

THE CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY AND NYU STEINHARDT'S
RESEARCHING INEQUITY IN SOCIETY ECOLOGICALLY (R.I.S.E.) TEAM



E-
RESPONDER

a brief about preventing real-world violence using digital intervention

WHO

CITIZENS CRIME COMMISSION OF NEW YORK CITY

The Citizens Crime Commission of New York City (CCC) is a leading nonpartisan nonprofit organization with multidisciplinary expertise that works to improve public safety through innovation.

NYU STEINHARDT'S COMMUNITY AND OPPRESSION RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT TEAM

(Dr. Shabnam Javdani, Corianna E. Sichel)

A research team that serves traditionally marginalized populations, focusing on health and mental health disparities in women and youth who are involved, or at risk of involvement, with the legal system.

E-RESPONDER

A three-pronged approach to promoting youths' healthy online engagement, building life skills, and targeting risky online behaviors.

This report will summarize the problem of social media and violence, present the E-Responder model, outline preliminary findings, and detail future directions.

WHAT



ADDRESSING ONLINE ALTERCATIONS WITH DEADLY OUTCOMES



Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are popular among young people and serve as a natural extension of their social lives. However, online platforms are emerging as places where youth also engage in risky behaviors and express distress.

Characteristics of social media, such as access to a wide audience and perceived anonymity contribute to an environment conducive to risky, impulsive behaviors and a lack of empathy. For example, social media users communicate through a screen, where the absence of eye-contact can decrease the likelihood of perspective taking (i.e., viewing a situation from another's point of view), increasing arguments and bullying. Indeed, while the majority of youths' online interactions are innocuous, sometimes real-world violent behavior is initiated or intensified through social media use, creating new opportunities for risk.

The risks are further exacerbated for youth involved in real world violence. In NYC, youth involved in gun violence are usually a part of a "crew." Crews are fluid, geographically based groups of youth between the ages of 16 and 25 who engage in violent turf rivalries, but lack the

structure and profit schemes of traditional gangs. In New York City crews are involved in nearly half of all shootings.

Like most teens, crew-involved youth use social media frequently. However, their use can cross from developmentally appropriate behaviors into behaviors that exacerbate their involvement in violence. For example, youth involved in violence frequently use social media to taunt and threaten each other, buy and sell guns, coordinate shootings, discuss and argue about previous shootings, post pictures with guns, and post videos of fights involving firearms.

In recent years law enforcement and community-based organizations have noted that many firearm-related deaths and injuries began as taunts or threats on social media. This risky online behavior can also have other consequences for youth, including disciplinary actions at school or work, arrest, and exposure to violence.

The take-home message is clear. In violent contexts altercations online quickly turn from virtual to violent. As such, interventions aiming to prevent the escalation of risky behaviors into physical violence need to meet youth where they are experiencing conflict: social media.

EXAMPLES OF RISKY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Affiliation & Self-Promotion (Lower Risk for Violence)

- Bragging about gang/crew affiliation
- Posting about criminal justice involvement
- Posting videos of "mobbing"

General Threats & Arguments (Medium Risk for Violence)

- Talking and bragging about past violence
- Uploading or sharing fight videos
- General threats against rivals
- Arguments in comments
- Loose plans for revenge
- "Stop snitching" posts

Weapons and Specific Threats (High Risk for Violence)

- Taunting and call outs to rivals
- Naming or tagging specific individuals in threats for violence
- Naming or tagging a location for violence
- Pictures with guns
- Sale of guns or bullets
- Bragging about serious violence

Grief & Emotional Distress (Varied Risk Levels for Violence)

- Troubling posts about youths' uncertain future
- Posts about death, dying, fear and loneliness
- Thoughts of suicide
- Thoughts of revenge and anger in response to loss

THE MODEL



E-Responder was developed to reach youth in new, virtual spaces of conflict. The goal of E-Responder is to prevent the escalation of violence on social media and to facilitate healthy expression by building on youths' strengths and skills to promote long-term growth and development. E-Responder is a collaboration between The Citizens Crime Commission (CCC), the Researching Inequity in Society Ecologically (RISE) Team at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, and NYC Cure Violence sites. E-Responder takes an evidence-based approach to addressing three key goals:

- Preventing the escalation of online provocation that can lead to in-person violence
- Supporting youth in developing life skills such as leadership, emotion management, empathy, and sociopolitical development
- Supporting Violence Prevention Professionals (VPPs) in effectively using social media to increase awareness about the problem of social media violence and promote digital citizenship

Leveraging the research literature on Sociopolitical Development, Trauma Informed Care, Violence Prevention, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), E-Responder has three major components: violence interruption, digital citizenship, and youth leadership. These three components are addressed through two resources:

The **Interruption Toolkit** is a comprehensive resource for VPPs engaging in interventions targeting youths' risky online behaviors. The Toolkit is composed of two elements: an interruption component that trains VPPs on evidence-based intervention strategies for the assessment and identification of risky posts and how to respond, and a digital citizenship component, which includes strategies for VPPs to use social media to respond to tragedies, change violence norms, raise awareness about social media and violence, and promote positivity.

The **Youth Leadership Program** (YLP) is a 12-week long program promoting positive digital citizenship by building on youths' strengths and preventing risky behavior. The YLP engages youth in twice-weekly sessions that address digital citizenship, emotion and expression, sociopolitical education, passions and interests, leadership, and digital activism. The program emphasizes mindfulness and emotion regulation skills, as well as the development of youths' sociopolitical critical consumption of online content.

E-RESPONDERS

PREVENTION

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

A curriculum developed to teach youth about digital citizenship, emphasizing mindfulness, emotions, and sociopolitical critical consumption.

Youth participate in a wide variety of activities directly or symbolically teaching them about social media, digital citizenship, emotion and expression, sociopolitical topics, passions and interests, leadership, and digital activism.

INTERVENTION

INTERRUPTION TOOLKIT

A resource for VPPs with information regarding the identification of and effective response techniques for risky online activity, as well as digital citizenship strategies to raise awareness, promote positivity and change norms of violence.

THE PILOT



In order to assess the efficacy of the E-Responder intervention, the CCC and NYU RISE Team conducted a six-month pilot study. The pilot utilized a quasi-experimental design, allowing for the assessment of intervention effects across four NYC Cure Violence sites and one high school. Three of the four Cure Violence sites received both the Youth Leadership Program (YLP) and the Interruption Toolkit; one Cure Violence site received no treatment (serving as the control), and the high school received the YLP only.

Preliminary results of the study indicate that the sites that received the E-Responder intervention were:

- Significantly more likely to identify risky posts than the control site ($\chi^2 = 20.1(3)$, $p < .05$)
- Significantly more likely to have positive outcomes after an interruption – such as posts being taken down, de-escalated conflicts, healthy grieving – than the control site ($\chi^2 = 9.9(3)$, $p < .05$)

During the pilot, 154 instances of risky online behavior were identified by VPPs across four NYC Cure Violence sites. Of these, the majority of instances (94%) were reported by sites that received E-Responder training, illustrating that trained responders were better able to recognize risky social media behavior. In the words of a VPP who received the E-Responder training, “After E-Responder training, I was more aware of how participants’ posts are a continuum of behavior that needs to be responded to and understood. Before, I always thought of a post as just a post, but now I see how it connects to all of youths’ behavior online and offline.”

More than half of the instances reported were identified as “high” or “medium” risk behaviors (e.g., threats; pictures with guns), highlighting the seriousness of youth’s social media behavior. At the sites that received training, 97% of the interventions were associated with positive outcomes such as de-escalation of the conflict or building emotional management skills.

154

77% of the interruptions involved social media
97% of the interruptions resulted in positive outcomes

reported instances of risky online behavior over 6 months across 4 NYC Cure Violence sites. 97% of reported instances received an interruption response.

Risk levels of posts identified by E-Responders:

