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Bullying in Scotland 2014

A report by respect*me*, Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service

This report was prepared by Brian Donnelly, Simon C. Hunter, and Rachel McDill.

Background

About respect*me*

respect*me,* Scotland's Anti-Bullying Service was launched in March 2007. The service is fully funded by the Scottish Government and is managed by SAMH (Scottish Association for Mental Health) in partnership with LGBT Youth Scotland.

Our vision is of a respecting, just, equal and inclusive Scotland in which all children and young people can live free from bullying and harassment and are encouraged to reach their full potential. Our work is driven by a focus on children's rights.

We work with all adults involved in the lives of children and young people to give them the practical skills and confidence to deal with children who are bullied and those who bully others.

We aim to build the capacity of these adults to effect change and challenge bullying and stigma at an individual, school, family, community and societal level. We provide policy support and training that promotes Children's Rights, equality and a positive ethos. We also campaign at a national level to raise awareness of the service and the impact that bullying can have.

What do we mean by bullying?

Bullying is not about just any kind of injury, nor just any negative impact. It involves a particular kind of harm. It is aimed at engendering a kind of helplessness, an inability to act, to do anything. It is an assault on a person's agency (Sercombe & Donnelly, 2012).

There have been many different definitions and theories about what constitutes bullying, but it's not helpful to define bullying purely in terms of behaviour.

Bullying is a mixture of behaviours and impacts, behaviours that can impact on a person's capacity to feel in control of themselves. This is what we term as their sense of 'agency'. Bullying takes place in the context of relationships; it is behaviour that can make people feel hurt, threatened, frightened and left out, it strips a person of their capacity for agency (respect*me,* 2013).

This behaviour can include:

- Being called names, teased, put down or threatened
- Being hit, tripped, pushed or kicked
- Having belongings taken or damaged
- Being ignored, left out or having rumours spread about you
- Receiving abusive messages, threats or comments on social media sites
- Behaviour which makes people feel like they are not in control of themselves
- Being targeted because of who you are or who you are perceived to be

This behaviour can harm people physically or emotionally and many can take place in person and online. Although the actual behaviour may not be repeated, the threat may be sustained over time, typically by actions: looks, messages, confrontations, physical interventions, or the fear of these behaviours.

The research

The primary aim of this piece of research was to obtain a picture of how children and young people are experiencing bullying in Scotland in 2014.

This research was designed to:

- Identify the types of bullying that is experienced by children and young people
- Give a clear picture of where bullying happens and where online and offline/face to face experiences differ or coalesce
- Identify from children and young people's own experience what they feel works and what is less helpful
- Identify where children and young people go online and what technology they use to get there

An online questionnaire was designed and tested and distributed to all schools in Scotland in May 2014 and was available until June 25 2014.

This study involved the collection of questionnaire data using an online procedure. SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was used as a platform to host the questionnaire and 38 questions were included.

In total, there were 8310 responses, and from this we analysed 7839. This subsample was chosen on the basis that some young people had omitted key sections. All information below is based on this subsample.

The young people who took part in the survey were aged between 8 and 19 years old. However, the majority (65%) were 12, 13, or 14 years old.

Of these, 48% were female, 47% were male, and 5% preferred to not report their gender.

Survey respondents were drawn from all over Scotland with all 32 Local Authorities represented.

Three focus groups took place with 45 young people to get a more detailed insight into children and young people's experiences of bullying – in particular, their thoughts on what happens online and in person, where these two are different and where they crossover.

This was an open survey and as such the findings presented here represent only the views of the children who took part.

Key findings

The key findings from the survey are as follows:

- 30% of children surveyed reported that they have experienced some sort of bullying between the start of school in August 2013 and June 2014.

  - Of this 30%

    - 49% experienced bullying in person

    - 41% experienced bullying both in person and online

    - 10% experienced bullying online only.

- A number of children and young people had more than one experience of bullying. Children and young people surveyed reflected 12,003 experiences of bullying.

  - Of these experiences

    - 60% took place in person

    - 21% took place both in person and online

    - 19% tool place online only

- 92% of children and young people who were bullied knew the person bullying them (91% online and 92% offline). Anonymity therefore may not be what is driving bullying online.

- Behaviours such as name calling, hurtful comments and spreading rumours that make people feel angry, sad and upset happen both face to face and online.

- Children and young people employ a range of strategies to cope with bullying; some are more successful than others. Adults need to promote these coping strategies as well as promote and utilise strategies that help stop the behaviour too.

  - Almost half (48%) of children and young people who are bullied tell their parents. Parents and carers can and do make a difference; we must continue to support parents and carers to have the confidence and information to respond effectively.

  - Friends and teachers are also providing support to a high number children and young people who are bullied.

- The most successful anti-bullying interventions are embedded within a positive ethos and culture and don't just focus on individual incidents**.**

- Children and young people's use of technology, especially mobile technology and social media, is woven into their everyday lives

- The majority of children and young people (81%) consider their online friends to be all or mostly the same friends they have in real life

- They access internet content on mobile devices such as phones and tablets more than any other devices such as a PC or laptop

- Google, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook are the most popular websites and Apps used by children and young people when they go online.

Experiences of Being Bullied.

Bullying was defined for participants using respect*me*'s definition; they were then asked if they had been bullied. In total, 2334 young people (30%) reported that they had been bullied since the start of the school year.

What behaviours were reported, and where did they take place?

Of those young people who reported being bullied, 51% reported that some or all of the behaviours they experienced took place online. However, 90% of the group reporting being bullied said that some or all of the behaviours that they experienced had occurred offline. Figure 1 shows details of this.

Figure 1: where bullying occurred (percentage within those who reported they had been bullied).
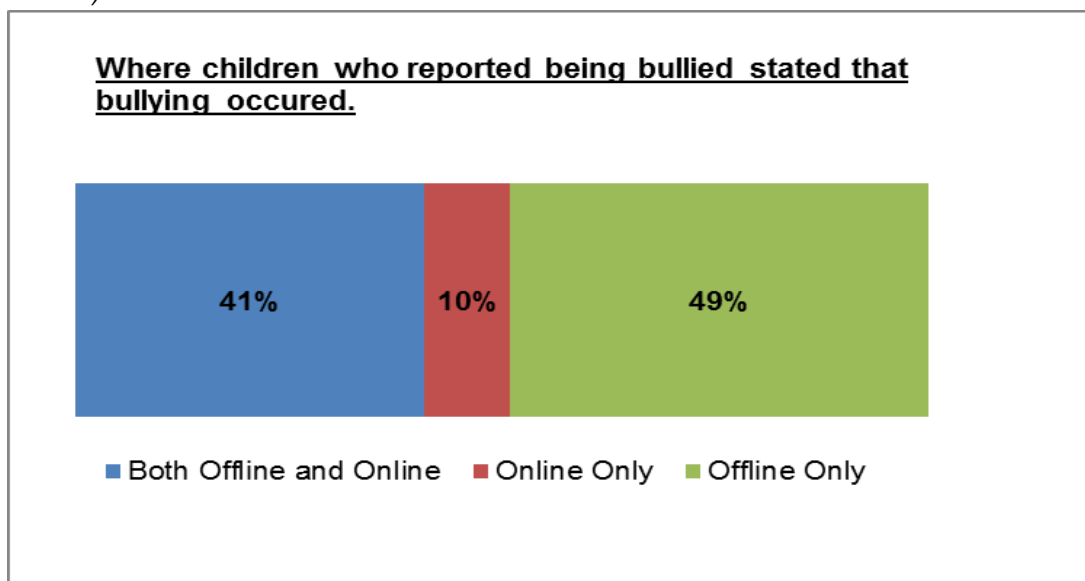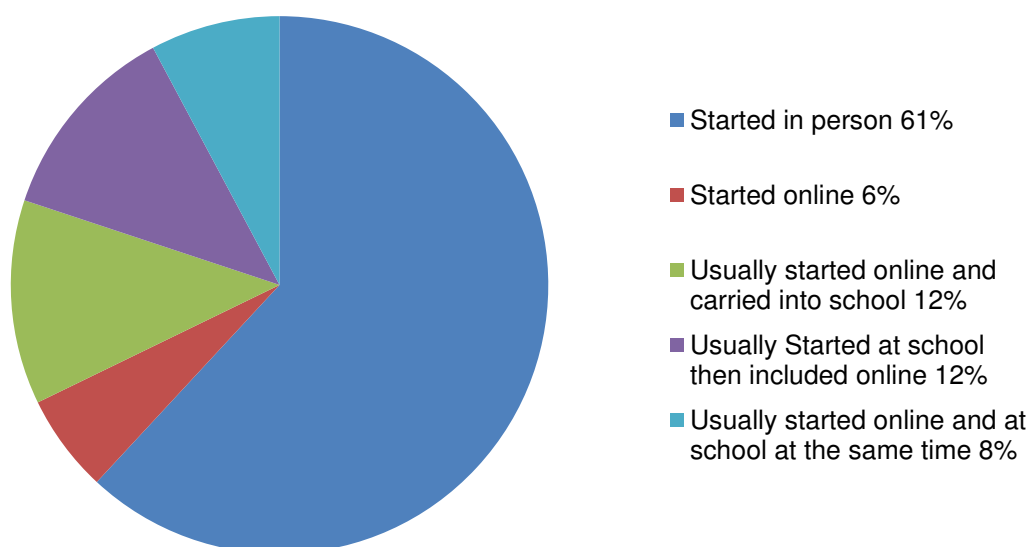

Bullying continues to take place more frequently in what some may call 'traditional' contexts, in person or face to face. It is also worth noting that *name calling* and *hurtful comments* were the top two forms of bullying that young people said they had experienced whether this took place online, offline, or in both contexts.

A total of 12,003 individual incidents of bullying were reported by young people. Of the entire 12,003 individual behaviours which were reported upon, 60% were offline, 19% were online, and 21% were both online and offline.

Given 92% of young people who were bullied knew who the person bullying them was (91% online and 92% offline) the anonymity of those using these behaviours does not appear to be driving experiences of bullying.

We also asked the survey respondents to indicate where bullying started (online, or in person) and whether one tended to lead to the other. As shown in Figure 2, the clear majority of bullying incidents began in a real-life context rather than online.

Figure 2. Starting place and progression of bullying.

- Started in person 61%
- Started online 6%
- Usually started online and carried into school 12%
- Usually Started at school then included online 12%
- Usually started online and at school at the same time 8%

Emotional reactions to being bullied

An important consideration when developing anti-bullying intervention and prevention strategies is the impact that bullying has upon those who are bullied. We asked young people about a number of emotional reactions they might experience when being bullied, and the most common response was feeling upset (see Table 1). This was closely followed by feeling angry or sad. A minority experienced other negative emotions such as shame, fear and embarrassment.

Table 1. Emotional reactions when being bullied.

Emotion	% experiencing
Upset	62%
Angry	55%
Sad	52%
Embarrassed	36%
Scared	34%
Isolated	23%
Ashamed	20%

There were some significant differences between boys and girls. Girls were more likely to report being scared (40% vs 26%), upset (74% vs 48%), sad (59% vs 43%), ashamed (22% vs 16%), and embarrassed (43% vs 28%) than boys were. In contrast, boys were more likely to say they were not bothered by the experience than girls (20% vs 9%). This may reflect genuine differences in the emotional reactions of boys and girls, or may reflect a greater willingness by girls to report experiencing emotions.

Young people's responses to being bullied

We asked young people to tell us what they did when they were being bullied by their peers. As can be seen in Table 2, young people in Scotland are quite prepared to talk to someone

they trust about the problem, with parent/carer being the highest, then a friend, or a member of school staff.

More than a quarter of young people tackle the problem by ignoring it or by walking away. In contrast to doing nothing, this is a non-confrontational but assertive strategy to use when faced by bullying behaviours. This does not necessarily imply that they are not upset or affected by what is happening, but does reflect that in the heat of the moment young people can remove themselves from a situation in an attempt to de-escalate it.

Table 2. Responses to being bullied.

Response	Number of Young People	% experiencing
Told parent/carer	1120	48%
Told a friend	864	37%
Told teacher/staff	794	34%
Ignored it, kept quiet, walked away	630	27%
Stood up to the person bullying	513	22%
Did nothing	467	20%
Told sibling	443	19%
Fought the person who was bullying	257	11%
Laughed at what was happening	233	10%
Joined in	70	3%
Called/visited Childline	47	2%

There were important gender differences in the ways that young people reacted. Girls were more likely to report telling a friend (44% vs 28%), telling a teacher or other staff member (55% vs 40%), and telling a sibling (23% vs 14%). Girls were also more likely to use strategies such as ignoring or walking away (30% vs 24%) and standing up to children using bullying behaviours (24% vs 18%). Boys were more likely than girls to report that they joined in what was happening (6% vs 1%), that they laughed at what was happening (13% vs 8%), and that they fought the person bullying (16% vs 7%).

Of course, what young people report doing is only half the story. We were also interested to find out whether these behaviours helped the young person to feel better, and whether the behaviour helped to stop what was happening.

Figure 3 demonstrates that many coping strategies are effective for helping young people to feel better, which in itself is likely to help them retain a sense of agency and to cope with the effects of bullying. However, these same strategies were not necessarily thought of as effective for stopping bullying. Having said that, it seems that adult involvement can still be an important way of intervening in incidents.

Figure 3. Percentages of students who reported that specific coping strategies helped them feel better
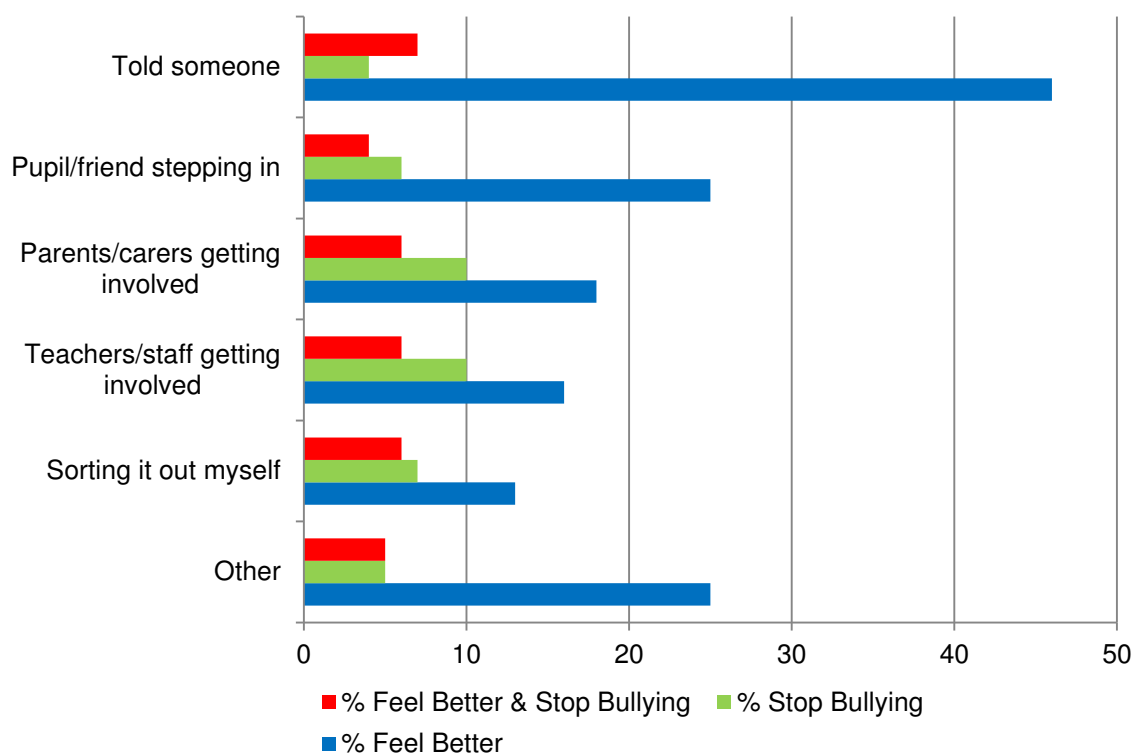
Feeling better

In terms of what made young people feel better, telling someone was high up as a successful strategy with more than 45% of pupils reporting that this made them feel better (see Figure 3). This is particularly encouraging given that seeking social support was the most frequently reported response to being bullied. When others stepped in to help, this was also viewed as helpful, though for fewer than a quarter of respondents. Among 'other' responses were, writing about the experience (11%), it just stopped (9%), and getting online support (5%).

There were some gender differences in how effective different strategies were perceived to be. Girls were more likely to report that talking to someone made them feel better (51% vs 41%) and that writing about it made them feel better too (14% vs 6%).

A relevant comment from the focus groups was that "Friendship really helps if you're getting bullied – you can go and be with your friends – that's harder online." This spoke to two issues. Firstly, that being with friends can help young people feel better, even if bullying continues. Secondly, that 'real life' friendships remain vital for young people and friendships based online can be limited in what they can offer.

Stopping bullying

When asked whether specific strategies helped to stop bullying behaviours from taking place, the most successful strategies were getting parents/carers or teachers/staff involved. Friends also played a role in this.

It is clear that the strategies about were generally much more effective for helping young people feel better than they were for actually stopping bullying from taking place.

There were no gender differences on these questions.

Stopping bullying *and* feeling better

We also asked about whether each strategy helped young people *both* feel better and stopped the bullying. Here, even fewer strategies were considered to be effective for both these purposes. There was one gender difference here. Boys reported that 'it just stopped' and this was more effective for both helping them feel better and for bullying stopping than it did for girls (7% vs 3%).

Young people in the focus groups made some comments in relation to this topic which were very interesting. One said: "*It can get worse for a while but it usually always gets better eventually once you've told your pals.*" This reflected the sentiment in that focus group that getting help doesn't always *immediately* reap benefits, but that over time social support does make things better. This is an important message for other young people to hear because concern that a difficult situation could get worse if help is sought may deter them from taking action which could (longer term) address and resolve the problem.

Summary

Young people will do things which can be legitimate choices for helping them to feel better but this need not be at the expense of other strategies which are directed more clearly toward actually stopping the bullying taking place. Employing strategies which help them to feel better will be good for young people's health and wellbeing regardless of whether it stops the bullying. Young people may feel able to cope with the impact of bullying without feeling they have the power to stop the bullying behaviours reoccurring. Different strategies or adult intervention may then be required to stop bullying.

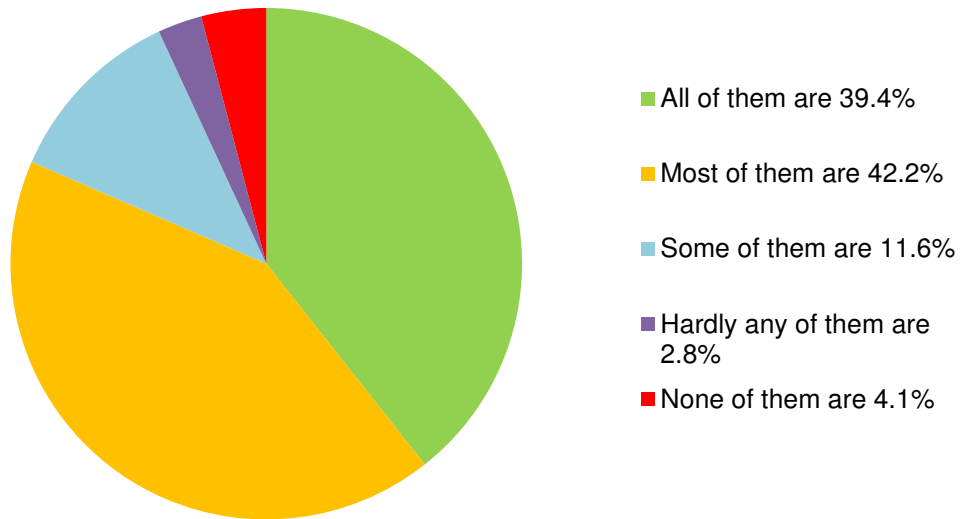### Are your online friends the same friends you have in person?

We also wanted to gain an understanding of the types of friendships young people experience online and how/if these are related to online bullying. Young people were asked whether their online friends are the same friends as those in 'real life'.

It is clear that a majority of young people (81%) consider their online friends to be all or mostly the same friends they have in real life.

This relates to our previous findings that bullying is experienced more often in traditional settings, as young people are relating to widely the same group of people both online and offline.

Perhaps the interactions are similar, and the difference in bullying experiences online and offline simply reflects the duration of contact within these different environments.

*Figure 4: Are your online friends the same as your real life friends?*

- All of them are 39.4%
- Most of them are 42.2%
- Some of them are 11.6%
- Hardly any of them are 2.8%
- None of them are 4.1%

What Can/Should Be Done To Tackle Bullying?

Children and young people were asked what measures they had in place in their school to address bullying and they were asked to rate their effectiveness.

These results show that the most successful interventions are those that tackle the ethos and culture of the school/organisation, rather than just focusing on individual incidents as and when they occur. So, interventions such as buddying, mentoring, and having clear anti-bullying policies were seen as more effective by the young people than reporting forms, worry boxes, and playground monitors.

Figure 5: What measures are in place in your school and how do you rate them?
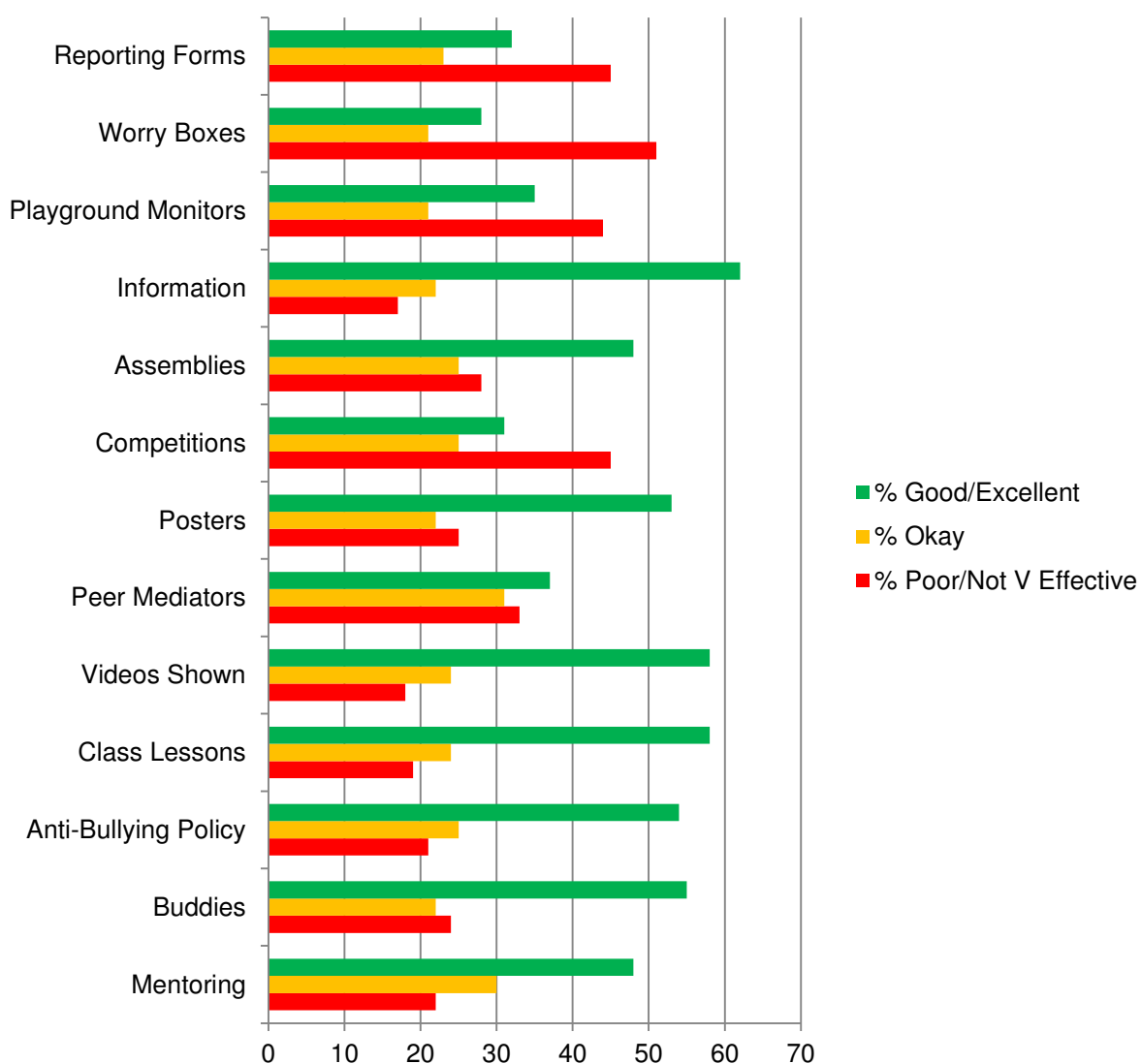
A range of open questions were included to ask respondents what **more** could be done to address bullying.

What more could schools do about bullying?
A popular response to this open question was that schools could provide more opportunity to talk to older pupils. Many young people also responded with requests for more supervision or involvement from staff.

What more could parents/carers do about bullying?
Many young people suggested that parents/carers could ask or talk about bullying more often, take bullying more seriously, or pay more attention to what's going on. This suggests that young people may not raise the issue unless prompted, but that if the issue was raised they would be willing to discuss with an adult that they trust.

What more could youth clubs/coaches do about bullying?
Many young people also suggested banning of children who are bullying.

What more could the media do about bullying?
More widespread advertisement was a common response to this question, whether that be on a small scale or using more widespread methods involving celebrities.

What more could social media do about bullying?
Punishment for those bullying involving more successful/permanent banning from sites was mentioned many times, as was better reporting procedures for bullying behaviour.

Again more monitoring was requested, so it appears from responses to all of these questions that young people do not wish to be simply left to their own devices online, they feel more secure knowing that activity is monitored in some way and that procedures are in place to prevent bullying behaviour.

Online Activity

## Online access

We also asked young people a number of questions about their online activity. This helps to contextualise discussions about online and offline bullying by making clear what young people do online, how they do it, and how often they do it.

Popularity of different activities

As shown, the online activities that were most popular involved Google, YouTube and Facebook. Also very popular were Instagram and Snapchat. The least popular online activities involved Pintrest, AskFM, and Tumblr.

Figure 6: Number of children and young people reporting engaging with different forms of online activity.
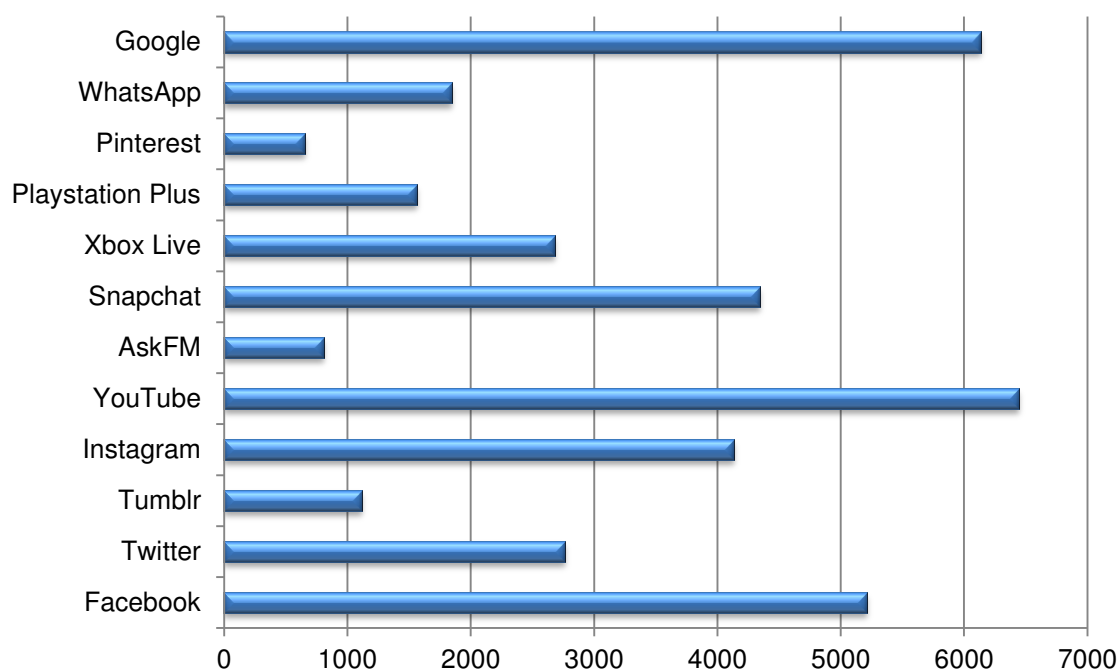

YouTube is extremely popular for watching music videos, channels and short programmes delivered by 'YouTubers' on everything from make-up tips to ideas/tips for gaming, from FIFA to Minecraft.

Frequency of usage

Turning to look at how frequently users of each of these services report engaging with them it is clear that almost all activities are used multiple times every day. Pinterest users and AskFM users reported less frequent usage, but for almost all other services more than 50% of users engaged in the activity "many times a day".

Figure 7: Frequency of usage reported by young people for different forms of online activity (only including those who said 'Yes' they engaged in each activity).
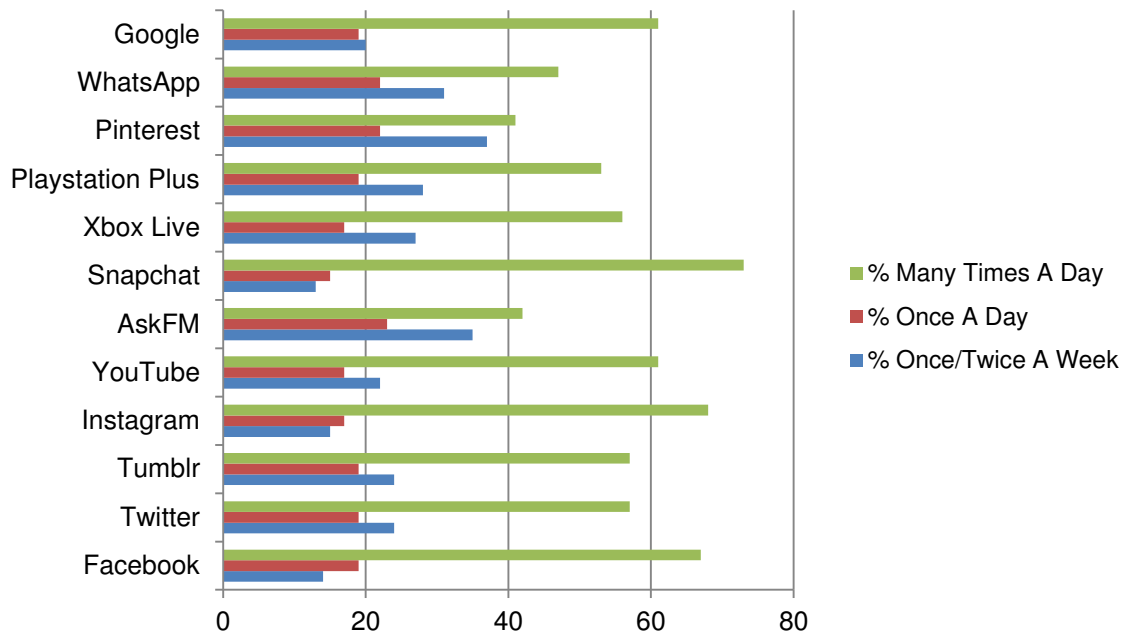
Reasons for going online

We also asked participants to say why they went online (Figure 8). Most responses related to chatting or accessing music or videos, though accessing pictures, viewing films, gaming, and searching the internet were all popular too. Least often reported was to 'gossip', though even here 32% of all young people who took part in the survey indicated that this was one reason for going online.

Figure 8: Number of children and young people reporting different reasons for being online.
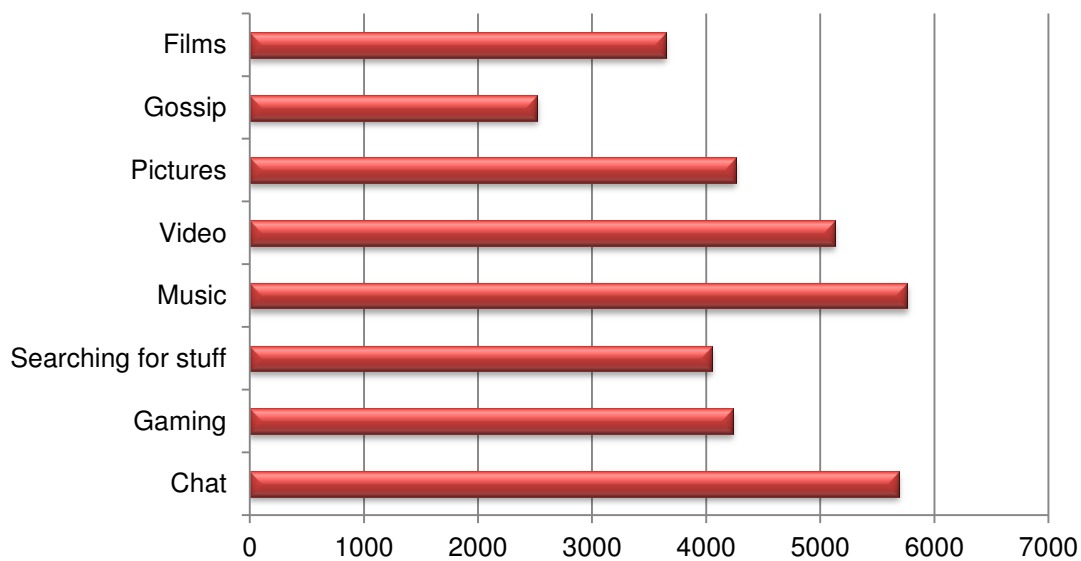
Ways of accessing online content

Finally, we wanted to learn more about the ways in which young people accessed online content. Having a clear picture of this is important in terms of intervention and prevention relating to any online activity, including bullying that takes place online. This information is shown below and indicates that smartphones (e.g., iPhone, Samsung Galaxy) are the most common way for young people to access the internet. Tablets (e.g., iPad, Kindle Fire), laptops, and games consoles (e.g., Xbox, Playstation) are also commonly used.

In contrast to what may have been expected only a few years ago, the PC is much less frequently used. New technologies and devices make it ever more challenging for adults (parents, teachers, and others) to maintain an effective level of awareness on how and when young people are accessing the internet. The changing landscape in terms of social media sites, websites, and web-enabled devices also highlights the importance of helping young people to learn how to behave responsibly and safely when online.

Figure 9: Number of children and young people reporting different forms of accessing online content.
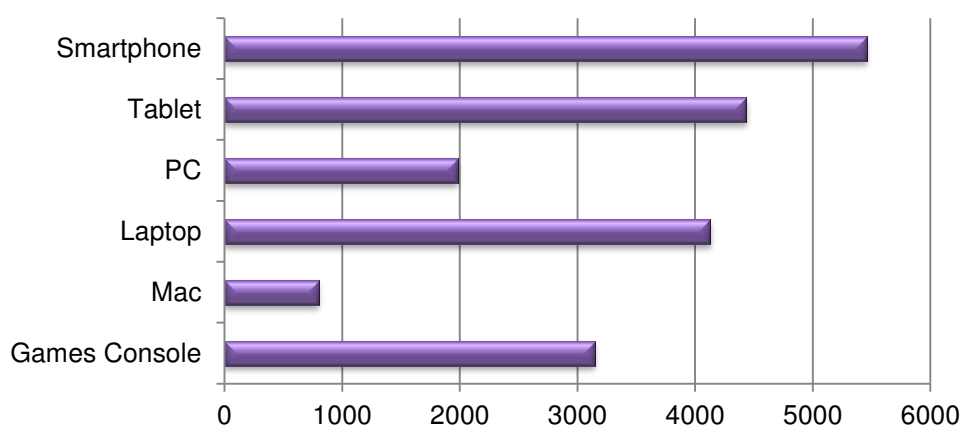
Conclusion

Behaviours such as name calling, hurtful comments and spreading rumours that make people feel angry, sad and upset happen both face to face and online. While some children and young people will experience bullying either face to face or online, they also experience bullying that is a combination of both face to face and online behaviour.

It is clear from this research that young people employ a range of strategies to cope with bullying; some are more successful than others. Some will make them feel better without actually stopping the bullying. This is still a vital part of responding to bullying, strategies that make young people feel better will increase their sense of agency and promote resilience.

Adults need to promote these coping strategies as well as promote and utilise strategies that help stop the behaviour too. It is not a case of one or the other but using a range of strategies that help people cope and reduce the impact of behaviour as well as ones that can stop bullying.

We should also note that a high number of children and young people who are bullied want to and do tell their parents (48%) and they can make a difference; we must continue to support parents and carers to have the confidence and information to respond effectively. The same applies to friends and to teachers who are also providing support.

The research shows that the most successful anti-bullying interventions are those that tackle the ethos and culture of the school rather than just focusing on individual incidents as and when they occur. So, interventions such as buddying, mentoring, and having clear anti-bullying policies were seen as more effective by the young people than reporting forms, worry boxes, and playground monitors.

This research also shows that young people engage with social media and internet content on a daily basis, it is an integral part of their daily lives. For the vast majority of children and young people, they interact with people they know. We must recognise this development and ensure that all policies on behaviour and relationships reflect the fact relationships with peers include a significant online dimension.

They go online to chat, listen to music and to play games. Children and young people access internet content on mobile devices such as phones and tablets more than any other devices such as a PC or laptop.

Next Steps

We will further analyse the data we have collected and use it to help develop effective policy and practice around bullying. The data is likely to help us to address some questions more effectively including: -

- Given the relatively low proportion of exclusively online bullying, and the similarity of online and offline bullying behaviour, to what extent is a specific response to online bullying needed?
- What are the appropriate responses to gender specific differences in experiences of bullying?
- How can we help schools to further develop an anti-bullying ethos? And how can we continue to ensure children and young people are involved and included in this process?
- How can we continue to support parents to respond when their children tell them about being bullied?