Civility in Public Life: Digital Citizenship Workshop

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In this presentation I will make three points:

1. That online harassment is frequent and correlates with other forms of intimidation

2. Current approaches

3. Limitations to current approaches

Data:

- Online survey conducted, with the support of BA/Leverhulme small grant SRG19\191702 between April and June 2020.

- N=1487 Local Councillors in England elected in 2019. The sample includes councillors from all parties. The response rate is 17% (total number of councillors contacted was 8,296).

- 72% Men 28% Women

"Abuse, intimidation, harassment facilitated by technology" (Esposito 2020)

Incivility, derogatory communication, non-policy based or that derive in the personal characteristics of the individuals in a derogatory manner (Kuperberg 2020)

- 40% of councillors have been on the receiving end of technology-enabled abuse

- 25% of online harassed also received threats and 12% had people loitering around their homes or work

- 91% experienced the abuse from angry members of the public or other councillors

- 6 in every 10 experienced fear as result

2) Current approaches

- More has been done to tackle sexual harassment and harassment in the workplace, but online harassment and cyber bullying have been given fewer practical considerations

- Legislation and regulation:

  - Character assassination

  - Threatening communication

  - Co-regulation between social media platforms and government

- Technological changes:

  - Extend the oversight of social media companies, during the election and between campaigns

  - Make it easier for social media companies to de-anonymise accounts and/or forbid anonymous accounts

  - Automated approaches to detect uncivil / threatening / abusive communications

Most common actions taken in response of online abuse
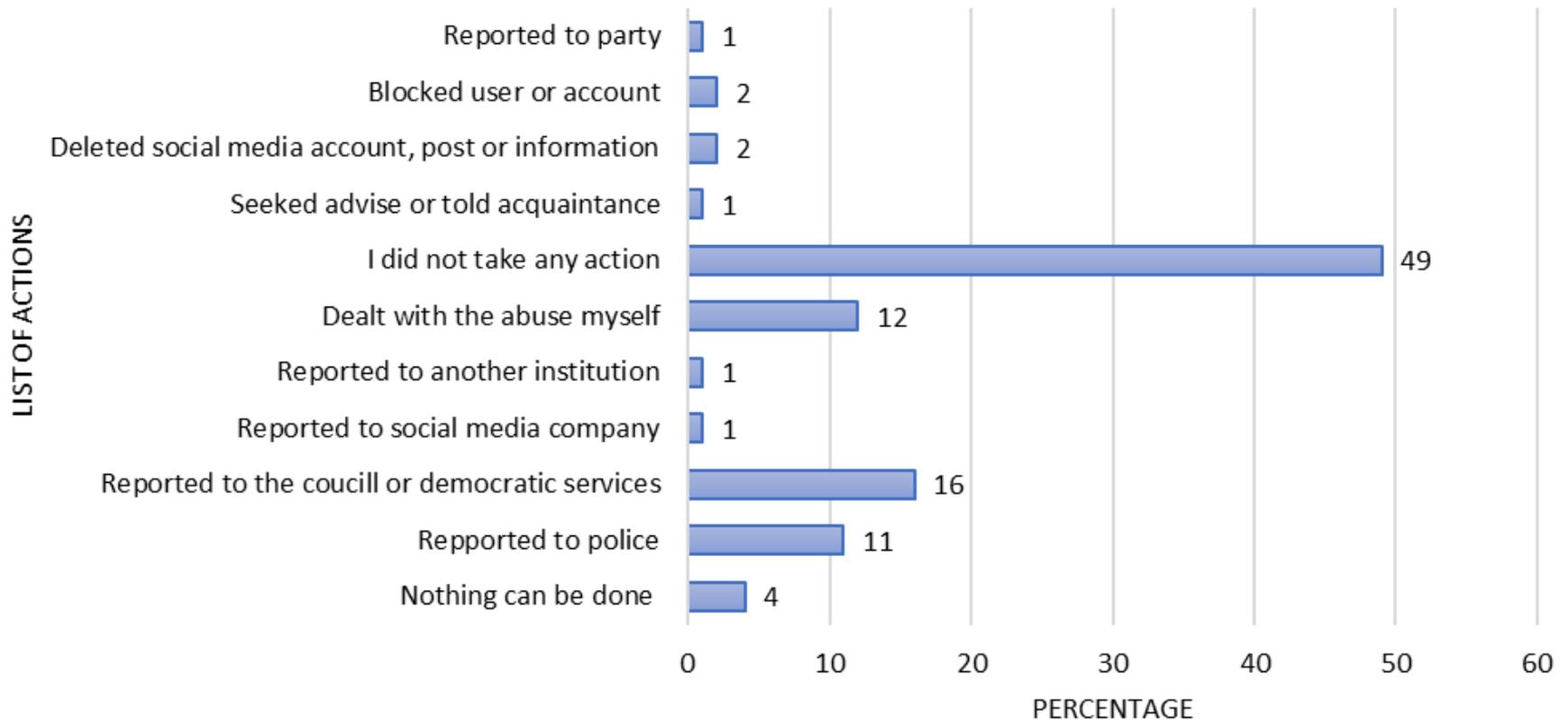
3) Limitations

- Identification→ Multi-platform, multi-perpetrator or not

    1. Banning is an option for repeating and serious offenders but the majority is "one time event" – Opportunistic

- Practical → Large volume of communications → Limited resources

- Content moderation– > who decides? – values and norms

- Reactive and not preventive → Culture

Take away points

- Online harassment is serious and not "political banter" or freedom of expression

- Online harassment is common and it has important political and emotional consequences

- Current approaches are reactive and limited

- **What can we do to change they way we interact online?**