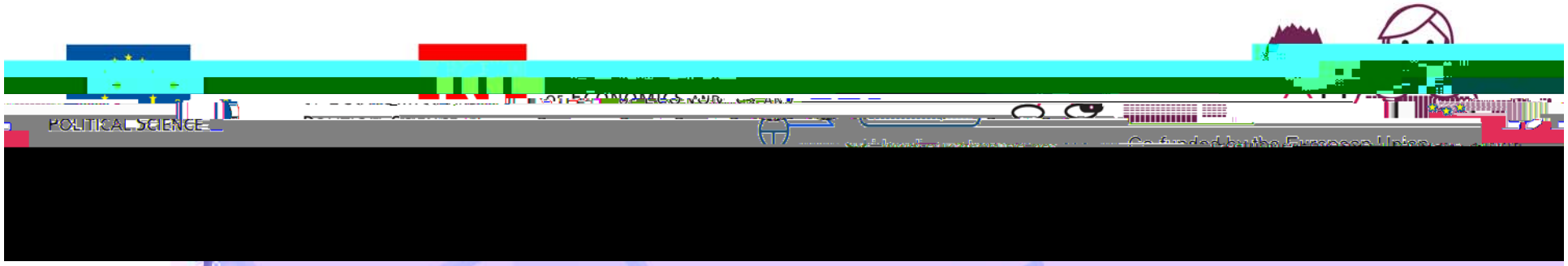


Exposure to Online Sexually Explicit Materials among Youth: Comparison across Europe

David Šmahel, Anna Šev

Introduction

- Exposure to sexually explicit materials as one of possible risks for children in internet usage (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006)
- There are different types of exposure (Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007), i.e. wanted / unwanted
- Different types of exposure may have different impact on children and adolescents

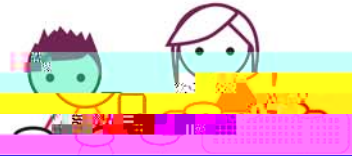
Research questions:

- What are most important predictors of online exposure to sexual materials?
- To what extent the exposure is affected by factors related to country specifics? Can we explain higher exposure in countries by country indicators?

Predictors of exposure to sexual contents

- Gender differences – more boys report exposure to online sexual materials than girls, and this holds true especially for wanted exposure (Mesch, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006)
- Older adolescents tend to consume sexual contents online more often than younger internet users (Mitchell et al., 2003; Wolak et al., 2007)
- Psychosocial characteristics: depression (Wolak et al., 2007; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005), heightened sensation seeking (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006), impulsiveness (Wolak et al., 2007).
- Lower capacity to control one's impulses could be related to excessive internet use (Shapira et al, 2003), we hypothesize that having a problem with excessive internet use might be a relevant predictor of frequent exposure to online sexual contents.

Cross-country variability (?)



- Role of psychosocial challenges in exposure to online sexual materials should not be overestimated (Mitchell et al., 2003; Wolak et al., 2007)
- Exposure to sexual materials online might be a common experience that occurs in the internet usage (Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009)
- Several cross-national comparative studies report that the extent of exposure to online sexual materials among children differs across countries (see Hasebrink, Livingstone,

Country indicators

- Higher religiosity is linked to delays in sexual development (Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003)
- Lower religiosity is linked to greater exposure to online sexual materials (Mesch, 2009).
- Czech Republic is at least religious country in Europe
- High speed internet connections allow access to a relatively large amount of data in a short time, which consequently may influence the amount of viewed sexual images (broadband penetration)
- The effects of gender on sexual behavior and sexual attitudes may also vary across Europe. In countries with liberal sexual norms women might be more sexually empowered and thus more active in seeking sexual stimulations (see Clement, Schmidt, & Kruse, 1984)

Measures

Exposure to sexually explicit materials in general and on the internet was measured using two filter questions: (1) "In the past year, you have seen lots of different images. Some of these might be sexual. Have you seen anything of this kind in the past 12 months?"

Other variables*:* The frequency of internet use, Emotional problems (5 items, i.e. „I get a lot of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness"), Sensation seeking, Excessive internet use (5 items)

Country-level indicators: *Broadband penetration (EUROSTAT), Religious faith* (indicates the percentage of religious people within the European countries that was assessed within the European Value Study in 2008)

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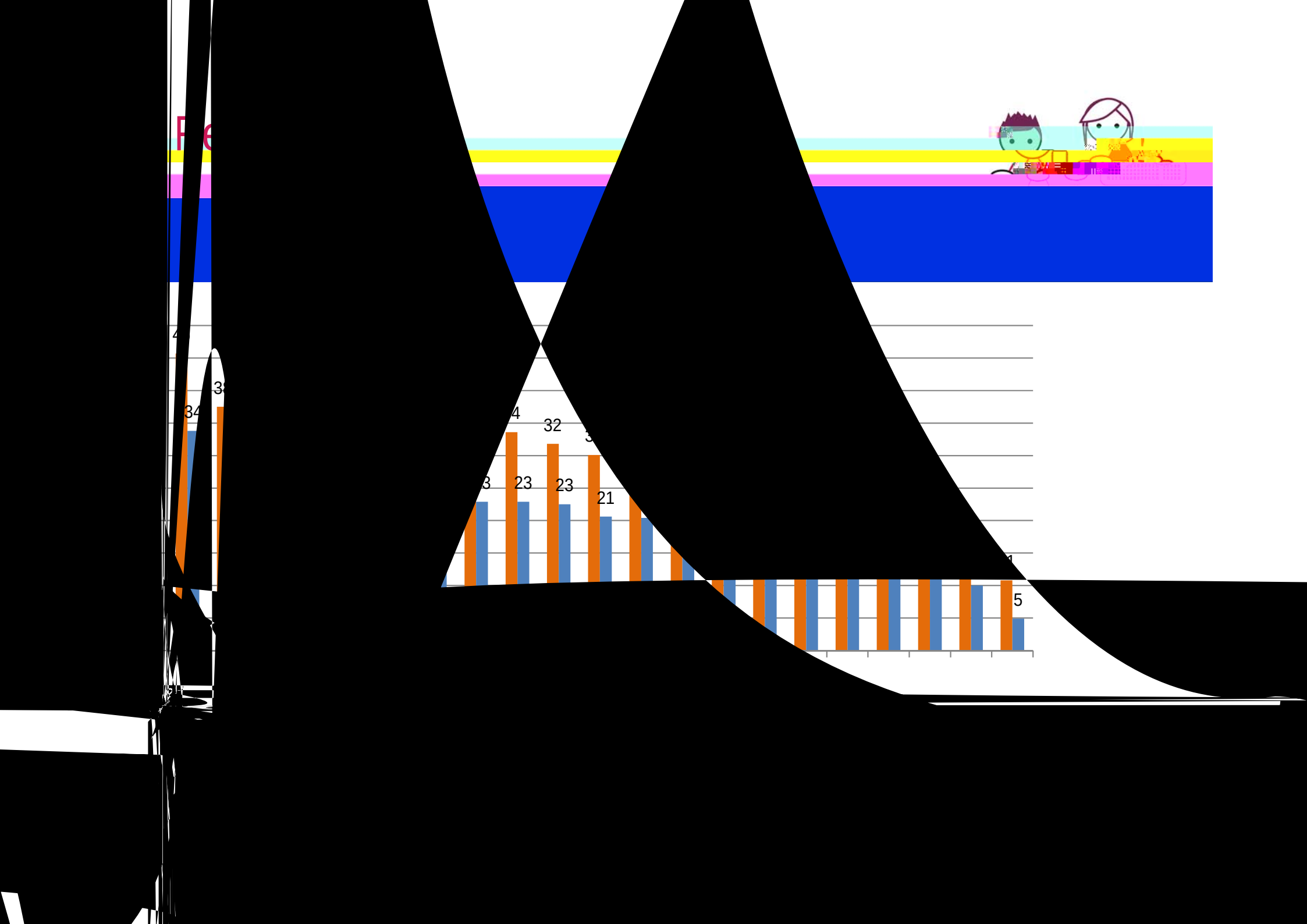
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Multilevel regression with Exposure to sexual materials as the dependent variable

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B (SE)	*OR*	*95% CI*	*B (SE)*	*OR*	*95% CI*
Fixed effect						
Level 1 variables						
[illegible]	[illegible]**			[illegible]**		
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[illegible]	[illegible]**	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]**	[illegible]	[illegible]
.39(.08)**	1.47	(1.25-1.73)	.39(.08)**	1.47	(1.25-1.73)	Emotional problems
.37(.03)**	1.45	(1.38-1.53)	.37(.03)**	1.45	(1.38-1.53)	Distraction seeking
.73(.05)**	2.07	(1.86-2.30)	.73(.05)**	2.07	(1.86-2.30)	Excessive internet use
[illegible]						
[illegible]	[illegible]			[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]			[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Random effect						
$\tau u0^2$	[illegible]**			[illegible]**		
$\tau u1^2$						

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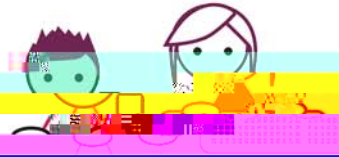
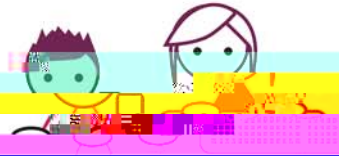
Multilevel regression analyses



- The country-level factors accounted for 11 % of the variation in exposure within the European sample.
- None of the country-level predictors were able

Discussion / conclusion



- Higher exposure among older children - developmentally-driven experience
- Relations between excessive internet use and exposure to sexual explicit materials .. what was first?
- Psychological variables: emotional problems, senzatin seeking – in line with prior research
- Cross-culture differences – country indicators as problematic variables (?)
- Gender differences differ across countries – females are more interested in online sexual materials in liberal countries (?) (Czech Republic is liberal with less restrictive sexual attitudes)
- Future research – longitudinal, cross-cultural differences