

Written supplementary evidence submitted by the Samaritans (OSB0251)

Content warning – this document contains details around self-harm and suicide and accounts from people with lived experience that could be distressing.

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The following evidence was provided by Samaritans supporters with lived experience of suicide and self-harm and has been collated by the Committee's Secretariat.

The vast majority of those submitting evidence requested it be anonymised, and so all has been anonymised for ease of information management. Each item of evidence has been numbered under one of two overarching questions on which respondents provided their views. The numbered item in the first list of responses is sourced from the same respondent as its corresponding number in the second list.

The Committee Secretariat has worked with Samaritans to redact specific details that could be harmful or distressing for readers. Aside from this, and some additional punctuation, the evidence has been presented as received.

Does the draft Bill make adequate provisions for people who are more likely to experience harm online or who may be more vulnerable to exploitation?

1. Having spoken to many young people on the phone and online over the years I know how important it is for these young people to be protected and kept safe.
2. Harmful material around suicide and self harm is dangerous for people of any age.
3. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age, but particularly so for children (persons under 18) and vulnerable adults.
4. I believe that everyone should be kept safe online. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can have detrimental impacts on anyone's mental health, at any age. I have been bereaved by suicide, with my uncle having committed suicide [redacted]. He was 19 when he died.
5. I have known of many cases of suicide in all age groups but particularly in middle-aged people who have found encouragement and comfort through accessing negative online sites leading to disastrous results. This content should be entirely banned and criminalised. The legacy of suicide is extremely painful for family and friends of the deceased. Attempts should be made to make positive online communication with trained counsellors easily available, co-ordinated and consistent for seriously depressed self harming people with suicidal thoughts.
6. Kids obviously need the most stringent protection but I also strongly believe all adults of any age need to be kept safe by inappropriate content that can cause at the least psychological harm and at worst self harm or suicide.
7. All people who are vulnerable or could be vulnerable need protection from triggering content online and any bad content can cause extra suffering and possibly lead to copy cat actions and people killing themselves or causing harm.
8. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous irrespective of age or gender. Individuals who may have thoughts of taking their own life or self-harming will have a range of triggers and it is vital that everyone has the same online protection from such

harmful content. Only protecting children from such content is still placing vulnerable adults at risk from coming across this kind of material when they are searching online.

9. People of all ages need to be kept safe, I'm 27 and at various times have found content depicting suicide or self harm that is done irresponsibly to be a trigger, and I've friends much older than me and family younger than me who also battle with their mental health and would also find this content triggering and painful. I've also personally been bereaved by suicide multiple times, which is devastating, and I know this kind of content being available and viewed regularly did effect them.
10. All people should be kept safe online and suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age and for anyone!! I am 66 now and have found it so easy to find such information on Google - my step-brother committed suicide **[redacted]** when he was not even 40 years old - a friend of mine's son of only 18 years committed suicide **[redacted]** and another friend's husband committed suicide **[redacted]** after they had only been married a few years. Such online content needs to be stopped - I know if sad people want to achieve this end they will do so anyway ... but ... they don't need the freedom of the web to help them ... PLEASE HELP THEM!!
11. I would like to say that people of any age deserve to be kept safe in the online space because harmful suicide and self-harm content such as:
 - Glamorising suicide or self-harm
 - Graphic descriptions and pictures of self-harm
 - Detailed methods and step-by-step instructions can be harmful to any age group, not just children.
12. Support should be readily available online & face to face for those affected via Suicide.
13. It is everyone who needs safety when they are helpless to make that happen themselves I found the web unhelpful to me when I tried to take my life it gave me ways to harm myself **[redacted]**.
14. People of all ages may suffer depression so intense that they feel that they cannot cope with this pain any more .
15. Everyone needs to be offered the protection from content that will trigger suicidal thoughts or those of self-harm.
16. I feel that as a young adult, the Online Safety Bill should be set out to not only protect children and young people but adults too. Harmful suicide and self harm content can be dangerous at any age no matter what age, gender, ethnicity, language and country you come from. An example for me would be when I was younger I used to post how I was feeling a things I wanted to do to end my life because of bullying and not feeling like it fitted in well. I used to write things on social media and not think of how it would affect other people. I now know how to openly talk with people from my support network and or my therapist instead of writing online.
17. Everyone - suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age.
18. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous to vulnerable people of any age.
19. Vulnerable people as well as the non-vulnerable people.
20. All children and vulnerable adults should be keep safe online. There is so much online which can be harmful to young maturing brains including misinformation about suicide and self harming.
21. Harmful suicidal and self harm content can be dangerous at any age. I worry about my young children and the harmful content they may be exposed to online as they grow up.

Professionally I work with many vulnerable adults who are desperate, isolated and lonely without support around them to protect them from dangerous online content. They are also at great risk and need protection.

22. Suicide and self harm is so prevalent in the modern world and having 3 daughters I can see first hand how detrimental them witnessing triggering content is. I am 34 and struggle with unstable mood disorder making suicidal tendencies strong and it effects me, let alone young children that have not been taught to regulate their own emotions, not being able to see through the fog of low mood or ways they can cope. They see self harm as a coping mechanism and when it is glorified by ridiculous social media groups it only reinforces this. More needs to be done.
23. Everyone should be kept safe online. Particular attention should be paid to those (predominantly the young) who are more likely to use social media, be specifically targeted and be more susceptible to engaging with harmful content.
24. All people young and old need to be kept safe from harm of the pro content online. There is too much easy access to these sites. Tougher and tighter systems and laws to prevent this needs to be taken.
25. The internet is here to stay but we have to make it a safe place for people of all places to be. Whilst it is important to allow people to share their feelings in support groups if they are going through a difficult time, we need to take action against the harmful content that can be very triggering for people who are unable to cope. We know through the Samaritans Research that suicidal thoughts can be interrupted but when you have method and examples of how to take your life available online, this could be reinforcing people's thoughts about suicide. We need to protect everyone who may at some point in their lives be struggling with their thoughts. This protection is for everyone.
26. I believe that harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age and should be controlled.
27. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age. I am 34 and have struggled with both self harm and suicidal ideation on and off since I was a child. These thoughts are terrifying, but feeling isolated and alone is also dangerous. One of the things that continues to help my recovery is to know that I am not alone and that I can learn to manage those thoughts and coping mechanisms better over time. It's important to be able to manage boundaries, and not be exposed to harmful content which can be very triggering and set off a relapse. But talking about it helps. Knowing you're not alone helps. Learning other coping mechanisms that are not harmful helps. At 34 I still need help with this, and I'll probably still need that help when I am 44, 54, 64, 74, 84, 94.. It's like a perpetual companion, always with me but sometimes closer or further away. Always somewhere in my mind, forever. Everyone deserves community in a safe and sensible way.
28. Exposure to harmful or graphic suicide / self-harm content can be dangerous at any age to any individual who is experiencing mental health distress.
29. Children and adults both need the proposed protection. This type of harmful content can be dangerous for anyone at any age if feeling vulnerable to suggestion.
30. People who are lonely.
31. Everyone, especially children, who need to build a solid basis of self-respect and courage
32. If anybody, at any age, is feeling vulnerable, seeing harmful suicide and self harm content can be dangerous.

33. I think age simply doesn't come into this right now. Anybody can reach a darkened vulnerable state and seek some sort of findings online in a desperate need like this we all whatever age reach this point and so i feel every age should be protected and made safe.
34. Anyone who is made vulnerable by having suicidal thoughts or self harm. Being exposed to suicide and self-harm content is put at further risk.
35. Everyone should be able to be safe online. Everyone has a right to be free from potentially triggering content. When I was 13 and I first started struggling with my mental health, I wasn't sure how to cope and I didn't know how to tell anyone how I felt. So I turned to an online community which, although was very supportive, was also very graphic at times when discussing self harm and suicide. Until that point, I didn't know what self harm was. But hearing how others used it to cope, and seeing how it was almost glorified made me want to try, because at that point I would try anything. That was the start of a long and dangerous downwards spiral I nearly didn't survive. [...] I am not the only person I know who has experienced similar online. The Bill needs to protect everyone, not just those deemed vulnerable, because anybody can be harmed by this kind of content.
36. Three years ago, at the age of 19,I was researching ways to end my own life online. I have experienced mental health problems the entirety of my adult life and at that point in time I was in crisis and getting no support, despite desperately seeking it. During that crisis every waking minute was filled with intense urges to end my life. It was almost comforting at the time that it was incredibly easy to find content on ways to end my life: I could simply Google it and I would have an answer. I scrolled past the webpages of services that I had tried and failed to get help from. I ended up on forums that gave detailed methods on suicide and it made me determined to act on them. I tried to act on them but I was so ill that I asked my doctor to help me end my life, he then called the crisis team. During this time I kept getting automatic emails from the forums suggesting more content on ending my life. I know this content is still out there. If I enter crisis again I am not safe because I could easily access that content. There will be people accessing that content now, who just like I was, are very ill. There is no limit to how old these people accessing these forums are, I was an adult and many people on there were too. In order to be adequate the bill needs to recognise suicidal people of any age are vulnerable and need this bill to offer protection.
37. I mentioned young people as a target for online content but the truth is anyone of any age, creed or religion can be affected and/or triggered by what they see or hear online.
38. Children today can legally access online sites that shouldn't be allowed to operate. It is appalling that our laws don't protect the more vulnerable in society. Often we hear of peer pressure in youngsters who are encouraged to view these sites just to keep in the group.
39. Websites encouraging self harm and /or suicide should be removed. Social media communications of bullying and harassment should be shut down. The Police should trace the source of harmful content and arrest.
40. All people need to be safe no matter what their age, gender, race , ability health. I found the partner of my aunt who was over 80 taken tablets thankfully I found them in time. They thought they would be arrested.
41. Every human being should be kept safe.

42. I'm 30, and mostly have good mental health during my years, but as we all have, have been through some bad times and have had a few moments with thoughts of not wanting to be here and self harm. I feel blessed that I was able to access resources online about suicide and self harm from places like Samaritans and Mind that are factual and able to properly support people with that mindset. I worry about some of the content online that could be triggering to certain people in that mental state, and believe it is up to us to work together to protect and help them.
43. Harmful and accessible suicide and self harm online content can be harmful at any age. I am in my fifties and would be tempted to act on this information if I felt suicidal again.
44. harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous and triggering at any age, when in a period of depression or anxiety and particularly in during a period of acute mental illness.
45. Content of self harm and suicide can be distressing and also triggering for some, something I have suffered.
46. Depressed or disaffected young people, PTSD sufferers, anyone who is vulnerable and easily influenced by bullies online, the elderly or someone with a serious illness or disability, who may feel like a burden, many people are affected by online content about or describing suicide, young people may be drawn into self harm when it is glamorised and promoted by those online who get some sort of a "kick" from using their online presence to influence the behaviour of others by manipulating them or even posing as friends and a sympathetic listener to the person in need of help. I might have looked for these sites myself if they had been available to me when I made at least three attempts at suicide, the last one was very serious and very near to being successful, resulting in a longish stay in hospital and a spell of residential treatment I am now 70, I was in my 50s at the time of turmoil in my life, I am mentally well now but still get the odd dark thoughts it never really leaves you. I am married with grown up children and grandchildren, I would not have seen my children's weddings or known my fabulous grandchildren if I had succeeded in killing myself. Suicide is FINAL!! It is not a game or a way to get attention. Many people with suicidal thoughts when asked " Do you really want to die and be gone for good, or do you just want this awful time to pass, or this problem to be solved, or to turn back time and not make that awful mistake?" will answer with the second option, when faced with the reality of suicide a lot of people will step back from the brink. Stepping back is NOT an option on these deplorable sites which actively encourage the very sad and vulnerable to either self harm or in fact KILL themselves....it's tantamount to murder by suggestion. I know at least two people whose sons have committed suicide in their late teens.
47. Adult males are the most at-risk group for suicide. Women affected by post-natal or menopausal depression are also at risk. Adults have greater access to the means to carry out their intentions [redacted] . Therefore all groups must be protected, not just youngsters.
48. I feel strongly people should be safe on line to discuss feelings around self harm. Suicide . If not isolation on top of these very painful feelings is not acceptable,
49. Young and any vulnerable person. My nephew aged 38 took his life.
50. That harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age.
51. Young people are especially vulnerable to harmful messages online but absolutely nobody of any age should be exposed to them.

52. In my own personal experience, men have a hard time convincing the authorities that they are the victim when it comes to domestic abuse, for me downright impossible to prove to the police that I was the victim. Having spent years living with Mental Health issues the abuse did not help my circumstances and the police took the side of my wife even though I had evidential prove I'm 55, now living in sheltered accommodation with no access to my daughter.
53. Everyone should be kept safe from suicidal/self harm content no matter their age or sexuality.
54. Self harm and suicide effects everyone and when you're unwell and come across harmful suicide and self harm content this can be dangerous. I am 25 and personally would find this content very triggering and if I was struggling already would find it difficult to keep myself safe.
55. I think everyone should be helped to stay safe. Suicidal ideation is often very short lived, but suicide is permanent. People need support, not instructions.
56. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous to individuals at any age and stage in their lives, not just children.
57. everyone should be able access positive and constructive support without being exposed to easily accessible, harmful online content.
58. Harmful suicide and self-harm content can be dangerous at any age.

Are the distinctions between categories of services appropriate, and do they reliably reflect their ability to cause harm?

1. It is key that all content is controlled not just on the obvious large sites.
2. People should be kept safe on all websites regardless of size.
3. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites.
4. Without doubt suicide and self-harm content online is accessible via many websites large and small and is just as powerful an influence to the suicidal person wherever it is found. This negative content has no place in any reasonable society that supports life. All content pertaining to self-harm and suicide should be entirely banned and criminalised.
5. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere, not only just large websites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Suicide and self-harm content should be treated differently, given the unique risks that the content poses.
6. I strongly believe small websites as well as large ones should take on the responsibility to protect children and anyone who is vulnerable from damaging content that has no place in society.
7. All online content should be respectful and supportive. Even on a small website it could cause harm and everyone should work together to keep everyone adult and child safe from crisis, suicide and self harm.
8. People should be kept safe online no matter whether the website is large or small. The size of the website is irrelevant and all should take responsibility for keeping their users safe. If we truly want to make inroads in making vulnerable children and adults safe

from such harmful content, the changes must include the full range of websites, including protocols for launching of new websites.

9. We need to be kept safe all over the internet, from big and small websites, this content should be gone. Particularly self harm, suicide or pro eating disorder content needs to go.
10. The awful suicide and self-harm content appears everywhere and not just on large websites ... PLEASE HELP to keep this away from all eyes because it poses such a terrible risk - especially today with the pandemic stress harming so many.
11. People, old and young, should be able to visit any website large or small and know that there won't be harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful there. This sort of content is not just on large websites.
12. More support is required.
13. We need to be kept safe by all web sites those who don't need to be shut down permanently before more people take their life not after it's too late then.
14. There are many websites with advice on how to take one's life successfully. This content is easily accessible to adults and children alike, and is responsible for many deaths. Surely, all websites should have a responsibility to protect life, and these activities should be illegal, and carry heavy penalties for any perpetrators. In any other setting, anyone who is responsible for another's death would be convicted of manslaughter!
15. All sites need to have ethics of dignity, not just large-scale ones.
16. I feel that harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites. As a young person and young adult, I feel any type of website no matter how big or small should take responsibility for the safety of their users. I used to stumble across websites that would advertise for young people to follow certain regimes and eat certain things and exercise excessively to be a size 0 or be super super skinny. These things are detrimental to the physical and mental well-being of young people. We need to prevent this happening because people are dying. I'm so passionate about standing up for our human rights and I hate to think the government will do what they have always done and won't listen or take into account all of our views. We are the ones that have lived to experience this first hand. So it's time for them to listen and take account.
17. Suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites. Suicide and self-harm should be treated differently as each pose unique risks.
18. Harmful content on any website large or small should be banned.
19. On social media, particularly young people, in schools and care homes.
20. I think wherever you are online, people should be kept safe. It only makes sense to keep everybody safe.
21. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is all over the internet, and particularly dangerous in smaller websites without any safeguards around them. These smaller websites are very easily accessed via search engines.
22. Every single platform / website that a human can look at should be safe of triggering suicide / self harm / mental health glorification. In fact, shut down / reprimand those responsible with serious consequence.
23. People should be kept safe everywhere online. The content concerning suicide and self-harm could be defined as 'niche' and therefore vigilance and legislation should cover all online presence.
24. I believe if sanctions preventing sites or financial fines will prevent these sites from harmful content, this will hopefully lessen the amount of sites people are able to access

but preferable all should be stopped. [...] I have lost family members and friends to suicide. Plus within my work I have known others who have completed suicide and self harm. The devastation on family/friends means the impact is more far reaching than just the individual themselves. There is greater need for increased support, services and funding to help individuals and family/friends to better understand and support.

25. There's no way back from suicide and it is important that suicide and self-harm content on the internet is treated differently as the impact a suicide has on family, friends and a wider community is felt forever. The internet is an essential part of our lives in the 21st century as we need to ensure that it can be safer for people to use within this area.
26. That harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites. suicide and self-harm content should be treated differently, because of the unique risks it poses.
27. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites. Suicide and self-harm content should be treated differently, because of the unique risks it poses.
28. On line suicide / self-harm content must be treated differently because of the unique & potentially fatal risks it presents.
29. Any place which promote these platforms for suicide or self harm should be restricted, not just the larger websites.
30. All of the web harbours potentially harmful sites. Big or small.
31. Some online content can exacerbate depression.
32. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is dangerous and inappropriate everywhere: not just on large websites.
33. The internet doesn't just need looking at I.E websites/ hidden social interactions such as hep forums or interactive places like chat sites need to be looked at also. Many allow all sorts to be posted and this can be very triggering and push somebody to their edge. I have too experienced this when seeking some support and was made to feel i should just push towards that end due to the unsafe content that was posted.
34. Any exposure to suicidal and self-harm content is harmful. Regardless of age of person or where that exposure originates from. Whether it is on social media or websites of any size.
35. If the distinction between the categories is the size of the platform / website, then the answer is no. All spaces should be safe. There is no need for harmful content and every reason to prevent it. Any website where people are free to express their experiences, opinions, or share their thoughts, needs to be regulated for any harmful content. Whether the website has a million users or a couple of hundred, triggering content is triggering content.
36. The forums I accessed were on smaller websites, not the main social media platforms. But they still ranked highly in searches and clearly attracted a range of people. Their method of emailing me more content to look at seemed to be a particularly intrusive tactic that not even larger companies use. At the time I was checking my emails a lot as I was at uni, I'd be at uni and emails would pop up telling me to look at content on ending my own life. It's clear to me smaller services cause harm and in some ways operate in ways that cause more harm than larger platforms.
37. Suicide and self-harm content should be treated differently, because of the unique risks it poses and it isn't just on large websites and mainline social media it's everywhere online for anyone to access.

38. All of society should be safe from all forms of worrying websites. Why has it taken so long for our mental health and suicide issues never been addressed years ago? We need to help society by having laws that will reduce the huge issues surrounding suicide and self harming.
39. All websites should be monitored for harmful content. Self harm content can and does escalate to suicide.
40. All online sites should be preventing people seeing or hearing harmful content anything that might glamourise self harm.
41. Any social media has responsibilities.
42. Harmful suicide and self harm content is harmful everywhere, not just on large websites, please consider this as I also think they should have a responsibility to keep their users safe.
43. The public need to be protected from any harmful online suicide or self harm content. It would be a mistake to only focus on removing this from larger websites.
44. Instagram. YouTube.
45. Careful thought should be given to content posted online as to whether it could be triggering self harm or suicidal thoughts This counts for all websites, big or small.
46. Any site or indeed individual who is either giving advice on how to self harm and maybe hide it, or how to kill yourself should be banned and anyone found to be responsible for this dreadful content should be prosecuted and banned from the internet. They are responsible for the deaths and misery of many people. This content is viewed by people at their lowest ebb, people who need comfort, non judgemental support and care. They do NOT need goading into taking action which may end or ruin their lives and their family. Children today take their bullies and false friends home with them, on their phones and tablets. they have NO escape. We as a country need to keep our precious young people safe, protected from very real harm which is only a few clicks away, it follows them from home, to school, to college and university and is a very real presence in their homes and bedrooms.
47. All web content is a potential hazard regardless of the size of the website. Self-harm can be a self-soothing mechanism that is a clue to suicidality therefore both issues (suicide and self-harm) must be addressed appropriately.
48. People should be kept safe online to stop further suffering from the wrong people online and not isolated.this should happen across the internet.
49. All websites that glamourise suicide and describe methods should be controlled.
50. That harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites.
51. Safety online should be across the board, not just confined to large websites.
52. Simple things can trigger emotions that could lead to self harm/suicide for all ages from children to OAPs. Every website, social media should take responsibility but at the same time free speech should be allowed as long as it does not harm anyone else.
53. We need to ensure that everyone is safe no matter where they are.
54. Smaller less-known websites are actually more likely to be where people are looking for self harm & suicide content as bigger websites tend to be safer already.
55. Both large and small websites are equally dangerous if they make access to suicide easier or more glamerous.

56. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is dangerous to website users irrespective of the size of the website. Smaller website owners should have just as much responsibility to keep their users safe as larger website owners.
57. All human beings are valuable and deserve protection.
58. Harmful suicide and self-harm content is harmful everywhere: not just on large websites. Suicide and self-harm content should be treated differently, because of the unique risks it poses.

9 December 2021