

Factsheet on The Rising Threats to **Children Online Safety** In Nigeria





Introduction

Nigeria, like many other countries globally, has rapidly embraced the digital age. However, as children's access to digital devices skyrockets, their safety in the vast, unregulated space of the internet is under unprecedented attack. In recent years, there has been an unprecedented level of exposure of children to cyber threats. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC (2020), **90% of children between 4 and 16 years old** across the country have been exposed to at least one of the common cyber attacks. This disturbing statistic showcases the reality of the average Nigerian child, indicating that we are in the middle of a cyber risk pandemic.

Scope of the Problem

What are these Threats and Why we should be Concerned

Parents and guardians are increasingly embracing new technologies for their kids, recognizing the numerous benefits they offer for their children's development. However, with 3 out of 4 children befriending strangers online, it highlights the significant risks they face in these digital environments (Project Open Eyes [POE], 2018). As kids spend more time on the internet each day, the threats they encounter are increasingly pervasive and dangerous. The most commonly reported online threat faced by children in Nigeria is unsolicited sexual approaches or harassment. Over 90% of 11-16-year-olds in Nigeria admitted to being sexually approached in a chatroom, social networking site, or via email. This is closely followed by 89% of children receiving "sexual images or content" (NCC, 2020). Cyberbullying or harassment, which involves using computers, smartphones, or other connected devices to embarrass, hurt, mock, threaten, or be mean to someone online, is another significant threat to children's psychological and mental safety online.

Moreover, the growing complexity of AI and its wide range of uses can expose children to more advanced risks like impersonation, data harvesting, and emotional manipulation. Other cyber threats that children may encounter online include phishing, hacking, Trojans, drive-by downloads, and malware. These threats have real-world consequences for children and if left unaddressed, they could cause irreparable harm to our society's future.



Factors Contributing to the Risks

1

Lack of Digital Literacy Among Children and Parents:

Children often lack the knowledge to recognize online risks, such as sharing personal information or engaging with strangers, while many parents are unfamiliar with the digital platforms their kids use leaving children more vulnerable to threats online.

2

Inadequate Parental Controls and Monitoring Tools:

Many parents are either unaware of these tools or find them too complex to use. As a result, children may access inappropriate content or engage in risky online behaviours without proper safeguards in place.

3

Insufficient Regulations and Enforcement of Child Protection Laws:

Despite the existence of child protection laws, enforcement is often inconsistent, and many platforms fail to comply with regulations, particularly in data privacy and age restrictions.

4

Rapid Evolution of Online Platforms:

The fast pace of online innovation makes it difficult for parents and regulators to keep up with new platforms and their associated risks. Emerging technologies such as Generative AI, Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) introduce even more complex risks for children.

Government and Non-government Efforts in Addressing this Issue

In Nigeria, several laws and policies aim to combat online threats against children. Here's an overview:

1

Child Rights Act (2003):

This act ensures the protection of children's rights in Nigeria. It outlines the responsibilities of the government and society in safeguarding children from abuse, including online threats. The act promotes the right to protection from violence and exploitation.

2

Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act (2015):

This law addresses cybercrime activities, including those targeting children. It prohibits various online offenses such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and child pornography, providing legal frameworks for prosecuting offenders.

3

National Child Policy (2019):

This policy outlines the government's commitment to the welfare of children in Nigeria. It recognizes the importance of protecting children from online exploitation and promotes digital literacy as a means of empowering children to navigate the internet safely.

4

Data Protection Regulation (2019):

The Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) aims to safeguard personal data, including that of children. It requires organizations that process children's data to obtain consent from parents or guardians, thus protecting minors from data misuse.

5

Child Online Access Protection Bill (2023):

This bill, currently before the National Assembly, aims to establish a legal framework to protect children from online threats and harmful content. It focuses on regulating online platforms to ensure they implement measures for child safety, including parental controls, age verification, and content moderation. The bill seeks to create a safer digital environment for children and to hold online service providers accountable for the protection of minors.

6

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP):

NAPTIP works to combat human trafficking, which can include online exploitation of children. The agency conducts awareness campaigns and collaborates with other stakeholders to address these issues.

In addition, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have taken on the task of addressing these rapidly growing threats. Projects such as Digital Citizenship and Online Safety Training for Teachers and Students by Webfala Digital Skills for all Initiative, the Digital Skills and Safety (DASP) project initiated by TechQuest STEM Academy, and the Virtually Safe School Tour organized by Teens Can Code, are some of the many non-profit organizations working to ensure a safer online environment for children. On a global scale, Nigeria ranks third highest on the COSI on Reputational Risks, well above the global average, which indicates that not many children in Nigeria have experienced cyber shaming or have risked harming others' reputations online.

Recommendations

Despite progress, several gaps remain in Nigeria's efforts to combat threats to child online safety. Hence, the following recommendations are put forward:

- **Strengthening regulations:** There is an urgent need for stricter enforcement of child protection laws and data privacy regulations. The timely passage and effective implementation of the *Child Online Access Protection Bill, 2023*, currently before the National Assembly, is crucial in addressing the rising threats to children's online safety. Also, government must allocate resources for the enforcement of this bill, ensuring that regulatory bodies are equipped to monitor compliance and swiftly address violations. The commitment to this legislation will demonstrate Nigeria's dedication to creating a safer digital environment for children, ultimately fostering trust among parents and guardians in the online safety of their children.
- **Digital literacy programs:** More education is needed for children and parents about online risks and responsible internet usage.
- **Collaboration with tech companies:** The government should encourage the development of more effective parental control tools and safety features on online technological platforms.
- **NGO initiatives:** NGOs can contribute greatly by consistently creating awareness campaigns, workshops, and resources for children, parents and educators.

Conclusion

The high percentage of Nigerian children being exposed to one or more online risks every day is alarming. This serves as a stark reminder of the dangers that children face online. Despite the government's efforts to introduce policies and frameworks to combat these threats, more needs to be done regarding their implementation. A strengthened regulatory system, improved digital literacy, better collaboration with tech companies, and increased NGO involvement will ensure a safer online space for children.

References

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