Online gendered harassment
Clearinghouse Connector – May 2016

Introduction

While men and women both experience online harassment, women report much higher rates of online sexual harassment, are targeted for more severe forms of abuse, are more likely to report negative impacts on mental health, and are mostly targeted by male perpetrators.  

This Connector explores gendered online harassment on social media platforms and includes local and international advocacy and policy work by governments as well as women themselves.

Gendered online harassment and abuse often targets individuals as a response to feminist activism or perceived feminist gains. It typically involves a large volume of violent and sexually aggressive threats and sometimes lies that cause reputational harm. Some cases have involved impersonations inviting sexual contact, posting of personal details online (doxing) and non-consensual posting of nude photos (image-based sexual exploitation/revenge porn). Gendered online abuse arguably silences women, and undermines their digital citizenship. It is a form of violence against women. Women of colour and the LGBTI community experience very high rates of online harassment.

The online harassment of women is becoming increasingly normalised. One in ten adult Australians have had sexually explicit images of themselves sent to others without consent. Seven out of ten Australian girls believe online harassment is endemic and that receiving unwanted sexually explicit content online is now considered common behaviour.

Women’s experiences of online harassment have often been trivialised and minimised by law enforcement and online platforms, however social media and other online platforms are increasingly reviewing their policies and procedures. Though Australian law has been slow to act, Victoria recently added new sections to the Summary Offences Act 1966 to criminalise the distribution of and/or threats to distribute intimate images. The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee recently released a report recommending federal legislation against image-based sexual exploitation.
This Connector focuses on online harassment of women by people predominantly unknown to them. It does not specifically address the use of technology to perpetrate domestic violence.

WHV thanks Dr Emma A. Jane, Senior Lecturer and Australian Research Council (ARC) DECRA Fellow at the University of New South Wales, for reviewing this Connector.

If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence, call 1800 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au

Overview

Rape threats and cyberhate?: vote no to the new digital divide The Conversation, 2015. Graphic language warning


Online harassment: summary of findings Pew Research Centre, 2014

Violence against women: does technology do more harm than good? The Conversation, 2016

Prevalence in Australia

Digital harassment and abuse of adult Australians: a summary report RMIT University, 2015

Online harassment: the Australian woman’s experience [Infographic] Symantec Corporation, 2016

“Don’t send me that pic.”: Australian young women and girls report online harassment as endemic Plan International Australia and Our Watch, March 2016

Image-based sexual exploitation / ‘revenge porn’

Revenge porn is just one part of a changing picture of harassment The Conversation, 2015

Submission to the NSW Standing Committee on Law and Justice Inquiry into Remedies for the Serious Invasion of Privacy in New South Wales Nicola Henry, Anastasia Powell and Asher Flynn, 2015

Criminalizing revenge porn Wake Forest Law Review, 2014
Gendered harassment on social media


"Real men don’t hate women": Twitter rape threats and group identity Journal of Pragmatics, 2016

Cybersexism: how did the Internet become unsafe for women: panel discussion [Video] Festival of Dangerous Ideas, 2015. Graphic language warning

Mates over merit?: the Women in media report: a study of gender differences in Australian media Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 2016

Sexism in online gaming

Serious games and GamerGate: the myth of an online egalitarian utopia In: Neoliberalism and contemporary challenges for the Asia-Pacific: proceedings of The Australian Sociological Association Conference 2015 TASA, 2015


Women’s experiences

Why it’s so hard for women to get justice for online abuse ABC Online, 2016

How cyber mobs and trolls have ruined the Internet – and destroyed lives Newsweek, 2014. Graphic language warning

Why women aren’t welcome on the Internet Pacific Standard, 2014


The end of kindness: weev and the cult of the angry young man The Verge, 2013

Advocacy in action

Online harassment and online solidarity: a technofeminist perspective Critical Issues in Science and Technology Studies, 2014

Online abuse: how women are fighting back The Guardian, 2016

DIY internet justice is a symptom, not a solution to online misogyny The Age. Daily Life, 2016. Graphic language warning

#EndViolenceAgainstWomen: thousands join social media campaign to name the men who troll them online The Age. Daily Life, 2015
Law reform in Australia

Phenomenon colloquially referred to as ‘revenge porn’ The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 2016


Serious invasions of privacy in the digital era Australian Law Reform Commission, 2014

Revenge pornography, privacy and the law NSW Parliamentary Research Service, 2014

Technology-facilitated stalking and abuse: putting our legal framework to the test Law Society Journal (NSW), 2015

Responses from online platforms

Reporting, reviewing and responding to harassment on Twitter Women Action Media, 2015

“Revenge porn” and Search Google Public Policy Blog, 2015

Announcing the Twitter Trust and Safety Council Twitter, 2016

Controversial, harmful and hateful speech on Facebook Facebook, 2013

International law reform

Online abuse: how different countries deal with it The Guardian, 2016


Related websites

University of NSW The Cyberhate Project

SmartSafe: technology abuse and your safety

Crash Override [US]

Women’s Media Centre [US]

Heartmob

Trollbusters
Footnotes

8. The term ‘image-based sexual exploitation’ is preferred to ‘revenge porn’ as it links to other forms of sexual violence. ‘Revenge porn’ wrongly assumes revenge (rather than humiliation/degradation/coercion) is the motive and that the subject is somehow deserving.

How our Clearinghouse can help you

Women’s Health Victoria’s Clearinghouse has a wealth of information on gender in health in various forms. Our experienced health and information professionals can assist you to access this information.

Feedback and subscription

We value your feedback. Please tell us what you think of this resource. Click here to take a brief online survey

Please Contact Us with any feedback including suggestions for future Clearinghouse Connector topics.

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