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CYBER SAFETY AND BULLYING

Exploring the SpeakNow Youth Survey

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KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

Cyber safety

Over 75% of South Australian youth report using mobile phones and the internet frequently, and a similar proportion express concerns about online safety.

- Younger people have heightened concerns about stalking and cyber-bullying. This lessens as they get older, at the same time concerns increase about social networking privacy settings, lack of education about the risks of social networking, and underage use of social networking.
- Young females are much more likely than males to express concern about stalking and bullying. One third of all young people and 20% aged 12 to 15 years, reported using communication technology to send or receive explicit images. This activity was more common in those aged 16 to 25 years, and more common for males.

Bullying

Close to a third of young South Australians reported experiencing some form of bullying in 2009/2010.

- The experience of bullying was a major issue for South Australians aged 12 to 15 years, and to a slightly lesser extent for those aged 16 to 19 years. Bullying was less of an issue overall for young people aged 20 to 25. This is consistent with the finding that most bullying occurred at school.
- More females reported bullying across all age groups, with females at particular risk of online bullying.
- Bullying was more prevalent in country than metropolitan areas. Over one quarter of young women aged 20 to 25 years in country areas reported bullying, compared with 7% of young men. Bullying online and via mobile phones was higher for females living in the country.
- Young people reported relatively high rates of age discrimination, followed by gender and racial discrimination. Just under 10% reported discrimination based on sexuality and religion.

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1 INTRODUCTION

A recent Australian report entitled *High-Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and the Young*¹ found the widespread use of the internet by young Australians presents a range of cyber-safety concerns that should be addressed to keep young people safe online. The report found that children as young as five years old were using the internet in Australia. Children aged eight to nine years use the internet for an average of an hour a day, increasing to about three and a half hours per day for those in the 16 to 17 year age group. Approximately half (51%) of children aged 8 to 11 years accessed social networking sites compared to almost all (97%) young people aged 12 to 17 years.

Cyber safety is of particular concern for young people because they may not be alert to the issues of how the technology can be abused. The report highlighted three specific online safety concerns: cyber-stalking, online grooming and sexting. *Cyber stalking* includes sending unwanted and repeat emails, instant messages or SMS, publicising private information, or gaining unauthorised access to a victim's computer or internet account. Although difficult to estimate the prevalence of cyber stalking, it is thought to affect about 7% of online users. In a minority of cases, cyber stalking can develop into *online grooming* where an offender attempts to coerce a young user to meet them in person for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The prevalence of online grooming is also extremely difficult to estimate. Although any level of grooming is of concern, it is acknowledged that in the vast majority of cases the sexual abuse of children is independent of the internet. *Sexting* refers to the practice of sharing sexually explicit messages or photos via the internet or mobile phones. The report detailed several studies on sexting in Australia, with most studies finding that between 10% and 20% of young people had engaged in sexting in the past. However, the report also suggests that the practice of sexting appears to be under-reported.

While acknowledging the broader safety concerns around cyber stalking, online grooming and sexting, the report suggested that *cyber bullying* is the most serious risk faced by young people using information technology. Cyber bullying involves communication via the internet or mobile phone with the intention to embarrass, frighten, hurt or cause harm to another person. The report suggested that between 10% and 22% of young Australians aged 5 to 18 years had been the targets of cyber-bullying in the past year, and that females reported higher rates across all ages. Cyber bullying, like traditional bullying, can have a range of negative effects on young people including low self-esteem, low self-confidence, poorer school performance and psychological distress. However, the report noted the negative consequences of cyber bullying can be more severe than those associated with traditional bullying. Therefore, cyber bullying is one of the most serious issues that parents and policy makers need to address to protect young people online.

Below, we present information on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of young South Australians on cyber safety and bullying, collected in the *SpeakNow Youth Survey 2010*. The survey was published in the *EducationNow* section of *The Advertiser* (26th October 2010) and hosted on the *AdelaideNow* website (25th October to 9th November 2010). The survey was completed by 2,661 young South Australians aged 12 to 25 years of age. Data were weighted to be representative of the population of South Australian young people by age, gender and region (metro vs. country). The survey was supported by the Office for Youth (Government of South Australia).

¹ Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety, June 2011

2 CYBER SAFETY

2.1 USE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Use of communication technology by young people in South Australia is widespread. Indeed, 90% who completed the *SpeakNow Youth Survey* did so online. Over 75% reported using mobile phones and the internet frequently. While online, 71% use *Facebook*, 65% use email, 40% watch and share videos using *YouTube*, and 29% use internet messaging to chat with friends. Use of other social media sites was less common with just 9% using *Twitter* and 4% using *My Space*.

Use of communication technology increases with age but is still common among young people aged 12 to 15 years where 65% use a mobile phone and 67% use the internet frequently. About three-quarters of 16 to 19 years olds use mobile phones (77%) and the internet (74%) frequently. These figures increase further for those aged 20 to 25 years of age where 87% use a mobile phone and 85% use the internet frequently.

Internet use is similar for young males and females (76% vs. 79%) but mobile phone use is higher among young females than males (82% vs. 75%). Males and females differ in the types of social networking they use. Females are more likely than males to use *Facebook* (76% vs. 67%) but males are more likely than females to use internet messaging (32% vs. 26%) to chat with friends and *YouTube* to share videos (44% vs. 35%).

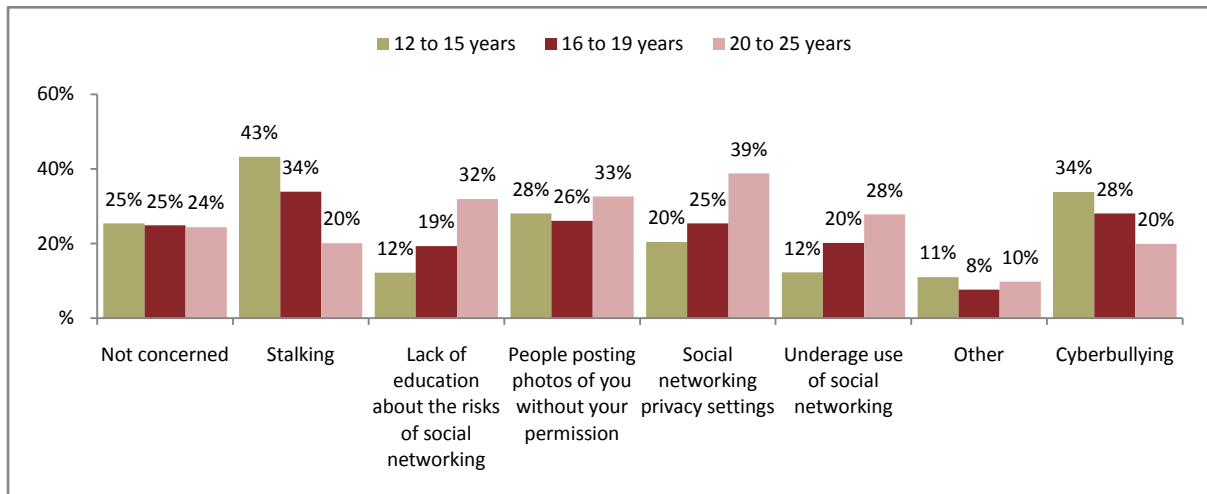
2.2 CONCERNS ABOUT CYBER SAFETY

Social networking can pose a threat to online safety because it is easy to obscure your identity. Young people chat to people they do not know personally assuming they are communicating with a peer. However, they could be talking to anyone. Other potential safety concerns online include posting private information and photos without consent, access to private information and cyber bullying.

Figure 1 presents results from the *SpeakNow* survey on key concerns South Australian young people have about online privacy and safety. Overall, about 75% have some concerns about online safety. Lack of education about the risk of social networks and privacy setting within these systems present a serious concern for all youth and increases in the older cohorts. Concerns about underage use of social networking also increases in the older groups, with younger users less concerned about their ability to remain safe while online. Young people of all ages expressed concerns about photos of themselves being posted without their consent and violating their privacy.

On a related topic, young people were asked whether they had ever received or sent explicit images, a phenomenon commonly referred to as 'sexting'. Just over 10% of respondents did not respond to this question. Of the 90% who did answer it, about one-third had received or sent explicit images. While this was more common among older youth, a substantial 20% of 12 to 15 year olds had sent or received explicit photos. This increased to 32% for 16 to 19 year olds and 43% of 20 to 25 year olds. More males reported receiving or sending explicit messages than females (40% vs. 27%) but there were no differences in this behaviour between youth living in metro and country areas.

Figure 1: Concerns about privacy and safety online by age

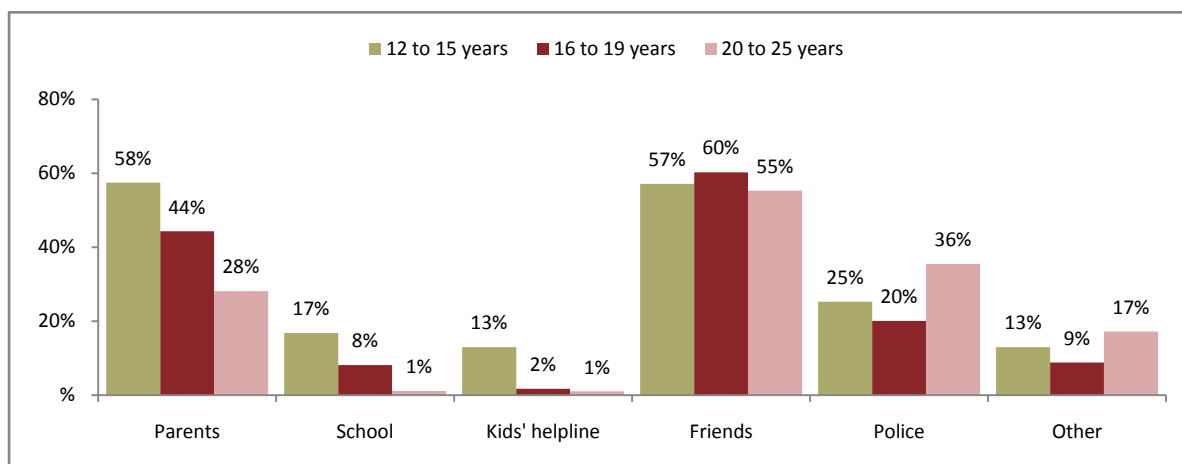


Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

Figure 1 shows that stalking and cyber bullying are the most common concerns in the 12 to 15 year old group with both issues becoming less of a concern with older age. Both stalking and cyber bullying present a serious safety concern for young people, and it is often the younger less experienced users with lower emotional maturity who are least able to deal with threats adequately. Females are more concerned about online security and privacy than males. For instance, 41% of young females are concerned about stalking compared to just 20% of males. Similarly, 34% of females are concerned about cyber bullying compared to just 18% of males.

The survey also addressed help-seeking behaviour if something occurred online that made them feel uncomfortable or scared. Figure 2 shows that the vast majority of young people would go to their friends if they had concerns about internet safety. While it is good that a large proportion of young people indicate that they would reach out to someone, it is not clear that their friends would know how best to help deal with the situation. Many respondents suggested they would tell their parents if something scared them online with this response most prevalent among younger groups. The older cohort of young people (20 to 25 years) was more likely to speak to the police than their parents. Some respondents indicated they would tell a teacher at school or contact the *Kid's helpline* with this most prevalent in the 12 to 15 year old group.

Figure 2: Help seeking behaviour for concerns about internet safety

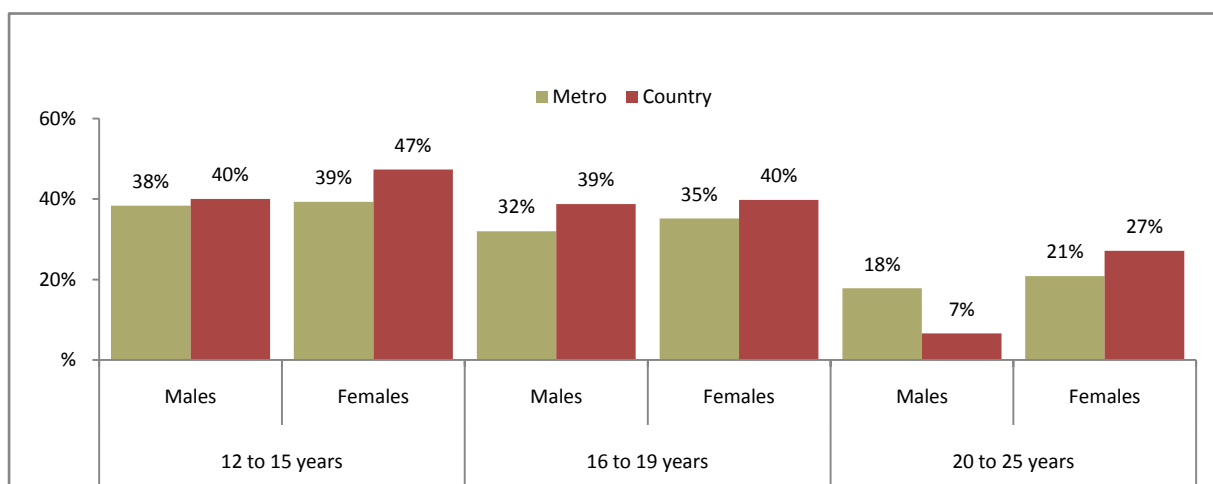


Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

3 BULLYING

A significant proportion (29%) of young people reported experiencing some form of bullying in the past 12 months. Figure 3 shows the extent of bullying by age, gender and region (metro vs. country). Bullying is very prevalent in the youngest age group with 38% to 47% of young people aged 12 to 15 year experiencing some form of bullying in the past 12-months. Bullying is still quite common in 16 to 19 year olds but becomes less common beyond 20 years of age. Bullying is more prevalent for females than males in all age groups and regions. Bullying is also more prevalent for young people living in the country than those living in metro areas. The only exception is males aged 20 to 25 years, where bullying is rare for those living in the country but more common in metro areas.

Figure 3: Proportion of people who had experience bullying in the past 12 months

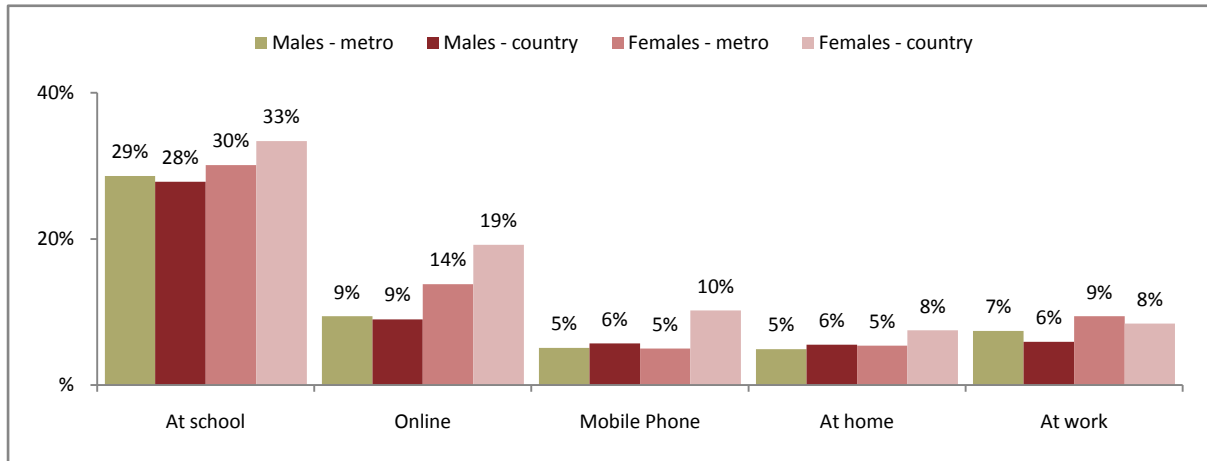


Note. These figures exclude the 9% of respondents who did not respond to this question.

Figure 4 shows the location where bullying occurred for those young people who reported experiencing bullying in the past 12 months. Most bullying occurred at school - a finding consistent with the fact that bullying is most prevalent among school aged young people (12 to 15 years). A significant proportion of bullying also occurred online, particularly for females. Fifteen percent of females had experienced bullying

online via *Facebook*, *Twitter* or instant messaging compared to 9% of all males. Bullying online and via mobile phones was higher for females living in the country (19% and 10%) than their metro counterparts (14% and 5%). Less than 10% of youth reported experiencing bullying at home or at work, and this was relatively consistent across gender and region.

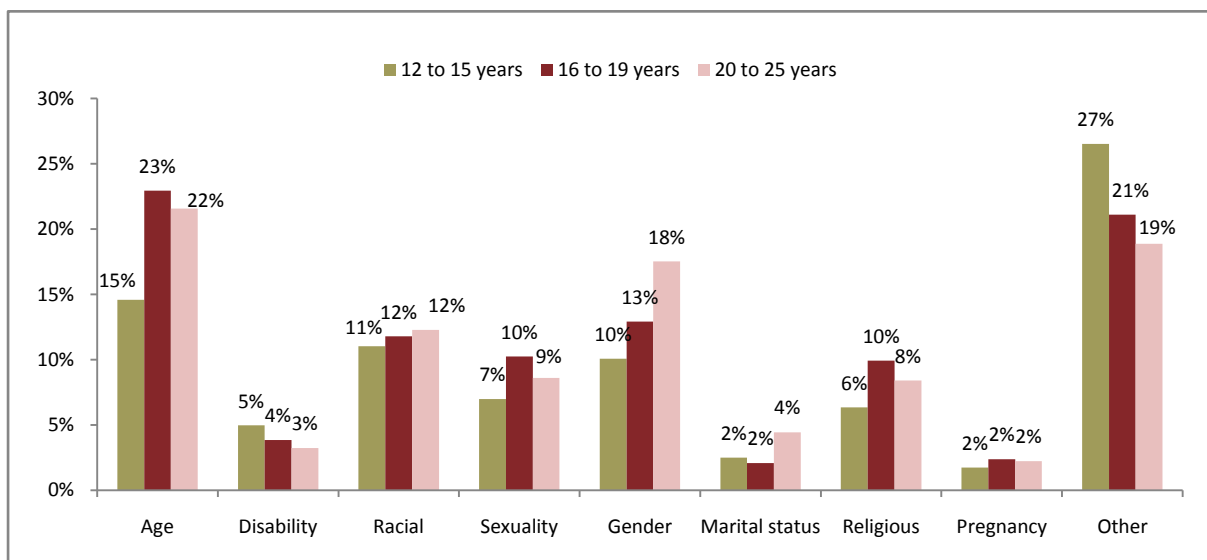
Figure 4: Location of bullying by gender and region



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

In addition to bullying, many young people reported experiencing some form of discrimination. Figure 5 shows the proportion who experienced discrimination by age group. About 20% experienced age discrimination and this increased in older age groups. Gender discrimination impacted 14% of young people and this also increased sharply with older age. Gender discrimination was reported by more females (21%) than males (8%). Racial discrimination was more prevalent for males compared to females (14% vs. 10%) and in metro areas compared with regional areas (13% vs. 8%). About 9% of young people reported experiencing discrimination based on their sexuality or religion. A relatively small number of young people reported discrimination based on disabilities, marital status or pregnancy. However, a significant proportion (22%) reported experiencing some 'other' form of discrimination.

Figure 5: Types of discrimination experienced by age



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.