Methodology Report

Aussie Kids Online

February 2022

Introduction

This report outlines the methodology used for eSafety's Aussie Kids Online research report series. This research is based on data from the eSafety National Youth Survey 2021, which was conducted from July to September 2021. eSafety commissioned Whereto Research to conduct the survey to establish and update statistics around young people's digital participation. Survey data will be analysed and presented in a series of publications during 2022.

This survey informs eSafety's online safetyresource development, program implementation and regulatory responsibilities. It builds on previous surveys of young people and parents commissioned by eSafety and is informed by the Global Kids Online research toolkit, which provides guidance for carrying out standardised research on children's online risks and opportunities.[1]

The research objectives are to:

★ examine the online activities and benefits of being online for young Australians aged 8–17

★ determine the prevalence and nature of harmful online experiences among young Australians aged 8–17

★ understand young Australians' responses to risky or harmful online experiences

★ provide insights into the online experiences of young Australians who may be most vulnerable to risk of harm online, specifically those who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse, LGBTIQ+ or living with disability.[2]

Online survey

The eSafety National Youth Survey 2021 was conducted online, with fieldwork commencing on 8 July and concluding on 13 September 2021.

The survey was conducted in two parts:

★ an initial 10-minute parent survey, where parents were asked about their perceptions of their child's online activity and internet use, and about their own awareness of their child's negative online experiences

★ a 20-minute child survey, where children aged 8–17 (as identified by their parent) were asked in more detail about their digital skills, online activity, internet use, exposure to harmful content on the internet and any negative online experiences they may have had.

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1 Global Kids Online, Tools for researchers.
2 Research conducted for eSafety in 2019 examining adult Australians found that these groups were twice as likely as other adults in the population to have had negative online experiences. See Adults' negative online experiences.

Ethical considerations

Various steps were taken to address ethical considerations during survey development and recruitment. This included only posing sensitive questions – for example, those relating to sexual content and LGBTIQ+ status – to children aged 14–17.

A parent or carer was required to complete the initial parent survey and provide consent for their child aged 8–17 to complete the remainder of the survey. The parent survey enabled parents to gain an overview of the question areas their children would be asked to respond to. This allowed parents to be fully informed as to the survey content before providing their consent for their children to complete the survey, mitigating a key ethical risk.

This survey was submitted as part of the Human Research Ethics Committee approval process, with ethics approval obtained on 6 July 2021 from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Questionnaire design

The online survey is an adaptation of the Global Kids Online[3] survey, Version 2, 2020 ('the GKO survey'). Global Kids Online is an international network of academics, social researchers and experts dedicated to studying children's rights, risks and opportunities in the digital age. While the GKO survey is a modular survey questionnaire containing core and optional questions, the eSafety National Youth Survey 2021 is primarily comprised of core questions from the GKO survey. These core questions are designed to enable comparability with other countries in the network on a range of key indicators. The eSafety National Youth Survey 2021 also included selected questions from the GKO survey's optional parent module.

Some changes were made to GKO survey questions to fit the Australian context and to meet eSafety's specific information requirements. For example, a question on seeking health information online was split into three questions on seeking information online about physical health, mental health and sexual health, as evidence on these topics was needed for eSafety's education programs. The online survey also included a small number of new questions, such as an open-ended question on children's perceptions of the internet and a follow-up question about their sources of emotional support online.

This is the first survey conducted by eSafety as a member of Global Kids Online.

3 Global Kids Online, Survey guide and questionnaire.

Topics covered in the questionnaire were:

Skills
operational skills, informational/browsing skills, social skills, creative skills and digital confidence

Activities
opportunities such as learning, civic participation, creativity, social relationships, entertainment, and health information

Risks
meeting new people, seeing sexual images, potentially negative user-generated content, and other negative online experiences

Internet access
such as places of use and devices used

Communication
use of websites or apps, approach to online communication, and behaviour and safety on social networking sites

Sexual communication
receiving/sending sexual messages online

Hurtful and bullying behaviours
experiencing and perpetrating

Actions taken to address negative online experiences

Parental mediation of internet use

Wellbeing
benefits of internet use

Sources of online safety information

Survey sample

A total of n=3,651 children (and their parent or carer) completed the National Youth Survey 2021. The sample was nationally representative based on gender, age, location and socioeconomic status (determined by postcode).

To ensure the experiences of the broader Australian population were included, the sample was also nationally representative based on groups identified as populations most at risk online.

These include people who:

* ★ identify as LGBTIQ+

* ★ identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (or both)

* ★ are culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

* ★ live with disability

Four non-probability-based online panel providers (Octopus Group, Pure Profile, Research Profiles and Student Edge) were used to recruit participants for this project. Online panels are technically convenience samples.

'Non-probability-based sampling' means that not everyone has an equal chance of being selected to participate in the research. Results may be subject to a range of biases when compared with results from research using probability-based sampling.

Although it is possible to control for demographic skews using quotas, controlling for psychographic skews arising from differential approaches to participation attraction is more problematic. It has been suggested that using at least three online panels ensures that most biases in panel populations are minimised, and that results closely represent those achieved by probability samples.

However, it should be broadly noted that there is no perfect sampling approach for humans. A random digit dialling telephone approach is generally regarded as best practice in the development of true probability samples. However, this approach is complicated by a range of factors, including the prevalence and usage of mobile phones and landlines, and further by issues such as social desirability in responses – particularly relevant for this study, in which participants were asked a range of sensitive questions.

Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews sample

In addition to the online survey, n=200 Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews were conducted for the purpose of confirming that the online survey results reflect the attitudes and experiences of the broader population. However, upon review of the data from the telephone sample and its close alignment to the online sample, no calibration of the online survey data was conducted.

Booster sample

The quantitative sample also included a booster sample for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and LGBTIQ+ identified individuals. A small number (n=61) of LGBTIQ+ youth from the booster sample was omitted from the findings that compared parent awareness with prevalence among children, as they didn't have a paired parent survey component. However, this non-paired youth sample is included in other survey findings focusing only on young people.

Weighting

Using the latest available Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population data, quotas were set to best represent a nationally representative sample. Weighting reduces the effective sample size of a study and can impact on results in uncertain ways. Therefore, where close alignment of a sample with a population

is recorded, it is preferable not to apply weighting. Close review of the data and demographic characteristics against ABS population figures based on age, gender, location and socioeconomic status indicated no need to apply any weighting.

Table 1: Summary of the overall sample reported

Demographics		Children (n=)	Parents (n=)
Gender	Male	1,797	1,797
	Female	1,755	1,755
Age of child	8–10	1,329	1,329
	11–13	912	912
	14–17	1,349	1,349
State	Australian Capital Territory	54	54
	New South Wales	1,092	1,092
	Northern Territory	16	16
	Queensland	747	747
	South Australia	267	267
	Tasmania	82	82
	Victoria	956	956
	Western Australia	376	376
Household	Single child	1,985	1,985
	Multiple child	1,605	1,605
Other demographics	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	223	223
	Culturally and linguistically diverse	854	854
	Living with disability	1,037	1,037
	LGBTIQ+ (only asked of those 14+)	229	168
	Total	**3,651**	**3,590**

Limitations

Children were recruited to participate in the survey via their parents. Parents could choose to share the survey with their child by having a link to the children's survey sent directly to their child, or by having a link sent to them to share with their child. It was also recommended that parents help their child complete the survey if the child was 12 years or younger. These factors may have affected the level of privacy that a child had in completing the survey and, potentially, the frankness of some of their responses.

In recognition of this limitation, a follow-up question was asked about the circumstances in which children completed the survey. The majority of children who participated in the survey responded (n=3,006), with 55% saying they completed the survey by themselves in private. Less than one in five (15%) said their parent or carer helped them complete the survey, while just under a third (29%) did the survey themselves with their parent or carer in the same room.

In future, changes will be made to the way the survey is administered to children to improve participants' privacy.