



EMBARGOED UNTIL 5:00AM NZST WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY 2019

Image based sexual abuse a problem for Kiwis of all generations, new research report reveals

New research from New Zealand online safety organisation Netsafe reveals that 5% of Kiwi adults have been the victim of image based sexual abuse online, and that the issue spans across generations.

The first of its kind research asked a nationally representative survey of New Zealand adults whether someone had or had threatened to distribute or share intimate or sexual content of them online without their consent.

Overall, 5% of adults reported being affected by image based sexual abuse, with instances increasing significantly for younger age groups, particularly those aged under 30. Although young adults were more likely to report being affected, the research shows that the issue spans across generations with instances of abuse being reported by those 70 years and older.

Netsafe CEO Martin Cocker says that the impact and harm that image based sexual abuse can cause should not be underestimated.

“Image based sexual abuse cases are some of the worst that our helpline sees in terms of the harmful impact that the abuse can have on a person. When people come to us for advice or help getting content removed, we often find that they feel exposed and humiliated to the point where it’s seriously affecting their everyday lives.

The overall percentage of people affected may seem small, but the research indicates that younger people are disproportionately affected in much higher numbers than the rest of the population,” says Cocker.

Men and women were equally as likely to report having been affected, but the research indicates differences in the context that the abuse happens. Women were more likely to report that the reason for the abuse they received was revenge, to threaten/intimidate, or for the other person to increase their social standing. Women were also more likely to report that the person who shared the content was an ex-partner.

Men were more likely to report that the most common reasons for the abuse was a joke or for extortion. Men were also more likely to report intimate content being shared by a stranger or someone that they know well but who is not an ex-partner. Netsafe says that these differences are reflected in the cases that their helpline receives.

“Typical image based sexual abuse reports from adult women tend to involve an ex-partner trying to maintain control, blackmail them or as retaliation for leaving the relationship. Sometimes these cases are part of a wider pattern of family violence.

Reports from men tend to be about sextortion, where they've engaged in sexual activity online with strangers which has been recorded and they are then being extorted for money," says Cocker.

The research shows that 35% of New Zealanders are unfamiliar with the law around image based sexual abuse. Netsafe Director of Operations, Helen O'Toole, says that victim blaming attitudes from supporting agencies and individuals can also dissuade people from seeking help.

"Some victims report they've felt blame directly or that it's been insinuated in some way. Some are told that they shouldn't have sent the intimate content in the first place, or that they should stop using social media", says O'Toole.

"This attitude is problematic and discourages people from seeking help. Sending intimate content of yourself is not the issue, it's when people then on-share that content without consent, and this is supported by legislation."

Under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in New Zealand, image based sexual abuse can be an offence regardless of whether the intimate content was initially sent consensually or created consensually with another person. Penalties for the offence can be a fine of up to \$50,000 or up to two years' jail for an individual, and up to \$200,000 for a body corporate.

Many of the criminal prosecutions under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in its first 18 months were for image based sexual abuse incidents. Netsafe is the approved agency under the Act, providing assistance to people experiencing harmful digital communications. Netsafe received almost 3,000 complaints of personal harm caused by digital communications in 2018.

What to do if you're affected by image based sexual abuse:

- Screenshot the content if possible and make a record of the URL of the content.
- Report the content to the platform that it's on to get it removed.
- Report the profile/account of the person who shared the content to the platform.
- Contact the Police if you believe a crime has been committed.
- Contact Netsafe if you need more information about your options under the Harmful Digital Communications Act, or if you need assistance with getting the content removed.

Contact Netsafe by calling toll-free on 0508 NETSAFE or visit www.netsafe.org.nz

About the research

The definition of image based sexual abuse used for this research was "the distribution or threat to distribute any intimate or sexual digital communication (e.g. picture or video) online without consent". 1,001 participants aged 18 years and older from a nationally representative sample were surveyed for the research. The margin of error for this study was +/-3.1% at a 95% confidence level on total results. The survey was conducted by Colmar Brunton.

The full report is available at netsafe.org.nz/image-based-sexual-abuse-survey-2019

-Ends-

Media Contacts

Outreach@netsafe.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Netsafe provides online safety education, advice and support for people in New Zealand. Taking a technology-positive approach to the opportunities and challenges digital technology presents, Netsafe works to help people in New Zealand make the most of technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.

Netsafe's helpline is open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays.

Netsafe was appointed as the approved agency to receive, assess and investigate complaints of harm caused by digital communications under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in 2015. The free service is available to all New Zealand internet users experiencing online harassment, offering help and advice to resolve complaints.

[Netsafe.org.nz](https://www.netsafe.org.nz) - 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) - help@netsafe.org.nz