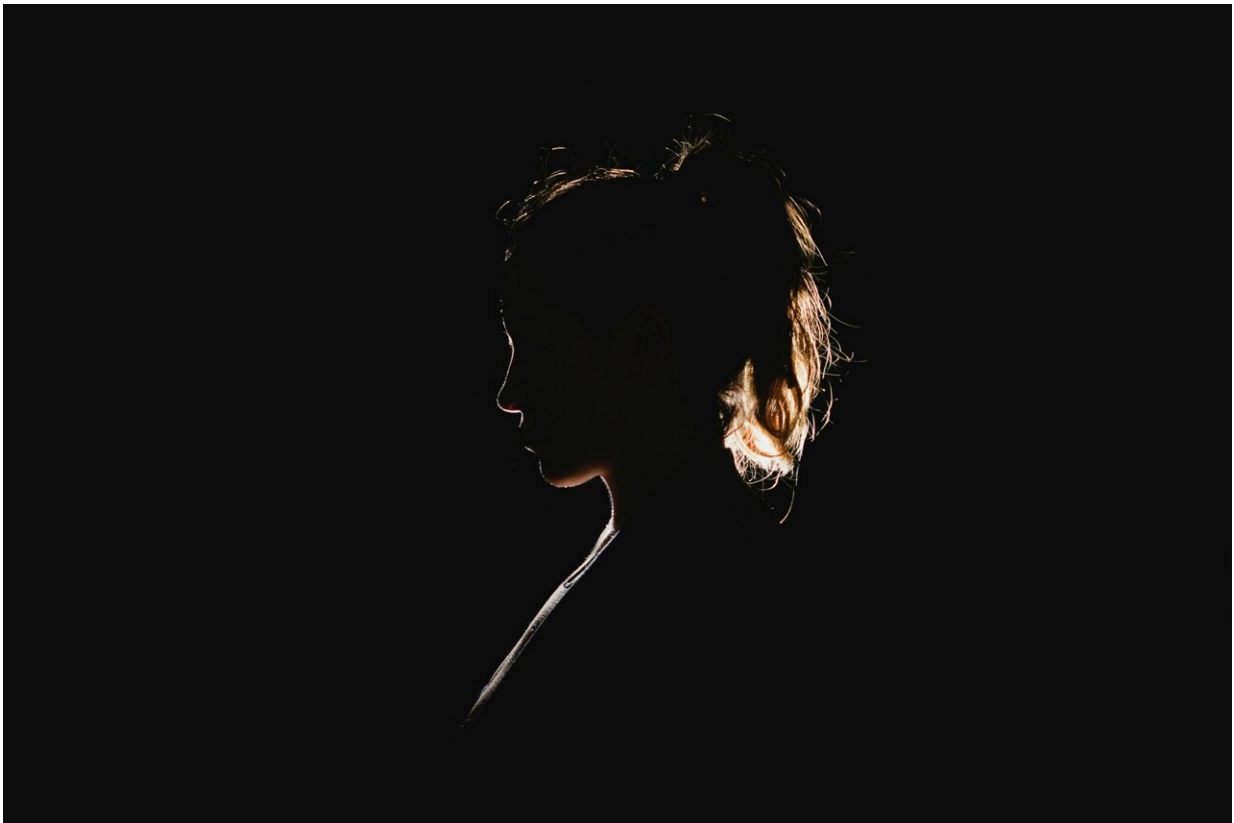


Why sexual violence against men by women needs to be 'called out' too

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Sexual violence against men by women is growing in areas such as social media, but is not receiving the level of attention as violence against women by men.

Female-perpetuated sexual assault against men—and why it can be downplayed or overlooked in social media debates—is the focus of a new study by criminology experts at Flinders University and Deakin University.

The research, published in the [Journal of Interpersonal Violence](#), analyzes 28 Facebook posts from 13 popular Australian newspapers to reveal common themes, including sexualized responses to attractive offenders.

The research highlights how online users continue to follow harmful and gendered expectations despite growing [social awareness](#) on the prevalence of sexual violence, says co-author, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Dr. Andrew Groves, from the College of Business, Government and Law at Flinders University.

"Our research explores how social media users seem to question the severity of these offenses and tend to sexualize the offenders based on their appearance," he says.

"Online Facebook users appear to downplay the harms perpetuated by female sex offenders due to perceptions of gendered expectations of 'pretty women' and 'lucky blokes.'"

Lead author Dr. April Murphy, from Deakin's School of Humanities and Social Sciences, says misguided and stigmatized online debates can perpetuate the harms experienced by male-identifying survivors.

The [online comments](#) "illustrate a disconnect between harm and fantasy" when talking about women as offenders, rather than men, "as users appear to focus on the sexual aspects of the act and what they could (or would like to) benefit or receive from the interaction rather than its impact as a serious crime," she says.

"The online users seem to struggle to consider the harms committed by women as equal to those committed by men, or indeed possible at all."

Denial of harm not only allows this kind of sexual violence to continue—arguably against both men and women—but also limits the likelihood of support or, in some cases, may enable retribution, the researchers say.

While acknowledging the gendered nature of sexual violence, these denial of harm responses devalue the impact of the behavior while shifting the blame away from the perpetrators who, in these cases, happen to be women.

"Such responses have serious consequences for male victim-survivors affecting the likelihood of reporting and the perceived legitimacy of victimhood by victims and the community," Dr. Murphy adds.

However, the researchers say there is a silver lining to these harmful stereotypes emerging as more people recognize the potential harm caused by female sex offenders.

The comments collected in the study emphasized a heightened awareness of female sex offending, with almost one-fifth (17%) of users acknowledging the damage caused by gendered double standards and more than one-quarter (26%) expressing concern for male victim-survivors.

"Several social media users recognized the challenges (and benefits) for men in coming forward, which illustrates growing interest in addressing female-perpetrated sexual violence against men and the need for further research in this field generally," Dr. Murphy says.

"We need to be more inclusive in our approaches to reducing the harms

associated with sexual violence and build on what we already know."

Dr. Murphy and Dr. Groves recognize that sexual violence is a gendered issue largely perpetrated by men against [women](#) and children, and state that this research seeks to expand upon the invaluable research that can help to develop recognition and support for all victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The researchers say, "In Australia, sexual violence is an enduring social and criminological issue characterized by widespread under-reporting, where what is known is far outweighed by what is not. Sexual violence is a deeply gendered issue and the infrequent reporting of female-perpetrated sexual violence has allowed rape myths to flourish creating falsehoods that it is less harmful than when male-perpetrated.

"Although [sexual violence continues](#) to be principally perpetrated by men, we must recognize the harms and impacts of female-perpetrated [sexual violence](#).

"Doing so will not only strengthen feminist literature and improve victim-survivor support services and associated [public policy](#) and practice, both in Australia and internationally, but also recognize the need for efforts to reduce broad social complacency toward female sexual offenders and increase awareness of this social phenomenon."

More information: April Murphy et al, "Pretty Women" and "Lucky Blokes": Unpacking Australian Social Media Responses to Female-Perpetrated Sexual Assault Against Men, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/08862605241239446](https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241239446)

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