

Technology and Sexual Violence

Technology has made it easier to stay connected to people across the world. However, that ability to stay constantly connected can also enable sexual violence. There are several ways technology is used to sexually abuse others, including:¹

- Online Sexual Harassment
- Misusing messages and online communities to groom victims
- Non-consensual sexting (sending sexual images, videos, or messages)
- Non-consensual image sharing of others (sharing sexual images or videos of someone else without their consent)
- Hacking an email or social media account and sharing sexual pictures or content
- Demanding or coercing sexual images and videos
- Creation and distribution of images and videos of sexual violence
- Creating **Deep Fakes**: Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) or photoshop to create images or videos that use the face, voice, or other recognizable features of another person from another (usually unrelated) video or image
- Misusing access to databases to gain information or plan an attack
- Misusing surveillance or security cameras to track or monitor victims
- Limiting access to tech to keep a victim from seeking help
- Internet-based sex trafficking
- Rape by Proxy*

* In 2014, the Maryland Senate passed a bill that would outlaw “**rape by proxy**.” Rape by proxy is when someone posts personal identifying information about another person without their consent to invite, encourage, or solicit another to commit a sexual assault against them. This bill came after a Prince George’s County woman had more than 50 strangers visit her home during a two-week period. The uninvited men claimed she had invited them to have violent sex with her in an online ad. It was the victim’s ex-husband who had posted the ads, posing as the victim herself.²

According to the 2024 study, *#MeToo: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault*, **32% of women and 15% of men** experienced cyber sexual harassment.³

In 2020 survey data, Pew Research Institute found that young women are particularly likely to have experienced sexual harassment online. **33% of women under 35 say they have been sexually harassed online.**⁴ In addition, LGBTQ+ adults are more likely to face harassment online.

Roughly **7 in 10 LGBTQ+ people have encountered any harassment online** and fully **51%** have been targeted for more severe forms of online abuse.⁴

Uber received **2,717** reports of sexual assault in the U.S. between 2021 and 2022.⁵ Of these reports, 355 were reports of rape and 285 were reports of attempted rape.

¹ *Technology and Sexual Assault* (2017). Technology Safety. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.techsafety.org/technology-and-sa>

² Frosh, B. *Solicitations of Proxy Rapists* (2014) Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Frontline Winter 2014 Issue. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://mcasa.org/newsletters/article/solicitations-of-proxy-rapists>

³ *#MeToo 2024: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault* (2024). Newcomb Institute. Tulane University. Retrieved October 3, 2024 from <https://newcomb.tulane.edu/content/metoo-research>

⁴ *The State of Online Harassment* (2021). Pew Research Center. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/>

⁵ *Uber’s US Safety Report 2021-2022*. (2024). Uber. Retrieved October 8, 2024, from <https://www.uber.com/us/en/about/reports/us-safety-report/>

Lyft received **2,651** reports of sexual assault in the U.S. between 2020 and 2022.⁶ Of these reports, 365 were reports of rape and 241 were reports of attempted rape.

A 2021 study on cyber dating abuse among middle and high school students found that⁷:

- 28% of students who had been in a relationship reported experiencing digital abuse
- Male students were more likely to report cyber dating abuse (32%) compared to female students (24%)

1 in 4 victims of stalking report being stalked by some form of technology (such as e-mail or instant messaging) and 10% of victims report being monitored with global positioning systems (GPS), and 8% report being monitored through video or digital cameras or listening devices.⁸

In 2022, the Maryland Senate passed a bill to improve Maryland’s stalking law by adding tracking without consent (for instance via stalkerware on a phone) and other electronic communication to the criminal stalking statute. Modifying the stalking statute will also permit peace and protective orders to be issued based on this conduct.⁹

The Rise of AI and “Deep Fakes”

Another new but very concerning type of technology-based sexual abuse are deep fakes - the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or computer-generated software to create fake videos or photos by using a person’s voice, face, or other identifiable feature from one source and replacing it with another person’s face, voice, or other feature in a different video.¹⁰ This is done to trick viewers into believing they are watching one person say or do something that the person has never actually said or done on camera. Deepfakes can also be created with sexual videos or images without the permission or knowledge of the victim and has led to shame from those harmed as well as creating increased fear about the future of AI.

- In October 2020, a firm that tracks down deep fake content, received 100,000 reports of deepfake nude images of women created without the victim’s permission or consent.¹¹
- Most deep fake videos are sexual videos of women, released without the woman’s knowledge.¹¹
- In the 2024 legislative session, several bills were introduced in Maryland to address non-consensual deep fakes, but these bills failed to become law.¹²

To learn more about digital safety, and find resources, visit **Technical Safety** at <https://www.techsafety.org/resources-survivors> and **End Tech Abuse** at <https://endtab.org>.

For more information about digital stalking, visit **SPARC Stalking Awareness** at <https://www.stalkingawareness.org> and the **Coalition Against Stalkerware** at <https://stopstalkerware.org>.

⁶ Lyft Safety Transparency Report (2024). Lyft. Retrieved October 3, 2024, from <https://www.lyft.com/blog/posts/2024-safety-transparency-report>

⁷ Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2021). Digital Dating Abuse Among a National Sample of U.S. Youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 36(23-24), 11088-11108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260519897344>

⁸ *Stalking Fact Sheet* (n.d.). SPARC. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from https://www.stalkingawareness.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SPARC_StalkingFactSheet_2018_FINAL.pdf

⁹ HB0148: Criminal Law - Stalking – Definition. (July 8, 2022). Maryland General Assembly. Retrieved November 1, 2022, from <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/hb0148?ys=2022RS>

¹⁰ Harris, D. (2015). Deepfakes: False Pornography is Here and the Law Cannot Protect You. *Duke Law & Technology Review*, 17(1), 99-128. Retrieved November 8, 2024 from <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1333&context=dltr>

¹¹ *Increasing Threat of DeepFake Identities* (2021). Homeland Security. Retrieved November 8 2024 from https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/increasing_threats_of_deepfake_identities_0.pdf

¹² MCASA 2024 Legislative Agenda. Retrieved from: <https://mcasa.org/law-public-policy/legislative-agenda>