CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE, AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING

An approach from the perspective of health, coexistence, and social responsibility

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GOBIERNO DE ESPAÑA — MINISTERIO PARA LA TRANSFORMACIÓN DIGITAL Y DE LA FUNCIÓN PÚBLICA — SECRETARÍA DE ESTADO DE DIGITALIZACIÓN E INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL

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Childhood, Adolescence, and Digital Well-Being
An approach from the perspective of health, coexistence, and social responsibility

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CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE, AND DIGITAL WELL-BEING

Integrating the use of digital devices in a healthy way during childhood and adolescence constitutes one of the major challenges we face as a society
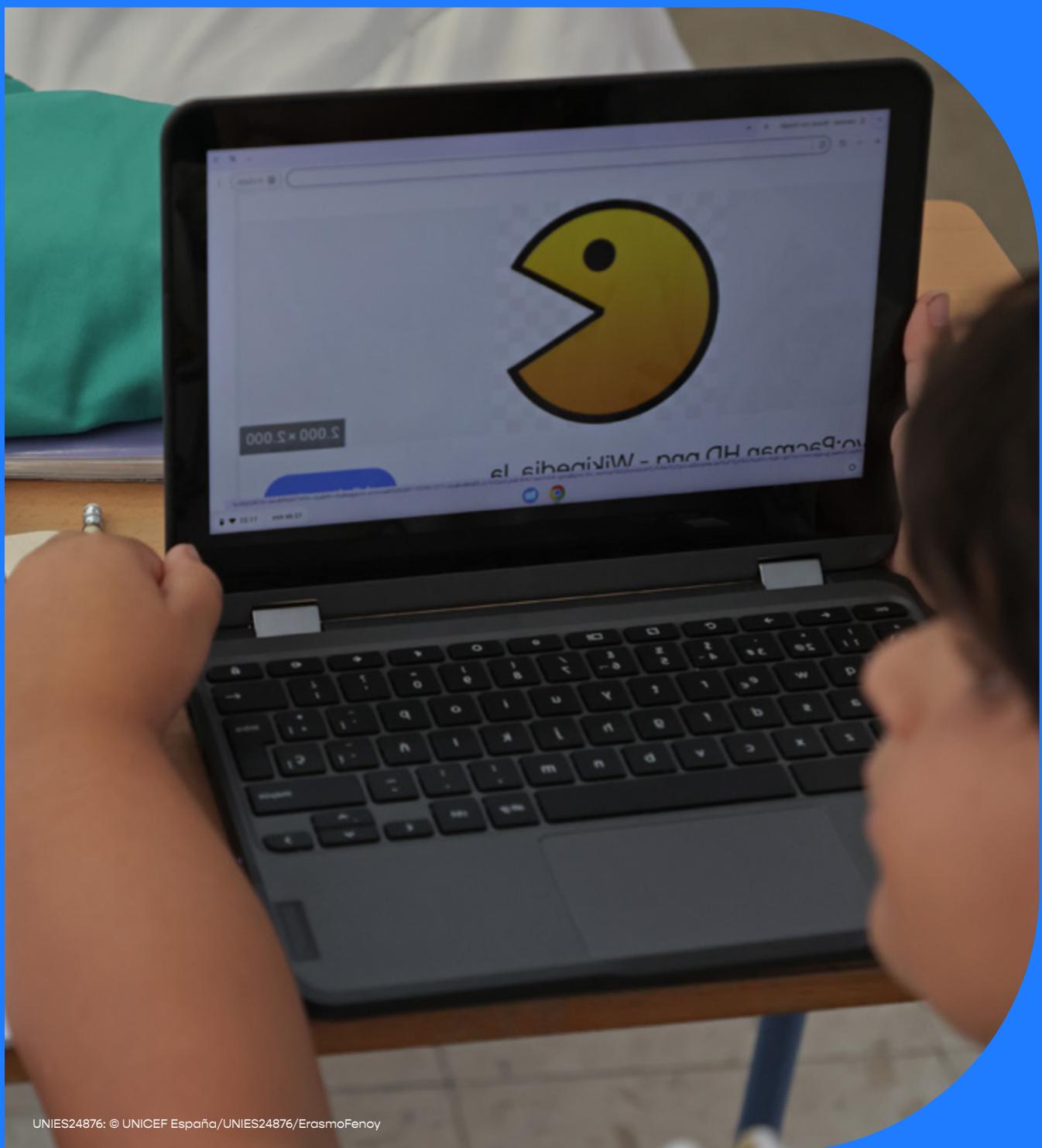
01 Introduction

Introduction

The digital revolution has ceased to be a technological phenomenon and has become a structural transformation of society. Connectivity is ubiquitous and cross-cutting: it reaches all sectors, shapes consumption habits, alters socialization dynamics, and redefines educational models. This new reality particularly affects children and adolescents: not only as intensive users but also as a generation shaping their identity and development within a deeply digitalized ecosystem.

Spain is no exception to this transformation. Access to connected screens begins at a very early age, and the use of social media and video platforms becomes established even before adolescence. The mobile phone, once considered a device for adults, is now a common tool in school, family, and recreational settings for children.

A social responsibility that concerns us all and must be addressed from a rights-based approach

By the age of 10, 41% of boys and girls already own a mobile phone, and by the age of 12, this percentage rises to 76%.

Digitalization, when directed toward serving human development, represents an extraordinary opportunity for children. It enables access to virtually unlimited information, stimulates creativity, broadens communication possibilities, and opens new pathways for personalized learning. In the school context, digital technologies can foster inclusion, strengthen collaborative work, and enhance critical thinking. Beyond the classroom, they offer spaces for self-expression, civic participation, and the strengthening of family and social bonds.

For this reason, access to the Internet is now recognized as an enabling right, essential for the exercise of other fundamental rights. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment No. 25 (2021), emphasizes that digital environments must be designed and managed in ways that foster the full development of children and adolescents, guided by the best interests of the child and ensuring a necessary balance among access, protection, education, and participation.

Ensuring the well-being of children and adolescents in digital environments, however, poses complex practical challenges. The risks associated with technology use in childhood are not new. Early, intensive, and unsupervised use has implications for child development that call for addressing the issue as a matter of public health, particularly as its scale and diversity have multiplied in recent years. This is not only about external threats (such as cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, or loss of privacy) but also about more subtle, yet equally concerning, consequences: overexposure, loss of healthy habits, mental fatigue, image-related pressure, and a reduction in face-to-face interaction.

Among the most significant challenges, the following stand out:

• The loss of control over time and content consumption by minors, with a particularly strong impact on younger children.

• Exposure to hate speech, violence, sexualization, or misinformation without filters or mediation.

• The weakening of the connection between educational and family environments when the digital guidance gap prevents parents, caregivers, and teachers from fulfilling their protective role.

• The development of habits of self-demand or comparison, especially on Social Media, which directly affect emotional well-being.

• The inequality of opportunities between those who possess critical digital literacy and those who merely consume technology without understanding its logic.

• The empowerment of children and adolescents as agents of change by promoting their participation in decision-making processes that affect their digital lives, listening to their voices, and taking their opinions into account to build a more inclusive Internet where they can fully exercise their citizenship.

Public concern about this issue is steadily increasing. In Spain, more than 90% of the population expresses worry about the risks faced by children and adolescents in digital environments. In order to implement appropriate prevention and response mechanisms to the challenges of digital environments, it is necessary to understand them precisely. Expanding the evidence base on the impact of children's digital activities on their well-being is essential to guide the adoption of measures and ensure that these keep pace with technological changes.

For this reason, UNICEF Spain, the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), the General Council of Colleges of Computer Engineering (CCII), and the Public Business Entity Red.es, under the Ministry for Digital Transformation and the Civil Service, have produced three reports designed as a comprehensive tool to better understand the lives of children and adolescents in digital environments. The first report was a qualitative study using focus groups and in-depth interviews, examining the perspectives of all stakeholders: families, adolescents, professionals, and experts. The second was a quantitative study capturing the views of thousands of teachers. The third was a large-scale survey of nearly 100,000 children and adolescents, reflecting their habits and experiences in a digital world.

The report presented below corresponds to the results of the third study, aimed at evaluating the use of digital technologies in childhood and adolescence. It builds on the previous study conducted by UNICEF, USC, and CCII in 2021 on the Impact of Technology on Adolescence, expanding it with a broader approach to provide a holistic view of the issue. The report is structured into five sections. First, the objectives of the study are established. Next, the methodology section details the technical design of the research. The central part of the report presents the students' results, organized into thematic sections: health, coexistence, mobile phones and social networks, consumption of pornography, video gaming, gambling, and the role of families. The document concludes with a section of conclusions, which synthesizes the most relevant findings of the study and proposes measures to improve the protection of minors in digital environments, with the authors suggesting key areas for action.

02

Objectives

The present study was designed with the objective of conducting a comprehensive assessment of the use of RICT (Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies; Marta and Gabelas, 2016) in childhood and adolescence, analyzing the potential implications for both mental health and coexistence and personal development. The aim is to provide institutional authorities with valid and reliable information that helps not only to better understand the role that the digital environment plays in childhood and adolescence but also to design policies for effective prevention equally removed from both alarmism and the trivialization of the issue. This work also constitutes an excellent opportunity to explore very precise aspects from childhood and adolescence like quality of life, mental health, school coexistence problems and new addictions through tha application of screenings tools that have been thoroughly validated at the international level .

Conceiving the relationship of new generations "with" and "in" the digital environment from a comprehensive perspective requires an awareness of its significance for development at multiple levels. Unlike the work conducted in 2021, the present edition has expanded the target population, incorporating both students in 5th and 6th grades of Primary Education (aiming to analyze this issue from an early age) and students in Upper Secondary Education and Vocational Training. The underlying approach of this initiative is one of social responsibility and rights, which entails proactively addressing the significant challenge that technology use poses for contemporary society, and particularly for the children and adolescents of today.

This involves understanding the relationship of new generations "with" and "in" the digital environment from a comprehensive perspective, giving voice to the protagonists themselves
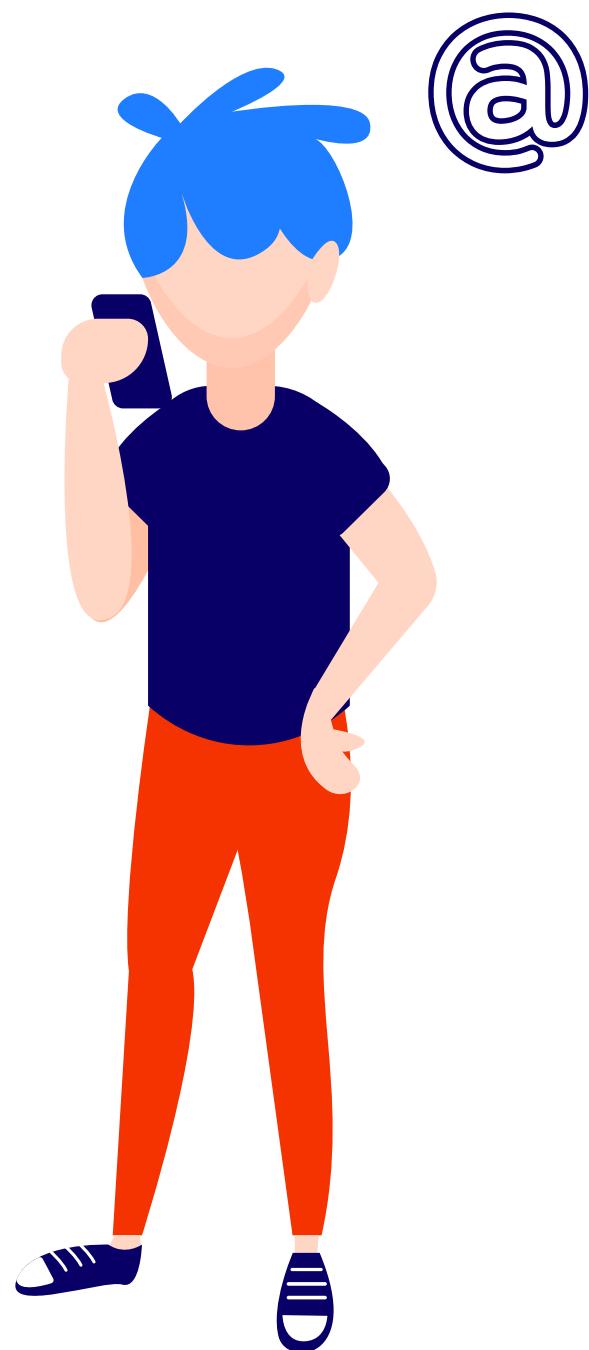
03 Methodology

Sample design

The reference population consisted of all students in 5th and 6th grades of Primary Education, Secondary Education (ESO), Upper Secondary Education (Bachillerato), Basic Vocational Training, and Intermediate Vocational Training programs across the entire country, including public, private, and state-subsidized schools. An analytical and cross-sectional design was used, with stratified cluster sampling for the selection of the sample. A total of 93,153 students participated in the study. After a rigorous data cleaning process, the final sample for analysis consisted of 75,329 students, aged between 10 and 20 years (Mean: 13.48; SD: 2.19). Of these, 26.9% were in 5th or 6th grade of Primary Education, 58.4% in Secondary Education, 11.5% in Upper Secondary Education, and the remaining 3.2% in Vocational Training. Regarding gender, 49.4% were boys, 48.8% girls, and 1.8% chose not to disclose their biological sex.

Instrument

An ad hoc questionnaire was developed, including items drawn both from previous studies and from original creation. For the assessment of various health-related constructs (Quality of Life, Emotional Distress, Depression, and Suicidal Behavior), internationally validated instruments were used, supported by the relevant scientific societies. Specific screening scales were employed to estimate prevalences of potential addictions or problematic uses.

Reliability values were high across all age groups and comparable to those reported by the original authors. Versions of the questionnaire were developed in the different co-official languages as well as in English.

Technical data sheet

Context: Spain

Population: infinite. Students aged 10 to 20 years, enrolled in 5th and 6th grades of Primary Education, ESO, Bachillerato, Basic Vocational Training, or Intermediate Vocational Training programs in public, private, or state-subsidized schools across the country (approx. N: 4,100,000).

Sampling strategy: Stratified by clusters according to autonomous community, educational level, and school ownership. A compromise allocation was used, with a minimum sample of 1,937 individuals per autonomous community and a maximum error at the disaggregated level of ±2%.

Sample size: 93153 students

Worst hypothesis: p=q=0,50

Significance level: α=0,05

Global sampling error for Spain ± 0,3%

Maximum sampling error for each autonomous city/community: ± 2%

Procedure

Data collection was conducted between November 2024 and June 2025, using an online questionnaire implemented in LimeSurvey and hosted on a server at the Galicia Supercomputing Center. Students completed the questionnaire in their classrooms under the supervision of teaching staff, following consent from their parents or legal guardians. They were informed about the study's objectives, as well as the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. To standardize the data collection procedure, maximize participation, and address potential questions, a Procedure Manual was developed, also available in multiple languages. All information was managed in accordance with data protection regulations and the 2024 Declaration of Helsinki.

The questionnaire development and pilot testing were supervised by an international scientific advisory team comprising 43 experts from various fields. The study protocol received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Santiago de Compostela (code USC 82/2024). Data weighting was applied to correct discrepancies between the fieldwork and the original sampling design. Statistical significance for all analyses was set at $p < 0.01$.

The Value of Methodology and Methodology as a Value: An Unprecedented Scientific Work

04 Health

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction constitutes a subjective measure of well-being that reflects how an individual generally evaluates their life situation.

Life satisfaction (HBSC Protocol; Cantril ladder, 1965)

The mean life satisfaction score is 7.86 (SD: 1.82) on a scale from 0 to 10, with statistically significant differences between boys (8.10) and girls (7.63), as well as across educational levels. The highest averages are observed in Primary Education (8.59) and the lowest in Vocational Training (7.24).

18.2%
Low satisfaction

40%
Medium satisfaction

41.8%
High satisfaction

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
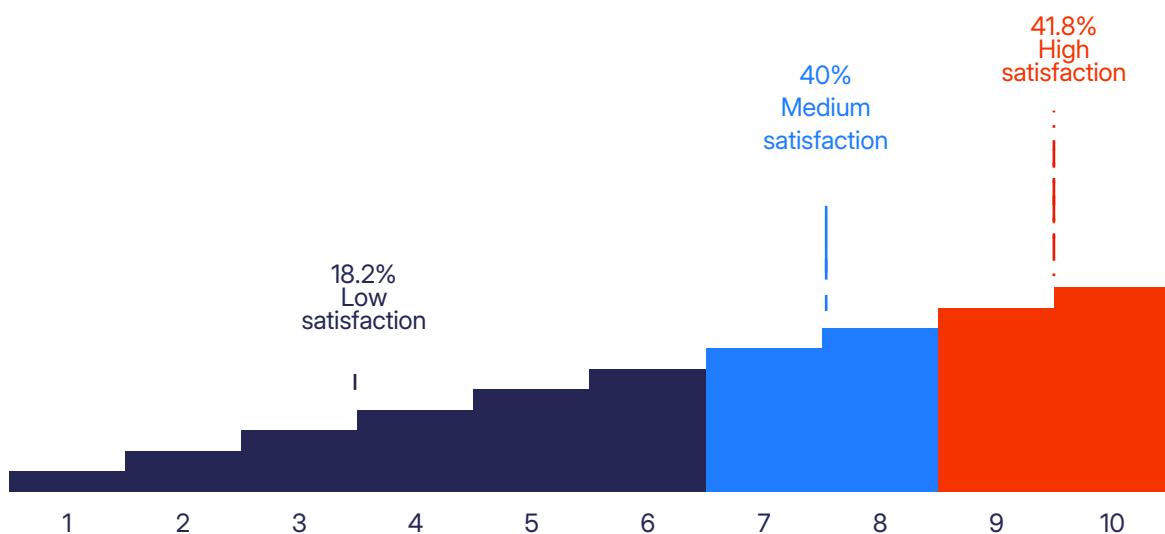
The percentage of adolescents reporting low life satisfaction is significantly higher among girls (22.4%) and in Vocational Training (28.9%). It rises from 9.2% in Primary Education to 21.1% in the transition to Secondary

UN0686465: © UNICEF/UN0686465/Gilbertson - Highway Child

Health-related quality of life

It is a key construct in the development of childhood and adolescence, a multifactorial indicator of individuals' perceptions of their physical, psychological, and social well-being in relation to their health status and the conditions of their daily lives. The mean quality of life score is 7.24 (SD: 1.52), with significant differences between girls (6.96) and boys (7.53) and across educational levels. The highest average is observed in Primary Education (7.93) and the lowest in Upper Secondary (6.59), followed by Vocational Training (6.72). Scores for each dimension range from 6.71or "Physical Well-being" to 8.13 for "Peers and Social Support"

Girls generally show lower scores, particularly in Physical Well-Being (6.16 vs. 7.26) and Psychological Well-Being (6.91 vs. 7.68)

FIGURE 2
Health-related quality of life (Kidscreen-10; Kidscreen-27)

School Environment
6.89

Physical Well-being
6.71

Peers and Social Support
8.13

7.24
KidScreen - 10

Psychological Well-being
7.29

Autonomy and Parent Relations
7.79

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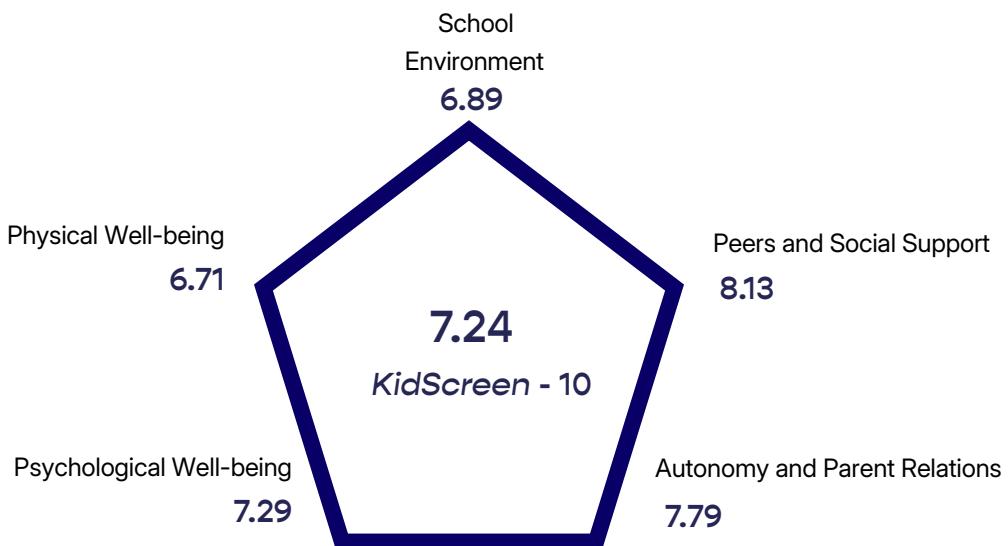
Emotional distress

It refers to the presence of feelings and symptoms that cause psychological discomfort and hinder daily well-being. In adolescence, it is relatively common and may affect both health and personal relationships, as well as academic performance. It is usually assessed through three dimensions: Anxiety, Depression, and Somatization. Overall, the level of emotional distress is 14.2%, being significantly higher among girls than boys (18.7% vs. 9.3%), and in Upper Secondary (18.7%) and Vocational Training (19.1%).

FIGURE 3
Emotional distress prevalence

Global	14.2%
Girls	18.7%
Boys	9.3%
Primary	10%
Secondary	14.9%
Upper Secondary	18.7%
Vocational Training	19.1%
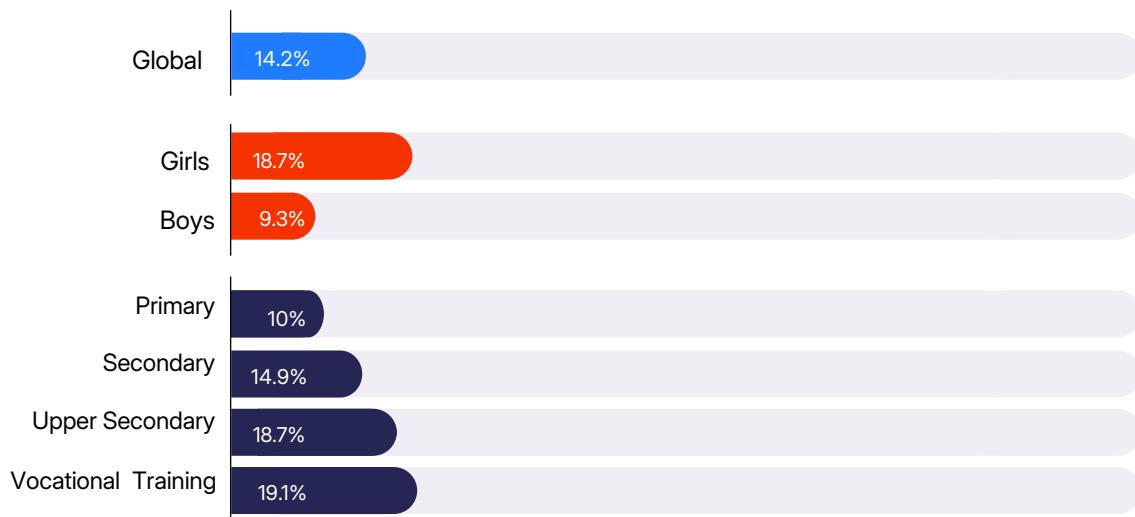
The data also indicate that 13.7% of students exhibit clear symptoms of anxiety, 13.1% of depression, and 9.1% of various somatic symptoms. Significant differences are again observed by gender and educational level, with higher percentages among girls, and in Upper Secondary and Vocational Training.

Anxiety, depression and somatization

		Girls	Boys
Anxiety	13.7 %	17.2 %	9.7 %
Depresssion	13.1 %	17.2 %	8.7 %
Somatization	9.1 %	12.3 %	5.7 %
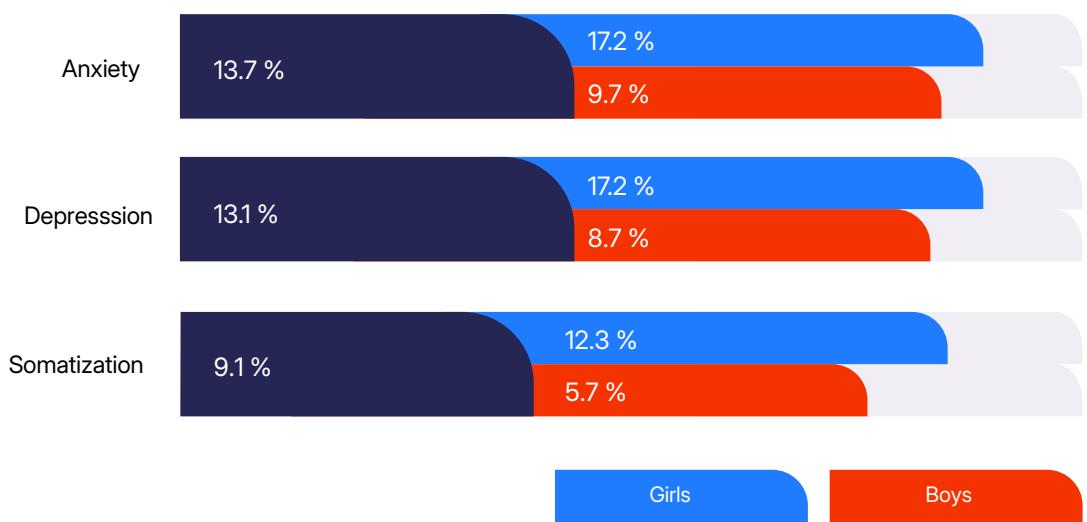
Specific symptoms experienced "in the past week…"

Has felt nervous or shaky	28.9 %
Has lost interest in things	27.6 %
Has experienced feelings of sadness	27.5 %
Has felt tense or upset	27.4 %
Has felt worthless	18.1 %
Has felt hopeless about the future	17.4 %
Has felt fear	16.1 %
Has experienced chest pain	15.1%
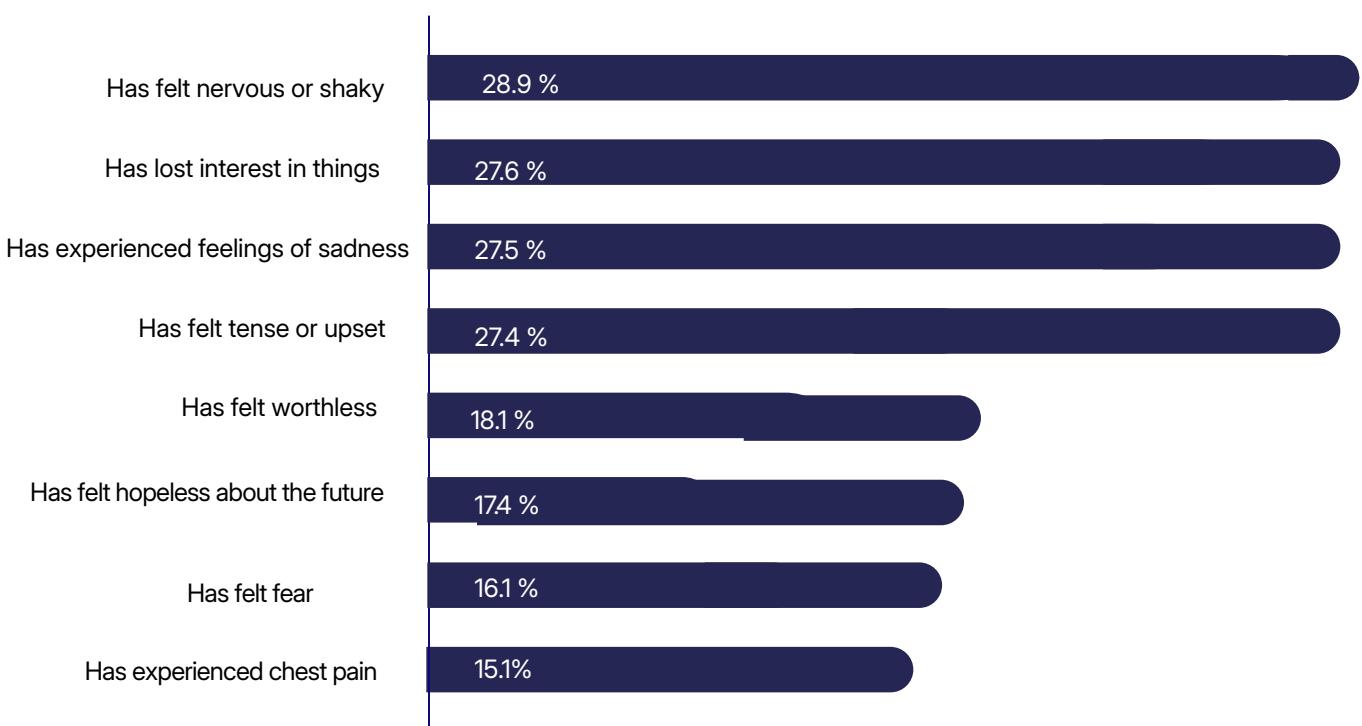
Suicidal behavior

It is a relevant indicator of emotional distress in adolescence, often reflecting a need for psychosocial support. It is understood as a continuum with varying levels of severity: from thoughts of death and suicidal ideation, to planning, and up to suicide attempts. It is not a diagnosis in itself, but its presence requires professional evaluation and the activation of support networks. Considering the different indicators, 7.4% of students are identified as having a high risk of suicide.

The risk of suicide is more than twice as high in girls as in boys (10.1% vs. 4.3%)
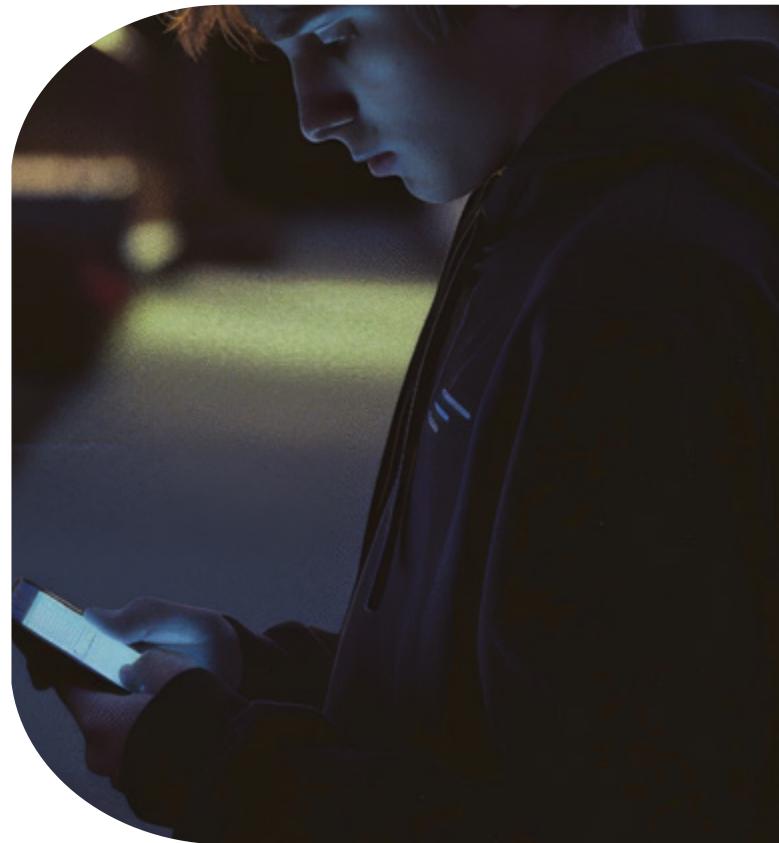
FIGURE 6

Suicidal behavior (Paykel scale, last year-related values) *

Thoughts of death

Has felt that life is not worth living — 21.7%

Has wished to be dead — 16.7%

Suicidal ideation

Has thought about taking their own life — 20.7%

Has planned how to take their own life — 9%

Suicide Attempt

Has attempted to take their own life — 6.5%
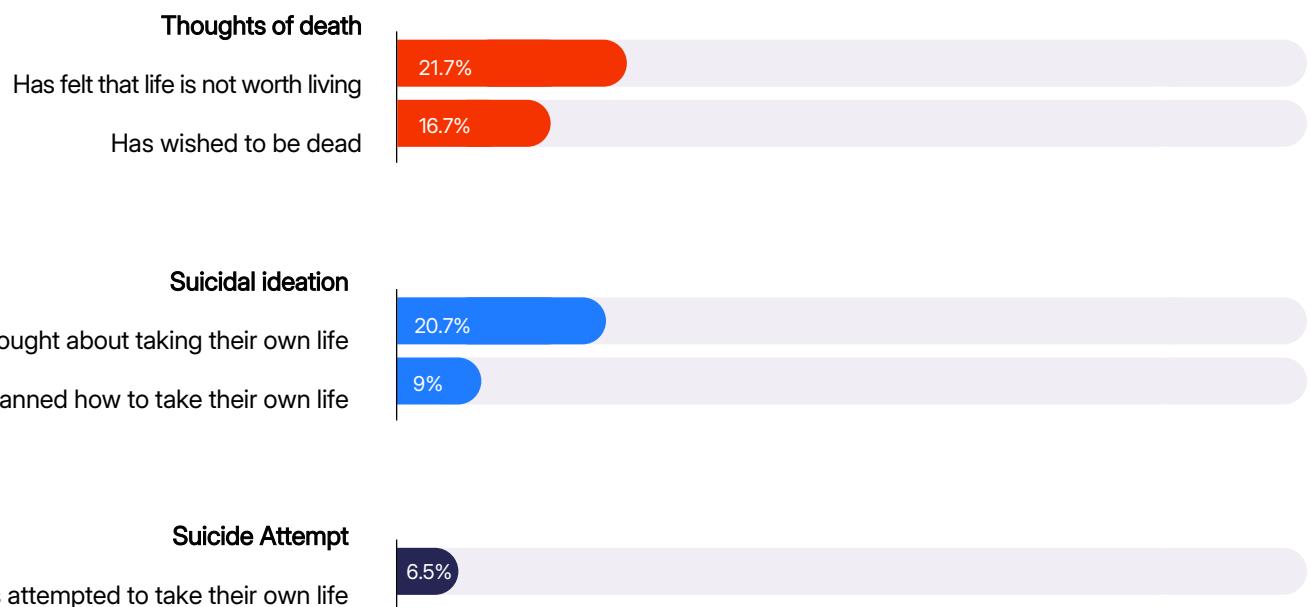
∗ Not evaluated in Primary

05 Family, School, and Cyber Coexistence
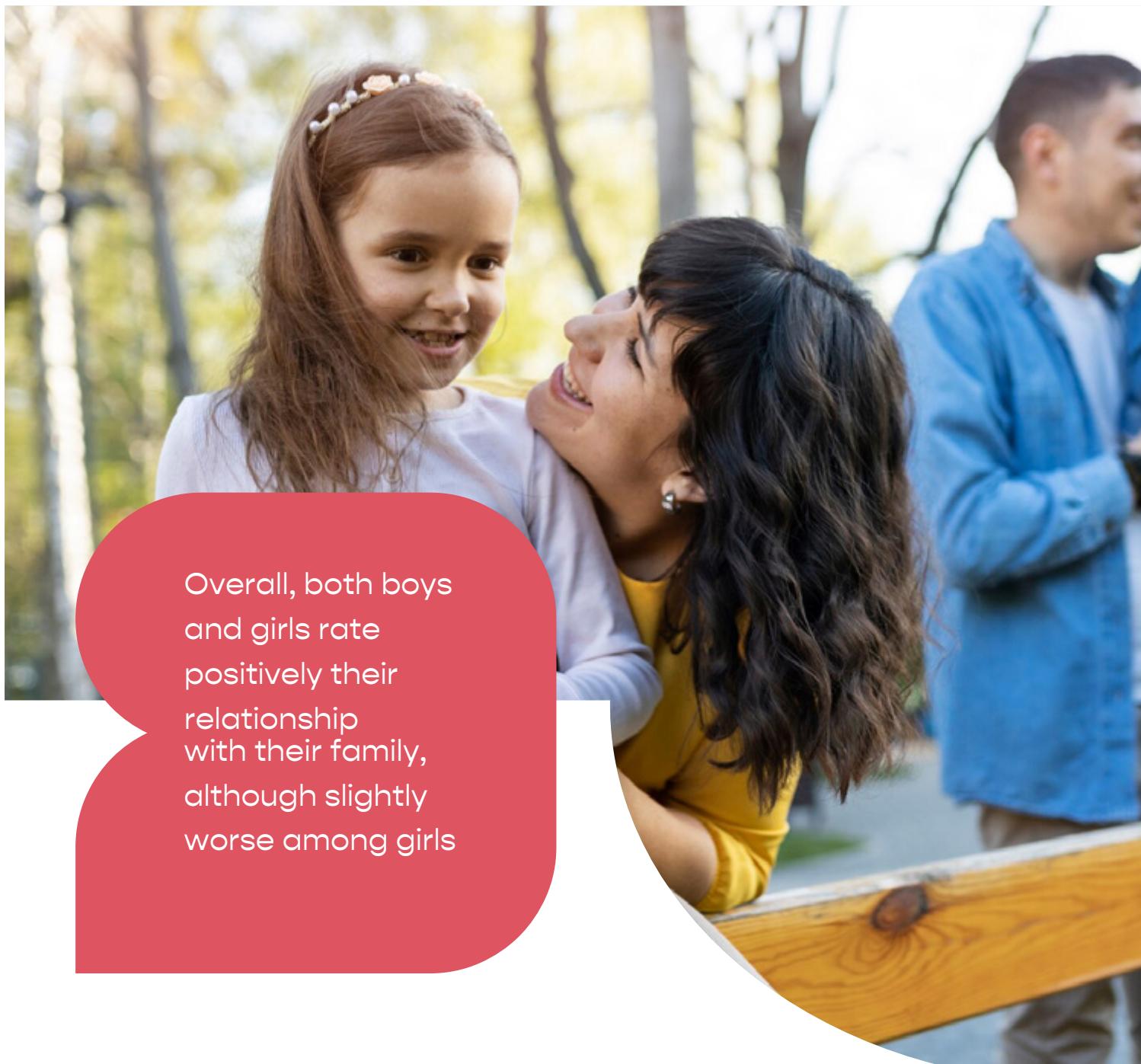
Overall, both boys and girls rate positively their relationship with their family, although slightly worse among girls

Assessment of Relationships with Parents and Other Family Members

The assessment of family relationships, particularly the bonds with parents, constitutes a central aspect of well-being during childhood and adolescence. The quality of these interactions is reflected in the perceived levels of support, communication, and trust—factors that significantly influence emotional, social, and academic development. On a scale from 0 to 10, students rate their relationship with their parents at 8.82 (SD: 1.73) and with other family members at 8.52 (SD: 1.88).

FIGURE 7

Assesment of relationships with parents and other family members

	Parents	Other family members
Global	8.82	8.52
Girls	8.64	8.31
Boys	9.01	8.75

Legend: Global, Girls, Boys
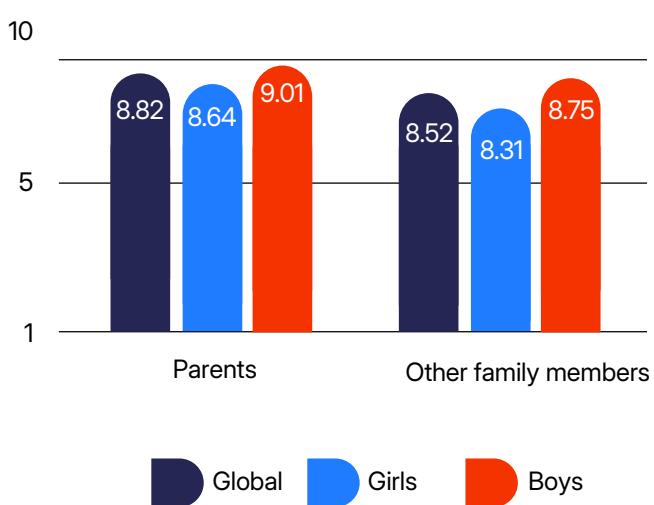
Child-to-Parent Violence

This type of violence refers to physical, verbal, or psychological aggression by children toward their parents or other caregivers. This phenomenon, which can manifest at varying levels of intensity and frequency, reflects a problematic relational dynamic that affects coexistence.

Both family coexistence and the emotional well-being of all members are affected. In 8 out of 10 households (82.6%), at least one instance of child-to-parent violence was detected in the past year. In 15.2% of cases, such behaviors occur frequently (at least one violent act on five or more occasions per year). Girls exhibit more verbal and psychological violence, while boys display more physical violence. These behaviors are generally less frequent in Primary Education, except in the case of physical violence.

FIGURE 8

Child to-parent violence ("at any time in the past 12 months")

68.7%

Girls 70.9%
Boys 66.6%

Had heated arguments
with their parents

48.6%

Girls 53.4%
Boys 43.9%

Shouted at their parents

20.5%

Girls 22%
Boys 18.9%

Blackmailed
their parents

12.6%

Girls 11.9%
Boys 13%

Insulted their parents

4.9%

Girls 3.5%
Boys 6%

Pushed or hit
their parents
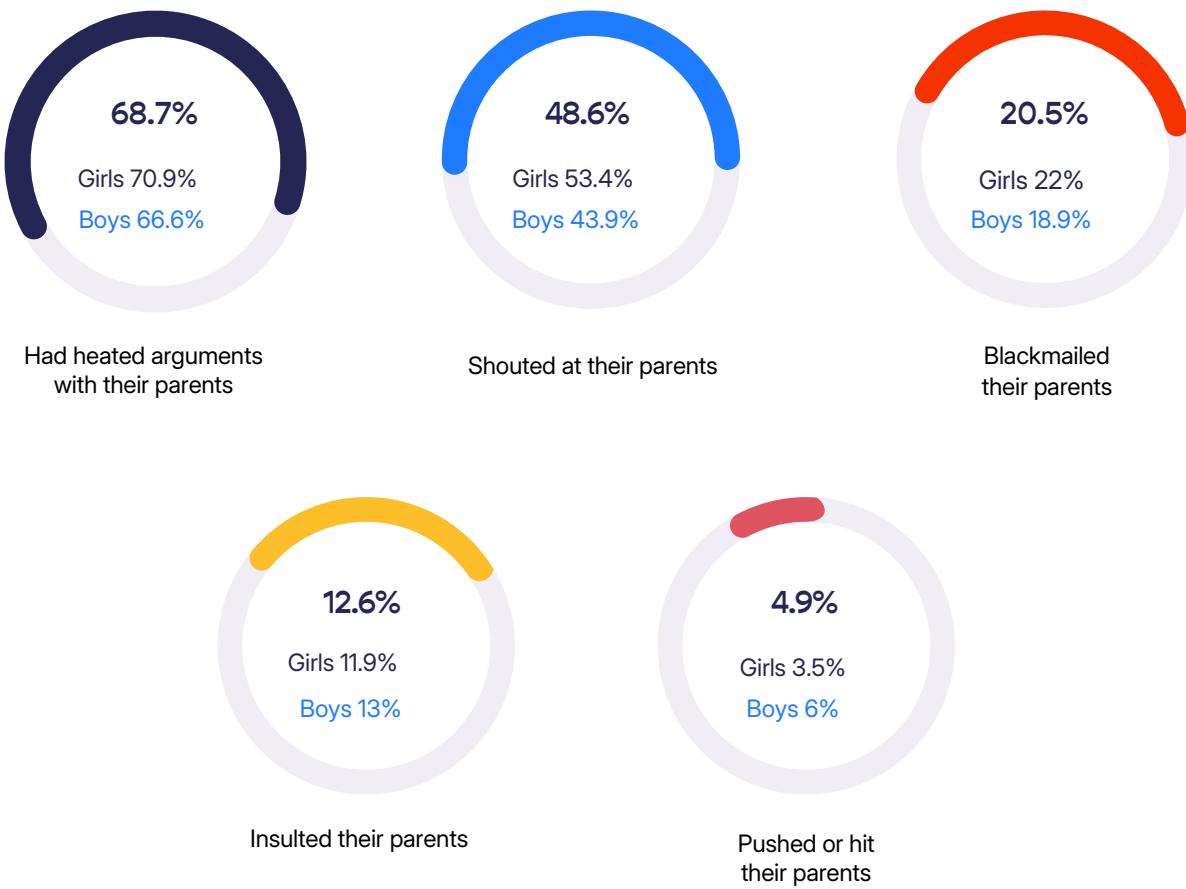
Perpetrators show lower quality of life and reduced life satisfaction, with emotional distress occurring three times more frequently (33.2% versus 10%)

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Perception of the School Environment

This encompasses the full range of experiences, relationships, and conditions that take place within the educational setting. It includes both academic aspects and the school's social climate, the interactions with teachers and peers, as well as the interactions with teachers and peers, as well as the perception of safety and support. It influences learning, socialization, and the overall well-being of students. Relationships with friends, classmates, and teachers were assessed on a scale from 0 to 10. Mean scores range from 7.53 for teachers (SD: 2.15) to 8.96 (SD: 1.55) for friends.

FIGURE 9

Assessment of Relationships with Friends, Classmates, and Teachers
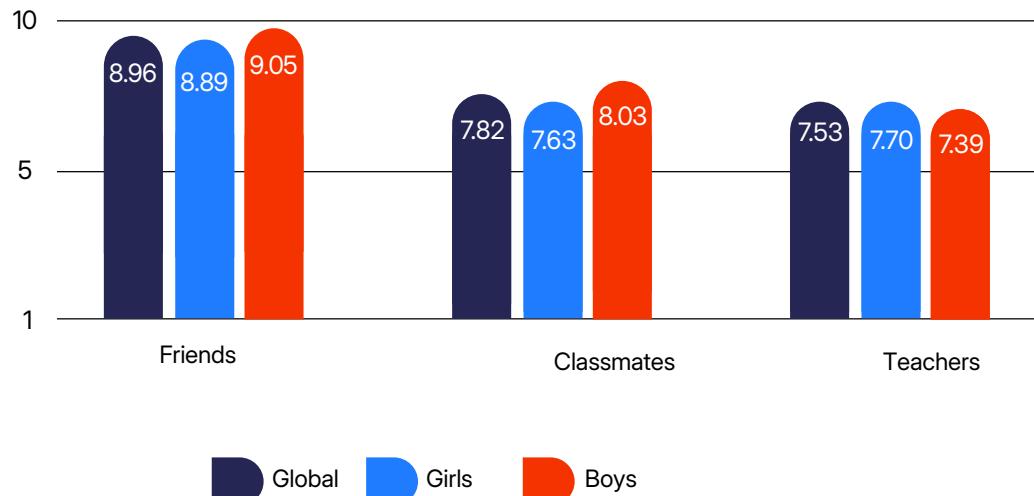
Perceptions are more positive among boys, except in the case of teachers, who are rated more favorably by girls

Bullying and School Victimization

School victimization refers to the experience of suffering physical, verbal, social, or emotional harm within the educational context. When these harmful behaviors occur repeatedly and within a relationship of power asymmetry between the bully and the victim, it is referred to as bullying. This phenomenon not only affects the safety and well-being of those who experience it but also impacts their personal and academic development. When students were asked directly, 2.5% reported currently experiencing bullying, and 23.2% reported having experienced it at some point.

However, when a specific instrument is used, the prevalence of school victimization rises to 25%, with similar rates among girls (24%) and boys (25.6%). However, the pattern differs: there are more bullies and bully-victims among boys, and more pure victims among girls. The highest victimization rates are observed in Secondary (27.2%) and the highest aggression rates in Vocational Training (18.6%).

		Victims	Bully-victims	Bullies
GLOBAL		16.2%	8.8%	3.7%
Sex	Girls	17.9%	6.1%	2.9%
	Boys	14.4%	11.2%	4.6%
Educational level	Primary Secondary	17.1%	5.4%	2%
	Upper Secondary	17%	10.2%	4.1%
	Vocational	11.3%	9.2%	5.3%
	Training	11.6%	12.9%	5.7%

Those who experience school victimization exhibit nearly four times higher emotional distress (31.2% vs. 8.5%) and lower quality of life (6.51 vs. 7.48)

Cyberbullying and School Cybervictimization

Cybervictimization refers to the experience of suffering harm through digital means, such as Social Media, instant messaging, or online platforms. These behaviors may include insults, harassment, spreading rumors, or the intentional exclusion from virtual groups. When such behaviors occur repeatedly within a context of power imbalance (facilitated by factors such as anonymity or wide dissemination), it is referred to as cyberbullying. This phenomenon can seriously affect the emotional health, self-esteem, and social relationships of those who experience it.

When asked directly, 1.5% of students report currently experiencing cyberbullying, and 10.2% report having experienced it at some point. When assessed using a specific instrument, the prevalence of cybervictimization is 8.3%. Cybervictimization rates are lower than those of traditional victimization (8.3% vs. 25%). Significant differences are observed by gender, with higher prevalence among boys, both in cybervictimization (10.3% vs. 5.9%) and cyberaggression (9.6% vs. 3.1%). By educational level, the highest rates of both victimization and aggression are found in Vocational Training (12% and 12.6%, respectively).

TABLE 2

Prevalences for Cyberbullying and School Cybervictimization (ECIP-Q; Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2016)

		Cybervictims	Cyberbully-victims	Cyberbullies
GLOBAL		4.5%	3.8%	2.7%
Sex	Girls	4.4%	1.5%	1.6%
	Boys	4.5%	5.8%	3.8%
Educational level	Primary	4.3%	1.9%	1.1%
	Secondary	4.7%	4.3%	3.2%
	Upper Secondary	3.8%	4.9%	3%
	Vocational Training	4.4%	7.6%	5%

Those who experience school cybervictimization also exhibit higher emotional distress and lower quality of life

A significant increase in the prevalence of school victimization is observed in Secondary in comparison with the 2021 study, rising from 19.9% to 27.2%. However, cybervictimization rates have decreased by 3 percentage points compared to 2021.

FIGURE 10

Comparison of Victimization 2021–2025 (Secondary Students Only)

2021

2025

27.2%

19.9%

12.2%

9%

School Victimization

School Cybervictimization
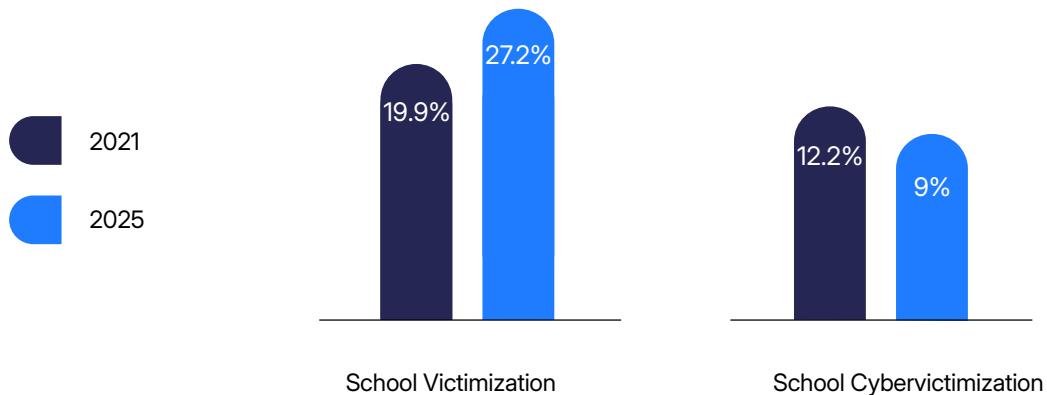
Cyberdating Violence

Digital intimate partner violence is a form of violence in romantic relationships that is carried out through technological means. It may include controlling behaviors (such as constant monitoring of social media activity), threats, blackmail, non-consensual sharing of private information or images, as well as other forms of harassment that restrict the autonomy, privacy, and well-being of the affected individual.

Approximately 1 in 3 adolescents who currently have or have had a partner at some point in their lives report experiencing some form of this violence frequently (at least once a month). The most common behaviors involve controlling their friends on social media, using digital devices to monitor where and/or with whom their partner is at any given time, or checking their mobile phone without consent.

Although this is a widespread phenomenon, it is relatively more prevalent among girls (32.7% vs. 29.7%) and among students in Upper Secondary (34.4%) and Vocational Training (43.6%).

FIGURE 11

Cyberdating Violence behaviors*

Behavior	Percentage
Controlling friends on Social Media	21.8%
Monitoring through digital devices	14.2%
Checking the mobile phone without permission	14.1%
Sharing private information online	8.9%
Threaten through social media with physical violence	5.9%
Create fake profiles to harass	2.6%
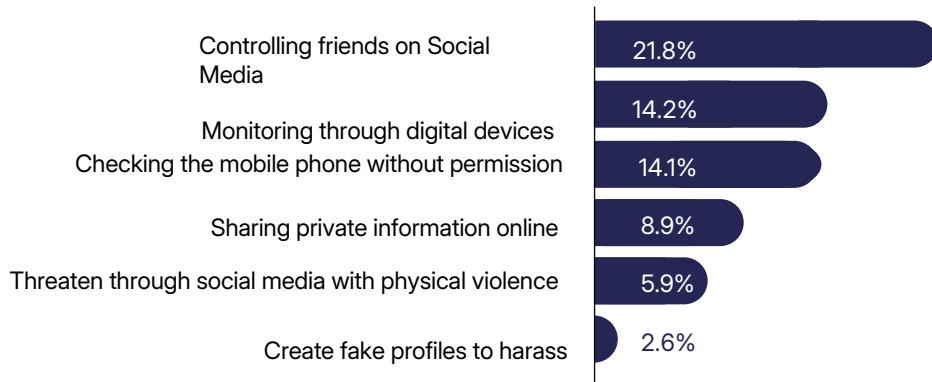
* Not evaluated in Primary

One in three adolescents who currently have or have had a partner report experiencing digital intimate partner violence at least once a month
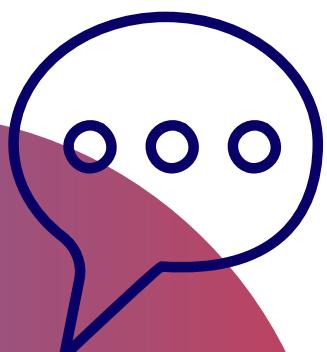
06 Mobile phone and Social Media

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Mobile phone

The mobile phone has become a central tool in the daily lives of children and adolescents, especially from preadolescence onward. Its use during these early stages not only facilitates communication and

> The presence of mobile phones in the daily lives of children and adolescents becomes evident from the final years of Primary Education onward

access to information, but also influences identity formation, peer socialization, and the development of autonomy. At the same time, it presents challenges related to screen time, exposure to multiple online risks, balancing online and offline life, and the opportunity cost of its use compared with other developmentally important activities. It has been observed that mobile phone use in adolescence is clearly widespread.

On average, students gain access to their first smartphone at 10.80 years (SD: 1.94). Considering only students in Secondary Education, this average rises slightly to 10.94 years, very similar to the figure reported in the 2021 study (10.96).

A total of 82.4% of students have their own mobile phone (83.4% of girls and 81.7% of boys). Among Primary Education students, 51.6% already own a mobile phone, a percentage that increases to 92.8% in Secondary Education.

FIGURE 12

How many own a mobile phone? ("Their own and with Internet")

82.4%

Own mobile phone

83.4%

Girls

81.7%

Boys

51.6%

Primary

92.8%

Secondary

98.1%

Upper Secondary

96.5%

Vocational Training
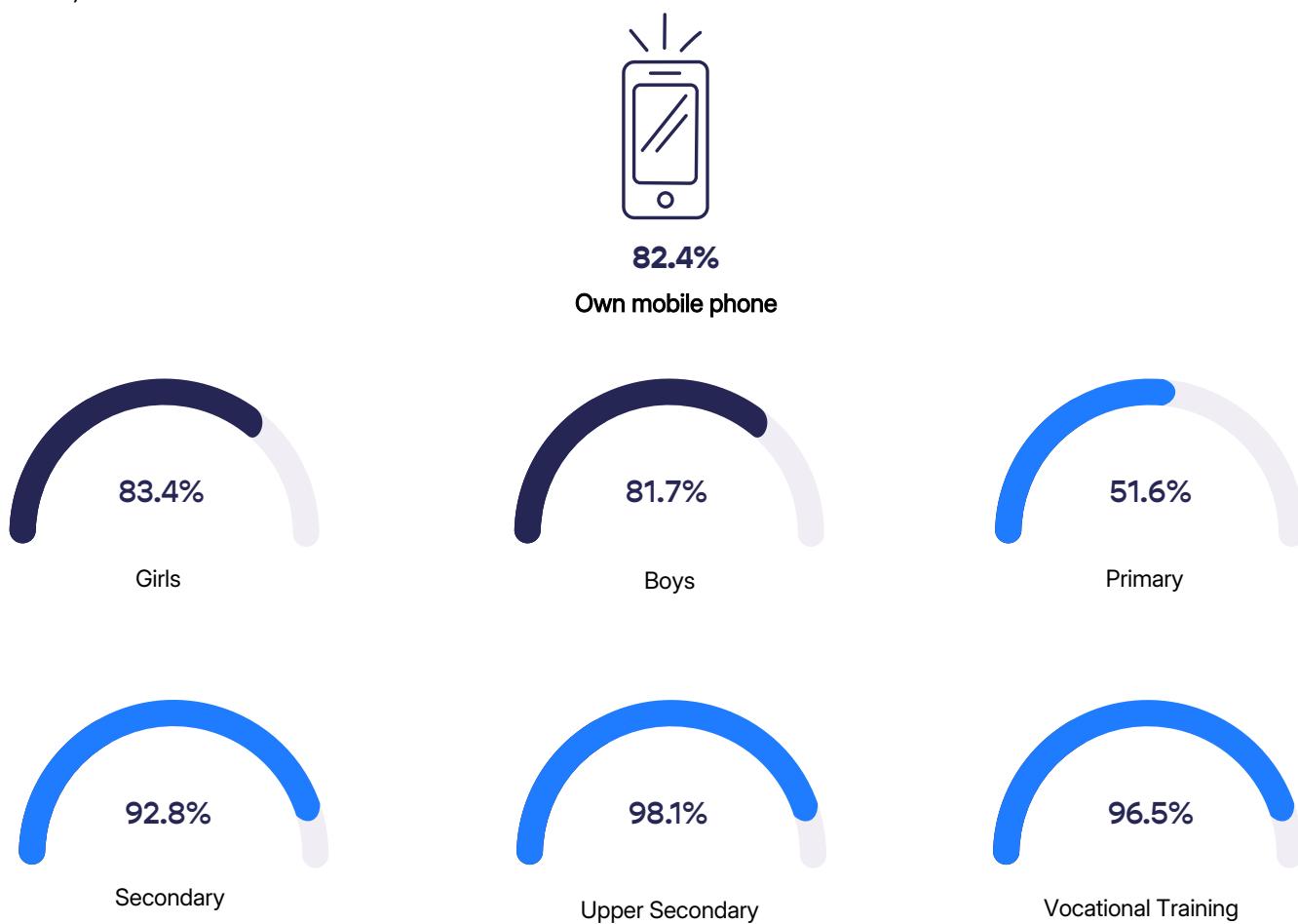
44.3% take their mobile phone to school every day (2.7% in Primary Education and 53.6% in Secondary Education). Of these, nearly 1 in 3 (29.4%) typically check it during class

41.2% sleep with their mobile phone in their room every or almost every night, and almost half of these (47.5%) report using it during the early hours

FIGURE 13

Comparison of Mobile Phone Use 2021–2025 (Secondary Only)

2021
2025

	Own mobile phone	Take their mobile phone to class (every/almost every day)	Sleep with their mobile phone in their room (every/almost every day)
2021	94.8%	59.1%	58.4%
2025	92.8%	53.6%	47%
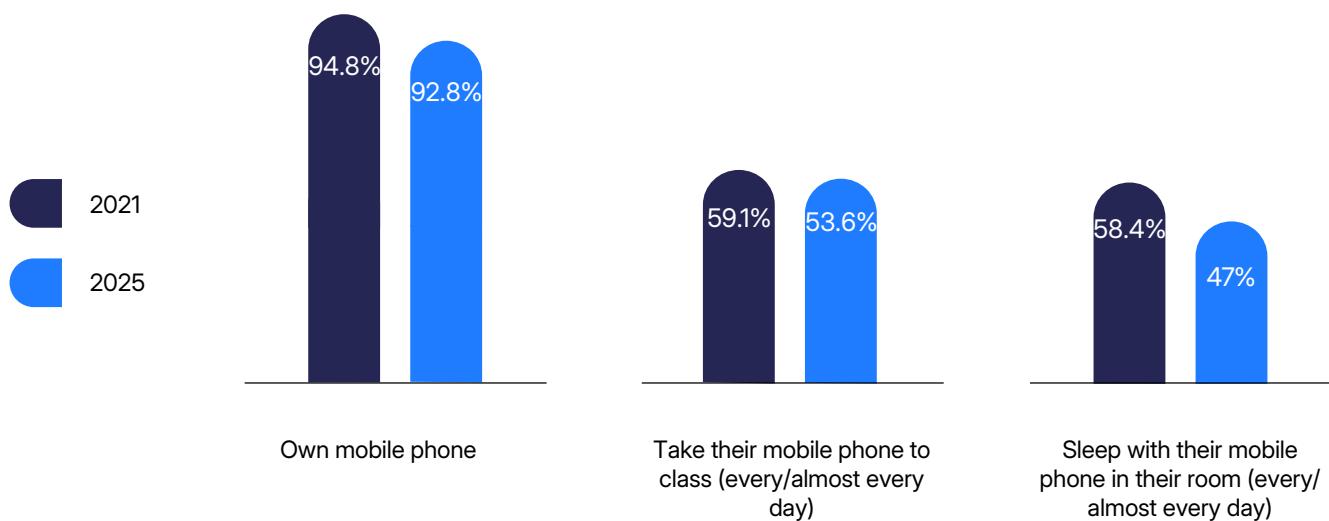
Percentages have decreased compared to 2021, except for the age of first smartphone access, which remains around 11 years (10.96 in 2021)

Social Media

The use of Social Media is a global phenomenon starting from preadolescence

Social Media are digital platforms that allow users to create, share, and consume content, as well as interact with others in virtual environments. During adolescence, their use is closely linked to the search for social connection, identity expression, and the development of peer relationships. While they offer opportunities for learning, creativity, and leisure, they also carry risks related to privacy, self-image, and exposure to social pressure dynamics.

Adolescents are registered on Social Media on a massive scale: 92.5% on at least one platform and 75.8% on three or more. Usage increases with age, although it is already present at early ages: 78.3% of Primary Education students are registered on at least one social network, and 43.6% on three or more. WhatsApp (78.4%), YouTube (78.4%), TikTok (66.9%), and Instagram (60.6%) are the most widely used platforms.

FIGURE 14

Most popular social networks

WhatsApp	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Pinterest
78.4%	78.4%	66.9%	60.6%	37.7%

BeReal	SnapChat	Twitch	X/Twitter	Telegram
30.8%	28.8%	25.4%	18.2%	18.1%

50.3% have more than one account on the same social network, and nearly one in three (31.9%) have a public profile (open to everyone). 8.9% spend more than five hours per day on social networks during the week, a figure that rises to 19.9% on weekends.

Significant gender differences have been found: girls are registered on three or more social networks more frequently than boys, and they are more likely to have multiple accounts on the same platform.

FIGURE 15

Social Media use
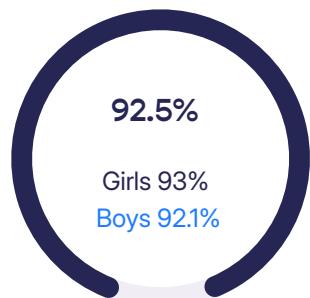
92.5%
Girls 93%
Boys 92.1%

Registered in at least 1 social network

75.8%
Girls 79.3%
Boys 72.7%

Registered in 3 or more social network

50.3%
Girls 55.6%
Boys 45.1%
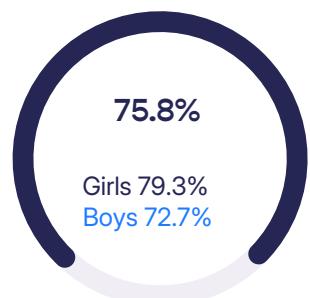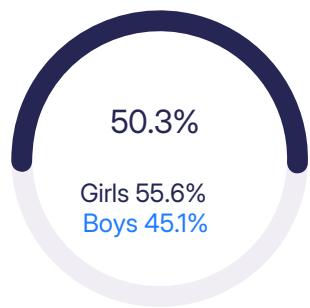
More than one profile in the same social network

31.9%
Girls 30.8%
Boys 32.9%
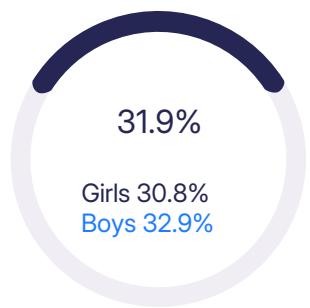
Public or open profile

FIGURE 16

Comparison social media 2021-2025 (only Secondary)

- 2021
- 2025

	2021	2025
Registered in at least 1 social network	98.5%	97.4%
Registered in 3 or more social networks	83.5%	86.2%
More than one profile the same social network	61.5%	57.3%
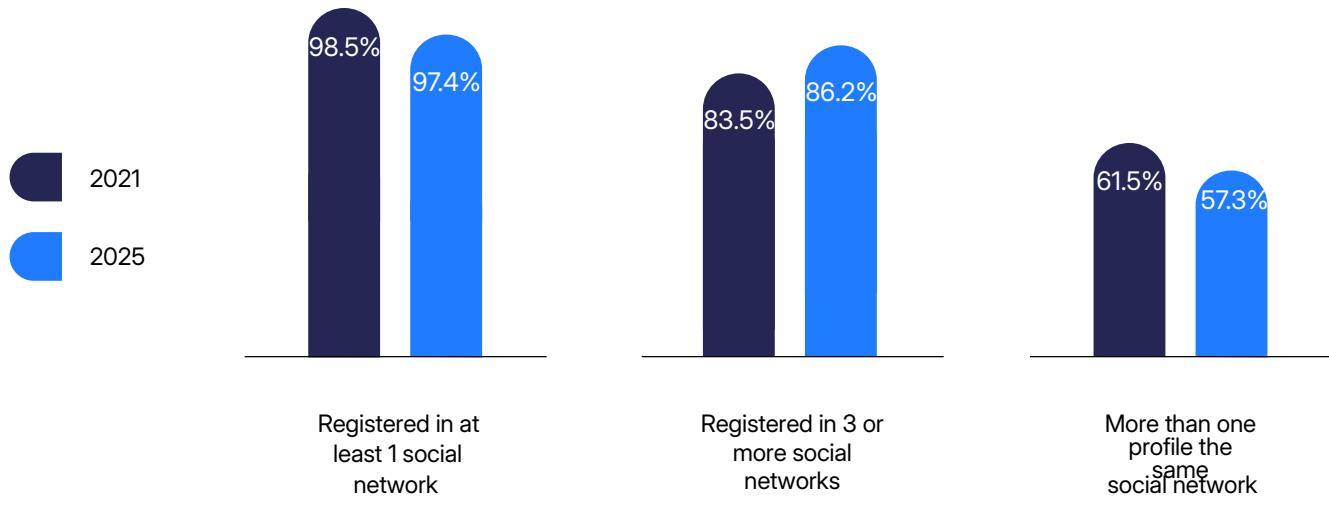
Percentages remain similar to those of 2021, although the proportion of students registered on three or more social networks has slightly increased, while the percentage with multiple accounts on the same network has decreased

46.7% upload personal photos, videos, or stories to social networks at least once a month (15.2% every week), 14.2% create dances, choreographies, or reels, and 9.8% participate in viral challenges.

Girls display more active behavior on social networks, uploading photos or stories more frequently (54.5% vs. 39.3%), creating choreographies or reels (22.2% vs. 6.4%), and participating in viral challenges (11.1% vs. 8.3%)

79.2% of secondary education students follow an influencer (Instagrammer, YouTuber, TikToker, streamer, or gamer), and one in five (21.3%) believe they could potentially become one; 7.8% say they are already trying.

Following Influencers*

79.2%

Girls 81.3%
Boys 77.6%
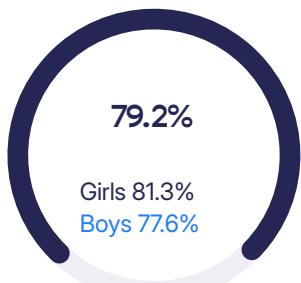
Follows any influencer

21.3%

Girls 19%
Boys 23.2%
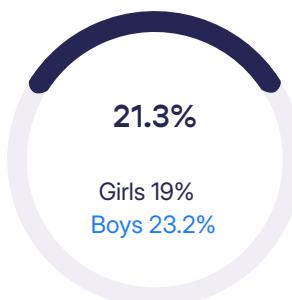
Wants to be influencer

7.8%

Girls 5.9%
Boys 9.4%
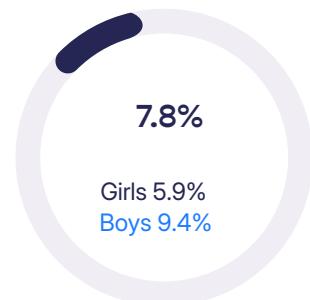
Spends time and effort trying
to become an influencer

* Not evaluated in Primary

Problematic Social Media Use

It refers to a maladaptive usage pattern (characterized by excessive and poorly controlled connectivity) that interferes with daily life and can lead to significant clinical distress. It is manifested in a constant need to stay online, difficulty reducing time spent on these platforms, and the presence of negative emotional symptoms when access is restricted.

This phenomenon can impact emotional well-being, family and peer relationships, academic performance, and the balanced development of personal identity. 5.7% of students may have developed Problematic Social Media Use. This percentage is higher among girls (7.2% vs. 4%) and increases with age, reaching its peak in Upper Secondary Education, with 7.7% exhibiting problematic use.

TABLE 3

Prevalaence of Problematic Social Media Use (SMD; Boer et al., 2022)

		Not problematic	Problematic use
GLOBAL		94.3%	5.7%
Sex	Girls	92.8%	7.2%
	Boys	96%	4%
Educational level	Primary	96.9%	3.1%
	Secondary	93.5%	6.5%
	Upper Secondary	92.3%	7.7%
	Vocational Training	94.3%	5.7%

FIGURE 18

Problematic use of Social Media, emotional distress and quality of life

Emotional distress

12.5%

41.3%

■ Not problematic   ■ Problematic use

School Environment

7   5.6

Physical Well-being
6.8   5.4

Peers and Social
Support

8   7.3

7.3%   6%

Kidscreen-10

Psychological Well-being

7.4   5.8

Autonomy and Parent Relations

7.9   6.8
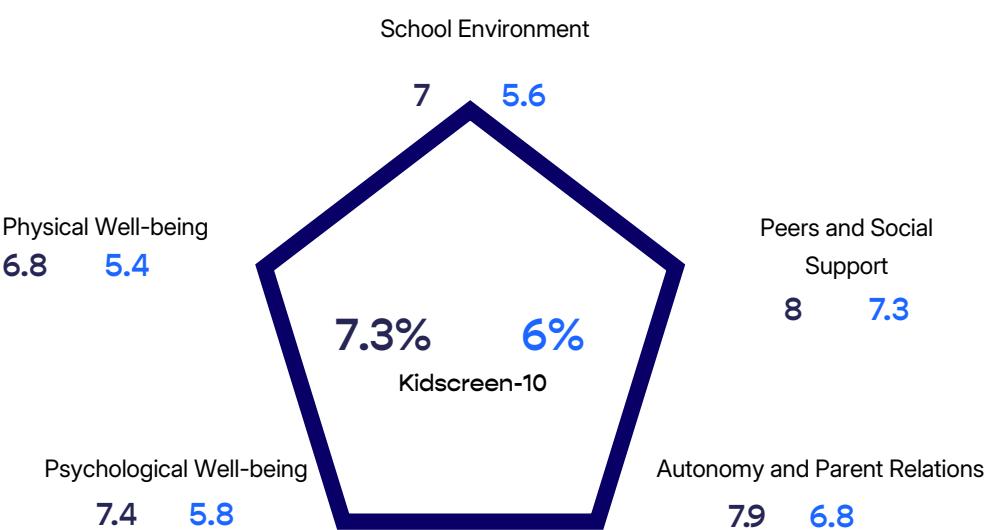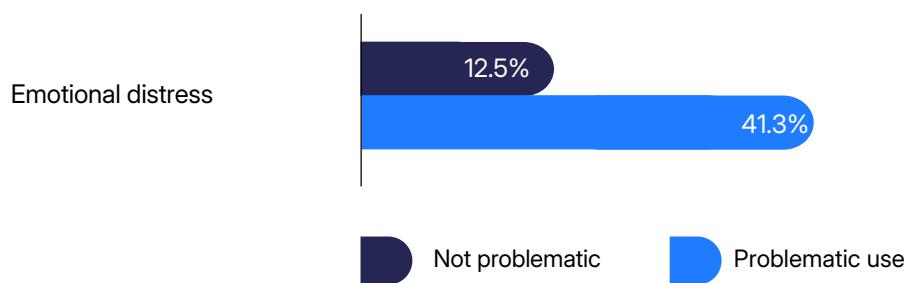
Problematic social network use during adolescence is associated with higher emotional distress, lower quality of life, and even an increased risk of suicide

More than half of adolescents begin to show a certain need to disconnect from the digital environment
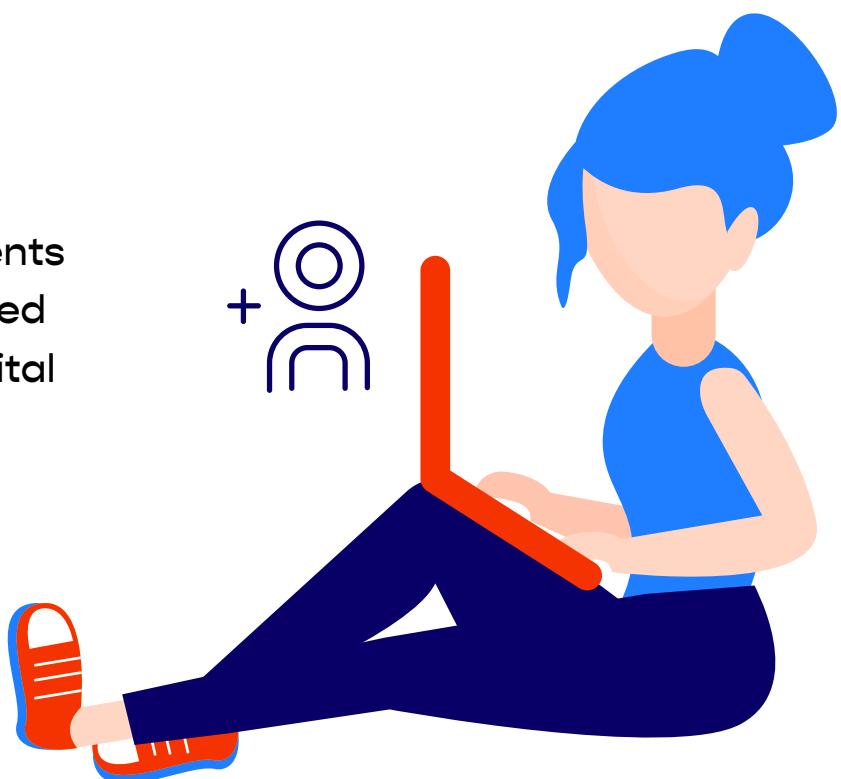
Digital Disconnection

It refers to the voluntary practice of attempting to limit, interrupt, or regulate the use of electronic devices and online platforms in order to promote rest, focus and balance in daily life.

During adolescence, promoting spaces and times for digital disconnection helps prevent problematic technology use and protects physical health, emotional well-being, and the quality of social relationships. More than half of students report a certain need for digital disconnection, with this need being greater among girls.

FIGURE 19

Need for Digital Disconnection

For me, it is important to be myself and not let my mobile phone decide when I can be contacted.	58.5%
There are certain situations in which I do not want to use my mobile phone.	52.3%
There are situations in which I do not want to be connected, so I turn off my mobile phone or put it away.	46.2%
There are moments during the day when I do not want to use my mobile phone.	44.4%
I try to ensure that my mobile phone does not play too important a role in my life.	42.3%

Sexting and Contact with Strangers Online

Sexting refers to the sending or receiving of sexually explicit messages, images, or videos through digital means. Contact with strangers online refers to interactions with people outside one's close circle via social networks, games, or apps. While these practices can be part of exploration and socialization, they also carry significant risks related to consent, manipulation or deception, as well as potential exposure to sexualized risks and criminal behaviors.

Passive and active sexting were 14.9% and 6.4%, respectively. Results are similar between girls and boys, except in the case of pressures, which affect girls much more (12.5% vs. 5.3%).

Contact with strangers online can be associated with higher emotional distress, lower life satisfaction, and an increased risk of suicide

FIGURE 20

Sexting behaviors

25.1%
Girls 23.9%
Boys 26%

They have received erotic or sexual messages

14.9%
Girls 15.5%
Boys 14.2%

Passive Sexting

6.4%
Girls 6%
Boys 6.5%

Active Sexting

9%
Girls 12.5%
Boys 5.3%

Pressures to send erotic or sexual photos or videos

2.9%
Girls 2.5%
Boys 3.1%

Blackmail or attempts at sextortion
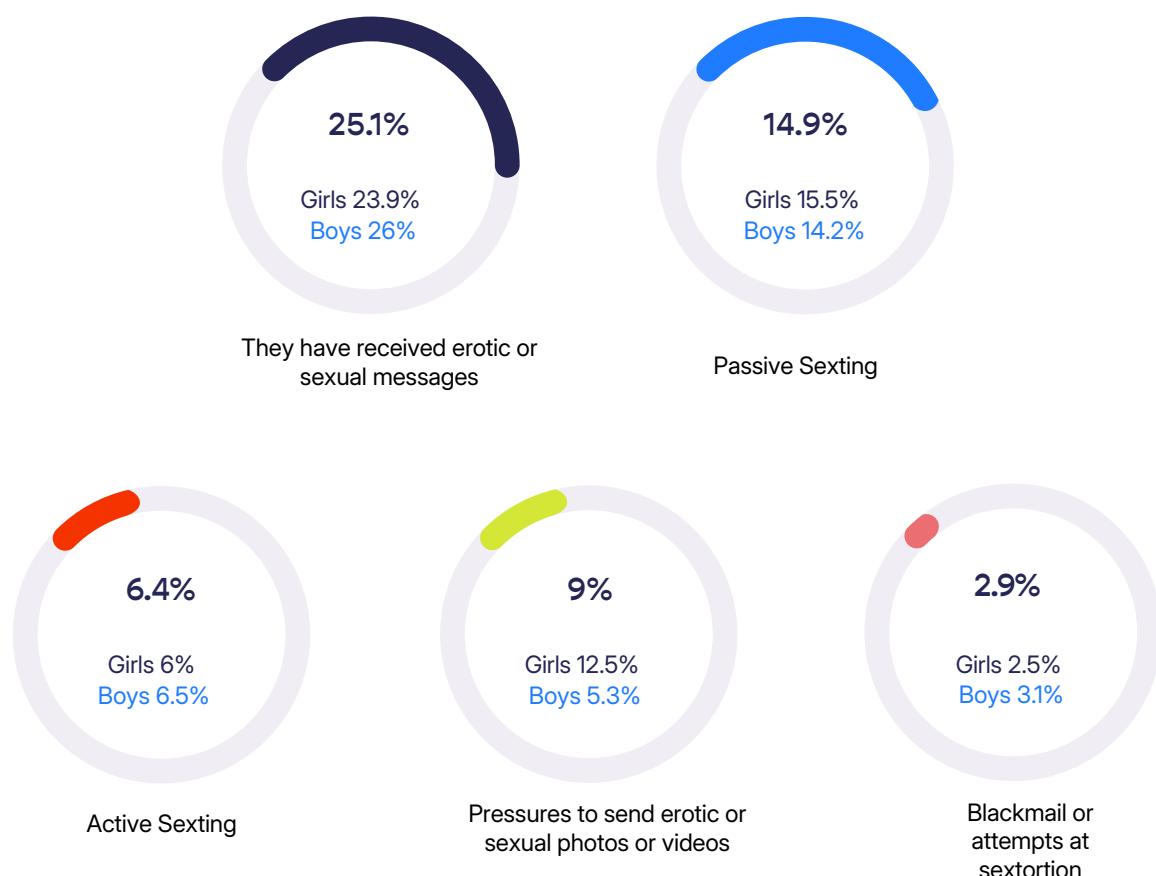
Risky behaviors such as sexting or contact with strangers remain relatively common, although a significant decrease is observed compared to 2021

58.4% of students report talking to strangers online, and 14.3% report meeting in person with someone they met

exclusively online.

7.8% have received a sexual proposition from an adult online. Girls receive significantly more sexual propositions than boys (9.4% vs. 5.9%).

FIGURE 21

Contact with strangers online

Talking to strangers online — 58.4%

Accepting contacts from strangers — 34.1%

Meeting in person with people met online — 14.3%

Receiving a sexual proposition from an adult online — 7.8%

7.4% of minors under 18
5.7% of minors under 16
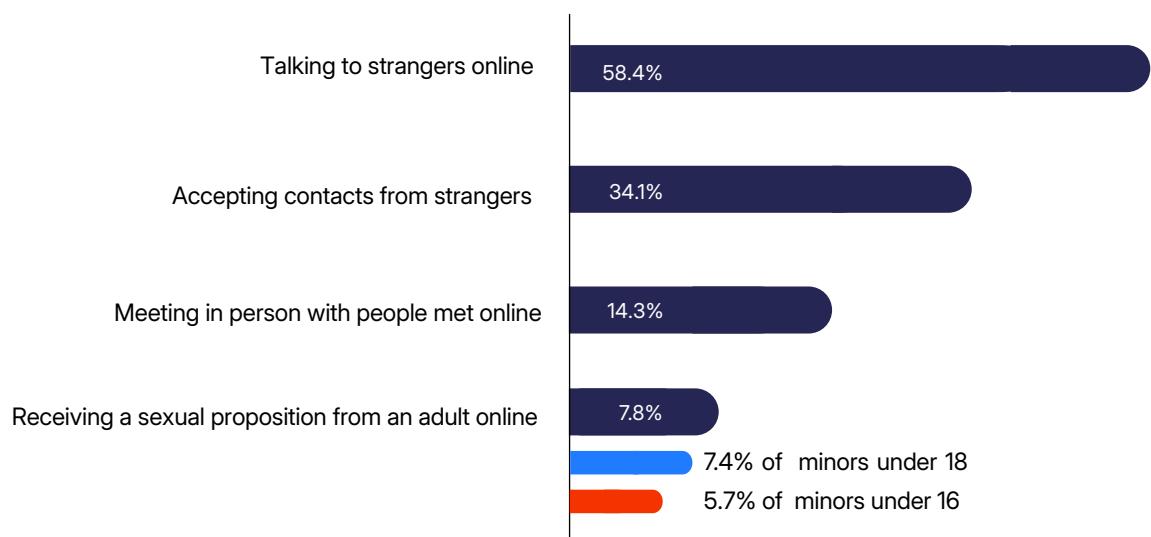
When comparing the 2021 data with those from 2025 (restricted exclusively to Secondary Education), a significant decrease can be observed in the different behaviors, especially in passive sexting and accepting strangers online.

Figure 22

Sexting comparison 2021-2025 (only Secondary)

	2021	2025
Passive sexting	26.8%	15.7%
Active Sexting	8%	5.9%
Accept strangers online	57.2%	38.9%
Meeting in person people met online	21.5%	15.1%
Receiving sexual propositions online from adults	9.8%	8%

2021   2025
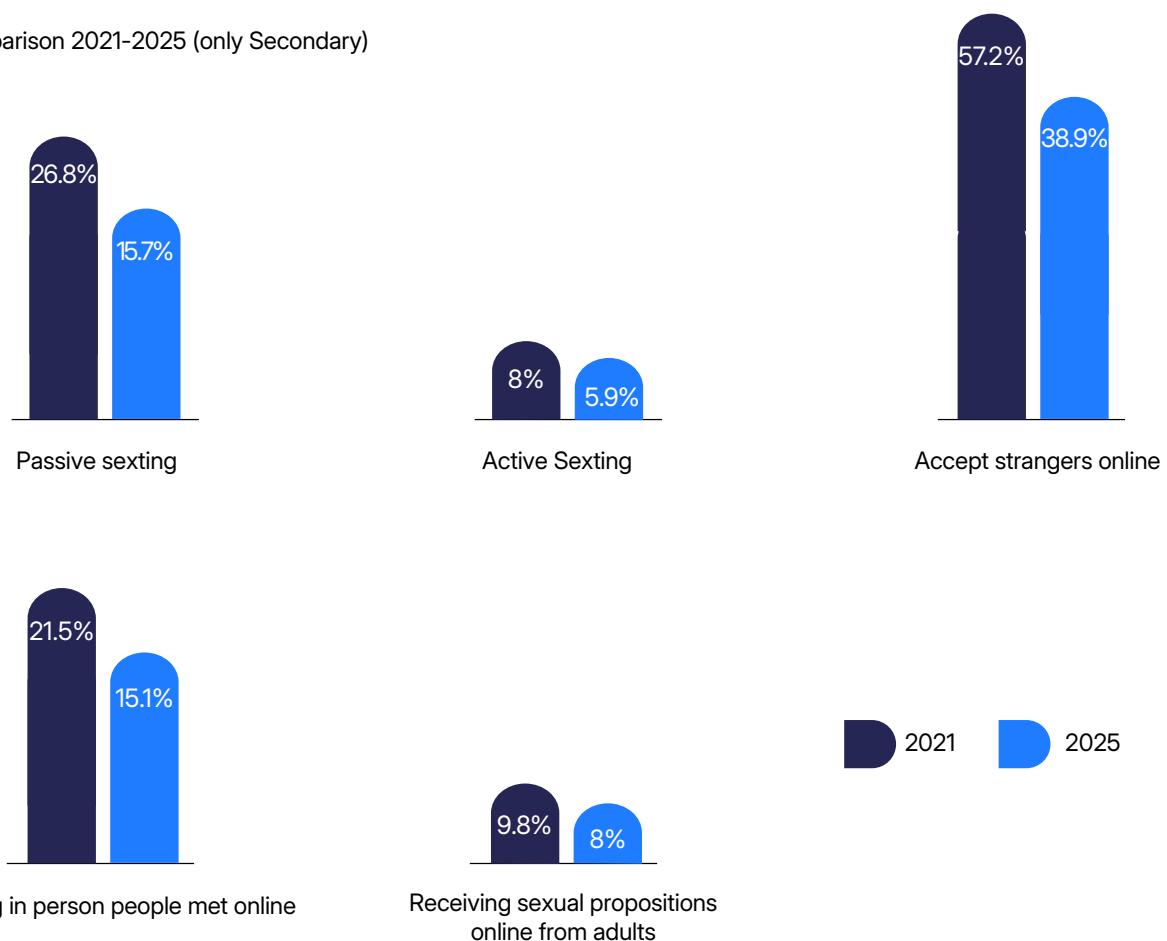
infancia digital
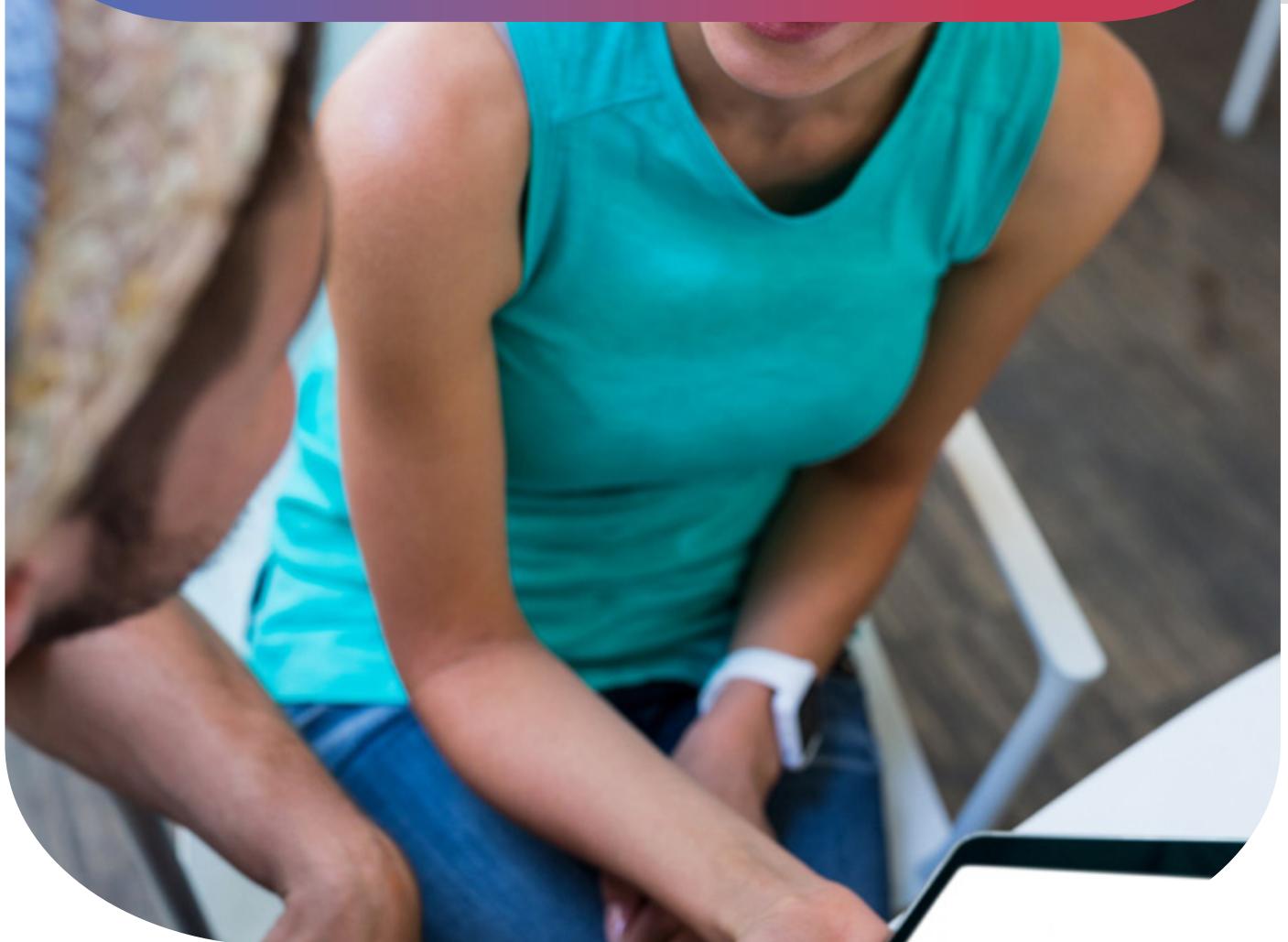
07 Pornography use

Pornography consumption begins at very early ages (11.5 years), playing a role in shaping attitudes and behaviors from childhood

Accessing and viewing sexually explicit content via the Internet or other digital media can be part of the exploration process during adolescence. However, it can also involve risks related to exposure to unrealistic representations of sexuality, the influence on attitudes and expectations regarding relationships, or even the development of problematic consumption patterns that affect psychosocial well-being.

29.6% of students report having viewed pornography at some point (7.2% of Primary Education, 33.2% of Secondary Education, 55.7% of Upper Secondary Education, and 62.9% of Vocational Training). The average age of first access to this type of content is 11.58 years (SD: 2.46), and in one out of three cases (36.7%) it occurs by chance. 73.7% report that accessing this content was "fairly easy" or "very easy." Boys are significantly more likely than girls to report having viewed pornography (42.3% vs. 16.7%).

FIGURE 23

Pornography use

Nunca	Occassionally Girls 14.8% Boys 24.2%	Weekly Girls 1.4% Boys 12%	Daily Girls 0,5% Boys 6.1%

| 70.4% | 19.5% | 6.7% | 3.4% |

57% of students believe that pornography portrays women worse than men, with this opinion being more common among girls than boys (74.8% vs. 50.5%).

FIGURE 24

Motivations for pornography use

To masturbate	48%
Out of curiosity	36.3%
To become aroused	26.3%
To learn about sexuality	22.5%
To reduce stress, anxiety,	18.1%
frustration...Out of boredom	18%
To satisfy sexual fantasies	18%
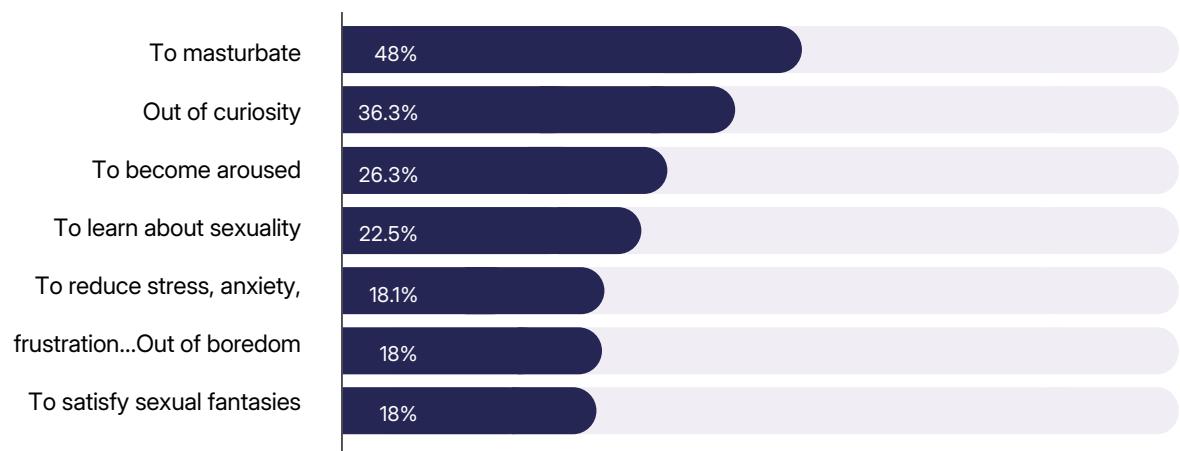
* Not evaluated in Primary

Almost half consume pornography "to masturbate," with significant differences between boys (57.5%) and girls (23%). For girls, the main motivation is "curiosity" (47.8%)

58.5% of students believe that consuming pornography contributes to creating a false or distorted image of what sex really is; 52.8% think it encourages pressuring others to engage in certain sexual practices, and 45.5% consider that it promotes not using a condom. Finally, 39.7% believe that pornography encourages the use of violence in sexual relationships.

Problematic Pornography Use

It refers to a pattern of excessive or poorly controlled consumption that interferes with daily life. During adolescence, it can have significant psychosocial consequences, such as increased feelings of guilt or distress, impaired self-esteem, and difficulty establishing balanced romantic relationships.

It can also reinforce unrealistic expectations about sexuality and limit the development of a healthy and well-rounded sexual experience.

7.9% of students would exhibit a certain pattern of problematic pornography use, a raet that rises to 20.7% in relative terms (calculated exclusively among adolescents who have ever viewed pornography). Significant differences by sex have been found (24.7% for boys and 9.9% for girls).

TABLE 4

Prevalence of Problematic Pornography Use (BPS; Tarragón et al., 2024) *

		Not problematic	Problematic use
GLOBAL		79.3%	20.7%
Sex	Girls	90.1%	9.9%
	Boys	75.3%	24.7%
Educational level	Secondary	78.6%	21.4%
	Upper Secondary	81.2%	18.8%
	Vocational Training	79%	21%

*Calculated based on students who have ever viewed pornography in their lifetime

** Not evaluated in Primary

Problematic Pornography Use is associated with higher rates of sexting and increased emotional distress

The OnlyFans phenomenon is very popular among adolescents. 1.8% of minors under 16 have an account on this platform

OnlyFans

OnlyFans is a subscription-based digital platform where users pay to access exclusive content from creators, much of it sexual or erotic in nature. 75.1% of students are aware of the existence of OnlyFans, 8.6% know someone in their environment who has earned money on the platform, and 2.1% have or have had an account on it.

The *OnlyFans* Phenomenon

Know *OnlyFans*	75.1%
Someone they knew earned money on *OnlyFans*	8.6%
Has an account on *OnlyFans*	2.1%
	1.8% of minors under 16
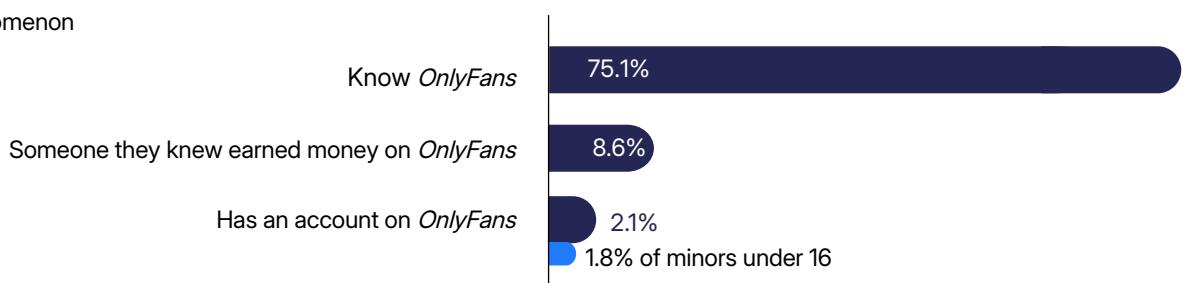
* Not evaluated in Primary

Having an *OnlyFans* account is associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and somatization

Sexual-affective education

69.9% of students report that they "never" or "almost never" talk about sexuality at home, but more than half (59.6%) indicate having received some type of sex and relationship education session or activity at their school during the past academic year.

48.4% explicitly request more activities of this type at school.

Sexual-affecive education

69.9%	59.6%	48.4%
Never or almost never talks about sexuality at home	Has received some type of sex and relationship education session or activity at their school	Would like more educational activities on this topic to be conducted
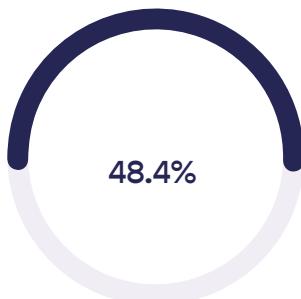
In 7 out of 10 households, sexuality remains a taboo topic

infancia digital

08 Gaming

Video games use

Video games are one of the main sources of leisure for children and adolescents. They provide entertainment, socialization, and skill development, although excessive or poorly regulated use can negatively affect rest, academic performance, personal relationships, and other areas of development.

Their impact depends on both the frequency and duration of play, as well as the content and family and educational guidance. The study data reveal that 53.5% of students play video games at least "once a week," and almost one in five (18.7%) play "every day or almost every day." In Primary, the percentage of regular players rises to 62.5%.

FIGURE 27

Gaming Frecuency

Never Almost never

At least once a month

At least once a week

Every or almost everyday

| 27.4% | 19.1% | 34.8% | 18.7% |

Regular Players (At least once a week): 53.5%
Boys: 78.4% │ Girls: 28.5%
Primary: 62.5% │ Secondary Education: 52.3% │ Upper
Secondary Education: 38.8% │ Vocational Training: 50%
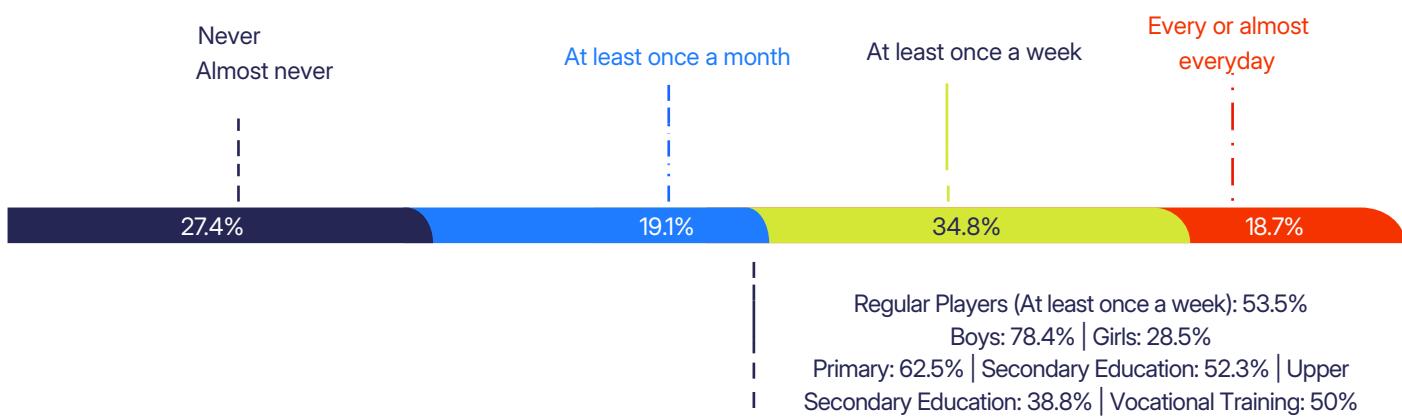
On average, they spend 7.14 hours per week playing video games. Boys spend twice as many hours (8.97) as girls (4.16). 29.4% feel they spend more time playing video games than they should.

Most popular gaming platforms

65.3%

Console
Girls 45.2% Boys 77.5%

64%

Mobile phone
Girls 68.4% Boys 61.5%

36%

PC
Girls 30.6% Boys 39%

30.3%

Tablet
Girls 41.9% Boys 23.1%
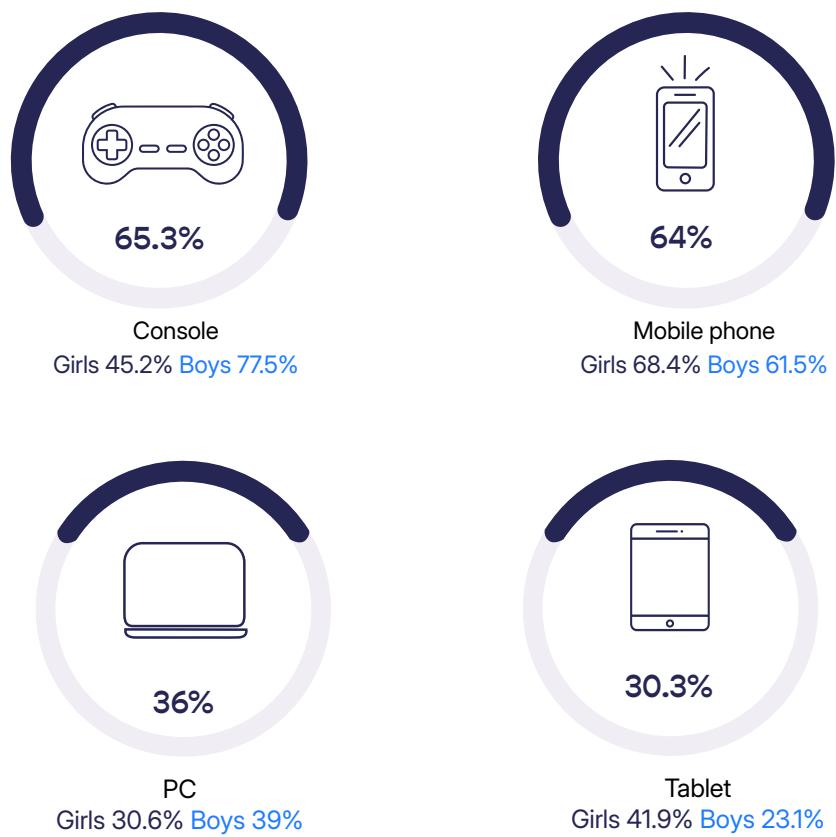
The console and mobile phone are the most commonly used platforms for playing video games. For girls, the main device is the mobile phone, while for boys it is the console. The most played games are: Brawl Stars (47.4%), Fortnite (45.9%), Roblox (38.5%), Minecraft (34.7%), and EA Sports FC/FIFA (30.2%).

One in three players (34.4%) spends money every month to buy or download video games (8% spend more than €30). One in four (26.3%) spends money every month on in-game purchases (4.9% spend more than €30)
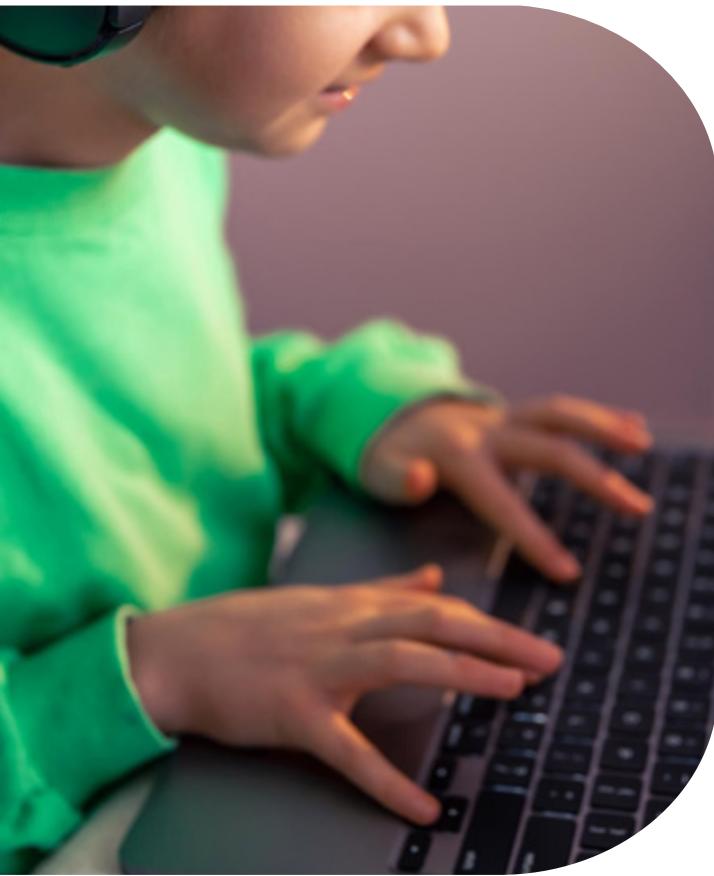
Video games are one of the main current leisure channels. One in four minors would be playing video games rated PEGI 18

Video games not recommended for minors (PEGI 18)

Video games not recommended for minors generally include content or depictions of explicit violence and/or various sexual behaviors or risky situations, which can have a negative impact on different levels.

FIGURE 29

Video games with violent content (according to PEGI)

70.2%

70.2% of players consume video games with violent content
51% of the overall sample

26.7%
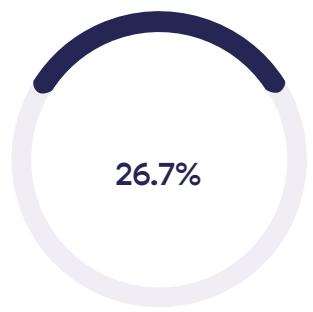
One in four players (26.7%) consumes video games rated PEGI 18
19.4% of the overall sample

26.5% of players under 18 play PEGI 18 video games (16.8% in Primary). The consumption of PEGI 18 video games is associated with higher prevalences of aggressors, both in school bullying and cyberbullying

Gaming Disorder

This is characterized by a persistent and uncontrolled gaming pattern that interferes with daily life. This problem can generate significant psychosocial consequences, such as social isolation, decreased academic or work performance, disrupted rest, family conflict, and the emergence of emotional distress.

The prevalence of a possible gaming disorder is 2,3% among players, which would represent 1,7% of the overall sample. Rates are significantly higher among boys and in Vocational Training.

TABLE 5
Prevalence for a potential Gaming Disorder (IGDT-10; Király et al., 2019) *

		Healthy use	Potential disorder
GLOBAL		97.7%	2.3%
Sex	Girls	98.9%	1.1%
	Boys	97.1%	2.9%
Educational level	Primary	98.2%	1,8%
	Secondary	97.4%	2.6%
	Upper Secondary	98.1%	1.9%
	Vocational Training	96%	4%

﹡ Calculated based on students who report playing video games at least once a month

Video game use disorder is associated with a higher prevalence of problematic social media use and problematic pornography use, as well as increased filio-parental violence and emotional distress

Loot boxes

In recent years, the video game industry has introduced a type of microtransaction that has sparked significant debate due to its potential adverse effects on players: Loot Boxes. These are virtual items (packs, supplies, "gachas", items...) in which the player does not know what they will obtain upon opening them.

They operate similarly to online gambling, as they constitute a random reward mechanism, and real money can be invested to obtain them. They can be acquired either by spending money (credit card, prepaid, etc.) or by investing hours of gameplay, completing missions, or meeting certain conditions. The first type of loot boxes can be associated with problems related to online gambling, while the second type can be linked to issues with video game use.

Loot boxes use

62.8%

62.8% of players report having opened a loot box without spending money, solely through their progress or skill in the game.

13.2%

13.2% of players usually spend some money on loot boxes at least once a month (2.2% spend €30 or more).

* Not evaluated in Primary

Players who invest time and effort in opening loot boxes without spending money show a significantly higher prevalence of a possible gaming disorder (3,4% vs. 1,2%). Moreover, the higher the spending on loot boxes, the greater the percentage of adolescents who engage in online gambling
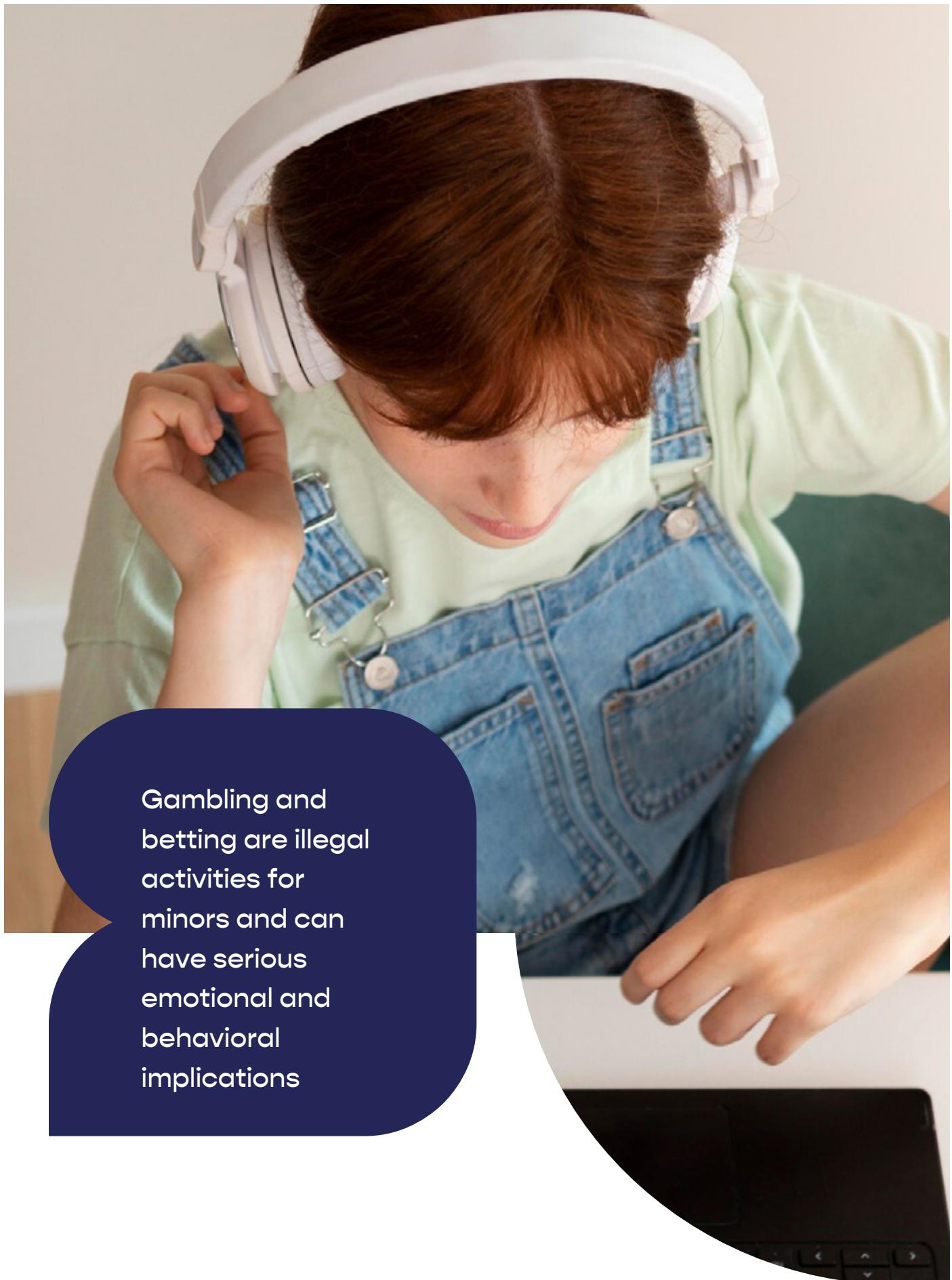
Gambling and betting are illegal activities for minors and can have serious emotional and behavioral implications

Gambling and betting with money, although prohibited for minors, have become widespread as a socially accepted form of entertainment. However, they present a high addictive potential and may lead to serious personal and social consequences.

For this reason, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes them as a public health issue of growing relevance. A total of 11.1% of students report having gambled or wagered money at some point in their lives (10.6% among minors), either in person (9.6%) or online (5.5%).

The possibility of earning easy money is a relatively entrenched belief among those who gamble or place bets

FIGURE 31 Gambling rates

11.1%
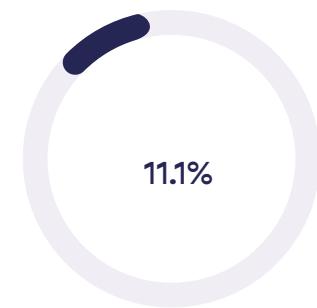
One in ten adolescents (11.1%) report having gambled or placed bets at least once, either in person or online.

9.6% vs 5.5%
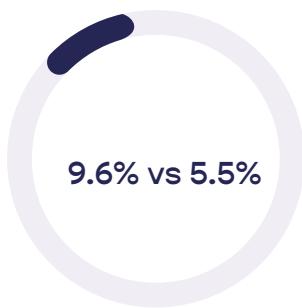
Of all reported gambling, 9.6% occurs in person, compared with 5.5% that takes place online.

71.9%

71.9% of those who have gambled or wagered money online have also done so in person.

15.2%

Monthly expenditure usually does not exceed €10, although 15.2% of adolescents who gamble spend more than €30 per month.

68.2%

68.2% of those who gamble or place bets do so with their friends, reflecting the social component of gambling.

54.8%

Bars and cafés are the most common venues for in-person gambling (54.8%).

78.7%

78.7% of minors were not asked for identification when placing bets.

47.9%
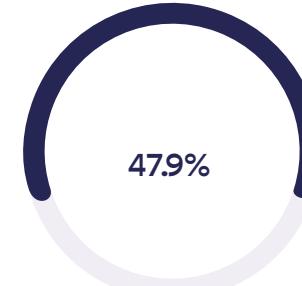
Betting websites (47.9%) are the preferred channel for gambling or wagering money online, ahead of video games (39.2%).

44%
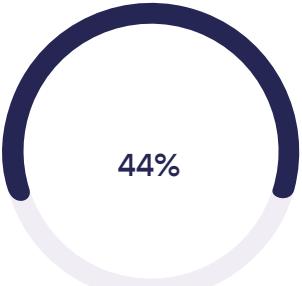
Credit cards (44%) are the most commonly used payment method for online betting, followed by PayPal/ Skrill accounts (21.6%).

* Not evaluated in Primary

For 65.7%, having fun and/or passing the time is the main motivation for gambling or betting, although nearly half (47.1%) do so to win money. Among adolescents who have gambled or wagered money, 84.4% report having won "on some occasions," 33.9% "quite often," and 14.5% "always or almost always."

Problem Gambling

Problems related to gambling arise when betting or other forms of gambling shift from being an occasional activity to a behavior that is difficult to control. They bet more than intended, attempting to recover losses, incurring debt, or hiding the activity, which can lead to emotional distress, family tensions, and a decline in academic and social performance.

The prevalence of problem gamblers is 2.4% (2.3% among minors). When calculated based on adolescents who report having gambled or wagered money at least once in their lives, this percentage rises to 21.7%. The prevalence of problem gambling is significantly higher among boys and among Vocational Education students.
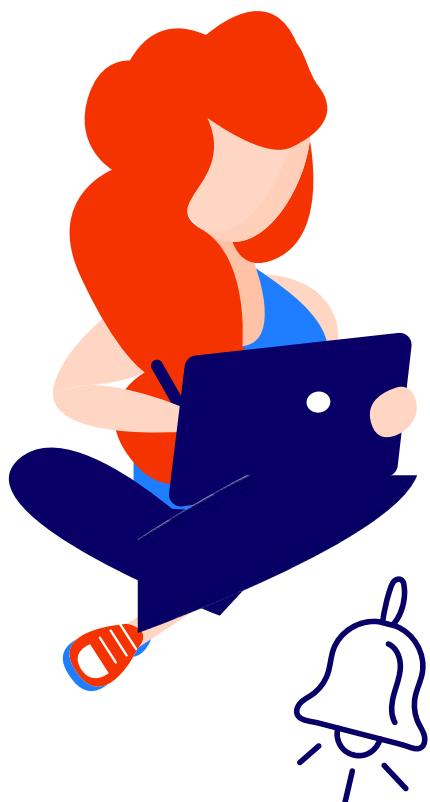
TABLE 6

Prevalence of gambling problems (PGSI: López-González et al., 2018)

		Not problematic	Low/Mid Risk	Problem gamblers
GLOBAL		45.8%	32.4%	21.7%
Sex	Girls	53.2%	33%	13.9%
	Boys	44.9%	33%	22.1%
Educational level	Secondary	45.1%	30.9%	24%
	Upper secondary	49.3%	36.5%	14.2%
	Vocational Training	43.2%	32.8%	24.1%

*Calculated based on students who report having gambled or wagered money at least once in their lives
**Not evaluated in Primary

Individuals considered problem gamblers exhibit significantly higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation, reflecting emotional harm

Proper guidance from families is essential when engaging with the digital environment
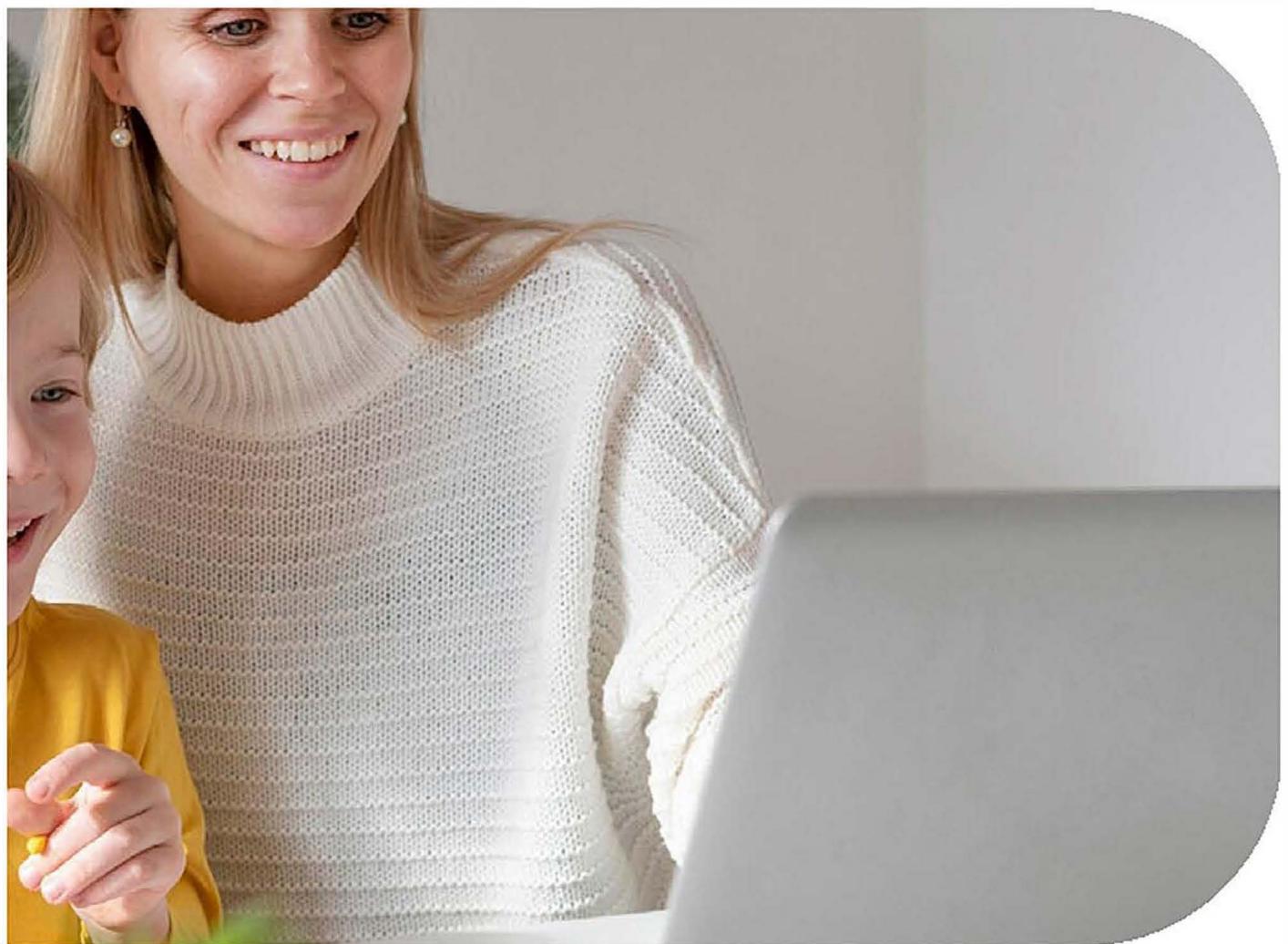
10 Digital Parental Mediation

The role of mothers and fathers has always been crucial during adolescence. In a reality co-constructed between offline and online spheres, parental mediation strategies are essential to maximize the positive uses of technology and reduce associated risks. Parental mediation strategies are divided into two main categories: Enabling Strategies (supervision and guidance) and Restrictive Strategies (establishing rules and limits).

According to experts, it is important to achieve a balance between both, while parents and legal guardians should also model appropriate device use. All of this contributes to the gradual establishment of good digital hygiene at home.

Parents must also set an example
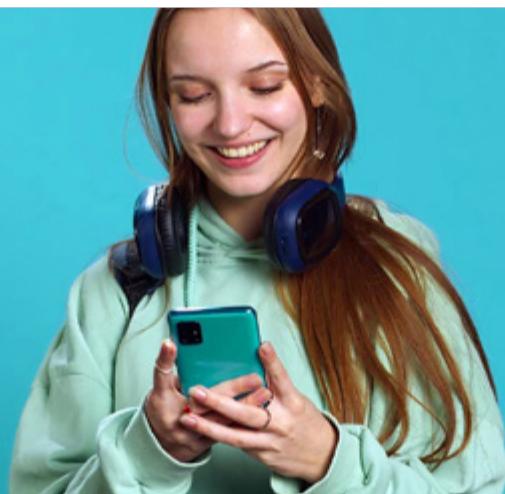
FIGURE 32

Online Parental Mediation Strategies

They talk about the risks of the Internet and how to prevent them	53.5%
They limit the hours of use of RICT	46%
They set rules and limits on the content their children access	36.5%
They set rules and limits on the content their children upload	30.7%
They request their children's social media passwords	22.7%
They frequently discuss RICT use	19.9%
They impose penalties for RICT use	14.6%
They set some type of rule or limit on the hours spent playing video games	39.6%
They set some type of rule or limit on the type of video games played	27%

More than half of parents (53.5%) regularly talk with their children about the risks of the Internet (enabling strategy).

Forty-six percent usually set rules or limits regarding the hours spent using mobile phones, the Internet, or Social Media, and only one in four (30.7%) restricts the content their children upload (restrictive strategies).

23.7% of students report that their parents habitually use their mobile phones to send WhatsApp messages, check email, etc., during family meals

FIGURE 33

Risk behaviors and problematic use according to parental modeling

Risk behavior	Parents do not use their mobile phones during meals	Parents use their mobile phones during meals
More than 5 hours/day on Social Media during weekends	17.9%	24.6%
Passive Sexting	12.8%	19.5%
Active Sexting	5.2%	8.7%
Pressure to send photos	7.4%	12.4%
Blackmail or Sextorsion	2%	4.3%
Accept strangers on Social Media	31.6%	40.3%
Meeting in person with people known through the Internet	12.6%	17.9%
Receiving sexual propositions online from adults	6.3%	10.8%
Pornography use	27.5%	34.3%
Social Media problematic use	4.4%	8.7%

Parents do not use their mobile phones during meals

Parents use their mobile phones during meals

infancia digital

FIGURE 34

Risk behaviors and problematic use according to whether or not the mobile phone is kept in the bedroom at night

More than 5 hours/day on Social Media during weekends
- 12.4%
- 30.6%

Passive Sexting
- 8.7%
- 23.8%

Active Sexting
- 3.9%
- 9.9%

Pressure to send photos
- 5.6%
- 13.9%

Blackmail or Sextortion
- 2.7%
- 3.3%

Accept strangers on Social Media
- 24.1%
- 48.5%

Meeting in person with people met online
- 9.4%
- 21.1%

Receiving sexual propositions online from adults
- 5%
- 11.8%

Pornography use
- 20.8%
- 42.2%

Problematic Social Media use
- 3.7%
- 8.5%

Does not sleep with the mobile phone in the bedroom   Sleeps with the mobile phone in the bedroom

Leading by example and establishing good digital hygiene at home is essential. The absence of rules and limits regarding technology use, combined with poor parental modeling, doubles the incidence of problematic use and various online risk behaviors

11 Conclusions

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The presence of digital devices in the daily lives of children and adolescents is undeniable. A total of 82.4% have their own mobile phone, which they typically access at an average age of 10.8 years.

Among primary school students, 51.6% already have their own mobile phone, a figure that rises to 92.8% in Secondary education. It is also evident that Social Media is an integral part of their daily lives.

A total of 92.5% are registered on at least one social network, and 75.8% on three or more. In fifth and sixth grade of Primary school, 78.3% of students are already registered on at least one social network, and 43.6% on three or more.

It has been observed that screen use carries a series of risks that should not be overlooked. The prevalence of sexting ranges from 6.4% (active sexting) to 14.9% (passive sexting). Nine percent report having experienced pressure to send erotic or sexual photos of themselves, and 2.9% report blackmail or attempts at sextortion. It is also noteworthy that 5.7% of minors under 16 report having received sexual proposals from adults via the Internet.

These figures have generally shown a slight decrease compared to the 2021 study, indicating a growing awareness among Spanish society regarding this issue.

Video games constitute one of the main sources of leisure during childhood and adolescence. A total of 53.5% of students play video games at least "once a week," and one in five plays "every day or almost every day." In Primary school, the percentage of players rises to 62.5%. On average, they dedicate 7.14 hours per week to video games.

A significant portion of adolescents also spend money on video games each month; 8% spend more than €30 per month on purchases or downloads, and 4.9% spend money on acquiring skins, gems, cards, or players. The presence of so-called loot boxes in gameplay is becoming increasingly common. A total of 62.8% of players report having opened a loot box without spending money, and 13.2% have paid to open one. Those who invest time and effort in opening loot boxes exhibit a significantly higher prevalence of video game use disorder, while spending on loot boxes is associated with a higher rate of online betting.

A large portion of problems related to the digital environment appears to have slightly declined compared to 2021, suggesting a gradual increase in awareness within Spanish society
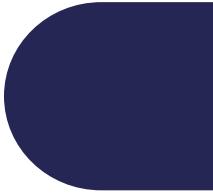
Another issue potentially associated with video game use concerns violent and/or age-inappropriate content. A total of 70.2% of players regularly engage with video games containing violent content, and one in four plays games rated PEGI 18. Playing video games not recommended for minors is associated with significantly higher prevalence of school bullying and cyberbullying.

Despite being illegal for minors, one in ten adolescents under 18 reports having gambled or placed bets at least once, either in person or online. Having fun and spending time with friends is the main motivation for gambling or betting (65.7%), reflecting the playful and social nature of the activity. Additionally, nearly half (47.1%) do so with the expectation of winning money. Among those who have ever gambled or bet, 84.4% report having won on some occasions, 33.9% "quite often," and 14.5% "always or almost always."

Regarding problematic use or potential "behavioral addictions," the application of internationally validated screening instruments to a representative sample of Spanish children and adolescents provides epidemiologically significant data. For example, the prevalence of Problematic Social Media use is 5.7%, while the prevalence of potential Gaming Disorder is 1.7%. The rate of problem gamblers is 2.4%.

It has also been observed that these types of addictions or problematic uses are often strongly associated with emotional problems and a lower quality of life, reflected in higher levels of anxiety, depression, somatization, and even suicidal risk. Although the use of a cross-sectional design necessitates discussing "correlates" rather than causal relationships, the data clearly indicate that those experiencing these problems tend to have poorer mental health, reinforcing the notion that this is a public health issue affecting thousands of children and adolescents in Spain.

One of the most "sensitive" and arguably most relevant topics of this study was pornography consumption. Data indicate that, although only 10.1% of adolescents consume pornography regularly, access to such content occurs at a very early age (11.5 years on average), and the prevalence of potential problematic use is high: one in five among those who consume pornography.
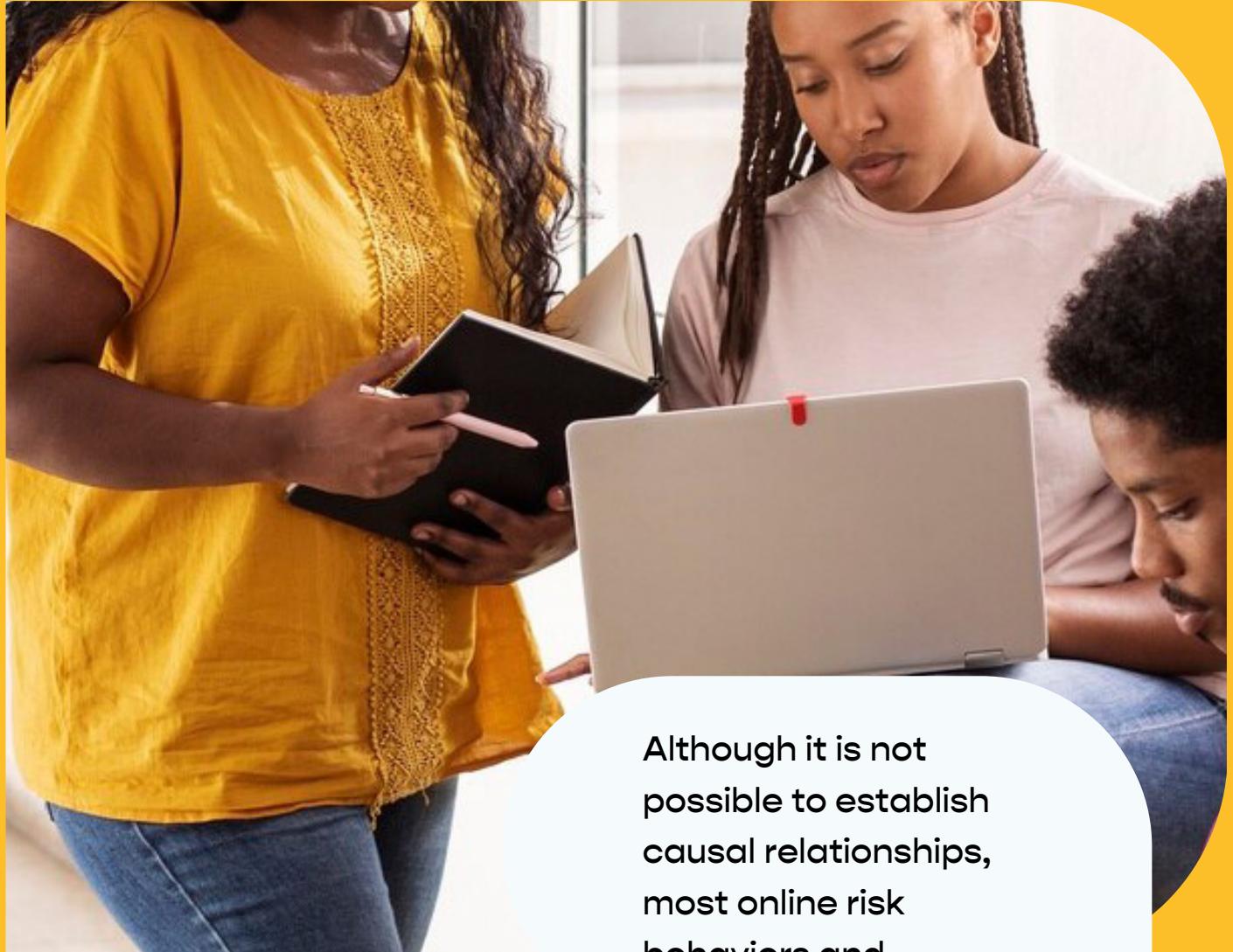
Although it is not possible to establish causal relationships, most online risk behaviors and problematic uses are associated with greater emotional distress and difficulties in social interactions
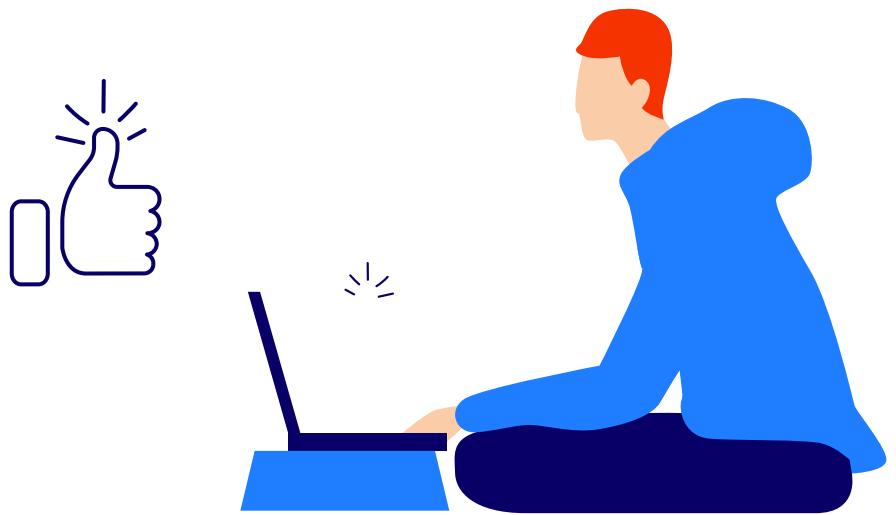
Beyond problems related to technology use, this study provided an excellent opportunity to obtain updated information on topics of particular relevance, such as mental health and school and family coexistence. Regarding mental health, data reveal that in Spain, 14.2% of adolescents exhibit clear symptoms of emotional distress, 13.1% show depressive symptomatology, and 7.4% are at high risk of suicide.

Concerning family coexistence, 15.2% of households reported frequent manifestations of violence toward one of the parents (physical, verbal, or psychological). In terms of school coexistence, data indicate a 25% prevalence of school victimization in the country and an 8.3% prevalence of cybervictimization, with a significant emotional impact on those affected.
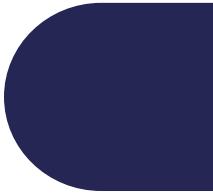
The study also delved into relational violence among peers, providing data on digital dating violence (cyberdating violence): 31.3% of students who currently have or have had a partner report experiencing some form of this violence frequently, generally involving behaviors related to controlling their friends on Social Media, using digital devices to monitor their whereabouts or companions, or accessing their mobile phones without consent.
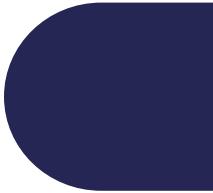
Online Parental Mediation remains an important area for improvement. Although Enabling Strategies, such as discussing screen use with children, are predominant, only three out of ten parents set limits regarding the content their children access or upload online. It is necessary to continue promoting good digital hygiene at home and to avoid habits such as using mobile phones during family meals. Not sleeping with the mobile phone in the bedroom and modeling appropriate behavior can reduce the rates of problematic use and online risk behaviors by half.

Across the various areas analyzed, significant differences were observed by age, but particularly by sex. The ways in which boys and girls interact "in" and "with" the digital environment differ, with distinct risks and patterns of problematic use. This underscores the need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach when designing new prevention policies.

Finally, it is essential to address the use of RICT in childhood and adolescence from a comprehensive and community-based perspective, taking into account the various life spheres involved, engaging all institutions and levels of administration (families, health and education systems, etc.), and, of course, always considering the viewpoints and experiences of adolescents themselves.

Promoting the safe and healthy use of digital devices calls upon all of us as a society

12 Action proposals

Proposals to enhance the protection of children in the digital environment
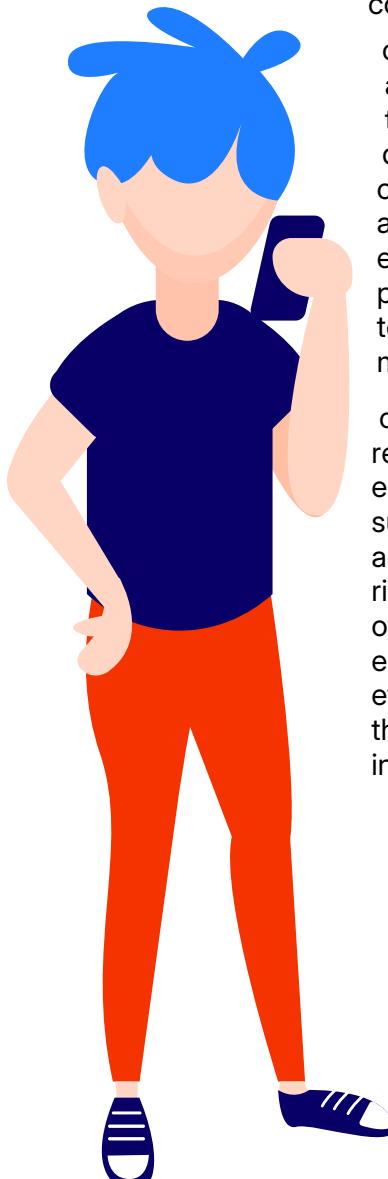
- Strengthen cooperation and coordionation between all agents involved in the protection and digital development of childhood and adolescence. families, educational institutions, public administrations, technology sector, media, social organizations, and the research community to ensure coherent, sustained, and effective action regarding the risks and opportunities of the digital environment, and to effectively implement the principle of the best interests of the child.

  - Promote the active participation of children and adolescents in the design, development, and evaluation of initiatives aimed at their digital well-being

- Promote the conduct of studies that expand the knowledge base on the lives of children, and adolescents in digital environments

- Develop a specific and agreed-upon national strategy to ensure the protection of minors in digital environments:
  - Reach consensus on goals and objectives among all participating stakeholders.
  - It must include the commitment and participation of Public Administrations (national, regional, and local), the private sector (especially digital platforms and service and content providers), civil society, families, and children and adolescents themselves.

  - The development process should create spaces for dialogue that allow each stakeholder to assume their share of responsibility and contribute their own action lines in favor of children and adolescents.

  - The Strategy should be evidence-based and evaluated according to its real impact. It must include clear and measurable goals, a robust monitoring system, periodic evaluations, and mandatory reviews to adapt it to new technological and social challenges. It should also incorporate mechanisms that promote the exchange and dissemination of best practices.

  - It must guarantee equitable and safe access to digital technologies, taking into account existing gaps and the reality of children and adolescents in the country. Child poverty, early school leaving, migrant children, violence against children, inequality, and gender diversity are challenging issues that digital tools can help address or, if mismanaged, transform into new and profound violations of their rights.

- Address the impact of problematic or addictive technology use as a public health issue, and equate digital violence (cyberbullying, grooming, digital dating violence, etc.) with violence occurring in the physical world for the purposes of protection and response.

- Incorporate digital prevention into primary care.

- Promote collaboration between schools, families, and social services with specialized mediation and support services.

- Train professionals across different areas of administration (teachers, healthcare workers, social workers, law enforcement, and the justice system) in the protection of minors against the risks of digital environments.

- Regulate the use of mobile devices in educational institutions.

- Ensure the availability of secure digital infrastructures in schools, cultural centers, and recreational facilities.

- Encourage the creation of digital-free spaces that allow for high-quality cultural, sports, and community activities without the need for digital devices.

- Limit children's and adolescents' access to content and services that are harmful or inappropriate for their development in digital environments.

- Establish effective age verification systems that respect children's rights and integrate parental control mechanisms accesible and free from digital

- Review the minimum age and conditions for accessing social media.
  Limit random reward mechanisms in video games and platforms.

- Promote gradual and adaptive parental mediation, beginning in childhood with close guidance and progressing in adolescence toward responsible autonomy, informed decision-making, and the gradual building of trust.

  - Ensure that families have access to appropriate training, tools, and resources that support dialogic guidance grounded in trust and the collaborative development of norms.

- Develop digital and media literacy programs starting from early childhood education.

It must be ensured that by the end of compulsory education, students have fully acquired digital competencies necessary to exercise safe and
responsible digital citizenship.

- Promote comprehensive sex and relationship education programs.

- Require technology companies to be accountable for the impact of their products and services on the rights of children and adolescents.