



ASSESSMENT OF ENGAGEMENT &  
RESPONSE OF BOYS TO THE  
MISOGYNY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Population First conducted an online survey with boys in the age group 10-19 years in the aftermath of the 'Bois Locker Room' incident from Delhi which gained traction in the media in May 2020. A total of 226 boys were surveyed of which more than three fourth were on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. Little more than half were part of private chat groups and 17% responded that conversations regarding sexism, sexual violence, rape were common in chat groups.

While one of two boys found the conversations riddled with sexism and with connotations of sexual violence *uncomfortable* in the chat groups and three of four boys did not participate in such conversations, *sexism* does appear to be commonplace for some of these young individuals as close to one third either *did not care* about such conversations or are *silent spectators* when such conversations are initiated by their peers. 60% of the boys joined these social media platforms and chat groups because of their peers, thus indicating the influence of peer pressure.

Many resorted to the internet to find answers on sex, sexuality, sexism, sexual violence, consent so on and so forth; many of them also got advice from peers, who may not be well-informed enough to answer; and did not find teachers or parents approachable to help address these questions.

It was interesting to note that these young boys are interested in gaining a better understanding on these issues with 80% boys wanting *sex education* to be part of their school curriculum, 45% reporting *they needed guidance* on the use of virtual and social media platforms, and nearly half of them mentioning they would prefer *guidance on safety and security issues*. 70% respondents called for counselling of the boys involved in 'Bois Locker Room' incident as a response to their actions. It was clear from their responses that sex education should be a priority in the existing school curriculum to deal with the questions and provide a platform to discuss the issues regarding sex, sexism and even sexuality.

This openness from the youth is even more crucial with the ongoing pandemic which has already seemingly exacerbated the existing issues of mental health around the world, and is pushing adolescents to use social media even more. Thus, the report **"Assessment of Engagement & Response of Boys to the Misogyny on Social Media"** provides, the relevant stakeholders – parents, teachers, policymakers, technology developers, social scientists and activists an opportunity to work with these young boys and aid them in becoming gender sensitive individuals.

## INTRODUCTION

India has over 680 million active internet users, 300 million active Facebook users in 2020; and with cheaper internet data packs and smartphones becoming the 'primary' screen for many people, India is fast becoming the one of the largest digital consumers, according to Statista Global Consumer Survey. It can't be denied that the pandemic has led to an increase in the use of social media, and provides us more opportunities than ever to change our lives for the better. However, overuse or abuse can lead to adverse consequences impacting both our physical and mental health and well-being.

Social media is widely used across the age spectrum in India and more so by individuals between the ages of 15 to 29 with Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp being the most commonly used social media platforms, according to a 2019 UNDP report. While this rapid adoption of social media, living and working online has led to Millennials and Gen Z – the majority users of technology – being called 'digital natives', they are also the ones to be most affected by unwarranted dangers and unintended negative consequences of such exposure such as cyberbullying – especially sexually offensive and vulgar in nature, internet addiction, intellectual and moral decline, decreased literacy and reckless sharing, according to the report.

Furthermore, these negative consequences especially among adolescents can aggravate depression, loneliness and anxiety, thus greatly impacting their psychological well-being, in the current pandemic scenario as presented in a new paper from Journal of Child and Adolescent Clinical Psychology, observing adolescents from India, Malaysia, Mexico and the UK.

With the growing influence of social media on the youth, the dangers of their negative impacts are also becoming evident. Recently, a group of boys from a prestigious Delhi school were found to have used abusive/derogatory language, including suggestions of rape, about girls in a private chat room on Instagram. This 'Bois Locker Room' incident that sent shockwaves through the country in May 2020 was the spark that motivated Population First to seriously look at this new frontier of media – social media platforms - and the attitude and behaviour of young boys.

Population First conducted an online survey in June and July 2020 among boys aged 10-19 years to get an idea of their social media usage, the content consumed and their attitude towards sexually explicit content and misogyny on social media.

## RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

A total of 226 boys from across the country responded to the online questionnaire. As seen in the graph, more than three fourth of the boys were active on some form of social media platform. WhatsApp and Instagram were the most used platforms with more than 80% respondents active on these platforms. Thus, social media appears to be an indispensable part of the lives of the teenagers.

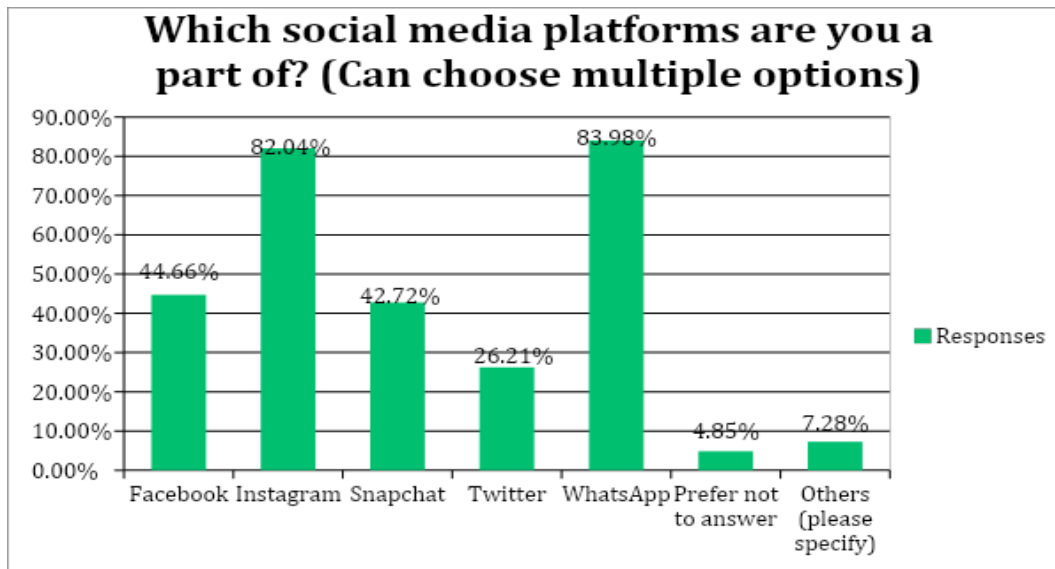


Figure 1 Most popular social media platform

## HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

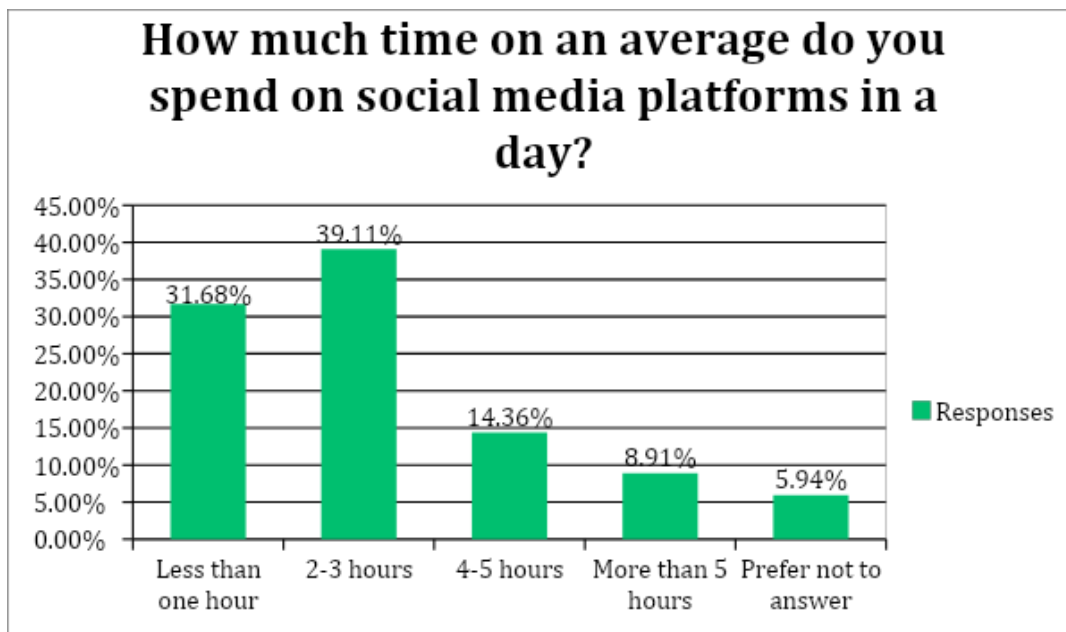


Figure 2 Number of hours spent on social media

Nearly 40% boys spent two to three hours every day on social media platforms. Nearly 9% boys spent more than 5 hours on social media in a day while close to one third spent less than an hour. This indicates that with close to one out of two boys spending more than 2-3 hours on an average on social media every day, there is a need to be cognizant about the exposure they receive through these platforms.

A little more than half the boys said that they were members of private chat rooms on the social media platforms. Nearly 40% boys mentioned the chats were about sports. Followed by less than 20% who discussed science or books. Almost half the boys talked about miscellaneous topics which included memes, games, politics, bikes, family, school work, studies, general chitchat.

### WHY DO YOU JOIN THESE CHAT GROUPS?

Nearly 60% boys were a part of the chat groups because of their friends. One out of two boys mentioned they were interested in the subject of the group while almost 20% joined as they wanted to learn new things. It is interesting to note that close to 12% joined to get accepted by their peers. This indicates that peer influence is one of the major factors contributing to the increased use and also sometimes misuse of social media.

### HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE 'BOIS LOCKER ROOM' INCIDENT?

More than three fourth of the respondents had heard about the 'Bois Locker Room' incident. Most of them were informed of it through Instagram while others got to know through social media platforms, friends and news.

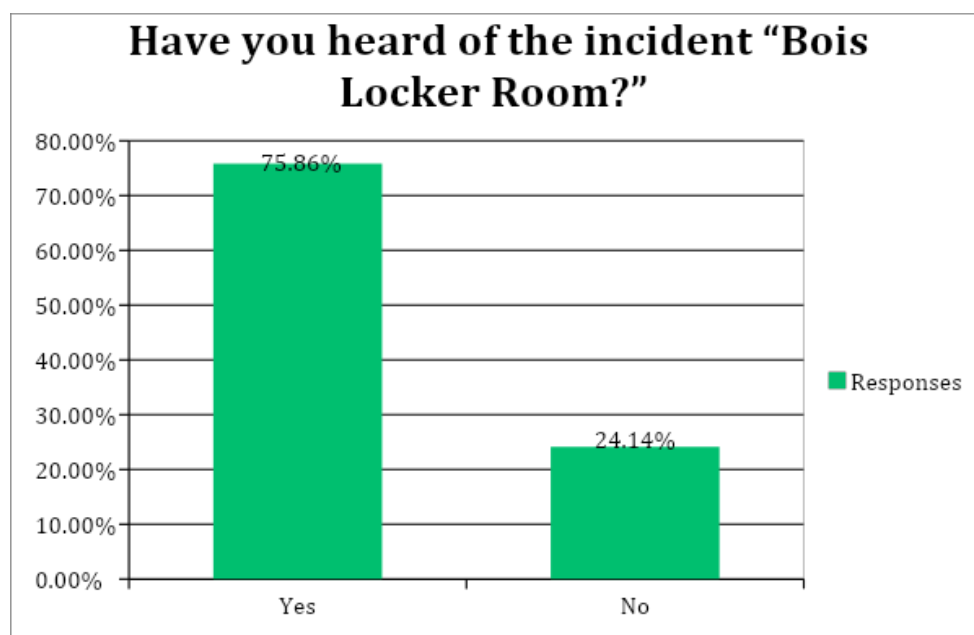


Figure 3 Knowledge about Bois Locker Room incident

On asking deeper questions on the conversations and behaviours online, 17% of the boys said that conversations which are sexist in nature, discussions regarding sexual violence and rape were common in chat groups. However, one out of three boys surveyed mentioned that such topics were never discussed and a little more than that *were not sure*. Nearly half the respondents mentioned that they indulged in such talks 'for fun', while 30% said to show off and 22% said it was sexually exciting.

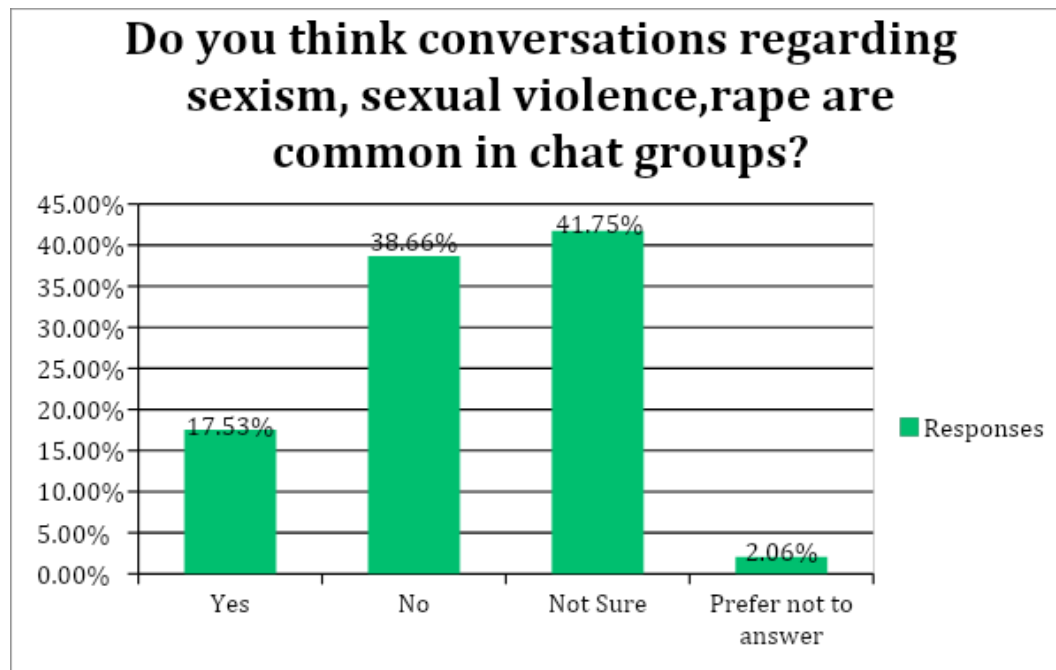


Figure 4 Commonality of conversation on sexism, sexual violence etc in chat groups

### HOW DO YOU FIND ONLINE CONVERSATIONS ON SEXISM AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Nearly one out of two respondents said that they were *uncomfortable* with conversations regarding sexism, sexual violence, rape, while 21% said, they *didn't care*. Close to 15% boys were *comfortable* with conversations riddled with sexism and sexual violence.

When asked about their participation in such conversations, three out of four boys mentioned they never *took part* while nearly 11% were *silent spectators*. And six percent either *initiated* such conversations or were *active participants*.

While most of the boys surveyed were uncomfortable with such conversations and did not participate in such behaviours, there is enough evidence to indicate that such behaviours and conversations are *considered* normal, harmless fun, a way to flaunt, an outlet to vent out anger and can be met with silence and inaction by peers, which is equally troubling.

## HOW DO YOU THINK THESE TALKS AFFECT GIRLS?

When asked how they thought such talk affected the girls who were being targeted, half of the respondents said girls would *feel sad, stressed, and anxious*. While close to 20% said they were either *not sure* or *did not know* what girls felt about such talks.

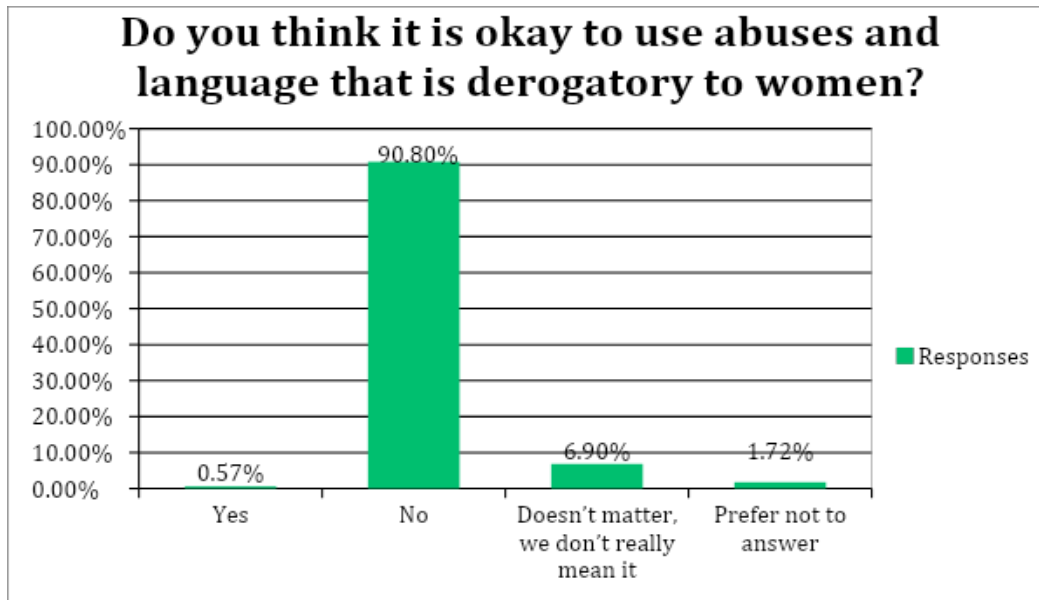


Figure 5 Derogatory language towards women and girls

Interestingly, although, as mentioned earlier, one third of the respondents *didn't care* or thought it was *okay* to indulge in sexist conversations and hint at sexual violence, 90% of the boys felt it was *not okay* to use derogatory language or abuses for women.

## CONSENT OR NO CONSENT?

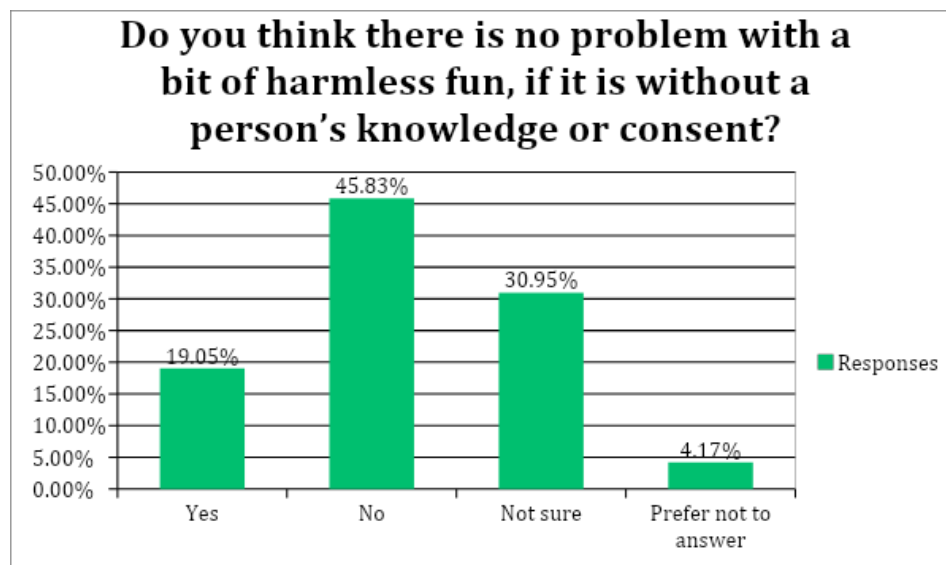


Figure 6 Consent or No Consent

When asked if harmless fun without consent is okay 45% said it was *okay*. This greater number of affirmative responses is concerning. Nineteen percent said that there *was a problem* even if it was harmless fun and thirty per cent boys surveyed said they were *not sure* if it was a problem.

Approximately 83% of the boys said they had learnt/heard about consent, rape, sexual violence, etc. The sources of information on consent, rape, sexual violence, etc were varied - news, social media, newspapers, internet, senior classmates, or family members. Only a few boys mentioned learning about it through sex education classes in school.

Shockingly, only 30% respondents said that sex education was part of their curriculum. Incidentally, this question was answered only by two-thirds of the total respondents. However, nearly 80% boys said they wanted sex education to be part of their curriculum. Furthermore 52% of the boys turned to internet, 49% to their friends and 28% to their parents *to solve their doubts, questions and issues* regarding sex and sexuality.

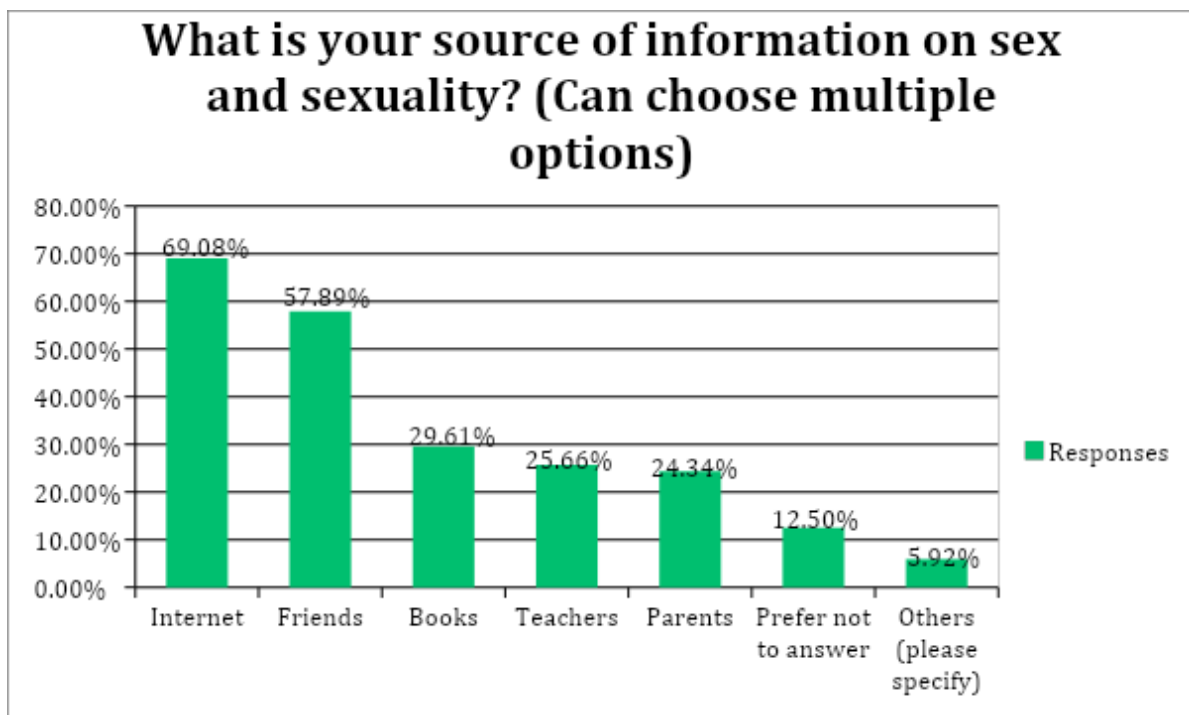


Figure 7 Source of information on sex and sexuality

Parents, teachers and family members such as siblings are an integral part of any youngster’s overall growth and development. Therefore, this only reinforces the need to sensitize and educate parents, teachers, and family members on how to address questions and issues related to sex, sexuality, precautions to be taken while using social media, so on and so forth.



## DO YOU WANT A GUIDE ON HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD?

When asked if there should be boundaries or restrictions on virtual platforms or chat groups, more than 60% *agreed on restrictions* while 15% *didn't agree* to the restrictions.

However, 45% reported *they needed guidance* on the use of virtual and social media platforms, and nearly half of them mentioned they would prefer *guidance on safety and security issues*.

## WHAT SHOULD BE THE COURSE OF ACTION AFTER THE 'BOIS LOCKER ROOM' INCIDENT?

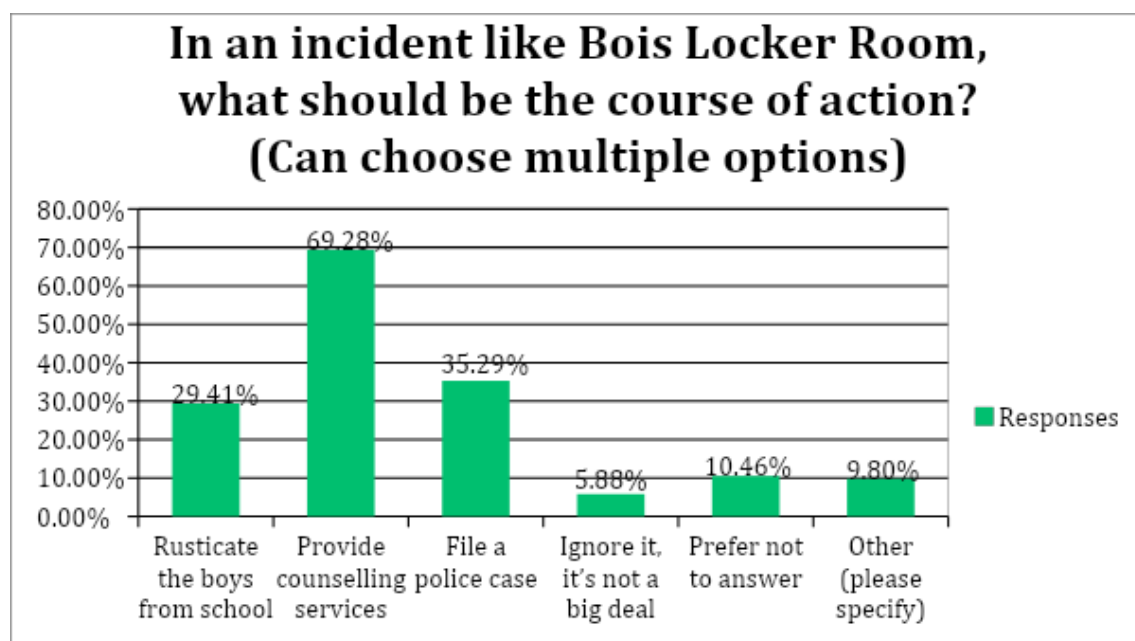


Figure 8 Course of action on 'Bois Locker Room' incident

While the graph above indicates a positive indicator from the youth of providing an opportunity for reformation for the boys involved in the incident with majority suggesting counselling for the boys, a lot needs to be done to sensitize the teenagers regarding such actions as well as various institutions, they are a part of.

## CONCLUSION

This survey of 226 boys from across the country and their response to misogyny online has shed light on the existing online behaviours and habits. While many of the boys surveyed were *uncomfortable* with, and *do not participate* in, conversations on sexual violence, rape and sexism, there is enough to indicate the need to address issues and have conversations on gender-based violence, sex, sexuality, acceptable gender sensitive and inclusive behaviour online and in the society and issues of gender-based discrimination with youth sensitively and with urgency, in general.

This is evident with lack of sex education and use of internet for all information - which although can be a great source of information - acts as source of misinformation when it comes to topics on sex and sexuality. It was also interesting to find that the majority of the boys surveyed requested and looked forward to *guidance on safety and security issues* online as well as *how to use social media and virtual platforms* safely. Their response calling for counselling of the boys involved in the 'Bois Locker Room' also indicates a general maturity among the youth.

This maturity, interest and need resulting from the survey opens a window of opportunity for gender and social development scientists and activists, technology developers and policymakers to reach out to the youth of our country and work with them on these issues, create better and responsible social media platforms with safety tools and protocols, develop better school curriculum, advocacy and awareness programmes.

Additionally, the survey also showcased the need for parents, teachers and educators to become part of the process. Thus, training, educating, and creating awareness among teachers and parents to have open and direct conversations on sex, sexuality, consent, gender-based issues at family and school level and using scientific information to address queries also becomes crucial.

Although, the focus of this survey has been on young boys between the ages of 10-19 as a result of 'Bois Locker Room' incident, a similar controversy also came to light around the same time on some girls' groups participating in derogatory conversation on girls and women which was also published by some leading national newspapers. This makes it imperative that similar survey is conducted with young girls as well to understand their social media behaviours, how are these behaviours different or similar to that of the young boys, the reasons for such behaviour, how is social media contributing to it, and how can we address it among both young boys and girls.

Such behaviours among the youth in general shows the need to intensify the efforts on creating sensitivity around gender-based issues and address deep-rooted misogyny,

which is further emboldened by peer pressure and existing attitudes in our society, media and social media.

This sensitization becomes even more imperative as a greater number of adolescents and youth are spending a greater number of hours online during the pandemic and are already being affected psychologically facing depression, loneliness, anxiety and internet addiction; and any insensitive and sexually offensive behaviour and attitudes will only worsen the health and wellbeing for our youth.

Youth, with their impressionable minds, malleable behaviours and strong peer relations are the driving force of any nation, hence it is crucial that they are sensitized on these issues so that they can continue to spread the word and help nurture a gender sensitive generation.

\*\*\*\*\*The End\*\*\*\*\*