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Kazakhstan Kids Online

The digital lives of children in Kazakhstan

FINAL REPORT

(12 October 2023)

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CAPI	Computer-assisted personal interview
CAWI	Computer-assisted Web Interview
COP	Child Online Protection
CRC	(UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child
ECARO	(UNICEF) Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GC	(UNCRC) General Comment No. 25 on Children's Rights in the Digital Age
GKO	Global Kids Online
ICT	Information Communication Technology
KKO	Kazakhstan Kids Online
OCSEA	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
p.c.	Personal computer
SPSS	Statistical Programme for Social Sciences
VPN	Virtual Private Network
y/o.	year old

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[1] These challenges are discussed in the Limitations section of the introduction, but here refer primarily to the long and tiring hours and risk of constant refusals that are central nature of any household data collection.

Executive Summary

"The rights of the 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 inter-dependent, even where children themselves do not have access to the internet." [2]

Introduction

Digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way that we live. Technology, and the internet, has permeated daily life for the vast majority of the global population. While globally, 63% of the world's population are estimated to be online (as of 2021),[3] this number is significantly higher for the CIS, where 82% of the region's population are connected to the internet, behind only Europe (87%). Globally, it was estimated in 2016 that one in three children were online,[4] a number that has significantly increased since then, not least as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the uptake of digital technology for children everywhere, as education, communication, and play all moved online (at least, for those who had internet connectivity).

Research into children's lives online in Kazakhstan is still in its relative infancy. According to the recent HSBC Kazakhstan study, more than one third of children spend more than two hours a day watching videos on their digital devices (whether computers or mobile devices), while more than half spend two hours or more of every weekday playing computer games (51%), an increase of more than 20% since 2018, or chatting to friends (57%).[5] However, a significant number of children in Kazakhstan utilise the internet for learning and information-seeking, with 31% reporting that they spend more than two hours a day searching for information.[6]

The Kazakhstan Kids Online (KKO) study attempts for the first time to extend the knowledge and evidence base on children's use of digital technology in Kazakhstan. It is a

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Kazakhstan Kids Online was conducted using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A nationally representative household survey was conducted face to face with 1201 children aged nine to 17 years old, and 1200 parents or caregivers of the same children throughout all regions of Kazakhstan, as well as using web-administered personal interviews with 300 teachers. In addition, a series of in-person focus group discussions was conducted with children, parents and teachers throughout Kazakhstan. The overall children's sample included:

- 50.4% girls, and 49.6% boys
- 25.1% 9-10 y/o; 24.6% 10-11 y/o
- 22.6% 13-14 y/o; and 27.6% 15-17 y/o
- 53.1% Kazakh speakers, 43.9% Russian speakers, and 3% speaking other languages.

Data was disaggregated by gender, age (9-10, 11-12, 13-14, and 15 – 17 years old) and area type, and where significant differences were identified, were noted in the body of the report.

[2] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. CEC/C/GC/25. 2 March 2021. Article 4.
[3] ITU, 2022, Global Connectivity Report 2022, International Telecommunications Union: Geneva. Available at https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/d-ind-global-01-2022/
[4] Livingstone, Sonia; Byrne, Jasmina; Carr, John (2016). One in Three: Internet Governance and Children's Rights, *Innocenti Discussion Papers*, no. 2016-01, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence
[5] National Center for Public Health of the Ministry of Health, 2022, using data from the World Health Organization HSBC Kazakhstan Study.
[6] *Ibid.*

national research study conducted with children, parents and caregivers, and teachers, and is the latest in the Global Kids Online (GKO) network of studies.[7] The study adapts the GKO toolkit, contextualized for the Kazakhstan context. The study, conducted in 2023, aims to explore the extent and nature of children's use of digital technology and the internet; the opportunities and benefits presented to children online in Kazakhstan; their experiences of risks and harms in the digital environment; and strategies and responses to mitigate these risks and harms. As such, the study makes progress in realising the mandate provided in the UNCRC General Comment No.25 on Children's Rights in the Digital Environment, 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. Such data and research, including research conducted with and by children, should inform legislation, policy and practice, and should be available in the public domain."*[8]

Study findings

Five domains of children's access to and use of the internet and digital technology were explored: children's access and use of the internet; their digital skills; social wellbeing and support; and internet mediation by parents and teachers. In addition, parents' access and use of the internet; their skills; and their mediation of their children's internet access were also explored.

Children's access and use of the internet

Snapshot: Children in Kazakhstan first access the internet at ever-younger ages, with most going online between the ages of five and eight years old. Most can access the internet whenever they want, with little difference by gender, although those in cities have greater access than those living in rural areas. While chatting with friends and watching videos or TVs are amongst the most common activities children do online, they also use the internet for studying and learning new things. The young age at which children go online bodes well for the development of skills and capacities, but also suggests that there is an urgent need for messaging and support to younger children (and their parents) on age-appropriate online activities, and the foundational aspects of digital safety as well as help-seeking for when they do encounter things that bother them.

- Children in Kazakhstan report high levels of internet access, and from an early age, with 46% first going online between the ages of five and eight years, and another third going online for the first time between the ages of nine and 12 years old. Children tended to reflect a growing familiarity and ease with the internet and devices as they got older.
- Most children can access the internet when they want to, and importantly, there was little difference by gender in those children who went online at an early age, or those who reported they could access the internet as and when they wanted. This suggests that the gender digital divide may be less of an immediate concern in Kazakhstan than it is in many countries.
- Children most commonly use their smartphones to connect to the internet, with 92% of children reporting that they use their smartphones to go online all the time, several times

[7] www.globalkidsonline.net

[8] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. CEC/C/GC/25. 2 March 2021. Article V.E.30

a day or daily. There was some difference by location, with children in cities significantly more likely to go online using personal computers or laptops than those in villages.

- The internet is seen as an overwhelmingly positive thing for children, with more than nine in ten children thinking there are useful things for children their age online (94%), and that children their age have a good time when they go online (93%), with little difference by gender. Enjoyment of the internet tended to increase with age, with older children between 15 and 17 years significantly more likely than those between nine and ten years old to say that they always have a good time when they go online.
- Using messenger apps, such as WhatsApp or Telegram, watching video clips, and browsing social network sites were the most common activities children undertook online, with 82% reporting they use messenger apps, 60% watching video clips, and 66% browsing social media sites daily, several times a day, or almost all the time.
- Beyond socialising and entertainment, children commonly reported using the internet for studying, with 60% using the internet to study, and 46% using it to search for something new daily, several times a day or almost all the time.
- These findings broadly corelate with findings across regions that reflect that while a broad base of children take advantage of the more superficial opportunities that being online present, such as consuming content and opportunities for entertainment and connectivity, there is growing attrition in those children accessing opportunities that may require greater technical and digital skills.[9] The majority of children consume content online, but are also far more limited in content creation or creative activities, and fully taking advantage of the opportunities that the internet presents, reflecting similar trends in many other GKO countries.[10]

Risk-taking in online communications

Snapshot: Children of all ages included in the study have a social media presence, and many have gaming accounts, even those younger than the mandatory 13 years. Many communicate with people they do not know offline, even sharing photos or videos. This fits a general pattern of using the internet to meet new people – a benefit particularly important for children in isolated or marginalized communities or living with disabilities - and to expand children's worlds beyond their immediate physical environment. While one of the many benefits of being online, this also introduces an element of risk into children's lives, particularly for those who are most vulnerable.

- Children in Kazakhstan are exposing themselves to various common risks online regularly, although at not quite the high levels that might be expected or are often portrayed: one in ten (10%) children have added friends or contacts to their contact lists who they have never met in person; and 11% had similarly sent their photo or video to someone they did not know in person. Less than one in ten children had spoken online to adults they did not know in person, with most of those (4% of all children) having done so only once or twice.
- Terms and conditions of use of many social media and gaming platforms restrict children younger than 13 years of age from having their own accounts, in accordance with the US

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

[10] Kuzmanović, D., Pavlović, Z., Popadić, D., & Milosevic, T. (2019). *Internet and Digital Technology Use among Children and Youth in Serbia: EU Kids Online Survey Results, 2018*. Belgrade: Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy.

COPPA legislation.[11] Yet in Kazakhstan, three in five (60%) of children aged nine to ten years old, and two thirds (66%) of children aged 11 to 12, report having their own social media and gaming accounts, with most of their profiles set to public, so everyone can view their accounts. Significantly more children aged nine to ten years old had their accounts set fully to public than older children, reflecting a greater awareness of potential risks, as well as greater awareness of some of the measures that could be taken to mitigate their risks, amongst older children, than younger children. This also points to the importance of earlier education of children in appropriate technical skills and online safety.

Children's digital skills

Snapshot: Children in Kazakhstan generally report confidence in a wide range of skills relating to their internet and device use. While self-reported skills may differ from actual skills,[12,13] most children report they are able to perform functions and tasks related to safety, social, creative and communication, while technical skills – those required to perform more advanced functions online, such as coding (or programming) - are lower. There is little difference by gender, but older children reported a higher level of skills, which may result in both greater exposure to risks online, but also, greater capacity to successfully navigate and mitigate these risks.[14]

- The majority of children considered themselves able to perform many of the everyday technical and safety steps that might be required of them online, ranging from installing apps on their phones to saving images they found on the internet. However, children were least confident in their creative and more advanced technical skills.
- Importantly, seven out of ten children knew when they should delete a contact from their list while 69% knew what images they should and should not share online with others. As with many of the other self-reported skills, older children reflected a higher understanding and grasp of digital skills than younger children, including those relating to basic safety steps, such as sharing images.
- Three in four children feel completely or mostly that they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones. While there is little difference by gender, significantly more older children than younger children were confident in their use of the internet and smartphones.

Children's experiences of risks and harms

Snapshot: Children in Kazakhstan are exposed to a range of risks online, from content risks such as seeing content relating to eating disorders and self-harm through to cyberbullying. These risks may relate to, or co-occur with other risks, including sexual risks. Cyberbullying emerged as the most common risk faced by children online, although this is faced less than in-person bullying. Girls are encountering cyberbullying more frequently than boys, while children of all ages are exposed to potentially harmful content such as that relating to self-harm, violence and hate speech. While most

[11] The Child Online Privacy Protection Act in the US governs all US-based social media, website and online service companies, and limits the collection of any data from any child under the age of 13 years, in practice restricting the opening of any accounts by children under the age of 13. Yet, this is commonly and easily circumvented by children using US-based apps and social media, including the TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and others, throughout the world.

[12] Zhi-Jin Zhong, From access to usage: The divide of self-reported digital skills among adolescents, Computers & Education, Volume 56, Issue 3, 2011, Pages 736-746, ISSN 0360-1315, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2010.10.016.

[13] Palczyńska, M., Rynko, M. ICT skills measurement in social surveys: Can we trust self-reports?. *Qual Quant* **55**, 917–943 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01031-4

[14] UNICEF Innocenti, 2019, Growing Up in a Digital World, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti: Florence.

children do not report being very bothered by these experiences, a number of victims are very or a little upset by their experiences. Many children do not tell anyone about their negative experiences; when they do, this is most likely to be their friends, rather than a responsible adult such as a parent or a teacher. This may impact the potential for help-seeking, and potentially psycho-social support they may need, as well as addressing other negative consequences that may emerge from these experiences. These could range from escalation of the experiences, poor educational or mental health outcomes, through to the potential for the development of adverse or externalising behavioural outcomes for the victims.[15]

- It was not uncommon for children in Kazakhstan to feel that their time online had caused some problems for them over the past year, including causing their grades to go down (10%), or cause conflicts with their families (11%), although this was largely not seen as a regular occurrence.
- One in eight children reported that something had happened online over the past year that had upset them, although of those who had been upset, more felt only a little upset over the incident. A little more than one in ten children who had been upset by something felt very upset by the occurrence, with younger children more likely to report that they had been very upset than older children.
- One in four children who had experienced something upsetting online in the past year did not tell anyone. When children did speak to someone about their experience, they most commonly spoke to their friends or peers (32% of those who had experienced something upsetting), or their parents (24%). Importantly, younger children who had been upset were more likely to speak to their parents about the incident than older children, as were girls.
- One in ten children had met with someone in person they had first met online, over the past year, with older children 15 to 17 years old four times more likely than younger children to have done so. Most children felt happy after the meeting, while 2.9% felt a little upset.
- Cyberbullying emerged as the most common form of risks encountered online. Between nine percent and 21% of children had experienced or witnessed some form of cyberbullying online. Girls were almost twice as likely as boys to have witnessed or experience cyberbullying as boys, consistent with much of the international literature on cyberbullying.[16] Most children did not tell anyone about their experiences, which may have profound impact both on the child's mental health and wellbeing. Like other risks encountered online, children were more likely to tell their friends than anyone else about their experiences. Importantly, and again consistent with much of the international

[15] Bin Yang, Bo Wang, Nan Sun, Fei Xu, Lianke Wang, Jiajun Chen, Shiwei Yu, Yiming Zhang, Yurui Zhu, Ting Dai, Qiang Zhang, Changqing Sun, The consequences of cyberbullying and traditional bullying victimization among adolescents: Gender differences in psychological symptoms, self-harm and suicidality, Psychiatry Research, Volume 306, 2021, 114219, ISSN 0165-1781, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.114219.

[16] Lee, Y., Harris, M. N., & Kim, J. (2022). Gender Differences in Cyberbullying Victimization From a Developmental Perspective: An Examination of Risk and Protective Factors. Crime & Delinquency, 68(13–14), 2422–2451. https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287221081025

literature, while cyberbullying is relatively common in Kazakhstan, in-person or face-to face bullying is more common than cyberbullying.[17,18,19]

- Children of all ages were routinely exposed to non-sexual risks online, including content relating to ways of becoming very thin (eating-disorders 15%), violent images or content (14%), hate speech, (12%), ways of self-harming (9%) and of taking one's own life (5%). Older children were significantly more likely to be exposed to this content than younger children, while there was no significant difference by gender, suggesting that both boys and girls are equally exposed to these different forms of potentially harmful content.

Exposure and experience of sexual risks online

Snapshot: Exposure to sexual risks online is significantly less commonly experienced by children in Kazakhstan than other risks. However, *this should be qualified by the observation that many children who participated in the study appeared hesitant to disclose their experiences.* Of the different risks explored, children mostly reported being exposed to sexual content online, or to seeing sexual messages or content sent to their friends' phones, rather than to their own devices. Many children did not want to say how they felt about seeing this content, but a small number (15%) felt very or a little uncomfortable about it. Less common was the experience of contact risks online, with the most common of these was being asked to talk about sex, or sexual relationships with someone online when they did not want to. Unwanted sexual contact online was most likely to come from people known to the child, rather than strangers, presenting important implications for safety messaging for children. Like other forms of risks, most children did not tell anyone about their experiences, with those who did, most commonly speaking to friends. This data suggests that children in Kazakhstan need safe spaces and psycho-social support systems where they can talk openly about their online experiences, particularly relating on sexual risks and harms encountered. Important will be messaging that builds on the evidence of children's experiences of risks, including where these risks come from, and the broad scope of risks, from cyberbullying to sexual risks.

- Just under one in five children in Kazakhstan had been exposed to sexual content online at least once over the past year, with 7% having seen sexual content at least once a month, weekly or almost daily. While most children did not want to say how they felt about encountering this content, one in three children were unbothered by what they saw, while one in ten felt a little uncomfortable, and 5% felt very uncomfortable.
- Children were asked about their own experiences, and those of friends. A little over one in ten children (11%) had seen sexual content – images, videos or messages – that had been sent directly to their friends' devices, while 7% had themselves received sexual content on their phone. Most children who had received sexual content didn't want to say how they felt about receiving these messages, but 12% felt either a little or very uncomfortable with having got these messages.
- Fewer than one in twenty children had received unwanted sexual contact online over the past year when they did not want it. When this did occur, it most commonly took for form of someone asking them to talk about a sexual relationship (4.5%), unwanted sexual

[17] Jadambaa A, Thomas HJ, Scott JG, Graves N, Brain D, Pacella R. Prevalence of traditional bullying and cyberbullying among children and adolescents in Australia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry. 2019;53(9):878-888. doi:10.1177/0004867419846393

[18] Arnarsson A, Nygren J, Nyholm M, et al. Cyberbullying and traditional bullying among Nordic adolescents and their impact on life satisfaction. Scandinavian Journal of Public Health. 2020;48(5):502-510. doi:10.1177/1403494818817411

[19] Wang, CW., Musumari, P.M., Techasrivichien, T. *et al.* Overlap of traditional bullying and cyberbullying and correlates of bullying among Taiwanese adolescents: a cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health* **19**, 1756 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-8116-z

comments or innuendo about them (3%) or being asked to send "selfies" (photos or videos) of their private parts, when they did to want to.[20] When children did have this unwanted sexual contact, they were most likely to speak to their friends about the experience, with one in two children telling their friends, while just over one in ten children told their parents about the experience.

- Children were also asked about sexual exploitation online. In total 3% had been offered money or gifts in exchange for sexually explicit selfies, while 2% had been offered money or gifts to meet in person with the explicit purpose of doing something sexual. 2%, or 11 children, had been threatened or blackmailed into doing something sexual online over the past year, suggesting that while such instances are rare, they are occurring in Kazakhstan.
- While less conclusive, it was not unusual in the study for children to say that they could not say, or chose not to say, whether these things had happened to them over the past year. This suggests that despite guarantees of confidentiality and the availability of counselling and support services, children still did not feel comfortable talking about these experiences.
- Contrary to common narratives of "stranger danger", or most sexual predatory behaviours online coming from strangers that children meet online, where children had experience unwanted sexual contact online, this most commonly came from people known to the child, including from family or extended family, and friends or peers both over and under 18 years of age.
- A key positive takeaway from the KKO study is thus that while older children are spending more time online, and encountering more risks, they are less likely to be othered or upset by the risks they do encounter, and are better equipped to mitigate these risks, and manage them when they do encounter them.

Internet mediation

Snapshot: Children report relatively high levels of active mediation – enabling and supporting children online, including through talking to them and sharing activities – by parents and caregivers, with the majority of children talking to their parents about what they do online and when something bothers them online; similarly, most children report that their parents both encourage them to do things online and to explore the internet, as well as talk to them about safety online. This has potentially important consequences for children's capacity to successfully and safely navigate and manage risks that they face online, minimizing the likelihood of harms resulting from online risks.

- Internet mediation refers to the support, engagement or "mediation" by those around the child, most commonly parents or caregivers and teachers, of that child's internet use. Internet mediation can play an important role in not only safety, but also in the development of the range of digital skills, as well as more fundamental life and communication skills, that children require in order to successfully navigate and manage the risks that they will encounter online, to minimize the risks of harm. While active and enabling mediation, particularly by parents, is likely to result in greater skills and the exposure to risks online, it also results in the child better able to navigate those risks in a

[20] It is important to differentiate between wanted and unwanted sexual contact. Children were asked here, and this data represents, unwanted sexual contact, as opposed to sexual contact or interactions that might occur consensually within an age-appropriate relationship.

way that minimizes the risks of harms occurring; conversely, more restrictive styles of mediation minimizes the risk that the child encounters online, but equally minimizes the skills required to manage those risks when the child does inevitably encounter risks, and so increases the likelihood of harm.[21,22,23]

- Three in ten children report that their parents, very often, often, or sometimes suggest ways of using the internet safely, while even more encourage them to use, explore and learn new things online. Four in five children speak to or help their parents with someone online that their parents are battling with, suggesting positive and engaged collaboration and engagement between parents and children when it comes to their internet activities. Less common, though, and reflecting earlier findings on children's help-seeking from parents, are children talking about their parents about things that bother them online, with a little more than one in two children speaking to their parents when things bother them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger children are more likely than older children to speak to their parents about things that bother them, perhaps reflecting a growing desire for independence commonly associated with adolescence.
- Restrictive measures relating to internet use placed on children by parents were relatively uncommon, with approximately three quarters of children reporting they were able to browse social networks and download music and films as and when they wanted. Children reported more restrictions placed on the use of webcams so freely (just under two in five children reported some restrictions on them in how and when they could use webcams or phone cameras).

Parents online in Kazakhstan

Snapshot: Parents in Kazakhstan exhibit a high level of familiarity with and use of digital technology, and feel comfortable accessing the internet, and with the benefits it could offer. Parents commonly use active and enabling internet mediation of their children's internet use, offering active support of their children's use of digital technology and the internet, encouraging them to make good use of the technology, explore opportunities, and provide a supportive and open environment. This picture also broadly supports the experiences of children, who largely reported that their parents talk to them about what they do online and encourage them to learn and explore things online. Less common are the use of technical mediation tools such as parental monitoring apps, although these are still used by a minority of parents. Parents tend to under-estimate the likelihood of their children encountering risks online, as well as the potential harm this could do, although they are more aware of sexual risks than other forms of risks such as cyberbullying or exposure to potentially harmful content, including self-harm or violence.

- Parents' own skills and confidence with digital technology, the way they use devices, and their interaction with children can all play a role in shaping children's experiences online, and their ability to make the most of the opportunities that exist online. In Kazakhstan, most of the parents in the study had been using the internet for several years or more, and the majority – 57% - could access the internet whenever they wanted. Like their

[21] Sonia Livingstone and Alicia Blum-Ross, 2021, Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives, Oxford University Press, ISBN: 9780190874704

[22] Sonia Livingstone, Kjartan Ólafsson, Ellen J. Helsper, Francisco Lupiáñez-Villanueva, Giuseppe A. Veltri, Frans Folkvord, Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online: The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental Mediation, *Journal of Communication*, Volume 67, Issue 1, February 2017, Pages 82–105, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277

[23] Livingstone, Sonia & Blum-Ross, Alicia. (2019). Parents' Role in Supporting, Brokering or Impeding Their Children's Connected Learning and Media Literacy. Cultural Science Journal. 11. 68-77. 10.5334/csci.124.

children, parents went online most frequently on their smartphones; unlike their children, parents also went online at higher rates on laptops and personal computers.

- Parents were less confident that they know more about the internet than their children, with fewer than three in five parents feeling they know more about the internet than their children. Most parents did feel comfortable accessing the internet and knowing how the internet could be useful to them. This is reflected in the general levels of competence across a range of operational, information, social, creative and mobile skills. With the exception of knowing how to use a programming language (operational skill), and creative skills, more than half of the parents included in the study felt some level of confidence in their abilities across all 24 individual skills measured.
- Parents generally reported high levels of internet mediation than reported by children. Between 67% of parents and 83% reported that they very often, often or sometimes spoke to or engaged positively with their child about different aspects of their internet and digital technology use. This data creates a profile of active support and mediation by parents and caregivers of their children's use of digital technology and the internet, encouraging them to make good use of the technology, explore opportunities, and provide a supportive and open environment. Restrictive and technical internet mediation was less common, with fewer than half of the parents using technical tools such as parental controls to block websites and apps, or to get notifications on what apps children are downloading on their devices. Parents are more likely to set rules and boundaries on internet and device use, and monitor (without the use of technical tools), apps downloaded, and websites visited, than use technical tools to mediate their children's internet access.
- Far fewer parents reported that their children had ever been exposed to something online that had upset them, than those children who reported the experience, suggesting that despite some level of supportive and enabling mediation, and relatively open conversation with children, many parents remain unaware of what their children are encountering online. When their children did encounter something upsetting online, most considered this to be a litle, rather than very upsetting, more accurately depicting the experiences of their children. Most parents thought it was very unlikely that their child would encounter something that upset or bothered them online in the next three months. Most parents also felt confident in their ability to support their child with anything upsetting that they encountered online, and that their child was themselves definitely (29.1%) or probably (50.7%) able to cope with upsetting things they encounter.
- One in twenty parents said their child had seen websites or discussions online relating to harming someone or self-harm, while slightly fewer reported their child had been exposed to hate messages online (3.9%) or relating to eating disorders. These are significantly lower numbers than those children wo themselves reported being exposed to this content, and again reinforces an under-estimation by parents of what their children may be encountering. Parents were more likely to think that their children had been exposed to sexual risks, and in particular sexual content online, than other forms of content risks.
- Parents in Kazakhstan generally tended to be aware of the potential risks for children associated with being online, particularly those associated with sending self-generated sexual content, such as images or videos. Four in five parents considered this to be very risky, with another 13% considering it quite risky, while more than three quarters (77.8%)

of parents thought that talking about an intimate relationship with someone online was also very risk, an another 15.5% quite risky.

- While parents also recognize the risks that children may face in meeting in person someone that they have first met online, fewer parents view this as very risky (66.3%) than those who consider talking about intimate relationship or sending sexually explicit material to someone online. This reflects the dilemmas that both parents, and policy-makers face: the digital environment is increasingly the space in which children explore romantic relationships, and often initiate romantic connections, including those that might be considered age-appropriate; yet parents are aware of the potential risks that such explorations and experiences could pose to children.

Recommendations for policy and interventions

The findings of the KKO study have implications for both policy and for programmatic interventions. These are detailed in the final chapter of the report in a series of recommendations.

Policy recommendations include:

- ⇨ Children in rural areas, or villages, are increasingly likely to have access to digital technology and internet access, although this is still not on a par with children in the cities. While recognizing that these disparities have been explicitly addressed through recent policy documents, including the involvement of Kazakhstan in the GIGA Initiative,[24,25] these geographical disparities should be addressed as a matter of priority and the importance of equitable digital access and skills to the overall development and rights of children should remain central to the connectivity and digital empowerment agenda in Kazakhstan.
- ⇨ The impact and management of digital technology into children's early years and pre- and primary schooling should also be prioritized. This includes the incorporation of the management of digital technology for children, based on the growing evidence-base, into parenting programmes, to equip parents with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their child's internet and device use, equipping them with the skills required to support their child to stay safe online and make the most of the opportunities.
- ⇨ Both policy and programming initiatives that promote and enhance life skills and life and health education are required. and enhance life skills and life and health education. This includes policies and strategies that promote open and safe conversations around sex and sexual exploration, as well as sexual identity.
- ⇨ Related to this is the need for the creation of (and accompanying dissemination of) safe and confidential reporting systems and support systems where children can share their negative and harmful experienced without fear of stigma or judgement or victim-blaming, and where they can be assured of support.
- ⇨ Policies and regulations should hold tech companies, including social media companies, to account, and ensure that adequate regulations are put in place to protect children from this content, while respecting all their concurrent rights. Many of the risks that children face online, including those relating to risks associated with harmful content such as eating disorders, other forms of self-harm, hate speech and suicide, are predominantly found on social media apps such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and other apps commonly used by

[24] More information on the ITU-UNICEF led GIGA project can be found here: https://www.unicef.org/innovation/giga
[25] See also UNICEF Kazakhstan, 2022, Feasibility study of Potential Technical and Financial Solutions for Upgrading School Connectivity to Broadband Speeds in Kazakhstan, August 2022, Astana. Available at Feasibility study for upgrading school connectivity to broadband speeds in Kazakhstan | UNICEF

children in Kazakhstan. Policies and regulations should hold tech companies, including social media companies, to account, and ensure that adequate regulations are put in place to protect children from this content, while respecting all their concurrent rights. Particular care should be taken that these regulations, and steps taken to comply by industry do not infringe on children's right to information and privacy, as well as those that may be adversely affected.

- Related to the above, it will be important that this regulation be accompanied with the more asset and capacity-building policies to foster resilience of children online and off, to deal with what they encounter online.

Programmatic recommendations include:

- Awareness-raising and capacity-build interventions, particularly for older children should thus focus less on simply drawing attention to these risks, and more on how to successfully navigate and negotiate them in a way that minimizes the likelihood of harm : The majority of children are aware of the common risks that they might encounter online. This awareness increases with age. Awareness-raising and capacity-build interventions, particularly for older children should thus focus less on simply drawing attention to these risks, and more on how to successfully navigate and negotiate them in a way that minimizes the likelihood of harm building not just digital resilience, but resilience in general.[26]
- Awareness-raising interventions should target very young and young children, who tend to be less aware of risks they may encounter online. Those awareness raising programmes focusing on the risks should target younger internet users who might not yet be aware of the potential risks, or the resources that exist to support them when encountering these risks.
- Messages should avoid fear-generation and scare techniques. There is a growing body of evidence that shows that such an approach has little impact, but the focus of education and awareness-raising should take an approach more consistent with prevention education.[27]
- The use of peer-mentoring and support mechanisms should be explored and tested, building on global evidence-based interventions. Most children share their adverse experiences online with friends rather than parents, teachers or other responsible adults. This may indicate a space for peer-support mechanisms, including those that focus on risks such as cyberbullying, as well as sexual risks.
- Establishment of alternative reporting and psycho-social support mechanisms that can ensure confidentiality and privacy should be supported as a matter of priority. Many children are unaware of the resources that do exist, both technical and psycho-social. Whatever services are established to provide this support should take care to ensure a non0judgemental environment when children will not be blamed for their experience, that avoid victim-blaming or shaming, and where children can be assured that they will not be punitively punished, including through the limitation or inhibiting of their internet or device use.

The Kazakhstan Kids Online study comes at an opportune time, aligning with the finalization in October 2023 of the *Comprehensive Plan on the Protection of children from violence, suicide*

[26] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-resilience-framework

[27] Finkelhor D, Walsh K, Jones L, Mitchell K, Collier A. Youth Internet Safety Education: Aligning Programs With the Evidence Base. Trauma Violence Abuse. 2021 Dec;22(5):1233-1247. doi: 10.1177/1524838020916257. Epub 2020 Apr 3. PMID: 32242503.

prevention and ensuring their rights and well-being, 2023-2025, which has included Child Online Protection, and the KKO specifically, noting the importance of ensuring that policies and strategies are evidence-based and drawing on data collected through the KKO.

Ultimately, the creating of safe online spaces that facilitate creative and beneficial use of technology, and the capacity of children and young people to constructively take advantage of and realise the benefits that the internet and digital technology have to offer is dependent on a comprehensive systemic approach that holds technology companies accountable, equips children (and those in their eco-system such as parents and teachers) with the skills require to both make the most of what the technology offers and to manage risk they encounter online, and provides children with the support system when something goes wrong to manage it and bounce back when harm is experienced.

Chapter 1. Introduction

> *"The rights of the 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 inter-dependent, 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."*[28]

Digital technology has become enmeshed in every aspect of children's everyday life. From play to communication to information-seeking, entertainment, and education, almost every aspect of children's daily lives is impacted, to some measure, by digital technology. Even where children themselves do not have access to digital technology themselves, they are likely impacted in some way by the use of technology by others in their family or by the world around them. Children have little or no choice in the way in which technology is part of their lives, and nor are they born with the inherent skills or knowledge to manage the risks that technology presents.

Access to the internet is increasingly important to the development and wellbeing of children. Digital technology has rapidly become integrated into almost all aspects of everyday life, from education and learning, to play and communication. This was both catalysed and exemplified throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as every aspect of children's lives were forced online, and digital technology became central to the wellbeing and developmental needs of children. School, health-care providers, social welfare and child protection services almost all shifted their services to online and mobile only platforms.[29] Access to digital technology and the internet, along with digital and media literacy, have become fundamental in shaping children's everyday life, their experiences, and future prospects.

Conversely, digital exclusion can reinforce social, economic and cultural forms of exclusion and inequalities,[30] disadvantaging children both while still at school, and preparing to and entering the formal or informal economy. Digital divides can compound other social and systemic inequalities including those related to age, gender, education and poverty.[31] It may exclude children from new and emerging forms of play and communication, particularly with those outside their immediate community. Importantly, digital divides that reinforce inequalities and exclusion refer not only to access to technology, but rather to access, use and appropriation of digital technology and digital media.[32]

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[28] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. CEC/C/GC/25. 2 March 2021. Article 4.

[29] UNICEF, 2020, COVID 19: A Spotlight on child data governance gaps, UNICEF Office of Global insight and Policy, New York. https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/covid-19-spotlight-child-data-governance-gaps

[30] UNICEF, 2022, Towards a child-centred digital equality framework, UNICEF Office of Global insight and Policy, New York. https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/reports/towards-child-centred-digital-equality-framework

[31] Banaji, S., Livingstone, S., Nandi, A., and Stoilova, M. (2018). Instrumentalising the digital: adolescents' engagement with ICTs in low- and middle-income countries. Dev. Pract. 28, 432–443. doi: 10.1080/09614524.2018.1438366

[32] Magis-Weinberg Lucía, Ballonoff Suleiman Ahna, Dahl Ronald E.2021. Context, Development, and Digital Media: Implications for Very Young Adolescents in LMICs. Frontiers in Psychology. 12. 2021. www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.632713

According to UNICEF's The State of the World's Children 2017,[33] 1 in 3 internet users is a child and every day, more than 175,000 children go online for the first time.[34] Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are central to children's everyday lives in almost every part of the world. The use of ICTs has transformed the environment in which children grow and develop with online technologies now embedded in the everyday practices of young people in their communication, socializing and interactions with the world around them. This shift has been even further catalyzed by the response of governments throughout the world, including in Kazakhstan, during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where children's communication, education, and even play, shifted online at an unprecedented rate, and with it, the imperative to dramatically increase access to digital technology and the internet (often though, without a focus on increasing the required literacy and skills) to children. In an increasingly digital world, internet access has become a vital gateway for children to realize their rights, while also presenting opportunities for these rights to be violated.[35]

The potential for risks and related harms to children was amplified in public discourse through the COVID-19 pandemic, as the shift of children's lives to the digital space at an unprecedented pace highlighted increased risks from sexual predators, cyberbullying and misinformation.[36]

While the internet is often seen as presenting problems and challenges for children, including increased exposure to risks and the potential for harms, the internet has become a lifeline for many children in help-seeking and health information, as well as for gaining the skills required to succeed in the workplace in their future. Data collected across 28 countries show that children regularly sought out health information, for example, at least once a month.[37] Indeed, the internet and digital connectivity is increasingly essential to the realization of children's range of rights, to their development, and in some instances even to their rights to life and survival.[38]

Research into children's lives online in Kazakhstan is still in its relative infancy. According to the recent HSBC Kazakhstan study, more than one third of children spend more than two hours a day watching videos on their digital devices (whether computers or mobile devices), while more than half spend two hours or more of every weekday playing computer games (51.3%), an increase of more than 20% since 2018, or chatting to friends (56.5%).[39] However, a significant number of children in Kazakhstan utilise the internet for learning and information-seeking, with 30.5% reporting that they spend more than two hours a day searching for information.[40]

With more children online, and more children spending more time online, it is also hardly surprising that children may be more exposed to risks online. For example, the limited previous data that does exist on children's experiences online in Kazakhstan show that in total 5.6% of children have experienced cyberbullying two to three times a month, while 13.4% have experienced it once a month. The data also shows a gendered dynamic, with boys significantly more likely to experience

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[33] *State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World.* UNICEF, New York. https://www.unicef.org/sowc2017/

[34] Safer Internet Day Press Release. UNICEF, New York, 6 February 2018. https://www.unicef.org/media/media_102560.html

[35] See http://globalkidsonline.net/covidunder19-summit/

[36] The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, End Violence Against Children, UNICEF, WHO, COVID-19: Protecting Children from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in the Home, Version 1, May 2020

[37] Kardefelt Winther, Daniel; Twesigye, Rogers; Zlámal, Rostislav; Saeed, Marium; Smahel, David; Stoilova, Mariya; Livingstone, Sonia (2020). Digital Connectivity During COVID-19: Access to vital information for every child, *Innocenti Research Briefs*, no. 2020-12, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

[38] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2021). General Comment No. 25

[39] National Center for Public Health of the Ministry of Health, 2022, using data from the World Health Organization HSBC Kazakhstan Study.

[40] *Ibid.*

cyberbullying than girls. In total, 4.6% of children report that they have participated in cyberbullying themselves.[41]

A brief overview of the legislative and policy environment in Kazakhstan

Recognizing, in part, the rapid growth of the internet and digital technology within Kazakhstan, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan has taken a number of steps to regulate and better legislate the digital space.[42] This has focused largely on the response to keep children safe online and address misinformation, including an emphasis on blocking and filtering potentially harmful content, including Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM).[43] These measures include the promulgation of:

- "On Approval of the Rules for Monitoring the Mass Media Distributed in the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Methodology for Its Calculation" (*Order of the Minister of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated April 29, 2019 no. 84. Registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan on May 2, 2019 no. 18617.dated April 29, 2019 No. 84*), to ensure the ongoing monitoring of content that violates the laws of Kazakhstan, and
- The *Law On amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the protection of children's rights, education, information and informatization"* adopted on May 3, 2022, № 118-VII.
- In October 2023, the *Comprehensive Plan on the Protection of Children from Violence, Suicide Prevention and Ensuring their Rights and Well-being for 2023 to 2025*, which includes provisions relating to online protections. The Comprehensive Plan consists of three parts: Realizing the right of children to protection from violence, bullying and abuse, Prevention and correction of suicidal and auto-aggressive behaviour in children, and Improving the well-being of Kazakh children.[44]
    - Of note within the *Comprehensive Plan* are several measures including (amongst others) activities relating to raising awareness of parents and children on cyberbullying and online risks, distribution of a free parental control system for aprents to track children's internet usage and habits, the introduction of children's sim cards; measures to combat "internet addiction", and ongoing strengthening of the legislative and regulatory framework for the protection of children, including online.
    - The Comprehensive Plan also includes the collection of data for policy and evidence, specifically through a Kazakhstan Kids Online Study.

The Criminal Code currently contains certain provisions relating to the protection of children, including from online harms, specifically, incitement to suicide or attempted suicide (art.105); coercion to sexual intercourse or acts of a sexual nature (further defined in Code)(art.123); trafficking of minors, and the involvement children in the production of sexual content (art. 144).

Kazakhstan is adopting an active surveillance approach to monitor social media for potential risks and harms. The Order "*On Approval of the Rules for Monitoring the Mass Media Distributed in the Territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Methodology for Its Calculation" dated April 29, 2019 No. 84,* requires that social media and other digital (and non-digital media) channels be monitored on an ongoing basis. This was amended through the "*Sarym-Zakieva amendment"*, which provides for filtering and blocking of content specifically for children.[45]

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[41] *Ibid.*
[42] ITU, 2022, Kazakhstan: Protecting Children Online. CIS Region. (English translation)
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] Government of Kazakhstan, 2023, *Comprehensive Plan on the Protection of Children from Violence, Suicide Prevention and Ensuring their Rights and Well-being for 2023 to 2025*, Kazakhstan: Astana
[45] ITU, 2022, Kazakhstan: Protecting Children Online. CIS Region.

In addition to the above, the Government has taken steps to establish a coordination and communication mechanisms between Ministries and partners to address online protection, as well as implementing several information and awareness raising initiatives and campaigns to further raise awareness amongst government officials and the public on the risks associated with children online.[46] The Committee for the Rights of the Child, within the Ministry of Education, is responsible for carrying out inter-sectoral coordination and international cooperation in areas relating to the protection of children from online risks and harms.

About Kazakhstan Kids Online

The Kazakhstan Kids Online study is a nationally representative household survey of children aged nine to 17 years old in Kazakhstan, and with their parents or caregivers. [47] The study builds on the Global Kids Online (GKO) study design, using a locally adapted version of the quantitative survey instrument. To supplement the household survey, a series of focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with children of the same age, in selected sites across all regions. Finally, a smaller survey was conducted with teachers, using the teacher module of the GKO toolkit, as well as a small number of focus group discussion.

The study has three objectives:

1. Provide data to guide more targeted interventions by key Government entities, development partners, ICT industries, civil society and children themselves, to efficiently realize the rights of all children, especially the most vulnerable ones. It will also inform the development of national child protection strategic documents and improvement of Kazakhstan's legislation in this area.

2. It will provide the necessary data for UNICEF Kazakhstan to strategically plan and implement interventions focusing on child online protection (COP) and children's rights online in line with the country programme for 2021-2025. Related to this, the results will also inform UNICEF corporate sector partners on key rights of children in digital environment which need priority attention.
3. Finally, the research will generate a solid baseline on children's experiences online based on international methodology of the Global Kids Online research project and allow for the tracking of progress and developments in children's rights in the digital environment within Kazakhstan over time.

To achieve these objectives, the study set out to explore in more detail:

- the extent and nature of children's access to, and use of, digital technology in Kazakhstan;
- the opportunities presented by the use of the internet for children;
- the range and nature of risks and harms faced by children online; and
- the mitigation strategies utilised by children in the face of these risks and harms.

In addition, the study explored certain aspects of parents and teachers internet use, and their interaction with children relating to the internet. Specifically,

- parents and caregivers, and teachers, use of the internet,
- their mediation of children's internet use at home and at school, and

[46] *Ibid.*
[47] The Terms of Reference for the study are available on request from the UNICEF Kazakhstan Country Office.

- their awareness of the risks faced by their children online.

The importance of the KKO in establishing a baseline for policy and programming is underscored in the explicit inclusion of the study in the recently adopted *Comprehensive Plan on the Protection of children from violence, suicide prevention and ensuring their rights and well-being, 2023-2025*, which clearly indicates the recognition of the importance of evidence-based policy-making within Kazakhstan, and the potential for impact of the study.

The Global Kids Online research approach

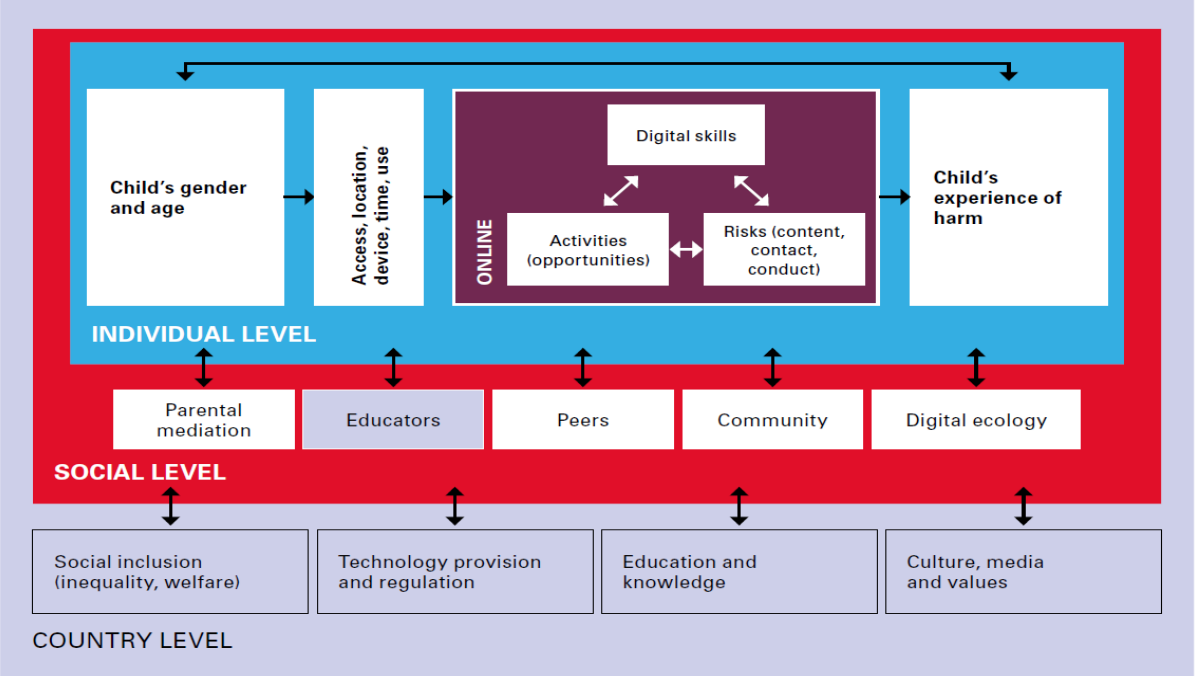
As noted, above, the Kazakhstan Kids Online study builds on the Global Kids Online sets of studies and research approach.

Global Kids Online is an international research initiative developed in partnership between the UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti and the London School of Economic. It allows for governments and others to carry out standardized research on all aspects of children's use of digital technology and their lives online, including opportunities, risks and protective factors. The GKO initiative builds on the success of the ongoing EU Kids Online initiative, a similar collaboration focusing on EU countries, that has arguably become one of the most influential and comprehensive sources of data for policy-making and legislating within the participating EU countries, and providing data for much of the evidence-base that now exists on children's opportunities, and their experiences of risks and harms online. The GKO project has also laid the foundation of the cross-national Disrupting Harms studies that are currently being led by UNICEF Office of Research, INTERPOL and ECPAT International. From its inception in 2016, GKO has now been conducted in 16 countries in the global South[48], and the study in Kazakhstan will provide the first data from the CIS region on this important topic.

GKO has developed and tested, on the basis of the initial country studies in Argentina, South Africa and Serbia, as well as subsequent country studies, a conceptual model that builds on a socio-ecological model of childhood. The model identifies factors that exist and interact at the individual level, at a social (broadly comparable to interpersonal or relationship), and at a country level, to influence children's experience of harm. In addition to factors relating to age and gender at the individual level, and the influence or role of parents, peers and community, the model specifically details the role of technology-related factors such as the digital ecology, children's access to technology, the time spent online and what they do online, as well as their digital skills and the activities they engage in online, as influencing harmful outcomes. It is important to note, like the application of the socio-ecological model to violence more broadly, the presence of these risks do not determine or predict harm, but rather increase the likelihood of harm occurring, which may be dependent on the interaction and interplay of collective risks as much as the presence or any single risk in a child's life.

[48] The Global South generally refers to low and middle-income countries in Africa, Latin America, Oceania and developing regions of Asia.

Figure 1. A socio-ecological model approach to understanding children's experiences of harm[49]



The GKO also integrates a specific conceptualisation of risks as children experience them online, that allows for a nuanced analysis of how best to address the different risks, in a way that prevent harms, but also promote the opportunities and benefits that the internet and being online has to offer children. Despite some definitional issues, there has been consensus over the previous decade that online risks could be operationalized into three categories, content, contact and conduct.[50,51] 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. Online risks can include a number of different experiences, from privacy invasions, and bullying, to encountering racist, hateful, violent or pornographic content each of which can be categorized according to the typology presented above.[52] An example is reflected in the table below, together with associated harms.

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 four categories of operational risks exist: content, contact, conduct, and commercial. These are illustrated in the diagram below.

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[49] Livingstone, Sonia (2016) A framework for researching Global Kids Online: understanding children's well-being and rights in the digital age. Global Kids Online. The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.

[50] Staksrud, E., Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., & Ólafsson, K. (2009) *What Do We Know About Children's Use of Online Technologies? A Report on Data Availability and Research Gaps in Europe (2nd edition)*. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. (EC Safer Internet plus Programme Deliverable D1.1) ISBN 978-0-85328-405-5

[51] Livingstone, Sonia , Mascheroni, Giovanna and Staksrud, Elisabeth (2015) *Developing a framework for researching children's online risks and opportunities in Europe.* EU Kids Online, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK.

[52] Staksrud & Livingstone, 2009, What Do We Know About Children's Use of Online Technologies? A Report on Data Availability and Research Gaps in Europe (2nd edition

Figure 2: Typology of ICT-related harms[53]

CO RE	Content Child engages with or is exposed to potentially harmful content	Contact Child experiences or is targeted by potentially harmful *adult* contact	Conduct Child witnesses, participates in or is a victim of potentially harmful *peer* conduct	Contract Child is party to or exploited by potentially harmful contract
Aggressive	Violent, gory, graphic, racist, hateful or extremist information and communication	Harassment, stalking, hateful behaviour, unwanted or excessive surveillance	Bullying, hateful or hostile communication or peer activity e.g. trolling, exclusion, shaming	Identity theft, fraud, phishing, scams, hacking, blackmail, security risks
Sexual	Pornography (harmful or illegal), sexualization of culture, oppressive body image norms	Sexual harassment, sexual grooming, sextortion, the generation and sharing of child sexual abuse material	Sexual harassment, non-consensual sexual messaging, adverse sexual pressures	Trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation, streaming (paid-for) child sexual abuse
Values	Mis/disinformation, age-inappropriate marketing or user-generated content	Ideological persuasion or manipulation, radicalisation and extremist recruitment	Potentially harmful user communities e.g. self-harm, anti-vaccine, adverse peer pressures	Gambling, filter bubbles, micro-targeting, dark patterns shaping persuasion or purchase
Cross-cutting	**Privacy violations** (interpersonal, institutional, commercial) **Physical and mental health risks** (e.g., sedentary lifestyle, excessive screen use, isolation, anxiety) **Inequalities and discrimination** (in/exclusion, exploiting vulnerability, algorithmic bias/predictive analytics)			

Although these risks are often considered in and of themselves to be dangerous, risk is only an indication of the potential danger of the internet, with the harm that results from risk being a more accurate indicator what makes the internet unsafe.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ONLINE AND OFFLINE VIOLENCE

Like other (offline) forms of violence against children, online violence does not occur in a bubble, but rather within the context of the broader socio and political environment (as depicted by the community, country and structural domains of the socio-ecological model). Those who are most disadvantaged are often so as a result of structural issues such as poverty (affecting access and use of technology), gender inequality, racism, sexual orientation, located within institutional and organizational practices that do nothing to change them.[1]

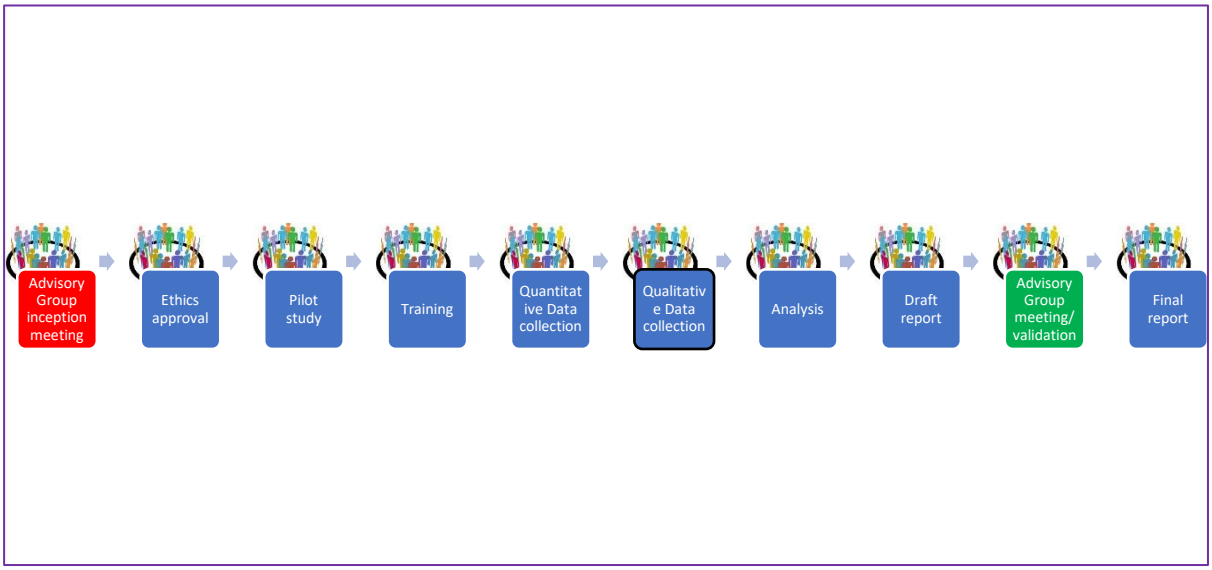
For example, recognizing that cultural and community codes of silence against open discussion of sexual abuse and exploitation is a driver of sexual violence at a community sphere allows us to design policies and interventions that address this driver. These could include interventions that break down taboos about discussing sex, reproductive health or sexual violence with young people and within families or creating policy that directly addresses harmful norms that condone sexual or gender-based violence. Creating environments where children feel safe speaking about sex, or where children are raised in home, community and societal environments that do not condone violent attitudes or patriarchal norms, will increase the opportunity and likelihood for children to speak up when they encounter sexual content or conversations online, or when they are faced with intrusive and unwanted sexual advances and contact online.

[53] *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/ssoar.71817*

The Kazakhstan Kids Online research process

The research process followed for KKO is depicted in the figure below. An advisory group was established to guide and provide oversight to the study, led by the National Committee on the Rights of the Child. An inception note detailing the background and methodology, including the proposed sample, was prepared, and reviewed and approved by the advisory group. The draft questionnaire was formulated for children (Q1), for Parents (Q2) and for Teachers (Q3), based on the Global Kids Online modules and data dictionary[54], and adapted for the Kazakhstan context. A draft qualitative research guide was developed, again building on the GKO Toolkit.[55] These were submitted to the advisory group, and following several rounds of feedback, were finalized and approved ahead of submission of the tools, along with a full ethics application, to the HML Ethics Review Board. Ethical clearance was subsequently received from HML for the full study.[56]

Figure 3. The research process



The questionnaire was translated into both Russian and Kazakh, before being back-translated into English to ensure consistency and correctness with the original, and that the questions remained true to their original meaning and construction.

Cognitive testing of the questionnaire was conducted for both parents and for children. This was followed by a pilot study of both the household surveys with children and parents, and the focus group protocol. Minor revisions were made to the questionnaire, including a slight abbreviation of the children's questionnaire, ahead of moving to training for the full study.

Data was collected using a combination of Computer-assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) and Computer-assisted web Interviews (CAWI). CAPI was utilised for all household interviews, i.e. both children and parents, while CAWI was utilised for the teacher interviews. This different method was required as the sample for the teacher interviews did not necessarily correspond with the geographical sample selection of the household samples. A walk-through method within the sampled

[54] http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/survey/
[55] http://globalkidsonline.net/tools/qualitative/
[56] HML IRB Review #706KAZA23, dated 18 April 2023. *Note: this has been provided as an Appendix (Appendix 6.) to this draft report but will be excluded from the final publication.*

Enumerator Areas was used, and households randomly selected. Where multiple children lived within the identified household, the child to be interviewed was randomly selected using a household listing process. Detailed notes on the respondent sample for both the qualitative and quantitative samples are provided in Appendices Three to Five.

Prior to taking part in the pilot study, the research study team conducted a comprehensive briefing for all supervisors and interviewers about the goals and objectives of the study, its social sign meaning, and history. As part of the briefing, the field teams were informed of how to recruit participants and collect data correctly, how to act in various unexpected situations which may occur in course of the field work. Special attention was given to ethical aspects of the study.

Only those interviewers who had received a comprehensive briefing, who had experience of work with similar target groups and trained to work with tablets were admitted to field work.

All the interviewers were provided with name tags, accompanying letters, police clearance certificates, additional instructions on recommended actions in case of emergency situations (where children, or other respondents, were deemed in need of support or immediate services), and handouts (brochures with information about hotline telephone numbers where a child or adolescent could call for support or counselling).

The moderators who conducted FGDs undertook a compulsory online UNICEF Training Course on Ethics and were provided with certificates of completion of UNICEF training in the ethical aspects of the study. Each moderator had extensive expertise in conducting online and offline discussions, including those with children and adolescents.

All interviews were conducted in either Kazakh or Russian, depending on the preference of the respondents.

Interviews with parents and caregivers generally lasted approximately 30 minutes, while interviews with children lasted between 30 and 45 minutes on average.

An overview of the survey sample design[57]

A two-stage cluster sampling method was used for the household survey component of the study. Households containing children below the age of 18 was the primary sampling unit for the study, using probability proportionate to size. This means that those enumerator areas, or clusters, with a greater number of households with children below the age of 18 had a higher likelihood of being selected into the sample. Only households with children using the internet were included and households were screened at the first point of contact. The sample was monitored throughout to assess the age and gender of respondents, to ensure that the sample reflects and is representative of the national and regional population of children between the ages of nine and 17.

The child was the primary respondent within the study. Within each household, one parent or caregiver was interviewed in addition to the child. Where both parents or caregivers consented to be interviewed, the parent with the oldest birthday was selected to be interviewed. On arrival at the household, a screening question to determine whether the child was an internet-user was administered, and *only internet using children were included in the study.* ***The experiences of children explored in this study should thus be read as those experiences of internet-using children in Kazakhstan only.*** In total a household sample of 1201 children, and 1200 parents or caregivers was realized,

[57] The detailed sample design for both the survey and the focus groups is provided in Appendix Three

An overview of the Focus Group design

For the focus groups, respondents were recruited and stratified into discussions by both age and gender. Child focus groups were stratified into a boys group, a girls group, and one mixed group, for each age group of nine to 10 year olds, 11 to 12 year olds, 13 to 14 year olds, and 15 to 17 year olds.

Parents were stratified into groups of parents for each age group of nine- to 10-year-olds, 11- to 12-year-olds, 13- to 14-year-olds, and 15- to 17-year-olds.

Similarly, the teacher focus groups were stratified into teachers of nine- to 10-year-olds, 11- to 12-year-olds, 13- to 14-year-olds, and 15- to 17-year-olds.

Seven to ten participants were included in each focus group discussion, allowing for active participation, discussion and comfort of all participants.

Several focus groups were also conducted with children living in institutions of care.

In total, eight focus groups with children living in households, eight focus groups with parents, four focus groups with children living in institutions, and eight focus groups with teachers, were conducted, representing the voices of 199 children.

Quality control

Steps were taken at every stage of the data collection, data management and analysis stage to ensure that the data included in the study was of the highest possible quality. In addition to the ethical measures taken above, and the over-training of enumerators to allow for the selection of only those deemed suitable to conduct a study of this nature with children the following measures were undertaken throughout the data collection and following the completion of collection into the data management stages.

- ✓ The core research team listened to the first questionnaires of each interviewer in order to identify errors and correct them at the start of the field work;
- ✓ Consistent telephone control check, on 25% of questionnaires for the CAPI interviews and 100% of questionnaires for CAWI interviews. This entailed calling the respondents using the specified contact information, re-administering the main questions and comparing them with the data from the database. Questionnaires in which inconsistencies are identified were rejected.
- ✓ Listening to 25% of interview recordings to identify any facts of falsification, passing one respondent to another, incorrect completion of the questionnaires, or any other possible fieldwork inconsistencies, falsifications or misconduct. Any questionnaires in which facts of falsification or gross violations of the survey procedure are noticed were rejected.
- ✓ Tracking geo-tags and IP addresses. While no such cases were identified, in case of detection of any duplicates, the questionnaires would have been rejected. Note that all geo-location data was deleted prior to finalisation of the dataset and before analysis was conducted, or the data shared with the rest of the research team.
- ✓ For the CAWI interviews with teachers, tracking duplicates by phone number and IP address in the database and between the databases of other projects conducted by BISAM. In total, 20 cases of duplicate telephone numbers were identified during this process. In each of these cases, these questionnaires were deleted by BISAM and exclude from the final sample for analysis.

Data capture, analysis and presentation of the data

The data analysis was performed using the statistical software SPSS v.21. Intersection tables were derived for the main characteristics of gender, age, region and area type for all variables. The database was verified by weighting and correcting sample biases in relation to the general population. The data and tables are available in both SPSS and Excel.

Throughout this report, disaggregated analysis by gender, age and location are only presented and discussed in the text *where there are statistically significant differences by any of those variables*.[58,59] Note that the findings relating to the children and parents components of the survey are presented independently, and individual children are not linked to their parents or caregivers responses.

The data was analyzed and presented in two separate reports. This main report presents the findings from the children's and parents' surveys and focus groups, while a second paper provides the findings from the teacher's study.

Following analysis and drafting of the report, the findings were presented to partners and stakeholders from the digital technology sector in Kazakhstan. The draft report was submitted for internal peer review within the UNICEF Country Office, as well as the UNICEF Regional Office. Comments and feedback from this process were incorporated into a final report that was then submitted to external quality assurance, prior to publishing.

Ethical considerations and child safeguarding

The utmost consideration was given to the ethical considerations and burden of care placed on the research company and research team to ensure the safety, wellbeing and safeguarding of all children (and others) included in the study. The approach to conducting the research within an ethical framework was guided by UNICEF 's Ethical Research Involving Children.[60]

- ✓ The research tools were designed and tested to ensure that they are child-focused and keep central the best interest and wellbeing of the child in the way each item is designed and phrased.
- ✓ The research protocol, including all instruments, consent and information forms, and inception note were submitted to an international ethics review board to ensure compliance with the highest ethical standards in the protection of children in research (see note above).
- ✓ All interviews were voluntary, anonymous and confidential, with the only identifiers collected being those required for interview data quality control.
- ✓ Any identifiers were removed from the dataset once quality checks were completed. These include any geolocation data that may be collected through the data collection process and the use of CAPI or WAPI technology.

[58] Significance at p>0.01

[59] As noted earlier in the report, all cross-tabulations are available on request in the intersection tables.

[60] Powell, Mary Ann; Taylor, Nicola; Fitzgerald, Robyn; Graham, Ann; Anderson, Donnah (2013). Ethical Research Involving Children, *Innocenti Publications*, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

- ✓ Participants were informed at the very outset of their right to stop the interview at any time, or to not answer any questions that they feel uncomfortable with.

- ✓ Informed consent was obtained prior to commencement of any interview.

    - Where the child was under the age of 16, consent for the interview was sought from the parent or caregiver, AS WELL AS assent from the child. Where the parent gave consent, but the child did not want to participate and refuse assent, no interview was conducted.
    - A separate consent form was provided to the parent and caregiver for their interview.
    - A signed *copy* of the consent forms was left with the respondents.

- ✓ The consent form included the aims and objectives of the study, who the study was conducted, what the data will be used for, and guarantees of anonymity, confidentiality, the expected length of the interview, and the right to refuse to participate. The form also included contact details for UNICEF and BISAM focal points. A separate one-page information note was also provided to all respondents to leave with them, which also included the UNICEF and BISAM contact details.

- ✓ At the end of each interview, the interview provided a contact number of a local Helpline or counseling focal point for the area, in case the participants wished to speak to anyone about any trauma or feelings that may have arisen during the interview, or about any previous or current experience they may have had relating to their wellbeing. This was in the form of a flyer for children. [61]A briefing form was left with the child and parent which includes these numbers, as well as the project focal point in case there are any other questions or concerns. Note that interviewers were trained to terminate the interview at any signs of distress from child participants and to immediately provide and encourage the child to speak to one of the service providers detailed in the referral form.

- ✓ All FGDs were recorded for transcription and analysis purposes. Only children who have consented to the discussion being audio recorded, explicitly included in the consent form, were able to participate in the study. No recording was undertaken for the survey.

- ✓ It is important that in all contexts children are free to participate in study in private, outside of the supervision or presence of their parent or other responsible adult. Children are consistently exposed to messaging from parents and teachers relating to online safety that stresses the dangers of speaking to strangers online, or of getting involved in romantic relationships, or sharing images. Yet for many children, this is one of the many benefits of being online, meeting new people, exploring new romantic relationships.[62] This is often, if not

[61] See Appendix for a copy of the flyer left with children.
[62] Phyfer et al, 2016.

usually done without the parent's knowledge or consent, and so children are unlikely to disclose these experiences in the presence of an adult. They often also fear having their internet access or device confiscated if they are seen by parents to be engaging in any of these behaviours. The perceived restrictions may also discourage help-seeking behaviours, as children fear the consequences if they report bad online experiences. The space for children to participate freely and in private is critical to the success of the study, and to generating the sort of evidence that is required to formulate policies and legislation, and interventions, that truly reflect the needs of children. This privacy is thus also critical to be able to ensure that children can access support if they need, and that they will not risk being disadvantaged by their participation in the study. The need for this privacy was explained to the parents or caregiver during the introductory stage of each interview. Where such privacy was not afforded to the child (the parents did not feel comfortable with or agree to allow this), no interview was conducted and the interviewers moved on to the next sampled household.

- ✓ At an institutional level, all data collectors were screened by BISAM to ensure that they had no criminal records or previous record of offences relating to children. A police clearance certificate was mandatory for all research enumerators and supervisors in the study.

- ✓ An intensive training of the research team and supervisors was conducted by the lead researcher at the outset of the study. This included the ethical protection and safeguarding of children and the sensitivities, and related skills relating to conducting research on sensitive subjects with children. A similar detailed training was subsequently conducted with all enumerators and facilitators. As noted above, the research team, including supervisors, were required to complete the UNICEF training course on Ethical research with children.

- ✓ In any instances where children were identified as in immediate need of care and protection, a direct referral was made to the UNICEF Child Protection section, for liaison with the appropriate services within the Kazakhstan Child Protection system.

Study limitations

As with any study, several limitations to the study emerged. Many of these were largely anticipated on the basis of previous GKO studies and other studies of this nature, and addressed in the pilot study.

1. While the questionnaire and content were received well by older children, younger children (aged nine to ten years old) often tended to lose focus and attention after some time. This was noted in the pilot, and the questionnaire subsequently shortened to compensate for this prior to the study, and some less core components of the questionnaire, including basic household information that could be collected from the parents, were moved to the end of the study, but some cases were still noted during the main fieldwork. This was only an issue with children aged nine to ten years old.

2. The study includes several items on what might be considered sensitive or "embarrassing" topics, particularly relating to online sexual activities and risks. Such challenges are not unusual when discussing topics relating to sexuality, sexual health, or sexual violence particularly in regions that may be relatively culturally conservative, or where any discussion of such topics are considered inappropriate for children. This challenge was anticipated ahead of time and extensively discussed in both the design of the research instruments and in the team and enumerator training. For any questions that were deemed in advance to be sensitive – specifically those relating to sexual risks and harms – children were given the tablet themselves to answer, with the interviewer available on standby to answer any questions of clarity relating to meaning of the questions that the child might have. On completion of those questions, the tablet was handed back to the interviewer to continue subsequent questions.

   While this did not prevent some open and frank disclosures from children in both the focus groups and household surveys, there are indications that many children did not feel comfortable answering such questions openly, with children often choosing to select a "I would rather not answer" response (rather than a negative response") to this question. This in itself may be an indication of some level of understanding and engagement with the content of the question, but an unwillingness to be open in their response for fear of punishment, stigma or judgement. This may have led to an under-reporting of experiences or exposure to online sexual risks and harms. Where this in suspected to have occurred, it is noted in the main text of the report.

3. Related to the above, the small number of direct experiences of sexual risks that emerged from the study, means that limited meaningful analyses can be performed on these items. For example, the numbers do not allow for reliable analysis of experiences by gender, or by age. However, the data does allow for a reliable estimation of prevalence of risk for children at a population level, recognizing that this may be subject to the same under-reporting challenges encountered with many forms of sexual violence in particular. Where the numbers are too small for further analysis, this is indicated in the text, and raw numbers are also indicated for context. These limitations do not apply to non-sexual risks encountered.

Challenges and lessons

Kazakhstan Kids Online is based on the Global Kids Online methodological design, which has been tested across various regions in the world, representing a range of contexts, languages and cultures. This, along with the scope for local adaptation, allows for its application and suitability across borders and regions. It is however the first GKO study to be conducted in Central Asia, and as such several areas for learning can be derived from the application of the methodology within the Kazakhstan (and potentially regional) context.

- ⇨ Gaining an understanding of the range of risks that children encounter online, particularly sexual, commonly pose methodological and administrative challenges when interviewing children directly. This go beyond the ethical considerations, which are non-negotiable to a "do-no-harm" approach to conducting research with children, to challenges relating to the receptiveness, openness and willingness of children to openly discuss these topics. Various strategies can be used to minimize barriers, and to foster open and comfortable disclosure, particularly in contexts where strong societal taboos and norms exist around these topics.

The KKO team was able to draw on extensive experience in working with children, including on topics such as this, to anticipate and manage these barriers. This resulted in sufficient disclosure of these unwanted sexual experiences and risks online to provide reliable and useful insight into the nature of these children's experiences (if not to the extent allowing for detailed disaggregation). However there may be further adaptations and refinement of the module on sexual risks and harms to fully unpack children's experiences of sexual risks, while maintaining the protections required for children within the Kazakhstan context.

- As with many of the GKO studies, the surveys included only internet-using households. It may be useful to consider supplementing this with a limited module for households selected into the sample that do not meet the criteria of internet-users, but meet all other criteria, to better understand barriers to internet access and use. However, this decision should be made on the basis of updated digital penetration rates, as the rapid pace of roll-out may render such a sub-sample largely irrelevant.

- The inclusion of the educator's module of the GKO Toolkit proved to be particularly important, particularly as Kazakhstan expands the roll-out of connectivity to schools through the GIGA partnership and given its introduction of digital literacy across the school curriculum from a primary level. In future research and KKO studies, it may be useful to expand this module to explore in more details teacher's familiarity with a range of risks, and how this knowledge is being applied or practically utilised in the classroom or supporting learners.

- The research process design, and allocation of responsibilities for the KKO study ensured almost seamless data collection and analysis process. The contracted research company responsible for the data collection, capturing and cleaning had extensive experience conducting research of this kind and were able to demonstrate thorough and ongoing quality control measures, ensuring that the analysis of the data presented no challenges, and the highest quality of the resulting data could be assured. The commitment of the company to ensuring adherence to the do-no-harm principle, and maintaining the highest ethical standards, also facilitated the process, and while this should be a given, in many contexts is more difficult to guarantee. This is particularly important when conducting studies of this nature under tight timeframes.

Structure of the report

This report is divided into eight sections following this introduction (chapter 1):

- Chapter 2 details the access that children in Kazakhstan have to the internet and digital devices, where they access the internet, and what they do online (the extent and nature of children's internet access).
- Chapter 3 explores their digital skills using 24 key indicators, categorized into operational, information and browsing, social and privacy, creative, and mobile skills.
- Chapter 4 examines children's experiences of risks and harms. This is in turn categorized into exposure to non-sexual risks, including age-inappropriate and [potentially harmful content and contact risks, sexual risks, and cyberbullying. Within each of these, the extent of harm and measures taken to mitigate these risks are also explored.
- Chapter 5 outlines the social support structures available to children.

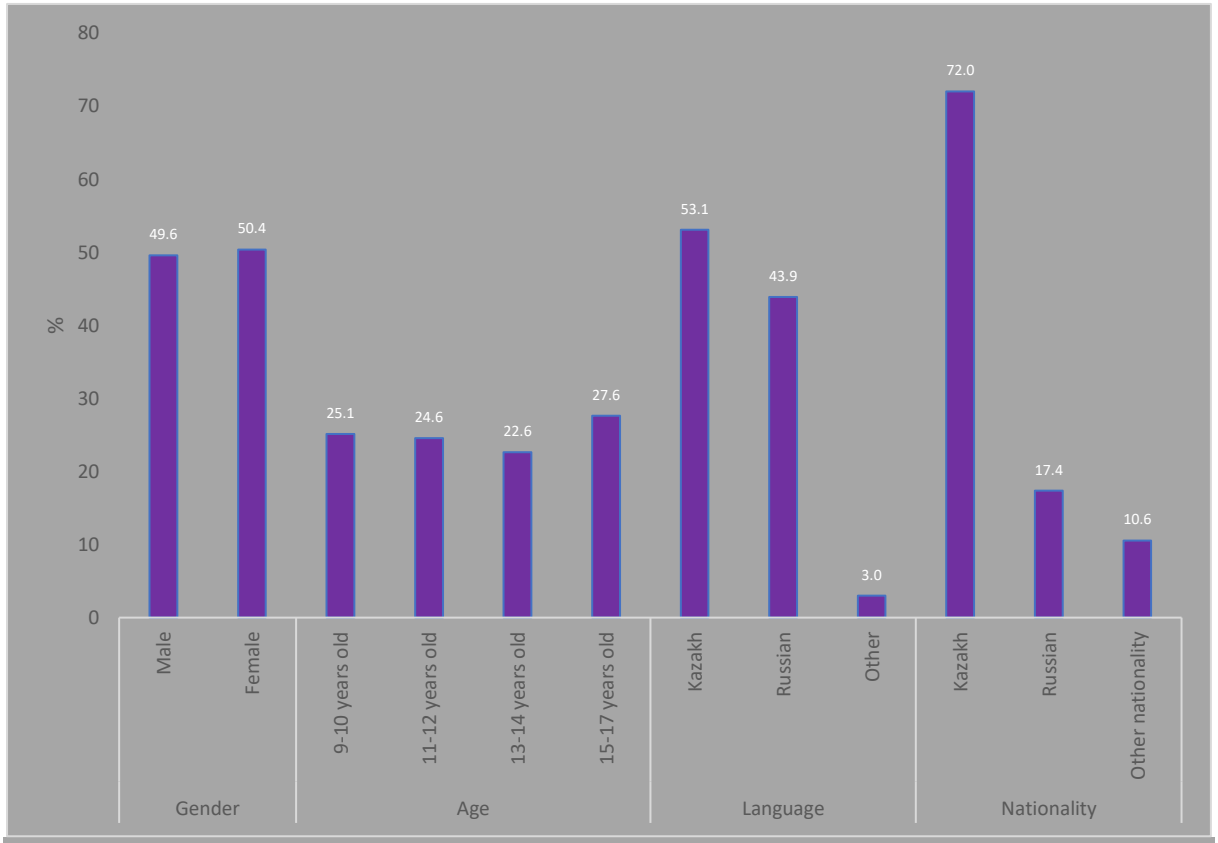
- Chapter 6 covers children's perceptions of the internet mediation measures undertaken or provided by parents and teachers.
- Chapter 7 moved into the findings of the parent's survey of the KKP. This includes parents and caregivers own access and use of digital technology, and their digital skills; their views on how they mediate their children's internet use, and their perceptions of risks faced by their children online.
- Finally, the report provides a brief summary and discussion of the implications of these findings for policymaking and programming within Kazakhstan, providing key pointers on how these findings can be used to inform both policy and interventions.

The findings of the teacher's component of the study are presented in a separate paper, Kazakhstan Kids Online: Teachers, Education and Kazakhstan Kids Online.

Study sample demographics

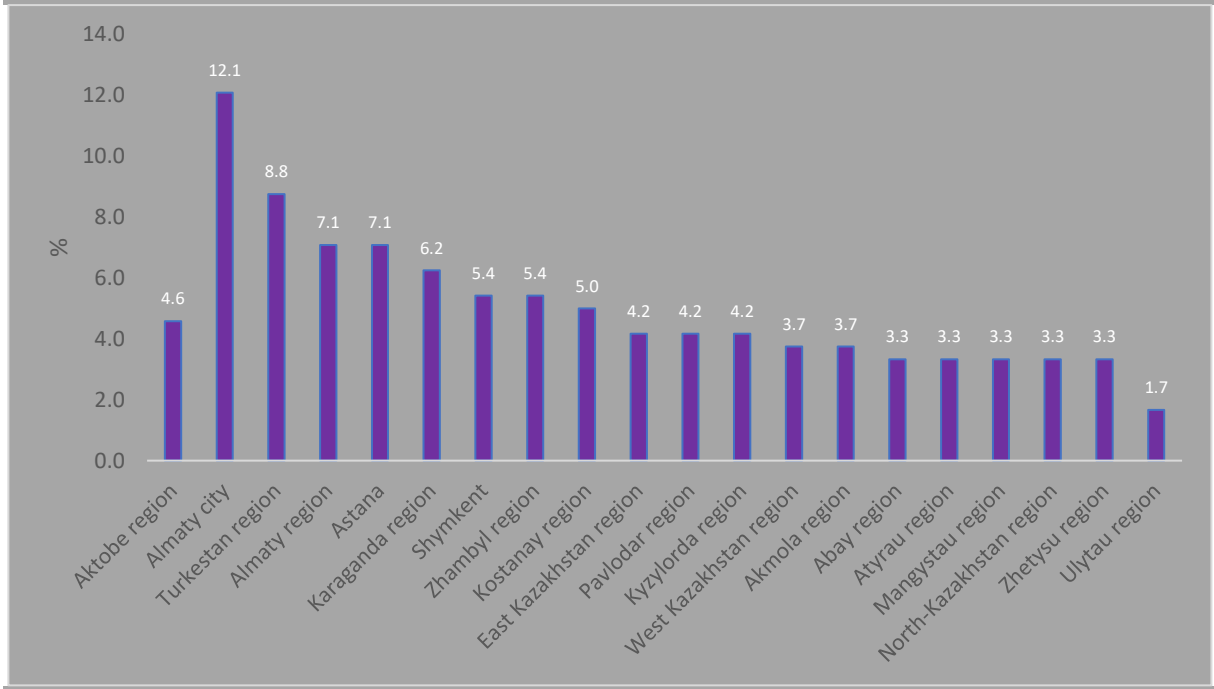
An overview of the children included in the study is provided below. As noted earlier, the sample was nationally and regionally representative of all children nine to 17 years old. The sample was almost equally distributed between male and female respondents, with 50.4% of the sample female, and 49.6% male. One quarter (25.1%) were between the ages of nine and ten, only fractionally less (24.6%) between 11 and 12 years old, and 22.6% were 13 to 14 years old. 15- to 17-year-olds constituted 27.6% of the sample. More than seven in ten (72.6%) identified as Kazakh, and 17.4% identified as Russian, with one in ten identifying as another nationality. Kazakh was the primary While the language spoken by 53.1% followed by Russian at 43.9%.

Figure 5(a). Demographics (children) (%) (n=1201)



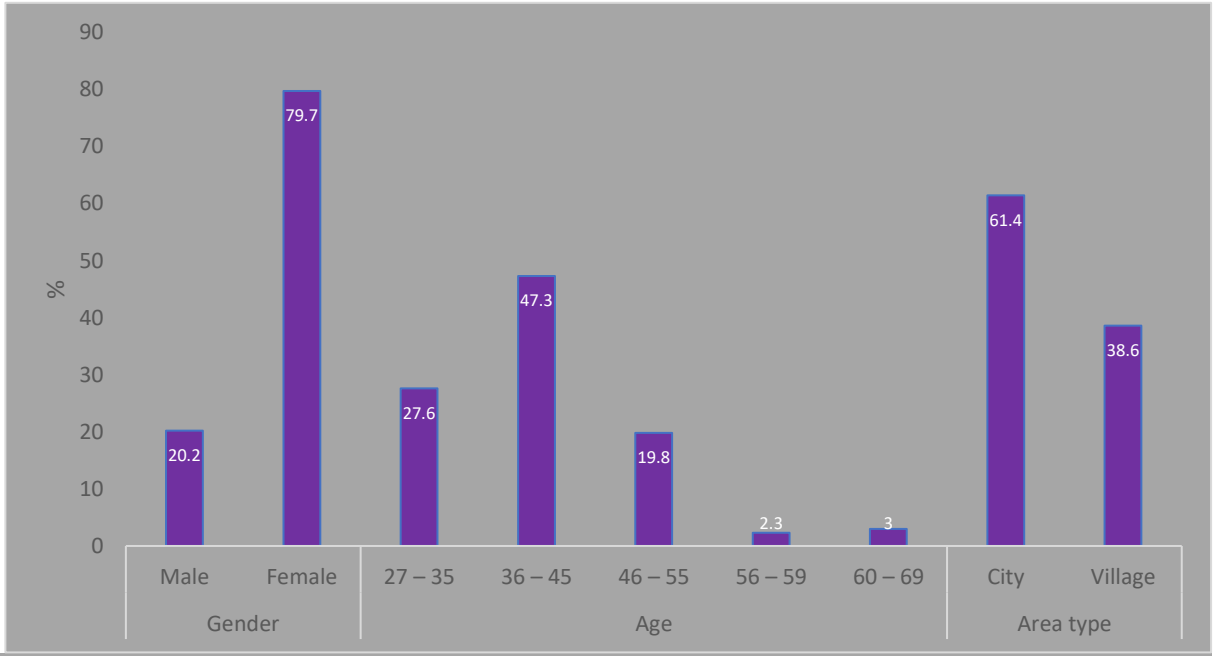
The distribution of the sample by region is depicted in figure 6 below. The largest representation was in Almaty city (12.1%), followed by Turkestan (8.8%) and Almaty region and Astana (both 7.1%). Zhetysu and Ulytau constituted the smaller representation (3.3% and 1.7% respectively).

Figure 5(b). Distribution of sample by region (%)(n=1201)



Significantly more female parents or caregivers were included in the study, with mothers or female caregivers constituting four in five (79.7%) respondents in the sample. Tis is often a product of more women still remaining home during the day, when interviews are conducted, than men. Parents aged 36 to 45 years of age were most represented (47.3%), followed by younger parents aged 27 to 35 (27.6%) and then parents aged 46 to 55. No parents or caregivers older than 65 years were included in the study. Three fifths (61.4%) of the parents were based primarily in cities.

Figure 6. Demographics (parents) (%) (n=1200)



Chapter 2. Children's access to the internet and connected devices

Introduction

This chapter describes how children in Kazakhstan access the internet, when they start going online, the devices they use to connect, and what they are doing online. It also captures children's views on their online experiences, and how important they see it in their lives, as well as how some of the activities they engage in, particularly those relating to every activities such as chatting and gaming, may start to introduce risks into their lives.

Children's access and barriers to the internet

In Kazakhstan, Children report first accessing the internet at a relatively young age (Figure 7). While more than four out of ten (45.8%) first go online between the ages of five to eight years, another five percent first go online at four years or younger. Fractionally fewer than one third (32.2%) go first go online at between nine to 12 years. While there is little different between boys and girls who go online before the age of nine years old, there was a significant difference between boys and girls who first reported going online between nine and 12 years old, with one in five boys (20.7%) reporting they first went online then, and one in three girls (33.9%) reporting going online between nine and 12 years old.

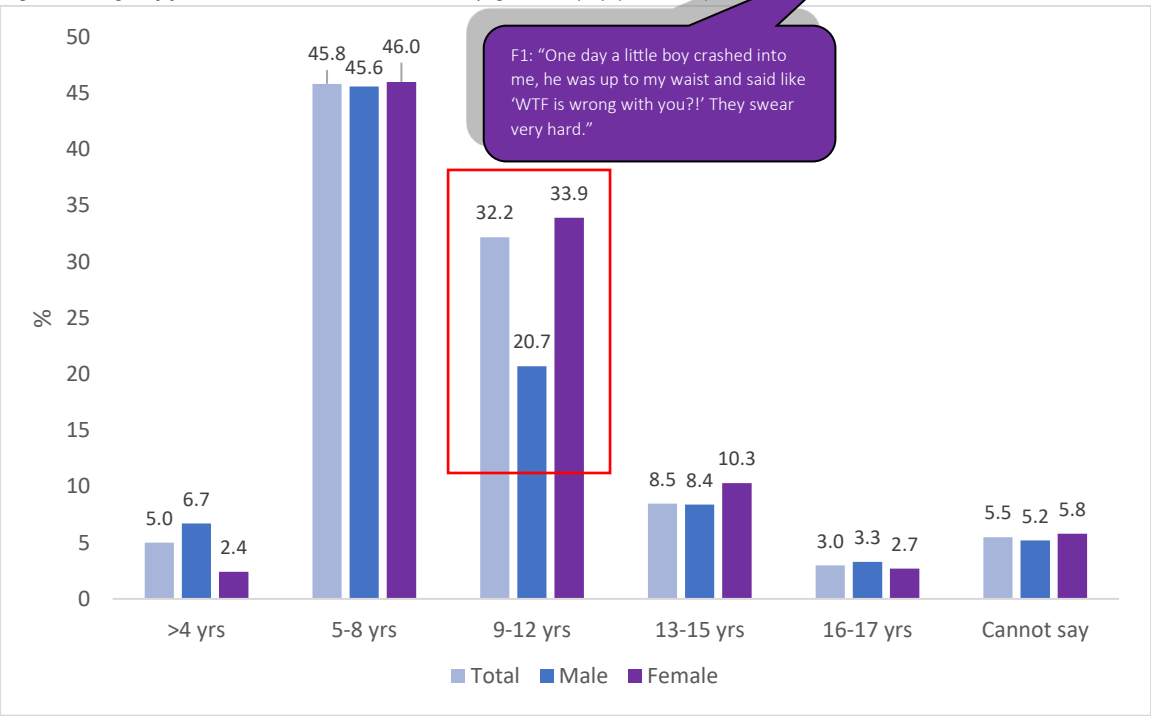
This is an important finding, as the age at which children first access the internet, particularly within the home environment, along with the general availability of access to the internet within the home, and the frequency of children's use of the internet within the home, all corelate with better digital skills amongst children.[63] The increasingly younger age of internet adoption was reinforced by children in focus group discussions, who noted how younger children re increasingly absorbed in their mobile devices.

[63] Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Stoilova, M. (2023). The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing: A systematic evidence review. *New Media & Society*, *25*(5), 1176–1202. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211043189

F1, 15-17 y/o: "Have you noticed that young children begin to grow up fast because of social media."

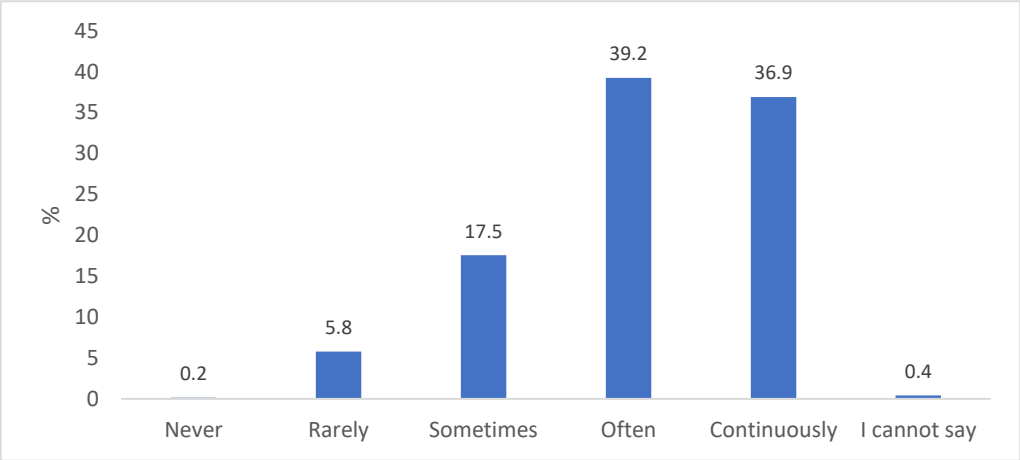
F2, 15-17 y/o: "They walk around the school and probably swear worse than the 11th graders."

Figure 7. Age of first internet use, total and by gender (%) (n=1201)



The majority of children report being able to access the internet when they want to, with more than one in three (36.9%) reporting they can access the internet often, when they want to, and another two in five (39.2%) reporting they can continuously access the internet (Figure 8). Both boys and girls report being able to access the internet when they want to at the same rate. This, along with the broadly similar age at which children are going online for the first time, suggest that at least in terms of access, gender is not a significant factor in shaping children's use of digital technology. This compares favourably to some other regions of the world, where gender often shapes children's access to the internet, as well as skills.[64]

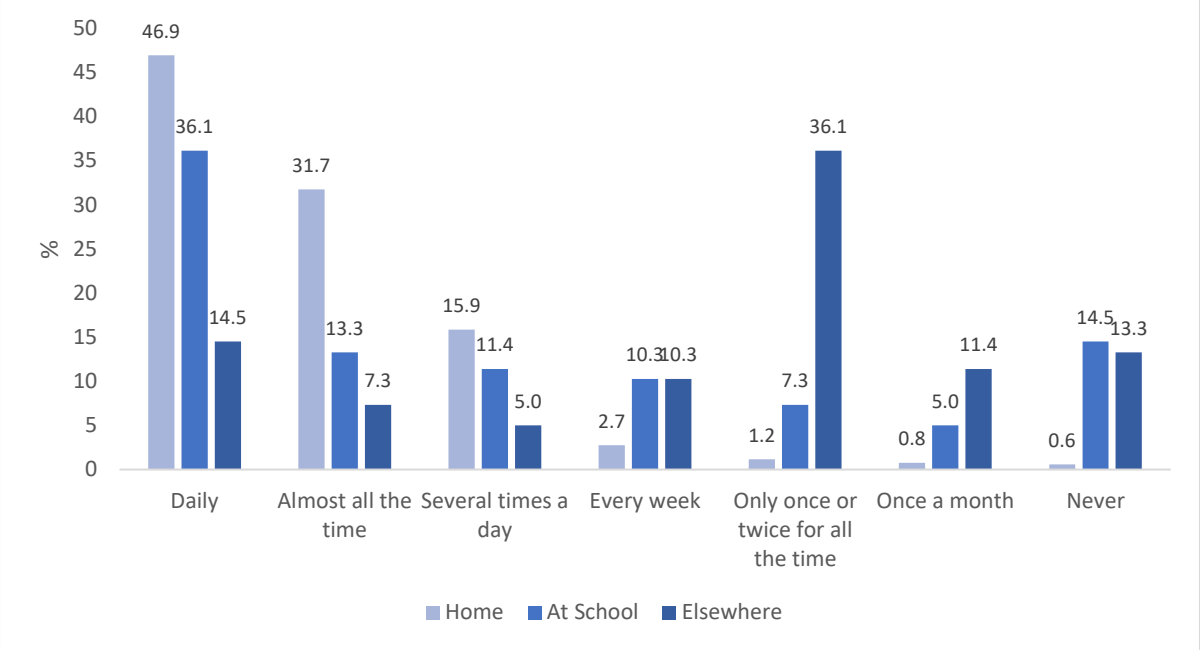
Figure 8. Children's self-reported access to the internet when they want to use the internet (%) (n=1201)



[64] Magis-Weinberg *et al*, Context, Development, and Digital Media: Implications for Very Young Adolescents in LMICs.

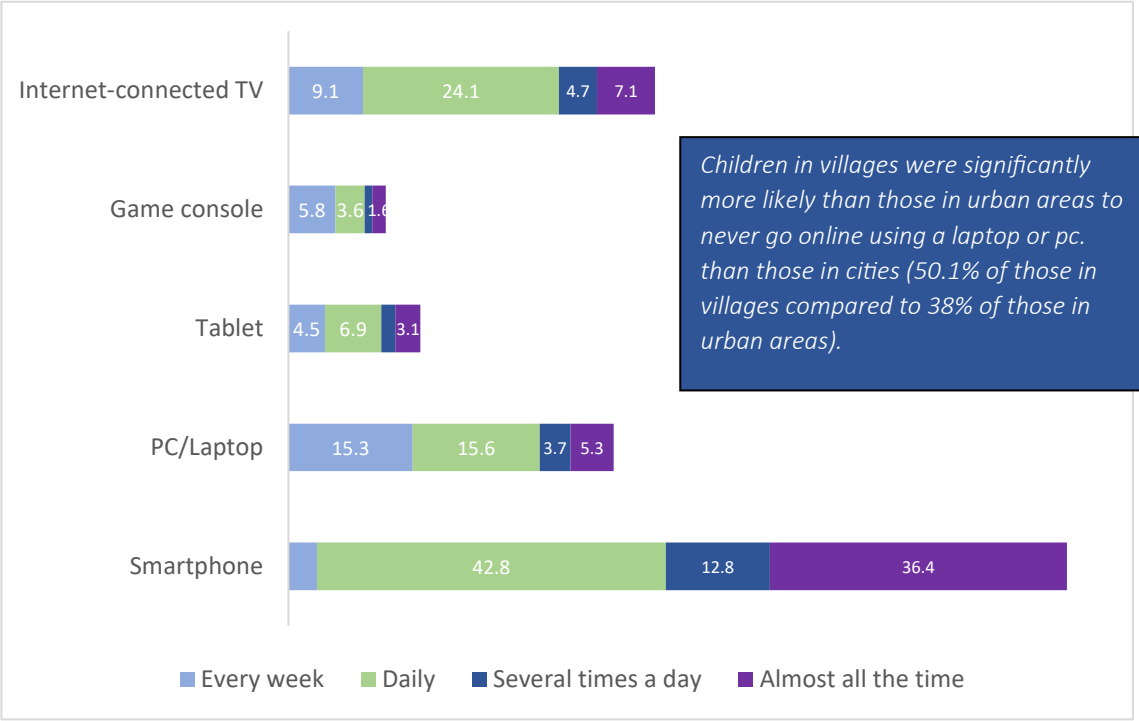
Home, followed by school, are the places that children spend the most time online. While this corresponds with where children spend most of the time, it is also an indication that there is ready access to the internet at home, and when wanted, at school. Almost one in two children (46.9%) report that they go online daily at home, while more than on in three (36.1%) go online daily at school. Another three in ten (31.7%) are online almost all the time while at home, and more than one in ten (13.3%) report that they are online almost all the time at school. Of note is that a significantly higher percentage of children never use the internet at school in villages (25.2%) than children in urban areas (15.8%). There is no significant difference by age or gender in how and where children access the internet.

Figure 9. Frequency of internet or smartphone use at home and school (%) (n=1201)



Children most commonly use smartphones to connect to the internet, with more than nine in ten (92%) using their smartphone to go online either all the time, several times a day, or daily. One in four children go online all the time, several times a day or daily on their laptop or computer, while 35.9% go online on their internet-connected (Smart) TVs all the time, several times a day or daily. This profile already hints at some of the most common reasons for children to go online, and their activities online, as smart TVs will be used primarily for entertainment and gaming, while PCs and laptops are more likely to be used for a wider range of activities, including schoolwork or information seeking. Tablets and gaming consoles are significantly less widely used to go online, with four in five children reporting that they never go online on a game console (75.9%), and a similar percentage never going online via a tablet (74%). Children living in villages were significantly more likely than those in urban areas to report that they never use a laptop or a pc to go online (50.1% of those in villages compared to 38% of those in urban areas).

Figure 10. Devices used to connect to the internet (%) (n=1201)



Children in villages were significantly more likely than those in urban areas to never go online using a laptop or pc. than those in cities (50.1% of those in villages compared to 38% of those in urban areas).

Barriers to internet access are mainly faced in the form of restrictions placed on internet use by teachers, and to a lesser extent, parents and caregivers. Almost one in three children reported that their teachers sometimes restricted their access to the internet, with another 13.9% reporting this occurred often. While slightly more children reported that their parents sometimes restricted their internet access (34%), less than on tenth (7.6%) reported that this occurred often.

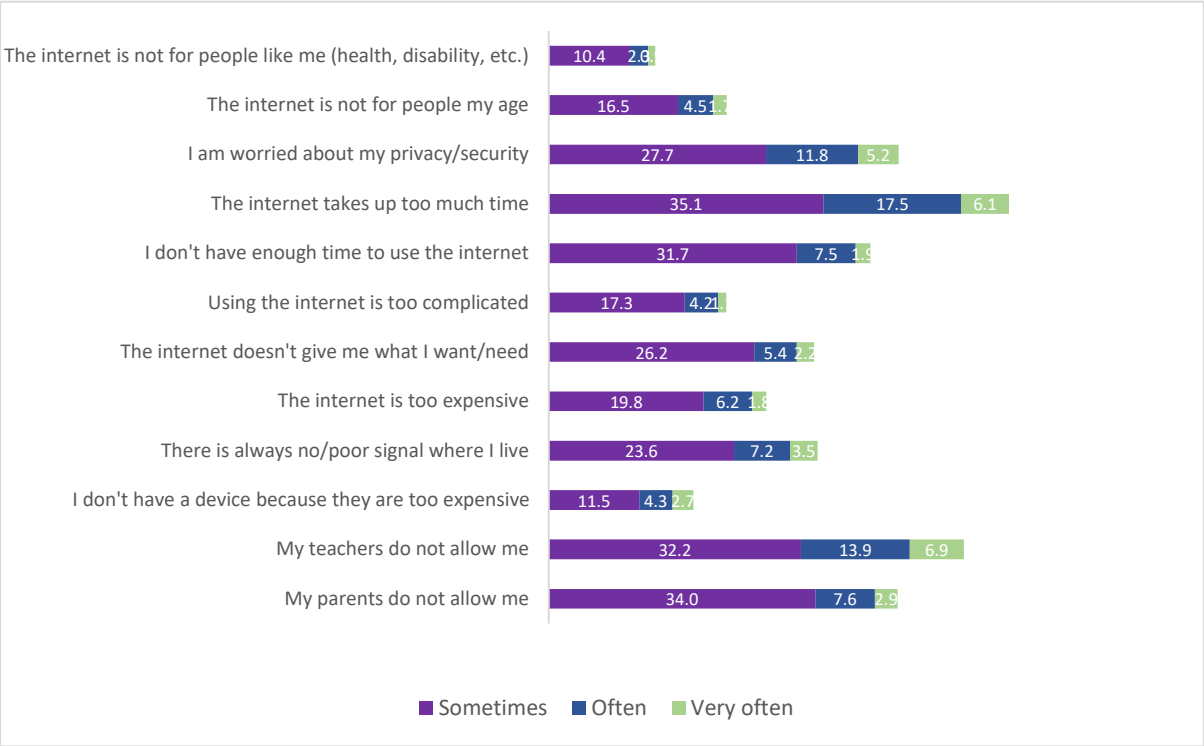
While less of a barrier as such, children also frequently reported that they felt the internet took up too much time in their lives, with more than in three (35.1%) reporting they felt this way, and another (17.5%) reporting that they felt this very often. This perception may result in adults in their lives, such as teachers and parents, placing restrictions on them.

"As a gamer, I can say that the internet in Kazakhstan sucks. It jumps up and down. It (the game) lags because of this" *(f, 15-17 years old).*

Children also commonly reported that there was poor or no signal where they lived, which got in their way of using the internet. While this was more commonly a challenge in villages, it was also noted by children living in urban areas.

Cost of internet access, or devices is amongst the lowest reported barriers to internet access. However, it is significant that while there is widespread access to the internet and to digital devices, a significant percentage of children in Kazakhstan still feel both that the internet is not for people like them, either because of their age (one in four feel this was sometimes or often), or because of their health or disability (13.2% feel this way sometimes or often), or it is too complicated for them (1 in five feel this way sometimes or often).

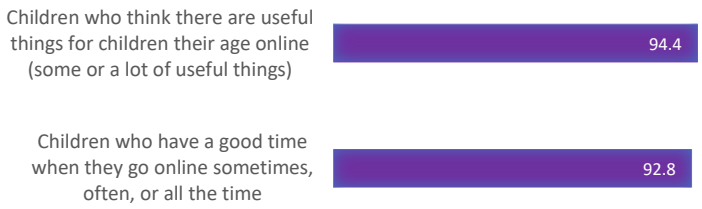
Figure 11. Barriers to internet access (%) (n=1201)



Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger children were more likely to report that the internet was not for people their age, than children between 13 and 14 years, and 15 and 17 years old.

Slightly more girls than boys reported that they sometimes (18.5% of girls compared to 16.1% of boys) felt that the internet was too complicated for them, although there was little difference between the percentage of boys and girls who often felt that the internet was too complicated). Conversely, more boys very often felt that the internet was too complicated for them, compared to girls (1.5% compared to 0.7%), although these numbers are too small to derive meaningful conclusions from. Younger children, between the ages of nine and 11 years old, and 11-12 years old, were more likely than children aged 24 to 24, and 15 to 17 years old, that the internet was too complicated, suggesting a growing familiarity, confidence, and some level of skills competency, as children grow older (see Appendix, figure aA1).

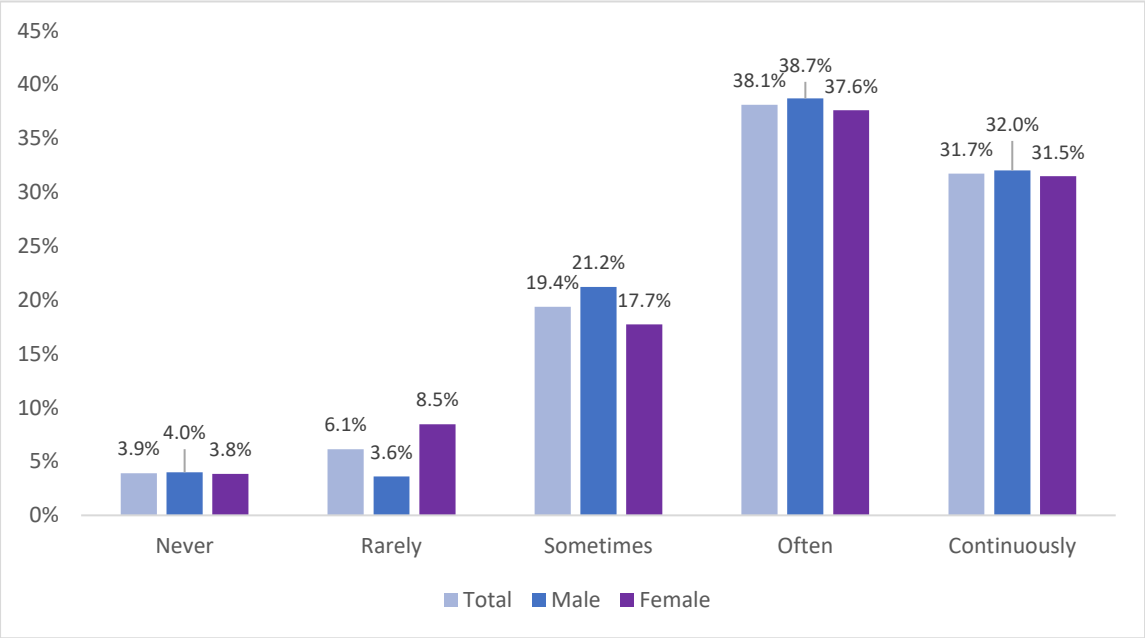
Girls (27.2%) were also a little more likely to sometimes feel that the internet does not provide them with what they want or need, than boys (24.5%), although boys were statistically more likely than girls to feel this often (6% compared to 4.8%)), or very often (2.8% of boys compared to 1.6% of girls) (see figure A.2). Younger children aged nine to 10 years old were significantly more likely to report that they sometimes felt this than children of other ages (31.3% compared to 24.4% of 11-12 year olds, 26.1% of 13 to 14 year olds, and 23.5% of 15 to 17 year olds). There was less difference amongst age groups when it came to children reporting that they often or very often felt that the internet does not provide them with what they want (see Appendix, figure A.2).



Children's experiences online

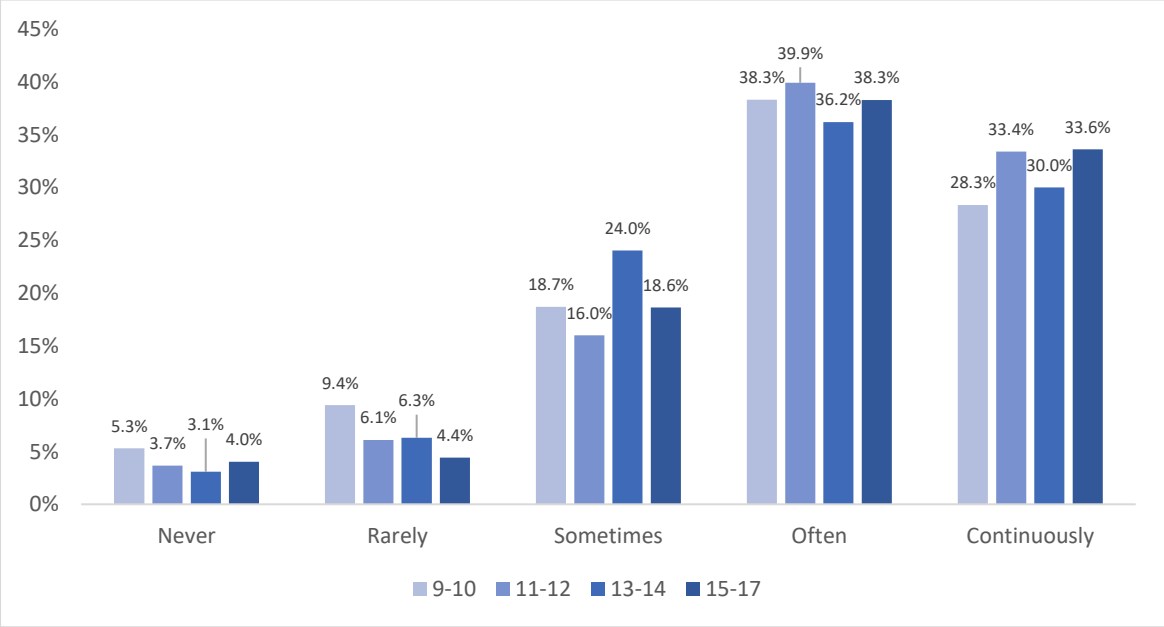
Most children (92.8%) report that they have a good time when they go online. There was little difference by gender amongst children who report that they have a good time often or continuously when they go online, although girls were more likely to report that they rarely have a good time (8.5% compared to 3.6% of boys), while boys were more likely than girls to report that they have a good time sometimes (21.2%) than girls (17.7%).

Figure 12. Children reporting they have a good time when they go online, total and by gender (n=1201)



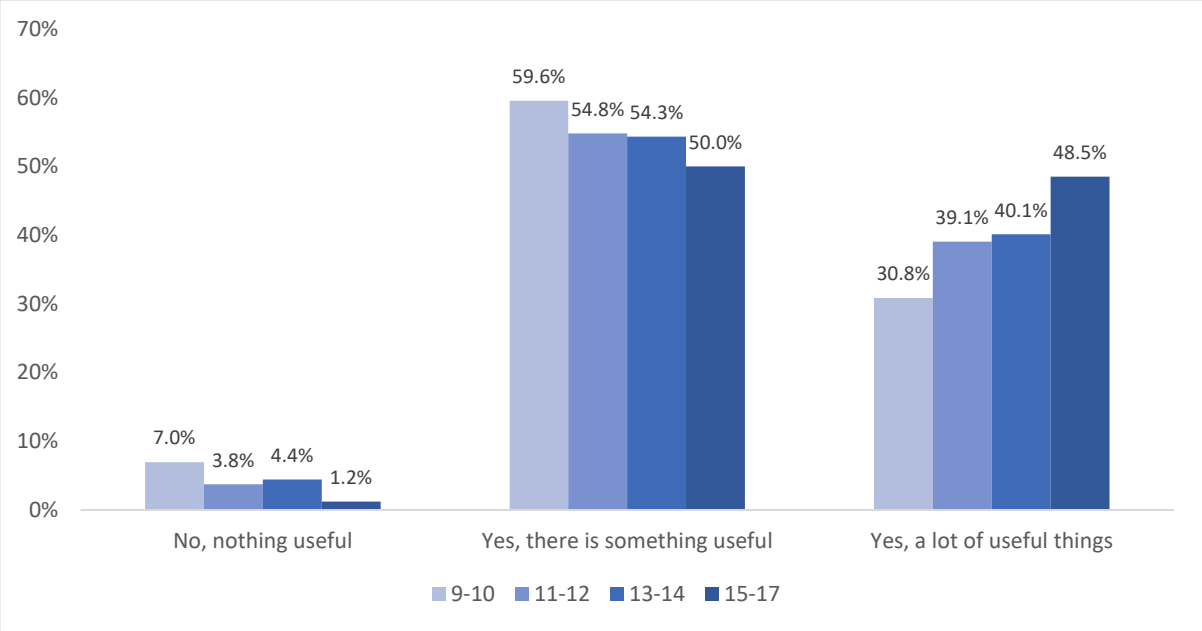
Children between the ages of 11 and 12, and those between 15 and 17 years old, were more likely than children between the ages of 13 and 14 to continuously or often have a good time online. Younger children, between the ages of nine and 10, were the most likely to say that they never (5.3%) or rarely (9.4%) have a good time when they go online.

Figure 13. Children reporting they have a good time when they go online, by age (n=1201)



While there was no significant difference by gender amongst those children in Kazakhstan who feel that there is something useful for children their age on the internet, older children were progressively more likely than younger children to feel that there are a lot of useful things for them online. This is consistent with literature that suggests that as children get older and develop greater levels of digital skills, they are better able to take advantage of the opportunities and benefits that the digital environment present.[65] Older children are more likely than younger children to learn how and where to find information and content that they find interesting and engaging, making it more likely for them to feel that the internet is useful for them. As digital technology is introduced into schools as well, children are more likely to feel that the internet is useful as they increasingly use it for schoolwork and study.

Figure 14. Children reporting that there is something useful for children their age on the internet, by age (n=1201)



Children's online activities

"We watch the stories of our friends…you can post a lot on Instagram, it archives its stories from a year ago, you can browse through them" *(f1, 11-12*
"We post our day in stories, *(f3, 11-12)vlogs)*
"I (use Telegram), to watch music and movies" *(f2, 11-12)*
"I read advice for girls (on Telegram)" *(f3, 11-12)*

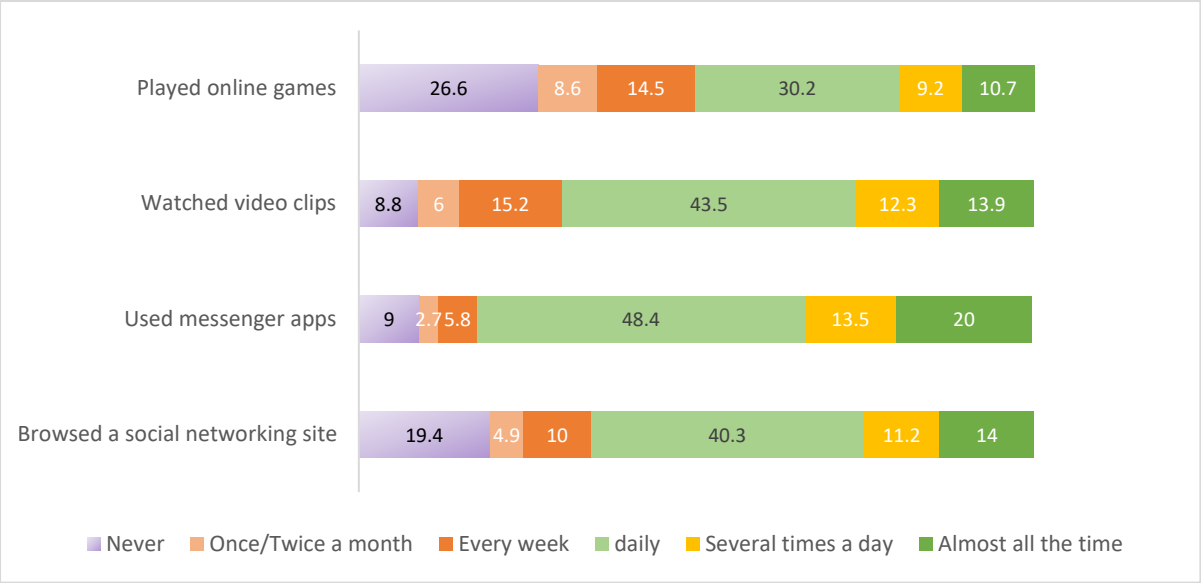
The range of activities that children can engage in online is vast. This study broadly explored three different sets of activities: entertainment and communication, information and knowledge-seeking, and content creation, or creativity.

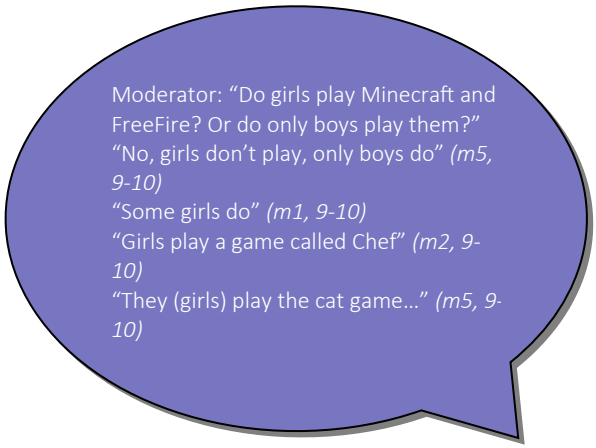
Perhaps unsurprisingly, children spent more time online on entertainment and communication activities than anything else. In total, using messenger apps such as WhatsApp or Viber, with four out of five children reporting that they use a chat app

[65] Haddon, Leslie, Cino, Davide, Doyle, Mary-Alice, Livingstone, Sonia, Mascheroni, Giovanna, & Stoilova, Mariya. (2020). Children's and young people's digital skills: a systematic evidence review. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4160176

daily (48.4%), several times a day (13.5%), or almost all the time (20%) reported they use a chat app all the time. Watching video clips was almost as popular, with seven in ten children watching clips online all the time (13.9%), several times a day (12.3%), or daily (43.5%). Playing games is the least common activity undertaken online daily, almost all the time or several times a daily, although one in two (50.1%) children still reported playing games at least daily, or more. While the evidence on the impact of gaming and online entertainment on children's health and wellbeing remains mixed, and is a somewhat contested space within the literature, there is substantial literature that shows that gaming, along with online entertainment such as social media, is correlated with higher levels of digital skills.[66]

Figure 15. Frequency of entertainment and communication using the internet, over the last month (%) (n=1201)





Many boys who participated in the focus group were of the opinion that girls didn't play games, a perception commonly echoed by girls in the focus groups as well: *"they (referring to boys) play games. Dota. FreeFire. they are constantly on the phone, playing 'the Fool' game, and card games"*. More common was the sentiment that the types of games girls p[lay are different from those that boys play.

Yet in the household survey there was little difference by gender amongst those children who played games, with both boys and girls commonly reporting that they played games online.

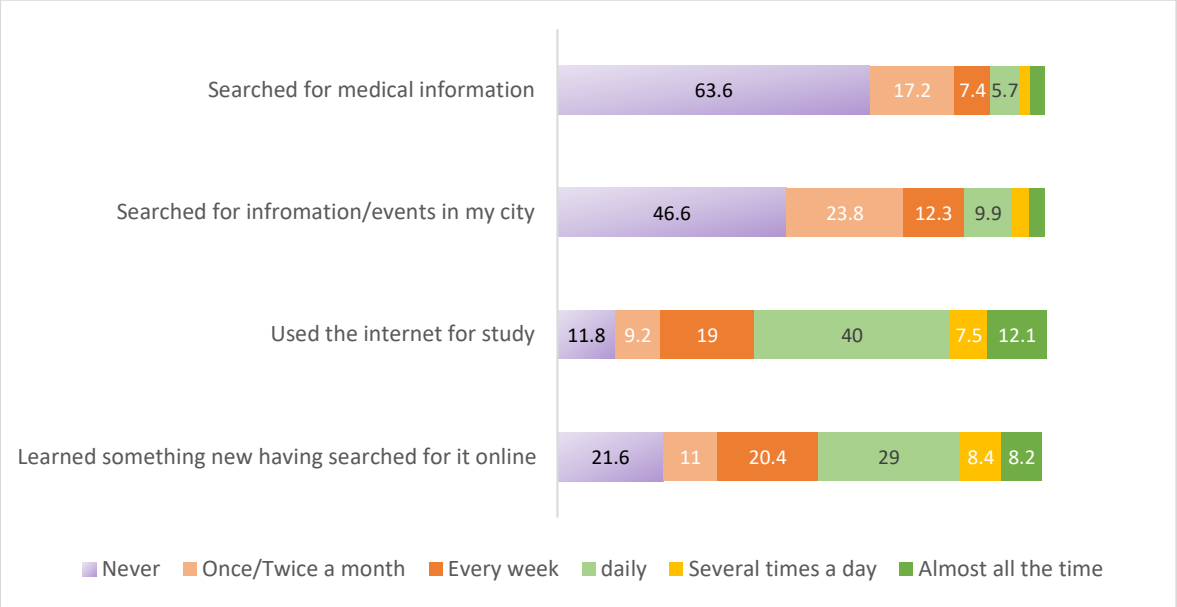
Information and knowledge seeking constitutes the second most common set of activities undertaken by children online in Kazakhstan. This included looking for medical information online, searching for information about their city or events in their city, using the internet for study, and learning something new from searching for it online. Three out of five (59.7%) children included in the study had used the internet for study or schoolwork at least daily (40%), several times a day (7.5%) or

[66] Haddon et. al., 2020, Children's and young people's digital skills: a systematic evidence review.

almost all the time (12.1%) in the past month, while just over one in ten 11.8%) had not used the internet for study at all in the same period.

While most children frequently used the internet to look for information or for study purposes, fewer children had learnt something new online after having searched for it. In total 45% of all children interviewed reported that they had learnt something new from having searched for it online in the past month. Children in the focus group discussions frequently spoke about how they could use the internet to learn new skills like language. This provided multiple benefits relating to both information and entertainment: being able to better understand and engage with online influencers from other countries, such as Korean singers and dance groups, while also being potentially useful for travel to those countries in the future.

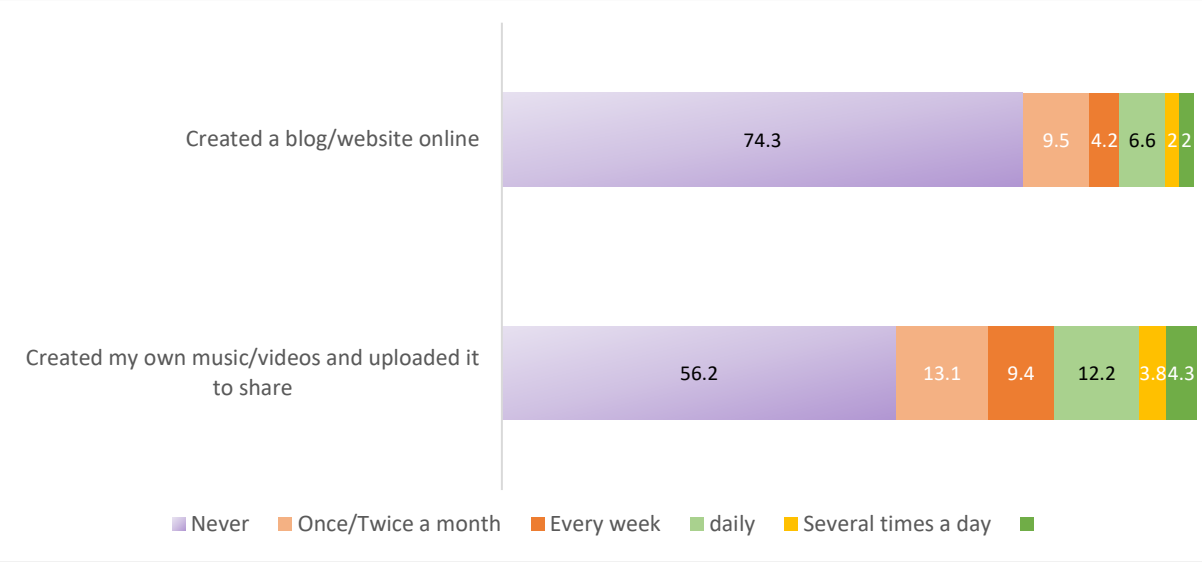
Figure 16. Frequency of information and knowledge seeking using the internet, over the last month (%) (n=1201)



The last set of activities explored in the study was those relating to creating content for the internet. Two specific activities were explored: creating a blog or a website online and creating and uploading their own music or videos and uploading it to share, for example through a website, social media or short video app like TikTok or YouTube.

The majority of children reported that they had neither created a website or blog at all over the past month or created their own music or videos to share online. Just one quarter (25.7%) had created a blog or website at all over the past month, with the majority of these (9.5%) having done so just one or twice over the past month, 4.2% every week, and 6.6% daily. Children were slightly more likely to have created their own videos or music and uploaded these online, with 13.1% having done so just once or twice, one in ten (9.4%) every week, and another 12.2% having done so daily. This may broadly align with the popularity of sites such as Instagram, Vkontakte and TikTok within Kazakhstan.

Figure 17. Frequency of content creation using the internet, over the last month (%) (n=1201)



These findings broadly corelate with findings across regions that reflect that while a broad base of children take advantage of the more superficial opportunities that being online present, such as consuming content and opportunities for entertainment and connectivity, there is growing attrition in those children accessing opportunities that may require greater technical and digital skills.[67] The majority of children consume content online, but are also far more limited in content creation or creative activities, and fully taking advantage of the opportunities that the internet presents.[68]

One of the many opportunities that being online does present, and that is clearly being taken advantage of by children in Kazakhstan, is communicating with a wide range of people, both within children's immediate sphere and environment, and more widely. While chat and messenger apps such as WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram as well as Facebook Messenger, present opportunities to stay in contact with family, both immediate and distance, and almost continual access to friends and boyfriends or girlfriends, they also present the opportunity to connect and engage with people far beyond children's immediate circle, particularly in disadvantaged or rural areas. Knowing who children are speaking to online, on a daily or even less frequent basis is a useful departure point for understanding both how children are reaping some of the benefits of being connected, and also how they might be exposed to some of the risks that they may encounter online. For example, communicating daily with family members, particularly parents and caregivers, or siblings, or friends of a similar age, may be considered one of the many benefits to being online, from both the parents and the child's perspective – perhaps more so from the parents – while for many children, being able to stay constantly in touch with their boyfriends or girlfriends, or close friends, is often counted as a benefit, and one of the ,many advantages to socila media and smartphones. However, from an adult's perspective, the possibility of children chatting to or otherwise communicating with people that they do not know in person and have only met online, particularly those who may be older than them, may pose specific risks and potential threats to children.

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

[68] See for example, Kuzmanović, D., Pavlović, Z., Popadić, D., & Milosevic, T. (2019). *Internet and Digital Technology Use among Children and Youth in Serbia: EU Kids Online Survey Results, 2018*. Belgrade: Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy

In Kazakhstan, children reported chatting to their parents on a daily, several times a day or constantly, more than any other person. This was followed by chatting to other adult relatives, and siblings (see figure A3). Another 13.6% reported speaking to their romantic partners daily.

Children were significantly less likely to report speaking to strangers over the age of 18 that they had first met online. In total, 4.2% of children reported speaking to strangers over 18 once or twice, while another 2.7% reported speaking to adult strangers once a month.[69] There was some variation by age, with older children more likely than younger children to report that they sometimes or regularly spoke to people older than 18 they had first met online. In total, seven in ten children (7.9.2% of children aged 15 to 17 reported that they never spoke to someone older than 18 they had never met in person, compared to 87.9% of children 13 to 14, 91.9% of those 11 to 12, and 95.1% of those aged nine to ten years old. There was some, although less marked, difference based on where children lived, with 93.5% of children in villages reporting that they never spoke to someone older than 18 they had first met online, compared to 85.1% of those in cities.

"And if one person saves your contact on Telegram, they can add you to thousands of groups. Even if you complain and leave, they will add you anyway, and there where are cringy people in the groups, where there are adult men, like: "Send me a picture", and all staff like that. Once a girl saved me there, she started adding me to groups." (f, 15-17)

Children's exposure to risk in everyday online communications

Children in Kazakhstan are relatively unlikely to engage in many of the more common risk-taking activities online – those activities that could potentially introduce particularly contact risks into the child's life. Children were asked about five different activities that could expose them to these risks: looking for new friends or contacts online, sending their personal information online, adding friends to contacts that they have never met in person, pretending to be someone else, and sending their photo or video to someone they never met in person. These are often the activities that common online safety messaging are premised on, with children discouraged from any of these activities as a means to staying safe online.[70] In general, they are all important messages, although they also fail to take into account many of the motivations of children in their online behaviours, including the excitement and opportunity to meet others beyond their immediate context and environment.

[69] A note of caution on the interpretation of these findings: while these findings are useful for painting a picture of children's communication patterns, it is important to note that while the risks posed by strangers online to children are frequently perceived as the most significant, and common, in public discourse, and are arguably those risks most feared by parents, caregivers and other adults for their children, research evidence and administrative data suggests that the most common risks encountered by children, and those that result most commonly in harm to the child, are more commonly posed by individuals known to the child, rather than strangers online. This note applies to the following paragraph as well. This is discussed in more detail in later sections of this report.

[70] Finkelhor, D., Walsh, K., Jones, L., Mitchell, K., & Collier, A. (2021). Youth Internet Safety Education: Aligning Programs With the Evidence Base. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 22(5), 1233–1247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020916257

This is particularly reflected in the percentage of children in Kazakhstan who had searched for new friends or contacts online. While not a common activity, more than one in ten - in total 14.6% - had looked for friends or contacts online at least once a month, and another 12.7% just once or twice in the last year. In total 7.2% had done this weekly, and a little fewer than one in twenty (4.1%) daily. Yet children in the focus groups frequently noted that expanding their circle of friends was one of the many benefits of being online, as they could search for new friends to expand their circle of contacts. While there was little difference in gender in how often boys and girls searched for new friends online, children living in urban areas or cities, were significantly more likely to look for friends online. Just over one in two (53.5%) children in cities reported they had never done this online, compared to two thirds (67.3%) of children living in villages.

Related to this, one in ten (10.2%) of children had added friends or contact they had never met in person once or twice, and 7.7% on average once a month. One in ten (10.3%) children reported that they had ever sent their personal information to someone online, with most of these (3.8%) having done so just once or twice in the past year, or once a month (3.3%). Children were not necessarily unaware of potential risks of adding new people to their contact list, as noted by one of the girls in a focus group (see sidebar)

A little more than one in ten (11.1%) children had ever sent their personal photo or video to someone they did not know in person, with the majority of these having done so just once or twice in the past year (4.7%) or once or twice a month (4.2%). These data suggest that while children are engaging in some level of risk-taking within their online communications, the majority of children are avoiding these activities.[71] This may have important implications for the targeting of online safety messaging for children.

Figure 18. Risk-taking behaviour online (n=1201)

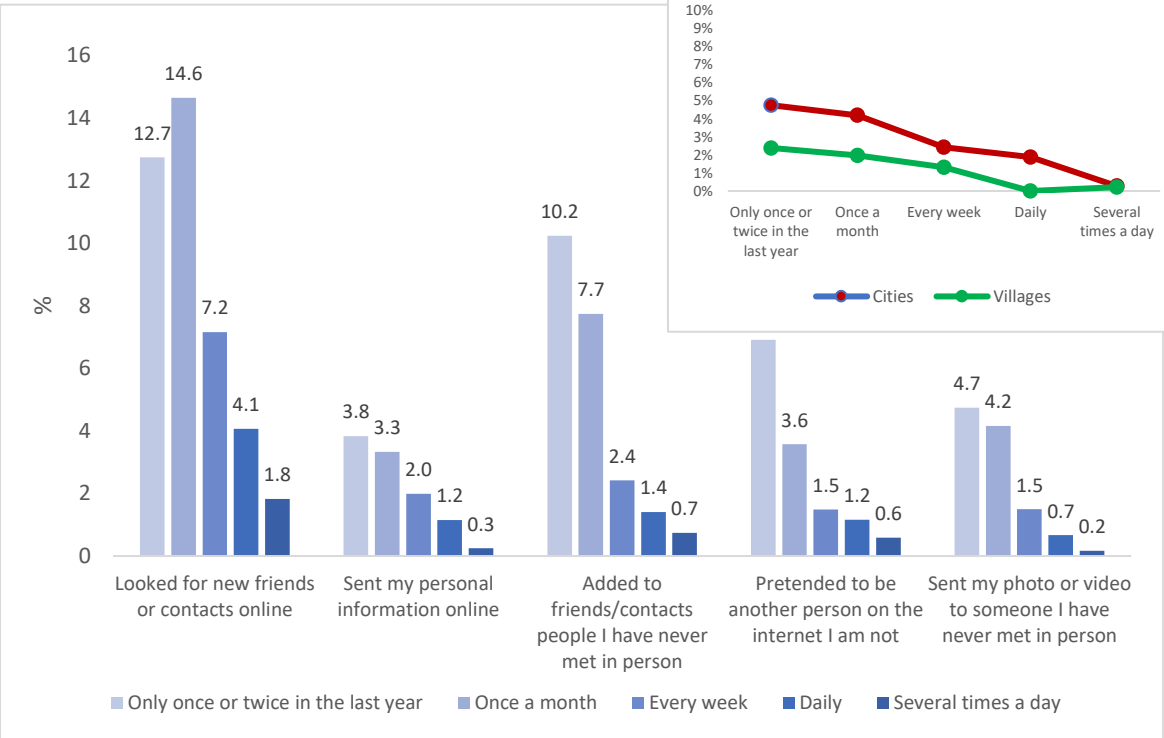
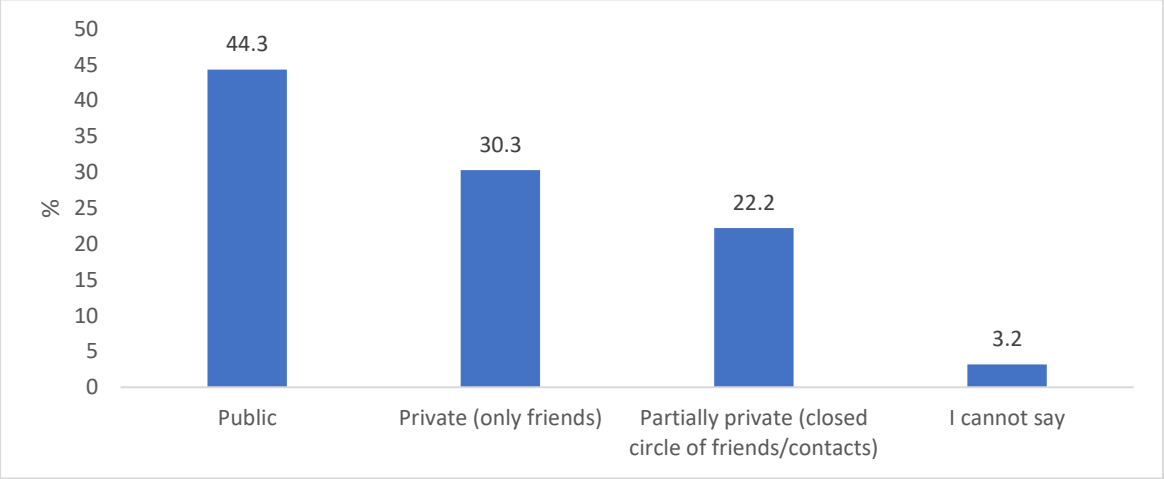


Figure 19. Children sending personal the last month to someone online they had never met in person, by location (%) (n=1201)

[71] It may also be possible that there is a level of social desirability bias in the disclosure of such activities, although there is little to suggest, when taking together with the rest of the data, that this is a significant factor.

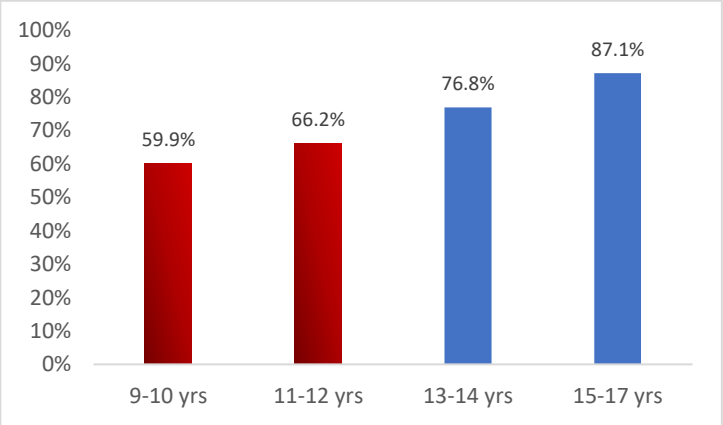
Given the high levels of gaming and social media use amongst children interviewed for the study, it is perhaps a reasonable assumption that many children have their own gaming accounts or social media accounts. Almost three quarters (72.8%) of children reported that they had their own gaming or social media accounts or profiles on sites on which they were active. This in itself does not pose an immediate risk to children. How those accounts are managed, and the degree to which they are age-appropriate, may be factors that influence risk that children might encounter online. For example, whether those accounts and profiles are kept public so that everyone can see their profiles and their details, including people they may not know, may impact on risks encountered by those children. For some children, keeping their accounts public may be a way of meeting new people, and exploring worlds beyond their own; simultaneously it may allow contact or conversations that might be deemed not age-appropriate, or may directly introduce risks into that child's life.

Figure 20. Percentage of children who have active social media or gaming accounts who keep their accounts public, partially private or private (n=874)



In total, more than two in five (44%) of children who have their own social media or gaming profiles keep their gaming or social media accounts public, while three in five (30.3%) of those with their own accounts keep their accounts completely private, that is, open only to friends or contacts that they know and chose to share their profiles with. Another one in five (22.2%) keep their account partially private; that is, open to their circle of friends or contacts, but not to the wide public. A very small percentage – just 3.2% - could not say whether their accounts were private or public, suggesting that they may not understand or use privacy settings at all.

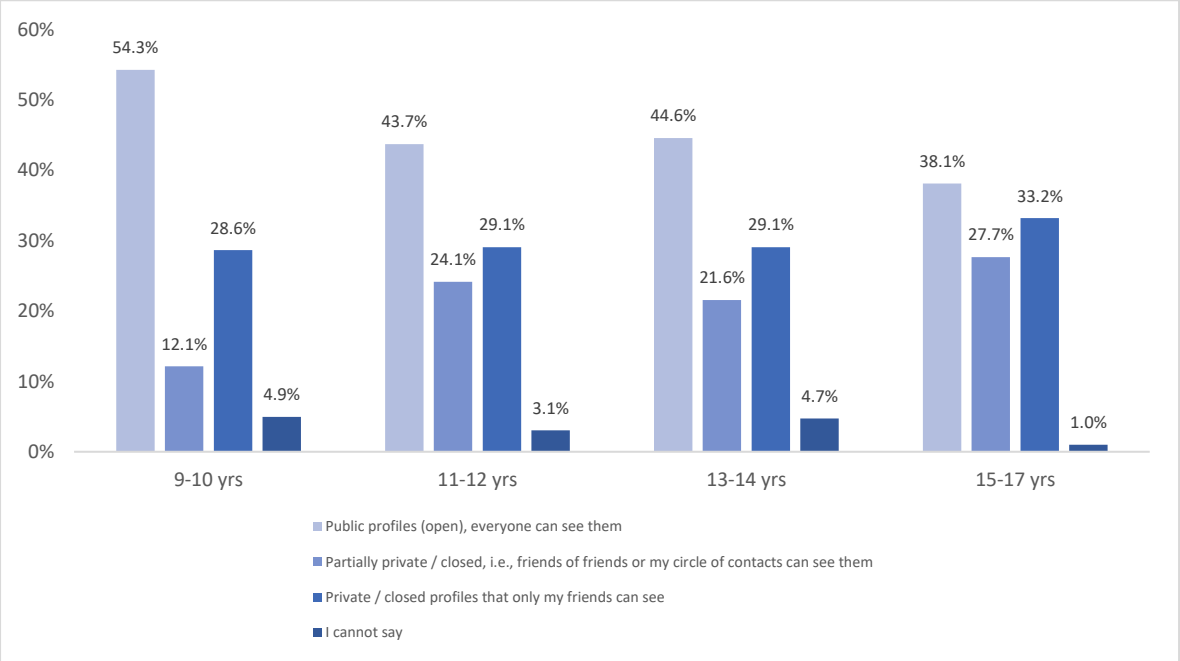
Figure 21. Percentage of children who have their own social media/ gaming accounts, by age (%) (n=1201)



While most social media sites are required by law to restrict access to children 13 years and older, three in five (59.9%) of children aged nine to ten years old report having their own social media or gaming profiles, while two thirds (66.2%) of children aged 11 to 12 years old have their own profiles on social media or gaming sites that they use.

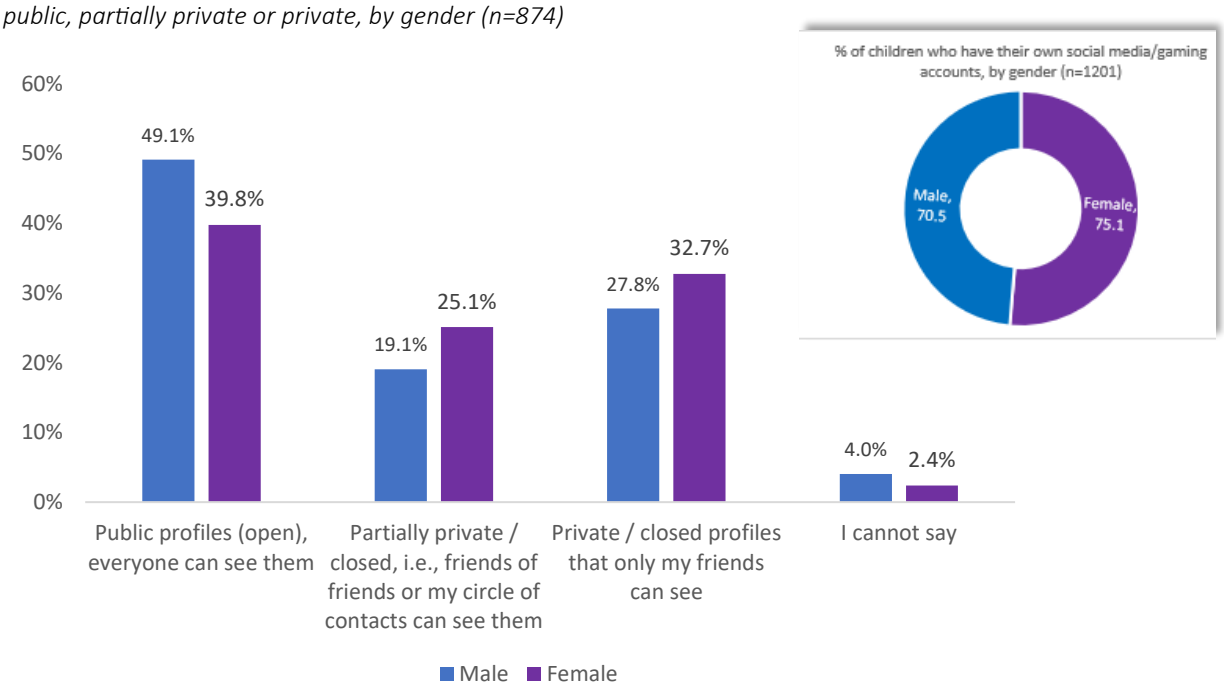
Younger children were also significantly more likely to report that they keep their accounts open and public, than older children. In total, more than half of the children aged between nine and ten years old who have their own profiles or accounts reported that their accounts were public compared to 43.7% of those aged 11 to 12, 44.6% of those aged 13-14, and 38.1% of those aged 15 to 17 years. Conversely, older children were the most likely to keep their accounts completely private, with one in three children (33.2%) aged 15 to 17 years reporting their accounts were private, compared to three in ten of those aged 13 to 14 or aged 11-12 years, and just 28.6% of those aged nine to ten. This means that children (who are least likely to have the skills to successfully navigate risks that they encounter online) are the most likely to have their accounts public and face potential threats from strangers online.

Figure 22 Percentage of children who have active social media or gaming accounts who keep their accounts public, partially private or private, by age (n=874)



Boys were significantly more likely than girls to keep their accounts and profiles public than girls, with one in two boys (49.1%) reporting their accounts were public than girls (39.8%), while girls were more likely to keep their accounts partially private (25.1% compared to 19.1% of boys) or completely private (32.7%) compared to boys (27.8%). This may suggest that girls are more aware of the risks that open accounts might post to them, that they are less comfortable with their accounts and information being public or may reflect an awareness or perception of greater risks based on their gender, than boys. It may also reflect personal experiences that have led them to keep their accounts and information private.

Figure 23. Percentage of children who have active social media or gaming accounts who keep their accounts public, partially private or private, by gender (n=874)



Chapter 3. Digital skills

Introduction

Digital access is just one step, and indeed a precondition, towards digital inclusion for children. It is on its own insufficient to alleviate the digital inequalities of children.[72] Indeed, existing inequalities may serve to heighten inequality in digital skills, as lower levels of access may result in unequal skills development, which in turn can lead to negative outcomes in children's learning and educational outcomes, as well as their safety and wellbeing online. A recent review of evidence also highlights how a range of antecedents impact on variable levels of digital skills, as well as variations in the types of digital skills. For example, a lack of health problems (often themselves stemming from offline inequalities and differential access to services and healthcare), higher educational, a more active approach to recreational reading, and better problem-solving, are all linked to better digital skills.[73] Higher levels of digital skills also have a measurable impact on children's outcomes across a range of spheres. For example, higher levels of digital skills amongst children are correlated with the successful navigation of online risks, better protection of personal data and privacy, and better learning outcomes. Indeed, as argued by Pagani *et. al., (2016), "… overall, internet skills have a positive impact on academic achievement. This effect is stronger for students with low academic performance or low family background."*[74]

Understanding the levels of children's digital skills, and how these capacities might vary across the different types of skills, is important in understanding children's overall digital competence and the eco-system in which they live their everyday online lives. At the same time, children's digital skills can be measured in different ways, often yielding different trends. For example, in self-reported skills, boys often reflect a high level of digital competency than girls, while actual competency tests tend to see less difference between boys and girls of similar ages.[75] In this study, children were asked to self-report on their perceived levels of skills performing different online activities, and across a range of competencies including technical skills, media literacy and critical thinking.

This chapter details children's self-reported skills in various online and digital tasks and activities. These are broadly categorized into operational, information, social, creative and mobile skills.

Children's self-reported skills

In general, the majority of children in Kazakhstan considered themselves to be able to perform many of the everyday technical and safety steps that might be required of them online. Three in five (61.4%) totally agreed that they could download an app on their phone, while another 17.4% mostly agreed they could do this; almost four in five children totally agreed (56.7%) or mostly agreed (21.4%) that they knew how to save an image they had found online; and almost three in five children totally agreed (37.8%) or mostly agreed (19.8%) that they could post a video online they had created themselves.

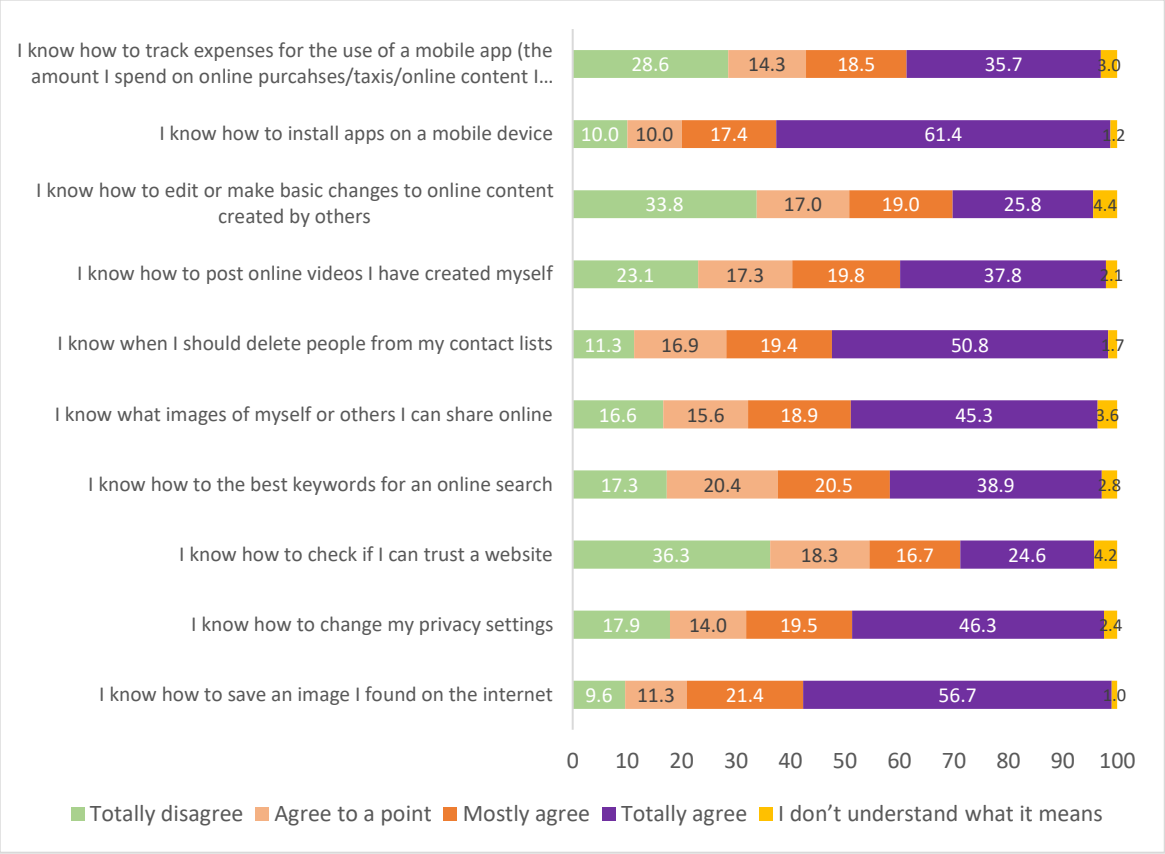
When it came to basic safety skills, more than seven in ten children totally agreed (50.8%) or mostly agreed (19.4%) that they knew when they should delete someone from their contact list, and only

[72] UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, 2022, Towards a child-centred digital equality framework.
[73] Livingstone, S., Mascheroni, G., & Stoilova, M. (2023). The outcomes of gaining digital skills for young people's lives and wellbeing: A systematic evidence review. *New Media & Society*, *25*(5), 1176–1202. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211043189
[74] Laura Pagani, Gianluca Argentin, Marco Gui & Luca Stanca (2016) The impact of digital skills on educational outcomes: evidence from performance tests, Educational Studies, 42:2, 137-162, DOI: 10.1080/03055698.2016.1148588
[75] Haddon et. al., 2020, Children's and young people's digital skills: a systematic evidence review.

slightly fewer totally (45.3%) or mostly (18.9%) that they knew what images of themselves or of others they should share online. Similarly, almost seven in ten children knew how to change their privacy settings online, with 46.3% totally agreeing with the statement, and another 19.5% mostly agreeing with it. That the majority of children know these basic safety skills should be considered a positive indication of awareness and basic safety skill.

Children were least likely to know how they could trust if a website was accurate or not, with just one quarter (24.6%) totally agreeing, and another fifth (19.5%) mostly agreeing that they knew how to determine this. A similar proportion of children knew how to edit or make changes to a picture of a video that they had found online (with only 25.8% totally agreeing and 19% mostly agreeing with this statement).

Figure 24. Children's perceptions of their digital skills (%) (n=1201)



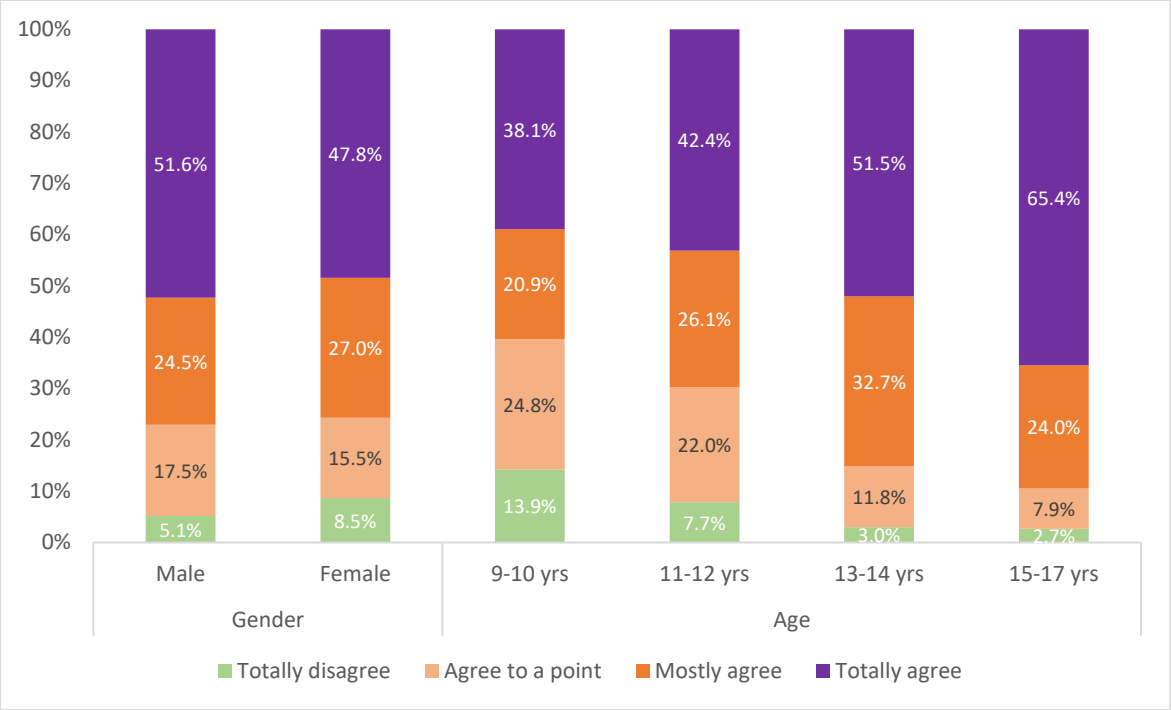
One in two children feel confident enough to report that they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones, while another quarter (25.7%) report that they mostly agree that they know a lot. In total 16.5% of children feel that they agree to a point, and just 6.8% totally disagree that they know a lot about using the internet and smartphones.

1 in 2 children (49.7%) completely agree that they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones.

1 in 4 children (25.7%) mostly agree that they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones.

While there is little significant difference between boys and girls who totally or mostly agree that they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones (51.6% of boys compared to 47.8% of girls completely agree and 24.5% of boys and 27% of girls mostly agree), there is considerably more variation by age. Perhaps unsurprisingly, older children between the ages of 15 and 17 years were significantly more likely to completely agree with the statement, while just 38.1% of children aged nine to ten years agreed. As children progress in age, they are progressively more likely to report that they feel either in full agreement, or mostly agree that they know a lot about the internet and smartphones.

Figure 25. Children reporting they know a lot about how to use the internet and smartphones, by age and gender (%) (n=1201)

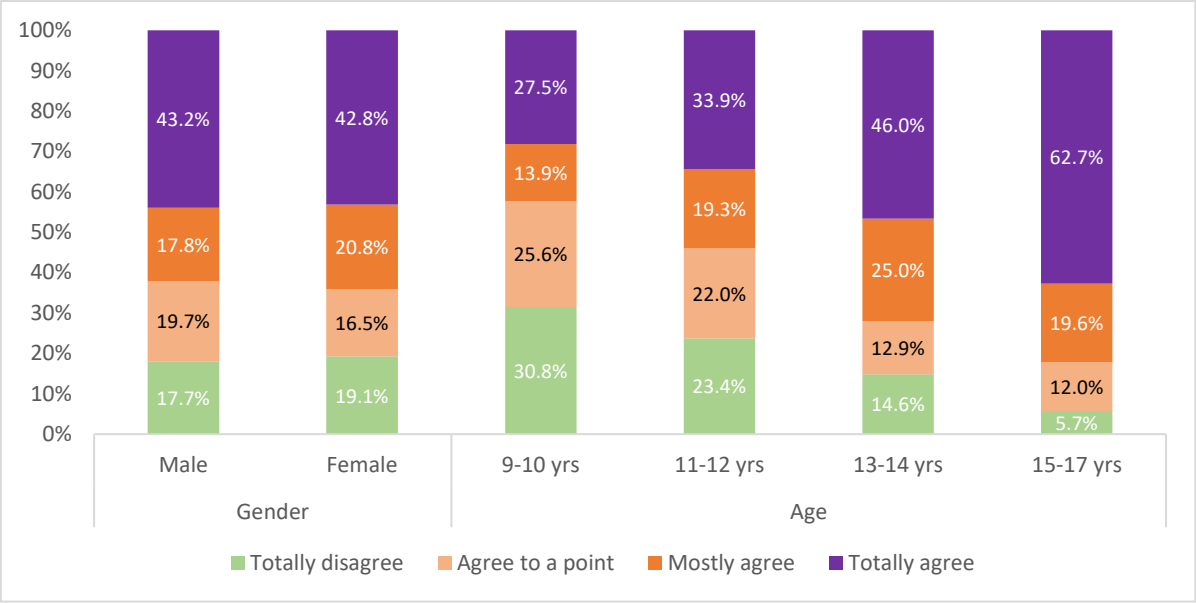


4 in 10 children (43%) completely agree that they know more about the internet and smartphones than their parents.

2 in 10 children (19.3%) mostly agree that they know more about the internet and smartphones than their parents.

In total, four out of ten (or two in five) children totally agreed that they know more about the internet and smartphones than their parents, while another two in ten (or one in five) mostly agreed with the statement. Like those who reported on their own knowledge of smartphones and the internet, there was little difference between boys and girls in perceptions of their own knowledge compared to their parents, but as children grow older, they were more likely to report that they mostly agreed that they know more about the internet and smartphones, than younger children. In total, more than three in five (62.7%) of children aged 15 to 17 totally agree that they know more about the internet and smartphones than their parents, compared to just on in three (33.39%) of children aged nine to 10 years old.

Figure 26. Children reporting they know more about the internet and smartphones than their parents, by age and gender (%) (n=1201)



How opportunities and risks converge online

A single story from a respondent from a focus group with 15-17 year old girls provides a useful illustration of how opportunities and risks converge, as well as how gendered assumptions of internet use can lead to gaps in responses.

R1 *"I've been playing computer games since I was a child. And basically, only guys play Warcraft. So I communicated with them there. Recently, when I was about 12 years old, I found a friend there, we were friends for three years/ And recently we fell out with her. And there are basically all my friends from Russia from different cities."*

Moderator: But you haven't met in person? Do you plan to meet any of them?

R1: *"No, they are all adults"*

A common theme in this research is how children use the internet to expand their groups of friends, and to meet new people. For many children, this is the first exposure that they may have to people from different countries, or communities. It may also be a way of connecting with new people as well as old friends (or relatives), as in this case, with the young girl discovering fellow gamers from her home. This is an important benefit of being online, as well as a potential opportunity. In this instance, playing Warcraft also presented the benefit of being a way to meet guys online, and so, it is implied, explore the potential for romantic relationships or at least a friendship that she might not be able to initiate in-person.

Yet, such new connections may also involve risks to a child, risks which may vary depending on the route those online relationships take (whether they stay online only, or lead to in-person meetings, for example). In this case, the guys the girl was connecting with online were adults, thus introducing an additional risk.

The example also reflects many of the common assumptions made about the gendered use of games, and in particular certain types of games, and how these may be false assumptions.

Chapter 4. Children's experiences of risks and harm online

Introduction

As noted elsewhere in this report, the evidence on the impact of the internet and social media on children's wellbeing is mixed. This is in part due to the lack of clear standardized measurement of what wellbeing in relation to children's use of the internet and social media is, and the lack of longitudinal data that allows for assessment of the impact of being online on wellbeing over a period of time.

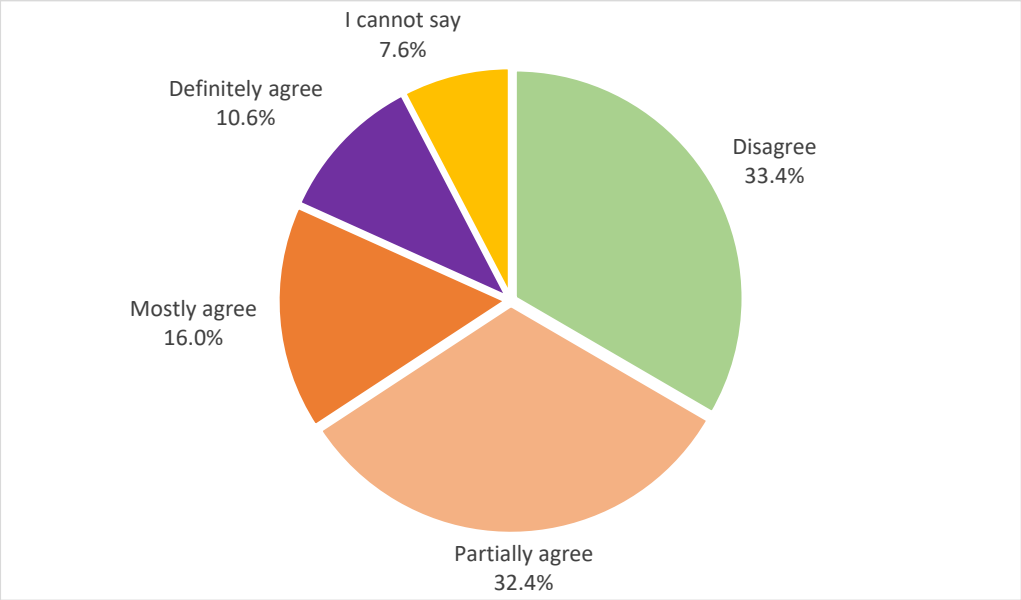
The Kazakhstan Kids Online data provides a cross-sectional "snapshot" of how children perceive (versus the real impact) the use of internet and social media has impacted on them. Such perceptions may be informed or influenced to some degree by the cues and inputs provided by parents or caregivers or others in their immediate sphere. However, such perceptions are useful in gauging how children themselves perceive the impact of their internet use on their everyday life.

This chapter details children's experiences of risks and harms online, first focusing on non-sexual risks. It starts by outlining actual experiences of things encountered online that bother kids, and both actual and perceived problems that being online have created for them. It also details help-seeking behaviour, and if and where children can find support is they need it. The chapter looks in some detail at child's exposure to content that may pose risks to them and result in harms. This is followed by a discussion of children's exposure and the nature of, sexual risks encountered online, followed by experiences of cyberbullying.

Experiences of different risks online

The majority of children included in the study agreed to some degree that there are things on the internet that bother or upset children their age. In total, one in ten (10.6%) strongly agree, another 16% mostly agree, and one in three (32.4%) partially agree that there are things online that upset or bother them or their peers. In totally one third (33.4%) disagree with the statement. There was no significant difference between boys and girls, in the perception that there are things online that bother children their age. Significantly more children in villages, however, disagreed with the notion that there were things online that upset children their age, than those living in cities (41.2% compared to 28.4% respectively).

Figure 27. Children who agree with the statement: there are things on the internet that worry or make my peers upset (%) (n=1201)



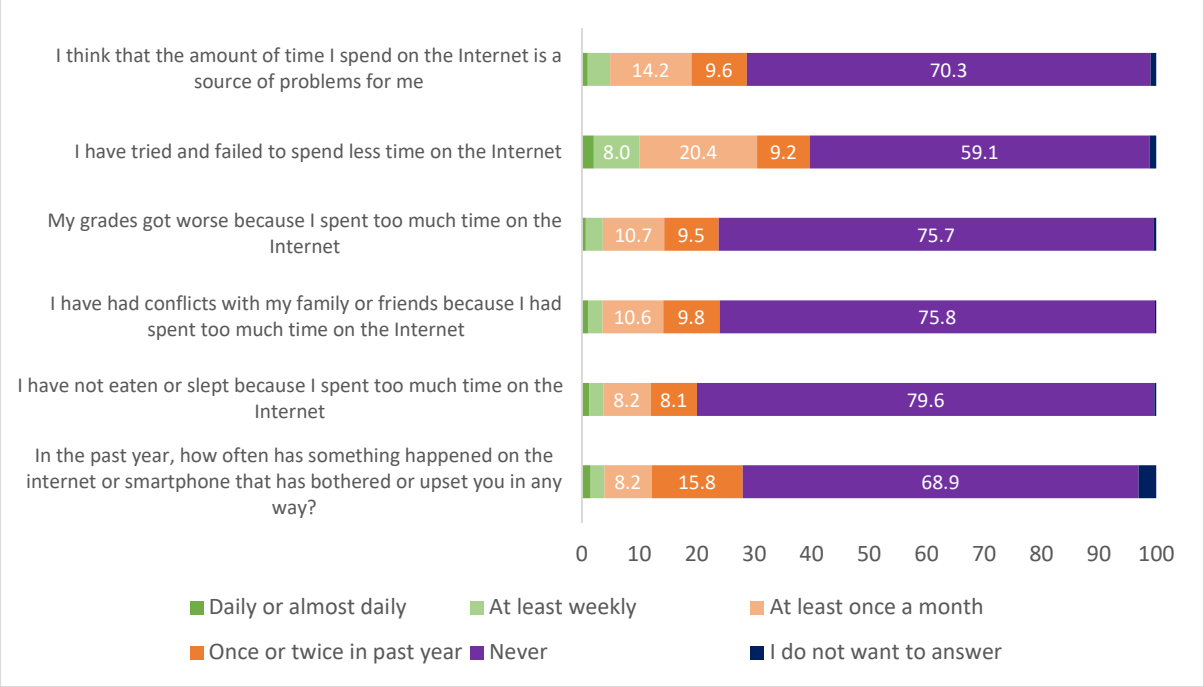
The majority of children in Kazakhstan did not report that they perceived that the internet had created problems for them in their everyday life. The most commonly reported problem was the amount of time that they spent online, with a little fewer than one in ten children (9.2%) reporting that they had once or twice in the past year tried to spend less time online and failed, while another one in five (20.4%) reported that this had occurred at least once a month. In total 8% of children reported that they had tried to spend less time online at least weekly and failed.

Related to this, one in ten children (9.6%) thought once or twice in the past year that the amount of time that they spent online over the past year created problems for them, while 14.2% reported that they felt this way at least once a month.

One in ten children reported that their grades had got worse because of the time they spent on the internet (10.7%), or that they time they spent online had caused conflicts with their family (10.6%) at least once a month over the past year, although significantly fewer reported this happening more regularly. While perceptions of falling grades, and the broader potential for problems resulting from the time spent online, are often influenced by teachers and parents who place the blame for problems on excessive internet use, of perhaps more concern is that 8.1% reported that once or twice in the past year they had not eaten or slept because of the time they spent online, and another 8.2% reporting that this had occurred at least monthly. Not sleeping, and missing meals are a slightly more objective measurement that can more easily be attributed to internet use and assessed by children themselves.

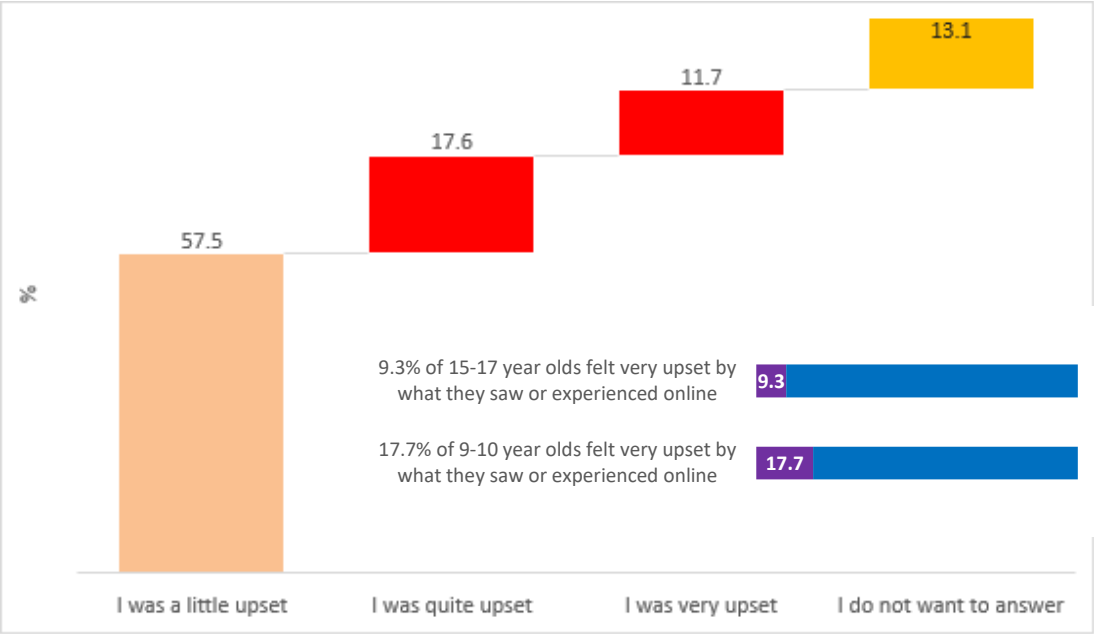
Second only to those children who had tried to spend less time online over the past year and had failed, are the number of children who reported that something online had upset them over the past year. In total, 15.8% of children reported they had been upset by something online once or twice over the past year, while another 8.2% reported this had occurred at least once a month.

Figure 28. Self-perceived problematic internet use amongst children (%) (n=1201)



Of the three in ten children who reported that something has happened at least once or twice, or more, in the past year to upset them, the majority (57.5%) felt just a little upset about the last incident, while 17.6% felt quite upset, and a little more than one in ten (11.7%) reported that they felt very upset. There was little difference between those boys and girls who felt very upset, while the younger children were who were upset by something, the more likely they were to feel very upset, or quite upset. This suggests that older children are better equipped to deal with upsetting content or experiences online, than younger children.

Figure 29. Degree of bother the last time something happened online to upset the child (%) (n=374)



For all children, having someone to speak to when they have upsetting experiences, both online and offline, or when anything is upsetting them, is an important step in processing and managing bad experiences.[76,77] Having someone who can also provide support, and where necessary, assist with decision-making and help-seeking, is an important component of successfully navigating risks and avoiding harms that may result from being online. Yet, research from around the world shows that children often navigate these experiences on their own, or at best, with the support of friends or peers rather than adults.[78] The reasons for vary from not trusting adults, being scared of being not being believed or being blamed for their bad experience,[79] and having their internet access taken away, or in some cases, young people simply not believing that speaking to an adult will yield any support or help.[80]

A similar pattern is evidence in Kazakhstan in relation to children who had had some form of upsetting experience online over the past year. One quarter of the children who reported having had an upsetting experience did not tell anyone about it, while of those that did speak to someone, just under one third (31.5%) spoke to friends or peers. Positively, one in four (24.1%) spoke to their parents or caregivers about their experience, although younger children were significantly more likely than older children to speak to their parents. Of note is that girls were significantly more likely than boys to speak to their parents (26.9% compared to 20.9% of boys), while twice the number of younger children (aged nine to ten years old) than children aged 15 to 17 spoke to their parents or caregivers about their experience (37.7% compared to 18.6%). Of note is that fewer children (13.8%) aged 13 to 14 years were likely to tell their parents about the incident online than older children

Under one tenth of children spoke to their older (adult) brothers or sisters (9.1%), while fewer still (8.5%) spoke to their brothers or sisters under 18 years of age. Having a reliable, trusted adult that children can speak to, without fear of being blamed, getting into trouble, and with some expectation of support, is an important mechanism for particularly younger children, who may not be equipped with the knowledge and experience required to successfully navigate risks online, and to know where and when they require support and assistance.

[76] Pereira, A., Peterman, A., Neijhoft, A.N. *et al.* Disclosure, reporting and help seeking among child survivors of violence: a cross-country analysis. *BMC Public Health* **20**, 1051 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09069-7

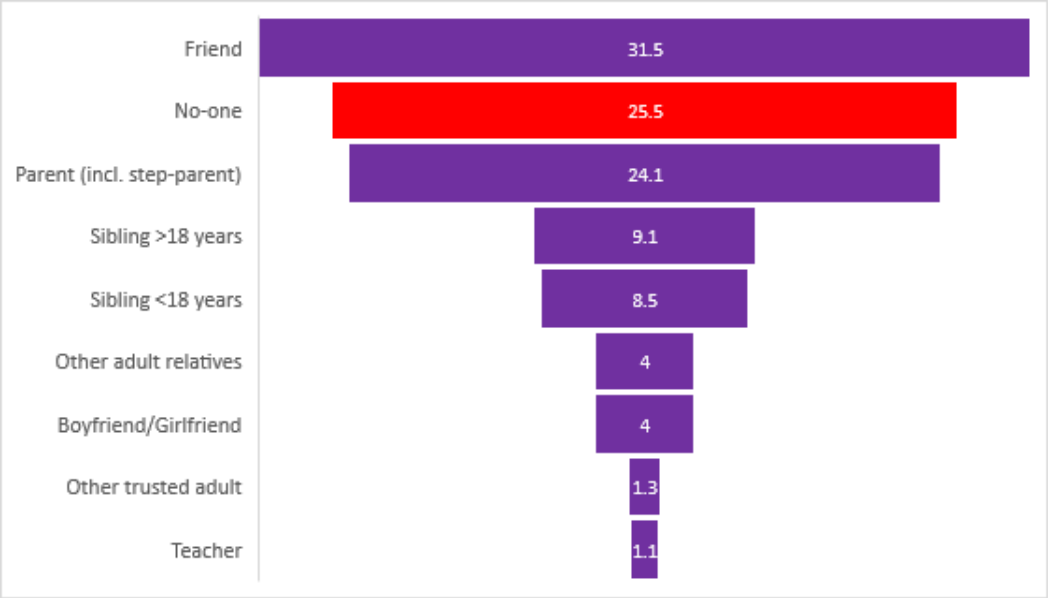
[77] Morrison SE, Bruce C, Wilson S. Children's Disclosure of Sexual Abuse: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Research Exploring Barriers and Facilitators. J Child Sex Abus. 2018 Feb-Mar;27(2):176-194. doi: 10.1080/10538712.2018.1425943. Epub 2018 Feb 28. PMID: 29488844.

[78] ECPAT International & UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti (2022). Children's Disclosures of Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Disrupting Harm Data Insight 2. Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children.

[79] McElvaney R, Lateef R, Collin-Vézina D, Alaggia R, Simpson M. Bringing Shame Out of the Shadows: Identifying Shame in Child Sexual Abuse Disclosure Processes and Implications for Psychotherapy. J Interpers Violence. 2022 Oct;37(19-20):NP18738-NP18760. doi: 10.1177/08862605211037435. Epub 2021 Aug 30. PMID: 34459692; PMCID: PMC9554283.

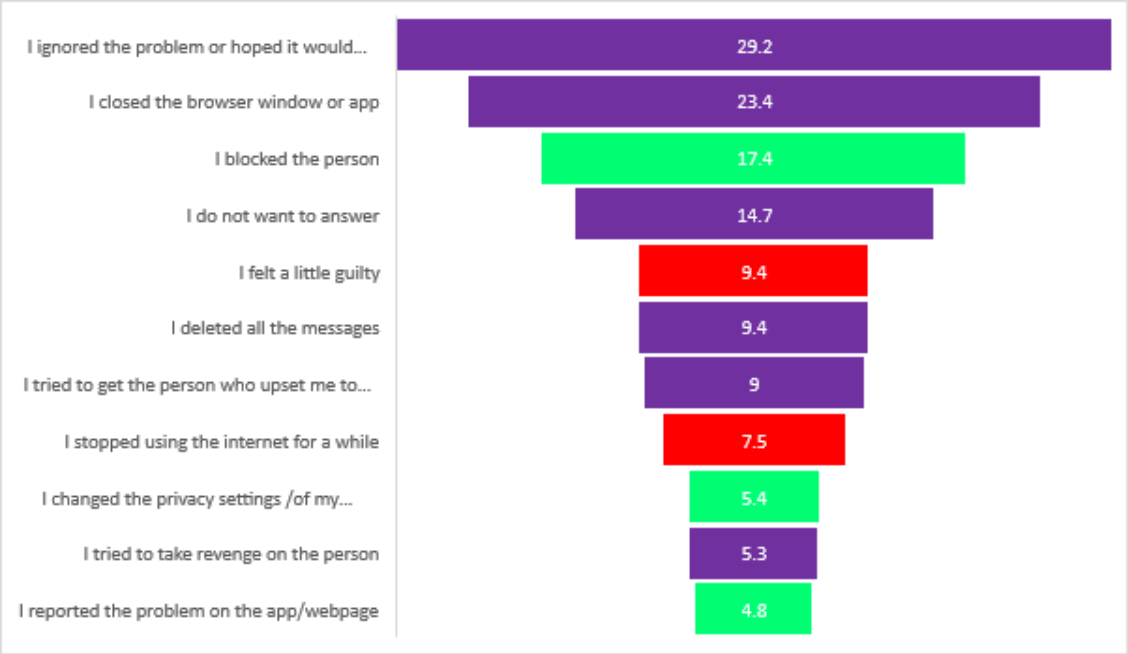
[80] *Ibid.*

Figure 30. Who the child spoke to about the incident the last time they were upset by someone online (%) (multiple answer) (n=374)



Children are often more likely to simply take steps themselves to "deal" with the problem: if they see something online that they do not like or that they find disturbing, they may simply close the browser or navigate away from a particular site; if someone is contacting them online, bullying them or sending unwanted messages, they may simply change their own internet habits, or stop using apps or sites through which thee unsolicited messages or contacts occur. They may also feel that there is simply nothing that they can do, or not know that there is specific action that they can take in response.

Figure 31. What action did the child take the last time they were upset by something online (%) (multiple answer) (n=374)



When asked what action they had taken in response to the last time that the experienced something upsetting online, three in ten children (29.2%) simply did nothing and hope that they problem would

go away (ignored the problem), while a little under one quarter (23.4%) just closed the browser or app. One in ten (9.4%) reported that they deleted all the messages that upset them, while a similar proportion tried to get the person who upset them to leave them alone.

Just 17.4% took a proactive step utilizing the functionality within the app or browser designed to keep them safe, such as blocking the person, while 5.4% changed their privacy settings to better protect themselves and stop interaction from the person, and 4.8% reported the person using the app or browsers in app reporting function.[81]

One in ten children felt guilty for the situation, assuming some level of blame and responsibility, and internalizing this, while 7.5% stopped using the internet for a while. While not unusual, these responses are cause for some concern, in that in the first instance, they are unlikely to result in resolution to the problem, or change the situation in a meaningful way, secondly, they increase the risk of harmful mental health outcomes[82] as well as other educational and developmental outcomes, and thirdly, may impact on children's use of the internet for activities such as school work, information seeking, or otherwise reaping the benefits that being online can present.

While some children reported that they blocked the person who upset them online, this did not always solve the problem. One teenage girl, in discussing whether information was easy to find when one looked for it, told how a man kept sending her messages online. Even after blocking him, she still kept receiving messages from him, with the same person reappearing in her inbox over and over again. Eventually, he managed to track her physical address online. Another girl recounted a similar story, describing how a 28-year-old man she had never met saw her one picture on Instagram, and started sending her unwanted messages (see text box).

As noted earlier in the report, being online opens up a range of opportunities and experiences that may not exist within a child's immediate environment. Connecting and meeting with new people, both within their environment and beyond, may present a particularly attractive appeal to being online, whether though gaming, social media, or other platforms.[83] This however presents arguably one of the greatest concerns for parents and adult in

EXPERIENCES OF RISKS

"They can find you anyway, so you're scared all the time. And you can't delete them. It is very difficult to remove them" (f, 15-17).

"There were some men, who wrote me all the time. I deleted them. But they reappeared. I blocked them. And the same person appeared again and again. And he finds your home address" (f, 15-17).

"I once communicated with a boy in the internet. Eventually I found out it was a girl who was only 9 years old. She just found a photo on the internet" (f, 15-17).

[81] A useful follow-up question here for future reason would include why children do not use these features if available in apps and browsers.

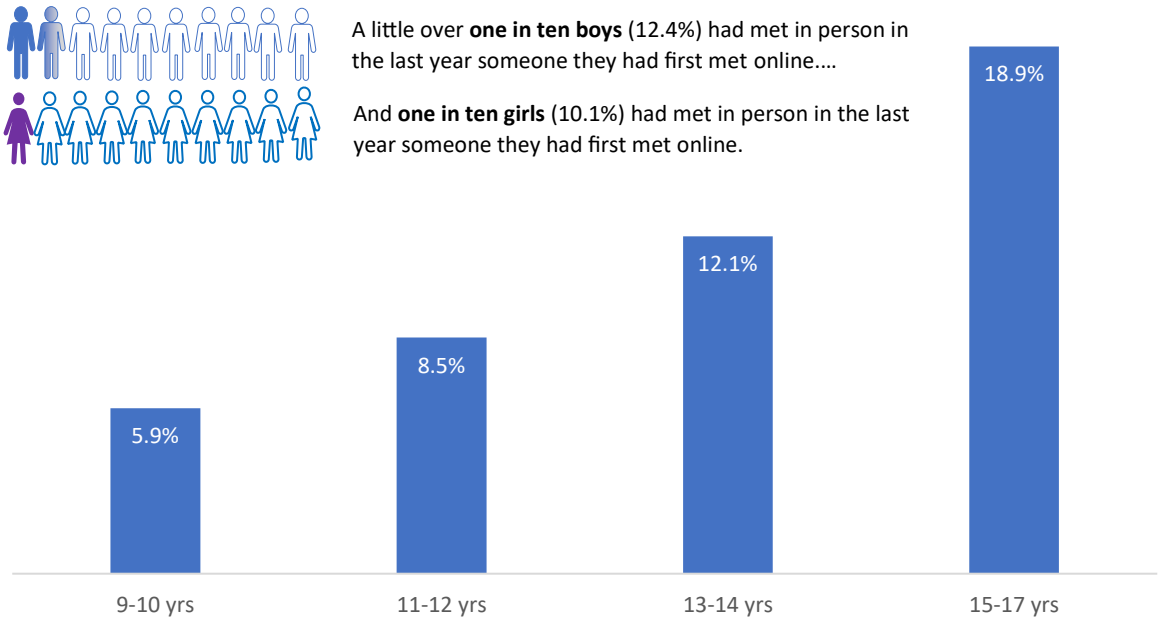
[82] Negrao C., Bonanno G. A., Noll J. G., Putnam F. W., & Trickett P. K. (2005). Shame, humiliation, and childhood sexual abuse: Distinct contributions and emotional coherence. *Child Maltreat-ment*, 10(4), 350–363. http://doi.org/10.1177/1077559505279366 [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

[83] Phyfer, J., Burton, P. & Leoschut, L. (2016). *Global Kids Online South Africa: 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. Available from: www.globalkidsonline.net/south-africa

general: the fear of what has been called "stranger danger."[84] That is, the risks associated to children by people otherwise unknown to them who they have first met online. Importantly, while meeting with strangers in person, particularly adults, poses a very real risk to children, evidence globally shows that the greatest risk to children is posed by adults or others known to the child, rather than strangers.[85,86] When children do experience harm from risks encountered from strangers, these incidents do tend to result in the greatest harm to the child, however.[87]

Children in the study were asked if they had ever met someone in person in the last year who they had first met online. In total, just over one tenth of children included in the study had met in person someone they had first met online. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to report that they had met someone in person (12.4% compared to 10.1% respectively), while older children were significantly more likely than younger children to have met someone in person. Almost one in five (18.9%) children aged 15 to 17 had met someone in person, while just 5.9% of nine- to ten-year-olds, and 8.5% of 11- to 12-year-olds had met someone in person they first met online.

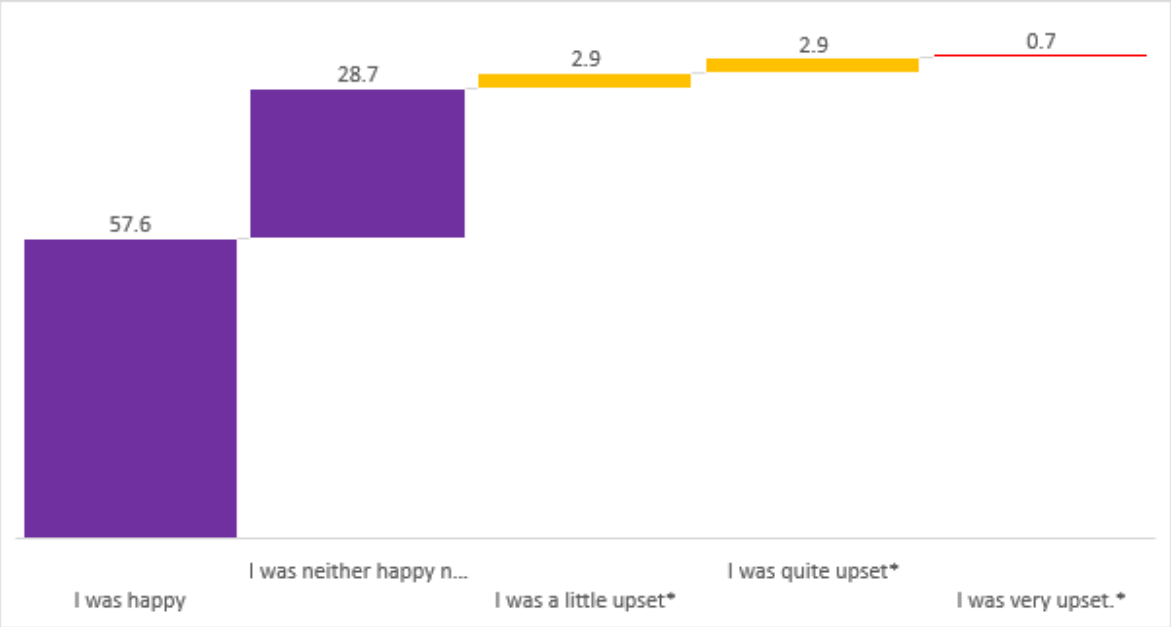
Figure 32. Percentage of children who have met in person in the last year someone they had first met online (%) (n=1201)



While only fractionally more boys than girls had met someone in-person they had first met online, children living in cities were twice as likely to report they had met someone in person they had first met online. In total, 14.9% of children in urban areas had met someone in person, while just 6.3% of those living in villages reported that they had met someone in person that they had first met online.

[84] Finkelhor D, Turner H, Colburn D. Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses Against Children in the US. *JAMA Netw Open.* 2022;5(10):e2234471. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.34471
[85] Finkelhor D. et al., 2022, Prevalence of Online Sexual Offenses Against Children in the US.
[86] What works to prevent online violence against children? Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/
[87] Wolak, J., Finkelhor, D., Mitchell, K. J., & Ybarra, M. L. (2010). Online "predators" and their victims: Myths, realities, and implications for prevention and treatment. *Psychology of Violence, 1*(S), 13–35. https://doi.org/10.1037/2152-0828.1.S.13 . See also Kardefelt Winther, Daniel; Twesigye, Rogers (2023). Disrupting Harm: Online Risk and Harm for Children in Eastern and Southern Africa, *Innocenti Research Briefs*, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence

Figure 33. How children felt after having met in person in the last year someone they had first met online (%) (n=139)[88]



Meeting someone in person that they have only met online is not something that children undertake blindly, with little thought for the potential consequences. Children are often aware of the risk that this may pose, at least in theory, and formulate their own strategies to keep themselves safe.[89] This could vary from taking a friend with them, to dressing differently to how they have told the person they would until they gauge whether the person is who they say they are, to simply telling someone about the meeting.[90]

The same trends emerge in Kazakhstan. Telling someone about the meeting is perhaps one of the most fundamental steps that a child can take towards their own safety if they are indeed intending to meet someone they've met online. One in five (21.7%) children in Kazakhstan who had met someone in person they had first met online, over the past year, did not tell anyone that they were going to meet the person, perhaps fearing disapproval or being discouraged from doing so. When children did tell someone they were going to meet a stranger, it was most commonly a friend (36.7%), followed by a parent or caregiver (25.1%). This suggests that in at least a quarter of the cases, children had their parents' consent for the meeting. Another 13.6% reported that they had told an adult sibling about the meeting, while fewer than one tenth told a younger sibling (younger than 18), another adult or relative, or a boyfriend or girlfriend that they were going to meet the person (7.9, 2.2%, and 2.2% respectively).

Boys were three times more likely than girls to not tell anyone that they were going to meet someone in person they had first met online (31.2% compared to 10.2% of girls). This may suggest that girls are more aware or cognitive of the risks posed by meeting someone in general, or correctly perceive themselves to be at greater risk from meeting strangers than boys. Girls were one third more likely than boys to tell their parents or caregivers about the planned meeting (30.8% compared to 20.1% of

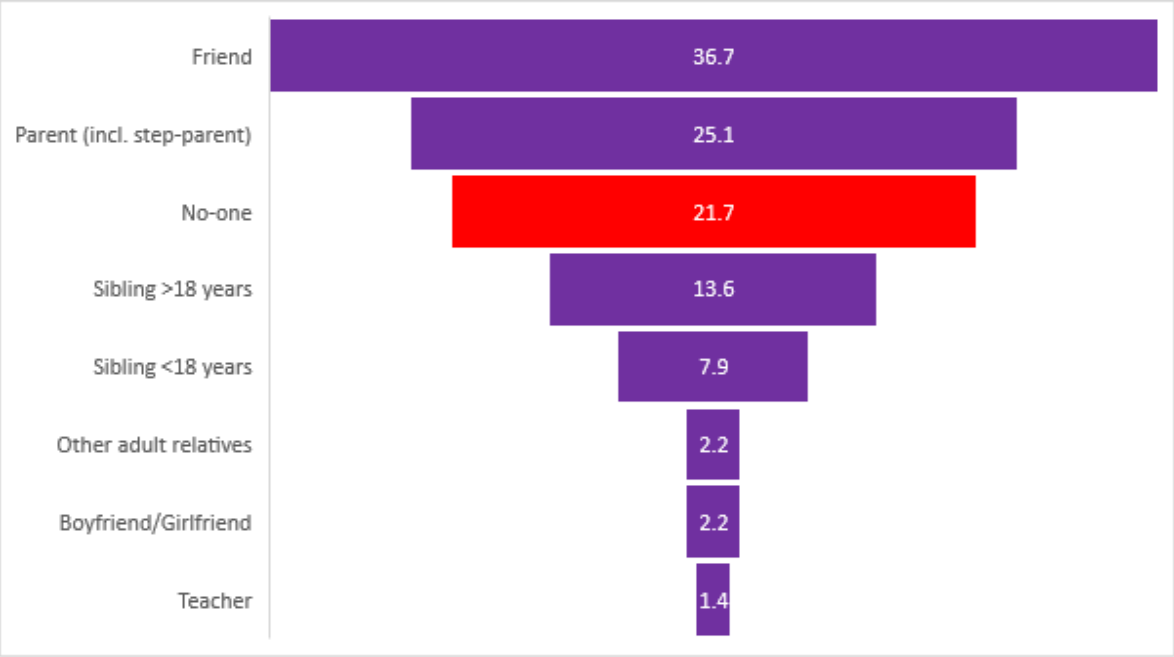
[88] Note that those responses marked with an asterix * are too small to derive meaningful analysis (a little upset=4 responses; quite upset=4 responses; very upset=1 response). .

[89] Phyfer, J., et.al., 2016, *Global Kids Online South Africa: 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. Available from: www.globalkidsonline.net/south-africa

[90] United Nations Children's Fund, *Child Online Protection in Palau*, UNICEF, Suva, 2020

boys), and twice as likely than boys to tell an adult sibling (18.4% compared to 9.5% of boys), while there was significantly less difference between boys and girls who told their friends about the planned meeting (38.5% of girls compared to 35.1% of boys told their friends about the meeting).

Figure 34. Who children told that they were going to meet in person someone they had first met online (thinking of the last time, if happened more than once) (%) (n=139)



Of those children who had met someone in person in the last year they had first met online, older children were significantly and progressively more likely to tell their friends than younger children (44.4% of 15- to 17-year-olds told their friends, compared to 16.7% of nine- to ten-year-olds, 24% of 11- to 12-year-olds, and 42.4% of 13- to 14-year-olds). Conversely, younger children were more likely than older children to tell their parents, with two in five (39% of nine- to ten-year-olds compared to 30% of 15- to 17-year-olds telling their parents about the meeting. However, of note is that only 15.1% of children aged 13 to 14 told their parents, significantly fewer than older adolescents.

Children as young as 13 or 14 in the focus groups spoke openly about meeting people in person first met online, although this tended to be more in terms of friends and peers, rather than their own experiences. While their recounting of the story illustrates they are aware of the potential risks, and in some instances of the different ways they have of "verifying" or checking who the person is, these reveal a certain lack of sophistication and the effectiveness required to truly provide any measure of protection for children their age:

M1: "*For example, a cute girl texts you, says: "Let's meet up," you go to a date, but this is a paedophile, this is the most dangerous."*

MODERATOR: Did anyone go to such dates?

M1: "*No, I haven't."*

M2: "*I didn't go, I checked first."*

MODERATOR: And how do you check?

M2: "*For example, I ask - send your photo or voice message. If they don't want to answer, then it's already clear, it's a man."*

MODERATOR: And some of your friends, maybe, went to such dates?

M2: "*One of my friends did."*

MODERATOR: And can you say, what happened at the end?

M2: "*He showed me, a girl writes to him: "Let's meet, I'll give you my Free Fire account." He goes and meets a man, there's a man talking to him, and he gets scared. He also was taking a video of the whole thing, it turned out."*

MODERATOR: A man?

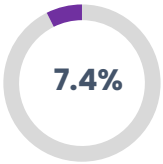
M2: *"Yes, a man. A man, about twenty-seven years old, or like forty or fifty-odd."*

MODERATOR: And what did he do then? He met this man... and then what?

M2: "*He ran away immediately. And before he ran away, he said: "Will you give me an account?" It's simply stupid, all because he's a Free fire gamer in our grade. He simply said: "Will you give me an account?" and that guy was just silent, and this was filmed in the video."*

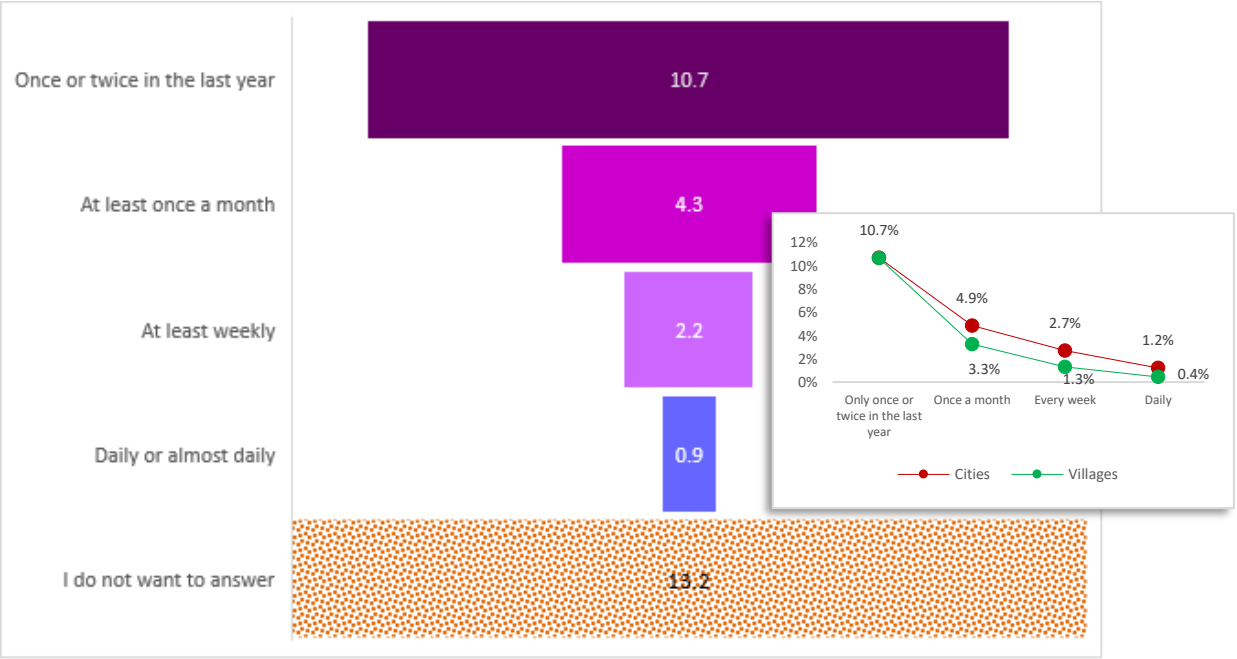
Experience and exposure to risks online.

7.4% of children have seen sexual images online at least once a month, or more, over the past year.



In total, one in 15 children in total in Kazakhstan (7.4%) had seen sexual images online in the past year at least once a month (4.3%), weekly (2.2%) or daily or almost daily (0.9%). Another one in ten children (10.7%) reported they had seen sexual images online just once or twice over the past year while the vast majority – 68.8% - had never seen sexual content online. It should also be noted that more than one in ten children (13.2%) did not want to answer this question, a departure from responses to the majority of other questions included in the study, which may reflect some embarrassment or hesitation to disclose their experiences as posed by the interviewer. There was no significant difference between boys and girls who reported having seen sexual content online, suggesting that children regardless of gender are being exposed to sexual content (see Appendix, figure A4). However, older children between the ages of 15 and 17, and 14 to 15 years, were significantly more likely to report they had seen sexual content online more frequently, at least weekly or daily (4.8% of 15 to 17 year olds, and 2.6% of 14 to 15 year olds reported having viewed images at least daily, or weekly, compared to less than one percent of nine to ten year olds, and 11 to 12 year olds, daily or weekly respectively).

Figure 35. How often children have seen sexual images online in the past year (and by location (inset)) (n=1201)



Of those who had seen sexual content over the past year, most did not want to say how they felt about what they saw. In total, more than one in three (37.7%) did not want to say how they felt, although more than three in ten (32.4) felt neither happy nor upset, and one in ten (10.2%) said they felt a little uncomfortable. Another 5.9% felt quite uncomfortable, and another 5.1% felt very uncomfortable. In total, 6.1% reported that they were interested or happy about what they had seen.

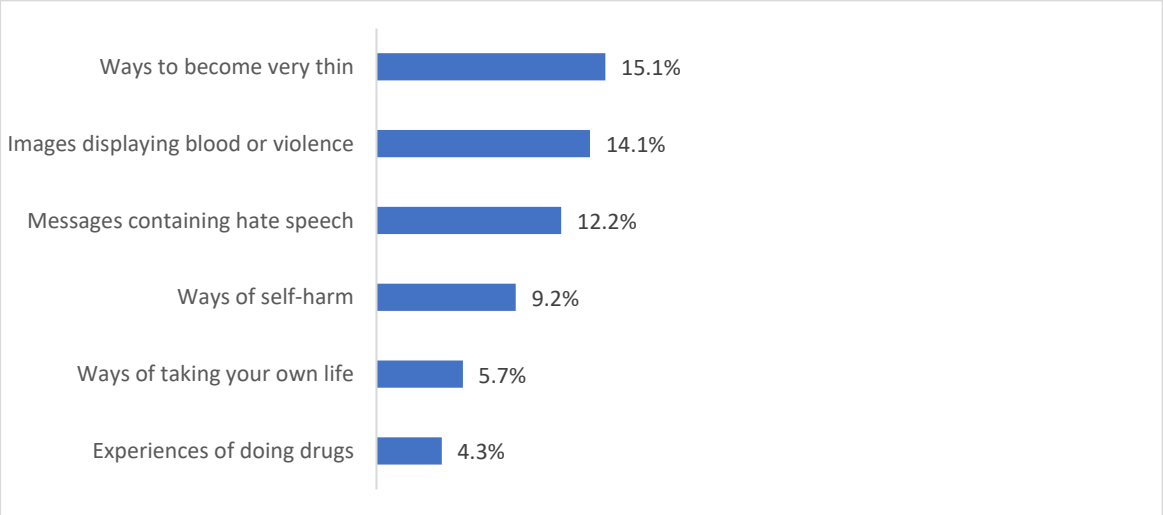
(Speaking of boys) "and they also watch obscene things o Google"
MOD: Do girls do this less? "Girls don't watch at all, sort of. Well, there are some..." *(j 15-17)*

Age-inappropriate sexual content is just one of the many risks that children might encounter online. The study explored children's exposure to a range of different risks, including those relating to self-harm (including eaten disorders, suicide and drug use), violence and hate speech.

Content relating to eating disorders such as Bulimia and Anorexia, and ways to become very thin, was the most common content children were inadvertently exposed to online through social media, websites or bulletin boards. In totally, 15.1% of children had seen content relating to eating disorders online, while 14.1% had seen images or videos containing violence, and 1.2% had been exposed to messages containing hate speech. While fewer children had been exposed to content relating to (non-eating disorder) self-harm (9.2%), 5.7% had seen websites or chat sites discussing ways of dying by suicide.

There was little significant variation between the experiences of boys and girls who had been exposed to potentially harmful content relating to violent content, or drug-related content. One in five girls (19.4%), compared to one in ten (10.7%) boys, had seen eating-disorder-related content online. While there was less of a difference, more girls also reported seeing messages containing hate speech, content relating to self-harm, and to suicide, than boys (14.1% compared to 10.4%, 10.2% compared to 8.2%, and 6.8% compared to 4.7% respectively). In general, this suggests that girls are more exposed to harmful content online that boys, particularly that relating to different forms of self-harm including suicide and eating disorders (see Appendix, figure A5).

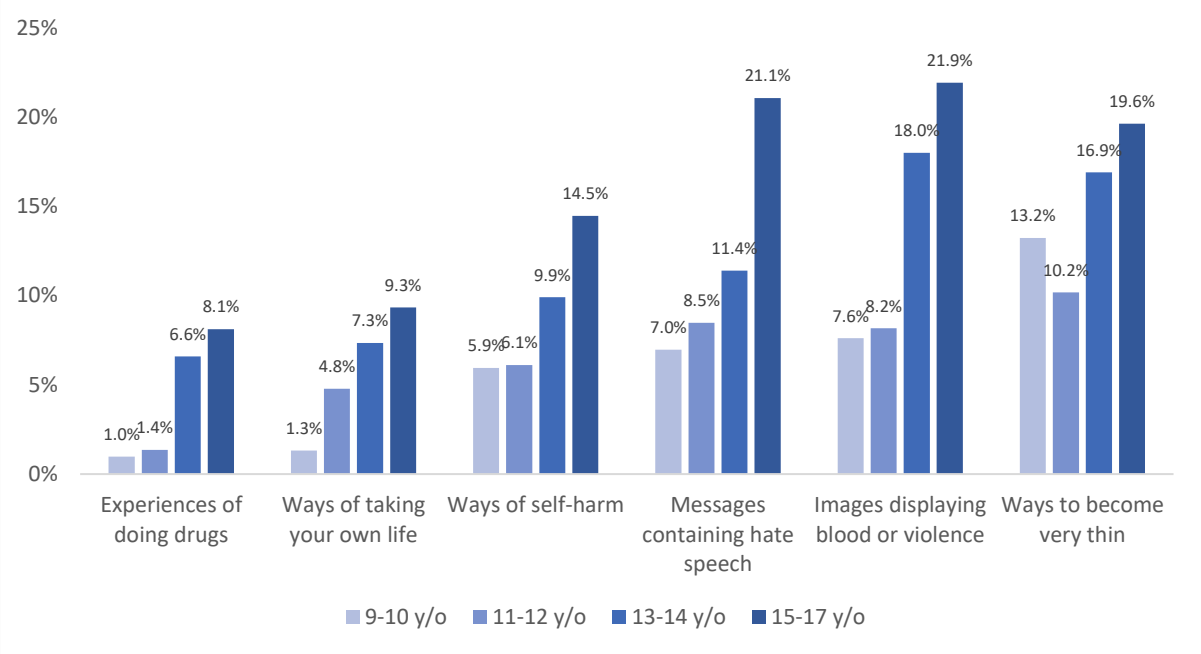
Figure 36. Children's exposure to content risks online over the past year (%) (n=1201)



Children's exposure to risky, potentially harmful, content online increased progressively amongst older children when compared to younger children. In total one in five children aged 15 to 17 had seen eating-disorder-related content, compared to one in ten 11 to 12-year-olds, and 13.2% of nine

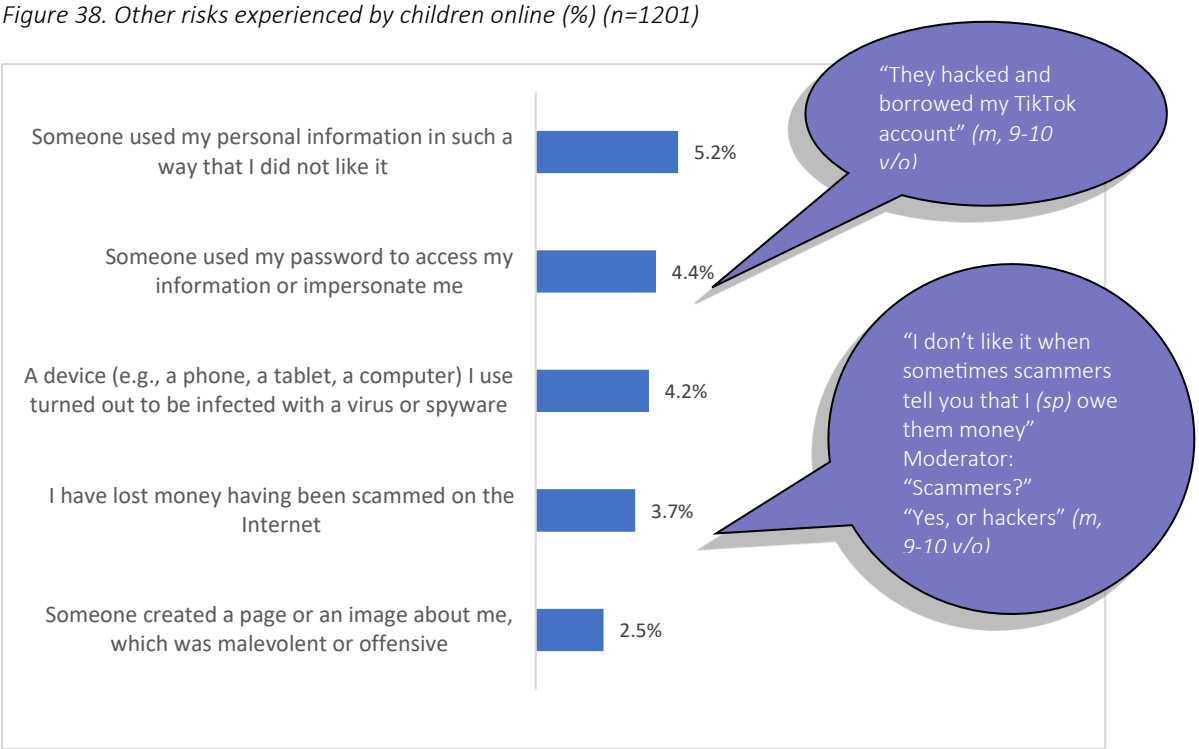
to 10 year olds. Similarly, Children aged 15 to 17 years old were three times more likely to see violent or gory material online (21.9% compared to 7.6% respectively), or messages containing hate speech (21.1% compared to 7%). A similar trend can be identified amongst children who had seen content relating to self-harm, with 14.5% of 15- to 17-year-olds having seen self-harm content, compared to 9.9% of 13- to 15-year-olds, 6.1% of 11- to 12-year-olds, and 5.9% of nine- to ten-year-olds. This would suggest that, consistent with international literature, children who spend more time online, older children and those with greater skills, are likely to encounter more risks online.

Figure 37. Children's exposure to content risks online over the past year, by age (%) (n=1201)



A small percentage of children also reported several other risks and adverse experiences, including to their privacy. In total, 5.2% of children reported someone had used their personal information online in a way they did not like, while 4.4% reported that someone had used their password to access their information or to impersonate them. While there was little difference by gender, older children between 15 and 17 years old were more likely to report having these experiences, as well as having lost money to scammers online. The greater number of older children reporting these experienced may well be correlated with increased activity online as they explore more online and develop greater skills. There was little difference by age in those reporting they had a device that turned out to be infected with a virus or malware (4.2% in total), or who have had a page or image created of them with malevolent intent. These same experiences were reflected in various focus group discussions with children.

Figure 38. Other risks experienced by children online (%) (n=1201)



Children actively seeking out risky online content.

In addition to be exposed to content risks online over the past year through content seen inadvertently, children were asked about whether they had, themselves, ever **actively sought out** content related to different risks that exist online. This could be through websites, message boards, social media or any other online app or website. While between 26 and 32 children (depending on the question posed) did not want to answer the question, it is notable that 48 children of the 1201 included in the study (or 4%) had actively sought out material related to eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia, 24 children (or 2%) had sought out content relating to physical self-harm (such as cutting or self-mutilation), and 21 children (or 1.7%) had sought out content relating to taking one's own life. Of further note, while noting the small number of cases, is that children in cities were twice as likely to look for content relating to taking one's own life, ways of self-harm, and eating disorders, than those in villages (se Appendix, figure A6).

Experience and exposure to sexual risks online

In Kazakhstan, children largely grow up in communities where open disclosure of sexual activity remains taboo. Within such a context, children may be hesitant to talk about any form of sexual activity, content or experiences they may have, or be exposed to, whether those experiences are consensual or non-consensual.[91] For this reason, only a limited number of questions on exposure and experiences of online sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as consensual age-appropriate sexual activity were included in the study. The following chapter details children's exposure and experiences of these risks.

The study first explored children's knowledge of their friends or peer's exposure to sexual contact or content online, before asking about children's own experiences. This has the advantage of allowing a sense of distance and detachment from children's own experiences, while still allowing some level of insight into the wider experiences of sexual contact or content of children online. Even taking this approach, disclosure of both friends, and children's own, experiences of sexual activity online was limited in the study (see figure below).[92] An indication of hesitancy to openly disclose experiences may be evident in the percentage of children who chose not to answer the question, rather than providing direct positive or negative responses.

11.7 had seen sexual images, videos or other content that had been sent to a friend.

Exposure to sexual content sent to friends over the past year.

In total, just over one in ten (11.7% or 139) children disclosed that they had seen sexual images, videos or other content that had been sent to a friend, over the past year. This was most commonly just once or twice over the past year (7.1%), or at least monthly (3.3%). Nine children included in the study reported they had seen such content at least once a week, and four reported they saw it daily or almost daily. However, 13.4%, or 161 children did not want to disclose their answer. Of those who disclosed that they had seen sexual content sent o their friends, one in four 25.2% felt neither happy nor uncomfortable with what they saw, while one in five felt either a litle, quite, or very uncomfortable, or frightened or scared. Half of those who had seen such content did not want to say how they felt when they saw the content.

7.1 had directly received sexual images, videos, or other content over the past year.

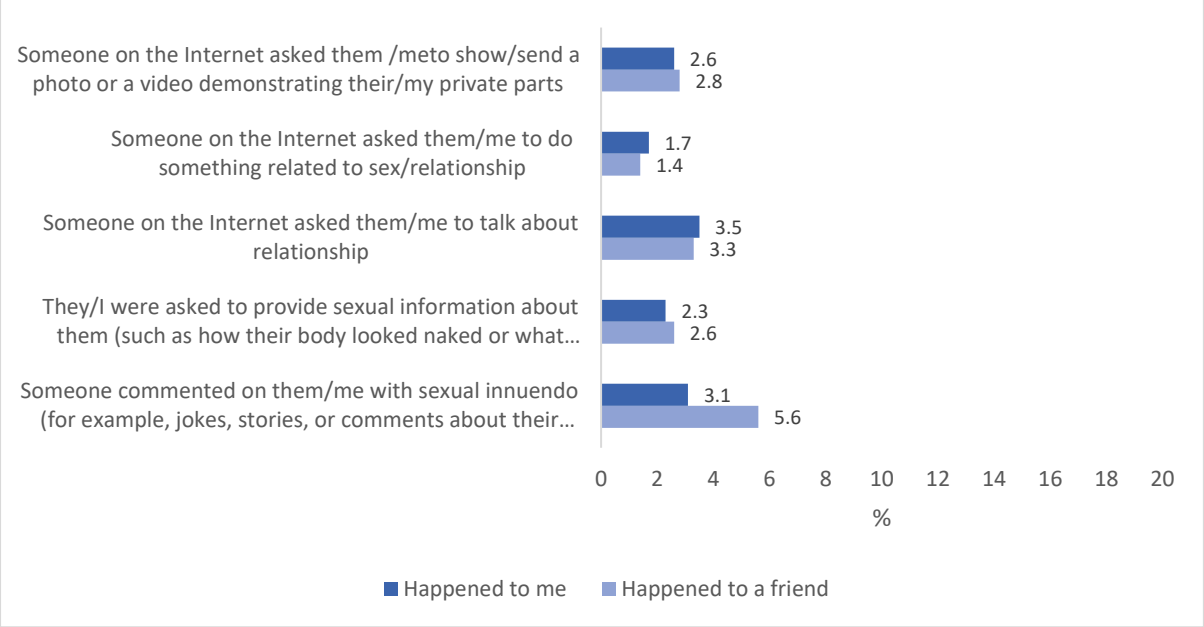
Received sexual content or messages over the past year.

In total, just 7.1%, or 86 of the 1201 children interviewed had received messages of a sexual nature over the past year. This was most commonly reported to be just once or twice over the past year (4.8% or 57 children), or at least once a month (1.7% or 20 children). More than one in ten (13.7%) of children chose not to answer whether or how often they had received sexual content. Of those who had received such messages, almost one quarter (23.5%) felt neither happy nor uncomfortable, while 7.9% felt a little uncomfortable, and 4.3% felt very uncomfortable. A little over half (51.8%) did not want to say how they felt when they received the messages.

[91] Michaela D. Mullis, Amanda Kastrinos, Easton Wollney, Greenberry Taylor & Carma L. Bylund (2021) International barriers to parent-child communication about sexual and reproductive health topics: a qualitative systematic review, Sex Education, 21:4, 387-403, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2020.1807316

[92] Because of the small numbers of children who disclosed, the raw number of respondents have been included in the presentation of the data in the text box, rather than simply percentages. Note that these numbers are too small to allow any meaningful disaggregation by age, gender or location.

Figure 39. Online sexual contact risks over the past year (%) (n=1201)



In the above instances relating to the children's own experiences of unwanted sexual contact, those responsible varied from those within the child's own environment and known to the child, to strangers. Most commonly (in eight instances), the requests or unwanted sexual contact came from people the child's own age (<18)) who the child had known prior to contacting online, while in four instances the request came from strangers online -those the child had not known in person, and who was over 18 years of age. In three cases, this contact came from a parent or step-parent, or a friend of acquaintance of the family that they child had first met online; in two cases the requests or contact came from a sibling over the age of 18, or a current boyfriend or girlfriend. Seven children did not want to identify who the request came from. While the number of cases identified in this study are too small to derive meaningful analysis from, it is of note that this broad profile of unwanted sexual contact reflects emerging evidence form elsewhere that most of the sexual contact risks posed to children come from those known to the child or within their immediate or distal environment. This finding has important implications for the targeting of messages to children and adults, as well as for service delivery and child online protection mechanisms and systems.

Of the 35 cases identified, 11 children reported that they were not upset by the contact, while 10 reported that they were just a little upset, and another 8 reported that they were quite upset. However, four children were very upset, while another two did not want to answer. Note that those children who were very upset all experienced this unwanted contact from family members or others known to them prior to meeting online.

One in two children told a friend about their unwanted sexual contact.

Just under one in five children told NO-ONE about their unwanted sexual contact.

Just over one in ten children told a parent about their unwanted sexual contact.

Children who did experience some forms of unwanted sexual contact were unlikely to seek help related to their experience. When they did, this was most likely to come from friends, with one in two children who had experienced unwanted sexual contact speaking to a friend about it. Just under one in five children told no-one about their experience, while only one in ten told their parent or caregiver about the experience. This means that, with the exception of those children who told their friends, most children were left to deal with the experience on their own. This impacts negatively on children's ability to avoid such situation in the future, to extract themselves from the current situation, and to deal with the potential psycho-social consequences of potential abuse and exploitation.

Children were also asked about coercion or exploitation, including possible acts of sexual extortion, that they may have experienced online over the past year. While similar uncommon as other forms of sexual violence explored in the study, a small percentage of children reported different types of incidents over the past year. In total 19 children (or 3% of those interviewed) had been offered money or gifts in exchange for sexual photos or videos of themselves over the past year. Another 2.4% (or 15 children) had been offered money or gifts to meet in person and do something sexual, over the past year, while 1.8% of children (or 11 children) had been threatened or blackmailed to enter into a sexual relationship with someone over the past year. While these numbers are very small, they are just an initiatl reflection that such forms of abuse and exploitation online are being faced by children in Kazakhstan. It should also be noted that between 63 children (or 10%) of those who answered these questions, chose to respond that they could not say whether this had happened to them online, rather than not answering at all. While this does not conclusively point to children having experienced such exploitation but not being comfortable to disclose them to an interviewer, it is still important to note that they *may* suggest a higher incidence of these forms of violence that would initially appear.

Experiences and exposure to Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is amongst the most common form of violence experienced by children online. It may take several forms, and comparative analysis across studies, countries and regions is often undermined by the lack of standardized definitions.[93] In this study, children were asked about a range of behaviours that may constitute cyberbullying, including being teased, excluded or ignored, being called names repeatedly, laughed at, having rumours spread about them, being sent unpleasant o rude messages, or being threatened. These did not necessary entail repeated behaviour, as there is growing recognition of the potential ongoing or repeated *impact* of just a single incident when perpetrated online.[94]

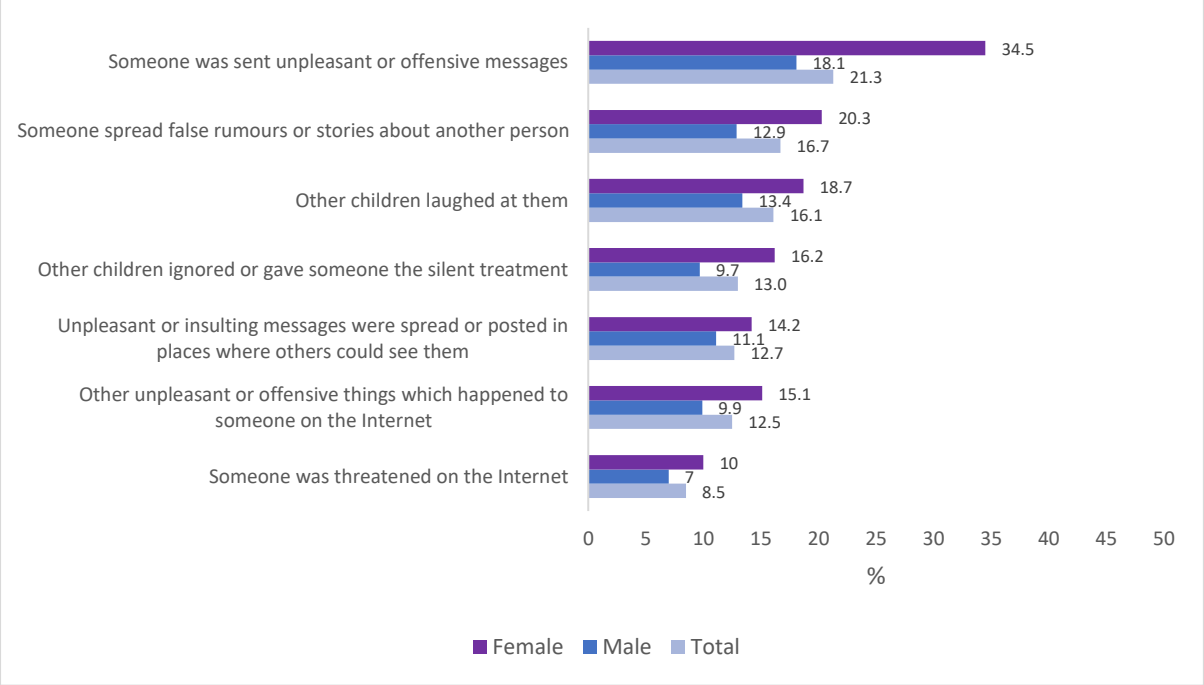
Both exposure to, and direct experiences or victimization to cyberbullying were explored. One in five (21.3%) children reported having witnessed someone being sent unpleasant or rude messages over the past year, while 16.7% had seen false rumours or stories being spread about someone else. A similar percentage (16.1%) had seen someone being laughed at online by others, while a little more than one in ten children had seen children being ignored or excluded by other children, having rude or unpleasant messages posted about them publicly, or experiencing any other form of unpleasant or offensive things online (13%, 12.7% and 12.5% respectively). Just under one in ten children (8.5%) had seen other children being threatened online over the past year.

Exposure to cyberbullying appears routinely more common across all forms of cyberbullying amongst girls than boys. Almost double the number of girls than boys reported having seen someone being

[93] UNESCO, 2020, Recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying, International Conference on School Bullying, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374794
[94] UNESCO, 2020

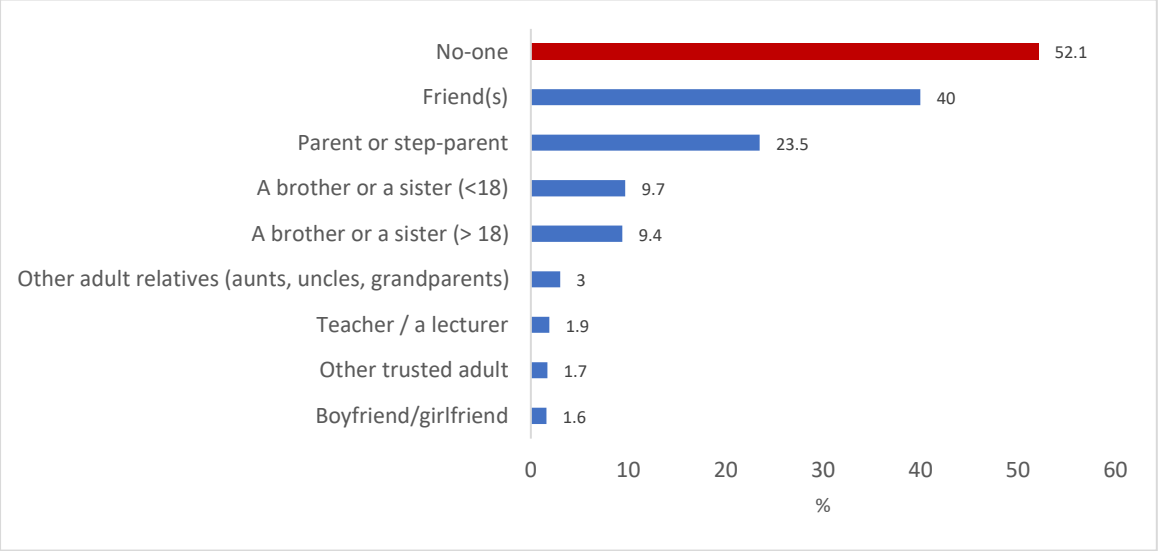
sent unpleasant or offensive messages (34.5% of girls compared to 18.1% of boys), while a similar proportion of girls compared to boys reported witnessing someone spreading false rumours about others, ignoring or excluding someone, or threatening.

Figure 40. Exposure to cyberbullying over the past year (%) (n=1201)



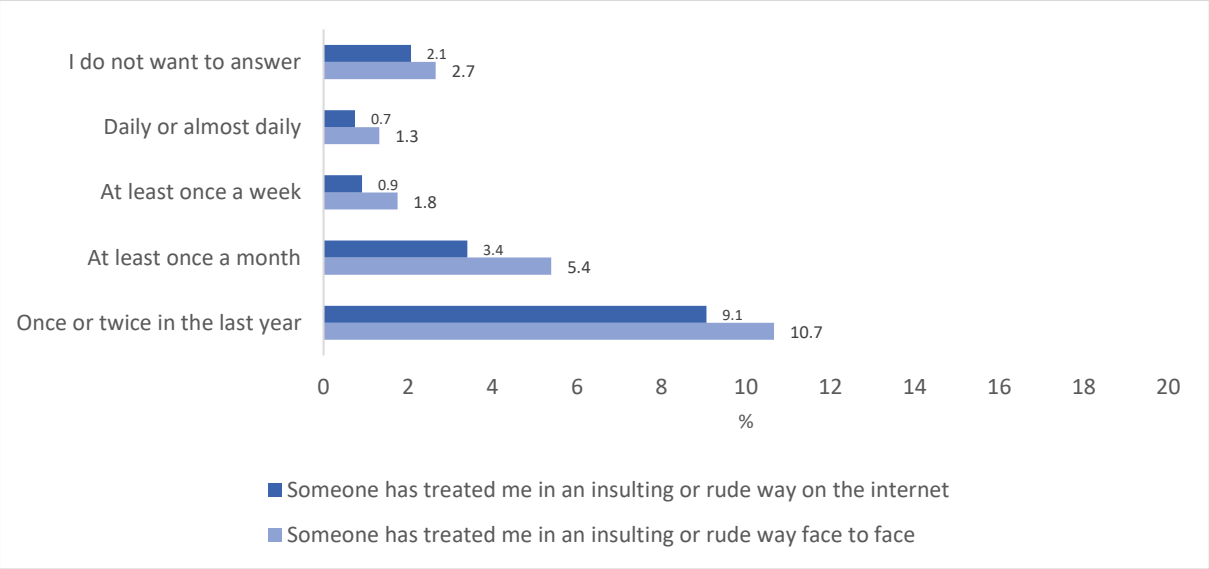
The majority (52.1%) of children who had witnessed cyberbullying online over the past year did not tell anyone about what they had seen. When children did speak to anyone about what they had seen online, this tended to be their friends rather than anyone else. In total, two in five (40%) of children spoke to their friends about what they had seen, while a little under one in four (23.5%) spoke to their parents or caregivers about the incident. Less than one in ten spoke to either an adult sibling, or a sibling under 18 years of age (9.7% and 9.4% respectively).

Figure 41. Who children spoke to about witnessing cyberbullying over the past year (%) (n=361)



While cyberbullying is often perceived as being more common than in-person bullying, evidence consistently shows that face-to-face bullying is more common than other cyberbullying.[95] Children in Kazakhstan were asked how often someone had insulted or been rude to them in-person (face-to-face) compared to online, over the past year. Regardless of the frequency of the interaction, slightly more children reported having been insulted or treated rudely in person, compared to those who reported a similar experience online, over the past year. The more common the experience, the greater the difference between online and offline experiences emerged. In total, one in ten (10.7%) of children had been insulted face to face over the past year, compared to 9.1% online, while 5.4% had been insulted face to face compared to 3.4% online at least once a month. In contrast, almost double the number of children (1.3%) reported being insulted or treated rudely in person on a daily basis compared to 0.7% online, while children were twice as likely to report being treated this way in person at least once a week (1.8%), compared to those who reported being insulted or treated rudely daily or almost daily online (0.9%).[96]

Figure 42. Someone has insulted or been rude to the child in face-to-face interactions compared to those online, in the past year (%) (n=1201)[97]



Children's victimization to cyberbullying followed a similar pattern as those who had been exposed to different forms of bullying. In total, a little over one in ten children (11.9%) reported that they had been sent unpleasant or offensive messages over the past year, while 6.5% had someone spread false rumours or stories about them. Fewer still (4.6%) reported that they had been ignored or excluded by others over the past year, while 4.5% had been laughed at online by other children. Across all forms of bullying victimization explored in the study, girls were significantly more likely to report having been victimized than boys. In total, 14.2% of girls had been sent unpleasant or offensive messages compared to 9.5% of boys, while 8.4% of girls compared to 4.5% of boys had false rumours spread

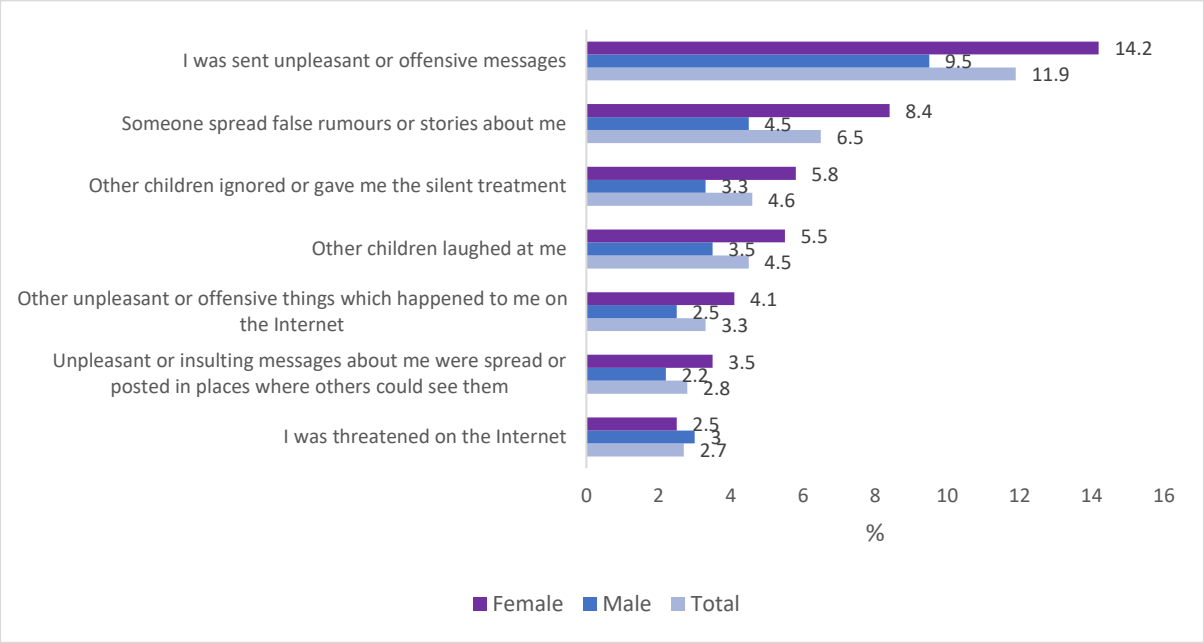
[95] United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, 2016, Ending the Torment: Tackling Bullying from Schoolyard to Cyberspace. https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/publications/tackling_bullying_from_schoolyard_to_cyberspace_low_res_fa.pdf

[96] A note of caution must be added as the number of respondents reporting these experiences weekly or more (weekly or daily) n <24 children or 2% of the total sample.

[97] Never face to face = 78.2%; never online = 83.8%

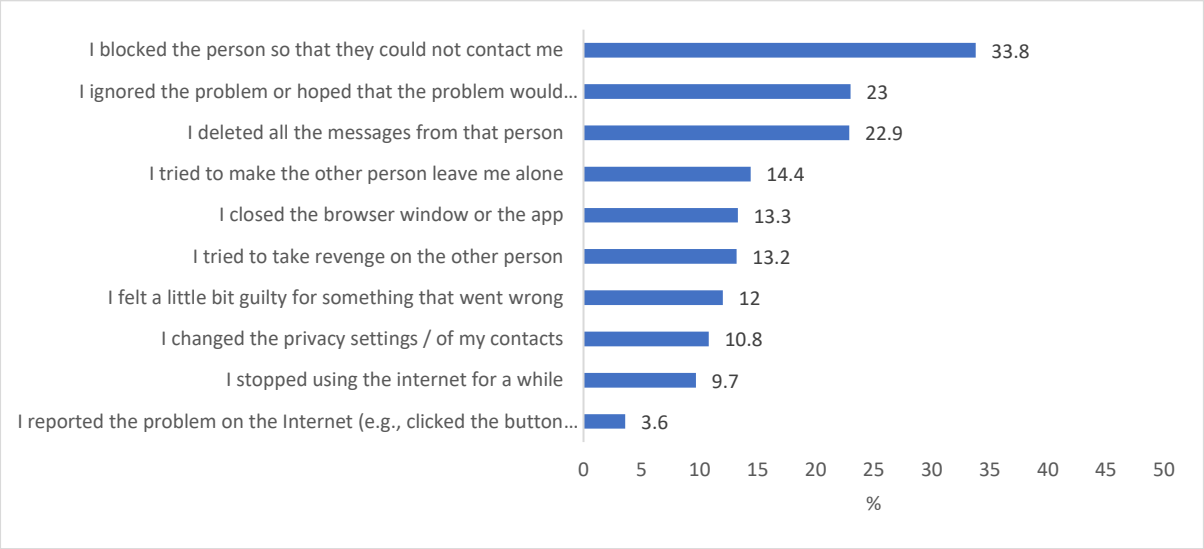
online about them. It must be noted that the exception to this was those who had been threatened online, with fractionally more boys (3%) compared to girls (2.5%) had been threatened.[98]

Figure 43. Personal experiences of cyberbullying over the past year (%) (n=1201)



Children's responses to being bullied tended to be a combination of both active and passive. One in three (33.8%) of those who had been cyberbullied blocked the person who had been bullying them (active), while just under one in four ignored the problem and hoped it would go away, and/or deleted the messages (passive) (23% and 22.9% respectively). Just one in ten changed the privacy settings of the app or their contacts as a means of stopping the person bullying them (active). A little more than one in ten closed the browser or app they were using on which the bullying occurred, and just under a tenth stopped using the internet for a while hoping the bullying would stop) (both passive).

Figure 44. Actions taken in response to being cyberbullied (%) (n=83)



[98] This last difference should be treated with some caution as n < 24 children.

Bullying and Cyberbullying

While the data shows that cyberbullying is experienced almost equally by girls and boys in Kazakhstan, differing opinions emerged in some of the focus group discussions. For example, there was some disagreement as to whether boys experienced cyberbullying to the same degree or in the same way as girls, in one group of 15- to 17-year-old girls:

> F1: *"Let's say cyberbullying. Even boys, there are ones who are vulnerable, every person is different, and everyone reacts differently."*
>
> MODERATOR: *The question is better worded this way: Are boys and girls exposed to cyberbullying equally often, or is there a difference?*
>
> F2 *"There is a difference. If your tits are small, they tell you're flat, well, if you post videos on TikTok, of course. And if you have nice tits, they write, 'Whoa, p****,' 'Cow,' and all that stuff. And they don't write such things to boys at all."*
>
> F3: *"And I saw that if a boy is of a sufficiently large physique, they also write to him: 'Why are you so fat, are you a hooker?'"*

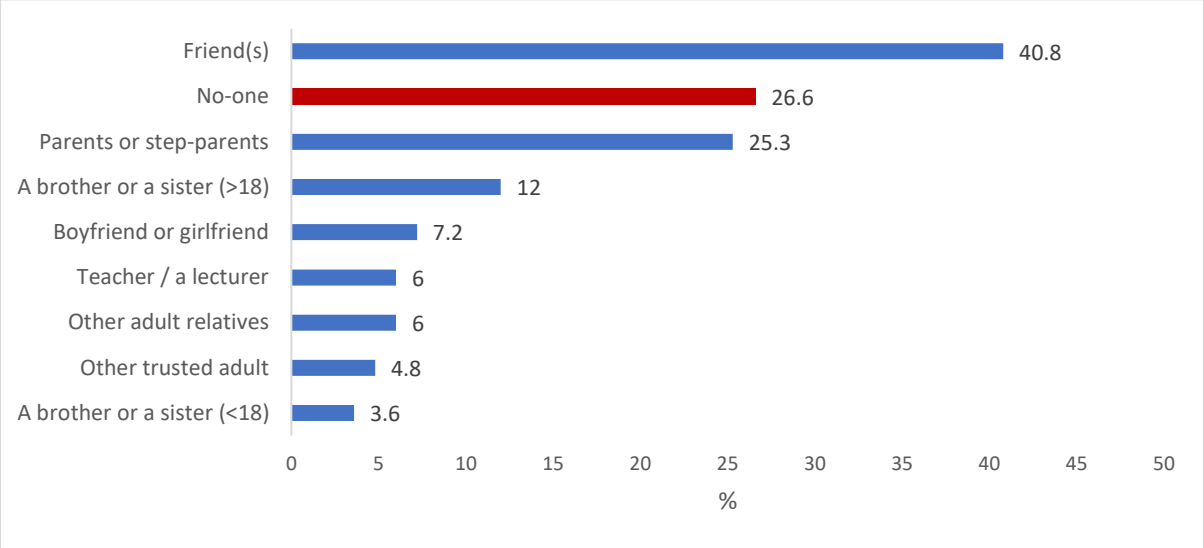
In the same group, children reflected on the relationship between children who might be bullied, and in turn bully others, illustrating very clearly the continuum of violence and relationship between victimization and certain conduct disorders. Using the same experience, children recounted how cyberbullying and bullying often traverses the online and physical environments, reflecting what is increasingly known about the relationship between online and offline violence.

> F4: *"I know a guy I met in another town. He has an extraordinary appearance. And he posted a belly dance or something like this. And Taraz is such a city, everyone has bullied him to the maximum, almost beaten him up. And he likes to make things up. He told me personally that he had beaten up some guys in another city while wearing heels and a dress. The point is, he's being bullied."*
>
> MODERATOR: *So, you're saying they saw something on the Internet, and they actually fought with him?*
>
> F4: *"Yes. There's a DVD park there. Teenagers go there all the time because the city is small. And everyone knows each other there. And everyone is discussing each other behind their backs."*

The above example also provides insight into bullying and cyberbullying victimization that may stem from the exploration of sexual identities online, and the space and freedom that being online provides to do this, in the absence of other opportunities.

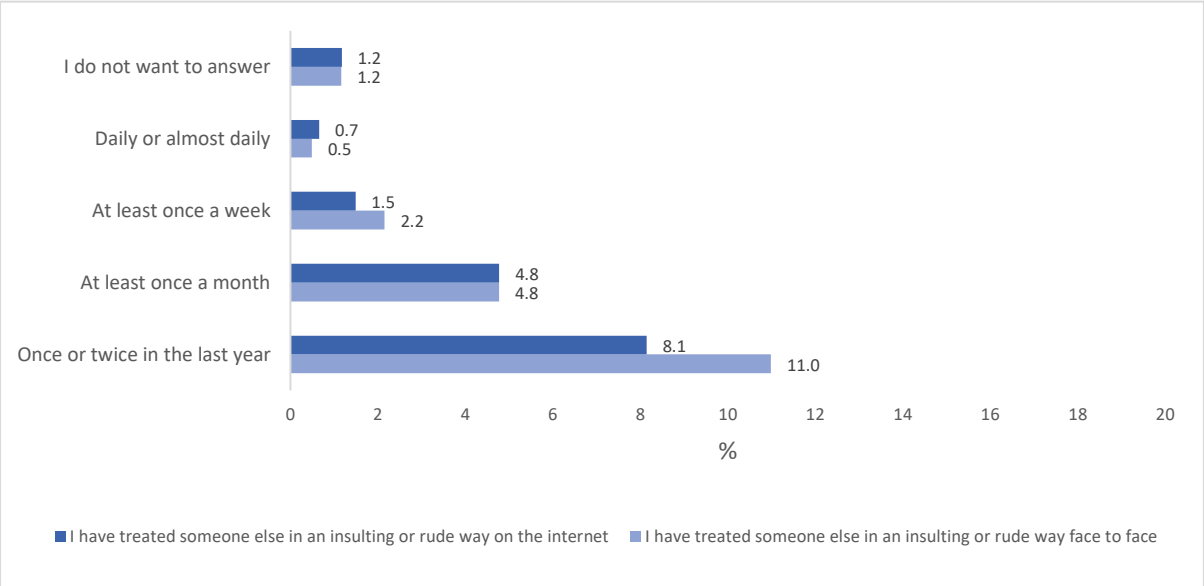
A significant percentage (26.6%) children who had been bullied did not tell anyone about their experience, although two in five (40.8%) did tell their friends about the incident(s). Children were fractionally more likely to not tell anyone as they were to tell their parents or caregivers (25.3%). This continues the pattern discussed earlier in the report to tend not to share their negative or adverse experiences online with others, regardless of how serious or potentially harmful those incidents might become, and where they do tell anyone, to tell their friends rather than anyone else.

Figure 45. Who children told about being cyberbullied (%) (n=83)



Children were also asked about their own behaviour and whether they had ever bullied others online. While this understandably might be behaviour that children are unwilling or hesitant to disclose, a little more than one in ten 11%) children disclosed that they had treated someone rudely or in an insulting way face to face over the past year, compared to 8.1% of children who had treated someone else similarly online. Just one in twenty children (4.8%) reported having done so at least once a month over the past year, for both those disclosing having done so face-to-face, and/or online.

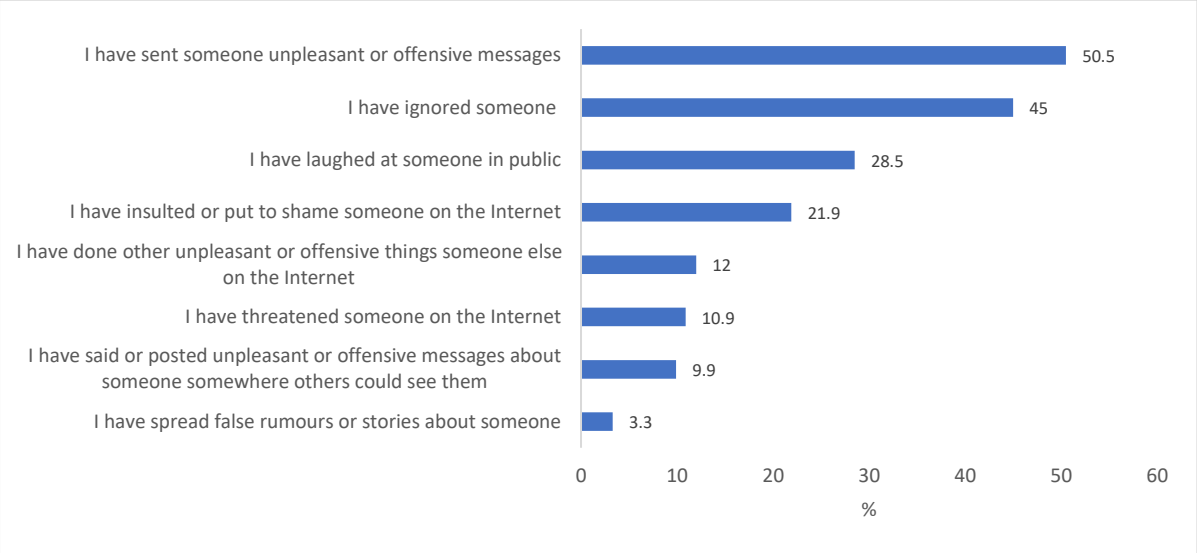
Figure 46. Children who have treated others in a rude or insulting way face to face, and online, over the past year (%) (n=604)[99]



[99] Never face to face = 80.4%; never online =83.8%

Of those children who did disclose some form of cyberbullying over the past year, this was most likely to be in the form of rude or offensive messages (50.5%), ignoring someone (45%), laughing at someone (28.5%), or insulting or shaming another child online (21.9%).

Figure 47. Children who have cyberbullied others over the past year (%) (n=91)



One important theme that emerged in discussions with children in the focus groups as well as from the household survey is the slow, if any, response from the platforms or apps in which reports of abuse or bullying are made. Taking any action online to report risks encountered was relatively uncommon, and this will only be exacerbated by slow responses from technology platforms and companies who have an obligation to act timeously on reports of abuse, or any violations of community standards or terms and conditions of their apps and platforms.

Experiences of privacy risks

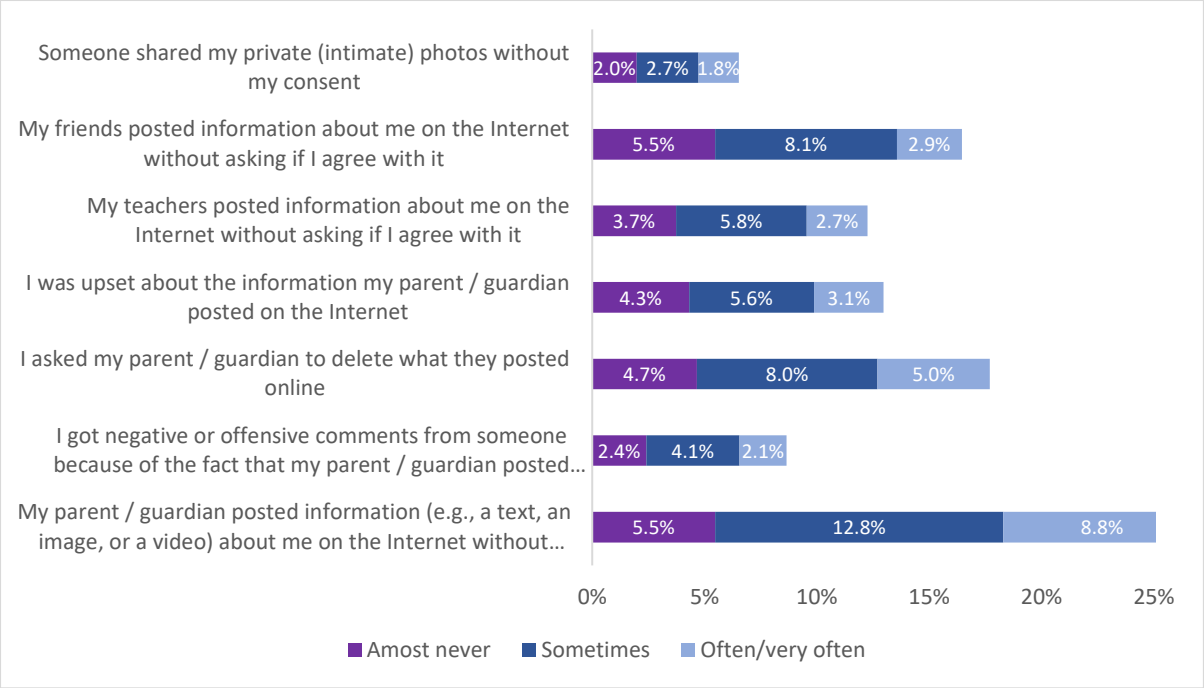
Privacy risks – those relating to interpersonal privacy, institutional or commercial – are cross cutting risks that do not 'fit' neatly into categories of contact, conduct, content or commercial, but rather have implications and relate to each of these four categories.[100] In part, these risks relate to children's concerns about parental intrusion in their life,[101] as well as the potential risks and consequences that the online sharing ('sharenting') of children's life journey's by parents may pose in the short, medium or long term.

Children were asked about the sharing of information, including photos or other details about their life, online by others in their environment, from parents, friends to teachers. More than a quarter of children (27.1%) said their parents or caregivers had posted information about them – in the form of messages, images or videos - without asking them in the last year, with 12.8% reporting this had occurred sometimes, and 8.8% reporting this occurred often or very often over the past year. Slightly fewer reported their friends had posted information without asking them if they were ok or agreed with it, with 8.1% saying this had occurred sometimes over the past year, and 3% saying this had occurred often or very often. Fewer still reported that they teachers had posted information about

[100] OECD (2021). *Children in the digital environment: Revised typology of risks*. OECD Digital Economy Papers, No. 302. https://doi.org/10.1787/9b8f222e-en
[101] UNICEF, 2017, State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital world, UNICEF, New York. https://www.unicef.org/media/48581/file/SOWC_2017_ENG.pdf

them online, with under one in ten (8.5%) of children saying this had happened either sometimes 95.8%) or often or very often (2.7%) over the past year. In total, more than one in ten children in Kazakhstan (13%) said they had asked their parents to delete something they had posted about them (the child) over the past time, with 8% having asked their parent to delete something about them sometimes over the past year, and another 5% having done so often or very often.

Figure 48. Privacy risks linked to others' actions over the past year (%) (n=1201)[102]



Sharenting may bring some benefits to both parents and children's lives, including being able to share parenting advice, share children's achievements with friends and families, and offer and share support particularly for parents of children who may face learning, emotional or physical challenges.[103,104] Social media and online connections have been shown particularly effective in supporting parents of young children with special health care needs.[105] This is often done with little regard to the protection, safety and wellbeing risks that sharing such information may introduce into children's lives.[106] That children regularly ask parents and caregivers to remove content about them that they have posted online suggests that in many instances children may be more aware of the risks that such information may pose; conversely it could simply be that such information is seen by them as embarrassing to them.

[102] All "*never*" responses excluded for clarity.
[103] Steinberg, S. (2017). Sharenting: Children's Privacy in the Age of Social Media. 66 Emory L.J. 839 (2017) University of Florida Levin College of Law Research Paper, 839(16–41).
[104] DeHoff BA, Staten LK, Rodgers RC, Denne SC., 2016, The Role of Online Social Support in Supporting and Educating Parents of Young Children With Special Health Care Needs in the United States: A Scoping Review. J Med Internet Res. 2016 Dec 22;18(12):e333. doi: 10.2196/jmir.6722. PMID: 28007689; PMCID: PMC5216258.
[105] DeHoff BA et.al., 2016, The Role of Online Social Support in Supporting and Educating Parents of Young Children With Special Health Care Needs in the United States: A Scoping Review
[106] Kamil Kopecky, Rene Szotkowski, Inmaculada Aznar-Díaz, José-María Romero-Rodríguez, The phenomenon of sharenting and its risks in the online environment. Experiences from Czech Republic and Spain, Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 110, 2020, 104812, ISSN 0190-7409, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104812.

Chapter 5. Social support and wellbeing

Introduction

Social networks, including peer networks and home and family support, can play an important role in preventing harms resulting from risks such as cyberbullying, as well as in coping with other forms of online violence including sexual violence.[107] In KKO, children were asked about the various networks and support mechanisms in their lives. The following discussion presents children's perceptions on how safe and secure they felt in their environments, and their perceptions of parent and caregivers, peer and teacher support.

Children's perception of social support and wellbeing

Just as parents may seek and receive support from social media and online connection, social support and family support may prove pivotal factors in parents' mediation and interaction with children in relation to their internet and device use. Social support may also impact on the development of appropriate social and emotional leaving skills and capacities to successfully navigate risks online when encountered.

In general, children in Kazakhstan reflect feelings of being safe and secure within their home and social environment, with the vast majority (94.1%) feeling safe, only fractionally fewer (93.5%) feeling that they have a good time together with their family, and nine in ten (90%) feeling that people in their family try to help them. More than four in five (84.3%) feel that when they speak, someone in their family always listens to them.

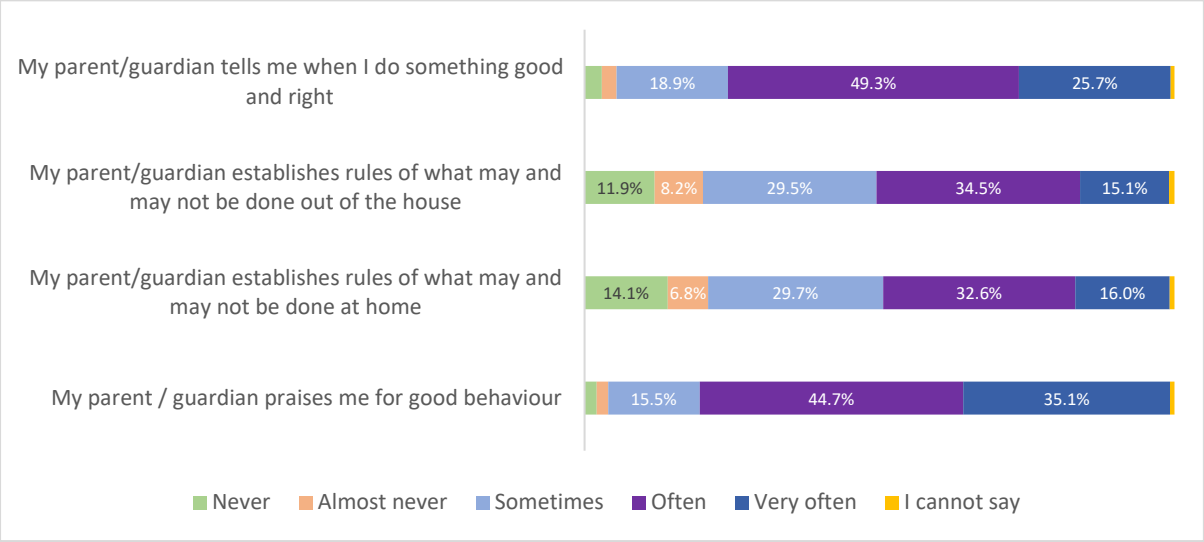
Figure 49. Perceptions of family support (%) (n=1201)

These positive perceptions largely extended to children's views of their parental support and mediation. In total three quarters of children reported that they parents tell them when they do something good and right very often or often (25.7% and 49.3% respectively), while four in five report that their parents praise them for good behaviour very often (35.1%) or often (44.7%).

Fewer children feel that their parents set boundaries for what they do inside the house, and when they go out. In total 16% report that their parents establish rules for what may be done at home very often, while 32.6% report their parents do this often. A similar proportion of children feel that their parents set boundaries for what can happen outside of the home, with 15.1% reporting their parents do this very often, and a little over another third (34.1%) reporting their parents do this often.

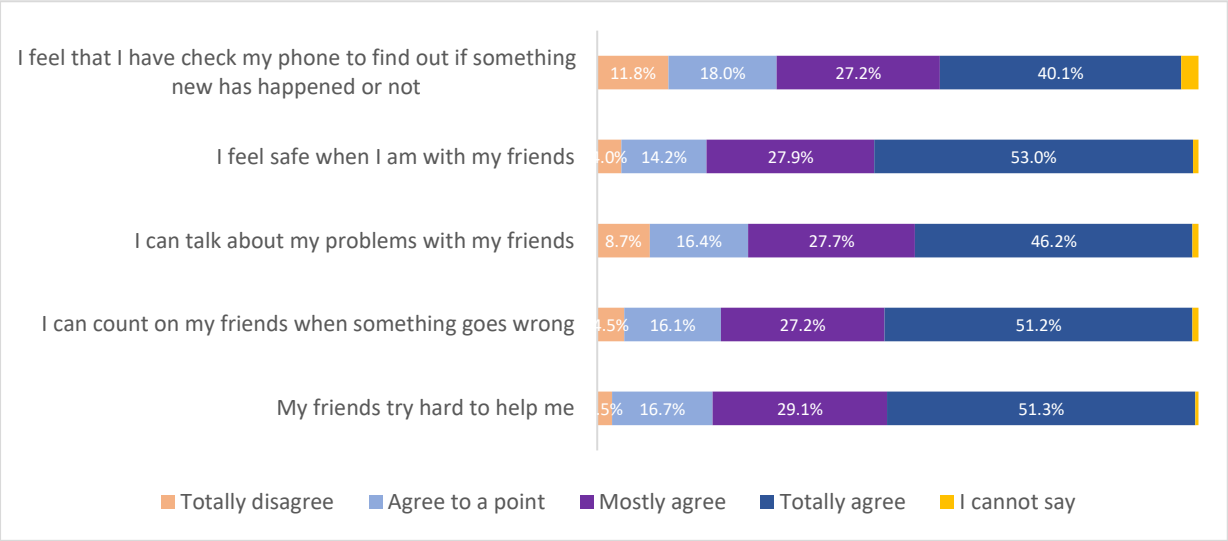
[107] See for example, Arató, N., Zsidó, A.N., Rivnyák, A. *et al.* Risk and Protective Factors in Cyberbullying: the Role of Family, Social Support and Emotion Regulation. *Int Journal of Bullying Prevention* **4**, 160–173 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s42380-021-00097-4

Figure 50. Perceptions of parental support (%) (n=1201)



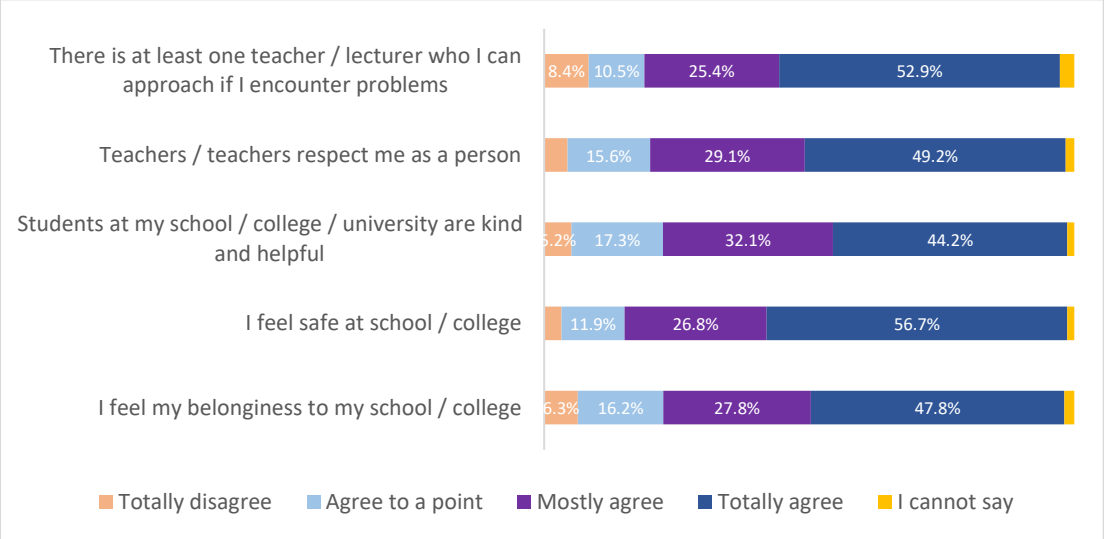
The majority of children also feel that their friends and peers often them the support that they need. More than half of the children interviewed totally agree that they feel safe when they are with their friends, that they can count on their friends when something goes wrong, and that they can count on them when they things go wrong (53%, 51.3% and 51.2% respectively), while a little over one quarter feel that they totally agree to each of these statements. Yet fewer (but still the majority) of children totally agree or agree that they can talk to their friends about their problems (46.2% and 27.7%) respectively.

Figure 51. Perceptions of peer support (%) (n=1201)



Most children felt similarly supported within their school environment. More than half of the children included in the study totally agreed that they felt safe at school, and that they totally agreed that there was a teacher they could go to if they had a problem (56.7% and 52.9% respectively), while 26.7% and 26.8% mostly agreed with these statements respectively. Similarly, the majority of children totally agreed or mostly agreed that teachers respect them as a person (49.2% and 29.1% respectively), felt they belonged at their school (47.8% and 27.8% respectively), and that peers at their school were kind and helpful (44.2% and 32.1% respectively).

Figure 52. Perceptions of school and teacher support (%) (n=1201)



Chapter 6. Internet mediation

Introduction

Internet mediation within both the home and school is important in children's lives, beyond keeping children safe online. There is now an established body of literature that shows how the presence of some forms of mediation, and different styles of mediation, can impact on different aspects of children's digital lives. Parental mediation refers to the strategies adopted by parents to regulate, discuss, and monitor children's media use.[108] Strategies can broadly be categorized in into two: active or passive, with active mediation reflecting a more engaged and supportive role in children's digital lives, while passive tends towards a more restrictive and controlling approach, the latter often intended explicitly to keep children safe.[109,110]

Styles of parental internet mediation have been shown across different regions to have a significant impact on children's acquisition of digital skills. More passive and restrictive mediation has been shown to result in less exposure to risks online, but also in lower levels of technical and other digital skills, and less access to opportunities that the internet offers. Conversely, active parenting has been shown to generally result in greater exposure to risks online, but equally, children are better equipped to successfully navigate and deal with the risks they encounter, thus minimizing the risk of harmful outcomes.[111] Importantly, children also often express the desire for greater guidance and support from parent's when it comes to their own digital lives.[112]

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[108] Sonia Livingstone Ph.D. & Ellen J. Helsper Ph.D. (2008) Parental Mediation of Children's Internet Use, Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 52:4, 581-599, DOI: 10.1080/08838150802437396

[109] Livingstone, Sonia & Blum-Ross, Alicia. (2020). Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives10.1093/oso/9780190874698.001.0001.

[110] Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) introduce a third position, that reflects a tend to move between active and passive mediation, often influenced by specific experiences that children or parents may have had relating to the digital environment, or to what they have seen in public discourse.

[111] Cabello-Hutt, T., Cabello, P., & Claro, M. (2018). Online opportunities and risks for children and adolescents: The role of digital skills, age, gender and parental mediation in Brazil. New Media & Society, 20(7), 2411–2431. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817724168

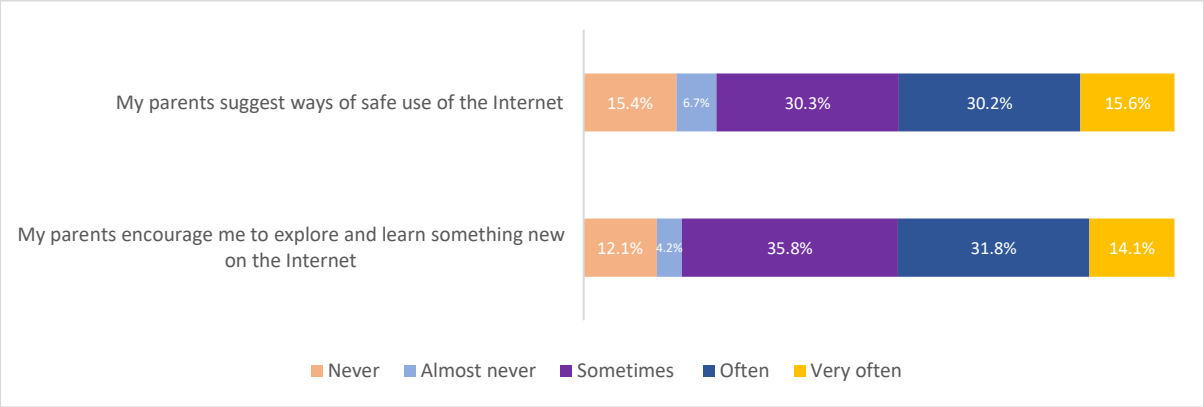
[112] MediaSmarts. (2023). "Young Canadians in a Wireless World, Phase IV: Trends and Recommendations." MediaSmarts. Ottawa. https://mediasmarts.ca/sites/default/files/2023-07/report_ycwwiv_trends_recommendations.pdf

In the study, various means of parental mediation were explored, from their child's perspectives. Children were asked about communication and engagement between parents and teachers about their internet use, and other instances of adults supporting and encouraging their internet use, parental and teacher monitoring of their internet use, and adult's use of technical and restrictive tools and practices. These findings are presented below.

Children's perceptions of parental and teacher mediation in Kazakhstan

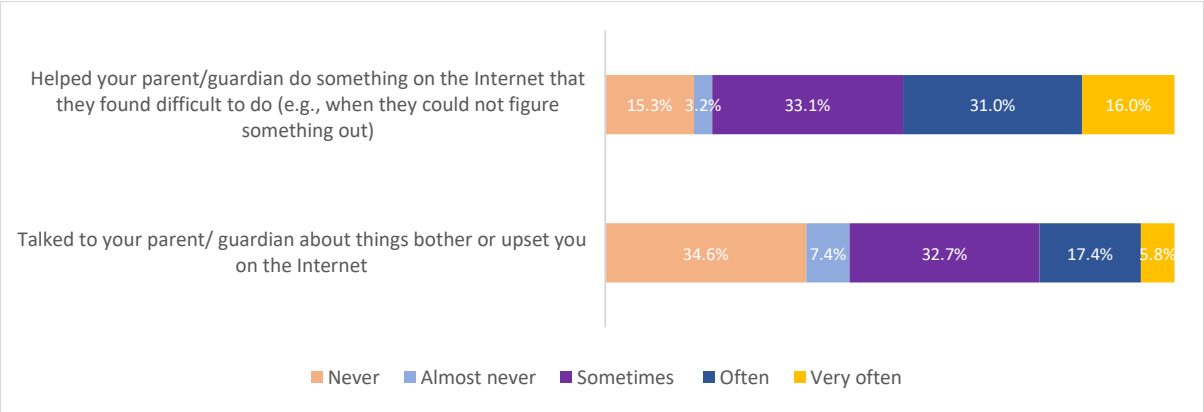
In Kazakhstan, just over one in five children report that their parents never, or almost never suggest ways of using the internet safely (15.4% and 6.7% respectively), while 16.2% report their parents never or almost never encourage them to explore and learn something new online (12.1% and 4.2% respectively). Three in ten children have parents who sometimes provide suggestions on safe internet use, and encourage them to learn and explore more online, while a similar percentage of children have parents who often encourage and engage with them on their internet use. Gender and age were not significant in determining how active parents were in the mediation of their child's internet use.

Figure 53. Parental active mediation (%) (n=1201)



Conversely, one in three (33.1%) children reported that they often helped their parents or caregivers do something online that they found difficult to do, while another one in ten had often helped their parents with something online. Similarly, one in three children reported that they sometimes spoke to their parents about things that bothered them online, while less than one in five (17.4%) did so often.

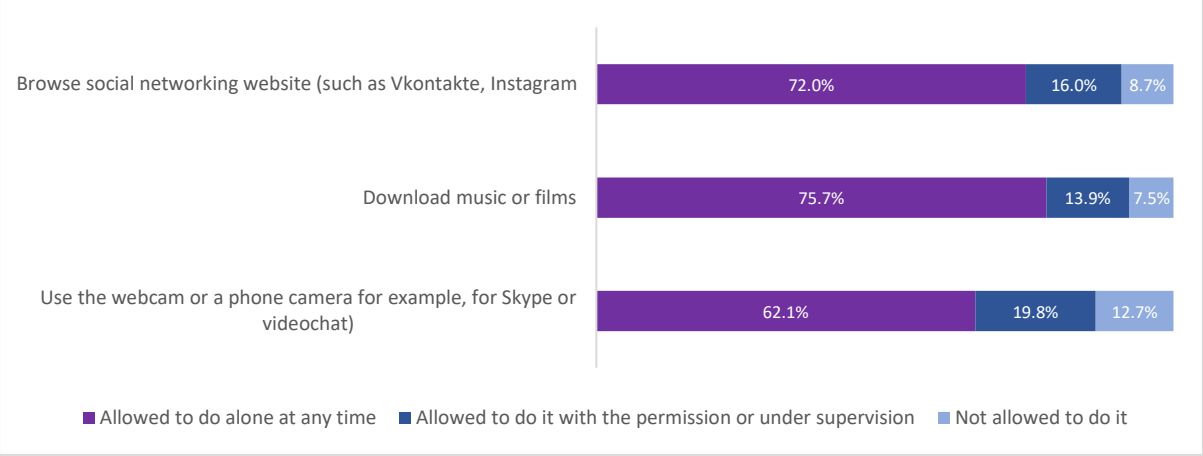
Figure 54. Parental active safety mediation (%) (n=1201)



Restrictive parental mediation was less commonly reported by children in Kazakhstan. In total almost three quarters of children in the study reported that they were allowed to browse social networking sites such as Vlonkakte and Instagram without supervision at any time by themselves, while fractionally more (75%) were allowed to download music or films without supervision at any time.

Three in five children (62.1%) reported that they could use a phone camera or webcam for video chats whenever they wanted, while another one in five (19.8%) were allowed to do it, but with supervision or permission of their parents. There was no difference by gender in the styles of parenting and types of restrictions or freedoms placed on children, although older children aged 13 to 14 and 15 to 17 were more likely to be allowed to do these things without supervision than younger children aged nine to ten, or 11- to 12-year-olds. Yet, children in particularly rural areas, in villages, did report the use of technical restrictive measures such as parental monitoring and controls.

Figure 55. Parental restrictive mediation (%) (n=1201)



CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL MEDIATION

Children in focus groups tended to reflect similarly varied experiences of parental mediation of their internet use. This tended to vary across age groups, even for the youngest children. For example, from one group of nine to ten year old boys:

MODERATOR: Who knows what you do on the Internet? Do(es) somebody check you?

M1 *"My older sister checks me."*

M2: *"No one checks me."*

M3: *"My older sister checks me."*

M4: *"No one."*

M5: *"My dad checks me twice a week."*

MODERATOR: Does he check the game, WhatsApp, everything?

M5: "*Yes, he looks through everything."*

MODERATOR: .....what about others, do your mothers or older sisters help you?

Children: *"We ourselves get help online.*

MODERATOR: Do your fathers, mothers or older sisters ban you from visiting certain websites?

Children: *"Nobody sets restrictions."*

M6: *"I can't just buy games. It is restricted."*

A similar discussion emerged in a group of 11 to 12 year old girls:

MODERATOR: Do your parents and sisters watch what you watch?

F1: *"My parents don't watch, but my brothers and sisters do, older people do. There is parental control, and it monitors how many hours I sit, how much time I spend, everything."*

F2: *"Only my sister checks my phone, my father checks when he has time do to it."*

These discussions discuss how when children's activities are mediated at all, they tend to be more restrictively mediated, not only by parents and caregivers but also by older siblings. Yet, for many, their online activities are largely unmediated, and in many ways, unsupported. This reflects a somewhat different picture to that painted by parents and caregivers in the next chapter.

Chapter 7. Parents Online

Introduction

The following section presents an overview of the online habits, skills and mediation of the parents of those children interviewed in the study. As noted in earlier chapters, how parents and caregivers use digital technology, their skills and their mediation of their children's internet and technology use plays an important role in children's digital technology use, and the development of their skills and capacities. These factors can all ultimately, can influence the safety and wellbeing of children in relation to their digital use.[113] Parents impact on children's digital lives may be informed by not only their parenting style in relation to digital technology – active or passive, supportive and enabling or restrictive – but also through the modelling of their own behaviour and habits relating to digital technology. Parents may function as "guides and supervisors, supporters, home teachers and learning facilitators regarding digital technology…but also as prohibitor, controller and filter of content that should not reach children."[114]

Parent's access to and use of the internet and digital technology

Almost all (96.3%) of the parents interviewed had been using the internet for several years or more, while just 2.1% (or 25 of the 1200 parents interviewed) had been using it for about a year. Just six respondents had been using the internet for several months, and seven had never used the internet. The majority of parents – 57.2% - could use the internet where and when they wanted, while another third (32.7%) could use the internet often whenever they wanted. There was litle difference between male and female parents in how they could access the internet. Access was easier within cities than villages, with three in five (60.4% of parents in cities reporting they could use the internet as and when they wanted very often, and another three in ten (31.1%) reporting they could often access the internet where and when they wanted, compared to just half (52.1%)of those in villages who could very often, and another third (35.2%) reporting they could access it often, when and where they wanted to (see Appendix figure A6).

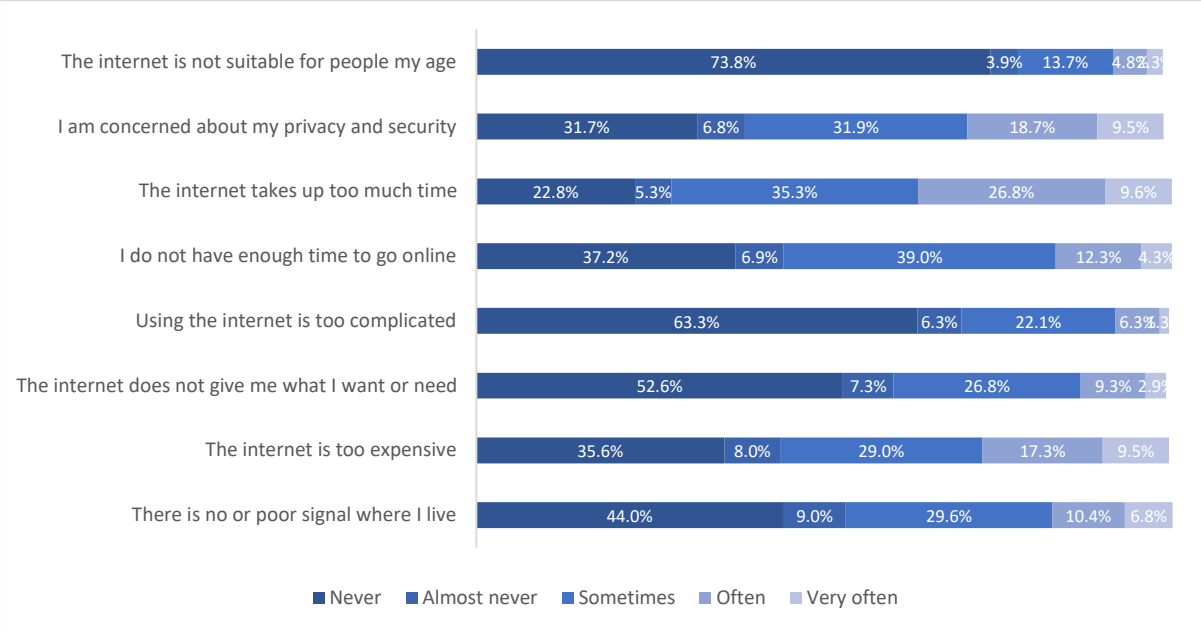
The most common factors stopping parents from using the internet was the perception that it took up too much time, along with the cost of the internet, with a total of seven in ten parents feeling that it took up too much time sometimes, often or very often, and 56.4% reporting that internet was too expensive for them sometimes, often or very often. Time in general seemed a common barrier to access. In addition to parents reporting that it was not uncommon for them to feel that the internet took up too much time in general, the majority also felt that they simply did not have enough time to go online (with two in five reporting they sometimes did not have enough time to go online, and 12.3% and 4.3% reporting they often and very often did not have time to go online, respectively).

Less common barriers included the perception that the internet was not suitable for people their age, with 73.8% reporting they never felt this way and 3.9% reporting that they almost never felt this about the internet; and that the internet was too complicated for them, with 63.3% reporting that they never, and another 6.3% reporting that they almost never, encountered this problem.

[113] Livingstone, Sonia & Blum-Ross, Alicia, 2020, Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives.

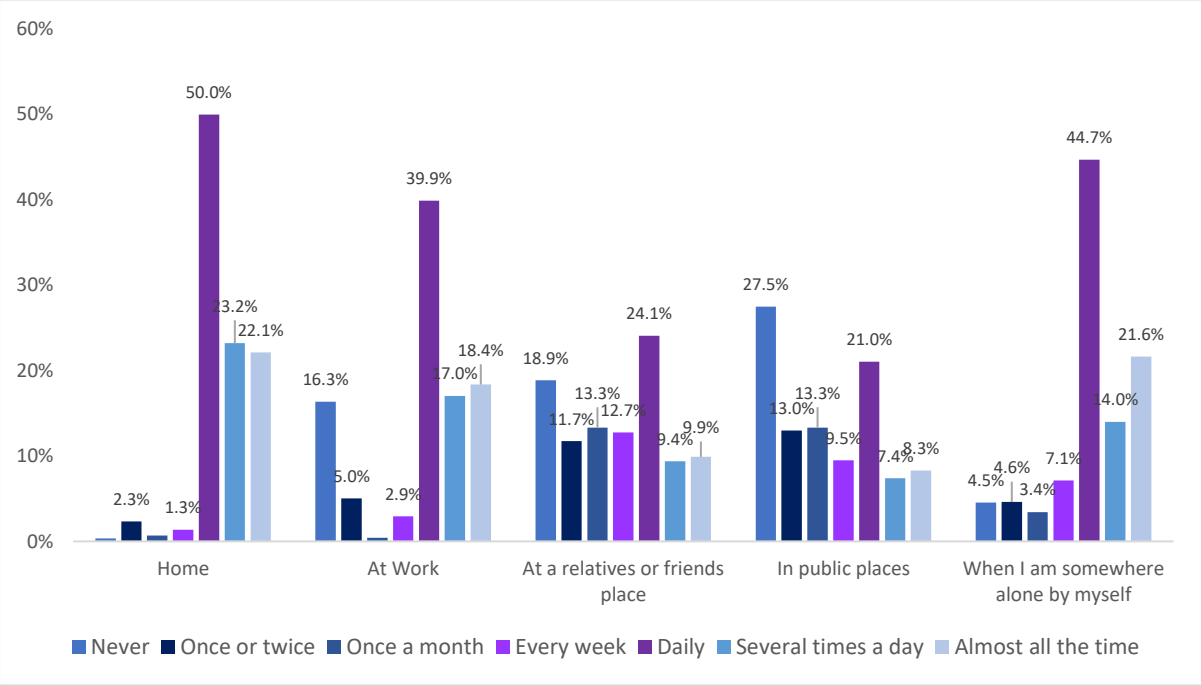
[114] Kapella, O., Schmidt, E. M. & Vogl, S. (2022). Integration of digital technologies in families with children aged 5-10 years: A synthesis report of four European country case studies. (DigiGen-working paper series No 8). 10.5281/zenodo.6411126

Figure 56. Barriers to internet access for parents (%) (n=1200)



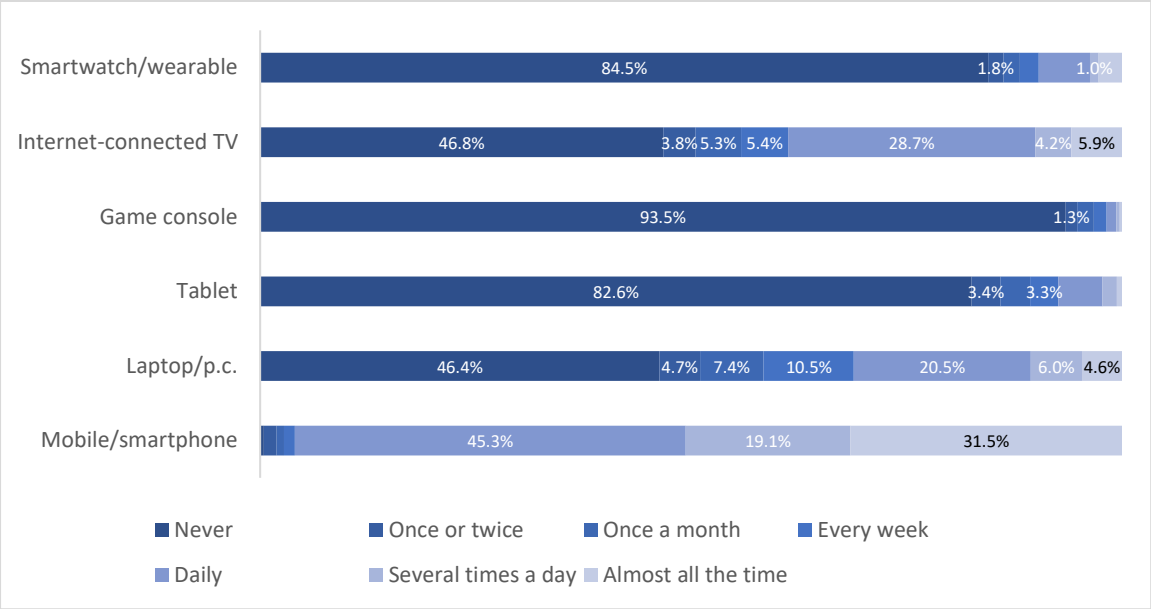
Like their children, parents mostly reported going online at home, although parents were significantly more likely to report more frequent access at work, than children did at their schools. In general, parents tended to regularly connect to the internet in all the main spaces that they live their lives, from home and work, to relatives and friends houses, in public places such as libraries or shopping centres, or when they are by themselves somewhere. This reflects a more constant connection to digital technology for parents, that may be a product as much of the more diverse spaces they occupy as adults when compared to children, as a sense of being more connected, or more constantly online.

Figure 57. Where parents access the internet (%) (n=1193)



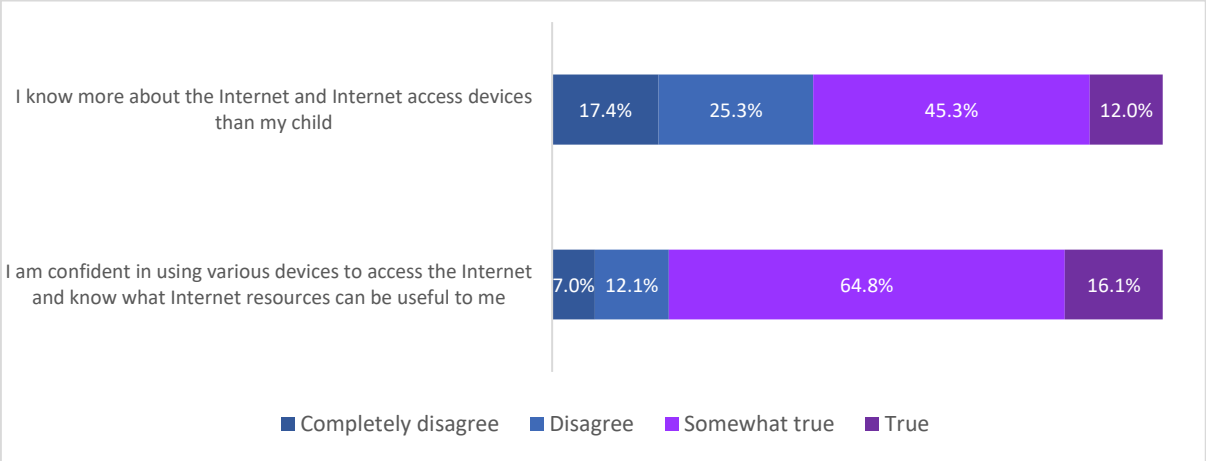
Like their children, parents were most likely to go online using their mobile or smartphone, with three in ten (31.5%) going online on their phone almost all the time, another one in five (19.1%) several times a day, and 45.3% daily. This was followed by laptops and personal computers (p.c.), and Smart (internet-connected) televisions. Conversely, parents were least likely to connect to the internet using gaming consoles, and wearable tech such as Smart watches or Fitbits.

Figure 58. Devices parents use to go online (%) (n=1193)



It is not uncommon across countries in many regions of the world for children to have a better understanding of digital technology and the internet than their parents, particularly in those countries where digital penetration and affordable internet access has only become a reality in the past decade. Equally so, children often over-estimate their knowledge of digital technology in relation to their parents, while under-estimating their parents' digital skills. In Kazakhstan, four in five parents are confident in using the internet and knowing what the internet and technology can be useful for them, with 64.8% feeling this is somewhat true, and 16.1% completely true for them.

Figure 59. Parents confidence in their internet knowledge and skills (%) (n=1200)



When comparing their own knowledge of the internet to their children's, fewer felt that they know more than their child. In total, less than half (45.3%) felt that it was somewhat true they knew more than their child about the internet, while a little more than one in ten (12%) felt it was true. Conversely, one quarter of the parents interviewed disagreed with the statement that they know more about the internet than their children, and another 17.4% completely disagreed. This compares to a total of 62.3% of children who somewhat or completely believe that they know more about the internet than their parents.

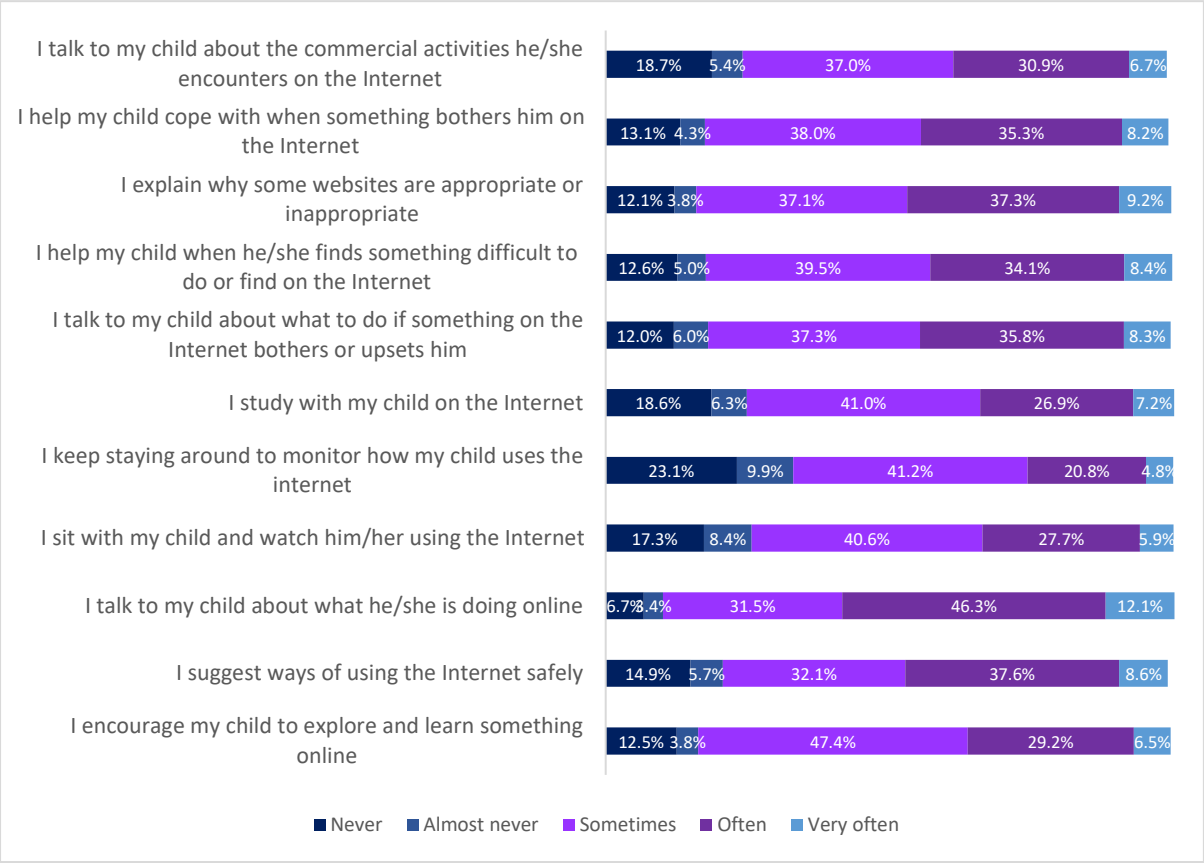
Yet, parents in Kazakhstan show some level of competency across a range of operational, information, social, creative and mobile skills. With the exception of knowing how to use a programming language (operational skill), and creative skills, more than half of the parents included in the study felt some level of confidence in their abilities across all 24 individual skills measured (see Appendix, figures A8 to A11). Amongst the skills parents were least confident in, was knowing what licenses applied to them, or knowing how to create a website (12.9 a bit true, 18.3% mostly true, and 7.3% very true for them), although slightly more reported that it was a bit true, mostly true or very true that they knew how to post online videos they had created themselves (12.7%, 367% and 17.8% respectively).

It is notable that amongst the social skills explored, parents felt less confident in their ability to report a negative message – a rude or offensive message – about them or their loved one, online through the relevant app or website, with 14.6% feeling it was a bit true, 41.3% mostly true, and 21.2% completely true for them that they could report a negative message online (see Appendix, figure A9). This is important for parents to be able to show children when they encounter something abusive or offensive online, or when they feel they are being harassed or otherwise bullied. However, it does also suggest that almost one quarter of parents do not know how to do this, and thus are in a position where they are unable to support their child in reporting content or messages online when they need to. In all, though, this data suggests that parents have a level of self-assessed competency at least on a par with their children and are thus in a good position to provide guidance and support to children.

Parents mediation of children's internet use

Parents generally reported high levels of internet mediation than reported by children. While between 4.8% of parents and 12.1% reported that they very often spoke to or engaged positively with their child about different aspects of their internet and digital technology use, significantly more reported that they often or very often engaged with and supported their child's internet and technology use. In total, more than two thirds of parents reported that they at least sometimes, or often or very often, supported or mediated their child's internet use, with the lowest levels of engagement being the physical monitoring of the child's internet use. Parents almost uniformly reported sometimes, often or very often talking to their child about commercial activities online, helping their child cope with things that bother them, explaining why some sites might be inappropriate for them, helping them when they cannot do something online, or talking to them if they learn that something online has bothered their child. Parents similarly report that they largely encourage their child to explore and use the internet for learning new things, and only slightly fewer suggest ways to their child of using the internet safely.

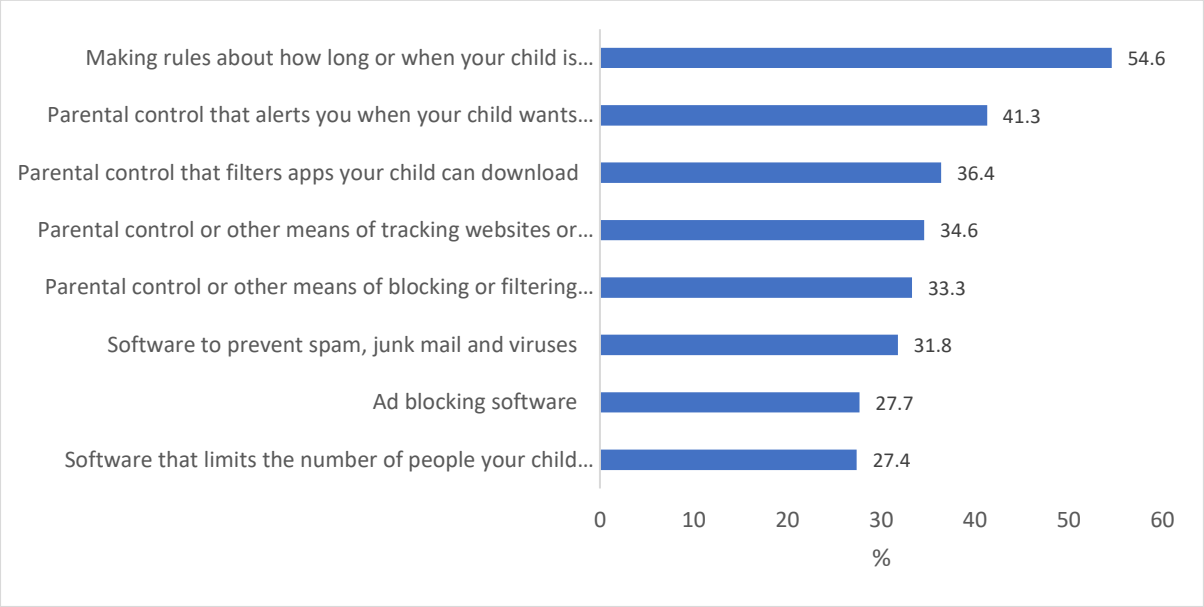
Figure 60. Parents mediation of their child's internet use and activity (%) (n=1200)



This data creates a profile of largely active support and mediation by parents and caregivers of their children's use of digital technology and the internet, encouraging them to make good use of the technology, explore opportunities, and provide a supportive and open environment. This picture also broadly supports the experiences of children, who largely reported that their parents talk to them about what they do online and encourage them to learn and explore things online.

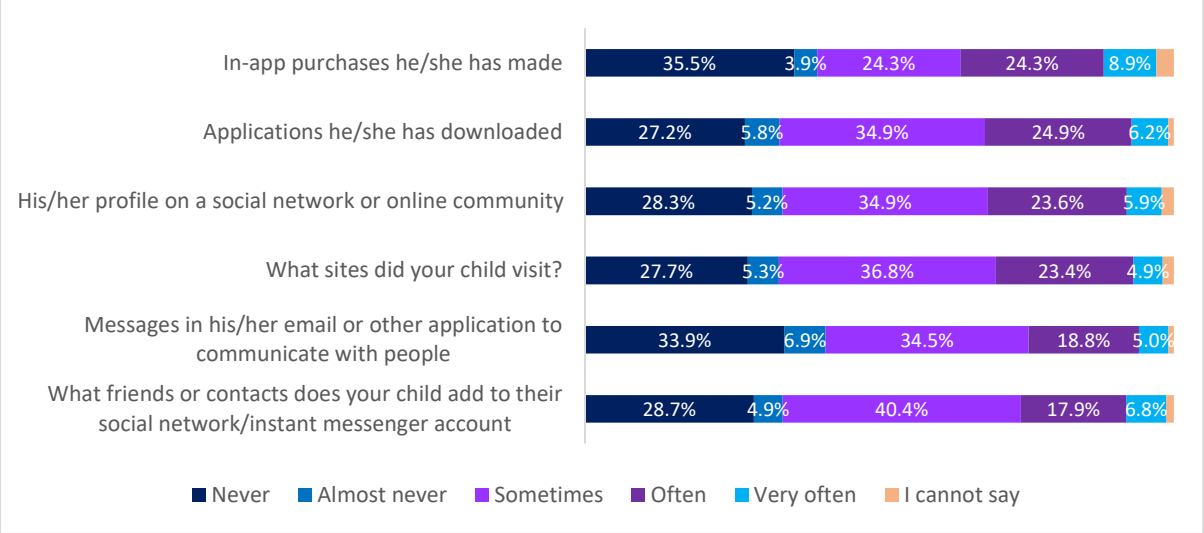
As noted earlier in this paper, parents may also engage in more technical, as well as restrictive, often passive, mediation of their children's internet and technology use. This is often through the use of technical tools such as parental monitoring and filtering tools and software, or filtering software. Less than half of the parents interviewed in the study reported using technical tools such as filtering or monitoring software. A little over two in five (41.3%) used parental controls to get notification when their child purchases within an app (in-app purchases), while 36.4% use parental controls that filter what apps their child can download on their device. A little more than one third of parents use parental controls that track the websites their child visits, and one third use controls to block or filter websites. Less common are technical controls that limit exposure to advertisements (27.7%), or that limit who their child can talk to online (27.4%). While accounting for less than half of the parents interviewed, this still suggests relatively common knowledge, and use, of technical and restrictive controls on children's internet access and use. More than half of parents do set rules about when, or how long, their child can spend online. Yet, these approaches tended to vary, and more diverse views on the use of these tools were reflected in the focus group discussions (see text box below).

Figure 61. Parent's technical mediation of their child's internet use (n=1200)



While the minority of parents use technical tools that are available to them to restrict and control their children's internet use, significantly more parents do actively monitor what their child is doing online. Two in five (40.4%) sometimes, and another 17.9% often, and 6.8% very often, check what friends or contacts their child adds to the social network or instant messenger account. A similar percentage of parents sometimes, often, very often check their emails or communications (34.5%, 18.8% and 5% respectively); what site they visit (36.8%, 23.4% and 4.9% respectively); their social media profiles (34.9%, 23.6% and 5.9% respectively); and what apps they have downloaded; and (34.9%, 24.9% and 6.2% respectively).

Figure 62. Parents monitoring of their child's internet use (n=1200)



This general profile reflects one of active and passive mediation of children's internet use, and a combination of what is emerging as both effective and less effective parenting strategies when it comes to children's digital habits, wellbeing safety and skills. For example, while it is not uncommon for parents to feel that monitoring who their children are speaking to, filtering and preventing access

to certain content, and monitoring who their child might have in their friends or contact lists, are effective ways of keeping their child safe, and making themselves more secure about what their child might be doing online, as children develop more skills and knowledge, it becomes easier for them to circumvent many of these measures. Some tools, such as parental controls and monitoring software, may be effective for younger children up to the ages of town or 11 years, context dependent, but older children quickly learn techniques to circumvent these controls.

Children also often share openly the strategies that they develop to evade their parent's supervision, not necessarily for any nefarious or ill-intentioned reasons, but simply to afford themselves a level of privacy that they feel they might not otherwise have. Children may simply create multiple social media accounts, sharing one or two with their parents and keeping others completely private from them.

Conversely, ongoing engagement, supporting children's safe internet use through open and honest conversation, that avoids judgement, and that allows for children to feel safe in approaching their parents for help and support or to ask for advice, serves to create an environment where children can thrive online, and that is conducive to the acquisition of greater skills.

Parents perceptions of children's risk online

While parents may not know definitively what experiences their child may have had online, and in particular negative experiences that children may be scared to tell their parents about, it is important to understand how parents perceive their child's online experiences, and how and when they encounter risk. Parents in the focus group discussions clearly reflected an awareness of knowledge of different risks that child could potentially face, ranging from exposure to violence (and as expressed by parents, *"cruelty"),* to contact sexual risks presented by *"paedophiles"* (see text box).

P1 (13-14 y/o): *"Games associated with cruelty, suicide".*

P2 (13-14 y/o): "*With cruelty, this is important! Just now we said, what its name, (the game) Counter-Strike, it was not in our childhood. Or UFC-related, fights etc., for example, a teenager, he plays Counter-Strike well, he owns weapons there, let's say even a knife. And now he, he has an idea, how is it in reality? Here, the Matrix movie, you have to try with a knife. I noticed that on the news, 7-8 graders hit an old man, a homeless person, they bet that a person could fall with one blow, he had a good hit there, trained hit etc. This is cruelty, this is violence."*

P2 (13-14 y/o): "*Then the suicide, recently they said in the news, they also discussed that journalists should be as responsible as possible when they post all the information; their WhatsApp communication, this is dangerous. And so much information about suicide, and now the script is ready there, etc., it should be limited."*

P1 (13-14 y/o): *"Pornerotic websites. There are a lot of them."*

Z2 (13-14 y/o): "*Now, basically, almost, maybe even 90 percent do not know what teenagers watch on their smartphones. A smartphone is Internet access everywhere, 24/7 watch at night or watch on the street, who knows now. For example, if earlier they talked about sexual contacts to 21-20-year-olds, now 15-16-year-olds boldly tell about it, they already have experience, they themselves admit it. Already at the age of 15-16 they have experience, so it also needs to be limited."*

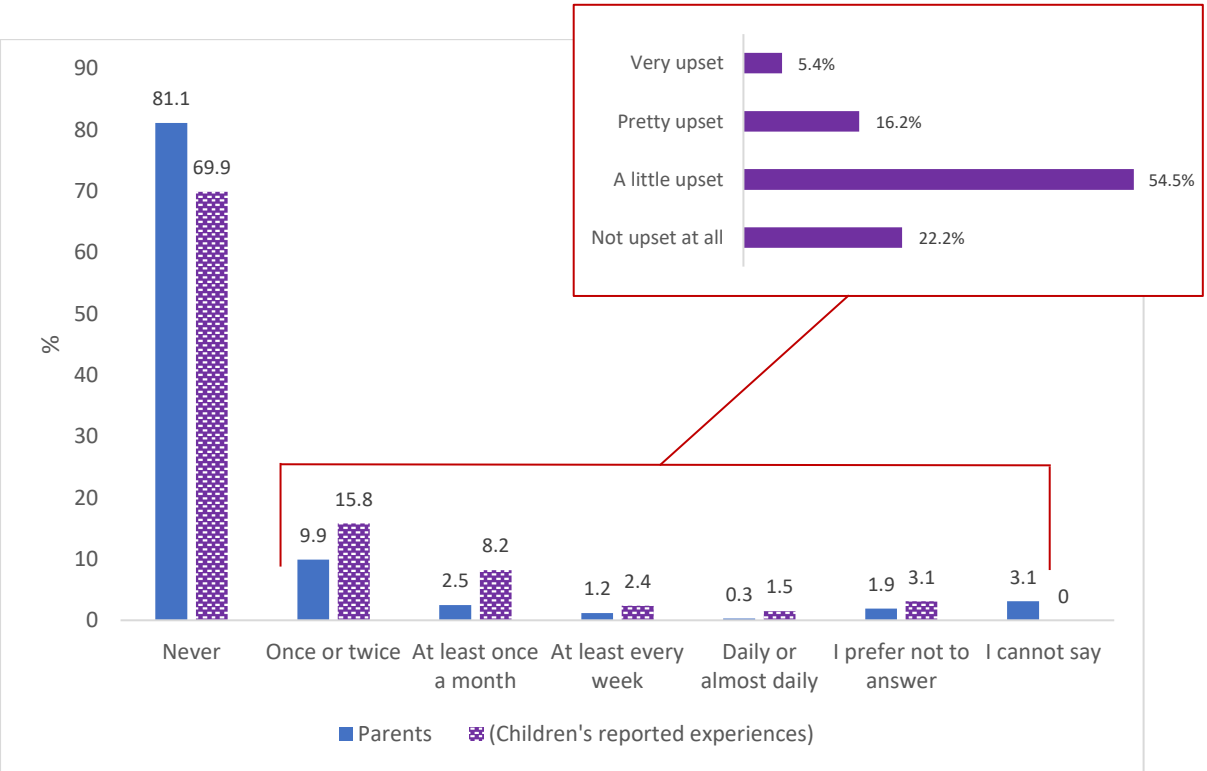
P1: (15-17 y/o):" *I have not personally encountered, but I know that there are pedophiles who text children, strangers asking for photos of an intimate nature. A lot of dangerous games that are distributed over the network."*

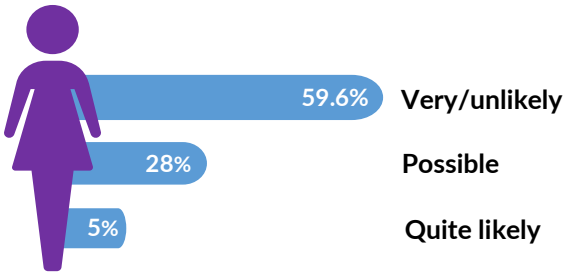
When asked if their child had ever encountered something online that had bothered them, four in five parents (81.1%) reported that their child had never had an upsetting experience online. This is significantly more than the seven in ten children who reported they had never been upset, suggesting that parents are unaware of many of the negative experiences that their child has encountered online. This is not in itself unusual, as children may be scared to tell their parent for fear of judgement or getting into trouble, having their internet taken away, or because they thought there was nothing that their parent could do about it. These are all typically reasons that children do not tell their parents about the risks that they encounter online. Children's responses to the same question, as discussed in the previous section of this paper, are provided in the figure below for comparison.

Four in five parents (81.1%) reported their child had never experienced something online that had upset them (compared to seven in ten children who reported never having encountered something that upset them online).

Of those who reported that their child had encountered something upsetting online, this was most commonly reported as happening once or twice (9.9%, compared to 15.8% of children who reported something online upsetting them once or twice). Just 2.5% of parents reported their child encountered something upsetting online at least once a month, compared to 8.2% of children who reported upsetting experiences as frequently. Generally, parents felt that their child was a little upset (54.5%), with another fifth (22.2%) reporting they were not upset at all about what they had encountered. One in seven (16.2%) parents reported that their child had been pretty upset over what they had seen, and 5.4% thought their child had been very upset.

Figure 63. Parents reporting (awareness) of online occurrences ever upsetting their child (n=1200, and how upset their child was then they did encounter something upsetting (n=167)(inset)

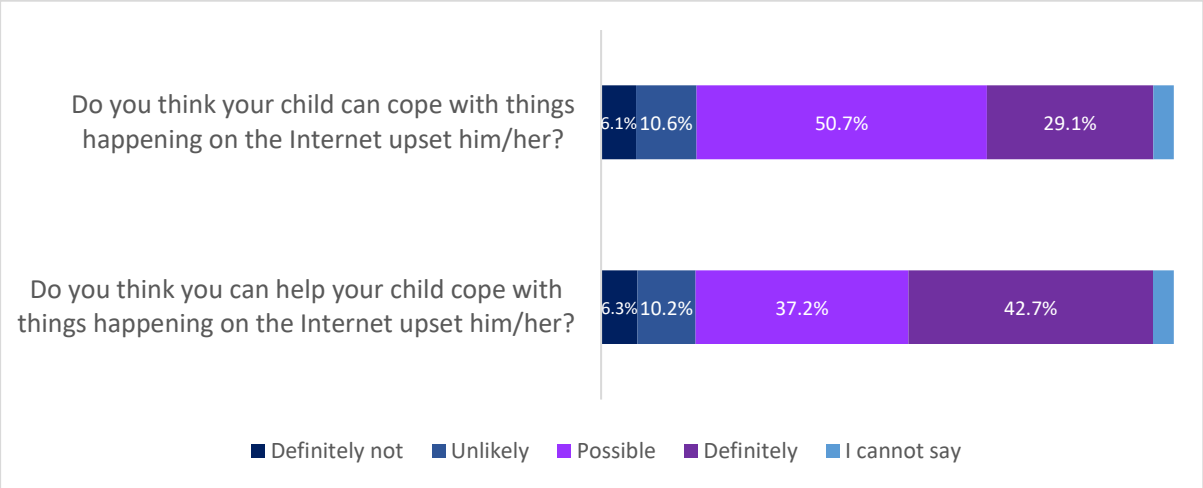




Three in ten parents, or 59.6%, thought that it was unlikely or very unlikely that their child would encounter something online that would upset or bother their child in the next few months, while just under three in ten (28%) thought it was possible, and just 5% thought that it would be quite likely.

Parents also viewed their child as largely capable of coping with risks that they encounter online. Half of the parents included in the study thought it was possible, while another three in ten (29.1%) definite, that their child can cope with things that they encounter online. Just one in ten (10.6%) reported that it was unlikely that their child could cope. Parents were equally condiment that they could help their child cope with things online that might upset them, although more (42.7%) parents were confident about this, while 37.2% felt that it was probable that they could help their child cope with things happening online.

Figure 64. Parents perceptions of ability to help their child, and their child's ability to cope (n=1200)

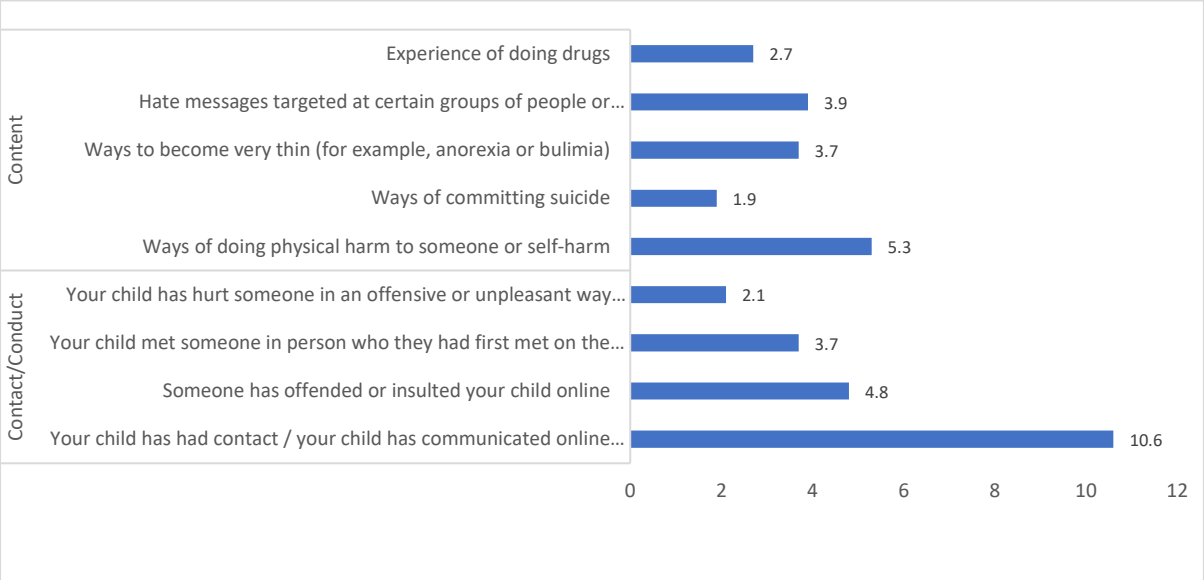


Parents were asked about the range of risks that their child might have encountered over the past year. In general, parents reported more contact or conduct risks that content risks. One in ten (10.6%) of parents reported that their child had had contact with or chatted with someone online they did not first know in person, over the past year, while just under one in twenty parents (4.8%) had children who had been insulted or offended by someone online. In total, 3.7%, or 44 parents, said their child had met someone in person they had first met online, over the past year.

One in twenty parents said their child had seen websites or discussions online relating to harming someone or self-harm, while slightly fewer reported their child had been exposed to hate messages online (3.9%) or relating to eating disorders (3.7%).

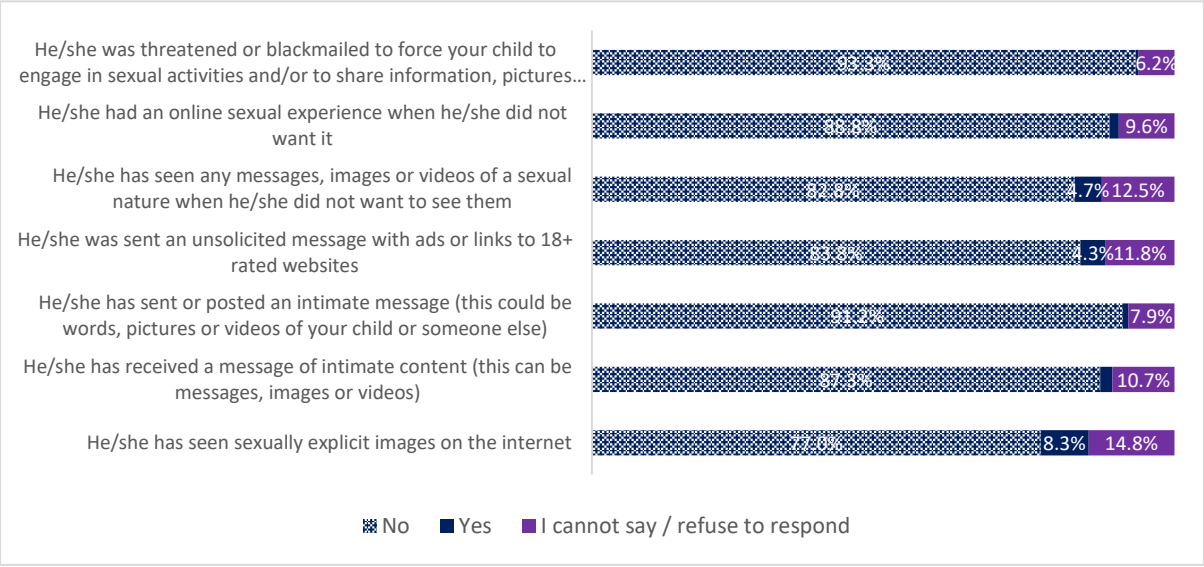
Just 3.9% of parents reported their child had seen content online in the past year relating to eating disorders (ways of being very thin); in total 15.1% of children reported having seen such content, suggesting that parents significantly under-estimate exposure of their children to risks online.

Figure 65. Parental perception of child's online risks (content, contact and conduct) (n=1200)



Of the risks relating to sexual contact, content or conduct explored in the study, more parents reported that their child had seen sexually explicit content online in the past year than anything else. Having said that, fewer less than one in ten (8.4%) parents knew of their child having seen sexual content online in the past year, while approximately one in seven (14.8%) were unsure. Just under one in twenty parents were aware of their child having seen sexual images, videos or other content when they did not want to see them or having received links to websites with adult content (4.7% and 4.3% respectively). There was a reasonable amount of uncertainty amongst parents about their child viewing such content when they did not want to, or receiving links to adult sites, with 12.5% and 11.8% being uncertain, respectively. In fact, parents in Kazakhstan tended to be more uncertain of the sexual risks their child had encountered than those who could say definitively that their child had encountered such risks, a reflection perhaps of the tacit acknowledgement that this was one area in which they might be less aware of their child's activities, than others. Having said that, most parents reported that their child had not experienced online any of the sexual risks included in this study, over the past year.

Figure 66. Parental perceptions of child's exposure to sexual risks (contact, content) (n=1200)



Similarly, few parents were aware of their child having encountered risks to their privacy or data, or any commercial risks, over the past year (see Appendix, figure A12). Most common of these was the child being prompted to make an in-app purchase in a game online over the past year. This correlates with the children reporting that they played online games over the past year. In total 5.7% were aware of their child being asked to make an in-app or in-game purchase, while only slightly fewer (5%) reported that their child's device, whether a phone or a computer, had been infected with a virus. Fewer still (3.8%) reported that someone had used their child's personal information in a way that they did not like, or that someone had used their child's personal information to access their social media or other account or profile (2.6%).

Parents in Kazakhstan generally tended to be aware of the potential risks for children associated with being online, particularly those associated with sending self-generated sexual content, such as images or videos. Four in five parents considered this to be very risky, with another 13% considering it quite risky, while more than three quarters (77.8%) of parents thought that talking about an intimate relationship with someone online was also very risk, an another 15.5% quite risky. This reflects the dilemmas that both parents, and policy-makers face: the digital environment is increasingly the space in which children explore romantic relationships, and often initiate romantic connections, including those that might be considered age-appropriate; yet parents are aware of the potential risks that such explorations and experiences could pose to children. Equally, these are often the risks constantly reinforced by messaging and awareness-raising interventions. The inherent challenge for parents is how to recognize and provide children with the space that they need to explore age and developmentally appropriate relationships of different kinds, while ensuring that they are equipped with the tools and capacities required to successfully navigate and deal with the risks that such experiences may present.

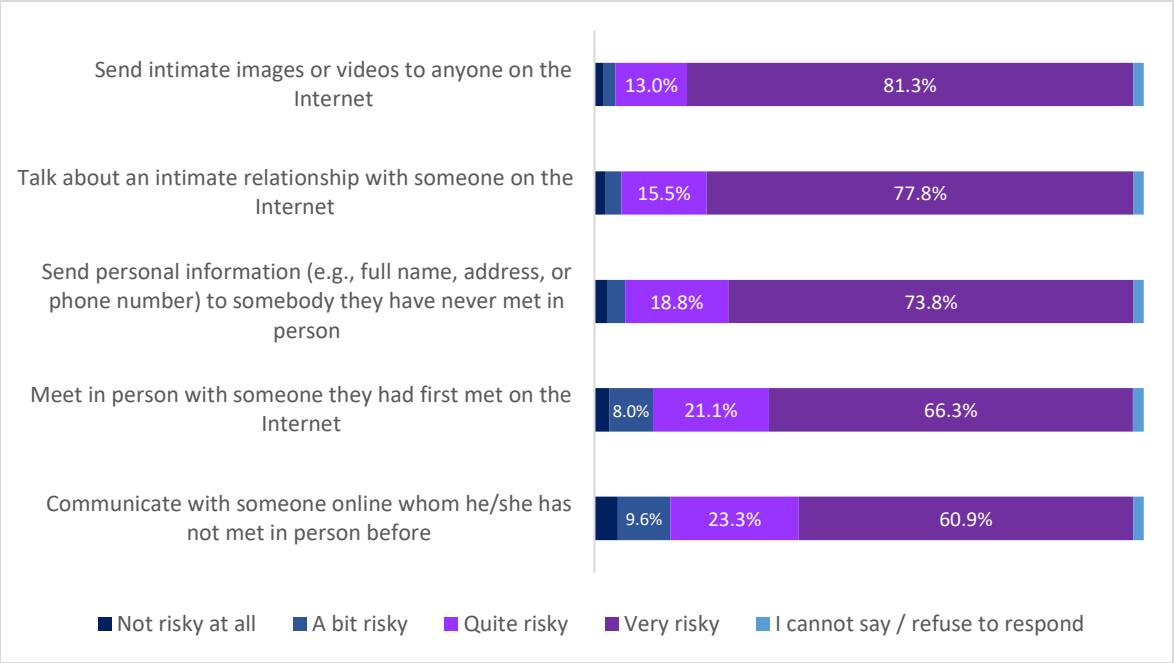
While parents also recognize the risks that children may face in meeting in person someone that they have first met online, fewer parents view this as very risky (66.3%) than those who consider talking about intimate relationship or sending sexually explicit material to someone online. This may be a result of parents feeling that they are more likely to know where their child is, what they are doing, and whether they are in fact meeting someone in person, than they are likely to know what their child is doing online. Parents may be in more control of their child's every activity and movement than those conducted online. Most parents also perceive simply communicating with someone online as entailing inherent risks, with three in five (60.9%) viewing this

EXPLORING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE

(This data) reflects the dilemmas that both parents, and policy-makers face: the digital environment is increasingly the space in which children explore romantic relationships, and often initiate romantic connections, including those that might be considered age-appropriate; yet parents are aware of the potential risks that such explorations and experiences could pose to children.

as very risky, and another quarter (23.3%) viewing it as quite risky. However, simply chatting to someone online is seen by parents as the least of the risks explored in the study.

Figure 67. Parent's perceptions of risky behaviour relating to the internet (n=1200)



Sources of information on online safety for parents

The response of parents to risks that children may encounter online, their approach to supporting their child, and their parental strategies may be influenced by their own parenting styles in general, but also by where they are receiving their information on online safety, and how best to support their child online. As with all aspects of safety and child wellbeing, parents are often influenced by public discourse and common narratives, which may or may not reflect evidence and best-practice. How parents respond at any particular point to their child's experiences online, and the steps and measures they put in place to support their child, may also be influenced by particular experiences that either their child had, or that they hear about or see on television or the news. This is one reason that parenting styles and approaches to keeping children safe online are often not static but may vary between active and passive, supportive or restrictive.[115]

Most of the parents in Kazakhstan report getting most of their information from friends and families, followed by their child's school, and internet service providers (39.1%, 35.1% and 17.8% respectively). Another one in sixteen parents (16.9%) feel that they do not need any information, or that they don't get any in any case. A similar percentage get their information from the news, television or newspapers, and one in ten report that they get their information on online safety from their child themselves.

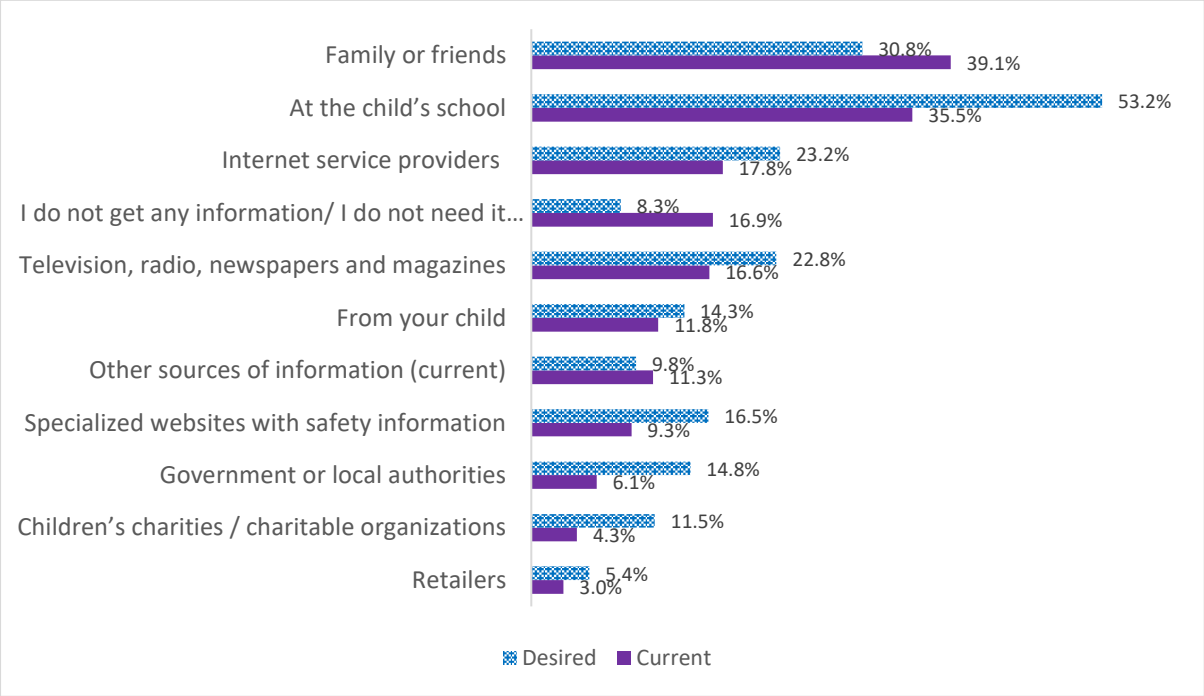
This range of sources may be seen as positive in one respect: parents and caregivers are getting information and guidance from different sources within Kazakhstan and possibly beyond, on keeping children safe online; equally so it reflects one of the challenges, with no way of ensuring that information is correct, informed by evidence, and reflecting the different information needs that

[115] Livingstone, Sonia & Blum-Ross, Alicia. (2020). Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears about Technology Shape Children's Lives

parents of different aged children, in different contexts, and with differing levels of their own skills and internet competencies, might require. Similarly, there is no way of ensuring that the information, guidance and advice that parents get reflects the realities of children's experiences online, rather than what is often presented as fear-based messaging emerging from single or isolated incidents that might occur.

This is of particular concern when parents primarily get their advice from family and friends. While often well-meaning, such conversations are often influenced by word-of-mouth and high-profile isolated incidents that do not necessarily reflect the everyday realities of children online. While family, and in particular parents own parents, and grandparents, as well as elders in more rural or village-based communities, have often served as a primary source of guidance, support and information on raising children, and how to deal with challenges and problems that parents might face, for generations, parents simply are unable to drawn on this wealth of accumulated knowledge relating to children in the digital environment, as they are the first (or in some cases just the second) generation of parents facing these challenges.

Figure 68. Current and desired sources of online safety information for parents (n=1200)



Positively, the fact that parents already receive much of their information from schools provides some level of possible reassurance on the possible quality of the information, but also, on the potential to ensure that evidence-based, contextual information and support is provided. More than half (53.1%) of the parents included in the study noted that they would like to get their information on their child's online safety through their school. While friends and family remained a common desired source of information in the future, another quarter of respondents (23.2%) also expressed their desire to get their information from their internet service providers. This provides very tangible entry points for future messaging, awareness-raising and dissemination of evidence-based strategies, including those formulated on the basis of the contextual data on children's experience presented in this report, on how best parents in Kazakhstan can support their children in the digital journeys, throughout their developmental stages, and pathways to adulthood.

Chapter 8. Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

Comprehensive data on children's access to the internet and digital devices, their experiences online, and how they make sense of these experiences, has been relatively sparse in Kazakhstan. The data collected through this study has sought to fill this gap, and provides the insight and evidence required to ensure that the voices and experiences of children in their digital journeys inform and shape policies that directly impact on them, as well as interventions and programmes that are formulated to support them online. The inclusion of children's voices through initiatives such as this are one step towards ensuring that the rights of children are respected across all spheres in which children live, including the digital environment. The importance of such data is underscored by the 2021 General Comment No 25 on Children's Rights in the Digital Environment, 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 socio-economic background."*[116]

Several themes have emerged throughout this study, both from the qualitative and quantitative components. These are presented in the following section and are in turn followed a discussion of recommendations for policy and programming in Kazakhstan.

Summary of key data themes[117]

Children in Kazakhstan are going online at an arguably unprecedented rate, and more importantly, at a younger and younger age. While perhaps intuitive, the data shows that children as young as four years old are accessing the internet, and importantly, at a rate that is consistent for both boys and girls.

Throughout the study, children in Kazakhstan exhibit fewer of the gender disparities, whether in access to technology, or skills, than are often found in different regions of the world, particularly through the Middle East and North Africa, and the rest of the African continent. This does not necessarily translate into less gendered *perceptions* of use, with children frequently expressing views particularly on games, which was often seen as primarily played by boys, while girls were more often seen as being interested in gender-specific topics like make-up, beauty and modelling. Despite these perceptions, there was mixed evidence emerging form the focus group discussions with children as to the degree to which these translated into practice.

Children were aware of the wide range of opportunities that being online presented, ranging from learning and education to information seeking, to following and learning new hobbies, learning about job opportunities and actively pursuing these. Parents and caregivers were similarly aware of the different opportunities, and generally expressed the importance of supporting the children in realising those opportunities, although parents were also very cognisant of the time that children spent online and longed for a greater balance between the time that children spent online, and that offline.

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

[117] Note that this report presents the findings of key themes deemed, in consultation with all stakeholders, as the most significant for immediate policy and programmatic priorities and needs. The KKO data, and the structure of the GKO body of data and research lends itself to further national, regional and global analysis through which additional themes, relevant to different stakeholders, ay be analysed and explored.

Importantly, children viewed the internet as important in pursuing and exploring romantic relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, hanging out in certain games to meet boys, or sharing photos and texts with romantic partners online, or exploring their own identities, including sexual. Often, parents were aware of these activities, and in some instances sought to be open and supportive in them; in others to control or "manage" them. In many instances, discussions with parents suggested that they were aware of online relationships but did not know the details.

Older children reveal more independence online and are better equipped to encounter different risks and situations; at the same time, they are also more likely to encounter risks, in large part due to the greater skills, activities and engagement online.

However, children aged 13 to 14 deviate from a pure age-linear progression. Children in this age group appear to be seeking greater independence from parents and caregivers, less likely to tell their parents about what happens online, meetings in person, etc, than even older adolescents. Also, they were less likely to tell their parents when things upset them online. These trends suggest that children of this age are trying to explore more, and gain more independence, while resisting potential restrictions that they fear parents might impose given their age.

Children in rural areas are more likely to have a positive view of the internet, being less aware of the potential risks and harms that exist, which may correspond with lower levels of digital skills that in turn are related to greater exposure to risk, but also more limited use and accessing of full range of benefits.

Children in urban areas in Kazakhstan are more likely to actively take risks online, sending their information to strangers, or looking for new friends online, for example. Awareness of the different risks that exist online does not tend to mediate children's activities and risk-taking; rather children engage in this behaviour despite knowing the risks, reflecting what we increasingly know about children's engagement with risks both online and in-person.

Notwithstanding this, a relatively small, but still concerning, percentage of children in Kazakhstan reported that they had encountered risks relating to sexual content, or contact, online. Approximately one in seventeen children had seen sexual images or content online over the past year at least once a month, or more. Even fewer had experienced unwanted sexual contact, but when this did occur, it most frequently came from people known previously to the child, including children or peers their own age. In some instances, this unwanted sexual contact came from parents or step-parents, or a friend or acquaintance of the family.

More children spoke about exposure to sexual content, including messaging, during the focus group discussions, where they were better able to de-personalize the experience and refer to what they know of friends and peers exposure and activities. Parents and caregivers reflected a similar awareness of different forms of online risks, including sexual, with much of their awareness oriented around Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA).

A significant percentage of children also reported exposure to other potentially harmful content, particularly relating to eating disorders, violence and hate speech. Both younger and older children expressed some level of exposure to these risks online, although older children progressively reported greater exposure. This includes one in ten children who had encountered content relating to self-harm, and one in twenty who had encountered ways of taking one's own life.

Significantly higher numbers of children in Kazakhstan had either witnessed, or experienced, cyberbullying. While experiences of in-person bullying were higher than those of cyberbullying,

examples were also provided in discussion with children of how bullying victimization often starts online, and then moves to in-person bullying or other forms of violence or may start offline and then move into the digital space.

Telling someone or seeking help when encountering risks ('help-seeking'), in any form, tended to be low. More children witnessing or experiencing cyberbullying tended to tell someone about their experience than those who encountered sexual risks. When children did approach others for help, this was most commonly friends or peers, rather than an adult. Reasons for this might be varied, ranging from not thinking it was serious enough, thinking that there was no point or that nothing could be done, or fearing being blamed or shamed, or for many children possibly the worst scenario, losing their internet access. This in part may explain why parents tended to under-estimate the risks that their children had encountered online over the past year, with significantly higher numbers of children reporting they had encountered contact or content risks over the previous year, than parents.

Varied pictures of parental mediation of internet access emerged from the study, from both the children and parents themselves. Children reported a combination of active and supportive mediation, with parents encouraging them to explore the internet and learn new things, while others reported the use of more technical restrictive tools, such as parental controls or monitoring. However, the use of restrictive tools was used by a minority of families, with much of the time that children spend online, by their own admission, unregulated. The complexities of parental mediation emerged more fully in the group discussions with parents, many of whom recognized the tension between needing to keep their children safe while recognizing that they had limited control and children increasingly had the means to evade controls, and the need to respect their privacy.

These findings raise several implications for future policy and intervention directions, and several recommendations for policy and interventions are provided below..

Recommendations for policy

Policies should prioritise addressing these geographical disparities and acknowledge the importance of equitable digital access and skills to the overall development and rights of children.

The data in this study suggests that while children in rural areas, or the villages, are increasingly likely to have access to digital technology and internet access, this is still not on a par with children in the cities. This in turn impacts on the general levels of digital skills, and subsequently on the awareness of the risks (and the opportunities) that exist for children online. Children are also significantly more likely to only access the internet through a mobile device, which may result in unequal levels of development of more advanced digital skills that allow them to fully utilise the opportunities of being online. Another result is that children are less equipped with the technical skills to successfully navigate risks. This unequal access is influenced by poor connectivity, and lower levels of affordability of devices and access within rural areas.

It is likely that unequal impact of this is also exacerbated by a generalized lower socio-economic status, disparate household incomes, and associated unequal access to other support services that may hamper help-seeking, education and other factors that impact on children's wellbeing, growth and development.

Policy initiatives focusing on children's early years, from those supporting parents and carers, to pre- and primary schooling, should address age-appropriate device use and associated skills.

The increasingly younger age at which children in Kazakhstan are going online clearly indicates the need for the integration of different aspects of digital technology use into policies focusing specifically on a child's early years, and on pre- and primary schooling. This should range from policies that address children's digital technology use for parents of very young children, from toddlers through to pre-primary and primary. One way of doing this is to incorporate the implications and management of children's use of digital technology (often called digital parenting), into work with parents from an early childhood development phase. Unlike many other countries, where knowledge and use of digital technology by parents is often very low, there may be less need to focus on raising the digital technology skills of parents, as many reflect some level of digital competency already, although this should not negate offering this support entirely. The focus should rather be on equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their child's internet and device use, equipping them with the skills required to support their child to stay safe online and make the most of the opportunities, building on the evidence of effective messaging and parenting strategies.

Policies that support and empower digital parenting should be complimented by support to teachers, again with a focus on age-appropriate support to teachers of primary-school aged children. While children primarily access the internet and go online at home, they are significantly likely to connect at school as well, and this will only increase as digital technologies are integrated into the formal education system and curricula throughout Kazakhstan. It will be important that school-level policies are put in place that promote the appropriate use of digital technology and internet access in schools, and that do not ban the *appropriate* use of mobile devices. However, these should be accompanied by very clear conditions of use policies and that all students are aware of these.

Education policies and strategies that prioritise children's development of appropriate life skills, and health education, are required.

The need for policy initiatives that promote and enhance life skills and life and health education, and that recognize children's evolving capacities and development, emerged. This includes policies (and strategies) that promote open and safe conversations around sex and sexual exploration, as well as sexual identity, clearly emerged from some of the focus group discussions in particular. Levels of reporting and help-seeking for children who encounter sexual risks online is low, in part likely caused by fear of judgment, shame, embarrassment and self-blame. Unreported, such experiences may lead disproportionately to harmful outcomes for the child, which in turn are likely to go unreported. They may also trap children in escalating or recurring cycles of violence or abuse.

These (life skills and health education) programmes should also include content on positive body image, self-acceptance, self-efficacy and confidence, conflict negotiation and decision-making. Many of these are fundamental life skills that are required in any physical environment, and which are critical to the healthy social and emotional development of a child. yet it is clear that these have a direct correlation to many of the online experiences of risk, particularly content risks such as exposure to content relating to eating disorders and other forms of self-harm, encountered by children in this study.

A policy and legislative framework that ensures anonymous, readily available reporting mechanisms for children who may have experienced online (and offline) violence, should be prioritized, along with dedicated funding and resourcing.

These mechanisms should ensure that children feel comfortable and safe and that they will be offered required levels of confidentiality and privacy wherever possible, as way of encouraging reporting.

Improved regulatory mechanisms for industry should be developed and implemented, ensuring accountability for all digital technology companies, across the full ambit of digital technology services. This should be done in a way that does not stifle innovation within the industry, but rather ensures accountability for services offered to, or accessed by children.

Children under the age of 13 commonly reported having their own social media profiles, despite a (theoretical and contractual) minimum age limit of 13 imposed on any US-based services. This may or may not be with their parents' consent or knowledge. Many of the risks that children face online, including those relating to risks associated with harmful content such as eating disorders, other forms of self-harm, hate speech and suicide, are predominantly found on social media apps such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and other apps commonly used by children in Kazakhstan. This likely correlates with the relatively high percentage of children exposed to these types of risks. While younger children aged nine to ten and 11 to 12 were less likely than older children to have seen such content, a concerning percentage of younger children had still witnessed content like this, and as noted in the above, are less likely to have the skills required to make sense or process what they are seeing. It is important that policies and regulations hold tech companies, including social media companies, to account, and that adequate regulations are put in place to protect children from this content, while respecting all their concurrent rights. The regulation of tech companies, internet service providers and content providers should be accompanied with the more asset and capacity-building policies described above, to foster resilience of children online and off, to deal with what they encounter online.

Intervention implications

Capacity-building interventions that foster and enhance children's digital skills and media skills, and that promote resilience, rather than just those focusing on awareness raising, are required.

It is clear that children are largely aware of many of the risks that do exist online, yet in many instances, take those risks despite this awareness, particularly amongst children aged 11 to 17. This is certainly not atypical of this age group, and reflects a greater willingness to take (what may be seen by the child as calculated) risks nonetheless. With this in mind, awareness-raising and capacity-build interventions should focus less on simply drawing attention to these risks, and more on how to successfully navigate and negotiate them in a way that minimizes the likelihood of harm building not just digital resilience, but resilience in general.[118]

Messages should avoid fear-generation and scare techniques. There is a growing body of evidence that shows that such an approach has little impact, but the focus of education and awareness-raising should take an approach more consistent with prevention education.[119] Children in this study exhibited awareness of many of the more spoken-about risks, and those that most commonly dominate public discourse, but that equally may not be the most commonly experienced.

Related to the above, peers and friends are the primary agents of support and help to children when they do encounter risk online. This suggests that while avoiding placing the burden of responsibility

[118] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-resilience-framework

[119] Finkelhor D, Walsh K, Jones L, Mitchell K, Collier A. Youth Internet Safety Education: Aligning Programs With the Evidence Base. Trauma Violence Abuse. 2021 Dec;22(5):1233-1247. doi: 10.1177/1524838020916257. Epub 2020 Apr 3. PMID: 32242503.

for a duty of care on friends and peers, peer-focused mentoring and intervention programmes could provide helpful, particularly within a context that may discourage reporting or disclosure to adults.

Establish alternative reporting and psycho-social support mechanisms that can ensure confidentiality and privacy should be supported as a matter of priority. The study revealed two important factors when it comes to reporting:

- There is a clear culture of non-reporting, or rather fear, for whatever reason, of reporting and help-seeking. As noted earlier, this can increase repeated victimization and escalation of violence, as well as impact negatively on other outcomes for the child, including education and health, amongst others.
- Children are also largely unaware of the non-platform or app-based reporting and counselling services that are available to them (often following the administration of the questionnaire, notwithstanding the information in the consent and briefing documentation). Not noted in the body of the report is that it was not uncommon for children responding to the study to actively inquire and discuss options for support and counselling, and generally were not aware of the Helpline available to them. This suggests the need for far greater dissemination of information on where children can get help, including for any matters relating to the internet and their experiences online (and associated capacity to deliver those services). The confidentiality and privacy of this contact should also always be ensured as far as possible, and this assurance, along with limitations, provided to the child. More targeting of dissemination about these services through social media used by children in Kazakhstan could also be utilised.

Meaningfully engage with children and young people in the development of messages, and the design and delivery of services.

It may be useful to involve children in the planning and development of support material for these support and counselling services, to ensure that they are targeted in a way that children can easily understand and relate to and feel confident in using. Not only does this comply with the mandate provided in the CRC GC.25 to ensure that children's voices are represented in all policy decisions affecting them, but children are often best-placed to identify their own concerns, priorities and needs relating to digital technology.

Implement targeted interventions for parents of different age children, that take into account their evolving capacities, within a broader policy framework of parental and family support.

Parents in the study repeatedly indicated the need for support in how best to support both young and older children in their digital use and activities. While the focus group discussions with parents, particularly those within the cities clearly reflected the competing imperatives to both protect their child and give them the freedom and privacy they require and request, they equally reveal uncertainty amongst parents as how best to do this, as well as a common understanding that many of the restrictions they might put in place children would navigate around.

Messaging and awareness raising for parents should take advantage of the access provided to parents by schools and the school body.

Parents and caregivers indicated their preference for information being provided through schools. However, care must be taken to ensure consistent messaging, and messaging premised on evidence, rather than left to individual schools to draft and disseminate. This may lead to messaging based on fear and common misconception, rather than evidence.

As noted in a recent Lancet editorial,

"Children and adolescents have the most to gain and are most at risk from digital technologies. They must be at the forefront of national and global digital policies, not only to protect them from online harm but also to allow technology to help them fulfil their full potential".[120]

This study recognizes the critical role that digital technology has to play in children's lives and their futures, and the inherent rights they are afforded, and provides the starting point for evidence-based policies, programmes and interventions in Kazakhstan to facilitate the realization of those rights, the opportunities and benefits that exists for them online, and the strategies that will be required to keep them safe in doing so.

[120] Growing up in a digital world: benefits and risks. The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health , Editorial| Volume 2, ISSUE 2, P79, February 2018. doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(18)30002-6

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Appendix One: Additional graphs and Figures referred to in text.

Figure A1. Children who felt the internet was too complicated for them, by gender and age (%) (n=1201)

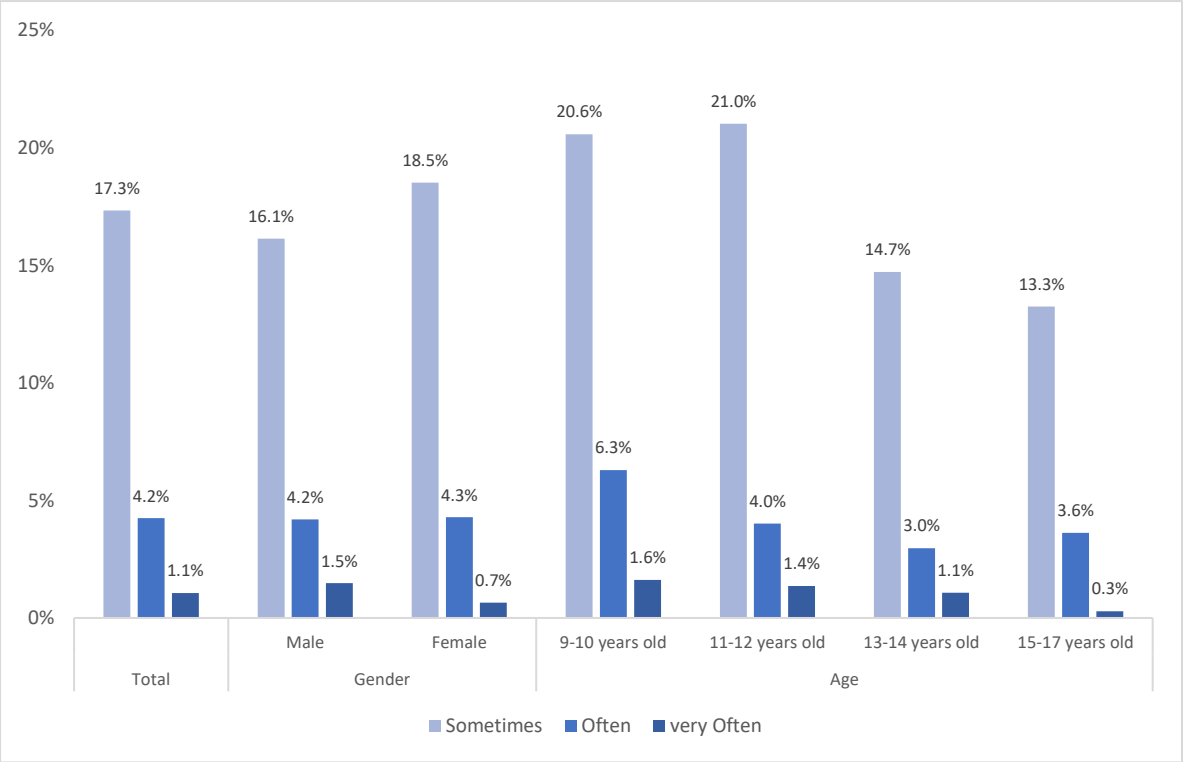


Figure A2. Children who felt the internet does not provide them with what they want/need, by gender and age (%) (n=1201)

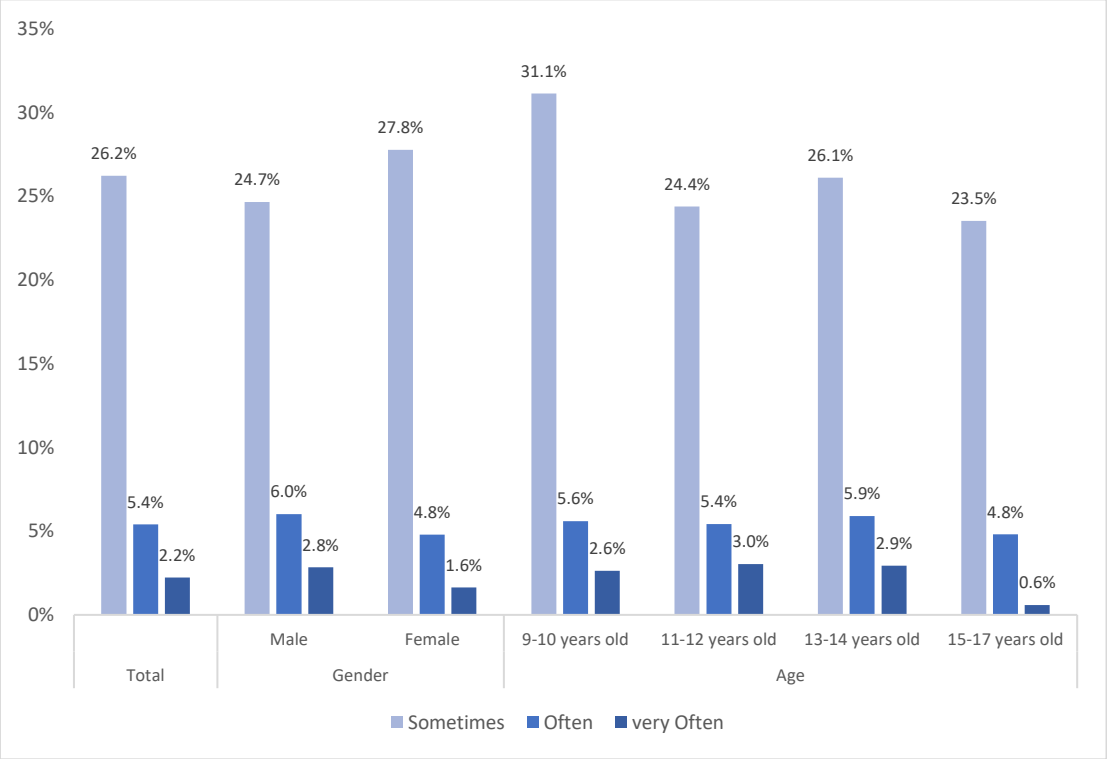


Figure A3. Frequency of communication with different people online (%) (n=1201)

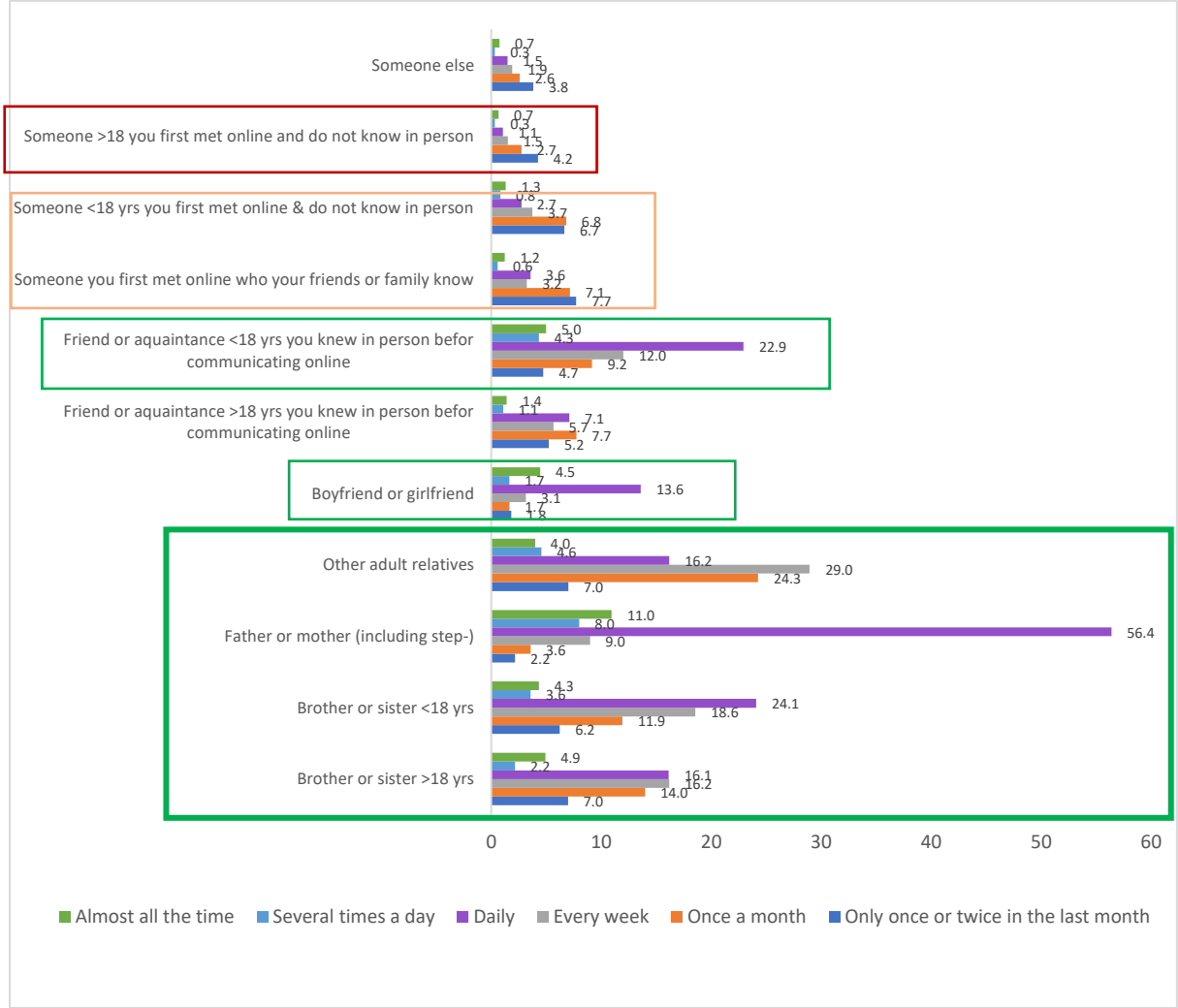


Figure A.4 How children who met someone in person in the last year they had first met online, felt about the meeting, by age (%) (n=139)

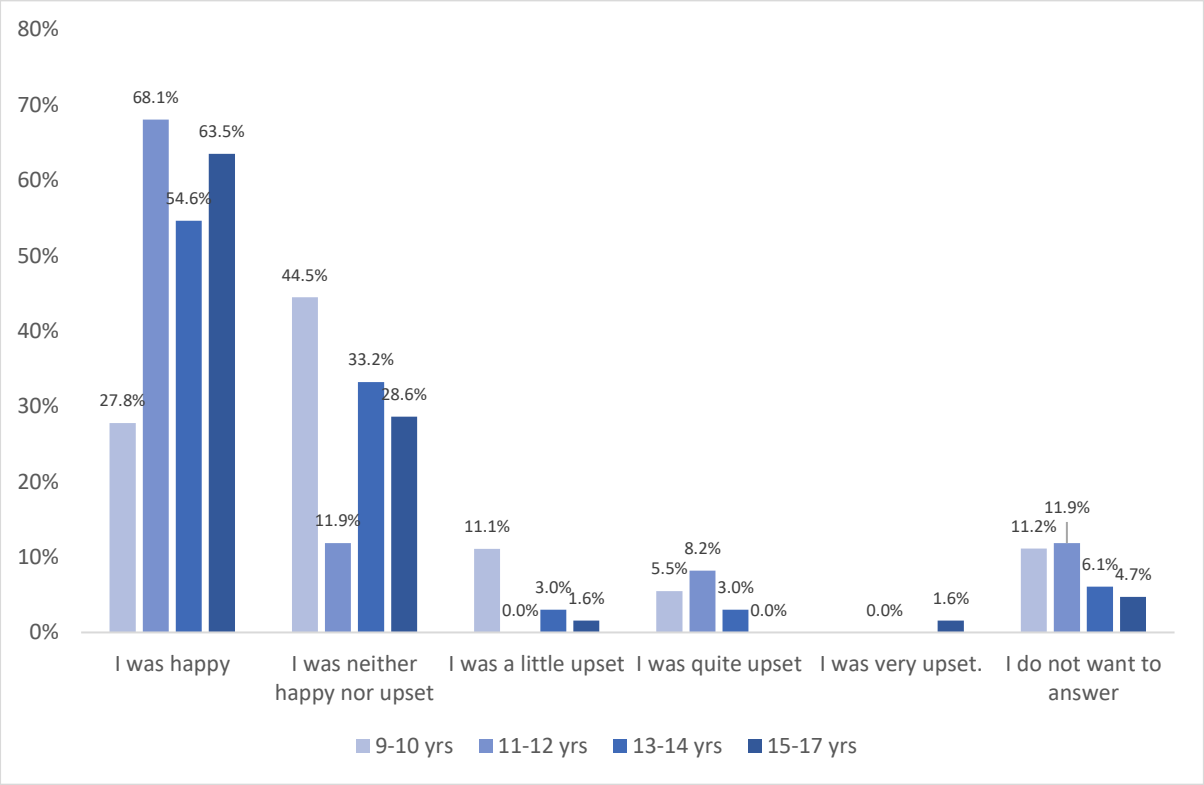


Figure A.4 Frequency of seeing sexual images online over the past year, by gender (%) (n=1201)

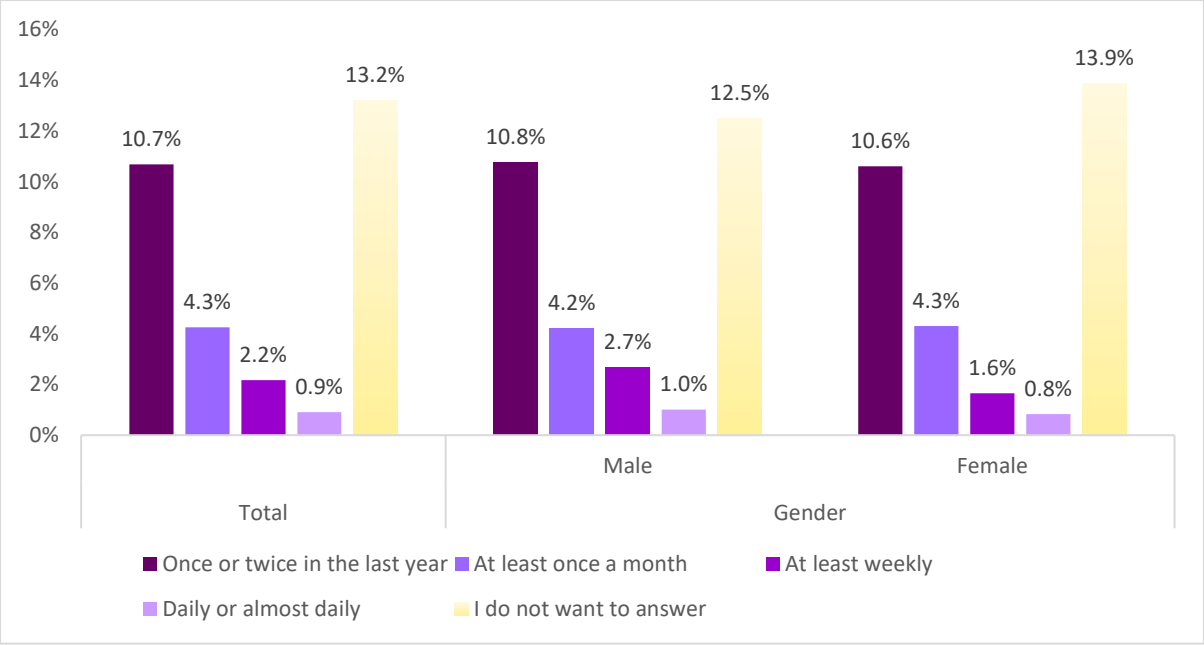


Figure A5. Children's exposure to content risks online over the past year, by gender (%) (n=1201)

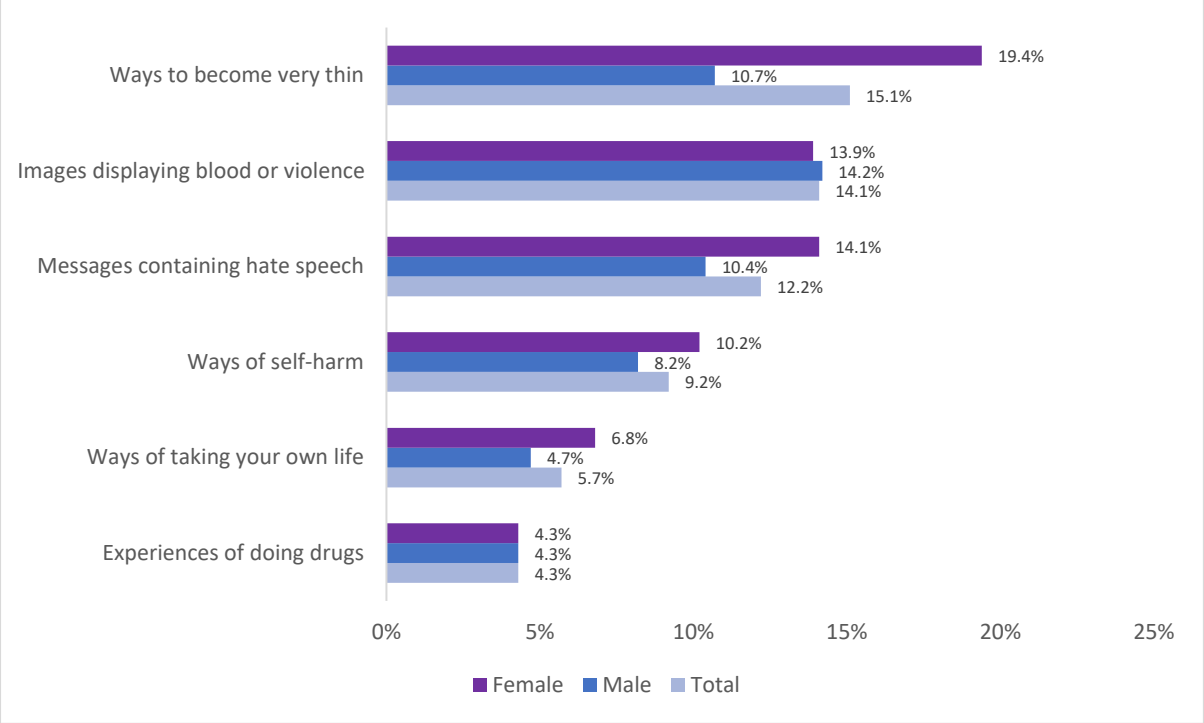
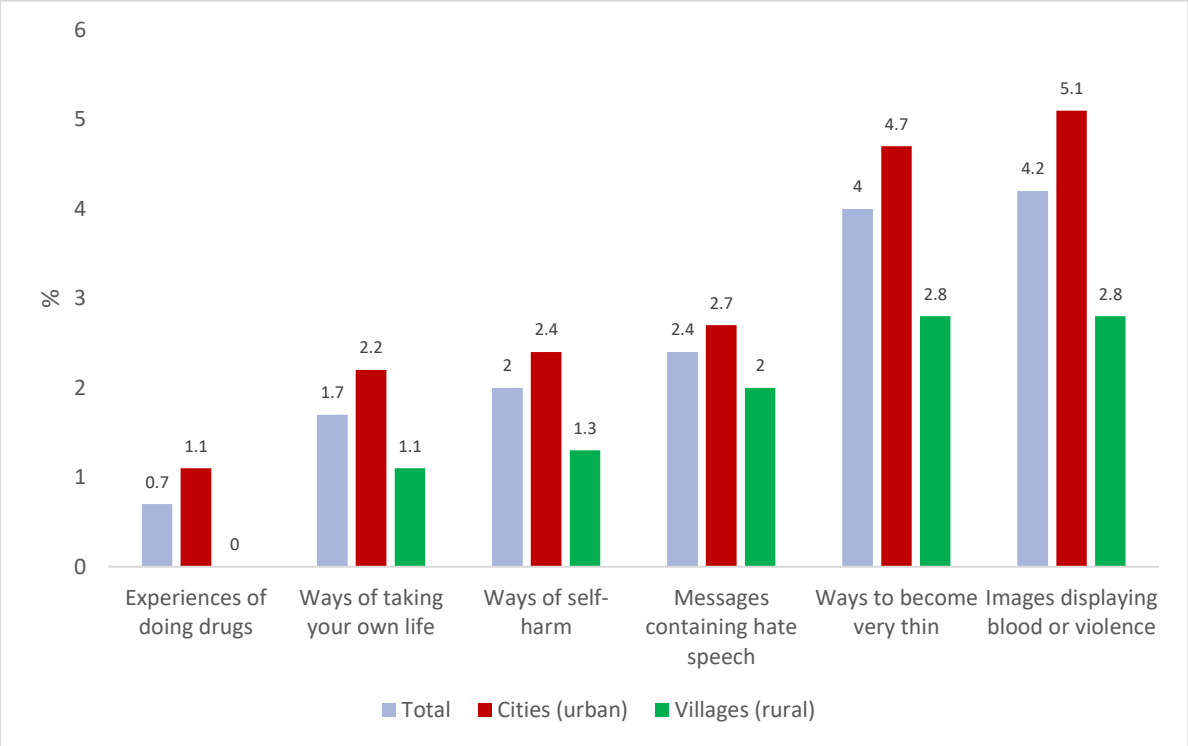


Figure A.6 Frequency of children actively seeking out potentially harmful content over the past year, by location (%) (n=1201)[121]



[121] Note that the reported cases for these questions are low, but still of interest:
Experiences of doing drugs, total cases = 8;
Ways of taking your own life, total cases = 21;
Ways of physically harming yourself, total cases = 24;
Messages containing hate speech = 29;
Ways to become very thin (anorexia or bulimia), total cases = 48;

Figure A6. Parental access to the internet when they want it, total, by gender and by location (%) (n=1200)

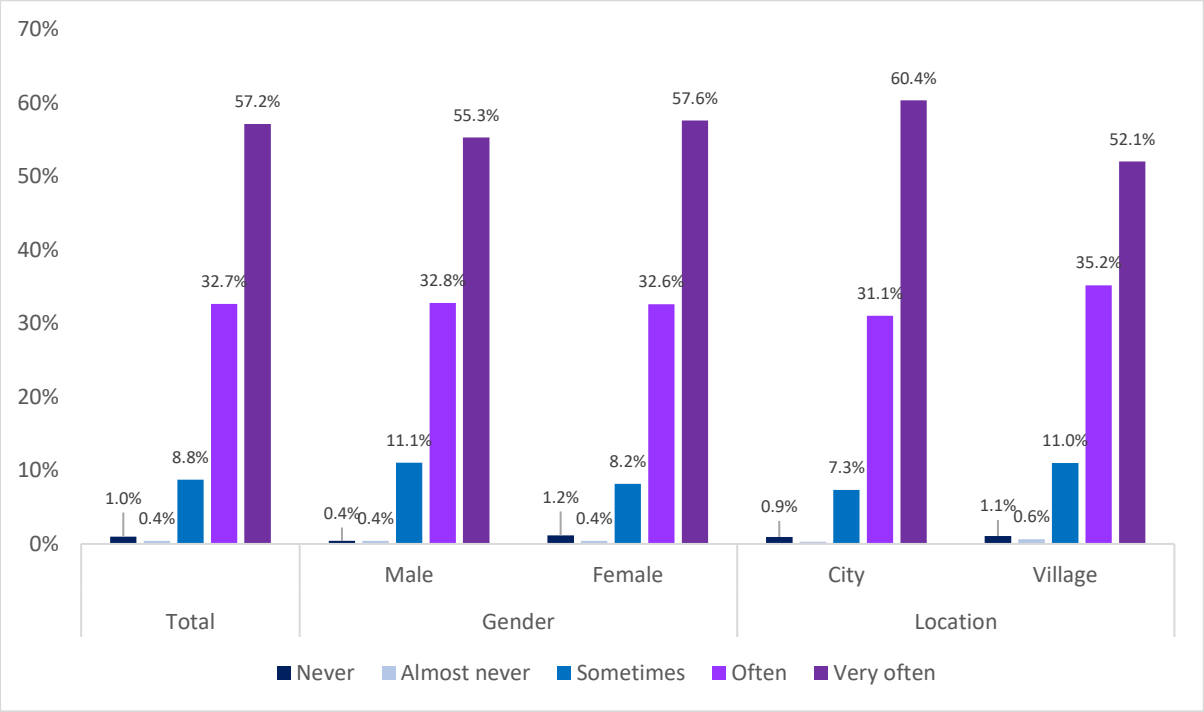
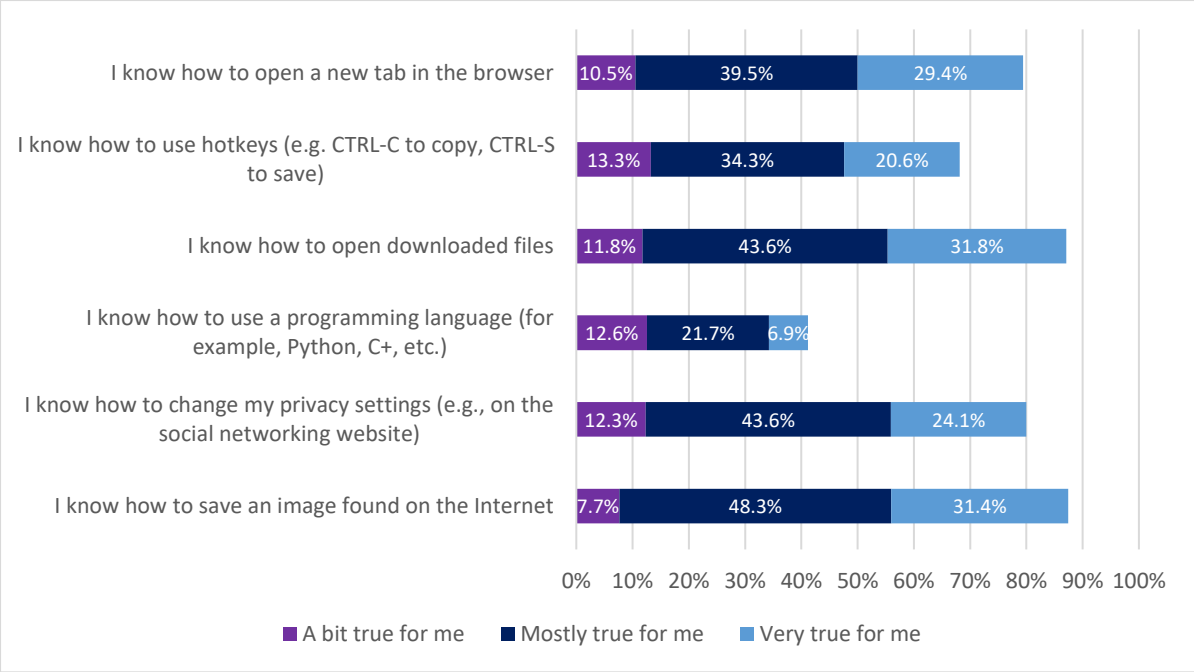


Figure A7. Parent's operational skills (%) (n=1200)



Images or videos displaying blood or violence, total cases = 51.

Figure A8. Parents Information skills (%) (n=1200)

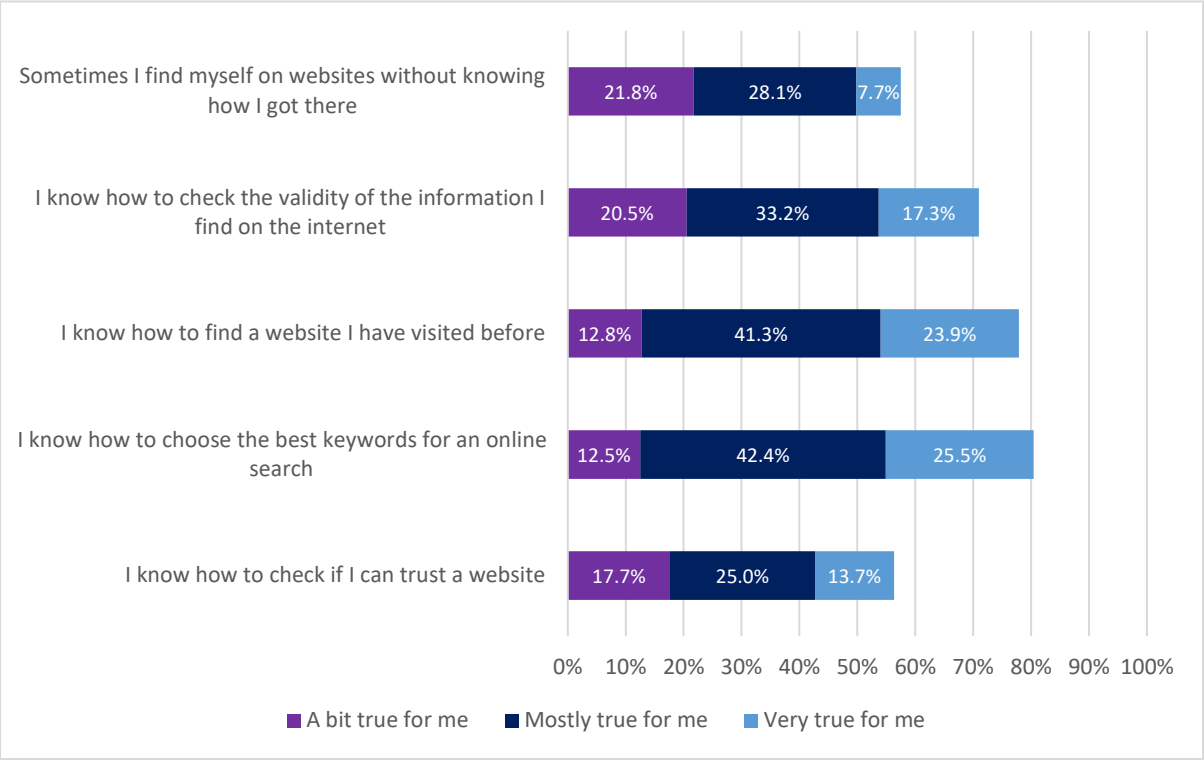


Figure A9. Parents social skills (%) (n=1200)

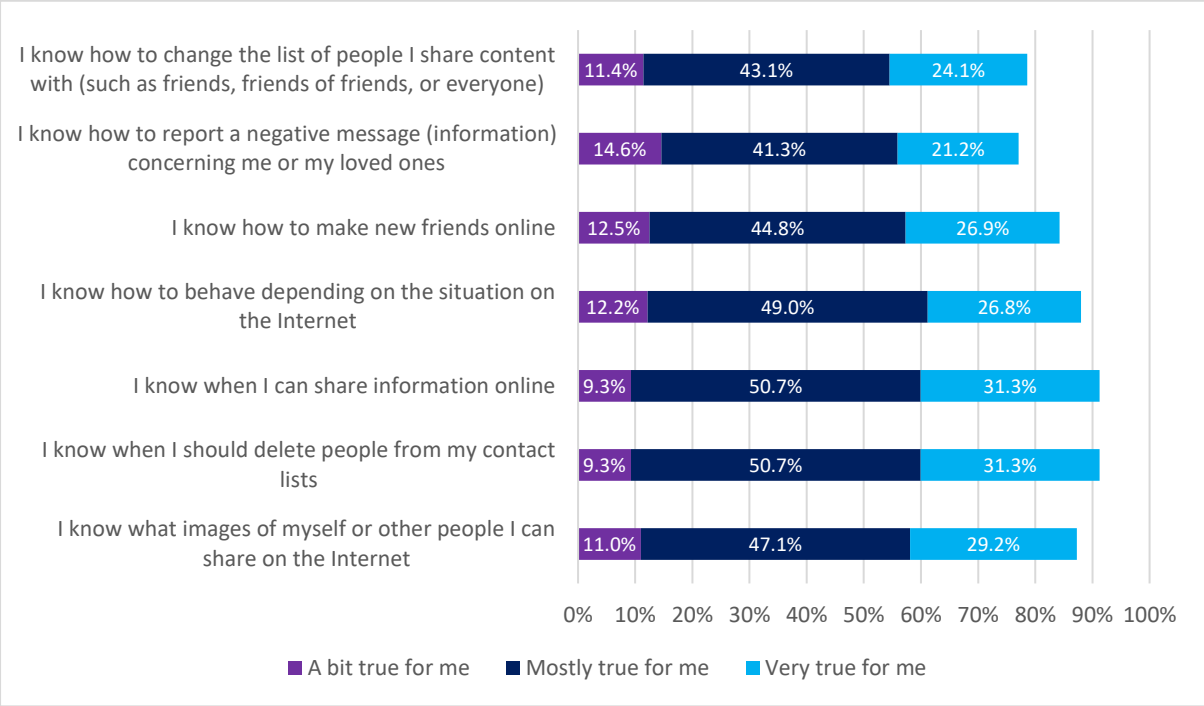


Figure A10. Parents Creative skills (%) (n=1200)

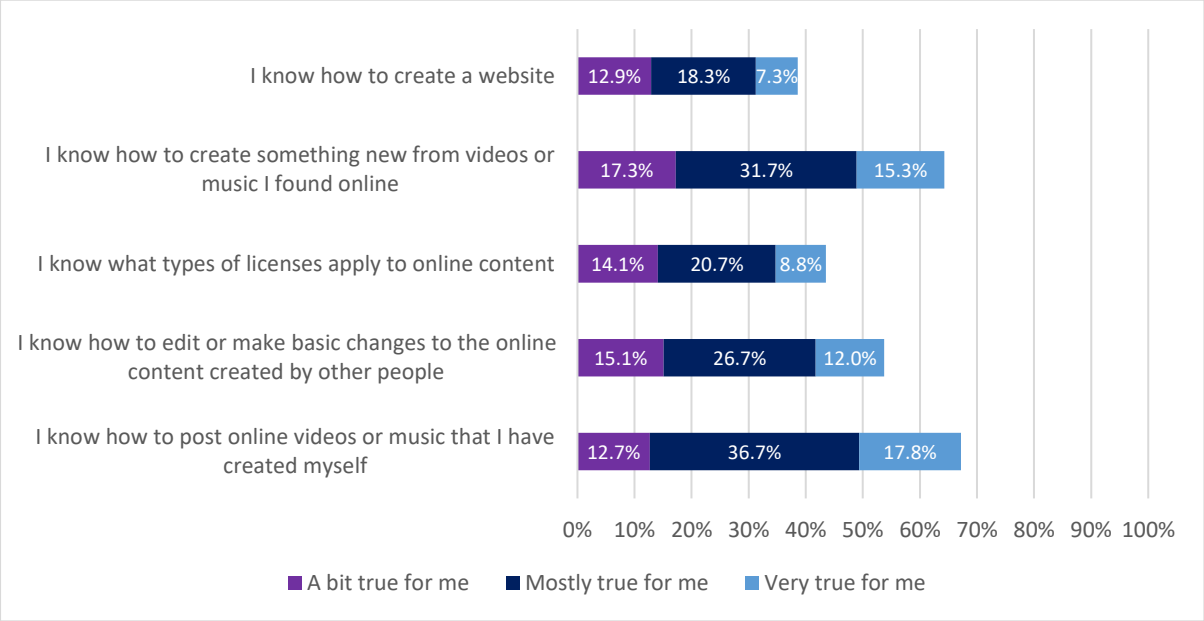


Figure A11. Parents mobile skills (%) (n=1200)

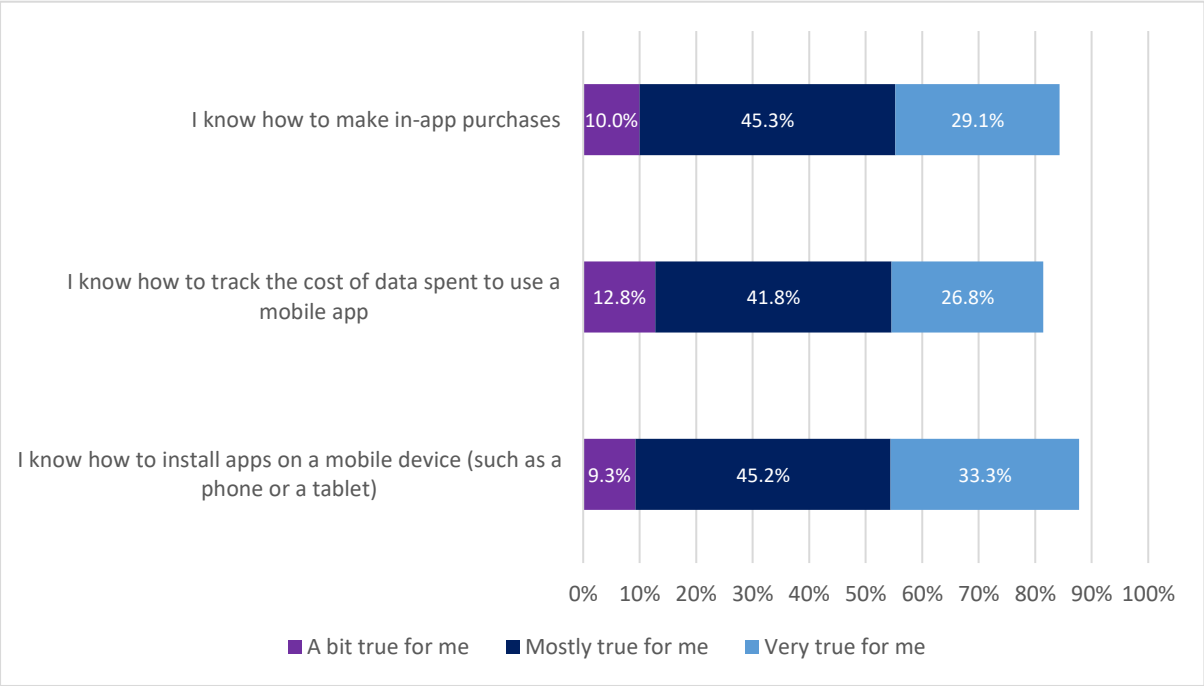
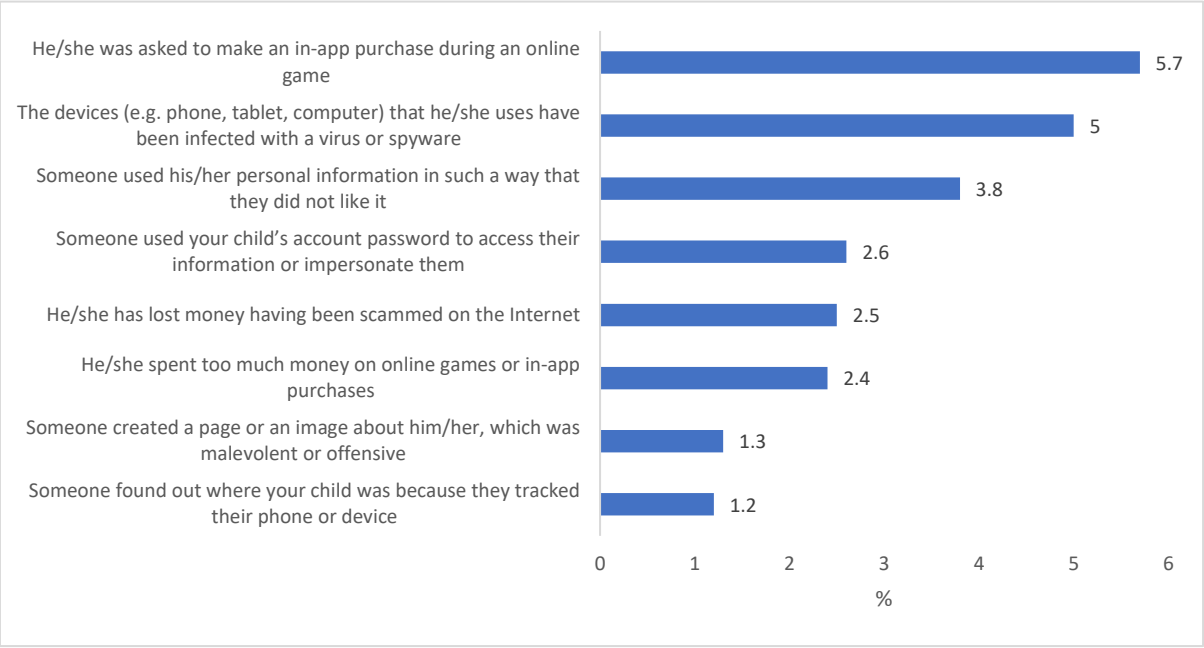


Figure A12. Parent's perceptions of child's exposure to data or privacy risks (n=1200)



Appendix Two. Thematic breakdown of the survey instrument

THEME	CONTENT
Demographics and child identity	Demographics Place of birth Family Disability Sensation-seeking School performance Time use Parent education and employment
Access to digital technology and the internet	Digital inclusion Place of internet use Devices used Connectivity Time spent online
Wellbeing (Benefits)	Benefits of opportunities
Activities online and opportunities realised	Activities including: Learning Civic participation Creative participation Social relationships Entertainment Personal Commercial Risky online opportunities Health
Use of digital technology for communication	Online communication Behaviour on social networking sites Approach to online communication
Digital skills and literacy	Operational skills Browsing skills Social/privacy skills Creative skills Mobile skills Digital creativity
Child well-being and harms	Harms from online risks Excessive internet use
Activities associated with risks online	Meeting new people Seeing sexual images Potentially negative user-generated content (including self-harm) Other negative online experiences
Communications relating to sexual risks online	Witnessing others receiving sexual messages Receiving sexual messages Sending sexual messages to others
Online child sexual exploitation and abuse	Witnessing sexual experiences happening to others Unwanted sexual experiences Unwelcome sexual comments Being asked to send sexual information Being asked to talk about sexual acts Being asked to do something sexual Coping with unwanted sexual experiences Sexual solicitation and sextortion
Hurtful and bullying behaviour,	Witnessing others being treated in a hurtful way Being treated in a nasty or hurtful way by others

	Treated others in a hurtful or nasty way
Social support	Who do you talk to Family Friends Community School
Education and learning	Use of technology for learning Use of internet and smartphone at schools
Internet mediation	Parental active mediation Parental active safety mediation Parental restrictive mediation Parental technical mediation Parental monitoring Benefits of parental mediation Peer mediation Teacher mediation Privacy risks linked to others actions
Privacy	Perceived vulnerability to privacy risks Perceived harms from privacy risks Privacy protection strategies

Appendix Three. Detailed sample design

Table 1. Detailed breakdown of the groups by gender, age and region

Group	Region	Settlement	Language	Other characteristics
Group 5	Almaty oblast	Rural of Chemolgan	Kazakh	Girls 11-12 y. o.
Group 6	Almaty oblast	Rural of Chemolgan	Kazakh	Parents of children 11-12 y.o.
Group 7	Almaty oblast	Rural of Chemolgan	Kazakh	Teaching staff
Group 8	Almaty	Almaty	Russian	Girls 11-12 y. o.
Group 9	Almaty	Almaty	Russian	Parents of children 11-12 y.o.
Group 10	Almaty	Almaty	Russian	Teaching staff
Group 11	Turkestan oblast	Rural of Aksukent	Kazakh	Boys 9-10 y.o.
Group 12	Turkestan oblast	Rural of Aksukent	Kazakh	Parents of children 11-12 y.o.
Group 13	Turkestan oblast	Rural of Aksukent	Kazakh	Teaching staff
Group 14	Shymkent	Shymkent	Kazakh	Girls 9-10 y.o.
Group 15	Shymkent	Shymkent	Kazakh	Parents of children 9-10 y.o.
Group 16	Shymkent	Shymkent	Kazakh	Teaching staff
Group 17	Akmola oblast	Rural of Petrovka	Russian	Boys 11-12 y.o.
Group 18	Akmola oblast	Rural of Petrovka	Russian	Parents of children 9-10 y.o.
Group 19	Akmola oblast	Rural of Petrovka	Russian	Teaching staff
Group 20	Astana	Astana	Russian	Boys 13-14 y.o.
Group 21	Astana	Astana	Russian	Parents of children 13-14 y.o.
Group 22	Astana	Astana	Russian	Teaching staff
Group 23	East Kazakhstan Oblast	Rural of Belousovka	Russian	Girls 15-17 y.o.
Group 24	East Kazakhstan Oblast	Rural of Belousovka	Russian	Parents of children 15-17 y.o.
Group 25	East Kazakhstan Oblast	Rural of Belousovka	Russian	Teaching staff
Group 26	East Kazakhstan Oblast	Ust-Kamenogorsk	Russian	Boys 15-17 y.o., institutions
Group 27	East Kazakhstan Oblast	Ust-Kamenogorsk	Russian	Girls 15-17 y.o., institutions
Group 28	Atyrau	Atyrau	Kazakh	Boys 15-17 y.o.
Group 29	Atyrau	Atyrau	Kazakh	Boys 11-13 y.o., institutions
Group 30	Atyrau	Atyrau	Kazakh	Girls 11-13 y.o., institutions
Group 31	Atyrau	Atyrau	Kazakh	Teaching staff
Group 32	Atyrau	Atyrau	Kazakh	Parents of children 15-17 y.o.

Table 2. Detailed breakdown by gender, age, region, ethnicity (CAPI)

Region	Type of settlement / Number of participants	Gender	Age/person	Ethnicity/persons
Parents/Guardians				
Abai – 40	Urban – 24 Rural - 16			
Akmola – 45	Urban – 21 Rural – 24			
Aktobe – 55	Urban – 40 Rural – 15			
Almaty – 85	Urban – 8 Rural – 77			
Atyrau - 40	Urban – 22 Rural – 19			
West Kazakhstan – 45	Urban – 24 Rural – 21			
Zhambyl - 65	Urban – 26 Rural – 39			
Zhetysu - 40	Urban – 18 Rural – 22			
Karaganda - 75	Urban – 61 Rural – 14			
Kostanay -60	Urban – 36 Rural - 24			
Kyzylorda - 50	Urban – 23			

Region	Type of settlement / Number of participants	Gender	Age/person	Ethnicity/persons
	Rural - 27			
Mangystau - 40	Urban – 17 Rural - 23			
Pavlodar - 50	Urban – 36 Rural – 14			
North Kazakhstan - 40	Urban – 20 Rural - 20			
Turkestan - 105	Urban – 20 Rural - 85			
Ulytau - 20	Urban – 16 Rural - 4			
East Kazakhstan - 50	Urban – 33 Rural - 17			
Astana - 85	-			
Almaty - 145				
Shymkent - 65				
Children/Adolescents				
Abai – 40	Urban – 24 Rural - 16	Boys - 19 Girls - 21	9-10 y.o. – 10 11-12 y.o. – 10 13-14 y.o. – 9 15-17 y.o. - 11	Kazakh - 25 Russian – 13 Other - 2
Akmola – 45	Urban – 21 Rural – 24	Boys – 23 Girls - 22	9-10 y.o. – 12 11-12 y.o. – 11 13-14 y.o. – 10 15-17 y.o. – 12	Kazakh – 27 Russian -13 Other – 5
Aktobe – 55	Urban – 40 Rural – 15	Boys – 28 Girls - 27	9-10 y.o. – 14 11-12 y.o. – 14 13-14 y.o. – 12 15-17 y.o. - 15	Kazakh – 48 Russian -4 Other – 3
Almaty – 85	Urban – 8 Rural – 77	Boys – 44 Girls - 41	9-10 y.o. – 21 11-12 y.o. – 21 13-14 y.o. – 20 15-17 y.o. - 23	Kazakh – 65 Russian -9 Other – 11
Atyrau - 40	Urban – 22 Rural – 19	Boys – 19 Girls - 21	9-10 y.o. – 10 11-12 y.o. – 11 13-14 y.o. – 8 15-17 y.o. - 11	Kazakh – 37 Russian – 2 Other - 1
West Kazakhstan – 45	Urban – 24 Rural – 21	Boys – 23 Girls - 22	9-10 y.o. – 12 11-12 y.o. – 11 13-14 y.o. – 10 15-17 y.o. - 12	Kazakh – 36 Russian – 7 Other - 2
Zhambyl - 65	Urban – 26 Rural – 39	Boys – 32 Girls - 33	9-10 y.o. – 16 11-12 y.o. – 16 13-14 y.o. – 16 15-17 y.o. - 17	Kazakh – 54 Russian – 6 Other - 5
Zhetysu - 40	Urban – 18 Rural – 22	Boys – 19 Girls - 21	9-10 y.o. – 10 11-12 y.o. – 11 13-14 y.o. – 9 15-17 y.o. - 10	Kazakh – 31 Russian – 4 Other - 5
Karaganda - 75	Urban – 61 Rural – 14	Boys – 36 Girls - 39	9-10 y.o. – 18 11-12 y.o. – 19 13-14 y.o. – 17 15-17 y.o. - 21	Kazakh – 44 Russian – 23 Other - 8
Kostanay -60	Urban – 36 Rural - 24	Boys – 28 Girls - 32	9-10 y.o. – 15 11-12 y.o. – 14 13-14 y.o. – 14 15-17 y.o. - 17	Kazakh – 28 Russian – 21 Other - 11
Kyzylorda - 50	Urban – 23 Rural - 27	Boys – 25 Girls - 25	9-10 y.o. – 13 11-12 y.o. – 12 13-14 y.o. – 12	Kazakh – 48 Russian – 1 Other - 1

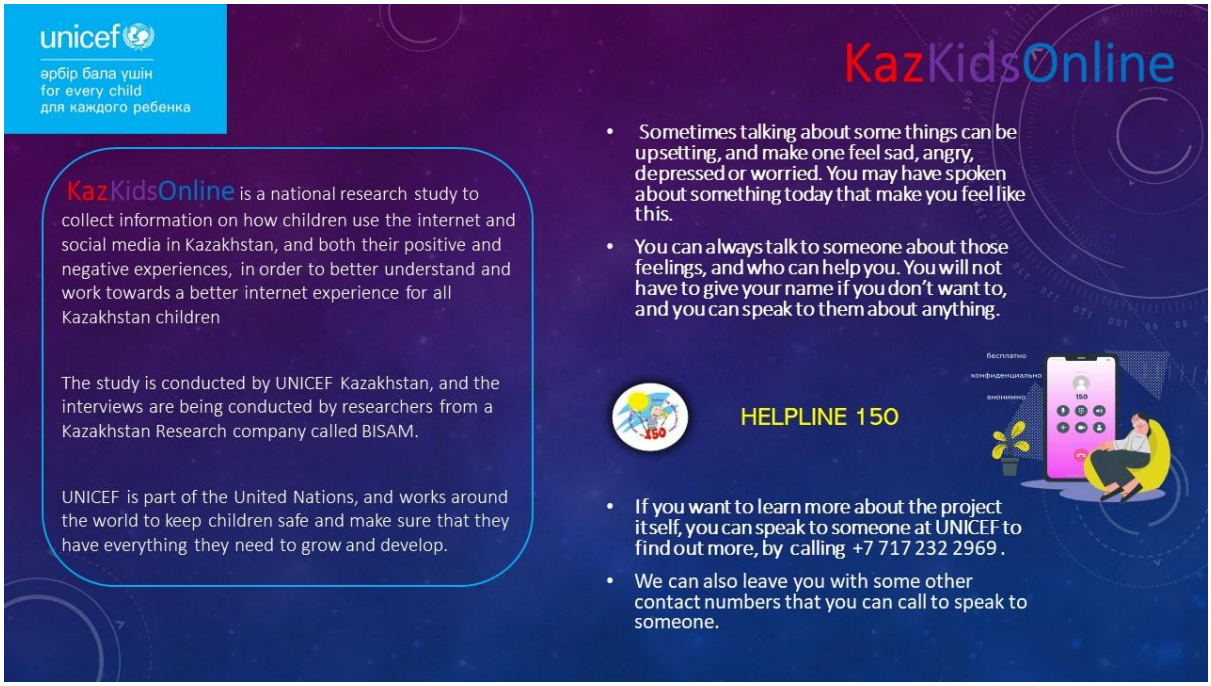
Region	Type of settlement / Number of participants	Gender	Age/person	Ethnicity/persons
			15-17 y.o. - 13	
Mangystau - 40	Urban – 17 Rural - 23	Boys – 19 Girls - 21	9-10 y.o. – 10 11-12 y.o. – 11 13-14 y.o. – 10 15-17 y.o. - 9	Kazakh – 37 Russian – 2 Other - 1
Pavlodar - 50	Urban – 36 Rural – 14	Boys – 24 Girls - 26	9-10 y.o. – 14 11-12 y.o. – 12 13-14 y.o. – 11 15-17 y.o. - 13	Kazakh – 29 Russian – 15 Other - 6
North Kazakhstan - 40	Urban – 20 Rural - 20	Boys – 18 Girls - 22	9-10 y.o. – 9 11-12 y.o. – 10 13-14 y.o. – 9 15-17 y.o. - 12	Kazakh – 16 Russian – 19 Other - 5
Turkestan - 105	Urban – 20 Rural - 85	Boys – 53 Girls - 52	9-10 y.o. – 26 11-12 y.o. – 25 13-14 y.o. – 24 15-17 y.o. - 30	Kazakh – 82 Russian – 2 Other - 21
Ulytau - 20	Urban – 16 Rural - 4	Boys – 10 Girls - 10	9-10 y.o. – 6 11-12 y.o. – 5 13-14 y.o. – 4 15-17 y.o. - 5	Kazakh – 12 Russian – 6 Other - 2
East Kazakhstan - 50	Urban – 33 Rural - 17	Boys – 25 Girls - 25	9-10 y.o. – 12 11-12 y.o. – 12 13-14 y.o. – 12 15-17 y.o. - 14	Kazakh – 32 Russian – 16 Other - 2
Astana - 85		Boys – 44 Girls - 41	9-10 y.o. – 23 11-12 y.o. – 21 13-14 y.o. – 18 15-17 y.o. – 23	Kazakh – 72 Russian – 8 Other - 5
Almaty - 145		Boys – 76 Girls - 71	9-10 y.o. – 35 11-12 y.o. – 34 13-14 y.o. – 33 15-17 y.o. – 43	Kazakh – 96 Russian – 31 Other - 18
Shymkent - 65		Boys – 33 Girls - 32	9-10 y.o. – 16 11-12 y.o. – 16 13-14 y.o. – 15 15-17 y.o. – 18	Kazakh – 47 Russian – 4 Other - 14

Table 3. Detailed breakdown by gender, region, language of teaching, age of pupils (CAWI)

Region	Type of settlement / Number of participants	Gender	Language of teaching (N)	Number of pupils (N)
Abai – 9	Urban – 24 Rural - 16	Men -1 Women- 8	Kazakh – 6 Russian - 3	Younger - 2 Middle - 5 Senior – 2
Akmola – 13	Urban – 21 Rural – 24	Men -2 Women- 11	Kazakh – 8 Russian - 5	Younger - 3 Middle - 8 Senior – 2
Aktobe – 16	Urban – 40 Rural – 15	Men -3 Women- 13	Kazakh – 10 Russian – 6	Younger - 4 Middle - 9 Senior – 3
Almaty – 24	Urban – 8 Rural – 77	Men -5 Women- 19	Kazakh – 15 Russian - 9	Younger - 6 Middle - 13 Senior – 5
Atyrau – 10	Urban – 22 Rural – 19	Men -1 Women- 9	Kazakh – 6 Russian – 4	Younger - 2 Middle - 5 Senior – 3
West Kazakhstan – 13	Urban – 24 Rural – 21	Men -3 Women- 10	Kazakh – 8 Russian – 5	Younger - 3 Middle - 7 Senior – 3
Zhambyl – 23	Urban – 26 Rural – 39	Men -5 Women- 18	Kazakh – 14 Russian – 9	Younger - 6 Middle - 13

Region	Type of settlement / Number of participants	Gender	Language of teaching (N)	Number of pupils (N)
				Senior – 4
Zhetysu – 12	Urban – 18 Rural – 22	Men -2 Women- 10	Kazakh – 7 Russian – 5	Younger - 3 Middle - 7 Senior – 2
Karaganda – 14	Urban – 61 Rural – 14	Men -2 Women-12	Kazakh – 9 Russian – 5	Younger - 4 Middle - 8 Senior – 2
Kostanay -12	Urban – 36 Rural - 24	Men -3 Women- 9	Kazakh – 7 Russian – 5	Younger - 3 Middle - 7 Senior – 2
Kyzylorda – 18	Urban – 23 Rural - 27	Men -4 Women-14	Kazakh – 11 Russian – 7	Younger - 4 Middle - 10 Senior – 4
Mangystau - 11	Urban – 17 Rural - 23	Men -1 Women-10	Kazakh – 7 Russian - 4	Younger - 3 Middle - 6 Senior – 2
Pavlodar – 11	Urban – 36 Rural – 14	Men -2 Women-9	Kazakh – 6 Russian – 5	Younger - 3 Middle - 6 Senior – 2
North Kazakhstan - 10	Urban – 20 Rural - 20	Men -2 Women-8	Kazakh – 6 Russian - 4	Younger - 2 Middle - 6 Senior – 2
Turkestan - 48	Urban – 20 Rural - 85	Men -13 Women-35	Kazakh – 29 Russian – 19	Younger - 12 Middle - 28 Senior – 8
Ulytau - 3	Urban – 16 Rural - 4	Men -1 Women-2	Kazakh – 2 Russian – 1	Younger - 1 Middle - 2 Senior – 0
East Kazakhstan - 10	Urban – 33 Rural - 17	Men -2 Women-8	Kazakh – 6 Russian – 4	Younger - 2 Middle - 6 Senior – 2
Astana - 10		Men -2 Women-8	Kazakh – 6 Russian – 4	Younger - 3 Middle - 5 Senior – 2
Almaty - 18		Men -2 Women-16	Kazakh – 11 Russian – 7	Younger - 5 Middle - 10 Senior – 3
Shymkent - 15		Men -3 Women-12	Kazakh –9 Russian - 6	Younger - 4 Middle - 8 Senior – 3

Appendix Four. Contact flyer left with respondents



Appendix Five. Detailed notes on respondent sampling and data collection

Procedure for selecting respondents for CAPI

According to the instructions stated in the Study Terms of Reference, any households located in the selected regions may participate in the study if their children meet the defined gender, age and ethnicity quotas.

The respondents were selected in several stages:

1. At the first stage, a map for distribution of routes was generated according to the existing regional separation, the main purpose of which was to ensure maximum route coverage of all districts of the city/village
2. At the second stage, the routes lying, as a rule, along the main roads in each of the selected districts, were elaborated.
3. At the third stage, the routes were distributed among the interviewers. In each route a survey start point was determined.

Therefore, the routes were located in both the central blocks, and in the suburbs; in the reach and in the poor areas.

Depending on the development type in certain districts of the settlements, different principles for respondent selection were applied.

The following principle was applied in high-rise housing sectors:

- The interviewer started moving along his/her route from the point specified in the route.
- He/she started selecting a respondent from the end entrance, from the highest floor, from the highest number of apartment.
- He/she was allowed to conduct only one interview on one floor.
- In case of successful interview, he/she missed one floor.
- If nobody was at home or the person didn't want to answer the questions, he/she didn't miss the floor, but the interviewer kept searching a person who was ready to take part in the survey by trying all apartments consistently.

In the areas of single-family houses, the following principle was applied:

- The interviewer started his/her route from the point specified in the map.
- The interviewer entered the first house along the route and in case of a successful interview, he missed 3 houses, moving on to the next house along the route.
- In case of an unsuccessful interview, the interviewer went to a nearby house.

If the child/adolescent, parent/guardian agreed to participate in the study, they signed an informed consent to participate in the study in electronic form before the start of the survey. The respondents were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and non-coercive. They were also guaranteed complete confidentiality of their answers and protection of personal data.

Procedure for selecting respondents for FGDs

Respondents for participation in focus group discussions were selected by skilled recruiters of BISAM in Almaty. In total, the staff of the company's recruiters consists of 25 people working all over Kazakhstan - 1-2 recruiters in each of the territorial segments of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Before recruiting, the project team conducted a comprehensive briefing for the recruiters where they learnt about the purpose and objectives of the study, and were provided with detailed instructions and characteristics of the target group.

Upon completion of the recruitment stage, the selected participants have been screened with the use of a specially designed selecting questionnaire (screener). Participants were selected by BISAM regular personnel from the head office in Almaty. The regular staff recruiters who selected participants were also comprehensively instructed by the project team.

The recruiters got in touch with the child's parents and obtained their consent for participation in the FGD from both the parent and the child. The parent and the child signed their informed consent for participation. These documents are kept in BISAM archive.

At the stage of selection of participants and immediately before the start of the focus groups, the respondents were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and non-compulsory. The respondents were guaranteed complete confidentiality of their answers and protection of personal data.

The procedure for selecting interviewing respondents for CAWI

For this stage of the study, regional recruiters were also involved, who received quota tasks for their region and recruited participants according to the quotas. The invited respondents followed the link and completed an online questionnaire, after which their contact details were transferred to control. The array of questionnaires was 100% verified by way of control calls to exclude possible falsifications.

Data collection

Conducting interview (CAPI)

The interview was conducted in households. The interviewer informed in details about the goals and objectives of the study and about the organization that conducted the study. Having obtained the consent from the parent and the child to participate in the study, the interviewer went to a separate room with the child and started the interview. The interviewer tried to find an isolated place so that other members of the child's family could not interrupt their work, thereby protecting the confidentiality of the child's answers.

Having completed the interview with the child the BISAM worker started interviewing the parent. In this case, he/she also tried to find an isolated place in order to maintain confidentiality. If both parents agreed to participate in the study, they selected one whose birthdate was latest. The same principle was also applied if more than one children in a family met the quota and were ready to take part in the study.

Following the interview with the child, the interviewer made sure to clarify how he/she felt and if he/she wanted to discuss with someone what they were talking about. If the child wanted to do so, he/she was provided with a leaflet with contact information of hotline services which were ready to provide assistance.

The average duration of the questionnaire was 30 minutes for the parent/guardian and 45 minutes for the child.

Conducting focus groups

The focus groups were conducted offline at the office of BISAM in Almaty and in the rented premises in other regions of Kazakhstan. The premises were selected in a way to ensure comfortable accommodation of the FGD participants, necessary equipment, and a place for the patent to wait for their children.

The children who participated in the discussions came together with their parents. Both the parent and the child signed an informed consent for voluntary participation in the study. The supervisor informed them in details about the study purposes, topics to be discussed, and design.

Each group was attended by a pediatrician who examined the children prior to the study to exclude the risk of infecting other participants.

After the participants had signed their informed consents, they were invited into the room for the FGD.

For conducting the study both in Almaty and in Almaty Oblast, flipcharts, stickers, anti-stress balls for warming-up, color markers and pens were used. At the end of the groups all the participants were given presents – stationery sets.

The focus groups were recorded, of which the respondents were informed in the beginning.

Appendix Six. Ethics approval – For review purposes only - **to be excluded from final report.**

unicef | for every child

Research Ethics Approval

18 April 2023

Patrick Burton, MSc
UNICEF Consultant
30 Carmichael Rd
Fish Hoek, South Africa, 7975

RE: Ethics Review Board findings for: *Kazakhstan Kids Online Study (KazKidsOnline)*
(HML IRB Review #706KAZA23)

Dear Patrick Burton,

Protocols for the protection of human subjects in the above study were assessed through a research ethics review by HML Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 20 March – 18 April 2023. This study's human subjects' protection protocols, as stated in the materials submitted, received **ethics review approval.**

You and your project staff remain responsible for ensuring compliance with HML IRB's determinations. Those responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- ensuring prompt reporting to HML IRB of proposed changes in this study's design, risks, consent, or other human protection protocols and providing copies of any revised materials;
- conducting the research activity in accordance with the terms of the IRB approval until any proposed changes have been reviewed and approved by the IRB, except when necessary to mitigate hazards to subjects;
- promptly reporting any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others in the course of this study;
- notifying HML IRB when your study is completed.

HML IRB is authorized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Human Research Protections (IRB #1211, IORG #850, FWA #1102).

Sincerely,

D. Michael Anderson, Ph.D., MPH
Chair & Human Subjects Protections Director, HML IRB

cc: Raushan Ibrasheva, Penelope Lantz, JD

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1101 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 450
Washington, DC 20036 USA
+1.202.246.8504
unicef@hmlirb.com www.hmlirb.com

Appendix Seven. Consent form – For review purposes only – to be excluded from final report.

ИНФОРМИРОВАННОЕ СОГЛАСИЕ НА ОПРОС (РЕБЕНКА)

Привет!

Мы – исследовательская команда BISAM Central Asia. Мы проводим исследование, чтобы попытаться понять, как дети по всему Казахстану используют Интернет, а также о хорошем и плохом опыте, который они получают онлайн. Исследование проводится для ЮНИСЕФ Казахстан, который хочет понять, как дети используют возможности, которые представлены им онлайн, а также как сделать онлайн-опыт детей лучше и безопаснее.

В этом исследовании мы проводим интервью с детьми и их родителями. Мы разговариваем с детьми от 9 до 17 лет – мальчиками и девочками по всему Казахстану. Мы случайным образом выбираем детей, с которыми хотим провести интервью. Нам интересно услышать, какие социальные сети используют дети и какой информацией они обмениваются в этих социальных сетях, и куда они обращаются, если им нужна поддержка или помощь в тех вещах, с которыми они сталкиваются онлайн. В рамках этих обсуждений мы хотели бы поговорить с как можно большим количеством детей о различных аспектах их онлайн-опыта. Вопросы, которые нас интересуют, включают в себя такие темы как:

- Как ты выходишь в Интернет (если выходишь) и что обычно делаешь онлайн (мы знаем, что не у всех есть доступ к Интернету или собственные устройства такие как телефон, планшет, компьютер для подключения);
- что и как много ты знаешь о различных аспектах онлайн-безопасности (если ты не знаешь, что такое онлайн-безопасность – нам также важно об этом узнать);
- твой положительный и негативный опыт онлайн;
- вещи, которые тебя больше всего беспокоят, когда ты онлайн;
- мы также хотели бы немного узнать о тебе, твоей семье и учебе в школе.

Все, о чем мы будем у тебя спрашивать, будет анонимным и конфиденциальным. Это значит, что мы не будем записывать или фиксировать где-либо твои личные данные такие как имя, фамилия, адрес или номер школы (хотя мы будем учитывать, сколько тебе лет и девочка ты или мальчик), и мы не будем как-либо связывать то, что ты нам расскажешь, и тебя лично. Единственные люди, которые будут иметь доступ к твоим ответам — это исследователи. Если ты согласен(-а) поговорить с нами, есть несколько важных вещей – о которых тебе следует знать, которые мы делаем, чтобы убедиться, что все твои права защищены, и что все твои ответы останутся у нас в безопасности.

- Интервью будет проводиться **конфиденциально (без посторонних)**, чтобы никто посторонний не смог услышать, о чем идет речь.
- Если ты не хочешь отвечать на какой-либо вопрос, ты можешь **не отвечать** на этот вопрос.
- Ты можешь пропустить любые вопросы, на которые ты не хочешь отвечать или которые ты считаешь слишком личными.
- Твое **участие является добровольным**, и тебя не могут заставить принять участие в интервью, если ты сам(-а) этого не хочешь.

- Если ты решишь не принимать участие, это никоим образом не повлияет на тебя. Тем не менее, мы будем очень тебе признательны, если ты примешь участие в исследовании. Информация, которую мы собираем на этих обсуждениях, будет чрезвычайно полезной, поскольку поможет нам лучше понять, как предотвратить и / или реагировать на негативные вещи и явления, с которыми дети по всему Казахстану сталкиваются онлайн, а также как сделать онлайн-опыт детей более безопасным и позитивным.

Мы оставим тебе информационный буклет после интервью, чтобы напомнить тебе обо всем, что я сказал(-а) сейчас. Этот буклет отвечает на некоторые из наиболее распространенных вопросов, которые дети задают нам об исследовании и их участии.

Если у тебя есть какие-либо вопросы об этом исследовании или интервью, ты можешь связаться с Айслу Бекмуса, руководителем программ ЮНИСЕФ Казахстан по охране детства по этому номеру телефона: +77172322878 (доб.128) или с Андреем Скуратовым, директором по исследованиям BISAM Central Asia по этому номеру телефона: +77017102674.

Если ты хочешь поговорить с кем-либо о своем опыте в Интернете, который как-либо тебя беспокоил после исследования, ты можешь позвонить на телефонную линию доверия (*Телефон доверия 150*). Ты также можешь связаться с ними в Whatsapp или онлайн по этому адресу: *http://www.telefon150.kz/* .

Если ты согласен(-на) принять участие в интервью, пожалуйста, подпиши форму согласия ниже.

Информированное согласие

Теперь, когда ты ознакомился(-лась) с информацией об исследовании, не мог(-ла) бы ты помочь нам с этим исследованием и принять участие в нашей дискуссии?

Возможно, есть еще что-то, что ты бы хотел(-а) узнать, прежде чем принять решение?

ДА НЕТ

Я, (пожалуйста, напиши здесь свое полное имя) ……

хочу

Пожалуйста, отметь выбранный вариант.

не хочу

…. принять участие в исследовании **KazKidsOnline**, которое проводит ЮНИСЕФ Казахстан.

- Я понимаю, что буду участвовать свободно и без какого-либо принуждения. Я также понимаю, что, если я не соглашусь участвовать в исследовании, со мной не случится ничего плохого и у меня не будет проблем.

- Я понимаю, что эта форма согласия не будет связана с моими ответами в интервью, и что мои ответы останутся конфиденциальными.
- Я понимаю, что могу остановить интервью в любой момент, и что я не обязан(-а) отвечать на любые вопросы, которые заставляют меня чувствовать себя некомфортно.
- Я понимаю, что я получу вознаграждение за участие в исследовании.
- Я также понимаю, что, поскольку мне нет 18 лет, мне необходимо согласие моего родителя или законного опекуна, который разрешит мне участвовать в исследовании.

…… ……..

Подпись и/или полное имя ребенка **Дата**

…… ……..

Подпись интервьюера **Дата**