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Young People's Navigation of Online Risks

Social Media, ICTs & Online Safety

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Mobile phones, in particular, have become an important predictor of social inclusion, and, at the same time, of exclusion.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and objectives

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have become an integral part of daily life for most South Africans. Social media, in particular, have become an important way for young people to connect, and to remain connected. Further, the developmental potential, for young people, of ICTs and the internet is increasingly being realised as technology is integrated into school curriculums, and as the use of computers and tablets is integrated into teaching practice at schools. Outside of the school environment, ICTs and social media also offer important opportunities for young people, such as engaging with government, accessing information on health care, and exploring economic and employment opportunities, to name just a few.

The opportunities presented by widespread access to, and use of, ICTs, are balanced by a number of new risks and dangers that present online. The extent of these risks and dangers, and the way in which young people respond to and deal with them, is largely unknown, at least within the South African context. With this in mind, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP), in partnership with UNICEF South Africa, undertook a study, aimed at exploring young people's online experience, as part of a larger national research study on school violence. This new study was designed to explore young people's use of social media, the dangers faced online, and the ways in which young people negotiate their own safety online. The study was located in tandem with the 2012 National School Violence Study[1] (NSVS 2012), which collected more quantitative data on issues of violence, including what has become known as 'cyberbullying'.

Specifically, the study set out to understand:

- how the increased use of social networks by children and young people makes them more vulnerable to abuse, harassment and violence;
- how children and young people negotiate these risks; and
- the ways in which children and young people perceive that online safety and responsible behaviour can be enhanced.

Study methodology

A quantitative study had been done by CJCP in 2008. This was repeated in 2012, but with qualitative focus group discussions added, in which the young people spoke in a relatively unstructured way about their experiences of social media. The quantitative results were used to contextualise the qualitative research findings.

Schools were the primary sampling unit for the study with 121 schools recruited to participate in the study. These schools were stratified by province, ensuring that all provinces were adequately represented in the sample. From these 121 schools, 93 agreed to participate in the qualitative component of the study. At each school, the principals and learners were briefed, and informed consent forms were distributed to all learners. The sample for the qualitative component was stratified by gender and by age, and within these parameters learners were randomly selected from those who had returned completed consent forms. Individual's access to social media was not established before the sample population was selected.

The focus group discussions were conducted during school hours at times pre-arranged with the school principals, so as to minimise disruptions to the school programme. This meant, however, that a maximum of two group discussions could be held at each school. Each focus group was made up of eight to ten learners. The groups explored a variety of subjects, including the use of social media, how safety is negotiated online and risk-reduction mechanisms when using social media.

Research findings

The majority of school-going South Africans, between the ages of 14 and 19 years, have access to, or own, a mobile phone, and have access to the internet. Mobile phones, in particular, have become an important predictor of social inclusion, and, at the same time, of exclusion. It is not just the ownership of, or access to the handset, however, that predicts inclusion, but the uses the phone is put to. Young people most commonly identify the benefits of mobile phones in terms of forms of connectedness: as being able to use Mxit, Facebook (and to a much lesser extent Twitter) or any other form of messaging, and for making and receiving calls.

The ubiquity of mobile telephony and internet access, in particular, comes with additional risks for children and young people. Not least of the risks brought by ICTs is the risk of online violence, including cyberbullying, and the risk of unanticipated consequences of sexting and video sharing. Just over one in five of the young people taking part in the 2012 NSVS reported being bullied online, or experiencing some form of online harm, ranging from identity theft or fraud, to sexting, to bullying. This tends to happen with both computers and phones. Although online activity and engagement

transcend geographical borders, it appears that young people in metropolitan areas are more likely to experience online harm than those in other urban areas or rural areas, suggesting that such behaviour, and vulnerability to such behaviour, may be linked to other factors relating to offline vulnerability. For example, those in metropolitan areas are more likely than those in rural areas to be characterised by risk factors that are common to both perpetration of and vulnerability to offline violence. This happens at both community and household level and can include social marginalisation and exclusion, high levels of inequality, family conflict, and poor educational attachment and performance.

Young people tend to be well aware of the dangers and risks that are attached to the use of ICTs, the internet, and social media, both in terms of online dangers themselves, and offline dangers relating to online activity, including risks of cyberbullying, grooming, and online-offline relationships. Young people are also acutely aware of the risk of social exclusion by and from their peers, and in many cases are willing to risk other online harms in order to feel a sense of inclusion or belonging – underscoring the importance of connectedness. A strong relationship between the learners' confidence, sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and their experiences and approach to online violence, was evident. Similarly, while aware of the risks of cyberbullying or of being harassed online, the vast majority of learners were willing to accept and manage such risks in order to reap the benefits that the technology and social media offer. In many instances, examples of conscious decisions by children balancing potential dangers with possible benefits were provided. In such cases, as with other forms of harms, the dangers tended to be managed, as both proactive and responsive strategies were put in place to mitigate or minimise online risks.

Different strategies also tended to be developed for different forms of harm, reflecting what are perceived as being the most appropriate and relevant responses to different threats. Some of these strategies demonstrate not only knowledge of the dangers, but also the perceived attitudes to social media amongst various groups within the young people's networks, such as peers, family, and others in authority, such as teachers.

Pro-active or preventative strategies developed by learners tended to focus on the management of platforms being utilised (for example privacy settings, etc.), and through communication with peers and others. In the first case, young people utilise the resources built into the software or platforms through which risks present themselves, for example by blocking unknown or unwanted contacts such as bullies, or by managing the security settings on Facebook. (Most young people knew the safety and privacy settings on both phones and computers.)

Communication-focused strategies entail conversations, the sharing of experiences, and seeking advice and support from others trusted by the young person – most often peers, and to a lesser extent also parents and educators.

Active communication strategies are particularly significant in instances where online relationships evolve into offline meetings (one in ten learners had met offline someone whom they had first met online) – a point at which young people appear acutely aware of the risks, and where the risk of violent physical danger resulting from online contact is most real. In most cases where young people choose to meet someone they have encountered online, they devise mechanisms with peers to enhance their own safety, and to minimise the risk of harm.

Responsive mechanisms relating to safety usually entailed actions such as logging off, in the case of chats or threats, leaving internet sites, limiting information shared, ignoring the person's calls or messages or chat requests, or simply doing nothing. In some instances, learners also spoke about simply not putting themselves into places or environments where risks might be realised. This might entail avoiding certain websites, or chatrooms. In more instances than not, in the case of sexting and the sharing of explicit photos between learners, children show some sense of agency by refusing to be manipulated into sharing more explicit photos after initial photos have been shared with someone online. In such instances, the person requesting more sexually explicit photos would usually be ignored after not accepting an initial refusal. Of more concern are cases where photos or videos are taken without consent, which has potentially greater consequence for the unknowing victim. This is often a more common scenario, as is the posting or sharing of images or videos that were consensually produced, following the end of a relationship.

Importantly, there appears to be very little support available for children regarding their experiences online, or to victims of online violence or bullying. Knowledge of available resources was minimal, and mention rarely made of sources of support. This is a significant gap, as there is growing evidence highlighting the relationship between online victimisation and perpetration. As importantly, there is more than adequate evidence from both this study and others that the impact of online violence is similar to conventional forms of bullying, and may impact negatively on the psycho-social wellbeing of children.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made, based on the research findings:

- Policies need to focus on fostering an environment where young people can build resilience, and learn appropriate responses to online risks. These appropriate responses need to harness the resources that children themselves possess, and that are available through children's own networks (for example peer networks).
- A relationship clearly exists between learners' confidence, their sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and their responses to and experiences of online violence. Strategies and approaches to online safety should utilise this, and should focus on building young people's sense of self-efficacy.
- Related to this, the research highlighted the importance of peer relationships in the way that young people approached and managed online risks. This is an area of potential that could be used to inform strategies and targeted interventions.
- Policies should be premised on an understanding of online risks, and the associated harms. Young people possess the resources to manage online conflict, and any strategies aiming to address online violence should support these resources and help develop them further.
- Strategies should build on the internal and external resources that children have, and should focus on enhancing young people's sense of self-efficacy and control, and their ability to make informed, healthy decisions. This should, in turn, result in responsible online behaviour. This can be done, in part, through the provision of supportive home and learning environments (which in turn emphasises the need for strategies to be contextualised within broader child safety and well-being policies and programmes).
- Online safety policies should be contextualised within the broader typologies and risks associated with violence generally. Policies should provide a framework for prevention and support strategies – at national, provincial and local levels – to embed online safety within broader violence- and bullying-prevention strategies. Further, the relationship between online and offline violence needs to be better understood, and be integrated into prevention approaches.
- Related to the above recommendations, priority should be given to reaching those who are most at risk for online harms.
- A gap exists in the provision of services and support to children, relating to their online experiences. In simple terms this could be considered a lack of victim support. Targeted resources offering support and counselling to children who do experience online violence could be combined with resources aimed at building young people's efficacy more generally. This would go some way towards promoting responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship in both proactive and supportive ways.
- Policy responses should be driven by evidence-led approaches, and considerable attention should be placed on generating a body of evidence for effective strategies and approaches within South Africa.
- Policy responses should be premised on a comprehensive understanding of adolescent development, recognising that risk-taking is a normal and necessary part of this developmental phase. These responses should therefore provide youths with the skills and support required to navigate the challenges of this period responsibly.
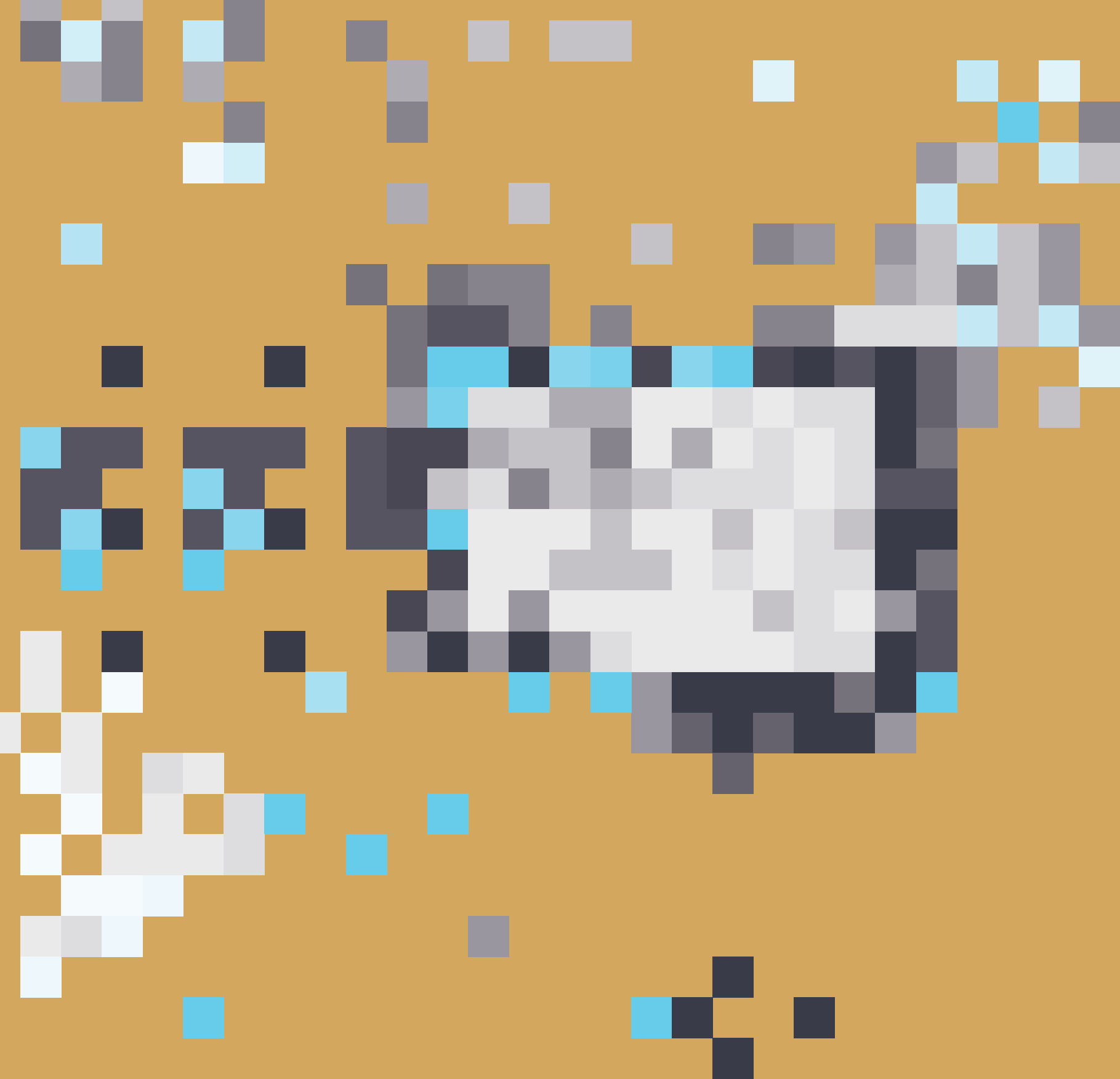
INTRODUCTION

Background and Motivation for the Study

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been described as revolutionising the way in which people and young people in particular relate and interact socially[2]. The internet, whether accessed through mobile phones or through computers, has become an indispensable source of knowledge and means of interaction and engagement – for young people in particular. The prevalence and influence of ICTs in the lives of young people have been shown in numerous studies, one recent example of which can be found in a publication by the Pew Research Centre which found that a typical 21-year old in the USA entering the workforce today will have spent a total of 5,000 hours of playing video games, participated in 250,000 exchanges of emails, instant messages and phone text messages, spent 10,000 hours using a cell phone (mobile phone) and 3,500 hours online.[3] Social media have become 'near ubiquitous' in the lives of many young people today, and have become critical tools for all forms of social engagement.[4] Social media – defined as the mechanisms used to help people connect, converse and interact with each other through instant messaging and social network sites – have become a platform for developing one's identity, meeting friends and even forming relationships that become part of the individual's social identity.[5] In essence, communication media such as these are 'becoming key resources for harnessing collective wisdom or opinion from "trusted" individuals'.[6] This scenario has become even more common as mobile telephony is increasingly the most affordable and easiest way to access the internet – particularly in many developing countries, where fixed broadband access may still be limited, and where access is further constrained by the relatively high cost of broadband.

The rapid (and continued) speed at which ICTs have developed, and the rate at which internet use has spread, have created enormous and diverse development opportunities. From the delivery of e-services and e-government, to access to market information for traders or farmers, to distance learning for rural children, to online and real-time disaster or conflict reporting and mapping, to micro- and small entrepreneurial opportunities, the developmental potential of technology and the internet has arguably only just been touched upon.

While the ICTs and the connected world might offer a wealth of opportunities and benefits to societies globally, there is a risk that the rapid diffusion of ICTs and the internet may deepen what has been called the 'digital divide' – the divide between those who can afford to access the internet, and those who cannot. Such a divide could further entrench existing inequalities, since those who have or can negotiate access to information technologies benefit from the potential and opportunities offered, while those who do not have such access become further excluded and marginalised, both socially and economically (and, in some instances, politically). In other words, there is a real risk of the digital divide excluding people from the developmental potential that the technology can offer, thus increasing the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

There is also increasing evidence that as young people spend more and more of their time online, and in virtual environments, new risks and dangers present themselves. These are most commonly perceived to be in the form of cyberbullying or harassment. Several studies focusing specifically on online violence have been conducted internationally. A recent study conducted by Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla & Daciuk (2011)[7] argues that cyberbullying is more prevalent than traditional ('real life' or 'offline') bullying. The findings of their national study conducted in Canada with 2,186 middle school and high school learners illustrated that 30% of these learners were involved in cyberbullying – either as a victim or as a bully – while a further 26% of the learners were involved as both bully and victim.

Though numerous studies have indicated an increase in cyberbullying over the years, in South Africa online violence remains less prevalent than offline violence – despite the common misconception that the reverse is the case. However, even though the estimates of online bullying are not as high as those of offline bullying, there has been a steady increase over the years, indicating that online violence, and cyberbullying in particular, should be a cause for concern.

The body of literature concerning the experiences of young people regarding their online safety, and violence online is growing in South Africa, and an increasing number of empirical studies is exploring the relationship between online and offline violence, as well as the impact of cyberbullying and other forms of online violence – as experienced by young people. Most of the research undertaken thus far has been focused on North America and a number of European countries, while research in South Africa or the African region as a whole has often tended to be commercial, quantitative or focused on small samples – despite the rapid growth in the mobile and internet market on the continent. It is within this context, and in the face of the dearth of rigorous and reliable research on young people's experience of online violence and their safety that the research presented in this report was undertaken.

The Context

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the details of access to the internet, social media, or ICTs and technology more generally, but it is useful at the outset to have an idea of the context of social media usage, and the degree to which the internet and social media are part of young South Africans' lives.[8] Recently, Internet World Stats (2012) identified the top ten countries in Africa with the highest percentage of internet users. The results showed that Nigeria has the highest number of internet users in Africa, and South Africa as having the fifth highest (see Figure 1).

Internet usage in South Africa has shown a rapid increase in both penetration and access. World Wide Worx recently found an increase of 25% in the South African internet user base – from 6.8 million users in 2010 to 8.5 million in 2011. Their findings also show that 7.9 million South Africans access the internet primarily through their mobile phones.[9] In South Africa, as in Africa more broadly, the use of mobile technology to access the internet is to be expected, as mobile penetration far surpasses access to fixed telephony (see Figure 2).

This trend is also reflected in a New Wave report (2012)[10] which found that one in three South Africans aged 15 or older use the internet (with 22% using it every day), and that internet usage has become more popular than reading newspapers (with 17% reading newspapers every day).

The 2011 National Census in South Africa showed that since 2001 the number of households owning mobile phones had increased significantly: from less than a third (31.9%) to almost nine out of ten (88.9%) in 2011 (see Figure 3). According to the last three Statistics South Africa censuses, the percentages of households with computers and/or landline telephones were significantly lower ($p < 0.05$)[11] than of those owning mobile phones. It is also interesting to note that the percentage of households with a landline telephone has actually fallen over this period.

One of the outcomes of this rapid increase in the use of the internet – and mobile internet in particular – has been the extremely rapid growth of social media. Social media incorporate features such as participation (by encouraging

FIGURE 1
Africa's Top Ten internet-using countries

Source: Internet World Stats, 2012

Nigeria 48.4
Morocco 16.5
Egypt 29.8
Tunisia 4.2
Uganda 4.4
Algeria 5.2
Tanzania 5.6
Sudan 6.5
South Africa 8.5
Kenya 12
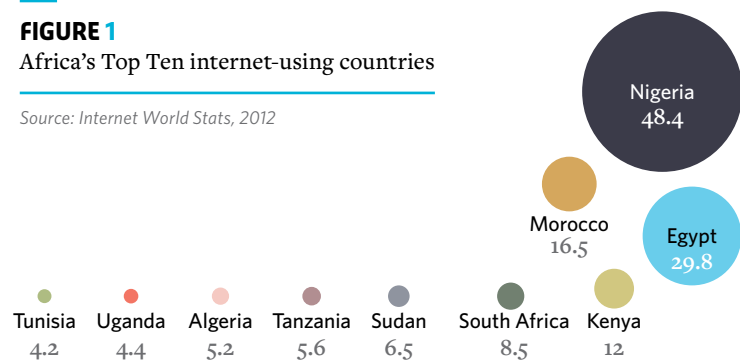
FIGURE 2
Mobile vs. fixed line subscriptions in Africa, 2000–2011

Source: ICTWorks, Available online, http://www.ictworks.org/news/2013/01/03/africa-has-more-mobile-subscribers-us-or-european-union

Mobile 648.8m
Mobile 16.5m
Fixed 12.1m
Fixed 9.2m
2000
2010
2011
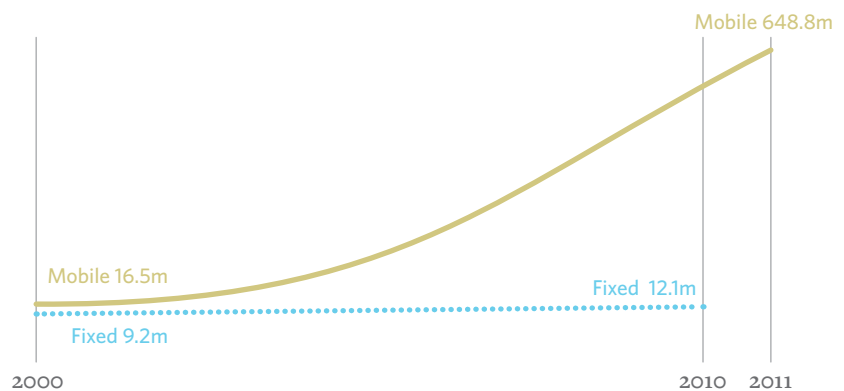
For the purpose of the research, 'social media and ICTs' refers to platforms such as Mxit, Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube and other video-sharing sites; instant messengers such as BBM (Blackberry Messenger), WhatsApp, blogs and micro-blogs; and communication linked with mobile telephones – SMSs, Bluetooth messaging, as well as any other platforms identified by the research participants themselves as social media and ICTs.

Mxit (pronounced 'mix it') is a free instant messaging and social network application that was created in 2005 in South Africa. Mxit is able to run on multiple mobile and computing devices (such as personal digital assistants (PDAS) and cellphones) and allows its users to have both public and private one-on-one conversations. Mxit users are able to chat, play games, download music, access video clips and news as well as buy and sell goods. In September 2011, Mxit was acquired by the South African investment group, World of Avatar. Thus Mxit is now a 'free messaging platform for Africans by Africans' (http://site.mxit.com/). Currently, Mxit users are estimated at over ten million (World Wide Worx, 2011).

2006 Twitter
2005 Mxit
2004 Facebook
2003 LinkedIn
MySpace
2002 Friendster
1997 SixDegrees.com
1995 Personal homepage service GeoCities
1978 First dial-up BBC

FIGURE 3

Mobile phone ownership in South Africa

Source: Census 2011: Statistical release p-03014.
Statistics South Africa, Pretoria, 2012

	2001	2007	2011
Mobile phone	31.9%		88.9%
Landline	23.9%		14.5%
Television	52.6%		74.5%
Fridge	49.9%		68.4%
Radio	72.1%		67.5%
Computer	8.5%		21.4%
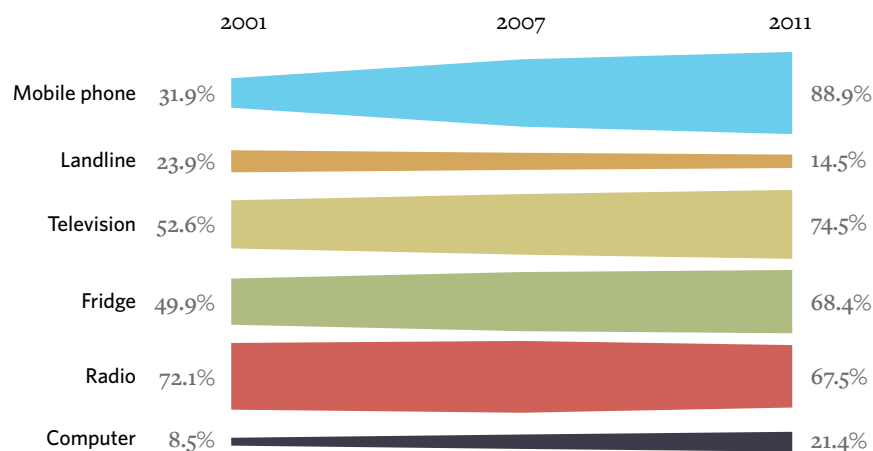
contributions and feedback from anyone), openness (by encouraging voting, comments and sharing of information), conversation (social media encourages a two-way conversation), community (created by people with shared interests) and connectedness (linking an individual with other people and different resources).[12]

There are two main types of social media: firstly social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube, which allow users to connect to friends in a 'virtual' community, build personal web pages, and share content; and, secondly, instant messaging (IM) services, for example Mxit and BBM, which allow users to have one-to-one conversations. South Africans are currently one of the highest users of mobile technology and mobile social networking on the continent, especially compared to countries such as Cameroon, Ethiopia, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.[13]

ICTs – in particular the internet and social media – can play a powerful role in contributing to the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, as they relate to children and young people. In 2008 the US MacArthur Foundation's digital media and learning initiative produced a report[14] which focused specifically on the potential benefits for young people in using these social media. The benefits highlighted were:

● The use of new social and recreational media as sites of learning – it is important to appreciate that young people who are interacting socially online are accumulating social and technological skills that are needed to participate in contemporary society.

● Diversity in forms of media literacy – online interactions range from purely friendship-driven to interest-driven, and each may have benefits in terms of the socialising or education that are necessary for participation in future social or work environments.

● Peer-based learning – the use of new media facilitates learning from peers, which has some advantages over learning from adults, including teachers.

● Changing role of education – the participation of young people in social media will present important new learning opportunities, if educational practices can harness the power of the new social tools.

In cases such as these, children and adolescents tend to be drivers of the use of the technology –rather than merely being beneficiaries or recipients of its assistance. ICTs are thus a particularly powerful means of enhancing young people's own sense of agency in driving positive change, both in their immediate environment and in the broader communities and societies in which they live. Such potential is, however, also contingent on the extent to which people in historically excluded and disadvantaged countries and communities have access to, and ownership of ICTs. Among the most significant pieces of modern technology is the mobile phone, and, more recently, the 'smart', or internet-enabled phone. According to UNICEF (2011)[15] the emergence of internet access on mobile phones 'has fostered new opportunities to bridge the digital divide and to close the internet participation gap between and within countries'. It is therefore important to understand how many people have access to ICTs such as mobile phones, as the mobile industry in Africa has been described as 'an enabler of economic development' with mobile services emerging in areas such as agriculture, banking, education, and healthcare.[16] For previously unconnected communities, these resources are increasingly becoming the means of choice for accessing the internet and the world of social media. As the roll-out of mobile telephony has far exceeded both the reach and the affordability of fixed line telephony in many African countries, so the world of the internet has become vastly more accessible through mobile handsets.

The Potential for Harm

With the rapid global take-up of ICTs, mobile technology and social media by young people[17], a number of new risks, and potential harms that young people might face, have emerged. These relate to the way in which the technology is used, as well as to the technology itself. Most commonly, the focus has been on emerging types of violence related to social media, such as cyberbullying, sexual predation and grooming, 'sexting' and harassment. Generally, online violence can be categorised into various typologies. Kowalski et al (2008)[18] identify a number of forms of cyberbullying alone, including flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing, trickery, exclusion, cyberstalking and happy slapping (these are detailed in the text box below). Although, these terms were not used explicitly by the researchers when speaking to learners, it was found that the experiences of learners fit these accepted typologies.

Note: The United Nations defines 'youth' as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years. In South Africa, young people 18 years and younger are defined as 'children', while individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 are defined as 'youth'. However, because this study is focused on youth at school, the terms 'children' and 'young people' are both used, and refer to individuals between 13 and 18 years of age.

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Cyberbullying can be defined as 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices' (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009a)[19]. Among the various types of cyberbullying that can be found[20] are the following:

Flaming - this involves brief yet heated online 'fights' involving two or more protagonists, where electronic messages using angry and vulgar language are sent or exchanged. It typically occurs in online public forums such as chat rooms or discussion groups, or games.[21] Flaming often includes offensive, rude and vulgar language and insults, and sometimes even threats. A lengthy series of these messages is called a 'flame war'.[22]

Harassment - this involves frequently sending a cruel, offensive or threatening message to an individual target. This is usually done via a person's e-mail account, mobile phone or other personal communication channel. It is usually persistent and repeated and is directed at a specific person. It may cause annoyance, alarm or substantial emotional stress to the receiver. The South African Law Reform Commission distinguishes between direct and indirect online harassment. Direct harassment includes threats, bullying or intimidating electronic messages sent directly to the 'victim'. Indirect harassment includes spreading rumours about the victim on internet discussion forums, subscribing the victim to unwanted online services and posting information about the victim on online dating or sex services.[23]

Denigration - this involves the sending or posting of cruel gossip or rumours about a person to damage his or her reputation or friendships. In many cases it involves spreading rumours about someone's sexual orientation and/or information that is derogatory and untrue. It also includes posting or sending digitally altered photographs of someone to others, particularly pictures that portray the victim in a sexualised or other harmful way.

Impersonation or identity theft - this is when someone breaks into someone else's account and poses as that person, sending messages or other information to others online in a bid to damage the victim's reputation and friendships, or to get the victim in trouble. Negative, cruel or inappropriate information is communicated

Since this categorisation, other forms of online violence have continued to emerge, including 'sexting'. Sexting most commonly entails the taking of explicit photographs or videos (with or without the knowledge/permission of those photographed) and distributing them to a wider audience via cellphones. It can also involve engaging in online chats or conversations that are explicit or erotic in nature. In itself, the act of sexting does not constitute online violence, or harm, but the consequences of sexting may include psychological and emotional harm. Further, in South Africa, sexting, even consensually, when involving parties under the legal age of consent, constitutes a crime.[29]

Documented consequences of cyberbullying, or online harassment, mirror many of those found in offline bullying: depression, impaired concentration, negative impact on social and peer networks, loneliness, suicidal thoughts.[30] However, the degree to which these results are generalised across young people who experience these forms of violence has not been well-documented.

These emerging forms of violence are increasingly presented as 'epidemics' or major threats that threaten young people's safety, despite the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that this is in fact the case. Indeed, Finkelhor (2011)[31] uses the term 'Juvenoia' to refer to the exaggerated fear that society at large tends to develop about the influence of social change on children and adolescents, and applies the concept to the response of current societies to the influence of the internet over young people. Such a tendency, he argues, is often fed by mainstream media.

In several high profile instances, initial online contact has led to offline physical violence, including rape and murder. Such instances tend to be highly publicised in the traditional media, leading to what might be construed as a moral panic or instinctual reaction by parents, community leaders, and governments. This has led to considerations of ways of restricting and controlling both young people's access to technology, as well as the actual content available through this technology.

One example prominently highlighted by the media was the 'Facebook rapist' (City Press, 2012) which described the way in which the perpetrator used his online profile to lure unsuspecting victims into meeting him – and then raping them. While reports of crimes such as rape are not new, the fact that such crimes are linked to social network sites increases the concerns of parents, teachers and even policy makers about social media – which could in turn create a 'moral panic'.

A differentiation needs to be made between the act or experience of online violence, including cyberbullying and other forms mentioned above, and the potential for harm of these acts or experiences. The potential for harm lies not only in the act of violence itself, but also in the consequences that may result from it. These include both psychological and physical harm. Psychological harm from online bullying is similar that experienced with offline bullying, including isolation, depression, loss of appetite, etc. Physical harm, and consequential violence, can itself

to others as if the target were voicing these thoughts.[24] This may occur in the target's personal web page, profile, blog, or through any form of communication.

Outing or trickery – this involves sharing someone's secrets or embarrassing information or images online with people whom the information was never intended to be shared with. In some instances deception is used to trick someone into revealing their secrets or embarrassing information, and these are then shared online with others.[25]

Exclusion – this is related to the designation of who is a member of the in-group and who is an outcast. The emotional impact of exclusion can be intense and may occur in an online gaming environment, group blogging environment, or any other password-protected communication environment.[26]
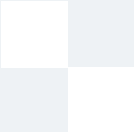
Cyberstalking – this, much like traditional stalking, involves threats of harm or intimidation through repeated online harassment and threatening or offensive messages. These cyberstalkers may also try to denigrate and destroy friendships and/or reputations.

Happy slapping – a relatively new type of cyberbullying which involves incidents where two (or more) people walk up to someone (not known to them) and one of them slaps the 'victim', while another captures the violence using a camera phone or digital camera. In some cases it becomes more than slapping, and assault may ensue.[27]

The methods used to cyberbully are limited only by the perpetrator's imagination and their access to technology. It is important to note that someone who is a cyberbully in one context may be a victim in another: roles often change, going from victim to bully and back again.[28]

Throughout this document, the phrase 'online violence' includes all of the above typologies, but excludes 'sexting' (see main text). Sexting is not generally termed an act of online violence or of cyberbullying, although the dissemination of private conversations, photos or videos without either party's consent or knowledge, may be considered a form of online violence.

what occurs online is often not recognised as violence

result from any of these acts, and may be inflicted by others, or self-inflicted. Violence inflicted by others could include physical bullying, and assaults, that have their origin in online bullying or any other form of online engagement, and morph into physical acts of violence, while self-inflicted violence may include self-harm or in its extreme case, suicide.

In discussing online violence, several points need to be borne in mind. First, online violence, as experienced by young people, is a recognisable, measurable and often preventable form of violence, and there is a danger in creating an artificial distinction between online violence and other forms of violence perpetrated against young people. This can mean that the seriousness of online violence can be underestimated. Generally, what occurs online is often not recognised as violence by either policy makers or violence prevention practitioners, or even by the children themselves. An example of this was found by Marwick and Boyd (2011)[32], highlighting the fact that children are more likely to perceive their experiences online as 'drama' for example, rather than as bullying – a term that may trivialise both the incident and the impact of the experience. In addition, there are sufficient issues that are unique to the nature of online violence, and to understanding the relationship of online violence to offline lives, to warrant a discussion of online

violence and cyberbullying separately from other forms of violence. The occurrence of physical and emotional offline violence is highly dependent on the physical space concerned, and so a delineation between school, home and community environments makes sense in this context. Online violence, on the other hand, tends not to be confined to any particular physical environment, and cuts across all the spheres and spaces in which young people live their lives.

Related to this, there is an increasingly tenuous or artificial separation between the concepts of 'online' and 'offline' – because of the way that young people utilise technology, with the lines between what happens and is said on the internet or social media platforms becoming blurred with what is said, and occurs, offline. The two should therefore be considered as parts of a continuum, rather than as two separate worlds or spheres in which young people function.

Global and local research suggests that, as the most avid and ardent users of the internet and social media, many young people are arguably more familiar than adults with the in-built security measures that are available on both the hardware and software used to access social media, as well as of the many of the dangers that do lurk online. As with young people's relationship with most forms of violence, the vast majority are aware of what constitutes right from wrong, and what is acceptable behaviour, whether it be online or offline. Again, as with many of the risks faced by young people in the past, much depends on what is considered 'normal', and on the ways in which normative behaviour is challenged or accepted. As with broader issues – such as bullying, unsafe sexual practices and human rights violations – much of the problem lies in ensuring consistency between knowledge and behaviour.

Any discussion of online risks and dangers is made more complex and difficult by the

lack of comprehensive data on the extent of various forms of violence, by the speed at which technological and related threats change and develop, and even, on the most fundamental level, by the lack of a shared conceptualisation and definition of the various forms or types of violence.

This report uses the above discussion as a departure point, acknowledging that going online creates potential risks for harm, and that these, when realised, are likely to have a negative impact on the wellbeing and health of young people. The recent EU Kids Online study report[33] recognises that using the internet does indeed expose young people to risk, but it also recognises potential positive outcomes. Consequently, the EU study makes the important point that paying too much attention to reducing risk may have the unintended adverse effect of limiting young people's opportunities. On the other hand, promoting online opportunities without highlighting the potential risks may also result in online harm. There thus needs to be a balance between promoting online opportunities and making young people aware of their own online safety.

The 2012 National School Violence Study[34] found that young people are, on the whole, aware of online risks and threats, and have developed mechanisms to deal with them. This highlights the importance of developing policies and response strategies that take cognisance of the agency of young people in their own online and offline behaviour, and of ensuring that these are built into the relevant policies. The current study therefore seeks to add to existing literature by providing insights into how the children of today attempt to negotiate the risks and benefits of online communication, whilst also providing recommendations on how these insights can be used to help promote online safety measures for children today.

Study Objectives

This research study set out to gain a better understanding of young people's online experiences with respect to safety and online threats, and to make suggestions as to how these could be addressed. Specifically, the study set out to understand:

- how the increased use of social networks by children and young people makes them more vulnerable to abuse, harassment and violence;

- how children and young people negotiate these risks; and

- the ways in which children and young people perceive that online safety and responsible behaviour can be enhanced.

METHODOLOGY

In 2008, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) conducted a national study to explore the nature and extent of violence occurring in South African schools, resulting in the first National School Violence Study (NSVS). This study was repeated in 2012, to assess any changes in levels of violence. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted – to provide an opportunity for exploring emerging forms of violence experienced by school-going children, data that had not been captured in the previous study. These included violence perpetrated and/or experienced through various forms of electronic and social media – usually characterised as 'online violence'.

The 2008 CJCP school violence study was primarily quantitative in nature – a survey instrument was administered to learners, educators and school principals to assess the nature and extent of offline violence occurring within schools. In this second sweep, a qualitative component was added, to explore in more detail the occurrence of violence through various forms of social media. This qualitative component was specifically intended to provide greater insight into young people's experiences of safety online: of the threats they face through the use of social networks and social media, how they negotiate these risks, and how their safety could be enhanced. While a distinct and discrete component of the study was intended to elicit very specific information in this regard, the approach and analysis were inextricably embedded within the broader framework of the National School Violence Study.

schools were stratified by province, ensuring that all provinces were adequately represented in the sample

Sample Design

The 2012 study consisted of two distinct components – a quantitative part and a qualitative part. The 2008 study had been only quantitative, using a pre-coded questionnaire as the research instrument. This was repeated in 2012, but qualitative focus group discussions were added, in which the young people spoke in a relatively unstructured way about their experiences of social media. The quantitative results were used to contextualise the qualitative research findings.

The focus group method was chosen because it gives depth and richness to the information gained[35] – not least through providing a platform where group members are able to remind each other of information which might have been forgotten if they had been interviewed individually.[36]

Schools were the primary sampling unit for the study with 121 schools recruited to participate in the study. These schools were stratified by province, ensuring that all provinces were adequately represented in the sample. From these 121 schools, 93 agreed to participate in the qualitative component of the study.

Letters of introduction from the Department of Basic Education were sent to each school, and visits by the research teams were then scheduled. At each school, the principals and learners were briefed, and informed consent forms were distributed to all learners. The sample for the qualitative component was stratified by gender and by age, and within these parameters learners were randomly selected from those who had returned completed consent forms. Individual's access to social media was not established before the sample population was selected.

The focus group discussions were conducted during school hours at times pre-arranged with the school principals, so as to minimise disruptions to the school programme. This meant, however, that a maximum of two group discussions could be held at each school.

Learners were recruited across all secondary grades, i.e. from Grade 8 to Grade 12, with ages ranging from 13 to 17 years. The data collection commenced in September 2012, which meant that at some schools the researchers were unable to include Grade 12 learners since they had already commenced preparations for their final examinations.

Each focus group was made up of between eight and ten learners. The groups explored a variety of subjects, including the use of social media, how safety is negotiated online and risk-reduction mechanisms when using social media. (The focus group discussion guide is attached as an appendix, for reference.)

KwaZulu-Natal	*47*
Limpopo	*44*
Eastern Cape	*31*
Gauteng	*16*
Mpumalanga	*3*
Western Cape	*14*
North West	*6*
Free State	*8*
Northern Cape	*8*
Total	*177*
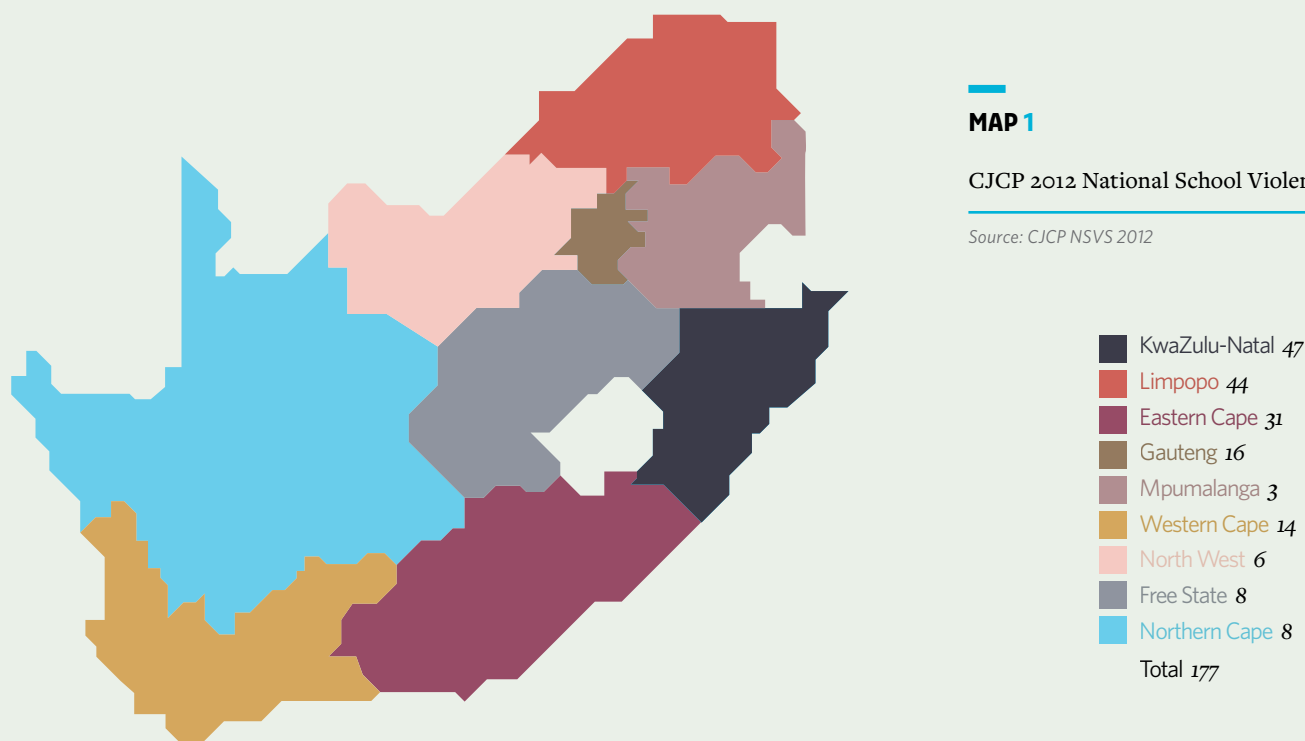
When conducting focus groups on sensitive topics such as violence, many researchers prefer a degree of homogeneity within the group, to obtain maximum disclosure. The aim was thus to recruit participants or learners who were relatively similar with regard to certain demographic variables, to increase the comfort level of the participants. The composition of the focus groups at each school was therefore based on two demographic variables: age and gender. A combination of mixed and male only, female only, groups were conducted. In groups in which both males and females participated, males and females were equally represented. Each group contained a spread distributed across the grades.

The 93 schools were spread across the nine provinces as detailed in Table 2. A total of 177 focus group discussions were conducted across the country.

Each focus group included two researchers: one facilitator and one scribe. The facilitators were provided with a facilitator's guide – in addition to the focus group discussion guide – which contained inputs from UNICEF SA, UNICEF NYHQ, and the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University. The facilitator's manual provided guidelines on how to conduct the discussion: how to select the location for the discussion (including seating arrangements), how to introduce the research, explaining to participants how issues of confidentiality would be dealt with, and describing what the research would be used for.

Focus Group Process

The focus group discussion approach was informed by that proposed by Farquhar and Das (1999)[37], who suggested that discussions with children should begin with a group activity, followed by general topics around the subject of interest (in this instance what kind of social networks are used, what they are used for, etc.), then leading to subjects or areas that are potentially more sensitive (for example, in this study, the participants' personal experiences – if any – of online violence), after which time should be given for questions of clarification.

The focus groups in this study were conducted in this manner. Each focus group discussion consisted of three activities:

Activity **1** Semi structured questions > Activity **2** Semi structured questions > Activity **3** Slogans
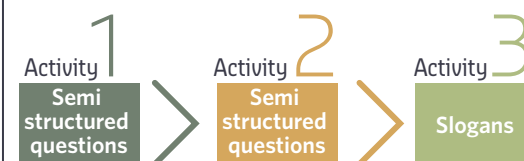
The first activity involved a series of semi-structured questions that were intended to gather information on the participants' own use of electronic and social media, and their knowledge of online benefits and potential dangers. The second activity involved discussion of a case study that was designed to elicit specific information exploring how young people respond to online dangers and how they negotiate their safety online. The final 'Slogans' activity gave participants an opportunity to suggest online safety messages that would appeal to young people. The discussions were audio-recorded (the learners having consented to this) and transcribed. A thematic analysis was used to analyse the study data.

Limitations to Study

There were several limitations to this study:

- Many learners focused mainly on the specific types of social media platforms they themselves used, which made it difficult to uncover opinions about the various forms of social media.
- The research was conducted in the third and fourth terms of the school year, so access to Grade 12 learners was limited, and the information gathered therefore focused mainly on the experiences of learners in Grades 8 to 11.
- The time available to conduct the discussions had to be limited, to minimise disruption to school activities.

Presentation of Research Findings

The design of the study generated a richness and depth of data on experiences of risks, and allowed online behaviour to be contextualised within quantitative data collected from each school. While the learners who participated in the quantitative component of the 2012 school violence study may in some cases not be the

Mxit and Facebook are the most commonly reported social media platforms used.

same as those who participated in the qualitative activities, certain characteristics may be assumed to be shared by virtue of their attending the same schools. Throughout the analysis presented below, data collected in the quantitative component, specifically on location characteristics, access and quantified experiences, is used to contextualise the qualitative findings.

The findings of the study are presented in four sections. The first section deals with social connectedness through social media; the second with learners' knowledge of online dangers, and the potential harm that could result from certain activities and behaviours; the third section deals with the concrete steps and precautions that learners use to protect themselves from harm; and the fourth with steps taken by the learners to protect themselves in relation to a very specific scenario, namely taking relationships from online to offline. The presentation of the findings is followed, in the final section, by a series of strategy and policy recommendations relating to online safety for young people.

In the discussion below, the verbatim quotations from learners are differentiated only by gender, with 'MP' standing for male participant and 'FP' for female participant.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section details learners' access to, and use of ICTs and social media, including the purpose they primarily associate with the use of mobile telephony, and social media in particular. It also covers social connectedness and exclusion, and knowledge of dangers and online risks.

As in other countries, young people in South Africa typically use social and electronic media to meet new friends, to reconnect with old friends, and to communicate with friends and relatives. It is also used for less social, but at times equally important activities: to download digital content such as music and video games, to share photos and videos, and to obtain educational information for school and homework. Mxit and Facebook are the most commonly reported social media platforms used.

Access to and Usage of ICTs

Mobile telephony has become almost ubiquitous in South Africa. Findings from the 2012 National School Violence Study show that four out of five (81.1%) secondary school learners have access to a mobile telephone (cell phone), while more than one in two (54.3%) have access to a computer, laptop or some form of tablet computer such as an iPad. As discussed earlier, access to the internet is increasingly available via mobile telephones. Half of the learners involved in the study reported that they had ever accessed the internet on a mobile phone (see Figure 4). While applications such as Mxit do not require a smart phone to carry out chats or conversations, they do require a GPRS (general packet radio service), which is a basic form of internet connectivity.

Category	Percentage
Own or have access to a mobile phone	81.1%
Own or have access to a computer, iPad, or tablet	54.3%
Ever accessed the internet on a mobile phone	46.2%
Ever used Instant Messaging through a mobile phone	42.3%
Have own social networking page	30.9%
Ever participated in online chatrooms	24.4%
Ever hosted or contributed to a website/blog	10%
Ever used Instant Messaging through a computer	9.5%

FIGURE 4

Access to and usage of ICTs by secondary school learners (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

When disaggregated by area type, it appears that access to telephony and internet services has, to a large extent, become common across all area types.

According to a New Wave report (2012)[37] the profile of internet users in South Africa has changed, with more users being black, one in two being female, and 20% of users currently living below the poverty line (defined as US$2 per person per day). This indicates that internet use has in many ways become part of everyday life.

Both the qualitative and quantitative data suggest that the internet is almost as widely used and accessed in rural areas as it is in urban areas. Access to the mobile internet – using mobile phones to access the internet – is, however, much more differentiated, as reflected in Figure 5, with those in metropolitan and other urban areas significantly more likely to access the internet on their mobile phone than those in rural areas.

More and more services are becoming available to users via smart phones, suggesting that this is the area in which there is the greatest potential for inequalities to be exacerbated, and for greater exclusion of those who could most benefit from the developmental potential offered through mobile connectivity. Not only do those with no access to desktop computers miss out on other ICT skills that could be learned, particularly those related to schooling and education, but there is also potential for social exclusion on the basis of the handset or hardware alone. As the research below shows, what type of phone one has access to – what features if offers ¬– can be as important as what one uses the phone for, or how one behaves and interacts with peers online. The utility of the phone, and its importance in young people's lives, is defined not only by its communication facilities (either voice or data), but also by its utility as a media player,

offering access to radio and music libraries. The possibility of exclusion is explored in more detail in the following sections. A rider stands, however, in that, from a social connectedness perspective, applications such as Mxit do to some degree bridge this potential gap in relation to chatting and communicating, as it does not require an internet-enabled phone.

For the most part, male and female learners reported similar rates of access to telephony and internet services, though significantly more males reported access to a computer. They also participated slightly more in certain online activities: accessing the internet through their mobile phones, having their own social networking page, and having ever participated in online chat rooms (p < 0.05). Comparative

statistics are shown in Figure 6. Such a gendered differentiation was not apparent in the focus group discussions, however, with girls tending to report using social media and access to smart or internet-enabled phones as often as boys.

FIGURE 5
Access to telephony and internet services, by area type (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

Legend: Metro, Urban, Rural

Category	Metro	Urban	Rural
Ever used instant messaging through a computer	21.6	11	4.7
Ever hosted or contributed to a website/blog	17.5	11.2	6.9
Ever participated in online chatrooms	38.2	30.4	17.3
Have your own social network page	49.3	38.5	21.5
Ever used instant messaging through your mobile phone	63.1	54.2	30.3
Ever accessed the internet on your mobile phone	64.3	56.3	35.9
Own or have access to a computer, iPad or tablet	76.7	65.3	42.1
Own or have access to a mobile phone	82.4	82.2	80.1

FIGURE 6
Access to telephony and internet services, by gender (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

Maslow stated that the five needs should be arranged in a hierarchical order, as depicted in Figure 7.[41] In order to reach the top of the pyramid, it is essential that each of the lower needs be fulfilled in turn, starting at the bottom. Physiological needs (such as food and shelter) are understood to be the most basic needs, followed by safety needs. Third is the desire for love, and lastly, the need to be esteemed.[42]

Of particular importance for this discussion is the need for love and belonging.[43] People strive to meet these needs by forming satisfactory relationships with others close to them such as their peers, friends, classmates, family members, teachers and others whom they come into contact with. Engaging with others and forming relationships with them enables the individual to be accepted by these others.

Social media, particularly the use of social networking sites, have provided children with alternative ways of establishing relationships and thus open up different and exciting ways for achieving feelings of belonging, and acceptance by others. This is reflected in the views of young people across the spectrum in South Africa. When asked, during the focus groups, about the general benefits of electronic media, the young participants frequently spoke about the ability to communicate

Mobile technology has significantly increased accessibility to the internet and online material. The networking potential and the opportunities for connecting to others through social and electronic media are arguably the most important attractions that ICTs hold for young people. This could be related to the efficiency and ease of using ICTs, which facilitate immediate gratification.[38]

ICTs, Social Media and Connectedness

Apart from the benefits of ICTs for development, and for extending education, health and other services to communities who would otherwise not have access to these facilities, social media platforms create virtual communities where young people are able not only to share information, but also to foster social connections that contribute to identity development and a sense of belonging.

Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' emphasises the importance of acceptance and

belonging in adolescence. According to Maslow (1970)[39], in order to develop healthily and reduce instances of selfish behaviour, an individual has to satisfy five needs, four of which he classified as 'deficiency' needs. These deficiency needs have to be fulfilled in order for growth to occur within the individual, and if they are not met this may produce a tension within an individual.[40]

FIGURE 7
Maslow's heirarchy of needs

Self-actualisation

Esteem

Love and belonging

Safety

Physiological

inexpensively, the instantaneous nature of conversations, and the possibilities of developing social connections, as well as the seemingly infinite scope of readily accessible information – whether needed for academic or for social purposes. Some examples of the opportunities expressed by learners are given below:

MP When it comes to family – when you want to pass a message and you don't have airtime – you go on Mxit and you know the message is passed.

MP I only talk to my cousin, like, and some of my friends, like, [from] back in primary schools.

FP You get to know a whole lot of stuff that's happening outside if you're curious about celebrities' lives... even sport...

FP Maybe I wasn't at school...I would ask my friend...what did they do at school? Did they have any homework?

MP It keeps us busy and off the streets.

The use of mobile phones to access social media or engage in online chats was without exception the most commonly identified across focus group participants. Children reported that they used their phones 'to Mxit' and 'to Facebook', to link up with school friends and old friends from previous schools or classes, or across schools. Both the Mxit and Facebook platforms were mentioned across every focus group as common activities on mobile telephones, highlighting the importance that mobile phones assume in maintaining communication. Two particular trends emerged in this regard: the first was the maintaining of existing relationships or the re-establishing of old friendships and relationships, the second the forming of new friendships and relationships. This reflects the core of social connectedness that refers not only to the quality of social relationships and connections, but also the number of such relationships and connections one has.

In the first case (maintaining friendships), learners spoke of utilising Mxit and Facebook

in particular, but also BBM and even just SMSs, to maintain friendships and ongoing conversations, discussions and debates with class and school mates, and other friends outside of their schools:

MP ...like, I got friends – we part four years ago – we just met this year again on social networks.

FP ...and sometimes, we as friends, we are having a topic, and we Google against each other, like if we are having an argument at school, and we use Google to see who is right, and we keep doing that.

FP We just keep in contact – it's, like, even when we are not together, we can keep talking, like, just continuing what we were saying earlier, and then it goes to another subject, and maybe boyfriends, and then we talk about homework maybe...

In the second case, learners spoke about meeting new friends on social media, most commonly friends who were perceived as being a potential love interest, or with whom they could flirt:

MP You meet new friends.

MP You meet someone on BBM you talk and then you meet at the movies or boardwalk.

MP ...like a date...

FP ...uhhmmm... like a date...

MP Ja.

FP Ja.

MP ...and you get new friends.

MP It's like when you chatting to a person from Cape Town you wanna hear how they doing things that side.

FP Oh, so you chat to people that you don't know to share information about where they are and what they doing.

Group Yes. To make friends.

MP You get this thing on Mxit; it says 'Random Chat'. It's a kind of thing where you search for people across the world and you just start talking to them.

Mobile telephony was also identified as a useful coping or supportive tool that may be of more general importance for the wellbeing of children. It is becoming more apparent, through the analysis of these findings, that the wellbeing and self-efficacy of children is an important factor in determining how young people make sense of and deal with online behaviour – in particular, using mobile telephones, and smart phones especially, as an escape, or as a source of comfort to the child:

FP ...and you use it, like, maybe when you feel down or something, and when you don't want to talk to someone else, you just have to go to your phone and listen to music, because music is like, um, feelings with words, so that music can help you calm down or something.

FP A phone to me is like a person, I can talk to it...like...when I am feeling down... and you having problems...

Such expressions are important when considering the emotional wellbeing and sense of self that emerges as a factor throughout the research – in the use of social media, and in the ways that children deal with online threats to their safety. As becomes apparent throughout the research, the ways in which young people use social media and online platforms are at times dictated by how they feel about themselves – the confidence they have, and the striving for peer acceptance and popularity – an observation that is important in formulating strategies for enhancing children's safety online.

Of note is that there was no apparent difference between urban and rural areas in the way Social media was used. This may be in part explained through the widespread use of Mxit, which allows for chatting over non-data-enabled mobile phones, although this is significantly lower in rural areas (see Figure 5 above). Despite this, the experiences and uses to which learners put mobile phones were expressed in common terms across area type.

Where and how children access the internet and most utilise social media is important for designing prevention strategies and approaches that are most suited to their usage patterns. The vast majority of children access the internet at home after school, either in the evening or in the afternoon (see Figure 8), reaffirming this as a preferred social and recreational pastime for most young people. This suggests that when it comes to strategies that look at usage, and potentially any monitoring or oversight, parents are particularly important stakeholders, as they are the people most likely to be present. However, this also suggests that those times young people use the internet most are most likely to be those when there is no supervision, as particularly in urban areas, many parents or caregivers will be working during the afternoons. This is less likely to be an issue in non-metropolitan urban areas, and significantly more so in rural areas.

Data from the quantitative study shows that males (13.9%) were more likely to have met, offline, someone they had previously met

Online relationships often evolve into offline meetings, with more than one in ten (12.1%) of learners meeting, offline, someone they first met online. On the whole, while learners who chose to meet someone offline were aware of the risks, their need to feel connected or have a sense of belonging still outweighs the negative aspects of online communication.

online, than females were (10.3%). Perhaps unsurprisingly, those between the ages of 17 and 18 years were most likely to have met (by design) someone offline that they had previously met online, with 15.2% of this age category reporting they had met someone in real life, compared to 5.6% of those 14 years and younger, 12% of those aged 15 and 16 years, and 13.2% of those aged 18 years and older. When considering area classification, rural learners (9.2%) were significantly less inclined to have ever met an online contact in person, when compared to their metro (16.3%) and other urban (15.6%) counterparts. This is presented in more detail in the Chapter 5 of the 2012 National School Violence Study.

During the focus group discussions, when asked why they were willing to meet strangers despite knowing about the possible harmful consequences of doing so, learners consistently mentioned being curious about the individual they had had only online contact with, and a desire to meet them in person. Other factors were loneliness and boredom, as well as the possibility of finding love (see Figure 9). This suggests that while young people are aware of the potential dangers and risks, the possible consequences are not fully appreciated. Alternatively, the possible benefits of meeting the stranger may be perceived as outweighing the possible risks. Each of the reasons provided by children for meeting offline is discussed in more detail below.

FIGURE 8

When and where learners access the internet (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

At home, in the evenings
37.2

At home
4.6

At home, on weekends
9.9

At a friend's home
2.2

At home, in the afternoon
46.1
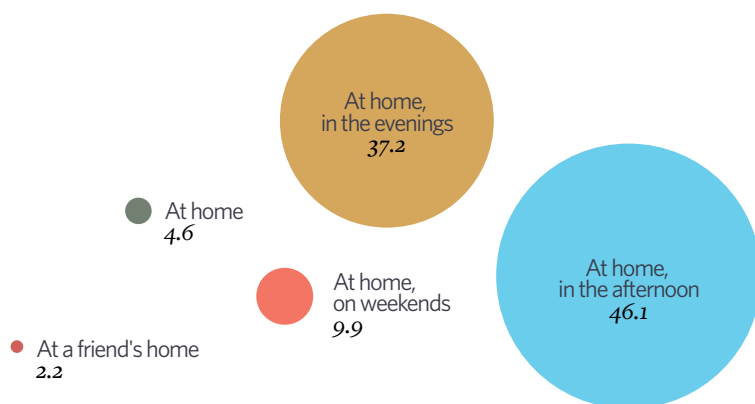
FIGURE 9

Reasons for meeting online contacts in person

Getting to know a stranger better and meet new friends

Opportunity to fall in love

Loneliness

Social connection

As a means of verification

Boredom

Strangers are fascinating/ general curiosity
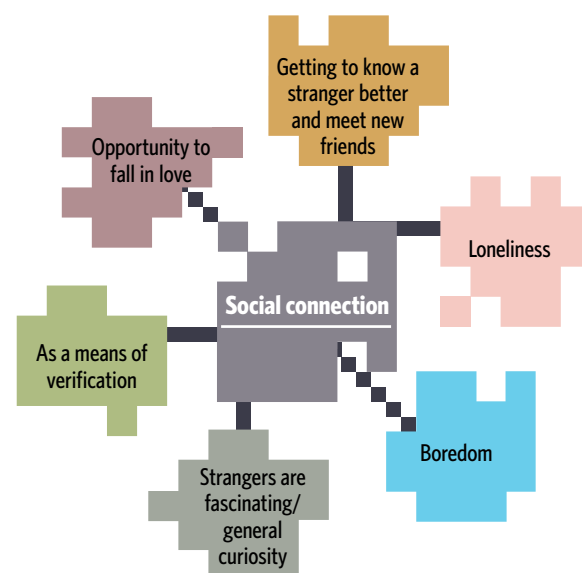
Making new friends

It appears that young people's ideas about meeting offline revolve around getting to know better someone they have 'met' online, and perhaps making new friends. This reflects the young person's goal to stay socially connected:

FP *You meet someone online and then you meet them in person. Why do you think people do that?*
FP *To get to know the person better.*
MP *There are people who like to make new friends, to make friends with other people.*

For these children, meeting new people was an end in itself, simply a route to widening a social circle, expanding a group of friends, and meeting new people that may share interests, or open up possibilities of new interests.

Loneliness

For some learners, being lonely and bored was cited as being a possible reason for agreeing to meet up with strangers.

FP *Why do they meet people when they know it can be dangerous?*
FP *...people are lonely...*
FP *Sometimes people are just lonely; they're sad.*
FP *Why did you decide to meet up with the guy?*
FP *I was bored. I'm lonely.*
MP *Everyone was away; I was bored. I wanted to meet someone new.*

For some young people boredom and needing someone to pass the time with was a good enough reason to meet a stranger. The importance of socially connecting to others (even those you do not know) could also be a possible explanation as to why adolescents put themselves at risk by agreeing to meet strangers. However, in the focus group discussions, boredom was not raised as a reason in itself, but was usually paired with

loneliness. Young people who possess personality traits such as shyness or social anxiety, or are lonely, might have some trouble in forming and maintaining friendships in the real world and therefore might prefer online communication.[44] We can extend this notion and argue that interactions with strangers online could increase the wellbeing of some learners who feel socially inept or socially self-conscious, and could open opportunities for acceptance and approval. According to some researchers, it is not that the internet makes some young people become risk-takers, rather it is those who are already dissatisfied, or have poor social relations, who are likely to be more at risk.[45, 46, 47]

An opportunity to fall in love

Related to the reasons above is the opportunity for an online friendship to develop into a more intimate relationship. What was clear from many of the learners' narratives is the importance to them of finding love – and social media are seen as a means to this end. Once having met a stranger online, and chatted for a time, setting up an offline meeting was seen, not only as a way of validating the person's veracity, but also as a possible way of precipitating a more emotional, intimate relationship:

FP *It's like they say – it's love at first chat or something...*
FP *So you feel that if you don't go meet this person then you would be missing out on an opportunity of finding love or whatever...*

While this was most commonly raised by girls, boys tended to agree, albeit somewhat more tacitly. There were few actual examples provided by boys of meetings whose purpose was to fall in love.

It appears that girls and boys displayed different motivations in their decisions to meet a stranger offline, with boys placing greater emphasis on the physical appearance of the girl. For the majority

of girls their motivation was affected as much by how well they could relate to the person through online communication.

FP *I found him interesting...conversations...*
FP *Ja, it's like that 'cos...just friends. I was bored. I'm lonely.*
FP *The thing is when you chat to a person sometimes, sometimes he...she chats... he is impressing now...you say I actually want to meet this person in person.*

On the other hand, for most boys the content of conversation was of a less importance, with more emphasis on the physical appearance of the person they are chatting too.

MP *Someone might be interesting online and you want to meet...know how she looks.*
MP *You see the girl on the profile pic, you tell her... 'Okay when we meet you wanna do this and that...'*
FP *You said it depends; it depends on what?*
MP *How she looks.*
MP *I had to meet her to see if she was beautiful.*

Meeting as a means of verification

Curiosity was also indicated by many young people as being their primary motivating factor in deciding to meet a stranger. They were mainly curious to find out how the person on the other side of the computer looks because of the positive impression these strangers had made on them. (This could entail sharing the same interests as the stranger, feeling accepted, etc.)

MP *...but honestly they are going to meet them because they are going to be interested in how they are going to look.*
FP *The thing is when you chat to a person sometimes, sometimes he or see she chats...he is impressing now...you say I actually want to meet this person in person...know how he looks.*

Some learners felt that meeting the stranger was a way to prove for themselves whether the person was genuine or just pretending to be someone that they were not. This suggests that there would already be some level of investment in the relationship, or that the individual sees the potential for the relationship or friendship to develop further.

FP *Some other children do it because they want to see if it is real or are you just faking...*

Once again it can be argued that not being able to see the person on the other side of the computer or phone might arouse a young person's curiosity, thus stimulating the need to verify the identity of the as yet unmet person.

Social Exclusion

With the importance and integration of ICTs and social media into young people's everyday life, and as one of the primary means through which children connect, ICTs, or a lack of access to and use of, can reinforce social exclusion of children. Social media, in particular, is seen as very important in serving to connect children with peers.

If ICTs and, more commonly, the social media utilised over mobile devices are most frequently used to forge new relationships and friendships, or to maintain existing relationships, it is a logical consequence that ICTs and social media can also serve to exclude young people from relationships. This could be through differentiated access to the technology, or through the use of the technology by the child and the child's peers.

Childhood, or more significantly adolescence, is a developmental phase where social inclusion is particularly important in defining identities. Conversely, social exclusion can have a profound negative effect on young people, and on the development of adequate social skills and coping mechanisms. According to Silver (2007)[48], social exclusion is

...a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live.

There is sufficient evidence both from the present study and from various dedicated ICT usage studies, to suggest that communication via social networking or instant messaging sites has become part of everyday life – to the extent that it is now considered normative behaviour among young people.[49] Participation in these conversations may require access to data-enabled mobile phones or smart phones, depending on the platform used. The significance of this technology in maintaining social connections was evident across all the group discussions, regardless of province, area classification, gender or age of the respondents, even in rural areas where access to data-enabled phones is low. Social exclusion surfaced for learners when they felt detached from their circle of friends because they did not own or have access to the required tool to engage in online conversations and activities.

Simply owning a mobile phone is, however, not sufficient to ensure inclusion. The technological features that phones offer seem to play a greater role, in terms of inclusion, than ownership of the phone itself, in ensuring that young people are able to participate as fully as the social norm requires. The lack of ownership of a technologically advanced phone can present problems:

FP *...I have a phone...I have friends that are buying phones. Now I am still sitting with my old phone...ja, they are mostly on BBM and I am still on Mxit, so I don't get a chance to talk with them or to ask them where they are now because they are not really there...*

MP *When my friends get a phone, like, if it's got better features then I have to get one, so we can keep sharing with each other.*

The literature has emphasised a relationship between social exclusion and anti-social activity; a relationship that children in this study have also identified. Current studies – including the present study – suggest that concerns around the 'digital divide' may be more dependent on the type of technology that young people have, and the social interaction that such technology either provides or precludes, than a simpler 'access or no access' scenario. Exclusion on the basis of the type of technology may have both overt and less explicit consequences on the behaviour of young people. It may feed into online anti-social behaviour, or the perpetration of cyberbullying, in the same way that offline exclusion can result in both bullying behaviour and vulnerability to bullying, but it can also result in offline anti-social behaviour, such as theft.

While not disputing the fact that individual choice is a primary factor in anti-social or criminal behaviour, the 2012 Position Paper of the Irish Penal Reform Trust[50] emphasises that one has to bear in mind that there are also other risk factors which may increase vulnerability to anti-social or aggressive behaviour. Among these are: growing up in disorganised communities, economically deprived home or community environments, family conflict, poor school performance and poor school attachment, as well as other individual factors such as a low sense of guilt, or a lack of empathy.

In many instances, the social pressure to belong is greater than the pressure to engage in socially acceptable behaviours. Peers play an important role in assisting adolescents' identity development.[51] Peer responses in the adolescent's pursuit of finding out 'Who am I?' are crucial as the social feedback informs how they see and evaluate themselves.[52] Thus identity is constructed through 'psychosocial reciprocity'[53] and is formed through interacting and connecting with people close to oneself. The rise of social media has provided adolescents with a new means of communicating and connecting with their peers. For this reason, the social rewards of acceptance and belonging to a group far outweigh the consequences of anti-social behaviour.

MP *Ja, want almal is geleer om ook `n selfoon te hê, kan maak dat hy steel ook, want hy wil ook in die groep inkom – dit maak nie saak nie... Dan word hy gevang en in die tronk gegooi...* [*Translation: Yes, because everyone is taught to have a cell phone, this can cause him to steal, because you also want to be part of the group, it doesn't matter; then you get caught and thrown in jail...*]

In summary, the use of mobile phones for chatting and communicating with friends, as much through text and message-based applications as through voice, is clearly the driver for children's use of the technology. Regardless of location or age, children prioritise the use of chat applications such as Mxit and BBM. The use of online communication tools has clearly become the norm amongst children, and this opens up the possibility that lack of access to phones that allow the use of relevant technology and applications may offer an opportunity for social exclusion. There is, however, some evidence that children also use mobile phones as an escape – a tool that facilitates their being alone, rather than facilitating only communication and engagement.

Knowledge of Dangers and Risks

The popularity of ICTs in the lives of young people has brought about questions on the potential risks and harms that stem from its use.[54] When related to offline risks and behaviours, these dangers possibly appear more manageable, with parents being able to monitor where their children go, and when, and what magazines or TV programmes they are exposed to. However, with the prevalence of online communication and the fact that new technologies are constantly being developed, it has become more of a challenge to monitor online activities, specifically when parents or caregivers are themselves not familiar with these forms of technology.[55]

There is a growing body of literature on the dangers associated with ICT use. Those most commonly identified include exposure to materials considered age-inappropriate for children and adolescents – such as commercial, pornographic and violent content.[56] Other frequently cited risks include the crossover from online relationships to offline meetings, exposure to sexual predators, disclosing personal information online, as well as falling prey to violence inflicted through various social media platforms. In attempting to standardise descriptions of risk, earlier studies have focused on risks as perceived by adults. Few, however, have focused on what young people themselves view as the potential dangers of electronic media.[57]

To better understand how young people negotiate their safety online, one of the objectives of this research was to ascertain how they themselves viewed online risks, and how they perceived the impact that electronic media had on their lives – since these perceptions would influence their behaviours in response to these risks. By and large, the study found that young people were acutely aware of the dangers and disadvantages associated with social and electronic media. Many of the pitfalls they cited were congruent

with adult views of online dangers, but children's awareness did not simply amount to knowledge of the dangers; it generally also translated into some form of risk management behaviour: steps that children could take to protect themselves in the face of possible dangers.

When asked what they thought the risks and dangers that lurked online were, children reported a range of risks that could impact on their psycho-social wellbeing, their physical wellbeing, and their school performance. These appeared to be informed by personal experiences, by experiences of their friends and peers, and undoubtedly by stories and events they had read about in the media.

The disadvantages or risks related to the use of social media were described almost uniformly by both boys and girls. Risks described by the participants that could threaten their psycho-social wellbeing included the following:

- it is time-consuming, thus taking time away from other activities, such as school work, or other relationships or activities;
- young people can become addicted;
- there can be threats of violence;
- online users may use foul language or badmouth others;
- stealing one's online identity;
- distribution of sex tapes and naked pictures;
- spreading rumours, and
- emotional abuse.

Many of these can lead to social exclusion of the individual. Other, more physical, risks resulting from online activity included:

- cyberbullying, and possibly its extension to offline bullying;
- chatting to strangers;
- meeting strangers, and
- becoming a victim of crime or violence (in the event of meeting an online contact offline).

Understanding Risks

Harm is defined as acquiring any physical or psychological injury;
risk is defined as being exposed to the possibility of harm.

According to the 2011 study by EU Kids Online[58] there are many factors hypothesised as increasing risk of online harm. These include encountering pornography, bullying or being bullied, sending or receiving sexual messages (sexting), and going to offline meetings with people first met online. In addition, risks may also be linked to negative user-generated content and personal data misuse. Many external factors may also influence children's experiences. EU Kids identified in their study a number of levels of influence which may shape the path from internet use to possible harm for the child (these may be different for each child):

- **Demographic factors** – such as the child's age, gender and socio-economic status.
- **Psychological factors** – such as emotional problems, self-efficacy and risk-taking.[59]
- **Social factors** – such as activities of parents, teachers and friends. These mediate children's online and offline experiences.
- **National context** – a range of economic, social and cultural factors that shape the online experience.

Eu Kids Online also identified different kinds of risks, particularly when it comes to online communication (see Table 1).

When considering risks it is important to note that young people may also be motivated by their desire to discover the boundaries of their social world. The risks young people take may be either beneficial or harmful. Some young people learn about social norms – and thus build resilience – precisely by breaking the 'rules'.

TABLE 1
Categorisation of risk

	CONTENT *(where the young person is the recipient)*	CONTACT *(where the young person participates in some way, even if unwillingly)*	CONDUCT *(where the young person is the actor)*
Aggressive	Violent/gory content	Harassment, stalking	Bullying, hostile peer activity
Sexual	Pornographic content	'Grooming', sexual abuse or exploitation	Sexual harassment, sexting
Negative values	Racist/hateful content	Ideological persuasion	Potentially harmful user-generated content
Commercial	Embedded marketing	Personal data misuse	Gambling, copyright infringement

Although online and offline friendships and relationships pose different threats, those initiated online might be considered as posing a greater risk.

For some young people in this study, the negative consequences of online communication were based either on personal experiences or on that of their friends. As a result, these young people were able to identify not only the risks but also the potential harms that online violence may inflict. In some cases, a negative outcome was clearly identified with particular chats or conversations. Examples of such negative outcomes would be a decline in school performance, or the ending of friendships.

FP   *I've experienced chatting with a person on Mxit that had some religion that I do not understand. And according to my religion [inaudible] it affected that I couldn't concentrate sometimes at school...*

MP   *You see I had this friend, he told this other girl that I liked, you see, saying that I...I play with girls feelings...then I told her it is not like that, for you to know me you have to socialise with me...that is not me.*

FP   *Dit was tussen my vriende gewees. My een vriend het blykbaar 'n outjie gehad en toe het hierdie outjie vir haar gelos vir my ander vriend. Toe het die stry nou gekom op Mxit, en hulle het net mekaar uitgevloek en aan gegaan oor die outjie, en later aan toe is hulle nie meer vriende nie.*
[Translation: It was between my friends. My one friend apparently had a boyfriend and then the boyfriend left her for my other friend. Then a fight started on Mxit, and they swore at each other and went on about this boy, and later on they stopped being friends.]

The most dominant ideas from those listed above were grouped into two thematic categories: the online–offline nexus, and online violence (including cyberbullying), discussed in more detail below. In addition, a third area was identified in several focus groups, that does not fit readily into either of these two categories: that of the relationships between Satanism, witchcraft and social media. This is discussed in more detail in the final section.

The Online–Offline Nexus

A nexus exists between online and offline behaviour, with connections developed online often extending into the offline environment, further reflecting the importance of social connectedness.

Increasingly, the boundaries between online and offline activities are being blurred. Social media are often used for maintaining relationships that had their roots in the offline world. Conversely, relationships initiated online are increasingly being taken offline. One of the most common uses of social media and ICTs identified by the children was the maintaining of, and forging of new, social connections, and so it is a logical step that relationships forged online will increasingly materialise into offline meetings.

Children across all the focus groups, without exception, spoke of the importance of the internet and social media platforms in facilitating the development of social connections:

MP   *You can make more friends.*

FP   *How do you make more friends?*

MP   *Like they (existing contacts or friends) ask you to invite another person over Mxit*

MP   *Or they suggest for you.*

MP   *People just invite you.*

MP   *You can get an invite from someone you didn't know. You introduce yourself to him...her.*

MP   *You get this thing on Mxit; it says 'Random Chat'. It's a kind of thing where you search for people across the world and you just start talking to them.*

These social connections, or feelings of connectedness, are often the basis for deciding to meet an online contact in person. Young people's need for social connections often drive their engagement with total strangers online. Social networking platforms are especially useful for young people who struggle to make friends ordinarily and who suffer from feelings of alienation. Learners said they often engaged with strangers out of curiosity or boredom, and that they tended to perceive conversations with strangers resident in their own communities as somewhat safer than those from other geographical areas. The content of adolescents' exchanges with strangers was found to be exactly the same as the content of their exchanges with friends and family, ranging from casual lightweight conversations to more intimate exchanges.

Casual or 'lightweight' exchanges

Casual or lightweight exchanges have been classified as instrumental communications and include topics such as discussing homework or making plans to meet up with friends. They tend to be less 'goal-directed' communications, for example checking up on a friend to see how they are, sharing jokes and posting on Facebook, or commenting on pictures posted on Facebook.[60]

These casual or lightweight exchanges were commonly reported in the focus group discussions:

FP   *Dan waaroor praat julle?*
[Translation: Then what do you talk about?]

FP   *Oor algemene dingetjies soos hoe was jou dag? Wat maak jy?*
[Translation: About general things like how was your day? What are you doing?]

Group   *Mmmm...talking about life in general as we are teenagers.*

FP   *Oor die dag wat het gebeur, en huiswerk.*
[Translation: What happened during the day, and homework.]

FP *Soos wat gaan jy maak vir die naweek. En hoe was jou vakansie?*
   [Translation: Like what are you going do in the weekend? And how was your holiday?]

FP *It's like you make friends and then you talk about the past things that happened, like memories, you see, and that... What are your plans for tomorrow? How was that person's day?...and everything...*

Intimate online exchanges

Research has shown that intimate self-disclosure is assisted by the use of digitally mediated communication. Children will often resort to, or in fact prefer, online communication of personal problems to friends, over face to face discussions with them.[61]

Such intimate online exchanges were commonly identified in the present study, particularly amongst female learners:

FP *A phone to me is like a person, I can talk to it – it's like I can talk to it when I'm feeling down... and you having problems.*

FP *Sometimes it's just easier to BBM your friend, like, if I want to talk about something, or a problem with my boyfriend, or what someone has said...*

Such comments support the notion that online exchanges can facilitate self-disclosure, thus making people feel more connected to others.

Meeting strangers online

The findings about online self-disclosure described above suggest that, for some learners, online communication with people known to them is sometimes easier than communicating face to face. For others, chatting to strangers online provided them with an opportunity to voice their concerns, while at the same time satisfying their need to be connected and accepted

by others. The group discussions showed that young people use the term 'stranger' to refer to people that they have spoken to only via ICTs and social media, and it is not until they have got to know the person better, through repeated conversations, that they start to define that person's role in their lives. This suggests that online friendships tend to be similar to offline friendships in that they are both developed through repeated engagement.

MP *It's like when you chatting to a person from Cape Town, you wanna hear how they doing things that side.*

FP *Oh, so you chat to people that you don't know to share information about where they at and what they doing?*

MP *Yes. To make friends.*

FP *It's like getting to know someone without using your face, you see, mam.*

FP *Then what do you chat to these people about?*

Group *Anything...*

MP *...get to know them...*

These conversations with strangers are initiated in various ways. At times, existing contacts or friends might suggest a new contact or friend. At other times, young people receive friend or contact requests from total strangers. Certain social networking sites also allow one to search for random people across the world and to initiate conversations with them. For many young people, these random conversations with strangers have become a means of countering boredom, and of occupying themselves. Besides avoiding boredom and keeping busy, on a deeper level the motivation for some learners is that these strangers provide them with emotional support not provided by existing friends or family.

MP *Sometimes you can't help... Sometimes you feel like you want to talk to someone...*

FP *Oh, so when you need somebody to talk to about a certain issue you feel like you can't*

speak to maybe your friends or your parents. You need, like, an outsider's perspective, when you go and speak to these people.

Group *Yes.*

This finding suggests that for some learners online communication provides an easier forum for communicating than face to face communication does. For the male learner above it appears that chatting to strangers online provides him with an opportunity of voicing his concerns and at the same time satisfying his need to be connected and accepted by others.

Responses to requests from strangers varied by gender. On the whole, females were more inclined to ignore these requests, while males tended to be more intrigued by them, and would accept them, particularly when the request was from a female.

While these conversations seemed to hold an element of fun for youths, the narratives depicted below clearly show that young people are not unaware of the dangers posed by these random requests and conversations. While they have their own reasons for chatting to and engaging with total strangers, despite being warned against doing so, they are constantly mindful of the risks associated with their behaviour as they engage with technology, and they do take precautions to safeguard themselves. The exact measures used are described in the following section of this report.

FP *I can chat with someone...like jokes and that, but I don't trust him. Like I said, I can't just go and meet somebody especially a guy...I can't do that...I'm just doing it [chatting]. To me it's a game...I'm playing a game and I do it, like, mostly when I'm bored.*

MP *She's chatting to people that she knows... or people that are in the same community. Those people in the same community are the people preying on young girls and boys...*

MP *...Like many girls and boys, they just ignore the fact that they don't know the person, but as long as that person is among the community they'll just go ahead and meet them.*

Apart from being mindful that not everyone met online should be trusted, and knowing that sexual or other predators are not necessarily from outside the learners' community but could be residents in the same neighbourhood, learners were also extremely aware that people often misrepresent themselves online. In addition, learners commonly cited examples where young girls were under the impression they were chatting to boys of an age similar to their own. After meeting, they discover that the individual they had been chatting with was actually an adult.

FP *En somtyds dan is dit nie veilig nie. Hulle jok vir mekaar oor Mxit. Jy sê vir my, jy is my pertiers... Dan sê jy vir my 'Ons gaan mekaar op so 'n plek ontmoet'. En ek dink jy is my pertier. Dan gaan ek maar, en dan sal ek daar kom, dan sien ek jy is `n groot man.*
[*Translation: And sometimes it is not safe. They lie to each over Mxit. They tell you they are your peer [your age]... Then you tell me 'We'll meet at a certain place'. And I think you're my peer. Then I go, and then when I get there, then I see you are a grown man.*]

FP *...'cos, like, old people put, like, profile pics of their grandchildren on. Then they act like they the youngsters, and they put the age younger, and then want to meet up with younger people and then, ja...it could happen that it could be your father.*

This awareness stems as much from experiential learning as it does from safety messages from adults. Of note is that there was clearly a gendered dynamic present in the conversations around the identity of strangers met online. The risks were spoken about more commonly by girls, but when boys spoke of the dangers, they often did so in relation to girl learners.

20.3% of young people admit to having lied online about their age.

Data from the quantitative component of the NSVS show how common online misrepresentation can be. One in five learners reported that they had lied, online, about their age. While this is just one example of misrepresentation, it suggests that lying online is not an uncommon experience. Older learners, and those resident in metro and urban areas were significantly more inclined to report having ever falsely stated their age online (p = 0.000). There were no significant differences between male (21.2%) and female (19.6%) learners who admitted to having ever done so.

It is believed that, in addition to lying about their age, individuals initiating offline meetings sometimes had questionable motives. The young participants spoke about the possibility of falling prey to crimes such as kidnapping, rape and even murder when meeting online contacts in real life for the first time. Although many learners had not personally experienced harm resulting from online risks, both male and female learners expressed an indirect awareness of online communication dangers, based either on the experiences of others (such as friends) or those read and heard about through the media.

MP *Like they say can you meet at this place, and then you go to that place and...comes with a car and kidnaps you.*
MP *Sometimes people can say 'Can we please meet here?' – and then the person will go and they don't know what that person will do with them.*
FP *You can be a victim of rape.*
FP *You can be a victim of murder.*

FIGURE 10
Had ever lied about age online: by gender, area classification and age (%)

Males	21.2	
Females	19.6	
Metro	27.2	
Urban	27	
Rural	15.2	
14 yrs & younger	15.3	
15 – 16 yrs	21.3	
17 – 18 yrs	23	
Older than 18 yrs	18.4	
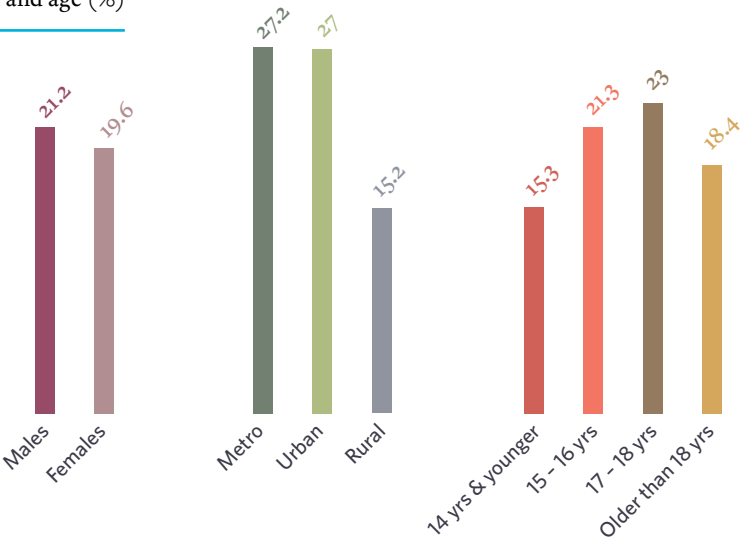
One in five (20.9%) secondary school learners have experienced cyberbullying or some form of online violence.

Online Violence

The occurrence of violence online has become increasingly prevalent. While bullying is still a common occurrence, another threat brought by rapid technological advances is the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

The EU Kids Online (2011) report stated that, as with face to face situations, 'being bullied is one of several risks that may harm children when they use the internet'.[62]

According to Hinduja and Patchin (2009)[63], cyberbullying can be defined as 'wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices'. Generally cyberbullying shares some characteristics with face to face bullying, for example its repeated nature and unequal power relationships. The most obvious difference between face to face bullying and cyberbullying is in the tools used. Whereas face to face bullying tends to be physically confrontational, cyberbullying is often inclined to take advantage of the anonymity that technology affords.

Cyberbullying via mobile phones may also take the form of sending malicious text messages or text messages of a sexual nature, or of taking pictures and videos of someone with the intention of distributing this to others via mobile phones or online.[64] Individuals may also impersonate others online, or create fake profiles with which to perpetuate cyber aggression.

Numerous studies have drawn attention to the fact that online bullying is facilitated by the anonymity behind the action.[65] And, although cyberbullying does not involve physical or personal contact, it remains psychologically and emotionally damaging.

In the CJCP's 2012 National School Violence Study, several questions were asked to uncover whether learners were aware of cyberbullying, how they defined cyberbullying, and what

prevention mechanisms they take, not only against cyberbullying but also against online violence. To encourage learners to speak about their experiences, the label 'cyberbullying' was not explicitly mentioned. Instead learners were asked to discuss a case study which also included questions formulated to uncover their opinions. The 2012 NSVS revealed that one in five (20.9%) secondary school learners had experienced some form of online violence or aggression in the twelve month period preceding the study.

Online fights, where angry or rude language was exchanged, were found to be the most common form of negative experience, with 14% of learners reporting having participated in such activity. This was followed by just under a tenth (7.8%) of learners saying that they had ever had rude or insulting messages sent about them via mobile phone or computer. Although less common, 3.8% had had hurtful messages posted about them online, which they believed were intended to damage their relationships and reputation. As indicated in Figure 11, 3.2% of the learners had had someone share their secrets or embarrassing pictures online without their permission, and 3% had had someone use their account and pretend to be them by sending messages to others and trying to ruin their friendships and reputation. This reflects what emerges from the qualitative data collected at the same time. The young participants spoke about their own experiences as well as those encountered by their friends or others known to them.

When learner's responses are analysed by area type, it becomes clear that differential access to internet-enabled phones, or to the internet more generally, is a significant factor in online violence and other negative experiences. Without exception, data from the 2012 NSVS shows that people living in metropolitan and urban areas are significantly more likely to experience some form of online violence than those living in rural areas (see Figure 12).

	Males	Females
Had an online fight with someone	15.3	12.6
Had rude or insulting messages sent to you via computer or mobile phone	6.6	8.8
Had messages posted or sent to you that were hurtful	3.1	4.4
Had someone share your secrets or embarrassing pictures online	2.9	3.4
Ever been threatened with harm or intimidated online	2.3	2.7
Had someone use your account and pretend to be you by sending messages to others	2.2	3.7
Had someone send sexually explicit images or messages about you online	2.3	2.3

FIGURE 13
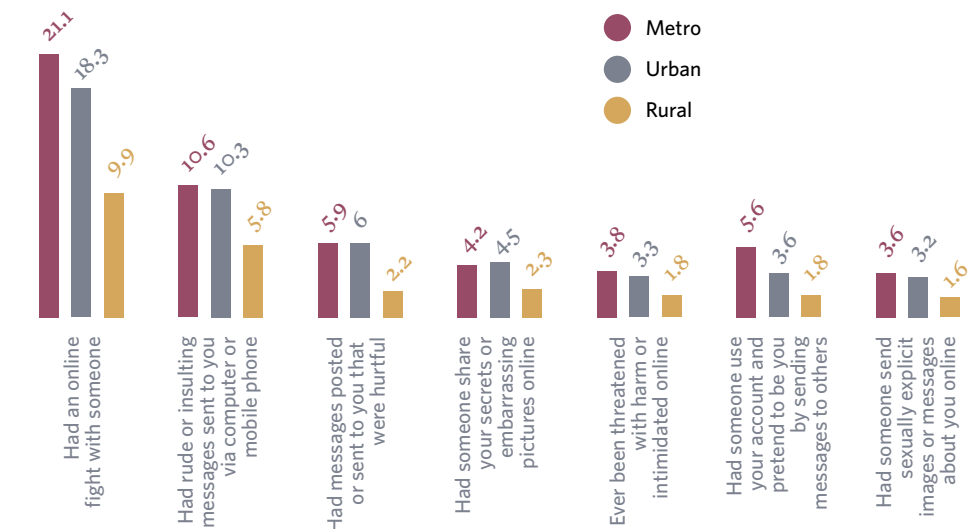Experiences of online violence, by gender (%)
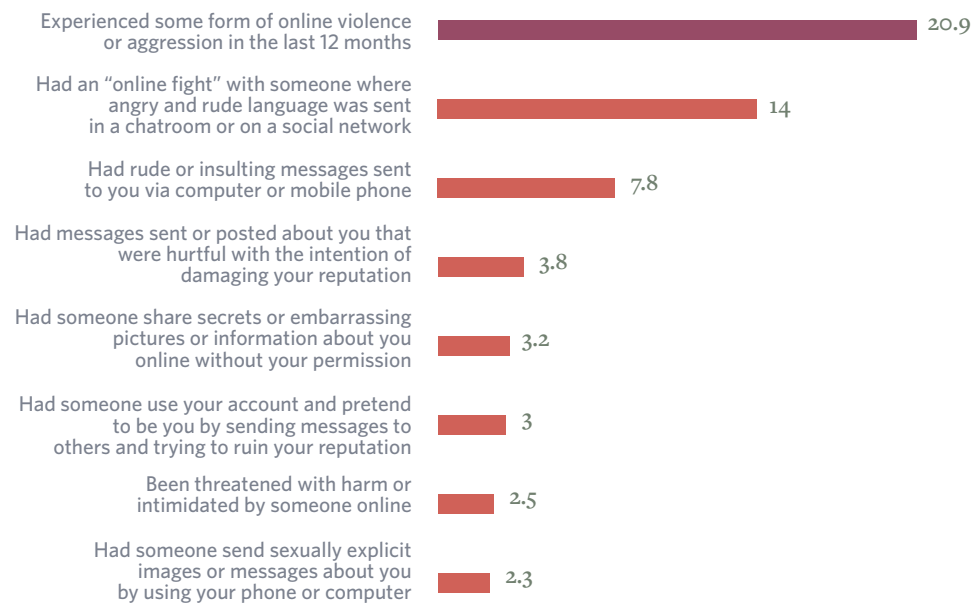
Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

With respect to gender, a result of note was that female reporting of online violence was always higher than that of males (except for 'sending sexually explicit messages', where they were equal) (see Figure 13). Male and female learners differed significantly ($p < 0.05$)[66] in only four of the seven types of online violence asked about. In all four of these cases, female learners reported higher levels of having ever had an online fight (15.3%), having ever had rude or insulting messages sent to them via computer or mobile phone (8.8%), having had hurtful messages sent or posted about them with the intention of ruining their reputation or relationships (4.4%), and having someone else use their accounts and pretend to be them by sending messages to others, again with the intention of damaging their relationships (3.7%). This is consistent with the available information on female bullies. While physical violence and aggression are more commonly associated with male bullies, cyberbullying behaviour often manifests differently among girls. Girls who cyberbully tend to focus on the emotional aspect of friendships and typically use deliberate social isolation, the spreading of rumours, and actions intended to embarrass and humiliate as a means of exerting power over their victims.

The examples cited by the learners in the qualitative group discussions reflected the prevalence of various forms of cyberbullying among the youth, including the categories mentioned above, namely having rude and insulting messages exchanged via cell phone or computer, having deceitful messages sent with the intention of destroying someone's reputation, having secrets shared online without the permission or knowledge of the person involved, the distribution of sexually explicit images, being threatened with harm online, and having someone else use their account without their knowledge to send messages to others, also intended to destroy the person's friendships and/or reputation.

MP *Cyberbullying every day.*
FP *Mense vat eintlik advantage van jou, deur jou te force om iets te doen...sê maar 'Jy gaan sien as ek jou kry langs die pad' of so.*
[Translation: People actually take advantage of you, by forcing you to do something...saying something like: 'Watch out next time I meet you'.]
MP *Like they scaring you, you don't wanna go out of the house... 'I'm gonna get you' and what, like they scaring you. I know a lot of people doing that.*
FP *They can display their names and then they can hurt you emotionally too... the words that they text you.*
MP *They can steal your details.*
FP *For instance, um, I know this girl, she was on Facebook, right. She sent a pic to a friend and then somehow it ended up on Facebook.*
FP *For example when you use the internet most people are unaware of the cyberbullying that's taking place, for example, someone can just put the sex tapes and stuff...ja.*

While not technically cyberbullying, or in itself online violence, the issue of sexting, and the closely related circulation or distribution of images or videos, was raised repeatedly by all participants.

The Link Between Cyberbullying and Sexting

The term 'sexting' was created from the words 'texting' and 'sex' and refers to sending nude or semi-nude photos or videos and/or sexually suggestive messages via mobile phone texting or instant messaging.[67] Research has shown that there is a definite relationship between sexting and cyberbullying.[67] The connection is especially evident when images or texts are used in a malicious manner, for example using sexually explicit images to humiliate or 'get even' following a relationship breakdown.[68]

FP   The sex tapes that they sending around to everybody...

FP   ...and videos.

MP   Today I got a naked picture of a girl in my street.

FP   Last week a girl I know, a picture of her came out as well, and they said a friend of hers took a photo and she sent it around.

MP   ...and sending you pictures of naked girls.

From the narratives it becomes evident that the sexually explicit photos in question are often initially taken and shared with the knowledge and consent of the individual in question.

FP   Normally It happens like I'm dating this guy on Mxit and now he asks me for a naked pic. Now I send it, and then someone else gets hold of it on Mxit, and then they would send it to everybody else...sometimes it's your friend – they took a photo of me and now we not talking so she would show her friend and she would send it to her [friend's] phone and she would send it to everybody else.

Sharing pictures of this nature seems to be relatively common among young people as they use their mobile phones to experiment with their sexuality. Data from the Pew Research Center's internet and American Life

> Many cases of sexting involve a process of coercion and manipulation, although this is not always the case. A strong relationship between sexting and cyberbullying is evident, particularly when learners choose not to engage, or to stop engaging, in sexting activities.

Project[69] have shown that nude or sexually explicit images are typically sent by young people in the place of, as a lead up to, or as a part of sexual activity. The problem arises, however, when there is a breakdown in the relationship and the recipient of the image distributes it with the intention of humiliating and shaming the individual in the picture. This is often done without the photographed individual's consent or knowledge. The learners were aware of the harm this can inflict on the victim. The fact that the intention is to hurt the victim shows an awareness of the consequences. In many instances, simply the act of taking such an image or video, or being in possession of it, may constitute a case of child pornography, laying the learner open to possible criminal prosecution in addition to the psycho-social consequences.

As there is clearly an awareness amongst children of the inherent dangers of sharing personal information, messages, videos or pictures, this issue was explored with the focus group participants through a vignette – asking why young people are still willing to share compromising videos and pictures online (see Appendix). A number of consensus responses was proffered by the groups:

- She was desperate for love and thought that the boy was also hungry for someone to love.
- Because she thought that the guy loves her – that is why she sends it.
- She wanted him to like her, because she wanted to be loved.
- She was trying to make a relationship.
- She sent it to impress him.

- She wanted the guy's attention.
- She was attracted to the boy, she was shy to face the boy and she wanted the boy to be attracted to her.

These responses, garnered from group discussions, centred mainly on the idea of love or searching for affection from the opposite sex, being attractive to others, wanting to make a good impression, and catching the individual's attention. These suggestions, all consistent with motivations for meeting people and engaging with peers, had emerged in previous discussions. Learners emphasising love, affection, and receiving attention from others is consistent with the need for acceptance and approval by others that is particularly common in adolescence.

The inability to satisfy these needs could explain why some learners highlighted the fact that a lack of self-esteem is one of the primary reasons that young people are willing to risk sending a photo to someone that they hardly know. An example of this is found in the following extract:

FP   The first question was why do you think Hope sent a picture of herself to someone she didn't know?

Group   She had low self-esteem; she was trying to attract him or please him. She trusted him too much; tried to change herself to be someone she is not in order to fulfil the guy's needs.

This again demonstrates the need to establish acceptance and a sense of belonging, which could lead to a learner engaging in behaviour that they know might have negative consequences.

During the group discussions, some young girls spoke about how they were often coerced or misled into sending sexually explicit or nude images to male friends. They described this as a gradual process of manipulation and coercion that starts off with a request for a seemingly harmless picture of their facial profile. Once the girl consents to this, she is then asked for pictures that are more sexually explicit in nature, e.g. wearing a swimming costume, or even posing nude. Interactions such as these were said to occur between individuals who knew each other as well as with mere acquaintances or strangers.

FP *Hulle vra soms 'n foto van jou in 'n ...a two-piece.*
     [Translation: They sometimes ask you to send a photo of yourself in a two-piece bikini.]

FP *Somtyds dan sê hulle mos 'Nou jy moet 'n pic van jou gesig stuur' en dan stuur jy, en dan later sê hulle 'Jy moet 'n two-piece stuur', en dan later aan sê hulle 'Jy moet 'n naked pic van jouself stuur'.*
     [Translation: Sometimes they [boys] just say 'Now send a pic of your face', then you send it, and then later they say 'You must send a bikini [picture]', and then later on they say 'You must send a naked picture of yourself'.]

The relationship between sexting and cyberbullying becomes most apparent when the consequences of failing to comply with requests for photos are explored. Failing to concede to such requests could result in other forms of bullying.

FP *Iemand het vir my ook 'n foto gevra waar ek in 'n bikini is. En ek het nee gesê en die persoon het van my sleg gepraat.*
     [Translation: Someone also asked me to send a picture of myself in a bikini. I said no, and the person spoke badly about me.]

The qualitative data provides evidence to suggest that much of the sexting that occurs between young people (specifically those

participating in the study) is as a result of normal adolescent sexual exploration.

MP *I think the first one, trying to attract him or please him...*
MP *For Hope it was only a minor thing, a spur of the moment thing.*
FP *She want to attract the guy... it's all about attraction.*
MP *...I think it's your decision you know... It's your decision, like, to send someone a proper picture or sending a other picture.*
MP *She thought it was love...he was a good person... maybe a good boyfriend who she can trust.*

These group responses explain why a learner might send a sexually explicit image. They suggest that such acts are a way of acquiring acceptance and belonging. Thus, for some – male and female – this behaviour is commonly engaged in as they experiment with their sexuality prior to initiating actual sexual activity.

Pictures and videos are often made and distributed in the name of fun, or with the intention of attracting the attention of someone of the opposite sex. The extracts below provide some clues to the safety mechanisms that young people often employ while experimenting online in this manner. These include securing personal or graphic photos with a password, and sharing sexually explicit pictures and videos only with friends or people that are known to them.

FP *...and your phone...you have to be careful with your phone sometimes.*
MP *I mean there are things I would do for fun, like taking vids just for fun...but then by sending it to a friend...somebody else take the video and then take it to another person...that's a stolen good because that video we make was for me and my friend. Only for us not for everybody to see...*
MP *Jy moet dit net na mense stuur wat jy ken.*
     [Translation: You should send them only to people you know.]

Data from the quantitative component of the National School Violence study have shown that a significant number of the secondary learners surveyed had themselves engaged in behaviours that could be defined as online bullying.

One in 16 learners admitted to ever having sent an sms or text message to someone about someone else, to make them angry or to make fun of them;

one in 25 learners had ever posted something harmful online about someone else (4.3%);

one in 33 learners had ever taken a picture of someone else and posted it online without their permission (3.2%);

and similarly one in 33 learners admitted to ever having sent someone an email or posted something on someone's social network page (2.9%) with the intention of damaging their reputation or relationships.

Further to this, 2.8% said they had ever logged into someone else's profile or sent messages from someone else's phone, pretending to them, to embarrass, hurt or get even with them.
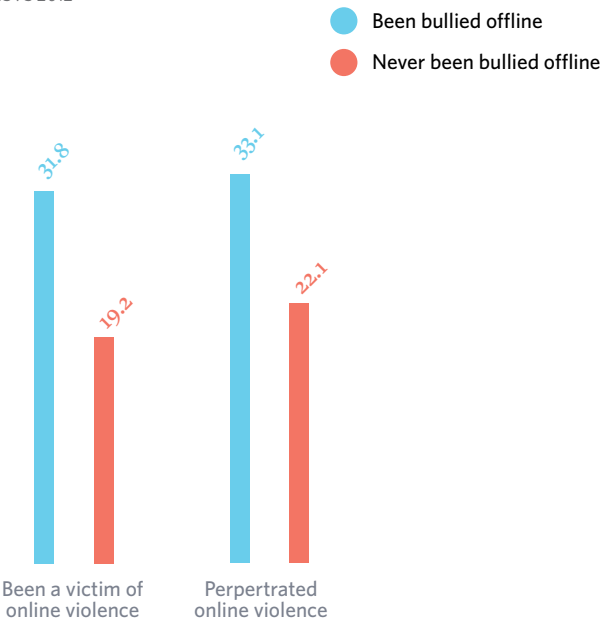
Online–Offline Victimisation and Vulnerability

An important point needs to be made regarding the link between online and offline experiences of violence, and not only in relation to the online–offline nexus. Evidence emerging internationally shows that a strong relationship exists between vulnerability to violence online, and vulnerability offline, and also between anti-social or aggressive behaviour online, and the same behaviour offline (see Figure 14). These relationships were also evident in the 2012 NSVS. This is particularly importance when considering how and where risk mitigation strategies should be targeted, and prevention efforts focused, as well as where support is most likely to be needed.

This new evidence suggests that the virtual communities created by social and electronic media should not be perceived as a separate environment that holds risk of harm. They should instead be regarded as an extension of the school or home environment, with respect to bullying, and other forms of potential harm.[70]

FIGURE 14
Relationships between offline bullying and online bullying (%)

Been bullied offline
Never been bullied offline

Been a victim of online violence — 31.8, 19.2
Perpertrated online violence — 33.1, 22.1

Many of the risk factors for face to face or traditional violence were also found to be significantly associated with online violence, highlighting a huge overlap between these two forms of violence. Specifically, exposure to family and community violence, interactions with delinquent peers, access to alcohol, drugs and weapons, knowledge of criminality, as well as parental and sibling criminality were all strongly related to both the victims and perpetrators of online violence ($p < 0.05$) (see Table 2). This suggests that interventions aimed at reducing levels of online violence should target at-risk youths in general and not simply those who frequently make use of social and digital media.

A Note on Social Media and Witchcraft

In addition to the risks and dangers discussed above, the children who took part in the study made mention of additional risks associated with religious belief systems, identifying possible occult or witchcraft dangers attached to the usage of ICTs. Although this was not as commonly reported as the other dangers and was specific to schools in Gauteng, the Northern Cape and the Free State, it warrants a mention, given its implications for young people and how they engage online. Social media were seen as a tool or instrument of the occult.

FP *...Like people are getting into Illuminati. People are getting into social media, ja... it's just hectic.*
MP *Other people who worship [the] devil, they like to spread that...that spirit to us...in our phones when we chatting. Sometimes we get a message that says 'You are a 666'.*

What is significant here is that these statements were not dismissed or ridiculed by the rest of the group, suggesting that they reflected an accepted perception amongst the group of peers involved in these discussions. However, it should also be noted that there was no lesser use of phones, or of the internet or social media, reported in the groups where dangers such as these were raised.

The impact of online violence

As has been pointed out above, there is a great deal of overlap between offline and online violence. One example of this is shown in the study conducted by Beran & Li (2005)[71], who found that approximately 30% of traditional bullies were also cyberbullies and one in three cybervictims were also victims of traditional bullying. While the impact of face to face violence has been well documented, new literature, both locally and globally, shows that many of the symptoms associated with

Selected risk factors for violence	Percentage of learners who had ever experienced cyberbullying	Percentage of learners who had ever perpetrated cyberbullying
Crime is a problem in my community	24.0	27.1
Crime is NOT a problem in my community	17.8	20.0
Easy to access alcohol in the neighbourhood	22.5	26.8
Difficult to access alcohol in the neighbourhood	17.9	17.4
Easy to access drugs in the neighbourhood	26.1	29.5
Difficult to access drugs in the neighbourhood	18.8	21.2
Easy to access firearms in the neighbourhood	25.3	25.1
Difficult to access firearms in the neighbourhood	19.8	23.1
Have friends who use drugs	46.6	44.4
Don't have friends who use drugs	19.9	22.7
Have friends who sell drugs	50.0	53.2
Don't have friends who sell drugs	20.3	22.9
Exposure to violence within the home	35.1	36.6
Non-exposure to violence within the home	19.9	21.7
Exposure to violence within the community	29.2	30.8
Non-exposure to violence within the community	12.9	16.6
Parent(s) ever incarcerated	36.0	42.7
Parent(s) never incarcerated	26.2	27.9
Sibling(s) ever incarcerated	31.3	35.6
Sibling(s) never incarcerated	25.7	27.2

vulnerability to bullying offline are also observed in victims of online violence. These may be primary level psycho-social factors such as depression, low self-esteem, and anxiety, or secondary factors such as low educational performance and outcomes, poor or negative peer and adult relationships, and social withdrawal. Victims of cyberbullying can suffer many emotional and psychological problems that are similar to those experienced in traditional forms of bullying. This is illustrated through the 2006 study by Patchin and Hinduja[72], which found that 42.5% of young people who experienced cyberbullying in the USA reported feeling frustrated; almost 40% were angry, and over a quarter (27%) felt sad.

Quantitative data from the 2012 NSVS reflect these trends. Of the children who had experienced some form of online violence or aggression, a significant percentage reported negative psycho-social outcomes as a direct result of their experiences online (see Figure 15). These included feeling sad, hurt, angry, embarrassed, anxious or afraid – either once or on several occasions – following their victimisation. Some of the victims also had negative school-related outcomes as a result of the online violence – such as having missed school, having had difficulty concentrating at school, and having noticed a decline in their academic performance following their encounter with violence online.

Very few (5%) learners who experience some form of online violence are told of available support services or resources. Of those who are told, three out of five utilise the service, suggesting that there is a real demand for various forms of support services for victims of online violence.
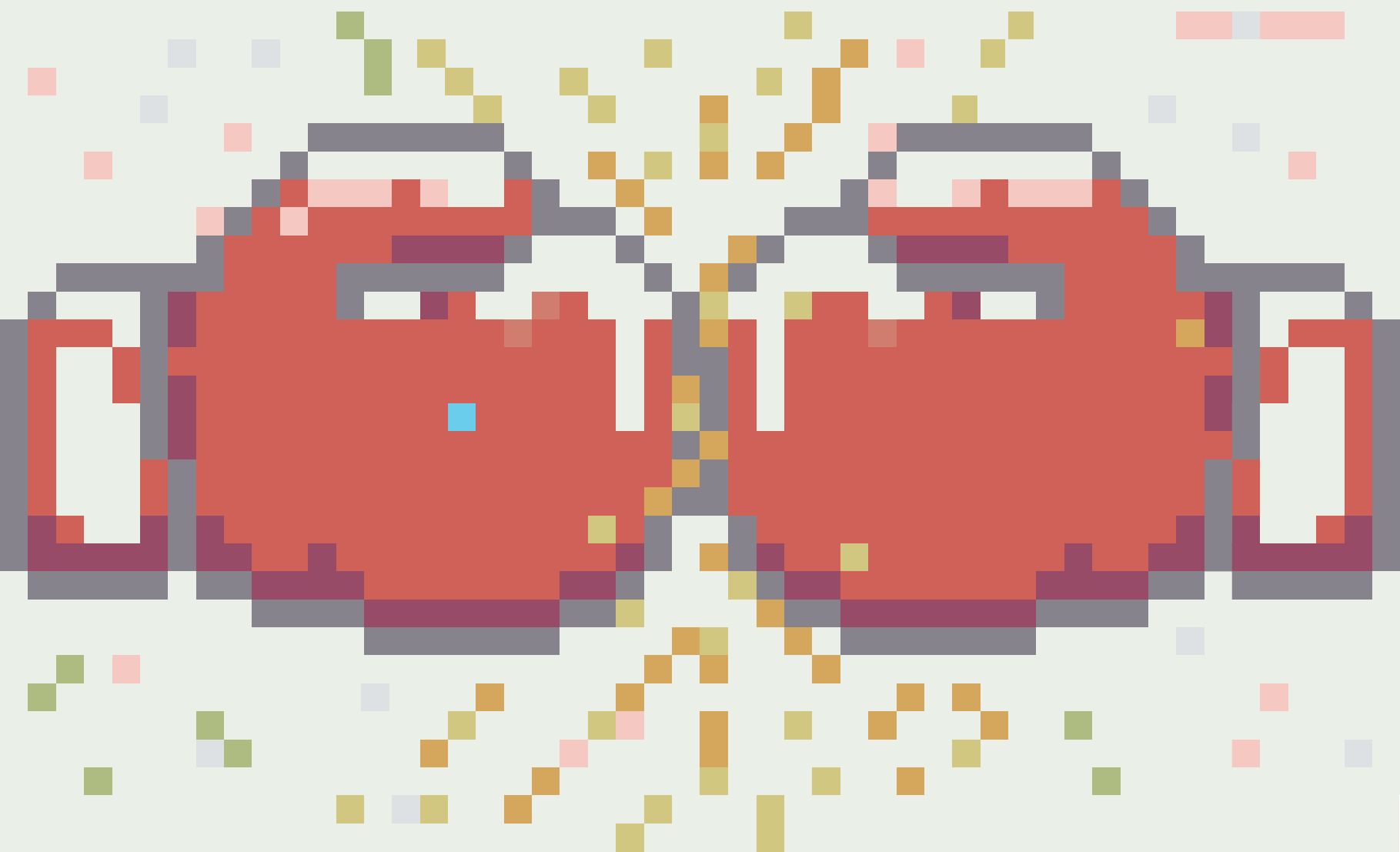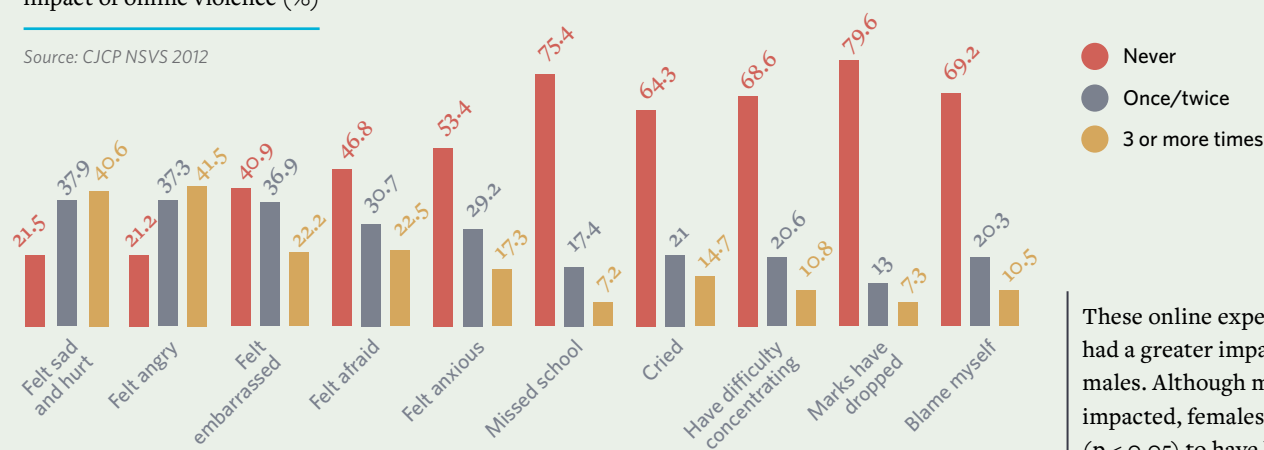
FIGURE 15

Emotional, psychological and behavioural
impact of online violence (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

Legend:
- Never
- Once/twice
- 3 or more times

Categories: Felt sad and hurt (21.5 / 37.9 / 40.6), Felt angry (21.2 / 37.3 / 41.5), Felt embarrassed (40.9 / 36.9 / 22.2), Felt afraid (46.8 / 30.7 / 22.5), Felt anxious (53.4 / 29.2 / 17.3), Missed school (75.4 / 17.4 / 7.2), Cried (64.3 / 21 / 14.7), Have difficulty concentrating (68.6 / 20.6 / 10.8), Marks have dropped (79.6 / 13 / 7.3), Blame myself (69.2 / 20.3 / 10.5)

These online experiences were found to have had a greater impact on female learners than on males. Although male learners were emotionally impacted, females were significantly more likely (p < 0.05) to have been affected negatively by their online encounters and tended to experience negative emotional symptoms for a longer period of time (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Impact of online violence, by gender (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

		Never	Once or twice	3 times or more
Felt sad and hurt	Males	25.0	39.6	35.4
	Females	18.9	36.6	44.5
Felt angry	Males	26.1	39.6	34.3
	Females	17.5	35.7	46.7
Felt embarrassed	Males	44.5	39.4	16.1
	Females	38.2	35.1	26.7
Felt afraid	Males	54.0	28.4	17.6
	Females	41.5	32.3	26.1
Felt anxious	Males	58.4	28.7	12.9
	Females	49.7	29.6	20.6
Missed school	Males	79.2	15.2	5.7
	Females	72.6	19.1	8.3
Cried	Males	79.2	15.3	5.5
	Females	53.2	25.2	21.6
Have difficulty concentrating	Males	71.0	20.5	8.5
	Females	66.7	20.7	12.6
Marks have dropped	Males	81.5	13.2	5.1
	Females	78.3	12.8	8.9
Blamed myself	Males	70.5	22.3	7.2
	Females	68.3	18.8	13.0

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that young people are aware of the risks and dangers they may encounter as they engage with various forms of social and electronic media. Apparent throughout the information presented here, however, was the notion that the social rewards and benefits associated with social networking platforms far outweighed the potential dangers.

Drawing on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, young people have both theoretical and, in many instances, practical knowledge of the harms and consequences of online violence. This practical knowledge may be personal, based on either direct or indirect experiences. Learners were able to talk about the experiences of their friends as well as recounting stories they had read or heard about.

In the following chapter, young people's use of social media is explored in detail, as well as means employed by them to safeguard themselves online.

NEGOTIATING DANGERS AND RISKS

Introduction

A range of social and educational benefits has been associated with the proliferation of information and communication technologies. Enabling young people to communicate frequently and inexpensively with others in their social networks – specifically with family members and friends – is arguably one of the most important benefits of social media.[73] The considerable amount of time young people spend using electronic media is fuelled by their innate drive to establish and maintain social connections with others.

'Young people view the internet as a place'[74] – a place where they can meet new people, reconnect with others from their past, strengthen existing relational ties, express their identity and individuality, build knowledge and foster a sense of belonging.[75] In spite of these benefits, adults have expressed concern about the potential dangers that electronic media hold for the country's youth. When asked what they perceived online dangers to be, young people demonstrated an awareness of the range of online dangers and risks they might encounter while using social and electronic media, as described in the previous chapter. They were concerned about these risks, and explained the mechanisms they put in place to minimise the perceived risks.

FP *But you don't Mxit if you don't know how to Mxit without using your mind, because you end up doing things that you end up to regret.*

FP *You don't live with these people. You don't know whether they telling you the truth or so. If you send pictures or say things about yourself without thinking about your consequences, then later on you get a bad reputation. So you can't Mxit and not use your brain.*

This chapter takes a closer look at the strategies and methods employed by young people as they negotiate their safety online. The strategies are presented in relation to online activities as well as to the crossover from online to offline meetings. What will become apparent in this chapter is that young people are active agents in their use of online social platforms. Not only do they assess the possible risks and dangers related to online use of social media, but they respond to these online threats in different ways, and tend to draw on both preventative and responsive coping mechanisms to deal with possible victimisation.

Steps Taken to Ensure Safety and Minimise Online Dangers

> Young people, both boys and girls, and across the urban-rural divide, are aware of the risks attached to online activity, and take both proactive and responsive measures to mitigate these risks

Privacy settings are available on most popular social networking sites which allow the user to take precise steps in controlling what information is presented to the different people within their social networks.[76] Once privacy settings are activated, people are able to control who sees their profile, posts and activities; what information is shared with external sites; which applications have access to their data; what information their friends are able to share about them; who can see their pictures and location; which sites integrate with their social network; and, lastly, they have the option to delete or block people from their account.[77]

This latter option is one of the mechanisms most commonly used by young people to protect themselves online. Most young people expressed a knowledge of how to activate the privacy and security settings available on the social networking platforms they used. Narratives suggest that this mechanism is most often enforced in response to invitations for friend or contact requests from unknown individuals, and in the case of online harassment.

FP *You remove them as soon as you see they starting to become a problem, when they ask you things you don't want to talk about and they carry on. You have to block them because one of these days they might follow you, you see.*

FP *Like you can delete that person from your social networking site. If you don't know the person then you should delete him or her to keep you safe.*

MP *Making use of privacy settings on social networks, block a person, delete a person, reject a person, limit your time.*

Awareness of these settings was equally common in urban and rural areas, and children did not differentiate between access to and usage of the privacy setting, whether they were using computers or mobile devices. This suggests that, even when using Facebook, Mxit or other social media on mobile telephones, knowledge of the privacy settings is common.

> Social networking sites and chat rooms serve as a form of 'private space' for the adolescent where he or she can choose to exercise the safety precautions available.

These findings lend support to data emerging from international studies. Recent results from the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2012)[78], which looked specifically at privacy settings and users' behaviour, indicated that a large proportion (58%) of social network users between the ages of 18 and

65 restrict access to their online profiles (allowing only their friends to view it); a further 19% opt to set it moderately private (allowing sight to friends of their friends), and 19% opted for entirely public profiles. Some scholars have argued that online privacy is important for adolescents because it allows them to have a sense of control over their own actions and to make their own decisions.[79]

Some of the young people described making use of the reporting mechanisms available on social networking sites when they experienced any sort of bullying or harassment. For learners it was simply an assumption that anyone who was a nuisance online, or who misused these sites, was simply deleted, blocked or reported to the social networking site provider.

MP *Making use of privacy settings on social networks, block a person, delete a person, reject a person, limit your time.*

MP *Report any kind of abuse to Mxit CEO, or top management of any social networks.*

These remarks reflect the findings of other international studies: the 2012 EU Kids online study[80], examining coping strategies and resilience to online bullying[81], found, amongst 9 to 13-year-olds, that when they met with online risks – such as sexting and online bullying – one of the most frequent responses was simply to delete the messages, or block the sender responsible for the hurtful content.[82]

Purposely 'hiding' their identity (not disclosing personal information) was another common tactic the learners used to ensure their safety when engaging in social and electronic media. This was achieved in two ways: either by refraining from disclosing any personal information that could be used to identify them or the area in which they lived; or by fabricating the information provided on their social networking profiles (i.e. lying about themselves).

FP *Facebook privacy settings, Whats app blocking, 'deny request' on Mxit, and 'hide personal details'.*

FP *You must hide your identity.*

MP *Hide your profile and block unknown invites.*

However, though many learners were quite knowledgeable about how to set up their privacy settings online, one must bear in mind that social media such as Facebook actually encourage the sharing of personal information, as part of online communication. Nonetheless, Valkenburg and Peter (2011)[83] maintain that, when compared to face to face communication, the internet – or social networking platforms – 'enhances the controllability of self-presentation and self-disclosure'.[84] In other words, the internet and social media provide a platform on which users can control how they present themselves to others, as well as what they tell others online. This online feature is attractive to young people since it creates a safe space for adolescents to just 'let go' and not feel constrained in the way they may do in face to face interpersonal interactions, in which this sense of security is not possible.[85] This notion has received support in numerous studies.[86]

It is interesting to note that, while learners may provide strangers with false information in an attempt to ensure their own safety online, they are fully aware that the stranger could himself or herself be deceiving them by also creating a false identity. Their awareness of deception could be attributed to the learners themselves employing such methods, to protect themselves online. This knowledge ensures that learners usually tread carefully when communicating with people online.

FP *Don't put too much information. Just put little.*

FP *Like name, age, don't put all your stuff.*

FP *...because when you Mxit or when you chat to somebody that you don't know, you don't use your real name nor your surname, and you don't give your phone number out. You*

don't say where you live. You don't meet people you don't know...you see, because people don't always tell the truth. Because, you know, you gonna lie and say you live in Petersen Street or you live in another street, so if you can lie, then what about someone else?

FP *You see, so, if you don't play by the rules then you can get hurt.*

FP *I don't tell you what street do I live in; I can tell you that I live in Eden Park but I can't tell you what street do I live in, you see, because if I tell you what street I live in, who says you won't come to my house? You see, I can't tell you that I'm home alone and then something bad happens and then it's all because of my foolishness, you see... So you have to be careful...*

This need to protect their identity extended beyond misrepresenting who they were on their profiles and included online conversations, particularly when engaging with strangers, or with individuals whom they had not met in person. Some young people mentioned limiting conversations with strangers or newly-met individuals to general topics and avoiding conversations about personal matters or facts that could be used to identify their geographical location or identity.

It must be noted that, while young users are clearly aware of the mechanisms available to protect themselves and their information online, and of the need to take such measures, the basis on which they choose to do so, or not do so, remains unclear, and is a possible area for further exploration. A tension appears to exist between the need and desire to meet and engage with people, including strangers, online, and the need and desire to protect themselves. Children are well aware of the dangers of letting others gain access to their personal information. For many, ensuring their own safety online is always at the back of their minds when making use of electronic and social media, and yet often they do at some stage make

this information available, perhaps at a point where the perceived gains outweigh the risks, or when the user is satisfied that the person at the other end of the conversation can be trusted.

The term 'communicative coping' has been used to refer to the tendency of young people to respond to violence or bullying encountered online by talking about it with others. This is the most common technique used by young people, in South Africa and elsewhere, as a form of support following online violence, regardless of the type of online victimisation experienced.

MP *It depends on what kind of parent you have.*
FP *Sometimes it's easier that your parent hears rumours from others, than you telling them... My mother is not the type of mother to...make her sit down and then, like, tell her. She's gonna freak!*
FP *Parents can lecture you, so it's better to tell a friend because parents can be negative.*

The children elected to speak to people they believed would listen to their experiences and concerns without passing judgement, or apportioning blame or punishment – making friends and strangers the ideal candidates to

ago I tell my parents everything...but it doesn't matter... Tomorrow she [mother] tells me about what I told her, you see, she throw it back to my face. It doesn't matter what I did.
FP *By not telling your parent, you see, like, you feel ashamed and you already know that your parents are going to tell you that you shouldn't have done that. You know that is wrong, but yet you don't think about it, you see. So now you don't want to hear 'I told you so', you see?*

Research by Third, Spry and Locke[87] suggests that having adults with a working knowledge of technology present in their lives creates an opportunity for young people to engage in discussion around safe and responsible online behaviours and practices. Unless young people believe that their parents or caregivers truly understand the attractions that social media platforms hold for them, and know how to use and navigate these platforms, they will continue to seek advice from other people – people they think would be able to relate to their experiences. This suggests an important area of intervention for child and youth online safety.

> It is important to note, however, that young people would generally first attempt to resolve the problem on their own (by employing the mechanisms previously mentioned) failing which, they would seek advice and assistance from a trusted individual.

FP *I would say before you go to someone that you trust, try to figure out for yourself first isn't there anything you can do without harming yourself or doing something to hurt you? And if you see there's nothing you can do about it, then you go to someone.*

Young people tended to deal with problems and risks themselves before asking for assistance, often – as pointed out above – utilising multiple mechanisms to minimise risk and deal with potential harm. If these measures were unsuccessful, they would consider seeking advice and assistance from a trusted individual.

As with traditional forms of bullying, youths who encountered violence online were more inclined to confide in and seek support from their friends or peers than from their parents. In addition, a number of learners expressed a preference for confiding in a total stranger rather than confiding in their parents or caregivers.

talk to about online violence. Parents, on the other hand, were viewed as less understanding; a perception fuelled by the adults' limited knowledge of the cyberworld, and by their being likely to punish the learners by restricting access to the internet. Feelings of shame and embarrassment also often prevented young people from talking to their parents or caregivers about the bullying or violence they had encountered online. These feelings were even stronger when youths had themselves engaged in behaviours their parents might previously have warned them against – for example sending a sexually explicit image of themselves to someone else online. Young people often spoke about the damage disclosure would do to the levels of trust their parents had in them.

FP *You know how parents are about social networks...especially with the stories going around the world right now...there are stories about the social networks currently...*
FP *Yes. Even I know for a fact, a couple of weeks*

While friends were the individuals most often approached for advice, several learners also mentioned the value of speaking to total strangers about their online encounters. Strangers were perceived to be more neutral and to be able to offer advice that was not emotionally laden and likely to result in disagreements.

FP *Some friends...they can be friends only when they see you, but when they turn their backs on you they gossip about you.*
MP *I keep it to myself, or tell a total stranger.*
MP *'cos telling a friend... You might tell a friend and then you guys have a fight.*

It can be argued that learners put their trust in strangers because online communication facilitates interaction with others. Youths can disclose details

Learners also used responsive, rather than preventative, approaches to dealing with online risks, either avoiding certain situations altogether, or removing themselves from scenarios that might pose a threat.

about themselves without worrying about the reaction of the person on the other side of the computer or mobile phone. It is not surprising that learners do not feel judged when engaging with strangers while online: the absence of auditory and pictorial cues stimulates communication and reduces inhibition, thereby enhancing feelings of being socially connected to others.[88] Interestingly, there are no significant data from either the qualitative or quantitative studies that suggest any urban-rural differentiation as to who young people turn to for support or assistance.

In addition to using the techniques described above, learners did sometimes respond proactively to the risks they faced online. However one of the most common practices identified by learners was simply to avoid circumstances that might escalate into bad or dangerous situations. technique

FP   *When incidents do occur, how do you usually respond?*
MP   *But some situations you just cannot face...*
MP   *But situations I do face...try to avoid them.*
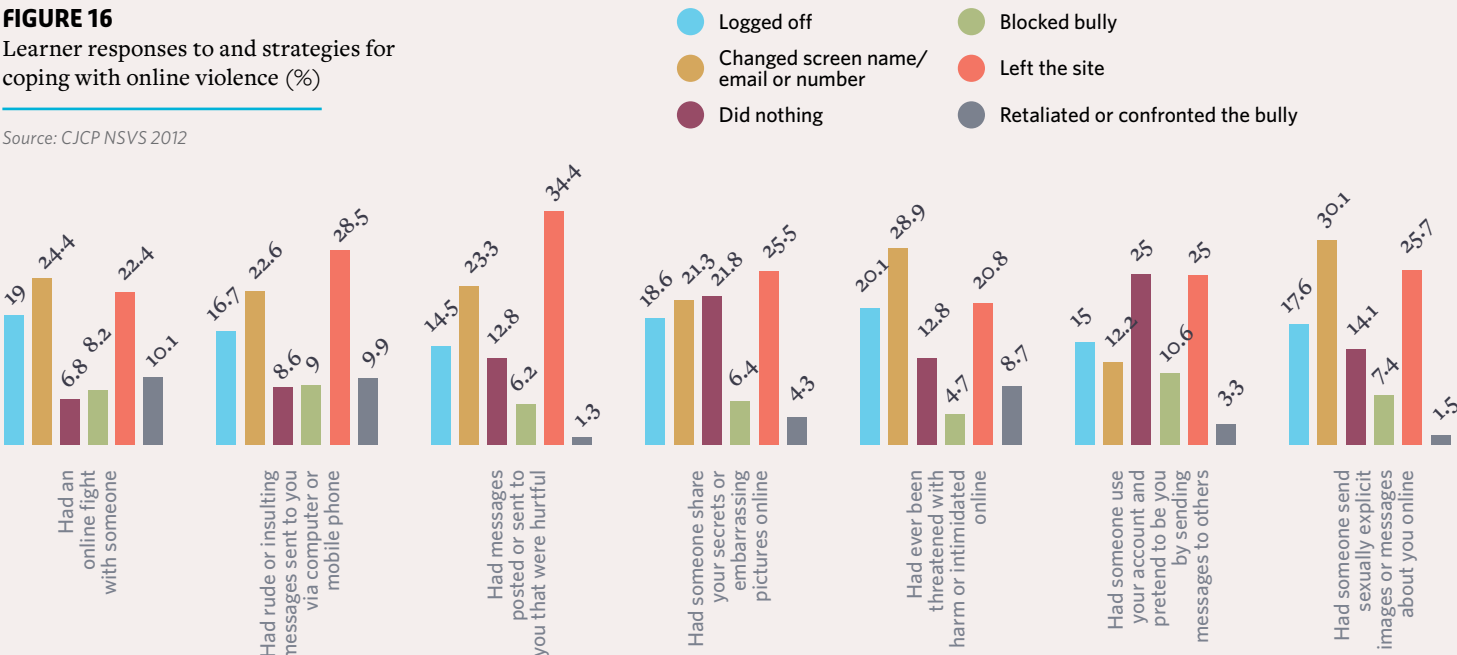MP   *That's the best way.*

Avoidance techniques were specifically highlighted in relation to questions which explored coping techniques in response to specific types of online violence, such as sexting. Views were commonly shared by both male and female participants, who admitted that there were certain situations that they would be unable to cope with.

The vignette used to facilitate discussion in the focus groups depicted a scenario where a sexually explicit image of a young girl was made public on the internet. The image had been electronically spread throughout the girl's school as well as neighbouring schools. Young people spoke fervently about the emotional consequences associated with a situation like this and suggested that the girl should avoid the perpetrators and people who might have seen the image, to minimise her humiliation and shame. However, in the light of the vast potential audience and the reach of information and communication technologies, the young people recognised that this would be a near-impossible feat. They suggested that the best solution would have been for the girl to move away from her community or geographical location in an attempt to avoid the far-reaching consequences of the situation.

These findings lend support to data stemming from the quantitative component of the school violence study. When learners were asked how they responded to the incidents of online violence they had personally encountered, three responses were more common than others, namely blocking the bully, logging off from the social network site, and doing nothing or simply ignoring the individual and the incident. See Figure 16 for the percentages.

FIGURE 16
Learner responses to and strategies for coping with online violence (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

- Logged off
- Changed screen name/email or number
- Did nothing
- Blocked bully
- Left the site
- Retaliated or confronted the bully

	Logged off	Changed screen name/email or number	Did nothing	Blocked bully	Left the site	Retaliated or confronted the bully
Had an online fight with someone	19	24.4	6.8	8.2	22.4	10.1
Had rude or insulting messages sent to you via computer or mobile phone	16.7	22.6	8.6	9	28.5	9.9
Had messages posted or sent to you that were hurtful	14.5	23.3	12.8	6.2	34.4	1.3
Had someone share your secrets or embarrassing pictures online	18.6	21.3	21.8	6.4	25.5	4.3
Had ever been threatened with harm or intimidated online	20.1	28.9	12.8	4.7	20.8	8.7
Had someone use your account and pretend to be you by sending messages to others	15	12.2	25	10.6	25	3.3
Had someone send sexually explicit images or messages about you online	17.6	30.1	14.1	7.4	25.7	1.5

An interesting difference emerged between the results obtained from the survey component of the study and those from the focus group discussions. This was particularly evident in the different ways in which boys and girls viewed or responded to sexting. Table 4 (bottom line) shows that, while a third (33.3%) of males would simply do nothing in response to having sexually implicit messages or images about them distributed without their consent, only 19.2% of females would do nothing in response. This could be explained in part by the fact that males and females view sexting differently. Apparent from the qualitative data was that for males sexting constitutes a normal part of sexual exploration, and thus is often not perceived as victimisation or violence. This difference in attitudes is attested to by the following extracts. Here learners were asked to respond to a vignette (see Appendix) in which a young girl had committed suicide after nude pictures she had taken of herself were distributed without her knowledge or permission. The girls in the group were inclined to perceive this behaviour as inappropriate and detrimental

to girls, whereas the majority of boys felt that the naked picture in itself was not a problem, and that the situation could have been avoided if the girl had not included her face in the picture.

MP *That's what I'm saying, if her face was not in the picture she would not have been so embarrassed.*
FP *…just send a picture of your face; you don't send a picture of your whole body because they can transform that whole thing into something ugly, you see.*
FP *Anything can happen with just a picture. So if you knew that boy, and you and that boy were dating, why can't you have it face to face?*
FP *Or she could just have taken the photo of herself but with her clothes on.*
MP *She should have sent the rest but not her face. Hide the face.*
FP *She has no self-esteem.*
MP *So long as they don't see the face, they can't match her body.*

A significant proportion of victims reported doing nothing or simply ignoring the violence they

encounter online. This was evident across the online violence types explored: 22.4% of online fight victims, 28.5% of victims who had rude messages sent to them via computer or mobile phone, 34.4% of victims who had hurtful messages posted about them online, 25.5% of victims who had someone share their secrets or embarrassing pictures online, 20.8% of victims who had been threatened online, 25% of account theft victims, and 25.7% of sexting victims had simply ignored these incidents (see Figure 16). In the discussion groups the young people admitted that they knew about the safeguarding mechanisms available on social networking sites, but seldom used them. This may also indicate that many of the acts termed 'online violence' by adults (for example cyberbullying) are regarded by young people as unimportant, and not warranting active steps to be taken.

There were no significant differences between males and females with regard to their responses or the strategies they employed to deal with online violence.

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TABLE 4
Responses to different types of online violence, by gender (%)

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012

		Logged off	Blocked bully	Changed screen name/email or number	Did nothing	Left site	Confronted bully
Online fight	Males	20.7	22.2	7.3	19.5	8.2	10.8
	Females	17.8	25.9	6.5	24.5	8.2	9.6
Rude or insulting messages sent to them	Males	16.3	23.6	5.1	32.0	8.4	10.1
	Females	16.9	21.9	10.8	26.3	9.4	9.7
Hurtful messages sent or posted about them	Males	15.3	22.4	15.3	32.9	4.7	0
	Females	14.1	23.9	11.3	35.2	7	2.1
Secrets or embarrassing pictures shared online	Males	22.8	21.5	20.3	25.3	6.3	2.5
	Females	15.6	21.1	22.9	25.7	6.4	5.5
Threatened or intimidated with harm	Males	24.2	25.8	9.7	25.8	1.6	8.1
	Females	17.2	31.0	14.9	17.2	6.9	9.2
Account theft	Males	20.6	11.1	25.4	25.4	6.3	3.2
	Females	12.0	12.8	24.8	24.8	12.8	3.4
Sexting	Males	20.6	22.2	14.3	33.3	4.8	0
	Females	15.1	37.0	13.7	19.2	9.6	2.7

MOVING INTO THE OFFLINE WORLD

Steps Taken to Avoid Dangers When Taking Relationships Offline

FP I think you should limit your privacy, because if you don't have a limit to privacy, you have too much, and then something bad could happen to you because you end up doing things knowing no one will find out tomorrow. So you do things that might end up ending your life or something.

Online social platforms provide an opportunity for fostering social connections; connections that are invaluable to young people who may often otherwise struggle to make friends. These connections are not always limited to social encounters in the cyberworld. At times, young people agree to meet someone offline after a period of communication online.

This trend was apparent in the 2012 National School Violence Study. More than one in ten participants (12.1%) admitted to having met someone offline whom they had first met online. Males (13.9%) were slightly more likely than females (10.3%) to have met someone offline whom they had initially met online. Older learners, between the ages of 17 and 18 years, were most likely to have met an online contact in person, with 15.2% of this age group reporting this, compared to 5.6% of those 14 years and younger, 12% of those aged 15 to 16 years, and 13.2% of those aged 18 years and older. The focus group discussions revealed much the same:

FP The thing is when you chat to a person sometimes, sometimes he or she chats... He is impressing... Now you say 'I actually want to meet this person in person...know how he looks...'

This crossover from online to offline meetings is a major concern for parents. Although the physical risks involved in meeting strangers offline – such as possibly falling victim to crime and violence – are widely known by both adults and children, research suggests that meeting offline contacts is not inherently dangerous.[89] A recent study conducted in the United States[90] found that connections initiated over the internet which led to offline interactions were normally friendship-related, established between similarly aged youth, and largely non-sexual.

When asked to elaborate on the ways in which they would keep themselves safe from harm when meeting people offline for the first time, young people spoke freely about the strategies they employed. These included arranging to meet in a public place; taking a friend or someone else along with them to the meeting place; and telling someone else about their plans to meet an online contact offline.

The three techniques identified were based on the premise that the online communication with their contact had been taking place for some time, allowing for a high level of familiarity. The authenticity of this knowledge is questionable, however, given the other risk-reduction techniques employed by young people, in particular those pertaining to hiding their identities.

Meeting in a public place

When asked how they would keep themselves safe when meeting offline, many children confidently stated that they would keep themselves safe by agreeing to meet their contact in a public place such as a park or a shopping mall. For the learners, being in a public space where they could easily request assistance if required, significantly minimised their perception of risk of violence.

FP Ja, I'm curious...you think of the disadvantages but then you come back and say 'I'm gonna meet him in a public place; what bad thing would happen?' Okay let me take that risk...sometimes it's...just sometimes it's good to take that risk you know.

MP But not with your life it's like...

FP Okay... Ja, I'm scared but I always have hope that these people are all my age 'cos I never met somebody who is old.

MP Even if you are still young you can get information about the cell phone...there's no need to be scared of meeting someone [offline].

Throughout the discussions, the tendency to rationalise away the dangers, and to weigh the risks against the potential advantages or benefits remain apparent, with the potential risks mediated by the steps that the learners feel are likely to minimise the potential for harm. The strategy of meeting in a public place was the most commonly identified across all the focus group discussions.

Taking a friend along

An effective safety mechanism used by many learners, particularly in rural areas, when meeting strangers offline, was to take someone with them. This is expressed in the group responses below. The friend may be a classmate or other peer, often, for girls, a female friend, but it could also be another adult, with one example provided of an uncle.

FP You go with someone if you want to meet someone you don't know.

FP Don't go alone.

MP If I go there, I will go with somebody else, like my uncle.

MP ...you go in a group.

MP (inaudible) ...to make sure nothing happens.

Telling someone else you are meeting a stranger offline

When choosing to meet an online contact in person, most learners felt it was imperative to inform someone about the meeting. Typically, friends or family members were informed about who was being met, the location and time of the meeting, as well as any other specific information that might be required in the event of something bad happening. This was particularly expressed by some young people as a mechanism to ensure their safety.

MP *Telling someone close to you where you going to meet someone, and to provide evidence if something may happen to you.*

FP *Tell your parents that you are going to meet this kind of person that you met online.*

MP *I will tell my mum...no, seriously, I tell my mum, like, everything.*

FP *...would you tell your friends about it?*

FP *Your friends? No.*

FP *It depends on what kind of friends you have.*

MP *Ja, it's good to tell your parents just because if you tell [inaudible] then she goes there if something bad happens to her, her parent doesn't know.*

MP *Only tell a friend.*

FP *Ons sê vir ons vriende.*
   *[Translation: We tell our friends.]*

When friends are told, these friends tend to be offline friends – friends known to the individual offline as well as online – rather than just online friends. This is deemed as being safer than just confiding in online friends about the meeting. This suggests that offline friendships are viewed as providing greater physical support (i.e. a greater sense of agency) than online friendships – particularly in instances when things go wrong. These suggestions support the data from the quantitative component of the 2012 NSVS, which found that, of the 12.1% of learners who had

ever met someone offline who they had first met online, 21% reported speaking to their parents or caregivers about their online contacts, and in addition 38.2% asserted that their parents or caregivers knew they had met an online contact in real life. It also suggests that, rather than hiding such meetings from their parents or other adults, there is an awareness among the children of the importance of sharing such plans, as an integral part of ensuring that they were safe.

While it might be expected that those in the older age cohort (those over 18) would be the least likely to tell their parents that they were going to physically meet an online correspondent (27.3%), of concern is that only 35.7% of learners in the 15 to 16 year age group had told a parent or caregiver they were going to meet someone offline. Two out of five (43.1%) of the 17 to 18 year olds reported informing their parents, while one in two (50.9%) learners who were 14 years of age and younger claimed to have told their parents or caregivers when they were planning to meet someone offline (see Figure 17).

FIGURE 17
Percentage of learners who informed their parents that they were meeting an online contact

Source: CJCP NSVS 2012
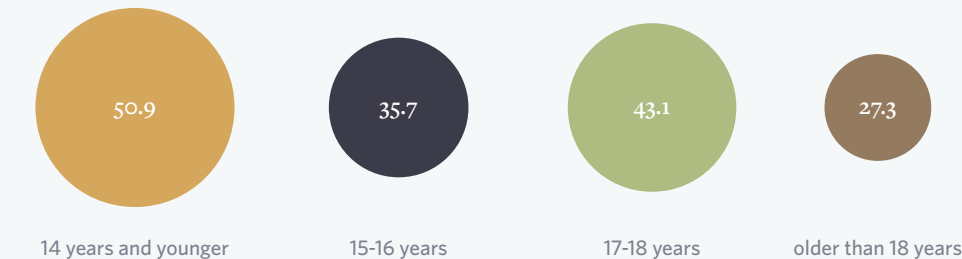
50.9 — 14 years and younger
35.7 — 15-16 years
43.1 — 17-18 years
27.3 — older than 18 years

there is a need to educate parents: to ensure that young people have technology-savvy adults present in their lives

While examples were provided of the children telling parents or caregivers of a possible or pending meeting, in more cases friends or other older relatives were told, rather than parents. Parents are often perceived as more likely to place restrictions on such meetings, or to simply prevent them, than other adults would be. Peers and friends were perceived as more likely to be supportive, and less judgemental. A number of specific reasons were provided by learners as to why they would rather turn to their friends, older family members and strangers: poor relationships with their parents, lack of communication, lack of understanding, fear of disappointing parents, fear of judgement, shame, feeling scared and embarrassed, and fear of punishment. Inherent in all of these is the fact that parents are more likely to prevent the meetings from happening than other adults, or the child's friends, would be. This was reinforced in the discussions regarding the vignette provided to the focus group participants. In the discussion, three primary reasons were identified for Hope, the child in the vignette, not telling her parents or teachers what was happening to her:

Lack of, or difficulty in communication with parents

MP I think that sometimes when you inform your parents about what is happening to you... sometimes it's hard to speak to your parents...

MP It's difficult to communicate with your parents about things like that.

FP If she spoke to her parents regularly and, like, told them why she did it and what happened, they would have understood. That's what I think.

Lack of understanding on the part of adults

Learners are saying that they talk to their friends rather than their parents:

MP Maybe 'cos they didn't have that understanding with their mother.

Group ...their peers, because they seem more understanding.

Learners also said that parents do not understand, because if you confide in them later on they could remind you of your mistakes. These feelings are expressed below by a female learner from Gauteng:

FP A couple of weeks ago I tell my parents everything...but it doesn't matter... Tomorrow she [mother] tells me about what I told her, you see, she throw it back to my face. It doesn't matter what I did.

Fear of judgement, feelings of shame and embarrassment, scared, fear of punishment

Learners
It's because she was afraid they were going to judge her.

Learners
She was scared and embarrassed to tell anyone about this thing because her parents would have thought she is a slut.

Learners
She was scared to tell her parents because they going to shout at her or beat her for what she has done.

Learners are clearly aware of the potential dangers associated with meeting people offline, but young people's curiosity and the perceived social benefits (a sense of acceptance and belonging, potential for relationships, and social connection) are, in many instances, judged as far outweighing the risks. The fact that children exercise precautionary measures seems to minimise the threat and potential danger – sufficiently at least to justify taking the risk of meeting.

Conclusion

What is apparent throughout this chapter is that youth actively employ steps to keep themselves safe, both while engaging with their contacts online and when crossing over from online to offline encounters. These steps appear to the children to be adequate for keeping them safe. However, these steps may not be wholly sufficient to ensure the child's safety in navigating the transition from online to offline acquaintance. Although employing these steps does not guarantee a young person's safety, it does highlight the fact that many of the safety strategies seem to draw on general cyber-safety messaging, as well as on information gained through peer networks and relationships with family members.

This chapter raises some points that are important to consider when devising online safety intervention strategies:

- In essence, young people are taking charge of their lives, and making decisions that to a large degree take into account the information that they have available;
- Children think about the possible consequences of their actions, and are exercising power and choice in navigating their decisions;
- Young people often draw on several techniques to ensure their online safety, ranging from blocking bullies online, to reporting them, to talking to people about their encounters;
- The findings highlight the important educational role that offline and online relationships with peers can play in online safety, since these were the individuals that youths were most likely to seek guidance from; and
- Notwithstanding this, there is a need to educate parents: to ensure that young people have technology-savvy adults present in their lives who can help educate them about safe and responsible online behaviours.

Be stronger than hate.

*Kiss the fun,
but fear the fire.*

ONLINE SAFETY SLOGANS

The slogan activity was intended to elicit safety messages from young people themselves pertaining to online behaviour. It was thought that these would be more appealing to young people than the messaging typically conveyed by adults. The slogans seemed to reinforce the notion that youths are aware of the risks and dangers they may encounter online. However, they seem to believe that these could be circumvented with thoughtful and responsible use of the internet, and social media in particular. The majority of the slogans centred on this idea.

- Kiss the fun, but fear the fire
- Talk, and mind your language
- Stop, think, do
- Knowledge and obedience is always better than sacrifice
- Think smart, play smart, and be safe
- Smart chat saves lives
- What you choose today, is what you live tomorrow
- Chat but don't lose concentration
- Think wise
- Chat with brains

Related to this, other slogans emphasised the need for young people to use the security features at their disposal on their devices, whether mobile phones or computers:

- Better privacy, better future
- Your privacy is your dignity
- Privacy for all, exploitation should fall
- Stop selling your privacy, start saving your privacy
- Wees oulik en hou dit vertroulik [Be smart and keep things confidential]

Other common slogans were related to young people's sense of confidence, respect and self-efficacy:

- Be proud of yourself
- Love yourself
- Strong people don't bully others
- Love your life first
- Be stronger than hate
- Spread your wings not abuse

These slogans reflect the importance of intervention strategies for building on the resources, and the sense of agency, that young people themselves have. Further developing these strategies will equip children and youth with the self-control and positive decision-making abilities that can help them meet the social and emotional needs of their developmental period – while at the same time keeping themselves safe from online harm.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ICTs, the internet, and social media, are integral and ubiquitous in young people's lives. Social media in particular have become one of the most common means at children's disposal for forming relationships and connecting with both friends and strangers, as well as for exploring the world outside their immediate environs – an ability that is particularly important for children and young people trapped in socio-economically deprived communities and areas. The developmental potential, for young people, of ICTs and the internet is increasingly being realised as technology is integrated into school curriculums, and as the use of computers and tablets is integrated into teaching practice at schools.

Ownership and Utilisation of ICTs

The data emerging from the 2012 NSVS, and related social media research provide useful information on a range of scenarios, namely access to and use of ICTs, the internet and social media; the experiences that young people encounter online; the ways in which children and youth are dealing with the risks and challenges faced online; and the ways in which some of these risks can translate into actual harms.

It was evident from the study that the vast majority of secondary school learners own or have access to mobile phones. This reflects the degree to which mobile phones have become an integral part of children's lives, and the importance they have assumed in daily communication, relationships and transactions. Over half the children in the 2012 NSVS have access to a computer, laptop or some form of tablet computer. Almost half access the internet on a mobile phone, suggesting that access to smart or internet-enabled phones is growing rapidly, and

reinforcing the notion that this is, increasingly, a means of going online for people who might not otherwise be able to afford or have access to internet-enabled computer.

Mobile phones, in particular, have become an important predictor of social inclusion, and, at the same time, of exclusion. It is not just the ownership of, or access to the handset, however, that predicts inclusion, but the uses the phone is put to. Young people most commonly identify the benefits of mobile phones in terms of forms of connectedness: as being able to use Mxit, Facebook (and to a much lesser extent Twitter) or any other form of messaging, and for making and receiving calls. Other benefits are found in the escape that phones can offer children, with examples provided of their being able to escape to phones to listen to music, or to speak to friends when feeling down. The most common usage of phones, together with usage of other forms of ICTs such as computers and laptops, does, however, introduce a number of risks that have emerged with the very rapid growth of South Africa's online activity.

The Awareness of Online Risk Amongst Young People

Not least of the risks brought by ICTs is the risk of online violence, including cyberbullying, and the risk of unanticipated consequences of sexting and video sharing. Just over one in five of the young people taking part in the 2012 NSVS reported being bullied online, or experiencing some form of online harm, ranging from identity theft or fraud, to sexting, to bullying. This tends to happen with both computers and phones. Although online activity and engagement transcend geographical borders, it appears that young people in metropolitan areas are more likely to experience online harm than those in other urban areas or rural areas, suggesting that such behaviour, and vulnerability to such

behaviour, may be linked to other factors relating to offline vulnerability. For example, those in metropolitan areas are more likely than those in rural areas to be characterised by risk factors that are common to both perpetration of and vulnerability to offline violence. This happens at both community and household level and can include social marginalisation and exclusion, high levels of inequality, family conflict, and poor educational attachment and performance. Data from the quantitative component of the NSVS further supports this, as experiences of online violence and harm are correlated with variables such as exposure to violence in the home, negative educational outcomes and poor self-efficacy.

Young people are, however, well aware of the dangers and risks attached to ICTs – to internet usage and social media in particular – both in terms of online dangers themselves, and in offline dangers related to online activity. These dangers and risks are broadly aligned with those identified by adults, and relate to both actual acts and negative outcomes. More specifically, the dangers and risks identified by the young participants generally related to bullying, emotional abuse and violence, threats, sexting and pornography, identity theft, as well as offline-related harms, stemming from online activity, such as addiction, distraction from school and other work activities, and dangers attached to taking online relationships offline. Most commonly though, young people tend to be aware of cyberbullying, sexting-related behaviour, and the invasion of privacy. Throughout both the qualitative and quantitative research described above, there were few learners who were not aware of some form of risk, and potential harms, that related to online activity.

Young people are also acutely aware of the risk of social exclusion by and from their peers, and in many cases are willing to risk other online harms in order to feel a sense of inclusion or belonging – underscoring the importance of connectedness.

A relationship between the learners' confidence, sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and their experiences and approach to online violence, was evident. Similarly, while aware of the risks of cyberbullying or of being harassed online, the vast majority of learners were willing to accept and manage such risks in order to reap the benefits that the technology and social media offer. In many instances, examples of conscious decisions by children balancing potential dangers with possible benefits were provided. In such cases, as with other forms of harms, the dangers tended to be managed, as both proactive and responsive strategies were put in place to mitigate or minimise online risks. Different strategies also tended to be developed for different forms of harm, reflecting what are perceived as being the most appropriate and relevant responses to different threats. Some of these strategies demonstrate not only knowledge of the dangers, but also the perceived attitudes to social media amongst various groups within the young people's networks, such as peers, family, and others in authority, such as teachers.

Proactive Safety Strategies

Pro-active or preventative strategies developed by learners tended to focus on the management of platforms being utilised (for example privacy settings, etc.), and through communication with peers and others. In the first case, young people utilise the resources built into the software or platforms through which risks present themselves, for example by blocking unknown or unwanted contacts such as bullies, or by managing the security settings on Facebook. (Most young people knew the safety and privacy settings on both phones and computers.) These strategies can be proactive, as in the case of privacy settings, which prevent risks materialising, or responsive, where unwanted intrusions are blocked after they have been initiated. Communication-focused strategies entail conversations, the sharing of experiences, and seeking advice and support from others trusted by the young person – most often peers, and to a lesser extent also parents and educators.

Active communication strategies are particularly significant in instances where online relationships evolve into offline meetings (one in ten learners had met offline someone whom they had first met online) – a point at which young people appear acutely aware of the risks, and where the risk of violent physical danger resulting from online contact is most real. In most cases where young people choose to meet someone they have encountered online, they devise mechanisms with peers to enhance their own safety, and to minimise the risk of harm. In many instances where such meetings take place, parents or other adults are told about the pending meeting. (According to the quantitative data from the research group, this happens in one in four instances – although reports from the focus group component suggested a higher number of cases). The ability to communicate about such events with both peers and adults is one of the most important risk-mitigating mechanisms available, as it may be argued that the risk of some form of violence is greatly increased when such meetings happen without the knowledge of anyone other than the parties involved. At the same time, there was substantial evidence that relationships with parents are often not conducive to sharing this information, and children often fear being prohibited from going through with such planned meetings, or being judged by their parents. This results in other adults and the children's peers being the preferred confidantes when it comes to planned offline meetings. Other mechanisms employed might entail assessing the accuracy of provided information prior to making contact (for example by going to the meeting place dressed in something quite different from what had been arranged), and meeting the individual in a public place, and/or with friends, to minimise the risk that might be presented.

Responsive Strategies

Responsive mechanisms relating to safety usually entailed actions such as logging off, in the case of chats or threats, leaving internet sites, limiting information shared, ignoring the person's calls or messages or chat requests, or simply doing nothing. In some instances, learners also spoke about simply not putting themselves into places or environments where risks might be realised. This might entail avoiding certain websites, or chatrooms. In more instances than not, in the case of sexting and the sharing of explicit photos between learners, children show some sense of agency by refusing to be manipulated into sharing more explicit photos after initial photos have been shared with someone online. In such instances, the person requesting more sexually explicit photos would usually be ignored after not accepting an initial refusal. Of more concern are cases where photos or videos are taken without consent, which has potentially greater consequence for the unknowing victim. This is often a more common scenario, as is the posting or sharing of images or videos that were consensually produced, following the end of a relationship.

Online and Offline Psycho-Social Support

Importantly, there appears to be very little support available for children regarding their experiences online, or to victims of online violence or bullying. Knowledge of available resources was minimal, and mention rarely made of sources of support. This is a significant gap, as there is growing evidence highlighting the relationship between online victimisation and perpetration. As importantly, there is more than adequate evidence from both this study and others that the impact of online violence is similar to conventional forms of bullying, and may impact negatively on the psycho-social wellbeing of children.

a strong correlation exists between young people being vulnerable to other offline forms of violence and being most vulnerable to online harm

Common Myths Dispelled

The research provides sufficient evidence to dispel several common myths.

Myth: *Cyberbullying and other forms of online risks are a new epidemic that threatens the wellbeing of all children.*

In fact, while the assumption is that cyberbullying and other forms of online harm clearly warrant concern and attention, this phenomenon still remains less common than other forms of offline bullying. This does not mean that attention should not be paid to the prevention of these behaviours, or to their impact on young people. Rather, it should be seen within the framework of violence more generally, and a realistic perspective on its extent, and its impact on young people, should be maintained. A more nuanced understanding of cyberbullying, and other forms of online violence is required, with a clear differentiation between risks or dangers, and associated harms.

Myth: *Given the ubiquitous nature of mobile telephony in particular, and the internet more broadly, and the fact that boundaries and locations to a large degree cease to exist online, all children are equally vulnerable to, or at risk of, cyberbullying and other forms of online harm.*

There is sufficient evidence emerging from research worldwide to suggest that a strong correlation exists between young people being vulnerable to other offline forms of violence and being most vulnerable to online harm. Similarly, it is these vulnerable children who are most likely to experience negative outcomes of online social interactions.

Myth: *Young people are unaware of the real dangers and risks that exist online, and need to be protected.*

There is substantial evidence to suggest that young people are well aware of online risks, and of associated offline risks that may result from, or be associated with, online behaviour. This awareness allows children to develop appropriate response and protection measures of their own, which enable them to navigate and negotiate their online terrain safely. In many instances such responses utilise the technology and platforms in a more effective way than most adults – and specifically parents – are able to. It must be noted that in some instances these approaches may not be wholly adequate, but they are an important starting point, and can be utilised as the basis for the development of further safety strategies.

Myth: *Online risks and the dangers faced by young people are the same as harms.*

The majority of children are aware of the possible risks that are faced, and of the dangers that present themselves online. In fact very few of the risks that present themselves to young people online, or which are faced by children daily when chatting, socialising or otherwise engaging online, result in harm, either physical or emotional, to the child. This is nowhere more marked than when online encounters evolve into offline contact. The most real of the dangers faced by children – harm associated with such contact – is probably the least common.

Myth: *Controlling access to, and use of, social media specifically, and the internet and hardware more generally, will serve to protect children.*

Among the most likely results of such restricting acts are: young people being excluded from the developmental opportunities that this technology presents; young people being placed at a learning disadvantage as technology increasingly infiltrates schools and classrooms; and social exclusion, which may itself increase the risks of other forms of harm.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Policies need to focus on fostering an environment where young people can build resilience, and learn appropriate responses to online risks, rather than on restricting and controlling usage or online behaviour. These appropriate responses need to harness the resources that children themselves possess, and that are available through children's own networks (for example peer networks).

- A relationship clearly exists between learners' confidence, their sense of belonging and self-efficacy, and their responses to and experiences of online violence. Strategies and approaches to online safety should utilise this, and should focus on building young people's sense of self-efficacy. This requires an awareness of the developmental phase of adolescence and the associated cognitive and social-emotional growth and development that characterises this period in the lives of children and youths.

- Related to this, the research highlighted the importance of peer relationships in the way that young people approached and managed online risks. This is an area of potential that could be used to inform strategies and targeted interventions.

- Policies should be premised on a more nuanced understanding of online risks, and the associated harms. Young people possess the resources to manage online conflict, and any strategies aiming to address online violence should support these resources and help develop them further. Where necessary, these should clearly delineate appropriate and inappropriate responses to online violence.

- Strategies should build on the internal and external resources that children have, and should focus on enhancing young people's sense of self-efficacy and control, and their ability to make informed, healthy decisions. This should, in turn, result in responsible online behaviour.

- Online safety policies should be contextualised within the broader typologies and risks associated with violence generally. Policies should provide a framework for prevention and support strategies – at national, provincial and local levels – to embed online safety within broader violence- and bullying-prevention strategies. Further, the relationship between online and offline violence needs to be better understood, and be integrated into prevention approaches.

- Related to the above recommendations, priority should be given to reaching those who are most at risk for online harms. At a governmental level, this would in all likelihood entail effective and transparent working relationships with all government departments involved in targeting at-risk children and youth.

- A gap exists in the provision of services and support to children, relating to their online experiences. In simple terms this could be considered a lack of victim support. Targeted resources offering support and counselling to children who do experience online violence could be combined with resources aimed at building young people's efficacy more generally. This would go some way towards promoting responsible online behaviour and digital citizenship in both proactive and supportive ways.

- Policy responses should be driven by evidence-led approaches, and considerable attention should be placed on generating a body of evidence for effective strategies and approaches within South Africa.

- Policy responses should also be premised on a comprehensive understanding of adolescent development. More specifically, policies (and related interventions) should recognise that risk-taking is normal – indeed it is a necessary part of this developmental phase. These responses should therefore be formulated with the intention of providing youths with the skills and support required to navigate this developmental period and its associated challenges responsibly, rather than in criminalising certain behaviours that are necessary for successful transition to adulthood.

APPENDIX

Note to Facilitators:
In obtaining the opinions of young girls and boys, the atmosphere created must be relaxed, open and fun. Emphasis must be placed on learning from young people how they negotiate their safety online and the meaning they attribute to their online practices. Discussions must therefore be encouraged in ways which are non-judgmental.

Some general reminders for facilitators:

- Ensure you have all the necessary materials such as flipchart paper, markers, prestik, pictures/props, tape recorder (which is only used if participants have indicated that they are comfortable for the session to be recorded. If any child indicates reluctance, then opt not to use the tape recorder).
- Note the place, age group and number of participants including sex breakdown of participants for each focus group.
- Observe the verbal as well as the non-verbal responses – which questions result in a silence or withdrawal of participation; which ones evoke awkward laughter/giggles

The duration of the focus group method is 60 minutes, with the breakdown of time as follows:

- Activity 1: Welcome and Introduction
  (20 minutes)
- Activity 2: Exercise:
  The story of Hope Witsell (Handout 1)
  (30 minutes)
- Closing Activity: Slogan
  (10 minutes)

Materials

- Newsprint/flipchart paper
- Markers
- Prestik
- Tape recorder

Facilitator Steps

STEP 1: Introductions and welcome.

Activity 1

Objective:
To create familiarity and ease between the group participants and facilitator

Method:
1. Facilitator must pass a roll of toilet paper to the group and ask each learner to take as much as they want with no explanation
2. Once every participant has a piece of toilet paper, the facilitator gives each person an opportunity to introduce themselves to the group by saying something about themselves for each square of toilet paper taken.
3. Once all the introductions are done, the facilitator welcomes the participants, and explains the purpose of the workshop

Tips/Reminders:
● *When explaining the purpose of the focus group inform the participants that the time together will involve fun activities, lots of talking with each other about issues relating to young people's use of social media.*
● *By social media you are referring to the internet or mobile-based technology, including Facebook, blogs, texts, podcasts, BBM (BlackBerry Instant Messaging), WhatsApp, Mxit, Bluetooth, YouTube, Twitter, SMS and any other form of social networking via the internet or mobile devices.*

STEP 2: Once everyone has settled, introduce the programme for the day.

STEP 3: Inform participants that in order for the programme to work well, they need to be able to work together. Identify some 'conditions' for working together and ask for further input from participants regarding other 'conditions' they think is necessary to ensure they are able to work well as a group.

Tips/Reminders:
● *When outlining the conditions for working together, the facilitator must highlight the following:*
   ● *the need to be respectful of one another;*
   ● *listening and giving each other a chance to talk (not interrupting someone else while talking);*
   ● *everyone's input is equally valued;*
   ● *assure participants that the information which they share is confidential (but also inform them about the limits of confidentiality i.e. how the information collected will be documented and reported on);*
   ● *mention the importance of keeping confidential whatever information is shared and discussed in the group*
   ● *state that no participant is forced to participate; and*
   ● *remind participants to only share information if they are comfortable doing so – they determine how they wish to participate.*

STEP 4: Once the ground rules have been established and accepted, pose the following initial questions to the group.

Questions
1. How many of you own a mobile phone or have access to a mobile phone that you personally use?
   - *And computers (desktop or laptop)?*
2. Can you tell me what you use your mobile phones and computers for most of the time?
   - *(probe for use of instant messaging, Mxit, BBM, WhatsApp, Facebook and any other social networking page)*
   - *What do they usually chat about?*
3. What have you heard others at school or in your circle of friends using their mobile phones or computers for?
   - *(probe for use of instant messaging, Mxit, BBM, WhatsApp, Facebook and any other social networking page)*
4. As the discussion picks up on social media and networking ask … what are some of the benefits of social media for young people?
   - *Probe for impact on relationships (friends, family, school), behaviours and development (i.e. academic etc.) of young people.*

5. What are some of the disadvantages of social media or the dangers young people may encounter while using various forms of social media?
   - *Probe for:*
     - *Other forms of cyberbulling (when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text message or when someone posts something online about another person that they don't like)*
     - *Social exclusion*
     - *Meeting people online – offline*
       - *Who are these people?*
       - *Where do they usually meet?*
       - *What happens when they meet in person?*
   - *Have you ever personally experienced any of these disadvantages?*
   - *Has anyone you know ever personally experienced any of these disadvantages?*

Enumerators to note down the 'advantages' on a sheet of paper as they are mentioned by the participants.

ACTIVITY 2

STEP 5: Following this discussion, participants are divided into two groups and each group given a copy of a case study: The story of Hope Witsell. (See case study in next column)

1. The facilitator should read the case study out loud.
2. Once learners have had an opportunity to listen to the case study, each group is asked to discuss and note key points (on newsprint provided) in relation to the related questions for their group.
3. Each group is asked to place their newsprint sheet (s) on the wall and through a gallery walk review the newsprints of the other groups.
4. Once the groups have reviewed each others' newsprints, the facilitator provides an opportunity for clarifying any information that is not clear on either of the groups' newsprints.
5. The facilitator then opens discussion among learners. This allows for any additional information to emerge and be noted by the facilitator/scribe.

CASE STUDY:

The Hope Witsell Story

In September 2009, a 13 year old girl called Hope Witsell committed suicide by hanging herself. She was the only child of her parents, and enjoyed a happy home life. Four months before her suicide, she did something which had far-reaching consequences. She met a boy whom she really liked. Hoping to attract his attention she sent him a picture of her exposed breasts. Someone else saw the picture while using the boy's cell phone and sent it on to others. The image spread throughout Hope's school as well as other schools in the area. You can imagine what this did to her reputation. As she walked along the school passages she had to endure taunts such as 'whore' and 'slut'. She was disciplined at school, and grounded by her parents, and eventually the situation became too much for her to handle.
Story by Kobus van Wyk, 24 October 2010, at http://www.e4africa.co.za/?tag=cyber-bullying

Questions for GROUP A:

- Why do you think Hope was willing to risk sending a photo of herself to someone she hardly knew? (provide possible reasons)
- Do you think you should you be allowed to see, send or read anything you want online? Why or why not?
- Do you think you should have a right to privacy when you are online? Why or why not?

Questions for GROUP B:

- What could Hope have done to keep herself safe from harm?
  - *What safety measures do young people (including you) take to keep yourself safe online?*
- Probe knowledge of various blocking/ reporting mechanisms of social networks
  - *When incidents do occur, how do you usually respond? (how do you negotiate these dangers)*
  - *Explore knowledge of prevention mechanisms*
- Why do you think Hope failed to tell her parents or educators about what was happening to her?
  - *Who do teenagers usually talk to about their experiences online? Why?*

- *If they do seek help, where do they seek assistance from? Why?*
- *How effective or ineffective are the available support systems? Why?*

Facilitators encourage participants to provide as much detail as possible when responding to questions!!

CLOSING ACTIVITY

STEP 6: For the closing activity, learners are instructed to come up with four slogans about preventing cyberbullying or being safe online which conveys a message they think is relevant for their friends and other young girls and boys. For this activity the learners could work in pairs or the group as a whole could generate these slogans (depending on the amount of time left).

- If working in pairs, the group is instructed to jot down their slogans on newsprint, which is later presented to the group.
- If working together as a whole, the facilitator is to jot down the slogans on newsprint as they are generated by the group.

Note to facilitator:
The focus on 'slogans' is meant to also make more apparent what messaging about social media and using it responsibly is likely to appeal to young girls and boys, thereby also revealing what the shortcomings are with current messages being conveyed to this age group and the resultant barriers/mismatch in translating knowledge into safe online practices.

STEP 7: Participants are given an opportunity to peruse the slogans and identify the ones they find most 'relevant and appealing'.

STEP 8: Thank participants for their participation.

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