

Risks and Opportunities Related to Children's Online Practices

Ghana Country Report - Summary Report
December, 2017



RESEARCH REPORT ON

Risks and Opportunities Related to Child Online Practices

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Introduction

This report gives a snapshot of the key findings and recommendations of the research “Risks and Opportunities Related to Child Online Practices in Ghana. The main objectives of the research are to

- Gather evidence on children’s access to, usage, user habits, risk and opportunities related to online media among children of 9-17years to inform policy and programme intervention.
- Explore the support and control measures that exist to protect children and how children cope with risks and negative online experiences
- Contribute to an overall understanding of children’s online practices and experiences in Ghana.

This report aims to highlight the main findings for children, families, civil society and state actors as each of them play their roles to ensuring a safe and an enabling internet space for children and young people.

Background and Rationale

Child online protection is one of the emerging topical issues in Ghana. Child online protection is an international collaborative network to protect children worldwide against cyber threats by providing legal, technical and organizational measures. It is geared towards the prevention of violence against children through the internet and other mobile technologies. This survey was intended to collect information on; access to, usage, user habits, risk and opportunities as regards online media among children of 9-17years. The trigger for the research was the need for evidence of the scope, nature of the opportunities and risks as well as the dynamics of the use of the internet by children in Ghana to inform policy and programme intervention. Moreover, the existing information had gaps in scope, and focuses on only certain aspects of the subject matter.

The study was conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Communications, The Ministry of Interior and the Ministry for Gender Children and Social Protection and supported by UNICEF. A research steering committee was established to oversee the research process and provide guidance to IPSOS Ghana who executed the research.

Survey Approach and Methodology

The survey was designed according to the Global Kids Online project which was developed as a collaborative initiative during 2015-2016 between UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, London School of Economics and Political Science, and the EU Kids Online network and funded by UNICEF. Global Kids Online research toolkit is a set of tools developed to enable academics, government, civil society and other actors to carry out reliable and standardized national research with children and their parents/guardians on the opportunities, risks and protective factors of children’s internet use. The toolkit was continuously adapted and revised via a sustained dialogue with and across research teams in the pilot countries before, during and after the research process.

The study was cross sectional in nature employing both quantitative and qualitative techniques of sampling, data collection, analysis and presentation. A descriptive and explanatory approach was adopted for the report writing as the study sought to understand and explore online behaviors and experiences of children.

The study targeted children 9-17 years, parents/guardians, internet service providers and relevant Policymakers and Opinion Leaders from the government and Civil Society knowledgeable about issues

under study. The study targeted and achieved a total quantitative sample of 3000 respondents. Since the children were the primary target respondents, a higher sample of children aged 9-17 years at 2000, than parents/guardians at 1000 was targeted and achieved. The sample was distributed proportionately to population size of the region. Consequently, Ashanti and Greater Accra contributed the most to the sample while Upper West region contributed the least. Quotas by location, gender and age of children were pre-determined based on the national distribution statistics of children in the country. In-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with children, parents, internet service providers and policymakers as well as stakeholders from relevant government institutions and civil society organizations.

Limitations of the study and implications

- **The study was largely descriptive:** All the quantitative questions were closed ended leaving little room for open ended explanatory questions. Whereas focus group discussions yielded some information on explanations for the quantitative results, not all aspects were fully covered. Hence, the study fails to offer explanations for some of the quantitative results found. Therefore, qualitative explanatory studies will be required to fully understand reasons behind some of the children online practices and peer mediation to guide design effective interventions.
- **Teachers as study participants:** Whereas the study assessed certain aspects of internet use at school, only the parents and children's perspective was assessed missing out on the teacher's perspective - a key stakeholder in use of the internet at school. An assessment might be required on the level of digital skills and knowledge of teachers as well as availability of devices and internet connectivity in schools to fully understand the low internet use at school.
- **Cyber bullying as a form of online violence was not fully explored:** Although online violence was addressed generally, cyber bullying as a form of online violence against children was not fully explored by this study. Future studies addressing this component will be required.

Key demographics:

Among child respondents, urban residents (57%) were slightly higher than rural residents (43%). Boys (51%) were slightly more than the girls (49%). Majority of the children aged 9-17 years interviewed were in junior high school.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of children

| | Characteristics | % (n=2060) |
|----------|-----------------|------------|
| Location | Urban | 57% |
| | Rural | 43% |
| Gender | Male | 51% |
| | Female | 49% |
| Age | 15-17 years | 35% |
| | 12-14 years | 35% |
| | 9-11 years | 30% |

Majority of the parents/guardians were female (61%) aged between 35 and 44 years.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of Parents/Guardians

| | Characteristic | Overall (n=1000) | Have a source of income (%) |
|--------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Gender | Total | | 86% |
| | Female | 61% | 89% |
| | Male | 39% | 84% |
| Age | 16-24 years old | 2% | 79% |
| | 25-34 years old | 22% | 87% |
| | 35-44 years old | 36% | 90% |
| | 45-54 years old | 20% | 89% |
| | 55-64 years old | 5% | 88% |
| | 65+ years old | 2% | 60% |

5 in 10 parents/guardians had attended high school and 2 in 10 had never attended school at all, these were mostly female parents/guardians. About 9 in 10 of the parents/guardians had a source of income and earning between GHS 255 and 699, consequently, majority of the children lived in households in the lowest wealth quintile - social economic status D.

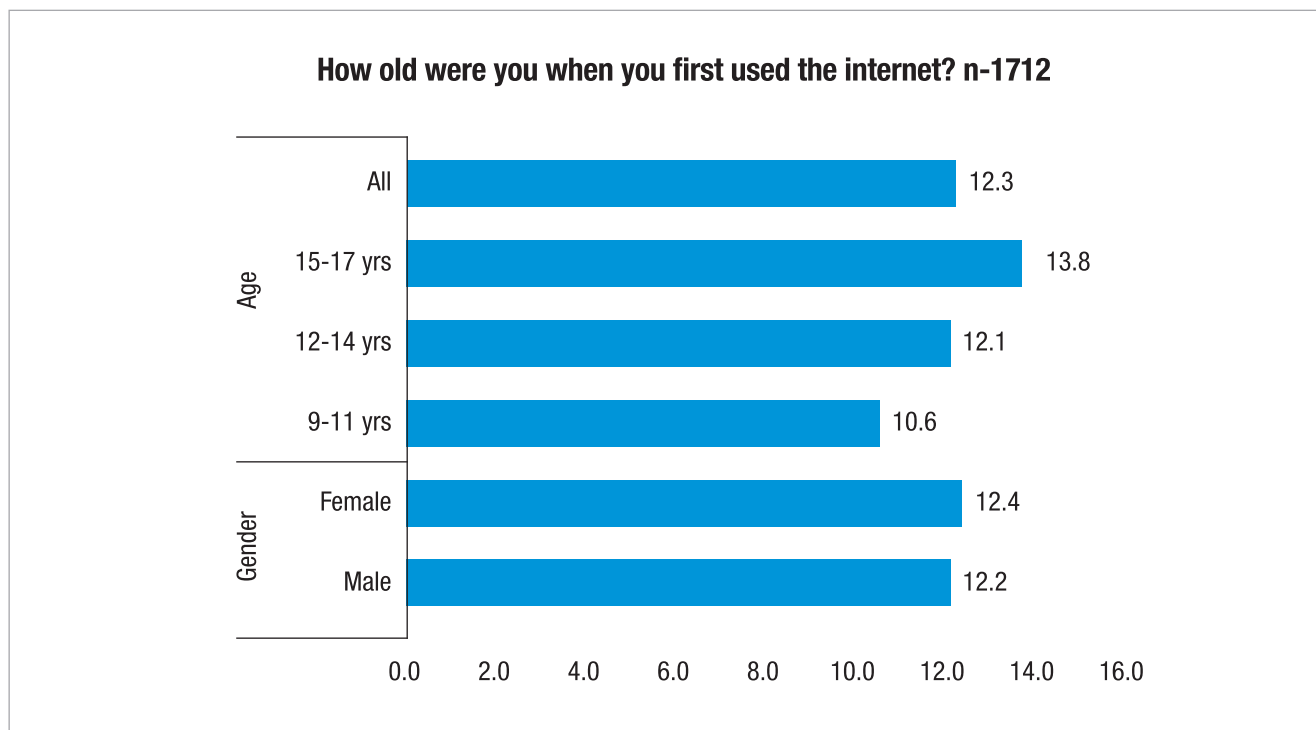
Key findings

1. Children start to use the internet at an earlier age yet majority of the parents/guardians are not using it



On the average, children in Ghana start using the internet at the age of 12 years. However, the average age increases with age. Older children had an average of 13.8 years for first use of internet while the younger ones had an average of 10.6 years. This implies that children today are starting to use the internet at an earlier age compared to the past. 6 in 10 parents/guardians have never used the internet. These are mostly females and aged 65 years and above. Usage of internet among parents/guardians relatively decreases with increase in age. Usage of internet was highest in parents/guardians below 35 years.

Figure 1: Use of internet by key demographics



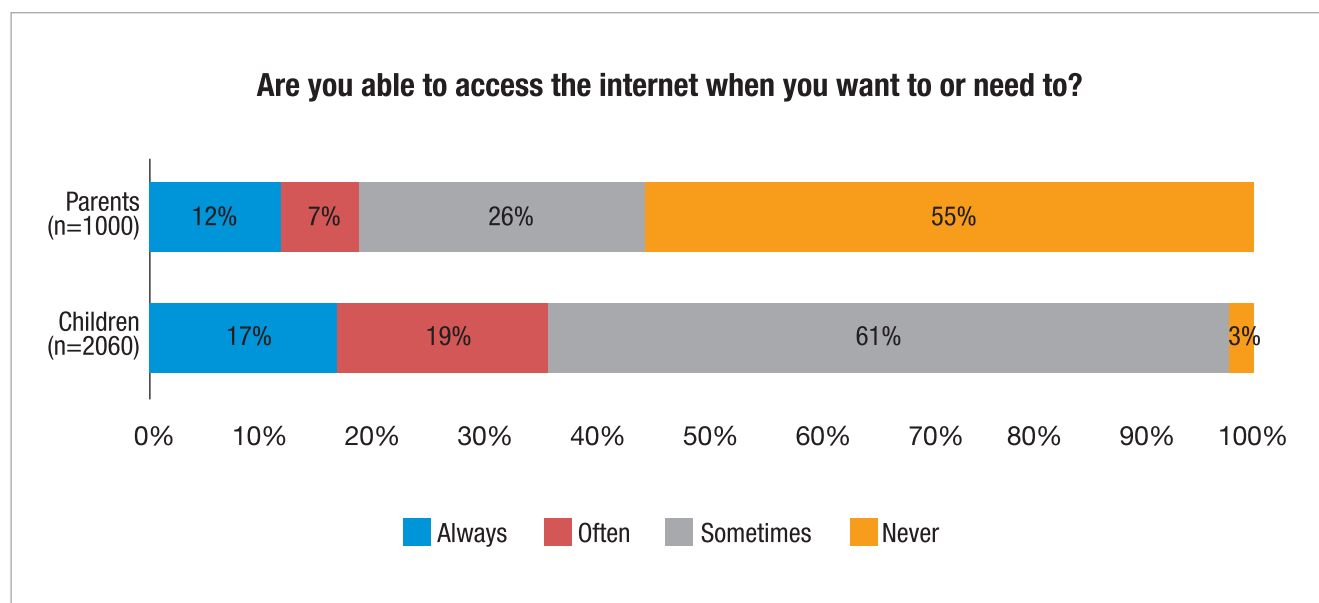
2. Children spend more time online during weekends

Biggest proportion of children (4 in 10) use the internet at least every week and very few (2 in 10) on a daily basis. Focus group discussions with children found that more time is spent online on the weekend because they are free as majority are not at school on weekends.

3. Children face barriers to access the internet but more Parents/guardians also face barriers to access the internet

All the children surveyed had used the internet 3 months preceding the survey. 6 in 10 children only access the internet sometimes when they need to. On the other hand, 5 in 10 parents/guardians are unable to access the internet, a big proportion of these have never used it. The main reason why most people (parents/guardians and children) are unable to access the internet is because there is no internet connectivity where they live. The other major barriers are related to cost of the internet and devices that can connect to the internet. Parental restriction is another major access barrier among the children. Both girls and female parents/guardians face slightly more internet access barriers than the males. Whereas younger children face more barriers, older parents/guardians face more internet access barriers. Children residing in rural areas face more barriers to access internet than urban children.

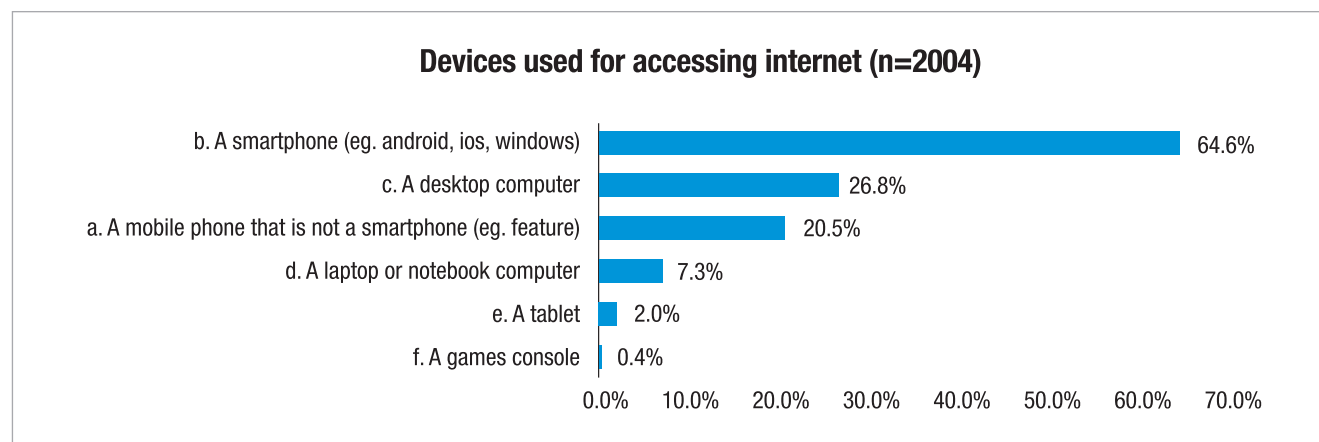
Figure 2: Access to internet



4. Children predominantly access the internet at home and through mobile devices

8 in 10 People (children and parents/guardians) access and use the internet from home. Group discussions found that children prefer going online at home because they don't have to pay for it. 7 in 10 children use a smart phone to access the internet. In-depth group discussions with children found that mobile phones are preferred devices because of the portability, easy to use and accessible at home.

Figure 3: Devices used for accessing internet



5. Children feel there are lots of things on the internet that are good for them but there are also harmful ones

About 7 in 10 children feel there are lots of things on the internet that are good for them. In-depth discussions found that children are excited with the ease and ability to meet new people through the internet, chatting with friends, sharing jokes, pictures and videos, searching for things not known especially for school work, playing and sharing online games.

On the other hand, some children feel the internet has had a negative impact on their lives. This is mostly related to exposure to negative culture and lifestyle and pornography. It further encouraged many to ignore important things in life. 4 out of 10 children don't feel safe on the internet. 4 in 10 children will accept all requests made to them online. In-depth group discussions showed that some children are worried to accept requests from people they don't know because of the negative outcomes such as harassment and misuse of their information and pictures.

I met a guy on Facebook who said he is from Pakistan and said he wanted to see me so I said I am in Africa.... When I was online, I received a friend request from someone and I was very happy

[FGD: 12-14 years, female, Upper West]

6. Most children use the internet more as a center for learning, communication and entertainment and less as a place for business and active participation on social-economic issues.

Most children use the internet for learning, social relationships and entertainment. Use of the internet at school among children is mostly for purposes of helping them complete class projects and assignments. A few use it for community participation. Very few use the internet for civic participation, commercial purposes and creative participation.

7. Children feel they know lots of things about using the internet (even more than their parents) however they are limited in creative and advanced digital skills.

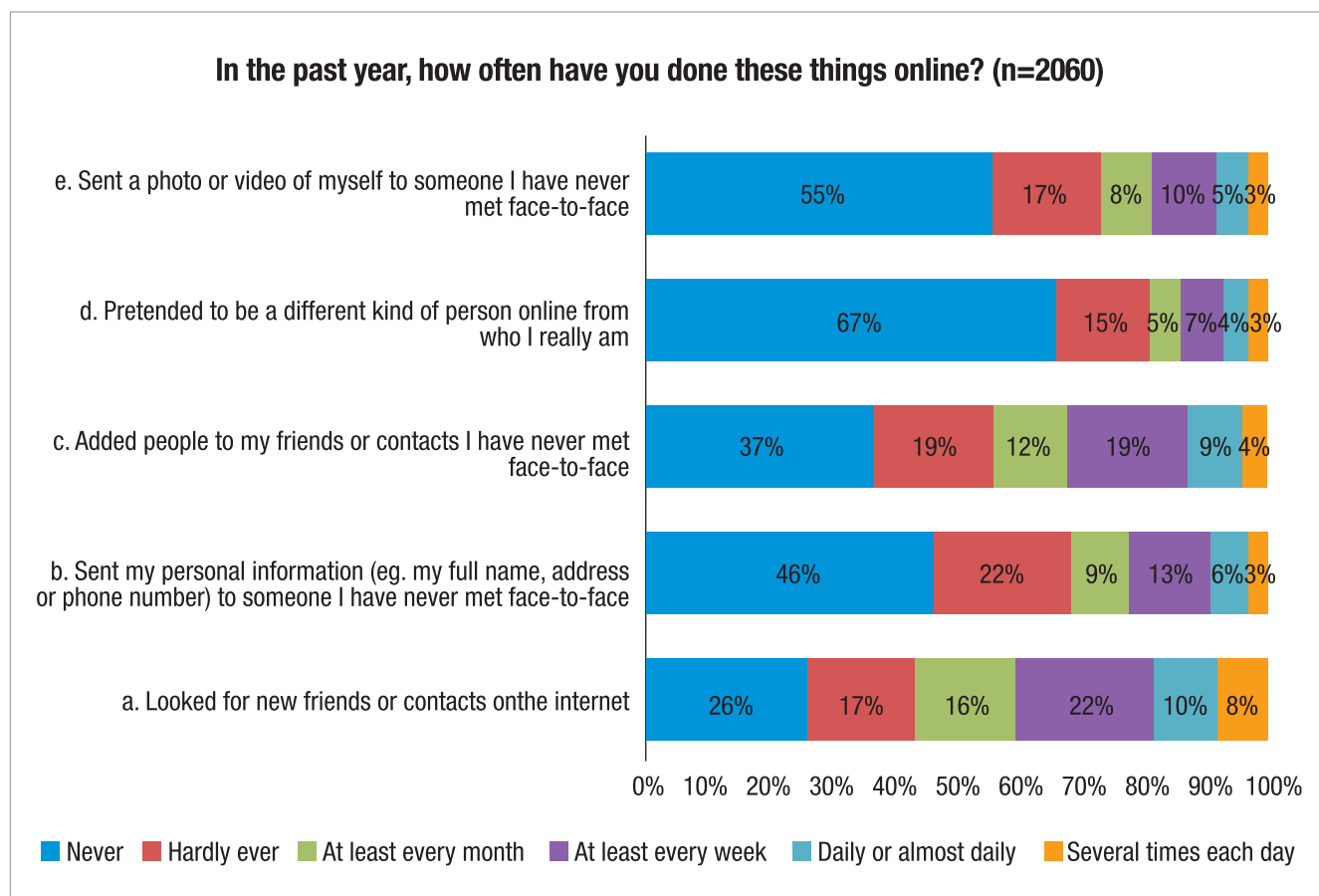
About 5 in 10 children feel they know lots of things about using the internet. 6 in 10 feel they know more about the internet than their parents/guardians. On the other hand, only 2 in 10 parents feels they know lots of things about using the internet, or they know more about the internet than their child. Common reported digital skills among children are the social skills (information sharing online), operational skills and mobile skills. About 4 in 10 children and 3 in 10 parents reported the mentioned skills. Creative skills are the least self-reported digital skills among both children and parents. Throughout all the different sets of digital skills, boys, urban residents and older children (15-17 years) reported higher skills than their counterparts. Male and younger parents also have higher self-reported digital skills. Overall, children reported more digital skills than the parents (including those that have never used the internet). However, parents that have used the internet before, possess more digital skills than the children.

8. Children are engaging in risky online practices

The most common risky online practice among children is looking for new friends and contacts, followed by adding people they had never met face to face as friends. About 4 in 10 children have made contact with someone on the internet they had never met face to face before. 2 in 10 have met someone face to face that they first got to know on the internet. 1 in 10 children send a photo or video of themselves to someone they have not met face to face. Throughout all the risky practices, more boys and older children 15-17 years are involved.



Figure 4: Risky online practices



9. Children experience events that upset or bother them online, however some parents/guardians have no idea what's going on

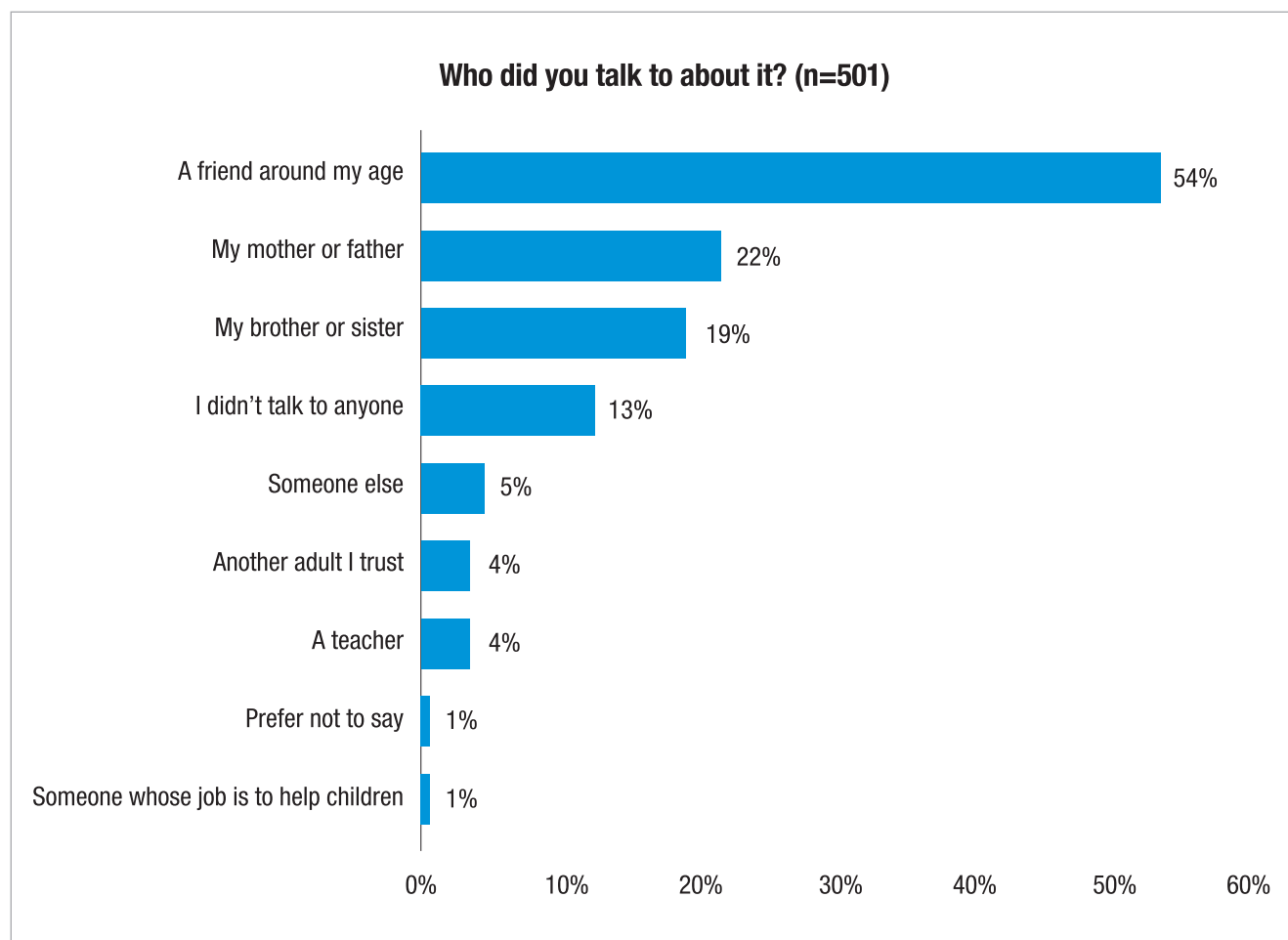
- Negative Online Experiences:** About 3 in 10 children have experienced something that bothered or upset them while online. About 2 in 10 children have been treated in a harmful way or in way they didn't like while online. These are mostly boys and urban residents. Experiencing something upsetting increased with the increase in age. About 1 in 10 parents has a child that has experienced something bothering and up setting while on the internet. However, about 3 in 10 parents have no idea if anything bothering or upsetting has happened to their children while using the internet, these are mostly males, the older ones, and have never used the internet. Group discussions found that the common things that bothered or upset children online included pornographic images, sharing of violent images, fraud and money scams.
- Exposure to sexual images:** 4 in 10 children have seen sexual images. These are mostly boys, urban residents and the older children. 2 in 10 children reported to have received sexual messages (in words, pictures or videos) in the past 12 months. These are mostly boys and the older children. About 1 in 10 children has sent, shared or posted sexual messages (words, pictures or videos).
- Children are not only exposed to sexual images via the internet:** Among children that have seen sexual images, 7 in 10 children are exposed from online devices or from TV. While online, 6 in 10 children are exposed to sexual images on social networking sites.
- Potentially negative user-generated content and negative online experiences:** About 2 in 10 children have experienced negative user-generated content and 1 in 10 have experienced other negative experiences on the internet.
- Children are more upset with violent images than sexual images: Among those that had seen sexual

images, 36% reported to have felt uncomfortable, 27% felt embarrassed or shy, while 26% felt neither happy nor upset. This implies that perceptions towards exposure to sexual images among children is divided. On the other hand, majority (47-56%) of the children were upset when they saw negative user generated content online. Children were most upset about content related to violent images (56%), ways of committing suicide (52%) and experiences of taking drugs (51%). This is higher than children that were upset after viewing sexual images.

12. Children trust their peers and share things that upset them online than any other person

5 in 10 children that have experienced things that upset or bothered them while online talk about it to a friend of the same age. Only 2 in 10 will talk to their parent or sibling, and about 1 in 10 will talk to a teacher. 1 in 10 will not talk to anyone about it. This implies that children trust their peers more and share with them upsetting things that happen to them online than any other person. In-depth group discussions found a similar result. The study further found that 5 in 10 children have friends that suggest ways to use the internet safely or encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet. This further confirms the significant level of interaction among children regarding internet use.

Figure 5: People children report to about online harm



13. Most parents/guardians are not confident of helping their children to cope with upsetting things online and largely depend on mass media for such information

Only 2 in 10 parents/guardians are confident that their children can cope with upsetting things online. These are mostly female, aged 25-35 years or 45-54 years. About 3 in 10 parents/guardians are confident of offering support to their children to cope with upsetting things online. These are mostly female, below 35

years and have ever used the internet. The most common and preferred source of information and advice on how to help and support children on the internet by parents/guardians was the media – TV, Radio, newspapers or magazines, followed by child's school. Notably, about 3 in 10 parents/guardians have never received such information. These are mostly female, never used the internet and never been to school.

14. Less than half of children surveyed benefit from an enabling parent-child relationship regarding the use of the internet

About 4 in 10 children have parents/guardians that encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet. 3 in 10 children have parents/guardians that suggest ways to use the internet safely. While this is quite positive, only a few children benefit from such positive parental mediation. The findings, also indicated that only 2 in 10 children tell their parents/guardians about things that bother or upset them on the internet. This is a reflection of poor parent-child relationship among this category of respondents. Male parents/guardians and below 35 years interact more with their children on issues related to the internet.

15. Majority of the parents/guardians do not restrict nor monitor what their children do on online

6 in 10 children are allowed by their parents/guardians to use the internet anytime. About 2 in 10 parents/guardians check what their children are doing on the internet. Whereas it is good that a significant number of parents allow their children to use the internet, the low involvement of parents/guardians in the online activities of their children can put the children at risk of harm and other negative online practices. Focus group discussions with children corroborated the low involvement of parents/guardians in the online activities of their children.

I use my mom's phone but she does not check.... my mom trusts me so she does not check....no one do check up on me....I log out so they don't even see if I use their phone [FGD: 15-17 years, male, Greater Accra]

Sometimes with my friends...It is not all the time... they [parents/guardians] don't even watch what you are doing, they don't even read....I don't even go near them. When I am online because I don't want them to know what I am doing [FGD: 15-17 years, male, Greater Accra]

16. Teacher mediation on the use of the internet is relatively low

5 in 10 children responded that teachers never or hardly suggest ways to use the internet safely or encourage them to explore and learn things on the internet or make rules about what to do on the internet at school. This is an indication that teachers do not play a substantial role in mediating and guiding children at school with regards to internet use.

Table 3: Teacher mediation

| Do teachers ever (n=1303) | Never | Hardly ever | Sometimes | Often/ very often |
|--|-------|-------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Suggested ways to use the internet safely | 43% | 9% | 32% | 16% |
| Encouraged me to explore and learn things on the internet | 39% | 8% | 32% | 21% |
| Made rules about what I can do on the internet at school | 44% | 10% | 24% | 21% |
| Helped me when I found something difficult to do on the internet | 49% | 10% | 22% | 19% |
| Talked to me about what I do on the internet | 45% | 10% | 29% | 16% |
| Explained why some websites are good or bad | 47% | 11% | 25% | 16% |
| Suggested ways to behave towards other people online | 51% | 14% | 21% | 14% |
| Helped me in the past when something has bothered me on the internet | 57% | 12% | 19% | 13% |
| In general, talked to me about what I would do if something on the internet ever bothered me | 57% | 13% | 16% | 14% |

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Some policy implications and recommendations arise from the findings of this survey. Largely, the survey evidence shows that multi-layered campaign connecting all relevant stakeholders (Government, NGOs, schools and internet industry – internet service companies) is really needed. The campaign should cover awareness raising on internet safety for children, helping children to improve their digital skills and making more visible and user-friendly online safety options.

Specific recommendations have been outlined below

- Interventions targeting increasing internet coverage and at a reduced cost will be required so as to tackle the major barriers for internet access and use for both children and their parents/guardians. Rural areas, the younger children (9-11 years) and girls need to be supported and prioritized in interventions to increase access and use of the internet.
- Interventions to sensitize and teach children on responsible and safe online practices including what and who to share personal information with and who to add as a friend (and available safety options) will be required. Such interventions should also aim at building skills of the children to use the internet for learning and creative purposes. Children need to be sensitized that the internet is just more than sharing pictures and messages. In addition, there is need to improve on children's technical digital skills so as to gain more from the internet. Since children share more with each other, about things that upset them online, they should be sensitized about online help centres and reporting processes so that they can help and support each other when the need arises.
- Children particularly the older ones (15-17) and males should be prioritized for interventions on exposure to sexual images and messaging online – they are at most risk.
- 21% of children interviewed reported that they look for health information online at least weekly. Sites with helpful and accurate information that is understandable and accessible for children will be required.
- Children mostly use the internet at home, so parents/guardians have a significant role to play in supporting, mediating or monitoring without limiting the rights of children and benefits of using the internet. Parents/guardians, particularly the older ones (above 35yrs) need to be strategically targeted to increase their awareness on online safety as well as increased access and use of the internet if

they are to play a role in supporting their children with use of the internet. They should be targeted in sensitization interventions to encourage them and teach them on how to be involved in how the children use the internet and help children cope with negative online experiences. Sensitisation programmes should include the benefits of the internet for children in order not to restrict its use. The parents/guardians (above 35 years) should be prioritized.

- Parents/guardians mostly use and prefer mass media as source of information to help children cope with things that upset them online. This is probably because of the proliferation of radio and TV stations, making this medium even more accessible. This is followed by schools. These information sources should be considered when designing media campaigns targeting parents/guardians.
- The survey shows that there is still limited use of the internet at school, interventions to increase and improve this will be required. Besides, parents preferred schools as a source of information and advice on their children's use of the internet, schools therefore certainly can play a key role in addressing some of the internet safety issues for children. In addition, schools are in a unique position to inspire children to use variety of positive internet opportunities and to extend the usage of internet in education. An assessment might be required on the level of digital skills and knowledge of teachers as well as availability of devices and internet connectivity in schools to strengthen the role of the schools in this regard.



