Australian Government

Office of the
eSafety Commissioner

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STATE OF PLAY—YOUTH, KIDS AND DIGITAL DANGERS

OFFICE OF THE ESAFETY COMMISSIONER

Contents

Research@eSafety

Under Section 15 of the *Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015*, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner (the Office) has the following research functions, to:

- support, encourage, conduct and evaluate research about online safety for Australians
- collect, analyse, interpret and disseminate information relating to online safety
- publish reports and papers relating to online safety for Australians.

The Office's research program is underpinned by four key themes including:

1. tracking trends
2. supporting the development of Office resources and programs
3. inter-agency and international co-operation
4. program and resource evaluation.

This research fits under themes 1 and 2.

Data sources

Data in this report about young people is drawn from the Office's 2017 Youth Digital Participation Survey. This survey comprised a random sample of more than 3,000 young people in Australia aged 8–17 and collected information on their online safety experiences and behaviours in the 12 months to June 2017.

Data on the online experiences of adults was taken from a survey of 500 people aged 18 years and over, exploring their personal experiences in the 12 months to December 2017.

Desk research was also conducted to provide additional context for key survey findings. Readers should note that the desk research is not exhaustive, with citations included to provide additional examples.

Other research relating to young people

A range of other research reports have also been published by the Office drawing on data from the 2017 Youth Digital Participation survey. These include:

- Young people and sexting—attitudes and behaviours, December 14 2017
- State of play—youth and online gaming in Australia, March 5 2018.

Research published by the Office is available online at esafety.gov.au/about-the-office/research-library

For any enquiries relating to the Office research program, please contact research@esafety.gov.au

Introduction

Young people aged 8–17

The internet is an integral part of the digital lives of young people in Australia, with most going online regularly to learn, keep in touch with friends and have fun. Born into an already web-connected world, kids and teens have been using the internet for the majority of their lives and, for them, not being online is simply unthinkable and unavoidable.

However, engaging online can be confronting in terms of having to deal with the behaviours of others who may not necessarily value or relate to the need for respect online. This report examines the online experiences of young people using of a number of key questions:

- What actions do young people take to manage their social media?
- What level of contact do they have with strangers online?
- How significant is the sharing of personal information online with strangers?
- What are their attitudes and behaviours towards sharing their personal passwords and in what circumstances does this occur?
- What are their negative experiences online and how do they deal with them?
- What are impacts of these experiences and what can be learnt from them?

Definition of 'kids' and 'teens'

For this report, when examining the online experiences and behaviours of kids and teens, the age ranges of 8–12 have been used for kids, and 13–17 for teens. This is to better align the analysis in this report with recommended user age on the majority of social media sites.

Adults aged 18 years and over

While this report seeks to focus on the online experiences and behaviours of young people, it is important to ask the question: Are the 'bad things' that happen online predominantly confined to the young?

Adults, particularly young adults, are just as active online as young people in Australia. If young people and adults are experiencing similar negative experiences this has broader implications for trust and confidence in digital society. Findings that show this would have a range of implications about the need to build digital resilience throughout life.

Key findings

This report highlights a number of key themes in relation to the online challenges facing young people age 8–17:

- They are exposed to a wide range of issues online from unwanted contact to bullying and deal with these issues in a range of ways.
- While negative experiences can be hurtful, young people also report positive outcomes from these experiences in terms of increased awareness of online risks and ways of dealing with issues when they arise.
- Young people are not alone in having to deal with the unpleasant aspects of online participation with adults also experiencing similar challenges. This is a reflection of the importance of ongoing learning to build digital resilience and respect online.

More detailed findings:

Approximately 68% of young social media users manage and curate their social media profiles in a range of ways. Specifically:

- 46% blocked or unfriended someone, 46% increased privacy settings, 43% ensured location details were not automatically set and 36% and 22% respectively removed comments they, or others, had made.

Young social media users encounter a variety of negative experiences online including:

- being contacted by strangers/someone they did not know, 25%
- being left out by others, 21%
- having mean things said about them/called names, 19%
- receiving repeated unwanted online messages from someone, 13%
- having lies/rumours spread about them, 13%.

Young people more often use informal channels to deal with online issues including:

- telling a family member—parents (55%), siblings (15%)
- blocking the offending social media account, 37%
- telling friends, 28%
- reporting it to the website or social media company, 12%.

Nearly 6 in 10 respondents who reported a negative experience online in the 12 month assessment period identified emotional and/or psychological impacts as a result, reporting:

- I did not feel good about myself, 36%
- I felt anger, fear, helpless, without power, 35%
- I felt left out/I lost some of my friends, 24%
- My reputation was damaged, 11%
- I didn't feel close to my family and/or friends, 9%.

A similar proportion also reported positive outcomes from these experiences:

- I became more aware of online risks, 40%
- I became more aware of who my real friends are, 33%
- I learnt to use the internet in a more balanced way, 23%
- I developed a greater understanding of my own behaviour online, 19%

- I became more able to overcome problems that I experienced online, 14%.

Young people also report behaving badly towards their peers online:

- In the 12 months, 20% of young people reported that they had behaved negatively towards others online with the range of behaviours including calling someone names, deliberately excluding people, spreading lies or rumours, etc.
- The overwhelming majority of these young people (9 in 10) also reported having negative online experiences themselves during the same period.

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Social media usage

Making and maintaining social connections are a central feature of growing up and becoming an adult (Abrams, Weick, Thomas, Colbe, & Franklin, 2011). For young people, this is increasingly achieved through online engagement. As digital natives, social media and digital technologies have become an integral aspect of the culture, education and lived experience of young people today (Allen, Ryan, Gray, McInerney, & Waters, 2014).

The upside and downside of social media

Previous research published by the Office shows that young people have what can be described as a 'love-hate' relationship with social media and, as Table 1 shows, recognise its upside and downside.

Table 1: Young people's perspectives on the upside and downside of social media

Upside (+)	Downside (-)
○ Keeping connected to friends and family—76%	○ Nasty comments—45%
○ Entertainment—69%	○ Inappropriate or hurtful content—36%
○ Keeping up to date—45%	○ Nothing—30%
○ Planning social life—30%	○ Feeling they have to keep checking it—23%
○ Self-expression—26%	○ Fear of missing out—18%

Base=Social media users aged 8–17. Source: *Research insights: Young and social online,* Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016. (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2016)

Office research is further supported by other studies which have shown that the ubiquitous nature in which young people use social media gives them greater opportunities to connect, communicate and interact with each other and improve their technical skills (Davis, 2012) (Abrams et al., 2011) (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). For example, there is evidence that social media has:

- helped young people broaden their friendship groups by allowing them to connect with peers regardless of their physical location or time of day (Davis, 2012)
- allowed lonely students to feel less shy and more comfortable about chatting online rather than face-to-face and feel that they belonged to a group (Bonetti, Campbell, & Gilmore, 2010)
- satisfied young people's social identity needs and fed their efforts to develop healthy and positive self-images (Gajaria, Yeung, Goodale, & Charach, 2011) (Barker, 2012).

However, there is also recognition that social media has contributed toward a range of negative consequences. A number of media reports have reflected on the 'compulsive' relationship people can develop with social media and its platform features (Lewis , 2017) (Hern , 2018).These concerns have also been raised in academic literature. For example, while not yet recognised as a disorder, recent reviews of social network addiction studies have found that between 2% and 10% of those surveyed were problematic users of social media (Marino, Gini, Vieno, & Spada, 2018). It was also the case that within this group, there was a positive correlation with psychological distress, including anxiety and depression as well as a small negative correlation between social media use and psychological well-being (Marino et al., 2018).

Adverse consequences of social media use have also been observed in some studies that have measured the academic performance of users. These have found a correlation between increased social media use and procrastination leading to poorer academic performance (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011) (Junco, 2012) (Panek, 2013) (Meier, Reinecke, & Meltzer, 2016).

Beyond the compulsive tendencies of social media and its effects on academic performance, the fact that young people are still mastering tasks such as impulse control, emotional regulation and the assessment of consequences and risks (Steinberg, 2008) also means that they face a number of other issues stemming from having access to social media and being online (Lareki, Martinez de Morentin, Altuna, & Amenabar, 2017). Some have already been explored by the Office such as sexting (SWGFL/UK Safer Internet Centre, University of Plymouth, Netsafe, Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2017) and others form part of the present report—e.g. negative online experiences, handling personal data and online safety. Further risks reported include grooming; social isolation; access and exposure to inappropriate content; identity theft and exposure to online marketing.

Take up of social media services

Our research highlighted what social media services young people used in Australia. In cases such as the use of YouTube, having a profile is not necessary to gain access to content. From this perspective, use of social media by kids and young people in Australia is almost ubiquitous with a broad range of services being accessed (Table 2). Young people make use of multiple social media services, on average 3 for kids and 5 for teens.

Considering social media sites individually, Table 2 shows the social media services used by young people in Australia in the year to June 2017. The table also highlights the variation in popularity of these services among key age ranges which closely reflect recommended cut-off ages for use of particular social media services.

Table 2: Social media services used in the 12 months to June 2017

	Kids	Teens	Total
YouTube	80%	86%	83%
Facebook	26%	75%	50%
Instagram	24%	70%	47%
Snapchat	26%	67%	46%
Google+	23%	29%	26%
WhatsApp	13%	22%	17%
Twitter	7%	25%	16%
Pinterest	8%	22%	15%
Musical.ly	15%	9%	12%
Tumblr	2%	14%	8%
Kik	3%	10%	7%
Reddit	2%	9%	6%
Something else	6%	5%	5%
AskFM	1%	2%	2%
Myspace	2%	2%	2%
Houseparty	1%	2%	1%
Keek	Less than 1%	1%	Less than 1%

YouTube was used by consistently high numbers of both kids and teens. For the other sites and services, there was an expected difference between the patronage of kids and teenagers. As young people age they are more likely to go about expanding their social identity online and meet requirements for setting up user profiles to access these services. Table 2 shows that around 26% of those aged 8–12 use certain social media sites (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Skype) despite the age restrictions these platforms place as part of their terms of use[1]. These restrictions have been established in order to comply with the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act*—a US law prohibiting websites from collecting information of children younger than 13 years without parental permission. Our findings therefore show that parents and guardians have an important role to play in assessing a child's maturity, agency and ability to deal with the content and contacts that they may be exposed to while online.

The Office's survey also confirmed previous findings around the gender differences in social media use. Lenhart et al. (2015), for example, reported that girls in the United States were more likely than boys to participate in visually oriented social media platforms. In an Australian context, our findings reflect this too, with girls more likely to use sites like Instagram (52% vs 42% for boys), Snapchat (53% vs 39% for boys) and Pinterest (23% vs 8% for boys). Other popular social media sites among girls include Musical.ly (18% vs 6% for boys) and Tumblr (12% vs 4% for boys). Boys on the other hand were more likely to use sites such as YouTube (85% vs 81% of girls) and Reddit (8% vs 4% for girls).

Managing social media privacy

When people update their social media profiles, they are producing online repositories of accessible self-representations (De Wolf, Willaert, & Pierson, 2014). They do so despite being aware of the potential hazardous consequences linked to social comparison, jealousy and conflict (Osatuyi, Passerini, Ravarini, & Grandhi, 2018). Motivations to update social media include pursuing visibility, affirmation and to avoid feeling alone or forgotten (Jeong & Kim, 2017). Straddling this line between risks and rewards, people on social media engage in a range of strategies to maintain their privacy while online. Often this involves managing a combination of privacy settings, considering social network size, and chosen degree of self-disclosure (Lankton, McKnight, & Tripp 2017). With a particular focus on Facebook, Lankton et al. (2017) have found evidence that users can be classified according to the level of privacy settings on their social media profiles, as seen in Table 3.

[1] Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat requires that users be aged 13 years and over. YouTube requires that account holders be 18 years and over but those that are 13 and up can sign up with parental permission.

Table 3. Social media users by privacy settings

User type	***Features***
Disclose very publicly and have large networks	They have less restrictive privacy settings and are concerned about being accepted in the short term rather than about their privacy.
Disclose little and have large networks	They have less restrictive privacy settings and engage in self-censorship by posting benign information to avoid reputational damage.
Disclose to a large network	They use restrictive privacy settings selectively across different social groups and are concerned with acquiring power, control and status.
Disclose little to small networks	They use more privacy settings and use social media for reasons other than making an impression or social connection. Their passive use of social media is more akin to content consumption.

Academic literature has shown a number of factors to be associated with different privacy maintenance behaviours. These include:

- One's privacy concerns*:* Feng & Xie (2014) found that a parent's privacy concerns and a teenager's increased social media use increased that young persons' online privacy concerns. The authors, along with Litt (2013), found that people with greater privacy concerns engaged with more technological privacy tools than those that did not.

- One's awareness of social network privacy features*:* Wisniewski, Knijnenburg, & Lipford (2017) confirmed that awareness of privacy features predicted their adoption. They showed that while those with greater expertise tended to use the most privacy features, this was not always the case. Employing fewer protective strategies was an informed decision for some of these users. In addition, social media novices also did not always use the fewest or most basic privacy features. Instead, they were more likely to seek out and use privacy mechanisms that accomplished specific goals such as selectively sharing information.

- One's experience on social network platforms*:* Litt (2013) found that accounting for motivational and background factors, those who most often used social network sites, were more likely to engage with more privacy tools. This was true for those that used social networks several times a day compared to those that used them less often than once a week.

- Having experienced a prior privacy breach*:* Litt (2013) confirmed previous findings which found that those users that have had turbulent online experiences use more technological privacy tools than those who have not experienced regret or negativity online. Moreover, Osatuyi et al.(2018) found that there were differences between people who had suffered a privacy breach and those who had not. The latter were more likely to disclose more shallow information.

- Demographic factors*:* Feng and Xie (2014) found that girls and older teens implement more privacy setting strategies than boys and younger teens. Litt (2013) also found that

males used a less diverse set of technological privacy tools than females even when privacy concerns and experience on social networking sites was controlled for.

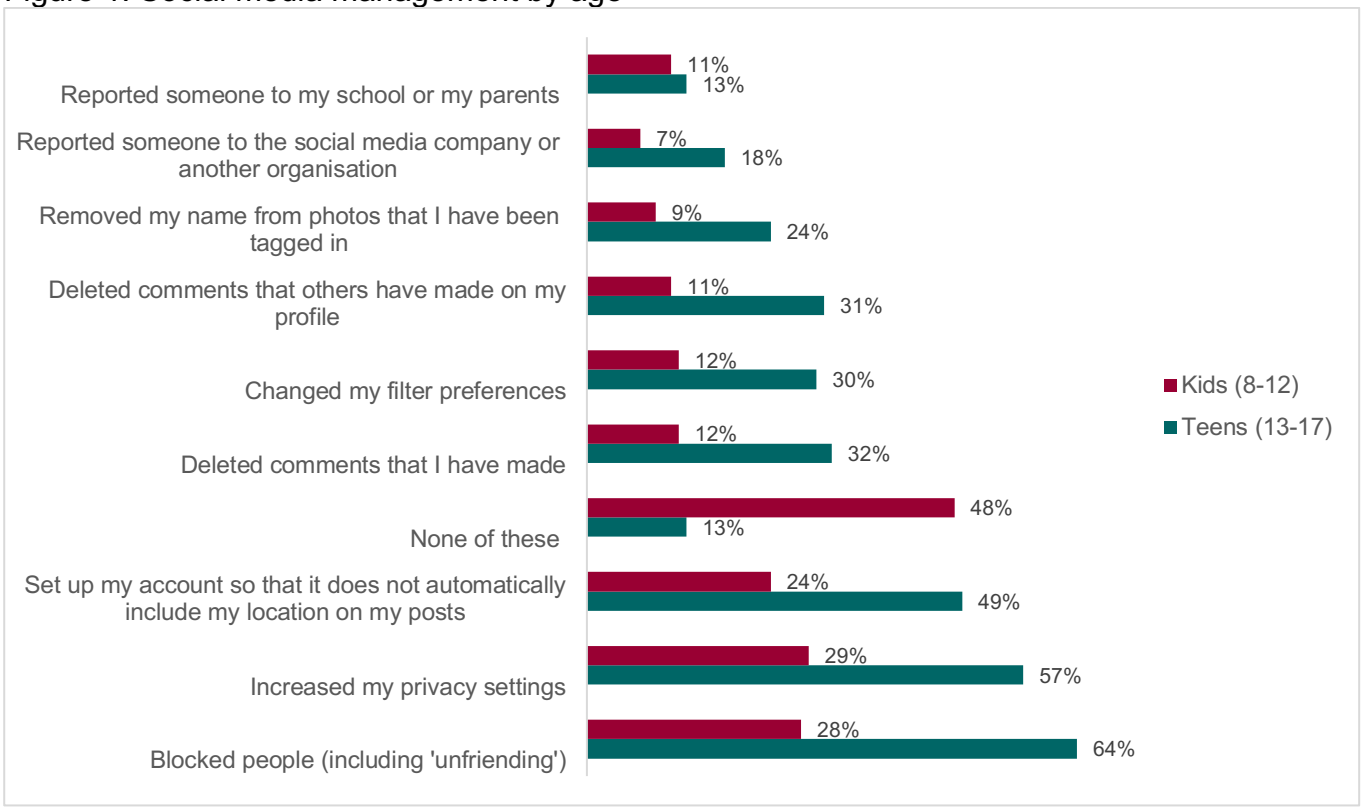
Excluding formal reporting to social media sites or schools and parents, our survey shows that 68% of young people who use social media in Australia have tried to actively manage their online privacy through privacy settings in the 12 month period. As Table 4 shows, young people's social media use is reflected in a number of actions targeted towards managing their online presence.

Table 4. Actions taken to manage young people's social media presence

Action	**Total**
Blocked people (including 'unfriending')	46%
Increased my privacy settings	43%
Set up my account so that it does not automatically include my location on my posts	36%
Deleted comments that I have made	22%
Changed my filter preferences	21%
Deleted comments that others have made on my profile	21%
Removed my name from photos that I have been tagged in	16%
Reported someone to the social media company or another organisation	13%
Reported someone to my school or my parents	12%
None of these	31%

While a large majority of young people actively manage their online digital presence, our survey also shows that there are some key differences in terms of the degree to which different age groups do so. Figure 1 highlights the differences in how kids and teens manage their online social media presence.

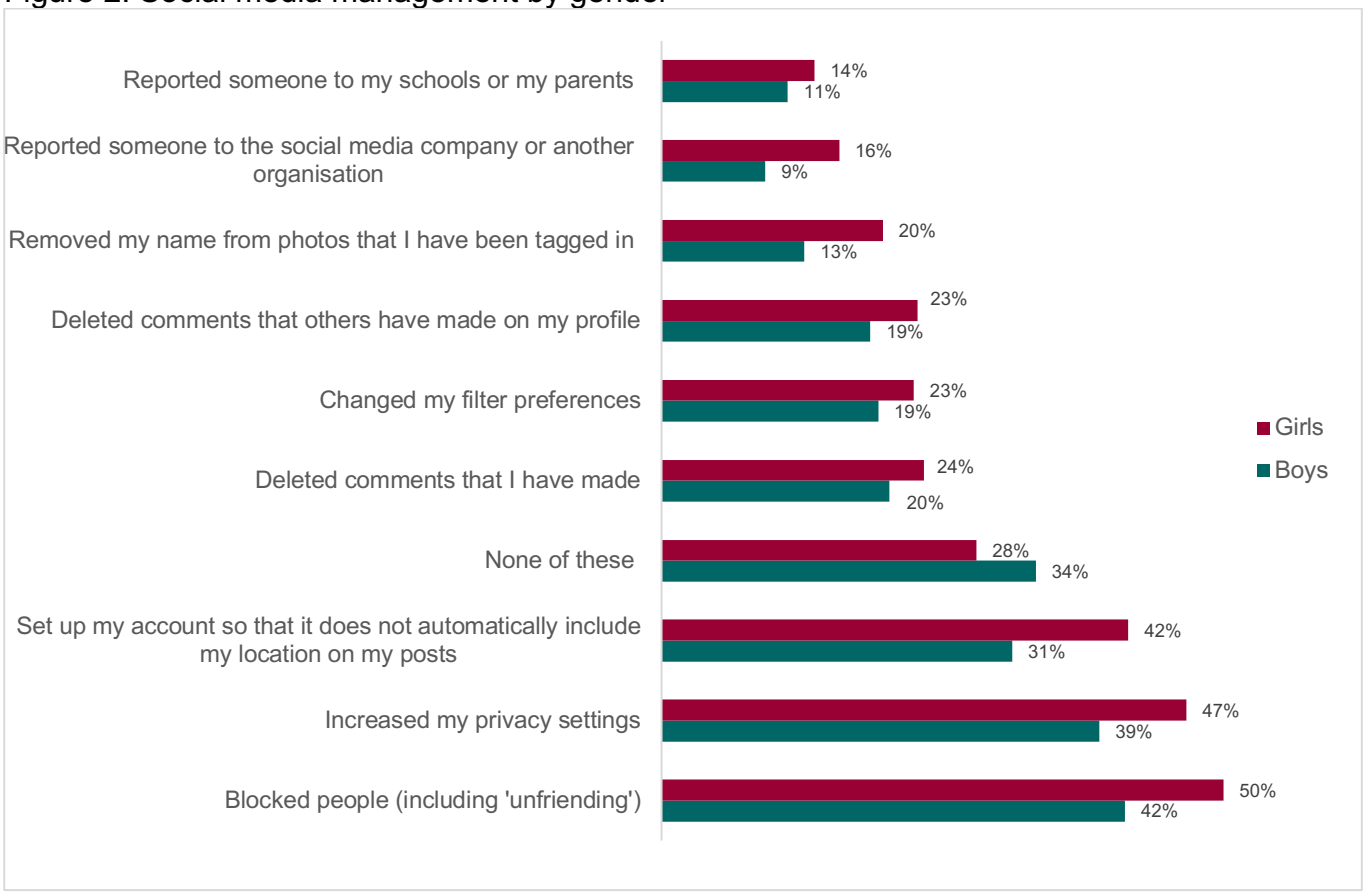
Figure 1: Social media management by age



Base=Young people using social media.

Nearly half of kids between the ages of 8 and 12 have not actively managed their online presence via social media. In addition, kids were significantly less likely than teens to undertake a number of tasks in order to stay safe online. These include blocking people (28% vs 64% of teenagers) as well as untagging themselves from photos shared by others (9% vs 24%). Reflecting previous findings around privacy management on social media sites, there were also differences between boys and girls. Figure 2 shows that girls are significantly more vigilant than boys in managing their online presence.

Figure 2. Social media management by gender



Base=Young people using social media.

Young people in special needs groups such as those with a disability and those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds are more active in their management of social media than the general population of young people. Around 72% of people identifying in both of these groups had actively managed their social media presence compared to around 67% for other social media users.

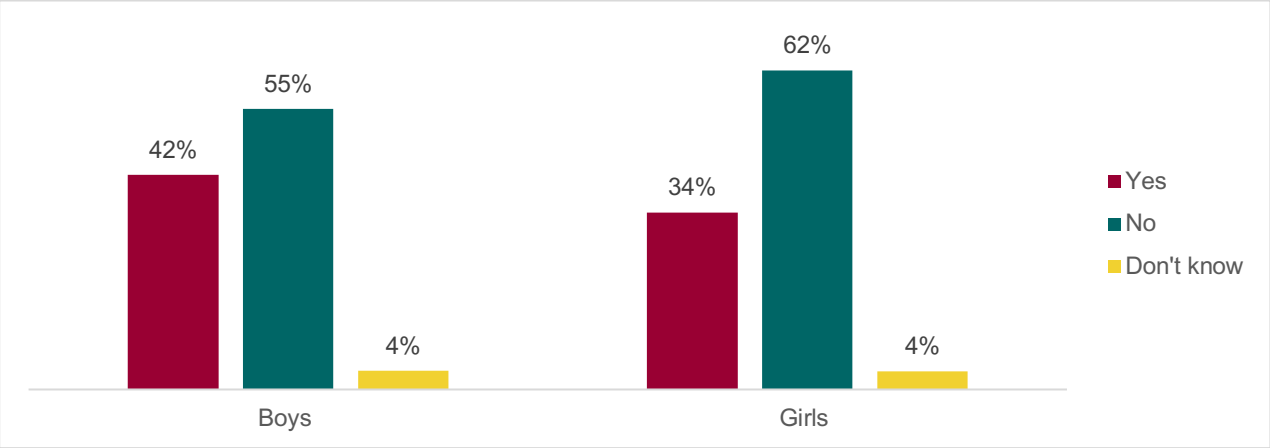
Contact with strangers

Young peoples' online presence and tailored self-representation across multiple social networking sites enables them to connect with others and broaden their social circle to include online strangers. Despite the fact that most of these interactions are harmless, they are often perceived as risky by both the public and researchers alike (Cernikova, Dedkova, & Smahel, 2018). An overly dominant focus on risky interactions, such as unwelcomed and potentially abusive adult contact overlooks the many other possible ways that young people can meet a stranger online. There are a number of services that young people use regularly where they get in touch with unknown people. These include social

networking sites, online games, video sharing sites as well as blogging and discussion sites (Cernikova et al., 2018).

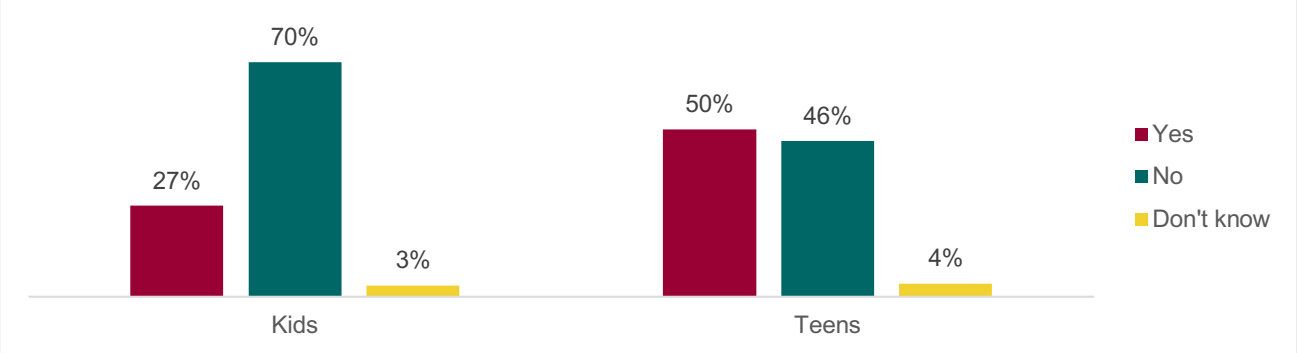
Reflecting this commonality, our survey findings show that around 38% of young people in Australia aged 8 to 17 had used the internet to talk or chat to someone that they did not previously know in the 12 months to June 2017. As Figure 3 shows, boys were significantly more likely to engage in this type of behaviour than girls.

Figure 3: Talking to strangers online by gender



This aspect of young peoples' online presence was significantly more common in older respondents—with teens almost twice as likely as kids to talk to a stranger online. As Figure 4 shows, around one in two teens (50%) talked to a stranger online compared to just over one in four of all kids (27%).

Figure 4: Talking to strangers online by age



Engaging in online conversations with strangers differed for young people coming from a CALD background or those with a disability. The survey showed that around 37% of young people who were not from a CALD background or did not have a disability had talked to someone they did not know online. In comparison, around half (50%) of those with a disability and 44% of those from a CALD background reported that they had done so.

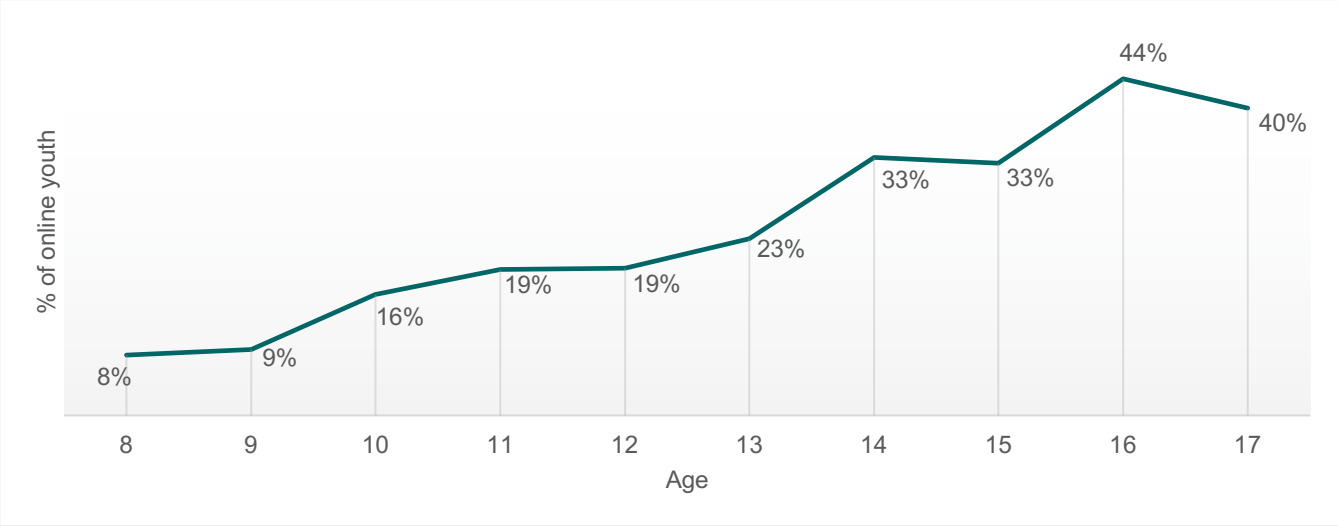
Making friends with people they first met online

With increasing intensity of interactions, young people can turn initial exchanges with online strangers into real world and online friendships (Cernikova et al., 2018). Qualitative studies have shown that as they move from non-verbal interactions to initial contact, communication and face-to-face meetings, young people often evaluate their interactions with online strangers to see if they are going to be problematic, and need to be stopped.

In doing so, they generally look for clues that suggest similarity, such as mutual friendships, and engage in conversations that are not perceived as inappropriate (Cernikova, et al., 2018).

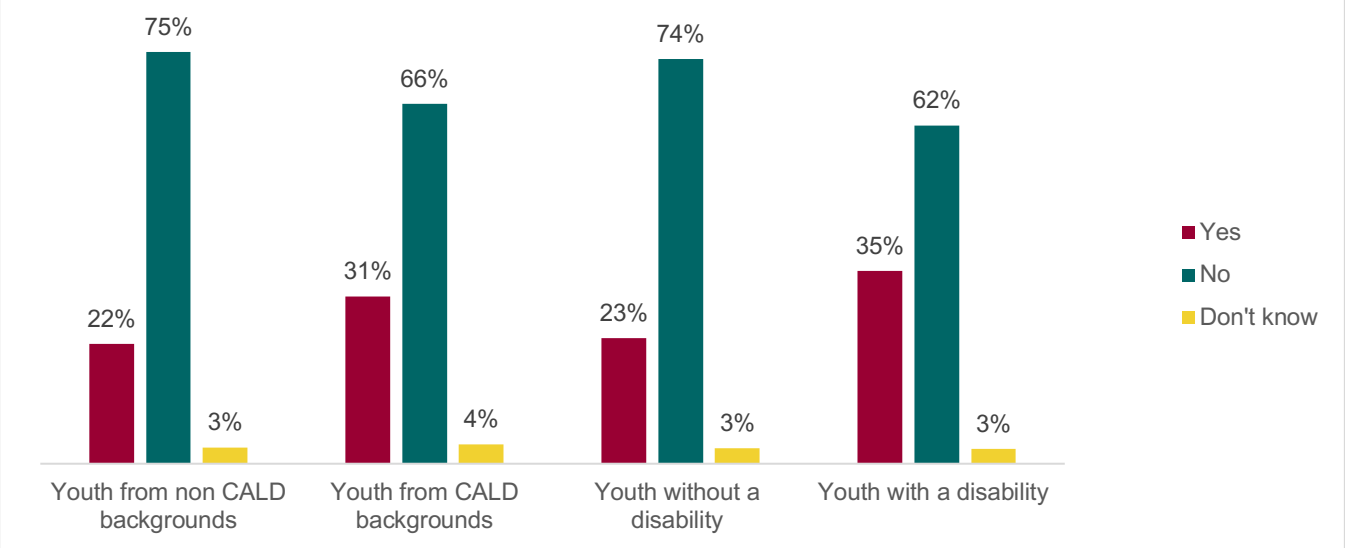
Overall, our survey findings show that around 24% of Australian young people had made friends with someone they met on the internet in the past year. While there was no observable difference between boys and girls, teens were more than twice as likely as kids to make online friends (34% of teens vs 14% of kids). Figure 5 highlights how making friends with people online increases with age.

Figure 5: Young people making friends with people they first met online



It was also the case that those from a CALD background as well as those with a disability demonstrated a significantly greater preference for making friends online in comparison to other groups (Figure 6). A total of 35% of those with a disability had made friends with someone they had first met online along with 31% of those from a CALD background.

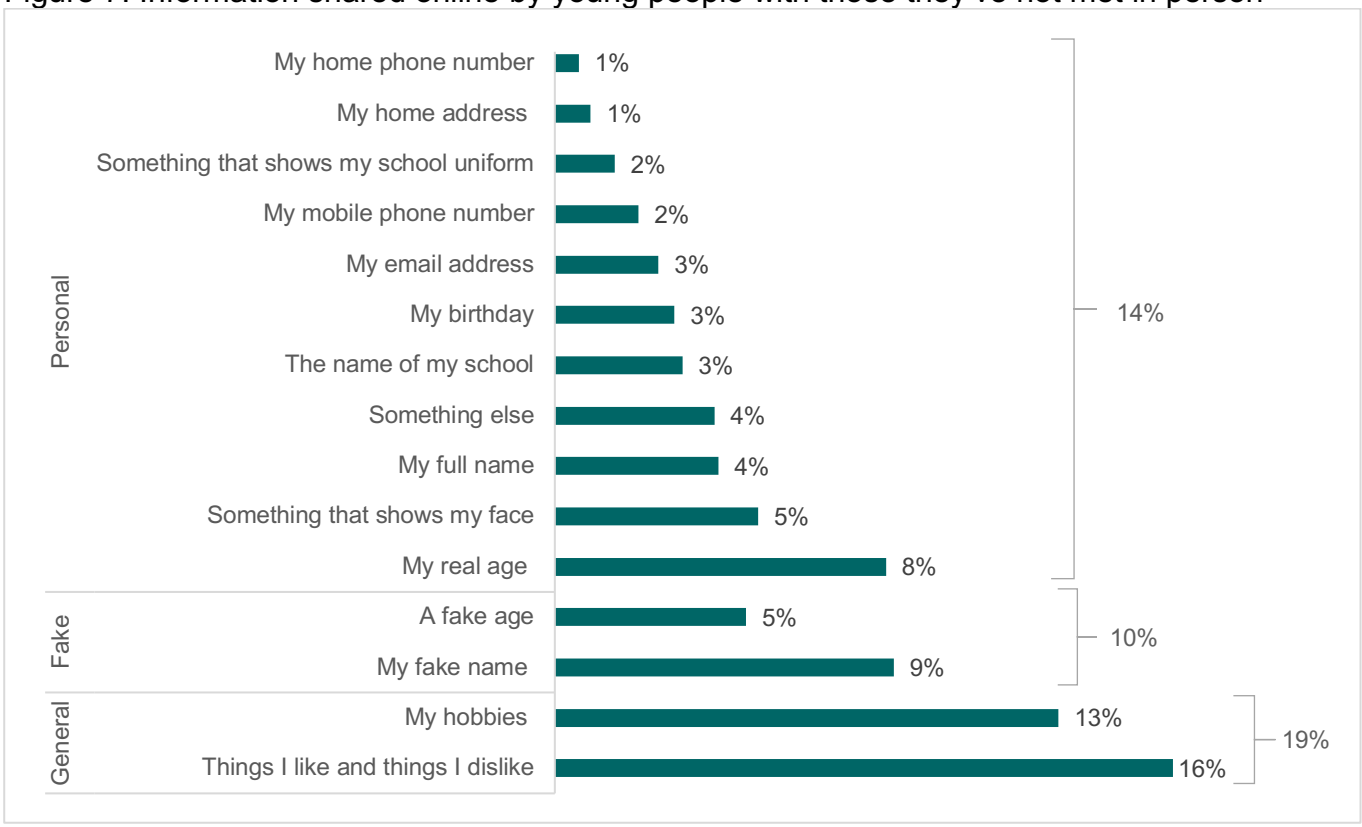
Figure 6: Making friends with people they first met online by CALD and disability status



Information shared online

Online communication promotes self-disclosure (Kashian, Jang, Yun Shin, Dai, & Walther, 2017). When engaging online, people have been shown to use more interactive strategies —self disclosure and question asking—to reduce uncertainty about others than those who use face-to-face communication (Schouten, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009) (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). In addition, people perceive the same self-disclosure to be more intimate when it is received online than when it is received face-to-face (Jian, Bazarova, & Hancock, 2013). Unprompted, people also display relatively personal information on dating and social media profiles like political and religious views, age, work history and hobbies.(Nosko, Wood, & Molema, 2010). Results from our survey (Figure 7) show that the type of information young people shared with people they have not met in person included general, personal and not surprisingly, fake information.

Figure 7: Information shared online by young people with those they've not met in person

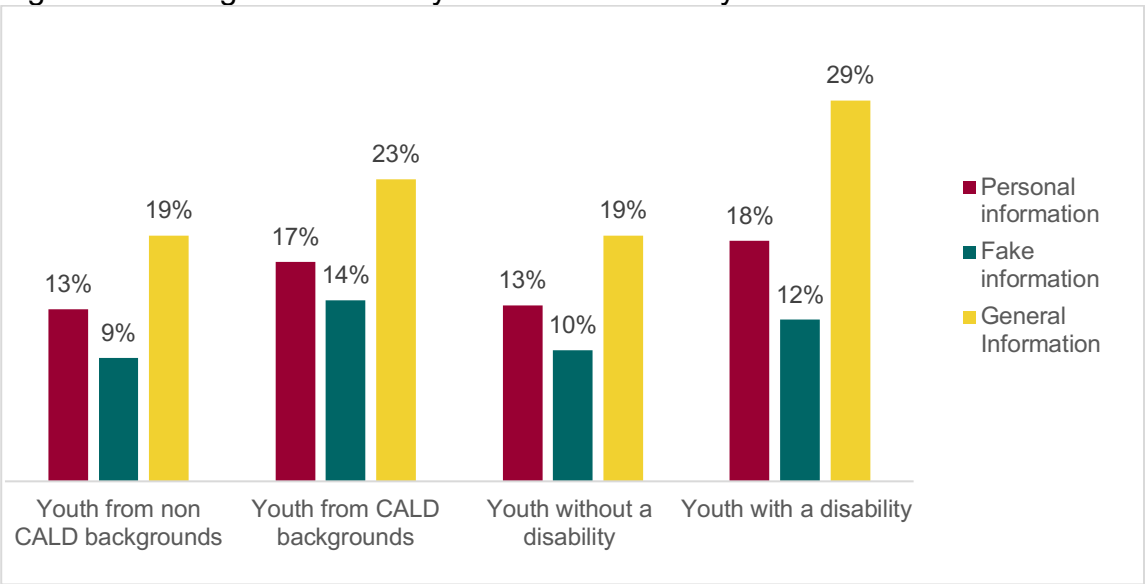


Our findings point to a number of demographic differences in the type of information being shared online. A slightly higher proportion of girls revealed personal information (15% vs 13% for boys) and boys revealed fake information (12% vs 8% for girls). In addition, teens were more likely to disclose information about themselves than kids:

- general information—26% vs 12% for kids
- personal information—19% vs 9% for kids
- fake information—12% vs 9% for kids.

Greater self-disclosure was also a trademark of young people from certain groups such as those from a CALD background or those with a disability. As evidenced by Figure 8, a higher proportion of these groups shared general, personal and fake information than their respective counterparts.

Figure 8 Sharing information by CALD and disability status

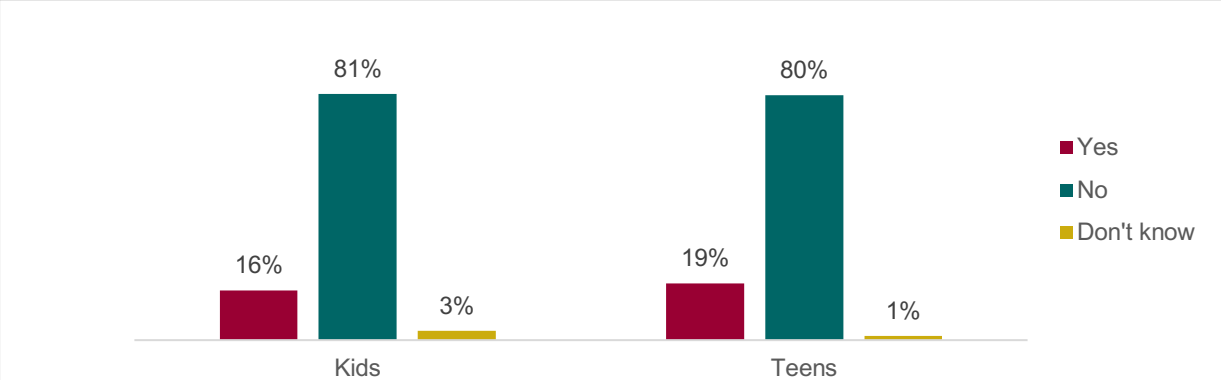


Password sharing

Previous research has found that the practice of password sharing is quite common among young people. Lenhart et al.(2011) found that around 30% of US teens shared a password with a friend or significant other and that this is more common among girls and older teens. Byrne et al (2016) and Lareki et al (2017) found though that for teens, password sharing was perceived as one of the riskiest online behaviours. Exploring this apparent paradox, young people have been shown to both routinely underestimate the degree of risk that sharing one's password carries—compared to assessments made by internet experts (Byrne, et al., 2016)—and to reveal passwords in exchange for a small reward or as consequence of a range of persuasive techniques (e.g. reciprocity) (Happ, Melzer, & Steffgen, 2016). Moreover, many young people have also grown up sharing their passwords with their parents (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). In using the language of 'trust' to frame password sharing as a mechanism of protection by parents, many young people have concluded that to trust means to share and to share means to trust (Marwick & Boyd, 2014). Young people thus share passwords and other information with their peers knowing that what they know about their peers will prevent them from revealing their own private information onto others and thus break trust (Marwick & Boyd, 2014).

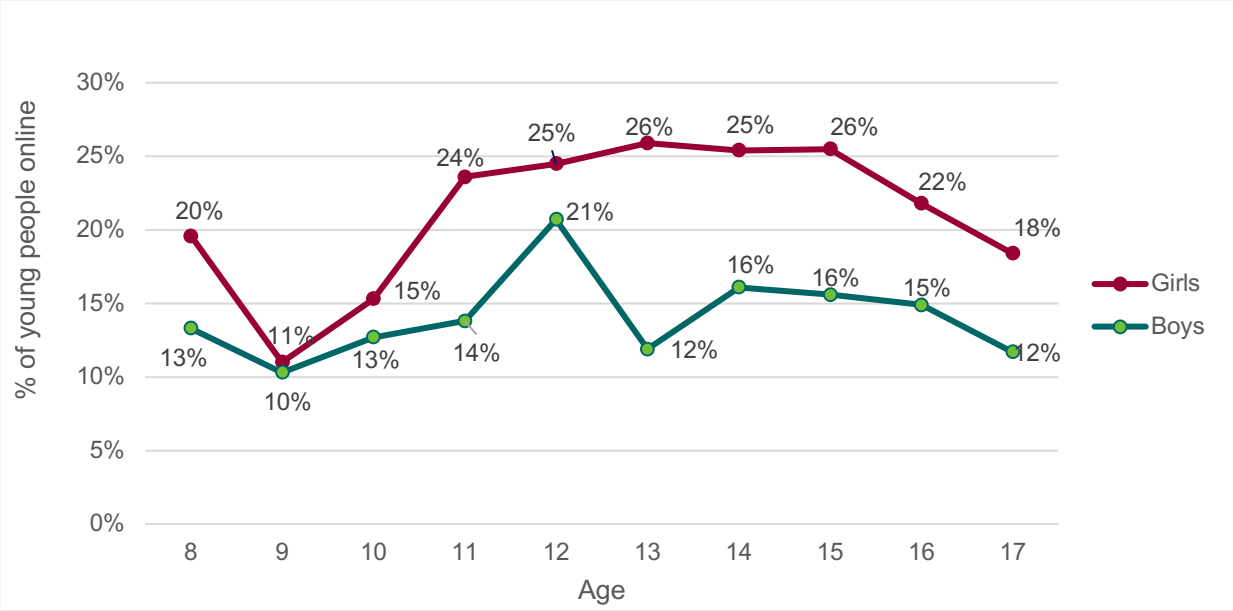
In an Australian context, our survey found that only around 17% of Australian young people between the ages of 8 to 17 shared passwords to their emails or social media accounts during the 12 months to June 2017. There was also little distinction between kids and teens. As shown by Figure 9, only slightly more teens (19%) than kids (16%) shared a password.

Figure 9: Password sharing by age



In line with previous findings in the literature, girls in Australia were also more likely than boys to share their passwords with others. Around 21% did so in comparison to 14% of boys. This is further highlighted in Figure 10, which plots these gender differences over young people's ages and shows young girls were consistently more likely to share a password than boys irrespective of their ages.

Figure 10: Password sharing by gender and age



As well as investigating the likelihood of password sharing, the survey also tracked why and with whom passwords had been shared. Table 5 shows that it was common for young people to do this with close family members such as parents.

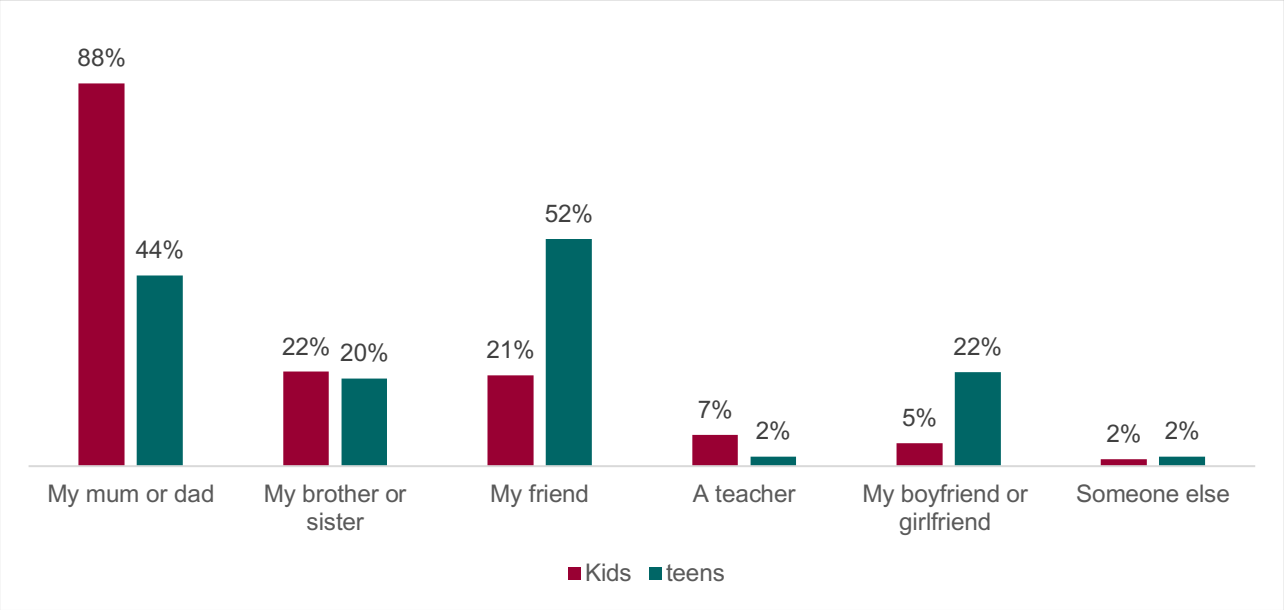
Table 5: People with whom a password was shared by young people

Their mum or dad	65%
A friend	37%
Their brothers or sisters	21%
A boyfriend or girlfriend	13%
A teacher	5%
Someone else	2%

Base=Young people sharing passwords.

These overall rates however hide some clear distinctions in the choices teens and kids make when deciding who to share their passwords with. Whereas around 88% of kids who shared passwords did so with their parents, only 44% of teens reported doing the same. Teens were more likely to share a password with a friend than with anyone else (55%). As well as this, Figure 11 also shows that in comparison to kids, teens were 4 times more likely to share their password with a boyfriend or girlfriend—22% vs 5% of kids.

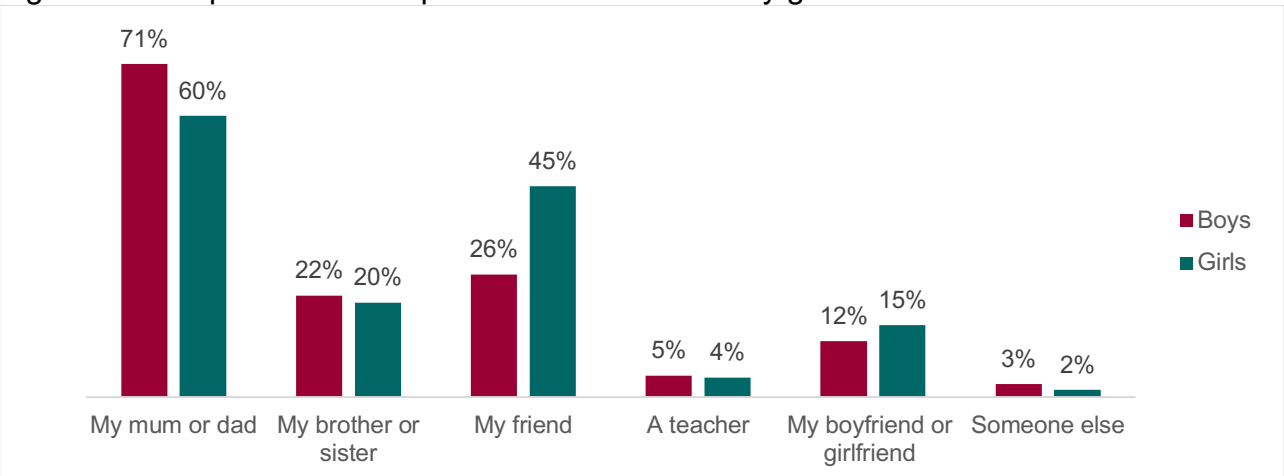
Figure 11: People with whom passwords are shared by age



Base=Young people sharing passwords.

Differences were also observed between boys and girls. As well as being less likely to share passwords with their parents, girls were also significantly more likely than boys to share their passwords with a friend. As Figure 12 indicates, 60% of girls shared their passwords with their parents compared to 71% of boys. Conversely 45% of them shared this information with a friend with only 26% of boys also doing the same.

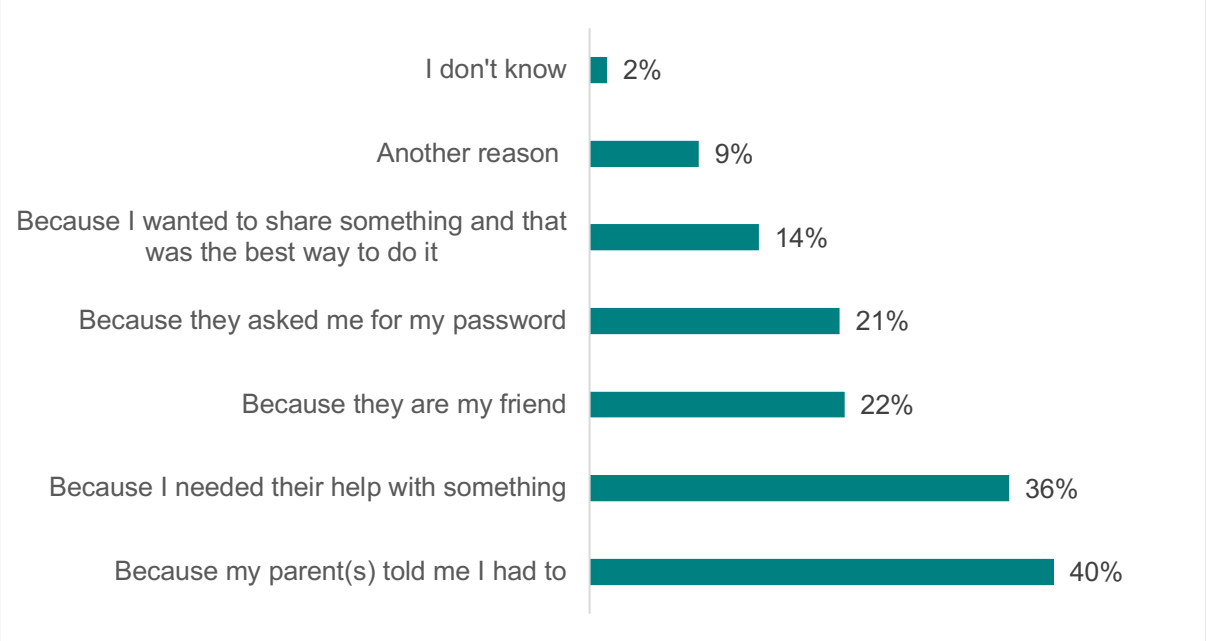
Figure 12: People with whom passwords are shared by gender



Base=Young people sharing passwords.

The Office also sought to understand the major reasons why people share their passwords with others. Figure 13 shows that requests made by parents for their children's passwords were the most common reason. Also common was as a consequence of seeking help with something (36%) and because they were friends (22%).

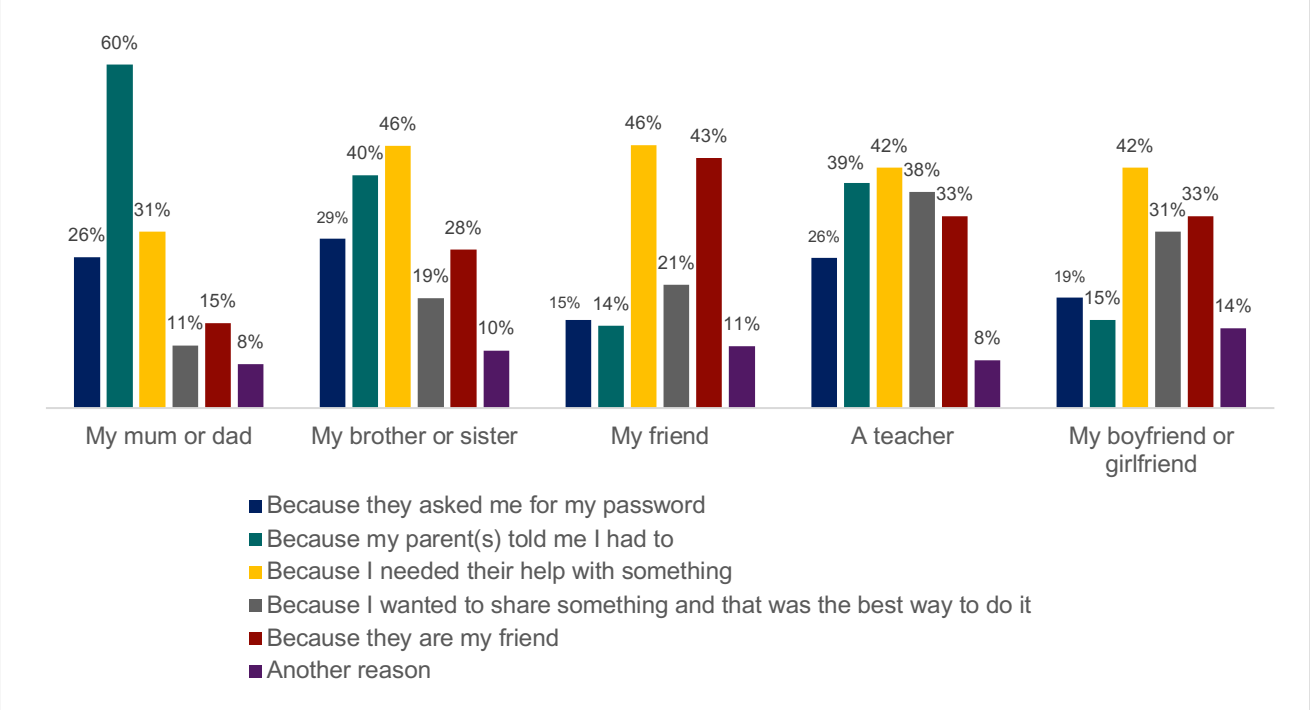
Figure 13: Reasons why young people share passwords with others



Base=Young people sharing passwords.

When considering who the password was shared with, young peoples' reasons were consistent. Around 86% of young people who shared a password with their parents were either told to, or had been asked by them for it. Sharing passwords with others seemed to be done predominantly because it was in that persons' interest and would help them to achieve something. As Figure 14 shows, this was true for sharing passwords with young peoples' siblings, friends, teachers as well as romantic partners.

Figure 14: Reasons young people share passwords with certain people



Base=Young people sharing passwords.

Negative online experiences

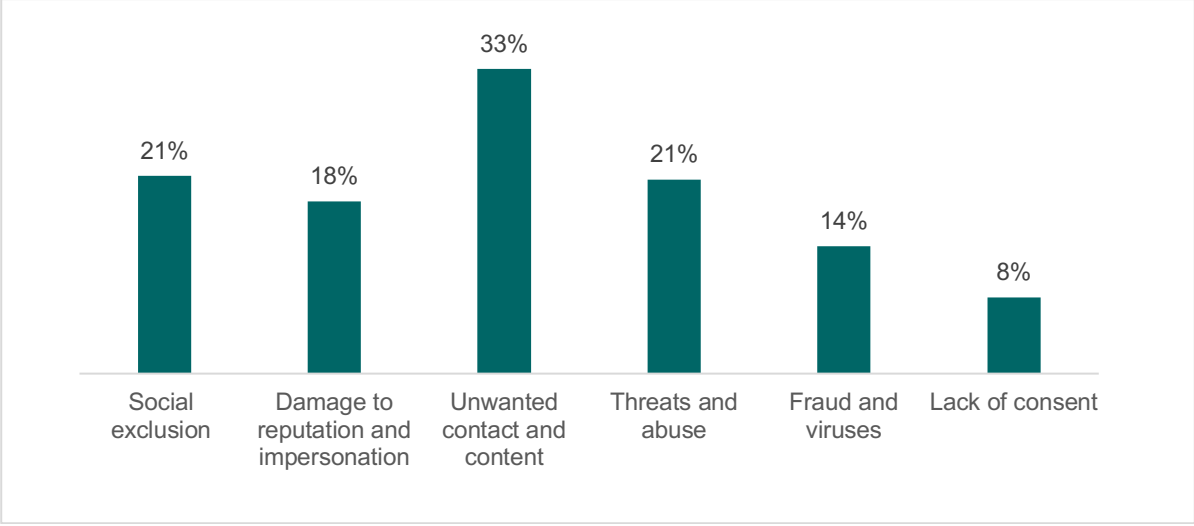
Expert opinion has indicated that cyberbullying, and negative online experiences more generally, are key risks in being online for young people (Lareki et al., 2017). Similar to traditional definitions of bullying, cyberbullying has been defined in academic literature as intentional harmful behaviour carried out by a group or individuals, repeated over time, using modern digital technology to aggress against a victim who is unable to defend themselves (Campbell & Bauman, 2018). The Office similarly defines cyberbullying as '…the use of technology to bully a person or group with the internet to hurt them socially, psychologically or even physically' (Office of the eSafety Commissioner, 2018).

Although on balance, a majority of researchers agree that it does not form a distinct form of aggression[2], cyberbullying victims have been found to report greater levels of anxiety, stress and depression as well as substance abuse and peer problems (Campbell & Bauman, 2018) The way in which cyberbullying is carried out also means that there are a number of distinguishing features that set it apart from traditional bullying. These include the:

- huge size of the potential audience
- continuous access
- permanence of online content
- ease of copying material and distributing it widely
- lack of oversight of online behaviour
- inability to view the emotional reactions of the targets keeping perpetrators from having empathy for them.

The Office's survey captured the broader set of negative experiences that young people in Australia might encounter online. Figure 15 shows that the most common negative online experience in a 12 month period faced by young people in aggregate related to receiving unwanted contact, contact with strangers and unwanted content (33%). Other common types of negative experiences included being socially excluded, threatened or abused (21% respectively) and suffering reputational damage (18%).

Figure 15: Young people's negative online experiences in the 12 months to June 2017



[2] See Campbell & Bauman, 2018 Chapter 1 for a discussion of competing opinions regarding whether bullying and cyberbullying are distinct forms of aggresion.

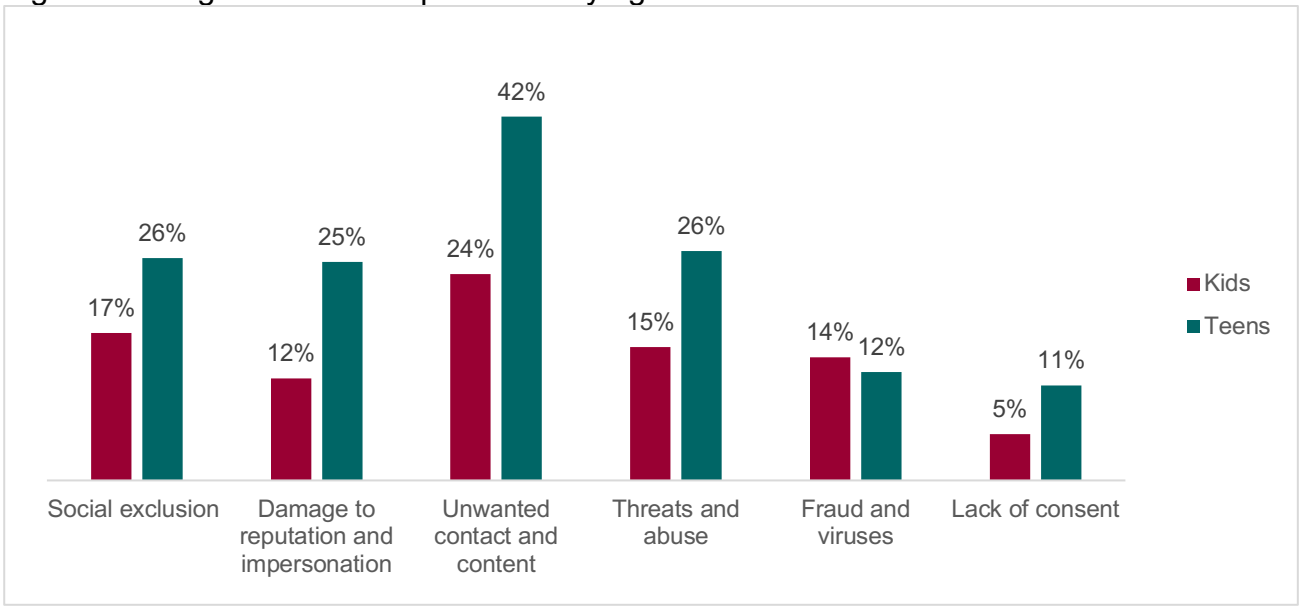
Table 6 outlines the prevalence rates relating to negative online experiences in more detail.

Table 6 Negative online experiences in the 12 months to June 2017

Negative experience		Prevalence rates
Social exclusion	Being left out by others	21%
Damage to reputation and impersonation	Having inappropriate private photos of themselves posted without agreement	2%
	Having someone pretending to be them online	4%
	Having personal information used in a way they did not like	5%
	Having lies or rumours spread about them	13%
Unwanted contact and content	Getting repeated unwanted online messages from someone	13%
	Getting sent inappropriate content e.g. porn or violent content	10%
	Getting contacted by strangers/someone they did not know	25%
Threats and abuse	Having others say mean things about them/ call them names (not in a friendly or funny way)	19%
	Having people threaten me or say they were going to hurt me	6%
Fraud and viruses	Having someone steal money through online fraud	2%
	Clicking on a pop up link and getting a virus	13%
Lack of consent	Having personal information posted without agreement	4%
	Having accounts accessed by someone without agreement	5%

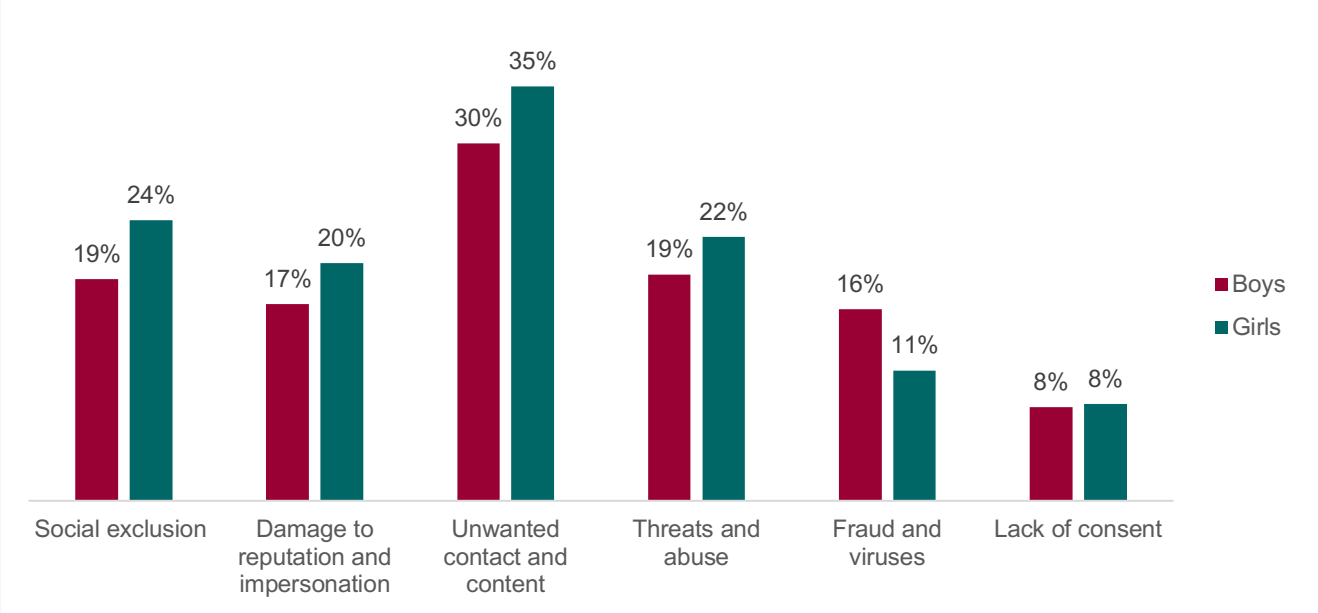
Like other online behaviours explored as part of this report, negative online experiences are encountered at different levels by different age cohorts. With the exception of fraud and viruses, proportionally, more girls and teens experienced the negative online experiences covered in this study. As Figure 16 shows, the greatest observable contrast between kids and teens was about receiving unwanted contact or content from people online—with 42% of teens and just under a quarter of kids (24%) having experienced this in the past year.

Figure 16: Negative online experiences by age



When it came to gender, there were statistically significant differences with respect to social exclusion, unwanted contact and content and fraud and viruses. As Figure 17 reveals, 16% of boys compared to 11% of girls got a virus or suffered a fraud online. Girls, on the other hand, were more likely to be socially excluded by their peers—24% vs 19% for boys—and to receive contact or content that was unwanted—35% vs 30% of boys.

Figure 17: Negative online experiences by gender



Cyberbullying complaints received by the Office

Data from the Office's national youth survey provides context to the cyberbullying complaints data received and compiled by the Office. Section 5 of the *Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015* defines serious cyberbullying as material provided on a social media service or relevant electronic service that an ordinary reasonable person would conclude was likely intended to have an effect on a particular Australian child and likely to be seriously threatening, seriously intimidating, seriously harassing or seriously humiliating to that child. Part 3 of the Act outlines the arrangements for the operation of a cyberbullying complaints scheme. Part 4 sets up a system to assist the Office to assist Australian children to have harmful material shared on social media sites removed rapidly. Some of the types of serious cyberbullying complaints that the Office has dealt with under the scheme during 2017 include:

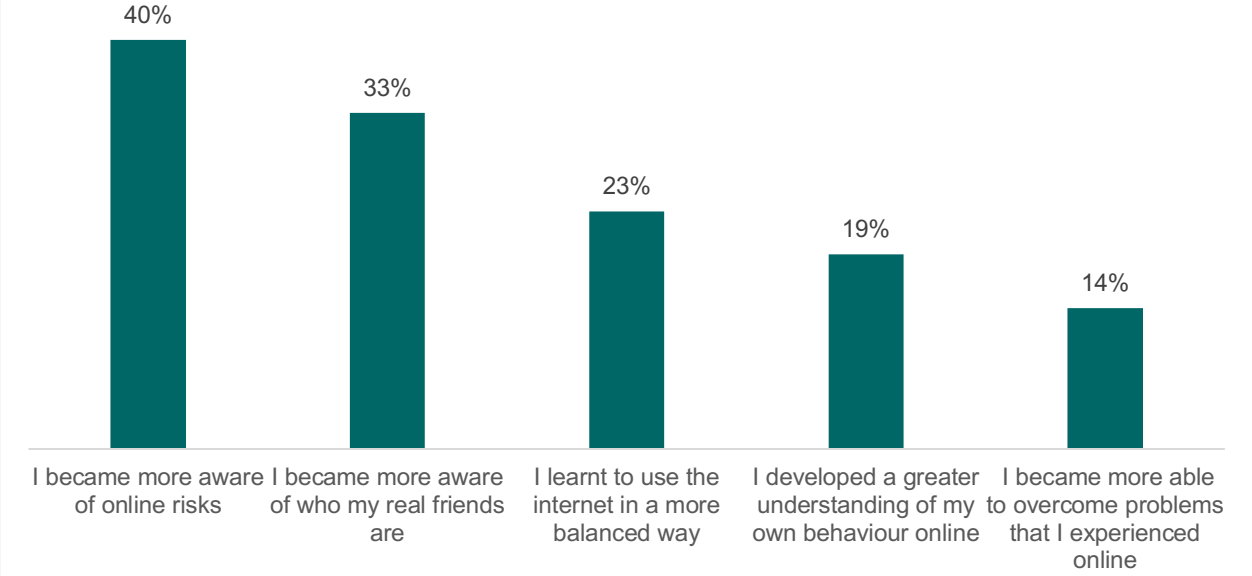
- nasty comments and serious name calling, including those that incite suicide or self-harm e.g. 'get yourself a coffin', 'you'd better go and kill yourself'
- impersonating, or 'hacked' social media accounts
- unwanted contact
- sexting and image-based abuse.

Impacts of negative online experiences on young people

As indicated by Campbell & Bauman (2018) cyberbullying can have a greater detrimental impact than face-to-face bullying. Our survey's more expansive look into people's negative online experiences has further shown that people can respond negatively to these experiences. And that people reflected upon it in more complex ways. For example,

around 39% of young people displayed mixed feelings about what they had gone through by recording both positive and negative responses. In addition, around 65% of them were able to interpret what had happened to them in a positive way. Specifically, as Figure 18 demonstrates, they were able to achieve a greater sense of self-awareness, the risks they face online and of who their friends were.

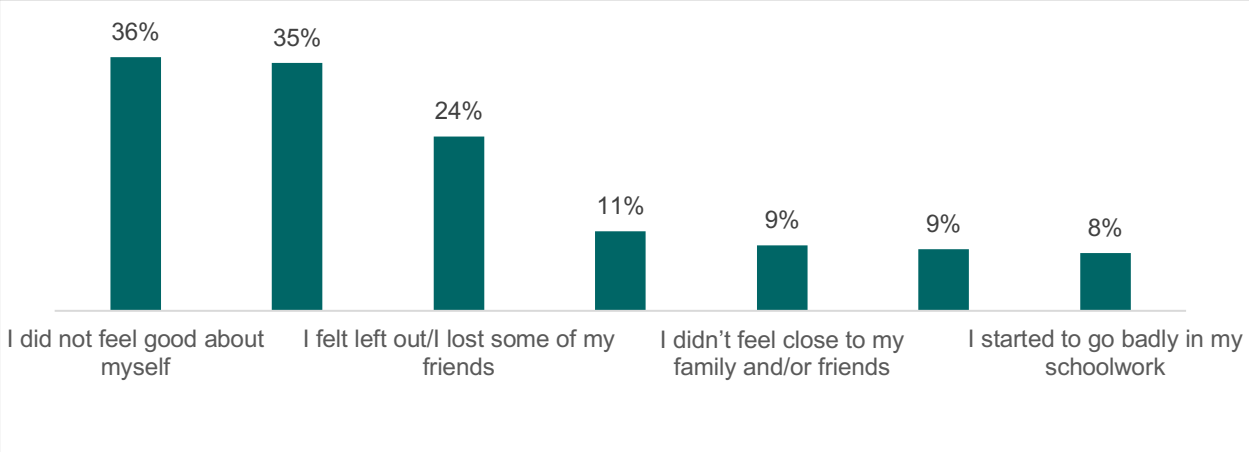
Figure 18: Positive impacts of negative online experiences on young people



Base=Young people who had a negative online experience.

A significantly higher proportion of teens and girls were able to reflect positively on what they had gone through. Overall, around 70% of teens and 69% of girls were able to do so compared to around 58% of kids and 61% of boys. Understandably, young people reflected negatively about what had happened to them. In this research, 63% of young people reported a negative impact overall. The most common response being that they did not feel good about themselves—36%. Figure 19 shows the full range of negative impacts young people experienced in the 12 months to June 2017.

Figure 19: Negative impacts of negative online experiences on young people



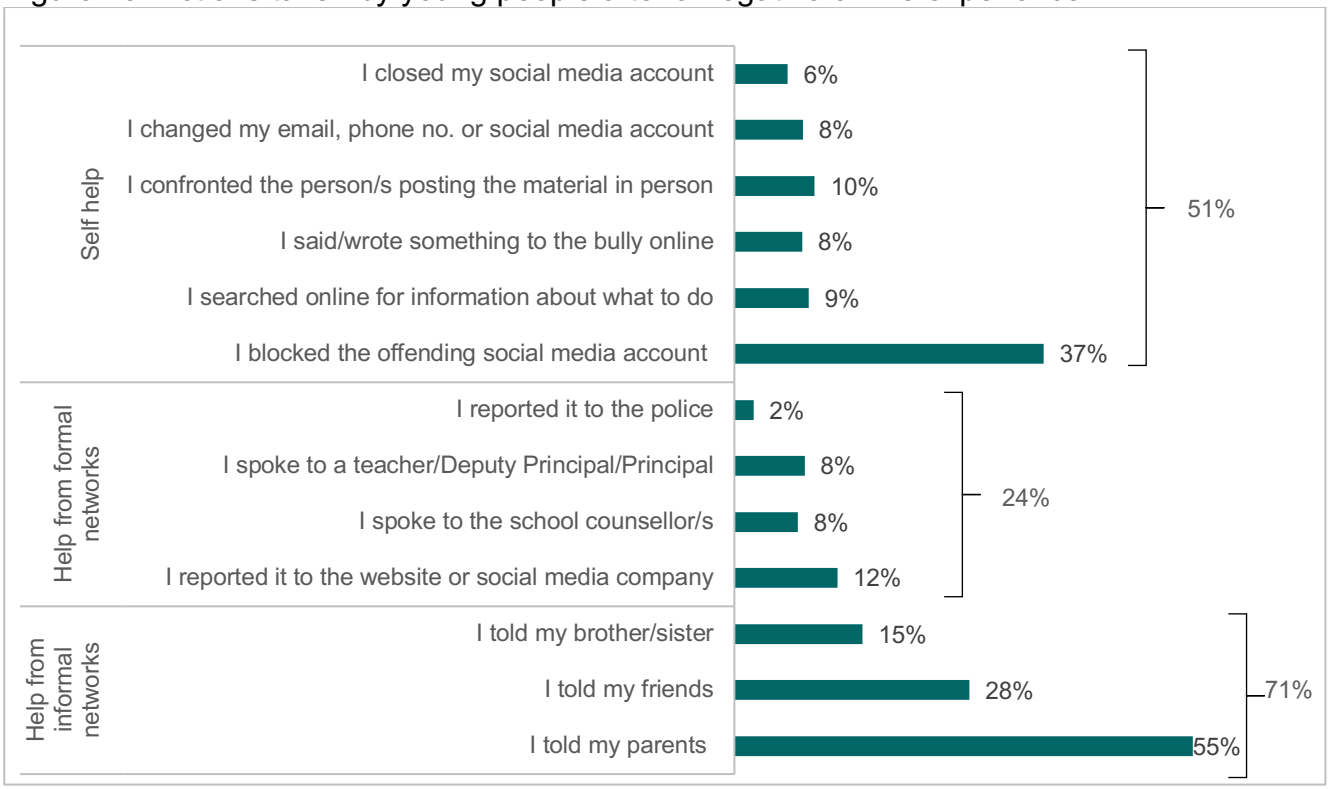
Base=Young people who had a negative online experience.

In a similar vein to young people's positive reactions, both girls and teenagers were also significantly more likely to feel negative about what they had experienced online. Compared to 59% of boys and 55% of kids, 66% of girls and 69% of teens reflected negatively about what had happened to them.

Actions taken after a negative online experience

In our survey, only around 13% of young people who experienced something negative online, chose to do nothing or forget about it. People who did take action chose a number of means to seek support and redress. These varied from relying on informal networks of family and friends, addressing the problem for themselves or going through more formal channels that included their schools, the police or the social media companies themselves. Figure 20 shows the types of actions young people undertook after experiencing something negative online.

Figure 20: Actions taken by young people after a negative online experience



Base=Young people who had a negative online experience.

Overall, only around 24% of young people who experienced something negative online sought help in a formal way through their school, a social media company or the police. Around 71% sought help from informal support networks such as their families and friends and around half (51%) attempted self-help strategies that included making changes to their social media presence. While nominally distinct, these response classes also overlapped quite extensively for those who took action. For example, nearly 8 in ten people who went through formal channels, also made the effort to talk to their family or friends about it.

In seeking self-help strategies, teens and girls showed greater assertiveness. Where around 43% of kids and 47% of boys reacted in this way, nearly 6 in 10 teens and 2 in 3 girls tried to tackle the problem on their own. Teens and girls were also more likely to use more formal channels. Around one quarter of teens and 27% of girls who had a negative online experience went to their school, police or social media platform for help. In contrast, slightly fewer boys (20%) and kids (22%) did the same. The survey findings also showed

that kids and girls relied more heavily on their informal networks in order to seek help—respectively, 81% of kids and 72% of girls, compared to 63% of teens 69% of boys.

Those from a CALD background were much more reticent to involve family and friends to resolve their negative online experience. For them, only around 56% did so compared to around 74% of those not from a CALD background. This was especially the case in relation to talking to their parents. Only 38% of those from a CALD background did so compared to 59% of other young people.

Adult negative experiences online

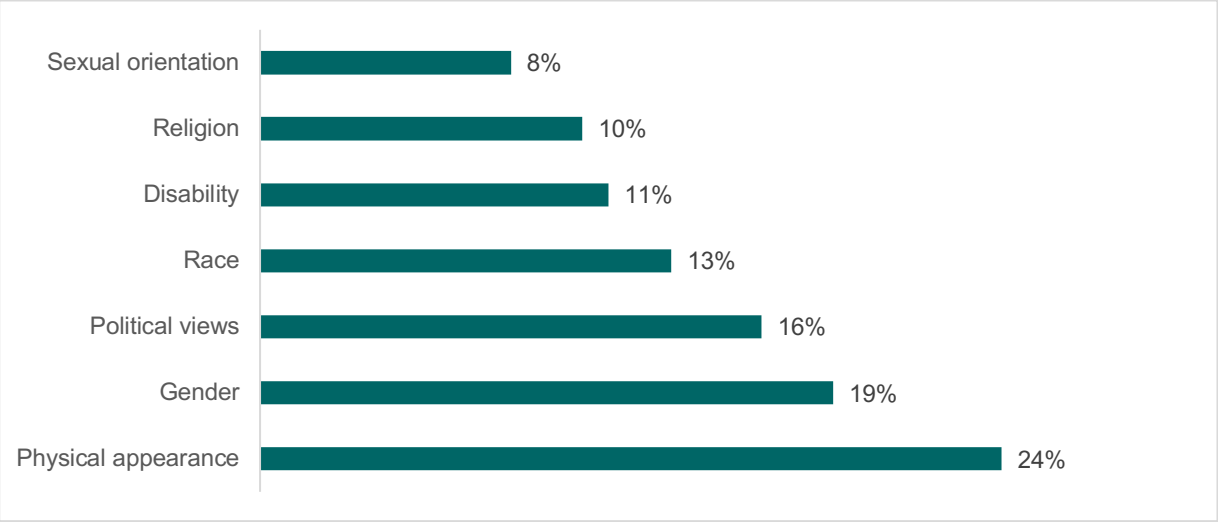
The need to face up to and confront negative online experiences is not the sole purview of the young. Adults are also confronted with similar issues as a result of their online presence. Figure 21 shows that for adults, repeated unwanted online contact was the most common complaint amongst adults (16%). Moreover, recalling the findings highlighted in Table 6, Figure 21 also indicates that with few exceptions, there is little variation in terms of the commonality of various types of online issues that young people and adults in Australia face. In fact, both groups had photos of themselves shared by others (2%) or had someone threaten to harm them (6%) to the same degree. Adults however, were more likely to have personal information used in a way that they did not like—11% vs 5% for young people—and have fewer offensive things said about them with the intention to hurt them—15% vs 19% of young people.

Figure 21 Types of negative online experiences of adults, 12 months to December 2017

Base=People aged 18 years and over.

Unlike in the youth survey, adults were also asked for their perceived motivations behind what they experienced online. Adults in Australia were targeted on the basis of a number of reasons that included their political and sexual orientation, race and gender. Figure 22 outlines how common these reasons were and reflects the fact that one's physical appearance was the most commonly cited reason (24%).

Figure 22: Motivations behind negative online experiences of adults

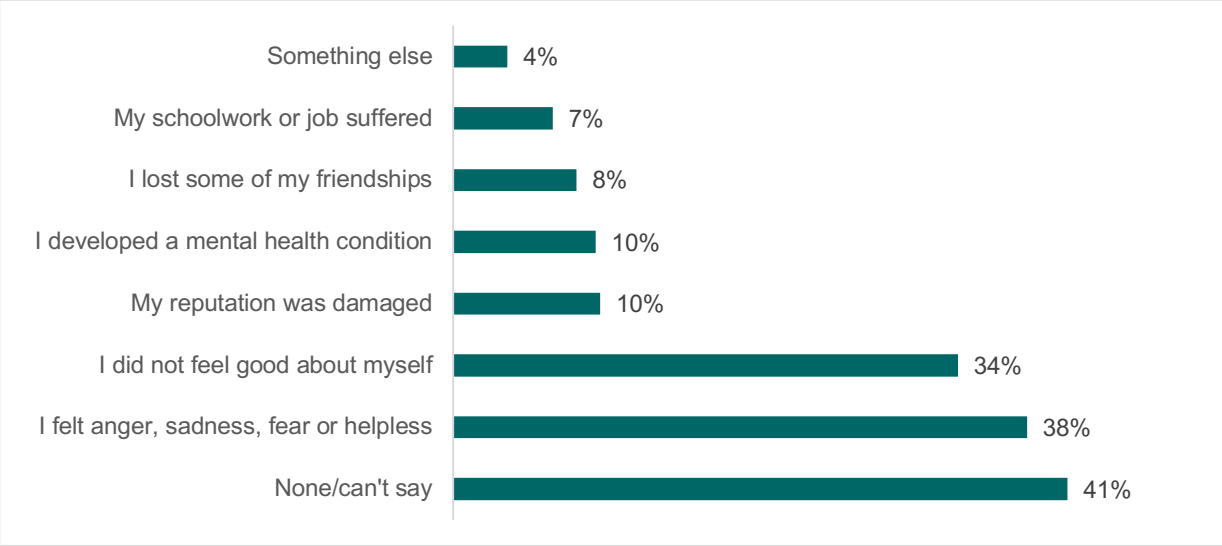


Base=People aged 18 years and over.

Looking across the experiences of both adults and young people, our findings show that people can be affected in a similar way by their negative online experiences, irrespective of age. When compared to the findings in Figure 19, Figure 23 shows that with little variation, both adults and young people felt that:

- their school/work suffered
- they developed a mental health condition
- they suffered reputational damage
- they did not feel good about themselves or
- they felt anger, sadness, fear or helplessness.

Figure 23: Impacts of negative online experiences for adults

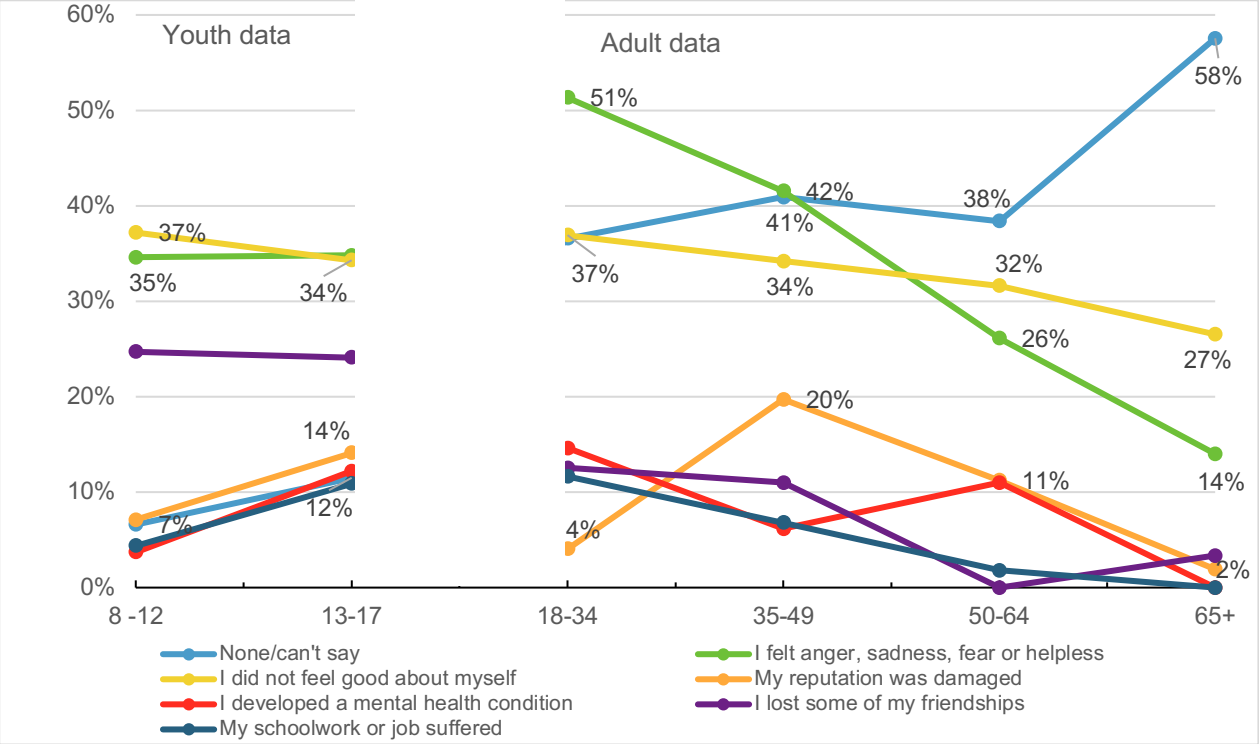


Base=People aged 18 years who had a negative online experience.

Combining data from the youth and the adult surveys, people's reactions to negative online experiences are highlighted in Figure 24 across age groups. The graph shows that irrespective of age, people consistently don't feel good about themselves after a negative online experience and that reputational damage was highest among 35 to 49 year olds (20%). Among those that were 65 and over, people were much more likely to report not

having suffered an effect as a result of their negative experience (58% vs 7% of 8-12 year olds) or to react with sadness fear and helplessness (14% vs 35% of 8-12 year olds).

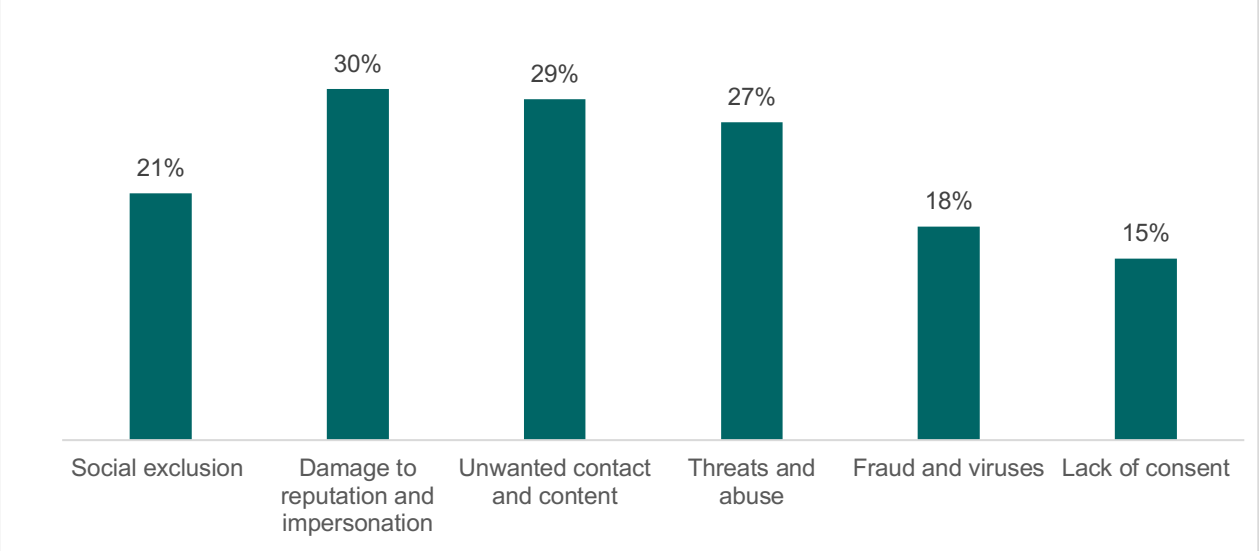
Figure 24: The impacts of negative online experiences for young people and adults



Young people as bystanders

The size of the potential audience attached to a negative online event is a key factor in one's experience of harm. Moreover such events can also have a harmful effect on those who witness it as well as be seen as a normal and acceptable form of interaction if not called out and acted upon. Figure 25 aggregates the range of bystander experiences that people have been privy to in the 12 months to June 2017.

Figure 25: Types of bystander experiences of young people



Broken down into individual bystander experiences, Table 7 shows that being witness to name calling and meanness online was the most common experience for young bystanders (24%).

Table 7: The type of negative online experiences witnessed by young people

Negative experience		Prevalence rates (bystanders)
Social exclusion	Being left out by others	21%
Damage to reputation and impersonation	Having inappropriate private photos of themselves posted without agreement	7%
	Having someone pretending to be them online	9%
	Having personal information used in a way they did not like	8%
	Having lies or rumours spread about them	22%
Unwanted contact and content	Getting repeated unwanted online messages from someone	15%
	Getting sent inappropriate content e.g. porn or violent content	12%
	Getting contacted by strangers/someone they did not know	20%
Threats and abuse	Having others say mean things about them/ call them names (not in a friendly or funny way)	24%
	Had people threaten me or say they were going to hurt me	9%
Fraud and viruses	Having someone steal money through online fraud	5%
	Clicking on a pop up link and getting a virus	15%
Lack of consent	Having personal information posted without agreement	8%
	Having accounts accessed by someone without agreement	11%

When compared to one's individual online negative experiences (see Table 6), both Table 7 and Figure 25 show that young bystanders have less awareness of online negative experiences only when considering being contacted by strangers. Only 20% of bystanders knew of someone who had been contacted by a stranger. In comparison, 25% of young people reported this was something that had personally happened to them—a difference potentially reflected in the process of evaluation and rejection that people go through when turning online strangers and acquaintances into online friends. Bystanders were much more keenly aware of issues like the experience of reputational damage. Reflected in the fact that these types of assessments are made especially by one's extended social circle, around 30% of bystanders reported knowing someone who had suffered reputational damage. In comparison, only 18% of people made this self-same assessment in the 12 months to June 2017 (see Figure 15).

Bystander responses

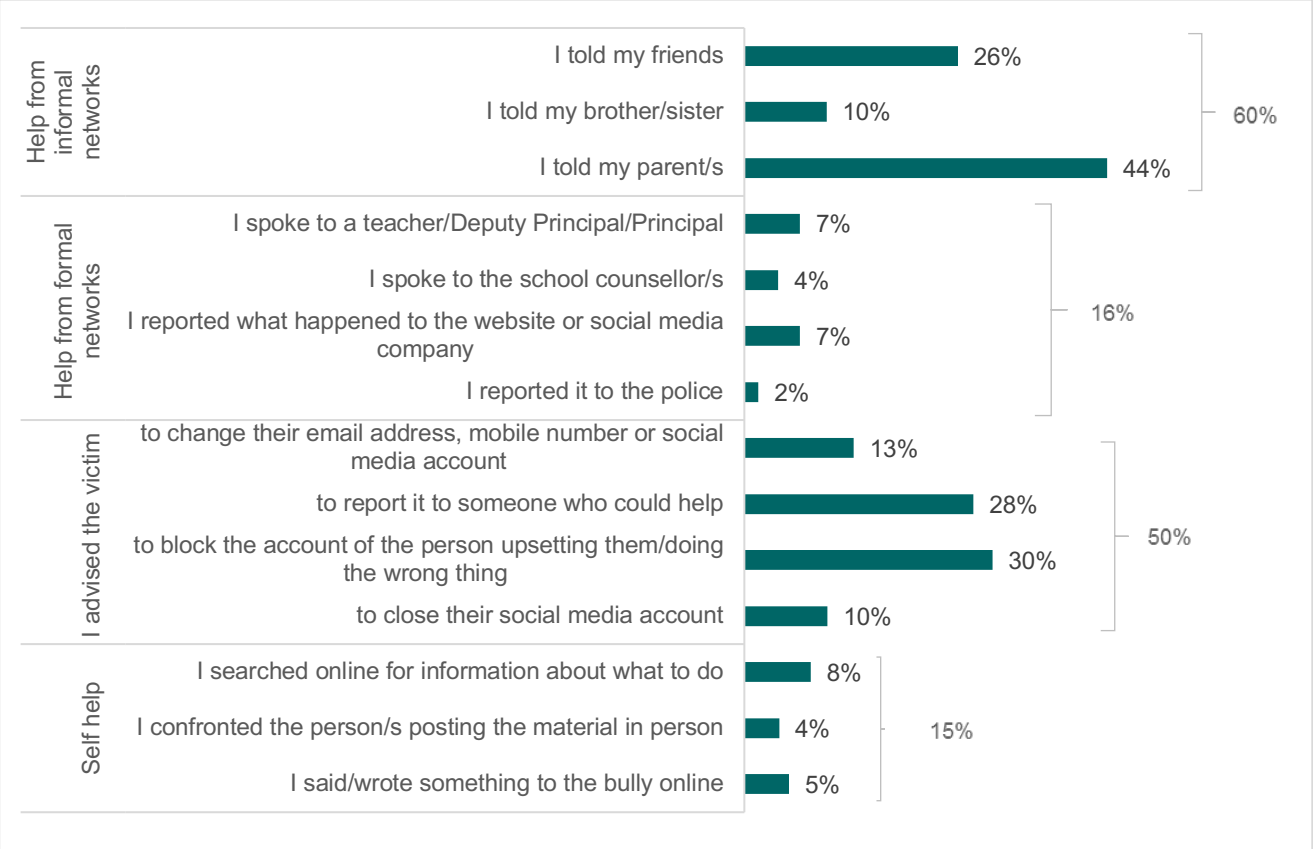
Researchers' interest in the bystander experience of negative online behaviour and cyberbullying lies in their potential ability to reduce harm through intervention. Previous academic findings have highlighted that unfortunately bystanders often remain passive or even join the bully in their online harassment (Machackova, Dedkova, & Mezulanikova, 2015).

The decision for someone to act as an 'upstander', a passive observer or to join in the negative online behaviour is a complex process. Song & Oh (2018) report that before providing assistance, people need to identify the event, recognise the situation, feel responsible to provide help and decide on the action that is needed. Factors that have been observed to influence this decision making process include a person's previous experience of perpetration or victimisation as well as the bystander's popularity, empathy,

quality of relationship with the victims, seriousness of event and perceived level of control (Song & Oh, 2018) (Machackova et al., 2015). Beyond this, there is also what has been described as the bystander effect. In a situation with increasing numbers of witnesses, bystanders become less likely to offer help. Machackova et al. (2015) found that this effect was observable even among a group of 3 bystanders and that this did not necessarily increase with the size of the bystander group.

Despite the limitations that have been reported on peoples' willingness and capacity to respond positively to other's negative online experiences, our findings show that only 8% of bystanders actually chose to do nothing or ignore the experience of others. For those who did do something, Figure 26 highlights what was done along with their prevalence rates.

Figure 26: Actions taken by young bystanders



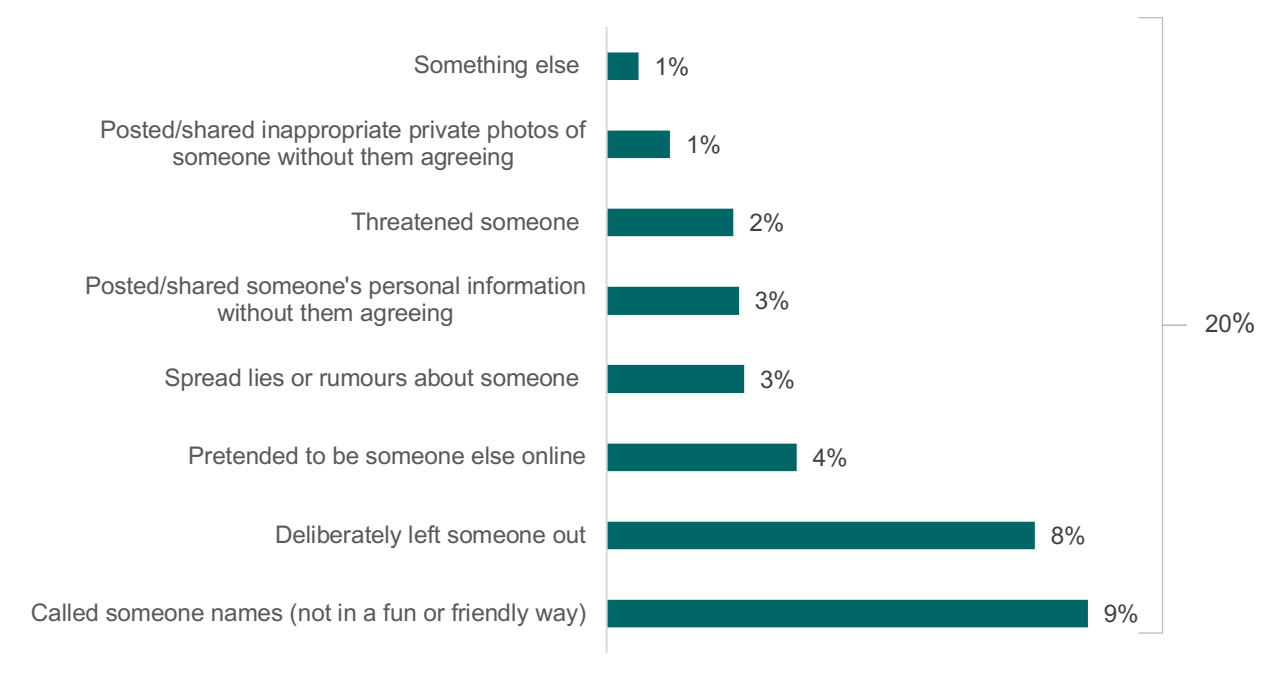
Base=Young people who have witnessed something negative happening to other online.

While not exacly providing support to those experiencing something negative online, bystanders' most common response was to talk about it with their own personal support networks of parents, friends and siblings (60%). When it came to actually providing material support to those facing online turbulance, around 50% of all bystanders gave direct advice to the victim. Our findings also show that bystanders marginally preferred to seek assistance from formal channels (16%) ahead of getting involved themselves (15%). Again, in a similar vein to people's own responses to negative online experiences, bystanders did not adopt these strategies in isolation—around 65% of those seeking help from formal sources had also reached out and told their informal networks about what they had witnessed.

Young people reporting behaving badly online

Finding a strong correlation between those engaging in traditional forms of bullying and cyberbullying, studies have also found that on average a reported 15% of people engage in this type of behaviour online (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). Broader in scope, our own survey asked whether young people had engaged in a range of negative online behaviours. As shown in Figure 27, calling someone names was most common (9%) with around 20% of Australian young people admitting that they had behaved in a negative way to a peer online in the 12 months to June 2017. In this, there was no distinction in prevalence rates between boys and girls although fewer kids than teens admitted to it (15% vs 24%).

Figure 27: Negative online behaviours by young people



Studies exploring the reasons for cyberbullying behaviour have also found that it mirrors traditional bullying. The reasons vary from entertainment seeking to exercises in dominance, power and social status, as well as the venting of emotions such as anger, jealousy and boredom (Kowalski & Limber, 2007). However, evidence also suggests that revenge also plays a part in cyberbullying behaviour. For example, Hinduja & Patchin (2009) found in their sample that cyberbullies were most likely to report that they were trying to get revenge (22.5%) with another 3% saying they did so because they had been picked on in school. Ybarra & Mitchell (2004) found that most cyberbullies were also cyber victims and that almost half of the cyberbullies reported having been victims of traditional bullying. Konig, Gollwitzer, & Steffgen (2010) tested this further: they found that 41% of those who had engaged in cyberbullying had chosen a traditional perpetrator as their last cyberbullying victim and that 52% of traditional bullying victims/cyberbullies had chosen someone who had bullied them in the past at least a quarter of the time.

While our survey did not ask why young people had behaved in this way online, it was striking to note that among those who had behaved negatively towards peers online, more than 90% reported having a negative online experience themselves.

Conclusion

This report has shed light on the issues young people face online and how they manage and deal with a range of negative experiences. It also shows online abuse and harassment can occur throughout life and that being an adult does not necessarily inoculate people from the bad behavior of others.

This report also highlights a number of opportunities for further research which the Office will seek to address over the next six months, specifically:

- Young people report that they make use of informal networks when dealing with negative experiences online and in the majority of cases seek help from parents. However, little or no national data is available on what steps parents take when their children disclose they have experienced online harassment or bullying. To address this, the Office will shortly undertake a national survey of parents to examine their awareness and responses to these, and other challenges, their children face online.

- The Office will also undertake more detailed research into how adults deal with their own negative experiences online, and where they source information about improving their online safety.

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