Peace Offerings: November 2025

UN DAYS OF ACTION

25th November 2025: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

10th December 2025: Human Rights Day

24th January 2026: International Day of Education

16 days of activism 2025: End digital violence against all women and girls

The theme of the 16 days this year acknowledges the growing concerns around digital tools being used to stalk, harass and abuse women and girls. This takes many forms including cyberbullying and trolling, online stalking, grooming, use of intimate images, sharing

personal details, disinformation and misogyny. Ending this digital violence matters. Online abuse often leads to violence in real life and has a significant impact on the lives of those targeted. It's hard to stop digital abuse. In many countries, regulation of the tech sector is limited and there's a lack of accountability from online platforms and social media. The growth of AI is adding to the problem as this enables the creation of complex new forms of abuse.

Protection for women in the UK

The Online Safety Act (2023) brought in regulation of online spaces, imposing regulations on providers of services. Online platforms and social media sites have a responsibility to prevent and remove 'priority' illegal content, and this priority content includes online stalking, harsssment, coercive control, online
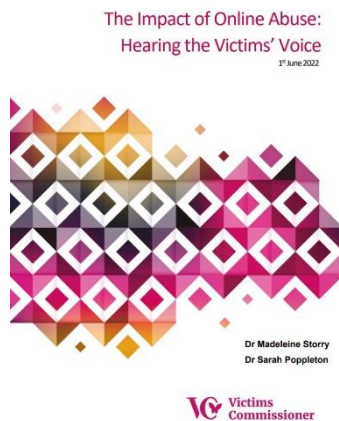

domestic abuse and initimate image abuse. While acknowledging the value of the Act, some women's groups and charities have identified limitations in relation to the online safety of women and girls. For example, some online content which is deemed harmful but legal lies beyond this scope of the act, including AI generated deepfake pornography. The Office of the Domestic Abuse Commissioner also reminds us that a law is only as effective as its implementation and public services must be trained and equipped to recognise and respond appropriately to online violence and abuse against women and girls.

Sisters' stories

What is it like to be a survivor of digital abuse?

The Impact of Online Abuse:
Hearing the Victims' Voice
1st June 2022

Dr Madeleine Storry
Dr Sarah Poppleton

VC Victims Commissioner

In 2022, the office of the Victims Commissioner published a report which explored the impact of online abuse. Over 500 people shared their experiences, the majority of whom were women. You can find the report at:

https://victimscommissioner.org.uk/document/the-impact-of-online-abuse-hearing-the-victims-voice/

The stories show exactly what a survivor experiences and how it makes them feel.

I've had people tell me to kill myself, harm myself, tell me that I'm ugly, etc.

The majority of the abuse has been unsolicited sexual images from males and unwanted descriptions of sexual acts, sexual comments.

My ex-partner hacked my Facebook account, wrote slanderous messages about me on it sent direct messages to my family and my boss at the time.

I was harassed by a work colleague on WhatsApp. He would not take no for an answer, wouldn't accept that I didn't want to go out with him.

I am also being watched by a stalker and as soon as my accounts online were closed down he was sat at my house the next morning.

I cannot enjoy everyday life anymore as I'm stuck in fright mode, I just struggle to get through each day, cannot work, cannot do any of the craft work I once used to enjoy, I feel I've been robbed of my life.

Women in public life are very vulnerable to online abuse

Journalists

With the support of UNESCO, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) published a groundbreaking global study on online violence against women journalists.

73% of the women who took part in the study said they had been subjected to a wide range of online violence, including threats of sexual assault and physical violence, abusive language, harassing private messages, threats to damage their professional or personal reputations, digital security attacks, misrepresentation via manipulated images and financial threats.

Nearly three-quarters of women journalists (73%) have experienced online threats and abuse
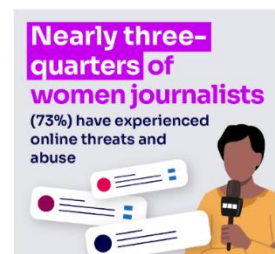
One of the most significant effects of this online abuse was on the women's mental health. They also reported that the abuse led to them missing work, becoming less visible by asking to be taken off air or using pseudonyms online. 4% left their jobs; some even left their career in journalism. In a chilling revelation, 20% of the women in the study disclosed that they admitted to having been attacked or mistreated in incidents related to the threats received online.

Politicians

On 14th July 2025, Ofcom published a report about the online hate and abuse received by women in public office. Some of the findings include:

- online abuse of women in politics has underlying misogynistic and/or gendered tone to it and regularly strays into rape and death threats.
- It is a constant everyday experience, often triggered by actions that are a standard part of the women's job role, such as speaking out about a particular issue.
- It is getting worse, becoming more common, more sophisticated in terms of how it targets individuals, and seemingly normalised.

The impact on these women is significant.

They start to make you feel scared in the street in your constituency once you are elected.

The thing that's horrible about it is they can get to you even when you're in your safe space with your safe people. Like, you could be out for a meal with your family and it'll pop up on your phone or you're at home in your dressing gown, sat on the sofa with the dog, you know, cup of tea, Love Island, and yeah, here, here, you know…[Name] calling you a [an abusive term was removed from the transcript here].

The women in the study are concerned that the level of online abuse discourages women from entering public office.

Any female audience actually I talk to, now ask me about the levels of abuse for female politicians… it changes the attractions to the job. I think, other women look at it and think. Um, well, why would I wanna do that?

This matters because, as you might recall from the January 2025 edition of Peace Offerings, there is evidence that women in government, and an equal balance of female and male representatives makes a difference, so it's important for women to see this a choice they would want to make.

Read more at:

https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/online-abuse/online-hate-and-abuse-among-women-in-politics-a-report-by-ofcom

Online violence affects everyone

In 2023, the actor Emily Atack made a film called Emily Atack: Asking for It? a documentary about her
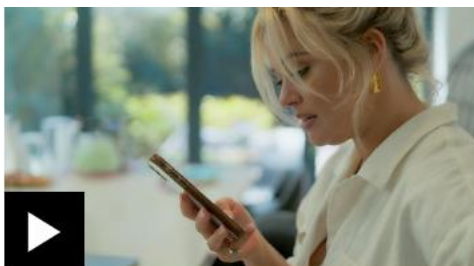
"It's the ultimate disrespect"

experience of receiving thousands of sexually aggressive messages and images on social media, and its impact on her. One of the questions she asks herself is whether by posting pictures of herself online wearing a bikini, is she 'asking for it?' Is it her fault that men send her sexually explicit messages and photographs?

It not just women in the public eye like Emily who experience this kind of sexual harassment. In the film, she talks to women who don't have a public profile but nevertheless receive such messages. One woman told her "It really is

humiliating, embarrassing for some reason, even though I didn't do anything wrong," Most concerning are the experiences Emily Atack hears about when she visits a school. Almost all of the 16 year olds she spoke had received 'dick pics' or videos of men masturbating. One told her she started receiving them when she was 12.

The impact of this on Emily, and so many others, is devastating. Like many women, Atack feels humiliated and ashamed by it but has dealt with the impact through humour. However, when she finally reports some of the abuse to the police, having never thought they would take it seriously, she cries. The impact is real and damaging.

You can see Emily Atack talking about why she made the documentary at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=favrRfk3qMU&t=49s

Local university leads research

These examples illustrate the nature of digital abuse and violence against women but do we really understand the full extent of the issue? New research led by Dr Stephanie Fohring, Assistant Professor in Criminology at Northumbria University, is looking to find out. A three-year study, called WOW: Women's Online Wellbeing, will examine the nature and scale of this form of abuse across Europe and will also explore the support needs of women who are victims of digital violence.

Find out more about the research at https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/news-events/news/researchers-explore-an-alarming-rise-in-digital-violence-against-women/

What next?

 The Online Safety Act 2023 makes platforms legally responsible for protecting people in the UK from illegal and harmful content. As part of this, Ofcom has published draft guidance setting out how providers can take action against harmful content and activity that disproportionately affects women and girls, by taking responsibility, designing services to prevent harm and providing supporting users. Read more at: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/illegal-and-harmful-content/a-safer-life-online-for-women-and-girls

We can also take steps to ensure our online safety:

- Make sure your passwords are strong and are not the same for every account you might set up

- Set up two factor authentications on all devices and accounts

- Turn off tracking options on apps

- Update your software regularly: updates often improve security

- Be cautious about opening emails/messages from unknown sources

- If something makes you anxious or uncomfortable, block the sender and report it. Keep a screenshot of the messages/images as evidence.