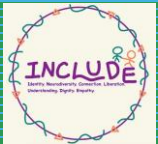


Cross-syndrome comparisons of the online experiences of neurodivergent children and young people

Grace McCabe, Deborah Riby, Amy Pearson



! Mentions of online harm,
sexual risk exposure!

Why are we interested?

- Neurodivergent children and young people are **interested** in using the internet
- Neurodivergent children and young people experience **more offline social risks** (e.g., bullying, exclusion) than other young people
- Internet use can be **beneficial** to young people, especially those who struggle offline

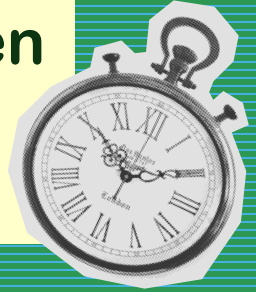
We don't know:

- Which online **risks** are faced by neurodivergent young people
- How different neurodivergent groups might **experience** the internet differently
- How we can make sure neurodivergent young people have the right **support**



What did we ask?

1. How do neurodivergent children and young people spend time online?



2. What risks/negative experiences did neurodivergent young people have when using the internet?



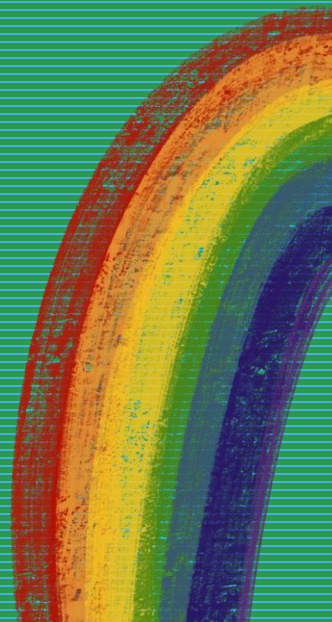
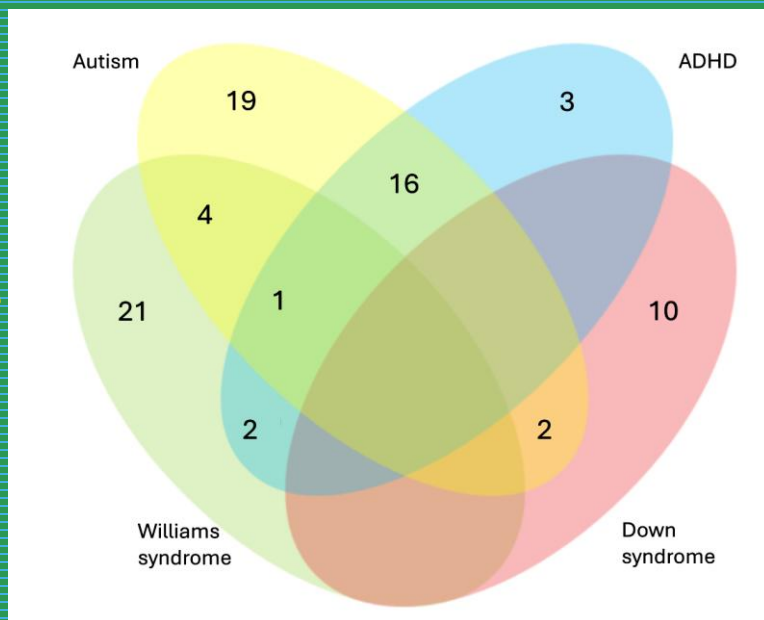
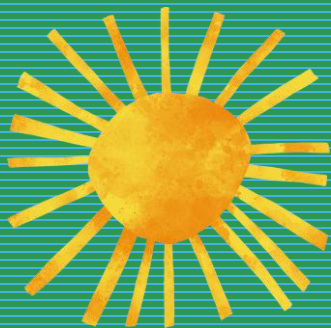
3. How did parents try to help their young people stay safe online?

What did we do?

- Recruited **parents** of neurodivergent young people aged **9-25 years**
- Online parent survey asking about
 - **Young people's:**
 - Social experiences
 - Use of the internet
 - Online experiences
 - **Parents':**
 - Opinions and concerns
 - Support/rules for young people



What did we find?: Our participants



- We received **78** responses from parents of neurodivergent young people
- Many young people had multiple diagnoses: neurodivergent young people are a diverse group!

What did we find?:

Types of users

- Young people fell into 2 groups: active and limited users

Active:

Older
Spent more time online
More freedom online
More likely to be treated hurtfully offline
Parents support internet use

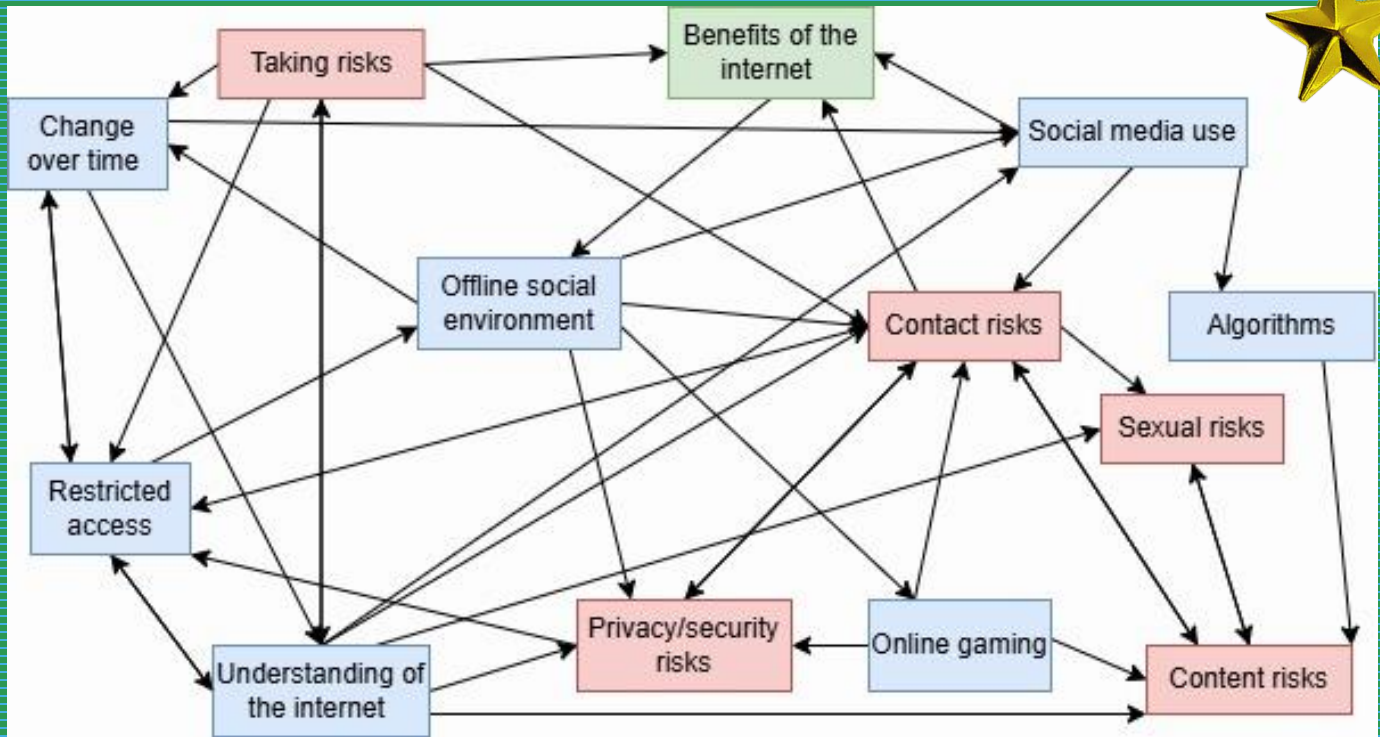


Limited:

Younger
Spent less time online
More restricted
Parents know more about use
Parents feel the internet is inappropriate



What did we find?: Online experience is complex



Links between activity, experience, and external factors
The issue is complicated; solutions should consider this

What did we find?:

Risky activities

- Some **platforms** were linked to more negative experiences
- **Active users** were more likely to use the internet socially, and were more likely to be exposed to **sexual risks and harmful content online**
- Limited users were sometimes more restricted due to **past experiences**

“she used to play on roblox now deleted her account because people in the chats were so nasty and cruel”



“Our child would be vulnerable to a lot of [risks] which is why her access is limited.”

What did we find?:

Complex risks

- Risk exposure is related to many different online and offline factors
- Sometimes exposure to one type of risk **leads to** other risk experiences

“[Young person’s name] spent hundreds of pounds after being asked to gift on TikTok”



“I know he did share photos of himself after fake nudes were sent to him, then they tried to blackmail him by threatening to send his pics to his contacts”

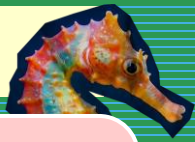


What did we find?: Offline factors

- Can lead to **negative** online experiences

“A friend from mainstream school sent a sexualised verbal message”

- Can lead to **positive** online experiences



“[social media use] increased massively ...since moving to special school where she was able to make friends for the first time. Due to distance this is how they keep in contact outside of school.”

- Can **influence** internet use and parent concerns



“Shopping on cheap online apps like Temu... others at college shop a lot and she wants to be like them”

“I think I would have more concerns if he was in mainstream high school due to potential online bullying etc”



What did we find?: Lack of support

- Many parents **supported** internet use, but **worried** about risks

“The internet has the opportunity to bring ...really good benefits... but we are anxious about what he may end up seeing ‘by accident’”

- It was especially difficult for parents to support **older** children/young people

“He is almost an adult so it’s trying to find the right balance of control and advice without patronizing”



“My child’s mental age is nowhere close to physical age and all controls are age related. This makes it very difficult to control and at some point we will lose the close supervision”

What did we find?:

Lack of support

- Some parents **disagreed** with government ideas about online safety

“Social media bans shouldn’t be necessary to protect young people, but social media companies can’t be trusted with young people’s data or mental health. Voluntary codes of practice are utterly insufficient and government needs to legislate to force social media companies to put young people’s wellbeing before their profits.”



What do you
think?



Did we miss anything?

What else should we
focus on?

