

THE CYBER ABUSE PROJECT

Listening Session Analysis



Produced by:



**Because Everyone Deserves a
Healthy Relationship**



CAP is supported by grant, 2016-TA-AX-K070, from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

THE CYBER ABUSE PROJECT

Listening Session Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1 - 3
ASSESSMENT & RESPONSE	4 - 16
RESOURCES	16 -17



CAP is supported by grant, 2016-TA-AX-K070, from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

Listening Session Analysis

INTRODUCTION

The Cyber Abuse Project (CAP), an initiative of Break the Cycle and the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, provides training and technical assistance for criminal justice professionals on the use and misuse of technology in sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking (including cyber-stalking) cases, particularly those involving young people ages 12-24. The term “cyber abuse” will be used to refer to these types of cases throughout this report.

Process

Towards development of new technical assistance resources for criminal justice professionals, CAP partners conducted a series of 10 listening sessions and interviews with criminal justice professionals, including campus law enforcement, campus safety staff, school resource officers and administrators, judges, court personnel, and youth from across the country.

The sessions were designed to gather input from those responding to and impacted by cases of cyber abuse reported by students, including minors. Gathering data from these sessions will inform resource and training development for criminal justice professionals, campus safety personnel, and school resource officers.

Responses from all session participants were gathered and analyzed to identify strategies and challenges for responding to cyber abuse cases among youth. This analysis breaks down participant themes based on audience; adult participants and youth participants.



Listening Session Analysis

Framework for Analysis: Socio-Ecological Model

Assessment categories and themes developed in the listening sessions and interviews are rooted in the various levels of the socio-ecological model. From individual behavior and understanding of boundaries, to school and law enforcement response, participant interviews and listening sessions, build on the societal impact of cyber abuse cases among students and young adults.

Individual: participant awareness, attitudes, and understanding of Cyber Abuse

Interpersonal: relationships between teens and young adults, as it impacts Cyber Abuse

Organizational: identifying opportunities for support, direct services and help resources

Community (Societal): interactions between participants and community resource outlets

Policy: local laws, campus policies and approach towards prosecuting cyber abuse crimes

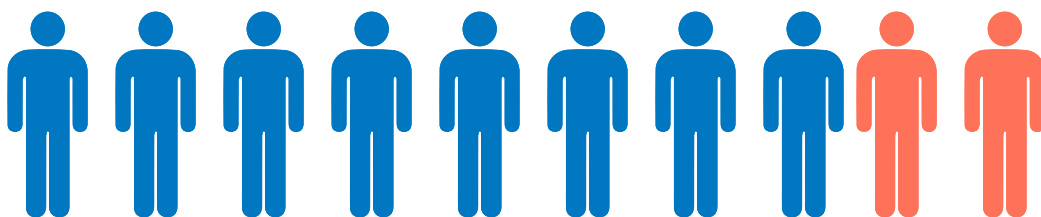


Listening Session Analysis

Background & Demographics

In each session, participants were asked a series of questions to assess participants' level of awareness, response strategies, and knowledge and availability of resources to address cyber abuse cases among youth, including areas where participants saw gaps or challenges. Adult participants included various criminal justice professionals. Youth participants were between the ages of 12-24 or identified as middle school, high school, or college students.

Participant Type	Location	Listening Session/Interview	Number of participants (36 total)	Date
University Police	Los Angeles, CA	Interview	1	12/1/2017
University Detective	Long Beach, CA	Interview	1	11/22/2017
DC Superior Court Criminal Justice Professionals	Washington, DC	Listening Session	7	01/26/17
DC Superior Court Judges	Washington, DC	Interviews	2	3/6/17
High School & College Youth	Silver Springs, MD	Listening session	5	3/7/17
Youth identifying as LGBTQ	Washington, DC	Listening Session	11	8/31/17
Secondary School Resource Officer	Austin, TX	Interview	1	12/14/17
Secondary School Resource Officer	Austin, TX	Interview	1	12/15/2017
Secondary School Resource Officer	Austin, TX	Interview	1	1/9/18
Campus Safety Staff	Washington, DC	Listening Session	6	1/22/18



■ ADULTS ■ YOUTH

Listening Session Analysis

ASSESSING PARTICIPANT LEVEL OF AWARENESS:

The first set of questions assessed the participants' level of awareness of cyber abuse as an issue.

Adult Participant Questions:

- Do you see cases of abuse using technology? If yes, what kinds of cases are you currently seeing? What platforms do you see being misused?
- If not, why do you think that you are not seeing these cases?
- What else do you know and what else would you like to know about digital/online abuse?



Youth Participant Questions:

- What social media platforms do you use most often?
- How can those be used to further cyber abuse?
- What are some examples?

IDENTIFYING THEMES:

Several themes were raised during listening sessions with both adult and youth participants. Ranging from individual perceptions of the impact of cyber abuse, to systemic flaws in evidence gathering, and processing student reports.

Listening Session Analysis

Themes from adult participants:

Cases involving Non Consensual Sharing

While non-consensual sharing of intimate images (NCS), or sharing someone's nude/semi-nude content without their permission, can occur without blackmail, the cases shared the most by adult participants involved using NCS to blackmail the victim. Like all NCS cases, cases involving blackmail could be perpetrated by a dating partner or ex partner, but was not limited to partners.

Some criminal justice professionals were aware of “take down” strategies to assist survivors in taking down NCS images from websites. They also recognize that this can be a tedious process if the abuser is using multiple platforms to post the image. *“[We] connected the survivor to a non-profit that helped her get the image offline. Unfortunately, the abuser ended up using the image on another platform.”*

Cases involving dating abuse

Within the context of dating abuse cases, cyber abuse is not usually the only method of abuse; It is often accompanied by other abusive behaviors such as physical, sexual or emotional abuse.

Adult participants also report that technology and social media apps are being used as a tool to stalk or harass a former or current dating partner. However, these cyber abuse elements are not typically seen as the primary concern for youth survivors.

For example, one first responder shares, *“A student came [to report] her boyfriend had been stalking her and being physically abusive... [she] also mentioned that he was messaging her constantly. [...] Technology abuse was more of an afterthought for the survivor. [...] some survivors don't see it as a big deal.”*



Listening Session Analysis

Themes from youth participants:

Knowledge based on lived experiences

Knowledge about cyber abuse is generally based on personal/individual experiences of oneself or peers with the most common examples being threats of exposure and physical harm. The most frequently mentioned platforms used for cyber abuse identified by youth participants included Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. Overall, youth see tracking someone's whereabouts as disrespectful.

Trust and Boundaries

With regard to sharing personal passwords, youth participants varied in their opinions. Most were comfortable having access to someone else's passwords but may not want to share their own. In some cases youth see sharing their passwords as part of friendship, relationships, and signaling trust among peers, though they also recognize the potential for mistreatment if something in the relationship goes wrong. *"I would have to change passwords once that person is out of my life and that's a lot to do."*

Sharing naked, semi-naked, or sexual pictures/selfies of themselves with friends and partners is acceptable among youth participants and is seen as a tool for building trust and keeping things interesting. *"If you don't share pictures with your partner, you're boring."* Youth participants also recognized the potential for harm and reported that sharing someone's pictures without permission is a form of betrayal. Furthermore, youth see the potential to use these pictures as a tool to control or get revenge on a partner "just in case" a partner is misbehaving. *"I could easily expose you. I won't do that, but I could."*



Gaps:

Both groups seem to have an understanding of cyber abuse. Youth tend to acknowledge cyber abuse among their peers, but it seems difficult for them to see the areas where they may be crossing boundaries or having their own boundaries crossed. It could be helpful to aid young people to analyze the gray areas with regard to cyber abuse and boundaries. Additionally, adult participants have varied experience with the types of technologies utilized to commit abuse; this can impact an investigation their ability to ask questions about use that could lead to more substantial cases being built.

Listening Session Analysis

Participant Quotes:

"If you don't share pictures with your partner you're boring."

"I could easily expose you. I won't do that, but I could."

**Technology-Based
Dating Abuse**

"...her ex-boyfriend had used [her nude photo] as his Xbox Live photo."
"...when a couple breaks up, one will send nude[s] of an ex to everyone [...] and then [they] trash talk them."

**Non-Consensual
Sharing of Intimate
Images**

"Finsta: doing bad stuff using a fake insta"

"...he was messaging her constantly..."

**Cyber Stalking/
Harassment**



Listening Session Analysis

ASSESSING PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE OF RESPONSE STRATEGIES:

Adult Participant Questions:

- What is the process when [cyber abuse cases] are reported? How do you collect evidence?
- How can your response be enhanced to better serve students?



Youth Participant Questions:

- What has your experience been with discussing cyber abuse with an adult like a lawyer, judge, investigator, parent, police officer or prosecutor?
- What do you wish adults understood about technology and social media?
- What would make you more likely to trust an adult like a police officer or lawyer if you needed help? How could they earn your trust?

.....

The second set of questions asked of participants was related to their existing knowledge around responses to cases of cyber abuse.

Listening Session Analysis

Themes from adult participants:

Understanding of response processes

Criminal justice professionals and other adults responding to cyber abuse cases among youth generally understand procedural processes for reporting and investigating these types of cases. Depending on the professional, the response can vary. It is common for law enforcement professionals to immediately begin gathering evidence, to determine the intent of actions and identify potential threats or annoyances. Law enforcement will move forward with conducting an initial assessment to determine if there is a credible threat based on actions and derived from evidence gathered.

Campus safety professionals tend to explore all options with a young person including counseling, online and in-person safety planning (especially if the abuse was within a dating context), and filing a report with the police or via Title IX. Overall, adult respondents typically advise youth not to delete potential evidence that could include text messages, screenshots, messages or posts from social media platforms, etc.

For adults, there are some state specific laws that differ from state to state regarding cyber abuse, and many first responders are not always up to speed on the most current laws in their state.

Listening Session Analysis

Themes from adult participants:

Evidence Gathering

One method for collecting evidence is to put out a Preservation Request. *“Anytime an officer has an inkling that there is something technological happening, they need to do a preservation request for the site so that they put a freeze on the perpetrator’s account. This also ensures that [the perpetrator] will not delete anything that has to do with that account.”* If an officer determines an urgency or threat to the victims life, evidence collection from social media can be expedited. Otherwise, it can be a lengthy process.

One strategy for validating that a perpetrator intended a social media post to be harassing or abusive is to record victim calls with the perpetrator to seek an admission of guilt. *“An example of this is a perpetrator saying, ‘I’m really sorry about what I did last night.’”*

A common strategy employed by police in cyber abuse/misuse cases is to issue a cease and desist call to the alleged abuser. Police will also, where appropriate, recommend that the victim pursue a protection order in court. One participant recommends to survivors that they create a new and separate email account to keep track of evidence in their case.

Listening Session Analysis

Themes from youth participants:

Trusting Caring Adults

Overall, youth participants do not talk to adults about cyber abuse and don't feel adults would be supportive or be able to help. This includes criminal justice professionals, parents, and teachers. *"There's nothing a judge could do."* *"The courthouse is filled with old conservative people [judges]."* Youth participants believe parents would blame them or be disappointed in them if they had issues with cyber abuse. Though youth participants see teachers as being interested in hearing about these issues, they do not believe teachers would know how to deal with the issue or may dismiss the behavior as "just bullying." Many students of color who participated in the listening sessions reported avoiding police engagement all together, this in many ways is in line with youth narratives around injustice faced by communities of color, in particularly lack of trust among youth with law enforcement personnel.

Validation and Minimization

When asked how they'd like criminal justice professionals to respond, youth participants reported wanting to be taken seriously and have their use of social media not be negatively judged. Youth participants report wanting adults to be more aware of the serious implications of bullying and cyber abuse and to not minimize the harm that comes from cyber abuse. Youth participants also reported that if they: 1) knew what they reported would be taken seriously; 2) thought they would not be blamed for what happened to them; and 3) thought the adult (teacher, police, or parent) would be able to provide them with concrete help to end the abuse, they would report it to an adult.



Listening Session Analysis

Gaps:

Adult participants do not always approach youth survivors in a trauma-informed or youth-centered way. Youth participants mention not being taken seriously. This appears to be an area of growth for the field. While youth participants generally seem skeptical of adult interventions, building trust and sharing knowledge between adults and youth could prove to be a beneficial strategy for responding to cyber abuse.

Not all adult responders consider and engage in safety planning with cyber abuse victims. Some may think another adult already has done this. It would be important for all adult responders to be familiar with safety planning or connecting a young person to someone who can help them safety plan. Parent involvement in cyber abuse cases involving minors is a tricky area for criminal justice professionals to navigate: “Everyone is passing blame. So who do we hold accountable? Is it the parents or the students?”

The ways in which adults provide help, do not always offer full support in cyber abuse cases. Though adult responders are advising youth to save screenshots and other forms of digital evidence, these screenshots may be found inadmissible by some judges due to their vulnerability to manipulation. There is a lack of knowledge around reporting processes and systems across jurisdictions. Especially around when and how campus safety officers need to engage local law enforcement.

This is extremely relevant for secondary campus safety professionals, who often deal with cases reported to them that happen off campus or on the weekend. Although both University and Secondary schools have reporting systems and software, it is unclear what student information is shared and how much is communicated between school and criminal justice systems.

Listening Session Analysis

ASSESSING PARTICIPANT KNOWLEDGE & ACCESS TO RESOURCES

The third set of questions asked to participants addressed existing resources that support criminal justice professionals in their investigation of cyber abuse crimes among youth. This series of questions was not asked of youth participants. Questions included:

- What is the best tool you've received/are using in assisting you to do your work with these cases?
- How tech savvy is your office? What resources do you find most useful related to digital/online abuse?
- What questions come up for you around serving clients experiencing cyberstalking or technology abuse? Are there additional questions when it relates to minor clients? What do you consider to be gaps in knowledge among criminal justice professionals when supporting victims of cyberstalking or technology abuse?



Listening Session Analysis

Themes from adult participants:

Understanding social media platforms

It is very common that adult responders are using Google searches to assist with their learning as well as other self-taught practices to educate themselves regarding the social media platforms being used by youth. Their experience varies across the board though some groups of professionals prioritize professional development around technology and apps. One promising practice for staying up to date on commonly used apps by youth was to create opportunities to learn from youth, *“its harder to keep up with specific apps. If we have questions, we ask our student advocates.” “[One police department] makes a point of hiring younger staff who can keep up with tech and teach the older officers.”*

Gaps:

Most participants lacked experience and comfort with technology and apps that are most frequently used by youth. *“It is hard to keep up with apps and social media forums as there are so many and they are always changing.”* Because technology changes so frequently it also can be challenging for investigation protocols, laws, and training of staff to keep pace with technology.

Most social media related training is self-taught or reserved for tech crimes units within an organization. One concern about technical assistance in this area is that many webinars and trainings provide general information about cyber abuse that service providers already know. Participants expressed an interest in training on practical strategies and approaches and were open to learning from youth. *“I would love to see youth train adults.”* Another suggested strategy was to provide training opportunities where multidisciplinary professionals can cross-train one another.

Listening Session Analysis

Other questions that came up in this section from participants include:

1. Are there any non-legal remedies to stop cyber abuse via apps when survivors do not want to report?
2. How can we give survivors a gauge of what type of case is a strong enough/not strong enough case for police investigation?
3. How do we communicate additional risks for youth who are minors such as possible pornography charges?



SUGGESTED RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SUPPORT:

Throughout the listening sessions, participants suggested tools, topics, & resources from which they could benefit. Based on these suggestions and identified gaps in knowledge or resources, we have identified the following list for resource development and technical assistance responses for the field; some of which have informed products created under this grant:

- Resources for trauma-informed strategies for filing civil cases
- Cyber abuse severity assessment tool for field officers
- Improving immediate referral list for cyber abuse victim support
- Safety planning tool that is youth centered and specific to cyber abuse safety
- Handouts for victims of cyber abuse (red flags, evidence needs)
- Media resources for public awareness around cyber abuse such as videos and infographics
- Training on relationship building between law enforcement, schools, adults and youth
- Content to better inform legal compliance and reporting cyber abuse

Listening Session Analysis



Cyber Abuse Project (CAP) is supported by grant, 2016-TA-AX-K070, from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.



For more information contact:

info@breakthecycle.org
<https://www.breakthecycle.org/cyber-abuse-project>

