ONLINE HARMS - PILOT EVALUATION

BACKGROUND

In response to the emerging concerns around the impacts of online experiences on young people, the West Yorkshire VRP commissioned research to capture young people's experiences online and to understand the potential impacts this has.

This research highlighted the range of potentially harmful experiences young people face online, with many young people, professionals, parents and carers feeling that these experiences contribute to poor psychological outcomes. Our research reviewed the existing support and interventions available and established that while there are many resources focused on online harms for children and young adults, there is limited information globally on what works to prevent and mitigate harm.

To address the identified gap in evidence-based, evaluated, education-based interventions tackling online harms, the VRP commissioned a pilot of an of an online harms educational and support provision within a school in Bradford, guided by the principles and evidence established in our research.

Evaluation was built in at the start of the project to establish the effectiveness and delivery of the pilot and importantly to contribute to the evidence based in addressing and mitigating online harms.

AIMS & METHODOLOGY

Aims

- To understand the efficacy of the pilot, through establishing increased awareness around identifying online harms, knowledge of how to stay safe online and knowledge of support mechanisms should online harm be encountered.
- To understand what elements of delivery worked and did not work well in delivering positive outcomes for children, staff and parents/carers.
- To understand whether this pilot should be implemented across more schools in the region and to provide recommendations for improvements in delivery.

Methodology

- Mixed methodology using primarily an 'in-session' evaluation
- Data was collected pre and post session/support
- Immediate feedback was gathered from PSHE teachers
- Focus groups
- Session observations
- Teacher, provider and stakeholder interviews
- Pre pilot survey
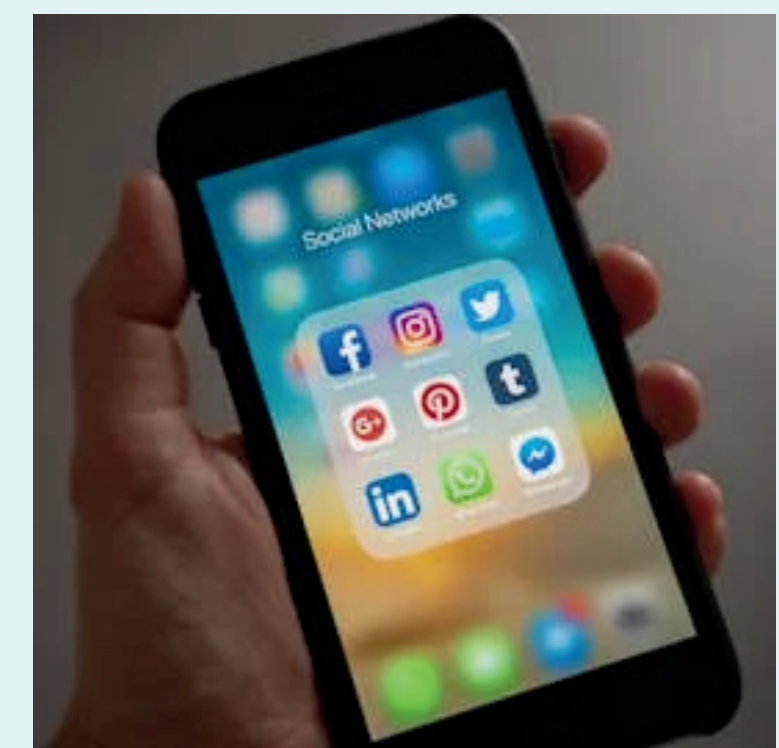
LIMITATIONS

- The qualitative findings draw from a small sample size, particularly with regard to teacher feedback forms (n=9) teacher interviews (n=1) and in-class observations which occurred in 2 classrooms

- There is the potential for bias in the data collected directly by providers. This may lead to an overestimation of the provider's positive impact or effectiveness and should be considered when interpreting the findings

- Workshop sessions were delivered to year 5 and 6 pupils in June and July. In-class evaluations were not conducted for these year groups as the evaluation team were unable to organise focus groups. Therefore, data in relation to these young people's experiences is unavailable for these year groups

Research report   Evaluation report

FINDINGS

- There is a need for further education and support in this area, and particularly the delivery of a whole school approach to this

- Parent/carer and young people's knowledge of where to seek support in the event of harm was initially low although young people's knowledge in this area has increased over the pilot

- For those receiving group or one-to-one support the areas of greatest gains in knowledge related to grooming and exploitation and identifying misinformation

- As a result of the pilot young people report increases in understanding of the risks and potential harms that can occur and how to reduce these risks

- There are some reports of behaviour change as a result of the pilot, such as increasing social media privacy settings

- Young people's recollection of the workshops was good 4-6 weeks after the session was delivered and the use of case studies and real life examples were identified as being particularly useful in their learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Young people identified a need to make the sessions longer and more interactive. Future iterations of the project should clearly establish the amount of classroom time that can be made available for workshops

- Young people identified additional topics that will be of benefit including Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, the use of deep fakes and misinformation as well as exploitation and grooming

- The co-production of sessions with pupils will increase opportunities for the delivery of a whole school approach

- The development of a brief assessment/triage of young people identified for one-to-one or group based support would be useful in determining the likely needs and duration of support required

West Yorkshire
Violence Reduction Partnership