

**Understanding Revenge Pornography: A National Survey of Police Officers and Staff in
England and Wales.**

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Abstract

Online abuse, facilitated via social media and mobile technologies has recently attracted considerable academic attention. The non-consensual sharing of intimate images – revenge pornography - can have a devastating effect on victims, is a global problem and constitutes interpersonal violence. The national helpline in the UK has now received over 7000 calls. In the UK new legislation making revenge pornography a crime was introduced in 2015 yet the police do not always respond appropriately to victims. This article presents the findings of a national online survey of police understanding of revenge pornography, undertaken in the UK in March 2017. The study set out to investigate police knowledge of revenge pornography legislation, their confidence in responding to cases of revenge pornography and what level of training they had received. 783 members of the police force responded to the survey and, to the authors' knowledge, this the first study to seek to quantify the understanding of revenge pornography by police officers and staff in England and Wales. The findings suggest that the police in the UK have a limited understanding of revenge pornography legislation and lack confidence in both investigating cases and in effectively responding to victims. The implications of the study demonstrate that there is an urgent need for training across police forces in order to ensure that cases of revenge pornography are appropriately responded to, victims are safeguarded and offenders brought to justice.

Key words: Internet and abuse, domestic violence, dating violence, mental health and violence

Introduction

The field of visual criminology opened up new and innovative pathways for developing our understanding of crime images (Dymock, 2017). Recently, considerable scholarly attention has ‘been paid to a range of criminal behaviours that are perpetrated with the aid of digital technologies’ (Henry & Powell, 2016, p. 397) and the affordances and interoperability of mobile internet technologies has enabled the easy photographing and filming of both the self – *the selfie* - and others in previously private spaces, which can quickly be made public at a click or the touch of a screen (author ref). Whilst sexting has attracted considerable academic (see, for example, Livingstone & Gorzing, 2012) and political attention, to date there is little research on revenge pornography. Sometimes referred to as non-consensual pornography, revenge pornography is the distribution of a sexual image of another individual without their consent (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Revenge pornography is a form of online abuse. Salter (2017, p. 7) defines online abuse as ‘the misuse of social media and other online communication platforms with the intent to cause harm or offence to another person or persons’. Findings from the Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI) (2013) non-consensual pornography survey undertaken in the US found that of the 361 victims identified, 63% indicated that the nude material was posted by an ex-partner. Images publicised in this way typically result from a relationship breakdown (Dymock, 2017) and are a form of sexualised abuse (McGlynn et al., 2017). The distribution of sexualised images online may also result from hacking of personal devices. Revenge pornography also enables additional avenues for domestic violence and abuse especially in

relation to coercion and control (see Stark, 2007). Intimate images can be quickly disseminated across several social media platforms, pornography websites and sites specifically created for revenge pornography (Beyens & Lievens, 2016), fuelling the manifestation and maintenance of coercive and controlling relationships.

Bates (2017, p. 1) suggests that ‘nonconsensual pornography is a relatively new phenomenon’ and according to Henry and Powell (2015, p. 105) ‘little attention to date has been given to the ways in which new technologies are used to facilitate or perpetrate technology-facilitated sexual violence or harassment against adult women’. Whilst the majority of victims are women, it is important to remember that ‘online abuse against women is not just an experience of gender. Women of colour, religious or ethnic minority women, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LBTI) women, women with disabilities, or non-binary individuals who don’t conform to traditional gender norms of male and female, will often experience online abuse that targets these different identities.’ (Amnesty International UK, 2017). Furthermore, according to the Government Equalities Office (2015), 25 per cent of calls to the Revenge Porn Helpline in the UK relate to male victims, approximately 40 per cent of which are gay men.

Whilst it is acknowledged that this is an issue for both men and women, research to date suggests that revenge pornography ‘disproportionately affects women, both in terms of the number of women affected and the amount of social stigma attached’ (Cooper, 2016, p. 819). Stigma is associated with being powerless (Goffman, 1963), and revenge pornography also constitutes abuse, making the abuser more powerful over the victim and furthermore the victim more vulnerable. However, societal attitudes to female victims of revenge pornography are often dominated by victim blaming, in that the breach of privacy which arises from the non-consensual sharing of the images is deemed, in some way, to be the

responsibility of the women who produced, or allowed to be produced, the images in the first place (Salter, 2017).

There is increasing evidence that revenge pornography is a rapidly escalating phenomenon with extremely distressing and often devastating personal consequences for victims (Revenge Pornography Helpline, online). Whilst ‘social media has an ambivalent place in public discourse’ (Salter, 2017, p. 12), there is currently much political rhetoric and public concern in relation to domestic abuse, coercion and control and privacy issues regarding the internet and social media. ‘Technology enables perpetrators to send a constant barrage of messages to a victim whether by phone, email and text messages, or tweets and posts on Facebook’ (Henry & Powell, 2015, p. 114) and digital ‘stuff’ (author ref). According to Salter (2017):

Online abuse is underpinned by entrenched power differentials on the basis of gender, age and other factors, and ‘crosses over’ with ‘offline’ harms such as domestic violence, bullying and sexual harassment. (pp. 12-13)

There are, however, ‘limited studies into the use of technology to share, or threaten to share, sexually explicit messages or images (known as “sexting”) in the context of domestic violence’ (Woodlock, 2017, p. 587). One study undertaken by Dimond et al. (2011) interviewed ten victims of domestic abuse on their experiences of technology-facilitated abuse. They found that technology has enabled offenders to continue to threaten, control and abuse survivors after they have physically left the relationship. In a later and much larger qualitative study also based on interviews, but with a far larger sample size of 69 survivors of domestic abuse in the UK, found that all 69 survivors had experienced abuse via social media and mobile technologies and that 12 had been victims of revenge pornography (author ref).

Technology is used by offenders to maintain control over victims and make it more difficult for them to leave a relationship (Dimond et al., 2011 & author ref). Facilitated by technology, revenge pornography is a weapon used as blackmail to keep victims in abusive relationships with abusive partners and as an effective leverage tool in custody negotiations over access to children (Goldgerb, 2014), which often remains hidden from the criminal justice system (author ref).

Revenge porn devastates its victims. It is also a cancer on society. Individual psychological and physical injury may help the public appreciate the extent of the problem and help practitioners prove particularized injury for certain civil claims, but the broader social harm is also relevant for determining an appropriate response (Waldman, 2017, p. 714).

Thus the non-consensual sharing of intimate images - revenge pornography - should not be understood as a seemingly 'private issue', as the Revenge Pornography Helpline received 2,846 calls from victims affected by revenge pornography in the UK in the last year alone. These numbers reflect the 'tip of the iceberg' with most victims not reporting it as they are frightened, stigmatised and humiliated, as well as not knowing where they can go for help (Revenge Porn Helpline, n.d.). The consequences are also far wider than humiliation and embarrassment and many victims experience professional consequences (Cooper, 2016) having to leave their job after photos have been shared or because they are frightened by a threat that images will be published (Kamal & Newman, 2016); depression, anxiety and even suicidal thoughts are also common (Bates, 2017 & author ref).

This issue is important to contemporary policing practice. The legislation was introduced in the UK in February 2015 and revenge pornography is defined by the Ministry

of Justice (2015) as the ‘sharing of private, sexual materials, either photos or videos, of another person without their consent and with the purpose of causing embarrassment or distress’.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the offence applies both online and offline and to images which are shared electronically or in a more traditional way. This includes the uploading of images on the internet, a social media site, sharing by text and e-mail, or showing someone a physical (paper) or electronic image (Ministry of Justice, 2015). However, it should be noted that the offence came into force on 13 April 2015 and can only be applied if the disclosure took place on or after this date. Unfortunately, the UK government campaign that accompanied the introduction of this legislation was the focus of considerable criticism for being victim blaming (Dymock, 2017). Despite this, the legal implications of sexting, more commonly associated with young people, are more established (author ref). In spite of various anti-sexting campaigns over the last five years making it likely that most adolescents are aware of the potential severe legal consequences of sexting, they are still choosing to produce them (Gregory, 2015).

Sexting behaviours in relation to adults are, however, often overlooked in both media and policy discourses, yet it is increasingly becoming a notable aspect of both romantic attachment and sexual attraction in contemporary adult relationships (Weisskircha & Delevib, 2011). It has been argued by Henry and Powell (2015, p. 104) that, in relation to young people and sexting behaviours, whilst legislation in many countries has over-regulated and even in some cases ‘criminalised young people’s consensual, digital, sexual communications’ it has simultaneously failed to adequately respond to the actual harm experienced by victims of ‘non-consensual making and/or distribution of such sexual images’.

According to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), revenge pornography is an offence under Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015 and carries a maximum sentence of 2 years' imprisonment. According to an article published by the BBC (2016), 206 perpetrators of revenge pornography were prosecuted in the first twelve months of the new law being introduced. Yet, as Cook (2015, p. 556) points out 'the availability of a criminal sanction is of little practical value for a victim, since it does little to prevent further dissemination of the image'. Whilst a few cases of revenge pornography are beginning to be brought to court, victims are very often unaware that an image or a video has even been posted of them. Sometimes images are online for a considerable time before victims are aware of them. During that time, images are often reposted to multiple sites or copied to other social media platforms before the victim is able to report the image and request or attempt to get it removed. Many victims may also be unaware of the new legislation designed to protect them and that other aspects of legislation may also be helpful. Yet as Cooper (2016) eloquently argues:

The evolution of privacy law created a system that protects certain privacy violations but fails to address revenge porn effectively. Revenge porn is, in essence, a privacy violation: images intended for a specific person at a specific time are publicized for the world to see. (p. 281)

The role of police officers

According to Robinson et al. (2016, p. 1) the police response to domestic abuse has been in the spotlight of scholars across multiple disciplines for more than 30 years. 'Online abuse and the threat of solicitation and harassment by strangers have been important in shaping the contemporary social media landscape' (Salter, 2017, p. 17) but, as Henry and Powell (2015) observe, recent research suggests that revenge pornography is utilised

frequently by perpetrators of domestic abuse, to threaten or control both current and former partners. This is, we argue, an important police matter. However, the actual number of people affected is very hard to quantify because of the embarrassment, humiliation and fear that victims experience and, like domestic abuse, the majority of cases remain unreported. Furthermore, due to the proliferation of dedicated revenge pornography sites and the unprecedented number and variety of social media platforms and personal mobile applications, the actual number of these types of images and abusive behaviours is impossible to even attempt to estimate. Where the image(s) and video content are originally posted is not always the main issue in tackling the problem as, even though the image(s) or video(s) can be removed, they can remain searchable and, therefore, often still exist in search engines like Google. This is especially so if the image has been tagged or associated with a person's name. Research reveals that in 50% of cases the victims of revenge pornography had their social media accounts and name linked to the online image(s) (Citron & Franks, 2014).

Various studies to date demonstrate the psychological consequences of revenge pornography and the devastating impact it can have on a victim's emotional and mental wellbeing. For example, the CCRI (2014) survey and the evaluation of the national Revenge Pornography Helpline (author ref) revealed that 93% of victims of revenge pornography suffered a significant amount of emotional distress. The detrimental psychological impact of revenge pornography upon victims includes depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, use of maladaptive coping mechanisms and suicidal thoughts (see Bates, 2017; author ref & Kamal and Newman, 2016). The negative impact of revenge pornography upon mental health is suggested to be similar to that experienced by victims of sexual abuse (Bates, 2017 & McGlynn et al., 2017). Furthermore, 'posting revealing photos of non-consenting others along with identifying information potentially leads to humiliation and embarrassment and

could increase the potential for online and “real-life” harassment’ and stalking by others seeking to abuse the victim (Stroud, 2014).

As detailed above, revenge pornography incurs a highly debilitating impact upon victims, including emotional distress and fear of being ostracised from both personal relationships and society (Bates, 2017; Cooper, 2016 & Waldman, 2017). Nonetheless, freedom of sexual expression, in addition to the growing normalisation of sending nude images/videos within contemporary relationships means increasing emphasis is placed upon the police force to resolve cases of revenge pornography. However as Citron (2014) observed, police lack the relevant training and understanding to respond effectively to victims of online abuse.

Due to revenge pornography featuring predominantly across various online platforms, there is a tendency for law enforcement to misunderstand the technicalities when addressing such cases (Citron & Frank, 2014). An article produced by the BBC (Sherlock, 2016), suggests that 1,160 cases of revenge pornography were reported to UK police forces from April to December 2015, of which only 11% of cases resulted in a prosecution. Low conviction rates in cases of revenge pornography appear to be common, and similar statistics have been reported by other researchers (Cook, 2015). It could be argued that the lack of criminal convictions in relation to revenge pornography cases may be due to a combination of limited understanding of revenge pornography legislation held by law enforcement, and a lack of confidence and knowledge to deal with related cases. Police officers’ understanding of revenge pornography will greatly influence the ability to manage related cases, communicate with victims and liaise with supporting organisations, such as the Revenge Pornography Helpline. Research suggests that specialised law enforcement training is central

to tackling the sophisticated use of the internet by cybercrime perpetrators (Marcum et al., 2011).

The purpose of the article here is to present the findings of a national survey designed to identify the level of understanding held by UK-based police officers and staff of revenge pornography. Efficient police responses to revenge pornography cases are of vital importance, to the victim, the successful prosecution of offenders and to society. To the authors' knowledge this is one of the first pieces of empirical research investigating police understanding of revenge pornography. Subsequent identification of police understanding would further enable insight into the provision of effective training, raising awareness and confidence in managing revenge pornography cases.

Methodology

The data collected is part of a survey sent out nationally to police forces within regions across England, as part of a wider research initiative undertaken by the (author ref) on domestic abuse, funded by the Police Knowledge Fund through College of Policing and HEFCE. The survey was undertaken between late February and early April 2017. Individual constabularies were contacted through the Better Policing Collaborative Partnerships and asked to distribute a survey electronically to all police officers and staff. In addition, the study was advertised on the College of Policing website. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and identifying information was not collected to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The online survey questions were designed in collaboration with the specialist team from the Revenge Pornography Helpline (Online).

In total, 783 members of the police force completed the survey across England and Wales. The survey was designed to take 15 minutes to complete, and included questions relating to understanding of revenge pornography and experience of responding to revenge

pornography cases. Questions from the original online survey design were initially piloted with a group of police officers and staff from one constabulary and subsequent amendments made from their feedback. A total of 17 questions were included in the survey, predominantly including closed questions, with an option for further comments at the end of the survey. Scenarios/vignette questions were also included as Bryman (2008) suggests that the use of vignettes can strengthen the research tool in that they reduce the possibility of an unreflective response. The questions broadly revolved around police knowledge of revenge pornography, training opportunities, experience of involvement in revenge pornography cases and knowledge of available victim support.

Results and Discussion

Data collected during this study was collated and analysed within SPSS. In terms of professional occupation, and the sample consisted mainly of Police Constables (40.4%) and Police Staff (36.4%), followed by Detective Constables (11.3%), Patrol Sergeants (7.7%), Custody Sergeants (1.2%) and Detective Inspectors (0.7%). The remaining 0.1% consisted of individuals within other policing roles, including Detective Sergeants, Special Constables and Police Community Support Officers. The geographic distribution of respondents were as follows: Midlands (26.8%); South East (24.7%); East (20.2%); South West (10.6%); North West (9.2%); South (7.9%) and the North East (0.5%) of England.

Certain limitations of the survey need to be acknowledged, as data in relation to ethnicity, gender and age was not collected from the respondents. This could be a focus for further research. The study presented in this article is however, to the authors' knowledge, the first to seek to quantify the understanding of revenge pornography by police officers and staff in England and Wales. Quantitative analysis of survey responses using SPSS Statistics (IBM, 2013) was utilised, focusing upon descriptive statistics and their implications. Four broad

themes were identified relating to police knowledge; training opportunities; experience of revenge pornography cases; knowledge of victim impact and victim support.

Police Knowledge of Revenge Pornography

The online survey asked participants to rate their knowledge of revenge pornography. The majority of the 783 respondents who took part in the survey reported that they had some knowledge of revenge pornography but with significant gaps (39.5%), or that they had an average understanding of revenge pornography (38.7%). A total of 45 (5.9%) police officers and staff reported they had no knowledge at all, but interestingly only 9 (1.2%) respondents reported that they had an excellent understanding of revenge pornography.

Respondents were also asked to rate how confident they felt in their knowledge and ability to collect evidence for a revenge pornography case. The majority of respondents answered that they had limited confidence when collecting evidence for a revenge pornography case (44.8%). The results demonstrate that a similar number of respondents reported that they were either not confident at all (25.0%) or in contrast reasonably confident (28.20%). Only 2.1% of the sample responded being very confident in their knowledge of how and when to collect revenge pornography evidence. Furthermore, less than a fifth (19.4%) of participants stated in the survey that they knew how to contact internet companies to gather evidence for a revenge pornography case. These findings suggest that, not only do the majority of police officers and staff feel as if they are lacking knowledge of revenge pornography, but they also lack confidence when investigating such cases.

In order to ascertain police understanding of current legislation in relation to revenge pornography, we developed five different brief scenarios based on real cases reported to the Revenge Pornography helpline. These were presented to respondents in the survey in which they were asked to decipher the legality of that specific scenario.

Scenario 1: A couple have been in a relationship for more than 10 years. In the process of a divorce one of the partners distributes sexual images of the other via WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

This is illegal and 96.20% of respondents answered correctly.

Scenario 2: A man has taken the Facebook profile picture of his ex-girlfriend and 'photo shopped' the image. The image now depicts the woman naked and engaging in sexual activity.

This does not actually depict an illegal case of revenge pornography due to the use of Photoshop to create a nude image, but it was wrongly considered to be illegal by 66% of the police officers and staff who took part in our survey.

Interestingly, by contrast in scenario 3 (depicted below and illegal under revenge pornography legislation) only 34.7% of respondents considered the case to be illegal.

Scenario 3: A woman has entered your local police station to report a rape. She further explains that the perpetrators filmed the sexual assault and are now circulating the material online.

Scenario 4 is also an illegal case of revenge pornography, which was the consensus amongst nearly half of the police responses with 49.6% replying it was illegal, whilst 40.5% responded that it was not, and 9.9% responded unsure.

Scenario 4: A man has entered your local police station to report sexual images of him being uploaded online. He explains that a friend of his had taken the image from his phone without his knowledge and posted them onto the internet.

Scenario 5 outlined below was not an illegal case of revenge pornography as images of an individual in underwear is not considered so under current legislation. Nearly half of the police respondents selected the correct answer (47.3%), although 30 % responded that it was illegal. This scenario caused the most uncertainty with 19% of respondents suggesting they were unsure if this was an illegal case.

Scenario 5: A woman has called 101 to report her images being posted online. The images depict her standing in her underwear.

These scenarios and their inclusion in the survey highlight the confusion associated with revenge pornography legislation amongst police officers and staff and the restricted nature of the legislation itself. Since its introduction in 2015, revenge pornography legislation has been subject to global interest and, indeed, global scrutiny with a number of issues and concerns identified (Henry & Powell, 2015a & Pitcher, 2015). The uncertainty relating to the UK legislation and misunderstandings of the socio-technicalities associated with revenge pornography (Citron & Frank, 2014), may lead to miscommunications with victims (author ref) and inconsistencies in police responses and the ability to manage revenge pornography referrals and cases effectively.

Police Training

Worryingly, a total of 94.7% of police officers and staff responded that they had not received any formal training on how to conduct investigations into revenge pornography. Of the 41 individuals who replied that they had received training, for nearly half of these respondents, the training was delivered via an online tutorial.

Respondents who replied that they had received some training were also asked whether they felt the training to be useful. Just over half replied that the training received was

moderately useful (52.5%), and nearly a third slightly useful. The evidence presented here suggests that relevant and appropriate training in responding to revenge pornography cases is limited across England. The reluctance to invest in cybercrime related resources and training may be a deterrent in reducing online criminal behaviour (Marcum et al., 2011).

Experience of Revenge Pornography Cases

A total of 19.1% of the respondents reported that they had been involved in a revenge pornography investigation. Of those who had been involved in such an investigation, 32.9% of the respondents reported that the case had been taken to court. Those who reported that they had been involved in a revenge pornography case were asked how confident they felt in managing and investigating it. Of those who had been involved in investigating a case of revenge pornography, 44.3% reported that they were fairly confident but 30.4% reported that they had somewhat limited confidence.

According to Cooper (2016, p. 824), ‘the problem with the current criminal and civil responses to revenge porn is that they are slow, costly, and—in many circumstances—ultimately ineffective at removing the underlying content’. Cooper’s suggestion is certainly reflected in our findings, with 80.6% of police respondents in our study reporting that they would not know how to contact internet companies to gather evidence for a revenge pornography case. We argue that this strongly suggests further guidance and training is needed on how to conduct an investigation of this nature is necessary.

Knowledge of Victim Support and Impact

The responses we received from the majority of online respondents demonstrated that they understood that revenge pornography could have a negative impact upon victims across a variety of outcomes. A total of 607 police officers and staff agreed that revenge pornography could lead a victim to experience depression, anxiety, relationship breakdown,

harassment and stalking. Therefore, it appears that the harrowing and detrimental effects associated with revenge pornography are recognised by many police officers and staff. However, despite previous empirical research emphasising the detrimental impact being a victim of revenge pornography can have upon an individual's psychological wellbeing, and the risks of exposure to further sexual abuse (see, for example, Bates, 2017; Kamal & Newman, 2016; Henry & Powell, 2015a), the resources dedicated to understanding and tackling some forms of cybercrime is minimal (Marcum et al., 2011). Our findings suggest that improvements need to be made in police training on revenge pornography.

Conclusion

'Email, the internet and mobile phone technologies are being used as a tool to harass, intimidate, humiliate, coerce and blackmail women' (Henry & Powell, 2015, p. 115) but little research to date considers how technology defines and shapes abuse. However, in our understanding of contemporary abuse it is important to avoid technologically deterministic approaches and bare in mind the human agents in the use of social media and digital platforms. Furthermore, the unhelpful terminology of the 'cyber' pre-fix crimes can create 'unwieldy categories that lack critical purchase' (Salter, 2017, p. 27). Revenge pornography is a crime – a growing crime facilitated by social media and mobile technology – but it is a crime committed by people – it is a human issue and one which the police need to respond effectively to. To the authors' knowledge the empirical study presented here is one of the first to investigate the understanding and experience of revenge pornography cases amongst police officers and staff. Victims of revenge pornography can suffer greatly in several aspects of their life, from their social lives and relationships, to their professional lives and psychological health. 'Understanding how social media facilitates and shapes abuse and prejudice is crucial to developing an adequate response' (Salter, 2017, p. 19). As such, we

argue that identifying barriers to successful identification and resolution of revenge pornography cases is crucial. Although the introduction of the UK law on Revenge Pornography in February 2014 was welcomed, Henry and Powell (2015) argue:

Whilst we support the intervention of the criminal law, we argue that equal attention must be given to policies and practices of educators, law enforcement agencies, service providers, online communities and social media networks to fulfil the promise of equal and ethical digital citizenship. (p. 397)

As ‘it is increasingly expected that police officers will be able to draw upon a professional understanding and awareness of the level of risk inherent in a wide variety of domestic abuse situations in order to respond effectively’ (Robinson et al., 2016, p. 2) the findings of this study raise considerable concerns, in that they reveal a significant lack of understanding and confidence felt by police when investigating and managing revenge pornography cases. The aforementioned lack of criminal convictions in relation to revenge pornography cases are of increasing concern. It is essential that if the limited understanding of revenge pornography legislation held by police officers and staff, as evidenced in our study, and their ability to manage related cases and communicate with victims is to be improved relevant and effective training is required. Inconsistent and incomplete knowledge is likely to lead to ineffective management of cases as well as increased victim dissatisfaction and suffering.

While policing agencies have invested heavily in certain areas of online law enforcement, they often lack the capacity or motivation to investigate adult complaints of online abuse. Even where online abuse takes clearly illegal forms, such

as in the case of rape or death threats, users report widespread disinterest and lack of understanding from law enforcement (Salter, 2017, p. 154).

Just as Woodlock (2017, p. 584) suggests that ‘technology- facilitated stalking needs to be treated as a serious offense, and effective practice, policy, and legal responses must be developed’, Cooper (2016, p. 821) argues ‘given the multitude of harms that result from revenge porn, there is a clear need for regulation and effective redress for survivors’.

Salter (2017, p. 31) argues that ‘complaints of abuse and harassment on social media have grown to the point where they can no longer be minimised or dismissed’. This study we hope will contribute towards the growing body of literature which explores online abuse and evidence the need for good quality training for officers and staff. Furthermore, we propose that future research should consider a systematic evidence review of police data and case handling in relation to revenge pornography, a more thorough investigation of police perceptions of revenge pornography using more in-depth qualitative methods and an empirical study of victims’ experiences when they contact the police.

There is a need for improved training of law enforcement officers on the forms of and impact of online abuse, and for investment of law enforcement resources into the investigation and prosecution of online abuse (Slater, 2017, p. 154).

The lack of revenge pornography training for police officers and staff is of particular concern, and signifies the substantial need for effective awareness raising and educational training programmes across constabularies in England. As Woodlock’s (2017, p. 599) study suggests, ‘non-consensual sexting should be considered a form of coercive control and be placed in the larger context of men’s violence against women’. According to the findings of Bates’ (2017: 40) study ‘it is clear that revenge porn leaves survivors feeling the same way

that many sexual assault survivors do after victimization'. It is important to remember here that 'revenge porn's harmful effects do not stop at the victim's psychological, social, and professional health. In addition to causing devastating harm to individuals, revenge porn damages society, as well' (Waldman, 2017, p. 716).

As such we argue that the impact of revenge pornography should be included in all training on domestic abuse, especially in relation to coercion and control. The widespread provision of educational sessions focusing upon revenge pornography legislation, collating evidence and effective victim-centred support is essential if police responses to revenge pornography are to be effective.

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