Social Care Ireland Conference

Reflections on the impact of internet use on relationships in social care practice

Rose Doolan Maher

Background
Virtual harm: disability associated child protection risks and the internet

PHD : Rose Doolan Maher

Research Study: Dr. Susan Flynn

Does Internet use pose child protection and welfare risk for children with disabilities?

- **Scoping review, Thematic analysis and documentary analysis.**
- **20 semi-structured qualitative interviews with children and young people with disabilities**
- **Secondary Schools - 480 surveys**

What is the nature of risk in internet usage for disabled individuals who are deemed to pose a risk to children?

Research Design

Qualitative Research

Scoping review, Documentary Analysis ,

Semi structured Interviews

Quantitative Research

Survey

Mixed Methods Approach

Rationale

Disability

- **Disabled children experience significantly elevated levels of abuse and neglect above non-disabled peers**
- **A study in the USA places this risk at 3.4 times more likely than their non disabled peers .**

Child protection and welfare

- **Children with disabilities are at a pronounced risk of problematic internet use**
- **International evidence demonstrates that parents with intellectual disability and their children face disproportionate child protection involvement**

Internet Use

- **Rapid increase prior to Covid 19**
- **Exponential growth in internet use by children since the Covid 19 pandemic.**
- **Internet Use is recognised as a key platform that mediates child abuse**

- THE GAP

Other influencing factors

Service delivery-sea change voice of young person with disabilities vital to research project

A gap in expertise – professionals , parents and educators lagging behind

Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022- (signed into law Dec 2022) Ireland in a unique position to regulate online platforms

Rapid changes in internet use with a consistent influx of new digital media options available to children

The voice of young people with disabilities is absent from literature.

Virtual Harm; Disability, Child protection and the Internet

Disability- Broad concept

- The Disability Act 2005, 2. -(1),
- UN Convention of Rights of People with Disabilities
- Mental health conditions and Hidden Disabilities
- Self identification
- Non tragedy, human rights, social model

Child Protection & Welfare

Uncertainty V risk. Risk competence V risk adversity.

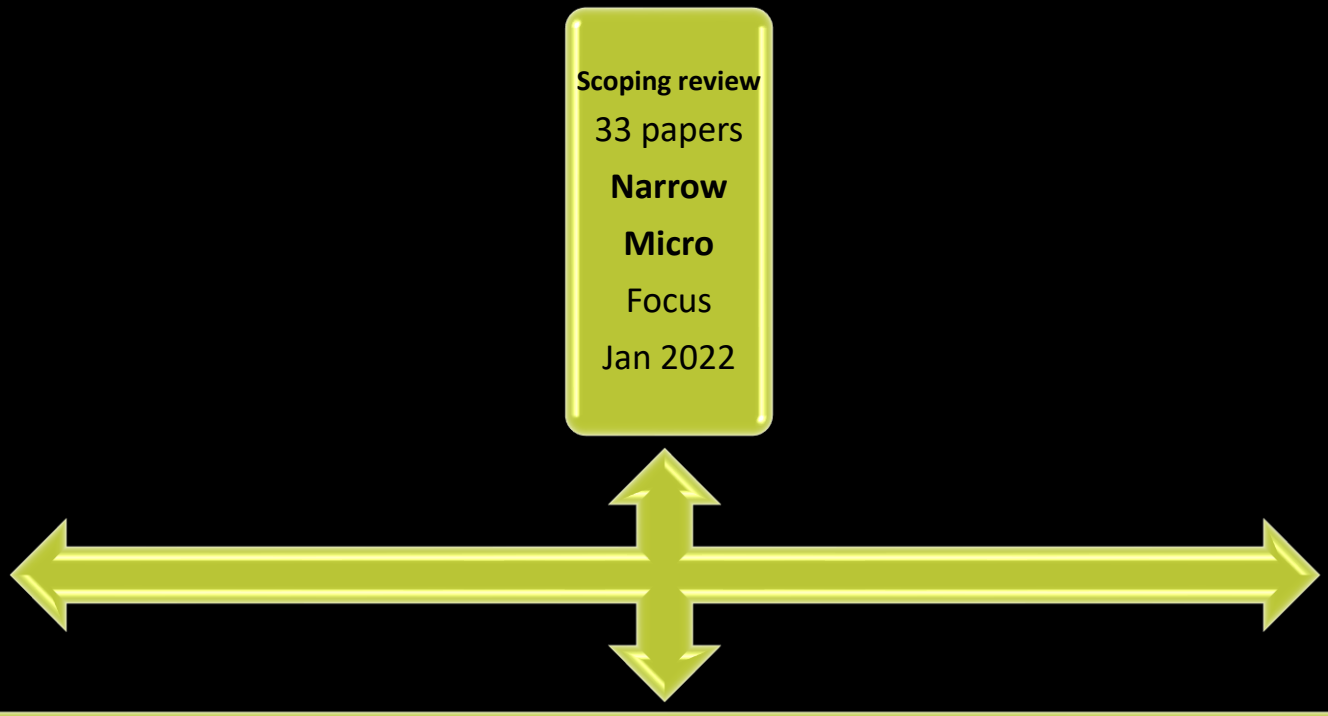
Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth 2019-government policy and agencies work to prevent and respond to neglect and abuse of children deeming the welfare of the child as paramount

- UNICEF - "Every child must be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse on the internet"

Internet

- Access to all digital media including instrumental, socialisation and entertainment applications. Media are digital when they use computerised networks to communicate data as opposed to face-to-face communication without computerised mediation (Chayko, 2020). Digital media cover applications which address the instrumental, socialisation, and entertainment aspects of life (Stavropoulos et al., 2021).
- Children with disabilities direct exposure and indirect exposure to internet risk

Documentary Analysis



Literature review

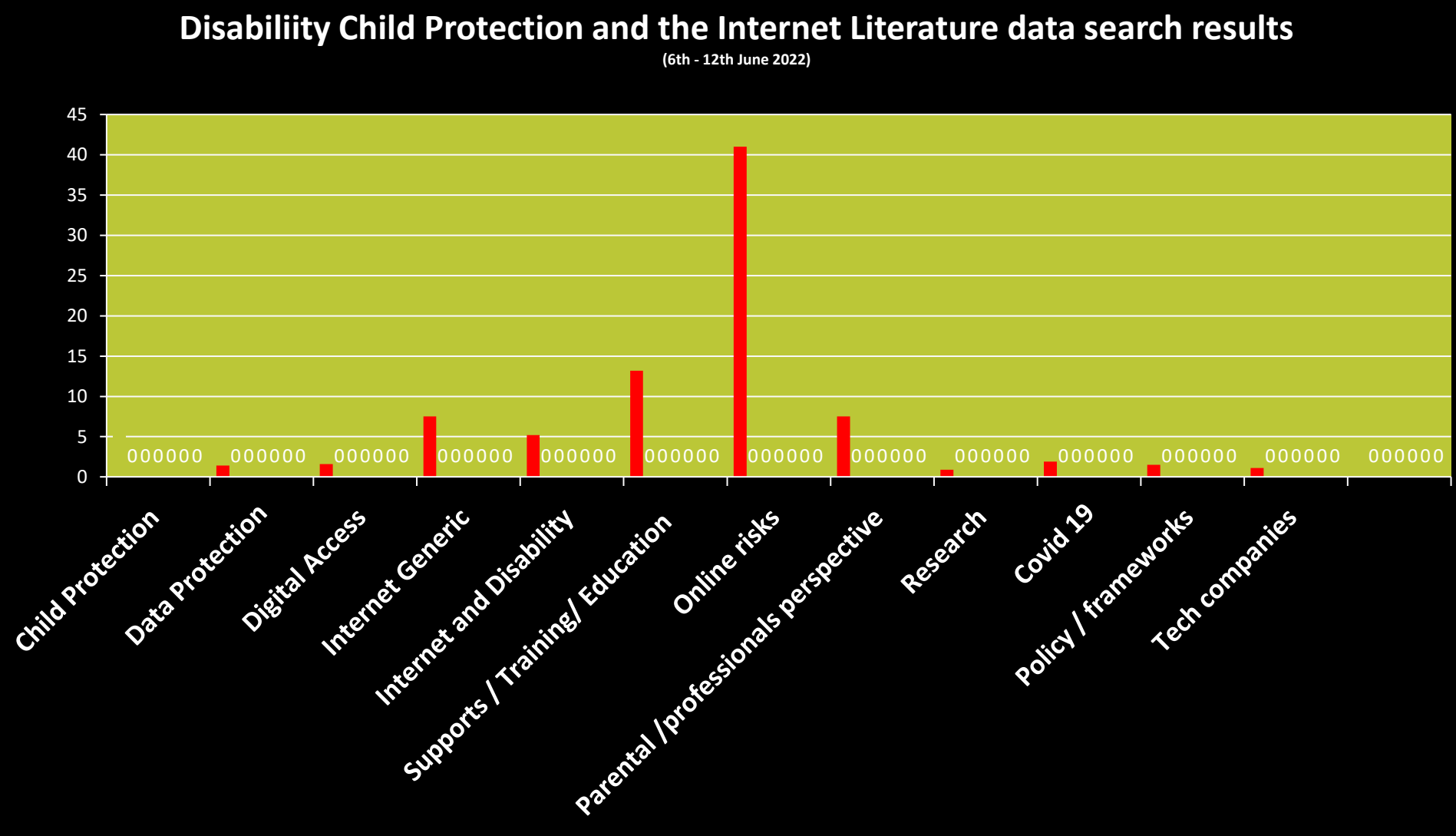
Broad Focus

Macro

242 papers

June 2022

Critical Literature Review



Digital Access

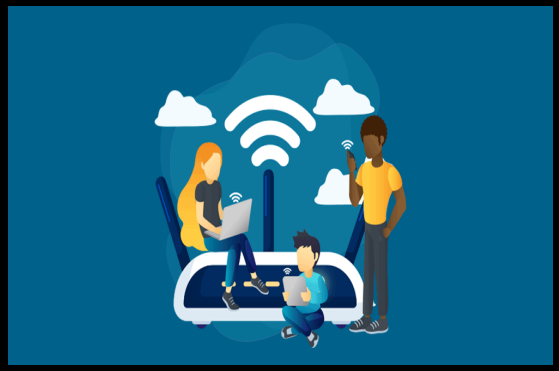
- **The European Union's Digital Strategy is working to promote a positive human centred digital agenda for all European citizens. This research is in keeping with this human rights model aiming to capture rich data from the perspective of children with disabilities.**

INTERNET

- ‘My son who is 9 spends almost all of his time online gaming or creating, or lately doing a bit of coding. All self-taught and self-managed. He is home educated and apart from reading, this is his education. He has autism and we want him to learn via his passions and interests. The Internet is his life and offers him fun, friendship, education, challenge and importantly, communication. I regularly thank my lucky stars that he was born in this era. Sometimes it seems the web or certain aspects of it and its constantly evolving games were made for a neurodiverse world. I worry, as he gets older, about what he’ll find as his searches widen but there is software I can install that will keep his imagination able to run free but protect him from the darker sides. The education needs to be for parents in how to allow freedom with appropriate protection. (mencap)

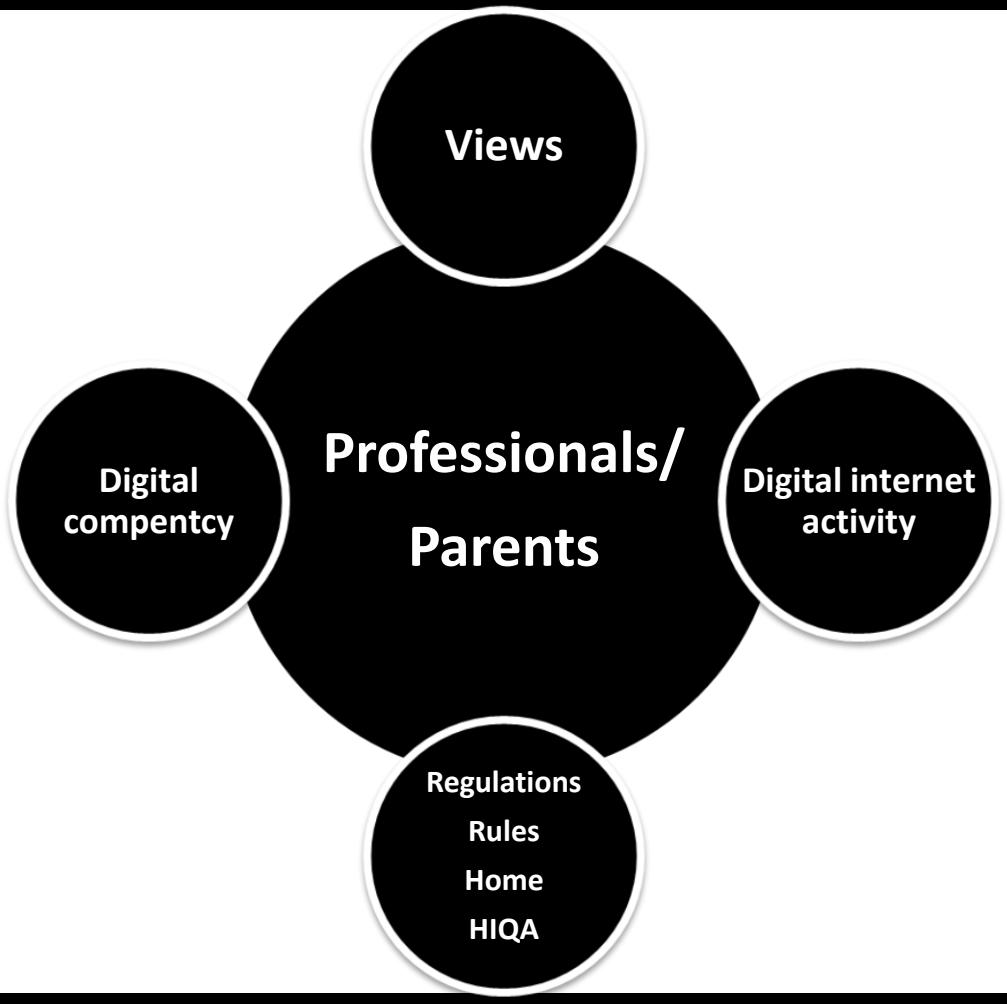
Problem Online behaviours

- Spamming
- Stalking
- Sexting
- Fake accounts
- Fake information
- Cyber bullying
- Grooming
- Radicalisation
- Internet Addiction

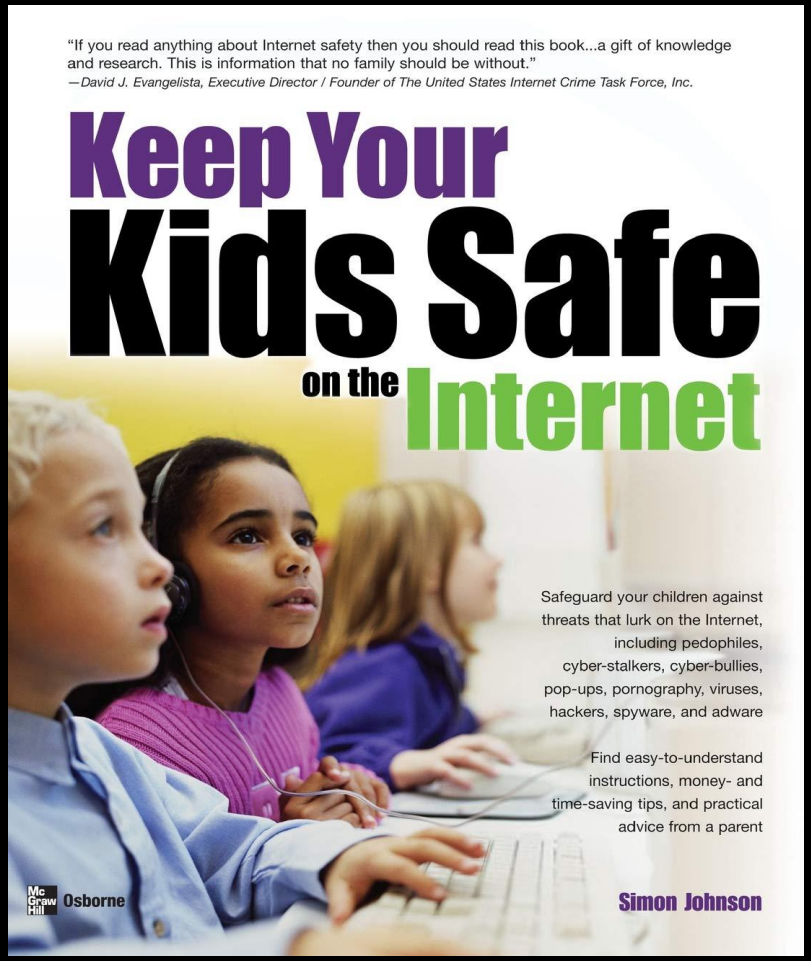


- ***Social Care Practice and Relationships- Critical Reflections on Relationship-based Practice***

Our relationship with the internet and the digital world impacts relationships with young people.



Parents and Professionals

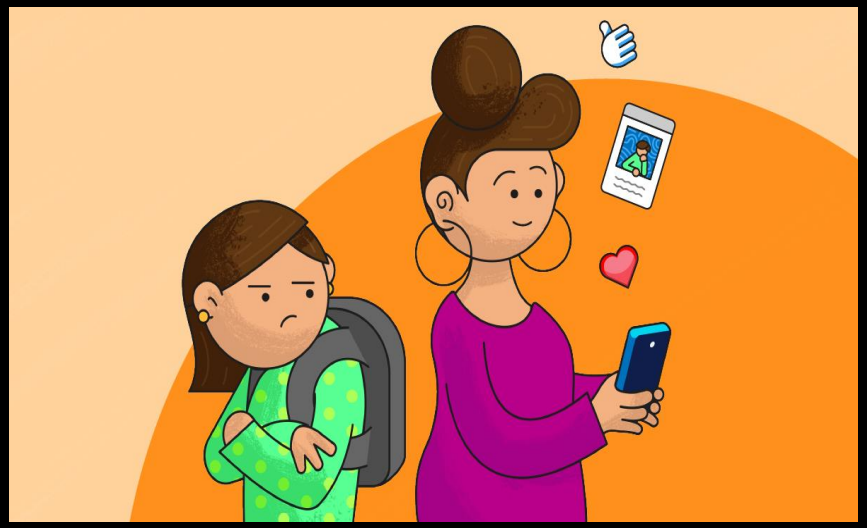


Risky online content

XXX

Barnardos training

Sharing online



REAL Child Protection Concerns

- Cybersafe kids survey reveal one in four n= 25000 children aged between 8 and 12 years old have been scared and upset after viewing content that is disturbing online. Many of these children it is reported **do not tell anyone** about this upsetting experience(Donnelly 2022)

ALARMING

- The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received reports of over sixty – nine million child sexual abuse material (CSAM) much of which came from platforms such as Google and Facebook.
- Tech companies are not obliged to address child sexual abuse material on their platforms as there is no legal obligation on them to do so, currently all they are required to do is report child sexual abuse material to the NCMEC if they become aware of it. (Krishna 2021).

DATA PRIVACY

- Children have become objects of digital surveillance, children are engaging in sharing information themselves alongside parents, teachers, care givers, family members, friends health care professionals who are also sharing children's' information on their behalf. (Lupton & Williamson, 2017)

- The cruelty of online platforms is exemplified in the case of two sisters in the US who were victims of abuse by their father when they were young.) The preserved images on the web constantly add to the torment of the survivors.
- A lack of action on the part of tech companies has allowed for an enormous amounts of videos and images to remain on the net.(Gurriell, 2021)

Parents online Behaviour

Supervision

- Lack of understanding of online safety
- Limited adult supervision - creation of boundaries leads to increase risk and danger online for children (Dyer 2018)

Screen time Internet use

- There exists a correlation between high levels of smart phone use by mothers and behavioural problems in children
- advocate for strategies to be introduced to reduce mothers Smartphone dependency
- (Kim et al 2022; Aiken ,2016)

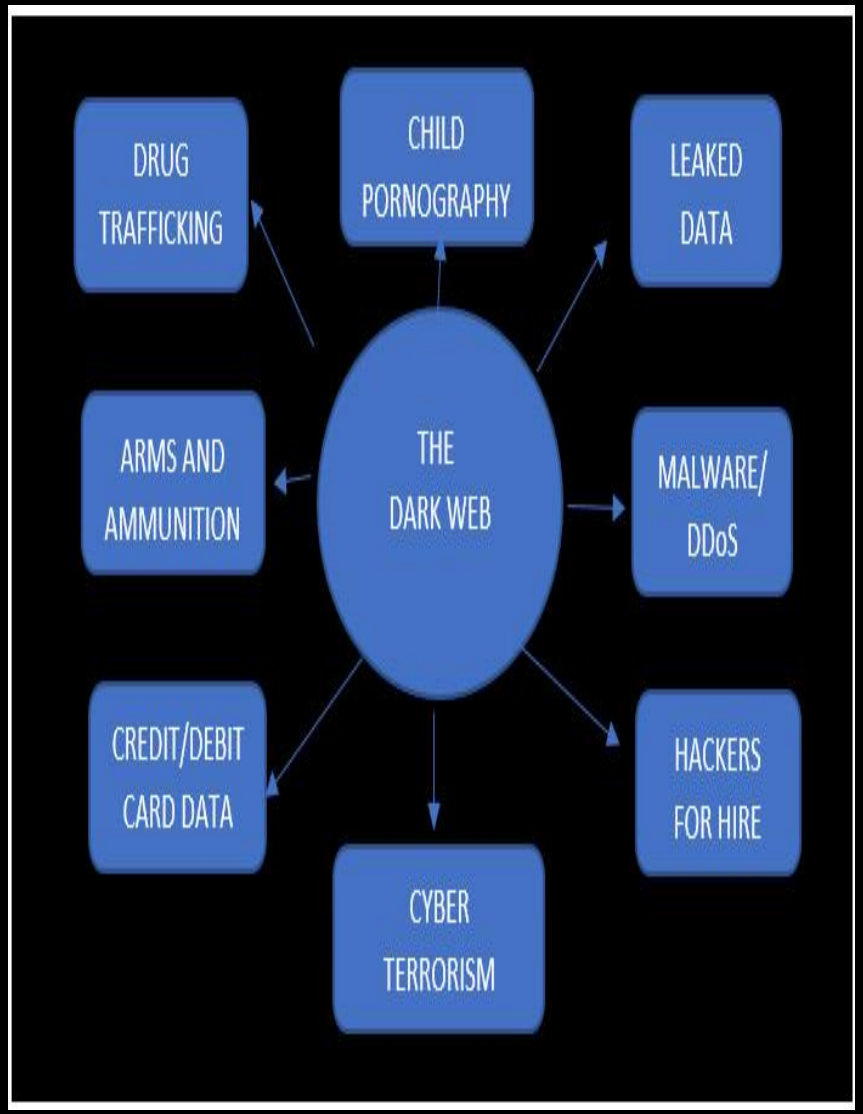
Sharenting

- *Often online dangers are caused by the behaviour of the parents by stripping their children of privacy by oversharing personal information about their kids*' (Alkhallouf ,2021;Iskül & Joamets ,2021: 104)
- Parents can fuel child sexual exploitation growth in the way they use technology whereby '*legitimate photos that were uploaded by parents are downloaded, sexualized and re-circulated as part of online pornography'* (Demetis & Kietzmann, (2021: 21).

Challenges

Law enforcement

- The complexity of the dark web and TOR, advances in technology, legal protection associated with encryption, the increase of availability of communication technologies such as Signal and Telegram, combined, present huge challenges for law enforcement specific to dealing with child exploitation material.



Parents relationship with Internet

- “ Burdening parents (/professionals) with all the responsibility of cyber- regulations is asking them to raise their families in a lawless environment, a cyber frontier where they must become their own sheriff or marshal..... Parents alone cannot police our youth in cyberspace” (Aiken 2016: 161)

(Professionals not part of this quote)

Rapid advancement of the digital world!

- **The metaverse future**

- **A DIGITAL SECOND LIFE!**

- https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/18/technology/personaltech/metaverse-gaming-definition.html

Constant questions???
Is it Ok?

- Go through a young persons phone?
- Check out a young person Facebook, instargram , page?
- Friend a young person on snapchat , face book?

Real Tension

- Compliance----------V---------- Risk Competence
- HIQA-Standards Opportunity
- Regulations
- Protection Capacity and Consent
  Risk Adversity Rights based approach

Culture counts!

- Munro advocates for a ‘positive error culture in child protection’ (2019, 123), including the creation of a learning culture whereby mistakes are treated in a constructive manner by organisations so that the blame culture is reduced.
- The reality is that if there is no positive error culture – risk competence is very hard to achieve

“EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.”

Young people are our educators

Positive, practical, protective internet safety tools

Software

- Thorn- report and eradicate child sexual abuse material
- PhotoDNA & eGlyph- addressing child exploitation and extremism
- R;pple-suicide prevention (Alice Heady)
- **DRAGON** Spotter & Sheild- **D**eveloping **R**esisitance **A**gainst **G**rooming **O**nline(Pilot)
- Aiken Algorithm -addressing cyberbullying (design stage)
- Cilter : super nanny smart phone Filter – online child protection

Information and Training

- St. Christophers -**Creating a Brighter Future** -inforamtion and training for foster parents(Fabrizio Proietti)
- DSR **Digital Resilience Scale-** learning digital resilience through online gaming- (Hammond, Polizzi & Bartholmew(2022)
- Radicalisation, trolling, hate speech **, hope not hate** orgainisation -Owen Jones

Websites

- **https://www.barnardos.ie**
- **https://www.cybersafekids.ie**
- **https://www.webwise.ie**
- **https://www.internetsociety.org/**
- **https://www.internetlifeguard.org**
- **https://www.r;pplesuicideprevention.com**
- **https://wwwhopenohate.org.uk/**
- https://www.cilter.ie/#about

Thank You

Recommended

- Rabbit hole podcast – New York Times Kevin Roose- https://www.nytimes.com/column/rabbit-hole
- Aiken, M. (2016). *The Cyber Effect A Pioneering Cyberpsychologist Explains How Human Behavior Changes Online*, New York: Spiegel & Grau
- Kiberd, R. (2021). *The Disconnect: A Personal Journey Through the Internet*. Serpent's Tail.

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- Alkhallouf, A. (2021). Parental cyberbullying through a global lens: Children's digital rights and social media policies. *Journal of Children and Media*, *15*(3), 448-453
- Donnelly, K (2022) ." Lessons on web safety for children need same priority as three Rs says charity" Independent.ie
- Dyer, T.F. 2018. The Effects of Social Media on Children. *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management, 14*.
- El-Asam, A., Katz, A., Street, C., Nazar, N. M., & Livanou, M. 2021. Children's services for the digital age: A qualitative study into current procedures and online risks among service users. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *122*, 105872.
- Gurriell, M. 2021. Born into porn but rescued by thorn: The demand for tech companies to scan and search for child sexual abuse images. *Family Court Review*, *59*(4), 840-854.
- Iskül, A. M., & Joamets, K. (2021). Child Right to Privacy and Social Media–Personal Information Oversharing Parents. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, *14*(2), 101-1