

Ember: Findings from the youth survey

Understanding OCSEA, online harm and reporting preferences
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We would also like to acknowledge the children and young people (CYP) who participated in and completed the survey.

List of acronyms

Acronym

CYP	Children and Young People
OCSEA	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
RQ	Research Question
SES	Socio-economic Status
SWGfL	South West Grid for Learning

Executive summary

This report presents findings from the survey strand of the Ember project, which explores how children and young people (CYP) aged 13-24 understand online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA), what types of online harm they believe should be reported, and how they prefer to report such experiences.

The survey was conducted using a purpose built, age appropriate online questionnaire and was designed to be exploratory in nature. It sits alongside other strands of the Ember research programme, including survivor / victim conversations, landscape analysis, stakeholder engagement and an evidence scoping exercise. Findings reflect the views of survey participants rather than the UK population as a whole and should be interpreted in light of the survey's skewed sample profile.

Overall, the findings point to a gap between recognition, confidence and action. While many CYP in the survey can identify core forms of OCSEA and express their views on what should be reported, awareness of OCSEA as a concept is uneven, confidence in recognising exploitation is often cautious rather than high, and emotional and practical barriers can limit reporting. These gaps have important implications for the design of education, reporting routes and support mechanisms if they are to be genuinely youth-centred.

Headline findings

1. Awareness and understanding of OCSEA are partial, uneven and shaped by language

Just over half of participants (56%) had heard of the term OCSEA prior to participation in the survey. Awareness is heavily shaped by formal education, with limited reinforcement through everyday environments such as social media or peer networks.

While most CYP recognise core exploitative behaviours, there is uncertainty around peer-to-peer harm and less confidence identifying more subtle scenarios. Recognition is most strongly associated with visible emotional distress, suggesting that less obvious forms of exploitation may be harder to identify.

2. There is strong consensus on what *should* be reported, but not all harms feel equally reportable

CYP show strong agreement that core OCSEA-related harms - such as grooming, image-based abuse and blackmail - should be reported. However, these same harms are also more frequently seen as difficult to report.

This highlights a clear distinction between perceived seriousness and perceived reportability. Harms involving sexual content or coercion are widely recognised but carry higher emotional and social barriers to disclosure.

3. Trust, safety and human support are central to reporting preferences

CYP primarily understand reporting as telling someone they trust rather than engaging with formal systems. Parents, friends and trusted adults are the most common reporting routes.

Preferences vary across groups, with younger CYP more likely to favour face-to-face reporting, and older CYP and those with experience showing greater openness to digital options.

4. Reporting is shaped by emotional, relational and structural factors

Barriers to reporting extend beyond awareness. Emotional factors such as embarrassment and fear, relational concerns about consequences, and structural gaps in awareness of reporting routes all influence decisions. Improving reporting requires addressing all three dimensions.

Implications

Findings from the survey highlight the need to go beyond awareness-raising alone. Improving understanding of OCSEA requires more than introducing terminology; it requires supporting CYP to recognise exploitation confidently across a range of contexts, including peer-to-peer harm and situations where signs may be subtle rather than overt.

Education and prevention efforts should use language that resonates with CYP's lived experiences, address uncertainty explicitly, and support confidence in recognising harm. Reporting systems must also respond to the emotional, relational and practical barriers identified, ensuring routes are clear, trusted and flexible.

These findings are timely in the context of evolving online environments and increasing recognition of peer-to-peer risks. They provide an evidence base to inform the next phase of work within Ember, including the development of more accessible, youth-centred reporting pathways and support mechanisms.

- Use language and examples that resonate with CYP's lived experiences, rather than relying solely on formal terminology.
- Address uncertainty around peer-to-peer exploitation explicitly, to reduce confusion about what "counts" as OCSEA.
- Support confidence in recognition, particularly in less visible or ambiguous situations, not only those involving clear emotional distress.

Reporting systems and support mechanisms must also respond to these realities. Systems that rely primarily on digital tools or assume high confidence risk excluding those who are unsure, embarrassed or uncertain about what they are experiencing.

1 Research Context

1.1 Situating the survey

Project Ember aims to develop a clearer understanding of how CYP conceptualise OCSEA, what forms of online harm they believe should be reported, and how they want to report such experiences. The project is grounded in the principle that effective reporting systems and support mechanisms must be informed by the perspectives, language and preferences of CYP themselves.

The survey findings presented in this report form one component of a broader programme of research delivered under Project Ember. This wider programme includes:

- Primary research, including conversations with survivors / victims and engagement with key stakeholders.
- Secondary research, including a landscape analysis and a scoping review of the existing evidence base.

Together, these research streams are intended to inform future work focused on improving reporting pathways, guidance and support for CYP. In particular, the research seeks to identify where current approaches may not align with CYP's understanding, expectations or lived experiences, and where there are opportunities to reduce barriers to reporting and improve access to support.

Project Ember is situated within a wider policy and practice context focused on improving how OCSEA is recognised, prevented and responded to. While existing frameworks and guidance set out what constitutes OCSEA and how it should be addressed, there is growing recognition of the need to better understand how CYP themselves perceive harm and navigate reporting in practice.

The Ember research complements existing evidence by foregrounding CYP perspectives and experiences, helping to bridge the gap between formal definitions, system design and lived realities. While existing frameworks define what constitutes OCSEA, much less is known about how CYP understand these definitions in practice, how confidently they recognise OCSEA, and how they interpret harm in ambiguous, peer-to-peer, or emotionally complex situations.

Project Ember therefore places particular emphasis on identifying areas of partial understanding, uncertainty, and misalignment between formal concepts and CYP's lived experiences of online harm.

1.2 Research approach

The findings in this report are based on a purpose built, age appropriate online survey designed specifically for CYP aged 13-24. The survey explored awareness, perceptions and preferences in relation to OCSEA, including how CYP recognise online harm, what types of harm they believe should be reported, and their preferred routes for disclosure and reporting.

The survey explored not only whether CYP were aware of OCSEA, but how they interpreted the concept, how confident they felt in recognising it, and how they navigated uncertainty, particularly in relation to peer to peer and less visible forms of harm.

The research was exploratory in nature and intended to surface patterns, perceptions and areas of tension, rather than to produce statistically representative estimates for the wider population of CYP.

Survey responses were collected between 22 September 2025 and 14 December 2025. The survey was disseminated through SWGfL communication channels, including newsletters and LinkedIn, alongside a link and QR code. Participants under the age of 16 were required to obtain consent from a trusted adult (such as a parent, guardian or teacher), in addition to providing their own informed consent.

1.3 About the sample

A total of 298 young people completed the survey. The achieved sample is not representative of the UK population of CYP and is skewed¹ in several important ways that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings ([Image 1](#)).

In particular, the sample:

- Is heavily weighted towards *younger participants*, especially those aged 13-15.
- Includes a slight over-representation of *female respondents*, with males under-represented.
- Is strongly over-represented by participants living in the *South West*.
- Predominantly reflects *English-speaking, middle-class* backgrounds.
- Shows higher than expected levels of *self-reported disability*.

¹ When compared to UK national statistics for this age group mid-2024 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2025) and the UK disability statistics by Stiebahl, Danechi and Harker (2025).

As a result, the findings reflect the views and experiences of this specific group of CYP rather than the wider population. They should therefore be understood as indicative and exploratory, providing insight into patterns and perspectives rather than population-level estimates.

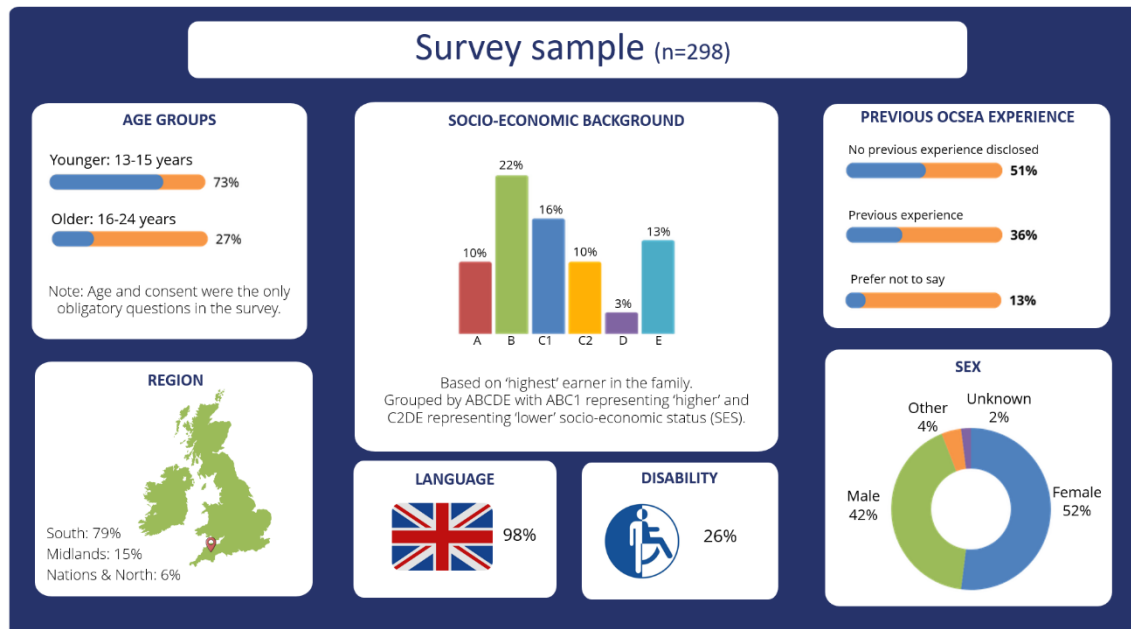


Image 1: Survey sample overview

1.4 Interpretation and use of the findings

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the size and composition of the sample, the data have not been weighted. Applying weights to a relatively small and skewed sample risked reducing the reliability and interpretability of the findings rather than improving them.

Results are therefore reported transparently, with differences by age, sex, socio-economic status and disclosed previous experience² of online harm highlighted where they help to illuminate patterns of understanding, confidence, uncertainty or misalignment.

The findings should be understood as indicative rather than definitive. They are best used to:

- Reveal how CYP make sense of OCSEA in practice, including areas of confidence, uncertainty and ambiguity

² Disclosed previous experience is defined as answering “yes” to either of the following questions: “Have you ever seen or experienced a problem online - for example someone sent messages or asked for things that felt wrong or made you feel uncomfortable?” or “Have you ever experienced or come across something online that felt uncomfortable or wrong - for example, someone sending inappropriate messages or making unwanted requests?”

- Identify areas of confusion or unmet need
- Inform the design and refinement of reporting routes, guidance and support mechanisms
- Generate priorities for further research, testing and engagement

The evidence presented in this report should not be used to:

- Produce population-level estimates
- Assess performance or effectiveness of services
- Make definitive comparisons between demographic groups



Key limitations include: self-selection, variation in interpretation of survey questions, and the skewed demographic profile of the sample. These factors should be considered when interpreting and applying the findings.

1.5 Presentation of the findings

This report presents findings structured around three research questions:

1. What do CYP understand by OCSEA?
2. What (types of) OCSEA & similar online harm do CYP want to report?
3. How do CYP want to report these types of OCSEA & similar online harm?

The fourth research question, concerning the responses CYP want after reporting, was explored through qualitative research.

Findings are reported thematically, drawing together related survey questions to highlight patterns in understanding, experience and reporting preferences. Percentages are included where they support interpretation, with further detail available in the appendix.

2 Findings

2.1 What children and young people understand by OCSEA

This section addresses Research Question 1: *what do CYP understand by OCSEA*. It explores awareness of the term, perceived relevance, understanding of behaviours, and confidence in recognising OCSEA.

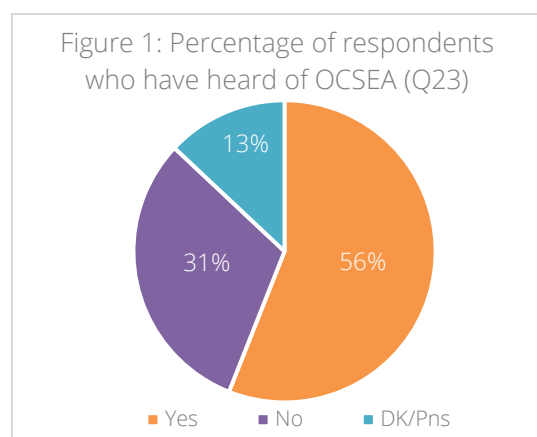
Figures are used selectively to illustrate key patterns, with more detailed breakdowns provided in the appendix.

2.1.1 Awareness of OCSEA and online safety

Awareness of the term “OCSEA”

Just over half of participants (56%) reported having heard of the term *online child sexual exploitation and abuse* prior to taking part in the survey ([Figure 1](#)), while nearly one third (31%) had not encountered the term before. This suggests that terminology commonly used by professionals is not yet consistently familiar to CYP.

Awareness of OCSEA did not vary significantly by age, sex, socio-economic status or previous experience of online harm.



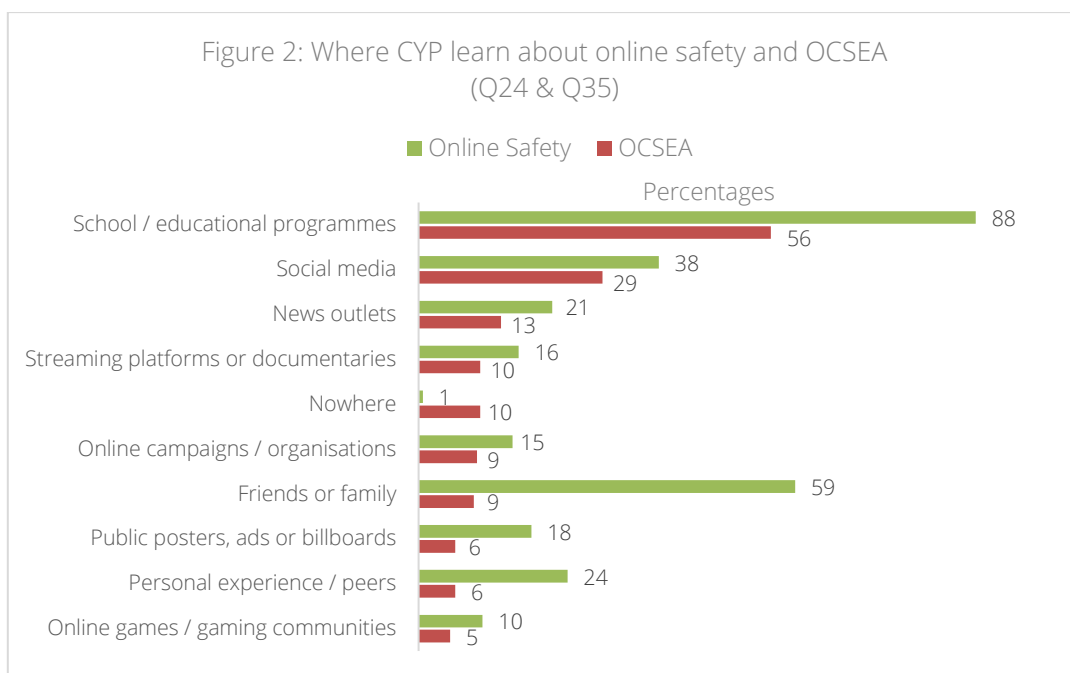
By contrast, online safety was a well-established concept, with very few (2%) participants reporting uncertainty about where they had encountered online safety information. This indicates high familiarity and saturation.

Sources of awareness

Information about online safety was reported to come from a wide range of settings (Figure 2), led by school and educational programmes (88%), and reinforced by family and friends (59%), personal experience (25%), and online or media environments.

Awareness of OCSEA followed a markedly different pattern. Schools and educational programmes were the primary source (56%), but other sources were cited far less frequently, including social media (29%), news outlets (13%), campaigns (9%), and personal or second-hand experience (6%).

This contrast indicates that, unlike online safety, awareness of OCSEA is largely confined to formal educational settings, with limited reinforcement through everyday environments.



Differences in OCSEA awareness

Older participants (16-24 years) were consistently more likely than younger participants (13-15 years) to report awareness of OCSEA across multiple sources, including schools, social media, campaigns, and personal or second-hand experience.

Notably, none of the older participants reported having never heard of OCSEA, compared with 13% of younger participants. Differences by sex were more limited, although participants identifying as “other” were more likely to report encountering information through campaigns (40%).

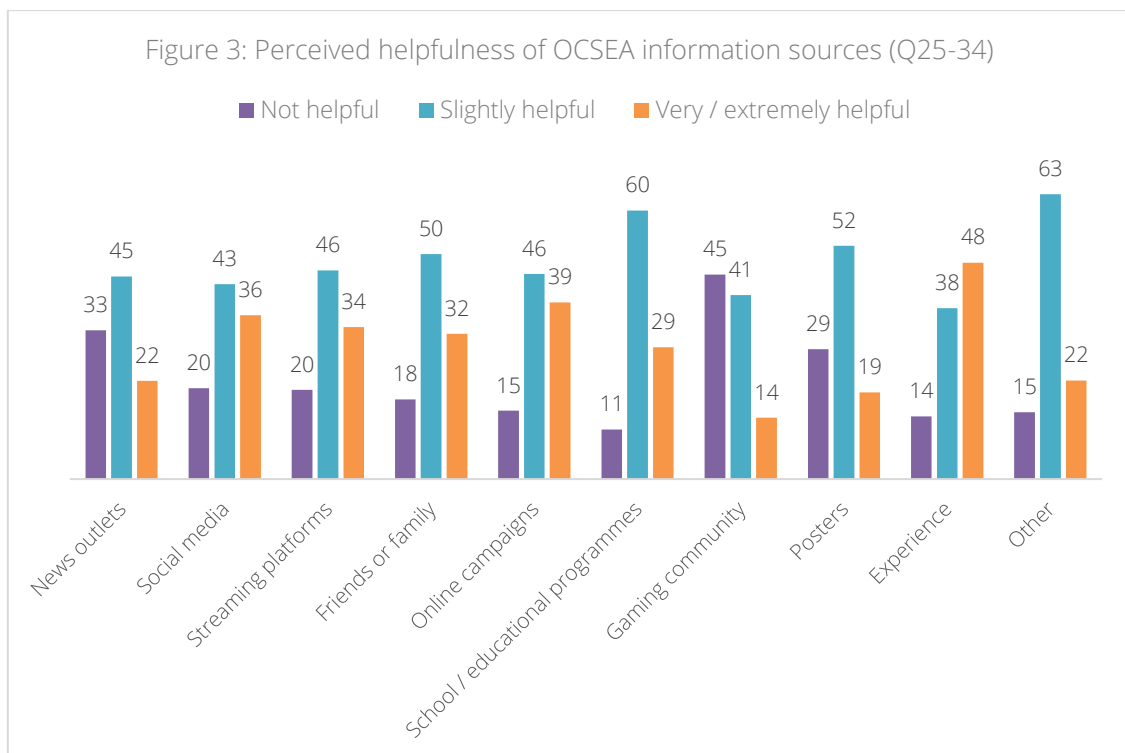
Experience of online harm also shaped awareness; those with lived experience were more likely to report learning through personal stories (13%), while those who preferred not to

disclose their experience were more likely to cite family or friends as information source (17%). More detailed breakdowns and percentages by age, sex and experience are provided in [appendices](#).

Perceived helpfulness of information sources

Although schools and educational programmes were the primary source of awareness about OCSEA, they were not perceived as the most helpful source of information ([Figure 3](#)). Fewer than one third of participants (29%) rated school-based provision as very or extremely helpful.

In contrast, online sources, including social media (36%) and online campaigns or organisations (39%), were more frequently perceived as helpful.

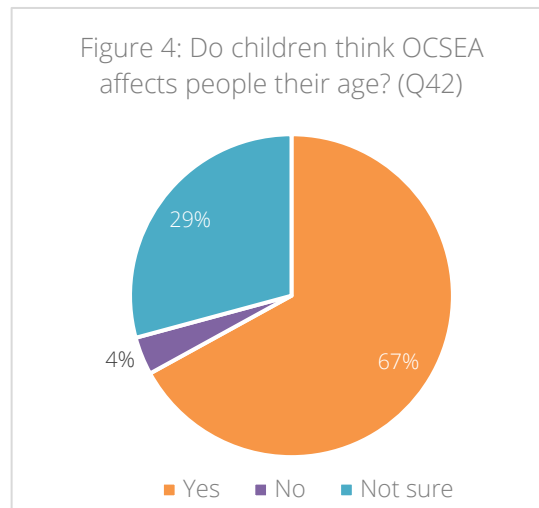


Differences in perceived helpfulness

Perceived helpfulness was broadly similar across demographic groups, although sources based on lived experience and campaigns were more likely to be rated as helpful by older participants (63%) and those with experience of online harm (61%). More detailed differences are described in [appendix 1](#).

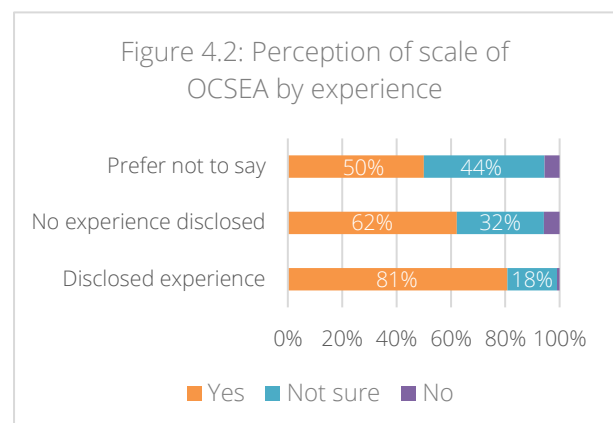
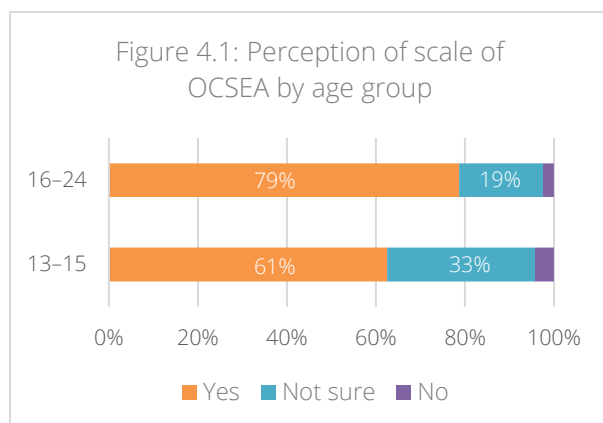
2.1.2 Perceived scale and relevance of OCSEA

In addition to awareness of OCSEA, the survey explored whether CYP see OCSEA as affecting people their own age. Two thirds of participants (66%) believed that OCSEA affects people their age, while a substantial minority (29%) were unsure (Figure 4).



Differences in perceived scale of OCSEA

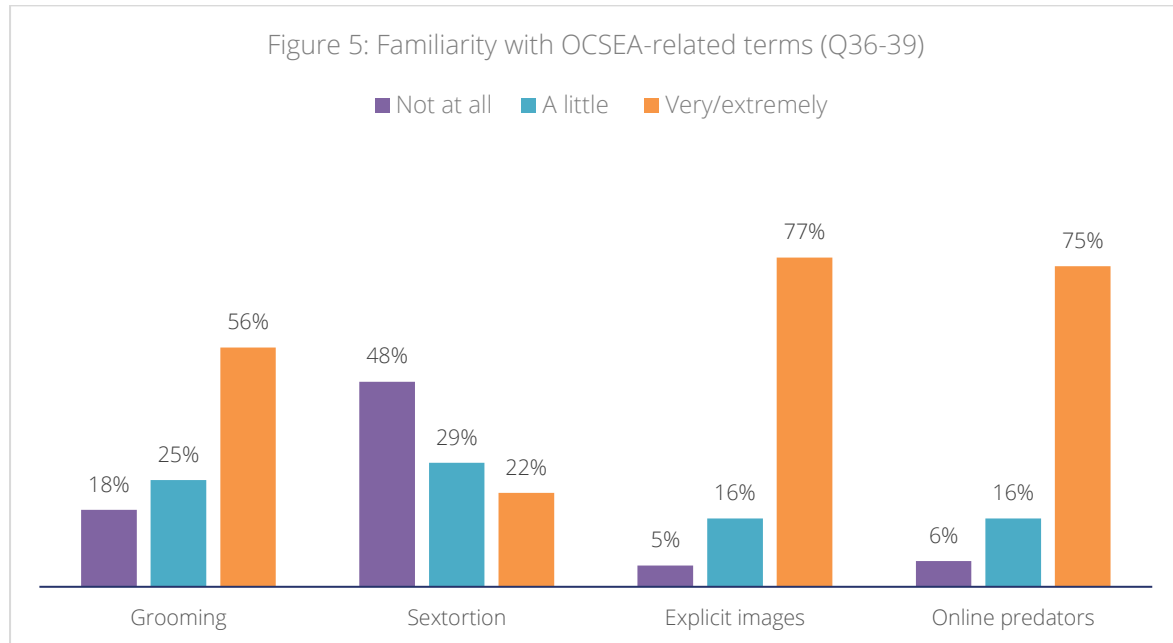
Perceptions of relevance or scale of OCSEA were most strongly influenced by age (Figure 4.1) and experience of online harm (Figure 4.2). Older participants and those with lived experience were significantly more likely to view OCSEA as affecting people their age (79% and 81% respectively), while younger and non-disclosing participants were more likely to express uncertainty (33% and 50% respectively). There was no meaningful variation by socio-economic status, and differences by sex were limited (see appendix 1).



2.1.3 Understanding of behaviours that constitute OCSEA

Having examined perceptions of the scale or relevance of OCSEA, we also looked at how CYP understand the behaviours associated with OCSEA.

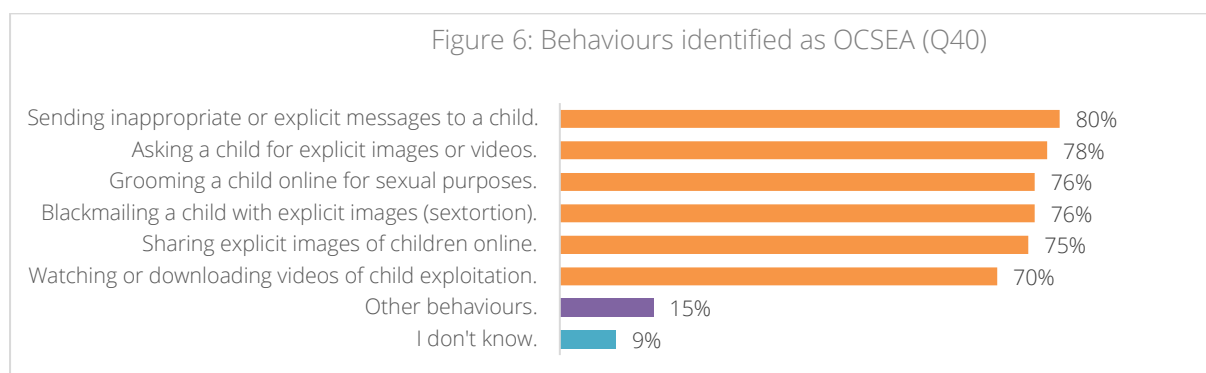
Familiarity with terminology relating to exploitative behaviours varied widely. Participants were most familiar with “sharing explicit images” (77%) and least familiar with “sextortion” (22%) (Figure 5).



Differences in familiarity with OCSEA-related terms

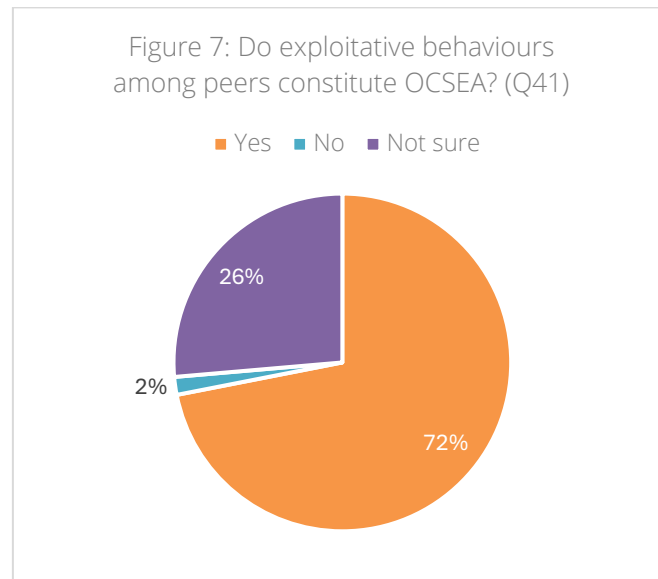
Older participants and those with lived experience consistently reported higher familiarity across terms. Differences by sex were statistically significant for some terms, including grooming and sextortion, but not for others. Further details are provided in [appendix 1](#).

Despite uneven familiarity with terminology, most participants recognised core exploitative behaviours - such as grooming and sextortion - as forms of OCSEA (Figure 6).



However, understanding was less consistent when similar harms occurred between peers (Figure 7). While a majority of respondents indicated that behaviours observed among peers

could be considered OCSEA (71%), a substantial proportion expressed uncertainty (26%). This suggests ambiguity in how peer-to-peer behaviours are understood and / or labelled.



Differences in understanding peer-to-peer behaviours

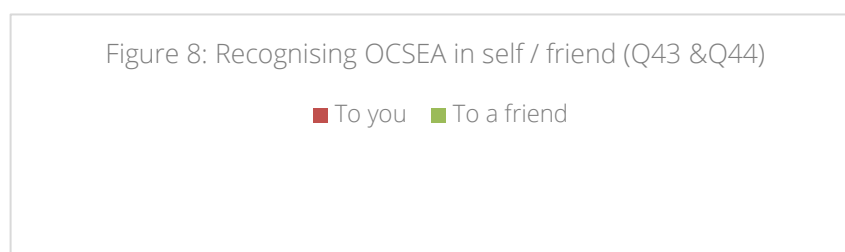
Uncertainty on peer-to-peer behaviour was most prevalent among younger participants, males, and those without disclosed experience of online harm. Further details on subgroup analysis are reported in [appendix 1](#).

2.1.4 Recognising OCSEA

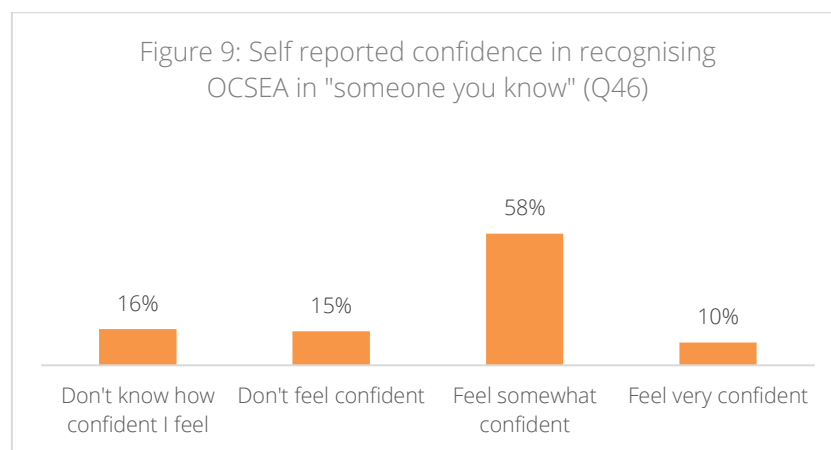
Confidence in recognising OCSEA

As part of young people’s understanding of OCSEA, we explored whether CYP think they would recognise OCSEA happening to themselves and / or a friend. Responses indicated mixed confidence with substantial proportions selected “yes” or “not sure” in both contexts.

Although a higher proportion of respondents indicated that online abuse is easy to recognise when it happens to themselves (43%) compared to when it happens to a friend (30%) ([Figure 8](#)), these percentages are based on different respondent groups due to item-specific non-response/ prefer not to say. As such, they should not be interpreted as evidence that CYP generally find self-recognition easier than recognising it in others. Among the subset of participants who answered both questions (n=286), responses showed considerable variation across contexts, with uncertainty particularly prominent and responses often aligning across the two items. In other words, those that found OCSEA easy to recognise in themselves were also more likely to indicate it was easy to recognise in a friend.



When asked specifically about confidence in recognising OCSEA in someone they know, most participants described themselves as *somewhat confident*, with fewer reporting high or low confidence ([Figure 9](#)).



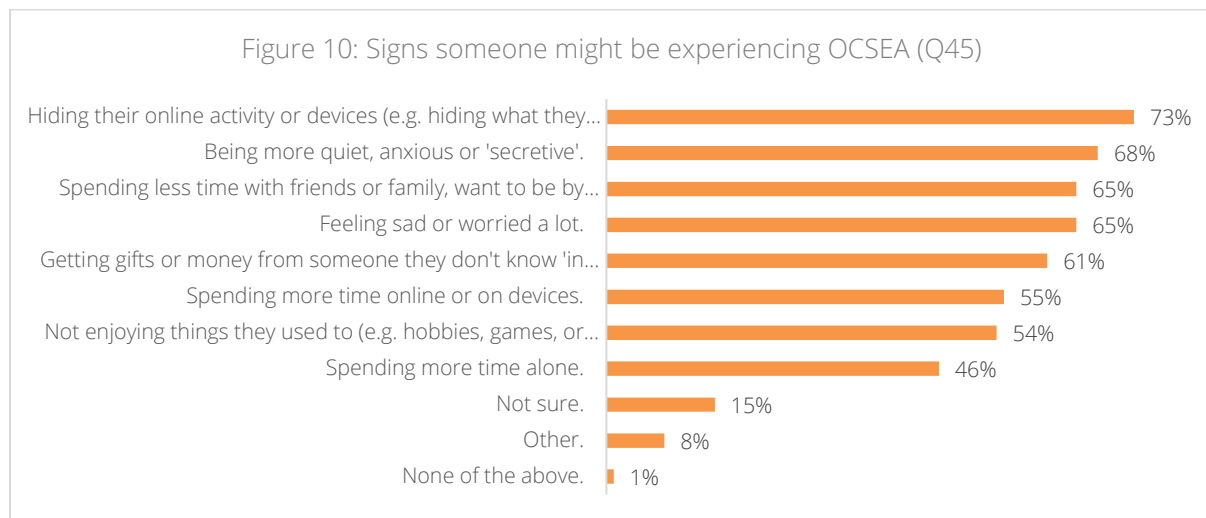
Differences in recognising OCSEA

Recognition was most strongly associated with experience of online harm and, to a lesser extent, by age. Participants who disclosed experience of online harm (52%) and older participants (49%) were more likely to say OCSEA is easy to recognise when it is happening to them. Sex showed no meaningful association and socio-economic status effects primarily reflected uncertainty rather than confidence. Confidence in recognising OCSEA in someone they know also increased with age (64%) and was higher among girls (63%) and those with experience of online harm (21%), while SES showed no meaningful association. Further detailed description of effects by subgroups can be found in [appendix 1](#).

Recognising signs of OCSEA

To further explore what CYP understood by 'recognising OCSEA', participants were asked to identify signs that would indicate someone may be experiencing OCSEA ([Figure 10](#)). Overall, participants most frequently identified emotional and behavioural signs - such as sadness,

anxiety, withdrawal, secrecy, and changes in online behaviour - as indicators that someone might be experiencing OCSEA.



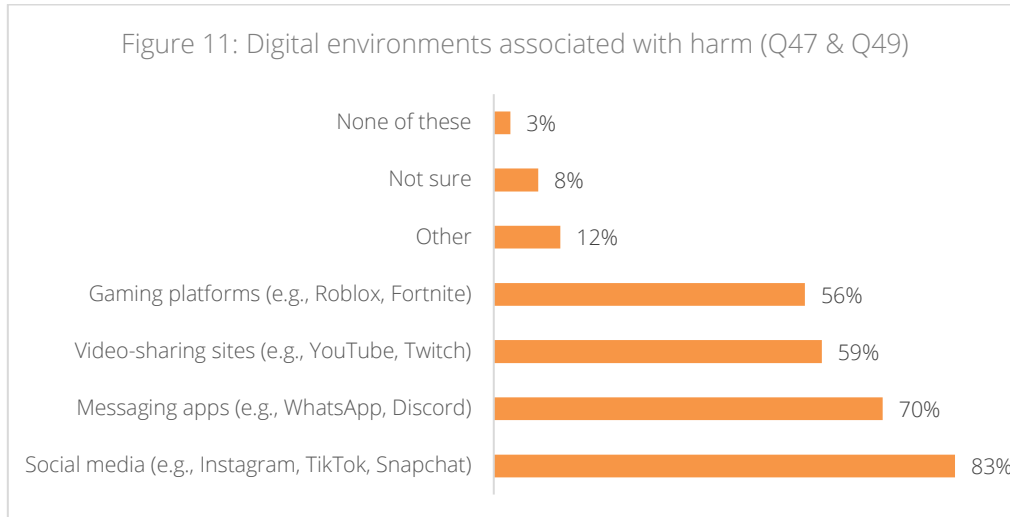
Online-specific indicators - such as receiving gifts from someone not known offline or increased time spent online - were however identified less consistently, and a notable minority selected “not sure”. These findings help contextualise earlier responses about recognition, suggesting that CYP primarily understand OCSEA through visible distress rather than more subtle or situational indicators.

Differences in recognising signs of OCSEA

While endorsement of specific signs varied by age, sex, experience of online harm, and socio-economic status, these differences largely reflected patterns of uncertainty rather than absence of awareness. Detailed analyses are provided in [appendix 1](#).

Risky apps and online spaces

While understanding of OCSEA behaviours and signs shapes recognition, it does not operate in isolation. Perceptions of risk are also influenced by the digital environments CYP associate with harm. When asked which types of apps, websites, or games might be risky, participants most frequently identified social media (83%) and messaging apps (70%) - [Figure 11](#). Video-sharing platforms and online games were identified as risky by around half of respondents.



This concentration of perceived risk within communication-focused platforms suggests that CYP associate OCSEA most strongly with spaces that enable private or direct interaction. Furthermore, very few participants selected ‘none of these’ or indicated uncertainty, suggesting that most CYP associate some aspects of the online environment with potential risk.

Differences in digital environments associated with harm

Perceptions of platform risk broadly mirrored previous patterns, with older CYP (73% vs 50% identifying gaming as risky) and those with lived experience (97% identifying social media as risky) more likely to identify a wider range of environments as risky, and higher uncertainty among younger (11%) and non-disclosing participants (32%). Further details are described in [appendix 1](#).

Practice insight RQ1



What CYP understand by OCSEA - based on the Ember survey sample:

- Terminology is not the primary driver of understanding
 - Recognition of harmful behaviours does not depend on familiarity with formal terminology, with many CYP able to identify exploitative behaviours without recognising or using terms such as ‘OCSEA’.
 - Systems that rely heavily on technical language risk limiting accessibility and engagement, particularly among younger audiences.
- Awareness requires reinforcement beyond formal settings
 - Awareness is most effective when reinforced across multiple environments, rather than concentrated in formal settings such as schools.

- Where information is primarily delivered through education systems alone, awareness is less likely to be sustained or normalised in everyday contexts.
- Communication channels need to align with where CYP actually engage
 - Information is more likely to reach and resonate with CYP when delivered through the platforms and spaces they use most frequently (e.g. social media and online environments).
 - Systems that rely on institutional or traditional channels alone are likely to experience reduced reach and effectiveness.
- Source credibility and usefulness are not always aligned
 - The sources through which CYP receive information are not always those they perceive as most helpful, with formal sources often seen as less useful than peer, digital or experiential channels.
 - Effective communication requires alignment between trusted sources and perceived usefulness, not just coverage.
- Understanding of behaviours is stronger than understanding of context
 - CYP generally demonstrate good recognition of core exploitative behaviours, even where familiarity with specific terminology is uneven.
 - However, understanding is less consistent in more ambiguous or contextual situations (e.g. peer-to-peer interactions), indicating gaps in how harm is conceptualised.
- Recognition is shaped more by visible impacts than underlying risk factors
 - CYP most readily identify emotional and behavioural signs of harm, rather than underlying situational or online-specific indicators.
 - This suggests that recognition is reactive (based on visible distress) rather than proactive (identifying risk conditions early).
- Awareness and confidence are uneven across groups
 - Awareness, perceived relevance and confidence in recognising OCSEA are higher among older CYP and those with lived experience of online harm, while younger and non-disclosing groups show greater uncertainty.
 - This indicates that systems need to address uneven reach and understanding across different groups, rather than assuming a uniform baseline.
- Perceptions of risk are concentrated in specific online environments
 - CYP tend to associate risk primarily with communication-enabled platforms (e.g. social media and messaging apps), with less consistent recognition of risks in other environments.
 - This may lead to narrow risk perceptions, limiting awareness of how harm can occur across a broader range of digital contexts.

2.2 What types of OCSEA CYP want to report

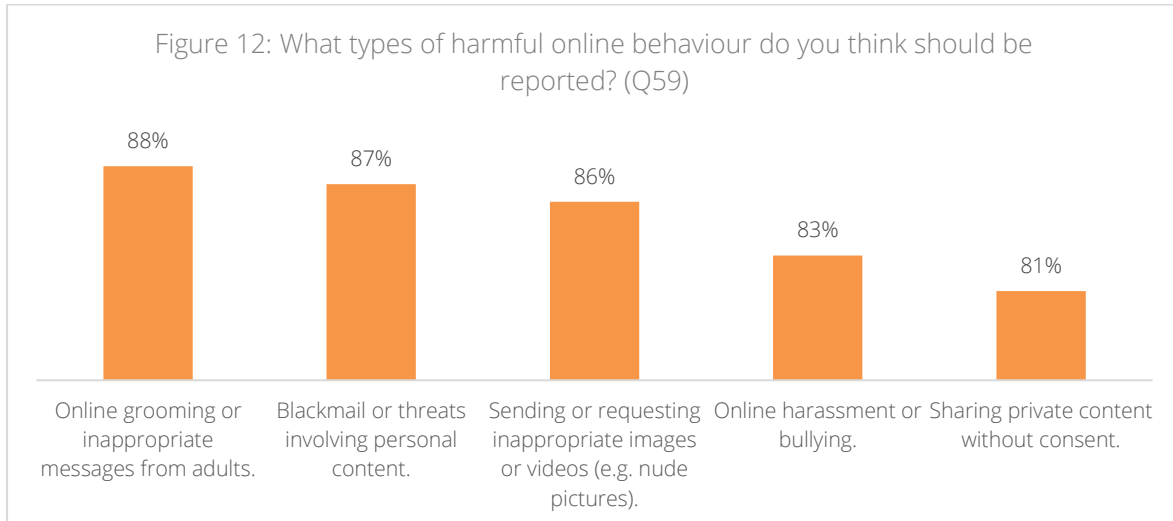
This section addresses Research Question 2: *What (types) of OCSEA do CYP want to report?* It explores which harmful online behaviours CYP believe should be reported, which harms they think may be more difficult to report, and why some young people may hesitate to talk about or report OCSEA when it occurs.

2.2.1 Online harms CYP believe should be reported

Participants were asked which types of harmful online behaviour they believe *should* be reported. It is important to note two things:

- 1) The survey did not define reporting and thus participants may have interpreted 'reporting' in a range of ways, from talking to a parent, friend or trusted adult, to telling a teacher, contacting a helpline, reporting content to a platform, or involving formal authorities such as the police.
- 2) Endorsement of reporting (i.e. what *ought* to be reported in their view) should not be read as a direct proxy for disclosure behaviour. Instead, it provides insight into how CYP conceptualise the seriousness and legitimacy of different harms, and into perceived reporting thresholds rather than behaviour.

Across the survey sample there was strong consensus that clear and well-recognised forms of online sexual harm should be reported ([Figure 12](#)). While endorsement of reporting was high across all listed behaviours, not all participants selected every type of harm. For core behaviours such as grooming, blackmail, and image-based abuse, between 12-19% of participants did not select the behaviour as one that should be reported. This pattern reflects variation in perceived reporting thresholds rather than explicit disagreement, and suggests that even well-established forms of online harm may not be uniformly seen as reportable by all CYP.



Differences in views on behaviours to be reported

Over four fifths of participants identified most listed behaviours as “to be reported”. However, older participants, girls, and those with lived experience of online harm were more likely to support reporting for behaviours involving grooming, blackmail, and the sharing of private content. In contrast, socio-economic status showed no meaningful association with views on what should be reported. Further details by subgroup are provided in [appendix 2](#).

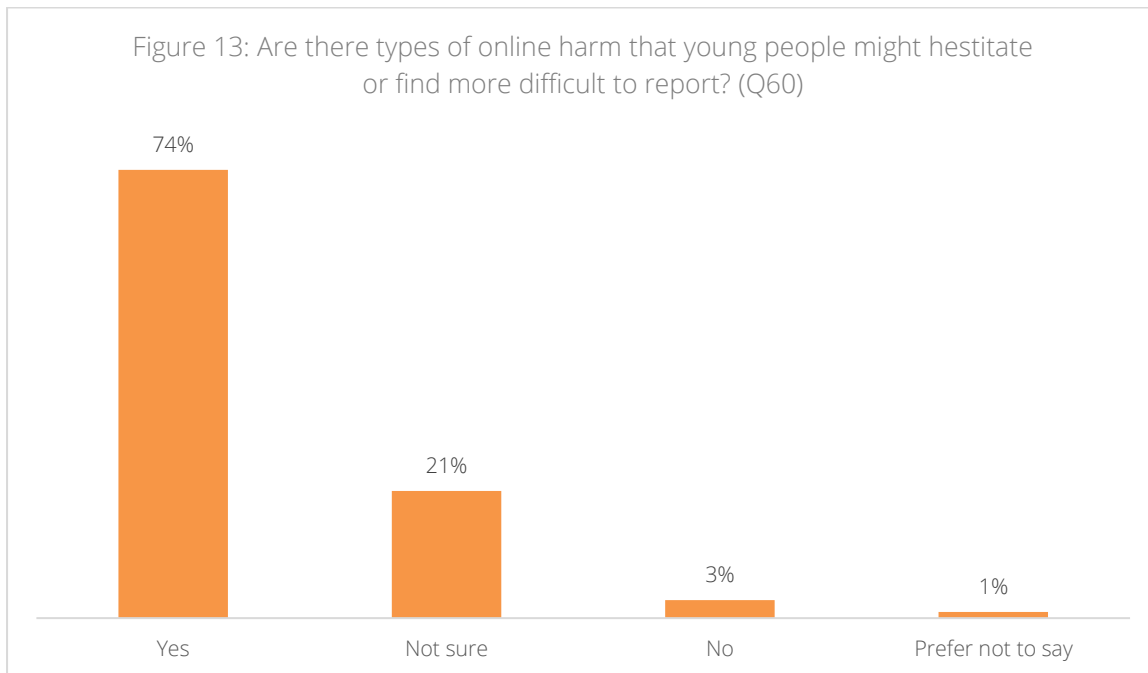
2.2.2 Harms CYP might hesitate to report and barriers to reporting

While the previous section illustrated broad agreement about which behaviours *should* be reported, it does not capture how straightforward reporting might feel in practice. As noted above, participants may have interpreted “reporting” in a range of ways, and endorsement of reportability does not necessarily imply confidence or willingness to disclose.

We therefore examined which types of online harm, if any, CYP believe young people may hesitate or find more difficult to report. This helps to illuminate how uncertainty, emotional barriers, and perceived consequences shape reporting thresholds beyond recognition alone.

Perceptions on difficulty of reporting

The vast majority of survey respondents indicated that some online harms are more difficult for young people to report ([Figure 13](#)). Nearly three-quarters of participants (74%) reported that there are behaviours CYP might hesitate or find more difficult to report, while a further 21% selected “*not sure*”. Only a small minority (3%) indicated that they did not believe any behaviours were more difficult to report. This pattern indicates that reporting hesitancy is widely recognised among CYP.



Differences in perceived reporting hesitancy

Perceptions of reporting difficulty varied by age and previous experience of online harm. Older participants were more likely than younger participants to indicate that there are behaviours young people might hesitate to report (87% vs. 70%), while younger participants were more likely to be unsure (25% vs. 10%). Differences by socio-economic status were not statistically significant.

Experience of online harm showed the strongest association, with participants who disclosed previous experience most likely to report that some behaviours are difficult to report (93%), and those who preferred not to disclose experience most likely to express uncertainty (58%). Sex differences were suggestive but should be interpreted with caution. Further details can be found in [appendix 2](#).

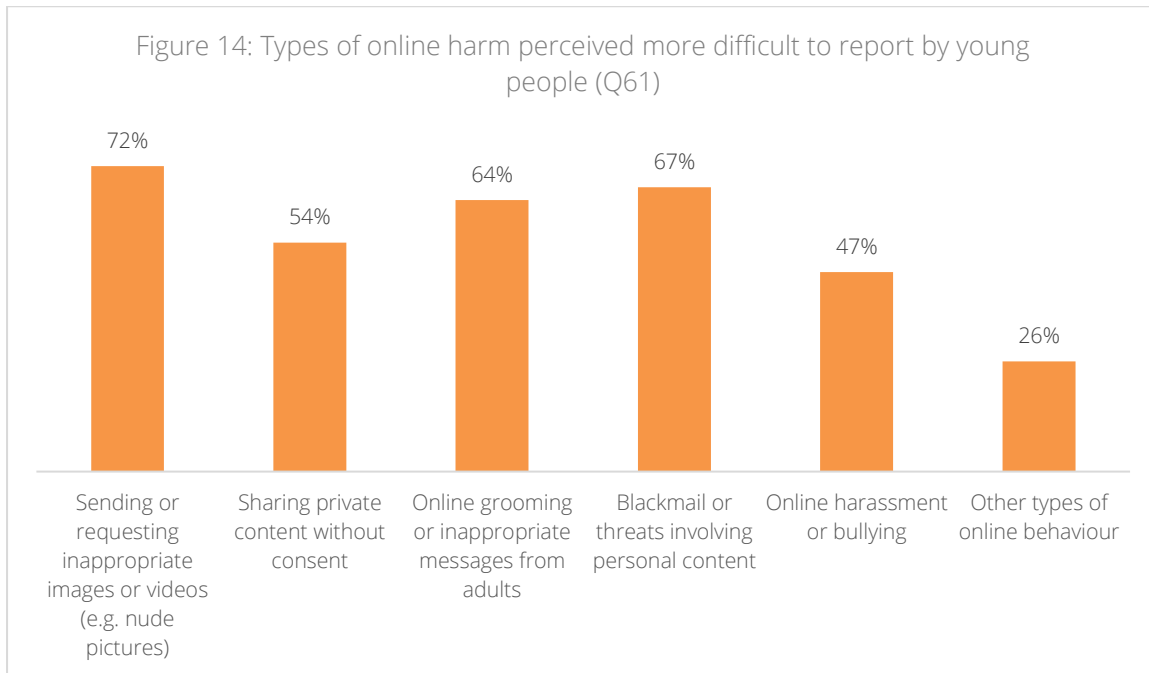
Next, we explored which types of harm are perceived as harder to report and why reporting may feel difficult, drawing together perceptions of harm severity, emotional responses, and concerns about consequences.

Types of online harm CYP found more difficult to report

When asked about specific types of online harm, participants consistently identified some behaviours as more difficult to report than others ([Figure 14](#)). Image-based harms and coercive behaviours were most commonly viewed as difficult to report. Over seven in ten participants (72%) believed that sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos would be difficult for young people to report, while 67% felt the same about blackmail or threats

involving personal content. Similarly, 64% reported that online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults would be difficult to report.

By contrast, fewer participants felt that online harassment or bullying was difficult to report (47%), and only a quarter (26%) identified “other” types of online behaviour as difficult. Sharing private content without consent sat between these extremes, with 54% indicating that this would be difficult to report.



Differences in perceived difficulty reporting specific harms

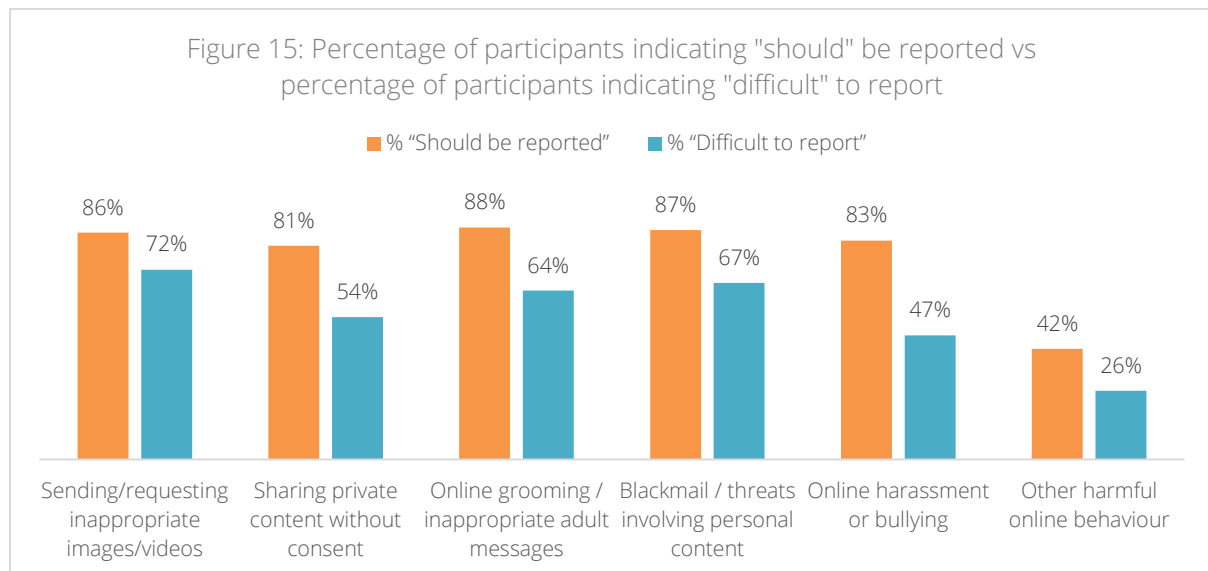
Perceived difficulty of reporting varied by sex and previous experience of online harm, and to a lesser extent by age. Girls were consistently more likely than boys to identify image-based abuse (78% vs 64%), grooming (74% vs 49%), and blackmail or threats (71% vs 59%) as difficult to report. Participants with disclosed experience of online harm were also more likely to report difficulty for coercive behaviours, while participants who preferred not to disclose experience were more likely to express uncertainty or lower perceived difficulty. Differences by socio-economic status were limited. Further details are shared in [appendix 2](#).

Comparing endorsement of reporting with perceived reporting difficulty

Taken together ([Figure 15](#)), these findings highlight an important distinction between perceived seriousness (what *should* be reported - [Figure 12](#)) and perceived reportability (what types of online harm are more difficult to report - [Figure 14](#)). Behaviours most strongly endorsed as ones that *should* be reported - including image-based abuse, online grooming, and blackmail or threats involving personal content - were also most frequently identified as

difficult to report in practice. For example, while over four-fifths of participants indicated that these behaviours should be reported, between 64% and 72% felt that young people might struggle to report them.

In contrast, online harassment or bullying were both less consistently endorsed as reportable and less frequently identified as difficult to report. Harms involving sexual content, coercion, or personal exposure sit at a particularly challenging threshold: widely recognised as serious, yet perceived as harder to disclose. This alignment can also be seen in in cross-tab analyses (see [appendix 2](#)), participants who selected behaviours as ones that should be reported were also significantly more likely to identify them as difficult to report. This suggests that endorsing reporting does not reflect confidence that reporting is easy; rather, it may reflect recognition of harm severity alongside awareness of the emotional and social barriers that may make disclosure difficult.



Barriers to reporting OCSEA and similar harm

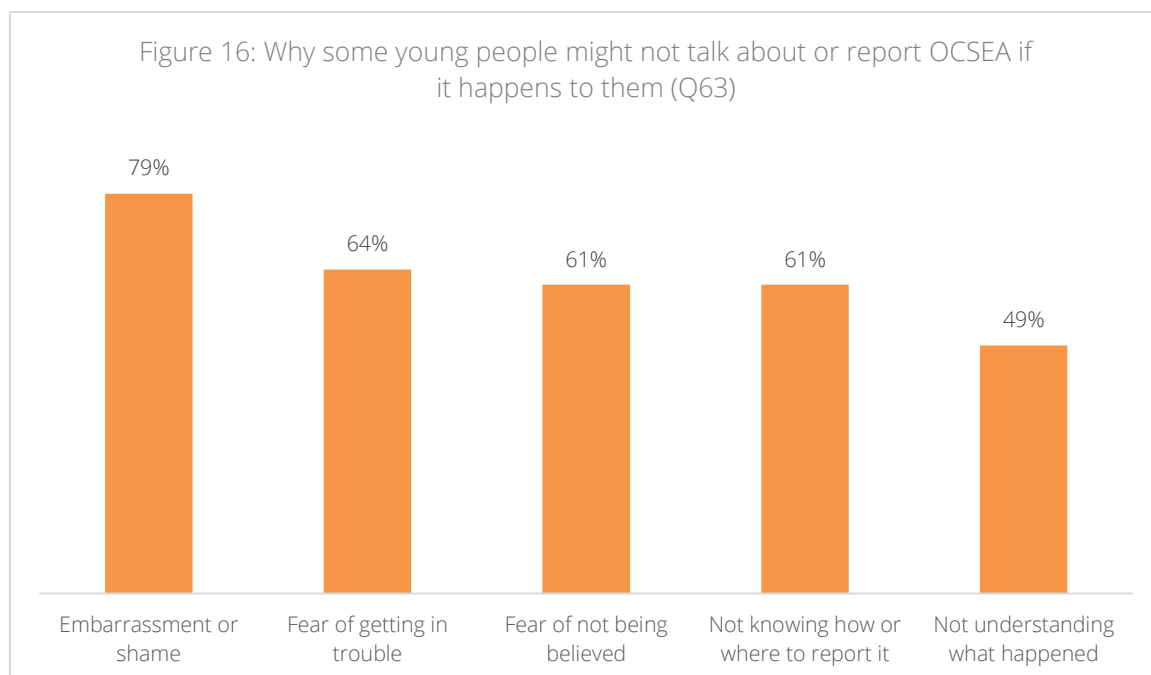
Three related survey questions explored barriers that may prevent CYP from talking about or reporting OCSEA and similar online harms. These questions captured slightly different perspectives: general views on why young people may not report OCSEA (Q63), broader beliefs about disclosure difficulty (Q54), and reflections based on lived experience (Q53).

At an overall level ([Figure 16](#)), participants most commonly identified embarrassment or shame as a barrier to reporting OCSEA and similar harm (79%). Fear-based concerns were also prominent: 64% selected fear of getting into trouble, and 61% selected fear of not being believed. Practical and knowledge-based barriers were similarly common, with 61% reporting

not knowing how or where to report. Around half of participants (49%) felt that not understanding what happened could prevent reporting.

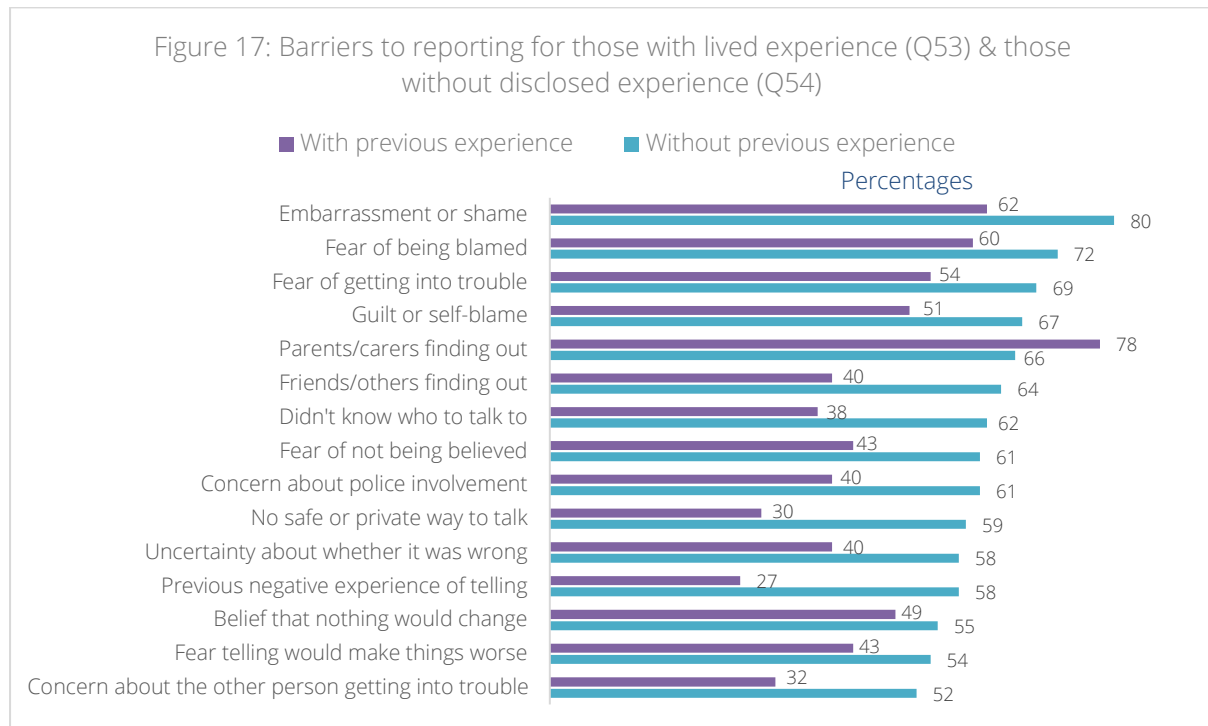
Differences in overall perceived barriers to reporting

Overall barriers showed some variation by age, sex and socio-economic status. Age differences were most evident for uncertainty and knowledge-related barriers, with older participants more likely than younger participants to cite not understanding what happened (62% vs 44%), not knowing how / where to report (72% vs 57%) and fear of getting into trouble (75% vs 59%) as reasons. Sex differences were also apparent across several barriers, with girls more likely than boys to cite fear of not being believed (71% vs 48%), embarrassment / shame (86% vs 69%), and not knowing how / where to report (67% vs 51%). Socio-economic status was most evident for shame and fear-based barriers, but this variable requires cautious interpretation due to the sample (see [section 1.3](#)). Full subgroup breakdowns are provided in [appendix 2](#).



Across the two more detailed barrier questions ([Figure 17](#)), the relative emphasis differed between those reflecting on barriers in general (Q54) versus those reflecting on lived experience (Q53). Emotional barriers remained central in both perspectives. Among participants without disclosed experience (i.e. those that either answered “no” or “preferred not to say” to the question of whether they had previously experience harmful online behaviour), 80% believed embarrassment might prevent reporting, compared with 62% of participants with lived experience identifying embarrassment as a barrier they experienced themselves. Fear of negative reactions was also widely recognised: 72% of participants

without experience believed fear of blame might prevent reporting, compared with 60% among those reflecting on their own experiences.



Uncertainty-related barriers were also common. Over half of participants without experience felt that people might not report because they were unsure if what happened was wrong (58%) or did not know who to tell (59%). Among participants with lived experience, these uncertainties were reported less frequently than personal barriers (40% unsure it was wrong; 30% lacking a safe or private way to talk).

Notably, one barrier was more prominent in lived experience than in general perceptions: concern about parents or carers finding out. Nearly four in five participants with lived experience (78%) reported this as a reason they found disclosure difficult, compared with 66% of participants without experience identifying this as a barrier for young people. This suggests that family-related concerns may be relatively underestimated in general perceptions, but highly salient in lived experience.

Differences in perceived difficulty reporting specific harms

Taken together, these findings suggest that while CYP recognise many reporting barriers in principle, emotional and relational concerns become more prominent when harm is personally experienced. Overall, perceived barriers varied primarily by sex and socio-economic status, with more limited differences by age. Girls were consistently more likely to endorse a wide range of perceived barriers, while SES differences were evident

across emotional and fear-based barriers. Among participants with lived experience, subgroup differences were limited and should be interpreted cautiously given small sample sizes. Full breakdowns are provided in [appendix 2](#).

Practice insight RQ2



What types of OCSEA CYP want to report - based on the Ember survey sample:

- Recognition of seriousness does not translate into reportability
 - Perception that a behaviour should be reported does not mean it is easy or likely to be reported, with many of the most serious harms also perceived as the most difficult to disclose.
 - Systems need to address the gap between recognising harm and being able to act on it, rather than assuming awareness leads to reporting.
- Reporting thresholds are uneven, even for well-established harms
 - While there is broad agreement that core OCSEA behaviours (e.g. grooming, coercion, image-based abuse) should be reported, reporting thresholds are not uniform, with some CYP not recognising these behaviours as reportable in practice.
 - Effective systems require clear, consistently understood thresholds for what constitutes reportable harm, particularly for younger and less experienced users.
- Harms involving exposure, coercion and sexual content present the greatest reporting barrier
 - Image-based abuse, coercion and grooming sit at a critical threshold, where harms are widely recognised as serious but perceived as significantly more difficult to report.
 - These types of harms require targeted support and tailored reporting approaches, as they are associated with higher emotional and social barriers.
- Emotional and relational barriers are central to reporting decisions
 - Embarrassment, shame, fear of getting into trouble, fear of not being believed, and concerns about others' reactions are core barriers to reporting.
 - Systems that do not address these emotional and relational dynamics are likely to face persistently low reporting rates, even where awareness is high.
- Practical and knowledge barriers remain significant
 - A substantial proportion of CYP report not knowing how or where to report, or being unsure whether what happened was wrong.
 - Effective reporting systems must therefore ensure:
 - Clear, accessible pathways, and
 - Confidence-building information, not just awareness of harm
- Lived experience shifts the nature of reporting barriers

- Barriers perceived in general differ from those experienced in practice, with lived experience associated with:
 - o Greater emphasis on family-related concerns (e.g. parents finding out)
 - o Relatively lower emphasis on uncertainty
- This highlights the importance of designing systems that reflect real-world reporting experiences, not just perceived barriers.
- Understanding of reporting is itself variable and ambiguous
 - CYP interpret “reporting” in different ways, ranging from informal disclosure (e.g. telling a friend) to formal action (e.g. reporting to authorities).
 - Systems that do not clearly distinguish between types of reporting risk:
 - o Confusion about available options, and
 - o Mismatch between intended and actual behaviour
- Reporting confidence and expectations are uneven across groups
 - Reporting expectations and perceived difficulty vary by age, sex and experience of online harm, with:
 - o Higher endorsement and awareness among older CYP and those with lived experience
 - o Greater uncertainty among younger and non-disclosing groups
 - This indicates a need for differentiated approaches to reporting support, rather than a one-size-fits-all model.

2.3 How CYP want to report OCSEA

This section addresses Research Question 3: *How do CYP want to report OCSEA?* It builds on the findings from section 2.2, which showed that while CYP broadly recognise which harms should be reported, reporting is often perceived as difficult due to a range of emotional, relational and practical barriers.

Understanding these barriers alone does not explain how CYP would report in practice, or what forms of reporting feel safe, appropriate, or accessible to them. In particular, the distinction between perceived and lived barriers highlights that reporting is shaped not only by awareness of harm, but also by expectations of how others will respond and what the consequences of disclosure may be. Concerns about embarrassment, blame, uncertainty, and the reactions of parents, peers, or wider systems all contribute to shaping reporting decisions.

These findings suggest that reporting should not be understood as a single or purely procedural action, but as a social and relational process, influenced by trust, perceived safety,

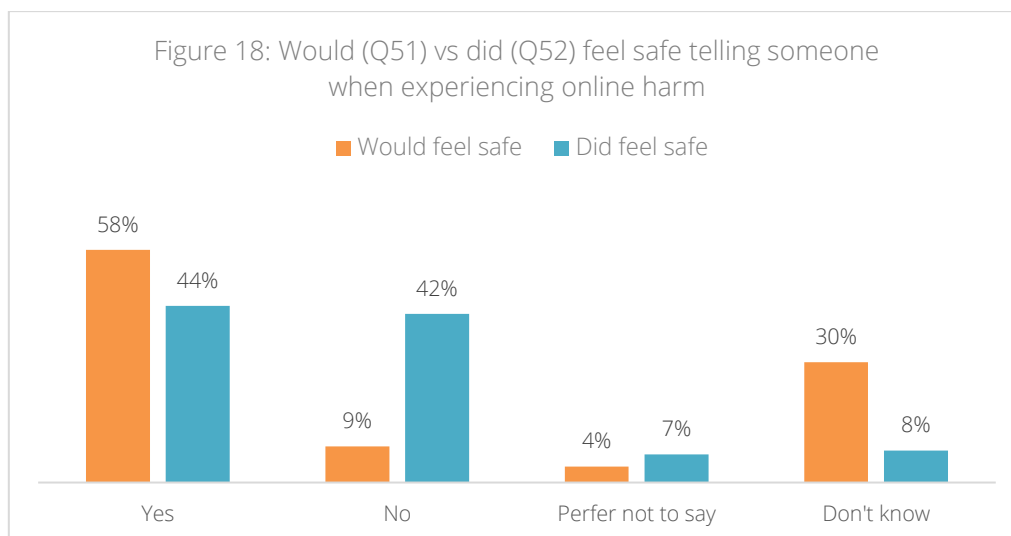
and anticipated outcomes. Reporting preferences are therefore likely to vary depending on context, experience, and the types of barriers CYP expect to encounter.

Building on this, the following sections explore how CYP describe their own preferences and experiences of reporting, including whether they feel safe telling someone, who they would choose to tell, how they would prefer to report, and what factors may make reporting easier.

2.3.1 Safety and confidence in disclosure

Participants were asked whether they would feel safe telling someone if they experienced harmful online behaviour, or, for those with lived experience, whether they did feel safe doing so.

Findings indicate a clear gap between perceived and experienced safety ([Figure 18](#)). While around six in ten participants reported that they *would* feel safe telling someone, this dropped to around four in ten among participants reflecting on their own experiences. This suggests that confidence in reporting in principle does not necessarily translate into feeling safe in practice.



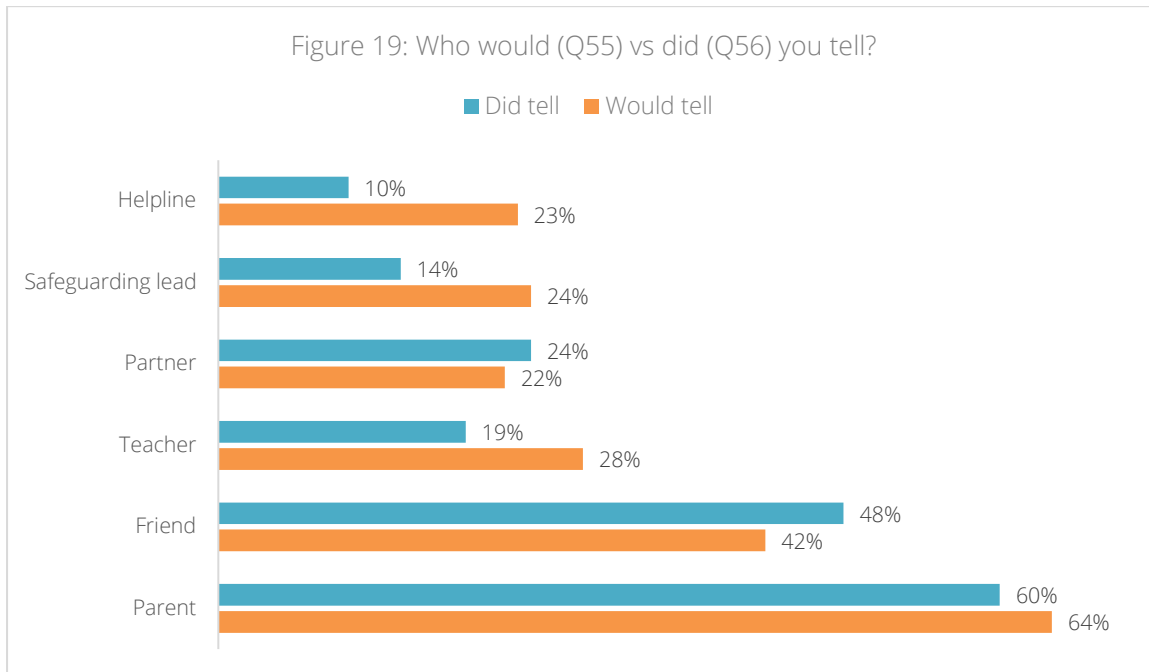
Differences in safety and confidence in disclosure

Perceived safety in telling someone (“would feel safe”) and experienced safety (“did feel safe”) showed no statistical significant differences by age, socio-economic status or sex. Details can be found in [appendix 3](#).

2.3.2 Who CYP would tell vs who they did tell

Participants were asked who they would choose to tell if they experienced online harm, or, for those with experience, who they actually told.

Across both groups, reporting was primarily framed as a relational act, with CYP most likely to identify informal routes. Parents or guardians and friends were the most commonly selected options, followed by teachers or other trusted adults (Figure 19). Formal or institutional reporting routes were less prominent across both hypothetical and lived responses. Contacting a helpline was not featured in the top five most indicated responses by CYP. The percentage of young people that *would* tell a helpline (23%) was higher than those who *did* tell (10%).



Patterns between the groups were broadly aligned, indicating that CYP expectations of who they would turn to are generally consistent with behaviour in practice. However, variation across groups suggests that these choices are shaped by experience and context, particularly where concerns about consequences or relationships are present (see [section 2.2.2](#)). These findings reinforce that reporting is not primarily understood as engaging with systems, but as confiding in trusted individuals, highlighting the central role of relationships in disclosure decisions.

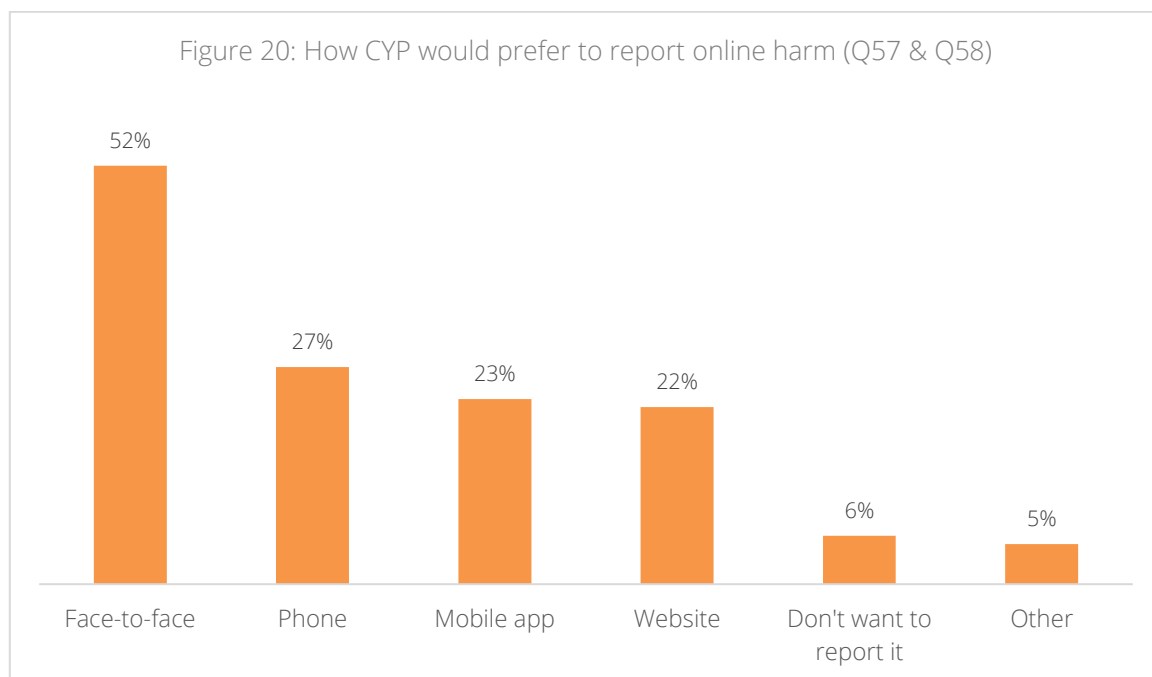
Differences in who CYP would or did tell

Differences in who CYP would tell and who they did tell were generally limited, with most subgroup comparisons not reaching statistical significance. Across age, reporting preferences were broadly similar, with no significant differences in likelihood of telling friends, parents, teachers, or formal services. Some differences were seen by socio-economic status and sex but should be interpreted cautiously given small sample sizes. Full breakdowns can be found in [appendix 3](#).

2.3.3 How CYP want to report

Apart from *who* CYP would tell, the survey also asked participants *how* they would prefer to report or tell someone about their experience ([Figure 20](#)).

Preferences were varied, but face-to-face reporting emerged as the most commonly selected option, with just over half of participants indicating a preference for speaking to someone in person. Other options, including phone, website, or app-based reporting, were selected less frequently but remained relevant for a substantial minority.



Differences in how CYP want to report

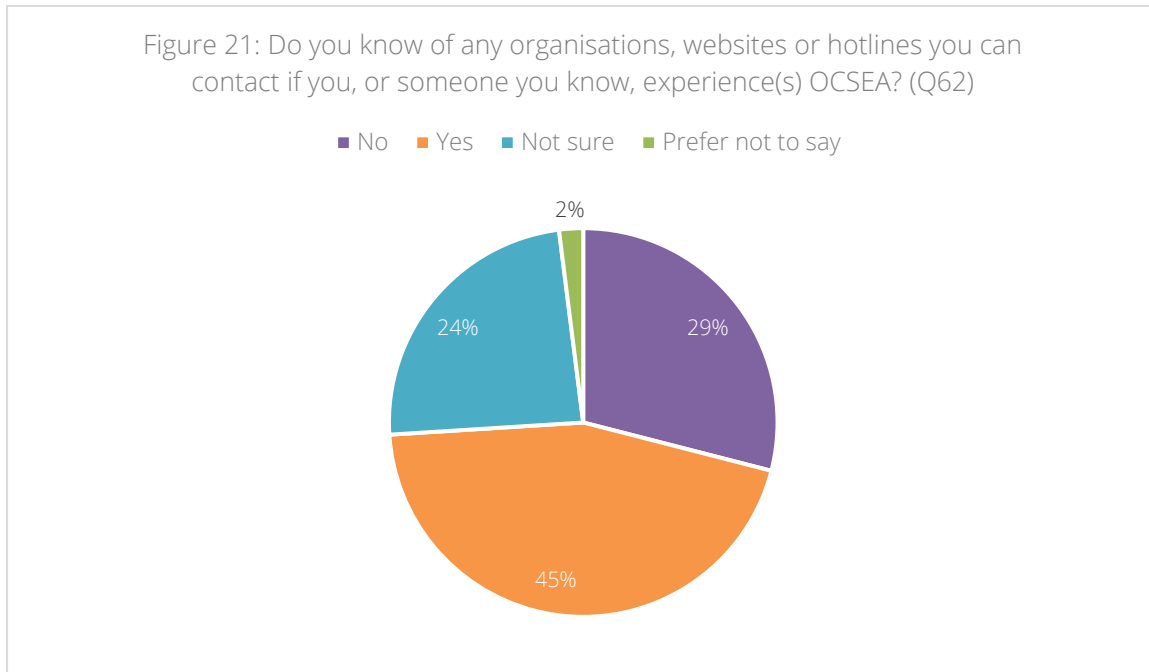
Differences by age and experience were evident. Younger participants and those without prior experience were more likely to prefer face-to-face reporting, while older participants and those with lived experience showed greater openness to digital reporting routes, including websites and apps. Participants identifying as “other” were also more likely to favour digital options. Differences in how CYP prefer to report OCSEA varied to a lesser extent by socio-economic status and sex. A small but important proportion of participants indicated that they would not want to report at all, with this pattern more common among those with lived experience. This suggests that barriers to disclosure may influence not only how CYP prefer to report, but whether they report in the first place. Full details can be found in [appendix 3](#).

Overall, these findings indicate that reporting preferences are not uniform, but vary depending on context, experience, and perceived safety of different routes.

2.3.4 Awareness of reporting routes

Regardless of their preference, participants were also asked whether they knew of any organisations, website, or hotlines they could contact if they experienced OCSEA or similar harm.

Around half of participants reported they did not know, or were unsure, where to go for support ([Figure 21](#)). This points to a significant gap in awareness of formal reporting options.



Unlike many barriers identified in [section 2.2.2](#), this finding reflects a structural rather than an emotional barrier, indicating that even where CYP may be willing to report, lack of knowledge about available routes could prevent them from doing so.

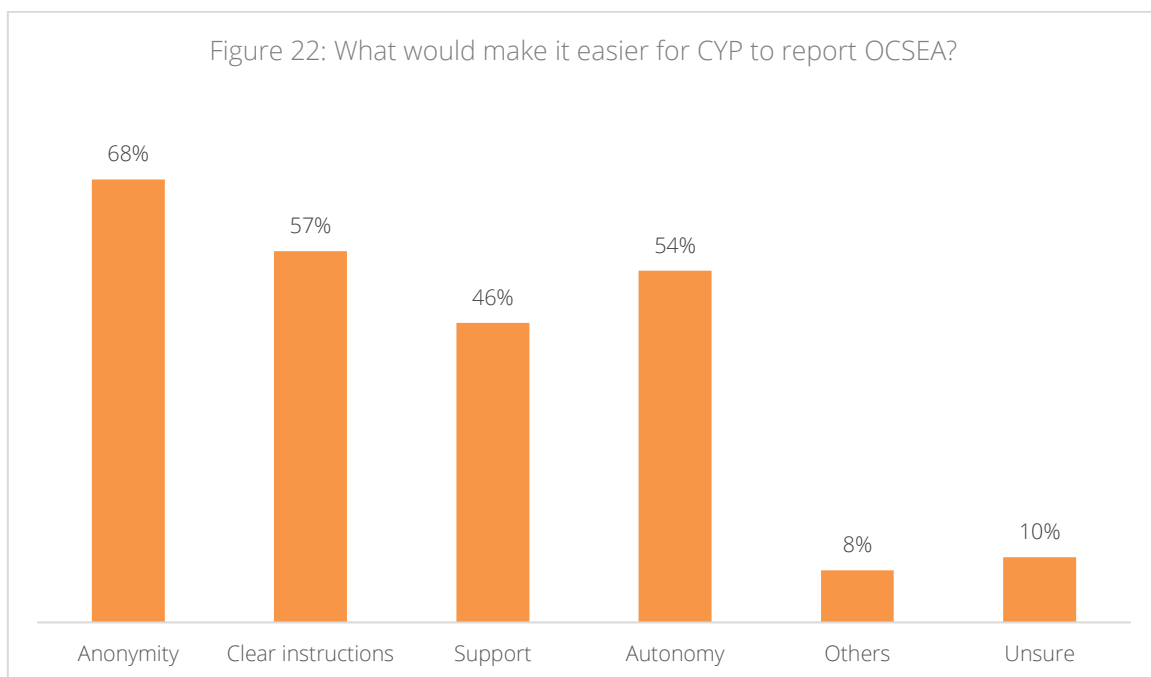
Differences in awareness of reporting routes

Differences in awareness of reporting routes were more limited than in earlier sections, but some patterns were evident across age and experience. A significant linear trend was observed in age, indicating that awareness tended to increase with age. Subsequently, older participants were more likely to report knowing where to go (47% vs 44%), but mostly they were less likely to be unsure (17% vs 27%). This suggests a gradual shift from uncertainty to awareness as CYP get older. The strongest differences were by previous experience of online harm. Those with lived experience were more likely to report knowing where to go (51%) compared to those without experience (49%), those this difference was relatively small. More notable, those who preferred not to disclose whether they did or did not have previous

experience were far more likely to report uncertainty (53%) compared to those with experience (18%) or without (20%). Further details can be found in [appendix 3](#).

2.3.5 What would make reporting easier

Participants were asked what would make it easier for CYP to report OCSEA. Across the sample, several key enabling factors were identified. Anonymity was most frequently selected (68%), followed by clear instructions (57%) on how and where to report, the ability to report independently (54%) and the option to access adult support (46%) ([Figure 22](#)).



Differences in what would make reporting easier

Differences in facilitators of reporting suggest three key dynamics. Clarity of instructions become more important with age and SES, control or autonomy is particularly important for those with lived experience and anonymity is universally important but emphasised more by girls and gender minorities. More details can be found in [appendix 3](#).

These findings suggest that effective reporting systems need to balance privacy, clarity, and support, offering flexible routes that allow CYP to engage in ways that feel safe and appropriate to their situation.

Practice insight RQ3



How CYP want to report OCSEA - based on the Ember survey sample:

- Reporting is a relational and social process, not just a procedural one
 - Reporting is primarily understood by CYP as confiding in trusted individuals rather than engaging with formal systems, with parents, friends and trusted adults forming the dominant routes.
 - Systems that frame reporting purely as a formal or technical process risk misalignment with how CYP actually disclose harm in practice.
- Perceived safety does not translate into experienced safety
 - There is a clear gap between anticipated safety in reporting and actual experiences, with CYP less likely to feel safe in real situations than in principle.
 - Effective systems must therefore focus on creating genuinely safe disclosure environments, not just raising confidence in theory.
- Trust and anticipated responses are central to reporting decisions
 - Reporting decisions are shaped by expectations of how others will respond, including concerns about blame, judgement, escalation, and consequences.
 - Systems that do not address these expectations may fail to build sufficient trust for CYP to disclose, even when reporting options exist.
- Informal and formal reporting routes are not well integrated
 - CYP expectations and behaviour are aligned towards informal disclosure, while awareness and use of formal reporting routes (e.g. helplines, platforms) remain limited.
 - This indicates a need to better connect informal disclosure pathways with formal support systems, ensuring that trusted individuals are equipped to respond effectively.
- Reporting preferences are diverse and context-dependent
 - CYP preferences for how to report vary significantly:
 - Many prefer face-to-face disclosure, particularly younger CYP
 - Others favour digital routes (e.g. apps, websites), especially older CYP and those with lived experience
 - Effective systems require multiple, flexible reporting routes, rather than a single standardised approach
- Structural barriers limit reporting even where willingness exists
 - A substantial proportion of CYP lack awareness of where or how to report, representing a structural barrier independent of emotional factors.

- Systems must ensure clear, visible and accessible reporting pathways, not just assume users know how to act.
- Reporting systems need to balance anonymity, control and support
 - CYP consistently identify the need for:
 - Anonymity and privacy,
 - Clear instructions,
 - Control over how they report, and

Access to support from adults

2.4 Summary of survey findings

Taken together, the findings across all three research questions point to a consistent and important pattern: a gap between awareness, confidence and action in how CYP understand and respond to OCSEA.

Firstly, CYP demonstrate partial but meaningful understanding of OCSEA. While many are able to recognise core exploitative behaviours, familiarity with the term itself is uneven and often shaped by formal education. Understanding is stronger for clear, well-recognised forms of harm, but becomes less consistent in more ambiguous situations, particularly in peer-to-peer contexts or where indicators are less visible. Recognition also tends to be based on observable emotional distress rather than underlying conditions of risk, suggesting that CYP may find it harder to identify exploitation at earlier stages.

Secondly, there is strong conceptual agreement about what should be reported, but this does not translate into confidence in reporting. Many of the harms most widely recognised as serious – including image-based abuse, grooming and coercion – are also those most frequently perceived as difficult to report. This highlights a clear distinction between perceived seriousness and perceived reportability, with emotional and social factors significantly shaping reporting thresholds.

Third, reporting is experienced as a relational and context-dependent process, rather than a purely procedural one. CYP primarily frame reporting as telling someone they trust – such as a parent, friend or teacher – rather than engaging with formal systems. However, there is a notable gap between anticipated and experienced safety in doing so, suggesting that confidence in principle does not necessarily translate into feeling safe in practice.

Across all areas, barriers to reporting are multi-dimensional, combining:

- Emotional factors, such as embarrassment, shame and fear;
- Relational concerns, including anticipated reactions from parents, peers and others; and
- Structural barriers, particularly lack of awareness of where and how to report

These barriers interact to shape not only how CYP report, but whether they report at all, with some participants indicating that they would prefer not to disclose under certain circumstances. Notably, some evidence suggests that those with lived experience of online harm may be less likely to report in future, highlighting the importance of prior reporting experiences in shaping confidence and behaviour.

The findings also highlight that experiences and perceptions are unevenly distributed. Older CYP and those with lived experience of online harm consistently demonstrate higher awareness, greater confidence in recognition, and more developed views on reporting. In contrast, younger participants and those without disclosed experience show higher levels of uncertainty across all stages, from understanding to reporting.

Overall, the evidence suggests that improving responses to OCSEA requires more than increasing awareness alone. Effective systems must:

- Support recognition across a wider range of contexts, including ambiguous or peer-to-peer situations;
- Reduce the gap between recognising harm and feeling able to act;
- And design reporting pathways that reflect the relational, emotional and practical realities of how CYP experience disclosure.

These findings provide a foundation for developing more accessible, youth-centred reporting systems where awareness, confidence and action are better aligned.

3 Implications and considerations

Drawing these findings together highlights several important considerations for future work to improve how CYP understand, recognise and report OCSEA. Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that effective responses must address not only awareness and access, but also the confidence, emotional and relational dimensions that shape whether and how CYP recognise harm and seek help.

3.1 Implications for understanding and awareness

Findings from Research Question 1 indicate a need for clearer, more consistent and CYP-friendly communication around OCSEA. Awareness of the term itself is partial, and understanding is uneven - particularly in relation to peer-to-peer harm and less visible forms of exploitation. While many CYP recognise specific harmful behaviours, they do not always connect these experiences to the formal concept or label of OCSEA, nor feel fully confident that what they are seeing or experiencing “counts” as OCSEA.

Where definitions or messages feel abstract, extreme or disconnected from CYP’s lived experiences, there is a risk that harmful behaviour is minimised, normalised or interpreted as something that falls outside safeguarding or reporting frameworks.

These findings point to the importance of:

- Clear, consistent messaging about what constitutes OCSEA, including explicit coverage of peer-to-peer exploitation and less visible harms.
- Language and examples that resonate with CYP’s everyday experiences, rather than relying solely on formal or professional terminology.
- Education that supports recognition in ambiguous or everyday contexts, not only situations characterised by overt distress or extreme harm.

Recognising that confidence in identifying exploitation is often cautious rather than strong, awareness-raising efforts should prioritise supporting CYP to navigate uncertainty, rather than assuming high levels of clarity or certainty.

These insights broadly align with existing safeguarding frameworks and curricula, which emphasise harm recognition and prevention, but also suggest that current approaches may under-represent grey areas, peer contexts and early warning signs, where CYP report the greatest uncertainty.

3.2 Implications for understanding and awareness

While Research Question 1 highlights uncertainty and partial confidence at the recognition stage, findings from Research Question 2 show that recognising harm as serious does not necessarily translate into confidence in reporting. While CYP show strong agreement about which types of harm should be reported, many of these same harms – particularly those involving sexual content, coercion or personal exposure – are also perceived as the most difficult to disclose.

This reflects a clear distinction between perceived seriousness and perceived reportability, shaped by a combination of emotional, relational and practical barriers.

Key implications include:

- Uncertainty about whether behaviour “counts” as OCSEA continues to shape reporting decisions, particularly in peer-to-peer and ambiguous situations.
- Emotional barriers, including embarrassment, shame and fear, are central to reporting decisions and may outweigh awareness of risk.
- Relational concerns, such as fear of judgement, blame or consequences (including parental reactions), play a significant role in shaping whether CYP disclose harm.
- Structural barriers, including not knowing how or where to report, further limit action even where CYP are willing to seek help.

Notably, the findings also suggest that previous experience of online harm may reduce willingness to report in future, indicating that prior experiences of disclosure, including perceived effectiveness or outcomes, can shape confidence and behaviour over time.

Taken together, these findings highlight the risk of:

- Delayed disclosure,
- Partial disclosure, or
- Missed opportunities for early intervention,

even where harm is recognised. This has important implications for safeguarding, suggesting that improving reporting outcomes requires addressing barriers at multiple stages of the reporting journey, not just awareness.

3.3 Implications for reporting routes and support

Findings from RQ3 show that reporting is not experienced by CYP as a single or purely procedural action, but as a relational and context0dependent process, shaped by trust, perceived safety and expectations of response.

Key implications include:

- Reporting is most commonly understood as telling someone trusted, such as a parent, friend or teacher, rather than engaging directly with formal reporting systems.
- There is a clear gap between perceived and experienced safety in disclosure, suggesting that systems must do more to ensure CYP feel genuinely safe in practice.
- Preferences for reporting routes vary, with younger CYP tending to favour face-to-face disclosure and older CYP and those with experience showing greater openness to digital options.
- Awareness of formal reporting routes is limited, with around half of participants unsure where to go for support.

These findings suggest that effective reporting systems should:

- Recognise and support informal disclosure pathways, ensuring that trusted adults are equipped to respond appropriately.
- Offer multiple, flexible reporting routes, including both human and digital options.
- Ensure reporting pathways are clearly communicated and easy to navigate, reducing structural barriers to access.
- Balance anonymity, control and support, allowing CYP to engage in ways that feel safe while maintaining access to help and follow-up support.

3.4 Cross-cutting design principles

Taken together, the findings across the research questions suggest that effective reporting systems and support mechanisms for CYP should be designed to:

- Address gaps and inconsistencies in understanding, particularly around peer-to-peer exploitation and less visible harm.
- Support confidence in recognition, including helping CYP to navigate uncertainty and ambiguity.
- Reduce emotional and relational barriers, including fear, shame and concern about judgement or consequences.

- Bridge informal and formal reporting routes, ensuring that trusted relationships are supported within the broader system.
- Provide multiple, flexible reporting pathways, accommodating different preferences, contexts and levels of confidence.
- Ensure clarity, visibility and accessibility of reporting routes, so CYP know how and where to act.
- Balance anonymity and follow-up support, recognising the potential trade-offs between privacy and safeguarding response.

Stakeholder engagement reinforced many of these priorities, particularly the importance of trust, clarity and accessibility, while also highlighting potential tensions – for example between enabling anonymous reporting and ensuring effective safeguarding responses.

3.5 Next steps

Findings from the survey and wider Ember research provide a clear evidence base to inform the next phase of the Ember project. In particular, they highlight the need to develop reporting approaches that are aligned with CYP's lived experiences, preferences and barriers, rather than relying on assumptions about awareness or behaviour.

The next phase of work will focus on applying these insights to the design and development of more accessible, youth-centred reporting systems and tools, including (ideally) iterative testing and co-design with CYP and stakeholders.

More broadly, these findings provide a basis for practitioners, policy makers and service providers to:

- Review and adapt existing awareness and education approaches,
- Strengthen reporting pathways and support mechanisms (particularly in day-to-day CYP environments), and
- Reduce barriers to disclosure across different contexts and user groups.

In doing so, they offer a foundation for developing responses to OCSEA that are not only effective in principles, but usable and trusted in practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1

A. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.1.1

Differences in awareness of OCSEA and sources of awareness

Awareness of OCSEA and where CYP encounter information about it varies most strongly by age and experience of online harm, with fewer differences by sex and no meaningful differences by socio-economic status.

Age

Older participants (16-24 years) were consistently more likely than younger participants (13-15 years) to report having heard about OCSEA through multiple sources:

- School or educational programmes: 67.3% vs. 51.6% ($p = .049$)
- Social media: 40.4% vs. 25.2% ($p = .036$)
- News outlets: 21.2% vs. 10.3% ($p = .045$)
- Campaigns: 21.2% vs. 5.2% ($p = .001$)

Personal or second hand experience: 15.4% vs. 2.6% ($p = .002$)

Notably, none of the older participants reported having never heard of OCSEA, compared with 12.9% of younger participants ($p = .006$).

Sex

Differences by sex were more limited but evident for certain sources:

- Social media: girls (35.8%) and participants identifying as another sex (40.0%) were more likely than boys (19.0%) to report this source (borderline significance, $p = .053$).
- Campaigns: participants identifying as another sex were significantly more likely to report campaigns (40.0%) than boys (6.3%), girls (9.2%), or those whose sex was unknown ($p = .029$).

These results should be interpreted cautiously due to small numbers in some categories.

Experience

Experience of online harm shaped how OCSEA was encountered:

- CYP with experience of online harm were more likely to report learning about OCSEA through personal stories or friends' experiences (12.8%) than those without experience (2.2%) or those preferring not to say (0%) ($p = .012$).

- CYP who preferred not to disclose experience were more likely to report learning through friends or family (16.7%) than those with experience (3.8%) or those without experience (11.2%) ($p = .046$).

SES

There were no statistically significant differences by SES in sources of awareness (all $p > .05$).

Differences in perceived helpfulness of information sources

Across most groups, CYP tended to view information sources as moderately helpful rather than very helpful, suggesting cautious confidence. Differences were driven primarily by experience of online harm.

Age

Perceived helpfulness did not vary by age for most sources (all $p > .05$). One exception:

- Experience based sources (personal or friends' experiences): rated very helpful by 63.2% of older CYP vs. 39.6% of younger CYP ($p = .007$).

Sex

Most sources showed no difference by sex. Two exceptions:

- Experience based sources: rated very helpful by 56.2% of girls and 75% of participants identifying as another sex, compared with 28.3% of boys ($p < .001$).
- Other sources: showed some variation by sex ($p = .034$), though small numbers warrant caution.

Experience

Experience of online harm was associated with higher perceived helpfulness for certain sources:

- Campaigns: rated very helpful by 53.1% of those with experience vs. 34.7% without experience ($p = .005$).
- Experience based sources: rated very helpful by 61.4% with experience vs. 41.3% without ($p = .025$).

SES

Perceived helpfulness did not differ by SES for most sources. Posters showed one statistically significant difference ($p = .020$), but with no consistent pattern across groups.

B. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.1.2

Differences in perceived scale and relevance of OCSEA

Most CYP believe OCSEA affects people their age, but uncertainty remains substantial, especially among younger participants and those without disclosed experience.

Age

- Older CYP: 78.8% said OCSEA affects people their age
- Younger CYP: 61.4% said this
- Younger CYP were more likely to be unsure (32.6% vs. 18.8%)
- This difference was statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Sex

Females were more likely than males to say OCSEA affects people their age (73.0% vs. 55.8%), while males were more likely to report uncertainty (35.8% vs. 25.0%). Results were suggestive but should be interpreted cautiously.

Experience

- Experienced harm: 80.8% said OCSEA affects people their age
- No experience: 61.7%
- Prefer not to say: 50.0%

Those preferring not to say were most likely to be unsure (44.4%) ($p \approx .01$).

SES

No meaningful differences by SES ($p > .05$).

C. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.1.3

Differences in familiarity with OCSEA-related terms

Understanding of terminology varied most strongly by age and experience, with more limited differences by sex and SES.

Grooming

- Younger CYP: 22.6% did not know the term
- Older CYP: 6.3% did not know

Knowing / fully understanding: 74.7% older vs. 49.8% younger ($p < .001$)

- Understanding was lower in DK/PNS SES (38.9%) and higher among those with experience (73.7%).

Sextortion

- 55.1% of younger CYP did not know the term vs. 30.0% of older CYP
- Knowing / understanding: 41.3% older vs. 15.3% younger ($p < .001$)
- Females (22.9%) and those with experience (36.4%) showed higher understanding.

Exploitative images & online predator

Most CYP reported understanding these terms, though younger and non disclosing participants showed higher uncertainty.

Differences in understanding peer-to-peer behaviours

Peer to peer exploitation is a major area of uncertainty.

- 70.9% said peer behaviours could be OCSEA
- 26.0% were unsure

Older CYP (87.5%), girls (75.8%), and those with experience (87.9%) were more likely to recognise peer behaviours as OCSEA, while younger CYP, boys, and non disclosing participants showed much higher uncertainty (all $p < .01$).

D. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.1.4

Differences in recognising OCSEA

Recognition confidence is shaped primarily by age, experience, and SES related uncertainty.

Recognising OCSEA in oneself

- Older CYP: 49.4% said easy to recognise vs. 41.1% younger ($p = .009$)
- Experienced harm: 43.3% said easy to recognise
- Prefer not to say experience: 63.9% said “not sure” ($p < .001$)

SES differences reflected higher uncertainty in DK/PNS groups ($p = .008$).

Sex differences were not significant.

Recognising OCSEA in a friend

Age and sex differences were not statistically significant.

Experience mattered strongly: 62.9% of those preferring not to disclose experience reported uncertainty ($p < .001$).

Differences in confidence recognising OCSEA in someone known to CYP

Most CYP felt somewhat confident, with confidence increasing by age and experience.

Age

- Somewhat confident: 63.7% older vs. 52.6% younger
- Confident: 12.5% vs. 8.8%

($p = .015$)

Sex

Girls more likely than boys to be somewhat confident (63.4% vs. 45.4%) ($p = .009$).

Experience

- Confident or very confident: 21.3% with experience vs. much lower in others
- Not sure: 37.8% among those preferring not to say ($p < .001$)

SES showed no significant effect.

Differences in recognising signs of OCSEA and perceived platform risks

Recognising signs of OCSEA

Older CYP more likely to identify:

- Receiving gifts: 85.2% vs. 52.1%
- Spending less time with others: 77.8% vs. 60.4%
- Anxiety / secrecy: 77.8% vs. 65.0%

(all $p < .05$)

Younger CYP more likely to select "not sure" (19.4% vs. 3.7%, $p < .001$).

Girls and experienced CYP consistently showed higher recognition; DK/PNS groups showed higher uncertainty.

Perceived platform risk

Age

- Gaming risk: 72.8% older vs. 50.2% younger ($p < .001$)
- Unsure: 10.6% younger vs. 2.5% older ($p = .024$)

Sex

- Social media risky: 90.8% girls vs. 72.1% boys ($p < .001$)
- Gaming risky: 63.4% vs. 43.4% ($p = .001$)

Experience

Experienced harm markedly increased perceived risk:

- Social media: 97.0% vs. 80.1% vs. 64.9%
- Gaming: 71.7% vs. 55.3% vs. 27.0%
- Unsure: 32.4% among non disclosing vs. $\leq 6\%$ others

(all $p < .001$)

Appendix 2

This appendix provides detailed breakdowns and subgroup analyses (by age, sex, socio-economic status, and previous experience of online harm) for key findings reported in section 2.2

A. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.2.1

Differences in views on what types of harmful behaviour should be reported

Overall, endorsement of reporting was high across all listed behaviours, with the vast majority of participants indicating that sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos, sharing private content without consent, online grooming, blackmail or threats involving personal content, and online harassment or bullying should be reported. Differences by subgroup were observed for some behaviours, particularly by age, sex, and experience of online harm, while socio economic status showed no consistent associations.

Age

Age was significantly associated with endorsement of reporting for several behaviours. Older participants (16-24 years) were more likely than younger participants (13-15 years) to indicate that the following behaviours should be reported:

- Sharing private content without consent: 88.9% older vs. 78.3% younger ($p = .038$, Fisher's exact $p = .045$)
- Online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults: 95.1% older vs. 84.8% younger ($p = .017$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content: 95.1% older vs. 83.9% younger ($p = .011$)

No significant age differences were found for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos: 85.7% older vs. 86.4% younger ($p = .876$)
- Online harassment or bullying: 81.1% older vs. 86.4% younger ($p = .282$)
- Other types of online behaviour: 41% older vs. 43.2% younger ($p = .732$)

This suggests that age related differences were concentrated around behaviours involving coercion, exploitation, or misuse of private material.

Experience

Experience of online harm was significantly associated with endorsement of reporting for some behaviours, particularly those most closely aligned with OCSEA.

Participants who disclosed previous experience of online harm were more likely than those without experience to indicate that the following behaviours should be reported:

- Online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults: 96.0% vs. 87.9% ($p = .003$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content: 93.9% vs. 87.2% ($p = .033$)

Experience was also significantly associated with views on reporting:

- Sharing private content without consent ($p = .041$), with lower endorsement among participants who preferred not to disclose experience (67.6%) compared with those with (84.8%) or without (84.4%) disclosed experience.

No significant differences by experience were observed for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos ($p = .170$)
- Online harassment or bullying ($p = .869$)
- Other types of online behaviour ($p = .242$)

Overall, participants who preferred not to disclose experience consistently showed lower endorsement across several behaviours, suggesting higher uncertainty or greater caution in this group.

Sex

Sex was significantly associated with endorsement of reporting across multiple behaviours, with girls generally more likely than boys to indicate that behaviours should be reported. Statistically significant differences by sex were observed for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos: Girls: 91.5% vs. boys: 78.7% ($p = .018$)
- Sharing private content without consent: Girls: 88.9% vs. boys: 68.0% ($p < .001$)
- Online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults: Girls: 93.5% vs. boys: 77.9% ($p < .001$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content: Girls: 91.5% vs. boys: 78.7% ($p = .006$)
- Online harassment or bullying: Girls: 88.9% vs. boys: 73.8% ($p = .007$)

Endorsement among participants identifying as another sex was high across all behaviours (often 100%), though these results should be interpreted with caution due to small cell sizes. Differences for other types of online behaviour showed a borderline association by sex ($p = .062$; linear by linear $p = .015$).

SES

There were no statistically significant differences by socio economic status for most behaviours:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos ($p = .510$)
- Sharing private content without consent ($p = .425$)
- Online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults ($p = .207$)
- Online harassment or bullying ($p = .107$)
- Other types of online behaviour ($p = .372$)

A borderline association was observed for blackmail or threats involving personal content ($p = .069$), with slightly higher endorsement among participants in the ABC1 group (91.7%) compared with C2DE (82.1%) and DK/PNS groups (83.3%). However, this finding did not meet conventional significance thresholds and should be interpreted cautiously.

B. More detailed breakdown of differences for section 2.2.2

Differences in perceptions of reporting hesitancy

Perceptions of whether there are online harms that young people might hesitate or find more difficult to report varied significantly by age and experience of online harm, but not by socio economic status. Differences by sex were suggestive, though interpretation is limited by small cell sizes in some categories.

Age

Age was significantly associated with perceptions of reporting difficulty ($p = .023$), with a clear ordered pattern (linear by linear association $p = .003$).

- Older participants (16-24 years) were more likely than younger participants (13-15 years) to indicate that some online harms are more difficult to report (87.0% vs. 69.6%).
- Younger participants were more than twice as likely to select “not sure” (24.8% vs. 10.4%), suggesting greater uncertainty among younger CYP.

- Very small proportions in both age groups indicated that no behaviours are more difficult to report ($\leq 3.7\%$).

These findings indicate that while most CYP recognise reporting difficulty, certainty increases with age, and uncertainty is more prominent among younger participants.

SES

There was no statistically significant association between socio economic status and perceptions of reporting difficulty ($p = .349$).

Across all SES groups, a majority indicated that some behaviours are difficult to report:

- ABC1: 78.6%
- C2DE: 73.7%
- DK/PNS: 66.2%

Levels of uncertainty were broadly similar across groups (around 19-25%). Differences by SES therefore appear descriptive rather than systematic, suggesting broadly comparable perceptions of reporting difficulty across socio economic backgrounds.

Sex

The association between sex and perceptions of reporting difficulty was not statistically significant on the Pearson test ($\chi^2(9) = 15.37$, $p = .081$), though likelihood ratio and trend based tests suggested a possible ordered pattern (linear by linear association $p = .009$).

- Girls were more likely than boys to indicate that some behaviours are difficult to report (78.1% vs. 64.4%), while boys were more likely to select “not sure” (27.1% vs. 19.2%).
- All participants identifying as another sex selected “yes”, though this group was small ($n = 11$). These findings should be interpreted cautiously due to small expected cell counts in several categories.

Overall, sex differences appear to be driven more by uncertainty among boys than by outright disagreement.

Experience

Experience of online harm showed a strong and statistically significant association with perceptions of reporting difficulty ($p < .001$; linear by linear association $p < .001$).

- Participants who disclosed previous experience of online harm were most likely to indicate that some behaviours are difficult to report (92.8%), and least likely to select “not sure” (4.1%).
- In contrast, participants who preferred not to disclose experience showed markedly higher uncertainty, with 58.3% selecting “not sure” and only 38.9% selecting “yes”.
- Participants without experience fell between these two groups, with 73.4% indicating that some behaviours are difficult to report and 20.9% selecting “not sure”.

This pattern suggests that lived experience is associated with greater clarity and confidence in recognising reporting difficulty, while non disclosure aligns with heightened uncertainty.

Differences in perceived difficulty reporting specific harms

Perceived difficulty of reporting varied across harm types and showed different patterns by age, sex, socio economic status (SES), and experience of online harm. Differences were most consistent by sex, with more limited or borderline differences by age and experience, and little evidence of systematic differences by SES.

Age

Age was not significantly associated with perceived difficulty for most harm types.

There were no significant age differences for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos (71.9% of 13-15s vs. 71.6% of 16-24s; $p = .961$)
- Sharing private content without consent (54.4% vs. 54.3%; $p = .993$)
- Online harassment or bullying (47.0% vs. 48.1%; $p = .860$)
- Other types of online behaviour (28.6% vs. 19.8%; $p = .123$)

For coercive behaviours, patterns were suggestive but did not reach conventional significance thresholds:

- Online grooming (61.3% of younger vs. 71.6% of older participants; $p = .099$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content (64.1% vs. 75.3%; Pearson $p = .066$; Fisher's exact $p = .072$)

Overall, older participants tended to report higher perceived difficulty for grooming and blackmail, but these differences should be interpreted cautiously.

SES

There was little evidence of meaningful SES differences in perceived difficulty across harm types. No statistically significant SES differences were found for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos ($p = .873$)
- Online grooming ($p = .136$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content ($p = .167$)
- Online harassment or bullying ($p = .437$)
- Other types of online behaviour ($p = .557$)

One exception was observed for:

- Sharing private content without consent, which differed significantly by SES ($p = .003$). Participants in the ABC1 group were most likely to report this as difficult to report (63.9%), compared with C2DE (50.0%) and DK/PNS participants (40.3%).

Aside from this single item, SES differences appeared limited and inconsistent.

Sex

Sex was the most consistent predictor of perceived reporting difficulty. Girls were significantly more likely than boys to identify the following harms as difficult to report:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos: 77.8% of girls vs. 63.9% of boys ($p = .010$)
- Sharing private content without consent: 59.5% vs. 44.3% ($p = .013$)
- Online grooming or inappropriate messages from adults: 74.5% vs. 49.2% ($p < .001$)
- Blackmail or threats involving personal content: 70.6% vs. 59.0% ($p = .045$)

Sex differences were not significant for:

- Online harassment or bullying ($p = .500$)
- Other types of online behaviour (tested earlier; non significant)

Participants identifying as another sex consistently reported high perceived difficulty across most items (often above 80%), though these results should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

Experience

Experience of online harm was selectively associated with perceived difficulty. There were no significant differences by experience for:

- Sending or requesting inappropriate images or videos ($p = .207$)
- Sharing private content without consent ($p = .171$)
- Online grooming ($p = .272$)
- Online harassment or bullying ($p = .199$)

However, a statistically significant difference was observed for:

- Blackmail or threats involving personal content ($p = .017$)

Participants with disclosed experience of online harm were most likely to identify this behaviour as difficult to report (77.8%), compared with those without experience (65.2%). Participants who preferred not to disclose experience were least likely to identify blackmail as difficult (54.1%).

A borderline association was also observed for other types of online behaviour (Pearson $p = .056$; likelihood ratio $p = .034$), suggesting lower perceived difficulty among participants who preferred not to disclose experience.

Comparing endorsement of reporting with perceived reporting difficulty

To explore whether views on what should be reported align with perceptions of what is difficult to report, each behaviour's "should be reported" item was cross referenced against the corresponding "difficult to report" item.

Across all behaviour types, there was a strong and statistically significant association between endorsement of reporting and perceived difficulty (all χ^2 tests $p < .001$). In general, participants who selected a behaviour as one that should be reported were also substantially more likely to say it is difficult to report, reinforcing the distinction between perceived seriousness and perceived reportability.

Image-based harm (sending/requesting inappropriate images/videos)

Participants who indicated image-based harm should be reported were much more likely to identify it as difficult to report (79.3%) than those who did not select it as reportable (26.2%, $p < .001$). This suggests that endorsement of reporting for image-based harm often co-exists with recognition that disclosure may be difficult in practice.

Sharing private content without consent

Participants who endorsed reporting of sharing private content without consent were more likely to perceive it as difficult to report (61.2%) than those who did not endorse reporting (25%, $p < .001$). This indicates a clear relationship between recognising reportability and anticipating barriers to disclosure for sharing-related harms.

Online grooming / inappropriate messages from adults

For grooming, the association was particularly pronounced. Among participants who indicated grooming should be reported, 71.6% also said it is difficult to report, compared with 10.8% among those who did not select it as reportable ($p < .001$). This supports the interpretation that grooming is widely seen as serious, yet simultaneously experienced as a high-threshold harm to disclose.

Blackmail / threats involving personal content

Participants who selected blackmail/threats as something that should be reported were substantially more likely to perceive it as difficult to report (74.5%) than those who did not endorse reporting (17.9%, $p < .001$). This aligns with findings elsewhere in the report that coercive harms are both highly recognised and highly difficult to disclose.

Online harassment or bullying

Although harassment/bullying was less strongly linked to reporting difficulty than the OCSEA-related harms above, the association remained statistically significant. Among participants who said harassment/bullying should be reported, 54.1% also perceived it as difficult to report, compared with 15.4% among those who did not endorse reporting ($p < .001$). This suggests that even for more familiar or peer-normalised harms, endorsement of reporting is associated with an awareness of reporting challenges.

“Other” harmful online behaviour

For “other” harms, participants who endorsed reporting were much more likely to report difficulty (46.8%) than those who did not endorse reporting (11.5%, $p < .001$). This indicates that where CYP interpret an “other” harm as reportable, they also tend to anticipate greater reporting difficulty - potentially reflecting ambiguity, uncertainty, or lack of clarity about routes and outcomes.

Differences in overall perceived barriers to reporting

Overall, the most commonly endorsed barriers were embarrassment/shame, fear based concerns, and knowledge related barriers. Subgroup differences were most consistently observed by age, sex, and socio economic status, with more selective differences by experience. Several comparisons include small cell counts in some categories so results should be interpreted cautiously.

Age

Age was significantly associated with several barriers, particularly those related to uncertainty and knowledge.

- Fear of not being believed showed no meaningful age difference (61.3% of 13-15s vs 61.7% of 16-24s; $p = .945$).
- Embarrassment/shame was higher among older participants (85.2% vs 76.5%), but this difference did not reach statistical significance ($p = .102$).

Significant age differences were observed for the following:

- Not understanding what happened: older participants were more likely to endorse this barrier (61.7% vs 44.2%; $p = .007$).
- Not knowing how/where to report: older participants were more likely to endorse this barrier (71.6% vs 56.7%; $p = .019$).
- Fear of getting into trouble: older participants were more likely to endorse this barrier (75.3% vs 59.4%; $p = .011$).

These results suggest that older participants were more likely to identify knowledge based and consequence related barriers to reporting than younger participants.

SES

Socio economic status was significantly associated with several barriers, indicating that perceptions of obstacles to reporting vary across SES groups.

- Fear of not being believed differed significantly by SES ($p = .019$).
 - ABC1: 66.0%
 - C2DE: 65.4%
 - DK/PNS: 47.2%
- Embarrassment/shame differed strongly by SES ($p < .001$).
 - ABC1: 88.2%
 - C2DE: 75.6%
 - DK/PNS: 65.3%
- Not understanding what happened also differed by SES ($p = .042$).
 - ABC1: 55.6%
 - C2DE: 47.4%
 - DK/PNS: 37.5%
- Fear of getting into trouble differed significantly by SES ($p = .008$).
 - ABC1: 71.5%
 - C2DE: 62.8%
 - DK/PNS: 50.0%

In contrast, not knowing how/where to report did not differ significantly by SES ($p = .116$), although the direction was similar (ABC1 66.0% vs DK/PNS 51.4%).

Overall, SES differences were most evident for shame and fear based barriers, with lower endorsement among participants in the DK/PNS group.

Sex

Sex differences were statistically significant for most of the core barrier types, with girls more likely than boys to endorse multiple barriers.

- Fear of not being believed differed strongly by sex ($p < .001$):
 - o Boys: 48.4%
 - o Girls: 71.2%
- Embarrassment/shame differed by sex ($p = .006$):
 - o Boys: 68.9%
 - o Girls: 86.3%
- Not understanding what happened differed strongly by sex ($p < .001$):
 - o Boys: 34.4%
 - o Girls: 57.5%
- Not knowing how/where to report differed by sex ($p = .020$):
 - o Boys: 50.8%
 - o Girls: 66.7%

Patterns for participants identifying as another sex indicated high endorsement across barriers, but these should be interpreted cautiously due to small numbers. Overall, sex differences suggest that girls are more likely than boys to identify emotional, uncertainty related, and reporting route barriers.

Experience

Most barriers did not differ strongly by experience status, but one significant difference emerged, alongside some borderline patterns.

- Fear of getting into trouble differed significantly by experience ($p = .042$):
 - o No experience: 65.2%
 - o Experienced harm: 71.7%
 - o Prefer not to say: 48.6%

- Embarrassment/shame showed a borderline association (Pearson $p = .083$), but the linear trend test was significant ($p = .028$), suggesting some systematic difference in endorsement across experience categories.
 - o No experience: 82.3%
 - o Experienced harm: 83.8%
 - o Prefer not to say: 67.6%

Other barriers (fear of not being believed; not understanding; not knowing how/where) did not reach significance (all $p > .05$), though several showed lower endorsement among those who preferred not to disclose experience.

Differences in perceived barriers to disclosure among those without personal experience

Q54 asked participants without personal experience to identify reasons why others might not disclose. Subgroup analyses were conducted by age, socio economic status (SES), and sex.

Age

Across most perceived barriers, no significant differences by age were observed. However, two barriers showed statistically significant age related differences:

- Unsure whether it was wrong: Older participants (16-24) were significantly more likely than younger participants (13-15) to perceive uncertainty as a barrier (75.4% vs 53.2%; $p = .003$).
- Fear of police involvement: Older participants were more likely to perceive fear of police involvement as a barrier (73.7% vs 57.7%; $p = .029$).

For other barriers - including embarrassment/shame, blame, guilt, fear of getting into trouble, fear things would get worse, fear of parents or friends finding out, believing nothing would change, lack of a safe way to disclose, or having no one to tell - no statistically significant age differences were found (all $p > .05$).

Age differences for perceived barriers were relatively limited and focused mainly on uncertainty and institutional consequences, rather than emotional or social barriers.

SES

Socio-economic status was associated with a range of perceived barriers, particularly those relating to embarrassment, fear, and anticipated negative consequences.

Significant SES differences

- Embarrassment/shame: Higher among ABC1 respondents (88.6%) than C2DE (75.0%) and DK/PNS (70.6%); $p = .005$.
- Not being believed: Endorsement decreased steadily from ABC1 (69.9%) to C2DE (62.5%) to DK/PNS (41.2%); $p < .001$.
- Guilt: More commonly endorsed by ABC1 (78.9%) than C2DE (62.5%) and DK/PNS (51.5%); $p < .001$.
- Fear of getting into trouble: ABC1 respondents were most likely to perceive this barrier (77.2%), compared with C2DE (68.8%) and DK/PNS (54.4%); $p = .005$.
- Fear that telling would make things worse: Highest among ABC1 respondents (64.2%) and lowest among DK/PNS (35.3%); $p < .001$.
- Having no one to talk to: ABC1 respondents were most likely to endorse this barrier (69.1%), compared with C2DE (64.1%) and DK/PNS (47.1%); $p = .010$.
- Belief that nothing would change: More common among ABC1 (58.5%) and C2DE (64.1%) than DK/PNS (38.2%); $p = .005$.
- Bad past experience with telling: Highest among ABC1 (68.3%) and lowest among DK/PNS (39.7%); $p < .001$.
- No safe or private way to tell: ABC1 respondents were considerably more likely to endorse this barrier (70.7%) than C2DE (60.9%) and DK/PNS (38.2%); $p < .001$.

Non significant or borderline SES differences

- Blame ($p = .081$),
- Unsure whether it was wrong ($p = .069$),
- Parents finding out ($p = .069$),
- Concern about the perpetrator getting into trouble ($p = .090$),
- Other reasons ($p = .095$).

Interpretation: SES differences were most pronounced for emotional and consequence related barriers, with ABC1 respondents consistently more likely to perceive a wide range of obstacles to disclosure than those in DK/PNS.

Sex

Sex differences were strong and consistent across almost all perceived barriers, with girls more likely than boys to endorse each barrier.

Girls were significantly more likely than boys to endorse:

- Embarrassment/shame (92.6% vs 64.3%; $p < .001$)
- Fear of blame (82.8% vs 58.3%; $p < .001$)
- Fear of not being believed (72.1% vs 46.1%; $p < .001$)
- Guilt (77.0% vs 53.9%; $p = .001$)
- Uncertainty about whether it was wrong (64.8% vs 47.8%; $p = .028$)
- Fear of getting into trouble (82.0% vs 52.2%; $p < .001$)
- Fear that telling would make things worse (65.6% vs 41.7%; $p = .001$)
- Parents finding out (78.7% vs 51.3%; $p < .001$)
- Friends finding out (75.4% vs 50.4%; $p = .001$)
- Perpetrator getting into trouble (61.5% vs 39.1%; $p = .002$)
- Having no one to tell (75.4% vs 46.1%; $p < .001$)
- Belief that nothing would change (63.1% vs 44.3%; $p < .001$)
- Fear of police involvement (75.4% vs 44.3%; $p < .001$)
- Bad past experience with telling (70.5% vs 46.1%; $p < .001$)
- No safe or private way to tell (72.1% vs 45.2%; $p < .001$)

Differences for the “Other reason” category were not statistically significant ($p = .250$).

Sex was the strongest and most consistent predictor of perceived barriers in Q54, with girls far more likely than boys to anticipate emotional, social, and institutional barriers to disclosure.

Differences in perceived barriers to disclosure among those with personal experience

Q53 asked respondents with personal experience about reasons they themselves did not disclose. Analyses were conducted by age group, socio economic status (SES), and sex.

Total N for Q53 analyses ranged from 36-37, depending on subgroup completeness.

Age

Two age related differences reached statistical significance:

- Embarrassment/shame: Endorsement was higher among participants aged 16-24 (76.2%) than those aged 13-15 (43.8%); $p = .044$; Fisher’s Exact (1 sided) = .047.

- Parents finding out: Older participants were significantly more likely to report this as a barrier (90.5%) compared with younger participants (62.5%); $p = .041$; Fisher's Exact (1 sided) = .050.

Borderline age differences

- Belief that nothing would change showed a borderline effect, with higher endorsement among those aged 16-24 (61.9%) than 13-15 year olds (31.3%), though this did not reach conventional significance ($p \approx .065$).

No statistically significant differences by age were found for:

- blame,
- not being believed,
- guilt,
- uncertainty about whether it was wrong,
- fear of getting into trouble,
- fear of making things worse,
- friends finding out,
- concern about the perpetrator getting into trouble,
- having no one to tell,
- fear of police involvement,
- previous bad experience,
- lack of a safe way to disclose,
- other reasons.

Age differences in Q53 were selective rather than widespread, with older participants more likely to report embarrassment and parent related concerns, suggesting increasing sensitivity to social and family consequences with age.

SES

Across all barriers examined, no statistically significant differences by SES were observed (all $p > .05$).

This included:

- embarrassment/shame,
- fear of blame,

- fear of not being believed,
- guilt,
- uncertainty,
- fear of trouble,
- fear things would get worse,
- parents or friends finding out,
- perpetrator consequences,
- having no one to tell,
- belief that nothing would change,
- police involvement,
- previous bad experiences,
- lack of a safe way,
- other reasons.

Several analyses included cells with very small expected counts, further limiting statistical sensitivity.

Unlike Q54 (others), personal reasons for non disclosure did not differ systematically by SES within this experiential subsample.

Sex

Overall, few clear sex differences were evident for Q53, and most comparisons were non significant.

Notable finding

- “Other reasons” showed a statistically significant difference by sex: Males were more likely than females to endorse “other” reasons for non disclosure ($p = .046$)

(Interpretation should be cautious given extremely small cell sizes.)

No statistically significant sex differences were observed for:

- embarrassment/shame,
- blame,
- not being believed,
- guilt,

- uncertainty,
- fear of getting into trouble,
- fear of making things worse,
- parents or friends finding out,
- perpetrator getting into trouble,
- having no one to tell,
- belief nothing would change,
- police involvement,
- previous bad experience,
- lack of a safe way.

Several outcomes showed directional trends (often higher endorsement among girls), but these did not reach significance due to limited power.

In contrast to Q54, sex differences were muted in Q53, suggesting that while perceptions of others' barriers differ strongly by gender, individuals' own reasons for non disclosure are more homogeneous once experience is present.

Appendix 3

This appendix provides detailed breakdowns and subgroup analyses (by age, sex, socio-economic status, and previous experience of online harm) for key findings reported in section 2.3

Differences in safety and confidence in disclosure

Age

There was no significant association between age group and whether participants would feel safe telling someone ($p=.581$). In both age groups, “feel safe” was the most common response:

- 13-15 years: 56.4% feel safe; 30.7% not sure; 8.6% not feel safe; 4.3% prefer not to say.
- 16-24 years: 64.7% feel safe; 26.5% not sure; 8.8% not feel safe; 0.0% prefer not to say.

Although older participants were slightly more likely to say they would feel safe, patterns were broadly similar and did not reach statistical significance. Two cells had expected counts below 5, so results should be interpreted cautiously.

There was no significant association between age group and whether participants did feel safe telling someone ($p=.481$). Responses were more evenly distributed than in the hypothetical question:

- 13-15 years: 48.9% feel safe; 34.0% not feel safe; 8.5% not sure; 8.5% prefer not to say.
- 16-24 years: 38.1% feel safe; 50.0% not feel safe; 7.1% not sure; 4.8% prefer not to say.

Older participants were descriptively more likely to report not feeling safe than younger participants, but this pattern did not reach significance and several expected counts were low (4 cells under 5).

SES

There was no significant association between SES and whether participants would feel safe telling someone ($p=.478$). Across SES groups, “feel safe” remained the most common response:

- ABC1: 61.5% feel safe; 29.7% not sure; 7.7% not feel safe; 1.1% prefer not to say.

- C2DE: 48.9% feel safe; 35.6% not sure; 8.9% not feel safe; 6.7% prefer not to say.
- DK/PNS: 61.0% feel safe; 23.7% not sure; 10.2% not feel safe; 5.1% prefer not to say.

Differences were descriptive only, and small expected counts in multiple cells mean results should be interpreted cautiously.

There was no significant association between SES and whether participants did feel safe telling someone ($\chi^2(6)=6.10$, $p=.412$). Across groups, “feel safe” and “not feel safe” were both common:

- ABC1: 46.7% feel safe; 42.2% not feel safe; 2.2% not sure; 8.9% prefer not to say.
- C2DE: 45.5% feel safe; 39.4% not feel safe; 12.1% not sure; 3.0% prefer not to say.
- DK/PNS: 30.0% feel safe; 40.0% not feel safe; 20.0% not sure; 10.0% prefer not to say (very small base).

SEX

There was no significant association between sex and whether participants would feel safe telling someone ($p=.885$). Boys and girls showed near identical distributions:

- Male: 56.4% feel safe; 30.9% not sure; 8.5% not feel safe; 4.3% prefer not to say.
- Female: 58.1% feel safe; 30.1% not sure; 8.6% not feel safe; 3.2% prefer not to say.

(Other and PNS/DK categories were very small.)

There was no significant association between sex and whether participants did feel safe telling someone ($p=.265$). However, subgroup sizes are small and expected counts are low in many cells. Descriptively:

- Male ($n=22$): 45.5% feel safe; 27.3% not feel safe; 9.1% not sure; 18.2% prefer not to say.
- Female ($n=57$): 40.4% feel safe; 50.9% not feel safe; 7.0% not sure; 1.8% prefer not to say.
- Other ($n=7$): mixed responses; interpret cautiously.

Differences in who CYP would or did tell

Age

Would tell

Across most reporting options, there were no statistically significant differences by age group. Patterns were broadly similar between younger (13-15) and older (16-24) participants:

- Friend: 40.4% (younger) vs 50.0% (older), $p=.251$
- Parent: 65.2% vs 56.8%, $p=.303$
- Teacher: 28.1% vs 29.5%, $p=.848$
- Police: 20.2% vs 29.5%, $p=.182$

A significant difference was observed for “someone else”:

- Younger: 2.8% vs Older: 13.6% ($p=.003$). This suggests older participants are more likely to identify alternative or less conventional reporting routes.

Did tell

Among participants with lived experience ($n=42$), there were no statistically significant age differences in who participants actually told. Descriptively:

- Friend: 37.5% (younger) vs 61.1% (older) ($p=.129$)
- Parent: 58.3% vs 61.1% ($p=.856$)

Small sample sizes mean findings should be interpreted cautiously.

SES

Would tell

A significant association was found for telling a friend ($p=.016$):

- ABC1: 50.0%
- C2DE: 44.0%
- DK/PNS: 27.7%

No significant SES differences were found for most other reporting routes, including:

- Parent ($p=.218$)
- Teacher ($p=.260$)
- Police ($p=.662$)
- Helpline ($p=.213$)

Did tell

A significant association was found for telling a sibling ($\chi^2(2)=7.90$, $p=.019$), although cell sizes were small:

- ABC1: 0.0%
- C2DE: 14.3%
- DK/PNS: 40.0%

All other SES comparisons were not statistically significant and should be interpreted cautiously.

SEX

Would tell

Most reporting options showed no statistically significant differences by sex, including telling friends, parents, teachers, or police.

A significant difference was found for “unsure” responses ($p=.025$):

- Male: 16.0% unsure
- Female: 6.9% unsure

This indicates higher uncertainty among boys regarding who they would tell.

Did tell

Most differences were not statistically significant. However, a significant association was observed for telling other school staff ($p=.004$), though small subgroup sizes mean this should be interpreted with caution.

Differences in how CYP want to report

Age

Significant differences were observed across multiple reporting modes:

- Face to face (FtF): 56.2% (13-15) vs 42% (16-24), $p=.028$
- Website reporting: 14.7% (13-15) vs 42% (16-24), $p<.001$
- App reporting: 17.5% (13-15) vs 37% (16-24), $p<.001$

Non-significant:

- Phone ($p=.774$)
- Not sure ($p=.415$)
- Other ($p=.620$)

Borderline:

- No report: 4.1% vs 9.9%, $p=.058$

Strong age-based shift from relational (FtF) to digital reporting

Experience

Significant differences emerged across multiple dimensions:

- Face to face: 63.1% (no experience) vs 46.5% (experience), $p=.004$
- Website: 16.3% (no experience) vs 36.4% (experience), $p<.001$
- App: 16.3% (no experience) vs 34.3% (experience), $p<.001$
- No report: 0.7% (no experience) vs 12.1% (experience), $p<.001$
- Not sure: prefer not to say 37.8%, $p<.001$

Those with previous experience show less reliance on FtF and more openness to digital reporting (and non-reporting). Among those who did not disclose experience there is higher uncertainty.

SES

Digital access / familiarity differences by SES

Significant:

- Website reporting: $\chi^2(2)=9.46$, $p=.009$
 - ABC1: 25.0%
 - C2DE: 29.5%
 - DK/PNS: 9.7%
- App reporting: $\chi^2(2)=11.41$, $p=.003$
 - ABC1: 28.5%
 - C2DE: 24.4%
 - DK/PNS: 8.3%

Non-significant:

- FtF ($p=.297$)
- Phone ($p=.826$)
- No report ($p=.264$)

SEX

Girls and gender minority participants show greater preference for digital routes

Significant:

- Website: $\chi^2(3)=8.60$, $p=.035$
 - Female: 26.1%
 - Male: 15.6%
 - Other: 41.7%
- App: $\chi^2(3)=11.96$, $p=.008$
 - Female: 24.8%
 - Male: 18.0%
 - Other: 58.3%

Non-significant:

- Face to face ($p=.975$)
- Phone ($p=.335$)
- No report ($p=.287$)

Summary interpretation

Unlike earlier sections, subgroup differences in how CYP prefer to report are substantive and patterned. The findings suggest three key dynamics:

- Developmental shift (age):
 - younger → relational / face to face
 - older → digital / independent
- Experience shift:
 - lived experience → more digital and more disengagement
- Access and identity effects:
 - SES and sex influence preference for digital reporting routes

Together, this reinforces that reporting preferences are shaped not only by availability of options, but by experience, confidence, and perceived safety of different modes of disclosure.

Differences in awareness of reporting routes

Age

There was no statistically significant association overall between age and awareness of reporting routes ($p=.078$). However, a significant linear trend was observed ($p=.020$), indicating that awareness increases with age.

- 13-15 years:
 - o Yes: 43.7%
 - o No: 26.3%
 - o Not sure: 27.2%
- 16-24 years:
 - o Yes: 47.4%
 - o No: 35.9%
 - o Not sure: 16.7%

Older CYP are less likely to be unsure, but not dramatically more likely to know.

Experience

A statistically significant association was observed between experience and awareness ($p<.001$).

- No experience:
 - o Yes: 49.3%
 - o Not sure: 20.3%
- Experience:
 - o Yes: 51.0%
 - o Not sure: 18.4%
- Prefer not to say:
 - o Yes: 19.4%
 - o Not sure: 52.8%

Previous experience might be associated with slightly higher awareness whereas non-disclosure shows high levels of uncertainty.

SES

There were no significant differences by SES ($\chi^2(6)=7.60$, $p=.269$).

Patterns were broadly similar:

- ABC1: 47.9% know
- C2DE: 42.1% know
- DK/PNS: 40.3% know

SEX

There were no significant differences by sex ($\chi^2(9)=4.51$, $p=.875$). Patterns were highly consistent across groups.

Summary interpretation

Overall, subgroup differences in awareness were limited, with the exception of experience. The findings suggest that:

- Awareness improves slightly with age, primarily through reductions in uncertainty
- Experience has a selective effect, linked less to awareness itself and more to certainty vs uncertainty
- Demographic factors such as SES and sex play a relatively minor role

Taken together, this indicates that awareness barriers are not evenly distributed across groups, but are particularly concentrated among those who are less engaged with or less willing to disclose experiences of harm.

Differences in what would make reporting easier

Age

Increasing emphasis on clarity and flexibility needs with age

Significant:

- Instructions: 53% (13-15) vs 69.1% (16-24), $p=.012$
- Other facilitators: 6% (13-15) vs 13.6% (16-24), $p=.032$

Trends:

- Support: 42.4% (13-15) vs 54.3% (16-24), $p=.066$
- Autonomy: 51.2% (13-15) vs 61.7% (16-24), $p=.103$
- Unsure: 12.0% (13-15) vs 4.9% (16-24), $p=.072$

Non-significant:

- Anonymity (high across both groups)

SEX

Girls / gender minority participants seek privacy, control and clarity, boys show higher uncertainty.

Significant:

- Anonymity: $\chi^2(3)=16.33$, $p<.001$
 - o Male: 56.6%
 - o Female: 77.1%
 - o Other: 83.3%
- Instructions: $\chi^2(3)=8.25$, $p=.041$
 - o Male: 49.2%
 - o Female: 61.4%
 - o Other: 83.3%
- Autonomy: $\chi^2(3)=18.35$, $p<.001$
 - o Male: 40.2%
 - o Female: 62.7%
 - o Other: 83.3%
- Unsure: $\chi^2(3)=10.04$, $p=.018$
 - o Male: 16.4%
 - o Female: 5.9%

Non-significant:

- Support ($p=.127$)
- Other facilitators ($p=.518$)

Experience

Those with previous experience show a need for autonomy whereas those who did not disclose previous experience show more uncertainty / disengagement.

Significant:

- Autonomy: 51.8% (no experience) vs 67.7% (experience), $p=.006$
- Unsure: 24.3% (prefer not to say) vs 5.1-8.5% (others), $p=.002$

Trend:

- Anonymity: $p=.115$ (direction suggests slightly lower among non-disclosure group)

Non-significant:

- Instructions (p=.103)
- Support (p=.137)

SES

SES differences mainly reflect access to clarity / familiarity with systems.

Significant:

- Instructions: $\chi^2(2)=7.45$, p=.024
 - o ABC1: 65.3%
 - o C2DE: 47.4%
 - o DK/PNS: 52.8%

Non-significant:

- Anonymity (p=.220)
- Autonomy (p=.100)
- Support (p=.248)

Disclaimer

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