

Online harms: social media and violence

Research

Students researching on computers

Key information

Publication type: General

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Description of research

The VRU recognises that social media can bring immense value to young people's lives as a creative outlet, a learning platform as well as a place to have fun connecting with friends. However, we also know that some social media content can cause harm.

Addressing violence as a public health issue. We're launching a series of research projects to:

- better understand the links between online content and offline violence
- engage with young people to identify strategic opportunities for prevention.

Online to offline violence

The VRU has commissioned research to investigate the relationship between social media and offline physical violence affecting children and young people in London.

Given the scale of social media, this project will specifically consider the following types of content:

- **Violent content** – defined as content that:
 - encourages, promotes or provides instructions for an act of serious violence against a person
 - depicts real or realistic serious violence or injury against a person in graphic detail
 - depicts real or realistic serious violence or injury against an animal or fictional creature in graphic detail.

Example content may include fights and injury, use or promotion of weapons, infliction of pain or gang violence.

- **Online violence against women and girls (VAWG)** – defined as online acts underpinned by misogyny, including but not limited to cyber harassment, cyber bullying, online sexual harassment, cyberstalking, and sexist, homophobic and transphobic speech.

This research will be delivered by winter 2025.

Keeping young Londoners safe on social media

The VRU works to convene key partners to support young Londoners to be safe online. This includes bringing together young people, youth practitioners and wider industry to ensure user input into interventions relating to social media.

Roundtables

Academic roundtable

The VRU partnered with London Research and Policy Partnership to hold a roundtable with a multidisciplinary group of academics. The roundtable responded to the question, "What are the opportunities and risks of using social media information to prevent violence affecting young people?"

The open discussion tackled regulatory and ethical considerations, limitations and risks, and solutions and interventions. [Read the discussion summary.](#)

Youth and practitioner voice roundtable

The VRU partnered with the Wickers Charity to run a workshop with young Londoners and youth workers to explore what a 'safe social media' would look like.

Young people and youth practitioners discussed their social media use, reflected on safety by design features and had the chance to design and pitch their 'ideal' social media platform.

Related online safety work

This research sits alongside the VRU's wider research and programme portfolio relating to online safety.

- [Research on young people's experience of Online Harm.](#)
- [Evaluation of the Social Switch Programme.](#)
- [The impact of young people of police using images of knives in social media posts.](#)

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