

## The battle against revenge porn

06 SEPTEMBER 2016

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**CATEGORY:**

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Last summer we reported on the then new crime of 'revenge porn' under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015. A year on, and the CPS has today released figures showing the extent of its successes in tackling the growing phenomena of bullying and humiliating online abuse. With the proliferation of revenge attacks on former sexual partners through the posting online of intimate images without consent, the new offence sought to deal head on with the problem by way of a specific new offence. It is unlawful for a person to 'disclose a private sexual photograph or film [not of a kind ordinarily seen in public] ... without the consent of an individual... with the intention of causing that individual distress'. In our previous blog we commented that the new law looked likely to offer victims of revenge porn 'a neater route to successful prosecution of their iPhone/camera wielding ex'. And indeed, the CPS figures show that in the year 2015/16 ending March, there were just over 200 prosecutions for the offence. (The figures also show the sad state of what we would like to consider to be our fair and caring society, where more than one fifth of the CPS workload is in dealing with sexual crimes.) 206 prosecutions for revenge porn over the relevant period shows that crimes are being reported and prosecuted – but the figures do not indicate the success levels in these prosecutions. Further, these figures are likely to be the tip of the iceberg for such offences, with many no doubt going unreported for fear by the victims that they could thereby be under even more threat from their aggressors. The Internet can be a great force for good, providing all of us with access to a universe of information; but is in particular used by our young people who are most familiar with the internet and its plethora of ways to educate, inform and entertain themselves and each other, and to progress in a fast moving world. But the easy access internet also allows those intent on ill, to use its services to humiliate and embarrass others, lashing out at their former partners deliberately and maliciously or in a moment of madness when the green-eyed monster of jealousy comes to call. And it seems to me, anecdotally from my own professional experience, that many more people besides are threatened with exposure by fleeting partners and one-night stands in a similar way, who are taking photographs of sexual partners – usually without their consent or knowledge during moments when they are intoxicated by passion or alcohol – and blackmailing the victim against the threat of exposing those images to wives, children and work colleagues. Educating the public that the law has been updated to deal with offences of this kind is a step in the right direction. As is giving confidence to the public that they will be dealt with, with tact and concern by the police. But it is a sad reality that the majority of these offences are not reported out of embarrassment or fear of reprisals. A sexual encounter is the most natural thing in the world; seeing it plastered across the Internet, is not. Peer pressure is a dangerous thing, especially for those most likely to be at risk, our young people. We need to educate our younger generation – a large proportion of whom spend their entire lives online – that a sexual liaison doesn't have to be filmed, and that they don't need to send a picture of their privates to their boy/girlfriend. There is a specific new offence; the offence is being reported; and the CPS are prosecuting these cases as the figures show. But our first line of defence against these crimes is, in fact, and must remain, ourselves.

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