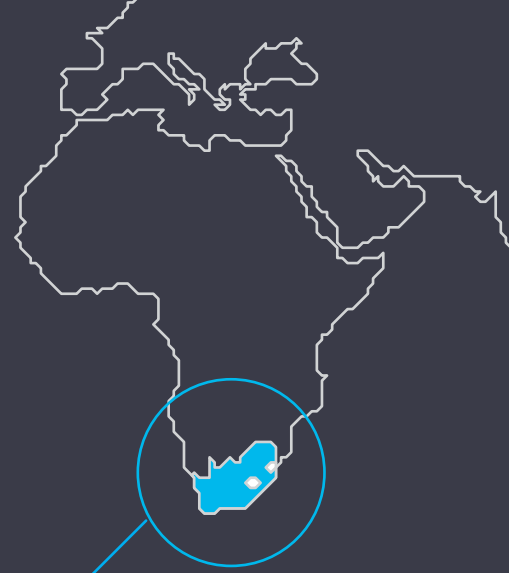# SOUTH AFRICAN KIDS ONLINE:

A glimpse into South African children's internet use and online activities.

How do children use the internet? How do they access it? Does it present risks or opportunities for them, or both?

What do parents think of their children's online activities? Do they support it as an opportunity for learning? Or do they see it as harmful?

We asked 913 children between nine and seventeen years, from three provinces in South Africa, and from different levels of household incomes, these questions and more. To compare their answers and find out more about the parents' internet use, we asked 532 parents of the same children the same questions. Finally, we dug deeper into the children and parents' answers with focus group discussions with 49 children and 20 of their parents.

This leaflet contains some of the things we found out; some surprising, some not. It also makes some recommendations for opportunities for parents, teachers and schools, policy makers and reserachers, and mobile companies.

For more detailed information about
South African Kids Online visit **www.cjcp.org.za.**

What
children
said about:

One in three

children were afraid of or upset by gory or violent images and hateful messages on the internet

How they access the internet
Through mobile phones, especially smartphones, rather than laptops or tablets, or desktop computers.

How often they go online
Most children go online often. They would like to go online more, but the high cost of data is the main reason they don't. Some children even said they would like to steal airtime to remain online. This shows just how important access to the internet is in their lives.

What they do online
They mostly socialise, play games online and search for music. They also use it for learning.

Where they go online
Online learning happens more at home than in school: teachers do not encourage using the internet during school hours for school work.

At home, most children have total privacy when using the internet.

If their parents are involved with their online activities
Most children don't speak to their parents about their internet use, and their parents don't encourage them to explore and learn new things online.

Who they speak to if something upsets them online
Children turn to other children, rather than parents or teachers, after experiencing something upsetting online, even though most said they felt they could talk to their parents and teachers.

Their schools, teachers and their internet use
Most children felt they belonged at their school, that their teachers cared about them and that they could ask their teachers for help. Teachers tended to check learners had their devices off in class and take phones away if they thought it necessary.

But their teachers did not encourage them to use the internet for study assignments at school.

What things on the internet upset them
One in three children were afraid of or upset by gory or violent images and hateful messages on the internet.

If they are nasty or hurtful to others online
One in five children been treated in a hurtful or nasty way by someone, either face to face or online.

Very few children had ever had any unwanted sexual experiences online

About online sexual imagery, conversations and sharing
Children most often were sent sexual messages or saw sexual images on social networking sites and instant messages.

Very few children had ever had any unwanted sexual experiences online or been asked to share sexual information by someone they did not want to online. Far fewer had done something sexual on the internet when they did not want to.

Almost half of fifteen to seventeen year olds who had seen sexual imagery online felt perfectly fine after being exposed to it.

Meeting up with strangers they met on the internet offline
Two in five children spoken to someone new on the internet at some point in their lives. Of these, one in two children had met with a stranger offline in the past year. More boys than girls had met with a new person offline. Very few of these children met with adult strangers.

Most children reported feeling 'fine' about face-to-face meetings with people they have met online, suggesting that these were not unpleasant experiences.

Most children **turned to their friends** for support when something bothered them online.

Internet access:
Through mobile phones, especially smartphones

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Parents and children had **similar levels of technical skills** on the internet.

What **parents** said about:

What they use the internet for	Most parents use the internet for instant messaging or for other practical reasons.
How they access the internet	Like their children, mobile phones are the main device they used.
How often they go online...	Most go online frequently.
If they are happy with their children's internet use	Most parents said their children's internet use was a point of conflict: with children avoiding chores, lying about completing homework and going to sleep late.
What they do to help their children with their internet use	Parents often don't know how to help their children, and some do things like take their child's device away or not allowing their child to use the internet.
What their main concerns for their children regarding the internet are	Parents' were very concerned with extreme forms of online risk for their children, including the dangers of their children meeting with strangers offline.
If they're involved in their children's online use	Parents and children said that parents are not involved in their children's internet use. They often do not know what their children are doing online.
What parents think about their own online skills	Both parents and children thought that children had better internet skills. But the study that parents had the same skills as their children.

Opportunities
we can take from this study:

For parents

Although parents felt they were less competent online, this turned out not be correct. Parents could actually do as much, or more, of the things children do online. Parents should consider getting more involved in encouraging and guiding their children's online use, as they do have the skills to do so.

Parents tended to focus more on the risks than the opportunities for their children online, and especially on extreme risks. This was informed mostly by TV shows such as the US 'reality' show, 'Catfish", which tends to show worst case scenarios. But very few of the children reported actually experiencing an extreme risk. Even meeting strangers offline was fine for most, and in 95% of these meetings, the strangers were peers, rather than adults.

Most parents' worried about their children's safety online or their children using the internet too much and so they restricted their children's internet use to keep them safe. Parents may want to think of other ways to keep their children safe that do not prevent children from going online and focus more on the opportunities the internet offers their children than they currently do, for example, encouraging them to use the internet to explore and learn.

For teachers

Schools and teachers could find creative ways to make internet use part of the learning experience. Teachers can encourage children to use their internet access more for school work, as currently they do not. Teachers can also play an important role in helping children to interpret content such as hate speech, a particular feature of South African society recently, and one that children do find upsetting.

For researchers and policy makers

South Africa has done good policy work on promoting children's safety online. However, there is still an opportunity to develop policies that promote the rights of children to benefit from what the internet offers.

Our legal framework needs to distinguish between producing sexual materials of children, which is an offence, and children's consensual online sexual interactions with each other. It also needs to explicitly address the digital rights of children.

Children do meet strangers offline, knowing that it is risky. We haven't yet done enough research to be able to understand the nature of this behavour, and why children are willing to go to these meeting, knowing the risks involved. This needs to be explored.

Parents, teachers, police, social workers and the legal system more broadly are not clear on their roles and the legal remedies for different online victimisations. We need clarification on these within the child protection system and to publicise these widely so that parents, children and teachers know about them

For internet service providers

The key barrier to children's internet use is the high cost of data. Data providers may want to consider creative ways of providing more affordable access to data for children. Affordable internet access for all, and especially children, is a goal South Africa has set itself in the National Development Plan 2030 and so this is an important priority.

For people who put information on websites

Children and parents may benefit from more online information and resources in languages other than English.

This study was a pilot project of the Global Kids online project, which was co-ordinated by the UNICEF Office of Research and the London School of Economics and Political Science. It was conducted in four pilot countries, all in the global South, chosen for their middle-to-lower income ranges. The countries are the Philippines, Argentina, Serbia, and South Africa.

Patrick Burton, Lezanne Leoschut and Joanne Phyfer of the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention conducted the South African research between 2015 and 2016. As this was a pilot study, the aim is to conduct a nationally representative study in future.