories such as hate speech, eCrime and sexting.

To access the full Report [Click Here](#)

POSH is provided by [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) and operated by [SWGfL](#).

It currently works in collaboration with some of the best known online platforms, including: Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Roblox, TikTok, Discord, Twitch, Microsoft and Google.

Professionals supporting young people with online safety issues can contact [POSH](#) via phone or email Monday – Friday 10am – 4pm

Phone: 0344 381 4772

Email: helpline@saferinternet.org.uk

-Ends-

Notes to Editor

About SWGfL

SWGfL (www.swgfl.org.uk) is a charitable trust working with schools and other organisations to provide safe and secure online access and resources. SWGfL has developed an international reputation within online safety. It is a founding member of UKCIS (UK Council for Internet Safety) and has spoken at conferences across Europe, America and Africa.

SWGfL, alongside partners Childnet and Internet Watch Foundation, lead the UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC) as part of the European Commission's Connecting Europe Facility. UKSIC is the national awareness Centre: responsible for raising the nation's attention to online safety issues as well as managing online criminal content and supporting professionals via its unique helpline. The UK Safer Internet Centre stands to lose 50% of its funding and will no longer be in receipt of any funding from Government sources after 1 January 2022 after its EU grant funding ends. Without some form of Government funding, a number of key online safety initiatives are at risk, including the work of Report Harmful Content.