

Online Harms and Mental Health

Overview

- What are online harms?
- Types of online harm
- Statistics
- How online harms impact mental health
- How can we support?
- Looking after yourself

What are online harms?

The UK government defines online harms as:

Either online content that is created by someone, or someone's online behaviour, that is illegal or could cause significant physical or psychological harm to a person.

Types of online harms

- Child sexual exploitation and abuse
- Terrorism and extremism
- Hate crime and hate speech
- Harassment and cyberstalking
- Cyberbullying/online abuse
- Online scams and fraud
- Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Sale of illegal drugs and weapons
- Online gambling-related harms
- Misinformation/Disinformation
- Promotion of eating disorders, self-harm, or suicide

Statistics

- Almost three quarters (71%) of users 13+ in Scotland have encountered one potential harm online recently.
- Young adults aged 18-24 are more likely than other age groups to have experienced harm online (80%).
- Minority ethnic communities are more likely than White users of the same age to have experienced harms online (71% vs 67%).
- Teenage girls are more likely than boys to have experienced harm online (73% vs 66%).
- LGBTQ+ users are more likely than heterosexual users to experience harm online (84% vs 66%).
- Almost 1 in 5 (17%) of young people in Greater Glasgow and Clyde said they wouldn't talk to anyone if something went wrong online.

Statistics

- 24% of 18 to 29 year olds have experienced mental or emotional stress as a result of online harassment.
- 55% of women said they had experienced stress, anxiety or panic attacks after experiencing online abuse or harassment.
- Black internet users were more than twice as likely to report an encounter really bothered or offended them than White users (38% vs 18%).
- In a study with over 2,000 secondary students in the UK, 35% of those presenting with PTSD symptoms were 'cyber victims'.

Impact of online harms

- Mental health impacts
- Low self-esteem
- Increases in suicidal thoughts or attempt
- Loneliness
- Financial losses
- Withdrawing from social interactions
- Substance use
- Impact on work or school
- Impact on sleep

How can we support?

Individual

- Talking
- Digital literacy
- Peer support
- Support healthy digital habits
- Report harmful content
- Signpost to appropriate support

Society

- Safer Internet Day, CyberScotland Week, Screen-Free Week
- Develop workforce's digital skills and understanding
- Policies – Online Safety Bill, Internet Safety for Children and Young People: National Action Plan

Looking after yourself

Things I can do

.....by myself

.....with others

People I can talk to.....