Teenagers, parents and teachers unaware of social networking risks

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A report into the legal risks associated with the use of social networking sites (eg. Facebook, myspace) has found that while 95 per cent of Victorian students in years 7 to 10 use social networking sites, nearly 30 per cent did not consider social networking held any risks.

The project was established to investigate the legal risks of social networking as experienced by Victorian secondary school students, teachers and parents. Survey and interview data was gathered from over 1000 Victorian middle school students (years 7-10), 200 teachers and 49 parents.

The report, Teenagers, Legal Risks and Social Networking Sites, found that Facebook is the most popular social networking site, with 93.4 per cent of students using it. The majority of surveyed students update information on their social networking sites at least every day, with a quarter updating their profile several times per day.

The majority of parents (80.4 per cent) said they had seen their child's social networking site profile at least once. Parents and teachers were particularly concerned with issues of cyber-bullying, grooming or stalking, with a lesser number expressing concerns about identity theft and disclosure.

Surveyed students felt that social networking sites were safer than did their teachers and parents. While 48.8 per cent of students felt there was some element of risk, more than one quarter (28.3 per cent) thought

social networking sites were safe. Moreover, 19.6 per cent of students were ambivalent about risk, essentially reporting the degree of risk was irrelevant to them as social networking is 'just what everyone does'.

Despite this, the majority of surveyed students (72.4 per cent) indicated they had received unwelcome or unpleasant contact by strangers via their social networking profile.

A minority of students (13.8 per cent) were concerned about security risks, such as identity theft. A very small group of students identified concerns relating to privacy or unwelcome disclosure of data.

"While risks posed by forms of abusive behaviour such as cyber-bullying and grooming have been emphasised both by the media and policy responses, comparatively little attention has been given to the potential legal risks that children and young people may face when using social networking sites," Dr Michael Henderson, one of the co-authors of the report and Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education said.

"Such risks exist in the areas of privacy, breach of confidence, disclosure, defamation, intellectual property rights, copyright infringement and criminal laws including harassment and distribution of offensive material, and this report recommends that education about the full range of legal risks potentially encountered via social media should be part of a fully integrated school curricula," Dr Henderson said.

  More information: For a full copy of the report, visit newmediaresearch.educ.monash.e … ourse/view.php?id=37

Provided by Monash University

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