

**Te Mana
Whakaatu**
CLASSIFICATION OFFICE

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Online Misogyny and Violent Extremism

Understanding the Landscape
(Summary Report)

Online Misogyny and Violent Extremism

Understanding the Landscape (Summary Report)

Content Warning:

This report includes references to topics such as misogyny, sexual violence, domestic violence and violent extremism. If you're feeling uncomfortable and you're not sure who to talk to, you can free call or text 1737 for more support.

Acknowledgements

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Chief censor's foreword

Our Office is tasked with examining some of the toughest material imaginable so that New Zealanders aren't exposed to its harmful effects. We assess this content to prevent and reduce harm to our communities. We do that while balancing protection against the right to freedom of expression.

It is through this mahi that we notice trends, we spotlight themes, we warn others of the dangers ahead, and we signpost content with age ratings and content warnings so that viewers can make informed decisions for themselves and their whānau.

Our response to the March 15 terrorist attacks, through the forming of our Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) team means we have developed our expertise in terrorism, violent extremist, and extremely violent material. We commissioned this work as we have continued to observe concerning misogynist themes in extremist content since 2019. We can't restrict content solely because of misogynistic elements, but we've seen a lot of it in the type of content that is restricted or even made objectionable. We discuss some of our observations in this summary report and encourage readers to visit our comprehensive online resource for deeper analysis.

It is critical to understand the challenges this type of content poses to New Zealanders. By exploring how and where online threats develop and grow, locally and globally, we hope this resource can inform evidence-based policy, regulatory responses, and ongoing service improvements from online platforms. We also hope this resource will support future research aims, as there is still so much more to understand. We welcome further exploration of this evidence, and we hope for wider conversations about what this means for our society. Thank you to our research team and to Hate and Extremism Insights Aotearoa for their dedication and perseverance in developing this resource.



Caroline Flora
Chief Censor

The term 'misogyny' and how it's used in this report

In this report, misogyny refers to hatred, contempt, dislike or distrust for women and girls based on their gender, and a belief that women and girls are inherently inferior to men and boys.

Misogyny can manifest in various ways, such as:

- Violence, abuse, harassment of women and girls (or support for this).
- Prejudice, discrimination, subjugation or hostility towards women and girls.
- Systemic oppression that enforces or reinforces gender inequality.
- Targeting women and girls who are perceived as transgressing gender norms or expectations.

One or more of these elements can be present in publications classified by the Office.

Our focus in this project was on understanding the intersections between online misogyny and violent extremism. In this report, 'online misogyny' means any manifestation of misogyny that occurs online including on social media platforms, messaging apps, or other digital platforms.

The aim of this research is not to investigate casual or everyday sexism; such topics are only addressed insofar as they contribute to a deeper understanding of how they may lead to or enable extreme misogynistic content, attitudes and behaviours.

This report presents a high-level summary of insights supported with examples from different studies and reports included in our literature review. To read the literature review and to access the full list of references, please visit our online resource.



Visit classificationoffice.govt.nz/resources/research/online-misogyny-and-violent-extremism

Who we are and what we do

Te Mana Whakaatu – Classification Office (the Office) is an independent Crown entity responsible for classifying material which may need to be restricted or banned. This can include films, books, video games and online content. We conduct research and produce evidence-based resources to promote media literacy and enable New Zealanders to make informed choices about what they watch.

Following the March 2019 terrorist attacks in Christchurch, we established a specialist Countering Violent Extremism team with a focus on research, education, outreach, and classification of extremist content. Through this team we engage with New Zealand and overseas government agencies, academics and experts at the forefront of countering violent extremism, to share insights and identify solutions.

The Office can restrict or ban content that promotes crime, terrorism or violence. When determining a classification, we also need to consider whether content degrades, dehumanises or demeans any person, or represents particular groups as

inherently inferior, including women and girls. These grounds are considered in association with other criteria. When publications are banned or restricted, it's because they include other elements such as violence, horror, crime, sex, or cruelty.

It's important to note that the Office cannot restrict or ban content solely on the basis of expressing opinions or attitudes that are hateful, discriminatory or offensive.

We can't restrict or ban a publication just because it contains misogynistic themes or content; however, these are often present when other classification criteria result in a ban.

Observations from our classifications

We have observed misogynistic elements in terrorist and violent extremist content (TVEC) and violent sexual content. We discuss below a few examples of publications we have classified as objectionable.

Male supremacy

Examples of violent extremist publications that the Office has classified as objectionable (imposing a legal ban) that have misogynistic elements include The Great Replacement, the 2011 Oslo Manifesto, the 2022 Bratislava Manifesto, and the 2022 Buffalo Supermarket Attack Manifesto. These publications were not banned because they contained misogynistic content. However, misogynistic elements were present alongside the objectionable content.

The authors of these ‘manifestos’ make frequent references to the erosion of traditional masculinity by feminism. The Bratislava shooter detailed how he had been radicalised at a young age by ideas of male supremacy. He noted his interest in the “men’s rights movement”.

The Oslo terrorist, who murdered 77 people in 2011, idealises the “traditional family unit” and gender roles of the 1950s. He blames radical feminism, which he sees as an offshoot of cultural Marxism, for “severely wound[ing] the family structure of the Western world”. He decries the “sex-and-the-city” lifestyles of modern women, which he claims distract women from their role to increase birth rates of white children. He fantasises about a “motherless” civilisation, establishing a “network of surrogacy facilities in low-cost countries”, envisioning “artificial wombs” that would create genetically European children and would remove the need for women in society at all.

The Oslo terrorist lists police, cultural Marxists, and the military as “female”. He believes this makes them “physically and mentally inferior”. He decries “soft white men” who are unable or unwilling to undertake acts of violence. The Buffalo shooter draws a similar comparison, before claiming that “Men of the West must be men once more”, implying a belief that violence is inherently connected to masculinity.

The Oslo terrorist imagines men as the victims of radical feminists, who would seek to “destroy the hegemony of white males” and undermine “the intrinsic worth of native Christian European, heterosexual males”. He writes this to justify his belief that women must be killed as part of the impending civil war. He warns followers that they must “embrace and familiarise yourself with the concept of killing women, even very attractive women”.

The ‘Great Replacement’: birth rates, masculinity, and hate

Another common theme in these manifestos is the ‘Great Replacement’ theory and birth rates. The ‘Great Replacement’ is a white supremacist conspiracy theory that claims that white people are being systematically replaced by people of colour. The Christchurch shooter, who murdered 51 people in 2019, named his ‘manifesto’ The Great Replacement in reference to this conspiracy theory. At their most extreme, adherents to the Great Replacement embrace accelerationism – the belief that acts of violence can be used to bring about societal collapse and change.

The Buffalo shooter, who murdered 10 people in a supermarket in 2022, wrote about the inevitability of “white men” being radicalised into violence as a consequence of existential threats to the “white race”. He believes that white women are being sexually abused en masse by people of colour. The attacker frequently references his belief that the sexual assault of white women is being “covered up”, and that this is leading to falling birth rates in the “white race”. He justifies his acts of extreme violence as a proportionate response to the existential threat to the “white race”.

In each ‘manifesto’ men are called on to use violence to protect “the gene pool”. Once they have achieved this, it is their duty to, according to the Bratislava attacker, fulfil their “biological purpose” to procreate.

Accordingly, interracial relationships are described by the Oslo terrorist as “the ultimate crime”, while the Christchurch terrorist refers to the same as “genes being bred out of existence”.

The Buffalo shooter believed a man’s duty was to protect ‘birth rates’ by procreating with white women. He described pornography and sex work as ‘distractions’ that simulate ‘actual relationships’.

In the context of white supremacy, references to birth rates can be understood as a misogynistic interest in controlling women’s bodies and reproduction.

The Bratislava shooter, who murdered two people at an attack on a LGBTQI+ club in 2022, writes extensively about his hatred of the trans community, dedicating a page toward invalidating trans identities. The attacker claims that watching someone in their friend circle transition – which they describe as watching someone “self-destruct” – contributed to their radicalisation toward violent extremism.

Transphobia is also a feature of the Buffalo shooter’s writing, in which he describes trans identities as a “mental illness”.

Incel ideology, the ‘manosphere’ and incitement of physical and sexual violence

The Office has classified and banned incel content that promotes misogynist violence and the dehumanisation and degradation of women. The incel (‘involuntary celibate’) concept originated from a late 1990s online forum created by a Canadian woman to support those struggling to find romantic partners.¹ Initially a supportive space, the incel community eventually shifted, becoming dominated by young men expressing hostile attitudes towards women.

Incels, who largely self-identify as such, are men who blame women and society at large for their lack of sexual success. They are known for their antagonism not only towards women but also towards men they perceive as “genetically attractive” and successful in securing partners. These men are often derogatorily referred to as “Chads” within incel communities. Incels typically express resentment towards these individuals, believing that their own lack of romantic and sexual success is due to inherent disadvantages in comparison to these “genetically superior” men.

Incels are part of what is called the ‘manosphere’, an umbrella term that covers various anti-feminist, often misogynistic online groups, including Pickup Artists (PUAs), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), and Men’s Rights Activists (MRAs). Some members of these groups express extreme views including vehement misogynistic and anti-feminist sentiments, sexual objectification of women, and advocating for violence against women.

An example is a video classified by the Office in 2021 as objectionable. The video is a capture of a Twitch streamer playing a video game who makes repeated references to his status as an incel.

Throughout the video the streamer refers to women as “foids”: a derogatory slur that combines ‘female’ and ‘android’. The term ‘foid’ also refers to his view that women lack autonomy and agency and are objectified for their capacity for sex. He explicitly targets women in his playthrough of the game, while offering a running commentary over the gameplay footage. He states that he wishes to “purge the world of foids”.

Often the streamer switches between referring to gameplay and referencing people that he knows in real life. He questions why women don’t want to have sex with him. He believes women are “sluts for everybody but me”.

The streamer threatens sexual violence against women who he knows in real life and claims to be sexually aroused while committing violence against women. He further states his intention to commit a mass shooting. He says that he has too much respect for police to shoot them, however, believes that women “don’t really serve any purpose” other than reproduction.

The streamer dehumanises and degrades women to such an extent and degree that he justifies not only simulated violence but physical, terroristic violence against women as well. This video was classified as objectionable for the manner in which it promoted criminal acts, and for its dehumanisation and degradation of women.

Sexual violence against women and girls

Misogyny appears in content depicting extreme violence or sexual violence against women and girls. Many examples of this have been classified as objectionable. These include games, videos and images depicting or promoting sexual violence, including rape, physical and sexual assault, and child sexual exploitation.

For example, a video game classified by the Office in 2023 as objectionable included sexual activities that are coercive and degrading in nature with a strong element of misogyny, particularly with adult women characters. The game also involves incest, sexual violence, and the promotion of child sexual exploitation.

In the past, the Office has cut or banned hundreds of commercial pornographic DVDs or videos for depicting degrading, dehumanising and demeaning sexual or physical conduct towards women and girls. We seldom classify this content today due to the decline in distribution of commercial pornography on DVD or video. This type of content is now widely available online from commercial pornography sites.



Why research on online misogyny is needed

Based on observations from our classifications and findings from our previous research², which showed that New Zealanders feel that it's hard for them to avoid seeing harmful or offensive content online, we recognised the need for further research. This research will allow for a deeper understanding of this issue and build an evidence base specific to New Zealand.

Since 2020, we have observed some concerning trends relating to online misogyny.


- Violent extremism and extreme violence. The convergence of misogynistic beliefs with various forms of violent extremism, notably seen in groups like incels.
- Misogynistic hate targeting public figures and minority groups. An elevated risk of experiencing misogynistic abuse for women in high-profile roles, and for individuals with intersectional identities, thereby reducing the voices of women and girls in public discourse spaces.
- Amplification by algorithm. Algorithms that maximise engagement have contributed to amplifying different forms of this harmful type of content, giving it wider reach.
- Reach and speed of spread. Misogynistic campaigns can spread across platforms, and in many cases, have a global reach.
- Mis/disinformation. The distribution of gendered disinformation targeting women and girls.
- Declining mental health, declining participation. The negative effects of online misogyny on the mental wellbeing of women and girls, discouraging their participation, silencing them, and exacerbating discrimination.

Understanding the real-world impact of online misogyny is key to creating safer online spaces for women and girls. By exploring how and where online misogyny develops and grows locally and globally, this research aims to inform evidence-based policy and regulatory responses and support future research.

The research Process

We commissioned Hate and Extremism Insights Aotearoa (HEIA) to conduct a focused literature review on online misogyny, a summary of government and social media responses to this type of content, and a content analysis of New Zealand-based posts on fringe platforms.

The research team at the Classification Office reviewed academic research reports, articles, and published documents. Additionally, the team sought insights from different government departments, Crown entities and NGOs. Following this, the Classification Office developed an online reference resource and this summary report.

 For more details, visit [About the Project](#) page in our online resource.



Gaps

This section outlines key gaps we observed.

There is a gap in how current systems collect and record data on online misogyny

In New Zealand, there are no standardised methods for collecting and analysing data on online misogyny across government agencies and NGOs. Unclear definitional boundaries mean that misogyny is often grouped with broader issues like gender/sex-based discrimination, harassment or hate speech, making it difficult to isolate and study.

Existing reporting systems don't consistently capture key demographic details such as gender, faith or ethnicity, which would be helpful for understanding how online misogyny and abuse specifically targets different groups of women and girls.

Globally, the lack of consistent, validated international measures and up-to-date data on violence against women hinders a comprehensive understanding and effective policy formation.

There are gaps in the evidence base in New Zealand

In New Zealand, there are evidence gaps in several key areas related to misogyny, both online and offline, as well as gender-based violence. It would be useful to see more quantitative and qualitative studies that could provide statistical data on the prevalence or patterns of misogyny and gender-based violence and explore personal experiences, perceptions, and narratives surrounding these issues.

For example, it would be useful to see additional studies exploring:

- The intersection of misogyny with other forms of hate such as antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, and transphobia.
- The connection between online misogynistic threats, content, and behaviours, and the real-world violence against women and girls.
- The overlap between domestic violence, intimate partner violence, online misogyny, gender-based violence, child sexual exploitation, and radicalisation.

It's also important to highlight that some New Zealand studies reporting on misogynistic and violent extremist content online have not undergone a rigorous peer review process. Peer review processes help ensure that methodologies and findings are reliable and robust.

Key insights

This report provides a summary of insights supported by a few examples of studies and reports from the literature review. For a more in-depth analysis and a full list of references, please refer to our online resource, where each of these key insights is discussed in detail.



Visit our online resource for more information.

Misogyny and violent extremism

This section discusses the key insights and findings identified about the intersections between online misogyny and violent extremism.

Misogyny is a common thread across various hateful and extremist ideologies.

Within the violent extremism landscape there appears to be a link between misogyny and violent extremism. This is particularly evident in online communities known as the ‘manosphere’. These online groups play a significant role in promoting and intensifying misogynistic views. Such beliefs have led to violent incidents globally and are linked to extreme far-right ideologies that intertwine misogyny with anti-feminism, blaming societal changes like feminism and the sexual revolution for various societal issues.

Some research indicates that individuals involved in violent extremism may also engage in other forms of criminal behaviour, including sexual assault. In incel circles, misogyny and a sense of male sexual entitlement fuel the justification for violence as retaliation against perceived injustices. Similarly, in the extreme far-right, exerting male dominance and subjugating women is central to the ideology of ‘reclaiming the West’ and traditional masculinity.³ This victimisation mindset, centred on blaming women and feminism, often extends to other demographics, leading to a broader spectrum of hate⁴.

A content analysis of New Zealand-based posts on three fringe online platforms found some crossover or juxtaposition of misogynistic content with other hateful ideologies. The analysis identified the presence of beliefs intertwined with extreme misogynistic content such as racism, anti-government conspiracy theories, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQI+ themes.

Algorithms amplify misogynistic and extremist content and create pathways for vulnerable individuals to be exposed to more extreme ideologies.

Another significant aspect of this landscape is the role of online platforms in the spread of misogynistic and extremist content. Extremist content remains accessible on mainstream platforms with a trend of these groups migrating to less-regulated platforms like 4chan and 8kun. This online presence is crucial in propagating and reinforcing extremist views, contributing to an evolving threat landscape in New Zealand and internationally.

In their 2021/22 annual report,⁵ the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) emphasised the persistent challenge of the widespread availability of violent extremist content. They noted an increase in the engagement of young New Zealanders with this material, primarily accessed online. These individuals often participate in discussions about carrying out attacks on specific groups with some showing support for violent extremism. There is a growing concern that the sheer volume and normalisation of violent rhetoric online could potentially radicalise individuals who were not previously identified on the violent extremist spectrum.

In a 2023 report⁶ assessing New Zealand’s security threat environment, the NZSIS noted that online spaces continued to have inflammatory language and violent abuse mostly targeting a variety of people from already marginalised communities.

There is a growing recognition of the threat posed by incel ideology, alongside the emergence of new trends in extremist beliefs.

New Zealand, in line with the international landscape, has witnessed a new trend emerging where individuals engage with a range of extremist beliefs without aligning with any one in particular. This trend, characterised by mixed, unstable and unclear extremist ideologies, is heavily influenced by the pervasive online environment, as noted by NZSIS in their 2023 assessment report of the New Zealand security threat environment⁷. NZSIS also observed that there are some individuals drawn to violent extremist ideologies due to an attraction to violence itself, rather than a genuine commitment to any particular cause.

Misogynistic and gender-based extremism, including incel ideology, has become recognised as one of the categories of violent extremism in numerous countries⁸.

In New Zealand, while the Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG) views the presence and threat of incel ideology as less significant compared to other extremist groups, the potential threat it poses is still recognised⁹.

The potential risks posed by individuals self-identifying as incels, including the prospect of an incel-linked violent attack within New Zealand have been investigated by the NZSIS;¹⁰ the absence of a well-defined incel culture in New Zealand steers most of them to white identity motivated violent extremism. The NZSIS investigation suggested that if a New Zealand-based incel were to resort to violence, it's highly likely they would also adhere to at least one other violent extremist ideology.



There is a potential link between violence against women, history of domestic abuse, hostile sexism, and support for extremist ideologies.

Research reveals a significant correlation between domestic violence, hostile sexism, and the support for extremist ideologies. Studies, including a 2020 UN Women and Monash University study in Asia¹¹, found that individuals who condone violence against women are three times more likely to support violent extremism, a trend observed in both men and women. The study highlights that misogyny may serve as an early indicator of a predisposition towards broader acts of violence.

A study¹² from 2020 looking into mass shootings in the US from 2014 to 2017 found a link between histories of domestic violence and those who commit mass shootings, revealing that more than 30% of mass shooters included in the study had these histories. In a similar vein, research sponsored by Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP)¹³ in the UK highlighted a connection between domestic abuse and individuals referred to the Prevent programme, which focuses on countering radicalisation.

Several perpetrators of violent extremism have documented histories of abuse and violence towards women. For example, the individuals responsible for the extremist attacks in Boston (2013), Florida (2016), Nice (2016), and London (2017) all had histories of domestic abuse¹⁴.

Some extremist and misogynist groups use the same online platforms and networks as those distributing child sexual abuse material, and there can be crossover in these online spaces.

The internet is a significant factor in both radicalisation and the spread of child sexual abuse material.

Enforcement agencies seize potentially illegal material and submit this to the Classification Office to determine if it is objectionable (meaning banned or illegal). Individuals are sometimes found to be in possession of a variety of potentially objectionable content that includes, for example, material promoting terrorism and violent extremism, child sexual abuse, bestiality and sexual violence.

The Office's role doesn't extend to investigating motives driving individuals who possess such content as we are not an investigative agency. We believe further research is necessary to explore this issue. However, it's concerning that individuals in New Zealand are in possession of a wide array of extreme content of various types.

Additional insights

In this section, we present some key contextual insights relating to online misogyny. We wanted to further explore and understand why we were encountering misogynistic elements in the content we classify. This led us to identifying numerous overlapping and peripheral issues, which are relevant for understanding the complex dynamics present between online misogyny and violent extremism. We categorised these insights into three key areas or themes: technology and online platforms, online harassment and abuse, and intersectionality.

Technology/online platforms

Online platforms play a pivotal role in amplifying and perpetuating misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, significantly influenced by their design, algorithms, and business models.

Online platforms operate under what Harvard Professor Shoshana Zuboff describes as a model of “surveillance capitalism”,¹⁵ which monetises user data for targeted advertising. This creates a commercial imperative to keep users engaged, and in some circumstances can result in amplifying harmful content like violent extremist narratives or propaganda, misinformation, hate, and misogynistic attitudes.

The commercial imperatives of these platforms, coupled with specific user behaviours, contribute to this phenomenon. High-profile influencers can exploit these platforms to spread and reinforce misogynistic views, particularly among young audiences.


Figures like Andrew Tate, known for their misogynistic and sexist ideas, gain enhanced reach through algorithms, impacting a vast audience, especially young men and boys. There is evidence¹⁶ of this in New Zealand with the controversial influencer’s content, which promotes harmful misogynistic views, gaining traction among young men and boys in New Zealand schools, raising concerns about its impact on their perceptions and behaviours.

Emerging categories of content and technology pose challenges.

A significant issue in this landscape is the emergence of new forms of image-based sexual abuse. An example of this is AI-generated deepfakes, especially those involving non-consensual pornography. These deepfakes pose a serious threat to women's and girls' safety and reputations online.

As the technology behind deepfakes becomes more sophisticated, detection becomes increasingly challenging. Often, this content resurfaces on platforms that exhibit minimal moderation, exacerbating the issue.

Sensity AI, a research firm tracking online deepfake videos since 2018, reported that by the end of 2020, around 85,000 deepfakes were online, with 90-95% being non-consensual pornography, predominantly featuring women¹⁷.

 Visit our online resource for more information.



Online harassment and abuse

Women and girls are more likely to encounter gender-based and severe forms of abuse.

Online harassment against women manifests in various forms, ranging from gendered to severe threats and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. The rise of digital manipulation tools, such as deepfakes and abusive memes, has become a new frontier in propagating misogynistic narratives. This form of online violence is often normalised and goes unnoticed, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and discrimination.

Online harassment is a prevalent issue affecting women and girls, some as young as eight¹⁸, across various platforms including gaming, social media and dating apps. While men and boys are also subject to online abuse, their experiences are less likely to be gender-based. The nature and severity of online harassment also differ significantly.

Women, in particular, are more likely to encounter severe forms of abuse, including sexist remarks, inappropriate images, and threats that can escalate to stalking, violence, and sexual assault. For example, a 2022 Bryter survey¹⁹ involving 1,500 female gamers from the US, the UK, and China revealed that these gamers faced a spectrum of abuse, from verbal attacks (31%) to extreme threats of violence and rape (14%).


The rise in online abuse has implications for women's participation in public discourse and their overall wellbeing. The impact of this harassment is profound, leading many women and girls to isolate themselves in online spaces or quit activities like posting or gaming altogether, adversely affecting their mental health.



There is a continuum of online and offline violence against women and girls.

The issue of online harassment against women and girls is deeply intertwined with offline violence, forming a continuum that includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, and online harassment. A study published by the World Health Organization in 2021²⁰ revealed that one in three women globally have experienced either physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

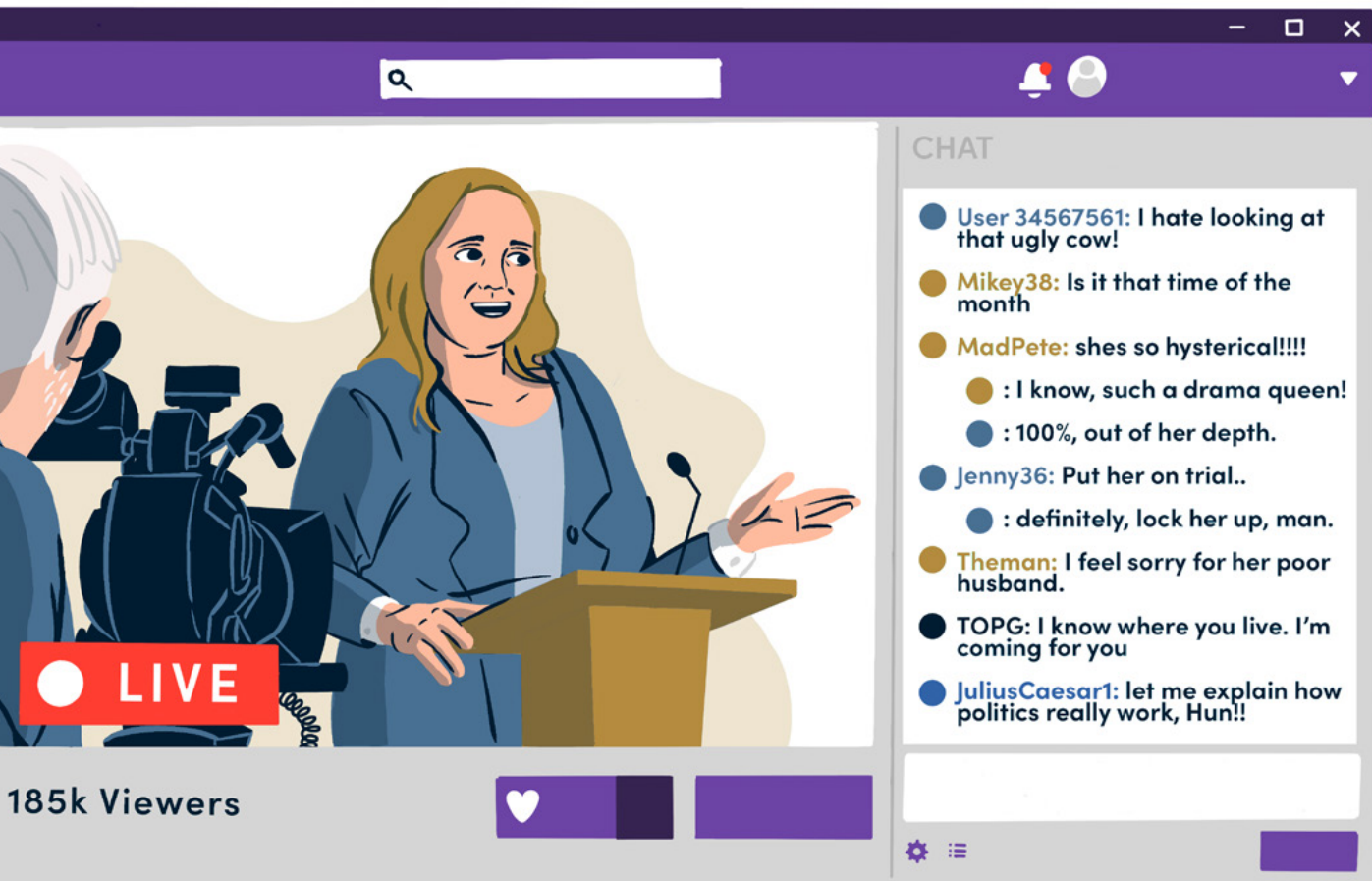
This continuum has been exacerbated by global events like the Covid-19 pandemic and is often underreported. A 2021 UN Women report²¹, which surveyed women from 13 countries across various regions, termed this surge in violence a “shadow pandemic”.

 Visit our online resource for more information.

Gendered disinformation perpetuates misogynistic stereotypes and targets women, particularly those in public roles.

Gendered disinformation has become an increasingly prevalent issue in the last few years. It refers to “the spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images against women political leaders, journalists and female public figures”²². Gendered disinformation, rooted in misogyny and societal stereotypes, aims to distort the public images of these women and discourage them from public participation. Tactics include fake narratives, threats and the use of degrading or sexual image manipulation such as deepfakes to discredit and demean women, discouraging them from participation in public life²³.

For example, abuse on- and offline has led some women Members of Parliament in the UK to choose not to run for office again²⁴. Research across various countries indicates that women in public roles, particularly those with intersectional identities, are frequent targets of gendered disinformation campaigns, exacerbating the challenges they face²⁵.



Intersectionality

Misogyny, when combined with other forms of discrimination like racism, amplifies the harm experienced by women with intersecting identities.

Abuse, hatred and discrimination are amplified by intersecting identity markers like race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, with an increase in online abuse across mainstream social media platforms.

Racism, religious bigotry, antisemitism, Islamophobia, sectarianism, transphobia, homophobia, and ableism intersect with misogyny and sexism. This intersectionality results in heightened exposure and more profound impacts, especially for women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously.

The emotional, psychological, and behavioural impacts of this abuse can be profound, leading to changes in online habits, mental health concerns, and feelings of vulnerability. Despite the severity of the abuse, many victims feel that their complaints go unheard, underscoring the need for proactive measures to address and combat online hate and discrimination.

According to Netsafe's 2021/22 annual report²⁶, New Zealand has witnessed an increase in reports of online harms spanning the full spectrum of online safety issues including hate speech, image-based abuse and child sexual abuse.

New Zealand organisations²⁷ have documented and highlighted the intersection of hate and harm with other forms of discrimination, particularly targeting women and girls from different backgrounds including



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Māori women, Muslim women, and trans people.

Responses

The following two sections outline some approaches from governments and online platforms in their response to harmful content, including misogynistic, hateful and violent extremist content.

Governments

Many governments around the world are responding to the challenges posed by harmful content in general, including various forms of misogynistic content such as deepfakes, and image-based sexual abuse. Some are introducing new laws and policies, and some are successfully using existing settings to tackle new challenges.

We looked at responses from the UK, Scotland, Ireland, the European Union, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, including proposed laws, projects, or policies. Some countries such as the UK, Ireland and Australia have already enacted online safety laws while others such as Canada and New Zealand are in the process of reviewing their current legislation.

Some key themes in these responses include:

Establishing online safety regulatory frameworks and systems

A number of countries and jurisdictions have introduced, amended or enacted online safety legislation to address harms including online misogyny and intimate image abuse. For example, the UK's 2023 Online Safety Act, Ireland's Online Safety and Media Regulation Act and the EU's Digital Services Act.

The creation of regulatory bodies or frameworks to oversee online platforms is becoming a standard approach in various countries. This may involve creating new regulatory bodies and roles like

Ireland's Media Commission and Online Safety Commissioner. Alternatively, some countries have granted new powers to existing media regulators such as the Australian eSafety Commissioner and Ofcom in the UK.

New Zealand has considered media regulatory reform; the Department of Internal Affairs consulted the public in 2023 on proposals in the Safer Online Services and Media Platforms discussion document²⁸.

Changes to hate offences

Several countries are considering or have enacted hate crime laws that specifically recognise gender or sex as protected characteristics.

For instance, Ireland's proposed Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2022 includes crimes motivated by misogyny. The new proposed legislation encompasses both hate crime and hate speech, including online.

In contrast, the UK does not consider sex or gender as protected characteristics under hate crime laws and has instead implemented alternative policies designed to address violence against women and girls such as the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy.

Other countries have expanded their definitions of hate crime to include gender and gender identity, as seen in the expanded federal hate crime laws in the United States.

Classifying misogynistic extremist ideologies as violent extremist ideologies

More countries are recognising misogynistic-motivated violence as a form of violent extremism. In Canada, misogynistic extremism (or gender-driven violence) is acknowledged as a part of broader extremist ideologies and is categorised accordingly for better law enforcement and countermeasures.

In the UK, the Prevent Program previously categorised incel ideology under a broad group labelled as 'mixed, unclear, or unstable'. Recent updates to The Prevent Programme in England and Wales, however, have expanded the number of high-level concern categories from four to ten. This expansion specifically includes categories that were once considered 'mixed, unstable or unclear.' As a result, incel ideology is now recognised as one of the ten high-level concern categories.

In the United States, since 2019, the US government has used five threat categories to understand the domestic terrorism threat. Incel ideology is categorised under All Other Domestic Terrorism Threats (DVEs) category.



Visit our online resource for more information.

Platforms

We looked at responses from Meta (Facebook and Instagram), X (formerly known as Twitter), Reddit, TikTok, YouTube, LinkedIn, Telegram, 4chan, 8kun, and Gab.

We looked specifically at their policies, community guidelines and initiatives aimed at mitigating harmful content, including misogyny. We discuss below some key observations:

Policies and community guidelines

Most online platforms have general guidelines against hateful speech or behaviour, but often, they lack explicit references to misogyny or gender-based violence. While some platforms, like TikTok, explicitly mention misogyny as one of the hateful ideologies prohibited on the platform, others like LinkedIn have broader policies against content that intimidates or denigrates individuals based on gender.

Gab, on the other hand, claims to curb explicit threats of violence, but it tends to be more permissive when it comes to hateful speech or behaviour and extreme posts, including misogynistic content.

Content moderation tools

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and human moderation is a common approach across platforms to identify and remove harmful content. AI tools are employed to detect potentially abusive content, sometimes even before it is reported by users. However, the effectiveness and limitations of these tools in accurately identifying misogynistic content can vary.

Fringe platforms such as 4chan and 8kun are known for their minimal content moderation, which has often led to these platforms becoming hubs for extreme views including misogyny.

Features to combat online abuse

Some platforms have introduced features to specifically address online abuse. For instance, Instagram has developed tools to filter offensive comments and is working on features to protect users from unsolicited explicit images. However, there is ongoing research and evidence questioning the effectiveness of these features.

Addressing transparency and algorithmic bias concerns

There is evidence²⁹ to suggest that algorithmic bias may amplify misogynistic or abusive content on some online platforms. For example, a 2023 study published by #ShePersisted³⁰ found that social media platforms have failed to protect their users, particularly in tackling abusive and disinformative content targeted at women political leaders.

The regulatory changes across the world include efforts to address platforms' transparency and accountability in their content moderation and response to user complaints.




Visit our online resource for more information.

Online resource

The screenshot shows a webpage with a pink header and a white main area. The title is 'Online Misogyny and Violent Extremism: Understanding the Landscape'. Below the title is a sub-header 'What effects does online misogyny have in New Zealand and abroad, and what's being done about it?'. The page is divided into several sections: 'Misogyny and violent extremism', 'About this project', 'Additional insights', and 'Helpline'. Each section includes an illustration and a brief text description. The 'Additional insights' section has four sub-sections: 'Technology and online platforms', 'Online harassment and abuse', 'Intersectionality', and 'Government Responses'. The 'Helpline' section provides contact information for various support services.

Alongside this summary report, we have launched an online resource with additional detail on key insights, and extensive references for topics covered in this research project. This resource is aimed primarily at academics, researchers, government and non-governmental organisations and will be a snapshot of the available research at the time of publication.

 Visit our online resource for more information.

Endnotes

- 1 See [hot yoga Tallahassee: a case study of misogynistic extremism](#). Department of Homeland Security: The US Secret Service. Published March 2022
- 2 See [What We're Watching: New Zealander's Views About What We See On Screen and Online](#). Te Mana Whakaatu Classification Office. Published June 2022.
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- 8 For additional details, please refer to the [Government Responses section](#) in our online resource.
- 9 See [the violent extremism ideological framework explained](#). Combined Threat Assessment Group (CTAG). National Security Journal. Published 3 July 2020.
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- 18 See Plan International (2020). [State of the World's Girls 2020: Free to Be Online?](#)
- 19 See [Female Gamers Study 2022: Data & Insight](#). Bryter. Published 2022.

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- 20 See [Violence against women](#). World Health Organization. Published 9 March 2021.
- 21 See [Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19](#). UN Women Data Hub. Published 24 November 2021.
- 22 See [gender-based disinformation: advancing our understanding and response](#). EU Disinfo Lab. Published 20 October 2021
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