

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION ON ONLINE SAFETY

In June 2022, the Sunlight Alliance for Action (AfA) conducted a series of focus group discussions with females, males, youths, parents, and educators on the issue of online harms. These sought to qualitatively better understand perceptions towards gender-based online harms and develop recommendations to guide programme and content owners on tailored initiatives to educate different target segments (e.g., parents, youths) on online safety.

WHAT ARE GENDER-BASED ONLINE HARMS (GBOH)?



Use of the Internet to engage in activities that result in harm or suffering to a person or a group of people online or offline, due to one's gender (e.g., cyberbullying or using a fake identity to befriend others online).

HOW SAFE DO PEOPLE FEEL FROM ONLINE HARMS?

Generally, people believe that they know and are doing enough to protect themselves from GBOH, and that these harms are unlikely to happen to them. However, they recognise that some groups are more vulnerable.

HAVING A SENSE OF CONTROL

Greatly impacts how safe people feel from online harms.

FEMALES

- More likely to feel targeted by GBOH of a sexual nature (e.g., unsolicited explicit images, unwelcomed sexual advances)
- May suffer greater emotional impact
- Experience more severe social stigma



MALES

- Less likely to feel targeted by GBOH
- Tend to be desensitised to GBOH due to factors such as hypersexuality and influence of porn culture
- More likely to be concerned about monetary loss from online harms than personal safety

CHILDREN AND YOUTHS

- Have basic online safety knowledge from cyber wellness education, but feel less safe online than adults
- May suffer greater emotional impact than adults when faced with harmful content
- Value peer approval highly and are at greater risk of social pressure at a younger age



PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

- Concerned about the online safety of children and youths as they are more susceptible to GBOH at a younger age
- Feel that children and youths' ability to process emotions in a healthy manner is still developing
- Find it challenging to supervise youths who prefer to be independent and desire privacy

MORE VULNERABLE SEGMENTS



Individuals in need of emotional connection



Lower-income families



Individuals who share a lot of their personal information online

WHAT WOULD PEOPLE DO IF THEY FACE ONLINE HARMS?

MOST COMMON

LEAST COMMON

INVOLVES SELF

- Ignore, block and report abusive user or content to platform
- Search for help-seeking resources when they need help

INVOLVES OTHERS

- Confide in someone e.g., peers

INVOLVES INSTITUTIONS/ ORGANISATIONS

- Go to teachers / counsellors
- Report to authorities

HOW CAN PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMES ON ONLINE HARMS BE TAILORED FOR KEY TARGET GROUPS?

CHILDREN

Focus on positive and preventive education



- Emphasise values education and online etiquette
- Create greater awareness on how to stay safe online and identify red flags
- Educate on how to respond when faced with uncomfortable situations online
- Initiate conversations to help them understand the consequences of their actions online

YOUTHS

Have open conversations to help youths internalise the ways to deal with and prevent online harms



- Share real-life testimonies from youth survivors
- Critical thinking and situational analysis exercises to work through possible impact and solutions
- General education efforts to reinforce awareness and nudges on social media and gaming platforms which youths are already using
- Schools can work with community partners to engage students on cyber wellness topics

PARENTS

Equip and update parents with knowledge and skills to support their children's online safety effectively



- Community partners can work with schools to engage parents and share bite-sized information and relevant trends
- Provide resources on having conversations with children on cyber wellness matters
- Increase awareness of the impact of online harms
- Increase awareness of resources that they can refer to for post-harm support

HOW CAN ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES BETTER FACILITATE POST-HARM SUPPORT?



MAKE SAFETY RESOURCES ACCESSIBLE

Ensure that victims and bystanders know where they can access relevant resources after experiencing GBOH

- Raise awareness of relevant resources that victims and bystanders can refer to

USEFUL CONTENT AREAS FOR VICTIMS AND BYSTANDERS:

- Information on what behaviours can constitute GBOH
- Resources on helping victims identify next steps e.g., hotlines, counselling services
- Survivors' testimonials
- A guide on how to support victims, e.g., identify signs of distress, ways to support victims



CREATE A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE

Encourage conversations which shape a supportive culture towards victims

- Start conversations to spotlight harmful attitudes commonly held against victims (e.g., victim blaming)
- Promote greater self-awareness when discussing online harms and empathy for victims
- Shift mindsets to hold perpetrators of online harms responsible for their actions
- Critical to engage parents on the topic of online harms and how they can support children who have been affected