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Parents police social networking sites

Sunday, 26 July 2009 | <http://www.nerve.in/news:253500237317> (<http://www.nerve.in/news:253500237317>) | channel: India (<http://www.nerve.in/channel:india>) (<http://www.nerve.in/channel:>)

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By **Nayan Sakhuja** (<http://www.nerve.in/author:Nayan+Sakhuja>)

New Delhi, July 26 - If you are a teenager, be careful who you talk to and what you say on social networking sites -- for papa and mama may be watching, sometimes with good reason.

Rakesh Kumar was worried what his teenage daughter was up to on social networking site Orkut. When he finally accessed her profile, he was shocked to find that she was in touch with absolute strangers. Now he has installed a software to keep her in check.

Rakesh's 15-year-old daughter Akansha has around 2,500 profiles on her friends list on Orkut -- a third of whom are people she has never met.

'With the growing cases of cyber crimes via these social networking sites, I decided to keep a tab on my daughter to find out what she was up to on Orkut,' Rakesh told IANS.

So he created a profile on Orkut and altered his privacy settings so that he could view Akansha's profile without her knowledge.

'I was shocked. My daughter was spending long hours talking to complete strangers. The first thing I made her do was to delete those strangers from her list and also assigned a software 'Nanny' that keeps a check on who she chats with.'

Rakesh is not alone -- many worried parents are resorting to similar measures, which children feel is 'an invasion of privacy'.

Fifteen-year-old Shreya Talwar was surprised when her mother sent her a 'friend request' on Facebook, another popular social networking site.

'When I first got a friend request from my mother, I ignored it. I felt that would invade my privacy. I didn't want my parents to know what I am talking about with my friends,' she said.

To escape the surveillance, Talwar found a loophole -- she added her mother to her list but only after changing settings to 'limited view'.

Her friends choose to lock their profiles when faced with the same situation.

Youngsters are also resorting to other ways to get around snoop parents, like using lingo they don't understand.

College student Utkarsh Kumar says he uses acronyms and code words while chatting with friends online.

'I have my parents on Orkut. I use terms like 'SO' that stands for 'significant other' meaning your girlfriend or 'MIA' which means 'missing in action'. I have to use these terms so that my parents don't go berserk,' Utkarsh said.

Social networking sites like Orkut, Facebook, Hi5, Twitter, BigAdda are a growing rage among teenagers.

The number of friends you have on your list, how regular you are with 'status messages', tagging photographs and uploading videos dictate how popular you are on the site.

Other applications like personal quizzes, movie and music preferences give you an edge over dormant profiles.

Parents however are apprehensive about the dangers online. What tops their fears is the possibility of virtual stalking and bad company.

Samira Sharma, 42, said: 'I log in almost every night to find out who my daughter has been talking to. It was difficult in the beginning to understand the whole process but now I am getting the hang of it.'

However leading psychiatrist Samir Parikh feels that trying to keep tabs by making profiles on the sites the children are using is not the best way.

'There should be good communication between the child and parents. Parents can't control what the children do online. Parents need to educate children to take precautions,' Parikh said.

According to cyber crime expert and supreme court advocate Pavan Duggal, youngsters are becoming more susceptible to crimes over social networking sites.

Duggal told IANS: 'Youths are becoming more and more susceptible to committing cyber crimes via social networking. The quantum of such crimes reported is very low -- for every 500 cases that occur, 20 are reported and only one is registered with an FIR -. These are conservative figures.'

He added: 'Youngsters are using anonymity for committing crimes like impersonation, identity theft, cyber stalking, defamation, misusing credit card information and harassment. Such sites are also conduits for piracy and a wonderful opportunity for blackmailing.'

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