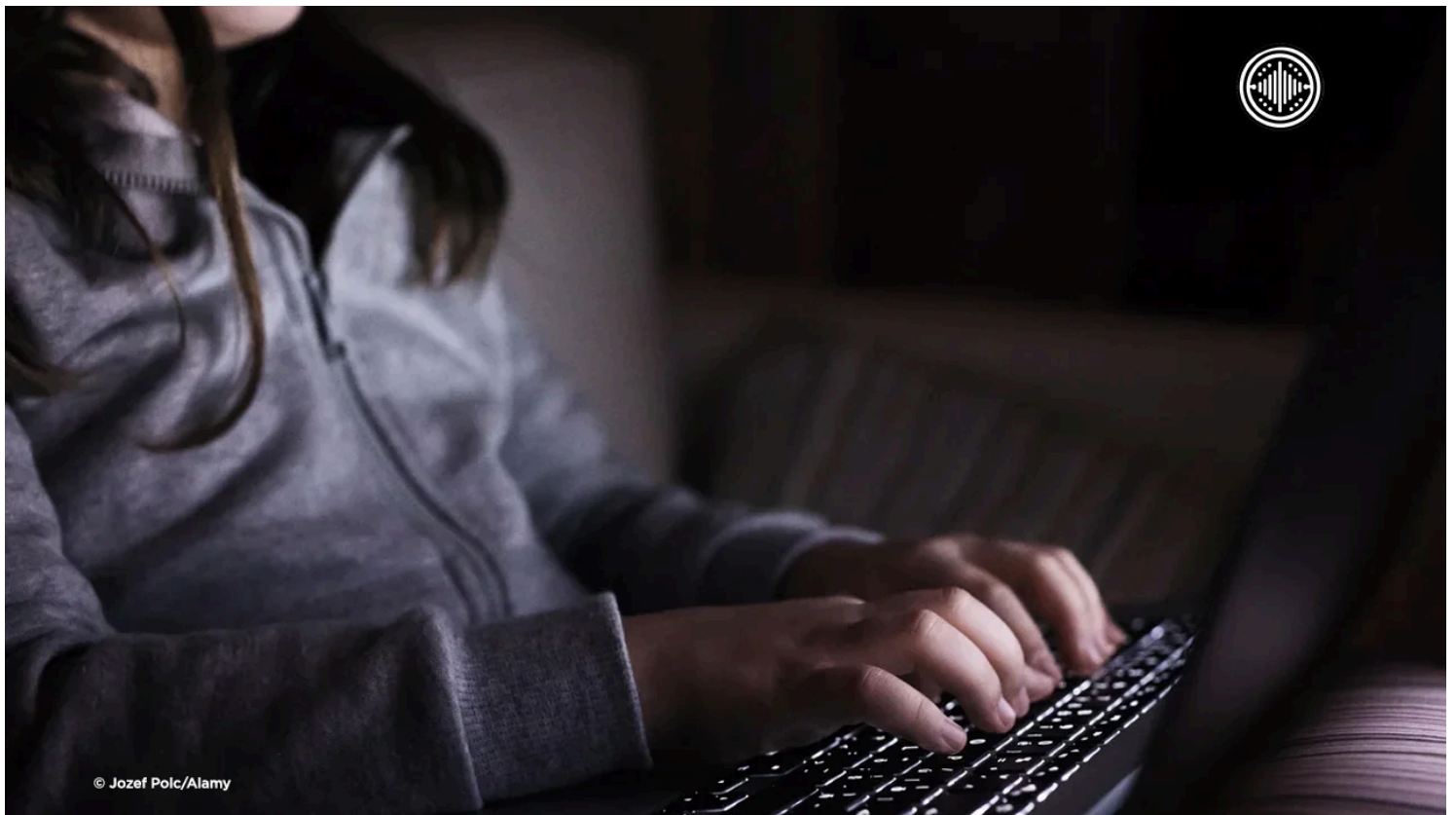


Counter-Terrorism Police Warn of Rising Child Radicalisation During School Holidays

July 26, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



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As schools break for the holidays, Britain's counter-terrorism authorities have sounded an alarm over a potential surge in children being radicalised online. In a coordinated statement, senior officials from the National Crime Agency (NCA), Counter Terrorism Policing, and MI5 urged parents to stay vigilant, warning that young people spending increased time online are at heightened risk of exposure to extremist content.

Statistics indicate that approximately one in five individuals arrested for terrorism-related offences in the UK in recent years has been under the age of 18, with suspects as young as 12 currently under investigation. This marks a sharp rise in the involvement of minors in such activities, driven largely by the proliferation of harmful material circulating on the internet.

A counter-terrorism officer, whose identity remains confidential due to the sensitive nature of their work, told LBC: “The scale of harmful material we’re seeing is unprecedented. It’s far more widespread than we can even imagine. It’s horrific.” The officer described a disturbing mix of extreme violence, self-harm imagery, antisemitism, racism, misogyny, and a significant uptick in indecent images of children being shared online, often through group chats known as ‘Com Networks’.

These Com Networks, described as “sadistic” by NCA Director General Graeme Biggar, are online spaces where young people are coerced into committing crimes to gain notoriety among peers. Earlier this year, Biggar described these networks as one of the UK’s most pressing emerging crime threats, noting their use in cybercrime, fraud, extremism, and child sexual abuse. The officer added: “Young people are being drawn into these spaces, often unaware of the psychological and legal consequences of their actions. They’re extorted, bullied, and coerced into committing acts of violence or self-harm.”

The officer stressed the need for parental oversight, comparing online safety to real-world vigilance. “If my child were going out with friends, I’d ask who they’re with, where they’re going, and what they’re doing. We need to apply that same scrutiny to their online activities. Parents might think their kids are safe in their bedrooms on their laptops, but that’s not always the case.”

The Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan, echoed these concerns, highlighting the ease with which young people can be drawn into criminality during school holidays. Speaking to LBC about his ‘Holiday Hope’ programme, which offers activities and skills training to keep young people engaged, Khan said: “Gang leaders often lure kids with something as simple as fried chicken or money for a meal. Radicalisation is easier now than ever before. In the past, it happened in public spaces where authorities could intervene. Now, a child can be radicalised in their bedroom.”

MI5 Director General Sir Ken McCallum underscored the situation: “In 2024, around 13% of individuals under investigation for terrorism-related concerns were minors. That deeply

concerning trend persists. In just a few clicks, young people can be interacting with dangerous terrorists online, consuming violent and extremist propaganda designed to pull them down a life-altering path.”

Authorities are urging parents to monitor their children’s online activity closely, particularly during the school holidays when unsupervised screen time often increases. The message is clear: the internet, while a powerful tool for connection, is also a breeding ground for exploitation., The current Labour government has come under scrutiny for its response to rising crime, including online radicalisation. The onus falls on families and communities to protect vulnerable young people from these insidious threats.