

New laws to better protect victims from abuse of intimate images

- new offences to be created in crackdown on abusers who share intimate images without consent
- changes will strengthen law and deliver on Prime Minister's pledge to outlaw 'downblousing'
- comprehensive package of measures to modernise legislation following Law Commission review

Under a planned amendment to the Online Safety Bill, people who share so-called 'deepfakes' – explicit images or videos which have been manipulated to look like someone without their consent – will be among those to be specifically criminalised for the first time and face potential time behind bars.

The government will also bring forward a package of additional laws to tackle a range of abusive behaviour including the installation of equipment, such as hidden cameras, to take or record images of someone without their consent.

These will cover so-called 'downblousing' – where photos are taken down a woman's top without consent – allowing police and prosecutors to pursue such cases more effectively.

This will deliver on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's pledge to criminalise the practice, in line with previous measures this government has taken to outlaw 'upskirting'.

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab, said:

We must do more to protect women and girls, from people who take or manipulate intimate photos in order to hound or humiliate them.

Our changes will give police and prosecutors the powers they need to bring these cowards to justice and safeguard women and girls from such vile abuse.

Today's announcement builds on the campaign of Dame Maria Miller MP, as well as recommendations from the Law Commission, to introduce reforms to the laws covering the abuse of images.

The amendment to the Online Safety Bill will broaden the scope of current intimate image offences, so that more perpetrators will face prosecution and potentially time in jail.

The Domestic Abuse Commissioner, Nicole Jacobs, said:

I welcome these moves by the government which aim to make victims and survivors safer online, on the streets and in their own homes.

I am pleased to see this commitment in the Online Safety Bill, and hope to see it continue its progression through Parliament at the earliest opportunity.

Around 1 in 14 adults in England and Wales have experienced a threat to share intimate images, with more than 28,000 reports of disclosing private sexual images without consent recorded by police between April 2015 and December 2021.

The package of reforms follows growing global concerns around the abuse of new technology, including the increased prevalence of deepfakes. These typically involve the use of editing software to make and share fake images or videos of a person without their consent, which are often pornographic in nature. A website that virtually strips women naked received 38 million hits in the first 8 months of 2021.

The government will take forward several of the Law Commission's recommendations to ensure legislation keeps pace with technology and can effectively tackle emerging forms of abuse. This includes:

- Repealing and replacing current legislation with new offences to simplify the law and make it easier to prosecute cases. This includes a new base offence of sharing an intimate image without consent and 2 more serious offences based on intent to cause humiliation, alarm, or distress and for obtaining sexual gratification.
- Creation of 2 specific offences for threatening to share and installing equipment to enable images to be taken.
- Criminalising the non-consensual sharing of manufactured intimate images (more commonly known as deepfakes).

The move builds on government action in recent years to better protect victims and bring more offenders to justice, including making 'upskirting' and 'breastfeeding voyeurism' specific criminal offences, extending 'revenge porn' laws to capture threats to share such images, and using the Online Safety Bill to create an offence specifically targeting 'cyberflashing'.

Ruth Davison, CEO of Refuge, said:

Refuge welcomes these reforms and is pleased to see progress in tackling abuse perpetrated via technology. As the only frontline service with a specialist tech abuse team, Refuge is uniquely placed to support survivors who experience this form of abuse.

We campaigned successfully for threatening to share intimate images with intent to cause distress to be made a crime, via the Domestic Abuse Act, and these reforms will further ensure police and law enforcement agencies rightly investigate and prosecute these serious offences.

Tech abuse can take many forms, and Refuge hopes that these changes will signal the start of a much broader conversation on the need for strengthening the response to online abuse and harm.

DCMS Secretary of State Michelle Donelan said:

Through the Online Safety Bill, I am ensuring that tech firms will have to stop illegal content and protect children on their platforms, but we will also upgrade criminal law to prevent appalling offences like cyberflashing.

With these latest additions to the Bill, our laws will go even further to shield women and children, who are disproportionately affected, from this horrendous abuse once and for all.

The government will bring forward the wider package of changes as soon as parliamentary time allows and will announce further details in due course.

Notes to editors

- The law recognises that intimate image abuse is harmful and wrong and these reforms will build on government action to address the ever-evolving nature of these problems in the digital era. This Government has taken steps to update offences that tackle “revenge pornography” and voyeurism, which are used to deal with intimate image abuse alongside other offences such as harassment, malicious communications, blackmail, and “coercive or controlling behaviour”.
- The Law Commission’s detailed review included a three-month public consultation, which closed on 27 May 2021, receiving 354 written responses from members of the public, professionals and organisations including legal professionals, the judiciary, parliamentarians, police, academics, medical professionals, and victim support groups. The final report can be found [here](#).
- We have already taken significant action to protect and support victims:
 - Increasing funding for victim support services to £460m over the next three years. We are using additional ringfenced funding to increase the number of Independent Sexual and Domestic Violence Advisors by 300 to over 1,000 by 2024/25 – a 43 percent increase over the next three years.
 - Working with Rape Crisis England & Wales to develop and deliver a 24/7 Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Line;
 - Publishing the all-crime and adult rape delivery data dashboard, to increase transparency on how the police and Crown Prosecution Service are tackling rape and sexual violence;
 - Extended the time limit for victims of domestic abuse to seek justice and taken action to protect women from harassment when they are breastfeeding in a public place.
 - Rolled out pre-recorded cross-examination and re-examination for vulnerable witnesses to every Crown Court in England and Wales. The

measures makes the experience of giving evidence to the courts less daunting, helping witnesses and victims give their best evidence.

- Introducing new pilots at three Crown Courts to give rape victims enhanced support to help to drive up prosecutions and convictions. This includes specialist trauma training for staff and new video technology to take advantage of the rapid rollout of pre-recorded cross-examination for victims of rape.
- Last month, we launched the 'ENOUGH' campaign to tackle violence against women and girls. The campaign gives bystanders safe ways to intervene if they witness violence against women and girls, including sexual harassment on the street, unwanted touching, sharing intimate images of someone without their consent and coercive control in a relationship.
- Through the government's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, the Home Office increased its funding to the Revenge Porn Helpline in 2021/2 to £120,000 to support victims of non-consensual intimate image sharing. Under the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan, the Home Office increased this further to £150,000 in 2022/3. Since 2015 when the Helpline was established it has supported nearly 16,000 people and removed over 270,000 individual pieces of content.