



Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University

# **Understanding Adult Experiences of Online Hate in Ireland – An Exploratory Survey**

**DCU Anti-Bullying Centre,  
Dublin City University**

Dr Maja Brandt Andreasen and  
Dr Darragh McCashin

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ISBN: 978-1-911669-55-5

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## DCU Anti-Bullying Centre

DCU Anti-Bullying Centre is a recognised national and global centre of excellence in education and research on bullying and online safety. The Centre is located in DCU's Institute of Education and hosts the UNESCO Chair on Tackling Bullying in Schools and Cyberspace and the *International Journal of Bullying Prevention*.

The aim of the Centre is to contribute to solving real-world problems of bullying and online safety through collaboration with an extensive community of academic and industry partners. Over the past 25 years, staff affiliated with the Centre have undertaken research on school, workplace, and online bullying, as well as many other issues relating to bullying and online safety. The Centre currently receives funding from the Government of Ireland, the European Commission, the Irish Research Council, Rethink Ireland and industry partners Vodafone Ireland Foundation and TikTok.

The Observatory on Cyberbullying, Cyberhate and Online Harassment is a project within DCU Anti-Bullying Centre and was established in 2021 to provide up-to-date research and advice, as well as monitoring the impact of anti-cyberbullying laws and regulations. More specifically, the Observatory focuses on researching the prevalence, contours, functions, and psychosocial impacts of cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment. It also aims to explore the impact of laws and regulations on those who engage in, or are targeted by, cyberbullying, cyberhate, and online harassment.

The Observatory is funded by the Department of Justice following the ratification of the Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 and is supported by the Department of Education under the Action Plan on Bullying (2022).

### Members of the Observatory

Dr. Angela Mazzone, Dr Maja Brandt Andreassen, Dr. Tijana Milosevic, Dr. Mairéad Foody (NUIG), Dr. Darragh McCashin, and Prof. James O'Higgins Norman.

## Key Findings

### Personal experiences of online hate

- **Just under half of respondents have at one point experienced some form of online hate (45%),** because of their personal identity or beliefs (for example race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, etc.).
- **Those aged between 18-25 were significantly more likely to report experiencing online hate,** compared to older age cohorts (from 35+).
- **Some key gender differences were evident in the data.** Women were significantly more likely to receive online hate targeting their gender compared to men (38% vs. 19% respectively). On the other hand, men were significantly more likely to receive online hate targeting their age, compared to women (19% vs. 10% respectively). Additionally, men were significantly more likely to be targeted due to their nationality compared to women (36% vs. 19% respectively).
- **Sexual minorities experienced higher levels of online hate than heterosexual people.** Those identifying as bisexual experienced significantly higher levels of online hate compared to those identifying as heterosexual.
- **Respondents belonging to the faith of Islam were significantly more likely to report experiencing online hate,** compared to the majority religion of Roman Catholicism (72% vs. 37% respectively).
- **People with disabilities particularly experienced significantly more online hate,** compared to those who did not consider themselves as having a disability (64% vs. 42% respectively).
- Of those who experienced online hate, **almost 50% identified a stranger as the source** of this.
- **Less than half of the respondents took action in response to their experiences.** Those who took no action did not feel it was serious enough (37%), did not know what to do (34%), or did not think that anything would change (31%).

- Of those who took action, most spoke to family and friends, reported it to the website or social media company, or blocked the account. **Few contacted the authorities – 18% contacted An Garda Síochána and only 7% reported it to Hotline.ie.**
- **While almost half the respondents had experienced no negative impact of the hateful communications they received,** young people experienced significantly higher levels of negative impact than older age groups.

### Witnessing online hate

- Just under half of the respondents had **never** witnessed any online hate in their adult life (46%).
- ***Respondents who had witnessed online hate primarily pointed to: race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, nationality and religion as the focus of this hate.***
- **Half of the respondents who had witnessed online hate took action,** with 71% reporting it to the website or social media company.
- The number one reason *not* to take action was that **they did not know what to do (38%).**

### Attitudes towards online hate

- Participants supported the statement regarding *the introduction of further legislation to prevent online hate* (74% agree or strongly agree).
- Participants also supported the statement that *social media companies should do more to stop the spread of online hate* (79% agree or strongly agree).
- Compared to the older age groups, 18-24 year-old participants were **significantly less likely to agree** with the preceding two statements, in addition to the following statement: *I believe that everyone has a role in tackling hateful content online.*

## Introduction

The online world has provided unquestionable benefits for individuals and societies at large. Our online and offline lives are now considerably overlapping, with a range of both social and professional interactions and opportunities available (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have emphasised the integral role that online interactions have in society, in addition to ongoing challenges (International Telecommunication Union, 2022). However, amidst the ubiquitous growth of online dynamics in our everyday lives, research continues to highlight the presence of negative online experiences (Davidson et al. 2019), with evidence of adverse outcomes for those who experience this (Kantar Media, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2017). In order to build greater transferable knowledge of these negative online experiences within different population groups, it is essential to provide a data-driven and evidence-based approach to this multi-layered phenomenon.

### Defining Online Hate

Across the academic literature, and indeed within media discourse, there can be an interchangeable use of terminology such as ‘online hate’, ‘online harassment’, ‘cyberabuse’, and ‘cyberbullying’. Although there remains no widely accepted definition for this, certain types of online behaviour can be criminalised, such as hate speech. Online hate can be defined as any form of online communication which targets some social groups’ specific attributes, including race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, disability, nationality, political orientation or religion (Banks, 2011; Blaya & Audrin, 2019; Powell & Henry, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2015). Online hate can take the form of expressions of: misogyny, homophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia (or other religious prejudice), transphobia, xenophobia (Banks, 2011; Mendes et al., 2019; Powell & Henry, 2017; Shepherd et al., 2015). Expressions of hate can ostracise marginalised outgroups and while hate speech also takes place offline, the online aspect can amplify both the experiences for targets (repeated, coordinated and scaled attacks) and can further radicalise the perpetrators and in worst cases result in violence.

### Research on Online Hate – an Overview

This report is the first of its kind in Ireland to examine experiences of online hate among adults. Some Irish reports have, however, investigated various aspects of negative online experiences. The 2021 report published by the National Advisory Council on Online Safety (NACOS), was partly dedicated to the experiences of adults in Ireland. A small section of the report, asked questions about negative online experiences, finding that very few of the

respondents had experienced any of the suggested negative experiences within the last year. That report, however, does not specifically ask broader questions about the experiences of different forms of online hate.

Another study undertaken in Ireland by Milosevic et al (2021) among children and young people (aged 10-18) during the first Covid-19 lockdown showed that almost half of the respondents (47%) had seen hateful messages online against specific groups (of different colour, ethnicity or nationality). Fifty-six percent (56%) of participants reported that they were exposed to these types of messages more frequently or a lot more frequently than before the lockdown.

International research has outlined the prevalence of racial hate online (For example Aslan, 2018; Harlow, 2015; Komaromi & Singh, 2016). Other research points to an increase in hate against sexual and gender minorities (as outlined in for example Keighley, 2022) while research into disablist hate is very limited (Burch, 2018; Sherry, 2019).

### Legal Initiatives in Ireland

In recent years, legislative initiatives have been introduced to tackle some online behaviours in Ireland: The Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020 (Coco's Law) was commenced in 2021 which criminalises the creation, sharing and threat to share sexual images without consent as well as criminalisation of grossly offensive or threatening online (and offline) communication<sup>1</sup>. The Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022 aims to tackle the spread of harmful online content, such as content which is criminal to share, serious cyberbullying material, material promoting eating disorders, and material promoting self-harm and suicide. The Act also provides for the establishment of an Online Safety Commissioner who will be empowered to make binding Online Safety Codes and impose sanctions on online service providers<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 criminalises the incitement to violence or hatred and disseminating and distributing material inciting violence or hatred against a person because they are associated with one of the following ten protected characteristics: race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origin, descent, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, gender (including gender expression and identity), and disability<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/act/32/enacted/en/print>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8e4c-online-safety-and-media-regulation-bill/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcqlclefindmkaj/https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2022/105/eng/initiated/b10522d.pdf> and <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/74ed9-new-bill-to-tackle-hate-crime-and-hate-speech-includes-clear-provision-to-protect-freedom-of->



Taken together these legislative initiatives tackle a wide variety of online harms. However, with the ever-evolving and expanding nature of the online world (such as new platforms or Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven interactions), new challenges can often emerge, calling for continuous research into online harms.

### Aims of the Report

This report asks about the potential experiences of online hate for adults in Ireland – asking whether it targeted their race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, appearance or personal beliefs. It is important to note, that the findings in this survey are based on respondents' own perception of whether the communication was experienced as hateful.

The present report is the first of its kind in Ireland to specifically investigate online hate – looking into who has experienced this as targets as well as bystanders. The report presents findings about the scope of online hate, the online channels where these experiences took place; who is believed to be the source of the hate; how these experiences affected the respondents, as well as whether and how the respondents took action. Finally, the report will offer unique insight into how negative experiences differ across gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion and disability.

The purpose of this report is to provide knowledge on the nature and extent of online hate in Ireland. We hope that this knowledge will aid policy enforcement, and create awareness for policy makers, educators and the general public, and ensure more effective stakeholder assistance to those who are targeted.

The report has the following aims:

1. Investigate the frequency of online hate experienced and witnessed in a sample of adults in Ireland.
2. Explore how these experiences differ across demographic groups.
3. Investigate how such experiences impact respondents.
4. Determine what kind of action they take when experiencing and/or witnessing online hate.

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[expression/#:~:text=The%20new%20legislation%20will%20criminalise%20any%20intentional%20or.offence%20will%20be%20up%20to%20five%20years%27%20imprisonment](#)

## Methodology

### Design and Sampling Approach

To optimise the representativeness of the respondents relative to the national population, an independent polling agency was recruited to distribute an online survey. To achieve a near representative dataset, a quota sampling approach was applied using two marginal quotas – first, for a combination of age and gender; and second, for regions. This fieldwork was conducted using web panels in Ireland during October 2022. A final sample of 1,008 adults was collected.

### Measures

Using adapted survey questions from a similar survey conducted by the Australian eSafety Commissioner's Office in 2020<sup>4</sup>, a range of survey items were used to measure negative online experiences and online hate speech. This adaptation occurred to take into account the variety of image-based sexual abuse as categorised in the 2021 report by the Observatory on Cyberbullying, Cyberhate and Online Harassment<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the added section on online hate was formulated to facilitate insights into the specifics of various forms of online hate such as: sources of online hate, impacts thereof, perceived motivations of perpetrators, responses to such hate, and the attitudes of respondents with regards to tackling these challenges. To facilitate greater between-group comparisons, a range of demographic questions were also included to ascertain respondents' gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, religion and disability. For the purposes of this report, exploratory data analysis is provided for the issue of online hate. The full survey and the data analysis is available via the Observatory website<sup>6</sup>.

### Ethics

Full ethical approval was sought and obtained by the DCU Research Ethics Committee in September 2022. The survey was anonymous and no personal or identifying data was collected.

### Participants

A sample of 1,008 adults in Ireland aged 18-82 took part in this study, with the largest age group ranging from 25 to 44 (29%) and only 3.8 % of participants above the age of 65. 49% of participants are men, 51% are

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.esafety.gov.au/research/adults-negative-online-experiences>

<sup>5</sup> <https://antibullyingcentre.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/DCU-Online-Abuse-Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://antibullyingcentre.ie/observatory/resource/understanding-adult-experiences-of-online-hate-in-ireland-an-exploratory-survey/>



women<sup>7</sup>. The sexuality breakdown was 78% heterosexual, while 7% identified as asexual, 6% as bisexual, 2% as gay/lesbian, 2% as “other”, and 6% preferred not to say. The ethnicity was predominantly White Irish (69%) and other White background (17%). The ethnic minority breakdown was as follows: Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi (4%), Chinese (1%), any other Asian background (2%), African (2%), Mixed background (1%)<sup>8</sup>. The following remaining ethnic minorities each were less than 1% of the sample: ‘other’/Irish Traveller/Roma/Arabic/Any other Black background; and 1% selected “prefer not to say”. Just under half of the respondents belong to the Roman Catholic Church (45%) while 24% have no religion and 12% belong to the Church of Ireland. 15% of respondents consider themselves to have a disability.

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<sup>7</sup> As only 4 respondents identified as non-binary, and 5 “prefer[red] not to say”, this group was deemed too comparably small to provide statistically reliable insights and thus the findings only report on men and women.

<sup>8</sup> This ethnic minority breakdown is broadly in keeping with CSO patterns (2016): <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8e/> (However, due to low sample sizes for these groups, statistical comparisons were not always possible).

## Findings

### Internet Usage

Before inquiring about their potential negative online experiences, respondents were first asked about their Internet usage to contextualise the subsequent responses. The results can be seen in Figure 1 and the resulting key trends are summarised as follows:

- Email is by far the most used Internet service (87%), followed by Instant messaging apps<sup>9</sup> (75%), Facebook (74%), Instagram (63%), Video sharing sites<sup>10</sup> (58%), and SMS/MMS which are all used by over half the sample. Less than half of the respondents use Twitter (42%), followed by Snapchat (35%), gaming platforms (34%), online discussion boards<sup>11</sup> (28%), dating sites (10%) and torrent sites<sup>12</sup> (6%).
- Some differences occur across different groups of people. Men use Twitter (49%) and gaming platforms (48%) more than women, who in turn use Instant messaging apps (82%), Facebook (80%), and Instagram (73%) more than men.
- The older age groups use email and SMS/MMS more than younger people who in turn use Instagram, Snapchat, Gaming platforms, and dating sites. A significant jump appears from 47% usage of Facebook among 18–24-year-olds to 79% among 25–34-year-olds with the 45–54-year-olds being the group which uses the platform the most (83%).
- Respondents had the opportunity to add which other social media they use, the most popular of which was TikTok. A minority of respondents indicated that they used the following online platforms: LinkedIn, Discord, and Telegram.

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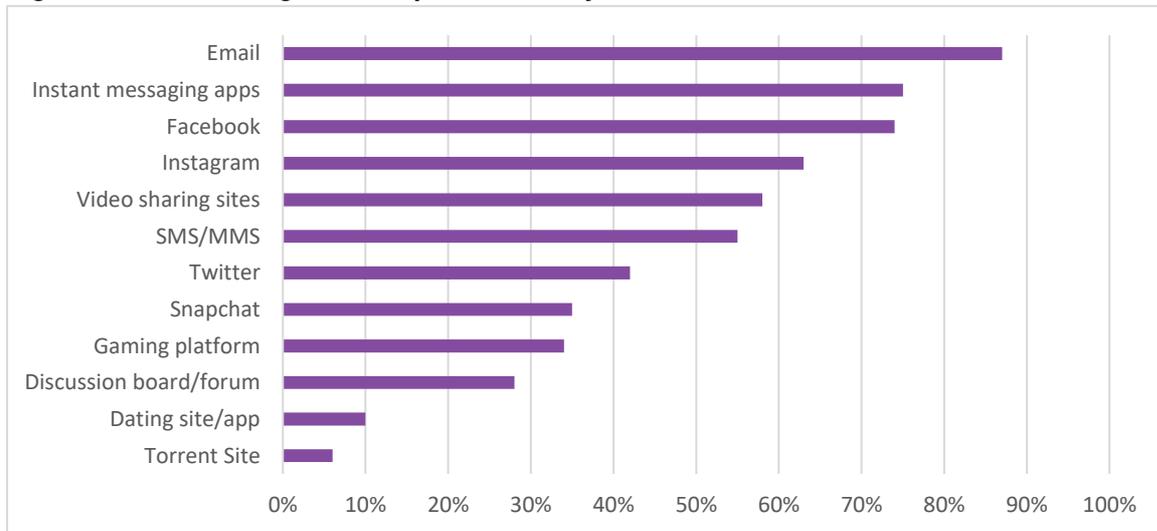
<sup>9</sup> For example messenger, WhatsApp, etc.

<sup>10</sup> For example YouTube.

<sup>11</sup> For example Reddit.

<sup>12</sup> Torrent sites are websites where users share BitTorrent files of for example music, films, games, usually infringing copyrights – for example the Pirate Bay.

**Figure 1. Internet usage: Which platforms do you use?**



## Online Hate

Participants were asked how many times over the course of their adult life, if ever, they had received a digital communication that offended, discriminated, denigrated, abused and/or disparaged them because of their personal identity/beliefs (for example race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, etc.). Respondents were asked to choose how often they had experienced this: never, once, a few times (2-4), or many times (5 or more).

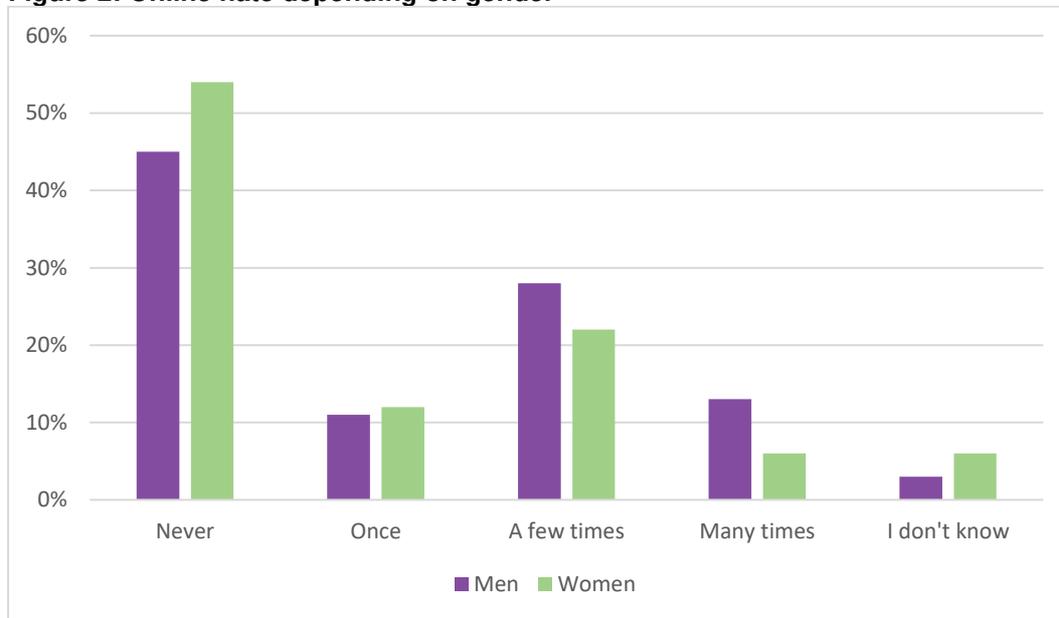
- 45% of respondents have at one point experienced some form of online hate (once; a few times; or many times).

**Table 1: Online hate experiences**

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once</b>	<b>A few times</b>	<b>Many times</b>	<b>I don't know</b>
<b>Total</b>	50%	11%	25%	10%	5%
<b>Men</b>	46%	11%	28%	13%	3%
<b>Women</b>	54%	12%	22%	6%	6%
<b>18-24</b>	29%	12%	37%	18%	5%
<b>25-34</b>	43%	17%	26%	11%	5%
<b>35-44</b>	49%	12%	25%	9%	5%
<b>45-54</b>	62%	7%	22%	4%	5%
<b>55-64</b>	71%	5%	13%	7%	5%
<b>65+</b>	87%	8%	5%	0%	0%
<b>Heterosexual</b>	55%	11%	21%	9%	4%
<b>Sexual minorities</b>	26%	13%	44%	14%	4%
<b>White</b>	53%	11%	23%	9%	5%
<b>Ethnic minorities</b>	28%	18%	32%	17%	5%
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	59%	10%	21%	5%	4%
<b>Religious minorities</b>	42%	12%	27%	13%	5%
<b>Disability</b>	34%	13%	34%	16%	3%
<b>No disability</b>	53%	11%	23%	8%	5%

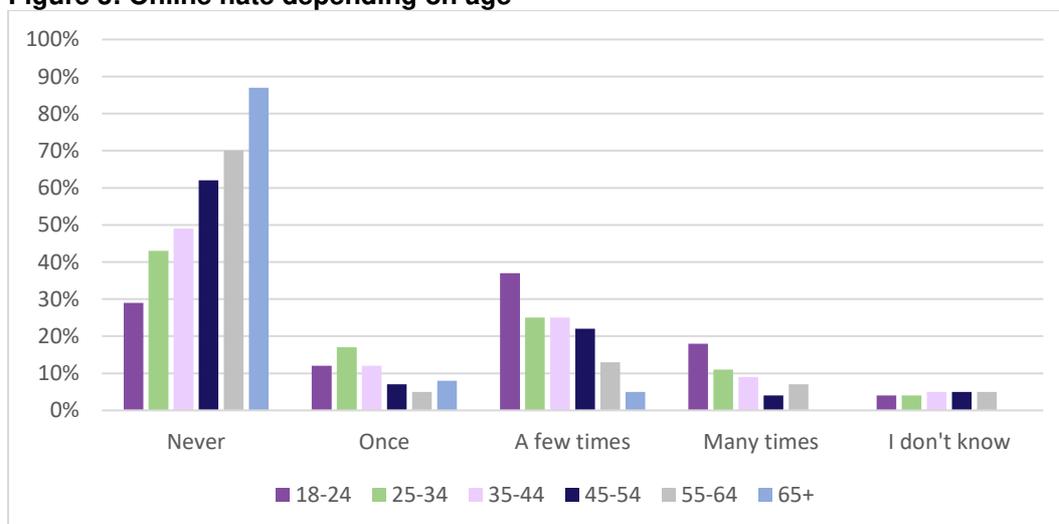
- Although men indicated having experienced higher frequencies of online hate compared to women (13% vs. 6% - see Figure 2), there was no overall statistically significant difference.

**Figure 2: Online hate depending on gender**



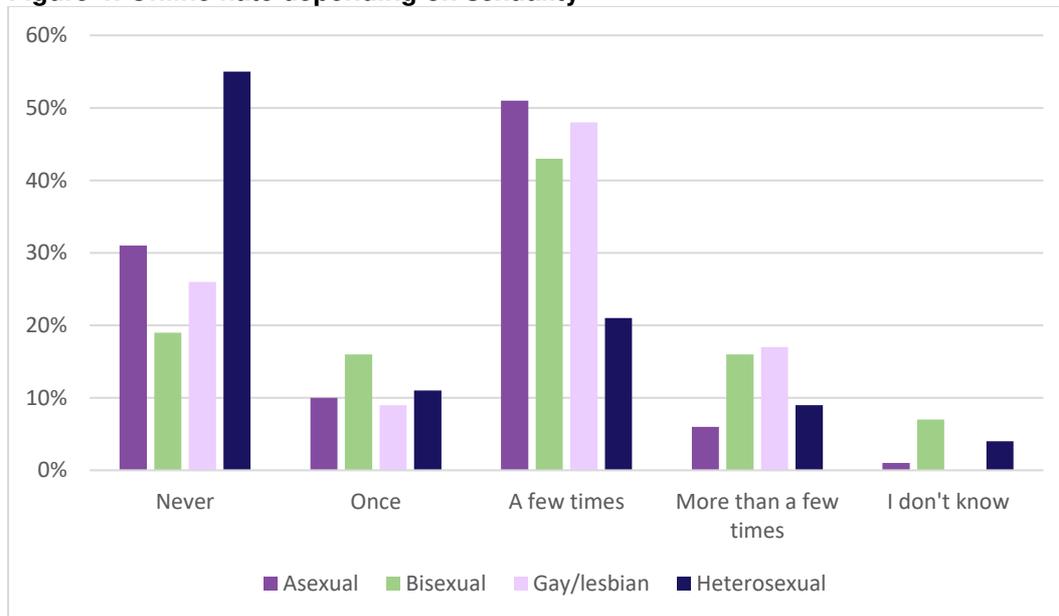
- People in the age group 18-24 are significantly more likely than those in older age groups to have received hateful communication (71% of 18-24 year-olds have experiences this at least once). Of particular note is the fact that 55% of 18-24 year-olds have received this a few times or many times in their adult lives. The older the participants are, the less likely they are to have received hateful communications.

**Figure 3: Online hate depending on age**



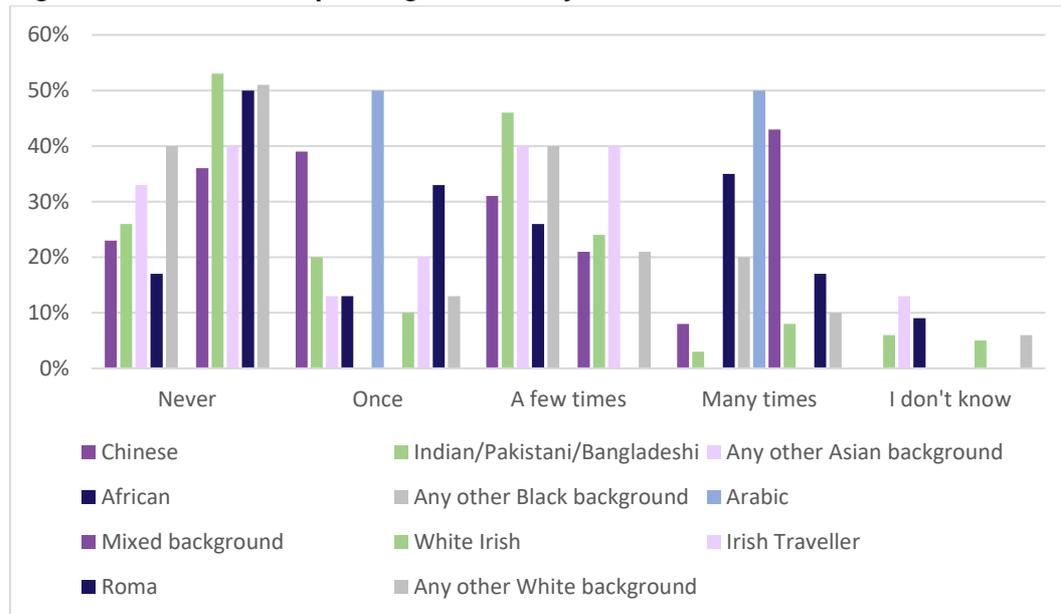
- Sexual minorities (including asexual, bisexual, gay and lesbian people) received higher levels of online hate than heterosexual people (see Figure 4). Almost half of the sexual minorities received hateful communications a few times (44%) compared to 21% of the heterosexual participants. Bisexual respondents were significantly more likely to experience online hate compared to those who identified as heterosexual. However, these findings should be interpreted cautiously given the lower sample size for sexual minorities.

**Figure 4: Online hate depending on sexuality**



- A third of respondents belonging to ethnic minority groups<sup>13</sup> received hateful communications a few times (compared to 23% of White people) and 16% had experienced this many times compared to 8% of the White participants. However, owing to the comparably smaller sample size for ethnic minority groups, no definitive group differences should be inferred.

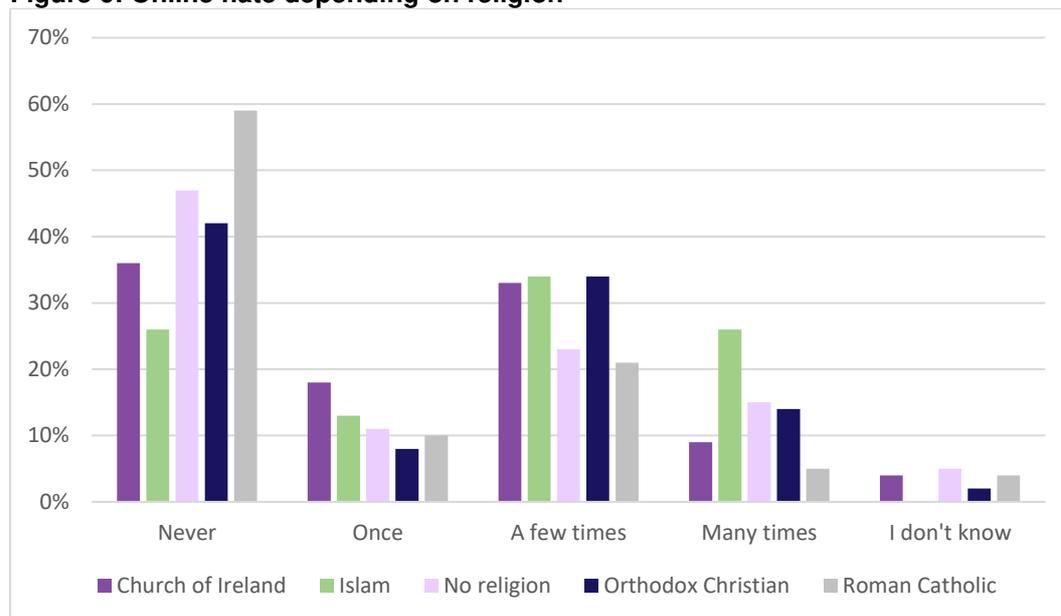
**Figure 5: Online hate depending on ethnicity**



- Religious minorities received statistically significantly more online hate compared to those who identify as Roman Catholic: 40% of the religious minorities had experienced online hate more than once compared to 26% of Roman Catholics. People belonging to Islam and those who selected 'other' were significantly more likely to say they had experienced online hate compared to the Roman Catholics (see Figure 6 below).

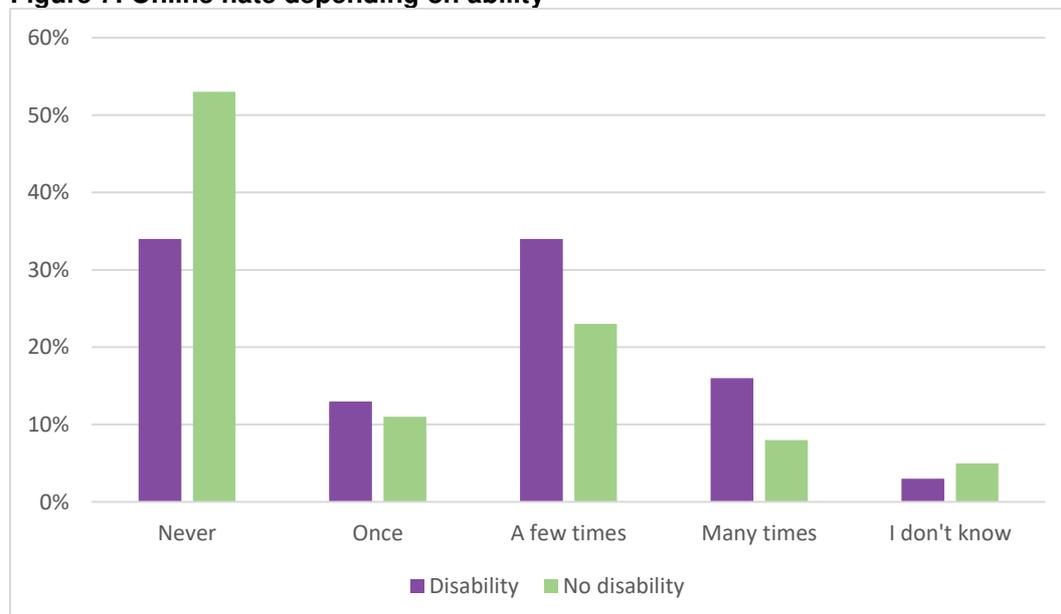
<sup>13</sup> Ethnic minorities include African, any other Black background, Chinese, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, any other Asian background, Arabic, mixed background, Roma, and Irish Traveller. White people includes Irish White and any other White background.

**Figure 6: Online hate depending on religion**



- There was a statistically significant result for those respondents who considered themselves to have a disability (see Figure 7). Those who disclosed that they had a disability were significantly more likely to have experienced online hate compared to those with no disabilities (64% vs. 42%).

**Figure 7: Online hate depending on ability**

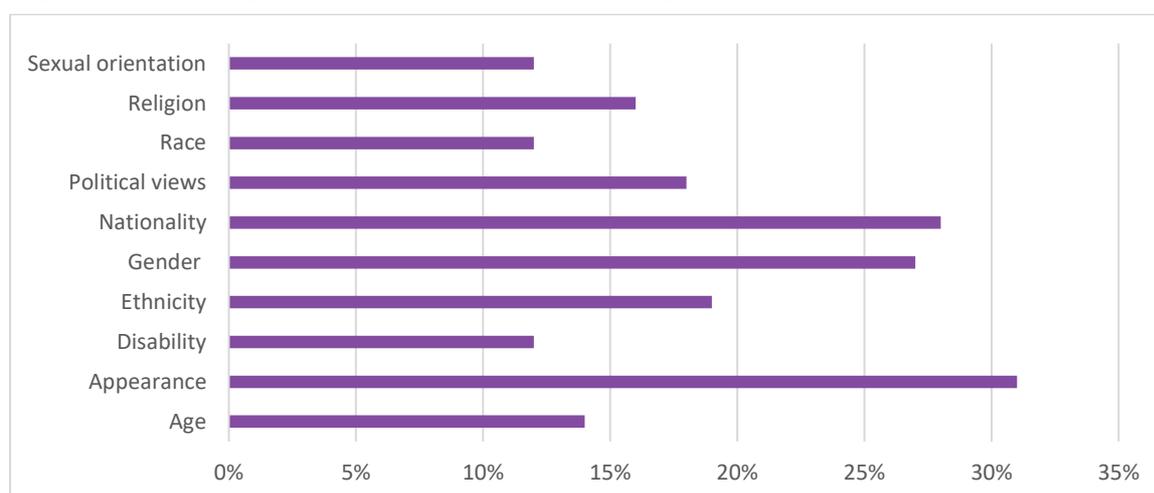


## Online Hate Specifics

Participants who indicated that they experienced online hate ( $n=458$ ) were asked to identify which aspects of their identity and/or beliefs were the focus of the hateful communications. Respondents were invited to select a number of options pertaining to their identity and/or beliefs – a full breakdown of these selections are provided in Figure 8.

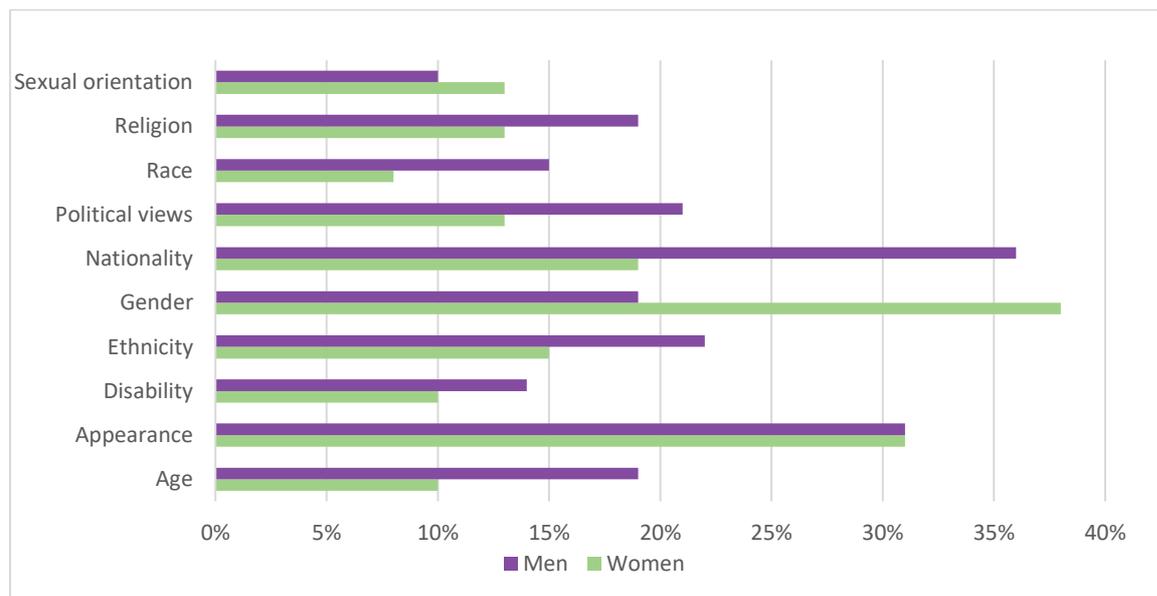
- Almost a third of respondents indicated that the hateful communications targeted their appearance (31%), followed by nationality (28%) and gender (27%).

**Figure 8: Which aspects were the focus of the hate you received?**



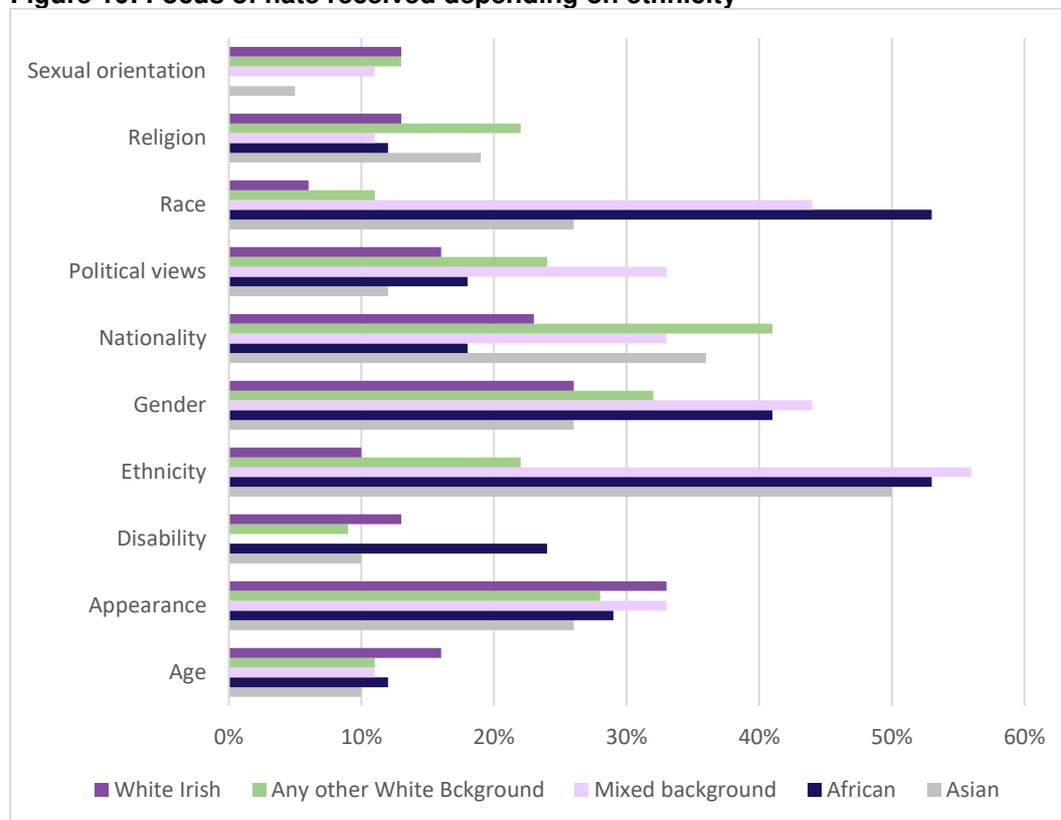
- Some gender differences were evident in the data. Men received more hate in relation to their nationality (36%) than women (19%), while women received more hate in relation to their gender (38%) than men (19%). Men were significantly more likely to be targeted due to their age compared to women (19% vs. 10%). No other statistically significant differences were found across the demographic groupings.

**Figure 9: Focus of hate received depending on gender**



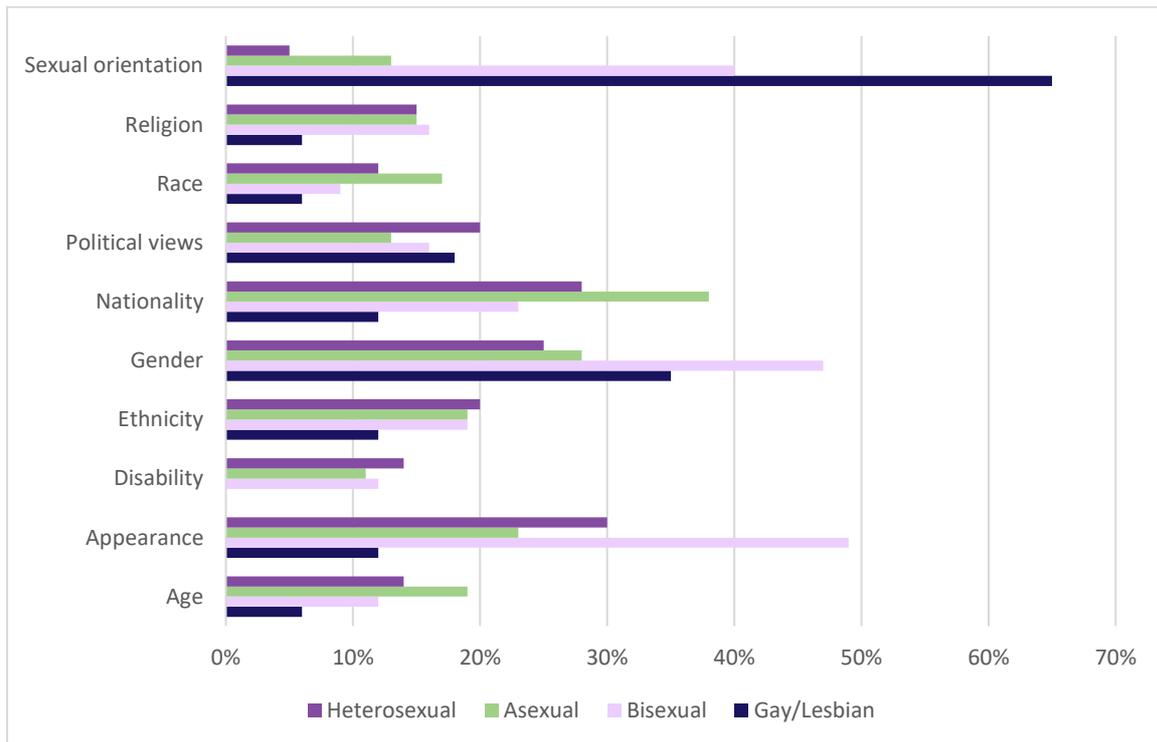
- Ethnic minorities had experienced hate directed at their ethnicity (48%) and their race (37%).

**Figure 10: Focus of hate received depending on ethnicity**



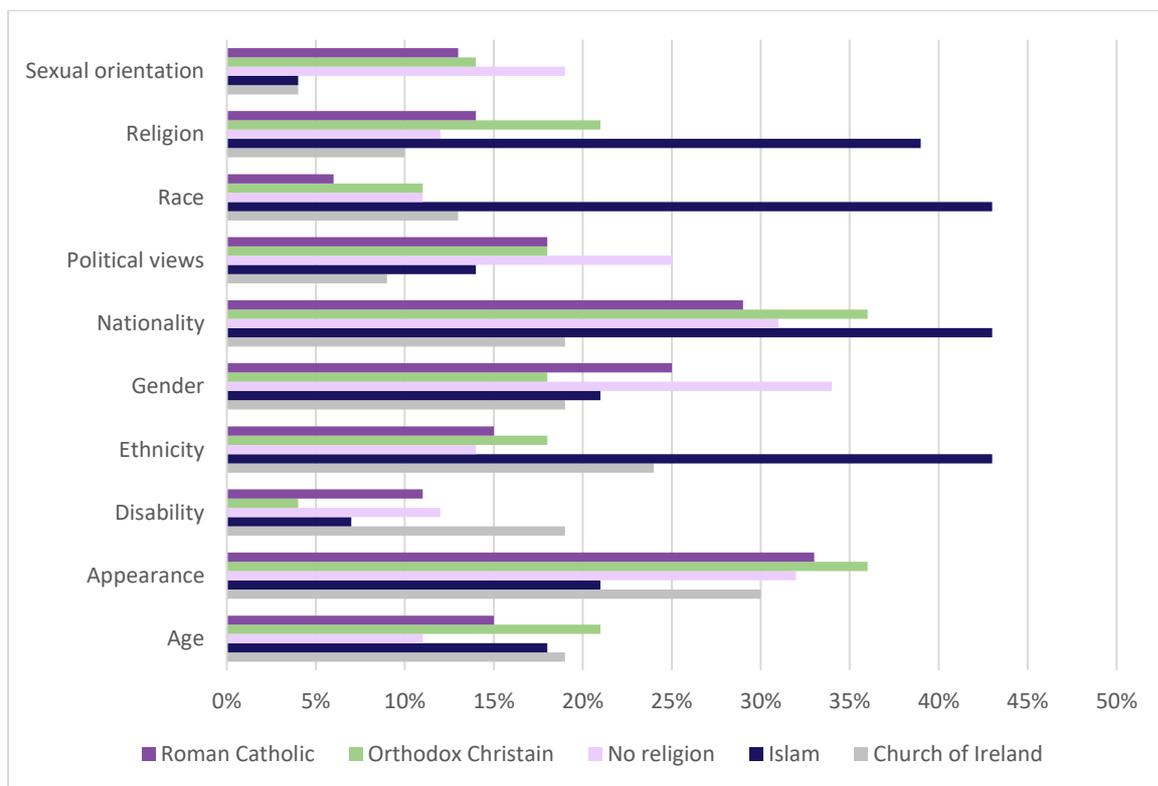
- People belonging to sexual minorities experienced more online hate directed at their sexual orientation, gender, and appearance than heterosexual people. Gay and lesbian people indicated particularly high numbers of experiences of hate directed at their sexual orientation (65%) in comparison to heterosexual people (5%). However, the significantly smaller sample size for gay and lesbian subgroups should be considered when interpreting these trends.

**Figure 11: Focus of hate received depending on sexuality**



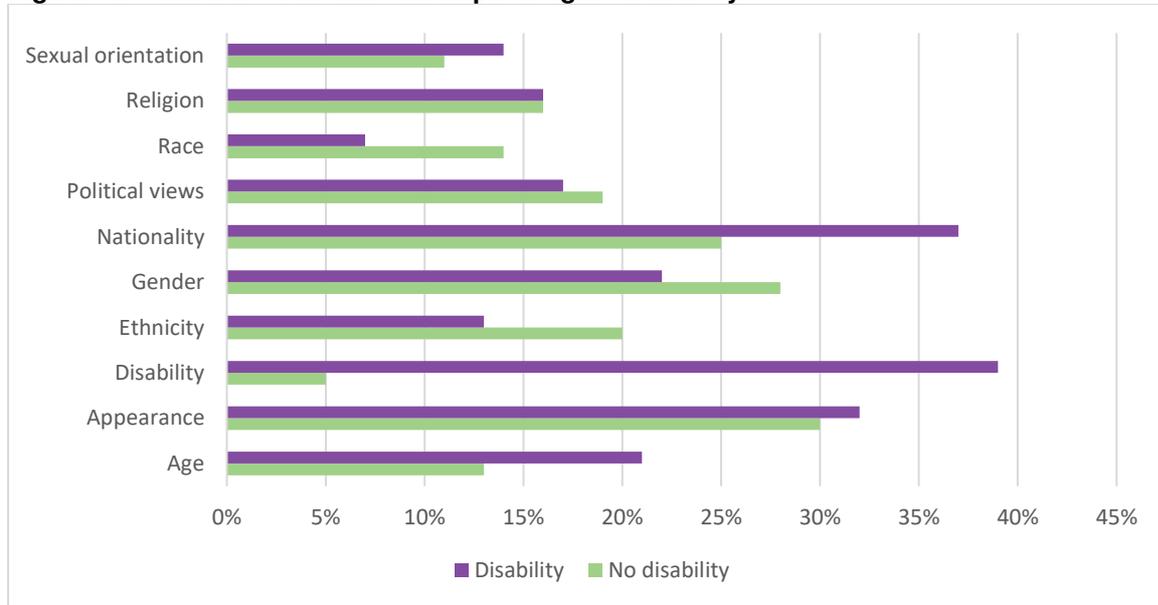
- Religious minorities identify ethnicity, race, nationality and religion as the focus of the hate they received. This was particularly prevalent for people belonging to Islam, who were twice as likely to mention religion, race and ethnicity as the factor for the hate they received than other religious groups – 43% have experienced hate based on their ethnicity, race and religion vs. 15% based on ethnicity, 6% based on race, and 14% based on religion for the Roman Catholic group. No other significant differences between other religious groups were identified.

**Figure 12: Focus of hate received depending on religion**



- More than a third of people with disabilities were the target of hate in relation to their disabilities (39%) as well as to their appearance (32%).

**Figure 13: Focus of hate received depending on disability**

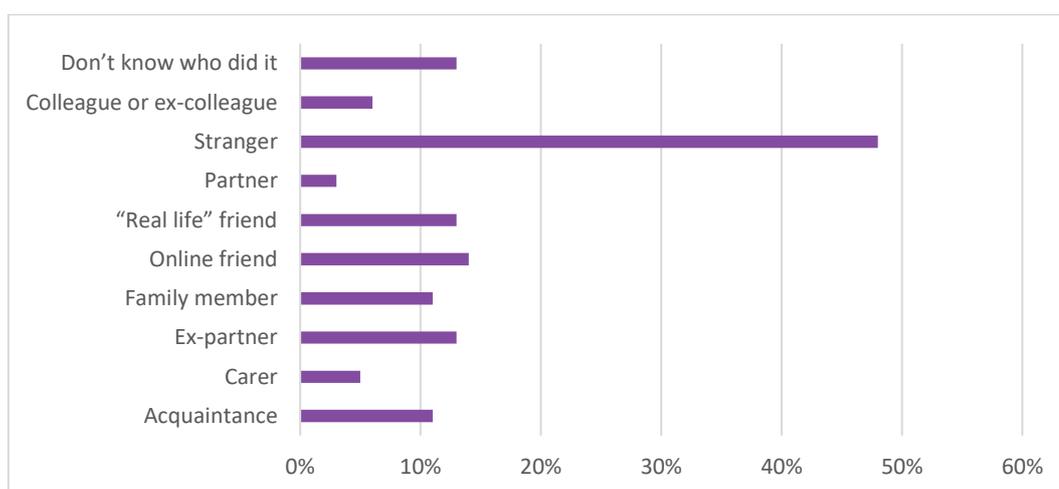


## Sources of Online Hate

Survey respondents who had experienced online hate were asked who they believed to be behind the hateful communication.

- Half of the participants indicated that a stranger was the source of the hateful communications.
- People in the 18-24 year-old age group were more likely to know the person behind the hate compared to the older age groups and were also more likely to say that the source had been an online friend.

**Figure 14: Who sent you the hateful communication?**

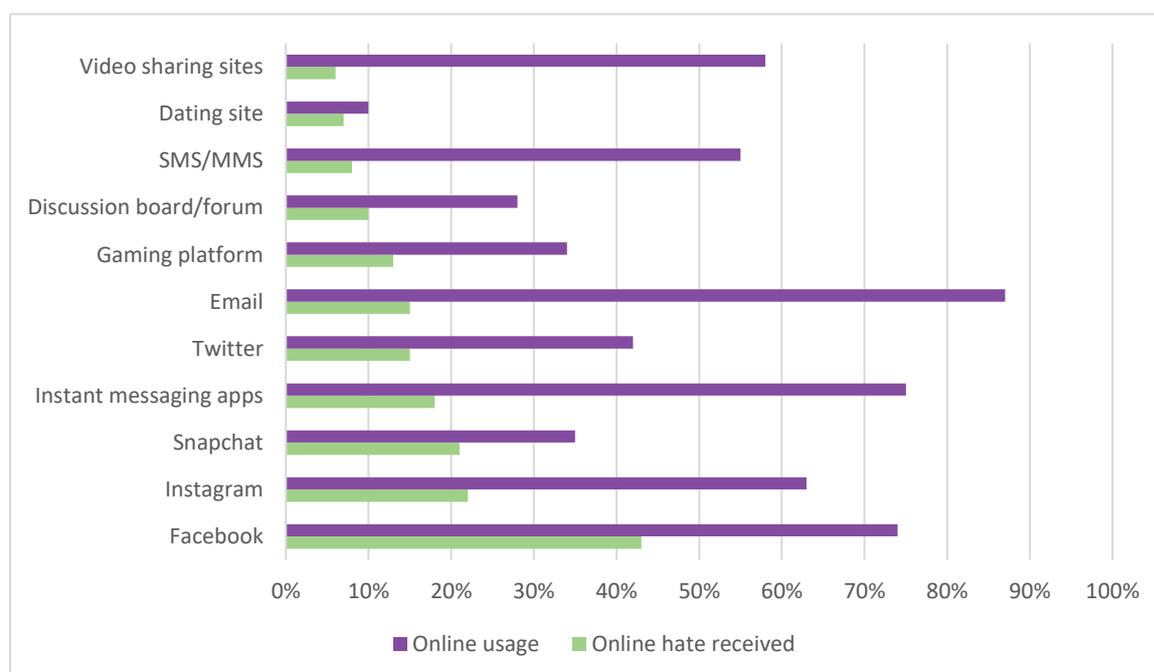


## Channels of Online Hate

Respondents who experienced online hate were asked to indicate on which platforms and services they received the hateful communications. The channels of online hate are reflective of which channels the respondents use the most (see Figure 15). Key findings include the following:

- A consistent proportion of respondents pointed to Facebook (43%), followed by Instagram (22%), Snapchat (21%), and Instant messaging apps (18%).
- The age group of 18-24-year-olds, however, identified Snapchat (34%), Instagram (31%), gaming platforms (29%) as more prevalent platforms for receiving hateful communication than Facebook (23%) – mirroring the fact that this age group uses Facebook less than older age groups.
- Overall, there was a small but statistically significant correlation between experiences of online hate and usage of the following platforms: dating sites/apps, Snapchat, Games/gaming platforms, and online discussion boards/forums.

**Figure 15: Via which platform or service did you receive the online hate?**

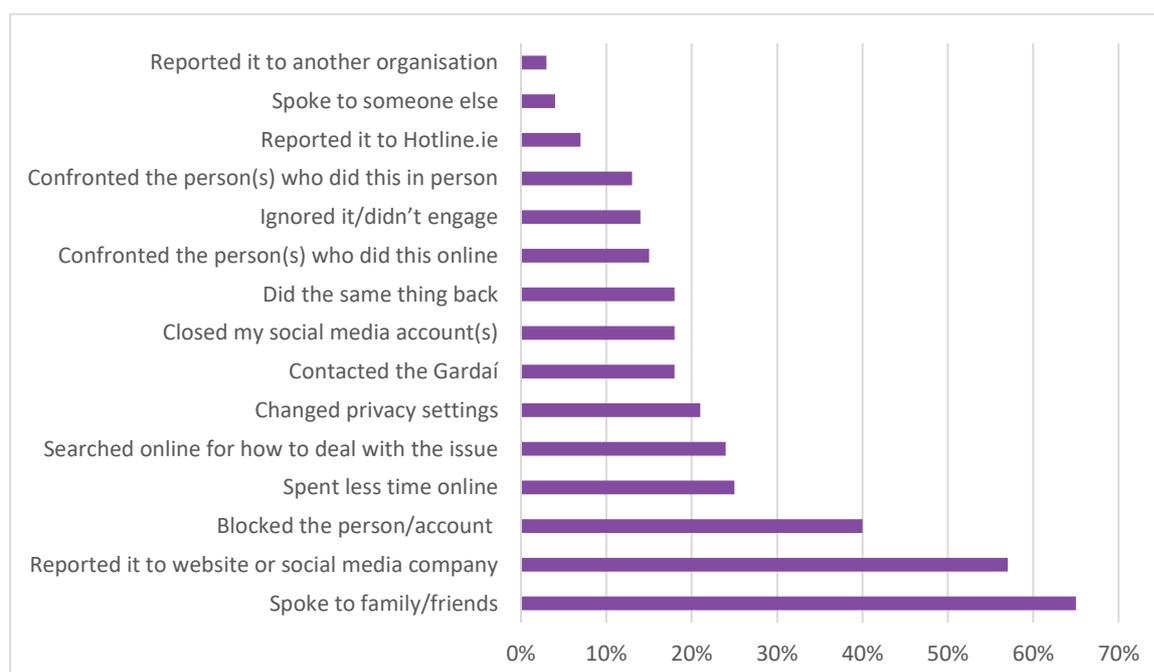


## Responses to Online Hate

Respondents who had received online hate were asked to indicate whether they took action in response to the episodes of online hate that they experienced.

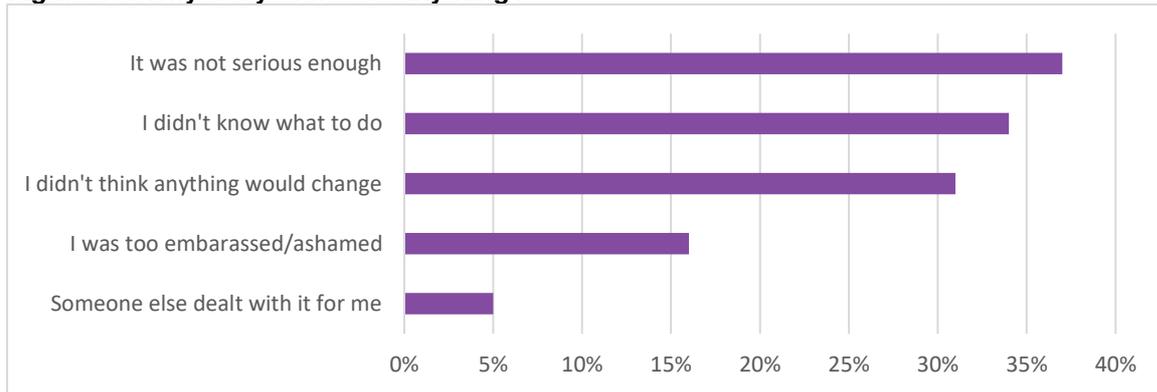
- Overall, 42% of respondents took action when confronted with online hateful communications, with no significant gender differences.
- Of those respondents who did take action, the majority spoke to family and friends (65%), followed by 57% who reported it to the website or social media company, and 40% who blocked the account. Women were more likely to block the accounts, while men were more likely to spend less time online as well as close their social media accounts.

**Figure 16: What did you do?**



- In terms of respondents who did not take action, the most common reasons given for inaction included feeling that the episode was not serious enough (37%), feeling that they did not know what to do (34%), and that they did not think anything would change (31%).

**Figure 17: Why did you not do anything?**

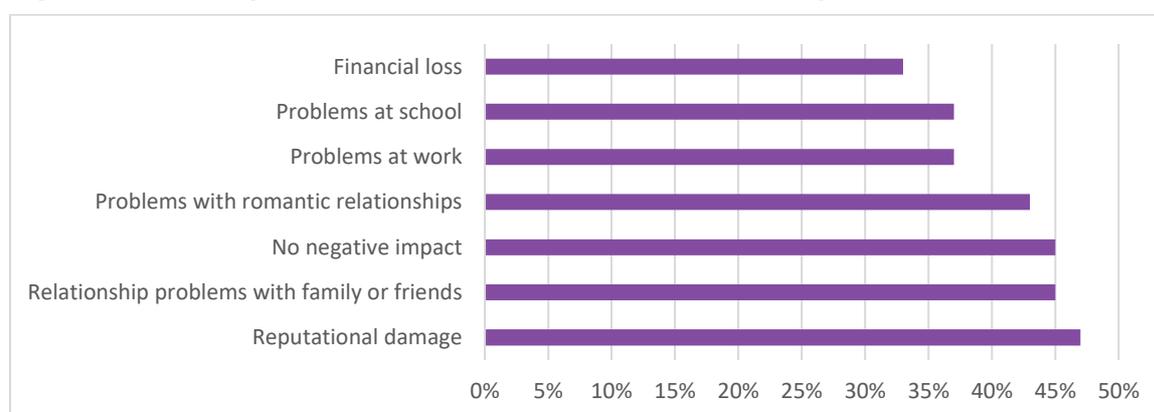


## Impact of Online Hate

Survey respondents who had experienced online hate were asked to indicate what impact online hate had across different areas of their lives.

- A consistent proportion of respondents indicated that the hateful communications caused reputational damage (47%), followed by relationship problems with family and friends (45%), while 45% believed it had caused no negative impact.

**Figure 18: What impact did the hateful communication have on you?**



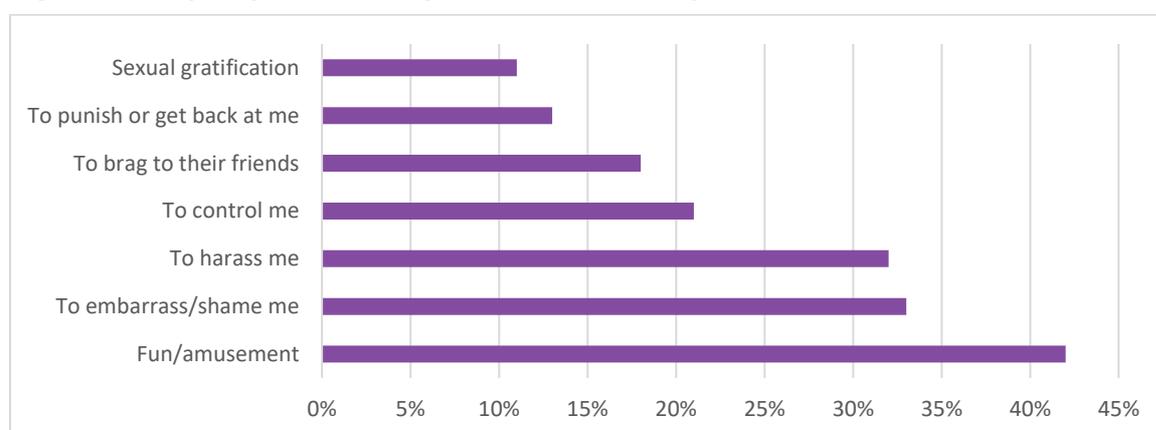
- A consistent and statistically significant effect for age was found across the impact statements. Overall, younger age cohorts were significantly more likely to be adversely impacted compared to their older age cohorts.
- Specifically, relationship problems with friends or family, reputational damage, problems at work, and problems at school were significantly more likely to be indicated by younger age cohorts (18-24, 25-34 and 35-44). No other significant age or gender patterns were observed.

## Perceived Motivation for Sending Hateful Communications

Respondents who had experienced online hate were asked to consider why they think the person(s) sent them the hateful communications.

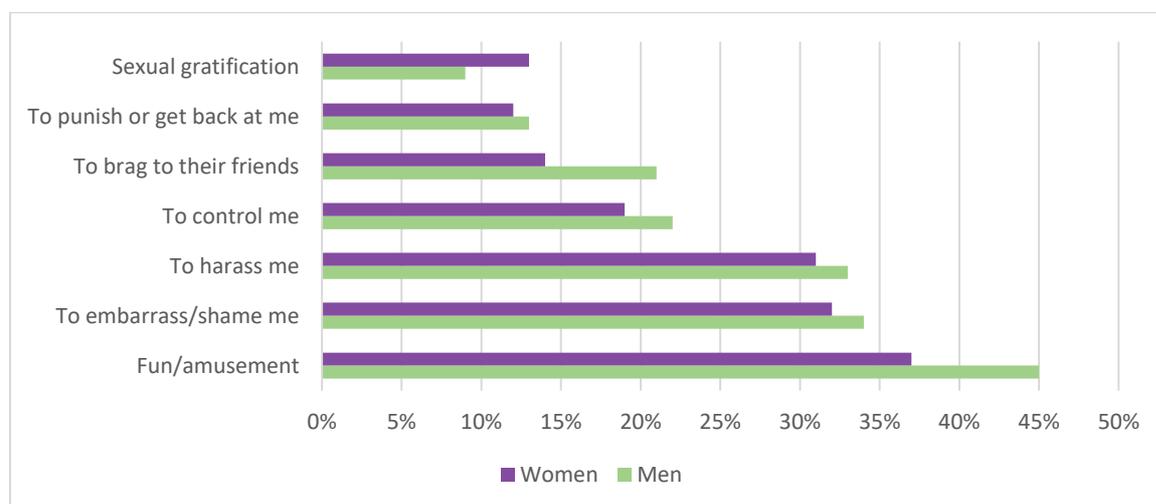
- The most common perceived motivation factor was fun/amusement (42%), followed by 33% who believed the person(s) did this to embarrass or shame them, and 32% who believed the motivation was to harass them.

**Figure 19: Why do you think the person(s) did this to you?**



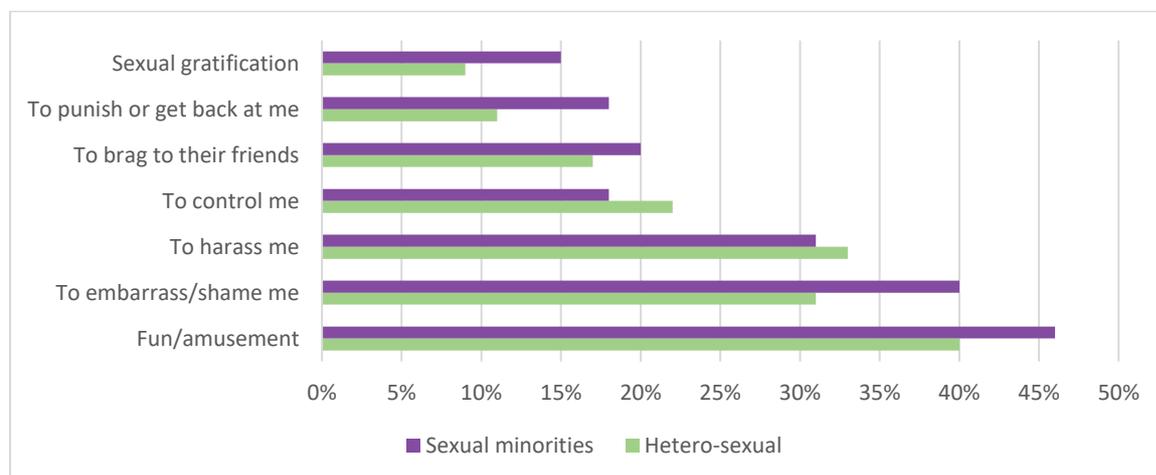
- Of the men who experienced online hate, they were more likely to cite fun and bragging as motivations (fun: 45% for men vs. 37% for women; bragging: 21% for men vs 14% for women); whereas women who experienced online hate pointed to sexual gratification at a higher level than men (13% for women vs 9% for men).

**Figure 20: Perceived motivation based on gender**



- Sexual minorities were more likely than heterosexual people to mention embarrassment/shame (40% vs 31%), punishment (18% vs 11%), and sexual gratification (15% vs 9%) as a motivating factor.

**Figure 21: Perceived motivation based on sexuality**



## Witnessing Online Hate

Respondents were asked how many times in their adult lives they had witnessed hateful digital communications that targeted someone else.

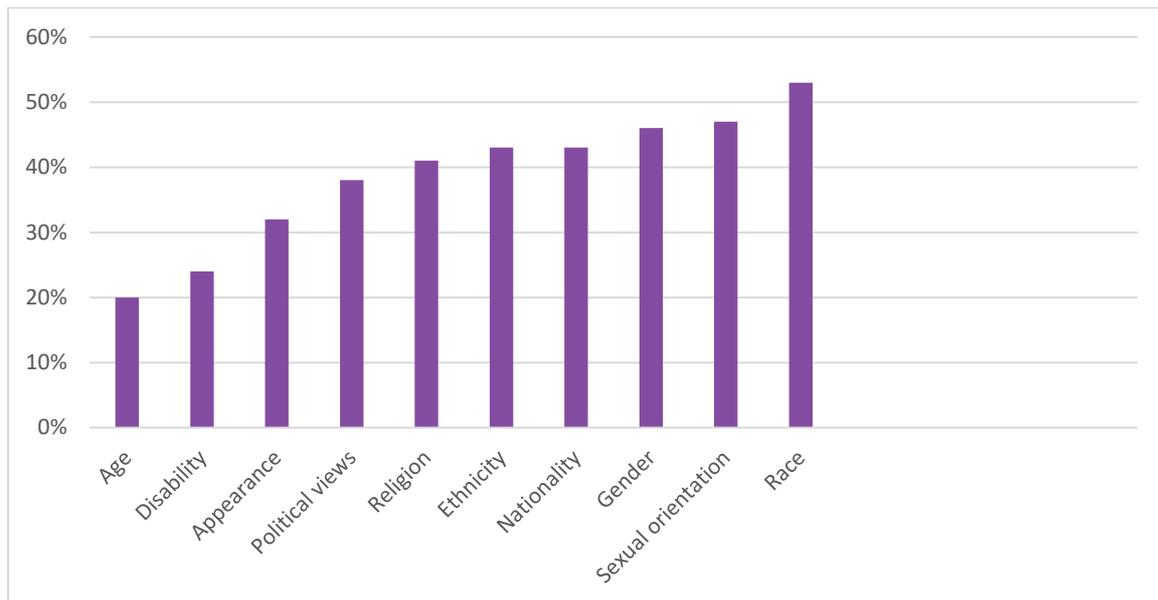
- Just under half of the respondents had never witnessed any online hateful communication against someone else (46%).
- Women indicated having witnessed this more often than men as 21% of the female participants had witnessed this many times vs 15% of the male participants.
- Younger people said they had witnessed this more often than people above 55 years of age.
- All minority groups indicated higher levels of witnessing online hate: 24% of sexual minorities, 19% of people with disabilities and 18% of ethnic minorities had witnessed online hate many times.

**Table 2: Witnessing online hate against someone else**

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Once</b>	<b>A few times</b>	<b>Many times</b>
<b>Total</b>	46%	8%	19%	18%
<b>Men</b>	46%	11%	20%	15%
<b>Women</b>	47%	6%	19%	21%
<b>18-24</b>	40%	12%	22%	21%
<b>25-34</b>	40%	9%	22%	21%
<b>35-44</b>	48%	10%	21%	14%
<b>45-54</b>	44%	6%	17%	20%
<b>55-64</b>	59%	3%	9%	20%
<b>65+</b>	84%	3%	11%	0%
<b>Heterosexual</b>	47%	7%	19%	18%
<b>Sexual minorities</b>	36%	13%	20%	24%
<b>White</b>	47%	8%	19%	18%
<b>Ethnic minorities</b>	40%	13%	24%	18%
<b>Disability</b>	37%	10%	25%	19%
<b>No disability</b>	49%	8%	18%	18%

When asked what were the kind of personal identities and beliefs they were primarily targeted, respondents primarily pointed to race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, nationality and religion.

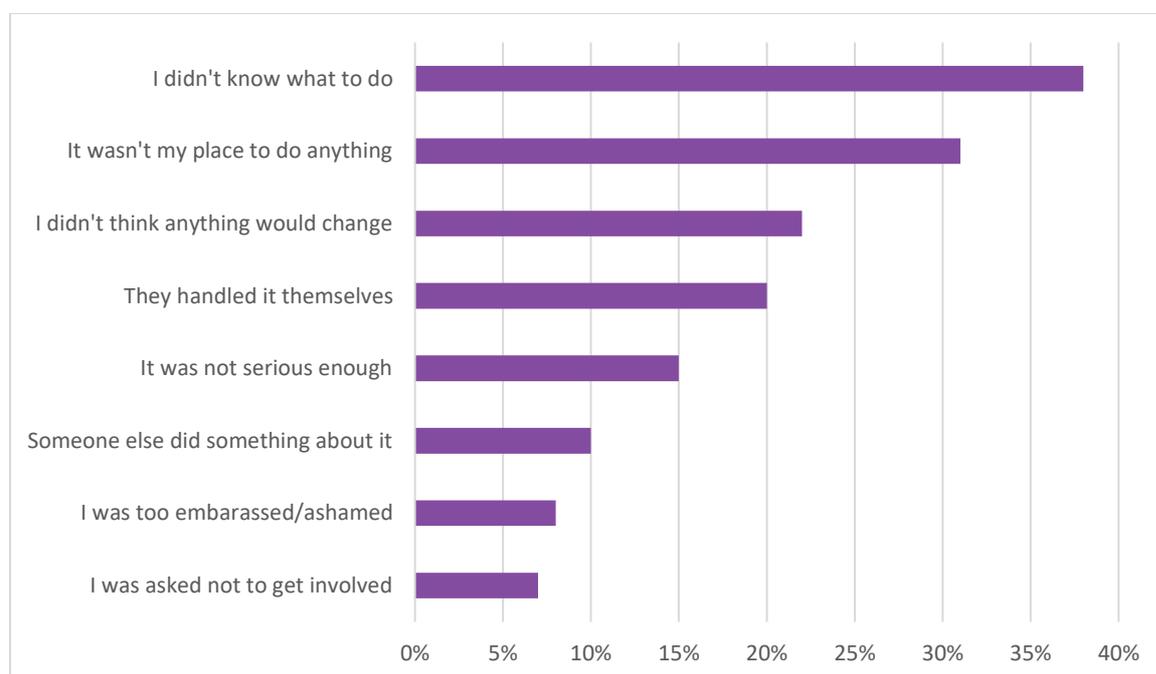
**Figure 22: Which aspects where the focus of the hate you witnessed?**



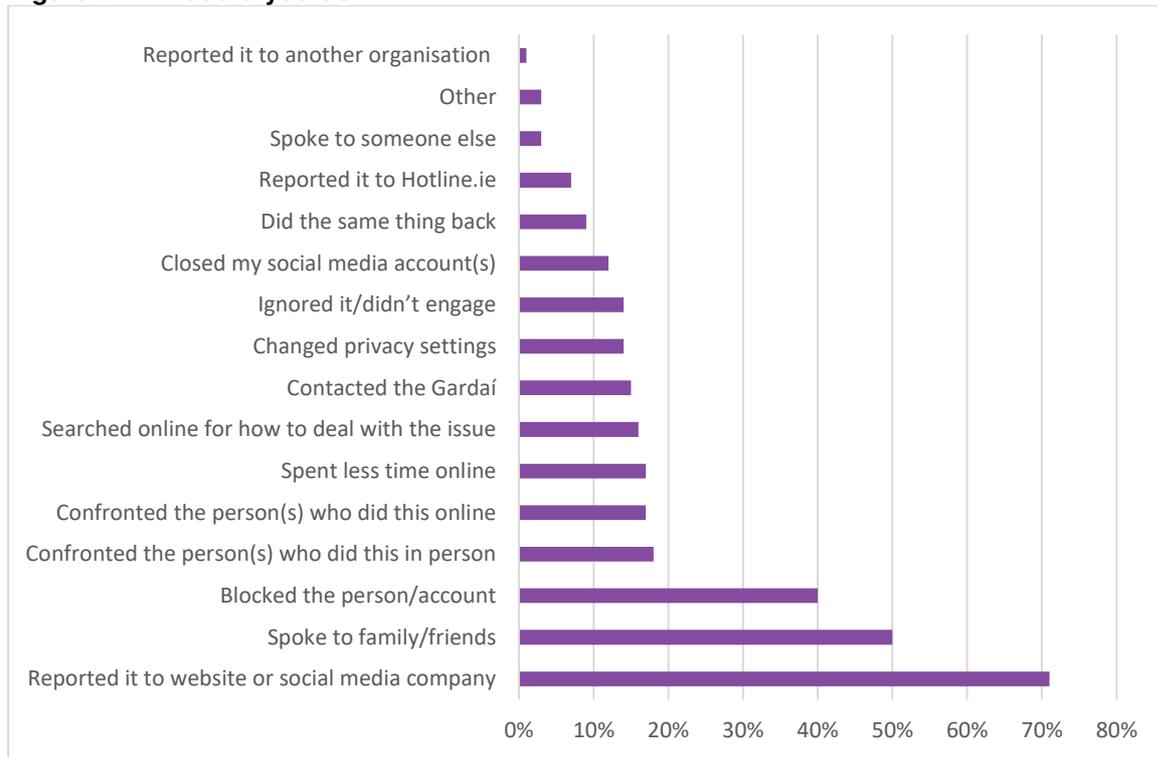
## Responses to Witnessing Online Hate

- When asked if they took any action in relation to the hateful communications they had witnessed, 47% of the respondents answered affirmatively.
- Of the 53% who did not take action, the most common reason given was that that they did not know what to do (38%), that they felt it was not their place to do something (31%), and that they did not think anything would change (22%).
- Those participants who did act upon witnessing hateful communications against someone else primarily chose to report the communication to the website or social media company (71%).
- Half of the respondents spoke to family and friends about what they had witnessed, while 40% blocked the account behind the online hateful communications.

**Figure 23: Why didn't you do anything?**



**Figure 24: What did you do?**



## Attitudes Towards Online Hate

For the overall sample ( $n = 1,008$ ), there was broad agreement with the following statements:

- *I believe social media platforms should do more to stop the spread of hateful content online (79% agree or strongly agree)*
- *I will support the introduction of further specific legislation to stop the spread of hateful content online (74% agree or strongly agree)*
- *I think we will need to do more than introduce additional legislation to prevent the spread of hateful content online (74% agree or strongly agree)*
- *I believe that everyone has a role in tackling hateful content online (74% agree or strongly agree).*

However, there was more disagreement with the following two statements:

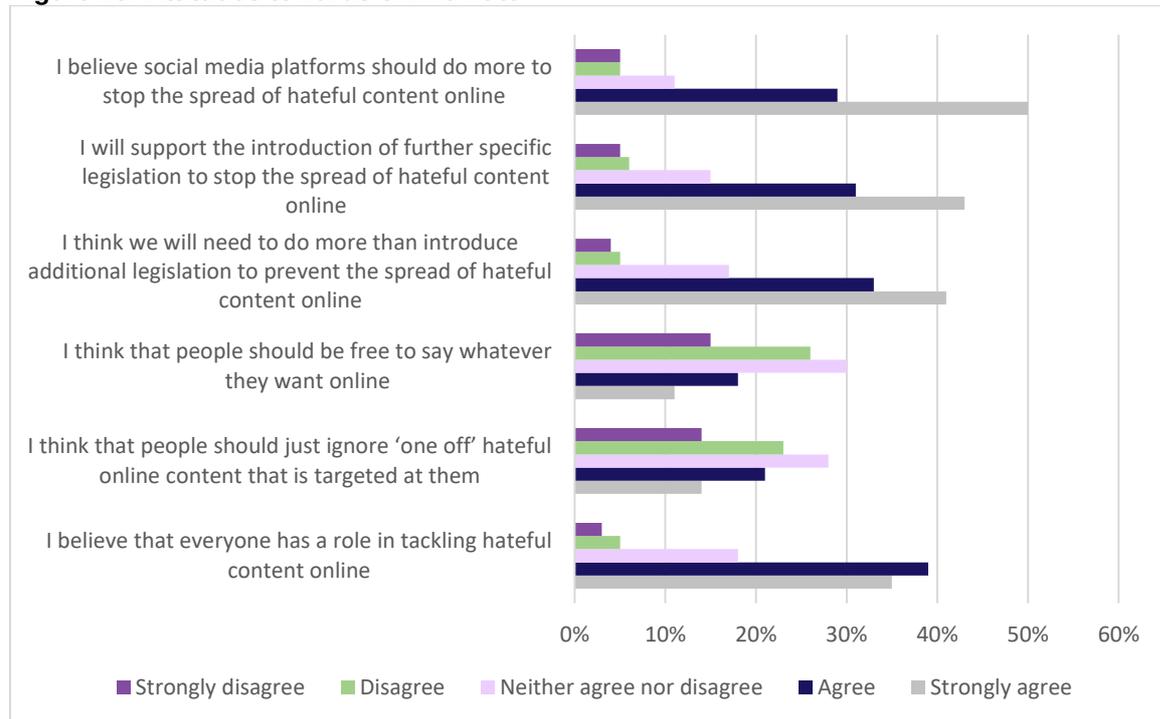
- *I think that people should be free to say whatever they want online (41% disagree or strongly disagree)*
- *I think that people should just ignore 'one off' hateful online content that is targeted at them. (37% disagree or strongly disagree)*

A full breakdown of these attitudinal insights is provided in Figure 25.

Finally, of those who experienced online hate, respondents were asked to consider whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of questions in relation to online hate and whether they think actions should be taken in relation to this. A range of statistically significant differences were again found to distinguish the younger age cohorts on the following attitudinal statements:

- *I believe social media platforms should do more to stop the spread of hateful content online - 18-24 age cohorts were significantly less likely to agree with this statement compared to the 55-64 cohort.*
- *I will support the introduction of further specific legislation to stop the spread of hateful content online - the 18-24 cohort were significantly less likely to agree with this statement, compared to the 25-34 cohort the 45-54 cohort, and the 55-64 cohort.*
- *I believe that everyone has a role in tackling hateful content online - the 18-24 cohort were significantly less likely to agree with this statement compared to the 35-44 cohort.*

**Figure 25: Attitudes towards online hate**



## Conclusion and Recommendations

In the first instance, it is important to note that these findings broadly mirror prior research in a number of key domains. Firstly, just under half of the sample have experienced some form of online hate – this reflects the widespread prevalence of this societal challenge. Secondly, young people are statistically more likely to be victims of online hate, and report greater adverse outcomes in their day-to-day lives – this is especially important given that emerging adults (18-25) are still developing and thus present with different risk and protective factors pertaining to online hate. Indeed prior research indicates that younger age groups are more likely to engage in higher risk-taking behaviours, uphold larger social networks and make use of a wider variety of social media (Netsafe 2018, Pfeil, U. et al. 2009, Wang, M. et al. 2019).

However, some notable gender differences were observed. For example, there was no significant difference between men and women regarding the frequency of online hate, but there were differences in the perceived motivations of the perpetrators. Women were more likely to experience gender-based hate, yet men were more likely to be targeted for their nationality or age. This emphasises the potential multifactorial motivations underpinning the cycle of online abuse between and within different demographic groupings. A further notable trend related to the stark difference between those who did – or did not – consider themselves to have a disability, with the former significantly more likely to indicate having experienced online hate.

Interestingly, despite the evidence tentatively suggesting that younger age cohorts experience greater adverse impacts of online hate, there was greater attitudinal variation for statements seeking to tackle such problems. These distinct patterns warrant further investigation to ascertain how and why varying attitudes for the prevention of, and intervention with, online hate can be managed when directing future policies. Understanding the factors underpinning such attitudes will greatly inform future work on digital citizenship and literacy (Cho & Byrne, 2020).

Despite lower numbers of respondents from minority groups, the data also indicated that ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, religious minorities and people with disabilities experienced high levels of online hate. Further targeted research which endeavours to maximise response rates from underrepresented minority groups in order to investigate underlying group differences would be of value.



With regards to the response to online hate, over half of the respondents chose not to take action and the main reason for this was that they preferred to ignore it or that they did not feel that it was serious enough. However, a third of respondents pointed to the fact that they did not know what to do – indicating that there is a need for better information to the public in terms of where and how to seek help.

The respondents, who did take action, mostly sought comfort from family and friends or took individual action (blocking, changing privacy settings and reporting to website). Very few reported it to An Garda Síochána or to Hotline.ie, which, considered in relation to the fact that a third of the respondents did not know what to do, suggests that better information on how to seek help is needed.

## Recommendations

- **Raise awareness:** The main trends in this report highlight the need to raise further awareness of the scope, as well as the impact, of online hate in Ireland. Awareness campaigns should also consider programmes within schools and universities, to assist in educating young people about the nature of online hate and their options to respond to negative experiences.
- **Create clearer and more effective avenues for seeking help.** The report has evidenced a lack of knowledge among the public in relation to how to seek help. We recommend introducing clearer avenues for where to go in relation to the specific experiences, both in terms of reporting to An Garda Síochána, and to seek advice and support via Hotline.ie.
- **Take into consideration how online hate may disproportionately impact certain demographics.** While the Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 addresses some aspects of the online experiences of hateful communications, this report indicates that certain demographics experience significantly higher levels of online hate than others (i.e. younger age groups, or those with disabilities). The development of the Bill and any other legislation in relation to hateful communication should take into consideration the disproportionate impact this may have on certain demographic groups.

- **Social media companies should endeavour to include all stakeholders in addressing the emerging trends of online hate in Ireland.** As this report has evidenced, adults in Ireland are already taking individual actions to address online hate in conjunction with readily available tools on social media (i.e. blocking, reporting to platforms, changing privacy settings, or closing social media accounts). However, given the widespread adverse impact of online hate across different population groups, social media companies should strive to work closely with different groups to critically evaluate any differentiated needs and design considerations to prevent, intervene with, and resolve online hate. Additionally, greater multistakeholder collaboration between social media companies, researchers, governments and NGOs – and in Ireland the Online Safety Commissioner – would likely yield more sustainable and impactful positive change into the future.
- **Critically consider the different motivations for the perpetration of online hate.** Respondents continually indicated different reasons for being targeted. To understand potential early detection and intervention factors for would-be perpetrators, stakeholders must aim to better understand the multiple factors that may underlie perpetrators' motivation. This will allow for a more evidence-based approach to building prevention and psychoeducation programmes to create a safer online world for all.
- **Further research is necessary to understand the adverse experiences of young people.** This should include in-depth research into the higher rates of online hate experienced by this group and what specific remedies they need within an Irish context. To optimise the outputs from such research, and build-in accountability for platform responsiveness to online hate, strategic coordination between key government agencies and departments is highly recommended.

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