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## ONLINE ABUSE:

The use of the digital world to  
perpetrate violence against women  
and girls



## Online Abuse – the use of the digital world to perpetrate violence against women and girls

### Online abuse - What's the issue?

As our lives are increasingly played out online, so the use of social media, apps and smartphones to abuse and harass women and girls increases with it. While the data analysis in this area is still fairly new, what is known is that women are 27 times more likely to be harassed online<sup>1</sup> than men. Additionally, a study of the experiences of 11 to 16 year-olds shows that girls are more likely than boys to experience pressure to look or behave in a particular way,<sup>2</sup> and in 2014, 87% of all reported child sexual abuse images depicted girls.<sup>3</sup> While people of all genders can experience online abuse, women and girls are foremost targets of online violence and are the most affected by the consequences. Online violence against women and girls is exacerbated by the gendered norms of popular culture creating gendered specific risks that reinforce harmful stereotypes and gender inequality. Online abuse of women and girls is compounded with multiple forms of discrimination intersecting with racism, homophobia and ableism etc. For instance over half of abusive tweets to MPs in the run up to the 2017 general election were directed at one black woman MP, Diane Abbott, shadow Home Secretary; the abuse targeted at her was misogynist and racist in its content.<sup>4</sup>

'One of the significant factors of online abuse for women is the frequent use of threats of sexual violence and derogatory comments about women's appearance and bodies.'<sup>5</sup> Studies have shown the impact of online abuse are no different to abuse experienced in the offline world, with feminists targeted online confirming it was very traumatic.<sup>6</sup>

Online abuse is not happening in a digital vacuum, it is an extension of and part of other forms of violence against women and girls. 'Online channels and spaces are new or more opaque ways to perpetrate other forms of violence against women and girls.'<sup>7</sup> Across Europe, 9 million girls have experienced some kind of cyber violence by the time they are 15 years old and 1 out of 4 young women reported being stalked or sexually harassed at least once.<sup>8</sup>

Online abuse, while overlapping, can be seen to fall into one of the following categories;

- Abuse of women in the public eye/with a public profile
- As an extension of coercive control by intimate (ex) partners and family members
- Specific issues of concern to children and young people including child sexual exploitation (CSE)
- Sharing images without consent
- Online sexual exploitation, including prostitution and pornography.

Digital spaces operate as a magnifying glass for harmful stereotypes, rape culture and patriarchy. 30% of all internet traffic is porn, with over 80% of the most visited sites containing aggressive acts directed

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<sup>1</sup> Her Net Her Rights – Mapping the state of online violence against women and girls in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> The State of Girls' Rights in the UK, <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-international-ukthe-state-of-girls-rights-in-the-uk-2016executive-summary/pdf/download?token=TpNDuxHe>, *Plan International UK, 2016*

<sup>3</sup> Her Net Her Rights, [https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights\\_report\\_2017\\_for\\_web.pdf](https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf), *European Women's Lobby, 2018*

<sup>4</sup> Women, Power and Politics, *British Council, 2018*

[https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j003\\_women\\_power\\_and\\_politics\\_report\\_digital\\_version.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/j003_women_power_and_politics_report_digital_version.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stoponlineabuse.org.uk/sexism>

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Lewis, Michael Rowe, Clare Wiper, 'Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls, *The British Journal of Criminology*, Volume 57, Nov 2017.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> The State of Girls' Rights in the UK, <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-international-ukthe-state-of-girls-rights-in-the-uk-2016executive-summary/pdf/download?token=TpNDuxHe>, *Plan International UK, 2016*

at women.<sup>9</sup> The viewing of violent porn compounds other violence against women and girls. Porn can train viewers (often children and young people) to develop a sexuality which erotises the domination of men and the subordination of women.<sup>10</sup> Online pornography is one aspect of sexual exploitation, it also includes the use of websites for facilitating prostitution as well as social media pages that condone rape and other violent acts against women.

Online abuse and harassment has a knock on effect to other parts of women and girls lives, with 41% of respondents to an Amnesty International survey saying they felt physically unsafe after experiencing online harassment.<sup>11</sup>

Digital spaces are used by anti-feminists and misogynists groups (whether related to political parties/groups or individuals) to express their hate of women, in a much more open way than in the offline world. This hateful rhetoric and harassment of women in the online sphere denies access to the opportunity for expression because of the fear of abuse and threats. 76% of women who have experienced online abuse have made changes to the way they use platforms.<sup>12</sup> Social media is an important space for expression; online abuse and harassment are therefore a threat to women's freedom of expression and used to maintain male domination in the digital sphere. Any policy work to address gender inequality and violence against women and girls, must, therefore, include tackling the gendered nature of online abuse.

## What's happening to women and girls?

### Trolling

Whoever the intended victim, the aim of online abuse is to control, silence and scare. The targeting of women's statements and profiles online with repeated abuse and threats has the aim to *'banish women from digital spaces.'*<sup>13</sup> Trolls often utilise anonymous accounts to target statements made regarding gender equality and feminism by women online. They can be 'attracted' by a hashtag or an issue that has been given a spotlight to target women or women's organisations with abuse and threats. Trolling can be conducted by numerous online accounts or by an individual account. Tactics used by trolls and perpetrators of domestic abuse using the online sphere as a tool to further their control will often overlap.

### Cyber stalking

Cyber stalking is the act of spying, fixating or compiling information on someone and communicating with them against their will.<sup>14</sup> Cyberstalking is often used as a form of coercive control by (ex) partners, but also to stalk someone not known personally to the perpetrator. Perpetrators utilise the information shared on an individual's personal, financial, relationships, social and work life to harass and intimidate, including utilising the information to commit stalking offline by monitoring the location identified on the profile or status updates. Online technologies allow perpetrators to potentially track down as well as continue to abuse without physical access to the survivor. Social media particularly gives perpetrators continued access to their victim post separation through messaging and social media – being physically present isn't necessary to continue the abuse. Reports have found that 48% of survivors have experienced online harassment or abuse post-separation and

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.broadbandcommission.org/documents/reports/bb-wg-gender-discussionpaper2015-executive-summary.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.objectnow.org/pornography/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/>

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> Op cit – Her Net Her Rights

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

38% reported online stalking.<sup>15</sup> Worryingly, given the increasing use of online technologies, this figure is likely to have increased significantly since the report was published in 2014.

### **Smart Home Devices**

The use of smart home devices offers another opportunity for control and surveillance. It is also another example of technological advances enabling abuse in the offline world. The issue of internet connected smart home devices being used within the context of coercive control was raised by Jack Sargent AM during plenary at the Senedd in July 2018. He noted 'Internet connected locks, speakers, thermostats, lights and cameras that have all been marketed as the newest conveniences are also being used as a means of harassment, monitoring, revenge and control'<sup>16</sup>. In response, the then leader of the house confirmed Welsh Government is aware of technology enabling coercive control and will be reviewing guidance via the 'Ask and Act' policy and 'Don't be a Bystander' campaign, to ensure people understand it can be used in this context and to recognise it.

University College London has also carried out research into the use of smart home devices within the context of coercive control. The findings highlight how the devices can enable psychological abuse and gas-lighting 'If you tell someone, 'My smart thermostat is behaving oddly, it keeps changing without me doing anything', or 'The lights in my home keep switching on and off without me doing anything' – it sounds like you're a bit unstable to the people around you.'" This process of systematic gas-lighting – a form of psychological abuse designed to make someone doubt their version of reality – erodes a person's self-esteem and can increase their dependency on their abuser.<sup>17</sup>

### **Smart Phones**

In terms of stalking and harassment, a quick google reveals websites and 'how to' guides on secretly tracking someone's location on a smart phone. Ex and current partners as well as friends and acquaintances can use geolocation installed in all smartphones to further control and intimidate and additional apps can be downloaded to the phone to monitor text and phone conversations. Allowing round the clock surveillance and putting women at increased risk. Perpetrators utilise the pervasiveness of mobile phones and the multitude of means of communicating to persistently message and call, both during an abusive relationship and post-separation, meaning that the survivor has little or no space where they can be free from the abuse.

### **Internet Banking**

Ex-partners have also been known to use internet banking as a way to threaten and control, depositing small amounts of money into the victim/survivors account and writing abusive messages in the 'reference' section – which will show up on the online bank statement.

### **Women in the Public Eye**

The New Voices report from the Electoral Reform looked at Welsh politician's experiences of abuse, with 40% stating they had experienced some form of online abuse<sup>18</sup>. While respondents to the survey were not just women, Sian Gwenllian AM stated 'The abuse that women in particular are having to face is just completely unacceptable and I think that is a cultural change that needs to happen. It's a bit of a sign maybe of how women are still viewed as people who can be demeaned and can be abused'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Women\\_s\\_Aid\\_Virtual\\_World\\_Real\\_Fear\\_Feb\\_2014-3.pdf](https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Women_s_Aid_Virtual_World_Real_Fear_Feb_2014-3.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> <http://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5000?lang=en-GB>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/internet-of-things-smart-home-domestic-abuse>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/new-voices-how-welsh-politics-can-begin-to-reflect-wales/#sub-section-1>

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

Mob attacks by trolls are a common form of online violence women with public profiles, such as politicians, experience. This is characterised by social media posts being attacked by an organised group of abusers who systematically follow identified women's social media accounts, wait for a posting and then fill the comments section with abusive and violent messages.

Women's organisations and individual women's campaign websites have also been disproportionately impacted by Malware and DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks. These cyber-attacks are aimed at silencing women's collective activism and campaigning by targeting their followers, crashing or shutting down their websites and effectively holding their mechanisms of communication "digitally hostage".<sup>20</sup>

### **Prostitution**

The internet is also used to enable the pimping of women and girls, enabling easier buying and selling of women via dedicated platforms and chat rooms. Sex traffickers and pimps are using the internet to recruit and groom women and girls and to sell them through adverts on websites either on generic or dedicated ad sites. Sites often promote young women and girls under terms such as 'sugar daddy wanted'.<sup>21</sup>

### **Online Dating**

Survivors have told Welsh Women's Aid about the use of online dating sites by perpetrators of abuse and violence. This includes the use of online dating sites by men with a history of domestic abuse and sexual violence and the use of the platforms like Plenty of Fish (POF) or Tinder to harass and abuse women also using the sites. The abuse online can include trolling, cyber stalking and the sharing of unsolicited explicit images or messages (i.e. dick pics). The abuse can also happen offline following the initial contact being made online. The 'Ask for Angela' initiative<sup>22</sup> instigated by Lincolnshire County Council, was set up in recognition of this. The initiative provides information at bar and club so that anyone feeling unsafe due to a person's actions, words or behaviour on a date can approach staff safely for support, the posters also link to local specialist support services.

### **Image-based sexual abuse**

The non-consensual creation and sharing of private, sexual images includes: revenge porn, recording sexual assault, sextortion (hacking into a person's media and sharing images or coercing a person to create and share images) and pornographic photoshopping. 30% of offences involve young people under the age of 19.<sup>23</sup>

Upskirting is a term used to describe the act of taking a photograph (also known as a 'creepshot') up someone's skirt without their permission. The sexually invasive act is set to be made a criminal offence in parliament.

### **Children and Young People**

In terms of young people, ChildLine has reportedly carried out over 2,100 counselling sessions with young people who talked about online child sexual exploitation (CSE) in 2016/17, and in 2016, the Internet Watch Foundation identified over 57,000 URLs containing child sexual abuse images<sup>24</sup>.

The European Women's Lobby report, *Her Net Her Rights*, identified a number of different types of online abuse which specifically impact on children:

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<sup>20</sup> Op cit – Her Net Her Rights

<sup>21</sup> Op cit – Her Net Her Rights

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/news/ask-for-angela-international-success-to-raise-awareness-of-sexual-violence/130376.article>

<sup>23</sup> Clare McGlynn and Erika Rackley, *Image-based sexual abuse: more than just 'revenge porn'*, University of Birmingham

<sup>24</sup> Online abuse facts and statistics, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/online-abuse/facts-statistics/>, NSPCC, 2016

- **Online grooming** - the process of building an online abusive relationship with a child, in order to lure the child into sexual abuse, child-trafficking situations, child prostitution, or child documented rape. The term 'grooming' is widely criticised by survivors themselves, as it fails to name explicitly the child sexual abuse dimension of the act.
- **Violence in pornography** - has increased remarkably, while the consumers are getting younger and younger. Research show that pornography normalises sexual violence against women and girls, and that it limits healthy sexual relationships<sup>25</sup>. Young people and future generations need to be able to develop their own sexuality, free from pornography's images of sex as connected to violence, humiliation and assaults.
- **Sexting** – the process of sharing explicit images or messages. Research shows this is not a gender-neutral practice; it is shaped by the gender dynamics of the peer group in which, primarily, boys harass girls, and it is exacerbated by the gendered norms of popular culture, and by families and schools failing to recognise the problem or support girls<sup>26</sup>.

## What is the response?

### Principles of responding

1. Women and girls should have the right to access online spaces free from harassment, abuse and threats.
2. Survivors of VAWDASV have a right to use technology and online platforms.
3. Safety planning should be survivor-centred and empower women and girls to continue to have access to technology and online spaces.
4. Abusers that use technology or are abusive on online platforms must be held to account.
5. Technology and internet companies have a responsibility to take action to prevent abuse from happening and to facilitate effective early intervention where it does occur.<sup>27</sup>

### Legislative and Government Responses

UK Government has gone some way in recognising the impact of online abuse and there are a number of pieces of legislation and court orders in place to help tackle it and hold perpetrators to account.

- While cyberbully is not a specific criminal offence in the UK, linked offences including harassment, malicious communications, stalking and threatening violence are crimes. The [Serious Crime Act 2015](#), which criminalises controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship, can be used in instances of online abuse.
- It is a criminal offence under the [Communication Act 2003](#) to send messages using any public communication channel, such as Facebook or Twitter which are grossly offensive, indecent or menacing.
- In 2015 it became a criminal offence in the UK, via the [Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015](#), with a maximum two years imprisonment to share private sexual images without consent.
- People experiencing online harassment and abuse from a person known to them, can use [injunctions and non-molestation orders](#) against the perpetrators.
- The [Harassment Act 1997](#) could be used when the abuser is not known – for example trolling by strangers.
- The UK government has also confirmed it will introduce legislation to ban upskirting.

<sup>25</sup> Op cit – Her Net Her Rights

<sup>26</sup> The State of Girls' Rights in the UK, <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-international-ukthe-state-of-girls-rights-in-the-uk-2016executive-summary.pdf/download?token=TpNDuxHe>, *Plan International UK, 2016*

<sup>27</sup> Developed using information from [www.techsafety.org.au](http://www.techsafety.org.au)

However evidence shows that the current response is not adequate. The Amnesty survey found 33% of women in the UK felt the police response was inadequate.<sup>28</sup> In the UK Government's recent consultation on Transforming Responses to Domestic Abuse,<sup>29</sup> they consulted on tackle domestic abuse which is perpetrated online, or through control of technology. This response needs to be wider than just domestic abuse and look at addressing all of the types on online abuse outlined above.

Welsh Government has recognised technology is enabling coercive control and stated in plenary that it will review guidance via the 'Ask and Act' framework and 'Don't be a Bystander' campaign, to ensure people understand it can be used in this context and to recognise it. This, however, is absent from the Cross Departmental National VAWDASV Delivery Framework 2018-2021 and National VAWDASV Strategy 2016-2021.

The Welsh Government have produced [an online safety action plan for children and young people](#) in Wales as well as [Hwb Digital Learning for Wales](#) online resource has produced recommendations for parents and carers to address the impact of social media on young people. The action plan commits to link with the delivery of the [National Strategy on Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence 2016–2021](#) relates to this area to increased awareness in children and young people of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and that abusive behaviour is always wrong. However the action plan itself and the resources on Hwb are not gendered and do not recognise the disproportionate impact of girls and young women.

### **Technology Company Responses**

Technology companies have developed mechanisms for abuse to be reported to the website/platform used by the abuser, for instance [Safety@Facebook](#). However they need to take more responsibility for the use of their devices and apps to further abuse. For instance, app developers should not be able to apply 'spyware' or GPS locators as standard to devices or apps and should be required to provide adequate and ongoing information and warning to consumers that these may give away their location or allow someone to track their movements.

Other methods technology companies have introduced to keep devices and online accounts safe from others utilising them include [2 step verification processes](#). This can help protect private devices and online accounts from being accessed by others without the owner's knowledge. This can help post-separation in preventing domestic abuse perpetrators from having continued access to accounts without the survivor's knowledge. It also assists in preventing accounts being hacked through Malware and DDoS, as mentioned above. However this protection is limited as it fails to take into account how the coercive controlling behaviour of a perpetrator of abuse enables them to have access to accounts.

Both the governments and technology companies' responses are often focused on safety of devices rather than prevention of abuse and the rights of women and girls to access online space and use technology free from abuse. Many of the responses so far put the onus on the survivor to take action rather than holding the perpetrators of abuse to account.

### **Specialist VAWDASV Services and Survivor-led Responses**

At Welsh Women's Aid we have carried out a literature review into online safety to inform the development of an evidenced based online safety training, which will be utilised by our member organisations with survivors accessing their services, including those living in refuge provision. Via the STAR programme, Welsh Women's Aid also offers a presentation for parents about the importance of online safety for children and young people. Further to this we are raising awareness of online abuse utilising our own social media platforms.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/>

<sup>29</sup> [https://consult.justice.gov.uk/homeoffice-moj/domestic-abuse-consultation/supporting\\_documents/Transforming%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse.pdf](https://consult.justice.gov.uk/homeoffice-moj/domestic-abuse-consultation/supporting_documents/Transforming%20the%20response%20to%20domestic%20abuse.pdf)

Other resources available online include:

- [Stop Online Abuse](#) is a resource that provides practical advice and information. It was developed by a collaboration of seven voluntary organisations from across the women's and LGBT sector led by Galop<sup>30</sup> to provide online resource to help women and LGBT people who have experienced online abuse.
- [Glitch UK](#) was set up by Seyi Akiwowo, a former British local politician from London, after she faced horrendous online abuse when a video of her speech at the European Parliament went viral. She found Glitch UK, a small non-profit organisation working to end online abuse. GlitchUK provide training, awareness raising, advocacy and action.<sup>31</sup>
- [HeartMob](#) is a project of Hollaback!, a non-profit organization powered by a global network of local activists who are dedicated to ending harassment in public spaces. It is a platform that provides real-time support to individuals experiencing online harassment and empowers bystanders to act.<sup>32</sup>
- [Take Back my Tech!](#) is a feminist initiative that provides a safe space and community online for those who may be experience online violence or harassment. The website provides safety roadmaps, information and provides an avenue for taking action.<sup>33</sup>

## Recommendations

### Policy

- Online abuse is an extension and continuation of gendered violence. UK and Welsh Government policy responses should therefore specifically name online abuse and plans to tackle it when working to combat VAWDASV.
- The Welsh Government have commitments their an online safety action plan for children and young people in Wales and resources in Hwb however these need to recognise the gendered context of online abuse for children and young people and enable access to specialist support. Additionally the Welsh Government has stated the 'Ask and Act' Framework and 'Don't be a Bystander' campaign guidance will includes responses to online abuse. Welsh Women's Aid would urge Welsh Government to ensure this is done in consultation with specialist services and survivors.
- There are many articles within the Istanbul Convention<sup>34</sup> which can be applied to online violence. Including article 33 on psychological violence, 34 on stalking and 40 on sexual harassment for example. Welsh Women's Aid again urges Welsh Government to embed the Istanbul Convention good practice to support its response to all VAWDASV including online abuse.
- Welsh Women's Aid backs the recommendations from the Electoral Reform New Voices report that Welsh political parties should develop a joint code of conduct on intimidating behaviour and offer better training and guidance to candidates on social media abuse.<sup>35</sup> This must recognise that online abuse of public figures is disproportionately misogynistic, racist, homophobic, transphobic and ableist.
- UK Government must also consider the police and other criminal justice professionals' response to reports of online abuse. Welsh Women's Aid would suggest training on the impact of online abuse within a gendered context, recognising that women are targeted online for the same reason they are targeted offline and that it can enable coercive control.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.galop.org.uk/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://fixtheglitch.org/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://iheartmob.org/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.takebackthetech.net/about>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>

<sup>35</sup> Op Cit – Electoral Reform New Voices



- UK government should strengthen protection orders and legislation to ensure that these extend protection to the online arena. Any contact made in an online context should be treated as a breach of an order, just as it would be in real life.
- Welsh Women’s Aid supports the call for at least 1% of the new Tech Tax announced in the UK government budget in October 2018 is invested in ending online abuse and violence against women and girls.<sup>36</sup>

## Education

- Media and ITC education should include gender equality awareness and an understanding how gender stereotyping has a negative impact on the achievement of gender equality overall.
- Education needs to encompass the legalities of sharing explicit content on social media. Making reference to the Criminal Justice and Courts Act, which includes the section on disclosing private sexual images.
- Welsh Women’s Aid supports the development of the new Sexuality and Relationships Education<sup>37</sup>, which will encompass a Whole Education Approach<sup>38</sup> to healthy relationships, sexual harassment and consent. A greater emphasis and gravitas also needs to be given to the effects of experiencing any kind of abuse online.

## Technology companies

- Social media platforms need to do more to recognise online violence and work to hold trolls and perpetrators to account, by working with the police and work to remove pages that incite gendered violence.
- Welsh Women’s aid would backs the call for social media companies to strengthen what they offer as tools for users to report abuse and enable the monitoring illegal online activity to assist in reporting to the police. Social media companies must take swifter and more robust action to remove abusive accounts and content to prevent further abuse.
- All internet providers should install Opt-in filters that block pornographic material as standard.
- Welsh Women’s Aid would urge social media sites to sign up to codes of conduct around Cyberbullying, work quickly to remove offensive sites and hold cyberbullies to account.
- Dating sites must have robust reporting mechanisms in place for users to report harassment from other users and the ability to immediately block anyone perpetrating abuse and harassment.
- App developers and smart devices producers should not apply ‘spyware’ or GPS locators as standard to devices or apps and should be required to provide adequate and ongoing information and warning to consumers that these may give away their location or allow someone to track their movements.

## Specialist VAWDASV Services

Many services and refuges will already be supporting survivors who are being harassed, threatened and tracked-down via technology, but consideration should be given to:

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<sup>36</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/647ff5\\_bdbdf862a2234be19ad65a9da060d1a2.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/647ff5_bdbdf862a2234be19ad65a9da060d1a2.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> The Future of Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales, <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf>, Welsh Government 2017

<sup>38</sup> Good Practice Guide: A Whole Education Approach to Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales, <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/commsafety/151020-whole-education-approach-good-practice-guide-en.pdf>, Welsh Government 2015

- Informing survivors of the risk of location their devices and accounts and those of their children. In particular gifted devices from the perpetrator to themselves or any children could be utilised to track-down or monitor them and locate safe accommodation including refuge.
- The on-going impact of online abuse and stalking post-separation and to support survivors to mitigate this through changing numbers, passwords or access to smart-home devices.
- Share details of resources who can provide further support
- Discuss using legislative powers to hold perpetrators of online abuse to account.
- The ongoing emotional and psychological impact of online abuse and the therapeutic support a survivor may want.

Services should give specific consideration to children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse and are living in refuge;

- Children in refuge may feel isolated; their routines have been disrupted and they are not able to have friends or other visitors which could leave them feeling lonely and more likely to connect with strangers online.
- Screen time may increase as different families have different approaches to managing how long children spend online and mum may find it difficult to enforce usual limits.
- Children need to be made aware of the risk of sharing the refuge's location when online.

Services supporting women who are experiencing harassment, either from someone known to them or a stranger online should be mindful it doesn't stop once the device is switched off. The impact of online harassment has real-world consequences with women plagued by emotional and psychological distress. Services should consider:

- Supporting survivors to document all the examples of harassment, this will prove valuable should they wish to involve the police. Additionally, harassment can escalate, it may be useful to keep a record of how long and how much abuse there has been.
- Ensure survivors are aware there are support networks available and opportunities to link-in with other people experiencing harassment.
- Support the survivor to report the harassment to the social media platform.
- Again consider legislative powers, such as the Harassment Act 1997.

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For more information on the points covered in this briefing please contact members of our policy and public affairs team:

Catherine Phillips – Children and Young People Public Affairs Officer

[CatherinePhillips@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:CatherinePhillips@welshwomensaid.org.uk)

Elinor Crouch-Puzey – Research and Policy Officer

[EliCrouch-Puzey@welshwomensaid.org.uk](mailto:EliCrouch-Puzey@welshwomensaid.org.uk)



Live Fear Free Helpline

0808 80 10 800

Llinell Gymorth Byw Heb Ofn



Welsh Women's Aid, Pendaragon House  
Caxton Place, Pentwyn, Cardiff, CF23 8XE

02920 541 551

info@welshwomensaid.org.uk  
gwybodaeth@llynellgymorthbywhebofon.cymru

    @welshwomensaid

[www.welshwomensaid.org.uk](http://www.welshwomensaid.org.uk)

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