Dr. Emma Short

Staying Safe Online: the truth about Cyberstalking

Unsocial Media: The Real Toll of Online Abuse against Women

- Amnesty International report – November 21st 2017
- 4000 Women aged 18–55 in the UK, USA, Spain, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, Poland and New Zealand.
- **23% of women polled across said they had experienced online abuse or harassment,** threats of violence, privacy violations or sexist and misogynistic comments
- **Of women polled who had experienced online abuse or harassment, more 26% said they had received threats of physical or sexual assault**
- **Online abuse has a silencing or censoring effect on women** with more than 3/4 (76%) of women who had experienced abuse or harassment on social media made changes to the way they use social media platforms as a result

Cyberharassment – Some definitions

"Threatening behaviour or unwanted advances directed at another using the Internet and other forms of computer communications" National centre for the victims of crime

- Cyberbullying
- Trolling
- Cyber harassment
- Cyber stalking

Cyberstalking, harassment, trolling or bullying?
What is the difference

- All characterised by the repetition of behaviours that cause harm – and an awareness of harm caused

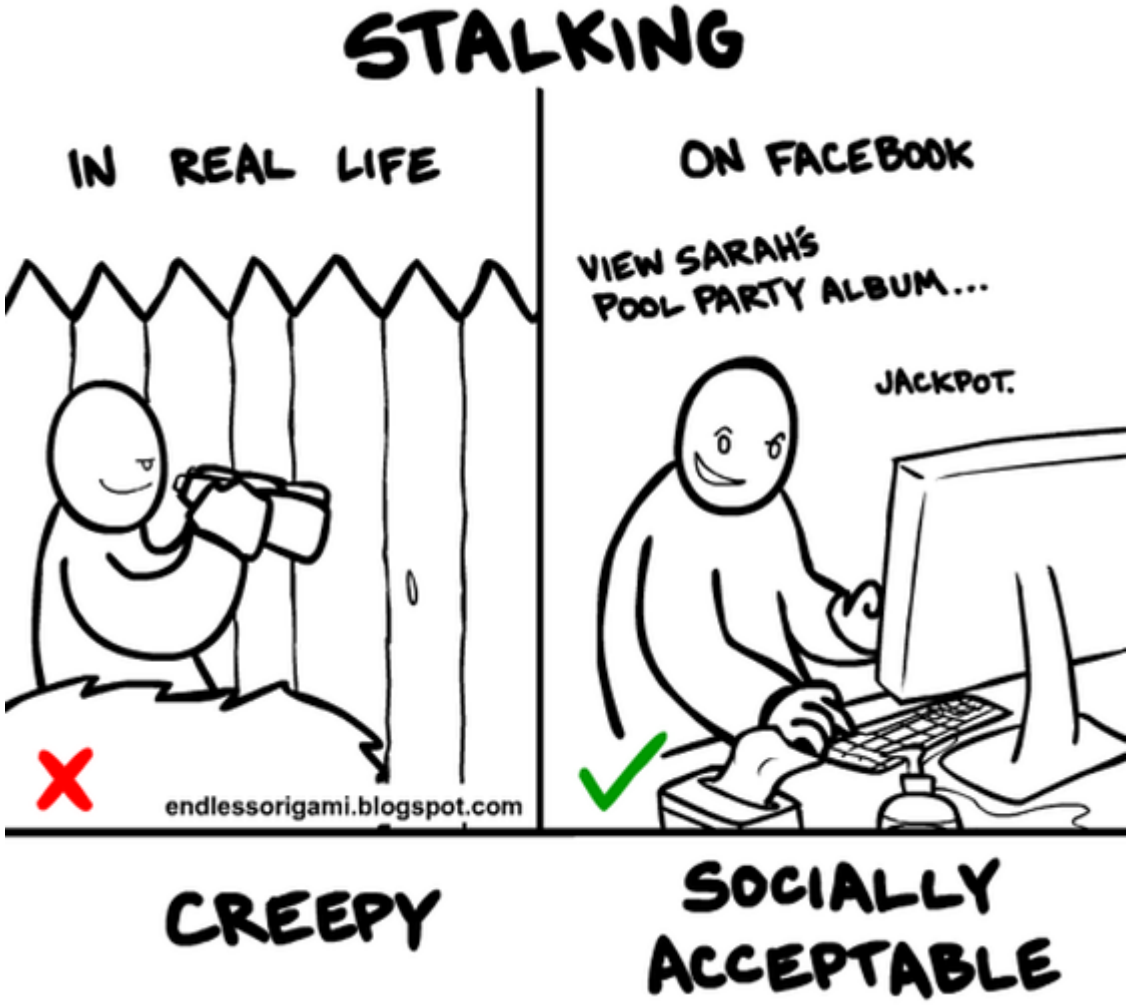
- Difference may lie in the degree of fixation the perpetrator has on the victim

- Currently the accepted threshold for abnormal behaviour is based on persistence and repetition. Contact known to be unwanted is maintained over four weeks and has occurred on more than 10 occasions

Cyber harassment prevalence

- Cyber harassment currently makes up 36% of reported cybercrime in the Bedfordshire region 4.96% of total crime (2015).
- Often deemed not serious, cyber harassment causes substantial distress and disruption to daily activities for victims
- It should be responded to in order to protect the public.
- The case for addressing the demand is further supported by the lack of public confidence in reporting cyber harassment. 90% do not report.

Attitudes – Identification – Investigation - prosecution


STALKING
IN REAL LIFE
ON FACEBOOK
VIEW SARAH'S POOL PARTY ALBUM...
JACKPOT.
endlessorigami.blogspot.com
CREEPY
SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE

Have social networks created more stalkers?

- The online environment provides conditions where expression is often more uninhibited
- Perceptions of invisibility even where there is not anonymity loosen the restrictions to expression felt in offline social exchanges
- ‘Relationship’ and emotional escalation formation are accelerated
- Higher propensity to disclose or engage at intimate level (e.g. sexploitation)
- The internet provides a high and immediate level of reward and reinforcement to behaviour
- Behaviour after the end of relationships is changing

Cyberstalking – a old problem through a new medium, creating wider threat

- Age-old problem
- Time and geography no longer important - Enabling perpetrators and obstructing investigators
- Penetration/broadcast of abuse – threats to reputation and social networks
- Threat of secondary abuse ‘Virtual Mobbing’
- Incitement of harassment ‘third party stalking’
- New personal security behaviours need to be learned and adopted

Cyber stalking – figures reported by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust: 2016

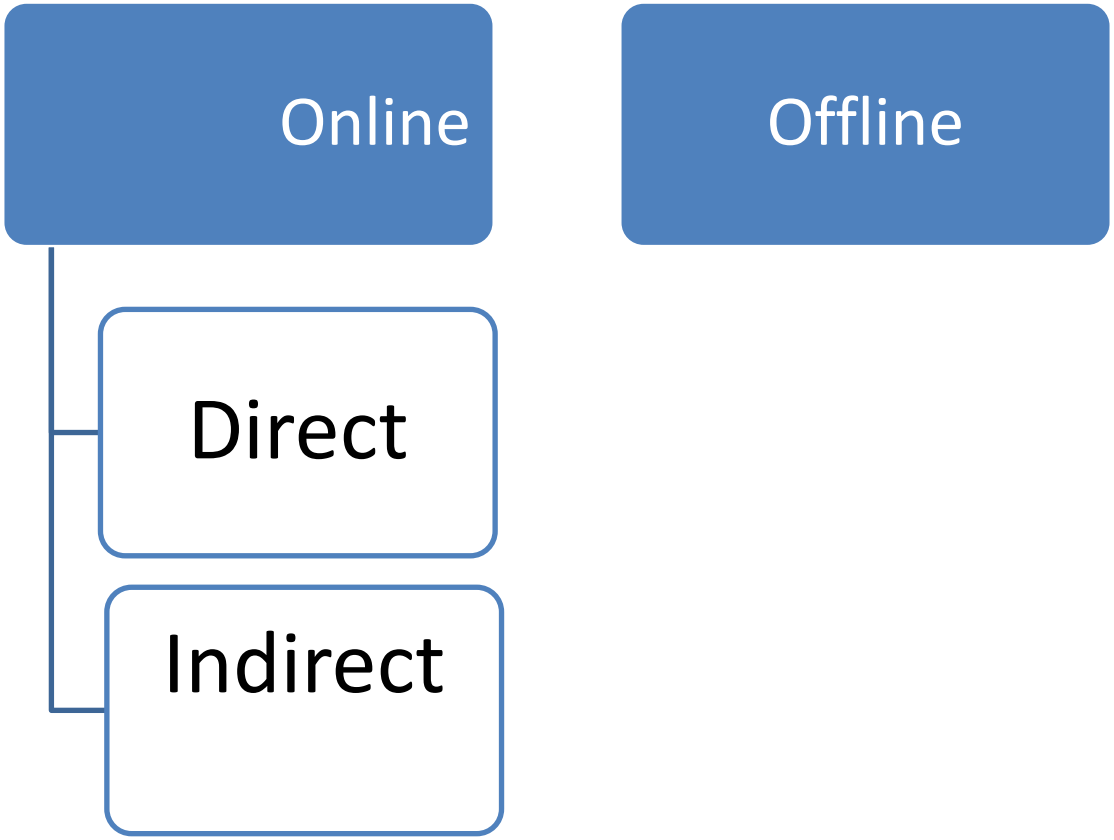
- 36.8% of people that have been stalked had been stalked using online methods
- Where online stalking was the sole form of stalking behaviour, only 9.8% of people reported it to the police
- Of those who have been stalked online, 43.1% have withdrawn from some form online activity and/or social media
- Of those who reported any form of stalking to the police, 43.4% found their response not very helpful or not helpful at all
- Victims often respond to stalking by disconnecting from the internet

Themes identified in personal accounts of cyberstalking – 'Determined offender'

- Harassment was constant and continued over long periods of time:
- "*the texts and calls were relentless. At every work breaktime she'd phone over and over again and send text after text of nonsense. These could amount to over 30 a day.*"
- "*went on for 3 to 5 years from the same person*"
- Creating new ways to maliciously attack if a method was blocked:
- *Each time I shut down a means of communication from her she would find another way to harrass me''* "

Attacks in multiple Environments

‘Control and Intimidation’



Online Stalking – 'Direct'

- Making threats: *"eventually chat threads started becoming threatening, to me personally and my family, in one instance someone anonymously wrote they wanted to kill me."*
- Making false accusations: *"The person would make up channels saying I was a paedophile, woman abuser, dog molester, drug addict."*
- Tricking by creating new identities: *"He created a fake journal and tried to become my friend"*;
- Threatening suicide: *"sent text messages indicating that he would commit suicide if I did not respond to him"*;
- Accusing victim of stalking them: *"she set me up to look like I'd stalked her by posting her email to the bulletin board."*

Online Stalking – 'Indirect'

- Talking to the victim's contacts:
- *"through her Facebook site…She contacted my daughter three times, some of the things said to my daughter were both vile and completely untrue."*
- *"Following my followers and sending them links to the malicious blog and to my business website simultaneously"*
- Impersonating the victim, harassing their contacts: Posting the victim's personal information online: *"He set up a missing persons post about me, on a missing persons website, which my friends, not knowing the situation, would tell him where I was etc. When contacted by me, the website did not reply, the police force where the website was hosted (Canada) did not reply"*
- Encouraging others to harass the victim;
- *"built web pages with my email address on them asking other men to send me their rape fantasies, the web page was made to look like I was asking for these as a fetish or something I supposedly have".*
- *"she contacted over 15 different funeral parlour services and had them mail out their brochures to me, consoling me on the loss of my own name"*

Offline – ‘Intimidation’

- Many participants also experienced offline Harassment, Being followed, Confrontation, Letters, Damage to property and Assault.
- Offline behaviors used either: as a precursor to CS; or in combination with CS*:*
- *“he started calling at all hours on the landline…[and] the mobile…[and] after he started using pay phones…He [then] overpowered and raped me, and continued calling and IM'ing me after that”*
- Or post CS: *“He posted aggressive and insulting messages on my myspace profile it escalated pretty quickly until one night he followed me home and tried to get into my house”* .

‘Negative Psychological Consequences’

- Fear: *“My whole life stopped because I was in so much fear*!”
- Paranoia: *“I get paranoid very easily and reluctant to trust indirect communications*”
- Anger *“I am not so much scared by this, just really.. angry, fear plays little part in it for me*”
- Psychological symptoms.*“I still have flashbacks and experience anxiety when going to my inbox. My health has not been the same since”*.
- *“I became very ill… and now suffer complex PTSD/depression as a result of the harassment and abuse” “all the trauma and stress suffered from the stalking resulted in me miscarrying our child*”
- *“I ended up attempting suicide. Being told you are to blame for being stalked and that it's your fault someone has had a bad life for 2-3 years straight, looking over your shoulder everyday, wondering when you or your family are gonna be maimed, kinda gets to you*

‘Negative Social Consequences’

- Damaged reputation, damaged family relations or loss of work; the cyberstalker *“impersonated me online sending out emails and status upates that ruined my reputation”*; *“I have been unable to work properly, as I have felt sullied, damaged, and abused.” “the stalking behavior caused irrevocable damage to family relations”*
- Some participants expressed helplessness and lowered perceptions of control *“He will follow me for the rest of my life and I can do nothing.” “impotence at how little I can do is the main emotion I fee[l].”“you are made to feel with less control of your life.”*.

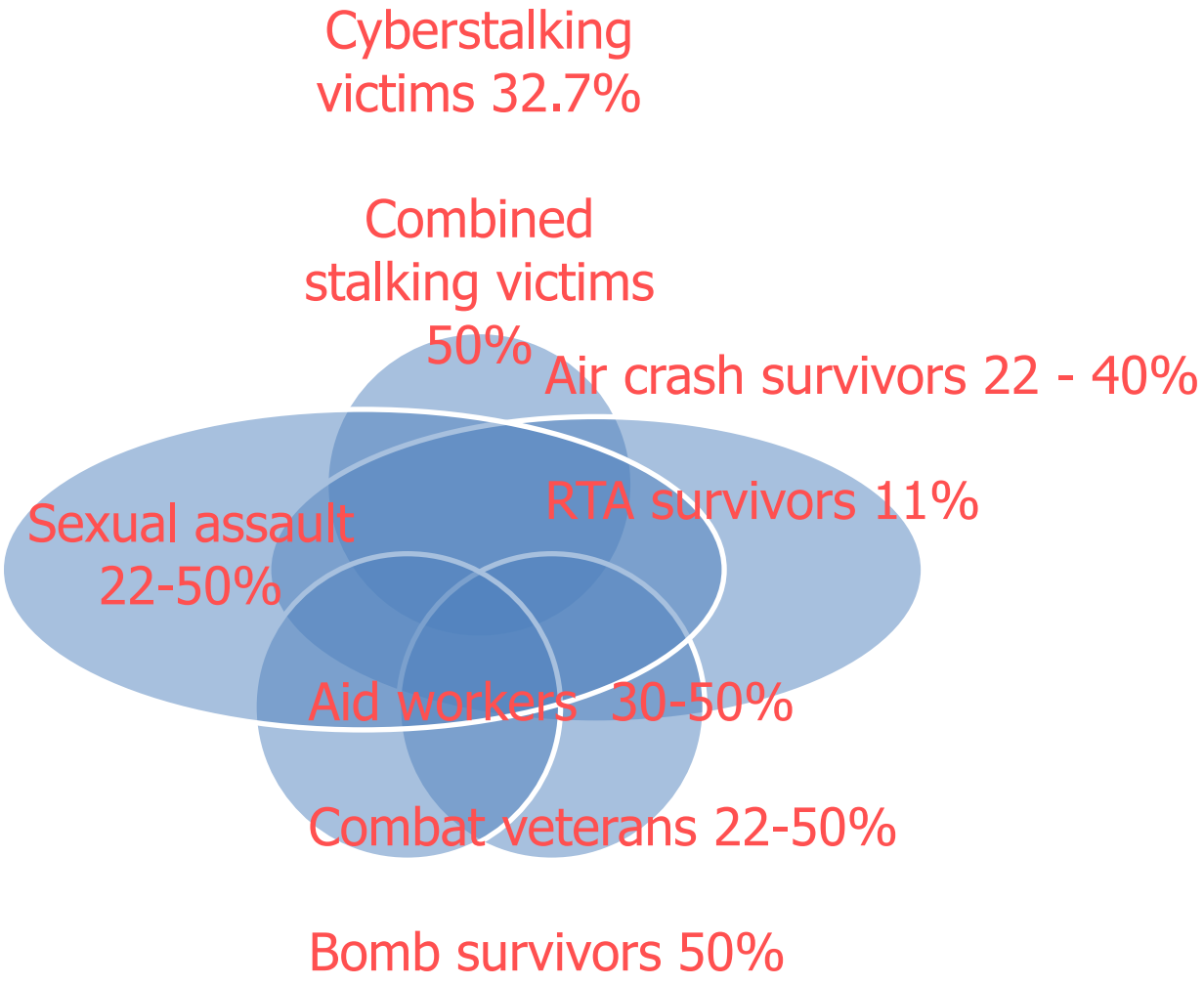
The Trauma of being cyberstalked

- Cyberstalking is traumatic - as a psychological term ‘trauma’ assumes two things
- that the person has been exposed to a dangerous experience that does not only expose people to physical threat or fear of physical threat
- it pierces strong psychological defences that enable us to function in general life to produce a state of fear, helplessness or horror
- this helplessness is illustrated very well by cases where the stalker is described as unknown or a stranger –

‘Sarah’ aged 26

- “I would start to get quite depressed and panicky and hated using the tube or even walking around in public - I was convinced if I stood near to a tube platform edge she'd appear and push me over - I was terrified of bumping into her, because I didn't think I could take very much more of the abuse. It directly affected me, my relationships and my friendships, I really wasn't myself for some time, and it took a good year after it had stopped to really get myself back on track”

Types of Traumas



Impacts on Daily life

- 32.0% felt fearful about their personal safety
- 9.5% moved home
- 26% stopped answering their telephone
- 18.1% stopped answering their front door
- 11.4% stopped using their mobile phone

‘Lack of Support’

- The majority of participants had little support: *“I completely despair at times of finding someone who will take this seriously.”*;
- *“My mother did not take this seriously at first, suggested I go out with him, and gave him my e-mail address*”.
- A lack of support was exacerbated if the victim was blamed for the harassment: *“ … said it was my fault for putting the information online in the first place.”*
- *“I was made to feel like it was almost to blame or that it was trivial*”

Imperatives of Raising Awareness

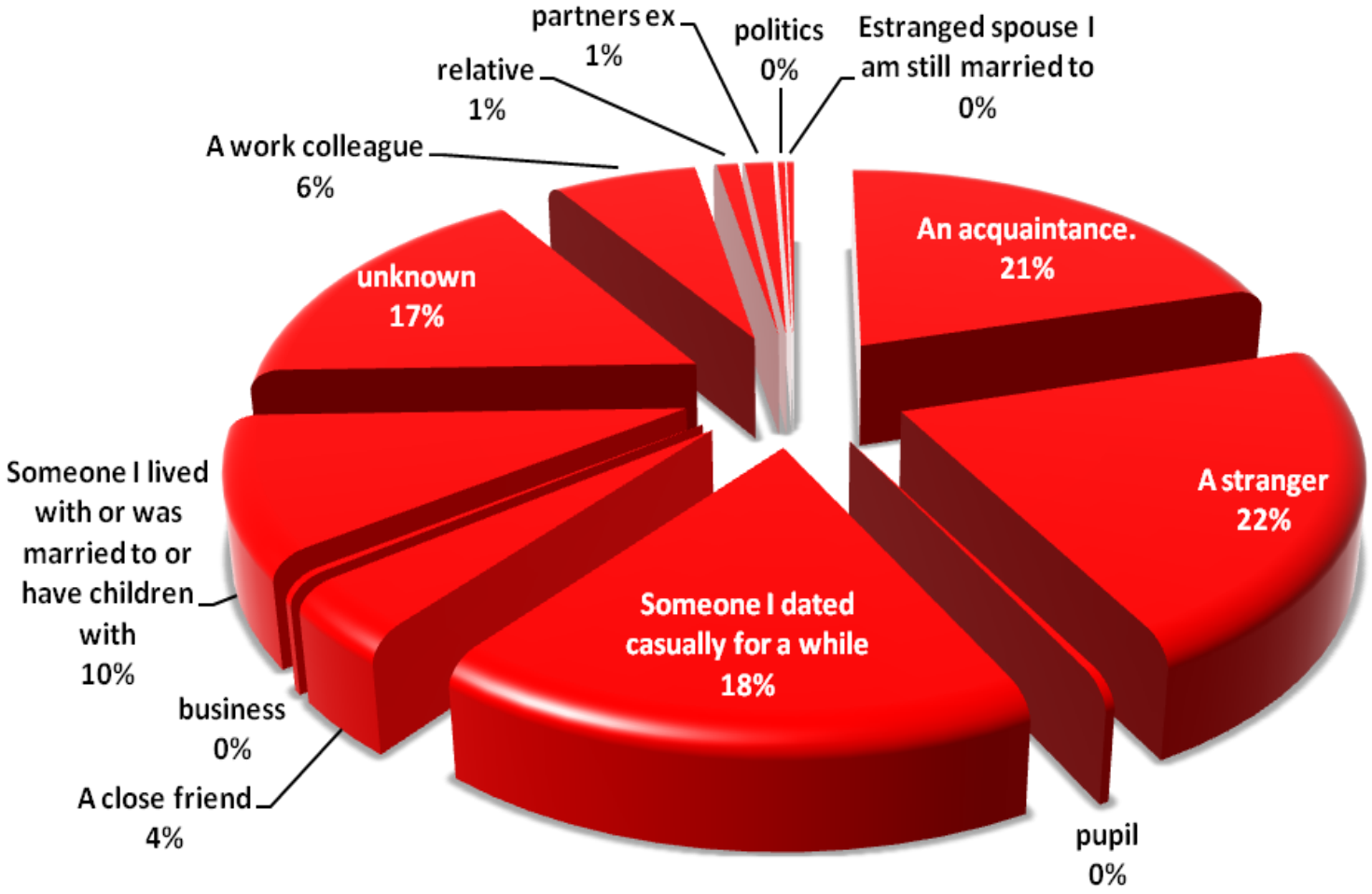
- Cyberstalking is a crime where control is exerted over the victim. It must be recognized for what it is and taken seriously
- If the person affected is further disempowered by a lack of support, the cyberstalker becomes more enabled and the effects upon them greater

Who were the cyberstalkers in the self report study?

- Stranger – whose identity was established **21.7%**
- Acquaintance **20.4 %**
- Someone dated casually **18.2%**
- Unknown **16.4 %**
- These categories represent **76.4%** of the group

- **Only 32% of our sample knew their stalker beyond the level of acquaintance**
- **Only 10% of these people had reported it to the police**

Relationship



Assessing risk of cyber abuse
Aspects associated with increased risk based on case analysis

- Standard Risk
  - Trolling through existing channels of communication
  - No immediate threats made
- Medium Risk
  - Access to Device
  - Signs of investment of time/ construction of channels
  - fake profiles used to harass
  - Public sharing details/contact info
- High Risk
  - Threat to kill/harm – which seem plausible
  - Tracking behaviours

Some suggested guidance for responding to unwanted or threatening communication

- What should I do if I am being trolled?:
- What should I do if I receive an offensive message?
- What should I do if I receive a threatening message?
- What should I do if someone posts personal information about me online?

What should I do if I am being Trolled?

- **Trolls** - individuals with hidden personal profiles who set out to inflict the maximum emotional harm on an individual.
- Check if their entire feed is dedicated to harassing others, but do not engage with them.
- Monitor the situation and report posts to the social media network in question if it continues.
- Twitter gives you options for tackling messages like these in the short term – **mute or block,** trolls and other accounts that send you offensive messages on Twitter.
- **Muting** will mean that you can no longer see their messages, but they do not get any notification that they have been muted.
- This is different to **blocking**, which will alert the user they're no longer able to direct tweets at you.

What should you do if you receive an offensive message?

- An offensive message includes, misogynistic, homophobic, racist, ableist, or other forms of hate speech
- If you receive a message that is offensive but not threatening, you should:
- Report it to the Police who will consider whether or not the message constitutes a criminal offence.
- **Do not** immediately report them to the social network if you have decided to approach this with the police, as they will need to record the messages as evidence. If you report the messages to the social media site, they may be deleted before the police see them.
- You can **mute** these users on Twitter or **block** on Facebook if you no longer want to see messages from them.

What should I do if I receive a threatening message?

- If you receive a threatening message via social media **do not delete it or reply.** You should:
- Take a screenshot and copy a link to the post and save these somewhere.
- Report it to the police
- **Do not** report them to the social network immediately as the police will need to record the messages as evidence. If you report the messages to the social media site, they may be deleted.
- If you believe there is an imminent threat you should report it to the local police by calling 999.

What should I do if someone posts personal information about me online?

- Posting personal information online about someone against their will, sometime called “doxxing”.
- This is not a criminal offence, but may be part of a ‘course of conduct’ which amounts to harassment or stalking.
- If someone posts intimate pictures or video of you online without your permission, this is image based sexual abuse “**revenge porn**”. It is a criminal offence.
- If someone is using such materials or information to blackmail you, this is a form of sexual abuse known as “**sextortion**” a criminal offence.
- In both cases, take screenshots and copy the link to the post. Save them securely
- Contact the police

What to do if you are being Harassed, Abused or Stalked online

- Assess the risk, the behaviours involved and the impact on you
- Mute
- Block
- Record – make a secure record of the abuse
- Report – to media platforms, police
- Get Support

National Stalking helpline - 0808 802 0300

Revenge Porn Helpline - 0345 6000 459

Website and email services – check the links to other agencies offering advice and support

Protect Yourself Against Cyberstalking

Get Safe online *www.getsafeonline.org*

- Review what online information exists about you and keep it to a minimum
- Regularly change your e-mail and passwords for key online accounts and keep them safe
- Review all your privacy and security settings
- Avoid public forums
- Ensure that your computer and mobile devices have updated antispyware software installed and turned on
- Ensure your wireless hub/router has security turned on. Change from factory settings.
- Unless you are using a secure web page, do not send or receive private information when using public WiFi
- Limit the personal and financial information you share on or offline
- Educate friends, family and work colleagues into the risks

What to expect when and after Reporting to the Police – Chapter 13, can be sent to you on request

Emma.short@beds.ac.uk

@Emmpath