

Youth Experiences of Cybercrime Reporting in Amman, Jordan

September 2022

A Community Based Research Project

SIREN
ASSOCIATES



I will tell you my story.



I am a 20 year old woman from Syria. I am married, and have two children. I was bored during the COVID lockdown, so I started a Facebook account. However, I didn't tell my husband because he is not a fan.

I added anyone because I wanted to interact with people. I connected with a lovely girl. She talked to me every day. We sent photos to each other. I also sent her photos of my daughters. I used to quickly login and out of Facebook, because my husband didn't know about it.

One day I logged in and found that her profile photo had changed to a photo of a young man. I asked her about it because I was suspicious. She told me that she had changed it because her brother wanted to use the profile to find work.

I still felt something was wrong so I reported to the page to Facebook, hoping to erase it, but it didn't happen. After a while, this man started to ask me to send him photos and videos. He threatened to tell my husband if I didn't. He knew that my husband didn't know about my Facebook profile. I was afraid, because if my husband found out he could divorce me and harm my daughters.

I knew a man from before I got married, so I called him to help me. He talked to the man from Facebook, and threatened him. He managed to get all the photos from him. However, the guy I asked for help then started to threaten me, asking to see me, to take advantage of me.

I was afraid of my husband because he might have beaten me if he knew. I feared losing my daughters. I wanted someone to help me.

20 year old Syrian women, research participant.

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Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CBPR	Community Based Participatory Research
EPS	Expanding the Protection Space Project
PSD	Public Security Directorate (the Jordanian police)
RMEL	Siren's Research, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team

Executive Summary

As part of the overall efforts of the RDPP-funded EPS project, Siren implemented a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) initiative between June 2021 and January 2022. This research aimed not only to collect stories to better understand the experiences of cybercrime of young people living in Amman, but crucially, to empower the researchers (who themselves come from affected groups) to directly analyse the complex inter-related social dynamics of online safety and security. This capacity-building element is a central characteristic of CBPR projects. In short: the CBPR approach meant that the researchers told the stories that mattered to them, explained why they were important and identified means to tackle the issues.

Centring young people as the key part of the process ensured that data collection was carried out in a conversational style, helping to ease the fears of participants who were sharing highly sensitive and personal stories of cybercrime and associated secondary forms of crime that victims can be exposed to. Furthermore, because the research was conducted by age and gender peers, participants were more able to share their experiences that spoke to the conservative, patriarchal and generational barriers they faced to seeking help when targeted online. In short, the CBPR methodology helped to better bring to policy makers the voice of those affected, by collecting authentic experiences that would likely have otherwise been missed by other methods.

76 stories collected

The initiative mobilised researchers from affected local communities. They collected 76 stories from a balanced sample of young men and women across different sections of society, including Jordanians, refugees and persons with disabilities.



The findings of this research illustrate that young people in Jordan face overlapping social barriers that negatively impact their ability to obtain sufficient protection when occupying online spaces. Additionally, prevalent societal norms mean that women, girls, men and boys experience cybercrime in very different ways. Relative to the latter, the former are constrained in the options they have available to resolve crimes visited against them.

The systemic social challenges that young people grapple with are further worsened by inter-generational knowledge gaps, making it hard for young cybercrime victims to confide in their parents to address issues. It is clear from the research that young women overwhelmingly suffer the most marginalisation, and face a higher possibility of violence directed against them after being targeted in online crime. Women suffer from double victimisation, which requires that tailored security processes and protection services are put in place to address this specific form of vulnerability.

The data underlines that - for the most part - there is significant overlap in the type of cybercrime and cascading violence that refugees and young Jordanians face. However, there are some key differences in the context in which they operate: The decisions of refugees are less likely to be impacted by tribal dynamics than some Jordanian families, for example. Their legal status as a refugee can also add to their perception of vulnerability and, in many cases, may cause them to not pursue legal means to address crimes against them, believing that they will be mistreated by authorities.

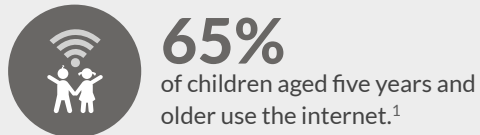
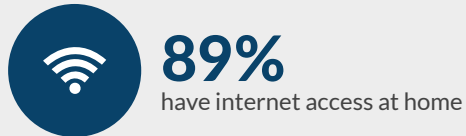
The family has significant influence in how people report cybercrime: families from tribal backgrounds might choose to follow tribal dispute mechanisms, rather than report it to the police. The family often provides the initial 'safety net' to a victim of a crime, including emotional support and advice. However, a key finding of this research is that the fear of further victimisation, particularly when a girl's or woman's 'honour' could be at stake, often places this support mechanism out of reach for victims. This is due largely to fears that there may be cascading consequences for the victim and their family, including financial loss, physical and emotional threats, loss of trust between family members, and social isolation.

Vitality, for an effective policy response, the research outlines the high levels of professionalism of the police when dealing with cybercrime victims. This was evidenced by the pleasant surprise noted by victims who reported of the Cybercrime Unit staff's sensitivity, efficiency and growing capacities.

Introduction



The availability and use of information and communications technology (ICT) in Jordan has increased over the past decade:



However, significant public safety concerns are associated with widespread internet penetration. Over a third of people in Amman report being concerned about cybercrime.² Concerns about online safety are significantly higher than public perceptions of physical safety.³

Cybercrime is any crime that is conducted online.

Siren Associates Jordan has, to date, focused research and programming on tackling violence committed against individuals online, working with the police and civil society actors to increase access to protection services. This type of crime, often committed by an individual against an individual, is called "inter-personal cybercrime," and examples include blackmail and exploitation.⁴

Reliable statistics about the prevalence of inter-personal cybercrime are not currently available in Jordan. The limited available statistics vary significantly, but do start to indicate how big the problem is: for example,

10%

of respondents reported that they or a family member had been a victim of cybercrime.

in a March 2021 survey conducted by Siren in Amman and north Jordan,

80%

of women have experienced online harassment.⁵

According to the Jordanian National Committee for Women's Affairs,

¹ Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (2019), ICT Facts and Opportunities in Jordan, Jordan

² Siren Associates (2020), Public Perceptions of Community Safety in Amman, can be accessed online at www.sirenassociates.com

³ Siren Associates (2021), Public Perceptions of Safety Online and Access to Protection Services, can be accessed online at www.sirenassociates.com

⁴ All research conducted by Siren Associates can be accessed online at www.sirenassociates.com

⁵ The Jordanian National Commission for Women (2017), Sexual Harassment Report 2017, Jordan



An important variance has become apparent through Siren's research and programming: while trust in security institutions is consistently high - particularly when compared to other national institutions ⁶ - this does not always translate into survivors reporting crimes to the police or seeking support from their local community. This is particularly the case with regard to crimes that are seen to bring shame to the victim, their family or the community: only 26% of the population of Amman would encourage a woman to report gender-based violence to the police. Over 40% would suggest doing nothing.⁷ Similarly, while women represent approximately 80% of victims of cyber blackmail, they made up less than half of the cases reported to the Cybercrime Unit in 2019.⁸



Furthermore, perceptions of safety among youth in Amman are lower than those of older age groups. While young people generally feel they would be able to talk to their family if affected by cybercrime (84% of men and 90% of women), when confronted by such a situation in reality they behave differently depending on the sensitivity of the case. Only 12% of those who had faced "crimes of shame" online reported it to their family.⁹ In effect, for young people seeking the help of security and protection actors, the immediate family acts as gatekeeper to their services. In addition to intra-household relations, one's status as a refugee or Jordanian national, level of ability/disability, gender, trust in institutions, and educational background all influence reporting patterns.



Online spaces have opened new doors for young people to interact freely and without parental oversight, but with it there is increased likelihood of an inter-generational clash with their parents, who may struggle to understand the method and purposes of their children's online practices. In Jordan, the growing use of social media has already led to rifts between parents and children.¹⁰ This gap results in a possible fracture within the family that can directly and negatively impact the young person's well-being, resulting in a barrier to informing family members about their online practices.¹¹

People's inhabitation within online spaces and the study of online practices has often been framed either in terms of 'social cohesion' (how positive relationships are developed online) or 'cyber-safety' (increasing the ability to ward-off danger or reducing the risk while online). Very little research has been done to understand how people assess the online dangers, their potential impact on social cohesion and take mitigating steps to reduce the risks.¹² Moreover, studies have often underlined the positive social cohesion elements that can occur through online practices, but without understanding the impact on offline social-cohesion that can stem from online insecurity (i.e. online threats or violence). This study takes the next step and seeks to create a multi-relational understanding of how online insecurity impacts the offline relationships between people of different genders, generations and between communities and state institutions. It also looks into the differences in this regard that can exist between refugees, people of varying educational backgrounds, and people with disabilities.

⁶ 90% of the population trusts the police, compared to 38% for the government, 14% for Parliament, and 65% for the judiciary. Arab Barometer V (2019), Jordan Country Report, Jordan

⁷ Siren Associates, Public Perception Survey of Community Safety in Amman, April 2020

⁸ This is compared to over 90% who would report theft, physical harm or blackmail to the police. Siren Associates (2020), Context Analysis: Expanding the Protection Space Project, Jordan

⁹ Siren Associates (2021), Public Perceptions of Safety Online and Access to Protection Services, Jordan.

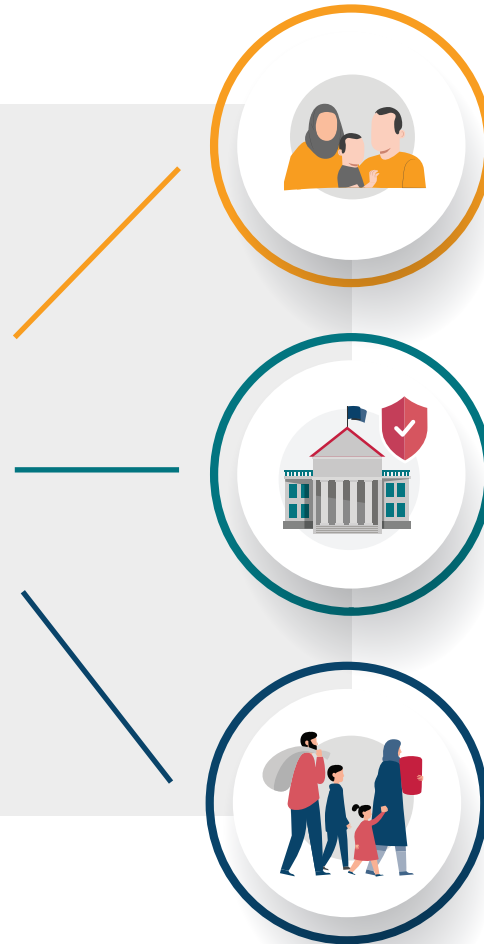
¹⁰ Social Media Technology and its Relationship with the Level of Social Alienation Feeling of Students at the University of Jordan <http://jaes-jo.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/10-11.pdf>

¹¹ Coping Strategies Of The Generational Gap Conflict As Practiced By Mothers In The Age Of Digitization And Its Relationship To The Family Alienation Of Teens

https://journals.ekb.eg/article_202371_7b7ee1ed2e48e04361c1a87018a54501.pdf

¹² Harris, Anita, and Amelia Johns. "Youth, social cohesion and digital life: From risk and resilience to a global digital citizenship approach." Journal of Sociology 57.2 (2021): 394-411, p.395

Siren's quantitative and qualitative studies since 2019 have helped shed light on public perceptions and practices around cybercrime. However, due to the highly sensitive nature of the subject, information was still lacking about the complex motivations that might support youth to seek help or, conversely, act as a barrier to them seeking help. This study uses community-based participatory research methodology in order further paint a picture of the experiences of Amman youth with cybercrime. The purpose was to be able to understand the interactions between young people who have been the victim of cybercrime, their families and state institutions, analysing their sentiments, particularly trust, well-being and belonging.¹³ As such, the following areas are observed:



Honour in the household:

this study identifies intersecting issues along gender and generational lines that undermine the building of trusting relationships within the household. These issues centre primarily around the concept of honour and shame, which in a society like Jordan's - where there are traditionally dominant societal bonds like the family and tribe - create behavioural norms that also govern online spaces.

Trust in state institutions:

trust is a crucial element to relations beyond the family, and to ensuring the State and wider society remain connected. Previous Siren studies underlined that, when it came to reporting cybercrime, there was a clear lack of trust in state institutions and that victims preferred to take informal means to address their problem. This study seeks to further understand the ways and means in which trust could be built effectively.

The experiences of refugees:

relations between citizens and refugees continues to colour aspects of life in Jordan, and tensions can occur between communities when there appears to be a discrepancy in the provision of services, or access to them. Furthermore, considering the different social formations that have arisen as a result of displacement, and the fact that Syrian refugees form a large part of Jordanian society, it is crucial to understand potential variances in responding to cybercrime in order to form an effective institutional response.

This study first presents insights into youth experiences of cybercrime in Jordan, before exploring intra-family dynamics and the reasons why an individual may, or may not, report a crime to the police. It ends with descriptions of the longer-term impact cybercrimes can have on the individual.

Throughout the study, the voices of the research participants are prioritised, with the most space given to their stories, rather than a more traditional, academic write up of the analysis.

¹³ Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1>

Research Methodology and Process



Collaborating with the Community

While Siren's previous studies into cybercrime in Jordan helped narrow the areas of inquiry for this study, the sensitivity of collecting data around this subject presented a challenge. Considering the nature of the crimes under study and their impact on victims, collecting information was likely to be problematic, especially if Siren, a non-Jordanian organisation, conducted the interviews. To tackle this problem, Siren's RMEL team employed a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach, which placed the control of the process in the hands of community members. This not only aided the collection of data, but also had the benefit of:

Creating knowledge through a methodology that seeks to understand the issue from the perspective of those impacted. Research often engages communities through a purely extractive relationship, drawing on their experiences during the data collection phase, but involving them little elsewhere. CBPR works with community members to identify: 1) what is important to them, 2) how they understand the problem, and 3) what should be done about it.

01

Positioning the research team to work with government institutions to answer needs identified by grassroots communities. Adopting a CBPR approach can create bridges between community members and institutions dealing with cybercrime; thus, helping to improve their responsiveness.

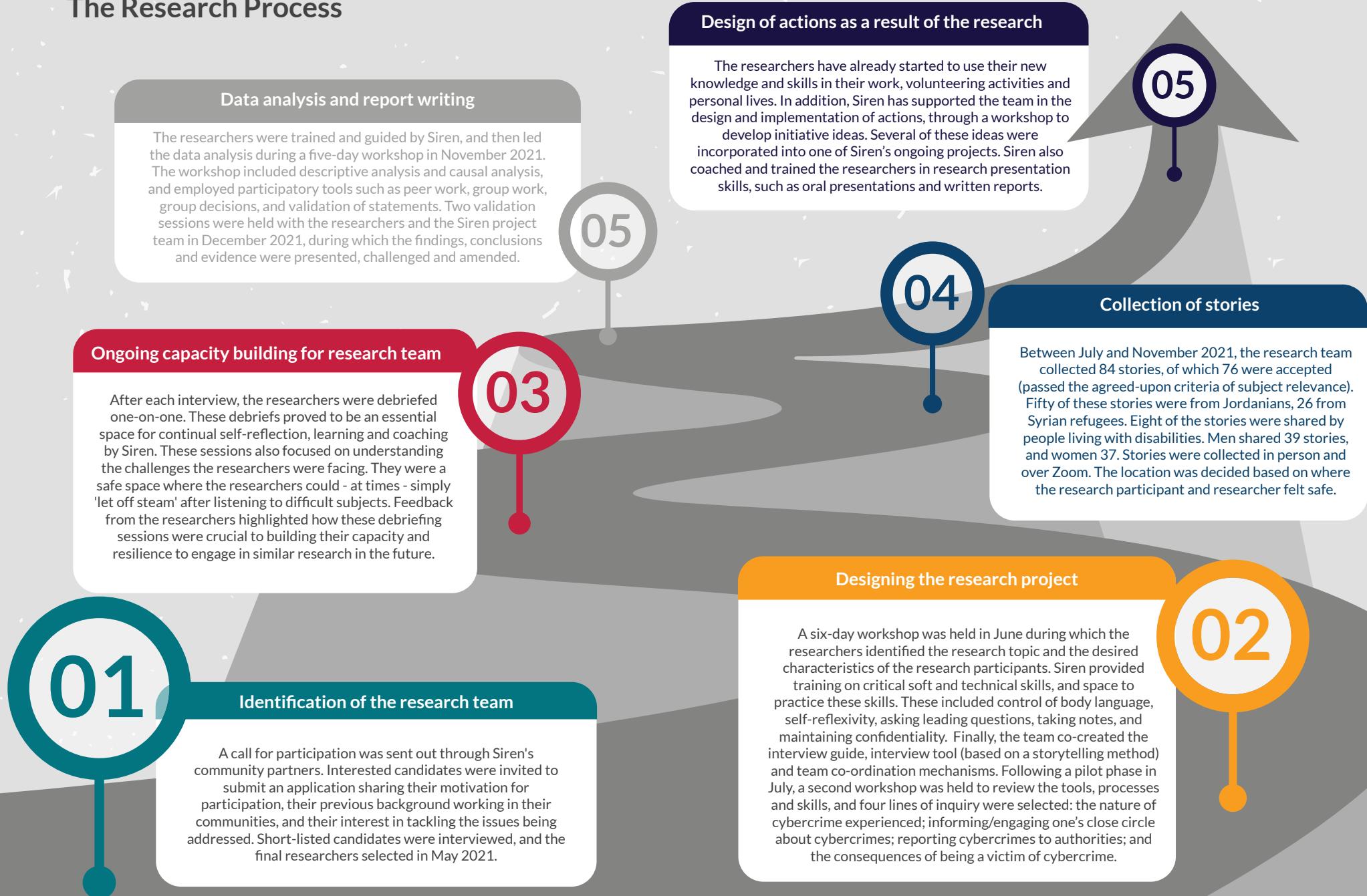
02

Creating equitable working relationships with grassroots activists. CBPR processes create community ownership of the research, and help research teams build longer term, trusting and supportive relationships with different segments of society. The formation of such mutually beneficial relationships can assist in programme interventions and future research with people who are familiar with CBPR processes.

03

Most of the 76 stories analysed below touch upon subjects considered by Jordanian society to be 'shameful'. Many of the research participants had not even shared their stories with family members or friends but were willing to open up to the research team. This unique access was possible thanks to the CBPR methodology, which used a 'snowballing' technique based on referrals from one research participant to another. The researchers used their personal and professional networks to approach potential participants, meaning that there already existed a degree of trust between the two parties. Personal introductions meant that the participants were more likely to open up and share their stories, particularly as anonymity was guaranteed. That the research team members were of a similar age, usually the same gender, and came from a similar cultural background as the participants also facilitated this productive, trusting relationship. This level of trust is something that an 'outsider' researcher would have been far less likely to be able to build.

The Research Process



Research Findings

Regardless of nationality, Jordanian and refugee youth in Amman have much the same experiences of cybercrime, living in the same neighbourhoods, and engaging in the same digital world. They have very similar levels of concern about online safety; a shared need to navigate family and gender dynamics; and risk facing various forms of secondary violence that can follow the original incident. However, there are stark gender dynamics that impact an individual's vulnerability to cybercrime, their perception of the options available for seeking help, and the risk of being further victimised once word gets out about the crime.

In over half of the 76 stories heard by the research team, the victim talked to their family about the cyber incident. This tendency was higher among refugees than Jordanians. Women informed their families more than men did, while men talked with their friends more than women did. The families of all the participants with disabilities knew about the cyber incidents.

About a quarter of all the research participants reported the incident to the police. Reporting was significantly lower among refugees than Jordanians, and refugees also confided less in their friends than Jordanians did. The reasons for this are elaborated on in more detail in the sections below.

The stories shared by the research participants provide some insights into the complex thought process involved when deciding whether or not to reach out to family members or the police. Fear weighs heavy on those affected, with victims often experiencing a looming anxiety that their 'shame' becoming known could result in other, cascading consequences.





Youth Experiences of Cybercrime in Amman

As elsewhere, globally, the online space has become for many youth a significant space where they can interact socially, meet new people and develop relationships that might not be as easy in face-to-face interactions. The large majority of the cybercrime stories shared with us took place on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, and involved the use of personal data for extortion, exploitation and blackmail. At times, perpetrators capitalised upon the desire to meet people by posing with false identities.

Many victims had not - prior to being exposed - been aware of such threats and lacked knowledge of safe internet usage. The education level of the victim did not seem to have a bearing on this.



Escaping Parental Controls

Young people see online spaces as a space of freedom, and as a place where they are able to communicate with their peers and explore new relationships that are not necessarily possible in the physical world. This is particularly the case for relationships between men and women, which can be otherwise out of reach for youth living in a socially conservative communities.

“

"I am a guy like any other guy in my age, I met a girl about a year ago and I used to talk to her on Facebook."

**- 19 year old,
Jordanian man.**

”

“

"Internet and social media are things that entertain us, and using it makes us happy!"

**- 26 year old,
Jordanian woman.**

”

“

"I got into a problem in the second month of my marriage, about two years ago. I was in a group on Facebook for girls only, where we talked about things openly. There was a post on the group from a girl requesting help. I commented and she replied to me in a personal message. We started talking, joking and laughing about things. After about three days, she started talking about private stuff (sexual). I am not going to lie, I also shared with her things about my relationship with my husband."

- 21 year old, Jordanian woman.

”

Lack of Awareness of Cyber Threats

Just like closing and locking the door when one leaves the house, there are basic steps internet users can take to protect themselves online. Many stories collected involved people not knowing - or forgetting - the importance of these steps for their own protection and privacy. Such steps include remembering to log out of accounts when using a shared computer; not clicking on suspicious links; and taking care when speaking to strangers online.

“I received a link from someone I don't know on WhatsApp. The link was supposed to be for online jobs. There was a file that I had to install. When I installed it, my phone restarted. When it started again, it was as if it was not my phone.”
- 19 year old Jordanian man.

“Someone had published a link on Facebook, which I opened. Suddenly my computer froze, then became slow and restarted itself. When it was back on, I received a message from the hacker on my Facebook account telling me that he had accessed my computer.”
- 28 year old Jordanian man.

“I borrowed a neighbour's laptop and logged in with my email and WhatsApp on it. Afterwards, I forgot to sign out of WhatsApp. Then people in my contacts started to receive weird messages and screenshots of my private conversations.”
- 20 year old Syrian woman.

“A few months ago on Facebook Messenger, I received a friend request. I mean, I didn't know her - the person who sent the request. However, I added her. After a while, she started to send me sexual clips and pictures.”
- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

In several cases the perpetrator concealed their identity, and often posed as a member of the opposite sex. This was in order to befriend or start a relationship with the targeted individual, obtain access to photos, or engage them in a conversation that could then be used to blackmail them. Part of the reason for this tactic is that women might more readily accept friend requests from other women, and be more open to share information with them.

“Once, a girl from a group I am on started talking to me. We started to talk a lot, almost every day. She asked me to send her a photo; I asked her to confirm that she was a girl. Send me your picture first. She didn't hesitate and sent me her picture. We started talking every day, and we sent pictures to each other with time. One day, I found the account changed its name, and it left the group. It was in the bio that it was a "hacker" after a few days, the same account sent me a message that I won't forget: "I am your friend who you were talking with." I became mute from fear, and I started crying, I didn't know what to do or whom to talk to.”
- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

The Impact of 'Shame' on the Individual and the Family

Threatening to publicly shame a woman - and through her, other members of her family - is often central to cyber threats targeting women and men.

Examples of 'shaming' include:

- Threatening to publish an intimate conversation between a teenage girl and boy
- Editing a woman's head onto a naked body, and taking advantage of how some people - with limited or no computer literacy - have not come across the concept of photo manipulation before and believe the photos to be real, and
- Taking someone's photos and re-publishing them in a way that is malicious, e.g. to spread rumours.

“

"I was a guy like any other guy in my generation. I met a girl about a year ago, with whom I used to talk on Facebook. One day I received a message from a fake Facebook account. It was a screenshot of the conversation between this girl and me. The person threaten that he would send it to the girl's family if I didn't send him money!"

- 19 year old Jordanian man.

”

“

"A guy had pulled my public pictures, and photoshopped them into pornographic pictures. He started to send them to me, blackmailing me and threatening me."

- 22 year old Syrian woman.

”

“

"I used to upload many of my photos to Instagram and Facebook. I thought it was normal, thinking that we lived in a progressive community. They were normal photos of my friend and me volunteering or hanging out. Then there was an account created in my name, with my photos and photos of my friends, and offensive captions about us. He had a picture of every girl, and written under it were unpleasant words."

- 22 year old Jordanian woman.

”

The Experience of Refugee Youth in Jordan

Jordanian and refugee youth in Amman have much the same experience of cybercrime, living in the same neighbourhoods, and engaging in the same digital world.

However, refugees can suffer from online bullying due to their status as refugees.

“

"They talk about us, the Syrians, and insult us. They keep bullying me, and they tell me that because of you - Syrians - our life expenses increased. You - Syrians - ate our food, and you - Syrians - took our rights."

- 30 year old Syrian woman.

”

“

"I met a [social media] influencer who said that he could help me. He had many followers; he posted my case on his page. He wrote about my problem, published photos, even the hospital account number where I am getting treatment and my phone number. Many people donated. But I also had people bothering me on my phone, sending me messages accusing me of not being sick, but begging for money."

- 22 year old Syrian woman.

”

Persons with Disabilities

The team collected stories from eight people living with disabilities, including a blind woman, people who are not able, or have limited ability to walk, and people with developmental challenges. There were many similarities between the experiences of cybercrime of those living with disabilities and those not living with them. However, despite the limited sample collected, there are some trends that started to emerge. Two of these trends would be worth exploring further in future research, specifically. People living with disabilities appeared to be close to and more reliant on their families. Their families have more involvement in their lives, and supported them with finding solutions when threats arise. People with disabilities faced bullying online due to their disability.

“

"All the accusations and bullying I faced [on social media] made me lose hope that doing this surgery would help my disability; it got me in a bad psychological state."

**- 30 year old Syrian woman,
living with disabilities.**

”

“

"I was subjected to so much online bullying that it does not affect me anymore; I am used to it!"

**- 29 year old Jordanian man,
living with disabilities.**

”

“

"I was posting my photos to Facebook, like any "normal" person; I reconciled with my situation – disability - and everything was fine. Then, one day, I was in a Facebook group and I found my photo being used as a meme for people to make fun of."

**- 23 year old Jordanian man,
living with disabilities.**

”



Intra-Family Dynamics

In Jordan, the family often provides the first line of protection and primary safety net against crime, or the response to crime when it occurs. This is particularly the case in communities governed at different levels by family ties and tribal tradition.

Yet, about half of those who shared their stories with us said they could not talk to their family and get their support. The level of fear felt by an individual when faced with telling their family about their experience with cybercrime was a crucial factor in their decision to tell them or not. Indeed, the word "fear" was repeated in three quarters of the stories analysed. The decision was generally made according to the following variables:

The type of relationship between the young person and their immediate family members, including levels of trust and the openness of lines of communication.

The extent to which the crime was considered 'shameful.' The more 'shameful' the crime, the less willing the victims were to share.

Whether the fear of the consequences of dealing with the issue outweighed the fear of the consequences of sharing: women in particular feared being blamed [see the section on victim-blaming below].



The Nuclear Family

For some research participants, key family members played a positive, supporting role when the young person shared their experience of cybercrime.

“

"I went directly to my brother ... At times, I felt him close to me, and I could talk to him ... My brother never told anyone ... This strengthened my relationship with my brother."

- 27 year old Jordanian woman.

”

“

"I couldn't keep silent. I went and told my mother because she was the closest person to me"

- 25 year old Syrian woman.

”

However, in well over half of the cases the young person feared telling their family about the incident. A significant factor preventing youth from seeking support from their families is the lack of solid family relationships and channels of communication between family members. This is due to a perception that older generations would not understand the issues that young people face today.

“

"Simply, my parents do not get 'technology' and they would not understand me."

- 20 year old Syrian man.

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“

"If I told my family, they wouldn't get it. They would tell me that it was nothing, and they would not take it seriously."

- 19 year old Syrian woman.

”

“

"Of course, I didn't tell my family. I don't like or want them to get involved in my life."

- 19 year old Jordanian man.

”

Confiding in Family and Friends

When the consequences of dealing (or not dealing) with the issue alone outweighed the fear of involving their families, young people often turn to key family members.

“I decided to tell my brother, who is older than me, as he would know what to do. I was afraid to tell my parents, frankly. I was sure that my brother would tell them, in the end. When my brother found out, he hit me, and then everyone knew.”
- 19 year old Jordanian man.

“I didn't tell my older sister what had happened for a long time. I was afraid of her reaction. But, when I did not know what to do, I had no other choice [than to involve her].”
- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

Women tend to go to close female members in the nuclear family (the mother or sister), or female members in the extended family.

“I told my sister because, no matter what happened, she would not expose me. It's not like [telling a brother or a fiancé].”
- 22 year old Syrian woman.

Young men, on the other hand, are more likely to try and solve the issue on their own, or with the support of their male friends. Indeed, half the men interviewed talked about involving their friends.

The subsequent 'solution' they decide upon can sometimes take the form of violence.

“If this was to happen again, trust me, I would get whoever it was to regret it. I would be violent and let out all my anger.”
- 23 year old Jordanian man.

“When I had this issue, I got a guy I know involved. I don't trust this guy, but I got him involved because he is a thug, and he can be helpful with such problems.”
- 24 year old Jordanian man.

Avoiding Potential Escalation and Fear of Putting the Family in Danger

The decision to not involve family members is also, at times, taken in an attempt to avoid escalating the problem. This escalation could take the form of violence against the perpetrator, which risks embroiling the whole family in conflict.

For the refugees interviewed, there was an additional fear that - should their family become involved - it could make them more vulnerable to being forced to return to Syria (see p.29 for more details).

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"I honestly backed-off in order for this issue to not escalate between my husband and him."

- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

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"No, no, I would never tell them, because I don't want to get a headache. I don't want them to ask me who the girl is, and then for the story to develop and for us to get into problems with the family. I didn't even tell my friend; I don't trust anyone."

- 26 year old Syrian man.

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Reporting to the Police

This section looks into the experiences of people who chose to report their experience of cybercrime to the police or not, and the key reasons involved in their decision-making.

Of the 76 stories, one third of the Jordanian victims reported the crime to the police, while the number was half this for Syrian refugees.

Non-reporting was primarily due to the fear of the crime being exposed publicly, and the resulting risk of the crime having cascading impacts in victims' lives. In other cases, victims' families opted to turn to tribal dispute mechanisms. Finally, a perception of long, and - for some - unfair judicial processes prevented some research participants from reporting the crime to the police. Those who did report to the police, however, generally had a better experience than they had expected, positively impacting their perceptions of the Public Security Directorate's technical expertise and handling of cases.



Experiences of Reporting to the Police More Positive than Expected

Often, the research participants who chose to report the case to the police had expected a negative experience. Many had doubts about whether their case would be escalated, did not want to enter into a lengthy police process, or worried about the involvement of other people, particularly their family. As such, most were surprised when their case was processed smoothly and professionally.

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"The experience was very comfortable, and they - the Cybercrime Unit - made me feel safe, and that my rights would be protected, and that he - the perpetrator - would get the punishment he deserved."

- 30 year old Jordanian woman.

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"I wasn't aware that things - reporting and handling cases - had become this easy."

- 26 year old Syrian man.

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"Maybe going to the police can be intimidating, especially as a woman reporting [a crime]. However, when you do go, it is better than expected. You won't lose your rights, and they will not allow anyone to take advantage of you."

- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

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"The treatment I received at the Cybercrime Unit was outstanding. After a few hours, they had identified the account and shut it down."

- 19 year old Jordanian man.

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Key Reasons Why People Choose Not to Report to the Police

About three quarters of the research participants chose not to report the online incident to the police. The key reason provided was the fear that a victim's family or the wider community could find out about the crime, which may have led to unwanted consequences for the individual (see section on financial, physical, emotional and social impacts below).

“I did not report it, because if the case had been pursued [by the police], they would have contacted the girl, and her family would have found out.”
- 26 year old Syrian man.

In several instances, the case was instead **processed through a tribal dispute mechanism**, the jaha.¹⁴ In these instances, the victim themselves did not decide whether or not to involve the tribe. Rather, the decision was taken by the individual with the most power and influence in the family.

“My family is from a tribe; we don't go to the police or the government. My Dad goes to the head of the tribe, and everything gets solved there.”
- 20 year old Jordanian woman.

“I wanted to report it to the police, but, you know, in our country, [even] cases of murder can be solved over a cup of coffee, so we just got people to intervene and solve it.”
- 27 year old Jordanian man.

“When the matter became tribal, my family made me withdraw the case from the police.”
- 25 year old Jordanian woman.

While many people wanted the online abuse to stop, they decided not to go to the police, citing long judicial procedures. They did not differentiate between the potential role of the police in stopping the incident (which could be relatively swift), and - should the victim choose to pursue the case - going to court to seek justice (which can take substantially longer).

“I didn't want this to escalate because I don't have time to go back and forth to court and get slack.”
- 20 year old Jordanian woman.

“I didn't want to report; I was afraid that the reporting process would drag on and I would lose my job.”
- 27 year old Jordanian man.

¹⁴ The jaha is when representatives from one family (or tribe) visit representatives from the family (or tribe) of the other person involved in the complaint. The victim's family's demands for compensation are discussed; when agreed, the perpetrator's family agrees to abide by them.

Key Reasons Why People Choose Not to Report to the Police

Refugees are less likely than Jordanians to report an incident to the police.

Access to police services requires knowledge of and trust in them. The stories collected indicated that refugees still have a hard time entirely believing in the judicial system's fairness. Often, this was a consequence of hearing about other people's experiences. In some cases, it was also driven by a fear of how reporting could impact their, and their family's, refugee status.

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"I told my father what had happened, and my father said, 'do not answer him, we will decide what we should do.' ... My father was afraid that, as we are refugees, it would become a problem and they would return us to Syria."

- 30 year old, Syrian woman living with disabilities.

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"I was afraid that, because we are refugees, it would become a problem and we would be [forced to] return to Syria. I felt that the threat was intended."

- 30 year old, Syrian woman living with disabilities.

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In addition, two research participants living with disabilities talked about the challenges that exist in reporting to official protection bodies, due to physical restrictions:

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"I fear that if I were to report, I would get into complications. I fear that they - the perpetrator's family - would harm one of my family members."

- 26 year old Syrian man.

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"I won't report. Maybe if the procedures are easier, I could file a report. But if the procedures keep being this difficult, it will be hard for me to report ... I need to go between the court and the public prosecutor of the police station ... Why can't we report on the phone?"

- 28 year old, Jordanian man living with disabilities.

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The Impact on Individuals of Being a Victim of Cybercrime

Young people who experience cybercrime feel less safe online. As a result, their behaviour often becomes more cautious. Sometimes, this could be for the positive, e.g. changing their passwords and taking care when talking to strangers. At other times, it could result in their withdrawal from internet use.

Being exposed to cybercrime does not only impact internet use. When targeted in a cybercrime, youth can also face a variety of other cascading impacts, physical and emotional violence, self-isolation, a breakdown in familial relations, and financial loss.

The risk of such impacts depends on:

- The type of crime experienced, and the degree to which it is considered 'shameful,' impacting the honour of the individual and their family.
- The gender of the individual - women in particular face victim-blaming.
- Whether the crime becomes known publically.
- The social norms of the family, particularly the role of tribal traditions in governing behaviour.

The impacts of cybercrime are not just limited to the individual. Families can - if the crime were to become known publicly - also suffer from a damaged reputation, which can in turn have social and economic implications. However, the nature of this research set out to explore people's personal stories, and as such, findings remain focused primarily on the individual.

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Financial Loss

There were stories of both men and women suffering immediate financial loss as a result of being targeted online. This included losses incurred when paying-off blackmailers, and job loss.

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"I was afraid that, in a moment, I would lose my source of income because of something I have nothing to do with or knowledge of how it happened."

- 27 year old Jordanian man.

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"My mother made me quit my job. At that moment, I directly accepted [this demand] because I was terrified and unable to go to work as a result. I quit my job, and had to ask people to bring me the things that I needed. My friends started come to my house if they wanted to see me and I didn't go out with anyone but my mother."

- 24 year old Jordanian woman.

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However, due to prevailing societal norms, women are more prone to facing longer-term financial consequences, e.g. in cases where the victim's family forces them to give up their job and stay at home.



Psychological Impact

Women shared more stories than men about being psychologically impacted by cybercrime and online abuse. The fear of facing the type of consequences outlined in this section weighed heavily on them mentally.

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"I got so skinny. I was tired, drained. Many days passed without eating. I even tried to commit suicide."

- 24 year old Syrian woman.

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"I was afraid, lived a life of terror, and felt that my life was ruined."

- 20 year old Jordanian woman.

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"My sister, whose photos were used by the hacker, had a heart attack due to the shock and passed away."

- 19 year old Jordanian man.

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Social Isolation

The social lives of youth have, to a large extent, expanded to the online space, where they meet people and develop relationships. When a crime takes place in this space, there can be a reaction to stop trusting people online. This distrust can also be transferred into the physical world. Families can prevent the individual (particularly girls and women) from leaving the home, as in the example above. Alternatively, the individual him or herself may choose to self-isolate from society.

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"After the incident that happened, I deactivated my account and stopped using social media completely!"

- 28 year old Jordanian man.

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"Do you see my phone? It is a small phone that doesn't have anything on it and doesn't even connect to the internet."

- 19 year old Jordanian man.

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"I stopped seeing anyone, including my friends and the guys from university, because everyone started to look at me in a way that I can't describe. I became lonely."

- 19 year old, Jordanian man.

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"I stopped going out to events because I became afraid of society."

- 22 year old Syrian woman.

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Loss of Trust and Breakdown of Relationships Between Family Members

The family can be the primary unit of support for victims of crimes in Jordan. However, when a family member is exposed to cybercrime, oftentimes this leads to a breakdown of trust within families - this is particularly the case when female family members are the victim of cybercrime and online abuse. This loss of trust can, in turn, lead down to the disintegration of relationships. Research participants talked about becoming more vulnerable, feeling humiliated and having private matters exposed.

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"If my husband knew, he would divorce me and take away my daughters."

- 21 year old Syrian woman.

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"As for the parents, when their girl is exposed to such a thing, the trust is gone."

- 26 year old Syrian woman.

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"My husband did not believe me. He thought that I was lying to him. I almost got divorced because it became a big problem between us. I left the house, and stayed with my family for a month."

- 24 year old Syrian woman.

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Victim-Blaming by the Family and Society

Many women who find themselves blackmailed online also have to deal with family members who are more concerned about their collective honour than the victim's wellbeing. Women shared how, instead of understanding the violations and threats that they faced, families often prioritised the question: "to what extent this will affect the honour of the family?"

“If I told any of my family or relatives, they would tell me that I was the one to blame. 'Why did you put your pictures online in the first place!?' [they would say].”
- 22 year old Syrian woman.

“In our society, they will always blame the girl, not the man; we will be shamed, not them. Regardless.”
- 22 year old Syrian woman.

“I imagined myself talking to my dad, and nothing good crossed my mind. I wouldn't be surprised if he disowned me. That is his mentality.”
- 27 year old Jordanian woman.

“My dad didn't report [the incident]; he just got mad at me!”
- 25 year old Jordanian woman.

“Thank God, my brother was understanding about the situation because I am not wrong, and the page that was hacked was with photos where I am in my hijab.”
- 25 year old Jordanian woman.

“My family and brothers are very strict. If they knew about the issue, it would become a big problem: we are refugees, and any mistake we make will be held against us. If my brothers knew, they might beat me to death because talking to other men is simply not allowed.”
- 26 year old Syrian woman.

Some Syrian research participants also mentioned facing victim-blaming as a consequence of stereotypes about their nationality or refugee status.

“To be honest, society has the wrong idea about Syrian girls, especially with the matchmaking (Misyar) marriage... That's why people could have believed anything, and they would have flipped on me, and no one would have accepted me.”
- 26 year old Syrian woman.

Threat of Physical Violence

The fear or actuality of physical violence was one of the most recurrent threats that young people expressed. When physical violence occurred, it was mostly directed by the family against the victim, particularly against women.

“It is impossible to think of reporting because I would be exposed, and my family would slaughter me.”
- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

“My parents don't know what the problem was exactly, because if they knew, I wouldn't be fine.”
- 24 year old Syrian woman.

“Thank God, he did not hit me when he found out.”
- 24 year old Syrian woman.

“When my brother found out, the only thing he saw was that I talked to a guy. He didn't see anything else. He hit my ear so hard it blew my eardrum. I still haven't recovered to this day.”
- 24 year old Jordanian woman.

The threat of physical violence can also be directed toward the perpetrator (when known), either by the victim themselves (particularly men), or their family or friends.

“Honestly, I stopped the reporting process because if the problem did not get solved, it would have ended in violence between [the perpetrator] and my husband.”
- 19 year old Jordanian woman.

“When I knew that my brother had opened the link that led to my laptop being hacked, my reaction was to hit him. I was raging; I broke his hand.”
- 27 year old Jordanian man.

“I'd had enough, as they say. I resolved the matter with my own hands, violently.”
- 27 year old Jordanian man.

Initiatives Emerging from the Project

A key objective of CBPR is building the capacity of the researchers so they are able to invest their new knowledge, skills and experience into initiatives tackling cybercrime in their communities. While the data collection phase of this project has just ended, and it is potentially too early to identify the emergent actions, the researchers shared with us the following initial areas of impact.



Use of new knowledge, skills and experience by youth researchers

Some researchers have already used their research skills in new initiatives and jobs:

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"I volunteer in an association. The topic of a study being done was about cybercrime. During a discussion, and from my experience [with Siren], I shared with them how to take samples. For example, I suggested that they should include all segments of society, including females, people with disabilities, and refugees".

- Youth Researcher

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"As a journalist and a researcher, I had used the same set of skills [taught in the research project] in the past. But the difference is that I was not using them the way Siren taught us to collect data... I became more flexible. I now give people the space to say what they want. I learnt how to highlight the most important points. [I now know] how to take into account how happy the person is that I'm talking to, as well as their preferences for how I publish their words. When I started taking note of these details, I felt the difference on a personal level. More trust has been built between me and the people I deal with. I became more confident in myself."

- Youth Researcher

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"Generations for Peace contacted me. They asked me to work with them on a similar project, as a session facilitator and sometimes as a note-taker. I agreed without hesitation. I held sessions with the community, sessions with target groups, trainees, and with an executive team. I used all the skills I had learned with Siren while writing the reports. I remembered how to copy people's views using their own words to ensure honesty in representation. I remembered all the communication skills and how to apply them. Sometimes the feedback reached ten pages! They were happy to talk to me, and this is evidence of my effective application of the acquired skills".

- Youth Researcher

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"A while ago, I attended a training course outside Jordan with participants from different countries in conflict or at war, including Syria, Iraq and Bahrain. Most of them were researchers and journalists, who had been bombed in their country and had to leave their countries to save their lives. I applied the communication skills I had learnt with Siren while talking to and listening to them, to hear more details." -

- Youth Researcher

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Use of new knowledge, skills and experience by youth researchers

More generally, being a part of the project developed the researchers' ability to communicate, and most of them have already gone on to use these skills in their personal lives or professional lives.

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"On the personal level, a lot has changed. Now I can write better and faster, and I try to check for spelling."

- Youth Researcher

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"I will use these skills personally and during volunteer work, especially body language."

- Youth Researcher

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"This opportunity opened a door for me to focus on this type of work."

- Youth Researcher

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"I have used [the communication skills] when dealing with people. I was one of those hasty people who used to talk without thinking, but the training and workshops developed my skills. Now, I listen before I speak".

- Youth Researcher

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"I have in mind a project related to mental health. I had been writing [the concept] this project for a while, and I needed some skills to start it. I do not think I am still able to start it now, but the skills I have acquired can help me start it sooner than expected."

- Youth Researcher

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Use of new knowledge, skills and experience by youth researchers

Many of the researchers had several suggestions of actions that could be taken to address the issues they researched. These included:



Working with the Cybercrime Unit to raise awareness on how to report a crime, including the procedures involved. This is essential for making people more confident to report a crime.



Integrating information on online harassment into a mental health project that one research participant has long intended to do.



Working with parents to increase awareness of cyber threats among school children.

One of the researchers has used research findings and discussions in press articles. She describes further:

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"In one of these discussions, we were arguing about the perception of women and the challenges they face in society. Some of my colleagues attributed these challenges to the tribal nature of society. I used this to write an article about how people tend to hold tribal norms accountable for the actions of an individual, which stem from how they were raised rather than from tribal norms. Another article I wrote was about online sexual harassment. Through the research, I noticed how women face far more consequences from being a victim of this type of crimes than men. In my press article I tried to highlight these differences and how the problems we face are also finding a place in the virtual space. A third article, published last month, was about social cohesion between Jordanians and Syrians. I wrote about how education can help build bridges by including Syrians in the same classroom as Jordanians instead of having them separated. The research findings helped me highlight the negative effects of separating Jordanians and Syrians in schools. Also, through the research... we saw how other nationalities face the risk of being blackmailed of having their personal information stolen when the smallest conflict with locals happens. This helped me work on the press report to present a possible solution for that."

- Youth Researcher

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Initial Integration of Research into Current Siren Project

Siren has already been able to integrate some of the researchers' ideas into ongoing projects (see below). Following the confirmation of research findings, a workshop was conducted with the researchers to outline areas of potential action. To guide the process of developing actionable initiatives, three important questions were asked of the community researchers:



Do the findings of the research inform particular goals?



What resources do Siren and the researchers have to create initiatives?



What role should the researchers play in the implementation of initiatives?

A number of options for action were discussed, and three initiatives were deemed viable, based on the potential resources Siren could contribute, and the network of stakeholders who would be interested in assisting, along with individual researchers. Stemming directly from the findings, the researchers and Siren's RMEL team identified that cybercrime's negative impacts on intra-family dynamics was the most important area to address. Taking into time constraints and available resources, the following three initiatives were decided upon:

1. Dissemination of the final report's findings through a series of meetings and workshops

- The findings of the report are to be delivered by the researchers to local activists and CBOs working on cybercrime issues with Siren.
- The findings will also be disseminated to the PSD Cybercrime Unit with which Siren is running Community Safety Campaigns.

2. Awareness raising sessions

- The researchers are to facilitate a series of dialogue sessions targeting two distinct groups: parents and young people. In both, the focus will be on understanding the nature of cybercrime, as well as the intra-family dynamics surrounding patterns of seeking help and reporting cybercrime.

The overarching goal of the follow up actions, as articulated by the researchers, would be to focus on strengthening bonds within the family unit, as well increasing knowledge of the types and nature of cybercrime as a preventive measure against it. Local stakeholders who engage in protection services would be a key target of the actions, with the aim that they would become better able to plan interventions to protect victims and potentially tackle disputes inside families. Through working with the families, the researchers would be able to increase community literacy of online security and protection, while starting important conversations around family cohesion. Finally, by taking the knowledge gained from the CBPR research, as well as the grassroots engagement with key stakeholders, the researchers would be perfectly placed to craft content for a awareness raising campaigns at the local or national level.

Meet a Couple of the Researchers





Humam:
Eyeing a Move toward Mental Health Research

Humam Al Wahedy, 23, is a researcher from Amman with a passion for mental health



What first got you involved in social development?

I was 17 when I first thought about it. There was a competition where you had to make a three-minute video about a social experiment, so I asked around and eventually I agreed with a group of people to film interviews with people on the topic of racism. I really liked how it came out and how people engaged with the topic. After that, I started looking for any work that involved working with people.



What do you think limits safety in Jordan?

In Jordan, there are gaps in people's feeling of being safe, and I'd say the social situation is largely to blame for this - the views of society on many topics are frightening. On harassment, I feel Jordanian society contradicts itself ... the majority of people think it's their right to harass a woman if she's not dressed "well."



What strengths have you brought to the research team?

When I sit with people and we speak about a topic, they're at ease. Cybercrime is the hardest topic to talk about ... we usually need about 30 minutes to an hour just to convince people to do an interview. To make people feel at ease, I always tell them that this is a private/personal matter, that nobody will hear about it, and that they won't be judged for what they say. After I've convinced people to talk about a subject, they talk a lot. I also really try not to let my own views interfere ... There have been many times I've not been convinced by what people are saying, but I just keep listening and noting, without showing that I disagree.



What has been a key takeaway from the research?

In every story there's something that surprises me, but the impact of family relationships on victims of cybercrime has surprised me the most. In the few cases where the family intervened correctly to support the victim, it was solved quickly ... either there was no need to call the police, or if the police were called, the victim was mentally at ease. But in the cases where the victim's position with their family was not good, they did not tell their families, report the crime, or do anything.



Do you see yourself doing more research in the future?

I've been thinking about doing something around mental health ... I have a giant database of people who have faced issues and come to my house to talk about it. This topic is really important to me, and once I finish this research, I will try and do something comparable for this topic. Before, I didn't know how to write notes - I was recording videos of interviews. If I want to do very personal research into mental health, who is going to let me film them or record their voice? Here, I learnt the process used, like getting their agreement to take notes, how to control my feelings, how to speak to people, and present the project. I'll use all of these things.



Abdel-Rahman:

Strength Through Collaboration

Abdel-Rahman Shawkat Salah, 28, is a researcher from Amman who loves working with people from different cultures and backgrounds.



What first got you involved in social development?

My interest started in 2012, after I graduated from university. I was very introverted and didn't know how to string two words together, but I got engaged in a lot of things, became a media manager in a team of volunteers, and we did a lot on various topics ... Making change at the societal level is the most important thing, it's so important that one has skills to communicate with people who are not like you, know how to talk and to how to appreciate others.



What strengths have you brought to the research team?

My work experience has helped me a lot - I can write, debate and discuss, and I'm strong at organising events. I can get a message across to people from different cultures and of different ages, so I feel that my greatest strength is my way of speaking and how I can defuse any issue or misunderstanding.



What interested you in researching cybercrime?

For me, the topic is super relevant. Nowadays you don't see anyone who doesn't have a smart phone or who's not on social media. Many problems can happen when there are many people online, but no boundaries. It's great that we can raise awareness, listen to the issues that many people have faced, and I really hope that the project will have a role in changing things.



Can you share with us a key takeaway from the research?

For me, the greatest thing that's shared between victims of cybercrime is the psychological impact of leaving the issue unresolved. I feel like it leaves a mark, even after years have passed, and it will consume your day because you are scared. There's fear from the problem itself, from the family and from the way society views it, and a fear of reporting it to the police.



How did you find the experience of interviewing people about this topic?

During the first interview, I was really scared. I worried that I'd forget questions or something specific, and that my fear would show. As time went on, I got to know what the important things were, what I must ask and what's not that important if I forget to ask it. I also became able to control my feelings in front of anyone. This is something I couldn't do before. Now, anyone from the group could ring me up, and tell me to fill in for someone else in an interview, and I'd say, 'Okay, let's go.'



What do you think about the methodology?

When there's flexibility in the choices, in the collaboration, it's something wonderful. Everything that we agreed upon was done by voting. We were putting forward ideas, whether from Siren or from us, and whenever there was an idea that could be beneficial, we would vote on it - even when it came to the research topic.

During the data collection, I initially wondered why we needed to do debriefs [after each interview] ... but it was actually really good because you see your mistakes, how to increase your strengths and reduce your weaknesses. Also, it affects me when I see someone hurt [by cybercrime]. The debriefings created a chance to get out what's inside, and to talk and discuss it.

CBPR: Best Practices & Lessons Learnt

The use of a CBPR approach helped Siren access research participants who provided authentic findings which were collected sensitively by the researchers. Through extended work with the researchers, Siren was able to develop grassroots connections with community members who were able to speak with authority on what kinds of programmatic responses could deal with the issue that they researched. However, CBPR projects are often not implemented, because they are time and cost prohibitive. This section outlines the Siren RMEL team's lessons learnt and suggested best practices for the application of CBPR principles.



Working with Community Researchers

Best practice 1: capacity building



The RMEL team provided a series of trainings and one-t-one mentoring for the researchers, and in so doing was able to significantly build the researchers' capacities in the following areas: Qualitative research analysis; Interview skills; Note taking; Research ethics.

As such, CBPR project implementers may find it useful to draw from Siren's experience in this area and deliver a series of capacity building activities along the following lines:

1. A workshop on qualitative research skills to provide the researchers with instruction and hands-on practice of key soft and hard skills
2. A review workshop to share early experiences of collecting data, identify and solve problems.
3. A data analysis workshop, where the researchers are trained in data analysis.
4. A findings and actions workshop to develop clear takeaways from the research, along with follow-up actions.
5. A presentation skills workshop to hone the researchers' dissemination skills and ensure the research will be presented to relevant stakeholders.

Best practice 2: training materials



The researchers identified that the Siren-developed training workbook that accompanied the initial workshop synthesised the lessons and allowed the individual researchers to reflect on sessions. CBPR project implementers may find it useful to emulate this approach.

Best practice 3: collaboration



The researchers identified that the CBPR process adopted by Siren's RMEL team meant that they felt valued and important to all aspects of the project. By creating a collaborative project, the researchers gained significant confidence in the skills they were taught, with a number of them now having been employed by Siren in different capacities.

Best practice 4: continued development



The researchers found the debriefing sessions held after each interview to be a helpful way to highlight the lessons learned from the interview, and an effective way to ensure quality of data. Siren RMEL staff gave immediate feedback and supported the researchers to self-reflect on any practical challenges they had faced or on any emotional impact they had endured during the interviews.

Working with Community Researchers

Lesson learnt 1: selection of researchers



CBPR usually involves working with community members who are already working in the area of study, which helps facilitate access to participants for data collection purposes and supports the development of post-research action. However, there are very few projects or initiatives in Jordan currently focusing on the cybercrime field. Therefore, the call to participate that Siren distributed was answered by young people who, while interested in (or personally impacted by) the subject matter, were not actively working in cybercrime. The research process could not, therefore, rely upon the natural emergence of actions: researchers – in such cases – will find it very challenging to use pre-existing community networks, organisations or initiatives. A decision will have to be made at the beginning of the CBPR project as to whether the facilitating organisation (e.g. Siren in this case) adds on a second phase of turning research into action.

Siren sought, but did not manage, to recruit researchers who belonged to refugee communities; ideally these voices would have been represented within the research team and not solely as research participants. Moving forward: to increase the response rate to the call to participate, steps need to be taken to more proactively recruit from groups less likely to be involved; we cannot rely solely upon word of mouth. This will likely take time, and could include – for example, conducting mini-presentations of the intended research project in target communities.

Lesson learnt 2: dealing with loss of motivation



Due to a delay in government approval to implement the wider EPS Project, there was a pause in the research process following the initial training workshop, leading to a loss in motivation among some researchers. As a result, RMEL staff had to expend additional energy to rebuild research team morale and motivation.

Ebs and flows in motivation of researchers in any project lasting half a year are to be expected; research leads and coordinators should expect these and plan ahead accordingly. Communication and coordination tools such as WhatsApp groups and having regular face-to-face workshops have proven to be very useful. Ensuring the researchers feeling in control, empowered, and on an upwards learning curve is also key to keeping motivation up. The development of procedures for ensuring different team members are held accountable (rather than Siren adopting a top-down management style) is also very important.

Lesson learnt 3: having a toolbox of participatory methods allows agility



Involving community researchers in the analysis of data and production of research findings is a key attribute of CBPR, setting it apart from more traditional research approaches. A week-long workshop was set aside for this, during which Siren trained and supported the researchers analyse their data.

At the beginning, the researchers found it difficult to understand how to use the pre-prepared methods and tools. The workshop facilitator had to agilely pivot to a different approach. Having a toolbox of participatory analytical methods and tools ready and on standby (as backup plans) is key, allowing the workshop facilitator to agilely respond to the needs of the researchers.

Internal Organisation of CBPR projects

Lesson learnt 1: expectations of researchers

In part, this was an experimental process for Siren's RMEL team, which normally conducts research with experienced and qualified researchers. This resulted in expectations about the community researchers' capacities that didn't marry with reality. Consequently, the RMEL team under-calculated the amount of time and resources required to build the researchers' capacities to the needed level.

Lesson learnt 2: fighting the urge to revert to top-down, expert-led processes

In light of the challenges faced by using community (rather than professional) researchers, it can be tempting to take away agency from the researchers and place it in the hands of the research lead or coordinator (in this case, the Siren RMEL staff). There should be mechanisms put in place to continuously check this impulse when it arises. This includes:

- Regular self-awareness and reflection sessions: the multi-disciplinary RMEL team held periodic, in-depth review sessions to evaluate how the process was going, share challenges and challenge each other, and find solutions.
- Continuously re-emphasising our commitment to capacity building: The RMEL team worked with each researcher and collaboratively identified and promoted their strengths. Those who produced strong transcripts took on the responsibility of supporting those who needed additional support in this area. Meanwhile, those who were more comfortable identifying research participants and leading interviews concentrated on these roles.
- Building regular, collaborative working sessions into the workplan: in addition to one-on-one or one-on-two debriefing sessions after each interview, periodic one-day workshops with the whole team were carried out between research phrases, allowing the research team to collaboratively develop shared tools and invest in team relationships.

SIREN
■ ASSOCIATES