

# Adult Online Hate, Harassment and Abuse:

A Rapid Evidence Assessment

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# 1. Executive Summary

The development of email and social media platforms has changed the way in which people interact with each other. The open sharing of personal data in public forums has resulted in online harassment in its many forms becoming increasingly problematic. The number of people having negative online experiences is increasing, with close to half of adult internet users reporting having seen hateful content online in the past year.

This report presents findings from a collaborative study undertaken by the University of East London (UEL) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). It describes the findings from a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of the evidence base in relation to adult online safety undertaken on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). The research was undertaken on behalf of the UK Council for Internet Safety Evidence Group. This REA focuses on exploring internet safety issues amongst adults, given the expansion of the remit of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) to include adults in the context of the new Internet Safety Strategy (2018) and Online Harms White Paper (2019).

## 1.1 Study Methodology

### *Definitions*

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) defines a child as a person under 18 years of age. This REA focusses on research conducted on adults aged 18 plus, with no upper age limit;
- Online harassment is a broad term, encompassing various negative experiences online, for example: offensive name calling, purposeful embarrassment, physical threats, sustained harassment, stalking and sexual harassment;
- There are no universally accepted terms for online harassment in the current research literature;
- Due to the lack of definition, online harassment is considered to vary by person and by context;
- Certain types of online harassment constitute criminal behaviour:
  - Cyberstalking is currently criminalised pursuant to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997
  - Revenge pornography which is criminalised pursuant to S.33 Criminal Justice and Crime Act 2015
  - Hate Crime is defined by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the police, and the Prison Service (now Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service). Online hate content or material can be classified as hate speech;
- Definitions are considered in each relevant section of this report.



## *Parameters of the REA*

This research design included a question-led adapted Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) in order to investigate online harm issues amongst adults. This REA has been commissioned in order to evaluate the existing literature pertaining to the following types of online harassment: -

- 1. Harassment, threats, stalking;**
- 2. Cyberbullying and trolling;**
- 3. Hate crime, hate speech, hate incidents;**
- 4. Revenge pornography and image-based abuse**

Specifically, the research questions asked in this REA are:

- What evidence exists about the **nature** of the different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What evidence exists about the **scope/prevalence** of these different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What evidence exists about which **groups are more likely to be subject to these types of online harm?**
- What evidence exists about the **impact** of these different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What appear to be the **gaps in the research** related to these types of harms and what are **recommendations for future research, policy, and practice?**

## *Methodology of the REA*

A detailed account of the methodology can be found at Appendix 1. The procedure is summarised as follows:

- Searches of academic databases (known to be productive in REAS and grey literature searches) using 4 search strings, identified 36 relevant studies;
- Further searches identified other relevant material;
- A total of 241 documents were evaluated using a Weight of Evidence approach;
- Documents with lower judgements (of confidence and relevance) were given less weight upon collating the identified information;
- The evaluated material, was synthesised by following a nine step approach, culminating in the production of a final report.

## **1.2 Key Findings**

Given the amount of research evaluated as part of the REA the following summary will highlight the key findings from each section very briefly.

## Online Harassment

- Online harassment encompasses a broad spectrum of abusive behaviours enabled by technology platforms and used to target a specific user or users;
- Compared to data from 2014, online harassment has increased. 41% of US adults have been victims of online harassment and 66% have witnessed the harassment of others (Pew Research Center, 2017);
- Younger people are more likely to be victims of online harassment;
- The main types of harassment encountered are:
  - *Offensive name calling*
  - *Purposeful embarrassment*
  - *Physical Threats*
  - *Sustained Harassment*
  - *Stalking*
  - *Sexual Harassment*
- Men are more likely to be victims of offensive name calling and physical threat;
- Women are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment. Women are also more likely to report online harassment as being “extremely” or “very” upsetting;
- Online harassment can have a lasting impact on those who are victimised, effects range from mental or emotional stress to financial loss and in some cases difficulty in securing employment and housing.

## Cyberbullying and Trolling

- There is a considerable overlap between behaviours labelled as cyberbullying, online harassment and trolling;
- Cyberbullying can be defined as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out in an electronic context against someone who cannot easily defend themselves. Whereas trolling is the result of indiscriminate targeting, involving any subject matter;
- There is relatively little research on adult’s experiences of cyberbullying as research has focused on children, and studies in this area primarily investigate cyberbullying in the workplace;
- Cyberbullying has a very similar impact to real world bullying and can result in mental health issues and low job satisfaction. Whereas the impact of trolling is largely unknown and can vary widely from simply being a nuisance, to being as pernicious as cyberbullying and systematic online harassment.

## Cyberstalking

- Cyberstalking usually refers to repeated unwanted electronic communication in order to cause harassment, alarm or distress to the victim. Offline and online stalking have considerable similarities;

- The number of reported and consequently recorded harassment offences in the UK has risen considerably between 2014 and 2015. Academic studies report varying rates of cyberstalking, ranging from 9% to 46.7%;
- Most victims of cyberstalking are female, and most perpetrators are male;
- Cyberstalking can cause victims to experience a serious and continued state of anxiety which can result in the victim substantially changing aspects of their lives.

### *Revenge Pornography*

- Revenge pornography is a subset of image based abuse, including both the non-consensual sharing and creation of sexual images, for a variety of motives, ranging from sexual gratification to harassment, control and extortion;
- Revenge pornography (often referred to as revenge porn) is conventionally seen as the non-consensual sharing of sexual images, that have been created with consent, for the purpose of revenge;
- Few studies have looked at the prevalence rates of revenge porn, and prevalence is hard to quantify with variations in methodology and definition; rates range from 1.1% to 23%;
- Victims are typically female, with studies reporting that 60-95% of victims are female;
- The harm caused by revenge porn can be devastating and are like those in other sexual crimes.

### *Hate Crime*

- Online hate content/material is usually classified as hate speech, and can take the form of words, pictures, images, videos, games, symbols and songs;
- Research indicates that statistics underestimate the extent of online hate, particularly concerning the LGBT community;
- Police statistics estimate that 2% of adult hate crimes have an online element;
- Race or ethnicity is the protected characteristic that provokes the most online adult hate, followed by sexual orientation, religion, disability, and transgender status;
- Most of the research on the experiences of victims of online hate focuses on those of different races and religions. Religious and racial hate can often overlap;
- Antisemitic online hate remains highly prevalent, and tends to centre around themes of perceived Jewish influence/power, conspiracy theories, world domination, Holocaust denial/trivialisation;
- Islamophobic online hate has risen exponentially, and increases following certain 'trigger' incidents such as terrorist attacks, it is commonly found that Muslims are labelled as sex offenders, and security threats;
- Online hate towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is being increasingly explored in research, these populations are labelled economic burdens, security threats, criminals, and inferior persons;

- A small but burgeoning body of research exploring the experience of online hate against disabled people, has determined that highly derogatory speech is directed towards disabled persons;
- There is also little research on the incidence and experience of online hate against LGBT individuals;
- Hate crimes can have a severe impact on victims, causing both direct and indirect harms. Online hate crimes can have various effects, including impacting upon a person's emotional state and psychological wellbeing, causing or worsening mental illness, disruption of daily behaviours and routines, and causing financial/economic losses.

There are several specific gaps in the research which are described along with the corresponding recommendations in section 8 of this report.

## 2. Findings: Context

### 2.1 Adult media literacy and use of the internet in the UK

This section provides a brief overview of the context of adult internet use in the UK, drawing on key sources (Ofcom, 2018; ONS, 2018; Livingstone, 2018). There are several

#### Key Findings: Adults Online

- There has been increased mobile use amongst adults
- Nearly all adults aged 16-54 are now online
- Three-quarters of adults use a smartphone; this is unchanged since 2016, although those in AB households are now more likely to use a smartphone
- Older people are less likely to be online and use the internet in a 'narrow' or limited way
- Adults are increasingly reliant on the internet for their livelihood
- Increase in smartphone use, 'on the go connectivity' (2018, p.4), is key for work and relationships
- Two in five internet users feel more creative since they've been going online
- More than half of adults watch on-demand and streaming content
- Around half of internet users had been online in the previous week for shopping or for banking
- The majority feel that adults should be protected from seeing offensive content online
- Social media platforms are still popular. Facebook is still the most common site on which to have a profile, although the number of adults using WhatsApp has increased and the number using Facebook has decreased
- Approximately two-thirds of adults have a social media profile
- Social media sites are central to maintaining relationships with friends and family
- Social media/messaging site users are less likely than in 2016 to consider their Facebook profile/account to be their main one

*Source: Ofcom (2018, pp. 3-6)*

sources of robust national data including that produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (from the Labour Force Survey) and data produced by Ofcom exploring adults' online behaviours and attitudes. Broad findings from these surveys are considered briefly below. These surveys do not, however, explore online harms experienced by adults in any depth or detail.

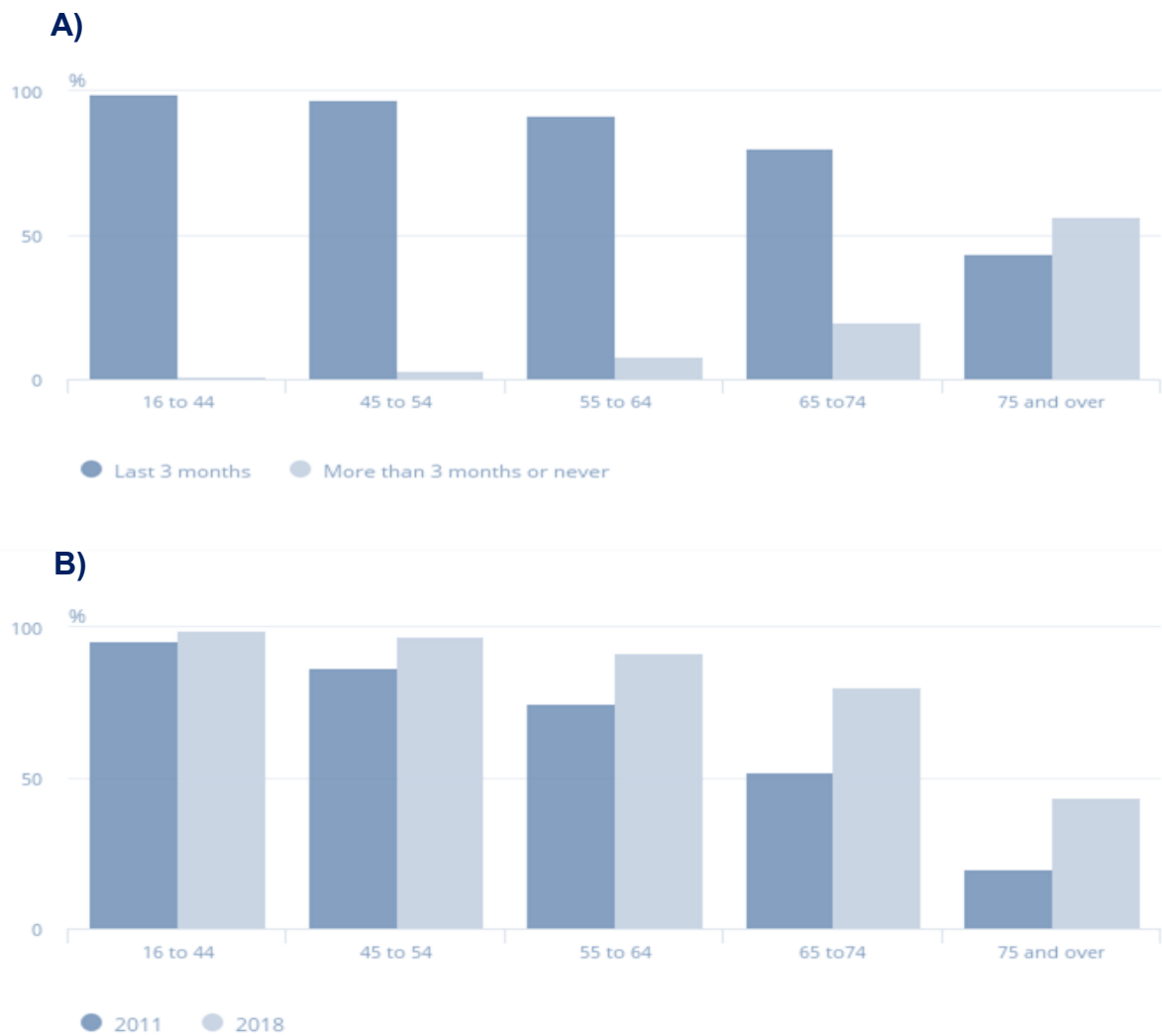


Figure 1. A) Internet users by age group, 2018, UK, B) Recent internet use by age group, 2011 and 2018, UK.

Source: Office for National Statistics

### 2.1.1 Adults online

The ONS has produced data on adult internet use drawn from the Labour Force Survey. The Labour Force Survey sample is intended to be representative of the entire UK population. It is comprised of approximately 40,000 responding UK households and 100,000 individuals per quarter. Respondents are interviewed for five successive waves at three-monthly intervals (ONS, 2018).

The data on internet usage for 2018<sup>1</sup>(ONS, 2018) indicate that:

- 90% of adults in the UK were recent internet users, up from 89% in 2017;
- 8.4% (4.5 million) of adults had never used the internet in 2018, down from 9.2% in 2017;
- virtually all adults aged 16-34 were recent internet users (99%) in 2018, compared with 44% of adults aged 75 and over;
- 20% of adults with a disability had never used the internet in 2018, down from 22% in 2017;
- Northern Ireland is catching up with the other UK regions in recent internet use, reaching 86% in 2018, although it remained the region with the lowest recent use.

Although internet use continues to increase amongst adults, there is a marked difference in usage by age group, with younger users being online more than older internet users (see Figure 1). The 75 and older age group spend the smallest amount of time online, and this group had the lowest internet use in the past three months (see Figure 1).

The ONS data indicates that in 2018, 8.4% of adults had never used the internet. Of the 4.5 million adults who had never used the internet in 2018, more than half (2.6 million) were aged 75 and over. There was a larger difference in recent internet use for adults aged 75 and over. Of adults with a disability in this age group, 39% were recent internet users compared with 49% of adults without a disability. Since 2014, the number of adults with a disability who had used the internet recently increased by 11.7 percentage points to just over 9.5 million in 2018. Overall, the proportion of recent internet users was lower for adults who were disabled compared with those who were not (ONS, 2018).

Ofcom produces robust survey and qualitative data regarding adults' online behaviours and attitudes in the UK. This section briefly outlines the context of adult media literacy and internet use in the UK drawing on data from Ofcom's *Adults' Media Use and Attitudes* report (2018) (see [www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf)) and the *Adult Media Lives* qualitative report.

Ofcom defines media literacy as 'the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts' (2018, p4). Ofcom's *Adults' Media Use and Attitudes* report provides evidence on media use, attitudes and understanding amongst adults aged 16+. It draws on data gathered from the annual adults' media literacy tracker survey, which is based on interviews with a sample of 1,875 adults aged 16 and over in September and October 2017 supplemented with data from Ofcom's technology tracker survey undertaken in 2017, which was based on 2,861 interviews with adults aged 16 and over in July and August 2017. This year, the report included findings from an additional online study conducted with 1,050 adults aged 16+ that explored internet

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<sup>1</sup> Each year referred to represents the period Quarter 1 (January to March) only. The estimates are derived from the Labour Force Survey and are not seasonally adjusted (see [www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2018](http://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2018)).

users' attitudes to being online. The key findings from these large-scale studies are reported briefly here and will be considered in greater detail in Stage Two of this project.

The Ofcom findings suggest that:

- Almost nine in ten (88%) UK adults are online.
- Adult internet users spend on average a day a week online. While this hasn't increased since 2016, adults that are online spend now more time using the internet in locations other than home or work/place of education.
- This is reflected in the increase since 2016 in the number of adults using their smartphones to go online (70% vs. 66% in 2016). Smartphones are more popular than a computer for going online.
- Facebook is still the most common site on which to have a profile, with three in five (62%) adults having a profile/account, the same as in 2016. However, the number of people using WhatsApp has increased.
- Just over one in ten (12%) UK adults do not go online; this is unchanged since 2016, and the majority (63%) of non-users say nothing would encourage them to go online in the next 12 months.
- The proportion who are not online increases with age, from 18% of those aged 55-64, to 35% of 65-74s and just under half of those aged 75 and over (47%).
- The proportion of adults in DE6 households who do not go online is almost double the UK average (22% vs. 12%). This compares to 4% of adults in AB households and 7% in C1 households.

### **2.1.2 Online experience and concerns**

Ofcom (2018, pp. 3-6) findings:

- Half of internet users (50%) say they are concerned about what is on the internet. This is unchanged since 2016, but specific concerns about risks to others or to society (27% vs. 22%), or about security or fraud (25% vs. 20%), have increased slightly.
- There has also been an increase in the numbers having negative online experiences. Close to half of internet users say they have seen hateful content online in the past year (47%), with one in seven (14%) saying they have 'often' seen this. Two in five (40%) who had seen this kind of content said they had done something about it, such as reported it to the website or commented to say they thought it was wrong, and three in five (59%) had ignored it or done nothing about it.
- Social media users are more likely than in 2016 to say they have seen something that has upset or offended them on social media/messaging sites in the past year (55% vs. 44% in 2016). However, they are less likely to say they have done something about it (55% vs. 61% in 2016).
- Three in ten internet users would like to cut down on the time they spend online, but for most, the benefits outweigh the risks. Four in ten internet users say they spend too much time online; this is higher than the proportion who disagree (26%).
- Four in five agree that new communication methods have made life easier, and three in five think that being online inspires them to try new things.
- For the majority (62%), the benefits of being online outweigh the disadvantages.



- Those in DE households are also less likely to make critical judgements about content, to understand how price comparison websites work, and to use security features to protect themselves online.
- The top three specific concerns about the internet mentioned by adult internet users are: strangers contacting children (19%), content unsuitable for children (17%) and sexual content/ pornography (16%).
- Women are more likely than men to be concerned about offensive/illegal content (37% vs. 31%) and about risk to others/society (31% vs. 23%).

### Key Findings: Adult online experience and concerns

- 47% of all adult internet users (16-75+), report to have seen hateful content online in the last year
- The number of reports from certain age groups (16-24; 25-34) encountering hateful content significantly increased in 2017, whilst reports from other age groups (55-64; 65-74; 75+) significantly decreased
- Two in five internet users who have seen something hateful online in the past 12 months say they did something about it
- Social media users are slightly more likely to have seen something upsetting online than in 2016, but are less likely to have reported it
- For the majority, the benefits of being online outweigh the negatives
- Those in the DE socioeconomic group are both less likely to go online and less likely to make critical judgements about online content
- Differences in media use and critical understanding are likely to be driven by both age and socioeconomic group. Older people and the DE socioeconomic group may be more vulnerable online given these factors
- About a quarter say they don't make appropriate checks before entering personal or financial details online
- Younger internet users are more likely to share their opinions online
- Compared to 2016, internet users are more likely to have concerns related to risks to others, security/fraud and advertising, and less likely to be concerned about offensive/ illegal content

Source: Ofcom (2018, pp. 3-6,102)

### 2.1.3 Research on parents

#### Key Findings: Research on parents

- More parents in the UK, in comparison to Japan and USA, feel addicted to their devices and feel the need to respond immediately to notifications
- Parents access a range of digital devices, particularly fathers, high SES parents, younger parents and parents of younger children
- Less parents have access to 'smart' devices, but again, fathers, high SES parents and young parents are more likely to use high-tech devices
- For high SES parents, privacy is their main concern when going online, and for low SES parents, lack of time is their top concern
- On average, parents who frequently use the internet have double the digital skills (4/10) of low internet-using parents (2/10)
- Just over half of parents are able to perform privacy related skills
- Parents experience barriers to internet use if they are BAME parents or parents of a child with special educational needs (SEN)
- Parents of higher SES or education are more digitally advantaged
- Fathers and mothers report on average similar level of digital skills
- Parents with a higher education report more digital skills
- Single parents and parents of children with SEN report more online harms for both themselves and for their child, and they also do more parental mediation activities

*Source: Livingstone (2018)*

There is an increasing body of research exploring parents' views, mostly in respect of their concerns regarding their children online. However, some aspects of this research focus on parents' online behaviour, for example, the recently published study co-authored by USC Annenberg and Common Sense Media (see [http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/digitaldevicesUK\\_oct2018.pdf](http://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/digitaldevicesUK_oct2018.pdf) referred to in a blog by Sonia Livingstone; see <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2018/10/01/whats-the-new-normal/>). This research is based on a survey of 13 to 17 year olds and their parents in the UK focusing on screen time and addiction. The findings suggest that:

- 46% of parents describe themselves as 'addicted' to their mobile device;
- 51% of parents say they get distracted by mobile devices at least once a day, and 72% of parents say their teen gets distracted;
- 86% of parents say their teen's use of mobile devices has not harmed or has even helped their relationship, and 97% of teens say the same of their parents' mobile use.

This research is part of a global mapping project that seeks to draw cross-country comparisons, with data from the US and Japan providing an interesting comparison to the UK data:

- More parents in the UK ‘feel addicted’ to their devices (46% vs. 27% of parents in the US and 38% in Japan);
- More parents in the UK feel the need to respond immediately to texts, messages and other notifications (57% vs. 48% in the US and 36% in Japan);
- More US parents report checking their mobile devices at least hourly, and more argue daily about mobile device use (36%) than do British (22%) or Japanese (19%) parents.

Livingstone comments, ‘so it seems that British parents are feeling worse about themselves, and under more pressure, even though they don’t necessarily use their phones more or create more conflict. I’ll leave others to explain the US and Japanese findings, but I am tempted to suggest that the high-profile UK media coverage constantly scrutinising and judging families’ once-private communication practices is itself part of the problem here’ (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/parenting4digitalfuture/2018/10/01/whats-the-new-normal/>).

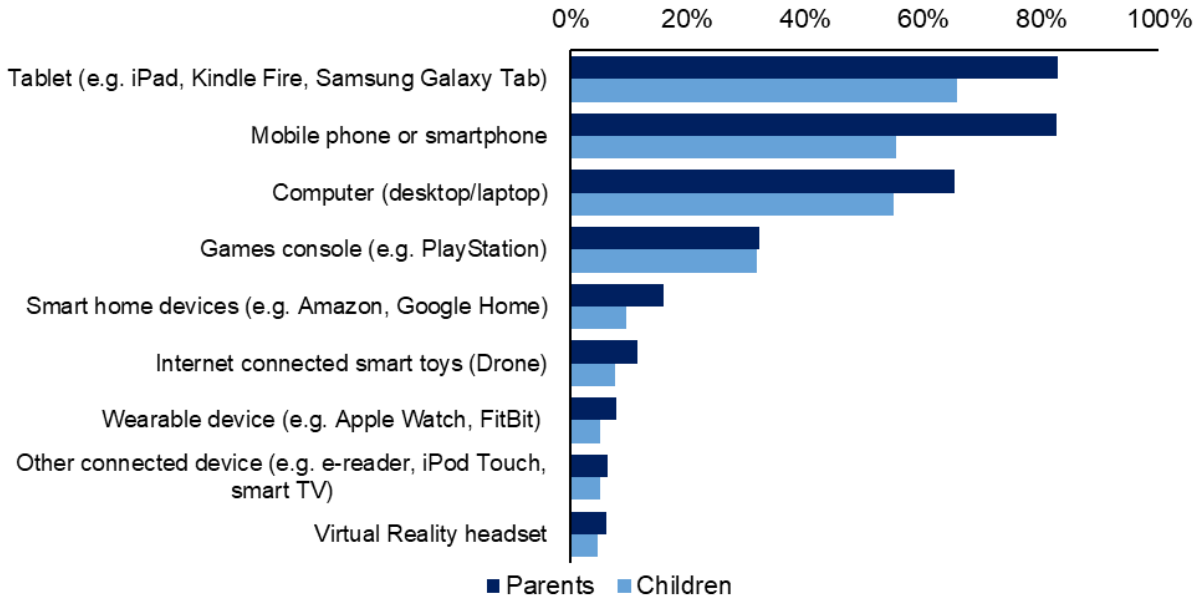


Figure 2. Survey responses to the following question: “Thinking about when you/your child uses the internet, independently or with help, on any device/in any place, in the past month, have you/your child used any of these devices to go online?”. Parents who use the internet at least monthly (%) choosing each answer option for Q7 and Q10 (N=1,959 for Q7, N=1,699 for Q10).

Source: Livingstone (2018)

Livingstone et al. (2018) suggest that, see Figure 2 for an illustration of these findings:

- On average, parents use three devices to go online – typically, tablet, smartphone and computer. Fathers, high SES parents, younger parents and parents of younger children use a wider range of devices than other groups.
- Sixteen per cent of parents say they have used a smart home device (e.g., Amazon Echo, Google Home) in the past month, 12% have used a wearable device, 8% an internet connected smart toy and 6% a virtual reality (VR) headset.
- Young parents, fathers and high SES parents use more high-tech devices such as smart home devices or VR headsets.

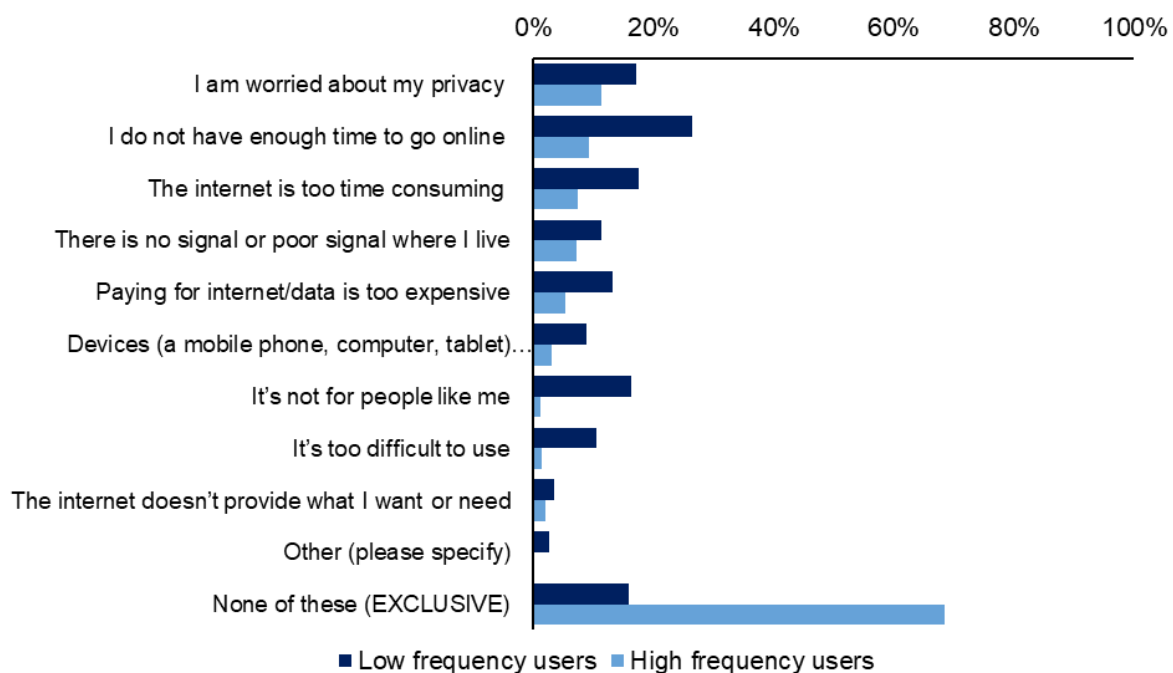


Figure 3. Survey responses to the following question: “Do any of these factors limit or prevent your use of the internet?” Parents (%) who chose each answer option for Q6 (N=227 for low frequency users, N=1,805 for high frequency users).

Source: Livingstone (2018)

### Privacy is the main barrier for parents going online followed by lack of time

While generally parents report few barriers that limit or prevent their use of the internet, worrying about privacy is the top barrier (12% of all parents), followed by lack of time to go online (11%), see Figure 3 for an illustration of these findings:<sup>2</sup>

- Among the 89% of parents who go online ‘daily or almost daily’ (‘high frequency users’, in Figure 3), privacy is the top concern which prevents or limits use (11% of these parents say this).

<sup>2</sup>This is likely to underestimate parental concerns about privacy, as here we just report the percentage of parents whose concerns are sufficient to *limit or prevent* their use of the internet. Note, too, that the fieldwork was conducted in October 2017, before recent revelations about privacy online from commercial bodies.

- Among the 11% of parents who go online less than daily - weekly or never ('low internet users' are more likely to be from low SES groups<sup>3</sup>) - lack of time is their top concern (26%), followed by privacy (17%) and thinking the internet is "not for people like me" (16%).
- Fathers (16%) are more concerned about privacy than mothers (9%). Other factors (the parent's age, age of child, SES) make no statistical difference.
- In this study, parents were asked about 10 different digital skills, from changing privacy settings, managing contacts, coding and more. Overall, internet-using parents report being able to do four of these ten things on average. Low internet-using parents, however, say they have just two of the 10 digital skills.

### *Parents' privacy skills:*

- Parents were asked about three privacy-related skills; 58% of parents say they can change their privacy settings, 57% can remove people from their contact lists, and 53% can decide which information to share online. For comparison, we included the abilities to edit or create content – revealing better privacy than creative production skills overall.
- However, while across all the 10 digital skills fathers and mothers report similar levels of skill, mothers report better privacy skills than fathers (managing settings, deciding what to share, managing contacts), while fathers are more likely to say they know creative skills like coding and editing content online. Recall, above, that more fathers than mothers described themselves as being concerned about privacy in general, leading to questions of whether they are conscious that they haven't translated their concerns into practice.
- High SES parents report more skills overall (especially more advanced creative skills such as coding or online content creation), as do parents of young children. While there is little difference by SES in terms of parents' privacy skills, younger parents are more able to manage their privacy settings and contact lists, and parents of younger children are better at managing their privacy settings.<sup>4</sup>

### *Access and use*

- Parents experience barriers to internet use if they are BAME parents or parents of a child with special educational needs (SEN). Parent gender makes little difference overall, although mothers and fathers encounter different barriers— fathers report more difficulty in using the internet, more privacy concerns and are more likely to think that "the internet is not for people like me". Mothers report more problems of connectivity and cost.
- Parents of higher SES or education are more digitally advantaged. Parents with a higher level of education use a wider range of devices to surf online, especially more

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<sup>3</sup> Respondents were grouped according to the SES of their household into categories A, B, C1, C2, D, and E based on responses about the household's chief income earner. We refer to categories A and B as high SES parents, C1 and C2 as middle SES parents and D and E as low SES parents.

<sup>4</sup> There is likely to be a relation between the age of child and age of parent, which we lack space to explore further here. Relatedly, there is likely to be a correlation amongst these different privacy skills.

smart devices; 24% of parents with a post-graduate degree used wearable devices during the past month compared to 11% of those with a college or university degree.

*Table 1. Responses to the question “Q36. As far as you are aware, in the past year, has anything happened online that bothered or upset your child in some way (e.g., made them feel uncomfortable, scared or feel that they shouldn’t have seen it)?”. Table shows numbers, percentage choosing each answer option, and the average.*

		<i>n</i>	Yes (1)	No (2)	Prefer not to say (3)	Average
<b>Parent gender</b>	Male	836	18.1	79.8	2.2	1.84
	Female	1196	11.5	85.9	2.6	1.91
						<i>0.001</i>
<b>Parent age</b>	18-34	514	16.9	79.4	3.7	1.87
	35-44	883	13.7	83.8	2.5	1.89
	45-54	550	13.5	85.6	0.9	1.87
	55-65	85	8.2	88.2	3.5	1.95
						<i>0.014</i>
<b>SES</b>	AB	573	19.7	78.2	2.1	1.82
	C1	584	13.7	83.6	2.7	1.89
	C2	443	12.4	84.4	3.2	1.91
	DE	432	9.5	88.9	1.6	1.92
						<i>0.001</i>
<b>All Parents</b>		<b>2,032</b>	<b>14.2</b>	<b>83.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>1.88</b>
Missing		0				

*Source: Livingstone (2018)*

### **Digital skills**

- Fathers and mothers report on average similar level of digital skills. However, mothers know how to find information and report better privacy skills than fathers (managing settings, deciding what to share, managing contacts), while fathers are more likely to say they know how to code, edit music and edit content online.
- Parents with a higher education report more digital skills, such as saving a photo found online, changing privacy settings, or coding and programming. However, parents’ digital skills do not vary according to SES.
- Single parents and parents of children with SEN report more online harms for both themselves and for their child, and they also do more parental mediation activities.

### **2.2 Summary**

This section has provided a brief introduction to the context of adult internet use and online experience in the UK based on the data produced by Ofcom (2018) and the ONS (2018), and recent data from Livingstone’s research on parents (2018). Key findings from

the Ofcom data (2018) suggest that most adults are regular internet users and have an overwhelmingly positive experience of the internet, relying increasingly on social media and instant messaging platforms to maintain relationships with family and friends. Research from other countries suggests similarities (see, for example, Davidson & Martellozzo, 2016, on research in the Middle East). It should be borne in mind, however, that approximately 4.5 million adults in the UK have never used the internet (ONS, 2018).

Adults are increasingly online on smartphones and many rely on the internet for their livelihood. However, an increasing number of adults have had a negative online experience, with almost half of those surveyed seeing hateful online content in the last year, and it is of concern that few adults report this or follow up in any way. Adult concern tends to focus on financial issues/online fraud/phishing and security rather than exposure to offensive content and behaviour. Certain groups of internet users may be more vulnerable given less and narrower internet use and less critical awareness around online security and internet regulation (older users and DE socioeconomic group users). The ONS data indicates that the 75+ age group has less frequent internet use than younger users, and the proportion of recent internet users was lower for adults who were disabled compared with those who were not.<sup>5</sup>Emerging research on parents suggests that BAME o parents of a child with SEN experience barriers to internet use, and also indicates that parents of higher SES or education are more digitally advantaged (Livingstone, 2018).

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<sup>5</sup>Based on usage in the last three months (ONS, 2018).

### 3. Online Harassment

#### 3.1 Introduction

Online harassment is a broad term which encompasses many of the other behaviours discussed in this report. The first section of the report begins with a general discussion of online harassment before considering cyberbullying and trolling. The issues of cyberstalking, revenge pornography and hate crime are then considered in more detail.

#### 3.2 The Nature of the Harm

According to Blackwell et al (2017) online harassment is a term which refers to a:

*“broad spectrum of abusive behaviours enabled by technology platforms and used to target a specific user or users” (2017, p. 24.)*

Blackwell et al. (2017) state that online harassment can include “flaming” which refers to the use of inflammatory language such as name calling or being insulting, “doxing” which refers to the release of personally identifiable information such as someone’s home address or phone number and/or “impersonation” in which the perpetrator uses the victim’s image or likeness without their consent and public shaming in order to damage the target’s reputation. These types of harassment are very often used concurrently and can involve one person targeting another, or a group of people coming together to target a specific individual (Smith et al 2008). Online harassment can impact upon individuals’ everyday lives and can also influence their future online behaviour, for example, Lenhart et al (2016) found that 27% of US internet users censor their own online posts for fear of being harassed. According to a poll conducted in 2017 industry experts and academics fear that online harassment and other anti-social online behaviour will continue to increase (Rainie et al 2017).

This REA considers the three largest studies exploring online harassment, all of which received a high weight of evidence weighting.

The most recent study was conducted by Kantar Media and was commissioned by Ofcom in 2018. The study considers online harm as part of a larger research project. The objective of this research was to quantify concerns and experience across four categories of online harm: Content; interactions with other users; data/privacy and hacking/security, the first two of which are relevant to this REA. The study included face to face home interviews from 27<sup>th</sup> June to 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 with a sample of 1686 internet users aged 16+ in the UK. The researchers set sampling quotas on region, gender, age



and working status using Kantar TNS Omnibus. It should be noted therefore that some of the general figures provided by Kantar Media (2018) encompass all four types of harm.

The other two studies were conducted in 2017. The first of these is a study conducted in the US by Pew Research Center which included a representative sample of 4248 US adults. The second, including both the US and the UK, is a study by the Cybersmile Foundation on the prevalence and nature of online harassment (Cybersmile Foundation, 2017)<sup>6</sup>. The Cybersmile US survey took place between June 8<sup>th</sup> and June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 with a total sample size of 20,554 across 50 states. The Cybersmile UK survey took place over the same time scale and included 21,098 participants across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (the sampling strategy is however not described, see footnote 6 below).

The following section of the report will consider the nature and prevalence of online harassment – this includes some of the other types of online abusive behaviour such as stalking, trolling and cyberbullying.

The Kantar Media Study (2018) suggests that respondents had a number of concerns. The most prominent issued raised was in respect of the protection of children on the internet, which is outside the scope of this REA. However, 15% of respondents reported being concerned about bullying/harassment/trolling (24% when prompted) and unprompted 10% were concerned about threats/stalking (18% when prompted) (Kantar Media 2018, p.9).

Figure 4 shows Kantar Media's breakdown of those who have experienced online harm relating to content that people view, read or listen to online by age. It demonstrates that older people were less likely to indicate that they had experienced online harm relating to content (Kantar Media, p.18), and that social media is the most common platform upon which online harassment takes place.

It is interesting to note however that men are nearly four times as likely to say that their most recent incident of harassment took place while involved in an online game (Pew Research Center 2017, p.24).

The Cybersmile study explored respondents' experiences of different social media platforms (see figure 5). The findings suggest that respondents were more likely to experience harassment on Facebook than on other platforms in both the US and UK samples. However, as the Cybersmile study did not provide baseline percentages of respondents' use of the social media platforms, it is difficult to determine whether Facebook is particularly susceptible to online harassment or whether it is simply the case

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<sup>6</sup> The Cybersmile Foundation conducted this study, the results do not appear in an academic paper. Therefore, there is limited information on methodology. The Cybersmile Foundation conducted the study using Google Survey, but do not provide a definition of terms or whether the terms investigated within the study were defined to the respondents. There is also no information on sampling methods and how this may bias responses. Therefore, the Research team recommend that the findings presented in this REA on the basis of this study be considered indicative of the issues, rather than as providing definitive evidence.

that most social media users preferred Facebook rather than other platforms. There is little academic research into the specific social media platforms and online harassment and clearly more research is needed.

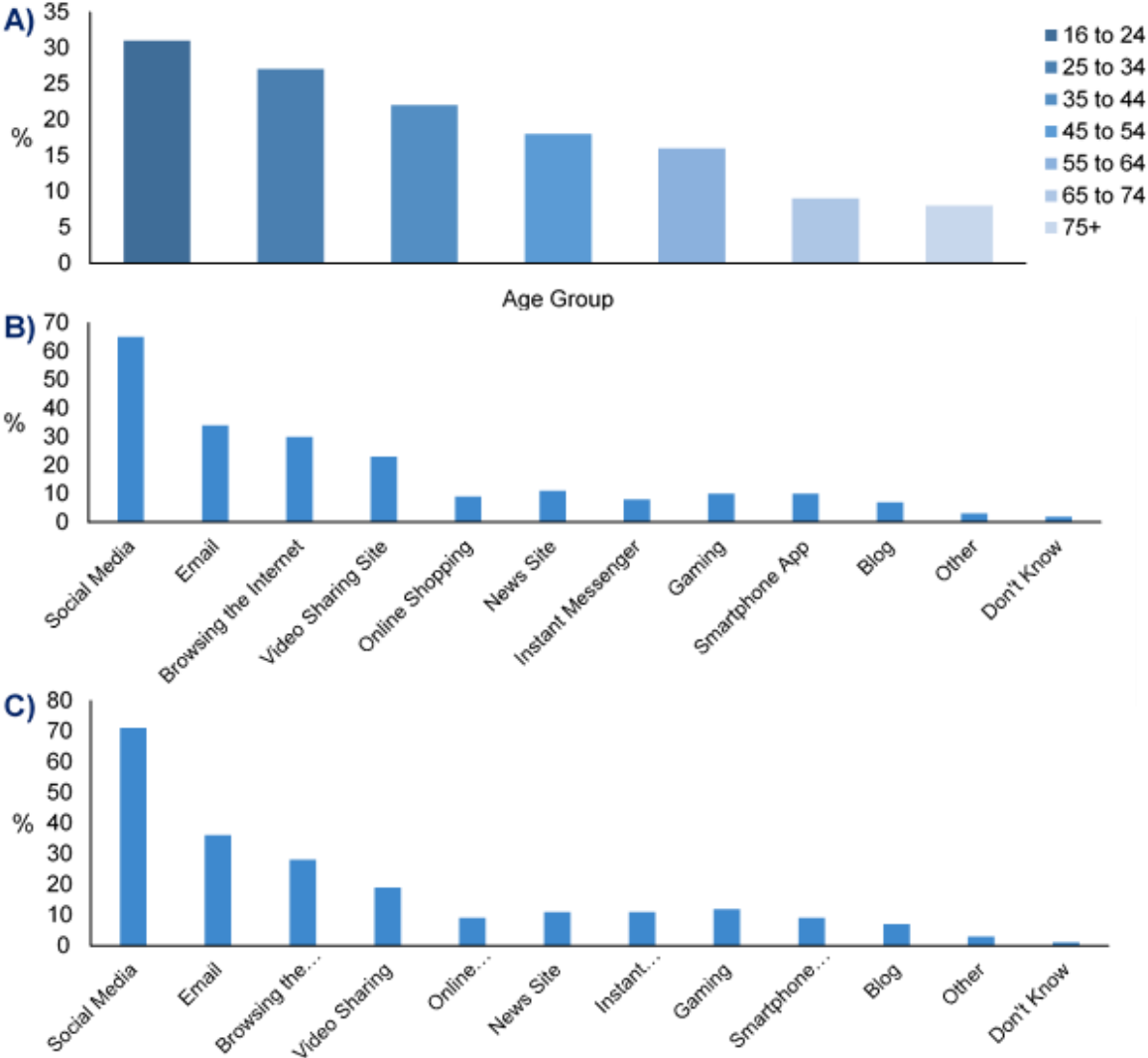


Figure 4. A) % of respondents who had experienced online harm relating to content B) Places where online harm was experienced by those who had experienced harm relating to content C) Places where online harm was experienced by those who had experienced harm relating to interactions with other users

Source: Kantar Media (2018)

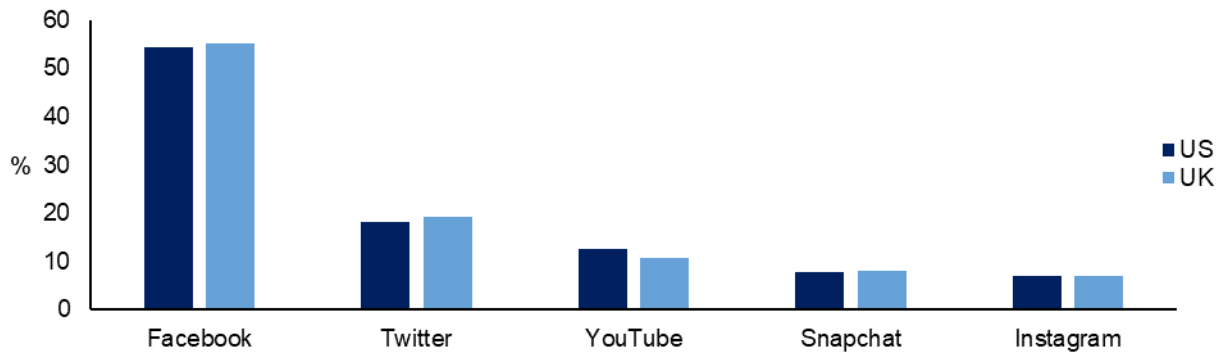


Figure 5. Platform upon which the most bullying, abuse or harassment took place. Sample size 4,094 US respondents and 4,321 UK respondents.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

### 3.3 The Scope of the Harm

According to Pew Research Center (2017), 41% of US adults (based upon a nationally representative sample of 4248 US adults aged 18+), have experienced online harassment and 66% of the respondents had witnessed online harassment. Some of these behaviours may be considered minor and potentially had a minimal effect on the recipient. However, 18% of US respondents reported having been subjected to particularly severe forms of harassment which included physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking or sustained harassment over a long period of time (Pew Research Center 2017, p.3). A large proportion of the sample (62%) believed online harassment to be a major problem, 33% believed it was a minor problem and 5% thought that it was not a problem (p.6). 79% of respondents believed that online services have a responsibility to act when online harassment occurs, and 15% believe that such online platforms should take no responsibility. Some suggestions for interventions include better policies and tools provided by online platforms, stronger online harassment laws (31%) and increased attention from law enforcement (49%). In addition, Pew Research Center reports that 43% of US respondents believe that incidents of online harassment are not treated seriously by law enforcement.

Figure 6 depicts the breakdown of types of online harassment and a comparison of how these figures have increased from 2014 to 2017 (Pew Research Center 2017, p.4). It is worth noting that although the study uses six specific behaviours to define online harassment (offensive name calling; purposeful embarrassment; physical threats; sustained harassment; stalking and sexual harassment), what many people consider to be online harassment can vary considerably and can be dependent on the context. Pew Research Center (2017) found that among the 41% of US respondents who had suffered one of the six behaviours, 36% felt that their experience did not qualify as online harassment, whilst 27% were not sure if they were a victim of online harassment (p.10). There does not appear to be a link between respondents believing themselves to be a

victim of online harassment and the severity of the abuse, for example, 28% of those who had been subject to stalking, sexual harassment, sustained harassment or physical threats did not consider themselves to be victims of online harassment. However, 32% of those who had encountered mild forms of online harassment such as name-calling or being embarrassed did consider themselves to be victims. Figure 6 also shows that younger people are more likely to be the victims of online harassment or may be more likely to report. This may be linked with time spent online (Pew Research Center 2017, p.14).

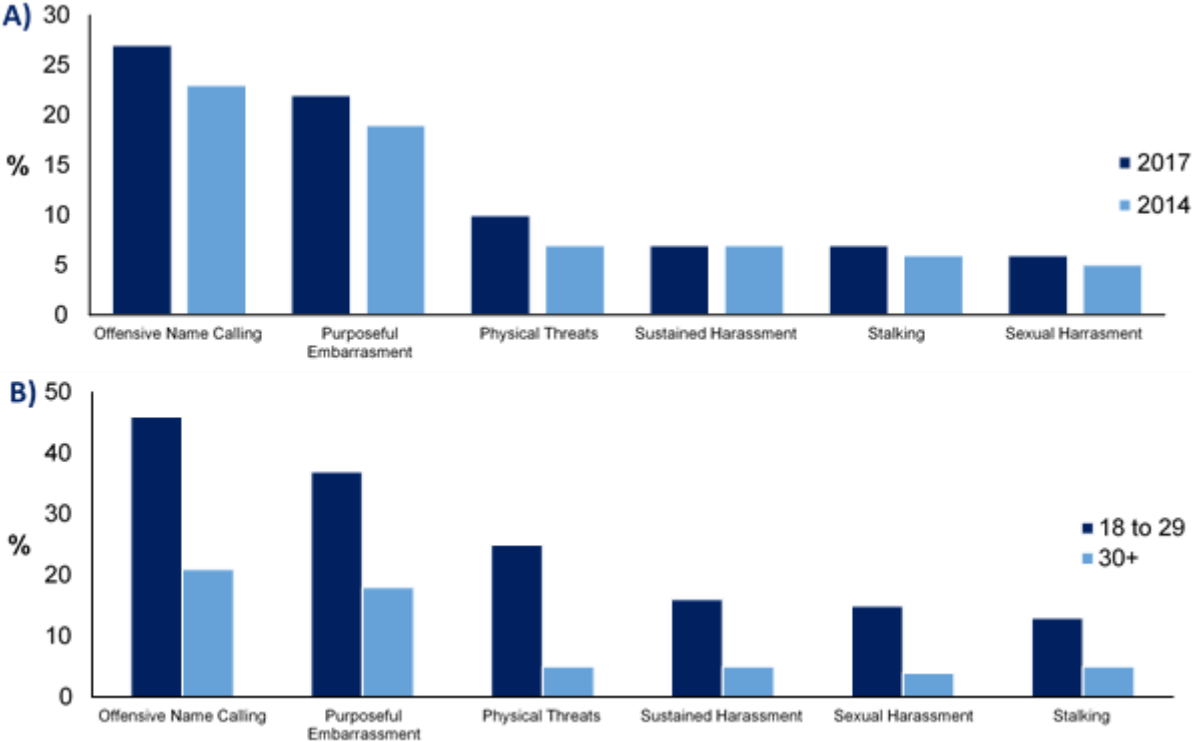


Figure 6. A) Types of harassment suffered by the 41% of US adults who have been subjected to online harassment, B) % of US adults who have experienced online harassment by age.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

According to Pew Research Center (2017) a wide cross section of US respondents have suffered some form of online harassment, and as a result online harassment has become a fact of online life for many people: 49% of 30 to 49 year olds in the US have experienced some form of online harassment, an increase of 10% from 2014. 22% of those aged 55+ have suffered similarly, an increase of 5% from 2014.

### 3.4 Are certain groups/individuals more likely to be victims than others?

The Pew Research Centre findings illustrated in Figure 7 make it clear that individuals are targeted for a variety of reasons, the most prominent being their political views (14%), followed by physical appearance (9%).

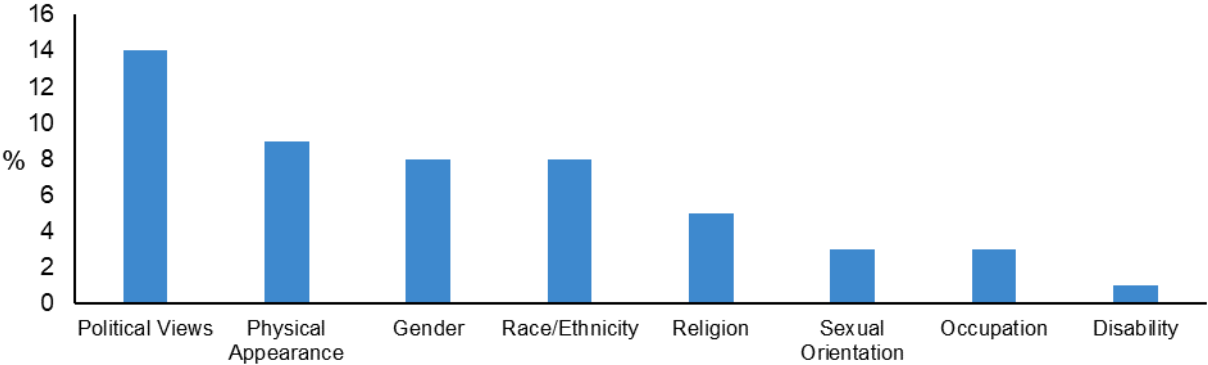


Figure 7: % of US adults who have experienced online harassment on the basis of the following.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

#### Gender

The Pew Research Center (2017) research suggests that men and women experience online harassment in different ways. Men are more likely to be victims of online harassment, in that 44% of US men, compared to 37% of US women, have experienced one of the six behaviours employed in the research to define online harassment. In general, men are also more likely to be subject to offensive name calling (30% vs 23%) and physical threats (12% vs 8%), whereas women are more likely to have suffered some form of sexualised harassment online: 21% of women age 18 to 29 report being harassed sexually online, which is more than twice the number of men in the same age group (9%) (p. 7).

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2017), cyber violence against women and girls is a growing problem. Research from the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) suggests that 1 in 10 women have already experienced some form of cyber violence by the time they are 15.

*The European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) note that cyber violence against women has not been fully conceptualised and there has been no EU wide survey on the prevalence and harms of cyber violence against women and very limited research at national level and within EU Member States.*

Further research sources suggest that women are more likely to be the victims of certain types of online harassment. A survey of more than 9000 German internet users found, for example, that women were significantly more likely to be victims of online sexual harassment and cyberstalking, and that these forms of harassment were more traumatic than other types of harassment (Staude-Muller et al., 2012). This is corroborated by the Pew Research Center (2017) research as noted above, even though harassment levels amongst men were slightly higher for certain types of harassment such as offensive name calling. Research by Maple et al. (2011) also suggests that the harm caused by online harassment and cyber stalking is experienced differently by men and women.

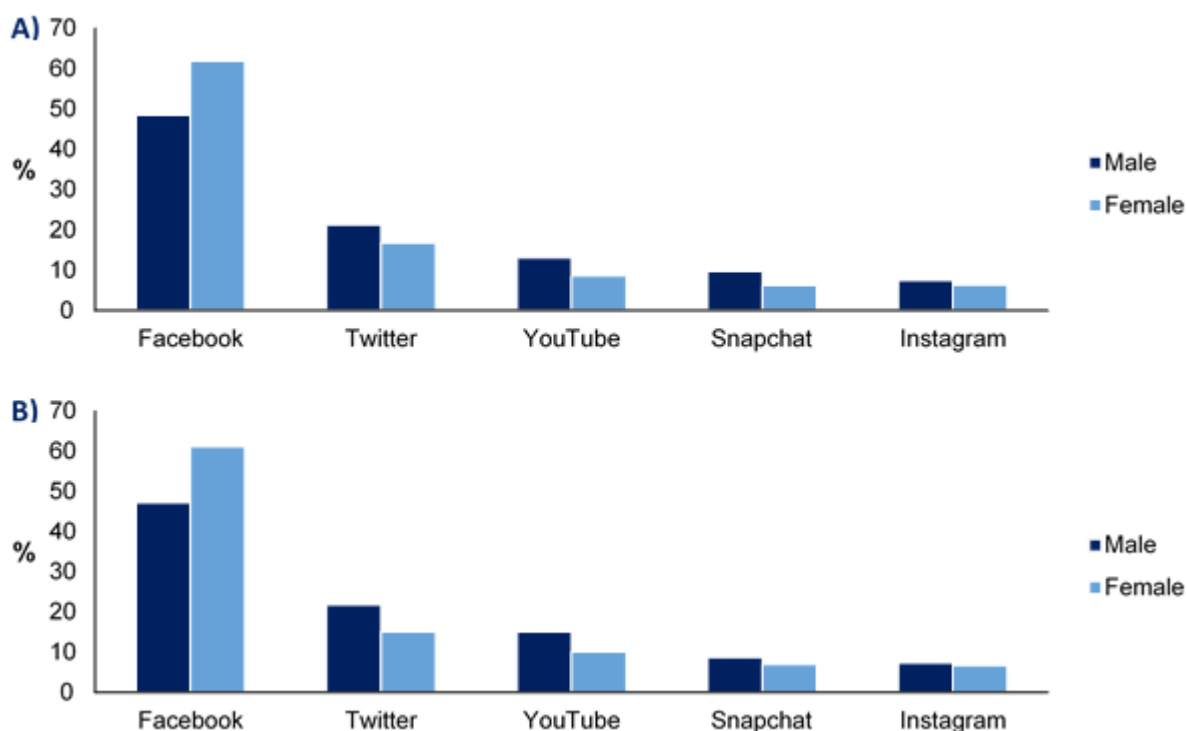


Figure 8. Online abuse, bullying or harassment by social media platform and gender in A) the UK and B) the US.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

Research from the European Institute for Gender Equality suggests that certain types of online harassment can be a “continuum of offline violence” (2017, p. 1). It has been

recognised that cyberstalking, for example, often follows a similar pattern to stalking in the real world which is enabled through the medium of technology (Burney, 2009). Cyberstalking will be discussed more fully later in section 5. Revenge pornography and image based abuse will be considered in section 6.

Attitudes to online harm also appear to vary by gender. Men and women have differing views regarding the extent to which online harassment is a problem: 70% of US women believe online harassment is a major problem, in comparison to 54% of men (Pew Research Center 2017, p.7). According to the same study, men are more likely to believe that improved policies drawn up by online companies are the most effective way of dealing with the issue (39% of men vs 32% of women), whereas women are more likely to believe that stronger legislation against online harassment would be the most effective approach (36% vs 24%).

According to the Cybersmile Study, women are more likely to be victimised on Facebook in both the UK and the US, whereas men are more likely to be victimised across the other platforms (Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram), although the gender differences are less pronounced (figure 8).

## Age

Figure 9 describes the Cybersmile Study of the age groups most likely to have been victimised on a social media platform. US and UK respondents identified Facebook as the social media platform upon which the most online abuse, bullying or harassment takes place (with 45.6% of 18 to 24s reporting some form of harassment on Facebook compared to 18.3% on Twitter, for example). However, as this study does not differentiate between types of harm, it is difficult to ascertain exactly which types of online harassment are included and how this is defined.

Although Facebook has a higher percentage of online abuse across the age ranges, it is interesting to note that a lower percentage of people age 18 to 24 have suffered online abuse than all other age groups in both the US (Figure 9: Table B) and UK (Figure 9: Table A) samples. The highest percentage levels of online abuse on Facebook were amongst the 25 to 34 age group in the UK and the 55 to 64 age group in the US.

The highest percentage levels of online abuse on Twitter were experienced by the 45 to 54 age group in the UK sample, and the 35 to 44 age group in the US sample. However, percentage levels of abuse among all age groups were very similar.

On YouTube the most abuse was seen amongst the youngest age groups in both the US and UK (18% and 13.3% respectively). Surprisingly the second highest levels of abuse were seen amongst the oldest age group (65+) in the UK (12.7%). In the US all other age groups suffered similar levels of abuse on YouTube.

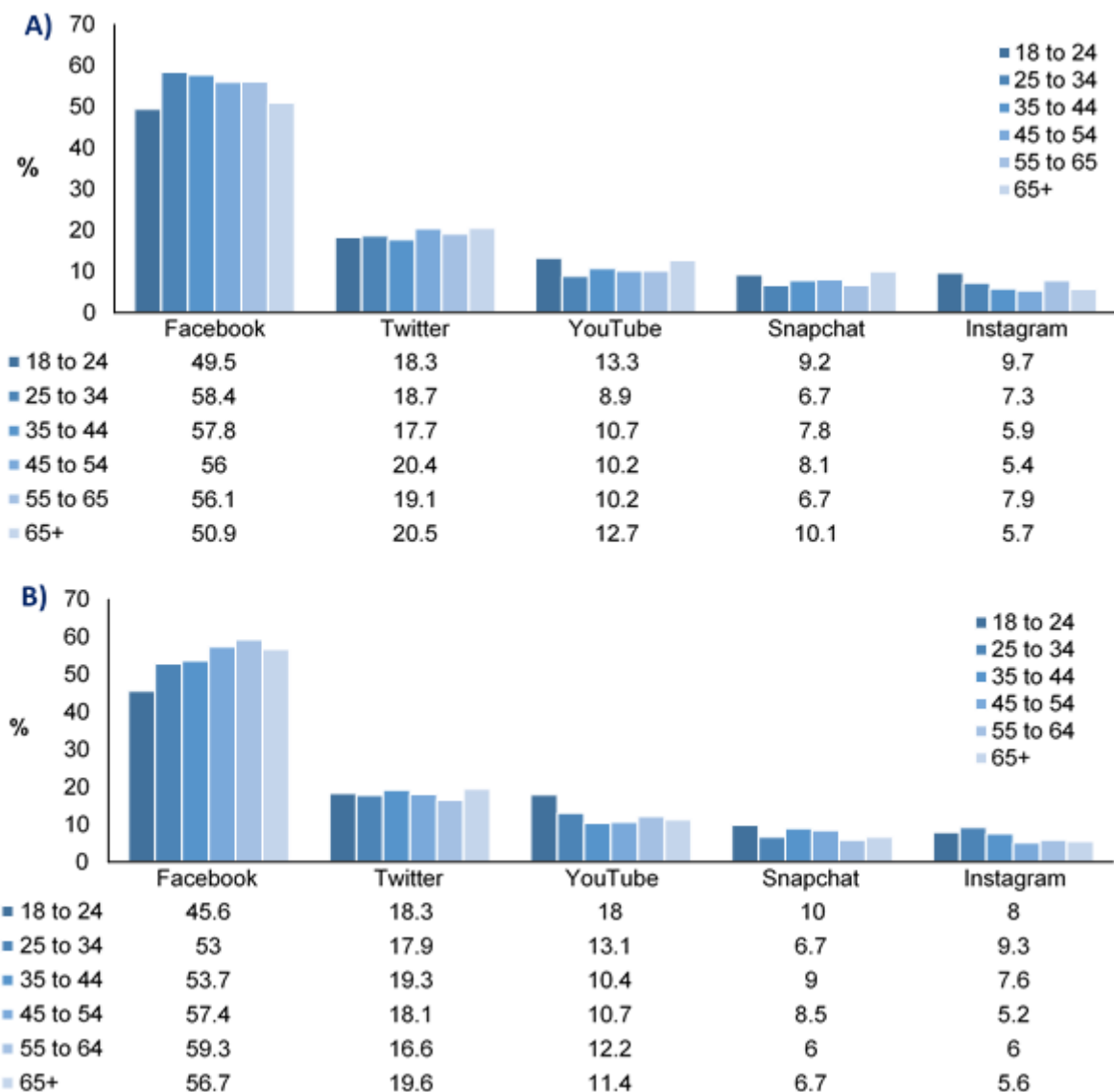


Figure 9. Online abuse, bullying or harassment by social media platform and age in the (A) UK and (B) US.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

One of the most surprising results from the Cybersmile survey (2017) was that the highest percentage of online abuse on Snapchat was experienced by those aged 65+ in the UK sample, but amongst the youngest age group in the US sample. However, in both the US and UK sample the 65+ age group was the age group with the smallest sample size, and in both surveys, there was greater variance in this age group than in younger adult age groups. Therefore, given the marginal differences across age groups, lack of comparability across age groups, and lack of understanding as to why 65+ are reporting more harassment via Snapchat, this finding is questionable and should be treated with some scepticism.



On Instagram the highest percentage of abuse was reported by the 18 to 24 age group (9.7%) in the UK sample and the 25 to 34 age group within the US sample (9.3%). However, there was not a significant difference in percentage levels across all age groups with the lowest group reporting 5.7% (65+) in the UK sample and 5.6% (65+) being the lowest in the US sample.

It is clear from the figures provided across both the UK and US samples that there is little disparity between the levels of abuse suffered by each age group across different social media platforms. Although generally there are higher abuse rates reported for Facebook, there is no substantial difference in the level of abuse experienced on Facebook across the age groups.

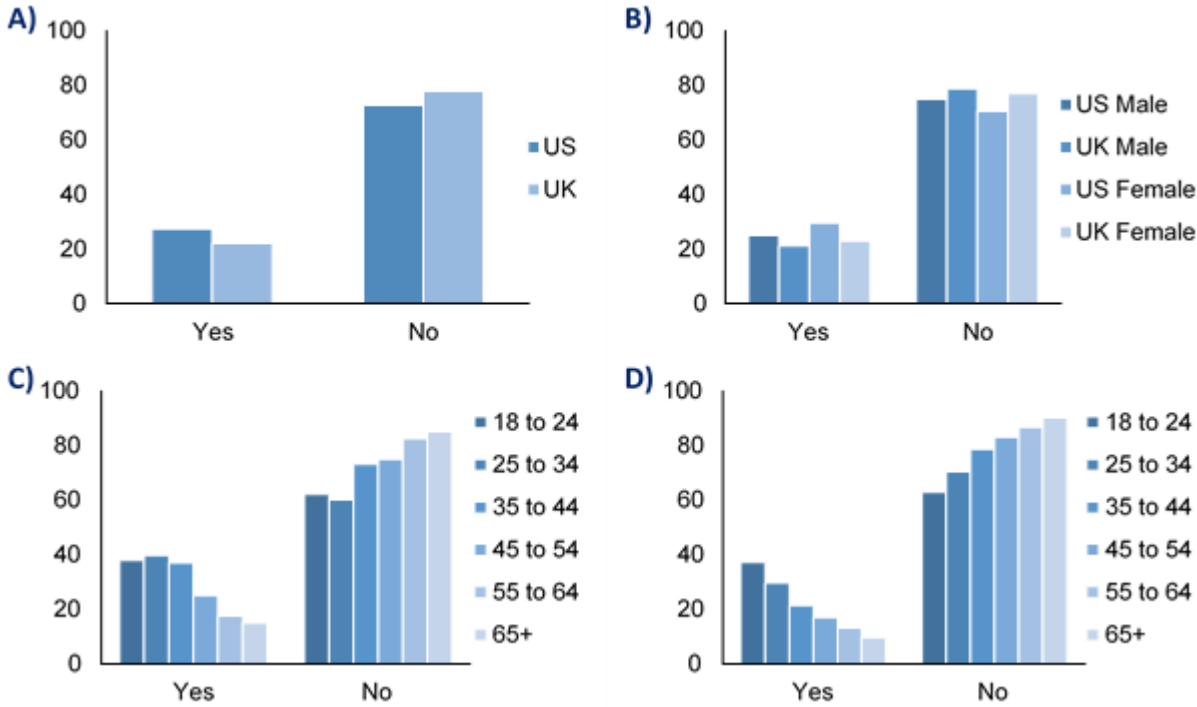


Figure 10. A) % of respondents who had witnessed homophobic abuse online, B) % of respondents who have witnessed homophobic abuse online by gender, and respondents who have witnessed homophobic abuse online by age in C) the US and D) the UK.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

**Sexual Orientation**

Similar proportions of UK and US respondents had witnessed homophobic online abuse. This is also the case when the gender of those witnessing the online homophobic abuse is considered, as the Cybersmile findings set out in Figure 10 demonstrate.

The largest group of respondents to have witnessed homophobic abuse amongst the US sample was the 25 to 34 age group (39.8%). The two youngest age groups had witnessed the most abuse, followed by the middle two age groups, with the two older age groups having witnessed less abuse. This is slightly different to the UK sample in which there is a steady decline in levels of abuse witnessed as age increases, from 37.1 % of 18 to 24 year olds to 9.7% of those aged 65+

**Religion**

Respondents from the US sample were slightly more likely to witness online abuse based on religion than those from the UK sample (28.6% vs 23%). Nevertheless, these figures are still comparable and are very similar to the previous figures outlined regarding the percentage of respondents who had witnessed homophobic abuse.

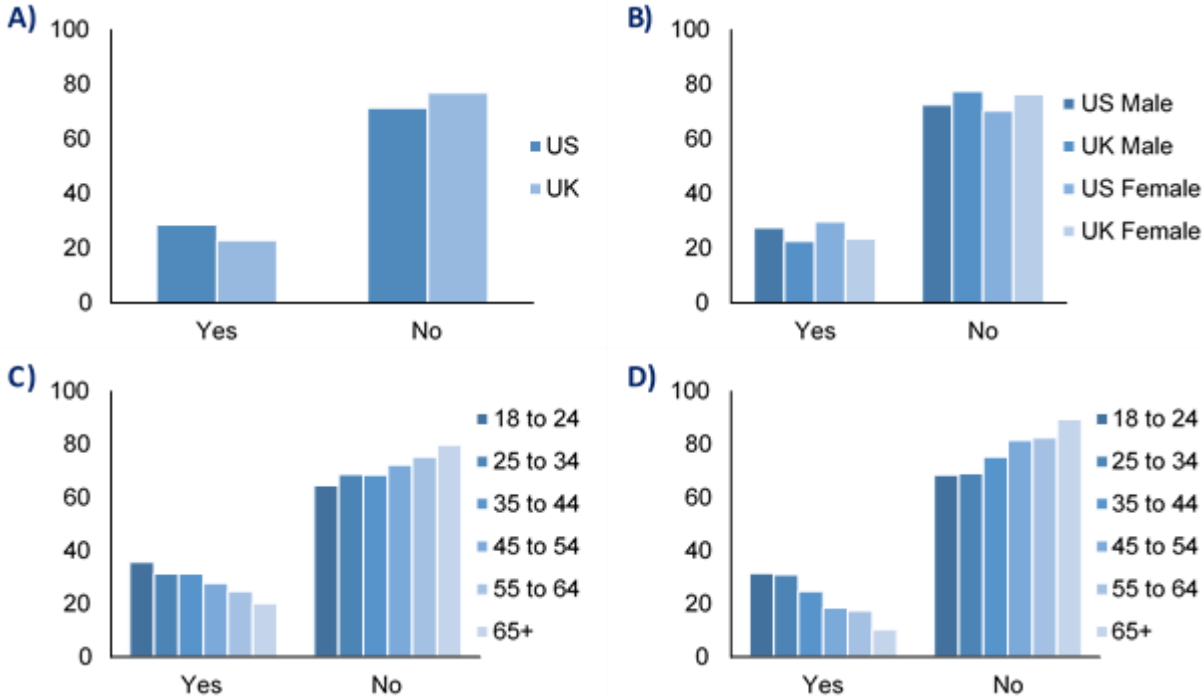


Figure 11. A) % of Respondents who had witnessed Religion Based Abuse Online, B) % of Respondents who have witnessed Religion Based Abuse Online by Gender and Respondents who have witnessed Religion Based Abuse Online by Age C) in the US and D) in the UK.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

As can be seen in Figure 11 there is not a particularly large difference between the number of respondents who have witnessed online abuse on the basis of religion when the gender of the respondents is taken into account: 27.5 % of US men have witnessed

such abuse compared to 22.5% of UK males, and 29.7% of US women have witnessed religion-based abuse compared with 23.6% of UK women.

When age is taken into consideration it is evident that a higher percentage of 18 to 25 year olds have witnessed online harassment based on religion than any other age group. For both the US and UK samples there is a steady decrease in the level of abuse witnessed as the age of respondents increase.

### Race

Findings from the Cybersmile Foundation survey (2017) indicate that a greater proportion of US respondents have witnessed online racial abuse than the UK sample (32.7% v 26.4% respectively). When gender is considered, US women have witnessed more online abuse based on race than any other demographic (35.6%), 8% more than their UK counterparts.

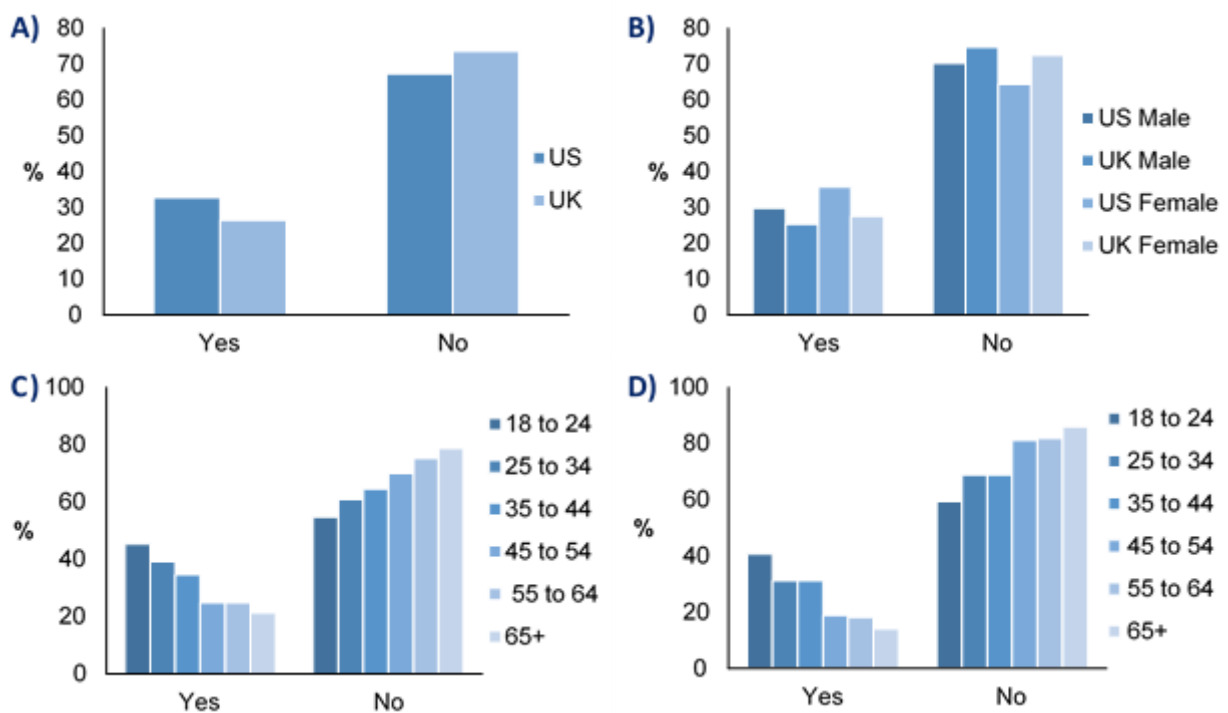


Figure 12. A) % of respondents who had witnessed racist abuse online, B) % of respondents who have witnessed racist abuse online by gender, and % of respondents who have witnessed racist abuse online by age C) in the US and D) in the UK.

Source: Cybersmile (2017)

As can be seen in Figure 12 for both the US and UK samples, the 18 to 24 age group reported witnessing the most online racial abuse (45.2% and 40.6% respectively), with the 65+ age group witnessing the least amount of online racial abuse (21.2% and 14.1%). However, all age groups in the US have reported witnessing more online racial abuse than any of the equivalent UK age groups.

The findings from this research raise some important issues that should be tested in further research before conclusions can be drawn. A full discussion of the impact of online abuse based on protected characteristics such as race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, age and disability can be found in the section of this report considering hate speech.

### 3.5 The Impact of the Harm

The Pew Research Center (2017) study notes that many incidents of online harassment consist of offensive name-calling and attempts by the perpetrator to embarrass the victim, and that to some extent this is accepted as an unfortunate side effect of the Internet age.

Respondents appear to believe that a personal characteristic such as physical appearance (34%), race (23%) or sexual orientation (13%) is most likely to be the cause of the harassment, and respond to the harassment by deleting their profiles, changing usernames or contacting law enforcement.

People who have experienced more severe forms of harassment are more likely to have a stronger reaction. However, the reactions of those who are the victims of more serious forms of online harassment such as threats of physical violence, sustained harassment such as cyberstalking and sexual harassment are varied. Immediately after suffering abuse victims have reported differing consequences such as problems with family and friends and damage to their reputation.

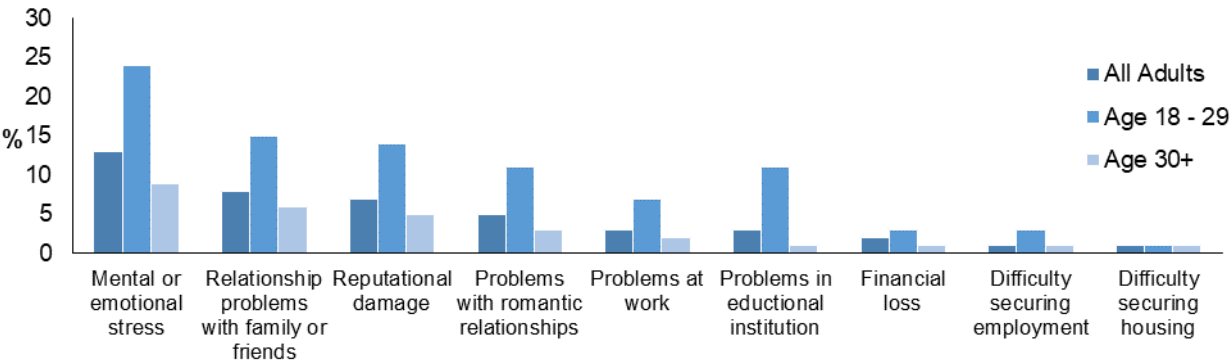


Figure 13. % of US adults who have experienced the following types of harm.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

Repercussions of online harassment can extend into the offline world as demonstrated by Figure 13. Young people appear to experience the impact of online harassment at higher levels, 24% of 18 to 29 year olds have experienced mental or emotional stress as a result of online harassment, a further 15% report difficulties with friends and family, 14% state that their reputation has been damaged, 11% have had problems with relationships or at school and 7% have had problems at work (Pew Research Center 2017, p.20). These experiences are likely to be reported regardless of the specific type of online harm that an individual has experienced.

Women are more likely to be negatively affected by online harassment, and of those who had fallen victim to harassment, 35% found their most recent experience to be “extremely” or “very” upsetting as opposed to 16% of men. 12% of those who had suffered online harassment feared for their personal safety (Pew Research Center 2017, p.28).

The Kantar Media Study (2018) did not provide a specific breakdown of the impact of the harm in terms of the effect upon victims, but did provide some data on the overall impact of the harm. For example, regarding harm caused by interactions with other users 18% reported a moderately annoying impact (1 on a scale of 1 to 5) while 24% reported a very harmful impact (5 on a scale of 1 to 5). With regard to harm caused by content 20% reported a moderately annoying impact and 18% reported a very harmful impact (Kantar Media, 2018, p.21).

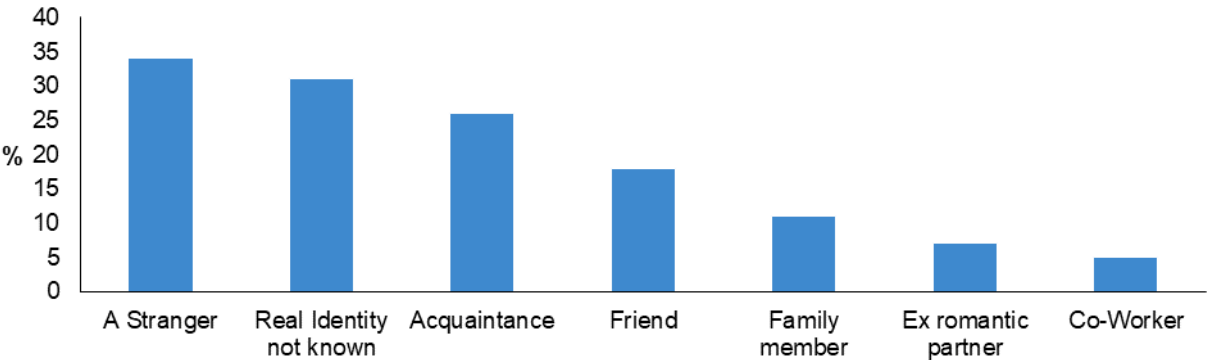


Figure 14. Identity of the perpetrators of online harassment, 2017 data.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

### Perpetrator of the online harassment

Respondents reported that in 34% of cases the perpetrators of online harassment were strangers (see Figure 14). It should be noted that there can be multiple perpetrators: 32% of those harassed reported that multiple people were involved, whereas 49% stated that one individual was involved and 18% were not sure (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 25).

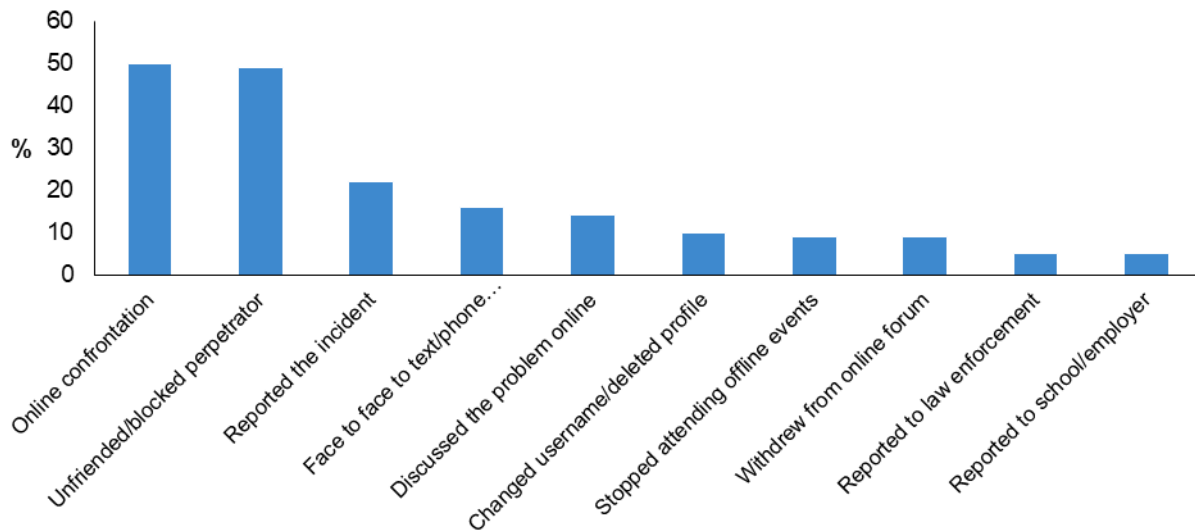


Figure 15. Responses to online harassment, 2017 data.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

### Reaction to online harassment

Regardless of whether an individual chose to ignore or respond to online harassment most appeared to be satisfied with their decision and stated that it had improved the situation. Some US respondents sought support from friends and family (29%), others stated that they received support from other people online (17%), and a minority (5%) sought help from a counsellor or mental health professional, a colleague or employer (4%) and only 3% sought legal assistance. However, 56% did not seek or receive support and men were less likely to receive or seek support than women (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 27).

### Witnessing Online Harassment

A substantial proportion of US respondents (66%) have witnessed online harassment (65% in 2014), 53% of adults stated that they have seen someone being subjected to offensive name calling and 43% had witnessed someone being purposefully embarrassed, 25% of US respondents stated they had seen someone physically threatened online, 18% had witnessed sexual harassment and 15% had witnessed online stalking (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 32).

Younger US adults are more likely to witness online harassment than older adults (Figure 16). As can be seen in Figure 16 there is a considerable difference between the level of online harassment witnessed among different age groups. Over half of those aged 18 to 29 have witnessed others being subjected to offensive name calling and purposeful embarrassment (arguably behaviours best characterised as trolling - see below).

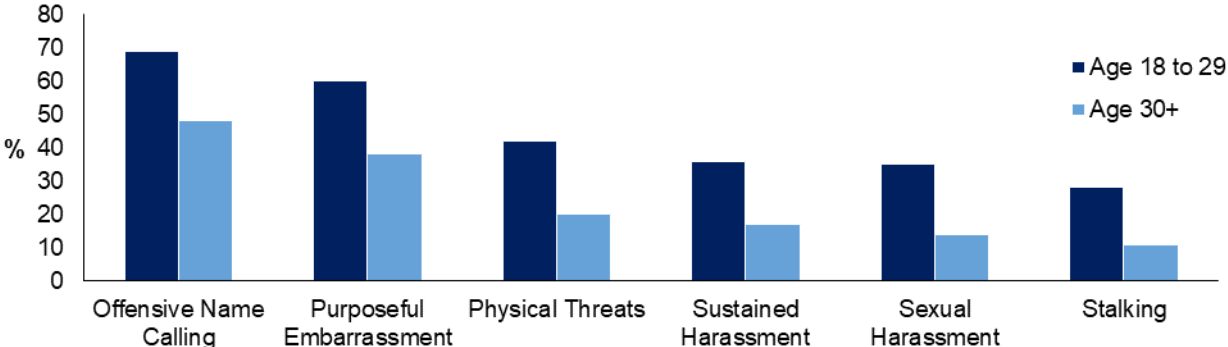


Figure 16. % of US adults who have witnessed harassment of others, by age.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

**Intervening in the harassment of others**

The Pew Research Centre research suggests that 30% of US adults have intervened when witnessing the online harassment of others, Figure 17 demonstrates the type of intervention. Sometimes respondents felt that intervening is not particularly effective as one commented:

*“I have witnessed people on Facebook call others ugly names, make racist and sexist comments, and denigrate specific religion and groups on many occasions. I usually report it but Facebook rarely if ever does anything. I also report fake profiles and Facebook ignores that too”*

*Pew Research Center (2017, p. 35)*

27% of US respondents stated that witnessing the online harassment of others has resulted in them avoiding posting something online, whereas 28% have stated that it has made them reconsider their own privacy settings, 16% have changed information on their own profiles and 13% have stopped using a specific online service after witnessing online harassment (p. 36).

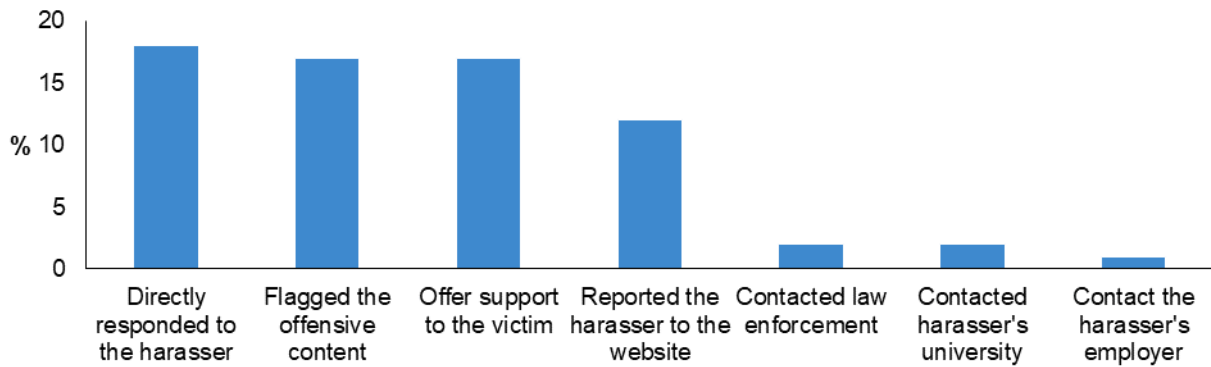


Figure 17. Types of interventions when witnessing others being harassed, 2017 data.

Source: Pew Research Centre (2017)

It should be noted that witnessing the online harassment of others can cause indirect harm and anxiety. A small proportion of US adults (8%) reported feeling very anxious after witnessing online abuse and reported concern regarding similar treatment, and 26% stated that they felt mildly anxious. However, it is interesting to note that those who have themselves been the victim of online harassment are more likely to be affected if they witness the abuse and harassment of others: 65% of those who had suffered severe forms of harassment stated that they felt a certain level of anxiety after witnessing others being harassed, with 21% indicating that witnessing the behaviour had made them “very anxious” (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 37).

The research conducted by Kantar media (2018) suggests that 1 in 5 internet users have reported offensive, disturbing or harmful content, and that younger adults are more likely to do so. Of those who did report such content, 49% were 16 to 34, 35% were 35 to 54 and 16% were 55+ (Kantar Media 2018, p. 31). Kantar Media suggest that higher reporting levels amongst younger users can be partially explained by the fact that they are more likely to have experienced harmful behaviour online and may have a greater degree of knowledge regarding reporting functions. When asked what types of content respondents would report if they encountered it, 40% stated they would report harassment or bullying and 39% stated they would report threats (p. 33).

### Online Harassment and Free Speech

Respondents are divided regarding the balance between freedom of speech and online behaviour which becomes abusive. Research suggests that 45% of US respondents felt that freedom of speech should take priority whereas 53% felt that online safety is more important. The same study reported that 56% believed offensive online content is taken too seriously whereas 43% believe that offensive online speech is not taken seriously enough. Those who believe that it is taken too seriously are predominantly young men; 73% of men aged 18 to 29 believe that offensive content is taken too seriously (Pew Research Center 2017, p. 7).



The research by Kantar Media (2018) reports mixed views on the need for online regulation, with over half (52%) of the sample stating that more regulation is required on social media platforms (Kantar Media 2018, p. 39). However, most respondents believe that the benefits of going online outweigh the risks (p.39).

### 3.6 Summary

- Online harassment encompasses a broad spectrum of abusive behaviours;
- The main types of harassment encountered are; -
  - Offensive name calling
  - Purposeful embarrassment
  - Physical Threats
  - Sustained Harassment
  - Stalking
  - Sexual Harassment
- Some people censor their own online posts for fear of online harassment;
- Social media platforms are the most common media for online harassment;
- Men are more likely to report online harassment within an online gaming environment;
- Of the social media platforms Facebook was reported as the platform upon which most abuse took place, but more research is needed to validate this finding;
- Almost half of US adults have been victims of online harassment and almost two thirds have witnessed the harassment of others;
- Many US adults (62% - Pew Research Center, 2017) believe being harassed or bullied online is a major problem;
- A large proportion of US adults (79% - Pew Research Centre, 2017) believe that online services have a responsibility to protect their users. Some adults (47% - Pew Research Centre, 2017) believe that law enforcement does not take online harassment seriously;
- Research suggests that online harassment has increased considerably since 2014;
- Younger adults are more likely to be victims of online harassment;
- The following are the primary motivations for online harassment (in descending order): -
  - Political Views
  - Physical Appearance
  - Gender
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Sexual Orientation
  - Occupation
  - Disability
- In general, men are more likely to be victims of offensive name calling and physical threats, whereas women are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment;
- Online harassment can have a lasting impact on those who are victimised. Victims reported suffering from the following: -

- Mental or emotional stress
  - Relationship problems with family and friends
  - Reputational damage
  - Problems with romantic relationships
  - Problems at work
  - Problems in their educational establishment
  - Financial loss
  - Difficulty securing employment
  - Difficulty securing housing
- Half of US adults (50%) victimised confronted the perpetrator online and almost half (49%) unfriended or blocked the perpetrator of the harassment (Pew Research Center, 2017);
  - Women are more likely to report online harassment as being “extremely” or “very” upsetting;
  - Only a third (30%) of US adults have intervened when witnessing the harassment of others (Pew Research Center, 2017);
  - In order to properly assess prevalence rates, research needs to take a more consistent approach in terms of definitions, questions and measurements employed and there is a lack of research in the UK;
  - Research needs to further investigate the harms generally, and mental health harms specifically, that can result from being a victim of online harassment;
  - There is very little research on victim diversity, and more is needed – such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability – to see whether certain groups are more likely to be victims of such behaviour;

## 4. Cyberbullying and Trolling

Cyberbullying has been defined as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out in an electronic context (for example using e-mail, instant messaging, text messages, social media networks, chat rooms, online games, and/or websites) against a person who cannot easily defend themselves (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder & Lattanner, 2014). Most studies on cyberbullying have focused on children and adolescents and less research has been conducted into the prevalence and impact of cyberbullying among adults. However, in recent years a growing body of research indicates that young adults commonly engage in hurtful online behaviour as both perpetrators and victims (Ramos & Bennett, 2016) and that cyberbullying does not stop after school but can continue into adulthood.

In 2007 Willard proposed an 8 category typology of cyberbullying to characterize the activities of cyberbullies and the experience of their victims. As can be seen in Table 2 there is considerable overlap between online harassment, cyberstalking and trolling.

There are several quite specific studies which consider adult cyberbullying in particular contexts, for example Kowalski, Toth and Morgan (2018) consider cyberbullying in the workplace and Lee (2017) considers the impact of cyberbullying amongst African American young adults. However, there is little research on cyberbullying which specifically considers adults in general, as most of the cyberbullying studies consider the effect of cyberbullying on children.

*Table 2. 8 Categories of cyberbullying and the corresponding experiences.*

Category	Experience
<b>Flaming</b>	Engaging in online fighting where users directly target one another with angry or irritated messages, often featuring vulgar language
<b>Denigration</b>	Making comments about an individuals' characters or behaviours that are designed to harm their reputation, friendships or social positions, such as saying that someone is homosexual or making fun of them
<b>Impersonation</b>	Falsely posting as other people in order to harm their reputation or social status by logging into their existing accounts to post messages or by creating fake accounts to masquerade as that person
<b>Outing</b>	Posting real personal information about individuals to embarrass them, such as sending images of them in stages of undress, posting who they are attracted to, or information about homosexual preferences which are not known to the general public
<b>Trickery</b>	Convincing individuals to provide personal information about themselves in what they think is a personal conversation, which is then revealed to the general public
<b>Exclusion</b>	Intentionally keeping others from joining an online group, such as a network on Facebook or some other site online
<b>Harassment</b>	The repeated distribution of cruel or mean messages to a person in order to embarrass or annoy them
<b>Stalking</b>	The use of repeated and intense harassing messages that involve threats or cause the recipient to feel fear for their personal safety

Cyberbullying in the workplace is the most widely researched topic regarding adults and as a result this section will focus on the phenomenon which is arguably an extension of general workplace harassment. As noted above cyberbullying is a form of online harassment, this section provides a general overview.

There is limited research addressing trolling, however Sanfilippo, Yang and Fichman provide a useful overview of this behaviour: - "Trolling behaviours are extremely diverse, varying by context, tactics, motivations, and impact," (2017, p. 1). As a result, many of the behaviours which would be considered trolling can also be considered online harassment, such as offensive name calling or purposeful embarrassment.

There are considerable difficulties in attempting to find an accepted definition of trolling. As can be seen in Table 3 there have been attempts by different researchers to define the phenomenon since 2010.

*Table 3. Proposed definitions of trolling.*

Year	Proposed Definition	Author(s)
2010	“repetitive, intentional, and harmful actions that are undertaken in isolation and under hidden virtual identities, involving violations of Wikipedia policies, and consisting of destructive participation in the community”	(Shachaf & Hara, 2010, p. 1)
2012	“the troll may be subtly or blatantly offensive in order to create an argument or may seek to lure others into useless circular discussion”	(Binns, 2012, p. 548)
2013	“sending of provocative messages via a communications platform for the entertainment of oneself, others, or both” “Trolling is the deliberate (perceived) use of impoliteness/aggression, deception and/or manipulation in CMC to create a context conducive to triggering or antagonising conflict, typically for amusement’s sake”	(Bishop, 2013, p. 302) (Hardaker, 2013, p. 79)
2014	“Online trolling is the practice of behaving in a deceptive, destructive, or disruptive manner in a social setting on the Internet with no apparent instrumental purpose”	(Buckels et al., 2014, p. 1)
2016	“Trolling’ refers to a specific type of malicious online behaviour, intended to disrupt interactions, aggravate interactional partners and lure them into fruitless argumentation”	(Coles & West, 2016, p. 233)
2017	“deliberate, deceptive and mischievous attempts that are engineered to elicit a reaction from the target(s), are performed for the benefit of the troll(s) and their followers and may have negative consequences for people and firms involved”  “set of diverse pseudo-sincere behaviours that draw attention, ranging from anger at provocation to appreciation of humour to recognition of serious opinions communicated”	(Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017, p. 1339)  (Sanfilippo et al., 2017, p. 1802).

There does not appear to be a universally accepted definition of trolling. Coles and West (2016) note that trolling is a complex activity which is still far from being clearly defined or understood; many research studies have used different definitions of the behaviour/behaviours and as a result there is little agreement amongst academics as to the true nature of trolling. Most researchers appear to agree that trolling can generally fall into two categories, verbal and behavioural trolling (Cook et al., 2018). Behavioural trolling appears to be restricted to the gaming community and as a result is outside the scope of this section. There has not been much research conducted into trolling and of the research that has been conducted there are disagreements as to what behaviours should and should not be considered trolling.

#### **4.1 The nature of the harm**

According to Unison (2013) cyberbullying can comprise the following: -

- Offensive emails;
- Email threats. This includes emails that appear to be inoffensive, but the implied meaning behind it constitutes bullying. For example, a manager using email to bombard an employee with more work than they can handle, and not treating other employees in the same way;
- Posting defamatory gossip on blogs and social networking sites. It is possible that a person does not immediately experience the bullying directly because they are unaware of what is being posted about them on sites;
- Threats or offensive comments by SMS text messages on mobile phones;
- Harassment by email;
- Posting private and personal details about someone online.

It should be noted that many of these behaviours can be considered generally as online harassment and that differentiating between harassment and bullying is not always straightforward.

#### **4.2 Legislation**

Under the Malicious Communications Act 1998 it is an offence to send an indecent, offensive or threatening letter, electronic communication or other article to another person and under section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 it is a similar offence to send a telephone message that is indecent, offensive or threatening.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 also applies. Under this Act it is a criminal offence to make repeated threats of violence, whether intentionally or not. On conviction a custodial sentence of up to six months or a maximum fine of £5000 could be imposed.

### 4.3 The impact of the harm

There is very little research exploring cyberbullying and trolling amongst adults, Unison (2013) note that victims of cyberbullying can experience the same types of feelings as those who are bullied face to face. These feelings may include fear, intimidation, stress and low morale. However, it has been found that cyberbullying may result in greater stress and lower job satisfaction than conventional bullying, especially given the fact that using IT systems the victim has no control over who sees the bullying behaviour.

This REA found few academic studies which specifically consider the impact of the harm on adults.

### 4.4 The overlap between cyberbullying and trolling

Trolling and cyberbullying do share some similar characteristics, and can both be forms of online harassment, which are influenced by anonymity and online disinhibition (Zezulka and Seigfried- Spellar 2016). The media has frequently presented cyberbullying as a type of trolling (Phillips 2011, Bishop 2014), some academic studies have also made the same comparison (Bishop 2012, Lumsden and Morgan 2012, Bishop 2013, Bishop 2014). However, there are some academic studies which have treated cyberbullying and trolling as separate behaviours (Zezulka and Seigfried- Spellar 2016, Sest and March 2017, Golf-Papez and Veer 2017, Seigfried-Spellar and Chowdhury 2017).

Research suggests that there are some notable differences between cyberbullying and trolling. Trolling behaviour includes the anonymous targeting of strangers, unlike cyberbullying where the perpetrators are often known to the victim (Craker and March 2016). Buckels et al. (2014, p. 1) note: "*the deceptive and pointless disruptive aspects may distinguish trolling from other forms of cyber antisociality, such as cyberbullying*". Arguably in cyberbullying the intent is more straightforward and the behaviours are direct and specifically targeted at an individual (Buckels et al., 2014, Craker & March, 2016). Cyberbullying is also often a repeated activity whereas trolling can include a wider variety of behaviours which may be a single occurrence and may also be without a specific target (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017).

### 4.5 Summary

- Cyberbullying can be defined as aggression that is intentionally and repeatedly carried out in an electronic context against someone who cannot easily defend themselves;
- Most of the research into cyberbullying has considered the nature, scope and effect of cyberbullying on children and adolescents;
- There is a considerable overlap between cyberbullying, online harassment and trolling;
- The main area of research in respect of adult's concerns cyberbullying in the workplace;

- The limited research which has been conducted suggests that some employees experience cyberbullying and that ethnic minority employees may be more likely to be victims; further research is however needed to test this finding;
- The research also suggests that employees with disabilities may be more likely to be cyberbullied than non-disabled employees, further research is however needed to test this finding;
- Cyberbullying has a very similar impact to real world bullying and can result in mental health issues and low job satisfaction;
- Trolling has been and continues to be very difficult to define;
- There is no universally accepted definition of trolling;
- Trolling overlaps considerably with online harassment and cyberbullying;
- The typology of trolls demonstrate that trolls can target people indiscriminately and the subject matter of the trolling can encompass any topic of discussion;
- The impact of trolling is largely unknown and can vary widely from simply being a nuisance to being as pernicious as cyberbullying and systematic online harassment.

## 5. Cyberstalking

### 5.1 Nature of the Harm

The term “cyberstalking” has been used to refer to *“repeated threats or harassment through electronic mail or other computer-based communication that make a reasonable person fear for his or her safety. Cyberstalking not only provides more rapid methods of choosing and identifying victims but also has created more subtle ways of constantly terrorizing individuals of all ages, races, genders, faiths, and sexual orientation.”* (Strawhun et al., 2013, p. 141-2)

Brown et al. acknowledge the difference between cyber harassment and cyberstalking. They state:

***“Cyberharassment is threatening behaviour or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of computer communications; whereas cyberstalking involves the repeated and deliberate use of the Internet and electronic communication tools to frighten, intimidate or harass someone.”***  
(2017:57)

According to the Office of National Statistics 2016 cited in Brown (2017) harassment offences rose by 62% to 112,564 incidents in 2015 in comparison to the previous year. However, given that this figure is the number of reported incidents it is likely that the number of unreported offences is considerably higher.

The European Institute for Gender Equality draw distinctions between cyberstalking and cyber harassment, see Table 4.

*Table 4. The European Institute’s distinctions between cyberstalking and cyber harassment.*

Cyberstalking	Cyber Harassment
<b>Sending emails, text messages or instant messages that are offensive or threatening</b>	Unwanted sexually explicit emails, texts or online messages
<b>Posting offensive comments about the respondent on the Internet</b>	Inappropriate or offensive advances on social networking websites or Internet chat rooms
<b>Sharing intimate photos or videos of the Respondent on the Internet or by mobile phone*</b>	Threats of physical and/or sexual violence by email, text or online messages
<b>To be considered cyberstalking these acts must be repeated and perpetrated by the same person</b>	Hate speech meaning language that denigrates insults, threatens or targets and individual based on their identity (gender) or other traits (such as sexual orientation or disability). **

\*This may also be “revenge pornography” which is covered in detail in a separate section below.

\*\* Hate speech/crime is also considered as a separate topic in a subsequent section and therefore has only been considered very briefly above, with reference to the prevalence of online harassment based on gender, age, sexual orientation, religion and race.

### 5.2 Scope of the Harm

Figure 18 shows the most recent UK figures for cyberstalking based on data collected by The Office of National Statistics.

Spitzberg and Hoobler (2002) found that among a study of 235 students almost a third had reported some form of unwanted online stalking. Paullet et al. (2009) found that 13% of 302 students had been victims of cyberstalking and Kraft and Wang (2010) found that 9% of 471 students had suffered similarly. The most recent study by Maran and Begotti (2019) found that of 229 college students in Italy 46.7% had been victims of cyberstalking and of the 107 respondents affected 61% were female. They also found that most of the stalkers were male and most likely to be a friend or acquaintance. This study reports particularly high rates possibly because a very broad definition of cyberstalking was employed which included any unwanted online sexual advances (p.3).



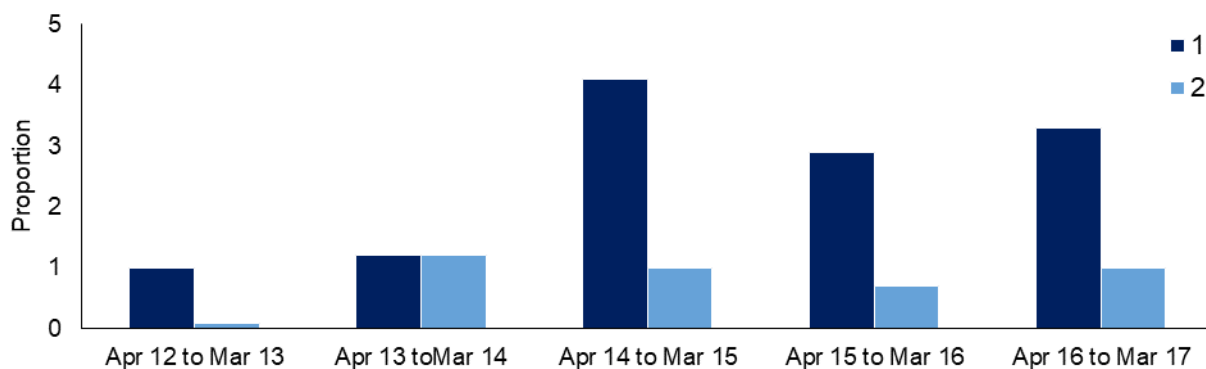


Figure 18. Proportion of women aged 16 to 24 who experienced cyber stalking in the last year, year ending March 2013 to year ending March 2017.

1= Received more than one unwanted email or social network message that was obscene or threatening and caused fear, alarm or distress in the last year, 2= Had personal, obscene or threatening information about themselves put on the internet on more than one occasion, causing fear, alarm or distress in the last year. However, it is noted that these statistics are only provided for female victims of cyberstalking between the ages of 16 and 24.

Source: ONS (2018)

### 5.3 Are certain groups/individuals more likely to be victims than others?

Most of the studies referred to have found a higher proportion of female victims of cyberstalking. However, there is very little research offering any further consideration of the nature of victimisation and the extent to which any specific groups appear to be at greater risk. Tjaden and Thonnes (2000) suggest that one reason that females may be more at risk is that they are more likely to perceive themselves to be victims, while men do not appear to identify certain types of behaviours as cyberstalking (Sheridan et al 2002, Yanowitz 2006). More research is however needed to substantiate these claims.

Also see the above section discussing online harassment generally as cyberstalking is covered in part within this section.

### 5.4 Legislation

The Home Office released a consultation on stalking in 2011 which stated that cyberstalking was one of the variants of harassment which the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 "was designed to, and does, cover" (Home Office 2011, p.5). However, in March 2012 the government recognized the need to legislate specifically to deal with stalking in a way which would encompass cyberstalking. As a result, an amendment was added to the Protections of Freedoms Bill which added two specific stalking offences into the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. S.111 of the Protections of Freedoms Act received Royal Assent on 12 March 2012, and the offences came into

force on 25th November 2012. The new offences included in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 are also considered to encompass behaviour which may be termed cyberstalking.

### 5.5 The Impact of the Harm

Research conducted by Maran and Begotti (2019) indicates that victims of cyberstalking may experience a serious and continued state of anxiety or fear which could cause the person being victimised to change his or her living habits. Jansen van Rensburg (2017) noted that cyberstalking can have an impact on a victim’s mental health and wellbeing and can result in feelings of betrayal, paranoia, hurt, anger, fear, insomnia and depression (Golladay & Holtfreter 2017, Worsley et al., 2017).

The Maran and Begotti (2019) study findings outline the emotional and physical symptoms reported by victims of cyberstalking (see Figure 19). Although this study also investigated whether respondents had previously been victims of real world stalking in addition to cyberstalking, only the online results are presented in Figure 19 as they are most relevant in the context of this report. The impact of online harassment in general has been discussed previously.

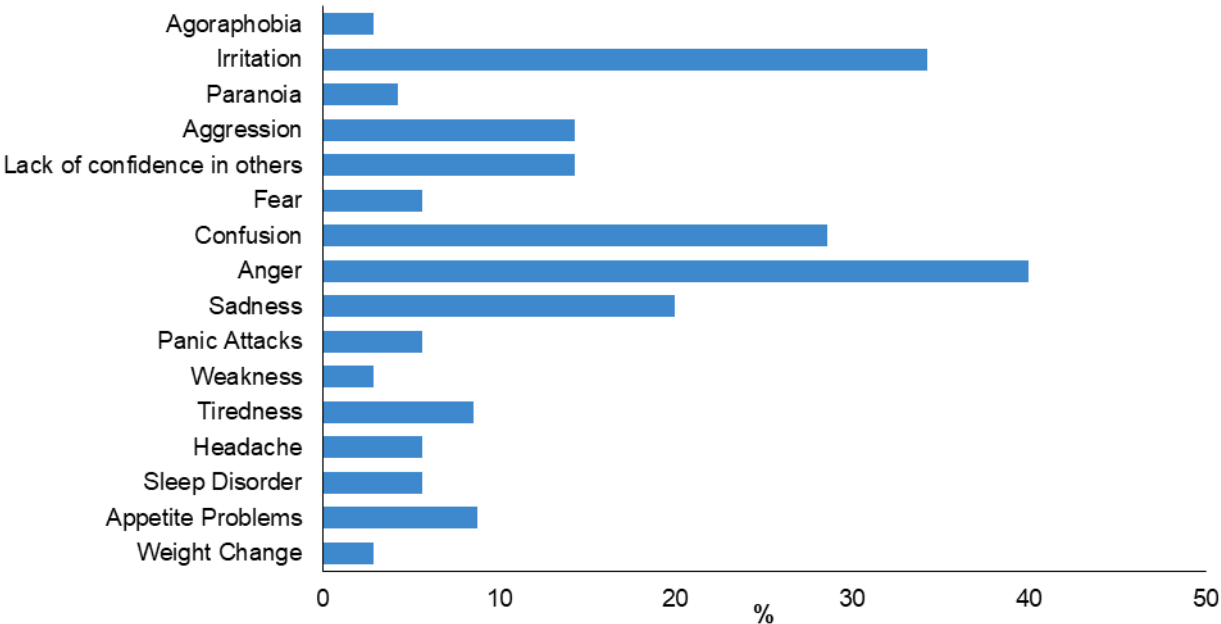


Figure 19. % of respondents displaying physical and emotional symptoms, as a result of cyberstalking.

Source: Maran and Begotti (2019)

Research indicates that due to the persistence of the perpetrators of cyberstalking, some victims of cyberstalking and online harassment generally report feeling powerless and socially isolated (Blauuw 2002). As can be seen in Figure 19 the emotional response described by the largest number of respondents was anger (40%), followed by irritation (34.3%). It is clear however that cyberstalking can have devastating consequences and can result in quite severe anxiety, paranoia and fear. Some victims of cyberstalking change their behaviours as a response of being victimised and decide to either take steps to defend themselves and/or reduce risk of future victimisation, for example some will change their address, phone number and/or email address (Nobles et al 2014). A small proportion of victims have also reported carrying a weapon such as pepper spray. Approximately 10 to 15% of victims stop spending time with friends and family in order to minimise their risk of exposure to victimisation or they begin to stay with loved ones in order to increase feelings of personal safety and protection. According to Nobles et al (2014) those who felt higher degrees of fear were far more likely to engage in higher levels of self-protection.

## 5.6 Summary

- Cyberstalking usually refers to repeated unwanted electronic communication in order to cause harassment, alarm or distress to the victim;
- The number of harassment offences has risen considerably from 2014 to 2015;
- It is likely that the actual number of cyberstalking victims is considerably higher as statistics reflect reported incidents;
- Academic studies report varying levels of cyberstalking from 9% to 46.7% depending upon the definition of cyberstalking used. Those using a broader definition report a higher rate;
- Most victims of cyberstalking are female, most perpetrators are male;
- Offline and online stalking have considerable similarities and some victims of cyberstalking have been stalked in the real world;
- Cyberstalking can cause some victims to live in a serious and continued state of anxiety which can result in the victim substantially changing aspects of their lives;
- Cyberstalking has been found to cause the following:
  - Agoraphobia
  - Irritation
  - Paranoia
  - Aggression
  - Lack of confidence in others
  - Fear
  - Confusion
  - Anger
  - Sadness
  - Panic attacks
  - Weakness
  - Tiredness
  - Headaches
  - Sleep disorders
  - Appetite problems
  - Weight change
- In order to properly assess prevalence rates, research needs to take a more consistent approach in terms of definitions and measurements used;

- More research is needed on victim diversity, such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability, to see whether certain groups are more likely to be victims of such behaviour.

## 6. Revenge pornography and image based abuse

### 6.1 Introduction

Revenge pornography (more commonly known, and referred to in this report, as ‘revenge porn’) is a sub type of online harassment. This section will explore the phenomenon in some detail, looking at: What is meant by revenge porn and how this relates to the broader area of image based sexual abuse; the scope and prevalence of the problem; which groups are more likely to be subjected to revenge porn, concentrating particularly on the gendered nature of the problem; and what types of impacts revenge porn has on its victims. In doing so, we rely quite heavily on papers by McGlynn and colleagues in the UK (e.g. McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a, McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b; and McGlynn, Rackley, & Houghton, 2017) which review and discuss the nature of the problem; large scale surveys performed by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (e.g. CCRI, 2014; Eaton, Jacobs, & Ruvalcaba, 2017) in the US, which seek to quantify prevalence and harms; and a systematic review of 82 studies by Walker & Sleath (2017). Methodological limitations of the studies are noted where appropriate.

### 6.2 The nature of the harm

Revenge porn be a phenomenon that has grown from the practice of sexting (Humbach, 2014). Sexting is broadly defined as the practice of using digital technology to create, send, and receive sexually explicit texts, images or videos, usually taking place between two people in a relationship (Scott & Gavin, 2018). However, sexting may result in a range of harms, perhaps most notably when private sexual images taken by one person and consensually sent to another, are then non-consensually distributed further (Walker & Sleath, 2017). The literature reviewed suggests that this is typically in the context of a relationship breakup, where the spurned partner takes revenge by posting sexual images originally intended for private use only (Scheller, 2015). This is where sexting may cross over into revenge porn.

Walker and Sleath (2017) define revenge pornography as:

***“Non-consensual sharing of sexually explicit images (including photographs) and/or videos, with an underlying motivation linked to revenge” (p. 5).***

Revenge porn images may be shared in different ways but are usually uploaded onto dedicated revenge porn websites (Griffith, 2016) which enable the images to quickly go

viral, often receiving thousands of hits before a victim is even aware that the images have been posted. An “*especially pernicious feature*” of revenge porn is a phenomenon known as ‘*downstream distribution*’, in which the originally posted images are then re-posted by third parties (Souza, 2016, p. 107). In these cases, it is often almost impossible for victims to completely erase the images from the Internet as even if the images are removed from one site they may have spread onto others, been downloaded/saved, or further shared (Kamal & Newman, 2016).

Moreover, the images can be accompanied by a practice known as doxing, in which a victim’s personal contact details – often including their name, social media profile, home address, telephone number and email address – are published alongside the pictures (Franklin, 2014). It could be argued that doxing can be just as, or even more, harmful as the distribution of the original images, as they are easily attributable to the victim, and the victim may be more likely to be subjected to secondary victimisation (Souza, 2016).

Thus, the key characteristics of revenge porn, as traditionally and narrowly defined, are that it:

- contains sexually explicit content, which may include images, photos, and/or videos;
- is usually created with the consent of those depicted;
- is further distributed without the consent of those depicted;
- is distributed online, which may be through email, social media, or on websites;
- is usually perpetrated in the context of a relationship breakdown;
- is usually thought of as perpetrated by males against females;
- is motivated by ‘revenge’.

However, as McGlynn and Rackley (2017a) observe, revenge porn is an overused, convenient, media-friendly phrase, which is problematic as it refers “*to a relatively small, albeit pernicious, subset of private sexual images ... [which] concentrates on the motives of perpetrators, rather on the harms to victim-survivors*” (p. 3). The terms ‘non-consensual pornography’, ‘involuntary pornography’ and ‘cyber rape’ are also sometimes used (usually in literature from the US) to describe the activity of the non-consensual sharing of private sexual images, as is the broader term of ‘image based abuse’, which will be explored further below.

### ***What is image based abuse?***

There is a further distinction to be made between revenge porn and image based abuse or image based sexual abuse (e.g. McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a and 2017b; McGlynn, Rackley, & Houghton, 2017). McGlynn and Rackley (2017a) refer to image based abuse broadly as the “*non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images*” (p. 1). While Walker and Sleath (2017) define image based abuse more explicitly as:

***“The sharing of sexually explicit images (including photographs) and/or videos, without the consent of those depicted, where the motivation is unclear or is not linked to revenge” (p. 5).***

Motives for the non-consensual distribution of images may include for example:

- fun/amusement;
- financial gain;
- notoriety;
- bragging;
- sexual gratification;
- control;
- harassment;
- blackmail/extortion.

A recent large scale (N=3,044) study by Eaton et al. (2017) was conducted in the US, with women and men aged 18-94, about both victimisation and perpetration of revenge porn. Of the 159 (5.2%) of individuals who reported having shared sexually-explicit images of another person without their consent, the most commonly chosen reason, selected by 79% of perpetrators, was: ‘I was just sharing the image(s) with my friends and didn’t intend to hurt the person’. Only 12% reported that they shared images because they were upset with the victim and/or wanted to harm them.

Crucially, as McGlynn and colleagues discuss, the practice of image based abuse includes sexual images that are not only distributed without consent but also *created without consent*. Some examples of image based abuse are described in Table 8.

Although these behaviours are perpetrated in several different ways, McGlynn et al. (2017) argue that they are all overlapping forms of abuse which are based around common characteristics:

- the images are sexual in nature;
- the images are private;
- the images are shared/distributed without consent;
- both perpetration (mostly by men) and victimisation (mostly women) are gendered;
- the nature of the harassment and abuse is sexualised;
- the harms breach rights to dignity, sexual autonomy and sexual expression;
- the abuse is often minimised by the public, in law and policy.

McGlynn and colleagues make an argument for a phenomenon of a ‘continuum of image based abuse’, practices that – taken together – both form our concept of image based sexual abuse, and which also place image-based sexual abuse firmly on a continuum with other forms of sexual violence. In this review the terms revenge porn, non-consensual pornography (NCP), involuntary pornography, and image based abuse were all used, usually in a broad sense and often interchangeably, as they will be here.

Table 5. Examples of Image Based Abuse.

Category	Description of Image Based Abuse
<b>Hacked or stolen images</b>	These may be obtained by gaining illegal access to an individual’s private electronic device. The victim is usually unknown to the perpetrator and the motives are more often financial gain, blackmail, or notoriety. An example of this phenomenon (sometimes referred to as ‘Celebgate’ or ‘The Fapping’) was in 2014 when dozens of female celebrities were victims of a targeted attack to steal their private nude photographs on their iClouds, which were then posted online and went viral (Bustamante, 2017).
<b>‘Upskirting’</b>	This is a phenomenon that involves images being taken surreptitiously up a woman’s skirt and then distributed without consent, usually online, often on pornographic websites (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b). This can be done using smartphones or equipment designed specifically for the purpose, such as cameras that fit in perpetrators shoes. So-called upskirting is often perpetrated on public transport, in supermarkets, and university campuses, with motives often being sexual gratification.
<b>Sexualised Photoshopping</b>	This is when, “without consent, a pornographic image is superimposed onto an individual’s head/body part, such that it looks as if that individual is engaged in the pornographic activity” (McGlynn et al., 2017, p. 33). New sophisticated technology means that it is often impossible to tell that the image is not real and there is now a market that caters to this practice, with websites producing such images. Research suggests that even though such images are not ‘real’ they may have as detrimental effects as more traditional forms of revenge porn.
<b>Sexual extortion/ Sextortion</b>	This is defined “as threats to expose sexual images in order to make a person do something or for other reasons, such as revenge or humiliation” (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016, p. 1). This may happen after a relationship breakup where an ex-partner threatens to share private images to force a reconciliation/humiliate their ex-partner, or where a perpetrator and victim have met online and a sexual image from the victim is used to demand more images/contact.
<b>Recordings of sexual assault and rape</b>	Such recordings, when distributed/shared online, are perhaps one of the most disturbing examples of non-consensually created private sexual images. These are often disseminated across social media and are frequently accompanied by humiliating and degrading comments which blame the victim, causing secondary victimisation on top of the primary victimisation of the attack (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b).
<b>Domestic abuse</b>	Domestic abuse may be a context within which sexual images may be taken without consent and then used to coerce, control, and harass victims, who are often threatened with their distribution if they do not conform to certain behaviours (Citron & Franks, 2014).

### ***Criminalising revenge porn***

In December 2015, revenge porn became illegal in England and Wales. The Criminal Justice and Crime Act (2015) introduced a new offence which, although doesn't mention revenge porn explicitly, is clearly designed to address it (Gillespie, 2015), with Section 33 stating that:

*It is an offence for a person to disclose a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made –*  
*(a) without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film, and*  
*(b) with the intention of causing the individual distress.*

Revenge porn is now punishable by up to two years' imprisonment and encompasses images shared electronically and/or physically, including online and offline images, text messages, and email. As will be seen in the next section there have now been over 200 cases of revenge porn prosecuted in the UK.

### ***Summary***

- Revenge porn is conventionally seen as the non-consensual sharing of sexual images, that have been created with consent, for the purpose of revenge;
- Image based abuse is a broader term, which includes both the non-consensual sharing *and creation* of sexual images, for a variety of motives;
- Motives may include fun, financial gain, notoriety, bragging, sexual gratification, control, harassment, and/or blackmail/extortion;
- Examples of image based abuse may include hacked/stolen images, upskirting, sexualised photoshopping, sextortion, recordings of rape/sexual assaults, and domestic abuse;
- Revenge porn/image based abuse can be accompanied by the practice of doxing where personal contact details about the victim are revealed;
- As of 2015, revenge porn was criminalised in the UK, punishable by up to two years in prison.

### **6.3 The scope of the problem**

Revenge porn has been described as a “disturbingly big business” (McGlynn et al., 2017, p. 29). For example, Hunter Moore's ‘Is Anyone Up?’ revenge porn website, created in 2010 and considered the first of its kind, reportedly received 30 million views and as much as \$13,000 in revenue from advertisers, a month, before it was taken down in 2014 and Moore ultimately indicted by the FBI and given a prison sentence in 2015 (Kamal & Newman, 2016; Bates, 2017). However, many other such sites followed, and it is estimated that there are now approximately 3,000 dedicated revenge porn websites, with over 30 sites operating in the UK (McGlynn et al., 2017).



In the first eight months following the criminalization of revenge porn in England and Wales in December 2015, police in England and Wales received 1,160 reports (Pina, Holland & James, 2017). However, over six in ten (61%) of these reports were not followed up and in the first year just over 200 cases were prosecuted (Crown Prosecution Service, 2016).

Similar to other sexual offences, both online and offline, official figures are likely to underestimate the real scale of the problem, as victims are frequently reluctant to come forward in the first place and there are high attrition rates, which may be due to feelings of embarrassment and/or fears of secondary victimisation by the criminal justice system (Bothamley & Tully, 2018). To get a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem we therefore need to move from official figures to studies, often in the form of anonymous victim surveys, which assess prevalence rates.

A large scale worldwide study, Love, Relationships and Technology, was undertaken by The Futures Company and MSI – who conduct international worldwide – among 9,337 men and women, ages 18 to 54, in December 2013 to January 2014 (Caetano, 2014) asked about their private data sharing habits and online behaviour:

- nearly a third (31%) of people worldwide said they had sent intimate content to someone;
- six in ten (60%) of people who have sent or received intimate content had saved or stored it on their devices, and;
- the vast majority (95%) of those who sent sexual pictures and messages trusted their partners not to share them further.

However, as Caetano (2014) observes, although content may seem private when consensually shared between two adults in a relationship, people need be aware of what may happen if the relationship breaks up or if hackers were to get hold of the images, reiterating the need for caution.

Although the above study looked at the consensual sharing of intimate content it did not assess how many participants had been subjected to further non-consensual sharing. Perhaps the most frequently cited statistics on revenge porn in the literature are those from a study by the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI, 2014)<sup>7</sup> in the US. CCRI is a non-profit organisation started by a victim of NCP, which supports victims, conducts research, and advocates for technological, social, and legal changes to combat online abuse. CCRI hosted an online survey on their website from August 2012 to December 2013, which was filled out by 1,606 self-selected participants. Key findings concerning the scope and prevalence of revenge porn were:

- 23% of participants were victims of revenge porn;
- 83% of revenge porn victims said they had taken nude photos/videos of themselves and shared them with someone else;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cybercivilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RPStatistics.pdf>

- Personal information that was posted with the image(s) included: full name (59%); email Address (26%); social network info/screenshot of social network profile (49%); physical home address (16%); phone number (20%); work Address (14%); Social Security Number (2%);
- 3% of victims have posted revenge porn of someone else.

It should be noted that the prevalence rate in this study of 23% is particularly high in comparison to other studies; this may be due to respondents self-selecting and may not therefore be representative of the general population.

Eaton et al (2017) note that: “*To date, published studies on the prevalence, correlates, and consequences of NCP [NCP] are lacking*” (p. 3). In their large scale study of 3,044 American adults (46.2% male and 53.8% female) who were recruited on Facebook to take part in a survey about sharing nude images online, it was found that:

- 12.8% of all participants reported having been victims of NCP (having had a sexually-explicit image of themselves shared without their consent) *or* having been *threatened* with NCP;
- 8% of all participants reported having been victims of NCP (having had a sexually-explicit image of themselves shared without their consent);
- 4.8% of all participants reported having *only* been threatened with NCP, *without it ever being distributed*;
- 5.2% of all participants reported having perpetrated NCP (having shared a sexually-explicit image of someone without their consent).

However, the authors note that the sample, while large, is not generalizable, as it cannot be applied to non-internet users or those without Facebook accounts. Although it is further observed that as 87% of all Americans use the internet, and 71% of these use Facebook, “*participants in our sample do reflect the typical characteristics of a large number of U.S. adults*” (p. 7).

While in a literature review of 82 studies about revenge porn (which included adults and children) Walker and Sleath (2017) found that non-consensual sharing/forwarding of sexual images was commonplace, although they observe that prevalence rates are very hard to determine, and estimates vary greatly. They attribute this variance to issues such as differences in:

- research of populations examined;
- definitions employed;
- questions/measurements used;
- time periods over which behaviours are measured;
- how prevalence is calculated.

Sharing without consent, for example, has no uniform measure and thus yields different rates. For example, when adults were asked if: “Somebody has disseminated or uploaded onto internet photos or videos with erotic or sexual content from you without your consent,” victimisation rates of 1.1% were found (Gámez-Guadix, Calvete, Orue

and Las Hayas, 2015). However, when adults were asked if their partner had: “Sent to others a private, intimate picture, or video that you shared with him or her without your permission,” higher victimisation rates of 6.3% were found (Marganski & Melander 2015). This illustrates the difference between images being shared without consent in an online context (e.g. with strangers on a website) and with another individual (e.g. by text to an acquaintance).

### Summary

- Few studies have looked at prevalence rates of revenge porn;
- It is hard to assess rates of revenge porn with any accuracy, partly due to methodological and definitional differences, there is very little research in the UK;
- Victims are often reluctant to come forward and report the crime;
- Official figures are likely to underestimate the true scale of the problem;
- Prevalence rates in studies range from 1.1% to 23%.

### 6.4 Are certain groups more likely to be victims of revenge porn?

There is little focus in the literature on victim diversity. In Walker and Sleath’s (2017) literature review, some studies looked at prevalence levels by sexual identity (e.g. Priebe & Svedin, 2012) and type of relationship (e.g. Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013); however, these used adolescent samples so are not within the scope of this review. Research looking at adult populations focuses almost entirely on gender differences, with limited data also identified on age differences.

#### Age of victims

The CCRI (2014) study found that 68% of victims of revenge porn were 18-30 years old and 27% were aged 18-22. While Eaton et al. (2017) grouped victim age into eight different brackets, calculating prevalence rates for each, finding that those between the ages of 34-41 reported the highest levels of lifetime prevalence<sup>8</sup>.

However, when it came to either victimisation *or threats* of NCP, participants between the ages of 26-33 reported the highest levels, with 17.7% of participants in this age group reporting having been victimised by *or* threatened with NCP at some point in their lives. While those between the ages of 18-25 reported the highest levels of perpetration of NCP, with 8.2% of participants reporting having shared sexually-explicit images of another without consent at some point in their lives.

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<sup>8</sup>However, the authors note that as there were very few (N=96) participants aged 74 and over in the sample, the age distribution for participants was skewed.

Table 6. Age and prevalence of victims of non-consensual pornography.

Age group	% who had ever been a victim of NCP
18-25	8.8%
26-33	17.7%
34-41	12.4%
42-49	10%
50-57	7.4%
58-65	4.5%
66-73	2.5%
74-95	3.1%

Source: CCRI (2014)

### Gender of victims

There appears to be widespread agreement in the literature that women are significantly more likely than men to be victims of revenge porn (Bloom, 2014; Kitchen, 2015; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Bates, 2017; Griffith, 2016; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b; McGlynn, et al., 2017; Pina, Holland & James, 2017). Although some revenge porn sites have images of men, they are predominantly of women, who are more frequently viewed and commented on (McGlynn et al., 2017). Bloom (2014) observes that women are far more likely to be pressured to send sexual pictures in the first place, much more likely to be victims of revenge porn and, further to that, victims of online harassment, while those who run revenge porn websites are predominately young males.

Kitchen (2015) estimates that 60-70% of revenge porn victims are women, while the CCRI (2014) study found that 90% of victims were female. This seems to be supported by snapshot data of a revenge porn website over a 28-day period, that found that just 18 (5%) of the 356 new posts featured men, with 95% featuring women (Whitmarsh, 2015, cited in McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b). While in the UK, figures from the Revenge Porn Helpline found that, over a six-month period, 75% of 1800 calls were from women (Government Equalities Office, 2015, cited in McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b).

Eaton et al. (2017) found that women were more likely than men to be victims of NCP and men were more likely to be perpetrators of NCP. This is broken down further in Table 10.

Table 7. Percentage of participants (N=3,044) who have been victims, threatened with (without distribution) or perpetrators of non-consensual pornography.

Gender	Victims or threatened	Victims	Threatened	Perpetrators
Women	15.8%	9.2%	6.6%	3.4%
Men	9.3%	6.6%	2.6%	7.4%
Total	12.8%	8%	4.8%	5.2%

Source: Eaton et al. (2017)

Pina et al (2017) argue that revenge porn is a form of gendered violence predominantly perpetrated against women by men, which negatively affects women more than men. Citron and Franks (2014) also observe that women are more likely to suffer harms as a result of being a victim of revenge porn, due to gender stereotypes, whereas men's sexual activity is generally "*a point of pride*"; thus revenge porn amounts to "*a vicious form of sex discrimination*" (p. 353). Hill (2015) further refers to it as "*a form of "cyber-misogyny": one online example of gendered hatred, harassment and abuse primarily directed towards women and girls*" (p. 117). Similarly, McGlynn and colleagues argue that societal gender disparities, such as sexual double standards, mean that female victims of revenge porn are humiliated, stigmatised and shamed in a way in which men are not (e.g. McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a).

However, it should be noted that there is some dissenting evidence regarding gender. In contrast to the above findings, the literature review by Walker and Sleath (2017) found a broader range of frequencies when it came to gender, finding that males were more likely both to be a perpetrator *and* a victim of revenge porn (except for adolescent female victimisation). They found that:

- The four studies that examined gender differences in adult populations found victimisation rates to be higher for males than females;
- Prevalence rates for adult male victimisation ranged between 1.8%-10.4%;
- Prevalence rates for adult female victimisation ranged between 0.5%-3.3.%.

Thus, the authors conclude that although it is commonly accepted that males are more likely to be perpetrators, and female victims, of revenge porn, this may not always be the case. However, it should be noted that the difference between male and female victimisation was only reported as being significant in two studies.

Drawing on gender-role stereotypes and defensive attribution theory, Scott and Gavin (2018) looked at the influence of perpetrator-victim sex, observer sex, and observer sexting experience, on perceptions of seriousness and responsibility in the context of revenge pornography, 239 university students were asked about their sexting experience and read one of two versions of a hypothetical scenario, responding to questions about their perceptions of the situation described. Contrary to their hypothesis, they found that women were more likely to perceive the situation to be serious when it involved a female perpetrator and a male victim, with men less likely to perceive the situation to be serious when it involved a female perpetrator and a male victim. A possible explanation offered for this is that male participants were more susceptible to gender-role stereotypes, with women identifying with the stereotypical role of the victim as hypothesised, but the overall effect being counteracted by men perceiving the situation to be more serious when it involved a male perpetrator and a female victim. This may be supported by McGlynn and Rackley (2017b), who suggest that men who do not conform to conventional masculine norms or stereotypes may be at greater risk of abuse and harassment than other men.

## **Summary**

- There is an absence of research on victim diversity when it comes to being a victim of revenge porn;
- The overwhelmingly largest body of work in this area is on gender;
- Research has found that between 60-95% of victims are female;
- Little research has been conducted on age, with the two substantial, identified studies differing in their results.

## **6.5 The impact/effect of revenge porn/image based abuse**

The material identified in this REA on the harms of revenge porn tended to be based on individual case studies from, for example, victims who had spoken out about harms experienced in their role as an advocate, in interviews with the media, or from court files. Some examples of harms cited in these studies are detailed below, before the few empirical studies that were identified are looked at.

### ***Psychological/emotional/mental health impacts***

Revenge porn can have numerous detrimental psychological effects and lead to mental health problems. Victims may struggle with: feelings of shame, helplessness, embarrassment, self-blame, anger, guilt, paranoia, isolation, humiliation and powerlessness; along with feeling a loss of integrity, personal dignity, sense of security, self-esteem, self-respect and self-worth (e.g. Franklin, 2014; Kitchen, 2015; Scheller, 2015; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2016; Kamal & Newman, 2016; Bustamante, 2017; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a).

Mental health problems are frequent and commonly include anxiety, panic attacks, depression, anorexia, suicide attempts and committing suicide (e.g. Citron & Franks, 2014; Bates, 2017; Bloom, 2014; Kamal & Newman, 2016; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017a). In their literature review of 82 articles about revenge porn and image based abuse, Walker and Sleath (2017) found that online harassment is associated with depression, anxiety, emotional distress, and substance abuse.

Bustamante (2017) refers to victims as experiencing “mental torture” (p. 364), with these psychological harms often leading to behavioural ones. Victims may feel scared when alone, or be too scared to leave home, not wanting to be seen in public in case they are recognised or being fearful of physical assault as a result of their online victimisation, which will be looked at in the next section.

### ***Online and offline harassment, stalking, and assault***

Kamal and Newman (2016) describe being a victim of revenge porn as a subtype of cyber harassment or cyber stalking. Furthermore, the primary harassment of the images being posted may result in secondary harassment (e.g. Citron & Franks, 2014; Franklin, 2014; D'Amico & Steinberger 2015; Bloom, 2014; Kamal & Newman, 2016; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b; Bustamante, 2017). Victims often receive vicious, malicious, highly

sexualised and personal, abusive and threatening messages, including rape or death threats, which may be sustained and persistent campaigns that amount to online stalking (Citron & Franks, 2014). This is particularly likely when victims have been 'doxed' (Bustamante, 2017).

These messages and threats may be perpetrated through anonymous calls and/or emails directly to the victim, or may be played out on websites where they escalate into a type of 'team sport', where 'cyber-mobs' 'compete to be the most offensive, the most abusive' (Citron & Franks, 2014, p. 5). Some victims may experience further victimisation when people doctor their online photographs (D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015), engaging in what we have described as 'sexual photoshopping'.

Victims may also fear for their physical safety (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017b), with victims of online harassment being more likely to be subjected to real world harms such as sexual violence (Bloom, 2014; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015). In a survey of 1,631 young people who had been victims of threats to expose sexual images ('sextortion'), Wolak and Finkelhor (2016) found that some cases extended beyond sextortion into stalking and/or sexual and/or physical assault. And Kitchen notes that: "Revenge porn harms thousands of victims. They sometimes suffer horrific consequences including committing suicide, being harassed, assaulted, stalked and murdered" (p. 292).

### ***Professional impacts***

Being a victim of revenge porn may have a damaging impact on victims' professional lives, including education, employment, and careers, which has a knock on financial effect (e.g. Citron & Franks, 2014; Bloom 2014; Kitchen, 2015; D'Amico & Steinberger, 2015; Scheller, 2015; Kamal & Newman, 2016; Bustamante, 2017).

Bloom (2014) notes that online sexual photographs can cause problems in victims' careers and in their workplace, affecting their professional reputation, as images may be seen by, or sent to, co-workers and employers. Citron and Franks (2014) further observe that victims may lose their jobs and/or be unable to find work. They note that most employers now do online searches on potential employees, with many rejecting applicants due to their findings, which may include concerns about their lifestyle including inappropriate comments, photographs, videos, and information about them. Employment and income may be further affected if victims withdraw from the online world due to their fear, as this may mean closing blogs or professional networking accounts.

Scheller (2015) argues that the ease of online communication means that revenge porn victims can be followed from job to job "haunted by a fleeting moment memorialized in the digital realm" (p. 553). This may result in victim's changing their names in an effort to make a new start professionally, yet this is not fool proof as images may simply be linked to their new name, thus: "Whether it is from damaged reputations, lost customers, or actual loss of employment, these sexual online pictures can destroy a woman's career" (Bloom, 2014, p. 242).

### *Intangible/abstract effects*

Being a victim of revenge porn can also lead to what Bloom (2014) refers to as less 'tangible' or 'abstract' effects. Some of these are explored by McGlynn and Rackley (2017a; 2017b) and include the violation of personal and bodily integrity; the infringement of dignity and privacy; and inhibition of sexual autonomy and expression. The authors further argue that revenge porn has wider reaching cultural and societal harms, compromising not only the dignity of individual victims but all members of that group (typically women) who live in that society. Furthermore, women are often explicitly blamed and shamed for creating, or allowing the creation of, the sexual images of themselves, attitudes which are based on gendered assumptions relating to women's sexual activity and agency and fed by cultural and social norms surrounding sexual inequality, which deny women's rights to express their sexuality without it being exploited and them humiliated.

Bloom (2014) also argues that more intangible effects of revenge porn include the loss of liberty and freedom, as victims are forced to change their lives in various ways, such as avoiding certain websites, changing email address, and withdrawing from online communities. This may deprive them of their online identity, which has been found to be particularly important to women, as they are no longer able to control and dictate how they present and construct their own identity. This intangible loss of liberty is felt offline too, as the harassment may change how victims interact with society and individuals, having experienced a basic violation of trust in people.

### *Empirical research on harms*

There was little empirical research identified addressing harms and impact. However, the CCRI statistics (2014) quantified numerous harms among the 361 self-reported victims of revenge porn in their survey. Over nine in ten victims (93%) said they had suffered significant emotional distress due to being a victim. Specific harms are shown in Figure 20.

Furthermore, in Eaton et al.'s (2017) study of 3,044 victims of NCP, it was found that participants who reported having their sexually-explicit images shared without their consent at least once (N=244) had significantly worse mental health outcomes and higher levels of physiological problems than non-victims (N=2800). Specifically, those who reported having had their sexually-explicit image(s) shared without their consent or having been threatened with the sharing of their images without consent (N=389/3044) had significantly worse mental health outcomes and higher levels of physiological problems (i.e. somatic symptoms) than non-victims (N=2655/3044).



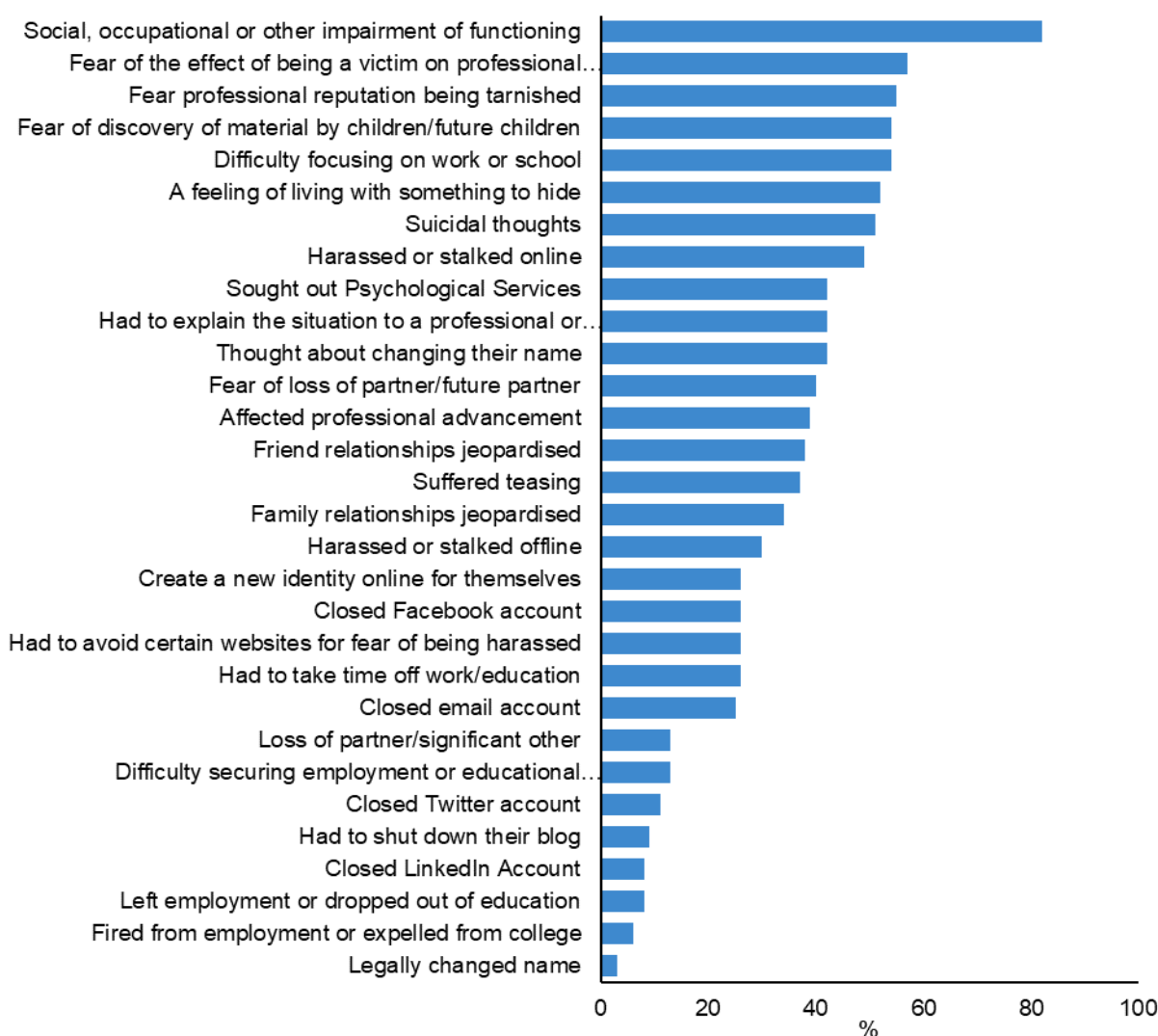


Figure 20. Harms reported by victims of revenge porn.

Source: CCRI, 2014

Bates (2017) noted that existing research concentrates ‘*mainly on its legal aspects and legal theories about these cases*’ (p. 24), identifying no published peer-reviewed studies focusing solely on the experiences of revenge porn victim-survivors and the impact on their mental health specifically. In order to address this gap in the literature, Bates conducted qualitative interviews with 18 survivors of revenge porn<sup>9</sup>. Survivors were between 21-54 years old and, although the study is Canadian, it has been included here as most participants (N=13) were American and one was from the UK. The study specifically examined the emotional and mental health effects of revenge porn on female survivors; despite their different types of experiences, participants reported similar effects, with a variety of mental health problems and coping mechanisms resulting from their experiences. Bates categorised mental health problems into three themes:

<sup>9</sup>The term was used in its broadest sense as survivors’ experiences varied, with both consensual and non-consensual images having been taken of them, and in some cases the motives were not revenge but blackmail (sextortion), which fit better with the broader term of image based abuse or non-consensual pornography.

- (1) Lack of trust: nearly all participants talked about a general loss of trust in people after their victimization, with many going from being very trusting people to hardly trusting anyone after a betrayal by someone they loved and cared about;
- (2) PTSD, anxiety, and depression: participants reported feeling anxious both in public and alone; feeling stressed, panicky or jumpy; sleeping too much or too little; obsessional checking of the Internet for images of themselves; and suicide attempts;
- (3) Diminished sense of self-esteem, self-confidence and a loss of control: participants reported feeling less confident, outgoing and sociable; more reserved and quieter; and less sexually confident specifically. The invasion of privacy and loss of control over their own bodies was felt particularly keenly and was experienced as deeply traumatic and violating.

Different coping mechanisms were reported, including negative coping mechanisms, such as: avoidance, denial, abusing alcohol, and obsessing over their victimization. Over time, participants tended to move towards more positive coping mechanisms, such as: seeing a counsellor/therapist, seeking support from family and friends, speaking out and helping others, and focusing on moving on. Bates concluded that the characteristics of revenge porn are similar to other sexual crimes, as are the numerous mental health effects, feelings of loss of control over their bodies and their sexual agency, feelings of stress, anxiety, distress, despair, and violation.

A study on 'sextortion' in the US, conducted by Wolak and Finkelhor (2016), surveyed 1,631 young people aged 18-25 (83% of whom were female) who had been victims of threats to expose sexual images. Threats or other harms were carried out in about 45% of cases and images shared in about 30% of cases. Participants reported:

- feelings of shame, helplessness, embarrassment, and self-blame;
- feeling their privacy had been invaded;
- feeling mentally and physically assaulted;
- the ruination of their self-image and future relationships;
- fear of being judged.

Around a quarter (24%) had to see a medical or mental health professional and just over one in ten (12%) moved home. The authors thus concluded that: "The personal and psychological toll on respondents could be quite intense" (p. 2).

### **Summary**

- There are few large scale studies on the impact and harms of revenge porn, with most literature using data from case studies and victim interviews;
- There is wide agreement that the harm caused by revenge porn can be devastating;
- Victims may suffer numerous psychological and emotional harms;
- Victims may be subject to online and offline harassment, stalking, and assault;
- Victims may suffer from mental health problems such as anxiety, panic attacks, PTSD, depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation;

- There are numerous documented cases of victims of revenge porn committing suicide;
- Victims may suffer harms to their employment, careers, and professional reputations;
- Victims may suffer more intangible/abstract harms such as the violation of personal and bodily integrity, the infringement of dignity and privacy, and inhibition of sexual autonomy and expression;
- The harms caused by revenge porn may be similar to those in other sexual crimes.

## 7. Hate crime, hate incidents, and hate speech

### 7.1 Introduction

The following section explores the way in which hate crimes, incidents and speech are defined and how online hate, usually in the form of hate speech, is becoming an increasingly popular medium for people to express, propagate and disseminate hate through various online platforms and channels such as social media. It should be noted at the outset, however, that this field is a particularly large one and we therefore do not claim that the material presented here is by any means exhaustive or comprehensive. However, we have endeavoured to give a broad overview of the main issues in the area, making particular use of recent studies with a high Weight of Evidence score.

### 7.2 The nature of the harm

In its simplest form, hate crime is an attack on a person's identity; the very characteristics of their makeup (Anstead, 2017). Thus, a hate crime is typically not aimed at an individual because of their actions but because of their mere existence as a member of a certain group and what this group is perceived to symbolise (Aslan, 2018).

Criminal justice agencies in the UK, which include the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the police, and the Prison Service (now HM Prisons and Probation Service), use a mutually agreed definition of hate crime, which focuses on the victim's (or any other person's) perception of the act:

*“Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice, based on a person's disability or perceived disability; race or perceived race; or religion or perceived religion; or sexual orientation, or perceived sexual orientation or perceived transgender identity” (CPS, 2019).*

As there is no legal definition of 'hostility', a common sense understanding of the word is employed, which includes “ill-will, spite, contempt, prejudice, unfriendliness, antagonism, resentment and dislike”.

The aspects of a person's identity, as laid out in the definitions above, are known as 'protected characteristics' which represent the five strands of hate crime which are centrally monitored by the police (Home Office, 2017):

- (i) Race;
- (ii) Religion;
- (iii) Sexual orientation;
- (iv) Disability; and
- (v) Transgender identity.

More specifically:

- race hate crime may be based on a person's race, nationality, ethnic group, or the colour of their skin;
- religious hate crime may be based on a person's religion, beliefs, or faith;
- sexual orientation hate crimes include those against lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals;
- transgender hate crimes include those against transsexuals, transvestites, and transgender individuals;
- disablist hate crimes may include those against people who are deaf or blind, who have a learning disability, physical disability, or mental health problem (Anstead, 2017).

There is a distinction between a hate crime (which is a criminal offence), a hate incident (which is a non-criminal offence) and hate speech (which may or may not constitute a criminal offence). Under police recording rules, officers are obliged to record both hate crimes and hate incidents. A hate incident is any *non-crime* incident (Trickett & Hamilton, 2016) or 'sub-criminal' incident (Williams & Tregidga, 2014, p. 948) which is perceived by the victim or anyone else to be motivated by hostility based on a protected characteristic.

However, the digital age has inevitably changed the way in which hate crime is committed (HMICFRS, 2018). The cyber world has become a highly effective means for individuals and groups to be targeted, harmed, and marginalised (Awan, 2016), largely through the medium of online hate *speech* (Anstead, 2017), which is a more complex phenomenon as regards definitions, reporting, recording, legislation, and prosecution

Although there is no universally accepted definition of hate speech, it is broadly defined as "a term that has become commonplace to describe words that are used online to attack a person or group based on a personal characteristic" (HMICFRS, 2018, p. 4). Some definitions go a step further, including the requirement that it 'incites violence', with Awan (2016) defining hate speech as:

***"Any form of language used to depict someone in a negative fashion in regard to their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or physical or mental disability which promotes hate and incites violence" (p. 2).***

Thus, although there is no one definition of hate speech, common elements in definitions include “an expression that is abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing, and incites violence or discrimination” (Barlow & Awan, 2016, p. 2), based on some element of perceived difference.

Online hate speech, also referred to as hate content, hate material, or simply online hate, can manifest and be disseminated in various ways, including using words, pictures, images, symbols, videos, games and music. This textual, visual or audio-based rhetoric may be posted on: social media and networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube; forums; websites of (e.g.) racist groups; news websites; chat rooms; blogs; Usenet Newsgroups; Web-based bulletin boards; online clubs and groups; InternetRelay Chat; and instant messaging (e.g. Delgado & Stefanic, 2014; Bliuc, Faulkner, Jakubowicz & McGarty, 2018; Cohen-Almagor, 2018). The Metropolitan Police Service (2019) give the following specific examples, which include:

- messages calling for racial or religious violence;
- direct webpages with pictures, videos or descriptions that glorify violence against anyone due to a protected characteristic;
- chat forums, where people ask others to commit hate crimes.

Various unique features of digital technology and the Internet have been found to facilitate hate speech, with some examples from Brown (2017) including:

**Anonymity:** can make people “more outrageous, obnoxious, or hateful in what they say” (p.298) when they are online, as opposed to offline, where they are identifiable. Such anonymity allows the expression of hateful thoughts, as people may feel that the normal rules of conduct do not apply and that they will not be held accountable for their actions.

**Invisibility:** when there is a physical distance between the speaker and audience, as there is online, the speaker remains invisible to the audience and vice versa. Thus, none of the normal cues of empathy (e.g. facial expressions) that may inhibit hate speech offline are present.

**Community:** the Internet also gives people opportunities to engage with like-minded others, who might otherwise be unaware of one another’s existence or be too geographically distant to connect.

**Instantaneousness:** in contrast to other types of hateful communications, the Internet provides instantaneous publishing, where the lapse of time between having a thought and expressing it can be just seconds. This may “encourage gut reactions, unconsidered judgments, off-the-cuff remarks, unfiltered commentary, and first thoughts” (p. 304).

With new advances in technology occurring rapidly, those who spread online hate are using increasingly sophisticated means of targeting individuals and groups and ensuring

that hate speech directed at them spreads as quickly as possible and endures as long as possible. For example, online hate may be perpetrated through the practice of 'cybersquatting' and 'Google bombing', where anti-hate webpages and Google searches are used to develop content that creates a measure of intolerance and targets specific individuals or groups, using these as platforms to spread more hate and intolerance (Awan, 2016). Additionally, search engines can index text on the web and generate it immediately, with indexed comments having no expiration date, creating outcomes with links to hateful comments posted years before (Balica, 2017). Trolls (users who become involved in online debates, creating discord with inflammatory messages) and bots (computer programmes generated by algorithms that mimic human behaviour) may also perpetuate and spread online hate, influencing how social media users, who may not realise that such posts come from 'actors', perceive a certain group (Evolvi, 2018). Seeing a proliferation of hate speech may also lead to those who disagree keeping silent, as they perceive themselves to be in the minority (Harlow, 2015).

Awan and Zempi (2017) observe that in today's fast moving cyber world, it is social media companies, as opposed to criminal justice agencies, who are at the cutting edge of defining, controlling, and sanctioning hate speech, as social media platforms are commonly used by perpetrators of online hate. This issue was brought to the fore in the UK in 2015 when the Home Affairs Select Committee raised the issue of Islamophobic hate crime on social media before the Attorney General Jeremy Wright, who pronounced that social media platforms needed to act upon hate speech (Barlow & Awan, 2016). Subsequently, in 2016, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft agreed a code of conduct with the European Commission on countering illegal hate speech online, which obligates them to have clear processes in place to review and act on reports and notifications of incitement to violent and hateful conduct (Anstead, 2017).

However, while social media companies are increasingly removing prominent far right figures from their platforms, there is still an upward trend in online hate on social media, with five out of 10 far right activists with the biggest social media reaches in the world being British (Hope not hate, 2019). Evolvi (2018) also notes that hate speech on social media remains "seldom punished" (p. 2), and Jewish respondents in a survey by The European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights (2018) about online antisemitism observed that social media platforms rarely acted on complaints.

Brown (2017) argues that such 'outsourcing' by governments of the regulation of online hate speech to Internet companies, may reflect concerns over attempting to regulate freedom of speech and expression, except in instances which are already covered by current legislation. This is a particularly contentious issue in America where freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment, although the European Court of Human Rights (1976) also states that people have a right to cause 'offence' to others, without defining what they mean by offence (Awan & Zempi, 2017). Below are some specific examples of how social media companies are attempting to navigate the issue of protecting users, while considering freedom of speech and expression:

**Twitter's** hateful conduct policy states that, while “*free expression is a human right*” and its mission “*is to give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information, and to express their opinions and beliefs without barriers,*” experiencing abuse on Twitter can jeopardise victim’s abilities to express themselves. Therefore, users “*may not promote violence against or directly attack or threaten other people based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease. We also do not allow accounts whose primary purpose is inciting harm towards others based on these categories*” (Twitter, 2019).

**YouTube** “*encourage free speech and try to defend your right to express unpopular points of view ... [but] we don't permit hate speech,*” which “*refers to content that promotes violence against or has the primary purpose of inciting hatred against individuals or groups based on certain attributes.*” These include race/ethnic origin, religion, disability, gender, age, veteran status, and sexual orientation/gender identity. They continue: “*There is a fine line between what is and what is not considered to be hate speech. For instance, it is generally acceptable to criticise a nation-state, but if the primary purpose of the content is to incite hatred against a group of people solely based on their ethnicity, or if the content promotes violence based on any of these core attributes, like religion, it violates our policy*” (YouTube, 2019).

**Facebook's** community standards define hate speech “*as a direct attack on people based on what we call protected characteristics — race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, caste, sex, gender, gender identity, and serious disease or disability. We also provide some protections for immigration status. We define attack as violent or dehumanizing speech, statements of inferiority, or calls for exclusion or segregation.*” However, hate speech which is shared in order to educate may be allowed, as are terms which in other circumstances might be derogatory but are used in a self-referential empowering fashion, and humour and social commentary related to these topics (Facebook 2019).

Thus, online hate speech is a more complex and nuanced issue in comparison to offline hate crime, which involves tangible acts such as physical assault, vandalism, damage to property, harassment and intimidation (e.g. Paterson, Walters, Brown & Fearn, 2018; Home Office Statistical Bulletin 20/18, 2018; CPS, 2019). The complexity, particularly in relation to investigation and prosecution, is due not only to the necessity of balancing/weighing of all freedom of speech and expression versus the harm caused to the victim, but also numerous other issues. These include: discovering what jurisdiction the offence was committed in; perpetrators being in different countries; perpetrators retaining anonymity through false names or avatars; technical capabilities and resources of the police; the role of Internet service providers; and the scale of offending behaviour (Anstead, 2017; Brown, 2017; Awan & Zempi, 2017; Law Commission, 2018).

## *The criminalisation of hate crime, incidents, and speech*

The five protected characteristics are covered in legislation, variously, by:

*The Public Order Act 1986;*                      *The Crime and Security Act 2001; and*  
*The Football Offences Act 1991;*                      *The Criminal Justice Act 2003*  
*The Crime and Disorder Act 1998;*

Specifically, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 details particular offences of racially and religiously (as amended in 2001) aggravated crimes, including wounding, assault, damage and harassment. While Sections 18–23 and 29B–29F of The Public Order Act 1986 state that it is an offence to use “threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour” to incite/stir up hatred in relation to race, religion and/or sexual orientation. However, there is currently no similar offence relating to disability or transgender (True Vision, 2019), with the Public Order Act, for example, not including disability (Burch, 2018).

The Criminal Justice Act 2003, however, sets out provisions for harsher sentences if it can be proved that the motivation for a crime was based on hostility towards race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity and disability. This legislation allows the CPS to prosecute offenders and apply for a ‘sentence uplift’, a harsher punishment/sentence, for any resulting conviction if hate is considered to be an aggravating factor (CPS, 2019).

In 2018, the government asked the Law Commission to review the laws on offensive communications and examine whether they give victims sufficient online protection (HMICFRS, 2018). The Law Commission’s subsequent scoping report (Law Commission, 2018) considers the ‘communications offences’ under the Malicious Communications Act 1988 (MCA 1988) and the Communications Act 2003 (CA 2003) and the terms they rely upon.

Specifically, Section 1 of the MCA 1988 criminalises sending certain types of communication to another person, when the sender’s purpose is to cause “distress or anxiety” to another, conveying messages that are indecent or grossly offensive, a threat, or false information. While Section 127(1) of the CA 2003 criminalises the sending of a message which is “grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character”, and Section 127(2) of the CA 2003 criminalises sending a message which is known to be false in order to cause “inconvenience or needless anxiety” to another.

Additionally, it has been argued that the five protected strands should be widened to include other person’s whose perceived difference may make them more vulnerable to experiencing hate crime, such as gender, age, and homelessness (Williams & Tregidga, 2014). In a survey of 1,106 people aged 16 and over, Chakraborti, Garland and Hardy



(2014) also found that significant numbers of individuals from 'hidden' or 'emerging' communities are subjected to hate crime, with the biggest group being those who are in some way different in how they dress, appear, or live (N=376). However, while this is worth noting as an area for future research, it is beyond the scope of this review to consider the issue further here.

### **Summary**

- There are five strands of hate crime articulated and protected in law: Race or ethnicity, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, and transgender identity;
- There is a difference between hate crime, hate incidents and hate speech;
- Online hate content/material is usually classified as hate speech;
- Although there is no universal definition of online hate speech, it generally refers to textual, audio or visual rhetoric that is abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing, and incites violence or discrimination;
- Online hate can take the form of words, pictures, images, videos, games, symbols and songs;
- Online hate may be posted and disseminated on a wide range of online platforms, including social media, racist websites, forums, news websites, chat rooms, blogs, bulletin boards, online clubs and groups, and instant messaging;
- The Internet affords a particularly potent means of spreading hate crime, due to issues such as anonymity, invisibility, community, and instantaneousness;
- Definitions of hate speech are increasingly being created by social media companies;
- There have been recent calls to make online hate speech against disabled people a recordable crime, bringing it in line with race and religious hate crime;
- Recent research has found evidence of hate crime against other groups of people, based on a perceived difference, who fall outside of the five protected characteristics.

### **7.3 The scope of the problem**

In this section, the scope and prevalence of online hate crime against the groups who have a protected characteristic under UK law will be considered. In addition, studies which provide us with information on the prevalence of hate crime against subtypes of these groups will be reviewed. Police recorded crime, and the problems associated with it, will be considered first, before we turn to the 'hidden figure' of online hate in the UK, using data from empirical studies on particular groups.

When recording a crime, police can assign an aggravating factor to an offence, which includes online crimes, and from April 2015 it became compulsory for police forces to flag up when a crime is committed on the Internet or through a computer or other digital device (Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 20/18, 2018). Analysis of hate crimes flagged as having an online element was conducted in 2016/17 for the first time (Home Office, 2017) and repeated the following year (Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 20/18, 2018), see Table 11.

Table 8. Number of online hate crimes recorded by the police in years 2016/7 and 2017/8.

Hate crime strand	Number of online hate crimes 2016/2017	Number of online hate crimes 2017/2018
<b>Race</b>	671	928
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	199	352
<b>Religion</b>	132	210
<b>Disability</b>	140	225
<b>Transgender</b>	29	69
<b>Total offences</b>	<b>1,067</b>	<b>1,607</b>

Source: Home Office (2018)

In both years, 2% of all hate crime offences recorded had an online element; in 2016/17 this was based on data from 23 police forces and in 2017/18 from 30 forces. Additionally, in both years, race was the most common motivating factor and in 2017/18 the biggest increase was for racially motivated online hate crimes.

Similarly, in a HMICFRS (2018) all-force data request, it was found that 2.5% of hate crimes had a cyber-enabled flag. However, it was further found that there was poor understanding by police officers of the Home Office requirement to identify cases with an online element and flag them as such. Therefore, police figures are “unlikely to be the true extent of the problem”, as despite the requirement to flag online hate crimes, “forces have been slow to make sure that this flag is applied rigorously and routinely” (HMICFRS, 2018, pp. 79-80). The above statistics, which are the first of their kind, should therefore be viewed with some degree of caution, seen as indicative rather than definitive.

In addition to issues surrounding police recording of online hate, under-reporting by victims is also a significant problem. Victims of both online and offline hate crime are often reluctant to make an official report, which leads to a further underestimation of the problem (e.g. Chakraborti et al., 2014; Littler & Feldman, 2015; Antjoule, 2016; Anstead, 2017; Paterson et al., 2018; Ofcom, 2018). Reasons for non-reporting may include, but are not limited to:

- feelings of embarrassment;
- fear of reprisals from the perpetrator;
- lack of trust in the police and the criminal justice system;
- fear of going to court;
- cultural and community issues surrounding police involvement;
- fears about not being understood due to language barriers;

- incidents becoming normalised and part of life;
- not wanting to cause a fuss.

Furthermore, when victims of online hate crime *do* make a police report, they are often unhappy with the outcome. Research exploring hate crime amongst LGBT individuals (Antjoule, 2017) found that those who had experienced online hate crime found it harder to report (46% compared with 40% in general) and when they did were less satisfied with the outcome (38% compared with 49%), leading to approximately one third (34% compared with 12%) saying that they would not make a future report to the police. Due to such issues, “*official statistics may significantly underestimate the scope and severity of the problem*” (Littler & Feldman, 2015, p. 6). Thus, victims of (particularly interpersonal) crime may be more likely to report incidents to agencies other than the police.

### *The hidden figure of online hate*

Empirical studies which consider the hidden figure of online hate enable us not only to gain a more complete understanding of its prevalence, but also to consider the scope of online hate speech against subtypes of victims.

Looking broadly at online hate speech, Ofcom’s Media Use and Attitudes Report (2018) draws on data from the annual adults’ media literacy tracker survey, which is based on interviews with 1,875 adults aged 16+ in September and October 2017. In order to gain an insight into the scope of online hate speech, the survey asked participants whether: “In the past year, have you seen anything hateful on the internet that has been directed at a particular group of people, based on, for instance, their gender, religion, disability, sexuality or gender identity?” Examples given were cruel or hateful comments or images on social media, comments in response to online articles, or videos posted on sites such as YouTube. Almost half of participants (47%) reported seeing this kind of online hate in the last year; 14% had ‘often’ seen it, and a third (33%) said they ‘sometimes’ see it. Younger participants – aged 16-24 (59%) or 25-34 (62%) – were more likely than internet users overall (47%) to say they had ever seen this type of content in the past year. While 55-64s (27%), 65-74s (24%) or those aged 75+ (13%) were less likely to have seen it.

More specifically, in a report on cyberhate for the Council of Europe, Baklis (2015) observed that:

*“Three groups stand out as being targeted across a number of European countries. The first is Jews, with antisemitism being prevalent across the whole continent. Secondly, Islamophobia appears to be on the increase with cyberhate against Muslims appearing mainly in Central and Northern Europe, but also in parts of Southern Europe. Online hate against the Roma is also rife, mostly in Central and Eastern Europe and parts of Southern Europe” (p.10).*

Although antisemitism is hardly a new phenomenon, social media is now increasingly being used as a tool to facilitate campaigns of antisemitic online hate which abuse, harass and threaten Jewish public figures, individuals, and/or institutions, or for those who wish to generally vent their antisemitic views. Targeted campaigns against individual victims may see multiple social media accounts which send hundreds (or thousands) of tweets/images/posts, using centrally-created material often on neo-Nazi websites (Community Security Trust (CST), 2018). The empirical studies summarised below go some way towards revealing the scope of antisemitic online hate.

Latest figures from the CST (2018), which records antisemitic incidents in the UK, recorded 727 such incidents in the first six months of 2018. In relation to online antisemitic hate it was found that:

- there were 163 reported antisemitic incidents that involved social media in the first six months of 2018;
- this comprised 22% of the overall total of 727 incidents;
- this was an increase from incidents recorded in the first six months of 2017 (N=145); and
- the number of incidents on social media recorded by CST in the second quarter of 2018 was approximately double the number recorded in the first three months of the year.

However, CST does not record antisemitic material that is permanently hosted on websites or proactively trawl social media platforms for such content and posts; it only records antisemitic comments posted on social media, blogs or internet forums if they have been *reported* to CST by a UK based victim or witness. Therefore:

***“The inclusion of the number of incidents from social media recorded by CST is not intended to reflect the real number of antisemitic comments on social media, which is likely to be so large and widespread across different platforms as to be effectively impossible to calculate” (p. 13).***

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights (2018) reported on the findings of the biggest survey of Jewish people ever conducted worldwide, looking at almost 16,500 Jewish people’s experiences of hate crime, discrimination and antisemitism, covering 12 EU member states. Broadly, nine in 10 (89%) of respondents felt that antisemitism had increased in their country in the five years before the survey and over eight in 10 (85%) considered it to be a serious problem. In relation to online antisemitism it was found that:

- nearly nine in ten (89%) of all respondents considered online antisemitism to be either ‘a very big’ or a ‘fairly big’ problem;
- nearly nine in ten respondents (88%) believed that online antisemitism had increased over the past five years, with most saying that it had increased ‘a lot’;
- online antisemitism was rated as the most problematic form of antisemitism;

- the percentage of respondents who thought that online antisemitism was problematic was particularly high (at least 90%) in Belgium, France, Italy, and Poland;
- eight in ten (80%) respondents identified the Internet as the most common forum for negative statements about Jewish people; and
- respondents thought that antisemitism was an issue on the Internet and social media (89%) (followed by public spaces, the media, and in political life).

A recent report by the CST and the Antisemitism Policy Trust (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2019), which used Google search data to reveal antisemitic attitudes in the UK, sheds further light on the prevalence, nature and origins of online antisemitic hate:

- an average of 170,000 Google searches with antisemitic content are made per year in the UK;
- approximately 10% of these 170,000 searches involve violent language/intentions;
- antisemitic searches are higher in Wales than the rest of the UK;
- the UK ranks third in the world for searches about Zionism (behind Israel and Lebanon);
- searches for Zionism are 29% higher in the UK than the US;
- antisemitic searches are as high in cities that mostly vote Labour as in cities that mostly vote Conservative;
- “Hitler Zionism” is the fourth most popular UK search about Zionism;
- there has been a 39% increase in Rothschild-related searches in the past three years;
- there was a 79% rise in antisemitic Google searches in April 2018, after Jewish community representatives met Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn;
- Google searches for “Holocaust hoax” are approximately 30% above average on Holocaust Memorial Day each year;
- antisemitic searches increased by 30% in the days after Israel’s victory in the 2018 Eurovision Song Contest.

Finally, Hope not hate (2019) is currently analysing approximately 27,000 Twitter accounts that follow a set of UK based left-wing accounts identified as frequently spreading antisemitic ideas. Tweets were considered antisemitic if they made use of common antisemitic tropes; used insulting phrases targeted at Jews as a group; denied the Holocaust; or made comparisons between the State of Israel and Nazi Germany. The ongoing research has so far identified up to 5,000 accounts that have expressed these ideas twice or more, results which “*are worrying and should receive immediate attention*” (p. 92).

Of concern in recent years is the increase in anti-Muslim religious hate crime, or Islamophobia. Indeed, Littler & Feldman (2015) refer to this as one of the most serious political issues of this century. Tell MAMA (Measuring Muslim Attacks) is the UK’s leading response and support service for victims of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. It also enables victims to report Islamophobic hate crime confidentially, using an online form<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup><https://tellmamauk.org/submit-a-report-to-us/>

in which they can detail the incident and obtain help and support from a case worker. Tell MAMA also uses these reports to collate data and statistics on both online and offline incidents of anti-Muslim hate crime, see Table 12.

*Table 9. Number of online and offline Islamophobic hate incidents reported to Tell Mama in the years 2015/16/17*

Year	Number of online hate incidents	Number of offline hate incidents	Total
<b>2015</b>	364	437	<b>801</b>
<b>2016</b>	311	642	<b>953</b>
<b>2017</b>	362	839	<b>1,201</b>

*Source: Tell Mama (2017)*

The latest Tell Mama Annual Report (2017) found that, between January and December 2017:

- there were 1,201 verified anti-Muslim or Islamophobic reports in the UK;
- offline reports rose by 30% from 2016-2017;
- approximately one third (N=362) of incidents took place online;
- online reports rose by 16.3% from the previous year (N=311).

It is observed that the spike in online incidents in 2017 could be “*partially attributed to the way in which ideologically-motivated social media users felt emboldened by major ‘trigger’ events and broader anti-Muslim discourses in the public sphere*” (Faith Matters, 2018, p. 1), a phenomenon which will be explored in further detail below.

Spikes in both offline and online hate crime have been found to be positively correlated with high profile ‘trigger events’ (Hambly, Rixom, Singh & Wedlake-James, 2018). For instance, in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in London, Brussels, Paris and Tunisia, carried out by individuals who identified themselves as Muslim or who were acting in the name of Islam, an increase in campaigns of cyber harassment against Muslims – which stereotyped them and saw them a threatening group, in addition to threatening actual violence against them – was found (Littler & Feldman, 2015; Komaroni & Singh, 2016; Miller et al., 2016a; Awan & Zempi, 2017).

For example, there was a surge in police reports of online anti-Muslim hate speech after the murder of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013, in addition to trending of Islamophobic hashtags (Awan, 2014). Similarly, the sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015/2016 saw the trending of hashtags connecting Islam with both immigration and sexual violence (Evolvi, 2018). While the results of the EU referendum, in which immigration was a key issue, also saw a spike in both Islamophobic (religious) and xenophobic (racial) tweets (Miller et al., 2016a), which were comparable with spikes in hate incidents observed after terror attacks (Miller et al., 2016b).

Exploring spikes in online hate after certain ‘trigger events’, The Centre for the Analysis of Social Media (CASM) at Demos (Miller et al., 2016a) conducted a study which looked

at the reaction on Twitter to (i) the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, and (ii) the outcome of the EU referendum on 24 June 2016. In relation to the Brussels attacks it was found that:

- from March 22nd-30th, 58,074 tweets had a word that could be considered anti-Islamic;
- of these 58,074 tweets, 4,798 were classified as angry, severely derogatory and explicitly anti-Islamic;
- in the two days before the Brussels attacks, an average of 216 derogatory anti-Islamic Tweets were sent per day;
- in the days after the attacks, an average of 680 derogatory, anti-Islamic Tweets were sent per day.

In relation to the EU referendum, where much of the public discourse centred directly on the theme of immigration and more indirectly on Muslims as examples of such immigrants, it was found that:

- between 19th June - 1st July 2016, 16,151 tweets were sent from the UK containing a word/hashtag related to xenophobia;
- of these 16,151 tweets, 5,484 were classified as derogatory and xenophobic;
- the result day of the referendum saw the highest volume of xenophobic tweets;
- between 18th March – 30th June 2016, 4,123,705 tweets were sent around the world containing a word that could be considered Islamophobic;
- of these 4,123,705 tweets, 28,034 were from the UK and were classified as explicitly anti-Islamic and derogatory;
- there was a small peak in the number of derogatory anti-Islamic tweets between 8pm on June 23rd and midnight on June 25th.

However, there is some evidence that anti-immigrant feeling in the UK has recently softened. For example, a poll by Hope not hate (2019) found that, in July 2018, 60% of people thought that immigration has been good for Britain, which is up from 50% in July 2016, and 40% in 2011.

According to police figures, online hate crime relating to sexual orientation is the second largest category of hate crime, while that relating to transgender status is the smallest. However, empirical studies identified in this REA suggest otherwise, unanimously finding that transgender individuals are subjected to the most online abuse (e.g. Antjoule, 2016; Pearson & Magić, 2017; Bachmann & Goode, 2017; Walters, Paterson, Brown & McDonnell, 2017).

The Galop Hate Crime Report on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in the UK (Antjoule, 2016) analysed an online community survey of 467 LGBT people. They found that 31% of all LGBT participants had experienced online hate aimed at their sexual orientation or gender identity, see Figure 21.

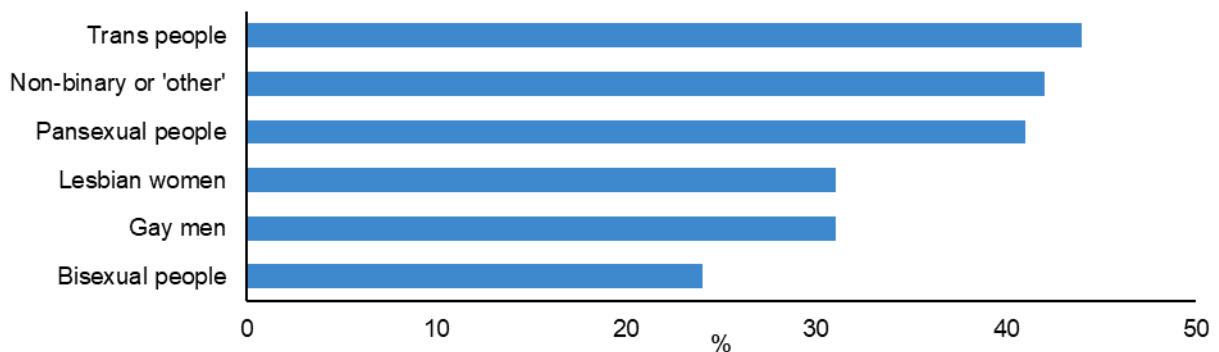


Figure 21. Percentage of LGBT people who have experienced online hate.

Source: Galop (2016)

The Scottish LGBTI hate crime report (Pearson & Magić, 2017) investigated the proportion of LGBTI people who had experienced or witnessed hate crimes/incidents relating to sexual orientation, transgender status, and intersex status in Scotland.

In a survey of 1,516 LGBTI individuals it was found that 36% of all respondents had experienced online hate. Specifically:

- 21% of LGB individuals had experienced online abuse;
- 31% of intersex individuals had experienced online abuse;
- 34% of trans individuals had experienced online abuse.

These findings are supported by Walters et al. (2017), whose survey of 593 LGBT people in the UK found that trans people are particularly susceptible to both direct and indirect online abuse. They found that:

- 52.2% of trans people (versus 27% of non-trans people) had directly experienced online abuse;
- 83% of trans people (versus 55% of non-trans people) had indirectly experienced online abuse.

They also found that trans people were more likely to engage in avoidant behaviours than non-trans people, with correlational analyses finding that avoidance was a consequence of a greater number of direct experiences of both verbal and online hate crimes.

More in-depth analysis that considers not only sexual orientation and status, but also age and ethnicity, was performed by Bachmann and Goode (2017) in their examination of data from a YouGov survey of over 5,000 LGBT people's experiences of hate crime in Britain. Looking at *direct* experiences of online abuse, it was found that *in the last month*:

- 10% of LGBT people had experienced online abuse;
- 26% of trans people had experienced online abuse;



- 23% of LGBT young people (aged 18 to 24) had experienced online abuse;
- 34% of trans young people had experienced online abuse;
- 20% of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people had experienced online abuse;
- 9% of white LGBT people had experienced online abuse;
- non-binary LGBT people were significantly more likely than LGBT men and women to experience personal online abuse (26% versus 10% of men and 8% of women).

As regards *witnessing* online abuse towards others, it was found that in the last month:

- 45% of LGBT people had witnessed homophobic, biphobic and transphobic online abuse towards others;
- 72% of LGBT young people had witnessed homophobic, biphobic and transphobic online abuse towards others;
- 66% of black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBT people had witnessed homophobic, biphobic and transphobic online abuse towards others, versus 44% of white LGBT people.

This data suggests that not only trans people, but also younger people and those from ethnic minorities, are more likely to personally experience and witness online abuse related to sexual orientation/status.

Finally, this REA found very few relevant studies relating to the prevalence of disablist hate crime. However, a systematic review by Alhaboby, Barnes, Evans and Short (2017) of peer-reviewed studies published between January 1990 and January 2016 was identified, which investigated the experiences of cyber-victimization of people with chronic conditions or disabilities. Ten studies were included, covering a total of 3,070 people, with an age range was 19-63<sup>11</sup>, with most participants from White ethnic backgrounds. It was found that the prevalence range of cyber-victimization was 2% at the lowest end and 41.7% at the highest.

To end this section, it should be noted that both police recorded crime and (relatively small scale) empirical studies cannot do justice to the scale of a problem which, internationally, is vast, as illustrated by just five brief examples:

- 4,123,705 tweets were sent across the world that could be considered anti-Islamic between 18 March-30 June 2016 (Miller et al., 2016a);
- an average of 170,000 Google searches with antisemitic content are made per year in the UK (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2019);
- in 2017 there were 954 hate groups currently in operation in the US alone (The Southern Policy Law Centre, 2019);
- the notorious white supremacist website Stormfront contained 9,963,883 posts and 738,155 threads as of 23 June 2014 (Wong, Frank and Allsup, 2015).

Thus, as concluded by Cohen-Almagor (2018): "*Hate speech is a significant problem worldwide, especially on the Internet*" (p. 44).

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<sup>11</sup> Although the studies in this review included both children and adults it is being used due to the paucity of material in this area.

### **Summary:**

- According to official police statistics, around 2% of hate crimes have an online element;
- According to police recorded crime, race is the protected characteristic that provokes the most online hate, followed by sexual orientation, religion, disability, and transgender status;
- Official police figures are thought to significantly underestimate the problem due to issues surrounding the recording of such crime by the police and under-reporting by victims;
- However, it is hard to determine prevalence rates from empirical studies due to differences in methodology, definitions, duration, and samples;
- Antisemitic online hate speech continues to be a huge problem, with online antisemitism being rated as the most problematic form of antisemitism in a recent study;
- Over recent years, Islamophobic online hate has risen exponentially;
- There have been spikes in Islamophobic (religious) and xenophobic (racial) online hate following certain ‘trigger’ incidents such as terrorist attacks;
- Police statistics find that trans people experience the least online hate, however empirical studies suggest that trans people experience more online hate than LGB individuals;
- Empirical studies have found that, of LGBT individuals, bisexual people experience the least online abuse, followed by gay and lesbian people, with trans people experiencing the highest levels of online abuse;
- Empirical studies have found prevalence rates of between 27%-36% for all LGBT individuals;
- Empirical studies have found prevalence rates of between 34%-52% for trans individuals;
- Research on LGBT populations has found that younger people and those from ethnic minorities are more likely to both personally experience and witness online abuse;
- There is a paucity of evidence surrounding the prevalence of hate crime against disabled people.

### **7.4 The nature of online hate**

In Section (i) we looked at various definitions of online hate speech, noting that while there was no universally accepted definition, the phenomenon broadly includes negative textual, visual or audio-based rhetoric that attacks, abuses, insults, harasses, intimidates, and incites discrimination or violence against, an individual or group due to their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability (e.g. Awan, 2016; Barlow & Awan, 2016; HMICFRS, 2018). In this section we seek to illustrate what this looks like, by considering some of the most commonly used terminology that stereotypes and demonises such groups. As noted at the start of this section, we do not claim that the studies drawn on here are exhaustive, given the limited scope of this REA and the large

body of literature related to this topic, but rather are ones chosen for their high relevance, in terms of epitomising online hate speech, and recency, given the rapidly changing nature of the online world.

### *The nature of online religious hate*

Studies have found that antisemitic online hate usually centre on themes of undue influence and power (e.g. banks and/or the media); conspiracy theories (e.g. world domination); and Holocaust denial or trivialisation (The European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights, 2018; Community Security Trust, 2018; Stephens-Davidowitz, 2019; Hope not hate, 2019).

Comments from Jewish people about their experiences of, and opinions on, online antisemitism on social media included:

*“My largest concern are the ‘alternative’ media like YouTube-channels, Twitter, Facebook or social media groups: racist and antisemitic insults are stated (apparently anonymously) and crude, insane, often antisemitic conspiracy theories are spread.”  
(Woman, 45–49 years old, Germany)*

*“Especially on Facebook there are many antisemitic and antiisraeli comments with an antisemitic character. If you report them to Facebook, they respond almost automatically ‘it meets our standards’.” (Man, 55–59 years old, Germany)*

Stephens-Davidowitz (2019) used Google search data from 2004 - 2018 to discover what people in the UK are searching for as regards Jews, Zionism and the Holocaust, and what this reveals about antisemitic attitudes in Britain today. It was found that:

- the most common antisemitic Google searches in the UK are for jokes mocking Jewish People;
- there is a direct correlation between searches for jokes mocking Jewish people and those mocking other minorities;
- someone who searches for jokes about Jewish people is more than 100 times more likely to search for other racist jokes.

As part of their antisemitic incidents report (January – June 2018), The Community Security Trust (2018) looked at antisemitism against politicians on social media. They observed that after a UK parliamentary debate on antisemitism in which some Jewish MPs gave speeches describing their experiences, they were afterwards re-victimised on social media. Following this debate, CST contacted every affected Jewish MP to offer support. Finally, Hope not hate (2019) examined a range of levels of antisemitic ideas in their analysis of left-wing antisemitic tweets, shown in Table 13.

Table 10. Analysis of anti-Semitic ideas on twitter.

Antisemitic idea	Description
<b>Holocaust denial</b>	A very small number of left-wing accounts engaged in Holocaust denial, with some overlap between far-right accounts here, with both left and right retweeting far-right material.
<b>Antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories</b>	This group is far larger and includes the idea that Jewish people have undue influence on world politics and a secret agenda, for example, through claims that Jewish people dominate banks, the media, and/or politics.
<b>Denying or trivialising antisemitism</b>	This category largely centres around discourse surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict, where Jews (as a group or individuals) may be blamed for the policies of the state of Israel, or seen as supportive of their actions against Palestinians, resulting in (sometimes veiled and regurgitated) antisemitic ideas and tropes.

Unlike online antisemitism, which often involves the targeting of individuals –such as politicians or other high profile public figures – most online Islamophobia falls into the category of ‘illiberal Islamophobia’ which doesn’t target individuals or groups, but targets people simply for belonging to Islam (Evolvi, 2018). However, despite the documented prevalence of online Islamophobia (as seen in Section ii), research on the nature of anti-Muslim hate crime tends to concentrate on offline hate crime, such as attacks on mosques and communities, while online Islamophobia is a relatively new, and thus sparser, area of research (Awan, 2014).

Existing research largely concentrates on analysis of posts/tweets on specific social media sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, as these have become increasingly popular means of spreading anti-Muslim hate. Such studies have found both broad and specific common stereotypical and derogatory terms/words used to describe Muslims, (e.g. Awan, 2014; Awan, 2016); other less common and highly offensive terms have also been noted (e.g. Miller et al., 2016b). Certain subgroups of Muslims, namely women and those who are visibly/identifiably Muslim, have also been found to be targeted more frequently (e.g. Awan, 2016; Awan & Zempi, 2015). These studies are considered in more detail below.

Awan (2014) conducted the first study of Islamophobia on Twitter, examining 500 tweets from 100 different Twitter users, the vast majority being from people in the UK and 72% being male. Over 75% percent of the tweets expressed strong Islamophobic feeling, often used to stereotype and blame all Muslims on a particular issue. However, there were also cases where Twitter was used merely “as a means to antagonize and create hostility” (p. 142), with some tweets using generalised pejorative terminology.

Turning to Islamophobia on Facebook, Awan (2016) examined 100 Facebook pages, posts and comments, finding 494 instances of online hate speech directed against

Muslim communities. An analysis of these categorised the comments into 'five walls of Islamophobic hate', which saw Muslims as:

- terrorists;
- rapists;
- a security threat (for Muslim women wearing the Niqab/Hijab);
- at war with 'us';
- a group who should be deported.

Also examining Islamophobic tweets (N=1,329) in the wake of the EU referendum, Evlvi (2018) found patterns in the data that presented eight views of Islam:

1. *Islam as monolithic, being unable to change or adapt;*
2. *Islam as separate to other cultures;*
3. *Islam as inferior to the West;*
4. *Islam as an enemy to the West;*
5. *Islam as manipulative in character;*
6. *Islam not being allowed to criticise the West/non-Muslims;*
7. *Defending discrimination against Islam;*
8. *Islamophobia as being natural.*

While Miller et al. (2016a) identified five categories of Islamophobia in their qualitative analysis of 100 random tweets from the 4,798 identified that were classed as angry, severely derogatory and explicitly anti-Islamic in the wake of the Brussels terrorist attacks.

Qualitative research supports the above findings. Awan and Zempi (2015; 2017) conducted 20 qualitative interviews with Muslim men and women who had experienced both virtual and physical anti-Muslim hate. Examples of online prejudice, discrimination and hate often took the form of highly offensive anti-Muslim racist language.

Awan and Zempi (2015; 2017) also found that certain subsets of Muslims are particularly vulnerable to online hate speech. In particular, it was found that participants who were 'visibly identifiable' as Muslim, with some of the women wearing the jilbab, hijab and/or niqab and men having a beard and wearing traditional Islamic clothing, were particularly vulnerable to abuse on social media when their profile immediately identified them as Muslim. As one participant said:

*"I have a public twitter account to promote my work and I get regular abuse on that. I have my picture on my twitter account, so they know I am Muslim ... I started wearing the hijab two years ago. I was not a Muslim before. I did not get any online or offline abuse at all before wearing the hijab" (S).*

Furthermore, Awan and Zempi (2015; 2017) found gender differences, with Muslim women being seen as particularly representative of the 'Islamic problem', experiencing loaded generalisations through hate images and posts on social media, being labelled as a 'national security threat' because of their visible identity, and receiving online hate messages that stereotyped, degraded, and demonized them.

### *The nature of online racial hate*

It is apparent from the literature that online Islamophobia, an example of religious hate speech, can sometimes overlap with racial online hate speech. For example, within Miller et al.'s (2016a) broad study of Islamophobic tweets in wake of the EU referendum, analysis of a smaller sample of tweets that were specifically identified as being derogatory and explicitly anti-Islamic was conducted. These included comments aimed at Muslims that encompassed racist terms.

In this context, hate speech against Muslims is less concerned with their religion and more with their (perceived) immigration status, their 'right' to be in Britain, and the idea of them as 'foreigners' who are plotting against (white) British people. This is supported by Evolvi (2018), who found that Islamophobia is often conflated with hate crime/speech against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, which comes under the umbrella of racial hate.

In Evolvi's (2018) study of Islamophobia on Twitter in the wake of the European referendum it was found that, of the 1,329 Islamophobic tweets, 21% referred to migration or refugees, usually in a (negative) context as a cause for the growth of Islam. Miller et al.'s (2016a) study on the Twitter reaction to the terrorist attacks in Brussels and the outcome of the EU referendum also found overlapping themes of Islamophobia (religious hate) and xenophobia (racial hate).

More broadly, there is a growing body of research which has found that both offline and online racial hate against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is an increasing concern (e.g. Harlow, 2015; Komaromi & Singh, 2016; Aslan, 2018). The College of Policing (2014) identifies immigrants from the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East as being particularly discriminated against groups in the UK; in the US Harlow (2015) found that those of Asian, Latino/Hispanic, Arabic and Middle Eastern descent are now the main target of racial online hate; and in Central and Eastern Europe, and parts of Southern Europe, online hate against the Roma (also referred to as gypsies, travellers and Romany people) is commonplace (Baklis, 2015).

Guidance from the College of Policing observes that policing hate crime against immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers is a new and more nuanced challenge in the field of racial hate crime. For not only are such groups discriminated against for being foreign/culturally different but also due to (unfounded) perceptions that they are given preferential treatment (e.g. in the form of benefits, healthcare, housing and employment).

However, the guidance is clear that “crimes which target someone because of hostility towards their immigration status constitutes a recordable race hate crime” (College of Policing, 2014).

Thus, while historically the area of racial hate has been seen as a binary issue, the empirical studies identified in this REA were heavily biased towards examining the nature and scope of online hate against, particularly Muslim (as explored above) immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This is supported by data from the Southern Policy Law Centre’s annual census of hate groups, which found that the number of anti-Muslim groups increased for the third year in a row, while the number of Ku Klux Klan groups decreased (SPLC, 2019).

Harlow (2015) found evidence of anti-immigrant racial online hate in a content analysis of a random sample of U.S. newspapers over a two-week period. It was found that stories about religion and politics/government mentioned racial terms the most frequently (67% and 40% respectively), often provoking comments that presented negative views of race or ethnicity. In particular, it was found that immigrants were often blamed for various societal ills and depicted in derogatory ways, using pejorative terms. It was found that Latinos were mentioned more than any other race/ethnicity, which was hypothesised was due to extensive coverage of immigration reform in the US.

With Syria currently generating the highest number of refugees in the world, Aslan (2018) examined hate speech against Syrian immigrants on YouTube, conducting a discourse analysis of a sample of seven Turkish videos from 1st-7th July 2017 that had been viewed and commented on thousands of times. It was found that discriminatory and hateful language was used.

Such anti-immigrant hate speech in some ways echoes that typically used by far-right white supremacist groups, seeking to create a dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Cohen-Almager, 2018). For example, in an examination of five white supremacist forums, Wong, Frank and Allsup (2015) found that virtual communities were built through the concepts and promotion of ‘racial othering’ and ‘racial enemies’, which see whites as the persecuted and oppressed victims in society.

### ***The nature of online disablist hate***

When disabled people are targeted because of a prejudice towards their disability, this may be referred to as ‘disablism’ (Richardson et al., 2016). However, as Burch (2018) notes: “*To research online disablist hate speech reveals a single, yet compelling finding; it lacks any sophisticated existence in current academic literature*” (p. 395). Burch (2018) analysed disablist hate speech on the online bulletin board Reddit, which has an estimated total of 234 million users, from over 215 different countries, with over 853,824 Subreddits to date. Looking at disablist hate speech within the context of austerity and welfare dependency, Burch analysed 24 Reddit threads and 16,908 comments.

The use of disablist language that related to austerity and welfare dependency was frequent amongst disabled people who received benefits. The recent Petitions Committee inquiry, in response to Katie Price’s petition for online hate crime against disabled people to be made a specific criminal offence, solicited the views of disabled victims through a series of events and consultations across the UK (House of Commons, 2019). Examples of comments included:

*“We’re either benefit scroungers or Paralympians” (Attendee at Belfast consultation event).*

*“I’ve been called an “it” many times – “What is IT doing?” ... I’ve had remarks about how I look in my wheelchair, and a few times the statements, “You should have been aborted”, and, “You don’t deserve to live”” (PP).*

*“There are loads of groups and posts on Facebook that claim to hate dwarfs and laugh at photos of people with dwarfism. These photos are often taken of dwarfs in public. For example, several times I have had people stop and directly take a photo of me” (Respondent to online survey).*

More generally, it was found that disabled people were often subjected to online abuse which used pejorative terms, noting that: *“These terms are, for many disabled people, as offensive as the worst terms of racist abuse”* (House of Commons, 2019, p. 21).

### **The nature of online LGBT hate**

Far-right movements, who place emphasis on traditional gender roles and family structures, have traditionally targeted LGBT individuals, and extreme homophobic material from the far right is easily accessible online (Hope not hate, 2019). However, almost no empirical research was identified about the nature of LGBT hate, despite several studies that considered the prevalence of the issue, as seen in Section (ii). The Scottish LGBTI Hate Crime Report (Pearson & Magic, 2017) included a small section on the experiences of LGBTI participants who described experiencing and witnessing various types of online hate speech. One Polish participant, for example, described how she *“received abuse on Facebook from other Polish people because I posted a photo of my same-sex partner and child.”* While, describing witnessing incidents of online hate, one participant said that they had seen victims *“swarmed by hate. It’s not subtle that it’s hate because the perpetrators are quite matter of fact about their hate.”*

### **Summary**

- Hate speech online often manifests in highly abusive discriminatory language that uses derogatory and pejorative terms and stereotypes;
- Most of the research in this area concentrates on the experiences of those of different races and/or religions;
- Antisemitic online hate remains a significant concern;



- Antisemitic online hate tends to centre around themes of perceived Jewish influence/power, conspiracy theories, world domination, Holocaust denial/trivialisation;
- More recent research on religious online hate tends to focus on Islamophobia;
- Muslims who are easily identifiable as such online (e.g. through their name or dress) are more likely to be subjected to hate speech;
- Muslim women are more likely to be subjected to hate speech, often seen as threats to national security;
- Religious and racial hate can often overlap when considering Islamophobia (a religious hate crime) and xenophobia (a race hate crime);
- Recent work exploring online hate concentrates increasingly on experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers;
- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are often subject to hate speech not merely based on being from a different culture/faith but also due to perceived preferential treatment;
- Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are commonly labelled as economic burdens, security threats, criminals, and inferior persons;
- There is a small but burgeoning body of research on the experiences of online hate against disabled people;
- There is little research on the experiences of online hate against LGBT individuals.

### 7.5 The impact of the harm

Broadly, research has found that although being a victim of any crime can result in several different harms, hate crimes can have significant impact as they are less likely to be perceived as random occurrences, but are specifically and personally targeted. (Chakraborti et al. 2014; Williams & Tregidga 2014). As noted by HMICFRS (2018):

*“Crimes motivated by hate can have an intense, enduring and sometimes devastating effect on victims and communities. It is particularly distressing to be a victim of crime because of who you are or what you believe” (p. 4).*

This is supported by analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) which found that victims of hate crime were more likely than victims of other crime to say they were affected in various negative ways (Paterson et al., 2018; Chakraborti et al., 2014).

However, in their review of research on cyber-racism, Bliuc et al. (2018) note that:

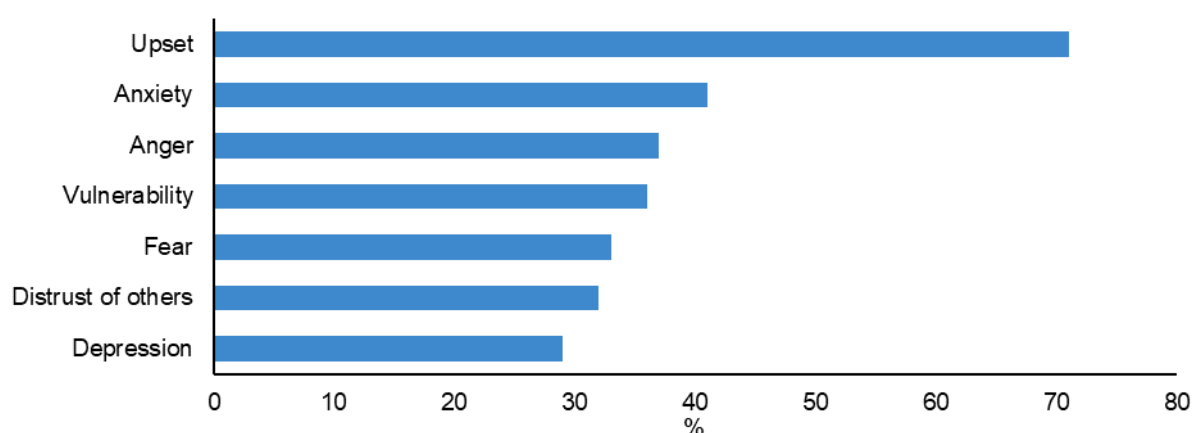
**“Although there is an extensive literature examining the effects of experiencing direct, face-to-face racism on targets of racism, our review suggests that there is considerably less attention paid by the scientific community to the effects of experiencing cyber-racism. This is concerning, particularly given the increasingly important role that online communication now plays in day-to-day interactions” (p. 84).**

This appears to hold for the other strands of online hate crime too, where research on the impact of online victimisation is sparse, with many studies including online hate within the broader phenomenon of hate crime, or comparing the impact of online and offline hate crime.

One paper that specifically considers the impact of online hate is that by the Law Commission (2018) who found that while not all victims react in the same way to online abuse, experiencing different “shades of harm”, at its worst *“the impact on victims can be devastating, even life threatening”* (p. 51). The most common types of harms reported in the literature (e.g. Chakraborti et al., 2014; Awan & Zempi, 2015; Alhaboby et al., 2016; Awan & Zempi, 2017; Law Commission, 2018; House of Commons, 2019) are considered below.

### **Psychological/emotional/mental health effects**

Online hate is associated with various psychological and emotional harms, as well as negative impacts on mental health. These broadly include feelings of anxiety, shock, fear, anger, depression, paranoia, distress, low self-esteem, frustration, fright, sadness, loneliness, self-harm and suicide (Law Commission, 2018). Chakraborti et al. (2014) found that, of 1,106 victims of hate crime, only 5% who had experienced verbal abuse, harassment and cyberbullying said that these experiences had no impact. The most common feelings and emotions that participants reported are shown in Figure 22.



*Figure 22. Most common feelings/emotions of victims of hate crime.*

*Source: Chakraborti et al. (2014)*

It was further found that transgender participants were most likely to report feeling upset (95%), followed by participants who felt they had been targeted because of their gender (83%), sexual orientation (80%), and religion (79%). Participants targeted because of their mental illness reported the highest levels of anxiety (72%), followed by those targeted because of their gender (58%), and learning disabilities (58%).

Interviews with 20 victims of anti-Muslim online and offline hate crime (Awan & Zempi, 2015; Awan & Zempi, 2017) found that victimisation (which was often repeated) led to victims feeling stress, anxiety, insecurity, isolation, depression, loneliness and a sense of rejection from wider society, feeling like outcasts. As respondent 'H' said: *"I feel very isolated and I have become quite cynical about non-Muslims"*. While respondent 'B' described how: *"Suffering Islamophobia has made me become insular, lack confidence, I feel I am not accepted"* (Awan & Zempi, 2017).

Participants who had experienced online hate also reported feeling vigilant, afraid, worried, tense, vulnerable, restless, alert, unsafe and paranoid and were always keeping their guard up against potential threats.

As participant B said:

*"To be honest, I have slowed down with my openness on twitter because I feel very unsafe, I feel very vulnerable. There was a time I felt so vulnerable just being in the UK because of my twitter account. I became paranoid, that everybody might be watching me, the government, people, everyone really"* (Awan & Zempi, 2017).

Alhaboby et al. (2016) found that the psychological effects of cyber-victimisation experienced by disabled people were consistent with those of non-disabled victims, with high levels of distress experienced. Negative effects on wellbeing reported by 19 disabled participants included distress, anxiety, mood disturbances, deterioration of existing health conditions, and suicide attempts. Specifically:

- 89.5% (17) experienced fear;
- 78.9% (15) experienced psychological trauma.

Participant H commented: *"I do not think many people realise how bad harassment can affect you psychologically, especially if it has been going on for some time."* While Participant P said: *"I am bipolar so all this (and it's still going on) has affected me deeply to the point of suicide."*

The Petitions Committee report (House of Commons, 2019), which also investigated disablist online abuse, found that disabled people who were told to harm or kill themselves reported mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety:

***“I have autism myself and have faced such abuse online before—I just accepted it as some kind of norm even though it was making me really anxious, nervous and paranoid” (Respondent to online survey).***

Participants also reported their health becoming worse; having increasing problems managing their conditions; and developing new conditions as a result of online abuse. The report observed that: *“Participants in our consultation were keen to stress that abuse can be a life or death issue for some disabled people”* (House of Commons, 2019, p. 20).

### ***Behavioural effects: Online hate leading to negative offline effects***

It has been found that being a victim of online hate may lead to certain negative behavioural effects, such as victims changing their lifestyles and routines. This may include, for example, avoiding certain places, changing their appearance and/or name, not leaving home, only leaving home when accompanied, or being afraid to be at home (e.g. Chakraborti et al., 2014; Awan & Zempi, 2015; Awan & Zempi, 2017; House of Commons, 2019).

For example, Muslim victims of online hate have reported changing their appearance so that they are less identifiably Muslim, or using a western name, in order to attract less attention online (Awan & Zempi, 2017). For instance, Sarah, Kelly, Sophie and Adam, who converted to Islam, kept their English names to avoid suffering Islamophobic abuse, and other participants who were born into Islam adopted western names to hide their Muslim identity, particularly online. Such behaviours may have negative effects on victims’ sense of identity, as reported by Respondent ‘A’: *“My hijab is my identity, but people hate me because I wear a headscarf. Why?”*

Muslim victims of online hate also reported becoming reluctant to leave home, or only going out when accompanied by someone. As Respondent ‘N’ said: *“We stay in, we don’t go out because we are scared of what will happen. If I leave the house I am usually accompanied by my husband or my son”* (Awan & Zempi, 2017). Conversely, albeit relatedly, some victims were fearful of being *in* their own home, afraid of online threats materializing offline. As Adam said about the effects of receiving online Islamophobic hate:

***“They were so nasty and horrible towards me that I did feel fearful to the point I thought that they would turn up at my house, and hurt me and my family because they knew who I was and where I lived” (Awan & Zempi, 2017).***

Victims of disability-related online hate have also reported being too afraid to leave their homes (House of Commons, 2019).

Participants above articulated how they changed their lifestyles and routines due to the fear of online hate crime resulting in offline hate crime. This association is supported by research from Chan, Ghose and Seamans (2016), who used a large-scale dataset to empirically quantify the impact of Internet access on (racial) hate crime, using econometric techniques. They found a positive relationship between Broadband availability/Internet penetration and offline racial hate crime in the US. This was particularly the case in areas with higher levels of racism, as indicated by higher levels of segregation and a greater likelihood of people in those areas searching for racially charged words. A link between online hate sites and the incidence of racial hate crimes executed by 'lone wolf' perpetrators, although not online hate groups, was also found. Supporting this, Hope not hate (2019) noted that The Anti-Defamation League's annual report on extremist murders in the US found that every perpetrator was linked to at least one right-wing online extremist group: *"In other words, what happens on social media does not stay on social media"* (p. 32).

The phenomenon of disablist 'mate crime', which refers to the practice of 'befriending' disabled people (usually those with learning disabilities) online or offline and then taking advantage of them in some way, may also lead to victims suffering serious real world harms that are arguably hate crimes. Victims told the inquiry in no uncertain terms that *"mate crime is hate crime"* (House of Commons, 2019, p. 47) and should be recognised as such.

Just as those with learning disabilities may be targeted online by extremist groups, Awan and Zempi (2017) note that young Muslim victims of online hate are at greater risk of radicalisation. As participant H said:

***"Anti-Muslim hate crime has affected Muslims. This is why Muslims are going to Syria. This is why they support ISIS. When people experience Islamophobic abuse, they will be easily radicalised. They feel weak, lonely, isolated, and rejected from British society. This is when these hate preachers pick them up and brainwash them. If you are constantly victimised, you are weak. Jihadi John and others who support ISIS are vulnerable. Vulnerability is the number one factor why Muslims go to Syria. These young people are groomed to go to Syria, groomed to become terrorists, groomed to blow themselves up."***

These are extreme examples of how online hate may isolate particularly vulnerable victims to the extent that they are susceptible to grave real world harms which may result in them committing criminal acts, being physically harmed or even killed.

### ***Exclusion from online public space***

When faced with online hate, many victims are simply told to avoid going online so as not to put themselves in harm's way. For example, The Petitions Committee inquiry found that when disabled people report online abuse, the advice, from support workers, family

and police, is often to 'stay away from the Internet' (House of Commons, 2019). However, this has echoes of victim blaming. As argued by the Law Commission (2018), asking any victims of hate crime to stay offline:

***“Would place an unreasonable and unfair burden on the victims of such abuse ... As one prominent MP said to us: When women are being abused online, the advice of the police can sometimes be to “not go online”. That’s the equivalent of telling women not to go out” (p. 5).***

If victims of online hate are driven offline entirely or forced to change their email address or delete their social networking accounts/profiles, this exclusion from the cyber sphere can make them feel socially isolated, lonely and disconnected, and limits their freedom of expression (Law Commission, 2018; House of Commons, 2019).

This can be incredibly damaging to victims when the online world is central to their personal and/or professional life (Law Commission, 2018). This may be particularly acute for victims who have a disability which renders them house- or even bed-bound. As reported by one respondent in the Petitions Committee inquiry: *“I have a severe disability and suffer verbal and online attacks daily, however, the benefits of computers outside social media are something which gives me a purpose”* (House of Commons, 2019). The Internet can thus be a 'lifeline' for some disabled people, and other victims with a protected characteristic, which they should be able to use and explore, feeling safe in the knowledge that they will not be subjected to abuse or victimisation.

### ***Economic/financial harms***

Exclusion from the online world, due to being targeted by online hate, may also mean that people miss out on social, professional and business opportunities that they would otherwise be able to financially benefit from (Law Commission, 2018). As Anne Novis, Disability Rights Campaigner and Chair of Inclusion London, said:

***“I came off LinkedIn, because on LinkedIn people get your contact details. You assume it is a professional network—I have an MBE and journalists want to contact me—but I came off it because of the nasty stuff that came my way as well. There is a way that we adjust our behaviour, because of the hostility we experience online and every day” (House of Commons, 2019).***

Economic harms can also come in other forms. In extreme cases these may involve loss of earnings/wages, when online hate renders victims unable to work, and fees for legal services and/or online protection (Law Commission, 2018).

An economic harm which is largely particular to disabled victims, especially those with learning disabilities, is being targeted online for financial exploitation. For example, adults

with learning disabilities told the Petitions Committee inquiry that they had been charged for online services that should be free (such as converting to a different religion), or been befriended online by people who then encouraged them to transfer their savings, benefits or income over to them. Anne Novis said:

*“Deliberate befriending online and offline of disabled people is very, very real, and deliberately to take advantage of them in different ways. It may be not to be hostile; it may be to have their money, their benefits, or to take some advantage of them. That definitely does happen and it’s a type of hostility that needs to be recognised” (House of Commons, 2019, p. 45).*

The phenomenon of disabled people being befriended for financial exploitation is another example of what was referred to in the last section as ‘mate crime’, although it should be noted that this is a contentious term as it is not recognised by law (House of Commons, 2019).

### ***The difference between online and offline hate***

There is some debate in the literature as to the similarity in impact between online and offline hate crime. Paterson et al. (2018) found that online hate crime among Muslim and LGBT individuals elicits similar emotional and behavioural responses as offline hate crime. They found that being a direct victim of offline or online hate:

- *Altered victims’ sense of safety, making them feel more vulnerable and anxious;*
- *Increased feelings of anger and injustice;*
- *Lead to increased suspicion and social withdrawal;*
- *Motivated increased community engagement through specialist groups and charities.*

However, online abuse was more likely than offline abuse to provoke help-seeking responses (e.g. discussing and reporting) and avoidant behaviours (e.g. ignoring the abuse, changing profiles), as opposed to retaliatory actions (e.g. being insulting or aggressive in return).

Participants in Awan and Zempi’s study (2015; 2017) observed that online hate can be worse than that which is face-to-face, as the Internet allows perpetrators to be anonymous. When victims do not know the identity of their abuser, this can lead to increased fear and paranoia. As Aisha said: “I am scared because in face-to-face situations I can see who the perpetrator is but when someone does it online, I always think who is it? Who is hiding behind the keyboard sending me messages of hate?” (Awan & Zempi, 2017).

The Law Commission (2018) also found that some victims felt that online hate was qualitatively different to offline hate. This was due not only to the anonymity of offenders, but also to the sheer volume of communications, their reach and permanency. Conversely, it is arguable that the distance between victim and offender renders the effects of online abuse less harmful, as there is no risk of immediate physical danger. However, given the large number of people who carry an Internet-enabled digital device with them wherever they go, online hate may be more difficult to escape from than offline hate.

Finally, it is observed that while being a victim of online hate may result in numerous and wide-ranging direct harms, wider societal harms may also incur through indirect victimisation, when those from the same group as the victim witness their online abuse. This may lead to them feeling vicariously victimised and restricting their online presence, which may harm society more widely if certain groups become under-represented online (Law Commission, 2018).

### **Summary**

- There is only a small body of research exploring the impact of online hate crimes;
- Online hate crimes can have emotional, psychological, mental health, behavioural, and economic/financial effects;
- Psychological effects of online hate may include feelings of shock, fear, anger, paranoia, distress, low self-esteem, frustration, fright, sadness and loneliness;
- Hate crime may cause or worsen mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide;
- Behavioural effects of online hate may include victims not leaving the house/only doing so when accompanied, and changing the way they look;
- Victims of online hate may avoid using the Internet, leading to feelings of isolation and disconnection, limiting their freedom of expression;
- Economic effects of online hate may include fees for legal services and online protection, and loss of income due to missed online professional opportunities;
- When online hate is witnessed, it may lead to feelings of vicarious victimisation which may lead to wider societal impacts;
- Unique features of online hate are the volume, reach, instantaneousness, and permanency of the abuse, as well as the fear of it manifesting in real world harms;
- There is growing research on the impact of online disablist hate crime leading to real world hate crimes;
- Research has found that victim of online and offline hate crime can experience similar, as well as different, harms;
- There is evidence to link online victimisation with offline victimisation;
- Hate crime may have both direct and indirect effects.



## 8. Gaps in the knowledge and recommendations for future research

The research evidence base on the adult online harms considered in this study is limited in scope and breadth. Whilst there is good, emergent research, much of the large scale research has been conducted in the US. Research conducted in the UK has tended to be smaller scale or based upon survey research with self-selecting samples that may be unrepresentative. In order to properly assess prevalence rates, research needs to take a more consistent approach as regards definitions, questions and measurements used. More research is needed on victim diversity, such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability.

### Research Gaps and Suggestions for Further Research: Overview

- There is a general lack of universally accepted definitions of many types of online harassment, particularly cyberbullying and trolling. Where there are accepted definitions more consistency is required across academic research
- There is an absence of prevalence statistics across all areas of online harassment, due to issues surrounding for example, police recording, under-reporting by victims, and methodological differences in empirical studies
- Statistics which do exist tend to omit certain groups; for example, there are rarely any statistics available which consider sexual orientation or any other gender other than male and female
- More research is required on victim diversity across all types of online harassment considered in this report
- There is very little research into adult cyberbullying. Most of the available research considers cyberbullying and children or adolescents
- There is considerable overlap between cyberbullying, trolling and online harassment in general which can result in difficulties in determining which type of online harassment is being considered specifically within some of the available research

Knowledge gaps and suggestions for future research, relevant to each section covered in this report are detailed below.

### Online Harassment

Online harassment is a general term which encompasses so many other behaviours, research should concentrate on specific areas of online harassment such as cyberstalking and trolling.

Although there is data available on the nature of online harassment and the scope of the problem more research is needed, and data should be compiled more regularly and in a more consistent way.

- Online harassment is a very broad term and therefore a universally agreed definition would be useful;
- Much of the research considers specific areas of harassment rather than general prevalence, nature, scope and impact of the harm;
- It would be arguably better to focus on discrete topics rather than using the general umbrella term "online harassment" for the purposes of future research.

## **Cyberbullying and Trolling**

- There is a lack of research which considers the cyberbullying of adults in general and trolling, given that most of the research in this area has considered cyberbullying and children and/or adolescents;
- The lack of research on prevalence makes it difficult to quantify the scale of the problem;
- The research which does exist is quite specific for example cyberbullying in the workplace;
- Given the overlap with other types of online harassment it may be more realistic to conduct further research into cyberstalking, trolling and online harassment in general given that cyberbullying is a type of online harassment and is closely linked to trolling;
- Further research is needed about the relationship between cyberbullying and gender and the protected classes such as race, religion, age, disability, sexual and orientation;
- There is very little research on the impact of cyberbullying in adults;
- There is little research addressing the impact of trolling in general other than in isolated and specific cases;
- There is little research on victims of trolling except for UK Members of Parliament and this research is currently in draft;
- More research is needed into the distinctions between all types of online harassment but the differences between cyberbullying and trolling;
- More research is needed to differentiate harmful behaviour from unpleasant behaviour which could be defended under the right to free speech.

## **Cyberstalking**

- Research into the prevalence of cyberstalking and specifically amongst groups other than young women aged 16 to 24;
- Further research into the gender differences in cyberstalking;
- Gender specific investigation into the perception of certain behaviours which could be considered cyberstalking;
- Wider research which also includes information on sexual orientation to evaluate whether sexuality is relevant in respect of the perpetrators and victims of cyberstalking;
- Research into male and transgender victims of cyberstalking is needed.

## Revenge Pornography

- In order to properly assess prevalence rates, research needs to take a more consistent approach as regards definitions and questions and measurements used;
- More research with those who engage in the non-consensual sharing of explicit images is needed in order to assess motivations, to see if such behaviour should be classified as revenge porn or be seen as on the continuum of image-based abuse;
- Research needs to further investigate the harms generally, and mental health harms specifically, that can result from being a victim of revenge porn;
- More research is needed on victim diversity, such as sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and disability, to see whether certain groups are more likely to be victims of such behaviour;
- The victim experience and pathways to perpetration need to be investigated further;

## Hate Crime

- Just as hate crime and incidents are clearly defined, a clear and widely agreed upon definition of hate speech needs to be developed;
- In order to properly assess prevalence rates across all five protected characteristics, research needs to take a more consistent approach as regards definitions, questions, and measurements;
- More research is needed on which of the five groups that are protected under law are most likely to experience harms as a result of online hate and why;
- As hate crime has been found to be on the rise against certain subtypes of these five protected groups – such as Muslims, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – future research should explore the experiences of these populations;
- Future research should look at online hate crime against groups with characteristics that fall outside of the five protected ones, such as gender, age, and homelessness.

## Appendix 1: Methodology

### Design

This research adopted a question-led adapted Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) in order to investigate online harm issues amongst adults, specifically: cyber harassment, threats, stalking, and coercion; cyberbullying and trolling; hate crime, hate speech, and hate incidents; and revenge pornography and image-based abuse. A REA is a tool for synthesising the available research evidence on a policy issue, as exhaustively as possible, within the limitations of a given timeframe. According to Davies (2003) the functions of a REA are to:

- search the electronic and print literature as comprehensively as possible within the constraints of a policy or practice timetable;
- collate descriptive outlines of the available evidence on a topic;
- critically appraise the evidence;
- sift out studies of poor quality; and
- provide an overview of what the evidence is saying.

A toolkit for undertaking a REA has been widely implemented since its inception by Government Social Research (see <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance>) and has recently been used by (e.g.) Horvath, Alys, Massey, Pina, Scally and Adler (2013); Horvath, Davidson, Grove-Hills, Gekoski, and Choak (2014); and Gekoski, Gray, Horvath, Edwards, Emirali, and Adler (2015).

The toolkit advises that a REA can be completed in three to six months. However, the research was undertaken to inform Government policy and the timeline was short, consequently the method was adapted as follows by:

1. Limiting the academic and grey literature searches to the databases previously found to be most productive in REAs;
2. limiting the number of search terms, search strings, and combinations used;
3. limiting the number of results reviewed from each database;
4. limiting the 'weight of evidence' scoring approach, to provide two scores only;
5. limiting the length of the final report.

### Research questions

The research questions in this REA are:

- What evidence exists about the **nature** of the different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What evidence exists about the **scope/prevalence** of these different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What evidence exists about which **groups are more likely to be subject to these types of online harm?**

- What evidence exists about the **impact** of these different types of online harm experienced by adults?
- What appear to be the **gaps in the research** related to these types of harms and what are **recommendations for future research, policy, and practice?**

## Procedure

### *Inclusion/exclusion criteria for material*

The initial step in identifying the relevant material was to set the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the literature, which were with the DCMS. The key criteria for the inclusion of material were:

- studies published between January 2014<sup>12</sup> and January 2019;
- international studies from the UK, US and EU only;
- studies focused on adult online harms (adults being defined as aged 18 and over);
- studies focused on online harassment, threats, stalking, coercion;
- studies focused on cyberbullying and trolling;
- studies focused on hate crime, hate speech, and hate incidents;
- studies focused on revenge pornography and image-based abuse;
- English language publications;
- all research methods, focusing on meta-analyses and literature reviews initially.

*Table 11. Search terms:*

Behaviour terms (OR separator)	Online terms (OR separator)	Age terms (OR separator)	Age terms (NOT/OR separators)
Harass*	Online	Adult	Young*
Threat*	Cyber	Wom?n	Adolescent*
Stalk*	Digital	M?n	Teenage*
Coerc*	Virtual	Child	Minor*
Bullying	Internet		Kid*
Trolling			Youth*
Revenge porn*			Juvenile*
Sex* image based abuse			
Hate crime*			
Hate speech			
Hate incident*			

<sup>12</sup> Some highly relevant pre-2014 materials were included as part of the REA identified by targeted searches.

### *Generation of search terms*

Search terms were subsequently developed from the research questions, see Table 11. Here, the focus was on maintaining a balance between including enough terms to ensure scope and rigour, while making them tightly and specifically focused, in order to lower the amount of results obtained and to exclude (as far as possible) a high number of irrelevant results. From the search terms, search strings were then generated.

From the search terms, four separate search strings were then generated:

**Search String 1:** (Harass\* OR Threat\* OR Stalk\* Or Coerc\*) AND (Online OR Cyber OR Digital OR Virtual OR Internet) AND (Adult OR Wom?n OR M?n) NOT (Child\* OR Young\* OR Adolescent\* OR Teenage\* OR Minor\* OR Kid\* OR Youth\* OR Juvenile\*)

**Search String 2:** (Bullying OR Trolling) AND (Online OR Cyber OR Digital OR Virtual OR Internet) AND (Adult OR Wom?n OR M?n) NOT (Child\* OR Young\* OR Adolescent\* OR Teenage\* OR Minor\* OR Kid\* OR Youth\* OR Juvenile\*)

**Search String 3:** (Revenge porn\* OR sex\* image based abuse) AND (Online OR Cyber OR Digital OR Virtual OR Internet) AND (Adult OR Wom?n OR M?n) NOT (Child\* OR Young\* OR Adolescent\* OR Teenage\* OR Minor\* OR Kid\* OR Youth\* OR Juvenile\*)

**Search String 4:** (Hate crime\* OR hate speech OR hate incident\*) AND (Online OR Cyber OR Digital OR Virtual OR Internet) AND (Adult OR Wom?n OR M?n) NOT (Child\* OR Young\* OR Adolescent\* OR Teenage\* OR Minor\* OR Kid\* OR Youth\* OR Juvenile\*) NOT (Extremism OR Terror\*)

### *Literature searching*

The relevant literature was identified through three main methods:

- systematic searches for relevant studies and literature across high priority academic databases relevant to the issue;
- an online search for grey literature; and
- a call for papers and approaching key research contacts directly, drawing on the teams pre-established networks.

The online databases identified for use in this REA were: **ISI Web of Science (WoS)** and **International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)**. Grey literature was identified through online **Google** searches. As the three databases all allow ordering of results by relevance, only the first **50 results** were reviewed from each database, for each search.

### *Data abstraction*

The first stage of data abstraction involved searching the academic databases. This identified **1,833** references altogether: **846** from **WoS** and **987** from **IBSS**. Taking the first 50 results for each, these were then screened in more depth. This was done firstly by title, secondly by abstract, and lastly by reading full text articles, which were obtained

through the UEL Library, the author’s website or university, Researchgate, LinkedIn, and using the Inter-library loans system. This left a total of **27** references from the academic database searches which were deemed relevant.

This process was then repeated for the Google searches, using modified search strings, as the original ones were designed for academic databases. Thus, for Google, the search strings were simplified with key words being used. For example: ‘online revenge porn adults’ (search string 3). The **Google** searches initially identified **13,889,030** pieces of material, **9** of which were ultimately deemed relevant to the REA.

Thus, the academic searches and grey literature (Google) searches together produced **36** relevant references across all four search strings, see Table 12.

*Table 12. Included numbers by search string and database.*

	IBSS included	WoS included	Google included	Total
<b>Search String 1</b>	1	9	1	11
<b>Search String 2</b>	3	7	0	10
<b>Search String 3</b>	0	4	5	9
<b>Search String 4</b>	1	2	3	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>36</b>

Due both to the low numbers produced from the academic and Google literature searching, and to ensure that the search process was as thorough and rigorous as possible, after the academic database and Google searches were complete, some further searching was undertaken. This was done by following up on references found when reading relevant studies, in addition to scanning the reference lists and bibliographies of included material. This method enabled the research team to include highly relevant literature that was not identified using search strings, more highly relevant literature could be identified if the recommended time scale to complete an REA was possible. Taken together with the material from the call for papers, this produced a further **205** pieces of material, which together make up the ‘miscellaneous’ searches.

*Table 13. Total number of search results and items excluded and included.*

All Search Strings	Total	Excluded	Included
<b>Academic databases</b>	1,833	1,806	27
<b>Google</b>	13,889,030	13,889,021	9
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	205	N/A	205
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,891,025</b>	<b>13,890,827</b>	<b>241</b>

After the data abstraction process was complete, there were a total of **241** documents, see Table 13. Key information from each piece of material (e.g. author(s), title, date of publication, type of source, country, method, and summary) was then extracted onto a specially designed Excel spreadsheet.

### *Weight of Evidence (WoE) coding*

Each reference was then evaluated using an adapted 'Weight of Evidence' (WoE) approach, in which the quality and relevance of the literature was assessed and given a strength rating of High (3), Medium (2), or Low (1). This approach was developed by the EPPI-Centre (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre; Gough, 2007) and can be used for both quantitative and qualitative research. Using this method ensured consistency in approach and allowed for assessment of existing research – which had been conducted using a variety of methodologies and diverse analytical strategies – according to a common assessment structure.

Given the short timeframe for this piece of work, the EPPI-Centre's approach was simplified, with each study weighted according to two (as opposed to five) dimensions. The first dimension was for the confidence in the paper and the second for the relevance of the paper to the REA. The first dimension combined EPPI1 and EPP2 in order to produce the WoE Confidence Score:

EPPI1: Considering all the quality assessment issues, how confident are you that the source's findings answer all the question(s) posed within this source?

EPPI2: How appropriate is the research design and analysis for addressing the questions of this rapid evidence assessment?

For the second dimension – the WoE Relevance Score - EPPI3 was used:

How relevant is the focus of the study (including conceptual focus, context, sample and measures) for addressing the question, or sub-questions, of this rapid evidence assessment?

The studies with lower judgements were given less weight in the synthesis. Full Weight of Evidence assessments for all **241** studies are included as a separate document (**Appendix 4**).

### *Data synthesis*

In order to produce the final report, data collected for the research questions was synthesised. This was achieved through **nine steps**:

1. Focusing on the research questions;
2. Organising the data collected in relation to the questions;
3. Identifying and exploring patterns in the data, underpinned by thematic analysis;
4. Integrating the data (synthesis);
5. Checking the synthesis (for quality, sensitivity, coherence and relevance) by revisiting the data collected;



6. Creating a final synthesis, comprising of two stages: (a) The PI and CI reviewing the work, and (b) The UKCCIS EG giving feedback on revised documents prior to publication;
7. Creation of the draft final report for the DCMS;
8. Revisions to the draft final report;
9. Production of the final report.

## **Ethics**

The REA poses few ethical issues as it includes reference to literature sources. The ethical areas prioritised relate to the correct use and acknowledgement of sources; the originality of writing; the need for a clear list of criteria for inclusion of studies to reduce any potential selection bias/mistakes by researchers; and awareness that findings in the REA could potentially exacerbate stereotypes and that findings could be controversial. Due care and attention has been paid throughout to these matters by the whole team, led by the Principal Investigator. Strategies to check for interrater reliability were also employed to help ensure integrity of searches. Our strategy mitigates against the likelihood of bias/skew from any one team member.

## Appendix 2: Team profiles

### Professor Julia Davidson, Principal Investigator

**Julia Davidson** is Professor of Criminology in the Department of Law and Criminology at the University of East London and is Co-Director of International Centre for Cyber Research at the University of East London. She is one of the UK's foremost experts on policy, practice and offending in online offending, with a specific focus on online victimisation and cybercrime. She plays an active role in key national committees such as the UK Council for Internet Safety (she chairs the Evidence Group) and provides expert advice to international organisations such as UNICEF, Europol, the US Sentencing Commission, the US Department of Justice and the United Nations (UN) ITU. She is a member of the Interpol Specialist Crimes against Children Group and of the Europol EC3 Expert Academic Advisory Group. She has recently joined the UK Inquiry into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse. As Chair of the Ethics Committee, she recently joined the Board of the Hague Justice Portal ([www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=13397](http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=13397)). She has directed a considerable amount of national and international research spanning 30 years.

Recent examples include a European Commission-funded ISEC study spanning four EU countries exploring industry and policing practice in the prevention of online child abuse (see [www.euchildsafetyonlineproject.com](http://www.euchildsafetyonlineproject.com)), and a study exploring young people's pathways into hacking undertaken in collaboration with the Europol Cybercrime Centre (EC3). She has also acted as an advisor on child internet safety to governments and practitioners in the MENA region, Africa and South America (Suriname), and has aided the Kingdom of Bahrain in developing a national Child Internet Safety Framework (2010, 2016). She is currently co-leading a project funded by end violence against children focusing on child online protection in Rwanda. Julia has worked extensively with the media and has published widely on abuse and internet safety, and has written many academic books and articles.

She has a PhD in Criminal Justice Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and was made Honorary Research Fellow at Royal Holloway University of London in May 2010. She is a Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. Julia provides regular expert advice on criminal justice issues to the media, and has recently worked on documentaries for the BBC and ITN. She has worked with ITV Evening News, the ITV News Channel, BBC News Channel, BBC Radio Four Woman's Hour, BBC Five Live Radio, BBC 2, BBC Northern Ireland, C4 and Sky News.

## Professor Sonia Livingstone, Co- Investigator

Sonia Livingstone is Professor of Social Psychology in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Taking a comparative, critical and contextualised approach, Sonia's research asks why and how the changing conditions of mediation are reshaping everyday practices and possibilities for action, identity and communication rights. She has published 20 books on media audiences, particularly examining the opportunities and risks for children and young people afforded by digital and online technologies, and with a focus on media literacy, social mediations and children's rights in the digital age. Her most recent books include the (2016, NYUP), *Digital technologies in the lives of young people* (edited, 2014, Routledge), *Meanings of audiences* (edited, 2013, Routledge) and *Media regulation: Governance and the interests of citizens and consumers* (2012, Sage).

She is a fellow of the British Psychological Society, Royal Society for the Arts, and is fellow and past President of the International Communication Association. She was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2014. She has advised the UK government, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, UNICEF and others on the opportunities, risks and rights associated with digital technologies for children and young people.

Currently she leads the projects Global Kids Online and [Preparing for a Digital Future](#) and directed the 33-country network, [EU Kids Online](#). Recent relevant reports include

- (1) Livingstone, S., Nandi, A., Banaji, S., & Stoilova, M. (2017) *Young adolescents and digital media uses, risks and opportunities in low- and middle-income countries: A rapid evidence review*. DfID/ODI: Gender and Adolescence, Global Evidence. [\[Text\]](#)
- (2) Livingstone, S. & Mason, J. (2015) *Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online: A review of existing knowledge regarding children and young people's developing sexuality in relation to new media environments*. A report commissioned by eNACSO, the European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online, Rome. [\[Text\]](#)
- (3) Livingstone, S., Carr, J., & Byrne, J. (2015) *One in three: The task for global internet governance in addressing children's rights*. Global Commission on Internet Governance. London: Chatham House. [\[Text\]](#) Republished by UNICEF Office of Research (2016).

Livingstone, S., Lansdown, G., & Third, A. (2017) *The case for a UNCRC General Comment on Children's Rights and Digital Media. A report prepared for the Children's Commissioner for England*. London: Office of the Children's Commissioner. [\[Report\]](#).

See Sonia's [online publications](#), [all publications](#) and blog posts on [media policy and parenting for a digital future](#). Or visit [www.sonia.livingstone@lse.ac.uk](mailto:www.sonia.livingstone@lse.ac.uk) and follow [@Livingstone\\_S](#)

### **Sam Jenkins, Research Fellow**

**Sam Jenkins** is a qualified barrister who has recently completed a PhD in cybercrime at Middlesex University for which she received a full scholarship. Sam's PhD concerns the justifications for the criminalisation of virtual child pornography. She has a master's degree in Criminology and Criminal Psychology and a first-class undergraduate degree in Criminology during which she wrote a first-class dissertation entitled 'The Electronic Scene of Crime – An investigation into Computer Forensics and Digital Evidence'. As a barrister Sam has experience of all types of criminal work and has also worked in house both in local government and in central government prosecuting high-value fraud cases for HMRC. She has also lectured in many aspects of cybercrime including cyberstalking and bullying and revenge and extreme pornography. Sam has excellent organisational and analytical skills and exceptional negotiation, legal research, IT and problem-solving skills. When Sam is not engaged in research work Sam runs a theatrical production company Ice Crystal Productions.

### **Dr Anna Gekoski, Research Fellow**

Anna Gekoski is Director of Research at Broome|Gekoski Ltd, a small research and evaluation company (<http://www.broomegekoski.co.uk>), a Research Associate at the University of East London; Forensic Psychological Services (FPS), Middlesex University; and the Centre for Citizenship and Community (CCC), University of Central Lancashire. Anna carries out research in the field of forensic psychology and criminology, specialising in qualitative trauma-focused research, with a particular emphasis on sexual and violent offending such as child sexual abuse, online pornography, rape, sexual offences on public transport, bereavement by homicide, offender profiling, media reporting of homicide, serial killing, and ethical issues in trauma-focused research. More recently she has also carried out research on mental health, wellbeing, and loneliness – working with local councils, housing associations, Clinical Commissioning Groups, and mental health charities. Anna is experienced in conducting literature reviews and Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) in the area of criminal justice. Most recently, she was employed as Project Manager and Senior Investigator on a REA commissioned by the British Transport Police, exploring 'what works in reducing sexual offences on public transport'. She has also worked on REAs on 'what works in managing young people who offend', commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, and on intrafamilial child sexual abuse, commissioned by the Office for the Children's Commissioner. Anna is highly proficient in researching and writing for various audiences, such as academics, policy makers, practitioners, and the wider public. She has published empirical research in well regarded peer-reviewed academic journals and has also written review chapters for edited books. As a writer, and formerly as a national newspaper journalist, she can write in a highly accessible way for the general public. As well as writing dozens of newspaper articles, she has authored/co-authored three popular books: *Murder by Numbers: Serial Sex Killers Since 1950* (1999); *Sara Payne: A Mother's Story* (2004); and *What's Normal Anyway: Celebrities' Own Stories of Mental Illness* (2014). She is currently working on a book about intrafamilial child sexual abuse which is to be published by Cambridge

Scholars Publishing in 2019. Anna has degrees in philosophy, psychology, criminology, and forensic psychology, from the Universities of York, Cambridge, Middlesex, and London Metropolitan University.

### **Dr Clare Choak, Research Assistant**

Clare Choak is an experienced Senior Lecturer who works in the criminology department at UEL and as an online specialist lecturer at the Open University. She recently completed her PhD - Young women on road: Femininities, race and gangs in London - has a master's in social research and is also completing a further master's in forensic psychology

### **Tarela Ike, Research Assistant**

Tarela Juliet Ike is a Doctoral researcher currently at the University of East London (UEL), UK. Her PhD research themes and current research area are on terrorism, radicalization/violent extremism and its implication for the efficacy of counter-terrorism. Her research has received funding's from diverse organisations such as the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threat and the British International Studies Association. In addition, she holds an LLM in International Law and Criminal Justice at UEL and a BL Law at the Nigerian Law School Abuja. Prior to her postgraduate studies, she worked as a lawyer at the Ministry of Justice, Anambra State, Nigeria.

### **Kirsty Phillips, Research Assistant**

Kirsty Phillips is currently employed by University of East London (UEL) as Project Coordinator, supervised by Professor Julia Davidson. At UEL, Kirsty is currently working on a project, funded by End Violence Against Children, to deliver a child online protection policy and implementation plan to the Government of Rwanda, in partnership 5Rights Foundation and University of Rwanda. Kirsty is also enrolled as PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London. Her PhD themes and current research involve Judgement and Decision Making, Bayesian Inference, Rationality and Evaluation of Eyewitness Testimony. Work undertaken as part of this PhD has been presented at and published by the Cognitive Science Society. Kirsty has previously worked as Research Assistant at Birkbeck and Honorary Assistant Psychologist in the NHS. Kirsty graduated University College London with a Distinction in Research Methods in Psychology MSc and Warwick University with a First Class degree in Psychology, BSc (with Honours).

## Appendix 3: References

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## Appendix 4: Abbreviated Weight of Evidence Table

(Please see the full WOE Table at Appendix 3a- contained in a separate document)

Reference	WoE Confidence Score	WoE Relevance Score
D'Amico, D. & Steinberger, L. (2015) 'Fighting for Online Privacy with Digital Weaponry: Combating Revenge Pornography', <i>NYSBA Entertainment, Arts and Sports Law Journal</i> , 26(2), pp. 24-36.	2	2
<a href="#">Alhaboby, Z.A., Barnes, J., Evans, H. &amp; Short, E. (2016) "'The language is disgusting, and they refer to my disability": the cyberharassment of disabled people', <i>Disability and Society</i>, 31(8), pp. 1138-1143.</a>	2	2
Alhaboby, Z.A., Barnes, J., Evans, H. & Short, E. (2017) 'Cyber-Victimization of People with Chronic Conditions and Disabilities: A Systematic Review of Scope and Impact', <i>Trauma, Violence, &amp; Abuse</i> , 36, pp. 1-18.	2	2
Anstead, A. (2017) Dealing with hate crime. EU: European Network Against Racism. Available at: <a href="https://www.ukren.org/uploads/Dealing%20with%20hate%20crime.pdf">https://www.ukren.org/uploads/Dealing%20with%20hate%20crime.pdf</a> .	2	2
Antjoule, N. (2016) The Hate Crime Report 2016: Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in the UK. London: Galop. Available at: <a href="https://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Hate-Crime-Report-2016.pdf">https://www.galop.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/The-Hate-Crime-Report-2016.pdf</a> .	2	2
Aslan, A. (2018) 'Online hate discourses: A study on hatred speech directed against Syrian refugees on Youtube', <i>Journal of Media Critiques</i> , 3(12), pp. 227-256.	2	2
Avocado Social (2019) The latest UK social media statistics for 2018. Available at: <a href="https://www.avocadosocial.com/the-latest-uk-social-media-statistics-for-2018/">https://www.avocadosocial.com/the-latest-uk-social-media-statistics-for-2018/</a> .	n/a	2
<a href="#">Awan, I. (2014) 'Islamophobia and Twitter: A Typology of Online Hate Against Muslims on Social Media', <i>Policy and Internet</i>, 6(2), pp. 133-150.</a>	2	2
Awan, I. (2016) 'Islamophobia on Social Media: A Qualitative Analysis of the Facebook's Walls of Hate', <i>International Journal of Cyber Criminology</i> , 10 (1), pp. 1-20.	2	2
Awan, I. & Zempi, I. (2015) We Fear for our Lives: Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility. UK: TELLMAMA. Available at: <a href="https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/We%20Fear%20For%20Our%20Lives.pdf">https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/resources/We%20Fear%20For%20Our%20Lives.pdf</a> .	2	3
Awan, I. & Zempi, I. (2016) 'The affinity between online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime: Dynamics and impacts', <i>Aggression and Violent Behaviour</i> , 27, pp. 1-8.	2	2
Awan, I. & Zempi, I. (2017) "'I will blow your face off": Virtual and physical world anti-Muslim hate crime', <i>British Journal of Criminology</i> , 57(2), pp. 362-380.	2	2
Bachmann, C. & Goode, B. (2017) LGBT in Britain - Hate Crime and Discrimination. London: Stonewall. Available at:	2	2

<a href="https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_hat_e_crime.pdf">https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_hat_e_crime.pdf</a> .		
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Balica, R. (2017) 'The criminalization of online hate speech: it's complicated', <i>Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice</i> , 9(2), pp. 184-190.	2	2
Barlow, C. and Awan, I. (2016) "You Need to Be Sorted Out with a Knife": The Attempted Online Silencing of Women and People of Muslim Faith Within Academia', <i>Social Media &amp; Society</i> , doi: 10.1177/2056305116678896.	2	2
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Bates, S., (2017) 'Revenge porn and mental health: A qualitative analysis of the mental health effects of revenge porn on female survivors', <i>Feminist Criminology</i> , 12(1), pp. 22-42.	2	3
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Best, J. (1999) <i>Random Violence: How we talk about new crimes and new victims</i> . London: University of California Press.	2	2
Binns, A. (2012) 'DON'T FEED THE TROLLS! Managing troublemakers in magazines' online communities. <i>Journalism Practice</i> , 6(4), pp. 547-562.	2	2
Bishop, J. (2012) 'Scope and limitations in the government of Wales Act 2006 for tackling internet abuses in the form of "flame trolling"', <i>Statute Law Review</i> , 33(2), pp. 207-216.	2	2
Bishop, J. (2013) 'The effect of de-individuation of the internet troller on criminal procedure implementation: An interview with a hater', <i>International Journal of Cyber Criminology</i> , 7(1), 28.	2	2
Bishop, J. (2014) 'Representations of "trolls" in mass media communication: a review of media-texts and moral panics relating to "internet trolling"', <i>International Journal of Web Based Communities</i> , 10(1), pp. 7-24.	2	2
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Community Security Trust (2018) Antisemitic Incidents. London: CST. Available at: <a href="https://cst.org.uk/data/file/2/9/Incidents%20Report%202018%20-%20web.1549538710.pdf">https://cst.org.uk/data/file/2/9/Incidents%20Report%202018%20-%20web.1549538710.pdf</a> .	2	2
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Crown Prosecution Service (2017) Hate Crime Annual Report 2016-17. London: CPS. Available at: <a href="https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cps-hate-crime-report-2017_0.pdf">https://www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/publications/cps-hate-crime-report-2017_0.pdf</a>	2	2
<a href="https://www.cps.gov.uk/hate-crime-matters">Crown Prosecution Service (2019) Hate crime matters. Available at https://www.cps.gov.uk/hate-crime-matters.</a>	n/a	2
Cybersmile Foundation (2017) Stop cyberbullying day survey 2017. London: Cybersmile Foundation. Available at: <a href="https://www.cybersmile.org/wp-content/uploads/Stop-Cyberbullying-Day-Survey-2017.pdf">https://www.cybersmile.org/wp-content/uploads/Stop-Cyberbullying-Day-Survey-2017.pdf</a> .	2	2
<a href="https://www.cybercivilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RPStatistics.pdf">Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2014). End revenge porn. Available at: https://www.cybercivilrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/RPStatistics.pdf.</a>	n/a	2
Davidson, J. & Martellozzo, E. (2010) Kingdom of Bahrain: State of the Nation Review of Internet Safety. Kingdom of Bahrain: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. Available at: <a href="http://www.tra.org.bh/media/document/State%20of%20the%20nation%20review%20full3.pdf">http://www.tra.org.bh/media/document/State%20of%20the%20nation%20review%20full3.pdf</a> .	2	2
Davidson, J. & Martellozzo, E. (2016) Kingdom of Bahrain: National Internet Safety Review. Kingdom of Bahrain: The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. Available at: <a href="http://www.tra.org.bh/media/document/%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9%20%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AA%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86.pdf">http://www.tra.org.bh/media/document/%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9%20%D9%84%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%B9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%A9%20%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%AA%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D9%85%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%86.pdf</a> .	2	2
Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2014) 'Hate speech in cyberspace', <i>Wake Forest Law Review</i> , 319, pp. 1-21.	2	2
Doom, J. (2015) 'The New Porn Platform: Standards Gaps in 'Revenge Porn' Policy and Protection', <i>Gnovis Journal</i> , XV(2), pp. 1-13.	2	2
Drake, B. (2015) The darkest side of online harassment: Menacing behavior. Washington: Pew Research Center.	2	2

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