Does posting in an online community encourage young people to disclose sexual assault or abuse?

Lisa Smith
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Abstract

There are many barriers to disclosing sexual assault or abuse for many young people. They may not understand that unwanted sexual experience is assault or abuse. So, how can the Internet help young people disclose their experiences or find information to help them make sense of what has happened to them? This paper explores how young people disclose sexual assault or abuse within online communities such as Yahoo Answers.

Findings suggest that young people engage in online communities to gain information, understand their experiences and find means of gaining support due to feelings of anonymity and reduced fear or imminent consequences. Further, this study found that people posting disclosures of sexual assault were able to begin the process of healing.

Introduction

The prevalence of sexual assault or unwanted sexual experiences among young people is disturbingly high, worldwide statistics state, one in three females experience abuse or sexual assault before the age of 18 years (UNIFEM, 2003) and US studies suggest one in six males experience abuse or sexual assault (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 1998). Despite the prevalence of sexual assault young people seldom report sexual assault or their unwanted sexual experiences spontaneously, if at all (Smith et al, 2000).

Sexual assault is a taboo subject despite the many individuals and families that are affected worldwide. Sexual assault by its very
nature is often entwined in shame and secrecy (May & Ronken, 2008). Feelings of confusion, guilt and betrayal make disclosures a difficult and complex process to contemplate or act upon, particularly when the perpetrator is someone known, trusted and/or loved. As Quadara states, “disclosure is not a matter of simply speaking up, but rather involves overcoming a series of complex issues” (2008; 4).

Disclosing sexual assault is a critical decision and has significant social, emotional, interpersonal and legal ramifications (Kogan, 2004). Thus, individuals face many barriers when considering disclosing sexual assault. This includes their relationship with the perpetrator, fear of not being believed or being blamed for the assault. Individuals also face many perceived consequences, including, wanting to protect family, friends and/or the perpetrator and often a lack of information including lack of awareness on sexual abuse (Crisma, Bascelli, Paci & Romito, 2004).

Furthermore, many young people do not use or necessarily understand the language or term ‘sexual assault’, ‘rape’ or ‘sexual abuse’ and therefore have difficulty naming the incident or experience (Hird, 2000; Powell, 2007 cited in Quadara, 2008). Young people, particularly children and those with an intellectual disability may have limited knowledge about societal sexual taboos and not fully understand that the sexual assault or abuse is wrong (Goodman-Brown et al, 2003) again creating further barriers to disclosure.

Research by Jenson et al (2005) found that young people have difficulty finding situations in which privacy and prompts allowed them to disclose. Further, young people were concerned about misinterpretations and the reactions of others. With so many barriers to disclosing, how can young people disclose their experiences or find information to help them make sense of what has happened to them? This paper explores public opinion from Yahoo Answers, the
knowledge-based online community regarding young people disclosing sexual assault online and within social networking sites.

In recent year’s, online communities and social network sites have been rapidly adopted by young people worldwide, creating new opportunities for young people to self develop, learn and construct a wide circle of relationships and support networks (Livingston & Brake, 2010). This technological and cultural shift from the analogue to the digital age means young people are growing up in a society that is strongly shaped by technological networks that includes both people and information (Boyd, 2007). In Australia, statistics suggest Ninety one percent of Australian family households with young people aged 8-17yrs have the Internet at home (ACMA, 2008) and one in five young people access the Internet for support (Evans, 2009).

With Internet access so readily available to young people, the opportunity to seek information and support from the virtual world is often far easier and more comfortable than in the ‘real world’. Sexual assault for any individual is difficult to talk about and understand. So, for those who have no one to confide in, do not understand their unwanted sexual experience or have been assaulted by those they trust and rely on, the opportunity to anonymously disclose without the perceived risk of imminent intervention may be a safe way to disclose (Ungar et al, 2009). Therefore, anonymous online communities such as Yahoo Answers may provide such an environment.

Yahoo Answers is the largest knowledge-sharing online community (90 million world wide members) and anyone can ask and answer questions on almost any topic (Yahoo.com, 2010). Yahoo Answers enables users to engage immediately without having to form social networks or gain trust.

For this reason it was deemed appropriate to engage with the users on Yahoo Answers through asking open questions to obtain

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qualitative data regarding disclosing sexual assault. Questions on Yahoo Answers can be asked on almost any topic. Those answering questions have the opportunity, freedom and control to voice their knowledge, opinions and experience. Furthermore, individuals had already posted questions relating to sexual assault on Yahoo Answers. These included questions such as; ‘is this sexual abuse?’ And ‘she has been raped and doesn’t want to tell anyone?’ Suggesting there are individuals experiencing sexual assault or abuse using the site that do not have the frame of reference to comprehend what has happened to them. Individuals that experience sexual assault may not know who to contact or what do about their unwanted sexual experience.

The aim of this paper is to show that young people disclose sexual assault within online environments to normalise their experience or seek validation and also get advice and support.

Method

This study took both a qualitative and quantitative approach to explore disclosures on the knowledge-based online community site, Yahoo Answers. The qualitative method included posting a series of ten open-ended questions on Yahoo Answers (see appendix 1) over a four-week period. Each question was posted for four days and open for any Yahoo Online Community member (world wide) to answer. Yahoo Answers allows members the freedom to express personal views and opinions; however members must follow the yahoo community guidelines, any offensive content posted can result in membership being withdrawn.

All questions posted on Yahoo Answers included a brief statement that advised Community Members that each question asked was for research purposes. Questions were posted in various sections of Yahoo Answers, including family & relationships, psychology, sociology and women’s studies and all questions followed

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the Yahoo Community Guidelines. Questions asked, were general in nature and did not ask individuals to disclose or describe any incidents of sexual assault, as this was deemed ethically inappropriate given the online environment. Furthermore, individuals were not asked to provide any personal information regarding their name, gender or age. However, when members respond to a question(s) their alias or avatar name and picture is included with the response suggesting their gender and approximate age.

A short anonymous survey was also posted on the Secasa kid’s website for eight weeks (see appendix 2), to obtain quantitative and age demographic information. The survey consisted of three questions relating to how individuals sought advice regarding sexual assault. The end of the survey, allowed for individuals to make any further comments. Again, none of the survey questions asked individuals to disclose or describe any incidents of sexual assault as this would be inappropriate given that no support or follow up would be provided.

**Results**

**Yahoo Answers Results**

The ten questions on Yahoo Answers generated a total of 74 responses, 72 of these were from unique respondents. All questions posted generated responses, however the quantity of responses varied with each question and ranged from three responses to nineteen responses per question. Answers to the questions varied in length and opinion. However, several themes emerged from the responses and these include;

- Sexual assault is difficult to discuss face to face
- Anonymity
- Testing the waters
- Healing and support
• Validation of experience
• Advice seeking
• Males look weak if they disclose sexual assault

This qualitative approach facilitated an appropriate way of understanding individual perceptions and societal assumptions of sexual assault. Opinions in response to the questions varied considerably in some instances. However, in many cases, opinions demonstrated that historical societal ‘norms’ regarding sexual assault are apparent within this online community.

Survey Results

The age range of the participants differed, 29 percent were under the age of 17 years, 57 percent were aged between 18 – 23 years and 14 percent were over 24 years. Responses from the survey suggest young people are more likely to seek advice regarding sexual assault from a friend (43%). Followed by a social networking site/internet (29%), a family member (14%) and a trusted adult (14%). None of the participants said that they would seek advice from the police. Of the responses, 43 percent said they had asked for advice or they knew someone that had asked for advice on a social network site/internet regarding sexual assault.

The final section of the survey asked for ‘any comments you would like to add’ this generated two responses, these are; “much rather use the net - no bad questions” and “you need more information about what to do if your dad or uncle touches you” Suggesting young people are looking to the internet to find information on sexual assault and need further advice and support after their initial search. However, it must be noted that no real conclusions can be drawn from the survey as only seven responses were generated in eight weeks.
unlike the questions posted on Yahoo Answers. In comparison, Yahoo Answers generated a greater amount of instant responses within the four weeks. Showing how useful online entities can be as a research tool.

**Discussion**

For many young people, the online realm may be adopted enthusiastically because it represents ‘their space’ visible to peers more than to adult surveillance. Creating an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence – to construct, experiment with and present a reflective self in a social context (Buchnar et al 1995, cited in Livingston, 2008: 396). Although this may be true for many young people, for some, the online realm has become so much more than a place where they can construct identities and maintain social networks. But a place where young people can share concerns, seek advice and validation and obtain support for traumatic experiences such as sexual assault.

The use of the Internet by young people has been at the centre of many public debates in recent years and will continue to be, particularly when children and young people are perceived as being at risk of harm. It is the risks and dangers of young people using the Internet that are most commonly the focus of public debates. Despite the many positive Internet experiences young people have, including the freedom to be able to express themselves (Powell, 2010).

The ability for young people to self-express can be a difficult part of adolescence. However, when young people experience sexual assault or abuse it can be incredibly difficult for them to make sense of. This is because of the complexity of their felt experiences such as shame and guilt, as well as family and societal issues of secrecy (May & Ronken, 2008). Thus many barriers to disclosing sexual assault are formed and often maintained for many years.
This study found the responses to questions posted on Yahoo Answers generated many opinions and views and illustrated a diverse range of understanding and experience of sexual assault despite no direct questions asked. The results also suggest that possibly not all responses to questions were answered by young people but by those who were looking to support young people affected by sexual assault. Individuals that simply had an interest in the question(s) posed or those trolling the site. The responses in some cases demonstrated that although questions were being asked on an anonymous site ‘societal norms’ regarding shame, humiliation and secrecy were still present. Other responses simply suggested sexual assault should be reported to the police.

However, a majority of responses expressed views suggesting they possibly have experienced some form of sexual assault or unwanted sexual experience. These respondents wrote how posting on the Internet could be a cathartic experience or a process of starting to heal. Research by Joinson (2001) suggests the computer acts as a mirror reflecting back what has been written enabling individuals to focus on inner feelings and emotions. Thus the process of healing begins.

This was evident in the question ‘why do young people use social networking sites to disclose abuse/assault rather than speaking to someone?’ This question generated many responses but the following response demonstrates powerfully and clearly why young people disclose sexual assault on the Internet and how individuals can concentrate on their most inner thoughts and feelings.

“...You can type freely on the internet, with tears running down your face and hands shaking and pain in your heart, you can still manage to piece together words. Speaking about something so gut-wrenching and personal is difficult in person, but on the internet, it feels candid because nobody is watching you. You can’t see who is

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listening, you can’t see their expression. If you get a detail wrong or say something you don’t want to, you can just backspace and it all disappears. If only words went away so quickly”

This response suggests there is a sense of emotional safety disclosing online. Not being observed while sharing painful experiences is a powerful message in this response. Further, there is a choice regarding when and where to disclose and the ability to compose words carefully; the use of backspace or delete is important to be able to articulate thoughts and feelings. Lüders (2009) supports this; her findings suggest in the absence of physical presence individuals’ online communication and self-presentations are more controlled, open and honest.

Another respondent wrote about disclosing on Yahoo Answers; ‘I tell people things here, but I don’t like people in real life to know what happened to me. None of my friends know. I couldn’t talk to a therapist because I don’t want anyone looking at me while I talk about these things’. Again the difficulty people experience in talking face to face about sexual assault is highlighted. Also, this response encompasses societal attitudes around secrecy creating a barrier to disclosing in the ‘real world’. However disclosure in a ‘virtual world’ where anonymity is a core element enables people to talk about painful issues.

Anonymity was a reoccurring theme throughout the research findings. The question ‘sometimes young people disclose sexual assault/abuse on social network sites in search of help. Is this helpful?’ This respondent wrote, ‘….Using a social networking site can help as it gives a sort of anonymous feel and you feel safe to disclose information without any direct repercussions e.g. how family and friends would treat you’ This response fits with Ungar et al’s 2009 research; anonymity may provide a safe way of disclosing when there is no perceived risk of imminent intervention. This was again reiterated in this response; ‘…the person feels really embarrassed and

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scared to tell someone just in case they pay a certain consequence for revealing it’.

Another respondent wrote; ‘think it’s primarily because of the anonymity. It could be hard to talk face to face about serious problems like these. Even worse if word gets out that you got assaulted!’ This respondent firstly addresses that anonymity provides a safe way to disclose. The respondent also addresses the difficulty of talking about sexual assault in a face-to-face environment. Further, this respondent highlights how much of a taboo subject sexual assault is within society.

The following respondent also indicated that sexual assault/abuse is a taboo subject. Further, this respondent expressed societal myths regarding individuals being responsible for their assault or abuse. ‘I hope I didn’t give the impression that I was asking for myself (postings re; abuse). Sometimes it’s because they think they’re going to be in trouble. Especially if they had put themselves in harms way’.

These views were also expressed by another respondent, ‘Sexual assault can be difficult frequently the victim blames themselves and so keeps quite about it in order to avoid ‘judgement’ from their nearest and dearest’. Myths about sexual assault, particularly in relation to self-blame can prevent people from understanding their experience as sexual assault. Thus, no disclosure or report will take place.

Other responses explored ‘testing the waters’ when considering disclosure. Research suggests on-line disclosures can have powerful repercussions in real life (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). This response explores testing the waters to determine the real life repercussions. ‘Saying ‘my boyfriend hit me’ on yahoo is very different than saying it to the police, or even to a friend. It’s a risk-free way of testing the waters. If you don’t like the outcomes, the advice, or you change your mind, it can be deleted with the click of the button. If you tell the police, then its

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not so easy’ research by Ungar et al suggests that some adolescents regret disclosing sexual assault as they have feelings of destroying their families when what they wanted was the abuse to stop.

Healing and support was a further re-occurring theme throughout the respondent’s opinions. Supportive responses to disclosing sexual assault are crucial and can result in alleviating distress (Bacon & Richardson, 2000, cited in Crisma et al, 2004). This respondent wrote how providing a supportive response to others on Yahoo Answers is beneficial. ‘simply giving a stranger the forum to share helps relieve tension or may help him or her to immediately reach a decision rather than endure the abuse’

When posting the question, ‘Does online communication, make it easier to disclose sexual assault or abuse? One respondent wrote; ‘you get relief from actually letting someone know it happened, gain courage to go further with it, and simply heal from it’. Healing and support is also apparent in response to the question ‘Do young people disclose sexual assault/abuse online because they have no other way of feeling supported?’ ‘Engaging others in conversation about it may be healing for the person doing the talking and may also be healing for someone else to read’. Suggesting disclosures of sexual assault posted online can be healing for those that read them also.

Some respondents expressed views regarding validating incidents of sexual assault and seeking advice. ‘The positive effects would be that the person could give voice to his or her feelings in a setting that was comfortable to them, and that perhaps they could connect with other teens that had gone through a similar experience and might have valuable information and advice’. Quadara (2008) states that pre disclosure of sexual assault for young people is an ongoing process and involves in part, recognition that the incident is wrong, seeking validation and overcoming confusing or ambivalent feelings about the abuser and incident.
Males’ appearing weak if they disclose sexual assault was also a theme within this research. The question ‘Are girls more likely than boys to disclose abuse/assault on social networking sites? Generated many responses including; ‘Boys and men are less likely to even admit that what happened to them was abuse, and less likely to open up to anyone because it'll make them look "weak". Not only because men aren't supposed to be weak, but because they blame themselves for being weak enough to get abused in the first place’. Society tells us that men and boys are expected to be self-reliant, strong and independent. So, when sexually abused the stereotypical male role is ‘damaged’ (Crome, 2006). This and other issues such as sexuality and self-identity create further barriers to disclosing sexual assault for males.

Another respondent wrote; ‘Boys are usually embarrassed or ashamed to admit they have been abused in real life. While a computer is safer and more discreet, it is still hard for boys to admit out loud that this horrible thing has happened to them’. Again this respondent highlights the difficulties males face. However, this respondent does suggest that disclosing online may be a way forward for males to disclose sexual assault.

A minority of opinions expressed that sexual assault was a matter for the police which contradicts the findings from the survey on the Secasa Kids website. Other responses made reference to individuals falsifying sexual assault disclosures to hurt others or made inappropriate comments; again this was a small number of responses. Some respondents warned of poor advice online.

Some respondents expressed the differences between disclosing on social network sites and online communities as this could certainly impede any recovery or healing. ‘I'm assuming you mean something like this site, rather than posting about your rape on Facebook’. This response highlights that young people do need to carefully consider
where to post disclosers of sexual assault. Hervely (2008) states that online material can reappear at inopportune moments and cause distress long into the future.

This respondent also writes about the risks of disclosing sexual assault on an inappropriate social network site. ‘Of course there are downsides, such as too much information about yourself can be viewed by total strangers, and depending on the networking site i.e Facebook, the information could end up family and friends lap anyway’.

In conclusion, the research findings suggest that disclosing sexual assault or abuse through posting in online communities is a beneficial experience for young people. Further when young people are responded to in a supportive manner and/or given information, they are able to understand their experiences and find means of gaining support.

Research by Skinner et al (2003) would further suggest that young people prefer an online environments to discuss difficult topics because there is less embarrassment or conflict. Also there is a perceived lack of judgement and unlike traditional services the Internet is accessible 24 hours a day everyday.

This research supports the literature that disclosing online can be easier due to feelings of anonymity and reduced fear or imminent consequences (Ungar et al, 2009). Valkenburg & Peter (2009) would further argue that when communicating online, young people feel fewer inhibitions in disclosing personal topics that are not easily disclosed, such as worries and vulnerabilities. This study also found that people posting disclosures of sexual assault were able to begin the process of healing.

Limitations and further research

A limitation of this study could be that there appears to be some confusion generally regarding technological terminology. Possibly

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many individuals do not comprehend the differences between social network sites and online communities and the implications this may have in terms of anonymity. A further limitation of this study is that research gathered may not necessarily be from young people but from adults providing support to those that post questions online. Also the respondents could be survivors of sexual assault or those that are simply interested in answering posted questions or those that are trolling sites.

In spite of these limitations, this research provides a unique insight into the opinions and views regarding young people posting online disclosures of sexual assault. This has important implications for SECASA and other sexual assault services in terms of considering how best to engage young people that are affected by sexual assault. Other implications for SECASA could be that they need to review some of the terminology on the kid’s website so young people can understand the information they are looking for.

This paper also suggests further research is needed due to the lack of research in this field. Future research could include obtaining views and opinions on disclosing sexual assault within closed online communities that are specific for survivors of sexual assault. Other research could explore disclosures on social networking sites such as Facebook or MySpace due to the enormity of users on these sites.

**Notes on this research**

Respondent’s opinions and views included in this paper have not been amended or changed for this research. However, some responses are only part included due to length of answers given.
Appendix 1

Question 1

Would you prefer to ask a question online about sexual assault or telephone a service?

Which do you think people would prefer to do? Ask a question online about sexual assault or telephone a sexual assault service for information or support?

I am a student researching disclosures of sexual assault on social networking sites. To help my research I would really like to understand what are the impacts (positive & negative) of disclosing sexual assault or abuse on social network sites in particular for young people.

Answer 1

i would rather online cuz it feels more anonymous than on a phone

i hope this answer helped

Answer 2

Online is easier and very private but the advice could vary and it may be harder to get help.

A phone call would be uncomfortable at the start but it would make the victim feel less alone and they would receive better advice and support from the one on one communication.

My vote – Telephone

Answer 3

I think people would first look to the internet to get info, ask, see what the general consensus is, etc. Then if they feel they needed further help they would contact the person by phone but I think it would be rare. The site would have to be reliable, not a site like this for example where you dont really know who you are talking to, but one where professionals are available and the users go through some kind of screening service (like reviewing their answers and or having them sign up with personal information).

Answer 4

the second option because there is a lot of false info online along with a lot of morons

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Question 2
Why do young people use social networking sites to disclose abuse/assault rather than speaking to someone?

Answer 1
Social networking sites take away any potential humiliation or shame the young person might feel. Or possible discomfort of talking face to face.
Also, people tend to be more extroverted online than they are in real life (on average). So they may go into more detail that would be too intimidating to discuss with someone in person.

Answer 2
I hope I didn't give the impression that I was asking for myself ( postings re; abuse).
Sometimes it's because they think they're going to be in trouble. Especially if they had put themselves in harms way.

Answer 3
Urm.
I've yet to see
"Soo....got raped last nite. Lulz"
on anyone's wall.

Answer 4
Good question....my friend just Tweeted she got raped. I'm not sure if she is kidding or not. I guess I'll have to check the status on her Facebook page tomorrow....and remind her to upload the pics from last weekend!

Answer 5
Probably because they can accuse any one they want and don't have to corroborate it with evidence

Answer 6
2 reasons, 1) for attention or sympathy 2) because they are anonymous

Answer 7

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because it is easier to type something on the internet and not have to look anyone in the eye.

**Answer 8**
think it’s primarily because of the anonymity. It could be hard to talk face to face about serious problems like these. Even worse if word gets out that you got assaulted!

Not much else I can say on the subject.

**Answer 9**
positives: the victim isn’t being psychically hurt, only verbally.
negatives: everyone can see it
people do it because they are either too scared to do it in person or they do it both in person or online.

**Answer 10**
Victims of abusers often feel guilt or shame and don’t want to get their abusers in trouble. Some are fearful and can not get away from their abusers long enough to meet with people. Leaving the abusive relationship is the most dangerous part, this is where most murder/suicides occur in domestic violence. Some are in abusive relationships where they have no control over finances and therefore lack resources to go to help face to face. Many reasons why finding help online might be a safer and more efficient way to access resources.

**Answer 11**
I think it’s because the person feels really embarrassed and scared to tell someone just in case they pay a certain consequence for revealing it. However, I know not telling someone about the problem would result in issues as it can be hard to resolve the problem alone. It can also lead to depression and anxiety if the person keeps the issue to himself, and who knows what that depression can lead to as it does several thing. As for telling someone, it is more helpful. I know when you talk to someone, it makes you feel good and much better, and through that, you will receive lots of support and ways to solve the issue that will ease your situation, whether it’s just talking to a friend, parents, or going to counseling. It will no doubt relieve the fear and anxiety.

**Answer 12**
In no particular order:

1. Lack of repercussions. Saying ‘my boyfriend hit me’ on yahoo is very different than saying it to the police, or even to a friend. It’s a
risk-free way of testing the waters. If you don’t like the outcomes, the advice, or you change your mind, it can be deleted with the click of the button. If you tell the police, then its not so easy.

2. Telling strangers is easier than telling the real world. Strangers don’t know you, can’t judge you, tell you that you deserved it, get involved, tell him that you told, etc.

3. Not knowing where else to get help. There really is a lack of information out there about where you can go to escape abuse, and who you can talk to, and if it is all confidential. The Internet is accessible, relatively anonymous, and full of information (good and bad)

4. Making a mountain out of a molehill. Being afraid that what happened wasn’t really abuse, he didn’t mean to do it, etc etc etc. I see questions here all the time such as ‘is this abuse’, ‘is this emotional abuse’. Maybe people are afraid that if they speak up, they might get told that they are overreacting.

5. You can type freely on the Internet, with tears running down your face and hands shaking and pain in your heart, you can still manage to piece together words. Speaking about something to gut-wrenching and personal is difficult in person, but on the Internet, it feels candid because nobody is watching you. You can’t see who is listening, you can’t see their expression. If you get a detail wrong, or say something you don’t want to, you can just backspace and it all disappears. If only words went away so quickly.

**Answer 13**
If its any form of teasing or something like that its because they are too scared to face the person face to face. For advice its either they have no one to talk to or they need more opinions.

**Answer 14**
Many young people are embarrassed to report abuse to their parents or law officials. Some teenagers try to avoid being questioned, ridiculed or misplaced by their peers. The Internet is filled with a broad spectrum of information and pathways to seek help or report abuse. Publicly sharing personal details can sometimes become burdensome as it is difficult to erase ur personal information that hundreds of people may be pasting and copying while spreading your news that u’d hope was directed to someone that could help. Sometimes they are connected to people who
have been assaulted or abused and can tell them exactly what they should do. Quite often, I read an outcry for help on YAHOO ANSWERS. I quickly respond because simply giving a stranger the forum to share helps relieve tension or may help him or her to immediately reach a decision rather than endure the abuse. I think most times the people use aliases but often share their true stories. Being able to sort thru the mess is usually the biggest part of any problems that causes tremendous amounts of stress. Different forms of media has taught the youth that no element of one’s life should be hidden. When it comes to abuse, there’s no kidding. Sometimes being open can be helpful and sometimes it can be detrimental to one’s reputation. If a person requires immediate help, I suggest him or her do what they deem to be best. In accessing each situation, the abused person has to ask: What’s more important saving one’s life or one’s reputation?

**Answer 15**
I’m assuming you mean something like this site, rather than posting about your rape on Facebook. I can think of a few reasons for this.

-Anonymity, and all that comes from that, including:

*Not having your friends and loved ones think of you as a victim.
*Not having your friends and loved ones have to choose between you and your assaulter (if you’re both friends with the same people).
*Avoidance of mandatory reporting laws.

-Few/no friends.
-No access to counseling.
-Confusion about what happened, or what to call it.

The positive effects would be that the person could give voice to his or her feelings in a setting that was comfortable to them, and that perhaps they could connect with other teens that had gone through a similar experience and might have valuable information and advice.

The negative could be that the response to the person’s query is negative. A lot of times, if it’s not presented in the right way or to the right audience, a cry for help on the internet is easily misinterpreted as trolling. But someplace like scarleteen might be a great place to disclose a story and get actionable help.

Even in the best case, it’s going to be less helpful than talking to someone in your own community, who can direct you to medical care.

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and survivor's groups, etc. But everyone processes in their own way. Giving voice to the experience to strangers on the internet might be someone's first step in healing.

**Answer 16**
Anonymity.

**Answer 17**
Because nobody will know who you are so its just easier…?

**Answer 18**
plenty of reasons. for one, theres more time for the person to transfer their enmity and hate to the other person as they type, so its more affront and distasting for their satisfaction. two, they won't feel as threatened or intimidated as opposed to a face to face argument which may lead to violence. three, when its a face to face situation, the person can lose his or her words over the rush and increase of blood pressure in their body to their brain and make them look like a total idiot as their lost for words. and four, youths nowadays are just more compelled to the internet in the hopes of distracting themselves from their pathetic emptiness and meaningless consumer driven minds. their all cowards its depressing.

**Answer 19**
social sites and over all internet communication provides a great shelter if your words fire back on you. You just log off.

**Question 3**

Are girls more likely than boys to disclose abuse/assault on social networking sites?
Research suggests that girls use social networking sites to get social support from friends or peers and boys often use social network sites to get information. What do people think?

**Answer 1**
I think it's pretty well 50-50 on that one.

**Answer 2**
I think it's even. I have to wonder why there is so much effort in discovering differences rather than similarities.

**Answer 3**
yes, beleive it or not women can be very viscous, they tend to ruin the social life of other guys or women , but guys we will ruin you physically.

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im a guy

**Answer 4**

You should study your own question and THINK???? Is Lisa a male or female?? We don't know only Lisa does. Statistically speaking you can never truly get an answer from this or any site but , you can only know that someone is typing on a key pad.

**Answer 5**

I think women are more apt to disclosing that information in general. Men tend to believe that weakness is intolerable and refuse to disclose information that shows weakness. that’s the reason that men don’t often disclose their feelings to women.

I think that women find it easier to disclose this information on social sites because there is an anonymity that allows them to feel more confident discussing these issues, and often, a support that makes handling the situation easier.

**Answer 6**

Probably. Girls are more likely to be abused, and more likely to seek help with the abuse. Boys and men are less likely to even admit that what happened to them was abuse, and less likely to open up to anyone because it'll make them look "weak". Not only because men aren't supposed to be weak, but because they blame themselves for being weak enough to get abused in the first place.

I've been in plenty of social networking sites where both genders are very honest about past abuse and help each other heal. But those areas are most often safe spaces frequented by women and avoided by men. They often openly affiliate with feminism. To an abused man, turning to women for that kind of support makes them even less of a man, and even weaker, which they assume makes them more likely to be abused again, or is an indication of the weakness that they (wrongly) assumed caused the abuse.

I mean, how many support groups do you know run and populated by men? How many of those are ridiculed by other men? Support groups for women are far more likely to be acceptable socially.

It’s very very sad, and just another indication about how toxic masculinity and the equation of any sort of vulnerability with weakness hurts men too. Gender roles hurt men, and they impede recovery.

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Answer 7
yeah

Answer 8
agree to u Lisa..

Gals use SNS mostly to share their grief and get emotional support from other peers no matter if they know them or complete strangers over internet...
but guys do not do it even though I would say even if they have some grief to share..but most of the guys i beleive here take information..

I dont think it has any negative impact as long as everything is under ethical limits..gals get emotional support and guys most of them i would admit, rather feel sorry for these gals.

cheers!

Answer 9
off the top of my head, guys to select few, girls in a broader setting

Answer 10
I am not sure how we would prove or disprove your theory. On Y/A it seems like boys and girls both troll the site, I am not sure if it would be safe to say more girls troll than guys though.

Answer 11
I think so. Boys are usually embarrassed or ashamed to admit they have been abused in real life. While a computer is safer and more discreet, it is still hard for boys to admit out loud that this horrible thing has happened to them.

Question 4

If you or someone you know had been abused or assaulted, would you first look online for support services?

If you or someone you know had been abused or sexually assaulted would you search on the internet first to find information or find out how to access support services?

Answer 1
there was no internet when i was abused

Answer 2
I’d go to the police.

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**Answer 3**
If someone I know had been abused or assaulted, if they hadn't already, the first thing I would do is implore them to seek help from the law and medical services.

**Answer 4**
I would not try to help them, I would direct them towards at least a therapist if not the police.

**Answer 5**
Disclosures, eh? When I did this stuff, there were no 'disclosures', ever! The teacher (a feminist by the way) said that rather than 'disclose' (she was a working professional in the field) she would go to prison.

I think I’d talk to quite a few different people and get their views - then I’d very carefully weigh up the choices - I would automatically discount feminist orientated ones, which you can see from the stories I have told for many moons here, about a very lovely lady friend of mine who did that and what it did to her.

I doubt that I’d look on the internet - I prefer to see who I’m talking to and to weigh them in the balance right then and there. The 'social science' world is rife with stories of the harm done by ill-informed and wrongly ideologised 'workers' in that field.

**Answer 6**
Abused and sexually assaulted is a matter for the police. I would call them. Then if needed they could contact organization dealing with their problems. As far as the internet I wouldn’t waste the time.

**Answer 7**
I looked for info on psychology and working through trauma’s on the internet and the library, but never felt the need to share with strangers.

**Answer 8**
Yeah I agree with Larry. If it were me the first thing I would do would be to call the police.

**Answer 9**
I would look online for support services, but I wouldn't look for online support services, if that makes any sense.

**Answer 10**

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http://www.dancinginthedarkness.com/

If you’re looking for an actual website here one is. This is to help people who were raped or sexually abused cope and give them a place to share their stories. It lets them know that they aren’t alone

**Answer 11**
There are many support groups in my area....

I can tell u.. being a person many years ago of abuse by husband.. it did wonders for me.. it was like a haven to be around others like myself.. who understand.. and gave me strength.. to recover from it all and build my self esteem and go on.. It has been a long time.. and today. I am a different person b/c of a support group...

I definitely think.. Hot Lines need to be open 24/7 for anyone especially for young ppl.. I believe more goes on than society wants to admit..
Not being a child of abuse or assault.. but through the years .. I have came across a lot of young ppl needing help in this area. and like U they do not no who to turn to.. they need to advertise it can be anonymous, and they need to know they will be in a safe place.. until after a hearing..
good luck on your assignment.. I wish you luck w/ it.. and hope some thing good comes out of it..
take care..

**Question 5**

Are youths more likely to first look online for info about sexual assault rather than speaking to someone?

**Answer 1**
nowadays yes

**Answer 2**
A lot of young people think that it won’t happen to them, because they are smart enough to avoid it. It is the type of thing that, parents find out they are talking to strangers or whatnot, parents confront them about it, usually youths get defensive and say they know better than to get involved, and then the youths joke about it with their friends and try again to justify their belief. I mean it is not the exact same but

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it is a pretty similar situation. If there is like a magazine that has
information about it they might pick it up a bit, but it is at their own
pace. If someone they feel open talking to about sexual things or many
things happens to know better than to think anyone who is smart can
avoid it, then, well. That is good for them. But unfortunately many
kids do not have that. :/

Answer 3
Unless it has actually happened to them yes..
otherwise.. if reported they are questioned then given
advise to seek counseling..
U need to check w/ counselors in ur area.. perhaps
they will bring together a group of kids that have been
assaulted... and u can get your inform from them direct

sexual assault is hard to discuss unless in a group
then they feel more free to speak out.. contact a hot
line in ur area.. they could have some suggestions.
best wishes..

Answer 4
Usually people don’t know who to talk to.
They are afraid about what their friends would think, and they are
afraid of how their parents would react.
So they turn to the internet where they can get their answers without
people knowing who they are.

Answer 5
I look online first before i make even the simplest decisions in life.

Answer 6
I think so. Once you start asking questions about sexual assault,
some people are going to jump to a conclusion that the youth may be
a victim, they make a report to their local police or DCFS agency. On
occasion, the person, out of concern, may go to the asker’s parents or
family to advise them of the inquiry. From there, it is possible that an
investigation will be opened by “good intentioned” social agencies. This
may go so far as to have the child/young adult examined to rule out
the possibility of sexual assault. Although all of this is being done in
the best interest of the individual, it is embarrassing and intimidating.
Whereas, if the individual has questions and goes to an informative
website, the questions may be answered without the involvement of
any others and with total and complete confidentiality.

Answer 7
i bet they are, so they could get anonymous advise. but i wouldn`t say
it`s better advise.

Lisa Smith, 2010
**Answer 8**
I would think so, I mean, it is always better to contact their family, friends, teachers, and so on, but I think a lot of people try to "hide" it, they may be afraid that people may think less of them, even though the exact opposite may occur (I mean in the way that people may think that they are strong for coming forward)

**Answer 9**
yes

**Answer 10**
I ans'd a question on Y!A's one time about.. well.. can't remember but I could go look.. it was one of my first replies.. to a little girl who had been raped.. She appreciated my ans.. then started writing me.. she said she was only 11.. and was so scared.. was an only child.. had been left w/ an older cousin.. We communicated for years.. and I still have her email address..I'm a grandmother... so I have much compassion for females who have been abused..
Good luck w/ ur research..

**Answer 11**
Unless they have a very close friend or an exceptional relationship w/ a parent.. I would think internet would be the way to go..
The impact.. I think is the shock of it all..
second.. what to do about it??

Negatively.. hardly anyone wants to get involved unless they are an agency of some kind.. most grown up can't handle.. so u can imagine what it is like for a young person they have to tell their parent etc..

There needs to be a HOT LINE. a real one.. not where someone can come and joke around about it.. but how does one know..??? that is a big problem.. Some just do it to get Information.. others are too young to know what is going on.. and just curious.. big problem via internet..

even on the phone would be hard.. and to ask them to come in.. scares the hell out of them.. but that is the only way to keep down the jerks..
Take care..

*Southern Health*

Lisa Smith, 2010
**Question 6**

**Sometimes young people disclose sexual assault/abuse on SNS' in search of help. Is this helpful?**

Young people sometimes disclose for the first time that they have been sexually assaulted or abused on social networking sites in search of help and support. Is this helpful to them?

**Answer 1**
No ur not ur the 55 yr old pervert who preys on teens

**Answer 2**
If you have any questions or if I can be of any further help...email me

**Answer 3**
Sexual assault can be difficult frequently the victim blames themselves and so keeps quite about it in order to avoid ‘judgement’ from their nearest and dearest. Using a social networking site can help as it gives a sort of anonymous feel and you feel safe to disclose information without any direct repercussions e.g. how family and friends would treat you. Also when you feel you know longer wish to talk about it, it is as simple as switching off the computer.

Of course there are downsides, such as too much information about yourself can be viewed by total strangers, and depending on the networking site i.e Facebook, the information could end up family and friends lap anyway.

**Answer 4**
Not if the disclosures are false.

**Question 7**

**Do young people disclose sexual assault/abuse online because they have no other way of feeling supported?**

**Answer 1**
Yes. And it's kind of like bragging rights too...because most people realize people who sit online 24/7 probably aren't getting any so it kind of boost their ego and makes them feel important. It's a ridiculous phase, huh?

**Answer 2**
It's much easier to talk about when you can be anonymous. Some do it to support others who may have gone through similar things. Abuse issues are often kept locked up inside, and a person who's worked through it knows that it must be processed. Engaging others in conversation about it may be healing for the person doing the talking and may also be healing for someone else to read.

**Answer 3**

Yes, it's called blackmail.

**Answer 4**

I'm not a part of any social networking site because those are not anonymous enough. I tell people things here, but I don't like people in real life to know what happened to me. None of my friends know. I couldn't talk to a therapist because I don't want anyone looking at me while I talk about these things.

**Question 8**

If you disclosed sexual assault/abuse on a SNS, would you get further support from a service face to face?

**Answer 1**

From the disclosures that I have read on social networking sites, many remain simply that, an anonymous written testament. Many receive sympathetic responses.

**Answer 2.**

Sounds like you're looking for answers to a homework question. You need to be searching the right scholarly databases for your homework question (like PsychLit, which is pretty all-encompassing). Off to the library you go!

**Answer 3**

You must always be careful of the on line molesters, many frequent those sites. Report to the police or social services.

**Question 9**

Do social networking sites encourage youths to disclose more personal information about themselves?

**Answer 1**

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Any one is capable of telling personal information about themselves in ANY type of social network. But many of us no better than to do such a idiot thing lol

common sense

Answer 2

Nope.
That’s a VIRTUAL world.

Answer 3

Yes, rather everyone including adults tend to reveal more of themselves on a social networking website then in real life.

It’s a lot easier to type something than to say it out loud especially if you’re not thinking that hard.

However, I doubt that anyone would disclose anything about sexual assault on the internet unless they were being anonymous. Such a thing is far too difficult to let anyone else know about it especially if they somehow know the offender.

Question 10

Does online communication make it easier to disclose sexual assault or abuse?

Answer 1.
hmm, if I get what your really asking I have an answer. (If you were assaulted.) Aniosity, you don’t have to post who you really are and you can get support, or just the, "I'm sorry that happened to you." The positive side is that you get relief from actually letting someone know it happened, gain courage to go further with it, and simply heal from it. The negative is worry that someone you didn’t want to know this, finds out, that you will be told you are wrong, and that you may be shunned/ridiculed. Hope I can add an insight.

Answer 2.
Yes I think online communication(such as myspace facebook or chat rooms) make it easier to disclose sexual assault and abuse because everything is stored in data banks in the computer and anything that needs to be bought up will be bought up by law enforcement

Answer 3

Lisa Smith, 2010
yes i believe that it is easier, not having to look at someone means that u don't have to worry as much about how they will react many victims feel ashamed, therefore being able to remain anonymous can make things easier.

**Answer 4**
It does, because you keep your identity private, but it is not as private as you might think. Always use fictional names and characters and give them different ages and locations and states.
Appendix 2

Survey

1. What age group are you?
   - 0 - 17 years
   - 18 - 23 years
   - 24 +

2. Where would you first get advice from if you or someone you know had been sexually assaulted?
   - a friend
   - a family member
   - a trusted adult
   - the police
   - a social network site/internet
   - other

3. Have you or someone you know asked for advice about sexual assault on a social network site?
   - yes
   - no

4. Any comments you would like to add

Appendix 3

Survey Results

1. What age group are you?
   7 responses
   - 0 - 17 yrs 29%
   - 18 - 23 yrs 57%

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2. Where would you first get advice from if you, or someone you know had been sexually assaulted?

7 responses
- a friend 43%
- a family member 14%
- a trusted adult 14%
- the police 0.00%
- a social network site/internet 29%
- other 0.00%

3. Have you or someone you know asked for advice about sexual assault on a social network site?

7 responses
- yes 43%
- no 57%

4. Any comments you would like to add

2 responses
- “much rather use the net - no bad questions”
- “you need more information about what to do if your dad or uncle touches you”

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