

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE ONLINE

A Study on
Online Safety
among Children
in Nepal

SUMMARY REPORT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As World Vision we are committed to address all forms of violence against children. We trust that this study will provide essential insights for those working with the government, international organizations, national civil society and the private sector to collectively address the many risks that our children face online. Furthermore, we hope that this study will initiate more research and will provide guidance for targeted interventions to address online violence against children.

On behalf of World Vision International Nepal I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this research, in particular all those children from various parts of Nepal who entrusted us with their responses to our surveys and questions.

Special thanks to the World Vision International Nepal team members Sunil Hakaju Shrestha, Anju Bhattarai, Badri Dulal, Krishna Giri who supported this research and Mr. Bishnu Khatri for leading this research.

JACOBUS KOEN

Program Development and Quality Director

Published by
World Vision International Nepal
Lalitpur, Nepal- National Office

March 2025

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नेपाल सरकार
महिला, बालबालिका तथा ज्येष्ठ नागरिक मन्त्रालय
राष्ट्रिय बाल अधिकार परिषद्
National Child Rights Council-NCRC

श्रीमहल, पुल्चोक, ललितपुर

पत्र संख्या : ०८०/०८९

चलानी नं. : २

श्री वर्ल्ड भिजन इन्टरनेशनल नेपाल

कुसुन्ति, ललितपुर ।

श्री हिमवत कन्सल्ट प्रा.लि.

बुद्धनगर, काठमाण्डौ ।

विषय:- सहमति प्रदान गरिएको सम्बन्धमा ।

उपर्युक्त सम्बन्धमा तहाँ वर्ल्ड भिजन इन्टरनेशनल नेपालको Ref.no. 083/80 र हिमवत कन्सल्ट प्रा.लि.को च.नं. ०७९/०८०/-५६ मिति २०८०/०३/२९ गतेको प्राप्त पत्रानुसार “Online Abuse Among Children in Nepal- A Research Study” विषयक Proposal अध्ययन अनुसन्धान गर्न यस परिषद्को सहमति माग गरिएकोमा यस परिषद् अन्तर्गत गठित बालबालिका सम्बन्धी अध्ययन अनुसन्धान उपसमितिको मिति २०८०/०३/२८ गतेको बैठकले बैठकमा छलफल भए बमोजिमका विषयहरू समावेश गर्ने गरी सहमति प्रदान गर्ने निर्णय गरे बमोजिम सो विषय समावेश भै आएको जानकारी प्राप्त भएको हुँदा सोही बमोजिम उल्लिखित विषयको प्रस्तावमा यस परिषद्को सहमति रहेको व्यहोरा निर्णयानुसार अनुरोध छ ।

उल्लिखित विषयको अध्ययन अनुसन्धान सम्बन्धी अवस्थाको आवश्यक नियमित जानकारी सहित अन्तिम प्रतिवेदन पेश गर्नुहुन समेत जानकारी गराइन्छ ।

Pranab

इन्द्रादेवी ठकाल
सदस्य-सचिव



Ref. No.: 18

Government of Nepal
Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC)
Estd. 1991

17 July 2023

Mr. Bishnu Bahadur Khatri

Principal Investigator

Himawat Consult Pvt. Ltd

Ref: Approval of research protocol

Dear Mr. Khatri,

This is to certify that the following protocol and related documents have been reviewed and granted approval through the expedited review process for its implementation.

Protocol Registration No/ Submitted Date	425/2023 28 June 2023	Sponsor Protocol No	NA
Principal Investigator/s	Mr. Bishnu Bahadur Khatri	Sponsor Institution	World Vision International Nepal
Title	Navigating the Cyber Menace: A Study on Online Safety Among Children in Nepal		
Protocol Version No	NA	Version Date	NA
Other Documents	1. Informed consent form 2. Data collection tools 3. Assent form 4. Sponsor agreement letter 5. Work plan	Risk Category	Minimal risk
Co-Investigator/s	1. Mr. Haribol Acharya 2. Mr. Nawaraj Dhakal 3. Mr. Santosh Bhandari 4. Ms. Shikha Bhattarai		
Study Site	Udaypur, Mahottari, Rupandehi, Kathmandu, Lamjung, Doti, Dailekh, Jumla, and Kailali district of Nepal		
Type of Review	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expedited <input type="checkbox"/> Full Board	Timeline of study July 2023 to September 2023 Duration of Approval 17 July 2023 to July 2024 This approval will be valid for one year	Frequency of continuing review NA
Total budget of research	NRs 13,19,275.00		

“सामान्य अवस्था वा कोभिड महामारी: बाल अधिकारको संरक्षण हामी सबैको जिम्मेवारी”

फोन नं. : ०१-५५५०९२९, ५५५०९४७

Tel. : 01-5550121, 5550147

फ्याक्स : ९७७-१-५५२७५९९

Fax : 977-1-5527591

E-mail : contact@ncrc.gov.np

Website : www.ncrc.gov.np

E-Portal : www.childrights.gov.np

Tel: +977 1 4254220, Ramshah Path, PO Box: 7626, Kathmandu, Nepal

Website: http://www.nhrc.gov.np, E-mail: nhrc@nhrc.gov.np



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Estd. 1991



Ref. No.:

Ethical review processing fee	NRs 39,578.25
Investigator Responsibilities <ul style="list-style-type: none">If you do not start the project within 3 months of this letter, please contact the Ethical Review M & E Section at NHRCAny amendments shall be approved from the ERB before implementing themSubmit the support letter from the regulatory authorities in Nepal like DDA, FWD, DoHS, before implementing the studySubmit progress report every 6 monthsSubmit final report after completion of protocol procedures at the study siteComply with all relevant international and NHRC guidelinesAbide by the principles of Good Clinical Practice and ethical conduct of the research	

If you have any questions, please contact the Ethical Review M & E Section at NHRC.

Thanking you,

Dr. Pradip Gyanwali
Member Secretary



1. BACKGROUND

The rapid expansion of internet access in Nepal has introduced children to a digital world full of opportunities for learning and socialization. However, it has also exposed them to increasing risks, including cyberbullying, online exploitation, identity theft, and exposure to harmful content.

Recognizing this urgent concern, **World Vision International Nepal** conducted a comprehensive study to understand the **prevalence of online abuse, children's digital literacy levels, risk factors, and gaps in policy implementation**. This research aims to inform **government agencies, civil society organizations, schools, and parents** on necessary interventions to ensure children's safety in the digital space.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used a **mixed-methods approach**, combining **quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews** across **nine districts** of Nepal. The data collection process involved:

Surveys:
2,259 students
(grades 8–12) from
67 schools across all
seven provinces.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):
Sessions with
children, parents,
teachers, and child
protection officers.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Discussions with
government officials, law
enforcement, and internet
service providers.

Case Studies:
Real-life accounts
from children
who experienced
online abuse.

Ethical considerations were prioritized, with **National Health Research Council (NHRC) approval**, confidentiality protections, and child-friendly data collection methods.

3. MAJOR FINDINGS

a) Online Behavior and Practices:

- Around 45.15% of girls and 46.92% of boys accessed the internet daily.
- Smartphones were the primary device for internet use for 90% of children.
- 54.15% of children used the internet primarily for friendship.
- Approximately 34.63% of children lacked awareness regarding safeguarding personal information online and 46.28% did not prioritize basic security system updates.
- 30.21% of children used the same password across all online accounts, and 17.04% accept social media friend request without safety precautions.

b) Prevalence and Type of Abuse:

- Instances of using fake identities for online interactions were reported by 16% of children.
- Online harassment was cited by 13% of children.
- 10% of participants reported instances of their online identities being hacked.
- Boys were more likely to encounter online-to-offline abuse (11.46%) compared to girls (8.26%).
- Children who identified as 'other' experienced highest online to offline abuse ((28%), followed by children who did not disclose their gender (12.73%)
- Among internet users, 21.14% experienced abuse with 51% boys and 44% girls and remaining others.
- Vulnerabilities were observed to be higher in government school students (23%) in comparison with private school students (20%).

c) Associated Factors in Online Abuse:

- Rural municipalities reported the highest average level of abuse at approximately 23.10% while that is 20.85% in municipalities and 18.99% in metropolitan cities.
- Parents hold a crucial position in influencing their children's online behavior.
- Peer influence is significant, with children trusting their friends' recommendations for games and making new online connections.

d) Relationship Between Online and Offline Abuse:

- 54.15% of children reporting that they use the internet primarily for friendship. These risks have potential to impact a large number of child users.
- 28% of 'others' children reported instances of abusive behavior during in-person meetings with individuals they had initially met online.
- 11.46% of boys were more likely to encounter abuse including online to offline abuse compared to girls (8.26%).
- 32% of children had expressed their tendency to meet their online friends.
- 6% of children reported having plans to meet their online friends who had never met before.
- 6% of children reported receiving proposals to meet offline, which they declined.
- Online abuse can lead to consequences such as leaving homes, suicide, child marriages, and conflicts with parents.

e) Psychological Impact of Online Abuse on Offline Well-being:

- Online abuse can lead to symptoms such as anxiety, sleeping disorders, and irregular school attendance.
- There is a shared concern about the need for responsible internet usage and awareness programs.

f) Policy Implementation Gap:

- There is a noticeable gap between policy formulation and implementation, with online abuse and children's safety not being prioritized in local government budgets.
- Lack of awareness among children and the public about existing laws and complaint mechanisms.
- Legal limitations, such as a short statute of limitation (35 days) for reporting online abuse cases and lack of comprehensive policies.
- Digital education on online safety is relatively new in formal education, with challenges in teacher training and access to resources.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Strengthening Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Extend the statute of limitations for reporting online abuse cases.
- Ensure budget allocation for child online safety initiatives at the local level.
- Strengthen enforcement of Nepal's Online Child Protection laws.

B. Digital Literacy and Awareness Programs

- Integrate digital safety education into school curriculums.
- Train parents and teachers on online risks and safety measures.
- Launch awareness campaigns on safe digital practices for children.

C. Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

- Collaborate with technology companies and internet service providers to develop child-friendly safety tools.
- Establish child-friendly reporting mechanisms within local government units.
- Further research into the specific vulnerabilities of children who identify as 'other' and who did not disclose their gender as they experienced the highest online to offline abuse.
- Strengthen partnerships between law enforcement, schools, and communities to tackle online threats.

D. Capacity Building and Support Services

- Provide counseling and support services for victims of online abuse.
- Train law enforcement officers on child-sensitive approaches to cybercrime investigations.
- Strengthen community-based reporting systems to address digital threats proactively.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the urgent need for digital literacy programs, stricter law enforcement, and collective action to ensure children's online safety. While digital platforms offer opportunities for learning and growth, their risks must be proactively addressed to protect Nepal's children from online abuse and exploitation.

World Vision International Nepal remains committed to advocating for a safer digital environment and calls on government agencies, civil society organizations, schools, parents, and digital platforms to take collective action in securing a violence-free digital space for children.



6. VOICES

"Children are not aware of the complaint mechanism of online abuse. People do not share or complain about online abuse until there is a big issue."

- KII WITH POLICE

"Teachers often skip these topics, assuming that students are already familiar with them. Teachers struggle to deliver these lessons effectively due to their limited knowledge on the subject."

-FGD RESPONDENT

"The media does not support the victims."

-KII WITH CSOS

"Families are often hide the case of online abuse due to their social status."

**-KII WITH
POLICE, LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

"There is gap in coordination among local government bodies, law enforcement agencies, and educational institutions."

**- CSO
REPRESENTATIVES
AND TEACHER**

"Children are not aware of the complaint mechanism of online abuse. People do not share or complain about online abuse until there is a big issue".

- KII WITH POLICE

"Article 43 presents several challenges in addressing online issues. Sending text messages from girls to boys or vice versa is not considered illegal under this article. Additionally, the Electronic Transaction Act does not provide adequate punishment for actions like irritating messages and sexting, especially in chat platforms. The current 35-day case expiry period may make it easier for perpetrators to escape consequences. Judges and court members often exhibit limited sensitivity to cyber-related issues, and there is a need to introduce psychological or mental health assessments in such cases. Moreover, the practice of keeping individuals in custody is far less common than releasing them on bail. Economic disparities and a lack of concrete evidence, such as device records, deter many from pursuing legal processes. Encouraging a storytelling approach with children during meals can be beneficial, and there's a growing realization of the importance of setting limitations on digital screen time."

- KII WITH POLICE

"People are not well aware of the complaint mechanism of online abuse. The people don't complain because they think online crime can complain from Kathmandu only, they think of disgraced and fear about the case being disclosed"

**- KII WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REPRESENTATIVE, FGD WITH BOYS**

"We block the person who abuses us, we don't know where to complain, we can't complain because of shyness, fear of the case being disclosed in society, and can't share it with the parents".

- FGD WITH CHILDREN'S

"A student committed suicide because their parent didn't provide a phone to her"

- KII WITH TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Online interactions bring a unique set of challenges. The offline world might be controlled, but we often lack visibility into our children's online interactions, making it vital to address this issue head-on."

- CYBERSECURITY SPECIALIST

"A 19-year-old boy loved girls from different districts, and they agreed to meet in Kathmandu. But the boy was found dead."

- KII WITH PARENTS

"Trust-building should never be mistaken for vulnerability. We've seen cases where innocent online connections have led to serious offline problems, and it's crucial to address this."

- CHILD RIGHTS ADVOCATE

7. STORIES: ONLINE THREATS FACED BY NEPALI CHILDREN

These stories highlight the serious risks children face online. Names and some details have been changed to protect their privacy.

CASE 1: ONLINE MESSAGE TO DISTURBING REAL LIFE

Two ninth-grade students were in a relationship and often chatted online. Tragically, the girl shared a private picture of herself with the boy. Later, another student from their school found this picture and shared it in social media groups. The girl, deeply hurt and shamed, dropped out of school and turned to drugs. She faced judgment from her family, friends, and the school, with no one offering support. Meanwhile, the boy faced no consequences.

What this shows:

- Sharing private images online can have devastating consequences.
- Cyberbullying and the spread of intimate images can lead to severe emotional distress and social isolation.
- Victims often face blame and lack of support.
- There's a need for better awareness and legal action against those who share private images without consent.



CASE 2: ONLINE ANGER, OFFLINE VIOLENCE

A 16-year-old boy, addicted to the online game "Free Fire," got into an argument with another player who used harsh language. They agreed to meet for a fight. The boy brought three older friends with him. When they arrived, they discovered the other player was just a 10-year-old boy. Some of the older friends started physically assaulting the younger boy. Luckily, one friend intervened, stopping the violence.

What this shows:

- Online games can escalate into real-world violence.
- Children and young people may not fully understand the risks of online interactions.
- Impulsive actions online can have serious offline consequences.
- There is a clear need of online behavior education.

CASE 3: BLACKMAIL AND FEAR

A 17-year-old girl started chatting with a stranger online. As their conversations progressed, the person asked for her pictures. After she shared them, the person threatened to share the pictures with everyone unless she met them in person. The girl and her family went to the police, but they chose not to file a formal complaint due to fear of public exposure.

What this shows:

- Online predators can manipulate and exploit children.
- Sharing personal information and images with strangers can be extremely dangerous.
- Fear of social stigma can prevent victims from seeking justice.
- There is a lack of trust in the system to protect the privacy of the victim.
- Local government need to prioritize online safety programs.

