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Digital Parenting: Fathers are crucial for digital security in parenting

Digital Parenting: Fathers are Crucial for Digital Security in Families

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Executive summary:

Nowadays, almost every child from a certain age uses a digital device connected to the Internet, meaning parents have to deal with a whole new aspect of parenting – 'digital parenting'. They have to decide what is good or bad for their children when it comes to using digital devices, how much control is appropriate and how to ensure children are safe in the digital environment. Kaspersky Lab wanted to get a better understanding of digital parenting, especially the roles of mothers and fathers in protecting children, and so joined forces with an expert on children's online behaviour, Professor David Smahel from Masaryk University. We carried out research into digital parenting with the help of the Toluna agency and 450 Czech parents and adult carers of children aged 5 to 17 who participated in our survey. The results suggest that mothers take the primary role in solving issues of child safety offline, while fathers assume the primary role for children's digital security. The key findings are presented below.

Key findings:

- Mothers spend more time on average with their children than fathers, though the difference decreases as a child grows older;
- The most common activities that mothers and fathers do together with their children are watching TV/videos and doing homework. Fathers play digital games together with their children more often than mothers;
- The biggest fears for mothers and fathers are their child being injured, how they are doing at school, and being harmed by other children. Mothers are generally more worried about these issues than fathers;
- It is mostly both parents who take responsibility for potential problems experienced by their child. When there is only one responsible parent, it is more often the mother;
- Fathers are more likely to teach their child how to use digital technologies and are also mostly responsible for the security of digital devices used by a child;
- Both parents regularly discuss with their child what they do on the Internet and help them with complicated things online. Fathers give more advice to children on how to use the Internet safely;
- Mothers are the primary controllers of a child's activities on the Internet;
- About 42% of parents check which websites their child visits. Only 15% of families have a dedicated software tool to control their child's activities on the Internet.

Introduction

Digital parenting is an important theme these days because most children use digital devices and the Internet on a daily basis. Parents are therefore interested in what is good or bad for their child when they go online, how much time they should spend online, how much they should control their child and also how to secure the digital devices they use.

The theme of digital parenting is of interest not only for parents but also for academics. There have been special issues of journals that focused solely on digital parenting, usually entitled "parental mediation" of children's digital media usage. Examples can be found in a special issue of the journal Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace (link). There are also several articles and reports focused on digital parenting, where scientists have studied the attitudes and parenting dimensions in parental regulation of the Internet (Alvarez, Torres, Rodríguez, Padilla, Rodrigo, 2013), mediations of media use from the perspective of children (Haddon, 2014), parenting and video games (Steinkuehler, 2016), and a report on parental controls (Zaman & Marije Nouwen, 2016). For parents, we can also recommend the book '*Media Moms & Digital Dads: A Fact-Not-Fear Approach to Parenting in the Digital Age*' from Yalda Uhls (2015) which dispels many myths regarding Internet usage and explains the facts about digital technology usage to parents in a clear and comprehensible way.

However, less is known about the specific roles of mothers and fathers in ensuring a child's safety both online and offline – something that this research focuses on. We were looking for answers to the following questions: What type of families do children live in? Who takes care of children and spends time with them? What do parents do together with their children? What (security) problems are parents afraid of and who deals with these problems in families? We also asked about children's internet usage, who teaches children to use digital devices, who ensures digital devices are secure, who helps children with their problems on the Internet, and if and how parents are controlling their children's Internet usage.

Research methodology

The quantitative research was carried out by the Toluna research agency, with the help of their international research panel. Parents and other carers of children aged 5 to 17 were asked to participate in the survey, and 450 respondents from the Czech Republic completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire itself was created by the experienced researchers Professor David Smahel, Ph.D. and Lenka Dedkova, Ph.D. – members of the Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society at Masaryk University, Czech Republic (http://irtis.fss.muni.cz). The survey was conducted online in August 2016.

The respondents were aged from 18 to 72, with an average age of 42. Of the 450 respondents, 54% were women (N = 242), and 46% were men (N = 208). From the whole sample, 45% were mothers, 35% were fathers, 2% were stepmothers, 4% were stepfathers, 6% were grandparents and 8% were other people taking care of children. With regards to the number of children, 50% of households had one child, 38% had two children, 10% had three children, and 2% had four or more children.

In the survey, we asked parents and other caregivers to refer to just one child from the household aged between 5 and 17 years old. This approach allowed us to describe approaches to education for children of a certain age. The ages of the children that the respondents referred to were almost equally distributed between 5 and 17; half were girls and half were boys.

## What type of families do children live in?

As is common in modern society, the children in our research sample live in a variety of family types. About 66% of children have both parents in one household, but the rest of the children live in different family formats, such as with a stepfather, stepmother, only with a mother, only with a father, but sometimes also with grandparents. Figure 2 below shows who lives with the child in the household and who takes care of the child on a weekly basis.

Figure 1
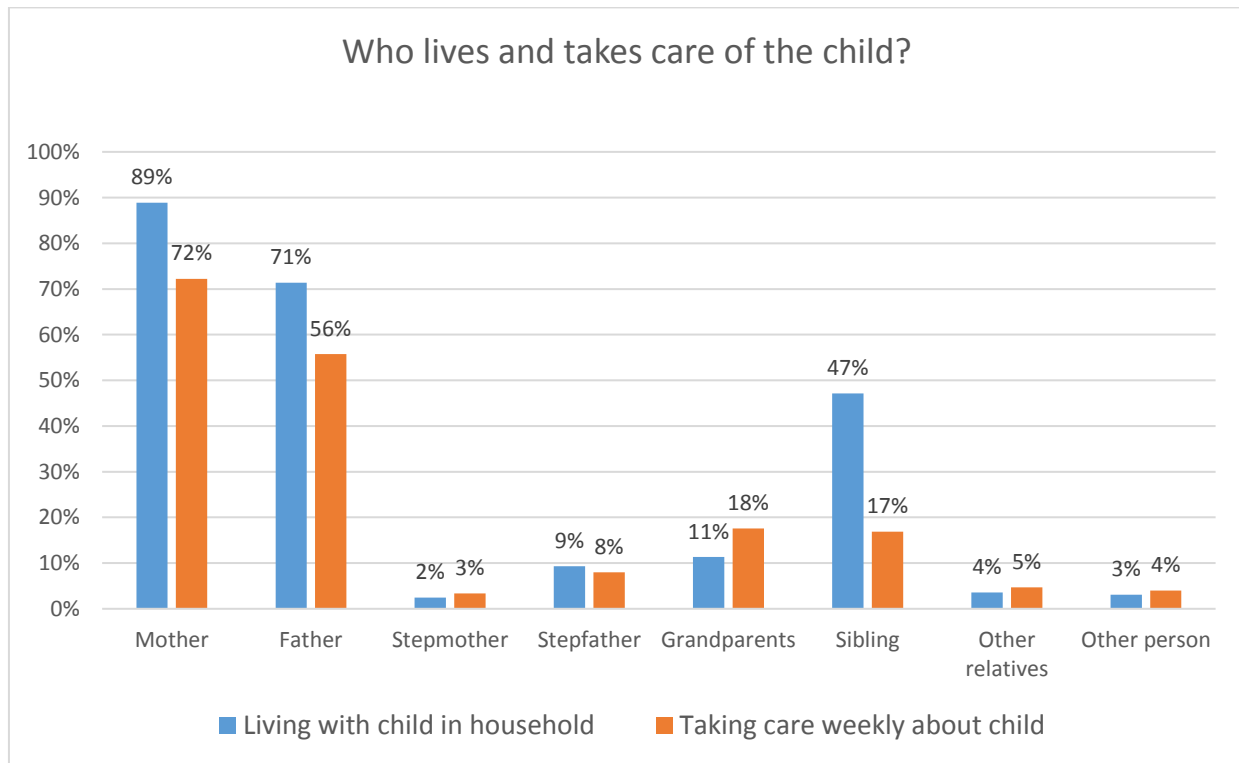
As we can see, children live mostly with their mothers (89%) and mothers also take care of them most. About 71% of children live with their fathers and 47% live with siblings who also take care of them sometimes. About 11% of children live with grandparents and in 18% of cases grandparents take care of the child during the week, though they may not be living with them. In the following sections of this report, we focus mainly on the role of mothers and fathers in families. The next figure shows how many hours mothers and fathers spend with a child each day.

Hours spent each day with children of different ages
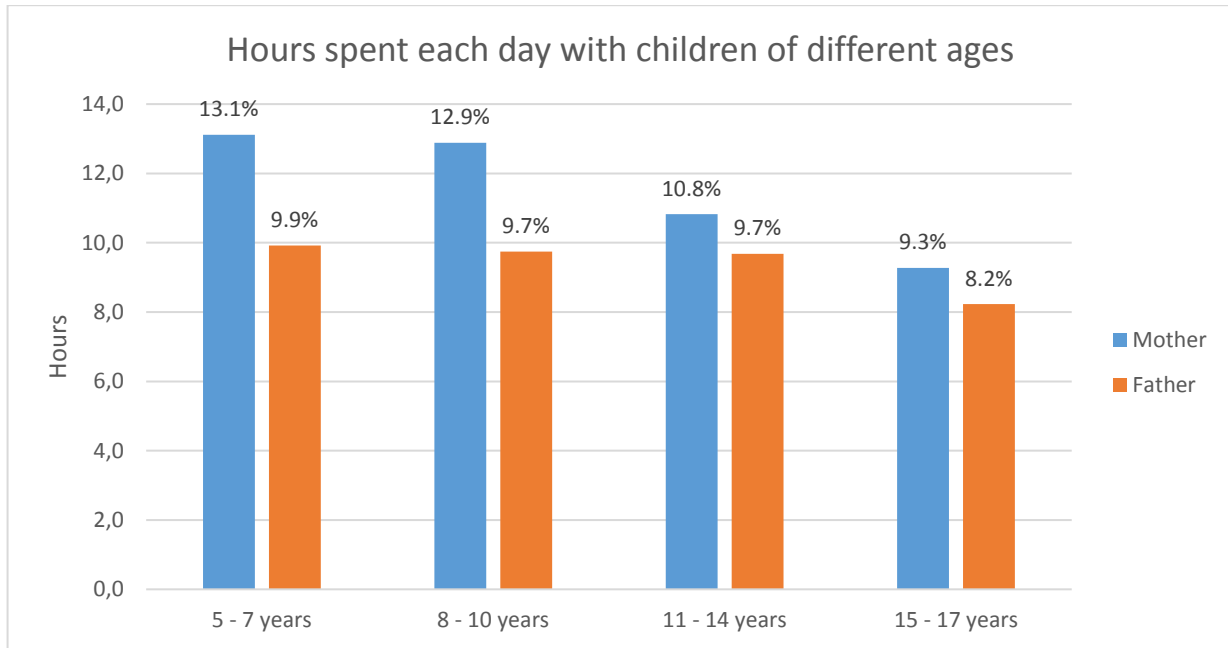
As expected, the time spent with children decreases as they grow older. Mothers spend on average about 13 hours daily with children aged 5 to 7 years and 9.3 hours with children aged 15 to 17. Mothers spend more time than fathers with younger children, while in later years the time spent with children is almost the same for both parents.

What do parents do together with their children?

Figure 3 shows the long list of activities that parents do together with their children. The activities are displayed independently for fathers and mothers and are sorted from the most prevalent to the least prevalent activities.

Figure 3

What do parents do together with their children?
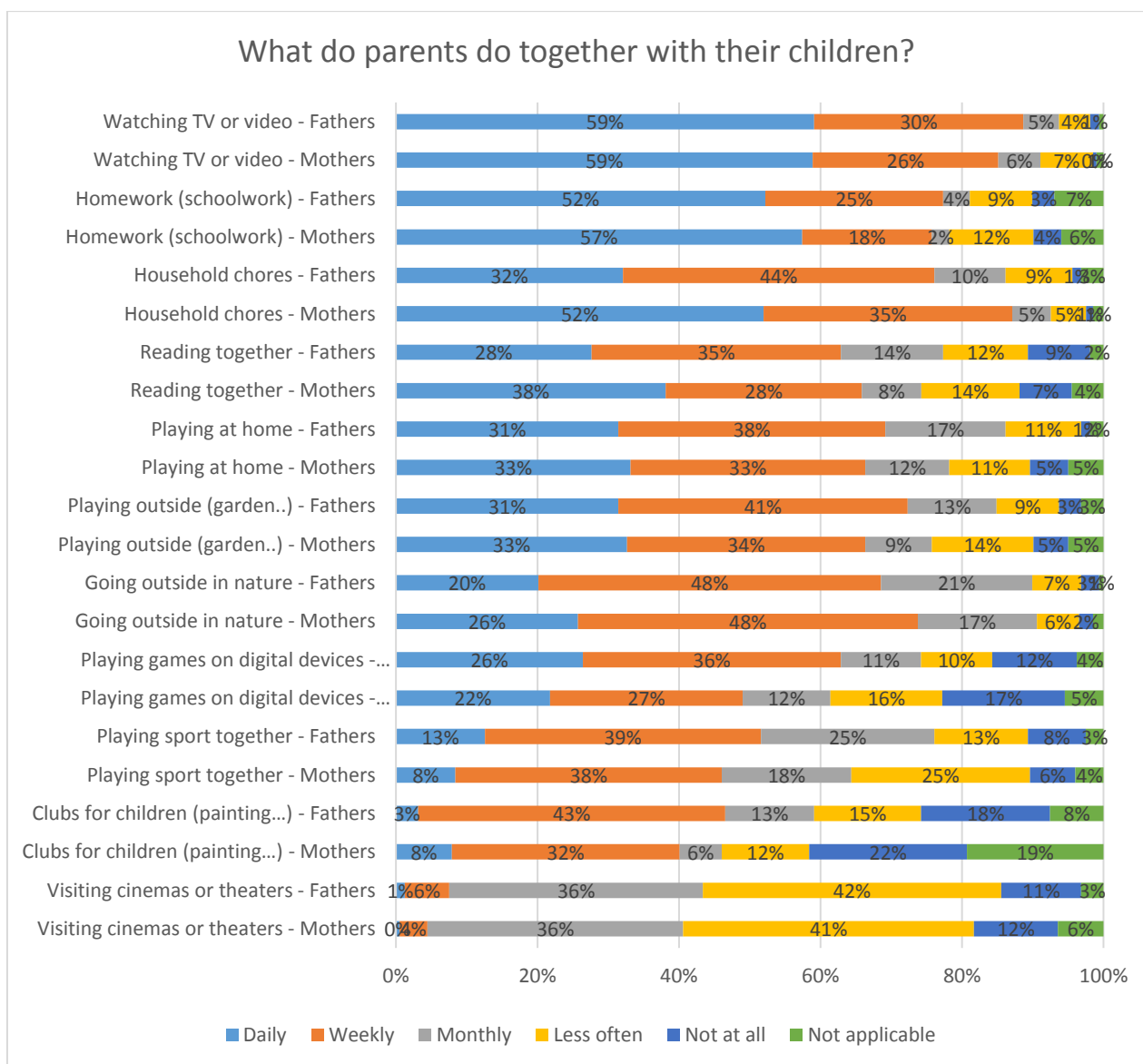
The most common activity that mothers and fathers do together with their children is watch TV or videos – 59% of families to this daily. Less fathers (52%) than mothers (57%) do homework (for school) with their children each day, and the same is true for household chores, which are done daily with children by 52% of mothers but only by 32% of fathers.

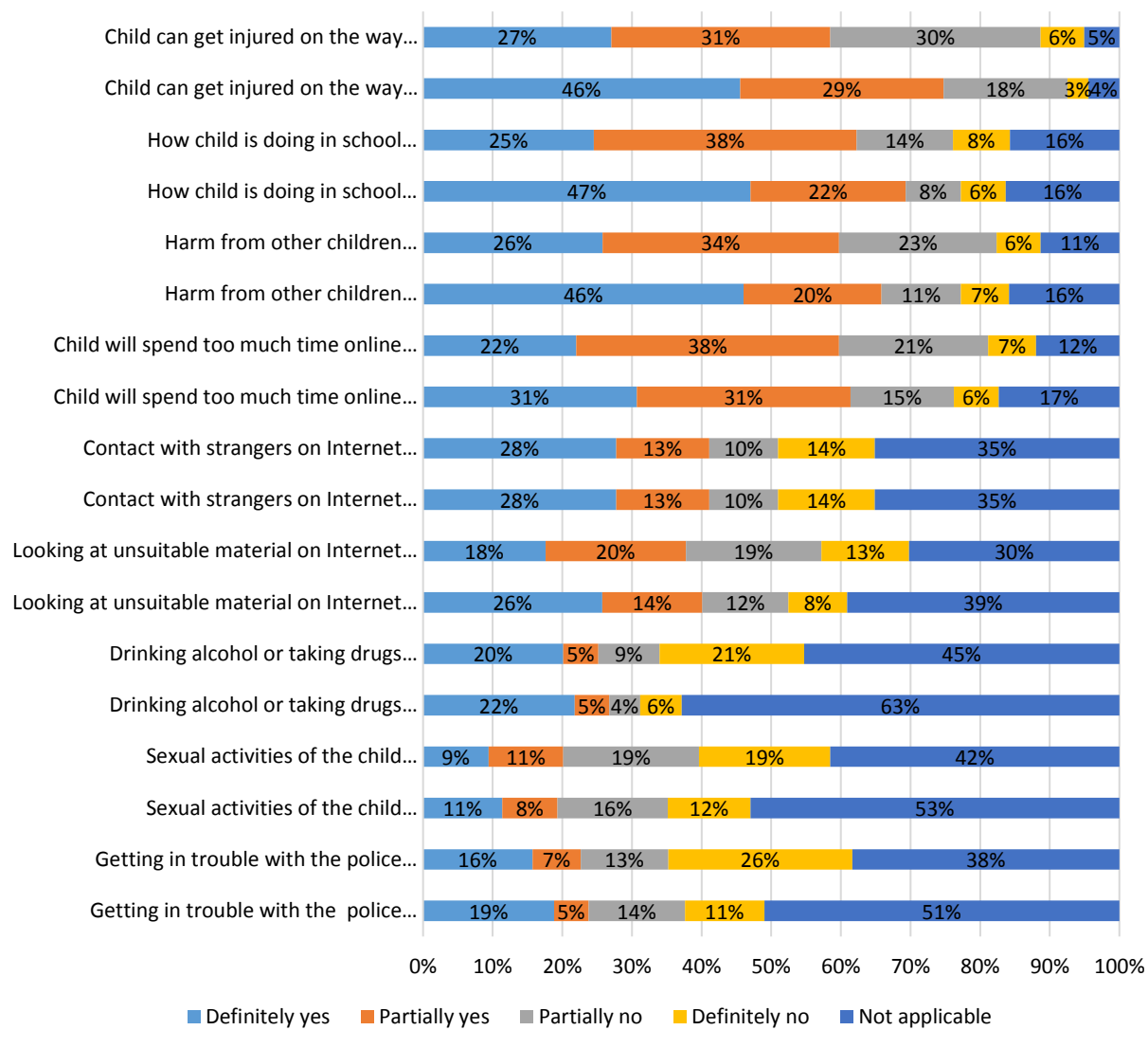And what do fathers do more often together with their children? More fathers (26%) than mothers (22%) reported playing digital games each day with children and more fathers (13%) than mothers (8%) reported playing sport daily with their children.

What problems are parents afraid of?

Figure 4 below demonstrates what fathers and mothers are afraid of when it comes to their children.

Figure 4

What are parents afraid of in relation to their child?

Category	Definitely yes	Partially yes	Partially no	Definitely no	Not applicable
Child can get injured on the way…	27%	31%	30%	6%	5%
Child can get injured on the way…	46%	29%	18%	3%	4%
How child is doing in school…	25%	38%	14%	8%	16%
How child is doing in school…	47%	22%	8%	6%	16%
Harm from other children…	26%	34%	23%	6%	11%
Harm from other children…	46%	20%	11%	7%	16%
Child will spend too much time online…	22%	38%	21%	7%	12%
Child will spend too much time online…	31%	31%	15%	6%	17%
Contact with strangers on Internet…	28%	13%	10%	14%	35%
Contact with strangers on Internet…	28%	13%	10%	14%	35%
Looking at unsuitable material on Internet…	18%	20%	19%	13%	30%
Looking at unsuitable material on Internet…	26%	14%	12%	8%	39%
Drinking alcohol or taking drugs…	20%	5%	9%	21%	45%
Drinking alcohol or taking drugs…	22%	5%	4%	6%	63%
Sexual activities of the child…	9%	11%	19%	19%	42%
Sexual activities of the child…	11%	8%	16%	12%	53%
Getting in trouble with the police…	16%	7%	13%	26%	38%
Getting in trouble with the police…	19%	5%	14%	11%	51%

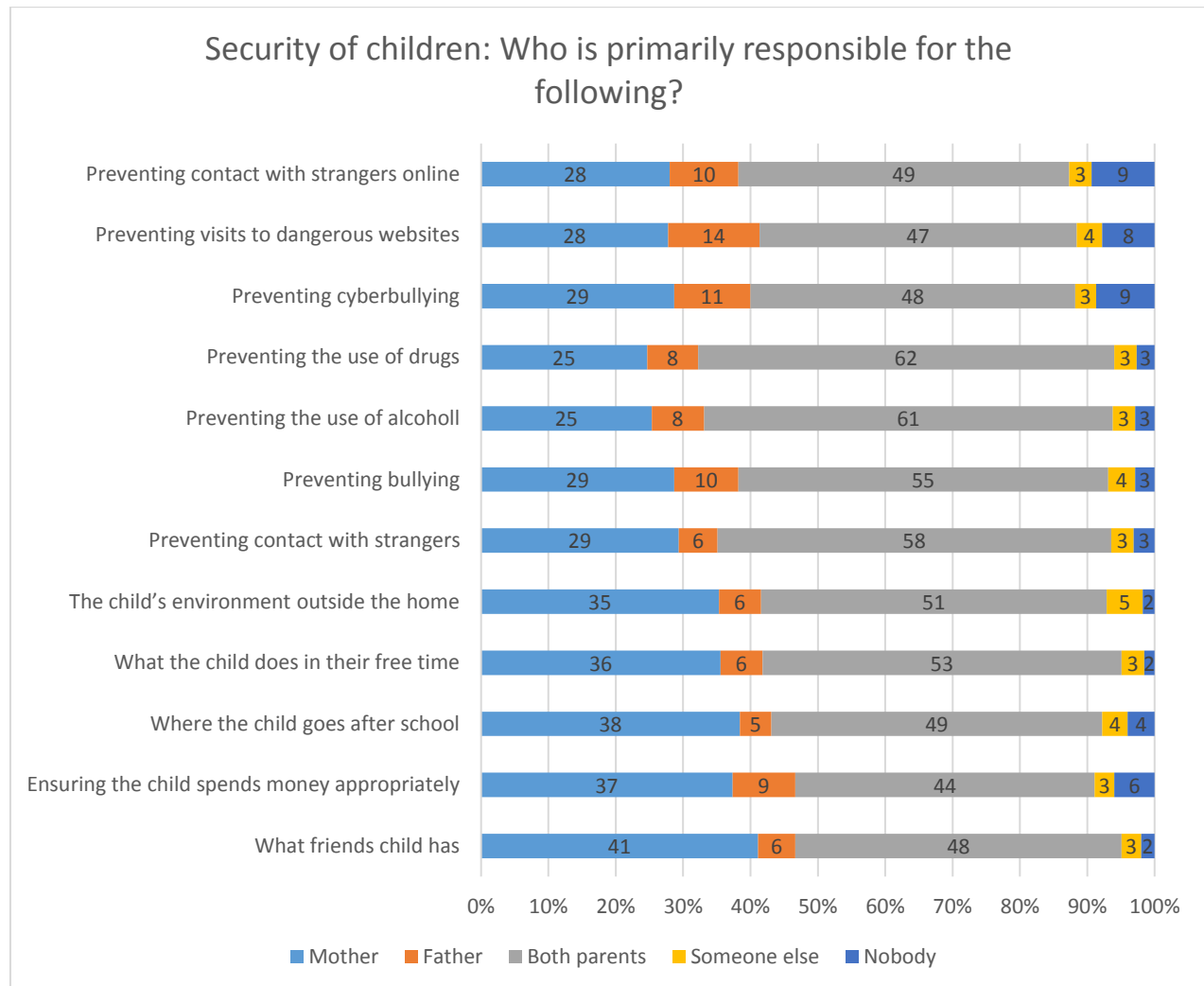Legend: ■ Definitely yes ■ Partially yes ■ Partially no ■ Definitely no ■ Not applicable

Both parents are most afraid of their child getting injured, how they are doing at school, and being harmed by other children. Mothers are generally more afraid than fathers, especially about these three issues. Interestingly, the level of worry displayed by mothers and fathers is more or less similar when we it comes to problems with the Internet: both parents are afraid that their child will spend too much time online. They are less worried about their child contacting strangers from the Internet. Another interesting point is that parents are more worried about their child viewing inappropriate content online than the sexual activities of the child. Both parents also worry more about Internet-related problems as their child gets older. They believe this is less of a problem for younger children.

Who deals with problems faced by families?

Figure 5 demonstrates who mostly deals with potential problems faced by children.

Figure 5

Security of children: Who is primarily responsible for the following?

| Category	Mother	Father	Both parents	Someone else	Nobody
Preventing contact with strangers online	28	10	49	3	9
Preventing visits to dangerous websites	28	14	47	4	8
Preventing cyberbullying	29	11	48	3	9
Preventing the use of drugs	25	8	62	3	3
Preventing the use of alcoholl	25	8	61	3	3
Preventing bullying	29	10	55	4	3
Preventing contact with strangers	29	6	58	3	3
The child's environment outside the home	35	6	51	5	2
What the child does in their free time	36	6	53	3	2
Where the child goes after school	38	5	49	4	4
Ensuring the child spends money appropriately	37	9	44	3	6
What friends child has	41	6	48	3	2

Both parents are mostly responsible for all the cited problems. When only one parent is responsible, it is mostly the mother. However, it should be noted that when children live with just one parent, that parent is usually their mother; in families with both parents, the situation is more balanced.

Mothers feel most responsible about what friends their child has, where the child is after school, what the child is doing in their free time and if the child spends money appropriately. Fathers are more often solely responsible for problems with the Internet: preventing contact with strangers online, ensuring that the child does not see dangerous websites and preventing cyberbullying. Some parents (8-9%) also stated that "nobody" was responsible for these Internet-related problems in their family.
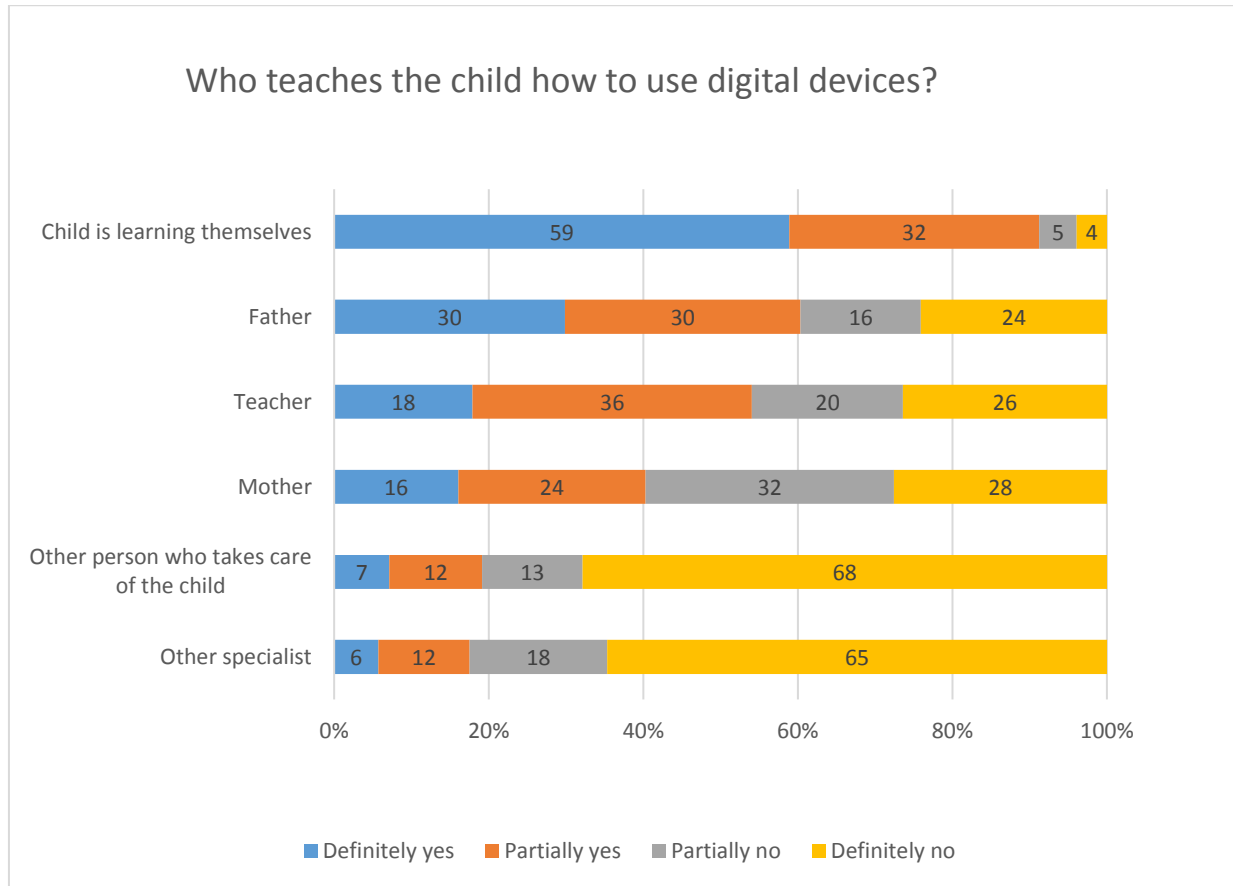
Internet usage by children

As reported by parents, 91% of children aged 5 to 17 are Internet users. There is no significant difference between boys and girls. The figure below displays Internet usage according to the age of the child.

Figure 6

Internet usage according to the age of child
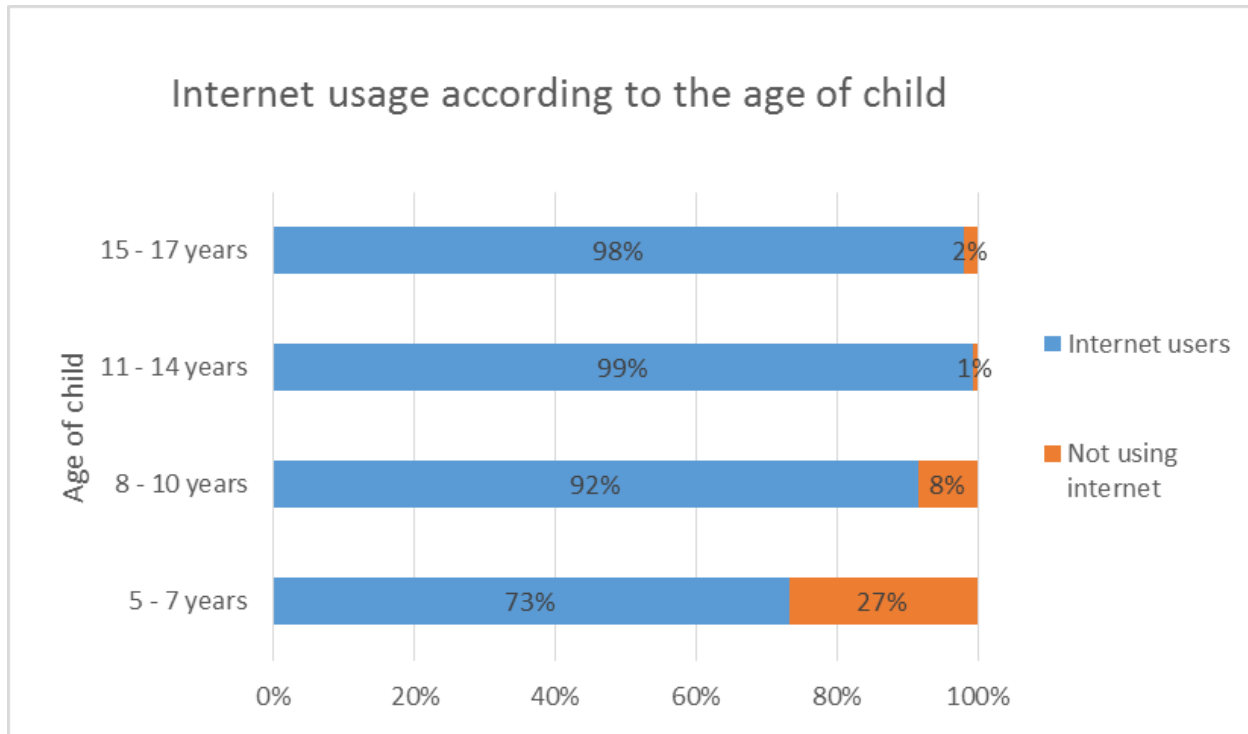
Parents reported that almost two thirds of children aged 5 to 7 use the Internet, while 92% of children aged 8 to 10 are Internet users. Almost all children aged 11 or older use the Internet.

Figure 7

Who teaches the child how to use digital devices?

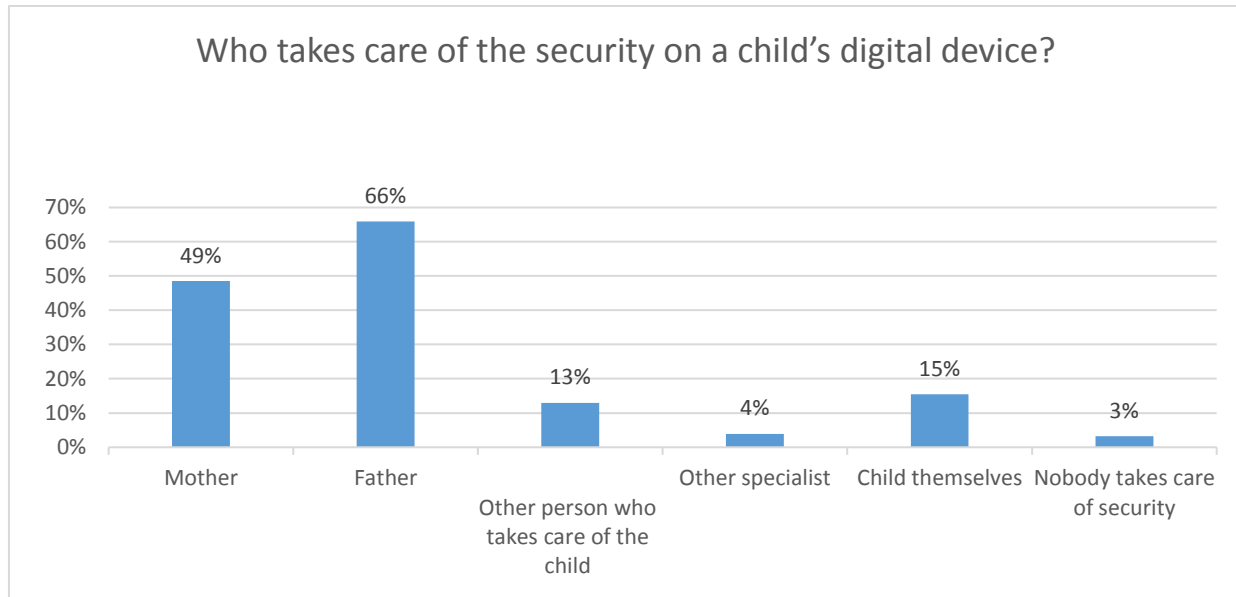|	Definitely yes	Partially yes	Partially no	Definitely no
Child is learning themselves	59	32	5	4
Father	30	30	16	24
Teacher	18	36	20	26
Mother	16	24	32	28
Other person who takes care of the child	7	12	13	68
Other specialist	6	12	18	65

This figure shows who teaches children how to use digital technologies. Most parents reported that children learn themselves and that unsupported learning increases with age. Fathers are the family members who most often teach their children how to use digital technologies.
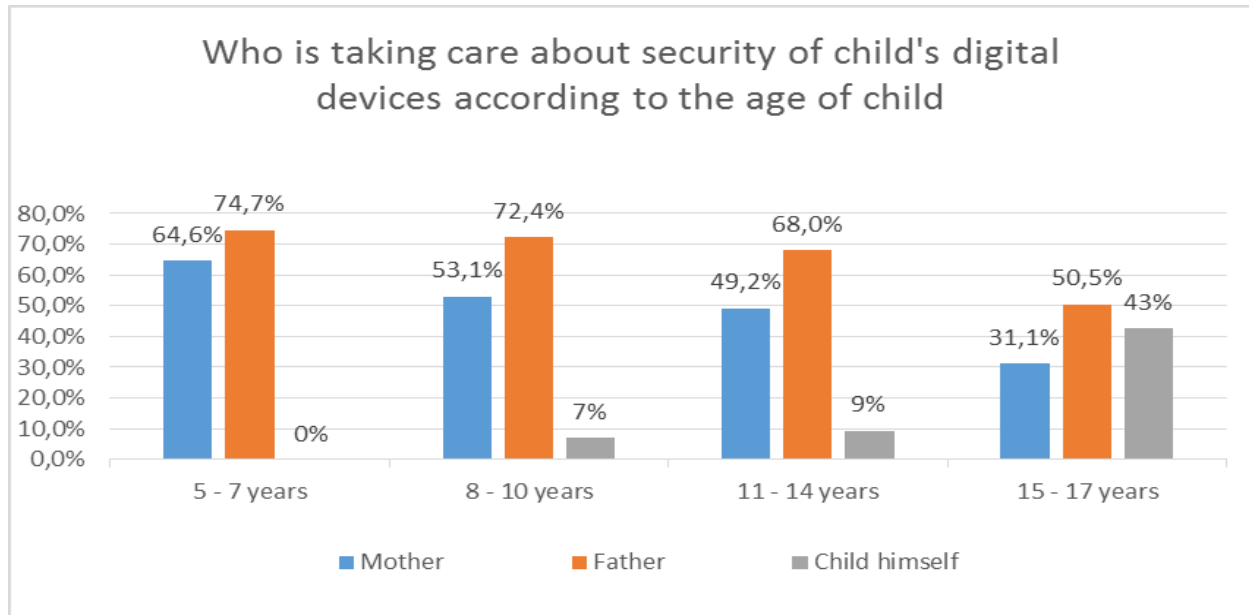
Security of digital devices

Figure 8 below shows who takes care of the security on a child's digital device.

Figure 8

Who takes care of the security on a child's digital device?

Category	Percentage
Mother	49%
Father	66%
Other person who takes care of the child	13%
Other specialist	4%
Child themselves	15%
Nobody takes care of security	3%

We can see that it is mostly fathers (66%) that take care of the security on a child's digital device. Mothers are in second place (49%). If we take into account only those families where both a mother and father are present, fathers are even more involved – 77% of them deal with security on digital devices. We can definitely say that fathers play a crucial role in securing children's digital devices in families.

Figure 9

Who is taking care about security of child's digital devices according to the age of child

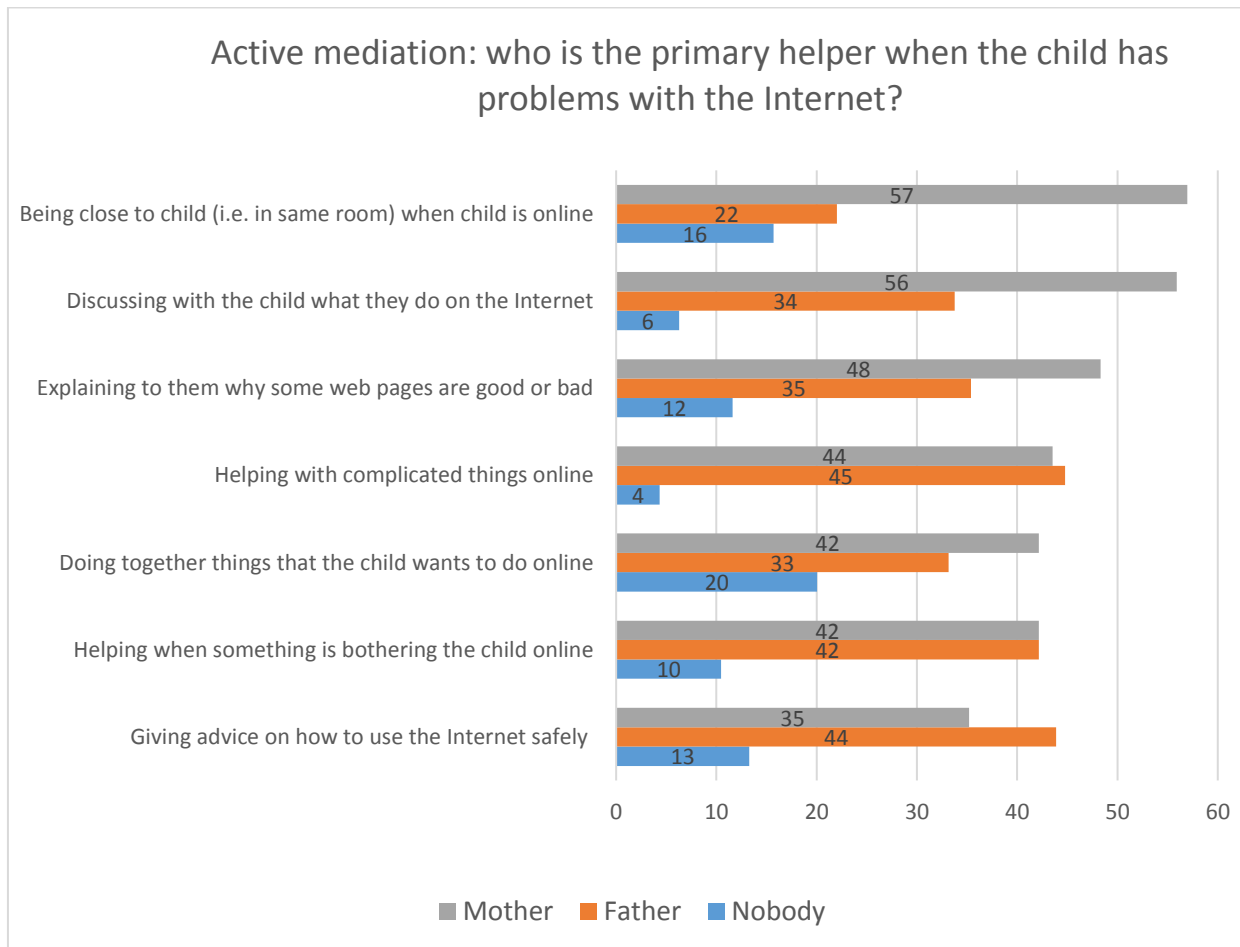|	5 - 7 years	8 - 10 years	11 - 14 years	15 - 17 years
Mother	64,6%	53,1%	49,2%	31,1%
Father	74,7%	72,4%	68,0%	50,5%
Child himself	0%	7%	9%	43%

The role of both parents in securing a child's device decreases as the child grows. By the age of 15, the child usually gets more responsibility – 43% of children aged 15 to 17 take care of security on their own devices. However, fathers, rather than mothers, still assume the leading role in this respect for all age groups.

Active parental mediation: Who helps children with their problems on the Internet?

We also asked parents about various kinds of so-called active mediation related to Internet usage. This can be described as active behaviour on the part of parents to help children with the Internet, such as discussions, using digital devices together with the child, giving advice, etc. The figure below shows who primarily helps children with Internet usage. We asked who the primary helper is, so respondents had to select only one person from the list.

Figure 10

Active mediation: who is the primary helper when the child has problems with the Internet?

Category	Mother	Father	Nobody
Being close to child (i.e. in same room) when child is online	57	22	16
Discussing with the child what they do on the Internet	56	34	6
Explaining to them why some web pages are good or bad	48	35	12
Helping with complicated things online	44	45	4
Doing together things that the child wants to do online	42	33	20
Helping when something is bothering the child online	42	42	10
Giving advice on how to use the Internet safely	35	44	13

Mothers assume the primary role when it comes to being near a child when they are using technology, speaking with them about what they are doing online, and explaining which web pages are good and which are bad. Mothers also use the Internet together with their child more often. Fathers play the leading role when children need to solve complicated things online, and they also give more advice on how to use the Internet safely.

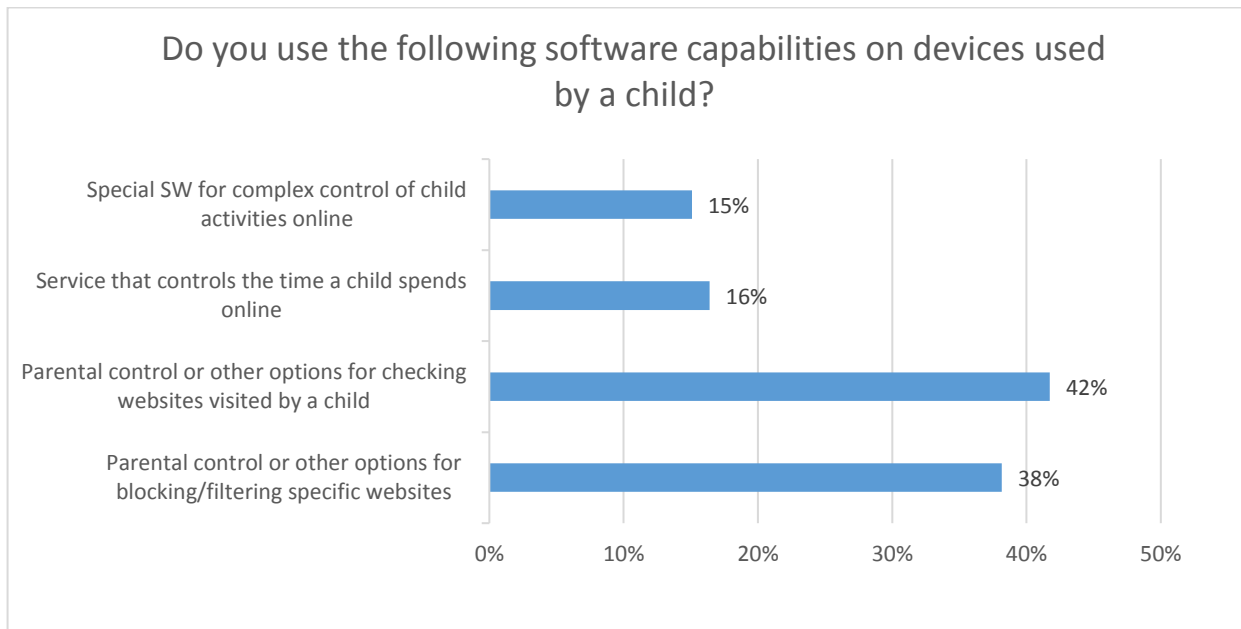## Controlling children: Who checks what children are doing online?

The following Figures show who controls the child's online activities.

Figure 11
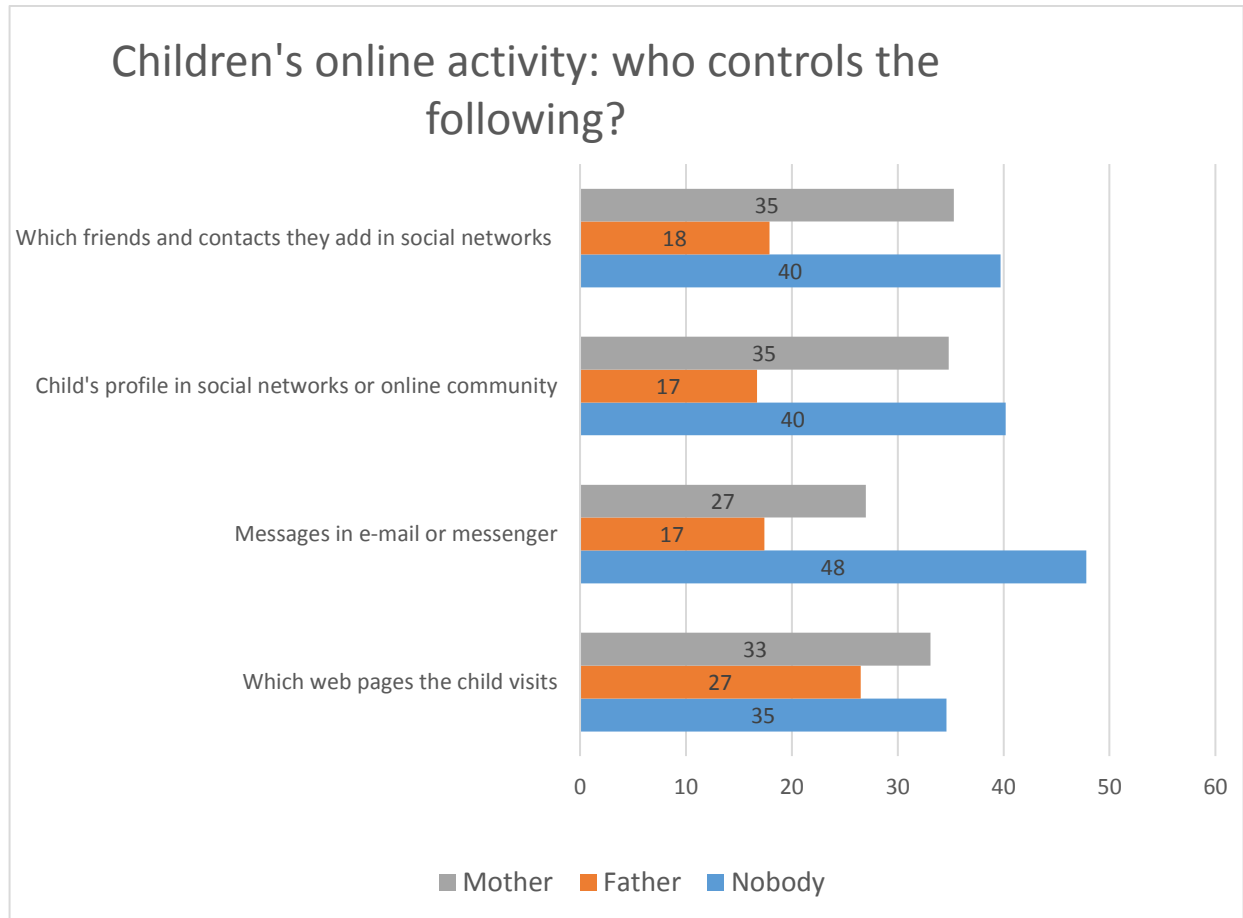
Mothers are the main controllers of children's activities on the Internet; almost half of mothers control children's communications via e-mail or messengers. Around 40% of mothers control their child's social networking sites (i.e. Facebook), the friends and contacts added and their child's profile in general. But we can clearly see that not all children are controlled – between 35% and 48% of the respondents said there is no control in these areas.

Figure 19

Do you use the following software capabilities on devices used by a child?

Special SW for complex control of child activities online	15%
Service that controls the time a child spends online	16%
Parental control or other options for checking websites visited by a child	42%
Parental control or other options for blocking/filtering specific websites	38%

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Some parents control their child's activities with the help of software tools. However, only 15% of parents use an integrated tool to control their child's activities on the Internet. A bigger proportion of parents (42%) check the websites children visit, and 38% of parents block or filter specific websites for their children.

What do parents thank their own parents for?

In this research, we also wanted to get an idea of what things people appreciated about their own parents and what they thank them for. Here are some examples of what they said:

"Which things in life are you thankful to your <u>mother</u> for?"

- I thank my mother for her love and life.
- I thank her for listening to me in times of difficulty.
- I thank my mother for her kindness and creating a nice home.
- I thank my mother for teaching me to be tolerant and creative.
- I thank her for her love, support, peace and positive thinking.
- I thank my mother for her wisdom and love.
- I thank her for her love and help in any situation.
- I thank her for understanding, empathizing with problems of others.
- I thank my mother for my education, her support and continuous help.

"Which things in life are you thankful to your <u>father</u> for?"

- I could always rely on my father, he taught me to respect people and work, to love reading and nature.
- Father taught me to look around me and to think about what I see.
- Father taught me to see life in a positive way and also helped me to set out in life.
- I thank father for helping me in difficult situations and his support, helping with my children and financially.
- My father showed me it is possible to live modestly with satisfaction.
- I thank my father for giving me enough freedom and supporting me at the same time.
- I thank my father for teaching me how to use computers.
- My father taught me a sense of honor, when I do something I do it properly.
- I thank my father for life, love and understanding.
- My father taught me humility, how to love people and animals and to appreciate the little things.

We cannot generalise anything from a few quotes – this just gives an idea of the things people are thankful for. There were also some negative expressions, and obviously not everyone has an "ideal" relationship with their parents. But the majority of quotes were positive, with parents, as anticipated, mostly giving simple answers such as "for life" or "for love". If we want to gain a deeper understanding of why people are grateful to their parents, further qualitative research is needed.

Conclusions

In this report, we focused on the roles of mothers and fathers in ensuring children's safety both online and offline. We revealed that the role of fathers and mothers is different. Both parents are most afraid of their child being injured, how they are doing at school and about being harmed but other children, but mothers are more afraid of these things than fathers. If the family consists of two parents, both are primarily responsible for the offline security of children, but if just one parent takes responsibility, it is more often the mother. However, fathers are more likely to teach their children how to use digital technologies and they are also mostly responsible for the security of digital devices used by children. Both parents talk to children about problems they may have with the Internet, but fathers give more advice on how to use the Internet safely. On the other hand, mothers are more likely to monitor and control what their child is doing on the Internet. Only a small proportion of families (15%) uses complex software tools to ensure a child's security online.

It should be noted that there are also huge differences in Internet usage between children of different ages, and digital parenting develops as the child grows. We recorded these differences in the course of our research, but they have not been presented in detail in this report due to limited space. However, in general, older children have more personal responsibility when it comes to using digital devices and parents sometimes rely on their child's knowledge or judgement, which is not always correct. Even for children aged from 5 to 7 years old, many parents think the risks of the Internet are "not applicable", especially when young children are not using social networking sites. This approach can be very risky because children may face risks not only while social networking but also in other areas, such as online gaming sites (see Chaudron, 2015). We recommend that parents ensure the online safety of their children from an early age.

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