

Online Child Abuse Prevention: Best-Practices for Parents, Communities, and Governments

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Childhood maltreatment

- Consists of omissions of care and commissions of harm
- Linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes
 - Diabetes
 - Heart problems
 - Chronic bronchitis
 - Depression
 - Anxiety



Global Prevalence of Child Maltreatment

- Estimated that 500 million to 1.5 billion children have endured violence (ACPF, 2021)
 - 3 out of every 4 children (Know Violence in Childhood, 2017)

Research on Child Maltreatment

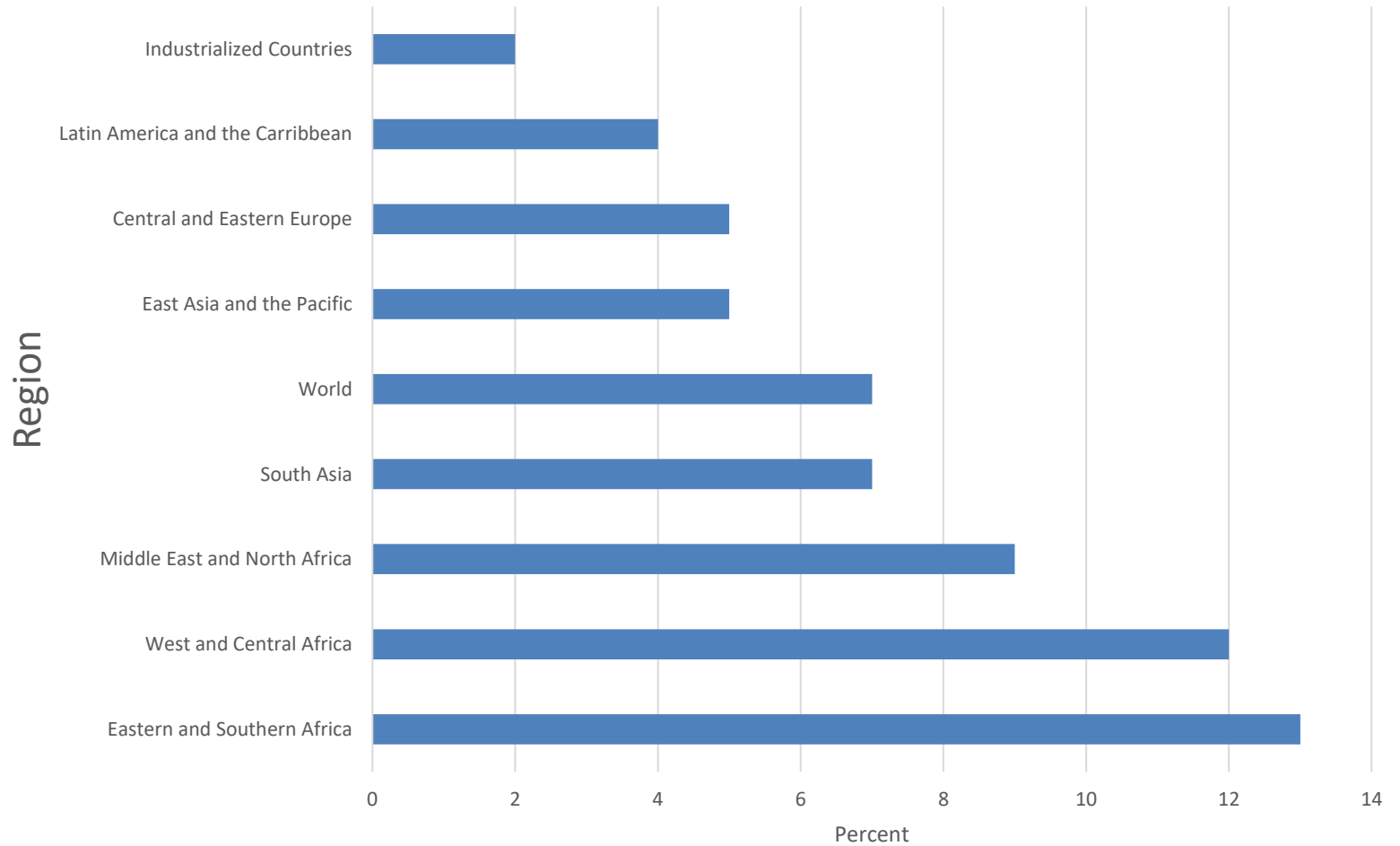
- 3 major weaknesses:
 - Vast majority of research conducted in high-income countries
 - Complex role of culture is not fully considered and accounted for
 - Difficulty in defining child maltreatment

Child Sexual Abuse

- Estimated that 121 million children performed a sexual act during childhood (UNICEF)
 - 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys has experienced sexual abuse (YWCA.org)
 - 91% of the perpetrators were a family member or close friend (CDC, 2020)
- Rates of child sexual violence differ throughout the world with highest rates in regions of Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia
 - Rates confounded by existence of child marriage



Percentage of girls aged 15-19 who experienced sexual violence



Source: Know Violence in Childhood, 2017



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Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OCSEA)

- Estimated that 1 in 9 children has experienced online solicitation
- Perpetrators can:
 - Create and distribute sexual content
 - Child pornography
 - Seek sexual content or vulnerable children to abuse online (Mitchell et al., 2014)
 - Sexually exploit
 - Sexually suggestive language, photos, or videos
 - Sexual grooming behaviors
 - Live online child sexual abuse



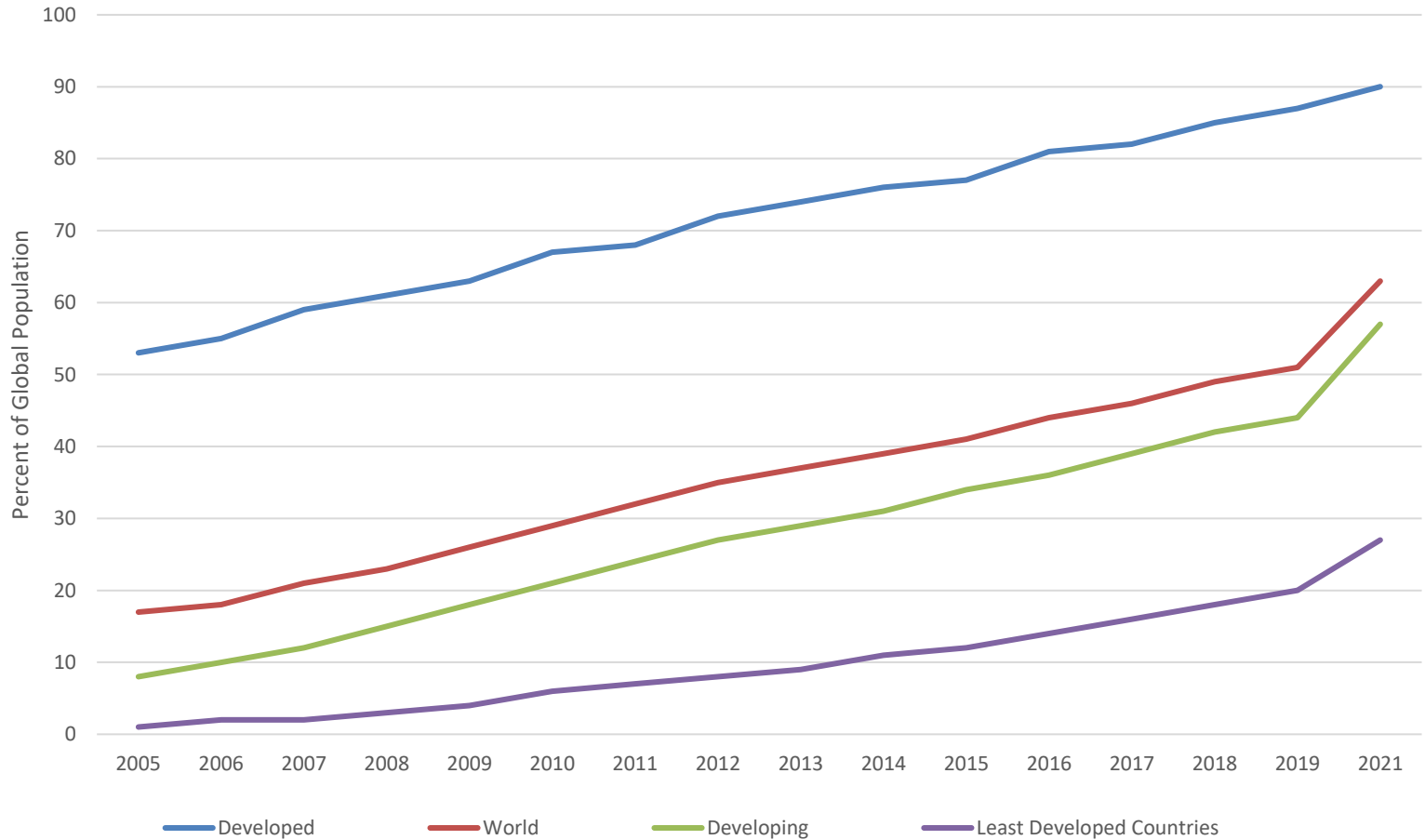
Problems Created by Technology

- Rates of posting online child sexual content exceeds the ability to for manual reviews of such content
- Increased anonymity of perpetrators
- Many national laws do not clearly codify legal protections for children online

Global Internet Access and Use

- Internet provides a plethora of benefits to society
- 5 billion people have internet access
 - 63% of global population (up from 20% in 2005)
- 4.65 billion people are social media users

Percent of Global Population Accessing the Internet (2005-2021)



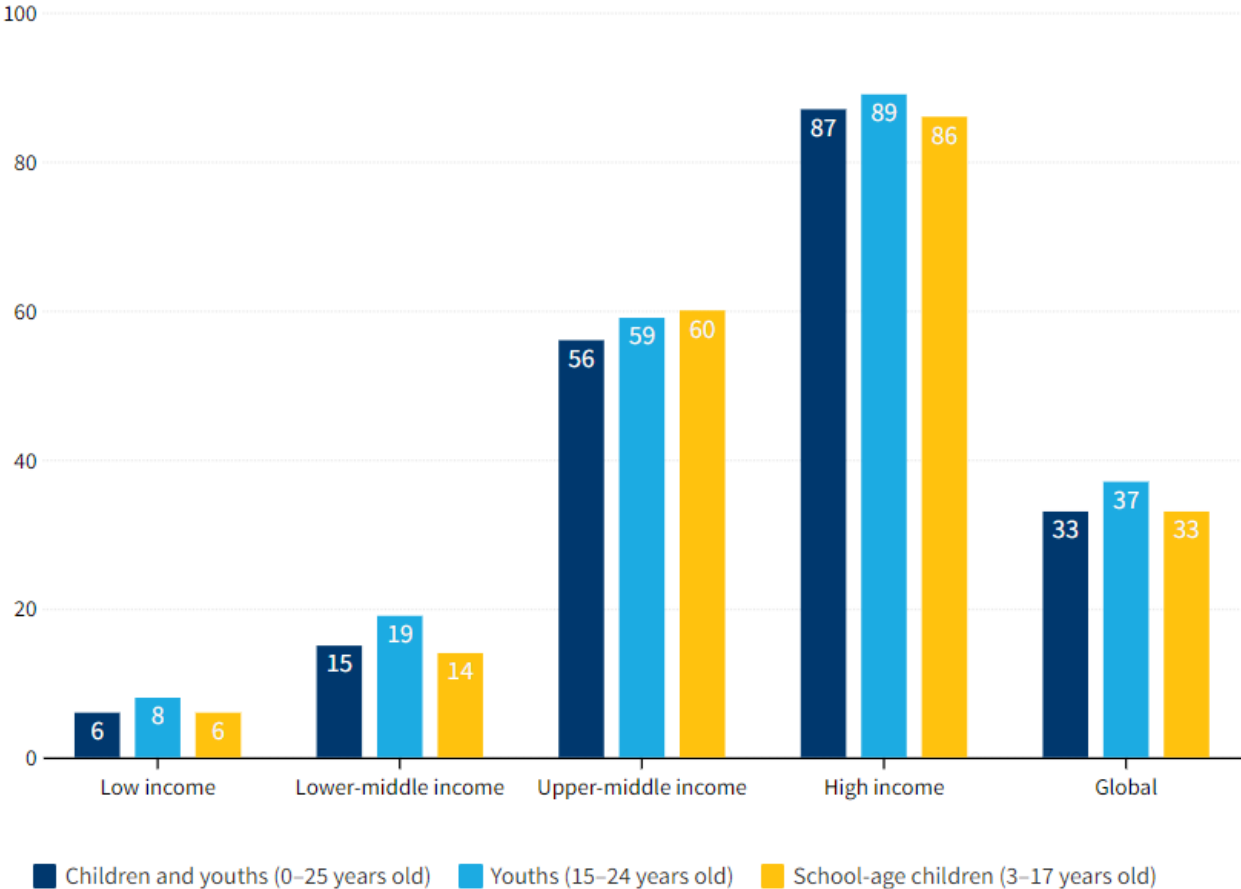
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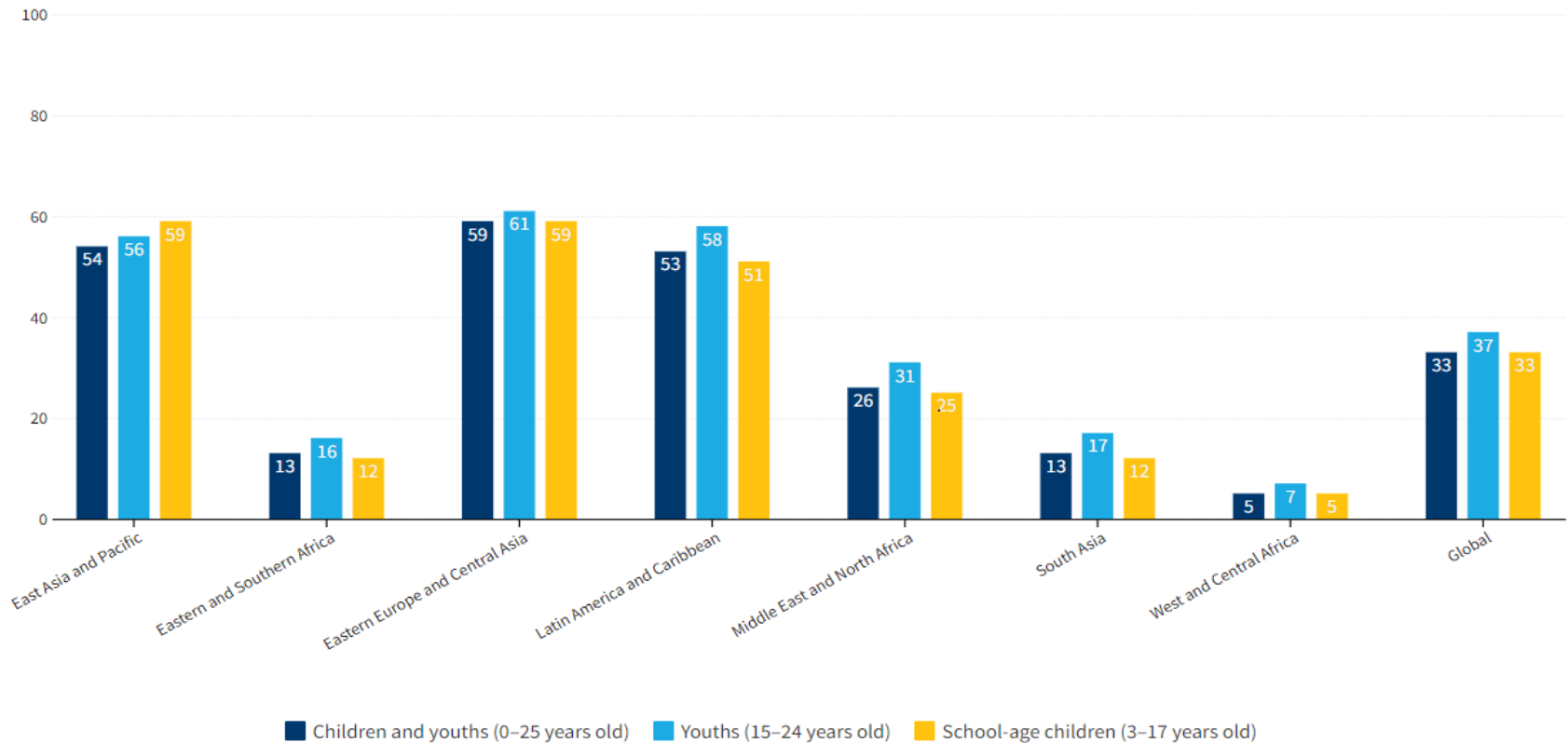
Child Global Internet Access and Use

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by country income group



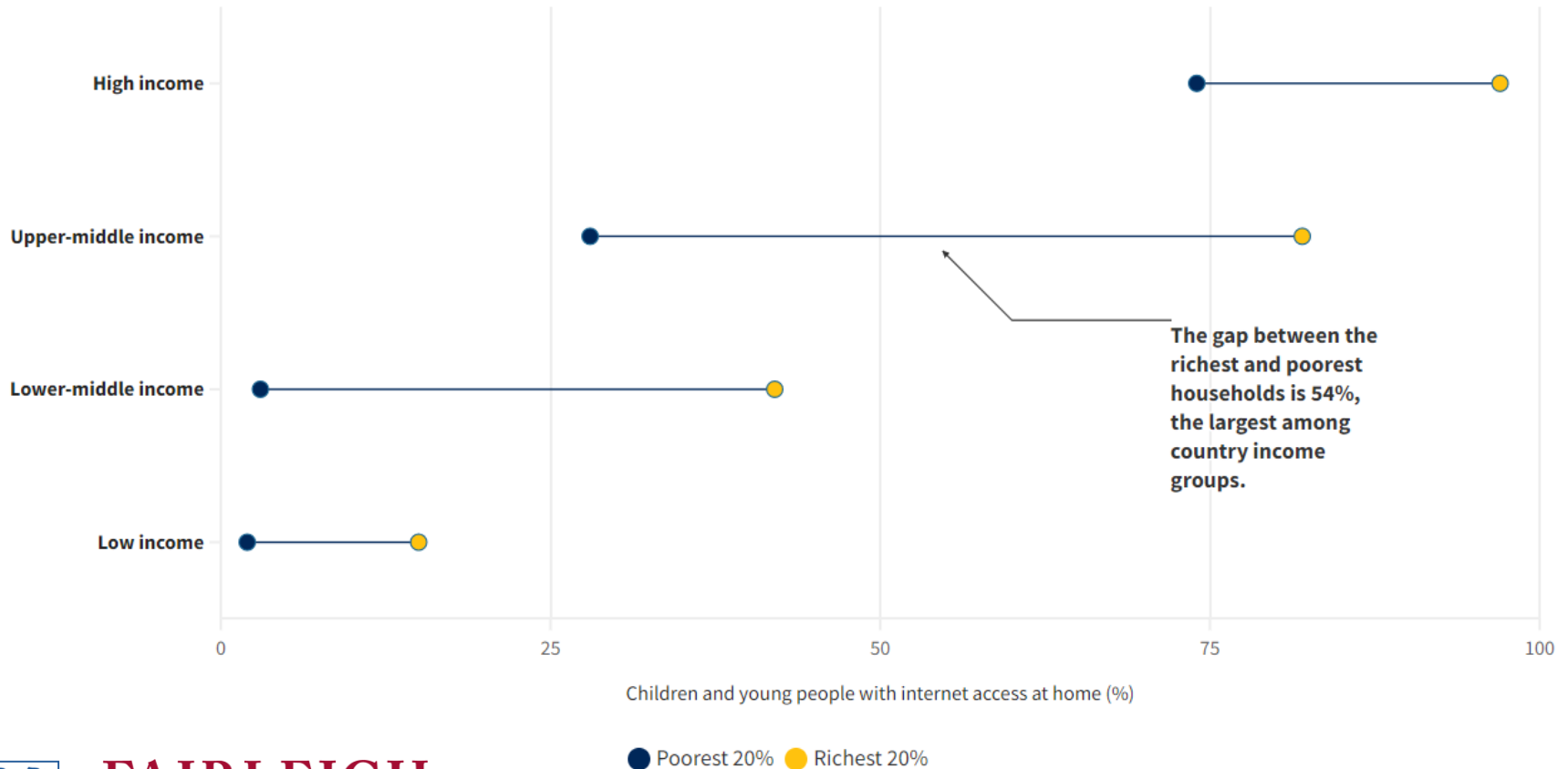
Child Global Internet Access and Use: By Region

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by region



Child Global Internet Access and Use: By Income Level

Percentage of children and young people with internet access at home, by country income group



International Response to OCSEA

- Emphasis on inter-governmental collaborations and inclusion of civil society
- WeProtect Global Alliance formed a Model National Response
 - Over 80 countries
 - 20 global technology companies
 - 24 NGOs



What is a Model National Response?

- Assess current responses and identify gaps in those responses
- Prioritize national responses to address gaps
- Support international cooperation
- Responses cannot be confined to national jurisdiction
 - Collaborations include:
 - Council of Europe
 - African Child Policy Forum



Best-Practices: Parent/Familial

- Strongest protective factor for OCSEA is involvement of actively engaged parents utilizing positive parenting practices
 - Focus on respect and interest in the child
 - Avoids excessive internet restriction or punishment
- Parents must remain an integral support system for children even during adolescence when children often seek greater autonomy
- Siblings and cousins can provide essential support, especially in adolescence



Best-Practices:Community School-Based Programs

- Focus on:
 - skill-building and behavior change over attitude and awareness
 - Long term, intensive, and interactive
 - Utilize specific examples and scenarios that children will relate to
 - Trained teachers with access to support and guidance
 - Mechanism to assess learning



Best-Practices: Government

- Foster international collaborations
- Adopt clear international standards for enforceable laws to protect children
- Develop clear plans to assess prevalence rates, identify indicators of successful intervention, and establish a budget (financial and human capital)
 - Interventions should include primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention



Conclusions

- OCSEA is a problem that is expected to grow in magnitude over the next decade as more individuals gain access to the internet
- Successful approaches to address OCSEA must recognize the value of each level within society so that children can maximize the benefits of technology while minimizing the dangers