



Online safety in Solomon Islands



The digital landscape in Solomon Islands 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 has profound implications for girls and boys online safety, opening up potential for 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 technology presents in Solomon Islands. Research participants represented low to middle income families residing in Honiara and the villages surrounding Guadalcanal. Stakeholder participants represented a mix of community, NGO, education and government agencies.

Children & young people

Key findings:

- In Solomon Islands, children identify cyberbullying and hacking on social media as their greatest online concerns.
- Overall, children are familiar with technical self-protective strategies, but only identified parents and carers as the primary support for their online safety.
- Access to digital technology remains a key challenge, with 50% of children reporting they do not own or have reliable access to a digital device.
- Children are excited to use digital technology to improve their English and access religious resources online such as bible apps.
- Dominant gender roles play into children's framing of online risks, with the vast majority of child participants reporting that they believe girls are far more at risk of harm online than boys.

Parents and caregivers

Key findings:

- Parents and carers are enthusiastic about the opportunities digital technology brings, emphasizing the value of internet access for the reinforcement of religious and cultural values and entertainment 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.
- Parents and carers report themselves as most responsible for their children's online safety. However, particularly in low-income areas, parents feel generally under-equipped to provide effective support to their children.
- Parents and carers are most concerned about managing their children's online contact with strangers and ensuring this access doesn't challenge strong family and cultural values.

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My fear is that my child will be exposed to this outside world where you have no control of the good and the bad.”

- Solomon Islands, parent, age unknown





Communities

Key findings:

- Children occasionally mention the police as a category for online safety support, only if no other avenues are available.
- Approximately 10% of adult stakeholders in Solomon Islands identify churches and other community and religious organizations as 'somewhat responsible' for online safety.
- Aside from Australian Federal Police initiatives, Solomon Island stakeholders identify few other dedicated online safety support programs for children.
- Parents and carers recognise schools as vital to children's online safety, calling for digital literacy and online safety to be embedded in the national education curriculum.

Societies

Key findings:

- Household gender roles in Solomon Islands shape mothers' and children's access to digital devices. In Solomon Islands, mothers frequently note that their husbands mediate and restrict their digital technology usage.
- Stakeholders in Solomon Islands were particularly vocal about the need for cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approaches to developing and strengthening legislation around children's online safety.
- Participants call for the implementation of further government regulation, applying age restrictions and bans on certain websites, particularly those containing inappropriate content and providing more support to mitigate the risks of cyberbullying.