KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN: NATIONAL INTERNET SAFETY REVIEW

"EXECUTIVE SUMMARY"

هيئــة تنظيــم الاتصــالات
Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
Kingdom of Bahrain – مملكة البحرين

إنترنت آمن
safesurf

His Royal Highness
Prince Khalifa bin Salman
Al Khalifa

The Prime Minister of
the Kingdom of Bahrain

His Majesty King
Hamad bin Isa
Al Khalifa

The King of
the Kingdom of Bahrain

His Royal Highness
Prince Salman bin Hamad
Al Khalifa

The Crown Prince,
Deputy Supreme Commander
and First Deputy Prime
Minister

1   INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority undertook the first Online Safety Study in the Kingdom of Bahrain; the study highlighted key issues around children's and adult's perceptions of risk and their online behaviour (Davidson, J. Martellozzo, E., 2012). In 2015 TRA has contracted the Researchers to undertake a second review of Internet safety awareness amongst adults and children. This report presents findings from the research set in the context of a review of recent and current international literature in the child online safety area.

The research involved approximately 2,433 respondents, of which, 98 were children aged 7-11 through focus group interviews, a national survey of 1,637 young people aged 12-18 from schools in the Kingdom and a national survey of 698 adults. The sample was nationally representative of Bahrain, including a 50/50 gender split. Furthermore, the split was also equal amongst different age groups (the following schools have participated in the study 1. Al-Wisam International School; 2. British School of Bahrain; 3. The Indian School; 4. Modern Knowledge School; 5. Bahrain Bayan School). Unfortunately no access was provided to public schools by the Ministry of Education. The target sample for the adult survey was 800 and 698 responded. However, 618 provided complete data and were therefore included in the analysis.
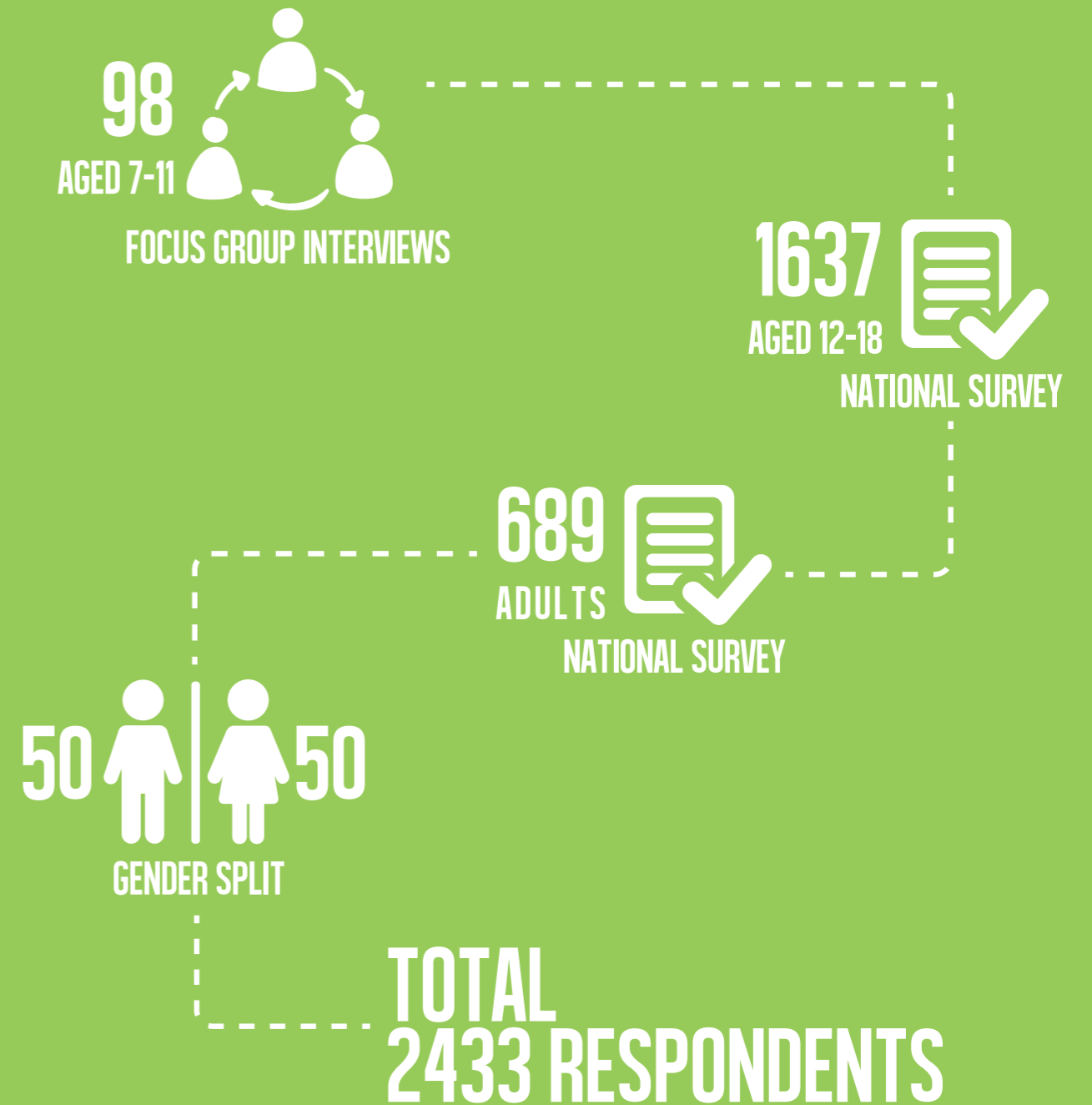
AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of the research were:

1. To gather baseline evidence regarding the online behaviour (positive and negative experience) and safety awareness of children aged 7-18, from:
    A.   A large national child sample (age 12-18);
    B.   A series of focus groups (age 7-11);
    C.   Focus group with teachers;
    D.   To compare 2015 data, where possible, to data collected from the first State of the Nation Review in 2010 in order to identify trends and change over time;
2. To gather baseline empirical evidence regarding online behaviour and awareness amongst adults (including parents and teachers) of Internet safety risks;
3. To measure the attitudes and safeguarding awareness of parents regarding their children's Internet usage;
4. To explore children's usage of mobile technology;
5. To disseminate the key findings to a group of teachers to inform and help develop safeguarding practice in schools.

DATA COLLECTION

FINDINGS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE - COMPARING 2010 AND 2015 DATA

HEADLINE FINDINGS

1. **Increased time spent online** - There is an increase in the amount of time young people are spending online, with approximately 47% reporting that they spent up to three or more hours per day online, compared to one-third of the sample in 2010;

2. **Decreased use of fixed internet** - Young people are moving away from fixed internet and online activity with a nearly fifty percent reduction in desktop use since 2010;

3. **Increased use of mobile technologies** - Young people are accessing the internet using more fluid, dynamic and mobile technologies in 2015, with nearly 4 times more reporting using a smartphone when compared to 2010;

4. **Decreased use of email** - Young people are reporting increased use of the internet for activities such as homework and researching, as well as instant messaging, but there is decreased use of email between the two data points;

5. **Less sharing of personal information** - There are reductions in the young person survey data across the majority of risk areas, including sharing of personal information with strangers online (16.6% in 2010 vs. 9.9% in 2015);

6. **Less likely to meet an online contact** - There was a large reduction in the number of young people reporting that they had met an online contact in person in 2010 (43%) and 2015 (16.4%);

7. **Cyberbullying is still of concern** - Changes in cyber-bullying were difficult to interpret, with nearly three-quarters of the sample in 2010 reporting having been bullied, this number being halved in 2015 (37.9%). WhatsApp, text messaging and social networking sites are the three most common mediums used to engage in cyberbullying;

8. **Negative impact of cyber-bullying** - the 2015 child survey included a more detailed section addressing the experience of cyber-bullying and the negative impact upon some young people is very clear;

9. **Increased confidence regarding online safety** - more young people (72%) are reporting that they feel confident in staying safe online;

10. **Playing age inappropriate online games** - The focus group data demonstrated that some children, particularly boys, play age inappropriate online games, sometimes with the consent of their parents.

98 AGED 7-11
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

1637 AGED 12-18
NATIONAL SURVEY

689 ADULTS
NATIONAL SURVEY

50 | **50**
GENDER SPLIT

TOTAL 2433 RESPONDENTS

THE FOLLOWING SCHOOLS HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE STUDY:

1. AL-WISAM 2. BRITISH SCHOOL OF BAHRAIN 3. INDIAN SCHOOL 4. MODERN KNOWLEDGE 5. BAHRAIN BAYAN

2   KEY FINDINGS

THE FINDINGS FROM THE 2015 STUDY ARE BRIEFLY SUMMARISED BELOW:

CHILDREN (AGE 7-11):

1. Unsurprisingly, young people spend a great deal of time across a range of mediums, forums and activities in the online space;
2. Most seem relatively aware of the more basic dangers of the internet;
3. Most of them learn about online safety through school, friends and to an extent, parental supervision;
4. None of the children interviewed have been exposed to any explicit sexual imagery or solicitation by adults. This could be due to: their age; or the limited times that they were approached by strangers with questionable intentions; and that they were equipped with the necessary preventative protection.
5. A small minority (7%) had experienced a stranger communicating with them online;
6. Nearly all participants admitted to having seen something inappropriate ('bad') or violent ('scary') in their searches.
7. There was also some evidence to suggest that young people often play age inappropriate online games, sometimes with the consent of parents and sometimes with their parents.

YOUNG PEOPLE (AGE 12-18):

1. There has been a substantial increase in smartphone use amongst Young people since the last survey in 2010 and this is consistent with findings from other countries;
2. There appear to be gendered differences in device use;
3. Image based preferences on social media and social networking sites—the young people prefer interacting and communicating with their friends and peers through pictures and videos on platforms including Snapchat and Instagram more than more text based ones such as Twitter or Facebook;
4. The majority of children and Young people seem honest/transparent about with who they interact and what they do online;
5. In terms of parental supervision there appears to be a relationship between age and controls, with younger groups more likely to be monitored than older groups;
6. Males are seemingly more likely to reveal personal information with strangers online than females and to engage in general risk taking behaviour;
7. There is a link between more time spent online (3 or more hours) and experience of negative and risky behaviours online;
8. Cyberbullying appears to be the most frequent harm encountered by children and Young people online. Significant emotional and behavioural changes occur in the Young people as a consequence of bullying, including reported feelings of depression, anxiety and helplessness as well as an increase in truancy and physically violent altercations with peers for some children;

9. Young people turn to family and friends for advice regarding internet safety more often than other sources such as schools and online resources;
10. There appears to be little in the way of a comprehensive and standardised approach to teaching Young people and children about online safety strategies in schools.

A RISK INDEX BASED UPON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RESPONSES WAS DEVELOPED AND IT IS PRESENTED IN THE BOX BELOW:

RISK AND FUTURE RISKS INDEX - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. **Posting pictures or videos- 48%** have posted pictures and/or videos online
2. **Cyberbullied -37.9%** report that they have been cyber-bullied in the past
3. **Received offensive content-29%** have received offensive content from a stranger online
4. **Privacy -20.2%** do not have privacy settings on their social networking profiles
5. **Met an online contact-16.4%** have met a stranger they met online, in person
6. **Received a virus -15.9%** have received a virus they obtained from downloading untrusted information online
7. **Shared personal information -9.9%** have shared personal information with a stranger online
8. **Received inappropriate messages-6.8%** have been sent inappropriate messages
9. **Sent a photo to a stranger- 6.8%** have revealed a photograph of themselves to a stranger online
10. **Unpleasant post -6.7%** have had someone post something unpleasant about them online
11. **Revealed mobile number- 6.5%** have revealed their mobile number to a stranger online

TEACHERS:

1. Teachers and counsellors do make use of different Internet resources in addressing Internet safety with children but there is no standard approach to teaching awareness and teachers said that this would be useful.
2. Teachers feel that cyberbullying is of increasing concern and a topic that is most frequently discussed in school with children, schools sometimes run anti-bullying initiatives with children to raise awareness;
3. Teachers are also concerned about the amount of time children spend on SNS (Social Networking Sites) and online gaming, this was seen as potentially damaging to children's schooling, one teacher commented that 'children do not go into the library anymore'.
4. Teachers feel that the use of mobile phones in school is problematic. Some schools do not permit children to bring mobile phones into school others prohibit use of mobiles during lessons but allow use in breaks.
5. Teachers suggest that it is difficult to police the use of mobile phones in school and that parents sometimes do not understand why phones are confiscated;
6. Teachers suggest that parents often do not know about their children's online activities and that

there is a need to raise awareness amongst parents via Internet safety training.

7. Teachers also stated that sometimes it is difficult to engage with parents due to their unawareness about their child's online activities;
8. Teachers expressed concern about public centres that allow unlimited access to the Internet for children of all ages. When children use the centres there is unsupervised access to the Internet.
9. Teachers believe that there is still naivety when it comes to internet safety and that key safety messages should be reinforced constantly (findings from adult survey);
10. Teachers are positive about the importance, awareness and need for internet safety (finding from adult survey);
11. However they felt that training could be improved and mainstreamed (finding from adult survey).

ADULTS:

1. Internet use is widespread amongst this sample, with the majority accessing the internet on a daily basis, through the increasingly popular use of their smartphones and tablets;
2. Two-thirds of the sample are spending 3 or more hours online per day, engaging in a range of activities from instant messaging to work related tasks;
3. On a positive note overall, 'risky' online behaviour in the adult cohort seems to have been reduced when compared to the 2010 cohort;
4. The lack of negative experience has also decreased, noting that perhaps adults in Bahrain are still engaging online freely until experiencing one negative experience, and 'learning' to be more risk-aversive as a result;
5. Approximately 1/3 of the sample shared personal information online normally through SNS or WhatsApp;
6. The provision of personal information appeared to be for the most part restricted to telephone numbers;
7. The experience of negative behaviour online was commonplace, with a range of different experiences being reported by the sample;
8. The majority of the cohort seems well educated and informed regarding their children's use, including location of use and accounts on SNS. However, it should be borne in mind that the majority of the sample were university educated;
9. There is however some concern about the extent of the knowledge parents and caregivers may have about their child's online safety;

STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS
GROWTH IN COLLABORATION

PARENTS SHOULD RECEIVE ONLINE AWARENESS INFORMATION ON INTERNET SAFETY (INCLUDING AGE APPROPRIATE GAMES AND TELEVISION PROGRAMMES)

INTERNET SAFETY SHOULD BE REINFORCED EVERY YEAR IN SCHOOL WITH EACH AGE GROUP

INTERNET SAFETY ADVICE SHOULD BE PROVIDED IN SCHOOL FROM AGE 7 AND MUST BE AGE APPROPRIATE

A TRAINED PERSON IS NOMINATED IN EACH SCHOOL SO THAT SHOULD CHILDREN NEED HELP AND / OR ADVICE ON WHAT THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED ONLINE AND WHERE CHILDREN WISH TO REPORT ONLINE ABUSE

ISPS TO DEVELOP SERVICES RELATED TO ONLINE SAFETY FOR BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULT USERS

DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE AND STANDARDISED APPROACH TO TEACHING ONLINE SAFETY STRATEGIES AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP IN SCHOOLS

3   RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to note at the outset that the vast majority of children and young people's online experiences and interactions are not negative or harmful, and that for most, their internet and technology use delivers significant benefits in terms of social, educational and creative engagement. They rely on digital devices to watch videos, download music, play games and communicate with friends, with a large number using the internet daily to help with school work. When looking at the ways young people may experience online risks and how these may affect them, it is important that harms and benefits are weighed appropriately.

This research has built upon the first State of the Nation Review undertaken by the Researchers in 2010. It is clear that there has been a marked improvement in awareness of Internet key safety issues amongst children, young people and adults in the Kingdom of Bahrain since 2010, however key issues remain to be addressed.

The original work focused not only upon the child and adult experience of Internet usage and safety but also sought to establish a countrywide infrastructure and framework to enable the development of Internet safety policy and practice and included a series of interviews with key stakeholders to inform this process.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the research findings, the Researchers would like to propose the following key recommendations (these have been divided into two sections: General recommendations and TRA focused recommendations):

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. A comprehensive and standardised approach to teaching Young people and children about online safety strategies and digital citizenship in schools to be developed and used (this should become part of the national curriculum for public and private schools);
2. A trained person is nominated in each school so that should children need help and/or advice on what they have experienced online and where children wish to report online abuse;
3. Internet safety should be reinforced every year in school with each age group;
4. Internet safety advice should be provided in school from age 7 and must be age appropriate;
5. Parents should receive online awareness information on internet safety (including age appropriate games and television programmes);
6. ISPs to develop services related to online safety for both children and adult users.

TRA FOCUSED RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. TRA should work with schools to develop anti-bullying policies and strategies for responding to cyberbullying, which include the provision of advice and support to children and parents about seeking support;
2. TRA should work with schools to enable implementation of 'Use of digital media at school' policies;
3. Adults should also be reminded of 'risky' online behaviour via online awareness information on internet safety which could be placed on the TRA website;
4. TRA should convene a committee or working group comprised of stakeholders from key Government Departments, ISPs and the TRA that focuses upon adult e-safety. The adult e-safety Committee should set out and ensure implementation of the Kingdom's adult e-safety strategy;
5. TRA should convene the Bahrain Committee for Child Internet Safety (BCCIS)(or similar) which should include a number of representatives from: Government ministries; the legal profession; relevant NGO's; child welfare organisations; academia; ISPs; TRA and key community groups.
6. The strategy should be informed by the findings from this research and reviewed yearly alongside the KPIs, supported by TRA;
7. TRA should work with media stakeholders to develop a public information media campaign to inform children and their parents about the nature and harmful consequences of cyberbullying;
8. The Child Abuse Centre might consider working alongside schools representatives and NGOs such as the BeFree Centre to provide support for children and their families affected by cyberbullying.

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