What’s the Problem? Opportunities and barriers to (researching) children’s rights in a digital, global age

The South African Scenario

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The Rapid Rise of Social Media
Time to reach 50 million users worldwide (in years)

- Twitter: 0.75 years
- Facebook: 1 year
- Internet: 3 years
- iPod: 4 years
- TV: 13 years
- Radio: 38 years
Children in South Africa

- 36% of SA population under 18
- 23% of children live with both parents
- 32% live in a household with no employed adult
- 55% live under the poverty line
- 22% have experienced violence at school
- 48.7% have been exposed to violence in community

Source: CJCP 2012, Child Gauge 2014
ICTs in South Africa

H/H has a mobile phone: 88.9%

Own a computer: 21.4%

H/H has a landline: 14.5%

Source: Statistics South Africa, 2011
Use of social media and ICT in SA

- Own or have access to a mobile phone: 81.1%
- Own or have access to a computer, iPad, tablet: 54.3%
- Ever access to the internet on your mobile phone: 46.2%
- Ever use Instant Messaging through your mobile phone: 42.3%
- Have your own social networking page: 30.9%
- Ever participate in online chatrooms: 24.4%
- Ever host or contribute to a website/blog: 10%
- Ever use Instant Messaging through a computer: 9.5%

Source: CJCP, 2012
Experiences of Online Violence

- Experienced some form of online violence or aggression in previous 12 months: 20.9%
- Had an 'online fight' with someone where angry and rude language was sent in a chat room or social networking page via the computer or mobile phone: 14%
- Had rude and insulting messages about you sent via computer or mobile phone: 7.8%
- Had messages sent or posted about you that were hurtful, with the intention of damaging reputation or friendship: 3.8%
- Had someone share secrets or embarrassing pictures or information about you online without your permission: 3.2%
- Had someone use your account and pretend to be you by sending messages etc and trying to ruin your reputation: 3%
- Been threatened with harm or intimidated by someone online: 2.5%
- Had someone send sexually explicit images or messages about you by using a phone or computer: 2.3%

Source: CJCP, 2012
felt angry
felt embarrassed
Felt afraid
Felt anxious
Had difficulty concentrating
Blamed myself
Missed school because of it
I cried
Marks dropped because of it

Source: CJCP, 2012
Methodological Challenges

- Impact of legislation on participation:
  - Criminalization of sexting
  - Mandatory reporting

- Appropriate measures of harm?

- Institutionalizing data collection (ownership, quality, funding)

- What constitutes evidence?

- Challenge of research uptake and advocacy when outside existing policy agenda/direction
Research Opportunities

- Prioritization of VAC, including online, in Government’s National Plan of Action on VAWC
  - (constraints of conceptualization/language)

- National epidemiological studies (Optimus, NSVS)
  - (but cross sectional, single sample, limitations)

- Political buy-in and support
Research Questions

- What are the kinds of online experiences children consider harmful and how they would characterise the harm they encounter.

- What is the relationship between the wider context of violence, inequality and poverty, and access to, and usage of ICTs and social media, and related vulnerabilities attached to online experiences? Are there shared or multiple vulnerabilities, or does vulnerability in one domain impact on vulnerability in the other.

- What is the most useful conceptual framework for framing our understanding of and research into children’s use of ICTs, risks and harms?
Towards Better Understanding Young People’s Experience

- More contextualized research:
  - Unpacking risk (what is it, how does it develop, response, who’s most at risk)
  - Risks in different contexts – high/low violence; urban/rural; marginalized/wealthy)
  - Young people’s agency in developing resilience
  - Developing reliable data systems
  - Developing tailored interventions (not one size fits all)
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Young People’s Navigation of Online Risks

Social Media, ICTs & Online Safety

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