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Cyberbullying a $444M problem for NZ, new report reveals

New Zealand's first-ever report into the economic effect of online harm estimates the cost to individuals, communities and interventions to be $444m every year.

The research undertaken by leading economist Shamubeel Eaqub provides an important new assessment of the damage from online bullying and harassment. To date, cyberbullying has been primarily understood in terms of social cost and personal harm. This report provides a fresh perspective on the size of the problem, and the way it impacts society.

"We know there is significant harm caused to victims of online abuse and harassment," says Netsafe CEO, Martin Cocker. "It frays community cohesion and places additional demands on services like health. What really stands out is the sheer size of the problem, and the way the burden falls upon friends and family. This report gives us a starting point to begin to understand the full impact of this behaviour here in New Zealand, and where to best focus interventions and responses."

The survey commissioned for the report reveals that 1 in 10 NZ adults have personally experienced online harm, and that 64% of people are worried about the impact of cyberbullying and its effects on society at large.

Lead economist for the report, Shamubeel Eaqub, says that cyberbullying has a much wider affect than the individual person being targeted and that more could be done to address the risks.

"Typically, we think of harm from cyberbullying as affecting an individual victim, but there can be societal and even economic impacts. Our ability to communicate facilitates trade, transfer of knowledge and deepens social connections.

If that ability is affected by such a pervasive problem, then it will have a knock-on effect on the economy. New technology has become ubiquitous, but when we look into the scale of the effect of cyberbullying, it is apparent that resourcing to manage the risks has not kept pace," says Eaqub.

The report states that cyberbullying is often associated with emotional and psychological conditions, including stress, lower self-esteem and life satisfaction. The anonymity available online means that cyberbullying is more intense than in person, and some research suggests that there could be a greater negative impact on happiness and wellbeing from cyberbullying than social bullying.

Cocker says that the report recognises the potential for severe and long-lasting effects on the

targets of cyberbullying.

"Cyberbullying can be hugely impactful. The report shows that it can reduce educational achievement and has been linked to poorer health outcomes in some countries," says Cocker.

The estimated $444M cost includes a number of factors such as loss of life, the cost of time and resources spent on the victims of bullying and the willingness of survey participants to pay to avoid cyberbullying. It does not include the long-term cost of cyberbullying on mental health, physical health and productivity, which Eaqub says would likely significantly increase the cost.

Shamubeel Eaqub will be presenting the full findings of the report at The Crossroads 2018 Trans-Tasman Online Safety Conference tomorrow in Auckland. The conference is co-hosted by Netsafe and the Australian Office of the eSafety Commissioner to bring together online safety professionals and others working in online safety related fields.

The report was commissioned by Netsafe to estimate the societal cost of cyberbullying in New Zealand.

The full report is available at www.netsafe.org.nz/cyberbullying-cost

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Media Contacts

For media queries please email outreach@netsafe.org.nz

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.

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