



London Family  
Court Clinic

Est. 1974

Professional Services for Families in Court



# ONLINE ABUSE:

Virtual violence and its impact on  
young women and girls



## Authors

Heather Fredin, B.A., D.A.T., B.Ed., M.Ed., Registered Psychotherapist  
Adele Carrier, B.S.W

## Acknowledgments

Sexual Assault Centre London – Girls Creating Change (Focus Group)  
London Youth Mental Health Advisory Council (YMHAC)  
Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support & Integration (Focus Group)

We greatly appreciate the training and input from our diversity consultant, Kike Ojo, B.A., M.A., B.Ed.

This new publication offers resources for service providers, parents and youth to help understand and navigate the complex world of online interpersonal violence. Topics explored include gender-based violence, sexting, sexual abuse, safety, cyberbullying, 'hookup' culture, identity, adolescent development, and online intimacy.

## DELTA Series Team

Rachel Braden, author; Todd Devlin, editor; Michelle Foster, graphic designer; Heather Fredin, author; Kimberly Harris, author; Pamela Hurley, author; Alicia Lean, communications assistant; Jenny Poon, researcher.

## Other publications in this Series include:

Calling a Young Witness: An Essentials Guide  
Helping an Abused Woman: An Essentials Guide  
Helping Children Exposed to Violence at Home: An Essentials Guide  
Preparing and Supporting Young Witnesses: An Essentials Guide  
Rethinking Resiliency: How understanding our world can help us bounce back

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Fredin, Heather, author

Online abuse : virtual violence and its impact on young women and girls.

Authors: Heather Fredin, B.A., D.A.T., B.ED., M.ED., Registered Psychotherapist, Adele Carrier, B.S.W.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-988275-08-6 (softcover).--ISBN 978-1-988275-09-3 (PDF)

1. Internet and teenagers. 2. Internet and women. 3. Computer crimes. 4. Internet--Safety measures. I. Carrier, Adele, 1986-, author II. London Family Court Clinic, issuing body III. Title.

HQ799.2.I5F74 2017

004.67'80835

C2017-904706-X

C2017-904707-8



200 - 254 Pall Mall St.  
London, ON N6A 5P6  
Canada  
info@lfcc.on.ca • www.lfcc.on.ca

We gratefully acknowledge funding from the Department of Justice Canada.



The opinions expressed herein are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice or the Government of Canada.

2017 © London Family Court Clinic, Inc.  
All Rights Reserved. Do not reproduce without written permission of the authors.



This resource is written to help youth, as well as individuals who support and counsel youth, to better understand and navigate the world of social media and other online platforms as they relate to intimacy and relationships. Of particular importance is learning about online sexual abuse, which can take many forms and lead to many negative outcomes.

This resource reflects a growing need, as online platforms have become an integral part of our relationships. Topics explored include gender-based violence, sexting, sexual abuse, safety, cyberbullying, 'hookup' culture, identity, adolescent development, and online intimacy. In addition to offering practical strategies to engage youth, this publication teaches critical thinking skills, as social media and other online platforms create both opportunity and risk for today's youth.

### Why a resource for online abuse?

Online platforms have become an integral part of our relationships, and we should all be questioning the nature and quality of these relationships. This is even more important for youth, who spend a great deal of time online, whether on social media or other online platforms. Social media can be great for building and fostering relationships, but it can also have negative effects. Unfortunately, online platforms create the opportunity for abusive relationships to form, and the technology offers new methods for abusers to coerce and control their victims.

The answer isn't to give up using social media and the Internet, and this resource certainly isn't intended to minimize the opportunities that online platforms

provide. In fact, online networks offer many positive and healthy opportunities, like knowledge exchange, relationship building, education, social networking, and social justice coordination, to name a few. Further, most of us would experience some level of isolation if we were to completely 'unplug' from our online networks. But herein lies the dilemma: What does a person do if they experience online abuse? Completely 'unplugging' would leave that individual feeling isolated and disconnected from the very networks that provide them with support and a sense of connection. But at the same time, remaining connected can lead to continuous abuse.

The solution doesn't exist within the technology itself, but rather within the broader culture's commitment to ending online abuse. Meanwhile, individuals (and particularly youth) need support in building critical thinking skills to assess their relationships – both 'offline' and online.

### Who can use this resource?

This publication can be used by anyone who helps or advocates for youth. This can include counsellors, social workers, or teachers. Youth will find this resource useful, particularly when discussing its contents with a trained professional or service provider. And parents, too, can benefit from the information found within these pages. The resource provides key information about social media and other online platforms as they relate to relationships and intimacy. And it provides tools to help people (particularly youth) better navigate the online world and build and maintain healthy relationships.



# CONTENTS

## Online Abuse: Virtual violence and its impact on young women and girls

Introduction .....	i
<b>Social norms and abuse against women and girls</b> .....	4
Gender-based violence: A societal problem	
The link between gender inequality and violence	
<b>The vulnerability of youth</b> .....	6
Adolescent development	
Development and risk	
Relationships, intimacy and the online world	
<b>Online and digital abuse</b> .....	9
The nature of online abuse – connection and communication	
Characteristics of online violence – Facts & figures	
Sexting and pornography	
Female gamers and harassment	
Understanding the consequences of online abuse	
Impacts of abuse on physical and mental health	
<b>Improving the safety and quality of online relationships</b> .....	16
Critical thinking skills for online relationships	
Bystander intervention	
Solutions for change	
Building a framework for healthy relationships	
Help create change through advocacy	
Areas of further inquiry/research	
<b>Glossary of terms</b> .....	20
<b>Focus group feedback</b> .....	22





# Social norms and abuse against women and girls

Violence against women and girls is caused by social norms and beliefs within our society that devalue women and girls. We must challenge the values, beliefs and attitudes that drive violence, and the social, political and economic structures and practices that support violence against marginalized groups, including women and girls.

Social norms that promote violence and abuse against women and girls are widespread and, unfortunately, have become normalized by our dominant culture. They impact our schools, our workplaces, and our communities. And they promote abuse and violence online. Youth are uniquely impacted, not only because they are in the process of shaping their own identities and forming relationships (including intimate relationships), but also because they use online platforms to communicate on a daily basis. Whether it's texting, email, or social media, youth are the most frequent users of online platforms. Young people – and those who work with young people (e.g., counsellors, social workers, teachers) – need to question the quality and safety of the relationships that youth form online, including intimate relationships.

Important: Online violence and abuse are *not* caused by online platforms or technology. These platforms are simply new ways in which violence is expressed in our society today. As mentioned, violence is caused by social norms and beliefs within our society.

## Gender-based violence: A societal problem

Gender-based violence (violence against women and girls) is one of our most pressing social problems in society today. It stems from our current dominant culture's attitudes and beliefs about women and girls, boys and men, and sexuality and relationships. All too often, we incorrectly deem the experience of sexual violence or sexually violent behaviour as an individual problem that requires an individual solution (e.g., treatment/counselling). But gender-based violence is not an individual problem. It is a societal problem, driven by cultural/social norms. Individual support/counselling is surely an important part of healing, but

it is only part of the solution.

Children and youth in today's world have inherited a culture in which violence is normalized within interpersonal relationships, and gender inequality is at the core of this problem. Youth also live in a world that continues to struggle with racism, sexism and heterosexism. But violence against women and girls is not an inevitable social problem. Nor is racism or heterosexism. These issues are the result of complex social norms and practices. Our task as a society, then, needs to be shifting our view of interpersonal violence from being a private issue to being a societal issue and a public priority. And that's a vital shift, because our current social norms, political systems, workplace practices, and economic structures all work to support and drive violence against women, girls and other marginalized individuals.

Consider: It is estimated that one in three women in Canada will experience violence at some point in their lives. And one in 10 is actively experiencing violence.<sup>1</sup> There were 1,232 reported cases of missing or murdered indigenous women between 1980 and 2015, according to the RCMP. Grassroots organizations and the Native Women's Association of Canada believe that the number is actually much higher.<sup>1</sup>

Although there is no single cause for violence against women and children, the primary driver for interpersonal violence is gender inequality. And the high rate of violence experienced by young women is of critical importance. In fact, young women aged 15 to 24 are at the greatest risk of experiencing violence – both within and outside of intimate relationships.<sup>2</sup>



Young women experience abuse and violence on a continuum, from cat calls in the hallways at elementary school or high school, to degrading comments from a boyfriend, to being monitored (movement and communication) via cell phones, to being raped during their first year at university. Factors such as age, racism, and heterosexism can increase the risk of violence for young women, and limit access to resources and supports when young women and girls seek help.

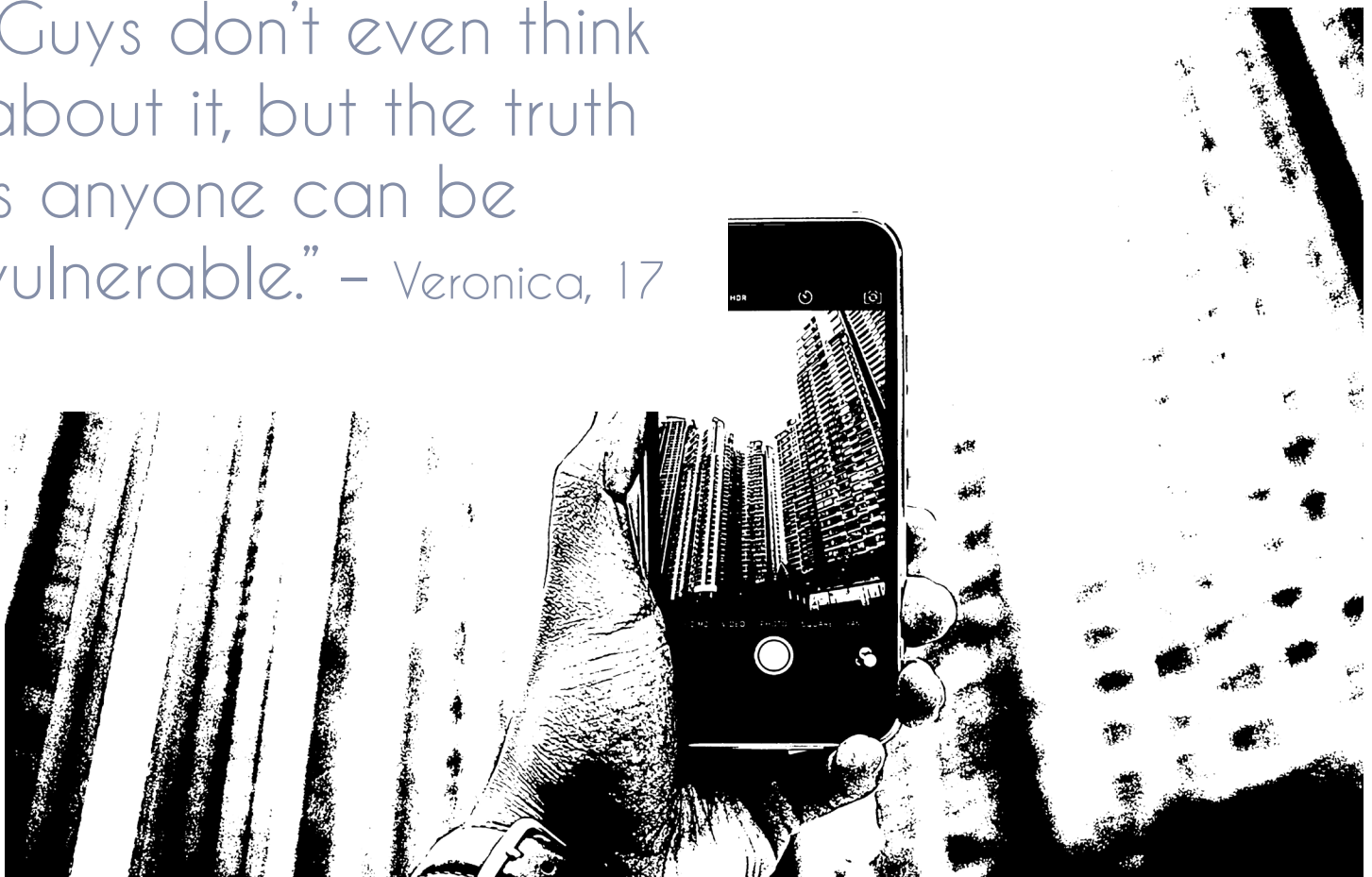
### The link between gender inequality and violence:

Men and boys are less likely to respect women and girls if they are not taught and encouraged to treat women and girls as their equals. And women and girls are less likely to realize that they are the victims of violence if they are used to being treated differently from men and boys. Violence against women and girls is even further heightened when gender inequality overlaps with other forms of discrimination (based on factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, geography, religion and socio-economic status). For example,

indigenous women in Canada are five times more likely than non-indigenous women of the same age to die as a result of violence.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, in Europe, North America, and Australia, over half of women with disabilities have experienced physical abuse, compared to one-third of non-disabled women.<sup>3</sup>

There are additional factors at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels that may increase the risk of a male abusing a female victim. For example, male children who witness violence have an increased risk of becoming abusive themselves later in life (if they receive no appropriate intervention). Likewise, female children who witness violence (or experience abuse) may be at risk of being abused in adulthood if they don't receive appropriate interventions. At the same time, there are factors that can protect against abuse, such as completing secondary education and building and maintaining a healthy network of support.

“Guys don't even think about it, but the truth is anyone can be vulnerable.” – Veronica, 17



# The vulnerability of youth

The reality is that anyone can be a victim of abuse – either online or ‘offline.’ Therefore, all youth need access to information and support to help reduce their risk of experiencing abuse. Additionally, we all share a responsibility (as a society) to change social norms to better support young people develop and maintain healthy relationships.

Research shows that young people who have experienced (or who are at risk of experiencing) abuse within their home have a greater risk of experiencing abuse online.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, the ‘offline’ abuse they already experience is extended (through technology) to online formats as well. For those who have been victimized in the past, abuse can become normalized. As a result, they may not recognize the warning signs of abuse online. Sometimes, these are called ‘blind spots.’<sup>2</sup>

This link between early experiences of violence and later experiences of victimization is identified as revictimization. In other words, early experiences of abuse increase the likelihood of a girl or woman experiencing abuse in her adult relationships.<sup>2</sup>

## Adolescent development:

Adolescents are faced with a number of developmental challenges. Additionally, youth and young adults face significant stress associated with independent living, educational goals, and a transition to meaningful employment.



Characteristics that emerge in adolescence:

- Sense of time is still developing, and distressed adolescents can ‘feel’ like what they are currently experiencing will last ‘forever.’
- Black-and-white thinking shifts towards more complex and abstract thought.
- Thinking becomes more complex, working memory increases, and thoughts become more organized.
- Impulsivity decreases as youth become older.
- Increased capacity for delayed gratification.
- Ability to regulate behaviour more independently, without parental support.
- Risk-taking and thrill seeking behaviours are present, as sensitivity to pleasure and reward increases during this time.
- An increased focus on body image, self-acceptance, and peer acceptance.
- Egocentricity decreases as youth age. Where it was once challenging to see other’s perspectives, youth begin to see the perspectives of others.
- Identity is developing and being informed by interactions with one’s social network. This includes both helpful and problematic cultural messaging about women, girls, masculinity, sexuality, etc.
- A focus on peer relationships, as these relationships become central to an adolescent (this makes it that much more distressing if a youth’s peer relationships are unsafe or violent).
- Levels of independence increase, and youth may be less likely to ask for support from parents, family, adults, etc.
- Sexuality plays a more central role in an adolescent’s life, and youth seek information, including through technology (e.g., the Internet, social media, texting) to learn about and explore sexuality. Sexual activity arises, at an average age of 17.
- Drug and alcohol use can be introduced during adolescence, and a binge-drinking culture can be normalized.
- Problem solving, motivation, and leadership skills increase with age.
- Beliefs about knowledge and authority become more flexible.



“I’ve worked with girls whose abuser uses social media to shame, blame and stalk. Girls will report feeling distressed and full of doubt, but they don’t always name the abuse as their source of distress. They feel responsible for the state of the relationship. They feel it’s their role to help him, even at their own expense. It becomes normalized for them.” – Lynn, Youth Worker

### Development and risk:

It is important to understand how adolescent development can intersect with risk. The experience of 17-year-old Rehtaeh Parsons, a teenager in Halifax who tragically died by suicide as a result of being bullied and sexually assaulted online, offers a sobering reminder of how often adolescent girls experience sexual violence, and the tragic impacts that can result. Sexual assault occurs most often between the ages of 13 and 24. Sadly, though, these are far from isolated incidents, and they occur frequently in our own communities. It is estimated that one in three Canadian women will experience sexual assault at some point in their lives.<sup>4</sup> That’s a hugely problematic statistic, as sexual violence is a significant risk factor for suicide, and abuse is the leading cause of mental health issues for women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable in the aftermath of a rape because, during this stage of development, they are forming their identity, building relationships with peers, gaining independence from their parents, and mastering their environments. When a rape occurs, girls often internalize the experience with blame and shame. When intimate images of a young woman are shared online, without consent, this often magnifies feelings of shame and distress. And a victim can feel violated every time an intimate image is shared. This type of trauma at this age interrupts the normal process of identity development. It can damage trust in very important peer relationships, and it can create a perception that a girl’s everyday life is unsafe, unpredictable, and out of her own control. Adolescent girls, because of

their developmental stage, can struggle to manage overwhelming feelings and can act impulsively, which can put them at further risk.

Young women can and do heal from sexual violence, but we need to ensure that we invest in prevention efforts and offer specialized services to support those who have been victimized by violence. Of greatest significance is the fact that we have a responsibility to end violence against women.

### Relationships, intimacy and the online world:

Healthy relationships are central to our wellbeing. This is especially true for youth, as friendships and romantic relationships become central to a young person as they move from childhood to adulthood. In doing so, youth shift their primary attachment from their family of origin and focus their attention on their peers and romantic relationships. During adolescence, youth are very much learning about who they are and how to intimately connect with others. They are looking to define their unique value and find their place in the world. These important developmental tasks can be both exciting and stressful. And in today’s world, that excitement and stress can be amplified by online intimacy.

Today, youth have continuous access to social media and online platforms. With this continuous connection comes both risk and opportunity. At the centre of youth culture is online intimacy, and online networks are the very system in which youth build and create intimate relationships. Unfortunately, online activity, including social media and texting, can



amplify gender-based violence. And the studies show that young women and other marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by online violence. Further, violence continues to be the most significant source of physical and mental health distress for young women.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, when youth experience abuse within intimate relationships, online platforms almost always magnify the impact of the abuse.<sup>5</sup>

The online world presents both opportunities and challenges for today's youth when it comes to building relationships. As a result, youth need skills to increase safety and to help build healthy connections. Our culture all too often offers youth false messages about relationships, and presents an image of intimacy as a sort of 'mysterious joy.' In other words, that intimacy (emotional or sexual) is something that happens to you if you're 'good enough,' or 'attractive enough' ... 'sexy, but not too slutty' ... 'tough enough' ... 'strong enough,' etc. Meanwhile, 'hookups' (casual sex) are normalized in our culture, while physical and emotional connection is minimized. Sadly, the ideas of building safety and trust as a prequel to sexual intimacy are uncommon in today's culture. Instead, sexuality and intimacy are often disconnected from concepts like compassion, empathy, responsibility, balance, joy and pleasure.



“Online skews reality. There’s no backstory to what we see on social media ... everything is constructed.” – Adele, 18



# Online and digital abuse

Children and youth are accessing modern communication tools (e.g., cell phones, email, social media) with increasing frequency, using them to expand and create social connections, stay in touch with peers and family, explore new ideas, and seek out needed information. These children and youth, who have been raised in our 'smartphone culture,' are at ease with the tools and applications, while their parents often play catch-up with their technology skills. Many of us (children, youth and adults alike) can't imagine a world without these connections, as using them has become second nature. But although many who use this technology create positive exchanges and relationships, others experience harassment, humiliation, or threats. In other words, they experience online abuse.

According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), increasing numbers of youth are becoming victims of this new form of abuse.<sup>6</sup> Although many different terms have been used to describe abuse online, including 'cyberbullying,' 'Internet harassment,' 'electronic aggression,' and 'Internet bullying,' none of these terms capture the gendered nature of online abuse and violence (e.g., violence against women and girls). But the reality is that online abuse is simply an extension of our culture of gender-based violence.

The negative ramifications that victims of online abuse can experience are significant. Online abuse is associated with emotional distress and conduct problems at school, and recent research by the CDC has even identified that youth who are victimized electronically are very likely to be victimized 'offline' as well (e.g., sexually harassed, or psychologically or emotionally abused by a dating partner)<sup>6</sup>. Victims of online abuse often feel an intense sense of isolation, fear, and helplessness. Furthermore, the abuse often goes unnoticed by family and friends.<sup>6</sup>

There is no wonder that the rates of online abuse are soaring. The use of online platforms has expanded exponentially over the last several years. For instance, Facebook, the social networking site, boasted 1.23

billion monthly active users worldwide by the end of 2013, an increase of 170 million in just one year. To put this into context, in 2004, Facebook had only 1 million users overall. According to numbers shared by the company, 757 million users log on to the social networking site every day. (Sedghi, 2014)<sup>7</sup> The explosion of social networking and other online platforms has expanded the opportunity for youth to meet, build, and extend current interpersonal relationships, but it has also increased the opportunity for abusive relationships to form – and for abuse to extend its reach from 'offline' to online contexts.

Online platforms are increasingly being used to perpetrate abuse against women. This abuse can take many forms, including behaviours such as monitoring of social media profiles or emails, verbal abuse over social media (such as on Facebook or Twitter), the sharing of intimate photos or videos without a person's consent, or using GPS locators or spyware to track a woman's movement and whereabouts.<sup>8</sup>

Although research is limited, most recent studies have identified that online abuse actually causes a greater negative psychological impact than face-to-face abuse or harassment.<sup>5</sup> The reasons include the unique nature of online platforms/social media (e.g., anonymity, continuous connection, and ease of early disclosure), our current culture of interpersonal violence against women, and the vulnerability of children and youth. Together, these factors create a recipe for a range of unhealthy and unsafe intimate connections online.





## The nature of online abuse – connection and communication:

As mentioned, the cause of violence against women and girls is not technology itself (e.g., texting, online platforms, social networking sites). Of course, violence is caused by abusers, which are created in part by society's social norms and beliefs that devalue women and girls. But modern technology does create new opportunities for abusers to extend their reach of interpersonal violence, and recent research shows that a victim's distress is magnified when experienced online.<sup>2</sup>

Young women face the highest rates of sexual violence and abuse in our society. This high prevalence, coupled with the growing numbers of youth and young adults using technology (e.g., the Internet, social media, email, texting),<sup>4</sup> has forever changed intimate relationships for young adults. The majority of youth have regular access to computers (83%) and cell phones (67%), and spend an average of three hours a day accessing online content. The most common points of contact online include texting, social networking sites, and YouTube.

Unfortunately, with this increased use of technology has come a rise in online abuse, including sexual violence and abuse. In fact, it has been reported that one out of every three female students in grades 7 to 12 has experienced sexual harassment, either through texting, email, Facebook, or other online means.<sup>2</sup>

Online formats like social media can amplify the impact of sexual violence and increase distress for young women. Electronic aggression threatens the safe distance and the safe space that a young woman would normally be able to retreat when experiencing interpersonal violence. Victims can receive text messages or emails 24 hours a day, and from any location. As a result, sexual violence via social media/ Internet forums can multiply exponentially the number of sexual abuse experiences for young women. Victims who have had intimate or abuse images shared online experience abuse every time those images are viewed and/or shared. And social media can extend the reach of an abuser even after an abusive relationship has ended.



The UN has documented that 95% of aggressive behaviour in online spaces, including abusive language and harassment, is aimed at women. And most of that abuse is perpetrated by former or current male partners.<sup>9</sup> Women's Aid research on online domestic abuse showed that 85% of the women respondents said that the abuse they experienced online from a partner or ex-partner was part of a pattern of abuse that they also experienced offline. In other words, technology and online platforms extended the reach of the abuser.

## Characteristics of online violence – Facts & figures:

- Online bullying/cyberbullying/violence is highly gendered.
- Statistics Canada reports that the majority of private Internet users (e.g., at home) are Canadians aged 34 years and younger. And Canadian youth are the largest growing group engaged in social networking and viewing videos online.
- Boys are more likely than girls to acknowledge that they engage in bullying behaviours, and girls report higher levels of impact from bullying.<sup>10</sup>
- 73% of women experience some form of online

violence.<sup>3</sup>

- Currently, there is no tracking of online violence and harassment.
- Though reporting rates for online abuse are low, incidents of online abuse continue to grow with the expansion of Internet access and the growth of online platforms.<sup>3</sup>
- Although more research is required, young women and girls appear to experience higher rates of sexual violence associated with social media.<sup>2</sup>
- Young men are the perpetrators of both ‘offline’ interpersonal violence and online violence far more often than young women.<sup>2</sup>
- The term cyberbullying can be interpreted as being gender neutral, which may not adequately highlight the significant sexual victimization of young women online.
- Online abuse often goes unreported. As a result, those who offend face few consequences and, thus, get the message that their behaviour is acceptable or normative.
- Social media and other online platforms operate at such a rapid pace, and often do not promote healthy sexuality and safe relationships. In modern society, online content is shaping our view of sexuality and normalizing sexual violence.
- Educational organizations simply don’t have the resources to promote healthy sexuality at the same volume or rate as the unhealthy messaging that is promoted online.
- Texting, social media and email can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which can make abuse feel highly intrusive. Victims often report having no place to retreat or find safety.
- Interpersonal (‘offline’) violence can be facilitated and maintained through social media, even after personal contact or a relationship has ended.
- The abusive person can remain unknown or anonymous to his victims. This complicates reporting, and it also increases the ease in which offenders can engage in abusive acts.
- Images of violence and abuse can quickly multiply online, and victims have little control over the digital image sharing of their abuse experiences. This means that victims can experience further abuse each and every time an image is shared. Images of an intimate consensual act can also be shared without consent.
- Little is known about how online sexual violence is

- experienced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis young women, the LGBTQ2+ community, rural women, and those living in poverty. An intersectional analysis is critical to our overall understanding of online abuse and sexual violence. The Internet is a forum where perpetrators of sexual abuse and violence feel a sense of unaccountability for their actions.
- As the ease of connectivity increases worldwide, so too does the reach of violence. This highlights the urgent need to ensure a safe Internet for all.

“There is no  
OFF time ...  
there is no  
sense of being  
away. The  
phone is always  
there, at work,  
at school, and  
in your room at  
night.”

– Maryam, 16







### Sexting and pornography:

Sexting refers to the use of technology to send or receive sexually explicit messages and photos, also known as 'sexts.' A study conducted by MTV and the Associated Press in 2011 found that one in three individuals between the ages of 14 and 24 in the United States has engaged in some form of sexting (Note: It is important to distinguish between sexts that are exchanged consensually and sexts that are exchanged as a result of someone being pressured, coerced, or threatened).

The consumption of pornography (sexually explicit materials which are intended to create sexual arousal) is rampant in our society. The well-known statistic that 30% of all Internet traffic constitutes pornography continues to be true. Troublingly, research also reveals that 88.2% of the most popular porn sites contain aggressive acts, and 94% of those acts are directed towards young women.

After viewing pornography, men are more likely to report decreased empathy for women (and rape victims), an increase in aggressive behaviour towards women, and increased feelings of anger towards women. They are also more likely to coerce female partners to engage in unwanted sex acts.<sup>3</sup>

A meta-analysis by Paolucci-Oddone, Genuis & Violato showed a significant relationship between pornography viewing and attitudes supporting

violence against women in nonexperimental studies.<sup>11</sup> This relationship was significantly stronger for violent pornography than for nonviolent pornography. However, both types showed positive associations with supporting violence against women.

Boys aged 12 to 17 are the largest consumers of Internet porn. What this tells us is that, in many cases, the first images and information surrounding sexuality that boys are presented with are acts of aggression towards women.

Meanwhile, the mainstreaming of pornography has not decreased the exploitation of the women used in the making of porn.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the percentage of violent and misogynistic images has increased as sites attempt to lure customers with increasingly graphic images. Today, consumers of pornography online can find more violent and degrading images than ever before.<sup>3</sup>

It's no wonder that boys today struggle with empathy, connection, compassion and communication. Empathy is a key ingredient in preventing abuse against women and children. And when boys are socialized to view and experience their sexuality in an egocentric way, they are unable to balance their own needs with the needs of their partner. In other words, a young woman's need for safety and trust is set aside while his need to feel pleasure takes precedence.

A larger concern about a 'pornified culture' is the impact that it can have on a child's growth and

development if they learn about themselves, their gender, and their relationships through the lens of pornography. This aspect, coupled with messages that lack respect and value for women and girls, builds a culture in which youth lack skills and hold false messages about healthy relationships and healthy sexuality.

### Fast facts and negative impacts of viewing pornography:

- Young men are the largest consumers of pornography.
- The consumption of porn can evoke feelings of distress and confusion for youth when they are unable to process or understand the images.<sup>12</sup>
- Viewing pornography normalizes violence against women.
- Viewing porn increases the belief that sexual pleasure exists without care and/or affection towards one's sexual partner.
- Casual or promiscuous sexual encounters become normalized.
- There is a correlation between viewing pornography and sexual aggression and sexual harassment of women.
- Pornography socializes youth to believe that building a safe and trusting relationship before sexual activity is not necessary or important.

### Female gamers and harassment:

Social media isn't the only online platform where females face harassment. In the male-dominated world of online gaming, women are often viewed as outsiders – people who do not belong. In recent years, major news publications and gaming blogs have written about the prevalence of female-targeted harassment and abuse in online games. And for some female gamers, the harassment and abuse they endured while gaming followed them onto social media.

According to a CTV News article, women have reported facing harassment, stalking, and threats in male-dominated online games. One female gamer's stalker, the article stated, 'began harassing her on the game's forums, impersonating her in the game and, later, sending her barrages of Twitter messages,

some threatening her with graphic rape and murder.' Though the harassment and threats did not deter her from playing video games, the experience changed her perception of online multiplayer gaming.<sup>13</sup>

In October 2014, feminist gamer and media critic Anita Sarkeesian was invited to speak to a Centre for Women and Gender Studies event at Utah State University. Prior to the scheduled event, the university received an anonymous email demanding the event's cancellation because "[Sarkeesian] is everything wrong with the feminist woman." If the school refused to cancel the event, the email claimed, "a Montreal Massacre style attack will be carried out against the attendees, as well as students and staff at the nearby Women's Centre."<sup>14</sup>

Both experiences are unfortunate and disturbing, and they serve as a reminder that sex-based violence occurs in all spheres of human interaction. As long as patriarchy and its social norms continue to exist, females occupying space in male-dominated occupations and hobbies – whether online or not – will be vulnerable to violence solely because of their gender. As a society, challenging gender norms is important and necessary if we want to make our physical and online spaces a safe place for everyone.

"Just use the block function. Don't feel bad about it. Sure, excluding hurts, but it's your space and your home. Would you feel bad about locking the front door? It helps if you think about it that way." – Sarah, 13



## Understanding the consequences of online abuse:

Online abuse can have devastating consequences for the health and security of women and girls. For instance, it normalizes violence against women in mainstream culture.<sup>02</sup>

The Learning Network, which is a resource hub within the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children (at Western University), has identified further negative consequences that are experienced by online abuse victims/survivors. These can include (but are not limited to):

- Suicide, suicide attempts and/or suicidal ideation
- Emotional and psychological distress
- Fear and/or loss of physical safety
- Violation of privacy
- Public humiliation
- Loss of employment
- Education delay
- Financial losses
- Feeling helpless in efforts to find, build, and maintain healthy intimate relationships<sup>2</sup>

## Impacts of abuse on physical and mental health:

Interpersonal violence, whether physical, emotional, psychological or sexual, impacts a person's sense of safety in the world. Young women often talk about how their experiences of violence impacted how they viewed themselves, others, and the world around them.

Because violence against women is rooted so deeply in social norms, it can be difficult to see the impacts of violence. For example, our culture tells us that women are responsible for the success, care and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. So, if those relationships aren't working on any level, women are left feeling responsible. This is a dangerous cultural assumption. It says that when violence is present in relationships, women are responsible. A female victim might take on the blame directly, or she may feel responsible for the safety of her siblings or friends, or feel responsible for "getting the abuser help." As a result, the needs of others are placed above her own needs for basic physical and emotional safety.

Self-blame and shame are the most common responses to sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment.

A young woman's response to violence and the impacts on her health are influenced by a number of contributing factors, including:

- Age at the time the abuse occurred.
- The relationship that the young woman had to her abuser. Often, closer, more intimate relationships (where the abuser has gained a sense of trust from the victim) result in greater feelings of distress for the victim.
- If the abuse occurred repeatedly.
- The frequency of the abuse. Online sexual harassment appears to create greater levels of distress because of the ongoing nature of the abuse. Young women have access to phones and laptops 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and this can create a feeling that there is no safe place to retreat from the abuse.
- If the young woman felt that her life was in danger, or if the violence created feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, or hopelessness.
- The level of support that the woman has in her life. Isolation can contribute to increased levels of distress from abuse. If a young woman's family isn't supportive, or if she is isolated from her peers, violence can create increased feelings of distress.
- Previous experiences of witnessing violence (e.g., witnessing one's own mother's abuse by a partner), or historical experiences of abuse (e.g., sexual, psychological, emotional, or physical). These past experiences can make healing from a recent experience of online abuse more challenging.



Sexual violence always contains a component of emotional and psychological abuse. These are also referred to as trauma responses. They are common and natural responses to feeling threatened by violence. In other words, they are *normal responses* to abnormal events. Often, though, victims of violence feel like their responses are abnormal, and they may minimize their experiences of sexual violence. Minimizing violence can be an adaptive way of coping with trauma.<sup>2</sup>

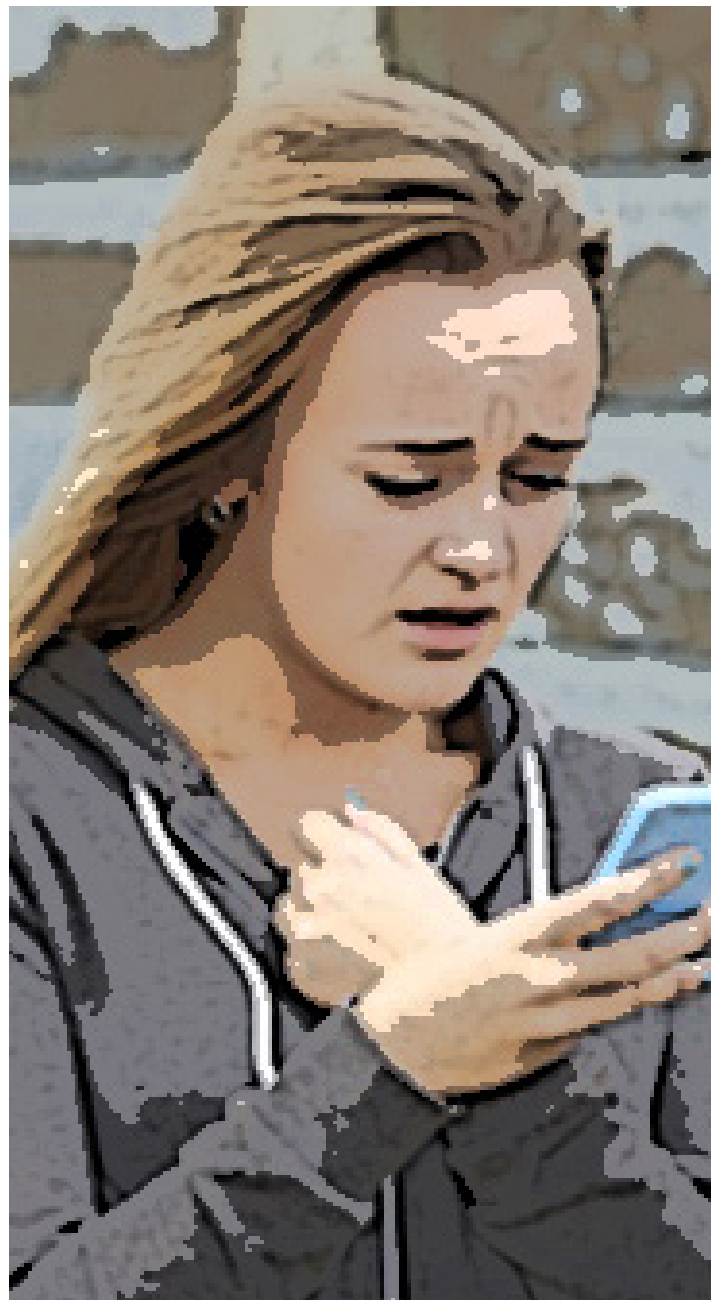
Many young women who have been victimized by violence experience a common human thinking error: “Because something bad happened, I must be bad.” Movies and popular novels in Western culture reinforce this notion, as they encourage us to (mistakenly) believe that only bad things happen to bad people. But remember, feeling distressed is a natural response to abuse or violence – either in person or online. Victims of violence often:

- Have intrusive thoughts or nightmares about the abuse.
- Avoid things that remind them of the abuse.
- Lose interest in pleasurable activities.
- Feel ‘on guard’ for danger all the time.
- Feel numb or without any feelings.
- Withdraw from family and/or friends.
- Feel anxious and/or depressed.
- Feel helpless, worthless and hopeless.
- Feel angry and irritable.
- Have difficulty concentrating.

Those with a long history of interpersonal violence can experience even more negative physical and mental health impacts. Again, these impacts are normal responses to abnormal events and circumstances. Sometimes, children/youth and adults develop these responses because they have experienced multiple forms of abuse over a long period of time. These victims of violence often:

- Have feelings of prolonged hopelessness and despair.
- Experience feelings of prolonged worthlessness.
- Feel shame, blame, and/or guilt.
- Have difficulties trusting others.
- Have difficulties regulating their emotions.
- Are impulsive.

- Have difficulty relaxing or feeling calm.
- Feel ‘on guard,’ waiting for the next bad thing to happen.
- Struggle to build an identity as a young person. As a result, they don’t really know or understand what they like or want.
- Feel like they don’t deserve happiness or good things.
- Self-harm, with behaviours like cutting or burning.
- Misuse drugs and/or alcohol in an attempt to cope with overwhelming feelings of distress.
- Have few sexual boundaries, and exhibit risk-taking behaviour.
- Have difficulty eating and sleeping.





# Improving the safety and quality of online relationships

“There’s a big difference between telling someone, ‘don’t do it,’ and ‘don’t do it yet.’”

– Sam, 17

## Critical thinking skills for online relationships:

- Rethink how you interpret relationship ‘success.’ Boys are often taught that sex is success. Winning over a particular girl is success for boys. This is problematic for a few reasons, including the fact that cultures highly focused on winning and competition are often linked to increased rates of stress and distress.
- Building trust takes time. Challenge your own concept of time, and create a balance between the need to build trust and the immediate needs that you’re trying to meet (e.g., intimacy needs, sexual needs, social needs).
- Think critically about our culture. Challenge the idea that everything is supposed to happen ‘right now.’ Practice delayed gratification.
- If you grew up in a home with unhealthy relationships, seek out support from counsellors, teachers or social workers, as they can assist you in learning healthy relationship skills. Engaging in healthy relationships is a skill that can be learned – with support, practice and time.
- No one deserves to be mistreated. Trust your instincts – both online and ‘offline.’
- Be mindful of what you expose yourself to online. Is it shaping your ideas about sexuality and your identity?
- Healthy relationships – both online and ‘offline’ – are built on safety and trust, meaning that they are free from coercion (e.g., threats, pressure, and obligations). In a healthy relationship, you know that the person will do what they have promised to do (because you trust them). It’s up to you whether you have an emotionally close and emotionally intimate connection before sex, but it’s important to ensure that safety and trust are present.
- Be intentional about setting boundaries – both online and ‘offline.’ Use privacy controls whenever needed.
- Set strong boundaries to start. It’s always easier to loosen boundaries or step back later.
- Know that others may have a ‘temper tantrum’ when you set a new limit, but stay strong and hold on. Let go of guilt, and align with yourself first.
- Be aware that trust takes time. Disclose personal information slowly, and monitor for the other person’s response. Is it sensitive? Kind? Encouraging?
- Be thoughtful about sharing personal information.
- People can pretend to be kind, responsible, and trustworthy in both ‘live’ and online spaces, but give it time to see who they really are before allowing yourself to be vulnerable.
- If you have experienced violence, seek out and ask for support. You have the right to be heard, believed, and supported.
- Be aware that police, education, and health and community-based organizations often don’t yet have consistent policies and protocols in place to effectively respond to online abuse.
- Build skills related to empathy, conflict resolution, and decision-making. These skills are just as important as language and math skills.
- If you are struggling with a breakup, don’t communicate with an ex-partner or monitor their social media. Step back from online communication. Give yourself permission to seek out help and support.







### Bystander intervention:

- Always check for consent: Do I have permission to view this? To share it? Ask, ask, and ask again.
  - Know that solutions and wisdom can be found in your own backyard. You CAN make a difference.
  - Contribute to creating a community of cooperation and connection. Communities where competition and authority are the focus often lead to less healthy relationships.
  - Make every effort to repair a relationship if you have used harsh words, or excluded or pressured someone. Take responsibly and ask what the other person needs to rebuild trust.
  - Use containment (setting limits for yourself – for instance, how long you are on social media, and what content you expose yourself to). Be intentional about when, where, and for how long you are online. You don't need to expose yourself to content or connections (even healthy ones) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You might even want to think about the content you are watching on TV, YouTube, or Netflix, in order to limit your exposure to stressful content.
  - Value social and emotional learning.
  - Families can feel responsible when a youth has experienced online abuse. Youth value conversation and support much more than monitoring. Only the abuser is responsible for the abuse – not the parent, and *never* the victim.
- ### Solutions for change:
- Solutions to end violence against women exist at the individual, relationship and community levels. Workplaces, schools, and health and social service agencies all need to play a role in addressing violence against women.
  - Demand that institutions (e.g., high schools and universities) have protocols and policies in place to effectively address both interpersonal violence and online violence.
  - View sexual violence from both a system perspective and an interpersonal perspective.
  - The personal is political; demand a national strategy to end woman abuse/child abuse.
  - Acknowledge the sexual nature of much of the cyberbullying and online violence, and continue to use a gendered analysis when speaking about bullying and harassment online.
  - Challenge boys' attitudes and behaviours towards girls and women, and promote healthy relationships and the respect of girls and women.
  - Resist victim blaming. Telling girls to avoid sharing intimate images may reduce some distress, but when that message is presented as a *solution* to online violence, it is clearly victim blaming and unhelpful (and potentially harmful).
  - Use an anti-oppressive framework (e.g., marginalized groups and LGBTQ2+ communities need to be at the centre of the conversation).
  - Build critical thinking skills around online communication.
  - Offer abuse prevention programs – both online and 'offline.'
  - Put in place prevention programs that match the level of risk for intimate partner violence (e.g., briefer programs for a general population of boys, more extensive for young men with risk factors, and most intensive for those who have previously harmed women and/or girls).
  - Ask about social media and online relationships as part of your ongoing assessment and counselling work with youth.
  - Prevent violence (which is distinct from responding to it). Preventing violence requires a focus not on the women and girls as victims, but on the perpetrators of the violence and the reasons behind it. Structural inequalities and systems of oppression affect the drivers of violence and create social preconditions for the abuse of girls, women and other marginalized groups.
  - Collect gendered data on the access to and use of technology.





### Building a framework for healthy relationships:

Everyone deserves healthy and supportive relationships. The good news is that developing healthy relationships is a skill that everyone can learn. Sometimes, if we haven't experienced healthy relationships growing up, or if our first/early romantic or friendship relationships are/were unhealthy, we can feel helpless to make positive changes. But there are plenty of reasons to be hopeful.

For young people who haven't grown up with healthy relationships, it may require an intentional effort to build and maintain healthy and safe relationships. But it can certainly be done. Our culture often tells us that relationships are natural, and we can feel like relationships are predetermined for us. But this is a false message. We can actively choose to relate differently and build relationships differently.

### Help create change through advocacy:

Want to help create change? Find a way to become politically active, even in a small way. Getting active can be a way to direct some of your frustration and anger into positive social change. Canada is one of the few countries without a national action plan to end violence against women and children. And because violence is a social, cultural and community issue, we won't see change in our personal lives unless there is a large-scale cultural shift in the way that our society values women, children and interpersonal safety.

Safety within our work, peer, online and intimate relationships is a human right. By changing social norms (e.g., the attitudes, values and beliefs about sexual violence, women, youth, masculinity, racism, sexuality and heteronormality), we can end violence in our interpersonal relationships. Research should be directed at evaluating sexual violence prevention programs and tracking the occurrence and the characteristics of online interpersonal violence.

Engaging youth is vital in efforts to change social norms. For instance, youth should always be consulted and engaged when developing policies, protocols and educational material to address online/electronic violence and abuse (for instance, several focus groups with

youth were held to help inform the writing of this publication).

### Areas of further inquiry/research:

Violence against women and girls is underreported.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, Canada does not currently have a recent prevalence and incidence study on violence against young women that documents the full continuum of violence, which includes harassment, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and technology-related violence.<sup>2</sup>

Online abuse is even less frequently reported on and documented. Although there are new laws in place to hold abusers accountable, this doesn't necessarily mean that victims of online abuse are more likely to file reports. Youth report experiencing different responses to their abuse disclosures from different authorities. For example, parents, educational systems, police and counsellors have varied responses to reports of online abuse, and victims often still face disbelief and blame when making disclosures.

While other countries have a clear understanding that addressing online abuse is an essential element in ending violence against women and children, Canada is still without a national strategy to end violence against women and girls.

Meanwhile, there is limited evidence-based or formally evaluated prevention initiatives that address sexual violence and social media. All programs related to prevention and education need to be evaluated for effectiveness, and boys need to be a central part of any prevention effort.

Finally, research related to the frequency, nature, and impacts of online abuse is limited for mainstream women and girls. We need to continue to ask questions about how social media and sexual violence intersect with newcomer communities, with racism, and with heteronormality. What we can confer is that because these groups face higher rates of interpersonal violence and marginalization, they are very likely to experience significant and unique impacts of online violence.



# Glossary of terms

---

## Sexual violence:

‘Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion.’ Sexual violence can be perpetrated by any person, *regardless of the location* (e.g., ‘offline’ or online) or the nature of the relationship. Sexual violence via social media always has components of emotional and psychological abuse, and the psychological impacts of this sexual violence can be amplified by the very nature of social media.

## Social media:

Social media refers to Internet-based and mobile services that allow users to engage in online exchanges, create content, and form or join online communities. Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are some of the most popular social media platforms.

## Coercion:

The practice of forcing another person to engage in an involuntary act, through the use of threats, manipulation or intimidation. This concept is critical in our understanding of sexual violence, and it is a central theme when young women blame themselves for the sexual violence that they have experienced. Young women often report that they feel as though manipulation, threats and intimidation do not constitute or qualify as violence. They often say things like, “I should have been able to do something different, but somehow I engaged in sexual activity that I didn’t want or wouldn’t normally do.”

## Bullying:

The CDC defines bullying as ‘any unwanted aggressive behaviour(s) by a youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated. Bullying may inflict harm or distress on the targeted youth, including physical, psychological, social, or educational harm.’<sup>6</sup>

## Cyberbullying:

Cyberbullying is defined as being cruel to another person by sending or posting hurtful materials using the Internet or a cell phone. It can include: phone and pager text messages; instant messaging; and website or blog postings. Victims often fear for their safety, and the aggressive and demeaning messaging can create feelings of shame, distress and isolation. Cyberbullying can take the form of public shaming, as in the case when large numbers of contacts view and distribute aggressive/abusive messages and images to others. It can also take the form of revealing private information or intimate moments that were shared consensually in the moment but are then passed on to others without permission.

## Gender-based violence (GBV):

A term used to identify that violence against women and girls is not something that occurs randomly. Rather, it occurs *because* the victims are women and girls. Gender-based violence includes: violence that causes physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering; threats of such acts; and/or coercion.

## Revenge porn (non-consensual sharing of intimate images):

Revenge porn is generally the practice of someone (usually a male) sharing intimate photos, usually as an attempt to shame and/or humiliate an ex-partner after a relationship has ended. It is a form of intimate partner violence/sexual abuse.

## Anonymity:

An abusive person can remain unknown to his victim/survivor.





### Technology and psychology:

Technology can lower one's inhibitions. When youth engage online, they share more easily than they would in a face-to-face interaction. Meanwhile, abusive actions require less time and less effort online, which can add to the normalization of violence.

### Accessibility:

The affordability of technologies makes them readily accessible to perpetrators of online violence.

### Propagation:

Online abuse (through the use of texts and images) that multiplies and exists for a long time – or potentially indefinitely.

### IPV:

Intimate partner violence.

### VAW:

Violence against women.

### Hacking:

Refers to sending messages under an assumed identity.

### Surveillance and tracking:

Abusers use technology (e.g., their cell phones) to stalk and monitor a victim's activities and behaviours. GPS programs can track someone's whereabouts via a cell phone. The browsing history on a computer/laptop can be monitored, or private emails can be viewed by an abuser.

### Pornography:

Pornography is sexually explicit materials (SEM) intended to create sexual arousal in the consumer.

### Malicious distribution:

The act of distributing illegal materials related to a victim. Intimate photos are the most common example (if the girl is under 18, this can constitute child pornography).

### Impersonating:

An abuser can use technology to assume the identity of his/her victim (or the identity of another person) in order to access private information. Abusers can shame the victim by sending out hostile messages using the victim's identity.

### Harassment:

This refers to the use of email, text messaging, cell phones, and social media to contact, threaten, and/or frighten the victim. Harassment refers to ongoing abusive behaviour.

### Rape culture:

Not all sexist jokes and disrespectful comments lead to sexual violence, but all sexual violence starts with disrespect. We live in a 'rape culture,' where men's desires (over women's bodies) takes priority. Pornography is a powerful example of the promotion of rape culture.

### The 'hookup' culture:

On many college and university campuses, the 'hookup' culture, which encourages casual sexual encounters (including one-night stands), has become normalized. Young adults engage in sexual activity without allowing enough time to check for safety and build trust with a sexual partner. Little rapport, trust or affection exists within the relationship before sexual activity begins. Often, sexual activity occurs within the first few hours or days of meeting.

### Victim blaming:

Blaming can take the form of ignoring and minimizing. Messages like "just get over it," "move on," "being online is a risk," or "you took the risk, so you have to be responsible for the outcome" are common victim-blaming statements.

### Trolling:

Refers to a person (a 'troll') who creates distress online by starting arguments or using critical or abusive language. They can also post inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages online. Their intention is to create emotional distress and intimidation in the victim.





# Focus group feedback

During the creation of this publication, the London Family Court Clinic (LFCC) held focus groups with youth during the fall and winter of 2016-2017. Below is a list of comments and quotes from youth who discussed a wide range of topics, including texting, social media, online abuse, sexting, sexual abuse, interpersonal violence, safety, identity, online intimacy, and relationships.

Names have been changed for privacy reasons.

“Don’t just wave your finger and tell me to be safe on the Internet when you’re never on there yourself. Go on, figure it out, and then we’ll talk.” – Sarah, 13

“I only allow friends that are real friends on my Instagram account. I keep it private and I only let safe people that I know there. That way I can be open and share my thoughts. I’m on another site, and I’m very quiet because there are people there that I’ve never met.” – Diana, 14

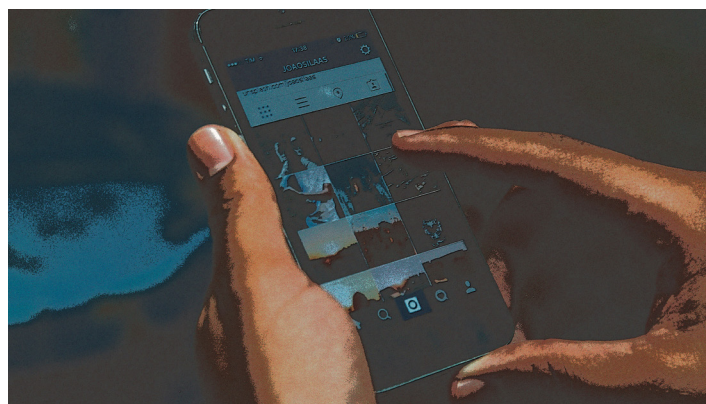
“Just use the block function. Don’t feel bad about it. Sure, excluding hurts, but it’s your space and your home. Would you feel bad about locking the front door? It helps if you think about it that way.” – Sarah, 13

“I think social media has made it hard for me to call people. I feel weird about calling ... afraid, almost ... because I’m not used to it.” – Jessica, 13

“I’ve worked with many youth who have experienced suicidal ideation and have made attempts, so when I hear that someone has texted, “go kill yourself” in an email or text, my heart sinks and I wonder how much harder I have to work and my client has to work in order to heal.” – Youth Worker

“After the assault, I texted him like normal. I was in shock, but now I’m afraid they [authorities/police] won’t believe that he assaulted me.” – Jayden, 19

“Facebook is for adults ... just FYI.” – Sarah, 13



“I’ve worked with girls whose abuser uses social media to shame, blame and stalk. Girls will report feeling distressed and full of doubt, but they don’t always name the abuse as their source of distress. They feel responsible for the state of the relationship. They feel it’s their role to help him, even at their own expense. It becomes normalized for them.” – Lynn, Youth Worker

“Dudes don’t even think about it, but they are at risk too. Even more as they are eager [for romantic connections].” – Amanda, 18

“We need a tip sheet on how not to be a bad person on the Internet!” – Casey, 16

“You can be hypervigilant waiting for a response, or hoping he will stop. It’s very stressful.” – Emily, 16

“It’s all impression management.” – Farah, 18

“[Jian] Ghomeshi brought out a lot of stuff ... We learned who was an ally after those tweets.” – Anna, 19

“Is it ever safe to express an opinion on Facebook? We are not there yet. Hostile opinions online can trigger survivors!” – Sophie, 18

“Online, it feels like you can enter a rabbit hole, where you wonder if the whole world is bad ... You have to keep your head out of it.” – Sam, 17

“Some say that threats online are empty threats, but

# “How do you teach people what’s a ‘good’ click vs. a ‘bad’ click? Think, should you really be forwarding that image or comment?” – Kayla, 19

they sure don’t feel empty.” – Alex, 16

“Any information about sex and online content needs to be sex positive. I don’t want to be shamed for my sexuality. We received no sex education at school, and messages we did receive were shaming. We need information about what a healthy relationship is supposed to look like. Some of us have never experienced that. And then we’re told to handle it ourselves. There’s a lot of shaming, so it’s very difficult to ask questions.” – Kayla, 19

“There’s a big difference between telling someone, ‘don’t do it,’ and ‘don’t do it yet.’” – Sam, 17

“There is also a permanency to any mistake you might make. Do you really know anyone who hasn’t made an insensitive comment in their youth? But now it’s out there forever.” – Emma, 18

“People need skills to have these difficult conversations online, and women are much more vulnerable online. Girls are seen as ‘attention seeking’ if they post online. If a girl posts, there is so much response. If a guy posts, there is so much less response.” – Karima, 18



“If she speaks up about injustice, she’s ‘attention seeking,’ or if she posts a photo, she’s ‘attention seeking.’ But what’s wrong with her wanting to get your attention? She has something valuable to share! But guys don’t get much negative feedback and judgment when they share.” – Amira, 19

“The volume of negative responses on social media far outweighs the positive.” – Amira, 19

“It’s hard to reach out when you are distressed ... If you do reach out online, you are ‘attention seeking’ and you are dismissed. You don’t really need support ...” – Darya, 19

“I don’t use the Internet for personal relationships, only to access information, that’s it. You can have friends, lots of friends online, or you can have privacy. You can’t have both.” – Jordyn, 17

“Online skews reality. There’s no backstory to what we see on social media ... everything is constructed.” – Adele, 18

“Trusting online is very generational.” – Sarah, 14

“There is no OFF time ... there is no sense of being away. The phone is always there, at work, at school, and in your room at night.” – Maryam, 16

“The number of ‘likes’ informs your self-esteem. People look for validation online, and not in real life. Sometimes people feel less safe within their friendships because of a lack of ‘likes.’ It’s not a healthy way to see yourself, or to build relationships. There are so many opportunities to misinterpret what’s being communicated or not communicated.” – Maryam, 16



“I get really anxious when I post, because you never know what you’re going to get [in response]. So, I read it over a lot, eight or more times ... then it takes a lot of energy to reply.” – Kate, 17

“Honestly, I’d rather a phone call, but texting is the norm now.” – Amanda, 17

“People say hurtful things in texting that they wouldn’t say in person ... I won’t allow my boyfriend to text me when he’s angry anymore ... texting also doesn’t allow for feelings and emotions to really be understood, anyway.” – Jessica, 16

“Blocking is great, but what if there’s an emergency and I need to reach you?” – Jasmine, 18

“Texting increases male aggression and increases male sexual advances ... I don’t let my boyfriend text!” – Veronica, 17

“I feel like iPads, video games and TV for kids have replaced playing outside.” – Jasmine, 18

“Very few women report [online abuse]. And if you do, there’s not much support ... I’ve even been blamed by police ... It took me a long time to stop blaming myself ... I was vulnerable, and guys can be very persuasive.” – Veronica, 17

“We should always be asking how we can create safe spaces.” – Kate, 17

“I find sexting uncomfortable. It’s not appealing to me, and it’s fake.” – Amanda, 17

“The process of outing people online is very stressful. It’s about shaming people publicly ... it’s a public format. It can be anything from ‘you’re gay’ to ‘you’re not a real man.’” – Maryam, 16

“We need a document that tells people how not to be a bad person online and in life ... It’s really about how much we value empathy and compassion for others ... If we made empathy a must-have skill, a lot less abuse would occur.” – Amanda, 17

“You can learn online who is an ally and who is not. There is risk in that, as sometimes you discover that someone in your family or workplace or school is racist, for example, and then you have to interact with them in person and you wish you didn’t know those things, because you are left feeling unsafe in your workplace or school.” – Farah, 18

“Is it ever really safe to share opinions on Facebook?” – Anna, 19

“It’s a culture of humiliation and shame, and privacy doesn’t create profit. The more shame, the more clicks, for more profit. That’s how it works. We need to push back.” – Anna, 19

“Women who use social media are perceived as ‘vain’ and ‘attention seeking.’” – Anna, 19

“Young women are discouraged to seek help by being labeled as ‘attention seeking.’” – Farah, 18



“The number of ‘likes’ you have is interrupted in many different ways. You can feel less safe in relationships if you have less ‘likes.’ It creates a circle of confidence that you seek validation from, and your self-esteem has become connected to the number of ‘likes’ you have.” – Farah, 18

“A young Muslim male was ridiculed by his peers for accepting a ‘friend request’ on social media by a non-Muslim female; peers also ridiculed the female in their own language on social media.” – Farah, 18

“It’s a confusing message: ‘Be slutty, but not too slutty.’” – Sam, 18



# References:

1. Canadian Women's Foundation. (2014). The facts about violence against women. Retrieved from <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-violence>
2. Etherington, N. (2015). *Learning network brief 28: Cyber misogyny*. Retrieved from Western University Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children website: <http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/cyber-misogyny>
3. Tandon, N. (2015). *Cyber violence against women and girls: A world-wide wake-up call*. Retrieved from UN Women website: [http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber\\_violence\\_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259)
4. Ontario Ministry of the Status of Women. (2015). *It's never okay: An action plan to stop sexual violence and harassment*. Retrieved from <http://www.women.gov.on.ca/owd/english/ending-violence/index.shtml>
5. Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073-1137. doi:10.1037/a0035618
6. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011, December 14). Press release: Sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence widespread in the US. Retrieved from [https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2011/p1214\\_sexual\\_violence.html](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2011/p1214_sexual_violence.html)
7. Sedghi, A. (2014, February 4). Facebook: 10 years of social networking, in numbers . *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/feb/04/facebook-in-numbers-statistics>
8. Laxton, C. (2014). *Virtual world, real fear: Women's Aid report into online abuse, harassment and stalking*. Retrieved from Women's Aid website: <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/virtual-world-real-fear/>
9. Association for Progressive Communications. (2015). Cases on women's experiences of technology-related VAW and their access justice. Retrieved from <https://www.apc.org/en/node/20135>
10. Women's Network PEI. (2014). *Taking stock of cyberbullying: A scan of the PEI context* . Retrieved from the Government of Prince Edward Island website: [http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ELJ\\_CyberBully.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/ELJ_CyberBully.pdf)
11. Paolucci, E. O., Genuis, M., & Violato, C. (1997). A meta-analysis of the published research on the effects of pornography. *National Foundation for Family Research and Education*, 1-8. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252364943\\_A\\_Meta-Analysis\\_of\\_the\\_Published\\_Research\\_on\\_the\\_Effects\\_of\\_Pornography](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252364943_A_Meta-Analysis_of_the_Published_Research_on_the_Effects_of_Pornography)
12. Manning, J. C. (2008, July). *The impact of pornography on women: Social science findings and clinical observations*. Paper presented at the meeting of The Social Costs of Pornography Consultation, Witherspoon Institute, Princeton, NJ. Retrieved from <http://afaofpa.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Impact-of-Pornography-on-Women.pdf>
13. Arbel, T. (2016, March 12). Women face harassment, stalking, threats in male-dominated online games. *CTV News*. Retrieved from <http://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/women-face-harassment-stalking-threats-in-male-dominated-online-games-1.2814667>





14. Meer, A. (2014, October 15). Games critic cancels campus talk after 'massacre' threat. *Rock Paper Shotgun*. Retrieved from <https://www.rockpapershotgun.com/2014/10/15/sarke-esian-utah/>
15. Rainie, L. (2008, June). *Teenagers' online safety and literacy*. PowerPoint presented at the Point Smart/Click Safe Summit. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/2008/06/10/online-child-safety-and-literacy/>
16. Comartin, E., Kernsmith, R., & Kernsmith, P. (2013). "Sexting" and sex offender registration: Do age, gender, and sexual orientation matter? *Deviant Behavior*, 34(1), 38-52. doi:10.1080/01639625.2012.707534
17. Etherington, N. A., & Baker, L. L. (2017). *Links between the maltreatment of girls and later victimization or use of violence*. London, ON: Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children.



