



**MOLLY ROSE
FOUNDATION**

Preventing the Exposure of Harmful Online Content

Katie Hayman-Joyce, Policy & Public Affairs Manager

Molly's story – the dangers of harmful online content



Exposed to over 2,000 items of suicide and self-harm content in the 6 months before her death

Social media contributed to her death in a “more than minimal” way



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Research summary

The availability and reach of harmful content immediately before the Online Safety Act came into force

Public attitudes: MRF polling 2025

Whilst the OSA provided an initial structure, MRF polling has always consistently demonstrated that more action must be taken. In March last year, we found that:

91%

Of adults are concerned about children being groomed for the purposes of suicide and self-harm acts.

4 in 5

Adults support a new Online Safety Act that strengthens online safety regulation for children.

9%

Of UK adults think the Government is doing everything it can to protect children's online safety, and

11%

Think the regulator Ofcom is doing all it can.

Children's exposure to suicide, self-harm, depression and eating disorder trackers on social media

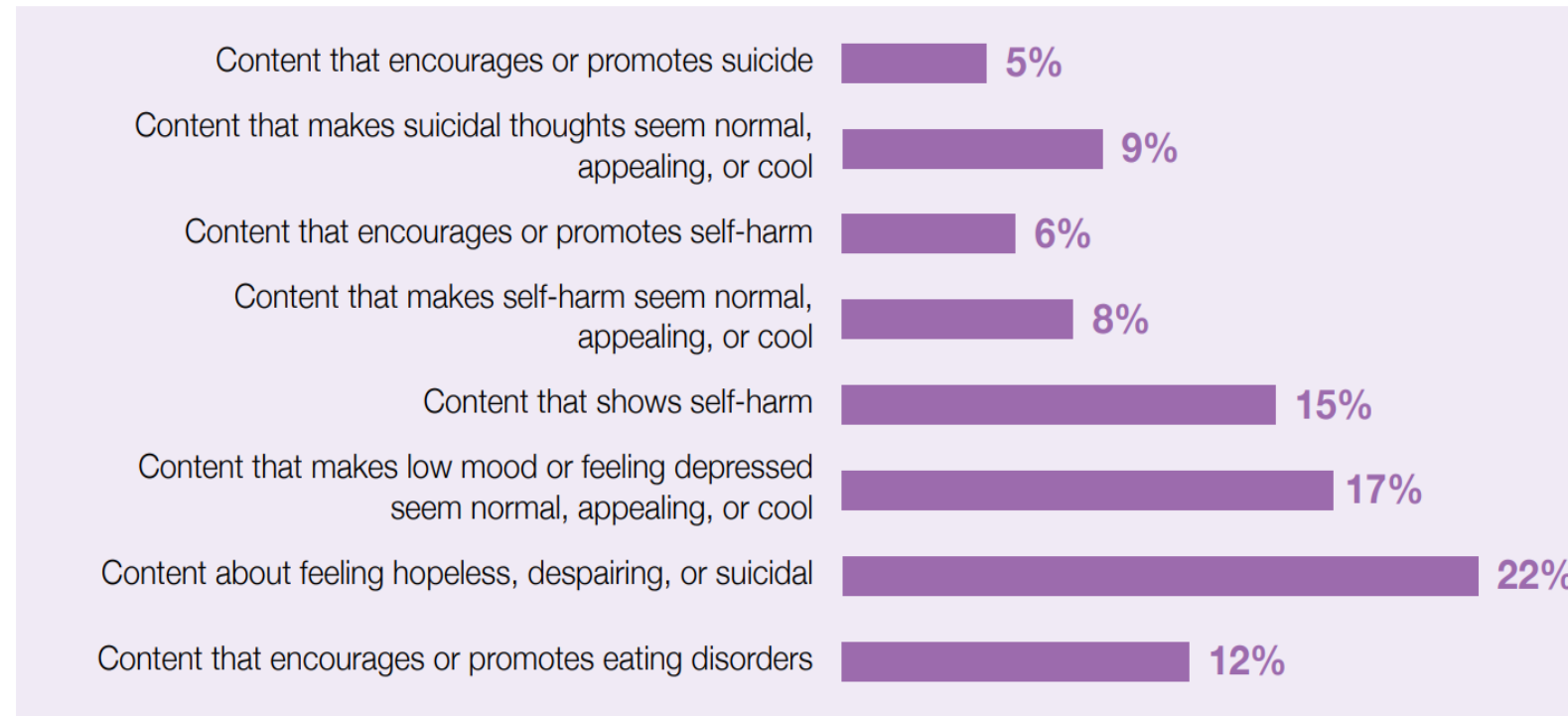
Building on existing trackers to get an in-depth understanding of children's exposure to four themes of harmful content in the last week:

- Survey of 1,897 children aged 13-17
- Enabling a more accurate understanding of exposure by including multiple types of content within each theme
- Understanding exposure both to content classed as 'harmful' under the Act, as well as content that could contribute to cumulative harm
- Understanding where, how often, and on which platforms children had encountered harmful content



Over a third (37%) of 13-17 year olds had seen high risk content that they should be prevented or protected from encountering under the OSA

Figure 1: Proportion of 13–17 year olds that reported they had seen high risk content types while using TikTok, Instagram, X, YouTube, Pinterest or Snapchat in the last week



27% of those who had seen ‘**content that encourages or promotes suicide**’ had seen this **10 times or more** on at least one platform.

Girls, children with low wellbeing and children with SEND were even more likely to be exposed to high-risk suicide, self-harm, depression and eating disorder content

**One-in-two girls
(49%)**

had seen at least one type of high risk suicide, self-harm, depression or eating disorder content in the last week

**43% of children
with SEND**

had seen at least one type of high risk suicide, self-harm, depression or eating disorder content in the last week

**68% of children
with 'low wellbeing'**

had seen at least one type of high risk suicide, self-harm, depression or eating disorder content in the last week

Many children were seeing high risk content **alongside high volumes of compounding material** – increasing the risk of cumulative harm

A third (34%) of those who saw content encouraging suicide or self-harm also saw ‘content about feeling sad, down or lonely’ **10 times or more** on at least one platform

Two in five (42%) of those who seen content encouraging eating disorders had seen ‘content that makes being slim look cool or desirable’ **10 times or more** on at least one platform



Risk Assessments: Why is Ofcom failing to act?

Risk assessments are a cornerstone of the OSA – online services must require ‘suitable and sufficient’ risk assessments for both the illegal and child safety parts of the regime.

However, Ofcom’s analysis in December 2025 of platform’s assessments demonstrates that platforms are systematically downplaying the risks on their products.

Despite the regulator setting out that it still has ‘outstanding concerns over the suitability and sufficiency of several providers illegal and children’s risk assessments’, Ofcom is still yet to take enforcement action.



Not a single social media platform

has determined that they are high risk for suicide, self-harm and depression content

1 out of 69

Illegal Risk Assessments claim that their platform has a high risk of suicide offences – that is, encouraging or assisting a suicide act

And at the same time as these risk assessments were produced, MRF found that

95% of algorithmically recommended posts

on a 15-year old's Instagram and TikTok account contained harmful suicide, self-harm and intense depression content

Ofcom states that it asked **only 11** platforms to revisit their risk assessment, and **only five** platforms to reconsider their risk ratings.



Malign platforms

In addition to this research undertaken, which demonstrates Ofcom's lack of ambition in tackling harmful content on the main platforms and those which actually submitted risk assessments, Ofcom also seem completely ineffective at tackling platforms which have been open about non-compliance.

A suicide forum that has been linked to at least 133 UK deaths since it started in 2018 remains accessible to UK users despite Ofcom 'investigating' the forum for over a year now. MRF have found and submitted to Ofcom evidence of over 100 UK users being active on the platform just before Christmas, as well as a UK-based moderator recruiting users from Minecraft to join the forum and die by suicide.

In a recent meeting with Ofcom, Melanie Dawes admitted that any action they took against the platform would not make a material difference to the voluntarily geo-block (which is demonstrably wholly ineffective) already in place. We know of at least two deaths since this block came into force.

Evidently, the regulator has neither the powers nor the ambition to tackle this threat.



Public attitudes: MRF polling 2026

Since Ofcom's codes have come into force, it does seem public concern has remained high.

91%

Of adults are concerned about children's online safety, with concern consistent across political affiliation, age, class and geography.

Three quarters

Of UK adults support new legislation to strengthen regulation of social media platforms – this is higher than support for an Australian-style ban.

One third (35%)

Of parents feel that their child's online safety has started to improve since the Online Safety Act came into force.

Next steps



Molly Rose Foundation's Roadmap to a safer online world

12th May – support our campaign
for change

1. Fixing and decisively strengthening the Online Safety Act
2. Extending the Online Safety Act to cover Wellbeing-by-Design
3. Requiring transparency, accountability and candour from Big Tech
4. A 'polluter pays' and whole stack approach to harm reduction
5. Education as inoculation – critical digital and media literacy that protects young people from harm and prepares them for our future economy

