



Mental health of children in a digital environment

The International Bioethics Committee (IBC) at UNESCO has released a report "[Ethical considerations for youth mental health in the digital environment](#)". The report highlights that children and adolescents live in a digital world that offers real opportunities including access to information, social connection, civic participation.

However, it also exposes them to serious risks, including problematic use of social media, exposure to harmful content, privacy violations, cyberviolence etc. These may lead to serious risks to their mental health, and that protecting them is an ethical & human rights issue.

Pakistan's digital landscape is expanding at remarkable speed: the country now has an estimated 117 million internet users, with online penetration reaching 45.6%, and roughly a third of the population with social media user identities. Broadband penetration has climbed past 64%, and telecom subscriptions have crossed 207 million.

Behind these numbers is a generation of Pakistani children and adolescents who are online for long and unsupervised periods, often without the digital literacy, parental guidance, or institutional safeguards needed to navigate this environment safely.

A panel discussion was convened at the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives on 11th August 2026. A panel of experts deliberated on how Pakistan can protect children's mental health in an increasingly digital world without excluding them from its opportunities.

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| Dr Asma Humayun | National Technical Advisor, MHSP&C Unit |
| Asfandiyar Khan | Member Digital & Emerging Technologies, Ministry of IT and Telecommunication |
| Hamza Ahmad | Assistant Director, Pakistan Telecommunication Authority |
| Mr. Pirbhu Satyani | Member Sindh/Minorities, National Commission on the Rights of Child |
| Mahwish Saeed Syed | SBC Officer, UNICEF |
| Ms Adeela Waqar | Director Labs, PKCERT |



A comprehensive report from the discussion will be shared with all stakeholders with the goal of translating this dialogue into concrete, actionable recommendations for policy and practice, which will cover the following areas:

- Cross-sector collaboration between mental health, education, and technology policymakers.
- National guidelines for parents and educators on safe, age-appropriate digital use and mental health literacy.
- Stronger regulatory coordination between MoITT, PTA, and PKCERT particularly on cyberbullying, online harassment, and platform accountability.
- Active engagement of child rights institutions to ensure protection frameworks are grounded in children's rights, not just technical regulation.
- An effective referral mechanism to mental health services for children & adolescents exposed to online violence or harassment.