Help Children Be Children

Child online safety
Lagos, Nigeria report

Written and submitted by

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MTN | Ipsos

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The internet is a pervasive feature in the lives of children and adolescents, presenting numerous possibilities for learning, social interaction and entertainment. Young individuals find themselves immersed in a digital reality filled with vast amounts of information and resources – which allows them to broaden their educational horizons through the use of e-learning platforms, interactive content and even online courses offered by global institutions. This ready access to a myriad educational tools has significant implications for a country such as Nigeria where the population is diverse and where certain areas suffer from a lack of educational resources (Matthew et al., 2015).

On a social level, the internet acts as a conduit for connecting with peers, sharing moments and honing digital competencies that are becoming increasingly important in a world dominated by technology. Social media platforms, online gaming communities and various forums offer spaces for nurturing friendships, collaborating and building a sense of community, all of which are important for the emotional growth of the young (Markauskaite et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these very opportunities present numerous threats that may endanger the safety and wellbeing of children and adolescents in Nigeria (Thrive Online, 2022). Exposure to inappropriate content such as violent imagery, explicit materials or expressions of hate poses a primary risk (Monyei, 2021). This content can inadvertently be encountered online due to the unregulated nature of the internet; in the absence of adequate supervision, children could be left exposed to such detrimental influences.

Cyberbullying represents another grave concern with its ability to inflict emotional scars that are magnified by the relentless nature of the internet (Blanchflower & Bryson, 2024). In Nigeria (where there is a burgeoning awareness and understanding of cyberbullying), young individuals might find themselves ill-prepared to cope with the resulting emotional distress. The spectre of online predators is particularly troubling as they exploit the anonymity of the internet to establish connections and potentially exploit young users. Recognising the inherent risks involved, the African Union has developed a Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy. This initiative aims to safeguard children in the context of society's deepening immersion in the digital realm, a trend that amplifies children's vulnerability without strategic protective measures being in place (African Union, 2023). In Nigeria, the situation is exacerbated by the insufficient distribution of knowledge regarding secure online behaviour among children and their caregivers, consequently increasing their exposure to hazardous online encounters.

Issues of data privacy and the hazard of identity theft are also on the rise. Children may not fully grasp the repercussions of sharing personal information online, which can inadvertently lead to breaches of privacy that affect not only themselves but also their families. In Nigeria, where the journey towards widespread digital literacy is ongoing, such lapses can have severe outcomes.

MTN, one of the leading telecommunications companies in Africa, together with Ipsos, recognised the importance of understanding the risks associated with online activity for children and adolescents. The company initiated an online child safety study aimed at delving into the behaviours, experiences and challenges faced by children and adolescents in Nigeria. This study was designed to shed light on the specific types of risks that children encounter while navigating the internet and the various kinds of risky online behaviours they engage in.

The study involved a comprehensive survey and analysis, reaching out to children and adolescents in Lagos to gain a broad perspective on their online habits. Lagos was chosen as the study location due to its urban character and the significant number of children and adolescents there with access to the internet and mobile devices. The goal was to identify common online activities that could potentially expose young users to harm, such as sharing personal information with strangers, accessing adult content or being subjected to cyberbullying.

By engaging directly with the demographic most affected, MTN hoped to gain authentic insights into the digital experiences of Nigerian youth. The intention was to use these findings to develop targeted initiatives and strategies that could contribute to making the internet a safer space for children. The study's outcomes were expected to inform not only MTN's corporate social responsibility programmes but also to provide valuable data for policymakers, educators and parents working to protect children in the digital realm.

1.2. Objectives

The study focused on the following objectives and sub-objectives:

1.2.1. Main objective

The study aimed to investigate how children between the ages of eight and seventeen in Lagos, Nigeria, utilise the internet. The primary goal was to enhance online child safety within the country.

The findings from this study will serve as a basis for improving online child safety nationwide and give direction for future research in other provinces and major cities to identify any regional differences.

1.2.2. Sub-objectives

- Understand how access to the internet on digital devices facilitates the exploitation and abuse of children online.
- Identify which categories of children are at risk and how these risks materialise.
- Understand how technologies impact child online safety to develop an evidence-based approach to mitigating these risks.

1.3. Ethical considerations

Considering that the participants in the study were minors needing protection from any potential harm, an application for ethical clearance was submitted to the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC). Multiple revisions were requested and incorporated into the data collection instrument to safeguard the wellbeing of the children involved, potentially mitigating any distressing experiences. Subsequently, the study received approval, resulting in the issuance of an ethical clearance certificate bearing the reference number **MTN/CEO/GK/MM/250923**

2. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a cross-sectional survey methodology to gather information. A purposive sampling approach was utilised to select those participants who satisfied the study's criteria (refer to Table 1). This technique was deemed suitable since it did not necessitate a sampling frame for participant selection and proved to be efficient in terms of time management.

Table 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Must be a resident of Nigeria (Lagos).	Not a resident of Nigeria (Lagos).
Children aged 8 - 17 years old.	Children below the age of 8 and adults aged 18 years and older.
Parent/guardian willing to provide informed consent.	Parent or guardian not willing to provide consent.
Child willing to provide informed assent.	Child not willing to provide informed assent.

As illustrated by Table 2 below, a total of 514 children completed interviews that took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Table 2: Sample size and length of interview

Sample Size	Length of Interview
514	20 minutes

2.1. Study variables
2.1.1. Outcome/dependent variables

The study aimed to examine the outcome variable of risky online behaviour among children aged 8 - 17 years. This variable was determined based on the responses to five specific questions in the survey. The first question sought to ascertain whether the children had added strangers to their instant messenger contact list and was posed as follows: Have you ever added a stranger to your instant messenger contact list? The second question sought to ascertain whether the children had engaged in conversations with online acquaintances and was asked as follows: Have you ever spoken to someone you met online?.

The third question sought to ascertain whether the children had met someone in person that they had previously met online and was asked as follows: Have you ever met someone in person that you had previously met online? The fourth question sought to ascertain whether the children had engaged in conversations about sex with online acquaintances and was asked as follows: Have you ever talked (via chat or phone) about sex with someone you met online? The fifth question sought to ascertain whether the children had shared personal information such as ages, mobile numbers and addresses with online acquaintances and was asked as follows: Have you ever shared personal information such as your age, mobile number, address, etc.?

The responses were categorised with "yes" and "no" binary responses from participants. Herein, the yes refers to children that have engaged in one or more of the risk behaviours described above and presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Dependent variable

Variable	Definition	Categorisation
Dependent (outcome) variable		

| Risky online behaviour | Children who have engaged in one or more of the following:
i. Added strangers to their instant messenger contact list. (C5)
ii. Engaged in conversations with online acquaintances. (C6)
iii. Met someone in person that they had previously met online. (C7)
iv. Engaged in conversation about sex with online acquaintances. (C8)
v. Shared personal information such as ages, mobile numbers and addresses with online acquaintances. (C9) | 1. Yes |
| | | 0. No |

2.1.2. Independent variables for bivariate and multivariate analysis

The study included several independent variables for the purpose of bivariate and multivariate analysis. These variables encompassed:

- Age,
- Gender,
- Level of education,
- Frequency of online usage,
- Daily duration of online activities,
- Parental and guardian rules regarding internet use,
- Frequency of speaking with parents and guardians about internet safety,
- Speaking to parents and guardians about internet safety more,
- Experience of online harassment,
- Experience of online bullying and abuse,
- Inclination to seek support when facing online threats.

Table 4 below provides more details on above-mentioned variables.

Table 4: Independent variables

Independent variables	Original question in the survey	Definition	Categorisation
Age	Which of the following age groups do you fall into?	Age of study participants.	1. 8 - 17 years
Gender	What is your gender?	The sex of study participants.	1. Male
			2. Female
Level of education (currently learning)	What school level are you in?	The current education level that study participants are pursuing.	1. Pre-school & Primary school
			2. Secondary, high school & college
Frequency of online usage	How often do you go online?	The frequency with which children access the internet online.	1. Daily
			2. Weekly
			3. Monthly
Daily duration of online activities	How much time do you spend online each day?	Time spent online.	Time spent online

Parental and guardian regulations regarding internet use	Do your parents or guardians have rules about your internet use?	The presence of parental and guardian rules and regulations within the household.	1. Yes
			2. No
Frequency of speaking with parents and guardians about Internet safety	How do you and your parents/guardians talk about internet safety?	Frequency of children speaking to their parents and guardians about internet safety.	1. We talk openly and regularly about what I do online
			2. We sometimes talk about what I do online
			3. We rarely talk about what I do online
			4. We never talk about what I do online
Willing to speak with parents and guardians about internet safety more	Would you like to talk about internet safety more with your parents/guardians?	Children willingness to speak with parents and guardians more about internet safety.	1. Yes
			2. No
Experience of online harassment	Have you ever experienced any form of harassment online?	The experience of online harassment by children	1. Yes
			2. No
Experience of online bullying and abuse	Have you ever been bullied and abused online?	The experience of online bullying by children .	1. Yes
			2. No
Inclination to seek support when facing online threats	If you felt threatened, would you turn to anyone for help?	The inclination of children to seek support if they feel threatened online.	1. Yes
			2. No

2.2. Data collection tool

All data collection was undertaken using tablets and bespoke computer-assisted personal interviews. The data collection instrument was designed by Ipsos under the Public Affairs Department led by Marcus Hollington in consultation with MTN led by Ncumisa Willie, a Senior Manager in Digital Human Rights. This data collection tool incorporated a combination of open-ended questions and specific inquiries, allowing for the collection of participant perspectives and facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the issues surrounding online safety and risky online behaviour.

2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis in the study was performed in three stages: univariate, bivariate, and multivariate. The univariate analysis focused on presenting key findings as frequencies and percentages of respondents.

The purpose of the bivariate analysis was to investigate the association of online harassment, which was the dependent or outcome variable of the study, and selected independent/predictor variables generated through chi-square tests and cross-tabulations.

The formula for Chi-square tests is presented below:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

where O — the frequencies observed
where E — the frequencies expected
where Σ — the 'sum of'

In the study, a multivariate analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the independent variables and risky online behaviour. The analysis used a binary logistic regression (BLR) model, with the study outcome categorised into binary responses of yes and no. The results were reported as odds ratios, with values above 1.00 indicating a higher likelihood of the outcome (online harassment) and values below 1.00 indicating a lower likelihood. Statistical significance was determined using a p-value threshold of $p < 0.05$, indicating results considered statistically significant at a 95% confidence level.

The equation for the BLR model is presented below:

$$Logit\ (Y) = In \left(\frac{n}{1 - n}\right) = a + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 \dots\dots..$$

Therefore,

$$\pi = Probability\ (Y = outcome\ of\ interest\ |X_1 = X_1, X_2 = x_2)$$

$$= \frac{e^{a+\beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2}}{1 + e^{a+\beta_1 X_1+\beta_2 X_2}}$$

Where π is the success probability that an observation is in a specified category of the binary **Y** variable (Risky Online Behaviour)

α = intercept

β = regression coefficients

$X_1, X_2 \dots$ **=** the study's predictors/independent variables

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3. FINDINGS

3.1. Demographic profile of respondents

The MTN online child safety (Let Children be Children) survey conducted interviews with a total of 514 children in Lagos, Nigeria. The gender distribution of the participants showed that males accounted for 49% (n = 254) of the sample, while females constituted 51% (n = 260). When considering age, the highest proportion of participants, 51% (n = 260), fell within the 13 –17 years age range, while the lower proportion, 49% (n = 254), belonged to the 8-12 year age range. In terms of area of residence, 100% of respondents reported residing in urban areas (n = 514). Regarding educational status, 94% (n = 481) of the participants reported being currently enrolled in school, while 6% (n = 33) reported not being enrolled. Among those enrolled, the majority, 76% (n = 364), attended secondary or high school, followed by 22% (n = 105) in primary school, 2% (n = 10) in college, and the smallest proportion, 0% (n = 2), were registered in university. In terms of access to electricity, 99% (n = 509) of the respondents reported having access to electricity at home, while 1% (n = 5) reported not having access at home.
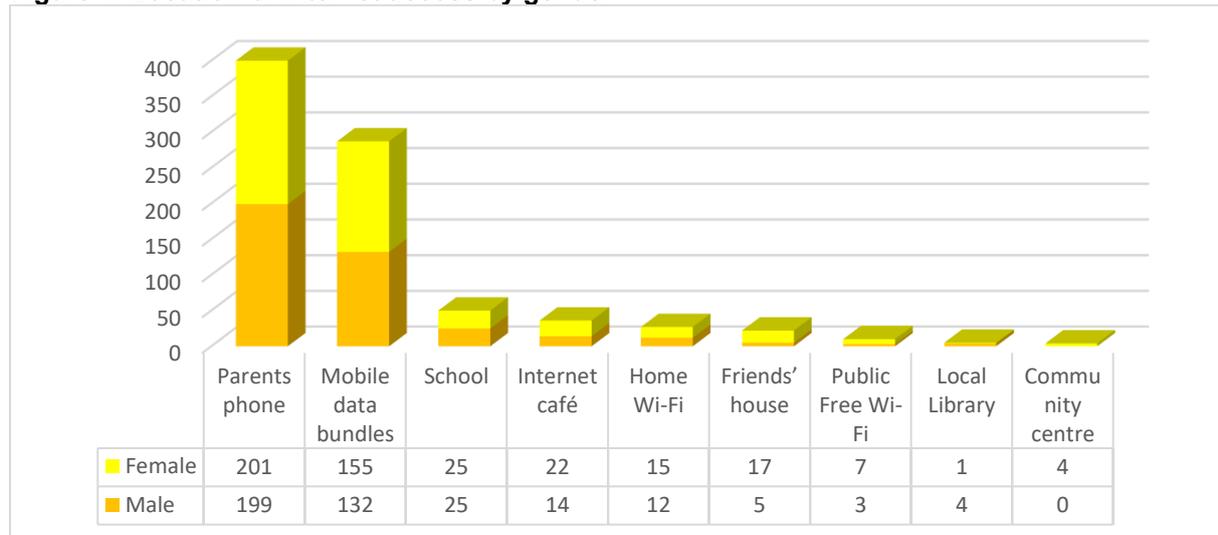
Table 4: Demographics

| Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	254	49%
Female	260	51%
	514	100%
Age group		
8 - 12 years	254	49%
13 - 17 years	260	51%
	514	100%
Area of residence		
Urban	514	100%
	514	100%
In school		
Yes	481	94%
No	33	6%
	514	100%
Current level of schooling		
Primary school	105	22%
Secondary school / High School	364	76%
College	10	2%
University	2	0%
	481	100%
Access to electricity at home		
Yes	509	99%
No	5	1%
	514	100%

3.2. Online activity

This section presents the results of the survey's online activity segments. When asked where they accessed the internet, most respondents reported accessing the internet through their parents' phones (n = 400). Herein, 50.25% of respondents who reported making use of this mode of internet connectivity (n = 200) were female while 49.75% of the respondents (n = 199) were male. The second most mentioned mode of internet access was mobile data bundles (n = 287). Herein, 54% of the respondents who reported using mobile data bundles for internet connectivity were female (n = 155) while 46% were males (n = 132). The third most used location/mode of internet access that was reported by respondents was at school (n = 50). Herein, 50% of the respondents were female while the other 50% were male. Respondents also mentioned making use of internet cafés to access the internet (n = 36), accessing the internet through home Wi-fi (n = 27), friend's houses (n = 22), public free Wi-Fi (n = 10), local libraries (n = 5), while 4 respondents reported accessing the internet through their community centres.

Figure 1: Location of internet access by gender

	Parents phone	Mobile data bundles	School	Internet café	Home Wi-Fi	Friends' house	Public Free Wi-Fi	Local Library	Community centre
Female	201	155	25	22	15	17	7	1	4
Male	199	132	25	14	12	5	3	4	0

Additionally, a total of 514 respondents were surveyed regarding their frequency of online activity. Among these participants, 304 individuals (59%) reported going online on a daily basis. Of daily users, 116 participants (38%) were between the ages of 8 and 12, while 188 participants (62%) were aged between 13 and 17. The second highest proportion of participants (39%) reported using the internet weekly, with a total of 202 participants. Among these weekly users, 131 participants (65%) were between the ages of 8 and 12 while only 71 participants (35%) were between the ages of 13 and 17. Participants who reported going online monthly constituted the smallest proportion at 2% (n = 8). Among the monthly users of the internet, 7 participants (87.50%) were between the ages of 8 and 12 while only 1 participant (12.50%) was aged 13 – 17.

Figure 2: Frequency of online activities by age
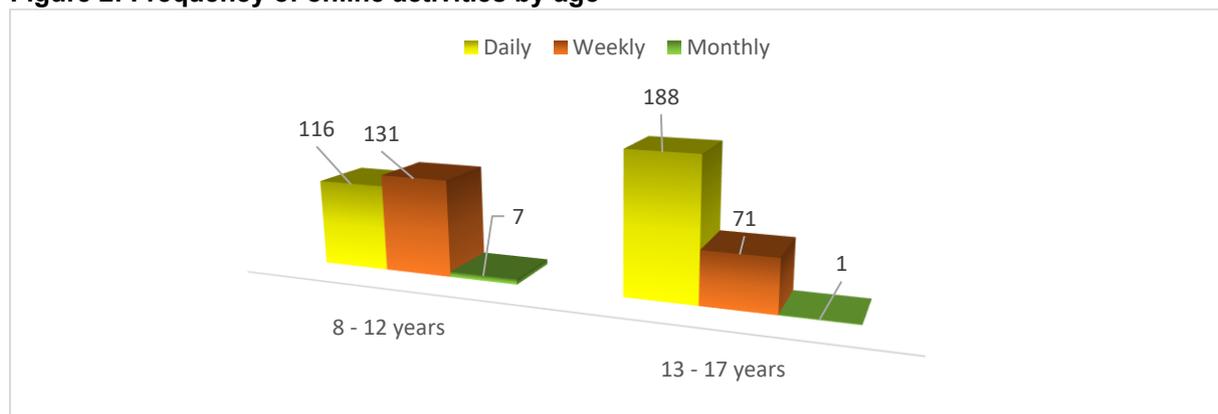
A total of 514 respondents were asked how much time they spent online every day. Herein, 283 respondents reported spending between 1 and 5 hours online. Of these, older children aged between 13 and 17 (55%) reported spending anywhere between 1 and 5 hours online with a total of 155 responses. Conversely, children aged 8 - 12 had the lowest proportion of participants in this category with 128 responses (45%). The second most common time spent online every day was less than 1 hour, with 163 responses. Within this category, children aged 8 - 12 accounted for the highest proportion of participants, with 112 responses (69%) while those aged 13 - 17 had the lowest proportion, with 51 responses (31%). The third most common time spent online by children every day was more than 5 hours (n = 50). Among these, children aged 13 - 17 had the highest proportion, with 50 responses

(100%) while younger children aged between 8 – 12 constituted the least with 0% (n = 0). Finally, 18 respondents did not have regular internet access. Herein, those aged 8 – 12 accounted for the highest proportion of participants, with 14 responses (78%) while older children aged 13 - 17 had the lowest proportion, with 4 responses (22%).

Figure 3: Time spent online each day by age
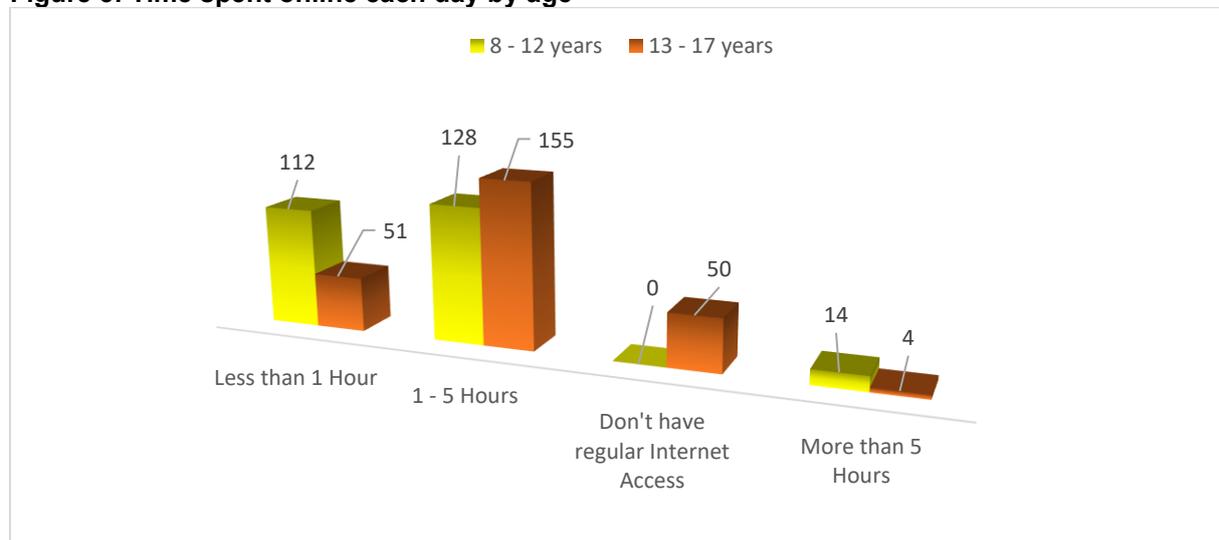
### 3.2.1. Parental rules on internet use among children and child safety

A total of 514 children responded to a question about whether or not their parents had rules for internet use. Among the participants, 81% (n = 417) reported that their parents indeed had rules about internet use. Within this group, 50.36% (n = 210) were male, making up the largest percentage of respondents while females constituted the smaller proportion at 49.64% (n = 207). On the other hand, 97 children aged between 8 and 17 indicated that their parents did not enforce rules on internet use at home. In this category, 54% (n = 53) were female, constituting the highest proportion of respondents, whereas males accounted for the lowest proportion at 46% (n = 44). These findings suggest that gender stereotypes within households may have influenced the prevalence of internet use rules, as more girls than boys reported that their parents implemented such regulations. This variation may be attributed to the notion that girls are often more vulnerable to online harm and exploitation (Meredith, 2023).

Figure 4: Parental rules on internet use for children aged 8 – 17
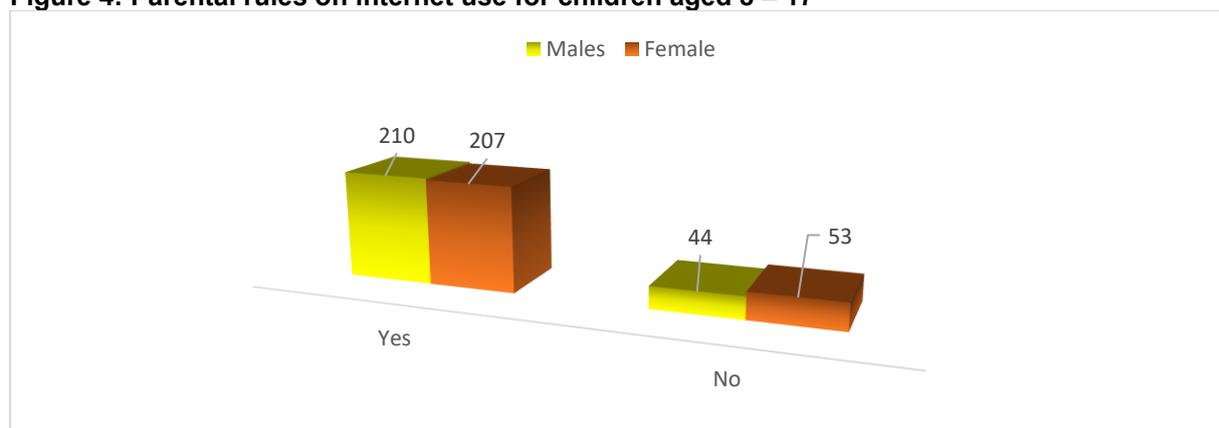

However, among respondents who acknowledged the presence of parental regulations regarding internet usage, 50% revealed that their parents implemented time constraints while 50% disclosed that their parents restricted their access to the internet.

Figure 5: Types of internet-use rules employed by parents

50%

50%

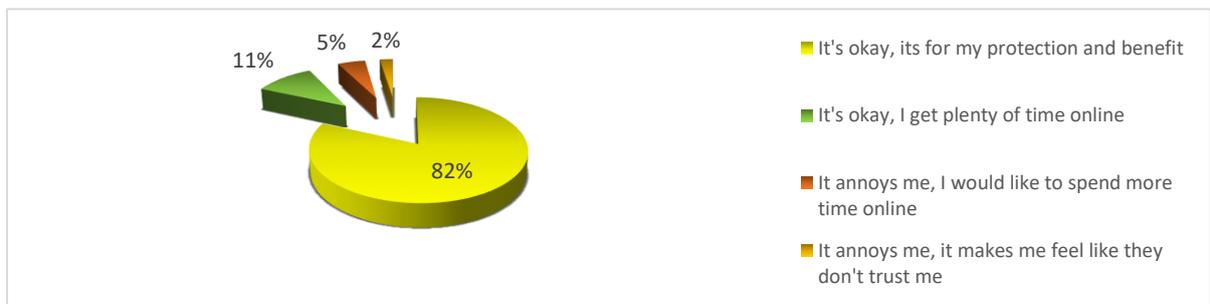■ My parents restrict my access　　■ My parents have time limits
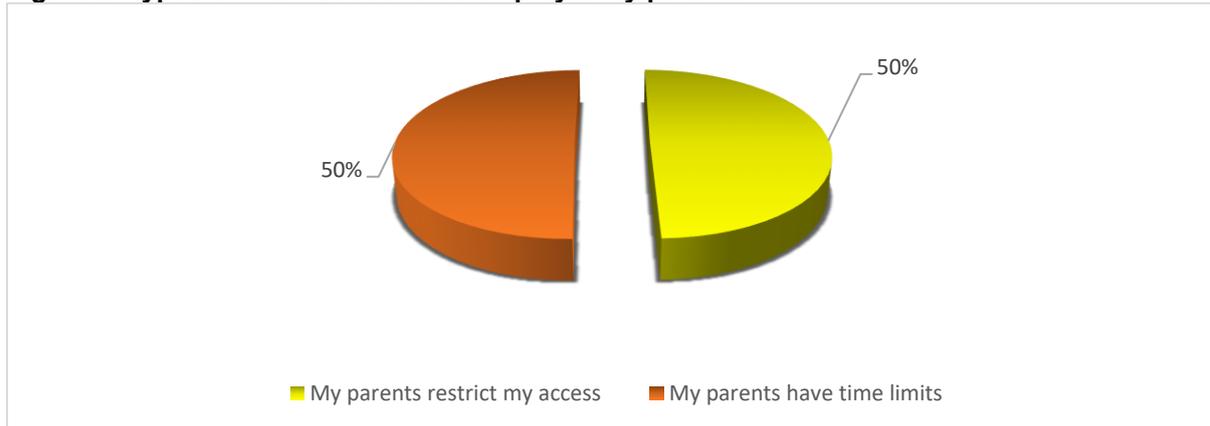
Additionally, when asked whether their parents went through their phones, 85% (n = 353) acknowledged that their parents did indeed go through their phones. On the other hand, 11% (n = 47) of participants stated that their parents did not engage in this behaviour. A small percentage, 4% (n = 17), indicated uncertainty regarding whether their parents monitored their phones or not.

Figure 6: Cell phone monitoring by parents

11%　4%

85%

■ Yes　■ No　■ I don't know
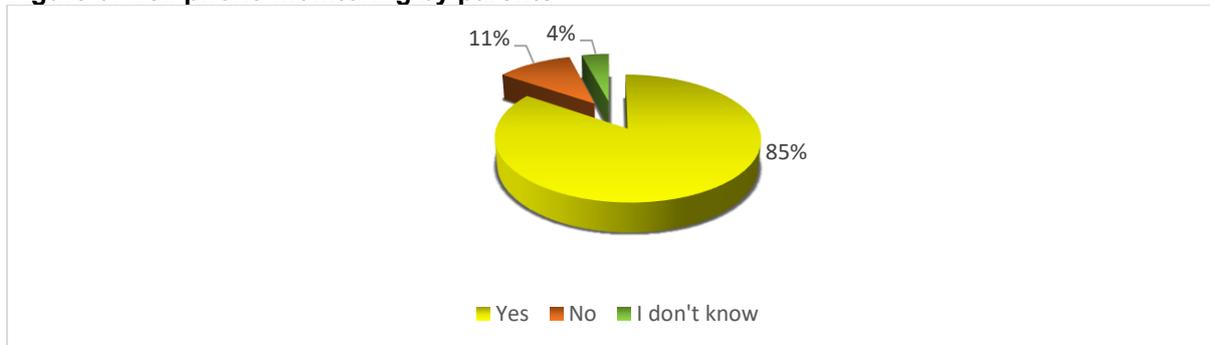
When the children were asked about how they felt about these rules, the overall sentiment was positive with 82% (n = 341) of participants reporting that they were generally okay with the rules as these were for their benefit and protection while 11% (n = 45) reported that the rules employed by their parents were okay as they still got plenty of time online, 5% (n = 21) of respondents indicated that they were annoyed by the rules as they wanted to spend more time online; 2% (n = 10) indicated that they felt annoyed by the rules as it made them feel as though their parents did not trust them.

Figure 7: Sentiment about parent rules on internet use by children

11%　5%　2%

82%

■ It's okay, its for my protection and benefit

■ It's okay, I get plenty of time online

■ It annoys me, I would like to spend more time online

■ It annoys me, it makes me feel like they don't trust me

Furthermore, when the children were asked about how often they spoke about internet safety with their parents and guardians 44% of them (n = 224) reported talking openly and regularly about what they do online. By age group, it was revealed that the highest proportion of participants who reported talking

openly and regularly about what they do online were children aged between 8 and 12 constituting 62.50% (n = 140) while the lowest proportion was observed among older children aged 13 to 17 at 37.50% (n = 84). Conversely, 31% (n = 161) of the children reported sometimes talking about what they do online with their parents. Specifically, older children aged between 13 and 17 constituted the highest proportion of respondents who reported sometimes talking about what they do online, constituting 53% (n = 86) within this category while children aged between 8 and 12 years constituted the lowest at 47% (n = 75).

Additionally, 14% (n = 74) of the children reported rarely talking about what they do online. Herein, children aged between 13 and 17 constituted the greatest proportion of respondents who reported rarely talking about what they do online with their parents at 65% (n = 48) while those aged between 8 and 12 constituted the lowest proportion at 35% (n = 26). Finally, 11% (n = 55) of the children reported never talking about what they do online with their parents . Herein, older children aged 13 and 17 constituted the greatest proportion of respondents who reported never talking about what they do online with their parents at 76% (n = 42), while younger children aged 8 and 12 constituted the least at 24% (n = 13).

Figure 8: How children talk about internet safety with their parents and guardians
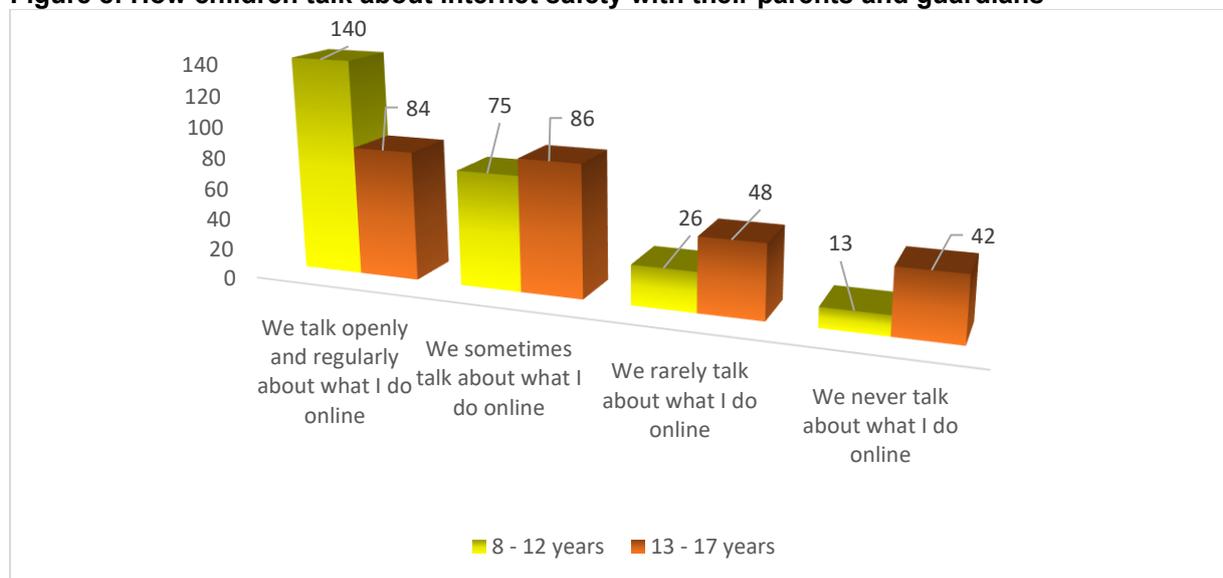
Interesting was the fact that when asked about whether the children wanted to talk about internet safety with their parents and guardians, 84% (n = 430) reported "yes" while 16% (n = 84) reported "no".

Figure 9: Children's interest in talking about internet safety with their parents and guardians
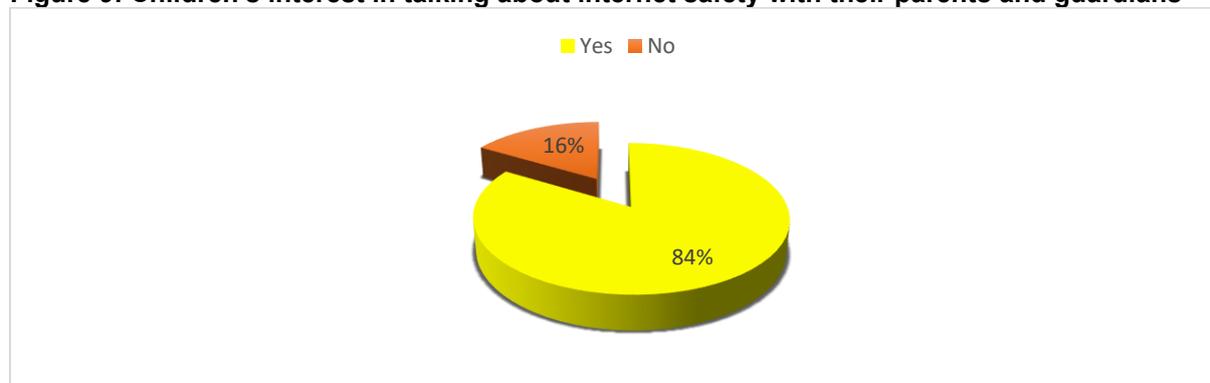
When queried about the reasoning behind their answers, the children presented a diverse range of justifications (***refer to Appendix A for an exhaustive compilation***). Nonetheless, the three most frequently cited rationales proffered by the children encompassed (i) seeking guidance to avert potential errors and missteps (ii) for protection and safety from online threats, and (iii) enjoying talking to parents/guardians.

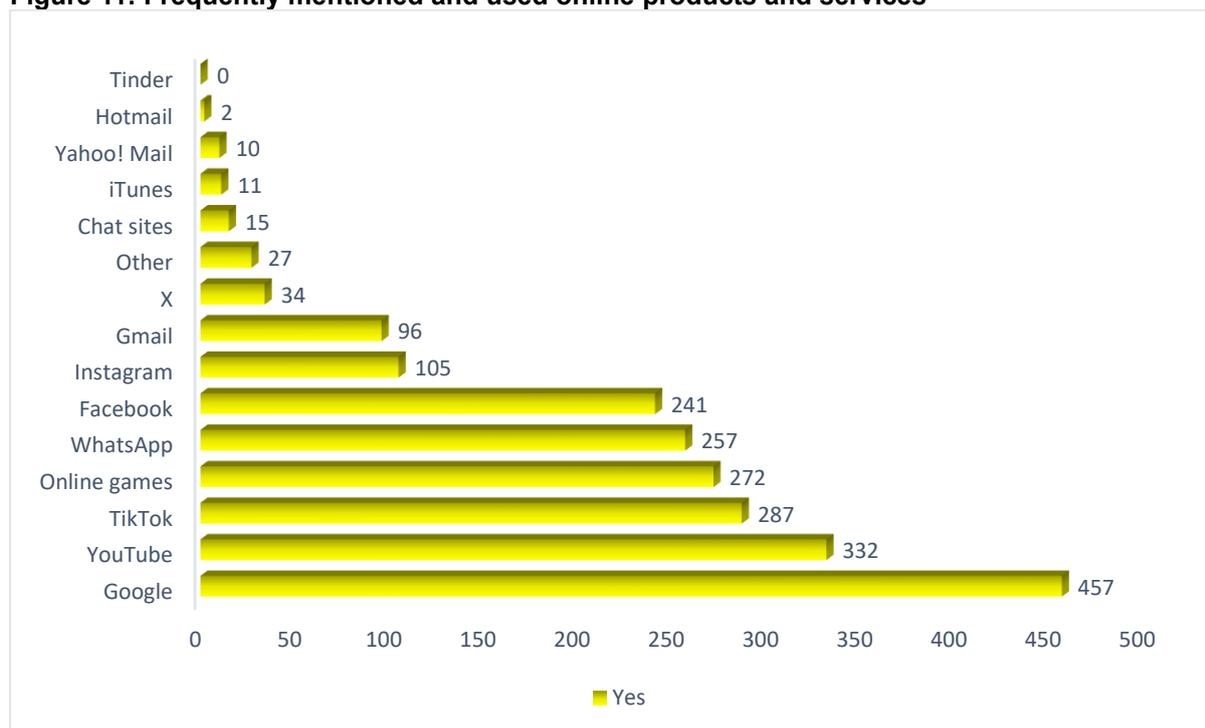|	Table 5: Top 3 reasons for wanting to talk about internet safety with parents/guardians (in the words of the children)
1	Seeking guidance to avert potential errors and missteps
2	For protection and safety from online threats
3	Enjoying talking to parents/guardians.

Furthermore, the children were provided with a set of six statements related to internet usage, from which they selected the ones they agreed with. These statements included using the internet for schoolwork, entertainment, communicating with friends, love using it extensively, news and negative impact on the lives of children. Among the respondents, the most frequently mentioned purpose of internet use was for school, which was reported by 89% (n = 457) of the respondents. Entertainment was the second most mentioned purpose, with 66% (n = 341) of respondents selecting it. Communicating with friends ranked third, with 56% (n = 287) of the respondents reporting it. Loving it and using it extensively ranked fourth, with 44% (n = 224) reporting it. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents, 20% (n = 104), reported using the internet to obtain news, while 4% (n = 23) reported that using the Internet sometimes had a negative impact on their lives.

Figure 10: Frequently mentioned statements on internet use.
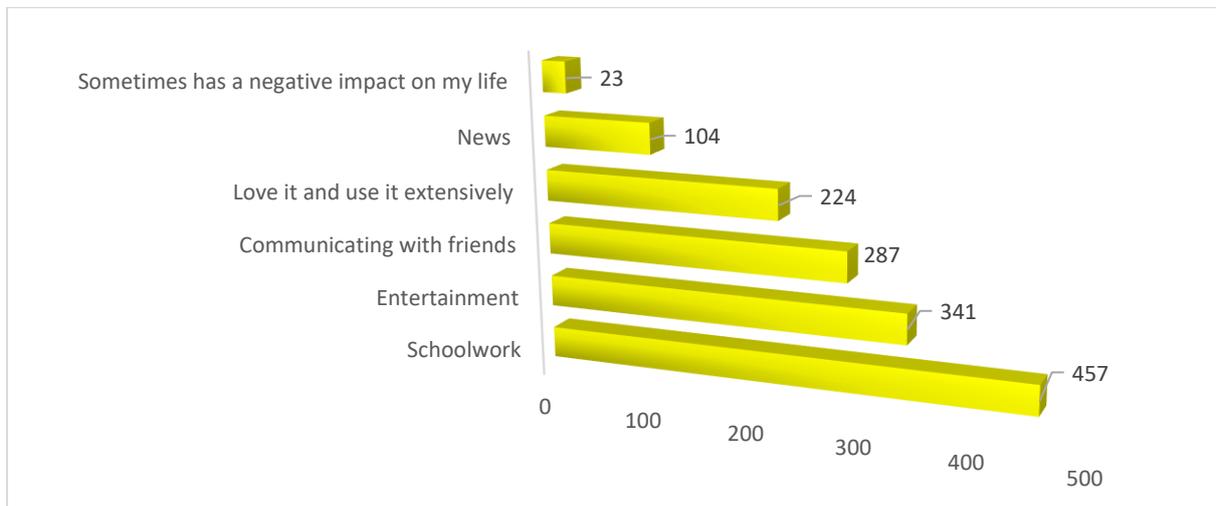
Additionally, the children were provided with several products and services that they regularly used online, in descending order: Google, which was mentioned by 89% of respondents (n = 457); YouTube, which was mentioned by 65% (n = 332) of respondents; TikTok, mentioned by 56% (n = 287), and online games, mentioned by 53% (n = 272) of respondents. WhatsApp was mentioned by 50% (n = 257) of respondents; Facebook by 47% (n = 241) of respondents. Instagram was mentioned by 20% (n = 105) of respondents, Gmail by 19% (n = 96); X by 7% (n = 34) and "Other" by 5% (n = 27). Chat sites were mentioned by 3% (n = 15), iTunes by 2% (n = 11), Yahoo Mail by 2% of respondents (n = 10), Hotmail by 0% (n = 2), and Tinder by 0% (n = 0).

Figure 11: Frequently mentioned and used online products and services

Product/Service	Yes
Tinder	0
Hotmail	2
Yahoo! Mail	10
iTunes	11
Chat sites	15
Other	27
X	34
Gmail	96
Instagram	105
Facebook	241
WhatsApp	257
Online games	272
TikTok	287
YouTube	332
Google	457

3.3. Online safety and abuse-related factors

This section discusses the results of the online safety and abuse-related factors of the survey. It will discuss the perceptions of children concerning their safety online, the experience of harassment online, psychosocial assistance for the harassment, online abuse and bullying, among others.

3.3.1. Feelings of safety online, experience of online harassment, bullying and abuse

When children between the ages of 8 and 17 were asked about their feelings regarding online safety, a significant majority of 85% (n = 438) reported feeling safe online and claimed to have never encountered any threats or nuisances. Among the respondents, the younger participants aged 8 to 12 constituted the largest proportion at 55% (n = 241), while respondents aged between 13 and 17 formed the smallest proportion at 45% (n = 197). Additionally, 9% (n = 44) of respondents mentioned that they feel safe online and can handle any threats and nuisances that may arise. Herein, respondents aged between 13 and 17 constituted the greatest proportion of respondents that fell within this category at 82% (n = 36) while those aged between 8 and 12 constituted the least at 18% (n = 8). Conversely, 3% (n = 13) of the participants aged 8 to 17 mentioned that they sometimes felt safe online, despite being aware of the dangers due to hearing about others' bad experiences. Among this group, the older participants aged 13 to 17 constituted the largest proportion at 92% (n = 12), while the younger participants aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 8% (n = 1).

Below are some of the quotations received from participants pertaining to the stories they had heard about online dangers from other people:

> *"Some of my friends have been hacked online."*
> **Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Lagos, Nigeria)**

> *"There are bad movies and naked films online."*
> **Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Lagos, Nigeria)**

"There are fraudulent people that hack online."
Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Lagos, Nigeria)

Additionally, 2% of the respondents aged between 8 and 17 reported never feeling safe and constantly thinking about their safety whenever they go online. Herein, respondents aged between 13 and 17 constituted the greatest proportion of respondents that reported feeling this way at 64% (n = 7) while respondents aged between 8 and 12 constituted the least at 36% (n = 4). Finally, just below 2% (n = 8) of the respondents aged between 8 and 17 reported sometimes feeling safe online as they had personally experienced bad incidents in the past, which made them more aware of the dangers of online activity. Herein, 100% of respondents who reported feeling this way were aged between 13 and 17.

Figure 12: Children and adolescent feelings of safety online

When questioned about their personal experiences of online harassment, 6% (n = 33) of the participants acknowledged having experienced such harassment while the remaining 94% (n = 481) reported never having encountered any form of online harassment (See Figure 13).

Among individuals who reported encountering online harassment, 36% (n = 12) acknowledged receiving psychosocial support, while 64% (n = 21) disclosed not receiving such assistance. This finding is worrisome as it highlights the vulnerability of children who undergo online harassment to potential psychological trauma (See Figure 14).

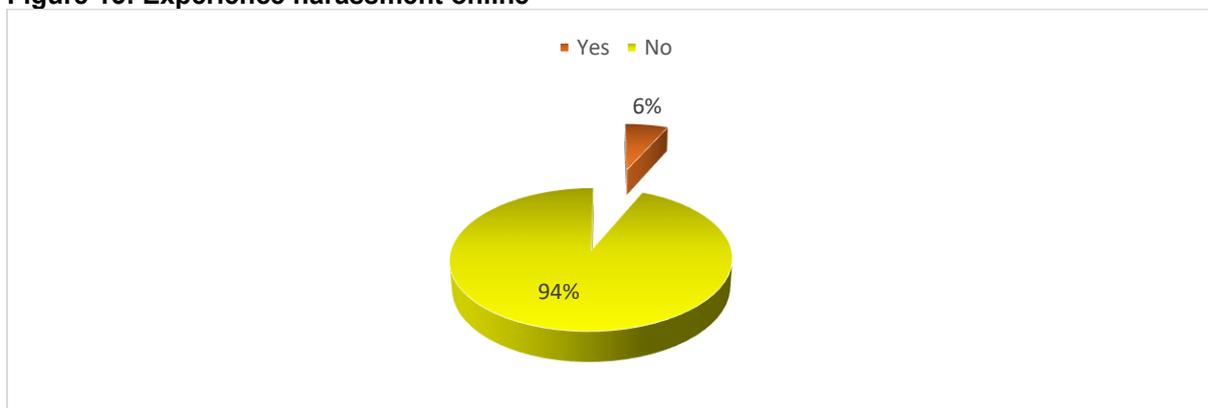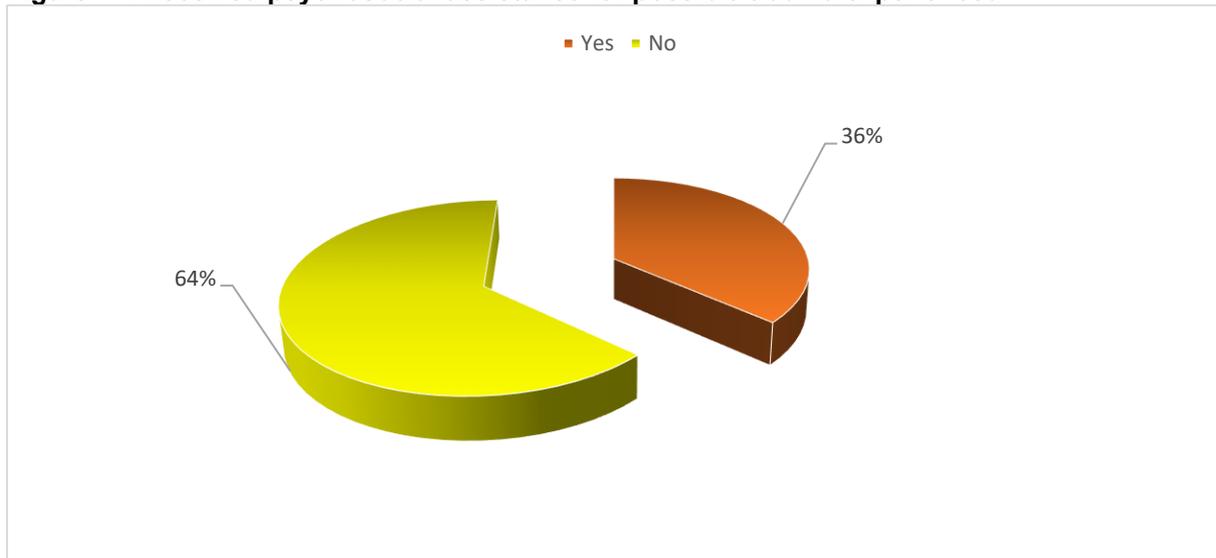**Figure 13: Experience harassment online**

Figure 14: Received psychosocial assistance for possible trauma experienced

Among the participants who received psychosocial assistance, a total of 9 respondents, constituting 75% of the sample, expressed their willingness to disclose the specific types of online harassment they encountered. Conversely, the remaining 25% (n = 3) of respondents did not feel comfortable divulging such information.

Figure 15: Children who were comfortable with sharing their experience of online harassment
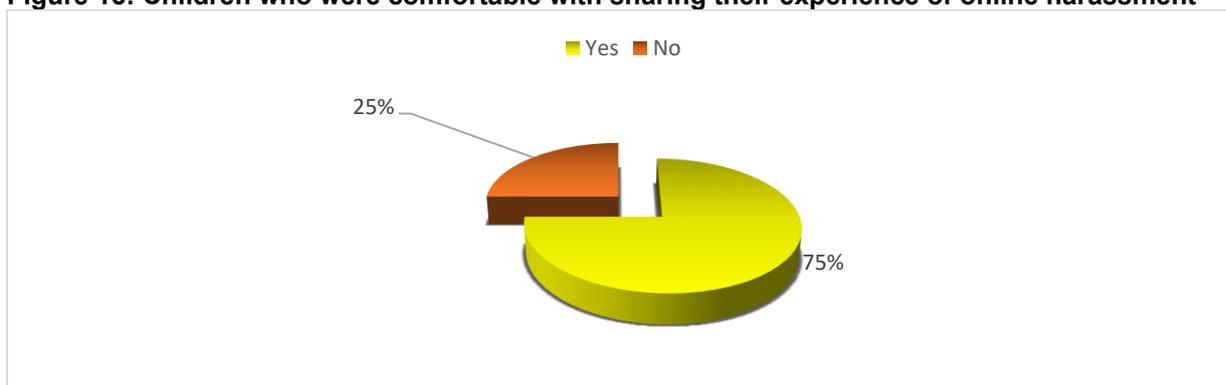
Below are some of the experiences that the children shared:

> *"A guy asked me to send him a picture of my private part."*
> **Male respondent, Victim of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)**

> *"A stranger sent me a naked picture of himself."*
> **Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)**

> *"My friend comes online to insult me."*
> **Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)**

Among those respondents who were harassed online, 33% (n = 3) of them were able to identify the perpetrators while 67% (n = 6) were unable to identify them (See Figure 16).

Figure 16: Experienced harassment
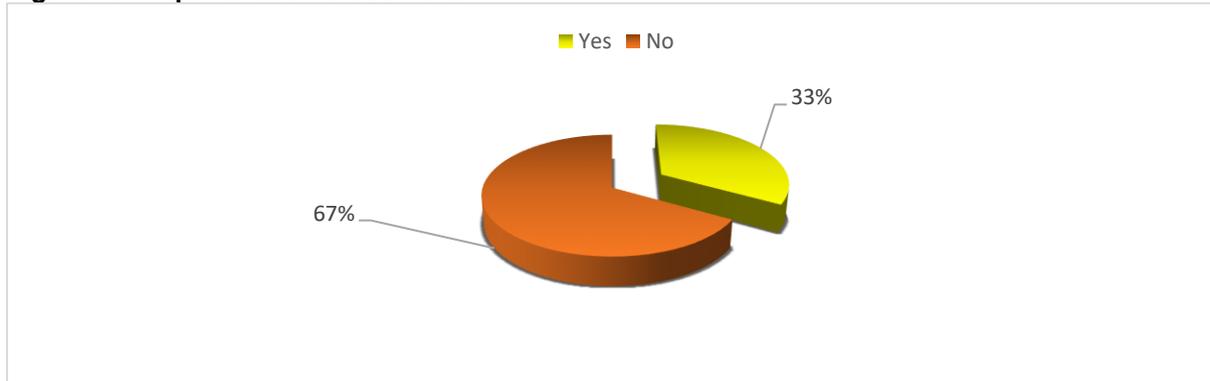
When asked if they had ever been bullied or abused online, 5% (n = 27) reported experiencing these issues while 95% (n = 487) reported never being bullied or abused online.

Figure 17: Ever been bullied or abused online?
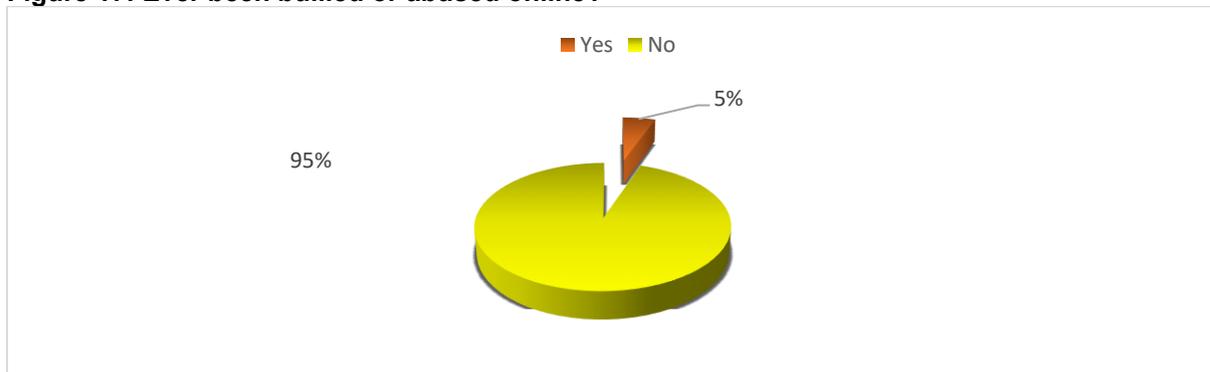
Some of the forms of bullying and abuse that were mentioned by victims are presented below:

> *"I was bullied and harassed by both friends and acquaintances online."*

Female (n = 8) and Male (n = 10) respondents, Victims of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)

> *"Someone inappropriately used my photos."*

Female (n = 2) and Male (n = 1) respondents, Victims of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)

> *"Someone taking unwanted photos of me and circulating them."*

Female (n = 3) and Male (n = 1) respondents, Victims of online harassment (Lagos, Nigeria)

In response to inquiries about seeking assistance from people, if the participants felt threatened, a considerable majority of 60% (n = 307) among the surveyed population of children expressed their inclination to do so. Conversely, a minority of 40% (n = 207) conveyed their disinclination towards seeking support in such circumstances.

Figure 18: Seek assistance if felt threatened online
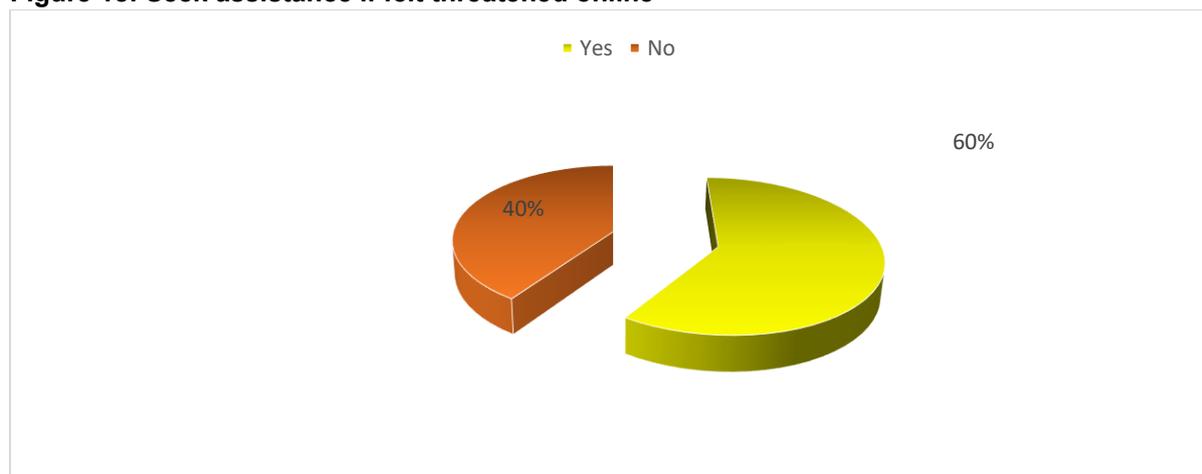
Among these respondents, several individuals or entities were mentioned as platforms they would seek help from if they were to experience online threats. The majority of participants, specifically 86% (n = 265), mentioned parents and guardians as their primary source of support. 7% (n = 20) stated that they would turn to family, while 5% (n = 15) mentioned that they would turn to a friend. A smaller percentage, 1.3% (n =4), indicated that they would reach out to their teachers, 0.6% (n = 2) indicated that they would reach out to the police, 0.3% (n = 1) indicated that they would report them on authority apps.

Table 6: People that children in Lagos would turn to if they felt threatened

People	Frequency	Percentage
My parents/guardians	265	86.32%
Family	20	6.51%
Friend	15	4.89%
Teacher	4	1.30%
Police	2	0.65%
Other	1	0.33%

3.3.2. Risky online behaviour

The children in the study were asked 5 online risk behaviour questions to gauge how susceptible they were to harm caused by their online activities. According to Figure 19, 18% of the children (n = 94) reported adding strangers they met online to their instant messenger contact lists. On the other hand, 82% (n = 420) stated that they had never added a stranger to their instant messenger contact list. When asked about speaking to someone they had met online, 32% (n = 163) of the participants indicated that they had done so while 68% (n = 351) reported that they had never engaged in such conversations.

In terms of meeting someone in person whom they had previously met online, 18% (n = 93) of the respondents mentioned that they had done so while 82% (n = 421) indicated that they had not. Furthermore, when asked about engaging in conversations about sex with someone they had met online, only 7% (n = 37) of the participants admitted to having done so whereas the majority, 93% (n = 477), stated that they had not. Lastly, when it came to sharing personal information such as age, mobile number, and address, 23% (n = 118) of the participants mentioned that they had done so while 77% (n = 396) indicated that they had never shared such information.

Figure 19: Online Risk Behaviour

18%	**32%**	**18%**	**7%**	**23%**
Added a stranger you met online to your instant messenger contact list	Spoken to someone you met online	Met someone in person they had previously met online	Talked (via chat or phone) about sex with someone you had met online	Ever shared personal information such as your age, mobile number, address, etc.
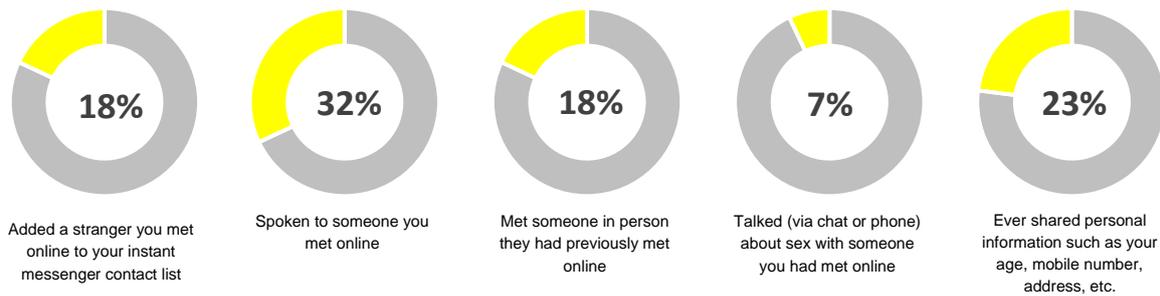
3.4. Online protection measures

This section of the survey sought to gain insight into the perspectives of older participants, aged 13 to 17, regarding online protection measures. The section commenced by inquiring whether these children believed that their internet service provider should offer them the ability to report instances of cyberbullying and any form of abuse. Out of the total number of respondents (n = 260), 89% (n = 231) answered affirmatively, indicating their support for such a feature. Conversely, 11% (n = 29), responded negatively to this question.

Figure 20: Sentiment on internet service providers enabling users to report cyberbullying and abuse of any nature to them
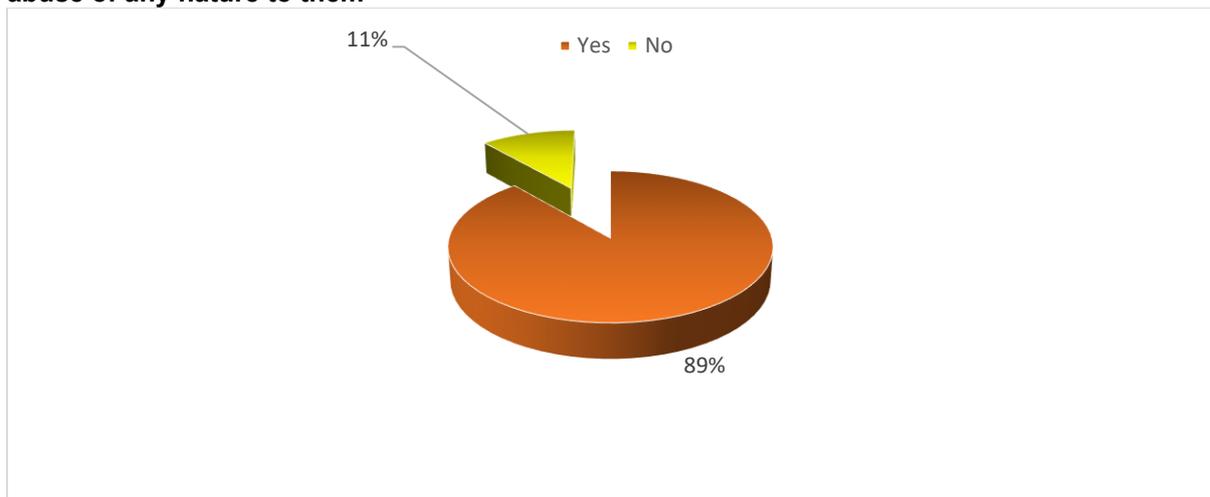
In the surveyed population, it was found that of those who answered affirmatively, a mere 24% (n = 56) possessed knowledge of the online child protection portal available in Nigeria. Conversely, the vast majority, constituting 76% (n = 175) of the respondents, indicated their lack of awareness regarding the existence of such a portal.

Figure 21: Respondents aware of online child protection portal in Nigeria
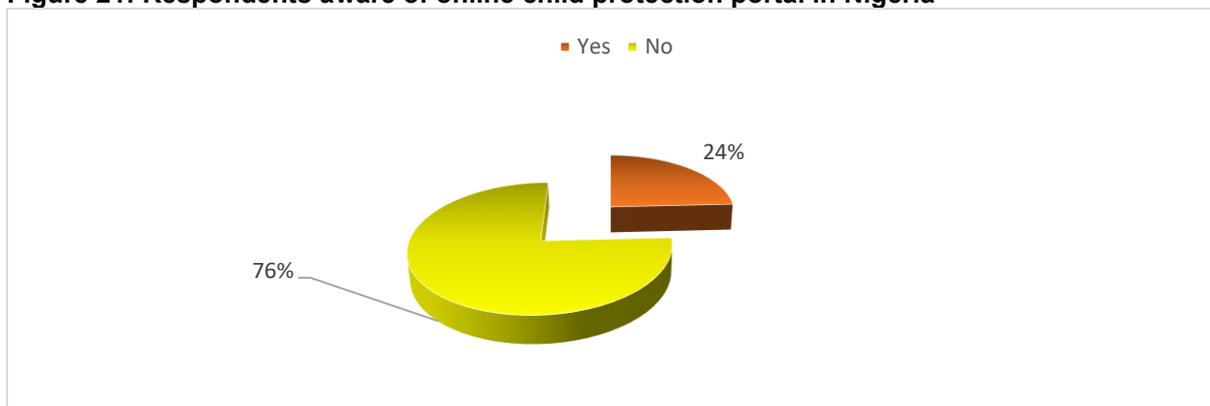
Inquiries were additionally made regarding respondents' perspectives on "report abuse buttons" and, subsequently, their responses were collected. As illustrated by Table 7 below, 46% (n = 119) of respondents reported that abuse buttons were good and played a big part in making them feel safe. Additionally, 27% (n = 69) reported that they did not know and were not aware of problem measures such as abuse buttons. Moreover, 21% (n = 53) reported that report abuse buttons were okay although more protection would make them feel safer. Lastly, 7% of respondents reported that they did not think most of the abuse buttons were effective in protecting young people.

Table 7: Sentiments on report abuse buttons

| Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage
They are good and play a big part in making me feel safer online	119	46%
I don't know - I'm not aware of any protection measures in place	69	27%
They are okay but more protection would make me feel safer	53	20%
I don't think most of them are that effective in protecting young people	19	7%

In addition, participants were asked about their perspectives on the privacy settings of social networking sites and the resulting responses were gathered. Table 8 presents the data, revealing that 47% (n = 122) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the social networking privacy settings, attributing to them a significant role in ensuring their online safety. Meanwhile, 25% (n = 66) indicated that they were unaware of any protective measures in place. Furthermore, 22% (n = 56) deemed the social networking privacy settings satisfactory but believed that additional protection measures would enhance their sense of security. Lastly, 6% (n = 16) expressed scepticism regarding the effectiveness of most social networking privacy settings in safeguarding young individuals (see Table 8 below).

Table 8: Sentiments on Social Networking Privacy Settings

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage
They are good and play a big part in making me feel safer online	122	47%
I don't know - I'm not aware of any protection measures in place	66	25%
They are okay but more protection would make me feel safer	56	22%
I don't think most of them are that effective in protecting young people	16	6%

Moreover, the study participants were interrogated regarding their perspectives on the extent to which the Nigerian government and organisations were attentive to the concerns of young individuals regarding online safety. According to the data displayed in Figure 22, it is evident that 43% (n = 111) of the respondents believed that young people in the country had a strong voice when it came to major issues while 57% (n = 149) expressed the belief that young people did not have sufficient influence on the matters that affect them online.

Figure 22: Perceptions of the government and organisations listening to young people about safety Issues they face online
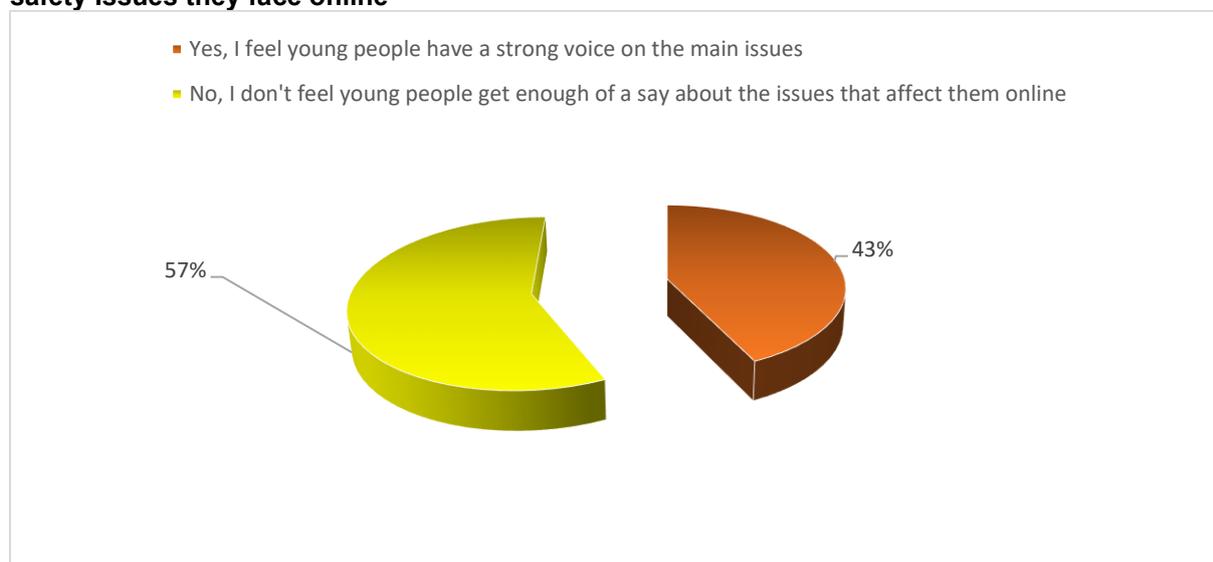
In response to the question of what actions the Nigerian government should take to enhance internet safety; the respondents provided a variety of suggestions. Specifically, 61% of participants (n = 159) recommended that the government develop and enforce laws to prosecute individuals who exploit and abuse children online. Additionally, 61% (n = 130) of respondents suggested restricting access to certain internet sites, controlling and monitoring them to avoid misuse and abuse. Furthermore, 48% (n = 125) of participants believed that the Nigerian government should implement education programmes for children on the consequences of their internet use.

Additionally, 40% (n = 105) of respondents indicated that the government should establish call centres to receive reports in both emergency and non-emergency situations. Lastly, 39% (n = 100) of respondents reported that the government should develop training programmes for parents and guardians, teachers, and school staff on how social networking sites operate to ensure that they keep their children safe.

Table 9: Recommendations on steps that the Nigerian government should take to make the internet safer

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage
Develop and implement laws to sentence those who exploit/ abuse children online	159	61%
Restrict access to certain internet sites and control and monitor them to avoid misuse and abuse	158	61%
Education programmes for children on the consequences of their internet use	125	48%
Establish call centres to receive reports in both emergency and non-emergency situations	105	40%
Training programmes for parents/ guardians, teachers, and school staff on how social networking sites operate	100	39%

4. Drivers of risky online behaviour among children aged 8 to 17 in Lagos, Nigeria

This section seeks to identify the drivers or determinants of risky online behaviour in Nigeria defined as adding unknown individuals to one's instant messenger contact list, participating in conversations with online acquaintances, meeting individuals in person whom one has only encountered online, engaging in discussions about sexual topics with online acquaintances, and disclosing personal information like ages, phone numbers and addresses to online acquaintances. To determine these factors, two regression models were developed: an unadjusted model and an adjusted BLR model. The independent variables were tested against the outcome variable to see if any of them were associated with risky online behaviour. The independent variables included parental and guardian rules on internet use, gender, age group, current level of education, frequency of online usage, daily duration of online activities, frequency of speaking with parents and guardians about Internet safety, willingness to speak with parents and guardians about internet safety more, the experience of online harassment, the experience of online bullying and abuse, and inclination to seek support when facing online threats.

Table 10: Bivariate and multivariate analysis

Risky online behaviour	Model 1			Model 2		
	UOR	P-Value	95% confidence interval	AOR	P-Value	95% confidence interval
Independent variables						
Parental or guardian rules on Internet use						
Yes (R.C)						
No	9.77	0.00**	3.36 - 28.41	9.13	0.01**	1.91 - 43.58
Gender						
Male (R.C)						
Female	6.79	0.01**	1.51 - 30.40	21.42	0.01**	2.22 - 207.05
Age						
8 - 17 years	1.94	0.00**	1.39 - 2.70	1.36	0.23	0.83 - 2.23
Current level of learning						
Primary and secondary (R.C)						
College and university	7.02	0.02**	1.40 - 35.28	0.35	0.37	0.03 - 3.48
Frequency of online usage						
Daily (R.C)						
Weekly or more	0.09	0.02**	0.01 - 0.71	0.07	0.10	0.00 - 1.63
Daily duration of online activities						
Time spent online	2.25	0.01**	1.26 - 4.01	3.29	0.07	0.91 - 11.94
Frequency of speaking with parents and guardians about internet safety						
We talk openly and regularly about what I do online (R.C)						
We sometimes talk about what I do online	1.81	0.38	0.48 - 6.86	1.23	0.81	0.23 - 6.44
We rarely talk about what I do online	3.6	0.08	0.87 - 14.82	0.59	0.62	0.07 - 4.77
We never talk about what I do online	2.63	0.27	0.47 - 14.86	1.90	0.63	0.14 - 25.04
Willing to speak with parents and guardians about internet safety more						
Yes (R.C)						
No	1.63	0.46	0.45 - 5.94	1.09	0.93	1.16 - 7.48
Experience with online harassment						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.05	0.00**	0.02 - 0.16	0.19	0.05	0.04 - 0.98
Experience of online bullying and abuse						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.04	0.00***	0.01 - 0.12	0.09	0.01**	0.01 - 0.60

Inclination to seek support when facing online threats.						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.54	0.29	0.17 - 1.71	2.76	0.25	0.49 - 15.60

UOR: Unadjusted odds ratio and **AOR:** adjusted odds ratio

***Significance level p<0.05

The results of the study's examination of the relationship between independent variables and risky online behaviour are presented in Table 10. Only statistically significant associations with risky online behaviour are interpreted. In terms of parental or guardian rules on internet use, the study found that children whose parents or guardians did not have any rules for internet use in place were almost 10 more times likely to engage in risky online behaviour in both Models 1 (UOR: 9.77; p<0.05; CI: 3.36-28.41) and Model 2 (AOR: 9.13; p<0.05; CI: 1.91-43.58).

By gender, Model 1 found that females were 6.79 more times likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to males (UOR: 6.79; p<0.05; CI: 1.51-30.40) while Model 2 found females were 21 times more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to males (AOR: 21.42; p<0.05; CI: 1.51-30.40). This necessitates the need for interventions designed to prevent female children from engaging in risky online behaviour. In terms of age, Model 1 found that the entire cohort aged 8 – 17 was 1.94 times more likely to engage in risky online behaviour (UOR: 1,94; p<0.05; CI: 1.39-2.70).

In terms of the current level of learning, Model 1 of the study found that older children in college and university were 7 times more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to children in primary and secondary or high school (UOR: 7.02; p<0.05; CI: 1.40-35.28). In terms of frequency of online usage, the study found that children who reported being online weekly or more frequently were 0.09 times less likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to children who reported being online daily. Additionally, time spent online was found to increase the likelihood of engaging in risky online behaviour by 2.25 times in Model 1 (UOR: 2.25; p<0.05; CI: 1.26-4.01).

In terms of experience of online harassment, the study found that children who reported not experiencing online harassment were 0.05 times less likely to engage in risky online behaviour in Model 1 (UOR: 0.05; p<0.05; CI: 0.02-0.16). Lastly, the study found that children who reported experiencing online bullying and abuse were 0.05 times less likely to engage in risky online behaviour in Model 1 (UOR: 0.04; p<0.05; CI: 0.01-0.12) and 0.09 times less likely to engage in risky online behaviour in Model 2 (AOR: 0.09; p<0.05; CI: 0.01-0.60).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This section seeks to provide recommendations to improve internet safety in Nigeria using the data and insights collected from the Lagos online child safety study. The majority of recommendations provided in this section were informed by inferential statistics. These statistics gauged associations between selected independent variables and risky online behaviour by analysing the univariate responses provided in the survey. Additionally, they were selected due to their theoretical propensity to inform risky online behaviour. Moreover, the independent variables were strategically selected to keep the sample size for inferential statistics (bivariate and multivariate) as robust as possible as some questions had routing instructions. After, dropping respondents who reported not being currently enrolled in school, the effective sample for analysis was 481 children . Upon providing recommendations, the study report will conclude.

5.1.   Recommendations

The findings underscore the importance of a multi-faceted approach that integrates technological innovation with educational and support initiatives.

In-depth enhancement of parental control features

MTN has the potential to pioneer advancements in parental control technology. The development of a robust suite of parental control tools can be a cornerstone of MTN's initiative. This toolkit should be thoughtfully designed to be intuitive, allowing for seamless navigation and operation by non-technical users. Features could include customizable content blocking, dynamic internet time scheduling, and real-time alerts for parents on their children's browsing activities. To ensure that these tools are effectively employed, MTN should roll out comprehensive instructional campaigns. These could take the form of interactive webinars, detailed guides, and a dedicated support line for parents and guardians, helping them to stay abreast of digital parenting best practices and the latest online risks.

The toolkit would have features such as:

i.   Website filtering to block inappropriate content,
ii.   Time controls to limit how long children can be online,
iii.   Activity tracking to review children's browsing history,
iv.   App management to control which apps can be downloaded and used,
v.   Location tracking to monitor a child's physical location, if needed,
vi.   Social media monitoring to oversee interactions on social platforms.

Tailored initiatives for female online safety

Given the specific vulnerabilities identified among female internet users, MTN should establish specialised programmes aimed at fostering a safer online environment for girls and young women. Such initiatives could include digital literacy workshops and online safety ambassador programmes, where girls are mentored by professionals who have forged careers in the tech industry. MTN could also spearhead efforts to celebrate and publicise the achievements of women in technology, thereby providing young girls with role models and a vision of what is possible. Collaborative efforts with educational institutions and gender-focused organisations will be pivotal in designing these programmes to address the particular challenges that young women face in the digital realm.

Comprehensive age-appropriate content development

Recognising the diverse needs of the 8 to 17-year-old demographic, MTN should invest in the creation of a broad spectrum of educational materials. These materials should not only cover a range of topics pertinent to online safety but also cater to the developmental stages within this age group. Interactive elements such as gamified learning experiences, engaging e-books and educational apps can help to encapsulate complex topics like privacy settings, cyberbullying awareness, and the importance of digital footprints. By partnering with schools and educational authorities, MTN can aid in embedding these resources into existing educational frameworks, thereby ensuring that online safety becomes an integral part of the learning experience from a young age.

Strategic outreach and resource provision in higher education

As older children in tertiary education settings are particularly susceptible to online risks, MTN's strategy should include targeted outreach to colleges and universities. This could be in the form of collaborative

events such as digital safety weeks, guest lectures, and panel discussions led by cyber-safety experts. Furthermore, MTN could offer a bespoke set of digital tools and resources, including apps and online portals that provide the latest updates on cyber threats and practical advice on digital self-care, tailored to resonate with young adults who are navigating the complexities of an increasingly online life.

Advocacy for measured internet use
With the study highlighting the correlation between increased online time and risky behaviour, MTN can play a significant role in promoting balanced internet use. To facilitate this, MTN could innovate with digital solutions such as an app designed to monitor online activity with built-in prompts reminding users to take breaks. Engaging in public campaigns that highlight the benefits of a balanced digital diet and the joy of offline pursuits can also be instrumental in shifting user behaviours towards more sustainable and mindful internet consumption patterns.

Holistic support systems for online harassment victims
Acknowledging the impact of online harassment, MTN should establish a robust support framework for young individuals who have been affected. This framework should include easy-to-navigate reporting procedures, access to professional counselling and partnerships with legal experts to guide victims through the process of seeking justice when required. Educational resources that empower young users to recognise early signs of harassment and respond appropriately are also crucial as they equip children with the knowledge to defend themselves in the digital space.

Extensive awareness campaigns on the ramifications of online conduct
Launching awareness campaigns that focus on the consequences of online behaviour is a pivotal step in cultivating a safer digital environment for children. These campaigns should be designed to convey the serious implications that risky online activities can have on an individual's emotional, legal, and social wellbeing. By utilising a range of media formats, including compelling short films, informative infographics, and interactive websites, the campaigns can tell real-life stories of individuals who have been impacted by unsafe online practices.

The goal would be to create relatable and educational content that resonates with young audiences, driving home the message that their actions online carry weight and can have significant repercussions. These narratives will not only serve as cautionary tales but will also provide practical advice on how to avoid such situations and how to act responsibly on the internet. Moreover, the campaigns should aim to foster a culture of empathy and respect within the online community. Encouraging users to treat others with kindness and consideration can help reduce the incidence of cyberbullying and harassment. The promotion of positive behaviour online is just as critical as a warning about the negative, and these campaigns should balance both approaches.

MTN can collaborate with educators, parents, and even peers to amplify the reach of these awareness campaigns. Workshops, school programmes and social media initiatives can all serve as platforms to disseminate this crucial information. By educating children about the potential negative outcomes of their online behaviour and empowering them to make better choices, MTN can contribute to a supportive and secure online community for all its users.

Implementing such comprehensive awareness campaigns will demonstrate MTN's commitment to the wellbeing of its younger users and establish the company as a leader in promoting responsible digital citizenship. The effectiveness of these efforts will undoubtedly be enhanced through the active involvement of all stakeholders, ensuring a united front in the pursuit of a safer online experience for children .

Government collaboration
Collaborating with the government is an essential aspect of enhancing online child safety. It entails establishing a cooperative relationship between MTN and governmental bodies to jointly tackle the challenges posed by the digital environment to children . Through this collaboration, MTN can play a key role in influencing policy development, contributing to legal frameworks, and participating in national initiatives aimed at protecting young internet users.

Government collaboration could involve several key activities:

- **Policy advocacy:** MTN could actively engage with policymakers to advocate the development of robust laws that specifically address the online exploitation and abuse of children. This would include discussing potential regulations, penalties, and enforcement strategies that could deter perpetrators and provide justice for victims.

- **Legislative support:** MTN could provide expertise and insights to assist the government in drafting legislation that reflects the latest technological advancements and the evolving nature of online threats. This support might include research, data analysis and recommendations based on MTN's understanding of digital trends and user behaviour.

- **Educational initiatives:** Working with the government, MTN could help design and implement national educational programmes that teach children about the consequences of their internet use. These programmes would aim to foster digital literacy and ensure children are aware of the potential risks they face online and how to navigate them safely.

- **Controlled access and monitoring:** MTN could support government efforts to restrict access to harmful online content and monitor websites for illegal activities. This could involve developing technical solutions that help filter out inappropriate content and providing the government with data on online behaviours that could inform their surveillance and monitoring strategies.

- **Public-private partnerships:** MTN could enter partnerships with the government to launch joint initiatives that promote online safety. These could include public awareness campaigns, support services for victims of online crimes, and collaborative efforts to improve the technological infrastructure that underpins internet safety measures.

- **Resource allocation:** The company could work with the government to ensure adequate resources are allocated to effectively enforce online safety laws. This might include funding for law enforcement agencies, support for victim assistance programmes, and investment in technologies that aid the detection and prevention of online risks.

By collaborating with the government, MTN can help create a cohesive and comprehensive approach to child online safety. Such a partnership would be about not only about compliance with regulations but also about active participation in shaping a safer online world for children. Through government collaboration, MTN can demonstrate its commitment to social responsibility and its dedication to protecting the rights and wellbeing of young internet users.

Training programmes for adults: Expanding on the recommendation for training programmes aimed at adults, MTN can initiate comprehensive educational interventions designed to empower parents, guardians, teachers, and school staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the online landscape and effectively safeguard children's digital experiences. The scope of the training will include the following:

- **Digital literacy curriculum:** Develop a curriculum that covers essential aspects of digital literacy, including understanding online privacy, recognising potential online threats and learning about the functionality and risks of various social networking platforms.

- **Hands-on workshops:** Organise workshops that provide practical, hands-on experience with setting up parental controls, using monitoring software, and engaging with children about their online activities in a constructive manner.

- **Resource distribution:** Compile and distribute comprehensive guides and resource materials that adults can refer to for help or clarification on issues related to children's online safety.

- **Online safety best practices:** Teach adults about best practices for online safety such as how to check privacy settings, how to report inappropriate content, and how to teach children to critically assess the information they encounter online.

- **Collaborative learning**: Encourage group learning and discussion forums in which parents and educators can share experiences, strategies, and challenges they face in monitoring and guiding children's internet use.

- **Regular updates:** As technology and online trends evolve rapidly, provide regular updates and continuous learning opportunities to ensure that adults stay informed about the latest developments and safety measures.

- **Counselling skills:** Offer training on basic counselling skills to help adults support children who may have encountered distressing situations online, such as cyberbullying or exposure to inappropriate content.

- **Legal awareness:** Educate adults on the legal aspects of online activities, including what constitutes cyberbullying, the ramifications of sharing personal information and how to navigate the legal system when an incident occurs.

- **Role-playing and scenario-based training:** Use role-playing exercises and scenario-based training to help adults understand how to react in various situations, fostering empathy and better preparation for real-life occurrences.

- **Building trust:** Guide how to build trust and open lines of communication with children so that they feel comfortable discussing their online experiences and any issues that arise.

By offering such training programmes for adults, MTN can aid in creating a safer online environment for children. The emphasis on adult education is pivotal, as they are often the first line of defence against online risks that children may not be equipped to handle on their own. The success of these programs can lead to a more informed and proactive community that prioritises the digital wellbeing of young internet users.

Strengthen the voice of youth: Strengthening the voice of youth in matters of online safety is a crucial component in creating an internet that is responsive to the needs and concerns of younger users. To expand on this point, MTN and other stakeholders can undertake a series of initiatives aimed at amplifying the perspectives and involvement of children in the digital realm.

- **Empowerment through representation:** Establish forums and advisory boards that include young people, giving them a platform to voice their opinions on online safety issues directly to MTN and other stakeholders. Additionally, relevant stakeholders should include youth representatives in decision-making processes related to digital policy and product development, ensuring their experiences and ideas are considered.
- **Youth-led campaigns:** Support and facilitate campaigns that are led by youth for youth, where children can create content and messaging that resonate with their peers. Additionally, MTN should encourage initiatives that allow young people to educate each other on safe online practices, cyberbullying prevention, and the importance of digital citizenship.
- **Educational programmes and school partnerships:** Collaborate with schools to integrate online safety education into the curriculum, providing students with the knowledge they need to navigate the internet safely. Additionally, programmes that teach critical thinking and media literacy, equipping young people with the skills to analyse and question the information they encounter online, should be developed.
- **Mentorship and leadership development:** Create mentorship programmes where experienced professionals in technology, education, and child welfare mentor young individuals, helping them to become leaders in online safety within their communities. MTN should offer leadership training for youths that focuses on advocacy, public speaking, and organising community initiatives.
- **Technology development participation:** Invite young users to participate in the development and testing of new technologies, apps and features designed to enhance online safety. Additionally, youth should be encouraged to provide input on the user-friendliness and effectiveness of parental control tools and safety features.
- **Public dialogue and media engagement:** Promote public dialogue that includes the voices of youth such as panel discussions, conferences, and media interviews on topics related to online

safety. Additionally, media outlets should be encouraged to feature stories and perspectives from young people, raising awareness of their experiences and advocating for a safer online environment.

By strengthening the voice of youth in these ways, MTN can ensure that their strategies for online safety are informed by those who are most affected by digital policies and practices. Engaging with young people not only empowers them but also leads to more effective and sustainable solutions for creating a safer online world.

5.2. Conclusions

The "Let Children Be Children" report provides critical insights into the online behaviours and risks faced by children in Lagos, Nigeria. The comprehensive study illuminates the pressing need for concerted efforts to bolster online safety measures and protect the younger demographic from the myriad risks that accompany internet use.

The study's findings highlight the importance of parental supervision and the establishment of internet-use rules in mitigating risky online behaviour. It also brings to the fore the unique vulnerabilities faced by female internet users and emphasises the necessity for age-appropriate educational content and resources. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for a supportive environment for victims of online harassment and the promotion of responsible internet use.

The recommendations section of the report outlines actionable strategies for MTN to address these concerns, advocating an integrated approach that combines technological advancements with educational initiatives and support systems. By enhancing parental control features, developing gender-specific programmes, creating age-appropriate educational materials, providing resources for higher education institutions and campaigning for moderate internet usage, MTN can make significant strides in safeguarding the digital wellbeing of children .

The study also calls for the development of comprehensive support structures for victims of online harassment and the implementation of extensive awareness campaigns to highlight the consequences of risky online behaviour. These measures can contribute significantly towards fostering a culture of empathy, respect and responsibility online, creating a safer and more supportive digital community.

By adopting these recommendations, MTN can demonstrate a strong commitment to the welfare of its younger users, positioning itself as a socially responsible entity within the digital ecosystem. The success of MTN's efforts will be amplified through collaboration with various stakeholders, including families, educators, and the children themselves, ensuring a collective commitment to promoting safer online practices.

The report serves as a call to action for MTN and other stakeholders to prioritise child online safety and work towards a future in which the internet is a secure and empowering space for all users, especially the most vulnerable. Through diligent application of the study's recommendations, the goal of enhancing online child safety in Nigeria can be realised, allowing children to explore, learn and connect in a protected digital environment.

6. REFERENCES

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Appendix A: Reasons for wanting or not wanting to talk about Internet safety more with parents and guardians

Verbatim	Frequency
For guidance / I want to avoid making mistakes	97
For my protection / safety from online dangers	88
I just want to talk to them / I love to talk to them / it is important to talk to them	33
For my parents to be aware of what I do online	32
Using internet for schoolwork/ use internet for work	29
None / Nothing / No comment	25
I am a big now / I can control my internet use / I can protect myself online	23
To learn more about the internet / they have more knowledge/experience than me	22
To avoid seeing things that are not suitable for my age/things I am not supposed to watch / to avoid seeing bad things	22
Scams / awareness of scams/ fraudsters / corruption	11
There is a lot to be learnt on the internet	10
My parents should trust me	10
I trust myself	9
Limited access on the internet / restriction/legal restrictions/activities	9
They know what is best/better for me	8
Parents are less educated and do not know the internet	8
How to take care of myself online	8
Freedom of use / they do not mind my internet use / my parents trust me	7
Cyberbullying	5
Privacy / they do not need to know what I do online/ I will be monitored	4
We do not talk about it / I would not like to talk to them / talking to them is not necessary	4
How to use the internet wisely/ teach me about the correct use of social networking	4
I have to follow their rules	4
Playing games freely	3
Creates awareness of doing things online or offline	3
Don't Know	3
I trust my parents/guardian	2
Not enough time	2
Because of what we are exposed to online	2
Internet can be good or bad / awareness of what is good or bad on the internet	2
Internet can be used for bad things / a lot of bad things on the internet	2
To inform them of problems/unexpected things happening online	2
Fake Links/viruses / so I don't click on the wrong links	2
Not applicable	2
They might refuse me to go online/stop me from using the phone	1
I want to explore a bit	1
Because I am scared	1
What I want and what my parents want is different	1
Only my parents have a right to talk to me/to tell me what they want	1
You can see new things on the internet	1
To learn more about the phone	1
Safety of YouTube/Facebook/Instagram	1

How to access videos and cartoons online/on Instagram	1
How much time should be spent online / not to spend so much time online// my parents don't allow me much time online	1
Because of the situation in the country	1
They can help with putting on blue light filters	1
To ensure I have a healthy lifestyle	1
There are rules and regulations on the internet	1
So, I can have my own personal phone	1
We talk about not giving out information to anyone online	1
They can tell me about illegal sites	1
Total	**514**