

LOSING FACE: ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEEFAKE PORNOGRAPHY

KEY RESEARCH QUESTION

Are legal literacy and gender related to attitudes towards non-consensual deepfake pornography among anglophone young adults?

BACKGROUND: NEW PHENOMENON, OLD LOGIC

Technology-facilitated sexual violence has evolved with the rise of new digital tools. The rapid growth of AI has enabled a new form of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA): **deepfake pornography**.

- Pornography constitutes **98% of all deepfakes**, with the 99% of victims being women and girls (Flynn et al., 2025).

Contextualising deepfake abuse requires examining androcentrism in the public sphere.

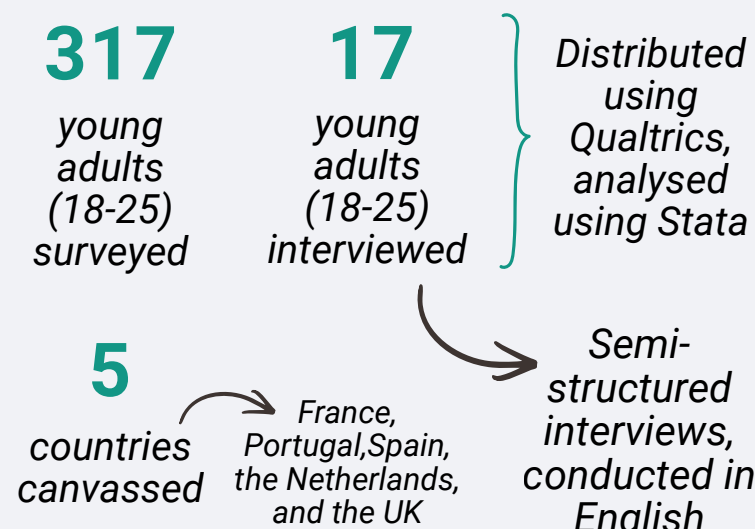
Feminist analysis of technology

- Harassment, sexualisation and abuse of women online is facilitated and manifested by the structural design of the internet (Adams, 1996).
- Online abuse causes women to disengage, marginalising them from an increasingly important part of public life (Bates, 2025).

Feminist legal theory

- The justice system is not designed to address gendered crimes; it treats everyone as individuals not as participants in systemic structures (Naffine, 1990).
- Individualising criminal responsibility leaves prevention and collective harms of deepfake pornography unaddressed (Kira, 2024).

METHODOLOGY



Current legal landscape:



Directive (EU) 2024/1385

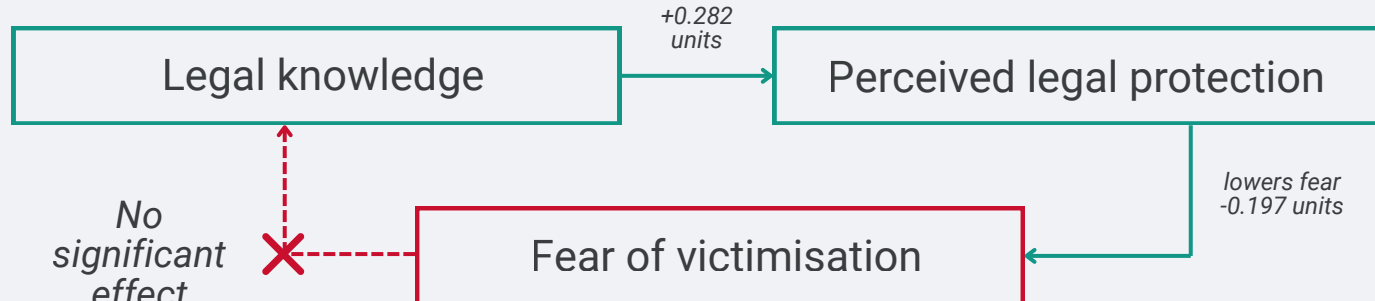


Online Safety Act 2023 and Section 138 of the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

A BROKEN LOOP:

Legal knowledge lowers fear. Fear does not enable legal knowledge.

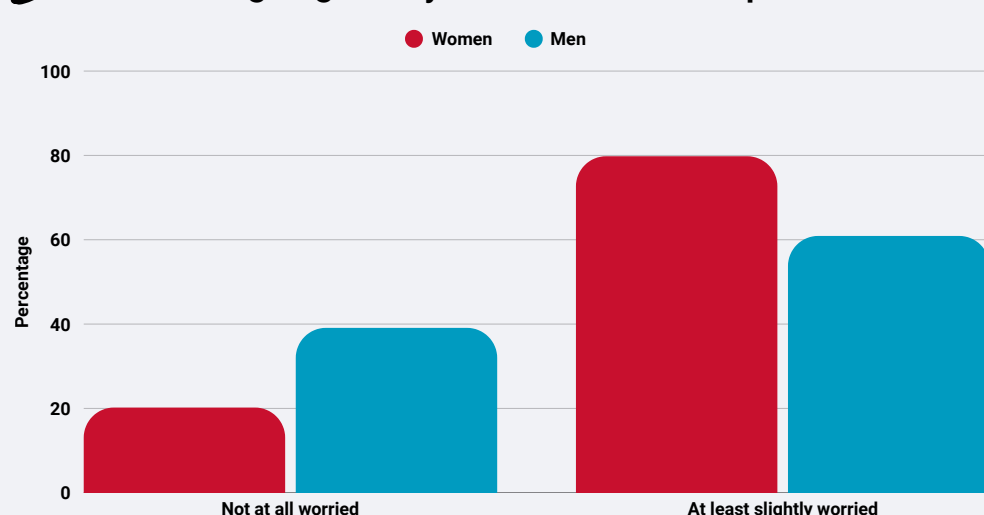


The absence of a statistically significant relationship between fear and legal knowledge suggests that concern alone does not drive young people to seek out protective legal information.

1. Fear of victimisation: Survey participants reported their **fear of non-consensual deepfake image abuse** on a 5-point Likert scale.

2. Perceived likelihood of victimisation: Male participants in the sample were statistically **less likely** to perceive themselves as likely targets of deepfake pornography compared to female participants ($b = -.41$; $p < .001$).

Fear of being targeted by non-consensual deepfake abuse



55% of women

29% of men

Have previously experienced online harassment of any kind.



Please find our references by scanning this QR code

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

THEME ONE: REGULATION AND PREVENTION

Potential solutions listed by interviewees spanned four sub-themes: **financial compensation, education, legislation and community support**.

- Education** was perceived as the most influential method of reducing harm.
- Effectiveness of **legal and punitive** approaches was treated with scepticism.
- Structural power of technology companies** was frequently mentioned as a barrier to meaningful change.

"I'm very aware that even if people commit even worse crimes, they're not really going to get a sentence which is worth the **embarrassment** or the **invalidation** you feel"

- Camilla, 21

"I don't think they are going to be able to **regulate the AI companies** in the first place. (...) They have way too much **money** and way too much **power** to be regulated and be regulated everywhere, which is the other thing. I think it's **almost impossible**."

- Claire, 20

Participants suggest:

- The justice system fails to adequately address gendered crime.
- Yet, **none could accurately identify the legislation** on deepfake pornography in their country of residence.

Our analysis:

- Perceived inadequacy** of the law is not based on legal knowledge. **Distrust** comes from broader experiences.

THEME TWO: AUTONOMY, IDENTITY AND CONTROL

"It's like **erasing a whole identity**, a whole person, to make them what you want them to be, and that's just **disgusting**."

- Juliette, 18

"I think the deep faking is really concerning, you don't even see the person as connected to their body at that stage... It's a really **dehumanising** thing."

- Daniel, 22

Loss of identity

- Discursive framing: language of theft**, e.g. "stolen", "taken", "erased".
- Social and epistemic harm is symbolically reduced to individual loss of property.

Our analysis:

- These **linguistic choices** show how **atomised** mentalities leave people with inadequate language to describe **collective experiences**.

Individualising responsibility through moralising language:

- Perpetrators were described as **"disgusting", "creepy", "sick"**.

Our analysis:

- Condemning abuse as aberrant is intuitive but rooted in **androcentrism**.
- IBSA is facilitated by **hegemonic masculinity** (Berlin & Rollero, 2025), meaning perpetrators **create and uphold the social norm** rather than transgressing it.

THEME THREE: SEXUALISATION AND DOMINATION

"**Whoever is at the top** of these websites, or owns them, is who ultimately benefits, financially."

- Lucia, 20

Gender in the public sphere:

- Sexualisation is linked to profit, **profit is linked to control**.
- Reputation was described as **gendered and unfair**.

Our analysis:

- Female bodies are **disciplined and policed** in the digital world.

Participants were **fearful** that the **sexualisation** of women could be exacerbated by easily **accessible** deepfake technology.

- AI depictions of sex **do not reflect reality**.
- Unrealistic expectations were perceived as harmful to socialisation.

CONCLUSION

Gender and legal literacy significantly shape perceptions of young adults.

- Women statistically perceived themselves as more vulnerable to non-consensual deepfake pornography, and report greater fear victimisation.
- Participants were conscious of patriarchal and domination frameworks but discursively relied on androcentric language and individualising logic.
- Legal literacy is extremely low, yet participants made negative assessments of legal legitimacy regardless of empirical knowledge.
- Participants judge the law as inadequate, perceiving regulating technology as impossible and unlikely to address the root cause of digital violence.

Recommendations: Hold platforms, not just individuals, to account. Criminalise the companies that enable deepfake abuse. Develop support networks for victim-survivors. Convict gendered crimes as hate crimes. Socialise and educate young men. Treat digital violence against women and girls as a priority.