



Parents' confidence in their ability to identify and respond to cyberbullying

A survey of Australian parents

Calvin Smith, PhD
Senior Researcher

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Executive Summary

This study surveyed 510 Australian parents on their confidence to be able to identify, report, prevent and stop cyberbullying, and on their experiences with the victimisation of their child/ren through cyberbullying. The sample was mainly drawn from NSW, Victoria and Qld) but is broadly representative of parental age range.

Parents' confidence in dealing with cyberbullying experiences of their child/ren

Queensland parents, like those across the country, feel confident

- that they know what constitutes cyberbullying,
- that their children would report it to them if the latter were being victimised by cyberbullying, and
- that they would respond effectively if they became aware of the cyberbullying victimisation of their child/ren.

Parents are less confident

- that they know where to go to report cyberbullying instances, or
- that they have the resources to help them prevent it, or
- that they have the resources to help to stop it once it begins.

Parental responses to cyberbullying perpetration by children

When thinking of their children as perpetrators of cyberbullying behaviours, parents (in Queensland as in the rest of Australia) feel confident

- in the effectiveness of their own responses to the problem

but less confident

- that they have the resources they need to prevent their child/ren cyberbullying, or
- that they have the resources needed to stop it once it has commenced.

Summary of findings and some recommendations

The main findings are highlighted throughout in "call-out" boxes integrated within the text, however they are listed here for convenience:

- Education about social networking apps and site use should be targeted more heavily at older parents
- Parents' are confident that they can identify cyberbullying, that they will respond effectively when cyberbullying occurs, and that their children will disclose when they are being victimized
- Parents' are less confident that they know where to report cyberbullying, that they have the resources to help them prevent cyberbullying or stop it once it occurs
- Parents' estimates of the likelihood their child/ren will disclose cyberbullying victimisation, and of the effectiveness of their own responses to such disclosure, may overestimate both.
- The majority of this sample of parents said their children had no previous experience of being victimized by cyberbullying
- Parents who are currently experiencing the victimization of their child/ren (or have in the past) are less confident than those with no such experience on three dimensions: policy and education strategies that are based on the confidence of people who have not experienced their children's victimisation may miss target resource allocation.
- One group of parents is of particular interest. They are not sure about their child/ren's experiences of cyberbullying, and they are the least confident in terms of where to report cyberbullying, believing that their child/ren would tell them if it was happening, and having the resources to prevent it from happening.

- Female parents are less confident than male parents on knowing where to go to report cyberbullying, and having the resources to prevent it, or to stop it once it is detected.
- Older parents are less confident than younger parents that they have access to resources for preventing and for stopping cyberbullying victimisation.
- Parents are more confident that they would respond well if they found out that their child/ren was engaged in cyberbullying behaviour, than they are that they have the resources to prevent it from happening or stop it once it is detected.
- Parents with no experience of their child engaging in cyberbullying of others are more confident than their counterparts on the effectiveness of their own responses if it were to happen, and their access to resources for preventing or stopping their child/ren from cyberbullying others.
- Female and male parents rate the effectiveness of their likely responses where they detect that their child/ren are engaged in cyberbullying behaviour, similarly and quite high (86% agreeing or strongly agreeing). However, about 30% of parents of both genders are neutral or disagree or strongly disagree that they have appropriate resources to assist them in preventing or stopping their child/ren's cyberbullying behaviour.

Conclusions

Based on other data collected by **yourtown** (reported in Collyer, 2018), we can say that parents are likely to be over-estimating both the likelihood their child/ren will report cyberbullying to them, and that their responses will be found useful by their child/ren.

Given the potential importance of the family in providing an educative and protective environment around young people, through the influence of which young people are empowered to report victimisation and to use strategies to prevent or stop occurrences of cyberbullying, as well as to resist become perpetrators of cyberbullying, the findings indicate a need for:

- education about the management of risks of cyberbullying, and of protective factors, to enhance parents' abilities to prevent it;
- education about the management of instances of cyberbullying, to enhance parents' abilities to stop it once it has commenced;
- an awareness-raising campaign showing how and where to access the resources that may assist parents in their endeavours;
- special attention to be paid to those who may be overestimating the effectiveness of their responses partly as a function of their lack of material experience with the problem.

Introduction

Purpose

The analyses reported in this document are part of a wider study the purpose of which is to examine the role that family culture, and parents' knowledge of, and beliefs and attitudes about their children's on-line lives play in supporting children to protect themselves from, and respond to instances of, various on-line harms, especially cyberbullying.

Parents can play an important role in the prevention of online risk behaviours and harmful online experiences as they are key in both preventing cyberbullying itself and providing supportive and appropriate interventions when it does happen.

In order for parents to offer adequate guidance and support, they need to know how best to respond to cyberbullying when it happens as well as how to create an environment where this behaviour is less likely to occur or be experienced and in which children are more likely to seek parental support, guidance and intervention.

Thus, the overall aim of this research is to inform effective strategies within the family context for parents and caregivers to assist in mitigating against the negative effects of cyberbullying

In this report, the analyses focus only on parents' self-reported confidence to:

- feel comfortable identifying what types of online behaviours are bullying;
- know where to go to in order to report cyberbullying;
- feel confident that my child would tell me if they were being bullied online;
- have the resources to assist me in preventing my child from being a victim of cyberbullying;
- have the resources to assist me in stopping my child from being victimised online if this were to happen; and
- feel confident that I would respond effectively if my child were to tell me they had been a victim.

Gender comparisons are made, as are comparisons of those persons whose children have experienced cyberbullying.

Methodology

Participants

Five hundred and ten (510) parents of children aged 12 through 16 (inclusive) completed a survey. Participants were 263 females and 246 males (one respondent preferred not to say and is not included in the analyses reported here). The effective sample was 509 after exclusion of the one person whose gender was unknown. The mean age of female respondents was 41 years (range 17-64; S.D. 7.9 years); mean age of males was 43 years (range 15-69 years; S.D. 10.6 years). The distribution of ages is in Figure 17 in the Appendix. Upon examination of the age range it was decided that some respondents should be excluded because they appeared to be unusual or outliers in terms of their age and the ages of their dependents. Arbitrarily, age was attenuated at 26 and 56 years. This left 455 respondents for inclusion in the age analyses that follow.

The majority of respondents (398, or 78%) were currently with a partner. As to family structure, 469 (or 92.5%) were either biological/adoptive parents living with children (85%) or blended/step families with children (8%). The majority (78%) were resident in New South Wales (32.8%), Victoria (25.0%) and Queensland (19.8%).

Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance for the research was obtained from Griffith University (GU ref no: 2018/452).

Materials and procedure

The survey canvassed questions related to family coherence, child and parent internet / social media usage, and parental monitoring of child internet / social media usage, experience with cyberbullying, and parental confidence in responding to and protecting their children from cyberbullying.

All bar a small number of questions in the survey were optional and could be skipped if the participant so chose. Those that were compulsory were so in order to establish quota, or to ensure follow-up questions dependent on preceding ones were answered.

The survey was accessed and completed *via* computer; it was designed in Qualtrics, and hosted at Griffith University.

Results

Children as victims of cyberbullying

Respondents' experience with social networking applications

Most parental respondents use Facebook (82%). Twenty-four to thirty-seven percent use Twitter, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram and Pinterest. A much smaller proportion uses Tumblr (10%) and Music.ly (9%) – see Figure I8 in the Appendix.

Use of Apps is associated with age, with all apps offered in a question on usage showing marked decline in use over the age groups in the survey; Facebook usage is more reliably distributed across age groups (between 76% and 88% usage) – see Figure I9 in the Appendix. This is not to say as individuals age, usage of some apps diminishes; rather it is a generational phenomenon. It does however suggest that education about social networking apps and site use should be targeted more heavily at older parents.

Education about social networking apps and site use should be targeted more heavily at older parents

Respondents' self-reported confidence in dealing with cyberbullying

Respondents were asked a range of questions about their confidence in understanding and responding to cyberbullying if it were to victimise their child/ren. Six questions, in Likert (1932) format, with the stem "How much do you agree with the following statements concerning cyberbullying?" were asked as follows:

- I feel comfortable identifying what types of online behaviours are bullying;
- I know where to go to in order to report cyberbullying;
- I feel confident that my child would tell me if they were being bullied online;
- I have the resources to assist me in preventing my child from being a victim of cyberbullying;
- I have the resources to assist me in stopping my child from being victimised online if this were to happen; and
- I feel confident that I would respond effectively if my child were to tell me they had been a victim.

Figure I shows the percentages across response categories on these six items (pooling strongly agree and agree together, and disagree and strongly disagree together), indicating that confidence is higher for:

- Identifying / defining cyberbullying;
- The propensity for the child to report incidents to the parent; and
- Having an effective response were it to happen.

Parents' are confident that they can identify cyberbullying, that they will respond effectively when cyberbullying occurs, and that their children will disclose when they are being victimized.

In contrast the data indicate that parents have less confidence in:

- Knowing where to go to report cyberbullying;
- Preventing cyberbullying; and
- Stopping cyberbullying once it has occurred.

Parents' are less confident that they know where to report cyberbullying, that they have the resources to help them prevent cyberbullying or stop it once it occurs.

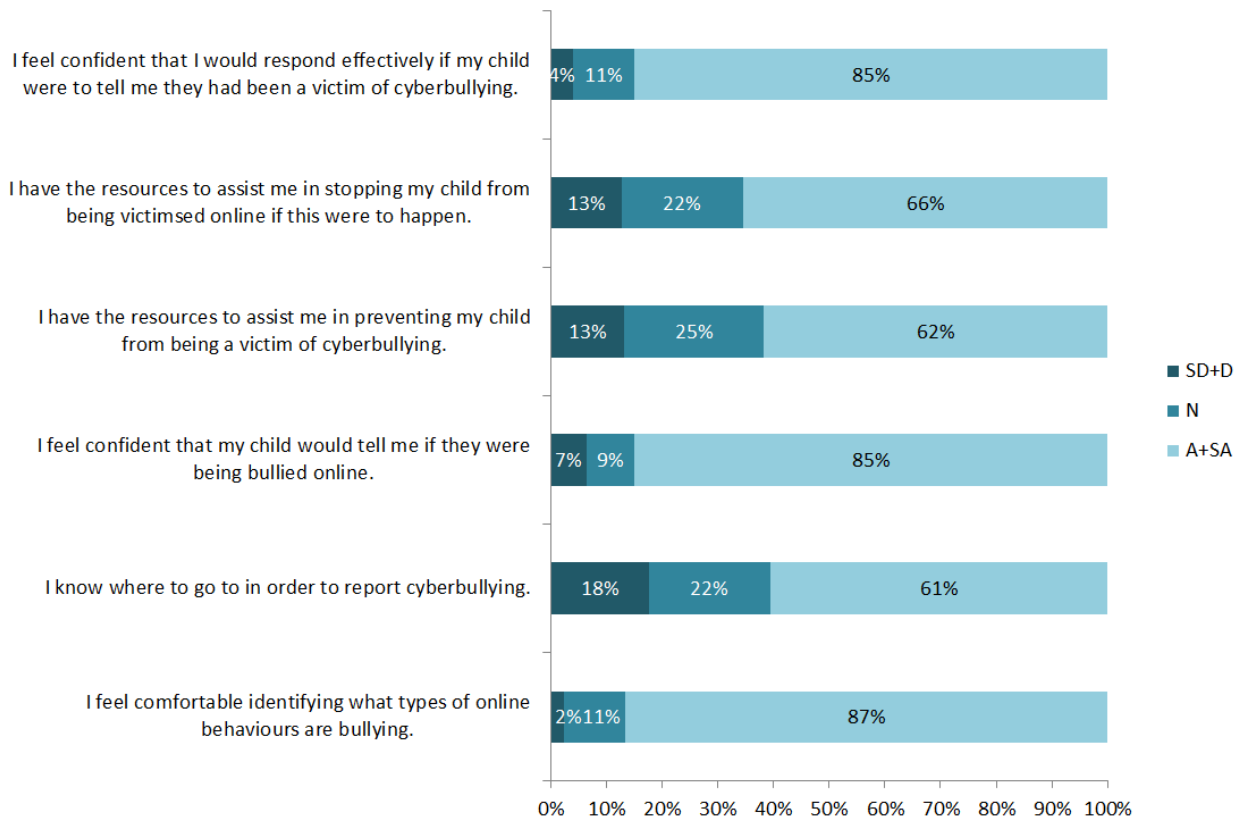


Figure I: Percentage distribution for six items focused on knowledge of and response to child victimisation by cyberbullying

Interestingly, a recent **yourtown** study of children's cyberbullying experiences (Collyer, 2018) indicated that only 41% of children who had been victimised by cyberbullying reported it to their parents; thus, the data in the present study showing parents' high levels of confidence that children would report cyberbullying to them may significantly over-estimate the likelihood of that occurring.

Data in this study also show that parents express considerable confidence that their responses would be effective if their child/ren were to tell them of instance/s of cyberbullying victimisation, but, again, data collected by **yourtown** (Collyer, 2018, p. 2) suggests that this is not as likely to be true as parents themselves would believe – of the 41% of respondents in that survey of children and young people, who said they had reported cyberbullying to a parent in the past, only 39% found it “very helpful”.

Parents’ estimates of the likelihood their child/ren will disclose cyberbullying victimisation, and of the effectiveness of their own responses to such disclosure, may overestimate both.

Respondents’ Children’s Experiences with cyberbullying

Most of the sample (75% or 382 respondents) indicated that their 12-16 year old child/ren had not been in the past, and were not currently being, cyberbullied. Of the remaining 25%, 80 (16%) indicated that their child/ren had experienced cyberbullying in the past, and 30 said their child/ren were currently victims of cyberbullying. The remainder (N=16) indicated that did not know their child’s/children’s history of cyberbullying victimisation (see Table I).

The majority of this sample of parents said their children had no previous experience of being victimized by cyberbullying

Table I: Ns for the item *Is your child currently the victim of cyberbullying, or have they been victimised in the past?*

	No	Yes, in the past	Yes, currently	I don't know
N =	382	80	30	16
% =	75%	16%	6%	3%

What role does experience play in parents’ confidence

We now consider the scores on these six items, analysed by actual cyberbullying experience. One question in the survey facilitated this; it asked: *Is your child currently the victim of cyberbullying, or have they been victimised in the past?* Table I reports the Ns for the six questions

Figure 2 through Figure 7 show the results of the analysis of self-rating scores by experience of cyberbullying.

They indicate that, for three items at least, the high confidence scores reported for the whole sample in the aggregate, are indeed inflated by the self-estimations of that group of respondents who report no prior or current experience with victimisation of their child/ren through cyberbullying.

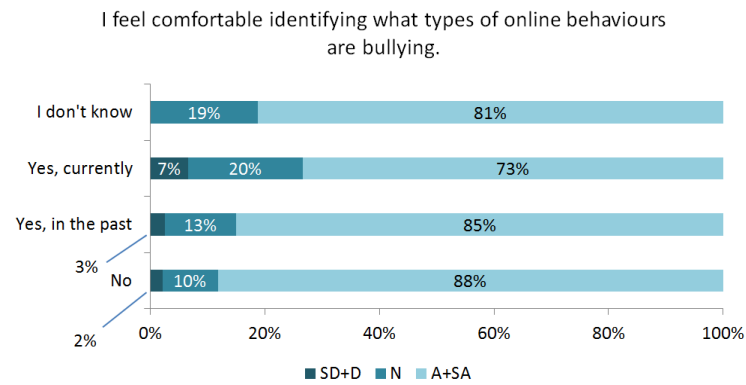


Figure 2: Identification of CB behaviours by child/ren's experience of victimisation

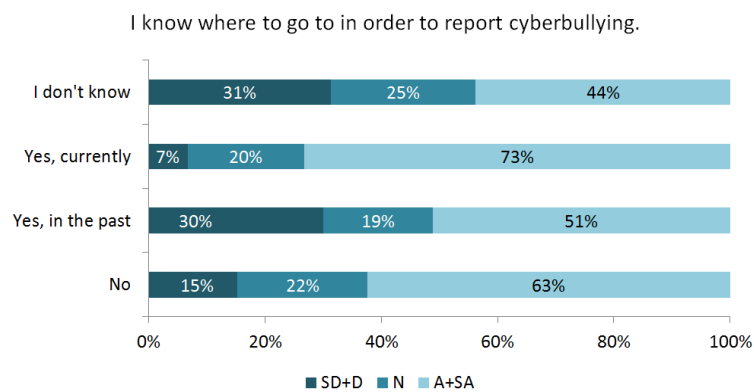


Figure 3: I know where to go to report CB

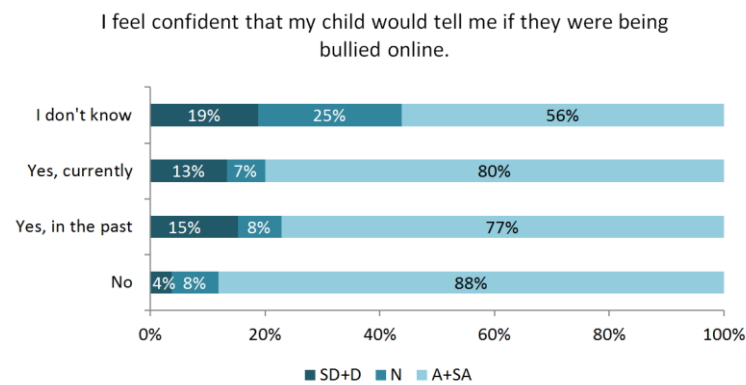


Figure 4: Confident the child/ren would disclose to parent

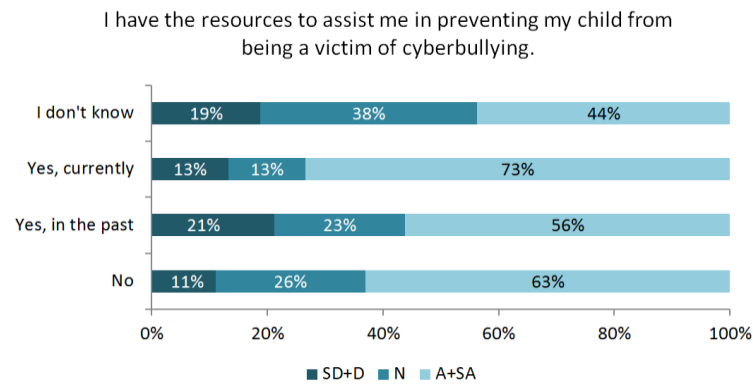


Figure 5: Have resources to prevent victimisation of child/ren

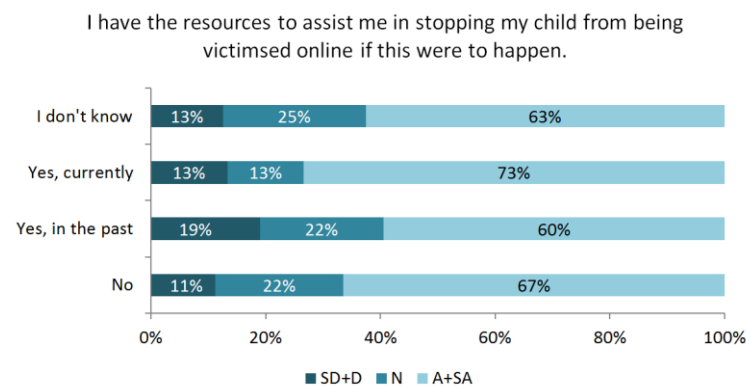


Figure 6: Have resources to stop victimisation of child/ren once detected

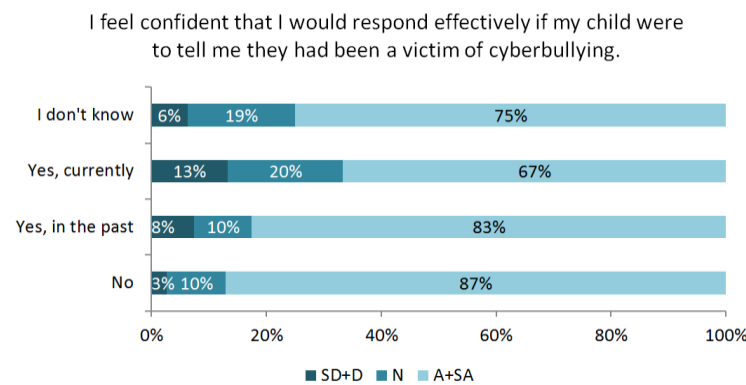


Figure 7: confident would respond to child/ren disclosed bullying victimisation online

Thus, for half of the questions (identify cyberbullying behaviours, confident child would tell parent, and confidence in own response), those without direct current or past experience of their child/ren's victimisation are more confident than those with such experience. In contrast, experience increases confidence in knowing where to report cyberbullying, and having resources to stop or prevent victimisation.

There is, however, another observable phenomenon of interest in these data, and it is that there is a group of parents who are not sure whether their child/ren are being or have been cyberbullied, and their confidence is the lowest on three items (knowing where to report cyberbullying, believing that their child/ren would tell them if it was happening, and having the resources to prevent it from happening; these parents represent an important group for whom targeted education may empower them to develop the kind of relationships with their children that would open communication about cyberbullying with their child/ren.

One group of parents is of particular interest. They are not sure about their child/ren's experiences of cyberbullying, and they are the least confident in terms of where to report cyberbullying, believing that their child/ren would tell them if it was happening, and having the resources to prevent it from happening

Do fathers and mothers report similar levels of confidence for dealing with cyberbullying?

Analysis of variance of the means for the six items by gender show that for the lower scoring items (reporting, preventing, and stopping) fathers' self-appraised confidence means are significantly higher than mothers' means (see Figure 8). (Note: these fathers and mothers are not parental pairs within each household).

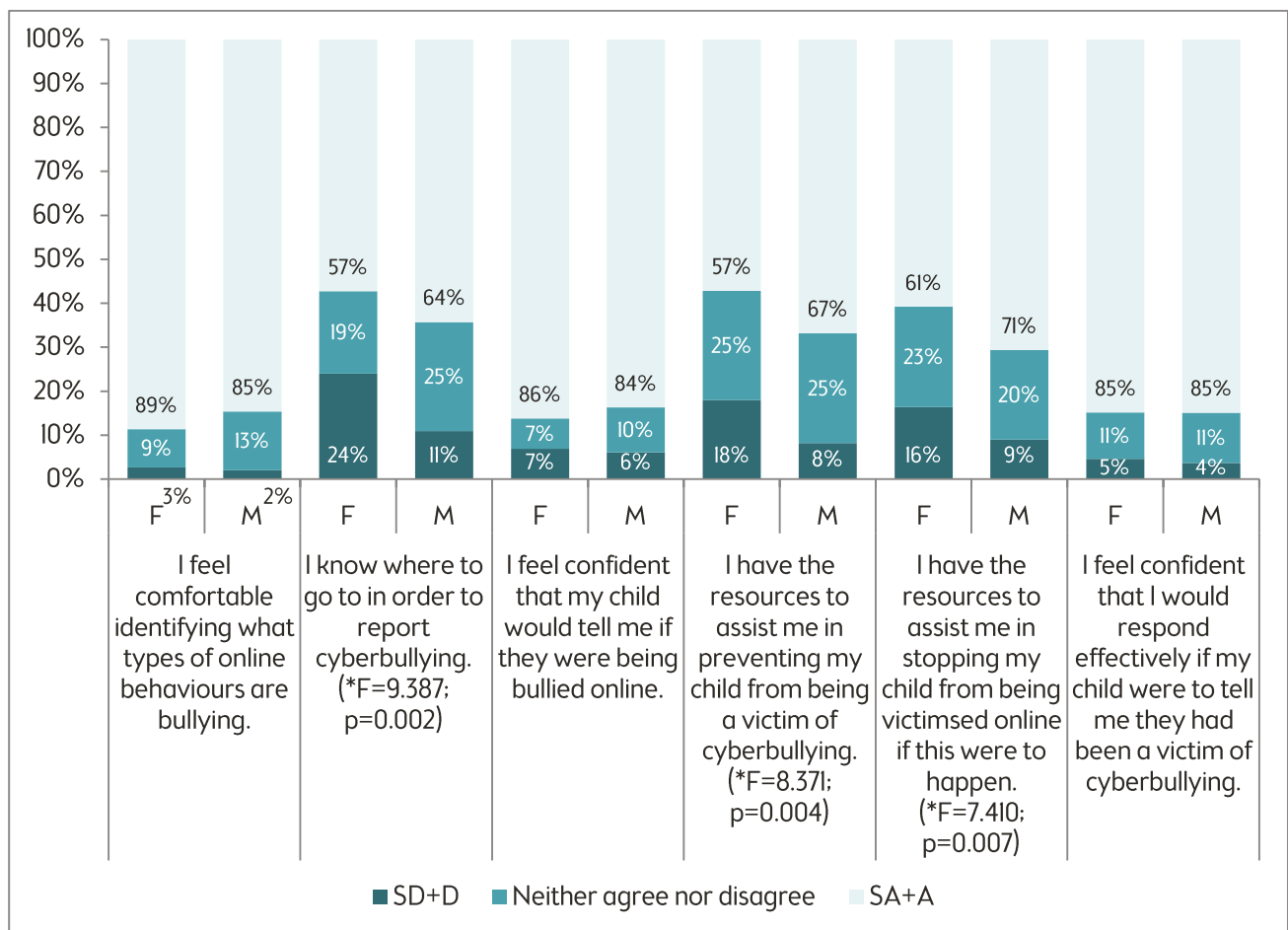


Figure 8: Parental confidence item proportions, by gender (significant *mean* differences indicated on chart)

Female parents are less confident than male parents on knowing where to go to report cyberbullying, and having the resources to prevent it, or to stop it once it is detected.

What is the impact of parental age on confidence?

Upon examination of the age range it was decided that some values should be excluded because they appeared to be unusual or outliers. Arbitrarily, age was attenuated at 26 and 56 years. This left 455 respondents for inclusion in the age analyses that follow. Then respondents were grouped into three sub-groups by age (26-39; 40-49; and 50-56). Using these three subgroups it was possible to show that for the items relating to resources for preventing and for stopping cyberbullying victimisation there was a patterning of results with age, with older parents being less confident.

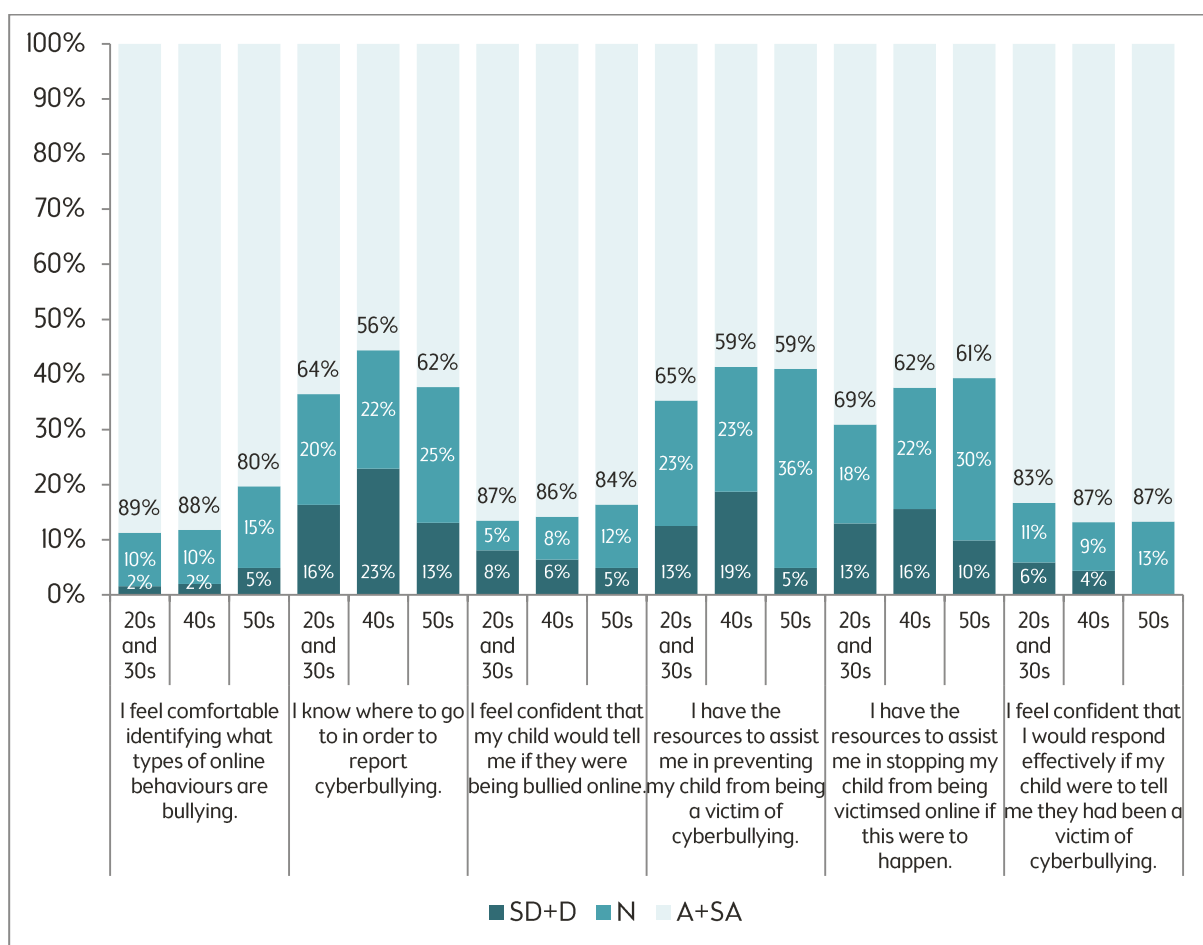


Figure 9: Proportions for three age sub-groups for six confidence items (experience of CB)

Older parents are less confident than younger parents that they have access to resources for preventing and for stopping cyberbullying victimisation.

Children as perpetrators of cyberbullying

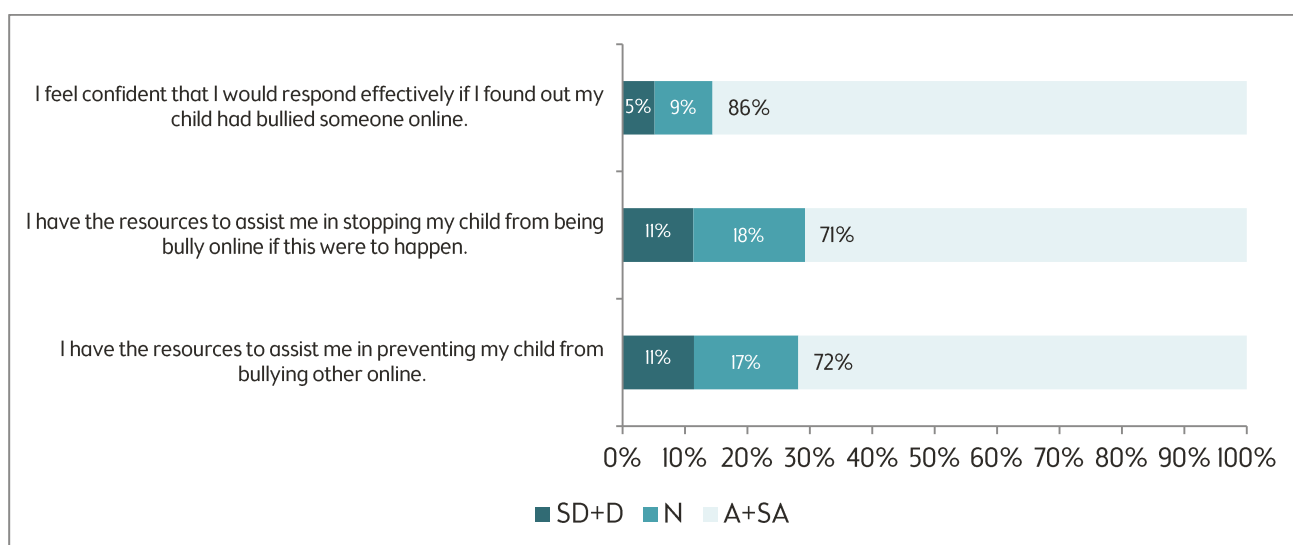
Parents may find themselves dealing not with victimisation by cyberbullying, but rather situations in which their child/ren is/are the perpetrators of the cyberbullying. Three questions explored parents' preparedness for responding to such a situation:

How much do you agree with the following statements concerning your child bullying others online?

- I have the resources to assist me in preventing my child from bullying other online.
- I have the resources to assist me in stopping my child from being bully online if this were to happen.
- I feel confident that I would respond effectively if I found out my child had bullied someone online.

Respondents' confidence in handling the situation where one of their children is bullying other/s

Results show that, as with the questions relating to victimisation, parent's belief that they will respond well if they find out their child is engaged in cyberbullying as a perpetrator, is higher than their belief that they are well resourced to either prevent or stop perpetration.



Parents are more confident that they would respond well if they found out that their child/ren was engaged in cyberbullying behaviour, than they are that they have the resources to prevent it from happening or stop it once it is detected..

Respondents' children's experience with engaging in cyberbullying behaviours

We ask parents if their children were bullying others online currently (N=25 or 5%) in the past (N=26 or 5%) or not (N=434 or 85%) – twenty-four (5%) said they did not know (Table 2).

Table 2: Ns for the item *Is your child currently bullying others online or have they done so in the past??*

	No	Yes, in the past	Yes, currently	I don't know
N =	434	26	25	24
% =	85%	5%	5%	5%

The role of experience in parents' confidence in dealing with children as perpetrators

Analysis of responses to each of the three questions about resources (for prevention and cessation) and confidence in their own response effectiveness, by these experience categories, reveals that those who have no experience of their child engaging in cyberbullying have the greatest confidence in their own future response, and their access to resources for prevention or stopping a child from cyberbullying. Those with the least confidence in these three aspects were those parents who were able to say one way or the other whether their child was or had cyberbullied others.

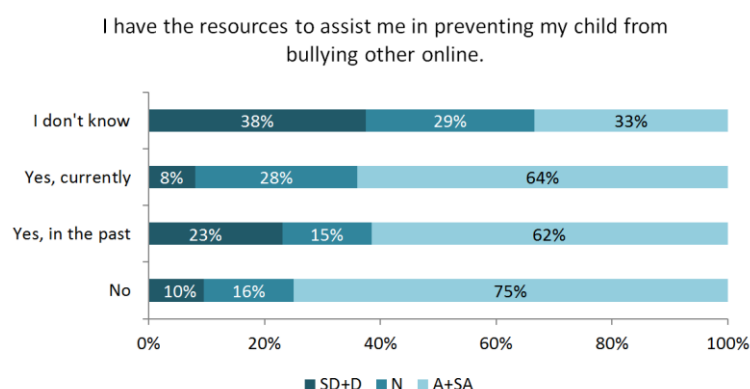


Figure 10: Have resources to prevent child/ren being a bully on line, by child/ren's engagement in bullying

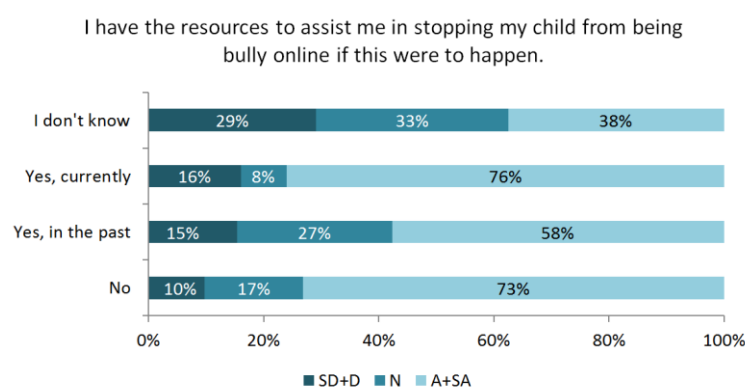


Figure 11: Have resources to stop child/ren bullying on line, by child/ren's engagement in bullying

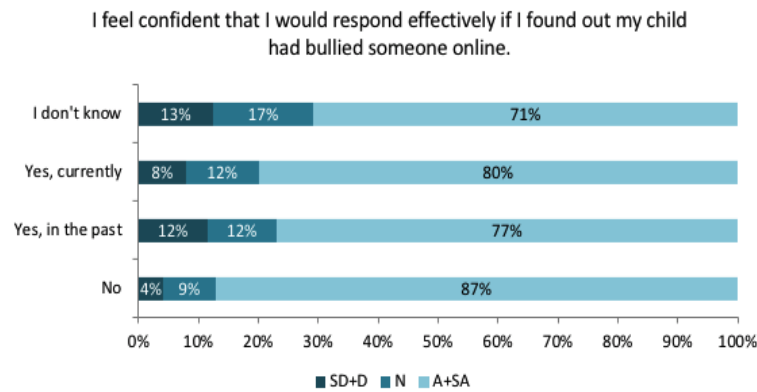


Figure 12: Confident own response effective if found out child/ren were bullying others online, by child/ren's engagement in bullying

Parents with no experience of their child engaging in cyberbullying of others are more confident than their counterparts on the effectiveness of their own responses if it were to happen, and their access to resources for preventing or stopping their child/ren from cyberbullying others.

The role of gender in parents' confidence with dealing with a child who is engaging in cyberbullying behaviours

There are no significant differences between the genders on these three questions. Mothers tend to be slightly less confident than fathers that they have the resources to prevent or stop a child of theirs from engaging in bullying someone online. The confidence rating on the resource questions is only about a 70% in the agree and strongly agree response categories; that leaves 30% either neutral or disagreeing with these two items.

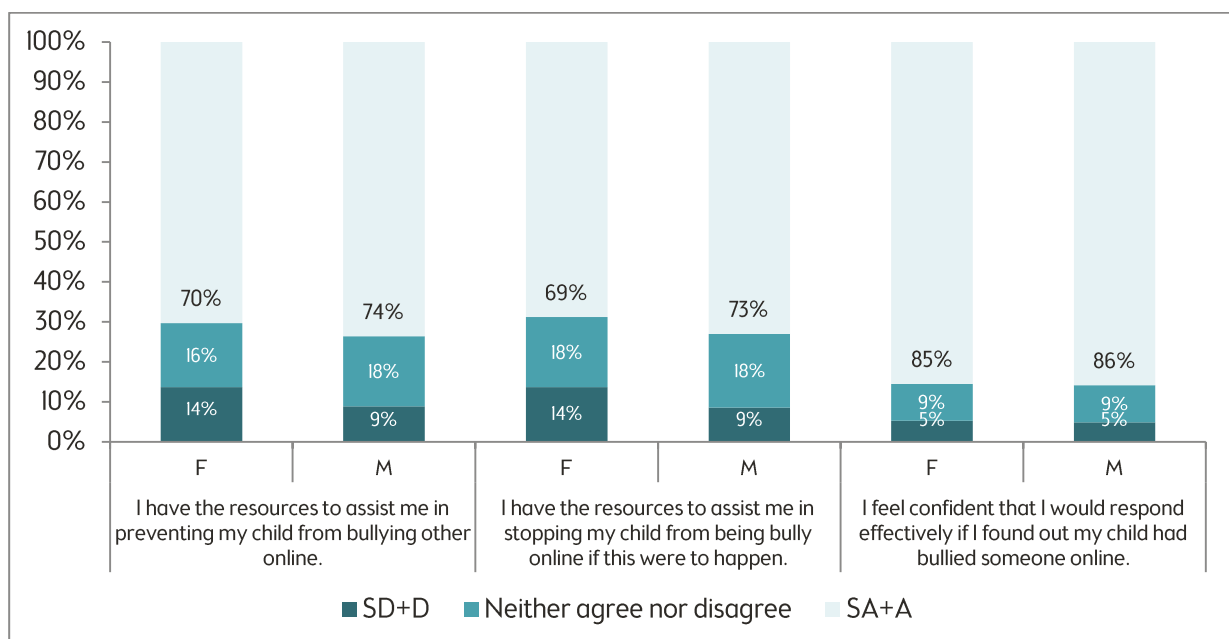


Figure 13: Questions relating to confidence when child/ren bullying others, by gender

Fathers and mothers are on par in terms of confidence that they would respond effectively if they were to discover a child of theirs was cyberbullying others.

Female and male parents rate the effectiveness of their likely responses where they detect that their child/ren are engaged in cyberbullying behaviour, similarly and quite high (86% agreeing or strongly agreeing). However, about 30% of parents of both genders are neutral or disagree or strongly disagree that they have appropriate resources to assist them in preventing or stopping their child/ren's cyberbullying behaviour.

The role of age in confidence with dealing with a child who is engaging in cyberbullying behaviours

There is no strong or clear relationship between age and the three variables of interest relating to parents' own response effectiveness to, or in access to resources to aid prevention of, or in access to resources to aid cessation of, a child's cyberbullying behaviours.

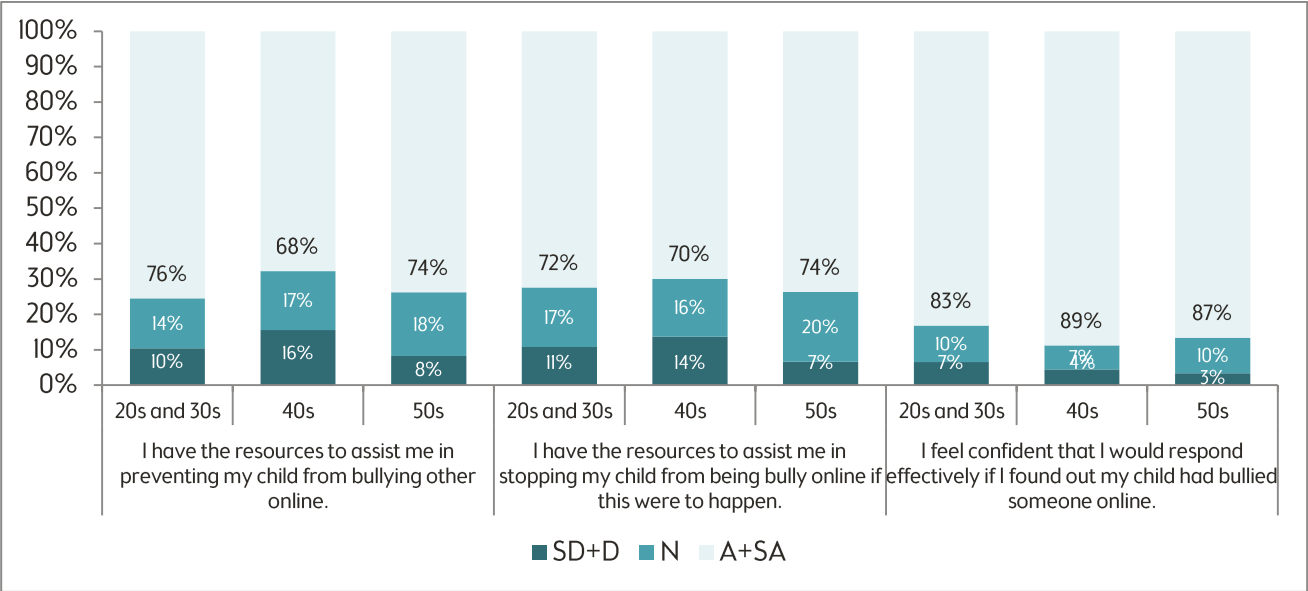


Figure 14: Questions relating to confidence when child/ren bullying others, by age

Queensland compared with the rest of Australia

One hundred and one respondents were residents of Queensland. Comparing the Queensland respondents' means scores on all six parental confidence and readiness variables with those of respondents in the rest of the country revealed no significant differences. Figure I5 shows the proportionate breakdowns for six items relating to child victimisation.

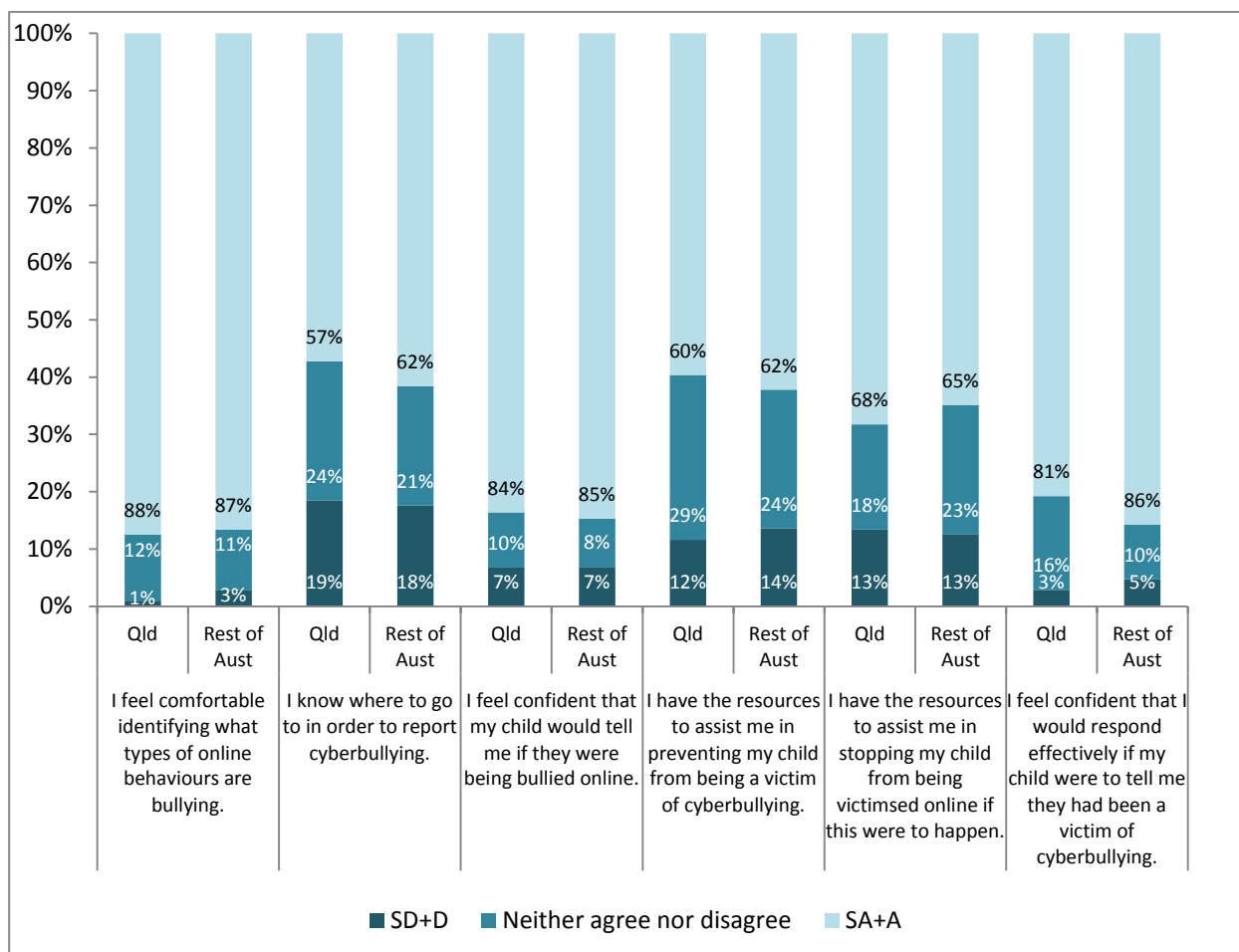


Figure I5: Qld versus rest of Australia - items relating to children's cyberbullying victimisation

Similarly, no substantial differences are observed when comparing Queensland respondents' answers to the question *Is your child currently the victim of cyberbullying or have they been victimised in the past?* (Table 3) or *Is your child currently bullying others online or have they done so in the past?* (Table 4).

Table 3: Ns for the item *Is your child currently the victim of cyberbullying, or have they been victimised in the past?*

		No	Yes, in the past	Yes, currently	I don't know
Qld	N =	82	17	3	2
	% =	79%	16%	3%	2%
Aust	N =	303	63	27	14
	% =	74%	16%	7%	3%

Table 4: Ns for the item *Is your child currently bullying others online or have they done so in the past?*

		No	Yes, in the past	Yes, currently	I don't know
Qld	N =	88	4	5	7
	% =	85%	4%	5%	7%
Aust	N =	347	23	20	18
	% =	85%	6%	5%	4%

There are no noteworthy differences between Queensland and the rest of Australia on the items related to responding when children are the perpetrators of cyberbullying.

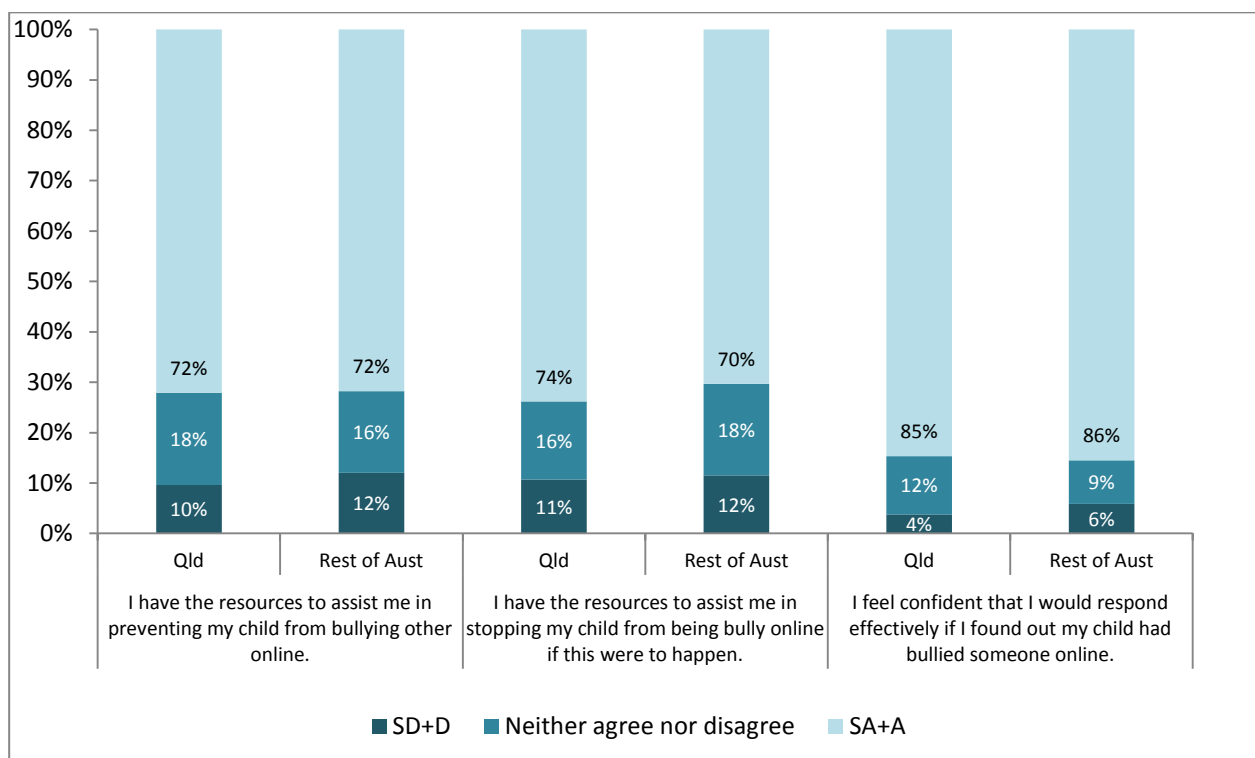


Figure I6: Qld versus rest of Australia - items relating to children's cyberbullying behaviours

Conclusions

Queensland parents, like those across the country, feel confident that they know what constitutes cyberbullying, that their children would report it to them if the latter were being victimised by cyberbullying, and that they would respond effectively if they became aware of the cyberbullying victimisation of their child/ren. Based on the data collected by **yourtown** (reported in Collyer, 2018) about the likelihood that children will indeed report, and, when they do, whether they found their parents to be helpful, we can say that there is a significant risk that parents' beliefs about their effectiveness and about their children's propensity to inform them about cyberbullying victimisation are over-estimations of the likely true value of both.

The data reported here show that compared with their expectations of child reporting and effective parental response, parents are less confident that they know where to go to report cyberbullying instances, or that they have the resources to help them prevent it, or to stop it once it begins.

When thinking of their children as perpetrators of cyberbullying behaviours, parents (in Queensland as in the rest of Australia) feel confident in the effectiveness of their own responses to the problem, but less confident that they have the resources they need to prevent their child/ren cyberbullying, or to stop it once it has commenced. Again, there may be some over-estimation of the effectiveness of parental responses based in part on inexperience with the problem.

Given the potential importance of the family in providing an educative and protective environment around young people, through the influence of which young people are empowered to report victimisation and to use strategies to prevent or stop occurrences of cyberbullying, it is sobering to observe these two patterns of high confidence on the one hand, that may not be backed by the perceptions of children themselves, and low confidence in key areas that help with prevention, cessation and reporting.

The findings of this research indicate that there is a need for:

- education about the management of risks of cyberbullying, and of protective factors, to enhance parents' abilities to prevent it;
- education about the management of instances of cyberbullying, to enhance parents' abilities to stop it once it has commenced;
- an awareness-raising campaign showing how and where to access the resources that may assist parents in their endeavours;
- special attention to be paid to those who may be overestimating the effectiveness of their responses partly as a function of their lack of material experience with the problem.

Appendix

Age distribution

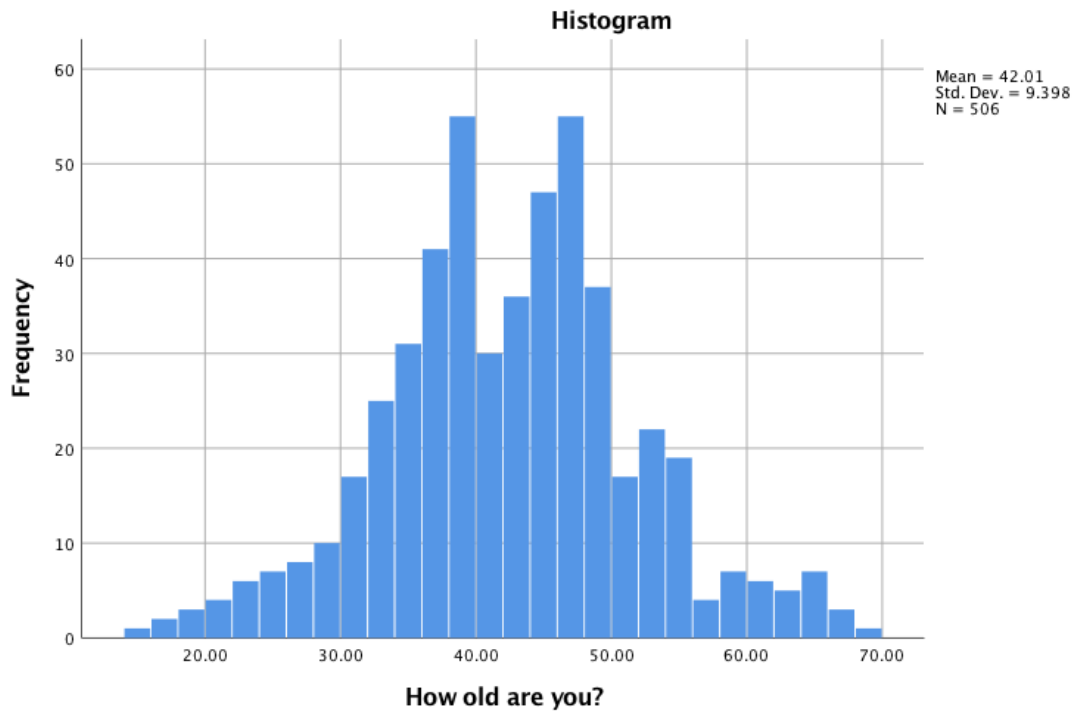


Figure 17: Age distribution chart

Parental use of social networking apps

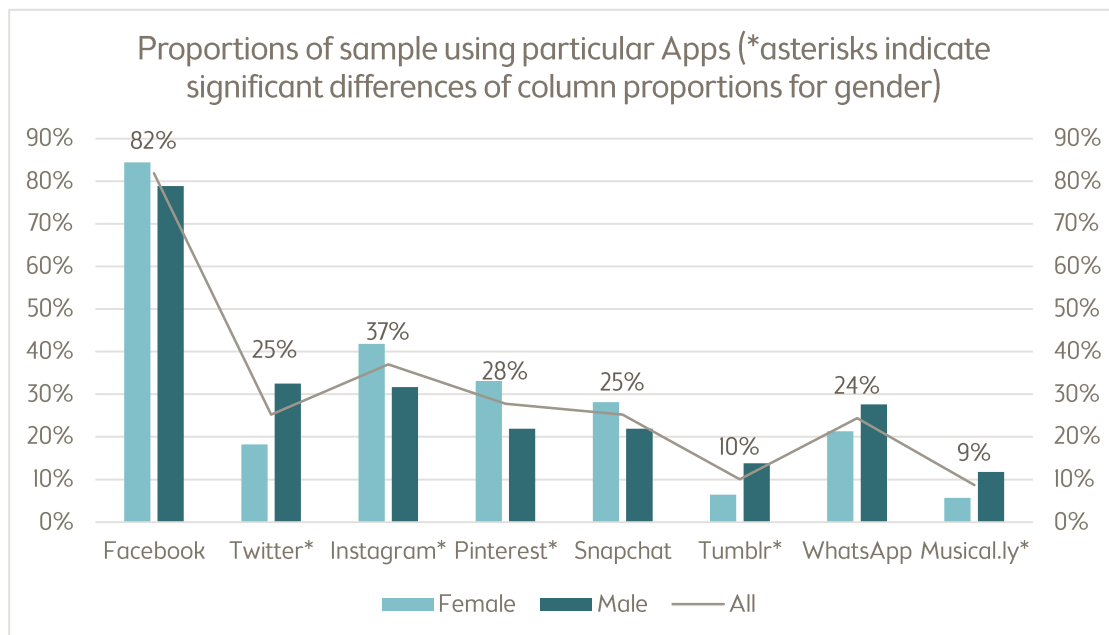


Figure 18: Parental use of SN Apps by gender and pooled

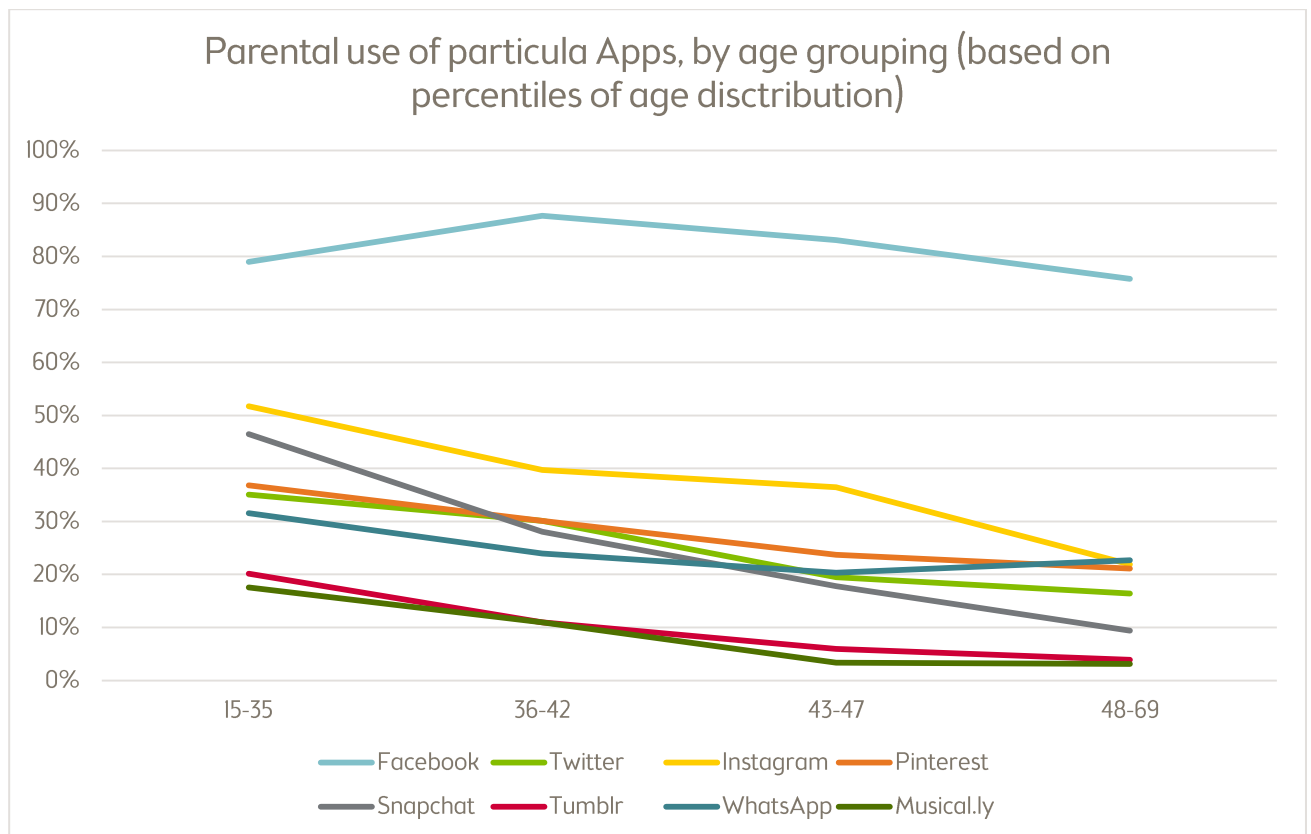


Figure I9: Parental use of SN Apps by age grouping

References

- Collyer, B. (2018). *Cyberbullying, Cyber Aggression and Help-Seeking: A Survey of Young Australians' Experiences*. Brisbane: yourtown.
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