

Online abuse affects three in five Australians, study finds

November 13 2015



Three in five Australians have been the target of online harassment and abuse, landmark RMIT University research reveals.

Women and young [adults](#) are most likely to report being sexually harassed online, while one in 10 adults said someone had shared a nude or semi-nude image of them without their consent.

Dr Anastasia Powell, from RMIT's Centre for Applied Social Research, led the Australian-first study on the experiences of adults and digital [harassment](#) and said the explosive findings revealed new laws were needed to deal with online abuse.

"That one in 10 Australian men and women have had a revealing image distributed without their permission is highly significant," Powell said.

"It is clear that image-based sexual exploitation and abuse of adults, sometimes referred to as 'revenge pornography', is an important issue.

"We need uniform laws to deal with people who share images without consent."

The study reveals [victims](#) of online harassment and abuse are both male and female, with women twice as likely to be targeted by male offenders and men also twice as likely to be the perpetrators of digital abuse.

More than name calling or offensive remarks, Powell said digital abuse included [sexual harassment](#), threats and cyber stalking. Powell and her co-investigator, Dr Nicola Henry from La Trobe University, produced the Digital Harassment and Abuse of Adult Australians study with

Australian Research Council funding.

They surveyed 3000 Australian adults aged 18-54 on their use of technology and their experiences with harassment and abuse. The pair also interviewed 30 experts in law enforcement, legal services and sexual and domestic support services.

"These interviews revealed how perpetrators of domestic violence use the threat and distribution of nude or sexual images as a means to abuse, exploit, and control their victims," Powell said.

"Gaps need to be addressed to protect the victims of targeted [abuse](#), harassment and revenge pornography and we also need to better utilise existing laws so that victims of online harassment, cyberstalking and [intimate partner violence](#) are supported to seek justice."

Provided by RMIT University

Citation: Online abuse affects three in five Australians, study finds (2015, November 13)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2015-11-online-abuse-affects-australians.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--