

ONLINE MISOGYNY AND ABUSE

What is online misogyny and abuse?

Online misogyny is when the internet and related technologies are used as tools to target, harm and express hatred towards women.

Online misogyny can start with ...

- Sharing sexist attitudes, jokes and memes
- Treating women like objects
- Stereotyping women
- Sending unsolicited porn or 'dick picks'
- Harassment
- Catfishing (using a false identity to trick someone into a relationship)

and can lead to more serious abuse like ...

- Doxxing (posting your personal info online and/or encouraging others to target you)
- Hacking or impersonation
- Image-based abuse (posting intimate photos)
- Stalking, electronic surveillance, monitoring
- Trafficking and exploitation
- Threatening or inciting rape and murder
- Committing crimes against you or your family

What are the impacts of online misogyny and abuse?

Online misogyny can have a range of psychological and emotional effects and may impact the way a woman views the world. It can lead to feelings of:

- Fear, for self or loved ones
- Anxiety, stress, and panic
- Sleeplessness
- Lowered self-esteem or confidence
- Isolation and loneliness
- Powerlessness and loss
- Anger, cynicism, suspicion, mistrust
- Depression, suicide

Experiencing online misogyny may cause a woman to disengage from online spaces or to censor herself. This impacts on her basic human rights protections including the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to privacy.

Over time, a woman who disengages from online spaces in order to feel safe or to protect herself and her children may lose technical knowledge, employment opportunities, social contacts, access to services, and other benefits provided by technology.

How common is online misogyny and abuse?

The United Nations reports that 73% of women online have been exposed to online abuse and that women are 27 times more likely to experience online harassment than men. The online abuse that younger women (ages 18-24) experience often includes more dangerous forms of stalking and violence¹.

A 2018 poll commissioned by Amnesty International² found that:

- 37% of Australian women who experienced online abuse and harassment felt a threat to their physical safety.
- 42% said that the abuse was sexist or misogynistic in nature.
- 20% reported that the abuse included physically or sexually violent threats.

What's the cause of online misogyny and abuse?

Online misogyny and abuse starts with harmful attitudes and beliefs about women. The internet can make it easier to abuse someone anonymously and without the repercussions that exist in real life.

Some misogynists work together to target women they disagree with, generally with the motivation to silence, control, and cause fear. Women are often targeted simply for being women.

Some women experience online misogyny and abuse for choosing not to date someone, for sharing their opinions, for being in a public profession like media, entertainment, or politics, or for having personal attributes which an abuser deems unacceptable for a woman. Online misogyny is not the fault of the woman being abused. We all have the right to access technology without fear or abuse.

How do I know if online misogyny is happening to me?

Sometimes it can be hard to tell what someone actually means online or what their intention is. For example, when a guy you really like posts a comment about how sexy you are using a pic where he's down bloused you (taken a pic of your breasts/cleavage) without your knowledge or consent, it might be confusing. Is it a compliment or a form of online misogyny and abuse, or both?

To figure out how you feel about a scenario, there are a few questions you might ask yourself:

- While he might be sharing his appreciation of your body, do his actions communicate respect, boundaries, consent, trustworthiness, and care?
- What other images may have been taken or shared? How do you want to be portrayed online and who has power over this?
- What other behaviours or patterns might give you clues about his values, empathy, and character?

¹ <https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/highlightdocumentenglish.pdf>

² <https://www.amnesty.org.au/australia-poll-reveals-alarming-impact-online-abuse-women/>

Our top 4 tips for women experiencing online misogyny and abuse

There are actions everyone can take to protect women from online misogyny and abuse. We can act individually and, in a group, in a multitude of ways, to address the harmful attitudes and beliefs that lead to violence against women.

1. **Secure your tech (accounts, devices, games, and social media)** using WESNET's [Online Privacy and Safety Tips](#) found within the [Women's Technology Safety & Privacy Toolkit](#) at techsafety.org.au.
2. **Ignore, block, and/or report the trolls and abusers if safe to do so.** This may help you regain your voice. Most social media platforms have settings for ignoring, blocking or reporting abuse. Check out our resources below under 'more information'.
3. Connect with others who will support and guide you. This might include services like **1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or your local domestic violence or sexual assault service.**
4. **Prepare to take care.** Pause and prepare yourself before you read online comments or check messages from someone who has abused you. Consider going offline for a time to nurture yourself and regain balance, but don't be silenced. Sharing what you are going through with someone supportive may help.

How can I help end online misogyny and abuse?

1. **Educate and motivate** others to **#knowtechabuse**. Follow WESNET on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) @WESNETAustralia for information you can share.
2. **Learn** from women who are overcoming the fear and pain of online misogyny and abuse. Google them to hear and read their stories.
3. **Join us** as we support women and children and address issues at the intersection of violence against women and technology.
4. **Contact your** government representatives, tech companies, and influencers to voice your concerns and let them know that this issue is putting women at risk.
5. **Mentor** a young person. Give them encouragement and insight into how they can create a more equitable online and offline world for all.

Acknowledgement

This handout has been created by WESNET through generous funding provided by Uber.

More information

Check out our [Privacy and Safety on Facebook](#) guide

NNEDV's [Safety and Privacy on Twitter](#) resource

Read this article for more information on [Dealing with Harassing Calls, Texts, & Messages](#).

Read this article for more information on [Being Web Wise](#).

Read this article for more information on creating a [Technology Safety Plan: A Guide for Survivors & Frontline Workers](#)

Read this article for [Documentation Tips for Survivors of Technology Abuse & Stalking](#)

Read this ridesharing safety guide, [Uber Safety Guide in Collaboration with WESNET](#).