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Online Violence Against Children Trends and Risks

What do we mean by online violence against children?

Definition

Online violence against children refers to harmful, abusive or exploitative behaviour carried out through digital platforms, devices or internet-based environments.

It can involve peers, known adults, strangers, groups, platforms or technology-enabled systems.

Common digital environments

- Social media
- Messaging apps and groups
- Online games and chat rooms
- Learning platforms and classroom devices
- Video-sharing platforms
- AI tools and image-generation apps

Expansion of ICT and social media in India

India's telecom data confirms that digital access has crossed the billion scale.

Internet subscriptions

1,028.61 Mn

Total internet subscriptions;
+1.06% over Sep 2025.

Wireless internet

983.29 Mn

Wireless internet dominates the access landscape.

Wireless mobile

1,244.20 Mn

Mobile subscriptions;
+6.30% over Sep 2025.

Broadband

1,007.35 Mn

Broadband is almost the full internet base.

Latest quarter: subscription growth

Indicator	Sep 2025	Dec 2025	Growth
Total internet	1,017.81	1,028.61	+1.06%
Total telephone	1,228.94	1,306.14	+6.28%
Wireless mobile	1,170.44	1,244.20	+6.30%

Mn = million
subscriptions/connections

Source: Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, The Indian Telecom Services Performance Indicators, October–December 2025, released 3 March 2026.

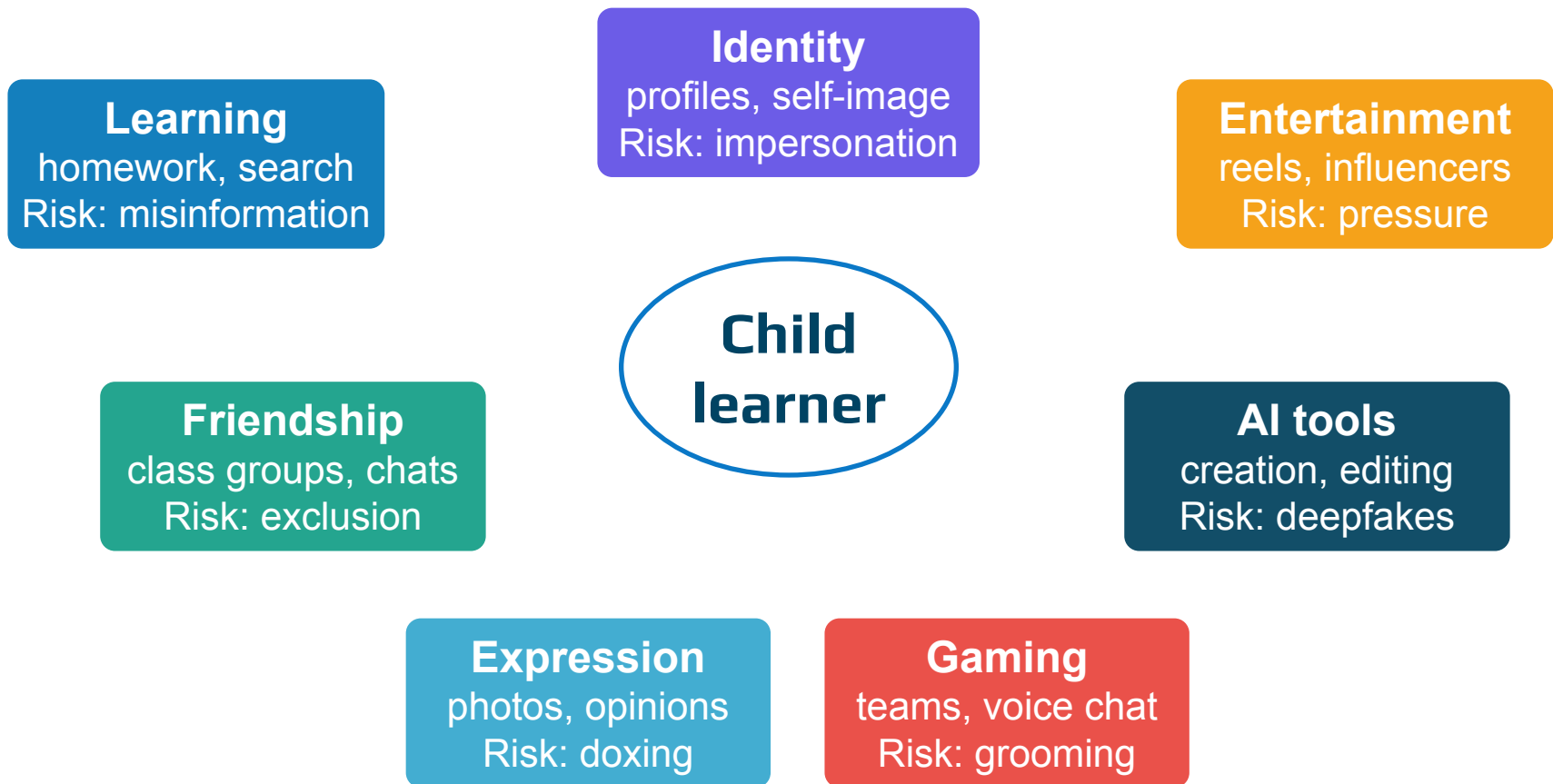


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Children are not just “using the internet” — they are living in a digital ecosystem

Learning, identity, friendship, entertainment and risk now happen in the same digital spaces



Global Evidence: Online and offline violence are now one landscape for learners

Drawing on UNESCO Safe to Learn and Thrive (2024); WHO Europe HBSC 2022; ITU Facts and Figures 2024; OECD PISA 2022

15%

of adolescents have experienced cyberbullying, roughly one learner in six

Cyberbullying rose from 13% in 2018, reaching 16% for girls and 15% for boys aged 11, 13 and 15 by 2022.

2.6B

people worldwide still lacked internet access in 2024 (ITU); the digital divide shapes who can report harm and reach support

1 in 5

15-year-olds in OECD countries report being bullied at school at least a few times a month (PISA 2022)

Education is central, not peripheral

Schools are where prevention, early recognition and response come together for learners and educators.



SCAN

Safe to Learn and Thrive

UNESCO,
2024



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Asia-Pacific Evidence: regional contours of the same global pattern

Drawing on UNESCO Behind the Numbers (2019, HBSC analysis); Republic of Korea Ministry of Education and police data (2024)

30.3%

bullying prevalence in Asia

range 7.1%-51.2% across countries; close to the global median of 32%

36.8%

bullying prevalence in the Pacific

above the global median; fourth highest of any world region

920

school-based deepfake victims in the Republic of Korea

in just the first eleven months of 2024; 74% of suspects aged 10-19

“ *Across the region, online and offline harms are recognised as one continuum requiring coordinated action across education, child protection, justice and digital regulation.*

UNESCO Global Symposium, Bangkok, 25-27 November 2025

22.2% of boys and **10.9%** of girls report physical bullying in Asia; sexual bullying affects **10.5% and 10.9%** respectively (UNESCO, 2019)



Connected, Protected & Empowered

UNESCO Global Symposium,
Bangkok, 2025

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India context: official reporting shows a rising concern

Reported child cybercrimes

Cases registered against children rose from 232 in 2018 to 1,823 in 2022 — a nearly eight-fold increase.

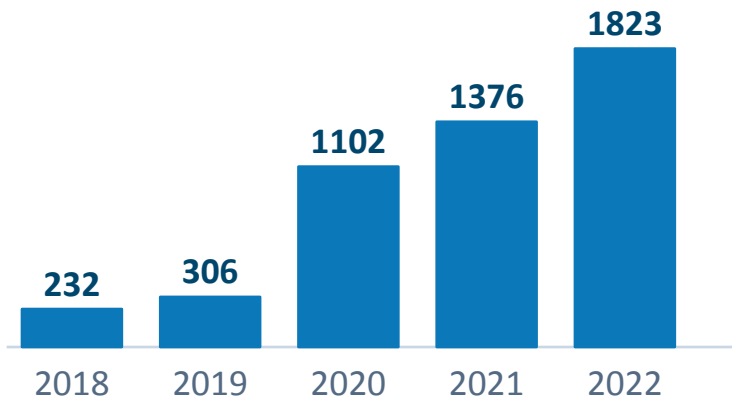
Category signal

In 2022, 1,171 cases involved obscene sexual material depicting children; cyber stalking/bullying cases were 158.

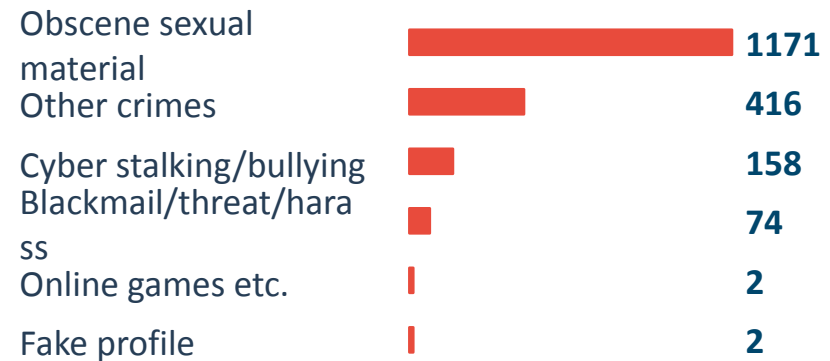
NCPCR digital wellbeing finding

NCPCR study of 5,000 children: 23.80% used smartphones in bed before sleep; 37.15% always/frequently experienced reduced concentration due to smartphone use.

Registered cybercrimes against children, India



2022 registered cybercrime heads against children



How many children are affected by online violence in India?

- 1 in 3 children in India reported experiencing cyberbullying. Tragically, more than half of those affected were unaware of any services or resources to report the abuse.
- India among the highest globally for rates of children falling victim to cyberbullying, with peer-on-peer harassment on social media and gaming platforms spiking dramatically.
- 85% of Indian children reported being the victims of cyberbullying. (McAfee)
- Indian children reach "mobile maturity" between the ages of 10 and 14 at a rate of 83%, which is significantly younger than the global average.

How many children are affected by online violence in India?

- 42% of children have faced targeted racist or discriminatory attacks online
- Publicly humiliating a child on comment sections, social media feeds, or gaming lobbies
- Unwanted sexual advances, explicit messages, or comments hits young girls the hardest, with nearly 1 in 3 girls aged 10 to 14 experiencing online sexual harassment.
- Doxing (23%): The malicious publishing of a minor's private information, phone numbers, addresses, or private photos without their consent to invite mass harassment.
- Malicious Rumors and Exclusion (35%–39%): Deliberately spreading false rumors on platforms like WhatsApp or intentionally blocking and isolating a child from class/peer group chats.



Trends in Child Online Violence in India

The Lockdown Screen Surge: COVID-19 lockdowns forced remote schooling, triggering an unprecedented migration of minors online. With screen time skyrocketing overnight, millions of children were exposed to the digital ecosystem without basic literacy or protection.

Expansion of Digital Risks: With remote devices acting as primary windows to the outside world, parental oversight limits were tested. Children experienced a severe spike in exposures to targeted peer harassment, predators, and unchecked toxic online spaces.



Trends in Children's Internet Usage in India

Age Group	Average Hours Spent Online per Day	Percentage Owning a Smartphone	Most Common Activities
0-5 years	1.5 hours	N/A	Educational videos, games
6-10 years	2.5 hours	60%	Social media, gaming, videos
11-15 years	4 hours	85%	Social media, online chats, gaming
16-18 years	6 hours	95%	Social media, online forums, shopping

Source: Child Internet Safety Report, 2023



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Trend 1: Boundary between online and offline safety is disappearing

A conflict that starts in school may escalate online, and online harm may show up first in school

Offline to online

Classroom teasing can become group-chat exclusion, memes, altered photos or public humiliation after school hours.

Online to offline

Online threats, rumors or image-sharing can lead to fear, avoidance, peer isolation, attendance issues and physical fights.

Teacher implication

Teachers may not see the original online content, but they can observe the social and emotional fallout: anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, sudden silence or academic decline.

Trend 2: Cyberbullying is faster, wider and harder to escape

The features of digital platforms can intensify harm

Speed

A harmful post can spread before adults notice.

Scale

One incident can involve dozens or thousands of viewers.

Permanence

Screenshots, reposts and archives make content difficult to remove.

Anonymity

Fake profiles and anonymous accounts can make accountability harder.

24/7 exposure

The harm can continue beyond school hours and into the home.

Trend 3: Image-based abuse is becoming a school safeguarding risk

Humiliation and harm can be created, forwarded and stored within seconds

What it can look like

- Non-consensual sharing of private images
- Sexualised comments and image-based threats
- Morphed or edited photographs
- Unwanted explicit content sent to learners
- Blackmail or coercion using images

Why schools must care

The incident may happen outside school, but the impact appears inside school: attendance avoidance, fear of classmates, reputational harm, mental distress and risk of further exploitation.

Trend 4: Grooming and coercion can be hidden in “normal” online spaces

Risk does not come only from strangers; peers and acquaintances also matter

Risk environments

- Gaming chats and live streams
- Closed social media groups
- Private messaging after first contact in a public space
- Accounts using false identity or age
- Educational apps and forums with weak moderation

Tactics to be aware of

- Flattery and secrecy
- Gift cards, rewards or in-game purchases
- Requests to move to private chat
- Pressure to share personal details or images
- Threats, blackmail or humiliation

Trend 5: AI-enabled harm is changing the speed and credibility of abuse

Deepfakes and synthetic media are entering school environments

Deepfakes and edited media

AI tools can generate or manipulate images, audio and video, making humiliation and sexualised abuse easier to produce and harder to verify.

Harassment at scale

Automated accounts, mass sharing and repeated tagging can intensify attacks against a child or teacher.

What teachers can say

“We will take this seriously. We will not blame you. Do not delete evidence yet. Let us get the right support.”

Trend 6: data, privacy and digital footprints are part of child safety

Learners need to understand what information they leave behind and who can use it

Personal data exposure

phone numbers, school details, location, photos

Doxxing

private information shared to threaten or shame

Impersonation

fake profiles using a child's name or images

Targeted manipulation

ads, scams, misinformation or exploitative contact

Permanent footprint

posts and images resurfacing later

Who may be at higher risk?

Risk is shaped by gender, age, social context, access, confidence and support systems

Girls and young women

Higher exposure to image-based abuse, sexual harassment and gendered body shaming

Gender-diverse learners

Global evidence indicates higher perceived risk of online harm

Children with lower digital literacy

May be less able to identify manipulation, privacy risks or unsafe contact

Children with disabilities or social isolation

May face exclusion, impersonation, targeted abuse or dependence on online peer groups

Children with limited trusted support

May stay silent because they fear blame, punishment or device restrictions

What might teachers notice first?

Online violence often becomes visible through changes in behaviour, learning and relationships

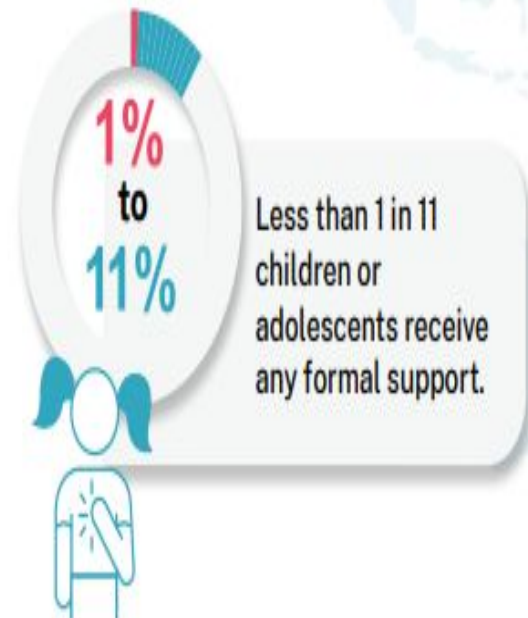
Possible learner indicators

- Sudden withdrawal from peers
- Anxiety during or after device-based activities
- Avoiding school, transport, clubs or certain peers
- Unexplained anger, fear, sadness or shame
- Rapid decline in academic performance

Possible peer/classroom indicators

- Whispering, laughing or sudden group attention
- Repeated phone checking or panic after notifications
- Exclusion from group work or online class groups
- Rumours, memes or coded language
- A child being pressured to “prove” something

Help seeking behavior among children



Education Sector Response to prevent and address online violence against Children

Schools can prevent, identify and respond to online violence against children

1 Digital Literacy & Safety Education

- Curricula integration
- Critical thinking skills
- Age-appropriate resources

2 Promoting Gender Equality & Respect

- Rights-based education
- Life skills training
- Challenging stereotypes

3 Strengthening School Systems

- Policies & codes of conduct
- Reporting mechanisms
- Teacher training

4 Support Services & Collaboration

- Counselling & psychosocial support
- Engage parents & communities
- Partnerships with tech platforms

5 Student Empowerment & Engagement

- Peer-led initiatives
- Youth participation
- Positive online culture

Thank you for your attention