

Preferred way of presenting: 1. Oral presentation

Title: Listening and Responding to Children's Needs – the importance of low-threshold online support

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Abstract:

Introduction: For the last fifteen years Unizon's member organisations have offered low-threshold online support to children and youth with thousands of online support contacts each year, and are thus one of Sweden largest online support services. Their main tasks are to listen, support, empower and help in contact with judiciary and other authorities. In 2020, when other support services limited visitations or closed down due to the pandemic, we extended our online support and went from sixty online support services to over one hundred. The presentation gives an introduction to our online support and collection of data during 2022 from a newly introduced chat service.

Methods: A new chat service for children seeking support and advise online were set up in 2021, named Unizonjourer.se/ung. This chat service allows children to communicate anonymously with a trained support worker in a one-to-one setting. Following each chat conversation, the support worker record child demographics and the nature of the conversation, including type of support, type of topic as well as contact frequency, on a pre-defined proforma in order to enable continuous evaluation of children's needs and service demand. The sample comprised of a total of 2 463 proformas detailing chat conversations with children between the ages 10 to 17 years that contacted Unizonjourer.se/ung in 2022.

Results: Approximately 80 % of the contacts were with girls. 41 % stated that this was the first time contacting the online chat service. Mental health and violence remain the main reasons for children to reach out to Unizonjourer.se/ung. Analysis on child demographics and the nature of the conversations will be presented.

Conclusions: With an increasing number of children seeking support online, the way in which children utilise online chat services is of great interest. Policy and practice implications will be discussed alongside experiences of the support workers.

Keywords: online support, low-threshold, support, sexual violence, abuse.

About Unizon: Unizon unites 140 women's shelters, young women's empowerment centers, and other support services working for a gender equal society free from violence. Unizon's member organisations offer support and protection and work with prevention and advocacy, using knowledge of violence, gender and power and the relationship between them.