



'creating a level playing field'

CHILD ONLINE SAFETY SURVEY REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all the children and parents/guardians who participated in the Child Online Safety Survey 2024 for their invaluable time and thoughtful responses. Your input has played a crucial role in shaping the findings and insights presented in this report. We are grateful for the openness and honesty with which you shared your perspectives on children's online activities, awareness of potential risks, and steps taken to ensure children's online safety. Your feedback is instrumental in helping us understand and address the challenges and opportunities as children navigate the digital landscape.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for their unwavering support and collaboration throughout the survey process. Their expertise and dedication have greatly enriched the quality of this report. This report is a result of the dedication and collaboration of a community committed to creating a safer online environment for our children. As we navigate the ever-evolving digital landscape, your input remains crucial in developing effective strategies for child online protection.

Thank you for your trust, engagement, and ongoing commitment to ensuring a secure and positive online experience for our children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'G. K. Machengete'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a horizontal line.

G. K. Machengete (Dr)
Director General

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proliferation of the Internet, globally, has brought forth immense benefits but also new threats and risks. This is particularly so for our vulnerable citizens, "children online", as childhood is considered the most vulnerable period of human life. The Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) conducted its first Child Online Safety Survey in 2024. The overall objective of the study was to collect data that would enhance the understanding of Zimbabwean children's use of the Internet, the opportunities presented to them online, the risks and harms they encounter, and the different strategies to mitigate these risks.

A mixed-methods approach was employed for the survey, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. The survey targeted children aged between 8 and 18 years, as well as parents and guardians. It adopted a school-based approach to collect data from children, in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. A total of 3,311 respondents were successfully surveyed, comprising 2,780 children and 531 parents and guardians. Among the 2,780 children interviewed, 55% were girls, while 45% were boys, selected from 60 schools in 32 districts, across all 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. Key highlights of the survey findings are as follows:

Internet Usage:

At national level, the proportion of children who had used the Internet aged between 8 to 18 years, within the three months reference period, was 52%. However, the proportion of children who had used the Internet at least once in their lives, regardless of timeframe was higher at 94.4%. The average age of initial Internet use was 10 years, and this age increased as the school's economic status decreased. Early Internet use among children is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic, the introduction of e-learning as well as the Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) framework which was implemented in the education system from 2022 to 2024.

Frequency of Internet Use was high as 58% of children who used the Internet within the three months reference period, reported that they did so frequently, i.e., every day or every other

day. Children cited several barriers to Internet access and use; these include network availability, parental restrictions, slow Internet connectivity, perceived high cost of data, cost of devices, and power challenges.

Access Devices:

The survey revealed that mobile phones were the primary device used to access the Internet by children in Zimbabwe, superseding laptops, desktops amongst other devices. 44% of the children reported that mobile phones were their primary gadgets for accessing the Internet; laptops and desktops accounted for 27%, and 17%, respectively. Other cited devices included game consoles, connected/smart TVs amongst others.

Social Media Landscape:

The survey revealed that social media was very popular amongst children, with an overall adoption rate of 93%. Overall, WhatsApp stood out as the predominant social networking platform used by children. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Tik Tok and X (formerly Twitter) were also popular. 75% of children who used social media platforms confirmed that they used their own profiles and not an someone's profile (e.g. a parent's, sibling's etc.). The majority (46%) of such profiles were set to public, implying that everyone, anywhere around the world, can have unrestricted view of their profiles. This limits privacy and raises data protection risks, highlighting the importance of digital literacy and awareness regarding privacy controls on online platforms.

Risks and Safety Concerns:

Despite the undeniable benefits of Internet access, the survey also identified harms that children were exposed to. The survey revealed that the main threat to Zimbabwean children online was exposure to sexual content, either intentionally or inadvertently. A considerable 44% admitted that they had seen sexual content online at least once, whether messages, images, or videos. Exposure to content instigating hate and violence was prevalent. Exposure to content instigating hate against certain people or groups (e.g., tribes, races, religion etc.), violence, fake news, consumption of drugs and other illicit substances, information about committing suicide was also prevalent. Furthermore, a considerable 13% of children reported that they had experienced cyber-bullying at least once.

Parental Involvement and Awareness:

The survey revealed children desired parental involvement, as 53% highlighted that they would want their parents/guardians to take more interest in their online activities. Children expressed their willingness to discuss their online concerns with their parents. Parental involvement is pivotal in digital safekeeping, and it is imperative that parents take more interest in children's online activities. Parents in this study exhibited a fairly liberal approach to the use of social networks by children but displayed a more cautious approach to activities such as downloading content, using webcams, visiting online chatrooms amongst other activities that they perceived as riskier. From the parents' perspective, while they could enforce rules regarding online duration and post-usage Internet checks at home, many remained unsure about their children's behaviour outside the home. There was a lack of appreciation of tools and applications for monitoring, filtering, and blocking age-inappropriate content.

Opportunities:

The Internet offers a plethora of opportunities for children. There was a widespread recognition of the value of the Internet to education, with 95% of the children citing this benefit. Children also cited other benefits such as exposure to new ideas, communication across distance as well as pleasure and enjoyment. Moreover, the children had high interest (72%) in receiving training on online safety and digital citizenship. Cyber-bullying, rights of children on the Internet, cyber-grooming, cyber-trafficking, general online safety measures, and digital privacy were amongst the most cited topics by children.

To ensure the safety of Zimbabwe children on the Internet, the following recommendations amongst others were proposed in accordance with the survey results.

1. **Enhance Internet Access and Digital Literacy:** Implement strategies to increase Internet access for all children while concurrently offering capacity building and training programs for educators, parents, and guardians to enhance their technical skills and digital literacy. This will empower them to guide and support children effectively in their digital endeavours.

2. **Integrate Digital Literacy into Teacher Training:** Incorporate digital literacy content into teacher training curricula to equip educators with the necessary skills to assist students in navigating the digital world. Additionally, leverage existing teaching methods and extracurricular activities to integrate online safety and digital literacy, providing immediate avenues for education while awaiting comprehensive curriculum adjustments.
3. **Strengthen Legislation on Age-Inappropriate Content:** Advocate for tighter legislation regarding the hosting of age-inappropriate content online, particularly sexual content. POTRAZ through the Cyber Incident Response Team (CIRT), in collaboration with national and international stakeholders should continuously monitor and restrict the distribution of such content to minors.
4. **Implement Child-Centric Education Programs:** Launch child-targeted education and awareness programs focusing on online safety and digital citizenship. Collaborate with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to conduct school-based interventions, ensuring comprehensive coverage and impact among children.
5. **Promote Local Language Digital Content:** Consider initiatives to make digital content available in local languages, especially for children. Recognise the linguistic diversity within Zimbabwe and prioritise the creation of local content and resources to facilitate better understanding and engagement as children navigate the online realm.
6. **Promote Parental Involvement:** Encourage parents to actively engage in their children's digital lives, understanding that their involvement, whether restrictive or enabling, can significantly shape their online experiences. Facilitate open communication between parents and children about sensitive online topics to bridge communication gaps and provide necessary support.
7. **Utilise Parental Control Tools:** Educate parents and guardians about the availability and effectiveness of widely accessible tools for filtering and blocking age-inappropriate content online. Encourage the use of apps and platforms specifically designed to monitor and manage children's online activities, providing insights and control over their Internet usage.
8. **Empower Parents with Digital Literacy:** Provide resources and training programs to enhance parents' digital literacy skills, enabling them to effectively mediate their children's online activities. Digital literacy should focus on practical skills rather than

technical expertise, empowering parents to navigate and guide their children's Internet usage responsibly.

Further recommendations targeted towards policy makers, parents and guardians as well as educators are detailed in this report. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards creating a safer and more inclusive digital environment for children in Zimbabwe, ensuring their holistic development and well-being in the digital age.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APP	Application
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews
CIC	Community Information Centre(s)
CIRT	Cyber Incident Response Team
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education
POTRAZ	Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
PPS	Probability Proportional to Size
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
WTDC	World Telecommunication Development Conference
CGC	Capitation Grants Classifications



1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are now an integral part of children's everyday lives. In an era defined by the rapid evolution of technology, children in Zimbabwe find themselves navigating a digital landscape that offers unprecedented opportunities and unforeseen challenges. The Internet has become an integral part of their lives, influencing their education, social interactions, and overall development. While the Internet offers seemingly endless opportunities to children throughout the world, it may also present several risks. Various World Telecommunications Development Conference (WTDC) Resolutions such as Resolution 67 (Rev. Dubai, 2014)¹, Resolution 179 (Rev. Busan, 2014² and Dubai, 2018³) recognised the urgent need and global demand for the protection of children from exploitation and exposure to danger and deception when using the Internet and ICTs. Recognising the importance of understanding the intricacies of this digital frontier as well as the gaps in evidence and baseline data, POTRAZ embarked on this comprehensive Child Online Safety Survey, covering all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe.

By exploring the intricacies of the digital landscape in Zimbabwe, POTRAZ aims to foster a safer, more inclusive, and educationally enriching online environment for children. This survey aimed to illuminate the various facets of children's online experiences, shedding light on how technology shapes their lives, influences their well-being, and impacts their educational journey. This survey stands as a testament to POTRAZ's commitment to the holistic well-being and development of the young minds navigating the vast terrain of the Internet in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has taken several significant steps towards ensuring the protection of children online, such as the implementation of the Child Online Safety Guidelines by POTRAZ in

¹ <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/67revDubai.pdf>

² https://www.itu.int/en/action/cybersecurity/Documents/Resolutions/pp-14_Res.%20179.pdf

³ <https://www.itu.int/en/action/cybersecurity/PublishingImages/Lists/resolutions/AllItems/Res%20179.pdf>

partnership with ChildLine in 2020. As Zimbabwe continues to progress in the digital age, it is crucial to equip policymakers, educators, parents, and guardians with empirical insights into the online behaviours and challenges faced by the younger generation. This report endeavours to contribute valuable data that not only reflects the current state of children's online interactions but also serves as a foundation for informed decision-making, policy formulation, and community engagement.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

POTRAZ was yet to conduct a nationally representative survey on children's Internet behaviour and experiences. Previous access and use surveys were based on a sample predominantly involving adults and children's perspectives were not taken into account. This presented the Authority with limited empirical evidence regarding the extent of online risks, including exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and online exploitation among Zimbabwean children. Furthermore, the role of parental guidance on children's Internet use remained underexplored.

This comprehensive study addresses these evidence gaps. With more children going online every day, it is more important than ever to ascertain the risks and experiences of children online, to adequately safeguard them from harm and abuse. This requires evidence from children themselves to effectively inform strategies for promoting a safe and positive digital environment for the younger generation. While the digital landscape offers opportunities for learning and connectivity, there is a critical need to investigate the opportunities, risks and challenges faced by children in Zimbabwe as they navigate the online environment.

1.3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the survey was to examine and generate a clear understanding of Zimbabwean children's online experiences. The specific research objectives were as follows:

1. Assess the level of Internet use among children, including the devices they use, frequency of use, barriers to Internet access and use.
2. Explore children's online activities, including their social media platforms engagement.

3. Assess the risks and harms that children are exposed to while using the Internet as well as gauge their level of awareness.
4. Identify the online safety measures in place and examine the extent of parental/guardians' involvement in children's online activities.
5. Formulate recommendations for policymakers, educators, and parents/guardians based on the survey findings, aiming to enhance the positive aspects of children's online experiences and address potential challenges.

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This Child Online Safety Survey plays a significant role in understanding children's online behaviour in Zimbabwe, offering valuable insights into the digital landscape and its impact on the younger population. The study will also shed more light on the knowledge and awareness levels of children and parents/guardians in Zimbabwe regarding online risks and safety measures. These insights are crucial for developing effective strategies and policies targeted at creating a safer online environment for children.

Information obtained from the survey may be used to design educational programmes aimed at empowering children to navigate the digital world responsibly. Understanding children's online behaviours also contribute to informed awareness campaigns for parents and guardians. This, in turn, will help them guide their children through the digital landscape and enforce responsible online habits. The survey has the potential to enhance academic comprehension regarding the interaction between children and online environments, serving as a foundation for additional research and scholarly undertakings.

1.5. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The survey was conducted at national level, covering all the ten (10) provinces of Zimbabwe. It covered both the rural and urban areas. Children aged between 8 and 18 years were interviewed, and questionnaires were administered through schools. All school categories, as classified by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education were included in the sample to ensure inclusivity. Parents and guardians across the ten provinces were also surveyed.

1.5.1. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The survey was conducted in a responsible and respectful manner, maintaining the trust and cooperation of children, parents, and guardians. Consent was obtained from school authorities before conducting interviews with children. Parents also participated voluntarily. To ensure inclusivity and comprehension, vernacular language was used in the administration on the survey instrument. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Assurance was given to participants that their responses will be kept confidential. The survey instrument was approved by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Fieldwork was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Representatives from the department of learner welfare (educational psychologists) were present during fieldwork in all provinces.





2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. OVERVIEW

This section provides a detailed description of the procedures and techniques employed to collect and analyse data. It encompasses various aspects, such as research design, sampling strategy, sample design, survey instrument design, target population, data collection procedure, data analysis and reporting, as well as other steps involved in implementing the survey.

2.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A cross-sectional research design was adopted for the Child Online Safety Survey. This approach allowed researchers to gather information from a diverse group of children at a specific moment, providing a snapshot of their usage, online safety awareness and practices. This method was chosen for its effectiveness, efficiency, and the ability to complete the study within a relatively shorter timeframe.

2.3. SAMPLING STRATEGY

2.3.1. INCLUSION CRITERIA

The research was conducted in 32 districts across all 10 provinces of Zimbabwe covering both rural and urban areas. The study targeted children aged between 8 and 18 years. The survey also included children with disabilities. The research also targeted parents and guardians aged 18 years and above. The Population Proportion to Size (PPS) approach was used with respect to gender for children, in line with the school enrolment ratios provided by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.



2.3.2. SAMPLING METHOD

A four stage Multi Sampling Strategy was used for this study.

➤ **Stage 1: Grouping by Provinces**

Schools were initially grouped or stratified by provinces. This ensured representation from different geographic regions.

➤ **Stage 2: Stratification based on Capitation Grant Classification within Each Province**

Within each province, schools were further stratified based on Capitation Grant Classifications (CGC): P1, P2, P3, S1, S2, S3. This step ensured equal representation of different types of schools in the study. The CGC is a criterion used by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to categorise schools in terms of resources. These categories are defined as follows:

- ♣ P1 and S1 Schools- these are primary and secondary schools mainly associated with high-income social class. They are mainly located in urban low-density areas. The categorisation also includes some elite boarding schools, irrespective of their location.
- ♣ P2 and S2 Schools- this category is comprised of primary and secondary schools in urban high-density areas, including government schools, as well as church-based boarding schools situated in rural areas. Schools in this category mainly service the medium to low-income groups of the society.
- ♣ P3 and S3 Schools- This category is mainly comprised of schools situated in the rural areas and those that serve the low-income groups regardless of location.

➤ **Stage 3: Random Sampling within Strata (Province and Capitation Grant Classification)**

Random sampling was employed within each stratum (province and Capitation Grant Classification) to select a representative sample of schools. Each school within a specific stratum had an equal chance of being selected.

➤ Stage 4: Child Selection within Male or Female Quota

After selecting schools, purposive sampling was used to choose children within each school for interviews. Quota Sampling ensured an equal representation of male and female children by setting quotas within each school. Random selection within each gender quota was then conducted.

2.3.3. SAMPLE SIZE

The projected school-going age population from the 2021 Zimbabwe Primary and Secondary Education Statistics Report was used as a sampling frame to come up with total sample size. The projected school-going age population aged between 8 and 18 years of age still in primary and secondary school accounted for 4,335,988.

The following formula for large populations was therefore used to come up with the nationally representative sample size for the survey for each province.

$$n = \frac{[z^2 \cdot p(1-p)]}{e^2}$$

Where:

n is the sample size for the survey

z is the *z* score

e is the margin of error 0.02



The Population Proportion to Size (PPS) approach was used. Table 1 displays the target sample size for each province.

Table 1: Sample Design

Province	Proportion of School Going Children Aged Between 8 and 18 Years	Target Sample size
Bulawayo	4%	101
Harare	14%	345
Manicaland	13%	320
Mashonaland Central	9%	221
Mashonaland East	10%	251
Mashonaland West	12%	277
Masvingo	12%	291
Matabeleland North	6%	148
Matabeleland South	6%	135
Midlands	13%	311
Grand Total	100%	2,401

A total of 2,901 interviews were targeted for this study, comprising 500 parents/ guardians over the age of 18, and 2,401 children aged between 8 and 18 years.

2.4. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey utilised quantitative methods in the form of interviewer administered questionnaires for children and self-completion questionnaires for parents. Qualitative data was also gathered through discussions with children. This approach enabled triangulation of findings to enhance the overall outcomes of the study. The questionnaires for children were developed in consultation with the Strategic Policy Planning and Research Statistics Division of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. The Educational Psychologists in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education assisted POTRAZ in adapting the questionnaires to the various age groups of the children and ensuring age-appropriate language was used to

facilitate comprehension and completion. The various topics covered in the children's questionnaire are highlighted in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Modules in the Children's Questionnaire

Module	Themes
Section 1	Demographic and Administrative Data.
Section 2	Access and Usage
Section 3	Social Networking
Section 4	Risks
Section 5	Awareness and Support
Section 6	Opportunities/Benefits

The various topics covered in the parents/guardians' questionnaire are highlighted in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Modules in the Parent's Questionnaire

Module	Themes
Section 1	Demographic and Administrative Data.
Section 2	Internet Use
Section 3	Monitoring and Controls
Section 4	Safety/ Risks/ Threats

2.5. PILOT TESTING

To ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the target age group, dummy interviews were conducted and necessary modifications to the survey instruments were implemented before full scale data collection.

2.6. FIELDWORK

Fieldwork commenced on the 31st of October 2023. The fieldwork was executed in two primary phases, with a substantial break taken during school holidays and the festive season. It resumed upon the re-opening of schools in January 2024 and was concluded on the 9th of February 2024. A dedicated team from the POTRAZ Research and Development department, along with representatives from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, played a crucial role in administering and overseeing data collection across all ten provinces.

2.7. DATA ANALYSIS

Data was captured using Microsoft Forms, then exported from the server in a Comma Separated Values (CSV) file format. Subsequently, it was imported into IBM SPSS Statistics 21 as well as Excel (XLS) for further analysis and the generation of statistical tables. The analysis approach utilised both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Triangulation of data from both children and parents was conducted to enhance the validity of findings.

2.8. RESPONSE RATE

The survey targeted a total of 2,901 interviews; a total of 3,311 respondents were successfully interviewed, giving an overall response rate of 114 percent (%). The detailed response rates per province are presented below in the table below:

Table 4: Response Rate

PROVINCE	CHILDREN			PARENTS			OVERALL
	Target	Achieved	Response Rate	Target	Achieved	Response Rate	Response Rate
Bulawayo	101	205	203%	22	51	232%	208%
Harare	345	350	101%	109	115	106%	102%
Manicaland	320	354	111%	65	51	78%	105%
Mashonaland Central	221	226	102%	43	43	100%	102%
Mashonaland East	251	275	110%	52	45	87%	106%
Mashonaland West	277	317	114%	57	51	89%	110%
Masvingo	291	327	112%	52	52	100%	110%
Matabeleland North	148	214	145%	22	27	123%	142%
Matabeleland South	135	197	146%	22	40	182%	151%
Midlands	311	315	101%	57	56	98%	101%
Grand Total	2400	2780	116%	501	531	106%	114%

Since the data collection was school based, the target sample per province was based on the provincial enrolment ratios as provided by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.





3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1. OVERVIEW

This Chapter provides an overview of the demographic profile of respondents i.e., children, parents, and guardians to allow for contextualisation of research findings. It also delivers an in-depth analysis of the survey results, encompassing diverse key indicators that have been identified.

3.2. PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

3.2.1. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY SCHOOL CATEGORY AND PROVINCE

A total of 2,780 children were interviewed across 60 schools in 32 districts spanning across all the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. An equal number of schools were selected in each province, one from each Capitation Grants Category (CGC) as defined by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

The sample spread was fairly distributed across capitation grants classifications as well as provinces as shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Sample Distribution by Province and Capitation Grants Classification.

Province	P1	P2	P3	S1	S2	S3	Total
Bulawayo	15%	15%	10%	22%	24%	14%	7%
Harare	16%	16%	16%	20%	17%	16%	13%
Manicaland	11%	19%	18%	12%	20%	20%	13%
Mashonaland Central	15%	18%	15%	17%	17%	17%	8%
Mashonaland East	19%	16%	16%	17%	19%	13%	10%
Mashonaland West	15%	14%	17%	23%	15%	16%	11%
Masvingo	17%	16%	16%	18%	17%	16%	12%
Matabeleland North	14%	14%	12%	21%	15%	24%	8%
Matabeleland South	16%	16%	16%	21%	16%	16%	7%
Midlands	16%	16%	16%	26%	14%	13%	11%
Grant Classification	15%	16%	16%	19%	17%	16%	100%

3.2.2. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER

The sample size was distributed proportionately to the projected school-going age population from the 2021 Primary and Secondary Education Statistics Report, considering gender proportions. Specifically, the distribution accounted for 44.8% males and 55.2% females, as shown in Figure 1 below:

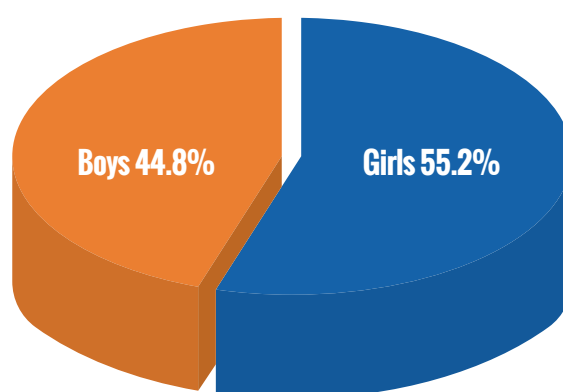


Figure 1: Sample Distribution by Gender

The gender distribution was in line with national demographic statistics and child enrolment ratios. Figure 2 below further highlights the detailed gender split across the Capitation Grants Classification of schools.

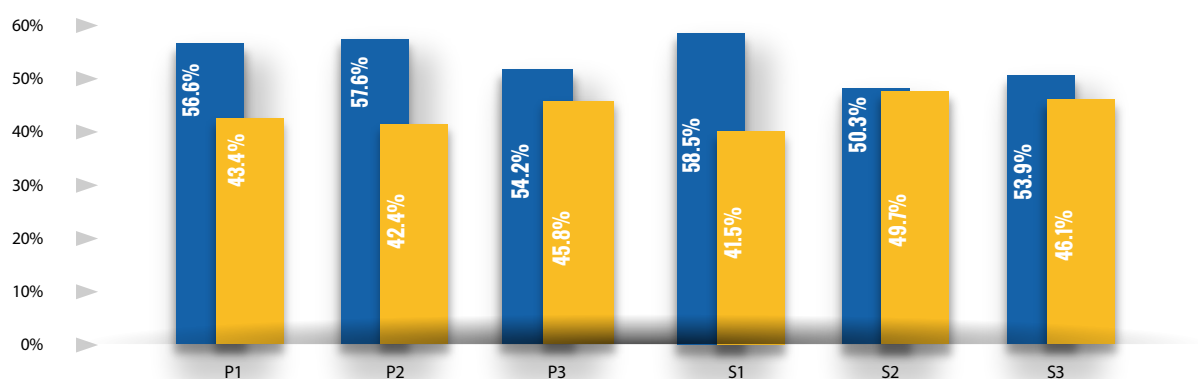


Figure 2: Gender Sample Split by Grants Classification

The Population Proportional to Size (PPS) method was employed to determine the sample distribution by gender per school. Exception was made for single-sex schools.

3.2.3. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE

The target population for the study included school-going children aged 8 years to 18 years. The sample distribution by age is shown in Figure 3 below:

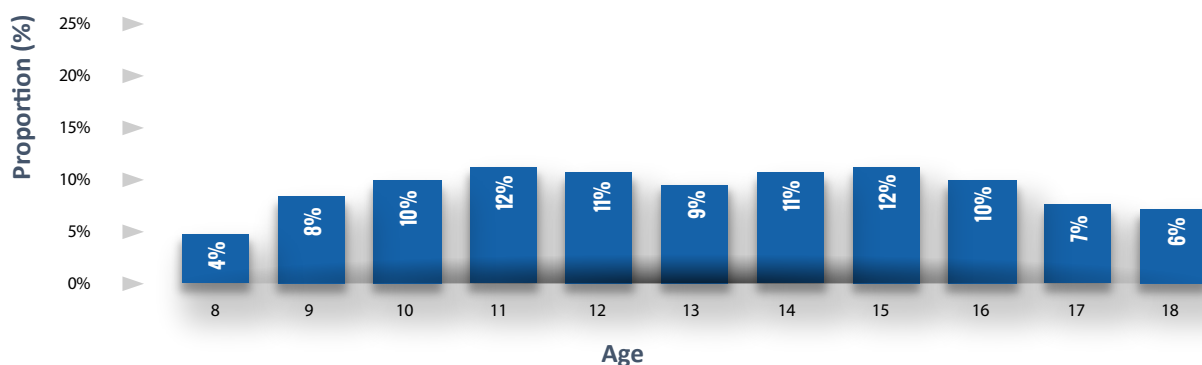


Figure 3: Sample Distribution by Age

The age range of children interviewed were in line with the expected ages of primary and secondary school pupils. However, some secondary school pupils were found to be over 18 years of age; these were dropped from analysis.

3.2.4. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

The sample distribution by children's level of education is shown in Figure 4 below:

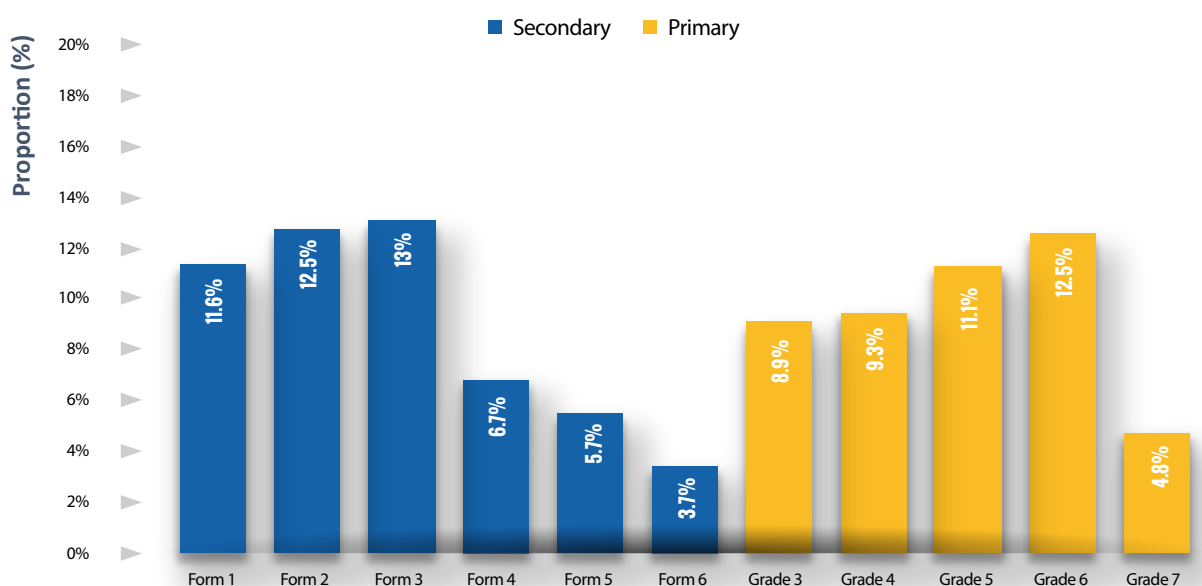


Figure 4: Sample Distribution by Level of Education

As the survey targeted children aged between 8 and 18 years, these mainly fell in the Grade three to Grade seven for primary level pupils and between Form one and Form six for secondary school pupils. There was a lower percentage of pupils in Grade 7 (4.8%), Form 4 (6.7%) and Form 6 (3.7%) due to the timing of the survey. The survey was carried out during the 3rd term of school calendar when students were preparing to sit for exam classes.

3.3. PARENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

With the increasing number of online risks faced by children, it becomes crucial for parents to take a proactive approach to ensure their children's safety on the Internet. A sample of 531 parents/guardians was reached through various data collection methods, including face-to-face interviews and self-administered questionnaires distributed online as well as manually. The parents' sample was distributed across all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe, addressing the rural-urban aspects of each province.

3.3.1. SAMPLE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE

The sample was normally distributed. The number of participants decreased for both younger and older age groups as shown in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Parents Sample Distribution by Age

AGE GROUP	TOTAL
18 - 25 years	3.4%
26 -30 years	5.09%
31 - 35 years	14.91%
36 - 40 years	21.89%
41 - 45 years	24.72%
46 - 50 years	14.15%
51 -55 years	10.57%
56 - 60 years	3.4%
Above 60 years	1.89%

As shown above, the largest proportion of parents/guardians was in the median age range of between 36 and 45 years old.

3.4. CHILDREN'S INTERNET ACCESS

The manner and locations through which children access the Internet, the types of devices they utilise, the duration of their online engagements, barriers to access are all facets of access and usage that mould children's experiences in the digital realm. Highlighted in this section are the in-depth findings of each facet by age, gender, province, and school category.

3.4.1. GENERAL INTERNET USAGE

Data on the opportunities, risks, and overall children's online experiences can only be gathered from children who have used the Internet. Hence, the first port of the survey entailed querying children's Internet use. The survey revealed that 52% of children had used the Internet in the three months leading to date of data collection. Nevertheless, 94.4% of the children had used the Internet at some point in their lifetime. This was after explaining to the children that using the Internet or going online entailed utilising services such as searching on Google, sending, and receiving emails, visiting websites, using applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, or Instagram, TikTok, playing online games etc, regardless of device ownership. The statistics of children who had used Internet in the three months are disaggregated by province in Figure 5 below:

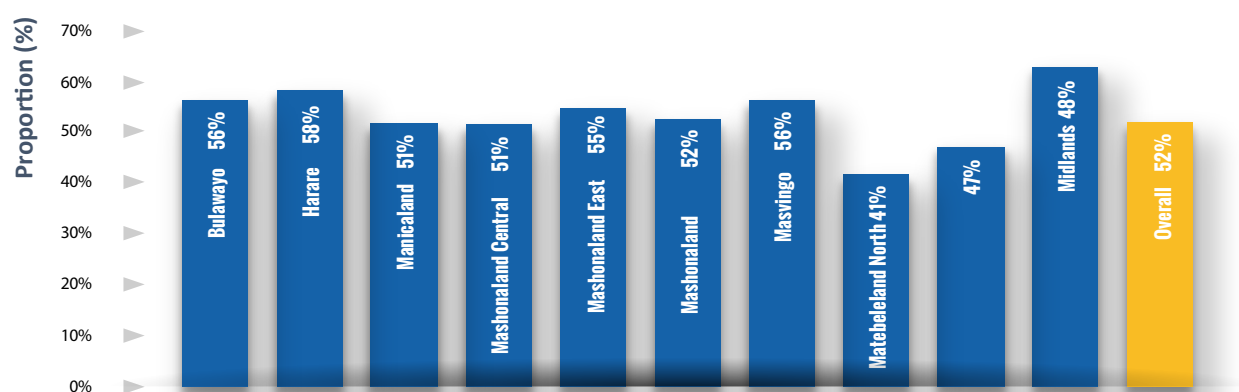


Figure 5: Internet Usage

On the other hand, Internet usage was lower for primary level pupils as compared to secondary level pupils. The proportion of children who had used the Internet was lower for pupils in the P3 category i.e., primary schools situated in the rural areas that mainly serve the

low-income groups. However, this disparity disappears in secondary schools, where usage is about the same across all categories. The COVID 19 Pandemic played a pivotal role in promoting Internet use amongst children. Lessons shifted from physical to online, as educators delivered educational content through video, audio and even text using various platforms, including WhatsApp.

3.4.2. AGE OF INITIAL INTERNET USE: EXPLORING CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ONLINE WORLD

By gaining insights into the age of initial Internet use, we can better comprehend the evolving landscape of digital interactions among the younger generation. As shown in the figure below, most children stated they first accessed the Internet at the age of 10 years. The 7-13 years age range was the most prevalent, accounting for 76.5% of children as shown in Figure 6 below:

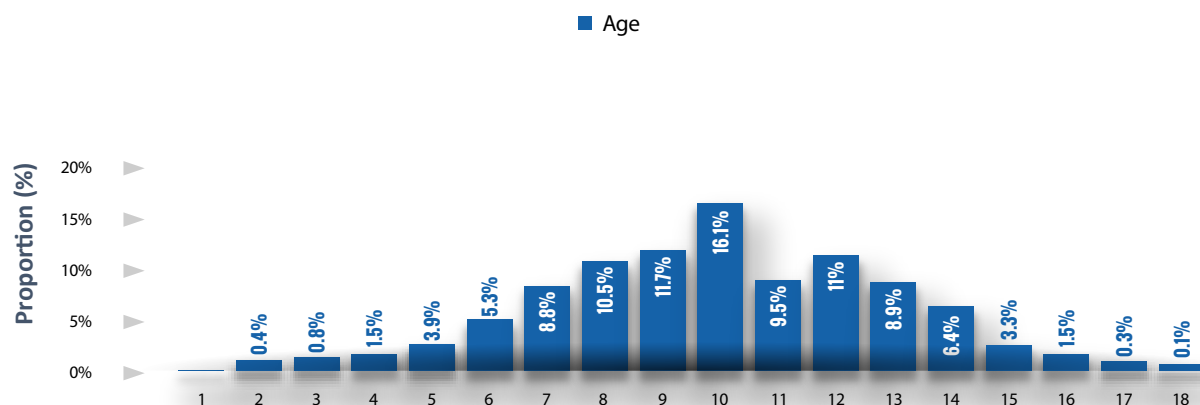


Figure 6: Age of Initial Internet Use

The average age of initial age of Internet use was 10 years. Disparities in age of initial Internet use may be influenced by factors such as Internet and device accessibility, affordability, parental and school restrictions amongst other factors.

The graph below summarizes age of initial Internet use by school classification.

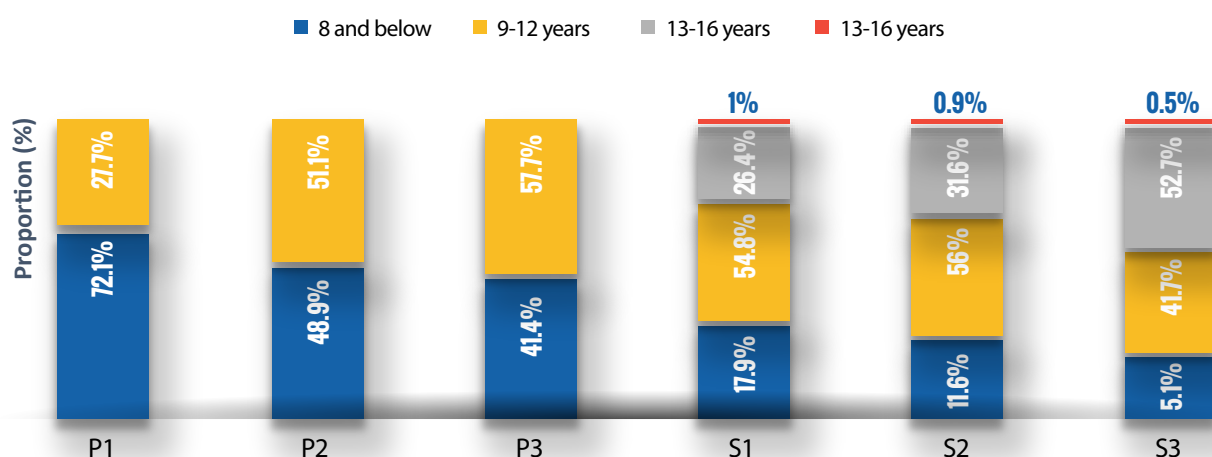


Figure 7: Age of Initial Internet Use by School Category

There is substantial difference in initial age of Internet use across school categories, with exposure and affordability of services being the main catalyst of the disparity. It is important to note that the Capitation Grants Classification of schools essentially reflects economic status of schools and pupils thereof. The age of initial Internet use increased as the school's economic status decreased. As shown in Figure 7 above, Children in P1 and S1 schools had early Internet use than their counterparts. Seventy-two (72%) of children in P1 schools were already using the Internet by the age of eight (8) years.

3.4.3. LOCATION OF INTERNET ACCESS

In this segment of survey report, we turn our attention to the pivotal aspect of the Children's online experiences that is the locations from which they access the Internet. This section aims to shed light on the diverse environments in which children engage with the digital realm. The children who accessed the Internet in the last 12 months were asked the place where they accessed it from.



The majority of children (89.6%) cited that they accessed and used the Internet from home as shown in Figure 8 below:

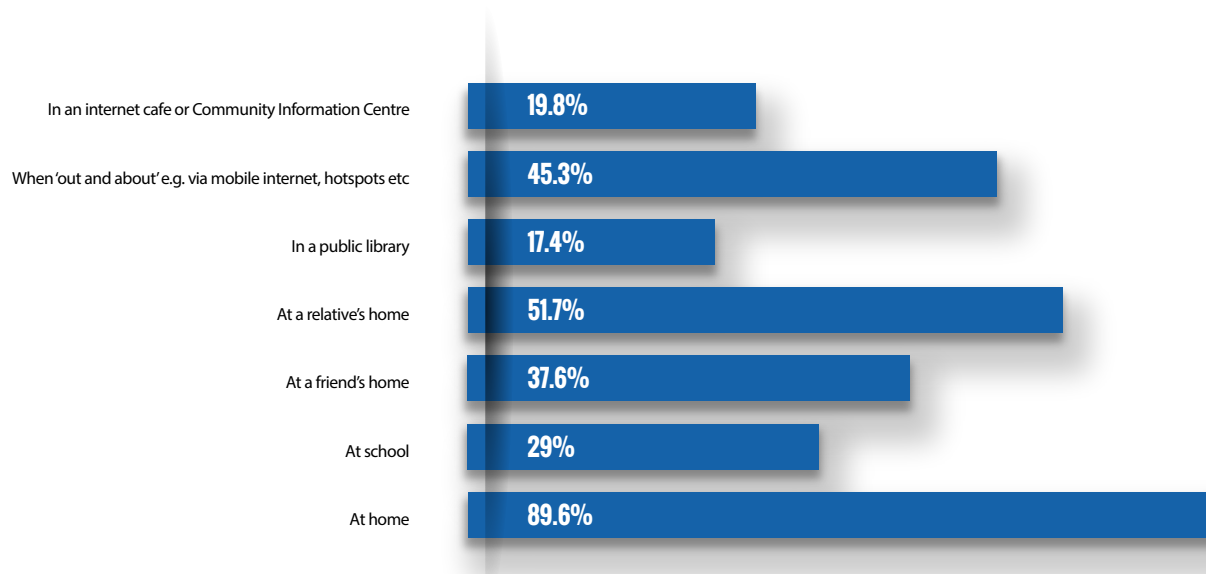


Figure 8: Location for Internet access.

The least used locations were public libraries (17.5%) as well as Internet cafes and Community Information Centres (19.9%). The proportion of children who accessed and used the Internet at school was not large at 29.1%. This may be attributable to a number of factors such as the restrictions on the use of personal devices on school premises. In addition, the survey also identified parents' workplace as a significant 'other' location where children accessed the Internet. The graph below shows that there is no noteworthy difference in the location of access by gender as shown in Figure 9 below:

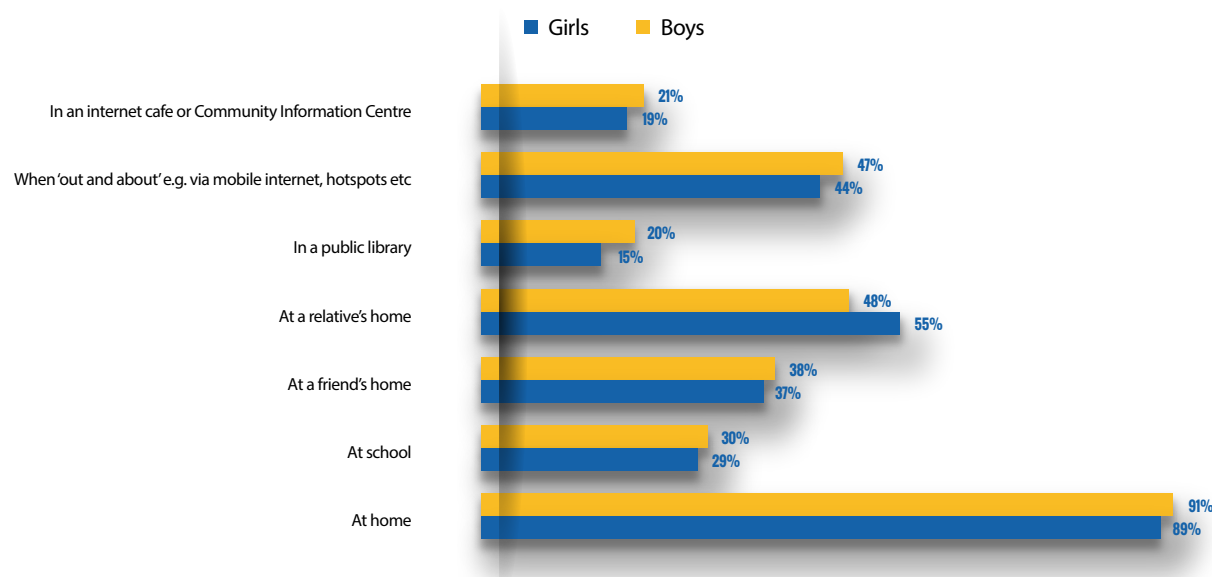


Figure 9: Location of Internet Access by Gender

The location of Internet access varied with age. The trend that Internet access locations became extensive as age increased as shown in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Location for Internet Access.

Location	8-10 years	11-13 years	14-16 years	17-18 years
At home	87%	91%	89%	92%
At school	14%	19%	35%	60%
At a friend's home	34%	35%	40%	43%
At a relative's home	48%	52%	53%	53%
In a public library	16%	14%	18%	27%
When 'out and about' e.g., via mobile Internet, hotspots etc	32%	37%	53%	66%
In an Internet café or Community Information Centre	22%	18%	20%	21%

The trend above, may be attributable to independence and movement freedom which increases with age. Across all age groups home was the primary setting from where children accessed and used the Internet. Figure 10 highlights a similarity in access locations across school categories, with home being the primary location for all categories. Relatives' homes and public spaces ("when out and about") also maintained consistence across categories, suggesting a general uniform pattern in Internet access points for children regardless of school type.

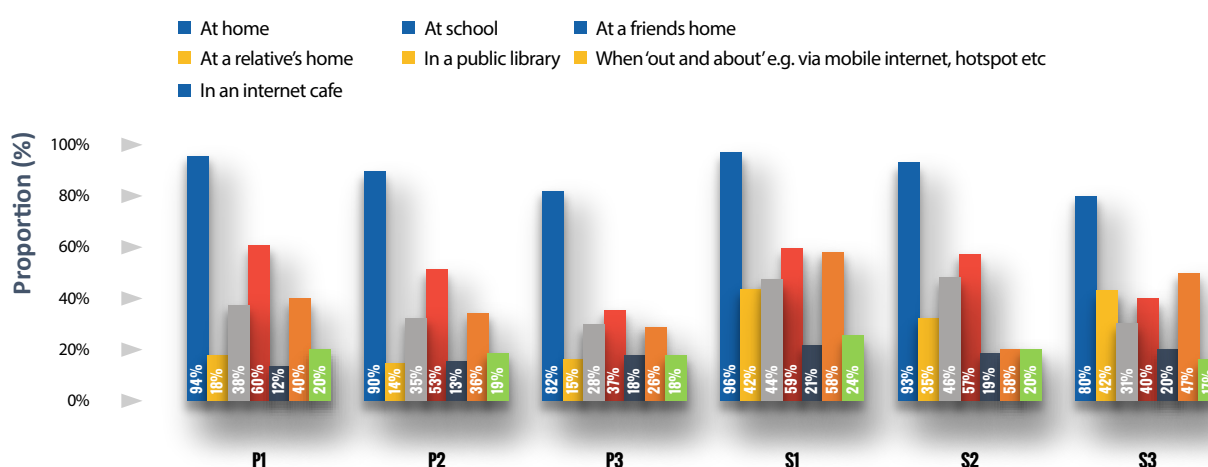


Figure 10: Location of Internet Access and Use by School Category.

Also as shown above, P3 and S3 schools had the least proportion of children who accessed the Internet from home. This may be attributable to overall lower Internet coverage rates in rural areas, as these categories mainly consist of schools serving the rural populace. Additionally, a noteworthy observation is the increase in the percentage of children accessing the Internet at school, particularly in all secondary school categories (S1, S2, S3), as compared to primary school categories (P1, P2, P3). This shift could be attributed to the integration of technology in education, particularly in secondary education. The survey also revealed that Internet cafes and Community Information Centres were not as popular amongst children, with percentages ranging from 17% to 24%. This may be attributable to that such facilities are not very widespread across the country.

3.4.4. DEVICES USED

The Internet can be accessed through a diverse range of digital tools and devices, and the utilisation of these tools can influence children's engagement on the digital space. The considerable increase in the availability of various devices and the emergence of affordable smartphones has brought about a paradigm shift in children's interactions with the online environment. The COVID-19 pandemic on the other hand, has also seen an upsurge in online education activities in Zimbabwe. To explore the various methods of online access, children were asked to state their primary device. Detailed below are the findings, broken down by both gender and age group.

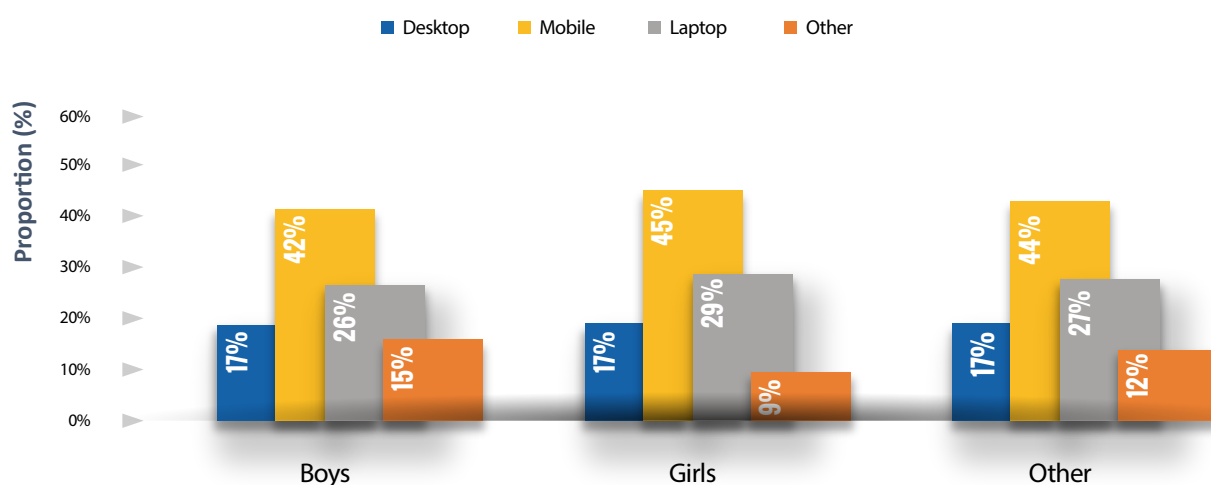


Figure 11: Devices Used to Access Internet by Gender.

As depicted by the graph, mobile devices were the primary gadgets across genders, accounting for 44% of usage. Laptops and desktops accounted for 27%, and 17%, respectively.

The 'other' consisted of devices such as game consoles, connected/smart TVs amongst others. An analysis of device use by age is shown in Figure 12 below:

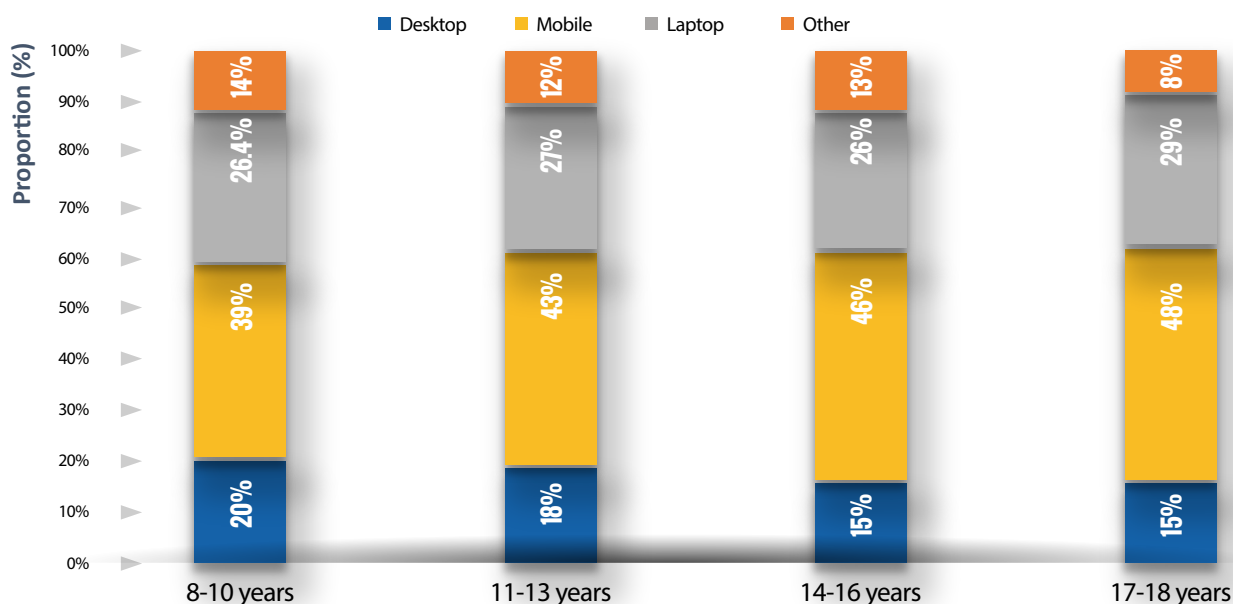


Figure 12: Devices Used to Access Internet by Age

While desktops and laptops remain popular, mobile phones emerged as the dominant device, reflecting the increasing mobility and connectivity demands of modern lifestyles.

3.4.5. FREQUENCY OF USE

The frequency of Internet use increased with age. There were also slight disparities in the frequency of Internet use by gender as shown in Figure 13 below:

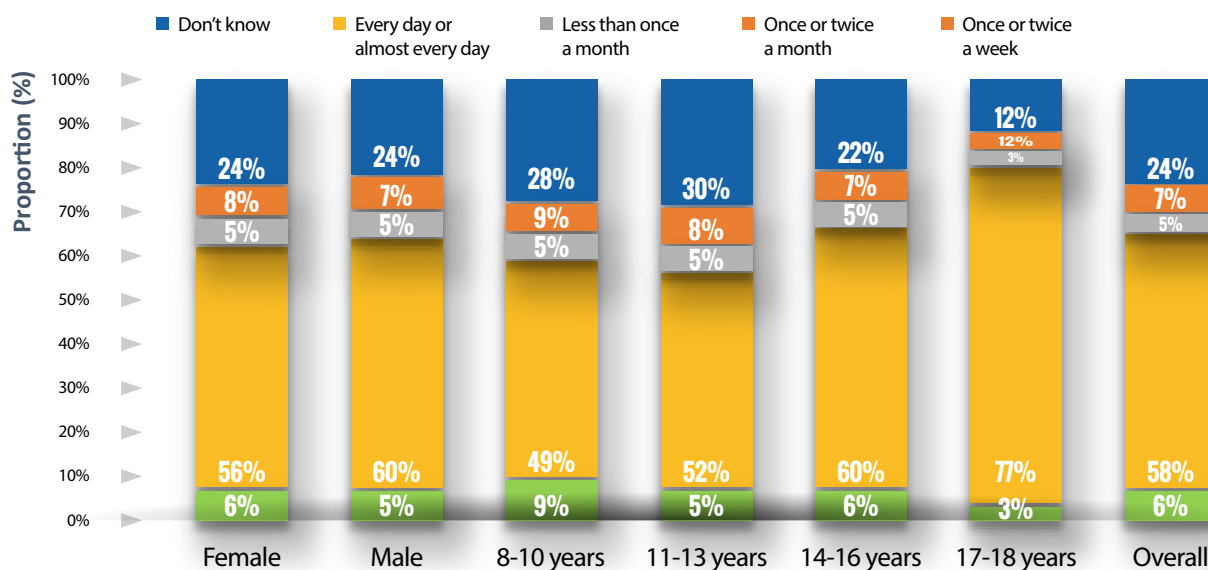


Figure 13: Frequency of Use by Gender and Age

Overall, 58% of children stated that they used the Internet frequently, i.e. every day or every other day. The proportion of children who used the Internet every day or every other day increased with age with the 17-18 years age group having the highest percentage at 77%. However, the proportion of girls who used the Internet every day or every other day was lower than that of boys. The frequency of use by children of different school categories is shown in Figure 14 below:

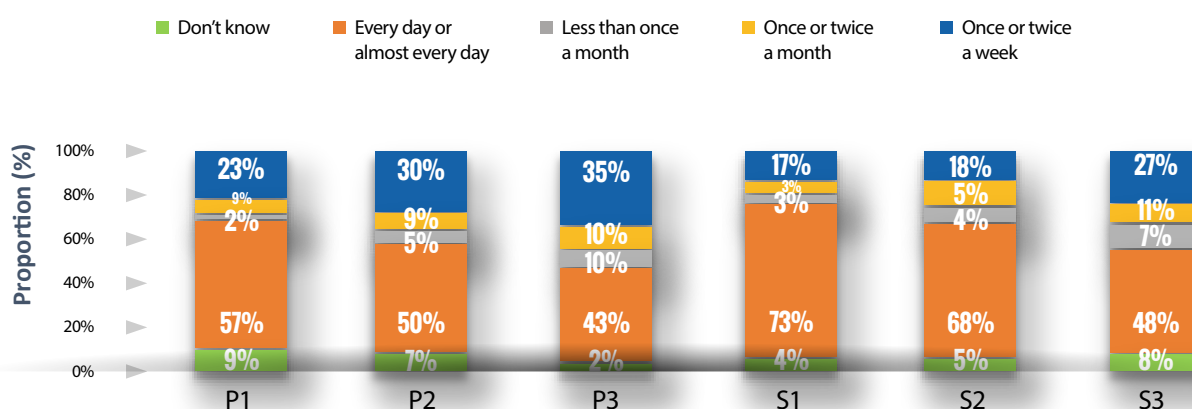


Figure 7: Age of Initial Internet Use by School Category

Figure 14: Frequency of Use by Capitation Grants Classification

The above graph shows that the frequency of use was higher amongst children in secondary education than those in primary education. The frequency of use was also higher amongst children in the more resourced P1 and S1 schools compared to the other categories.

3.4.6. TIME SPENT ONLINE

Children who used the Internet were asked to estimate the average time spent online on a regular school day and during non-school days. The results as shown in Figure 15 below revealed that children generally spent less time on the Internet during school days as compared to non-school days i.e., holidays and weekends.

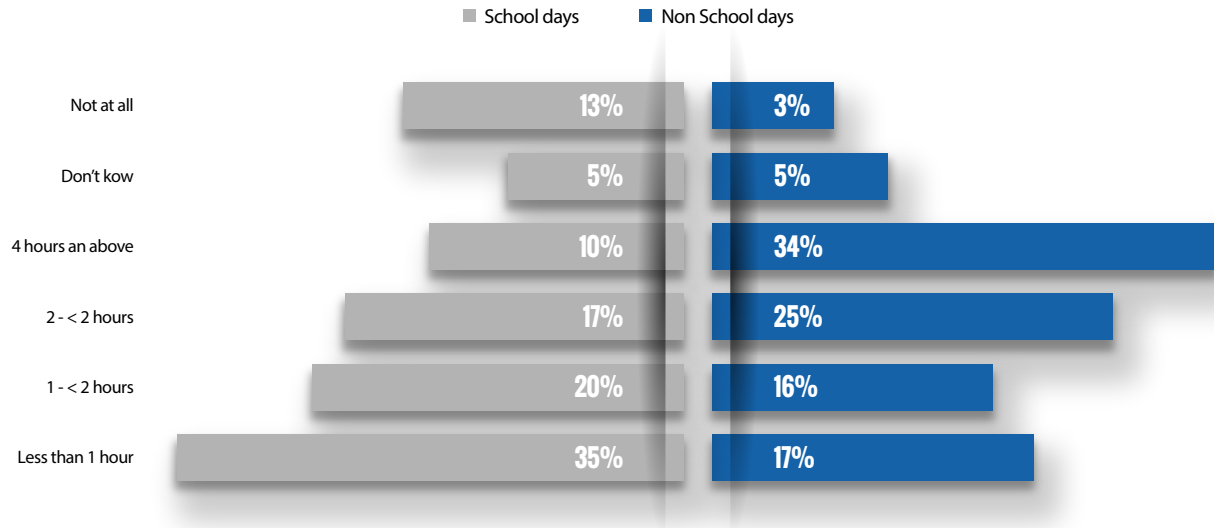


Figure 15: Approximate Time Spent on Internet

The findings revealed an exponential increase in hours spent online during non-school days, suggesting increased access to devices and a decrease in academic-related work during such breaks. The prevalence of the "Not at all" category is higher during school days (13%) compared to non-school days (3%). The lower usage during school days may be attributable to some schools and parents restricting device and Internet usage during school days. It is noteworthy that the "Don't know" category is consistent for both school days and non-school days (5%), indicating that some children could not determine their Internet usage duration as it varied. An analysis by gender shows that males and females exhibited similar trends as shown in Figure 16 below:

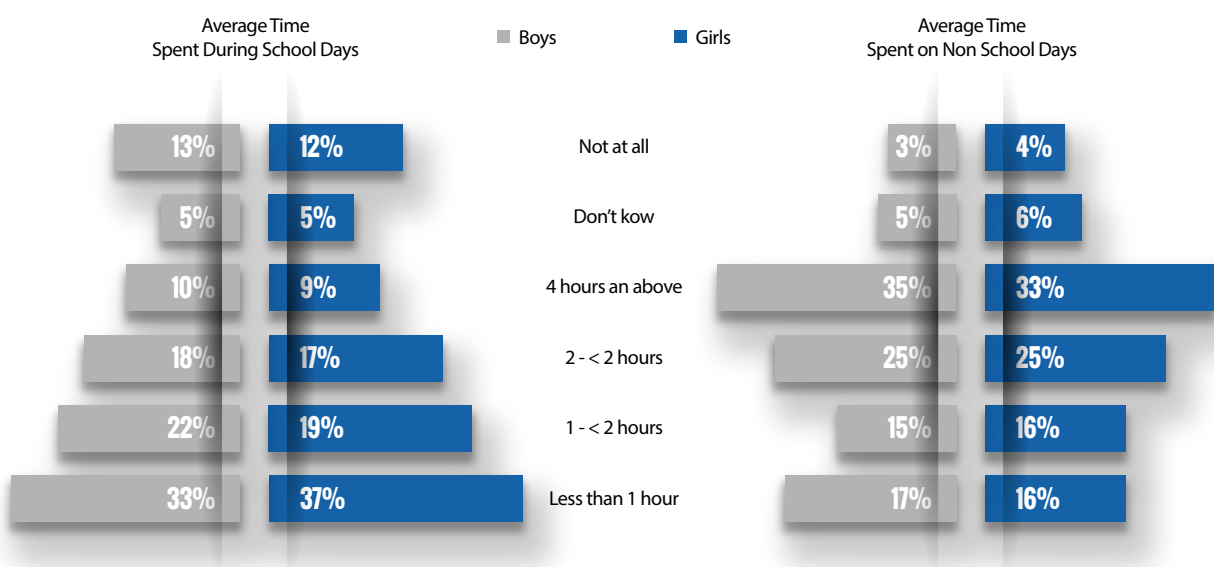


Figure 16: Average Time Spent on Internet by Gender

An analysis of average time spent on the Internet by age revealed that time spent increased with age as shown in Figure 17 below:

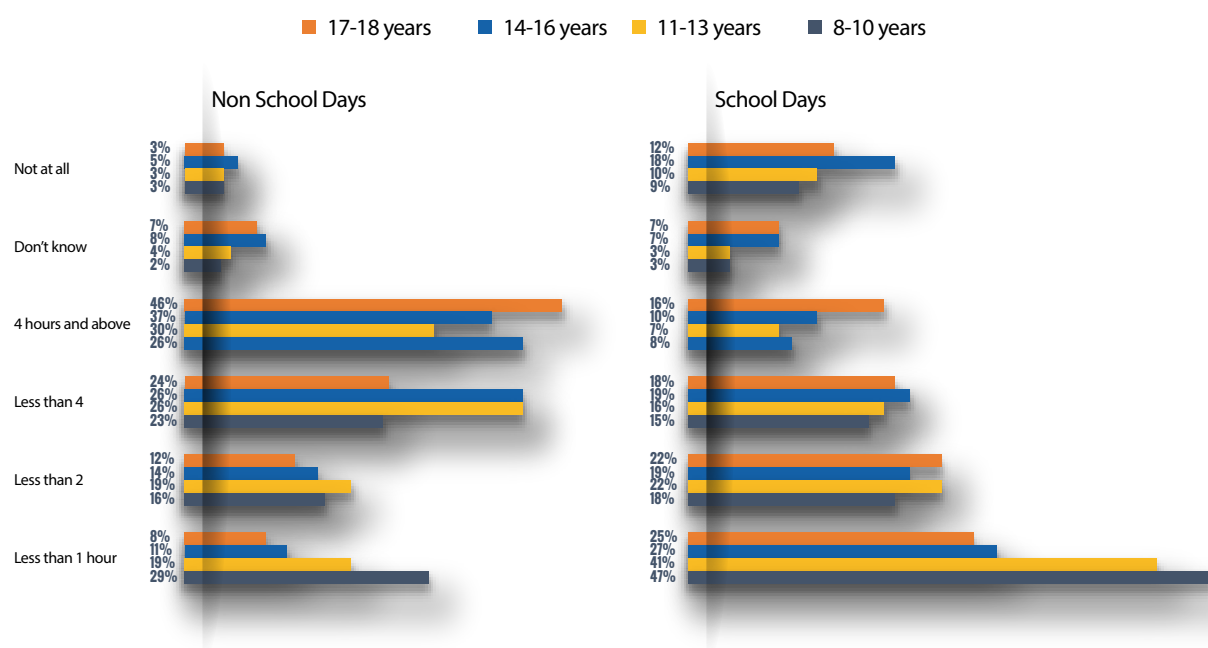


Figure 17: Average Time Spent on the Internet by Age

As shown above, most children across all age groups spent less than 1 hour on the Internet during school days. On the other hand, there was a substantial increase in the percentage of children who spent at least 4 hours daily on the Internet during non-school days, with the highest percentage being among the 17-18 years age group. Time spent on the Internet is also analysed by school category in Table 8 below:

Table 8: Average Time Spent on Internet by School Category

		Less than 1 hour	less than 2	less than 4	4 hours and above	Don't know	Not at all
P1	School days	40%	19%	16%	12%	3%	10%
	Non School days	18%	15%	23%	40%	2%	2%
P2	School days	44%	20%	16%	7%	3%	11%
	Non School days	27%	20%	22%	25%	3%	2%
P3	School days	53%	20%	17%	3%	3%	4%
	Non School days	28%	16%	28%	21%	3%	3%
S1	School days	23%	19%	20%	15%	8%	14%
	Non School days	9%	10%	24%	46%	8%	3%
S2	School days	28%	19%	18%	10%	6%	19%
	Non School days	10%	16%	24%	40%	6%	3%
S3	School days	32%	24%	16%	8%	6%	14%
	Non School days	15%	18%	29%	25%	7%	7%

The data reveals varying patterns in the reported hours spent online during school days and non-school days across different categories. In general, Category P3 reported higher proportions in the "Less than 1 hour" and "Not at all" categories on both school days and non-school days. On the other hand, Category S1 consistently showed lower proportions in these categories and higher proportions in the "4 hours and above" category, particularly during non-school days. These patterns showed disparities in Internet usage amongst children of different backgrounds.

3.4.8. ONLINE ACTIVITIES

To better understand children's activities and behaviours online, it is important to appreciate the degree of access to the Internet and the varying ways that the Internet is used across different demographics.

Figure 18 below highlights the activities that children used the Internet for.

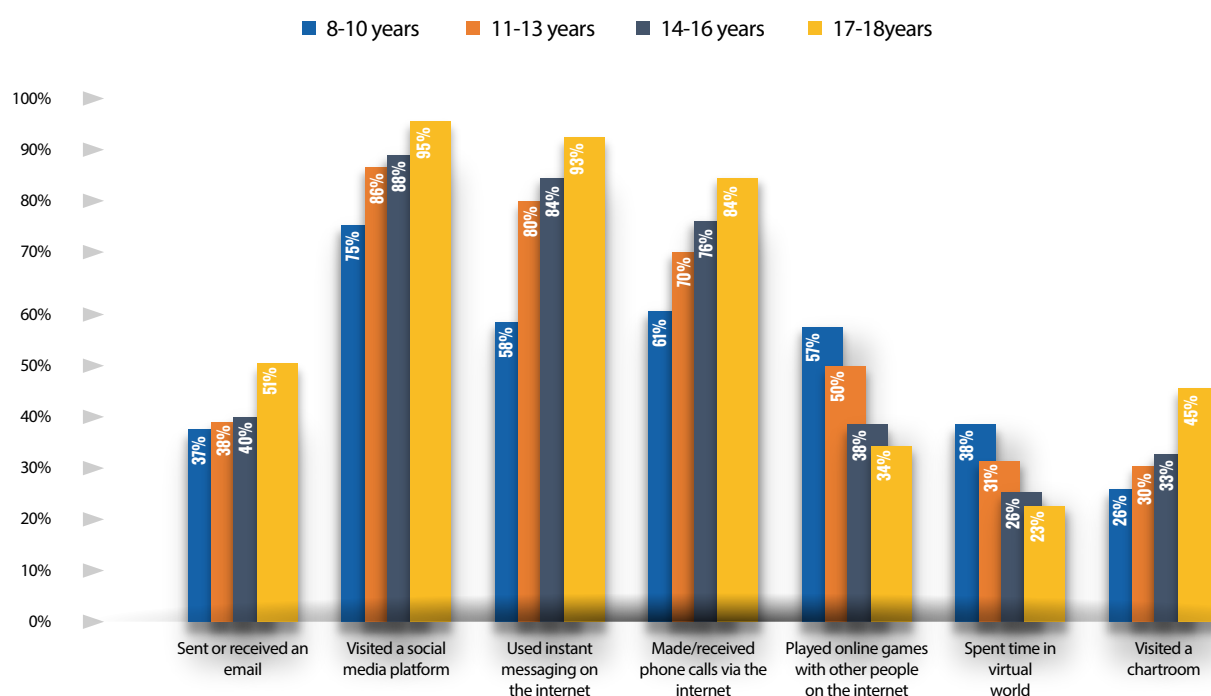


Figure 18: Children's Online Activities by Age

Of those that used the Internet, the most prevalent activities across all age groups were visiting social networks, using instant messaging platforms, and making calls via the Internet as shown in the graph above. It is important to note that a substantial proportion of children under the age of thirteen (13) reported that they used the Internet to visit social networking

platforms. This is in spite of the fact that the widely accepted digital age of consent is thirteen (13) years, which is why social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X formerly (Twitter) restrict access to children under the age of 13. However, children misrepresent their ages on profile registration. Figure 19 below highlights online activities that children engaged in by gender.

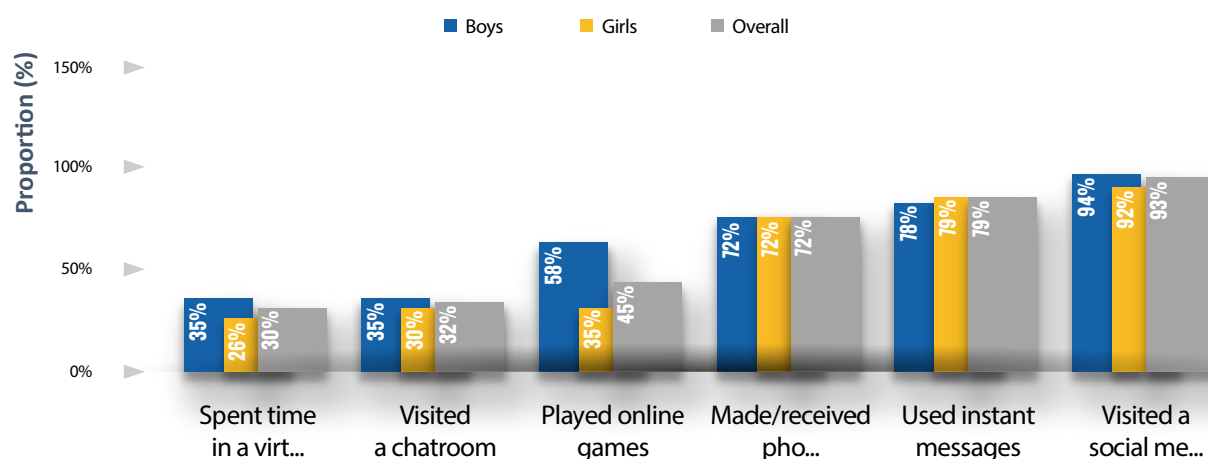


Figure 19: Children's Online Activities by Gender

As shown above, the most noticeable disparity in the online activities by males and females was on 'playing online games.' The playing of online games was evidently more popular amongst males than females. The analysis of children's online activities by school category is shown in Figure 20 below:

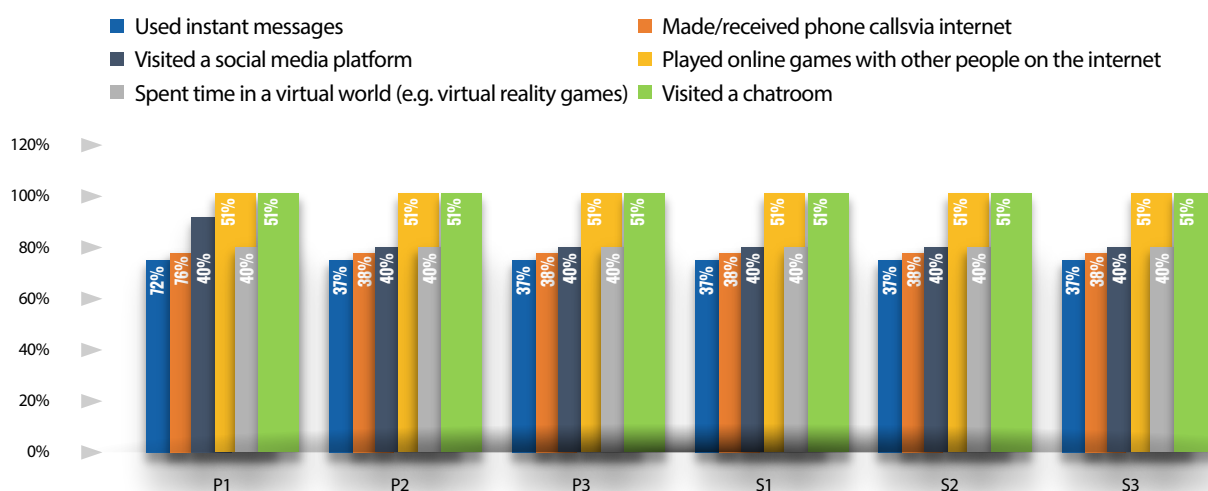


Figure 20: Children Online Activities by Capitation Grants Classification

As depicted in figure 20 above the results revealed a general consistency in online activities across schools in different category levels. Social media platforms dominated, with 93% on

average of students in all categories having visited social network platforms. Instant messaging and Internet calls were also popular, with usage exceeding 50% in all groups. However, a clear distinction emerged in online gaming. Notably primary school students were engaged in online games, with participation exceeding 50%. This enthusiasm seemed to wane in secondary schools, where students showed less interest compared to their younger counterparts.

3.4.9. BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE INTERNET

Recognising the importance of digital connectivity in today's world, it is imperative to identify and understand the barriers that children may encounter in their quest to access the Internet. To gain an in-depth understanding of barriers to accessing the Internet, children were initially asked “do you experience any barriers to accessing the Internet”. The graph below showed that 45% agreed that they encountered barriers to accessing the Internet as shown in Figure 21 below:

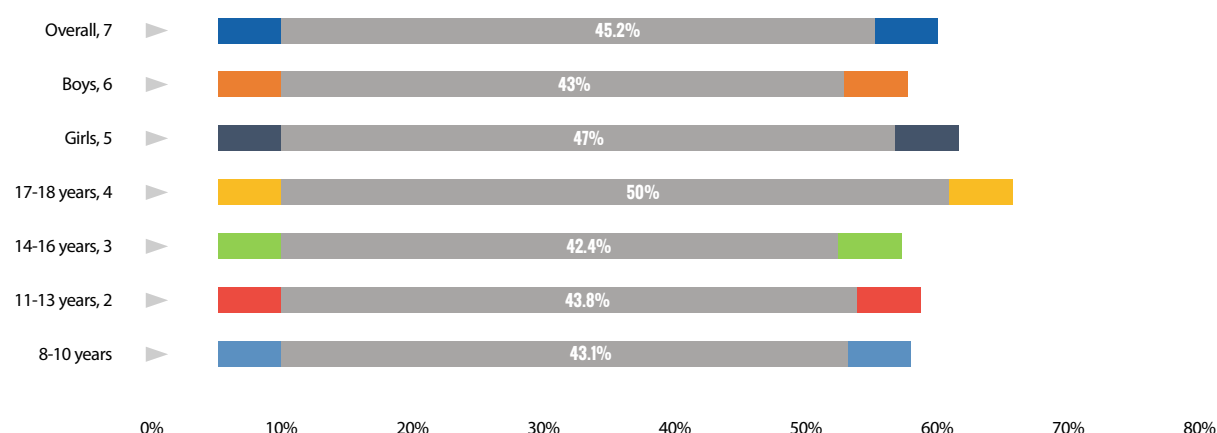


Figure 21: Barriers to Accessing the Internet by Gender and Age

Girls reported a slightly higher percentage (47%) than boys, suggesting that, on average, girls perceived a greater number of obstacles to Internet access. The 17-18 years age group had the highest proportion (51%) of children who reported experiencing barriers to accessing the Internet. Children further elaborated on the barriers to accessing and using the Internet. Below is a word cloud highlighting some of the major barriers.

As shown above, children generally did not believe the Internet was difficult to use as it had the lowest score (1.97); this implied that they did not consider digital literacy as a barrier. However, the scores were lower for children in more privileged schools P1 and S1, in comparison to children in P3 and S3 schools. This implies that there may be need for digital literacy training in these schools serving the rural communities. Children generally perceived that Internet and data was expensive. This barrier had the highest score of (2.80). The scores were higher for children in the P3 and S3 categories, implying they were more affected by the cost of Internet and data than their counterparts.

Connectivity challenges were also a significant barrier that children sometimes faced with a score of (2.68). The scores were higher for children in P3 and S3 schools. This is in line with lower Internet coverage rates in rural areas as compared to urban areas. The results also showed that children were hardly ever concerned with digital privacy issues (2.54). This implies the need for targeted education and awareness on privacy matters for children. Nevertheless, girls were sometimes concerned about their privacy (2.60) compared to boys (2.47) who were hardly ever concerned.

3.5. SOCIAL NETWORKING USAGE

This section gives an in-depth exploration of social networking usage amongst children. The digital landscape has witnessed a dynamic shift, and understanding how young individuals use social platforms is pivotal. The analysis sought to uncover patterns, preferences, settings, and potential challenges surrounding social networking. Analysis was done by age, gender, and school category. The graph below highlights the proportion of children that used social networking platforms:

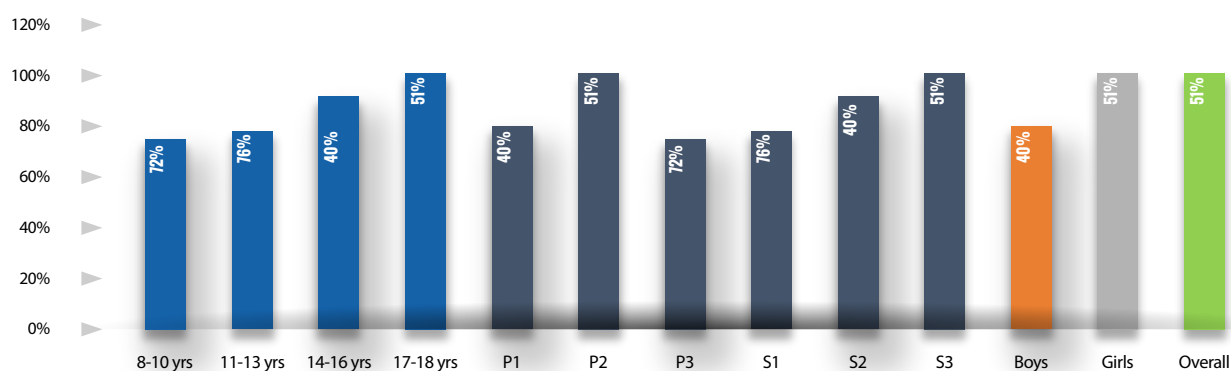


Figure 23: Social Networks Usage

Social networking enjoyed widespread popularity, with an overall adoption rate of 93%. The utilisation of social networking platforms exhibits an upward trend with age, with the lowest adoption rate recorded at 87% among 8 to10 year-olds. Gender differences in social networking usage were not discernible. Children in school category 3 exhibit a slightly lower Internet usage compared to those in school categories 1 and 2 in their respective primary and secondary segments. Overall, WhatsApp stood out as the predominant social networking platform among children, followed by Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok as shown in Figure 24 below:

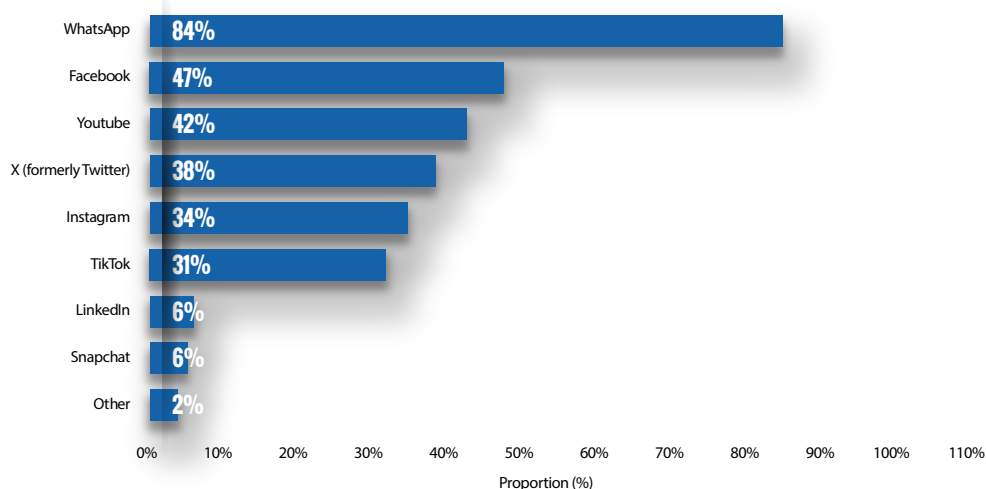


Figure 24: Social Networking Platforms Used

There was no significant difference in the use of social networks by males and females as the order of popularity was the same as shown in Figure 25 below:

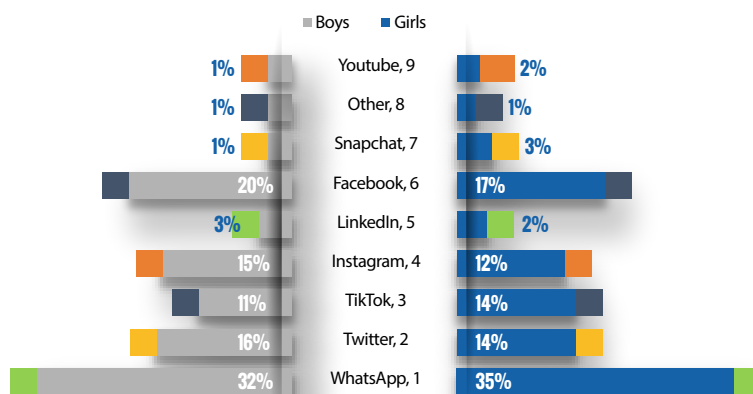


Figure 25: Social Networking Platforms Used by Gender

WhatsApp emerged as the predominant social media platform for both boys and girls, underscoring its widespread popularity and indispensable role in the communication landscape. The diverse array of social media platforms reflects the varied preferences and interests within this age group. Boys exhibited a slightly higher interest in X (formerly Twitter), indicating a preference for expressing thoughts on this platform. In contrast, girls showed a



greater preference for platforms such as TikTok and Snapchat, which are mainly video and photo sharing platforms. This diversity underscores the dynamic nature of the social media landscape among children, where each platform caters for specific interests and communication styles.

Children were further asked whether they use their own social media profiles or whether they used someone else's profile, e.g., a parent or older sibling's profile. They were also asked whether the profiles were set to public or private. The results are shown in the graph below:

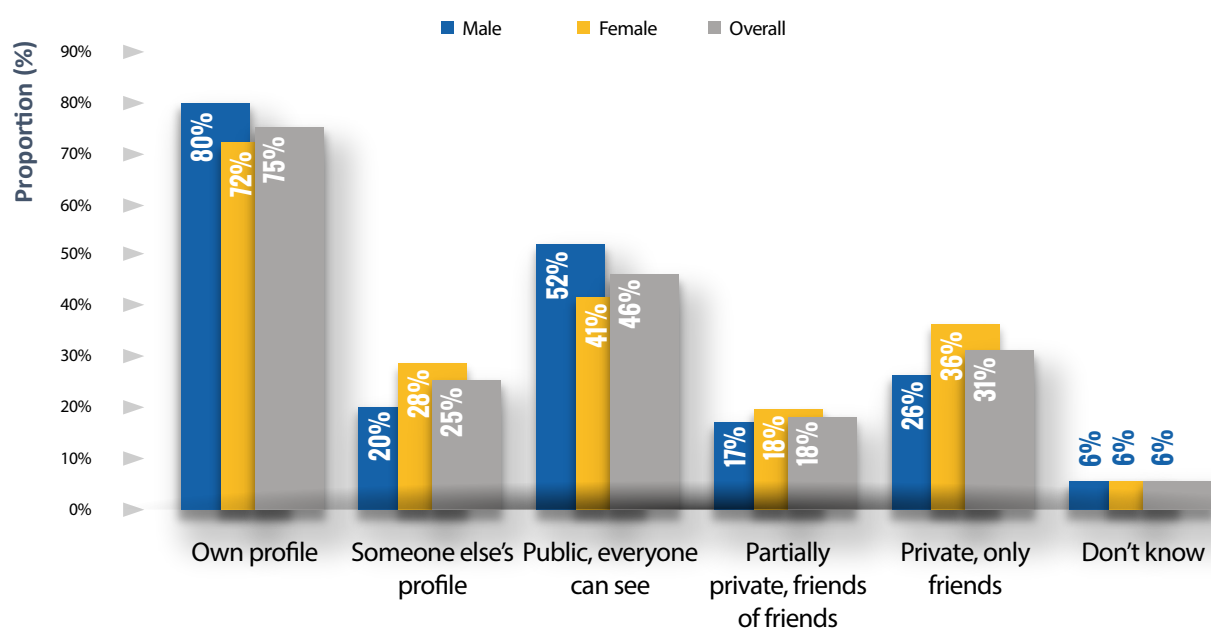


Figure 26: Social Media Profile and Setting

As shown above, 756% of children who used social media platforms confirmed that they used their own profiles and not an someone's profile, with boys registering the largest proportion. The majority (46%) of such profiles were set to public, implying that everyone, anywhere around the world, has unrestricted view of their profiles. This limits privacy and raises data protection risks. The presence of a small proportion (6%) of children who were unsure of their profile settings highlighted the importance of digital literacy and awareness regarding privacy controls on online platforms. An analysis by age is shown in Figure 27 below:

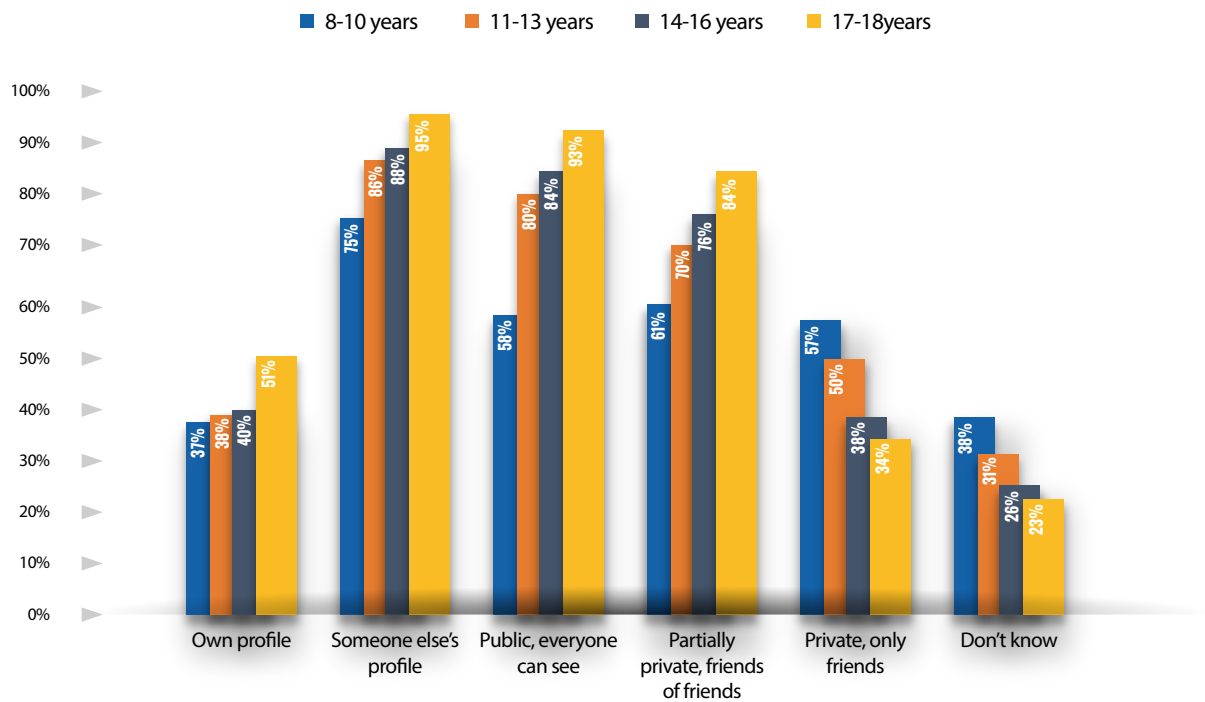


Figure 27: Social Media Profile and Setting by Age

The graph above shows that the prevalence of children who owned and used their own social media profiles increased with age. There was no distinct trend on the profile settings, inferring that they were determined by attributes such as personal preferences, level of security awareness and digital literacy, but not age.

3.6. ONLINE RISKS

While it is commendable to acknowledge the positive aspects of increased Internet usage among children, considering the developmental opportunities it offers, it is also essential to recognise that the Internet also exposes children to potential dangers present in online environments. To gain an in-depth understanding of the risks that children are exposed to, they were asked various questions summarised in this section.

3.6.1. VIRTUAL FRIENDSHIPS

Children were asked if they had a virtual friend whom they had met on the Internet. They were further asked whether they had intentionally met a virtual friend in person. The results are shown in Figure 28 below:

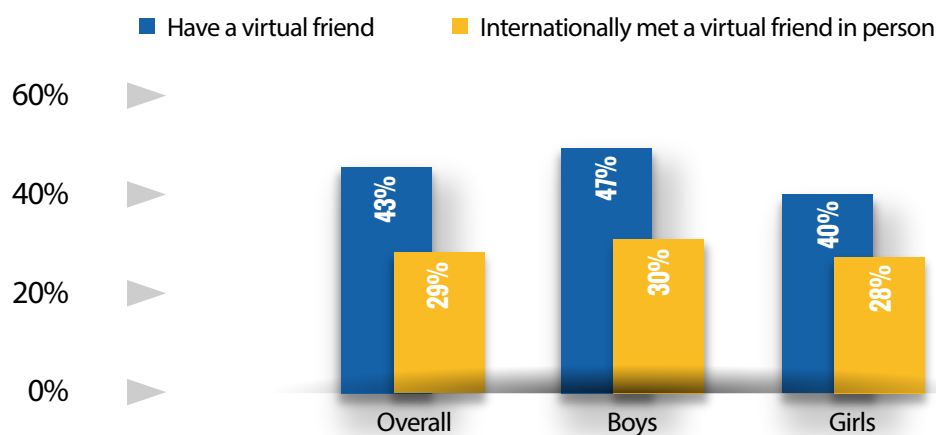


Figure 28: Virtual Friendships

As shown in Figure 28 above, a substantial proportion of children (43%) confirmed that they had virtual friendships with people they had met on the Internet. Broken down, the statistics revealed that boys were more likely to develop friendships with strangers online, as compared to girls. Virtual friendships are not inherently bad, they are part of life, particularly for a generation of children that had to endure lockdowns. The phenomenon is similar to ‘pen pals’ before the proliferation of the Internet.

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of children also confirmed that they had met virtual friends in person. The statistics also suggested that boys were more inclined to form virtual friendships and transition these online connections into in-person meetings (30%). Although these face-to-face interactions may not necessarily always lead to any harm, they may expose the children to online predators. These individuals use social media platforms, chat rooms, or other online forums to groom children and gain their trust, often with the intention of engaging in sexual exploitation or other forms of abuse. The data was further disaggregated by age as shown in the graph below.

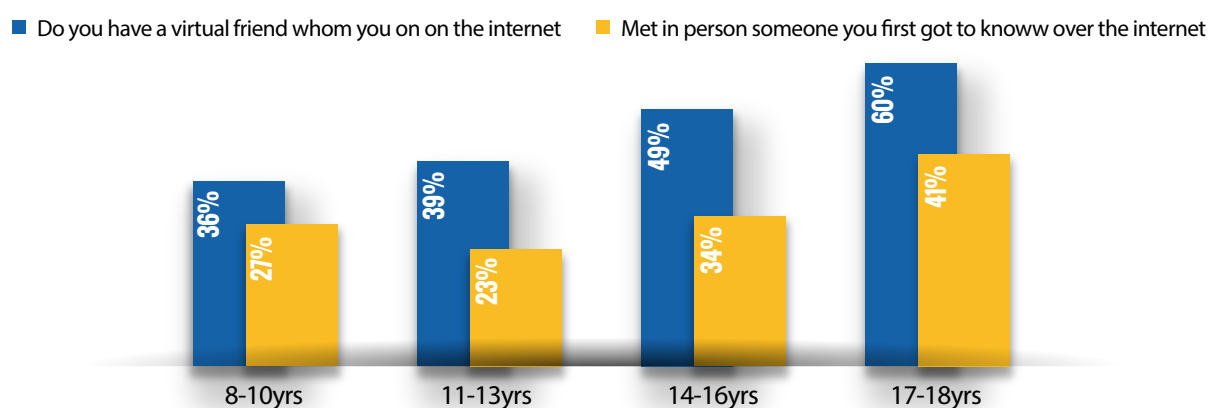


Figure 29: Virtual Friendships by Age

The data also revealed a noticeable increase in the proportion of children establishing virtual friendships as age progressed. This trend was particularly evident, with 36% of 8-10 years old having virtual friends, increasing to 60% in the 17-18 years age group. This suggests that older teenagers were more likely to establish virtual friendships compared to their younger counterparts. There is a similar trend regarding face-to-face meetings with virtual friends. The likelihood of meeting virtual friends face-to-face increased with age, reaching 41% in the 17-18 years age group. This indicates that older teenagers were more prone to transitioning online relationships into in-person interactions.

3.6.2. EXPOSURE TO ONLINE SEXUAL CONTENT

The digital landscape exposes children to a myriad of content. Understanding the prevalence of encounters with sexual content is essential for assessing the online experiences of the younger generation. The findings are highlighted in Figure 30 below:

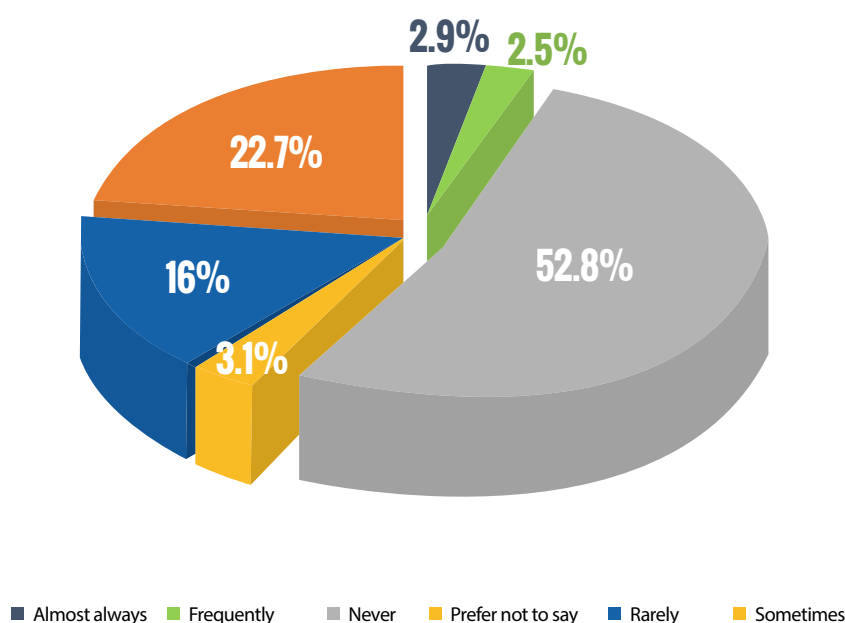


Figure 30: Exposure to Sexual Content

The majority of children (53%) highlighted that they had never encountered sexual content online. This implies that a considerable 44% were exposed to sexual content online at least once. Further analysis showed that boys were more likely to be exposed to sexual content than girls. Figure 31 below shows proportion of exposure to sexual content by gender:

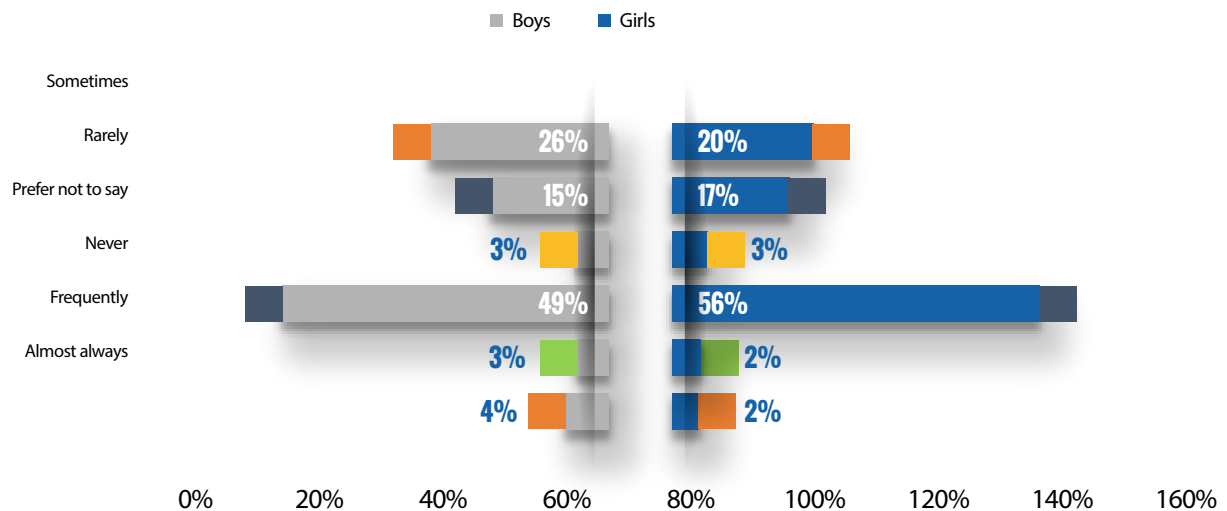


Figure 31: Exposure to Sexual Content by Gender

As shown above, more boys were exposed to sexual content online, as compared to girls. The differences in frequency between boys and girls are most pronounced in the categories of 'Almost Always' and 'Sometimes', where boys reported slightly higher percentages of 4% and 26%, respectively. The graph below summarises the frequency of children's exposure to sexual content by age.

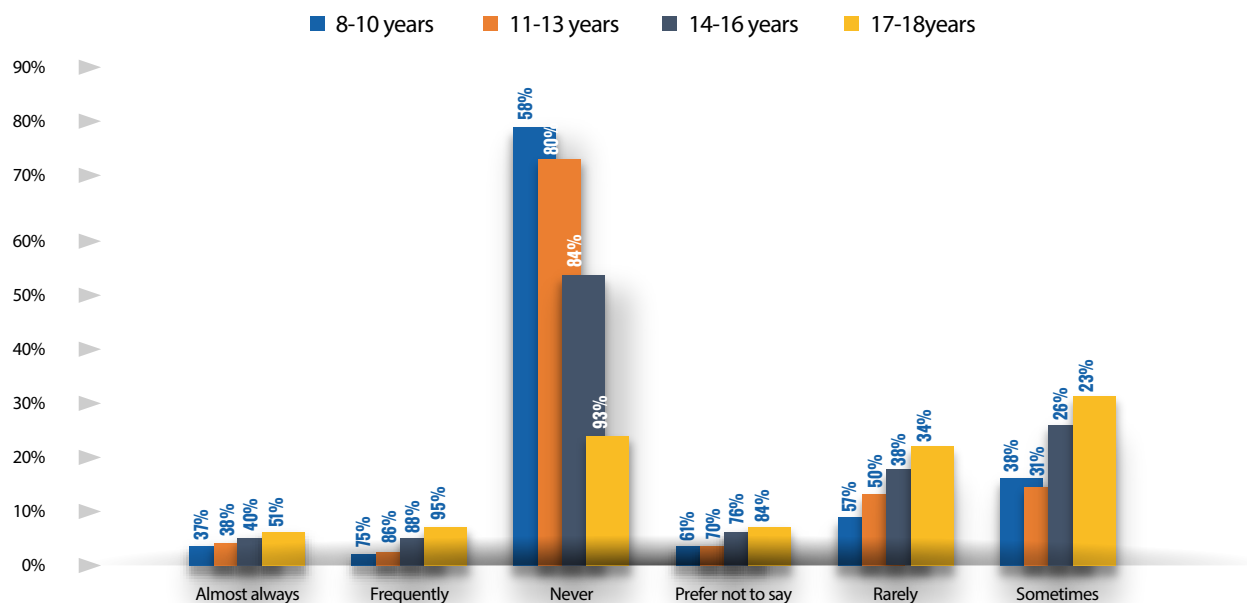


Figure 32: Exposure to Sexual Content by Age

The proportions of "Almost always" and "Frequently", with respect to the frequency of exposure to online content, increased with age, peaking in the 17-18 years age group. This suggests that older children were more likely to encounter sexual content online, possibly due to increased independence and reduced parental monitoring. Additionally, as age increases, there is a gradual rise in the percentages of children preferring not to respond indicating that older age groups were less comfortable to discuss or report exposure to sexual content. The "Never" category is particularly prominent for the 8-10 years and 11-13 years age groups, signifying a lower exposure to sexual content in these younger age brackets. A further analysis of exposure to sexual content by school category was made and the findings are shown in Figure 33 below:

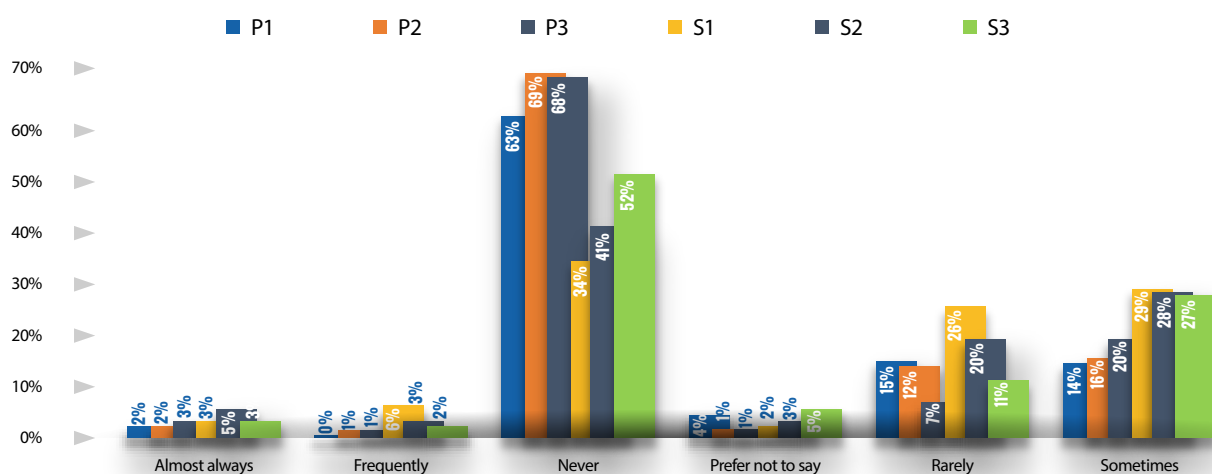


Figure 33: Exposure to Sexual Content by School Category

As shown above, children from elite schools were more exposed to sexual content online, with a lower percentage of children in P1 and S1 schools reporting that they had never seen sexual content online.



3.6.3. CYBERBULLYING

Cyberbullying has the potential to cause profound and lasting harm. Cyberbullying can take many forms, ranging from targeted, ongoing harassment to more isolated incidents of abuse or persecution, teasing or exclusion. These incidents, whether isolated or ongoing, can influence a child's experience online, and their well-being as well as mental health. While physical bullying traditionally unfolds in public spaces where a child interacts with peers, the virtual realm of cyberspace, coupled with the ubiquitous presence of mobile phones, transforms our understanding of public spaces. This continuous connectivity provides bullies with potential access 24 hours a day. It is imperative to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of cyberbullying among children. Children were surveyed on cyberbullying matters, whether they had been a victim, or a perpetrator and whether they had witnessed others being cyberbullied. The following section provides a summary of the findings.

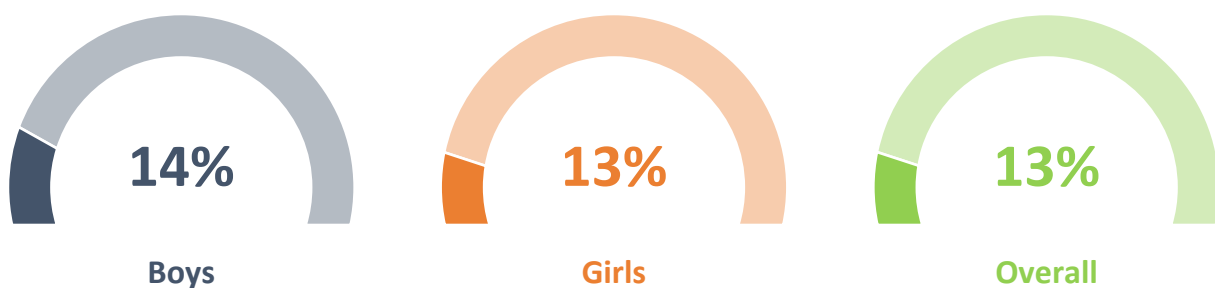


Figure 34: Proportion of Children Cyberbullied

As shown in Figure 34 above, 13% of children reported that they had been cyberbullied at least once. There was no statistically significant difference between genders. However, the trend showed a positive relationship between children's ages and the incidence of cyberbullying as shown in Figure 35 below.

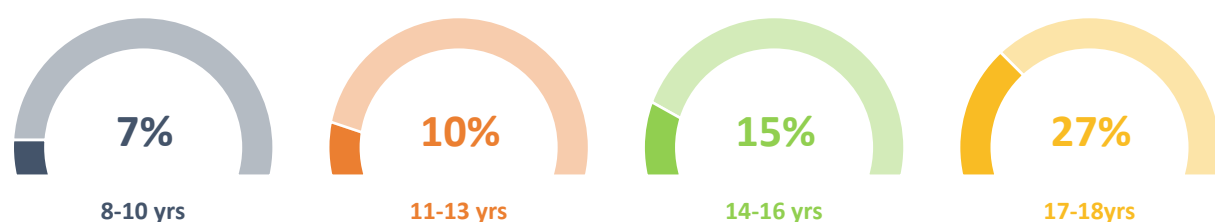


Figure 35: Proportion of Children Cyberbullied by Age

The posting of personal information online, circulation of private conversations, pictures, videos, and messages without permission, spreading rumours, body shaming, being insulted, and threatened, were the key forms of cyberbullying the children experienced among other forms. The children also reported that these forms of cyber-bullying were mainly happening on WhatsApp platforms. To gain more insights into cyberbullying, children were asked whether they had witnessed someone being cyberbullied or if they themselves had committed such an act. The findings are shown in Figure 38 below:

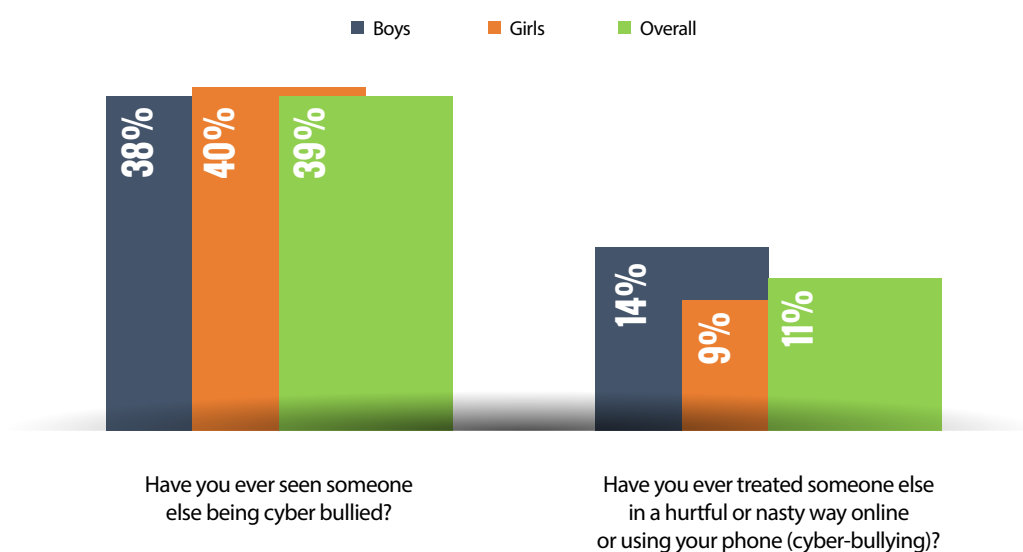


Figure 38: Cyberbullying

The graph above shows that 39% of children reported that they had witnessed someone else being cyberbullied, with no notable difference between genders. Overall, 11% of children admitted to having engaged in cyberbullying. There was a significant difference between genders, with more boys (14%) having cyber-bullied someone else compared to only 9% of girls. This implies the need for child-tailored education and awareness programs on cyberbullying, focusing on promoting digital citizenship i.e., navigating our digital environments in a way that is safe and responsible, as well as to engage in these spaces respectfully.

3.6.4. OTHER ONLINE HARMS

Numerous threats loom over children as they immerse themselves in online activities. Consequently, it becomes imperative to comprehend the array of threats that they encounter. Of particular concern is the level of age-inappropriate content that the children are both inadvertently exposed to and that they actively seek out. The level of exposure to the prevalent harms is shown in Figure 39 below:

Q: Have you come across the following content online?

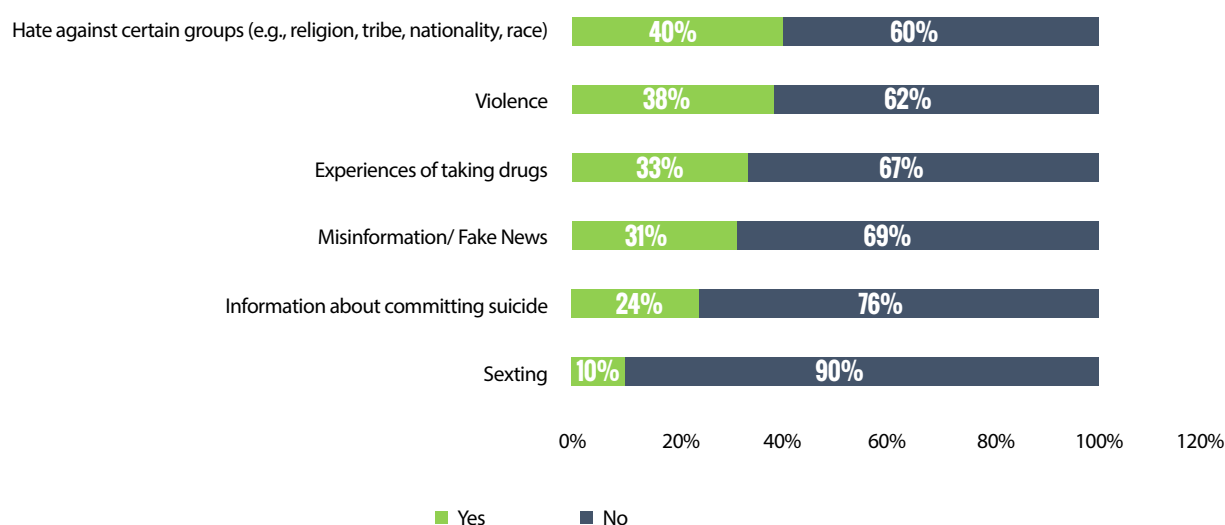


Figure 39: Other Online Treats/Harms

As shown above, exposure to content instigating hate and violence was prevalent. To gain more insights, the exposure to some of the online harms was disaggregated and analysed by age and school category as shown in Table 10 below:

Table 10: Exposure to Other Threats/Harms

	Boys	Girls	P1	P2	P3	S1	S2	S3	8-10 years	11-13 years	14-16 years	17-18 years
Information about committing suicide	22%	25%	15%	20%	21%	30%	29%	24%	17%	20%	28%	33%
Their experiences of taking drugs	34%	33%	20%	23%	32%	45%	43%	33%	22%	26%	38%	53%
Gory or violent images	41%	35%	25%	31%	34%	48%	47%	37%	29%	30%	42%	57%
Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals	39%	41%	29%	28%	27%	53%	51%	46%	26%	33%	46%	63%

Older age groups, specifically those aged 14-16 years and 17-18 years exhibited greater exposure to online harms, indicating heightened vulnerability. However, the analysis by school category showed no significant trend, showing the universality of exposure to inappropriate online content across socio-economic groups.

3.7. AWARENESS AND SUPPORT

In the digital age, children's online activities have become an integral part of their daily lives. As such, understanding the dynamics of parental involvement in these activities is crucial for promoting a safe and positive online environment. This section delves into awareness as well as perspectives and preferences of children regarding parental involvement in their online endeavours.

3.7.1. CHILDREN AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF ONLINE SAFETY PRACTICES

Figure 40 below highlights children's awareness and knowledge of different aspects of online safety practises by age,

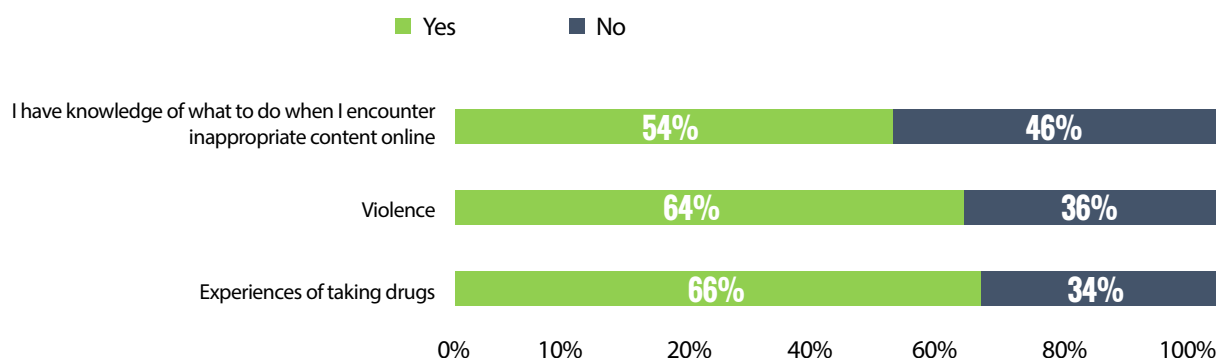


Figure 40: Awareness and Knowledge of Online Safety Practices

As shown above, there was no statistically significant difference in all the aspects of online safety awareness with respect to gender. Table 11 below further disaggregates aspects of knowledge and awareness by the type of educational institution:

Table 11: Awareness and Knowledge of Online Safety Practices by School Category.

	P1	P2	P3	S1	S2	S3
Received some guidance on how to stay safe online	79%	71%	59%	75%	71%	65%
Awareness of the risks exposed to on Internet	78%	67%	55%	73%	71%	62%
Knowledge of what to do when I encounter inappropriate content	57%	49%	37%	68%	59%	49%

Children in P1 and S1 schools consistently showed higher awareness and knowledge levels while those in P3 and S3 had lower percentages across all categories. The above data justifies the need for continuous education and awareness programs, that are inclusive of the various socio-economic demographics. Such programs should be delivered through schools as they are a channel that guarantees wide reach to children. Younger children 8-13 years exhibited lower levels of awareness, signifying the need to ‘catch them young’ and empower them to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

3.7.2. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ONLINE ACTIVITIES: PERSPECTIVES AND PREFERENCES

Children were asked whether they thought their parents were knowledgeable about their online activities and whether they would want their parents to take more interest in their online activities. The responses are shown in Figure 41 below:

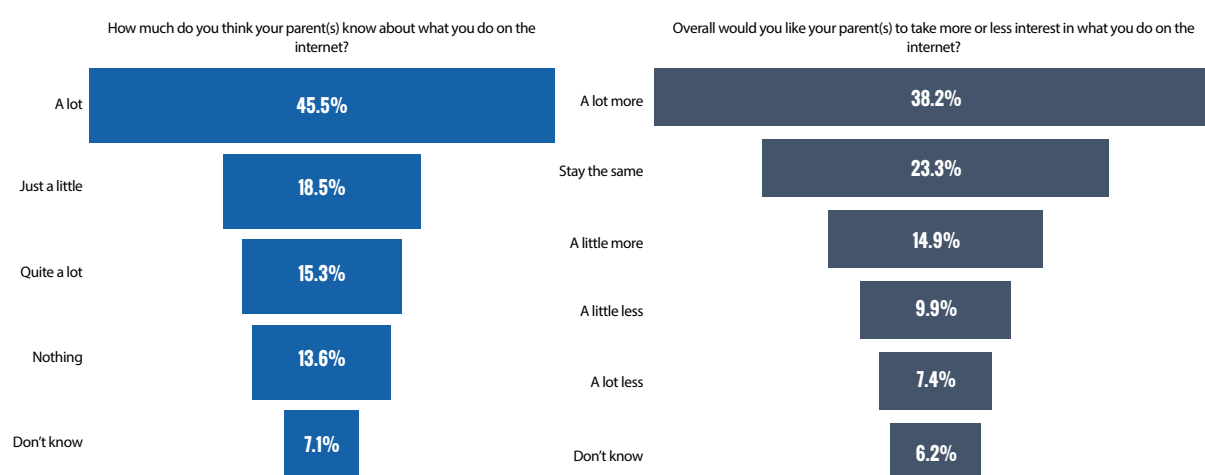


Figure 41: Parental Involvement in Online Activities

As highlighted in Figure 41 above, 46% of children perceived that their parents knew a lot about their online activities. Furthermore, 53% were willing for their parents to know more about their online activities, indicating some level of interest in parental involvement. Parental involvement is pivotal in digital safekeeping, and it is imperative that parents take more interest in children's online activities. The perception that parents have little to no knowledge about children's Internet activities generally increased with age, with the highest percentage in the 17-18 years age group (16%) as shown in Figure 42 below:

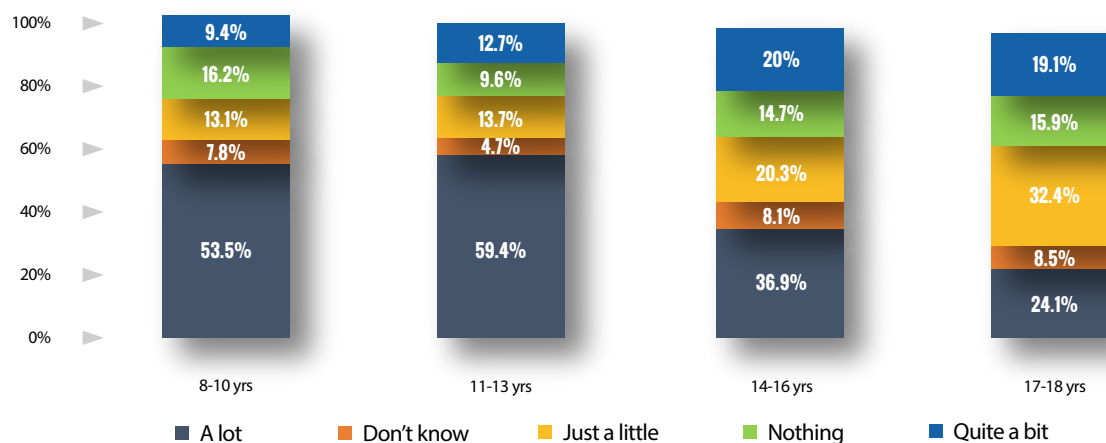


Figure 42: Parental Knowledge on Kids' Online Activities -Perspectives by Age

This phenomenon indicates a perceived decline in parental understanding as children enter adolescence, emphasizing the importance of maintaining open communication and staying attuned to the evolving digital experiences of teenagers. Tailored approaches to communication and awareness may be beneficial in bridging potential gaps in understanding. There was a strong desire by younger children for their parents to show a lot more interest in what their online activities as shown in Figure 43 below:

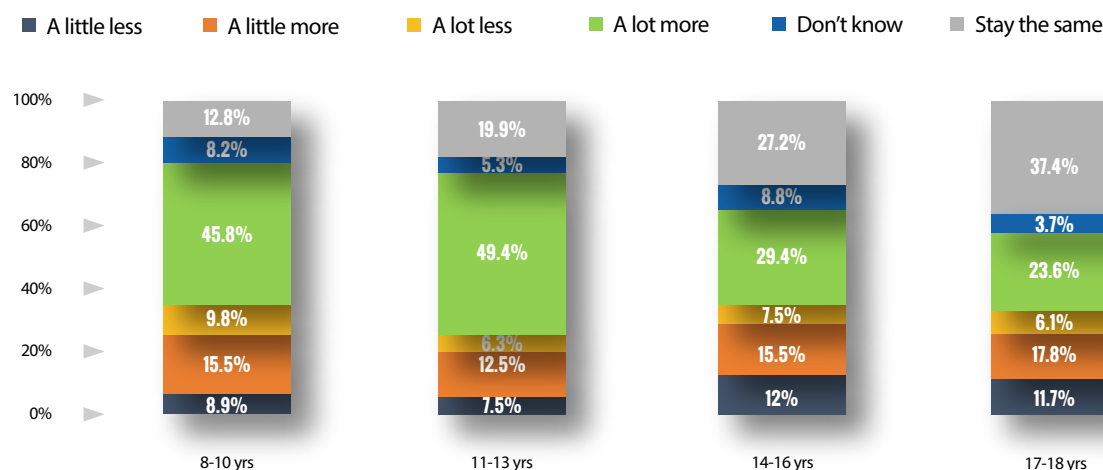


Figure 43: Parental Involvement in Online Activities -Preferences by Age

There was however a significant decrease in the proportion of children in the 14-16 years and 17-18 years age groups who wanted their parents to take more interest in their online activities. This suggests a potential shift towards the need for independence and reduced parental influence during adolescence. However, these ages are associated with greater incidence of online threats, hence there is need for parents to balance autonomy and control.



3.7.3. PARENTAL AND TEACHERS' GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT ON CHILDREN'S ONLINE ACTIVITIES.

Children were asked to confirm whether their parents and teachers had provided them some guidance and support in using the Internet. The findings are shown in Figure 44 below:

Q: Have any of your parents or teachers ever done any of these things?

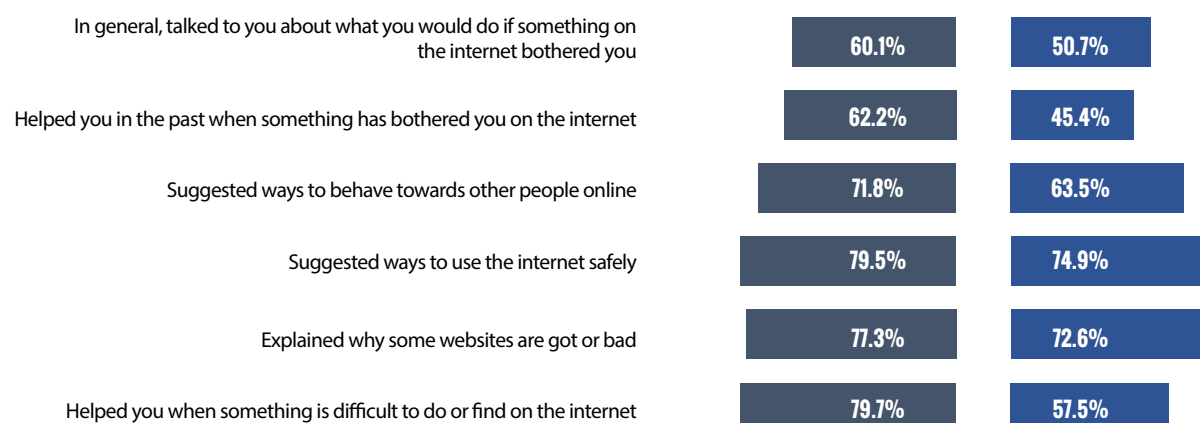


Figure 44: Parents and teachers' guidance and support.

As shown above, parents were perceived to engage and provide children with more assistance, as compared to teachers. Children viewed their parents as the main source of guidance and support when it comes to dealing with Internet-related challenges and aspects. This emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in promoting digital literacy, online safety, and responsible behaviour among children. Furthermore, it also emphasises the need for greater teacher involvement. There is need for collaboration between parents and teachers to provide comprehensive support for children's Internet usage and well-being.

3.7.4. PARENTAL SUPPORT- OPENNESS

In today's digital age, children are exposed to countless online experiences, ranging from positive interactions to potential risks. Amidst these encounters, the role of parental guidance and support is paramount. Understanding the extent to which children feel comfortable discussing their online concerns with their parents is crucial for fostering a safe and supportive online environment. Children were asked, 'Do you feel comfortable talking to your parents about issues that you may have encountered online?' The responses are highlighted in Figure 45 below:

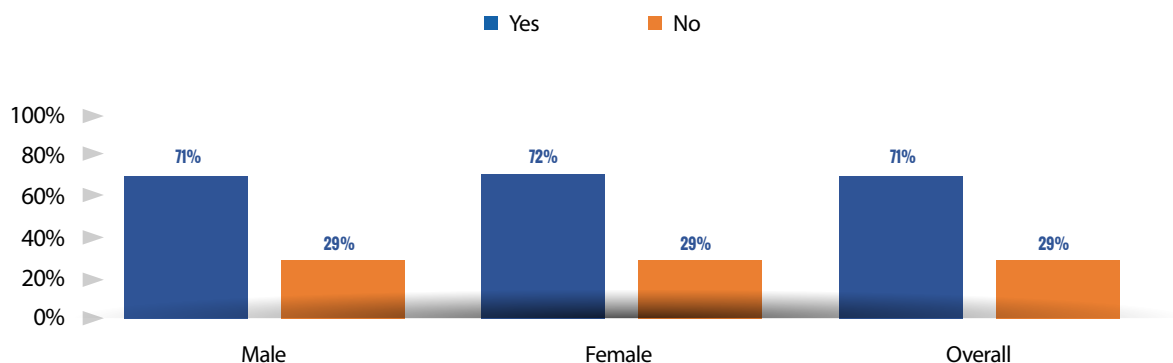


Figure 45: Comfort in Discussing Online Concerns with Parents

The proportion of children that felt comfortable discussing concerns about their online activities with their parents was relatively high. There was a minimal difference in the levels of comfort in addressing online issues with parents between genders, with 71% of boys and 72% of girls expressing similar sentiments. The odds ratio of 0.970 at a 95% confidence interval (Lower = 0.818, Upper = 1.151) suggests that, compared to females, males have slightly lower odds of the outcome. However, since the confidence interval includes 1, the difference is not statistically significant. The graph below summarizes the children's comfort and openness level in discussing online concerns with parents by age.

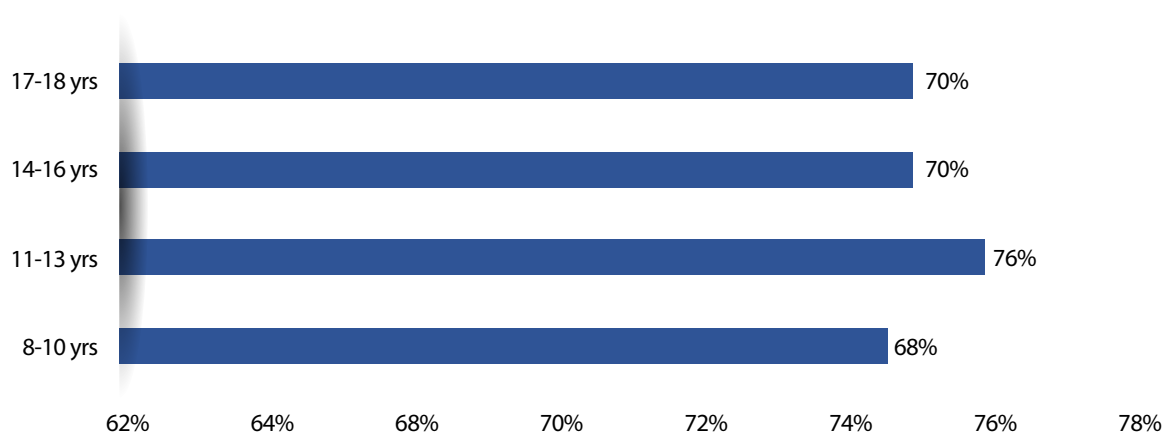


Figure 46: Level of Comfort by Gender

Children in all age groups were fairly comfortable talking to their parents or guardians about online experiences (68%-76%). This indicates generally open communication environments within families. However, there was still a substantial proportion of children who were not comfortable discussing their online activities.

The graph below highlights the proportion of children that showed interest in receiving future training on online safety and cyber ethics.

[illegible]

As shown above, the most cited topics included the following amongst others:

- Cyber-bullying
- Rights of children on the Internet

- Cyber-grooming
- Cyber-trafficking
- Online Safety Measures
- Digital Privacy

This highlights the need for targeted and comprehensive education and awareness to empower children to navigate the digital world securely.

3.9. BENEFITS OF THE INTERNET TO CHILDREN

In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, children's interaction with the online realm has become inevitable. As technology continues to shape the way we live and learn, it is essential to explore the myriad benefits that the online environment offers to children. The children were asked, "Which of the following benefits have you enjoyed on the Internet?" The findings are summarised below.

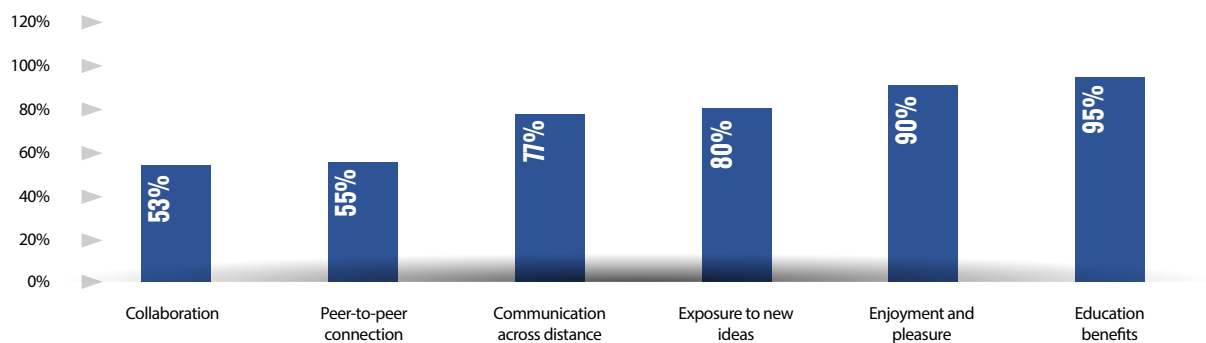


Figure 49: Benefits of the Internet

As shown above, the most cited benefits of the Internet were educational benefits, enjoyment and pleasure, exposure to new ideas, and communication. The graph below highlights benefits enjoyed online by children's age.



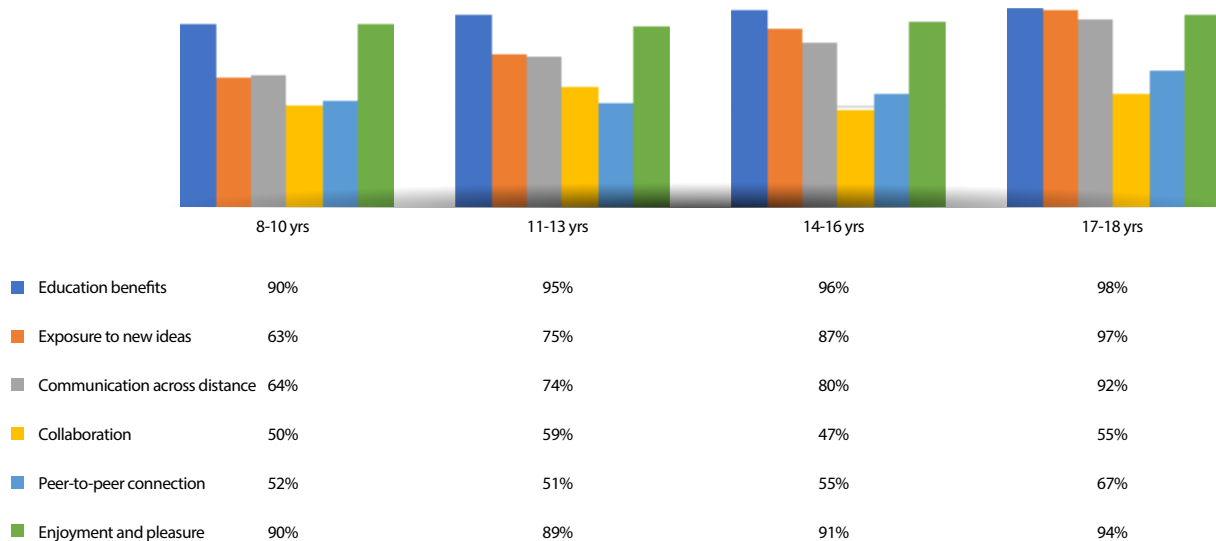


Figure 50: Online activities enjoyed by age.

As shown above, the educational benefit was a fundamental aspect enjoyed across all age groups, suggesting a widespread recognition of the value of educational content and resources on the Internet, regardless of age. The table below summaries the benefits enjoyed by children by school category.

Table 12: Online activities enjoyed by school category.

Benefits Enjoyed	P1	P2	P3	S1	S2	S3
Education benefits	93%	92%	89%	97%	98%	93%
Enjoyment and Pleasure	87%	86%	79%	89%	90%	82%
Exposure to new ideas	74%	65%	63%	91%	91%	79%
Communication across distance	73%	63%	69%	86%	82%	74%
Collaboration	54%	49%	62%	44%	45%	47%
Peer-to-peer connection	50%	39%	65%	59%	56%	48%

Educational benefits and enjoyment were generally high across all groups. Exposure to new ideas and communication across distance showed significant variability, possibly indicating diverse preferences or experiences across social groups, with enjoyment of these decreasing with school category. Collaboration, and peer-to-peer connection also exhibited variability, suggesting differing levels of engagement or preference across groups.

3.10. PARENTS

Traversing the online realm presents children with numerous challenges, underscoring the essential role of parental monitoring and controls in ensuring their safety and well-being. Engaging in activities designed to oversee and manage children's online interactions becomes crucial for recognising potential online hazards, fostering responsible online conduct, and nurturing trust and effective communication.

3.10.1. INTERNET ENGAGEMENT

Understanding how parents engage with the online world, helps to shed light on children's own Internet behaviours and provide useful comparative insights. Parents were generally heavier Internet users, with 84% using the Internet daily or almost every day as shown in Figure 51 below:

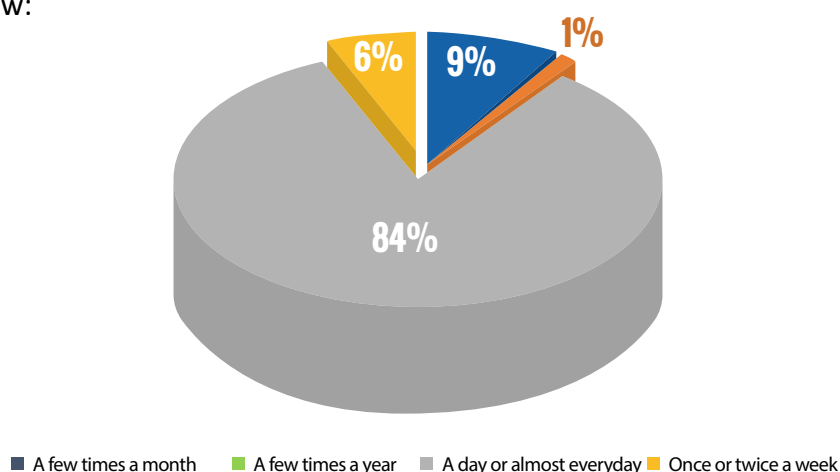


Figure 51: Parental Frequency of Internet Use

The data in Figure 51 above demonstrates that the Internet has become an essential good, that is integral to everyday life.

3.10.2. PARENTAL PERMISSIONS FOR CHILD'S ONLINE ACTIVITIES

Parents play a crucial role in overseeing and regulating their children's digital experiences, influencing the boundaries set for various online activities. This section explores the dynamics of parental permissions in relation to their children's online activities. The following chart

depicts the extent to which children required permission for specific online actions and the flexibility granted by parents in these situations.

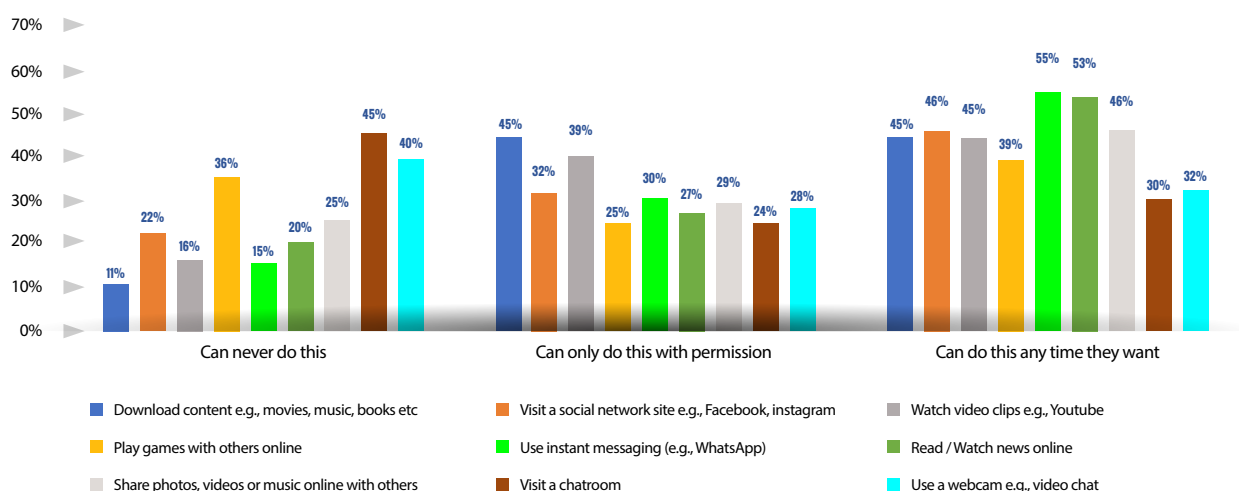


Figure 52: Parental Permissions

Parents in this study exhibited a fairly liberal approach to the use of social media as 46% cited that their children could visit social networks any time they wanted without restrictions. On the other hand, parents were most cautious when it came to the use of the webcam as 40% prohibited its use whilst 28% highlighted that children could only use the webcam with the parent's consent. Parents were also fairly liberal towards activities like instant messaging and reading/watching news online as 55% and 53% respectively allowed their children to access these services without direct supervision or explicit permission. However, when it came to "Downloading content," 45% of respondents stated that children could only do so under supervision or with their permission, indicating higher parental oversight for this activity. Activities perceived as riskier, such as visiting a chatroom and using a web for video chatting, had 45% and 40% of respondents, respectively, completely prohibiting their children from engaging in them. These findings highlight a cautious yet evolving parental approach to online safety, with parents and guardians adjusting their level of involvement based on the perceived risk associated with specific activities, as indicated in figure 53.

3.10.3. MONITORING HABITS OF PARENTS: EXAMINING CHECKS AT HOME

The survey also sought to understand the extent to which parents monitored their children's online activities at home. This helps us gain insights into the vigilance of parents and guardians over their children's digital experiences. This investigation provides a closer look at the

strategies employed by parents to ensure online safety and contribute to responsible Internet use among children. The graph below summaries some of the monitoring habits of parents and guardians.

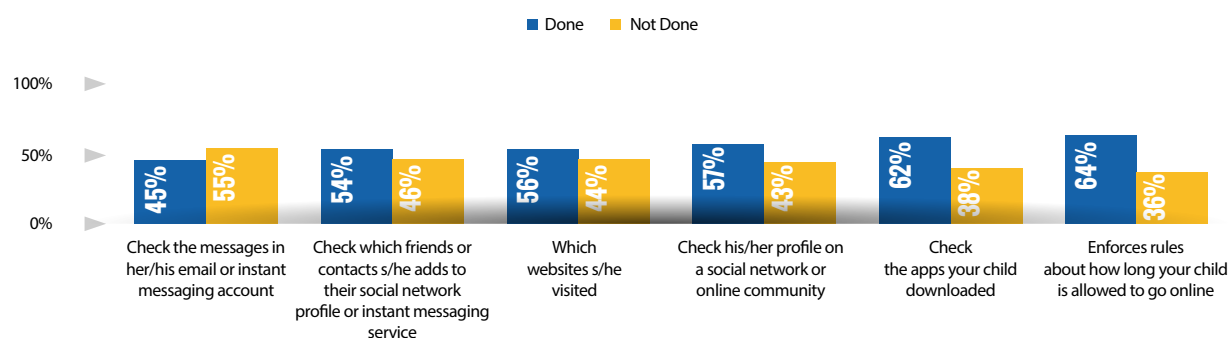


Figure 53: Parents Online Monitoring & Control Measures

The checking of applications downloaded by children was very popular amongst parents (61.51%). Parents highlighted that they did so in order to ensure that children did not download age-inappropriate content. Cost containment was also a motive as some apps are notoriously data hungry. The checking of social media profiles (57.36%), browsing history (56.25%) and children's contacts (53.83%) were also done by a larger proportion of parents. However, fewer parents had the practice of checking their children's emails or instant messaging accounts. Parents have the dilemma of balancing privacy and protection, particularly for older children. Additionally, over 64% of parents had established rules regarding the duration and timing of their child's Internet usage, indicating a commitment to healthy screen time habits.

3.10.4. UNDERSTANDING AWARENESS OF ONLINE PRIVACY RISKS

In an era dominated by digital connectivity, the online landscape presents numerous opportunities for sharing personal information. However, with this convenience comes the responsibility of being aware of the potential risks associated with divulging sensitive details on the Internet. The survey also assessed parent's general awareness of the risks of sharing information online. The findings are shown in Figure 54 below:

Q: Are you aware of the risks associated with sharing personal information online?

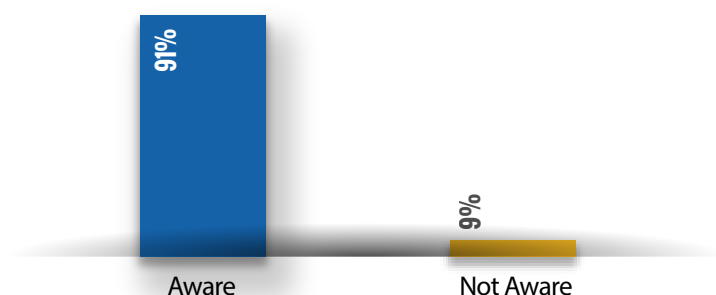


Figure 54: Parents' Awareness of Risks of Online Information Sharing

A significant majority 91% of respondents reported that they were aware of potential risks associated with sharing personal information online. This high level of awareness suggests that the surveyed individuals perceived that they possessed a good understanding of the potential dangers and challenges linked to disclosing personal details in the digital realm. However, awareness does not always translate to safe online behaviour. Further research might be needed to understand how this perceived awareness translates into actual online practices of adults.

3.10.5. PARENTAL CONFIDENCE IN CHILD'S ABILITY TO IDENTIFY AND AVOID ONLINE DANGERS

This section explores parents' perceptions of their confidence in their child's capacity to recognize and steer clear of online hazards. The graph below summaries the findings.

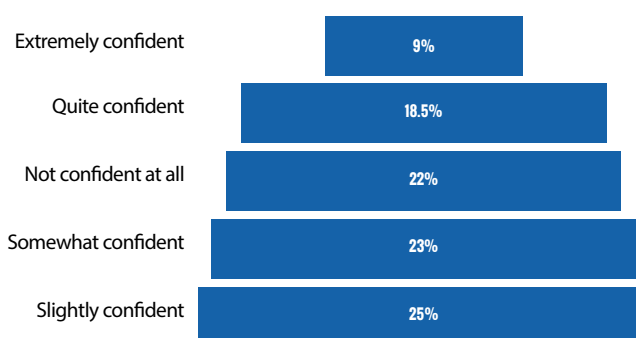


Figure 55: Parental Confidence in Children's Abilities to Identify & Avoid Online Dangers

As shown above, only a small percentage (9%) conveyed extreme confidence in their children's abilities to identify and avoid online dangers. A notable 22% of parents reported feeling not confident at all. These findings highlight a significant parental concern regarding children's ability to navigate online dangers, suggesting a need for open communication, education and awareness and appropriate safeguards to empower children as responsible digital citizens.

3.10.6. INCIDENTS OF THREATS IN THE PAST YEAR

The survey also assessed parents and guardians' awareness of online threats or incidents that may have affected their children over the past year. By examining parents' awareness of the occurrence of specific incidents, we gain valuable insights into the openness of communication channels between parents and children.

The following graph summarizes the responses obtained from parents regarding incidents or threats encountered by their children in the past year.

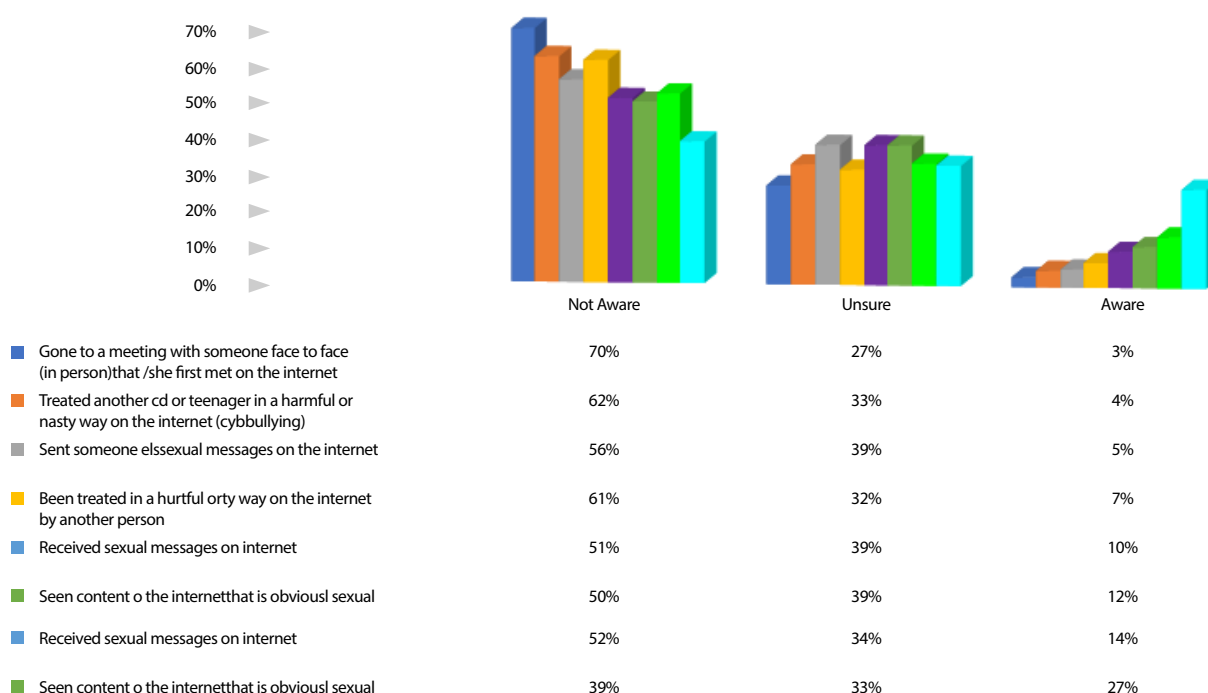


Figure 56: Parental Awareness of Children's Adverse Online

The data above shows that there was significant scope to increase and enhance parents' and guardians' engagement and communication with their children about their online experiences. For example, 27% of children reported that they were victims of cyberbullying, however 7% of parents were aware of these incidents on their children; the proportion of those who were unsure was also large at 32%. There was a high proportion of unsure responses across most categories, averaging around a third of parents. This suggests a potential communication gap between parents and children concerning their online experiences, particularly regarding sensitive topics. Having open communication and a supporting adult network is important in ensuring that children have support and referral to redress when needed. Addressing and closing this gap is crucial for fostering a safer and more informed digital environment for children.



4. BENCHMARKING WITH SIMILAR STUDIES

Other countries have also conducted similar surveys, therefore it is also imperative to compare research findings across borders, to better inform action. However not many African countries have conducted the child online survey our comparison was limited to a few countries. The findings from this research will be compared against the results of similar studies conducted in Zambia⁴, Uganda⁵, and Ireland⁶.

Age Of Initial Internet Use:

The 7-13 years age range was the most prevalent age range of initial Internet use in Zimbabwe, accounting for 76.5% of children, with 10 years being the peak. A comparison with other African countries shows that Zimbabwe the initial age of Internet use for Zimbabwean children was lower as compared to Zambia and Uganda. The average age of first use in Zambia and Uganda were 13 years and 14 years. This implies that children in Zimbabwe are integrated into online environments from a formative stage. This potentially influences socialisation, learning, and development; it will be interesting to analyse the impact of early exposure, particularly to the Alpha Generation (born 2010-) in the long run.

Frequency of Internet Use:

Frequency of Internet Use was higher in Zimbabwe as compared to Zambia and Uganda. Overall, 58% of children who used Internet in Zimbabwe reported that they used the Internet frequently, i.e., every day or every other day. On the other hand, 32% of children in Zambia accessed the Internet daily or every other day. In Uganda, the proportion of children who accessed the Internet daily or every other day was 33.9%. Zimbabwe's higher frequency may be attributable to the increased Internet reliance because of the Continuous Assessment Learning Activities (CALA) framework which was implemented in the education system from 2022 to 2024. All the three countries observed a similar trend of increasing frequency of Internet use as children's age progressed.

⁴ <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/zambia-kids-online-a-global-kids-online-study/>

⁵ https://www.ucc.co.ug/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Final_Report_Child-Online-Survey.pdf

⁶ <https://assets.gov.ie/204409/b9ab5dbd-8fdc-4f97-abfc-a88afb2f6e6f.pdf>

Devices:

The survey revealed that mobile phones were the primary device used to access the Internet by children in Zimbabwe, superseding laptops, desktops amongst other devices. This phenomenon is not unique to Zimbabwe. In Uganda, mobile phones were also the primary device, accounting for 78% of Internet. This phenomenon is not unique to developing countries but developed countries as well. In Ireland, 81% of children cited that they accessed and used the Internet via mobile phones, either smartphones or feature phones.

Cyberbullying:

The proportion of children in Zimbabwe who reported experiencing cyberbullying, at least once, was 13%. This proportion was lower than reported in Zambia (23.2%) and Uganda (27%). Although, the prevalence of cyberbullying was lower in Zimbabwe than in Zambia and Uganda, it was higher than what was reported in Ireland. In Ireland, 11% of children reported that they had experienced cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is global challenge; there need for concerted efforts to raise awareness and promote online safety. This requires collaboration amongst various stakeholders including POTRAZ, educational institutions, Civil society organisations etc.

Exposure to Sexual Content:

The survey revealed that the main threat to Zimbabwean children online was exposure to sexual content, either intentionally or inadvertently. Although most children (53%) highlighted that they had never encountered sexual content online, a considerable 47% admitted that they had seen sexual content online at least once, whether messages, images, or videos. The prevalence is comparable to Serbia (46%) and Uganda (50.7%). The findings in these countries showed similar trends such as increased prevalence of exposure to sexual content with age; the 14 to 18 age group was more susceptible. Gender differences were also apparent with boys being more susceptible than girls. Ireland had significantly lower proportions of children who had encountered sexual content online (18%). This may be attributable to tighter controls at Internet Service Provider (ISP) level, such as document-based age verification for access to adult content.



Virtual Friendships:

A substantial portion, comprising 43% of the surveyed children in Zimbabwe, had virtual friendships, with people they did not personally know. Furthermore, 29% of children with virtual friendships had intentionally met these friends in person. These results closely align with Zambia's results, where 47% of children engaged in virtual friendships and 28% had met at least one of these virtual friends in person. The similarity in these suggests a consistent trend across different countries, emphasizing the global nature of online socialisation. It is human nature, from the onset, to seek and establish connections. Virtual friendships are not inherently bad, they are part of life, particularly for a generation of children that had to endure lockdowns. Although face-to-face interactions may not necessarily always lead to any harm, they may expose children to online predators. These insights underscore the need for careful consideration of online safety measures and the promotion of responsible online behaviour to ensure positive and secure virtual interactions.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSIONS

Children across the globe are going online at an unprecedented rate and Zimbabwe is no exception to this phenomenon. This poses a wealth of opportunities and benefits, but also potential risks that may result in harm to the children. Many of these risks and harms are similar to those faced by children in the offline space, risks related to bullying, teasing, exposure to age-inappropriate content, and sexual violence and abuse. However, many of these risks have taken on new forms and are being proliferated online. This study sought to capture the online experiences of children in Zimbabwe, the benefits, and opportunities they are realising online and the risks and harms that they encounter in their everyday life. This was the first survey of its kind conducted by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe. More periodic surveys are expected to be conducted in order to continue providing critical insights and benchmarks on developments in this matter. This will help inform relevant stakeholders to foster a policy and environment that is conducive to children's well-being.

5.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides recommendations, based on findings from the Zimbabwe Child Online Safety Survey. These are categorised separately for policymakers, educators, and parents as well as guardians.

5.2.1. POLICY

- It is important that children add their voice and inform policy, strategies and guidelines that directly impact them. It has been the traditional norm for parents and guardians to participate in information and data sharing on behalf of children. This survey has shown that parents and guardians' perceptions are not always in line with the children's actual experiences.
- While use of the Internet is undoubtedly profound, barriers persist according to the feedback from children. These include the affordability of services, and devices, coverage, and quality of service challenges. This suggests the need for accelerated roll-out of service, particularly to rural communities and schools, as well as the subsidisation of costs for services and devices used for educational purposes. This can be in the form of tax reduction on devices as well as Internet and data services used for educational purposes. This is particularly important for rural schools and communities.
- Strategies for increasing Internet access for all children should be accompanied by increased capacity building and training for educators, parents and guardians on their technical skills and digital literacy. This will enable them to provide more effective support to the more tech-savvy generation of children. Teachers training curricula should incorporate digital literacy content. Digital literacy may also be done through teacher in training.
- The survey revealed that children in Zimbabwe clearly have access to age-inappropriate content online. This includes sexual content amongst other disturbing content. Children as young as eight (8) years reported having accessed such material and the trend showed that access increased with age. This suggests the need for tighter legislation on the hosting of age-inappropriate content, beyond sexual content, within Zimbabwe, accompanied by strict remedies where this content is made available to children.

- There is need for the implementation of child-targeted education and awareness programs focusing on online safety and promoting digital citizenship. This can be done through school-based interventions, done in partnership with the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Schools are an effective channel for reaching the largest proportion of children.
- The use and usefulness of the Internet could be better enhanced by the availability of digital content in local languages. This is particularly true for children. Zimbabwe has 16 official languages, fifteen being vernacular. Vernacular dominates every sphere of a typical Zimbabwean's life. In contrast, English currently dominates the Internet space. This speaks to the importance of initiatives that focus on the generation of local content and content in local languages.

5.2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

- Digital citizenship and digital literacy should be integrated into core curricula, across all primary and secondary grade levels. Teachers and schools can be the primary source, and sometimes the only source, of reliable information and support, particularly in situations where children use the Internet while their parents or guardians do not or do so parsimoniously. This is more so important as children spend so much time within the school environment.
- While it may take time for comprehensive curricula revisions to occur, there are still opportunities for online safety and digital literacy to be integrated through existing teaching and through extracurricular school activities.
- Schools can also play an important role in ensuring that online safety is adequately integrated into broader school violence prevention or safety policies and programs, including its integration in complaints reporting systems. Safety programmes should ensure the inclusion of categories of online violence such as cyberbullying or an option to indicate where digital technology is involved in any incidence of violence or abuse.

5.2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

- Parental support and mediation are just as important to children's use of digital technology and the Internet as they are to any other aspect of a child's development. Parental involvement in children's digital lives, whether restrictive or enabling, active or passive can play an important role in defining their online experience, particularly for

younger Internet users. The survey showed a potential communication gap between parents and children concerning their online experiences, particularly regarding sensitive topics. Having open communication and a supporting adult network is important in ensuring that children have support and referral to redress when needed. Addressing and closing this gap is crucial for fostering a safer and more informed digital environment for children.

- The survey revealed that a large proportion of children were accessing age-inappropriate content. Parents and guardians should use widely accessible tools to filter and block children from accessing age in-appropriate content. There is a plethora of apps that allow parents to restrict their children from accessing inappropriate content as well as to gain insight into their activities on the Internet. In addition, there are platforms, services, search engines and websites that are specifically tailored to children and their needs. You cannot single-handedly have a bird eye`s view of your child`s online activities 24/7, but these apps and tools can effectively police, control, and report access to undesirable content.
- Parental mediation is considered to be a necessity for all age groups; however, adults need to also have a level of digital literacy to effectively mediate their children`s activities on the Internet. Digital literacy does not necessary imply being digital experts, and the latter is not a requisite for being involved in children's online activities. Parents should take advantage of available literacy programs such as those offered through Community Information Centres. Likewise, mutual exchange is desirable; it is okay for parents to learn from their own children if they are more adept at using digital devices.



APPENDIX 1: CHILDREN SURVEY INSTRUMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE
NUMBER

CHILD ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

This survey aims to gather information about children's online activities, awareness of potential risks and steps taken to ensure online safety. By sharing your experiences and opinions, we can identify areas where additional support and education may be needed to ensure a safe and positive online environment for children like yourself. Rest assured that all responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. Your privacy is of utmost importance to us. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. We simply want to hear your honest thoughts and experiences. Your contribution will make a difference in ensuring a safer digital space for children in Zimbabwe. Ask me if there is something you don't understand.

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.1 What is your gender?

Male	☐
Female	☐

1.2 What is your current age in years?

1.3 What is your current education level?

1.4 Which school do you attend?

1.5 What is your province?

1.6 What language do you speak at home most of the time? (Multiple Responses Permitted, tick where appropriate)

1.	English	☐
2.	Shona	☐
3.	Ndebele	☐
4.	Tonga	☐
5.	Venda	☐
6.	Kalanga	☐
7.	Others (Specify)	☐

2. ACCESS

People use the Internet differently. Using ‘the Internet’ or going ‘online’ means utilising services such as searching on Google, sending, and receiving emails, visiting websites, using applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, or Instagram, TikTok, sending emails etc. This could be on a mobile phone, tablet, or computer.

2.1 How old were you when you first used the Internet?

If you cannot remember exact age, kindly provide best estimate.

Tick in the box if you have not used the Internet.

☐

2.2 Which of the following things you have done in the last THREE MONTHS? Kindly tick YES, NO or DON'T KNOW for each service.

		YES [1]	NO [2]	DON'T KNOW [88]
A	Sent or received an email			
B	Visited a social networking profile (yours or somebody else's), for example Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok etc.			
C	Used instant messaging, i.e., exchanged messages on the Internet with online friends or contacts e.g., WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook Messenger etc.			
D	Made/received phone calls via the Internet (e.g., WhatsApp calls, Skype, Facebook calling etc.)			

F	Played online games with other people on the Internet			
F	Spent time in a virtual world (e.g., virtual reality games)			
G	Visited a chatroom, i.e., a place on the Internet where you can chat with people you may not know			

2.3 How often do you use the Internet?

1. Every day or almost every day	
2. Once or twice a week	
3. Once or twice a month	
4. Less than once a month	
88. Don't know	

2.4 Which of these devices do you use for the Internet? Please say yes or no to each of the following...

		YES [1]	NO [2]
A	Your own desktop computer		
B	Your own laptop		
C	A desktop computer shared with other members of your family		
D	A laptop shared with other members of your family that you cannot take to your own room		
E	A mobile phone/tablet that belongs to me		
F	A shared mobile phone/tablet		
G	A Games console such as a PlayStation		
H	A connected Television (TV)		
I	Other (Specify)		

2.5 Please tell me WHERE you normally use the Internet from? Please tick yes or no to each of the following...

		YES [1]	NO [2]
A	At home		
B	At school		
C	At a friend`s home		
D	At a relative`s home		
E	In a public library		
F	When `out and about` e.g. via mobile Internet, hotspots etc.		
G	In an Internet café or Community Information Centre		
H	Other (Specify)		

2.5 On average, how long do you spend using the Internet ON A NORMAL SCHOOL DAY?

[One answer permitted. Tick where appropriate]

1	Just a few minutes	
2	About half an hour	
3	About an hour	
4	About an hour and a half	
5	About two hours	
6	About two hours and a half	
7	About three hours	
8	About three hours and a half	
9	About four hours	
10	More than four hours	
11	None at all	
88	Don't know	

**2.6 On average, how long do you spend using the Internet ON A NORMAL NON-SCHOOL DAY
(weekend, holidays)?**

[One answer permitted. Tick where appropriate]

1	Just a few minutes	
2	About half an hour	
3	About an hour	
4	About an hour and a half	
5	About two hours	
6	About two hours and a half	
7	About three hours	
8	About three hours and a half	

9	About four hours	
10	More than four hours	
11	None at all	
88	Don't know	

2.7 Do you have any barriers to use the Internet?

Yes [1]	
No [2]	

2.8 If YES to Question 2.7, what are the barriers you are facing when you want to use the Internet?

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2.9 How often do you experience these things?

	Never (1)	Hardly ever (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Very often (5)
My parents don't allow me to use the Internet					
There is no signal or poor signal where I live					
Getting access to devices (mobile phone, computer, tablet) is too expensive					
Paying for Internet/data is too expensive					
The Internet doesn't provide what I want or need					
The Internet is too difficult to use					
The Internet is too time consuming					

I am worried about my privacy					
The Internet is not for people of my age					

3. SOCIAL NETWORKING

Now I would like to ask you about social networking. By this we mean sites like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter etc. where you can have a profile (i.e., a page or place where you put things about yourself that others see) and where you can keep in touch with people and share things with them.

3.1 Do you use social media?

1	Yes	
2	No	

3.2 If yes, which social networking site do you use? If you use more than one, tick all of them.

1	Facebook	
2	WhatsApp	
3	TikTok	
4	Instagram	
5	LinkedIn	
6	Twitter	
22	Other (SPECIFY)	

3.3 What is your purpose of / reasons for social networking? Tick where necessary.

1	Video games	
2	Photo sharing	
3	Educational	
4	Communication	
5	Dancing videos	

4	Other specify....	
---	-------------------	--

3.4 If yes to 3.1, do you have your OWN profile on a social networking site that you currently use, or you use someone else`s profile? it could be your parent`s, sister`s, brother`s, guardian`s etc.

1	I use my own profile	
2	I use someone else`s profile	

3.5 If you use your own social media profile, is your profile set to ...?

1	Public, so that everyone can see	
2	Partially private, so that friends of friends or your networks can see	
3	Private so that only your friends can see	
88	Don't know	

3.6 Do you understand the importance of protecting your personal information online?

1	Yes	
2	No	

3.7 Have you encountered any online privacy or security issues before?

1	Yes	
2	No	

3.8 If you use your own social media profile which of the following information does your profile show about you?

1	A photo that clearly shows your face	
2	Your last name	
3	Your address	
4	Your phone number	

5	Your school	
6	Your correct age/date of birth	
7	An age that is not your real age/date of birth	
8	None of these	
88	Don't know	

4. RISKS

4.1 Do you have a virtual friend whom you met on the Internet?

1	Yes	
2	No	
3	Prefer not to say	

4.2 Have you EVER met anyone face-to-face that you first got to know over the Internet?

Choose one answer.

1	Yes	
2	No	
3	Prefer not to say	

4.3 How often, if ever, do you come across sexual content online or on a phone? This could be words, pictures, or videos. Choose one answer.

1	Never	
2	Rarely	
3	Sometimes	
4	Frequently	
5	Almost always	

6	Prefer not to say	
---	-------------------	--

4.4 Have you ever encountered the following threats or risks?

	Treats / Risk	YES [1]	NO [2]	Don't Know [88]
1	Sexual content			
2	Harmful information			
3	Internet overuse/addiction			
4	Exposure to misinformation			
5	Fewer sleeping hours			
6	Sexting			
7	Cyber trafficking			
8	Cyber grooming			

4.5 On the Internet, people discuss things that may not be good for you. Here are some questions about these kinds of things. In the PAST YEAR, have you seen websites or online discussions where people talk about or show any of these things? Answer for each option:
No (1), Yes (2)

	YES (1)	NO (1)
Ways of physically harming or hurting themselves		
Ways of committing suicide		
Ways to be very thin (such as being anorexic or bulimic)		
Hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals (e.g., people of different colour, religion, tribe, or nationality)		
Their experiences of taking drugs		

Gory or violent images		
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CYBERBULLYING:

Cyberbullying is when a person uses digital technology to deliberately and repeatedly harass, humiliate, embarrass, torment, threaten, pick on or intimidate another person. Cyberbullying happens in many different ways – in text messages, emails and online games, and on social media platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp amongst others. Examples of cyberbullying include deliberately and repeatedly:

- posting or sending messages that insult, threaten people, or put people down.
- spreading nasty rumours online about people.
- setting up unkind or unpleasant fake social media accounts using real photos and contact details.
- stalking people online.
- sharing or forwarding people's personal information without their permission.
- posting insulting or embarrassing photos or videos of people without their permission.
- harassing other people online.

With the above explanation, kindly answer the following questions:

4.6 Have you ever experienced any form of cyberbullying or harassment online?

1	Yes	
2	No	

If YES, could you please provide details of the experience(s)?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

4.7 Have you ever seen someone else being cyberbullied?

1	Yes	
2	No	

4.8 Have you ever treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way online or using the phone (cyber-bullying)?

1	Yes	
2	No	

5. AWARENESS & SUPPORT

5.1 How much do you think your parent(s) knows about what you do on the Internet? Would you say a lot, quite a bit, just a little, or nothing?

1	A lot	
2	Quite a bit	
3	Just a little	
4	Nothing	
88	Don't know	

5.2 Overall, would you like your parent(s) to take more or less interest in what you do on the Internet, or to stay about the same? And is that a lot/little more/less?

1	A lot more	
2	A little more	
3	Stay the same	
4	A little less	
5	A lot less	

88	Don't know	
----	------------	--

5.3 Do you feel comfortable talking to your parents or guardians about any issues or concerns you may have about your online experiences?

1	Yes	
2	No	

5.4 Has your parent(s) / guardian ever done any of the following things with you?

Please say YES or NO to each of the following...

		Yes [1]	No [1]
A	Helped you when something is difficult to do or find on the Internet		
B	Explained why some websites are good or bad		
C	Suggested ways to use the Internet safely		
D	Suggested ways to behave towards other people online		
E	Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the Internet		
F	In general, talked to you about what you would do if something on the Internet ever bothered you		

5.5 Have any teachers at your school ever done any of these things?

Please say YES or NO to each of the following...

		Yes [1]	No [1]
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION			
	find on the Internet		
B	Explained why some websites are good or bad		
C	Suggested ways to use the Internet safely		
D	Suggested ways to behave towards other people online		
E	Helped you in the past when something has bothered you on the Internet		
F	In general, talked to you about what you would do if something on the Internet ever bothered you		

5.6 Would you be interested in attending workshops or educational programs aimed at raising awareness about online safety and cyber ethics?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	

5.7 Are there any topics or issues that you would like to learn more about related to online safety or responsible Internet use?

--

5.8 Are you aware of your rights on the Internet?

Yes	1
No	2

5.9 Are you aware of the risks which you are exposed to on the Internet?

Yes	1
No	2

5.10 Are you aware of online safety practices?

Yes	1
No	2

5.11 Have you received any guidance or education on how to stay safe online?

Yes	1
No	2

5.12 Do you know what to do if you encounter inappropriate content or receive messages from strangers online?

Yes	1
No	2

6. OPPORTUNITIES / BENEFITS

6.1 Which of the following benefits have you enjoyed on the Internet?

Benefit	YES [1]	NO [2]	Don't know [88]
Education benefits			
Exposure to new ideas			
Communication across distance			

Collaboration			
Peer-to-peer connection			
Pleasure			
Enjoyment	8		
Other specify....			

APPENDIX 2: PARENTS SURVEY INSTRUMENT

QUESTIONNAIRE
NUMBER

CHILD ONLINE SURVEY PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Parent/Guardian, we are reaching out to you as the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), for an important survey focusing on children's online experiences. In today's digital age, it is crucial to understand how children are navigating the online world and the challenges they face. By gathering insights from you, we can gain a better understanding of the current landscape and identify opportunities to enhance online safety measures. Your participation in this survey is highly appreciated, as it will help us shape policies and initiatives aimed at protecting children online.

We believe that your unique perspective as a parent is invaluable, and your responses will contribute significantly to our research. Rest assured that all gathered information will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. Your identity and individual responses will remain anonymous throughout the entire process. We kindly ask you to dedicate a few moments of your time to complete this online questionnaire. Your input will make a real difference in keeping our children safe in the digital world. Thank you for your support and commitment to the well-being of our children.

1.1. In which province do you reside?

Province	Code
Harare	
Bulawayo	
Manicaland	
Mashonaland Central	
Mashonaland East	
Mashonaland West	
Matabeleland North	
Matabeleland South	
Masvingo	
Midlands	

If unsure, write down the name of town, city, or suburb.

1.2 Which of the following describes the residential area where you live?

AREA	CODE
URBAN	1
RURAL	2

1.3 What is your gender?

Female	1
Male	2

1.4 What is your age group?

AGE	CODE
Below 18 years	TERMINATE
18 – 25 years	1
26 – 30 years	2
31 – 35 years	3
36 – 40 years	4
41 – 45 years	5
46 – 50 years	6
51 – 55 years	7
56 – 60 years	8
Above 60 years	9

1.5 Do you have a child (18 and under) directly under your care?

YES	1
NO (Terminate)	2

1.6 What is your relation to this child or these children?

Father (including step/foster father)	1
Mother (including step/foster father)	2
Grandparent	3
Aunt or Uncle	4
Other Relative	5
Unrelated guardian	6



1.7 **EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:** What is your highest level of education that you have completed?

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	CODE
No formal education	1
Some primary school	2
Primary school completed	3
Some secondary school	4
Completed secondary school	5
Certificate/Diploma or other vocational qualification	6
Undergraduate degree	7
Any other post graduate qualification	8

1.8 Which of these statements best describes your employment status?

Full-time employed (greater than 35hrs per week)	1
Part-time employed (less than 35 hours per week)	2
Self-employed/business owner/freelancer	3
Housewife	4
Student	5
Retired	6
Unemployed	7
OTHER SPECIFY.....	88

1.9 Most spoken languages

	CODE
English	1
Shona	2
Ndebele	3
Tonga	4
Venda	5
Kalanga	6
Sotho	7
Nambya	8
Chewa	9
Chibarwe	10
Ndau	11

Shangani	12
Chibarwe	13
Koisa	14
Sign Language	15
Xhosa	16
Others Specify	17

SECTION 2: INTERNET USE

2.1 Do you use the Internet yourself?

YES	1
NO	2

If YES to using the Internet, how often do you use it?

5. Every day or almost every day	1
6. Once or twice a week	2
7. A few times a month	3
8. A few times a year	4

2.2 Does your child or any of your children use the Internet?

YES	1
NO [Terminate]	2

2.3 As far as you are aware, in which of these places does your child use the Internet these days? Please say YES or NO to each of the following.

	Yes	No	Don't know
His or her own bedroom (or other private room) at home	1	2	88
Living room (or other public room) at home	1	2	88

At school or college	1	2	88
In an Internet café (cybercafé)	1	2	88
In a public library or other public place	1	2	88
At a friend's home	1	2	88
At a relative's home	1	2	88
When 'out and about' (e.g. via a mobile phone, tablet)	1	2	88

SECTION 3:

MONITORING & CONTROLS

3.1 Which of the following, if any, do you sometimes do with your child?

	YES	NO
Talk to him/her about their online activities	1	2
Explain why some websites are appropriate or inappropriate	1	2
Suggest ways to use the Internet safely	1	2
Sit with him/her while s/he uses the Internet (watching what s/he is doing but not really joining in)	1	2
Talk to him/her about what to do if something online bothers/upsets them	1	2
Suggest ways to behave towards other people on the Internet	1	2
Do shared activities together with your child on the Internet	1	2
Set rules about how long or when your child is allowed to go online	1	2

3.2 When your child uses the Internet at home, do you sometimes check any of the following things afterwards?

	YES	NO
Which websites s/he visited	1	2

The apps your child downloaded	1	2
The messages in his/her email or instant messaging account	1	2
His/her profile on a social network or online community	1	2
Which friends or contacts s/he adds to their social networking profile or instant messaging service	1	2

3.3 For each of the following options below, please tell us if you currently let your child do these things on the Internet, and if so, whether he/she needs your permission to do them?

	Can never do this	Can only do this with permission or supervision	Can do this any time they want
Download content e.g., movies, music, books etc.	1	2	3
Visit a social networking site e.g., Facebook, Instagram etc.	1	2	3
Watch video clips e.g., YouTube	1	2	3
Play games with other people online	1	2	3
Use instant messaging (e.g., WhatsApp)	1	2	3
Read/watch news online	1	2	3
Share photos, videos, or music online with others	1	2	3
Visit a chatroom	1	2	3
Use a webcam e.g., video chat	1	2	3

SECTION 4:

SAFETY / RISKS / THREATS

8.1 Are you aware of the potential risks associated with sharing personal information online?

YES	1
-----	---

NO	2
----	---

8.2 How confident do you feel about your child's ability to identify and avoid online dangers?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Confident at all	Slightly Confident	Somewhat Confident	Quite Confident	Extremely Confident

8.3 As far as you are aware, in the past year, have any of these things happened to your child?

	YES	NO	UNSURE
Has your child communicated with strangers online	1	2	88
Gone to a meeting with someone face to face (in person) that he or she first met on the Internet.	1	2	88
Been treated in a hurtful or nasty way on the Internet by another person. (cyber-bullying)	1	2	88
Treated another child or teenager in a hurtful or nasty way on the Internet. (cyberbullying)	1	2	88
Seen content on the Internet that is obviously sexual – for example, showing people naked or people having sex.	1	2	88
Received sexual messages (e.g., words, pictures, or videos) on the Internet.	1	2	88
Sent someone else sexual messages (e.g., words, pictures, or videos) on the Internet.	1	2	88
Seen aggressive or violent images of people attacking or killing each other on the Internet. <i>This could include characters in cartoons or games as well as “real” people, for example</i>	1	2	88

8.4 In general, where do you get information and advice on safety tools and safe use of the Internet from?

None, I don't get any information about this	1
Your child's school	2
Television, radio, newspapers, or magazines	3
Government, local authorities	4
Children's welfare organisations/charities	5
Internet websites with safety information	6

Family and friends	7
From my child	8
Other sources specify....	9

8.5 Would you be interested in receiving more information or resources about online safety for children?

YES	1
NO	2

Thank you for your time and for taking part in the study. Your answers will help us understand better the online experiences of children and young people. We will use this knowledge to try to make the Internet a better place for everyone.





'creating a level playing field'

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