



Zambia Kids Online

A Global Kids Online Study

April, 2022



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Acronyms

AADS	Age-Appropriate Design Code
APC	Association for Progressive Communication
COP	Child Online Protection
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRIA	Child Rights Impact Assessment
CSA	Census Supervisory Area
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Material
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
EA	Enumerator Area
ECD	Early Childhood Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GC. No 25.	General Comment Number 25 (of the CRC)
GKO	Global Kids Online
HH	Household
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IWF	Internet Watch Foundation
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MCDSS	Ministry of Community Development and Social Services
MoGE	Ministry of General Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCSEA	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PPS	Probability Proportionate to Size
PSU	Primary Sampling Unit
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAC	Violence Against Children
WWF	World Wide Web Foundation
ZICTA	Zambia Information and Communications Authority
ZIPAR	Zambia Institute for Policy and Research
ZKO	Zambia Kids Online

Executive Summary

Study Snapshot:

The Zambia Kids Online study included 988 children and 999 parents or caregivers, living in three peri-urban districts in Zambia. The study collected data through a household questionnaire, as well as several focus group discussions. It explored children's access to technology and the internet; barriers to internet access; opportunities and benefits; children's digital skills, online risks and harms; and mediation by parents and teachers.

The study found that while the majority of the children in the peri-urban areas did have internet access, there are still significant pockets of children who do not, and children do not have the ready access that is needed in order to maximise either the educational and learning opportunities that exist online nor the other more social and technical skills and benefits. Access to infrastructure (both devices and reliable network) is not the only barrier; other barriers include a lack of support or encouragement from parents or teachers and fears related to privacy and the potential risks that children may encounter online.

Like children everywhere in the world, children in Zambia spend much of their time online on social media for fun, entertainment and chatting to friends. While many of the most important benefits and opportunities presented by digital technologies are perceived as being those that enhance these fun activities, children in Zambia also widely appreciate the opportunity the internet presents to learn new things and to expand their knowledge. However, only a minority of children included in the study exhibit the more advanced technical skills that are required to fully realise the potential that digital technologies and the internet have to offer. Further, most children tend to consume, rather than create, digital content. As might be expected, older children reported a greater level of skill than the younger children, and it is interesting and important to note that there is little statistically significant difference in the skills reported by the boys and girls.

The children in Zambia are clearly routinely facing the same risks faced by children the world over when they go online. These risks range from contact and conduct risks to content risks (where children are exposed to content that may pose specific risks to them). These risks were faced by both the boys and girls, although generally the girls encountered more contact risks (particularly sexual contact risks) than the boys. However, it is important that boys are not excluded from any interventions in order to prevent online violence and support victims as a significant percentage of boys in Zambia are also the victims of online (sexual) violence and are routinely exposed to online risks. Of particular concern is the level of age-inappropriate content that the children were both inadvertently exposed to and actively sought out, particularly content relating to self-harm, suicide, violent content and drug-related content. It is important to note that the combination of agency and inadvertent exposure suggests that there are both online and offline factors that are driving or facilitating children's exposure and children are seeking out such content. The reported low levels of seeking help within this context creates a potential minefield for possible negative psychological and mental health outcomes for children. The absence of help-seeking behaviour suggests that the provision and visibility of psycho-social support services for children should be prioritised, along with strengthened support and referral systems within the school and other environments in which children spend their time. This can, in part, be addressed through greater supportive and active mediation by parents or caregivers and teachers.

The study shows that there is little active or supportive mediation of the children's internet use by adults. This may impact on the children's online experiences in different ways: they may feel that they are largely on their own or reliant on friends and peers to figure out their own way online, including knowing how to stay safe. They may also feel that they cannot approach the adults in their life in order to look for help when they need it as the adults are viewed as either not having the requisite skills to help and support them or may become even more restrictive of their internet activities. It is also something of a lost opportunity to support and assist children in developing the skills and competencies that they need in order to make the most of their time online to maximise the opportunities that being online presents.

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are now an integral part of children's everyday lives. While much of the growth in the use of ICTs over the past decade has taken place in developed countries, there is exponential growth taking place in developing countries as more and more children, in particular, come online. The internet offers a wealth of opportunities for children to learn, to play, to develop new skills and to expand their interests and circle of friends. At the same time, it may also present a number of risks and dangers. To date, there is little written on online risks and harms to children within the Zambian context or on children and the internet more broadly.

Methodology

This study attempts to fill the above-mentioned gap for the first time. The overall objective of the study was to collect data that would enhance the understanding of children in Zambia's use of the internet, the opportunities presented to them online, the risks and harms they encounter and the different strategies used by children and parents to mitigate these risks.

Using the Global Kids Online (GKO) methodology and toolkit, Lifeline/Childline Zambia, together with Save the Children Zambia and with support from Finland Development Cooperation, undertook a detailed household (HH) study in three districts in Zambia: Lusaka, Livingstone and Ndola. Through a questionnaire administered to children aged 9 to 17 and their parents or caregivers, information on the following questions was collected:

- **Access:** How do children access and use the internet in their everyday lives, and what are potential barriers to access?
- **Skills and practices:** What online activities do children find easy and what things are the most difficult and why? What do children do online and how digitally skilled are they? How do they know which sites to go to?
- **Opportunities:** What activities do children do online and why? What do they like and dislike, and why?
- **Risks:** What things worry or upset children when they are online? What type of problems or challenges do they encounter online (what sorts of things have they seen online that they find violent/offensive/etc.)?
- **Well-being and resilience:** How do children cope and respond to risks? How do they seek help and help others when they encounter online risks? What do they report, to whom and how? What kind of support do they get?
- **Parents/caregivers:** What role do parents play in protecting their children online? What do they discuss with their children, what kind of advice and support do they provide and what kind of limitations do they set?
- **Teachers:** What role do teachers play in protecting children online? What do they discuss with their pupils, what kind of advice and support do they provide and what kind of limitations do they set?

In total, 988 children (531 girls and 457 boys) and 999 parents or caregivers (717 female caregivers and 282 male caregivers) were interviewed. In addition, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted: one with girls aged 9 to 17 in a care home; a second with a group of girls at a secondary boarding school, predominantly from high-income household and a third group with both boys and girls, predominantly out-of-school children from low-income households.

Study findings

The research focused on access to the internet and barriers to access; online activities and digital skills; online risks and harms; and adult mediation of children's internet use.

Children's access to the internet

- Most of the children interviewed in Zambia accessed the internet at least every week (34%), or daily or almost daily (32%). A little over one in ten were online several times a day, while 14% hardly ever go online. The girls were more likely than the boys to report that they had limited or restricted internet access, and prepaid internet was the most commonly utilised means of going online, which was mostly done through smartphones.
- Parental restriction and a lack of signal or broadband coverage at home were the most common reasons for children saying that they could not go online when they wanted to do so. Girls were much more likely than boys to report that parents and teachers stopped them from going online when they wanted to do so. While the reasons for this were not explored here, it suggests that the parents and teachers either fear more for the girls' safety online than the boys or believe that there are not as many benefits for girls being online.
- Two in five children reported that they are concerned about their privacy online, while the same number of children also reported that they do not have enough time to go online.
- Three quarters of the children interviewed in the study went online by themselves. Those that needed help to go online tended to get that help from family members or friends. It was not uncommon for older children to help their friends or family go online, although this was far less common for the younger children who may not be particularly digitally literate themselves.

⇒ This data suggests that while the majority of the children have internet access in these peri-urban areas, this is still limited to a large degree, and the children did not have the ready access that is needed in order to maximise the educational and learning opportunities that exist online or the other more social and technical skills and benefits. Access to infrastructure may not be the only barrier; other barriers may be due to a lack of support or encouragement from parents or teachers driven by fears related to their privacy and the potential risks that children may encounter online.

Online activities and skills

- Children who participated in the study reported having a largely positive experience when they go online. In total, 61.2% of children reported that they had a good time or fun *very often* or *often* when they went online, while almost one in three children (32.7%) reported that they sometimes had a good time or fun online. Older children – aged between 16 and 17 years old – were more likely to report having fun when they went



online than younger children (between the ages of 9 and 11, and between 12 and 15). While there was little difference between the boys and girls, the girls between 16 and 17 years old were the most likely to report having fun when they go online (14.9% of girls in that category reported having a good time compared with 11.9% of the boys of the same age).

- Perceptions of positive content and good things online tended to improve as the children got older, which may be a result of the greater levels of skill and more independence that the older children may have in regard to exploring online, leading them to discover new things.
- The most important aspect for most of the children in the study was the opportunity that the internet offered to relax and have fun or to develop new skills (and in fact, they thought the internet encouraged them to develop more skills). Importantly, providing a space in which the child could express themselves and learn about things that he or she cares about, as well as keeping up with current affairs, were considered important benefits.
- Children we spoke with in Zambia engaged in a wide range of activities online, although many of these were concentrated on content consumption and communication rather than content creation. Importantly, using the internet for learning and schoolwork is also relatively common and may correlate with the current programming of the Ministry of Education that aims to increase access to and the use of technology within the classroom, as well as potentially correlating with the shift to online learning and resources that has been a result of COVID-19.
- The most common activities reported by the children included a range of social media and entertainment activities (visiting social media sites, listening to music and watching videos online). More than three in five (63%) of the children reported visiting a social media site such as Facebook, 62% reported watching videos online and 55% reported streaming or downloading music *all the time, several times a day, daily, weekly or over the past month*.
- While there was little difference in how boys and girls we spoke to in Zambia used the internet, the older children were more likely to report using the internet for schoolwork and for learning new things, while the younger children's activities focused more on watching videos or films, connecting with friends and listening to music. Few of the children reported using the internet for engaging in community interests or for work, advocacy work or any other form of civic engagement.
- Children were most likely to chat to friends or acquaintances (either over or under 18 years old) who they knew offline before communicating with them online *almost all the time, several times a day or almost daily*, as opposed to chatting with some other person. This suggests that maintaining contact with friends who exist offline remains the most common use of internet platforms amongst the children in Zambia. But chatting to new people they meet online is also important: almost two in five (39%) of the children reported that they chatted to someone online who had no prior connection to their life *all the time, several times daily, daily or at least every week*.
- Children we spoke with reported being more confident in their social skills related to social media and in everyday activities (such as photo or video sharing, chatting and meeting people online) compared with their confidence in their more technical skills (such as programming and website design).
- More than half of the children interviewed reported that they felt it was *very true* or *fairly true* to say that they know a lot of things about using the internet, while one in two reported that they knew more about the internet than their parents did.
- Older children tended to reflect more technical skills than the younger children, and there was no significant difference between the skills reported by the boys to those of the girls of the same age.

- When asked about different steps that they take to, for example, keep their data and identity safe online, children generally reflected a very low level of understanding of data privacy and protection. For most children, protecting their identity online meant simply not sharing their location or full name.
 - The most commonly used privacy steps taken by the children interviewed in Zambia were keeping passwords secret, with one third of the children having done this, and blocking messages from someone to whom the child does not want to speak. A little over one in five of the children have changed the settings on their social media profiles so that fewer people can see them, while one in ten have changed their browser settings to block pop-up messages. While there is no significant difference in the steps taken by gender, the girls were more likely to report having blocked messages from people that they do not want to receive messages from when compared with the boys.
 - The most common social media apps used by children were Facebook followed by Instagram and Snapchat. In total, 96.3% of the children who had a social media presence had a Facebook profile, while a little fewer than one quarter of the children reported having an Instagram account, followed by those with YouTube and Snapchat profiles. Almost half of the children with social media accounts accepted contact requests all the time, regardless of whether or not they know the person or if the person was a contact of a contact. This may be to boost their followers on the basis of a 'like-for-like' follow, but it poses potential risks to the child.
- ⇒ Like children everywhere in the world, children in Zambia spend much of their time online on social media, for fun, entertainment and to chat to friends. While many of the most important benefits and opportunities presented by digital technology are perceived as being those that enhance these fun activities, children in Zambia also widely appreciate the opportunity the internet presents to learn new things and to help with schoolwork. However, only a minority of the children interviewed in Zambia exhibited the more advanced technical skills that are required to fully realise the potential that digital technology and the internet have to offer. Further, most of the children tended to consume, rather than create, content. As might be expected, the older children reported a greater level of skill than the younger children, and it is interesting and important to note that there is little statistically significant difference in the skills reported by the boys and girls.



Online risks and potential harms

- The study clearly delineated between the online risks and actual harms that children experienced. Not all risks result in harm to children, and how children manage or mitigate different risks may be informed by a range of different social, family, technical and environmental factors. While it is important to minimise all harms that children may experience and to try and prevent those harms from happening, it is equally as important that children, with the support of those around them, learn to manage and mitigate the risks that they may encounter.
- Both online risks and the possibility of resulting harms can impact on children's experiences and well-being online and offline. This impact may range from annoyance and irritation to physical, sexual and psychological

injury. More than half of the children interviewed thought that there were things online that bothered people their age, while one in three – with no difference by gender – had experienced something that bothered them in some way over the past year. These experiences were reported more by the older children than the younger children, which is likely to be a result of the older children's greater online engagement and more time spent online when compared with younger children. When these experiences did occur, three in five felt very upset at the experience, suggesting that whatever form the experience took, it had a profound negative impact on the child.

- When these experiences occurred, the children tended to only speak to friends, rather than to adults (including family, teachers or other responsible persons). This suggests a huge gap in help-seeking awareness and utilisation.
 - Children also commonly engaged in, and were exposed to, risky online activities:
 - Three in ten had sent a photo of themselves to someone they had never met in person.
 - 28.3% had sent their personal information to someone online they had never met in person.
 - More than half had added people to their contact lists, as friends, that they had never met in person.
 - Almost three in five had seen websites with gory or violent images online.
 - Over one third of the children had seen websites talking about or promoting drug use.
 - One third of the children had seen websites or content online promoting eating disorders.
 - Three in ten had seen websites promoting or talking about self-harm.
 - While more older children reported seeing potentially harmful content online, a significant percentage of younger children had also experienced these risks online. It was also not uncommon for the children to report actively seeking out such content, particularly in the cases of gory or violent images and (amongst the older children) eating disorders.
 - Almost one in two of the children reported that they had contact with someone online over the past year who they had not first met face to face, while over one quarter of the children had met someone in person that they had first met online.
 - Children interviewed for the study were routinely exposed to different content and contact sexual risks, including being sent links to porn websites that they did not want, being sent sexual messages (including videos, pictures or text) that they did not want and opening messages of sexual content that they did not want to see. Significantly more of the girls than the boys had been asked for sexual information about themselves (23.2% compared with 10.9%), to talk about sexual acts when they did not want to (19% compared with 12%) and asked for a video or picture of their private parts when they did not want to send such a picture or video (18.6% compared with 6.3%).
 - The majority of children who were asked for sexual information, videos, pictures or to engage in sexual conversations when they did not want to do so rebuffed these attempts, although one in ten did send sexual information about themselves when they did not want to do so or did something sexual online that they did not want to do so and one in four children talked about sexual acts when they did not want to do so.
 - It is often commonly assumed that unwanted sexual advances and requests for sexual content originate from strangers. Most commonly, the children reported that these requests came from romantic partners (28.6%), followed by those who reported they came from people they met online who they had not met in person (26.5%).
- ⇒ The children we spoke with in Zambia are clearly routinely facing the same risks faced by children the world over when they go online. These risks range from contact and conduct risks to content risks (where children



are exposed to content that may pose specific risks to them). These risks were faced by both the boys and girls, although the girls generally encounter more contact risks, particularly sexual contact risks, than the boys. However, it is important that boys are not excluded from any interventions that aim to prevent online violence and support victims as a significant percentage of boys in Zambia are clearly also the victims of online (sexual) violence and are routinely exposed to online risks. Of particular concern is the level of age-inappropriate content that the children are both inadvertently exposed to and that they actively seek out, particularly content relating to self-harm, suicide, violent content and drug-related content. Important here is the combination of agency and inadvertent exposure, and we suggest that there are both online and offline factors that are driving or facilitating children's exposure and children seeking out such content. The reported low levels of seeking help within this context creates a potential minefield for possible negative psychological and mental health outcomes for children. The absence of help-seeking behaviour suggests that the provision and visibility of psychosocial support services for children should be prioritised, along with strengthened support and referral systems within the school and other environments in which children spend their time. This can, in part, be addressed through greater supportive and active mediation by parents or caregivers and teachers.

The mediation of children's online experiences

- Parents have a critical role to play in shaping their children's online experiences and activities, as well as children's capacity to stay safe online. Like all aspects of parenting, much of the way in which parents engage with children about technology and the internet depends on the communication between the parents and children and on active engagement that is informed by the evolving capacities of the children. Parents or caregivers may engage with the child in different ways, ranging from more restrictive practices that primarily limit both the time online and the things the child can do online through to more active supportive engagement that promotes their child's use of the internet and fosters greater skills and literacy. Similarly, schools – simply by virtue of their core mandate as institutions of education and care, and through the amount of time that children spend at school – are vital in equipping children with the digital and technological skills required to stay safe and to maximise the opportunities that exist for children online, as well as being vital in simply equipping them with the requisite skills to succeed.
- The majority of the children we spoke to reported little or no engagement by their parents or caregivers in their online activities:
 - Approximately one in three of the children reported a form of positive and active engagement with parents or caregivers in regard to the children's online activities, discussing what the children did online and encouraging the children to use the internet and explore online.
 - A similar proportion of the children reported that their parents spoke to them about how to stay safe online, with just one in ten reporting that their parents did this very often.
- The children we spoke with in Zambia reported that their parents set specific restrictions on some of the activities that the children can do online. One in five of the children reported that they can only watch online video clips, download music or videos or use the internet for schoolwork with their parents' permission, while 16.6% reported that they can only use a webcam with their parents' permission and 15.3% reported that they can only read or watch news online with their parents' permission.
- This data points to parents having a largely restrictive approach to their children's internet use across a broad range of activities. Yet, given the large proportion of the children who reported using social media sites, chatting to friends online and using the internet for schoolwork, the reality of the children's lives suggests that, despite some of these restrictive practices and boundaries established by their parents or caregivers, many of the children are still finding ways to go online and engage in many of the activities in which their friends, peers and other children their age are engaged. It further reiterates the above finding that parents are generally unlikely

to actively engage in supporting their children online or to support them in staying safe through speaking to them about how to stay safe, how to identify risks and how to act when encountering risks, given that they are likely to think that their children are not doing the things online that they are in fact doing.

- When children's perceptions of the measures that their parents took to keep track of their internet use are compared with those of their parents, children slightly over-estimated the apps and parental controls that their parents used to keep track of their online activities. In total, 7.2% of the children reported that their parents used filtering software to control what sites they visited, 5.8% reported that their parents used software to keep track of apps or websites visited and 5% reported that their parents used software to filter the apps that their children could download. When parents were asked about the measures they took, just 5.3% of the parents or caregivers reported using content filtering or blocking software and 4.8% reported using apps or software to keep track of the websites or apps their children use.
- Within the school environment, teachers were reported to generally restrict, rather than promote, internet use. Just one quarter of the children reported that their teachers sometimes encouraged and supported them to learn new things online, with approximately another one in ten of the children reporting that their teachers did this *very often* or *often*. One in five of the children reported that their teachers sometimes suggested ways to use the internet safely, with another one in ten reporting their teachers did this very often.
- ⇒ The data, taken together, suggests that there is little active or supportive mediation of children's internet use. This may impact on the children's online experiences in different ways; they may feel that they are largely on their own or reliant on friends and peers to figure out their way online, including how to stay safe. They may also feel that they cannot approach the adults in their life to look for help when they need it as the adults are viewed as either not having the requisite skills to help and support them or as the adults may become even more restrictive of their internet activities. It is also something of a lost opportunity to support and assist the children in developing the skills and competencies that they need to make the most of their time online and to maximise the opportunities that being online presents.

Recommendations

Recommendations are provided for the development of **policy and legislation**, for **schools and teachers**, for **parents** and for **children** themselves. Future research directions are also provided.

- While children are going online at an ever-increasing rate, access still remains a significant barrier to internet use. Ensuring an accelerated broadband roll-out is critical in ensuring that children do not get left behind. However, a coordinated effort beyond this is also required to ensure that, once infrastructure is available, support is then provided to children in under-resourced families in regard to them accessing this network. This is provided through increasing internet access through schools and public access points, as well as through providing access to personal devices (such as tablets) that may be required to facilitate e-learning or the use of the internet for school assignments and other assignments.
- Notwithstanding this, it is important to assume that every child has some internet access, rather than working from the assumption that many do not. Many children access the internet through friends' or family's phones. It is thus important that in the roll-out of all programming, online safety and online privacy and data protection measures be included. As the roll-out of broadband and internet expands, it is also a useful opportunity to ensure that there are obligations on industry and service providers to integrate online safety and data protection mechanisms into products and to provide online safety and data protection services for their products. This should be accompanied by requirements for all service providers to undertake child-rights impact

assessments in the design of services and platforms in order to ensure that children's interests and rights are taken into consideration in the design phase (as well as the implementation phase) of any digital technology product and service delivery.

- Given pockets of limited access, it is important to increase access to computers and tablets at schools across Zambia. This must be accompanied by digital literacy and online safety training for teachers and school staff, including the provision of school data protection systems and guidance for schools on acceptable use policies, the use of EdTech, the integration of online safety into school safety policies and on the provision of support and referral systems within schools.
- Specific measures may be required to ensure that children with disabilities have equitable access to digital technology and have the requisite skills to utilise these and to stay safe online. This could be achieved through partnerships with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society organisations that work directly with children with disabilities.
- Online safety and child online protection should be integrated into existing child protection policies and legislation, ranging from the national-level child protection systems and mechanisms down to the district- and local-level child protection systems and mechanisms. It is important to ensure the integration into existing protection systems rather than the creation of duplicate systems targeting online protection. This should be accompanied by training for child protection workers, ranging from social workers through to community protection officers and school protection officers (where relevant), as well as training for law enforcement actors, prosecutors and other criminal justice actors.
- There is also a clear need for support to parents and caregivers, as well as teachers, in regard to how best to support and engage with children in relation to their digital experiences. While this should be done in a way that promotes parents' and teachers' own digital competencies and skills, it does not preclude interventions and support for parents and teachers that focus on the development of non-digital skills – such as positive parenting, developing healthy strong adult–child bonding, communication skills and conflict negotiation and management – all of which are offline skills that are critical for healthy childhoods and also translate into the online environment.
- There is also a clear gap in either or both awareness of child support and psychosocial services amongst children or the utilisation of such services. This suggests the need for targeted interventions and programming that increase both the awareness and uptake of the available services (including within schools), as well as support for these services.
- Schools should ensure that consistent support is provided to boys and girls in a way that promotes equal adoption and the use of technology while ensuring that teachers are able to support both boys and girls in staying safe online.
- Digital citizenship, literacy and media literacy should be integrated into core curriculums, across all grade levels, where possible. This is particularly important in a context where it is common for children to be online while their parents or caregivers are not. It is important that teachers learn how they can instil values that positively affect online safety.
- Schools should encourage very clear guidelines for schools, and for teachers within schools, on the use of personal devices (what can be used and how it can be used, and what is acceptable use) and the acceptable use of school hardware and internet. Model guidelines can be developed by the National Ministry of Education on a consultative basis.

- Children exhibited a very rudimentary understanding of their privacy online, their data footprint and how to protect their data. Schools should ensure the integration of data privacy and data protection into their digital literacy curriculum (as it is developed), as well as media literacy. This should of course be accompanied by strict data protection and data privacy policies for the school itself in the management of children's data.
- It is important that parents and caregivers recognise and are made aware of the range of opportunities and benefits that the internet offers for children and of the critical role that digital technology can and increasingly will play in children's lives. This is particularly important in a context where parents were identified by children as one of the most common barriers to going online. There is thus clearly a need to support parents and caregivers in regard to raising awareness of the opportunities that exist, as well as supporting them regarding how to best support their children. This should be done through targeted digital literacy programmes for parents and caregivers, and also, through non-digital programming.
- Examples of this include the integration of discussion on digital technology, the risks and opportunities provided by the internet and how best to address these in existing parenting programmes and even though ECD programmes. Examples could include age-appropriate online activities for children and guidance on age-appropriate device usage, as well as age-appropriate measures to enhance child safety online. However, these programmes should also stress the importance of non-digital skills – conventional positive parenting and parenting skills (such as positive communication, the development of empathy and conflict management skills) – for their child's digital presence.
- As children increasingly spend more time online (not only as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic) it is increasingly important that parents and children themselves should be made aware of the importance of spending time online engaged in a variety of activities that can include play and gaming, but that also take into account learning, education and communicating with others. The emphasis to this programming and guidance should be on the range of different activities and on how children's time is spent on different activities online.
- Children themselves are a huge and valuable resource in regard to the policies, strategies and mechanisms related to staying safe online. As such, it is important that children are integrally involved in the development of policies, programmes, strategies and messaging relating to online safety and that they are given a voice with which to share their everyday experiences and their own priorities, and are integrally involved in the development of messages.
- Children should be encouraged to identify trusted adults that they can speak to when they encounter something online that bothers them and they should be encouraged to share who this person is with their parents (if they are not the trusted adults) in order to ensure that both parents and child are satisfied that there is someone that the child can turn to if needed.
- As children predominantly turn to peers for support and assistance online, rather than to adults, children can themselves foster an online safety peer-support culture and system through children's safety committees, peer programming and through schools, religious institutions, or youth clubs.



ZAMBIA KIDS ONLINE A Global Kids Online Study

Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are now an integral part of children's everyday lives. While much of the growth in the use of ICTs over the past decade has taken place in developed countries, there is exponential growth taking place in developing countries as more and more children, in particular, come online. While the internet offers seemingly endless opportunities to benefit children throughout the world, it may also present a number of risks and dangers. To date, there is little written on online risks and harms to children within the Zambian context or on children and their internet usage within Zambia more broadly. The literature that does exist has focused more on the developmental and educational opportunities within schools and universities. Yet Zambia has taken several significant steps towards ensuring that the protection of children online is codified through both the Cyber Security and Cyber Crime Act of 2021 and the more recent Child Online Strategy. Recognising the gap in evidence and reliable baseline data, Save the Children Zambia, together with Lifeline/Childline Zambia, commissioned the Zambia Institute for Policy and Research (ZIPAR), together with an international consultant, to undertake the Zambia Kids Online (ZKO) study in order to fill this gap in evidence relating to children online within Zambia.

The ZKO study is based on the Global Kids Online (GKO) research project – an international research project that aims to generate and sustain a rigorous cross-national evidence base on children's use of the internet.¹ Zambia joins South Africa and Ghana as the first African countries to join this international project.

Framing the study

The rapid spread of technologies and the digitalisation of even the most remote communities and households (HHs) has changed the face of economies and societies throughout the world. The rapid spread of technology has been accelerated even further by the COVID-19 pandemic as children and young people are forced online for schooling, play and communication. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated the inequalities and disparities in access to technology and in the digital skills and capacities of children.

As the potential benefits and opportunities of a 'connected' society extend to HHs and individuals, the opportunities for abuse and violent behaviour extend into the digital environment,² as has been noted by the Association for Progressive Communication (APC) and Human Rights Watch:

*The Internet and mobile technologies provide for new ways to connect, share resources and experiences, and build communities. However, these digital spaces have also provided tools and platforms for the replication and continuation of the perpetration of violence ...*³

Access to the internet is increasingly being recognised as a fundamental right, both in itself and as a means to realise

¹ <http://globalkidsonline.net/about/>

² UNICEF (2017) *The State of the World's Children: Children in a Digital World*, available at https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_101992.html

³ Human Rights Report (2016), *Ending Technology-assisted Violence Against Women*. Available at https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/HRC%2029%20VAW%20a%20briefing%20paper_FINAL_June%202015.pdf

other fundamental rights, including the right to education and information. This becomes particularly important for children, and as the World Wide Web Foundation (WWWF) notes:

the Internet is a public good, and should be used, managed and governed as such.”

The WWWF consider that, for children, the internet is a means to realise all other rights – children see the internet as a tool, a cross-cutting mechanism for doing this. This notion of the internet as a mechanism with which to realise other rights has been further emphasised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which notes that:

The rights of every child must be respected, protected and fulfilled in the digital environment. Innovations in digital technologies affect children’s lives and their rights in ways that are wide-ranging and interdependent, even where children themselves do not have access to the internet. Meaningful access to digital technologies can support children to realise their full range of civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights.⁴

If the internet offers a gateway to the realisation of many rights for children, the importance of the internet and digital environment for children living with disabilities – as well as other, often marginalised groups of children – cannot be overstated. The Committee on the Rights of the Child draws particular attention to children with disabilities, arguing that:

the digital environment opens new avenues for children with disabilities to engage in social relationships with peers, access information and participate in public decision-making processes.⁵

It is within this framing that the ZKO project is located.



⁴ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 25, CRC/C/G/25 Children’s Rights in the digital environment, I.4.

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 25, CRC/C/G/25 Children’s Rights in the digital environment, IX.89.

The objectives of the study

The overall goal of the project was to conduct a provincial representative study on children online in three provinces of Zambia. This study was informed by the UNICEF and London School of Economics and Political Science' (LSE) GKO toolkit, as well as by recent innovations and adaptations of this toolkit in other countries.

As per the provided Terms of Reference, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- understand the extent of use of internet among children
- understand the opportunities available for access to and use of the internet
- identify the type of activities mostly undertaken by children online
- identify risks and harms children are exposed to while using the internet
- assess the extent of the awareness of mitigation tools/strategies among children and parents/caregivers
- provide estimates of children's internet use, which will guide actions taken to implement the Child Online Protection (COP) strategy and other initiatives in support of children's safe and responsible internet use
- provide clear recommendations on how to better protect children from online risks, how to effectively mitigate and respond to risks, and how the use of the internet could contribute positively to children's lives.

Key study questions

In support of the study's overall purpose and objectives, the study sought to answer the following key questions:

- **Access:** How do children access and use the internet in their everyday lives, and what are potential barriers to access?
- **Skills and practices:** What online activities do children find easy, what things are most difficult and why? What do children do online and how digitally skilled are they? How do they know which sites to go to?
- **Opportunities:** What activities do children do online and why? What do they like and dislike and why?
- **Risks:** What things worry or upset children when they are online? What type of problems or challenges do they encounter online (what sorts of things have they seen online that they find violent/offensive/etc.)?
- **Well-being and resilience:** How do children cope with and respond to risks? How do they seek help and help others when they encounter online risks? What do they report, to whom and how? What kind of support do they get?
- **Parents/caregivers:** What role do parents or caregivers play in protecting their children online? What do they discuss with their children, what kind of advice and support do they provide and what kind of limitations do they set?
- **Teachers:** What role do teachers play in protecting children online? What do they discuss with their pupils, what kind of advice and support do they provide and what kind of limitations do they set?

The study relied on the GKO toolkit and research framework⁶ in the design, implementation and quality assurance of the data collection, as well as when providing the reporting and analysis framework with local adaptations for the Zambian context as and where required, based on the input and contribution of the Zambian partners and reference group.

Methodology

The following section provides the detailed research approach, instrument design and sampling, as well as ethical considerations.

The research approach

The project utilised the GKO toolkit and comprised three distinct, but inter-related, components: a quantitative survey of 9- to 17-year-olds, sampled at HH level, together with parents/caregivers; a qualitative component utilising FGDs; and in-depth interviews. More information on the sample is provided in the following sections.

Questionnaire formulation and digitisation

The study utilised all the compulsory modules of the GKO toolkit and a combination of optional and country-specific modules. The optional and country-specific modules build on the specific needs of the Zambian partners. These modules also allow for the exploration of online and offline violence, particularly important given the last violence against children (VAC) study conducted in Zambia was conducted in 2015 and is thus somewhat dated. Items relating to the intersection of online and offline risks and harms were developed. The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability were incorporated into the instrument as well. The development of the tools was preceded by a rigorous desk review process which further informed the refinement of the tool. The tool was digitalised using KOBO Collect.

Activities included a mix of a 'traditional' FGD and more participative, child-friendly methods, including interactive mapping, the use of graphics, matrixes and other approaches. It is essential that the children's voices be captured through these activities and through diagrams, quotes and call-outs, photos and other visual means.

Sampling

The sample size for the study was determined to be 1000 based on the national sampling frame obtained from the Zambia Statistics Agency (aka ZamStats). When the sample of 1000 HHs was proportionally allocated to the three districts of interest (namely, Lusaka, Ndola and Livingstone), the resultant distribution would not allow Livingstone and Ndola to have enough cases to sustain the desired tabulations of the data (see Table 1). Therefore, a disproportionate allocation was adopted.

The number of clusters was selected based on a cluster take of 25 HHs that was based on ZamStats' recommendation. Dividing the allocated sample size to each district by the cluster take of 25 gives the total number of clusters selected per district.

⁶ See <http://globalkidsonline.net/>



Table 1: Sample Allocation

District	Total population (2020 projections)	Proportion	Sample HHs (proportional allocation)	Sample HHs (disproportionate allocation)	# of clusters
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Lusaka	2,731,696	0.78	779	425	17
Livingstone	190,419	0.05	54	275	11
Ndola	585,974	0.17	167	300	12
Total	3,508,089	1	1000	1000	40

A disproportionate sample allocation, shown in column 5 of Table 1, was arrived at by estimating a minimum acceptable sample size that could be allocated to the smallest district – thus, a sample size of 275 was calculated for Livingstone.

Stratification

It was desired that the sample would be stratified by rural and urban categories and ensure representativeness by age group and gender. However, all the selected districts are predominantly urban. Going by the ZamStats classifications, Lusaka and Ndola are purely urban. The stratification of primary sampling units (PSUs) provided for in the sampling frame for urban PSUs was low-cost (high-density) units, medium-cost (medium-density) units and high-cost (low-density) units. For the purpose of this study, the high- and medium-density areas were collapsed into the high-density category. The distribution of sample HHs by the desired stratification is shown in the following tabulations:

Table 2: Sample distribution according to high- and low-density stratification

District	Low-density stratification	High-density stratification	Low-density stratification	High-density stratification	Total
Lusaka	0.1	0.9	50	375	425
Livingstone	0.2	0.8	75	200	275
Ndola	0.1	0.9	50	250	300

Table 3: Sample distribution according to gender

District	Children aged 9–12		Children aged 13–17		Children aged 9–12		Children aged 13–17		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Lusaka	0.49	0.51	0.48	0.52	110	113	98	104	425
Livingstone	0.47	0.53	0.48	0.52	65	74	66	70	275
Ndola	0.51	0.49	0.50	0.50	80	76	72	73	300

Table 4: The distribution of the sample according to age group

District	Age group		Age group		Total
	10–14	15–19	9–12	13–17	
Lusaka	0.52	0.48	223	202	425
Ndola	0.51	0.49	139	136	275
Livingstone	0.52	0.48	155	145	300
Total			517	483	1000

Note: the proportions are based on using the 10–14 and 15–19 age groupings as proxies for 9–12 and 13–17 age groupings (2020 projections).

Sampling frame and sampling units

The 2010 Census of Population and Housing provides an effective sampling frame for selecting PSUs for conducting the survey. The statistical area units delineated in the census frame are the enumeration areas (EAs) and census supervisory areas (CSAs).

The 2010 Census of Population and Housing provides data on the HHs and population at different geographic levels. The geographic divisions of Zambia are the provinces, districts, constituencies and wards. These administrative units are further divided into rural and urban areas. For urban areas, stratification according to population density is also provided.

The selection of sample clusters or PSUs

Sample clusters were selected with probability proportional to size (PPS) where the measure of size was based on the population from the 2010 Census of Population and Housing.

The selection of HHs

All participating HHs in the selected clusters were systematically selected. The only exclusion criterion was the lack of a child in the target age bracket. This meant that HHs where the head of the HH reported not having internet access but had a child in the target age group were also enumerated under the assumption that the children of such HHs could still access the internet via friends and other sources.

The sample achieved

For the HH surveys, one parent/caregiver and one randomly selected child between the age of 9–17 were interviewed in each HH. The survey targeted 1000 HHs and managed to interview 999 parents and caregivers, representing an achieved sample rate of 99%, while 988 children were interviewed, representing an achieved sample rate of 98%. The difference in sample achievement resulted from parents who consented to have their children participate in the study being interviewed while their children were at school, but during call backs, these children were not available due to school commitments or getting home late.

Table 5: The distribution of parents/caregivers and children by sex

Sex	Parents/caregiver	Achieved sample rate	Child	Achieved sample rate
Female	717	99%	531	98%
Male	282		457	
Grand total	999		988	

In some instances, during HH screening, parents and children reported that they had no internet at home but had access to the internet away from the home. These HHs were still included in the study.

For the qualitative interviews, the study conducted three focus group discussions (FGDs) and six key informant interviews (KIs). The participants of the KIs were drawn from the members of the advisory group. These participants included the Zambia Information and Communications Authority (ZICTA), ZAMSTATS, Lifeline/Childline Zambia, Save The Children, the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) and UNICEF.

Three FGDs targeted three different groups of children. The first was a group of all girls, aged 9 to 17, in a care home. The second group was also an all-girl group at a boarding school, predominantly from high income HHs. The last group included both sexes, predominantly out-of-school children from low-income HHs. The study aimed to conduct a total of six FGDs; however, data collection was conducted during the examination period, which restricted access to in-school children.

Other targeted respondents

Prior to data collection, stakeholders were identified based on service area or sector of operation and related interactions with children welfare online and offline. As such, the following stakeholders were identified:

- **The advisory group:** This included the key ministry officials that are involved in the administration of social protection programmes, such as the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) and the Keeping Girls in Schools (KGS) programmes; ZICTA; UNICEF; the Ministry of General Education (MOGE); the MCDSS; the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Child Development; Zambia Police; and representatives from civil society and internet service providers.
- **Parents/guardians and caregivers:** This targeted those responsible for children in HHs and care facilities.
- **Children:** The target group for the study was children aged 9–17.

Quality control and checks

Upon completion the data collection and checking it each day, the field supervisor transmitted the data from the tablets to a central location where it was consolidated and checked for consistency. If any corrections needed to be done, feedback was given to the field staff so that they could make them. Data was also coded and filed in such a way that it remained anonymous and could not be attributed to any person. The collected data were then analysed using Excel and SPSS Statistics software.

Enumerators used smart mobile devices, which have proven to be efficient and to offer the remote sensing and troubleshooting of data in real time. In addition, the field supervisors were able to offer on-spot quality checks of the

data and query suspicious or inconsistent responses. Digitised questionnaires also allowed for the uploading of data to a central data base in real time.

The training of enumerators

Before the commencement of data collection, training of enumerators was conducted. Enumerators were purposively selected to ensure gender balance. A total of 14 enumerators were selected, comprising of seven females and seven males. Training was conducted in person over a five-day period and included comprehensive coverage of the issues of child safeguarding and ethics. The enumerators were drawn from ZIPAR's large pool of qualified young people who have previously worked on various projects. The enumerators were trained on various aspects, inter alia, on familiarisation with the child safeguarding and the child protection framework. Thereafter the training and pre-testing of survey instruments was done in Lusaka.

Translation of the data collection tools

Instead of translating the entire questionnaire into local languages, the enumerators were trained to conduct the interviews in the local language. Questions and phrases were translated into the three languages common within each site (Bemba, Nyanja and Tonga) during the training to ensure consistency with the original meaning. Additionally, the selection of the enumerators took into account considerations about being able to speak English and the local language on the survey site.

Reference/advisory group

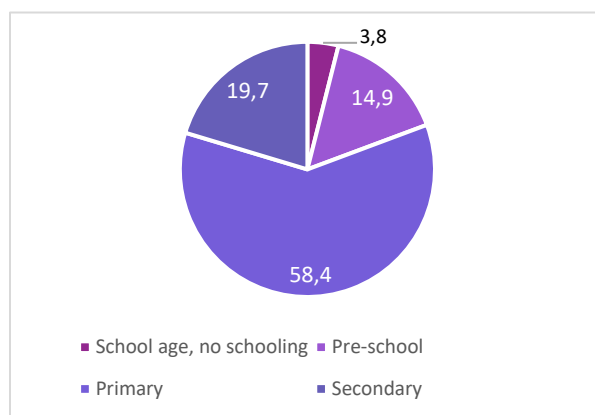
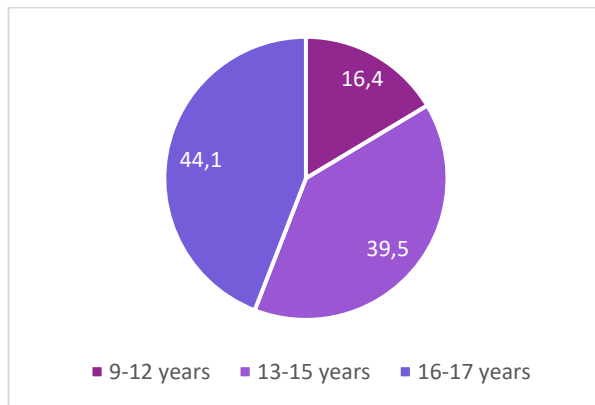
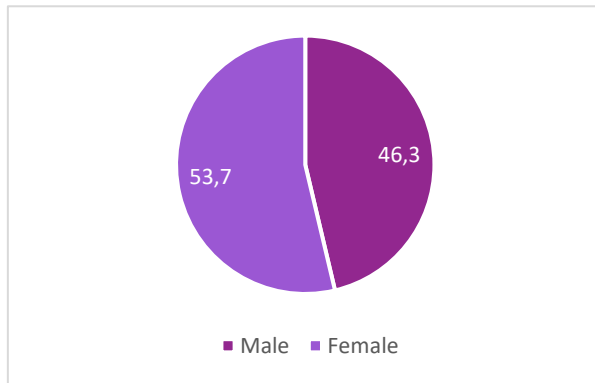
An advisory group was constituted at the outset of the project. The advisory group comprised of the contracting parties of Save the Children and Lifeline Childline Zambia, as well as members from all the key stakeholders including ZICTA; ZAMSTATS; UNZA; UNICEF; MOGE; the MCDSS; the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Child Development; Zambia Police; and representatives from civil society and internet service providers. The advisory group provided overall guidance to the research process. The inception note and draft findings were presented to the advisory group for validation and feedback, and suggestions were incorporated into the final draft report.

Study demographics

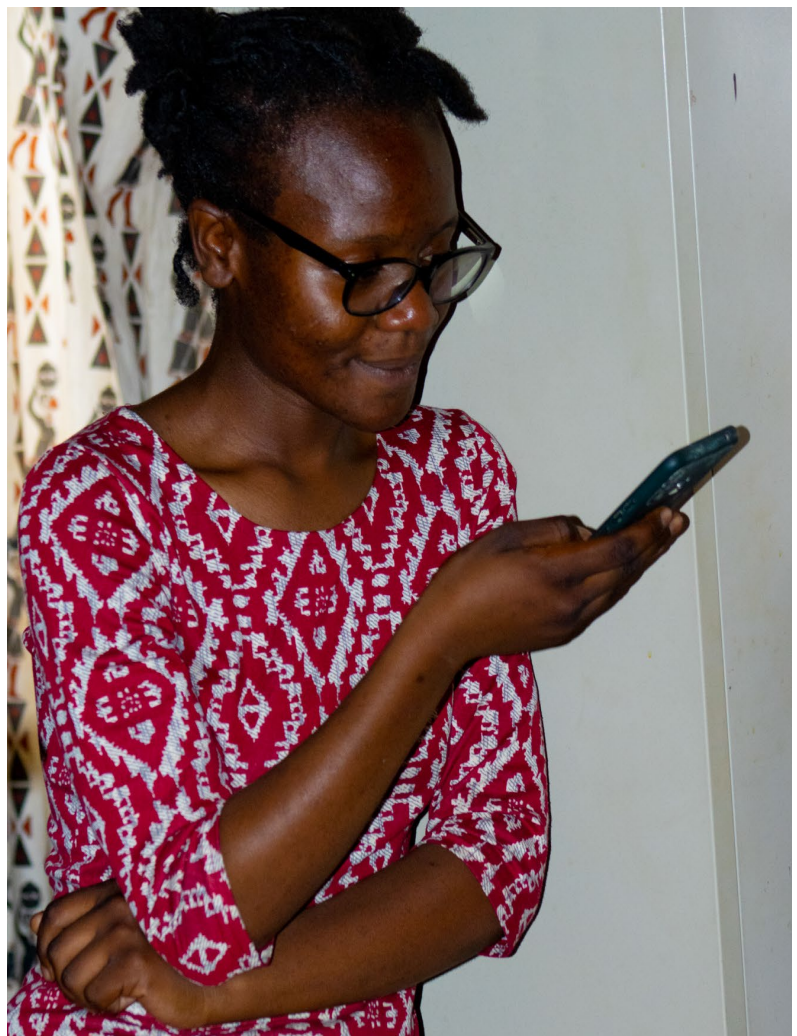
The survey enumerated a total of 988 children aged 9–17. A little more than half (53.7%) of the sample was male (with 46.3% being girls). Children between the ages of 9 to 12 constituted 16.4% of the total sample, with 39.5% and 16.4% falling between the ages of 16 and 17 and 13 and 15 respectively.



Figure 1: Sample demographics (n=988)



More than half of the sample (58.4%) had completed primary school, with just under one in five (19.7%) reporting they had completed secondary schooling. In total, 3.8% were of school-going age but had no schooling, while 14.9% reported that they only had pre-school. 14.9% of the children interviewed reported that they were of school-going age but had no formal schooling.

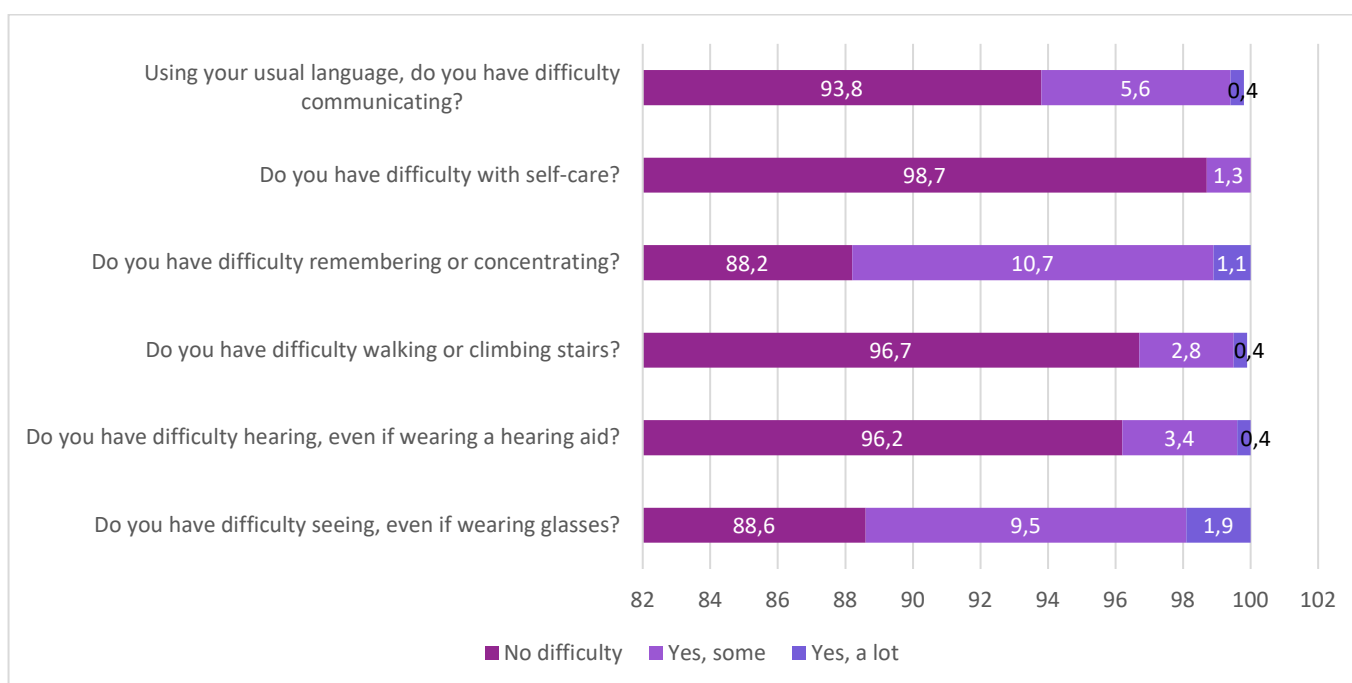


Children with disabilities

Children were also asked about any disabilities they might have, using the Washington Group Short Set of Questions.⁷

The most common disabilities reported were those relating to vision, with just under one in ten (9.5%) reporting that they had some difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses, with another 1.9% reporting they had a lot of difficulty. One tenth reported that they had some difficulty remembering or concentrating, while 5.6% of the children reported that they had some difficulty communicating when using their usual language. No children reported that they were unable to undertake any of these activities at all. It must be noted that these numbers are very small, and thus, meaningful analysis is limited.

Figure 2: Self-reported disabilities (n=988)



Study limitations

There are several limitations that relate to the design of the study and to the analysis that was performed:

- The study was limited to three peri-urban, largely high-density districts in Zambia. While the selection of these districts provides an accurate picture of trends across mostly urban districts, it excludes the experiences of children in Zambia living in more rural and remote districts.

⁷ The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability (WG-SS) was developed by the National Center for Health Statistics of the US Center for Disease Control (CDC). The WG-SS is designed to not directly ask children about disabilities, and at no time is the phrase 'disabilities' used in the introduction or administration of the questionnaire. Children are rather asked about a 'health problem' that they may encounter and how, if experienced, this impacts on their performance of a specified list of daily activities. The questions are thus intended to identify a population with functional limitations that have the potential to limit independent participation in society. More information on the WG-SS can be found at: https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/washington_group/wg_questions.htm

- While items relating to disability were included in the research tools, the sample of children with disabilities in the final sample achieved was too small to allow meaningful analysis on the basis of their disabilities. This leaves an important gap in knowledge that should be addressed in future research through purposive sampling.
- As with most GKO studies, only children aged nine years and older were included in the study. As younger and younger children go online, it will become important to include children younger than nine-year-olds, although this is likely to require an adapted methodology and questionnaire.
- Data was not collected on HH screening where neither parent nor child had internet access and neither was data collected on the reason for this. This information on the reasons for a complete lack of access in any environment may be a useful additional piece of information in relation to the barriers to HH internet access. However, this is likely to be more of an issue in more rural areas, that were not included in this study. Where parents reported that they did not have internet access but the child did report access, these HHs were included in the study.

A note on the presentation of the analysis

- Note that all the data was analysed by age and sex, at minimum. Where no discernible trends were identified by either age or sex, or where no statistically significant differences were noted, the disaggregated data was not reported in the text.





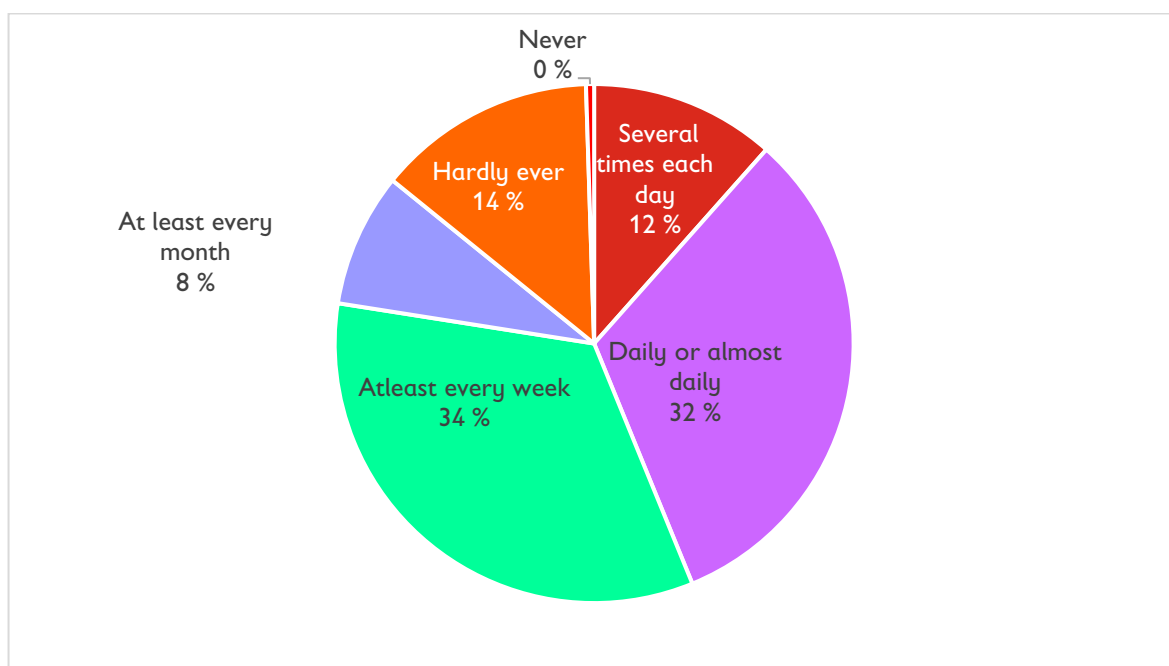
Chapter One: Access to the Internet

This chapter describes how and where children in Zambia access the internet, their patterns of use and possible barriers to internet access. Access to the internet is increasingly critical to the well-being and developmental needs of children, and how and where children go online can play an important role in shaping their experiences, both positive and negative, online. The importance of affordable internet access, along with the associated digital and media literacy skills, has become increasingly important since the onset of the COVID pandemic as children's learning, playing and social lives have all been shifted online. Access and skills are fundamental in shaping children's and young people's experiences.

How children access the internet

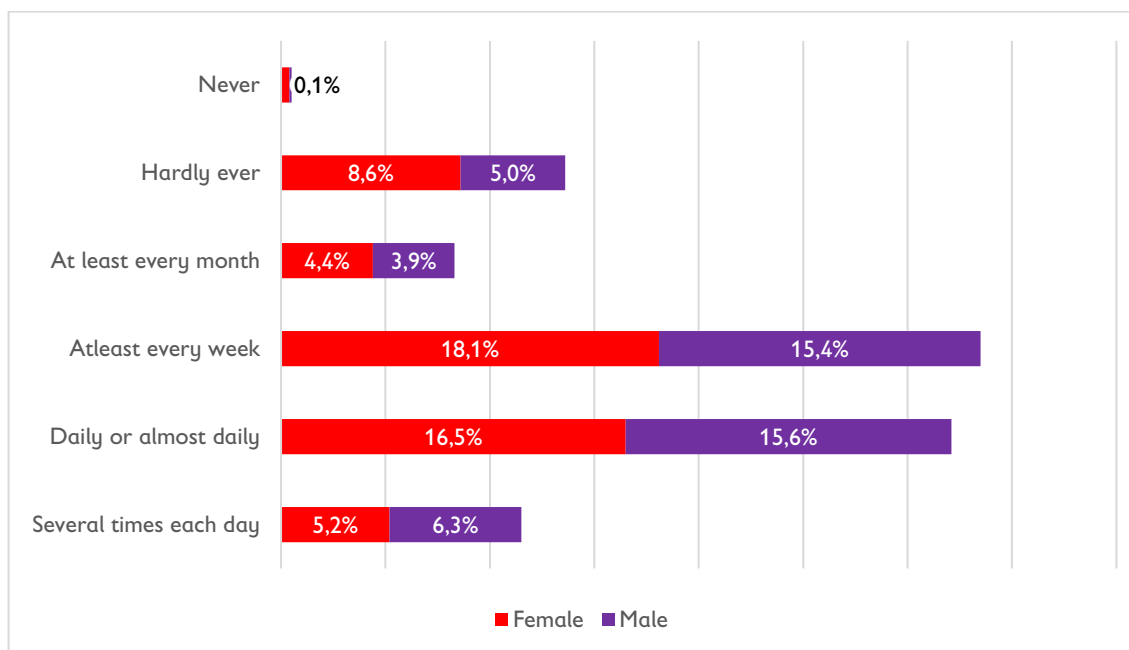
A little more than two out of five of the children (12%) reported that they accessed the internet several times a day and 32% accessed it daily or almost daily. Just over a third (34%) accessed the internet at least every week, while just fewer than one in ten children (8%) reported that they accessed the internet at least every month. While this suggests that children in Zambia are increasingly connected, there are still significant strides to be made in rolling out and ensuring widespread internet access for children if they are to fully realise the benefits and opportunities that being connected present.

Figure 3: How often do you use the internet? (n=988)



While neither age nor gender were statistically significant factors in how often children go online, it is important to note that of those who have daily or almost daily internet access, or those who access it several times a day, boys were slightly more in the majority, while girls were more likely to report that they never, or hardly ever, accessed the internet, or only did so at least every month. This suggests that there may be barriers to going online that are faced by girls that either do not exist, or serve as lesser barriers, for boys.

Figure 4: How often children use the internet, by gender (n=988)



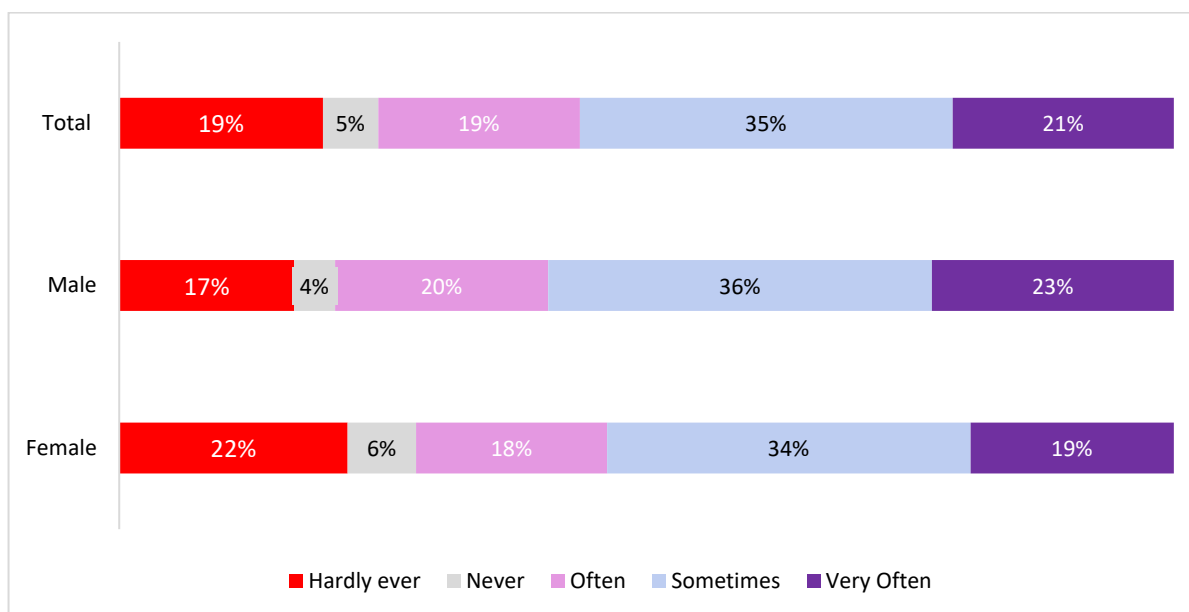
Children were asked if they were able to access the internet when they wanted to do so. The majority of children who had some access to the internet reported that they were able to go online when they wanted to *very often* or *often*, with one in five (19%) reporting that they could hardly ever go online when they wanted to and another 5% reporting that they could never go online when they wanted to do so. This again suggests that a significant number of the children experience barriers that inhibit their use of the internet when they want to use it. This does not mean that they do not go online, but simply means that they do not have the freedom to go online whenever they want to do so. Girls were more likely to never, or hardly ever, be able to go online whenever they wanted to, which suggests that boys are afforded greater freedom or opportunities to connect when they want to do so.

Almost one in four children reported they can never, or hardly ever, go online when they want to do so.

More than one in five (22%) of girls reported that they can hardly ever access the internet when they want to, compared to 17% of boys.

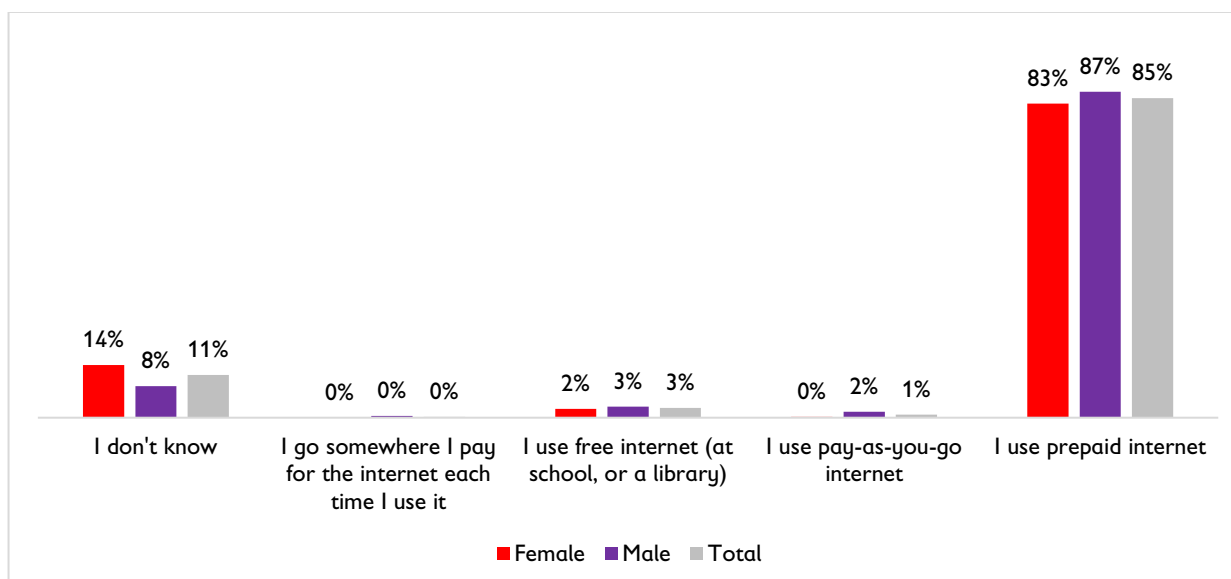


Figure 5: Children who can access the internet when they want to, as a total and by gender (n=988)



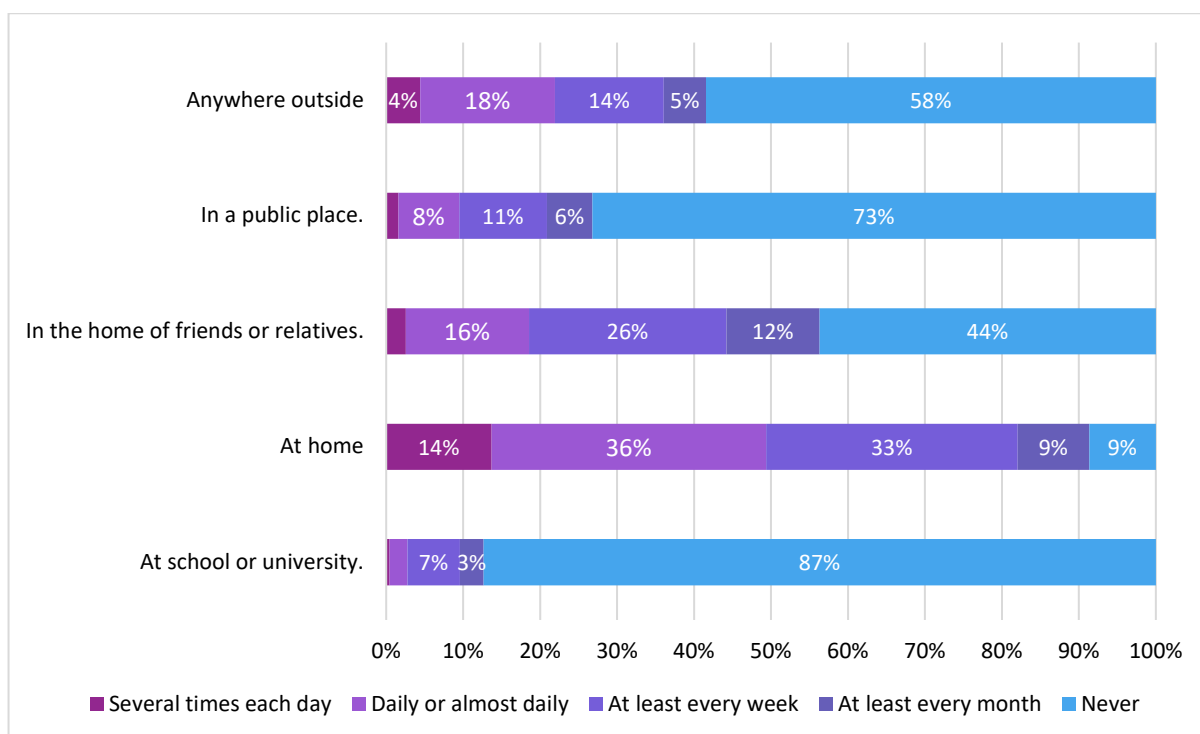
There was little difference in how children connected to the internet by gender. The vast majority of the children in Zambia that were included in the study go online using prepaid internet (85%), while one in ten of the children do not know how they connect and rather just accept that the device they are on simply connects to the internet. Very few children used free internet at school, libraries or other public facilities most of the time that they go online (3% of the children sampled). This suggests that there is substantial progress to be made in rolling out open access or free internet access through institutions and public spaces, which can offer vital opportunities to expand the breadth of internet access to children and young people, and to the population in general.

Figure 6: How children connect to the internet, displayed as a total and by gender (n=988)



This use of prepaid internet access as the primary means of connecting reflects regional trends identified in other GKO studies and industry data.⁸ When asked where they mostly were when they went online, children were reported that they went online at home several time a day (14%) or daily (36%), compared with just nine percent who reported going online several times a day or daily at school or in a public place (2% went online several times a day at school, 7% did so daily at school; 1% went online several times daily in a public place and 8% did so daily in a public place). Children also tended to go online frequently at friends' or relatives' homes, with almost one in five of the children reporting they went online regularly at a friend's or family's residence (3% doing so several times daily and 16% doing so daily). This has important bearing on how parents engage with their children's online activities as there is scope for some parental supervision and direct engagement when children go online at home, but far less when children access the internet from outside of the home environment, without the parents' direct supervision. This also reflects research from other countries which shows that children often simply use friends' or relatives' devices, sim cards or home internet access to get around parental supervision and restrictions on their internet access.⁹

Figure 7: Where children are when they go online, and how often they do so (n=988)



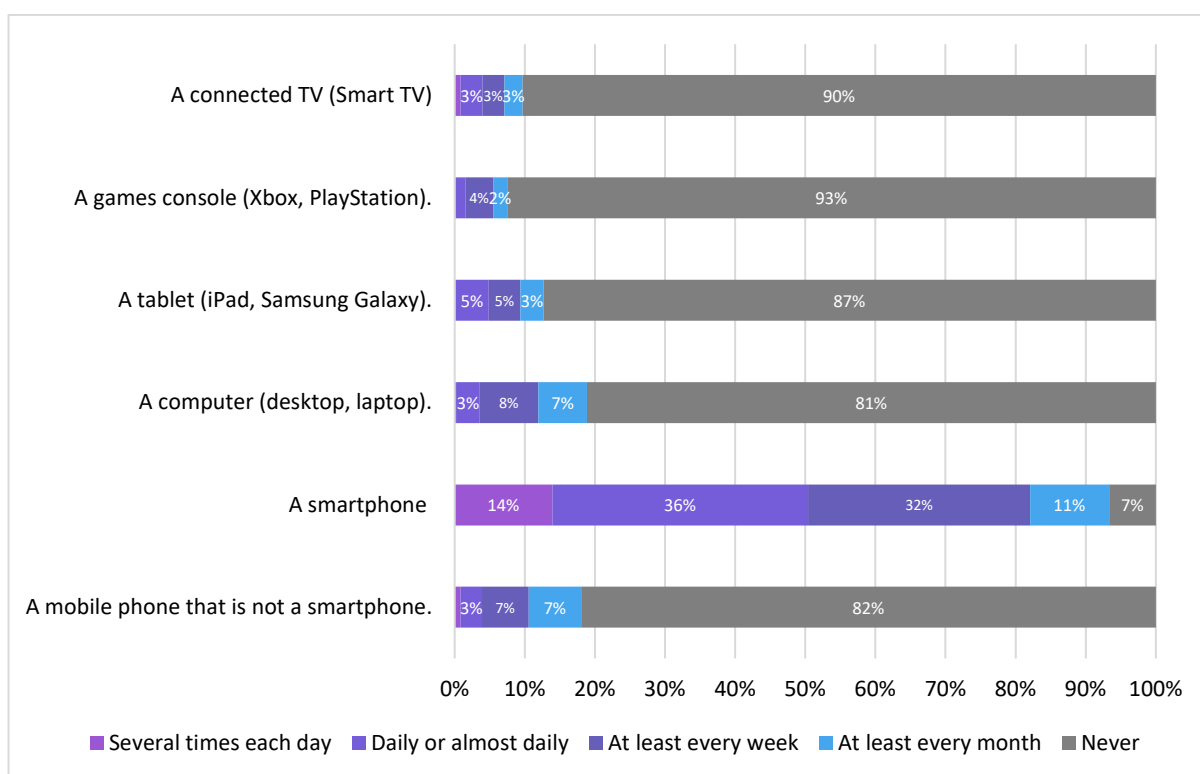
Smartphones were the most commonly utilised device used by children to go online. In total, less than one in ten children reported that they never used a smartphone to go online. This follows regional trends which show that smartphones are the most commonly used form of access to the internet for populations in Sub-Saharan Africa and the wider

⁸ See, for example, Phyfer, J., Burton, P. & Leoschut, L. (2016). *South African Kids Online: Barriers, Opportunities and Risks. A Glimpse into South African Children's Internet Use and Online Activities*. Technical Report. Cape Town: Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention; and UNICEF Ghana. (2017). *Risks and Opportunities Related to Children's Online Practices*. Ghana Country Report. Accra: UNICEF Ghana.

⁹ See, for example, Bulger and Burton, 2020 Livingstone et al., 2019.

continent.¹⁰ Laptops or desktops were the second most commonly used devices for children to go online, although even in this case, just one in ten children reported that they went online using a desktop or laptop *several times a day, daily* or *at least once a week* (see Figure 8 below). Fractionally fewer children reported using a feature phone – a phone that is not a smartphone and is almost exclusively limited to chat and communication functions – to connect. The types of devices used by children have an important bearing on the way in which the safety features of software and hardware are designed and delivered, and on the skills that children develop. One in ten children reported regularly going online using a smart TV, while even fewer (7%) reported using a games console to go online.

Figure 8: How often children go online using different devices (n=988)



Most of these devices, with the exception of smartphones, were devices that were shared with family members and others rather than being solely for the children's own use. One in three of the children reported that they had a smartphone that was just for their own use, just 45 children had their own feature phone, 24 children had their own tablet and 21 children had their own computer or laptop. There was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls who had a smartphone that was purely their own device, with boys being significantly more likely to own their own smartphone than girls.

The sharing of devices also suggests that the children are likely to experience some limitations to their ability to develop their own digital skills, which would be easier if they had their own devices. While smartphones are increasingly becoming ubiquitous throughout the region and within Zambia, this data suggests that access to devices for children

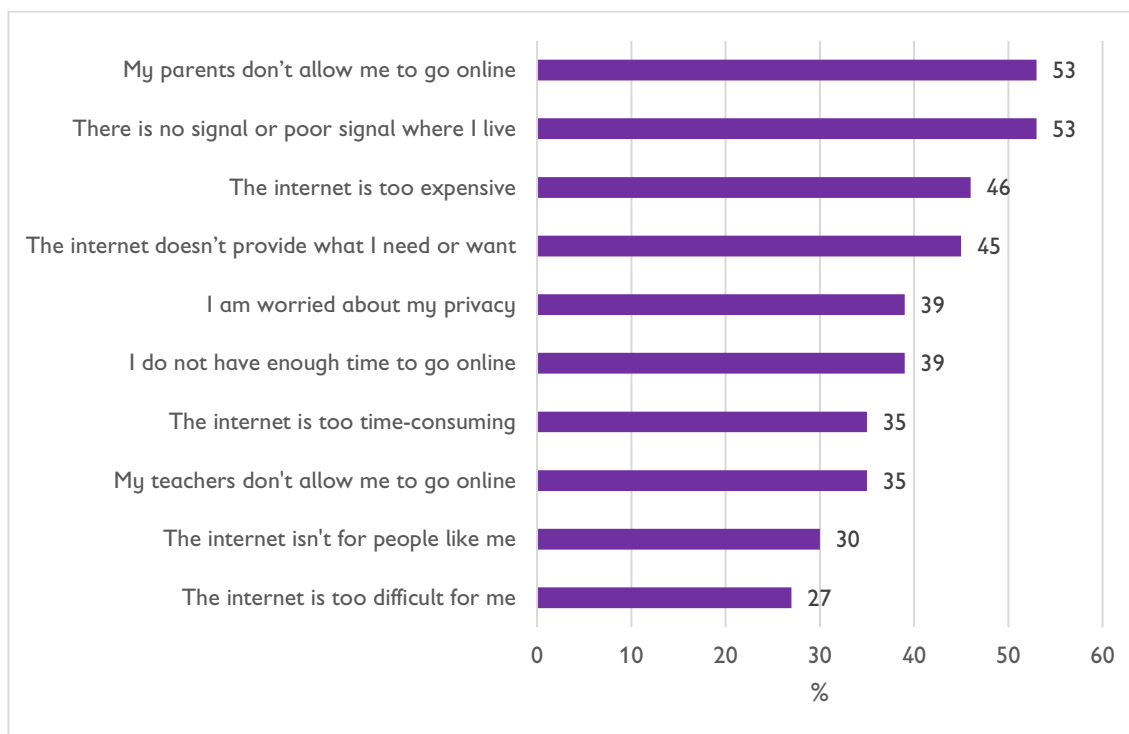
¹⁰ GSMA, 2020

and young people to use themselves – which can be used to foster digital skills and literacy, and (increasingly important) media literacy – remains a potential challenge.

Barriers to internet access

Not having their own device to go online is not the only barrier that children in Zambia face in relation to their online and digital experience. Approximately one in two (53%) of the children interviewed reported that their parents did not allow them to go online when they wanted to and that the lack of an internet signal (this could include a poor internet signal) where they lived presented major challenges to them going online. For those children who did have a signal or who went online away from home, the cost of data presented the second most common barrier to going online with 46% of the children reporting this as a barrier to internet access. A similar percentage (45%) reported that the internet does not provide what they need or want online, while approximately two in five (39%) were concerned about their privacy or thought they did not have enough time to go online. In total, a little more than one third (35%) of the children reported that their teachers did not allow them to go online, while three in ten said that the internet is not for people like them (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Barriers to accessing the internet that are faced by children sometimes, often or very often (n=988)



These barriers presented above to the children in Zambia going online as they want to, provide important data for all those involved in the digital ecosystem – internet providers, regulators and the government – and in those involved in the mediation of children's internet access and digital skills, such as parents and teachers.

Girls in Zambia were significantly more likely than boys to report that both parents and teachers served as barriers to internet access.

Double the number of girls than boys reported that their teachers served as a barrier to their internet access.

A poor signal, data coverage and data costs are barriers to the large-scale uptake of broadband internet that the regulator, government and internet service providers should address at the first instance in order to enhance access to the internet by children.



Just over one in three children reported that their teachers stand in the way of their internet access, while a little more than one half (53%) of children reported that their parents do not allow them to go online. As this is a separate barrier to that of affordability (the internet or devices being too expensive), it suggests that this is primarily a limitation imposed on children by their parents or teachers. This could be a result of both parents and teachers perceiving that the internet is more of a threat to children's development (and even that the internet is superfluous to their needs), rather than perceiving it as a critical tool for participation, learning, education, development, communication and play. However, in the case of teachers, it could also be a result of teachers enforcing school policies and regulations regarding internet use within schools. This points to the need for the government to actively engage parents, teachers and schools in how the internet can be used to support children. That teachers serve as a significant barrier to access may seem at odds with the move to digitising classrooms in Zambia and to ensuring access to tablets for children within schools. However, this may also be a result of teachers limiting the use of internet access for non-educational purposes within schools, but it does suggest that there may be a need for active engagement with schools around acceptable use policies, the teaching of internet safety and broader digital skills and literacy programming. It is also important to note that significantly more girls than boys reported that their teachers, their parents or both their teachers and parents stopped them from using the internet, suggesting a gender bias in the way that those responsible for mediating children's internet use perceive how boys and girls go online (see Figure 10 and 11 below).



Figure 10: Children whose parents do not allow them to access the internet sometimes, often or very often, by gender

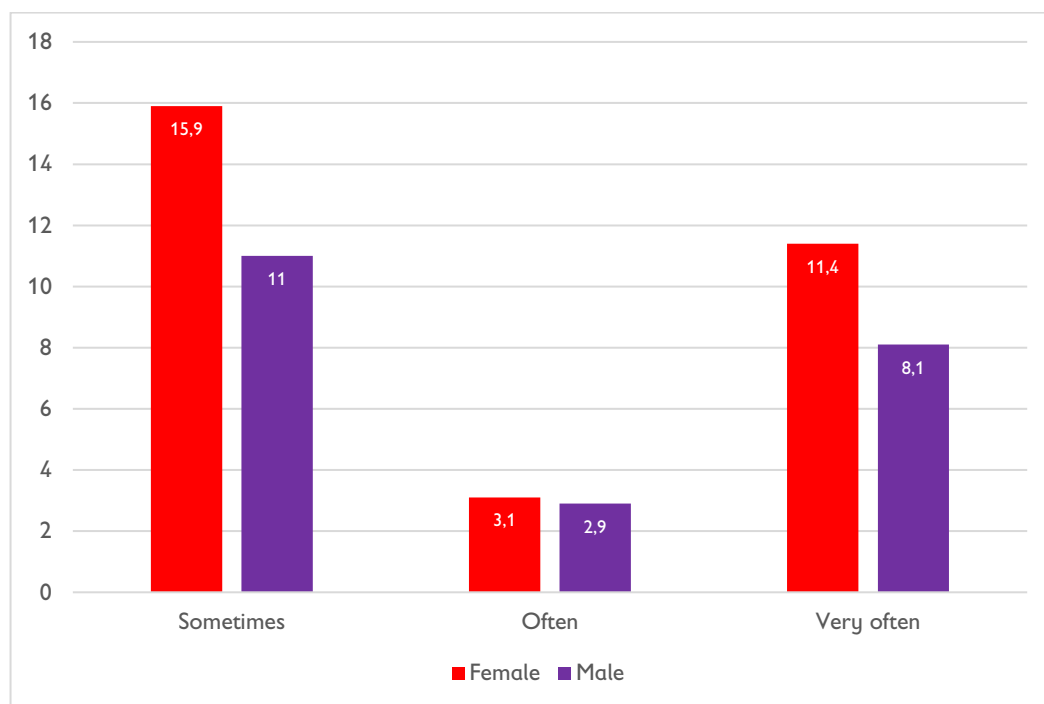
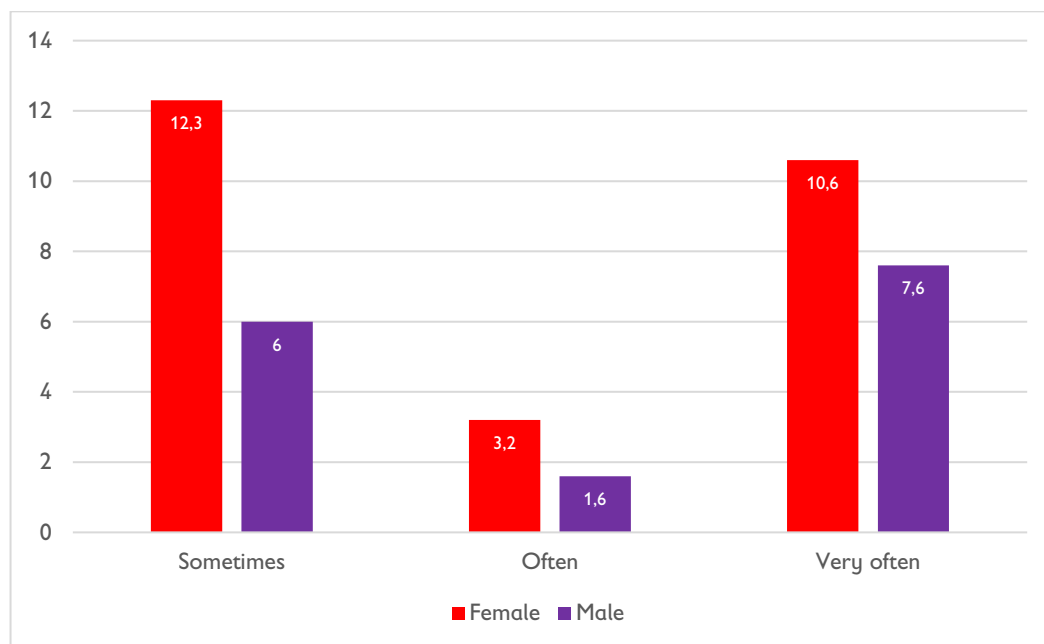


Figure 11: Children whose teachers do not allow them to access the internet sometimes, often or very often, by gender



That almost two in five children are concerned about their privacy online (39%) and that they do not have enough time to go online (39%) and that a similar percentage (35%) are concerned that the internet is too time-consuming suggests that the children may have absorbed and processed messages that are projected in the media and common narratives, as well as suggesting some level of safety messaging (the latter point in particular relating to their concerns about privacy). However, it is important that these concerns do not become long-term impediments to children's internet use and the realisation of the opportunities and benefits of the digital world; it is important that they do not prevent full participation as envisaged in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the subsequent General Comment (GC) No 25. These perceptions presented by children may suggest the need for further support being given to parents, caregivers and teachers in order to promote healthy and safe online practices. This support clearly needs to include explaining how children can best divide their time online and offline, and just as importantly, how to best use and divide their online time between different activities, countering the common and mistaken narrative portraying time online as negative and time offline as positive.

Children in the FGDs also reflected a broad awareness of the privacy risks attached to going online, particularly among those children coming from higher income HHs. However, understanding of privacy risks and what privacy practically means online were largely superficial with children only having the most basic awareness of what data is collected online.

That children recognise that there are risks to their privacy online is in itself a positive finding; that this prevents them from going online itself risks undermining many of the rights that children can realise online, as well as undermining the potential for them to fully realise the benefits and opportunities of the digital space.

The majority of children (77.2%) accessed the internet by themselves rather than requiring assistance from parents or caregivers, teachers, friends or others to go online. When children did need assistance to go online, they usually got help from family members (17.4%) or a friend (11.9%).¹¹ It is perhaps unsurprising that older children, aged between 16 and 17 and between 13 and 15, were less likely to require assistance to go online than those aged between 9 and 10 and between 11 and 12.

Conversely, more than two in five (44.9%) children assisted others to go online. Most commonly, the children assisted friends or peers their age (18.9%), siblings (11.8%) or parents (11.5%) to go online. Older children were also significantly more likely to help their friends or parents go online than younger children (aged between 9 and 11 and between 12 and 15).

A little more than one in ten children (12%) helped their friends change their safety settings (with boys more likely than girls to assist friends with their safety settings), while just 7% of children reported assisting either parents, or caregivers and siblings with changing their safety settings.

¹¹ Note this information is derived from a multiple response question, so the responses may add up to more than 100%.

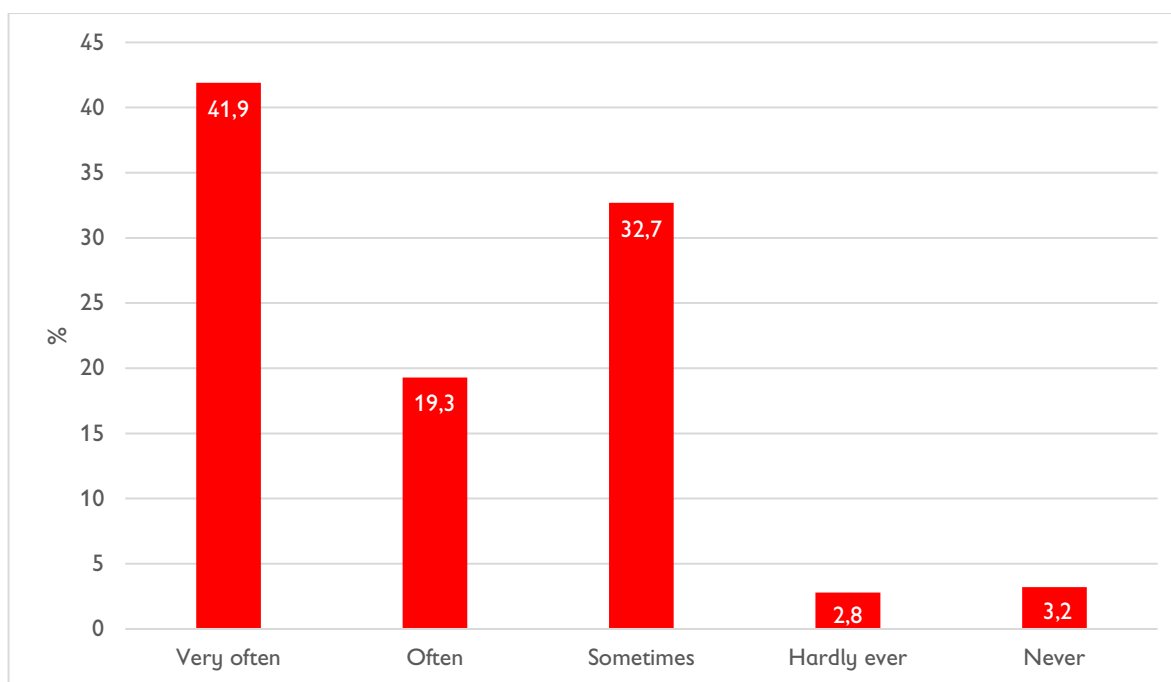


Chapter Two: Online Activities and Digital Skills

The following chapter explores what the children interviewed in Zambia are doing when they go online, their skills and knowledge of the digital environment and what opportunities and benefits they are realising and reaping from being online. There is growing attention being paid to the diversity of children's online activities and experiences, and to both how these are shaped and in turn shape individual children. The ability to fully realise the benefits and opportunities that the internet has to offer, including achieving substantive participation in aspects of civic life, has become increasingly important since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and is likely to only increase in importance in the post-pandemic world. For many children, all aspects of learning, play and communication shifted almost entirely online, and for others, they shifted substantially. The capacity to fully engage in the online space is largely not only dependent on access but also on the skills and capacities of children to utilise that space healthily, productively and fully.

Children in Zambia reported having a largely positive experience when they go online. In total, 61.2% of children reported that they had a good time or had fun *very often* or *often* when they went online, while almost one in three children (32.7%) reported that sometimes had a good time or had fun online. Older children – 16 and 17 years old – were more likely to report having fun when they went online than younger children (aged between 9 and 11 and 12 and 15). While there was little difference between boys and girls, girls between 16 and 17 years old were the most likely to report having fun when they go online (14.9% of girls in that category reported having a good time compared with 11.9% of boys of the same age).

Figure 12: Children who reported having a good time or having fun when they go online (n=988)



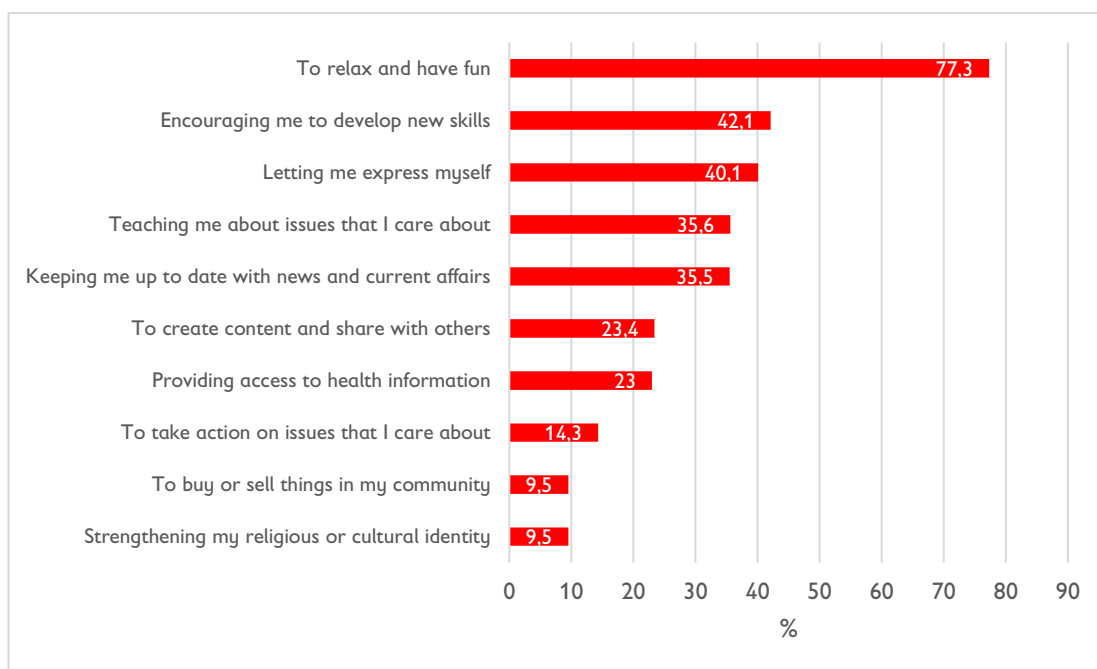
The perceived opportunities and benefits available online to children in Zambia

Perceptions of what happens online, the type of content that exists and the opportunities presented may play an important role in shaping how children view the internet and their online experiences. The vast majority of the children felt that there was either a lot (30.5% of children) of good things or some (57.2% of children) good things for children their age online. Perceptions of the quality of content tended to improve with age, with significantly more children between the ages of 16 and 17 reporting that there was either lots of good things for children their age online or some good things for them, followed by those aged between 13 and 15. This is likely to be shaped by the opportunity afforded to older children to explore more online by themselves, by their growing independence and by their growing levels of skills and literacy, as well as by them having the opportunity to form their own opinions of what exists online for them.

The children reported a wide range of opportunities and benefits that were offered by the internet and that they considered most important to them. Most important to them was the opportunity to develop new skills (and the encouragement to do so offered by the internet), with 42.1% of children reporting that this was one of the most important benefits of being online, followed by another approximately four in ten children who reported that one of the most important benefits of being online was the freedom for them to express themselves (40.1%).

However, the opportunity for fun and to relax formed the single most important benefit presented by the internet to children in Zambia, with more than three out of four (77.3%) children citing this as an important benefit and opportunity. While relatively broad in scope, how the children had fun and relaxed online is explored more in the following section's analysis of how and who they communicate with and the social and entertaining activities they engage in online.

Figure 13: Opportunities presented by the internet for children (n=988) (multiple response)



It is also important to note that almost one in four of the children reported that one of the most important benefits for children offered by the internet is being able to access health information. This suggests that a sizable proportion of children are turning to the internet to access a range of health information. This could include, for example, sexual and reproductive health information and suggests possible impediments to accessing such information through alternative,

more traditional means, such as the life skills or life orientation curriculum at school, parents or other sources of information. Girls, particularly those between the ages of 16 and 17, were significantly more likely to list this as a benefit of being online (10.6% of girls listed this compared with 6.8% of boys). This has implications for the sort of information and content that may be subject to filtering or parental control through well-meaning risk mitigation measures. That two in five of the children reported that the internet offers the important benefit of letting them freely express themselves also suggests that the internet offers an important means for children in Zambia to engage with, and formulate, their identity and sense of self.

Children's online skills

Children in Zambia engaged in a wide range of activities online, although many of these are concentrated on content consumption and communication rather than content creation. Importantly, using the internet for learning and schoolwork is also relatively common and may correlate with the current programming of the Ministry of Education that aims to increase access to and the use of technology within the classroom, as well as correlating with the shift to online learning and resources that is a result of COVID-19. This range of activities is important. Much attention has been placed on the concept of 'screen time' – the amount of time that someone (here, a child) spends in front of devices – and voices concerns that too much screen time will lead to internet addiction, a lack of social skills, poor educational outcomes and other negative developmental, social and educational outcomes for children. These concerns were amplified through the COVID pandemic as children inevitably spent more time in front of their screens. More recent research, however, has shown that these outcomes are not inevitable with longer time spent on devices, that the greater time that children are online does not necessarily lead to negative mental health outcomes and that, in fact, it is the nature and diversity of what children are doing online, rather than the amount of time that they are spending online, that has an impact on their well-being.^{12 13 14 15} It is thus important that children and young people engage in a range of online activities.

The most common activities reported by children included a range of social media and entertainment activities, including visiting social media sites, listening to music and watching videos online. More than three in five (63%) children reported visiting a social media site, such as Facebook, 62% reported watching videos online and 55% of children reported streaming or downloading music *all the time, several times a day, daily or weekly* over the past month.

This media consumption was followed by the use of the internet for learning and schoolwork as the most common activity, with just over one in two of the children reporting that they used the internet for schoolwork or for looking for something new online *all the time, several times a day, throughout the week or at least weekly* over the past month. Other commonly undertaken activities included commenting on updates that friends and family post on their own social media channels and chatting with people from different places or backgrounds.

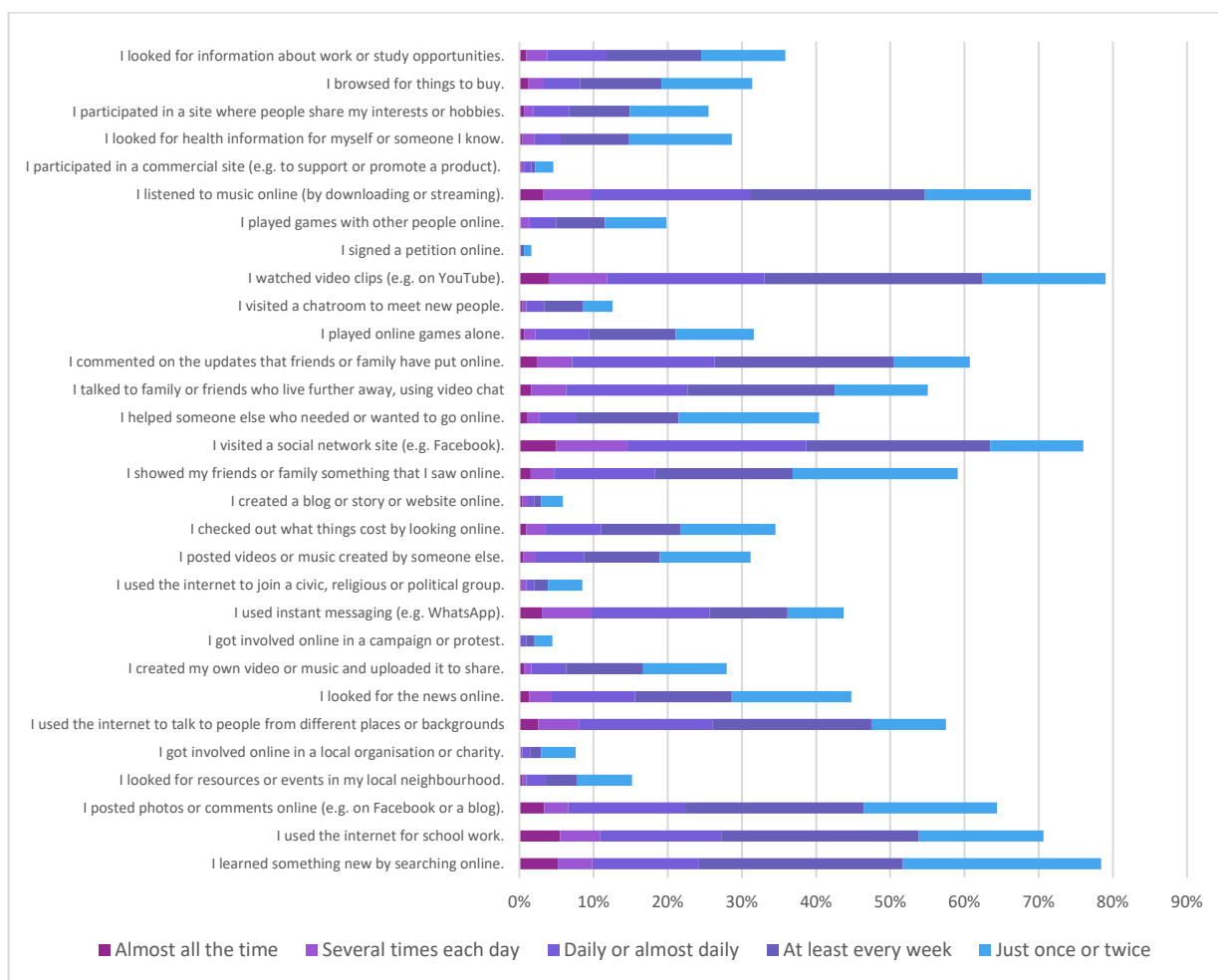
¹² Stoilova, M., Edwards, C., Kostyrka-Allchorne, K., Livingstone, S., & Sonuga-Barke, E. (2021) *Adolescents' Mental Health Vulnerabilities and the Experience and Impact of Digital Technologies: A Multimethod Pilot Study*. London School of Economics and Political Science and King's College London.

¹³ Livingstone (2019) From policing screen time to weighing screen use, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2019/02/08/from-policing-screen-time/>

¹⁴ Orben, A., Przybylski, A.K. The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nat Hum Behav* **3**, 173–182 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1>

¹⁵ Orben, A., Przybylski, A.K. There is no evidence that associations between adolescents' digital technology engagement and mental health problems have increased. *Clinical Psychological Science* (2021) Vol 9(5) 823-835

Figure 14: Frequency of Online activities over the past month (n=988)



While gender was not a significant factor in internet use, the older children were more likely to report using the internet for schoolwork and learning something new online.

The internet can offer important opportunities for children from diverse backgrounds to fully participate in civic society and all aspects of life, including actively advocating for their needs and interests. GC No 25 notes that *meaningful access to digital technologies can support children to realize their full range of civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights.* (UNCRC 2021)

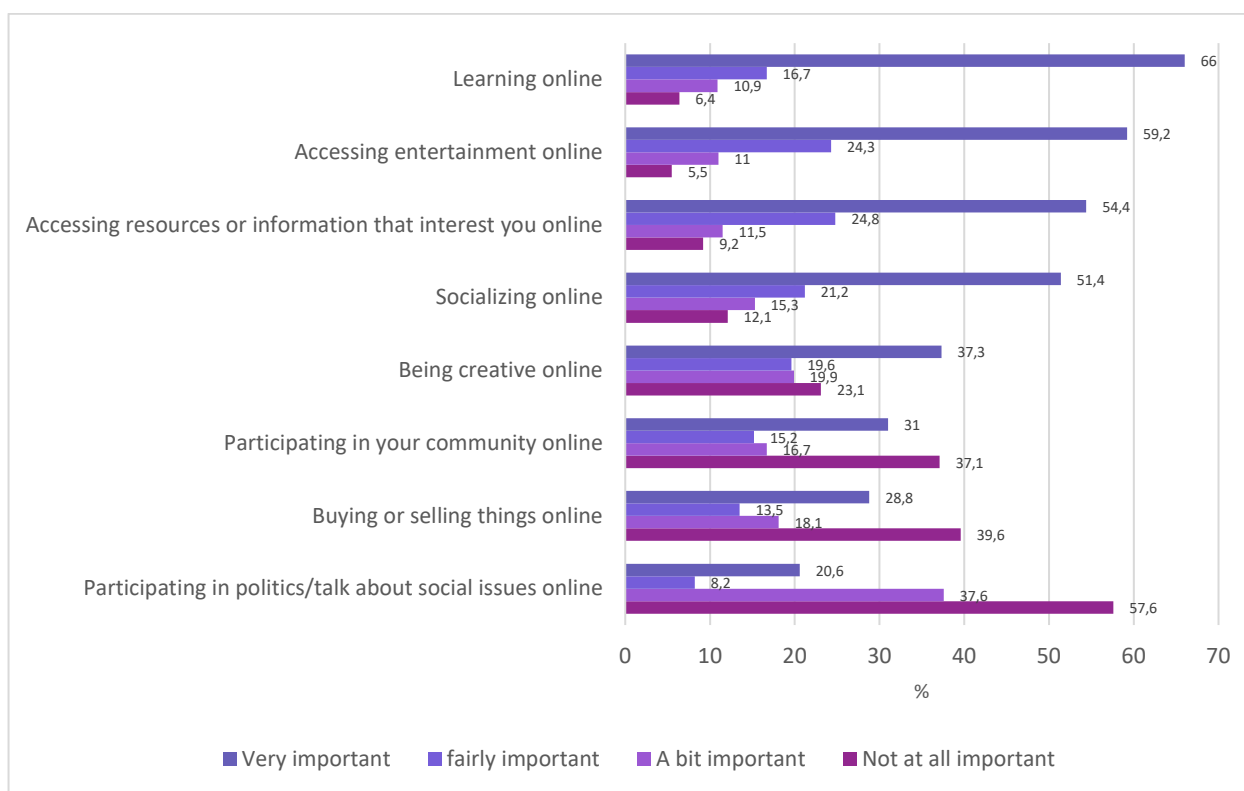
Yet, as Figure 14 above reflects, in Zambia, very few of the interviewed children reported using the internet for any form of civic participation or advocacy. Less than one in 20 of the children reported using the internet to get involved in a campaign or a protest, or getting involved in a local charity or organisation, and even when they did, they only did so just once or twice or at least every week.

It is not uncommon that children who report fewer digital skills are late adopters or are younger often reflect a pattern of limited participation in activities other than communication, social networking and media consumption, and they

often get trapped in this rather limited utilisation of the internet and digital technology.¹⁶ The limited use of technology reflected in the figure above suggests that, in Zambia, the government and partner organisations can play an important role in encouraging and supporting children to engage more meaningfully with the internet and digital technology for civic engagement, more active content generation and in the development of greater skills that will enhance and realise the range of benefits that technology and the internet offer to children.

The importance of social activities online is further reflected in Figure 15 below. Children were asked how important different online activities are for them. Accessing entertainment online and socialising online were the second and fourth most important activities reported by children. However, the children were most likely to report that learning online and accessing resources and information that interest them online are the most important online activities (significantly, particularly within the current context of disrupted education), with two in three (66%) children and more than one in two (54.4%) of the children, respectively, reporting that these two activities were the most important to them. Less important activities were participating in politics or social issues, buying and selling things online and participating in their community online.

Figure 15: How important different online activities are for children (n=988)

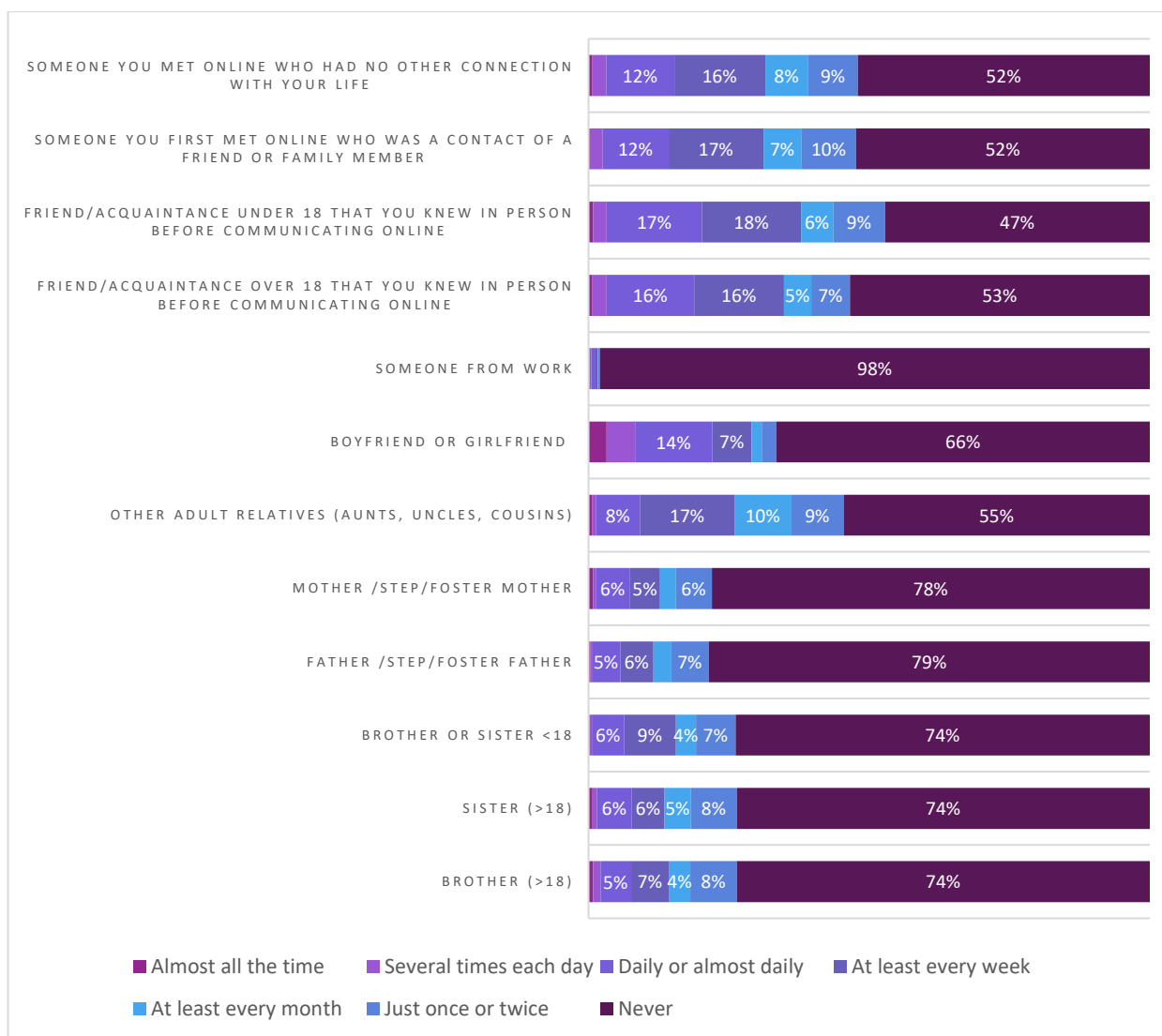


¹⁶ Sonia Livingstone, Daniel Kardefelt Winther, Petar Kanchev, Patricio Cabello, Magdalena Claro, Patrick Burton, Joanne Phyfer (2019). Is there a ladder of children's online participation? Findings from three Global Kids Online countries, Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2019-02.

Notwithstanding this clear prioritisation of learning and social uses of the internet, it is perhaps still noticeable that three in ten (31%) children reported that participating in their community online was very important to them and one in five (20.6%) children reported that participating in politics or talking about social issues was very important to them, although they may not yet use the internet as often for these activities as they do for other, more entertainment-focused activities. There was no significant difference in how boys or girls, or children of different ages ranked the importance of online activities.

Given the importance to children of communication and chatting to people online, it is important to see who children are chatting to and how children are engaging with different people in their lives and outside of their immediate circles via the internet. Children were asked how often they chatted online with different people.

Figure 16: How often children speak to different people, if at all, by going online (n=988)





Children were most likely to chat to friends or acquaintances (either over or under 18 years old) who they knew offline before communicating with them online *almost all the time, several times a day* or *almost daily* compared to the likelihood of chatting to other people. This suggests that maintaining contact with friends who exist offline is the most important to children included in the study. However, this is closely followed by children who reported that they chat to someone who they first met online who had no other connection with their life *almost all the time, several times a day, daily* or *at least every week*. While this may be one of the most frightening aspects of children's online activities for parents, caregivers and other adults everywhere in the world, it is arguably hardly surprising given that meeting new people online is one of the most important benefits and opportunities that exist for children online, and this is something which children globally openly acknowledge. In total, almost two in five (39%) of children reported that they chatted to someone online who had no prior connection to their life *all the time, several times daily, daily* or *at least every week*. While communication with family – siblings, mothers, fathers, uncles and aunts – is far less common, this may well be children may see many of these family members on a daily basis and so be in a better position to speak to these people face to face.

Older children were progressively more likely than younger children to report that it was easier to be themselves or to talk about private things online compared with doing so face to face. This applied to both boys and girls. Similarly, older children were more likely than younger children to report that the internet was a safe place for them.

Children's identity online

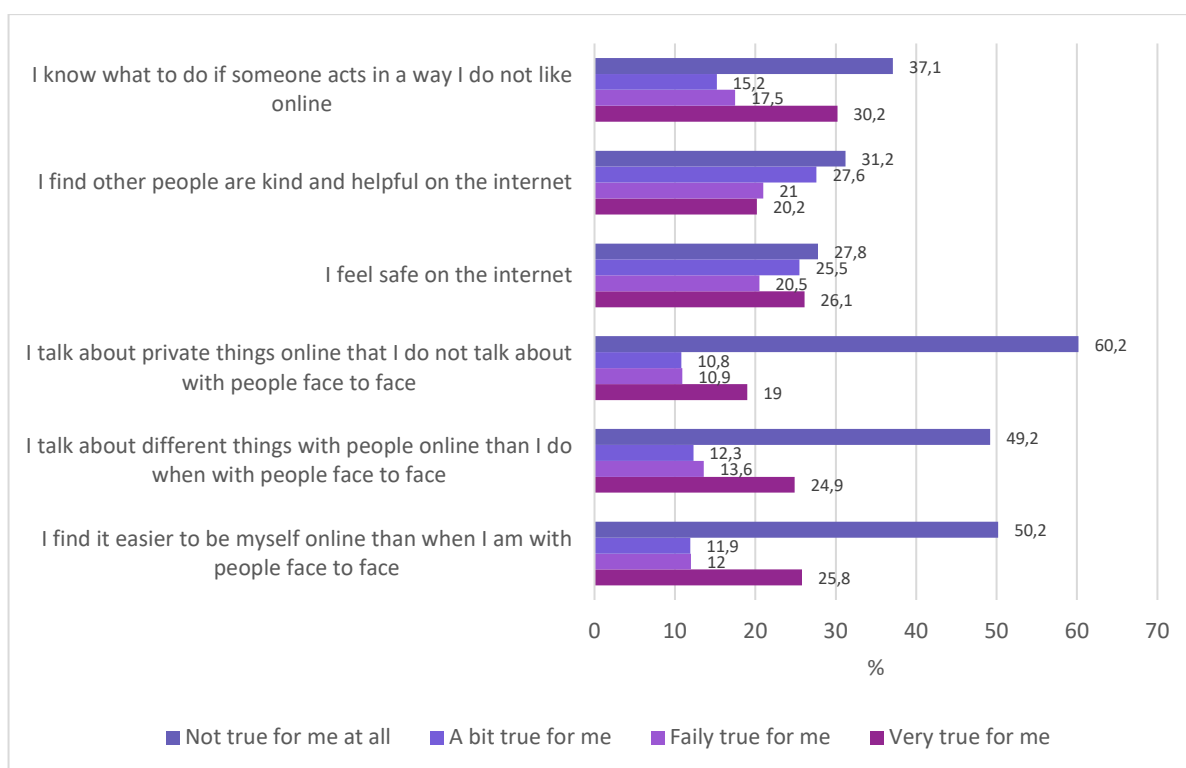
Many children in Zambia included in the study viewed one benefit of the internet to be letting them express themselves freely online. How children view their identity online is important in shaping how they use the internet. The internet may also, conversely, contribute to, or inhibit, how children formulate their identity.

Even though the children reported elsewhere in the study that, for most of them, their online experiences were positive and that they mostly had fun when they go online, only a minority of the children reported that they find other people are kind and helpful on the internet. In total, when asked if it is true that people are kind and helpful on the internet, one in five (20.2%) children felt that the statement is very true and 21% felt that it is mostly true; when asked if it is true that they feel safe on the internet, fractionally more than one quarter of children (26.1%) said that it is very true and one in five (20.5%) said that it is mostly true. This suggests that the majority of children do not feel safe on the internet, which is likely to impact on the quality of their experience, what they do and how they learn online. These feelings of unsafety may also impact on the fact that three in five children (60.2%) said it is not true at all to say that they talk about private things with people online that they do not talk about with people face to face, and another one in ten (10.8%) said that it is only a bit true for them. Older girls, aged between 15 and 17, were most likely to report that they felt it easier to be themselves online when compared with the other age groups, which suggests that the internet becomes an increasingly important space for children to explore their identity as they get older.

Girls between the ages of 15 and 17 were the most likely to report that it was very true to say that they found it easier to be themselves online than in person (11.7% felt this to be true, compared with 8.6% of boys of the same age).

These numbers suggest that the internet is largely not seen as a safe space by the children, even though they spend so much time online. The degree to which this view is shaped by their own experiences or shaped by the narratives of others will be discussed in the following section. The fact that more of the older children tended to report feeling that the internet is a safe space may also reflect a sense of greater confidence in their capacity to keep themselves safe online or to take appropriate action when faced with perceived threats. This confidence may be a result of more access to information and knowledge on how to stay safe online that has been shared by parents, teachers or friends, it may be based on personal practical experiences or it may be a combination of both.

Figure 17: How children feel about people online (n=988)



It is notable that one in two children collectively reported that, when asked if it was true that they talk about different things with people online that they do not talk about with people in person, 12.3% reported that it is a bit true, 13.6% reported that it is fairly true and 24.9% reported that it is very true, suggesting that the internet provides an important space for children to speak about different interests or challenges in life, although these are clearly not private subjects or challenges that they may face. There is no significant difference in how the boys and girls felt about how they speak to people online compared with offline.

Children's digital skills

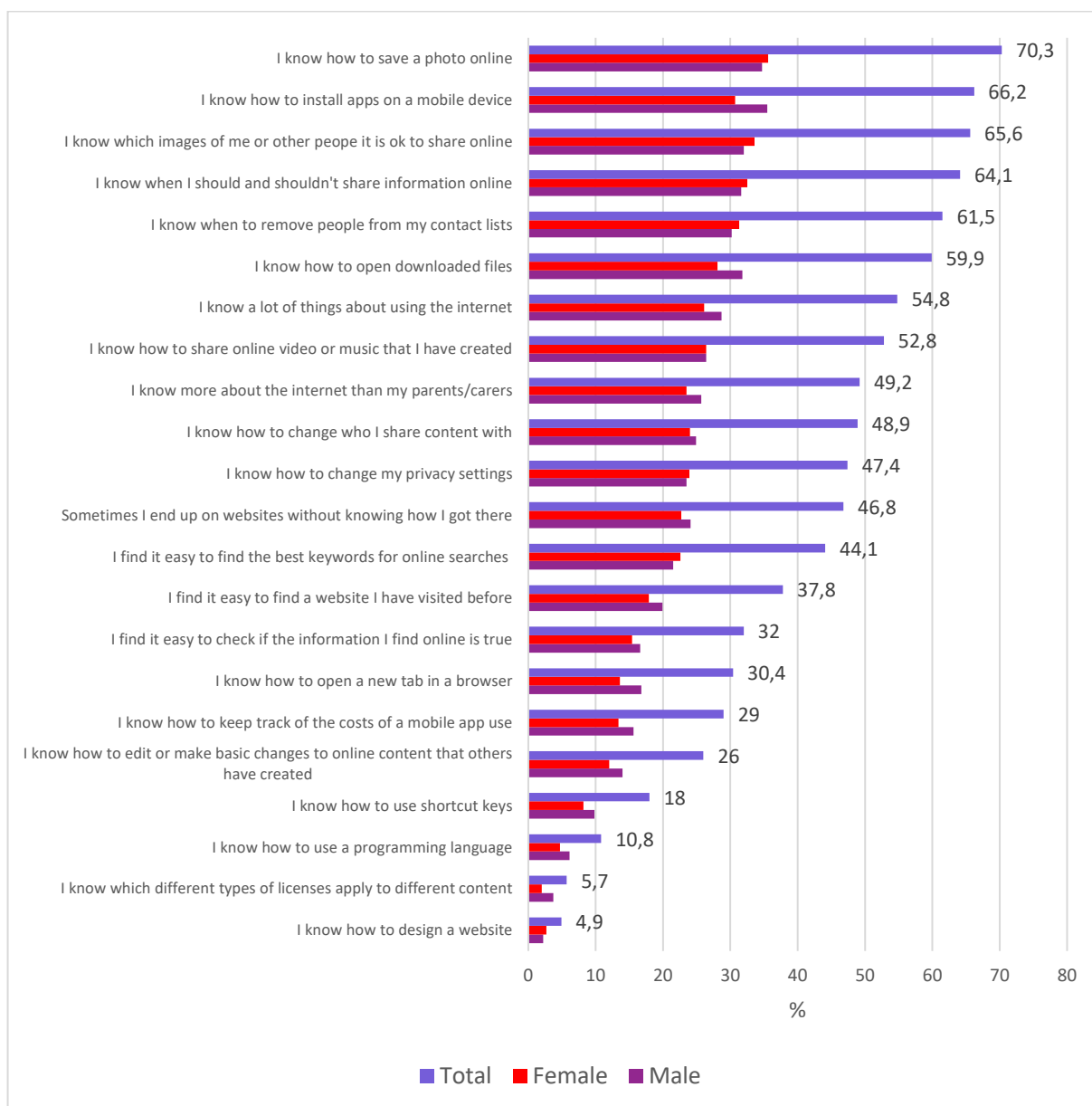
Children reported being more confident in social skills relating to social media and in everyday activities (such as photo or video sharing, chatting and meeting people online) than they did in more technical skills (such as programming, website design, the use of shortcut keys or the use of multiple tabs in browsers) (see Figure 18 below). More than half of the children interviewed (54.8%) reported that they felt it was very true or fairly true that they know a lot of things about using the internet, while fractionally less than one in two (49.2%) reported that they knew more about the internet than their parents did (a perception borne out in the FGDs too).

Perhaps because the children spent much of their time online chatting or visiting social media, music and video sites, the majority of the children reported being confident of some of the safety guidelines and actions that they could take to keep themselves safe online, including which images of themselves or others to share or not (65.6%), when they should and should not share information online (64.1%) or when to remove people from their contact lists (61.5%). However, significantly fewer children reported knowing how to change their privacy settings in the apps they used, with less than half (47.9%) of children feeling it was true or very true to say they knew how to do this. Privacy settings are an important and basic safety measure that all children should be able to adapt and change when using any connected device, and the responses suggest that there is still a glaring need for online safety education amongst all age groups of these children. While there is little difference between how confident boys and girls felt in regard to their internet and technology skills, there is something of a difference by age group, with older children reporting that they felt more confident in their more technical skills (such as changing settings, creating and editing content, findings information online and programming). This trend may be expected as the more time that children spend online as they get older, the more skills they are likely to develop, either through their own exploration or through some form of teaching or a curriculum.





Figure 18: Children who reported feeling confident or fairly confident (very true or fairly true) in different skills (n=988)

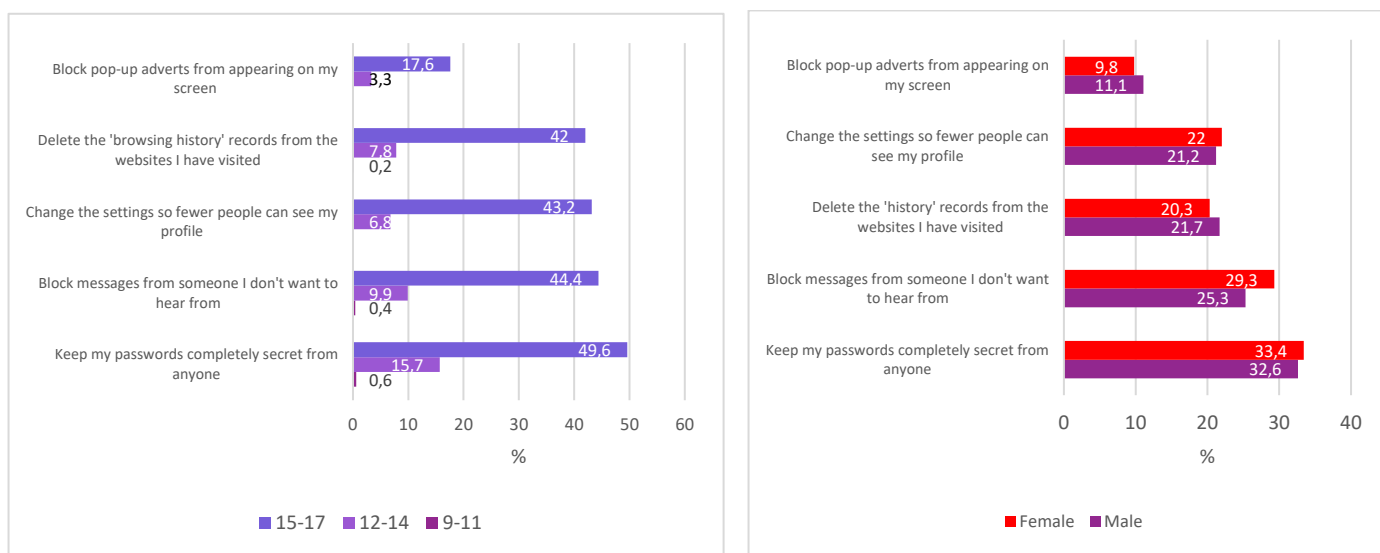


Only 32% of the children knew how to tell if something that they find online is true. This is increasingly important given the rise of misinformation and 'fake' news – seen most prominently in relation to COVID, as well as to political news. This can be addressed through the integration of media literacy programming – distinct from digital literacy – into training programmes and curricula intended to build children's online competencies.

While knowing how to keep information private, or change privacy settings, constitutes an important measure for keeping oneself and one's data safe, there are a range of other measures that children and young people can use to protect their privacy. These include blocking messages from someone (including strangers), keeping passwords secret and blocking pop-up messages in browsers.



Figure 19: Steps taken by children to protect their privacy online, by age and gender (n=988)



The most commonly used privacy steps taken by the children interviewed in Zambia were keeping passwords secret (with one third of the children having done this) and blocking messages from someone the child does not want to speak to. A little over one in five of the children had changed the settings on their social media profiles so that fewer people can see them, while one in ten had changed their browser settings to block up pop-up messages. While there is no significant difference in the steps taken by gender, more girls (29.3%) were likely to report having blocked messages from people that they do not want to receive messages from when compared with the boys (25.3% of boys had done this). This reflects reports from the FGDs where girls often spoke about being contacted by strangers online, through WhatsApp messages and Facebook requests. Often, though, girls chose to simply ignore the requests rather than block the person. However, blocking can also be used to shut down communication with people known to the child, including classmates and romantic partners, who the child may want to ignore. Whatever the context, these measures are all important skills and steps that children should know in order to enhance (though not guarantee) their privacy online. Children in the focus groups also reflected a somewhat superficial understanding of privacy and what personal data could be tracked online.

'The internet knows who you chat with because when you want to block someone the internet asks: "Do you really want to block this person?"' (boy)

'[the internet knows where we stay because] the makers of the phone could search for the phone using special codes and be able to trace where the phone is via the internet.' (girl)

A group of girls in one FGD, representing a relatively high-income strata, confidently spoke of different ‘red flags’ that they looked for when strangers contacted them online. The first step was to ‘stalk’ the person – referring to examining that person’s social media accounts and pages to assess whether they were indeed who they said they were. The red flags included:

- 🔒 *No mutual friends*
- 🔒 *A recently created account*
- 🔒 *Infrequent posting prior to making contact*
- 🔒 *Liking all my pictures*
- 🔒 *The language they are using – the way in which they speak to me and interact and the language they are using*

While clearly indicating that this group of girls was aware of certain risks that strangers might pose and while reflecting some awareness of steps that they could take to assess the veracity of a person, this level of caution and active interrogation of unknown people contacting the child was unusual amongst the groups of children included in the study.

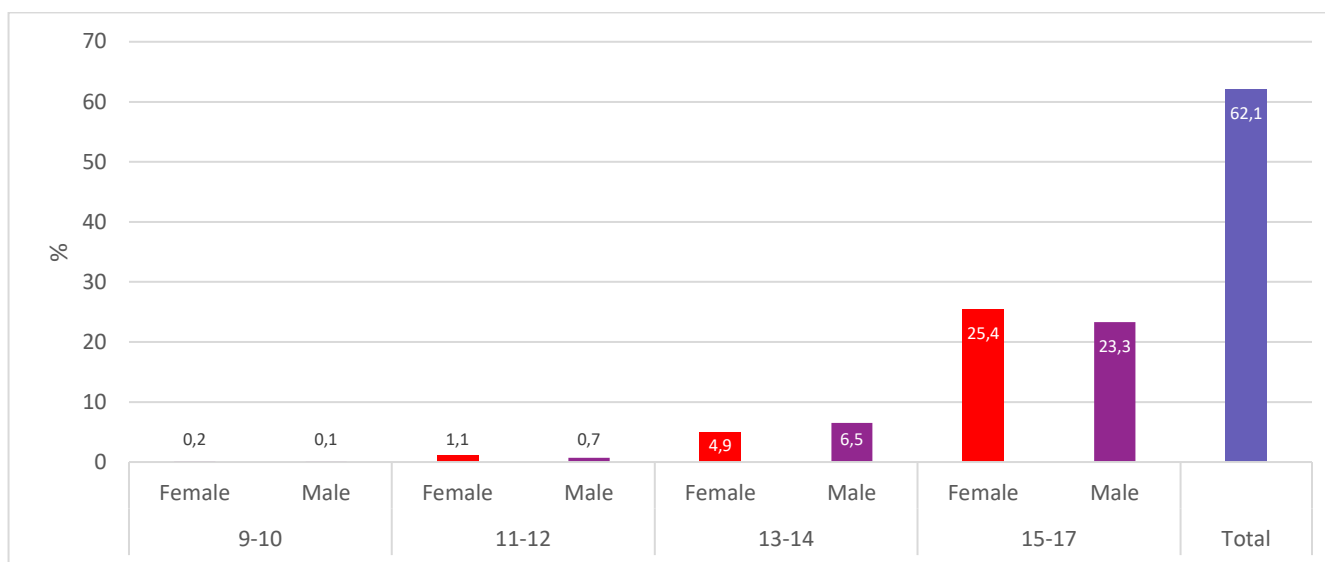
Active steps taken to secure the child’s privacy online by the children aged 9 to 11 were almost non-existent. Less than one percent of the children reported having taken steps to protect their privacy online. While this might be considered hardly surprising, it should be cause for some concern that the younger children are not engaging at all (based on these measures) with their privacy online. Like safety, privacy should be an integral part of any child’s online journey from the start. While older children and those who are more digitally literate and engage more online are likely to be more exposed to risks to their safety and their privacy, older children, where more digitally literate, should also be more equipped to mitigate the risks they face, whereas younger children are more vulnerable to online risks, particularly when accessing the internet without parental supervision at a young age. This suggests the need for targeted intervention and messaging for younger internet users on how to protect one’s privacy online – the steps one can take to keep one’s identity and privacy safe.

It is not just the younger children who took few steps to protect their privacy. Indeed, the majority of the children interviewed in Zambia in general had not taken steps to protect their privacy online, with only one half of the children aged 15 to 17 keeping their passwords completely secret and even fewer taking steps to block people they do not want to be contacted by, changing their profile visibility settings or deleting their browser history (44.4%, 43.2% and 42% of the 15 to 17 year olds respectively).

Children’s digital ecology

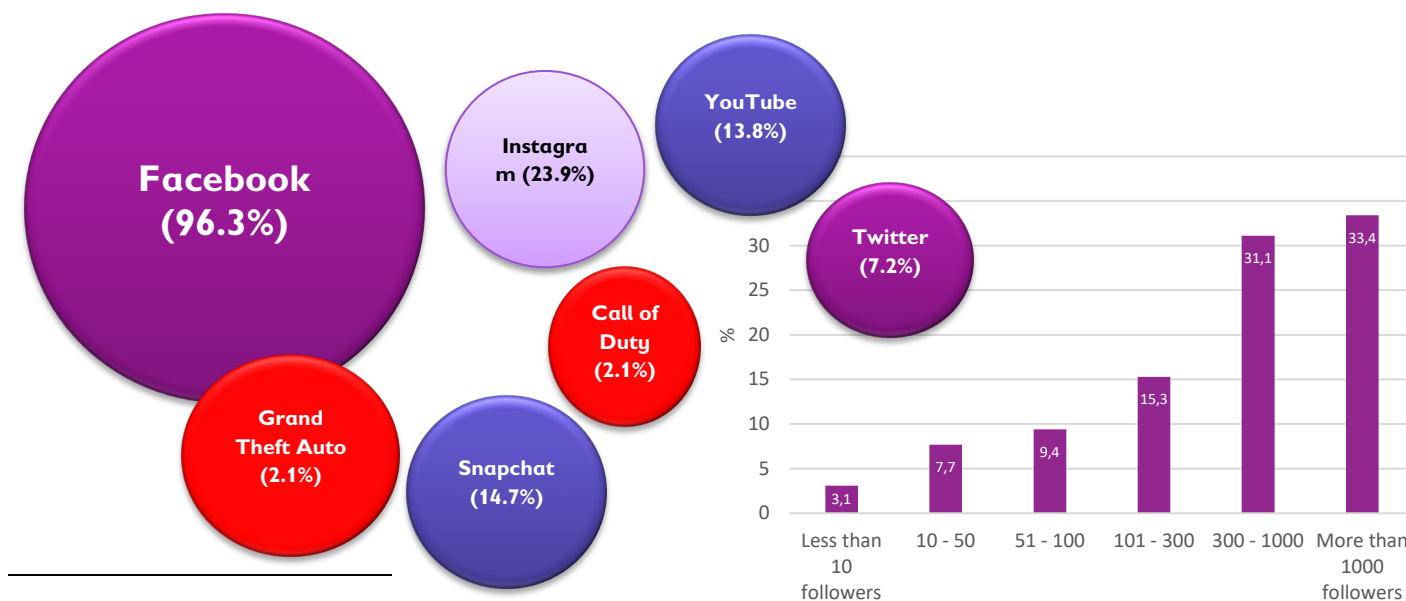
Children’s privacy online becomes particularly important within the context of their digital ecology – the digital environment and profile online. Particularly given that using social networking sites is one of the most common activities reported by the children interviewed in Zambia, one might expect that a significant proportion of children had their own profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, or gaming sites or platforms. More than three out of five (62.1%) of the children reported that they have their own profile on at least one social media website, with the majority of these children being 15 to 17 years old, and together, the boys between 15 and 17 (23.3%) and the girls between 15 and 17 (25.4%) accounted for 48.7% of all those who had their own profiles. There is little difference by gender in those who had their own profiles. Based on most platform’s terms of service, only children older than 13 may have their own accounts, so it is to be expected that most of those who have profiles fall above this benchmark. However, it is also not uncommon, generally, for children to use an incorrect birthdate or have their parents, older siblings or older friends create accounts for them if they fall below the age limit, and this may account for those few children below the age of 13 interviewed in Zambia who reported that they had their own profile on a social media site.

Figure 20: Children who reported that they have a profile (of their own) on a social network or gaming site, by gender



The most popular of the social media sites amongst the children in Zambia was Facebook, following trends identified elsewhere in both the region and in many other Global South countries. In total, 96.3% of the children who had a social media presence had a Facebook profile, while a little fewer than one quarter (21.9%) of the children reported having an Instagram account; these were followed by children with a YouTube profile (13.8%) and those with a Snapchat profile (14.7%).

Figure 21: The most common social media sites for children interviewed in Zambia, and the number of their followers¹⁷



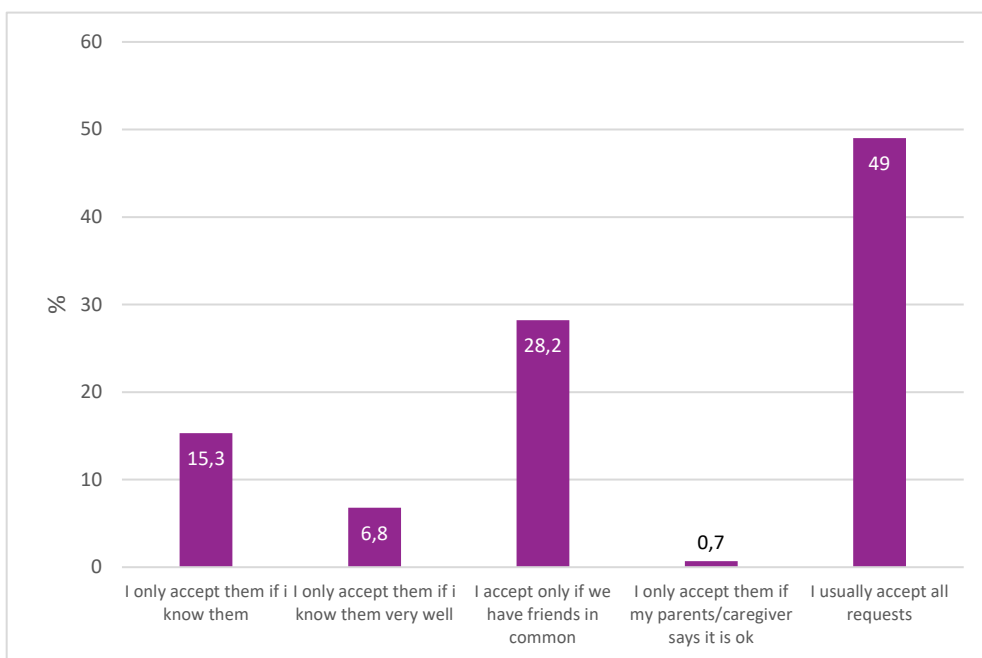
¹⁷ Note: Grand Theft Auto and Call of Duty are multi-user online video games where children connect online and play with users throughout the world. Importantly, in addition to game play, such games are increasingly also becoming the most common and important spaces for children to chat with others online.

Children reported large followings on their social media profiles, with one in three children reporting having more than 1000 followers on the profile they use the most and another one in three (31.1%) reporting that they had between 300 and 1000 followers. While there was no significant difference in followers by gender, the children between the ages of 15 and 17 were most likely to report having over 1000 followers, which is most likely a result of the greater time that they spend online and the larger social network they have through school and community friends.

For most of these children, their profiles are set to be public, so everyone can see their profile or find it in a search. Almost four in five (79.2%) of children reported that their profile was set to be public, while just over another tenth (10.6%) reported that their profile was partially private so only their friends, or friends of their network, could see it. Just 8.8% had their profile set to be private, so that only their friends could see it. Younger children who had profiles were the least likely to report that their accounts were private or partially private, reinforcing earlier findings regarding the use of privacy measures.

How children respond to online requests from people is also important in maintaining their privacy and their safety. Almost half of the children interviewed reported that they usually accept friend requests from people online, while a little fewer than three in ten (28.2%) responding that they only accept the friend requests from people if they have friends in common. In total, 15.3% of the children only accepted friend requests if they know the person who is contacting them, while 6.8% only accepted them if they know the person very well.

Figure 22: When children accept friend requests from people online



Collectively, this suggests that younger children are particularly vulnerable in terms of the lack of protective or privacy measures that they take in relation to their social media profiles. This again points to the importance of targeting information and messaging towards younger internet users, as well as equipping those supporting and working with these children – parents, caregivers and teachers – with the skills to support children in regard to how to best keep themselves safe online. These skills, together with the risks and harms that children face online, are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

It is important that the evident lack of privacy measures taken by children, particularly the younger children, does not lead to more restrictive measures being taken by those wishing to keep children safe, but rather, that it leads to an emphasis being placed on targeted messaging and supporting both the children and those working with these younger children in regard to teaching them how to protect their privacy online.



Chapter Three: Online Risks and (Potential) Harm

The report has thus far explored children's access to the internet, their skills and the opportunities and benefits that children view as existing for them online and that they are starting to realise. However, with increased access to the internet comes increase exposure to risks. Despite some definitional issues, there has been general consensus over the previous decade that online risks can be operationalised into three categories: content, contact and conduct risks.¹⁸ *Content risks* include exposure to any unwelcome or inappropriate media or content; *contact risks* describe any incidences where the child participates in risky communication; and *conduct risks* refer to scenarios where the child themselves behaves in a way that contributes to risky content or contact.¹⁹ Online risks can include a number of different experiences ranging from privacy invasions and bullying to encountering racist, hateful, violent or pornographic content, each of which can be categorised according to the typology presented above.²⁰

With the massive growth of the commercial use and exploitation of children for commercial gain by industry and the private sector, a fourth risk category has recently been added to the above typology with a slight revision of the original risks. It has been recently proposed that the following four categories of operational risks exist: content, contact, conduct and commercial risks.²¹

It is also important to differentiate risks from harm. These two concepts are often conflated by policymakers and practitioners. Not all risks necessarily lead to harm – in fact, it is increasingly acknowledged that only in a minority of cases do harms result from encountering risks online, although this may vary depending on the type of risk encountered. It is also likely to depend on a range of other factors that are discussed in more detail below. Yet, narratives of children's internet use are often driven by exaggerated fear of risks despite the fact that some risks are necessary and developmentally normative for children to encounter in order to develop the skills required to navigate those risks online. The analysis of the risks and harms experienced by children in Zambia, as explored through this study, will be framed within this more nuanced approach that clearly delineates risks from harms.

Children's experiences of harm

Children were asked about their online experiences in broad terms. They were first asked if they think that there are things on the internet that upset people their age. In total, a little more than half of the children interviewed reported that there were things on the internet that bothered children their age, with little difference between boys and girls.

¹⁸ Livingstone, Mascheroni & Staksrud, 2015; Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009

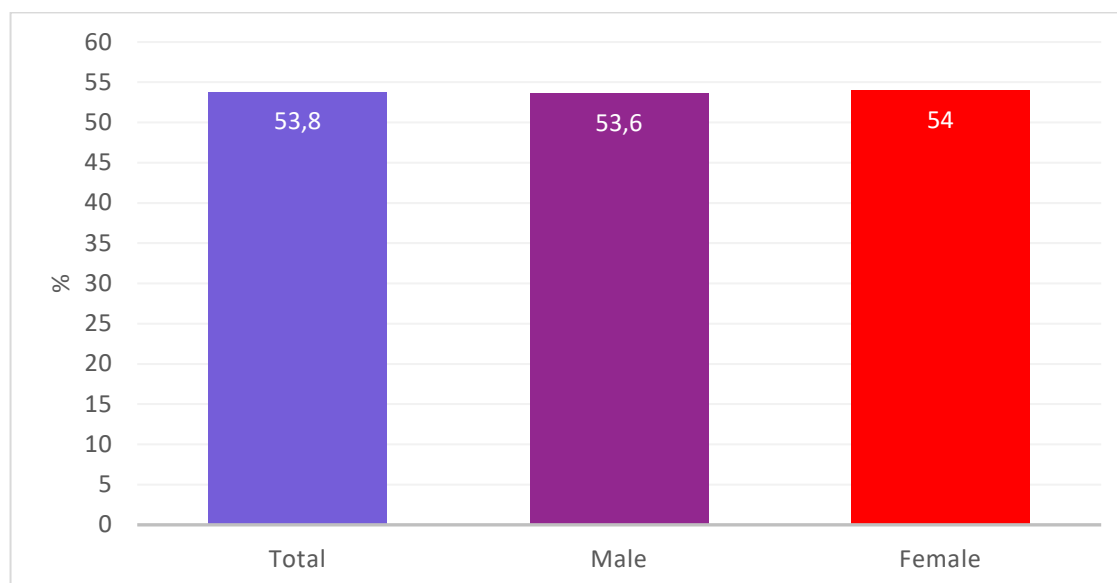
¹⁹ Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009

²⁰ Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009

²¹ Livingstone, S., & Stoilova, M. (2021). *The 4Cs: Classifying Online Risk to Children*. (CO:RE Short Report Series on Key Topics). Hamburg: Leibniz-Institut für Medienforschung | Hans-Bredow-Institut (HBI); CO:RE - Children Online: Research and Evidence.
<https://doi.org/10.21241/ssar.71817>

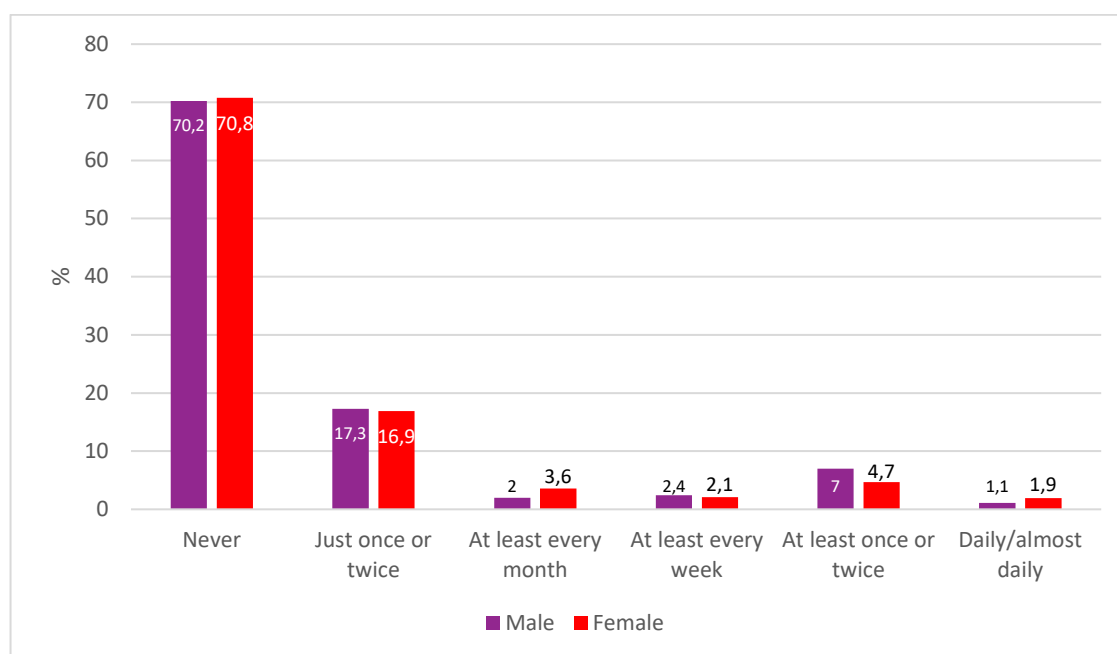


Figure 23: Children who think there are things online that bother children their age (n=988)



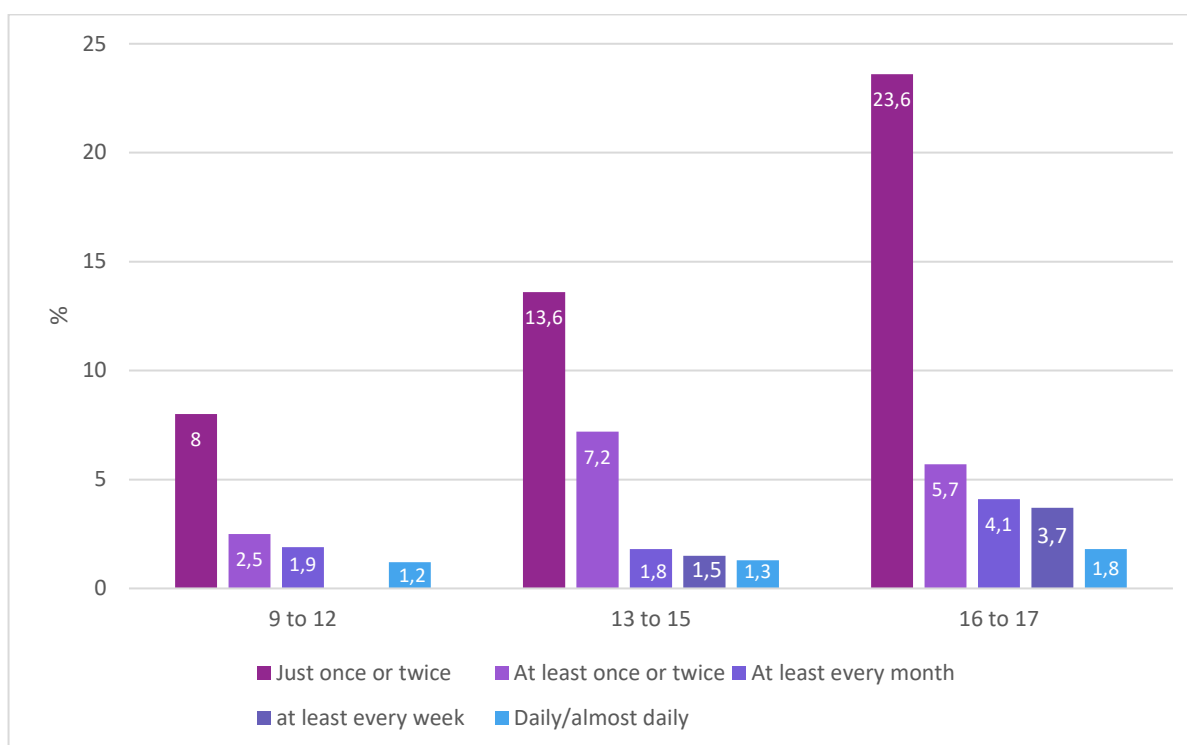
Children were then asked about their own personal experience and whether something had happened online over the past year that had bothered or upset them in some way. One in three children, in total, reported that something had happened over the past year that had bothered or upset them, with no statistical difference between boys and girls who reported an upsetting experience. For most children, this experience had been a one off, with 17.3% of boys and 16.9% of girls reporting that it had occurred just once, while 7% of boys and 4.7% of girls reported that it had occurred at least once or twice.

Figure 24: Children who reported something online that bothered or upset them over the past year, by gender (n=988)



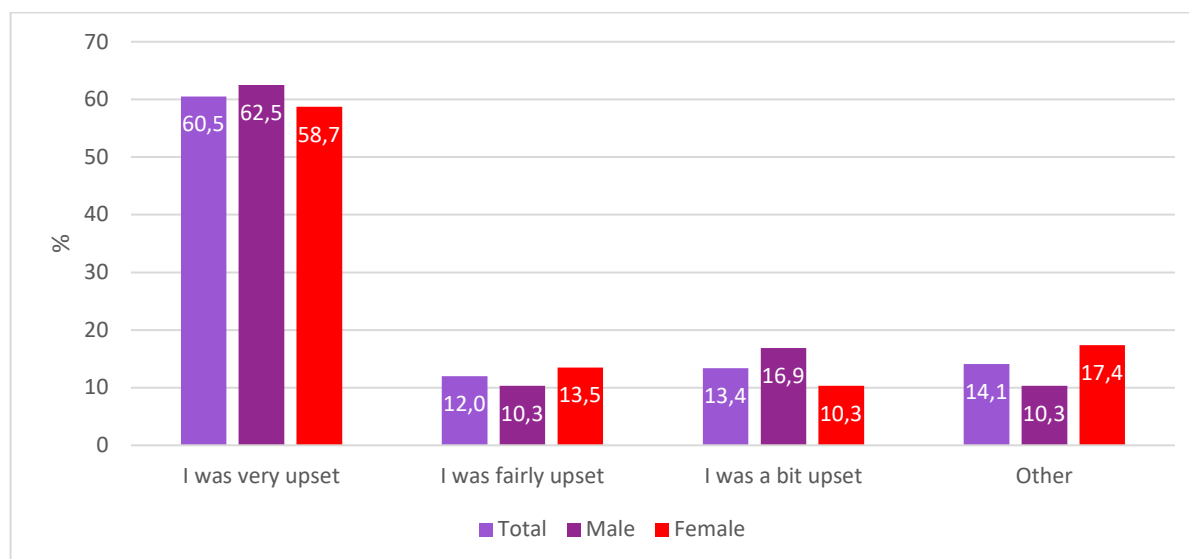
Older children, between 16 and 17 years of age, were most likely to report that something had happened that had bothered them, and of those who had such an experience, most reported that this had occurred just once. Of the children between 13 and 15 years old, 7.2% reported that it had happened at least once or twice, suggesting that this cohort of children were the most likely to report repeat experiences, although these were limited to a few instances rather than an ongoing negative experience. That the highest number of repeat negative experiences is experienced by this age group suggests that it may likely be a result of increased internet engagement as children gain more independence online and start to explore more; also, they are able to learn what steps to take to address these experiences and to limit them in the future as they get older.

Figure 25: Children who reported something that had bothered them over the past year; and the frequency (n=988)



While these upsetting or bothersome experiences were experienced by a minority of the children interviewed in Zambia, it is important to note that when they did happen, they tended to have a profound impact on the victim, with three out of five of the children (60.2%) reporting that they felt very upset after the experience or encounter, with slightly more of the boys (62.5%) reporting that they felt very upset when compared with the girls (58.7% were very upset). Also, compared with the girls, more of the boys reported feeling a bit upset by the experience (16.9% of the boys felt this compared with 10.3% of the girls), while more of the girls reported feeling fairly upset when compared with the boys (13.5% felt this compared with 10.3% of the boys). This points to the importance of ensuring that both boys and girls benefit from psychosocial support and access to counselling and support services relating to adverse online experiences and victimisation.

Figure 26: How this experience made the children feel, by gender (n=155)



Help Seeking: Children tended to speak to their friends or acquaintances about the experience when they had these upsetting experiences, but rarely spoke to anyone other than these friends. When children did tell a family member about their experience, they most commonly spoke to their siblings with just children speaking to their parents or caregivers about their experience.

How children's online experiences evolve and the quality of these experiences – including how children start to engage with others online – may shape their attitudes to their digital experience, as well as how they utilise technology themselves. It is important to ensure that, regardless of what these bothersome or upsetting experiences are, or regardless of the severity of them, all children have access to adequate services and support in order to assist them when they encounter things that bother them online. Depending on the nature of the experience, this support may require specialised intervention, but support may also be sought from parents, caregivers or teachers. The likelihood of this happening is largely dependent on how open and supporting the adults surrounding the child are and on the quality of communication and trust between the adult network and the child.

While children living with disabilities are recognised as being at greater risk of a range of different forms of online and offline violence, evidence of this is somewhat limited within the ZKO study. This may in large part be due to the relatively small sample of children randomly selected into the study. The exception to this is the children who reported (using their usual language) that they had difficulty communicating. The children reporting having difficulty communicating all the time²² or a lot of the time were statistically significantly more likely to report being bothered by something online over the past year when compared with the other children. While a slightly higher percentage of the children reporting some difficulty or lots of difficulty concentrating reported being bothered online in some way, there is no statistically significant difference between those with this challenge and others.

²² Coded as "cannot do at all"

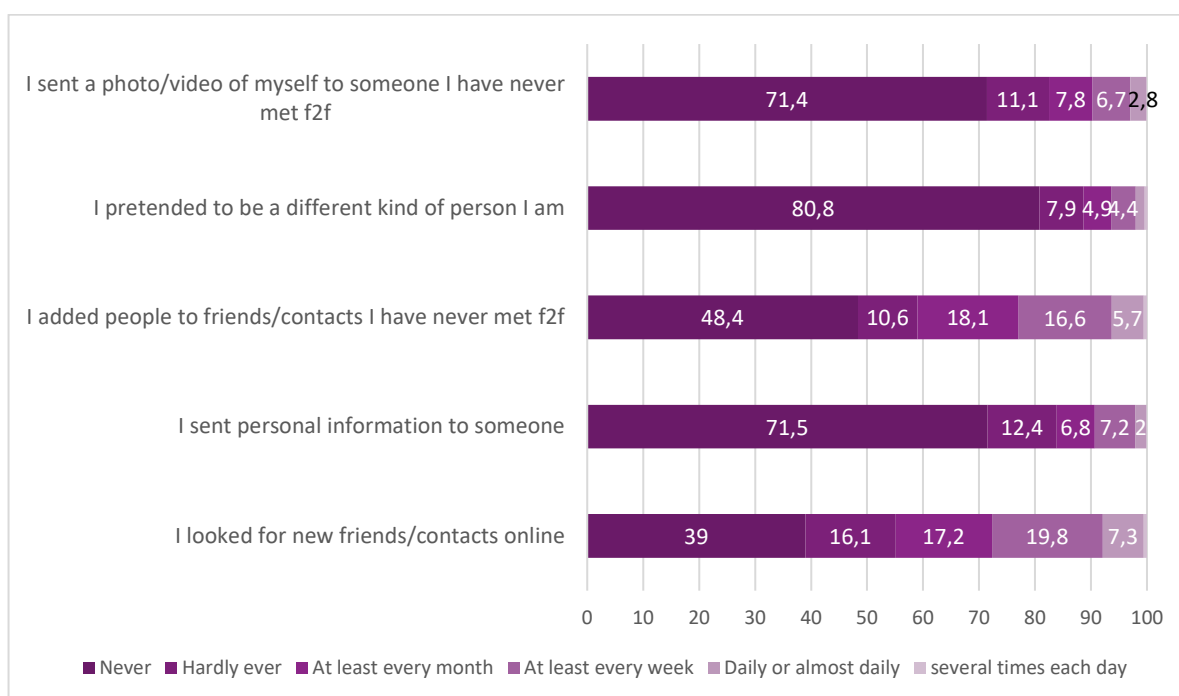
Exposure to contact and content risks

Children were also asked about activities that they may have engaged in online over the past year that may have placed them at some level of risk for harm, either online or offline. Almost three in ten of the children had sent a photo of themselves to someone online they had never met face to face, with 11.1% reporting that they had done this hardly ever and another 7.8% reporting they had done this at least every month. This means that one in ten children had sent their photo to someone they had never met in person at least weekly, daily or several times each day. Similarly, 28.5% of children had sent their personal information to someone online over the past year, with 12.4% of children reporting that they had done this rarely and another 6.8% doing this at least every month. One in five of the children had pretended to be someone other than who they were online over the past year. This could be for a range of reasons, ranging from intentional deception to engaging in a conversation that they might otherwise not have had, or it could simply be a prank on a school friend.

Significantly more of the children had added people to their friends or contact lists that they had never met face to face, with a little more than one in two of the children reporting that they had done this over the past year and, of those, almost one in five (18.1%) reported doing this at least every month and another 16.6 at least every week. This suggests that this action is a pattern, which is consistent with findings reported earlier in the study on the importance of children meeting new people from different backgrounds. While this simple action may present a very real risk to children, it also does not necessarily mean that the action will result in harm occurring to children. Yet it suggests an important entry point for online safety messaging.

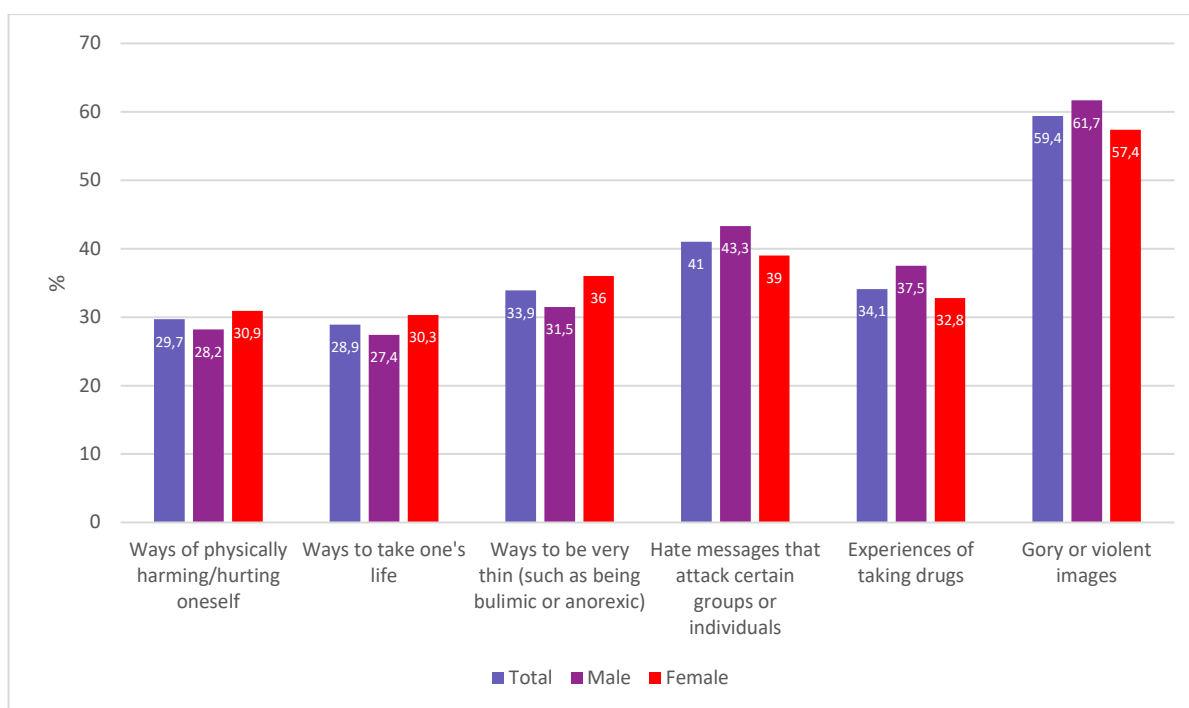
Similar to this and not unrelated to this are those children who actively look for new friends or contacts online. These may be people with shared interests, hobbies or backgrounds, or they could be people from very different backgrounds. Three out of five children reported that they have looked for new friends online, with one in five (19.8%) having done this at least every week and another 17.2% doing this at least every month.

Figure 27: Risk-taking behaviours (n=988)



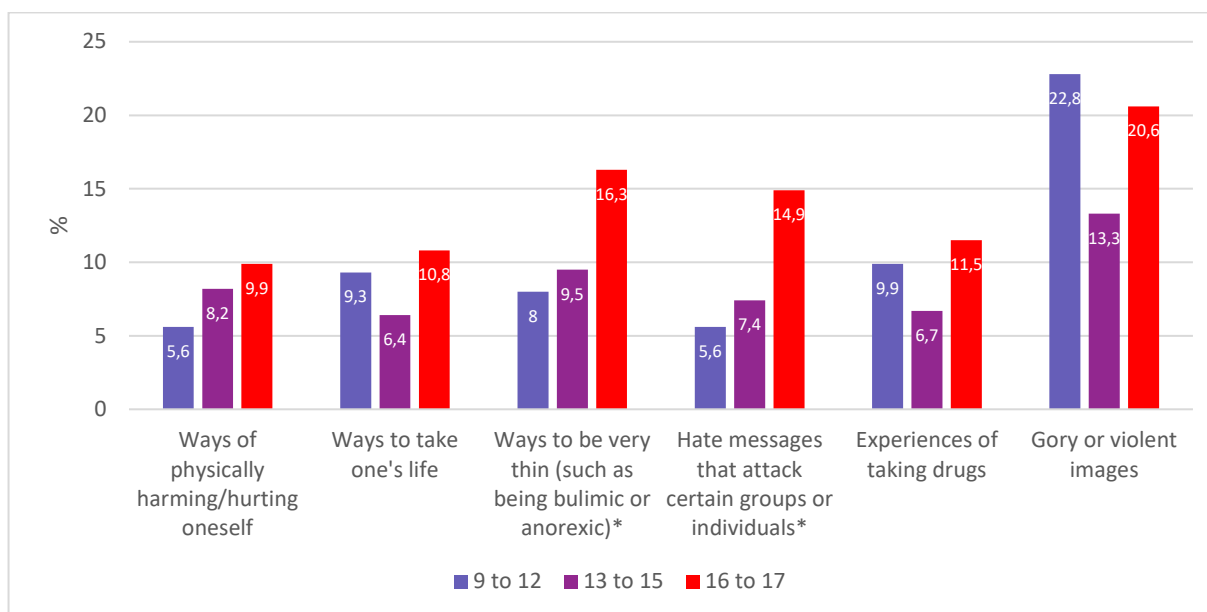
It was also not uncommon for children to report some form of exposure to content risks online. In total, 59.4% of the children reported that they had seen websites with violent or gory images, with fractionally more of the boys reporting this compared with the girls, while two in five of the children (41%) had seen hate messages or content online in the past year. A little more than one third of the children (34.1%) had seen websites promoting or talking about the use of drugs, with significantly more of the boys (37.5%) reporting having seen this kind of content online over the past year compared with the girls (32.8% had seen this). A similar proportion of children – about one in three (33.9%) – reported having seen websites speaking about eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia. Only slightly fewer children – just under three in ten (29.7%) – had seen websites speaking about ways of hurting oneself (29.7%) or had seen sites with content relating to ways of taking one's life (28.9%) (see Figure 27 below).

Figure 28: Exposure to risky content online, displayed as a total and by gender (n=988)



Exposure to gory or violent images was the most common across the age groups, with more of the younger children, aged between 9 and 12, reporting seeing this kind of content compared with the other age groups. Older children, aged between 16 and 17, were the most likely to report viewing any other form of undesirable content, although one in ten children between the ages of 9 and 12 reported seeing websites discussing ways to take one's life. This content, in its entirety, is inappropriate for children of all ages, but particularly inappropriate for younger children who are unable to view such material in any form of context and are often unable to make informed decisions or process the content in a way that might mitigate any potential harm.

Figure 29: Exposure to risky content online, by age (n=988)



Three in ten of the children (30.4%) felt very upset by the content that they had seen online, while 16.3% reported that they felt fairly upset. One quarter of the children reported that they were not upset by the content that they had seen at all, potentially suggesting that these children had the internal and external mechanisms to process the content in a healthy way. Boys (26.2%) were significantly more likely to report they were not upset at all by the content than girls (21.2%), although there was very little difference between how the boys and girls felt beyond this.

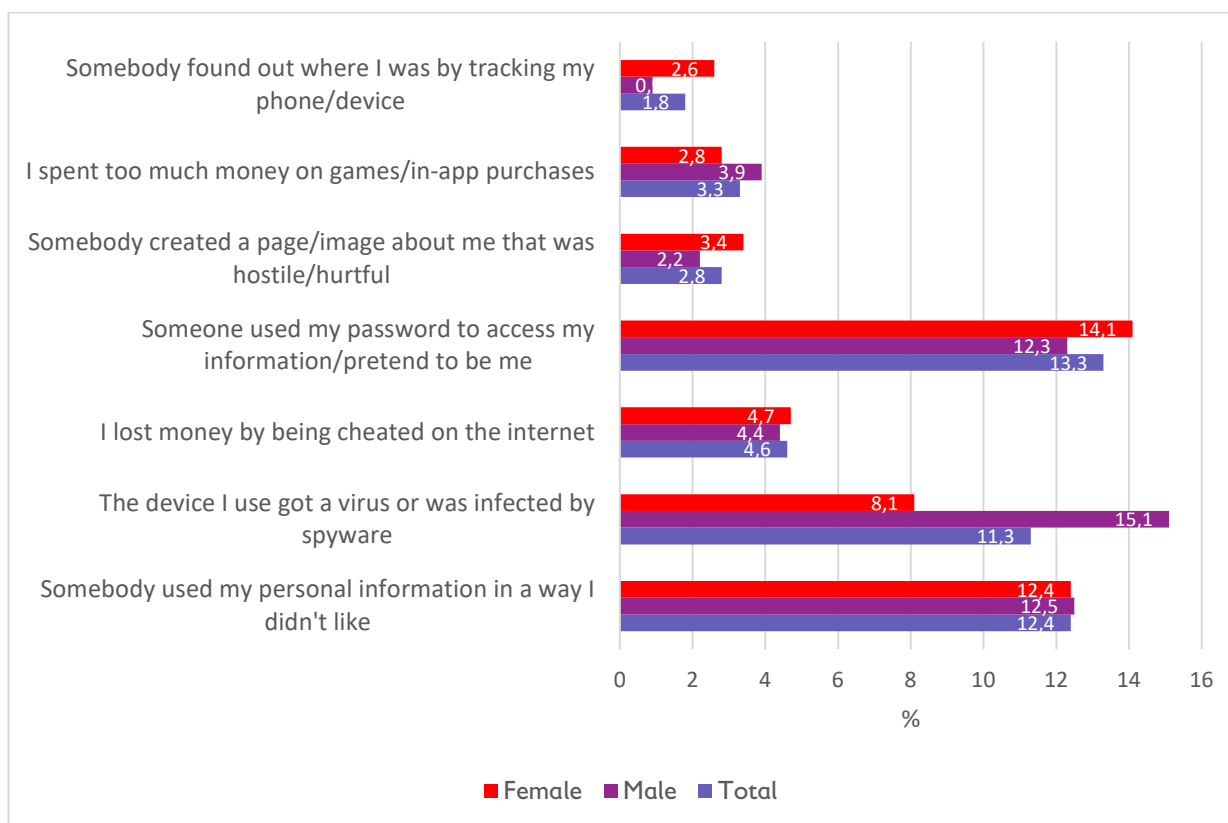
Children had also encountered a wide range of non-sexual risks online over the previous year. The most common of these were other people online who used the child's password to access their account or pretend to be them (13.3%). This could be to hack their personal accounts or to impersonate them to friends, classmates or even strangers online. Girls (14.1% of girls interviewed) were slightly more likely to report this than the boys (12.3% of boys interviewed). This was followed by children who reported that someone used their personal information in a way that they did not like (12.4% of all children) and those whose devices got a virus or infected by spyware.

The hacking of personal accounts has been identified elsewhere as a major concern of children, and while it may often be relatively benign, it may also precede potentially more harmful acts, like the sharing of personal correspondence, private images or videos (including those of a romantic or explicit nature) amongst classmates or more widely.²³

²³ See, for example Bulger and Burton, 2020



Figure 30: Children's exposure to non-sexual risks online, by gender (n = 988)



It was also not uncommon for the children to actively seek out potentially harmful content rather than encountering it accidentally. A little fewer than one in ten of the children (8.7%) had actively sought out websites discussing ways to hurt oneself, ways of taking one's life (8.8%) or ways of taking drugs (9.3%), while 12.2% had looked for information online on ways to be thin.

Generally, the older children were more likely to report actively looking for this content online, although 9.3% of the children between the ages of 9 and 11 reported looking for websites discussing ways of taking one's life and 9.9% of this age group had looked for websites discussing drug use over the past year.

While these numbers are relatively small, it is of great concern that around one in ten of the children were actively looking for potentially harmful information such as this online, and it suggests an import role for both content providers, social media networks and those with a duty of care over children to ensure that such content is not accessible and that appropriate support is available to children who may require it.

Figure 31: Children who had actively sought out potentially harmful content online, by age (n = 988)

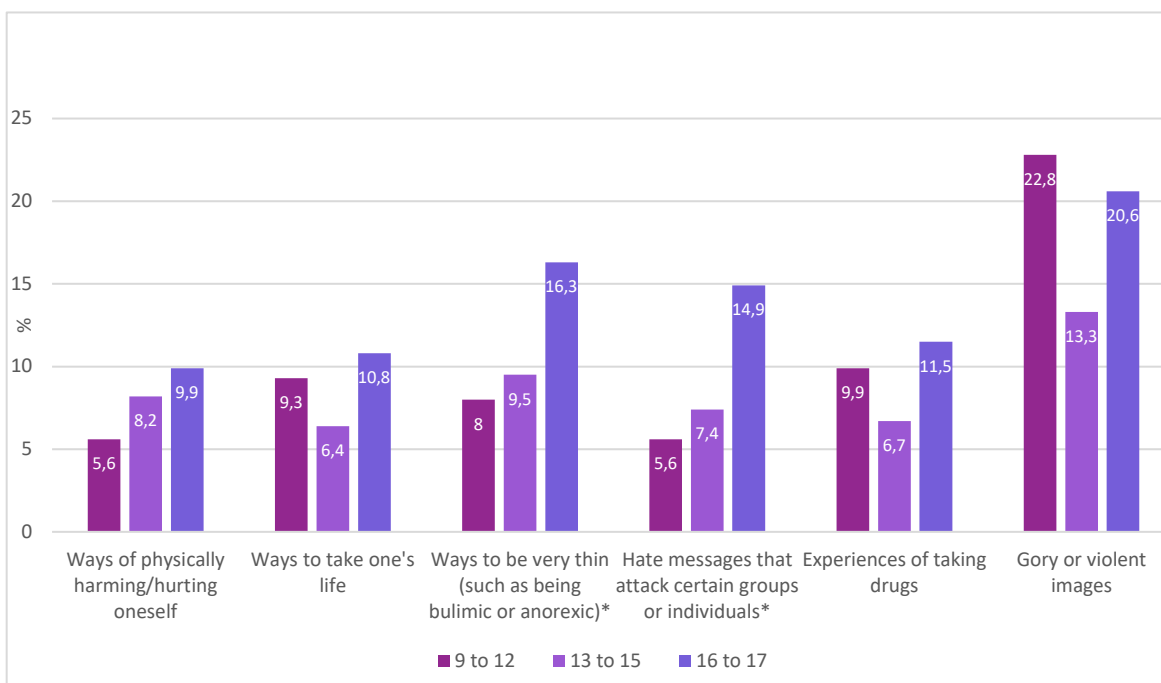
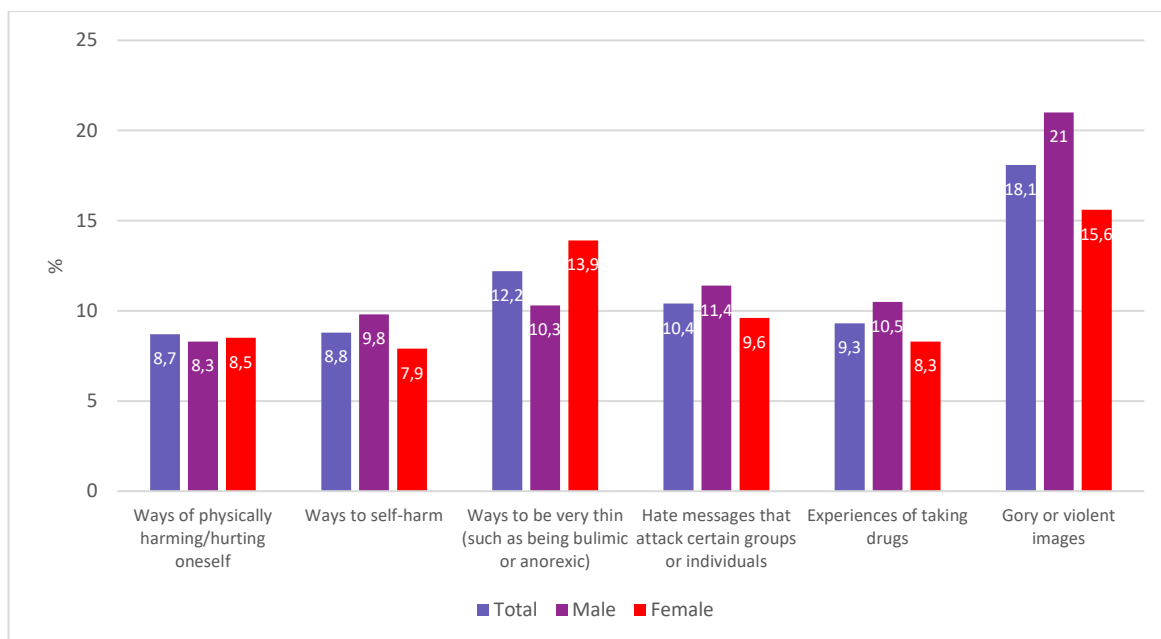


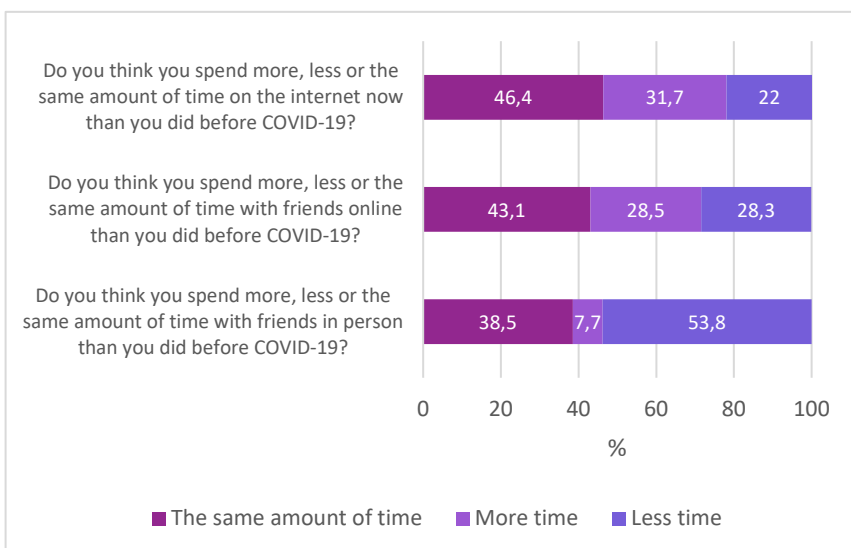
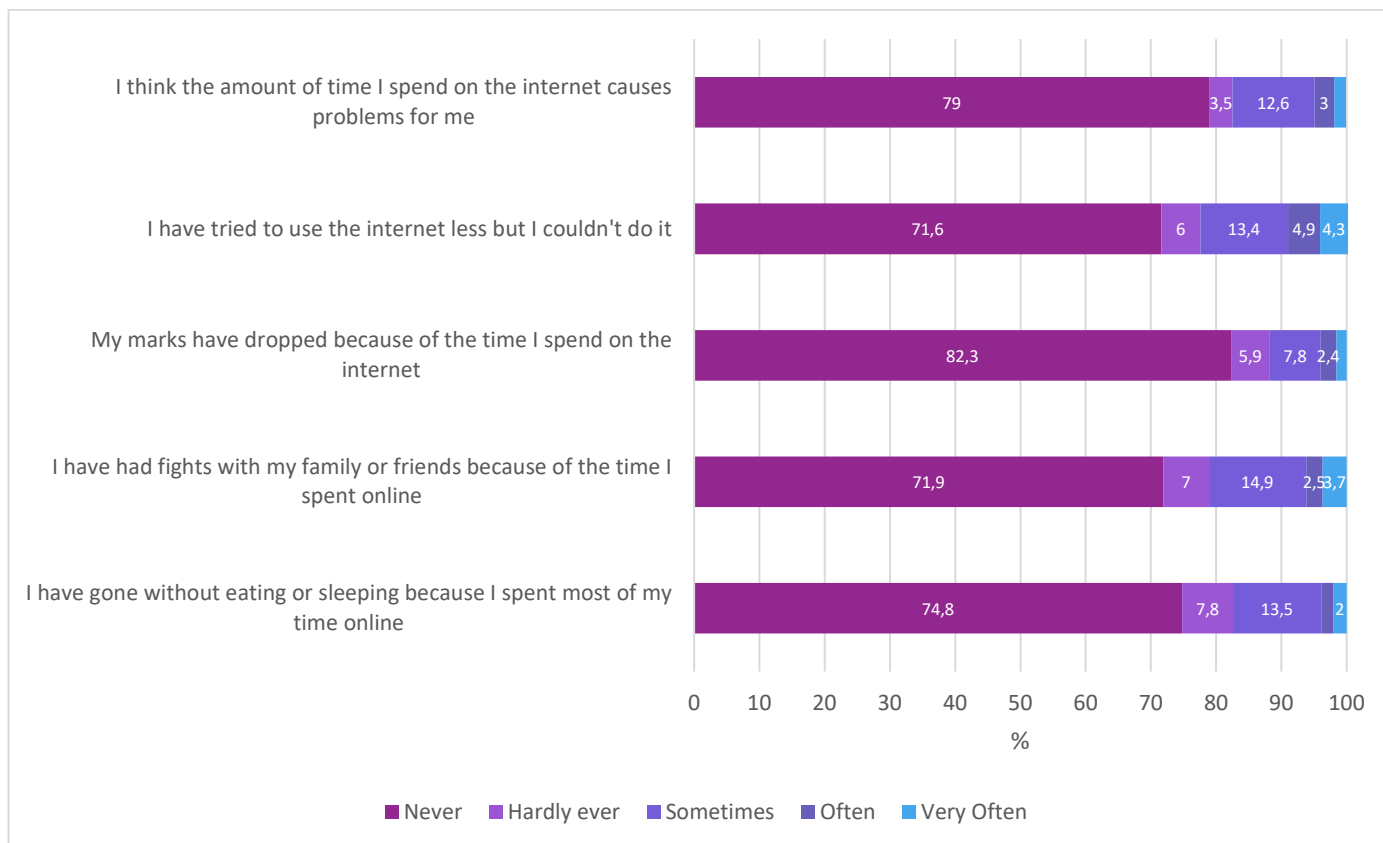
Figure 32: Children who had actively sought out potentially harmful content online, by gender (n=988)



As noted elsewhere in this report, children are increasingly spending more time online, raising concerns about their well-being. While most of these concerns are raised by adults, children are increasingly considering the impact of their time online themselves, although these considerations are more difficult to quantify reliably. However, self-assessment of time on devices may be useful for children to self-regulate to some degree. The majority of the children reported no

impact of their time online on various outcomes. However, 12% of the children sometimes thought that the amount of time they spend online causes some problems for them, and 14% reported that the time they spend online sometimes causes fights with their family or friends. A similar percentage (13.1%) reported that they have sometimes gone without sleeping or eating because they spent too much time online.

Figure 33: Children's perception of the length of time spent online and its impact (n = 988)



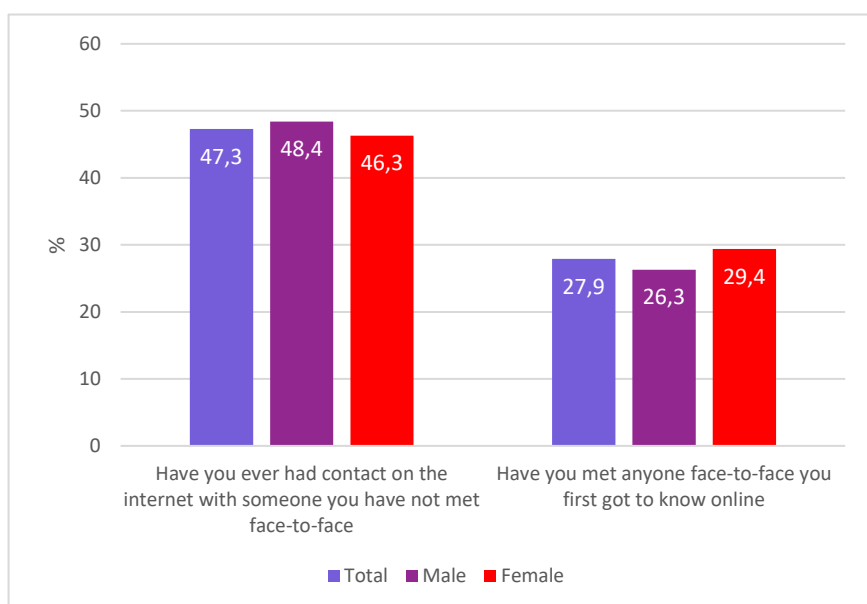
Despite perceptions of children spending much more time online, including time spent online with friends as a result of COVID, only slightly more than one third (31.7%) of the children in Zambia that were interviewed reported that they spend more time online now than they did before COVID, while a little more than a quarter thought that they spend more time online with friends than they did before the pandemic. More significantly, more than half felt that they spent less time with friends in person than they did prior to the pandemic,

reflecting the conditions and limitations of lockdowns and how these are likely to have impacted on in-person play for children and young people.

Arguably, one of the risks that is of greatest concern for many parents and caregivers globally is the risk of their child meeting someone online who may inflict harm on the child, either online or through a transition to an offline meeting. While not all risks, nor the most severe, are posed by strangers to children (indeed, when it comes to sexual violence and abuse, much of the violence and abuse online is perpetrated by individuals known to the child, much as is the case with offline sexual abuse and violence), meeting strangers online, particularly when older, may pose a real risk. Yet, as noted above, meeting new people online is one of the benefits that the internet offers, potentially providing children with the opportunity to expand their world and social circle beyond their immediate physical environment, and many of the children interviewed for this study report chatting to new people online who they did not previously know. This is particularly enticing to children living in communities or environments where any such opportunities offline are severely limited, such as those children coming from poor social economic backgrounds or from where mobility is not an option.

In total, almost half (47.3%) of the children interviewed reported that they had contact with someone online that they had not met previously face to face, with fractionally more boys (48.4% of them) reporting this experience compared with girls (46.3% of them). This person may be someone their own age or someone older (or younger) than them. While older children between the ages of 12 to 17 were most likely to report this experience, one in ten children between the ages of 9 and 11 reported that they had had contact with someone online that they had not previously met in person.

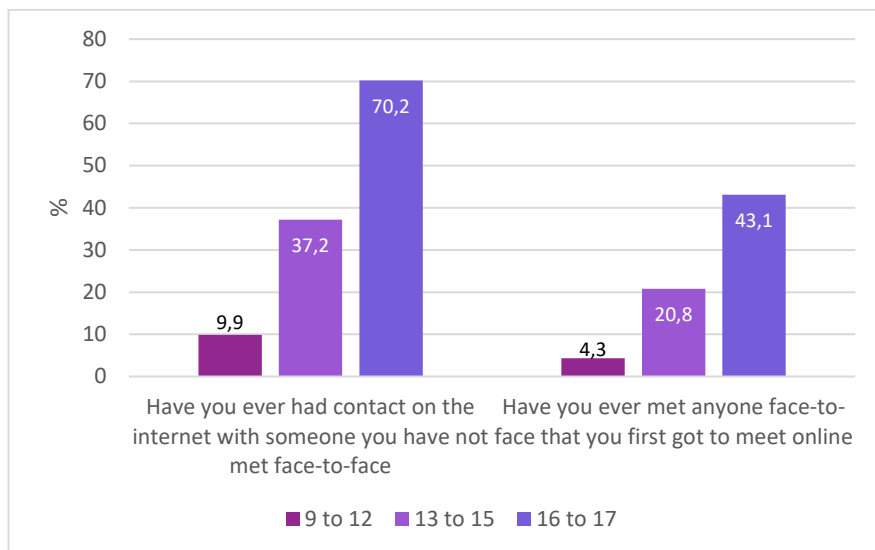
Figure 34: Children who had met someone online that they had not previously met in person and those who had met someone in person that they first met online, by gender (n = 988)



Given that the opportunity to meet new people online is so important to young people, the solution does not simply lie in preventing children from speaking to others online but rather lies in being aware of who children (particularly younger children) are speaking to, managing and supporting them in these conversations, opening up space for open and frank communication between parent or caregiver and the child. As older children are afforded more independence and decision-making regarding their online activities and who they meet, adults should manage the risks faced by older children once they decide to meet people in person.



Figure 35: Children who had met someone online that they had not previously met in person and those who had met someone in person that they first met online, by age (n=988)



More than one quarter of the children had met someone in person that they had first met online. Girls (29.4%) were slightly more likely to report having met someone in person than boys (26.3%), although gender is not a statistically significant factor. Given that older children are more likely to have greater freedom, as well as be more mobile than younger children, it is not surprising that significantly more children between the ages of 16 and 17 had met someone in person that they had first met online when compared with younger children aged between 9 and 12 (4.3%) or between 13 and 15 (20.8%). Notwithstanding this, it is likely that even children up to 15 years old who meet someone face to face that they have had no previous contact with online are unlikely to truly appreciate the risk that this poses or to take adequate risk-mitigation measures to ensure their safety. Children in the FCDs frequently reported meeting someone offline who turned out to look, or be, very different to who they had expected based on their online conversations:

'I met someone who looked very nice and young online, but was much older with a big belly – older than my dad – when I eventually saw them physically' (girl)

'I met someone who looked young and had a beautiful profile photo. Upon meeting her, I discovered that she was elderly and nowhere near her profile photo in terms of age. I had to call to verify that she was the one. Upon confirming that, I was uncomfortable to meet her so I told her we'd meet the following day. After that I disengaged communication'. (boy)

'I encountered someone who told me they were a brother to a known celebrity on the Copperbelt and even sent me money for transport to meet him. However, upon meeting him, he couldn't even afford to give me the money for transport to get back home' (girl)

Notwithstanding that the internet offers an important opportunity to expand networks and to meet new people, these experiences reflect very real risks for the children involved. This data suggests that there is an urgent need for open conversations with children about the risks that such actions pose, as well as a need for measures to assist parents and caregivers in supporting children who may be considering meeting strangers in person. Given that the opportunity to meet new people online is so important to children, the solution does not lie in simply preventing children from speaking to others online but rather lies in being aware of who children (particularly younger children) are speaking to, managing and supporting them in these conversations, opening up space for open and frank communication between parent or caregiver and the child. As older children are afforded more independence and decision-making in their online activities and who they meet, adults must manage the risks faced by older children once they decide to meet people in person.

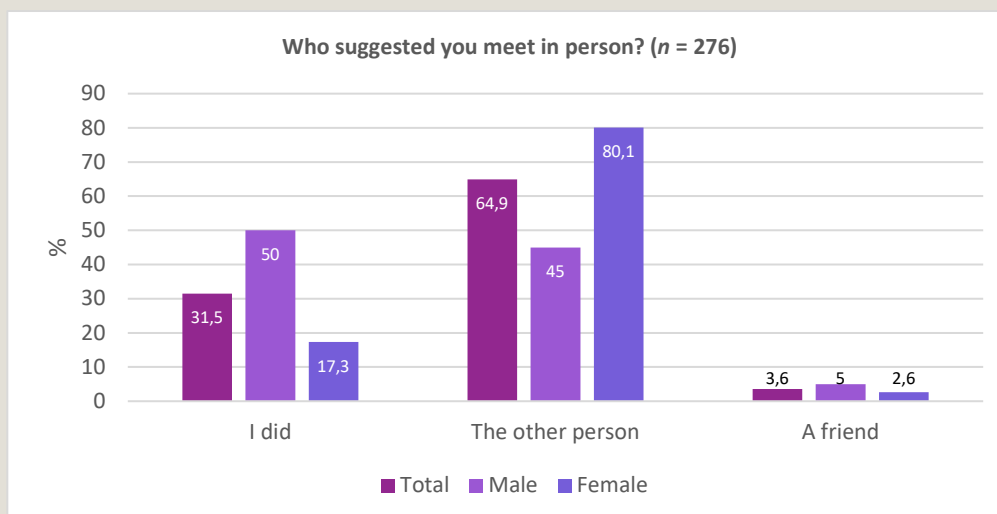




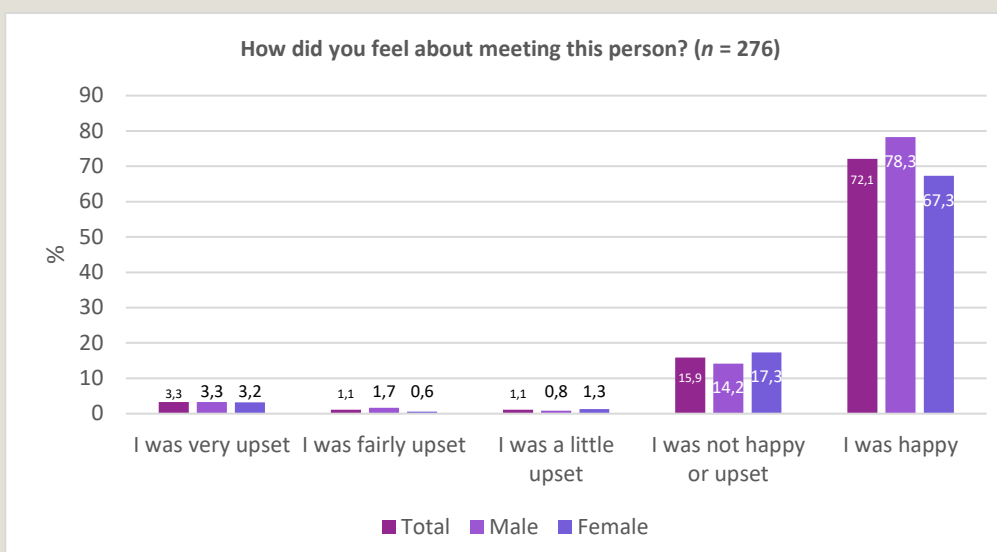
A profile of in-person contact risks faced by children in Zambia

While meeting someone in person that a child first met online can be considered a risk in itself, several factors help shape that risk and may exacerbate the risk of harm occurring. Put simply, if a young girl meets a significantly older man offline, at the man's suggestion, there is likely to be a greater risk of harm occurring to the child than if the girl had suggested the meeting herself and if the meeting was with a school peer or someone her own age that she had first met online.

Most of the interviewed children had met the person on a social networking site, predominantly Facebook and WhatsApp. In most cases (64.9%) the other person suggested an in-person meeting, with this being the case significantly more in the case of girls (80% of girls who had met someone face-to-face) when compared with the boys (45% of the boys who had met someone face-to-face). In just 17.2% of the cases the girl suggested meeting in person, while the boys suggested meeting in 50% of the boys' meetings.



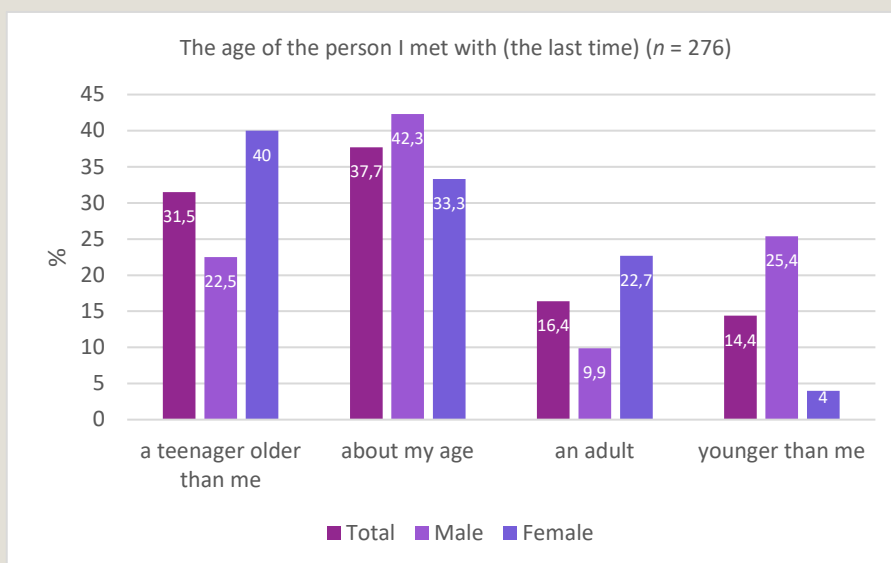
In the majority of cases, the children reported that they felt happy about meeting the person. Three quarters reported that they felt happy, with significantly more of the boys feeling happy about the meeting (78.5% of them) compared to the girls (67.3% of them felt happy about the meeting).



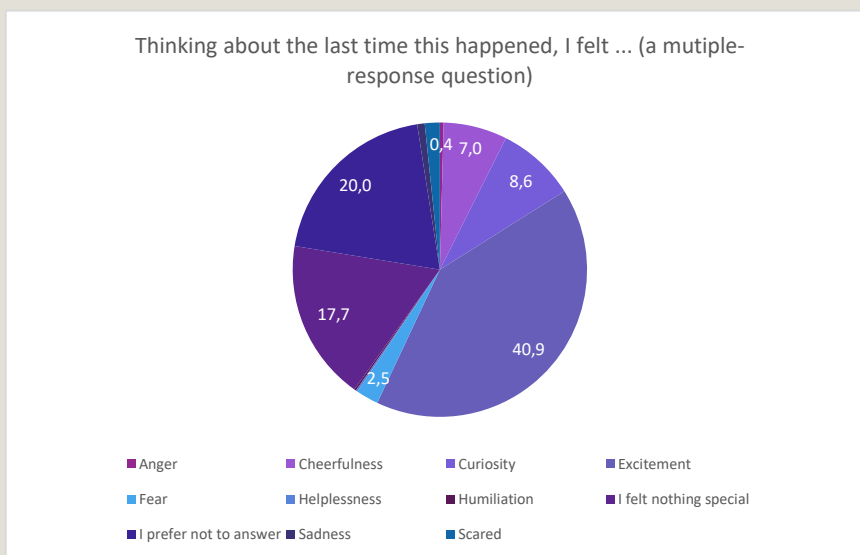


Of the 15 children who reported that they felt upset when they met the person, this was primarily because the person did not look like they expected the person to look (this was the case for 5 children), the person made them feel scared (the case for 4 children), they were bored by the person and thought the meeting was a waste of time (the case for 3 children) or the person was not who they said they were (the case for 3 children).

In 16.4% of the cases, the child met with an adult, although the girls (22.7%) were statistically more likely to meet with an adult than were the boys (9.9%), who were most likely to meet with someone younger than them (25.4%) While in most cases children met with someone who was about their age (37.7% in total), or a teenager who was older than them (31.5% in total, the proportion of children (particularly girls) who met with an adult is cause for some concern.



Children who met someone offline that they had first met online generally felt excitement (40.9%) or nothing special (17.7%), the last time it happened, followed by curiosity (8.6%) (see figure below). However, 20% of the children reported that they preferred not to say what they felt the last time they met someone under such circumstances.

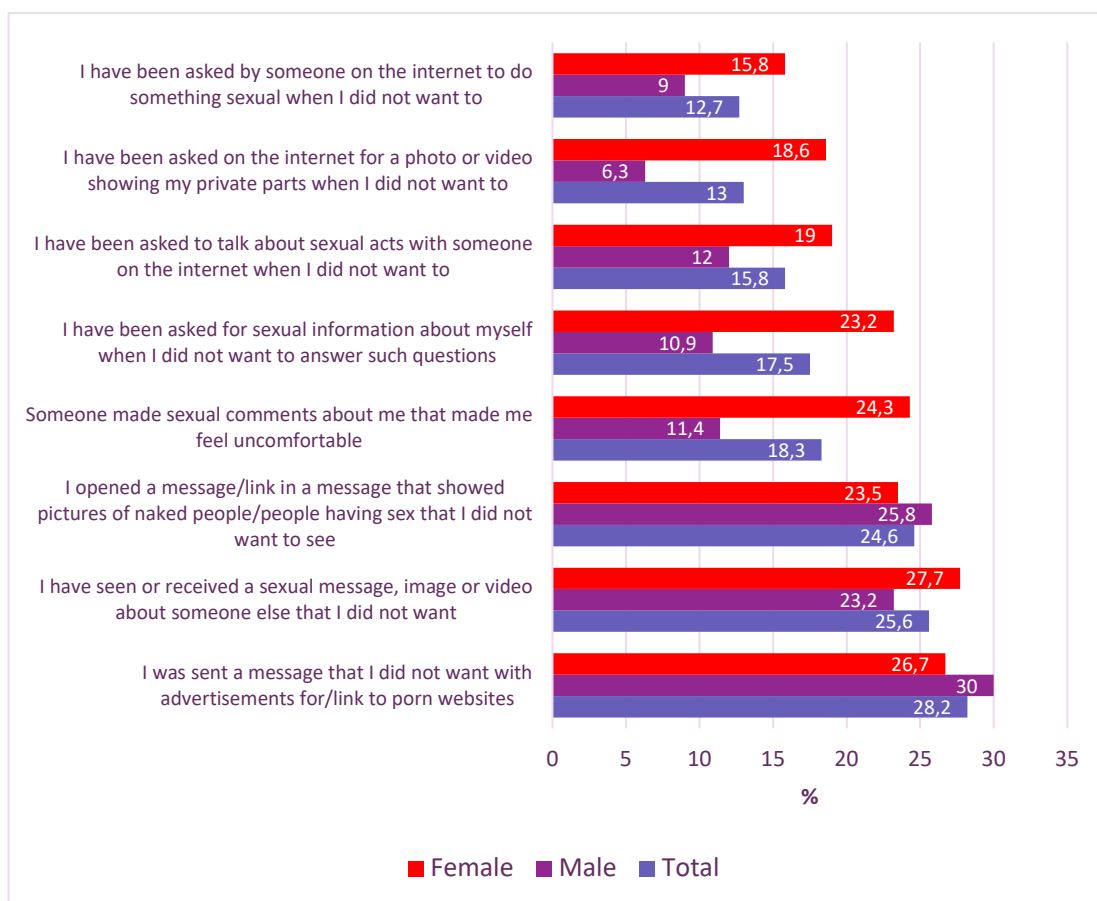


Online sexual content, conduct and contact risks faced by children in Zambia

Children may encounter sexual content online or have contact with others of a sexual nature, both through their own agency (such as when they have actively sought out such content or contact) or inadvertently and against their will. As children grow through puberty into adolescence, there is often an increasing curiosity about sex, and this can lead to children both actively looking for sexual content online or, when they enter into relationships or even outside of formal romantic relationships, they can start to engage in varying forms of sexual exploration with their partner.

Almost three in ten children (28.2%) reported that they had been sent messages that they did not want to receive with links or advertisements for porn websites. This experience was slightly more common for boys (30%) than girls (26.7%). One quarter of children had seen or received a sexual message, image or video online about someone else that they did not want to see, with girls (27.7%) being more likely to receive these messages than boys (23.2%), while a similar percentage (24.6%) of children had opened a message or a link to a site or message that showed naked people when they did not want to see the image.

Figure 36: Unwanted sexual contact risks experienced by children (n = 988)



When asked about more direct solicitations received for sexual information, images or videos about themselves, a more marked distinction between the experiences of girls and boys emerged.

In total, 23.2% of girls, compared with 11.4% of boys, reported they had received sexual comments about their appearance that made them feel uncomfortable, while a similar percentage of girls (23.2%), compared with one in ten boys (10.9%), had been asked for sexual information about themselves when they did not want to be asked about this. This trend continues across different types of unwanted sexual interaction, with statistically significantly more girls than boys reporting being asked to talk about sexual acts with someone, being asked for photos or videos of their genitals or private parts, or being asked to do something sexual online when they did not want to (the figures being 19%, 18.6% and 15% respectively, compared with 12%, 6.3% and 9% of the boys respectively).

This data suggests that boys may be slightly more (or as likely as) girls to be exposed to non-contact sexual risks, such as exposure to unwanted sexual imagery, while girls are significantly more likely to be exposed to much more targeted, potentially contact-driven sexual risks online.

When encountering unwanted sexual solicitations online, children do not generally respond as requested, with the majority of children who are asked for sexual information, videos or images, or asked to engage in sexual acts online when they do not want to, choosing not to comply. This suggests a degree of knowledge and awareness as to what is appropriate and that children have a generally strong sense of agency and resilience, leading them to rebuff such requests.

Figure 37: How children respond to requests for sexual information (36a), conversations (36b), images (36c) or acts online (36d) (n = 988)

Fig 36a. I have sent sexual information about myself when I did not want to

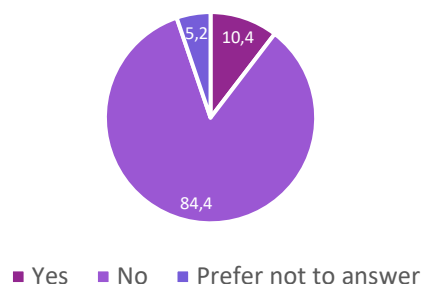


Fig 36b. I have talked about sexual acts with someone online when I did not want to

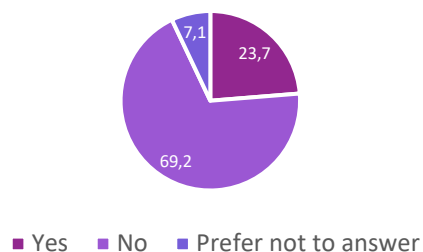


Fig 36d. I have done something sexual on the internet when I did not want to

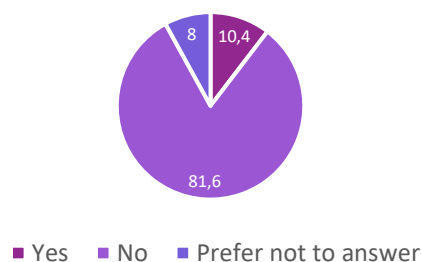
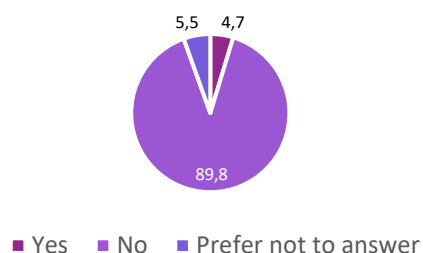


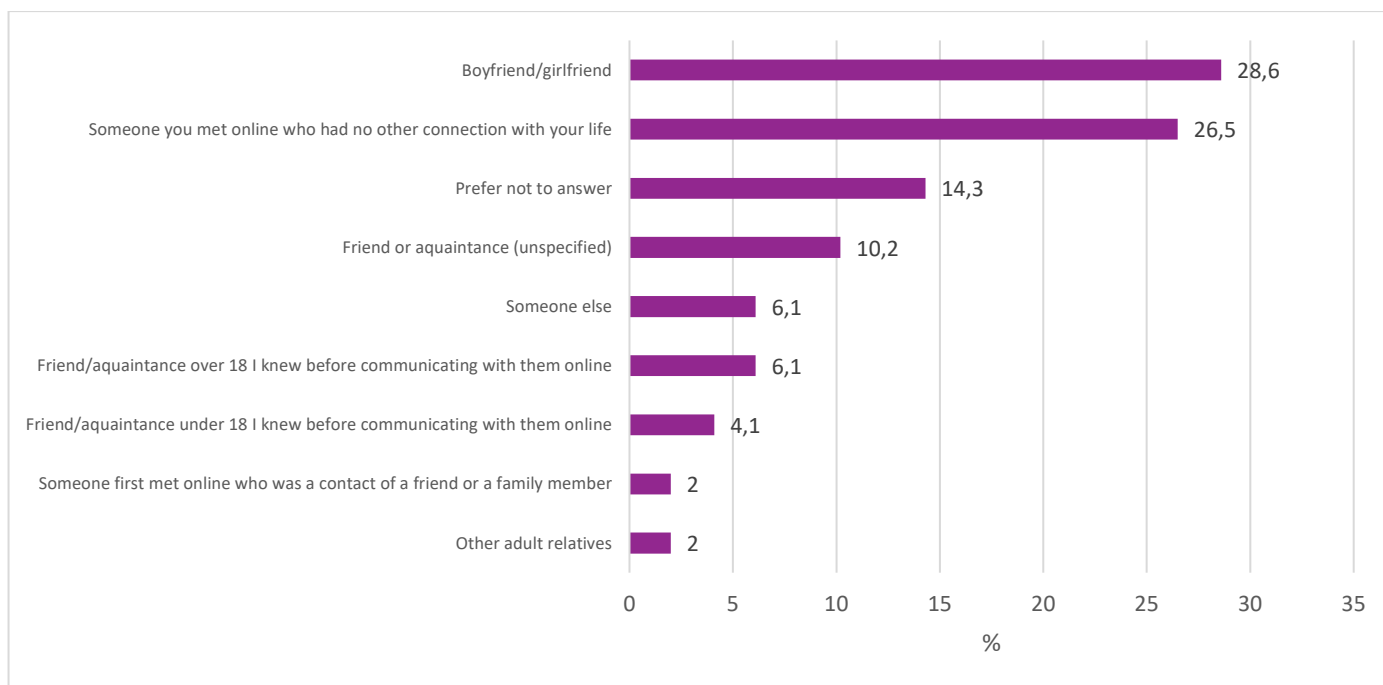
Fig 36c. I have sent someone a photo or video showing my private parts when I did not want to



While children generally responded by rebuffing unwanted requests for sexual information, one tenth of children (10.4%) still did something sexual online or sent sexual information about themselves (10.4%) when they did not want to, while almost one quarter (23.7%) talked about sexual acts when they did not want to do so.

Children who had experienced unwanted sexual contact online were asked who was responsible for this contact. As the figure below shows, much of the unwanted attention came from romantic boyfriends or girlfriends who were placing pressure on their partner to share or engage in sexual activity when they did not want to do so. A little over one in four of the children (26.46%) reported that the unwanted sexual engagement came from someone they had met online who they had no other prior connection with, while another 14.3% preferred not to say who the other person involved was.

Figure 38: Who was responsible for the unwanted sexual contact when it occurred? (n = 149)



This profile of who was responsible for this unwanted sexual contact is important for several reasons. First, it highlights the fact that many of the dangers and risks that children face online, including sexual risks, come from people who are known to the victim rather than from a stranger. In total (excluding both the category of ‘someone else not listed in these options’ and those who preferred not to answer), more than half of the children reported that the threat came from someone who was known to them either directly or indirectly. Secondly, it provides an indication of where different prevention and response interventions are required, as well as the relationship between online and offline prevention, the link between broader sexual and reproductive health, and gender violence initiatives and those focusing on online protection.

However, in discussing unwanted contact – both sexual and non-sexual contact – in the FGDs, many of the children pointed to those outside of the country as responsible, reporting that they were often contacted by people they did not know from outside of the country, including people from India and from the Middle East. In one instance, when asked how they knew where the person was, the group reported that they knew from video-chatting with the person.

Not only do children who have received unwanted sexual contact clearly require targeted support and interventions, but the fact that any children are being placed in a position where they are engaging in any form of sexual activity online against their will, or where it may be age inappropriate, suggests the need for measures from both content providers and internet operators, as well as from parents and caregivers, and schools. These measures need to range from education and capacity building through to the provision and promotion of reporting and blocking mechanisms and psychosocial support services for children who may be placed in these situations.

Help Seeking: Having access to support – both formal and informal – is critical in situations where a child might be or feel coerced into engaging in any sexual activity online, regardless of age or gender. *Support* entails both a supply and demand aspect – services and support need to be available and the child needs to know where and who to speak to and feel safe when doing so. Of the children who had been asked to engage in some form of sexual content sharing online, a minority had spoken to someone about their experience. In total, just under half (47%) of the children did not tell anyone about their experience, while 27% spoke to a friend or acquaintance about the experience. Another 15% preferred not to answer who they had spoken to, while 6% spoke to their older sister

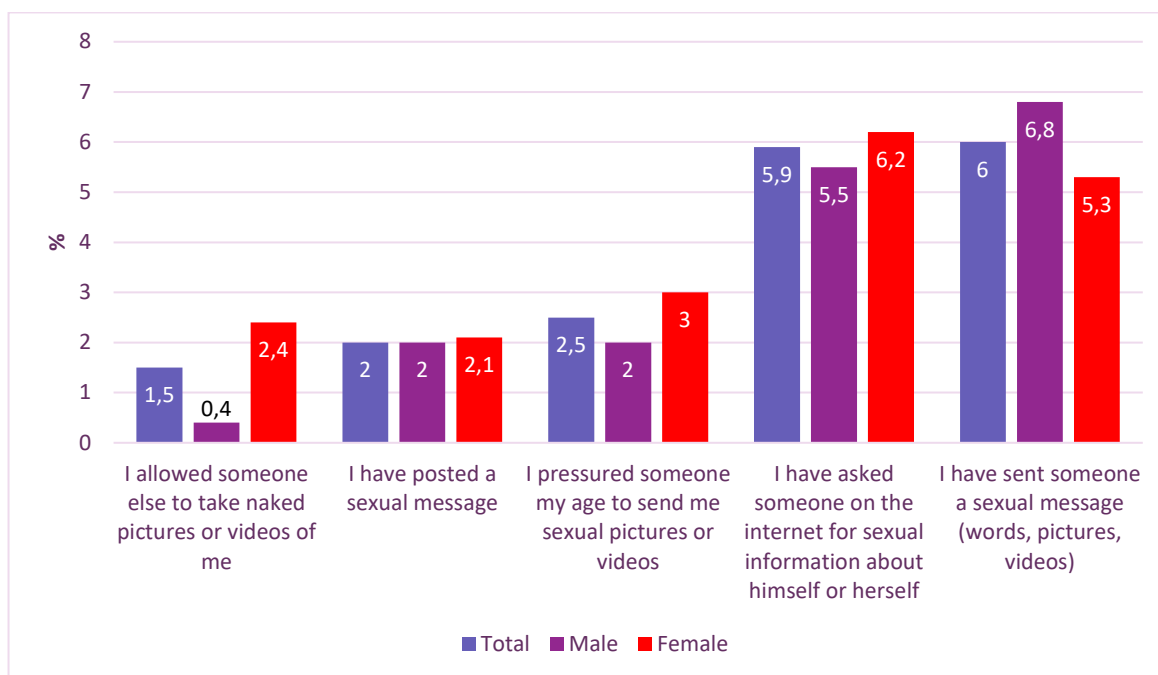
This profile of unwanted sexual contact online highlights the fact that many of the dangers and risks children face online, including sexual risks, come from people who are known to the victim rather than from a stranger.

Children often engage in sexual activities, both within the context of relationships with romantic partners and peers, both consensually and at times when their partner is exerting an influence and unwanted attention on them. This is clearly evident in the above discussion, where romantic boyfriends or girlfriends are the most common source of unwanted sexual requests being made to their partners.

Children were asked whether they had ever willingly engaged in sexual activities online, including whether they had ever asked others for sexual content. It is important that a distinction is made between children's own sense of agency to engage in consensual sexual conduct online, according to their own evolving capacities, and non-consensual or age-inappropriate sexual activity, as discussed above.

While often reluctant to disclose their own consensual sexual activity for fear of disapproval or repercussions, some of the children interviewed in Zambia did share their own involvement in online sexual activity. In total 6% of the children reported that they sent someone a sexual image in a message, with a slightly higher percentage of the boys (6.8%), rather than the girls (5.3%), reporting this, while a similar percentage of children reported they had asked someone else for sexual information, images or videos of themselves online. Those children who sent their own sexual images or messages tended to be the same children who had asked others for sexual information about themselves, reflecting a general greater engagement in online sexual activity amongst this core group. Just 2.5% of the children reported that they had pressured someone else to send them a sexual message or image.

Figure 39: Children who actively engaged in online sexual activity (n = 988)



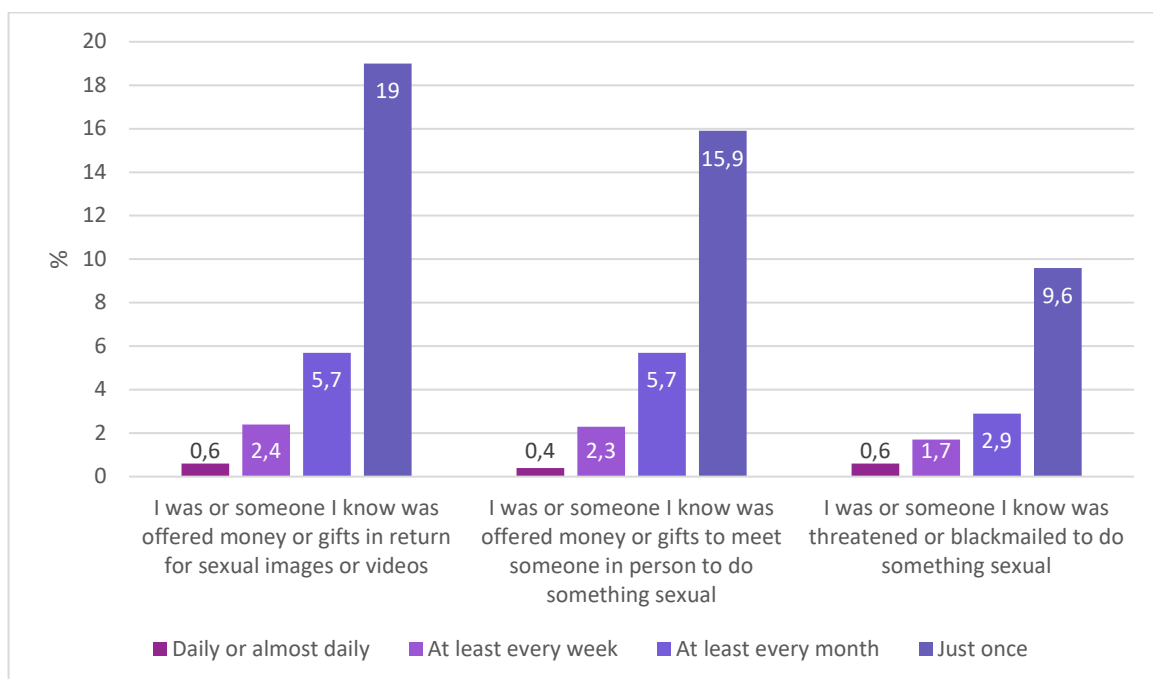
Online sexual exploitation and abuse

Children were asked about various forms of commercial online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA). Almost one in five (19%) children reported that at some point they, or someone they know, had been offered money or gifts in exchange for sexual images or video, with another one in seven children reporting that this had happened repeatedly, at least monthly (5.7%), weekly (2.4%) or almost daily (0.6%). A similar proportion of children reported that either they or someone they knew had been solicited online for an offline meeting in order to engage in sexual activity. In total, almost one quarter of the children reported that this had happened at least once, with 15.9% reporting this had happened just once, and another 5.7% reporting that this had happened at least monthly. One in ten children reported that they, or someone they know, had been blackmailed once, while in total, another one in ten reported that this had happened monthly (2.9%), weekly (1.7%) or daily (0.6%).

These acts constitute some of the most serious forms of online child sexual abuse (CSA) and may often escalate into some of the most harmful outcomes for children. While these numbers are small in comparison with other forms of risks that children encounter online, they relate to the risks that are most likely to result in harm including the most extreme forms of harm for children, which include trafficking and violent sexual abuse. This pattern also fits with earlier evidence from the Global North which shows that while these forms of abuse and exploitation are in reality the most uncommon and faced by a very small number of cases and translating into real risks in a very small number of cases, they are ones that are most likely to result in physical harm for children.²⁴

²⁴ Finkelhor et al., 2011

Figure 40: Children who reported some form of commercial online sexual exploitation (n = 988)



Children's experiences of cyberbullying

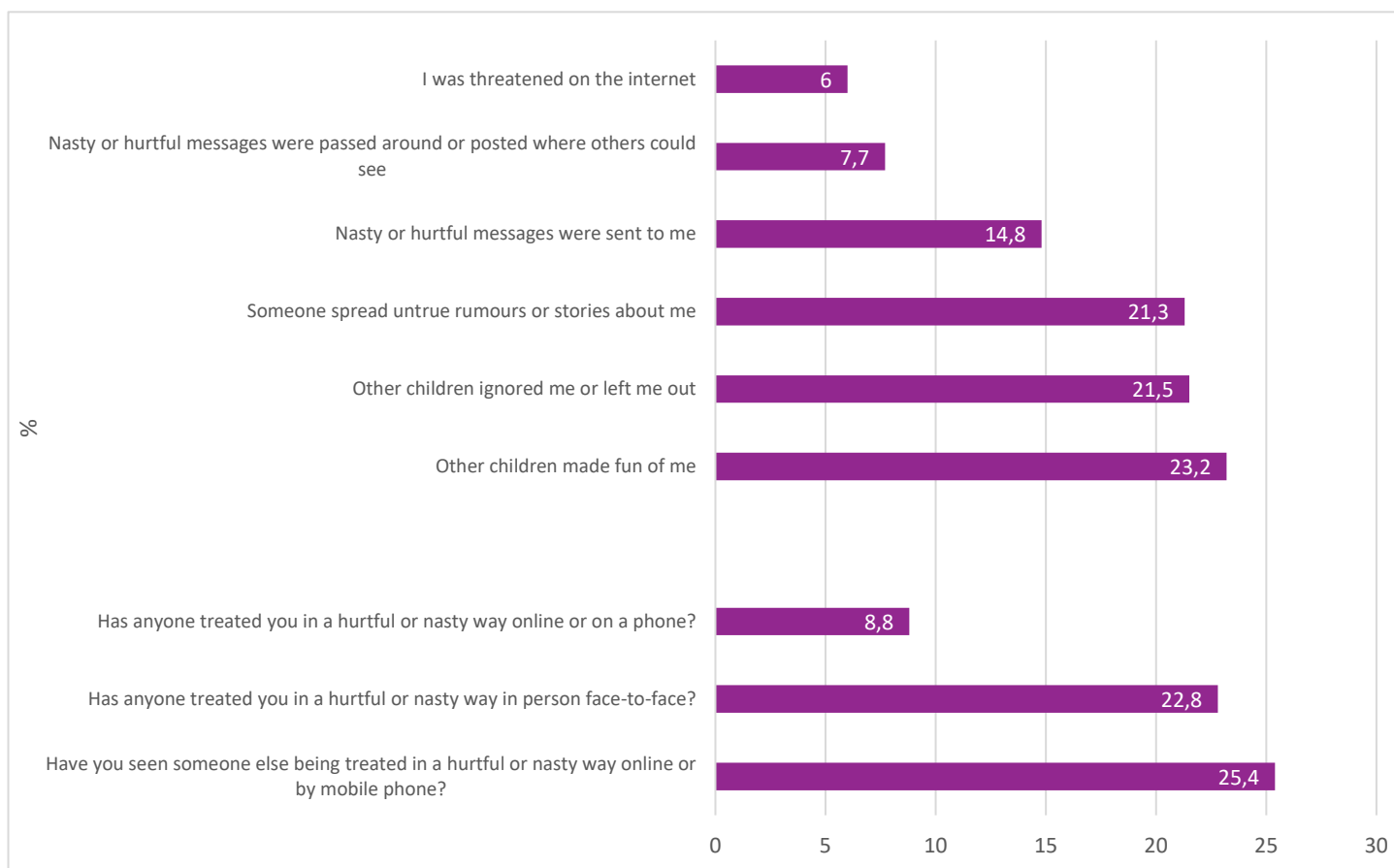
As children's lives have moved online over the past decade, so have many of the forms of violence that children have traditionally been faced with elsewhere. Cyberbullying can take many forms, ranging from targeted and ongoing harassment through to more isolated incidents of abuse or persecution, teasing or exclusion. These incidents, whether isolated or ongoing, can influence a child's experience online, and their well-being and mental health. Like conventional forms of bullying, cyberbullying can result in poorer educational outcomes, social isolation, depression and other undesirable outcomes that negatively impact on a child's health and well-being.

In total, almost one quarter (23.2%) of children included in the study reported that other children had made fun of them online over the past year, with there being little difference between the experiences of boys and girls. A little over one in five (21.5%) of children reported that over the past year other children had excluded them online, with more girls (23.5% of all girls) reporting having experienced this when compared with boys (19.3% of all boys). A similar percentage reported that others had spread untrue rumours or stories about them online, with more girls (23.5% of all girls) reporting this than boys (18.6% of all boys). In total, 14.7% of children reported that others had sent them hurtful or mean messages via their phone over the past year.

With the exception of being threatened online, more younger children (between the ages of 9 and 11) reported experiencing different forms of cyberbullying. In total, 22.8% of 9- to 11-year-olds (compared with 21.3% and 21.1% of children aged 12 to 15 and 16 to 17 respectively) reported being ignored or excluded, while one quarter (24.7%) of younger children reported being made fun of by other children (compared with this happening to 22.1% of the children aged 12 to 15, and aged 16 to 17). Conversely, more children between the ages of 16 and 17 (10.6%) reported being threatened online when compared with the children aged between 12 and 15 (with 3.3% reporting this), while none of the younger children reported being threatened online; older children also reported the most instances of having untrue stories or rumours spread about them (25.5% of all 16 to 17 year olds) when compared with children aged 12 to 15 (20.3% of 12 to 15 year olds) or those aged 9 to 11 (12.3% of children 9 to 11).

Yet, despite this experience, in total, less than one tenth of children (8.8%) considered that they had been treated in a hurtful way via their phone in the past year, significantly fewer than those who reported that they had been treated hurtfully in person (22.8%). This follows international trends where cyberbullying, as much as it is present in children's lives, still largely remains less common than other forms of bullying faced by children.²⁵

Figure 41: Experiences of cyberbullying over the past year (n = 988)

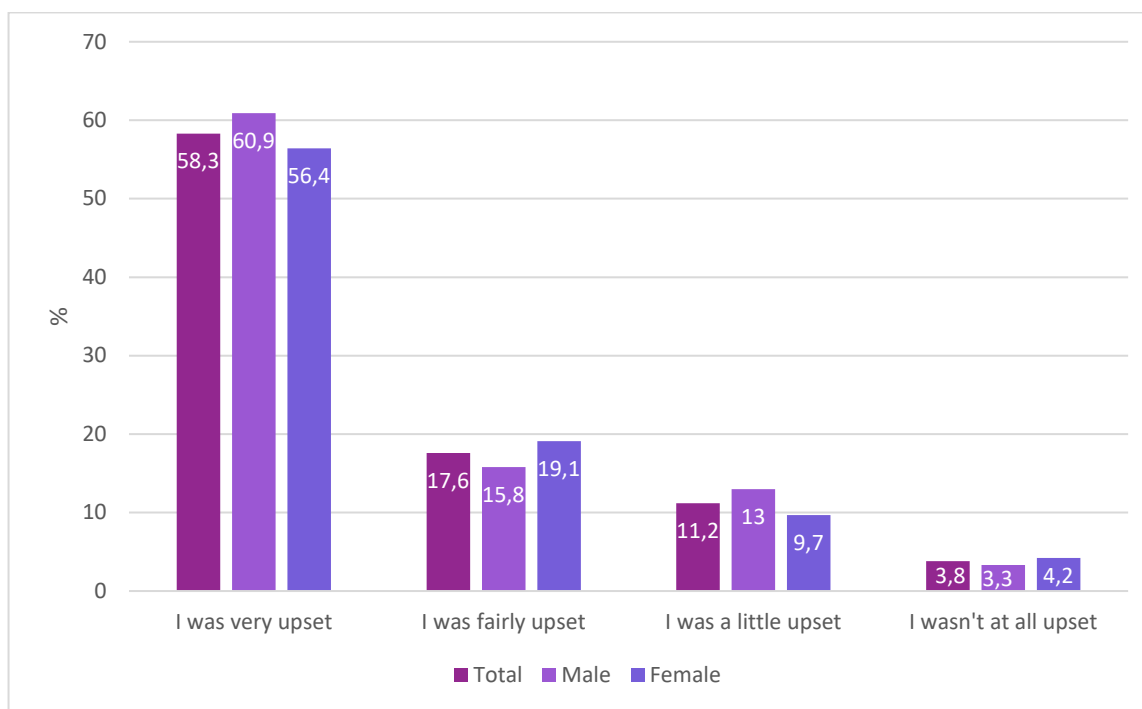


These experiences, when they occurred, tended to have a profound impact on the children, with almost three in five of the children (58.3%) reporting that they were very upset the last time this happened (with boys being fractionally more likely to report being very upset than girls) and another 17.6% reporting that they were fairly upset. While cyberbullying and the impact it has on children may often be considered relatively unimportant by many working with children (such as teachers and educators), particularly in relation to other forms of online risks that are perceived as more severe or more likely to result in harm, it is important to note that the experiences and impact of cyberbullying are strongly correlated with other forms of bullying and with other forms of violence that children may experience (and which may escalate into other forms of violence).²⁶ As such, it warrants specific intervention and attention.

²⁵ UNSRSG, 2016

²⁶ UNSRSG, 2016

Figure 42: How the last experience of cyberbullying impacted on children (n = 420)



Where the children had witnessed others being bullied online over the past year, this had tended to happen just occasionally, with almost one in two (48.2%) of children reporting that they had viewed someone being bullied online just once or twice, with almost another quarter (24.3%) reporting that it occurred at least every month and with one in five reporting that it occurred frequently (at least every week). Fewer than one in ten (7.6%) of the children reported that they had witnessed this daily or almost daily.

Children most commonly reported that the incidents of bullying that they witnessed online were primarily a result of how the victim looked or behaved (28.7%), followed by incidents resulting from their opinions or beliefs (13.5%) and where their family is from (11.2%). Other reasons included the victim (or their family) not having enough money (4.4%), the victim's height or weight (4%), a disability the victim had (3.2%) or the victim's skin colour or sexual orientation (2.8%).

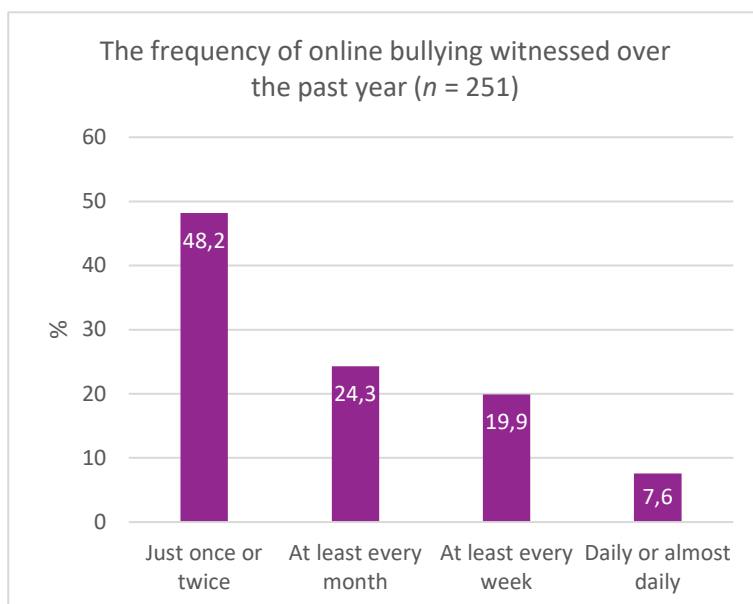
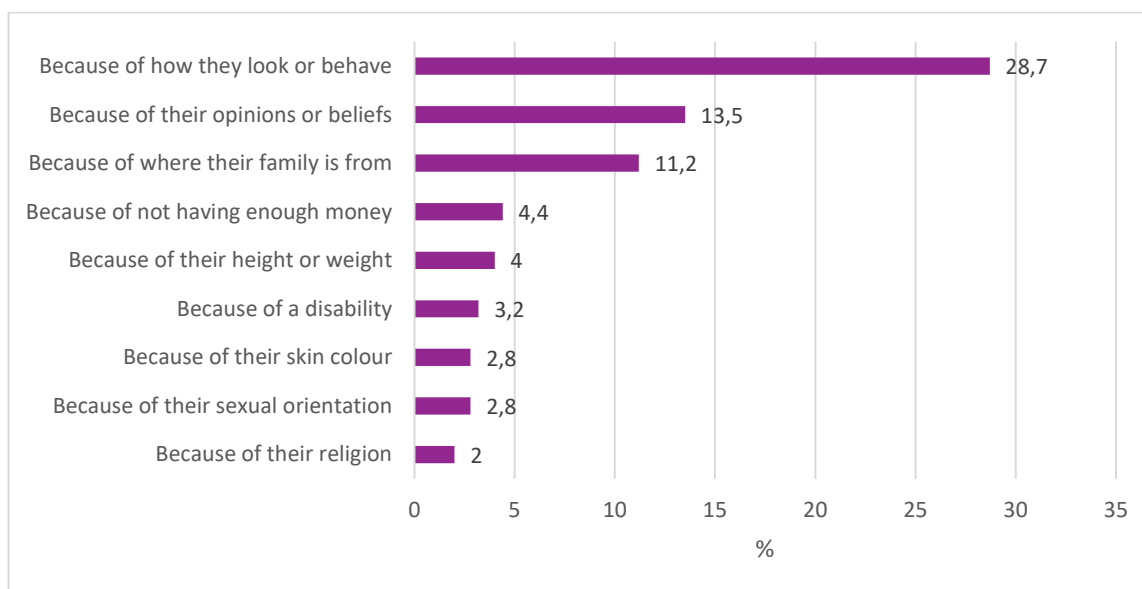




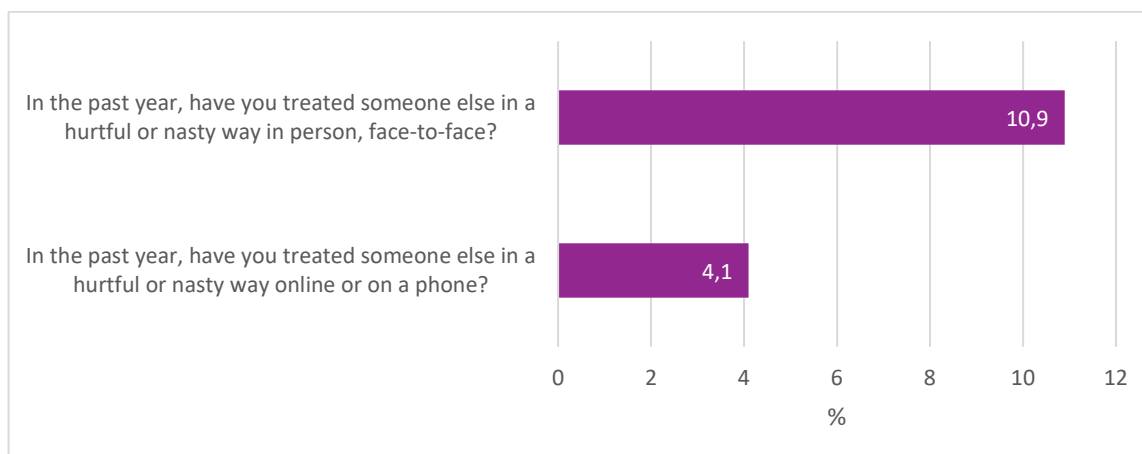
Figure 43: Reasons provided for the incidents of bullying witnessed online over the past year (n = 251)



Both victimisation via cyberbullying and engaging in cyberbullying behaviour follow the same pattern, with one in ten children (10.9%) reporting that they had treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way face to face in the past year, compared with 4.1% of children who reported they had treated someone nastily online in the same period.

The children were progressively more likely to bully others, both face to face and online, as they got older, with 7.1% of the children between the ages of 16 and 17 reporting they had treated someone in a nasty way online (compared with 2.6% of those between 12 and 15 and no children aged 9 to 11 doing this) and 13.1% of the older children reporting they had bullied someone face to face (compared with 10% of the children aged 12 to 15 and 7.4% of the children aged 9 to 11.) Girls were also slightly more likely to report that they had bullied someone both online or offline when compared with boys (4.7% of girls bullied someone online, compared with 3.5% of boys, and 11.9% of girls bullied someone offline, compared with 9.8% of boys).

Figure 44: Children who had bullied others face to face and online over the past year (n = 988)





Chapter Four: Mediation of Children's Online Experiences

Parents have a critical role to play in shaping children's online experiences and activities, as well as in shaping their capacity to stay safe online. Like all aspects of parenting, much of the way in which parents engage with children about technology and the internet depends on the communication between the parents and children, and on active engagement, that is informed by the evolving capacities of children. Parents or caregivers may engage with the child in different ways, ranging from more restrictive practices that primarily limit the time and things that children can do online through to more active supportive engagement that promotes their child's use of the internet and fosters greater skills and literacy. Similarly, schools, simply by virtue of their core mandate as institutions of education and care, and through the amount of time that children spend at school, are vital in equipping children with the digital and technological skills required to stay safe, maximising the opportunities that exist for children online and simply equipping them with the requisite skills to succeed. This chapter explores the children's perceptions of their parents and schools' involvement in their digital lives.

Parents mediation of children's digital lives

How parents engage with their child may be shaped by many factors, including the parents' levels of digital literacy and confidence and how they personally perceive the internet. In turn, this may be shaped by the parents' experiences, by more public discourse and narratives or it may simply be shaped by their own prioritisation of the internet and digital technology in their lives. 'Digital parenting' was previously thought of as either active or passive, where *active parenting* focused on educating, discussing, promoting and supporting both technical skills development and social and self-management skills development, while *passive parenting* tended to be more restrictive, limiting time online, monitoring use, restricting access and co-using the internet. In general, the review of the evidence shows that more restrictive styles of digital parenting tend to protect children more from potential risks, particularly at younger ages, but that they limit the development of the children's technical skills and the opportunities that children are able to realise. Restrictive parenting also limits the development of the skills required to successfully navigate online risks successfully.

More active styles of digital parenting tend to lead to the greater development of digital literacy and online skills by children, allowing them to realise more of the benefits and opportunities that exist for children online, but they also result in children being exposed to more risks online (albeit, with greater levels of skills and capacities to successfully navigate those risks). Livingstone et al. have recently pointed to a more nuanced model of digital parenting in which parents often move from an approach that either embraces technology and the internet or resists it, often following the same practices as those listed above. These styles are not absolute, parents tend to move from one to the other depending on different factors at any point in time, often settling on a balance between the two styles.²⁷

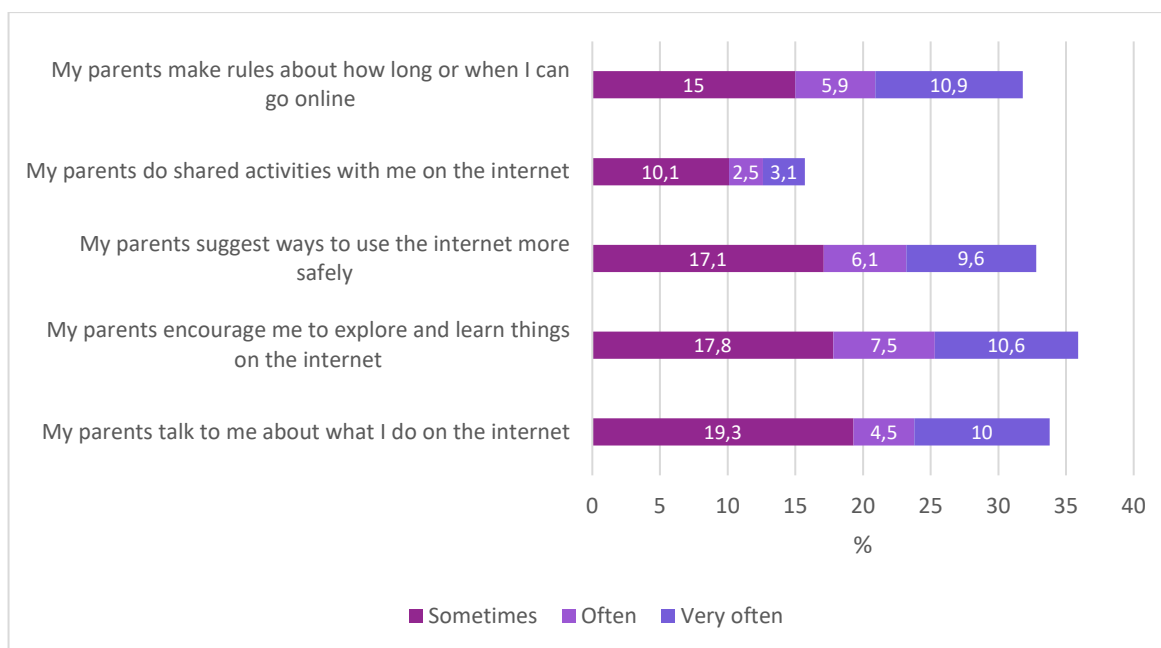
Children in Zambia who participated in the study were asked about how they perceived their parents' or caregivers' engagement with them in regard to their digital activities and device usage. The majority of the children reported little or no engagement by their parents or caregivers related to their online activities. Approximately one in three children reported a form of positive and active engagement with them, discussing what they did online and encouraging them to use the internet and explore online. A similar proportion of children reported that their parents spoke to them about how to stay safe online, with just one in ten reporting that their parents did this very often.

Almost one in five children (19.7%) reported that their parents sometimes spoke to them about what they did on the internet, with another 4.5% reporting that their parents often spoke to them about their online activities and 10%

²⁷ Livingstone, S. and Blum-Ross, A. (2020). Parenting for a Digital Future: How Shapes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives. Oxford University Press: Oxford. DOI:10.1093/oso/9780190874698.001.0001

reporting that they did so very often. In total, 17.8% reported that their parents sometimes encouraged them to explore and learn new things on the internet, with another one in ten reporting that their parents very often encouraged them in this way.

Figure 45: Parents' engagement with children on their internet use (n = 988)



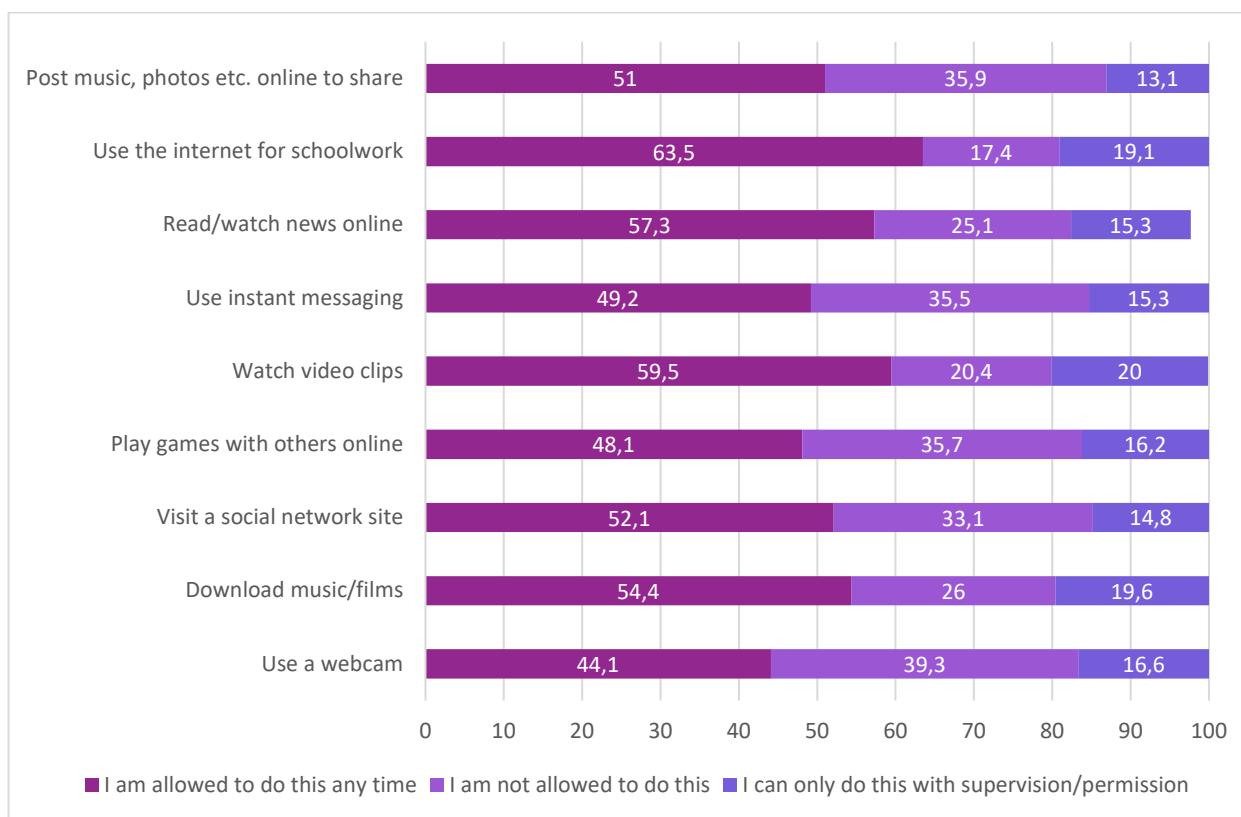
The parents of the children interviewed in Zambia were perceived by their children to set specific restrictions on some of the activities that the children can do online. One in five of the children reported that they need their parents' permission to watch online video clips (such as watching clips on YouTube) (20%), download music or videos (19.6%), use the internet for schoolwork (19.1%), use a webcam (16.6%), read or watch news online, or use instant messaging (both 15.3%) and to visit a social networking site (14.8%).

However, children also frequently reported that their parents simply never allow them to do any of these things online. Two in five children were never allowed to use a webcam, 35.9% were never allowed to post content online, 35.5% were never allowed to use instant messaging and 35.7% were never allowed to play games with others online. A little less than one in five of the children (17.4%) were never allowed to use the internet for schoolwork.

This data points to the parents' largely restrictive approach to their children's internet use across a broad range of activities. Yet, given the large proportion of children who report using social media sites, chatting to friends online and using the internet for schoolwork, the reality of children's lives suggests that, despite some of these restrictive practices and boundaries established by parents or caregivers, many of the children are still finding ways to go online and engage in many of the activities in which their friends, peers and other children their age are engaged. It further reiterates the finding above that the parents were generally unlikely to actively engage in supporting their children online or to support them in staying safe through speaking to them about how to stay safe, how to identify risks and how to act when encountering risks, given that they are likely to think that their children are not doing the things online that they are in fact doing.



Figure 46: Limitations set by parents on online activities (n = 988)



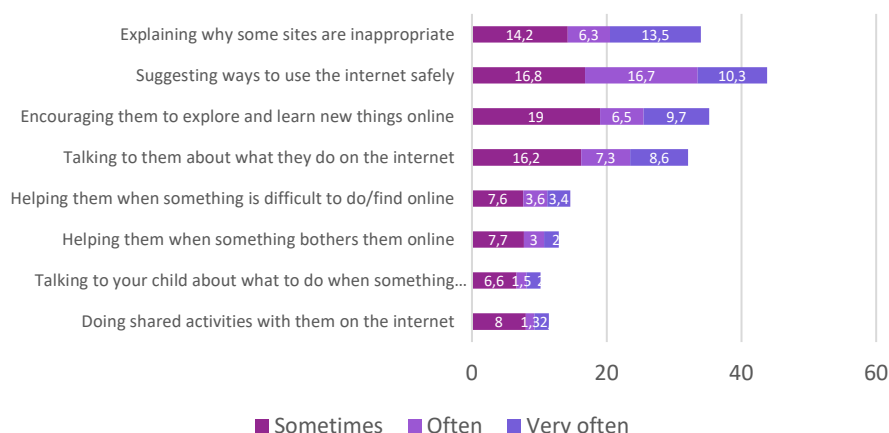
Despite these largely restrictive parenting practices, only a small proportion of the children reported that their parents utilised parental controls to monitor or restrict their online activities. Parental controls are distinct from parental monitoring, although they are one tool that may be used in parents monitoring of their children's internet use. *Parental controls* refer specifically to software that may be installed on children's phones, computers or any smart-enabled technology (such as televisions or satellite decoders) in order to restrict what children can view, what sites they can visit or what apps they can download. Parental controls also include software apps that may be used to track a child's location. While offering some benefits, particularly for younger children, parental controls have been shown to be largely ineffective for older children who are adept at finding ways around these measures, making them both redundant and often creating a false sense of security for parents. A reliance on parental controls (as well as monitoring) may also prevent or restrict the development of the appropriate skills required to both navigate online risks successfully and develop resilience to online risks.



Parents' views on how they mediate and support their children online

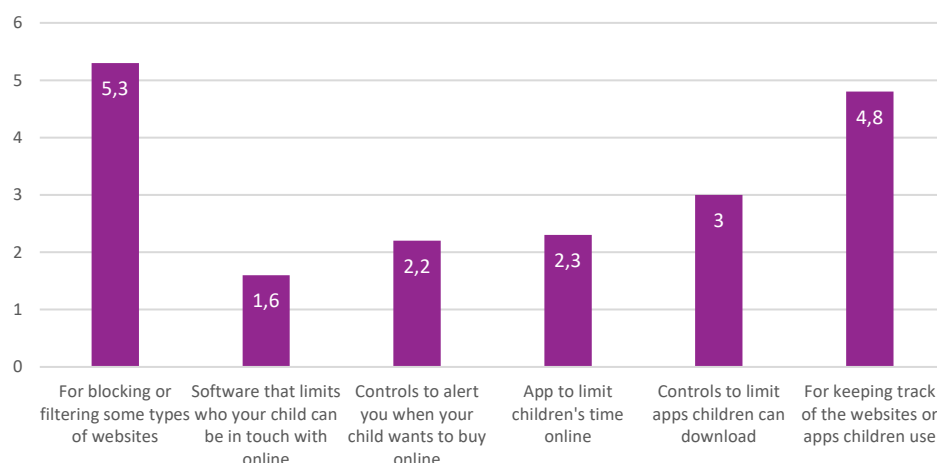
When the parents were asked about how they engaged with their children, their responses were broadly consistent with those of their children, although the frequency of the conversations or mediation varied somewhat. In total, a little more than one third of the parents reported that they encouraged their children to learn new things online and talked to them about what they did online, although a larger number of the parents reported that they had spoken to their children about how to stay safe online when compared with the number of children who reported that their parents did this, suggesting either an over-estimation on the part of the parents or caregivers, or under-reporting (or simply forgetting) by the children.

Parents' reports of their active engagement with their children about their online activities (n=999)



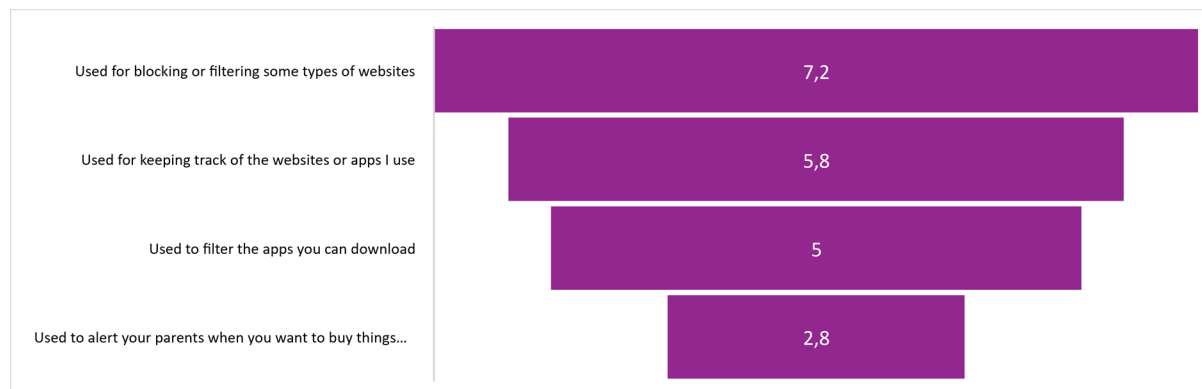
While generally consistent, the children slightly over-estimated the apps and parental controls that parents used to keep track of their children's online activities. Just 5.3% of the parents or caregivers reported using content filtering or blocking software, and 4.8% reported using apps or software to keep track of the websites or apps their children use.

Parents'/caregivers' reports of the use of parental controls (n=999)



Children reported that less than one in ten of their parents used a form of parental control. Just 7.2% of the children reported that parents used filtering software to control what sites they visited, 5.8% reported their parents used software to keep track of apps or websites visited and 5% reported their parents used software to filter the apps that children could download (see Figure 46 below).

Figure 47: Parents' use of parental controls (n = 999)

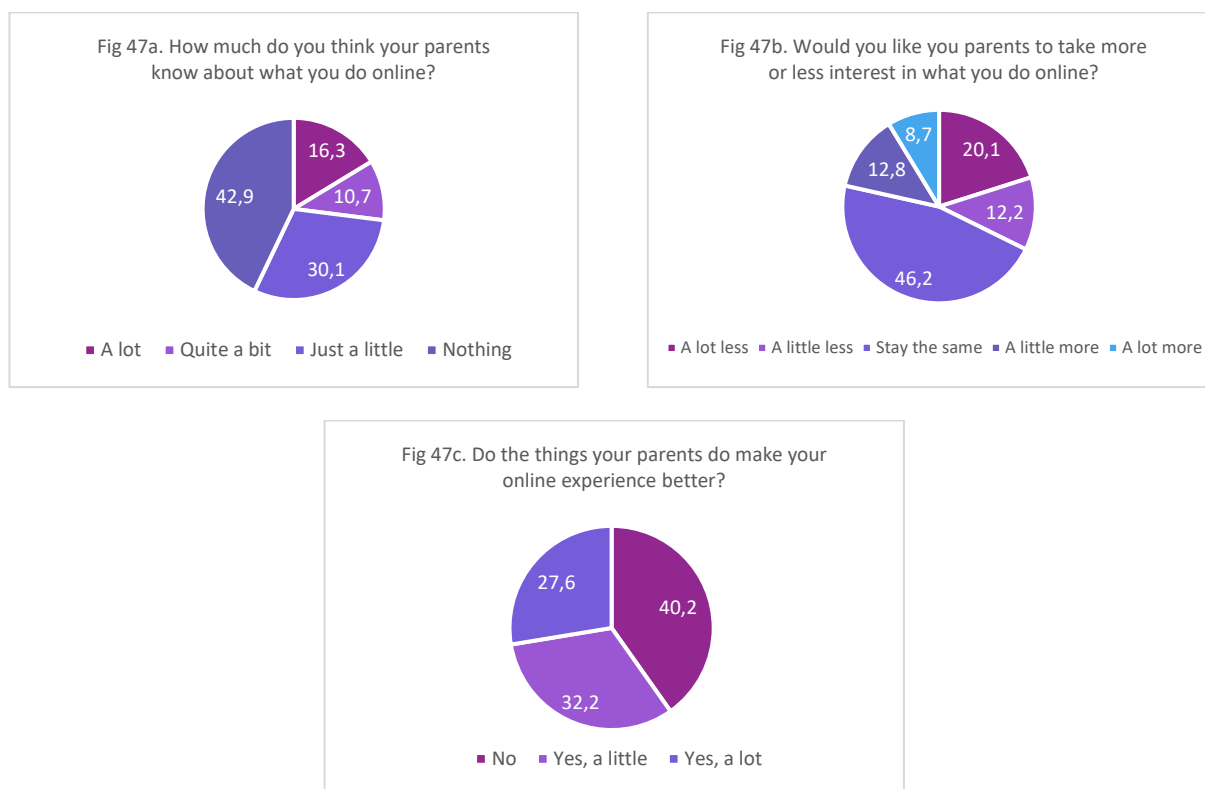


This dichotomy between the restrictions that parents set and what they actually do online is further apparent when the children were asked about how much they think their parents or caregivers actually know about what they do online. Less than one in eight of the children (16.3%) thought that their parent knew a lot of what they do, and one in ten thought they knew a little, while a total of three quarters of the children thought that their parents either knew nothing of what they do (42.9%) or knew just a little (30.1%). Most of the children were happy with this scenario with almost half (46.2%) reporting they would like the amount their parents know about what they do online to stay the same and another fifth (20.1%) wishing that their parents knew a lot less. However, it is notable that almost one in five of the children wished their parents knew a little more about their online activities (12.8% children) or a lot more about them (8.7% of children).

Despite the somewhat limited involvement in the children's online lives by their parents, one third (32.2%) of the children thought that the things their parents do related to their online activities make their online experience better, while more than one quarter (27.6%) thought that their parents' involvement made their experiences a lot better.

How much do parents really know? In addition to specific questions that both the parents and children were asked about the parents' or caregivers' knowledge and mediation of the children's internet activities, behaviour and experience, a fundamental discrepancy between the parents' perceptions and children's realities emerged. When screening HHs for inclusion into the study, there were several instances of the parents or caregivers reporting that their child or children did not have access to the internet; yet, when enumerators asked the children themselves, they reported that they did indeed have access. This access might have been at a friend's or neighbour's house, without their parent's knowledge. This reinforces a critical lesson: conversations about internet safety with children are important even when a parent might not think that their child is online and should be had in anticipation of the time when they do go online, with or without their parent's knowledge.

Figure 48: Perceptions of parents' knowledge and support of internet activities (n = 988)

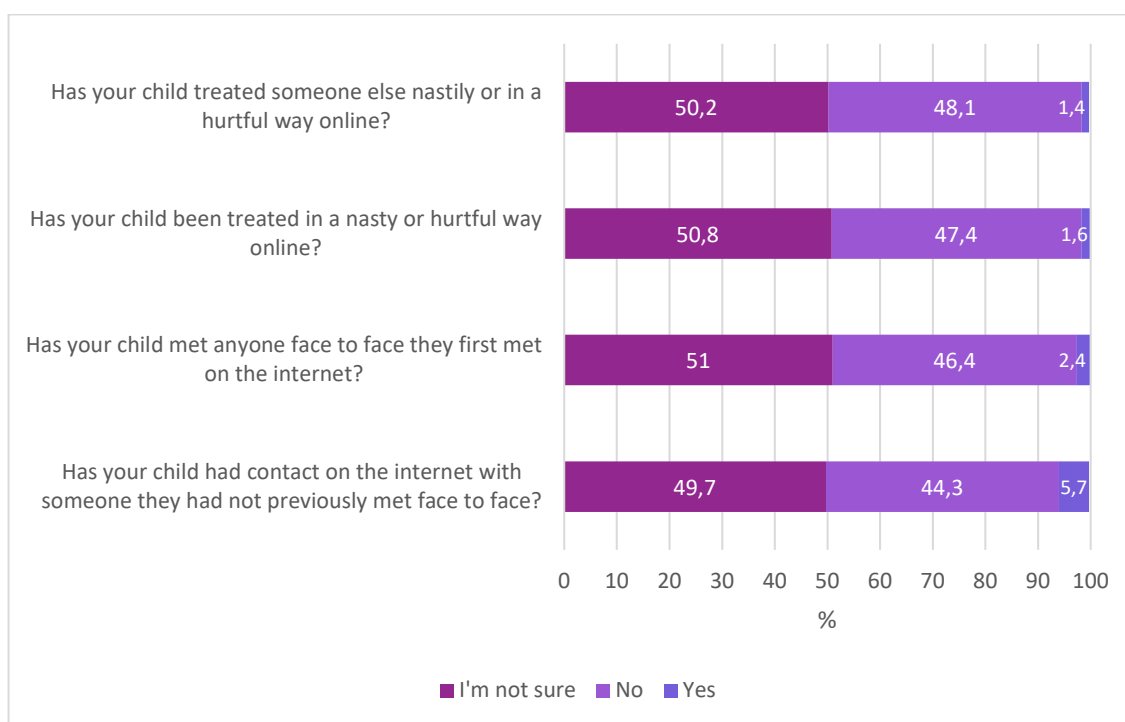


The children in the focus groups also reported mixed actions, if any, on the part of their parents, in monitoring or engaging in their children's times online:



In light of these findings, it is useful to compare the parents' view of their children's online experiences with those reported earlier by the children themselves. While the majority of the parents recognised that they may not know of (or are unsure of) negative experiences that their child may have had over the past year or risky behaviour they may have engaged in, a significant percentage of the parents were firm in their certainty that their child has not encountered these risks. Just five percent or less reported that their child had been treated in a nasty or hurtful way online, or had themselves treated someone else in a hurtful way online. In total 5.7% reported that their child had spoken to someone online that they did not know in person and 2.4% reporting that their child had met someone in person that they first got to know online (compared with 27.9% of the children having actually met someone in person).

Figure 49: Parents' knowledge of their child's adverse online experiences over the past year (n=999)



These findings suggest that there is significant scope to increase and enhance parents' and caregivers' engagement and communication with their children about their experiences online. While the children often fear going to the adults in their lives (particularly their parents and teachers) when they encounter online risks or an adverse experience because they fear that they will be blamed or that they will have their internet access or device taken away from them or restricted, having open communication and a supporting adult network is important in ensuring that children can learn the skills that they need and in ensuring that children have support and referral to services when needed.

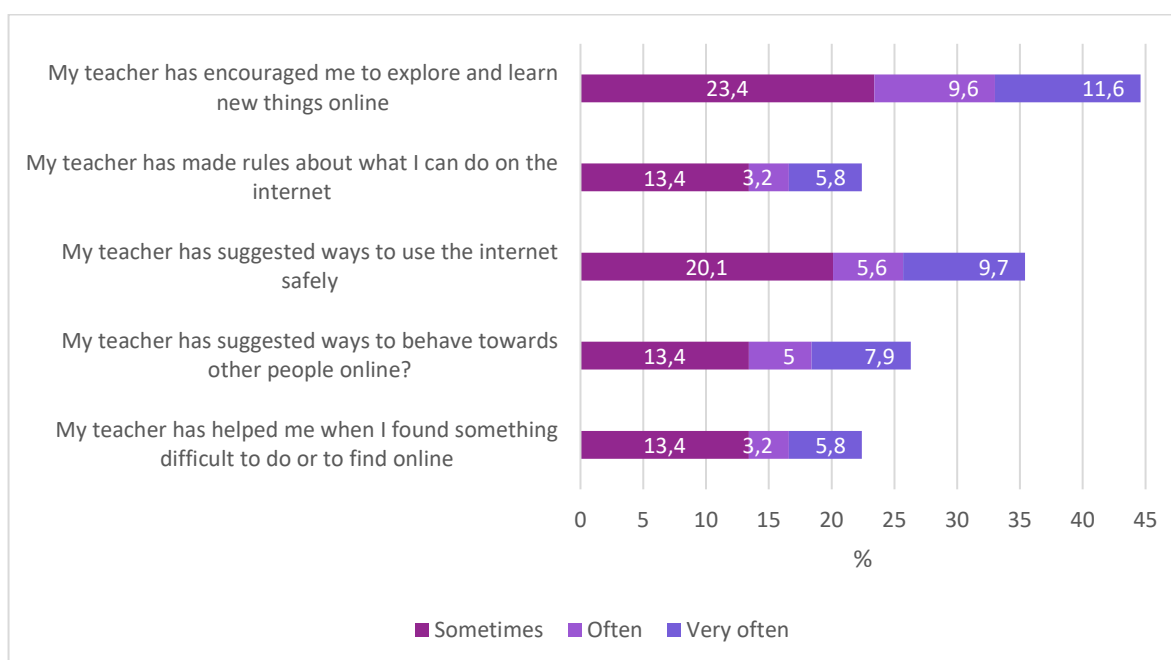
School mediation in children's internet activities

Schools have an important role to play in supporting children in developing the digital skills that they will need to stay safe and in maximising the opportunities that exist online; this is increasingly so as children are expected to utilise technology and the internet for schoolwork and learning. The roles of the school as an institution and of teaching are not just to impart and support digital skills in the classroom through a formal curriculum but also to do so through more informal mechanisms, including being available and supportive to learners when they encounter online risks or

experience harms online, or in the identification of vulnerable children or children at risk of experiencing harm resulting from their online activities.

Yet only a minority of the children in Zambia interviewed reported that their schools played an active and supporting role in their online activities and experiences. Just one quarter (23.4%) of the children reported that their teachers sometimes encouraged and supported them in learning new things online, with approximately another one in ten of the children reporting their teachers did this very often (11.6%) or often (9.6%). One in five of the children reported that their teachers sometimes suggested ways to use the internet safely, with another one in ten reporting that their teachers did this very often and 56% reporting that they do so often. The teachers less frequently spoke about ways to behave to others online (13.4% spoke about this sometimes, 7.9% did so very often and 5% did so often), while a total of 22.4% of the children reported that their teacher *sometimes, often or very often* helped them when they found something difficult to do on the internet or, more restrictively, set rules about what they could or could not do online.

Figure 50: Teachers' support of children in their online activities (n = 988)



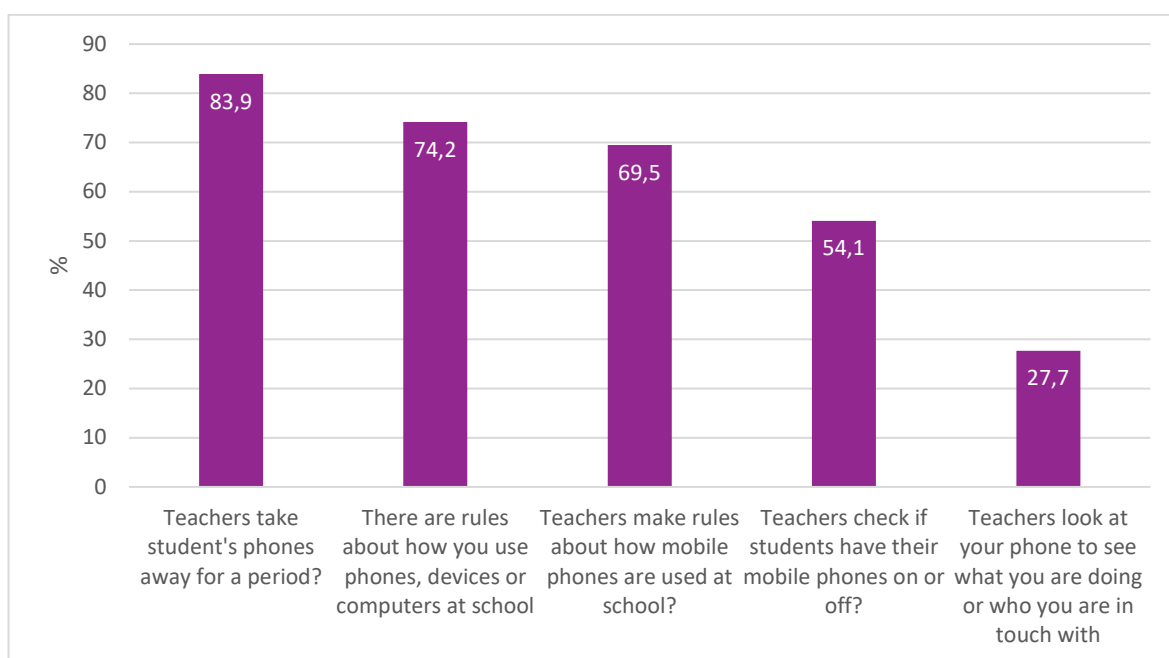
This profile of the somewhat limited support provided by the teachers or educators to the children in regard to what they are doing online may result from a number of factors, including a lack of the trust or approachability that is required to open up opportunities for support, a lack of time or opportunity within the classroom setting to provide formal support or, simply, it may result from the lack of teachers' and educators' digital literacy skills and confidence. As technology is increasingly introduced into school and classroom settings in Zambia, it will become increasingly important to equip teachers with their own digital and online skills – including media literacy – and to provide guidance to teachers on how they can best offer formal and informal support to learners within the classroom setting and outside of the classroom.

Learners were also asked about rule setting and the more restrictive practices that the school or teachers may advocate and practice. Three quarters of the children reported that the school has rules about the use of phones, computers or other devices at school, while three in five reported that their teachers made rules about how phones could or could

not be used within the classroom. More than one in two (54.1%) children reported that their teachers checked that phones were turned off in their class, with more than four out of five (83.9%) children reporting that their teacher would confiscate a phone for a period, presumably if the phone was left on or used in class in violation of the class or school rules.

A little over one quarter of the children (27.7%) reported that their teacher looked at their phone to see who they were talking to or who they are in touch with – a responsibility that arguably lies more with parents and caregivers, if it is appropriate to happen at all (for example, in the case of younger children) (see Figure 52 below).

Figure 51: School and class restrictions and rules on mobile phone and technology use (n = 988)





Conclusion and Recommendations

Across the globe, children are going online at an unprecedented rate. Zambia is no exception to this, with ever more children having access to the internet. This poses a wealth of opportunities and benefits, but also potential risks that may result in harm to the children. Many of these risks are similar to those faced by children in the offline space: risks related to bullying, teasing, exposure to age-inappropriate behaviours and content, and sexual violence and abuse. Many of these risks have taken on new forms or proliferated online. This study has sought to capture the online experiences of children in Zambia, exploring both their access to and use of the internet and digital technology, the benefits and opportunities they are realising online and the risks and harms that they may encounter in their everyday life. It is framed within both the UN GC No 25 of the CRC, which notes that:

States parties should ensure the collection of robust, comprehensive data that is adequately resourced and that data are disaggregated by age, sex, disability, geographical location, ethnic and national origin and socioeconomic background

and the *Zambian Child Online Protection Strategy* (Chapter 5, Obj. 2, p. 20), which calls for:

periodic studies on COP that will among other things include age and gender disaggregated evidence on Zambian children's online activities, risks and opportunities.



While not national in scope, this first ZKO study provides critical insights into how the government of Zambia, civil society partners and the private sector can foster a policy and a legislative and practical environment that is conducive to children's well-being, health and safety online, promoting the opportunities and benefits that the internet offers while keeping children safe online.

The following section provides preliminary recommendations, based on the data emerging from GKO. These are categorised separately for policymakers, educators and schools, parents and caregivers

and, finally, for children themselves. Lastly, a number of suggestions are provided for future research based on the limitations and gaps of this study and where the findings from this study point to the need for further exploration.

Recommendations for policy and legislation

- In the development of policies and legislation that might impact on children's access to digital technology and the internet, and in all aspects of children's lives online, it is important that children in Zambia are themselves given an opportunity to feed into, inform and participate in the policy and legislative process. While not originating from this study, this recommendation is made on the basis of the conceptual framework informing this research and is in line with the UN CRC GC No 25.
- While access to the internet by children in Zambia is undoubtedly increasing, significant barriers to access still remain. These include the cost of data and the lack of reliable Wi-Fi or data coverage. This suggests the need for **an accelerated roll-out of data coverage and internet access, both at homes and schools, as well as a more affordable pricing strategy.** Children, in particular, are more reliant on public Wi-Fi, being provided by schools, public hotspots and other public access points (such as libraries), and focusing on providing reliable, high-speed internet access through these public access points is important in ensuring that all children have access to the internet. However, a coordinated effort beyond this is also required in order to ensure that, once infrastructure is available, support is then provided to children in under-resourced families in regard to accessing this network (provided through the increased provision of internet access through schools and public access points, as well as through access to personal devices, such as tablets, that may be required to facilitate e-learning or the use of the internet for school and other assignments).
- Notwithstanding the existing limits to access, it is important to take as a given the fact that children are likely to be going online through whatever routes are available to them, even when there is limited broadband or Wi-Fi infrastructure or low levels of teledensity in homes, particularly (it is assumed) in rural areas. It is important that specific measures are taken to ensure that those children who may experience specific challenges in accessing the internet are ensured equitable access and priority in the roll-out of digital technology and associated programming. This includes younger children, girls who may experience specific challenges relating to safety or any other barriers to accessing more public forms of Wi-Fi and internet access, and children with disabilities.
- Given the limited access at schools and the increasing move to integrate EdTech into schools (at least at a secondary level), internet and tech access at schools should be enhanced.

BALANCED MESSAGING FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

In messaging campaigns and social mobilisation interventions, it is important that messages do not foster fear of the online space but rather focus on building awareness of the different risks and teaching children and young people how to respond to these, (rather than to avoid them altogether).

Consistent and discrete messages need to be formulated for different age groups. In particular, the younger children we interviewed had a very superficial knowledge of privacy, their data protection and platform safety settings, which suggests the need for very targeted messaging to this age group and to the parents and caregivers of these younger children.

Messaging to parents and caregivers should be similarly targeted, providing evidence-based messaging that caters to the parents of children of different ages and what works for different age groups in terms of protecting them, building their skills and fostering online resilience. These messages to parents can start in the early years of having a child, even being integrated into early childhood development interventions and community parenting or pre- and perinatal services. Examples of content for messaging at this early stage could be focused on what is an appropriate amount of time for children to spend online or what content is appropriate at different ages.



- As many children do not yet have their own devices, or devices solely for their use, their ability to fully develop their skills and literacy is likely to be somewhat limited. This is exacerbated by very limited access to devices other than smartphones, which is further likely to restrict the development of the critical digital and technological skills that children are likely to need. This suggests the need **for a scaled-up strategy to make computers and tablets available in schools**; with these, children can develop technical skills extending beyond mere content consumption.
- While there were limited children with disabilities included in the randomised sample with which this study could draw meaningful conclusions on specific needs or gaps, it will nonetheless **remain important to ensure that specific measures are taken to ensure equitable access to the internet and digital technology for all children living with disabilities**. Rather than working from the assumption that children with disabilities may have less need of technology as a result of their disability, the **assumption should be that digital technology is more important for them** as it may open up a world of opportunities and benefits that would otherwise be denied to them.²⁸ Global evidence has shown that children with disabilities often make even greater use of digital technology in order to engage in everyday activities that might otherwise be denied to them.
- These strategies for increasing access for all children should be accompanied **by increased capacity building and training for educators on their technical skills and digital literacy**, as well as their critical analytical skills, such as their media literacy. The children clearly perceived limitations to the teachers' and educators' digital skills, which then inhibit their own capacity to support learners online. Training for teachers can be done through both formal training curricula within teacher training colleges, but more immediately through in-service training.
- Children in Zambia clearly have access to age-inappropriate material online, not so much in terms of sexual content but content focusing on self-harm, violence and other disturbing content. This includes younger children, although access does increase with age. This suggests the need for tighter legislation on the hosting of age-inappropriate content, beyond sexual content, within Zambia, accompanied by strict remedies where this content is made available to children. This must be done within the framework of the CRC GC No 25, which calls for the balancing of protection from harms, and the protection of

INTEGRATING ONLINE PROTECTION INTO CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

Child protection policies and legislation should integrate COP protection into the same policy. The rationale for this is three-fold:

- There is a growing body of evidence showing that offline risks for children (that exist at individual, family and community levels) translate into online risks. This also indicates that evidence-based interventions addressing risks ordinarily incorporated into child protection initiatives (including early intervention and prevention strategies) yield positive outcomes for online risks.
- The referral pathways for children to access the child protection system and support services are the same for both online and offline abuse. Reporting and recording forms that are used to capture online experiences, from cyber-bullying to grooming, should be integrated into the standard reporting and referral forms used under a standard child protection policy.
- Where separate policies exist, these may be taken by some to suggest to service providers and statutory services and agencies, such as police and psychosocial support services, that one type of abuse is more serious than another. This risks reinforcing any public perceptions amongst adults that online abuse or violence is less harmful than offline

²⁸ See for example, Michael Walsh, Roisin Cormack and Malcolm MacLachlan. (2021). *Digital and Assistive Technology Use in Disability Services during COVID-19: A Report on the Experiences of 120 Service Providers*. "Right to Connect". National Clinical Programme for People with Disability. Health Services Executive. Available online at <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/disability/programme-publications/digital-and-assistive-technology-use-in-disability-services-during-covid19-report.pdf>; and Bulger and Burton, 2020, amongst others.

freedoms and information. One potential approach is to require the adoption of tools such as **Child Rights Impact Assessments** (CRIA) and the **Age-Appropriate Design Code** (AADC), which are currently being implemented in the United Kingdom for all tech products that may be utilised by children.²⁹

- This should be accompanied by **a targeted strategy that aims to raise awareness of formal reporting mechanisms, platform-specific reporting tools and the IWF child sexual abuse material (CSAM) reporting portal**, used for the reporting and removal of any CSAM. However, the primary focus should be on increased awareness of and the utilisation of reporting systems for seemingly ‘less serious’ but disturbing and potentially harmful content, such as that discussed above. Exposure to this content can lead to both offline harm to the child and is often linked to other forms of risks and vulnerabilities.
- Related to this, children in the study showed very little awareness of formal counselling or support services, with few children reporting any use of formal mechanisms when encountering any online risks. This suggests the need for **greater awareness raising regarding services such as those offered by Lifeline/Childline Zambia**, as well as any other psychosocial service providers, specifically drawing attention to the availability of these services to online experiences and the risks and harms that children may encounter. This can be done through both public awareness campaigns and through school-based interventions made in partnership with the Ministry of Education. Ideally, every school should have referral resources that are visible and constantly promoted in classrooms. It is important to ensure that whatever forms the promotion of social mechanisms take, they include targeted measures to promote equitable awareness and access to children with disabilities in a way that is suitable to the different needs of children with different disabilities.
- Notwithstanding the very real barriers and limits to internet access for many children in Zambia, when it comes to online safety and wellbeing of children, it should be assumed that, de facto, children have (rather than do not have) some form of access, however limited, and thus steps should be taken to ensure that initial conversations, lessons and messaging are rolled-out throughout Zambia, targeting children of all ages. This is particularly important for younger children, who are likely to be less equipped to seek reliable information on privacy and safety in the absence of formal digital literacy and online safety programming.
- It is important that in any programme, intervention or strategy where public access Wi-Fi, internet or any form of connected technology are offered to children – including schools and community-based programmes – online safety and digital citizenship are mandated. The onus should also be placed on the delivery agent – whether it is an NGO, library, school, private business or local government agency – to ensure that their network is protected and that suitable, age-appropriate child protection measures are utilised. Notwithstanding the limited effectiveness of such measures for older children, these should include content filtering services and, where appropriate, the use of parental or security controls.
- The online experiences of children are deeply embedded within their offline experiences and their everyday lived realities. This is exemplified in the intersection between the online and offline risks that children face. This is clearly illustrated in the shared experiences of many children in Zambia of online and offline bullying. It is important that rather than creating supPLICATE protection systems and policies, this intersection be explicitly acknowledged and that **online protection systems be integrated into the broader child protection system within Zambia**. This includes in case identification, referrals and case management systems. This may require that additional categories

²⁹ While there are very real limits as to what can be done to restrict certain content on global social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram without severely limiting internet access and access to the majority of the age-appropriate content that sits on these sites, moves within the US, the United Kingdom and the EU in particular are increasingly starting to increase the legal and regulatory obligations of these companies that require them to take responsibility for content risk and inappropriate and potentially harmful material. Within Zambia, placing similar obligations for local internet companies, social media companies and content providers to take responsibility for age-inappropriate material and age-inappropriate design is an important step that can be taken while still ensuring children’s internet freedoms and rights to access and information.

of violence and abuse be integrated into the existing case management system or, alternatively, that an indication of where technology was involved in different cases. Usually, the integration of online violence and abuse does not require any major overhaul of a well-designed and implemented child protection system but rather requires tweaking the system (for example, additional communications may be required with internet service providers or social media companies, though these are usually undertaken by law enforcement bodies rather than protection agencies).

- Digital citizenship and digital parenting³⁰ should also be integrated into early intervention and prevention strategies, where these exist. Various existing programmes supported by the government and other partners could be adapted to include aspects of digital citizenship. Community-oriented facilitation and dialogue processes, including those addressing SRH or GBV, could provide an important entry point through which many of the basic concepts of digital citizenship – including aspects of empathy, respect and communication (all entrenched in existing community value systems) – could be introduced.
- The lack of content available in local languages, as well as more local content, emerged as one challenge facing the children interviewed in Zambia. It is also important to note that the children who had difficulty communicating in their own language were also significantly more likely than others to report experiencing upsetting things online. This all speaks to the importance of initiatives that focus on the generation of local content and content in local languages. Children are a hugely powerful resource for generating exciting, varied and engaging content, and strategies that promote the development and availability of local content and the use of local languages online should be actively encouraged by the government.
- Within the global context of the rise of hate crimes, xenophobia and polarisation, care should be taken to ensure that education systems, policies and programmes that focus specifically on internet safety do not inadvertently promote or foster similar attitudes. This is noted within the context of frequent comments and anecdotes in the FGDs which identified online sexual contact risks coming from people outside of the country. While these risks need to be directly addressed, there is a danger that such experiences may escalate into cultures of intolerance and xenophobia against those from outside the country or region.

Recommendations for schools and educators

- Significantly more girls than boys tended to report that their teachers served as barriers to their internet access, suggesting a gender bias within the classroom. This may be based on perceptions of how safe the internet is for boys compared with girls or simply a more systematic bias that being online is less important for girls than it might be for boys. **Schools should ensure that consistent support is provided to boys and girls in a way that promotes equal adoption and use of technology**, while ensuring that teachers are able to support both boys and girls in staying safe online.
- Digital citizenship, literacy and media literacy should be integrated into core curricula, across all grade levels, where possible. This is particularly important in a context where it is common for children to be online while their parents or caregivers are not. In this environment, teachers and schools become the primary source, and often the only source, of reliable information and support. It is important to ensure that younger children are included in these lessons as the study clearly shows the significant numbers of younger children going online yet remaining largely excluded from formal online safety support. Where integrated into the curriculum at all, current online safety is often only addressed within the ICT curriculum, which means that those children not taking ICT as a subject do not receive the benefit of online safety messages. Children in Zambia receive little guidance or support from teachers

³⁰ While the term *digital parenting* is in common use by researchers and practitioners, it is used here with some caution. Many of the skills and competencies required by parents in order to provide support to their children in their online activities are fundamental to good parenting rather than necessarily digital in nature.

on how to stay safe online, resulting in a lost opportunity, particularly as children spend so much time within the school environment.

- While it takes time for curriculum revisions to occur, there are still opportunities for online safety, digital literacy and media literacy to be integrated in less formal ways through existing teaching and through extracurricular school activities. The integration of online safety can still be addressed within schools in alternative ways while waiting for curriculum reform to occur. **It is important that teachers learn how they can instil values that positively affect online safety**, even when they do not consider themselves particularly technically literate. These skills include positive communication, conflict management, empathy and respect, all of which impact positively on online behaviour and the capacity to navigate online risks successfully.
- The children interviewed in schools also reported varying responses from their teachers to the use (and potentially misuse) of phones and personal devices in the classroom and at schools. Similarly, there was inconsistent reflection of school policies regarding the use of personal devices in schools. **Establishing very clear guidelines for schools and for teachers within those schools on the use of personal devices – what can be used and how they can be used, and what is acceptable use – and the acceptable use of school hardware and internet is an important step** towards promoting access to technology and the use of technology in a healthy and safe way. These policies should be clear on what the remedies are for the misuse of technology within the school and should ensure that, whatever measures are taken, these measures do not restrict or remove children's access in a way that will disadvantage them.
- Schools can also play an important role in ensuring that online safety is adequately integrated into broader school safety or school violence prevention policies and strategies, including its integration in reporting and referral systems. School-based violence prevention or safety programmes should ensure either the inclusion of categories for online violence or an option to indicate where digital technology is involved in any incidence of violence or abuse.
- While this study did not explicitly include teachers and educators in the sample, children provided some insight into the general lack of support or referrals for them within the school system when facing online risks or experiencing harms relating to their online activities. Schools are an important source of information for school-going children of any age and can be a useful resource in linking children with available support services. Making teachers aware of the importance of providing both online and offline resources to children, such as referrals to services (such as those provided by Lifeline/Childline Zambia and other agencies) or providing information (through different subjects) on the importance of reporting unwanted behaviour, even if seemingly minor, when encountered online can make an important difference in the quality of children's online experiences. Similarly, ensuring that at least some teachers within each school are familiar with how the most common apps work and how to report and block unwanted attention or content, or change basic safety settings, is important in equipping teachers with the skills required to support children online.
- **However, like parents, teachers do not themselves need to have the most advanced technical and digital skills in order to help children stay safe online.** Including life skills (such as empathy, positive communication and conflict management, as well as basic gender equality and respect for all rights) is fundamental to evidence-based programming focusing on online risks (such as cyberbullying and online harassment) and it does not necessarily require technical knowledge or skills to teach these life skills.
- Children exhibited a very rudimentary understanding of their privacy online, their data footprint and how to protect their data. Where consideration was paid to their online privacy and protection, this was most commonly in the form of not sharing photos, addresses, names or ages online through their profiles (although sharing such things was not uncommon among some of the children). This suggests the need for **specific interventions, offered both through school (whether in curricula or extra-curricula) and through broader universal campaigns and initiatives that focus on data privacy and protection.** This includes raising awareness about how others online collect and exploit private user data – including how business, app developers, social media platforms and

online retailers, collect and use children's data – and what steps they can take to protect their data (and why they should do this). This is separate to, but just as important as, how individuals with ill-intent can collect private data and information from children and use that to target them. It is important that this awareness raising targets both children and parents.

Recommendations for parents and caregivers.

- Parental support and mediation are as important to children's use of digital technology and the internet as they are to any other aspect of a child's development. The approach that parents take to their child's internet use can define their online experience, particularly for younger internet users, and can either foster resilient and adept tech use or restrict the development of important skills and opportunities. Parental involvement in their digital lives – whether restrictive or enabling, active or passive – can play an important role in children's general, self-reported life satisfaction.³¹ Children generally reported little involvement on the part of the parents and caregivers in their digital lives. This suggests the need for providing targeted support to parents and caregivers on how best to support their children online.
- The first step towards ensuring parental support (rather than restrictive actions or simple non-engagement) is to ensure that **parents and caregivers across regions and across the urban–rural divide are aware of the potential and opportunities that technology and being online provides for children**, and indeed, aware of the critical role that technology plays in children's lives today. This may necessitate a move away from fear-based messaging, which may lead parents to restrict and simply remove children's access to technology. This may be particularly important in rural areas, where access to technology by parents themselves may be more limited and where the parents levels of technological familiarity, literacy and skills may be limited. However, this does not imply the unimportance of messaging relating to online risks and safety, but rather that a balanced messaging strategy is required.
- **Where parenting programmes are offered, technology and online safety should be incorporated into this content.** This can be done through either or both a separate module or section, or integrated through the use of technology and online safety-related examples, case studies and illustrations. As noted above, parents have an important role to play in imparting skills (such as those related to communication, empathy and respect), and examples of how these are important to children's online behaviour and activities can easily be incorporated into existing structures and content. This is particularly important within the Zambian context where a significant number of HHs do not have access to the internet at home and parents and caregivers are not online but their children are. Within these contexts, the parents' digital literacy development becomes important and promoting and ensuring positive parenting and good parent–child communication and bonding (to ensure that parents and caregivers can support their children through offline measures and parenting practices) becomes more important.
- Children spoke about both their perceptions of the length of time they spend online and how their parents and caregivers manage their time through setting boundaries and limiting time and access. Support could be provided to parents and caregivers related to adopting a more analytical approach to the time their children spend online, particularly within light of the children's increased reliance on technology to connect with friends and to learn over the past two years due to the pandemic. **Parents and the children themselves should be made aware of the importance of spending time online engaged in a variety of activities** that can include play and gaming but that also take into account learning, education and communicating with others.

³¹ Milosevic, Tijana, Kuldass, Seffetullah, Sargioti, Aikaterini, Laffan, Derek & O'Higgins Norman, James (2022). children's internet use, self-reported life satisfaction, and parental mediation in Europe: An analysis of the EU Kids Online Dataset. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.698176.

Recommendations for Children

The data from the ZKO study clearly shows the importance of supporting children of a young age in how best to stay safe online and suggests that it is never too early to start having these conversations with children. The data shows specific areas where children can benefit from direct guidance and support:

- Children themselves are a huge and valuable resource in policies, strategies and mechanisms for staying safe online. As such, it is important that children are integrally involved in the development of policies, programmes, strategies and messaging relating to online safety and that they are given a voice with which to share their everyday experiences and their own priorities, and with which to take part in the development of messages. Children can also play a valuable role in supporting friends and peers through peer-support systems and in advocating for change that would make the internet a safer place. Encouraging children to develop online safety messaging based on their own experiences is invaluable and an important step in ensuring children's voices are heard and heeded, as envisaged within both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Committee's GC No 25.
- It is important that children themselves be supported in identifying trusted adults – these could be parents and caregivers, teachers or any other responsible adult that the child trusts – that they can speak to when they encounter things online that bother them or when they encounter situations they do not know how to handle. It is equally important that the caregiver knows who this person is (if it is not him or her), but it is up to children to identify who they trust and can speak to openly in order to increase the chance of them confiding in someone who can support and help them.
- There was little awareness of privacy and safety settings, particularly amongst younger children. This also speaks to the importance of engaging and teaching children, young children in particular, the importance of keeping their profiles and settings private and ng at the highest safety levels. It is important that children know the difference between personal privacy online and the protection of their data, and that they take steps to keep all data safe and private.
- It is important that children be encouraged to develop their digital skills and to engage in a wide range of different activities online, ranging from learning to chatting and playing games. Rather than focusing on being aware of screen time, children should be encouraged to think about the different activities that they do online and encouraged to engage in a wide range of activities rather than focusing on just one.
- As children spend more time online, it is important that they are aware that the same skills that they have offline – the same behaviour, attitudes and expectations – translate into the online space and that the online space is not somewhere that behaviour that would not be acceptable offline is somehow more acceptable. It is thus important that children are taught how the socio-emotional learning and life skills that they learn offline translate into the online space.

A few examples of how these recommendations for children can be summarised into key messaging for children include:

- ☛ *Identify someone – an adult – you trust and who you can speak to when things bother you online or when you see things online that bother you. It is important that your parent or caregiver knows who this person is (if this person is not them), and that you have someone you can talk to, even though it may not be them.*
- ☛ *Keep your privacy settings on all apps private and set for access to contacts only. While it is fun to meet new people online and explore new things, you never know if the people you meet want the same things or if they have other reasons for talking to you.*
- ☛ *If you don't know how to change your settings, ask your parents, an older sibling or a friend who knows how to help you.*
- ☛ *When someone you do not know tries to talk to you online, think about why they might want to do that. Can you trust them?*

☛ *Whenever you share any information about yourself, think about how other people might use that information. Do not just think about how the person you are sharing that information with might use it, also think about how strangers might use it if they got their hands on it and think again about how safe it is to share it online.*

Recommendations for future research and exploration

- As noted in the limitations section of the introduction, this study was limited to peri-urban, high-density districts within Zambia and thus excluded rural areas. It is important to ensure that a future study of this kind be expanded to include a nationally representative sample, representing both urban and rural areas, where discrepancies between access and skills are likely to be significantly more marked and the impact on both online risks and digital skills more critical. This ZKO study provides an important ‘first-look’ representative sample of three districts, but future policy and programme development could benefit from a truly national ZKO study.
- Data from this ZKO study clearly shows that even young children in Zambia are going online. As the Government of Zambia’s broadband roll-out continues and gains traction, so even younger children will come online. This study focused on children nine years old and older, and so excluded any information on children younger than nine years who may be online. Younger children generally require a modified and simpler research approach, and it will be important that data on younger children be collected as more and more younger children come online.
- While the study was set up to include children with disabilities and to explore all aspects of the digital experiences of children with disabilities, the resulting sample did not allow for meaningful analysis of this important sub-group of children. Globally, there is increasing evidence of the importance of digital technology for many children with disabilities in regard to them realising much greater shared engagement in everyday life, as well as evidence of the greater risks that they encounter in doing so. It is proposed that a more targeted study, specifically sampling children with disabilities, be undertaken to explore their experiences, challenges and opportunities within the Zambian context. This is important information that is required to ensure that policy and programming integrate the everyday needs of children with different disabilities. This can be done through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, working with specific organisations or agencies that work with children with disabilities.
- This study has shown a somewhat superficial understanding of data privacy and data protection amongst the children interviewed in Zambia. This is an area that warrants further exploration, particularly the aspect of how children’s notions of privacy inform their interaction with others online – especially those not known to them offline. This exploration would inform the development of both formal and non-formal programmes to improve children’s understanding of data privacy, the protection of their data online, and how their data is used by different actors.
- As Zambia is in the relatively early stages of offering comprehensive online safety programming and interventions, it is important to establish an evidence base of what works in online safety programming within the Zambian context. The existing evidence base or programming remains grounded within European and North American contexts, and as new programmes and policies are designed within Zambia (particularly within low-resourced contexts and in areas such as parenting and early childhood development), it is critical that high-quality evidence of what works (and what does not work) is generated to inform both programming and policies in Zambia and within the region more broadly. Zambia is currently in an important and exciting position to make a substantial contribution to this knowledge base.
- While touched on in this study, there is still a gap in understanding the degree to which children in Zambia can identify misinformation and disinformation, and how they interrogate what they see online. This is important information that is required to inform the development of a media literacy intervention and material to be integrated into school literacy curricula. This could be packaged with further research on data privacy and protection, as identified.

