

[COR0140]

Written Evidence from South West Grid for Learning (COR0140)

SWGfL is a charity with the belief that everyone should benefit from technology, free from harm.

Leaders in Online Safety and Security

As a not-for-profit charitable trust, SWGfL has specialised in supporting schools, agencies and families to affect lasting change with the safe and secure use of technology since 2000.

SWGfL has been a partner in the UK Safer Internet Centre since 2010, working alongside the 32 European Safer Internet Centres that constitute the Insafe network. SWGfL works closely with UK and International Governments and Agencies; Organisations and Technology providers, advising on policy, practice and legislation.

SWGfL is a founding member of the UK Council for Internet Safety as well as acting on behalf of the United Nations ITU in its Child Online Protection programme

SWGfL most important and rewarding work is that which it does directly with children, schools, groups and parents, having a direct impact in ensuring everyone is free from harm. As part of this, SWGfL operates three UK Helplines, UK Safer Internet Centre Helpline, Revenge Porn Helpline and Report Harmful Content hub.

This direct work and Helpline support provides continual feedback and discloses the issues and challenges, threats and harms that is felt online; a barometer of online harms

Covid 19 Impact

1. As the majority of the country turn to the Internet to maintain some form of normality in terms of socialising, entertainment or learning, it is gratifying that the UK largely has the technology and infrastructure to support this, something that may not have been possible even a few years ago. Equally, and perhaps predictably, this has also raised the threats and harms that are encountered online, bringing into sharp focus our vulnerabilities and resilience to this. This is highlighted by the experience through calls and reports to our Helpline services.

Revenge Porn Helpline

2. Facts and Figures

Website	https://revengepornhelpline.org.uk/
Support	Phone and online
Established	2015
Supported	Home Office and donations
<p>A Helpline service supporting adults (aged 18+) who are experiencing non consensual intimate image abuse, also known as, revenge porn.</p> <p>The Helpline was established in 2015 to coincide with the legislation which made it an offence to share intimate images or videos of someone, either on or offline, without their consent with the intention of causing distress. The Helpline is run by a small team of passionate and motivated individuals.</p> <p>Revenge Porn Helpline caseload has increased each year by an average of 34%</p> <p>The Revenge Porn Helpline has managed the removal of over 58,000 intimate images online</p>	

3. Covid 19 Experience

Despite moving to an 'email only service', the Revenge Porn Helpline has seen a dramatic rise in caseload during the Covid 19 restrictions.

Due to remote working, the review of image content has been paused until normal operations are resumed

Revenge Porn Helpline Caseload	March	April
2019 (Actual)	128	122
2020 (Predicted)	163	172
2020 (Actual)	183	242

Compared to April 2019, the April 2020 the Helpline has received 98% more cases

4. As has been commented by Clare McGlynn, Professor of Law at Durham University, 'Stress, break-ups and job loss can all aggravate pre-existing abusive behaviour and coercive control', attributing the rise in cases of intimate image abuse to "the increased use of the internet and social media, as well as heightened emotions"

5. In terms of trends, the Helpline has experienced

- Rise in cases of **sextortion**. This is attributed to a rise in the use of online dating services, with extortion following the sharing of intimate images. The Helpline has seen this type of abuse which predominately affects men, during lockdown, there has been a rise in the proportion of female victims.

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- **Perpetrators are known.** In 43% of cases, the victim identifies the perpetrator – predominantly (75%) current / previous partners
- **Leaked content from subscription services:** reports of losing control of content by subscribing to services that generate revenue through sharing of personal content

6. Challenge for the Revenge Porn Helpline is to manage this surge in cases. Funding from the Home Office since 2015 supports 2.4 case managers, who can typically have the capacity to manage 120 cases per month. The Home Office has provided additional funding to increase this to 3.2 case managers for the duration of the restrictions. This raises the capacity to 160 cases per month.

7. The number of cases reported to the Helpline continues to rise with an anticipation that the **number cases reported in May may exceed 300.**

8. Content Review. Once normal operations can resume, the paused content review will restart. The extent of work involved in this is significant. The number of cases paused for content review is rising and currently totals 43. This is likely to involve 650 individual images that will require review and management. It is important to stress the distress that knowing your intimate images are online is significant and can be overwhelming

UK Safer Internet Centre Helpline

9. Facts and Figures

Website	https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/helpline/professionals-online-safety-helpline
Support	Phone and online
Established	2011
Supported	European Commission and donations
A Helpline service for any professional or volunteer working with children in the UK (typically teachers), with any online safety issues they, or children and young people in their care, may face.	

10. Covid 19 Experience

The Helpline has continued to operate throughout the Covid19 restrictions and whilst seeing an initial reduction (in late March), the volume of cases reported rose in April.

UK Safer Internet Centre	March	April
2019 (Actual)	92*	48
2020 (Actual)	73	83

*March 2019 caseload was dominated by the 'Momo' challenge

11. In terms of trends during Covid 19 restrictions, the most significant type of case (47%) relates to media literacy and specifically the safeguarding considerations of using of video conferencing to support children's learning online. Predominately, this relates to the use of Zoom. It is worth mentioning that Zoom (standard service) has a minimum age requirement of 16 and therefore not suitable in most educational settings.

12. In anticipation of this type of question, SWGfL published guidance to support 'Safe Remote Learning' on March 13th – www.swgfl.org.uk/saferemotelearning. This has since been supplemented with:

- [A guide to Video conferencing for children](#)
- [Education Professionals Guide to Remote Working](#)

13. This content is clearly meeting a demand, with **80% more visitors to the website** that compared to the same period in 2019. Contributed to the Department for Education updated Covid 19 safeguarding guidance.

14. [SWGfL decided to donate its anonymous messaging service \(SWGfL Whisper\) to all Schools across the Nation during the Covid 19 restrictions](#). Whisper provides everyone in a school community a safe place to talk, report or highlight issues and concerns.

Report Harmful Content hub

15. Facts and Figures

Website	https://reportharmfulcontent.com/
Support	Online
Established	2019
Supported	European Commission and donations
<p>Report Harmful Content is a national reporting centre to assist anyone in reporting legal but harmful content online. It provides advice and reporting for users</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice for anyone who has come across harmful content online to report it by providing up to date information on community standards and direct links to the correct reporting facilities across multiple platforms. • Reporting support to users over the age of 13 who have already submitted a report to industry and would like their response reviewed. Report Harmful Content industry responses against platform-specific reporting procedures and community standards in order to provide users with further advice on actions they can take. <p>ReportHarmfulContent was first piloted in December 2018 and formally launched in December 2019</p>	

16. Covid 19 Experience

ReportHarmfulContent (RHC) operates as an online service and has continued throughout the Covid19 restrictions, but with limitations of image content review. Whilst comparative data exists with 12 months ago, as it was in pilot the comparison is misleading.

ReportHarmfulContent	March	April
2020 (Actual)	37	48

17. Reports can only be submitted to RHC online following a report being made to the platform provider. Reports to RHC are platform specific, allowing the capture of relevant information to support the case assessment, including the initial platforms report case reference. Reports are reviewed and either rejected or accepted. If rejected, advice is given as to why this has been rejected, for example it does not violate the provider community standards and would not be removed. If accepted, a case is logged and representation is made to the provider on the reportees behalf. Typically, 50% of reported cases are accepted

Over all RHC removal rate on cases reported to providers is 93%

Caseload during Covid 19 has risen by 30%

18. Trends for cases reported during Covid 19 lockdown include bullying & harassment as well as pornography related issues

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19. The first Annual Report Harmful Content Report was published on May 13th 2020 - <https://swgfl.org.uk/magazine/report-harmful-content-launch-annual-report/>. The Annual Report provides further details as to the types of harmful content reported and removed.

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