



~~Digital~~ ~~Abuse~~ ~~of Women~~

The Challenge of
Online and Technology
Abuse, Shaming and
Stalking in Intimate
Partner Relationships.



WOMEN'S AID

Making Women and Children Safe

Women's Aid Guide to Digital Abuse and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can include emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse of women.

Digital abuse of women includes online and technology abuse, online shaming and stalking and the non-consensual sharing of explicit images ('revenge porn').

Domestic violence is widespread with 1 in 5 women in Ireland experiencing domestic violence.

60% of abuse starts before the age of 25.

Women in Ireland are more likely to be stalked by a current or former partner than anyone else.

41% of abused women experience tracking or harassment by electronic means.

Stalking is a high risk factor for victims of domestic violence and is a red flag for support services and frontline responders when doing high risk assessments and safety planning.

55% of women murdered in Ireland are killed by a current or former partner.

"He stalked me after I left him. Sometimes in the dark, I'd see him in the back garden. I was getting texts saying things like 'get back to work, you bitch' or 'don't go out tonight bitch' and calling me a 'slut' and a 'cunt' and a 'whore'. He was still trying to control me. I used to think he was under my bed and that he was going to pounce and finish me off. I had this feeling that he wanted to kill me and that he wasn't happy that he hadn't before things ended. It finally stopped because he's got a new woman. So he's got a new focus now and I feel very sorry for her."

— Lisa*

"For a long while, I believed what he said about me; that I wasn't attractive, that I was stopping him from enjoying his life. He would text me, saying that I was old, fat and used up. That I wasn't able to take care of our son, and he could take him away from me. He constantly hacked away at my self-esteem. It gave me a hole in my stomach that I thought would never leave me. He still texted me a lot after I had escaped him, threatening me, telling me I was sick, that I didn't know who I was dealing with. It made me so anxious. One time I was with my son at sports training - he was only five - and the texts just kept coming. I felt so alone. Guilty too, that my son didn't have a dad there for him. I was frightened. Women's Aid explained I had to go to court to get a domestic violence order to deal with the abuse. I have to thank Women's Aid."

- Ellen*



National FreePhone Helpline:
1800 341 900
24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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Digital Abuse Disclosed to Women's Aid

Women are harassed and monitored online, through mobile phones and texting.

Abusers often combine digital abuse with more traditional offline stalking tactics such as following, damaging property and abusive calls.

Abusive partners use the internet and social media to control and stalk women.

Women have personal details shared or lies spread about them and are impersonated by their abuser online.

The most common form of digital abuse we hear about are damaging rumours being spread about women both personally and professionally and having sexually explicit images and videos that were taken with consent posted online without consent ('revenge porn').

Abusers have advertised their partners on escort sites without their consent or knowledge.

Abusers have used specific spyware to monitor the woman, find out her online and bank account passwords and keep track of her whereabouts.

The Impact of Digital Abuse

Women feel that their privacy has been invaded and that they have no control over their lives. Women experience anxiety, feel vulnerable and fearful, have difficulty in concentrating and sleeping. Women have to change their contact numbers and email addresses, close down social media accounts and in some cases, move out of their homes.

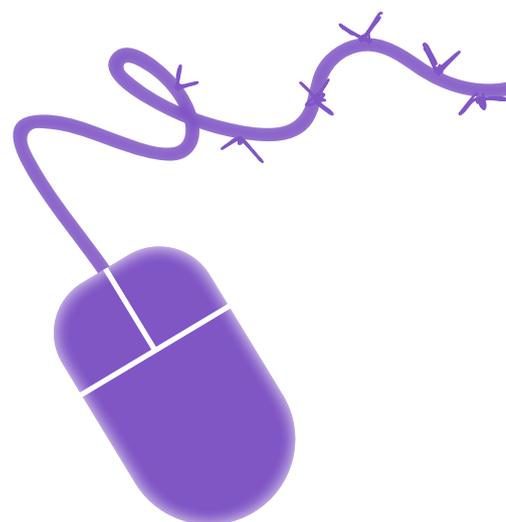
Women have to try to repair damage done to their reputation with their family, friends, at work and with their online communities.

In our experience, women experiencing digital abuse from a current or former partner rarely seek redress through existing legislation, either legal or criminal.

Niamh was in college when she started seeing Dave. The relationship became abusive and controlling. Dave used to humiliate her in front of her friends and family and threatened to hurt her if she didn't do what he wanted. Niamh ended things when she couldn't take the name calling and insults any longer. Dave called her a slut and accused her of cheating. It was the summer holidays so she didn't have to worry about seeing him around campus. However, a few weeks after things ended, Dave started to hassle Niamh by sending her texts, all day and night, asking for forgiveness then calling her names. 'Slut' was his favourite word for her. Niamh finally felt like she gained some control when she changed her mobile number.*

But things got really bad when Dave started to target her using social media. Dave logged into her Facebook account and, while pretending to be Niamh, sent abusive messages to her college friends. Then the worst happened. One day she logged into her Facebook account to see that a naked picture of her had been uploaded as her profile picture. She didn't know when he took it, but she knew Dave was behind it. He left a comment saying 'Slut'. She was humiliated and lots of people left really horrible comments. She felt completely alone, had lost friends and felt unable to return to college for her final year.

**names have been changed to protect identities*



Has someone shared sexually explicit images of you without your consent?

The term 'revenge porn' covers the online posting of sexually explicit visual material, without the consent of the person portrayed. The term typically includes photographs and video clips which have been consensually generated-either jointly or by self ("sexting"), as well as content covertly recorded by a partner or unknown third party.

Things you should know:*

- If private, sexually explicit material is posted online without your consent, notify the platform or website immediately.
- There may be an online complaint button: if so, use it and make clear in your online complaint that the material is an invasion of your privacy, and data protection rights, and has been uploaded without your consent.
- If you know the person who uploaded the material, notify them also to take it down immediately for the same reasons.
- Often however, the person may not be identified. Also, even if he or she takes it down, the material may have been posted to other sites. For that reason, you need to contact the platform such as Facebook or Twitter, or whatever website is hosting the material.
- Take a screen shot of your complaint, so that you have a record of it, and send a written complaint to the platform or site, and the uploader, keeping a copy of your letters.

Things you could say:

- The material was private: you did not give permission for it to be published online. It is an invasion of your privacy rights under the Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- If the material relates to persons who are under the age of 18 years, the material may be classed as child pornography. Possession or distribution by anyone of child pornography is a criminal offence.
- You have a right of access, rectification and erasure in relation to personally sensitive data under the Data Protection Acts 1988-2003, so request the internet site to take it down under Data Protection laws.
- If you are being blackmailed, or anyone is seeking money from you, or if you feel harassed, you can go to the Gardai to make a complaint.

If you have experienced this type of abuse and harassment please contact the Women's Aid National Freephone Helpline on 1800 341 900 open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and speak to someone at your local Garda Victims Service Office.

Women's Aid has extensive information on phone, internet, email, spyware and social networking safety available at www.womensaid.ie

**Please note that this is not legal advice. If you need legal advice, please consult a solicitor.*