Image Based Abuse

What is image-based abuse?

Image-based abuse is when someone shares, or threatens to share, intimate images without the consent of the person in the photo.

Image-based abuse includes photos or videos of:

- A nude person
- A person whose breasts or genitals are visible
- A person engaged in a sex act
- A person showering or bathing
- 'upskirting' and 'downblousing': taking photos up someone's skirt or down their top
- A person's face digitally added to a pornographic or sexualised image.

It includes images that were taken **with and without** a person's consent.

This behaviour is a form of abuse. It is used to threaten, harass, objectify, abuse and coerce people. Perpetrators of image-based abuse have varying motivations including control, intimidation, sexual gratification, monetary gain and to build social status[1,2.]

Anyone can be a victim.

Image-based abuse can be perpetrated by partners, former partners, someone known to the victim, or by strangers. Other people that have been targeted include temporary visa migrants, people using dating websites that have consensually shared intimate images and are later blackmailed, women on public transport who have had photos taken up their skirt or down their tops, and people who have had their computer or devices hacked and are later blackmailed[3].

Language matters: Beyond 'revenge porn'

You may have heard this type of abuse described as 'revenge porn'. This term does not adequately capture the nature and causes of this type of abuse. The term 'revenge porn':

- Implies the perpetrator is a former partner that has been wronged – perpetrators have various motivations and may not even know the victim.
- Implies that the victim has done something wrong and deserves revenge – no one deserves to experience this form of abuse.
- Likens the images to legal, commercial pornography – these images are not necessarily used for sexual gratification but can be used to ridicule a person's body type or objectify them[4].
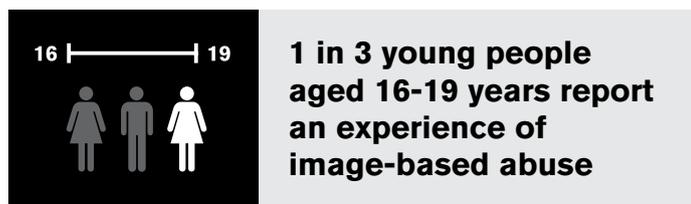
How many Australians have experienced image-based abuse?

Research shows that 1 in 5 people have experienced image-based abuse[5] and that some people, for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, LGBTQI people, people with a disability and young people, are at heightened risk.

The research also revealed the harm caused by image-based abuse. Overall, victims of any image-based abuse were almost twice as likely as non-victims to report experiencing high levels of psychological distress.

1 in 3 young people aged 16-19 years report an experience of image-based abuse

Henry, N., Powell, A. & Flynn, A. (2017). Not just 'revenge pornography': Australian's experiences of image-based abuse. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University. Retrieved from: https://www.rmit.edu.au/content/dam/rmit/documents/college-of-design-and-social-context/schools/global-urban-and-social-studies/revenge_porn_report_2017.pdf

While women and men are equally likely to report being a victim of image-based abuse, the perpetrators are most likely to be men[6].

Victims of image-based abuse experience high levels of psychological distress

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What can people do if they are experiencing image-based abuse?

If you or someone you know is experiencing image-based abuse, you can:

- Report it to the eSafety office (if the victim is aged under 18 years). See www.esafety.gov.au/complaints-and-reporting/offensive-and-illegal-content-complaints.
- Report it to the Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network, who can investigate your report and may refer it to the Police (if the victim is aged over 18 years). See https://www.acorn.gov.au/.
- Report it to Police.
- Contact the website administrator and ask them to remove the content.
- If you feel safe and able to do so, you can ask the perpetrator to delete copies of the images.

[1] Henry, N, Powell, A & Flynn, A (2017). Not just 'revenge pornography': Australian's experiences of image-based abuse. Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University. Retrieved from: https://www.rmit.edu.au/content/dam/rmit/documents/college-of-design-and-social-context/schools/global-urban-and-social-studies/revenge_porn_report_2017.pdf

[2] DeKeseredy, W & Schwartz, M (2016). 'Thinking sociologically about image-based sexual abuse: The contribution of male peer support theory'. Sexualization, Media and Society. October – December 2016: 1-8.

[3] Henry, Powell & Flynn, op cit., p. 3.

[4] Ibid., p. 3.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 5.

[7] Ibid., p. 7-8.

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