Help Children Be Children

Child online safety
Lusaka, Zambia report

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The availability of internet access has been steadily increasing among young people in Africa, leading to various positive outcomes such as job creation and poverty reduction. This is crucial to address the needs of Africa's rapidly growing population. However, as countries in Africa transition from low to high connectivity, there is a need to actively address potential risks and harm that may arise from increased online exposure. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of high-quality, comprehensive data and research to guide legislation, policies, and practices aimed at safeguarding and supporting children in the digital realm. The committee emphasises the need for research involving children themselves (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, 2021).

The African Union has identified a significant dearth of empirical research, information, and data on this subject across most African countries. This lack of evidence makes it challenging to develop informed strategies and responses. Thus, while internet usage among young people in Africa is on the rise, there is a critical need for comprehensive research and data to inform efforts to protect and support children in the digital world. This gap in empirical research and information poses a significant challenge in addressing the potential risks associated with increased online connectivity. To bridge this gap, MTN conducted an online child safety survey in Lusaka, Zambia. The survey aimed to understand the level of risk associated with internet use among children aged between 8 and 17. Lusaka was chosen as the study location due to its significant number of children and adolescents with access to the internet and mobile devices, which is facilitated by the city's urbane nature.

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 8 and 17 in Lusaka, Zambia, utilise the internet. The primary goal was to enhance online child safety within the country. Lusaka was chosen as the research site due to its urban nature and the expectation of a substantial number of children there having internet access and mobile devices. 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/or 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.

1.2.3. Ethical considerations

Considering that the participants of the study were minors needing protection from any potential harm, an application for ethical clearance was submitted to the National Health Research Authority in Lusaka, Zambia. 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 **NHREB002/23/08/2023**.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a cross-sectional survey methodology to gather information. A purposive sampling approach was utilised to select 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 Zambia (Lusaka).	Not a resident of Zambia (Lusaka).
Children aged 8 - 17 years old.	Children below the age of 8 years and adults aged 18 years and older.
Parent/guardian willing to provide informed consent.	Parent or guardian not willing to provide consent.
The child willing to provide informed assent.	The child not willing to provide informed assent.

As illustrated by Table 2 below, a total of 523 children completed interviews that were approximately 20 minutes long.

Table 2: Sample size and length of interview

Sample Size	Length of Interview
523	20 minutes

2.1. Study variables

2.1.1. Outcome / dependent variable

The study aimed to examine the outcome variable of risky online behaviour among children aged 8-17. This variable was determined based on the responses to five specific questions. The first question sought to ascertain whether the children had added strangers to their instant messenger contact lists and was asked 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) v ariable		
Risky online behaviour	Children who have engaged in one or more of the following: i. Added strangers to their instant messenger contact lists. ii. Engaged in conversations with online acquaintances. iii. Met someone in person who they had previously met online. iv. Engaged in conversation about sex with online acquaintances. v. Shared personal information such as ages, mobile numbers and addresses with online acquaintances.	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 - 12 years
			2. 13 - 17 years
Gender	What is your gender?	The sex of study participants.	1. Male
			2. Female
	What school level are you in?		1. Pre-school and primary school

Level of education (currently learning)		The current education level that study participants are pursuing.	2. Secondary, high school and 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?	The duration of internet use per day by children.	1. Less than 1 hour and does not have regular internet access
			2. 1 - 5 hours
			3. More than 5 hours
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 from the survey 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

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

3. Findings

3.1. Demographic profiles of respondents

The MTN online child safety (Let Children be Children) survey conducted interviews with a total of 523 children. The gender distribution of the participants showed that females accounted for 51% (n = 267) of the sample while males constituted 49% (n = 256). When considering age, the highest proportion of participants, 51% (n = 267), fell within the 13 –17 years age range, while the lowest proportion, 49% (n = 256), belonged to the 8-12 age range. All the respondents were from urban areas in Lusaka. Regarding educational status, 94% (n = 494) of the participants reported being currently enrolled in school, while 6% (n = 29) reported not being enrolled. Among those enrolled, the majority, 69% (n = 341), attended primary school, followed by 29% (n = 149) in secondary school/high school, 1% (n = 7) in preschool, and the smallest proportion, 0% (n = 1), registered in college. In terms of access to electricity, 98% (n = 511) of the respondents reported having access to electricity at home, while 2% (n = 12) reported not having access at home.

Table 4: Demographics

Demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	256	49%
Female	267	51%
	523	100%
Age group		
8 - 12 years	256	49%
13 - 17 years	267	51%
	523	100%
Area of residence		
Urban	523	100%
In school		
Yes	494	94%
No	29	6%
	523	100%
Current level of schooling		
Pre-school	7	1%
Primary school	341	69%
Secondary school/high school	145	29%
College	1	0%
	494	100%
Access to electricity at home		
Yes	511	98%
No	12	2%
	523	100%

3.2. Online activity

This section presents the results of the online activity segments of the survey. When asked about where they accessed the internet, 51% (n = 252) of respondents who were female reported accessing the internet at home while 49% (n = 239) of respondents who were male also reported accessing the internet from home. Fifty four percent (n = 20) of respondents who were male reported accessing the internet from their friends' houses while 46% (n = 17) of respondents who were female reported accessing the internet from their friends' houses.

Fifty five percent (n = 12) of female respondents reported accessing the internet at school while 45% (n = 10) of male respondents reported accessing the internet at the same location. In terms of accessing the internet at an internet café, 67% (n = 4) of respondents who were female reported accessing the internet at internet cafés while 33% (n = 2) of respondents who were male reported accessing the internet at the same location. In terms of accessing the internet at the community centre, 1% (n = 4) reported accessing the internet from the same location while only 1 (0%) respondent who was male reported accessing the internet from the library.

**Figure 1: Location of internet access by gender**
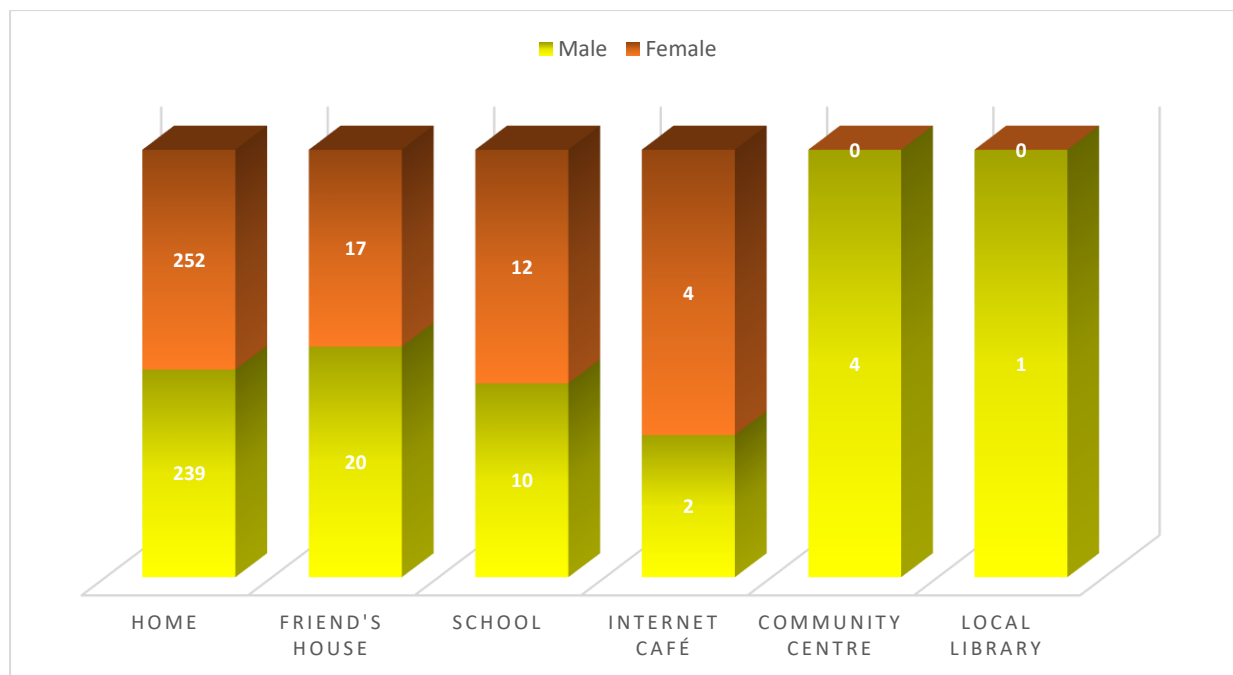
3.2.1. Location, source, and device of internet use, frequency of online activities, and time spent online by age

In total, 523 participants responded to the question pertaining to location of internet use. Specifically, older children between the ages of 13 and 17 constituted the highest proportion, with 47% (n = 248) using the internet from home. On the other hand, younger children aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion in this location category, with only 46% (n = 243) accessing the internet from home. Participants who reported using the internet from their friends' houses made up the second highest

proportion, accounting for 7% (n = 37) of respondents. Among this group, older children aged 13 to 17 constituted 4% (n = 21) while younger children aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 3% (n = 16). Additionally, participants who reported accessing the internet at school constituted the third highest proportion, making up 4% (n = 22) of the total sample. Within this category, older children aged 13 to 17 accounted for 3% (n = 15) of the sample, while younger children aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 1% (n = 7). A total of 6 participants reported using internet cafes, with younger children aged 8 to 12 and older children aged 13 to 17 each accounting for 1% of the total sample. In addition, 4 participants reported making use of community centres, accounting for 1% of the total sample. Finally, 1 participant reported making use of the local library to access the internet.

Figure 2: Internet access locations by age
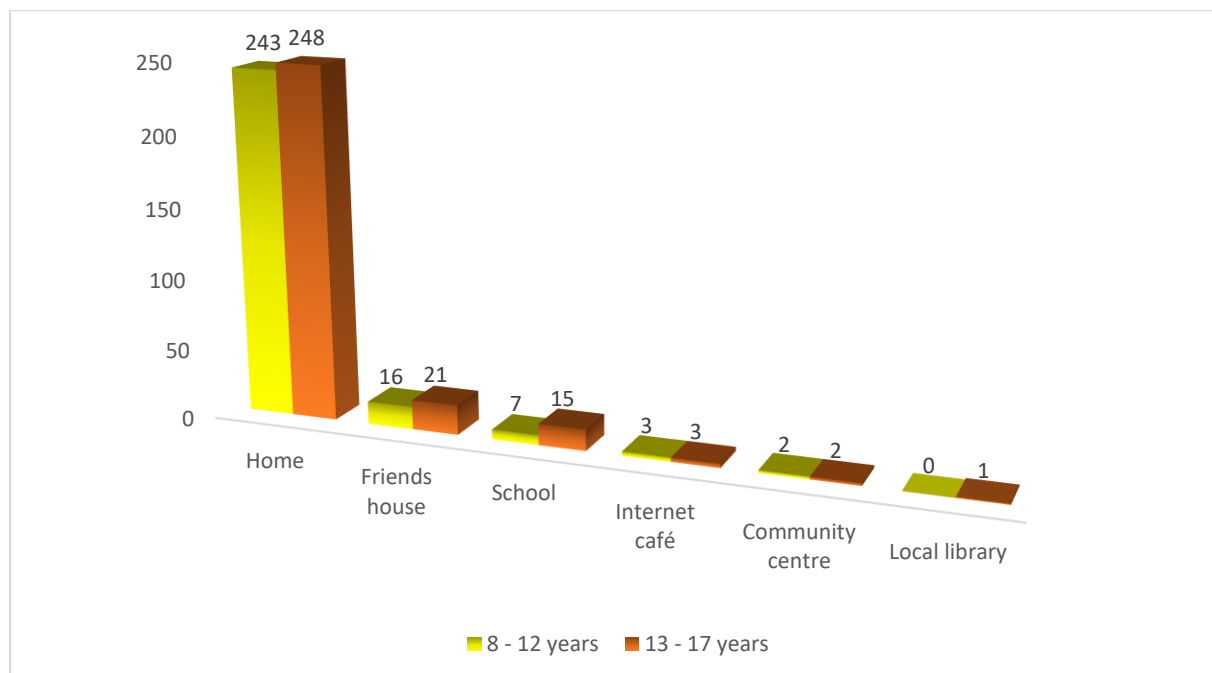
In total, 523 participants responded to a question on the source of internet access. Among the participants, 94% (n = 491) reported using mobile data bundles to access the internet. Among the respondents, the highest proportion of users of mobile data bundles were older children between the ages of 13 and 17, accounting for 48% (n = 251). On the other hand, younger children between the ages of 8 and 12 constituted the lowest proportion at 46%. The second most commonly mentioned source of internet connectivity was home Wi-Fi, which accounted for 7% (n = 34) of the total sample. Among respondents who selected home Wi-Fi as their source of internet connectivity, children between the ages of 8 and 12 constituted the largest proportion at 4% (n = 20), while older children aged between 13 and 17 accounted for 3% (n = 14). In contrast, 3% (n = 18) of participants reported using mobile Wi-Fi (Mi-Fi) as a source of access to the internet. Among those who selected mobile Wi-Fi, older children aged 13 - 17 accounted for 3% of the total sample while younger children aged 8 to 12 accounted for 1% (n = 4) of the total sample. The least mentioned source of internet access was public free Wi-Fi, which accounted for 3% (n = 16) of the total sample. Among the participants who used public free Wi-

Fi, children between 8 and 12 constituted the highest proportion at 2% (n = 10) while older children aged between 13 and 17 accounted for 1% (n = 6) of the total sample.

Figure 3: Source of internet access
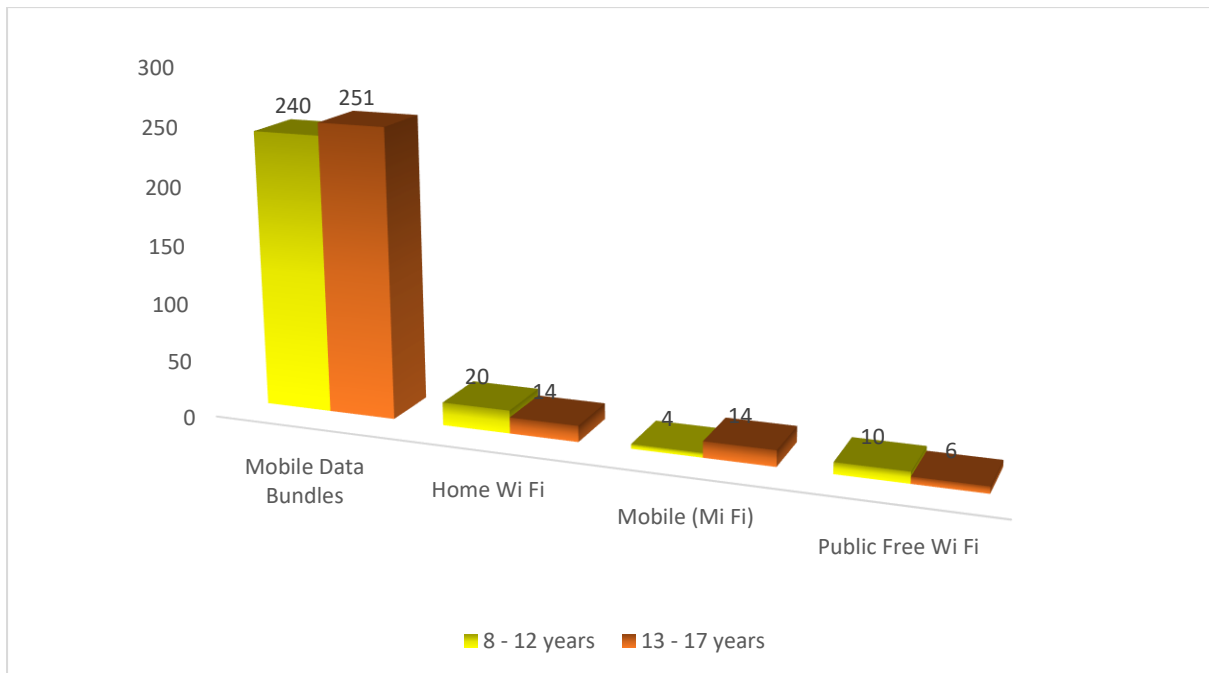
In total, 523 participants responded to a question on the devices that they use to access the internet. Participants were able to select multiple devices. The most commonly mentioned device for internet connectivity was parents' phone which ranked highest among children aged between 8-12 at 36% (n = 189), while the remaining 115 (22%) were older children aged 13 - 17. This indicates that younger children (8-12 years) were the majority in using their parents' phones for internet access as they are not typically old enough to own their own phones. On the other hand, the older group (13-17 years) had the lowest proportion in this category, as most of them owned their own phones.

The second most frequently mentioned device for internet connectivity was the participants' own phones, with a total of 139 responses. Among these responses, 111 (22%) were reported by participants aged between 13 and 17, which aligns with the aforementioned hypothesis. In contrast, only 28 (5%) responses came from children aged between 8 and 12 years in this category. The third most mentioned device for internet connectivity used by children was a relative's phone, with a total of 107 responses. Among these responses, 55 (11%) were from younger children aged between 8 and 12, constituting the greatest proportion in this device category. The remaining 52 (10%) responses were from older children aged between 13 and 17 years, constituting the lowest proportion. Additionally, other devices used by children and adolescents aged between 8 and 17 years to connect to the internet in descending order included a friend's phone (n = 40 or 8%), personal laptop, computer, and school computer (n = 3 or 1%), school devices (n = 2 or 0%), a Smart TV for YouTube (n = 1 or 0%), and accessing the internet at the market (n = 1 or 0%).

**Figure 4: Device for internet access by age**
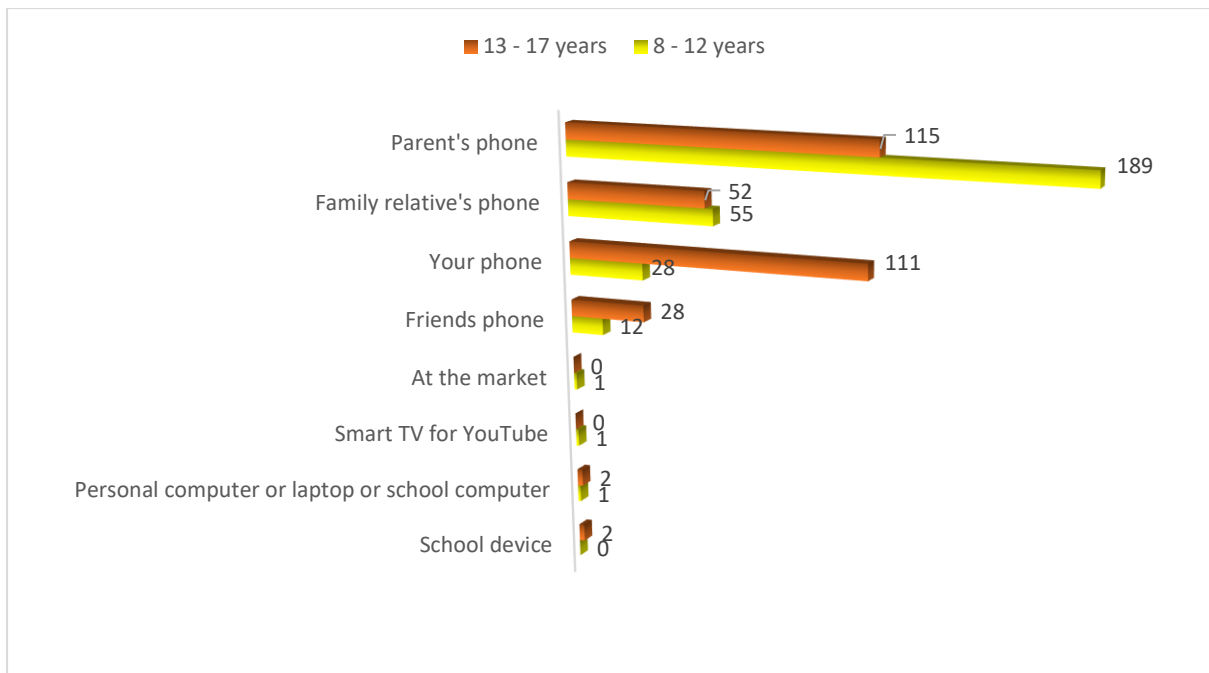
A total of 523 participants were surveyed regarding their frequency of online activity. Among these participants, 336 individuals (64%) reported going online on a weekly basis. Within the weekly users, 181 participants (34%) were between the ages of 8 and 12, while 155 participants (30%) were between 13 and 17. This age group had the highest proportion of minors, which could be attributed to parental rules at home aimed at promoting safety, studying and socialising among other things, as highlighted by the Pew Research Center (Auxier, 2020). The second highest proportion of participants (28%) reported using the internet daily – a total of 147 participants. Among these daily users, 92 participants (18%) were between the ages of 13 and 17 while only 55 participants (11%) were between the ages of 8 and 12. Participants who reported going online monthly constituted the smallest proportion at 8% (40 participants). Within this category, both age groups (8-12 years and 13-17 years) accounted for 4% of the total sample.

Figure 5: Frequency of online activities by age
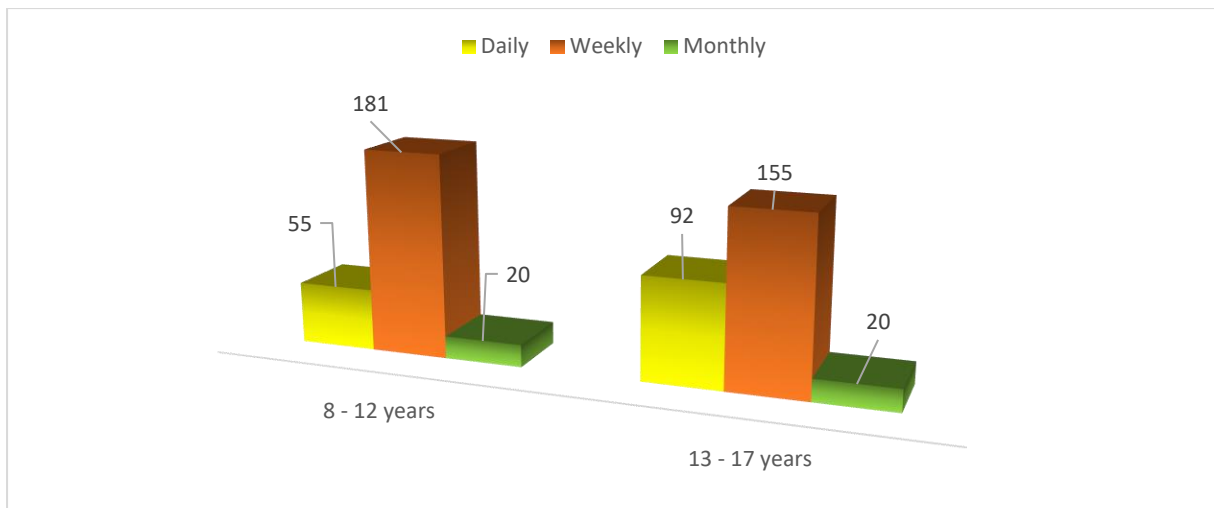
A total of 523 respondents were asked how much time they spent online each day. Herein, 56% (n = 293) reported using the internet less than 1 hour each. Most participants, specifically children aged 8-12, reported spending less than 1 hour online each day, with a total of 164 responses (31%). On the other hand, older children aged 13-17 had the lowest proportion of participants in this category, with 129 responses (25%). The second most common time spent online each day was between 1 and 5 hours, with 194 responses (37%). Within this category, older children aged 13-17 accounted for the highest proportion of participants, with 113 responses (22%), while younger children aged 8-12 had the lowest proportion, with 81 responses (16%). The third most common time spent online each day was more than 5 hours, with a total of 23 responses. Among these participants, older children aged 13-17 had the highest proportion, with 18 responses (4%), while younger children aged 8-12 had the lowest proportion, with 5 responses (1%). Additionally, 13 participants (2%) aged 8-17 indicated not having regular access to the internet.

Figure 6: Time spent online each day
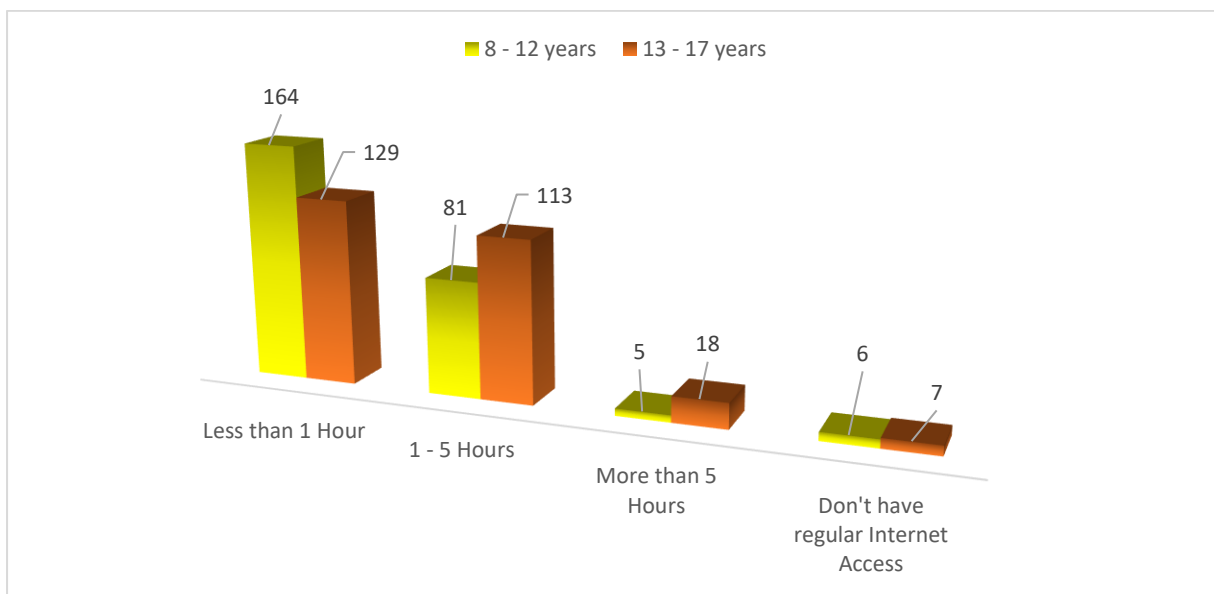
### 3.2.2. Parental rules on internet use among children and adolescents

A total of 523 children responded to a question pertaining to whether their parents had rules for internet use. Among the participants, 66% (n = 347) reported that their parents indeed had rules about internet use. Within this group, 35% (n = 181) were female, representing the largest portion of respondents, while males comprised the smallest portion at 32% (n = 166). On the other hand, 176 children and adolescents aged between 8 and 17 years indicated that their parents did not enforce rules on internet use at home. In this category, 17% (n = 90) were male, constituting the highest proportion of respondents, whereas females accounted for the lowest proportion at 16% (n = 86). 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 7: Parental rules on Internet use for children and adolescents aged 8 – 17 years
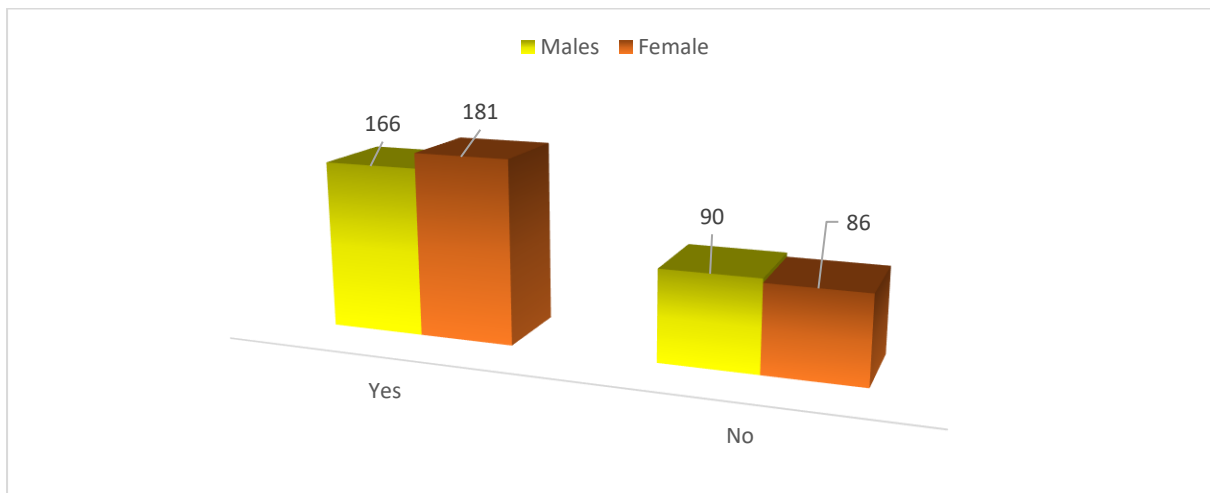
However, among respondents who acknowledged the presence of parental regulations regarding internet usage, 52% revealed that their access was limited by their parents, while 48% disclosed that their parents implemented time constraints.

**Figure 8: Types of internet use rules employed by parents**
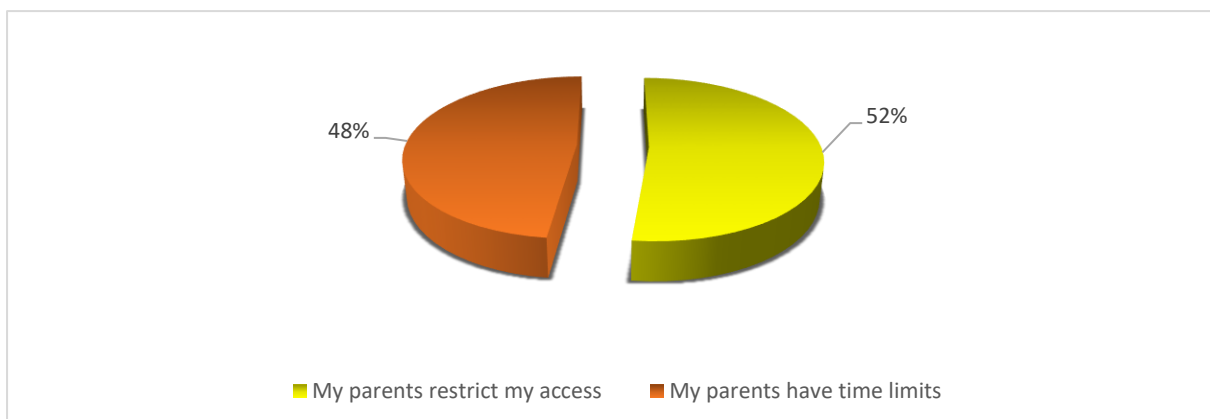
Additionally, when asked whether their parents went through their phones, 65% (n = 184) acknowledged that their parents did indeed go through their phones. On the other hand, 30% (n = 84) of participants stated that their parents did not engage in this behaviour. A small percentage, 6% (n = 16), indicated uncertainty regarding whether or not their parents monitored their phones.

Figure 9: Cell phone monitoring by parents
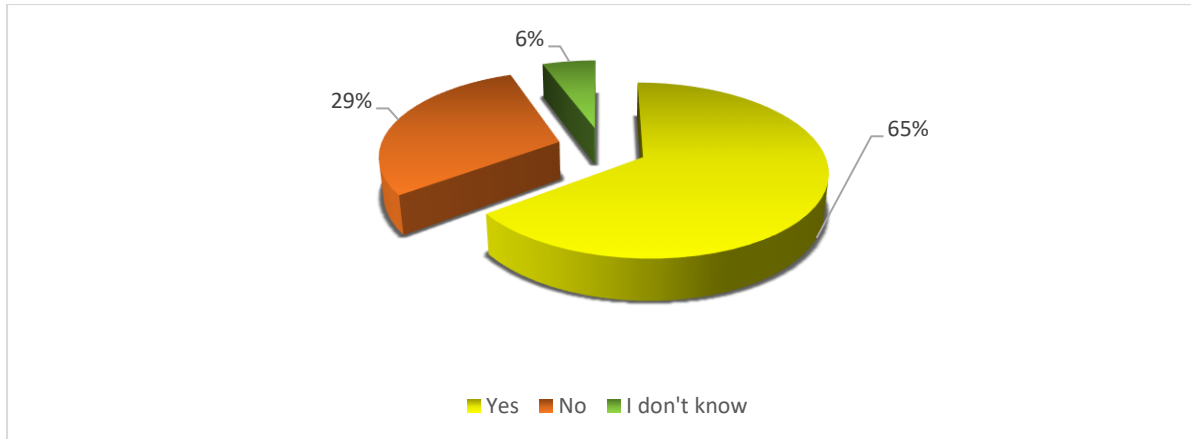
When the children and adolescents were asked about how they felt about these rules, the overall sentiment was positive with 80% (n = 276) of participants reporting that they were generally okay with the rules as these were for their benefit and protection while 10% (n = 36) reported that the rules employed by their parents to limit their internet use were irritating as they wanted to spend more time online, 5% (n = 18) indicated that they were okay with the rules as they were still able to spend a lot of time online. Finally, 5% (n = 17) of respondents indicated that they were annoyed by the rules as they made them feel as though their parents did not trust them.

Figure 10: Sentiment about parent rules on internet use by children and adolescents
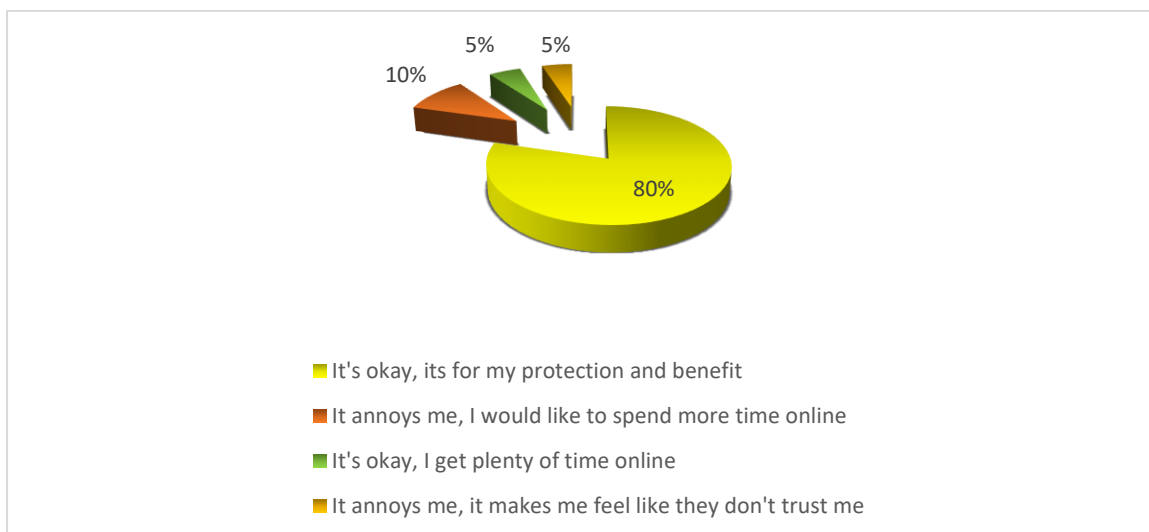
Furthermore, when the children and adolescents were asked about how they spoke about internet safety with their parents and guardians 37% (n = 193) reported they never spoke about the internet. When examining the age groups, it was revealed that the highest proportion of participants who never talked about their online activities with their parents were older children aged 13 to 17 years at 21% (n = 108), while the lowest proportion was observed among younger children aged 8 to 12 years at 16% (n = 85). On the other hand, 23% (n = 118) of children and adolescents reported occasionally discussing internet safety with their parents or guardians. Once again, older children aged 13 to 17 years constituted the highest proportion of participants who sometimes talked about internet safety at 12% (n = 62) while younger children aged 8 - 12 constituted the lowest at 11% (n = 56).

In contrast, 18% (n = 95) of children openly and regularly conversed about their online activities. Among this group, younger children between the ages 8 - 12 constituted the highest proportion at 10% (n = 50), whereas older children aged 13 to 17 years accounted for the lowest proportion at 9% (n = 45). Additionally, 15% (n = 81) of the children reported rarely discussing their online activities with their parents or guardians. Notably, older children aged 13 to 17 made up the largest proportion of participants who rarely talked about their online activities at 8% (n = 41) while younger children aged 8 to 12 constituted the lowest proportion at 8% (n = 40). Finally, it is worth mentioning that 7% (n = 36) of the sample consisted of children who did not regularly discuss their online activities. Among this group, children aged 8 to 12 years formed the highest proportion at 5% (n = 25), while those aged 13 to 17 years comprised the lowest proportion at 2% (n = 11).

Figure 11: How children and adolescents talk about internet safety with their parents and guardians
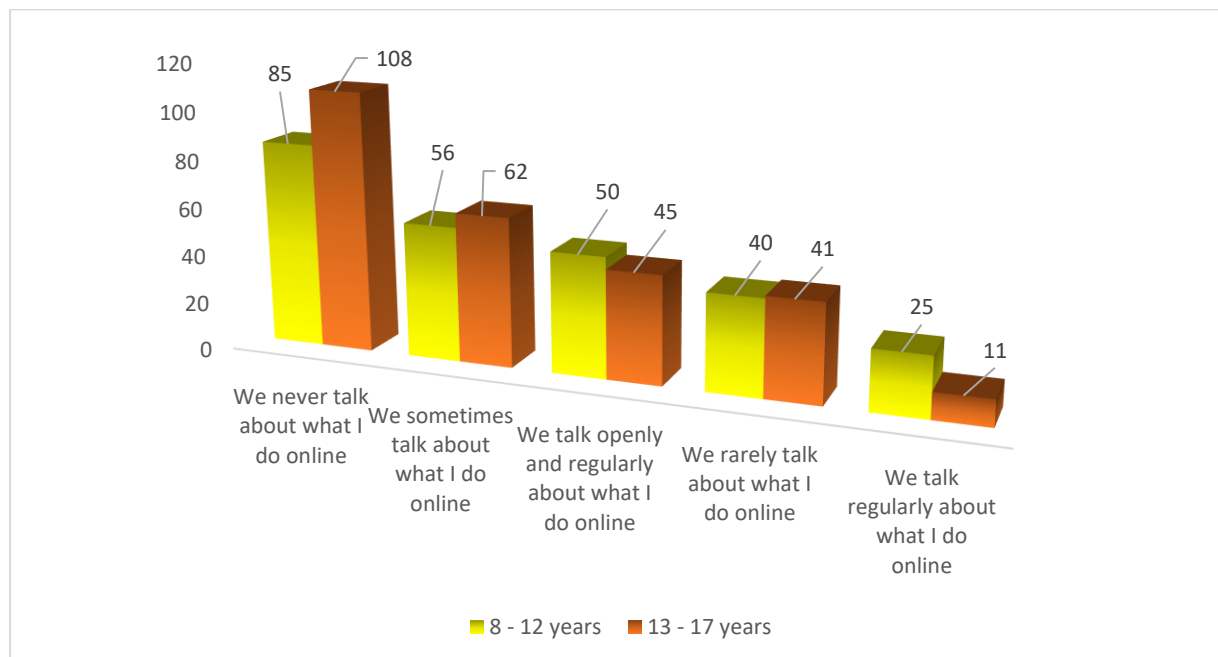
Interesting was the fact that when asked about whether the children wanted to talk about internet safety with their parents and guardians, 74% (n = 387) reported "yes" while 26% (n = 136) reported "no".

Figure 12: Children's interest in talking about internet safety with their parents and guardians
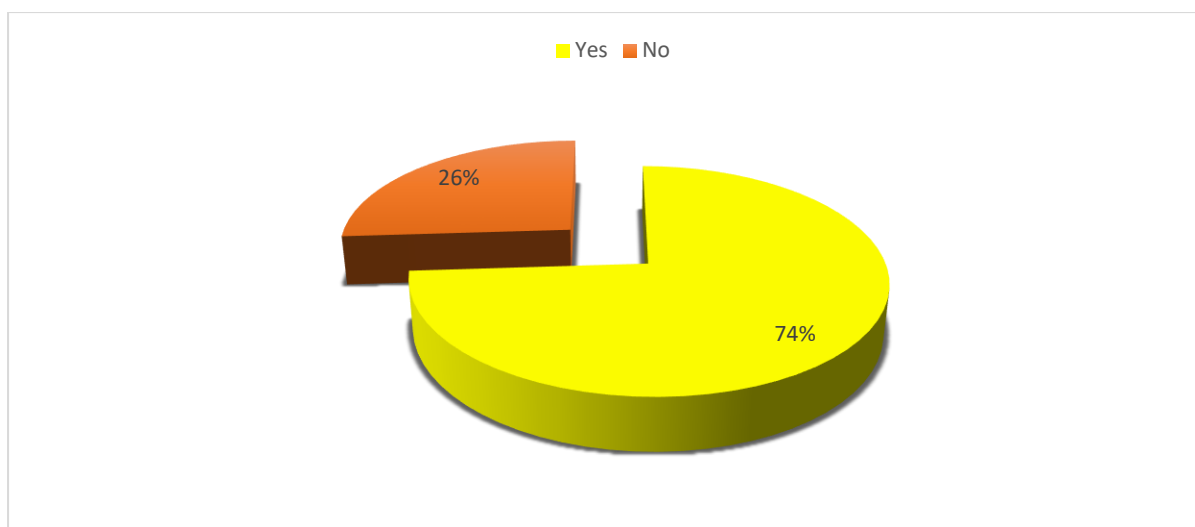

When queried about the reasoning behind their answers, the children presented a diverse range of justifications (**refer to Appendix A for an exhaustive compilation**). Nonetheless, the three most frequently cited rationales proffered by the children encompassed (i) safeguarding their personal wellbeing and security in the digital realm, (ii) acquiring additional knowledge about the internet by leveraging the superior expertise and experience of their parents, and (iii) seeking guidance to avert potential errors and missteps.

Table 5: Top 3 reasons for wanting to talk about internet safety with parents/guardians (In the words of the children)	
1	For my protection and safety from online harms
2	To learn more about the internet as parents have more knowledge about internet safety
3	For guidance and to avoid making mistakes

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 entertainment, schoolwork, communication with friends, love of the internet and using it extensively, obtaining news, and acknowledging the negative impact of the internet on their lives. Among the respondents, the most frequently mentioned purpose of internet use was for entertainment, which was reported by 79% (n = 415) of participants. Schoolwork was the second most mentioned purpose, with 67% (n = 350) of respondents selecting it. Communication with friends ranked third with 46% (n = 242) of participants mentioning it. Additionally, a significant proportion of respondents, 22% (n = 114), reported using the internet because they loved it, while 20% (n = 104) mentioned using it for news consumption. Finally, a smaller percentage of respondents, 7% (n = 35), acknowledged that the internet sometimes had a negative impact on their lives, despite their usage.

Figure 13: Frequently mentioned statements on internet use
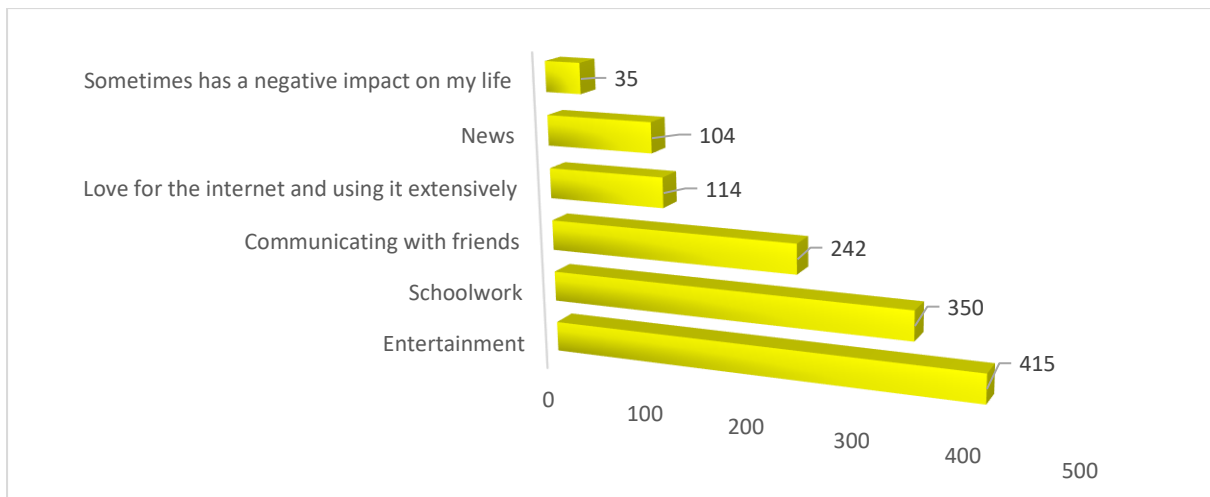
Additionally, the children were provided with several products and services that they regularly used online, in descending order: TikTok, which was mentioned by 62% of respondents (n = 324); YouTube, which was mentioned by 60% (n = 313) of respondents; Google, which was mentioned by 55% (n = 290); Facebook, mentioned by 47% (n = 244); Online games, mentioned by 38% (n = 200); WhatsApp, which was mentioned by 33% (n = 175); Instagram, mentioned by 11% (n = 55); Gmail, mentioned by 6% (n = 30); chat sites, which were mentioned by 4% (n = 21); iTunes, mentioned by 4% (n = 20); X, which was mentioned by 2% (n = 8); "Other" which was mentioned by 1% (n = 7); Yahoo! Mail, mentioned by 1% (n = 5); Hotmail, mentioned by 0% (n = 2), and Tinder, which was mentioned by 0% (n = 2) of respondents.

Figure 14: Frequently mentioned and used online products and services
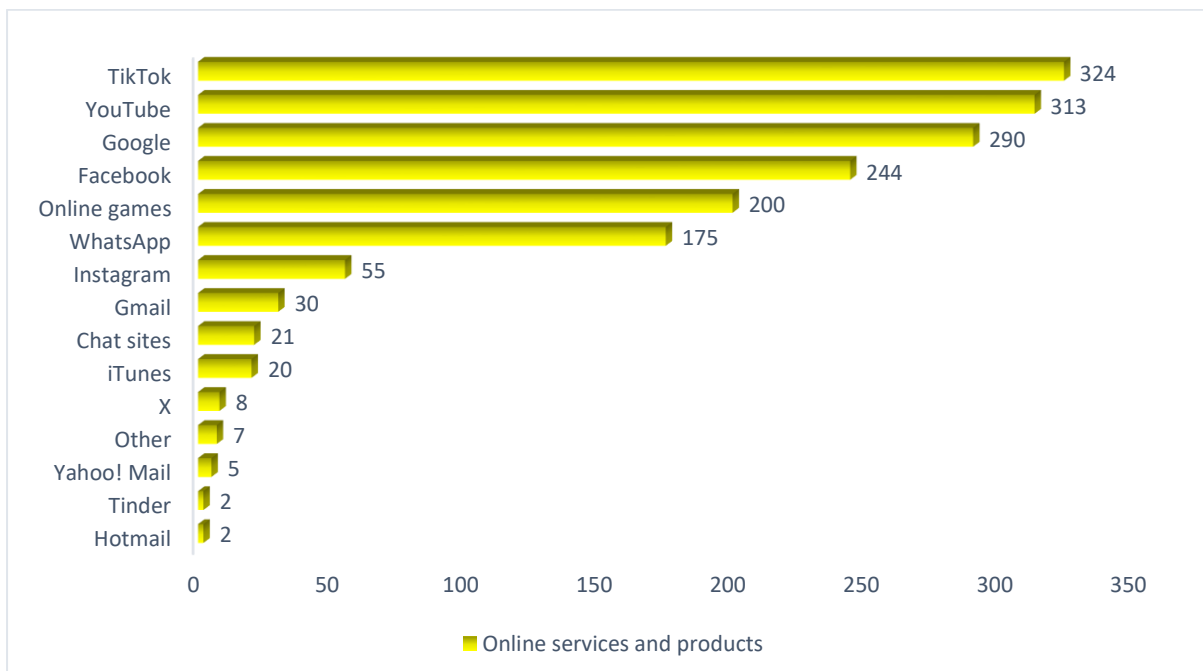
3.3. Online safety and abuse-related factors

This section discusses the results of the online safety and abuse-related factors of the survey. It will discuss the perceptions of children on their safety online, 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 67% (n = 350) reported feeling safe online and claimed to have never encountered any threats or nuisances. Among the respondents, the younger participants aged 8 to 12 years constituted the largest proportion at 38% (n = 201) while the older participants formed the smallest proportion at 28% (n = 149). On the contrary, 11% (n = 60) of the participants mentioned that they never felt safe online and were constantly concerned about the dangers associated with online activities. In this case, the older participants aged 13 to 17 constituted the largest proportion at 7% (n = 35), while the younger participants aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 5% (n = 25). This suggests that the older participants may have been more aware of the dangers of online activities and thus more concerned about their online safety. Moreover, 10% (n = 53) of the study participants aged 8 to 17 indicated that they felt safe online because they believed they could handle any threats or nuisances that may arise.

Among this group, the older children aged 13 to 17 constituted the largest proportion of respondents at 7% (n = 37), while the younger children aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 3% (n = 16). Conversely, 6% (n = 33) of the participants aged 8 to 17 years 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 5% (n = 27), while the younger participants aged 8 to 12 constituted the smallest proportion at 1% (n = 6). Finally, 5% (n = 27) of participants mentioned that they felt safe online sometimes because they had personally experienced bad incidents in the past, which made them more aware of the dangers of online activity.

Figure 15: Children and adolescent feelings of safety online
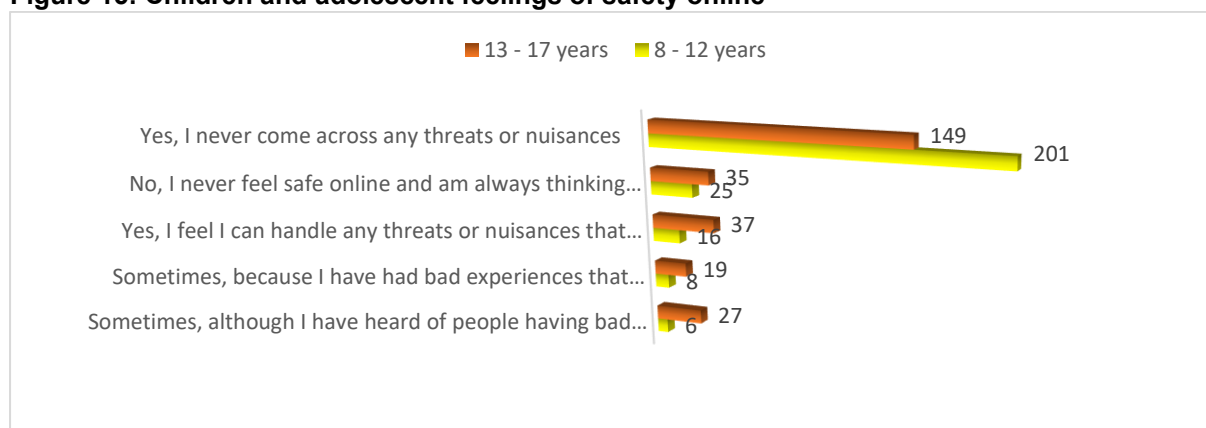
Participants who indicated that they felt safe online sometimes, although they had heard of people having bad experiences that made them more aware of the dangers, mentioned that the people who had had these experiences were their friends, mothers, and strangers.

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

> *"Heard of a girl who met someone online, met the person and was killed."*
> **Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Zambia)**

> *"A girl who was a regular user of the internet and they got access to her account and used it against her."*
> **Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Zambia)**

> *"Have heard about people being scammed and people complaining about being scammed."*
> **Study respondent, Online Child Safety Study (Zambia)**

When further questioned about personal experiences of online harassment, 9% (n = 46) of participants acknowledged having experienced such harassment while the remaining 91% reported never having encountered any form of online harassment.

Figure 16: Experienced harassment online
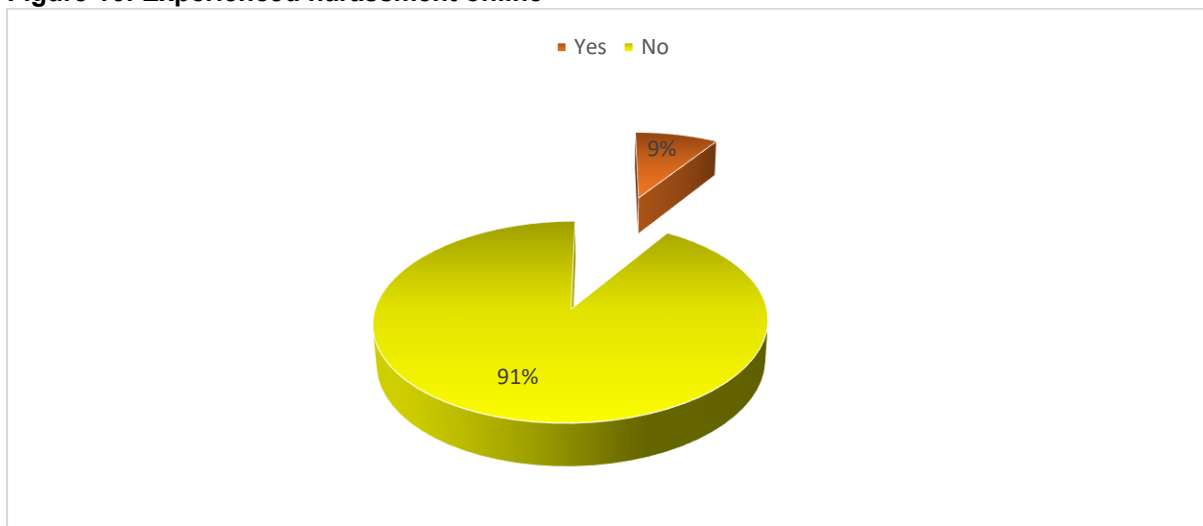
Among the individuals who reported encountering online harassment, 43% (n = 20) acknowledged receiving psychosocial support, while 57% (n = 26) disclosed not receiving such assistance. This finding is worrisome as it highlights the vulnerability of children who experience online harassment to potential psychological trauma.

Figure 17: Received psychosocial assistance for possible trauma experienced
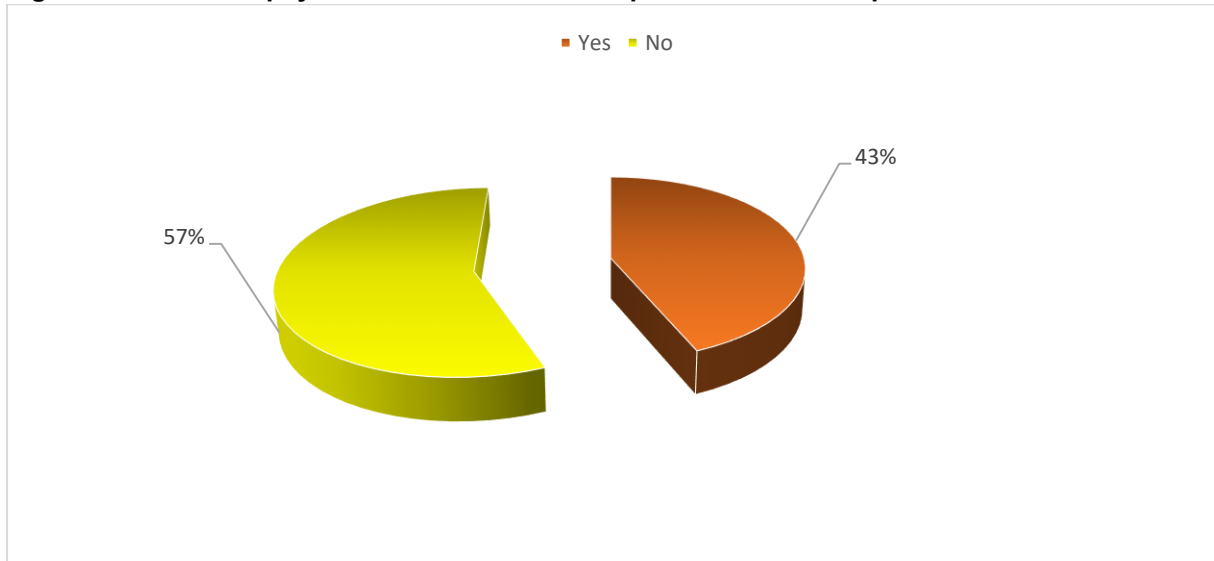
Among the participants who received psychosocial assistance, a total of 11 participants, constituting 55% of the sample, expressed their willingness to disclose the specific types of online harassment they encountered. Conversely, the remaining 45% of participants did not feel comfortable divulging such information.

Figure 18: Children and adolescents who were comfortable with sharing their experience of online harassment
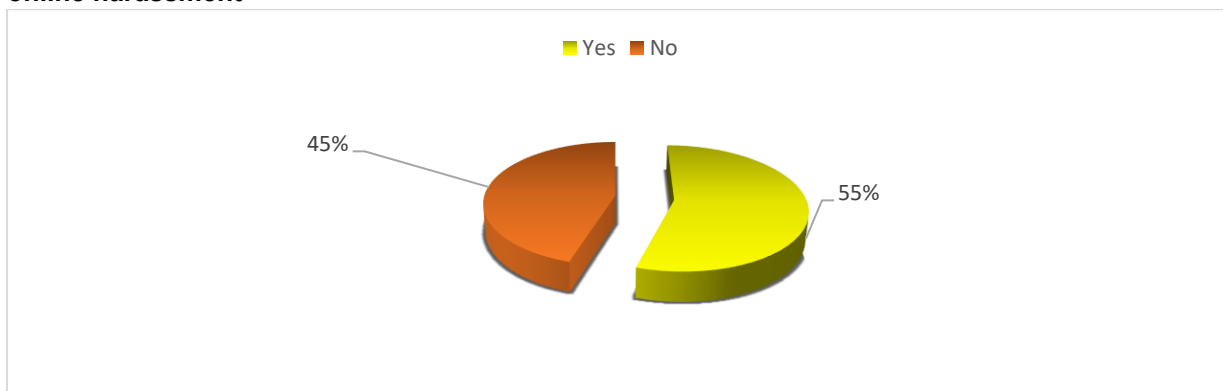
Below are some of the experiences that the children shared:

    "Took some posts with my friends and people started sending negative comments and posted them online."
    Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

    "Someone threatened to block my Facebook account but my friend and I blocked him."
    Male respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

"Was told I had a bad heart."
Male respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

"I was scared because I would receive messages about joining Satanism."
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

"After talking to some people online I started experiencing spiritual attacks and bad dreams."
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

The children also highlighted being "**sextorted" and receiving sexual** content from people online:

"Sending bad messages and sexually harassing."
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

"Someone older than me was sending sexually offensive remarks to me that made me uncomfortable."
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

"Strangers sent me inappropriate videos that I thought would harm me."
Male respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

Among those respondents who were harassed online, 3 were able to identify the perpetrators. However, only 67% (n = 2) of them reported the perpetrators while 33% (n = 1) did not report them.

Table 6: Respondents that identified and reported their online harassers

Action Taken	Male	Female
Reported	2	0
Did not report	0	1

When asked if they had ever been bullied or abused online, 5% (n = 28) reported experiencing the afore while 95% (n = 495) reported never been bullied or abuse online.

Figure 19: Ever been bullied or abused online?
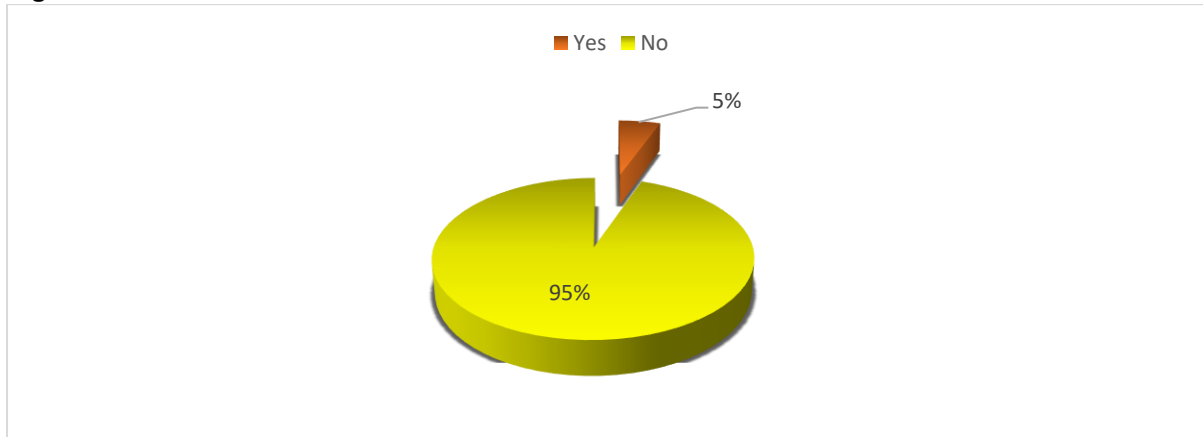
Some of the forms of bullying and abuse that were mentioned by victims are presented below:

❝❝ *"My friends were making fun and laughing at my photos."*
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

❝❝ *"Posted a photo and received hate comments."*
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

❝❝ *"I had no power to refuse but my photos were on his phone."*
Female respondent, Victim of online harassment (Zambia)

In response to inquiries about seeking assistance from people if the participants felt threatened, a considerable majority of 74% (n = 387) among the surveyed population of children expressed their inclination to do so. Conversely, a minority of 26% (n = 136) conveyed their disinclination towards seeking support in such circumstances.

Figure 20: Seek assistance if felt threatened online
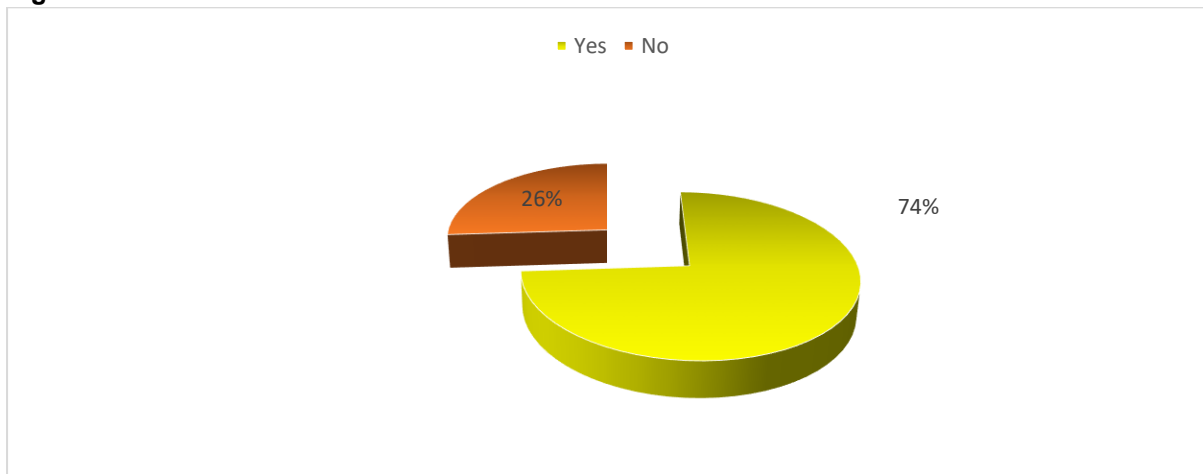
Among these respondents, several individuals or entities were mentioned as platforms they would seek help from if they were to experience online threats. The majority of participants, specifically 67% (n = 258), mentioned parents and guardians as their primary source of support. Additionally, 13% (n = 49)

stated that they would turn to a friend, while 10% (n = 38) mentioned family members. A smaller percentage, 4% (n = 16), indicated that they would reach out to the police, and a similar percentage, 4% (n = 14), mentioned relying on a sibling. A mere 1% (n = 2) of participants mentioned seeking assistance from a teacher, religious leader or ZICTA (Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority). Conversely, 0% (n = 1) mentioned that they would turn to an NGO for help. Furthermore, 0% (n = 1) stated their intention to report the instigators of violence without specifying the recipient of the report.

3.3.2. Risky online behaviour

Children in the study were asked 5 online risk behaviour questions to gauge how susceptible they were to harm caused by their online activities. These are presented in Figure 21 below:

Figure 21: Online harm risk indicators

26%	37%	24%	8%	27%
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.

According to Figure 21, 26% of the children (n = 134) reported adding strangers they met online to their instant messenger contact lists. On the other hand, 74% (n = 389) stated that they had never added a stranger to their instant messenger contact lists. When asked about speaking to someone they had me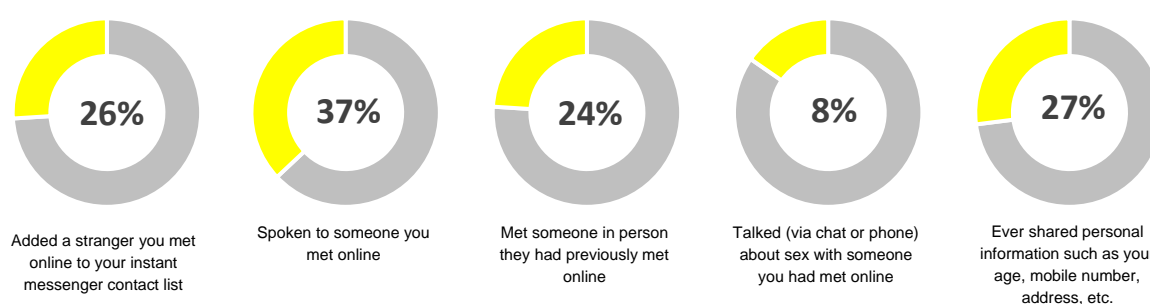t online, 37% (n = 192) of the participants indicated that they had, while 63% (n = 331) reported that they had never engaged in such conversations. In terms of meeting someone in person whom they had previously met online, 24% (n = 126) of the participants mentioned that they had, while 76% (n = 397) indicated otherwise. Furthermore, when asked about engaging in conversations about sex with someone they had met online, only 8% (n = 42) of the participants admitted to having done so while the majority, 98% (n = 481), stated that they had not. Lastly, when it came to sharing personal information such as age, mobile number, and address, 27% (n = 139) of the participants mentioned that they had done so, while 73% (n = 384) indicated that they had never shared such information.

3.4. Online protection measures

In this particular section of the survey, the objective was to gain insight into the perspectives of older participants, aged 13 to 17 years, regarding online protection measures. The section commenced by inquiring whether these adolescents 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 participants, specifically 215 individuals, 81% answered affirmatively, indicating their support for such a feature. Conversely, 24 participants, constituting 9% of the total, responded negatively to this question.

Figure 22: Sentiment on Internet service providers enabling users to report cyberbullying and abuse of any nature to them
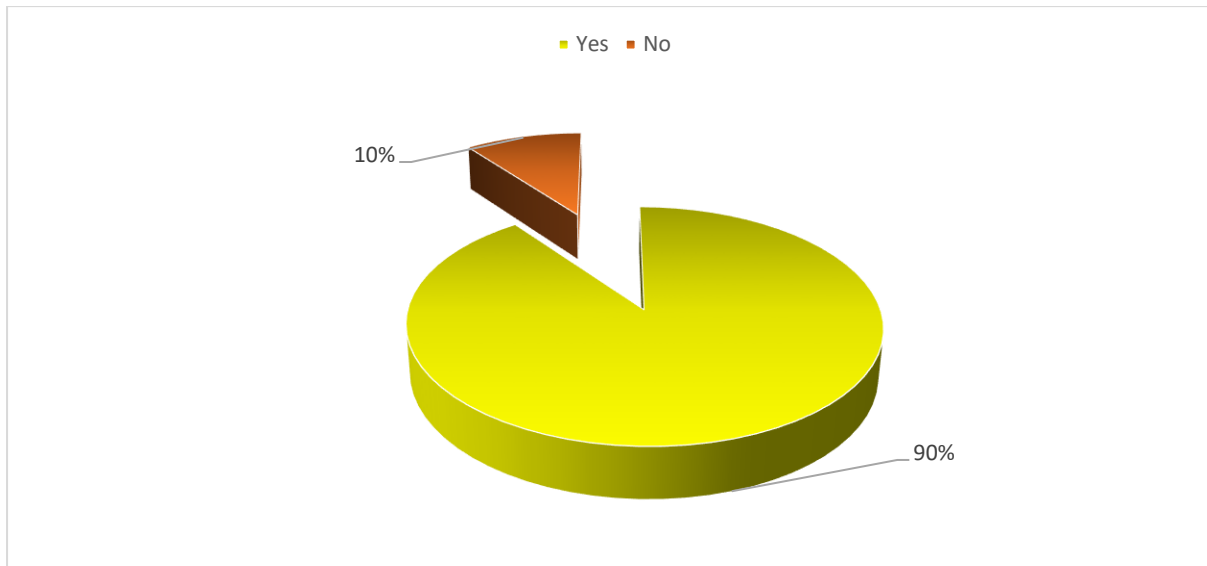
In the surveyed population, of those who answered affirmatively, a mere 20% (n = 42) possessed knowledge of the online child protection portal available in Zambia which serves as a platform for reporting various forms of online abuse. Conversely, the vast majority, constituting 80% (n = 173) of the respondents, indicated their lack of awareness regarding the existence of such a portal.

Figure 23: Respondents aware of online child protection portal in Zambia
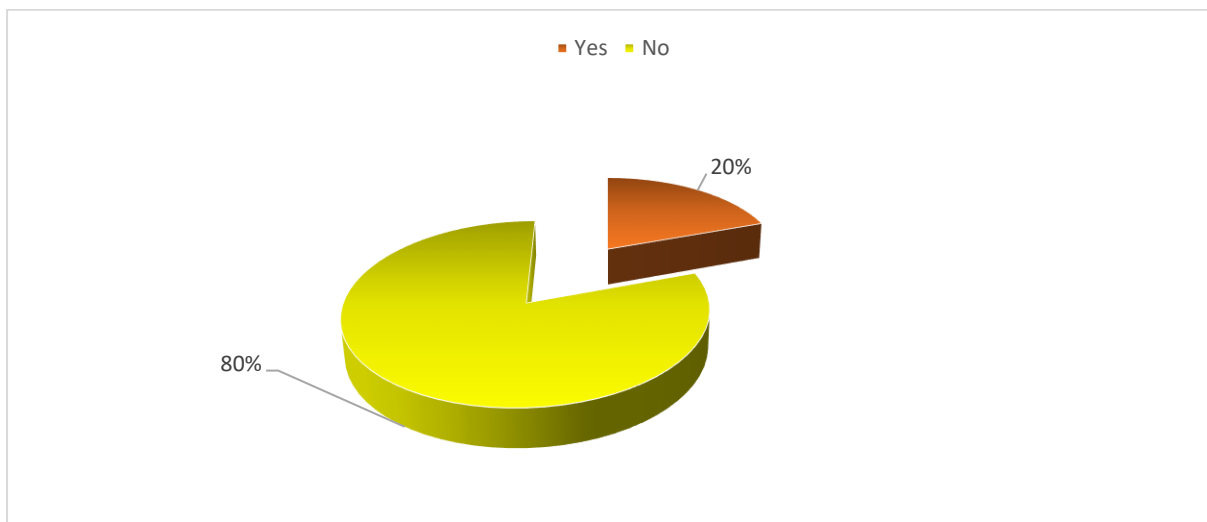
Inquiries were additionally made regarding participants' perspectives on "report abuse bottons". As illustrated by Table 7 below, 43% (n = 112) of respondents indicated that report abuse buttons were good and played a big part in making them feel safer, 38% (n = 101) reported that they did not know as they were not aware of any protection measures in place, 14% reported that report abuse buttons were okay although more protection would make them feel safer, and 6% (n = 17) mentioned that they did not think most of the report 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	112	42%
I don't know - I'm not aware of any protection measures in place	101	38%
They are okay but more protection would make me feel safer	37	14%
I don't think most of them are that effective in protecting young people	17	6%

In addition, the participants were asked about their perspectives on the privacy settings of social networking sites. Table 8 presents the data, revealing that 49% (n = 132) of respondents expressed satisfaction with the social networking privacy settings, attributing to them a significant role in ensuring their online safety. Meanwhile, 30% (n = 81) indicated that they were unaware of any protective measures in place. Furthermore, 15% (n = 39) deemed the social networking privacy settings satisfactory but believed that additional protection measures would enhance their sense of security. Lastly, 6% (n = 15) 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	132	49%
I don't know - I'm not aware of any protection measures in place	81	30%
They are ok but more protection would make me feel safer	39	15%
I don't think most of them are that effective in protecting young people	15	6%

Moreover, the study participants were interrogated regarding their perspectives concerning the extent to which the Zambian government and organisations were attentive to the concerns of young individuals regarding online safety. According to the data displayed in Table 9, it is evident that 38% (n = 105) of the participants expressed the belief that young people did not have sufficient influence on the matters that affect them online. In contrast, 37% (n = 100) of the respondents believed that young people in the country had a strong voice when it came to major issues. On the other hand, 24% (n = 62) of the participants indicated that they were unsure and unable to provide a response to the question.

Table 9: Perceptions of the government and organisations listening to young people about safety issues they face online

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage
No, I don't feel young people get enough of a say about the issues that affect them online	105	39%
Yes, I feel young people have a strong voice on the main issues	100	37%
I don't know - unable to provide a response	62	24%

In response to the question of what actions the Zambian government should take to enhance internet safety, the respondents provided a variety of suggestions. Specifically, 61% of participants (n = 164)

recommended that the government develop and enforce laws to prosecute individuals who exploit and abuse children online. Additionally, 49% (n = 130) of respondents suggested implementing education programmes for children to educate them about the consequences of their internet usage. Furthermore, 46% (n = 123) of participants believed that the Zambian government should regulate access to specific internet sites and establish monitoring mechanisms to prevent misuse and abuse. Moreover, 45% (n = 119) of the respondents suggested the implementation of programmes to educate parents, guardians, teachers, and school staff about the functioning of social networking sites. In terms of emergency and non-emergency situations, 36% (n = 96) of the participants proposed the establishment of call centres to receive reports. Lastly, 6% (n = 17) of respondents indicated that they were unable to provide a response or did not know.

Table 10: Recommendations on steps that the Zambian government should take to make the internet safer

Sentiment	Frequency	Percentage
Develop and implement laws to sentence those who exploit/ abuse children online internet safer.	164	61%
Education programmes for children on the consequences of their Internet use	130	49%
Restrict access to certain internet sites and control and monitor to avoid misuse and abuse internet safer.	123	46%
Training programmes for parents/ guardians, teachers, and school staff on how social networking sites operate	119	45%
Establish call centres to receive reports in both emergency and non-emergency situations	96	36%
I don't know - unable to provide response	17	6%

4. Drivers of risky online behaviour among children and adolescents aged 8 to 17 in Lusaka, Zambia

This section seeks to identify the drivers or determinants of risky online behaviour 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 such as 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 these were associated with risky online behaviour. The independent variables included parental and guardian rules on internet use, gender, age group, current level of learning, 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 11: Bivariate and multivariate analysis

	Model 1			Model 2		
Risky online behaviour	UOR	P-Value	95% confidence interval	AOR	P-Value	95% confidence interval
Independent variables						
Parental and guardian rules on internet use						
Yes (R.C)						
No	2.83	0.08	0.89-9.06	0.87	0.86	0.17-4.40
Gender						
Male (R.C)						
Female	1.35	0.61	0.42-4.31	0.63	0.54	0.15-2.73
Age Group						
8 - 12 years (R.C)						
13 - 17 years	4.94	0.04***	1.07-22.78	0.89	0.92	0.09-8.59
Current Level of Learning						
Pre-school and primary school (R.C)						
High school, secondary school, and college	6.67	0.01***	1.74-25.40	4.02	0.17	0.55-29.70
Frequency of online usage						
Daily (R.C)						
Weekly	0.24	0.03***	0.07-0.84	0.48	0.36	0.10-2.34
Monthly	0.51	0.53	0.06-4.29	1.04	0.98	0.09-12.46
Daily duration of online activities						
Less than 1 hour and does not have regular internet access (R.C)						
1-5 hours	6.54	0.02***	1.37-31.12	7.73	0.07	0.85-70.62
More than 5 hours	14.48	0.01***	1.94-107.96	10.32	0.12	0.55-194.58
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	2.24	0.51	0.20-25.04	1.39	0.81	0.10-19.09
We rarely talk about what I do online	1.63	0.73	0.10-26.34	1.96	0.65	0.11-35.80

	UOR	p	95% CI	AOR	p	95% CI
We never talk about what I do online	5.62	0.11	0.69-45.49	3.28	0.33	0.30-36.30
Willing to speak with parents and guardians about internet safety more						
Yes (R.C)						
No	2.07	0.22	0.65-6.64	0.89	0.89	0.19-4.25
Experience of online harassment						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.18	0.01***	0.05-0.62	0.88	0.89	0.13-5.85
Experience of online bullying and abuse						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.07	0.00***	0.02-0.22	0.09	0.01***	0.01-0.59
Inclination to seek support when facing online threats						
Yes (R.C)						
No	0.95	0.94	0.25-3.55	0.64	0.64	0.10-4.05

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 11. Only statistically significant associations with risky online behaviour are interpreted. In terms of age group, Model 1 reveals that adolescents aged 13 to 17 are significantly more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to children aged 8 to 12 (UOR: 4.94; p<0.05; CI: 1.07-22.78). With regard to the current level of learning, Model 1 shows that children and adolescents currently enrolled in high school, secondary school and college are significantly more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to those enrolled in pre-school and primary school (UOR: 6.67; p<0.05; CI: 1.74-25.40). In terms of frequency of online usage, children and adolescents who reported using the internet weekly are significantly less likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to those who use it daily (UOR: 0.24; p<0.05; CI: 0.07-0.84).

Regarding the daily duration of online activities, children who reported spending 1-5 hours are significantly more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to those who spend less than 1 hour or do not have regular internet access (UOR: 6.54; p<0.05; CI: 1.37-31.12). Conversely, children who reported spending more than 5 hours are significantly more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to those who spend less than 1 hour or do not have regular internet access (UOR: 14.58; p<0.05; CI: 1.94-107.96). In terms of experiencing online harassment, children who reported not experiencing it are significantly less likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to those who did (UOR: 0.18; p<0.05; CI: 0.05-0.62). Lastly, in both Models 1 and 2, children who reported not experiencing online bullying and abuse are significantly less likely to engage in risky online behaviour (UOR: 0.07; p<0.05; CI: 0.02-0.22; AOR: 0.09; p<0.05; CI: 0.01-0.59).

5. Recommendations and conclusion

This section seeks to provide recommendations to improve internet safety in Zambia using the data and insights collected from the Lusaka online child safety study. Most of the recommendations were informed by inferential statistics, which gauged associations between selected independent variables and risky online behaviour by analysing the univariate responses provided in the survey. Additionally, they were also 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 of the questions had routing instructions. After dropping respondents who reported not being currently enrolled in school, the effective sample for analysis was 494 children and adolescents. Upon providing recommendations, the study report will conclude.

5.1.   Recommendations

This section presents recommendations to enhance online child safety in Zambia based on findings from the study. The study identified several factors associated with risky online behaviour among children aged 8 to 17. Specifically, it was found that older children between the ages of 13 and 17, as well as those in secondary, high school, and college in Lusaka, were more likely to engage in risky online behaviour compared to younger children. Therefore, interventions should be targeted at this age group to protect them from online harms. One suggestion is for MTN and other telecommunication companies in the country to launch awareness-raising campaigns targeting adolescents. Research shows that mass media campaigns are successful in influencing the knowledge, attitudes and practices of both adolescents and their caregivers. Methods of delivery for awareness-raising campaigns need to be relevant to the local context. Therefore, it is recommended that these are implemented in schools, on popular youth radio stations like Power FM, television, billboards, community posters, and SMSs. To ensure the effectiveness of these campaigns, MTN will need to monitor and evaluate their impact through tracker studies conducted in Lusaka and other major cities where mobile use among children and adolescents is prevalent.

Additionally, it was observed that children who utilise the internet on a weekly basis exhibit a reduced likelihood of engaging in risky online behaviour in comparison to those who access the internet more take part in risky online behaviour when compared to those who spend less than an hour a day online or those who report not having regular access. This underscores the significance of parental supervision in relation to children's online activities. While the implementation of parental controls can be advantageous in safeguarding children from inappropriate content, it should be acknowledged that these controls do not provide a comprehensive solution for ensuring online safety. It is therefore imperative that parents engage in ongoing conversations with their children to foster comprehension and transparency with the intent to mitigate resistance against online rules.

Herein, it is advised that parents and guardians advocate for children and adolescents to exercise caution when interacting with individuals they have met online. It is important to instil in them a sense of constant vigilance regarding their online interactions. Additionally, educating children and adolescents on the importance of reporting individuals who engage in online harassment, sextortion, and bullying, as well as guiding them on how to handle such situations by walking away, resisting the urge to retaliate or respond, is crucial. Instructing them on the value of preserving evidence of any bullying or sensitive content they encounter can also assist in substantiating their claims. Moreover, it is essential to educate parents and guardians about the potential risks their children may face online and how to create an environment in which children feel comfortable sharing any online threats they encounter. This will facilitate open discussions on internet safety between children and adolescents, and their parents or guardians.

Equally important is teaching children how to report instances of bullying, as social media platforms take such matters seriously, including instances of individuals posting malicious or hurtful content or creating fake accounts. If individuals report instances of abuse, the site administrator has the authority to prevent the perpetrator from accessing the site in future. Reporting offensive texts or emails to the respective phone service or email providers, such as Comcast, Google and Verizon, is recommended. Furthermore, it is crucial to educate children and adolescents who face online harassment and abuse about the availability of psychosocial assistance. Such education would aim to reduce the potential occurrence of trauma and provide support for those who have already experienced trauma. Lastly, despite children and adolescents generally feeling secure online, implementing the measures is imperative to provide additional layers of protection against online threats. To effectively reach the target audience, these measures should be promoted and marketed on popular platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Google, Facebook, and online games, which are commonly used by children aged 8 to 17.

Furthermore, any campaign targeting parents should emphasise their role in taking various measures such as monitoring the family's digital presence, instructing children to maintain their location confidentiality, and ensuring that screens and devices are visible to enhance online safety for their children. In the specific context of Zambia, MTN has the potential to develop a complimentary online course aimed at educating parents about online safety and cyberbullying, equipping them with the essential tools to prevent and address such issues. As per the association extracted from the data, implementing this initiative will likely decrease the occurrence of online bullying and abuse towards children while also lowering their chances of facing harassment and consequently decreasing their inclination to partake in unsafe online activities. This initiative can be executed in collaboration with Ipsos' social experts to facilitate the collaborative development of course content.

5.2. Conclusion

This study aimed to improve online child safety in the country by examining how access to the internet through digital devices contributes to the exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents online. The study also aimed to identify which groups of children are most vulnerable and how these risks

manifest, as well as to understand how technology affects child online safety in order to develop an evidence-based approach to addressing these risks. To achieve these goals, the study created a data collection tool with various indicators that demonstrated how digital devices enable the exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents online. These indicators were presented throughout the report as part of the study's findings. The findings included information on the online activities, safety, and abuse-related factors that impact children, such as the location of internet access, types of devices used, frequency of online use, average time spent online, and the presence or absence of parental rules on internet access.

This information provided insight into how the internet and digital devices can make children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse online. Additionally, the study included verbatim accounts from some children, who reported encountering inappropriate messages and sexual harassment from acquaintances or receiving harmful videos from strangers. Through inferential analysis, the study was able to identify children and adolescents at risk of engaging in risky online behaviour and illustrate how these risks manifest. Based on these profiles and the factors driving such behaviour, the study provided recommendations on how to mitigate these risks and protect children and adolescents from online harm. By implementing these recommendations and utilising the data and insights provided in the report, stakeholders can collaborate to create a safer online environment for children and adolescents in Zambia.

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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 my protection / safety from online dangers	107
Because they are my parents	2
For my parents to be aware of what I do online	10
For guidance / I want to avoid making mistakes	28
I trust my parents/guardian	8
They know what is best/better for me	5
I trust myself	3
To learn more about the internet / they have more knowledge/experience than me	73
Scams / awareness of scams	7
Privacy / they do not need to know what I do online	22
I am big now / I can control my internet use / I can protect myself online	6
Parents are mostly not available/not at home / no time to discuss the matter / not interested	12
They might refuse to let me to go online/stop me from using the phone	10
To avoid seeing things that are not suitable for my age/things I am not supposed to watch / to avoid seeing bad things	23
We do not talk about it / I would not like to talk to them / talking to them is not necessary	17
They will shout at me / I am scared of what she will say / parents are too judgemental	6
I just want to talk to them / I love to talk to them / it is important to talk to them	11
Not enough time	5
Limited access on the internet / restriction	16
Hacking / I'm afraid of being hacked	6
Cyberbullying	7
Using internet for school work	8
They know what is good for me	5
I do not feel comfortable talking to parents about internet safety	4
How to use the internet wisely	2
I have to follow their rules	12
Freedom of use / they do not mind my internet use	6
Internet destroys children / a lot of people are being destroyed through the internet	2
I do not use the internet much	4
To ask for permission	3
It helps them to be updated	2
My mother does not like me using the internet/going online	1
I want to explore a bit	1
They say phones/internet are for adults only	2
Because I am scared	1
Awareness of child trafficking	1
Because of what we are exposed to online	6
Internet can be good or bad / awareness of what is good or bad on the internet	6
Parents are less educated and do not know the internet	4
Playing games freely	1
Internet can be used for bad things / a lot of bad things on the internet	3
That is what I have to do as a child	2
What I want and what my parents want are different	1
I have already been told what I need to know	4
Only my parents have a right to talk to me/to tell me what they want	2
They will start giving me rules	1
Helping to solve problems I face on the internet	1
You can see new things on the internet	1
To learn more about the phone	3

To inform them of problems/unexpected things happening online	2
It is an important topic that needs to be looked at	1
Parents teach us good manners	2
Spam	1
There is a lot to be learnt on the internet	3
I do not want to talk about big people things that I do not know about	1
I want to know the rules that will be given	1
I never get the response or advice I need	1
So many are on the internet	1
Safety of YouTube	1
How to delete things on Facebook	1
How to access videos and cartoons online	1
Some applications are for elderly people	1
I do business on TikTok (to pay for my school fees)	1
How to take care of myself online	1
I am the one showing my grandmother how to use the internet	1
None / Nothing / No comment	14
Don't know	16