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Online harm increasing in Aotearoa's rainbow community

A Netsafe study shows increasing trend in LGBTQIA+ experiences of sending and receiving harmful communications

Around a quarter of people who identify as non-heterosexual have received harmful digital communications in the previous year, according to a Netsafe study.

Trends identified in the data – released to coincide with Pride – suggest that since 2018, LGB+* participants' have been more likely to receive unwanted digital communications than heterosexuals. In 2020, there were large increases in the sending and receiving of such communications.

"It is utterly unacceptable that any person should be subjected to harm online due to their sexuality, gender or sex characteristics. Netsafe will do whatever we can to help stop the harm," says Martin Cocker, Netsafe CEO.

Netsafe is launching the *Here for every stripe of the rainbow community* campaign as the new data recognises the rainbow community is over-represented in the statistics.

The campaign will use the *#forallstripes* hashtag, offer self-help advice, and reinforce how to get incident support for online issues.

Netsafe has a long history of supporting all rainbow community members. There is a renewed commitment considering the study to let everyone know help is available, no matter their sexuality, gender or sex characteristics.

"Netsafe has an unrelenting focus on reducing online harm, and with various Pride events taking place right now, we want to encourage the rainbow community to talk to Netsafe if they need help as we are available seven days a week to assist," Cocker says.

In 2018, 13 percent of respondents were physically threatened online, but this jumped to 21 per cent in 2020. The figures were much higher than for heterosexuals, three percent and eight percent, respectively.

The study also showed a considerable increase from 2019 to 2020 of people sending unwanted digital communications. This includes a 20 percent increase in participants saying they had sent a sexual advance when they weren't sure it was wanted.

Netsafe has formalised a collaboration with InsideOUT to improve the sharing of resources and expertise.

This latest research demonstrated why such an initiative was significant, according to InsideOUT managing director, Tabby Besley.

"This data highlights the need for more information and education targeted at rainbow communities, regarding online safety and healthy relationships," Besley says.

"We know non-heterosexual people – and particularly young people – are more likely to use the

internet to explore their sexuality, and stigma and discrimination still exists across Aotearoa towards those with diverse sexualities.

"Unfortunately, the internet isn't always a safe place and people need to know that there is support available and actions they can take if they are on the receiving end of unwanted digital communications."

Annual trends in receiving unwanted digital communications

Percentage of participants receiving different types of unwanted digital communications 2018-2020 by sexual orientation

	2018	2019	2020
Physically threatened or intimidated you			
Heterosexual	3%	8%	8%
Non-heterosexual	13%	12%	21%
All participants	5%	9%	9%
Tried to embarrass or humiliate you online			
Heterosexual	7%	12%	8%
Non-heterosexual	19%	14%	36%
All participants	8%	12%	18%
Stalked you by monitoring your online activity to intimidate or control you			
Heterosexual	5%	8%	6%
Non-heterosexual	11%	11%	28%
All participants	6%	8%	8%
Made an unwanted sexual advance to you			
Heterosexual	8%	11%	10%
Non-heterosexual	28%	26%	37%
All participants	9%	12%	13%

Base: All respondents (2020 n=1,150; 2019 n=1,161, 2018 n=1,001).

Q18 - In the last 12 months, have you personally received an unwanted digital communication (e.g., email, text, photo, video, or online comment) that: Physically threatened or intimidated you… Tried to embarrass or humiliate you online… Stalked you by monitoring your online activity to intimidate or control you… Made an unwanted sexual advance to you (e.g., Messages propositioning sex acts, naked selfie, images or live video stream)

Annual trends in sending unwanted digital communications

Percentage of participants sending different types of unwanted digital communications 2019-2020 by sexual orientation

	2019	2020
Physically threatened someone		
Heterosexual	2%	1%
Non-heterosexual	6%	19%
All participants	2%	3%
Tried to embarrass someone online		
Heterosexual	3%	3%
Non-heterosexual	4%	13%
All participants	3%	4%
Involved regularly monitoring someone's online activity in order to influence their behaviour or thoughts		

Heterosexual	2%	3%
Non-heterosexual	3%	12%
All participants	2%	3%
Was a sexual advance toward someone that that you were not sure was wanted		
Heterosexual	2%	3%
Non-heterosexual	2%	23%
All participants	3%	5%

Base: All respondents (2020 n=1,150; 2019 n=1,161)

Q54 - In the last 12 months, have you personally sent or shared a digital communication (e.g., email, text, photo, video, or online comment) that: Physically threatened someone... Tried to embarrass someone online... Involved regularly monitoring someone's online activity in order to influence their behaviour or thoughts... Was a sexual advance toward someone that you were not sure was wanted (e.g., messages about sex, naked selfie, images or video live stream).

About Netsafe

Netsafe is an independent non-profit organisation with an unrelenting focus on online safety. We keep people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice and education. Visit netsafe.org.nz for useful resources or call 0508 638 723 seven days a week for help with an online incident.

About the research

Netsafe is publishing results that show annual trends across four types of digital risk: *online threats of physical harm*, *trying to embarrass someone online*, *monitoring online activity to influence someone's behaviour or thoughts*, and *making a sexual advance that was not guaranteed to be welcome*.

This study looked at LGB+ and heterosexual participants' experiences with both receiving and sending such communications. The study supports findings from previous Netsafe research that provided snapshots of the online experiences of LGB+.

* While Netsafe collects response data from people identifying with non-binary gender identities, the number of participants is too small to enable statistically relevant analysis which is why the term LGB+ is used and not LGBTQIA+.