PLAN INTERNATIONAL | GIRLS GET EQUAL

FREE TO BE ONLINE?

Girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment

TECHNICAL REPORT

CONTENTS

TABLE OF TABLES

TABLE OF FIGURES

ACRONYMS

ADHD	**Attention deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**
CAPI	**Computer -Assisted Personal Interviewing**
CATI	**Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing**
CEDAW	**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**
EU	**European Union**
GBV	**Gender-Based Violence**
ICT	**Information & Communication Technology**
ILO	**International Labour Organisation**
LGBTIQ+	**Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer/ Questioning +**
SMS	**Short Message Service**
SOTWG	**State of the World Girls Report**
UNCRC	**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**
VAWG	**Violence Against Women and Girls**
VAW-P	**Violence Against Women in Politics**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Design: Sandra Dudley

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Free to be Online?

This year, Plan International's annual State of the World's Girls report is based on research - conducted across 32 countries with over 14,000 girls and young women - aimed at uncovering and understanding their experiences of being online on social media platforms.

⬚   More than half of girls surveyed, from around the world, have been harassed and abused online.

⬚   One in four girls abused online feels physically unsafe as a result.

⬚   Online abuse is silencing girls' voices.

"Social media can be a really amazing place to, for example, speak out and share information…but also, can be a horrible place where, I don't know, crazy people can have an anonymous place to throw shade and hate…So, it's very difficult because of that, because you can be anonymous and just like do horrible things." Young woman, 22, Chile

Perpetrators who threaten rape and physical violence, use abusive and sexist language, post manipulated photos and send pornographic pictures are able to remain anonymous and unconstrained; girls are often afraid, begin to restrict what they post and are forced to try and protect themselves.

"And in the worst situations, I just felt really unsafe because it confuses me how this one specific guy could find so many details about my life and it made me concerned that he could find my address and come to my house." Young woman, 23, USA

Box

Racial justice online

In the report girls and young women talk about the many different and combined reasons they are harassed; as well as being young and female, young Black women are objectified and vilified for their race. We stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Black girl and women protestors in all their diversity, and allies who are organising and taking action. Racial justice is a critical and crucial component of justice for girls: we cannot achieve equality for girls, without achieving equality for Black girls.

Ends

What girls are saying

Girls are targeted online just because they are young and female, and if they are politically outspoken, disabled, Black or identify as LGBTIQ+, it gets worse. Harassment ranges from being put down for your opinions, to being threatened with violence, to being besieged by unwanted pornographic images. Like street harassment it is unremitting, often psychologically damaging and can lead to actual physical harm.

➢   58 per cent of girls surveyed have experienced online harassment.

- 24 per cent, about one in four girls, who have been harassed are left feeling physically unsafe, 42 per cent lose self-esteem or self-confidence, 42 per cent feel mentally or emotionally stressed, and 18 per cent have problems at school.
- 50 per cent of girls said they face more online harassment than street harassment.
- 37 per cent of the girls who identified themselves to be from an ethnic minority and have faced harassment said they get harassed because of it.
- 42 per cent of girls who identified themselves as LGBTIQ+ and have faced harassment, said that they get harassed because of it.
- The platform it happens most on is Facebook (39 per cent), followed by Instagram (23 per cent).
- Online harassment starts for girls from the age of 8 and the majority of girls get harassed for the first time between the ages of 14-16.

19 per cent of girls who were harassed very frequently said they use the social media platform less and 12 per cent just stopped using it.

"My friends who experienced harassment online became less active on social media platforms." Girl, 17, Philippines

"I often face harassment online or in public, and it makes me feel unsafe, because every time, whatever I'm doing on social media, people keep commenting… I just feel I cannot express myself freely." Young woman, 19, Indonesia

Online harassment is depriving girls and young women of their right to information and education and of the ability to express themselves freely or engage in activism. And this at a time when COVID-19 is driving ever increasing online use.

"But for cyber bullying, mostly it's getting worse and it's hard to control, it's hard to handle. Once it spreads, it's everywhere, and everyone can see it, and you know, maybe they can make fun of it, they will troll you … I think psychologically, emotionally, it's really depressing and it has more effect than in real life." Young woman, 21, Myanmar

It is very clear that at the moment very little is being done to protect girls and young women online. The treatment they receive is unacceptable, frightening and must be stopped. Someone must take responsibility.

In the 22-country survey, girls were asked who – choosing from the police, social media companies, the government, other social media users or civil society organisations – should do more to fight against online harassment. Social media companies topped the list followed by governments.

What needs to be done

Governments and society as a whole need to monitor this abuse rigorously and social media companies must use their technological skills and financial resources to put freedom online for girls and young women at the heart of their agenda.

- ✓ **Create effective and accessible reporting mechanisms that target gender-based violence**
- ✓ **Hold perpetrators to account**
- ✓ **Collect disaggregated data that acknowledges girls' intersecting identities and tracks the scale and size of the problem**
- ✓ **Take this issue seriously**

Social media companies must:

- Create stronger, more effective and accessible reporting mechanisms specific to online gender-based violence, that hold perpetrators to account, and are responsive to all girls' needs and experiences, taking into account intersecting identities.

- Collect and publish disaggregated data on online gender-based violence that tracks the scale and size of the problem and provides insight into the nature of the harassment and violence against girls and young women in all their diversity.

"I feel like there has to be more investment… 'cause the company doesn't invest money into things, and I feel like they should invest more money into having people actively watch comments." Girl, 17, Canada

National governments must:

- Ensure their policies on internet access are inclusive and actively ensure gender equality in accessing online spaces. This would include encouraging mobile network operators to enable increased connectivity and mobile internet access.
- Update and reform legislative frameworks to deal with online harassment and violence against all girls and young women, bearing in mind specific intersectional characteristics, including: race, age, disability, ethnicity, LGBTIQ+.
- Enact laws addressing violence against women and girls, holding social media platforms and other third-party internet platforms to account.
- Enable the effective implementation, by all relevant government departments – such as the police, the judiciary, and the prosecution services – of laws and policies addressing online harassment of and online violence against all women and girls.

Communities, families, civil society, faith-based organisations and other stakeholders must all take this issue seriously:

- Communities and families must take steps to engage with girls so that they feel secure in talking about online harassment and know that they are supported.
- Civil society should develop and deliver digital citizenship education and awareness raising initiatives on the opportunities as well as risks of being online, with a focus on online abuse
- All members of society should recognise the harm caused by online harassment and violence against women and girls, and become active bystanders reporting abuse and amplifying girls' voices.

"And who should do that? I think everyone. Start from our self, and then people who use social media and also the social media itself." Young woman, 19, Indonesia

Warning: This report contains descriptions of sexual violence and abuse.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This technical report sets out the detailed findings of research conducted in 2020 by Plan International on girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment, specifically on social media platforms. The technical report forms the basis of the 2020 State of the World Girls Report.

The **State of the World's Girls Report** (SOTWG)is released every year for International Day of the Girl on 11 October. The report contains the annual, signature research for **Girls Get Equal**, a campaign for girls' voice and power, championing their leadership in the drive for gender equality. For girls and young women to lead change themselves, everyone needs to challenge power holders and decision-makers to make sure girls have equal power to be involved in all decisions made about their lives, equal freedom to speak up in public and online without fear of harassment and violence, and equal representation with an end to the promotion of the harmful gender stereotypes that hold girls back. These three aspects of gender equality – power, freedom and representation - that form the foundation of the campaign are grounded in a human rights approach that stems from international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and UN Convention on Ending Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

As set out in the Girls Get Equal Strategic Framework, for the 'Equal Freedom Online' component, the GGE campaign is calling on 'governments and digital platforms to take active steps to make girls' safety online a reality'. In the long term the ambition is 'for the online community to take a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women and girls online'.

The 2020 SOTWG research aims at understanding and uncovering girls' and young women's perspectives and experiences on social media platforms online – how are they using social media platforms, whether they are harassed, what that harassment looks like, who are the perpetrators of the harassment, the impact of the harassment on them and the ways which girls and young women find to cope with online harassment on social media platforms. The research both qualitative and quantitative was conducted across 32 countries, involving a survey with over 14,000 girls and young women in 22 of those countries. It employed a mixed method approach to determine scale and meaning in relation to the issues listed above.

In this report, we outline the focus of the research and research questions, provide a brief outline of key existing global literature on the topic, before going into detail on the methodology. The findings are presented in section 5 and the final section draws these findings together and outlines the key conclusions and recommendations that emerge.

2.1 Focus of the research

Mobile technology markets are constantly expanding in developing countries. However, the increase in access to the internet, including social media, has not been coupled with appropriate measures to address young people's safety, and it has not been sufficiently focussed on ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination. As will be evidenced in this report, the gender- based violence girls are subjected to offline is burgeoning in the online world and in new and evolving ways. As a result, there is a rapidly increasing population of digital citizens who are being exposed to increased harm without the necessary protections.

Importantly, these online citizens use their online space for a multitude of purposes – including, amongst others, learning, communicating, income generation, and resource acquisition.

2.1 Scope of the research

Globally, girls and young women are increasingly online. The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 have set an agenda that addresses access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), including the internet. Online spaces give girls and young women the opportunity to exercise their rights and freedoms to express their opinion, participate in dialogue on current issues and exercise their power and agency in way that they are often not afforded in the offline world. Yet girls and young women are harassed and face violence when they engage in

online discussions, when they speak up in general, engage in political debate, and act as human rights defenders. This is a barrier to them engaging in public life and leading the drive for gender equality. While there are obviously multiple aspects effecting the experiences of children and young people online, both positive and negative, this research has a narrow focus.

First, the overarching aim of the research is to address some of the gaps in knowledge on the scale and reach of these online harassment issues in multiple contexts; increase the understanding of how the abuse that they are subjected to impacts girls and young women and amplify their experiences and lived realities in navigating the online world. In addition, while there are evidence gaps on the extent and nature of girls' and young women's *access* to the internet, this is only briefly touched on in the literature review and marginally dealt with in the survey in order to set the context.

Second, adolescence is commonly defined as the second decade of life. The age of 10 to 19 years signifies a particularly critical phase in life for both girls and boys when many transitional social, economic, biological, and demographic events set the stage for adult life. However, girls still face major barriers to their development. Girls' unequal access to their rights and basic services from childhood to adulthood, such as nutrition, education, and healthcare, followed by their unequal access to economic and financial resources as they enter early adulthood, is well documented. While ideally the research would have been focused on 10 – 24 years of age to cover the journey through adolescence into young adulthood that girls need to navigate, for ethical reasons it was decided that surveying and speaking to younger adolescent girls was too risky from a 'do no harm' perspective and therefore the research focuses on girls in later adolescence and young adulthood.

Third, given the existing evidence which shows that young people spend a majority of their time online using social media, this research has sought to focus on online harassment on social media platforms and not on other online spaces, for example, online gaming. **Finally**, as will be discussed in section 3 below, there are a multitude of criminal actions and human rights violations online. In addition, the scope of online abuse is broad, encompassing crimes such as child pornography and commercial sexual exploitation of children. This research focuses on one aspect of online abuse, namely online harassment (also referred to throughout the research as online harassment and violence, or online/cyber violence against women and girls).

For the purpose of the research, the following definition of online harassment has been used: "action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sex-based harassment, defamation, hate speech, exploitation and gender-trolling."[1]

3. SETTING THE SCENE

As noted, one of the *Girls Get Equal* focus areas is supporting girls to enjoy equal freedoms to speak up in public and online without fear of harassment and violence. During the new campaign year, which starts with the International Day of the Girl 2020, *GGE* will call on 'governments and digital platforms to take active steps to make girls' safety online a reality'.

3.1 A human rights-based approach

"We believe that the Internet is a public good and should be used, managed and governed as such… For children, the Internet is a means, a tool, a crosscutting mechanism to the realization of all other rights." [2]

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[1] Hinson, L., Mueller, J., O'Brien-Milne, L., & Wandera, N. (2018). Technology-facilitated GBV: What is it, and how do we measure it? International Center for Research on Women. Retrieved from https://www.icrw.org/publications/technology-facilitated-genderbased-violence-what-is-it-and-how-do-we-measure-it/

[2] World Wide Web Foundation (2014). Digital media and children's rights: Safeguarding human rights online. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Discussions/2014/WorldWideWebFoundation-AssociationforProgressiveCommunications-CJCP.pdf on 3 June 2020.

These were some of the words from the opening paragraph of World Wide Web Foundation's submission to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child's (UNCROC) General Day of Discussion in 2014. The World Wide Web went live 2 years after the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and a whole 12 years after the adoption of CEDAW. Thus, the two human rights frameworks which seek to protect them, provide for their basic rights and allow for their participation in all aspects of their lives were drafted at a time when the online world was not yet a reality. While the two treaties were drafted in such a way that their application is broad enough for, and pertinent to, most situations, the ever evolving nature of the online world meant that the international human rights community was playing catch-up[3] and certain issues required specific attention: evidenced by the eventual need to adopt the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2000. By 2014, when the UNCROC held its Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and Digital Media, the Committee recognised that many of the issues highlighted below in this section had become apparent. It not only recommended the adoption of human rights based laws and policies that are regularly monitored to ensure they stay up to date; that States establish national coordinating frameworks to coordinate all activities related to children's rights and digital media and information and communications technologies; that States provide training and support for children to ensure the development of their digital and social literacy skills, including in basic education curricula; but importantly it also called out the issue of discrimination – especially for girls - requiring that States: *"[i]ntensify efforts to ensure the effective elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls and address gender stereotypes and social norms that limit girls' access and use of technology, including through awareness-raising programmes."[4]*

Unfortunately, the statement regarding non-discrimination against girls appears in the recommendation relating to non-discrimination in *accessing* digital media and the internet.[5] The Committee goes on to provide in-depth recommendations on combatting harm, violence, exploitation and abuse of children online,[6] but fails to note the particular vulnerabilities of certain groups of children, especially girls and LGBTIQ+ children. There is a separate recommendation dealing with children with disabilities[7] – including their access and preventing negative stereotypes - but yet again the recognition that certain children who have specific characteristics, including those that intersect with others, may undergo particular forms of online abuse and harm is missing.

However, some progress was made in 2017 when the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) adopted General Recommendation No. 35[8] on gender-based violence against women, updating the 1992 General Recommendation No. 19. General Recommendation No. 19 had unequivocally framed violence against women as a form and manifestation of gender-based discrimination, used to subordinate and oppress women. While General Recommendation No. 35 is framed as dealing with gender-based violence against women, paragraph 14 thereof specifically extends its scope to include girls.

Importantly, the General Recommendation recognises that gender-based violence happens in 'all spaces and spheres of human interaction', including 'technology-mediated environments, such as contemporary forms of violence occurring in the Internet and digital spaces'.[9] The General Recommendation requires States to criminalise and sanction all forms of gender-based violence *in all spheres* [emphasis added] – specifically GBV which violates women and girls' physical, sexual and psychological integrity,[10] as well as ensuring that victims/survivors of gender-based violence have access to justice and effective remedies.[11]

It further recommends that States adopt and implement special measures to *encourage* [emphasis added] all media to eliminate discrimination against women in their activity, including harmful and stereotyped portrayals of

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[3] Livingstone, S. (2019). Rethinking the rights of children for the digital age. LSE Impact Blog. Retrieved from https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2019/03/18/rethinking-the-rights-of-children-for-the-internet-age/ on 3 June 2020.
[4] UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Annex III from Day of General Discussion: Digital media and children's rights. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crc/pages/discussion2014.aspx on 3 June 2020.
[5] Recommendation 15.
[6] Recommendation 22.
[7] Recommendation 25.
[8] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19: CEDAW/C/GC/35. Retrieved from https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_35_8267_E.pdf on 6 June 2020.
[9] Para 20.
[10] Para 29.
[11] Para 30.

women or specific groups of women, such as women human rights' defenders,[12] and goes on to specifically *encourage* [emphasis added] 'the creation or strengthening of self-regulatory mechanisms by the media, including online or social media, aimed at the elimination of gender stereotypes relating to women and men, or to specific groups of women, and to address gender-based violence against women that takes place through their services and platforms.'[13] It is significant that human rights defenders are called out in this recommendation, yet also significant that (testament to the intricacies of laws and liability especially when dealing with secondary perpetrators and holding transnational companies liable under international law)[14] the recommendation only requires 'the encouragement' of the media.

Unfortunately, these international legal frameworks which have valiantly sought to provide protection and redress for women and girls who have been subjected to all forms of GBV in all spheres, have not resulted in focussed and appropriate remedies for girls and young women who are subject to online harassment. The advent of the internet has resulted in a plethora of laws that seek to govern and regulate the online world. This collection of legislation includes laws that govern electronic transactions; consumer protection, privacy and data protection and cybercrime. However, a cursory examination of these laws demonstrates that most are aimed at transactional, financial and e-commerce matters; many are outdated and they have disparate adoption around the globe.[15] In fact, the definition of cybercrime is completely oblivious to the nature and scale of some of the infractions of women and girls' rights online. For example, taking a country with quite a sophisticated legal framework on digital crimes, the UK's National Cyber Security Strategy divides cybercrime into 2 categories:[16]

- Cyber-dependent crimes - crimes that can be committed only through the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) devices, where the devices are both the tool for committing the crime, and the target of the crime (e.g. developing and propagating malware for financial gain, hacking to steal, damage, distort or destroy data and/or network or activity).
- Cyber-enabled crimes - traditional crimes which can be increased in scale or reach by the use of computers, computer networks or other forms of ICT (such as cyber-enabled fraud and data theft).

It is the latter component which governs the types of offences suffered by women and girls. And within that framework the UK does recognise acts such as cyberbullying, trolling, cyberstalking, revenge pornography; child pornography and computer enabled child sexual abuse. However, the actual legislation dealing with these infringements is broad and disparate – potentially causing confusion not just for prosecutors and police but the public that is supposed to be served by them.[17] For example, the laws that could be applicable for cyber stalking include the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; the Offences Against the Person Act 1861; the Sexual Offences Act 2003; and the Malicious Communications Act 1988. Likewise, there is an even longer list of legislation applicable for offences involving social media, and the UK Crown Prosecution Service has taken great pains to create guidance for prosecutors on how to apply these in cases of Violence against Women and Girls, but using offences which have not been created for an online world and for online crimes could potentially open up legal loopholes, as well as problems with evidence and meeting the burden of proof in criminal proceedings. Too often victims need to rely on ordinary criminal laws which are patchy, not necessarily fit for purpose and difficult to prosecute, with a justice system slow or failing to act on reports of online harassment.[18]

Another example is Spain where the Spanish Constitution specifically protects freedom of speech including online: the right of persons to freely express and disseminate thoughts, ideas, and opinions *through words, in writing, or*

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[12] Para 37.
[13] Para 37 (a).
[14] As discussed in Abdul Aziz, Z. (2017). Due diligence and accountability for online violence against women. APC Issue Paper. Retrieved https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/DueDiligenceAndAccountabilityForOnlineVAW.pdf on 6 June 2020.
[15] A online repository of laws can be found on the webpage of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Retrieved from https://unctad.org/en/Pages/DTL/STI_and_ICTs/ICT4D-Legislation/eCom-Global-Legislation.aspx on 6 June 2020.
[16] National Cyber Security Strategy 2016-2021. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-cyber-security-strategy-2016-to-2021 on 9 June 2020.
[17] UK Crown Prosecution Service (2019). Cybercrime – prosecution guidance. Retrieved from https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/cybercrime-prosecution-guidance on 9 June 2020.
[18] Lyons, K. et al. (2016). Online abuse: How different countries deal with it. The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/online-abuse-how-harrassment-revenge-pornography-different-countries-deal-with-it on 6 June 2020.

by any other means …..by any means of dissemination whatsoever [emphasis added].[19] But it also provides for cases where the freedom of expression may be restricted: as necessary to protect the rights recognized in the Constitution and the laws implementing such rights--especially the rights to honour, privacy, and one's own image, and the protection of youth and childhood – which provides protection for girls and young women.[20] The Spanish legal system further includes regulations related to security in the use of ICTs. In the criminal field, new crimes have been defined in Spain that deal with behaviours that are typical of online violence and, in addition, many of the experiences related to sexual and/or gender violence on social networks can be considered crimes under certain legal criteria included in the Spanish Criminal Code. The Spanish Constitutional Court has established that freedom of expression and information may only be restricted when it includes expressions that are unquestionably insulting and bear no relationship to the ideas or opinions to be expressed.[21]

Probably the most robust type of human rights-based laws to counter online offences are those that relate to child pornography and sexual exploitation of children and these would be inevitably linked to the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour No. 182 (1999). Obviously, this is of critical importance, but the failure to recognise how online gendered harassment crimes   need equally focussed laws and substantive offences, is unfortunate. Clearly there are not only gaps in international law, but the issue of gender-based violence against girls and young women in online spaces is an area where there is a dearth of appropriate and harmonised legal protection available at a national level. The ITU Broadband Commission for Digital Development agrees: "No matter the platform employed, growing cyber-crime calls for an explicit incorporation of the relevant and human rights conventions and constitutional laws into Internet governance."[22] The Commission concludes that the UN system is in a unique position to broker cooperation between the tech industry and governments to bring about the necessary incentives, resources and political will to champion and address cyber violence against women and girls, especially given the range of international human rights frameworks requiring governments and other stakeholders to take action.

However, for governments and other stakeholders to be able to properly address the issue of online harassment of girls and young women through laws and other measures, a clear understanding of the issues, their scale and nature is necessary. What follows is an overview of some of the literature on the issue of online violence against women and children. However, it is important to note, that there are not many comparative studies that specifically look at the nature and extent of the issue as it affects girls and young women and examines their experiences, thoughts and coping mechanisms. It is for this reason that the research on which this report is based has sought to seek out the lived realities, in relation to online harassment on social media, of girls and young women across multiple countries.

3.2 Access and use of the internet

The Broadband Commission has hailed 2019 as a significant year in global internet adoption. It notes that 2019 marked the first full year when more than half of the world had begun to participate online, the 30th anniversary of the World Wide Web was celebrated and the latest data estimate indicated that there were 21.7 billion connected devices: with over 74,500 GB of data being sent over the internet every single second.[23] Compare this to 1995 when less than one per cent of world's population was connected to internet.[24] The Commission notes that the growth is continuing, due to new methods of connectivity, especially the expansion of three and four G mobile networks across developing countries.

As of April 2020, Statista claims there are 4.57 billion active internet users and 3.76 billion active social media users with the global online penetration rate being 59 percent. Regionally, Northern Europe ranks first with a 95 percent

[19] Law Library (2019). Laws protecting Journalists from online harassment: Spain. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/law/help/protecting-journalists/spain.php accessed on 23 June 2020.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] The Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015). Cyberviolence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call accessed at https://www.broadbandcommission.org/publications/Pages/bb-and-gender-2015.aspx on 3 December 2019.

[23] The Broadband Commission (2019). State of broadband report 2019. International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf on 7 July 2020

[24] The Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015). Cyberviolence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. Retrieved from https://www.broadbandcommission.org/publications/Pages/bb-and-gender-2015.aspx on 3 December 2019

internet penetration rate among the population; and the countries with the highest internet penetration rate worldwide are the UAE, Denmark, and South Korea, with North Korea having virtually no online usage penetration amongst the general population, ranking last worldwide.[25] And in the current state of the world, immersed in the global COVID-19 pandemic, the digital divide is being exposed like never before.[26] The World Economic Forum notes that billions of people have been going online to stay in touch during the COVID-19 pandemic but still almost half of the world's population has no access to the internet, with fewer than one in five people in the least developed countries being connected and the divide impacting women more than men.[27]

While noting that there are multiple obstacles to online access such as urban versus rural geographies and income levels, the Commission highlights that gaps in access between sexes continues to proliferate around the world and that country level gaps appear to be widest where mobile adoption is the lowest.[28] However it does point out that gaps in access to the Internet by the sexes appears to be narrowing slightly at a global level: in 2017 men were 31.5 per cent more likely to have access to the internet, whereas the figure declined to 24.8 per cent in 2018. The Commission notes that a significant driver of this reduction is the increase in women's use of the internet in low-income and lower middle-income countries. Unfortunately, it would appear that there is no age disaggregated data (yet again) so it is not possible to understand the levels of online access that girls have as opposed to women.

Access in times of COVID-19

Girls, women, and marginalised groups were already at a disadvantage in having less access to the internet than men and boy. This year the COVID-19 pandemic has moved so many aspects of daily life online that their lack of connectivity has become even more alarming. Lockdown restrictions have left millions of girls, women, and vulnerable people of all genders susceptible to a growing shadow pandemic of violence — including cyberviolence and exploitative grooming of children — and with limited access to help. For these people, technology can be a lifesaving line of defence, whether via instant messaging services with a geolocation function, free calls to domestic abuse hotlines, or discreet apps that provide disguised support and information to survivors in case of surveillance by abusers. There is a need to ensure that solutions do not only focus on high-end tech, further marginalising girls and women without those resources. A two-pronged approach is needed: to assure full connectivity for everyone and to cater to those who are not online.[29] Since most people access the internet through mobile devices — in low-income countries, especially — mobile network operators and internet service providers play a central role in enabling access. Governments and civil society can demand free or cheap access to the internet for those who cannot afford it, whether in the form of lower data-bundle costs, the waiving of caps and additional fees on data usage, or zero-rating important websites, such as those with key educational content. Service providers, too, need governments to provide a supportive regulatory environment to help maintain connectivity as demand surges.

Access and social media

In the social media world, the Commission notes that as of 2019 the active user count of some online social media communities was larger than the populations of many sovereign nations: as of March 2019, Facebook's monthly active user community reached over 2.3 billion people worldwide, and over 1.5 billion people logged into Facebook daily; whereas Google had over 1.5 billion active users just for its email product (Gmail).[30]

In the case of social media, there is some indication of teenager usage but this is not global, nor is it easy to discern the full picture because of the differences in measurement. For example, two surveys conducted with teenagers in

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[25] Statista (2020). Global digital population as of Jul 2020. Retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide on13 May 2020.
[26] World Economic Forum (2020). Coronavirus has exposed the digital divide like never before. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-digital-divide-internet-data-broadband-mobbile/ on 7 June 2020
[27] Ibid.
[28] The Broadband Commission (2019). State of broadband report 2019: International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf on 7 July 2020
[29] Albrectsen, A.B. and Mlambo-Ngcuka, P. (2020).We cannot allow COVID-19 to reinforce the digital gender divide. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/5/op-ed-ed-phumzile-covid-19-and-the-digital-gender-divide on 23 June 2020.
[30] The Broadband Commission (2019). State of broadband report 2019: International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf on 7 July 2020

the United States – one in 2018 and one in 2019 – paint different pictures of which platforms they use the most. According to a study conducted in 2018 by The Pew Research Centre, the social media platforms most used by teenagers (in order of usage) were YouTube (85 per cent), Instagram (72 per cent) and Snapchat (69 per cent) with Facebook coming in a distant fourth at 51% per cent.[31] Whereas a survey with US teenagers by YouGov in 2019 showed that Instagram topped the list (25 per cent), next being Facebook (24 per cent) followed by Snapchat (22 per cent) and YouTube (16 per cent).[32] The latter study disaggregated by sex and this showed that teenage girls were more likely to use Snapchat and Instagram, whereas for boys it was Facebook and YouTube.

A three country comparative study created a rank ordering of children's online activities and determined that there is a fairly similar order from most to least popular activities, with the results suggesting that most children start online by engaging in social activities and gaming as these appear the most attractive and accessible activities that encourage early internet use.[33] Interestingly, given one of the strands of enquiry of the present study – the freedom to speak out online – involvement in an online campaign or discussing politics were routinely in the least frequent use grouping for online activity across all ages of children in all three countries.

3.3 The nature of online harassment

In ongoing efforts to promote the benefits of online participation, the Broadband Commission points to the concept of 'meaningful universal connectivity', which encompasses 'broadband adoption that is not just available, accessible, relevant and affordable, but that is also safe, trusted, empowering users and leading to positive impact.'[34]

So, is the Internet safe? Evidence suggests not. As alluded to above, there is a collection of legal frameworks looking to criminalise digital activities that constitute cybercrime. And the scale of these nefarious acts can be staggering. For example, crimes against governments – also known as cyber terrorism - involves hacking government websites, military websites or distributing propaganda. There are some notable recent examples which include the 2017 cyber-attack on the UK National Health Service (NHS)[35] and the interference in the US 2016 election[36] but a recent article by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies really underscores the incredible scale of such attacks - listing 12 examples for May 2020 alone.[37] This doesn't even start to capture the scale of crimes committed against corporates and individuals that include fraud, privacy breaches, ransoming information and data theft; for example the 2014 hack of eBay which impacted 145 million users, the 2013 hack of Adobe that impacted 153 million users and the 2020 hack of Sina Weibo that impacted 538 million accounts.[38]

While all of these digital activities are reprehensible and have significant impact on the targets – whether government departments, companies or individuals - none have such personal impact as those acts which target individuals and threaten their well-being. And it is these acts which encompass online violence against women and girls (cyber VAWG).

The Broadband Commission defines cyber VAWG to include hate speech, hacking or intercepting private communications, identity theft, online stalking and uttering threats.[39] The Commission notes that it can also entail convincing a target to end their lives (counselling suicide or advocating genocide) as well as facilitating other forms

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[31] The Pew Research Center (2018). Teens, social media and technology. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/ on 3 December 2019.
[32] YouGov (2019). Teens use these social media platforms the most. Retrieved from https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2019/10/25/teens-social-media-use-online-survey-poll-youth on 7 June 2020.
[33] Livingstone, S. et al. (2019). Is there a ladder of children's online participation? Findings from three Global Kids Online countries. Innocenti Research Brief. Retrieved from https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRB_2019-02%2013-2-19.pdf on 3 December 2019.
[34] The Broadband Commission (2019). State of broadband report 2019: International Telecommunication Union and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.20-2019-PDF-E.pdf on 7 July 2020
[35] The Telegraph (2017). NHS cyber attack: Everything you need to know about 'biggest ransomware' offensive in history. Retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/13/nhs-cyber-attack-everything-need-know-biggest-ransomware-offensive/ on 9 June 2020.
[36] The New York Time. Russian Hacking and Influence in the U.S. Election: Complete coverage of Russia's campaign to disrupt the 2016 presidential election. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/news-event/russian-election-hacking on 9 June 2020.
[37] Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2020). Significant cyber incidents. Retrieved from https://www.csis.org/programs/technology-policy-program/significant-cyber-incidents on 9 June 2020.
[38] CSO (2020). The 15 biggest data breaches of the 21st century. Retrieved from https://www.csoonline.com/article/2130877/the-biggest-data-breaches-of-the-21st-century.html on 9 June 2020.
[39] The Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015). Cyberviolence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. Retrieved from https://www.broadbandcommission.org/publications/Pages/bb-and-gender-2015.aspx on 3 December 2019

of violence against girls and women including trafficking and the sex trade. Lumsden and Morgan also refer to the ongoing debates about the 'dark side of the web' that involves various forms of online abuse, such as trolling, cyber-bulling, e-bile, revenge porn, and sexting.[40] But what is challenging with the use of these terms to give meaning to cyber VAWG is that they can be gender blind – for example cyberbullying. There are many definitions of cyberbullying, but the first to coin the term were Belsey and then Willard.[41] The former defined it as 'bullying which involves the use of information and communication technologies such as email, cell phone and text messages, instant messaging, defamatory personal websites, and defamatory online personal polling websites to support deliberate, repeated and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others' while the latter construed it as 'the use of speech that is defamatory, constituting bullying, harassment or discrimination, and the disclosure of personal information that contains offensive, vulgar or derogatory comments'.[42] Now obviously cyberbullying is not solely carried out against women and girls, but the link to cyber VAWG needs to be made in a way that recognises the particular vulnerability of girls and women to this type of activity due to ongoing gender inequality.

There is a similar argument to be made about trolling. Berghal argues that the 'phrase "online trolling" denotes the practice of anonymously interrupting normal and customary information exchange in order to lure the recipient into reacting to the message'.[43] Leaver explains further - trolling was originally considered an activity whereby an individual frequently tried to provoke arguments for the sake of argument, rather than having a consistent point or desiring anything other than the continuation of disagreement, and goes on to argue that trolling is often employed as a blanket term for online abuse and typical trolling techniques and trolls are now just part of everyday online discourse.[44]

Importantly, Mantilla has coined the phrase 'gender trolling'[45] giving significance to the phenomenon that Lumsden and Morgen note: that '[t]rolling most commonly involves rape and death threats directed at women who are in the public eye, such as politicians, television presenters, musicians, and feminist bloggers and activists. These examples demonstrate the increasingly prevalent 'rape culture' which incorporates aspects of popular misogyny and which entails anti-female violent expression via the threats of rape and death directed at women online'.[46]

And Mantilla has conceptualised seven characteristics of gender-trolling as opposed to generic trolling: (i) women targeted for expressing opinion online; harassment is (ii) graphic, (iii) sexualized and (iv) gender-based; (v) attacks not limited to one platform; (vi) harassment is intense and ongoing and disruptive; (vii) attacks can be organised.[47]

So, what does gender-trolling, online abuse and misogyny look like? There are too many examples to cite, but a few are mentioned here to provide some context and to also demonstrate the prevalence against women and girls:

- The **Broadband Commission** noted that South Korea is one of the countries with the highest internet penetration. And with that goes online harassment: it has been observed that misogynistic discourse is not confined to a few extreme sites, but is prevalent.[48] In a 2015 survey by the **Korean Women's**

[40] Lumsden, K. and Morgan, H.M. (2017). Cyber-trolling as symbolic violence: Deconstructing gendered abuse online'. In N. Lombard (Ed.) The Routledge handbook of gender and violence. London: Routledge.

[41] Burton, P. and Mutongwizo, T. (2009). Inescapable violence: Cyberbullying and electronic violence against young people in South Africa. CJCP Issue Paper No. 8. Retrieved from http://www.cjcp.org.za/uploads/2/7/8/4/27845461/issue_paper_8.pdf on 3 December 2019.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Berghal, H. (2018). Trolling pathologies. Computer. Retrieved from http://www.berghel.net/col-edit/out-of-band/mar-18/oob_3-18.pdf on 15 January 2020.

[44] Leaver, T. (2013) Olympic trolls: Mainstream memes and digital discord? The fibre culture Journal Issue 22. Retrieved from http://twentytwo.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-163-olympic-trolls-mainstream-memes-and-digital-discord/ on 15 January 2020.

[45] Mantilla, K. (2015) Gendertrolling: How misogyny went viral. Praeger, Santa Barbara, California. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=kKNZCgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=mantilla+2015+gender+trolling&ots=iNA3FQVnUo&sig=EEho8DgKY6qSOBDMuvSgw46iZjU#v=onepage&q=mantilla%202015%20gender%20trolling&f=false on 15 January 2020.

[46] Lumsden, K. and Morgan, H. (2017). Media framing of trolling and online abuse: Silencing strategies, symbolic violence and victim blaming. Feminist Media Studies. Vol.17, No.6.

[47] Mantilla, K. (2015) Gendertrolling: How misogyny went viral. Praeger, Santa Barbara, California. Retrieved from https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=kKNZCgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=mantilla+2015+gender+trolling&ots=iNA3FQVnUo&sig=EEho8DgKY6qSOBDMuvSgw46iZjU#v=onepage&q=mantilla%202015%20gender%20trolling&f=false on 15 January 2020.

[48] Kim, J. (2018). Misogyny for male solidarity: Online hate discourse against women in South Korea. In J.R. Vickery and T. Everbach (Eds.) Mediating Misogyny: Gender, Technology, and Harassment, Palgrave McMillan. Retrieved from

Development Institute 83.7% of respondents reported exposure to misogynistic language and content on the Internet and terms coined in the Ilbe community – whose members are largely anti-immigrant, anti-women and politically right-wing - now circulate widely in Korea: for example, 93.7% of respondents were familiar with the gendered expletive *kimchi-nyeo*.[49] Created in 2010, the Ilbe site collected the best daily posts from the bulletin board of the popular website DC Inside and was ranked first among humour sites, as of October 2016 it was Korea's third-largest online community.

- **Demos** ran a study on UK twitter accounts in order to better understand the volume, degree and type of misogynistic language used on Twitter. Some of the findings demonstrated that of over 100,000 Tweets mentioning 'rape' more than 1 in 10 appeared to be threatening in nature and a high proportion of Tweets containing misogynist language were judged to be doing so in a 'casual' way.[50]

- A 2020 global survey of young people's experience (male and female, children and young adults) of online abuse and harassment was conducted by **The World Wide Web Foundation and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts.** The survey found that 52% of young women and girls have experienced online abuse, including threating messages, sexual harassment and the sharing of private images without consent; 64% of all respondents know someone who has experienced harassment, abuse or violence and young people's top concern is the sharing of private images, videos or messages without their consent - 30% said it is their top worry.[51]

- **Amnesty International** conducted qualitative and quantitative research about women's experiences on social media platforms including the scale, nature and impact of violence and abuse directed towards women on Twitter, with a focus on the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). The study demonstrated that the nature of the abuse included direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence, discriminatory abuse targeting one or more aspects of a woman's identity, targeted harassment, and privacy violations such as doxing or sharing sexual or intimate images of a woman without her consent.[52]

- **Vickery and Everbach** cite numerous examples of online harassment against women to underscore their argument that it has become an "epidemic". They point to studies that show 76 per cent of Australian women under 30 report having been harassed online; that in the US young women are disproportionately the targets of severe sexual harassment and stalking online; that in countries like Pakistan, online harassment of women is "generally accepted as a routine part of Pakistani women's daily lives" and that traditional media has played a role in amplifying or even being the catalyst for online harassment: when a reboot of the Ghostbusters movie starring an all-female leading cast was released in summer 2016, the only leading black cast member, was forced to leave Twitter temporarily after trolls harassed her with pornography, threats, and racist messages.[53]

- A new and alarming category of cyber violence involves live streaming of offline acts of violence. While cyber stalking and online sexual harassment do not involve physical violence, in these instances, crimes, including gang rape, are committed in a physical offline space and streamed live by perpetrators. In this way social media, crime and self-promotion are intertwined, resulting in a macabre "crime performance" where perpetrators share the planning and live streaming of themselves both in the act of committing the crime and in post-crime bragging.[54]

- The **Broadband Commission** references several studies to demonstrate prevalence of online harassment against women and girls. It points out that women aged 18 to 24 are at a heightened risk of being exposed to every kind of cyber VAWG and they are "uniquely likely to experience stalking

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paromita_Pain/publication/323146855_NastyWomen_Reclaiming_the_Twitterverse_from_Misogyny/links/5abbc1b20f7e9bfc045592c9/NastyWomen-Reclaiming-the-Twitterverse-from-Misogyny.pdf on 3 December 2019.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Bartlett, J. Norrie, R. et al. (2014). Misogyny on Twitter. Demos. Retrieved from https://www.demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY_ON_TWITTER.pdf on 15 January 2020.

[51] The World Wide Web Foundation (2020). The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality. Retrieved from https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-online-crisis-facing-women-and-girls-threatens-global-progress-on-gender-equality/ on 9 June 2020.

[52] Amnesty International (2018). Toxic Twitter – A toxic place for women. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/ on 3 December 2019.

[53] Vickery, J.R. and Everbach T. (2018). The persistence of misogyny: From the streets, to our screens, to the White House. In J.R. Vickery and T. Everbach (Eds.) Mediating misogyny: Gender, technology, and harassment, Palgrave McMillan. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Paromita_Pain/publication/323146855_NastyWomen_Reclaiming_the_Twitterverse_from_Misogyny/links/5abbc1b20f7e9bfc045592c9/NastyWomen-Reclaiming-the-Twitterverse-from-Misogyny.pdf on 3 December 2019.

[54] Abdul Aziz, Z. (2017). Due diligence and accountability for online violence against women. APC Issue Paper. Retrieved from https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/DueDiligenceAndAccountabilityForOnlineVAW.pdf on 6 June 2020.

and sexual harassment, while also not escaping the high rates of other types of harassment common to young people in general", like physical threats. To underscore this, reference is made to research in the EU which shows that 18 per cent of women have experienced a form of serious Internet violence since the age of 15, which corresponds to about 9 million women. Likewise, a report from India suggests that "only 35 per cent of the women have reported their victimisation, 46.7 per cent have not, and 18.3 per cent have been unaware of the fact that they have been victimised."[55]

3.4 Perpetrators and enablers of online harassment

Identifying and holding perpetrator(s) to account for online harassment is not an easy matter.

The enhanced anonymity offered by digital and virtual spaces, through encryption and privacy tools, provides particular challenges in identifying perpetrators of online violence against women and magnifies impunity.[56] And while the perpetrator is the person who creates or authors the online violence, any post can be distributed or accessed online, leading to secondary transmitters who unwittingly or deliberately amplify the harm.[57] For example, it has been observed that trolling sits within the wider social and cultural context of the rise of 'lad culture' where sexist and misogynistic language and treatment of women is praised and admired amongst peers, through online displays on sites such as 'Lad Bible', and forms of racist and sexist trolling on Twitter and other social media sites 'resulting in the heteronormative masculinization of virtual space'.[58] Importantly, the DEMOS study referenced above also suggests that women are almost as likely as men to use the terms 'slut' and 'whore' on Twitter, and that women are increasingly inclined to use the same derogatory language that has been, and continues to be, used against them. [59]

It is further noted that perpetrators of online violence against women often employ a continuum of violence, both offline and online, and, just as in the case of other forms of violence against women, perpetrators are often known, and include intimate partners and ex-partners. A pertinent example of this is revenge pornography - the online, sometimes offline, non-consensual distribution or sharing, of explicit images of someone else by ex-partners, partners, or others seeking revenge or entertainment – which, in the main, it is committed by men on women ex-partners.[60]

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the internet itself plays an important role in enhancing access to and facilitating the dissemination of information and obviously freedom of expression and freedom of information must be protected. Abdul Aziz notes that internet intermediaries bring together or facilitate transactions between third parties on the internet and they give access to, host, transmit and index content, products and services originated by third parties either on the internet or by providing internet-based services to third parties.[61] And while internet intermediaries do not necessarily post violating materials, nor do they have possession of private data and images which are disclosed and disseminated, nevertheless Abdul Aziz argues that the intermediaries have a responsibility to put in place preventive measures and respond to violating materials, especially when they have the capacity to moderate content and have in place measures to flag and report "user-generated" content.[62]

In recent times, some of the big social media platforms have tried to puts steps in place – such as the ability to turn off comments, and more sophisticated privacy mechanisms – and it must be acknowledged that managing harmful

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[55] The Broadband Commission for Digital Development (2015). Cyberviolence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call. Retrieved from https://www.broadbandcommission.org/publications/Pages/bb-and-gender-2015.aspx on 3 December 2019.
[56] Abdul Aziz, Z. (2017). Due diligence and accountability for online violence against women. APC Issue Paper. Retrieved from https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/DueDiligenceAndAccountabilityForOnlineVAW.pdf on 6 June 2020.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Lumsden, K. and Morgan, H. (2017). Media framing of trolling and online abuse: Silencing strategies, symbolic violence and victim blaming. Feminist Media Studies. Vol.17, No.6.
[59] Bartlett, J. Norrie, R. et al. (2014). Misogyny on Twitter. Retrieved from https://www.demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY_ON_TWITTER.pdf on 15 January 2020.
[60] Hall, M. and Hearn, J. (2019). Revenge pornography and manhood acts: A discourse analysis of perpetrators' accounts, Journal of Gender Studies, Vol. 28 No. 2.
[61] Abdul Aziz, Z. (2017). Due diligence and accountability for online violence against women. APC Issue Paper. Retrieved from https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/DueDiligenceAndAccountabilityForOnlineVAW.pdf on 6 June 2020.
[62] Ibid.

content is difficult – but it isn't impossible.[63] And there are many calls for the social media platforms to be held responsible for cyberbullying. [64]

There is a very interesting, and arguably ground-breaking, example of a national law creating accountability for online platforms. This is the German **'Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks (2017)'**, otherwise known as the 'NetzDG'. Increasing levels of internet hate speech, harassment and fake news led to Germany adopting the law, which requires social media platforms like Twitter, Reddit and Facebook to remove hate speech and other controversial or offensive content within 24 hours. The consequence of failing to remove banned content is up to 50 million Euros in fines. And social media platforms are therefore complying: Facebook has 2 deletion centres in Germany and employs 1200 workers to monitor content.[65] While such strident moves to hold the platforms accountable should be commended, it is a controversial law which has come under much scrutiny on the basis that it restricts freedom of speech.[66] In June 2020 the law was amended.[67] This amendment makes provision for stronger accountability for social media companies, but also criminal provisions for perpetrators. The new amendments binds social media companies - in addition to deleting posts within 24 hours - to report criminal content to the German Federal Criminal Police Office. This includes the IP address. Criminal content includes, but is not limited to, threats of murder, threats of rape, and spreading content that shows violence or abuse. In cases of particularly serious crimes, such as terrorism or homicide, the Federal Criminal Police Office officials can also request the users' password. Another component of the amendment concerns online threats, such as threats of physical violence, sexual assault and insults: prison sentences of up to two years can be imposed for these and the potential prison sentence for online death threats has also been increased from one to three years. As with the original law, the amendment has been seen as controversial particularly in relation to freedom of speech. In addition, some parties fear the amendment violates the protection of personal data.

3.5 Effect of online harassment

Being online is regarded as hugely beneficial by many children and young adults. In fact, a 2017 inquiry into the impact of cyberbullying on children and young people's mental health, undertaken by UK charity Young Minds, together with The Children's Society and a British Member of Parliament, found that 62% of respondents said that social media had a positive impact on their friendships.[68] However, the inquiry also revealed that 38% of young people reported that social media had a negative impact on how they feel about themselves.

In a study looking at violent tweets against women in politics in three countries – Kenya, Indonesia and Colombia - one of the research questions was to determine whether violent content had an effect on women's online engagement.[69] The study found that both Kenya and Colombia had larger changes in response to online VAW-P,

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[63] Marketwatch (2019). Instagram, Facebook and Twitter struggle to contain the epidemic in online bullying. Retrieved from https://www.marketwatch.com/story/why-it-may-be-too-late-for-instagram-facebook-and-twitter-to-contain-the-epidemic-in-online-bullying-2019-07-15 on 9 June 2020.
The Guardian (2016). What are four of the top social media networks doing to protect children? Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/feb/09/social-media-networks-child-protection-policies-facebook-twitter-instagram-snapchat on 9 June 2020.
[64] LawyersWeekly (2018). Firm pushes for platforms like Facebook to be held responsible for cyber bullying. Retrieved from https://www.lawyersweekly.com.au/sme-law/22872-firm-pushes-for-platforms-like-facebook-to-be-held-responsible-for-cyber-bullying on 10 June 2020
Engineering and Technology (2019). Tech bosses must be accountable for online child abuse, says NSPCC head. Retrieved from https://eandt.theiet.org/content/articles/2019/06/tech-bosses-must-be-accountable-for-online-child-abuse-says-nspcc-head/ on 10 June 2019.
[65] Lam, A. (2018). 87% of Germans approve of social media regulation law. Retrieved from https://daliaresearch.com/blog/blog-germans-approve-of-social-media-regulation-law/ on 18 June 2020.
[66] Oltermann, P. (2018). Tough new German law puts tech firms and free speech in spotlight. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/05/tough-new-german-law-puts-tech-firms-and-free-speech-in-spotlight on 18 June 2020.
[67] BMJV (2020). Gesetzespaket gegen Hass und Hetze ist ein Gesetzespaket zum Schutz der Demokratie. Retrieved from https://www.bmjv.de/SharedDocs/Artikel/DE/2020/061820_GesetzHassundHetze.html on 14 July 2020
Tagesschau (2020). Gesetze gegen Hass im Netz. Retrieved from https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/internet-hass-hetze-101.html on 14 July 2020
Lomas, N. (2020). Germany tightens online hate speech rules to make platforms send reports straight to the feds. Retrieved from https://techcrunch.com/2020/06/19/germany-tightens-online-hate-speech-rules-to-make-platforms-send-reports-straight-to-the-feds/?guccounter=1
[68] Safety Net Report: Impact of cyberbullying on children's mental health. Retrieved from https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/policy-reports/cyberbullying-inquiry/#about-the-inquiry- on 9 June 2020.
[69] Zeiter, K. et al (2019). Tweets that chill: Analyzing online violence against women in politics report of case study research in Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya. NDI. Retrieved from https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Tweets%20That%20Chill%20Report.pdf on 3 December 2019.

which demonstrated that politically active women were slowing down, pausing, or altogether stopping their social media presence after experiencing online VAW-P. Nonetheless it was found that across all three case studies, it was rare (2-4%) for respondents to completely stop engaging online in response to online violence.

A recent map of systematic reviews on the association between screen based activities and the mental health of children and young people, showed that while it is a highly reviewed area of research, the reviews themselves were of differing quality and there are a number of areas where more and better research is needed.[70] The study found that few reviews analysed subsets of populations (e.g. specific age groups, gender, mental health status) which could help contextualise the relationship between screen based activities and mental health and psychosocial outcomes. In terms of mental health outcomes, measures of depression were reported across six of the nine reviews measuring associations. Other mental health outcomes (e.g. loneliness, aggression/hostility, ADHD, suicidal thoughts, anxiety) were observed less frequently, only in one or two of the reviews that were the focus of the study.[71]

None of the studies seemed to suggest ways to address the mental health issues being experienced by those who suffer online abuse, and certainly not the specific cohort of adolescent girls and young women who experience online harassment and violence. There is obviously the availability of the usual mental health interventions, but no specific end-to-end programme or interventions tailored for this specific instance of cyber violence was determined. Likewise, it was only a few studies – minimal – that acknowledged the specific nature and effect of cyber violence against girls. There is still much to understand about why they are targeted, who the perpetrators are, what the nature of the abuse is, and importantly, the effect on girls.

4. METHODOLOGY

This year's report is based on two strands of data collection and data analysis. The first one being qualitative data collection and analysis and the second one quantitative data collection and analysis. While the quantitative data collection in 22 countries allows us to see the big picture and the trends across regions, the qualitative data collection with 18 girls from 16 countries allowed us to dive deeper into the statistical findings and understand the lived realities of girls.

Ethical approval for the research project has been granted by the University of Cape Town. Furthermore, girls who participated in qualitative data collection have given informed and voluntary consent to participate. In cases where girls were under the age of 18, their parents/guardians also consented. For the quantitative data collection, Ipsos and Kantar collected implicit consent from survey participants. Furthermore, both Ipsos and Kantar adhere to the ISOMAR standards.

4.1 Qualitative Methodology

4.1.1 Data collection
Qualitative data was collected over a 3-week period between March and April through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The interviews varied in time but lasted roughly between 35 minutes to an hour and were conducted via calls on the platforms Skype and WhatsApp. These platforms were used as they offered convenience for making lengthy international calls, were accessible, and among the girls' preferred communication methods. The date and time were also chosen by the girls in order to fit around their schedules and respective time zones. The questionnaire was structured into four sections with between four to six questions in each. All questions were open-ended and intended to be explorative, offering the girls the opportunity to give as much or as little information as they felt comfortable with, and used to understand the experiences of the participants in their own words. The first section largely asked questions around the nature of the girls' use of social media, the second, around the frequency and nature of online harassment and harassers, the third the effect of online harassment, and the fourth, around how they deal with online harassment and potential solutions.

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[70] Dickson K. et al. (2018). Screen-based activities and children and young people's mental health: A systematic map of reviews. EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education, University College London
[71] Ibid.

In line with ethics and safeguarding procedures qualitative interviews were conducted by two members of Plan International staff, which also offered the opportunity for one researcher to remain engaged in the discussion whilst the other could note-take. Information sheets were provided ahead of time, and informed consent and assent, for girls under 18, were given prior to the commencement of interviews, verbal consent was also given to record the interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the data collection, analysis and write up process.

4.1.2 Sample size

Research participants were recruited through Plan International Country Offices, National Offices and Global Hub Advocacy team members. The qualitative sample was intended to consist of young female activists, between 15-24 years old, with intersectional characteristics. Overall, interviews were conducted with 18 girls aged between 16-24 years old from 16 countries around the world, including: Canada, Chile, Indonesia, Malawi, Nepal, Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, USA, Guinea, Peru, El Salvador, Spain, Ecuador and Myanmar. The participants indicated, prior to the KIIs, that they were social media users, who 'speak out' about important topics online and may have faced or witnessed online harassment. Whilst it is not possible to differentiate the girls' intersectional characteristics, it is possible to deduce from the content of the interviews that they displayed differences in age, culture and context, ethnicity, race, and religious, political and social views.

Most of the interviews were conducted in English, some were conducted in French and Spanish. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English using the platform ref.com. Unfortunately, due to technical and translation problems one transcript was excluded from the study. Internet connectivity was sometimes problematic during conversations. However, all interviews were completed and despite pauses due to reconnection of the calls this did not seem to affect the quality of answers or the flow of the discussions.

4.1.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was undertaken through content and sentiment analysis using qualitative NVivo software. Few measures were taken to clean the data in order to preserve the rhetoric strategy, arrangement and delivery of information of the verbatim transcripts to ensure a more complete representation of the girl's experiences and voices. Transcripts were familiarised against an initial analytical framework which considered themes related to the overall sections of the questionnaire. These themes were refined for coding and made into six overarching 'nodes' within the software, which had multiple and interconnected subcategories. The overarching six categories included:

1. Nature of social media use
2. Experiences of online harassment
3. Characteristics of online harassers
4. The effect of, and resilience against, online harassment
5. Continuum of harassment between online and offline settings
6. Solutions to prevent online harassment.

Using the Nvivo software the transcripts were individually read and coded into respective nodes and sub-categories. The contents of each node were reviewed to ensure consistency, accuracy and minimise the risk of misinterpretation, consequently some quotes were either removed or re-coded. The overarching analytical framework and coding structure, informed by the questionnaire, helped organise and structure the data, and enabled key findings, themes and arguments to be identified within and across each sub-category and overarching node. The initial qualitative write up was structured into the aforementioned six sections and comprehensively featured various quotes from the girls, and a sense of whether what was being discussed was a first or second-hand account and the frequency of the experience or view among the participants.

4.2 Quantitative Methodology

4.2.1 Data collection

Data was collected using a closed-question survey with 16 questions that asked girls about their social media use, their experience of online harassment, the consequences of online harassment and possible solutions to online harassment. Data was collected via online surveys and via computer assisted telephone interviews.

The survey was conducted by Kantar in some countries and Ipsos in other countries between the 1st of April and the 5th of May. Respondents were girls and young women between the age of 15-25. Data was collected in the following countries: Australia[I72], Benin[K], Brazil[I], Canada[I], Colombia[I], Dominican Republic[K], Ecuador[K], Germany[I], Ghana[K], Guinea[K], India[I], Indonesia[K], Japan[I], Kenya[K], Netherlands[I], Nigeria[K], Norway[I], Philippines[K], Spain[I], Thailand[I], USA[I], Zambia[K].

The survey was delivered through online and SMS modalities using two survey firms, Kantar and Ipsos Mori. In addition, Kantar used two alternative methods of data collection following low response rate from SMS in some countries: Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI), and Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Both firms have a large pool of survey respondents who are in the survey demographic in each country which they reach out to. They are typically chosen from a pre-arranged pool of respondents who have agreed to be contacted by a market research service in order to respond to surveys. As the respondents have already agreed to be part of a panel, online samples tend to achieve higher response rates than other methods such as using an existing customer database to conduct research.

4.2.2 Sample Size

Overall, 14071 interviews were collected across 22 countries.

Table 1 Sample sizes per country

Australia	1000	Colombia	500	Ghana	500	Japan	501
Benin	500	Dominican Republic	500	Guinea	500	Kenya	500
Brazil	500	Ecuador	500	India	500	Netherlands	1000
Canada	1002	Germany	1003	Indonesia	500	Nigeria	500
Norway	400	Thailand	500	Philippines	500	Spain	1000
USA	1165	Zambia	500				

4.2.3 Data Analysis

Before the raw data supplied by Kantar and Ipsos were merged, the datasets were recoded and labelled in order to create identical variables. Data cleaning, merging and analysis was conducted using Stata. Data analysis included the creation of basic summary statistics, often disaggregated by country, region[73], age and intersectional characteristics of girls; and bivariate statistics, such as correlations and group comparisons. All percentages are rounded up when the decimals are .50 or higher and rounded down when the decimals are smaller than 0.50.

4.3 Research Limitations

- Data collection as conducted remotely, and only girls and young women who had sufficient access to devices that have internet or phone connection could participate as respondents. This means that girls who do not have sustainable access to the internet or phone connections, often the girls who are the most vulnerable, were not able to share their accounts of online harassment.

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[72] Countries marked with [I] signify that Ipsos collected the data for the respective country, countries marked with [K] signify that Kantar collected the data.

[73] The regions are Asia-Pacific (Australia, India, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines); Europe Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Spain); Africa (Benin, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia); Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador); North America (USA, Canada)

- While we can verify that the participants in the qualitative data collection all have been female, we cannot verify this for every quantitative survey respondent. It might be the case that other family members or friends who were not female have filled in the survey.
- The samples of the quantitative survey are not representative of the girl population in the specific countries.
- Even though we know that early adolescence (age 10-14) is a critical period in a girls' life, we conducted data collection with girls and young women between the age of 15-25 due to ethical considerations.
- Since qualitative interviews, that have been conducted in French or Spanish, were translated into English before data analysis, the original meaning of some concepts that the girls mentioned during the interview, might have been lost in translation.

5. FINDINGS

The findings section combines the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data collection and data analysis. While the findings that are based on the quantitative data and analysis provide overarching statistics and trends on online harassment on social media platforms, the qualitative data and analysis provides a deep dive into the lived realities of girls and young women and provides space for their voices.

The findings section is structured in the following way:

Section 1 discusses girls and young women's usage of social media. This includes information on how frequently they use social media, which social media platforms are used, how and for what purpose social media is used and how important social media is to girls and young women.
Section 2 explores girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment. This section provides information on how frequently and from what age girls and young women face online harassment, what types of online harassment girls and young women face and some of the reasons why this might be happening to girls and young women.
Section 3 discusses the profile and characteristics of the perpetrators and harassers.
Section 4 examines the consequences of online harassment for girls and young women. It discusses how girls and young women are affected by online harassment and how they deal with online harassment when it happens and what coping mechanisms girls and young women employ.
Section 5 shows how online harassment is a continuum of the harassment that girls and young women are facing in public spaces.
Section 6 discusses possible solutions to end online harassment against girls and young women.

5.1 Adolescent girls' and young women's use of social media

This section provides an overview on which social media platforms adolescent girls and young women use, what they use it for and how frequently they use it.

5.1.1 Level of social media usage

Girls and young women across the 22 countries included in the survey were asked about their use of social media. 98% of girls and young women said that they use social media. Of those, 74% said that they frequently or very frequently post on social media. And 64% of girls and young women said that they frequently or very frequently comment on social media posts of other users.

Figure 1 Frequency of posting and commenting on social media platforms
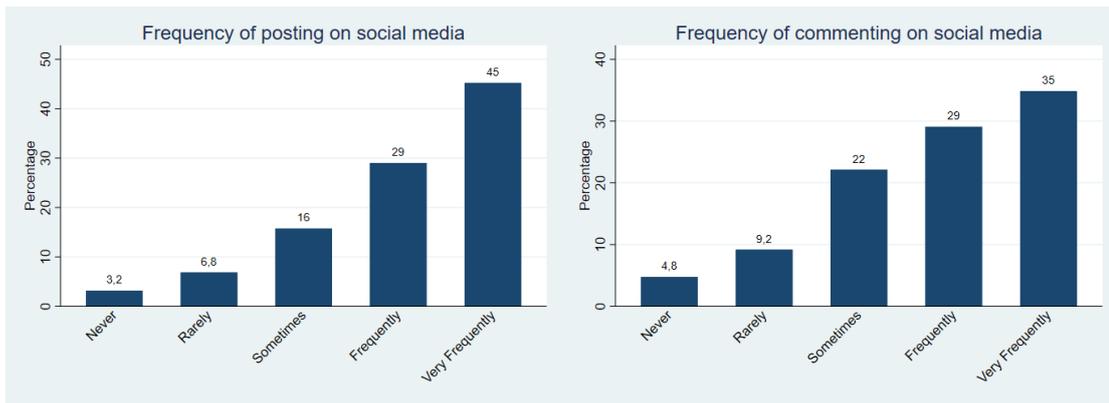
The overall level of social media usage was calculated taking both, the frequency of posting and the frequency of commenting on social media platforms into account. The results show that across all countries, 64 per cent of girls and young women can be classified as having a high level of social media usage, 23 per cent as having a medium level of social media usage and 13 per cent as having a low level of social media usage.

When looking at the level of social media use by region and country, the highest overall level of usage occurs in Europe, where 82 per cent of girls and young women report high levels of social media use and the lowest overall level of usage occurs in Africa, where 48 per cent of girls and young women report high levels of social media use.

Figure 2 Level of social media usage by region
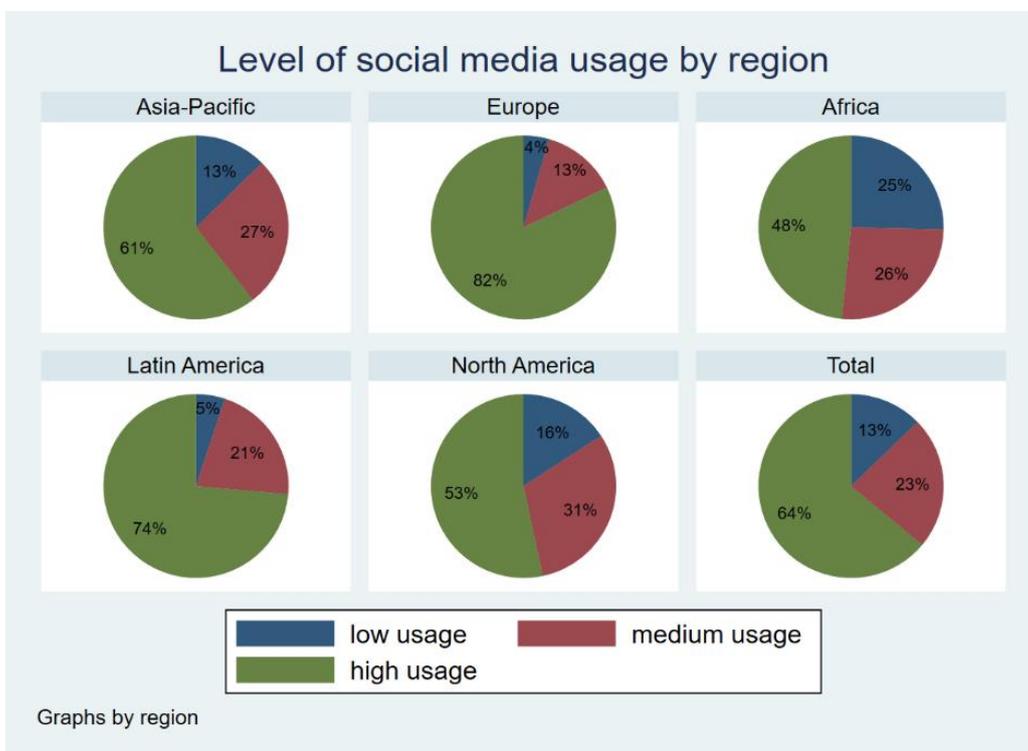
When looking at the age distribution of social media use, the proportion of frequent or very frequent social media users is highest amongst 15-year-old girls (72 per cent) and lowest amongst 25-year-old women (57 per cent). Between the age of 16-24 the proportion of girls and young women who are frequent or very frequent users of social media ranges from 61-66 per cent.

During qualitative interviews all participants described being social media users. When asked to consider how important social media was to them 82 per cent of respondents identified social media as important, whilst none of the respondents considered social media to not play a part in their lives. Social media was considered important for a number of reasons ranging from; keeping in touch with friends,[74] communicating with family,[75] job opportunities[76], spreading and acquiring information,[77] keeping updated with current affairs,[78] interacting with a wide range of people[79] and building online communities.[80]

> **'Actually, uh, uh, social media is v- very important these days, and I often keep using for three to four hours a day.'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> **'It plays an essential part in my daily life, and also to communicate and to keep contact with my friends and family.'** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

> **'They're extremely important to me, to be honest. Uh, I mean I grew up in the time where all these applications were becoming very famous, and it's very trendy for young people. But I think I do spend most of my day online…I use it on a daily basis for lots of hours.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Adolescent girls and young women from the qualitative sample characterised themselves as daily users, often spending vast amounts of time online every day. Girls discussed that they used social media for a number of reasons which have been grouped into the following overarching categories: education, studies or work,[81] entertainment, news or general learning,[82] to share personal content,[83] to socialise and connect with friends, family or online communities[84] and to speak out or learn about topics of importance to them.

Respondents in the qualitative interviews were selected because they use social media to speak out about important topics. All respondents confirmed during the interviews that they are using social media for this purpose. There was an impressive range of issues the girls and young women speak about which ranged from: abortion,[85] menstrual hygiene management,[86] sexual reproductive health (SRHR),[87] online child sexual abuse,[88] gender-based violence including social issues related to violence against women and girls,[89] rape[90] and child marriage,[91] female empowerment,[92] female representation in media,[93] girls' access to education,[94] challenging gender stereotypes and female sexual objectification,[95] feminism,[96] gender equality,[97] street harassment,[98] women and children's rights[99] including the impact of tobacco on children,[100] human rights,[101] politics[102] and

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[74] Young Woman, 23, Spain
[75] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[76] Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[77] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[78] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[79] Girl, 17, Philippines
[80] Young Woman, 23, USA
[81] Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[82] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[83] Girl, 17, Canada;Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[84] Girl, 17, Canada, Girl, 16, El Salvador, Girl, 17, Philippines, Young Woman, 24, Tanzania, Young Woman, 23, South Sudan, Young Woman, 23, Malawi, Girl, 17, Indonesia, Young Woman, 18, Nepal, Young Woman, 18, Ecuador, Young Woman, 21, Myanmar, Young Woman, 20, Sudan.
[85] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[86] Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[87] Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[88] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[89] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador
[90] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[91] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[92] Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[93] Girl, 17, Indonesia
[94] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[95] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[96] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador
[97] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Peru
[98] Young Woman, 23, USA
[99] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Indonesia
[100] Girl, 17, Indonesia
[101] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 16, El Salvador
[102] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

political participation,[103] youth activism,[104] social inequality,[105] volunteering,[106] promoting literacy online,[107] self-care,[108] hygiene safety during the COVID-19 pandemic,[109] and climate and environmental concerns including-intersectional environmentalism,[110] ecological rights,[111] sanitation and the environment,[112] environmental crisis,[113] the environment[114] and climate change.[115]

Girls were asked how they use social media to speak out about the above topics. The girls' activity has been categorised into three methods; sharing original content, sharing secondary content and interactive engagement.

The original content which girls created and shared to speak about important topics included writing articles or written posts,[116] posting girls and women's first-hand experiences through written content,[117] or posting photographs or video stories,[118] creating infographics,[119] posting stories or videos of their own opinions,[120] posting photos and photos with captions,[121] private or direct messaging,[122] or creating music.[123]

The girls also speak out about important topics by sharing content from secondary sources on social media which includes sharing information or resources,[124] sharing other people's articles,[125] and sharing others posts and opinions.[126] Finally, girls also use social media to speak out through interactive forms of engagement. This has included hosting online question and answer sessions,[127] joining online groups or communities about the topic,[128] and creating a global account that has inspired other regional accounts on the topic to be set up, to offer a space to share experiences.[129]

Often girls described using a mix of different ways they speak out online:

> **'I share lots, like pictures, videos, uh, or even a song and it's like it's in graphics, and then even sometimes I just make like um, interactive Instagram story to engaging with the audience on my Instagram.'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> **'I put up text and photos and share other people's articles. Also to comment, sometimes, on topics of my interest.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'I make short articles according to what I study and on topics depending on an important day or political juncture, what I do often is share serious news of rape against women and children.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

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[103] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[104] Girl, 17, Canada
[105] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[106] Young Woman, 24, Tanzania
[107] Girl, 17, Indonesia
[108] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[109] Girl, 17, Indonesia
[110] Girl, 17, Canada
[111] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[112] Young Woman, 24, Tanzania
[113] Young Woman, 23, Spain
[114] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador
[115] Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[116] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[117] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[118] Young Woman, 23, USA;Girl, 17, Indonesia
[119] Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia;
[120] Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador;
[121] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar,
[122] Young Woman, 23, Spain; Girl, 17, Philippines
[123] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[124] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[125] Girl, 17, Ecuador
[126] Young Woman, 23, Spain; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[127] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia;
[128] Girl, 17, Indonesia; Girl, 17, Philippines
[129] Young Woman, 23, USA

'So mostly it's I post photos and write, uh, some articles on them.' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

5.1.2 Social media platforms

The social media platforms that are used by most girls across all 22 countries are WhatsApp (60 per cent), Instagram (59 per cent) and Facebook (53 per cent). LINE is an app for private chats that is very popular in Japan. Therefore, it has only been added for Japanese respondents. It is used by 64 per cent of girls in Japan. Although WeChat is a private messaging app that is used by one billion people, it is almost exclusively used in China. Therefore, the small percentage (7 per cent) of girls and young women indicating that they are using WeChat can be explained because the survey was not conducted in China.

Table 2 Percentage of girls and young women using social media platforms

Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Tik Tok	Snapchat	WhatsApp	WeChat[130]	YouTube	Line[131]
53%	24%	59%	22%	38%	60%	7%	28%	64%

Across all countries, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook are not only the social media platforms used by most girls and young women, but also the social media platforms that are used most frequently. In the survey girls and young women indicated whether they use each platform never, rarely, sometimes, frequently or very frequently.

Figure 3 Most frequently used social media platforms across all countries
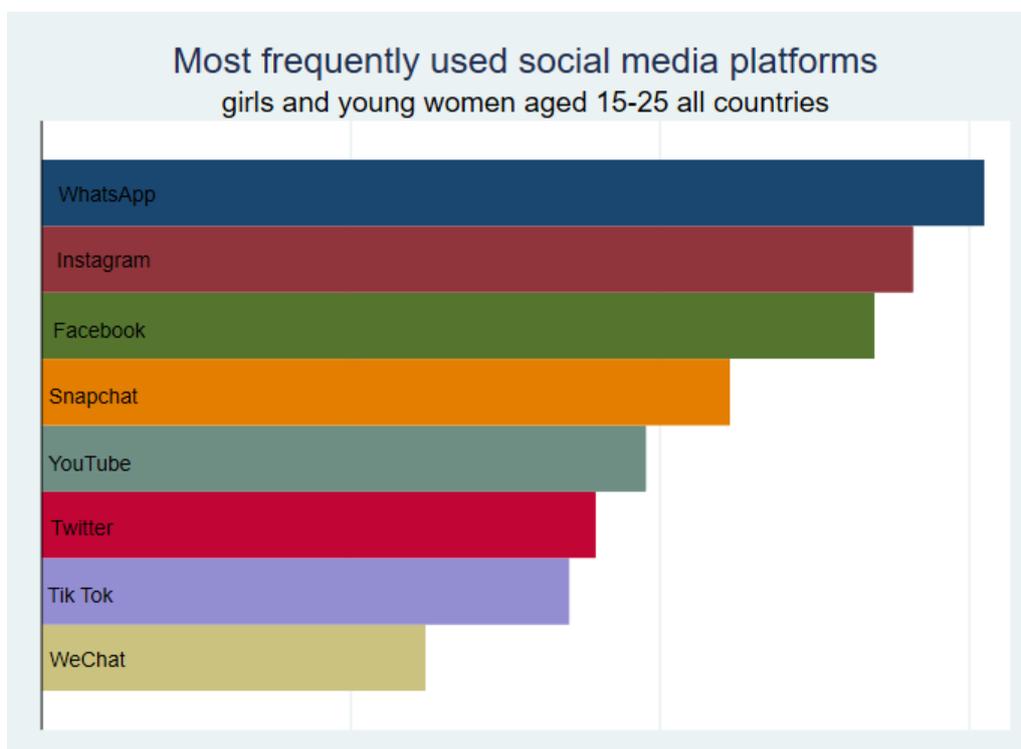
Respondents of the qualitative survey confirmed that they use the following social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, WeChat, Whatsapp and Youtube. Other sites used included SnapChat,[132]HouseParty,[133]

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[130] The small percentage of girls and young women using WeChat is probably a reflection of the geographical presence of WeChat and the countries included in the survey. Ie. WeChat is mostly popular in certain Asian countries and we don't have all of those included in the survey.
[131] Line has only been included in the survey for girls and young women in Japan. Therefore, the 64,47% refer only to the survey respondents from Japan.
[132] Girl, 17, Canada
[133] Young Woman, 23, Spain

Line,[134] Linkedin, Tango and Skype[135] and Kik,[136] Facebook (including Facebook Messenger)[137] and Instagram[138] were discussed the most and can be identified as the most frequently used.

Girls in the qualitative interviews said that they choose a social media platform based on which platform is most popular in their country and which platform is most popular with their friends and audience.

> **'I use, uh, Facebook and, I, I mean Instagram sometimes, but I'm so much onto Facebook, because my country, it is the social media, uh, one of the social media everybody uses and everybody goes for.'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> **'Facebook and Instagram because they are the best known.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'Uh, mostly Facebook and Twitter … because they're the most trendy, and people, like, a lot of the population is on Facebook'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

> **'Yes, it is Instagram… in Indonesia if you want to reach especially young people, you have to use Instagram because there are so many of them that are using that… But if you want to reach adults, so I think that's better but Indonesian's use Facebook…'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> **'I chose social media because the target audience, especially youth is there as the audience. I hope through my messages they could get the idea and can open up their perspective.'** (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

> **'It depends on who you use the networks with. If it is with my friends and in a more informal tone, the Instagram in "stories" format.'** (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

Indeed, when looking at how frequently girls and young women use various social media platforms in different regions, the variations become apparent.

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[134] Girl, 17, Indonesia
[135] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[136] Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[137] Girl, 17, Canada, Girl, 16, El Salvador, Girl, 17, Ecuador, Girl, 17, Philippines, Young Woman, 22, Chile, Young Woman, 23, South Sudan, Young Woman, 23, Malawi, Young Woman, 24, Peru, Young Woman, 19, Indonesia, Young Woman, 18, Nepal, Young Woman, 18, Ecuador , Young Woman, 21, Myanmar, Young Woman, 20, Sudan, Young Woman, 23, USA
[138] Girl, 17, Canada, Girl, 17, Ecuador, Young Woman, 24, Tanzania, Young Woman, 22, Chile, Young Woman, 23, South Sudan, Young Woman, 23, Spain, Young Woman, 24, Peru, Girl, 17, Indonesia, Young Woman, 19, Indonesia, Young Woman, 18, Ecuador, Young Woman, 21, Myanmar, Young Woman, 23, USA

Figure 4 Most frequently used social media platforms by region

Most frequently used social media platforms by region
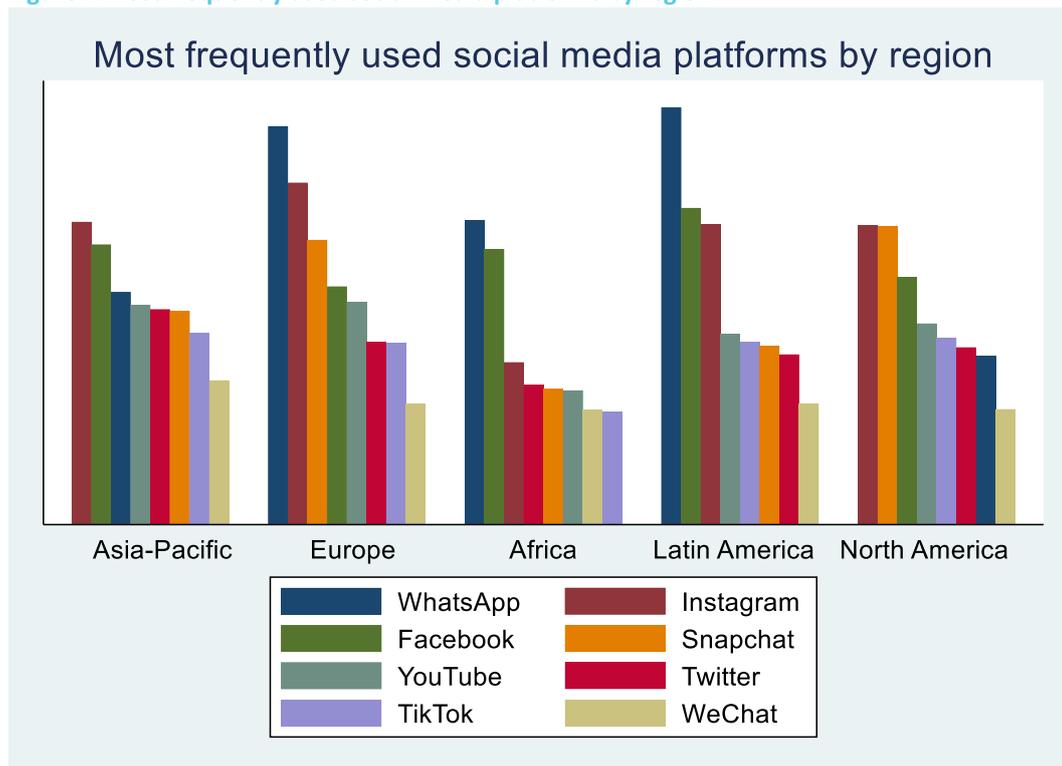
When looking at how frequently various social media platforms are used by girls and young women of different ages, we find that WhatsApp is one of the most frequently used social media platforms across all ages. The older cohort of young women use Facebook more frequently than the younger cohort of adolescent girls, while adolescent girls use Instagram more frequently than the older cohort of young women. Adolescent girls are also using Snapchat and TikTok much more frequently than young women.

Figure 5 Most frequently used social media platforms by age

Most frequently used social media platforms by age

Age 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25

Whatsapp   Instagram
Facebook   Snapchat
YouTube   Twitter
TikTok   WeChat
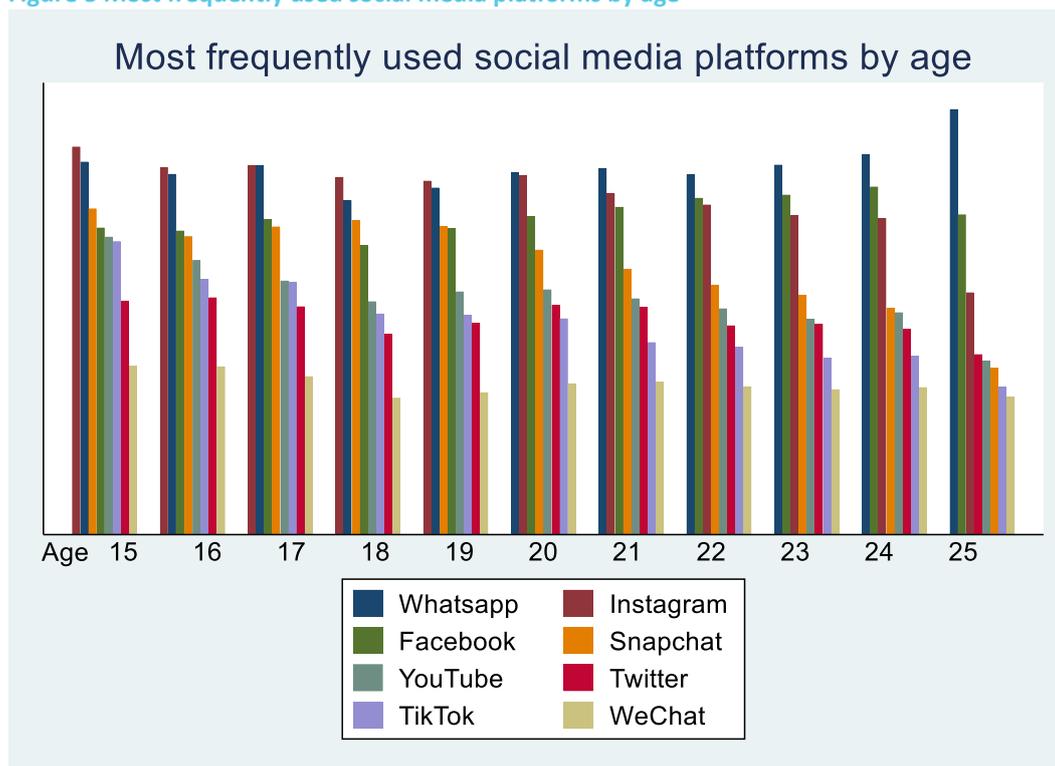
5.1.3 Conclusion

We found that virtually all girls and young women are using social media platforms. Across all countries, most girls and young women (64 per cent) are using social media platforms frequently or very frequently. Girls and young women in the qualitative interviews described how important social media is for them in order to socialise and connect with friends and family, to entertain themselves, educate themselves and also to speak out about topics that they are passionate about.

The social media platforms that most girls are using, and girls are using most frequently across all countries are Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

The results of this section highlight that being active on social media platforms is an important part of girls' and young women's lives and therefore understanding the prevalence and impact of online harassment against girls and young women on social media platforms is an important topic for all countries and regions.

5.2 Experiences of gender-based online harassment

Social media platforms are spaces where girls and young women spend a considerable amount of time and it is of utmost importance to understand that a social media platform can also be a very hostile environment for girls and young women. The following section explores the prevalence of online harassment against girls and young women on social media platforms, the types of online harassment that girls and young women are facing and alludes to the reasons behind gender-based online harassment.

5.2.1 Proportion of girls and young women facing online harassment

Across all 22 countries, 58 per cent of girls reported that they had experienced some form of online harassment on social media platforms. In the qualitative survey 15 of 18 girls confirmed that they had faced some form of online harassment on social media platforms.

Looking at the percentage of girls and young women who have reported that they experienced online harassment on social media platforms by region, only minor differences can be observed. In Europe 63 per cent of girls reported having been harassed on social media platforms, followed by 60 per cent of girls in Latin America, 58 per cent in the Asia-Pacific region, 54 per cent in Africa, and 52 per cent in North America.

However, when looking at what percentage of girls have faced online harassment on social media platforms in each country, there are big differences, with some countries having a much higher percentage of girls saying they have never been harassed online than girls saying they have been harassed online. Countries where girls who have not been harassed outweigh those who have been harassed are USA, Japan, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Indonesia and Kenya.

Figure 6 Girls and young women who experience online harassment by country

Graphs by country
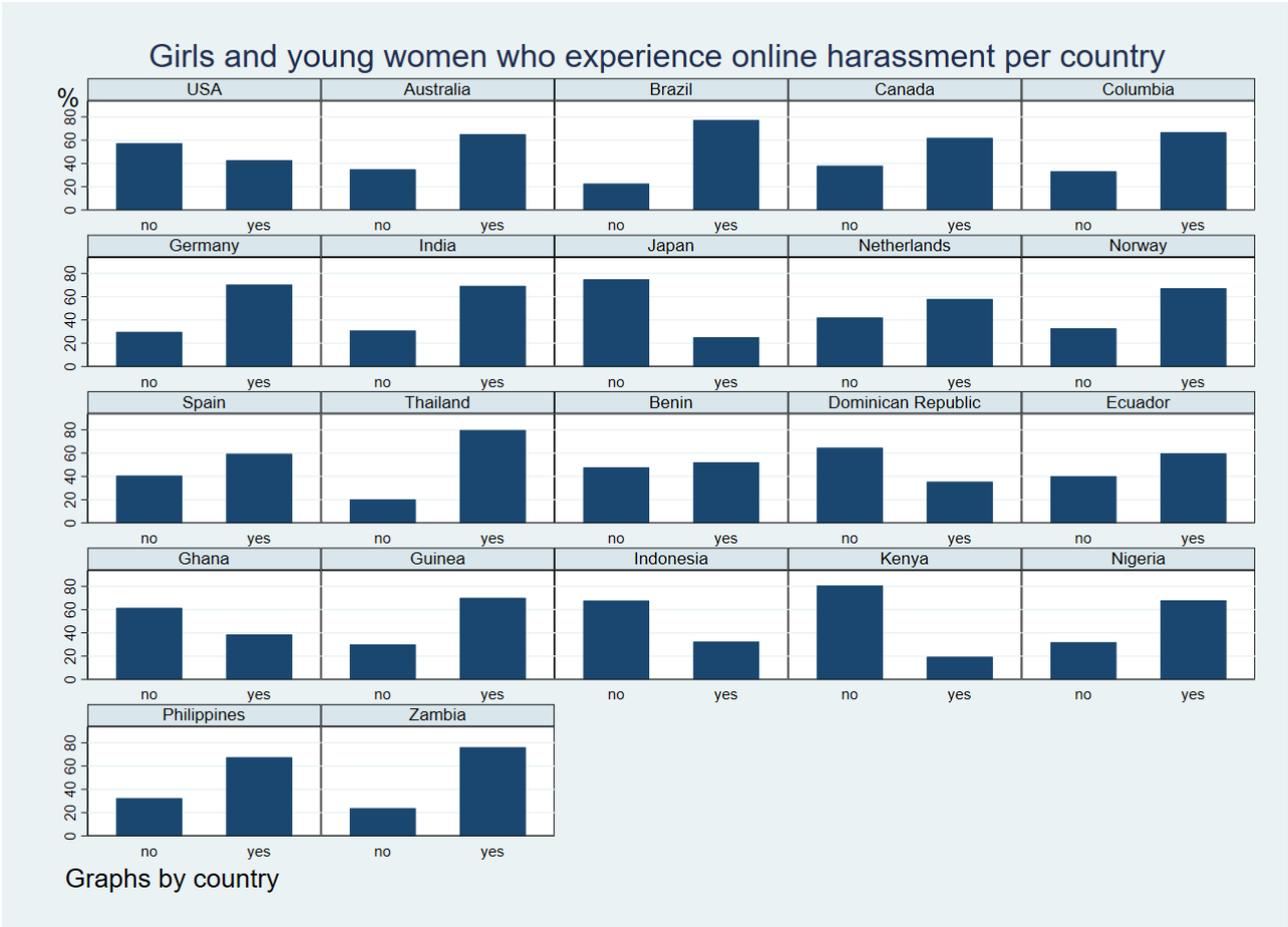
Even when girls have not faced gender-based online harassment themselves, the majority of the girls who were asked this question (63 per cent) know other girls or young women who have experienced online harassment on social media platforms. In the qualitative interviews girls who witnessed online harassment happening to other girls or young women reported that this had a negative effect on themselves:

> **'Well, personally, since I pass filters, I received some education as a child on how to take care of my privacy and who I add to social networks, so I don't think I get attacked directly... But looking at other cases, yes, too much hatred towards my classmates. It's almost weekly that one is there.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

> **'Okay, about that question, I thought that if I have experience, I thought maybe if I, I have seen somewhere else, but me, I myself, I haven't faced the any harassment, but I've seen to, to, many people, other people, I've seen it.'** (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

> **'I have never experienced online harassment, although sometimes I got scared to post or give comments on social media for getting negative comments or judgements.'** (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

In the qualitative interviews, almost all girls and young women reported that they experience online harassment on social media platforms. The respondents who said they do not face any online harassment at the time of the

interview, reported that they had faced online harassment in the past and that it became less or non-existent due to them taking precautions:

> 'Um, it's... not too often because now as I'm aware of uh, social media, and how to use it uh, correctly. So now I mean, it's not often I'll be seeing such online sexual abuse.' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> 'Uh, well, I used, or the, the time where I used to face most harassment was when I was younger. So now I just turned 20, so there, the time when I faced harassment the most was when I was between, uh, nine to 14, I guess. It was that era of my life where I faced so harassment because I was immature and I did not know how to respond to most of the things that were happening. And I was trying to be as open as I could so I remember there were, like, I used to use almost seven social media platforms per day.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

5.2.1.1 Age when first online harassment occurs

In both, the qualitative interviews and the quantitative surveys, girls were asked at what age they first experienced online harassment. The youngest case of online harassment identified in the qualitative interviews started at 9 years old,[139] with the oldest starting from 22 years old.[140] The rest of the girls first experienced online harassment between the ages of 14 and 17 years old.[141]

The results from the quantitative survey support the accounts of girls in the qualitative interviews. Across all 22 countries, some of the girls who reported harassment first experienced online harassment at a very young age (between the ages of 8 to 10), while some experienced it only at an older age (between the ages of 21 to 24). However, most girls started to experience harassment on social media between the ages of 14-16.

Figure 7 Age when girls and young women first experience online harassment
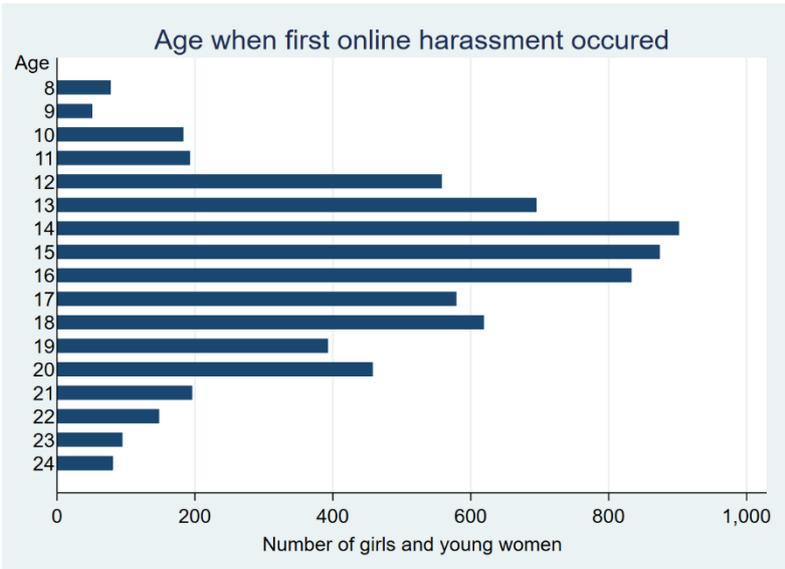
5.2.1.2 Proportion of girls and young women facing online harassment by social media platform

In the quantitative survey girls and young women also indicated on which social media platforms they face harassment. With 39 per cent of girls reporting that they face harassment on Facebook, Facebook is by far the platform where most girls experience harassment. This is interesting as girls in the qualitative interviews also mentioned that Facebook is the platform that they are most concerned about using because they do not feel safe:

> 'Actually I can say that I- I'm, (laughs), more careful nowadays, because like, um, I- I don't often like go on Facebook anymore. I only do it like once in a while, to avoid, you know, like bad comments, or any

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[139] Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[140] Young Woman, 23, Spain
[141] 14 (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador);14 (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar);15-16 (Girl, 17, Ecuador); 15 (Girl, 17, Philippines); 16 (Young Woman, 18, Nepal); 16-17 (Young Woman, 22, Chile); 17 (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

explicit things, or anything else like that. So, I prefer just staying on WhatsApp, because I feel safer on it.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'In Facebook I have received many people and eliminated many people, in Instagram I feel less attacked, in Facebook there is more violence.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'…[Facebook] Messenger is more risky because it is less private…' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

Twenty-three per cent of girls and young women reported experiencing online harassment on Instagram and 14 per cent of girls and young women reported experiencing online harassment on WhatsApp.

Table 3 Percentage of girls who face harassment on various social media platforms

Social Media Platform	% of girls who said they face harassment on social media platform
Facebook	39%
Twitter	9%
Instagram	23%
Tik Tok	6%
Snapchat	10%
WhatsApp	14%
WeChat	1%
YouTube	10%
Line	0%
Other	3%

5.2.2 Frequency of online harassment

Through the survey across 22 countries and the qualitative interviews it became apparent that most girls (58 per cent) have experienced online harassment on social media platforms. 64 per cent of girls and young women said that they, or other girls they know, had experienced online harassment frequently (32 per cent) or very frequently (32 per cent) and another 25 per cent said they, or other girls they know, sometimes faced online harassment.

Figure 8 Frequency of online harassment
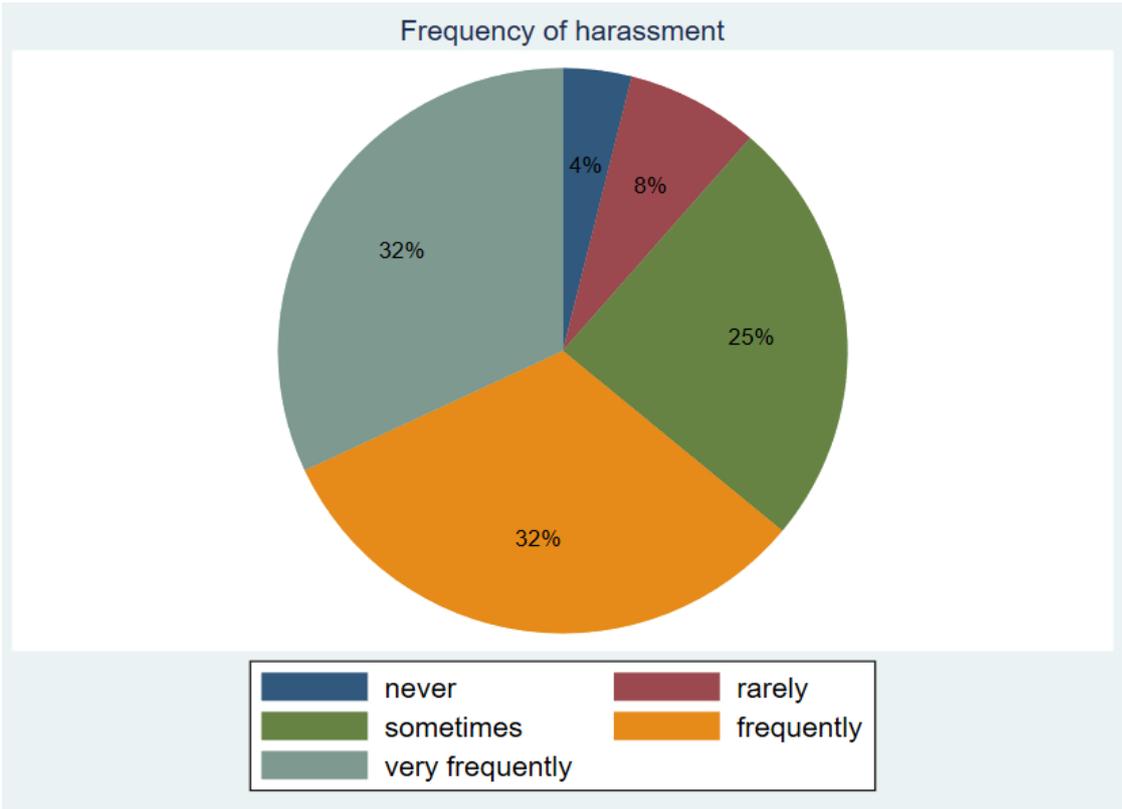
Overall, the finding that online harassment happens frequently or very frequently to girls was echoed by the experiences of girls and young women in the qualitative interviews.

In the qualitative interviews, girls were asked to describe how often they face online harassment. Their responses related both to the harassment they face and the harassment they see towards peers online. Overall, 41 per cent of interview respondents described that they directly faced what could be considered frequent online harassment,[142] whilst a further 24 per cent said that they would characterise online harassment towards peers or female friends as frequent.[143] 'Frequent' was not defined or intended as a quantifiable concept in the qualitative research questions, it was instead used to gauge the perspective of how often the girls feel they are impacted. Some of the respondents that described harassment towards themselves detailed what they meant by 'frequent':

> **'They were almost leaving one or two days, mostly from older men who wrote and sent pictures, pornography.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'I face harassment online uh, often. So maybe not every day because I didn't post a photo every day, but it is almost every day'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> **'Almost always because I'm always publishing this kind of stuff and if I think it's a reaction to what I publish or write.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'…it's like you know, once a week maybe. It's mostly when men find the Instagram…'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

Only one girl described online harassment as a one-off incident.[144] Another two girls described it as happening less often:

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[142] Girl, 17, Ecuador,; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 23, USA

[143] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

[144] Young Woman, 23, Spain

'Um, no, it's not that often, no...it's probably once in a while' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'Um, when I now, for example in my, in my like personal social media, sometimes I would get some hate. It's not like very common though.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

When looking per region at the percentage of girls and young women, in the quantitative survey, who report frequent or very frequent online harassment, the highest proportion of girls and young women who get harassed frequently or very frequently is amongst girls and young women in African countries (73 per cent), followed by girls and young women in Latin American countries (69 per cent). The percentage of girls and young women who experience online harassment frequently or very frequently is lowest in North America (56 per cent).

Figure 9 Frequency of online harassment by region
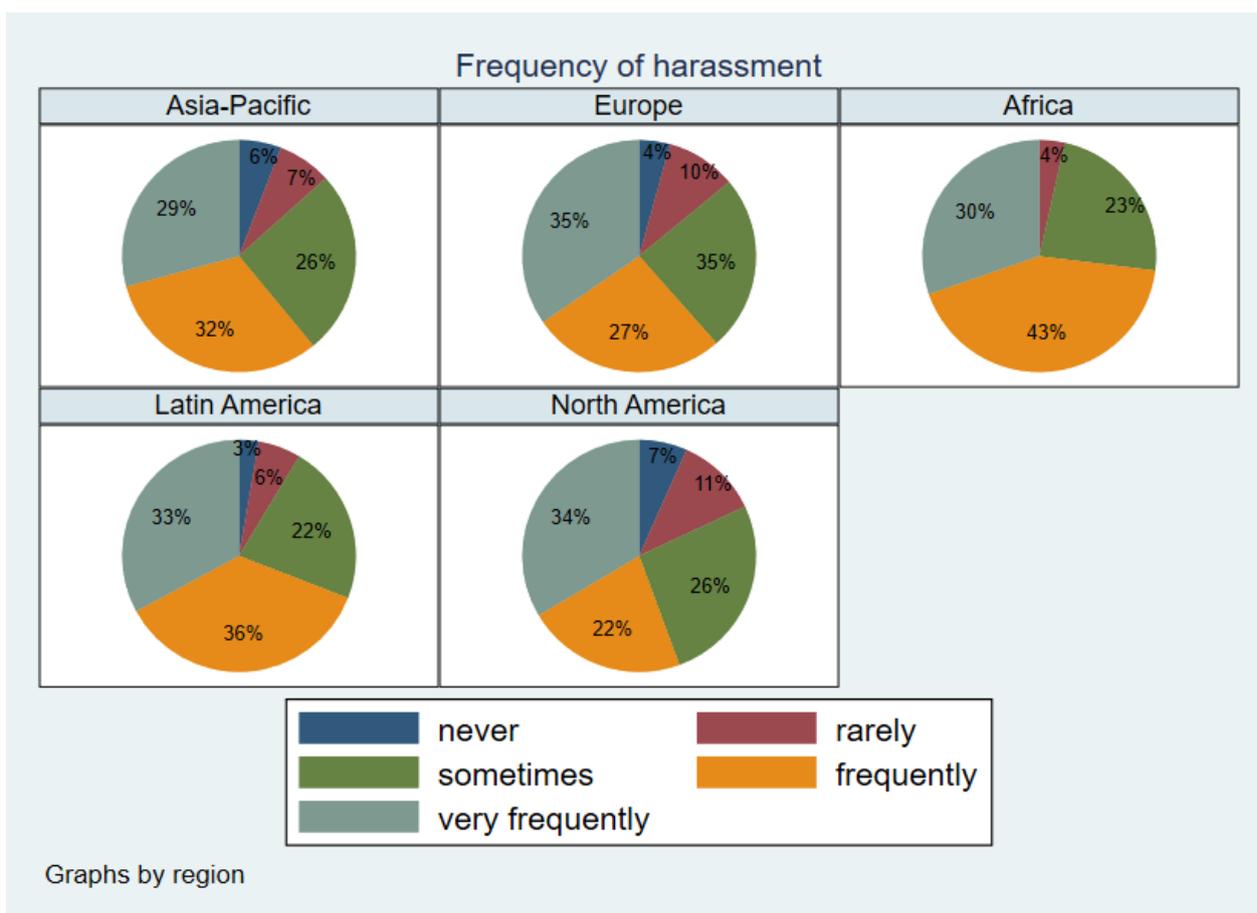
When looking at the reports of frequency of harassment by age, more young women than adolescent girls report frequent or very frequent harassment, even though the previous section has shown that adolescent girls use social media more frequently than young women. For example, while 51 per cent of 15-year-old girls report being harassed frequently or very frequently, 62 per cent of 18-year-olds report that they get harassed frequently or very frequently and 72 per cent of 25-year-olds report frequent or very frequent harassment.

The fact that young women report experiencing online harassment more frequently than adolescent girls does not necessarily mean that this is actually the case. After all, respondents in the qualitative interviews told us that they were more frequently targeted when they were younger. Instead, it is perhaps more likely that young women have more in-depth awareness and knowledge of the concept of online harassment and are therefore more able to recognise, identify and report experiences of online harassment accordingly. This hypothesis is further supported by the finding that awareness of online harassment and age are positively correlated. For example, while 36 per cent of 15-year-olds say that they have heard a lot about online harassment this percentage increases steadily with age to 43 per cent of 24-year-olds having heard a lot about online harassment.

5.2.3 Awareness of online harassment

Through the qualitative interviews it became apparent that the concept of online harassment can be understood differently from girl to girl and sometimes it is not understood very well at all. This seemed to have an impact on whether girls could identify whether they have been harassed on a social media platform or not.

Through the online survey, girls and young women from all 22 countries were asked how much they have heard about online harassment. Eight per cent of girls and young women said they have not heard of online harassment, 18 per cent said they have heard a little bit about it, 33 per cent said they heard something about it and 41 per cent said they heard a lot about online harassment. How much they already knew about the existence and meaning of online harassment appeared to influence whether they were able to reflect whether online harassment has happened to them. And indeed, the level to which girls were aware of the concept of online harassment is proportional to girls reporting online harassment: of the girls who have never heard about online harassment, 82 per cent said they had never been harassed; of the girls who said they have heard a little about online harassment, only 50 per cent said they had never been harassed; of the girls who heard something about online harassment only 41 per cent said they had never been harassed, and of the girls who heard a lot, only 33 per cent said they had never been harassed. This means that in order to identify online harassment and call it out, it is important that girls and young women are aware of what constitutes online harassment.

The highest percentage of girls and young women who have never heard of online harassment are in the Asia-Pacific region (11 per cent), followed by Africa (ten per cent) with Latin America and North America both at six per cent and European girls being most aware, with only four per cent never having heard of online harassment.

One example of how awareness around the topic of online harassment may influence girls' and young women's ability to identify and report online harassment is reflected in the following example from a qualitative interview with a girl who, when initially asked if she had ever experienced online harassment, said that she had not, but later described an incident, and realised, that she had indeed experienced online harassment.

> **'Um, personally I don't have that kind of very harsh experience'** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

The girl went on, throughout the interview, to describe the experiences of her friend facing online harassment. However, during the course of the conversation, when the researcher asked about the security settings on her friend's social media account it lead to the respondent describing two examples where she, herself, between the ages of 14 and 15, had faced what this research would consider to be significant examples of online harassment. These experiences included receiving and being tagged in explicit images by a stranger on a social media platform and receiving sexual messages and requests to send photographs of herself from a stranger on a different social media platform.[145] The respondent described the incidences as:

> **'a very shocking experience that I had...'** and that **'...I was just so scared, and I didn't even talk about this to my family because I was scared of getting scolded, so I just sat with myself and then tell no one.**' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

The lack of initial identification with her own experiences as online harassment could be interpreted in multiple ways. It could in some ways be used to suggest that the term 'online harassment' may not have aligned with her own understanding of the experience, or that because it happened a long time ago she may have simply forgotten or brushed-over the experience, or finally perhaps, given her eloquence in identifying and speaking about other people's online harassment including her friend's, that when negative online experiences happened to her it may have become 'normalised' as something bad that happened and in some way have become downplayed from a form of 'online harassment.' The girl did not provide any further reflections on this herself.

5.2.4 Types of online harassment faced by girls and young women

Given that online harassment is evidently happening to most girls and young women, the analysis of the types of online harassment is important in order to understand the full extent of the burden that girls and young women are experiencing when being active on social media platforms. The overarching categories of harassment that we will discuss during this section are: threats of sexual violence, sexual harassment, threats of physical violence,

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[145] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

attacks on the girls' appearance or intersectional characteristics, including body shaming, unauthorised sharing of the girls' content, including for the purpose of embarrassing the girls publicly, stalking, and insulting and abusive language.

Girls and young women reported which types of online harassment they, or other girls they know, are facing on social media platforms. 67 per cent of girls said that they, or other girls they know, have been exposed to abusive and insulting language via social media platforms, sometimes, frequently or very frequently. Other types of harassment that girls or other girls they know are facing are threats of sexual violence (58 per cent), purposeful embarrassment and body shaming (both 52 per cent).

Table 4 *Percentage of girls or other girls who face different types of online harassment*

Types of harassment	% of girls who have ever faced this type of harassment or know other girls who have faced it (sometimes, frequently or very frequently)	% of girls who have been harassed online and have ever faced this type of harassment (sometimes, frequently or very frequently)
Threats of sexual violence	58%	39%
Sexual harassment	51%	37%
Threats of physical violence	42%	21%
Anti LGBTIQ+ Comments	40%	26%
Racist comments	45%	29%
Body shaming	52%	39%
Purposeful embarrassment	52%	41%
Stalking	45%	32%
Abusive and insulting language	67%	59%

Combining responses for threats of physical and sexual violence shows that, of the girls who have been harassed, 47 per cent have been threatened with either physical or sexual violence.

Eighty-one per cent of girls said they, or other girls they know, have experienced multiple types of harassment. Only 18 per cent of girls say they, or other girls they know, ever only faced one type of harassment. 22 per cent of girls said they, or other girls they know, have faced all nine types of harassment listed in the table above.

From the girls' description of harassment in the qualitative interviews it also became clear that the types of harassment and the frequency of harassment increase with a girl's activity online. This was confirmed by the quantitative analysis where a positive relationship between the frequency of use of social media platforms and the increase in types and frequency of harassment is observed.

Following the qualitative interviews, there was a sense from the researchers that online harassment experienced by adolescent girls and young women could be categorised into two overarching categories. First, harassment experienced purely because girls have an online presence on the social media platform and second, a heightened level of harassment when girls are actively engaged online by posting and speaking out. The first, harassment from girls being present online can be considered a deep-rooted manifestation of gender-based online harassment that girls experience simply for having a social media account, for existing as a girl online, and hence the harassment can be seen as unprovoked, and in many ways ubiquitous to girl's experiences of social media use. The second,

harassment from girls being actively engaged online, is not intended as an antithesis to the first by way of implying that the abuse is provoked, but is used instead to articulate a second and added layer of online harassment that girls face when they actively post content or engage online, which harassers choose to interact with.

Girls who face harassment by simply existing online describe the majority of the harassment as, what could be considered, sexual in nature. The following types of harassment have been described by the girls as happening to them:

- Receiving sexual comments or explicit messages,[146] including propositions of transactional sex[147]
- Receiving sexual or explicit photos or images[148]
- Receiving requests to send photos of themselves,[149] including examples of blackmail[150]
- Unauthorised sharing of content and/or demonstrating knowledge of the girl's personal information[151]

Sexual harassment

Girls described the experiences which fall under the heading of sexual harassment in the qualitative interviews. Sexual harassment included sexual comments or explicit messages and offers to engage in transactional sex, receiving sexual and explicit photos and being asked to send photos or nude photos of themselves.

Receiving sexual comments or explicit messages, including offers to engage in transactional sex, was a vast sub-category, intended to draw together examples of comments and suggestions made to the girls, which could be perceived as intending to sexually objectify, harass, demean or proposition adolescent girls and young women. Out of the qualitative respondents, 35 per cent of girls shared experiences that could be identified as part of this sub-category. The experiences include a variety of incidences which demonstrate a spectrum of harassment, ranging in severity and highlights the different manifestations this form of online harassment can take. These incidences included a man starting to talk about sexual content to a girl over social media,[152] making flirtatious comments,[153] asking a girl on a date which she found inappropriate,[154] or another making comments about a girl's body.[155] It also included girls receiving sexual invitations or propositions.

> **'Responses from strangers with sexual invitations or sexual assaults'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'… he used to say like, come to my room I will be for you in that way…''** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> **'…Oh yeah, you would get some texts like, uh, would you please come over looking like this? Would like to like, uh, you know, let's have sex or whatever just because I'm not wearing a scarf or, do you usually, do you know how to do this or do that, like, uh, sexual activities, you know?'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Finally, one of the respondents detailed an incidence where they were offered money to participate in sexual activities by a stranger on social media:

> **'…what happened to me it's when a guy just tried to hold something about me on social media, and saying that, "How, uh, what currency would you like? Would you like dollars? Would you like euro? Uh? What do you want? You really like … pounds? I can give it to you. You know, just one night I can give you a lot of money that will change your life. I can give you all the money in this world. Come and fuck you and everything." You know… Can you imagine such things? Yeah. I felt very bad'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

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[146] Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 23, USA
[147] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[148] Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[149] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[150] Girl, 17, Ecuador
[151] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[152] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[153] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[154] Young Woman, 23, USA
[155] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia

Receiving sexual or explicit photos or images was experienced by 35 per cent of the girls and young women. For the respondents that provided more details on the senders of these images they believed the perpetrators were male.[156] Additionally there was a common experience shared by these respondents which was that they had all unexpectedly been sent images of genitalia, or in one instance pornography,[157] on social media.[158]

> '**Um, yeah, actually it happens like even if I don't post anything…It's just like, men just have this mentality where they can just play around with you, that kind of thing, like they just, you know, start sending you explicit photos of themselves ... because like having a guy just send me a naked photo of himself…is really freaky- … and especially when I don't like even know him or stuff, mm…Well even if you don't like accept their friend request, they just go into your inbox like, "Boom," send those pictures and they're like, "Hey babe," and then I just like open this message and I just freak out like, "What the hell is happening?"… well, yeah. Yeah, because like, I mean, they sending you things without your consent, which is just disrespect.**' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> '**They were almost leaving one or two days, mostly from older men who wrote and sent pictures, pornography.**' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> '**…he sent me a picture, a giant picture of a penis, and I just blocked him.**' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

As well as receiving explicit photos or images, the girls and young women interviewed also described receiving requests to send photos of themselves**.** 24 per cent of respondents described this happening to them.[159] For two respondents this seemed to be some of their first experiences of online harassment, which were combined with other types of harassment such as making sexual comments or advances:

> '**That was my very first social media experience, and I kind of had some kind of experience like strangers coming and talking to me and asking for my photos and, you know, the conversation leading to some of the abnormal ones. Something like saying I miss you, I want to see you, where you live, can I know more about you, can you send me your pictures so that I can see it, something like that.**' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

> '**You know it was, it was when, uh, smart phones were just, were brand new and everybody was using them. So, I remember this one specific incident. Um, when I was young I was using Kik, but it's over now, I don't know if people still use Kik. Uh, I remember because it was, it was, it was just a form of messaging. I used to get a lot of messages from boys asking me to send nudes or blackmailing me about a picture that I posted that they're going share it or like, edit it in a bad way, you know, and like, share it with everyone if I don't do this or that. Or just generally talking, like saying bad words to me. Uh, at that young age it was, honestly, horrible. It was the worst time for my life, using social media. Between that age of 9 and 14**' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

The last experience is particularly interesting as it highlights the vulnerability of young girls who may be new to social media and are exposed to such levels of online harassment. It is also interesting for the intimidation or blackmailing tactics used by the harassers in order to convince girls to send them photographs and could be indicative of the power held and used by online harassers. Such techniques were similarly experienced by another respondent. Even though, in contrast to the first respondent, they seemed to be a more experienced or cautious social media user and had tighter security settings:

> '**I'm set up so that only my friends can see my pictures, but I got a message from an unknown person saying that if I don't give them my ass, they're going to upload pictures of me. This person, who until now I don't know who he is, sent me pictures of me that nobody else had, of places I was. The man knew where I was and what I was doing. I told my parents and brother. I'm afraid, the fear is in me, every time I go to post something. I think all girls have that fear.**' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

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[156] Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[157] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[158] Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[159] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

Whilst neither of the girls in the examples discussed gave in to blackmail or pressured demands to send such photos of themselves, there may be many more girls and young women around the world who did feel frightened or compelled to comply. Intimidation used to gain and control the personal content of girls and young women, should be considered in all contexts a serious offence and hugely detrimental to security and livelihood.

The girls and young women interviewed also discussed additional types of harassment that they have faced when actively engaged online, for example when they post content or engage with other social media users, or online content. Concerningly, the types of harassment related to this could often be perceived as aggressive or attacking in nature and were targeted at different manifestations of girls and young-women's self-expression online. For example, when posting photos, stories, sharing their own or others content, when speaking out about important topics, engaging with friends, family or online communities, or otherwise just being themselves online.

Girls described the following attacks happening to them when they are active on social media:

- Attacking how a girl/individual looks or presents themselves online[160]
- Reacting to the topic the girl is speaking about, especially in relation to perceived feminist or gender equality issues[161]
- Attacking the credibility or knowledge of the girls[162]
- Relentless commenting to put a girl down[163]
- Escalated negativity following perceived rejection[164]
- Stalking or grooming[165] and unsolicited sharing of content[166]
- Threats or wishes of harm towards the girls and/or their families[167]
- General negative or aggressive comments.[168]

These subcategories have strong parallels to the seven characteristics listed within 'gender trolling' mentioned in secondary literature which included: (i)women targeted for expressing opinion online; harassment is (ii) graphic, (iii) sexualized and (iv) gender-based; (v) attacks not limited to one platform; (vi) harassment is intense and ongoing and disruptive; (vii) attacks can be organised (Mantilla, 2015). Overall, 94 per cent of qualitative respondents were able to describe experiences which could be considered in relation to the above categories.[169]

Importantly, intersectionality was shown to affect the way these types of harassment manifest, with gender, religious, feminist, ethnic and racial identities causing additional layers of harassment. Whilst some of the sub-categories only feature experiences from one respondent, it remains important to give space to these types of harassment to not only distinguish them and demonstrate the multitude of ways girls face abuse online, but also, importantly, to respect the voices and the courage displayed by the girls and young women in discussing these experiences during the interviews.

Harassment in reaction to girls' and young women's content
Girls and young women who are speaking out described their experience of negative reactions and harassment to what they are saying and the content they are sharing. They felt that often the aim of the attack was to diminish their credibility and knowledge of the topic or even to try and silence them: saying that girls and young women should not speak about certain topics.

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[160] Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania
[161] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[162] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, Spain
[163] Girl, 17, Canada
[164] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, USA
[165] Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Girl, 17, Ecuador
[166] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[167] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[168] Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru
[169] Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

Reacting to the topic the girl is speaking about, especially in relation to perceived feminist or gender equality issues was a significant theme that emerged from the girls' and young women's discussions of online harassment: 47 per cent of interview respondents had experiences which could be considered under this subcategory.[170] Interestingly, out of these, the majority of experiences, 63 per cent, were taken from first-hand incidences and directly mentioned backlash to 'feminist' content.[171] This section also displays intersectional barriers, where harassers problematise girls' dualistic religious and feminist identities, as well as display backlash to a girl's racial identity when speaking out about important topics.

When asked, during the interviews, whether they feel more attacked online when they publish certain types of content, four girls directly indicated this was true when posting about gender [172] and feminist related issues,[173] with one girl highlighting that feminist content tends to attract comments from 'people of all ages, women and men' to comment against what she thinks.[174] Another respondent, when asked the same question, responded that harassment was indeed a reaction to what she posts:

> **'... I think it's a reaction to what I publish or write'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

She went on to say that the topics she speaks about such as femicide or incidences of 'extreme violence' towards women receive:

> **'...silly comments... there are still people who are very closed-minded. When we get together, they start asking typical questions and talking about feminists...'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

Anti-feminist rhetoric can also be identified within negative comments and understood as language intended to insult the girls and young women. The example below is especially important for problematising religious and feminist identity, and the subsequent layers of harassment this causes. The respondent discusses an experience which can be interpreted as displaying harassment, not only for speaking out about perceived feminist topics, but also is harassed further because of her religious identity - which the harassers perceive as at odds with her feminism

> **'...I post photos of me with all of my friends when I was in conference, and then the also maybe cool to send that, but then I just find out that one of my friends tell me that there is someone just make fun of it because they say that oh [you're] a feminist, and feminist will call it out because as I didn't you know, obey to the religion, obey to the god, and blah, blah blah. So yeah...**
>
> **...Lots of people commenting especially because I'm a feminist, also because I'm a woman...**
>
> **...And yeah, because of that, especially because I took off my hijab, and then I support and think, and I'm just transformed to be a feminist. Because for Indonesia, if they heard about feminists or feminism, they would think about going to hell, or religious person, or LGBTQ, like that...'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)
>
> **'You're a feminazi bitch. Um, I hope you get harassed because you secretly like it.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The second respondent targeted with the above example of abusive name calling and language, discussed in detail why she thought she and other women get harassed by men online in this way. Her activism takes the form of speaking out on social media against harassment by sharing first-hand accounts of women's street harassment. Whilst doing this work, she has experienced online harassment targeted not only towards her, but also in reaction to the stories of other women that she has publicised. Her understanding of the motivation of harassers seems to draw on gender power dynamics, and is believed to be a reaction or defence from some men towards empowering

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[170] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Canada
[171] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[172] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[173] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[174] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador

female movements or activities which highlight female victim's experiences, and in consequence could be perceived to implicate or blanketly proscribe the role of perpetrator to men:

> 'Yeah, I mean I think that there's so much backlash to, um, talk about sexual harassment, I mean with the Me Too movement and everything that's going on right now, I think that there's a pattern of backlash from men who feel targeted by it. They feel like they have to be defensive because if we're talking about sexual harassment, we must be talking about men doing bad things. And rather than having productive conversations and, um, think about it together, I think there's a certain defensiveness saying, um, "No, no, this is just a compliment." Um, I, I think that, yeah, I think that wanting to harass does come from a place of just being really defensive about conversations of sexual harassment…

> …And maybe angry too that, that things are changing and that people are speaking up about it and I think also they may feel like they're not, um, important or something. I mean I think that when the stories are all coming from girls and women, maybe they feel like, "Well, what about me? Um, you know, I have a hard life too." Or there's this certain feeling of entitlement that they should be entitled to be part of this too, but it's not really about them or for them.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Whilst not in relation to speaking about feminist or gender issues, another respondent made a comment that compliments the above understanding of a sense of backlash from harassers feeling in some way personally targeted. The following example was discussed in the context of harassment for speaking about race or minority rights:

> '[Researcher] Do you feel like that might be because those people who comment feel sort of attacked by this opinion? Like they're afraid of it somehow?
> I don't know if afraid is the right word, I think it's more offended.
> …Like you know, she's accusing … I have friends that are like … and they feel like I'm you know, accusing them of something. And it's like it's not, it's not at you, it's more at the system that people like you have created. I don't hate you…'
>
> (Girl, 17, Canada)

Interestingly, when the respondent was asked if there are specific topics that they speak out about which receive more harassment that others, they answered that in their experience, when speaking about race or indigenous rights they receive negative attention and comments:

> 'And that, yeah, that usually gets a lot of people riled up, which is weird because any time I talk about race or anything that you know, we don't like … I, I think race in a lot of issues, like we're starting to talk about it, but it always wasn't there. … People aren't … don't want to talk about race….
> …And like, and how severely … Or like indigenous issues. Every time I talk about that, there's always one person that's like, "You're just complaining.'
>
> (Girl, 17, Canada)

Importantly, this example could again be used to suggest that girls face intersectional barriers when speaking out online, not only in relation to the content the girl is discussing, but in respect of her own gender and racial identity. When asked by the researcher whether she felt she was harassed due to any additional characteristics other than her political views, the respondent mentioned:

> '…but I know to some extent that the people that were white, they saw me in a different way. Like I was the only, at that point, I was the only activist, I was the only woman of colour…'

Whilst she goes on to suggest that race does not play a part in the online harassment she has faced by school peers online:

> 'So, I think it just varies. Like, um, but my school, there's actually, personally, we're all like people of colour...

…Which in, in its own way, is a safety net for me, I think. But, um, till then I can tell like then it's probably not race, it's literally just, it's like being a girl that's left.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

Overall, this subcategory offers significant insights into the experiences of harassment faced by girls and young women on social media. It establishes a link between girls being targeted online for speaking out about particular topics, and furthermore, that particular topics, especially related to gender equality or feminist issues, receive greater backlash. Insights from the experiences discussed also provide a better understanding behind the perceived motivation, and dynamics, of gender-based harassment online. Moreover, the above experiences further demonstrate how such dynamics are influenced by intersectional identities or constructs that are perceived to relate to the girls, confirming that girls face multiple and cumulative barriers to safely accessing their right to freedom and expression online. These experiences show that the online harassment faced by adolescent girls is not a homogenous experience but instead parallels the differentiated forms of abuse and discrimination girls face in offline settings.

Girls also faced harassment **attacking their credibility or knowledge**. This was in some way similar to the above section, however provided a broader focus regarding the content the girls speak about, in addition to what could be considered a more specific motive for the harassment - that the girls are neither considered capable nor placed to speak about such things. Compared to the above section this was also less commonly identifiable in the experiences discussed by the girls and young women interviewed. Two particular examples seemed to show harassment towards girls on the basis of who the girl was and what she was therefore able to talk about. The first example seems to question the credibility of the respondent speaking out about climate issues because of the prominent role of her parent in a related field:

'It was about a troll who questioned my work … because of family issues, because of being the daughter of who I am -a Spanish politician and environmental activist…

… I recognize a direct attack on my abilities in the field where I work, as I'm the daughter of a very well-known person in the sector.' (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

The second, was discussed by a girl relating to the harassment her female friend faces when she speaks openly online about political affairs. This harassment seems not only to be caused through the harasser having opposing political views to the girl, but due to contextual perceptions around politics being considered a male dominated subject which by extension girls should refrain from speaking or sharing opinions about:

'For some other girls, like, um, some of my friends, when they comment or you know give opinions on some of the political matters, there are some people that, not from this kind of view, but from very far, far from this, and we can also say not very well educated people, they are a bit narrow minded, so they tend to use fake accounts and do some harsh comments using rude words, and you know, saying that who- who are you to tell this, and you know… … and why are you telling this, something like that. Using harsh words and you are not supposed to do this, you are a girl, just don't mess up with this kind of thing, something like that, but not me.'

…Um, yeah, I think she's been in this situation for like a year already. Most of the time when she puts something like, expressing her views on the current affairs going on, or maybe you know, talking about, maybe Trump or maybe about the British Prime Minister or maybe about the North Korean leader, and then people will say, that's nothing to do with you, just mind your own stuff, just mind your business, something like that.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Relentless commenting to put a girl down is used to sub-categorise a type of harassment that while it is similar to 'attacking the credibility or knowledge' of a girl, was more sustained in nature. Although this was only identified in the experience of one of the girls, it was an interesting finding which had a significant impact on the individual girl, who described it as *'mentally deterring:'*

'… I know this kid that goes to my sister's school who follows me. And I didn't really think anything of it. But when I post something that he doesn't agree with, he'll be very sure to message me and remind me that he doesn't agree with this constantly …

… And I guess like yes, to some extent, the tone was okay, but I'm also … Like it, it began feeling like you know, this person's just messaging me to remind me that they don't agree with me all the time. And so that becomes like mentally deterring too….

… the idea of like they're there to get in your head. Like I … There's no other way around that. Like I don't, I don't think the person that tells me they're wrong is particularly you know … They, they think I'm wrong. Their opinion is not going to change whether we have a discussion or not.

… But, I think it's more like, even if they leave a comment, like that's trying to get in your head and trying to make you doubt whatever it is that you believe in…' Girl, 17, Canada)

Another issue that girls who are particularly active on social media are facing is the **unauthorised sharing of their online content, as well as cases of stalking and grooming.** Girls in the qualitative interviews described how the unauthorised sharing of their own content and photos made them feel unsafe and often bordered on stalking or actually turned into stalking.

Unauthorised sharing of content and/or demonstrating knowledge of girl's personal information was a broad sub-category, relating to responses from 41 per cent of the girls and young women interviewed. Both types of this harassment relate to issues around consent, privacy and the use and misuse of information online.

Unauthorised sharing of content included incidences discussed relating to both personal experiences[175] and more systematic or widespread situations.[176] While only one respondent directly mentioned the issue of consent,[177] the personal incidences included: being threatened that the online harasser would upload photos without the girl's consent that had also been acquired without the girl's consent,[178] potentially copying or storing a girl's photo without her consent or otherwise using it in what she considered an inappropriate way,[179] and saving and uploading a girl's photo/s onto their own profile without consent, in addition to sharing the girl's photos without consent.[180]

The respondent quoted below described multiple experiences of unauthorised sharing of their content, and considers it to be a form of sexual harassment. This seems especially apparent due to comments about her appearance being featured in two of the examples:

'Um, actually, uh for me, sexual harassment online isn't only about people commenting that on your uh, me- or on your photos, or… things, uh about you. But it is also sometimes I find out that some people just share my photos or use my photos there for the profile uh, without my consent, and then that happened often…'

'… So actually, like to, I think on …certain activities I would say this before that someone using my photo for bio, and that is a guy, and then I didn't know them, I didn't know him, and he just started lifting every of my photos on his profile, and I was just real surprised. But then he said that I was beautiful in that photo, which is not a compliment, I think that's one example of sexual harassment, and that's really bad.'

'And then the other is using my photos without my consent, but also share it and also commenting, or you know, commenting bad about my body, which is, my body's my right, but so many people say that my body's belong to god, so I, I do not have the control of my own body.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

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[175] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[176] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[177] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[178] Girl, 17, Ecuador
[179] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[180] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia

Finally, there was an example of this occurring in what could be considered a more systematic way. This seemed to differ from the above experiences in that it involved multiple harassers and multiple victims, and also appeared to be happening over a sustained period of time rather than a one-off occurrence, which could suggest that comparatively this is an active and intentional rather than opportunistic process. It is also an example of both unauthorised sharing of content, and demonstrating knowledge, and unauthorised sharing, of personal information online. This experience included an 'under-ground web page' which randomly posted images of women for its users to cyberstalk and post as much information as they could find about them online.[181]

> **'There was like a horrible case, uh, I think it was last year. About, um I don't know how to explain it. It was like kind of uh, it wasn't like a deep web thing, but it was like uh, a very like, I don't know, underground web page... Like, it was like firms of... men, who would like um, I don't know, like try to find information on women. Like, I don't know, someone would post a picture that he like found on like some random Instagram, and they would like investigate this woman, and like try to find the most- most of information about her on social media. So, they would even know like where this woman lives... And that happened, uh it was like huge because I looked, like a lot of women were harassed. Uh, um, this [inaudible 00:30:14], they would like text them, like you know, obviously send horrible pictures and things like that. Uh, it was like a couple more...I mean the- actually the page was like, it was there for like years but we realised that it was happening, I think it was on a February last year, February. Um, I mean I wasn't like personally targeted, but some women that I knew were. So, at that time I remember it was a fearful thing for most young women in, I don't know, the city, the country. We had this feeling of fear, to like make everything private, delete all your private information on social media, or things like that. Because you knew you could be targeted.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

While it is important to note that the girl was not a direct victim of the above, and that the web page may not be exclusive to adolescent girls and young women, but to women generally, it remains an important example of the unauthorised sharing of both photos and personal information, including addresses, publicly or with unknown audiences which could establish a link between online and the potential for offline harassment and violence. Importantly this highlights the increased vulnerability of girls targeted by this form of online harassment and additionally could be used to show how more systematic or networked experiences of online harassment have the potential to create a climate of fear among social media users, having an effect not just on direct victims but on adolescent girls and young women more broadly.

These experiences demonstrate wider issues around the way social media users can access and use information online in relation to concepts of consent and privacy, pointing towards reform needed in acceptable standards of online behaviour, group and individual activity and security mechanisms within social media sites and other online spaces.

The second part of this sub-category, demonstrating knowledge of girl's personal information, included a stranger claiming to know personal information about a girl's location and about her relatives, which was discussed in the context of what the girl described as the harasser trying to flirt with her.[182] Another incidence included an online harasser telling a girl that he knew details about her family such as information about her dad which occurred after the harasser had made aggressive comments to the girl, in reaction to content she posted, calling her a *'...feminazi bitch'*.[183] The final incidence was perhaps more subtle, and involved a girl being approached on social media, after previously having a private account with limited information on a dating app for a short while:

> **'And went, "Hey, I saw you on this app, but you never messaged me." I was like, "Huh?" Like how is it so easy to find my like ... And that, like I don't, I don't think that that's something people should ... I don't know, like that happens. Like people can find you from a dating app, even though you don't acknowledge your social media on that at all. I only had my first name on it...And that's really creepy if you think about it 'cause that just means someone can find you.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

It is important to note that this type of abuse, violates girls' and young women's rights to privacy and contributes towards an atmosphere of insecurity and vulnerability. This again highlights a link between online and offline

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[181] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[182] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[183] Young Woman, 23, USA

harassment, and importantly shows an impact on the girls themselves and their feelings of safety. For example, the respondent from Canada describes the incident as unsettling as it proves you can be easily found, and the girl in the US described that it was the comment about her personal information that:

'…really freaked me out' and '…Um, so, so that made me feel pretty unsafe.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Escalated negativity in reaction to perceived rejection was another interesting finding. The sub-category was intended to describe experiences where male harassers would display more aggressive or inappropriate behaviour to girls online after they felt the girl or young women had rejected or turned them down in some way. Girls noted that this type of harassment has strong parallels with offline forms of street and sexual harassment demonstrative of gender power dynamics. 18 per cent of girls and young women interviewed had experiences that could be attributed to this type of behaviour.[184]

The girls had similar examples which were discussed during the interview when talking about the harassment they had faced. Experiences included a boy making a sexual or romantic advance, the girl or young women turning this down which resulted in online harassment or the threat of online harassment:

'If they date you and you refuse, they go and talk about you badly on social media, you know.' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

'She mentions a situation she experienced, in which a boy from her school sent her recurring messages that made her uncomfortable, and she replied to them by being polite or empathetic, but at the moment of blocking this person from her networks, he began to speak ill of her.' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

'…And then I blocked him. And I didn't really think too much about that experience. But then, a few months later he messaged me on Instagram and he called me a cunt and, um, and was really angry about me running this project. He said, "You're so stupid. Um, these are all compliments." Uh, so he messaged me with a lot of angry comments…

…I think the situation … the person who was stalking me, was really interesting because all of the harassment started after I told I wouldn't go out on a date with him after I, I ignored his request to go out on a date. And I think with street harassment it often escalates after rejection and this is a pattern that I've seen with so many submissions on the account but also in the news with various stories. Um, so I, I think that there are similar patterns across both behaviours where maybe it escalates after rejection. It's a way to exert power over someone.' Young Woman, 23, USA)

This again could support the idea that types of online harassment parallel offline forms of sexual or street harassment, indicating the girls face similar types of abuse in all aspects of their lives which are underpinned by harmful gender norms.

The experience of **stalking** mentioned above, was a particularly disturbing example discussed during the qualitative interviews**.** It included the girl being harassed over a long period of time via multiple social media accounts, including fake accounts and pretending to be people within her online activist group. The harasser had originally been declined for a date and blocked on social media. However he pursued the girl in this manner whilst also sending her aggressive comments and demonstrating that he had found out personal information about her and her family.[185] Whilst, in the context of these interviews, it was an uncommon form of harassment, it was indeed a significant finding which once again demonstrates strong parallels between not only the types of online and offline forms of harassment e.g. stalking and cyberstalking, but the risk between online to offline actions and potential violence, especially as within the example discussed the harasser could have joined the activist's face to face events that she organised and attended.

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[184] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, USA
[185] Young Woman, 23, USA

Another example which could be considered in relation to stalking, was described by one of the respondents from Ecuador. This included being pursued by a harasser who ignored attempts to block communication with them, and who continued to create new social media profiles in order to maintain contact:

> **'This person had different profiles but it was the same person. I would block but he would create more profiles and keep sending me pictures of me.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

This demonstrates another element of harassment, where there is continued disregard for personal and privacy boundaries which in a traditional offline setting, speaks to characteristics of stalking.

The respondent from Nepal discussed an example of what could be considered online grooming with the harasser intentionally using content and information about the girl to get closer to her. The girl discussed this as part of a broader project of online sexual harassment or abuse, whereby social media users could collate information to build a level of report before becoming more predatory. Although this was only highlighted by one of the respondents it offered a unique insight, which could have broader implications for security around posting information publicly or privately online:

> **'Yeah, I think our post also, uh, is directly or indirectly related with the harassment that happens to us. Uh, because the one who, like uh, the sexual abuser is following our Facebook page and this account, and they are just following what are we doing, what are we posting about, and what kind of uh, person we are. They use this to make a study on it, and they try to like, message, and try to connect with us. And after connecting with us and making- making uh, us in a comfort zone then they will like uh, try to abuse us. So, uh, this, uh, the way we post in our Facebook feed- uh, account, and that will also affect uh, whether the abuser will, abuse us or not.'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

5.2.4.1 How often different types of harassment are happening to girls and young women

From previous sections, it became clear that online harassment in general is happening frequently or very frequently to most girls. This section examines more closely, how often the different types of harassment are happening to girls and young women on social media platforms.

41 per cent of girls and young women state that they, or other girls they know, experience abusive language and insulting language frequently or very frequently. 30 per cent of girls and young women also report that they, or other girls, experience threats of sexual violence and body shaming frequently or very frequently.

Table 5 Frequency of different types of harassment happening to girls or other girls they know

Type of harassment	Very Frequently & Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Threats of sexual violence	30%	28%	16%	26%
Sexual harassment	29%	22%	18%	31%
Threats of physical violence	20%	22%	19%	40%
Anti LGBTIQ+ Comments	23%	17%	13%	47%
Racist comments	26%	19%	16%	39%
Body shaming	30%	22%	17%	31%
Purposeful embarrassment	27%	25%	19%	29%
Stalking	24%	21%	20%	35%

| Abusive and insulting language | 41% | 26% | 16% | 18% |

Plotting the average frequency of each type of harassment in figure 10 below, it becomes apparent that overall, the harassment that happens most frequently to girls and young women on social media platforms is the use of abusive and insulting language, followed by threats of sexual violence, body shaming, purposeful embarrassment and sexual harassment.

Figure 10 Types of online harassment sorted by how frequently they happen
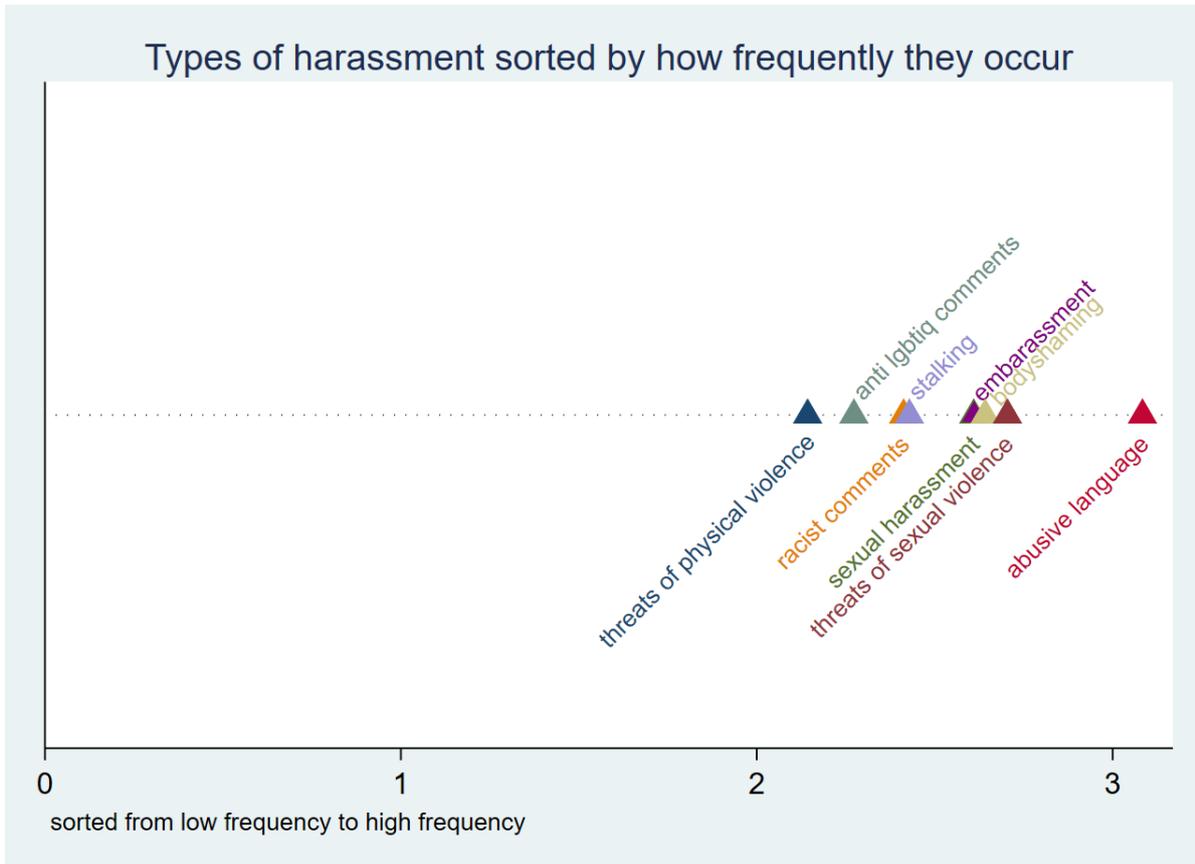
The use of abusive and insulting language towards girls and young women is the most frequently encountered type of online harassment in all regions, except for Africa. In Africa, threats of sexual violence are the most frequently experienced type of online harassment amongst girls and young women. From figure 11, below, it also becomes evident that threats of sexual and physical violence play a much bigger role in Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region than in Europe and North America.

Frequency of types of harassment by region

Graphs by region
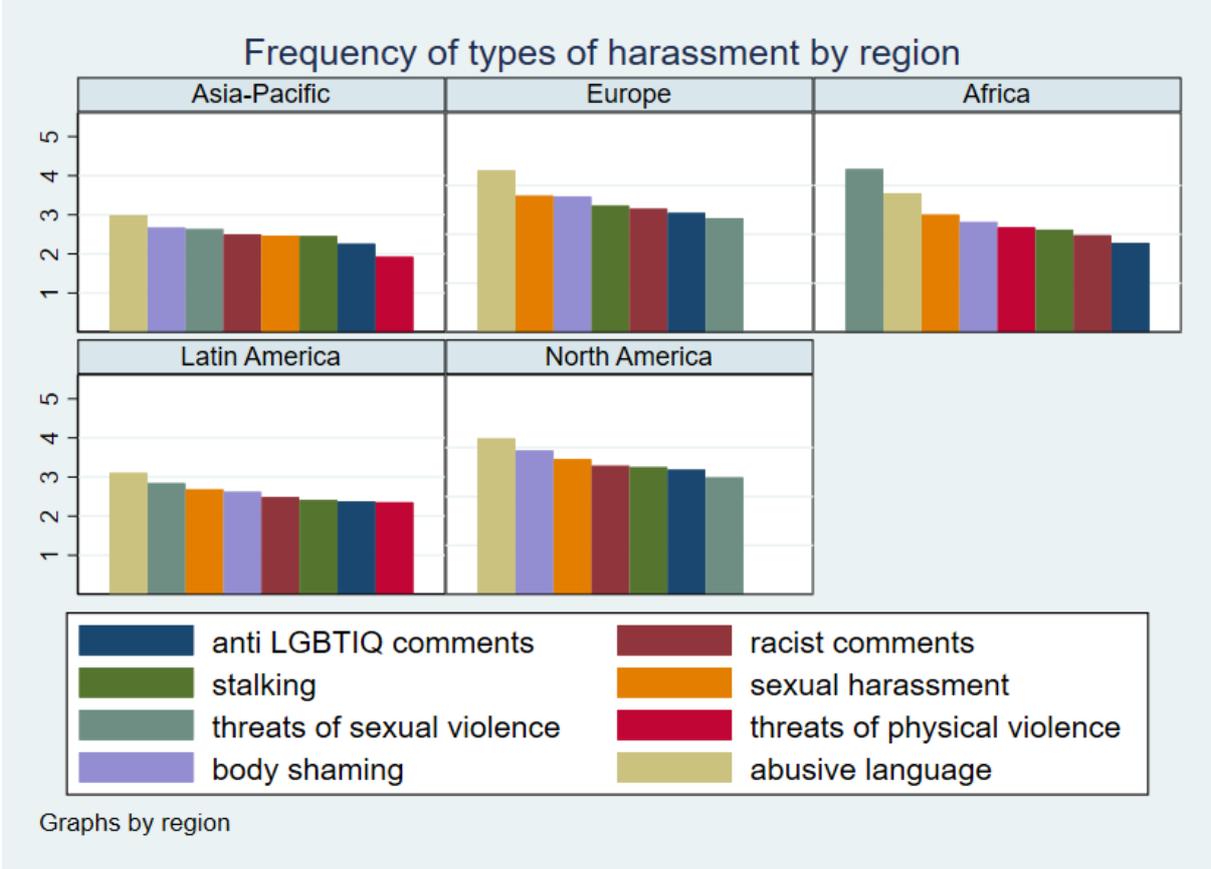
Even though, or maybe because, girls and young women are so frequently subjected to abusive language on social media platforms, girls and young women who took part in the qualitative interviews often only mentioned instances of abusive language in passing. This could indicate that abusive language has become a normal part of their experiences on social media platforms. Some of the comments they receive are shown in the box below.

'Feminazi Bitch'
'Cunt'
'You have to be ungrateful in order to think that this is harassment'
'You're so stupid. Um, these are all compliments'

(Young Woman, 23, USA)

'You are not respecting yourself'

(Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

'Let it be known that you're like super dumb'
'You should kill yourself'
'You should have been the one aborted'

(Young Woman, 22, Chile)

'Prostitute, selling yourself and ABC on social media'
'Girls? Who, girls? No matter what, they will never be on top. No way.'

(Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

'Who cares? Like, who gives a damn about you'

(Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'Your parents will go to hell'

(Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

Attacking the way girls and young women present themselves online

Girls and young women also described their experience of being body shamed, harassed and abused because of the way they look or because of certain characteristics that are visible through their content.

Girls with intersectional characteristics seem to suffer especially from this type of harassment. The sample of 14,071 girls and young women across 22 countries includes 25 per cent of girls and young women who have at least one intersectional characteristic. Of the girls interviewed, 10 per cent identify as LGBTIQ+, 8 per cent identify as living with a disability and 9 per cent say that they are from an ethnic minority.

Girls and young women who do have an intersectional characteristic are more frequently harassed with racist comments, anti-LBTIQ+ comments, purposeful embarrassment and abusive language than girls and young women who have no intersecting characteristics.

In the qualitative interviews, attacks on the girls' and young women's looks and style was a commonly identified issue with 35 per cent of respondents mentioning either personal or second-hand accounts of this. The majority of examples, which will be discussed below, received negative or hateful comments towards content featuring themselves such as photos relating to perceived provocative dress, vanity or gender identity. Throughout this subcategory there are clear examples of intersectional experiences of online harassment: whereby girl's descriptions of religious, cultural and gender identity can be seen as providing additional and cumulative barriers to their freedom in using online spaces, and reasons for additional layers of harassment.

Interestingly, one respondent was able to highlight the apparent double standard they see online:

> '**If a guy uploads a picture without a shirt, it doesn't happen, while if a girl uploads pictures under those conditions, she would be super attacked**' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

This seems in some way supported by the two accounts below which describe abusive comments that imply, in these experiences, that if a girl is posting photos of herself, or multiple photos, then she is being disrespectful, and in the later example intending not only to impress men but to actively prostitute herself:

> '**…Uh, like if someone, a woman has posted her, have a picture that is showing most of her, her body, some people will attack her that, "You are not respecting yourself."**' (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

'So this sometimes happens when I post something about, uh, maybe gender equality, you know, and sometimes when I post my nice photo, you know, where many people would comment and, and some people would be like, "Oh, all the time posting," you know, calling me some names, and you know, uh, "You're selling yourself? Are you advertising yourself for a, a man?" You know, "Prostitute, selling yourself and ABC on social media," you know…' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)'

There seems an interesting implication in these experiences, of an inherent relationship and a normalisation of the link between girls and young women posting content featuring themselves and sexual objectification, and remains another clear example of harmful gender norms informing online harassment.

This point is also arguably visible in the experiences below, where girls describe first and second-hand accounts of harassment due to the way they are dressed or present themselves in photos. The girls also face intersecting barriers as the images posted are not only objectified but are also criticised for being considered outside proscribed or expected contextual gender norms, as well as additional religious or conservative ideals:

'…. I, I don't know, I don't know why it was so, because of like, so, the photos that uh, like I think on this February, I post a photo of me at the beach, um, with my legs showing a little bit, and then there is a girl commenting that I, actually didn't know that the comment belongs to women or men, because it's like a fake account commenting on my photos. And say that um, your body's belong to god, and I have to cover that, and don't wear that kind of dress because uh, I have to be afraid, like my parents will go to hell….

… I have uh, bad experience because of someone just accusing me because I take off my hijab, and then get talking bad about that. And so I just deleted it because I feel so bad and I feel so terrible because of that…

…And that in the part I often face is for harassment online or public, and it makes me feel unsafe, uh because like every time, or whatever I'm doing on social media, people keep commenting. Like I have to cover my hair, or I have to wear a long dress, or anything and yeah, I just feel I cannot express myself freely.' (Young woman, 19, Indonesia)

'…In our city's community we're very, we're Muslims…And we're conservative, and people are not used to like, uh, not wearing- girls not wearing scarves, or like, wearing skinny jeans or whatever. And I come from a different family so my parents don't really care what I wear or what I say or whatever. So, whenever I post something, in the public community in- in a platform like Twitter where there are no boundaries, like, there the … is usually very public, I will, I usually get these, um, uh, like, bad words because it's, it makes them feel like, say for example, I'm not wearing a scarf, they have the right to say whatever they want to me. Or like, I would accept harassment in such a case.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

The experience below, is similar in nature, and discusses how a former Miss Tanzania contestant, who had previously posted photos of herself on social media in perceived revealing clothing for the competition, but later became a district commissioner, received sustained criticism:

'…So, people said many things about her, they, they shared her picture, uh, brought her past pictures of her being a second runner, half naked pictures, so they shared it everywhere, like, "She doesn't deserve to be in this position." (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

Other experiences of harassment from 'provocative' dress or the way a girl/individual presents themselves can be seen as backlash to simply expressing identity. The second example, importantly displays themes of intersectionality relating to the cumulative harassment they face due to gender identity:

> **'I have a friend (female), who often receives hate comments and whose posts were being talked about in other group chats, regardless of what she posted or shared online. She was being attacked because of how she dresses and because she always puts make-up on.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> **'I have friends from the LGBT sector who experience offline and online harassment due to them openly expressing their sexuality. I even have this friend also from the LGBT sector, who is being bashed online because he dresses femininely.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

Whilst this section has included very different experiences described by the girls, they seem to have in common that there is a standard of behaviour expected of girls or individuals on social media. This standard of behaviour seems to have translated contextually specific and often harmful gender norms from offline realities into online settings, and further seems to justify or enable harassers to target girls when they consider them to be acting outside of these behavioural standards. Importantly, girls are also shown to face intersecting barriers that have an impact on the harassment they face when presenting themselves online.

Threats or wishes of harm towards the girls or their families, was an extreme and concerning finding that could be identified in the experiences shared by 18 per cent of interview respondents. These incidences ranged from religiously motivated threats in reaction to what the harasser perceived to be a revealing or provocative photo:

> **'…And say that um, your body's belong to god, and I have to cover that, and don't wear that kind of dress because uh, I have to be afraid, like my parents will go to hell'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

To more explicit and severe wishes of harm to the girls in reaction to topics the girls posts about:

> **'…Or like there's a lot of mean people like treating you, like telling you that you should die, or that you should have been the one aborted, that's a classic phrase that we see.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'Many of the Christian religion, evangelicals, who wish me death…'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

The respondent from Chile described speaking about abortion and women's experiences of illegal abortion, whilst the topics discussed by the girl from Peru included a broad range such as: gender identity, gender equality, abortion, rape of women and children, social inequality, ethnic diversity, political participation and others.

This highlights the level and severity of the abuse girls face online, which is important for considering the impact harassment has and the methods needed to support and protect them.

5.2.5 Why do girls face online harassment?

Having considered the types of harassment adolescent girls described facing online, it is important to consider the reasons why they face such harassment, and importantly why the girls themselves believe they are targeted.

Whilst there were many examples from the qualitative interviews that could be used to evidence the types of harassment, there were fewer examples to support the reasons for the abuse. In addition, when looking for the reasons why girls are harassed for being actively engaged online there were fewer explicit examples described by the girls. In comparison, it was easier to identify reasons why girls felt they were targeted for harassment in relation to being present online.

5.2.5.1 Reasons to suggest why girls face harassment for being present online

In relation to the types of harassment girls face for being present online, it was possible to group potential reasons for these into the following headings: gender, gender and age, gender and intersecting characteristics such as race or cultural norms, and finally the power and lack of inhibition felt by harassers when acting online. Overall, comments from 65 per cent of the girls and young women from the qualitative interviews could be used to support these headings.[186]

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[186] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Canada, Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, Malawi

Gender

To support the idea that adolescent girls face harassment for simply being present online, there is a logical implication that this happens because of their gender: because they are female, because they are a girl. During the research phase this became loosely referred to as a baseline of abuse to characterise a grounding principle that seems to run through or provide a basis for the reasons why such harassment happens. The girls themselves supported this concept. 53 per cent, when asked why they believe they face harassment online, either agreed with this idea or articulated directly that it was because of their gender:

> **'Yeah, I think like, uh, just because I'm girl I can be sexually abused in social media, or in general like as this, because uh, people think that girls are weak and they won't speak out, and if they speak out then their family won't listen to them'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> **'Um, yeah. I mean I would say that it's targeted based on gender for the most part.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

> **'Sure, because I'm a girl and because I liked to upload my photos showing me.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'Yeah. It's because of our gender.'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> **'… mentions that women because of their gender are more harassed on social networks.'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

> **'[Researcher] …do you feel like they're actually doing this maybe because you're a girl and they think, you know, she doesn't know what she's talking about because she, she's a woman?**
> **Yes, definitely.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'[Researcher} Okay. And, uh, and so you would say that, is it true then, that you feel like you get, you get those comments because you're a young woman and, and also though, maybe because of the cultural system in which you live. I mean, just sort of, do you feel that you get attacked for certain characteristics that people see in those pictures?**
> **… it was, it was, uh, culturally mostly because even if, if a girl was older and …any age to be honest, but even if a girl was 25 or like, 30, she would still get the exact same harassment.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

> **'[Researcher]…And, um, do you feel like you are targeted, or you know this account, and the things you post are targeted specifically because of any personal characteristics? Like specifically because it's about women, or it's about, I don't know, maybe cultural background of those women? …**
> **…Yeah, I think it's because like, you know, it's men and it's for women.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'[Researcher]…. I mean what you described sounds like um, women who are present on social media and who are successful do get attacked mostly just because they're women. Um, I mean do you think that this is true for, for Tanzania …**
> **…Yeah, that, yeah, I accept that. That's very true yeah, in Tanzania.'** (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

This was a hugely important finding which could be used to substantiate the idea that online harassment is experienced as a form of gender-based harassment.

Gender and age

It could be argued that some of the answers provided to support the 'gender (baseline)' concept could implicitly be used to support the idea that the age of the girls remains an inherent reason for why they are targeted. This is in the context in which gender is being discussed, whereby it is focused on the experiences of adolescent girls or young women, hence the discussion of gender is not separate from the consideration of age, and, in this way, they can be seen as intersecting qualities within the harassment. With this said, however, there remain examples of discussions from the respondents that particularly emphasise their youth or age in respect of harassment, which seems important to highlight.

The following comments were not made whilst directly being asked why they feel they suffer harassment but came up in more broader answers describing the types or experiences of harassment;

> **'Uh, well, I used, or the, the time where I used to face most harassment was when I was younger. So now I just turned 20, so there, the time when I faced harassment the most was when I was between, uh, 9 to 14, I guess…**

> **…Maybe you know, people will be more comfortable doing it to a young girl.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

> **[Researcher] 'Okay, and do you think this is especially for young women, like are there people you know who face um, harassment, are they mostly young women or are they also men for example? You know, mostly women, young women face that.'** (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

The following comments were made more directly in response to being asked about characteristics that may influence why they are harassed. The answers can be used to subtly indicate themes of gender and age or youth;

> **[Researcher] 'Has there been any situation where you have felt that it was your specific goal, but because of some personal characteristic, for example, your gender or gender identity, your age, some special feature?**
> **What I did see in common with their profiles, as I say, is that they had only aggregated people of my age and sex. I was a girl'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

> **'Definitely. I mean like its teenage boys picking on teenage girls. Like I, I know people are not ready to acknowledge that, but like there's something in that aspect any way of like teenage boys thinking it's okay to pick on teenage girls. Like that, that general idea on its own where it's like kind of funny that like a guy picks on a girl. Not even, not even in the roman- like just it's funny. Like or like she's not ... Like a lot of people think that I'm still idealistic because I'm young.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

Gender and other intersecting characteristics

This category can also be identified in the girls and young women's interview responses, suggested as a reason for why they face harassment online. This was an important finding and section to consider, especially in regard to gaps in current data and secondary literature.

The responses below were all provided whilst responding to questions as to whether they feel they are targeted online because of any 'personal characteristics', which the research question prompts as gender, gender identity, culture, expression of sexuality or any other characteristics? The answers highlighted below predominantly relate to race or ethnicity, or cultural norms, and feature first and second-hand experiences:

> **[Researcher] 'Has there been a situation where you felt you were a specific target because of some personal characteristic? For example, your gender, gender identity, cultural background, expression of sexuality, or any other characteristic?**

> **Afro-Peruvian women are seen as hypersexual. I don't upload many personal photos anymore.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'…Um, sometimes I think it's just, yah, more of a cultural kind of thing. Because, um, you know, people here are just like taught that men are better than women all the time.**
> **…Just because men are the breadwinners most of the times, and they think that a woman can never be a breadwinner. Maybe because I'm young, that means even if I have a degree, I'll still have to depend on a man. So, I think it's just like all mixed up…'** (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> **'…Um, well, in my opinion, she is a girl and that's one of the characteristics and another one is she is a law student…**
> **…And the way she behaves, like the way she speaks is also a bit of sometimes, using curse words or sometimes in an aggressive way. She's just expressing what she thinks, but for the other people who view differently, they think that this girl is being rude and being very, very frank with the topic, and she**

shouldn't be doing this on public. At least she should be, you know, talking polite, or I don't know, a bit of, you know, sort of, like the choice of words are sometimes a problem for this kind of thing.'

[Researcher] 'No, that does make sense. Um, is it true... because from what you said, it sounds like in Myanmar girls are um, expected to be polite and, you know, not to talk about those things. So, it is also something that has to do with the society of what is expected of girls, and what she does goes against what is expected of her?
...Yes. I- I would say yes, because the communities here are kind of conservative, and they expect us to be polite, and you know, to behave as a girl. Even using, even while using social media we must be very careful with that and we shouldn't say, you know, what we want, so they expect a lot from the girls especially.' (Young woman, 21, Myanmar)

Interestingly, in the last two examples the girls seem to articulate the harassment as part of cultural or community beliefs. However, these could also be understood as contextual 'gender norms', although this is not articulated directly by the girls.

The responses are significant, as they help to show that the harassment adolescent girls and young women face online is not homogeneous. It usefully provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the experiences, and lived realities, of different girls and young women who endure different forms of online harassment, and as such could suggest the necessity for multiple approaches to support needs, reflective of the multiplicity of types and experiences of online harassment.

In the quantitative survey all girls and young women, whether they had intersectional characteristics or not, were asked whether they think the harasser targets them or other girls they know because of any of the following characteristics: disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or race or ethnicity. The results are in line with the reports from girls in the qualitative interviews.

- 29 per cent say that they or other girls they know get harassed because of their gender identity
- 9 percent say that they or other girls they know get harassed because they have a disability
- 19 per cent say that they or other girls they know get harassed because of their race or ethnicity
- 25 per cent say that they or other girls they know get harassed because of their sexual orientation.

These findings are interesting, as it is necessary to note that depending on how much or little information the girls share on their profile, other social media users would not always be able to determine the girls' gender identity, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, or disability status. However, it shows that harassers are willing to harass girls because they perceive them as having these characteristics.

In all regions, it is the case that girls and young women who identified themselves as having at least one intersecting characteristic, face harassment more frequently than girls who do not identify as having an intersecting characteristic. In North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region the difference in frequency of harassment for girls with and without intersecting characteristics is bigger than in Africa and Latin America. For example, in Africa, of the girls who have an intersectional characteristic and have been harassed, 27 per cent say they get harassed very frequently while 18 per cent of girls who do not have an intersectional characteristic say they get harassed very frequently. The fact that there is so little difference in the frequency of harassment between intersectional and non-intersectional girls in Africa and Latin America might be explained by the generally high levels of reported harassment in those two regions. Conversely, given that the amount of very frequent online harassment increases by 10 per cent in North America and by 18 per cent in the Asia-Pacific region for girls who have intersecting characteristics, this indicates that in those two regions intersecting characteristics are one of the central reasons for online harassment.

Table 6 Percentage of girls with and without intersecting characteristics who face very frequent online harassment.

Region	% of girls with intersecting characteristics who get harassed very frequently	% of girls without intersecting characteristics who get harassed very frequently	Difference in % of girls who get harassed very frequently
North America	24	14	10
Europe	33	18	15
Asia-Pacific	37	19	18
Africa	27	18	9
Latin America	29	23	6

Girls get harassed because of their intersectional characteristics:

- 42 per cent of the girls who have been harassed and identify themselves as LGBTIQ+, said that they get harassed because of their **sexual orientation**.
- 56% of the girls who identified themselves as LGBTIQ+ and had experienced harassment, said that they get harassed because of their **gender identity or sexual orientation**.
- 14 per cent of the girls who have been harassed and identify themselves as having a disability, said that they get harassed because of their **disability**.
- 37 per cent of the girls who have been harassed and identify themselves as from an ethnic minority, said that they get harassed because of their **ethnicity or race**.

Power and inhibition in online spaces

Finally, it was identified that a compounding factor for online harassment is the power and lack of inhibition that online spaces afford perpetrators. This was another interesting finding, and could relate to themes in secondary literature, whereby harassers feel dissociated from the girls and young women they are targeting simply because they are online rather than face to face, or that they feel it is a free space in which they can act without consequence or boundaries. This was hinted at by three respondents who described a sense of harassers being able to do or say anything due simply to being online:

> **'Yeah. Of course. because that's what I feel like. They feel like … like they are in social media and they maybe are anonymous. They can do anything…**
>
> **…I, social media can be a really, I mean can be an amazing place to, for example, speak out and like share information like … For me it's, but also could be like a horrible place where like, I don't know, crazy people could like have, you know, an anonymous place to like, throw shade and hate.**
>
> **…So, it's very difficult because of that, because you can be anonymous. Uh, like hide your-your identity and just like do horrible things.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'Uh … when it is confirmed they will have negative, you know, they'll be like, "No. …social med- social media. You know, I can comment anything I want. You know, there's no way you can tell me …even that. I mean, social media, it's not your father's house." You know, when they talk like that…'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> **'If the harassment started on social media, the attackers are usually strangers. If they are not personally connected with the one that they're attacking online, they become more empowered to carry out the action.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> **'…they feel like have no limit to what they say or what they do on the social media, 'cause they know that they are behind the screen and there's nothing you can do to them.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

5.2.5.2 Reasons to suggest why girls face harassment for being actively engaged online

Considering the sub-categories of types of harassment that girls face for being actively engaged online, it was possible to deduce or suggest that some of the motivations or reasons behind such types of harassment could be

broadly categorised in the following ways: a backlash driven by conservative ideals, a process of double victimisation and a reaction to content featuring the girls themselves.

Backlash driven by conservative ideals

Backlash driven by conservative ideals was a blanket term intended to cover elements of political, cultural, religious and gender norms discussed by girls and young women during qualitative interviews. In relation to the types of harassment it could be related to: attacking the way a girl/individual presents themselves online, reacting to the topic a girl is speaking about especially in relation to perceived feminist or gender equality issues, attacking the credibility or knowledge of the girls, relentless commenting to put a girl down, threats or wishes of harm towards the girls or their families and general negative comments. Although none of the girls explicitly stated a harasser's conservative ideals as the reason they believe they were targeted, 35 per cent of respondent's answers could be used to support this concept.[187]

In regard to political conservatism as a basis for online harassment whilst girls are actively engaged online, one girl commented that she felt her 'left-leaning' political views, in addition to being a girl discussing politics, may have been the basis for some of the harassment she experienced:

> '… I, I told you, I post quite a bit of like opinionated. And, um, I'll be honest, my opinions are super I guess, what I've heard from other people, they're super left ….
>
> … in my area, the teenage boys are super conservative, so what I post doesn't really … with them. I know a lot of the girls like are conservative, but they don't, like they don't waiver on like women's issues, right? Like they believe in abortion and stuff. It's just more the guys that are like, "That's not something you should be complaining about or you don't full know about it." …
>
> …But, um, till then I can tell like then it's probably not race, it's literally just, it's like being a girl that's left…' (Girl, 17, Canada)

In the quantitative survey, 14% of girls said they or other girls they know get harassed because of the political views they share on social media.

Conservative religious ideals were also implicated both indirectly and directly during qualitative interviews:

> 'My LGBT friends who post empowering messages online e.g. "accepting and expressing yourself" are often being attacked and questioned by people who have rigid religious views -conservatives. These conservatives are those who subscribe to only one perspective or the views that they were raised with, and do not even try to be critical of issues.' (Girl, 17, Philippines)
>
> '…Let me just explain something to you. In our city's community we're very, we're Muslims… …And we're conservative, and people are not used to like, uh, not wearing- girls not wearing scarves, or like, wearing skinny jeans or whatever. And I come from a different family so my parents don't really care what I wear or what I say or whatever. So, whenever I post something, in the public community in- in a platform like Twitter where there are no boundaries, like, there the … is usually very public, I will, I usually get these, um, uh, like, bad words because it's, it makes them feel like, say for example, I'm not wearing a scarf, they have the right to say whatever they want to me. Or like, I would accept harassment in such a case…' (Young woman, 20, South Sudan)
>
> 'Um, because of that I post often and I sometimes may have opened a Q and A, and then I just, you know, I just answer them, and then I highlight where I address all of the issues that all of women and girls feels, uh feels and thinking that is really bad for them. And they want to end that. And because of that, so many people, especially the religious ones, and also men, just attacking me because they think that what I'm doing is wrong…
> …But the characteristic is that they're a religious person, and most, most of them are using fake accounts.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

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[187] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

Conservative gender norms could also be identified in discussions by respondents. The first description was used to contextualise the experience her friend has faced when speaking out online about politics using expressive language:

> 'Yes. I- I would say yes, because the communities here are kind of conservative, and they expect us to be polite, and you know, to behave as a girl. Even using, even while using social media we must be very careful with that and we shouldn't say, you know, what we want, so they expect a lot from the girls especially…

> …If it is a boy its totally free, you are free to curse, you are free to say anything, you can use as many bad words as you can, you know, as you want, but for girls it's not like that. So, the community, the mind set off the community is also very important, like for to get equality online.' Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

Double victimisation

This phrase is used to describe the motivation of online harassers who target girls who are speaking out about experiences of harassment or abuse: girls are harassed for speaking about harassment. This was particularly interesting and suggests a relentlessness to the abuse girls face, an additional barrier to their online expression and potential healing from such experiences, and a perverse logic to the harasser's intent. This type of reasoning could be related primarily to the following types of harassment: attacking the way a girl/ individual looks or presents themselves online, reacting to the topic the girl is speaking about especially in relation to perceived feminist or gender equality issues and negative or aggressive comments. Whilst only one respondent's answer could be used to explicitly support this categorisation, 24 per cent of interview respondents provided descriptions that could be aligned with this concept.[188]

The example below was given in response to being asked whether certain content that gets published receives more harassment than others. The girl in question runs an Instagram account in Chile that helps publish women's first-hand experiences of abortions and illegal abortions:

> [Researcher] 'Do you feel that-that this happens more when you po-, when you post something specific? Um, I don't know, when there's a, when there's a story maybe of a woman who shares her story of an abortion. Um. Do you feel like there's more, this gets more attacked than other things that are posted? Maybe just information about abortion, or is it all the same?

> Yes. Yes absolutely….
> …I don't know for me it's like breaks my heart because, obviously the stories that we're telling are very, like, very difficult experience for the woman. And you can read how much, like, suffering she went through with all this process. And anyways these people come, and like 'you should be like ashamed of yourself'. Things like that, you know. So, it's like-
> …How can you see all the suffering that was gone through, and just like comment without like seeing this, you know.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

Similarly, a girl describes speaking out about feelings of vulnerability and sensitivity and being harassed with comments that are intended to upset her:

> 'Um, yeah, there have been at times where maybe I would just like post a quote about me being sensitive or something…
> ... and then people will just like go like, "Who cares?" Like, "Who gives a damn about you," (laughs), you know? It's- it's weird though because like I'm just trying to tell people how sensitive I am-…'
>
> (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

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[188] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 23, USA

A further two respondents describe experiences which display harassment, for speaking out around issues about forms of sexual and gender-based violence. The first example is an experience described by a girl who uses social media to speak out about gender equality and ending child marriage:

> **'[Researcher] And, uh, but when you, when you post about gender equality or Girls Not Brides, um, what are the negative comments and the harassment that people have on that? Because you would think that everyone can agree, you know… that this is a good thing. So what is the harassment that they, they comment on?**
>
> **…Um, you know… it's funny, sometimes they, they, they write and say that … "Girls? Who, girls? No matter what, they will never be on top. No way."… This is what, these are some of the comments that they give. And, and, and some say, "Keep wasting your time, as, I mean, pretending that you are mentoring them, but they will forever remain girls. Girls are girls. And our tradition has said girls are girls. Women are women. And forever they will be women, no matter what you try to do."**
>
> (Young Woman, 23, South, Sudan)

The final examples are excerpts from the previously mentioned young woman based in the US who runs an Instagram account to publicise women's first-hand experiences of street harassment:

> **'… the comments that I got a lot about just the chalk images were, you know, "This isn't important. This is a compliment. Um, why are you doing this? You have to be ungrateful in order to think that this is harassment." Um, so there was a lot of comments early on in the project that really belittled it and said it wasn't important.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

In addition, she also describes being persistently pursued and harassed by a man who had contacted the Instagram account to share an experience where he had been out with a group of 'feminists' and felt that he wasn't accepted by them. He therefore felt he had been harassed by them. Due to the young woman and her team not replying in what he perceived as an adequate way his behaviour escalated:

> **'…Um, so, uh, then after my teammate responded, he basically said that we weren't validating his experience and he was really angry and he was messaging over and over again saying, um, you know, "I'm gonna write about this. And I'm gonna, uh, send this story to a newspaper." So then I blocked him. …And after that, he somehow found my email and he was emailing me these long paragraphs of how he was going to, um, write something really negative … Um, he sent messages to the website. He then started to message each …subaccount individually …'**
>
> **… um, I don't know, undermine (laughs) things a little bit. And just the extreme persistence with which he was emailing me, sending messages to the website, and messaging lots of people in the movement, that was really difficult to handle, because, um, so many people were messaging me asking, you know, "What is this? Is this true?"…So, I don't know…the persistence that he used it felt like he was harassing me and also other members of the, the movement.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

She commented later that:

> **'I do think that there is an added level of, like, irony and hypocrisy to all of it, because the account is specifically about harassment. Um, so it, it is interesting to, to show that…'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Girls' Appearance

Finally, the last categorisation to help explore reasons for harassment is content featuring the girls and young women themselves. This could be considered the most commonly identified reason among girls' answers with 53 per cent of interview respondents describing examples that could support this.[189] Most experiences included abuse that was specifically in relation to posting images online, either photos or videos of the girls.[190] Whilst this could be considered a 'type' rather than suggesting a 'reason' for the harassment, there remains an important distinction between the way a girl is harassed and how or why this occurs, 'content featuring the girls themselves' arguably belongs to the latter. This type of reasoning could be related to the following types of harassment: attacking the

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[189] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[190] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan

way a girl/individual looks or presents themselves online, using content to get closer to the girl, unsolicited sharing of content, threats or wishes of harm towards the girls or their families and finally general negative or aggressive comments.

In the quantitative survey 57 per cent of girls said that they, or other girls they know, get harassed because of their style and appearance.

Out of the responses that could be used to support this, two respondents provided a more explicit description that could indicate content such as photos featuring themselves was a reason for the harassment they face when actively engaged online. The second example, interestingly, also distinguishes between the type of harassment commencing, and altering to sexual objectification rather than harassment against the content of her work - speaking out about street harassment:

'…At first I didn't publish. Then I started to socialise more and upload pictures of myself and there I felt that there was harassment.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'…Um, and now that I've started to post videos of myself and others of my team members, the harassment is, is a little different. Sometimes people will message in response to a video and say, eh, sexual things about us. Um, like, for example, someone said, "I want, I want to lick your feet." Um, really bizarre things. Um, someone said, "I want to bite your ass." I, I wrote these down just so that, um, I would remember.

…Um, so, eh, what I noticed when I started posting videos of myself is that the harassment increased to a more personal level. So, at first, people were just kind of criticizing the project and then when I started posting videos of myself chalking, they would actually kind of use that opportunity to sexualise me. Um, I don't post the videos that frequently, but I'd say that pretty consistently whenever I do post a video, someone will say something like that in the direct messages.

…Um, but, yeah, I do feel like when someone knows who you are and maybe sees your face, they harass you more.' (Young woman, 23, USA)

Finally, one respondent also described an incident in relation to a friend which could be used to suggest harassment that was caused by content featuring the girl. However, interestingly, it was the only example where harassment had originated offline and continued online once the girl had begun social media use.

> **'I have a friend-female, who often receives hate comments and whose posts were being talked about in other group chats regardless of what she posted or shared online. She was being attacked because of how she dresses and because she always puts make-up on. The bullying started offline, but when she became active on social media, people began bashing her online as well.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

This is an interesting finding that again highlights a string of abuse that girls face in all aspects of their lives. In comparison to previous examples it is useful for suggesting a real sense of continuity and the relentless nature of abuse that some adolescent girls and young women face.

5.2.6 Conclusion
Having described the statistics and lived experiences of online harassment that girls and young women are experiencing on social media platforms, it becomes clear that the majority of girls across all regions frequently face multiple types of vicious online harassment. Girls and young women get harassed for being girls online and harassment gets even worse when they dare to actively use social media spaces: posting their own content and speaking out about topics that are important to them.

During the quantitative surveys, girls and young women across all 22 countries were asked how safe they feel on social media platforms in general. The results are displayed in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Feelings of safety on social media platforms amongst girls and young women

Safety levels	% of girls
Not safe at all	5%
Not very safe	19%
Neither safe nor unsafe	35%
Mostly safe	31%
Very safe	10%

In addition, to 24 per cent of girls not feeling very safe or not safe at all on social media platforms, the analysis found that the more frequently girls get harassed the less safe they feel. Another factor that determines how safe girls feel on social media platforms is the type of harassment they experience.

The analysis revealed that while all types of harassment decrease the girls' feeling of safety on social media platforms, threats of sexual violence has the biggest impact on girls' feeling unsafe.

5.3 Perpetrators of gender-based online harassment

This section considers characteristics identified by the girls and young women that help create a more comprehensive picture of the online harassers themselves. During the interviews, the girls and young women were asked whether they could describe the types of people that harass them and if they could further recognise any common features these harassers have. From these answers, as well as from comments made throughout the course of the interviews, the responses highlighted themes such as whether the harassers where known to them, whether they were unknown to them, and characteristics such as gender, age, religion, race and political beliefs.

5.3.1 Who have the girls experienced harassment from: are the perpetrators known or unknown?

In the quantitative survey, girls across 22 countries shared that they, or other girls they know, have been harassed by the following groups of people: current or former intimate partners, friends, people from school or work, people from social media platforms that aren't friends, strangers, a group of strangers, anonymous social media users, or others.

Table 8 Percentage of girls and young women who have been harassed or know other girls who have been harassed by a perpetrator belonging to the following groups

Perpetrator	% of surveyed girls or young women who report that they, or girls or young women they know, have been harassed by a perpetrator belonging to the following groups
Current or former intimate partner	11%
Friends	21%
People from school or work	23%
People from social media platforms that aren't friends	29%
Strangers	36%
A group of strangers	16%
Anonymous social media users	32%
Other	2%

Given the global reach and often public nature of online behaviour and social media use, it was interesting to establish whether the girls were targeted by people they know, or they did not know. In some ways this could have implications for whether online spaces and social media platforms might be considered, in broader senses, an enabling space for the continuation of harassment girls may already face or be at risk to, or whether it could be considered a more predatory space used as a tool by harassers to connect and target wider audiences. From the numbers above we can see that a higher percentage of girls report having been harassed by anonymous social media users and strangers, or group of strangers, than by people they know, such as friends, current or former intimate partners, people form school or work.

Girls who report being harassed, or knowing girls who have been harassed, by people they know feel marginally safer on social media platforms than girls who get harassed by people they do not know.

Considering responses from qualitative interviews, 'known harassers' was subdivided into two categories: identifiable users who the girls had some form of personal connection with and identifiable users who the girls may have known but did not have any personal connections with. 'Unknown' was used to refer to strangers (accounts with clearly identifiable users), anonymous or fake accounts. Overall, comments provided by the girls and young women in the qualitative interviews indicated that 71% per cent had experiences where the harassers could be identified within the overarching category of 'unknown',[191] 29 per cent had experiences where the harassers could be identified within the category of 'known',[192] whilst an additional 24 per cent had experienced a mixture of both known and unknown types of harassers.[193] A particular difference suggested in the findings below was the effect harassment had when coming from known or unknown sources. Another overall finding was that whilst women were listed in the examples of 'known' harassers, none of the girls suggested 'women' were behind the 'unknown' accounts, many directly mentioned they thought they were men.

First, looking at the category of **known**, the majority of experiences came from the first subcategory of more personally known social media users. Girls' responses included examples of school peers,[194] people known from other social movements[195] and people living in the same area.[196] Two of the respondents provided comments that could suggest the effect this had on them:

'   **[Researcher] And it's actually also quite a lot of people that you know you're saying that actually are going to school with you…That must be tough if you then also you know, see them in school and you know, sort of that you might-…**

…Yes, it's very awkward 'cause it's like, "Wow, you have such a nice opinion about me-"
... so glad I get to wake up and see you in the morning…

…It was very, it was very overwhelming because I was not in that mindset of like you know, I don't wanna be with you. I think that's pretty obvious, but he had it. And so, it was very I guess hard to escape it because I couldn't, I, I couldn't block him because he went to my school. And then that would be a conversation point. And then everyone would know what had happened.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

'It led me to keep an eye on the social networks and I was afraid to find them on the street. It made me dependent on my cell phone, responding.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

These excerpts highlight the impact and difficulty of knowing the harasser, and seeing them frequently, or at all, offline in daily life. They also emphasise how difficult it can be to deal with this situation.

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[191] Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Spain, Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[192] Young Woman, 18, Canada; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Spain
[193] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 17, Canada
[194] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador
[195] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[196] Young Woman, 24, Peru

Only one respondent described an experience of harassment relating to the second subcategory of known harassers; an identifiable user who the girls may have known but did not have any personal connection with. The harasser was described by the girl as a 'known troll', who she had been previously warned about.[197]

Different types of **unknown** harassers were more frequently discussed in the responses of the girls and young women interviewed. Within the subcategories 'strangers' were identified in 41 per cent of responses,[198] fake accounts were included in 35 per cent of responses,[199] and anonymous users were included in 18 per cent of responses.[200] A key finding was a similarity across all forms of 'unknown' harassment in their effect on the girls and young women. Within discussions of harassment from strangers, fake and anonymous accounts responses suggested what could be considered a sense of vulnerability from not knowing who was behind the harassment as well as the sense that, as they did not know the girls, or were not acting under their real identity, they had nothing to lose: in effect there could arguably be less to stop their actions, and they could also continue to make multiple accounts. This has strong parallels with issues discussed in relation to possible reasons for harassment against girls for being present online with regards to **power and inhibition that online spaces afford perpetrators.** This could be seen as having particular implications for identifying, addressing, preventing and safeguarding against the harassment.

Below are some examples which are indicative of such effects:

Strangers

> **'Most of the time it's, it's just so random. Like, you wake up and you find random sexts from last night, so yeah, most of the time it's random. And to be very clear with you, most of the time it's from strangers as well, because they have nothing to lose, you know. They- they're not going to ruin their relationship with you or anything.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Anonymous

> **'Yeah. Of course, because that's what I feel like. They feel like … like they are in social media and they maybe are anonymous. They can do anything.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'…I just thought of something that's in common. They all have anonymous accounts, which is, most of them have anonymous accounts. Not all of them, but most of them. These are not their real accounts, and these are not their real pictures. So even if you do end up trying to sue one of them, it's not a real person.**
> **…And this is something that was very creepy because I, I remember my friend, uh, wanted to hunt one of the people that, uh, sent her like, a nude picture of himself. And she couldn't do anything about it because he turned out to be unreal.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Fake

> **'But the characteristic is that they're a religious person, and most, most of them are using fake accounts. I don't know why, because I think they just do not want to show their identity, and they just want to um, commenting and feel safe because I won't know who is that, or who are they'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> **'…The case I told you about was a man, a complete stranger …We tried to do everything we could to find out who this person was and to denounce him. This person had different profiles but it was the same person. I would block but he would create more profiles and keep sending me pictures of me. My daddy is the person I trust.** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

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[197] Young Woman, 23, Spain
[198] Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Ecuador
[199] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA
[200] Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Malawi

Other interesting findings in relation to girls' discussions of fake accounts included the idea that such accounts may be specifically set up in order to facilitate harassment. Answers by two respondents could be used to support this, and both are also useful for pointing out the characteristics associated with such accounts:

> **'So the issue is, a lot of people will harass from an account that has zero followers and is clearly just made as an account to maybe harass people or write inappropriate comments. So I can't actually tell who's behind the computer screen…**
> **…And that of course makes me question, "Is it just one person making all of these accounts?" Um, I don't know. I guess in my head I picture a kind of a teenage boy doing this for fun. Um, maybe sometimes it's a picture of a teenage boy, but again it's just hard to know, because these accounts could be using any picture as the little profile picture. ... Um, and like I said, a lot of them have really few followers, which makes it seem like they were just made recently, um, with the purpose to send out harassing messages.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The example below describes interacting unknowingly with a fake account which was set up to appear as a girl. The respondent described the experience in relation to online grooming which could highlight more severe and sinister motives for potentially using fake accounts:

> **'…for example, sometimes I was on Facebook as a girl to play. Then, from those games, people find your profile. It's sending a message… They were names that were in another language. They were people from other continents. You could see their features in their clothing, in the people. In fact, the people I noticed the most were their friends and the people who were added to them were other girls close to my age or were just women. It was too obvious. She was from some network or something. I hadn't interacted with little girl, I wasn't interacting with anybody I didn't know…'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

Finally, some responses indicated that there were experiences of being harassed by both known and unknown harassers:

> **'Uh, most of them do it with their actual names. But some, we have some fake accounts as well.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'Yeah. It just depends on sometimes it's people I know and sometimes ... Like if it's someone I don't know, I'll just block them. But if I know them…'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'In terms of familiarity, if the harassment started on social media, the attackers are usually strangers. If they are not personally connected with the one that they're attacking online, they become more empowered to carry out the action. However, if the harassment started offline and advanced to an online platform, then the attackers are usually individuals that the victim knows.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

This is useful in emphasising that girls may not just experience a one-off case of online harassment but can experience multiple and varied incidences.

5.3.2 Characteristics or common features of perpetrators

The findings suggested some common features, or at least common ways the girls and young women interviewed described the harassers. These primarily related to gender, age and religion, further characteristics highlighted less frequently were in relation to race and political views. Only one respondent's comments could be used to suggest that from her experience and understanding it is not possible to suggest common features among online harassers due to the ubiquitous nature of abuse and abusers:

> **'I guess, like… characteristics of any abuser because that may be anyone, because uh, knowingly or unknowingly …What personality do the abuser … because- I know that abuser can be anyone- our friend, our close relatives, one on one, we don't know…'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

Considering the rest of the girls and young women's interview answers that can be used to explore this section: 76 per cent of respondents indicated that the harasser was or could be male,[201] 29 per cent indicated that the harasser could be or was female[202]; 47 per cent mentioned age in relation to the harasser,[203] 18 per cent mentioned the harasser was in some way religious,[204] whilst both political beliefs[205] and race[206] were mentioned by 6 per cent of respondents.

Looking first at gender, girls frequently discussed that men and boys were behind the harassment they had faced. The responses given were often quite direct about this, and some could be used to suggest that this was more the 'norm' than the exception:

> **'I do feel like everyone who's harassing us are, are boys and men'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

> **'My feminist friends are usually targeted by males because of the patriarchal society we are living in. These same people do not want other individuals with other genders to be empowered.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> 'I'm not su- really sure, because when it comes to me it's mostly men.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> **'…. I'm sorry because it's mostly men (laughs) ……Yeah it's mostly young men. We have seen. But also adults and they, they do these kind of comments that I told you about, like trying to invalidate the young women…'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> '…it's mainly the, the teen boys for me, but I've seen other people with other stuff.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'Since we're talking about feminist content, it's common for them to be men first... So I think that if that's the characteristic, I impose men, they can actually be adults, but above all they are young, who are the ones who are most attentive to social networks and want to be annoyed.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

> **'Uh, not everyone's, does that, but some people do that, especially eh, the, the, the male, uh, the men and, and, and boys, they're the people who normally do that for me on social media.** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> **'…mostly from older men who wrote and sent pictures, pornography'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'They're strange, and mostly men'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

> **'Maybe, most of the people that, uh, do this are usually boys…'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

While women were also mentioned by the respondents as perpetrators of online harassment, they were less commonly identified. In addition, one respondent makes an interesting observation which distinguishes between the nature of harassment attributed to female and male harassers:

> **Oh, definitely, yeah. Um, yeah, I guess, um, I do feel like everyone who's harassing us are, are boys and men. Um, that being said there have been some comments from women that don't approve of the project, but when it comes to the sexualisation and the objectification, I definitely get a sense that it's men and boys.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

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[201] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 24, Peru
[202] Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 23, Spain, Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, USA
[203] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 16, El Salvador, Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Tanzania; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA
[204] Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[205] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[206] Girl, 17, Canada

This could be supported by comments made by three other girls. Two describe experiences of harassment which could be considered in relation to the topics they are speaking out about - abortion[207] and environmental issues [208] - whilst the last describes abuse caused by perceived failings of motherhood:

> **'Yeah it's mostly young men. We have seen. But also, adults and they, they do these kinds of comments that I told you about, like trying to invalidate the young women. And also, we have seen like older women, like, attacking…**
> **… basically, all the comments are like hate. To this. And we could see that actually most of them were like, older women.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'Young mothers blaming other mothers of abused girls.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

A potential anomaly could be found in the observations made by one respondent. The answer below was provided after discussing abuse towards online content that features women wearing revealing clothes. When asked what are the common characteristics of online harassers the young woman stated:

> **'Mostly, I think all kinds of people, but mostly, are women ourselves.**
> **…Like yeah, mostly are women that are, are attacking their fellow women posting anything in this social media.**
> **…I don't know what is wrong, but yeah, most of comments are women's.'**
>
> **[Researcher]'Okay, and do you have a guess… to why this is? Why are women commenting bad comments on other women?**
>
> **Uh, sometimes it's jealous, sometimes they're being honest, yeah.'** (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

Age, was another identifier that emerged when the girls and young women were describing online harassers. Only a couple of responses provided estimations of age, whilst the majority spoke in loose terms of 'young', 'teen' or 'old'. Due to this, it is necessary to highlight the relativity of these concepts. For those who answered there seemed an even split between young, older or both young and older harassers:

Young

> **'…it's mainly the, the teen boys for me, but I've seen other people with other stuff.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'.. They're 18-20-year-old men from my social circle …'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'And that of course makes me question, "Is it just one person making all of these accounts?" Um, I don't know. I guess in my head I picture a kind of a teenage boy doing this for fun. Um, maybe sometimes it's a picture of a teenage boy, but again it's just hard to know, because these accounts could be using any picture as the little profile picture...'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Both young and older

> **'Since we're talking about feminist content, it's common for them to be men first. Sometimes they are young people of my age, sometimes they are even adults. So I think that if that's the characteristic, I impose men, they can actually be adults, but above all they are young, who are the ones who are most attentive to social networks and want to be annoyed.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

> **Yeah, it's mostly young men. We have seen. But also, adults and they, they do these kinds of comments that I told you about, like trying to invalidate the young women. And also, we have seen like older women, like, attacking.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

Older

> **'Mostly from older men who wrote and sent pictures, pornography.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

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[207] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[208] Young Woman, 23, Spain

'And also, she, she tried because she, she, she's in Tanzania, and in Tanzania, most of people, especially o- old women, old men, these old one, they, they don't respect a beauty contest even, so she, she, she tried to act as what people they want her to be.' (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

'And whenever she posts about politics, only men came and, you know, comment on that kind of stuff, and most of them are older age, I would say above 30, because under 30 they share the same view, I guess, or mostly they don't, they have no feelings or opinions on that. Only the older guys who are a bit of conservative and yeah, the kind of people comment under her post.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Due to the rather even mix of age ranges described, it is not possible to state that girls and young women face online harassment more from younger or older individuals, but instead it is possible to conclude that they experience harassment from individuals of varying age ranges.

Religion was mentioned by 18 per cent of respondents, the answers were given directly in response to what characteristics they believed online harassers have in common and can be seen below:

'Those with superiority complex and highly religious people' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

'Many of the Christian religion, evangelicals, who wish me death…' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'But the characteristic is that they're a religious person, and most, most of them are using fake accounts.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

Political beliefs were only mentioned by one respondent: provided as a direct answer to the characteristics they believe harassers have in common:

'Neo-liberal political men do mans-plaining when I talk about inequality and trafficking in mining.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

Finally, race was similarly only mentioned by one respondent. The answer was given whilst describing what they believe as backlash to speaking out against minority and indigenous issues, the researcher asked whether they felt that the harassers were of a certain race:

**'Um, I, I notice either it's, um, white people. I, I don't know exactly if they're older men or not, because a lot of it's online. In person, it is usually older men…
…I notice a lot more white people that do it, and I don't know, I don't know if it's old men 'cause I see a variation depending on ... Like, like friends that are white activists, for them, I, I don't know if it's like them, 'cause they never comment on who it is. I, I suspect it is white men, because that's like every other woman of colour that's an activist that I follow, I notice a lot of that comes from them. Or they get, they get angry emails, which is a different kind of importance. But yeah…'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

This is a particularly interesting insight as it not only details her personal experiences, but provides a sense of common experiences that she witnesses or is aware of.

This section was useful to highlight findings that help develop a more comprehensive understanding of who the girls and young women interviewed believe have harassed them online. The findings suggest a range of different characteristics which reflect the varied and multiple examples of harassment articulated by the girls. Overall, however, it is possible to state based on the answers provided that the most frequent types of harassers seem to be from unknown sources, that the harassers are more likely to be (or perceived to be) male, and that they are of varying age ranges.

5.3.3 Conclusion
Girls and young women experience harassment from a wide range of groups and people. Most harassment is executed by harassers who are unknown to the girls, including those who are using anonymous accounts to conceal their identity online. Girls and young women reported through the qualitative interviews that the harassers are mostly men, whether young or old, and often appear to have conservative ideals. This is especially

important given that girls and young women report that harassment increases exponentially when they are speaking out about feminist topics that are perceived as contentious in many societies.

5.4 Consequences of online harassment

Something that is often overlooked by studies on online harassment is a thorough examination of the effects that online harassment has on girls and young women. Given that the previous sections have established that girls and young women face frequent, vicious online harassment from a multitude of harassers, this section will now examine the consequences for girls of being relentlessly targeted by harassers on social media platforms.

Different levels and layers of impact and consequence from online harassment can be identified through the quantitative survey and especially through the girls' and young women's responses in the qualitative interviews. The findings have been categorised in the following way which will be explored below: how girls and young women are affected by online harassment, how girls and young women deal with harassers and harassment, if and how girls and young women change the way they use social media as a result of online harassment and finally, what gives them the resilience and strength to keep being active online.

Findings in this section are crucial to amplify the voices of girls and young women themselves and to have a more complete picture of all the consequences of online harassment, both in terms of its personal impact and its impact on girls' and young women's ability to move freely in online spaces. This is especially significant when considering ways to provide future support, help or protection to girls and young women online.

5.4.1 How girls and young women are affected by online harassment

Girls and young women across 22 countries said that experiences of online harassment had caused them, or other girls they know, the following negative consequences: feeling physically unsafe, experiencing lower self-esteem or loss of confidence, feeling mental or emotional stress, having problems at school, problems with friends or family, trouble finding or keeping a job.

Overall, 66 per cent said that they or other girls they know had experienced negative effects due to being harassed on social media platforms. The most common negative effects of online harassment are lower self-esteem or loss of confidence and mental or emotional stress, followed by the feeling of being physically unsafe.

Table 9 Percentage of girls and young women experiencing negative effects due to online harassment

Effect	% of girls or other girls they know having experienced it	% of girls who have been harassed and experienced it
feeling of being physically unsafe	22%	24%
lower self-esteem or loss of confidence	39%	42%
mental or emotional stress	38%	42%
problems at school	18%	18%
problems with friends or family	18%	19%
trouble finding or keeping a job	7%	7%

When looking at the three most common negative effects on girls (feeling physically unsafe, low self- esteem or loss of confidence, mental or emotional stress) by region, we see that the percentage of girls who suffer, or know other girls who suffer, feeling physically unsafe is highest in Latin America (28 per cent) and Europe (26 per cent). The percentage of girls who suffer, or know other girls who suffer, with mental or emotional stress is highest in North America and the Asia-Pacific region (both 43 per cent). And the highest percentage of girls who suffer, or know other girls who suffer, with low self-esteem or loss of confidence due to online harassment is in North America (47% per cent) followed by girls in the Asia-Pacific region (40 per cent). This indicates that while online

harassment has a negative effect on girls around the globe, it might have different effects on girls from different regions. [209]

Figure 13 Girls and young women who feel physically unsafe or believe that other girls feel physically unsafe as a result of online harassment by region
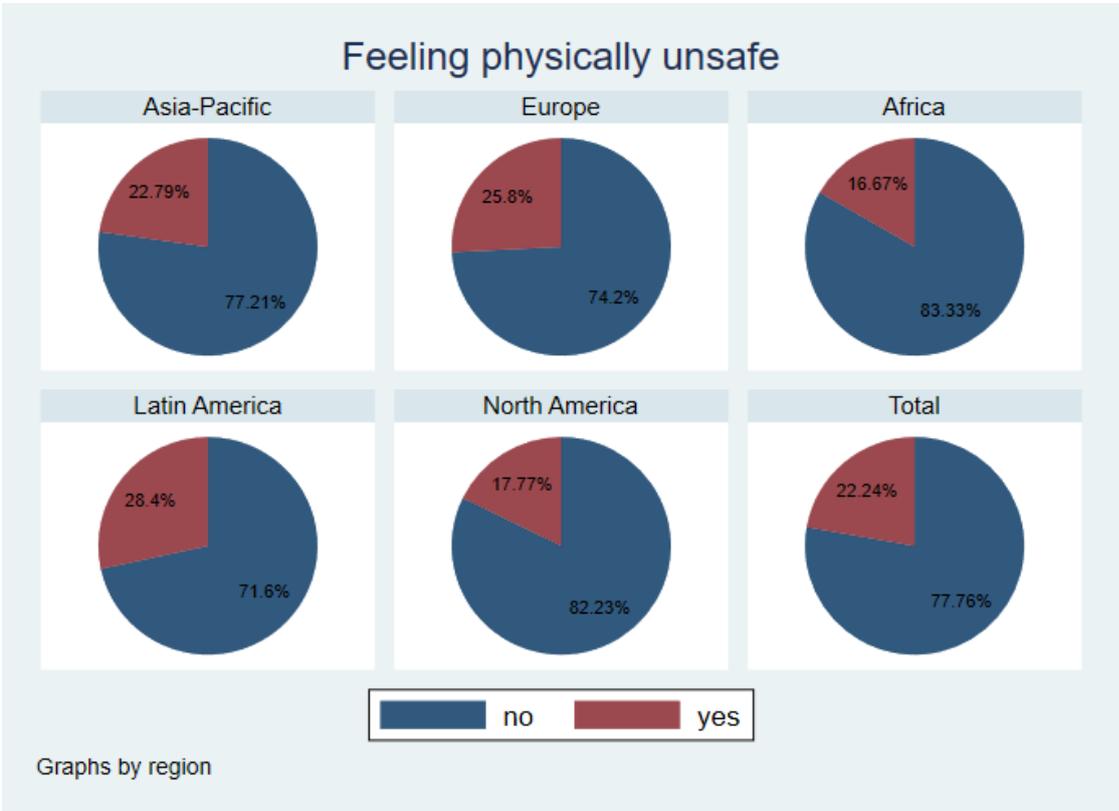
The type of negative effect that girls are facing seems to correlate with the type of harassment. For example, the two most commonly and frequently experienced types of harassment in the Asia-Pacific region and in North America are abusive language and body shaming. Both forms of harassment are specifically targeted at diminishing girls' self-esteem and confidence. In Latin America, where 28 per cent of girls say that they, or other girls they know, feel physically unsafe as a result of online harassment, the most frequent types of online harassment are abusive language, sexual threats and sexual harassment. Again, one could argue that those specific types of harassment could cause specific feelings of being physically unsafe. However, while threats of sexual violence are by far the most frequent harassment in African countries, only 17 per cent of girls in Africa report that they, or other girls they know, feel physically unsafe. This indicates that there are multiple other factors of online harassment, besides the type of harassment, which contribute to a girl feeling physically unsafe. However, looking at the link between types of harassment and types of negative effects allows for some interesting observations.

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[209] There are also regional difference, looking just at those girls who report having been harassed: Of the girls who have been harassed in Latin America and Europe, 33 % and 27 % respectively, report being most physically unsafe while the percentage of girls who suffer with mental or emotional stress is highest in North America (47%) and the Asia-Pacific region (49%). Forty-two per cent of the research respondents who had experienced online harassment had experienced more than one of the effects discussed.

Figure 14 Girls and young women who experience, or believe that girls they know experience, low self-esteem or loss of confidence as a result of online harassment by region

Low self esteem or loss of confidence

Asia-Pacific	Europe	Africa
40.42% / 59.58%	39.23% / 60.77%	32.83% / 67.17%
Latin America	North America	Total
33.6% / 66.4%	47.35% / 52.65%	38.61% / 61.39%

no   yes

Graphs by region
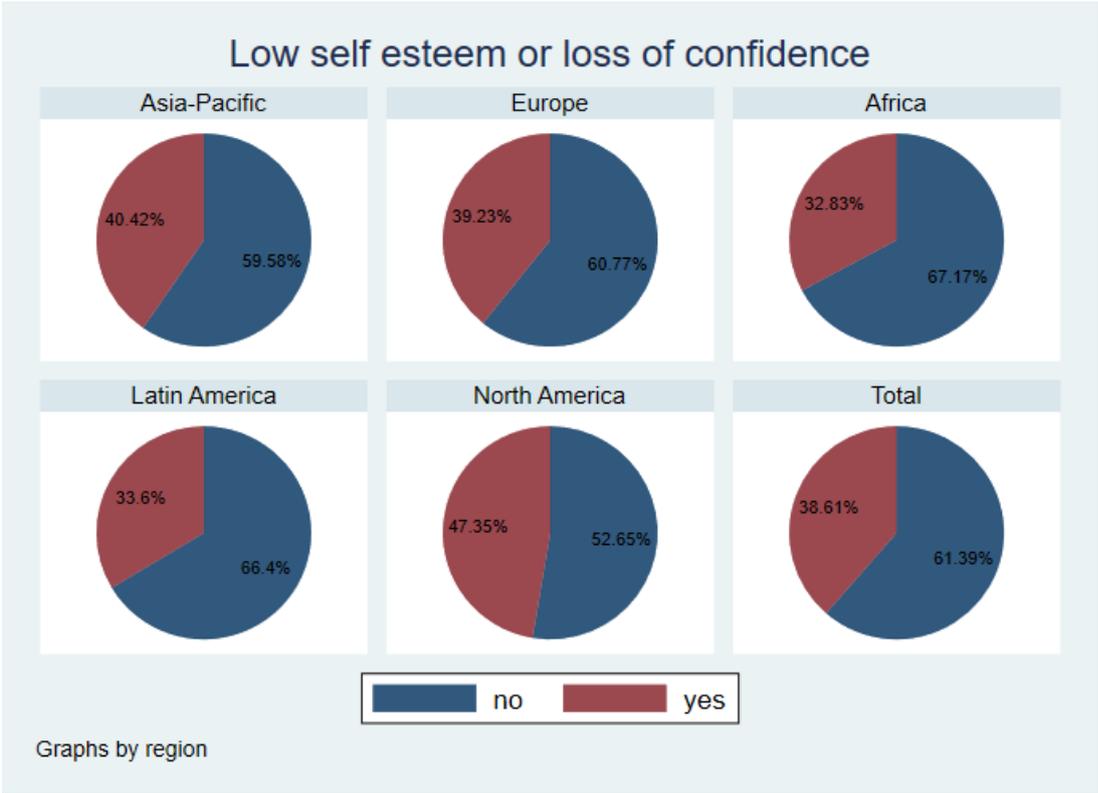
Thirty-nine per cent of girls and young women said that they or other girls they know experience more than one of those negative consequences. Unsurprisingly, the number of negative effects increases with the frequency of harassment that girls and young women are experiencing. For example, amongst all girls who say they rarely get harassed, 55 per cent of girls say that they experience negative effects, and 26 per cent say they experience more than one negative effect. In contrast, amongst those girls who say they get harassed very frequently, 73 per cent say they experience negative effects, and 53 per cent experience more than one negative effect.

In the qualitative interviews, out of respondents who described first or second-hand experiences of online harassment, all could be used to show that it had, in some way, effected them or the girls they were discussing.[210] Interestingly, effects and particularly their severity, were not described as consistent and static but could instead be seen as being more significant when they were earlier experiences of harassment. This suggested that over-time girls may have developed resilience or coping strategies which helped reduce the effect of later experiences, or that there was a potential de-sensitisation or normalisation of online harassment over time.

> '**Right now, it don't- I don't have any negative effects of that harassment…**
> **…But um, in past I like, uh, I- it has- it used to affect me badly because I keep on thinking about that. And like, now I have been able to deal with abusers so, now it is- it's not a big deal.**' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal
>
> '**Yeah, like, at the beginning probably would like affect me a little, but now I feel I'm so used to it, that we just laugh…**
> **… Uh, not anymore. Like probably when I was like younger, it would be like I would stop commenting or things like that. But now, yeah, it's like I learned how to live with it, really.**' (Young Woman, 22, Chile

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[210] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 23, Spain, Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 16, El Salvador

'Um, I mean in some ways it has become so normal just to get a passing comment that upsets me that I don't often tell people about it because, um, (laughs) because it's become a normal part of running the Instagram account. So, like I said, I normally block it and then, um, move on, because were I to just message someone and tell them about every time it happened, um, I don't know. It, it would just be pretty frequent.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Overall, the effects that were discussed tended to be characterised by more emotively informed descriptions that relate to the personal impact the experiences have had on the girls. The findings display a plethora of highly concerning and troubling consequences. Whilst it seems important to note that each girl's experience was clearly a unique and personal account, there were also some similarities between the responses. As such it was possible to group descriptions of effects in the following way: feeling afraid, uncomfortable or unsafe,[211] feeling upset, anxious or depressed,[212] feeling guilty, or being made to feel in some way responsible, for why it may have occurred,[213] feeling embarrassed,[214] feeling vulnerable to further online actions,[215] or feeling like their confidence or ability to express themselves has been effected.[216] Each of these groupings will be looked at below.

The most commonly identified feelings related to the category of **feeling afraid, uncomfortable or unsafe**, which is a particularly alarming find. Whilst feeling afraid or uncomfortable or unsafe are separate experiences, their grouping is intended to depict a spectrum from unease to insecurity reflected in the girl's descriptions of, and reactions to, online harassment.

The responses below are from first-hand experiences and imply a mix of the effect relating to the incidence or having a continued impact:

'…I'm afraid, the fear is in me, every time I go to post something. I think all girls have that fear.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'…And then we saw all the hate and we actually…got a little scared……I remember times, uh that I have been very afraid.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

'Yeah, that was very, uh, yeah. Now that I'm thinking about it, that was very, it was very uncomfortable. And the fact that it's happened twice, it just amazes me.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

'Of course uncomfortable, just as uncomfortable as when it happens to you in real life. You know, like, it's not something that you want to see, when you get a, an ugly picture all of a sudden, or being asked to do something that you don't want to do. It- it's very extremely uncomfortable.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

'… it makes me feel unsafe, uh because like every time, or whatever I'm doing on social media, people keep commenting. Like I have to cover my hair, or I have to wear a long dress, or anything and yeah, I just feel I cannot express myself freely. …Uh, that makes me feel so terrible...' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

'I was scared to death, and I was little, and I consider that the first act of harassment I received.' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

'…And in the worst situations, I just felt really unsafe because it confuses me how this one specific guy could find so many details about my life and, um, it made me concerned that he could find my address and come to my house.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

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[211] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 22, Chile, Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA
[212] Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[213] Young Woman, 18, Nepal, Young Woman, 21, Myanmar, Young Woman, 23, USA
[214] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[215] Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[216] Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

The last example is particularly interesting for highlighting the effect of harassers being able to find personal information about you online, but more significantly how this could escalate online harassment into offline settings, indicative of the girls being at further risk. This directly relates to some of the examples described in types of harassment girls and young women face for being actively engaged online.

The second most commonly found effect related to **feeling upset, anxious or depressed.** These findings were particularly important for connoting examples of distress, including the impact on mental or physical health.

> **'Um ... I, I would spiral quite a bit, because like, um, anxiety, so I, I would, I was very bad at just completely going on social media, but I would rather just look at this comment. I would keep looking at the comment…**
> **…Or I would message my friend about the comment and panic. And my friend would try and reassure me, but that would only do so much because I myself was not okay with this stuff. In the beginning, my friend could say anything to me and I'd just be like, "Yeah, like you know I, I'm still panicking or I'm still nervous." And yeah, I was kind of just that like…**
> **…And it'd make me very shaky. And because I didn't even know how to deal with it, it would end up being spiralling.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

(

> **'It's given me a lot of anxiety. Then a lot of anger.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'I felt so sick. I felt like not even eating, I couldn't eat anything. I just spent the whole day without eating…**
> **…The following morning, I … I felt very sick. I had to go to the doctor, and when I got to the doctor, and doctor, they run some tests and tell you, you're okay, but, eh, you have ... You know, something that I've even never had before. So, it has caused sickness in me, a very negative impact.'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

The last respondent also described similar reactions among girls within activity groups that she leads, highlighting some particularly concerning effects including causing a girl to miss school:

> **'They refused to go back on social media a- again, because it makes them cry. It makes them shed tears. It makes them lose hope, you know, it ta- it keeps them away …you know…**
> **…And, and, you know, so, so much more, you know, like the girl, she was crying. She never even goes to school for, for, three days until I came in and, and I asked her and … the situation. So these are some of the negative impact that it has on us'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

The above examples are significant for demonstrating the direct impact online harassment can have on girls' and young women's health and livelihood, and how this can in turn impact other areas of everyday life.

Feeling guilty, or being made to feel in some way responsible, for why the harassment may have occurred was a similarly concerning find and was mentioned by two respondents living within different contexts and cultures across the global north and global south. The responses detail comparable experiences of in some way being held accountable, or fearing that they would be, by family members for the harassment they were experiencing:

> **'…Yeah, I was just so scared, and I didn't even talk about this to my family because I was scared of getting scolded, so I just sat with myself and then tell no one…**
> **…Yeah, because my family, especially my dad is kind of very conservative and not a fan of using social media, so...**
> **… if I tell them the truth, I might get scolded because I was not being very careful with how I'm handling, you know, the usage of social media. So at that time I was so scared of being scolded and also being, you know, taken, they might take my phone away if I tell them this is happening to me, then they will say, okay, stop using this, and give us your phone back, something like that. So I was afraid of that, and I just keep it a secret.**
> **…Um, at that time, I didn't even have the idea of sharing it with anyone, even with my close friends, because I was worried about how they would think of me, and yeah, I was very careful about their**

comments and their opinions of me, regarding this kind of stuff, because I was talking to a stranger, a complete stranger.

…So I was kind of nervous with how my friends and family would view me or my behaviour at that time. That's why I keep it.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

'Actually, when I was facing harassment from the stalker, I was told by my family that I, I shouldn't put, post so many photos of myself because he could look at them. And, or, you know, I shouldn't wear certain clothing. Um, and it was almost the exact same thing as so many people say when girls are getting harassed in the street, like, "Cover up," or "Go out less." Um, so that really frustrated me.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The implication in both examples is that the girls' actions could be responsible for them being targeted, in addition to the girls being responsible for ensuring safety in future, and as the respondent from the USA articulates, parallels narratives of 'victim-blaming' within cases of street harassment or broader cases of sexual and gender based violence.

Feeling embarrassed or ashamed, was also identified in two girls' descriptions of online harassment. Both examples seemingly discuss these feelings in relation to the public setting in which online harassment often occurs:

'… You know, I felt very bad, I was harassed to the, to the whole world. I mean, to my friends who are following me on Facebook. I really felt bad. I felt like even leaving social media…

…And sometimes it also, uh, make me feel ashamed of, of something that I've not done. It makes me feel really very ashamed. It, it brings in stigma and discrimination. (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

'But then, one thing happened to me, one account, which is strange to me, tagged me, I'm not even friends with that account, but then that account tagged me in a post which contained nudity, and I was very, very shocked, because I don't know that person and that just popped up on my timeline, and it's very embarrassing for me...' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Fear of further online actions was used to group together feelings of increased and ongoing vulnerability, as well as a sense of being unprotected:

'… So it's resulted in a lot of paranoia …

…Um, so it's kind of like, I, I need to continue to look out for accounts that he could've created, because, um, he can still create a new account and then follow me …

…I think, yeah, the hardest part is just not knowing when something is going to come, like when, whether there's going to be another harassing comment or another account made…' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

'Unprotected. Totally unprotected. Because supposedly these networks have privacy policies, you can set up who they want you to see and I had it set up and this person was not on my friend list, I had no friends in common and I could still see what I was doing. Through the networks he found me and he could see what I was doing. I had to think about where this person would be and what pictures he would have of me and who could help me.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'Well I just feel like- like, it- it just scares me the most-…

... because it's like, I don't know it's, perhaps sometimes I feel like maybe I'm being spied on, or maybe someone is hacking my account, or something else is gonna happen next, you know? …

…So, I just have like, yah, I have my head all muddled up, like I don't know what's next.

…And then you block the person, and then, yah, you just wait for something else…to happen.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

These findings hint at a heightened sense of awareness and caution adopted by the girls, and may therefore point to a more sustained or longer-term effect of online harassment.

The final subcategory of **feeling like their confidence or ability to express themselves has been affected** was used to encompass feelings in responses from five of the girls and young women. Such effects are particularly important as they suggest implications for the development of girls, with online harassment having potentially disempowering and oppressive effects. The examples below encompass first and second-hand experiences and could be considered as having varying levels of impact:

> **'For my friend who was harassed online because she dresses differently and she always puts make-up on, her self-esteem and self-confidence diminished. She also became less active on social media.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> **'I think it's related to self-esteem."** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

> **'The hardest part is when I go to upload a picture and have to ask half the world if I should. You always worry when you upload a photo that is out of the ordinary…**
> **…To continue to live in fear, to have to think at least 10 times before posting or writing.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'I have never experienced online harassment, although sometimes I got scared to post or give comments on social media for getting negative comments or judgements'** (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

> **'But some of my friends have that kind of experience, and they are really sad, just because they are girl's they don't have like freedom to express, you know, their opinion, and don't have a chance to speak up as they want.'** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

5.4.2 How girls and young women deal with online harassment
This section considers the consequences of online harassment on girls and young women in more pragmatic terms, to understand what they do when the harassment happens.

As discussed previously, it is possible to see a change in how girls and young women were affected by initial instances, compared to how they dealt with later experiences of online harassment. The same pattern is reflected in the way the girls manage the harassment in practical terms both relating to, what can be considered, their **behavioural solutions** and their **technological solutions**. For this reason, the findings will be discussed in relation to **initial and longer-term methods** of managing harassment that the girls describe. Often behavioural solutions mean that girls will adapt the way they use social media and the way they express themselves online in order to avoid or lessen the frequency of online harassment. This is discussed in a separate section below as it is a very important aspect of the consequences of online harassment

Overall, it is important to point out that the solutions described in this section are self-management, and self-learnt: methods developed by the girls and young women which suggests a trial and error process. The methods encompass a range of choosing to act or engage, or conscious inaction. Importantly, such self-management strategies decisively place the burden of responsibility for dealing with harassment on the girls themselves. This shows how girls have not only been left vulnerable to experiencing online harassment, but have further been left vulnerable to dealing with preventing it, and, as will be discussed in the subsequent section, coping with the effects of this as well. Girls are systematically and continually let down and left unsupported throughout the process or cycle of online harassment.

Categorising the behavioural and technological solutions from the quantitative surveys, behavioural solutions include: challenging the harasser; ignoring the harasser, ceasing to post their own opinion, changing the way the girl expresses herself, using social media platforms where the harassment happens less, and ceasing to use social media platforms where harassment has occurred. Technological solutions include reporting the harasser and making the account private and increasing security settings.

5.4.2.1 Behavioural solutions
Amongst the behavioural solutions reported in the quantitative surveys, 42 per cent of girls who had experienced online harassment said that they ignore the harasser and keep using social media platforms regardless. The

practice of ignoring the harasser was reflected in girls' qualitative accounts of how they deal with online harassment.

Table 10 Percentage of girls and young women who apply behavioural solutions

Behavioural solutions	% of girl adopting the solution
Publicly challenge harasser by writing a reply	13%
Ignoring the harasser and keep using the social media platform regardless	42%
Stopping posting content that expresses the girl's opinion	13%
Changing the way that the girl expresses herself	12%
Using social media platforms where the harassment happens less	13%
Stopping using the social media platform where the harassment happened	8%

Combining responses for stopping and reducing social media use shows that out of the girls who reported having experienced online harassment, 19 per cent have either limited their use of the social media platform or stopped using the social media platform altogether.

The girls' solutions didn't differ depending on the type of harassment. Whether girls get sexually harassed or body shamed, they tend to apply their chosen solution consistently.

Within the qualitative interviews behavioural solutions to more **initial experiences** of online harassment could be categorised in the following ways: not telling anyone,[217] telling someone such as a family member,[218] an organisation[219] or being the person others report incidences to,[220] directly engaging with the harasser, which was the most frequently discussed experience,[221] indirectly engaging with the harasser, including asking friends, family or peers to engage with them,[222] or creating video's to post online, speaking out against the experience or harasser,[223] and finally ignoring the harassment by either choosing not to respond[224] or through avoiding negative comments in the first place.[225]

Some of the most interesting descriptions were given in relation to the category, directly engaging with harassers. There was a range of approaches within this, whereby some girl's experiences could be seen as more subtle or pacifying in nature, whilst others appeared as more direct in challenging and calling out the harassment. For example, one girl described privately messaging the harasser when she witnessed offensive posts about other women to *'influence him/her by sharing my perception'*,[226] another girl discussed *'answer respectful opinions'*,[227] and another suggested using *'non-barbaric language, more subtle language'* to communicate with harassers.[228]

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[217] Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[218] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Peru
[219] Girl, 17, Philippines
[220] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[221] Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA
[222] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 20, Sudan;
[223] Young Woman, 23, USA
[224] Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 23, Spain
[225] Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[226] Girl, 17, Philippines
[227] Young Woman, 24, Peru
[228] Girl, 17, Indonesia

There were also, however, more direct approaches to engagement with harassers which included offline and online interventions. The excerpts below were discussed while describing an experience with a 'known' harasser of another girl or young woman, as well as against harassment she has experienced:

> '…So I have to take a step forward and look for this guy. I got him and I went with this lady and I asked, "What have you done? What have you done to this lady on social media?" And I demanded to what … I demanded him to apologise to this lady and also apologise on Facebook on the comments that sh- he had made on, on this, on the young girls', uh, I mean, uh, Facebook, uh, uh, page…
> …So, and I gave him condition. I told him, "If you don't do this, I will take you ahead, because this is a crime." Although in my country it's not considered as a crime at all…
> …but the guy agreed with me and say, "Okay, fine. I'm so sorry for what happened. I will go ahead and apologise to this girl." … apologised in front of me and then went to the social media and apologised. And he came back and came and said, "I'm so sorry… for what had happened. I'm sorry, it won't happen again. It won't happen to any person. I mean, any … Because I asked him, "If it was your fir- uh, i- if it was your, your sister or your mother, well, how would you feel about it?"…
> …Because if you do something to me and I know you, I will look for you and face you. You have to apologise to me. You know? You have to apologise to me and also go on social media and, and, apologise…' Young Woman, 23, South Sudan

Another participant described engaging with an 'unknown' harasser to challenge their behaviour:

> '…if there is any strange person who I- who I don't know, look closely and if they begin to talk to me, and like uh, they are behaving like, um, they are trying to be so flirty, and then I used to tell that guy, you can't uh, talk to a girl in this way because if you are uh, because uh, the way you're talking may not uh, be that good, uh, you are talking with … and this is like a kind of sexual abuse. And like they are- uh, un-sorry for their mistake.' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

These two examples are interesting to compare due to the variable of 'known' and 'unknown' harasser whilst directly calling out inappropriate behaviour. The first example with someone who was known displayed some level of success in the harasser recognising their error, and further apologising, while within the second experience the stranger remained unapologetic. With this said, it is not possible to conclude that this is a rule, as a respondent from the US described directly engaging with a known harasser in the beginning and having no success in them changing their actions. Moreover, the harasser subsequently proceeded to stalk them over a period of time using unknown accounts.[229]

There was a sense from the findings that directly engaging with the harassers was overall a less effective or less sustainable method, demonstrated through it only being visible in the answers of two respondents as a more long-term approach.[230] This is further supported by the description below:

> 'Well at first of course, you get really angry and, I like, when I started experiencing it, I used to, um, ca-reply to everything. And I used to tell my friends to like, gang up with me like, … back to the person. But eventually you just learn to ignore it because it never stops them, it only gets worse.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

The finding that girls might confront the harasser when they start using social media but then stop doing so because they realise that it does not make harassers stop, is supported by the quantitative analysis: adolescent girls are the ones who say that they confront and challenge the harasser, while there are fewer young women doing so. For example, amongst 15-year-olds 20 per cent said that they challenge the harasser, but this drops to only 12 per cent of 23-year-olds. Whether the defence mechanism changes based on the harasser being known or unknown to the girl could not be confirmed through the quantitative analysis.

Approaches that could be identified as more **longer-term** strategies in relation to **behavioural solutions** seen in the girl's responses included:

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[229] Young Woman, 23, USA
[230] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador

Learning to speak out when previously afraid to tell anyone

> **'Yeah, at that time, I was really scared and also embarrassed and kind of ashamed. I had that feeling, and that's why I keep it secret, confidential, telling no one at all. But now, it needs to be shared and, you know, you- you need to let your close friends, at least your family members know about that. Because if something- something serious happens then they are the only one who will help you, this kind of situation. But if no one knows about this, no one can help you. If you get threatened or if your information and photos are being used in an inappropriate way.'** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Engaging with harassers with the intention to educate or inform

> **'…neutralizing part of the, like, hate comments on our social media. ….**
> **… I will try to like go and support them. And also I go like something gratuitous like give facts, because also it's not only harassment but a lot of fake information, fake news, about everything. Uh, and I think it's important to like try to fight these kinds of things with like proper information, good source** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **"I used to fight with people over comments, but, from my training at Plan International on how to give intelligent answers, not anymore, because I try to support the information I publish."** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

Either beginning to, or stopping, documenting incidences of harassment

> **'Hmm, so usually what I do is I take a screenshot of it to document it. And I, if they sent in a direct message, I'll just decline the message.'** *(Young Woman, 23, USA)*

> **'Yeah, like, at the beginning probably would like affect me a little, but now I feel I'm so used to it, that we just laugh. As I told you, like we used to take a screenshot, so we have, we kind of have like an archive of the hate we received. But now we just delete them, it's like we laugh a little, but because to be honest, most of them they don't even make sense. Like, it's just like random hate words.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

5.4.2.1.1 Do girls change the way they use social media because of harassment?

For girls who use behavioural solutions to avoid online harassment this often means making sustained changes to how often they use social media, changing what they post, and guarding or altering how they express themselves. This is a serious consequence of online harassment as it means that girls and young women cannot use social media freely if they want to protect themselves against online harassment.

Discussions from the qualitative interviews displayed a mixed response to this; comments made by 76 per cent of the girls could be used to support the idea that they had in some way changed their use of social media because of harassment[231] whilst 47 per cent of girl's answers could be used to suggest they had not.[232] Interestingly, three respondents (18 per cent) provided comments which could be considered as supporting both the idea that they had and had not altered their behaviour online.[233] The reasons for this varied from not knowing whether they have subconsciously changed their behaviour whilst overall trying not to, the fact that initially harassment caused a change in behaviour in general but over time they had continued use as normal, and finally that they intentionally continued posting the same content but had changed their security settings:

> **'Well, I, I don't know. I guess honestly … it's hard to know if maybe subconsciously I've decided to post maybe less pictures out with my friends, um, or people close to me because I know he could find their**

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[231] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[232] Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 20 Sudan
[233] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA

profiles… It's hard to know for sure to be honest, but I try to not let it get in the way of posting what I want to post and saying what I want to say…' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The same respondent also said:

'… I, I, I don't change my behaviour because, um, I think I should still be able to post what I want to post...' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

' Uh, not anymore. Like probably when I was like younger, it would be like I would stop commenting or things like that. But now, yeah, it's like I learned how to live with it, really' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

'No, no I didn't change what I'm posting. It's just about the privacy.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Examples of girls changing the way they use social media
There were, however, many examples of responses that could be used to support the idea that girls **had in some way changed their use of social media because of harassment**. From responses given, it was possible to consider these changes through the following subcategories: adjustment to social media use,[234] content adaptation [235] or technological solutions.[236]

Adjustment to social media use
In the qualitative interviews, adjustment to social media use was used to group together actions such as being less active on social media,[237] using social media less frequently,[238] ceasing use of social media or changing social media platforms.[239]

In the quantitative analysis it becomes clear that there is a significant correlation between the frequency of online harassment and the girls' level of social media use. The more frequently girls experience online harassment the more likely they are to use the social media platform on which the harassment occurred less or to stop using the social media platform altogether. Of the girls who get harassed very frequently, 19 per cent said they use the social media platform less and 12 per cent said they stopped using the social media platform altogether.

Some examples from the qualitative analysis are included below:

'So it is happening in my country and a lot of girls are suffering, a lot of girls have dropped Face- I mean, social media generally. And young girls are now staying on their own, you know. This is what is going on in my country.' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

'My friends who experienced harassment online became less active on social media platforms…' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

'Actually I can say that I- I'm, (laughs), more careful nowadays, because like, um, I- I don't often like go on Facebook anymore. I only do it like once in a while, to avoid, you know, like bad comments, or any explicit things, or anything like else like that. So, I prefer just staying on WhatsApp, because I feel more safer on it. (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'Yes, everything is private in Facebook. Security restrictions. … I left him on Twitter because he was seeing violent things. Instagram I left for a while and now with restraints.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

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[234] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru
[235] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 23, Spain
[236] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[237] Young Woman, 22, Chile
[238] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Philippines
[239] Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru

Content adaptation

The subcategory content adaptation exposed some concerning findings in the interviews relating to girls and young women's continued ability to express themselves. It was used to group together actions which displayed changes in their social media use due to harassment for example: ceasing to post their own opinion,[240] altering, or being hesitant about, the content they post in order to avoid speaking about certain topics,[241] altering the content they post in order to share less personal information in addition to photos,[242] or posting content that may be in some way expected by society or to present themselves in a specific way.[243]

In the quantitative analysis it becomes clear that there is a significant correlation between the frequency of online harassment and the girls' level of content adaptation. The more frequently girls experience online harassment the more likely they are to stop posting content that expresses their opinion and even more strongly, they actively start to change the way they express themselves. 18 per cent of girls who face very frequent harassment stop posting content that expresses their opinion and 16 per cent of girls who face very frequent harassment change the way they express themselves in order to avoid harassment. This is a clear sign that girls cannot speak freely online and that their freedom is being challenged.

Ceasing to post their own opinion was only discussed by one of the girls in the qualitative interviews however it remains an alarming finding. The answer was provided in direct response to whether harassment has changed the way they use social media. This particular response highlights that whilst the interviewee continues to post secondary forms of content, she has stopped discussing her own opinion, and instead has found creative outlets for this:

> **'Yes, yes, it has definitely changed, because before I used to put my opinions in a personal capacity and all that, and then you started to feel the rejection and that hatred that it generates is generated in people when one speaks. So, from that point on I decided to do better and my opinions were going to be in my music. I feel that my music is mine, they will definitely dare my microphone, where I can say what I feel with total freedom, the right of my authorship. So I avoid giving my position on a personal level there, but nevertheless, I am always sharing articles or information. I'm interested and I'm interested in other people being aware of. Only that has changed, that I don't do it on a personal level, but I keep it that way. I keep sharing and discussing it.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

In the quantitative analysis we found also that more adolescent girls, especially 15 and 16-year-olds, as compared to young women, change the way they express themselves to avoid harassment that they receive for content they post.

Altering, or being hesitant, regarding the content they post about certain topics, was a similarly concerning find and was possible to identify in comments made by five of the girls and young women in qualitative interviews. This seems a significant effect particularly when considering it in line with the harassment girls face for being actively engaged online, including reactions to the topic the girl is speaking about, especially in relation to perceived feminist or gender equality issues and attacking girls' and young women's credibility or knowledge. Some examples of responses used to support this are included below:

> **'For a while I stopped posting about feminism and the problems it brought. After quite a while I felt a bit more confident.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'She says that she feels insecure and unprotected from publishing topics related to gender violence and feminism, which has led her to be careful about the kind of things and content she publishes. She mentions "first I think about how people are going to react'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

> **'I stopped talking about the abortion. I don't talk much about LBTGIQ+ either…'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

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[240] Girl, 16, El Salvador
[241] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 23, Spain
[242] Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador
[243] Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

> **'My friends who experienced harassment online … some became afraid to voice out their personal opinions.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

Altering content was also visible in responses **through posting less personal information or photos of themselves**. Such actions were possible to identify in four of the girls and young women's responses, and is similarly significant when considering it in relation to harassment girls face for being actively engaged online, especially in relation to attacking the way a girl or individual presents themselves online. Some examples of the girls' and young women's responses used to support this are evident below:

> **'Yeah, I have changed what they told me to do to protect myself from social media because, uh, um, because people I used to post wherever I go, like uh, if I go for, uh, well uh, vacations, or school, and I used to post like, "really happy with this, and this, and at this place". And but, uh, you see, I did post too much about where I had been going, where- with who I was...**
> **….So I have minimized posting my uh, like where I have been going, where uh, with who I was.'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> **'I don't upload many personal photos anymore.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'She shares less information, and has changed the privacy settings of her social networks, so that her posts are seen by people she knows.'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

The final overarching theme identified within the subcategory of content adaptation was the idea of **posting content that may be in some way expected by society or intended to present themselves in a specific way**. It displayed yet another concerning find which suggested that due to online harassment the girls' and young women's ability to authentically express themselves had been limited and compromised.

The first example refers to the previously mentioned case of a Miss Tanzania contestant later becoming a district commissioner and receiving online harassment for photos relating to the contest, the change also relates to both the presentation of herself in online and offline contexts.

> **'So, uh, this, what this woman did, example, uh, this district commission, on her Instagram account, she deleted all her past pictures though it's uh, they, they were in other's account, but in her account, she deleted all her pictures, and she started anew…**
> **…Though it, yeah, it was really difficult for her, but she was trying to show to people that, "Okay, I was this one, but now, I have changed again. I am, I am someone else…"**
> **…Yeah, so even in her dressing style changing, the way she speaks to people, yeah, she, she well, she changing her, almost her old lifestyle.'** (Young Woman, 23, Tanzania)

> **'For my friends who experienced body-shaming, they became more determined to change who they are just to please others and conform to societal standards.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

The final example below is perhaps more subtle and was not expressed as the opinion of the girl herself. It is possible however to consider the reserved nature of her speaking out online as a form of presenting herself in a way that is in some regards expected by society. The girl previously discussed community expectations of girls needing to be polite, reserved and not discuss certain subjects. She also described the experiences of her more outspoken female friend who receives online harassment due to this. The respondent, herself, however provided an answer about whether her friend should change her behaviour: she responded that the girl should not, but instead wished '*…the community and people to be more understanding…'*. Considering the response below in relation to this backdrop could imply a form of presenting her opinions in a way that is expected by society; with this said however, the girl does not discuss a contrasting case of herself previously speaking in a more open or abrupt way, which might have suggested a change in the way she uses social media, to fully substantiate this theory.

'So I'm a very reserved person on social media and I'm very careful with the content that I post or share…

… 'Whether we want only our friends to know or public to know what we think, and also the choice of words. Sometimes we need to be balanced on our view, because I mean, the balance … I'm not very extreme with what I say. I don't want to harm anyone because of what I posted. So yes, by being very careful, I mean, when I say, not to harm other people, and also while expressing your opinions you need to deliver the message that you want them to know in a polite way. Like... in a well-mannered way I would say because that's what people express from that' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Examples of girls not changing their social media use

For the interview respondents whose answers could be used to **support the idea that social media use had not changed due to harassment**, there seemed to be a common theme that this was in some way a deliberate or active choice. This ranged from what could be categorised as the wish to stay oneself despite harassment,[244] not changing the way they post or use social media in order to not let the harassers 'win',[245] and not changing their behaviour because what they are saying is important and they want to continue getting their message across.[246] The answers included both first and second-hand experiences and generally related more to behavioural rather than technological solutions.

Persisting in being oneself despite harassment

A particularly interesting answer in relation to the category continuing to post content even though they feel in some way apprehensive, was from a girl describing her friends experience of harassment:

'Um, she says it's really depressing and sometimes she says she doesn't even want to use social media because of those things. She hates seeing these comments popping up in her notifications also. She said, I'm so fed up with this, I don't want to do this anymore, I don't even have freedom to share my opinions using my own account. …

…But then um, she just keeps doing this…She just keeps using this, she just does what she thinks is right. And now I think she doesn't even care about those anymore. She just does what she thinks is right…

…Well I think, yeah, she prefers that, so she doesn't change everything, like, privacy settings or anything, she just posts anything in public and yeah, not even friends only, mostly public and friends of friends…

…She's that kind of person, so yeah, she doesn't make any, like she doesn't do any security setting or privacy setting, she doesn't change anything, she just keeps doing it that way….' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

The researcher asked whether the young woman thinks her friend should change the way she uses social media the young woman provided an important answer, that seemed to counter previous parallels relating to narratives of 'victim-blaming', and instead looked for change and understanding in society:

'[Researcher] I was just thinking, like, do you wish that your friend, who sometimes uses curse words, and you know, doesn't express herself so nicely, do you wish that she would- would change how she talks or rather that people would just let her speak how she wants?

…Um, actually I don't want her to change the way she is because that's how I see her…I don't want her to change, and it's not very important how people are viewed, but she also needs to keep her identity, because that's who she is, so she doesn't need to change anything, but that I want the community and the audience to be a bit more understanding. …

…Like, we cannot be polite every time, that- that's the truth. So, there are sometimes that we may be angry and really want to, you know, curse out. Sometimes we can't do that among our family members

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[244] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar
[245] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Girl, 17, Ecuador
[246] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia

with are friends, but on social media, we can do it publicly. Like that's the only way out, that's the only escape. ..

…So yeah, I wouldn't say she needs to change. I just want the community and people to be more understanding of our situation*. (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Not wanting to let the harasser win

Two respondents' answers could be used to support the subcategory, **not changing the way they post or use social media in order to not let the harassers 'win'**. A particularly interesting answer, similarly, seemed to suggest that the harasser and their behaviour should be the one to change, paralleling the response in the previous section:

> 'You know, I felt very bad, I was harassed to the, to the whole world. I mean, to my friends who are following me on Facebook. I really felt bad. I felt like even leaving social media. But I, I was just like, "No way. I won't leave social media." I started fighting back. I fought the guy back and I wrote for him also very terrible t- uh, I mean, very terrible t- uh, message as well. I replied him back very badly because I, it's just like, "What can I do now? There's no law in their countries, there is no law in my country that ... What can I do? What I will do, I'll fight back."…
>
> …So sometimes, I, I, I decided that, you know, but I, I proved to, to some men that there's no way I can leave social media and now they are getting used to it. You know, you, you, you do that to me, I also get back on you somehow…
>
> … something just came to me and say that, "No, no, don't give up. You can fight this guy. You can overcome them. You know? Keep posting those photos, you know. Keep posting." And something will …for me in my heart to keep posting the photos. They will get used to it.
>
> …So I kept posting a lot of photos about… the right of girls, the right of women's on social media… Like it or not, this is what I'm going to do … anything, and it is what I've been doing all this time, and I do not change anything and now they're getting used to it.' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

Fighting for a cause

The final subcategory within girl's responses which could suggest that they don't alter social media, was not changing their behaviour because what they're saying is important and they want to continue getting their message across. This could in some way be seen in responses from three of the girls and young women interviewed. Two examples included below are compelling through displaying the girls resolve and determination to keep using and expressing themselves in online spaces:

> 'I feel like the only things, like, trying to be more careful, but like I decided I'm, it's like uh, a decision like I made, like I won't stop sharing what things I care about because of this…I won't change my behaviour because of this thing….
>
> …Uh because I truly believe in this. You know it's something that I'm very passionate about. Like rights, and you know like human rights in general. And as I tell you, I don't think uh I have to, like, change my behaviour or what I think, what I believe in because of the hate……. I won't change what I do because of these people.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> '[Researcher]My question is would you change the content you're posting, um so that you don't face harassment?
>
> …No. I, I don't think that's right thing, how to avoid or how to not face sexual harassment online, because I don't want to change the way I am, this is me. If people do not like that, I think, I think the most important thing that, you know everyone, to realise or everyone get knowledge about gender equality, that is why I will never ever stop doing my activism online or public.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

5.4.2.2 Technological solutions

Other methods of responding or dealing with online harassment included **technological solutions** in relation to both **initial and longer-term experiences of harassment.** This category was intended to encompass any actions

related to functions within the social media platform including: blocking accounts,[247] reporting accounts,[248] deleting negative comments[249] or deleting your own social media account.[250]

Similarly, within the quantitative surveys technological solutions were used to deal with online harassment. 35 per cent of the girls who have been harassed reported the harasser and 32 per cent increased their privacy settings to shield themselves from harassers.

Table 11 percentage of girls and young women who apply technological solutions

Technological solutions	% of girl adopting the solution
Reporting the harasser	35%
Making account private and increasing security settings	32%

The quantitative analysis showed that there is a significant correlation between the frequency of harassment that girls face and taking the actions of reporting the harasser or increasing privacy settings. This means that the more frequently girls get harassed, the more likely they are to report harassers or increase the privacy settings on their accounts. This hints to an observation that was made throughout the qualitative interviews: that girls are learning by doing. Unfortunately, they must first experience harassment to then learn how to protect themselves.

Perhaps, the most significant finding from the qualitative analysis was that whilst blocking and reporting were the most frequently discussed methods of dealing with harassers on social media platforms, mentioned by nine girls (53 per cent),[251] blocking and reporting were also listed by seven girls (41 per cent) as being nearly completely ineffective.[252] The girls' responses seemed to suggest that both of these mechanisms fail to bring about any meaningful outcomes or long-term solutions. The reasons for this seemingly being that whilst you can block an account, harassers – and especially unknown harassers- can continue to make new accounts as this is not limited by social media platforms. Effectively, this means that whilst you can block one account a harasser can relentlessly create multiple new accounts and is therefore not stopped in any long-term sense.

> **'I would block but he would create more profiles and keep sending me pictures of me.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

> **'…And then I feel like, we women are, you know, being pushed down so, so much, and it's so hard, because it's social media, because all we can, all I can do is just block this person, and then there'll be another person coming again,'** (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> **'You can block them, but even then, like if they're, if they're feeling petty about it, they will make a separate account…'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

Similarly, reporting was just as ineffective. Either because no action was ever taken and because of unnecessarily difficult criteria being aligned to the reporting process:

> **'…reporting does not help. Because if people report them, they don't usually get deleted from what I see.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'…happened in Indonesia that they just make a fake account, and then post of the, post photos of girls wearing, wearing hijabs, and then put really bad um, really bad or sexist captions. And then when we**

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[247] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA

[248] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 23, USA

[249] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Malawi

[250] Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar

[251] Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 23, USA

[252] Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Malawi; Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, USA; Girl, 17, Ecuador

want to report that account, it's really hard because we need lots of people report the account.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

'Even the reporting system is not effective because they report the account, you report the account, I can get, uh, stop for a few days and then you see the person come back again. So it's not a big deal.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

'So it took about two or three days for the account to get deleted after hundreds of people reported him…
…Um, so finally it did get deleted. So that was successful. But the issue is he can create any, I'm not sure what number of new accounts one person can create, but since then, he's created new accounts.
…Um, I don't usually report their accounts, just because I've had so little luck with reporting accounts. They don't often get taken down…' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The difficult criteria, or algorithm, related to reporting processes on social media platforms is interesting. If it does require hundreds, or at least significant numbers, of people to report an account before action can be taken then the procedure is almost completely useless for safeguarding most adolescent girls, many of whom may not be supported by huge numbers of people to help report the account or may be targeted by one-on-one harassment or by harassers with small followings. In addition, another girl made a particularly interesting observation related to what could be seen as a double standard in the reporting procedure, describing how if you report something - for example sexual harassment, nothing happens, yet if content is posted by the girl featuring a nipple '*they will like ban you for life' (Young Woman, 22, Chile).*

Technological solutions also varied in comparison to initial experiences, **longer-term** strategies seemed more likely to include:

Continued and active monitoring of followers

'Doing a clean sweep. Learning how to get rid of people. It's been a lot of emotional work because they're tied to your close connections. It's hard to break ties.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'Oh yah, I, I actually been really straight through my Instagram account, I sometimes feel unsafe, and that is why I control my Instagram account, like I quarterly check through my Instagram that maybe there is like, there are lots of, or there are so many types of constant following me, I sometimes just, or I always block them. And also checking on my accounts like how many people …also how many people share my photos, or, yeah'. (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

'I also became cautious of accepting friend requests. I even unfriended and unfollowed some of my friends.' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

Increasing security through privacy settings

'I changed all my social network settings private.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'My friends who experienced harassment online … Some modified their security settings' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

'Well, watch your privacy. Not to publish all my promotion, like my full name, my address, the place where I study, work. Also take care of the people who are my friends. Not to make public my personal pictures when the information if I let it public. But not my personal stuff? Not to accept anyone. Evaluate the profile of the requests that come to me, that is a security protocol.' (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

'She shares less information, and has changed the privacy settings of her social networks, so that her posts are seen by people she knows.' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

>'I've had to change Facebook three times….
>
>…. Yes, everything is private in Facebook. Security restrictions….' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

>'I-I remember, I don't remember why exactly but I remember times, uh that I have been very afraid. So, I-I have like, I don't know, closed all my social media. But like I made everything private, you know, I like changed my name or things like that.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

>'No, no I didn't change what I'm posting. It's just about the privacy.' *(Young Woman, 20, Sudan)*

>'…starting from that year I started to find out how to, you know, how to advance my security settings in order to prevent that kind of things from happening in the future. So yeah, starting a year after using Facebook, I started to- to do that kind of thing, not from the very beginning.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

>'I mean, it really made me conscious about what I post on social media and what I say, and …. I remember making sure all of my accounts were private and you know.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

Or removing family from being connected to your social media account to protect them from harassment:

>'Once I was threatened with my parents. My mom feels bad for me, I had to block my family from social networks so that they wouldn't be affected.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

These actions differ from initial technological responses, especially as none of the above relate to blocking or reporting and could instead be seen as ways to ensure a level of online safety in spite of these functions.

Overall, the findings seem to support that both in relation to approaches that could be considered as part of behavioural solutions or technological solutions, girls and young women develop different ways of dealing with harassers and online harassment overtime. What seems particularly striking is that the accounts are arguably all cases of self-management to deal with and protect yourself from such incidences. This could highlight a double burden or victimisation of girls and young women: in that they are both the ones who have experienced the harassment and have also had to learn and take responsibility for how best to address it. This seems to be borne out by the comments below:

>'Um, and especially the fact that they can continue to do that it feels like without big consequences… It's, it's hard to deal with because there aren't a lot of resources that I have to deal with it.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

>'I don't have anyone who defends me… It's- it's a lone game, yeah, solo games.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

5.4.3 Sources of resilience and strength that keep girls and young women active online

Resilience was discussed during the interviews through asking the girls if there is anyone who they can rely on/ who helps them when they are being harassed on social media, and what do they do to take care of themselves when they are facing a lot of harassment and negativity on social media platforms. The answers, discussed in the section below, both relate directly to responses from these questions but also display comments that came up during the interviews. Overwhelmingly, the girls and young women's responses to the questions, discussed factors that kept them going, whilst only one respondent mentioned something in relation to self-care. The findings will be discussed respectively as girls self-coping strategies and other, or more external support systems: more respondents' answers could be seen in relation to the latter category.

The heading **'girls' self-coping strategies'** related nearly entirely to why the girls feel able to continue using social media following harassment. The answers given suggested reasons in relation to their passion for the topic they

are speaking out about[253] and strength from their upbringing.[254] Only one girl mentioned what could be considered a self-care technique.[255]

Passion for the topic the girls and young women are speaking out about was an important find in the context of this study and why girls continue to use online platforms. It interestingly highlights a cycle of cause and effect in terms of online use and online abuse, in that girls and young women feel passionate and as such they begin speaking out about an important topic online, subsequently many then face frequent online harassment in direct relation to this, yet it is the passion for this topic which is the basis of their resilience to keep going. This concept was arguably identified in four of the respondents' answers, given both directly and indirectly in relation to questions of strength and continued social media use:

> **'...And also like, it's what I'm passionate about. At the end of the day, like I don't see myself being passionate in anything else to this extent. Like I am, I know that I'm proud of what I'm doing, even if it upsets other people. Sorry, I'm, uh, um, and I can ... It, it just yeah. I don't know.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> **'Uh because I truly believe in this. You know it's something that I'm very passionate about. Like rights, and you know like human rights in general.'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> **'...So I think also these things of girls and women in my life, it has made me moving and is the reason why I've also founded this organization that I am now leading in my country. I founded it because of girls and women. I don't want to see them suffering. So the organization, it added me more energy to keep moving.'** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> **[Researcher]: 'My question is would you change the content you're posting, um so that you don't face harassment?**
> **...No. I, I don't think that's right thing, how to avoid or how to not face sexual harassment online, because I don't want to change the way I am, this is me. If people do not like that, I think, I think the most important thing that, you know everyone, to realize or everyone get knowledge about gender equality, that is why I will never ever stop doing my activism online or public.'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

Upbringing was also found in comments that could relate to concepts of resilience. Two respondents discussed this in relation to the strength it had given them:

> **'... I would say my- my upbringing made me feel, um, made me the strong person, (laughs), because of what I went through so, when it comes to like social media, I go like, "Okay, this is less to what I have faced, I can get through this."'** (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> **'I have felt like they want to, they discredited me, but maybe because of the training I have received since I was a child, that has helped a lot in my strengthening and empowerment. So, personally I feel that I am not usually affected by criticism. In fact, more strength I just feel, I feel. Does it feel like someone wants to discredit your position? I understand that everyone's education has been different and that everyone is going to want to decide at their own convenience. So, understanding this like that, I don't have a conflict with my problem. In fact, I just ignore it, and that's why people don't insist on bothering me. I show indifference to what is unfounded.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

Overall, there was a lack of responses that detailed things that the girls and young women specifically do to look after themselves or around self-care. This is in itself an important finding as it suggests an absence of looking after themselves following, and/or dealing with or healing from, incidences of online harassment. The responses instead seem to focus on how the girls keep going or continue to use social media, which could be harmful both as an initial and long-term coping strategy. It could further suggest a need for more support around developing girls and young women's knowledge and practise of self-care strategies, as well as developing support mechanisms to assist them. Lack of practicing self-care strategies is implied in the response below:

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[253] Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[254] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Young Woman, 23, Malawi
[255] Young Woman, 23, USA

> '**I said no, I have nothing specific I do. It's just that, uh, time passes and, uh, the, the feeds, the feeds get up- updated and you just forget about it … move on. But nothing specific.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

The only answer that could be used to show an example of self-care included a response regarding resilience in order to keep supporting others through the social media account they run, rather than being exclusively about self-care to look after themselves after an incidence of harassment. Nonetheless, the response describes important themes of consciously looking after your mental health:

> '**But then again, I do think it is important to breaks from my phone, to take breaks from social media because even when there is so much positivity, I'm still reading, you know, maybe 10 messages a day of people's stories of harassment, that is, that have happened to them. So I think it's important mentally to take breaks from that because it's, you know, it's never fun to read someone's story of harassment even if they're really thankful for sharing it**.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

External or other systems of support to the girls was a decisively bigger topic, with responses from 82 per cent of girls and young women being able to relate to this. Whilst the heading seems quite arbitrary it was intended to reflect discussions around the importance of support from followers;[256] families;[257] friends;[258] or organisations.[259] It hence referred to support systems external to themselves.

The importance of **support from friends** was most commonly mentioned in regard to the subcategory external or other support systems, featuring in ten of the respondents' discussions. Some answers simply indicated that friends were important as the people that are there for them, whilst others provided more detail in the way they helped support them, why it is important, or why their friend's turn to them. For example:

> '**Or like really supportive friends that really like, even if they don't understand what I'm doing per se, they really care about I'm doing it. And so, that stuff is kind of what keeps me going.'** (Girl, 17, Canada)

> '**Yeah, mostly I will talk with my friend... Because we kind of, you know, get used to it together'** (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

> '**Some two or three people from the feminist movement to whom I always resort. I write and tell them.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> '**… And so I just text my friends to help me comment on my photos and then they actually, I have a friend, so he just support me for everything I do, because he also found out on the news. And then he just comm- he also comments on my photos, helps me to fight with, to help me fighting with um, you know, actually helping me answer all of the bad comments. And so I also you know, be confident in that time.'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> '**…Yeah, she's- she frequently experiences that. She came talk to me about that.**
> **…Uh, she kind of shares some of her feelings'.'** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Supportive families, was also seen as important and mentioned in six of the girls' and young women's responses. The girls discussed immediate family members: mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and partners; which is perhaps interesting in displaying a range of male and female relatives they rely on.[260] A particularly expressive response, hinted at the gratitude of having such a support system and the implied difficulty for those that do not have this:

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[256] Girl, 17, Canada; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, USA; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia
[257] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador
[258] Young Woman, 24, Peru; Girl, 17, Canada; Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 19, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[259] Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[260] Girl, 16, El Salvador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Young Woman, 22, Chile; Young Woman, 23, Spain; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador, Young Woman, 19, Indonesia

'But I'm very lucky because I have a really strong and really good support system, which is, that's one of really strong factor that makes me, you know that makes me able to reconcile. But I just kind of, I just can't imagine if that happened to someone, or to girls that do not have strong support systems like me. Because like even my mom, my friends and my organisation of friends, they just talk to me, and keep you know, saying that I am more than that, I have the power, that I can face this because I have them. …Especially my mom because she's very supportive. Even when, even when the sexual harass- that sexual harassment happened online, like on this February, my mom even commenting on my photos and say that I even, I even, I even support my daughter to do all of her activities and then I don't you know, don't even pay attention to or don't even care about what you hear, why you just care a lot, care too much. Because like she has the right to do or be whatever she wants. And she just supporting me, yeah.** (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Support from followers was an interesting topic as it gave some sort of counterbalance to the negativity girls and young women experience online: particularly negativity related to harassment described under reacting to the topic the girls are speaking about or attacking their credibility or knowledge. The comments gave a sense of resilience coming from the power afforded by positive comments received on social media and a sense of achievement from helping others through their activism:

'Yeah, uh, we talked a lot about the negatives, but at the end of the day like the good stuff is always there. It's like for every one bad comment, I still get five really nice ones.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

'I think it's, obviously sometimes it's like tiring and you don't want to check like, uh why hate, you know? But at the same time, especially when the …we feel that we're doing a great job. And we, as we received hate, we receive a lot of love from the people who, who the, like the … is helping. So when you receive that kind of message, where at some point you know that everything was worth it. So, yeah.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

'Honestly, my friends, and all of, all of the girls who are my audience on Instagram because sometimes they also sending me something and tell, telling me about their problems and telling me that they are really glad that there are so many people who keep, you know, who keep fighting for gender equality.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

'Well, I do think that the positivity always outweighs the negativity. So, the Instagram account is a huge space for people to speak up about what's happened to them. And everyone who sends in a message about what has happened to them is so thankful and so appreciative that they have a space to talk about it. I think most of the messages hold so much. You know, I, I, I feel like each person who messages in has felt like this has made a difference in their life, um, that they're able to speak up about it. So that really gives me the energy to keep going, um, going, you know, to the public spaces and writing the chalk always feels really, like I'm taking some power back so that feels great. Um, I'd say in general there's so much positivity, so much support from the followers on the account that that's what keeps me going.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The final comment, from the same girl, is also interesting for highlighting more active support from followers when the girl posted online her account of harassment:

'… I spoke up about that on Instagram, and the followers on the Instagram account were so extremely supportive. They kept messaging me saying, you know, "We support you. How can we help?" Um, and that was a huge, huge support at that time because that was one of the scarier situations. Um, so I do rely on the followers of the Instagram account.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

Somewhat less common, but an encouraging find, was **support from organisations** which was highlighted in answers from two of the respondents. The first relates more to support from a local organisation for support on a more personal basis, whilst the second relates more to support from more official organisations as a procedural support:

'Yes, my empowered friends and girl scout organisations' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

'Yeah, you know, I, I have good, uh, relationship, actually, not me but my organisation, my organisation has good relationship with, uh, government officials, uh, like the Ministry of Interior, you know, I know a lot of people in the Ministry of the Interior, especially on, uh, on, yeah, yeah, on the special consideration unit of, of it. We know a lot of people there. So, such change, or such … and harassment, they are always taken to, uh, uh, especially for this … of the police.' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

In summary, this section provided findings that were encouraging, through seeing that many of the girls and young women interviewed have people to rely on, and/or have reasons why they continue using social media after facing harassment, However, the idea of resilience or strength seems to have been substantiated in a one dimensional way that focuses on the girls being able to continue the use of social media or indeed continue to speak out about topics important to them, rather than also meaningfully consider how they deal with and process their experiences of harassment. This is particularly concerning given the stark lack of examples the girls described in terms of how they look after themselves. Whilst this is not to suggest that girls and young women should be responsible for, or blamed for the lack of, ways they practice self-care it highlights an important gap and a support need for external actors to consider.

5.4.4 Conclusion

Online harassment has a profound influence on girls' and young women's wellbeing. The majority of girls and young women who have been harassed online experience a multitude of negative effects on their lives, from loss of self-esteem, to mental or emotional stress or issues with their families and friends. Online harassment also forces girls to adapt the way in which they use social media. While many girls try to defy the harassers by carrying on using social media regardless, this has a toll on their long-term wellbeing and can only be achieved by constant adaptation of their own behaviour. This section clearly showed that girls and young women are not free online.

5.5 Gender-based online harassment in context with gender-based street harassment

Online harassment is not a stand along concept but rather is an extension of the harassment that girls and young women experience in other parts of their life, such as street harassment.

In the quantitative survey girls were asked: ' Generally speaking, where [are you/do you think girls and young women] [experiencing/experience] more harassment: on social media platforms or in public spaces?' and within the qualitative interviews the girls were asked: 'If you have ever experienced harassment on the street, how do you think online harassment is different from harassment on the street? Where do you feel safer from harassment, on the street or on social media and why?

Especially in the qualitative interviews girls and young women drew parallels between online and street harassment. They also elaborated that these are not mutually exclusive concepts and one type of harassment can escalate into the other and therefore traverse both spaces. Understanding online harassment within the context of all the harassment girls and young women face is important in order to provide a more comprehensive and informed picture of lived experiences and ways to better protect adolescent girls moving forward.

The results of the quantitative analysis show that, overall, more girls face online harassment than street harassment. Fifty per cent of girls said they or other girls they know face more online harassment than street harassment, 19 per cent of girls said girls face more harassment in public spaces (at work, at school, on public transport, on the street) than online harassment and 29 per cent of girls said they or other girls face both, the same amount of street harassment and online harassment.

However, interestingly, when looking at the answers of only those girls who said that they themselves have experienced online harassment 59 per cent of them said that they face more harassment on social media platforms than on the street, 21 per cent said they face more harassment on the street than on social media platforms and 20 per cent said both happen to them in the same measure.

Girls who have not faced harassment themselves but instead have witnessed it happening to other girls, were asked if they think girls experience more harassment on the street or on social media. Forty per cent said that they think that girls face more online harassment than street harassment and 17 per cent said that street harassment

happens more often to girls than online harassment. However, the important statistic to note here is that 42 per cent think that girls face both equally.

This shows that girls who haven't faced online harassment themselves seem to underestimate the frequency with which online harassment happens. On the other hand, it is remarkable that so many girls feel that both, online harassment and harassment in public spaces, happens to the same degree. This is a testimony to the continuum of harassment that girls face in all parts of their lives.

Unsurprisingly, when testing the correlation between the frequency of harassment and the girls' estimate on whether harassment happens more often on social media or on the street, we found that the more frequently a girl gets harassed, the more likely she is to state that harassment happens more often on social media platforms. Because we don't know how frequently the girls in our survey faced harassment in public spaces, we cannot directly compare whether girls face online harassment or street harassment more often, but rather this is an interesting finding about girls' perceptions as to where they are more in danger of harassment, in public spaces or online.

When looking at the answers of girls who have experienced online harassment themselves by region, we see that across all regions, most girls believe that online harassment happens more often than street harassment. North America is the region with the highest percentage of girls (66 per cent) reporting that online harassment happens more often than street harassment, followed by Africa (60 per cent), Asia-Pacific and Europe (both 59 per cent).

When looking at the percentage of girls who have been harassed who say that they face both types of harassment to the same degree, the percentage is highest in Latin America (27 per cent) and Africa (24 per cent) and lowest in Europe and North America (both 16 per cent). This indicates that a large percentage of girls in developing countries are facing harassment online and on the street at the same time, while girls in developed countries are more likely to face either online harassment or street harassment, but not both at the same time.

Statements provided in the qualitative interviews will be considered below through a framework of understanding the girls' lived experiences with regards to both types of harassment as a continuum of abuse: highlighting comparative elements expressed by the girls in respect to what could be considered the underlying motivation of harassment, how it plays out and the effect.

The **basis for the motivation of harassment towards girls** in both experiences of online and street harassment, was discussed by two respondents as comparable in their opinion, which could be understood as hinting at negative expressions of gender power dynamics:

> **'I would think that's the same. I think that's the same, no matter online or public, that's the same because that's still sexual harassment.'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

> **'Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that, um, I think they are similar behaviours, um, and they have similar motivations too, um, because I think both street harassment and online harassment are about power and exerting power over someone by making an inappropriate comment.**
> **… So I think it's all part of this experience of, um, particularly being a young woman.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

The last comment made by the respondent, that it is all part of the experience of being a young woman, is hugely impactful in not only articulating this sense of continuum, but the ubiquitous and inherent nature of harassment within the lives of girls and young women.

Another similarity expressed by the girls was the often **public nature of harassment**, whether this was in relation to being vulnerable whilst being in public spaces both offline and online; or that the harassment is visible for others to see and is therefore impactful not only for the primary effect of the incidence, but a sense of embarrassment or concern that it was witnessed by others:

> **'It can happen any time. Um, you know, I think in both situations predominately girls and young women are just trying to live their lives, maybe go to the grocery store, go to school, um, post something on**

Instagram…. And it's just, I don't know, it's, it's kind of this, this thing that comes out of the blue and it has frustratingly a lot of power over how we live our lives, because it's a reminder that this could happen at any time, um, just while we're on social media or while we're in the street.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

With respect to online harassment this was also discussed in regards to long-lasting digital footprints:

'Uh, and I think that because uh, something in, in social media last longer more than anything else, so it's something that will haunt you, almost all your life. Even if you're trying to change, people will keep something for you…and later on, if they want to post that thing again, they'll do that.' (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

'Besides, Twitter works like a newspaper library, and the information remains for life, which is dangerous because someone can use it against you at any time'. (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

In addition to the visibility of the harassment as others can see this:

'But for cyber bullying, mostly it's getting worse and it's hard to control, it's hard to handle. Once it spreads, it's everywhere, and everyone can see it, and you know, maybe they can make fun of it, they will troll you … So I think psychologically, emotionally, it's really depressing and um, it has more effect than in real life. Cyber bullying is more serious in my opinion for me.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

'I would say that the …harassment times, uh, it goes worldwide, it goes globe, you know, it's global. That uh, I mean anybody who is your friend on the timeline would see about that…
… social media, media harassment goes really globe. It goes really very far around the world…' (Young Woman, 23, South, Sudan)

This was similarly discussed in relation to experiences of street harassment:

'But when like someone tries to touch me, it makes me even feel worse, because that's something physical, you know?...
…And then it- it brings all these emotions like, "Why would someone just want to touch me on the street?" First of all, it's embarrassing, second of all people talk a lot…
… Yeah, it's embarrassing, and people say a lot of things. Sometimes people will think that maybe you know the person who's touching you-
… maybe you're some whore, maybe, you know, people just have like all these things in their mind, which gives you a bad picture towards society, which I feel is not right.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)
(

It was also possible to identify what could be considered **feelings of not being able to escape or stop harassment** in the answers of the girls relating to their experiences of both online and street harassment. Whilst the responses below give what could be considered in some ways opposing views, they represent important findings in relation to insecurity and safeguarding:

'But then, like online harassment is like it doesn't determine where you are, you are like in your like safe space in your house, but then you receive this like, kind of things. On some stands, I don't know, I-I remember, I don't remember why exactly but I remember times, uh that I have been very afraid….
… So yeah, I feel like okay, both are terrible but I feel like online harass-harassment also like violates like your safe spaces.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

'I don't feel safe in either space. Online bullying has much more information, on the street you pass, the builders whistle, they yell, but you pass. Online, the stalker still sees you, still has information about you, your family, your likes. The online stalker has much more information.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'But, but people ... And online for me, at least to some extent I can. I can ... If I don't want to look at the comment, or sorry, if I don't want to look at their message, I can mute them for at least a little bit. Like obviously the mental toll at the end of the day depending on how heavy it, it, it's still there. But for me, I guess based on what I've been through I, I can see the difference 'cause I, I can't get out of my physical

harassment, but I can online…
…I think to me personally, it's different, but that's because, um, I can't escape street hara- like I … when I was younger, I was, um, harassed and I couldn't get out of that situation.' (Girl, 17, Canada)

'She doesn't feel safe in either space. She considers that on the one hand, in the street there can be acts that put her physical integrity at risk, but on the other hand, social networks can affect her psychologically, but somehow in social networks she can limit the actions of the other person against her own integrity, which she could not do in front of an act of physical violence' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

The idea of f**eeling insecure in both spaces,** and **both types of harassment effecting the girls,** was further apparent in responses, discussed in relation to both first and second-hand experiences:

'I don't feel safe in either space.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'For people that I know who have experienced harassment, they feel unsafe both on the street and online. Some developed trauma and fears engaging others online…
…I think the effects of street and online harassment on people are the same.' (Girl, 17, Philippines)

'I would say that they both have an, it- it, they both have like their own effects in some way' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'…the first uh …like response that came to my mind was like, okay yeah, probably when you're like street harassed. With a street harassment you feel more like, fear. But then I remember some experience that you actually a lot of fear when you're like harassed, like uh true like I don't know on social media. So yeah, I don't know. Like, both are terrible, what I think that you-you can feel a lot of fear' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

There were also some more distinctive features discussed, which related more exclusively to online harassment. These can be considered in the overarching categories of: (i) the intensity of online harassment due to inhibition from harassers acting online and (ii) lack of official measures or prevention available. The first is significant in consideration to findings which discussed potential reasons girls face harassment for being present online, relating to power and lack of inhibition that online spaces afford perpetrators. The second is significant, when considered against the lack of responses in the previous section regarding how girls and young women deal with online harassment, relating to support from police, legal bodies, or other organisations informed by formal processes to prevent or support against online harassment. Moreover, when explored together the logical implication suggests that online forms of harassment are distinct through the sense of inhibition from online activity that enables attackers to carry out more intense or relentless attacks, yet at the same time there is a sense that there aren't substantive measures in place by authorities to address this.

Looking at the first concept around the distinct nature of online harassment, responses included:

'Well it's very similar but I'm sure that, uh, the harassers in real life, uh, are at least a bit more afraid or cautious about what they do to you but they, they feel like have no limit to what they say or what they do on the social media, 'cause they know that they are behind the screen and there's nothing you can do to them. So they realise I mean, you could literally throw a stone or whatever but it, I mean, virtually there's nothing you can do other than, um, like, talk back. Even the reporting system is not effective because they report the account, you report the account, I can get, uh, stop for a few days and then you see the person come back again. So it's not a big deal.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

'On social networks people unleash their anger. There's nothing that restricts it more than you do, restricting your accounts.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'Networks facilitate anonymity. If someone harasses or assaults you through networks... many times you don't even know who to report.' (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

> '**In case of online harassment, they do it sort of more freely, comment about things that could harass the target, they also could use fake accounts.**' (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

Interestingly, two of the comments also hint at the relational nature of the two overarching problems in that even if there were efficient processes in place, if the harasser is anonymous then how would you be able to use them?

In respect to **lack of official measures or prevention available** three respondents directly discussed this in relation to lack of laws or lack of information available by authorities. What seems important to note is that each of the girls were from different countries which implies a spread of this problem. The lack of girls' and young women's answers in relation to effectively using formal procedures or processes to report or protect against online harassment should also be seen in support of this section. The direct responses are included below:

> '**I replied him back very badly because I, it's just like, "What can I do now? There's no law in their countries, there is no law in my country that ... What can I do?...
> ...in my country it's not considered as a crime at all ...
> ...So even ...road harassment would be a law ... punish that immediately while the social media one...
> ... like you basically can face it at any point in time and there is no punishment for it.**' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

> '**In the street there are measures you can take, look for someone, run, scream, there are posters that say harassment is violence, people are understanding that it is a crime, in social networks it is not, it is invisible, for them it is not violence but a comment.**' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> '**It said that 160,000 students had missed classes because they were victims of cyberbullying. So, well, that was in the United States. In El Salvador, they don't publish that kind of stuff as much because they don't pay much attention to the harassment you get. In fact, not even. There is no institution that is directly concerned with that… There are few articles in the Code, in the Constitution that protect and especially in children.**' (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

This section has been useful to suggest the ways in which girls experience harassment in all aspects of their life. It has helped substantiate the idea of a continuum of harassment with strong parallels in the way that online and street harassment manifest and are experienced by girls and young women. Whilst there are also distinctions that can be made between the types of harassment, they should overall be considered in a broader context which continues to impact the security and livelihood of girls and young women:

> '**It's better that there are no sexual violence public or online, because I think especially women has the right to feel freely or to freely from any violence online or public.**' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

5.6 Proposed solutions to end gender-based online harassment

One of the final questions the girls were asked during interviews was; 'what do you think can be done to stop online harassment against young women and who should take action?' The answers will be considered in line with the two stages of this question, first, what do the girls believe should be done, and second, who do they think could support this change. Overall, there were more in-depth answers relating to suggestions for what could be done than who could do this, which could indicate that third party actors should take a proactive role to ally with girls to effect the changes they have articulated.

5.6.1. What actions can be taken against online harassment

Many interesting solutions were discussed by the girls, their answers can be categorised in the following way: education and awareness raising, empowerment, representation and gender norms, law and implementation, and technological solutions. The most extensively discussed of these groupings was education and awareness raising.

5.6.1.1 Education and awareness raising

Education and awareness raising was a broad category used to group together suggestions that could be characterised in respect to raising awareness of online harassment and responsible online behaviour,[261] and raising awareness around processes and courses of actions girls can take if they face online harassment.[262] Overall, 59 per cent of girls and young women in the qualitative interviews mentioned comments that could be seen in relation to this category.

Raising awareness of online harassment and responsible online behaviour was discussed frequently. The responses seemed to suggest that such education and awareness raising should be targeted not just towards girls and young women, but also wider audiences including harassers, boys, youth generally, and even those who do not use social media. Some of the answers discussed this through what could be considered more gendered actions, for example, suggesting that girls should be made aware of the risks and boys should be educated about responsible online behaviour. Only one respondent, who will be considered last, suggested that boys and girls should receive equal training, in recognition that both can be victims of online harassment. The responses could all be interpreted as trying to create a safer and freer environment online where girls and young women can feel secure and their opinions respected. Comments included:

> **'Well I'm thinking about, …more awareness for every, like, everyone, the girls themselves and the, the people that are usually, that usually harass, the girls like, for example the boys should be educated on what they should do online and you should aware, make girls more aware of what, how they should respond and what they should do and everything.'** (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

> **'Educate young women and the youth (in general) on how to use social media responsibly and its possible consequences.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> **'Yeah, I'm thinking an awareness should be raised the ... to all people that uh, women post should be respected because if anyone decides to post anything, that's her decision, if she feels that way to post that. So, if she, like all of us should respect others account, others posting, so an awareness is very important, and they should know the important of women as women.**
> **…Yeah, so an awareness should be raised to all people that's in social media, even those who would not use social media.'** (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

> **I think we have to share more about what is sexual harassment, what is online harassment, what are the effects of it.** (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

> **'She sees education as a way of teaching the risks that exist on the Internet and the mechanisms for making a complaint of harassment'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

Interestingly, two answers could be used to highlight a need for parents to also be targeted in awareness raising initiatives and online safety education, which could enable them to advise their children. Both the comments below discuss a current gap in this, the second more explicitly showing that this could have helped them better protect themselves as an initial user of social media platforms:

> **'We should also start with the fact that our parents, and not only they, because sometimes they don't have that information in their elements either, but the media and the schools, because that doesn't refer to that article, are waiting to give us this information, to give us. As advice or elements to take care of our privacy, what we should and should not do, and to whom we should add the message, we have to pay attention when we go to our relatives. When we receive well messages or something like that, then I do think that it has to be implemented quite a bit in the area of education, since sometimes it is not in the house and that the media should also have a campaign where they are informed about this.'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

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[261] Young Woman, 21, Myanmar; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Tanzania; Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Girl, 17, Indonesia; Young Woman, 18, Nepal; Girl, 16, El Salvador
[262] Young Woman, 18, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Ecuador; Girl, 17, Philippines; Young Woman, 20, Sudan; Young Woman, 24, Peru

'And they should, I guess there is an important role for a, for a balance to stop ah, sexual abuse. Um, if sexual abuse happens to a young, uh, young female or any children because… opening social media accounts, Facebook, et. cetera, and making new friends, making all of the friends, and getting so much Like, Comments, so they will add uh, too much uh, too many strange people who they might know or uh, uh, might not know. So, if their parents will teach them how to make the privacy settings, and how to uh, what we have to do when we become victims of sexual- uh, sexual abuse, and the child or any young female who... feels danger, and he won't be the victim- he or she won't be the victim of sexual abuse. Because uh, uh, when I opened the Facebook, the- the like, my family, my parents also didn't know about Facebook at that time and they don't know about the fact that, that then privacy settings as I do, because my parents' friends are not more educated. So, I guess there is a big role about- about parents to save us from social media.' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

The final response that can be seen in relation to this subsection described multiple experiences they have had working with local NGOs on such education and awareness campaigns in Myanmar. It interestingly highlights themes of peer-to-peer education, public awareness campaigns, and the importance of educating young people before or when they first start using social media, as well as reaching more rural locations for such support. The need to target users at the beginning of their social media use is particularly significant, considered against comments from girls in previous sections which indicated a trial and error process of experiencing harassment and over time learning more effective self-management strategies for this, in addition to harassment often happening more frequently at younger ages. The implication of raising awareness and education curricula on online behaviour and safety when users initially join social media platforms could be an important step which could contribute towards ending this cycle of harassment, the imperative of which can be seen against the new waves of users globally that are continuing to join online networks every day. The excerpts below display answers to both part one and part two of the question:

'Doing campaigns and also educating public and you know raising awareness on our rights and responsibility while using social media in a safe way. And there's some kind of application and campaigning programs and activities happening in our society as well.
…So I think especially young people, peer to peer education or maybe from some of the strong or big organisations doing such campaigns and educational like spreading educational contents, both on social media, news and other platforms, raising awareness and educating people, young men and girls will be very effective.
… girls are, they don't really know it when they first start using social media, that's why we need to educate them first before that.
…And also in different schools, we, I also see organisations doing this, like going to different high schools, middle schools, and educating about online safety to use it in a safe way and, you know, to apply such kind of potential problems, like cyber bullying, cyber …cyber grooming, et cetera. So yes, uh, I think that's really helpful for the young girls and women out there.
…I yeah, I actually participated in a workshop by Plan International to the middle school, to one of the middle schools in Yangon. It is a partner project with …so yeah, um, they are educating the students about online safety and also it contains demonstrations, set up quizzes on how to use social media effectively and safely.
…And another experience is, I think the … workshop about the Peace Ambassador project with my peers …. At that time they were discussing about, you know, including this social, online safety curriculum in the Peace project, Peace Ambassador curriculum, Peace Ambassador project… and I kind of participated in that discussion and also to raise awareness mostly in rural areas, so to hold a social media campaign and to.. So we did some discussion on that and chose the best way to reach to public, like are we going to do this on radio or on newspaper or through social media, um, or any other campaigns, activities, or something like that.
…And another experience was I was a member, I used to work for the NGO, which is called Youth Society for Education. So I worked there for over a year, and we also do that kind of education and stuff, educating young people, and we had a media contest about the impacts of social media. So at that time, we also do some campaigning activities as an organisation as, mostly containing youths, educating young people about the impact of social media, how to use it in a safe way, how to use it uh, you know, to get um, advantage and also to use in a useful way, not to overuse it and not in a harmful way.

…I think it goes both- both ways, because nowadays, not just girls, also boys, are also the victim of cyber bullying and that kind of thing and, you know, harassment as well. So it goes both ways. …They also need to behave and you know respect us, respect girls, not to flirt too much, and be respectful, and also they need to protect themselves from the potential threats. So I think both parties, both girls and boys have to be um, respectful. You know, they should have mutual respect. That's what, yeah, just have mutual respect and be open minded. Not be too judgemental, like don't be too judgemental and be supportive human beings for everyone.' Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

Online safety education and awareness raising was also discussed in regards to publicising, or suggesting, courses of action for girls and young women to take when they experience cases of online harassment. Solutions included platforms or networks to be set up where girls can report or discuss cases, publicising organisations who can help support them, as well as training on how to use reporting mechanisms.

> **'Teach them how to report or seek help, and introduce to them people or institutions that can help them.'** (Girl, 17, Philippines)

> **'… make girls more aware of what, how they should respond and what they should do and everything.'**(Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

> **'Closed Facebook group or website or WhatsApp group, some platform where activists can report their harassment and receive support…Training on these issues, having a control manual, how to report, etc. To feel more secure that in front of the harassment in networks there are people who support the denunciation.'** (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

> **'She sees education as a way of teaching the risks that exist on the Internet and the mechanisms for making a complaint of harassment. She mentions "I think Facebook has an option for people to come forward to report some kind of harassment. I think this is super good, but not many people know about it." She also believes that apps can be a way to help make complaints and limit harassment, citing an example of a WEHELP app.'** (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador) [Third person: Interview Note Format]

> **'We can help in some way. I know that there are some pages where you can send a message to help you with birth control, what to do and how to act. We should implement something like this for network bullying. I didn't know what to do and I kept quiet. If a girl has the same problem and doesn't trust her dad, she could write to this page and it would be great.'** (Girl, 17, Ecuador).

5.6.1.2 Empowerment, representation and gender norms

Empowerment, representation and gender norms was a broad subcategory used to discuss more substantive change to revise attitudes online and within societies towards women and girls. Such efforts could help to target online harassment through what could be considered the root cause relating to gender norms and inequality.

Empowerment and representation were used to describe solutions that could be considered both preventative and coping-mechanisms for experiences of online harassment.

The first related to a suggestion around raising girl's self-esteem as a strengthening process in order to help better deal with negativity online:

> **'Well, I've been saying that during the interview, but I think it's important to make young girls very strong… First, to strengthen their self-esteem so that any comment or message doesn't hurt them, affect them directly, and not be so sensitive'** (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

The second solution, discussed by one of the respondents from Indonesia, related to the way women are represented and portrayed generally through media and the implication this has as objectifying or demeaning women:

> **'But the most, the worst thing is that so many media keep showing that we are an object, or we, we are, we do not have the ability to be leader, or we are weak. And that is why so many people just see us**

as, as an object as well. And I think the media have a really big roles with that.

…so we uh, first we have to, you know, to show uh, to show especially in the media, that girls has the power and also that we should show lots of in- insp- inspire women or young leader, or young women leader. I would say that. But yeah, that's what I think. Because, because I really, really like in the, media it's just had really strong impact in our mind, that affect our daily life. And that is why I think the media should change the way they see girls. The way they see women.' (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

This idea around the valuation of women is further described through what could be seen as changes to contextual gender norms or changes in society's views and support for women and girls both within offline and online spaces. This was identifiable in three of the responses, which were made through a mix of responding to the respective question but also in the course of the interview:

'… and I feel that like, I wish these people knew how valuable we women are to actually like go out there, and how hard it takes like one, it takes a lot of courage to go and post something, especially being from, in a African country …

…I feel that in African countries, um, women are just portrayed as people who always have to be behind….

…And because of that like in society every time you do something better than a man, they just, you know, just feel that they can just insult you, because they don't want you to be at the position, at a certain position better than them….

…Yeah, so, um, I think people, we just need to understand how good it is to be equal people.' (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

'I don't know who the people in charge would be, but as a society we could create a common good, protect girls on social networks because I haven't been the only one. There are worse things like sharing girls' pictures. We have to create campaigns to stop these photos from being shared. Where I live, there are girls who have sent their photos and then half of (place name deleted) already has those photos and they see them as freaks. In my school, on the computers, they put pictures of a girl. The boy was expelled, but they already exposed him to her. She didn't go out at recess, she stayed in the bathroom and then we didn't hear from her. This is not going to happen to a man because he is considered a macho man, a superman. We all have to change the chip, from the youngest ones, and know all the problems that come with having social networks.' (Girl, 17, Ecuador)

'Like we also need to be very careful with our, you know, contents, like what we post, what we share, what we reply, what we say on social media, and also the community, society need to be very supportive, not judgemental. They also need to be open minded and, you know, need to see a bigger picture of what we are doing as girls and also as young women.

… I just want the community and people to be more understanding of our situation.' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

5.6.1.3 Law and implementation

Law and implementation was another overarching category that could be seen in the responses. As previously mentioned, this seems an important recommendation in regard to the lack of discussion around support from legal or judicial authorities. The answers tended to focus on government or state action in relation to creating and implementing policies, potentially imposing fines, and the freeing effect this could have on girls and young women navigating online spaces:

'I think there is a law that needs to be put in place in my country to at least …that will punish them, to give them rules of interior in my country, join hand together, there will be a law that will punish that. Because many girls and women are suffering…

… if they are …many people will think. They should even … Even this should pay fine and also … I have a civil society organisation like my organisation, and also I am … and, and, and, and, and our civil societies, and, and all the national organisations, they have to put head together with Plan International and the government of this country… many ladies will celebrate, and many girls will really

appreciate. And many… will really be free, and they would use social media freely because they know there's a law that punish that ….' (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

'To this we are informed that this problem exists, that it affects our development too much and that therefore it goes the State and the means of responsibility and provide us with information of how to create. And when we are in a situation of harassment, let's keep the evidence and proceed to fight so that this case starts to work and take, and prove and put into operation what effectiveness of the competent institutions in this is to protect.' (Girl, 16, El Salvador)

'But yes, it's very ... reporting it at times is very helpful but I think …like, accept her word or like, to encourage the governments to develop policies that protect, uh, people online more, because even if they do exist, I don't think they're applied as much. They're not implemented so I think … applications in different countries, I don't know if it's possible but like if it's possible to work with countries to make girls more safe. Not just girls, to be honest, but everybody, more safe. And, uh, people should be aware overall of what they should do.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

5.6.1.4 Technological solutions

Finally, **technological solutions** were discussed in 47 per cent of the girls and young women's responses to the qualitative interviews. In many ways these can be seen as directly relating to some of the issues previously mentioned around the inefficiency of current mechanisms. They correspond to preventing the creation of multiple accounts, effectively monitoring comments and ensuring blocking and reporting processes work and are accessible. The responses almost entirely suggest solutions which could be undertaken by the social media companies themselves:

'Not being able to create multiple accounts, or be able to harass the same account they've been blocked from using a different account' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

'I think the problem is of monitoring comments is often there by, like every social media app like, "Oh, we're very cautious, we monitor X, Y, and Z," but they never really do…
…. If someone reports someone, there should be people actually going through those reports properly rather than a bot…Because a bot can't identify personal attacks' (Girl, 17, Canada)

'The ways in which other people make comments should be limited, because it can affect other people.' (Young Woman, 18, Ecuador)

'Twitter should allow privacy, and from time to time content should be allowed to be removed. I don't know if it's much use' (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

'Facebook and social networks should take further restrictive measures. Delete account immediately, do not ask for time to find out or many people have to report the account….
To feel more secure that in front of the harassment in networks there are people who support the denunciation.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'Social media developer should also be more responsive to cases that has been reported.' (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

'But also, also I think that the applications, like the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, uh, should have more strict policies to harassment' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

'… it's very difficult because of that, because you can be anonymous. Uh, like hide your-your identity and just like do horrible things. But I feel like it's kind of a, for me it's kind of a uh like, you know, I don't know, like a society, like the society of social media. I think we should all, like a community thing, we should all work like reporting this kind of accounts, like sharing information about like who is the people who is doing this. Oh, and try to stop them, you know.' (Young Woman, 22, Chile)

The last response is interesting as the solution could be carried out by social media users themselves and is perhaps more of a consideration of what could be done in the climate of the current mechanisms not working.

Finally, the respondent from the US highlighted an interesting additional consideration that should be given specifically to protecting online users and accounts, such as those relating to the girls and young women discussed in this report, which are used to speak out about certain topics and therefore are more likely to be targeted by online harassers:

> **'I think that that's a good question and a difficult question, because I know Instagram is such a big company so they, they get so many reports every day with, um, harassment and all of that. But I do think there should be a special focus on accounts raising awareness about something maybe taboo or difficult, like sexual harassment. Because both within Catcalls of NYC and all the Catcalls accounts there have been a lot of instances of harassment but also in general in my broader network, I see that people who raise awareness about sexual harassment are more vulnerable to harassment online. So I think there should be measures taken to focus in on these accounts doing important work in telling people's stories of sexual harassment. Um, because I think that if there's more of a focus on that then more attention paid to that then there could be more action taken against the accounts that are harassing, um, these accounts raising awareness about sexual harassment.'** (Young Woman, 23, USA)

All of the above findings offer varied and rich solutions that importantly relate to the types of harassment that girls and young women have discussed in relation to harassment for being present and actively engaged online. Significantly, the solutions could therefore help provide safeguarding measures not only from an individual perspective, but approaches that could be applied to help all girls and young women using online platforms.

5.6.2. Who can help enact change?

In the quantitative survey, all girls (irrespective of whether or not they had experienced online harassment) were asked who they think should do more to fight against online harassment of girls and young women on social media platforms. They could choose from the following actors: the police, social media companies, the government, other social media users who witness the online harassment, or civil society organisations and activists.

Roughly the same actors were identified by girls in the qualitative interviews when discussing who they thought could help support the above solutions and contribute towards ending the online harassment of girls and young women. The actors could be categorised in the following way: responsibility at an individual level, online support group, governments or law-making bodies, NGOs and civil society, and social media companies. It is important to note that these were not necessarily mutually exclusive groups but could work jointly on one or multiple solutions.

The results of the quantitative survey showed that most girls and young women (44 per cent) suggested that social media companies should do more to fight online harassment on their platforms, followed by government and other social media users (both 18 per cent). Thirteen per cent of girls said that the police should act against online harassment while seven per cent said that they would like to see civil society organisations and activists fighting against online harassment.

When looking at girls' answers by region, we see that, in developing countries, a higher percentage of girls would like the government to act, than in developed countries. Across all regions most girls and young women say that social media companies have the duty to fight against the online harassment of girls.

Figure 15 Percentage of girls who think that various actors should fight against online harassment

Actors who should help fight online harassment against girls and young women
according to girls and young women

Asia-Pacific — 13% The police, 35% Social media companies, 18% The government, 24% Other social media users, 9% Civil society organizations

Europe — 18% The police, 43% Social media companies, 16% The government, 16% Other social media users, 6% Civil society organizations

Africa — 6% The police, 52% Social media companies, 21% The government, 12% Other social media users, 10% Civil society organizations

Latin America — 18% The police, 36% Social media companies, 26% The government, 13% Other social media users, 6% Civil society organizations

North America — 10% The police, 54% Social media companies, 9% The government, 22% Other social media users, 4% Civil society organizations

Total — 13% The police, 44% Social media companies, 18% The government, 18% Other social media users, 7% Civil society organizations

Legend:
- The police
- The government
- Civil society organizations
- Social media companies
- Other social media users

Graphs by region

5.6.2.1 Responsibility at an individual level

Responsibility at an individual level was used to group together suggestions which implicated girls and young women themselves, everyone as social media users, and all individuals more generally. The answer can in some way be seen as helping to implement solutions related to empowerment, representation and gender norms discussed earlier. This was an interesting subheading, suggesting a bottom up approach to transformative change which could both be interpreted as empowering for girls, or, alternatively, burdening them with too much responsibility. This is especially apparent in the precursor to the respondent from Malawi's answer, which suggests that social media companies are so big that they cannot, or will not, help and by default, women and girls themselves could take up this role:

> **'Um, I think we have our own responsibilities actually, because if we say that maybe social media, um, owners have to do something, I would lie, because social media is a big, big platform, and it's like all over around the world. So, they can't manage to-**
> **... to have, um, I would say that maybe we as women, if we could at least help each other... well maybe just as n- not women as such, but maybe if people could just at least hear out what people are facing on social media, and then maybe talk about it, freely, maybe just like a group or something, and then talk about things like wounds, maybe it would at least help...'** (Young Woman, 23, Malawi)

> **'I think to stop online harassment that the individual- and every- every individual is responsible to stop online harassment. Because if uh, one has been victim of online harassment, then uh, he or she should speak out about it and... that will just minimise uh, it's to minimise the online sexual abuse...'** (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

> **'And who should do that. I think everyone. Start from our self, and then people who use the media, who are using social media, and also the social media itself.'** (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

5.6.2.2 Governments and or law-making bodies

Governments and or law-making bodies were also implicated in the responses. Overall it seems governments are being called upon to lead on policy development and implementation,[263] both at a national and international level,[264] including a focus on tackling issues of sexual abuse more broadly.[265] Other than the first example below, the government solutions were also discussed in relation to working with other actors, including social media companies[266] or NGOS and civil society.[267] Only one respondent provided greater detail around specific ministries and actions:

> '**And one thing that I, really, um, I want to request ... is that if really you can support us, especially through resource, and if you could support us to, to, to really, uh, come up with the law, I think my organisation can really stand, , with you people, uh, my organisation stand together with the ministry and Plan International of Swaziland, Ministry of Gender and Child Welfare South Sudan, and then the ... organisation, which is my organisation, that works very closely with women and girls...**
> **... our civil societies, and, and all the national organisations, they have to put heads together with Plan International and the government of this country. And government, the national NGOs or the civil societies then had to ...many ladies will celebrate, and many girls will really appreciate.** (Young Woman, 23, South Sudan)

5.6.2.3 NGOs and civil society

NGOs and civil society were further mentioned in relation to raising awareness and supporting movements relating to freedom online. Plan International was referred to in both responses below:

> '**Uh, I don't have anything so far, but I think uh, you as Plan International also, should find a way maybe that an awareness thing to see how you can help women not to get this online harassment.**' (Young Woman, 24, Tanzania)

> '**Uh, well yeah, I think most of the groups, like [inaudible 00:33:00] and NGOs doing some kind of encouraging and supporting movements on getting equality and getting freedom online. Something like, yeah, for example, Plan International is very, very active in this as far as I can see throughout my takeover program. It's very, very effective and really, really committed to this topic.**' (Young Woman, 21, Myanmar)

5.6.2.4 Social media companies

Finally, **social media companies** were directly and indirectly implicated as actors to undertake technological solutions. Girls and young women suggested that social media companies needed to improve safety mechanisms such as reporting, blocking or monitoring comments, or revising their policies in relation to stricter standards towards harassment and safeguarding. Most of the comments were general, mentioning 'social media companies' collectively, while a few answers named specific platforms:

> '**And so I feel like there has to be more investment in ... 'Cause the company doesn't invest money into things, and I feel like they should invest more money into having people actively watch comments.**' (Girl, 17, Canada)

> '**Twitter should allow privacy, and from time to time content should be allowed to be removed. I don't know if it's much use.**' (Young Woman, 23, Spain)

> '**Social media developers should also be more responsive to cases that have been reported.**' (Girl, 17, Indonesia)

> '**And I think, especially Instagram or another, another platform, media social, they should put uh, like special feature, or simplify their system to report especially when there is sexual violence or**

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[263] Young Woman, 20, Sudan. Young Woman, 23, South Sudan
[264] Young Woman, 20, Sudan
[265] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[266] Young Woman, 18, Nepal
[267] Young Woman, 23, South Sudan

harassment happened online. So that would also mean the social media companies should do more to protect from harassment. (Young Woman, 19, Indonesia)

'Um, I mean I, I think that the work, the burden of this work though is probably placed on us, the accounts who are raising awareness. Um, I think if we were come together and maybe make some requests of Instagram for example, "Don't let the same person harassment us, um, from all of these different accounts," um, I think maybe they would be receptive to that. Um, I guess I don't know enough about what's realistic for Instagram.
…It would be really helpful to talk to someone there to figure out what are tangible methods to maybe make it so these harassers don't continue to target specific accounts who are doing this work.
…Yeah, I mean I think that it, it would be really tangible for them to do something like make sure the same person can't, um, create and follow the same account that they were blocked from. I think that should be pretty tangible and straight forward, um, yeah.' (Young Woman, 23, USA)

'Facebook and social networks should take further restrictive measures.' (Young Woman, 24, Peru)

'…I guess uh, internet service provider, and government will come through on that, because we- we [inaudible 00:29:17] I think our mental health as well. And especially it will, I think the health of children, and uh, yeah. Every individual should uh, well- or should come up to stop online child sexual- online sexual abuse.' (Young Woman, 18, Nepal)

'But also, also I think that the applications, like the social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, uh, should have more strict policies to harassment.' (Young Woman, 20, Sudan)

6. CONCLUSION

This section seeks to consolidate some of the emerging issues of the study. What follows is a discussion of certain key insights from both the literature and the analysis of the findings. These insights either give additional meaning to existing knowledge on the issue of online harassment or highlight more detailed and nuanced understandings of the issue for girls and young women.

These insights are grouped into various themes but what emerges from all of them is that there is one overarching conclusion. Girls are not free online: they are harassed for just being girls, the harassment has a profound effect on their wellbeing, there are few, or no, appropriate support mechanisms and, as a result, they report an overwhelming feeling of being alone and having to face up to the harassment themselves, yet they do so with resounding strength and power.

6.1 Girls get harassed for just being girls online

It's no surprise that girls are subject to gender-based violence online. There is much literature on the topic and it's a well-established fact that violence against women and girls is one of the key nefarious activities online.

Building on this evidence this study contributes to a greater understanding of the scale, reach and lived realities of online violence against girls and young women. It found that 58 per cent of all girls and young women surveyed are harassed and of those who have been harassed, 60 per cent report being harassed frequently or very frequently; there were insignificant differences between regions, indicating the global reach of online harassment against girls and young women.

6.1.1 Harmful gender norms

The research also points to the reasons behind girls and young women being subject to online harassment and violence. Unsurprisingly, these reasons are grounded in harmful gender norms. The research respondents almost unanimously recognised that the harassment was based simply on the fact that they were online in the first place.

Girls reported being subject to continuous sexual harassment, threats of sexual violence, stalking and unauthorised sharing of their images just for being present online. Hence the harassment can be seen as unprovoked, and in many ways ubiquitous to girls' experiences of social media use. This all points to the harmful gender norms that are seemingly pervasive online.

The harassment does not stop there. It becomes so much worse and varied in nature when girls then actively engage online, by posting and sharing content. This online interaction which by any means should be free and unencumbered, becomes a draw card for harassers to further target and direct violence against girls and young women.

Girls reported that no matter what they post, it seemed to become an invitation for harassers to intensify their attacks. Whether it is a picture of themselves or speaking out about feminist and human rights topics, the harassment becomes more vicious and intense. For example, one young woman participant recounted her experience of being verbally abused, stalked and threatened with rape as a result of her being an online activist fighting against street harassment. This example tends to demonstrate that when girls speak up about certain issues, which are particularly divisive and contentious like for example abortion, femicide, gender-based violence, feminism she offends harassers in two ways: first, by being a girl speaking out and second, by speaking out on issues that are rooted in patriarchy.

From the nature of the harassment it appears that harmful gender norms are driving the comments and outbursts against young women and girls. The research participants articulate how their harassers target them for, amongst others things, expressing themselves in a way that girls are not expected to, dressing and portraying themselves in a way that girls are not expected to, talking about topics that girls shouldn't talk about – especially topics that criticise patriarchal society. The girls reported that their knowledge and abilities are constantly questioned, that they are constantly being silenced, belittled and sexually objectified as well as victim blamed: the harassers seem to be employing methods that question, undermine and silence girls and young women as a way of reinforcing their "assigned" roles in society.

But there is more: unsurprisingly, the research shows that harassment also intensifies when girls and young women have intersecting characteristics. This corresponds to available evidence on violence against (mainly) women who have intersecting characteristics. Importantly this research highlights the scale and reach of harassment based on the intersecting characteristic of age. The research respondents called out several issues. First, the fact that harassers perceive it easier to harass younger girls and second, that girls and young women felt that the harassment they had faced was more intense when they were younger (though the findings also point to girls becoming better at managing their online safety the older they get).

Furthermore, not content on targeting girls and young women with online gender-based violence, harassers are drawn to girls and young women who also identify as LGBTIQ+, living with a disability and being from an ethnic minority.

6.1.2 The all-encompassing nature of harassment

The above findings point to different types of harassment and that it is all encompassing in girls' online lives. This is evidenced by examples of where harassment spills over into their offline lives, namely when stalking starts online but threatens them offline or when their personal information is revealed online which exposes them to the risk of being physically confronted by harassers. In fact, 24 per cent of girls who have been harassed online said that they feel physically unsafe. This points to the fact that harassment happens in different spaces. One particular example of this, which Plan International has previously studied is the phenomenon of street harassment. The current research sought to build on the lived realities of girls who suffer street harassment, or harassment in public spaces like parks, stations and on buses for example, by specifically investigating any parallels between street harassment and online harassment with the research participants. The results were particularly illuminating. Girls themselves articulated how there is a continuum between online harassment and street harassment. Furthermore, the girls have identified a number of commonalities between the two: gender inequality and harmful gender norms are the basis of the harassment, harassment happens in public spaces which leaves girls feeling embarrassed, harassment can happen at any point in time and in any place; while street harassment and online harassment manifests itself in different ways, girls feel like they cannot escape from it and they cannot stop it.

As a result, girls and young women constantly need to be vigilant to protect themselves from harassment in both, their online and offline lives.

6.2 The impact of online harassment

As alluded to above harassment is all encompassing in girls' and young women's lives so too is the effect of the harassment. The picture that the girls and young women paint of how their lives are impacted daily is heart wrenching. It is important to highlight the depth and breadth of their experiences when it comes to the overwhelming effect of the harassment on them. Overall, 64 per cent said that they or other girls they know had experienced negative effects due to being harassed on social media platforms.

In defining those negative effects girls and young women have reported the effects on their individual and internal emotional wellbeing on the one hand and their external relationships and situations on the other. As such we see that girls and young women feel physically unsafe, experience lower self-esteem and mental or emotional stress. They also speak of experiencing problems at school, with their friends and family and trouble finding or keeping a job. These various negative effects do not happen independently of each other. In fact, most girls report experiencing multiple negative consequences of online harassment at the same time and therefore are burdened by its stifling and repressing effects.

This points to girls lived realities of being afraid, uncomfortable and unsafe online. Given that we know the vast extent of time that girls spend online this shows that their daily wellbeing is jeopardised and demonstrates the profound effect that online harassment and violence is having on them. The question is therefore what measures exist to support girls and young women when experiencing online harassment and whether and how they are coping.

6.3 How girls and women deal with online harassment

The main take away in this section is that girls are effectively left to cope with online harassment and its impact by themselves, and while they should not have to, they do this very well.

There have been a number of studies looking at the effects of online harassment, but these have been on children or women and girls as a homogenous entity. While women and girls experience many things in common, equally there are significant differences in their experiences and these need to be surfaced. As a result, there is limited understanding of how girls and young women, within a certain age bracket, deal and come to terms with the impact of online harassment. This research offers multiple insights into the different ways that girls and young women have had to prevent and address it.

6.3.1 Girls and young women are alone in dealing with online harassment

The findings indicate that when girls go online for the first time, they go into the online space without knowing what will happen. Several girls described how they start using social media at a young age and they do so without any information or help on how to navigate the social media world. They talk of how their parents simply don't know how to prepare them; how they go online without their parents knowledge; that they don't know who to ask for advice or support; and that social media sites themselves don't have accessible tools which explain the risks and how to prevent them, or even how to maximize the benefits of the sites. The cumulative effect is that they have to learn and adapt to the online world all by themselves. And by no means do harassers give them time to adjust, the harassment starts almost immediately. This means they are vulnerable to the dark side of social media from an early age and remain at risk until such time as they have taught themselves how to cope - which differs from girl to girl, leaving some girls particularly vulnerable to online harassment.

Being left alone to cope means that girls and young women are alone in managing and dealing with the harassment. The research participants described how they teach themselves about the technical options on the various platforms, including removing negative comments, reporting or blocking accounts, monitoring followers of their accounts, and increasing privacy and security settings; how they need to learn how to deal with the stress of getting harassed; and how they need to appear strong while at the same time facing the onslaught of harassment and the attendant mental health issues.

What compounds this debilitating situation is that they note they are reluctant to reach out for help. They attribute this to victim blaming, especially within family contexts where the girls rather than perpetrators may be held responsible for the harassment, and to embarrassment and to the belief that there is no one who could help or even cares enough to help. The consequence is that they alone develop the skills to defend themselves over time and it's only much later that they realise they can speak to others about their experiences.

In describing these experiences girls and young women include examples of attempts to report and complain about the harassment that they endure as well as the harassment. They talk about how ineffective the existing measures are and how they generally get ignored. These experiences are borne out by the literature which shows how international normative frameworks, national legislation and policies, and social media regulations are all wanting and there is a lack of appropriate measures of redress.

Nonetheless girls did say that when they have the support of families and friends this mitigates feelings of loneliness and increases their sense of resolve to continue using social media platforms, but it's not enough for a sustainable solution to the issue. Where girls and young women lack these support networks, they are not only alone but more vulnerable.

6.3.2 Despite all adversity girls and young women adapt and are resilient
As noted above girls deal with online harassment alone and they do so through learning how to defend themselves over time. The research provides insights into the way they do this. Some of their methods, unsurprisingly result in them protecting themselves through expediency and this unfortunately sometimes reinforces the harmful gender norms themselves. However, some girls are able to overcome the adversity thereby demonstrating how they are able to lead and harness the power that they have in spite of the adversities caused by gender inequality. To the point made in the previous section about girls and young women having to deal with online harassment alone, they also achieve resilience by themselves and through their own strengths.

In order to avoid online harassment, one of the short-term measures that girls adopt is to harness the technological solutions that are available to them. The girls mention the lack of available resources to guide them through the pitfalls of social media platforms and therefore they learn by doing, making use of the limited tools that are available such as turning off comments, reporting and blocking aggressors, as mentioned above.

Another means to avoid harassment that some girls resort to is adapting their behaviour to conform to what they think is acceptable behaviour for girls in society. This includes ceasing to post content that expresses their opinion; questioning what content they post; altering what they wanted to post to make it more 'acceptable'; reducing the amount of personal information and photographs that they share; and most extremely portraying a socially acceptable version of themselves online. This is yet another example of girls and young women having to adapt to harmful gender norms for the sake of expediency, despite their knowledge of the injustice in doing so. It is important to emphasise, that this is not a willing choice on their part but a measure of strategic pragmatism to be able to exist online and prevent the continuous abuse that they would ordinarily face.

Contrary to this approach, some girls make the conscious decision in the face of ongoing harassment, and despite its effect on them, to continue using social media and engage online on their own terms. They do so fully conscious of the consequences, namely that they will be faced with ongoing harassment to varying degrees. The research participants highlighted two reasons for this strategy: first, they don't want to capitulate to the harassers and in fact, they want to actively defy them; second, they are committed to the various causes that they support and want to continue to speak out to ensure progress towards the achievement of their cause.

6.3.3 Girls and young women need allies
It was evident from the findings not only that girls and young women recognise their own strength and ability but also how exhausting it is being subject to constant harassment. Girls and young women in the research spoke about how important it is for them to carry on but were not aware or did not identify any self-care strategies, that would help them to sustain their online presence and well-being in the long term.

It is also clear that there is little support available to them but when that support manifests itself, even to a small extent, this empowers them and enhances their strength and resilience. For example, girls and young women who had support from either family, friends or received reassurance and positive feedback from their online community carried on fighting for their cause despite the hostile environment. Girls and young women told us that

positive comments and experiences with other social media users often outweigh the negative experiences of online harassment.

Therefore, it became evident that in order for girls and young women to have a positive and sustainable existence online, it is necessary to provide them with a comprehensive support matrix, including ensuring that they are part of a broader coalition of like-minded allies who empower them to lead and exercise their inherent power and strength. Additionally, safe online spaces could offer a platform where girls and young women can build connections and discuss their shared experiences of online harassment. In this way, girls and young women can reclaim the internet for their benefit.

Girls and young women online are not a homogenous group and have different experiences depending on their activities online - whether they are using social media for leisure or are activists - and on their personal characteristics, circumstances and lived realities. Therefore, any support needs to be designed in a way that understands the gendered dimension and that girls who are activists, or girls who have intersecting characteristics, face specific harassment and specific repercussions. However, currently most support is oblivious to gender and intersecting characteristics, such as LGBTIQ+, race and disabilities, and is neither appropriate nor effective.

In order to transcend harmful gender norms, support needs to be varied, to reflect the multiplicity of the experiences of online harassment and the nuances in the needs of girls and young women: for those girls who are adapting their social media use to survive in the face of harmful gender norms and the harassment caused as a result, support must empower them so that they do not have to change the way they behave or express themselves; for those girls who choose not to alter their way of using social media and expressing themselves, support must provide strategies for long-term wellbeing so that they can continue to resist and stay healthy.

6.4 Final remarks

The study has shown that the online world and social media is yet another space where gender inequality is rife. All evidence points to the fact that girls do not enjoy freedom online. Given that the 21st century is characterised by increased online access and digital spaces for people to engage and interact in, it is inevitable that social media is an integral part of girls' and young women's everyday lives. What should not be inevitable is the fact that online harassment is too.

Despite this, many of the girls we have spoken to showed extreme resilience in the face of relentless online harassment. While we salute the strength of the girls and young women who are able to overcome the impact of online harassment, we must not forget that equally there are girls who succumb to it and that online harassment shuts them out of online spaces even though they have as much right to be there as everyone else. After all, out of the girls who reported having experienced online harassment, 19 per cent have either limited their use of the social media platform or stopped using the social media platform altogether.

This must change because girls need to be free and equal online.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Social media companies

Social media companies must:

- **Create stronger, more effective and accessible reporting mechanisms** specific to online gender-based violence, that hold perpetrators to account and are responsive to all girls' needs and experiences, taking into account intersecting identities (including race and LGBTIQ+ youth).
- **Implement** their corporate responsibility to respect human rights in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

- **Work with** girls and young women globally in all their diversity to co-create policy and technical solutions to address and prevent gender-based harassment and violence on social media platforms.
- **Strengthen and improve** content moderation to identify and remove gender-based violence in a timely fashion, also ensuring that there is parity, proportionality and transparency in their approach to content moderation across the globe.
- **Hold perpetrators** of gender-based online harassment to account, including by timely sanctioning of perpetrators, consistent with other platform violations.
- **Take responsibility** for creating a safe online environment for girls and young women in all of their diversity by initiating discussions on the topic of gender-based online harassment amongst social media users; providing reliable information on the topic to increase awareness, and providing digital citizenship education for all users.
- **Collect and publish** gender and age disaggregated data, in partnership with private entities and civil society, that provide insight into the scale, reach, measurement and nature of online harassment and violence against women and girls and the digital gender divide

7.2 International, regional human rights systems and other inter-governmental initiatives

The international community must:

- **Call on** the Committee on the Rights of the Child to ensures that the draft General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment pays further attention to online harassment and ensures a gender, age and diversity approach.
- **Work with** the United Nations and other international entities to collect and harmonise laws and standards for online violence against any user, including women and children, in order to prevent impunity due to international borders and jurisdictional issues and promote mutual legal assistance.

7.3. National governments

National governments must:

7.3.1 Adopt laws and policies that:

- **Ensure** government policies on internet access are inclusive and actively ensure gender equality in accessing online spaces. This would include creating enabling environments for mobile network operators to enable increased connectivity and mobile internet access.
- **Update** and reform legislative frameworks to deal with online harassment and violence against all girls and young women, bearing in mind specific intersectional characteristics: including, amongst others, race, age, disability, ethnicity, LGBTIQ+.
- **Enact** innovative laws addressing violence against women and girls, holding social media platforms and other third-party internet platforms to account
- **Enable** the effective implementation, by all relevant government departments – such as the police, the judiciary, and the prosecution services – of laws and policies addressing online harassment of and online violence against all women and girls.
- **Ensure** access to justice for girls and young women who are targeted with online harassment and violence: including promoting awareness of reporting mechanisms, training law enforcement and judicial officers and establishing helplines
- **Consult** girls and young women in order to understand what their specific requirements are and how to enact the appropriate laws and policies

7.3.2 Ensure appropriate education and awareness raising that:

- **Requires** education departments to develop and deliver digital curricula on how to be safe online; giving students the skills to recognise, avoid and prevent online harassment and violence against women and girls, including the ability to use reporting mechanisms.
- **Trains** government officials on the risks of online violence for girls and how to manage reports of online harassment, including the investigation and prosecution of related crimes.

7.3.3 Establish a public health campaign that:

- **Reaches out** to the wider community with information about the impact of online harassment on mental and physical health, including collecting and publishing disaggregated data on online gender-based violence, with a focus on intersectionality.
- **Operates** as a public-private partnership to create awareness and deliver a broad range of support services, including helplines, primarily to girls, but also to their families and communities, with a focus on mental health and self-care.

7.4 Communities, families, civil society, faith-based organisations and other stakeholders

- **Communities and families** must take steps to engage with girls so that they feel secure in talking about online harassment and know that they are supported.
- **Civil society** should develop and deliver digital citizenship education and awareness raising initiatives, so that communities, families and civil society are better informed about the opportunities as well as the risks of being online, with a focus on online abuse.
- **NGOs** must facilitate broader discussions on the issue of online harassment and violence, aimed at eliminating gender inequality, harmful gender norms and violence against women and girls.
- **Mobile network operators** must take measures to make mobile internet access more inclusive, with a particular focus on making educational and health-related information and content freely accessible as well as increasing data allowances and lowering costs.
- **All members of society** should recognise the harm caused by online harassment and violence against women and girls, stand in solidarity with them and become active bystanders reporting abuse and amplifying girls' voices.

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ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We strive for a just world, working together with children, young people, supporters and partners. Using our reach, experience and knowledge, Plan International drives changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels. We are independent of governments, religions and political parties. For over 80 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children and we are active in more than 75 countries.

Girls Get Equal: Plan International has been campaigning for girls' rights for over a decade. The Girls Get Equal campaign, created with youth activists around the world, aims to ensure girls and young women have equal power over their own lives and can shape the world around them. Promoting leadership and amplifying girls' voices is central to the campaign. They have a right to speak up and take part in public life, but online abuse is disempowering girls: shutting them out of a space which plays a huge part in young people's lives, is limiting their potential to thrive and become leaders. In order to achieve gender equality in an increasingly digital world, online spaces must be made safe, accessible and affordable for everyone. Girls and young women, in all their diversity, must be free to be themselves: to campaign, debate and make decisions about the issues that affect their lives without fear of harassment and violence, wherever they are.

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