



Online safety in Papua New Guinea



The digital landscape in Papua New Guinea is currently undergoing significant transformation, with the new undersea fibre optic cable providing high-speed connectivity. Enhanced access and increasing uptake of mobile digital technologies have profound implications for girls and boys online safety, opening up potential exposure to new risks of harm. Simultaneously, however, these technologies offer a wide range of new possibilities and benefits for girls and boys education, health and development.

The Young and Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University, ChildFund Australia and Plan International Australia conducted research to map the challenges and opportunities that digital technology presents in Papua New Guinea. Child and adults participants for the research resided in the Joyce Bay settlement on the outskirts of Port Moresby. Stakeholders were recruited from a range of sectors and organisations, including representatives from NGOs, government agencies and community groups.

Children & young people

Key findings:

- Children living in Joyce Bay settlement have limited internet exposure beyond their parent's mobile. These exposure constraints mean children have very little understanding of online risks.
- In lower-income settings, the high costs of mobile data plans/devices impedes children's development of digital literacy and protective strategies.
- Children emphasise social media as the biggest online risk, particularly for girls. Despite limited digital exposure, children have received education about the negative effects of cyberbullying and hacking, although they were unsure how these types of risks can occur.
- Children highlight developing their English language skills and strengthening bonds with their family and peers as the key benefits for increased digital access.

Parents and caregivers

Key findings:

- Parents and carers are enthusiastic about how digital technology can strengthen online connections with family and friends and enable more economic opportunities for their children.
- Parents and carers generally believe that restricting their children's digital technology use best protects them from online dangers, with 15% prohibiting their children from going online altogether.
- On average, 89% of parents and carer's list addiction and consumption of inappropriate content (pornography) as their greatest concern for children's online safety.
- Parents identify themselves as the most responsible for their children's online safety, despite having low confidence levels in their digital literacy skills.

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I am concerned about [the] increase of mental health issues (depression, anxiety), stereotypes and low self-esteem.”

- Stakeholder, Papua New Guinea, female, age unknown





Communities

Key findings:

- Parents and carers place equal importance on the police as responsible for protecting children's online safety.
- Approximately 10% of adult stakeholders and parents identify churches, community leaders and other religious organisations as 'somewhat responsible' for children's online safety.
- Stakeholders call for more targeted and comprehensive digital literacy and online safety education to be embedded into the national school curriculum.
- Stakeholders identify social media as a platform that can expose children to extreme issues such as grooming and exploitation and believe the government must further develop policies and legislation to protect children online.

Societies

Key findings:

- Financial dependence of digital devices by the paternal family figure can impact women's and children's access and use of technology. Some mothers report, for example, that they must request money from their husband to buy phone data.
- Participants note insufficient financial support invested into cyber safety as a key barrier to protecting children online.
- Government actors and decision-makers limited digital literacy or lack of familiarity with how children use technology is a key concern for stakeholders.
- Stakeholders highlight the necessity of adopting broader, whole-of-community approaches to children's online safety, utilising the police, NGOs, and other practitioners to educate and monitor online safety issues.