A Glance into the Online World of Children: A Study to Examine the Online Activities of Children in Indonesia

Karen Muller*
Child Witness Institute, South Africa
*Correspondence: childwitness@gmail.com

Astrid Gonzaga Dionisio
Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Indonesia, Indonesia

Sanghyun Park
Child Online Protection officer, UNICEF Indonesia, Indonesia

Nahar
Deputy of Special Protection for Children, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Indonesia

Ciput Purwianti
Assistant Deputy of Child Protection from Violence, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Indonesia

Abstract
Digital technology has influenced children's lives, shaping their norms, attitudes, and behaviours. This study aims to understand the online behaviours of children in Indonesia, exploring their activities, risks, and safety measures. Conducting semi-structured interviews with 510 children aged 9-18 across Central Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi Provinces in Indonesia, the study sheds light on the prevalence of internet usage among children and their online experiences. Indonesian children use the internet extensively for entertainment, communication, and information. Children consider the internet an important part of their lives, although they often lack awareness of online dangers and what constitutes risky behaviours, such as adding unknown contacts and sharing personal information, especially in online gaming contexts. Children rely on simple safety measures, necessitating comprehensive education on online safety. While many share their online experiences mainly with friends, those with strong parental bonds share it with their families too. The study emphasizes the importance of discussing online risks, including sexual exploitation and abuse, and cyberbullying as they frequently encounter such experiences but hesitate to report them. Overall, the study provides valuable insights for tailoring online safety programmes to meet children's needs and underscores the importance of informed digital parenting strategies to safeguard children's online well-being.

Keywords: *online sexual Exploitation and abuse (OCSEA), online behaviour, online risks, online safety, child online protection*

Introduction

Digital technology has transformed human interactions in fundamental ways and has become an integral part of children's lives in the 21st century. Children spend more time in the digital environment than ever before and at younger ages. As digital technology has increasingly become part of daily life, it has altered the norms, attitudes and behaviours not only of adults, but has also impacted quite fundamentally on those of children.

At the global level, it is estimated that one in three children is an internet user and one in three internet users is a child (UNICEF Innocenti, 2019). The age at which children enter the digital world has been decreasing at a rapid rate and children are having their first experience with digital technology before the age of two (Chaudron et al., 2018). Studies have shown, for instance, that in the United Kingdom, Estonia and the United States, approximately 83 per cent of five-year-olds use a digital device at least once a week, with 42 per cent using it every day (OECD, 2020). In Europe, time spent online by children ranges from 134 minutes per day in Switzerland to 219 minutes per day in Norway with little difference between boys and girls (Smahel et al., 2020). In the USA, in 2021, 97 per cent of 3- to 18-year-olds had home internet access, 93 per cent had access through a computer and 4 per cent had access through a smartphone (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). In 2020, according to Statista (Statista, 2020), 59 per cent of children in in East Asia and Pacific had internet access in their households and 59 per cent in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Since technology is now an integral part of the lives of children, research has begun to focus on the ways in which digitalization is changing childhood, for better and for worse. The internet has changed how children form and maintain their friendships and how they keep in contact with peers. It has also transformed the way in which children spend their leisure time as it provides them with access to ready entertainment in the form of movies, videos and games (UNICEF, 2017). The impact that this has had on children and the disruption between their physical and virtual world has given rise to the debate whether access to the internet is a positive or a negative influence in their lives. Some have argued that technology has impacted on the ability of children to connect with others, forge meaningful relationships, pay attention and think critically, while others believe that the internet provides unprecedented opportunities for learning, engagement and interaction (Harris, 2014).

The impact of internet usage on children's behavior is profound, shaping their norms, attitudes, and activities. Globally, adolescents are increasingly reliant on the internet, with over 90 per cent owning smartphones by age 18, leading to pervasive online engagement (Gabriela Vatu, 2023). Texting has become the primary mode of interaction, with adolescents sending numerous messages daily. Social media is central to their lives, with over 90 per cent participating daily, utilizing platforms like TikTok extensively. However, this accessibility exposes children to age-inappropriate content and risks, including encountering sexual material and engaging in online sexual exploration (Jenny S. Radesky et al., 2023).

The *Disrupting Harm in Indonesia* Study (ECPAT et al, 2022) provided the baseline for research on children's online behaviour, activities and experiences, and offered a framework for more intensive research that would focus on the reasons why children behaved in certain ways and how they felt about their experiences. The perspectives of children became the focus of the *Our Lives Online Study* (UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office and the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2020) which aimed to generate a snapshot of social media use among 11–18-year-olds in East Asia and the risks of child sexual exploitation and abuse online. The shortcoming of this study related to the small sample size – seventy-seven children in Indonesia took part in the study - which did not provide statistically significant data. The data from these studies is, nevertheless, clear that digital technology is an integral part of the lives of children in Indonesia.

To mitigate the harmful effects of children's online interactions, it is essential to understand how they perceive the online world and how and why they engage with it. This is vital for developing a response that is informed by their experiences. Similarly, because of their developmental limitations, children require guidance and supervision when engaging with the internet. As such, it is equally essential to determine how the parents or caregivers of children engage with their children about the online world, in essence digital parenting. The exploration of these two phenomena is believed, provide a deeper understanding of how to protect children online in Indonesia.

Although the *Disrupting Harm Study* provided a baseline for children's online activities and experiences, it was necessary to explore in greater depth the children's feelings and thoughts about their online experiences. It is not only important to know what children are doing online but why they are doing it. It's not enough to know whether, for instance, children disclose abuse. It is even more important to know why they do not disclose, what prevents them from doing so and, if they do disclose, to whom and why. Answers to these questions will enable a greater insight into understanding children's online experiences and assist in the development of mechanisms that respond effectively as well as enable the design of programmes that target the needs of children as identified by them.

The purpose of the present study was, therefore, to undertake an in-depth investigation into the current online behaviours and activities of children and their caregivers in Indonesia, building on the *Disrupting Harm* and *Our Lives Online* studies, although the focus of this article is primarily on the interviews conducted with the children.

Methodology

The research participants were selected from two (2) population groups, namely parents/caregivers of children who fall within the 9-18 age group and children in the 9 to 18 age group. In terms of the law, the term `child' is used in Indonesia to refer to any person under the age of 18. However, in the interviews conducted, 23 children aged 18 also completed the interview as these children were still at school. The group of children included children without disabilities, children with disabilities and children out of school and in institutions. Five hundred and ten (510) children were interviewed, of which fifty-two (52) were children with disabilities, and sixty-one (61) children who were not at school. Five hundred and nine (509) parents/caregivers were interviewed, although the findings of these interviews will not be presented in this article.

The participant sample for both the children and the parents/caregivers was selected randomly with the only criterion being that they have access to a cell phone or other internet-connected device. This however simultaneously constitutes the limitation of this study since the findings cannot be generalized to the national level. Nonetheless, this can provide an overview of the behaviour of children who are already active online. There was no family relationship between child participants and parent/caregiver participants in the majority of the sample. Where there was a relationship, the child and their parent were interviewed in separate places to ensure that children would not be restricted in their responses.

The parent/caregiver and child participant samples were selected from three (3) research sites, namely, Central Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi. These locations were selected because they have higher population densities, as well as high internet penetration. Districts within these locations were identified by in-country programme partners and included urban and rural settings.

Since the aim of the research was to obtain in-depth information from research participants about their online behaviour and activities, semi-structured interviews were used as it allowed participants to speak freely and at length, using their own views, impressions, vocabulary and terminology. It gave the interviewer an opportunity to follow up a particular area of importance in the interview, while at the same time the participants were able to provide a more complete picture. This provided for increased quality in the data collected and resulted in the analysis providing a richer understanding of the data, particularly given the exploratory nature of this study.

The interviews were based on questionnaires to ensure that participants received the same questions during the interviews, although it also allowed the interviewer some measure of flexibility to make maximum use of the opportunities offered to enrich the data without changing the focus of the study. Interviewers were guided by the questions in the questionnaire but were able to explore further ideas and concepts that were raised by the participants.

The questionnaire developed for the children aged 8-18 years focussed on identifying their online usage in terms of time spent online, what applications they use, what they enjoy about being online, any negative experiences they may have encountered online, what they do to protect themselves online, and what information they disclose online. The questions included in the questionnaires were informed by the desktop review as well as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with in-country experts.

Field interviewers were selected to conduct the interviews with the children. The interviews were conducted in-person in the language preferred by participants. Thereafter, the interviews were translated for analysis. The interviewers were provided with training prior to the conducting of the interviews. The training included an intensive session on interviewing techniques and building rapport with the participants. Rapport building was essential due to the intimate nature of some of the questions. It was important that the children felt comfortable with the interviewers to encourage truthful responses to the questions.

The responses obtained during the interviews were captured, translated and then analysed in terms of a quantitative and qualitative framework. Thematic areas were identified, and statistics captured.

Results and discussion
Internet usage
Time spent online

The study showed a higher rate of internet usage by children than previous studies with 99 percent of the children in the study accessing the internet. Eighty-nine percent of these children use the internet on a daily basis and spend an average of 5.4 hours a day online, which is also higher than that recorded in previous studies internationally. Eight percent of the children use it every week and access it on average 4.7 times per week. Almost all of the children (99.2 per cent) use their mobile phones to access the internet while some also use laptops (9.5 per cent), personal computers (6.1 per cent) and tablets (3.1 per cent).

Location for accessing internet

The internet was accessed at home by 98.6 percent of the children and nearly half of them (41.4per cent) have access to it at school. A far larger number of children (44.2 per cent) accessed the internet in public spaces which included malls, internet cafes, games centres, roadside food carts and village offices. Almost half of them (42.4 per cent) reported accessing the internet at a friend's house. Nearly eighty percent (78.9 per cent) of the children said that their favourite place to go online was at home and the bedroom was identified as the most favourite place at home to go online. The next most favourite place to go online was at a friend's house (5.9 per cent) followed by a public space (3.4 per cent) and then school (2.8 per cent). Bedrooms were popular venues to access the internet because they were private, comfortable and quiet and there was little chance of being disturbed there. Children preferred accessing the internet at home because they felt safe there; it was comfortable and relaxed; it was convenient because they were always at home and meant they had more time to be online; they were not disturbed at home; they had access to the Wi-Fi; they had access to assistance because their parents were there, and it was generally fun to be at home. Some of the children said that they had no choice because they used devices that were at home, or they were not allowed to leave the house. Accessing the internet at a friend's home was popular because they were able to hang out with their friends and there was less parental control. These were also the reasons given for accessing the internet in public spaces.

Reasons for the popularity of the internet amongst children

An overwhelmingly clear finding that emerged from the study was that children love being able to access the internet, with 85 per cent of them qualifying this as `a lot' and `very much.' The cell phone was considered to be an essential part of their lives *("My cell phone holds my life"* and *"My cell phone is my friend"*). They provided a myriad of reasons, twenty-six (26) in total, to explain why they like going online. The main reason supplied by 42 percent of the children[1] was the opportunity for entertainment and games, followed by the ability to access information (14 per cent).[2] Other reasons included making friends, communicating with family, being creative, doing schoolwork and shopping. The internet offers them the ability to take part in all the activities that are important to them, and they are overwhelmingly positive about the role it plays in their lives. According to the children, the internet has limitless possibilities in that they are able to do almost anything online.

As discussed earlier, the establishment and maintenance of peer relationships is an integral part of adolescent development and adolescent well-being. Social media has, therefore, provided the perfect vehicle for children to connect with friends and develop friendships. The children in the interviews said that they liked the internet because it enabled them to communicate with family and friends, and a few of them mentioned that it was easier to communicate online as opposed to face-to-face. This accords with other research that has found that texting has become the normative form of communication for children (Harris, 2014).

The internet also alleviated boredom, especially where children felt that they did not have alternative activities to occupy themselves with. The internet was *"never boring and there is always something new to discover."* A few of the children mentioned that they did not know how to occupy themselves when they were not online. A 15-year-old male commented *that "I'm confused about what to do if I don't play on the internet."* This may be as a result of the fact that many children start using the internet as a source of entertainment from very young, as was evidenced in the interviews with the parents, and are not exposed to other forms of entertainment. This may be an important point to address in parenting programmes.

A number of the children described the internet as an addiction and offered this as an explanation for why children like the internet so much, with a few of them admitting that they were addicted to the internet and others to online games.

Rules or limitations on online activities

Nearly three quarters (70 per cent) of the children interviewed said that their families had imposed rules and limitations on their online activity. Most of the rules or limitations (86.7 per cent), however, related simply to the length of time they were allowed to be online. Only 8.2 percent mentioned that they were not allowed to view negative or violent content, porn sites and adult sites while 1.1 percent said that they had rules relating to their behaviour online. These included not posting negative photos or videos, being responsible and being careful. Further restrictions included the use of monitoring

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[1] n = 214

[2] n = 71

applications on the children's phones or intermittent checks on the phones by parents (14 children); rules that required the children to use their devices only at home (4 children); and one child was not allowed to have a password on their phone.

As mentioned, most of the restrictions related to time spent online and varied from half an hour online time to 6 hours per day. Some children were only allowed to access the internet over weekends, and some were not allowed to use their phones during examinations. There were also time restrictions for the evenings. Children had to hand over their cell phones or go offline from generally between 7pm and 10pm at night while one had 12am as a limit and another 1am, the latter in the case of the older children.

Nearly eighty percent (78.8 per cent) of the children who had family rules about online, said that they obeyed the rules. Those children, who did not obey the rules, did so because their phones were too important to them; they were bored and many said that they had been in the middle of a game, which they had to finish, or the game was too exciting to stop; they were influenced by friends; and sometimes lost track of time. Although a number of children said that they did not like the restrictions and did not consider them to be important, generally, the rules broken related to exceeding time limitations. One child admitted that they open negative sites that they are not allowed to while another stated that they break the rules by going online when their parents are asleep.

A number of children said that they had difficulty sleeping and that the cell phone entertained them, so they would break the rules to do that. A child said that they could not sleep until they had played on their cell phone, and they were not allowed to have their cell phone at night, so they were forced to break the rules. A few children said that they broke the rules relating to time restrictions because they were addicted to their phones.

Although only 78.8 per cent of the children said they obeyed the rules, 90.7 per cent said that they agreed with the rules that their families had in place regarding their online activities. Those who did not agree felt that the limitations were too great; they did not consider them to be important; and it made them angry to be over-regulated.

Discussing online activities

About half of the children (49 per cent) shared their online activity with someone, and most of them chose to speak to their friends. The children discussed their online activities with their friends (71.5 per cent); their parents (33.7 per cent); siblings (6.8 per cent) and other family members (4per cent). Friends included close friends, classmates and neighbourhood friends, and one child specified that they spoke to an online gaming friend. This is in line with adolescent development, where peer relationships become very important as adolescents try to become more independent. This finding has implications for the development of online safety programmes for children since they may themselves not be exposed to any negative online incidents but may be approached by friends who have. They would then need to know how to deal with these situations.

The children were asked to explain why they chose to speak to the groups they had identified, and their responses provided some insight into the kind of characteristics that promoted discussion. The key to being able to share with parents was a positive parenting relationship between child and parent. The children chose to talk to their families because they felt more comfortable doing so; they had good relationships with family members; their parents were approachable; they were present in the house with them and sometimes they provided advice and assistance. Many of the children referred to the fact that they had close relationships with a particular parent, usually the mother, and that they felt safe going online when their parents were around. Revealing comments included: *"Mother is a good listener;" "Because my mother is always at home;" "Fun to talk to mother;"* and *"Open to talk about the internet."* It was clear from the responses that children were happy to discuss their online activities with their families when these were available, approachable and prepared to listen.

Children chose to speak to their friends because they felt comfortable doing so as they had common interests and talked about the same things, had the same experiences and understood what was trending. Their friends understood more about the internet, and they could connect with them more easily. They could discuss topics (like filters on their phones) with friends because they had a common understanding of the subject matter. Also, their friends were good at keeping secrets and they could talk to them about anything, including things they could not discuss with their parents. Friends were also available to chat whereas parents had busy schedules.

Internet activities

Activities performed online

Except for physical activities, the children seemed to perform most of their other activities online. They talked to friends and family, watched videos and movies, listened to music, read books, studied, followed the news and sought emotional support. Once again, friendship[3] and entertainment[4] were the key focus of their online activities. Talking to and making friends are a priority for children, particularly adolescents, and it is this normal developmental occupation that makes children especially vulnerable online. Many children chatted with their families online[5] and 74 percent played games online.

Virtual private networks

The majority of the children were not aware of what a VPN was, how to use it or where to obtain one. However, seventy children (13.8 per cent) in the study said that they did use a VPN. The main reason offered for the use of VPNs was related to online gaming since a VPN was needed in order to play certain games, and it improved the network for playing games. This is an important finding for the development of prevention programmes as gaming is revealed as a key pathway to illicit sites. Other reasons provided by the children included the fact that it enabled them to open any website they wanted; to access the servers in other countries as well as blocked sites; to access pornography as well as to meet people and date with videochat; to improve the network connection generally as it stabilized the connection and made the internet smoother; to hide their identity; to watch pirated videos and movies, including pirated anime movies; and it was useful to keep friends private.

Online applications and search engines

The children used a wide range of online applications, with WhatsApp and YouTube being the two that are used the most. Children's use of online applications and search engines has been captured in the Figure 1.
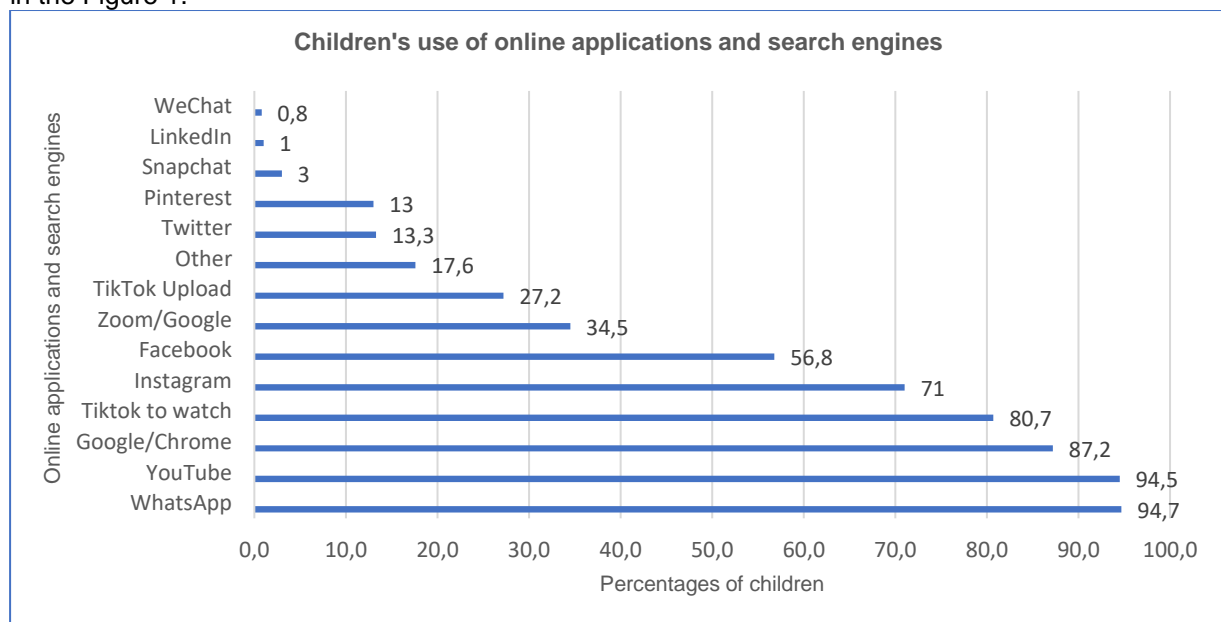

Figure 1 Children's use of online applications and search

Allowing family to `friend' online accounts

As children share their photographs, videos and activities on their social media accounts, it was interesting to find out whether they would allow members of their family to `friend' their accounts and thus have access to their communications. Almost three-quarters (74.8 per cent) of the children said that they allowed their families to `friend' their accounts and they supplied various reasons for so doing. These children explained that they had good relationships with their parents and saw it as a way of communicating with their families as they could share posts, photos, news and activities and to be able to contact them, especially where they did not live with them. A number of them said that they did not have secrets to hide from their families. Some of the children felt safe knowing that their parents were

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[3] n = 435 (86 per cent)

[4] n = 431 (85 per cent)

[5] n = 404 (80 per cent)

able to monitor their activities and believed that it provided their family with an opportunity to be more familiar with their friends as they did not often meet them face-to-face. Some children were required to do so by their families as their families monitored their accounts while others were afraid that their parents would be angry if they did not allow them to `friend' their accounts. Family members were also added to increase the number of followers that the children had on their accounts.

Those children who did not allow their families to `friend' their accounts, said that they did not want to be monitored by their families because they were afraid that they would get into trouble for various activities that they undertook both online and offline. They were embarrassed that their parents would see their posts and photos, and it made them feel uncomfortable.

Secret accounts

Although most children do allow their families to `friend' their accounts, there is the possibility that they may have other accounts secret from their parents or families. Sixty-eight children (13.4 per cent) disclosed that they had accounts that were secret from their families because they did not want their parents or families to become aware of their online activities, as these included things that they were not allowed to do, and they were afraid of getting into trouble. They did not want their families to see the photographs that they posted, nor did they want them to see their online status. A few of the children did not want their parents to know that they watched Korean dramas, while others did not want their parents to find out that they had a boyfriend or a girlfriend. It was also a place where they could share secrets with their friends. They also used the secret account as a fake profile for following others without being recognised online. Secret accounts were also used to register for online games.

Those children who did not hide their accounts from their families said that they were prohibited from having secret social media accounts and feared that if their parents ever discovered these accounts, they would get into trouble. Some said that they did not need to create secret accounts as they had nothing to hide while a few said that they did not know how to create secret accounts.

Internet safety
Feeling safe online

Almost two-thirds of the children (60.6 per cent) said that they felt safe on the internet. However, on closer questioning, this belief appeared to be based on the naïve assumption that the main danger online was fraud, hacking of accounts and compromising data, and that they would be safe if they had a password on their phone. They did not seem to be aware of any real dangers on the internet. Many said that nothing had happened to them online thus far, so they believed that they were safe. A few children did acknowledge that they were not aware of any dangers on the internet.

Reasons for feeling safe online included a number of ingenuous responses. The children felt safe because they ensured that their cell phone was password protected; they used the internet sparingly or only accessed it when their parents were around; their parents monitored their accounts; they only saved the numbers of people they knew, and they limited the number of stories they posted. Some believed they were safe because there were laws in place to regulate online behaviour. Others were a little more aware and said that they felt safe because they only used trusted applications; did not upload problematic content; did not browse adult sites and strange or illegal sites and they did not `friend' unknown people.

Dangers on the internet

The children who said that they did not feel safe on the internet (31.4 per cent) were asked to elaborate about what risks or dangers there were on the internet that made them feel unsafe. This group highlighted that they were primarily concerned with hackers, hoaxes and inappropriate content. Only two (2) children referred to danger of a sexual nature. The identified dangers included health risks relating to excessive internet usage; being contacted and harassed by unknown persons; interference with their focus on learning and schoolwork; hackers and false accounts; hoax news; fraud; leaking or theft of personal data; phishing links; the possibility of being kidnapped; encountering adult or pornographic content; negative content like violence, advertisements for drugs and online gambling; and bullying.

A number of comments made by the children highlighted a thread relating to online games. A lot of the bullying that was mentioned took place as a result of online gaming. There was bullying during the games as well as harassment afterwards, especially from people who had lost in the games.

Online safety information

Just over a third of the children (37 per cent)[6] said that they had received information on how to be safe online. They received this information mostly from the internet on various applications and accounts i.e., Google, YouTube and TikTok. They also received information from their schools (22.6 per cent) and from friends (19.5 per cent). Only 18 children said that they received information from their families.

The children identified a wide range of topics relating to online safety that they had received information about. The main focus, however, was on the use of passwords and privacy settings on their devices with specific emphasis on dangers of the internet related to hacking of their accounts and fraud. Others had received information about what constituted appropriate and/or safe sites; online behaviour which related to posting stories wisely and communicating correctly; what content was appropriate to post; how to block negative content; online bullying; and how to report sites.

Monitoring of online activity

Just over half of the children (55 per cent) said that their parents monitored their online activity. Parents monitored phones in various ways, with the majority of them examining the phones to scrutinise the child's activities, which sometimes included checking their phone history. Parents would ask questions and offer advice (17.3 per cent), or, in the case of younger children, they would accompany children online by sitting next to them (8.7 per cent). Other mentioned methods of monitoring included sharing the phone with a child; limiting sites ("*no pornography*"); checking the child's status or stories online and the photographs they posted; checking their children's friends on social media and insisting on access to passwords. Checking of phones took place at a variety of times, and children said that their phones were checked any time the parent decided; only sometimes; every day; routinely; or every night.

Although the children disclosed that there were certain things that they were prohibited from doing, thirty-eight of these children (10.9 per cent) admitted that they would do these activities anyway. They were asked how they managed to perform these activities without their parents or caregivers discovering it and they revealed various techniques they used to conceal online activities that they were not allowed to perform. The most common of these was simply to do it in secret and many used the privacy of their bedrooms to perform these activities while a few went online at a coffee shop. Some children delete applications after they have used them and delete or archive their chats. Some children use a VPN to ensure that their parents cannot monitor their activities.

One child made a revealing comment relating to inappropriate advertisements that pop up on their phones or computers when they are online. The child said that he did not search for inappropriate content online but did watch it if it appeared on his screen ("*Don't seek out inappropriate content – only watch it if it pops up*"). This is yet another important finding and highlights the danger of inappropriate pop-up advertisements as a passive entry point for children accessing inappropriate material.

Sharing personal images online

In the interviews the children were asked what images of themselves they would share online, and the dominant response related to their dress. They said that they shared images where they were appropriately dressed and wore the hijab and images that were polite, stylish and positive. Twenty-three (4.5 per cent) children said that they never shared photographs or images of themselves. They also shared photos of their pets; daily activities; selfies; with friends; with family; school-related activities; and funny photos.

Risky behaviour

The internet offers children a wonderful, easily accessible venue to learn, communicate with friends and find entertainment, but it also carries with it numerous risks. The open structure of the internet, the sheer impossibility of controlling its contents and the difficulty of supervising this environment increases the risks to which children are exposed, including cyberbullying, exposure to pornography and inappropriate content, invasion of privacy and online grooming. These risks are exacerbated by certain activities children perform online. Children look for friends online, meet these new-found friends, share intimate information and photographs and explore unknown links. In order to investigate the extent to which children in Indonesia are exposed to these risks, it was necessary to find out more about their online activities.

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[6] n = 190

The Dark Web

The children who took part in the study had very little knowledge of the Dark Web. Only sixty-four children (12.6 per cent) knew what the Dark Web was and only twelve children (2.4 per cent) admitted to going onto the Dark Web. Two (2) of those children accessed the Dark Web once, were disturbed by what they found and never went back. Some of the other children appear to use the Dark Web regularly.

The children accessed the Dark Web because they were curious, tempted or mischievous. They talked to people on the Dark Web, accessed dangerous applications, and browsed. They watched and read horror stories and other content while one child said that he had tracked a hacker onto the Dark Web. The children, except for two (2), found the experience to be negative. They described it as terrifying, creepy, weird, risky and not good. One of the children, who found it to be positive, said that they had gained experience, like speaking skills and knowledge sharing, on the Dark Web.

Meeting people online

One hundred and fifty-six children (30.8 per cent) said that they had added contacts of people whom they did not know personally. Thirty-two percent (32.1 per cent) of these children said that they had shared personal information with these people. They shared their ages, names, telephone numbers, home addresses, schools and grades with these people. Twenty-six percent (26 per cent) of these children provided their real names and twenty-two percent (22 per cent) supplied their home addresses. Many of the children said that they shared personal information in online gaming. Forty-seven of these children (30.1 per cent) shared photographs and images with the people they had met online. The majority shared photographs of themselves (selfies) and of their daily activities. Only one child (16-year-old male) admitted to sending pornographic images.

Meeting someone face-to-face after an online meeting

One hundred and twenty children (24 per cent) admitted to meeting a person face-to-face whom they had first made contact with online. The vast majority of this group (84.2 per cent) met friends, both male and female, including those who later became girlfriends and boyfriends. The data from this study also highlights the fact that friendship, including the making of new friends, is a key online activity for children. An analysis of the data further revealed that almost double the number of boys (65.8 per cent) as opposed to girls (34.2 per cent) met someone in person that they had met online for the first time. A further extrapolation of the data revealed that two thirds of the meetings took place in the 15 to 17 age group range with the highest recorded in the 17-year-old group.

The majority of children met this person in a public place. Public places included the main square, terminal, in the street, coffee shop, park, food stall, mall, stadium, restaurant, café, field and football field. Meetings also occurred at their home, at a friend's house and at school.

The children expressed feeling either happy or indifferent about meeting the person with a few mentioning that they felt embarrassed, shy or uncomfortable. Only one child (15-year-old female) reported feeling worried about the meeting ("*Actually, it's normal, but there is fear because he can do strange things*"). The meetings appeared to be positive experiences for the children and the need to make friends was a key motivation.

Forty-nine percent[7] of these children told their parents about the face-to-face meeting. Almost half of the parents were indifferent about their children meeting someone face-to-face whom they had first met online. Others were supportive of the meeting and gave their permission with some restrictions. Only one child said that they had been reprimanded and three mentioned that their parents had asked a lot of questions. Restrictions imposed on the meetings included that they had to be careful; they could only meet at home; they must behave; girls could only meet same-sex friends; and there were restrictions on time.

Risky activities

In order to find out whether the children participated in behaviours considered to be risky, they were presented with five activities and asked whether they had performed any of them. From the data below it is clear that finding friends was a key motivation for children being online.

- Looked for new friends on the internet: 80.9 per cent
- Used a false name and profile picture: 41.2 per cent
- Lied about their age online: 29.6 per cent
- Sent a photo/ video of themselves to someone they have never met   15.8 per cent

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[7] n = 59

- Advertised on social media that they were looking for work: 5.3 per cent.

Unpleasant online experiences

Forty-two percent of the children had had experiences online that bothered and upset them and made them feel uncomfortable or scared. These included being bullied; receiving inappropriate comments or images; being the victim of fraud; being exposed to pop-up adverts; being ostracised online; receiving random inappropriate video calls; being harassed by strangers for their numbers and their photographs and being blackmailed.

A number of children mentioned that they were bullied about online games. They were sworn at, threatened and forced to play by friends via messenger. One child said that they were so bullied online that they dropped out of school. Bullying took the form of being ridiculed in WhatsApp groups or having their photographs randomly edited.

1.   Online sexual experiences

Received sexual messages

One hundred and twenty-eight children (25 per cent) said that they had received sexual messages on their social media accounts. Six children said that they had invited the messages, but the other one hundred and twenty-two had not. The majority of the children said that they felt shocked, annoyed and uncomfortable, while a number said that they felt indifferent, and it did not bother them. Two children said that the messages made them feel happy.

Sexual images received on social media

One hundred and eleven children (22 per cent) had received sexual images on their social media accounts. Forty-eight (48) children said that they had received these images more than once while twenty-three (23) children said they had received these images only once. The majority of sexual messages were sent by friends (49.5 per cent).[8] This included school friends, online friends, and new friends met on social media. This was closely followed by strangers (9.3 per cent),[9] one of whom was described as a middle-aged man. A few children mentioned that they had received these messages from foreigners (7 children), one child specifically referring to someone from Europe. One child received it from a family member (cousin) while others received it on social media groups.

Sexual images seen on social media

Half of the children (50.3 per cent) had seen sexual images on social media. More than half of these children accessed the sexual images on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.

Posted sexual messages

Five (5) children said that they had posted sexual messages via their social media accounts. Only one of these was a female. The messages were sent to boyfriends/girlfriends or friends for fun or as part of a relationship.

Sexual information requested

Thirty-four (34) children, which comprised seven percent of the total participant group (7 per cent), had been approached for sexual information about themselves. The children were approached for sexual information by strangers (16 children); friends including both schoolmates and online friends (15 children); partner/ex-partner (2 children) and family (1 child).

Sexual information sought from the children included photographs of breasts/genitals; naked photographs; bra size and other personal information. Seven (7) of the thirty-four (34) children agreed to the requests, although four (4) said that they had not wanted to do so. Three of the children said they felt indifferent about the experience while the others were disturbed by it.

Request for photographs of private parts

Twenty-five (4.9 per cent) children had received requests for photographs or videos of their private parts. The request for photographs or videos emanated mostly from strangers (19 children). The rest were requests from friends (6 children). Of the twenty-five (25) children who had received requests, three (3) children sent the images but only one (1) said that they were okay with the process. The other one was forced and the third one did not actually want to send the image. The children who refused to send images of their private parts experienced a number of negative emotions, including being angry and annoyed; irritated; uncomfortable; disappointed; afraid; disturbed; cried and one

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[8] n = 55
[9] n = 47

"wanted to hit and punch them." Those children who did send the image in response to the request felt indifferent; embarrassed; and uncomfortable and regretted it (the one who was forced).

Unsolicited photograph or video of private parts sent
Three (3) children sent photographs or videos of their private parts to someone without being asked. They sent the photographs and images to their boyfriends and girlfriends. Two of the children said that they sent the images of their private parts because it was to their partners, and one said he sent it to a girl because he wanted to have some fun. Because the children chose to send the images, they did not experience any negative feelings. Two said that it made them feel happy while one said that he felt "indifferent."

Online sharing of children's sexual images
Nine (1.8 per cent) children said that their sexual images had been shared online. The sexual images were mostly shared by their friends who included online friends, partners and schoolmates. The images were shared mostly on WhatsApp (5 children) followed by Instagram (2 children), Facebook (1 child) and Telegram (1 child). Except for two children, who felt indifferent about the sharing, the others experienced negative emotions unhappiness, discomfort and shock. The majority of the children deleted and/or blocked the account from which it had been shared. One said that they "*just left it.*" Nobody mentioned reporting it or asking for assistance.

Links to pornographic websites received
Nearly a quarter of the children (23.7 per cent)[10] admitted to having received a link to a pornographic site. The majority said that they had not received these links often and only twenty-six (21.7 per cent)[11] children said they received them often. The overwhelming majority of the children received the pornographic links from their friends (67.5per cent) while the rest (27.5 per cent) were from strangers. Seventy percent (70 per cent) of the pornographic links were shared via WhatsApp, which aligns with the fact that the majority of links were sent by friends. The majority of the children deleted and/or blocked the links, some ignored it, and a few reported it.
Most of the children expressed feeling shocked, angry, irritated, sad and afraid when receiving the pornographic links while 20.8 percent said they felt indifferent ("*It is usual because I have watched it so much*" 14-year-old male). Two children said it made them happy ("*Enjoyed the movies provided by the porn site*") and two were amused.

Threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual activities
Nine (1.8 per cent) children said that they had been threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual activities. The threats emanated from strangers (2 children); ex-lover (1 child); new social media friends (1 child); friends (1 child); teacher (1 child) and three (3) did not know. This activity occurred mostly on WhatsApp and Telegram. Threats included humiliating the family if they did not comply; humiliating and disgracing the child; ending a relationship in the case of a boyfriend; reporting to parents or teacher the child's online activity; and seeking them out.

Payment to meet for sexual activity
Thirteen (10.8 per cent) children disclosed that they had been offered money or gifts to meet someone in person for the purpose of taking part in a sexual act. Of the thirteen children, two were children with disabilities. Eight (8) of the children were approached by strangers; one (1) by a family member; three (3) by friends on social media; and one (1) by a college student. Two of the children accepted the offer and performed the sexual act. Most of the children were approached on WhatsApp and Telegram.

Payment for sexual images or videos
Eight (1.6 per cent) children said that they had been offered money or gifts in return for sexual images or videos. These children said that they refused the offer; ignored it or told a parent.

2. Reporting online sexual experiences
Two hundred and sixty-four children (52.1 per cent) said that they would tell someone if any of the above happened to them. Thirty-seven percent (37 per cent) of the children said that they would not report. Of those children who would disclose, the overwhelming majority (47.7 per cent) said that they

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[10] n = 120
[11] n = 26

would tell a parent, and more than a quarter specifically mentioned telling their mother. The next favoured person to confide in was a friend (13.6 per cent). Only four children said that they would tell a teacher.

Of the 37 per cent of children who said that they would not report the matter, the majority acknowledged that they were too scared to do so. From the responses, it is clear that the children have very little understanding of what reporting the matter to the police involves. They expressed a number of fears related to reporting to the police and many of these were based on their misconceptions. They were afraid that they would be interrogated; that they would have to be a witness; that they would become the accused even if they did not do it; and that they would go to jail. Fear also related to possible retaliation from the perpetrator as well as fear of their parents' anger or shame. Ignorance of what would happen if they reported also contributed to their fear. Many also mentioned that they were afraid of the police themselves.

Another reason why children did not report was because they believed that they could deal with the matter themselves. They dealt with it by reporting the application; blocking the person; deleting the message; ignoring it or telling their friends.

3. Cyberbullying and psychological abuse
Teased by others

Two hundred and forty-one children (48per cent) have been teased by other children. Most of the children said that they were teased about physical attributes and disabilities. A big concern for the children was taunts about their parents, insults aimed at their parents and the mimicking of their parents' names. They were teased about their bodies, their hairstyles and clothing, their skin colour, physical deformities, being single, not being active on social media, their religion, not being good at sport and losing at online games.

Embarrassed by others

One hundred and thirty-six children (26.8 per cent) said that they had been embarrassed by someone. This included being pushed and made to fall; mocked; bullied; openly humiliated; trousers pulled down in public; mimicked; parents made to be the butt of jokes; candid photos posted; humiliated in online games; shamed about things they do not have; having naked photographs shared; and having humiliating photographs of them posted online.

False stories spread by others

One hundred and six children (21 per cent) said that they had had false stories spread about them. The children gave examples of the kinds of stories that were spread and these included that they had a bad attitude; slandered about a photograph of sex that was not true; mocked for crying when they had not; said they stayed out all night; saying they had stolen something; spreading stories that their family origins were not clear; accused of smoking or watching pornography; that they had had sex with a friend and a lot of bad gossip.

Blocked from groups

One hundred and thirty-one children (26 per cent) have been blocked or deleted from groups. The reasons for this were varied and ranged from fights to simply no longer communicating with a person.

Received nasty or scary messages

Ninety-five children (19 per cent) had received nasty and scary messages online. These varied from horror and ghost messages to bullying and sexual harassment. Horror messages included horror spam and violent photographs. Many of the children had received threats, which included murder messages and threats of death; threats that they would be beaten; threats that they would be traced to their homes; and terrorised into playing games.

Children's responses to unpleasant online experiences

Most of the children said that they simply ignored the messages, blocked them or told their parents. Other methods of responding included leaving the group; telling a close friend; retaliating; avoiding the threats or requests; reporting to a teacher; being more careful online; and changing accounts.

The children identified a wide range of emotions that they experienced as a result of the unpleasant incidences they had suffered online, but there were two particularly interesting comments, which were echoed in a number of the earlier responses. Many of the children described becoming resigned to the cyberbullying while others described their reactions online as indifferent. There is a need for further

research in the area of the impact of online bullying on mental health and how this differs from offline ("*If online do not feel anything, if offline angry*").

Again here, the majority of the children described themselves as feeling indifferent (78 children) to negative things online and regarded them as normal. The strongest emotion experienced was anger (52 children), followed by fear (45 children). Other emotions included sadness, embarrassment, shame, feeling inferior and "*messed up.*"

Conclusions

The qualitative nature of the study was successful in providing deeper insight into the activities of children online as well as offering a greater understanding of their perceptions and feelings about the online world. This information will be able to contribute richly to the development or adaptation of online safety programmes that respond to the needs of children as highlighted by them themselves.

Key findings from the study show, overwhelmingly, that most children in Indonesia engage with the internet for a substantial portion of their day. To address online literacy for children, there needs to be recognition that the online environment has become an integral part of their lives, a place where they are entertained, their development is taking place and they feel happy. Their world is contained within their phones and the benefits far outweigh the negative experiences. Indonesian children go online for entertainment and games, to access information and to communicate with their friends. They regard the internet as interesting, exciting and fun and they see it as an entertaining and happy space where they can play and interact with their friends.

In most cases, children share their online activities primarily with their friends. The study did find, however, that children with good relationships with their parents also share their online activities with them. The children chose to talk to their families because they felt more comfortable doing so, had good relationships with family members, were present in the house with them and received advice from them. Many of the children referred to the fact that they had close relationships with a particular parent, usually the mother. They described their parents as being good listeners, open to talk about the internet and fun to talk to. This finding emphasises the need for parenting programmes that promote good relationships and interactions with children.

However, the children need a greater awareness of the dangers that are inherent in online activities as their knowledge is limited in this regard. Although two-thirds of the children said they felt safe online, their basis for this belief was naïve and showed a lack of appreciation of the dangers. They focus on hacking and fraud and, therefore, believe that they are safe if they have privacy settings and passwords on their devices. They also need more detailed information on how to protect themselves online against these dangers since many simply block negative or problematic content or messages or ignore them, irrespective of whether there are images of them being shared with others. This gives credence to the finding that just over a third of the children had ever received information on how to be safe online. Most children received their information on how to be safe online from the internet itself on various applications and accounts.

Although some children's phones are monitored, the monitoring appears to be negligible. Almost a third of the children have no restrictions at all online. Those who did have restrictions were prohibited from watching pornography or inappropriate content; limiting time spent online; watching violence or gambling; and sharing inappropriate photographs. Nearly eleven percent of these children said that they did the prohibited activities anyway.

Children exhibit various forms of risky behaviour online. Nearly a third have added contacts they did not know personally and shared personal information with these people, including their real names and addresses as well as shared photographs and images with these contacts. An important thread emerging relates to online gaming. Many of the children, who shared information, did so in online gaming. Almost a quarter of the children met someone in person whom they first met online. The meetings appeared to be positive experiences for the children and the need to make friends was a key motivation. Nearly half (of the parents knew about the meeting and almost half of them were indifferent about it. False names and profile pictures online were used by nearly half of the children while almost a third of them lied about their age online.

Children have online sexual experiences, both wanted and unwanted, and to ensure that they have the knowledge to adequately protect themselves, programmes need to contain open discussions of appropriate sexual behaviour and how to keep safe online. These discussions are important since the taboo on discussing sex impacts on the child's ability to disclose possible abuse. Half of the children have seen sexual images on social media; some children received requests on social media for photographs or videos of their private parts; some children had sexual images of themselves shared online by friends; nearly a quarter of the children admitted to having received a link to a pornographic site; a few of the children had been threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual activities; some were

offered money or gifts to meet a person to perform a sexual act and some were offered money or gifts in return for sexual images or videos.

The children were not willing to report any sexual experiences they had online. They were too ashamed and embarrassed and afraid that they would be misunderstood so would deal with it themselves by blocking the person concerned. Those children who were prepared to report would do so mostly to their parents, particularly the mother. Two-thirds of the children said that they would not report the matter to the police because they were too scared.

Bullying online was the experience that bothered the children the most. Almost half of the children have experienced some form of cyberbullying, including mocking and teasing; posting of embarrassing photographs of them; spreading of false stories; and receiving scary messages, and threats. shared. Most of the children ignored the bullying and blocked the person, while others told their parents or family members. Online gaming is emerging as a prominent venue for bullying. A number of participants mentioned that they were bullied about online games. They were sworn at, threatened and forced to play by friends via messenger or terrorised if they lost at games.

Suggestions

Children's digital literacy is significant as they increasingly go online for both entertainment and developmental purposes and the research has produced findings which have given rise to the following recommendations for future activities relating to the safeguarding of children online:

1. The lack of awareness on the part of the children concerning online risks underscores the necessity for comprehensive safety education, encompassing topics such as OCSEA and CSAM.
2. As misconceptions about online friendships may make children vulnerable to further risks, it is necessary to elucidate clearly the meaning and concept of online friendship to promote safe online engagement. In this regard, further research on this concept and children's online risk is worthy.
3. In addition, children with disabilities are also disproportionately vulnerable due to inadequate access to safety education and this is an area that would require further research and response.
4. Parental involvement is imperative, with a focus on comprehending online hazards and nurturing positive relationships to discuss children's online experience. This highlights the importance of parenting programmes and the need to include this information in programmes and activities.
5. The pervasive cyberbullying issue validates continued research and educational initiatives.
6. An overall comprehensive safety environment for children to develop and thrive in the digital world is necessary in Indonesia. In line with that, relevant registration, national strategy, and a roadmap to protect children from online violence, and efficient, speedy, measurable, sustainable capacity-building for stakeholders including law enforcement, service providers, teachers, parents, caregivers, and children themselves are recommended.
7. Collaboration with the tech sector is pivotal for tailored programme, especially catering to children with disabilities.
8. Enhancing reporting mechanisms for online exploitation and abuse is must, necessitating accessible platforms and widespread education on reporting procedures and legal aspects.
9. Given the evolving nature and ongoing impact of this subject, further research into existing online safety programmes and their efficacy is recommended. This research should aim to identify effective prevention and mitigation strategies, such as strengthening legislation and regulation, developing comprehensive online safety education, and enhancing response and compensation mechanisms.

Author/Authors Brief Bio.

Karen Diane Muller, Child Witness Institute**,** B.A. (Hons) LLB, PhD (Rhodes University)
Numerous publications in books and journals.

Astrid Gonzaga Dionisio, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF Indonesia, MA in Child and Adolescent Welfare (Charles Sturt University, Australia)

Sanghyun Park, Child Online Protection officer, UNICEF Indonesia**,** MA in Education and International Development (University College London, UK)

Nahar
Deputy of Special Protection for Children, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Indonesia)

Ciput Purwianti
Assistant Deputy of Child Protection from Violence, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Indonesia)

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