



Project Safe S.P.A.C.E.

(Students & Partners Against Cyber-Violence Everywhere)

Youth Needs Assessment Results Package

Prepared for Project Safe S.P.A.C.E.

Victim Services Toronto

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Introduction

In April 2014, Victim Services Toronto launched a Status of Women Canada funded cyber-violence initiative, Project Safe S.P.A.C.E. (Students & Partners Against Cyber-Violence Everywhere). The two year project is being conducted within a framework of Gender Based Analysis and runs until March 2016. Youth, school boards, law enforcement, digital companies, and other local stakeholders including social service providers have been brought together to prevent and address cyber-violence. This includes: internet luring, harassment, bullying, stalking, and threats of violence and sexual violence using social media. Project design, testing, implementation and evaluation are employing a participatory process of engaging both adults with relevant professional expertise and youth, particularly young women and girls.

Early on in the project the Safe S.P.A.C.E. Steering Committee was developed. The steering committee participates in all decisions. Members include young women bringing youth experience and expertise from Victim Services Toronto, Toronto Police Service, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, VISR (digital media company), BOOST Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, YWCA, and St. Stephen's Community House. The Steering Committee members bring different perspectives, and draw on their organizational experience to inform decisions and provide feedback.

An integral part of Victim Services Toronto's Safe S.P.A.C.E. Project has been the cultivation of Youth Leaders to inform and champion the project. There are 18 active Youth Leaders all of whom completed the Status of Women's Canada GBA+ online course. Youth Leader representation is present at each project Steering Committee meeting. In addition to the Youth Leaders, five Youth Communication Liaisons have been retained. They provide leadership at Youth meetings, and created a video and a power point presentation to increase accessibility to information on cyber-violence for youth with disabilities. Youth Communication Liaisons also prepare media announcements and have a key role in the social media Twitter chats, including helping to determine topics, questions and multiple answers.



To determine the needs of youth, identify gaps, and explore best practices in relation to cyber-violence a literature review was completed in conjunction with qualitative and quantitative research including Toronto based youth focus groups and an online survey. Over the next few months, the learnings from the needs assessment findings will be applied to the design of the strategies that will be developed to prevent and eliminate cyber violence against young women and girls.

This report will share the key findings and highlights from the needs assessment comprised of a literature review, youth focus groups and online survey.

Literature Review

Taking into consideration that the Internet is omnipresent, cyber-violence can transcend home, school, work and play environments and can have short or long-term effects on a victim's emotional, psychological, and/or physical wellbeing which can negatively impact academic and professional performance (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). As individuals experience or witness cyber-violence a greater need for research and coordinated community services arises.

In the realm of cyber activity, interactions can be helpful or harmful. As apps and social networking sites develop, greater awareness and accountability is required to prevent cyber-violence. For the purpose of this project, cyber-violence is an umbrella term which encompasses the digital experience of bullying, harassment, sexual harassment, sexting/nude selfies and/or child luring. Each definition is discussed below.

Cyber-bullying is defined as **mean and cruel** behaviour (MediaSmarts, 2014) directed towards an individual or group with the **intention to cause emotional harm** through the use of technology.

This definition of cyber-bullying draws on the experiences of the bully, victim and/or bystander and highlights the use of the Internet and electronic devices utilized by youth and; thus, the definition is not 'one-sided'. The terms 'mean' and 'cruel' are used to capture the affect of involved parties. Overall, the definition pulls together the essence of traditional bullying with the augmentation of electronic forms of communication.

Adding to the Criminal Code of Canada, 1985, s.264, definition of harassment, cyber-harassment is contextualized as **repeated, unwanted, communication** with another individual through the use of technology either directly or indirectly such as non-stop text messages, e-mails, private and public messages, threatening the individual or their family/friends.

Building on the definition of cyber-harassment, and drawing information from the Ontario Human Rights Code for sexual harassment, cyber-sexual harassment is communication of a sexual manner and is defined as **repeated, unwanted, communication of a sexual nature** with another individual through the use of technology either directly or indirectly.

Cyber-sexual harassment is different from cyber-bullying and sexting because the action of cyber-sexual harassment forces unwanted sexual communication, attempts to obtain a sexual act through coercion, and/or promotes sexual comments or advances. Cyber-sexual harassment typically targets women and is sexist and misogynistic in nature (MunnRivard, 2014).

Sexting and nude selfies are defined as creating, sending or distributing **sexual images** and/or videos of oneself or others and engaging in sexual conversations with peers via the Internet and/or electronic devices (MediaSmarts, 2014).

Child luring is defined as an individual 18 years or older, a person of trust or authority, who electronically communicates with **youth under the age of 18** for the purpose of committing a **sexual crime** such as, but not limited to, sexual assault, creating child pornography and sexual exploitation. (Criminal Code of Canada, 1985, s153(1), 155, 163.1, 170, 171)

To avoid re-victimization, shaming or (self) blaming, definitions use youth-friendly qualifiers such as 'harm', 'cruel', and 'sexting'. Other, pre-determined examples could be provided should participants require further clarification. The term "self-exploitation" was not used because of its potential to be perceived as victim blaming and shaming. Tokunaga (2010) noted that participants can respond differently to questions based on words and definitions provided. In the 2012 Kids Help Phone survey, 75% of youth stated that it would be helpful "talking to someone who 'gets it' and won't judge or blame you". In maintaining respectful language, participants may be more likely to disclose personal experiences associated with cyber-violence.

Scholarly material on cyber-violence leans on research that explores in-person interactions. The results from studies in online communication and cyber-bullying are listed below.

Perreault (2013), referencing the 2009 Canadian Crime Reporting Survey noted:

- 80% of Canadian households have access to the Internet and over two-thirds of youth, aged 15 to 24, were more likely to be cyber-bullied by someone known such as a friend, classmate or acquaintance.
- 67% of females reported crimes of online intimidation.
- 90% of child luring victims were females.
- Based on solved cases, males perpetuated online intimidation (72%) and nearly all investigations of child luring (98%).
- Younger males (in the 21 years of age range) were likely to resort to cyber intimidation and older males (in the 33 years of age range) were accused of child luring.
- Majority of females knew the identity of their cyber-harasser (80%); however, the same could not be said for child luring. Over two thirds (69%) of child luring was carried out by a stranger.

Relying on data from the General Social Survey (referenced in Perreault, 2013) adult participants were asked about their children being cyber-bullied and lured and were probed about the most recent experience they were aware of. A brief summary of the study results is listed below.

- Approximately 10% of adults were aware of their child experiencing cyber-bullying.
- Of these adults, 15% disclosed that more than one child in the home had been cyber-bullied. Another 2% knew of their child being lured or sexually solicited.
- Related to cyber-bullying, 74% of adults noted children received threatening or aggressive emails or instant messages.
- Majority, 72%, of hate comments were sent via email or posted on websites.
- In 16% of known incidents, the identity of the child was used to send threatening messages to another.

The findings of a MediaSmarts (2014) report indicate:

- 72% of participants agreed with the statement, "If I have a problem online (for example, someone posts something hurtful or sends me a photo that makes me uncomfortable) I can trust my parent(s) to help me solve it".
- Specific to online threats, students in grades 4 to 6 were inclined to ask parents for help.

- However, in grades 7 to 11, rather than asking trusted adults for advice/support, students turn to friends for help; do nothing; ignore and hope threats go away; and/or address the issue with the person who posted the comment.

The findings of The General Social Survey (referenced in Perreault, 2013) are listed below.

- 71% of victims, both cyber-bullied and lured, were females.
- Close to half (41%) of survey participants who had knowledge of their child being bullied online or lured noted that their child was aged 12 or 13 when the most recent incident occurred.
- Majority, 40% of cyber-bullying was conducted by a classmate; 21% by a stranger; 20% by a friend, 11% by an acquaintance and 6% by a family member/current or former boy/girlfriend.
- With child luring two thirds of incidents were conducted by a stranger.
- To 'terminate' communication, 64% of victims blocked messages from the sender
- In addition, nearly half (47%) of adults blocked their child's access to the Internet or particular site. A third, 34%, of adults met with school officials for assistance.

Taking into account, however, that MediaSmarts (2014) has demonstrated youth in grades 7 to 11 are not inclined to disclose experiences to parents and/or school staff: statistics obtained for the General Social Survey may not accurately capture rates of cyber-bullying and child luring.

Kids Help Phone (2012) conducted an online survey and received 460 responses in a two week span. The results are summarized below.

- Of the participants surveyed, 74% were female and 54% were between the ages of 13 to 15. The survey noted that 65% of participants experienced cyber-bullying at least once.
- Social networking sites and text messaging were the preferred platforms to carry out cyber-bullying.
- In a span of four years, 2007-2011, cyber-bullying grew from being called names, having rumours spread; feeling threatened or scared to including unwanted photos, videos or misrepresented visuals circulated.
- Over two thirds of respondents, 65%, would inform a friend before seeking support from a parent or school staff.

MediaSmarts (2014) surveyed youth about cyber-bullying and noted the following:

- 6% of youth in grade 4 reported mean behaviour which increased to 31% in grade 8 and peaked at 38% for students in grade 11.
- Additionally males were more likely to "harass someone in an online game, make fun of someone's race, religion or ethnicity, make fun of someone's sexual orientation or sexually harass someone".
- Females were more likely to "post an embarrassing photo/video or call someone a name". There was no gender difference in spreading rumours.
- A small number of students, 4%, grades 7 to 11, forwarded a sext that they had received.
- Males were more likely to make online threats and females were more likely to give credence to online threats.

Online interactions can be an extension of face-to-face interactions and MediaSmarts (2014) found that retaliation is the second or third most common motive for posting 'mean and cruel' information online. Thus, 39% of victims were bully-victims meaning that they experienced (cyber) bullying and perpetuated the act. For youth who are growing up in the digital age, there is little difference between the online and face to face world where what is discussed offline is discussed online and vice versa (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).

- 55% of youth who participated in the MediaSmarts (2014) study, noted that they were "joking around" and 64% of boys and 45% of girls were more likely to suggest this explanation to justify actions.
- Males justified their actions by stating boredom and other 'friends were doing it'.
- Half, 52%, of females went online to retaliate, to defend a friend, out of anger or because they did not like the victim. When meanness and threats are present, girls are inclined to seek assistance and/or privately message the person who posted the comment. Males are more likely to ignore the conflict and do nothing.

Using the theoretical framework of Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) the literature review looked at the intersectionality of cyber-violence amongst youth, aged 12 to 18, living in neighbourhood improvement areas, members of the deaf and hard of hearing community, newcomers, Aboriginals lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender communities and those diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities.

Endorsed by the Status of Women Canada, Gender Based Analysis advances gender equality and the "plus" moves beyond gender to assess other pluralities such as socio-economic status, abilities, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (<http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/gba-acis/intro-eng.html>). When looking at cyber-violence, scholarly and popular sources of information have related relational (in-direct) aggression with females and physical (direct) aggression with males. Subscribing to this form of categorization has influenced how violence is observed thus, potentially, limiting objectivity (Orpinas, 2014). GBA+ encourages parties to acknowledge preconceived notions and openly assess assumptions based on merit and evidence.

Limited research examining intersectionalities in relation to cyber-violence exists. Although further research is required to explore intersectionalities it can be concluded that no one group or population is immune to cyber-violence. If an individual is viewed as "different" i.e. physical/intellectual ability, sexual orientation and/or gender expression, citizenship or nationality s/he is at risk of increased victimization. Those who are perceived as "other" experience higher rates of being picked-on and tormented for attributes they cannot alter. This represents and is a symptom of larger systemic discrimination. Research does agree that cyber-violence has lasting negative impacts on victims. For example, a 2010 meta-analysis, Tokunaga noted that both in-person bullying and cyber-bullying have similar negative impacts on victims including, lower self-esteem, greater levels of depression and significant life challenges. Scholarly articles indicate that those who are bullied in person are also likely to be bullied online (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). Relative to traditional bullying, cyber-bullying may have life-long debilitating results. Contributing factors include that youth are more likely to have technological devices in their bedrooms and also because the Internet 'does not sleep' (Tokunaga, 2010).

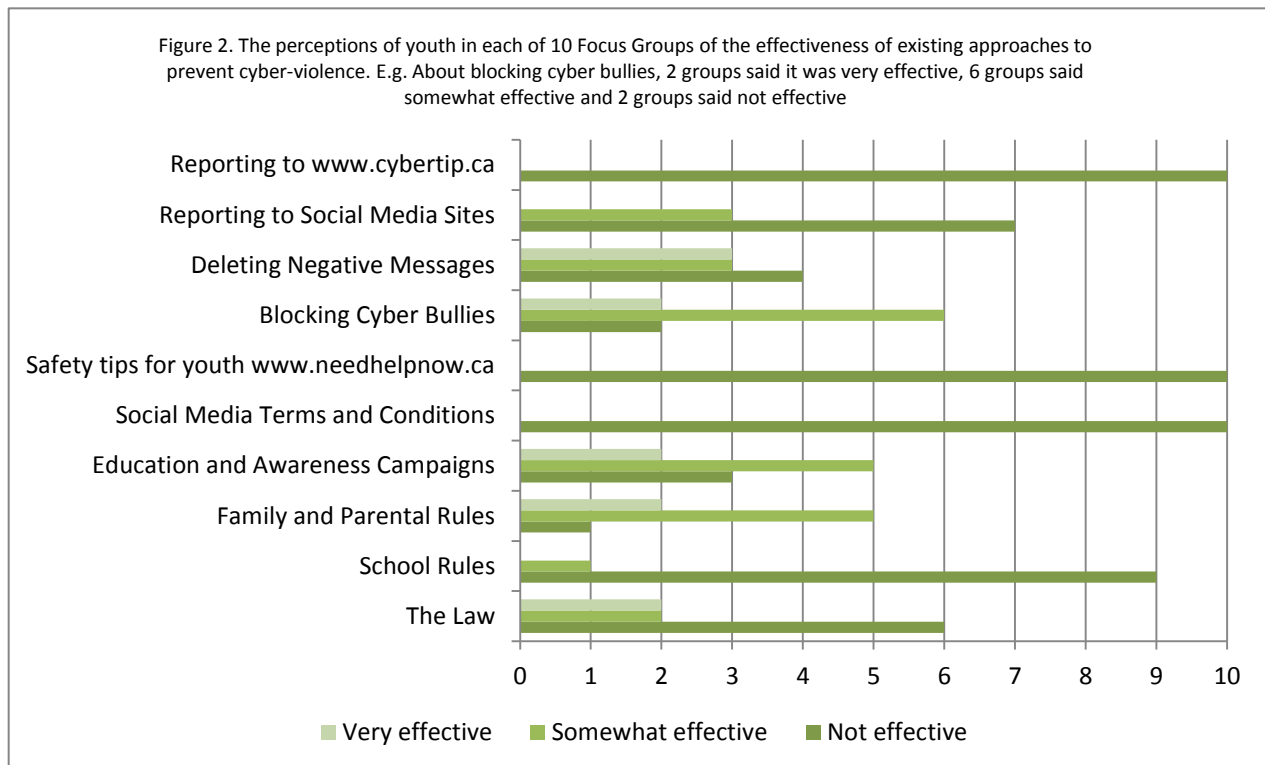
Using the theoretical framework of Gender Based Analysis Plus proved to be invaluable as it highlighted that greater research and attention is needed to uncover the experience of individuals vis-à-vis abilities,

immigration status, heritage, and sexual orientation and gender expression. Although society strives to balance equality with equity, intersectionalities should not be overlooked.

Preventing and responding to cyber-violence requires a multifaceted and coordinated approach. It requires creators of social media platforms to anticipate the impact of their site/app and build-in effective reporting protocols. Similarly, organizing regular meetings to openly dialogue about cyber-violence could foster a sense of community and lead to innovative strategies. Effective intervention, takes coordination from community services, law enforcement, parents, teachers, youth and other members of the community.

Focus Groups

Ten Focus Groups were held in November 2014 with a total of 106 youth who identify as Aboriginal, newcomer, LGBTQ and teens with disabilities including deaf and hard of hearing and mild intellectual disabilities as well as youth from Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. A highlight of the findings was finding out what youth think about the effectiveness of a number of existing approaches to prevent cyber-violence. Figure 2 shows the perceptions of youth in each group. The youth in the Focus Groups experience many of the existing approaches as ineffective in reducing or eliminating cyber-violence. The most promising strategies are deleting negative messages, blocking cyber bullies, education and awareness campaigns and family and parental rules.



The findings from the Focus Groups informed the design of the online survey which was piloted with Youth Leaders, revised and finalized. The online survey was extensive in scope and detail in order to capture the priorities, viewpoints and experiences that would help identify new strategies for addressing cyber-violence and identify the effectiveness and/or gaps of existing institutional mechanisms and supports.

Online Needs Assessment

Ambitious in the target for how many respondents would complete the online survey, the Project team and the Steering Committee were pleased that the extensive promotion through posters, Safe S.P.A.C.E. networks via e-mail, youth, social media i.e. twitter and Facebook announcements as well as Ryerson Scope Radio Station announcement 1280AM and the CHHA 1610AM radio interview resulted in **460 people completing the online survey**. Of the 460 completed surveys, 62% were aged 12-18. The project succeeded in attracting 69% of youth responses from girls, of these, 169 girls were 12-14 and 199 girls 15-18 years old. Two thirds of the youth who identified themselves as struggling financially, were girls, 40% of the youth who had immigrated to Canada in the last 5 years were girls and 60% of the youth who identified themselves as having a disability were girls.

Findings from the online needs assessment survey conducted by Safe S.P.A.C.E. suggest many possible strategies:

Youth Behaviour

- **Safer practices:** Across all behaviours, female youth are currently using safer practices than male youth. Girls are more likely than boys to be positive role models and advise friends on how to be positive online, and younger girls are 21% more likely to do this than younger boys.
- **Knowing online friends:** 57% of youth always know who their friends and followers are and do not accept requests from strangers. 19% more girls than boys do this, 21% more younger girls do this compared with younger boys, and 13% more older boys than younger boys know their friends and followers.
- **Friending trusted adults:** 41% of youth friend positive trusted adults who can watch out for them. 11% more girls than boys friend positive trusted adults and older girls do this more than younger girls.
- **Positive online presence:** 64% of youth make sure that if they are active online that their profile is fun and positive. 17% more girls than boys, and 20% more older girls than older boys make sure that their profile is positive.
- **Privacy settings:** 64% of youth check privacy settings, 16% more girls than boys and when age is taken into account 28% more younger girls than younger boys check their privacy settings. 14% more younger girls check their privacy settings than older girls.
- **Telling trusted adults when they experience cyber-violence:** Nearly two thirds of youth (63%) **do not** tell a parent or trusted adult when they experience cyber-violence. 17% more girls than boys tell a parent or trusted adult when they experience cyber-violence online. When age is taken into account 19% more older girls than older boys tell a trusted person when they experience cyber-violence online.

- **Telling trusted adults when they see cyber-violence:** 27% of youth tell a parent or trusted adult when they see cyber-violence online. 11% more girls than boys tell parents or trusted adults. When age is taken into account 14% more younger girls than older girls tell a trusted person. Similarly with boys where younger boys are 11% more likely than older boys to tell a trusted person.
- **Reporting:** Only about one in five youth report cyber-violence in school, i.e. 77% of youth do not report cyber-violence in school and 81% do not report cyber-violence to the police. Older girls are more likely to do this than older boys, and younger boys more likely than older boys.

Locations for Information

- **Schools good place for information:** 89% of youth suggest that schools would be good locations for education and information about cyber-violence
- **Police good place for information:** 81% of youth suggest that police would be good location for education and information about cyber-violence
- **Peers a good source of information:** 80% of youth suggest that support groups of friends and peers would be good location for education and information about cyber-violence

Social Media Sites

- **Stricter responses from social media:** Treating cyber-violence seriously and in a timely way with strict consequences, was commonly recommended by youth respondents as ways that social media sites should reduce and stop cyber-violence

Making a Difference

- **Improving social media:** 61% of youth indicate that using social media would be better if cyber-violence against youth was stopped or reduced. Explanations for this relatively low figure include respondents saying that they do not get involved online, or that cyber-violence does not affect them.
- **Youth agree on what needs to be done:** There was a high level of consensus among youth demographic groups about what youth could do to have the most impact on reducing cyber-violence: not posting nude photos of themselves online, not sending mean and cruel things about other people online, (84% of youth say that youth not sending mean and cruel things about people online would make the biggest difference to reducing cyber-violence), 79% said

not posting nude photos of themselves online and 78% said stopping to think before deciding to send any online pictures or messages about themselves or others.

- **Stop to think before posting:** 81% of youth stop to think before they send any online pictures or messages about themselves. 11% more girls than boys stop to think, older girls stop to think more than older boys, and 10% more younger girls than younger boys stop to think before posting.
- **Anonymous reporting:** Being able to make anonymous reports about cyber-violence to police was favoured by three quarters of youth and anonymous reports at school by about two thirds of youth.
- **Posting private information:** Only about 40% of youth thought that not posting private information about themselves would help to reduce cyber-violence.

Civic Behaviour

- **Stricter consequences:** Youth favour stricter consequences including involving the police and stricter laws for cyber-violence as well as more timely police response to make a big difference in reducing cyber-violence.
- **Consistent school rules:** Two thirds of youth suggest that it would be helpful if the same rules about cyber-violence existed in all schools.
- **Role for parents:** 46% of youth thought parents or guardians friending their kids, or parents making rules for their kids on how they should use social media, would reduce cyber-violence.

Conclusions:

Youth provide valuable insight into cyber-violence and a comprehensive understanding of the nuances of the digital world. We live in a time of unprecedented rapid technological change where research, laws and policies alone cannot keep up. Therefore, in preventing and responding to cyber-violence it is essential youth voices be at the forefront of a multifaceted and coordinated approach amongst community service providers, law enforcement, school boards, parents, digital media companies, parents/guardians and community members.

For the full Safe S.P.A.C.E. needs assessment report please call 416-808-7054

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