YOUNG VOICES:
Insights from Young People in Hong Kong

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Key Findings

Introduction

The Young Voices research captures the opinions and perspectives of young people in Hong Kong, shared with us through focus group discussions and interviews with youth aged 12-17 from across the city. In general, the youth identified that they want to be listened to, influence and help address issues that concern them and broader issues in the society. Adults in Hong Kong, no matter their roles, should seek out and listen to the experiences and perspectives of children and youth on issues that affect them. Key results include:

- 42% of youth often or always felt sad and down for a long period of time within the last year, and 64% often or always felt stressed over schoolwork or academic results.

- In the past year, 3 out of 5 young people have worried that someone they know will harm themselves.

- Over the past year, almost half of the respondents have often or always worried about being punished by parents (46%), while 1 out of 3 has worried that their parents would kick them out and they could not live at home anymore.

- Just over half (57%) of secondary school students think their future is positive.

- Almost 90% of the secondary school students believe that they have few or even no opportunities to express their opinion to leaders and decision-makers in society, while around half of them would like to have more influence and opportunities to address issues concerning them in their schools, municipalities and homes.

- Nearly 80% of students think their school has done enough to help them in managing their schoolwork. When in need of support with their studies, secondary school students (88%) rely on their peers more than on any other person.

- Around 30% of students don't think their school has done enough to stop bullying, assist disabled children who need special support, or teach them how to use the internet safely.

- Nearly 1 out of 4 youth never or seldom feels safe on the internet, ranking the internet the least safe environment for them, and only a little more than 50% of secondary school students always feel safe in the classroom.

- Over the preceding 12 months, nearly 1 out of 4 often or always worried about being bullied or experiencing violence from other children and young people, and 1 out of 5 often or always worried about experiencing violence from an adult.

- 1 out of 5 youth does not know where to seek help when they need it, either for family issues, mental health support, or when facing violence.

- Over the past year, 1 out of 5 youth failed to join in some leisure activities with classmates or friends because they could not afford it.

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Proposals from the Youth

Ranking of issues of importance

01 Mental health

02 Situation for disabled children

03 Discrimination against ethnic minorities

04 Situation of low-income families

05 Discrimination based on gender

06 Discrimination based on sexual orientation

07 Discrimination against new immigrants

08 Climate change

Better protect children

In general, secondary school students have high expectations of leaders in addressing social issues that affect young people. 82%, 83%, and 86% of them believe leaders should work to stop bullying, stop online harassment and abuse, and help children with mental health issues, respectively.

Supporting those most in need

Countering discrimination and inequality is also important, with up to 85% of the students agreeing that leaders should stop discrimination against ethnic minorities and immigrants, as well as discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. Around 85% also believe leaders should improve the situation for low-income families and for disabled children.

Climate change and green way of life

When it comes to climate change, nearly 7 out of 10 young people believe leaders should address it. In focus group discussions, students approved of a green way of life, and suggested ways to protect the environment such as reducing single-use plastics and recycling.

Acknowledgements

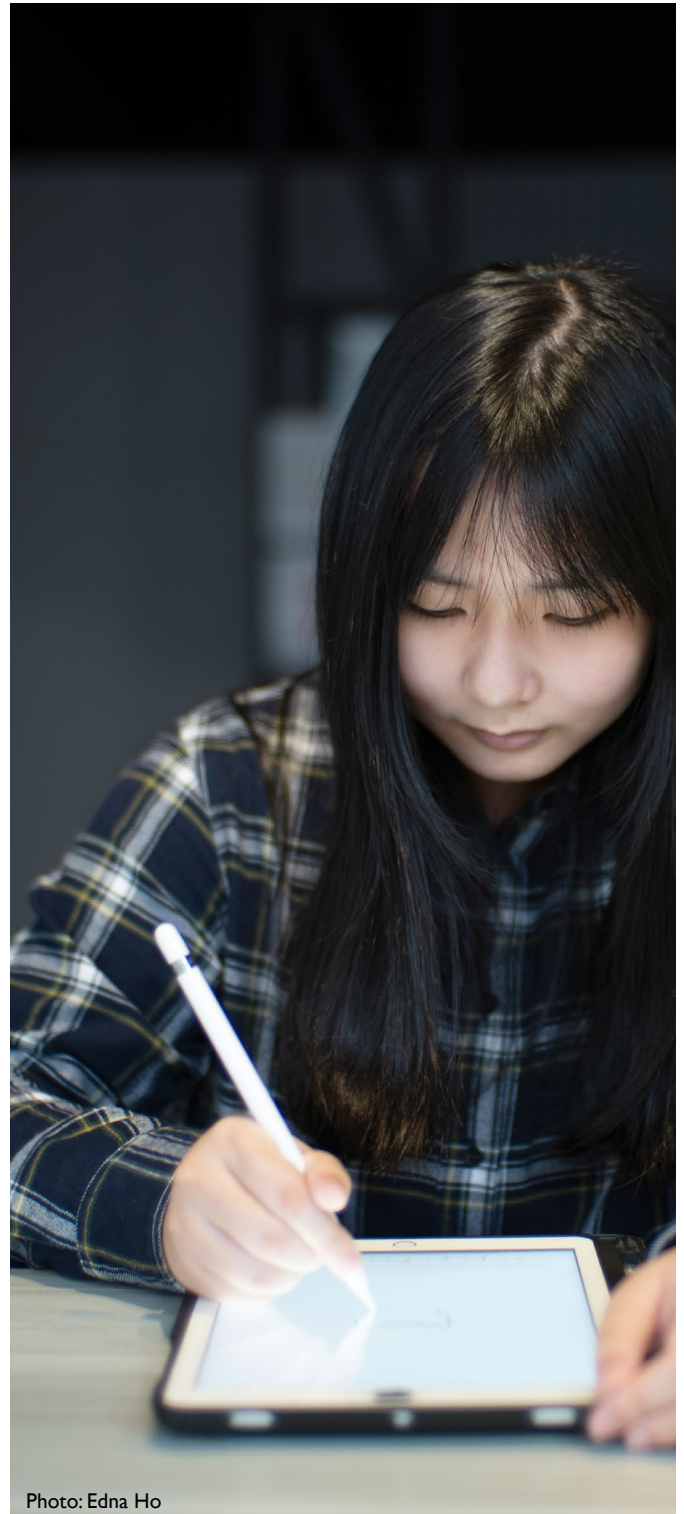Photo: Megan Wei

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Photo: Edna Ho

What is Young Voices?

Adults often believe they know what young people need and want, but they seldom actually ask them. Through Young Voices surveys and focus groups, more than 35,000 young people worldwide have been able to make their voices heard, raising issues that concern them: problems with safety in schools, worries about being bullied or academic stress, and not being able to attend school because of financial constraints.

"Young Voices" uses a well-recognized survey method, combined with focus group discussions, to share with the public what young people really think and need. The questionnaire and topics covered in the study mirror the rights of the child stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

What is Young Voices

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Young Voices in Hong Kong

Our work began in mid-2019 convening 8 groups of youth under the age of 17, inclusive of different socio-economic and demographic groups of the Hong Kong youth population. The 58 young people comprising these separate boys' and girls' focus groups engaged in rich discussion with their peers on the key topics covered in this study, sharing their views and personal experiences. Following this, in July 2020, we met young people in the streets and interviewed 1,151 teenagers in diverse socio-economic circumstances in 8 different neighborhoods nearby 39 secondary schools attended by students from all over Hong Kong. The results presented in this report are the views and opinions of these youth.

We weighted the responses to our interviews so that proportional representation was given to boys and girls and students of different ages and form levels in alignment with the actual composition of the whole youth population enrolled in secondary schools. This ensures that our study results are not biased by overrepresentation of either boys or girls or younger or older students, but rather that they are a reasonable indication of the opinions or experiences of most secondary school students in Hong Kong.

Focus Groups
Conducted in mid-2019, **58 youth aged 12-17** participated in groups based on their socio-economic status, type of school and gender.

58
participants
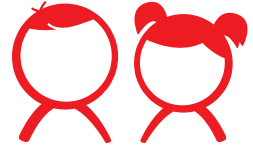
aged:
12-17

1,151
respondents

aged:
12-17

Survey
The survey was conducted in July 2020 in public space of selected school districts. 1,151 respondents of age 12-17 were interviewed.

The Young Voices study has expanded its reach across the globe, having been completed in 13 countries previously and counting.

Sweden
Lithuania
Mongolia
Kosovo
Albania
Armenia
Jordan
El Salvador
Vietnam
Peru
Zambia
Paraguay
Uruguay

Topics Covered

Children's Awareness and Knowledge of their Rights

Mental Health and Emotional Support

Education and School Life

Online Protection and Safety
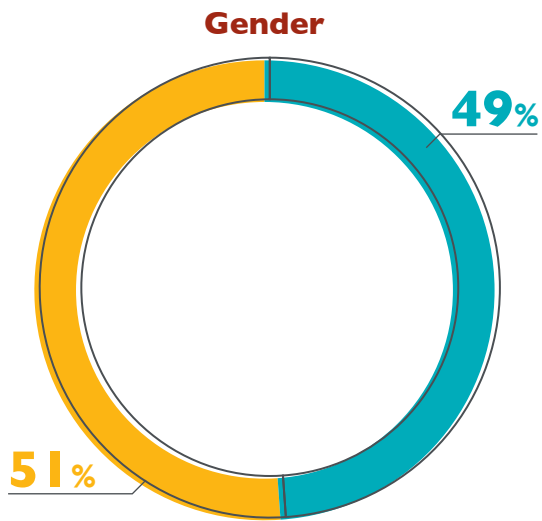
Physical and Humiliating Punishment (PHP)

The Future

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Respondents' characteristics
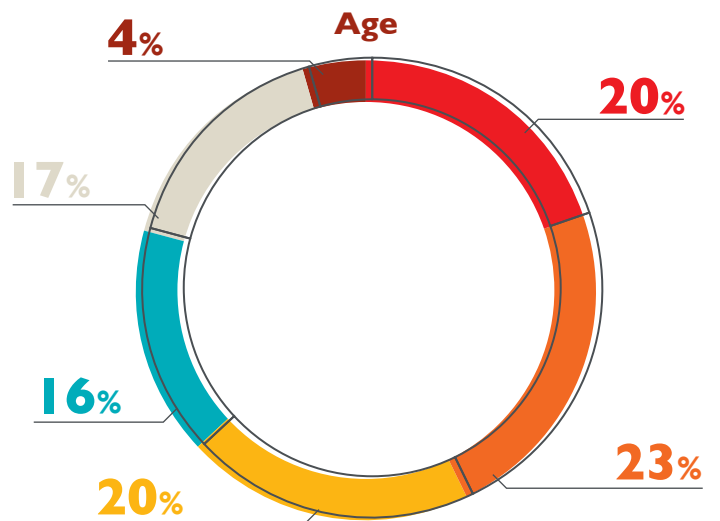
Gender

- **Male** (teal)
- **Female** (yellow/orange)

49% Male
51% Female

Age

- **12 years old** (red)
- **13 years old** (orange)
- **14 years old** (yellow)
- **15 years old** (teal)
- **16 years old** (grey)
- **17 years old** (dark red)

4%
17%
16%
20%
20%
23%

Form

- **Form 1** (red)
- **Form 2** (orange)
- **Form 3** (yellow)
- **Form 4** (teal)
- **Form 5** (grey)

19%
22%
24%
20%
15%

Type of schools
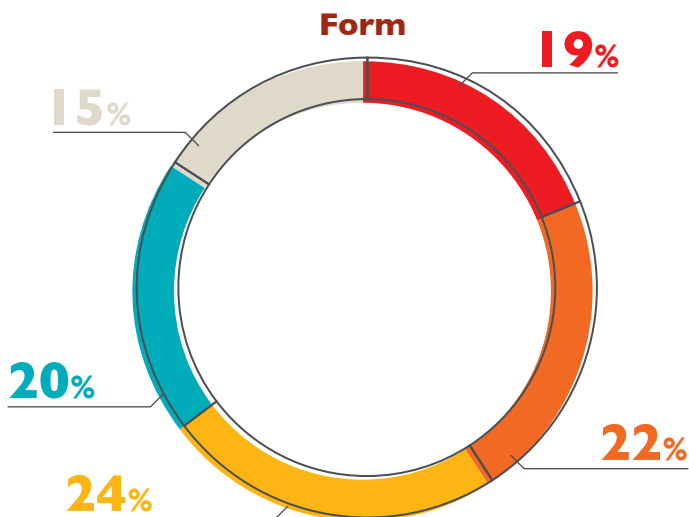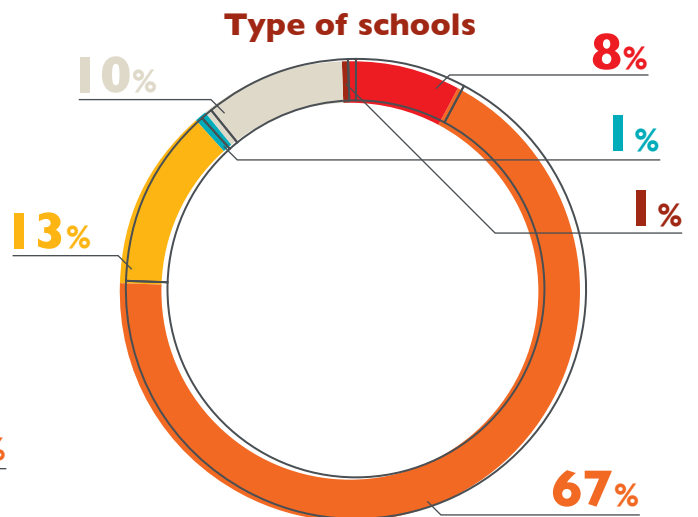
- **Government Schools** (red)
- **Aided Schools** (orange)
- **Schools under Direct Subsidy Schemes** (yellow)
- **Private Schools or International Schools** (teal)
- **Not Applicable/ Not Known** (grey)
- **No Responses** (dark red)

8%
1%
1%
10%
13%
67%

The Young Voices
Population in Hong Kong

According to census data, the Hong Kong population aged 10-19 makes up 8% of the total population and 51% of the 19-and-under population. In the last census there were 599,970 youths in this age group living in Hong Kong. The majority of youth live in the New Territories, with the greatest concentrations of the population in Sha Tin, Yuen Long, and Kwun Tong.

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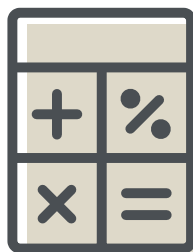
Heat map of youth population (2016 census)

Hong Kong Island

12,479	18,314	21,298	42,769
Wan Chai	Central and Western	Southern	Eastern

94,860

Kowloon

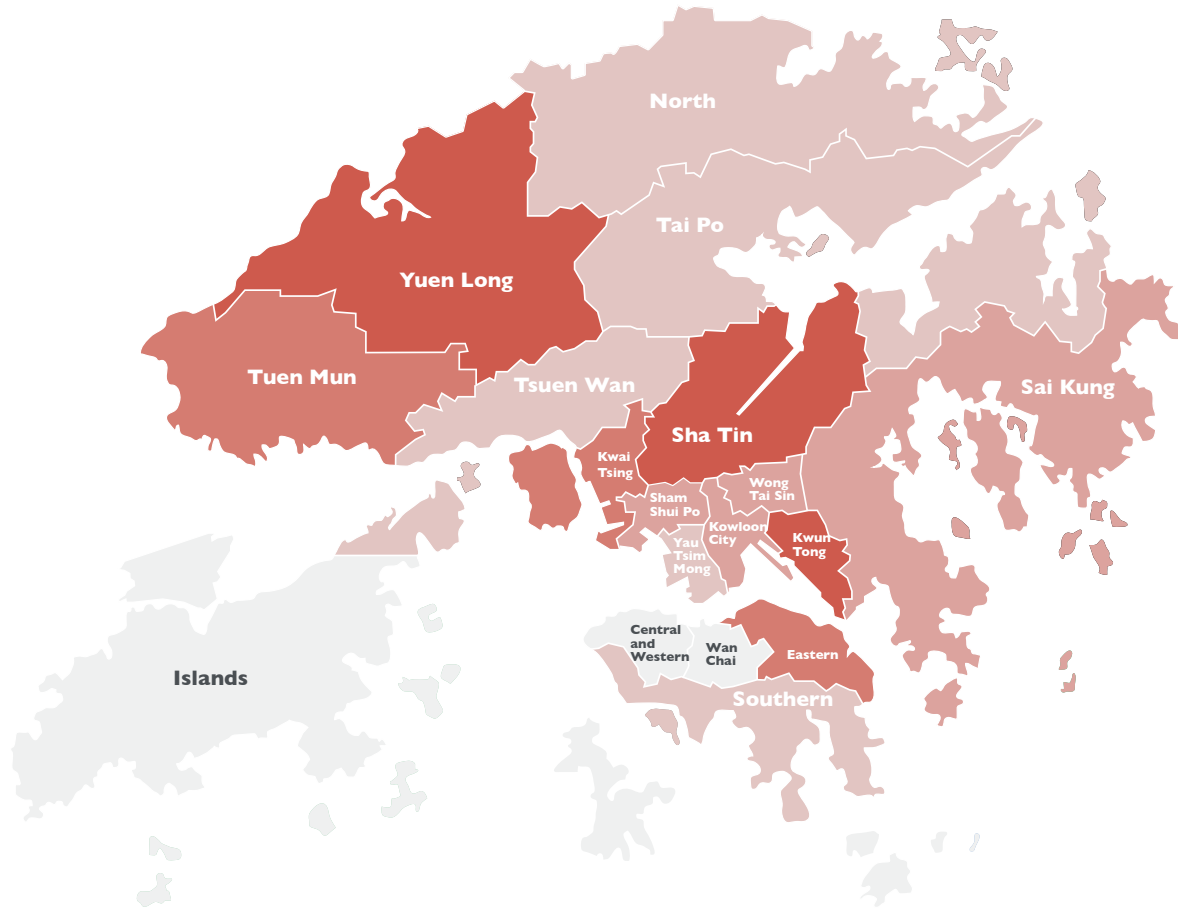| 26,653	32,169	32,240	35,154	54,079
Yau Tsim Mong	Kowloon City	Sham Shui Po	Wong Tai Sin	Kwun Tong

180,295

New Territories

12,073	25,636	26,042	28,061	36,887
Islands	Tsuen Wan	Tai Po	North	Sai Kung

41,933	44,834	52,783	56,566
Tuen Mun	Kwai Tsing	Yuen Long	Sha Tin
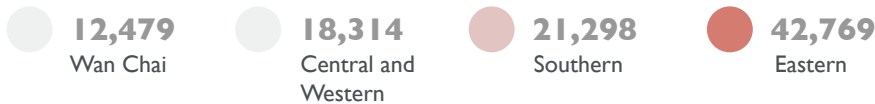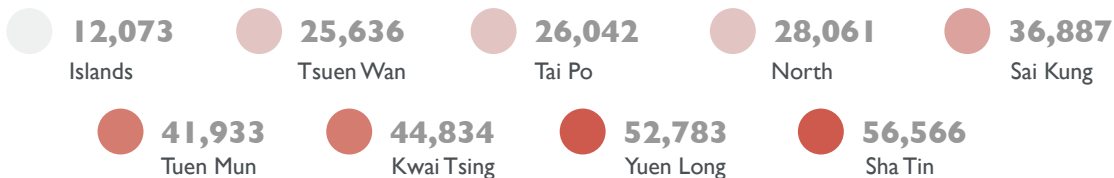
324,815

599,970

Land total

School Life

60% of youth would like to have more influence and opportunities to address issues concerning them in school.

60%

Topics Covered

Student Voices at School

Children's Rights Education

Participation in Extra-Curricular and Leisure Activities

Academic Stress

Bullying at School

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Student Voices at School

Over 60% of secondary school students would like to have greater influence and opportunities to address issues concerning them in school. When asked about how they think the school incorporates students' views in decisions that affect them, nearly 1/3 stated that their school had not done enough to consult them. Although student unions are established to serve as a channel for students to raise issues that matter to them and represent their interests, students generally feel that the schools control student unions and hinder the unions' ability to represent the voices of the students. Instead of raising concerns to their student union, students told us they turn to teachers or parents for help with issues related to their school. The lack of an opportunity to participate in school governance or to have their concerns and ideas heard by school decision-makers led some students to express frustration with the status of student unions and school rules they found unfair. The students in our focus groups gave different examples of how they felt their voices were not considered and why they felt their interests and needs were not prioritized in the school rules. Some felt that the school rules are too harsh and unreasonable.

> "The school does not give the student union any real power. **90% of our suggestions were banned by the teachers.** We planned to organize a sports event, and it was previously written in our election platform. The plan was still rejected by the school. We found that the school was trying to stop us from making substantial contributions for the students."

"The student unions are controlled by the teachers. I was chairperson of the student union. **The teachers rejected many ideas that we wanted to pursue.**"
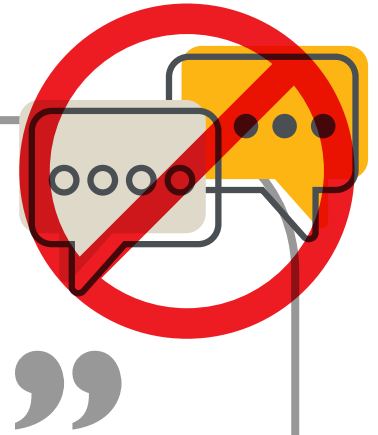
"If the temperature does not drop below 14 or 15 Celsius, **then students ought not to wear the school blazer as the weather is not considered cold enough.** If they do not follow this strict dress code, they will receive a demerit."

"I disagree with the school regulations the most. For example, water bottles are not allowed to be put on the desk. **We are only allowed to wear down jackets when a cold weather warning was issued....**"

"According to the school regulations we are not allowed to bring mobile phones to school. I think it is unreasonable as there is no such regulation in other schools. **Actually teachers do not care whether we do follow the rules....**"

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Children's Rights Education

Students we consulted told us that children's rights, such as having their opinion heard on matters relating to them, were not highly valued or integrated into their school teaching. More than 80% of youth reported that children's rights were not explained to them at school in the current or previous school term.

Participation in Extra-Curricular and Leisure Activities

We surveyed secondary school students on the affordability of extra-curricular and leisure activities with friends. Nearly 1 out of 5 young people often or always found extra-curricular or leisure activities unaffordable. This means that a sizable minority do not experience the same privileges as their peers to participate in school and social life.

Academic Stress

> **You are always compared with the other classmates on the test results. Sometimes you also have to explain why you get lower marks this time. This kind of comparison is a source of pressure....**

More than 60% of the youth frequently felt stressed over schoolwork or academic results in the 12 months prior to our survey. They pointed out that being compared with their peers or classmates on their academic performance added an extra level of pressure on them. They shared a number of comments about the pressure they felt, driven by the culture of academic competition in Hong Kong.

Who do young people most rely on for help with their homework?

88%

80%

55%

52%

45%

● **Classmates**

● **School teachers**

● **Tutorial school teachers**

● **Parents**

● **Other family members**
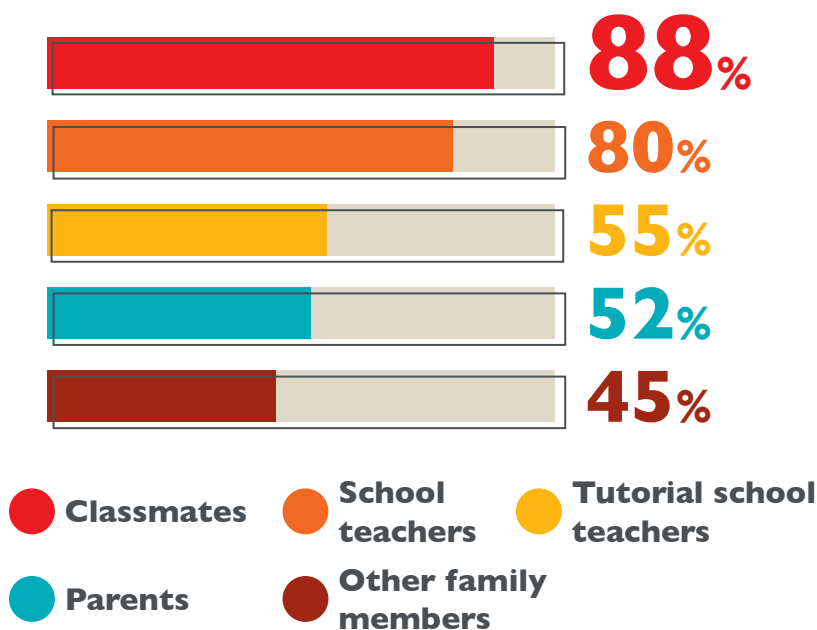
The majority of youth interviewed were confident that they can get the support they need on their homework at school, with over 80% receiving a little or a lot of help from their classmates and teachers. About half of the students responded that they can regularly get help from their tutorial school teacher or parents and less than half regularly get help from a different family member. In general, nearly 80% of surveyed youth think their school has done enough to help them in managing their school work.

" **The DSE is 'a matter of life and death'** for most students. Our life would run into a dead end **if we could not get into university.** "

" **We cannot pursue our dreams** if we do not perform well on the DSE and **cannot study the academic disciplines** we are interested in. "

Students consider the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) exam, the key assessment for university entry, a major source of stress in their lives. The exam results, whether positive or negative, are considered by young people as a measure of their personal development and as very influential on their career prospects and life outcomes. Many of the students we spoke to believe that suicide among youths is related to a high level of academic pressure.

Bullying at School

Nearly 1/4 of young people often or always worried about being bullied.

Only a little more than 50% of young people always feel safe in the classroom and at recess. Bullying is harming both girls and boys. Girls more often experience bullying in the form of mean gossip, and boys are more likely to experience physical violence or threats. Students told us that being ignored and having personal items vandalized are common forms of bullying at school. The most commonly-cited reasons that young p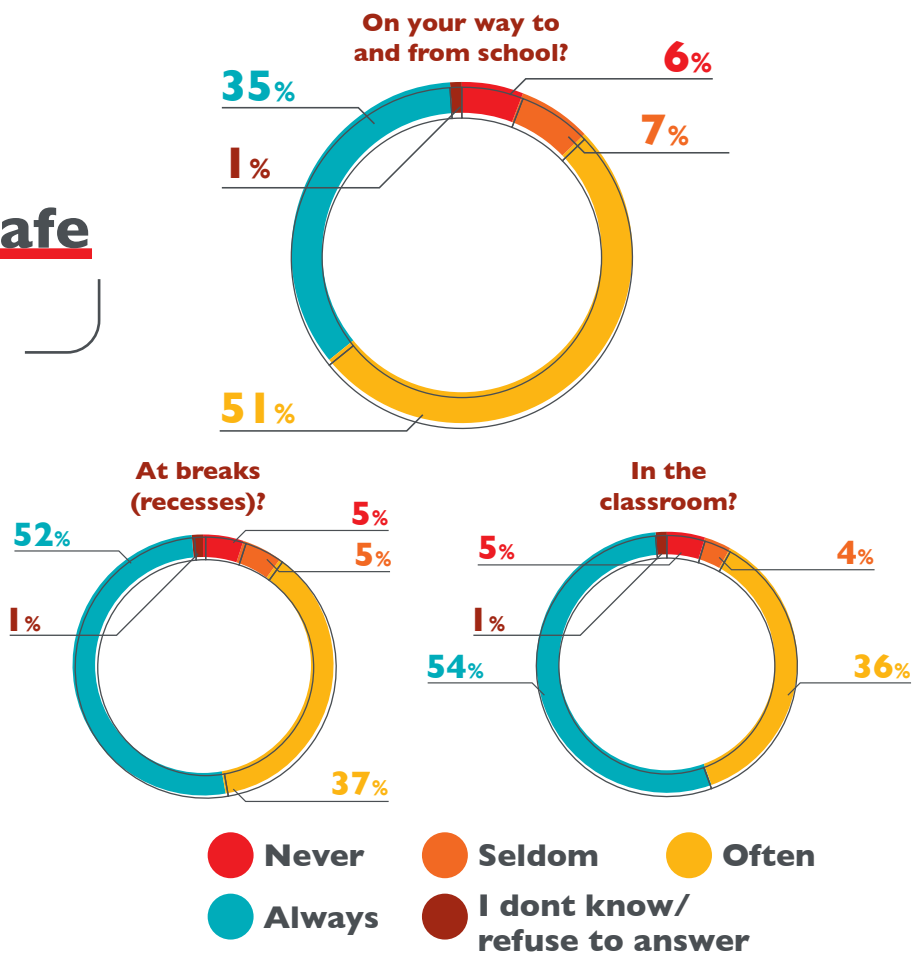eople were bullied were for their appearance (15%), for their family being worse off (6%), and for being disabled (4%). In focus groups, young people told us that there is a blurred boundary between joking and bullying, but that their feelings can still be hurt regardless of the intention.

> **I think 'spreading of rumours' is more common in girls' schools.** Girls always want to feel special and outstanding. We are cautious when there are new people joining our social circle.

> **There are many [mean girls] pretending to be your friends, but then they bad mouth you on Instagram.**

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Do You Feel Safe at School?

10% of the students we surveyed never or seldom feel safe at recess, potentially facing chronic bullying in the school environment. 1 out of 5 young people confessed that they don't know where to get help when bullied or harassed. When asked about the role of the school in preventing and responding to bullying, students expressed disappointment.

On your way to and from school?

- 35%
- 1%
- 51%
- 6%
- 7%

At breaks (recesses)?

- 52%
- 1%
- 5%
- 5%
- 37%

In the classroom?

- 5%
- 1%
- 54%
- 4%
- 36%

- 🔴 Never
- 🟠 Seldom
- 🟡 Often
- 🔵 Always
- 🟤 I dont know/ refuse to answer

School Intervention in Bullying

Some students refer cases of bullying to the school social workers. However, young people we spoke to said that they do not see that teachers and the schools are dealing with bullying effectively. School social workers seem to be the only staff members students can turn to when they experience bullying. Some youth said that they provide emotional support to students, but are not confident that they are resolving or reducing bullying cases. Apart from school bullying among young people, a number of young people in our focus groups actually gave concerning examples of teachers humiliating students.

> **The size of my classmate's head is quite [large], and they always get humiliated by the teacher saying that their brain should be 'well-developed' enough to answer questions. I also witnessed [a teacher] calling students 'cheap creatures' and slapping students' faces.**

> **A teacher who taught [one subject] to the whole form would label the class which ranked the lowest score in the subject as 'rubbish in society'.**

> **When a classmate did not join [a specific class], they got humiliated by the teacher saying 'with parents like yours', of course you are such a failure without manners.**

> **Our class teacher knew that (bullying) [was happening], but they tended to cover up the problem.**

> **Social workers at my school hardly ever intervene in such incidents. They mainly focus on handling students' stress and emotional problems.**

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> "Social workers would talk to the persons involved, **but any response to the bullying depends on the will of the victim.**"

The Difficulties in Reporting

While many young people in Hong Kong are hurt by bullying, they also point out real difficulties for them to reduce bullying at their school. Secondary school students we spoke to gave the following examples when we asked what students witnessing bullying could do:

> "It depends on the level of seriousness and whether the victim is my friend. I have witnessed my classmate being **thrown out of the window.** Everyone tried to stop this. If the victim is my friend, I will surely report. Otherwise, I might just ignore it because I am afraid of being bullied as well."
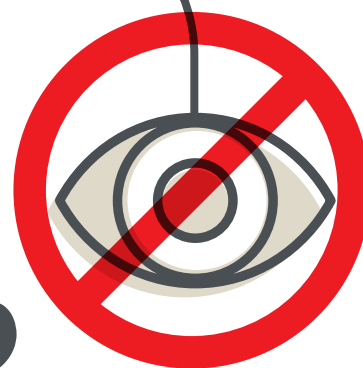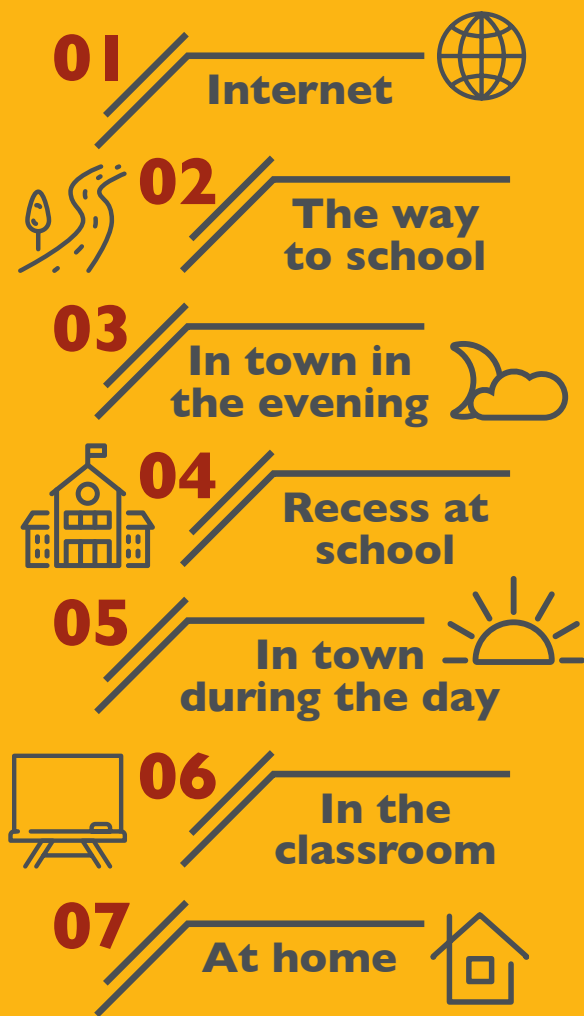
> "Our class teacher knows about this [bullying] but tends to keep it low profile to protect the students and themselves. They usually only scold the students without imposing any penalties because it is difficult to identify the perpetrators **when no one [among the students] dares to report the case.**"

Sense of Safety in Different Settings

Ranking of Safety in Different Settings by the Youth (from the most unsafe to the safest)

01 Internet

02 The way to school

03 In town in the evening

04 Recess at school

05 In town during the day

06 In the classroom

07 At home

Most youth feel safe at home and school; for the majority of young people, public areas of the city are also considered safe no matter if it is at daytime or night-time.

Many youth worry about being physically harmed by adults and peers. In the 12 months prior to our survey, more than half worried about experiencing violence from peers, while nearly 50% worried about experiencing violence from adults.

Seeking help

1 out of 5 youth does not know where to seek help when they need it, if they feel bad mentally (anxious, depressed, etc.), face problems in the family, or are exposed to violence. When people they know are exposed to violence or when they feel harassed or unfairly treated, 1/5 of youth also said they do not know where to get help.

Only a little more than **50% of secondary school students reported always feeling safe in classrooms.**

Among a range of issues that young people might worry about, youth told us that they most often **worry about being punished by their parents** and that someone they know would harm themselves.

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Personal Life

21% of youth don't know how to get support when they have problems in the family.

Topics Covered

Family Life

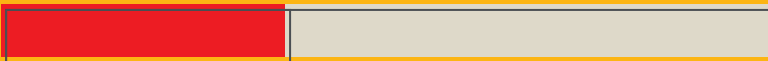Mental Health

Growing Up in a Digital World

Online Harassment and Abuse

Family Life

37% of young people worried about being kicked out of their home by their parents over the past year.

More than half of youth would like to have more influence and opportunities to voice their views on family issues or decisions that affect them. Young people described diverse experiences to us. Some said that their opinion was well-respected by their parents while others said their parents always ignored their views. These parenting practices or the absence of them can have an impact on the parent-child relationship. More than one-third of young people have even worried about being kicked out of their home (37%) over the past year. Yet, while facing problems in the family, 21% of young people don't know how to get support. More than 3/4 worry about being punished by their parents, with 46% reporting often or always worrying about this.

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In focus group discussions, some young people shared negative experiences with their parents:

> "When I was young, **I was punished by being forced to [hold stress positions]. My** parents would hit me and I felt **mentally traumatized.** My father would use a hard [blunt instrument] to hit my elder sister. There was a time that my hands got swollen after the beating."

> "**I was repeatedly hit by my parents since I was young.** My mother can hit me for many reasons ranging from not practising the piano enough, not getting homework done, to not listening to her orders, etc."

With the exception of such extreme cases, youth considered humiliating punishment as worse than physical punishment. They told us that the impact of humiliating punishment, especially public humiliation, is far-reaching and especially destructive to their mental health.

> "Open humiliation in public causes mental trauma. I do not understand why parents **would humiliate their own youth.** The humiliation can make youth question the value of their life, so is this necessary?"
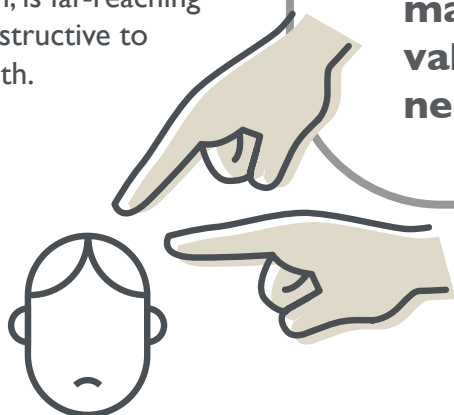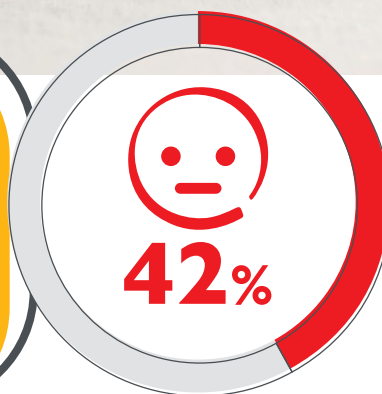
About 42% of youth often or always felt sad and depressed for a long period of time in the past year.

42%

Suicide Seek-Help Suggestions

This section of our report contains some potentially upsetting stories from young people on the topic of self-harm and suicide. There is no need for people having these thoughts to deal with them alone. If you or anyone you know is experiencing negative feelings and having thoughts about self-harm and suicide, do reach out and talk to somebody you trust, e.g. parents/caregivers, school teachers and school social workers. Reaching out to professionals can also be helpful. Two support resources are:

Anonymous online chat platform by Open Up

Website: www.openup.hk
Facebook / Instagram: hkopenup
WhatsApp / SMS: 91 012 012

24-hour hotline

by The Samaritans: 2896 0000

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The mental wellbeing of young people in Hong Kong has been an issue of serious concern for several years. When we asked young people in Hong Kong about their mental wellbeing, almost half told us they have often or always felt sad and down for a long period of time in the prior 12 months. More than 60% of youth we surveyed said they had worried within the last year that someone they know would harm themselves.

In the past 12 months, have you felt sad and down for a longer period of time?

13%
1 %
29%
25%
32%
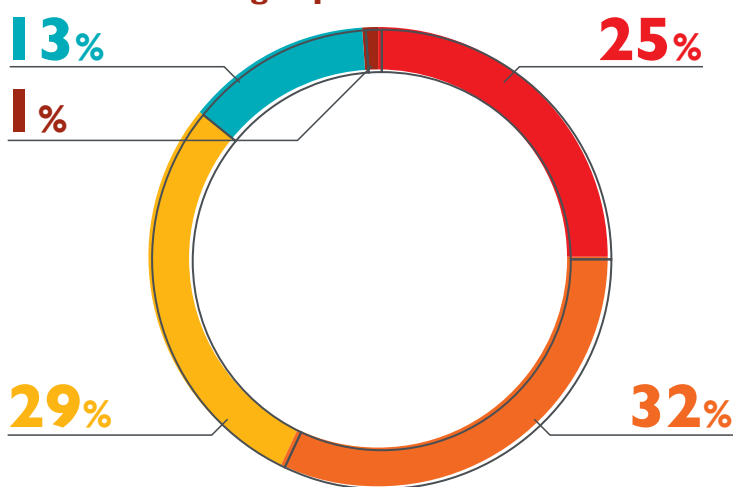
Family and school are significant sources of stress for young people . In our discussions with young people, they told us that stress related to school performance and bad relationships with family are what they expect to be the primary contributors to youth suicides in Hong Kong.

● **Never** ● **Seldom**

● **Often** ● **Always**

● **I dont know/ refuse to answer**

Suicide is not a remote issue for young people. Youth suicide and self-harm were seen as a common phenomenon by focus group participants when speaking on the topic of mental health. This includes the behavior of "cutting arm", which young people described to us as a suicide-related attention-seeking behaviour especially common among young girls who share photos of their self-harm online. Young people told us that self-harming behaviour is so common that it was perceived as, "a regular part of life".

> **I have attempted suicide** when I was young owing to the stress given by my parents. It is impossible to change your parents, what you can do is **to change the way you deal with things....**

> **My mother always compares me with other people.** When I was in form 3 there was a classmate who performed better than I did in terms of both academic performance and extra-curricular activities. My mother kept asking me why I could not perform as well as her. I was so depressed because of that. I did not want to see my mother at home, and I thought about committing suicide....

> I have two friends who have the inclination **to commit suicide and inflict self-harm.** There was a time that my friend almost wanted to **kill himself.** Another friend who was always questioned by his parents on his academic performance. He studied... a hard subject which requires time and effort to get good grades.

Although negative emotions and stories of suicide attempts from peers are not far from the minds of many youth, about 70% know where to go if they need to talk to someone or to get help when feeling bad emotionally (very anxious, depressed, sad, etc).

For the prevention of mental health problems and youth suicide, some young people think it would be helpful to strengthen communication between parents and youth, introduce student-teacher activities that promote communication, or provide students with help from a reliable social worker to deal with the high level of continuous distress. However, school talks aimed at suicide-prevention were considered ineffective by some young people, who believed a different approach was needed.

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Growing Up in a Digital World
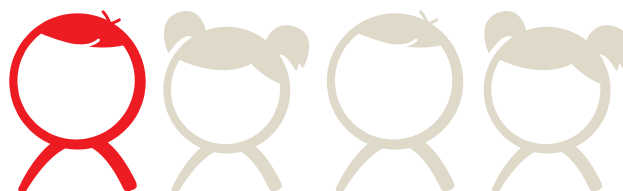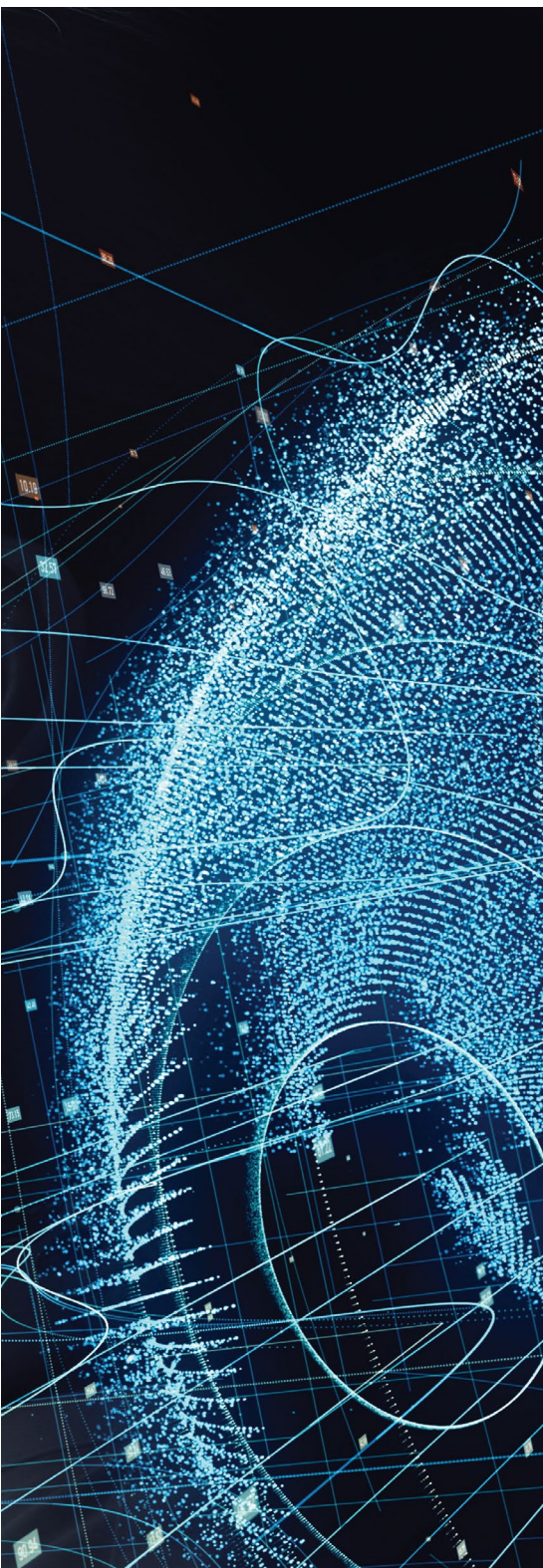
1 out of 4 youth never or seldom feel safe on the internet.
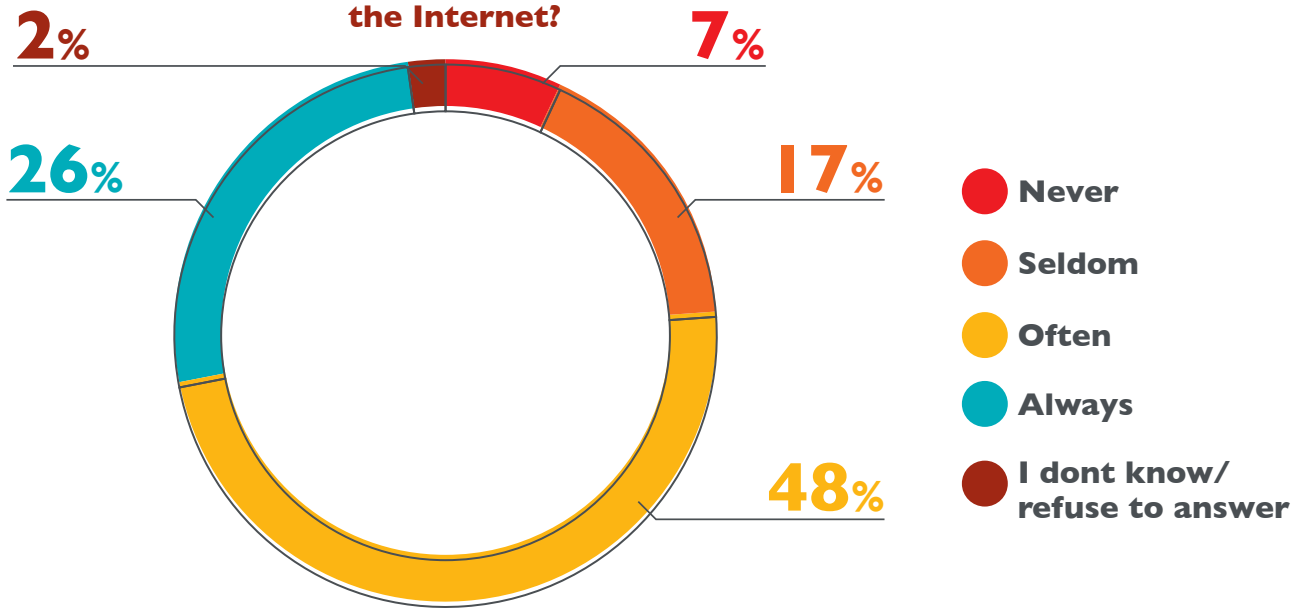
Digital Device Ownership

Use of the internet and access to digital devices are ubiquitous in Hong Kong. Digital technologies play a more and more significant role in the everyday lives of young people, who may begin socializing, seeking entertainment, and learning with digital devices at an early age. Most young people we interviewed had access to online devices for personal use. While just 71% of the youth in our study have their own computer, 94% have their own mobile phone.

Young people told us about their use of Instagram as not only a platform for social networking, but also a place where they could earn an income. For instance, some maintain Instagram stores to sell clothing or become 'influencers'.

Young people were conscious about their privacy online and made attempts to protect their information and online social activities from others. They believe different levels of information should be available to different audiences. For example, some young people do not post pictures revealing their face on Instagram accounts viewable by the general public, and some create an account specifically for "new friends". Some young people make an effort to ensure the details of their personal life are not revealed in these kinds of public and semi-public Instagram accounts.

Do you feel safe on the Internet?

- **2%**
- **7%**
- **26%**
- **17%**
- **48%**

Legend:
- 🔴 Never
- 🟠 Seldom
- 🟡 Often
- 🔵 Always
- 🟤 I dont know/ refuse to answer

> **"** All my public accounts are customized to avoid having acquaintances knowing too much about me. **My private account is for my closest friends,** and it's updated frequently. **"**

> **"** **I blocked my parents** on social media. It's dangerous to let them know that side of me. **"**

Not only are youth aware of the potential risks of having their personal information and pictures available to friends and strangers on social media platforms, some take the same approach to ensure their parents cannot access their "private realm" on social media. Some limit the view access (i.e. Instagram Stories) of their Instagram content for their parents, whereas some only accept their parents to be Facebook friends as Facebook is not the primary social platform for youth. Some consider all social media to be their private realm from which their parents should be excluded.

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The Negative Side of Youth's Digital World

The digital world has become an indispensable part of young people's lives and helps them develop social connectivity and access to information and knowledge; however, many of them feel that the internet is less safe compared to physical environments regularly visited by youth. In fact, nearly 1 out of 4 youth never or seldom feels safe on the internet. Some youth perceive the online community as hostile and full of suspicious activities. Young people told us that they felt the digital world was unsafe because of the risks of losing money to fraud in online games or e-commerce activities, online bullying, facing "online trials", and exposure to sexual harassment.

> " Why should the victims face **'online trials'**? How to make sure that the public would trust the victims? The victims will face even more pressure if the public do not believe their accounts. "

Unpleasant online experiences are not uncommon. The risk of facing an "online trial" (sometimes known as "cancel culture") when voicing one's views was raised by youth. It is an aspect of online culture that youth told us weakens the potential of the online realm to be an effective space for them to genuinely express their views and concerns. Taking the "#MeToo" campaign as an example, young people saw that victims of sexual abuse who called-out their abusers were widely discussed in a negative light, or even blamed for the abuse they suffered. Young people think this not only fails to offer justice to the victims but also exposes them to additional harm.

> " My online game account was hacked. That guy stole all my weapons and then terminated my account. It was worth **HK $2,000 to $3,000.** "

Online gaming is specifically common among male secondary school students, and several of the male students we spoke to had experienced scams on their online gaming platforms such as fraudulent "point cards" sold by third parties. In the examples given, the amount lost to fraud ranged from several hundred to several thousand Hong Kong dollars. These experiences were regarded as common and not practical to resolve or to seek help from the police.

Online Harassment
and Abuse

Almost all young people believe it is important for leaders and decision-makers in society to do more to stop online harassment and abuse.

95%

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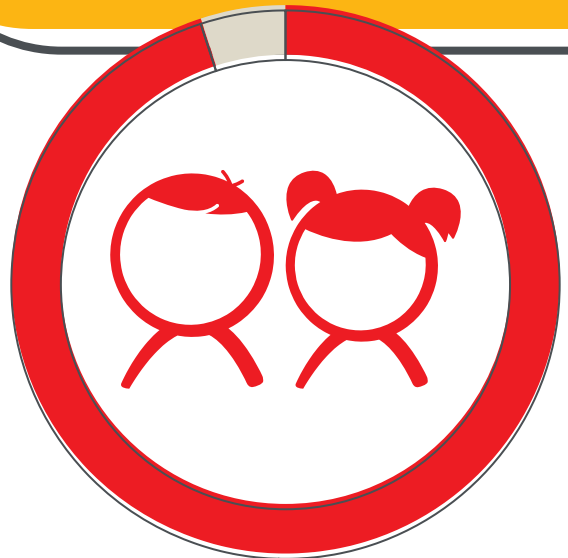
Almost all young people believe it is important for leaders and decision-makers in society to do more to stop online harassment and abuse. It is common for both female and male students to be approached by strangers requesting connections on social media, usually referred to as "Strange uncles" and "Pretties".

"Strange uncles" is the term young girls used to describe the suspicious men who try to connect with them and are presumed to have ill intentions such as asking young girls out for sex, requesting nude selfies, and asking them to sell their school uniforms. Some girls we spoke to had received close-up photos of male private parts from boys online, and conveyed that receiving these photos "is quite common among pretty girls".
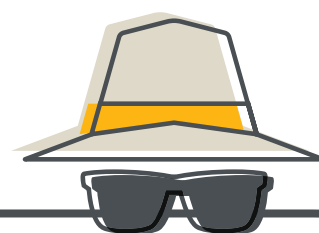
> "There was once a stranger saying he would give me **HK $1,000** to be his friend. I blocked him immediately. There were also strangers approaching me through **WhatsApp, WeChat,** and **Instagram.** They kept asking me to be their girlfriend. It's really scary as I did not know how they managed to find me online and what they would do to me."

For male students, coming across fake accounts of "pretties" is common. Boys, however, find it hard to determine the intention of these fake accounts where suspicious people pose as beautiful girls and try to connect with them. Both male and female students are aware of the potential risks associated with these strangers or fake accounts and believe it is not difficult to determine if online strangers may be dangerous and if they should reject their invitations.

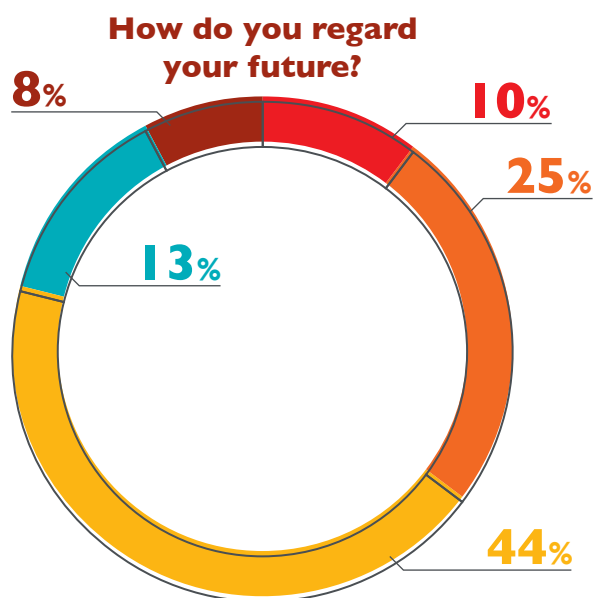> "**I block all accounts** of pretty girls trying to follow me on Instagram."

Looking Forward

Just a little more than half of the youth think their future is positive, while just over a third of them regard their future negatively

How do you regard your future?

8%
10%
25%
13%
44%

- ● **Very negatively**
- ● **Fairly negatively**
- ● **Fairly positively**
- ● **Very positively**
- ● **I dont know/ refuse to answer**

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Career Prospects

When evaluating their future career prospects, young people are not optimistic. Only 41% of them think they can get a job when they finish school. Youth we spoke to also gave some personal accounts of their views on future career prospects:

> " My school has been requiring us to do **'Life Planning'** since I was in Form 1. Every year we are asked to write down our expectation for the future. Our teachers also told us to complete the task like doing an assignment; just get it done. "

> " Even if I have the capability to one day become a famous basketball player, **my parents would ban it anyway.** They would think about my future and decide that the prospect is too bleak. The professional lifespan in the sports industry is quite short and usually an athlete retires after they reach the age of 30... "

> " First of all, we need to decide whether personal interest or salary is more important. If I choose to study acting, it means I will not be able to earn much for living. However, if I were to study design, **that is not something I like.** "

> " **In Hong Kong, the art industry is very small in scale.** The government does not promote art or sports. Therefore, you do not get paid much for those jobs. The overall climate does not allow you to pursue your aspiration. "

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Young Voices is a study that brings us closer to the perspectives and experiences of young people in Hong Kong in various aspects of their lives. During the last two years, the socio-economic situation and prolonged school closures have affected the lives of our young people. The study findings signal important considerations for their wellbeing and development. All stakeholders – Government, schools, parents, businesses, and civil society organisations - have a role to play in supporting our youth so they can develop to their full potential.

We hope that Young Voices will inspire actors at all levels of our society to prioritise the needs of our young people, and also create an environment that enables them to become active agents of change on issues that affect their lives and their future.

We recommend that the Government provides more opportunities to encourage children's participation in civic affairs, and ensure that the consultative mechanism in the government is responsive to taking their views and suggestions into consideration during the process of policy formulation. The Government should also ensure that young people in Hong Kong can benefit from more child-focused legislation, policies and budget that comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Schools should find ways to alleviate the academic pressure on children, and establish systems to identify and support students with mental wellbeing or protection issues. They should also ensure students are given sufficient opportunities to present their views and take an active role in matters related to them. Parents can equip themselves with knowledge on positive parenting, online protection, and ways to improve young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Parents and young people should focus on having more open communication and building stronger family relationships, so children can freely share their concerns and issues.

Businesses can offer professional trainings, guidance and job opportunities to young people, to encourage and support them to pursue their career.

Civil society organisations, including us at Save the Children Hong Kong, will continue to develop and implement programmes, and engage the Government and other actors in collective efforts to address the needs of Hong Kong children and youth. Together, we protect our next generation and help our young people build a brighter future.

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Methodology

Young Voices Hong Kong Study Methodology

The Young Voices study in Hong Kong used a mixed-methods approach, collecting qualitative data through 8 focus groups with 58 participants between April and May 2019 and separately collecting quantitative survey data through structured interviews with 1,151 participants in July 2020. The study target group was Hong Kong residents aged 12 to 17. The sampling procedure is not a probability proportional to size method and all data presented in this study are descriptive statistics, thus a confidence level and margin of error for the study sample are not provided.

The potential participants for focus group discussions were approached by snowball sampling and were offered a modest incentive to participate in the study. The invitation first started from the personal network of the research team. The participants in the focus groups were mainly composed of young people aged 15-17. The formation of focus groups was based on three criteria: socio-economic status, type of school, and gender. Based on these criteria, eight groups were arranged. Each group was formed of six to eight children. To ensure a diversity of opinions and confidentiality, most of the respondents were strangers to each other.

The focus group discussion covered the following areas: (a) awareness and knowledge of children's rights, (b) education, schooling, and violence, (c) mental health and emotional support, (d) physical and humiliating punishment, (e) online protection and online safety, (f) climate change, and (g) the future while the discussion time allocated for each topic varied depending on the interactions of the participants.

The quantitative data was collected via a time-location sampling method with structured interviews used to collect responses via surveys by enumerators approaching target participants in high pedestrian traffic areas. Invited study participants were eligible to participate in a lot-drawing for a modest reward. The sampling was carried out from 2nd July to 10th July 2020, Monday through Friday (from 10am to 5pm) in a public space of selected school districts. There were a total of 8 locations selected for the sampling, chosen because of their proximity to 39 secondary schools attended by students from diverse geographic locations of residence. The sample locations were: Tai Kok Tsui, Mong Kok, Po Lam, Kwun Tong, Tsuen Wan, Sheung Shui, Sai Wan Ho, and Shek Kip Mei.

The team chose interview times most likely to reach a higher number of students. Staff members of the Academy of Hong Kong Studies of the Education University of Hong Kong monitored the interviews on site. Interviewers who had received half-day training conducted face-to-face interviews and invited respondents to fill in the questionnaires.

Ethical Considerations

Considerations and controls to ensure ethical research design and conduct were the responsibility of both the research consultant who is employed as a professor at a Hong Kong tertiary education institution and the staff of Save the Children Hong Kong supervising the study, including one staff member trained in research ethics. Young Voices study advisors at Save the Children Sweden also had oversight on study adaptations and methods including ethics considerations. Specific measures were taken to adapt the research instruments and methods to ensure low or no risks to participants and that beneficence was assured. All study participants were well informed of the conditions for their participation in the study and consented to their participation with awareness of any risks and their rights. Participants in the focus group discussions additionally had the consent of their parents which was deemed necessary

because of the sensitive nature of some of the discussion topics. Most participants in the street-intercept structured interview surveys participated without parental consent but the option to participate after receiving parental consent was available to all respondents. Because acquiring parental consent for participation in the street-intercept surveys wouldn't have been possible for most participants, the survey instrument contents were adapted with the assumption that participants are "mature minors" and that participation must have minimal risk so that it is assured that the study participants have the cognitive capacity to understand any study risks, their rights, and any impact on them relating to their participation. In consideration of this and the presumption that an effective child support services referral mechanism wouldn't be feasible for the street-intercept survey respondents, assurance of anonymity was established as a primary factor of the survey design and a design criteria was set to that no question requiring the survey respondent to identify victimization of violence or to disclose current mental health conditions could be included in the questionnaire.

Informed consent was assured by the presentation of consent statements both in writing and verbally describing any risks involved, the voluntary nature of the study, assurance of no penalty by refusing to participate,

withdrawing, etc. Participants in the focus groups were reminded to practice confidentiality with anything shared by other participants, and individuals were not identified to each other by full/real names. To minimize risks associated with the discussion of sensitive topics like abuse and mental health, groups were segregated by gender and fliers with contact information for services to help youth with mental health or abuse were distributed to all focus group participants. In addition, a referral mechanism was established prior to the focus group discussions and the researchers were trained on Save the Children's Child Safeguarding Policy and signed agreements to adhere to Save the Children Hong Kong's policy. Difficulties in obtaining parents' consent for the adolescents in junior form resulted in lower participation from this age demographic in the focus groups. Minor details in some quotes from participants in focus groups were modified to protect the anonymity of study participants as well as persons and groups of persons described by the study participants.

Both interviewers and interviewees wore face masks as a precaution against Covid-19. They also adopted social distancing. All time-location interviews stopped starting from the 13th of July due to the outbreak of the third wave of Covid-19 infections.

Limitations

In focus group discussions the

primary limitation was the time allocated for the discussion for a broad range of topics. The amount of time allocated for the focus groups was determined to be the most appropriate for participants, but on account of high participant interest in some subject areas there was often inadequate time remaining for detailed discussion on topics scheduled for the end of the session, namely "climate change" and "the future". This has resulted in considerably less insights and diversity of views on these topics in the study results.

On account of typical difficulties with street-intercept interviews, some interview questions were left unanswered by some respondents. The most unanswered question was Q15, accounting for 5% of the total sample. It was observed that around one-tenth of passers-by declined the interview, among which the number of male passers-by were higher than that of female passers-by. 13 Respondents (including 4 who attended the street interview and 9 who took part in the online survey) did not complete the survey. Their responses were not included in the analysis.

There is a general expectation that time-location interviews in public spaces receive feedback from respondents who are more cooperative. Respondents in this setting also usually tend to deliver answers that are more socially-acceptable. However, compared with interviews conducted on school campuses, our interviewees on the side-walk and in public areas appeared to worry less about interference from teachers and fellow students. The interviewers and interviewees did not know each other. As interviewers have declared that the collected information would be kept confidential and provision of no personal data was required, interviewees were more willing to share their views on sensitive topics.

Based on the population sample, students who are 12 years old take up 21% and student who are 17 years old take up 4% of the entire student population. However, in our respondent samples, only 5% of the respondents are 12 years old and 18% of the respondents are 17 years old. Given the gap between the population sample and our respondent sample, findings were weighted to offer a more representative result. Therefore, we have increased the frequency of age 12 students and reduced the frequency of age 17 students to fit the distribution of the population sample. The same applies to gender, while we have interviewed more female students than male students, we weight the distribution of male and female according to the distribution of the population sample. We also weight the forms distribution according to the same mechanism. Respondents who did not provide his or her age, gender and form of study were excluded from weighting. The proportion of students in Hong Kong refers to Hong Kong Education Bureau Student Enrolment Statistics, 2019/20 (Kindergartens, Primary and Secondary Schools) P. 87, Table 4.11.
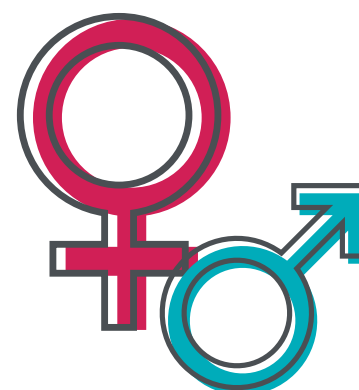
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