Online Safety and Social Networking Use by Young Adults with Williams Syndrome

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Introduction

Internet Use
- Important tool for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)
- ~ 97% of individuals with IDD have access to the Internet at home, 41% in bedroom (Didden et al., 2009)
- Primarily used for downloading music/playing games
- Others use for social connections
  - Sending or receiving e-mail
  - Posting information about themselves
  - Chatting with friends (Didden et al., 2009)
- Risks of Internet Use
  - Cyberbullying, identity theft, & online grooming
  - Individuals with IDD likely to talk with people they meet online and likely to display sexualized behavior online (Wells & Mitchell, 2014)
- *Little research conducted on Internet use patterns and online victimization of individuals with IDD*

Current Study
- Risk may differ by type of disability because of certain characteristics of the disability
- Williams syndrome (WS)
  - Rare genetic neurodevelopmental disorder
  - Mild to moderate levels of intellectual disability
  - Extreme pro-social drive to engage with others
  - Struggle to form and maintain peer relationships
  - Vulnerable in the real world (Fisher et al., 2012)
  - Are they vulnerable online?

Research Questions
1. Why do adults with WS use the Internet and how often do they go online?
2. Do adults with WS use social networking and how accessible are their social networking profiles?

Method

Participants
Individuals with Williams Syndrome
- N = 28 (6 female, 22 male)
- Mean age = 27.7 years (*SD* = 8.4; range 19 – 51)
- KBIT-2 FSIQ = 69.11 (*SD* = 15.28)
- 86% lived at home with their parents
Parents of Individuals with Williams Syndrome
- N = 28 (25 mothers, 3 fathers)
- Mean age = 56.9 years (*SD* =7.4)

Method

Measures
- **Demographics Questionnaire**
- **Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test, 2nd edition**
- **Internet Use Questionnaire**
  - Adapted from EU Kids Online Survey
  - Parent and Child version
  - Individuals with WS provided with Likert scales and visual aids to support comprehension of questions
  - Topics included:
    - Time spent on Internet
    - Location of internet use
    - Websites visited
    - Individuals contacted
    - Social media activity

Procedure
- Parents received link to complete questionnaires online
- Individuals with WS completed adapted forms of parent measures during a residential camp with a research assistant

Results

Internet Use
- 85.7% (24) use Internet every day or almost every day
- 48.1% (13; of those who use the Internet) use it for more than 2 hours each day
- 25.9% (7) use it for more than 4 hours a day

Results

Access the Internet
- 96.3% (26) use a mobile phone
- 74.1% (20) use a portable device (e.g., tablet)
- 55.6% (16) use a laptop in bedroom
- 40.7% (11) use a gaming console
- 33.3% (9) use a computer in bedroom

Most Frequent Internet Activities

	% use (n= 27)	How Often (%)		
		1-2x/ Month	1-2x/ week	Almost everyday
Video (You Tube)	100	3.7	11.1	85.2
Social Networking	85.2	13.0	21.7	65.2
Email	59.3	6.3	50.0	43.8
Instant Message	51.9	7.1	25.0	41.7
Chatroom	44.4	33.3	25.0	41.7

Parental Supervision
- Few parents provide supervision while the adult with WS is on the Internet
  - 11.1% (3) report parents sit with them
- Parents not always aware of Internet activities
  - 29.6% (8) said parents know nothing or just a little
  - 66.6% (18) said parents knew most or a lot
  - 3.7% (1) said they were not sure

Social Networking
- 85.2% of sample (n = 23) use social media
- 95.7% (22) can use it anytime (1 only with permission)
- Most frequently visit Facebook
  - average of 655 friends (range 15 – 1722)
  - 56.5% (13) had profile set to 'public'
  - 95.7% (22) talk to people they know
  - 78.3% talk to people they do not know in real life

Specific information that individuals with WS share in their Facebook profile

Publicly Available Facebook Profile Information	% (*n*)
Picture with clear face	95.7 (22)
Last name	91.3 (21)
Address	30.4 (7)
Phone number	56.5 (13)
School/job	73.9 (17)
Birthday	91.3 (21)

Conclusions

Internet Use and Supervision
- Adults with WS frequently use Internet
  - Similar to individuals with other IDD (Didden et al., 2009)
- Parental supervision/oversight is low
- Parents do not know everything that they do online

Social Networking Use
- Adults with WS are on Facebook
- Share a lot of identifiable information on their profile
- Facebook "friends" with several hundred people
  - Known and unknown to them in real life
  - Often speak to unknown people online
    - Talking with strangers is risk factor for sexual solicitation online (Mitchell et al. 2007, 2008)
    - Could increase the risk of sexual cyber-victimisation (Murphy & O'Callaghan, 2004)

Need for Intervention
- Social nature of WS, on/offline, highlights importance of parental monitoring and/or Internet safety training
- Equip with strategies to recognize and respond to risky situations
- Develop strategies to stay safe online
  - Increasing privacy settings
  - Minimizing interactions with unknown individuals
  - What personal information can be shared
  - Who is/is not appropriate to accept as a 'friend'

Future Directions for Research
- Compare Internet use of individuals with other IDD
- Examine use of social media apps
- Examine social media use at younger ages
- Compare social skills online versus in person

For More Information