

Revenge Pornography

The Rising Tide of Digital Harassment



A Parliament Street Report

Prepared by Steven George-Hilley, Director of Technology

PARLIAMENT STREET

A right of centre think tank in the United Kingdom

Introduction

For many of us, social media offers the opportunity to engage with friends and family at the touch of a button. It provides users with a platform to launch a business, to share creative ideas and reach vast global audiences.

Unfortunately the ability to instantly upload images and video is not always used responsibly.

Our research shows that there are an increasing number of investigations launched by Police forces across the country into 'revenge porn' cases. The offence often involves an offender uploading and sharing intimate content of a former partner onto social media, designed to cause distress and harassment.

In response to the growing number of offences in this category, a new law was passed in April 2015 making such conduct illegal and a criminal offence.

Victims of revenge porn suffer extreme humiliation, distress and some contemplate suicide. This report reveals previously unseen data into the callous nature of revenge pornography offences in Britain today.

Steven George-Hilley, director of technology,
Parliament Street

Methodology

A team of researchers from the Parliament Street think tank have obtained and analysed Police data from 18 forces in the UK concerning investigations under Section 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015.

The investigations concerned "disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress," and the commencement date for this specific offence was 13th April 2015 when it was introduced into law.

Our research team obtained the data under Freedom of Information (Fol) legislation. In some cases the Police notes provided additional detail about the nature of the incident and the course of action taken by the Police force against the offender.

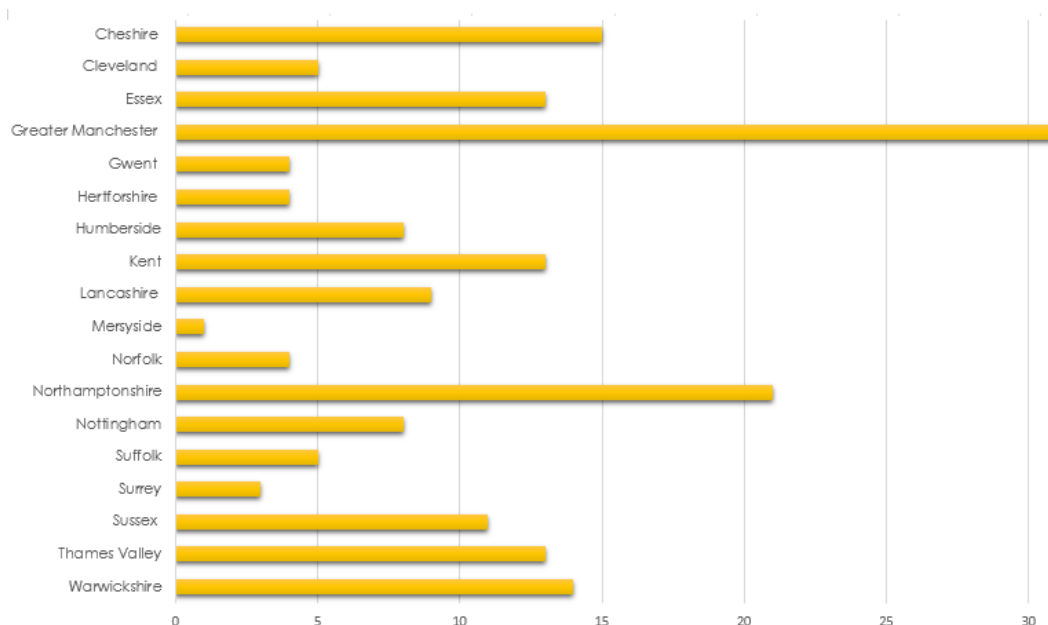
The purpose of this project is to examine the volume of investigations pursued under this new law and to raise awareness of the increasingly prominent problem of individuals placing private photographs of former partners online.

The data captured by the Parliament Street research team and analysed in this report should be viewed as a snapshot of the current number of investigations being undertaken. Not all Police forces in the UK responded to or were able to fully respond to our request for information.

A cause for concern

The Police data reveals hundreds of incidents of revenge pornography have been investigated by the 18 Police forces which provided information since April.

Greater Manchester reported the highest number of incidents at 31 with Merseyside only reporting a single incident. Of the investigations which provided data around the platform the incident occurred on, 21 cited Facebook, 3 cited SnapChat and 2 cited WhatsApp.



Overall there were 182 incidents since April reported and investigated under the new offence according to the data we received from 18 Police forces who responded to our requests.

Perhaps most disturbingly, many of the Police notes reported that charges were not formally progressed.

Again the stress and fear experienced by the victim could be a factor in this process.

Police notes

The Police notes which were contained within some of the documentation released reveals the suffering of victims and indeed the cruelty of the offenders.

In Humberside, one report read: ***“Victim sends nude photos of herself to her boyfriend. They split up due to his violence and the victim doesn't hear from him for two years.***

The victim is then informed by her friend that the male has posted the nude pictures on a social media website that is open for anyone to view.”

In Suffolk, a girl was threatened by text message, according to Police notes: ***“Sent victim (22 years old) a naked picture of the victim via text message, and threatened to post it on social media.”***

Another example of text sharing was apparent in Lancashire: ***“Aggrieved had sent a digital naked picture of themselves to their then partner by mobile telephone and has now been informed by third party that this image has been posted on a bogus account on a social media site.***

Aggrieved complained to their ex-partner and is now informed by third parties that bogus account has now been closed and image is no longer available to view on social media.”

Whilst Gwent Police reported detail of one offence via SnapChat: ***“A video of a sex act involving a 23 year old female victim was placed on snapchat by a 26 year old male offender.”***

Conclusions

The incidents contained within this report provide an insight into the horrors of revenge pornography crime across the UK. Due to stress and humiliation inflicted on the victims, many fear to come forward and even if they do so, charges are rare.

The Police and the government must do more to ensure that those affected are given the necessary counselling and support to make a complaint and be reassured that every step will be taken to prosecute the perpetrators.

Recommendations

- Increase the custodial sentence to five years for perpetrators
- Charges for those who share the content once posted
- Free online support and guidance for those affected
- School support and education about the dangers as part of the wider national curriculum

