

SESSION NOTES FOR “YOUTH CONVERSATION ON TACKLING ONLINE HARMS”
31 JULY 2025, 7.00PM – 9.00PM
OTC CAFÉ, NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD, VICTORIA STREET

On 31 July 2025, 84 youth participants from diverse backgrounds gathered to share their concerns about online harms and hear about the upcoming online harms legislation.

The session was co-organised by the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) and the National Youth Council (NYC), in partnership with SG Her Empowerment (SHE) and YouthTechSG (YTSG), and involved the following panellists:

- Mr Eric Chua, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Law and Ministry of Social and Family Development
- Ms How Kay Lii, Chief Operating Officer, SG Her Empowerment
- Mr Bryan Ong, Executive Coordinator, Youth Tech Institute
- **(Moderator)** Mr Mohamed Mikhail Kennerley, Member, #TechHacks Youth Panel and PhD Student, National University of Singapore

The session was part of the Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth (MCCY) and NYC’s series of SG60 youth engagements, which will lead to the development of the SG Youth Plan. The SG Youth Plan is an action plan – created by youths, for youths – which will hold the hopes and aspirations of all youths, and to turn ideas into reality and turn passion into action with support from the rest of society.

The session began with a presentation by a MinLaw representative on upcoming measures to better tackle online harms, which included a statutory reporting mechanism, new statutory torts, and a proposal to address online anonymity.

Participants then took part in breakout group discussions where they shared their views on issues related to safer online spaces such as (i) strengthening digital resilience in youth, (ii) building shared responsibility in the online world, and (iii) navigating the challenges of online anonymity.

Finally, participants engaged in a panel discussion on how youth can work together with the Government and the whole-of-society to create a safer online space.

Key insights from breakout group discussions and panellists’ responses to insights

Topic: Strengthening Digital Resilience in Youth

Issue: Youth need better education, clearer reporting processes, and faster responses to online harms, supported by both technology and community networks.

- Participants said that while the upcoming legislative infrastructure was on the right track in providing adequate protection against online harms, there can be more efforts to educate youth on identifying online harms and building digital resilience.

- Participants also said that they wished to see more transparency in the reporting mechanisms and if complaints would be acted upon, particularly across gendered experiences.
- Participants also said that faster technological solutions could also complement legislation, enabling quicker removal of harmful content.
- In response to the participants, Ms How said that both men and women should take part equally in conversations on online harms. She said that SHE aimed to serve both men and women and hoped to remove the negative attitude towards men seeking help for online harms.
- In response to the participants, Mr Ong said that it was encouraging to see youths work towards safer online spaces. He also said that trust in online platforms and its online harms prevention mechanism would decrease when users saw no outcomes after reporting harms, and that community networks such as families, schools, and youth groups could serve as first responders to provide support for victims.

Topic: Building Shared Responsibility in the Online World

Issue: Social media platforms need stronger incentives and responsibilities to moderate or remove harmful online content, as profit-driven goals discourage them from taking action.

- Participants said that social media platforms might not assume responsibility to moderate online content because they lacked legal authority and the incentive to deal with reported harms.
- Participants also said that social media platforms should bear greater responsibility as first responders to online harms, especially since better harm detection and content filtering tools were available.
- In response to the participants, SPS Chua said that participants were right about the lack of incentive for platforms to tackle harmful content, as profits often took precedence. He also said that profitable content driven by likes, shares, and comments incentivised platforms to keep such material online.

Topic: Navigating the Challenges of Online Anonymity

Issue: While online anonymity allows for freer expression, especially for marginalised voices, it needs to be balanced with clearer guidelines and accountability measures to prevent misuse.

- Participants said that online anonymity provided opportunities for users to be more genuine and share opinions more freely, but its disadvantages included a lack of consequences and accountability for posting harmful content.
- Participants also said that stricter and clearer guidelines from platforms, with more equal and rigorous enforcement that could be aided by Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, would make users feel safer online.
- In response to the participants, Ms How said that families should play more active roles in guiding children's device use and fostering intergenerational conversations on responsible

technology use. She said that anonymity has value for marginalised voices but also required accountability to prevent its misuse.

Key insights from panel dialogue

Topic: Current State of Singapore's Online Space

The Moderator asked about the efficacy of the new legislation in improving social media platforms' efforts to update their policies, implement better support systems for victims, and hold perpetrators accountable.

- SPS Chua said that big tech companies have very little financial incentive to intervene extensively on online harms and their responses to user reports were often inconsistent or absent. Therefore, legislative moves in Parliament to define online harms and the duties of users, platforms, content creators, and administrators were a good first step to improving support for victims.
- SPS Chua also said that setting out clear rules and responsibilities would enable stakeholders in the online space to take tangible action and impose consequences on perpetrators, rather than operating in grey areas.

The Moderator asked about the evolving trends of online harms, and the availability of support for victims.

- Ms How said that in recent years, SHE's help centre handled high volumes of cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and image-based sexual abuse, with deepfakes emerging due to rising AI use. She said that many of these cases overlapped, such as cyberbullying with doxxing or cancel culture, and often escalated into offline harassment, requiring multilayered support.
- Ms How said that non-profit organisations such as SHE offered free counselling, pro bono legal referrals, and had trusted flagger status with social media platforms, allowing them to act as intermediaries to help victims secure faster content takedowns, with success rates of 50% within 24 hours and 70% within 72 hours.
- Ms How also said that SHE's study showed that swift action and takedown of harmful content were crucial for survivors to regain their confidence and self-respect.
- Mr Ong said that current measures were mostly reactionary and enhancing pre-emptive measures, including using AI to detect and flag harmful content on platforms, could help users feel safer online.

Participants asked (via Slido) about the trade-offs the Government faces when legally requiring social media companies to incorporate identity verification for profile creation on their platforms.

- SPS Chua said that the main concern was how willing social media companies were to work with the Government to improve user identification online. He also said that the Government's priority was to address how online harms could translate into real-world harms.
- SPS Chua also said that online threats like doxxing, cancel culture, and AI-generated fake content could damage the foundations of a thriving democracy and people's ability to have

healthy public discussions, due to fears of being attacked or ostracised for sharing one's opinions.

Topic: Singapore's Vision for Our Online Space

Participants asked (via Slido) whether Singapore as a society would prefer an online space that is completely transparent and open to expressions, or one that maintains some anonymity with safeguards in place.

- Ms How said that most of society would prefer an online space with certain levels of online anonymity, but with safeguards such as legislative infrastructure and tools to identify perpetrators, so as not to threaten racial, religious, or personal safety.
- Ms How also said that Singapore was exploring its own approach to online safety, balancing caution with cultural context, and avoiding draconian measures like banning phones or the internet that might be used in other countries.

A participant asked about the challenges in applying the upcoming legislation on instant messaging apps like Telegram.

- Ms How said that platforms like Telegram, Discord, and Tellonym posed challenges with accountability, as proper reporting routes were often ignored by the platforms.
- SPS Chua said that instant messaging platforms with point-to-point encryption required creating a culture around responsible content consumption and reactions. Therefore, society needed to nurture digital upstanders who would actively stand against online harms and negative content.
- SPS Chua also said that legislation alone was not enough to address online harms, and that deeper issues, including mental health, sexuality, and toxic masculinity, required safe and open conversations within families and the broader community to foster an environment of understanding and mutual respect.

Topic: Taking Action Together for a Safer Online Space

A participant asked about the ways that youths could work with the whole-of-society to resist the normalisation of derogatory content and foster a safer online space.

- Ms How said that addressing racist and sexist comments required calling people out respectfully, as negative or derogatory feedback would be ineffective and potentially trigger further backlash. She also said that normalising respectful feedback over time would build more supportive communities.
- Mr Ong said that youths may have been desensitised to online harms, seeing them as a normal occurrence. As such, small actions, such as reporting harmful posts and supporting victims of online harms, could be the first step in fostering a safer online space.

Participants asked (via Slido) about the ways that Singapore could enhance education on AI harms and online trust and safety issues among youth, in light of rapid AI advancements.

- Mr Ong said that Generative AI education was still new, as schools have not fully caught up with trends and downstream effects. He also said that AI should be recognised as a neutral tool, with outcomes depending on individual awareness and responsible usage.

Closing remarks by panellists

- Mr Ong said that he aspired to see symbiotic cooperation between the Government, online platforms, and youths. He said that social media companies should prioritise safety in its platform design and include transparent reporting mechanisms and clear content takedown processes. He said that youths could also contribute further insights towards online harms through initiatives like the YouthTechSG's digital safety policy sandbox.
- Ms How said that society needed better communication, as many online harms stemmed from breakdowns in social norms. She said that survivors often faced fragmented experiences when seeking recourse, and that safe spaces for difficult discussions were necessary to establish safer social norms in the online space.
- SPS Chua said that conversations about online safety should not only be technical or legislative, but also social. He said that strong family structures that provided unconditional support were foundations for a resilient society, serving as the base for effective systems, laws, and community wellbeing.

Notes recorded by the NYC Youth Leadership and Engagement Team.