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# Digital Risks and Needs Analysis

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the final version of the "**Digital Risks and Needs Analysis**" study, which is the analytical output of the "**Capacity Building Project for Participatory Information Production and Media Monitoring with Youth**" carried out under UNICEF Turkey's **ACAR** (Stronger Civil Society for Stronger Accountability on Child Rights) program. The report brings together findings from literature reviews, focus group interviews, and field workshops, as well as a comprehensive survey conducted across İzmir, presenting digital risks holistically through both qualitative and quantitative data.

The research was conducted using a **mixed-method** approach. Within the scope of the fieldwork, a survey was done with a total of **350 participants**, including 200 children and 150 parents living in different socioeconomic regions of İzmir; additionally, qualitative observations were made by providing direct training to **225 children and 84 parents (309 people in total)** through workshops held in children's centers and schools.

The findings prove a deep '**Perception and Communication Gap**' between parents and children regarding digital risk perception. While **70.6% of parents** see social and moral threats, such as 'meeting malicious people' and **60.8%** see 'inappropriate content' as the greatest risks; children define risks through technical and asset-oriented threats, such as '**account hacking**' (**64.7%**) and '**virus infection**' (**51%**). This divergence prevents the parties from speaking the same language and makes domestic security management inefficient.

Field data also shows that the control methods parents resort to (e.g., **device checking/snooping at a rate of 45.1%**) trigger a '**hiding**' reflex in children rather than safe behavior. **72.5% of children** who encounter a disturbing situation on the internet try to solve the problem merely by 'blocking the person,' and **49% do not report** this situation to their families. This '**cycle of silence**' leaves children vulnerable to cyberbullying and abuse. Furthermore, the fact that **84.3% of digital parenting responsibility** lies with mothers confirms that gender roles are being reproduced in the digital space. In this framework, the study proposes a transition from the '**Safety**' (**Protection from Risk**) paradigm to the '**Resilience**' paradigm, in line with UNICEF ACAR's child rights-based approach. Instead of completely isolating children from risks, the goal should be to empower them as active

subjects who recognize risks, identify emotional manipulation, and can ask for help without fear.

"In light of these concrete data obtained from the field, the report's policy recommendations are gathered under the following headings:

- Capacity building programs to ensure parents transition from 'police-like monitoring' to communication-oriented 'digital mentors'
- Emotional awareness-focused school workshops that enable children to move beyond the reflex of 'blocking' and adopt the behavior of 'reporting and seeking help'
- Creation of alternative social spaces by local governments to prevent digital spaces from being a 'refuge' that merely compensates for the lack of physical playgrounds

Strengthening algorithmic monitoring mechanisms for children on social media platforms and the creation of advisory groups based on child participation.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACAR: Strengthening Civil Society for Strong Accountability on Children's Rights in Türkiye: Enhancing Monitoring, Collaboration, and Advocacy at the Central and Local Levels

DMAD: Association for Digital Media Research

ERIC: Ethical Research Involving Children

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

## 1. INTRODUCTION: AIM and CONTEXT

Digital transformation is transforming children's daily lives while simultaneously creating new opportunities and vulnerabilities. While the internet offers children space for learning, creativity, socialization, and expression, it also brings multi-dimensional risks such as cyberbullying, digital manipulation, online harassment, data privacy violations, and content violence (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021; UNICEF, 2024). Therefore, digitalization is not just a technical development but a social transformation that needs to be reconsidered in terms of child rights and well-being.

This report is one of the analytical components of the "Capacity Building Project for Participatory Information Production and Media Monitoring with Youth," carried out under UNICEF Turkey's ACAR (Stronger Civil Society for Stronger Accountability on Child Rights) program. The research aims to understand the types of risks children encounter in digital environments in Turkey, to reveal how these risks intersect with international literature's conceptualizations within the Turkish context, and to validate these through the experiences of children and parents at the local level.

In this direction, the study is built on two main axes. First, through a literature review, it systematically examined the types of digital risks, children's online behavior patterns, parenting models, and gender-based inequalities. Second, it tested these literature findings in the field through focus group interviews conducted in İzmir, collecting qualitative data from the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of children and parents. Thus, the research has produced a multi-layered analysis by bringing together theoretical knowledge and local observations.

Consistent with UNICEF's "Evidence-Informed Programming for Child Digital Rights" approach, this study aims not only to define risks categorically but also to understand how children cope with these risks and what social support mechanisms they need. At the heart of the study lies the idea of "strengthening the capacity to cope with risk" rather than merely "protection from risk." This is because children inevitably encounter risks in digital environments, but these encounters also provide pedagogical opportunities for the development of resilience, critical thinking, and self-awareness skills (Helsper & Vosloo, 2022; Livingstone & Pothong, 2023).

Aligned with the general framework of UNICEF ACAR, the project is based on three fundamental principles:

- **Participation:** Children are seen not just as research objects, but as active interpreters of digital experiences and stakeholders in policy processes.
- **Inclusivity:** The unique needs of different child groups are evaluated by taking into account socioeconomic inequalities, gender differences, and cultural context.
- **Capacity Building:** The aim is to create sustainable digital resilience mechanisms among children, parents, and local institutions.

In this context, the developed “Digital Risk Analysis” does not only map existing threats; it also generates policy, education, and social awareness recommendations for children to be empowered as safe, productive, and participatory digital citizens.

In conclusion, this study aims to recognize children as subjects of digital rights as much as it aims to protect children’s rights in the digital age. This approach, extending from the analysis of digital risks to digital resilience, offers a new conceptual ground for the relationship children in Turkey establish with media and technology.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a **mixed-method** design within the scope of the ACAR Project, run by UNICEF Turkey and co-financed by the European Union, to multi-dimensionally analyze the digital risk perceptions, online experiences, and digital safety needs of children and parents.

The research process is based on the principle of testing and validating (triangulation) the theoretical framework obtained from the literature review with quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus group and workshop observations) data.

### 2.1.Data Collection Processes and Tools

Research data were collected from four different complementary channels:

### 2.1.1. Literature Review

To establish the conceptual framework of the study, academic studies, and UNICEF and OECD reports published between 2017–2025 were examined. Digital risks were classified under the categories of "Content," "Contact," "Conduct," and "Contract" (the 4C Model), forming the basis for the questionnaires.

### 2.1.2. Quantitative Data: Survey Implementation

To measure common trends in the field, a structured survey was done with **children aged 10–18 and their parents** living in different regions of İzmir.

- **Sample:** A total of **350 participants** (200 children, 150 parents).
- **Scope:** The surveys questioned digital habits, types of risks encountered, parental monitoring mechanisms, and privacy awareness.

### 2.1.3. Qualitative Data: Focus Group Interviews

A two-stage focus group study was conducted to deepen the survey data and understand the participants' experiences in their own words:

1. **Gürçeşme Session (July 24, 2025):** Full-day sessions were held with a total of **23 children** (ages 10-16) at the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Gürçeşme Campus.
2. **Buca and Kadifekale Session (August 21, 2025):** In-depth interviews were conducted with **8 parents and 5 children** at the Buca and Kadifekale Children's Centers.

### 2.1.4. Field Workshops and Observations

Workshops were organized in 9 different centers across İzmir (Uzundere, Buca, Kadifekale, Limontepe, Yenişehir, Cengizhan, Gürçeşme, Gümüşpala, and Uğur Schools) between **November 23 and December 4, 2025**, to measure the impact of training materials and observe the potential for behavioral change.

- **Reach:** A total of **309 unique individuals**, including **225 children** and **84 parents**, were reached during this process.

- **Method:** Participants' reactions to digital safety concepts and the questions they asked during the workshops were included in the analysis process as qualitative data.

## 2.2. Sample and Participant Profile

The research sample was determined to represent households with different socioeconomic levels, reached through the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality Children's Centers. Representation was ensured by considering age, gender, educational status, and regional diversity (central and peripheral districts) in the selection of participants.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to a two-stage analysis in accordance with UNICEF's information production standards:

1. **Quantitative Analysis:** Survey data were collected digitally, cleaned, and analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (frequency and percentage distributions). Perception differences (risk vs. safety) were reported by comparing child and parent responses.
2. **Qualitative Analysis:** Focus group interviews and workshop notes were examined using the thematic analysis method. Data were grouped and interpreted under codes such as "trust", "monitoring", "lack of communication", and "gender."

## 2.4. Ethical Framework

The study was conducted based on high ethical standards specific to research involving children (UNICEF ERIC principles).

- Approval was obtained from the **Izmir University of Economics Ethics Committee** for all processes.
- Consent was obtained from the parents of the participating children, and verbal assent was obtained from the children themselves.
- Data were stored in a way to keep the participants anonymous, and personal information (name, surname, contact information) was not used in the analysis reports.

### 3. FINDINGS

This section presents a synthesis of the quantitative and qualitative data collected within the scope of the research. Theoretical risk definitions derived from the literature review were tested through focus group interviews (qualitative) in İzmir and a survey study (quantitative) conducted with a total of 350 participants. This triangulation method has revealed distinct and statistically significant differences in how children and parents perceive the digital world. The findings are detailed below across the axes of children's digital usage habits, the generational gap in risk perception, the effectiveness of parental monitoring strategies, and gender roles.

#### 3.1. Children's Digital Usage Profile: Game Hegemony and Screen Time Management

The literature states that the digital space functions as a "compensatory space" for children where physical limitations are mitigated. The field research confirms with numerical data that children code the digital world primarily as a space for consumption and entertainment rather than a place for "seeking rights" or "acquiring information."

- **Platform Preferences and Purpose:** According to survey results, playing games (82.4%) and watching videos (78.4%) are by far the leading purposes for digital platform use. Education-oriented uses like homework or research lag far behind these rates and remain secondary.
- **Platform Dominance:** The most frequently used platforms were identified as YouTube (72.5%) and Instagram (70.6%). This data quantitatively supports the "I can't go out, I socialize on the internet" narrative in focus group interviews and shows that the digital space has turned into a primary socialization area for children that compensates for the lack of physical play areas.

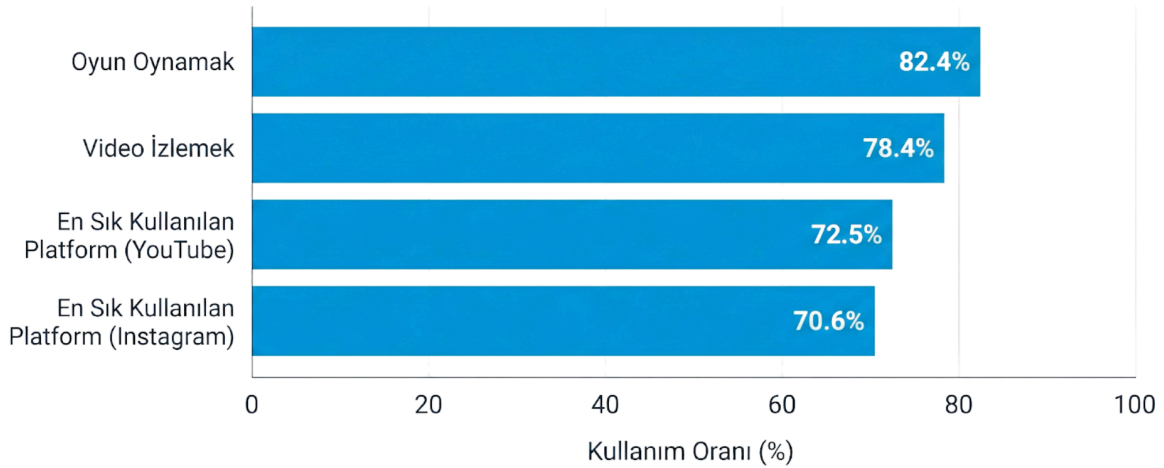
This finding of 'high game and video consumption' obtained from the İzmir field is directly related to the 'time paradox' and 'neuropsychological cycles' detailed below.

##### 3.1.1. The "Time" Paradox of the Digital Age: What Does Measuring Duration Measure?

The concept of screen time is one of the most controversial metrics of the digital age. While the "duration of exposure" was a sufficient variable to predict content effects in the traditional media era, today's multi-screen, simultaneous media use, and state of constant connectivity

have complicated this relationship. Being online is no longer just a leisure activity; it also encompasses identity construction, socialization, gaming, education, and even emotional regulation.

### Çocukların Dijital Dünyası: Oyun ve Video Tüketiminin Hegemonyası



Not: Çocuklar dijital alanı birincil olarak eğlence ve tüketim odaklı kullanmaktadır.

OECD's *Digital Education Outlook* (2021) report states that evaluating children's contact with screens solely in terms of "duration" yields erroneous results. Two hours spent in the same period, one for educational purposes and the other for high-stimulus entertainment, have radically different cognitive and emotional effects. Therefore, UNICEF (2024) proposes evaluating children's digital experiences through four dimensions: (1) content type, (2) mode of interaction, (3) social context, and (4) the child's age and developmental level. This approach forms the basis of the transition from "screen time reduction" policies to "screen time interpretation" policies.

#### 3.1.2. Neuropsychological Foundations: Impulsivity, Reward, and Self-Regulation

Neuroscience research shows that the reward system (ventral striatum) of the adolescent brain matures early, whereas the prefrontal cortex, responsible for self-control and planning, develops late. **The 82.4% game-playing rate in the survey data** can be explained by this developmental asymmetry; digital environments that offer 'immediate rewards' (e.g., short videos, games, social media notifications) make self-control difficult.

When this physiological structure is combined with the 'behavioral engineering' elements of social media designs, it creates attention traps for children. Mechanisms such as 'infinite scroll', 'autoplay', and 'variable ratio rewards' constantly trigger the dopamine release cycle. UNICEF (2024) emphasizes that these design patterns fall into the category of 'structural digital risk' for children and that individual self-control alone cannot be sufficient.

Observations by parents in focus group interviews, such as 'restlessness when without a phone' or 'secret use during sleep hours', are the intra-familial behavioral reflections of this neuropsychological cycle. Although parents interpret these behaviors of their children as a 'lack of discipline', the literature reveals that it is actually a combination of a biological tendency and environmental stimuli.

### 3.1.3. The Sociocultural Dimension of Self-Regulation: Discipline or Negotiation?

Time management and self-regulation are not just cognitive skills but also cultural practices. While the concept of "self-regulation" in Western literature is defined by autonomy and individual responsibility, in collectivist cultures like Turkey, child behavior is often shaped by compliance with authority. This difference is also reflected in the monitoring of digital behaviors: Turkish parents tend to set structural and external boundaries to restrict their children's screen time; for example, "I take the phone at night," or "we set a 2-hour daily limit."

Focus group interviews confirm this trend. Most participants use technical measures like "parental locks" or "daily time limits." However, these restrictions increase "rule-breaking" strategies among children. This picture is consistent with Livingstone and Blum-Ross's (2017) definition of "authoritarian digital parenting." This approach reduces time in the short term but does not provide behavioral internalization in the long term; the child reverts to the previous behavior once the monitoring is removed.

In contrast, in Nikken and Jansz's (2014) "active mediation" model, the parent and child create common norms by discussing digital habits. When the child learns the cause-and-effect relationship, regulation becomes "internal" rather than "external." This model aligns with UNICEF's (2024) "empathetic parenting" principle.

### 3.1.4. Digital Fatigue and the Parents' Dilemma

OECD's (2021) "parental digital fatigue" concept defines the situation where parents feel a constant need for control in the face of children's increasing digital activities, but cannot sustain this due to technical and time constraints. This fatigue is more pronounced in mothers; the vast majority of the caregiving labor burden is still on women. In İzmir focus groups, mothers mentioned strategies such as "relaxing the rules because they are tired of dealing with the child" or "sometimes giving permission so the child can be occupied."

This situation shows that the self-regulation mechanism is fragile not only in the child but also in the family system. Livingstone and Pothong (2023) emphasize that digital parenting is a form of emotional labor and that parents also need psychosocial support. Self-regulation is a skill learned by the parent as well.

### 3.1.5. Psychosocial Effects of Screen Time

Excessive use of digital media can lead to various psychosocial consequences in children and adolescents:

- **Sleep Disorders:** Sleep quality decreases due to melatonin suppression, blue light exposure, and the feeling of constant connection.
- **Anxiety and Mood Swings:** Social comparison, FOMO ("fear of missing out"), and online pressure increase anxiety levels.
- **Social Isolation:** As digital interaction intensifies, face-to-face communication skills weaken.

UNICEF (2024) states that these effects are related to the state of constant arousal (hyperarousal) rather than directly to duration. Although children perceive the time they spend in front of the screen as "resting," cognitively this is a cycle of high arousal and low satisfaction.

### 3.1.6. Educational and Cognitive Dimension: How Does Screen Time Affect Learning?

Digital tools can support learning, but passive consumption patterns reduce cognitive depth. "Multitasking" leads to visual distraction and memory overload, especially in adolescents. According to UNICEF's *Learning in the Digital Age* report, three conditions are necessary for productive digital use for learning purposes: (1) the child's goal-oriented awareness, (2) pedagogical design of the content, (3) mutual review processes under adult guidance.

Focus group data showed that parents complained about behaviors such as "staying online under the pretext of homework." This observation aligns with OECD's concept of "invisible online procrastination." Lack of self-regulation affects not only leisure behavior but also learning processes.

### 3.2. Gap in Risk Perception: "Technical Fear vs. Social Threat"

The concept of digital risk has evolved today into a multi-layered structure encompassing interactional, structural, and psychosocial vulnerabilities, moving beyond a view focused only on "harmful content." In this section, the deep perception gap between parents and children is analyzed by combining the theoretical framework in the literature (the 4C Model), cultural codes in the Turkish context, and quantitative data (survey results) obtained from the field research.

#### 3.2.1. Conceptual Framework: The Multi-Layered Structure of Risk (The 4C Model)

The 4C Model (Content–Contact–Conduct–Contract), developed by UNICEF and LSE and forming the analytical ground of this report, classifies digital risks into four basic categories:

- **Content Risks:** The child being passively exposed to violence, sexuality, or misinformation.
- **Contact Risks:** The child actively interacts with malicious individuals (grooming, manipulation).
- **Conduct Risks:** The child engaging in cyberbullying or exposing their own privacy.
- **Contract Risks:** Commercial exploitation, data breach, and algorithmic manipulation.

Field research shows that parents' risk perception is concentrated in the "Contact" and "Content" categories, while children's risk perception is concentrated in the "Contract" category.

#### 3.2.2. Parents' Perspective: "The Enemy Outside" and Moral Concerns

In Turkey, parents' digital risk perception is generally shaped around themes of "threats coming from outside" and "protection of moral integrity." Parents classify the digital environment as a "security vulnerability" where the child is detached from the family, or harmed.

- **Contact and Stranger Danger:** According to survey results, parents' greatest fear is the risk of "**My child meeting malicious people**" at a rate of **70.6%**. This data overlaps with the "grooming" (online abuse) concern in the literature. Odak grup görüşmelerinde bir ebeveynin, "*Yetişkin bir bireyin çocuğuyla flört etmeye çalıştığını fark etmesi*", bu korkunun somut bir yansımasıdır.
- **Content and Trauma:** Parents' second major concern (**60.8%**) is videos containing violence and sexuality. Especially, the "promoting substance use" or "traumatic" content offered by YouTube and TikTok algorithms is defined as the area most difficult for parents to monitor.
- **Financial Anxiety (Fraud):** Parents also frequently expressed risks of data theft and fraud resulting from children's lack of economic literacy. A mother's statement, '*They clicked a link on YouTube and money was withdrawn,*' indicates that this risk triggers 'prohibitive reflexes' (confiscating the device) in parents.

### 3.2.3. Children's Perspective: Technical Fears and the Problem of Making Sense

Contrary to the "social and moral" focused risk perception of parents, children's risk perception is surprisingly "technical and asset-oriented."

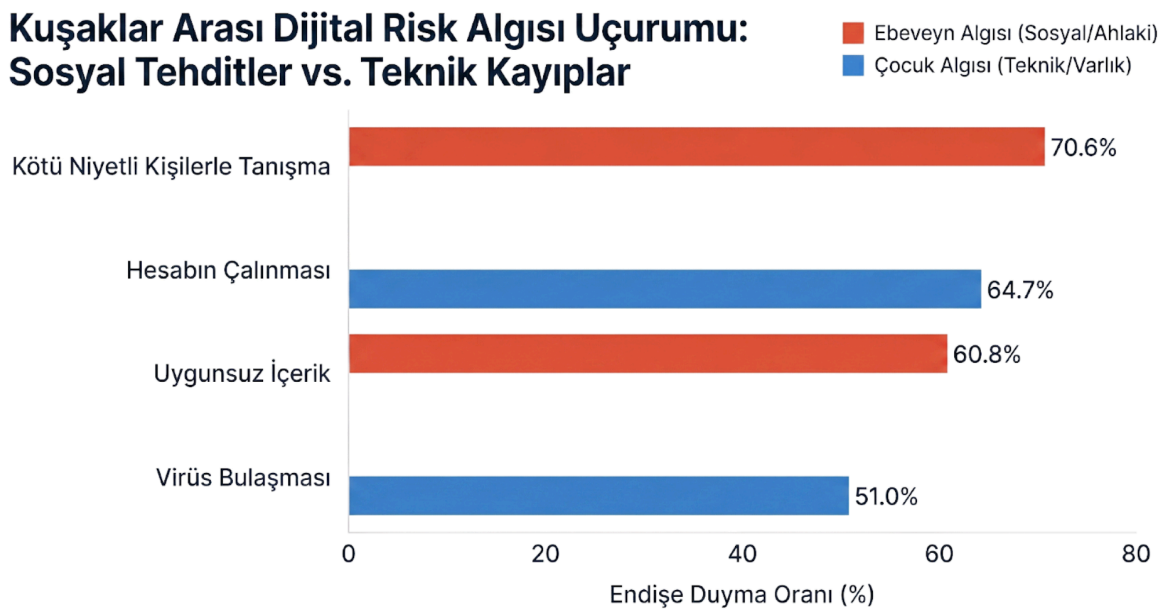
- **Fear of Asset Loss:** According to survey data, the situations that scare children the most are "**My account being stolen**" (**64.7%**) and "**Viruses**" (**51%**). Children prioritize protecting their digital status (game level, social media account) over their emotional safety.
- **Cognitive vs. Behavioral Awareness:** In focus groups, children stated that they know the risks as "parental rules" but do not understand "why they are dangerous," saying, "My mom says don't talk to strangers but doesn't explain why." **This proves that children's risk awareness remains at the behavioral (obedience) level rather than the cognitive level.**
- **Cyberbullying Blindness:** The fact that the rate of those who fear the risk of cyberbullying, which targets the child's psychological integrity, remains at the **25.5%** level suggests that children have internalised relational risks (being teased, excluded) as a "natural part" of digital gaming culture rather than as a "risk."

### 3.2.4. Overlooked Dimension: Structural (Contract) Risks

The most insidious category of risk that escapes the radar of both parents and children is **Structural Risks (Contract Risks)**. Algorithmic manipulation, data mining, and hidden commercial targeting are violations that occur without the child's consent.

- Research findings show that while parents focus on “who their children are talking to,” their awareness of how platforms process children's data remains low.
- UNICEF (2024) emphasizes that these types of risks are “**silent risks**” and that children's digital footprints are being transformed into a “**consumer profile**” that could affect their future lives.

**Conclusion:** This picture indicates a serious mismatch in the “language of risk” between generations. While parents pursue “morality and safety” and children pursue “accounts and devices,” platforms seek to protect or use “data.” An effective protection policy requires bringing these three distinct levels together on a common ground of “digital resilience”.



### 3.3. Parents' Perspective: Anxiety, Control, and Gendered Responsibility

Parents' view of the digital world radically diverges from the “entertainment and play” oriented perspective of children, being shaped around the axes of “fear, control, and a sense of inadequacy.” In this section, parents' digital parenting practices, risk perceptions, and the impact of gender roles in this process are analyzed in light of field data.

### 3.3.1. The Gendered Nature of Digital Parenting

The 'gendered nature of digital parenting' discussed in the literature has been strikingly confirmed by the survey data. The responsibility for managing digital risks, monitoring, and communicating with the child is not distributed equally among parents.

- **Participant Distribution:** 84.3% of the parents who participated in the research and undertook digital parenting processes were women (mothers), while only 15.7% were men (fathers).
- **Digital Care Labor:** This disproportionate distribution indicates that the responsibility for managing digital risks, monitoring children's online behavior, and undertaking “digital care labor” is still primarily attributed to mothers in the Turkish context.
- **Division of Roles:** The limited involvement of fathers in digital processes is one of the primary causes of the “parental digital fatigue” phenomenon discussed in the literature. While mothers become the “monitoring and worrying” party, fathers are generally positioned as the “ultimate authority” who intervenes only in times of crisis.

#### Dijital Ebeveynliğin Cinsiyetlendirilmiş Doğası: Yük Kimin Omuzlarında?



**Sonuç:** Dijital risk yönetimi ve ebeveynlik yükü ezici bir çoğunlukla annelerin üzerindedir, bu da "dijital ebeveynlik yorgunluğu" yaratmaktadır.

### 3.3.2. Priorities in Risk Perception: Fear of the “Enemy Outside”

While children perceive digital risks as technical or asset-oriented threats such as 'account theft' or “viruses”, parents' risk perception is entirely built upon “social threats” and “moral concerns.”

- **Primary Concern (Contact Risk):** According to the survey results, by far the greatest concern for parents is the risk of “**My child meeting / communicating with malicious people**” (70.6%). This data indicates that parents code the digital space not merely as a “security vulnerability,” but as an “**external threat area**” (**stranger danger**) targeting the child's moral and physical integrity.
- **Secondary Concern (Content Risk):** This is followed by “**Exposure to inappropriate/harmful content**” (60.8%) and “**Fraud**” (49%).
- **Perception Gap:** Parents are more concerned about *who* their children are talking to than *what* they are losing (data, accounts). This situation points to a fundamental perception gap between children and parents regarding the very definition of risk.

### 3.3.3. Monitoring Strategies: “Police Measures” and Prohibition

The high anxiety levels of parents give monitoring strategies a “restrictive” and “police-like” character; rather than fostering safe behavior, this situation triggers a hiding reflex in children.

1. **Monitoring Methods:** 64.7% of parents selected “I set time limits for internet use” as their primary strategy. The second most common method is “I check their device or browsing history” (45.1%).
2. **Lack of Participatory Methods:** In contrast, the rate of those using active/participatory mediation methods, such as “I spend time online with my child' or 'We identify appropriate websites together,” is considerably low.
3. **Erosion of Trust:** The perception among 51% of children that “my family searches through my device” aligns with the 45.1% of parents who declare “I check my kids’ devices.” This situation quantitatively proves that digital governance within the family revolves around 'surveillance and restriction' rather than 'trust and guidance.'"

### 3.3.4. Inadequacy of Capacity and Demand for Education

One of the underlying reasons why parents resort to harsh monitoring measures is their sense of inadequacy regarding digital literacy and communication skills.

- **Need for Education:** In response to the questions directed at them, 78.4% of parents expressed the demand, "I would like to receive training on online safety and risks."
- **Communication Support:** Furthermore, 51% of them demand specialized support regarding "Digital parenting and communication."
- **Strategy of Desperation:** This high demand indicates that parents' current "prohibitory" attitudes are not a preference, but rather a strategy of desperation stemming from a lack of knowledge regarding alternative methods such as guidance, dialogue, and co-use.

These findings reveal that parents need to be moved away from the "bad cop" role and transformed into technically and pedagogically equipped "digital mentors." Parents need to learn that they cannot eliminate risks through prohibition, but can only protect their children by equipping them against these risks (digital resilience).

### 3.4. Parental Capacity Deficit and Demand for Education

The primary reason behind parents resorting to strict monitoring measures is their sense of inadequacy regarding digital literacy and communication skills. The research findings reveal that their current "prohibitory" attitudes are not a deliberate preference, but rather a **strategy of desperation** stemming from not knowing alternative methods like guidance, dialogue, or co-use.

3.4.1. Technical Inadequacy and "Police-Style" Solutions: Observations from the İzmir field study reveal that parents feel inadequate in using digital security tools (filters, privacy settings, parental control software). Especially in lower socioeconomic households, this "digital literacy gap" causes monitoring to be reduced to physical and confrontational methods, such as "hiding the device."

- **Demand for Education:** According to the survey results, **78.4%** of parents expressed the demand: "I would like to receive training on online safety and risks." This high rate proves that parents are not satisfied with their current "prohibitory" roles and desire to become more competent "digital guides."

3.4.2. Communicative Inadequacy and "Digital Parenting Stress": The difficulties experienced by parents are not solely technical; they are also a communication crisis stemming from not knowing how to talk to the child about digital boundaries. Since the traditional "authoritarian" parenting culture in Turkey limits negotiation with the child, parents resort to imposing digital rules, which in turn increases intra-family conflict and digital parenting stress.

- **Communication Support:** According to the research data, **51%** of parents demand specialized training specifically on "**Digital parenting and communication,**" going beyond technical knowledge. Parents are seeking answers to questions such as, "How do I set boundaries without saying no to my child?" or "How do I talk to them about their digital world?" This demand is an indicator of the desire to transition to the "active mediation" model recommended in the literature.

3.4.3. The Need for Transitioning from Prohibition to Management: These high demand rates prove that current "prohibitory" attitudes are being implemented by parents out of necessity. The sentiment expressed by mothers in focus group discussions, "I want to protect them, but I am tired of constantly acting like a police officer" summarizes this predicament.

Consequently, parents need to learn that they cannot eliminate risks by banning them, but can only protect their children by equipping them against these risks. The message for policymakers is clear: parental training must be based on a holistic curriculum that teaches not only "which button to press" (technical) but also "how to connect with the child" (pedagogical).

### 3.5. General Evaluation

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data obtained within the scope of this research proves that digital risk management in Turkish families operates on the basis of "fear, anxiety, and prohibition" rather than one of "trust, communication, and guidance." The strategies developed by parents through their reflex to protect their children do not align with the children's realities in the digital world; instead of closing security gaps, this situation further deepens them.

#### 3.5.1. Perception Gap: Fears of Different Worlds

Parents and children define digital risks in completely different hierarchies. This situation is the fundamental barrier preventing both parties from speaking the same language.

- Parents' Fear: For parents, digital threats are perceived as external attacks on a child's moral and physical integrity. According to survey data, the primary threat perception of parents, at a rate of 70.6%, is centered on "contact with strangers/malicious individuals."
- Children's Fear: For children, however, the threat is a technical attack on their digital presence and status. The primary fear among children, at a rate of 64.7%, is "being hacked/account theft."
- Conclusion: While the parent focuses on "protection from strangers," the child focuses on "protecting their account." This misalignment causes "relational" risks (contact risks), such as cyberbullying or emotional manipulation, to fly under the radar of both parties.

### 3.5.2. Strategy Conflict and "False Security"

There is a sharp conflict between parents' methods of coping with risk and children's defense mechanisms. This conflict creates an illusion of "security through control" for parents, while fostering practices of "hidden resistance" among children.

- Police-Style Surveillance: 45.1% of parents state that they adopt the strategy of "I monitor/search through the device" to lower the risk. This method is based on a logic of "searching for crimes and evidence" rather than trust-based guidance.
- Silent Resistance: In response, children have developed a "silence strategy" to evade parental control and avoid losing their access rights. 72.5% of children who encounter a disturbing situation online try to resolve the matter on their own by "blocking" it, without informing their families.
- Risk: When a child presses the "block" button, they resolve the technical issue, but they continue to carry the emotional burden of the traumatic content or bullying they were exposed to entirely alone.

### 3.5.3. Solution Path: Transformation from "Bad Cop" to "Digital Mentor"

These findings indicate a need for a fundamental paradigm shift in Turkey's digital parenting culture. The solution lies in removing parents from the "bad cop" role and transforming them into technically and pedagogically equipped "digital mentors."

True digital protection is possible:

1. Not through Prohibition: Not by taking the tablet away from the child,
2. Not through Technicality alone: Not just by pressing the "block" button,
3. But through Communication: By ensuring the child can talk about the reason behind that block with a trusted adult without fear.

The ultimate goal, "Digital Resilience," is not for the child to never encounter risk; it is for them to have the equipment and family support to recognize, manage, and seek help when they do encounter it.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: FROM a CULTURE of PROTECTION to a CULTURE of RESILIENCE

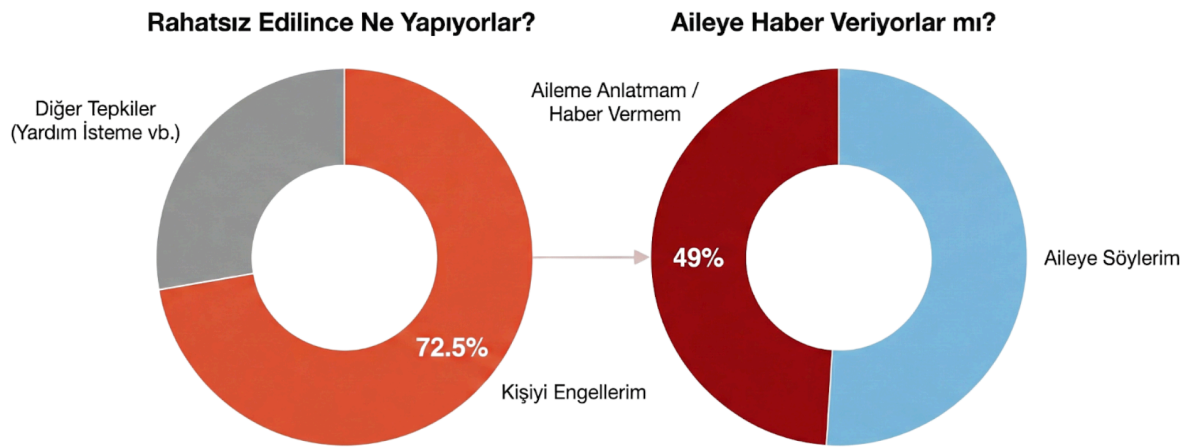
This report, an analytical output of the "Capacity Building for Participatory Knowledge Production and Media Monitoring with Youth" project conducted under UNICEF Turkey's ACAR program, has comprehensively revealed children's digital risk perceptions, parents' monitoring reflexes, and the impact of local context on digital experiences through the example of İzmir (Buca and Kadifekale). The integrated analysis (triangulation) of literature reviews, focus group interviews, and survey data from 350 participants has uncovered three fundamental results that will guide digital safety discussions in Turkey.

**First**, there is an intergenerational "**Perception and Communication Gap.**" Research data has proven that parents and children define digital risks on entirely different levels. While **70.6%** of parents see "**malicious strangers**" and moral risks as the greatest threat, **64.7%** of children fear technical/asset-oriented risks such as "**account theft**" and "**viruses.**" This discrepancy in risk definitions prevents the parties from speaking the same language and renders security management inefficient. While the parent tries to protect "morality" and the child tries to protect their "account," relational risks such as cyberbullying and emotional manipulation are overlooked.

**Second**, restrictive monitoring creates a "**Silence Cycle.**" The fact that **45.1%** of parents resort to "police-style" monitoring methods, such as searching through devices, has

developed concealment skills in children rather than safe behavior. The findings that **49%** of children do not inform their families during a threat and **72.5%** attempt to solve the problem merely by "blocking" demonstrate that current parenting strategies leave children vulnerable and isolated. Fear of authority blocks access to the adult support needed during a moment of risk.

## Sessizlik Döngüsü: Çocuklar Tehdit Anında Yalnızlaşıyor



⚠ Sonuç: Çocuklar tehdidi teknik olarak (engelleyerek) çözmeye çalışıyor, ancak duygusal destek için aileye başvurmuyor. Bu durum onları savunmasız bırakıyor.

**Third**, the digital experience has transformed into a "**Compensatory Space for Inequalities.**" Especially in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas, the digital sphere has been identified as a mandatory "sanctuary" that compensates for the lack of safe physical playgrounds for children. This situation shifts the debate over screen time from being an individual discipline issue to a matter of urban and social justice. Furthermore, the fact that the digital parenting burden rests on mothers at a rate of **84.3%** confirms that gender roles are being reproduced in the digital realm as well.

**Final Evaluation:** The findings of this report demonstrate that in ensuring the digital safety of children in Turkey, a transition from the "**Safety**" (**Protection from Risk**) paradigm to the "**Digital Resilience**" paradigm is mandatory. Completely isolating children from risks is neither possible nor pedagogically sound. The primary goal is to empower children as **active digital subjects** who can recognize risks, identify emotional manipulation, and seek help without fear.

For this, parents must evolve from a "supervisory" role to a "guiding" role, children from a "protected" role to a "participatory" role, and policymakers from a "prohibitory" stance to an "inclusive" vision. By defining the first steps of this transformation at the local level, the UNICEF ACAR project provides a strong foundation for a digital future based on children's rights.

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This report presents the findings of a comprehensive study conducted with the participation of 200 children and 150 parents across İzmir. Rather than focusing solely on 'protection,' the study analyzes digital risks through the lens of 'digital resilience,' placing children's rights at the center. By providing empirical evidence of the perceptual gap between parents' social anxieties and children's technical fears, the report offers strategic policy recommendations for local governments and policymakers.