How Children of Police Officers Keep Safe Online

Dr Lasara Kariyawasam
University of Oxford

Dr Katrin Mueller-Johnson
University of Oxford

UKRI

Engineering and
Physical Sciences
Research Council

Aim

Children of police officers face a unique set of challenges due to their parents' policing profession and negative views towards police officers held in parts of society. The negative attention given to police officers as a group has increased in the recent years due to the advances of technology and ease of filming police actions of alleged, perceived, or actual misconduct that are widespread on the internet and social media platforms, as well as the ease with which hate filled messages of any type can spread online. Therefore, it is speculated that children, especially teenagers and young people are at risk of receiving hate both online and in person. Yet, there is little to no research investigating the experiences of children of police officers. Therefore, this study aimed to understand what it is like for children to grow up with police officer parents, and the challenges they face in the digital age.

Findings

Interviews and a focus group conducted with teenage children of police officers across four police forces uncovered that children have had direct or indirect negative experiences due to their parents' profession. Although the impact was not considered grave, children had received negative comments or jokes about their parent or the parent's profession and have encountered social media content that portray police officers in a negative manner. This has led children to stay extra safe online and to maintain a private profile on social media platforms. Parents too remind children of the importance of online safety and most children abide by parents' advice and restrictions. Parents, school administrators, and even police forces should implement interventions to protect children of police officers from public hate and help them to deal with the negativity that they are faced with simply due to their parents' profession.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Police officers with children should be aware of the potential that their children may be targeted with negative messages online due to their parents' profession. This may not be confined to social media but can also extend to gaming platforms.

Recommendation 2

In addition to the standard talks about online safety, they should have early conversations with their children about social media and the potential harms they might encounter, including how to keep themselves safe online (include practical settings, avoidance of photos etc).

Recommendation 3

Officers with children should think consciously at which age their children are given access to smartphones/social media on other devices. Some officers we spoke to have intentionally delayed giving smart phones to their children until a slightly older age.

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@3po_project   3po@shu.ac.uk   @3po_project   3po-project.co.uk