



EMBARGOED 5AM THURSDAY 2 MAY 2019

## Digital self-harm affecting NZ teens, new research report reveals

**New research from online safety organisation Netsafe reveals that 6% of New Zealand teenagers have anonymously posted mean or harmful content about themselves online in the last year.**

The study found that younger teens (aged 13-14) were more likely to report taking part in digital self-harm. It also found that among the teenagers who reported they had posted self-harm content online, 65% said they had done it more than once.

Netsafe's CEO Martin Cocker said it was important for parents and other people caring for teens to be aware that a small number of young people may be taking part in this type of behaviour. "Online bullying is a very real problem affecting thousands of teenagers each year. This research shows that in some online bullying cases the person sending the abuse may also be the person at the receiving end of it."

Research by Dr Justin Patchin at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (USA) into digital self-harm has found a link between the behaviour and depression, bullying and offline self-harm. Patchin said that Netsafe's research was important in shining a light on the prevalence of the behaviour in a New Zealand context. "Any time a student experiences cyberbullying, there is a problem that needs to be resolved. Even if—*no, especially if*—the sender and receiver are the same person".

Teenagers reported that the main reasons for posting the content about themselves included wanting to show resilience, looking for sympathy from friends, making a joke or seeking reassurance about their friendships.

The research also found that boys and girls reported different motivations for posting harmful content about themselves online. Girls reported that they had posted the comments online in order to get sympathy from friends, as a way of showing their resilience publicly and in order to seek reassurance about a friendship. Boys were most likely to report that they had posted the content as a joke.

Cocker said the research showed that parents can play a big role in supporting their children and keeping them safe. "Our research shows that many teens may be using digital self-harm as a way of seeking support or reassurance about their relationships. Parents can play a part in addressing these feelings by talking with their children about their experiences online and providing support when they need it."

Netsafe provides free confidential advice and support for anyone experiencing online abuse or harm. Netsafe's helpline is open seven days a week from 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays. Call 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) or email [help@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:help@netsafe.org.nz).

For advice about supporting your child with online bullying visit:

<https://www.netsafe.org.nz/parents-bullying/>

The full report is available at <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/digital-self-harm-19/>

To learn more about Dr Justin Patchin's research visit <https://cyberbullying.org/>

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### **About Netsafe**

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Netsafe provides online safety education, advice and support for people in New Zealand. Taking a technology-positive approach to the opportunities and challenges digital tech presents, Netsafe works to help people in New Zealand make the most of technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.

Netsafe's helpline is open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays.

Netsafe was appointed as the approved agency to receive, assess and investigate complaints of harm caused by digital communications under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in 2015. The free service is available to all New Zealand internet users experiencing online harassment, offering help and advice to resolve complaints.

**Netsafe.org.nz - 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) - [help@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:help@netsafe.org.nz)**