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Underage Facebook Members: 7.5 Million Users Under Age 13

Consumer Reports find millions of kids violate Facebook's terms of service.

By ABC News

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May 10, 2011 -- [Sasha and Malia Obama may not be on Facebook](#), but millions of other kids under the age of 13 may be lying their way on to the social network.

In violation of [Facebook's requirement that members be at least 13 years old](#) to open an account, about 7.5 million users in the U.S. are under the age of 13, and about 5 million are under the age of 10, Consumer Reports said in a report released today. That's out of 20 million U.S. minors in total who actively used [Facebook](#) last year, Consumer Reports said.

The annual survey, which looks at the "State of the Net," asked more than 2,000 U.S. households with an Internet connection about their experiences with online security threats, social networks and identity theft.

Jeff Fox, technology editor for Consumer Reports, said the 7.5 million figure was extrapolated from the number of parents surveyed who knew that their underage children were [Facebook members](#). But even that number could be low, he said, because they can't estimate the number of kids who join the site without their parents' knowledge.

"It's becoming extremely popular," he said. "We suppose that's not the entire iceberg."

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Reacting to the report, Facebook said it is not easy for an online company to enforce an age limit.

"Recent reports have highlighted just how difficult it is to implement age restrictions on the Internet and that there is no single solution to ensuring younger children don't circumvent a system or lie about their age," the social network said in a written statement. "We appreciate the attention that these reports and other experts are giving this matter and believe this will provide an opportunity for parents, teachers, safety advocates and Internet services to focus on this area, with the ultimate goal of keeping young people of all ages safe online."

Facebook: We Delete Information for Children Under Age 13

Facebook's privacy policy does caution kids under 13 years old against registering for an account.

"If we learn that we have collected personal information from a child under age 13, we will delete that information as quickly as possible," the company says. "If you believe that we might have any information from a child under age 13, please contact us through this help page."

To verify that each user is old enough open an account, Facebook asks members to enter their birth dates when they sign up. But Fox called the safeguard "a pretty flimsy screening."

"We all know how bright those folks are that run it," he said. "I cannot believe that they cannot devise better systems for preventing kids under 13 than just asking for a birth date."

While parents of young kids may think that joining the social network may be innocent enough, Fox cautioned that it's not even a totally safe environment for adults and teenagers.

"There's a lot of dangers -- there's adults, there's bullies, there's malware," said Fox. "A 10-year-old is ill-equipped to deal with any of those things."

Over the past year, Consumer Reports said more than five million online households in the U.S. have been subjected to some kind of Internet abuse, such as virus infections and identity theft, via Facebook. About one million children who went on Facebook were exposed to bullying, the survey found.

The survey also revealed that parents of kids 10 and under are friending their kids much less frequently than parents of older kids, which means they don't have the opportunity to monitor -- and defend -- their children on the social network, Fox said.

First Lady Michelle Obama sparked debate about underage users on Facebook when she told the "Today" show in February that Facebook was off-limits for the first daughters.

"I'm not a big fan of young kids having Facebook," she said, "So, you know, it's not something they need. It's not necessary right now."



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