Increase in cases of radicalisation among minors in Australia

On 11 February 2022, Director-General of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Mike Burgess, at a press conference on its annual risk assessment in Australia, said there had been a recent increase in the number of investigations by the service involving young people who demonstrate a vulnerability to ideologically motivated violence. In the past year, juveniles have been involved in more than half of anti-terrorism proceedings each week.

According to ASIO, this is because the internet is the world’s single most potent and powerful incubator of extremism.

Online radicalisation is nothing new, but COVID-19 sent it into overdrive. Isolated individuals spent more time online, exposed to extremist messaging, misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Social media platforms, chat rooms, and algorithms are designed to join up people who share the same views, and push them material they will 'like'. It's like being in an echo chamber where the echo gets louder and louder, generating cycles of exposure and reinforcement.

More time in those online environments—without some of the circuit breakers of everyday life, like family and community engagement, school and work—created more extremists. And in some cases, it accelerated extremists' progression on the radicalisation pathway towards violence.

Recording of the speech by ASIO DG:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7SXIqjrQF4

Text of the speech by ASIO DG:
https://www.asio.gov.au/publications/speeches-and-statements/director-generals-annual-threat-assessment-2022.html

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