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Cyberbullying Public Awareness Research

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for Public Safety Canada

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Executive Summary

Prepared for Public Safety Canada by Environics Research

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Executive Summary

1. Background and objectives

Public Safety Canada (PSC) wants to better understand how to effectively prevent and address cyberbullying. In Spring 2019, Cyberbullying Public Awareness Research was conducted to serve as a baseline measurement of Canadian youth and parents of youth in terms of their knowledge, experience, awareness, attitudes and behaviours with respect to cyberbullying. That information was used to develop and implement a multi-year public awareness campaign on cyberbullying.

This research study conducted in the Fall of 2022 aims to measure the extent to which there have been any shifts in Canadian youth and parents of youth knowledge, awareness and behaviours about cyberbullying, in comparison to the findings from the survey conducted in 2019. POR findings will also determine if Canadian youth and parents of youth are now more aware about where to get help if they are dealing with the issue of cyberbullying. In this case, the two target audiences are Canadian youth, aged 14 to 24, as well as parents of youth who are between the ages of 10 and 24.

Research findings will support future policy and communications plans and activities regarding public awareness, and will help determine where the cyberbullying campaign could potentially shift focus in coming years.

2. Methodology

Environics Research conducted two online surveys of Canadians. The first survey was with 809 youth aged 14 to 24, and the second survey was of 603 parents with children between 10 and 24 years of age. Quotas were set by age, gender and region and the data were weighted to ensure the sample is representative of these populations according to the most recently available Census information.

As an online survey is a non-probability sample, no margin of sampling error is reported.

This size of sample provides robust data to understand behaviours, opinions and attitudes within the total population and sub-groups of interest for parents and youth.

More information about the methodology for this survey is included in Appendix A.

3. Cost of research

The cost of this research was \$87,558.05 (HST included).

4. Key findings

Youth are spending more time online than they did in 2019. Cyberbullying continues to affect a substantial minority of youth.

Safety and technology. The majority of youth are spending more than five hours a day using online social media. The daily average now stands at six hours, compared to about five in 2019. Majorities also continue to use the internet for social interaction multiple times daily. However, while Instagram, YouTube and text messaging are

the most common types of social media sites or apps used by youth, Discord and TikTok have become more popular since 2019.

Parents' perceptions of their children's technology use are similar, though they have less awareness of their children's use of Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Discord, Twitter and Reddit.

- One-third of youth indicate that they feel *very safe* while online, and even fewer parents feel the same way about their children when online – results that have remained consistent since 2019.
- While about six in ten or more youth report positive experiences with texting, messaging, gaming and using social media, these proportions have declined since 2019. This decline is most prominent for gaming, where just under six in ten report positive experiences, compared to three-quarters in 2019.

Perceptions of cyberbullying. Awareness of cyberbullying among both parents and youth remains at almost identical levels as in 2019, where majorities are at least somewhat aware, with youth being more likely to be very aware than parents. Awareness is particularly prominent among parents whose children have experienced cyberbullying or who have witnessed it themselves. As was the case in 2019, most youth think that cyberbullying is a serious problem for young people in Canada; however, parents continue to be more likely to hold this opinion.

- Most youth and parents continue to believe that cyberbullying is illegal. However, this opinion is even stronger among those who speak French and/or live in Quebec.
- Youth most often learn about cyberbullying from school or teachers, followed by news stories, ads or public service announcements. Youth in Quebec and Atlantic Canada are less likely to learn about cyberbullying from news stories; however, these youth are more likely to learn about cyberbullying from their parents.
- While around four in ten youth and parents say that everyone is equally likely to be cyberbullied, perceived specific targets of cyberbullying are more likely to include those who are viewed as unattractive, people who are gay, lesbian, queer or those who identify as gender diverse.

Experiences of cyberbullying. Steady since 2019, three in ten youth say they have personally experienced cyberbullying at some point. Two in ten parents report that any of their children have been cyberbullied. This gap in perception may have something to do with the declining proportion of children who come to their parents right away to tell them about the cyberbullying, according to parents. While close to four in ten parents say their children came to them right away, this proportion has declined from 2019. Parents are now more likely to hear from their child long after it has happened or, increasingly, from another source.

Among youth who have been cyberbullied, three in ten have experienced it within the last three months.

Parents indicate similar time frames for their children, but are slightly less likely to know about incidents within the last month.

Compared to 2019, youth are increasingly experiencing cyberbullying on Instagram and less so on Facebook. However, parents are less likely to identify Instagram as a platform where their child was cyberbullied. Name-calling and negative comments about physical appearance continue to be the most common types of cyberbullying experienced. However, youth are now more likely to mention physically threatening messages and negative comments about mental illness or race/ethnicity. Most cyberbullied youth report that the cyberbully was someone from school, an anonymous person or a friend/former friend.

- As in 2019, youth are more likely to respond to being cyberbullied by blocking the bully, or talking to a friend or parent about it. As a response, parents are more likely to talk to their children and be supportive. Among youth, girls are more likely to talk to a friend as a response, while boys are more likely to ignore it or do nothing.
- Most youth and parents say the cyberbullying stopped after they took action, similar to 2019.

About half of youth who were cyberbullied continue to say it was a very hurtful experience. And while still a majority, parents are less likely to consider the cyberbullying a very hurtful experience for their child compared to 2019. The same proportion (three-quarters) of parents also say it was a very hurtful experience for them personally, also down from 2019.

A majority of youth continue to be concerned about being cyberbullied in the future, as do most parents about their children. Parents who are most concerned include younger parents (under 35) and those with kids under 18.

Witnessing cyberbullying. Four in ten youth and two in ten parents have witnessed cyberbullying directed at others.

Among youth who have witnessed it, most say it happened to a friend/former friend. In line with this, parents who have witnessed cyberbullying are also likely to say it was a friend of one of their children. Youth continue to typically report witnessing cyberbullying that involves name-calling or negative comments about physical appearance. However, they are now more likely than they were in 2019 to witness physically threatening messages.

- After witnessing or hearing about someone being cyberbullied, youth are more likely to say that they talked to the victim and tried to be supportive, though this proportion has decreased since 2019. Parents are more likely to say they talked to their own child about cyberbullying or tried to be supportive to the victim.

Perpetrating cyberbullying. One in ten youth admit to having cyberbullied someone; however, only four percent of parents say the same about their children. Despite this, almost four in ten parents are at least somewhat concerned that their child might cyberbully someone in the future, similar to 2019.

Youth who may have cyberbullied someone say that the victim was most often a friend or former friend, or someone from school. The most common reasons are feeling that the person they bullied started it/deserved it, out of anger or thinking it was funny.

- Three in ten parents who say their child may have committed cyberbullying say that they confronted their child/disciplined them; however, only about one in ten chose to take action by restricting access to the internet.

Responding to cyberbullying. Parents are more likely to talk to their child and be supportive, and keep records of the incidents; while youth are more likely to say they would block the cyberbully or ignore the incident. The choice to ignore it and not respond is unchanged since 2019.

Most parents and youth remain concerned that cyberbullying is a growing problem that is not taken seriously enough, and that most cyberbullies get away with it.

Among parents, fathers are more likely to be confident the problem would go away if their child took steps to deal with it. Fathers are also more likely to think their child would talk about being cyberbullied to their friends first, before them. Compared to Anglophone youth, Francophone youth are more comfortable discussing being

cyberbullied with their parents, and are more likely to trust authorities to take it seriously if they reported it.

Nine in ten youth and over nine in ten parents are still not aware of any help lines or websites offering support for those being cyberbullied.

Political Neutrality Certification

I. Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify as senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada, and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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