Blocking Cyberbullying: Findings From a National Study On Cyberbullying Among Youth

Facebook. OKcupid. Kik Messenger. Apps and social media outlets like these are nothing new to young people. In fact, these platforms are particularly useful for connecting youth to friends, family, and the world. But there is a drawback with this mass connection. As social communication becomes more and more digitized, cyberbullying in the form of harassment, digital stalking, and threats has been on the rise. As compared to face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying is especially harmful because it has the ability to follow youth into their homes. YTH and Vodafone teamed up to investigate the state of cyberbullying: how it's happening, when it's happening, and how young people are dealing with it.

Here are some of the major findings that came out of this investigation:

SUICIDE

Many focus group members were able to think of stories they had heard of young people being cyberbullied into depression and anxiety, and in some tragic cases, suicide.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Youth shared stories of rape, sexual violence, and sexual harassment that happened to some of the young women they knew at school. When sexual harassment, violence, and even cases of rape occur on social media, the effects of cyberbullying are often both extreme and long-lasting.

MENTAL HEALTH

Participants shared that the experience of being cyberbullied weaves itself into many aspects of your life and beyond your social networks. Preventing cyberbullying does not translate to a simple "log out"; in fact, many young people feel that it affects their friendships, school interactions, and family relationships in the long-term.

BODY IMAGE

A young person's physique was identified as a common source for cyberbullying attacks, particularly for young women. At such a critical age for self-confidence, particularly in relation to their own bodies, girls are experiencing cyberbullying and body shaming from both boys and girls.

VIOLENCE IN VIDEO GAMES

Whether mobile-based casual gamers or "hardcore" console and PC gamers, were a popular medium of entertainment for the majority of focus group participants. However it was common knowledge that video game chats and forums often—almost always—led to verbal harassment and violence.

GENDER, SEXUALITY, RACE

For participants who identified within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) spectrum and/or as youth of color, the internet was often a respite from heteronormative and white culture. However, homophobic, transphobic, racist, and sexist comments can be pervasive, particularly on public forums where the demographic profile of a person is known.

CONCLUSIONS

Cyberbullying is a growing issue among young people across the nation. Many young people are impacted by cyberbullying; whether they are:

directly being targeted

supporting a friend experiencing it

or a part of a community recovering from tragic events.

At the same time, technology is constantly changing and weaving itself into our daily lives. While cyberbullying may not completely stop, we have an opportunity to empower young people to maintain their sense of self and well being both online and offline.