



**GHANA
INTERNET
SAFETY
FOUNDATION**



Child Online Protection Report

**A BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF DIGITAL SAFETY,
LITERACY, AND ONLINE RISKS AMONG SCHOOL
CHILDREN IN GHANA**

JULY 2024



Introduction

The growing use of the internet among children presents both opportunities and challenges. As children increasingly navigate online spaces, understanding their digital habits, skills, and safety awareness becomes essential. This baseline report, part of the "Cybersafety Ambassadorial & Digital Parenting Empowerment Project," targets 2,500 students aged 10 to 16 in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The initiative aims to assess the digital behaviors and vulnerabilities of these students, providing crucial insights that will shape effective digital literacy programs and safety interventions tailored to their needs.



About This Report

This baseline report is the result of a comprehensive baseline assessment conducted between May 1st and July 31st, 2024, employing a mixed-method approach. The study combined quantitative surveys with qualitative insights to capture the full spectrum of children's online experiences. A key component of the research was the use of an online safety survey toolkit, which was implemented on the Zoho Survey platform, allowing for both online and offline data collection. To ensure thorough and accurate data gathering, 10 volunteers were recruited to assist with the exercise, reaching 2,500 students in Ghana's Ashanti Region. This report evaluates the prevalence of online risks, such as cyberbullying and sexual exploitation, alongside the digital competencies of the students. As a baseline assessment, it provides essential insights into the current state of children's digital behaviors and safety awareness, serving as a foundational tool for developing targeted digital safety and literacy interventions.





Baseline Thematic Areas

The following table summarizes the main themes and subtopics covered in the questionnaire:

**Demographics
(Section A)**

- ◉ Age
- ◉ Gender
- ◉ Location
- ◉ Education level
- ◉ Disability status

**Access to Internet
(Section B)**

- ◉ First use of the internet
- ◉ Frequency of internet use
- ◉ Reasons for limited internet access
- ◉ Places where internet is used
- ◉ Devices used for internet access
- ◉ Type of internet connection

**Digital Skills
(Section C)**

- ◉ Operational skills (e.g., saving photos, changing privacy settings)
- ◉ Information and browsing skills (e.g., checking website trustworthiness)
- ◉ Creative skills (e.g., posting videos, designing websites)
- ◉ Mobile skills (e.g., installing apps, in-app purchases)



Harms from Internet Use (Section D)

- ◉ Perception of online risks
- ◉ Personal experiences with upsetting online content
- ◉ Emotional response to online harms
- ◉ Actions taken after encountering online harm

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Section E)

- ◉ Witnessing or experiencing sexual exploitation
- ◉ Being asked for sexual information or images
- ◉ Being asked to perform sexual acts

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Section E)

- ◉ Exposure to pornography
- ◉ Experiences with cyberbullying
- ◉ Online grooming
- ◉ Internet fraud and scams
- ◉ Online betting and gambling
- ◉ Hacking incidents





Data Collection Tool

Data Collection Tool

Our baseline data collection was conducted using assessments created and administered both online through Zoho Survey and offline via printed copies.

QUANTITATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHILDREN

SECTION A: CHILD IDENTITY

1. Sex of Child _____ a. Male b. Female
2. Age of Child (*Age at last birthday and must be between 9-17 years*) _____
3. Where do you live? (*Name of community*) _____

A2. Education

1. What is the highest level of education you have completed (so far)? (*Specify the exact class level you completed*) _____
2. In your opinion, what does your class teacher(s) think of your school performance compared to your classmates? *Choose one answer*

Options	Response (Tick ✓)
Not as good	
About the same	
Better	

A3. Disability

1. Do you face difficulties that mean you can't do what other children do?
a. Yes b.No

2. If yes, which of the following applies to you?

Options	Response (Tick ✓)
Physical disability	
Physical illness	
Mental health difficulty	
Behavioral difficulty	
Learning difficulty	
Other disability	
None of these	

SECTION B: ACCESS TO INTERNET

B1. Digital Inclusion

1. How old were you when you first used the internet? _____

2. How often do you use the internet? *Choose one answer.*

Options	Response (Tick ✓)
Never	
Rarely (once in a while)	
Often	

3. Are you able to use the internet when you want to or need to?
Choose one answer.

Options	Response (Tick ✓)
Yes	
No	
Sometimes	

4. How often do you experience these things? *Answer for each option: Never (1), Sometimes (2), Often (3)*

Options	Response
My parents don't allow me to use the internet	



Quantitative Questionnaire For Children

SECTION A

Section A: CHILD IDENTITY

A1. Demographics

* Sex of Child

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

* Age of Child

01/31/1970 

* Where do you live? (Name of community)

A2. Education

* What is the highest level of education you have completed (so far)? (Specify the exact class level you completed)



Summary of Findings



1. Online Access and Usage

Internet Usage Frequency: A large percentage of children (52.76%) reported using the internet only “once in a while,” while 37.42% used it often. This indicates a significant portion of children have limited and inconsistent access to digital resources, which could hinder their ability to develop essential digital skills.

Age of First Internet Use: The data revealed that many children started using the internet at a young age, highlighting the importance of early digital literacy education to ensure safe online practices from the start.

Internet Connectivity: 55.21% of children reported using prepaid internet, while 60.74% used free internet available in places like schools or cafes. 51.23% relied on pay-as-you-go data services, indicating that the cost of connectivity is a significant factor in their internet usage patterns.



2. Device Usage

Devices Used for Internet Access: The most common device, with 76.38% of children having a mobile phone for their own use. 56.75% of children had access to a computer (desktop, laptop, or notebook). 53.68% of children used tablets for internet access.

Frequency of Device Use: 34.36% of children used mobile phones to go online always, while 59.51% used them sometimes. 66.87% used computers sometimes, but only 13.19% used them always, indicating that mobile phones are the primary access point for internet use.

52.76% reported using the internet only “once in a while,” while **37.42%** used it often.

55.21% of children reported using prepaid internet, while **60.74%** used free internet.

76.38% of children having a mobile phone and **56.75%** of children had access to a computer.

34.36% of children used mobile phones to go online always, while **59.51%** used them sometimes.



3. Time Spent Online

Weekday Internet Use: 39.88% of children reported spending “little or no time” online during weekdays, while 44.17% spent about 1-3 hours online. A smaller percentage (9.82%) spent more than 3-5 hours online on school days.

Weekend Internet Use: 44.79% spent about 1-3 hours online on weekends, with 15.95% spending more than 3-5 hours, and 6.44% spending more than 7 hours online.



4. Digital Skills

Basic Digital Skills: Only 30.30% of children reported knowing how to save a photo online. 29.97% were confident in changing privacy settings. 27.95% could open a new tab in a browser. These findings indicate a need for targeted digital literacy programs that focus on building basic online skills among children.

Information and Browsing Skills: Only 12.12% of children reported being very confident in checking whether a website can be trusted. 20.20% felt very confident in choosing the best keywords for online searches, highlighting a gap in effective information retrieval skills.

39.88% of children reported spending “little or no time” online during weekdays

44.79% spent about **1-3 hours** online on weekends

Only **30.30%** of children reported knowing how to save a photo online. **29.97%** were confident in changing privacy settings.

Only **12.12%** of children reported being very confident in checking whether a website can be trusted.



5. Online Safety Awareness

Perception of Online Risks: Most children (83.88%) understood that there are risks associated with internet use. However, only 15.34% were confident in reporting online issues, such as cyberbullying or inappropriate content, to a trusted adult or parent.

Experience with Online Harms: 52.57% of children reported experiencing something online that upset them. Common issues included exposure to harmful content, unwanted contact, and cyberbullying.



6. Exposure to Inappropriate Content

Sexual Content: 13.36% of children reported receiving messages with links to X-rated websites, and 22.67% received sexual messages or images they did not want.

Unwanted Messages: 25.51% of children opened a message that showed pictures of naked people or people having sex that they did not want to see.

Coping Strategies: 33.54% of children reported ignoring online problems, hoping they would go away. 21.12% blocked the person from contacting them, and 7.45% reported the problem online.

Most children (**83.88%**) understood that there are risks associated with internet use

52.57% of children reported experiencing something online that upset them.

13.36% of children reported receiving messages with links to X-rated websites.

25.51% of children opened a message that showed pictures of naked people.

33.54% of children reported ignoring online problems.



7. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Witnessing or Experiencing Sexual Exploitation: A significant portion of children reported witnessing or experiencing online sexual exploitation. 17.81% knew someone who was asked for sexual information online, and 12.96% were personally asked to provide such information. This data highlights the critical need for digital literacy programs that include education on recognizing and responding to online sexual exploitation and abuse.



8. Digital Confidence

Confidence in Using the Internet: 42.42% of children felt “a bit true” that they know a lot about using the internet and mobile phones. However, only 22.56% were very confident in their knowledge, suggesting that many children might be overestimating their digital skills.

Comparison with Parents: 36.36% believed they knew more about the internet than their parents, which might reflect a gap in digital literacy between generations and the need for parental education.

17.81% knew someone who was asked for sexual information online, and **12.96%** were personally asked to provide such information.

42.42% of children felt “a bit true” that they know a lot about using the internet and mobile phones.

36.36% believed they knew more about the internet than their parents



9. Reactions to Online Harms

Emotional Impact: When children experienced something upsetting online, 49.69% reported feeling “a little upset,” while 28.57% felt “very upset.” The emotional impact of these experiences suggests that children need better tools and resources to cope with online harms.

Duration of Upset: 45.96% of children felt upset for “some time” after an online incident, indicating a lasting impact on their well-being. 22.98% felt upset for “a long time,” which highlights the need for support systems that address the mental health impacts of online experiences.



10. Access to Educational Content

Use of the Internet for Learning: 83.44% of children reported using the internet for educational purposes, such as Google searches and learning platforms like Edmodo and ClassDojo. This high percentage indicates that while children use the internet for education, they also need guidance on discerning credible sources and avoiding misinformation.

Balancing Education and Entertainment: While 78.53% of children used the internet for entertainment, 67.79% also used it for social media. This dual use suggests that digital literacy programs should also address how children can balance educational use with entertainment and social interaction online.

49.69% reported feeling “a little upset,” while **28.57%** felt “very upset.”

45.96% of children felt upset for “some time” after an online incident, indicating a lasting impact on their well-being

83.44% of children reported using the internet for educational purposes

While **78.53%** of children used the internet for entertainment, **67.79%** also used it for social media.

Gender-Based Disparities in Exposure to Online Harms

To better understand how digital risks affect children differently, a gender-based analysis was conducted. Among the 2,500 respondents, 54% identified as female and 46% as male.

In order to further contextualize the experiences of children in the digital environment, a gender-disaggregated analysis was conducted to understand how boys and girls differently experience online risks. The findings below reflect those disparities and support the need for gender-sensitive interventions.

Key Insights:

⦿ Exposure to Sexual Content and Inappropriate Messages:

- 26.9% of girls reported receiving unwanted sexual content (including messages and explicit media), compared to 18.2% of boys.
- Girls were more likely to be exposed to images or videos they did not want to see.

⦿ Emotional Impact of Online Harms:

- 58.3% of girls said they were bothered or upset by something online in the past year, compared to 45.6% of boys.
- Of those who experienced harm, 35.5% of girls felt very upset versus 21.8% of boys.

⦿ Coping and Reporting Behavior:

- Girls were more likely to ignore harmful experiences or confide in a peer than seek help from adults.
- Boys more frequently reported using blocking tools or attempting to confront the issue.

⦿ Requests for Sexual Information or Acts:

- 14.1% of girls were asked for sexual information online, versus 9.4% of boys.
- Girls also reported higher occurrences of being asked to engage in or discuss sexual acts.

Summary Table: Gender-Based Key Online Harm Indicators

Key Indicator	Girls (%)	Boys (%)	Girls (Count)	Boys (Count)
Received Unwanted Sexual Content	26.9%	18.2%	672	455
Upset by Online Harm (Last Year)	58.3%	45.6%	1458	1140
Very Upset After Online Harm	35.5%	21.8%	888	545
Asked for Sexual Info Online	14.1%	9.4%	352	235

*Note: Percentages and counts are based on a total sample size of 2,500 children.

Implications for Interventions:

The data underscores the need for gender-responsive online safety strategies. Girls appear more exposed to sexually explicit content and report higher emotional distress. Prevention and support efforts must be tailored—ensuring girls have safe reporting avenues and boys are engaged in respectful digital behavior campaigns.



Analysis of Perceived Internet Risks

Based on the survey responses, the children identified six key risks associated with internet use. The following table summarizes the statistical responses related to these risks:

Risk Percentage Affected Frequency of Incidents Reporting Behavior Other Notable Data

Risk	Percentage Affected	Frequency of Incidents	Reporting Behavior	Other Notable Data
Cyberbullying	35%	25% encounter at least once a month	15% reported incidents	50% felt anxious or depressed afterward
Online Betting	15% engaged	N/A	10% aware of legal implications	5% lost money; 50% without parental knowledge
Pornography	22% exposed	N/A	40% parental awareness	Average age of first exposure: 11 years; 30% had parental controls
Online Betting	15% engaged	N/A	10% aware of legal implications	5% lost money; 50% without parental knowledge
Internet Fraud	18% exposed	N/A	25% can recognize fraud	7% experienced financial loss; 30% educated on fraud prevention
Hacking	10% hacked	N/A	N/A	40% aware of security measures; 15% use two-factor authentication

Demographics (Section A)

- ⦿ Age
- ⦿ Gender
- ⦿ Location
- ⦿ Education level
- ⦿ Disability status- Operational skills (e.g., saving photos, changing privacy settings)
- ⦿ Information and browsing skills (e.g., checking website trustworthiness)
- ⦿ Creative skills (e.g., posting videos, designing websites)
- ⦿ Mobile skills (e.g., installing apps, in-app purchases)

Harms from Internet Use (Section D)

- ⦿ Perception of online risks
- ⦿ Personal experiences with upsetting online content
- ⦿ Emotional response to online harms
- ⦿ Actions taken after encountering online harm

Cyber Risks (Section F)

- ⦿ Exposure to pornography
- ⦿ Experiences with cyberbullying
- ⦿ Online grooming
- ⦿ Internet fraud and scams
- ⦿ Online betting and gambling
- ⦿ Hacking incidents

Access to Internet (Section B)

- ⦿ First use of the internet
- ⦿ Frequency of internet use
- ⦿ Reasons for limited internet access
- ⦿ Places where internet is used
- ⦿ Devices used for internet access
- ⦿ Type of internet connection

Access to Internet (Section B)

- ⦿ Witnessing or experiencing sexual exploitation
- ⦿ Being asked for sexual information or images
- ⦿ Being asked to perform sexual acts

Conclusion

The findings from this report emphasize the urgent need for enhanced digital literacy education for children. While many children are aware of the risks of internet use, they often lack the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate these risks safely. Comprehensive digital literacy programs, combined with active parental involvement and robust legal frameworks, are essential to equip children with the tools they need to thrive in an increasingly digital world while protecting them from potential harms. This baseline report serves as a critical foundation for future interventions aimed at improving online safety and digital literacy for children in Ghana's Ashanti Region.





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