MUNI FSS Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society

What parents (don’t) know about online activities of their adolescent children?

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Contents

1 Key Findings 4
2 Introduction 6
3 Social Media Platforms 7
4 Personal Information Sharing 8
5 Risky Online Interactions 14
6 Risky Content Exposure 16
7 Generative AI Usage 18
8 Parental (Over)confidence With Their Answers 20
9 Conclusion 22
10 Methodology 24
11 References 26

Key Findings 01

1.

Social media platforms are commonly used by adolescents under the age of 13, the minimum age set by the platforms. More than half of 11–12-year-olds use TikTok and Instagram, and more than one-third use Snapchat. In the vast majority of cases, parents are aware of their children's underage social media use.

2.

On social media, more than half of adolescents share pictures or videos showing themselves (57%) or their current location (58%). Posting other personal information or content (e.g., pictures of family, personal data, or content depicting them or their friends engaging in substance use) is less common. Fewer than a quarter of parents remain unaware that their children share pictures of themselves, their locations, or their families. A bit over half of parents are unaware of their children sharing personal data or content depicting substance use.

3.

Sharing content with peers via personal messages is rather popular, with more than two-thirds of adolescents sharing pictures of themselves (78%) or their current location (72%). Similar to sharing on social media, other personal information or content is shared less. Only a minority of parents are not aware of adolescents sending pictures or videos depicting themselves (6%) or their location (7%) to their peers. Comparatively, more parents are unaware of adolescents sending personal data (including login information) or content depicting them or their friends using substances (44-52%).

4.

In comparison, sharing personal information with people whom adolescents know only from the internet is reported by only a minority (less than one quarter) of adolescents, with more sensitive information (personal data, content depicting substance use, or login details) being shared the least (12% or less). Across these disclosures, between 46% and 59% of parents are unaware that their child shares such information with people they meet online.

5.

Across three types of risky online interactions (i.e., sexting, sexual solicitations, and aggressive messages), receiving such messages is more prevalent than sending them. The most common experience is with aggressive messages (receiving 41%, sending 18%). Both sexual interactions are reported less (receiving 16-19%, sending: 6-8%). Across these interactions, between 44% and 51% of parents are unaware that their child is receiving or sending such messages.

7.

Across the risky activities, gender differences in prevalence were apparent, with girls typically (but not always) reporting the respective behavior or experience more often than boys (e.g., sharing contents, being exposed to thinspiration, and sexual interactions).

6.

Exposure to risky content (e.g., violent content, thinspiration, cyberhate) is reported by 34% to 49% of adolescents, depending on the respective content. The percentage of parents unaware of such exposures is also rather stable here, between 32% and 43%.

8.

However, the level of parental awareness typically does not differ between adolescent boys and girls (or the difference is small). The variation in awareness thus seems to be driven by the differences in the nature of the activity (its prevalence and riskiness) rather than adolescents' gender.

9.

Overall, underestimating parents (i.e., those unaware of adolescents' particular behaviors/ experiences) were quite certain of their answers. Despite being wrong, they were mostly or very certain their child did not experience or engage in the respective activity.

Introduction 02

This report is guided by a question about how much parents of early adolescents are aware of what their children do and experience online. **We focus on early adolescents** (i.e., children aged 11-14), as this is the developmental period when children start to use digital media more frequently, particularly for socializing. This translates into their stronger presence on social media (browsing, posting, and interacting with others more often) and, generally, higher exposure to online risks (Smahel et al., 2020). At the same time, this is still a period when parents play an important role as socialization agents and a source of support in cases when it is needed (Kaiser et al., 2020).

To provide such support or intervene in a risky situation, parents need to be aware that it is happening, as a lack of awareness simply prevents them from reacting. Therefore, **this report presents the prevalence of selected online experiences among early adolescents**, and, among those who reported engaging in the respective activity/experience, we present **how many parents underestimate its occurrence and how confident they are in their answers**. We focus on personal information sharing (on social media profiles, in private messages with peers, and with people met online), risky online interactions (sexting, sexual solicitations, aggressive messages), and risky content exposure (self-harm, thinspiration, cyberhate, content depicting illegal activities, sexual content, and violent content). Given the current debates on age limits for social media use and the popularity of generative AI, we also examine the prevalence of these behaviors, although we do not consider them risky in the same sense as the activities listed above.

The report is based on a comparison of **data from 1,562 parent-adolescent dyads**. We asked both adolescents (11-14 years old, M = 12.51, 51.4% boys) and their parents (24-71 years old, M = 43.63, 59.2% mothers) the same set of questions. Adolescents reported their online activities/experiences, and parents reported online activities/experiences of their adolescent child participating in the survey. We were interested in those adolescents who reported engaging in the activity at least once in the previous six months. Parents of these adolescents, who also reported that their child engaged in the activity at least once, are understood as parents with accurate knowledge. **Underestimating parents are those who reported their child did not engage in the activity (never in the past six months), while the child admitted they did.**

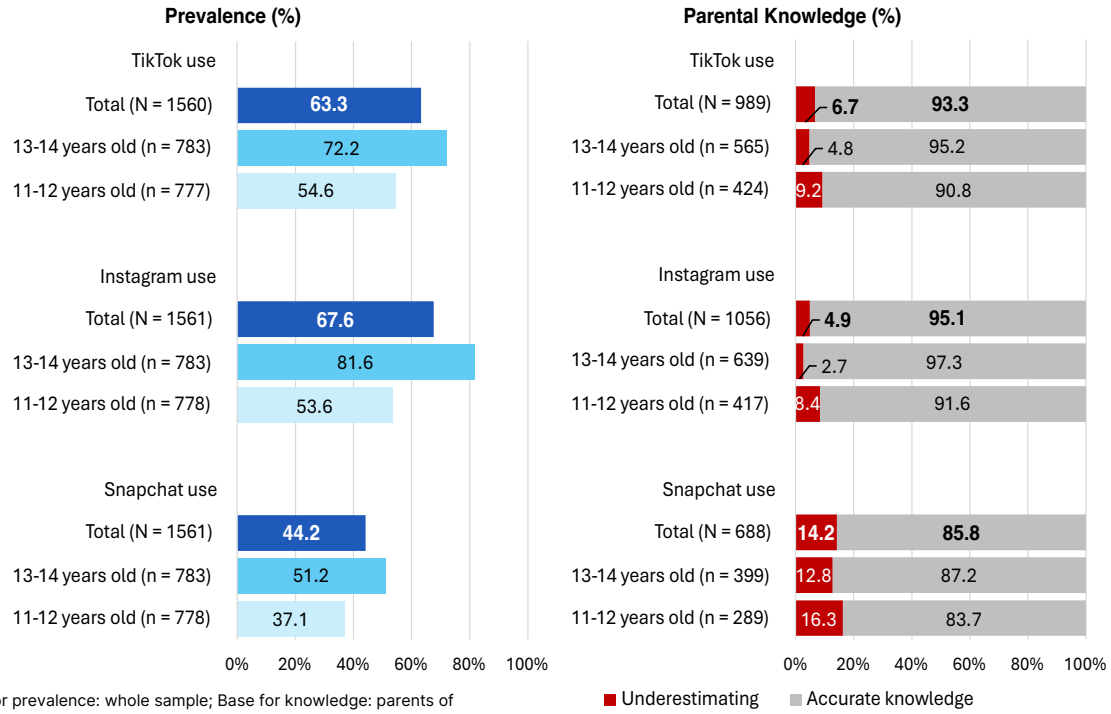
We present the findings for the whole sample, and separately for boys and girls. Since the age range was already narrowed to early adolescents (11-14), we do not distinguish participants by age, except in the very first section, which focuses on social media participation in general. Here, we were interested in showing how many children under the age of 13 (i.e., the official minimum age on social media platforms) use social media and how many parents are aware of this.

Social Media Platforms

03

The first section focuses on the general usage of three social media platforms that are currently most popular among adolescents: TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. (Blahošová et al., 2023). TikTok and Instagram are used by approximately two-thirds of early adolescents (63% and 68%, respectively), whereas Snapchat is less popular, used by 44% (Figure 1). A clear age pattern exists, with all three platforms used more by older adolescents (aged 13-14) than younger adolescents (aged 11-12). Yet, even among the younger group, more than half of adolescents use TikTok and Instagram, and more than one-third use Snapchat. These represent underage users, since 13 is currently the minimum age required by the platforms. Importantly, the vast majority of parents are aware of this usage. In the case of TikTok and Instagram, fewer than 10% of parents underestimate their underage children's presence on these platforms (and even fewer underestimate social media usage among older groups). In the case of Snapchat, the percentage is somewhat higher, with 16% underestimating parents, likely reflecting that Snapchat is generally used less. Overall, the parents seem well informed about the social media their children use.

Fig. 1 **Adolescents' social media use**
% of adolescents who used a specific social media platform at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

Personal Information Sharing

04

In this report, we conceptualized personal information as information that could potentially identify the adolescent. Thus, we focused on sharing photos that depict the adolescent or their family members, their current location, and personal data such as full name, address, birthdate, or login information. For these types of shared information, the primary risks include third-party privacy violations (including use of the information for marketing purposes or identity theft), cyberaggression, or the ability to locate the adolescent in the physical world (Sun et al., 2026).

In addition, we also asked adolescents about content depicting them or their friends engaging in substance use (i.e., drinking alcohol, smoking or vaping, or taking drugs). In these cases, the activities violate social (and legal) norms, thus posing a specific risk beyond potential privacy violations (Paluckaitė & Žardeckaitė-Matulaitienė, 2021).

In the questionnaire, we asked adolescents about sharing these contents in three contexts: (1) posting the contents on their social media profiles, (2) sharing them in direct messages with their peers (who they know personally), and (3) in direct messages with people met online (who they do not know personally).

Instructions to adolescents:

1. You can add your own content (text, photos, videos) to your social media profile, either as a status/post or a story (Stories or Reels). We don't mean posting via direct/private messages, but posting on your profile.

In the last 6 months, how often have you shared the following on your social media profile?

---

2. People often message each other over the internet, not only through social media sites but also through other applications (e.g., WhatsApp). Next, we will ask about such private messages.

In the last 6 months, how often have you sent the following information in private messages to peers you know personally (e.g., friends, classmates)?

---

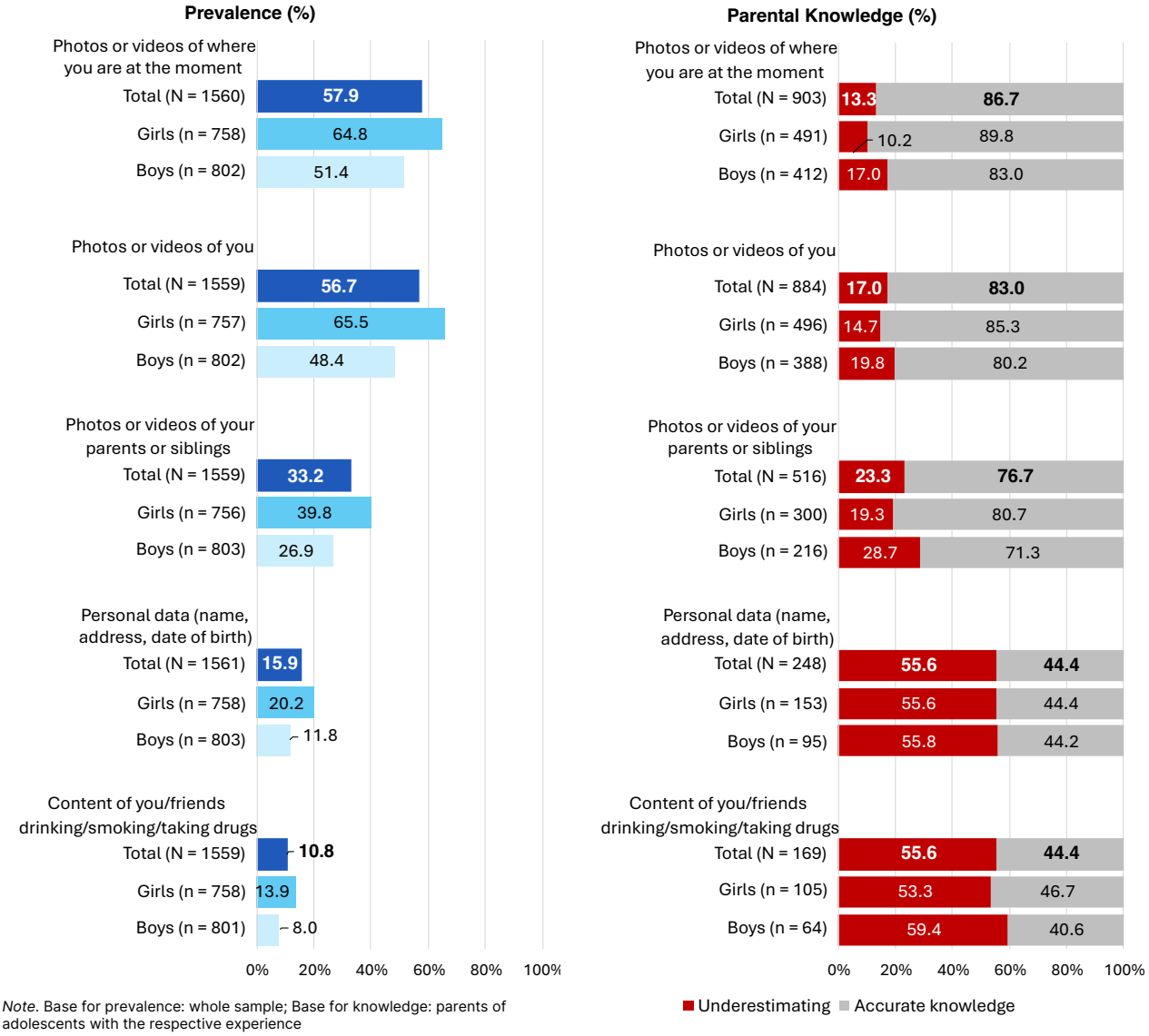
3. Some people talk online with people they don't know in person. This means that they have never met each other; they only know each other through the internet, e.g., from social media sites or games.

In the last 6 months, how often have you sent the following information in messages to people you don't know in person?

Sharing Personal Information on Social Media

As shown in Figure 2, most commonly, adolescents reported posting photos or videos of their current location (58%) and of themselves (57%) on social media. One-third of adolescents reported posting content showing their parents and siblings (33%). Lastly, posting of identifying personal data or content depicting substance use (both comparatively riskier activities than the others) dropped sharply, as only 16% and 11% engaged in them, respectively. A statistically significant gender difference in prevalence was found for all content categories. Girls reported a higher frequency of sharing, with the biggest difference for sharing pictures of themselves (66% of girls vs. 48% of boys).

Fig. 2 **Posting personal information on social media**
% of adolescents who posted it at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

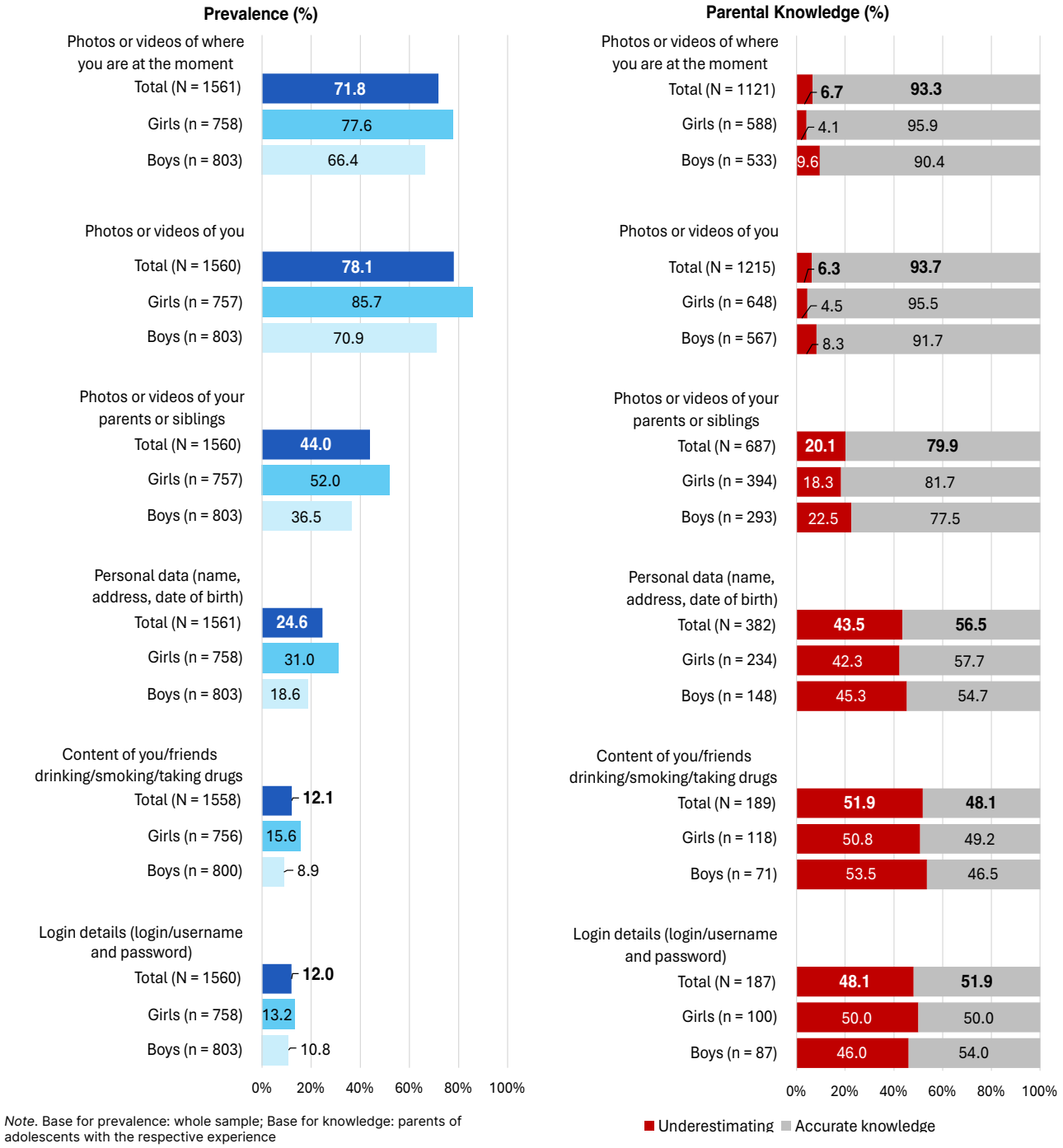
Regarding parental awareness, parents' reports were mostly accurate about the content adolescents share most on social media. The least underestimated activities were adolescents' posting of photos and videos of their current location (13%) or themselves (17%). Less than one-third of the parents underestimated adolescents' posting photos or videos of their family members (23%). On the contrary, more than half of the parents underestimated their child's posting personal data (56%), and content showing substance use (56%). The parents overall underestimated the content shared by boys more; the gender difference was statistically significant for most types of content except for personal data and substance use content. The differences, although significant, were rather small, with much larger differences between contents than between genders.

Sharing Personal Information in Private Messages With Known Peers

The prevalence of adolescents sharing personal information in private messages to peers is shown in Figure 3. The overall pattern of sharing is quite similar to what adolescents share on their social media profiles, with most adolescents sending photos or videos of themselves (78%) or photos where they currently are (72%) to their peers. Fewer, but still almost half of the adolescents, send photos or videos of family members (44%) to their peers. Messaging more sensitive content was generally less frequent. A quarter of adolescents reported sending personal data (25%). Sending content depicting substance use was among the least popular (12%). In the part of the survey focused on direct messages, we added a question about sending login details (username and passwords), which was not included in the part focused on social media posting. This sharing was similarly unpopular, with only 12% of adolescents reporting that they did so. For most types of content sent to peers, there was a statistically significant difference across genders. Girls reported sending each type of content more often than boys, with the largest difference reported for sending photos or videos of themselves (86% of girls vs. 71% of boys). The exception was sending login details, which was similarly unpopular among both girls and boys (13% of girls vs. 11% of boys).

Parents underestimated the least the extent to which their child sends messages to peers with photos or videos of themselves (6%) or those showing their location (7%). The underestimation slightly increased for adolescents' sending photos or videos with their family members (20%). A sharper increase of underestimation was apparent for their child's sending personal data (44%), login details (48%), or content depicting substance use (52%). The last three riskier types of content did not show significant gender differences. On the other hand, parents of boys were significantly less aware than parents of girls of their child sending messages containing photos or videos of themselves or their location. The gender differences in underestimation were, however, generally small (less than 3 percentage points).

Fig. 3 **Sharing personal information in private messages with peers**
% of adolescents who shared it with peers at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge

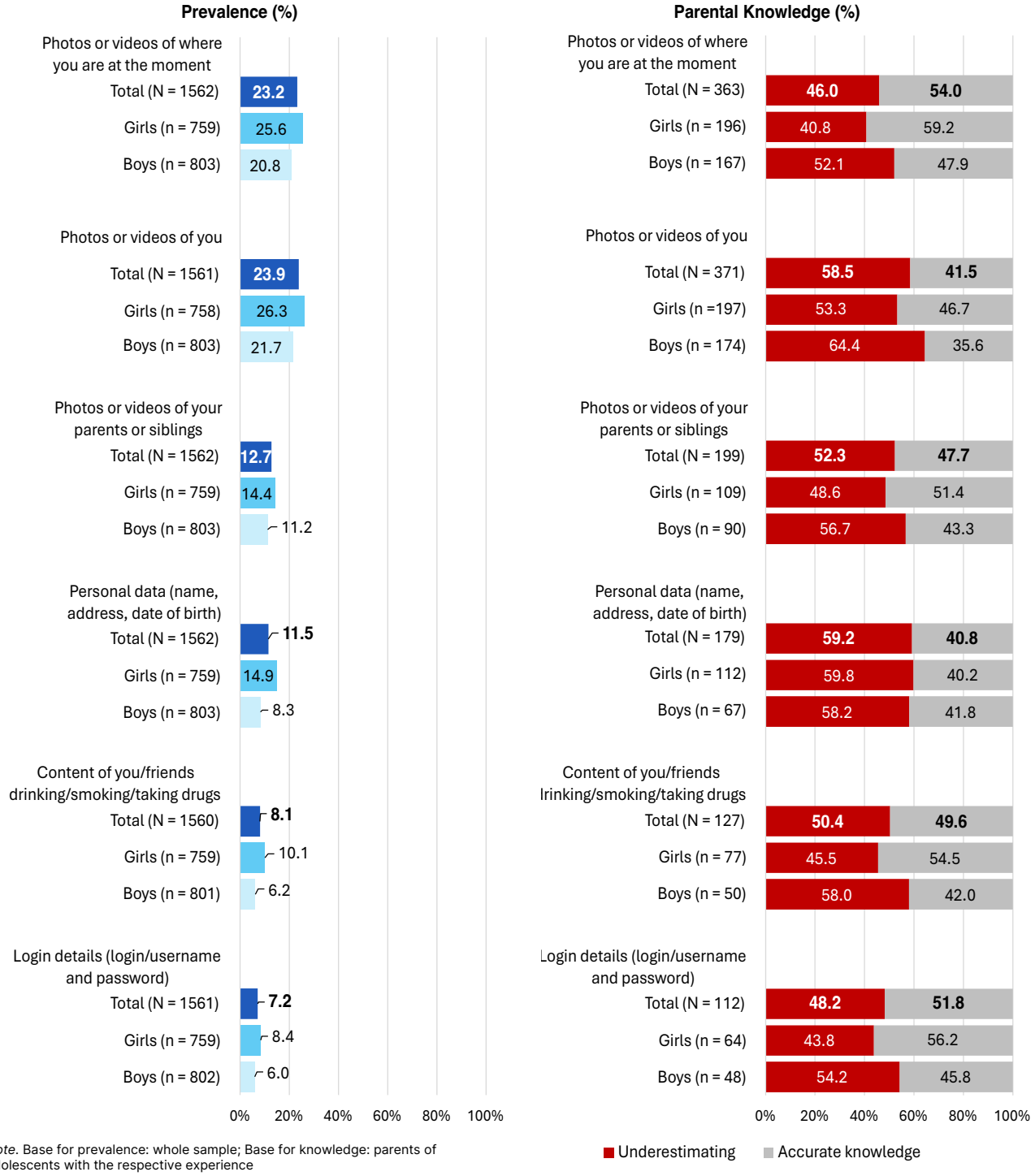


Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

Sharing Personal Information in Private Messages With People Met Online

Figure 4 shows how many adolescents share personal information in private messages with people known only from the internet. Notably, far fewer adolescents do this than share personal information on social media profiles or in direct messages with known peers. Across all types of personal content, fewer than a quarter of adolescents send it to people they met online. Similar to the pattern found for sharing in social media profiles and messages to peers, sending pictures of themselves (24%) and their location (23%) were reported most

Fig. 4 **Sharing personal information in private messages with people met online**
% of adolescents who shared it with strangers at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

often. Other types of content were shared less - approximately one in ten adolescents sent photos or videos of family members (13%) and personal data (12%). Sharing login details (8%) and content depicting substance use (7%) remain the least reported. Statistically significant differences between genders were found in sharing pictures of oneself, location, and personal data, as well as content depicting substance use. In these cases, more girls than boys shared such content with people they met online.

The overall pattern of parental awareness differs from that identified in sharing content on social media and in messages to peers. There, parents were well aware of children sharing several types of content. However, when content is shared with people met online, a comparatively high proportion of parents underestimate their children's sharing practices. The proportion of underestimating parents ranges from 46% for photos displaying the current location to 59% for sharing personal data. The gender differences were statistically significant for most categories, except for personal data sharing. Parents of boys were less aware of these behaviors, with differences ranging from 8 to 12 percentage points.

Risky Online Interactions

05

This section focuses on adolescents' risky online interactions, specifically, both sending and receiving sexting, sexual solicitations, and aggressive messages. Sexting refers to the exchange of sexually suggestive or explicit messages, images, or videos of oneself through digital media (Klettke et al., 2014). **Sexting** can be benign and possibly beneficial, particularly when consensual and within established relationships, and can play an important part in the development of adolescents' sexuality and identity (Madigan et al., 2018). However, this activity, especially when non-consensual, is also linked to potential risks including reputational harms, bullying and cyberbullying, or higher stress (Doyle et al., 2021). Younger adolescents also tend to report more harm than older adolescents after receiving sexting (Livingstone et al., 2011). **Online sexual solicitation** refers to sending or receiving messages that ask or pressure someone to engage in sexual conversations, create and share self-generated sexual content, or participate in other sexually explicit interactions (Schulz et al., 2016). It is a particularly concerning form of online risk, because it involves explicit requests that can make recipients feel stressed, depressed, anxious, offended, harassed, or shocked (Klettke et al., 2019; Lisztwan Honusová, Dedkova, et al., 2026). Lastly, **online aggressive messages** (i.e., sending or receiving insults intended to cause harm) are similarly perceived as unpleasant and linked to distress, loneliness, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction (Kowalski et al., 2019).

Instructions to adolescents:

In the following questions, we're no longer just talking about people you don't know personally, but about anyone you may be in contact with online. So think about any messages you receive or send over the internet, regardless of who you send them to or who send them to you.

Sexting: People do various things on the internet. One of these is sexting - that is, sending sexually explicit or suggestive messages or photos/videos of themselves, e.g. in a provocative pose or naked.

Sexual solicitations: Sometimes you may also receive unsolicited messages or requests with sexual undertone. For example, someone may ask for your nude or provocative photos of you, ask what you're wearing, or make sexual suggestions.

Aggressive messages: Sometimes people use the internet to insult each other or send each other aggressive messages intended to hurt a person.

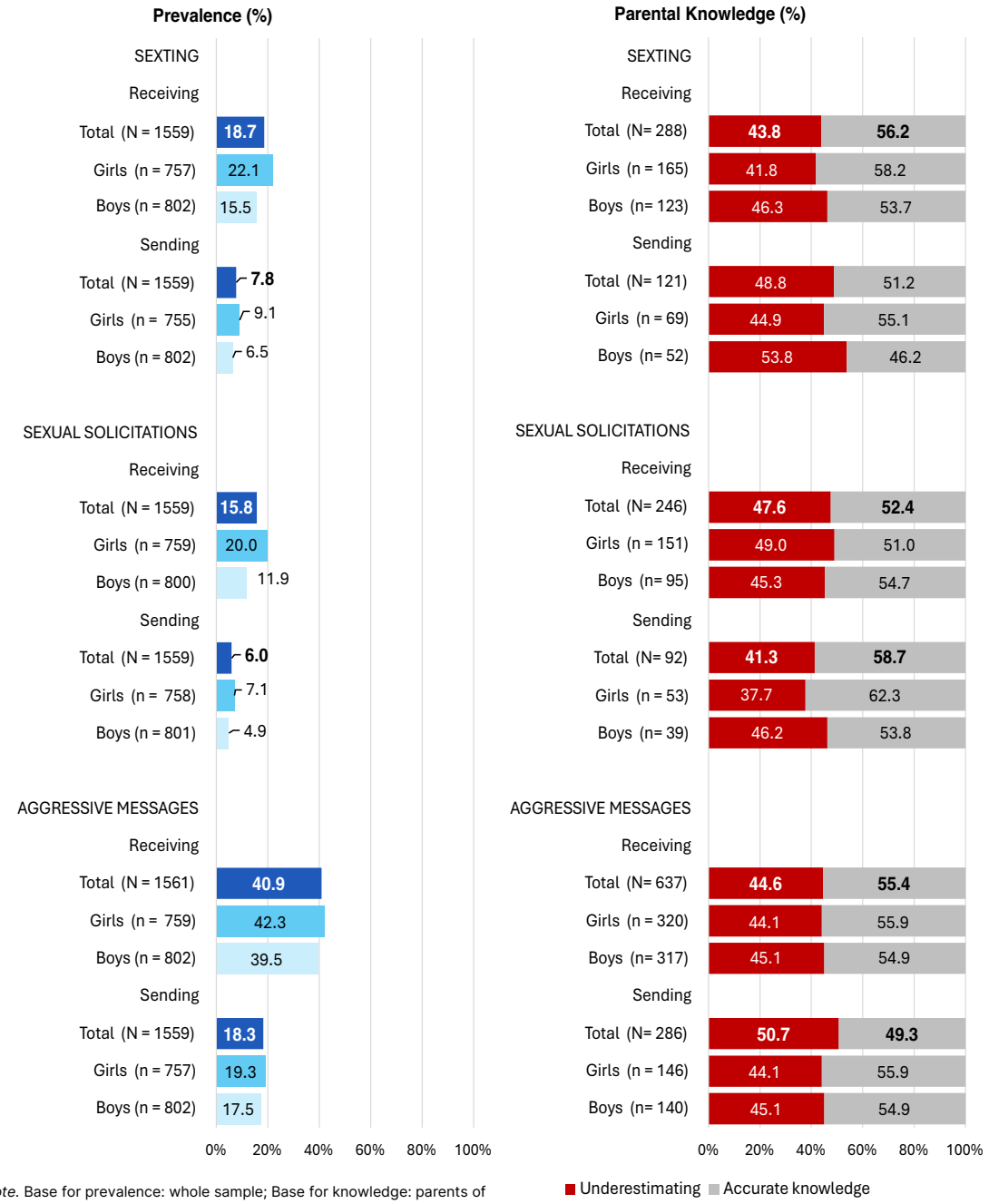
For each, we asked two questions:

How often in the last 6 months have you received such a message, from anyone?
How often have you sent such a message to someone else in the last 6 months?

Figure 5 shows the prevalence of examined risky interactions. Overall, being the recipient in these interactions was more common than being the sender. Receiving aggressive messages (41%) was also more prevalent than receiving sexting (19%) or receiving sexual solicitations (16%). Similarly, sending aggressive messages was reported by 18% of adolescents, while sending sexts (8%) and sexual solicitations (6%) were reported more rarely. Significant gender differences emerged in receiving sexual messages, where more girls than boys reported receiving sexting (girls 22%, boys 16%) as well as sexual solicitation messages (girls 20%, boys 12%). For receiving aggressive messages and for sending any type of these messages, the prevalence did not differ between boys and girls.

Parents were least aware of adolescents sending aggressive messages (51%), sending sexts (49%), and receiving sexual solicitations (48%; Figure 2). However, parental underestimation was common across every risky interaction examined. It reached its lowest point for sending sexual solicitations, yet even there, 41% of parents underestimated their child's involvement. No significant gender differences in parental underestimation were found.

Fig. 5 Risky online interactions
% of adolescents who experienced it at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

Risky Content Exposure

06

In this section, we focus on potentially risky content that adolescents may encounter online (e.g., on social media), discounting content sent in private messages. Specifically, we examined exposure to content involving self-harm, thinspiration (i.e., promoting unrealistic body ideals), cyberhate (i.e., hateful content targeting groups or individuals based on characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, or religion), illegal activities (e.g., drug use, vandalism), sexual content, and violent content. These contents are potentially risky, because they display behaviors or attitudes that can lead to harm, either to oneself or others, especially when viewed uncritically (Smahel et al., 2020).

Instructions to adolescents:

When people use the internet, they can see all sorts of things shared publicly - it can be on social media, but it can also be on other places like YouTube or other websites.

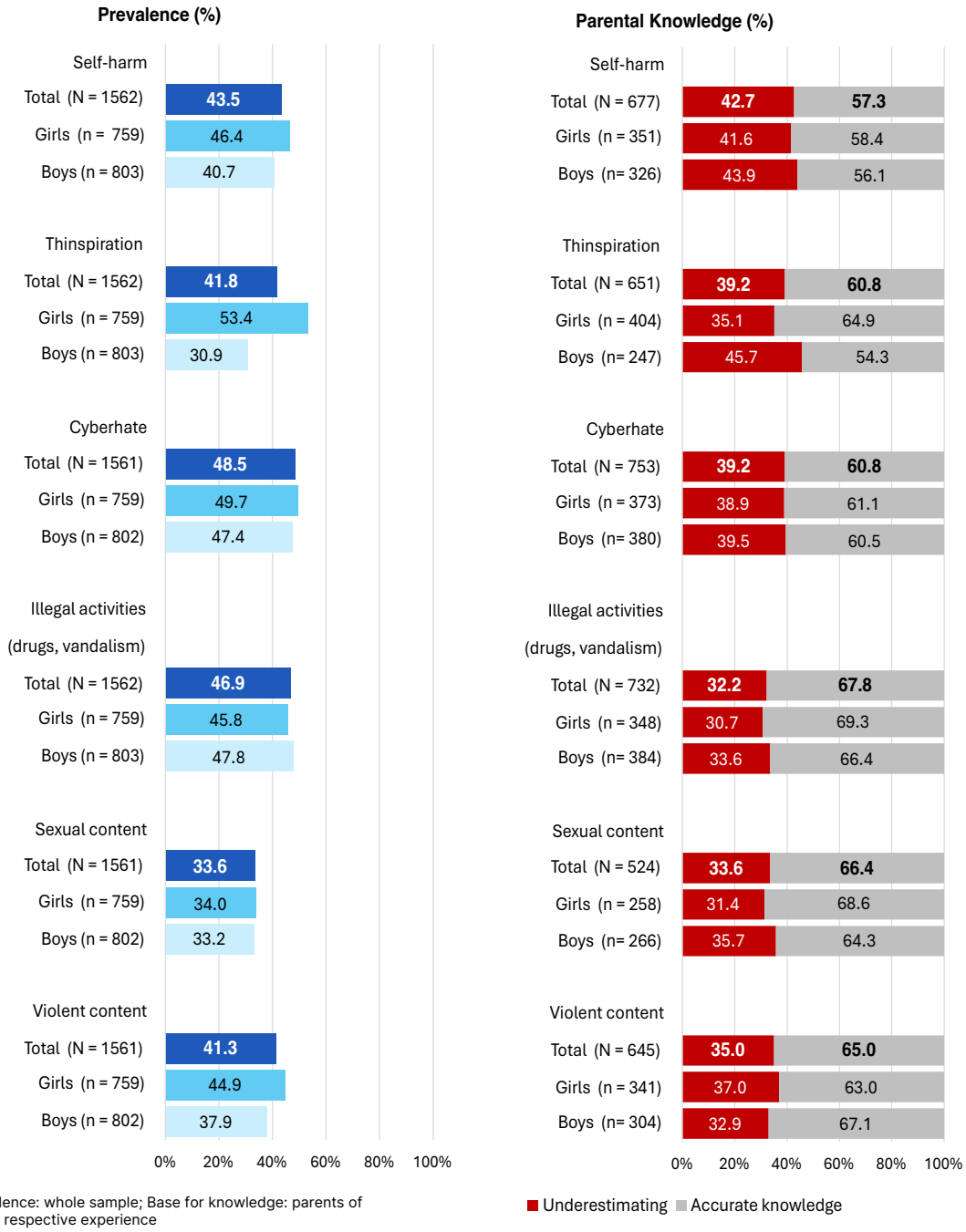
How often have you seen or not seen the following things on the internet in the last 6 months? Don't include things from private messages.

Posts, photos or videos showing...
...the ways that someone can physically harm or hurt themselves.
... ways of being very thin (e.g., anorexia or bulimia, or 'thinspiration' - the motivation to be extremely thin)
... hateful content that attacks certain groups or individuals (e.g., people with different skin color, religion, nationality or sexual orientation).
... illegal or socially inappropriate behavior such as drug use or vandalism (destroying or breaking other people's belongings)
... content of a sexual nature, e.g., depicting naked people or people having sex.
... cruel or violent behavior, for example of people deliberately hurting other people or animals.

Exposure to various types of potentially harmful online content in the last six months was reported by slightly less than half of adolescents in each case (Figure 6). Exposure to cyberhate-related content was the most common (49%). Seeing online posts about illegal activities, such as drug use and vandalism, was reported by 47% of adolescents. Exposure to content related to self-harm (44%), thinspiration (42%), and violence (41%) were reported less, and the least frequent was exposure to sexual content (34%). Regarding gender differences, seeing content depicting self-harm (46% vs. 41%), thinspiration (53% vs. 31%), and violence (45% vs. 38%) was significantly more reported by girls than boys.

Parental underestimation ranged from 32% to 43% across the different content types. Most underestimation occurred for content depicting self-harm (43%), followed by thinspiration and cyberhate (both 39%). Parents were a bit more aware of their adolescent children being exposed to illegal activities (32% underestimating), sexual content (34%), and violent content (35%). Except for thinspiration, where more parents of girls than parents of boys reported accurately, there were no other significant gender differences.

Fig. 6 Exposure to potentially harmful content
% of adolescents who have seen it at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge.



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

Generative AI Usage

07

This section examines adolescents' use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI). Unlike the activities in the previous chapters, which were considered risky, we did not ask about risky GAI usage. Given the relative novelty of this technology, we opted instead for a more general approach, asking about four typical GAI usage types: for schoolwork, to look up information (outside school-related purposes), for encouragement/support, and just for fun.

Instructions to adolescents:

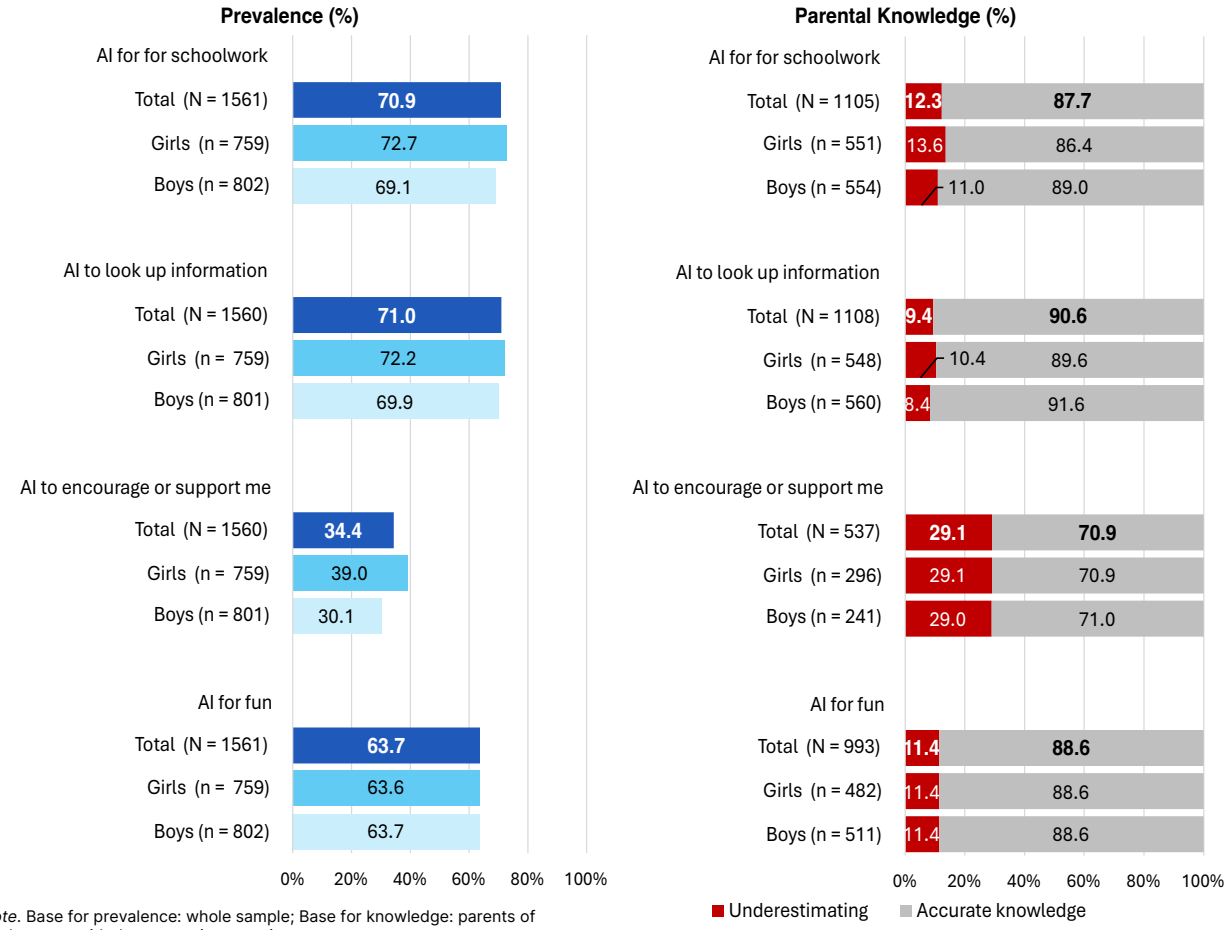
Lately, there's been a lot of discussion around the use of generative AI (genAI), i.e., tools that can answer questions and generate text or images (e.g. ChatGPT, Copilot or Gemini).

In the last 6 months, how often have you used AI for the following things?

Figure 7 shows that more than two-thirds of adolescents reported using GAI for looking up information (71%) and for schoolwork (71%). A substantial number of adolescents (64%) also reported using GAI for fun. About a third of adolescents (34%) used GAI for encouragement or support. More girls (39%) than boys (30%) reported using GAI for encouragement and support. There were no gender differences in the prevalence of other types of use.

Regarding parental awareness, only about 1 in 10 parents were unaware of their child using GAI to look up information (9%), for fun (11%), and for schoolwork (12%). In contrast, more parents underestimated that their child had used GAI for encouragement or support (29%). Notably, this use of GAI was the least prevalent among adolescents. Gender differences in parental awareness of all types of GAI usage were non-significant.

Fig. 7 **Adolescents' use of generative AI**
% of adolescents who used it at least once in the past six months, and parental knowledge



Note. Base for prevalence: whole sample; Base for knowledge: parents of adolescents with the respective experience

Parental (Over)confidence With Their Answers

08

We were also interested in how confident the parents are when reporting on their adolescent children's experiences, especially in situations where they are wrong, that is, when the parental answer does not match their adolescent children's experience. Similar to the chapters above, we focus on parental underestimation, a situation in which parents said their children did not have the respective experience, whereas the children themselves reported having it at least once in the previous six months. We focus solely on the behavior considered risky, so we do not present their confidence regarding the general social media or generative AI use.

Table 1 shows an interesting pattern that is consistent across all examined risky experiences and activities: a large majority of underestimating parents are mostly or completely confident that their children did not have the respective experience. In most experiences/activities (apart from one), the largest proportion of underestimating parents reported the highest level of confidence. In other words, parents are very certain in their (wrong) answers, which highlights that high parental confidence does not equal high accuracy. Further, this high confidence in the (assumed) absence of risky online experiences may prevent parents from taking proactive steps to monitor or support their children's online lives, operating under the false sense of security that their oversight or help is not needed.

Table 1 **Parental confidence in their response among parents who underestimated children's online risks**

		Not at all confident	Mostly not confident	Mostly confident	Completely confident
	N	%	%	%	%
PERSONAL INFORMATION SHARING					
... on social media					
Photos or videos of where you are at the moment	120	0.8	5.0	33.3	60.8
Photos or videos of you	150	2.0	4.7	32.7	60.7
Photos or videos of your parents or siblings	120	1.7	5.8	30.8	61.7
Personal information (name, address, date of birth)	138	3.6	6.5	39.9	50.0
Content showing you or your friends trying drinking alcohol, smoking/vaping or taking drugs	94	2.1	4.3	25.5	68.1
... in private messages with known peers					
Photos or videos of where you are at the moment	75	0.0	6.7	34.7	58.7
Photos or videos of you	76	0.0	7.9	38.2	53.9
Photos or videos of your parents or siblings	138	2.9	9.4	34.8	52.9
Personal information (name, address, date of birth)	166	1.8	12.7	40.4	45.2
Content showing you or your friends trying drinking alcohol, smoking/vaping or taking drugs	97	5.2	10.3	30.9	53.6
Login details (login/username and password)	90	3.3	10.0	27.8	58.9
... in private messages with strangers					
Photos or videos of where you are at the moment	167	4.2	10.2	26.9	58.7
Photos or videos of you	217	4.1	10.1	31.3	54.4
Photos or videos of your parents or siblings	104	7.7	8.7	25.0	58.7
Personal information (name, address, date of birth)	106	4.7	11.3	24.5	59.4
Content showing you or your friends trying drinking alcohol, smoking/vaping or taking drugs	64	4.7	4.7	32.8	57.8
Login details (login/username and password)	54	5.6	3.7	22.2	68.5
RISKY ONLINE INTERACTIONS					
Sexting					
Receiving	126	7.1	9.5	34.9	48.4
Sending	59	10.2	13.6	22.0	54.2
Sexual solicitations					
Receiving	117	8.5	20.5	29.9	41.0
Sending	38	13.2	13.2	13.2	60.5
Aggressive messages experiences					
Receiving	283	2.8	9.5	36.4	51.2
Sending	145	4.8	7.6	47.6	40.0
RISKY CONTENT EXPOSURE					
Self-harm	289	5.2	8.0	33.6	53.3
Thinspiration	255	3.5	8.6	26.3	61.6
Cyberhate	295	3.7	8.5	33.2	54.6
Illegal activities (drugs, vandalism)	236	3.8	7.2	32.6	56.4
Sexual content	175	1.7	10.3	28.6	59.4
Violent content	226	4.0	10.2	31.4	54.4

Base: Parents who were wrong (i.e., parents of adolescents with the respective experience, who think their children did not experience it)

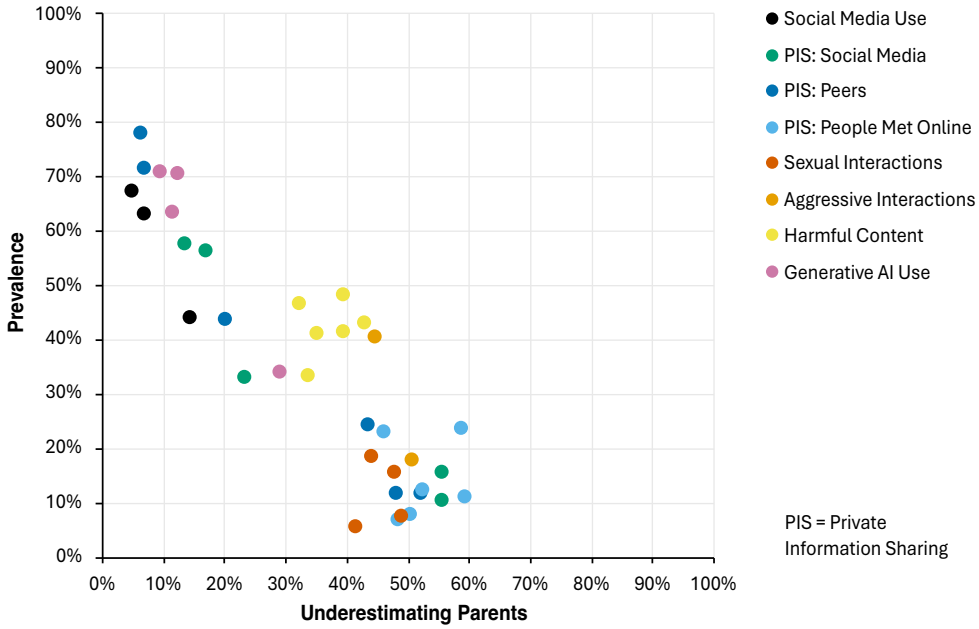
Conclusion 09

Our report shows that early adolescents are avid users of digital media. While online, they also encounter risky experiences or engage in potentially risky behaviors, including sharing personal information, engaging in risky communication, or viewing risky content. Regarding the prevalence of risky behaviors and experiences, we found an overall pattern that is well known already - behaviors that tend to be understood as riskier (e.g., sending sexual messages or sharing personal data with people met online) are also those that adolescents engage in less (see also Smahel et al., 2020).

Regarding parental knowledge, the prevalence of engagement also plays an important role: it is precisely those behaviors that are less prevalent (and riskier), where parental underestimation occurs the most (see also Figure 8). Across the risky activities, we found that around 40-50% of parents were unaware that their adolescent child had experienced the respective risk. The pattern is particularly apparent when compared to activities that are not as risky by default, for instance, general use of social media, use of generative AI, or sharing personal information in private messages with peers known from an "offline" environment (typically friends or schoolmates). For those activities, we see that the vast majority of parents have accurate knowledge. Lacking parental awareness about riskier experiences may represent a barrier to help and support that some of these situations may require.

Interestingly, our report also shows that underestimating parents are rather confident in their inaccurate knowledge. Most of them firmly believe their child did not engage in the respective behaviors, whereas the children themselves admit they did. This is important because this sense of certainty may further prevent parents from inquiring more about early adolescents' online lives, thereby preserving the lack of information exchange within the family.

Fig. 8 **Prevalence and parental underestimation of adolescent online activities and experiences**



Advice for parents

This report is not intended to scare parents. Adolescents can solve a number of potentially problematic situations online, either on their own or with help from friends, without requiring parental assistance at all. As they grow, they also need more privacy and autonomy, and we advise parents to gradually grant them. Parents do not need to know everything, yet we believe that understanding the patterns of what is typically known or unknown, as well as the barriers in parent-child communication, can help prevent situations in which parental assistance might be needed but a child is not willing to ask for it. Hence, here are a few points for parental consideration:

1.

Nowadays, parents already have a lot on their plates, and the online world can feel like just another thing to deal with. You don't have to understand everything your child does online. What matters is staying curious rather than dismissing, and exploring rather than downplaying their experiences. Ask specific questions, and let your child explain what happens online in their own words.

2.

Talk to the children about their online lives and be proactive. Our data show that regularly asking children about what they do online supports their voluntary disclosures even in cases of unpleasant online experiences (Lisztwan Honusová, Dedkova, et al., 2025). Being actively interested in adolescents' online activities is also associated with less secrecy and less lying about online experiences (Lisztwan Honusová, Mýlek, et al., 2026).

3. Early adolescents often hesitate to talk to their parents about unpleasant online experiences for fear of being misunderstood or fears that parents would restrict their media usage as a form of punishment (Lisztwan Honusová, Dedkova, et al., 2026). When talking to your child, do so respectfully, with an open mind. Nowadays, online experiences are important parts of adolescents' lives - their friends, their entertainment, their education all happen (at least partly) online. Use restrictions sensibly and make sure your child understands why you are imposing them.

4. Being certain the child is not encountering some problematic online situations may not necessarily reflect reality. Be aware of that.

Methodology 10

Data Collection and Ethics

This report uses data from an anonymous online survey that was conducted in April-May 2025 as part of the research project Parental Knowledge of Early Adolescents' Online Social Lives: The Role of Parental Mediation (PARKA).

An external survey agency STEM/MARK recruited a sample of 1,562 households from three large online panels. In each household, one parent and one adolescent (aged 11-14) filled in our questionnaire. We used quota sampling to ensure the sample well represents Czech households with children based on the latest available information from the Czech Statistical Office (see Table 2). To ensure participants understood our questions correctly, we conducted cognitive testing. This involved semi-structured interviews with adolescents and parents, focusing on their understanding of the questionnaire.

Parents were invited via email, and their eligibility and quota characteristics were checked. Parents were asked to provide informed consent for their participation and that of their adolescent children (we enabled parents to review a PDF with questions for adolescents). Adolescents were also informed about the study and asked to provide their assent. After completing the questionnaire, adolescents were shown a debriefing message thanking them for their participation, normalizing their online experiences, and providing a contact for a helpline, Modrá linka.

Participation in the survey was voluntary – participants could leave the survey at any point and skip any question (except those checking eligibility and quota) by selecting "I don't want to respond." Each household received compensation in accordance with the agency's standards. The data collection was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Masaryk University. STEM/MARK, the agency that handled sampling and data collection is a member of professional associations SIMAR and ESOMAR, and adheres to their respective ethical guidelines and quality standards.

Table 2 **Data collection overview**

Country	Czech Republic
Participants	Parent-adolescent dyads
N	1,562
Adolescent age	11-14 years old, M = 12.51, SD = 1.13
Adolescent gender	48.5% girls, 51.4% boys, 0.1% other
Parent age	24-71 years old, M = 43.63, SD = 6.15
Parent gender	59.2% women, 40.8% men
Data collection	April 29 – May 15, 2025
Method	Online survey (CAWI)
Agency	STEM/MARK
Online panels (sampling frame)	European National Panel, Median, Dialog
Quotas	
Adolescent age	Equally sized cohorts
Adolescent sex	Balanced in each cohort
Parent sex	60/40% split or more balanced
Household socio-economic status	Parent education (3 categories)
Household municipality population	4 categories
Household region	NUTS2 (8 regions)
Cognitive testing	7 adolescents, 4 parents

Statistical analysis

In this report we focus on prevalence of adolescents' online behaviors and experiences and parental awareness of them:

- **Prevalence** – for each behavior or experience, we calculated prevalence by counting how many adolescents reported it happening at least once in the past six months.
- **Parental awareness** – we asked parents the exact same questions about their teenager. For every pair where the adolescent reported a behavior/experience, we compared the two responses:
  - Underestimation: The parent did not report the behavior/experience
  - Accurate Knowledge: The parent also reported the behavior/experience

To assess potential differences between adolescent boys and girls reported in the main findings, we used chi-square tests of independence with a standard significance level of $p < .05$. For less common behaviors, fewer respondents were included in the analysis regarding parental awareness. Because of these smaller group sizes, a gender difference had to be larger to be statistically significant. In other words, the same percentual difference between boys and girls may be statistically significant for one behavior/experience but not for another, depending on the respective sample size (and resulting statistical power).

If an adolescent or parent selected *"I don't want to respond,"* we treated their answer as a missing value and excluded it from that specific analysis. As a result, the total number of participants varies slightly across different behaviors and experiences.

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