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Millions of girls using Facebook, Bebo and Myspace 'at risk' from paedophiles and bullies

By PAUL REVOIR


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Parents are alarmingly ignorant of the danger posed to millions of girls by social networking websites, a report reveals.

A study of sites such as Bebo, Facebook and MySpace shows children using them can be at great risk from paedophiles and bullies.

More than a quarter of children aged eight to 11 bypass online age restrictions to put reams of intensely personal detail about themselves online.

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Name:
[Redacted]

Gender:
Female

Last Active:
7 hours

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Hometown:
[Redacted]

Profile Views
33,000:

■ **AT 16, this would-be model displays dozens of photos of herself in her underwear on her web page. In nothing but a waistcoat and briefs, she poses provocatively on a bed and standing on a window-sill. Perhaps unsurprisingly, her page has been viewed more than 33,000 times, and attracted a series of comments - many sexually explicit.**

But more worryingly, in a blog written when she was 14, she claims she and her friends 'nearly got raped and abducted by sum old man' at a fairground. The blonde teenager, who describes herself as 'very gullible' has given her full name and details of her home town, her college and her studies - more than enough for anyone to trace her.

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Youngsters feel "invincible" when on the web, the report says, but they are setting up meetings with strangers and are often "addicted" to social networking sites.

Teenage girls think nothing of posting profiles accompanied by sexually provocative pictures of themselves along with personal details including names, addresses and the school they attend.

In addition, families regularly show private pictures of their children online, unaware that all other website users can see them, not just friends.

The true scale of the risk came to light after a major investigation by the communications watchdog Ofcom.

It found that parents who think they know what their children are doing, are often hopelessly out of touch with their child's activities on the internet.

Last night the Daily Mail discovered some of the shocking content youngsters are putting up on these sites.

This includes a 14-year-old girl whose profile picture, which can be viewed by anyone, focuses on her breasts.

Another 15-year-old is smirking at the camera as she grabs her breasts.

She has listed her date of birth, her home town and name of school.

One has also innocently posted pictures of her ten-year-old sister half-clothed alongside lots of personal information, including full name and home town.

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Name:
[REDACTED]

Gender:
Female

Last Active:
3 hours

Share the Luv ❤️

Hometown:
[REDACTED]

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■ **THIS 14-year-old's profile picture on the social networking site Bebo barely shows her face. Instead, visitors to her web page are greeted by a photograph of her breasts, putting her at immediate risk from predators who seek out under-age girls to groom for sex. Unlike thousands of youngsters who have set up their pages so they can be viewed only by schoolmates or recognised 'friends', this girl's page is accessible to anyone. The teenager boasts she has kissed a stranger, smoked, drunk alcohol and run away from home, and 'been with someone' - an apparent euphemism for sex. She says she is 'taken' and tells her 15-year-old boyfriend: 'Luv Yu'.**

Another 16-year-old is seen posing in her underwear in dozens of photographs.

Ofcom's first in-depth study was published days after psychologist Dr Tanya Byron's review on child Internet safety recommended a voluntary code of practice for social networking sites.

The Ofcom report also comes after the Home Office published guidance for children and parents on how to safely use such sites.

Parents will be told to monitor their children's Internet use, and check their entries on Facebook and MySpace.

Yesterday Ofcom called on parents to do more to clamp down on their children's online activities, saying they are largely ignorant of the issue.

Robin Blake, head of media literacy at Ofcom said: "There is an issue about parents who are allowing their children to go online without any supervision.

"They need to recognise that their children are potentially at risk."

James Thickett, director of market research at the regulator, added: "There are a number of discrepancies between what children are doing and what parents believe they are doing.

"The sites tend to have a caveat that says 'this is not appropriate for children under a certain age', but this doesn't stop children using it.

"Parents are not aware of what their children are doing."

The report also revealed that there are concerns about cyber-bullying, with some even admitting they were using the sites to get back at people.

Youngsters in the survey claimed to be not bothered about risks because the need to make friends is more important than being "safety conscious".

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Name:

██████████

Gender:

Female

Last Active:

3 hours

Hometown:

██████████ ██████████

Profile Views

11,000:

Do My Quiz ❤️

■ **POSING** with a friend, this 15-year-old girl grabs at her breasts as she mimics a pose from a pornographic model's repertoire.

Alongside pictures of Disney princesses and teen pin-up Shayne Ward, she has posted a quiz which asks such blatantly explicit questions such as 'Would you rather do me or date me?'

Next to a picture of her 17-year-old boyfriend,

she has written: 'The one i love, this is 4 ma baybee boi i love im sooo much an he reli dnt no how much i love im.' The teenager - whose page has been viewed by more than 11,000 people - lists her date of birth, home town and the name of her school, which would make her an easy victim for anyone who wanted to find her.

While parents claim they have rules, many children reveal their activities online go largely unchecked.

Popular sites Bebo and Facebook state that users must be 13 or older while MySpace users must be 14.

The Ofcom report, which surveyed 8,500 adults and children, reveals that half of all eight to 17-year-old Internet users - about 4million people - have a personal profile.

This compares with 22 per cent of adults.

Ofcom said two-thirds of children using social networking sites were on Bebo, while another third were

on MySpace and Facebook.

Facebook is most popular with adults.

The survey showed 16 per cent of parents did not know who can see their children's profiles.

A worrying 41 per cent of children admitted they did not use privacy settings and only 53 per cent said their parents set them rules for use.

One 15-year-old girl said: "I am single and it is nice to get the attention of men.

"Some of the photos I post are a bit racy, but really they aren't meant to be that serious and a bit of a giggle."

A 34-year-old mother said: "I had no idea the whole of Facebook could see my little girl in the bath."

Statistics show that 59 per cent of children who use networking sites do so to make new friends.

A spokesman for the police's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre said: "Where children go, sex offenders will follow. The first step is getting parents to acknowledge and understand that risk."

Tory MP Philip Davies, who sits on the culture, media and sport select committee, said: "Parents just don't understand what the potential risks are because they don't understand the technology."

Brenda Stafford, development manager at children's charity Kidscape, said the "risk was high" with networking sites.

She said: "Whilst not every child is going out to meet these people, they are still passing information backwards and forwards.

"They feel perhaps they are talking to someone of their own age and freely giving information about themselves and their families."

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Use with caution: the Ofcom study highlighted the potential danger of teenage girls using websites including Facebook

Diana Sutton, the NSPCC's head of policy and public affairs, said: "Online social networking is part of millions of children's lives but children need to understand the risks as well as they understand the technology."

On Friday, Home Office minister Vernon Coaker will publish guidance for children and parents on how to safely use social networking sites.

He will warn against children giving away information which may make it easier for a person they have met online to track down their home address, or other sensitive details.

Officials are alarmed by evidence that paedophiles are using the sites to identify possible victims.

They adopt false identities, posting images of teenagers, to groom possible targets.

MySpace was hit by scandal last year after it admitted it had detected and barred 29,000 registered U.S. sex offenders.

Also in 2007, a paedophile was jailed for having underage sex with a teenage girl he met on the social networking website Facebook.

Last night a Bebo spokesman said of the Ofcom report: "Privacy and safety are taken very seriously by Bebo.

"We have detailed guidelines, prominently placed, to help ensure that members are aware of how to keep themselves and their details safe online.

"Our members control which groups can access their personal information, and every new Bebo account is private by default at the point of registration.

"Profiles are only made public if the user actively chooses to make them so, and we advise all users

against this.

"Only those profiles which are made public can be accessed through Internet search engines."

Find this story at www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-553348/Millions-girls-using-Facebook-Bebo-Myspace-risk-paedophiles-bullies.html

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