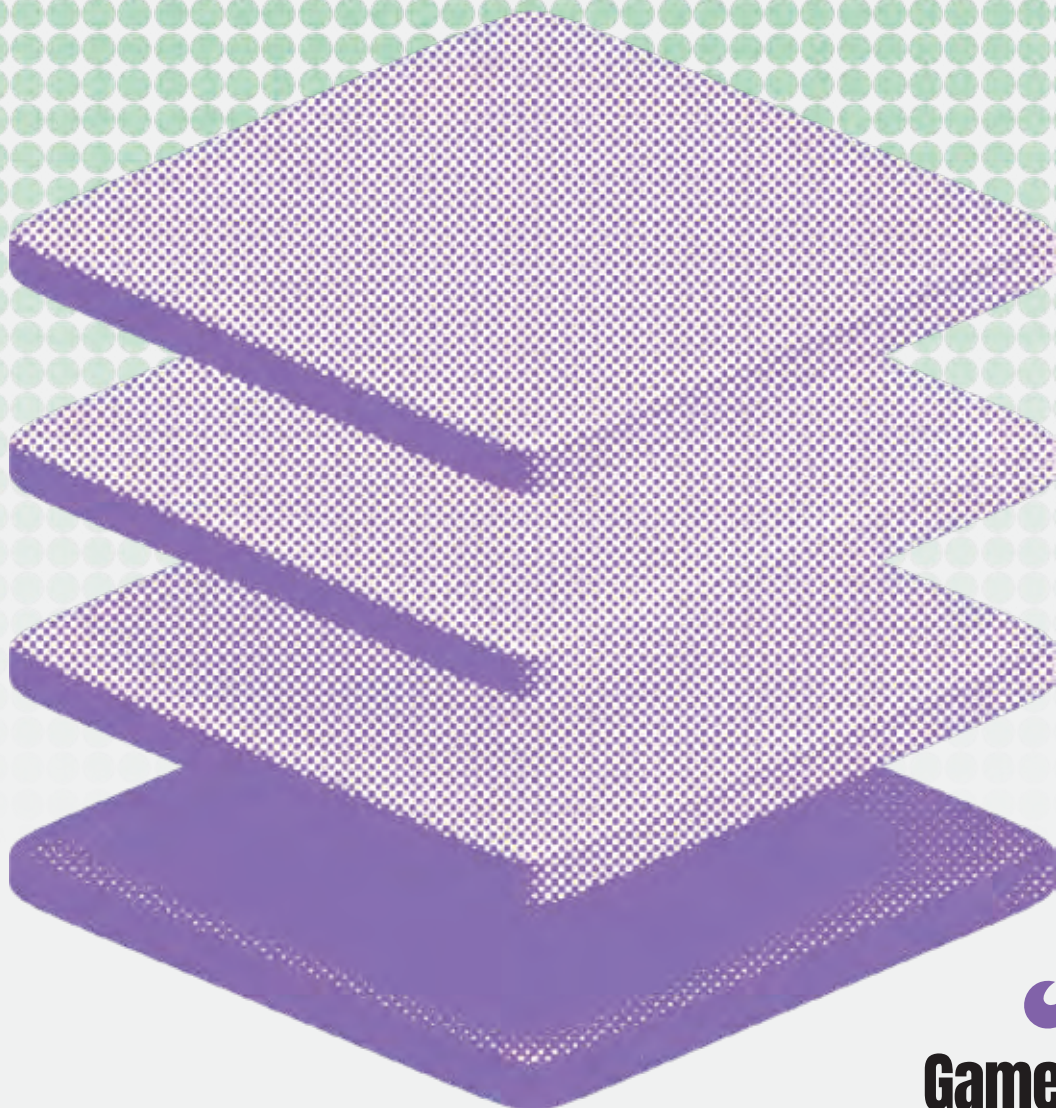


DESIGNING PLAYER SUPPORT THAT WORKS: AGE AND GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN PLATFORM AND COMMUNITY SAFETY



GamerSafer

GamerSafer protects online play at scale by strengthening player accountability across games and platforms. As a pioneering Trust & Safety technology provider built exclusively for games, GamerSafer delivers identity, verification, and accountability solutions that protect players and reinforce ecosystem integrity across titles and platforms.

With a privacy-first protection layer spanning onboarding, in-game integrity, and post-game enforcement, GamerSafer helps teams reduce repeat abuse, protect fair play, lower operational strain, and build healthier communities over time. Today, GamerSafer supports communities across 250K Minecraft servers, 50K Discord servers, over 50M players in more than 200 countries.

ECPAT International

ECPAT International is a global network of civil society organisations working together to eliminate the sexual exploitation of children in all its manifestations. The ECPAT Network currently consists of 143 members working as independent organisations or coalitions in 114 countries.

The ECPAT International Secretariat coordinates the global work of the network and is based in Bangkok, Thailand. The Secretariat designs and implements global and regional initiatives and undertakes programming, campaigning, advocacy and research to facilitate network initiatives.

This report was written by ECPAT International: **Karina Padilla**, **Julieanne Marie Tabilog** and **Francesco Cecon**.

ECPAT International extends its thanks to **Maria Oliveira** and **Rodrigo Tamellini** for their valuable review of the report, and **Ramón Bartra** for his support with the quantitative analysis.

Suggested citation: ECPAT International and GamerSafer. (2026). *Designing Player Support that works: Age and Gender Considerations in Platform and Community Safety*. Bangkok: ECPAT International.

© ECPAT International, 2026

Extracts from this publication may be reproduced with acknowledgement of the source as ECPAT International. All other requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of this document should be addressed to info@ecpat.org.

Design and layout by: Eduart Strazimiri

Published by:

ECPAT International

328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,
Bangkok 10400, THAILAND.

Phone: +66 2 215 3388 | Email: info@ecpat.org

Website: www.ecpat.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
Topline Takeaways	6
Practical implications for trust, safety, and community	7
DATA IN FOCUS: HELP-SEEKING, COMMUNITY, AND GENDER EXPRESSION IN MINEHUT	11
About the survey	12
Methodology	12
Limitations	13
FINDINGS: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS	14
Part 1. Help-seeking behaviours	15
Preferred support channels for game-related concerns	15
Preferred support channels for concerns outside of the game	17
Use of AI for support	19
Analysis: Patterns of help-seeking across contexts	22
Implications on trust, safety, and community	22
The age factor in declining support reliance	23
The different uses of AI for support	24
Part 2. Perceptions of the Minehut community	25
Analysis: Patterns of help-seeking against community perceptions	25
Implications on trust, safety, and community	27
Part 3. Gender expression in gaming	28
In-game skins and gender expression	28
Analysis: Tendencies of help-seeking according to motivations	29
Other game elements and gender expression	30
Perceived pressure from gender norms and roles	31
Analysis: Patterns of help-seeking according to perceived pressure	31
Implications on trust, safety, and community	32
CONCLUSION: ACTIONABLE PATHWAYS AND KEY OPPORTUNITIES	34
For enhanced game design and features	35
For improved trust and safety confidence	35
What we should look into next	36

KEY TERMS USED IN THE REPORT

Girls: respondents aged 13–18 who identified as female.

Young women: respondents aged 18 and above who identified as female.

Boys: respondents aged 13–18 who identified as male.

Young men: respondents aged 18 and above who identified as male.

Binary players: Respondents who identified as either girls/young women or boys/young men.

Non-binary players: Respondents who did not identify exclusively as girls/young women or boys/young men. This may include players who identify as gender diverse or prefer another gender identity outside the binary categories.

Help-seeking: Behaviours that involve a person reaching out or searching for support on different channels, tools, or mechanisms with the goal of addressing a concern they can't resolve in their current capacity.

Gender identity: Refers to how a person understands and describes their own gender. It may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender dynamics: How ideas of stereotypes, assumptions, and expectations linked to gender identities manifest within social interactions online or offline.

Age-appropriate: Design, content or interactions that are aligned with the developmental stage, capacities and needs of children and young people at different

ages. This includes ensuring that features, language, risks and safeguards are suitable for their cognitive, emotional and social development.

Gender-sensitive: Design, content or interactions that recognise and respond to the different experiences, needs and risks associated with gender, including diverse gender identities. This may include avoidance of stereotypes, addressing unequal power dynamics, and ensuring that environments are welcoming, safe and supportive for all genders.

Statistically significant difference: The difference between groups (e.g. by gender or age) is unlikely to be due to chance. It suggests that the pattern observed is probably real.

Modest difference: The gap between groups (e.g., by gender or age) is small. Even if statistically significant, the difference may not be large in practical terms.

Game-related struggles (and similar terms): Refers to matters that players seek help for, that are generally about the Minecraft game.

Out-of-game struggles (and similar terms): Refers to matters that players seek help for, that they may be experiencing outside of the game or in-person.

In-game skin: The visual appearance or design of a player's avatar within the game. Skins typically alter how a character looks (e.g. clothing, colours, style, or gender presentation). In Minecraft, players can choose one of the nine default characters and customise it by downloading third-party skins or uploading their own.

INTRODUCTION

Online games play an important role in the lives of many children, teens, and young people, across all gender identities today. For many, these games are not only sources of entertainment but also important social spaces where players interact, learn, explore their identities, and find a sense of belonging.

Often, online games are often viewed as neutral, universally engaging platforms, offering a digital environment that caters to all. Yet, research¹ increasingly shows that factors such as age and gender can shape gaming experiences in subtle and uneven ways, given how they intersect with wider social dynamics, norms, and expectations.

Recently, the importance of both age-appropriate and gender-sensitive design in in-game content and play mechanics has begun to be recognised, with some progress in implementation—particularly in age-appropriate approaches. But when it comes to designing player support and community safety tools, age and gender considerations are often overlooked by standardised, “one-size-fits-all” models. This may delay intervention, weaken prevention, and risk children and youth underreporting important concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

How then can Trust & Safety professionals, community managers, and safety teams design better support that actually reaches players?

This data snapshot, produced through a collaboration between ECPAT International and GamerSafer, explores practical, scalable approaches for designing community safety in online gaming environments, with age-specific and gender-informed considerations. It is based on an in-game survey which explored the help-seeking behaviours, community perceptions, and gender expression of 1,991 child and youth players from the **Minehut community**.

Minehut is a free, cloud-based Minecraft server hosting platform that allows anyone to create and manage their own servers instantly, without any technical expertise or cost. The platform supports a wide range of game modes — from survival and creative to minigames and role-playing — and has grown to reach millions of players worldwide. GamerSafer is the owner and operator of Minehut since Feb 2024, leading its trust and safety strategy and initiatives. With a massive and diverse user base, Minehut is the world's largest independent server network for Minecraft, bringing together players of all backgrounds and play styles. Its community-driven environment fosters social interaction, collaborative gameplay, and user-generated content, making it one of the most vibrant communities in gaming. The Minehut context is relevant because it reflects a live, youth-facing gaming ecosystem with multiple support and community touchpoints, but the findings may be applied to broader gaming contexts as directional insights rather than universal conclusions.

¹ ECPAT International. (2025). *Gender considerations in online child sexual exploitation and abuse: a focus on boys*. Bangkok: ECPAT International. UNICEF (2023). *Children's rights and online gaming: Industry toolkit on advancing diversity, equity and inclusion*. UNICEF. Equimundo (2021). *Masculinities and gaming: A global study of online gaming culture*.

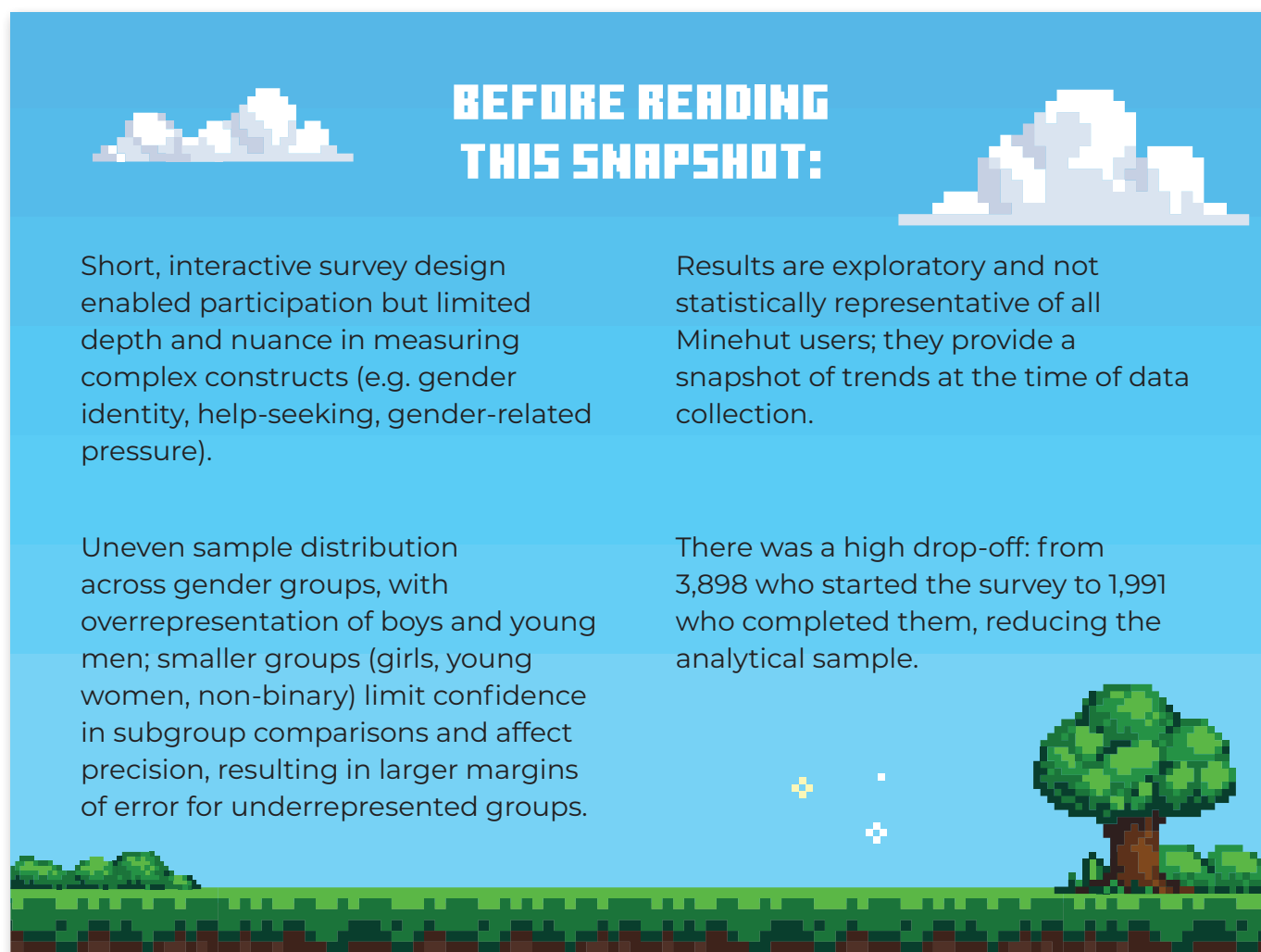
At a glance, this snapshot contains:

➤ **Topline takeaways:** Age and gender differences in support-seeking habits and how they intersect with community perceptions and gender expression

➤ **Practical implications:** Actionable learning points for those working in trust, safety, and community in the games industry

➤ **Survey findings:** Methodology and design of the in-game survey; Data analysis

➤ **Conclusion:** Actionable pathways and key opportunities



TOPLINE TAKEAWAYS

- Young players in this survey sample, aged 13 and above, appear to adapt their help-seeking strategies depending on the type of difficulty and the context in which it occurs, rather than relying on a single, consistent approach.
- Nearly half of players prefer in-game chat and access to server staff for quick game-related support, these being the most preferred channels among boys.
- Regarding personal struggles, close relationships remain central. Many still prefer to talk to someone close in person, such as a family member, teacher or friend. There are very few players who use formal support services (server staff or external hotlines).
- **There are noticeable differences in help-seeking behaviour based on age and gender factors.**
- Players aged 15–17, corresponding to mid-adolescence, showed a noticeable shift in support-seeking patterns, including greater use of their peers, communities, and AI tools.
- AI is primarily used for practical, game-related support especially among boys and young men. But there were also players, particularly girls and young women, who use it as an outlet, talking to AI about feelings and learning from AI about gender identity.
- **A substantial number of players, around one in three, do not seek help at all.** As players get older, the tendency to reach out for support decreases, both for game-related concerns and concerns outside of the game.
- Open-access and public digital channels may not feel equally safe or comfortable for all gender identities, as there were only some genders who tended to use them more than others, to resolve in-game concerns.
- Players who feel positively about their community tend to be more comfortable seeking help within the platform when facing personal difficulties.
- Identity, reflected in choices such as in-game skins, and gender expression through game elements are often subtle and not always the result of a fully conscious decision. Even so, these forms of in-game representation can provide some players with meaningful opportunities for self-expression and identity exploration.
- Players who had aspirational motivations behind their in-game skin choice have a higher tendency to seek help from peers online, from someone close to them and from formal or moderated support, for personal struggles.
- **Players who had experienced gender-related pressure were less likely to seek help from someone close to them for personal struggles, although they were more likely to seek help from peers online.**

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR TRUST, SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY

Standardised or universal formats for safety and support may not be reaching players as intended. The availability of these tools do not automatically translate to their use.

Considerations	Suggestions
Younger teens were more likely to use quick-access support channels such as in-game chat and server staff support over more formal pathways or information-heavy resources.	Add subtle features - for example, chat-based commands - that more easily prompt support options. Test lightweight entry points such as help commands, contextual prompts, and clearly signposted staff presence rather than relying only on formal reporting flows.
Older players may eventually disengage and rely less on platform tools and the wider community for support.	For older players, consider support options that feel self-directed, such as searchable help, anonymous help channels, clear escalation choices, and asynchronous follow-up rather than highly visible staff-led intervention.
Open and publicly visible spaces for help-seeking may not feel equally safe or comfortable for all gender identities.	Where resources allow, test moderated peer spaces, smaller-group interactions, or more structured channels aimed at increasing comfort and participation. Active moderation, clear norms, and visible escalation options became even more important in this case. As resources allows, map off-platform (unofficial) channels where players are seeking for support. Engage and address their needs bridging both realities (i.e. Discord communities, forums, Reddit, etc.)
Despite the perceived accessibility of quick-use channels, formal pathways remain vital to document more severe harms and safety issues happening on the platform.	Explore low-friction support moments, such as chat prompts or peer-help entry points, to build confidence in more formal reporting systems and make escalation paths visible, predictable, and easy to understand.

Enabling AI-powered tools to aid platform and community safety requires gender-sensitive, child-centered safeguards.

Considerations	Suggestions
AI is already being used by young people for practical gaming help and personal guidance. But not all AI tools are safe for youth, accurate, and free from gender-related biases.	Pilot AI integrations on specific aspects of player support first, rather than broadly testing its use across different functions, so that safeguards are measured at each stage. For example, AI chatbots can assist with tickets related to in-game help, but for more serious matters, it cannot recommend actions and must defer to staff.
The manner of using AI to obtain support varies across genders, with some using it to navigate information and others, as an outlet for emotional support. Mid-adolescents are turning to AI for both.*	In general, choose AI tools that have strong ethical standards, including policies on child safety and wellbeing and inclusive design practices, to ensure that interactions with young people will be safe, accurate, and free from gender-biases. Integrating AI-powered chatbots must be done with utmost care if there will be high interactions with children and teens. Given the mixed and age-specific ways AI appears to be used, teams may want to test AI as a complementary support layer rather than a primary support channel, especially in spaces with high youth participation.
Players who use AI for emotional support and advice also rely more on social media apps known to offer helpful content, i.e., Reddit, YouTube, TikTok.	Communicating safety reminders, rules, and the availability of support could mirror the short-form, fast-paced format for a more engaged onboarding.

* Considering recent and fast adoption of AI tools, these considerations and suggestions may require a more careful review and update.

Off-platform support remains a vital part of the help ecosystem of child and youth players.

Considerations	Suggestions
Players may still prefer to talk to someone close in person, such as a family member, teacher or friend for personal struggles.	Moderation tools and engagement strategies could establish a framework for detecting when there is a need to nudge players to seek help outside of the game.
Age-appropriate and gender-informed approaches also apply to parents, educators, and families in the position to help.	Platforms with capacity to produce non-player-facing resources could develop materials that help facilitate meaningful conversations with teens.
Formal support services or hotlines may not be players' go-to channels, as many seek support through other avenues.	Platforms and safety teams could offer clarity on what extent their support is able to do for players, when higher-level off-platform services are needed, and how they could support the process in-between. It may also help to anchor in platform safety system and communities on existing off-platform services, so that players make that connection and feel that the jump-off is intuitive.

Creating a community atmosphere that is safe, welcoming, and friendly can contribute to better help-seeking habits.

Considerations	Suggested shifts
Players who feel positively about the community find it easier to seek help within the platform when facing personal difficulties.	Reinforce safety and inclusive community norms visibly and consistently through casual in-game reminders and assets, educational campaigns, community-building events.
There is indication that as young players age, their engagement with, and reliance on the community may decrease. The ages 15 to 17 are a critical period for targeted engagement strategies.	Design experiences for mid-adolescents as a distinct group and allow them spaces where they can interact safely with peers.
Players' positive perceptions of the community seem to decline with age, which mirrors the trend for help-seeking habits.	Identify and address the touchpoints that tend to create negative or unwanted experiences for different age groups and genders. Reinforce the aspects that help sustain positive experiences for players across different ages and gender identities, as per the observations and needs of each specific game and community.
Certain game elements, such in-game skin choice, are meaningful avenues for self-expression. Encouraging visibility of different identities may increase the welcoming, helpful, and inclusive characteristics of a community.	Expand opportunities for identity expression and visibility, whether through in-game features or community engagement initiatives - for example, member spotlight features, campaigns around visibility or celebration days (e.g., women's day, pride month).

DATA IN FOCUS: HELP-SEEKING, COMMUNITY, AND GENDER EXPRESSION IN MINEHUT

ABOUT THE SURVEY

ECPAT International and GamerSafer sought to explore how young gamers perceive and navigate gender norms, how they seek help when facing challenges, and how digital tools, including AI, are used as sources of support. The goal was to gather insights and data that could inform the design of platform tools and community safety features to enable trust, wellbeing, and healthy behaviours in gaming communities.

A short in-game survey with young players was deployed to collect indicative data from Minehut players globally. While the survey is not intended to provide a representative or comprehensive assessment of gender dynamics in gaming, it offers valuable insight into patterns of behaviour, perceptions of community, and identity and gender expression within this specific platform context.

METHODOLOGY

How the data was collected

- + Structured, in-game survey designed into the Minecraft platform;
- + Participation of players was entirely voluntary, non rewarded and anonymous.

What thematic areas were explored

- + Help-seeking behaviours for in-game challenges and for struggles outside the game
- + Perceptions of the Minehut community

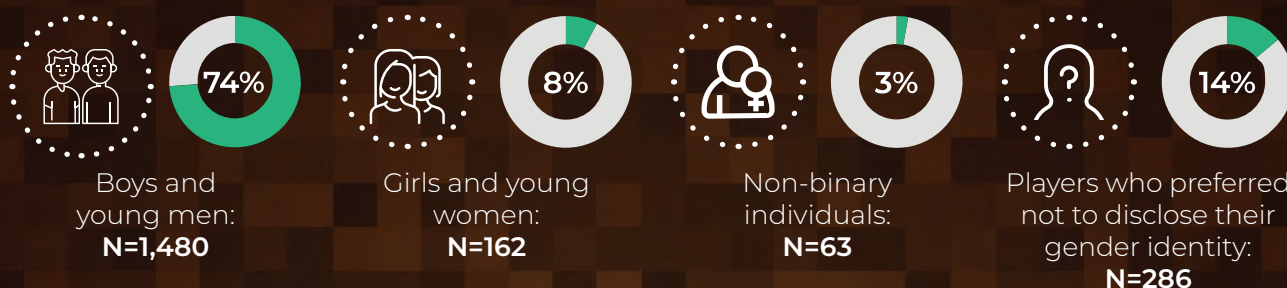
- + Identity expression and experiences of gender-related pressure

How the questions were designed:

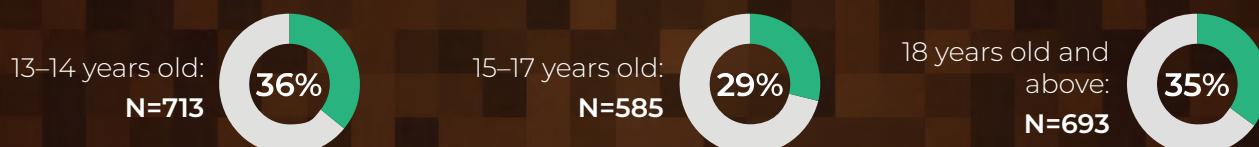
- + Mostly closed-ended questions, including multiple-choice and multi-select items, allowing players to select up to three responses in selected questions;
- + One optional open-text item was included to provide qualitative insights into experiences of gender-related pressure.

SURVEY SAMPLE

A total of 1,991 children and young adults completed the survey



Players were distributed across three age groups



How the data was analysed

The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were calculated for all survey items. Cross-tabulations and tests of association were conducted to explore differences by gender and age group. In addition, statistical tests were used to check whether the differences between groups were meaningful or simply due to chance, helping clarify which differences were important and how strong they were.²

For questions related to help-seeking, responses were grouped into analytically meaningful categories (peer digital support, in-person support, formal or moderated support and open digital

spaces) to facilitate pattern analysis and comparison between in-game and offline contexts. These categories were inductively constructed by clustering similar response options based on the type of support and the space in which it occurs (e.g. peer vs formal, digital vs in-person). As players could select multiple options, the categories were not mutually exclusive and may overlap, meaning that a single player could be represented across more than one category.

Qualitative responses were reviewed and thematically categorised to provide contextual insight into players' experiences, particularly regarding perceptions of pressure deriving from gender norms and dynamics on the platform.

LIMITATIONS

The survey was designed to be short and accessible using the platform's interactive features, which enabled participation but limited the depth of analysis. Complex constructs such as gender identity, help-seeking dynamics, and perceptions of pressure deriving from gender norms were measured using a limited number of simple questions, which may reduce nuance and accuracy.

There was a substantial drop-off across the survey. Of the 3,898 players who answered the initial demographic question, only 1,991 completed the full questionnaire. As a result, analyses are based on a smaller subset of respondents. The analysis includes relevant statistical tests to identify significant differences.

Differences in proportions across gender and age groups were assessed using pairwise chi-square tests of independence. Odds ratios were calculated to estimate the strength and direction of the associations.³ It is important to note that the precision of the estimates varies across groups due to disparities in the number of respondents, particularly the smaller sample sizes of girls and young women and non-binary participants compared to boys and young men. As a result, margins of error are larger for these groups, and findings should be interpreted with caution.⁴

Overall, the survey does not aim to be statistically representative of all Minehut users. Rather, it provides an exploratory snapshot of trends and patterns among players at the time of data collection.

² These included chi-square tests, comparisons of proportions, and odds ratios.

³ As all variables comprised more than two categories, all possible pairwise comparisons were performed. For each comparison, odds ratios were estimated to quantify the strength and direction of the association, and statistical significance was assessed using chi-square tests.

⁴ Illustrative reference only: The approximate worst-case 95% margins under a hypothetical simple random sample would be ± 12 percentage points (non-binary), ± 8 (girls and young women), ± 6 (undisclosed), and ± 2.5 (boys and young men). These are heuristic values only and should not be interpreted as formal margins of error for this non-probability sample.

FINDINGS: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS⁵

5 These results are exploratory and platform-specific; subgroup findings, especially for smaller groups, should be treated as directional.

PART 1.

HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS

PREFERRED SUPPORT CHANNELS FOR GAME-RELATED CONCERNS

In-game chat is the primary support channel:

Nearly half of players (48%) turn to in-game chat when they need help.

- Binary participants- girls, young women, boys and young men- were more likely than non-binary participants to choose “In-game chat” (53% vs 25%)

A substantial proportion do not seek help at all. Almost one in three players (32%) indicated that they usually do not ask for help.

- Players who preferred not to disclose their gender identity (41%) were more likely to indicate, “I usually don’t ask for help” than boys and young men (29%).

Statistical differences by gender:

- Players within the gender binary (53%) were about twice as likely as non-binary players (25%) to use in-game chat.
- Girls and young women (39%) were more likely than boys and young men (29%) to indicate not asking for help, particularly among those aged 18 and above.

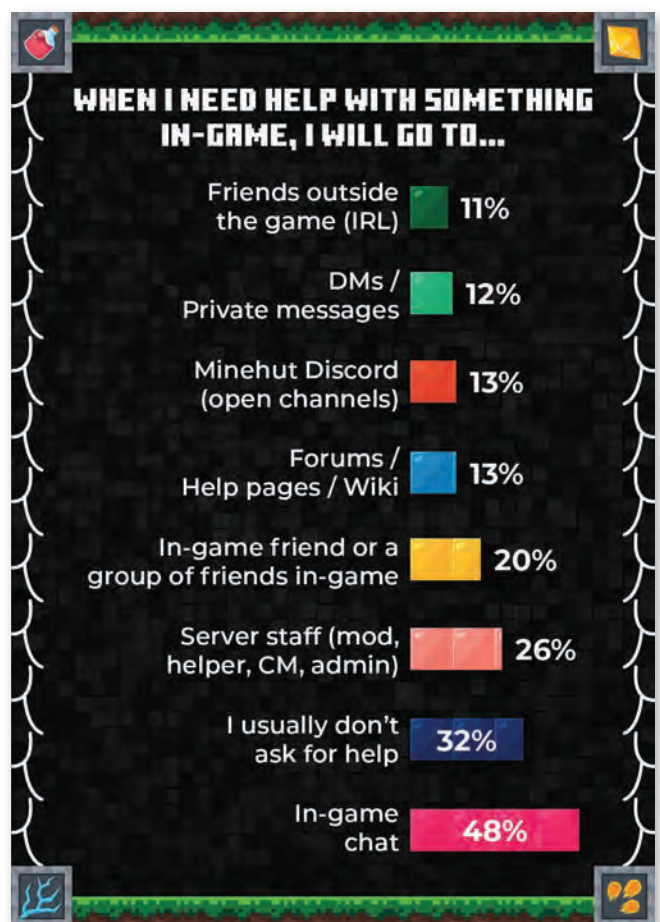
Statistical differences by age:

- Younger players (13-14), particularly boys and girls, were more likely to use quick-access online support:** Use of in-game chat and approaching server staff was highest among 13-14-year-olds and gradually declines with age.⁶

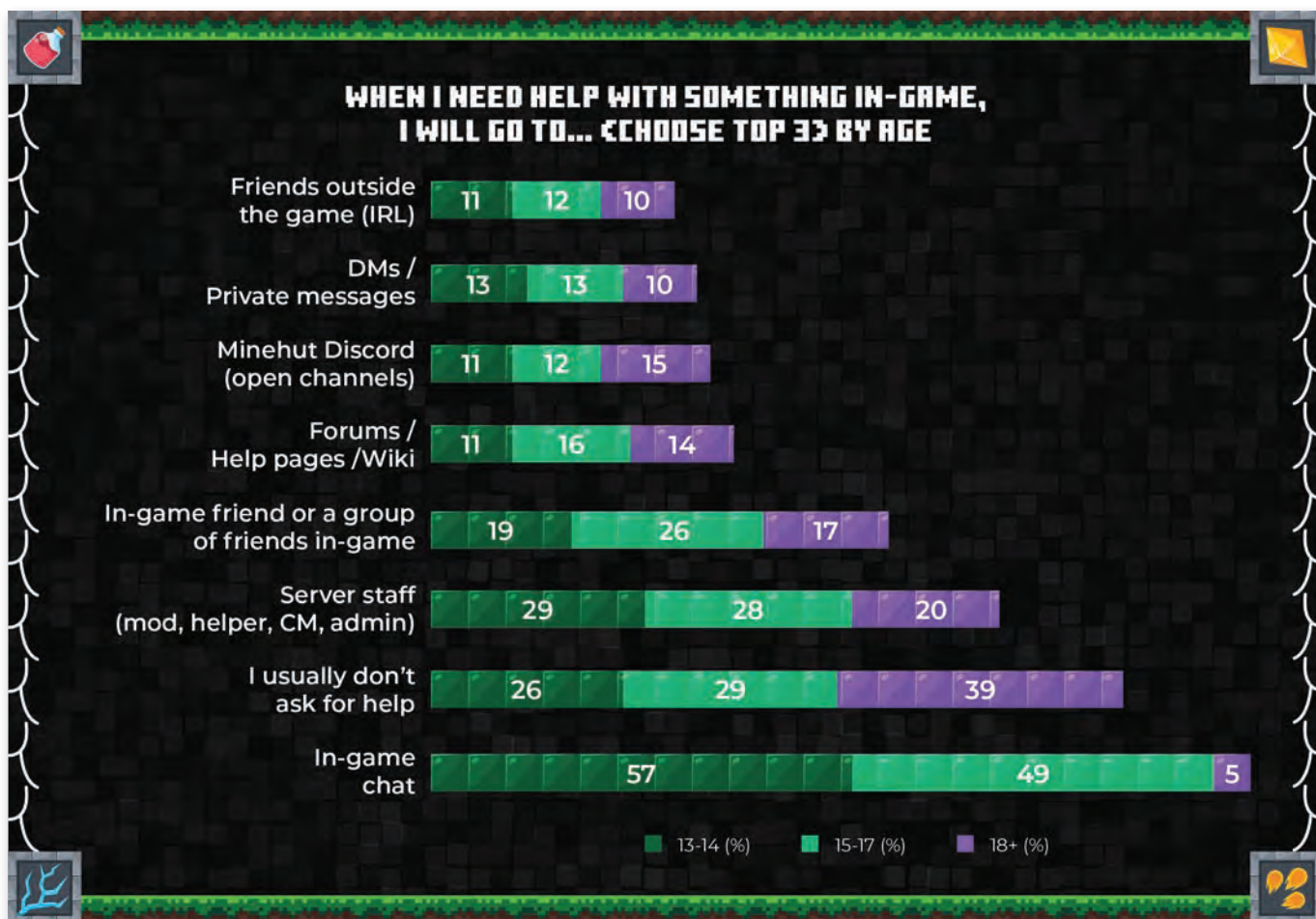
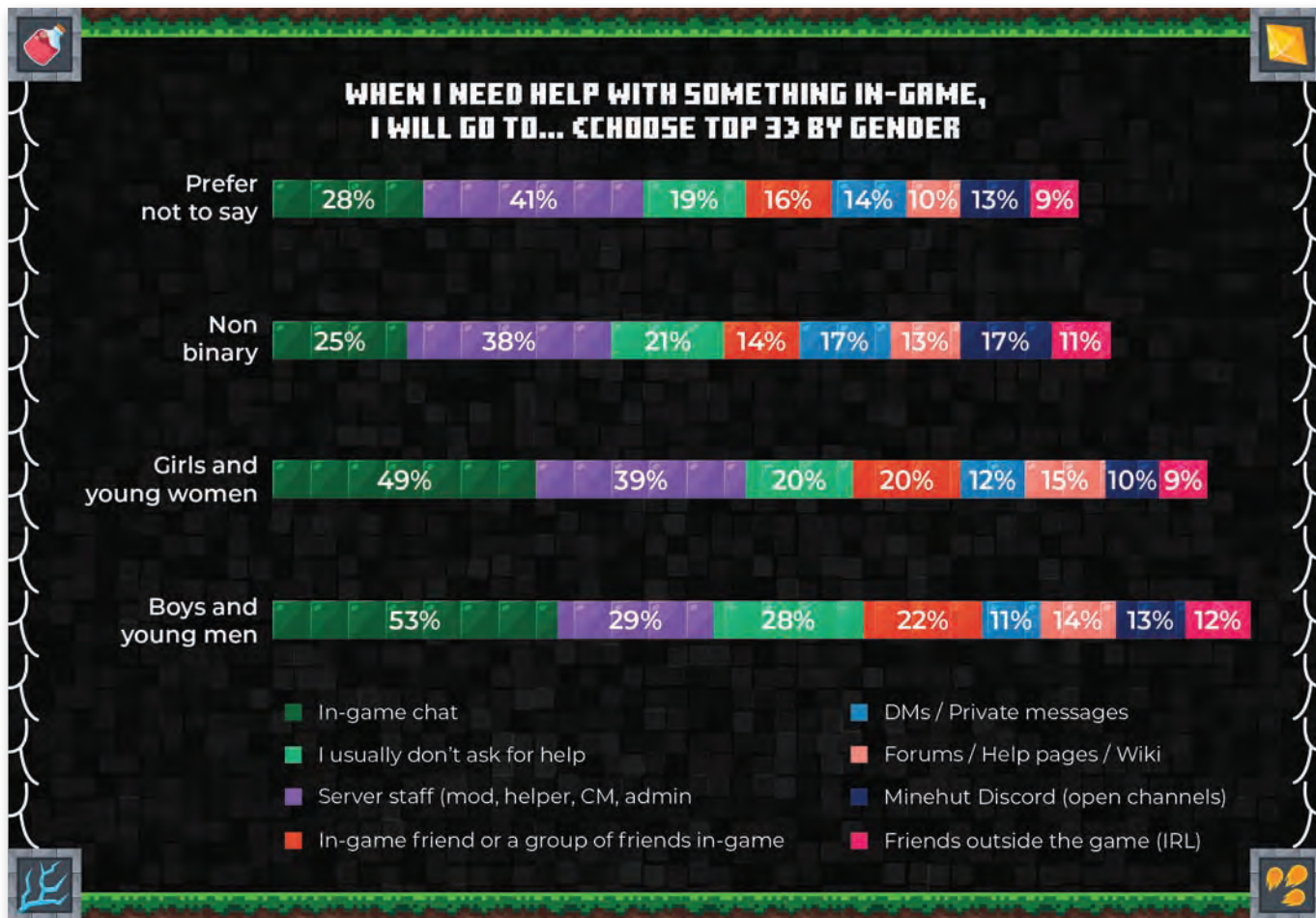
- Help-seeking decreases with age:** Older players were significantly more likely to indicate they do not ask for help.

- This pattern is especially pronounced among players aged 18 and above, where young women (49%) and those who prefer not to disclose their gender identity (45%) show the highest levels of not seeking support.

- Peer-based support peaks in mid-adolescence:** Players aged 15-17 were most likely to turn to in-game friends and communities for help.



⁶ 57% of players aged 13-14 chose “in-game chat”, and 29% selected “server staff (mod, helper, CM, admin)”, whereas only 5% of players aged 18 and above chose “in-game chat” and 20% selected “server staff”.



PREFERRED SUPPORT CHANNELS FOR CONCERNS OUTSIDE OF THE GAME

A large proportion do not seek support:

More than one in three players (37%) indicated that they do not usually reach out to anyone (on- or off-platform) when facing personal struggles outside game-related concerns. Further investigation is needed to evaluate if this may reflect self-reliance, low perceived need, lack of trust in available channels, or other factors not captured in the survey.

- The last share of boys and young men (36%) and those who preferred not to disclose their gender identity (47%) marked this option.

Close relationships remain central:

A similar proportion (36%) said they would talk to someone close in real life, such as a family member, teacher or friend.

- This was the most common response among both boys and young men (39%) and girls and young women (39%).

Online peers play a role: Nearly three in ten would turn to a friend or someone they play with on Minehut (29%)

Limited use of formal services: Very few players, only 7% indicated using external support services or hotlines for advice to face in-person struggles⁷:

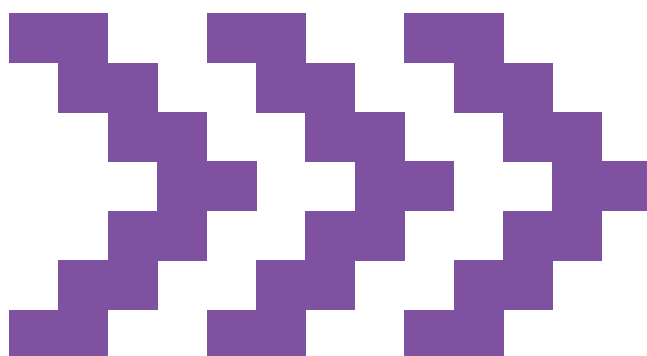
- Non-binary participants were more likely than boys and young men participants to choose: Use a support service or hotline (17% of non-binary participants vs 7% of other groups).

Statistical gender differences were modest:

- Girls and young women were somewhat more likely than boys and young men to seek support through social platforms: 11% report preferring to post on Discord or other social media, compared to 5% of boys and young men.
- Boys and young men (36%) and those who prefer not to disclose their gender identity (47%) were somewhat more likely to indicate not reaching out for support.

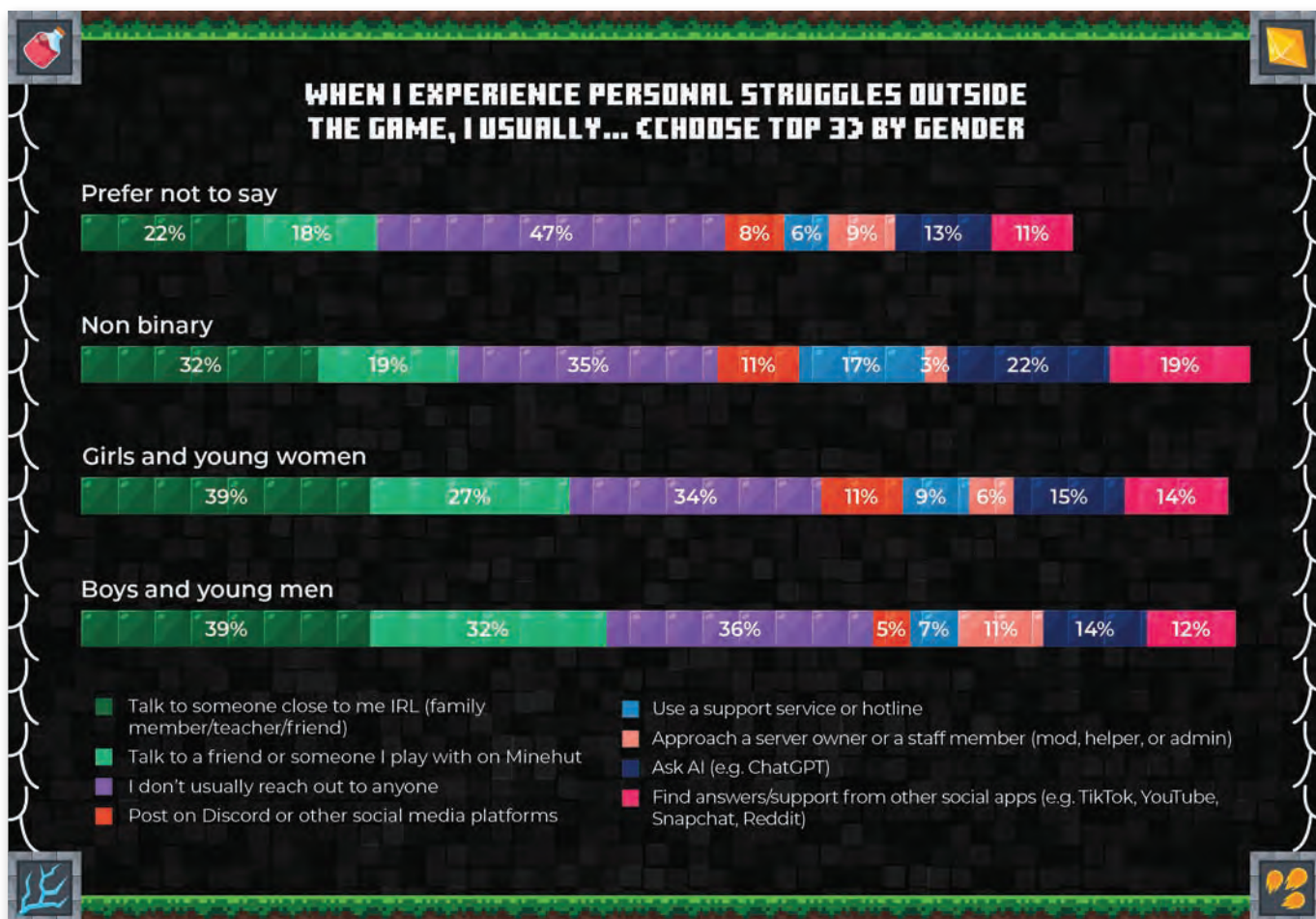
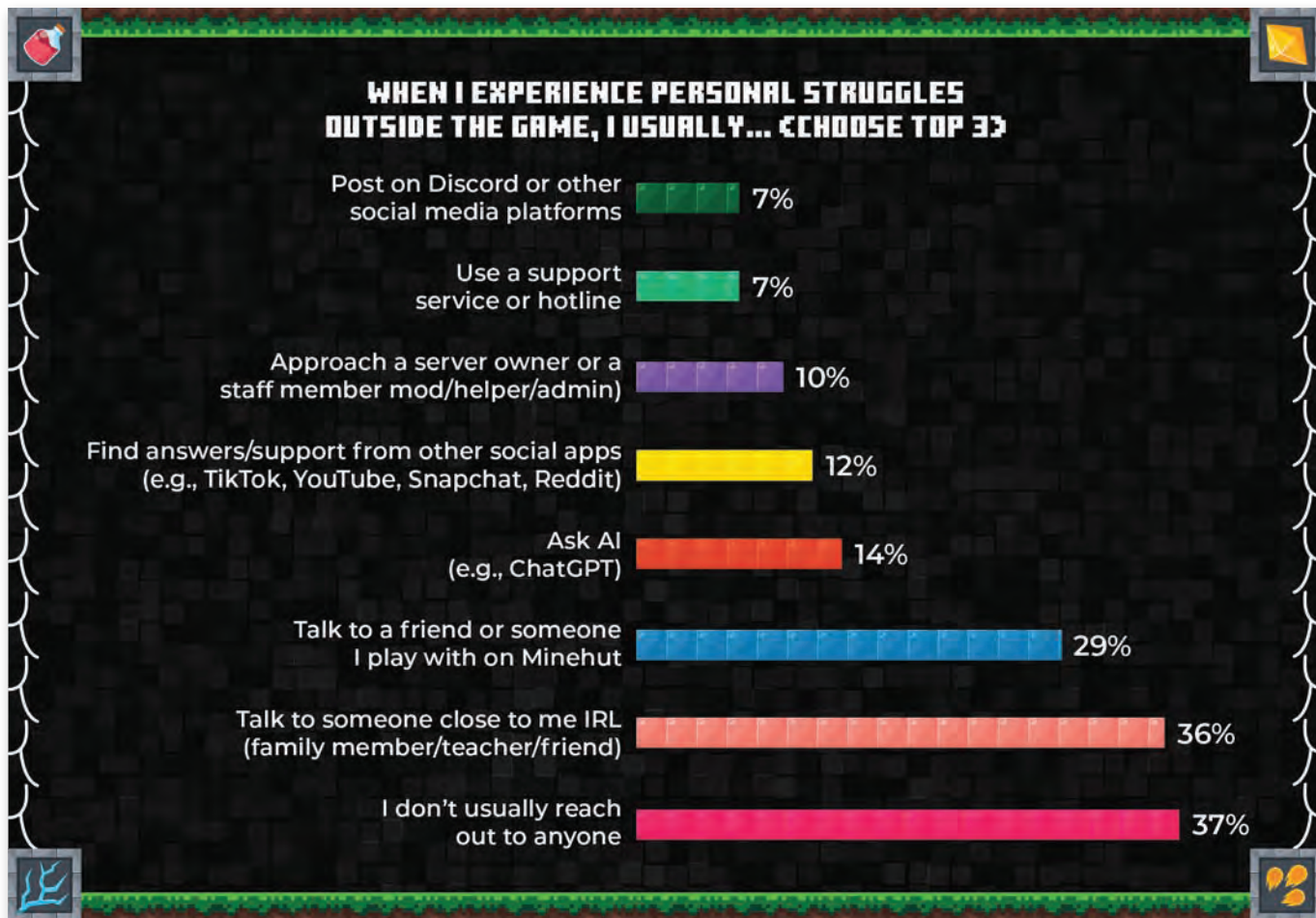
Support-seeking gradually declines with age:

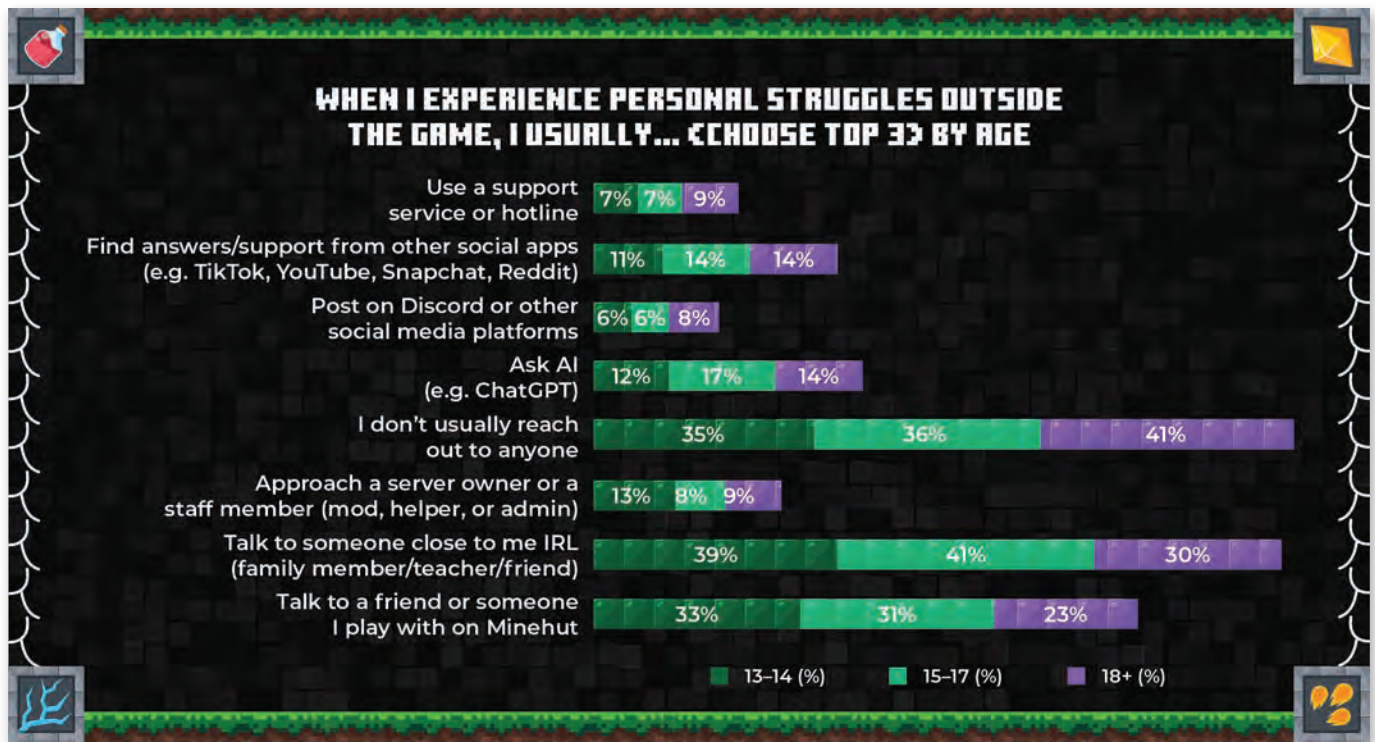
- Reliance on friends (both on and off-platform) decreased with age.⁸
- Approaching a server owner or staff member also declined with age, for all genders.



⁷ Although the difference was not statistically significant. 17% of non-binary players, 7% of boys and young men, 9% of girls and young women, and 6% of players who preferred not to disclose their gender selected "using a support service or hotline."

⁸ Most 13-14 year-old players would choose to talk to a friend or someone they play with on Minehut, and this percentage decreased to 31% for players aged 15-17 and 23% for players 18 and above. Similarly, while 41% of players 15-17 chose this option, only 19% of players aged 18+ selected this option.





USE OF AI FOR SUPPORT

Use of AI is evenly split: Almost half of players (49%) indicated having used AI tools to obtain help in-game or in real-life situations, while just over half (51%) indicated otherwise.

Use of AI peaks in mid-adolescence:

Reported AI use to obtain help was highest among players aged 15–17 (56%) compared to those aged 13–14 (47%).

AI is primarily used for in-game support:

The most common purpose was help with in-game tasks and quests (31%), suggesting that AI is frequently used as a practical tool for in-game related quests or issues.

- This was the response most frequently selected by boys and young men (34%). Age-wise, players aged 15–17 are the most likely to use AI for this purpose (37%), followed by younger adolescents (aged 13–14) (31%), with those aged 18+ indicating the least preference for this (27%).

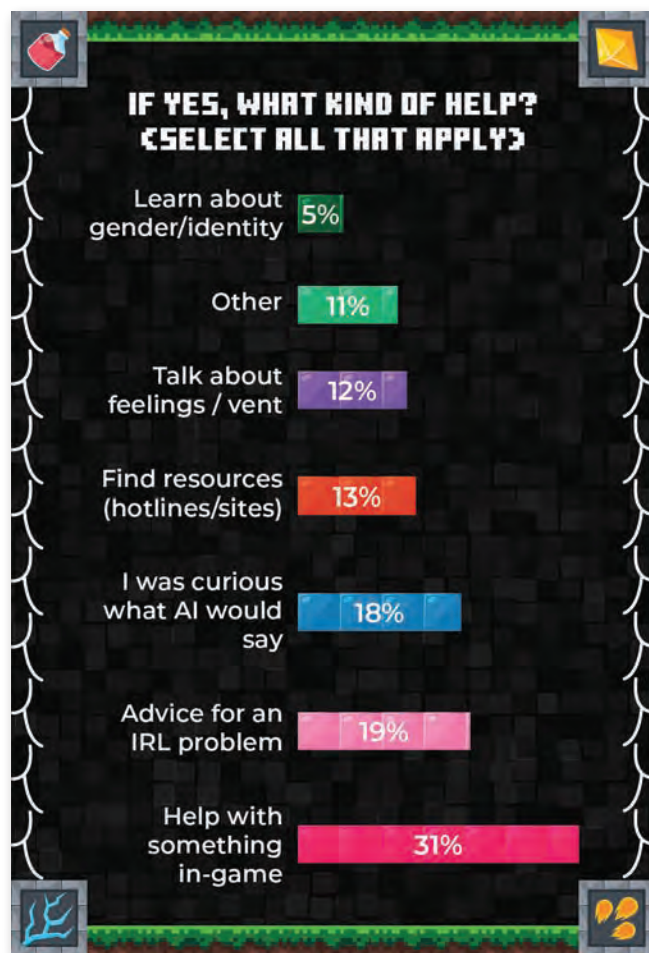
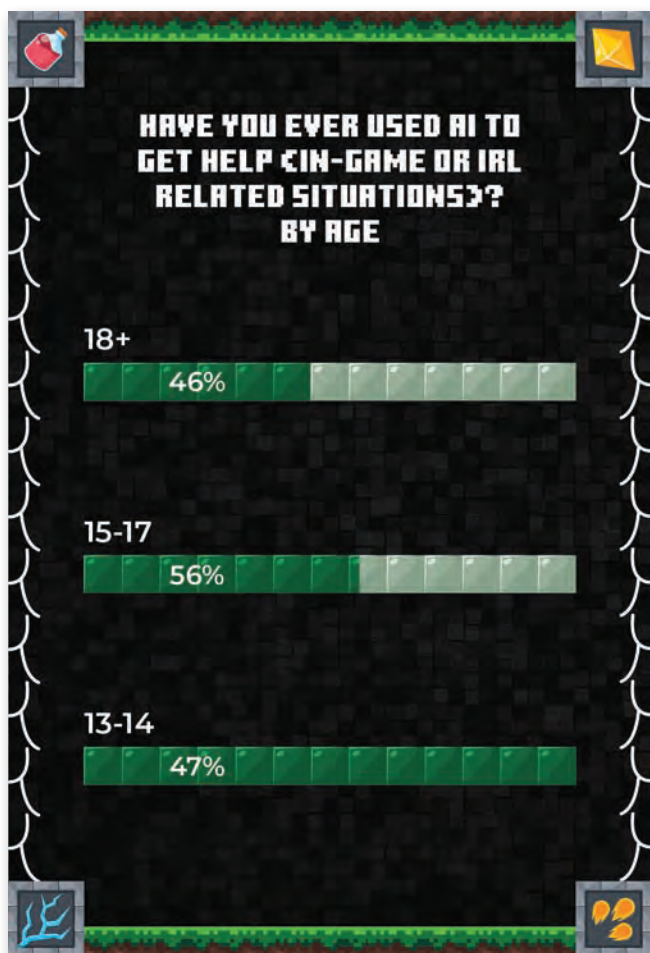
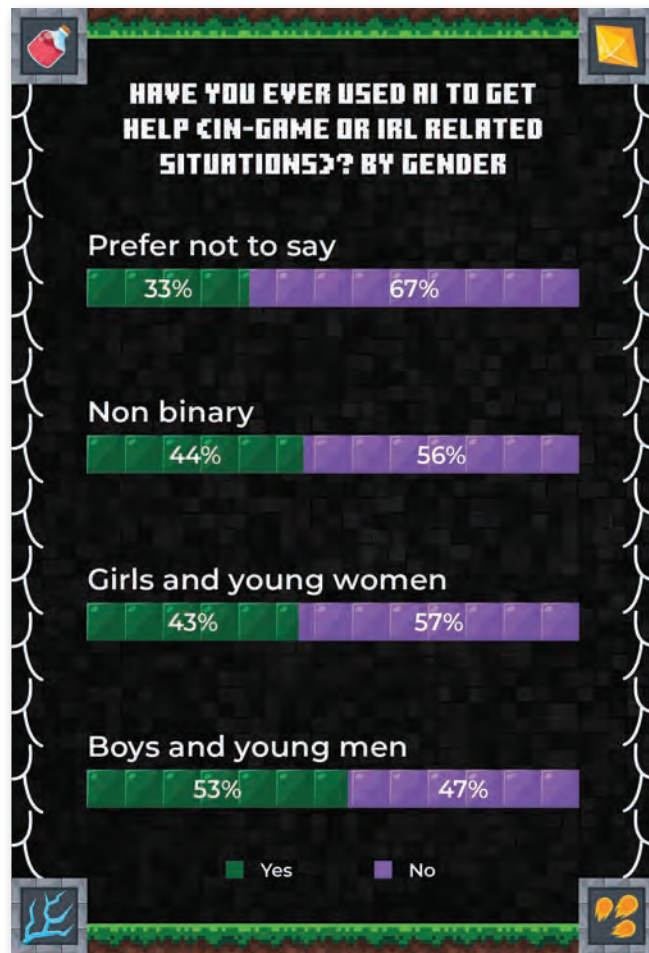
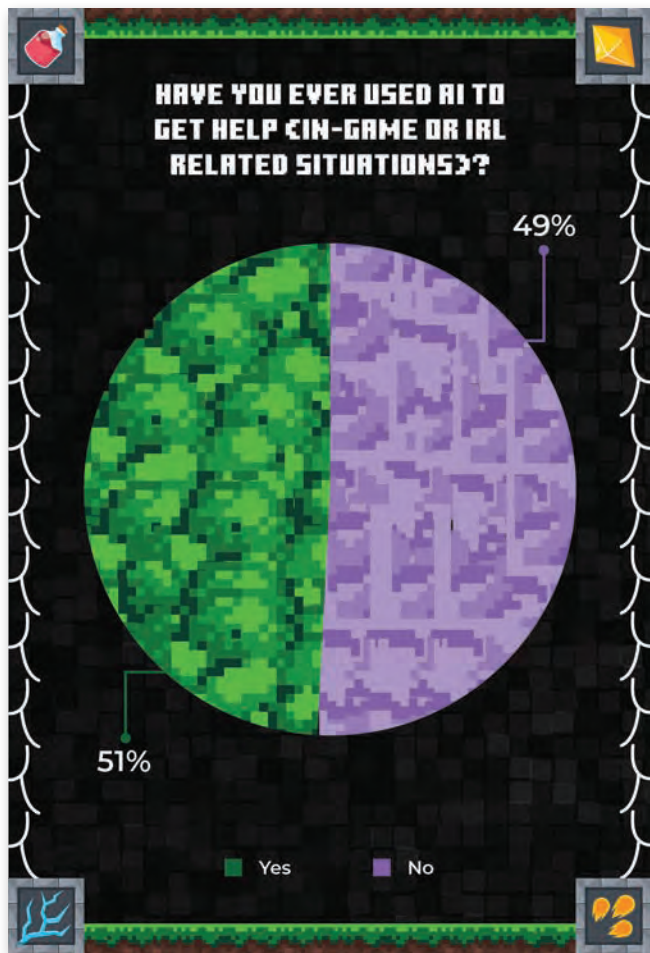
AI is also used for personal guidance:

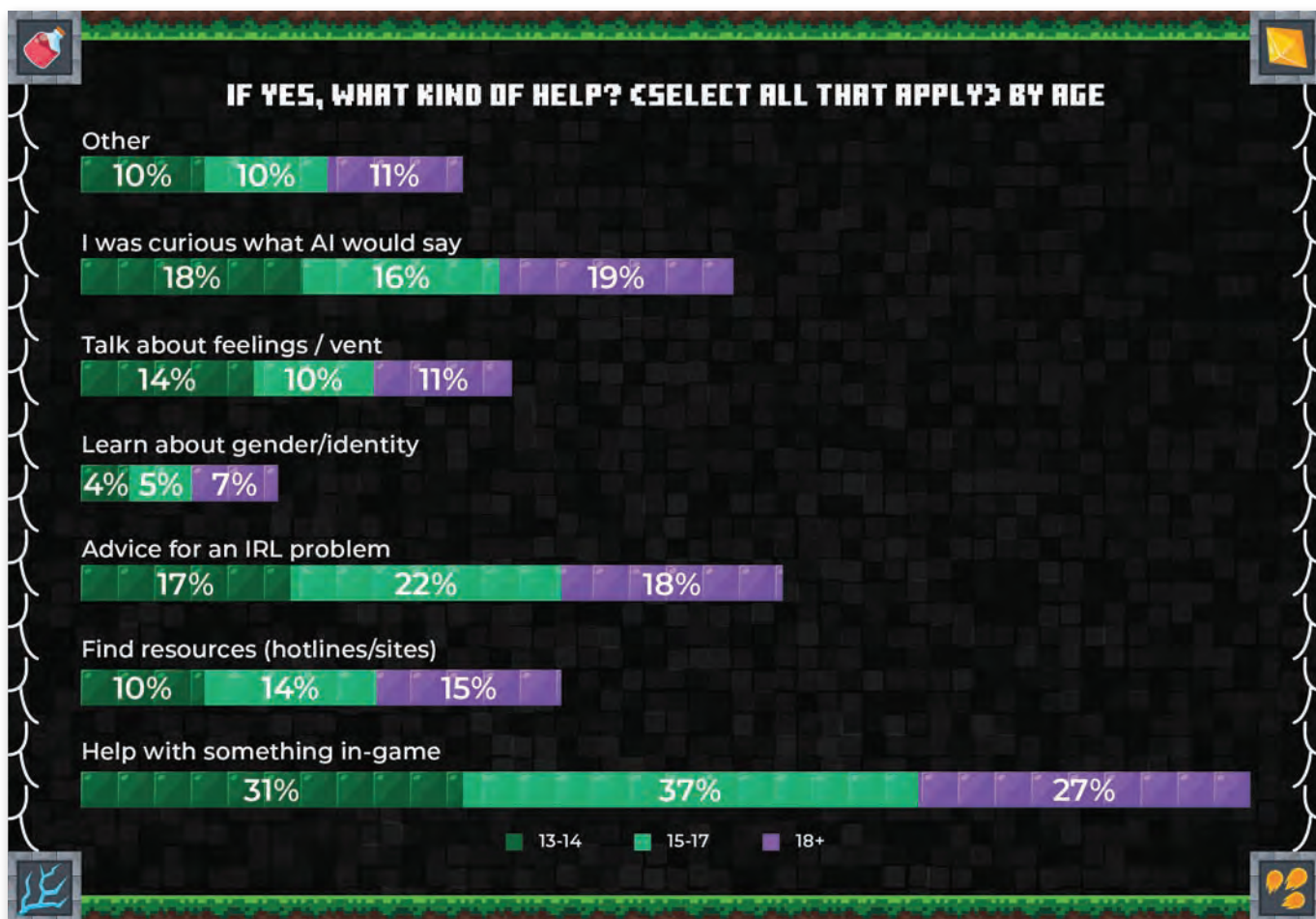
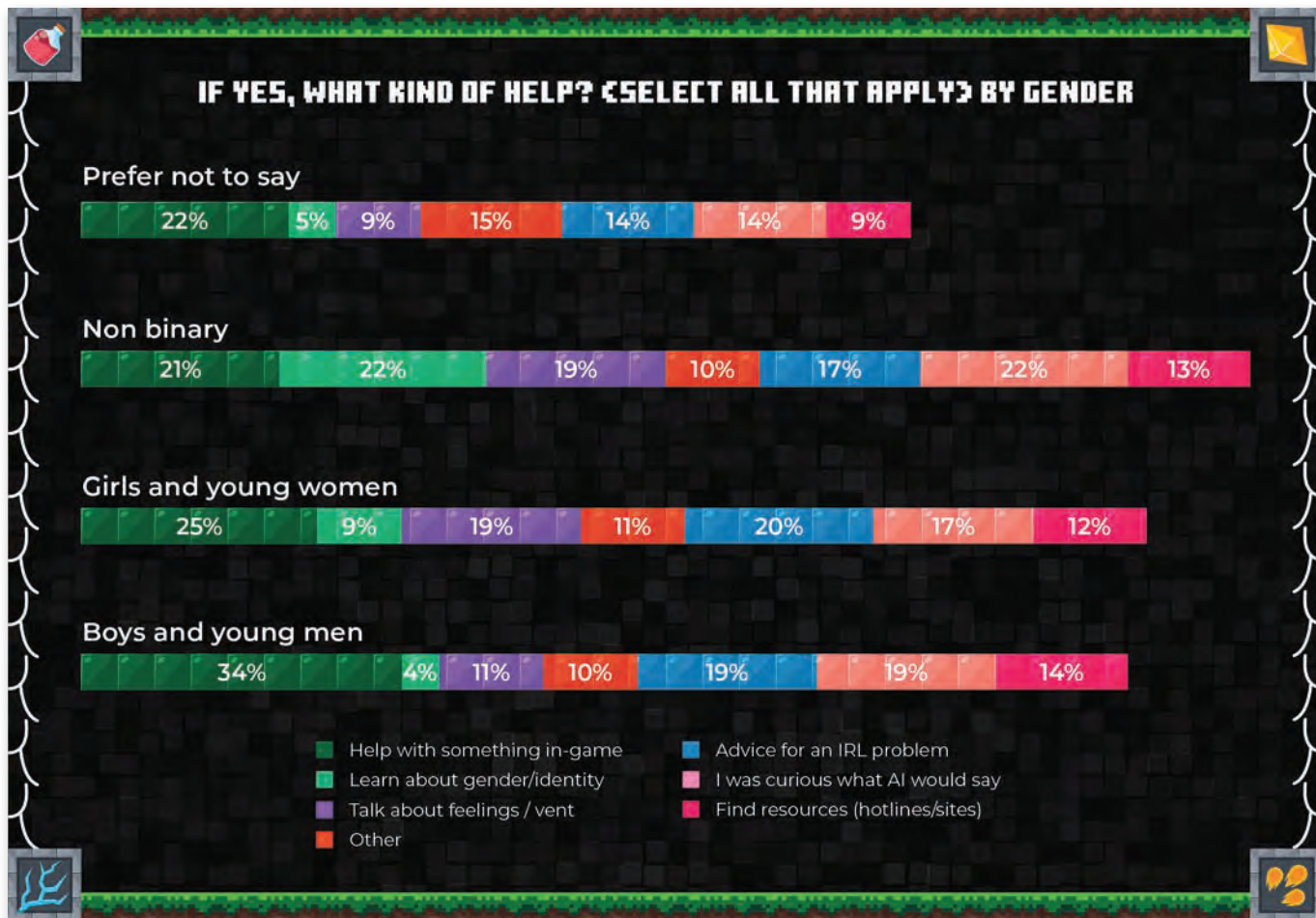
Nearly one in five players indicated using AI to seek advice about a problem in real life (19%) or to see what AI would say (18%).

Choosing to use AI to obtain help was common for all genders; however, there were significant differences in the purposes for which it is used:

- Non-binary players were significantly more likely to use AI to learn about gender or identity-related topics compared to binary players (22% vs 5%).
- Girls and young women players were more likely than boys and young men players to use AI as a space to talk about their feelings or to explore questions related to gender and identity.⁹
- In contrast, boys and young men were more likely than girls and young women to use AI for support for game-related issues. (34% vs 25%).

⁹ 19% of girls and young women and 11% of boys and young men selected “talk about feelings/vent”. In addition, 9% of girls and young women and 4% of boys and young men reported using AI to learn about gender or identity.





ANALYSIS: PATTERNS OF HELP-SEEKING ACROSS CONTEXTS

To better understand whether players use similar support-seeking strategies across different situations, responses for help with in-game concerns versus struggles outside of the game were further analysed based on four main categories:

- 3 Peer digital support – e.g., in-game friends, DMs / Private messages
- 3 In-person support – e.g., close friends and family
- 3 Formal or moderated support – e.g., server staff, support service or hotline
- 3 Open digital spaces/information-seeking. - e.g., in-game chat, wikis, Minehut Discord channels or other social media apps.

Key insights

1. Support strategies shift across contexts:

Players seek help in different ways depending on the situation. Only a small proportion use the same type of support both for in-game and out-of-game concerns (6%- 12%)¹⁰.

2. Quick-access support channels within the platform appear to be used differently across gender groups.

Boys and young men report greater use of open digital spaces and formal or moderated support, whereas non-binary individuals and those who preferred not to report their gender identity have comparatively lower engagement with publicly visible digital channels.¹¹

- 3. Players who use AI for both emotional support and advice tend to rely more heavily on open digital spaces/information-seeking channels, such as TikTok, YouTube or Reddit, when facing difficulties outside of the game.¹²

IMPLICATIONS ON TRUST, SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY

Standardised tools versus shifting behaviours

The findings reveal a complex and context-dependent picture of how the sampled young people seek support. Rather than relying on a single, consistent strategy, players appear to adapt their help-seeking depending on the nature of the difficulty and the context in which it occurs, and age and gender factors also shape their help-seeking choices.

Within the game environment, help-seeking largely occurs in quick-access digital spaces. In-game chat emerges as the dominant support channel, suggesting that young people often turn to accessible, real-time communication tools when facing game-related challenges. Moderators and server staff also play a role in providing support, particularly for younger players.

However, a notable proportion of players stated that they do not seek help at all. This pattern appears both for on-platform and off-platform spaces, indicating that self-reliance, or potential disengagement, is a recurring feature of young people's coping strategies. **The availability of tools does not automatically translate into their use.**

¹⁰ 6% was the lowest percentage of overlap in the category 'In-person personal support', and 12% was the highest overlap for 'Peer digital support'.

¹¹ For the category of open digital spaces, clearer differences were observed. Boys and young men reported the highest use (64%), compared with around 49% of non-binary players. Girls and young women showed a similar proportion to boys (63%), although the difference was smaller. Formal or moderated support was the most common strategy and was reported more frequently by boys (28%) than by girls and non-binary players (both around 20%).

¹² AI users who rely on AI for both emotional support and practical advice are more likely to ask AI directly for help (54%) compared with other AI users (17%). They are also more likely to seek support on other digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube or Reddit (29% versus 14%).

Given that some players already turn to AI for game-related help, it could be good to explore the curated and safe integration of such tools within in-game experiences as a potential area for enhanced safety, ensuring they are age-appropriate and gender-sensitive.

The findings also suggest that AI is being used as an accessible space for emotional reflection or identity-related questions; however, its influence depends on the specific tool used, as different models may carry different biases or limitations that shape whether the experience is supportive, stereotyping or potentially harmful. This highlights important implications for platforms, including the need to carefully select, design and monitor AI tools to ensure they provide safe, inclusive, and reliable support for young users.

The limited overlap between help-seeking strategies for in-game and out-of-game concerns further suggests that support-seeking behaviours are situational. Where they players turn to for game-related support is likely different from where they turn to for support for non-game-related concerns.

Gender differences in help-seeking are observed more when it comes to dealing with game-related concerns. A closer look at who uses open channels and relies on authority-based support suggests that **public digital spaces may not feel equally safe or comfortable for all gender identities**. Although the differences were small, they were consistent, suggesting that gender may influence how young people experience and use these channels on the platform.

For struggles outside of the game, gender differences were less pronounced. In-person support remained the dominant strategy across groups, and help-seeking behaviours between girls and young women and boys and young men appeared to be similar. A substantial proportion of players rely on people such as family members or friends or on peers they play with online, when seeking support for personal struggles, emphasizing the importance of having a support network outside of the game.

THE AGE FACTOR IN DECLINING SUPPORT RELIANCE

Age consistently shaped help-seeking patterns. Younger teens, across gender identities, were more likely to use quick-access and authority-based forms of support, both for in-game and out-of-game concerns. As age increases, reliance on moderators, staff, and peers declined, and the preference not to reach out becomes more common. This may reflect developmental shifts towards greater independence. However, it may also signal increasing reluctance to seek support, particularly among older players. The decline in peer- and authority-based help-seeking with age raises questions about whether older adolescents are better equipped to self-navigate or are finding fewer reliable, safe, or relevant support options.

Mid-adolescence (age 15–17) seems to stand out as a distinct phase. Players in this age group show higher use of AI and greater reliance on in-game peer networks, suggesting that this stage may be characterised by experimentation with both social and technological forms of support. Notably, AI-driven tools commonly blend social elements into the technology.



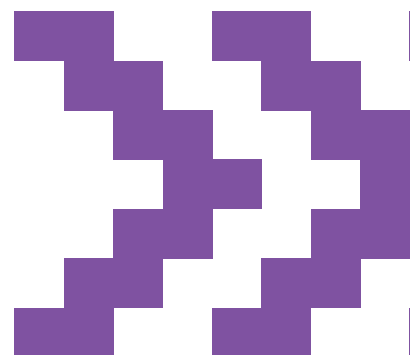
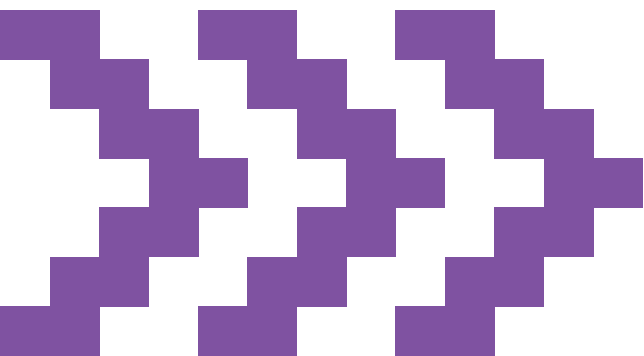
THE DIFFERENT USES OF AI FOR SUPPORT

The use of AI introduces an additional dimension to help-seeking patterns. While overall use was evenly split, mid-adolescents were more likely to indicate using AI, and the purposes vary. AI was most commonly used for practical in-game assistance, but a notable proportion of players also indicated using it for personal guidance, including general advice and as an outlet for emotional expression.

Gender differences in AI use were

nuanced. Boys and young men were more likely overall to use AI for game-related concerns or struggles outside of the game, whereas girls and young women were more likely to use it for emotional expression or identity-related exploration.

Interestingly, non-binary players show higher engagement with AI for gender- and identity-related learning. This suggests that, for this group, AI may function not only as a technical tool but also as a space for individual reflection or exploration, particularly in relation to identity matters.



PART 2.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE MINEHUT COMMUNITY

Overall perceptions were largely positive: Most players describe the Minehut community as fun (45%), friendly (31%), and welcoming and inclusive (30%).

Gender differences were nuanced:

Girls and young women (43%) were more likely than boys and young men players (29%) to describe the community as welcoming and inclusive. At the same time, girls and young women (17%) were also more likely to describe the community as judgmental or selective, suggesting more complex or ambivalent perceptions.¹³

Older players indicated less positive views of the community:

- Describing the community as friendly and fun decreases with age. It was younger players (13–14), across all gender identities, who chose these options more often than older players.
- Perceptions of the community as helpful also decline among older players (18+).
- Players aged 15–17 were more inclined to view the community as aggressive.

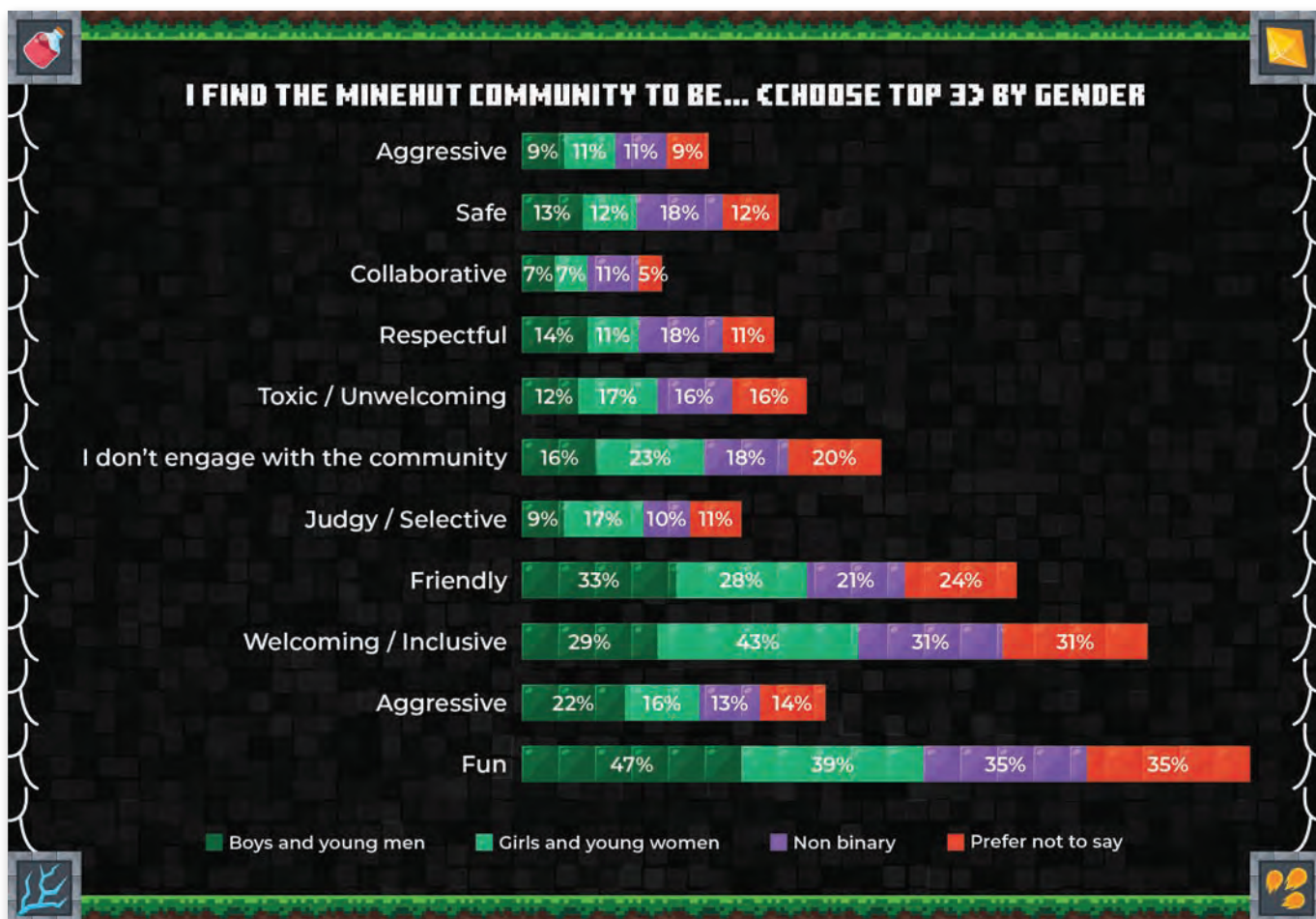
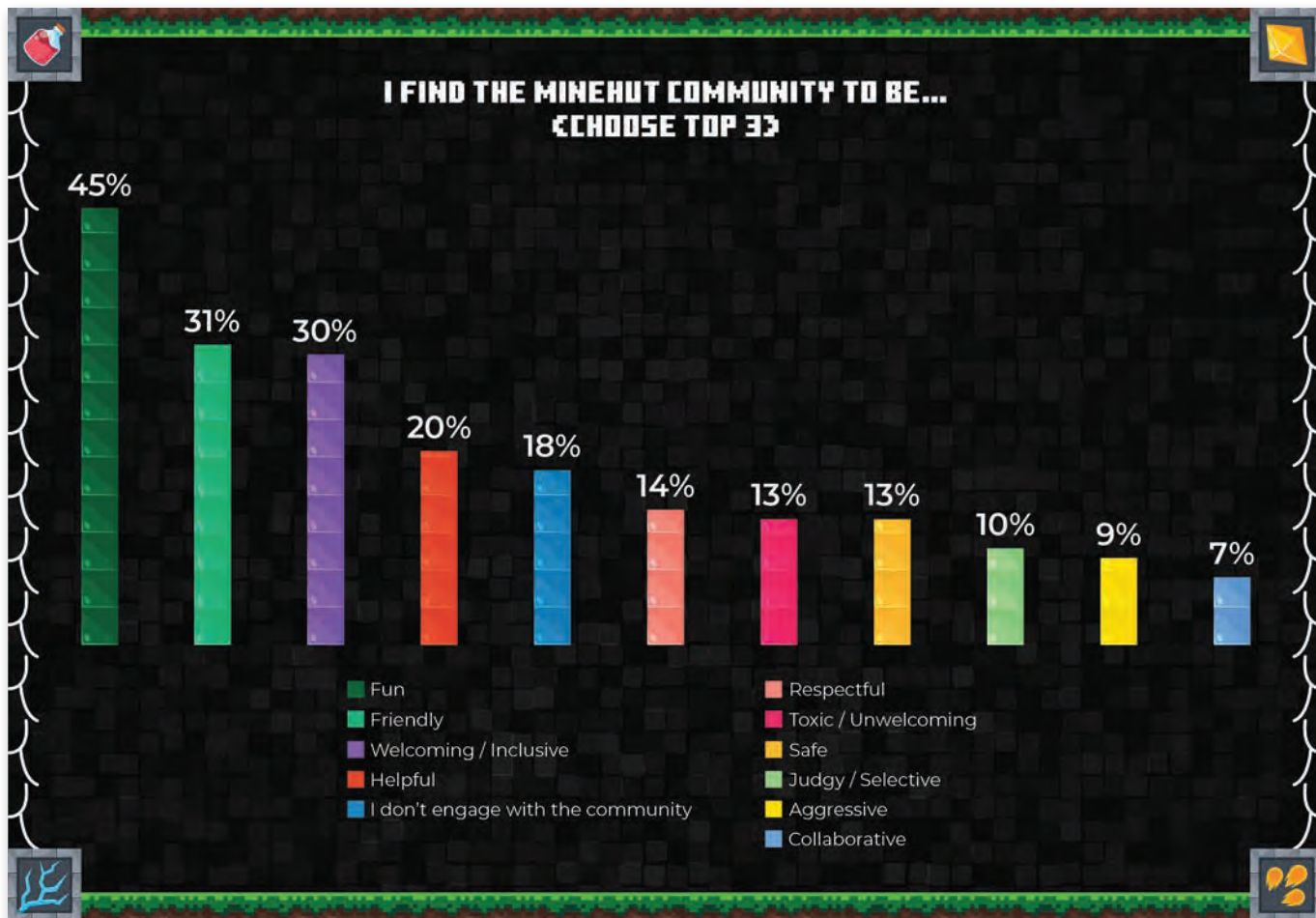
Perceived toxicity or unwelcoming behaviour were somewhat more common among players aged 15–17, although these differences did not consistently remain statistically significant.

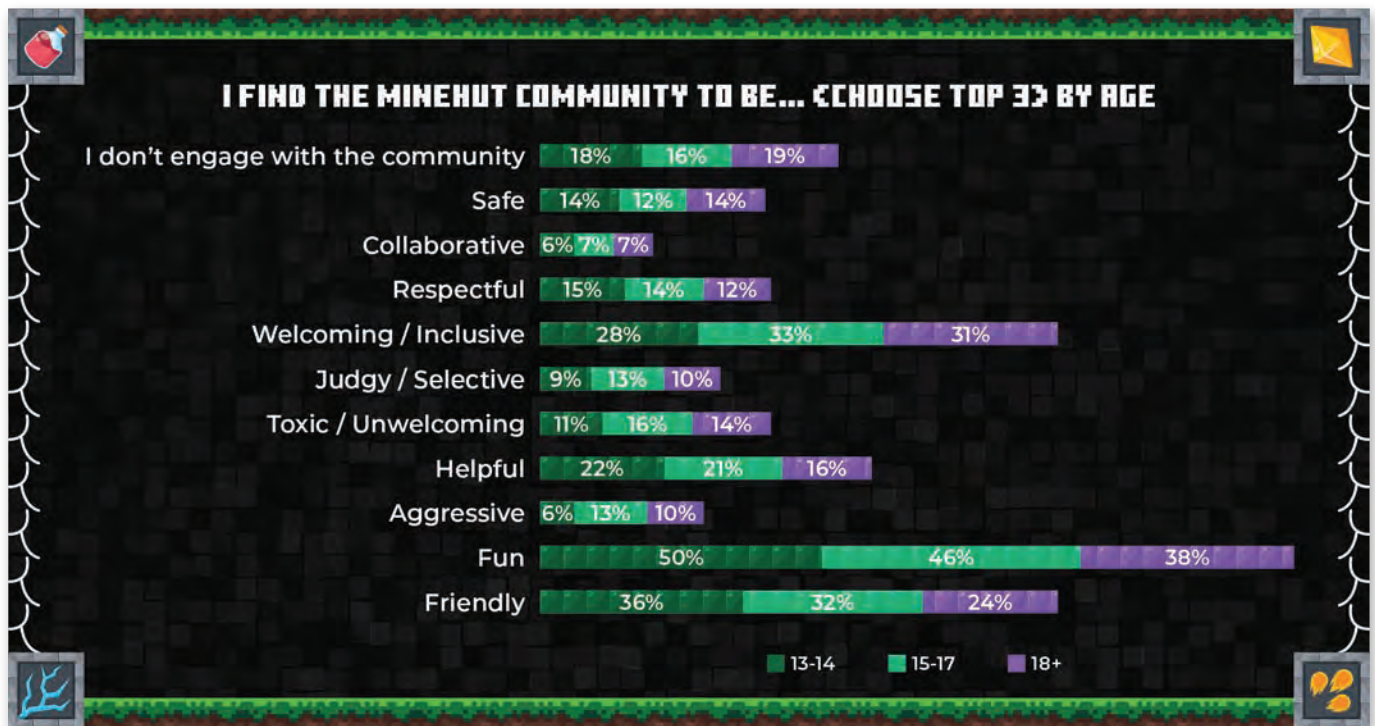
Age differences appeared to be more pronounced than gender differences: while modest gender differences were identified, age seems to shape perceptions of the community more strongly (keeping in mind there was limited representation of some genders in the sample).

ANALYSIS: PATTERNS OF HELP-SEEKING AGAINST COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

Players who see the Minehut community in a positive way were more likely to seek help within the platform when facing personal difficulties. Those who describe the community as welcoming, inclusive, or supportive were more likely to talk to someone they play with on Minehut (37%) than those who do not report a positive perception (29%). They were also more likely to approach a server owner or staff member for support (12% vs 7%).

¹³ 9% boys and young men players indicated they find the Minehut Community to be judgy/selective.





IMPLICATIONS ON TRUST, SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY

Players' perceptions of their online community reflect the general landscape within which help-seeking habits are formed and supported. The Minehut community is largely perceived as positive, particularly among younger players. Positive descriptions such as fun (45%), friendly (31%), and welcoming (30%) were common.

Positive characterisations tended to decline among older players, a trend that parallel to help-seeking behaviours, which decreased among older adolescents.

Still, those who perceive the Minehut community in a positive way were also more likely to seek help within the platform when facing personal difficulties.

This highlights the value of nurturing a healthy gaming community, which can not only serve as an engaging, socially meaningful space for many young people but also support help-seeking habits. As players grow into adolescence and early adulthood, their engagement with and reliance on the community may become

more critical or selective, as the data suggests. Thus, they may require different forms of engagement or outreach that consider their growing autonomy and capability to manage their needs.

The findings suggest that help-seeking habits may be shaped by underlying gender dynamics. Girls and young women were more likely to describe the community as welcoming and inclusive, but also more likely to perceive it as judgmental or selective. While further exploration with a larger sample of girls and young women is needed, these results may reflect the more complex gender dynamics at play within gaming spaces. **Narrowing in on what is helping create positive experiences and what is leading to negative experiences for different gender identities can inform the design of trust and safety tools.**

In a space where participation is still often shaped by male-dominated dynamics (e.g., pressure to show dominance, aggression, or emotional disengagement), attention to the player's environment can help give a clearer picture of why safety and support tools are being used (or not being used) by players.

PART 3.

GENDER EXPRESSION IN GAMING

IN-GAME SKINS AND GENDER EXPRESSION

Most players indicate no intentional reason for choosing their skin: Just over half (53%) indicated there is “no real reason” behind their choice. This response was most common among players who preferred not to disclose their gender identity (62%).

However, identity expression is meaningful for many:

- Nearly one third of players (32%) selected “It feels like me”, indicating that for many, in-game identity reflects how they see themselves. Girls and young women players were more likely than boys and young men to choose “It feels like me” (51% vs 32%).
- Around one in five (21%) select “It’s what/who I want to be”, suggesting aspirational or exploratory identity expression. This option was particularly prominent among non-binary players, 48% of whom indicated it – the highest percentage among all gender groups.

Differences by gender:

- Non-binary players were significantly more likely to select aspirational identity motivations. Almost half (48%) indicated: “It’s what/who I want to be”, while binary players were more likely to indicate “No real reason” (52%).

➤ Within the binary group:

- Boys and young men were significantly more likely to select “No real reason” than girls and young women (54% vs 34%).
- Girls and young women were significantly more likely than boys and young men to choose identity or aspiration-aligned motivations, including both “It feels like me” (51% vs. 32%) and “It’s what/who I want to be” (32% vs. 20%).

Statistical differences by age:

- Younger players (13–14) were significantly more likely to choose a skin because it “feels like me”, and this motivation steadily decreases with age.¹⁴
 - Girls in this age group were more likely than boys to choose “It feels like me” (63% vs 37%).
- Younger (13–14) and mid-adolescent players (15–17) were more likely to choose the aspirational reason, “it’s what/who I want to be”.¹⁵
 - Among players aged 13–14, girls were more inclined toward this motivation (63%), but in the 15–17 age group, it was non-binary players who chose this more than other gender groups (56%).
 - This motivation becomes less popular among players aged 18 and above. Still, non-binary players in this age group chose it more than the other gender groups (52%).

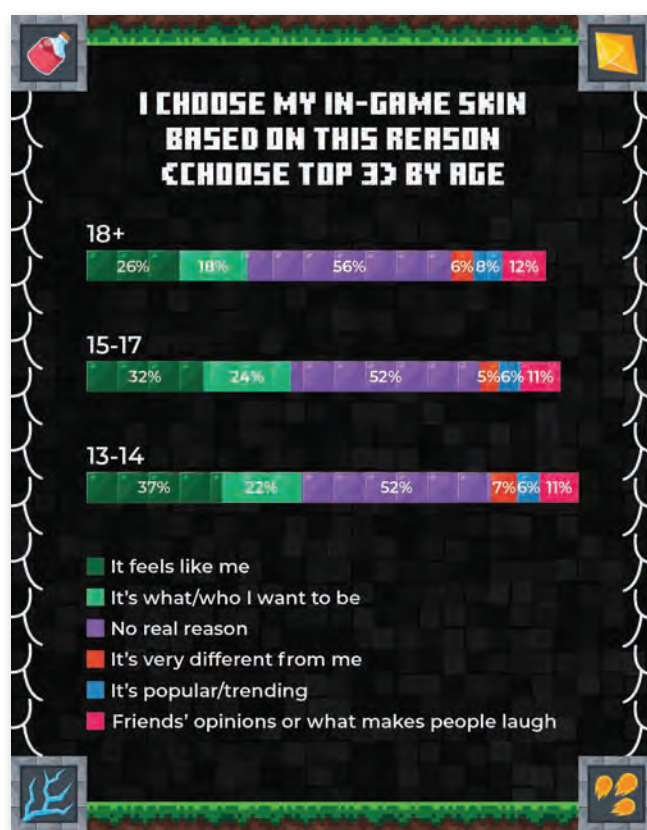
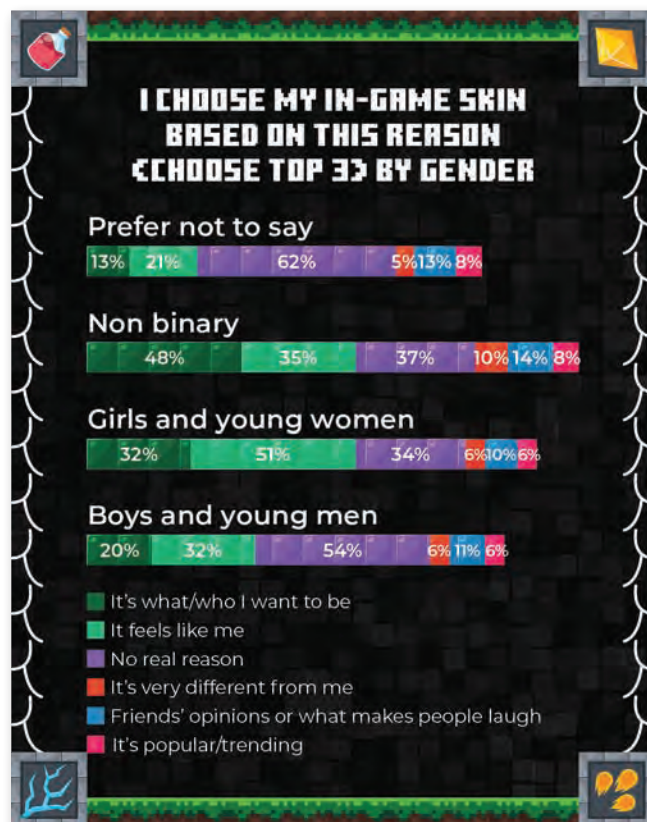
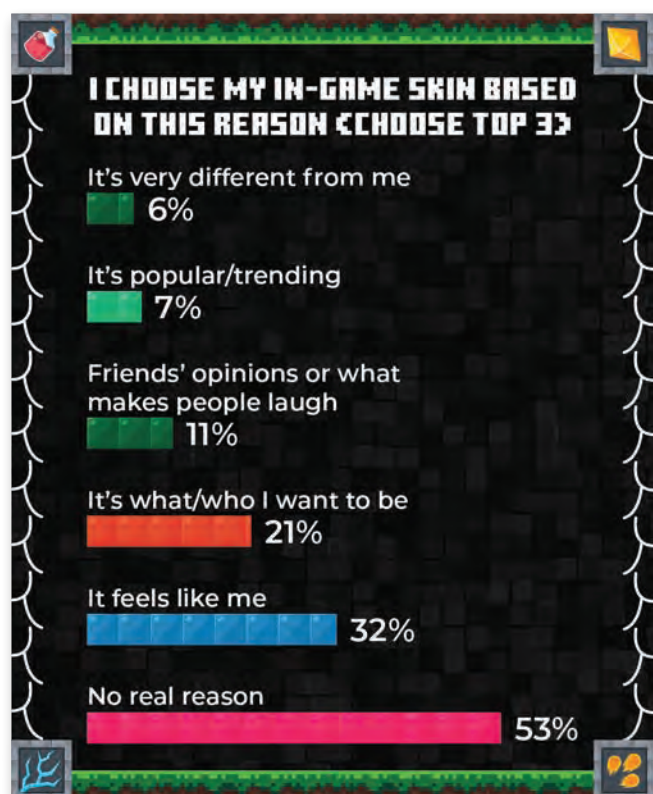
¹⁴ It feels like me” was selected by 37% of participants aged 13–14, 32% of those aged 15–17, and 26% of participants aged 18 and above.

¹⁵ There is a small age difference in choosing a skin because it reflects who or what players want to be. This reason is reported more often by younger (22%) and mid-adolescent players (24%) than by those aged 18 and over (18%).

ANALYSIS: TENDENCIES OF HELP-SEEKING ACCORDING TO MOTIVATIONS

Players who chose their in-game skin for aspirational reasons¹⁶ showed different help-seeking behaviours compared to players who had other motivations.

- The most notable difference is when dealing with problems outside of the game. **These players were more likely to seek help from friends online¹⁷, from someone close to them, or from formal or moderated sources such as server staff or support service or hotlines.**
- Smaller but consistent differences were also observed for in-game support. The same group of players were slightly more likely to search for information or advice in open digital spaces, such as in-game chat or a Wiki, ask other players for help, or approach moderators or formal support.¹⁸



¹⁶ It feels like them, it represents who they want to be, or it is very different from them.

¹⁷ There were differences between players who selected their in-game skin for aspirational reasons and those who did not, in how they seek help for out-of-game struggles. The percentage of players seeking digital peer support, in-person support, and formal or moderated help was higher among those who chose their skin based on aspirational reasons than among those who did not (41% vs 28%, 41% vs 32%, and 21% vs 13%, respectively).

¹⁸ For in-game support, the percentage of players seeking information or advice in open digital spaces, formal or moderated help-seeking channels, and peer digital support was higher among those who indicated aspirational skin choices than among those who did not (65% vs 57%, 29% vs 23%, and 32% vs 27%, respectively).

OTHER GAME ELEMENTS AND GENDER EXPRESSION

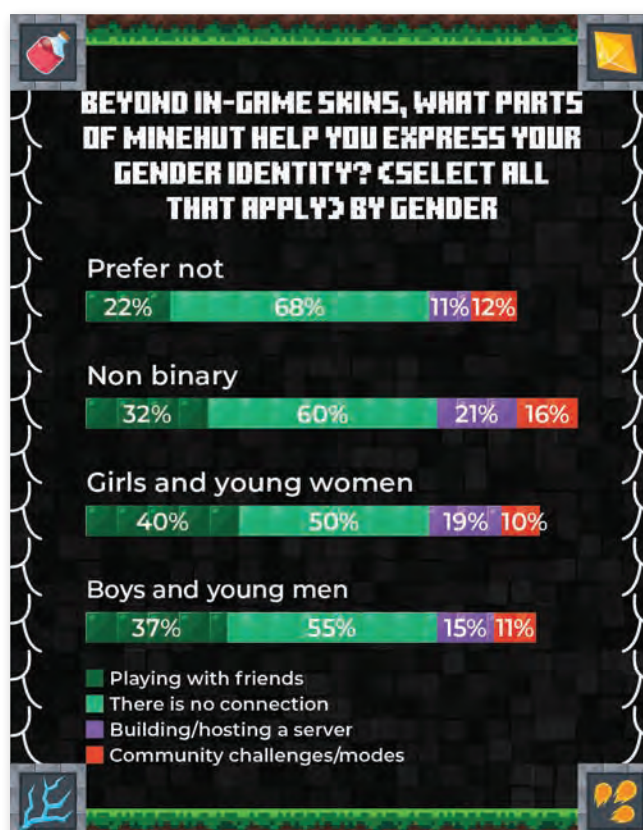
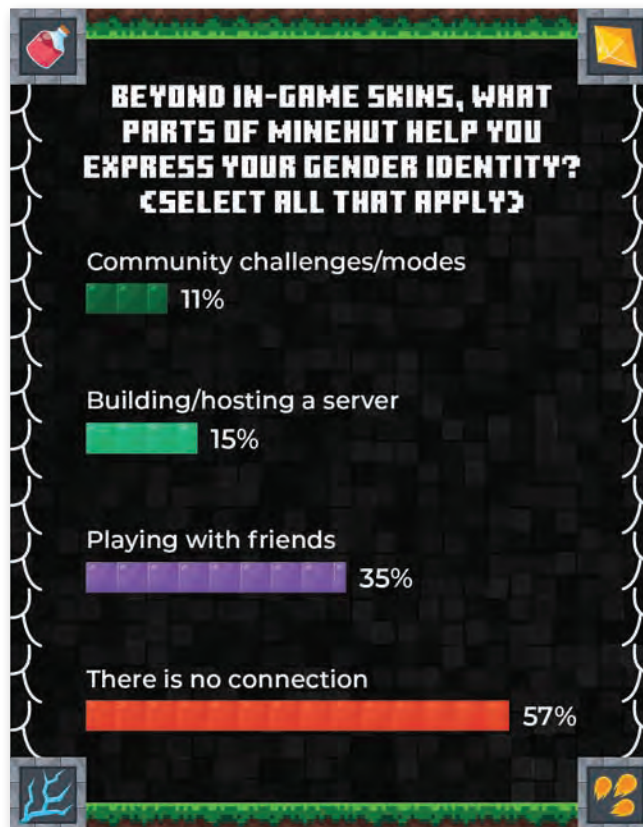
Most players, regardless of gender, do not generally link game features to gender expression: A majority (57%) indicated that there is no connection between Minehut's features (beyond skins) and their gender identity.

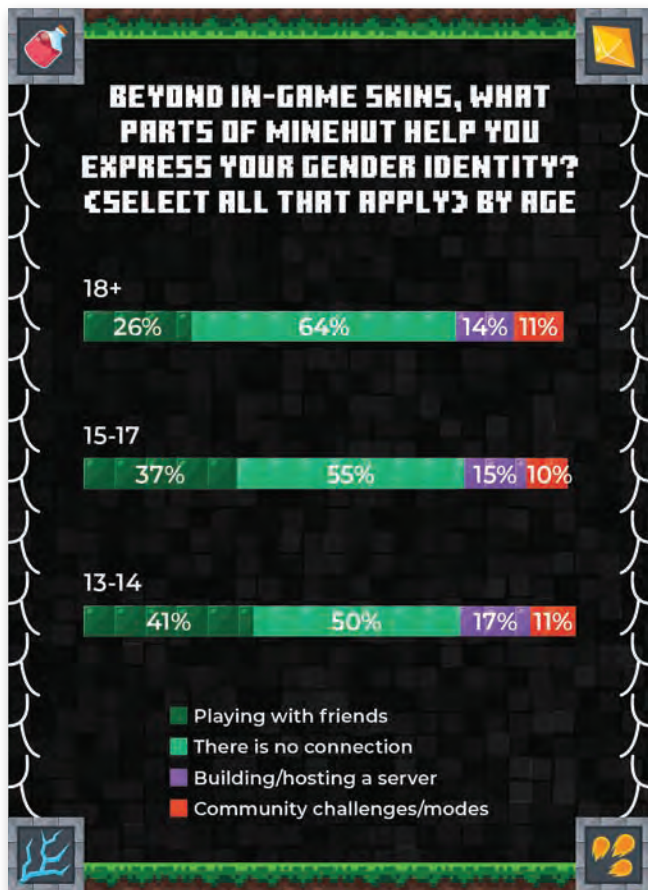
However, a substantial minority identify meaningful pathways for gender expression within the game.

- **Social interaction facilitates identity expression:** Playing with friends was the most commonly selected way respondents linked game experience to gender expression (35%).
- **Creative control plays a secondary role:** A smaller proportion associated with building or hosting a server with gender expression (15%). This option was most commonly selected by non-binary players (21%).
- **Collaborative gameplay is less linked to gender expression:** Community challenges or modes were selected only by 11%, making this the least commonly identified pathway.

No other statistically significant gender differences emerge in this question, but **there were some age-related differences.**

- Younger players (age 13–14) indicated more often that playing with friends (41%) helps them express their gender identity, and this role declines steadily with age.
- In contrast, older players indicate more often that there was “no connection” between Minehut and their gender identity (64%).





PERCEIVED PRESSURE FROM GENDER NORMS AND ROLES¹⁹

The majority of players indicated that they have not felt pressure to act in a certain way because of their gender identity when using Minehut. This was particularly evident among boys and young men, 60% of whom selected “No” as an answer.

Age-wise, adolescents aged 15–17 were the most likely to say they have not felt pressure related to their gender identity in Minehut (63%). In contrast, 13–14 year olds were more likely to say they are “not sure.” (29%).

Gender differences are significant:

➤ **Mixed sentiments appear to be somewhat more common among girls:**

Girls and young women were significantly more likely than boys and young men to indicate that they had experienced pressure related to their gender identity (20% vs. 8%). They were also more likely to select “Not sure”, suggesting mixed or less clearly defined experiences of gender-related expectations (31% vs. 22%).

➤ **Boys and young men more often indicated they did not feel gender-related pressure:** They were significantly more likely to state this than girls and young women (60% vs 43%). While the raw data shows this trend, the qualitative responses add important nuance.

✦ Boys and young men, particularly older players, were more likely to elaborate on their answers, frequently **rejecting the relevance of gender in gameplay** (e.g. “Gender has nothing to do with me playing Minecraft”). Some responses also reflected a broader dismissal of gender as a relevant category (e.g. “No one cares about my gender,” “Who cares about gender?”).

ANALYSIS: PATTERNS OF HELP-SEEKING ACCORDING TO PERCEIVED PRESSURE

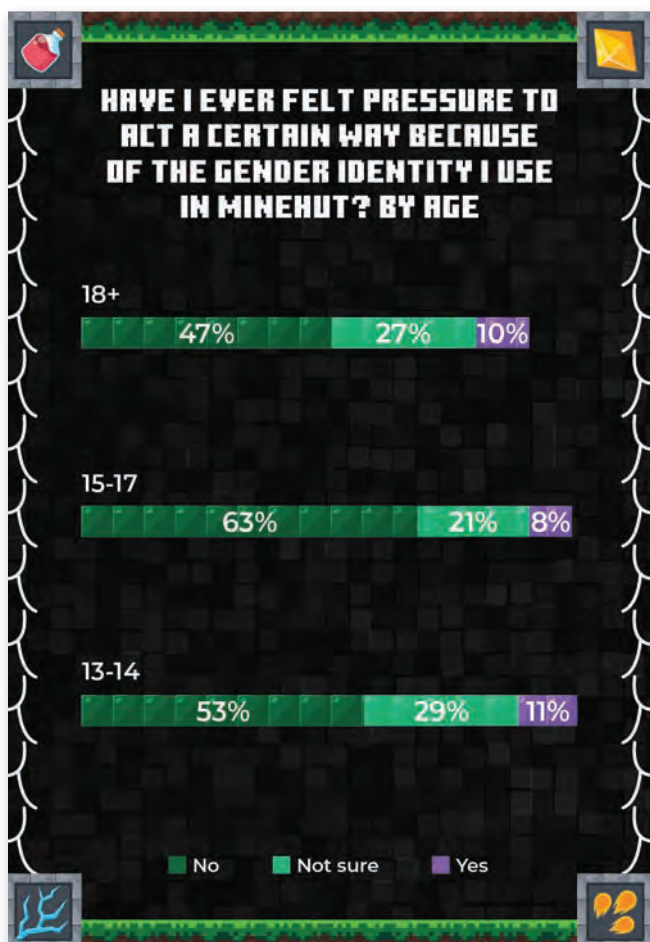
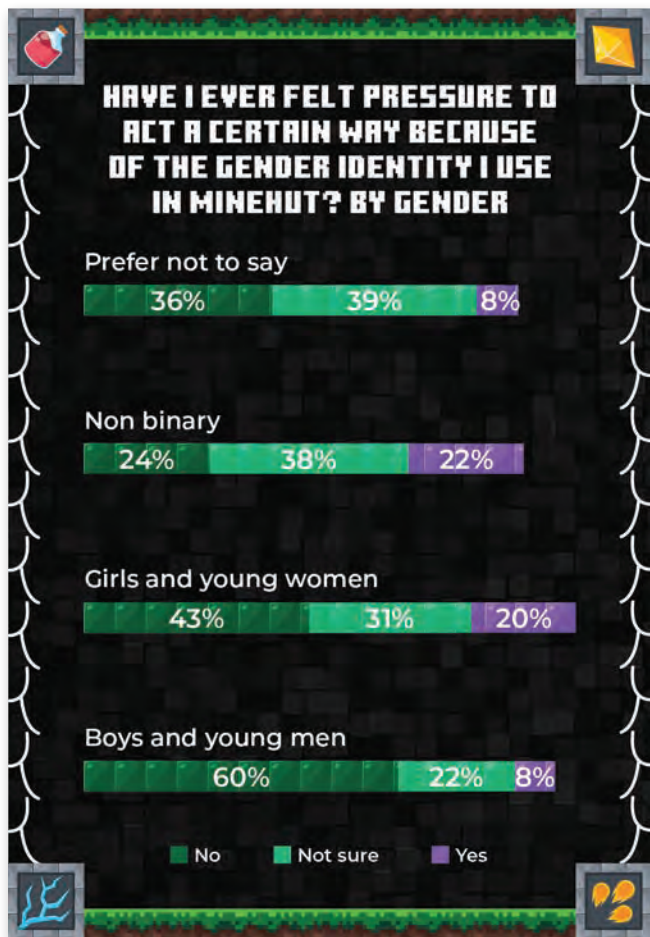
When dealing with problems outside of the game, players who had experienced gender-related pressure showed different help-seeking patterns compared with those who had not.

➤ **These players were less likely to seek help from friends, in-person or family.²⁰** However, the opposite pattern appeared for online support. Players who felt gender-related pressure were more likely to seek help from peers online.²¹

¹⁹ The question on perceived gender-related pressure included four response options. The quantitative analysis only included the ‘Yes’, ‘No’, and ‘Not sure’ responses, while qualitative analysis was done for the open-text responses under ‘Explain’. With this, the total responses included in the quantitative analysis is 1,776.

²⁰ For out-of-game struggles, in-person help-seeking was less common among players who felt gender-related pressure (25%) than among those who did not (44%).

²¹ For out-of-game struggles, digital peer help-seeking was more common among players who felt gender-related pressure (44%) than among those who did not (34%).



IMPLICATIONS ON TRUST, SAFETY, AND COMMUNITY

Subtle explorations of identity

The findings suggest that for many players, identity expression – including gender-related – may not be a consciously articulated choice or a primary factor shaping their gameplay decisions, citing no real reasons or connection. This is observed more among boys, who tend to see gender as irrelevant or external to gameplay. However, for some players, Minehut may serve as a meaningful space for identity expression and exploration.

These contrasting perspectives coexist within the same environment, showing how identity is expressed, explored, downplayed, or rendered invisible within the gaming space.

These findings should also be understood in the context of Minecraft’s design. Players can choose and customise skins freely, and the game does not use formal gender markers. This may shape how players interpret questions about gender expression in gameplay. Rather than pointing to the absence of gender identity considerations altogether, selecting “no real reason” may reflect habitual choices, limited reflection at the time of responding, or the possibility that gender identity expression is occurring in more subtle ways or within other spaces.

At the same time, there are young people who identify with their in-game choices. This means that **in-game representation still functions as a space for self-alignment or aspirational identity exploration**. Even if it is not the dominant response, these motivations remain meaningful and suggest that, at least for games that emphasise character building, expanded customisation options and more diverse representational possibilities could enhance opportunities for more conscious identity expression.

It is also important to consider that players indicated other experiences within the game environment that can relate to identity. Identity expression therefore may not be limited to visual or aesthetic representation but may instead emerge through social interactions, community participation, and perceptions of belonging within the platform.

Inclusive environments support help-seeking

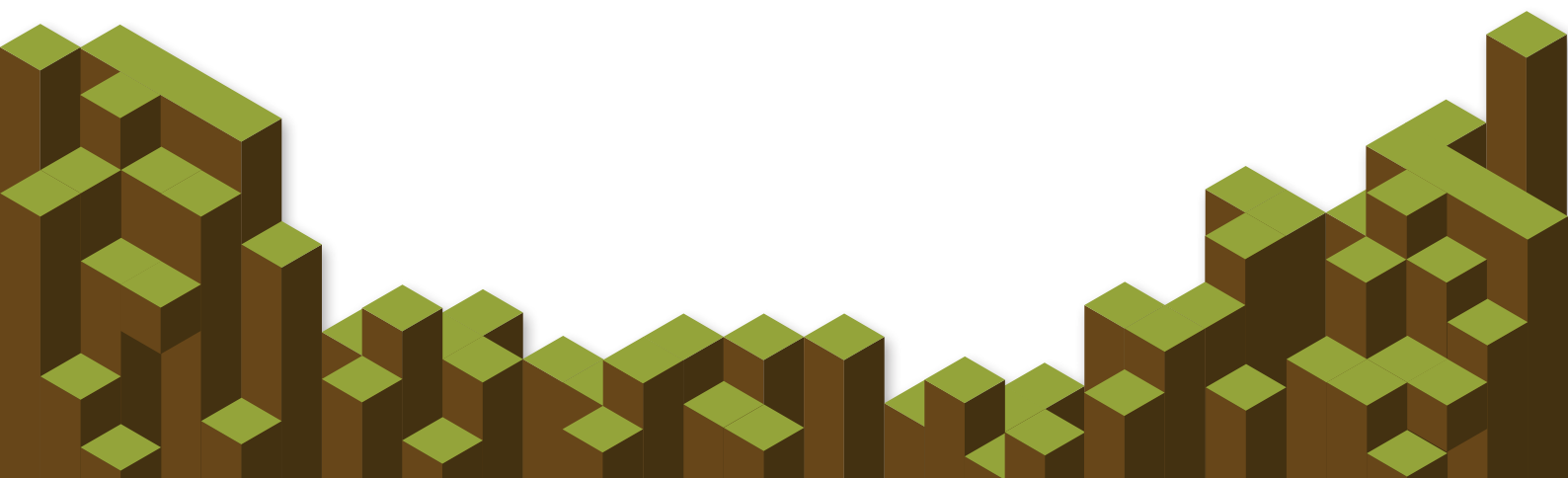
Supporting players' identity expression is closely tied to supporting help-seeking habits.

Similar to how players' perception of the community may influence how likely they are to reach out, whether players feel their identity is seen and respected within the community, could influence their trust in safety tools, support staff, and peers. These dynamics can make a meaningful difference when players are facing personal struggles, highlighting that inclusive and identity-affirming gaming environments create opportunities to support player wellbeing beyond the game itself.

Gender could shape who players turn to for help, what feels safe to disclose, and whether formal or peer support feels more accessible. **While some players said they do experience gender-related pressure, online spaces can still function as important and avenues for support that can supplement more specialised offline help, especially when dealing with problems outside of the game.**

This is particularly relevant given that gender pressures experienced in online communities may mirror those present in in-person contexts. In this sense, online spaces may offer a meaningful additional opportunity for support and connection.

These are points of reflection for those designing community engagement and trust and safety tools, as certain design choices can affect whether players feel included, safe, and supported.



CONCLUSION: ACTIONABLE PATHWAYS AND KEY OPPORTUNITIES

FOR ENHANCED GAME DESIGN AND FEATURES

Leverage positive perceptions to strengthen support pathways. As with Minehut, a gaming community or platform's positive reception presents an opportunity to integrate more age-specific support and help pathway features more intentionally into the gaming experience. Tools such as in-game chat could offer subtle design features (e.g. contextual prompts, visible yet non-intrusive support options, and peer-support cues) help strengthen help-seeking as part of the overall gaming experience, including for broader personal concerns.

Explore factors that may cause the decline in engagement and help-seeking behaviours for older-aged players, in light of each platform dynamics and characteristics. This information could inform the design of strategies that differentiate engagement for older adolescents and youth, who may require more autonomy-supportive, private, or self-directed support mechanisms rather than authority-based models.

Expand opportunities for identity expression. For games where role-playing or persona-building is central to gameplay, expanding avatar customisation options and representational diversity may strengthen engagement while also supporting identity expression. Even small enhancements to creative control may increase players' sense of ownership and belonging.

Strengthen safe peer spaces. Non-binary players and those who preferred not to disclose their gender identity were less likely to use publicly visible digital channels. This suggests that open digital spaces may not yet feel equally accessible to all groups. Moderated peer spaces, smaller-group interactions, or more clearly structured and visible support pathways may increase comfort and participation.

FOR IMPROVED TRUST AND SAFETY CONFIDENCE

Recognise differentiated gendered experiences within the platform. Trust and safety strategies should recognise that neutrality does not guarantee equal experience. A closer look at gender dynamics affecting gaming experiences, including interactions with player support and safety tools, could inform design choices and structures of community moderation.

Reinforce inclusive community norms visibly and consistently. Clear and visible communication about respectful and caring behaviour, proactive moderation, and transparent reporting systems may strengthen perceptions of fairness and inclusion, particularly for gender-diverse players.

Support mid-adolescents as a distinct group. Players aged 15–17 show pronounced perceptions of aggression and toxicity while also having a greater reliance on friends for support. This stage may represent a critical intervention point. Targeted community messaging and structured support features during mid-adolescence may prevent disengagement in later years and also provide support that responds to their developmental and social needs.

Integrate AI responsibly within safeguarding strategies. AI is already part of young people's support ecosystems, used both for practical gaming help and personal guidance. As AI becomes more present across both games and the wider tools players use, platforms have an opportunity to act as curators by identifying, shaping, and responsibly integrating AI-informed support pathways that guide players toward safe, age-appropriate, and trustworthy resources when needed.

Opportunities for Minehut

- Build on the positive perceptions about the community to promote help-seeking and safe gaming habits. Use this opportunity to introduce more nuanced campaigns that can strengthen the culture of safety and inclusivity.
- Review and recalibrate formal and informal support systems based on what the behavioural trends showed.
- Conduct deeper exploration of how players are using the different support channels, possibly over a longer period of observation and with gender and age disaggregated data.

WHAT WE SHOULD LOOK INTO NEXT

Understanding of in-game peer dynamics.

Gender differences appear more visible within the gaming environment than out-of-game struggles, suggesting that platform dynamics also influence players' experiences. Further qualitative research could explore how peer cultures, particularly in spaces dominated by rigid gender dynamics, shape identity expression and general perceptions of belonging.

Barriers to help-seeking among older adolescents and youth.

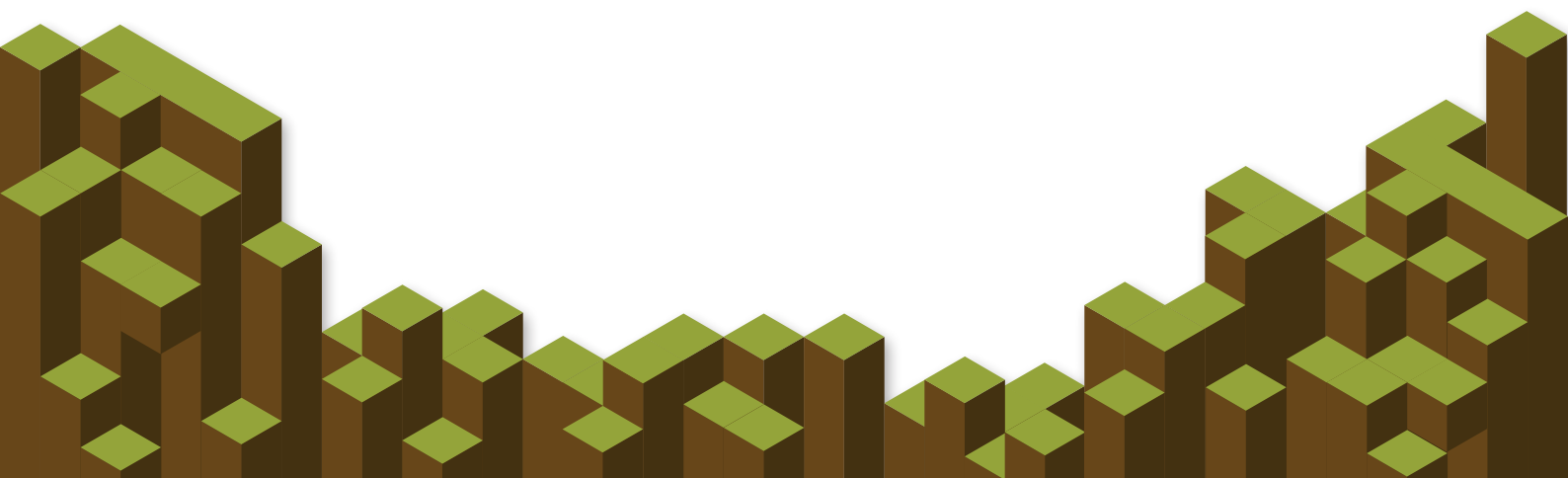
The consistent increase in “not seeking help” with age, across genders, raises important and urgent questions. Future research could explore whether this reflects developmental independence or growing disengagement from available in-game support structures. It could also examine whether this trend is linked to mental health challenges among younger people, including how emotional distress, stigma, coping strategies and access to trusted support shape help-seeking across age groups.

Differences between in-game and Discord community formats.

It would be valuable to compare in-game and Discord-based community spaces more directly, including how structure, visibility, moderation style, and social norms may influence help-seeking, age-related patterns, and perceptions of safety. This could help clarify which findings are tied to platform design and which are tied to community format.

More robust analysis of girls and non-binary respondents.

Given the smaller subgroup sizes in this survey, future research should expand data collection for girls, young women, and non-binary players to increase confidence in subgroup findings and support stronger conclusions about age- and gender-related differences.





328/1 Phaya Thai Road,
Ratchathewi, Bangkok,
10400, Thailand

Telephone: +662 215 3388
Email: info@ecpat.org
Website: www.ecpat.org

For more information:

