Screens, Safety and Social Media

Evidence from the Kids' Life
and Times (KLT) and Young Life
and Times (YLT) surveys

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List of Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
GHQ12	The 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire
KLT	Kids' Life and Times
MCS	Millennium Cohort Study
P7	Primary 7
SBNI	Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland
TEO	The Executive Office
UK	United Kingdom
YLT	Young Life and Times

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Executive Summary

Background

Drawing on evidence from the Kids' Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) surveys, this report explores children and young people's use of the Internet and social media. The KLT and YLT surveys are part of a suite of three annual social attitudinal surveys undertaken by ARK, Northern Ireland's Social Policy Hub (www.ark.ac.uk). The KLT survey, which began in 2008, is an online survey of Primary 7 (P7) children (aged 10 to 11-years-old) in Northern Ireland. Approximately 20 per cent of all schools and 25 per cent of all P7 children complete the survey each year. The YLT survey, which was first conducted in 2003, is an online survey of 16-year-olds living in Northern Ireland. Each year both surveys include questions on a range of topics relevant to children and young people. In 2025, for the first time, the YLT survey asked about experiences and prevalence of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media, with 2,129 young people completing the survey (ARK 2025).

The YLT social media questions were not asked in the 2025 KLT survey. However, in previous KLT surveys (2008, 2009, 2013, 2024) the children were asked about their Internet use and aspects of online safety. Findings from these surveys have shown that almost all children surveyed use the Internet daily, often unsupervised, and have a smart phone on which they can access the Internet. Nearly all children reported that they had received training on online safety in school or at home and around seven in ten stated that their parents knew 'a lot' or 'a bit' about what they were doing online. Nonetheless, 16 per cent of children said they had seen content online that they found upsetting.

Time spent by 16-year-olds on social media

In 2025, over three quarters of YLT respondents spent at least three hours on average per day on social media, whilst three in ten spent six hours or more. Females tended to spend more time on social media than their male counterparts, while respondents from financially not well-off family backgrounds were more likely to spend six hours or more daily on social media compared to their well-off peers. In addition, same-sex attracted

young men were much more likely to report spending longer hours on social media compared to opposite-sex attracted young men. Respondents not living with their mother and father in the same household were also more likely to spend longer on social media.

Time spent on social media and mental health

The 2025 YLT survey found a relationship between the time respondents spent on social media each day and poorer mental health. This relationship existed when mental health was measured using the standardised General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) and when considering self-assessed mental health. Further research is required to investigate the possible causal reasons for this relationship.

Social media apps used

Almost all YLT respondents said they used social media, with only two per cent reporting that they never used it. By far, the most popular social media apps used were Snapchat and TikTok – both used by almost nine in ten YLT respondents. Instagram was used by over eight in ten respondents, followed by YouTube and WhatsApp which were used by over seven in ten respondents.

Illegal and/or harmful behaviours experienced

Over half of YLT respondents had experienced illegal and/or harmful behaviours via social media. The most common behaviours experienced were the posting/sharing of offensive, indecent or obscene material, sharing material without consent, and online stalking, all of which were experienced by at least one in five respondents. These were also the three behaviours respondents said young people were most likely to perpetrate. Snapchat was identified as the social media app on which users were most likely to encounter illegal and/or harmful behaviours, due to its features and popularity. However, respondents stated that these behaviours can occur on all social media apps.

Young women were more likely than young men to have experienced illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media. Additionally, same-sex attracted young people, those with a disability or long-term illness, and those from not well-off family financial backgrounds were most likely to have experienced illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media.

Whilst 'strangers' were most often named as perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviours (with 42% of 16-year-old respondents stating this), when all categories of perpetrators known offline (i.e. people known through face-to-face interactions within communities) were combined, these made up a larger proportion of perpetrators (67% versus 42%). The perpetrators known offline to the respondents included friends/classmates (29%), another young person (17%), an ex-girlfriend/boyfriend (15%), a current girlfriend/boyfriend (2%), a family member (2%) and another adult (2%).

Respondents reported a range of reasons why they felt illegal and/or harmful behaviours occurred on social media. These can be grouped into five categories – emotional (e.g. anger or jealousy), situational (e.g. taking advantage of an opportunity, lack of awareness), dispositional (e.g. lack of empathy), instrumental (e.g. to gain something or to fulfil a need), and entertainment (e.g. banter, making fun).

About half of respondents felt that young people are 'very' or 'quite competent' in dealing with illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media, while around three in ten felt that young people were 'not' or 'not at all' competent to deal with these behaviours.

Recommendations

1. More awareness raising and education in school and at home.

2. Need for more research and greater recognition of how social media experiences may affect mental health and wellbeing.

3. Better reporting mechanisms and stricter sanctions for perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media.

4. Implementation, regulation, and enforcement of the United Kingdom (UK) Online Safety Act 2023.

5. Monitoring of research into adaptive artificial intelligence (AI) generated algorithms.

1. Introduction and context

1.1 Young people's social media use and their wellbeing

Children and young people increasingly communicate via social media. In Northern Ireland, the *Growing Up Online study* (Purdy et al., 2023) found that 34 per cent of 14 to 18-year-olds spent four hours or more online on an average school day. This rose to nearly two-thirds of young people spending this amount of time online at weekends, with over one in five spending seven hours or more online daily at weekends and during holidays.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the *Northern Ireland Youth Wellbeing Prevalence Study* (Bunting et al., 2020) found around five per cent of 11 to 19-year-olds met the criteria for problematic social media use (as measured by the van den Eijnden et al (2016) Social Media Disorder Scale), and this proportion was higher for girls and young women (6-7%) than for boys and young men (3%).

The Children's Society (2022) reported that spending long periods online can be symptomatic of poor wellbeing or mental ill-health but stated that there was no evidence yet for a causal relationship between the amount of time spent online and poor mental health. In their report, The Children's Society (2022) were critical of the growing body of research that suggested a link between time spent on social media and poor mental health (e.g. anxiety and depression), especially regarding problematic social media use and social media addiction (e.g. Huang, 2022; Lopes et al., 2022; Montag et al., 2024). Their report criticised the epidemiological approaches used in many of these studies and the shortage of young person-centred approaches to researching social media use. They argued that large-scale longitudinal research is required to conclusively demonstrate a causal relationship between social media use and poor mental health/wellbeing. Unfortunately, large-scale longitudinal studies are often in short

supply, largely because they are complex and expensive to run. However, some such studies exist and have collected data on social media use and mental health/wellbeing.

One of the largest longitudinal UK-wide studies of children and young people is the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). Over 10,000 children born in the year 2000 have been followed since birth, and a wide range of data have been collected, including some on their social media use. Evidence from the MCS found that over-exposure to social media can have a negative impact on young people's mental health (Kelly et al., 2018).

Several standardised scales measuring addiction/problematic social media use have been developed (e.g. the Social Media Disorder Scale; the Social Media Addiction Scale or the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale). These scales show high internal consistency, suggesting that they successfully measure problematic social media use. However, to date, social media addiction is not an officially recognised medical disorder, perhaps, indicating the remaining uncertainty about its effects and the need for further research in this field.

Zendle and Bowden-Jones (2016) point out that, ultimately, social media companies hold much of the data and evidence that is required to investigate the possible addictive nature of social media content and algorithms. Yet, conducting such studies and sharing this data may not be in the commercial interest of these companies.

While research into the functionality and addictive nature of algorithms used by social media companies is not comprehensive, early indications from longitudinal surveys suggest that there is a link (Mandile, 2025). Recent research found that frequent engagement with social media apps alters dopamine pathways (De et al., 2025). Dopamine is an important neurotransmitter responsible for

feelings of pleasure and satisfaction, but also plays an important role in memory, learning, coordination and mood regulation. De et al. (2025) found that changes in dopamine pathways, triggered by frequent and long hours of social media use, can leave users vulnerable to addiction, similar to substance addiction, whilst the observed changes in the brain activity increased emotional sensitivity and compromised decision-making abilities. De et al. (2025) argue that the adaptive AI powered algorithms which seek to maximise time spent on social media fosters social media addiction, especially among children and young people who are less able to self-regulate social media exposure. While this is an emerging area of research, it is fair to say that concerns are growing.

1.2 Harmful and criminal behaviour on social media

The focus of this report, funded by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI), is not so much on the relationship between social media use and mental health and wellbeing, but on time spent using social media and the extent to which young people are exposed to illegal and/or harmful behaviours while doing so.

The SBNI is a partnership organisation consisting of key statutory bodies, voluntary sector organisations and appointed independent persons that manage, operate and resource the safeguarding and child protection system. It was set up under the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 and is the statutory body responsible for coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of its member bodies, for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Northern Ireland. One of its three core strategic priorities is online safety, and it leads the coordination of the Northern Ireland Executive's 5-year Online Safety Strategy and Action Plan (Department of Health, 2021).

While the relationships between social media use and mental health and wellbeing are still being debated, there is clear evidence internationally that young people are both increasingly exposed to illegal and/or harmful behaviours (De La Hoz, 2021; Kaur et al., 2024), and involved in perpetrating cyber-crimes on social media (e.g. Geeraert et al., 2024; Gupta et al., 2024), including sexual crimes (Dowdell, 2025) and youth violence more generally (Patton et al., 2014). Existing evidence shows that, amongst other issues, exposure to online violence and illegality has a negative effect on academic performance and on young people's relationships (Patton et al., 2014).

1.3 The UK Online Safety Act 2023

The purpose of the UK Online Safety Act 2023 (UK Government, 2023) is to make the use of Internet services safer for individuals in the UK. The Office of Communications (Ofcom) is the independent regulator responsible for enforcing the Online Safety Act, ensuring that online services protect users from harmful content and comply with safety duties. To do so, the Act imposes several new duties on online and social media companies, as well as search services, requiring them to be more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms and applications. The new legislation requires companies to take proportionate measures to ensure user safety, to implement systems and processes to reduce the risks that their services are used for illegal activity, as well as imposing a duty to remove illegal content when it appears. From July 2025, online and social media platforms are required to prevent children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

Moreover, the UK Online Safety Act puts an onus on companies to be more transparent about the potentially harmful content permitted on their platforms and applications, and is designed to give people more control over the types of content they want to see. The timing of the YLT survey was fortuitous, as

it provided an opportunity to collect baseline data which, more or less, coincided with the phased implementation of the UK Online Safety Act 2023, including key child protection duties introduced in July 2025.

1.4 The Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy

The Northern Ireland Executive's Online Safety Strategy (2022–2027) aims to ensure that all children and young people can safely access the educational, social, and economic benefits of the online world. Overseen by the Children and Young People's Strategy Child Protection Group and coordinated by the SBNI, the Strategy promotes cross-departmental collaboration and is supported by detailed action plans. Its core objectives include:

- Promoting evidence-based online safety practices, aligning with UK and international efforts.
- Educating and empowering children, young people, and their caregivers.
- Ensuring meaningful participation in policy development.

Key initiatives have included:

- The creation of Northern Ireland's central Online Safety Hub (https://onlinesafetyhub.safeguardingni.org/) which holds resources for education and support.
- Public campaigns on online abuse prevention and reporting.
- A training needs analysis that has informed future learning priorities.

The updated Action Plan places greater emphasis on education for children, parents, carers, and professionals. Participation with children and young people is also a central focus, as demonstrated through the *Growing Up Online research* (Purdy et al., 2023).

1.5 This Report

As noted, this report draws on KLT and YLT survey data to explore the experiences of Northern Ireland's children and young people with regards to their use of the Internet and social media. While the report primarily draws on data on young people's exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media collected in the YLT 2025 survey, results from previous YLT and KLT surveys are also presented.

2. Previous evidence collected in the KLT and YLT surveys

Over the years, the KLT survey has included questions on children's access to mobile phones, the Internet, as well as Internet safety education received at home and/or in school. In '*The Net Generation*,' Lloyd and Devine (2009) summarised the results of the first KLT survey that asked about these issues. The key findings relevant to the UK Online Safety Act 2023 are now presented.

2.1. Children's access to smart phones, social media and the Internet

Already in 2009, 93 per cent of the children taking part in the KLT survey had their own mobile phone. In addition, almost all (98%) stated that their family had at least one computer or laptop and, of these, 94 per cent said these computers/laptops had an Internet connection. Almost half of KLT respondents said they used social networking sites – these were mainly Bebo, Facebook or MySpace, despite the terms and conditions of these social networking sites prohibiting 10 and 11-year-olds from using their services.

Four in ten boys (41%), and almost one in three girls (31%), reported that their connections on

these social networking sites included people they talked to online but had never met face-to-face. Most KLT respondents (87%) reported their parents or teachers had talked to them about Internet safety, with girls (90%) slightly more likely than boys (83%) to state this.

The 2009 KLT survey did not explore online crimes and illegal behaviours, but it did ask children about their experiences of cyber-bullying. Thirteen per cent of KLT respondents reported that they had experienced bullying either online or by text.

Not every KLT survey sweep included a comprehensive set of questions on children's Internet use. However, selected questions were asked most years, enabling the monitoring of possible changes over time. Figure 1 shows that the proportion of P7 children who said they had a mobile phone has remained stable over the years, indicating that almost all children aged 10-11 years have access to a mobile phone. In 2013, 82 per cent of children confirmed that their mobile phone was a smart phone which could connect to the Internet.

Figure 1: Percentage of KLT respondents stating they have a mobile phone by survey year
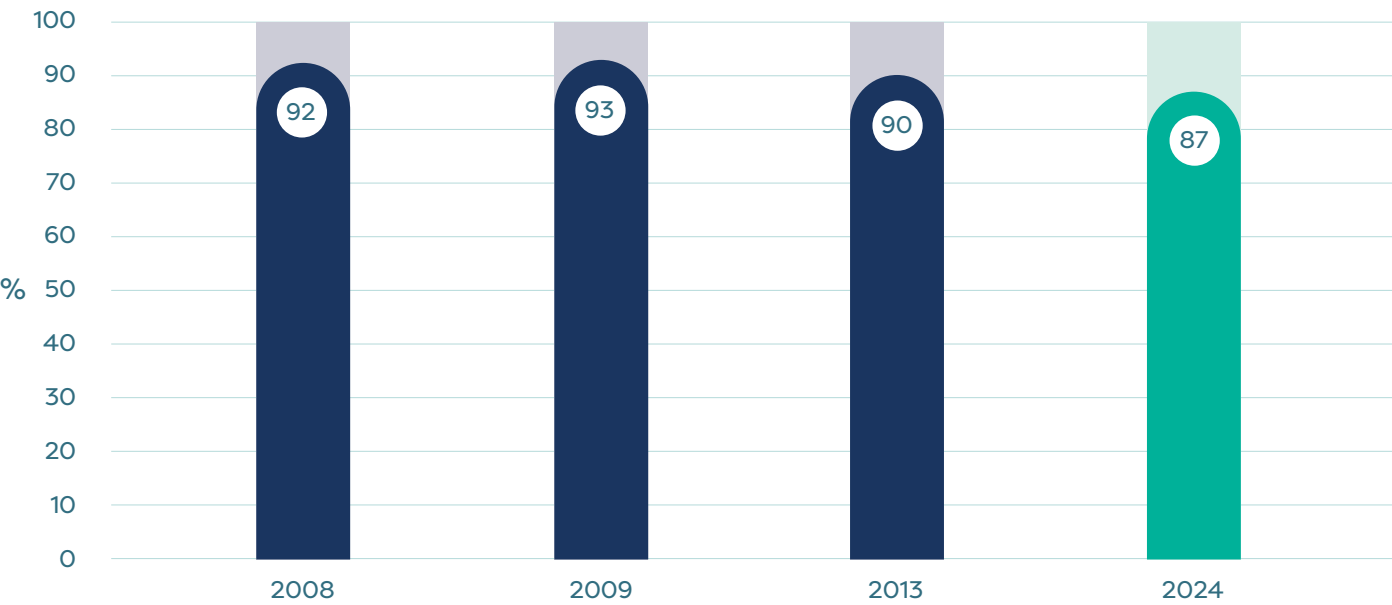
Figure 2 shows that in the 2024 KLT survey about 9 in 10 children in Northern Ireland accessed the Internet daily, with 84 per cent doing so on their mobile phone.

Figure 2: Percentage of KLT 2024 respondents accessing the Internet

Legend: At home | On their phone
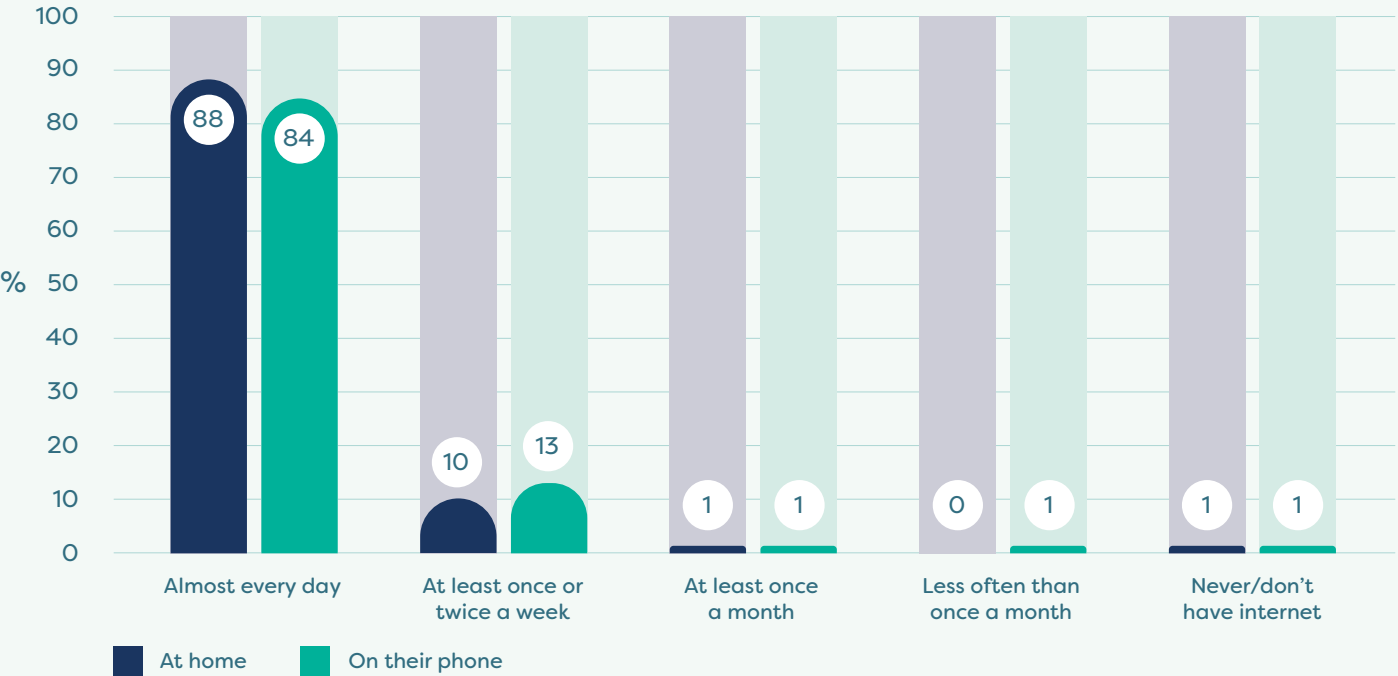
The 2024 KLT survey did not ask where children accessed the Internet at home, but the data from the 2013 survey provides some context. Figure 3 shows that in 2013 a range of devices were used by children to access the Internet, with about one quarter of respondents (23%) stating they accessed the Internet on a computer in their bedroom, which is often a space where they were least likely to be monitored.

Figure 3: Percentage of KLT 2013 respondents reporting how they access the Internet at home
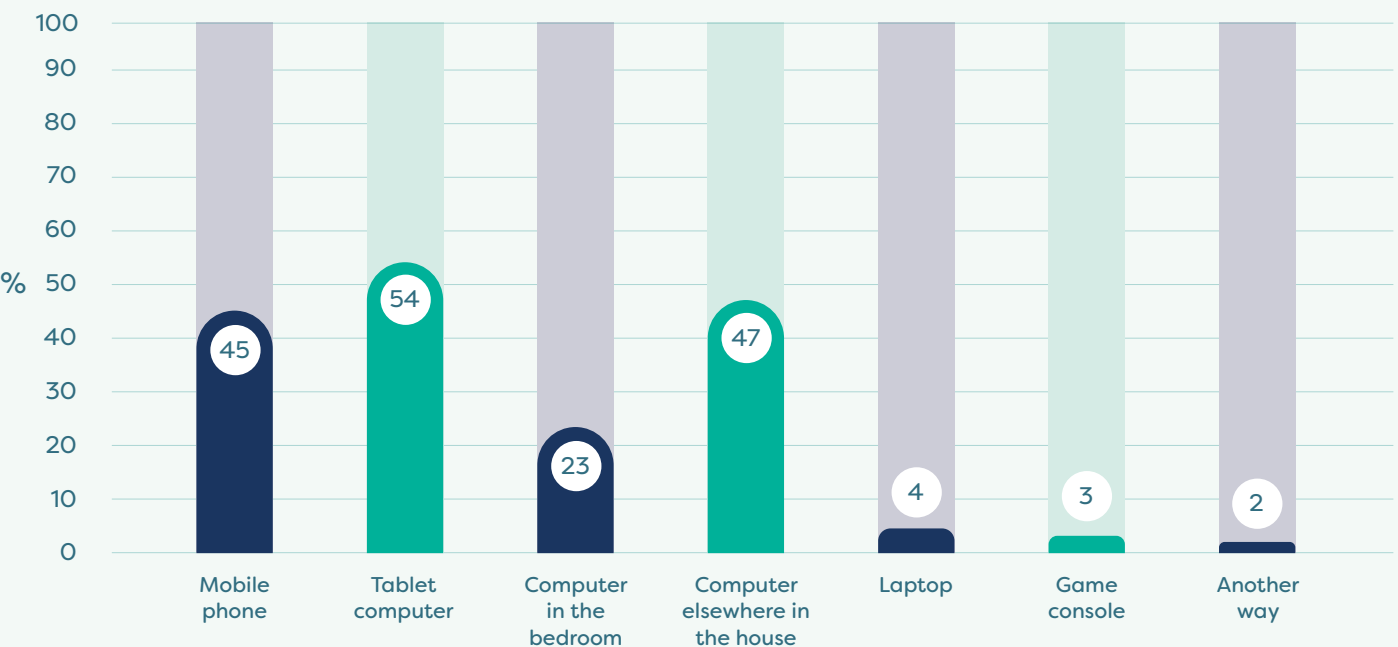
Returning to the more recent 2024 KLT survey data, around half of P7 children (51%) said they had access to the Internet whenever they wanted, or needed to, and a further 21 per cent said they often had access to the Internet (see Figure 4). The KLT data suggests, therefore, that only a small minority of P7 children in Northern Ireland are limited in how often they can access the Internet.

Figure 4:
Percentage of KLT 2024 respondents who can access the Internet whenever wanted or needed

Legend: Never | Sometimes | Often | Always | I don't know | Prefer not to say
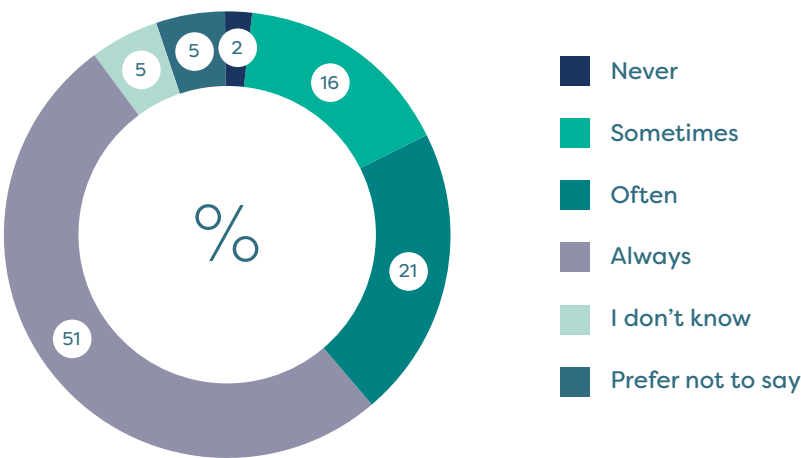
2.2. Parental monitoring and information about online safety

Figure 5 shows the extent to which children think their parents or carers are aware of the things they do online. Nearly three quarters of children (71%) maintained that their parents knew 'a lot' or 'quite a bit' about what they were doing online. A combined 15 per cent said their parents 'never' knew or they 'did not know' if their parents knew.

Figure 5:
Percentage of KLT 2024 respondents reporting how much their parents/carers know about what they do on the Internet

Legend: Nothing | Just a little | Quite a bit | A lot | I don't know | Prefer not to say
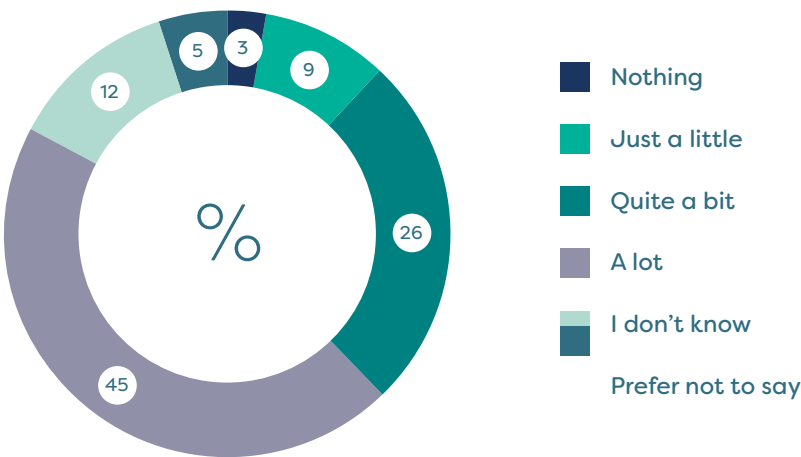
In the 2013 KLT survey, children were asked if they had received any information about keeping themselves safe online. Around three quarters reported receiving information about being safe online at school, whilst about six in ten (62%) said they had received information about online safety at home (see Figure 6). The proportion of children stating they had received information about staying safe online had increased to 98 per cent in the 2024 KLT survey, suggesting a growing awareness among parents, carers, and schools that information about online safety should be provided to children. However, the 2024 KLT survey did not collect data on the nature of this information and how useful children found it.

Figure 6:
Percentage of 2013 KLT respondents who received online safety education from the following sources
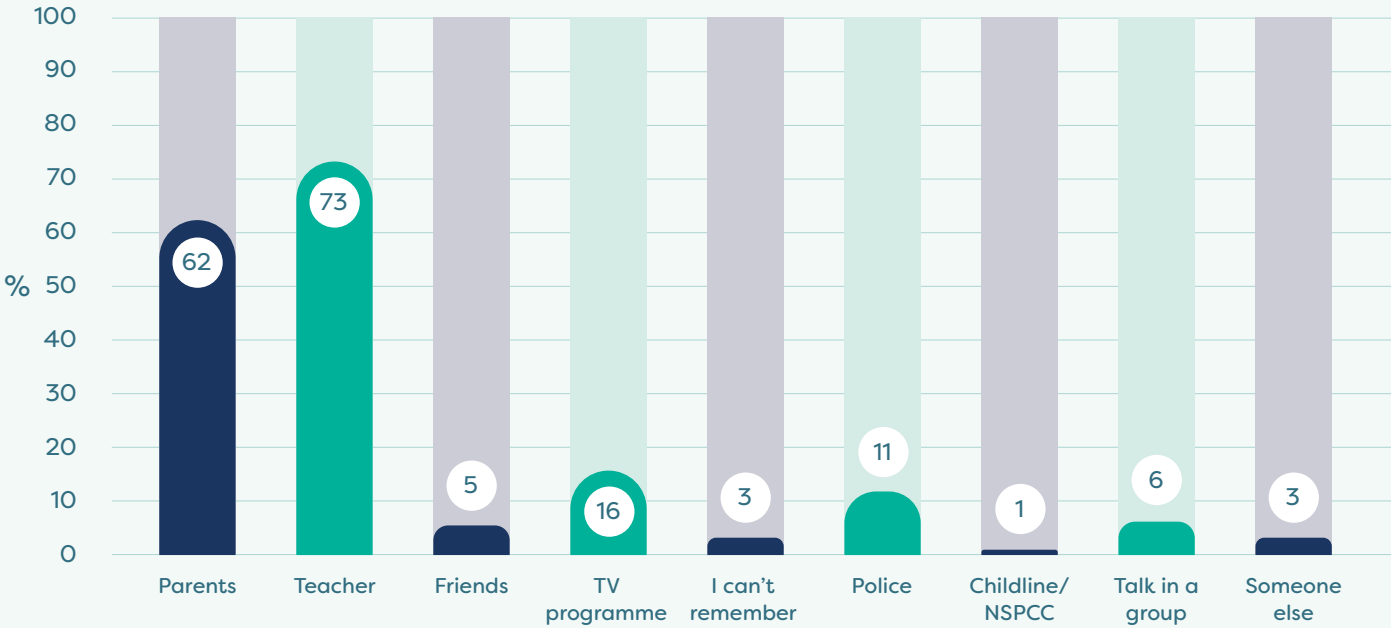
2.3. Accessing upsetting content, cyber-bullying and children's wellbeing

Despite parental monitoring and online safety training, in the 2013 KLT survey some children reported coming across upsetting and/or harmful content online, with 16 per cent saying that they had seen something that upset or worried them.

Figure 7 shows how the children responded when they had seen upsetting content. Around three fifths said they contacted an adult or reported seeing this content, while 45 per cent said they turned the computer off or left the site and 12 per cent said they did nothing.

Figure 7:
Percentage of 2013 KLT respondents saying they did the following after viewing upsetting or worrying content online
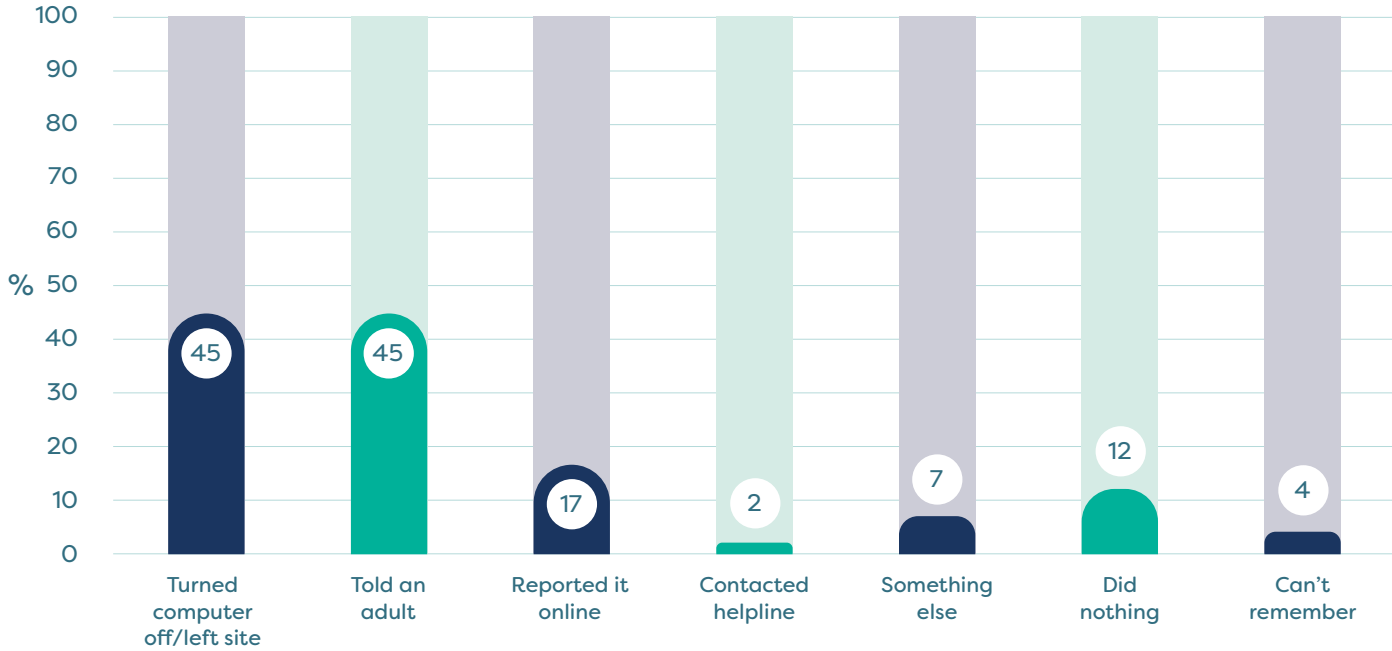
The proportion of children reporting cyber-bullying conducted online, on social media, or texting has doubled since the first KLT survey was conducted. As Lloyd et al. (2025) show, whilst ten per cent of KLT respondents reported being a victim of cyber-bullying in 2009, this had increased to 21 per cent by 2024. According to Lloyd et al. (2025), cyber-bullying experiences are more prevalent among girls, with 24 per cent of girls compared to 17 per cent of boys in 2024 saying they had experienced cyber-bullying.

The relationship between children's online access and their wellbeing was also explored by Lloyd et al. (2025). Social wellbeing was assessed in the KLT survey using the 10-item version of the KIDSCREEN, which is a standardised screening tool that facilitates the assessment of children's wellbeing (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010). KIDSCREEN has been included in the KLT survey most years. Using the 2024 KLT data, Lloyd et al. (2025) found that children who had the highest wellbeing scores were the ones who always had access to the Internet when they wanted.

The 2024 KLT survey also included another measure, namely the social self-esteem sub-scale of the Coopersmith Self-esteem Scale (1967). Lloyd et al. (2025) found that children who stated their parents knew 'a lot' about what they did online had the highest social self-esteem score. No relationship between the frequency with which the children accessed the Internet and their social wellbeing scores was found. However, those at the receiving end of cyber-bullying were found to be much more likely to report poorer social self-esteem and wellbeing scores as measured by the Coopersmith Social Self-esteem Scale and KIDSCREEN-10 respectively (Lloyd et al., 2025).

2.4. Online behaviours and experiences of 16-year-olds

Prior to 2025, the YLT survey had not systematically asked 16-year-olds about their access to the Internet, smart phones, time spent online, or illegal and/or harmful behaviours they may have encountered on social media. However, some of the topics covered in previous YLT surveys included time spent playing computer games and online gaming, young people's trust in online content, online bullying and harassment, as well as experiences of sexual grooming and gender-based violence online.

2.5. Computer games and online gaming

In the 2016 YLT survey, respondents were asked how often they played online games or used computer games in their free time. The survey found that 18 per cent did this daily, 18 per cent several times a week and 12 per cent several times a month. Over half (53%) stated they played online or used computer games less often or never. There was a very clear gender difference in relation to online gaming, with 65 per cent of males saying that they played daily or several times a week compared to 14 per cent of females. In fact, 65 per cent of 16-year-old females said they never/a few times a year played online/computer games compared to just 13 per cent of males.

2.6. Trust in online content

In the 2018 YLT survey, as part of a set of questions on citizenship, 16-year-olds were asked to what extent they trusted information on current affairs and news accessed via the Internet and/or on social media. Nearly one third (31%) stated that they did not trust information on social media, while 15 per cent stated that they did not trust websites. Seven in ten (70%) stated that they trusted some information provided on the Internet but only 58 per cent said they trusted some information on social media. Only four per cent of 16-year-olds stated that they trusted all information

about current affairs provided on the Internet, with only two per cent claiming they trusted all information about current affairs provided on social media. This suggests that there was a significant degree of distrust in information provided on social media and the Internet.

2.7. Online bullying and harassment

In the 2017 YLT survey, around two-thirds of those who said they had been personally bullied in the preceding three months (11% of all respondents) said that this bullying had taken the form of cyber-bullying. Additionally, five per cent admitted that they had personally taken part in bullying other pupils, with some admitting this bullying had taken place online.

2.8. Sexual grooming and gender-based violence online

In 2010, the YLT survey contained questions on sexual grooming. Just over one in ten respondents (11%) stated that an adult had ever tried to groom them. Of these respondents, 27 per cent said that the initial contact made by that adult was online, for example through a chat room or social networking site. Among young women, this proportion was slightly higher (31%).

Whilst the proportions of 16-year-olds who stated they experienced cyber-bullying or online sexual grooming is low, the data collected by the YLT survey more recently, as part of ARK's monitoring role for the Government's Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (The Executive Office, 2023), suggests that online abuse of young women is now more prevalent. In the 2022 YLT survey, 47 per cent of males and 50 per cent of females stated that they had personally experienced abuse or threats on social media or via messaging services, such as Snapchat or Instagram. Four in ten males (40%) and 54 per cent of females also said that they had personally received unwanted sexually suggestive comments or 'jokes' online. Four in ten females (40%) and 15 per cent of

males reported that they had been asked for, or been put under pressure to share, an intimate photo or video. Moreover, nine per cent of males and ten per cent of females reported that an intimate photo or video of them had been shared with other people without their consent.

Since 2023, the YLT survey has also asked respondents what types of gender-based violence, including online violence, they have experienced. In 2025, when this question was last asked, 20 per cent of females and 8 per cent of males stated that they had been victim of gender-based online violence, which was defined as receiving threats online or via social media, online trolling, or being sent or asked for intimate images against their will. Figure 8 shows these results by gender.

Figure 8:
Percentage of YLT respondents experiencing gender-based online violence in the last 12 months (2023 – 2025) by gender
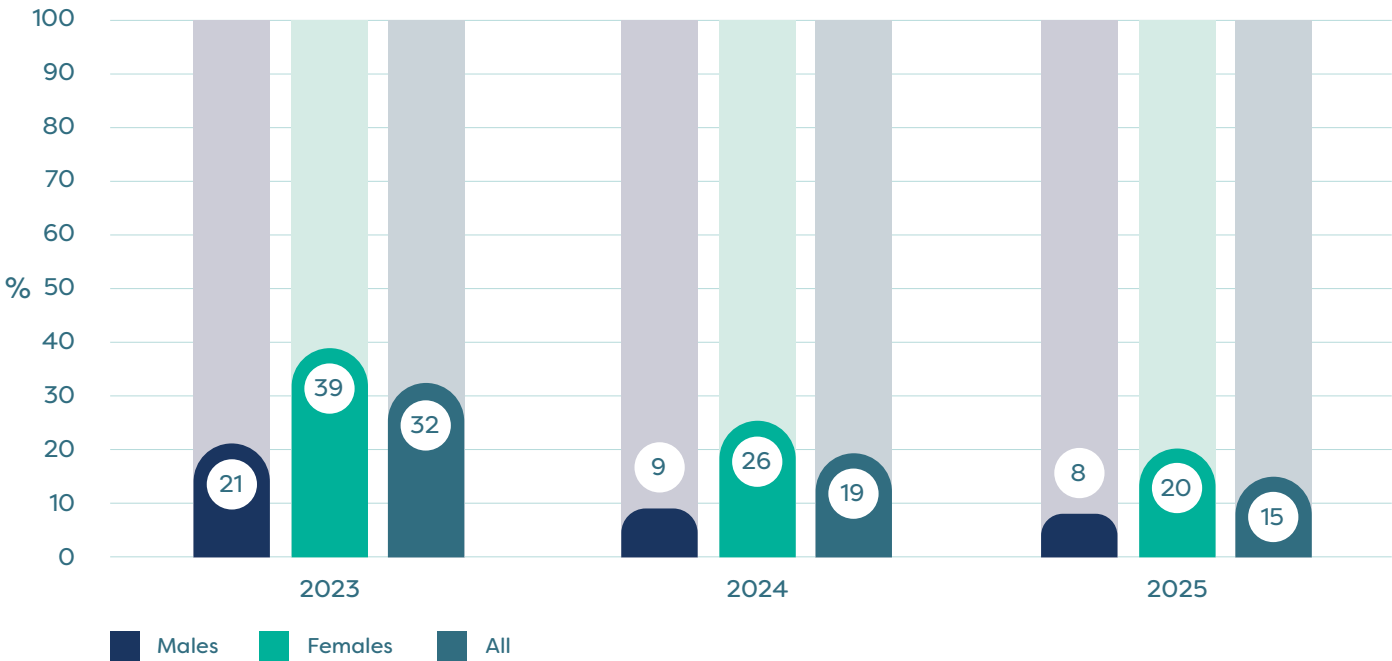
The significant fluctuation in results between 2023 and 2024 may be due to two reasons. Firstly, the very public launch of the Strategic Framework to End Violence against Women and Girls (TEO, 2023) and related media coverage during 2023 may have increased public awareness of gender-based violence and impacted on the reporting of such experiences by respondents. Secondly, some of the phrasing of the questions in the survey changed slightly between 2023 and 2024 to harmonise with similar surveys conducted elsewhere in the UK, potentially affecting the reporting of such experiences by respondents. Further analysis of the 2025 YLT survey data regarding online gender-based violence show that particular groups of 16-year-olds were more likely to experience this. For example, 19 per cent of females who said they had no disability or long-term illness had experienced gender-based violence online compared to 25 per cent of females who said they had a disability or long-term illness.

Table 1 shows that gender-based violence interacts strongly with sexual identity/ attraction. Same-sex attracted females were five times more likely than opposite-sex attracted males to be targets of online gender-based violence and twice as likely as same-sex attracted males. Interestingly, males and females from not well-off family financial backgrounds were equally likely to experience online gender-based violence.

Table 1:
Sexuality, family financial background and experiences of online gender-based violence

	%				
	Sexuality		**Family Financial Background**		
	Opposite-sex attracted	Same-sex-attracted	Not well-off	Average	Well-off
Male	7	17	15	8	6
Female	17	35	16	21	20
All	**12**	**30**	**15**	**16**	**13**

2.9. Summary

Based on previous KLT survey results, the picture that emerges in terms of children's access to the Internet, social media and smart phones is that by the time children have reached their final year in primary school, almost all have access to a smart phone and use the Internet daily. While many children report that their parents are aware of what they are doing online, children can often be accessing the Internet outside of the presence of adults, potentially increasing the risk that they access age-inappropriate material or are exposed to harmful or upsetting content. Yet, on a more positive note, the most recent data from the 2024 KLT survey suggests that almost all P7 children now receive information about online safety.

There is no evidence in the KLT survey data that Internet access is related to poorer wellbeing or self-esteem. In fact, there is some evidence that access to the Internet, combined with parental monitoring and receiving online safety information, is associated with positive wellbeing and self-esteem. The almost universal daily access to social media and the Internet that children in Northern Ireland have also indicates that there may be a peer-expectation of having access to content online and that preventing this access may lead to a sense of exclusion.

Having said that, there is evidence that children do access harmful and inappropriate material and are being subjected to adverse behaviours, such as cyber-bullying, which the KLT data shows can have negative consequences for children's wellbeing and self-esteem.

With regards to previous YLT survey data, the results prior to 2025 similarly indicate that some 16-year-olds are being exposed to illegal and/or harmful behaviour online, with females, those with a disability, and same-sex attracted young people being more likely to experience such behaviours. The 2025 YLT survey module exploring young people's experiences of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media provides an opportunity to explore this issue in more detail and is examined in the next section.

3. Social media experiences reported in the 2025 YLT survey

3.1. Background to the 2025 YLT survey

The 2025 YLT survey was conducted between 16 April to 16 May 2025. The sample was drawn from the Child Benefit Register which is the only random sampling frame available for 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland. Every 16-year-old living in Northern Ireland with a birthday in January, February or March was invited to take part in the survey. A list of names and addresses of eligible 16-year-olds was received directly from the Government and these potential respondents received an information sheet which contained a link to the online survey platform. Information sheets were sent to 6,012 eligible young people and, after two weeks, a reminder letter was sent to those who had not completed the survey. Respondents who completed the survey received a £10 gift voucher as a thanks for their participation.

Of the eligible 16-year-olds invited to take part in the survey, 2,295 logged onto the survey to complete it, resulting in an overall response rate of 38 per cent. However, after removal of the most incomplete responses (i.e. responses where only very few questions were answered), 2,129 16-year-olds remained, resulting in a 35 per cent completion rate. Whilst the 2025 YLT survey was a split survey (i.e. not all 16-year-olds answered all questions), all 2,129 respondents answered the questions about their experiences of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media as these questions were included in both versions of the survey.

2025 survey respondents

As Table 2 shows, females were somewhat more likely to respond to the survey than males. Apart from this, the YLT sample is fairly representative of the population of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland.

Table 2: Sample characteristics for the 2025 YLT survey

Background variable	%
Gender	
Male	41
Female	57
Identifies in another way	2
Where the respondent lives	
A big city	9
The suburbs or outskirts of a big city	12
A small city or town	42
A country village	16
A farm or home in the country	19
Don't know	3
Has long-term physical or mental health condition	
No	83
Yes	17
Of those saying 'yes'...	
Yes, but not limiting	23
Yes, a little limiting	58
Yes, limiting	19
School type most recently attended	
Planned Integrated	8
Grammar	44
Secondary	45
Other school types	3

Background variable	%
Respondent lives with	
Mother and father in the same household	74
Mother, but not father	17
Father, but not mother	2
With mother some of the time and with father some of the time	6
Someone else	2
Family financial background	
Well-off	30
Average	50
Not well-off	12
Don't know	8
Religious background	
Catholic	38
Protestant	21
No religion	36
Other religions	5
Member of an ethnic minority group	
Yes	10
No	90

Questions asked and results reported

The questions on social media included in the 2025 YLT survey can be found in the Appendix of this report. The questions focused on the following topics:

- Time spent online.
- Types of social media apps used.
- Types of illegal and/or harmful behaviours experienced.
- Information on perpetrator(s) of illegal and/or harmful behaviours.
- Perceptions of who is more likely to perpetrate such behaviours.
- Perceptions regarding whether such behaviours are more likely to occur on some social media apps compared to others.
- Perception of how likely or unlikely young people are to engage in these behaviours.
- Perceived competency of young people to deal with these behaviours.
- Any further comments.

The results for these questions are now presented. When analysing the data, statistical tests were used to examine if significant differences were evident between different groups of respondents. For example, gender differences, differences by family financial background, school type attended, ethnicity, religious or sexual identity, rurality etc. were

examined and reported if a significant effect size relevant for policy and practice considerations was found. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that small sample sizes (e.g. minority ethnicity) may limit the ability of statistical tests to detect a significant effect size so caution is required when interpreting the results for smaller groups.

3.2. Time spent on social media

The 2025 YLT respondents were first asked how much time they spend on social media on an average day. The question was asked as higher exposure to social media potentially means more exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviours.

Respondents were most likely to say they spent 3-5 hours each day (46%) on social media, followed by just over one fifth who spent 6–8 hours (22%), 18 per cent who spent less than three hours, and eight per cent who spent more than eight hours on social media each day. Only two per cent of respondents said that they did not use social media, while five per cent did not know what proportion of their day was spent on social media.

Significant differences in time spent on social media by gender[1] were found. Figure 9 shows that female respondents tended to spend more time on social media than their male counterparts. The young people's responses indicated that 35 per cent of females, compared to just 23 per cent of males, said they spent six hours or more on social media on an average day. Females were more likely than males to say they spend more than eight hours on social media each day (10% and 6% respectively).
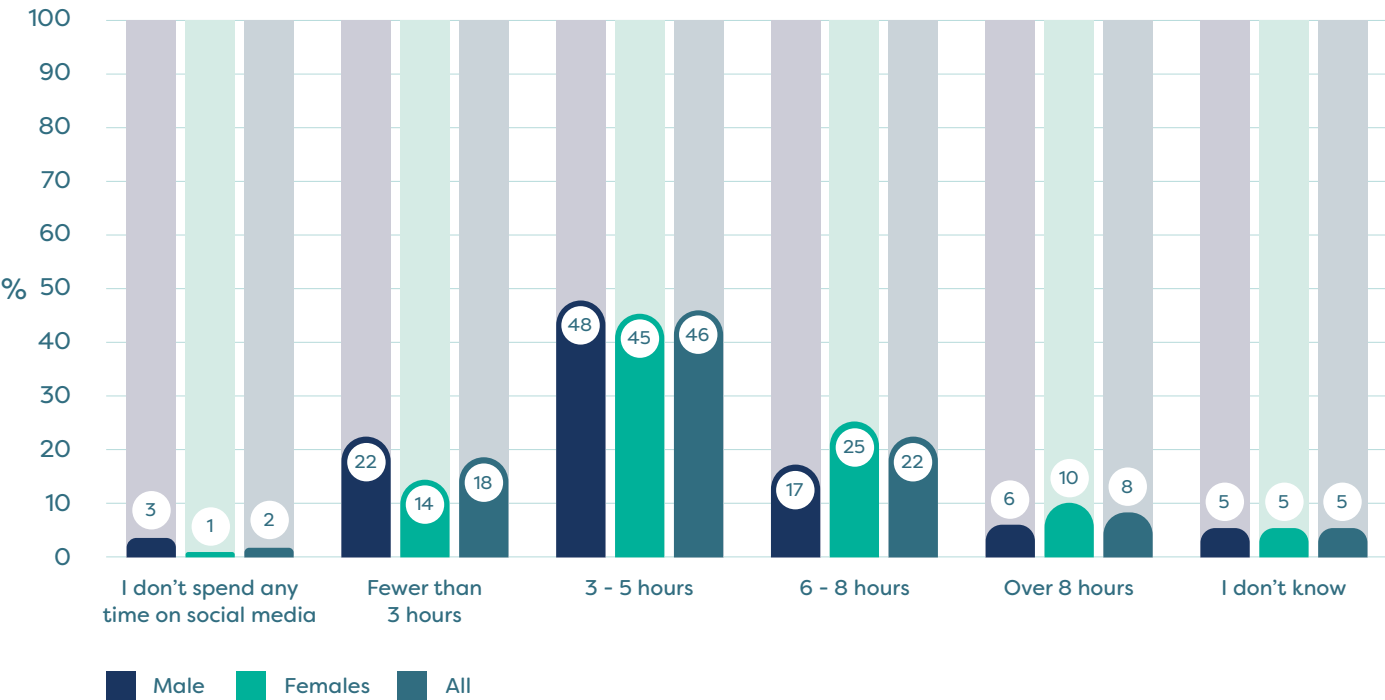
Additionally, same sex-attracted respondents were more likely to spend six hours or more on social media daily in comparison to their opposite-sex attracted counterparts (37% and 29% respectively). This difference was largely due to the difference between same-sex attracted young men, with 33 per cent of same-sex attracted young men reporting spending on average at least six hours a day on social media compared to 21 per cent of opposite-sex attracted males. There was no difference in how much time same-sex attracted and opposite-sex attracted young women spent on social media.

A difference was also evident in the time spent on social media and family financial background, with those from less well-off family financial backgrounds spending more time on social media. For example, 37 per cent of those

from not well-off families spent more than six hours per day on social media, compared to 31 per cent of those from average family financial backgrounds and 22 per cent from well-off families. This difference was most noticeable in those spending over eight hours per day on social media, with 12 per cent of those from less well-off families doing so compared to nine per cent from average family financial backgrounds and three per cent from well-off families. In contrast, 24 per cent of respondents from well-off families said they spent on average less than three hours per day on social media compared to 16 per cent of those from families from an average financial background and 14 per cent of those from not well-off family financial backgrounds (see Figure 10).

Figure 10:
Percentage breakdown of time spent on social media on an average day by family financial background

Legend: Well-off | Average | Not-well-off
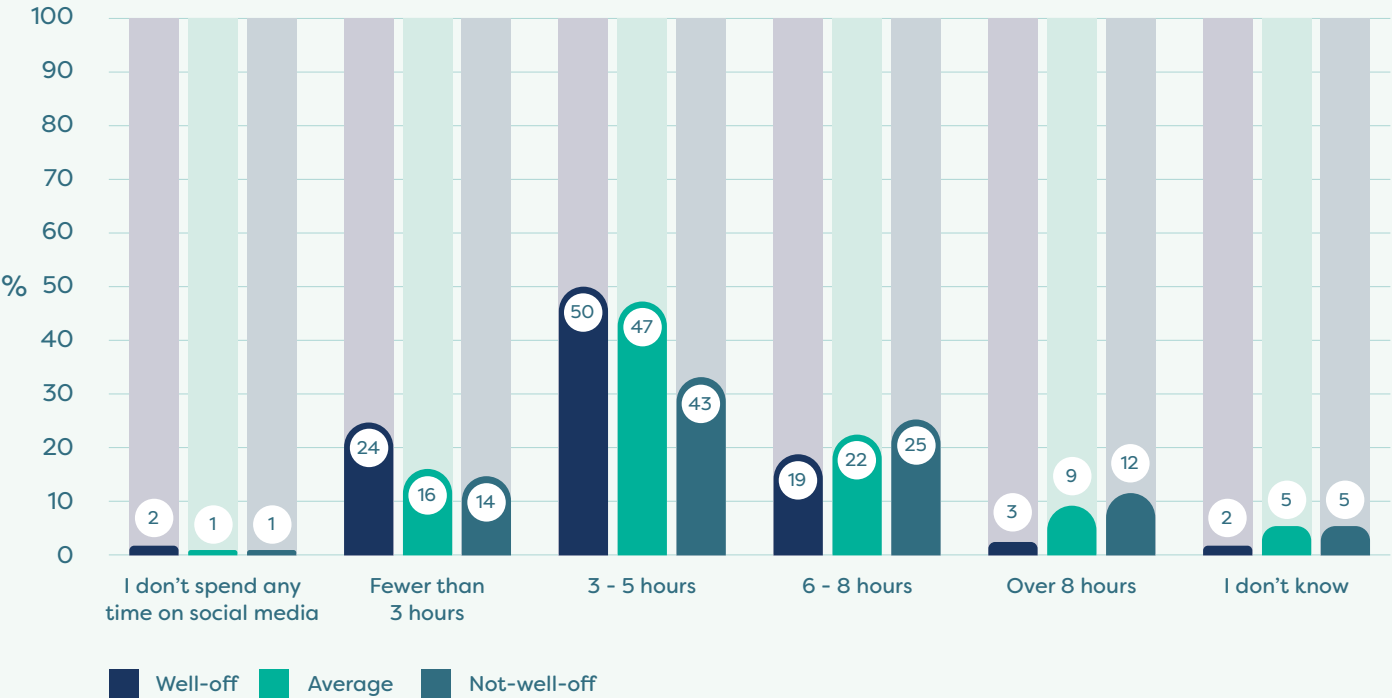
Further, while 24 per cent of respondents who attended Grammar schools spent six hours or more on social media on an average day, this proportion was much higher for those who attended non-Grammar schools, such as formally integrated schools (37%) or secondary schools (35%). When controlling for family financial background (as it is possible that young people from well-off backgrounds may be more likely to attend Grammar schools than non-Grammar schools), the school effect for those from not well-off backgrounds becomes redundant. This suggests that those from not well-off backgrounds are more likely to spend more time on social media regardless of what school they attend, whereas for those from well-off family backgrounds, attending a

Grammar school means that they are less likely to spend six hours or more on social media per day than their counterparts in non-Grammar schools.

In addition, those who live with both their parents in the same household were less likely to spend more than eight hours on average per day on social media compared to those with other living arrangements. While this effect size was small, suggesting there is a range of other factors that contribute to this difference, this confirms the findings from the much larger longitudinal MCS survey which found that boys and girls who live in one-parent families are more likely to spend five hours or more online (see Table 3).

Table 3:
Percentage of time spent on social media on an average day by respondents' living arrangements

	%	
	Mother and father in same household	Other living arrangements
Less than 3 hrs	19	14
3 – 5 hrs	47	44
6 – 8 hrs	21	23
Over 8 hrs	6	13
Don't know	5	5
I don't spend time on social media	2	1

3.3. Time spent on social media and mental health

As the 2025 YLT survey was a split survey, half the respondents completed questions relating to their mental health and wellbeing. These questions included the 12-item version of the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12), and a self-assessment of respondents' own mental health. The GHQ12 is a reliable screening instrument for non-psychotic psychiatric disorders and is used as a clinical diagnostic tool. The GHQ12 consists of 12 questions asking about concentration, sleep loss, anxiety, worry, loss of confidence, the ability to complete day-to-day tasks, and unhappiness experienced by respondents in the last few weeks. The responses to these questions are coded to calculate a 'caseness' score. A GHQ12 'case' is someone who responded to at least four of the 12 questions in a way that suggests they have felt worse/were less able to complete tasks etc. over the last few weeks. This 'caseness'

score is typically used when the GHQ12 is being used as a diagnostic tool. Overall, 45 per cent of YLT respondents who answered the GHQ12 questions in the 2025 survey fell into that category, the highest proportion ever recorded in the YLT surveys. This 'caseness' score has increased steadily over the years, and in 2004 when the questions were first included in the YLT survey, it applied to 24 per cent of respondents.

Figure 11 shows a relationship between the average hours spent on social media and GHQ12 'caseness' (i.e. poorer mental health). Nearly six in ten (59%) of those who used social media more than eight hours a day fell into the GHQ12 'caseness' category, indicating they were experiencing poorer mental health. This compared to just over one third (35%) of those who used social media less than three hours per day and 16 per cent of those who never used social media[2]. This trend was similar for males and females (see Figure 11).

[2] The sample size for those who stated they never used social media was too small to break down by gender.

Figure 11:
Percentage GHQ12 'caseness' and time spent on social media on an average day

Legend: Females — All — Males

Figure 12:
Percentage breakdown between self-assessed mental health and wellbeing by time spent on social media on an average day

Legend: Excellent — Very good — Good — Fair — Poor

Respondents were also asked to self-assess their own mental health and wellbeing, with the response options being 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'fair' and 'poor'. As with the responses to the GHQ12, a significant relationship was observed between time spent on social media and respondents' self-assessment of their mental health and wellbeing. As demonstrated by Figure 12, 59 per cent of those who said they spent eight hours or more daily on social media assessed their mental health as 'fair' or 'poor' compared with 24 per cent of those who said they spent less than three hours on social media each day. In contrast, 50 per cent of those who reported spending less than three hours daily on social media assessed their mental health and wellbeing as being 'excellent' 'or' 'very good' compared to 22 per cent of those who spent eight hours or more on social media on an average day.

It should be noted, however, that while this data reveals a relationship between time spent on social media with respondents' mental health and wellbeing, it is not possible to identify the possible causal reasons underpinning this relationship from the 2025 YLT survey. Further research is required to investigate the causal reasons for this relationship. For instance, if time spent on social media directly causes poorer mental health, if people with poorer mental health tend to spend more time on social media and/or if spending more time on social media may result in greater exposure to more illegal and/or harmful behaviours which may negatively impact on mental health and wellbeing.

3.4. Types of social media used

Table 4 displays the social media apps that 16-year-olds reported using, with respondents often using multiple apps. There was very little difference between males and females in respect of the social media apps they used. However, females tended to use Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook slightly more than males, whilst males tended to use YouTube, X/Twitter and other social media apps slightly more than females. Examples of some of the other social media apps used by respondents included Discord, Reddit and Pinterest.

Table 4:
Social media app used by gender

	%		
	Males	**Females**	**All**
Snapchat	86	92	**88**
TikTok	82	90	**86**
Instagram	75	87	**81**
WhatsApp	68	72	**71**
YouTube	77	67	**71**
Facebook	30	37	**34**
X/Twitter	25	13	**18**
An online dating app	1	1	**1**
Other	5	3	**4**

3.5. Illegal and/or harmful activities on social media

Respondents were asked if they had experienced a range of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media. Just over half of the respondents (54%) reported experiencing such behaviours, while 46 per cent said they had not experienced any of these behaviours on social media.

Table 5 shows that, except for selling and buying stolen goods, females were more likely to report experiencing illegal and/or harmful

behaviours on social media, although in most cases the differences between males and females were relatively small. Sharing/posting of offensive material (26%), sharing of material without consent (21%), and stalking (20%) were the behaviours mostly frequently reported by respondents, with between one in four and one in five having experienced these behaviours. The other behaviours were generally less frequently reported and were experienced by about one in ten respondents, or, in the case of identity theft, fewer than one in twenty respondents.

Table 5:
Prevalence of illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media

	%		
	Males	**Females**	**All**
Someone posting/sharing material which you found offensive, indecent or obscene	19	29	**26**
Someone sharing your information, photos, videos with others without your consent	21	21	**21**
Someone stalking your activities	16	22	**20**
Someone attempting to build a relationship with you to try to manipulate you	9	16	**13**
Someone posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/dislike towards your race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender	10	13	**12**
Someone posting/sharing threatening, intimidation or harassing material about or towards you	9	13	**11**
Offers to buy or sell illegal or stolen goods	11	11	**11**
Blackmail	8	10	**9**
People deliberately being dishonest to you to obtain a financial/personal benefit or cause you to lose something	8	9	**9**
Someone using your information on social media to hack into your accounts	6	9	**8**
Someone using your information on social media to steal your identity	3	5	**4**
I have not experienced any of these behaviours	50	43	**46**

Table 6 shows the proportion of respondents who said they had 'never' experienced any of the above behaviours by their demographic profile. This analysis was undertaken to examine whether some groups were less likely to report they had 'never' experienced these behaviours compared to others. Same-sex attracted 16-year-olds were the least likely to report 'never' experiencing any of these behaviours, with less than one in four reporting this. This was followed by those with a disability or long-term illness, those from not well-off families, those attending Grammar schools, and females. These findings suggest that same-sex attracted respondents, those who

have a disability or long-term illness, come from not well-off families, attend Grammar schools and are female may be more likely to experience illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media. In contrast, those who were most likely to report 'never' experiencing any of these behaviours included opposite-sex attracted young people, males, those from well-off families, those who did not have a disability or long-term illness and those attending non-Grammar schools.

Table 6:
Respondents stating they have never experienced illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media by demographic profile

	%
Gender	
Males	49
Females	43
Family financial wellbeing	
Well-off	48
Average	45
Not well-off	35
School type attended	
Grammar School	42
Non-grammar school	48
Long-term illness/disability	
Has disability or long-term illness	32
Has no disability or long-term illness	48
Sexual attraction	
Opposite-sex attracted	50
Same-sex attracted	24

There were certain negative experiences on social media that were particularly strongly associated with poorer mental health, as measured by GHQ12 'caseness'.

For instance, 72 per cent of those who had experienced someone attempting to build a relationship with them to manipulate them fell into the GHQ12 'caseness' category. This also applied to 70 per cent of those who reported that someone had posted/shared threatening, intimidating or harassing material about/ towards them; 66 per cent of those who had experienced someone posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/dislike towards their

race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and/ or gender; and 66 per cent of those who had been stalked on social media. While further research is needed to investigate the possible causal reasons for these findings, the findings suggest that these experiences are strongly associated with poorer mental health.

3.6. Perceptions of illegal and/or harmful behaviour across social media apps

When respondents were asked if they believed that the illegal and/or harmful behaviours they had experienced were more likely to happen on some social media apps compared to others, 76 per cent said 'yes', six per cent said 'no' and 17 per cent said they were not sure.

Respondents were then given the opportunity to explain what behaviours they thought were more likely to happen on which social media apps, with one in four availing of this opportunity to provide additional information. These 16-year-olds referred to all the behaviours covered in the survey questions, as well as some additional behaviours listed in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13:
Perceptions of Illegal and/or harmful behaviours occurring on social media apps

Blackmail	Bullying	Discriminatory / prejudical behaviour	Exploitation	Fighting
Fraud (including scams and catfishing)	Grooming	Hacking	Harassment	Hate speech
Misinformation (about self, others and things)	Phishing	Selling illegal goods	Sexual harassment	Sharing inappropriate obscene content
Sharing material without consent	Stalking	Theft (money, photos, information and identity)	Threatening behaviour	Verbal abuse

The most common behaviours mentioned by respondents included the sharing of material without consent, followed by bullying, the sharing of inappropriate/obscene content and blackmail. For example:

> *"Somone sharing an image you don't want shared."*

> *"Bullying because people don't have to show their faces which makes them think it's ok to do so."*

> *"Sending inappropriate photos would be found on Snapchat and finding*

> *violent videos would be found on Twitter."*

> *"People sharing photos of themselves to people they think they know, but that person is just pretending to be a person they know and then use their photo for blackmailing."*

Some respondents believed that exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media could negatively impact on young people's mental health, beliefs and self-image.

For instance:

"Social media in my opinion is very manipulative and younger people who have access to it are believing so much stuff that is completely wrong, e.g. videos created with certain topics, body issues and bullying people into looking a certain way to attract other people. It is making more people develop mental health issues, like depression and anxiety, with a sense of not feeling good enough for anyone. Or even eating disorders in which people may starve themselves because they think they are too overweight, or people eating too much because they feel too thin. Bullying people because of the way they look is never acceptable, people feel like others have to be a certain size or have certain features to be worthy of being seen as a human to them. It's unreal."

3.7. Social media apps and illegal and/or harmful behaviour

The young people reported seeing illegal and/or harmful behaviour on several social media apps, including Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter/X, Facebook, WhatsApp, Discord, Telegram, Reddit, Roblox, dating apps, iMessenger, Spotify, Tumblr, Wizz and YouTube. While they acknowledged that these behaviours could occur on any social media app, they felt that some behaviours were more likely to occur on some apps because of their features, popularity and user profile. As explained by one young person:

"Apps such [as] Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram, Discord, etc. usually don't filter content appropriate to the user (age, religion, sexually content, inhumane content, such as car accidents and gore in extreme cases), along with their identity protected, thus they believe they can't be held

accountable to their cruel actions (which they should be). Encouraging people to commit acts such as fraud, posting illegal content, scams, extreme bullying (sometimes resulting in physical, mental, and or emotional harm and possibly suicide)."

Illegal and/or harmful activities were believed to be especially likely to occur on apps which facilitated anonymity, had less rules and moderation of content, inadequate enforcement of policies, and where fake accounts were easily created:

"Some social media apps are less strict on what users can post, allowing people to post worse things on certain social media apps."

In some cases, it was felt that inadequate moderation was intentional to drive up engagement and enhance the profitability of social media apps:

"It's encouraged as the moderators/ workers don't ban or suspend accounts as it drives up engagement in post and more view-time, which means more money for the companies who own these social media platforms."

Moreover, the features of the social media apps, and what they were designed to do, were believed to play a key role in influencing the probability of users being exposed to illegal and/or harmful behaviour:

"Because social media contains many different platforms that caters to different audiences, and their content is displayed in different ways. For example, I don't think you'd catch someone sharing private photos or messages on something like Pinterest, whereas it'd be more likely on Snapchat, as it is easier to do so because of what Snapchat is used for."

For instance, the extent to which user accounts were publicly visible, searchable and easily accessible was believed to increase the likelihood of being contacted by other users, contributing to the normalisation of interactions with unknown others and enhancing exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviour:

"I think behaviours such as these are more likely to happen on social media platforms like, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, because strangers and people you know have easy access to your account and it is more accepted on those platforms."

In addition, apps which were easy to use, enabled direct communication with other users, automated the deletion of content, facilitated anonymity and were popular, were believed to have more illegal and/or harmful behaviours occurring on them. As explained by the young people:

"Apps that are more popular, and more centred for younger people, it will happen more on."

"Also, private messaging features are easily used for bullying, harassment and/or sharing inappropriate images. Those apps are designed for fast content with big audiences and no accountability so, obviously, it's easier for negative behaviour to spread."

"On some social media apps, it is a lot easier to share images, texts and videos, and then remove them to stop getting caught, than it is on other apps."

There was also a sense that some social media apps were used to commit more illegal and/or harmful behaviours because of the profile of their users. For example, illegal and/or harmful behaviour was believed to be especially common on apps popular with young people, which when combined with minimum

moderation and poor enforcement of policies, could pose real challenges for young people:

"Apps such as TikTok or others like it have younger or less mature audiences and so are either targeted by others, or are able to target others, in ways such as phishing, scamming or sexual posts, and it is hard to protect yourself on apps where it's easy to bypass security measures, as well as harder to control what you see."

As such, the 16-year-olds were able to identify patterns in the likely illegal and/or harmful behaviours that could be encountered on different social media apps. Examples included:

"Anything discriminatory and things that happen via text message would be more on Snapchat and Instagram because of the direct messaging and, also, because on Snapchat the messages can disappear. Anything about harmful content being posted would be on TikTok because of the fact the whole app is about posting videos and, also Snapchat because of private stories. Anything about hacking or financial issues can be on any app but probably Instagram and WhatsApp because it has a lot of your information."

"More likely to be sent unwanted photos on Snapchat because photos cannot be previewed and it is very accessible. Stalked on Snapchat or Instagram because location services are linked on Snapchat and Instagram is known to be one of the most unhinged app - and their profile details encryption is not great. There have been known cases where people have been stalked because their phone number was linked to their account and hence location is linked. Groomed on Roblox because it is known to be used

by people who are under 18, predators gravitate towards it."

"Snapchat- random people can add you and may threaten you and blackmail you. For example, random people could add you and send you a rude image and blackmail you with it by saying something like 'If you don't do this, I'll tell everyone you are looking at rude images'. TikTok/Instagram- someone could post a video or comment and get hated on. Someone could leave hurtful comments or if a person shares their opinion, then a person could DM [direct message] them and threaten them. Doxxing³ people is also on the rise".

"Apps like Snapchat and WhatsApp, where the main use of the app is communication with others, are more likely to have cyberbullying or blackmail occurring on them. Posting indecent and inappropriate images/ videos would be seen more often on TikTok or Instagram. Misleading information, like inaccurate factual information or stereotypical views, are likely to be found on apps like Twitter, TikTok, Facebook and Spotify (specifically on the podcasts offered). The posting/spreading of images of a person without their consent is likely to happen on all social media apps, although I've personally seen it done on TikTok and Twitter."

Snapchat and illegal and/or harmful behaviour

Overwhelmingly, respondents highlighted Snapchat as a social media app in which illegal and/or harmful behaviour frequently occurred, including but not limited to the sharing of material without consent, bullying, the sharing of inappropriate/obscene content, blackmail, stalking, threatening behaviour,

grooming, the selling of illegal goods and fraud. This app was believed to be especially prone to illegal activities due to its features and the mistaken sense of privacy and protection these features could provide to its users.

For instance, the ease with which pictures, videos and location data could be shared on Snapchat was believed to contribute to illegal and/or harmful behaviour:

"Snapchat is probably the worst for most things, as it's extremely easy to share personal information/pictures about someone to anyone as it is so easy to spread things in Snapchat."

The ability to control for how long other users could view shared content and the potential for shared content to be automatically deleted was also believed to encourage illegal and/ or harmful behaviours, as this automated the removal of evidence. As stated by one 16-year-old:

"Snapchat is inherently designed to support shady activity, such as sending nude photos of yourself to people, due to the fact that unlike other texting apps, images immediately delete upon the recipient seeing it."

Moreover, Snapchat uses encryption for the sharing of photos and videos via messages (known as Snaps) and provides its users with a notification if Snaps are screenshot. These features can lead people to believe that the app is safe for the sharing of more intimate and/or illegal content:

"Definitely Snapchat is the easiest one for nudes because you can add friends more, it's easier, and people are more likely to accept the friend requests. Also, the thought that it disappears after 24 hours and that you often can't view a Snap more than once."

However, as users can share Snaps screenshot without consent, this facilitates illegal and/ or harmful behaviour, such as sharing material without consent, blackmail, bullying, threatening behaviour, the sharing of inappropriate/obscene content and the selling of intimate content shared without consent on other apps/websites. Examples provided by the respondents included:

"Well Snapchat, for example, you can Snap pictures and send them to people which they can save, which then they could sell. Instagram as well. You can post pictures of people on your stories making them feel unsafe. Some apps don't have restrictions which could make people feel unsafe in some situations."

"Snapchat: nudes, sexting. Common because Snapchat 'deletes' the snaps and chats you send but people screenshot them and send them around."

Snapchat [...] you can share images with a wide range of people in your school. A boy in my school made a fake account on Snapchat and used it to talk to one of my friends. He convinced my friend (who is also a boy and slightly autistic, but still smart enough) to send him a personal picture. Since you cannot screenshot on this app without the person you're talking to knowing, the boy took a picture of it from another phone and it got sent around everyone in the school."

In addition, Snapchat stories, the sticker feature and group chat functions were also used to facilitate illegal and/or harmful behaviour, such as bullying or the sharing of material without consent:

"Snapchat is used for bullying and group chats are made to bully someone because they may think it is funny."

"The sharing of personal information or photos happens more on Snapchat stories and groups, I myself have witnessed these kind of behaviours with one of my close friends experiencing their personal photos being made into 'Stickers' and shared into groups. Another friend of mine had this 'Sticker' and I requested for them to delete it to save my friend's decency."

Snapchat had originally been designed as a social media app for use with friends and people known offline. However, respondents explained that the ease with which fake accounts could be created meant that users did not always know who they were talking to and the autodeletion of content made it more challenging to verify the identity of other Snapchat users.

"Snapchat chats will disappear after a given amount of time meaning that people feel more comfortable sharing inappropriate things, where they may feel otherwise on Messenger or WhatsApp where the messages stay. [...] Certain apps like Snapchat also allow for easier made fake accounts - you don't need to post photos or have memories to prove your identity, so this makes it easy to deceive others. People also feel safer adding others for those same reasons."

For all these reasons, some young people felt that illegal and/or harmful behaviour had become normalised on Snapchat:

"It's so easy to do this on Snapchat, and lots of people don't see the problem with it."

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³ Doxxing refers to the publishing of private or identifying information about a person/organisation online without their consent and typically with malicious intent.

3.8. Perpetrators of these behaviours on social media

Respondents were asked about who the perpetrators of the illegal and/or harmful behaviours they had experienced on social media were. Multiple responses were possible. Table 7 shows that whilst the most frequently reported response was 'a stranger', in the majority of cases the respondent knew the person(s) perpetrating these behaviours, as 67% reported that the perpetrator was known to them offline. These perpetrators included friends or classmates, another young person known to them offline, a current or former boyfriend/girlfriend, a family member, or another adult known offline. One in five respondents (21%) either said they did not know who the perpetrator was, or they did not want to share this information.

Table 7: Perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media

	%
A stranger	42
Friends/classmates	29
Another young person known to you offline	17
My ex-girlfriend/boyfriend	15
Someone you met on social media	14
My girlfriend/boyfriend	2
A family member	2
Another adult known to you offline	2
I don't know	14
I prefer not to say	7

Whilst it was not appropriate in the survey to ask 16-year-olds directly if they had personally ever perpetrated such behaviour, respondents were asked how likely they felt other young people were to engage in these behaviours. Table 8 shows that the answers to this question were quite similar to respondents' personal experiences, with sharing material without consent, posting offensive, indecent or obscene material, and stalking being the top three behaviours respondents said other young people were likely to perpetrate. It is notable, however, how much higher the percentage is of those who say these behaviours are 'likely' or 'very likely' to be perpetrated compared to the percentage of respondents who reported personally experiencing such behaviours. This could suggest that these behaviours are 'normalised' among young people. Alternatively, it could suggest that, in reality, occurrences are less common than perceived, or that they are so pervasive that young people either do not recognise these behaviours when they are personally affected by them, or they do not feel they are important enough to report.

Table 8:
Perceptions of how 'likely' or 'unlikely' other young people are to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media

	%		
	Very/quite unlikely	Very/quite likely	Don't know
Sharing information/photos/videos about other people without their consent	17	74	10
Stalking	17	71	12
Posting/sharing material which is offensive, indecent or obscene	23	61	16
Posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/ dislike towards another's race, disability or gender	27	57	16
Posting/sharing threatening, intimidating or harassing behaviour	33	50	17
Attempting to build relationships with others to try to manipulate them into doing things for them	34	46	20
Buying or selling illegal or stolen goods	41	39	20
Blackmail	42	38	20
Deliberately being dishonest to obtain a financial/ personal benefit or cause someone to lose something	49	28	23
Using information on social media to steal another person's identity	59	23	18
Using information on social media to hack another person's account	55	28	17

3.9. Beliefs about perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media

Respondents were also asked if they felt that some people were more likely than others to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media, with 80% of 16-year-olds stating 'yes', only 4% stating 'no' and 16% saying they were unsure.

When asked to explain who they thought was more likely to engage in these behaviours and why, nearly one in four provided additional information. Within their responses, there was a general recognition that anyone could engage in these behaviours because of the anonymity provided by social media and because they could engage in these activities from the safety of their own homes, with minimal consequences. In the words of the respondents:

"Anyone because many feel that if they are behind a screen they can remain anonymous and less likely to be caught out. They may feel it is alright to be racist, sexist or a bully towards a person because they are less likely to meet them in real life."

"People are more likely to engage in these behaviours because they know they cannot be physically harmed and are in the comfort of their own home."

As such, it was felt that both strangers and people known in-person offline (e.g. friends, classmates, current and former boyfriends/girlfriends, family members, friends of friends, etc.) could engage in these activities:

"People you have fallen out with, as since you've been friends/dating, you've told them a lot of things about you, which some then choose to use against you in a humiliating way."

"I think strangers are more likely to engage in these behaviours as they believe that they are unable/unlikely to be found."

Nevertheless, as detailed in Figure 14, 16-year-olds did identify some groups they felt were more inclined to engage in these illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media.

Figure 14:
People believed to engage in more illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media

Being male, young and immature

Of particular note was how many 16-year-olds believed that these behaviours were more common among young/immature people and among males. It was felt that people who were younger and/or immature were more inclined to do so for the following reasons: lack of awareness/thinking about the consequences of their actions; lack of knowledge regarding how to behave appropriately on social media;

susceptibility to peer pressure to engage in these behaviours; and/or using these activities as a means of gaining status/attention.

"Kids who don't get attention at home. They crave the attention from somewhere and sometimes doing it the bad way works. The more attention they get, the more addicted they get and happy they are."

"Young men because of peer pressure and because they want popularity."

"Young children are more likely to engage in these behaviours as they are less aware of some of the consequences that comes from these types of behaviours."

"People who have not been educated on what is right and wrong to share on social media and how to navigate it safely by remembering everyone on it are real people with feelings."

Males were also frequently identified as being more likely to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. Younger and older men, especially cisgender, heterosexual males, were believed to be more likely to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour, as they sought to fulfil their sexual desires and were more likely to be targeted by right wing content, as well as content promoting toxic masculinity and misogyny. As one 16-year-old explained:

"Social media has become a powerful influence on teen boys, shaping their views on identity, masculinity, and success. Figures like Andrew Tate have gained massive followings by promoting a version of masculinity that often glorifies dominance, emotional suppression, and control over others, likely traits of toxic masculinity. While some teens may be drawn to his confidence or lifestyle, his messages can be harmful, encouraging sexist attitudes and discouraging emotional vulnerability. Platforms like TikTok and YouTube often amplify this content, making it easy for young boys to internalize these views without critical thinking. This can create pressure to conform to unrealistic and unhealthy standards of what it means to be a 'real man', affecting mental health, relationships, and self-worth. These type of people tend to be the type to have these types of behaviours overall."

Escaping, deflecting and/or dealing with difficult situations

Another frequently mentioned group involved people who were believed to be engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media as a means of escaping, deflecting or dealing with challenging circumstances or unhappy situations. People experiencing difficult home environments, who struggled to form meaningful connections with others, were insecure, had been victimised/bullied, believed to have poor mental health, and were jealous of others were thought to engage in these behaviours to make themselves feel better about their own situation and/or distract themselves from their own feelings. Examples given by the respondents included:

"I think people who have experienced a lot of childhood trauma are more likely to pursue these behaviours, as it's far easier to do them online than in person, and it's almost like a coping mechanism to hurt people this way for this kind of person."

"People that have been hurt emotionally as they do not know how to deal with it and they proceed to take their hurt and anger out on other people."

"Someone who is mocked and bullied as it can give them a sense of relief and power when they go online to be mean."

"People who are struggling so they take it out on you because they don't know what else to do."

"People who are maybe unhappy with their own lives, or feel jealous about someone, so they feel just because they are going through a rough time the people around should also suffer."

Bad intentions, need money, extreme views, strange or coerced

Other groups believed to be involved in committing illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media included those who were thought to have bad intentions, needed money, held more extreme views, were believed to be strange, or were coerced. For many of the respondents, there was a belief that some people engaged in these behaviours because they were bad people, involved in offending more generally, bullies and/or specifically disliked those they were targeting:

"People with bad intentions online."

"Criminals."

"Not nice people, bullies."

"People who dislike their target or have something to gain from their target's grief."

Further, there was a belief that people who needed money may be more likely to engage in blackmail, fraud and/or theft on social media:

"People in need of money in dire situations will blackmail others to attempt to get money or expensive items."

Those who held more extreme views were also believed to be more likely to become involved in illegal and/or harmful behaviour, especially discriminatory/prejudicial behaviour, hate speech and harassment. As explained by the respondents:

"I believe Christians are more likely to bully or discriminate LGBTQ individuals due to their religious beliefs."

"People with far-right or far-left political opinions."

In addition, YLT respondents felt that people who were 'weird' or 'creepy' were more likely to engage in these behaviours, as well as some people potentially being coerced by others to take part in these activities:

"People who are just downright creepy and know they're more likely to get away with it hidden behind a screen."

"People who have been blackmailed to do so or have been forced against their wishes."

Confidence, need for esteem/attention, boredom and normal/fun

Additionally, it was stated that confident/popular people, people who were looking for esteem/attention, people who were bored and those who thought this behaviour was normal/fun were more likely to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. Respondents felt that people who were confident/popular were more likely to feel able to engage in these behaviours, due to their confidence and/or because they may be less likely to be held to account for their actions by others:

"People who are extremely confident and comfortable in themselves and people who are arrogant."

"People who think they are superior to other because of race or gender, etc."

"People who know they will get away with acting like this as they know they have the upper hand."

Engaging in these behaviours was also viewed as a way of garnering esteem/attention, as well as passing time for those who may be bored:

"They crave attention and approval."

"Someone who is bored and has nothing better to do in their life."

Moreover, there was a sense that increasingly these behaviours were becoming normalised due to the frequency of their occurrence on social media, and in the community, with some people thinking that it was fun to engage in them. It was felt that this belief was especially common among young people and contributed to their increased likelihood of engaging in such activity:

"It's normalised."

"I think that young boys are more likely to engage in behaviours like this, especially if it's towards girls or women or an ethnic minority. I think that being racist/sexist and making racist/sexist comments is normalised by their other male friends and society as a whole and they think that it makes them cool."

"Young people as it's looked at as being funny which it sometimes can be but done in good measure."

3.10. Perceived reasons for engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviour

Respondents also offered some thoughts on why people may engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. These reasons have been grouped into five different categories listed in Figure 15.

Figure 15:
Perceived reasons for engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media

Emotional	Situational	Dispositional	Instrumental	Entertainment
Anger	Anonymity	Bad intentions	Fulfil sexual desires	Banter
Dislike of victim/ retaliation	Easy to commit	Immaturity	To obtain money	Fun
Jealousy	Minimal consequences	Judgemental/ feeling superior	To gain popularity	To socialise with others
Insecurity	Peer pressure	Being confident	To manipulate people	To cause mischief between people
To escape/ deflect/ cope with difficult situations	Reaction to content posted	Expressing more extreme views	To mislead/trick people	To relieve boredom
To seek attention from others	Lacking awareness of harms caused	Struggling to socially connect with others	In retaliation for harms caused	
To obtain approval/ validation from others	Visible and accessible account	Lacking empathy	To gain status amongs peers	
	Normalised behaviour	Displaying unusual traits/behaviours	To obtain information	

While the majority of these reasons overlapped with the young people's perceptions of why they thought some people were more likely to engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media, some additional insights were also offered. For example, some of the young people believed that posting certain content could trigger this behaviour:

"Bullying because of content that people make."

Yet, it was also noted that there was a popular trend on social media whereby people may deliberately engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour (e.g. harassment, posting discriminatory/prejudicial content, hate speech, or sharing inappropriate/obscene material) to drive up reactions to their content. As explained by one 16-year-old:

"There's this 'trend' called rage baiting going around at the moment, where people will comment obscene and horrible things on people's videos just to get a reaction out of others."

A tendency to be judgemental or lack empathy was also felt to contribute to people engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media:

"Bullying is more likely to happen as more people have become more judgmental."

"People who don't care much about others therefore they are selfish and only looking out for themselves."

Likewise, attempts to fulfil sexual desires could lead people to try to manipulate others on social media. In particular, there was a perception that this was especially the case for older males:

"Old lonely, creepy men because they are insecure. A woman would not go near them in real life so they either pretend to be someone they're not or blackmail as a sense of control."

"Adult men, they are horny or feeling some other disgusting feeling and want to take it out on somebody else and take advantage of the most vulnerable, a young person."

Another reason offered by respondents for why some people might engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media was in retaliation for a past wrong. As explained by the young people, some people may engage in these behaviours due to previous bullying behaviour or to get back at a someone they had fallen out with or who had humiliated them:

"People that experience bullying within school as they may feel the need to lash out to someone or look for a way to get back at someone."

They also felt that people may engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviour, such as stalking, hacking and phishing, to obtain information on another person. There was a sense that people could engage in this behaviour to try to find out about others, to coerce/control someone, or use this information to commit fraud/theft:

"Ex-boyfriend/girlfriends trying to see if you've moved on yet or seeing if your life is failing or a classmate or someone you might know trying to find stuff to use against you."

"People, such as scammers, who want to obtain your information for a variety of reasons."

Lastly, there was a sense that people engaged in these behaviours as 'banter'. In other words, this activity was viewed as a way of teasing/joking with others to fit in and socialise with peers:

"Banter. Socialising. Showing off things they do."

"People who want to fit in with others. I think this because they don't want to be the odd one out and be made fun off for not following what others are doing."

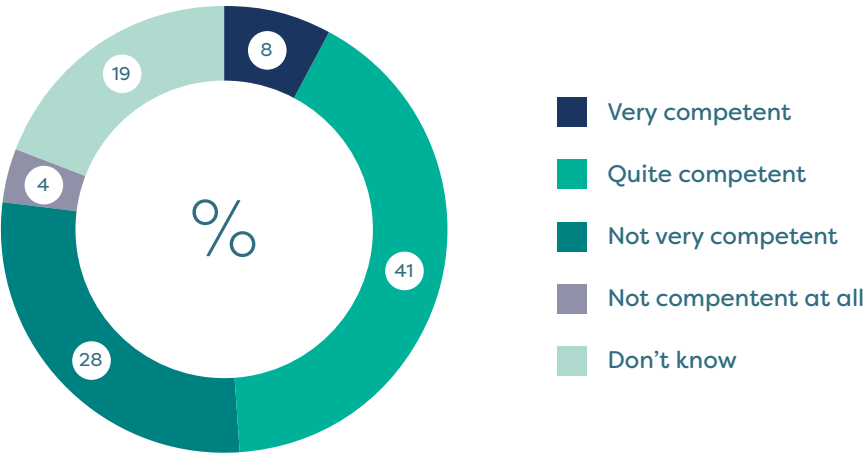Only in some cases was this thought to be deliberately done to cause mischief between other people:

"Bullying and harassment, stalking and false information spread to a person. People just like drama most of the time."

In this way, there was a sense that many of the 16-year-olds thought engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviour had become normalised in their social media interactions.

Figure 16:
Perceived competence of young people to deal with illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media

- Very competent
- Quite competent
- Not very competent
- Not compentent at all
- Don't know

3.11. Competency to deal with illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media

Additionally, respondents were asked how competent they felt young people were to deal with illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. Figure 16 shows that 49% of respondents felt that young people were either 'very competent' or 'quite competent' to deal with these behaviours. Yet, 32% felt young people were 'not very' or 'not at all competent' to deal with these behaviours. No significant differences were found in how different groups responded to this question.

While the survey lacked the space to explore in more detail what this perceived competence entailed, some of the responses suggested that some respondents felt there was a need for more education on social media use. Many of the young people who left comments felt that more work needed to be done to teach young people how to safely use social media and deal with the potential negative consequences associated with its use:

"Illegal activities such as pornography and asking for photos of young people (while they can be any age) is not okay, and people asking and thinking this

type of behaviour is okay are getting younger and younger, because social media gives them access to anything and everything. It's really an issue that needs to be taught or brought to young people's attention in schools."

"I feel as if many young people are very vulnerable to situations like these. As many are not taught the dangers of the Internet [...] and younger people tend to be more trusting, as they do not know any better, which may lead to unsafe environments such as these."

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In particular, it was felt that a failure to teach young people how to behave on social media was contributing to the occurrence of illegal and/or harmful behaviour, as people did not consider how their behaviour may harm others and/or because they believed such behaviours were normal/fun. While it was recognised that young people could sometimes be taught about online safety, it was felt that more attention needed to be paid to helping them to understand the harm they could cause through their own actions and to tackle perceptions that engaging in such behaviour was 'normalised', 'fun' or 'banter':

> *"Young people who are uneducated about the side effects of these harms. Mainly because they haven't been taught how to behave appropriately online by an adult at home or in school."*

> *"People that have not understood the seriousness of these actions. As well, there are people that think that this is normal and even funny."*

> *"I think people that are surrounded by others who already behave badly online are more prone to engage in these behaviours, as the consequences are not often highlighted to them; rather it is always the dangers that are taught to us."*

Coinciding with the implementation of the UK's Online Safety Act 2023, this report provides a timely baseline about the experiences and perceptions of 16-year-olds living in Northern Ireland in relation to the occurrence of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media. It also provides data and insights on children's and young people's experiences of using the Internet and potential exposure to inappropriate content online. Social media has been around for just over two decades, and as such is still a relatively new phenomenon. However, the 'success story' of social media in terms of proliferation is remarkable. Facilitated by the IT revolution and the subsequent availability of affordable and ever more powerful smart phones and hand-held devices, the availability and accessibility of social media has managed to fundamentally change the way people, in particular children and young people, communicate with each other. Taking, sharing and manipulating images and videos instantaneously has never been easier. Moreover, the availability of large language models and AI-tools and algorithms has started to add a new dimension, the effects of which are yet to be fully understood. However, what is evident is that while social media can facilitate connection and communication, it can also provide opportunities for illegal and/or harmful behaviours to occur.

When the Internet - a pre-condition for social media – was developed, it was promoted as a tool that would democratise and decentralise control over information, help to make information freely available (regardless of status, qualification and wealth), and enable, as well as foster, freedom of expression and connection. There was also a perception that users of Internet-based services would naturally self-regulate and 'police' their behaviour. Whilst many of these promises have been realised, there is concern about the regulation of people's behaviour online, the accuracy of material shared online, and increasing criminal

behaviour occurring online, especially on social media. The challenges associated with regulating and investigating illegal behaviours on social media and the Internet more broadly further add to these concerns. It is in this context that the UK Online Safety Act 2023 has been introduced.

From the findings of this report, it is apparent that nearly all children aged 10 to 11 years in Northern Ireland have a smart phone and access the Internet and social media daily. In 2025, three in ten YLT respondents were found to use social media for at least six hours on an average day. By far, the most popular social media apps used were Snapchat and TikTok (used by almost nine in ten respondents), Instagram (used by over eight in ten respondents), followed by YouTube and WhatsApp (used by over seven in ten respondents).

While The Children's Society (2022) argue that much of the existing research on the impact of spending long periods online is inconclusive, they agree that there are legitimate concerns about the negative impact of excessive time spent online. In this research, a relationship between time spent on social media and mental health and wellbeing was observed. The more hours 16-year-olds spent on social media was associated with poorer mental health, as measured through the GHQ12 and young people's self-assessed mental health and wellbeing. It is not possible to identify the possible causal reasons underpinning this relationship from the 2025 YLT survey. However, respondents' comments indicate that experiences of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media may negatively impact users' mental health and wellbeing. In addition, these comments also show how people struggling with poorer mental health/ challenging circumstances may engage in illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media as a way of escaping, deflecting or coping with their particular circumstances. As

such, further research is required to investigate the complexities involved and identify the possible causal reasons for the relationship witnessed between time spent on social media and mental health and wellbeing. Whilst research is still emerging about the effects of excessive social media use on mental health, some experimental studies suggest that those who limit their social media use can experience improvements in their mental health compared to those who do not (Faulhaber, 2021).

The results of the 2025 YLT survey show that over half of 16-year-olds had personally experienced illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. The most common behaviours experienced were the posting/sharing of offensive, indecent or obscene material, sharing material without consent, and stalking, all of which were experienced by at least one in five respondents. Same-sex attracted young people, those with a disability or long-term illness, young people from financially less well-off family backgrounds and young women seemed to be especially likely to experience these behaviours. In addition, while respondents acknowledged that illegal and/or harmful behaviours could occur on any social media app, Snapchat was often identified as a social media app in which illegal and/or harmful behaviour was especially likely to occur.

Policy Recommendations

1. More awareness raising and education in schools and at home

   This report shows that almost all children in Northern Ireland already receive information on Internet safety in school and at home. Around half of YLT respondents felt that young people are 'quite competent' or 'very competent' in dealing with illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media, while a third felt young people were 'not very' or 'not at all competent' in dealing with these behaviours. Accordingly, further work is

required to adapt and strengthen existing educative efforts. In particular, respondents stressed the need to teach young people how to behave appropriately on social media, to consider how their actions can affect other people, and to tackle perceptions that engaging in illegal and/or harmful behaviour was 'normal', 'fun' or 'banter'.

2. Need for more research and greater recognition of how social media experiences may affect mental health and wellbeing

   The results of this research indicate that there is a relationship between time spent on social media, as well as experiences of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media, with mental health and wellbeing. In this research, more time spent on social media was associated with poorer mental health. However, on the basis of the available data, it is currently not possible to state if time spent on social media directly caused poorer mental health, if people with poorer mental health are more likely to spend more time on social media, and/or if spending more time on social media may increase exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviours which may negatively impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. For this reason, it is recommended that further work is undertaken to investigate the causal relationships, if any, between time spent on social media, and experiences of illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media, with mental health and wellbeing. What is evident from these findings is that there is a link between people's mental health and wellbeing and their usage of social media and exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. Greater recognition of this link may be required to better support young people in dealing with the possible negative consequences of social media usage on their mental health and wellbeing.

3. Better reporting mechanisms and stricter sanctions for perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media

   The findings reveal that young people and children can encounter inappropriate content online, as well as illegal and/or harmful behaviour on social media. As such, it is important to ensure that the reporting of inappropriate content and illegal and/or harmful behaviour is made as easy as possible. In particular, social media companies should ensure that policies and practices are properly enforced and regulated, with swift action taken to sanction illegal and/or harmful behaviour. These companies may also need to take action to limit the anonymity offered to their users if this anonymity is facilitating illegal and/or harmful behaviour, as well as hindering the identification, investigation and prosecution of perpetrators of illegal behaviours on social media. Given that many perpetrators of illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media are known to respondents offline, it may also be necessary to ensure that families, friends, schools, etc. hold perpetrators to account for their actions and feel empowered to challenge the perception that such behaviour is 'normal', 'fun' or 'banter'.

4. Implementation, regulation and enforcement of the UK Online Safety Act 2023

   There is a need to closely monitor the extent to which social media companies and online platforms take the actions they are now legally required to take given the UK's Online Safety Act 2023. Implementation, monitoring and enforcement of this Act will be important in helping to reduce children's and young people's exposure to illegal and/or harmful behaviours on social media and online. To what extent the UK Online Safety Act 2023 regulations with be implemented

by social media providers remains to be seen, so it is important that those charged with monitoring the implementation of this Act and its enforcement are sufficiently resourced and enabled to take action when needed. The level of sanctions for companies that fail to implement appropriate measures in response to the Act should also be carefully considered and evaluated to determine their effectiveness.

5. Monitoring of research into adaptive AI-generated algorithms

   It is not clear yet in what way adaptive AI-generated algorithms and large language models will affect the way social media apps are run and operated and how they will affect what children and young people see online. Educators and policy makers working with and on behalf of children and young people in Northern Ireland will need to monitor this research closely and adapt their policy interventions accordingly.

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Appendix – Social media questions asked in the 2025 YLT survey

The next set of questions are about young people's use of social media.

1. Approximately how many hours would you spend on social media on an average day? *(Select one answer only)*

Fewer than 3 hours	1	
3-5 hours	2	
6-8 hours	3	
More than 8 hours	4	
I don't know	5	
I don't spend any time on social media	6	Skip to question 9

2. What social media apps do you use? *(Select all that apply)*

Instagram	1
Snapchat	1
WhatsApp	1
X/Twitter	1
TikTok	1
Facebook	1
An online dating app	1
YouTube	1
Other *(Please type in)*	1

3. Have any of the following happened to you on social media? *(Select all that apply)*

Blackmail (e.g. someone demanding something from you to not reveal compromising or damaging material)	1
Sharing your information/photos/videos with others without your consent	1
Someone attempting to build a relationship with you to try to manipulate you into doing things for them	1
Someone stalking your activities	1
Someone posting/sharing threatening, intimidating or harassing material about you or towards you	1
Someone posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/dislike towards your race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender.	1
Someone posting/sharing material which you found offensive, indecent or obscene	1
Offers to buy or sell illegal or stolen goods	1
Someone using your information on social media to steal your identity.	1
Someone using your information on social media to hack into your accounts	1
People deliberately being dishonest to you to obtain a financial/personal benefit or cause you to lose something (e.g. money)	1
I have not experienced any of these behaviours on social media	1	Skip to question 5

4. Do you know who behaved this way towards you? *(Select all that apply)*

My girlfriend/boyfriend	1
My ex-girlfriend/ex-boyfriend	1
Friends/classmates	1
A family member	1
Another adult known to you offline	1
Another young person known to you offline	1
Someone you met on social media	1
A stranger	1
I don't know	1
I prefer not to say	1

5. Do you think some people are more likely to engage in these behaviours on social media compared to others? *(Select one answer only)*

Yes	1	Go to next question
No	2	Skip to question 7
I don't know	3	Skip to question 7

6. Can you please explain who you think is more likely to engage in these behaviours on social media and why? *(Please type in)*

7. Do you think any of the above behaviours are more likely to happen on some social media apps compared to others (e.g., the sharing of information/photos/videos without consent on Snapchat in comparison to Instagram)? *(Select one answer only)*

Yes	1	Go to the next
No	2	Go to question 9
I don't know	3	Go to question 9

8. Can you please explain what behaviours you think are more likely to happen on which social media apps and why?

9. How likely or unlikely are young people to engage in the following behaviours on social media? *(Select one answer in each row)*

	Very unlikely	Quite unlikely	Quite likely	Very likely	Don't know
Blackmail	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing information/photos/videos about other people without their consent	1	2	3	4	5
Attempting to build relationships with others to try to manipulate them into doing things for them	1	2	3	4	5
Stalking another person's activities	1	2	3	4	5
Posting/sharing threatening, intimidating or harassing material	1	2	3	4	5
Posting/sharing material motivated by hostility/dislike towards another's race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or gender	1	2	3	4	5
Posting/sharing material which is offensive, indecent or obscene	1	2	3	4	5
Buying or selling illegal or stolen goods	1	2	3	4	5
Using information on social media to steal another person's identity	1	2	3	4	5
Using information on social media to hack another person's account	1	2	3	4	5
Deliberately being dishonest to obtain a financial/personal benefit or cause someone to lose something	1	2	3	4	5

10. How competent do you think most young people are to deal with these behaviours on social media? *(Select one answer only)*

Not competent at all	1
Not very competent	2
Quite competent	3
Very competent	4
I don't know	5

11. Is there anything else you would like to say about social media use among young people? *(Please type in)*