

Revenge Porn Helpline Report

2022

Written by Zara Ward,
Senior Helpline Practitioner

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Executive summary

Intimate image abuse and its impacts are far-reaching, but the laws aiming to protect victims are still not encompassing the intricacies of these issues. The laws have been recommended to be improved and Revenge Porn Helpline gave insight into the affect on victims. These recommendations alongside the latest draft of the Online Safety Bill will aim to put intimate image abuse as a priority offence. Until then, RPH work within their remit of reporting private sexual images on behalf of UK based victims, where links to content can take practitioners to many corners of the internet. Using their expert reporting skills RPH have around a 90% removal rate. These issues and non-case-based projects will be outlined throughout this report, showcasing the trends of 2022.

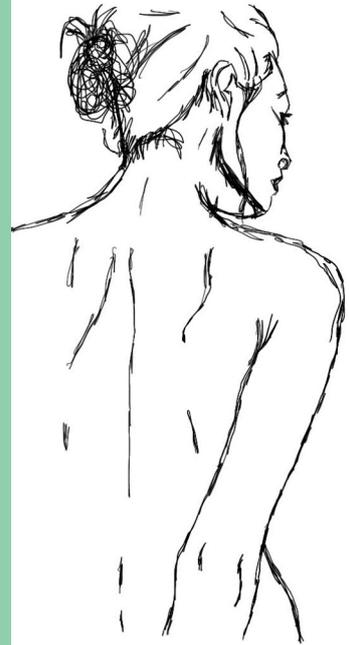


The Revenge Porn Helpline

The Revenge Porn Helpline (RPH) is operated by South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL), a partner in the UK Safer Internet Centre. The Helpline was founded in 2015, due to the volume of calls to its Professionals Online Safety Helpline (POSH) that made it clear that there was a significant issue that demanded this support.

RPH has evolved ahead of the law and as the needs of our clients have changed. We have continued to develop the assistance we can offer by building partnerships and improving practice. The evidence from RPH also supports the development of policy and legislation in this area.

Primarily, RPH provides advice and information regarding: the law around intimate image abuse, how to report to the police, how to collect evidence and the reporting of private sexual images online for removal. RPH also signposts to a variety of support services where appropriate that extend to emotional and legal support.



Recognition of funders

RPH is partly funded by the UK Home Office following an acknowledgement that the issues seen by RPH sat more appropriately within the Government's Violence Against Women and Girls strategy. Since 2021, the UK Safer Internet Centre, and therefore RPH, has been partly funded by Nominet – the UK-based company providing DNS (Domain Name Service) and funding for social impact organisations. RPH also receives funding from Scottish Government's Delivery Equally Safe Fund to support our work with Scotland

RPH has always been a small Helpline because it operates within a limited budget from government funding, it relies on additional donations from the public, private sectors and other funding grant agreements. We promise to help any clients affected by intimate image abuse and work towards meeting our goal of empowering all victims. Intimate image abuse (IIA) is a large umbrella term, but as RPH is only funded to operate within the UK, we have taken the time to define different branches of IIA under UK laws.

What is intimate image abuse?

Despite the name of the Helpline, we prefer to avoid the term “revenge porn”: the sharing of intimate images without consent is not always for “revenge”, – nor is it just “porn” – it is **abuse**. The term “revenge porn” does not cover all the different aspects of intimate image abuse which include: the sharing of private sexual imagery, threatening to share intimate content, (s)extortion (or webcam blackmail), voyeurism, cyber flashing and upskirting. Therefore, we prefer to use the all-encompassing victim supportive term of intimate image abuse (IIA). In the following section we shall outline the areas of IIA and any corresponding laws in the UK, as there have been developments in 2022.

The sharing of intimate images without consent

If the intent is to cause distress, this is when the sharing of intimate images is most commonly referred to as ‘revenge porn’. In April 2015 the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, section 33, made it an offence for a person to – “disclose a private sexual photograph or film if the disclosure is made without the consent of an individual who appears in the photograph or film and with the intention of causing that individual distress”. This law covers the offence in England and Wales.

In Scotland, the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016 made it an offence to disclose a private sexual photograph without consent with the intent to cause distress, or the person sending the image is reckless as to whether it will cause distress. In Northern Ireland, the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 made it an offence to disclose a private sexual photograph without consent with the intent to cause distress.

By ‘private’, the law means that the content cannot be already made public or created for commercial use. In other words, a person’s content could be shared anywhere on or offline, including, but is not limited to, general pornographic sites, social media, chat forums, private messages, or as printed copies. ‘Sexual’, in its legal definition, is any image depicting genitals, or breasts, or any sexual acts that wouldn’t normally be seen in public.

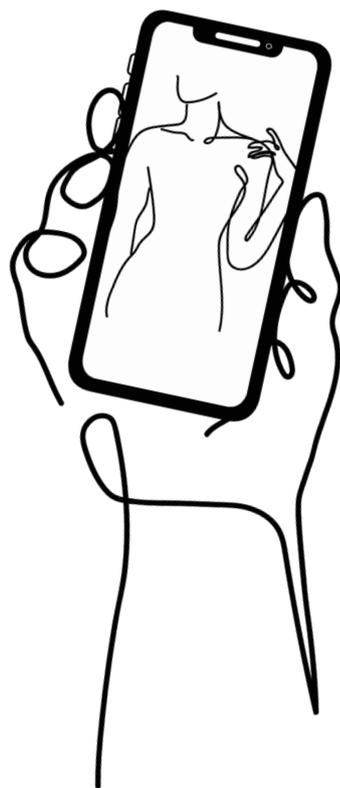
Threatening to share intimate content

This was not originally a specific offence, although the Sentencing Council included the “threat to disclose intimate material or sexually explicit images” within its guidelines for offences under the Communications Act 2003 – which came into effect from 1st October 2018. The Domestic Abuse Act (2021) includes threats to share private sexual images as an offence in England and Wales.

Threats to share content can be made online or offline, and though the perpetrator may or may not have the content they describe, the Helpline is able to offer advice when other behaviours are considered. For instance, a person could be subjected to malicious communications, or even a pattern of harassment or stalking, all of which would be against the law.

Webcam blackmail (sextortion)

Webcam blackmail is a crime where the victim has begun an online relationship with someone who may be using a fake identity. Once the relationship has become sexual, and images or videos are shared (or recorded during a video chat), this is then used as leverage for financial gain. These operations are usually carried out by organised crime gangs based overseas. In most cases, even though the content isn’t shared, the pressure of the moment and fear of sharing can affect victims substantially. There are no laws directly relating to ‘sextortion’, but it would be encompassed by broader blackmail laws if the perpetrator was in the UK.



Voyeurism/ Upskirting

This is a sexual offence that refers to when the victim has been filmed by someone without their knowledge or consent – for their own sexual gratification – which can include filming up a skirt or down a blouse.

This is limited to private spaces, or where the body parts/acts would not usually be seen in public. In England and Wales, the supporting legislation is Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019, while in Scotland, it was adopted in an earlier law within the Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009.

The Law Commission Review of the law

It has become clear since 2015 that the law on the taking, making and sharing of intimate images without consent does not provide adequate support to those affected. The ‘intention to cause distress’ criteria is difficult to prove and the lack of anonymity for victims are both significant barriers to people reporting the abuse to the police. The Government recognised the shortcomings of the current legislation and, in 2019, announced a review was to be carried out by the Law Commission.

Throughout the review process the Law Commission engaged with multiple stakeholders. These included victims of non-consensual intimate image abuse, academics, activists and support services, including RPH. Following an extensive research and consultation period, the Law Commission published their recommendations in July 2022. The main ones included life-long anonymity for victims and a complete restructuring of the current offence. ***These recommendations create a base offence that applies regardless of the perpetrator’s motivation, supplemented by three additional offences: where the image has been shared for sexual gratification; threats to share have been made; causes humiliation, alarm or distress.***

Recognising that the images themselves could be taken without consent, the Law Commission recommends that any person caught installing equipment to **record** someone doing a private act without consent should be considered to be committing an offence – this applies to both the base offence and the specific intent offences.

Finally, and in line with Scottish law, the review recommends that ‘deepfakes’ (doctored or altered imagery of a sexual nature) should be considered intimate images and should fall within the definition of a private sexual image. Currently, this is not the case in England and Wales, and many victims of deepfake sexual imagery are unable to access support. In November 2022, the Government announced its intention to include some of the Law Commission’s recommendations in the 2023 Online Safety Bill.



Online Safety Bill (OSB)

The Online Safety Bill (OSB, UK Government, 2022) aims to make platforms providing web services more accountable for the content they allow – giving rise to higher levels of scrutiny and action within platforms. **The disclosure of private images falls within the OSB:**

- placing these crimes as a ‘priority offence’ that would require platforms to have a duty of care.

Platforms will need to respond and remove illegal content from these priority offences as soon as they are made aware of them. They must also take a stronger preventative approach when it comes to intimate image abuse. These measures will be extended for previous unregulated areas of extreme pornography that include sexual assault-related content and bestiality. To achieve this, Ofcom can be responsible for policing platforms and issuing large fines for platforms that are in breach of this bill.

To broaden the offence scope of IIA further, in March 2022 the Government announced that cyberflashing – the non-consensual sharing of sexual images – will also become illegal under upcoming changes to the OSB. However, at the time of writing, we are still waiting for the details of this legislation. We anticipate that it will criminalise these acts and penalise offenders with a prison sentence of up to two years. The OSB and its recommendations are still under consideration, and we are waiting to hear developments as they happen before making further changes to the support RPH can offer.

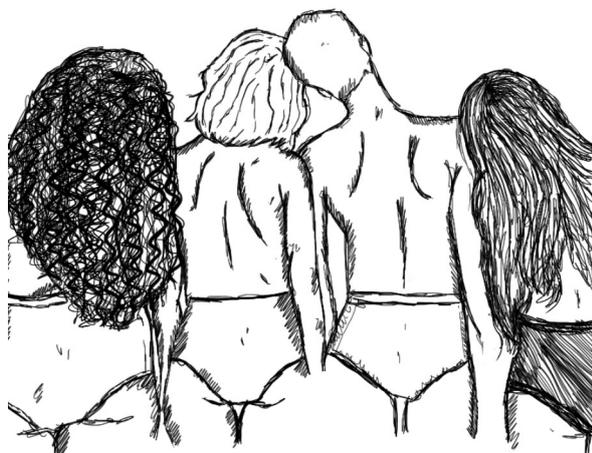
International reach

2022 saw awareness growing around the IIA issue and other forms of online abuse where women globally are disproportionately affected. As the first dedicated helpline, RPH have established themselves as world leaders in the provision of direct support for victims of IIA and the removal of online intimate content shared without consent. We have consulted with the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse and the non-profit organisation, Panorama Global, and its Image-Based Sexual Abuse Initiative. Our work in developing StopNCII.org, which is explored further in later sections, has led to a global partnership of NGOs who signpost to the platform and can provide dedicated, appropriate support to those in need. We are proud to be able to share learning and best practice with our partners around the world.

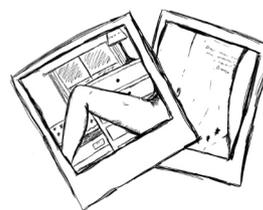
Report scope

Last year, RPH continued to provide a practical solution for clients who have had their images shared, threatened, or made without their consent. Trends and outcomes for clients also change rapidly over time, which encourages flexibility within the team.

This report aims to showcase the incredible work our team does to support those affected by these crimes – as evidenced by the amazing removal rate of content, the incredible perseverance of manually reporting content, and additional projects RPH has taken on.



Helpline case reports



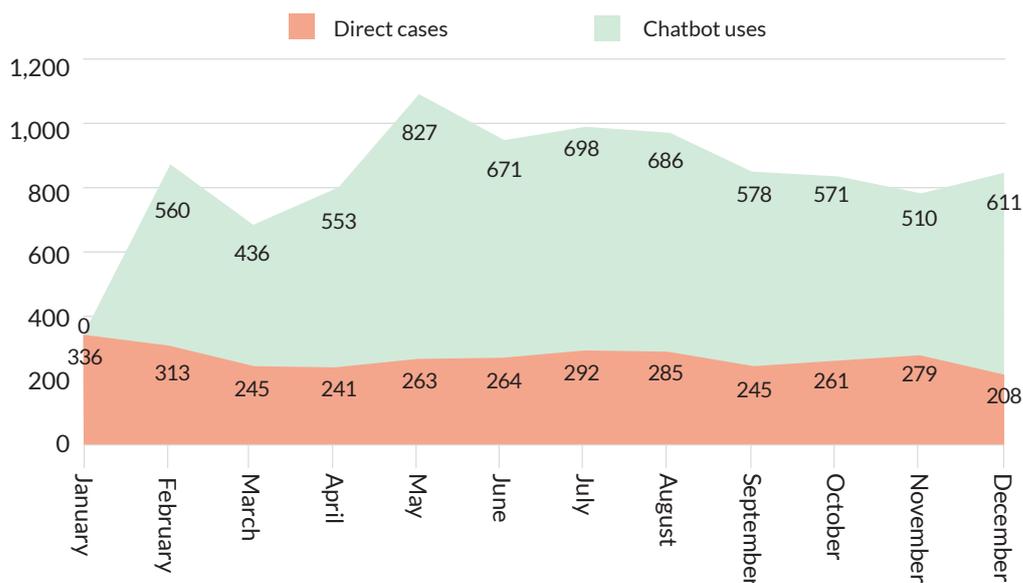
All data outlined in the report was obtained from the internal systems of the Revenge Porn Helpline during the year of 2022 only. For confidentiality all marks relating to personal details have been removed, and aggregated data are used. The analysis of this data is descriptive as no predictions are being made.

Reports to the Helpline

A superficial look at the data suggests that reports to the Helpline declined in 2022. However, this apparent drop in numbers coincides with the introduction of the website chatbot offering out of hours support and advice (see below). Taking this into account, what we see is a plateau of cases following the incredible surge from 2020 and 2021. Following the significant increase during COVID, this levelling of cases numbers is still higher than pre-pandemic levels.

The decrease could be due to a number of factors: namely the removal of Facebook messages to the Helpline and the success of the chatbot triaging more effectively, where collectively, cases and chatbot interactions account for over 9,000 cases.

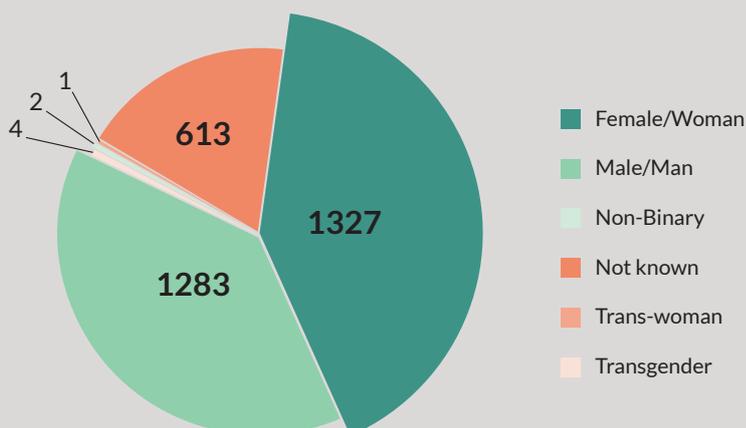
1. Graph showcasing direct cases and chatbot interactions from 2022, by month



There is more detail regarding the chatbot interactions below, though it is necessary to establish the success of it here. Whilst it has had a reductive impact on cases, the upkeep and monitoring of the chatbot still requires plenty of the Helpline's time so the chatbot reflects the most up to date support for clients when they access it.

Within these cases, the division between men and women contacting the helpline is incredibly close, with around 40% for each gender. This gender gap reporting to the Helpline is closing, as last year this divide was 44% female victims and the year before nearly 60%.

2. Pie chart of assumed genders contacting the Helpline

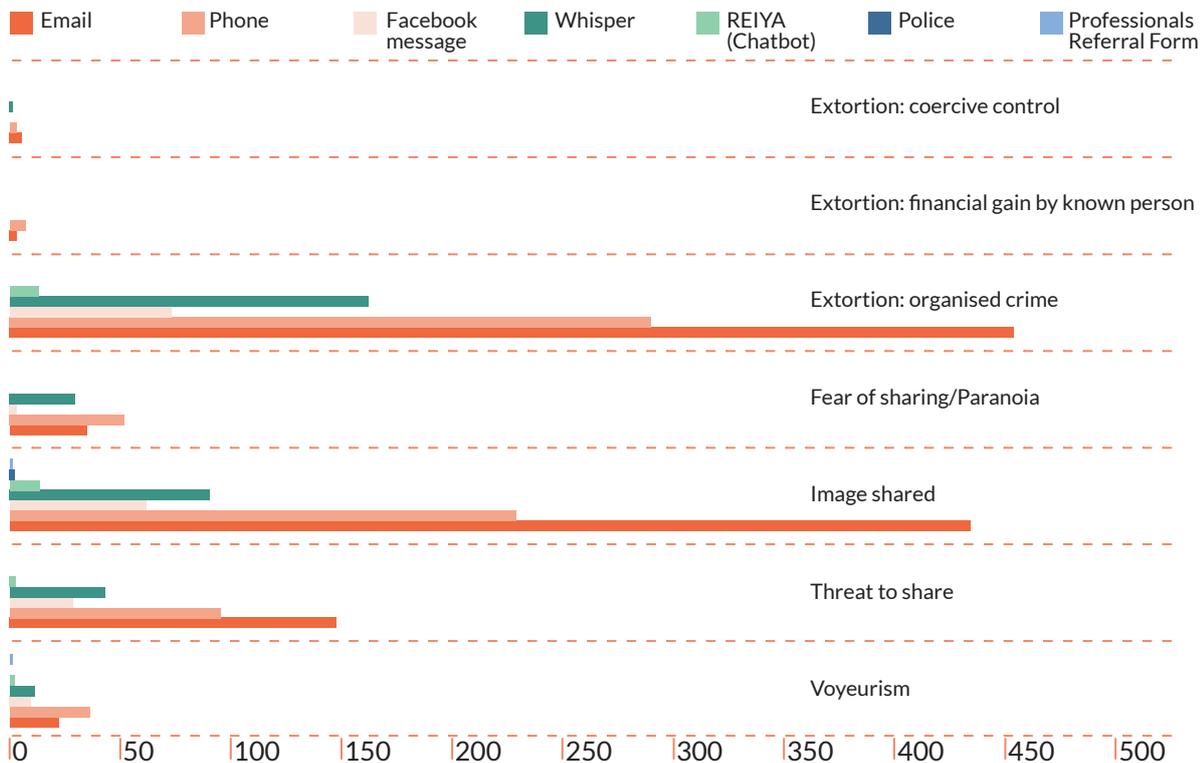


Contacts to the Helpline

The number of contacts made to RPH remain the same across the years at around four per case; but the dispersion of the contact method for a case has changed significantly over the year. Email continues to be the most popular, which is understandable based on how easy it is to send messages at any time.

What is particularly intriguing is that phone calls increased more than three times between 2021 and 2022, going from 276 to 923. Using these metrics, we can delve further into what types of issues clients report when using different contact methods.

3. Intimate Image abuse issues by the contact method used. Issues outside of these will be explained further



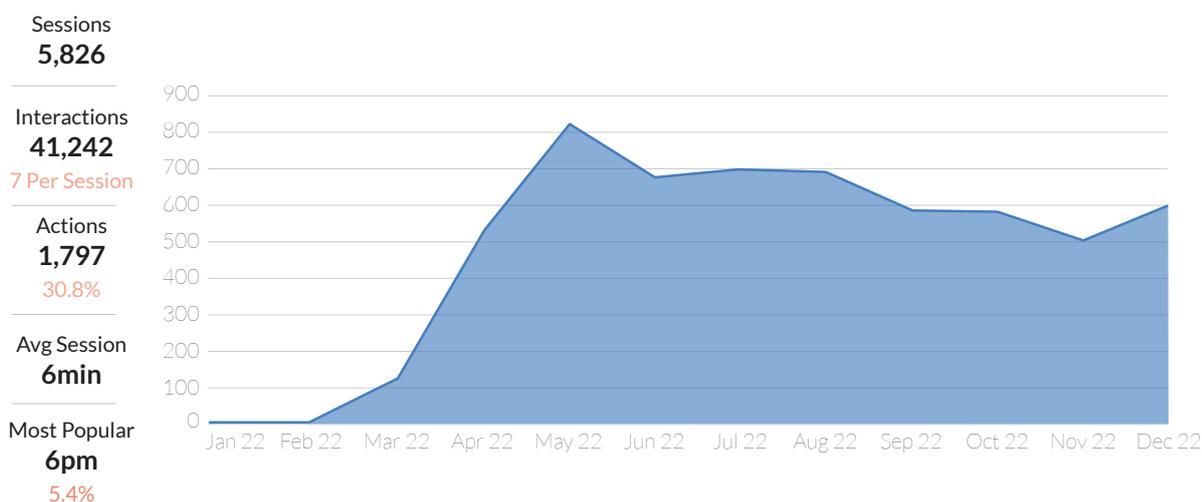
When clients get in touch with the team via email, the most common issues they report are sextortion and intimate image sharing. They also provide a range of information about their ongoing issues, as well as links to online content. It's therefore not surprising that email is so popular, with around 50% of cases coming directly to us this way.

Because of a technical change in our case management system, midway through 2022, we stopped using Facebook Messenger. This was a relatively popular way to contact the Helpline, thanks to the app's availability on personal devices – accounting for around 300 contacts. Unfortunately, RPH will not be using the service in the foreseeable future.

A similar, chatbot-like based software clients can use to contact the Helpline is Whisper – SWGfL’s anonymous reporting tool. Users can get in touch without having to provide personal details. They simply log into a web-based portal using a code to access the chat messages. Compared to other contact methods, sextortion-related issues are the most likely to be reported on Whisper – almost twice as much as intimate images shared without consent. This can be attributed to the need for anonymity during these threats, as the scammers know how to infiltrate all their victims’ contact methods with their demands.

Following investigation into RPH’s cases, we know that providing contact methods outside of our Helpline working hours has proved incredibly valuable for over 60% of cases. Clients need to be able to access support at any time, so we developed an out of hours support system. The chatbot, Reiya, was built following an initiative by Comic Relief’s Tech for Good fund that has been running since 2016. And when this ended in 2020, Reiya went live on both RPH and our sister service, Report Harmful Content’s websites in February 2022.

4. Chatbot interactions during 2022 over months



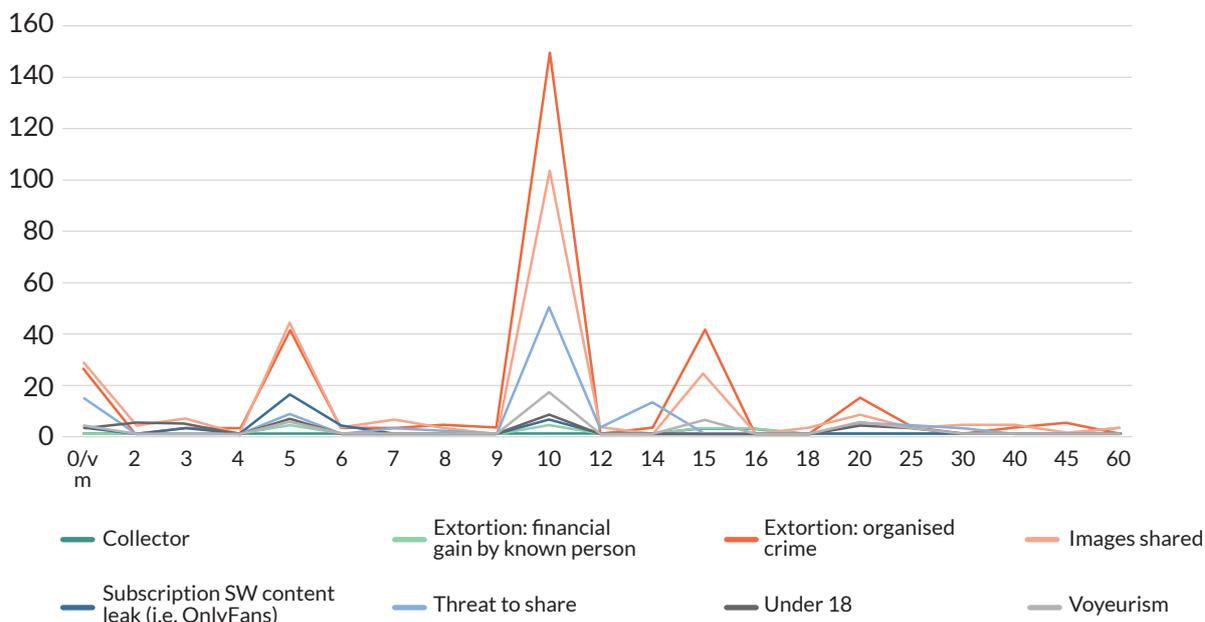
During the 10 months of operation in 2022, Reiya via RPH’s website saw nearly 6,000 unique sessions, with around seven interactions per session creating over 41,000 interactions. At the end of 2022 further updates were undertaken within Reiya to provide users with additional information for sextortion-related issues, as the key issue users get advice with whilst accessing Reiya is sextortion accounting for over 900 sessions.



The Revenge Porn Helpline know that nothing can replicate the hard work the team provide and they continue to run their phone-based service; as previously mentioned, the need for this has increased more than three times from 2021, being the second most common form of communicating with the Helpline. It takes a huge amount of courage to call the Helpline and our clients want to hear a friendly compassionate tone, and speaking on the phone offers a space to transfer any information required quickly, and in many cases can reduce miscommunication errors that can occur in written formats.



5. Frequency of phone call-based issues by minutes spent on the phone



As one can imagine, with the highest percentage of cases relating to sextortion, the percentage of phone calls also reflects this, at around 40%. Most commonly, calls relating to sextortion are undertaken for around 10 minutes, though in a few cases they extended up to an hour. This is also reflected in “intimate image shared” wherein calls also last around 10 minutes but account for around 33% of calls made to the Helpline.

Through further research into the 2022 data, there was no difference between the amount of time spent on the phone for men or women, alongside there not being a reportable difference in men and women making calls to the Helpline; demonstrating how valid speaking to someone on the phone is for everyone faced with issues.

Primary issue reported

Within the issues RPH can support with, the cases are in line with that of 2021: sextortion, or webcam blackmail [990] continues to be the most reported issue, followed by intimate images being shared [820]. Threats to share [318] voyeurism [70], extortion from coercive control [10], extortion financial gain by a known person [9] and collector [6]. Outside of the issues RPH can practically support with account for around 30% of cases, though we will evidence that we make all attempts to guide clients to better provisioned services.

Issues outside of RPH’s remit

Regrettably, limits on funding mean there are a series of issues RPH cannot support directly. Where appropriate, we signpost out for expert guidance. To be transparent, we want to take this opportunity to outline these particular issues and offer some explanation.

Clients who were outside of the UK accounted for the highest percentage of people that we, as a UK-funded service, were not able to support – around 12% [288] of cases – mostly around intimate images being shared without consent [98].

Other areas outside of our remit were harassment and clients aged under 18: both around 4% [127] each. The former represents clients who have been verbally, text, or suffered image-based harassment, but would not include sexual imagery. In

these instances, we often signpost to the Report Harmful Content (RHC) service and/or other stalking support services.

Other primary issues that have not been reported due to the vast variety in nature, encompasses many issues such as: malicious communications, copyright-based problems, reported sexual assault, stalking, collector, hacked accounts etc. RPH always ensures adequate safeguarding is undertaken, but in many of these cases we cannot offer any useful support and, instead, would signpost out to specialised services.

For those who are either under the age of 18 now, or were under the age of 18 in the harmful content, clients have reached out to RPH in 127 cases. Because of the law surrounding this material, the Helpline are unable to assist in these cases and instead, signpost to services such as the Internet Watch Foundation, our partner at the UKSIC.

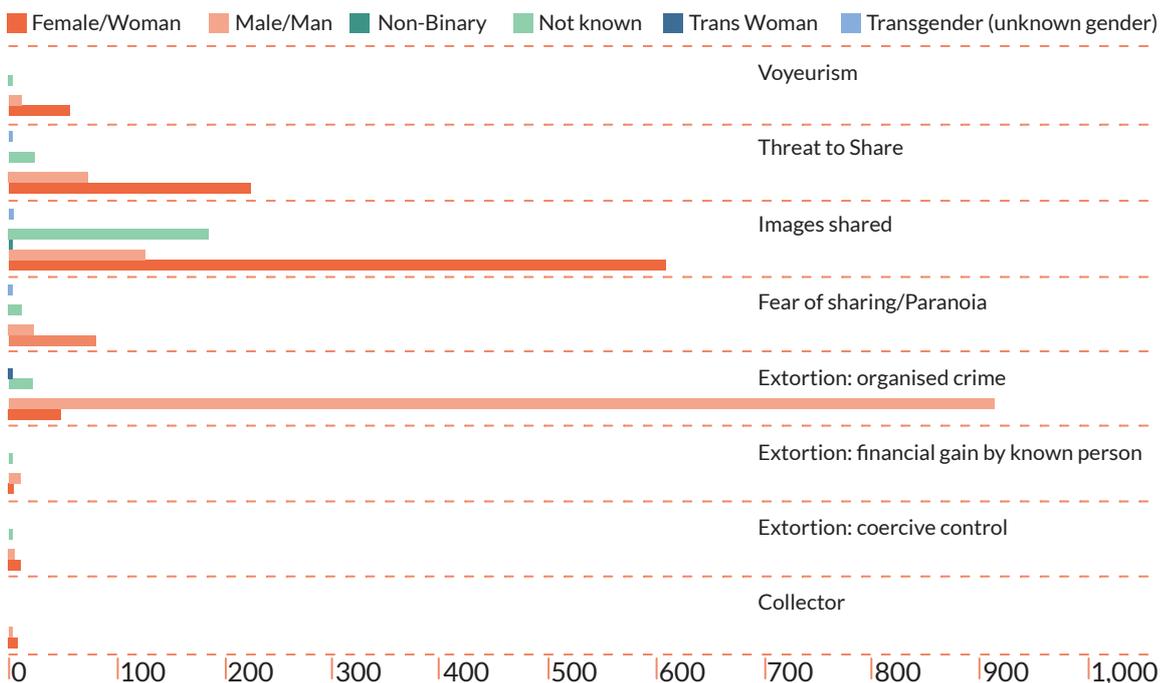
The next issue is – the fear of content being shared – which accounts for 107 cases, and is something we are limited in reporting on. And without having content to report on directly, RPH are unable to support in the practical removal of it. Although in this situation, we would try to use our tools to put the client’s mind at ease.

Commercial content creators and/or sex workers who have had their content shared online is another issue that RPH is limited on dealing with. This is because the nature of the content has a commercial purpose and is therefore not considered private. We will, however, make every attempt to assist the client in getting additional support where available to make a copyright claim against any content that’s been shared.

A further limit of RPH’s service pertaining to content, which we hope will be changed in the near future, is the sharing of deepfakes – something that has been previously mentioned in reference to the recommendations by the Law Commission review.

But it is important to note that, while the current law in England and Wales does not consider a deepfake or doctored image to be an intimate image, the reports of this continue to rise from 18 cases to 21 in 2022. These numbers may seem inconsequential, but it still remains that 21 victims were unable to get complete support because of being restrained by the current law in England and Wales. In Scotland the law already covers such images; and thanks to receiving additional funding, RPH have been able to expand services to Scotland. See more on this below.

6. Image abuse issues as reported by different assumed genders, removing out of remit issues



Threats to share intimate content

The issues reported to RPH surrounding intimate image abuse have been consistent over the years across all genders. For a man, the most common issue by far consists of threats to share intimate imagery for money (or sextortion) as organised by an overseas criminal gang. This crime is not the same as threatening to share content for coercive or non-financial purposes, or threats being made to share intimate content by a known person for money. These two latter crimes are most likely to be experienced by women and perpetrated by men, so these threats should be considered very differently.

Sextortion (webcam blackmail)



We have noted previously that reports of sextortion significantly increased in 2021, and in 2022 it continues to be our most reported issue to the Helpline. In-line with previous years, sextortion is also an issue disproportionately experienced by men. They continue to report it to the Helpline through anonymous routes: either by making a phone call or using the reporting tool Whisper.

We are seeing complex changes in the scammer approach too, with the perpetrators attempting to jump between different platforms to facilitate these crimes. There is real-world fear that is impressed upon victims for sharing intimate content. But these threats are shown to be practically empty after the scammers have shared the content, and as a result, they lose any leverage for demanding money. However, we are seeing an increase to around 20% of cases where content is shared, mostly through Instagram and Facebook direct messages. The scammers know that through these platforms they can reach the victim's audience – friends and family – and that the messages are end-to-end encrypted and not proactively searched by a moderation team.

The sharing of intimate content

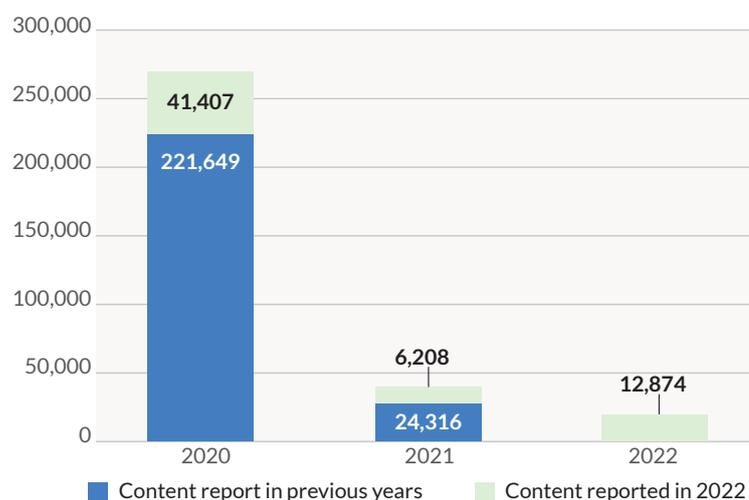
The non-consensual sharing of sexual, or intimate content is a devastating form of abuse. In many of the cases the Helpline has been involved with these images are shared online and are publicly accessible to anyone. Although this online space might seem incredibly abstract on one level, Brown (2009) describes how this – “never-ending shifting pixels affect real lives; produce real humiliation in which real life human pains are created”. Women are disproportionately affected by intimate image sharing, being six times more likely to report it and requiring more support compared to men. The sharing of intimate images also includes ‘collector culture’, something we have commented on at length in our 2020 report. This refers to online groups collecting and sharing packages of sexual content without consent for money/status.

Illegally shared content reported

Even though direct reports to RPH plateaued in 2022, there are a number of cases from previous years still being reported on. In 2020 this was a total of over 220,000 images, which by 2022 had risen to over 320,000 pieces of intimate content, with over 280,000 pieces of content removed.

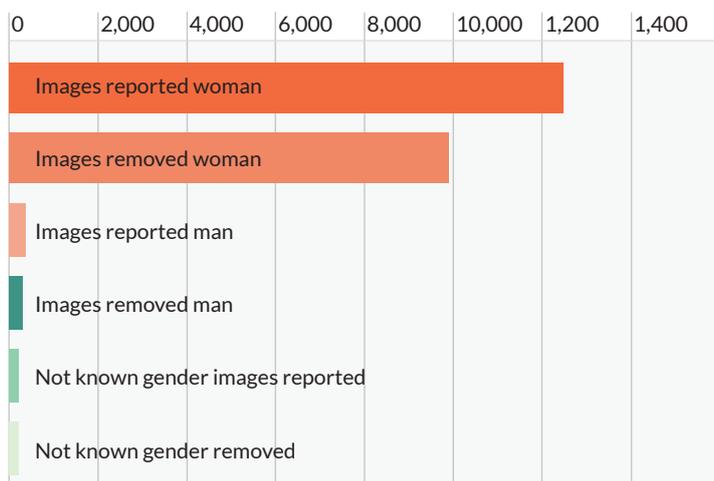
The limitations of our case management system mean that image reporting numbers are categorised within the year the case started. But in reality, more content is reported to RPH every year – something which accounts for a large amount of content being attributed to previous years.

7. Content reported in 2022



As shown in the graph above, from 2015-2020, RPH reported over 200 thousand images, but during the following years, we reported an additional 40,000. 2021 saw a similar picture, where we reported nearly 25,000 images, but reported an additional 6,000 in 2022. Putting all the years' numbers together shows the true scale of the issue, with over 60,000 pieces of sexual content reported by the team.

8. Images reported/removed by assumed gender in 2022



As content can often be re-distributed on the same or other websites, each year RPH continues to report content for clients from 2020. We believe that the re-sharing is an unacceptable outcome for victims and we hope to develop the reach of tools such as StopNCII.org to hash content and prevent resharing in the future. This innovation in technology is now a game-changer for clients; making it easier for the industry to remove these images from their platforms – but more on that below.

During 2022, content being reported per case accounts for around 15 images, which is still heavily weighted towards women. When a woman's

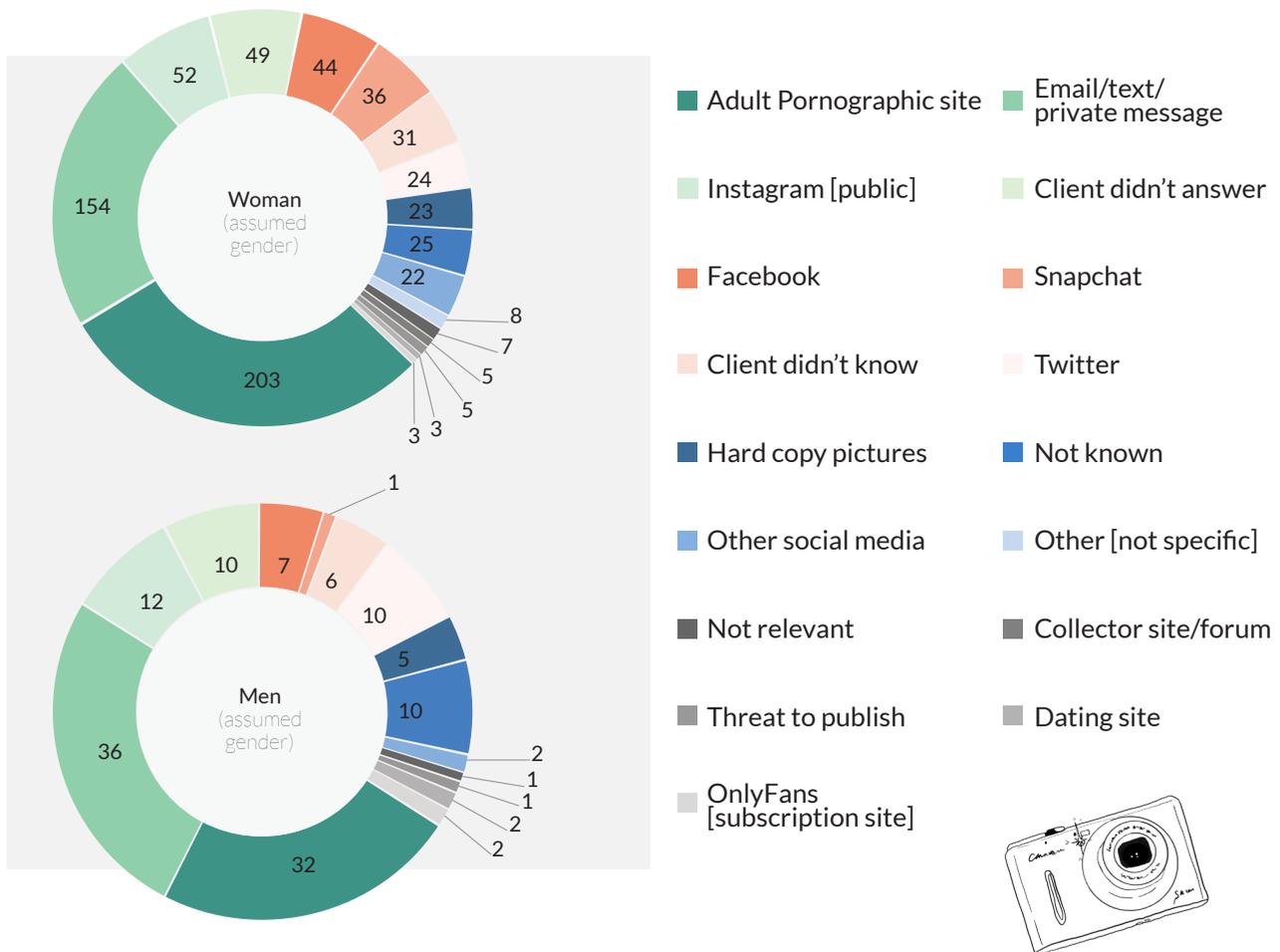
images were shared, and reported by RPH in 2022, there were 20 images per case, whereas for men this was just two images per case – ten-times the difference. Since 2015, these data sets have reinforced the basis for IIA being tech-facilitated, gender-based abuse that we have already documented.

Women continue to be subjected to the sharing of their sexual images for the purpose of control and degradation, and at a rate that's exponentially higher than that of their male counterparts. As in previous years, the primary suspected perpetrator sharing this content is a previous/current partner (between 50%-60% of cases if 'unknown outcomes' are omitted); perpetrators are also identified by the victim as male in 90% of cases (where known). This data is in keeping with the 2021 and 2020 research – acknowledging that at the core of these behaviours, nothing has changed (Revenge Porn Helpline, 2020).

In the Helpline's eight year history, it is clear that most cases involve male-perpetrated violence against women. We know there is under-reporting of this abuse; and we understand that many victims may not be able to report these issues to us. It could also be argued that men experience intimate image sharing as much as women. One can observe from the issues outlined that men do contact the Helpline – the same amount as women, in fact – but their presentation of what they experience is incredibly different, although no less valid.



Where are images shared in most cases? Location of sexual images shared



Private sexual content is frequently shared on adult content sites, in around 40% of cases where content is shared. Though there is a smaller proportion of men having images shared online and reporting it to the Helpline, the distribution between location shared is very similar. As mentioned previously, we are seeing an increase in content being shared from scams such as sextortion and this is mostly completed through messages though in some cases the scammers will share the content more widely.

This can be on a range of millions of surface-websites where content is publicly accessible and hosts primarily adult content. This content does not have to be hosted in the UK, it can be hosted globally and RPH's team of practitioners report this content for removal on the basis it has been illegally shared.

As part of this report, we wanted to explain the success of the RPH team in removing content. The removal rate of RPH continues to be very high (around 90%) and is achieved with an incredible amount of hard work by practitioners. All reporting is completed manually: skilled practitioners spend hours reporting, checking and proactively searching for intimate content on behalf of clients. This is unique to the Helpline and demonstrates the passion the team share in supporting clients.

In the 10% of images that are not removed, practitioners have exhausted all options but had no successful response from the platform, or no ability to report the content.

The remaining ten percent

The impacts of the content remaining online are immeasurable for victims, we know that content has a virility in its nature and can spread quickly. RPH also know from their data that women are likely to be more affected by images being shared but also the amount of content being distributed; around 20 images per female victim. At RPH we support victims by reporting and removing as much content as possible, but it can sometimes not happen. These intimate images are a snapshot of their life, whether the content was consensually made or not, it illustrates a moment that was not meant to be shared. The image freezes them in time and keeps this moment ever available. As one can expect, when the images are created in an abusive situation the impacts are compounded to reinforce the abuse the person experienced.

Leaving even one image can provide ongoing triggers and re-traumatise victims, because at any point a secondary (or primary) sharer could resend the content and make the person re-experience that high amount of stress. This leaves victims vulnerable and reluctant to engage online life. As mentioned previously, we report content for years for some clients, which is a direct result of content being re-shared. Every year that passes there is a higher possibility of content being re-shared when the content is live on websites, but it also allows for the views of this content to rise. It gives the victim a tie to that content, so when their names, faces or association is searched the imagery could come up, impacting their personal and professional lives. They are not given the opportunity to move on without their content following them.

Even when victims have dealt with an arduous court process to gain a conviction, something which already has an incredibly low success rate, the content itself is under no legal obligation to be removed.

The content that was shared without consent and causes the person ongoing trauma has no process to be removed by a court mandate.

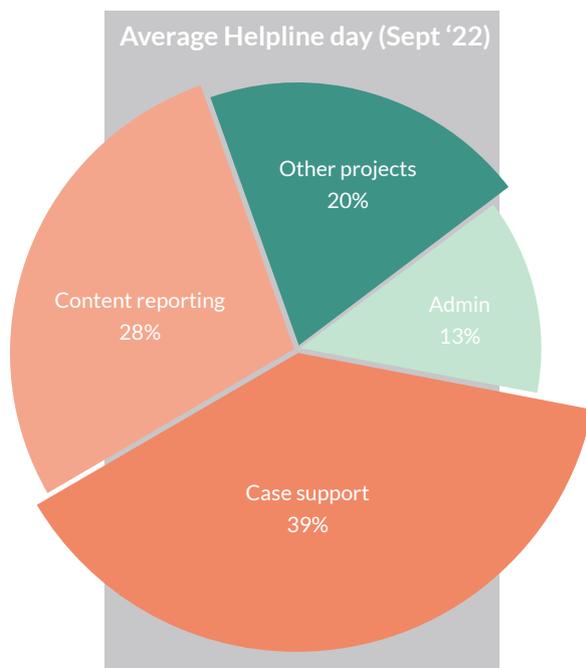
There is no reprieve for victims outside of them reaching out to a service like ours or removing the content themselves; something we know is a great burden. We believe this to be a disservice to victims that is not being spoken about: the ten percent. For our service, we know that 10% of content reported is not removed, but this is – as we always say – the tip of the iceberg. This doesn't include content that was not found, or shared peer-to-peer; this is only content that is public.

RPH will continue to advocate for victims of intimate image abuse to ensure their content must be removed following a conviction. In the meantime, RPH continues to report clients non-consensually shared content by utilising a range of searching and reporting tools.



Searching for and reporting content

10. A pie chart outlining the average day of a practitioner (from data obtained in sept 2022)



The chart to the left illustrates how an RPH practitioner's average day breaks down. If the workday is around eight hours, then over two hours of each day, for each practitioner, is dedicated to content reporting. This includes, but is not restricted to, proactively searching and scanning websites for content of a specific client, as well as collating links for reporting content, using a range of different reporting methods which in most cases need follow up reports due to sites being uncooperative.

RPH does not only report content to UK-based domains, but rather any domain that hosts illegally shared content. This, alongside the proactive searching that the practitioner team undertake, means the RPH team report to hundreds of unique domains each year.

These domains primarily host adult content, but the sub-genre of the website can be anything: a forum for so-called "revenge porn" content; or a forum where collector culture is rife, something spoken at length about in our previous report; kink/fetish sites, sites which share specific ethnic/cultural content and much more. Each of these sub-genres of websites bring about their own set of issues, as they usually lie outside of the legitimate business model that is profiting from adult content and thus do not apply the same supportive systems of larger corporations.



Methods of reporting

As previously mentioned, the reporting process is very much a manual one. And owing to the breadth of content involved there are also an incredibly large number of ways to report that content. There are at least twenty images per case and this can amass across a variety of unique domains. In 2022, 820 clients reported that their intimate content had been shared. But as in previous years, RPH continue to proactively report, remove, and search for content for clients, so the actual number of RPH reports is in fact much higher than last year's amount.

Reporting this type of content over a vast range of different domains is time-consuming and can be challenging. Many of these websites are not hosted within the UK, and though intimate image abuse laws are found in other countries, these are far from being implemented globally.

RPH base what we do on professional trust and cooperation, and in most cases this works. We take a kind but firm approach and find that outlining in simple terms where the violations have been, whilst keeping our clients' anonymity is key. We are not always effective, however. Some websites continue to disregard our reports that we send via email or webform. And sometimes these just bounce back, or the website has no direct line of contact at all.

If practitioners do not gain a positive response from the website after a few attempts they then try to work alongside hosting providers of domains – the entities that 'keep the lights on' and are more legitimate areas of business. As one can imagine, this takes more time and can be an extremely stressful for the clients involved. RPH are always looking for ways to improve on these processes, to ensure the best and fastest outcome for the client.



Vicarious trauma

Viewing and reporting content is incredibly stressful. It can take a large toll on the team, mentally and emotionally; but they take pride in being thorough and taking as much time as needed to scrape the internet to find as much harmful content as possible.

Not only does the team support victims at the front line – listening to their stories of abuse and pain. They can also be exposed to it during reporting, whether this is through the client's content, or any other distressing content on the websites. As one can imagine, many of these websites are not happy corners of the internet; the imagery can be disturbing and the comments can be vile. This kind of exposure can impact everyone differently and can form the basis for compassion burnout (King & Lewis, 2019).

Being a support service for those experiencing abuse, it is important that we support one another through different calls, or experiences, and giving members of the team space when needed. We also all undertake external clinical supervision once per month: providing a perfect opportunity to speak about what has been experienced. Another way for us to mitigate the impacts of viewing so much distressing content is to investigate ways of automating the reporting processes.

Projects

Alongside the core work RPH do, we are also involved with several projects to support clients and raise awareness of these issues. 2022 has been an incredibly inspiring year for us, where our teams worked on some amazing initiatives to support victims of online abuse and, more directly, intimate image abuse.

Minerva

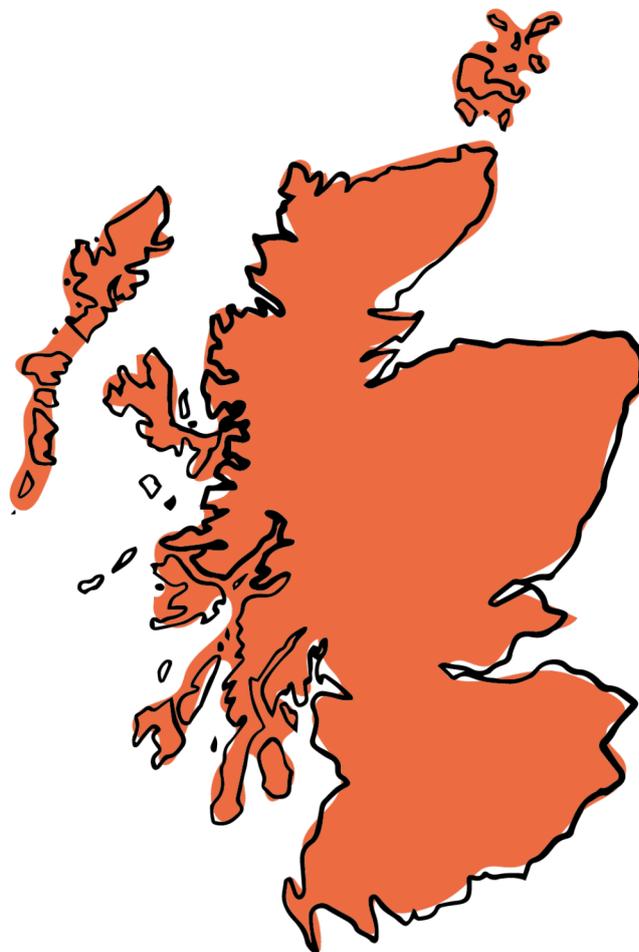
Building on the expertise of RPH and Report Harmful Content, funded by DCMS's Tampon Tax Fund, Minerva is SWGfL's biggest project to date. Using a language learning mechanism, it's aimed at developing an AI-based tool for reporting and recording online abuse. In this unified place users are guided through reporting, logging and journaling about their experiences. That could be for one, or repeated issues, while being holistically supported with safeguarding and referrals to direct support services such as Report Harmful Content and the Revenge Porn Helpline.

Throughout 2022, the Grid has engaged in stakeholders' meetings with organisations and academics. This is to ensure the tool is designed with the user in mind; providing them with a frictionless experience when under a great deal of distress. SWGfL's Helplines and web development team worked alongside tech developer partners to develop the application which is planned to be released under phase one in April 2023.

Scotland

RPH received funding from the Scottish Government Delivering Equally Safe Fund in October 2021. This allowed the Helpline to expand its service to support all adults affected by intimate image abuse. Due to the difficulties faced with collecting demographic data, including the location, of adults contacting the Helpline, we do not have an accurate number of clients contacting us from Scotland.

This funding also allowed us to build capacity within the team to reach out to existing services and organisations working in Scotland to develop alliances and working relationships, including the University of Edinburgh and Scottish Women's Aid. We also successfully delivered free training sessions to professionals working in Scotland, ranging from Women's Aid support workers and school nurses to police officers.



Training

In 2022, we also developed a training programme for professionals working with adults. The aim with this was to create awareness of intimate image abuse and best practice of supporting someone affected by this form of abuse. In total, we reached 1001 attendees and delivered 40 training sessions.

Quotes from feedback:

“I feel better equipped if a client discloses information about intimate image abuse”

“It is really helpful and reassuring to know there are services like yours that exist, that there’s somewhere we can refer survivors and that something practical can be done for them in a time that feels very out of control”

“It is important for us to gain more knowledge in this area as this type of abuse is something that is new and sometimes overlooked”



Accessibility

RPH strives to support all adults affected by intimate image abuse by providing an accessible Helpline service and advice displayed on our website. In 2022, we developed a series of 16 videos which display our advice in video formats which are audio read and captioned. We hope that this allows those with additional needs who are experiencing the anxiety and stress of intimate image abuse to access our advice through a calm and clear format. We aim to improve the Helpline’s accessibility even further to ensure we are providing the best support possible for everyone.

StopNCII.org

The world’s first device-side hashing technology was launched in December 2021, providing adults with a level of protection and moderation if their content was ever shared on public platforms. This global tool is available in over 20 languages and, because it is web-based, it’s accessible at any time. Within the first year, StopNCII.org has seen over 14,000 cases and created over 50,000 hashes. This hash list is available to participating platforms Facebook and Instagram, and in 2022 was extended to TikTok and Bumble. We will continue to establish connections with industry and partners throughout 2023 and have some exciting initiatives to announce in the near future.

Conclusion

In the last year, we have seen a drop in the number of cases coming directly to RPH. This in part is due to the impact of the successful chatbot launched in the first quarter of 2022 – accounting for over double the interactions RPH receives in cases. That being said, phone calls have also increased three-fold in this year which demonstrates the continuing need for speaking with a practitioner on the phone.

During 2022, RPH have been a part of consultations to improve the law as well as supporting a Bill to hold industry more accountable for hosting illegally shared content. Looking ahead, we aim to support future clients and raise awareness of intimate image abuse nationally and internationally with training sessions and outreach. We also look forward to improving the reach of preventative measures through platforms such as StopNCII.org.



@RPhelpline 

@rphelpline 

help@revengepornhelpline.org.uk 

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