

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 2930
TO BE ANSWERED ON: 20.12.2024

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

2930. SHRI G.K. VASAN:

Will the Minister of ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

- (a) whether Government is aware of studies indicating harmful effects of social media, especially on children and adolescents;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether Government is aware of the factors attracting children and adolescents towards social media; and
- (d) whether steps have been taken by Government to wean away children and adolescents from social media and protect them from its harmful effects?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE FOR ELECTRONICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(SHRI JITIN PRASADA)

(a) to (d): The policies of the Government are aimed at ensuring an Open, Safe and Trusted and Accountable Internet for its users. With the expansion of the Internet and more and more citizens including children, accessing the internet services, the risk of exposure to inappropriate content and the harmful effects of these activities have also increased. The Government is cognizant of the immense opportunities offered by these technologies and the harms they may cause.

In order to protect the children and adolescents from exposure to inappropriate content and the harmful effects of social media, Government has adopted a series of measures for preventing the flow of such information.

With regard to inappropriate and unlawful content on the internet, the Information Technology Act, 2000 ("IT Act") and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 ("IT Rules, 2021"), together, has put a stringent framework to deal with unlawful content in the digital space.

The IT Rules, 2021 casts due diligence obligations on the intermediaries, including social media intermediaries. Such due diligence obligations includes that the intermediary shall make reasonable efforts by itself to cause its users not to host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share, among others, any information which is harmful to child or violates any law. Intermediaries are also required to remove information, violative of any law for the time being in force, as and when brought to their knowledge either through a Court order or through a notice by Appropriate Government or its Authorised Agency.

This Ministry has also launched a program titled Information Security Education & Awareness ("ISEA") to generate awareness among users while using internet. A dedicated website has been created for information security awareness that generates and upgrades

relevant awareness material on a regular basis and can be accessed at <https://www.infosecawareness.in>.

Additionally, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (“DPDP Act”) has been enacted which establishes the legal framework to regulate the processing of digital personal data. The DPDP Act allows Data Fiduciaries to process the personal data of children only with parental

consent. It does not permit processing of personal data which is detrimental to well-being of children or involves tracking, behavioural monitoring or targeted advertising.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (“NCPCR”) has conducted a study on “Effects (Physical, Behavioural and Psycho-social) of using Mobile Phones and other Devices with Internet Accessibility by Children” in 2021. The study report is available at https://ncpcr.gov.in/uploads/165650458362bc410794e02_effect1.PDF

Additionally, NCPCR has prepared following guidelines on Cyber Safety and Protection of children:

1. Guideline and standard content for raising awareness among children, parents, educators and general public titled “Being Safe Online” is available at https://ncpcr.gov.in/public/uploads/16613370496305fdd946c31_being-safe-online.pdf

2. Guidelines on Cyber Safety (for inclusion in) Manual on Safety and Security of Children in Schools which is available at: https://ncpcr.gov.in/uploads/16613369326305fd6444e1b_cyber-safety-guidline.pdf

3. Guidelines for Schools for prevention of bullying and cyber bullying” which is available at https://ncpcr.gov.in/uploads/1714382687662f675fe278a_preventing-bullying-and-cyberbullying-guidelines-for-schools-2024.pdf

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has released a handbook on “Safe online learning in times of COVID-19”. The handbook is available at https://ncert.nic.in/pdf/announcement/Safetolearn_English.pdf
