Experts urge parents to step up online guidance, warn of the growing threats

UGANDAN CHILDREN USING ONLINE SITES EXPOSED TO PORN – REPORT

BY JACKY ACHAN

In Uganda, half of the 1,000 children sampled in a study accessed pornography online, with boys and older adolescents being disproportionately affected, a new report has revealed.

Titled *Disrupting Harm*, the study report, which was released by Safe Online formed part of a wider warning issued in Kampala by the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) last Tuesday.

The organisation said children across the country are increasingly running into disturbing and confusing material on television, radio, social media and other online spaces.

The warning was shared as the world marked the day dedicated to preventing the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. The theme for the day discussed ways how new technologies can either protect children or expose them to danger.

ROLE OF MEDIA

Reading a statement on behalf of UCRNN, Hope Wambi, the chairperson of prevention of sexual violence against children in the organisation, said children are being shaped by violent scenes, sexualised pictures, misleading ideas about relationships and harmful gender stereotypes.

The stereotypes, Wambi said, are widely held but oversimplified

Children using a tablet. Digital content influences how young people behave and how they see the world

beliefs.

"These exposures influence how young people behave, how they see the world and how vulnerable
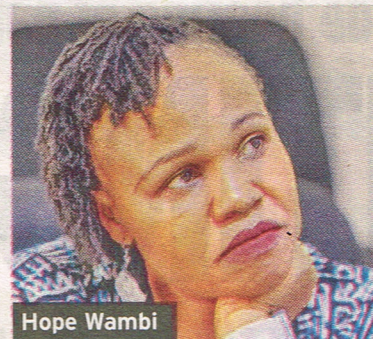
Hope Wambi

they become to exploitation," Wambi said.

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Parental guidance on online material and social media use is the action point that stakeholders have fronted.

According to the Uganda Communications Commission 2020 report, 70% of the children do not have meaningful guidance from their parents about how to use the Internet.

UCRNN officials said this lack of parental guidance increases the risk of children facing harmful content.

REGIONAL TRENDS

Across eastern and southern Africa, one in 10 children have experienced online sexual abuse.

To avert the trend, UCRNN officials said there is a need for the Government to build media spaces that protect children and allow them to dream, learn and feel confident.

The officials also urged the media houses and content creators to follow child-sensitive guidelines and share positive and age-appropriate content.

UCRNN officials also called upon the Government and regulators to tighten the enforcement of media and digital safety rules.