



incogni

Online abuse against women in the US

Survey



As digital spaces increasingly become part of daily life, opening avenues for communication, work, and social engagement, they have also given rise to new challenges, many of which pose a particular threat to women in the US. These include various forms of online abuse such as cyberbullying, doxxing, and, more recently, AI deepfakes.

Online harassment is a widespread issue, but certain forms affect women disproportionately. AI deepfakes—fake images, video, or audio, generated using artificial intelligence to look or sound like the victim—while a relatively new form of online abuse, have already become a problem almost exclusively for women. Such attacks can have a deep emotional and psychological impact. They can also be used to discredit, silence, and push women out of traditionally male-dominated spaces.

Politics is just one area in which online harassment is used as a tool to make a space inhospitable to women. Recent reports reveal that women in Congress are 70 times more likely to be targeted by AI deepfake attacks than their male counterparts.¹ Similarly, cyberbullying, doxxing, and other forms of harassment have been routinely used to push women out of the gaming industry, as was highlighted by Gamergate, a targeted harassment campaign that started in 2014 and has been seeing a revival recently due to the shifting political climate.²

This issue can be made worse by personal data. Personal information—ranging from phone numbers to financial data—is collected, traded, and often made easily accessible online. This provides perpetrators with tools to locate and target their victims. Online harassment (especially on popular dating apps³) can, and often does, extend into the real world, turning into physical threats such as stalking, swatting, vandalism, and even violence. This can lead to heightened anxiety and changes in daily behavior in many victims. Professional women also face harassment targeting their expertise and reputation, and women from marginalized groups are harassed for their identity, creating compounding issues that lead to greater psychological impact and feelings of helplessness.

Despite these risks, there is still no data privacy law in the US at the federal level. The responsibility for privacy regulation and anti-harassment laws largely falls to individual states. Legal protections against online harassment also remain inconsistent across state jurisdictions. For example, there is no federal anti-doxxing law, leaving doxxing legal in many states. Since laws restricting the unauthorized use of personal information don't necessarily extend to a person's likeness, AI deepfakes also occupy a legal gray area.

This study, conducted jointly by the National Organization for Women and Incogni, a data privacy company, explores how online harassment affects women in the US, the potential impact factors like age, ethnicity, and geographic location may have on this, and the role of personal data.

Key findings:

- 1 in 4 American women have experienced online abuse, and 1 in 8 indicated that they suffered from cybercrimes resulting from having personal data available online.
- The most frequent type of online abuse experienced by American women was cyberbullying (10%), followed by sexual harassment (9%), and trolling (8%).
- Women with mixed racial backgrounds experienced online abuse most frequently, including cyberbullying (23%), hate speech (21%), and sexual harassment (16%).
- Latina or Hispanic women also experienced some of the highest rates of online abuse, including cyberbullying (13%), hate speech (10%), and sexual harassment (13%).
- All of the reported cybercrimes were experienced more frequently by younger women (aged 18–34).
- Revenge porn, doxxing, swatting, and AI deepfakes were indicated as having the most severe impact on everyday life, including self-esteem, mental health, and financial wellbeing.
- 84% of American women think that their personal data might be used by hackers or unauthorized parties, and 29% of respondents were personally negatively affected by this issue.
- 69% of respondents expressed that they don't think there are sufficient laws protecting victims of online abuse.

Table of contents

1. Methodology	5
2. Results	6
2.1. Women overall	6
2.2. Ethnicity	8
2.3. Age	9
2.4. Location	10
2.5. Online harassment and its impact on women's lives	10
2.6. Personal data exposure and its role in cybercrimes	11
3. Discussion	15
3.1. The intersection of race and online harassment	15
3.2. Younger women are at higher risk	15
3.3. Geographic disparities	15
3.4. The societal impact of online harassment	15
3.5. Legal gaps and the need for stronger protections	16
4. Appendices	17
Sources	19

1. Methodology

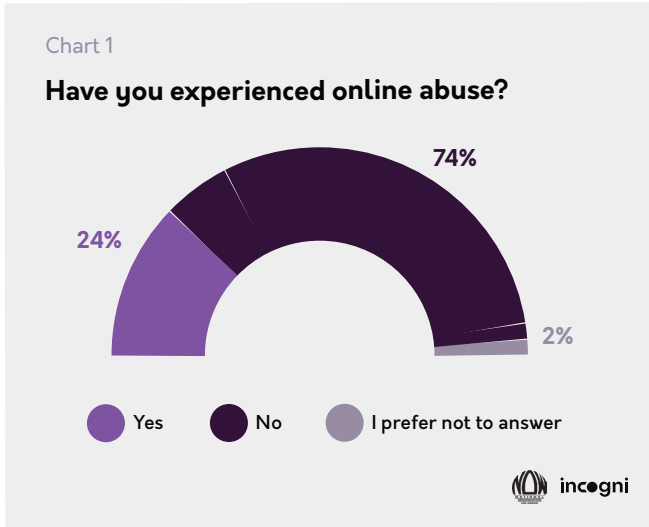
This study was conducted by Incogni Research Team in collaboration with the National Organization for Women (NOW). A nationally representative sample of 5,110 adult female residents of the United States was surveyed using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) method. Quotas for age, ethnicity, and place of residence were established based on US demographic data to ensure a representative sample. Data collection took place between January 23, 2025, and February 2, 2025.

The primary objective of the survey was to identify the most common forms of online abuse experienced by women and analyze the data by age, ethnicity, and geographic location. Additionally, the study examined the accessibility of women's personal data online and its potential exploitation by malicious actors.

The full survey script is available in Appendix 1.

2. Results

2.1. Women Overall

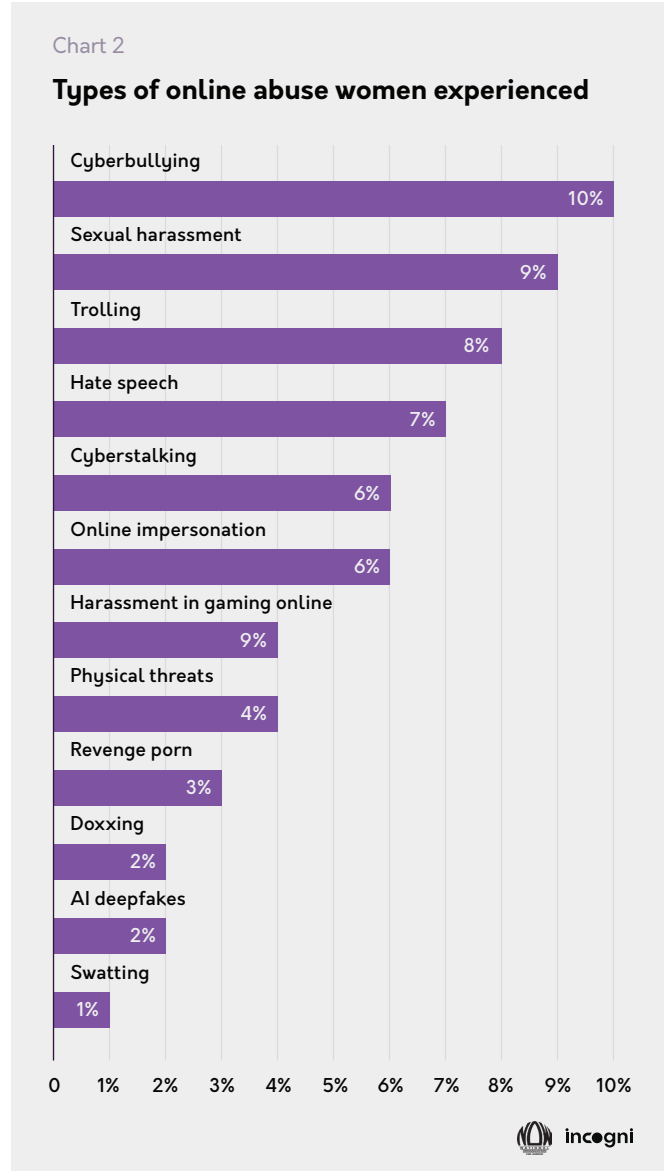


According to the survey, almost 1 in 4 American women have experienced online abuse. Among those, the most frequent type of online abuse reported was cyberbullying (10%), followed by sexual harassment (9%) and trolling (8%).

The respondents also reported having experienced hate speech (7%), cyberstalking (6%), and online impersonation (6%) relatively often.

Less common were harassment in gaming (4%), physical threats (4%), revenge porn (3%), doxxing (2%), AI deepfakes (2%), and swatting (1%). However, while low, these figures aren't insignificant. AI deepfakes are a relatively new technology, having only become common in the last few years, yet already affect 2% of women.

What is especially worrying is the relatively high occurrence of sexually-motivated online abuse, such as sexual harassment, revenge porn, and, again, AI deepfakes, that in the majority apply only to women¹.



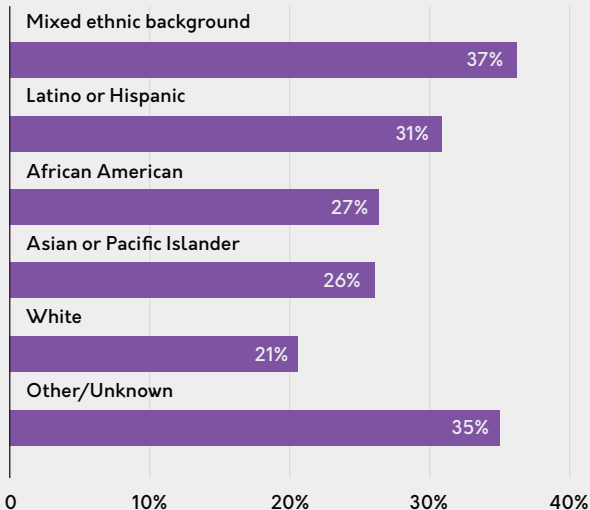
Definitions—types of online abuse

Abuse	Definition	Table 1
Cyberbullying	Bullying or harassment through social media, messaging apps, or online forums	
Doxxing	Public release of private information about an individual without their consent	
Swatting	A false report to emergency services to prompt a SWAT team response at the target's location	
Trolling	Posting offensive or inflammatory comments to provoke reactions and disrupt discussions	
Online impersonation	Creating fake profiles or accounts to impersonate and defame an individual	
Hate speech	Offensive views against a particular race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation group	
Sexual harassment	Unwanted and inappropriate sexual comments	
Cyberstalking	Persistent and unwanted attention, monitoring, or contact online	
Revenge “porn” (media-based sexual abuse)	Sharing intimate images or videos of an individual without their consent	
Harassment in online gaming	Harassment, bullying while playing online games	
Physical threats	Death threats, sexual threats	
AI deepfakes	Content depicting real or non-existent people in unfavorable ways that's created with the help of artificial intelligence tools	

2.2. Ethnicity

Chart 3

Women who have experienced online abuse, by race



Among survey respondents, women of color were affected by online abuse the most, with women from mixed ethnic backgrounds experiencing the highest rates of online abuse at 37%. Latina or Hispanic women also experienced high rates of online abuse at 31%. This was followed closely by African American women (27%) and Asian or Pacific Islander women (26%).

The White women in our survey experienced the lowest rates, though still significantly high with more than 1 in 5 (21%) reporting online abuse.

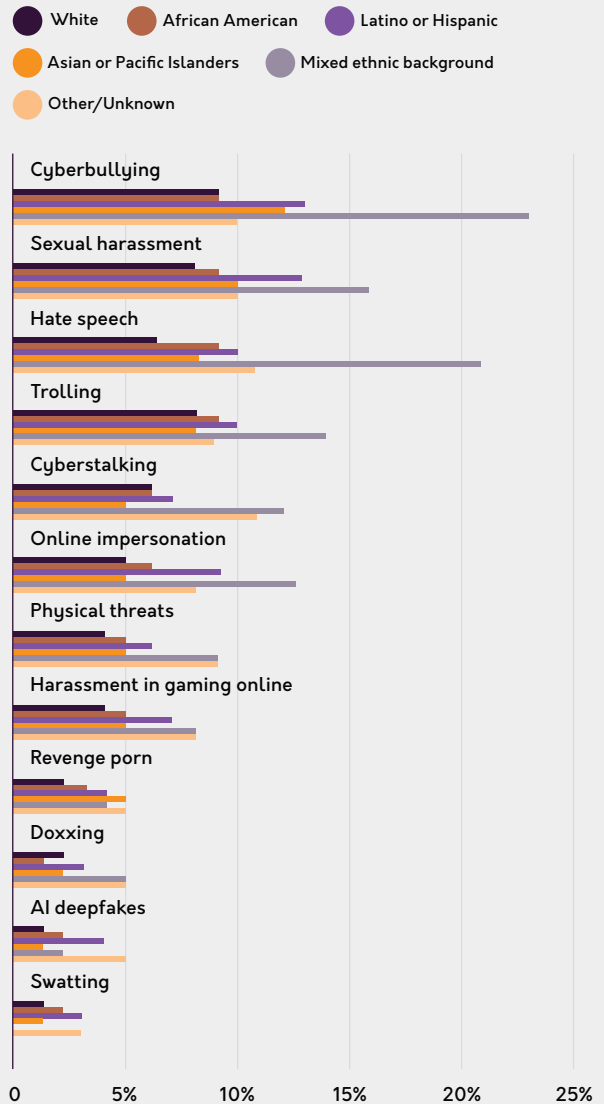
Another category that stood out statistically was women from other or unknown ethnic backgrounds. This category included less common ethnic minorities such as Hawaiian and Native American women. Collectively, this group experienced the second highest rate of online abuse, with more than 1 in 3 women (35%) from this category having experienced some form of it.

Significant patterns also emerged when looking at the types of online harassment women from different ethnic backgrounds experienced.

Compared to other types of online abuse, women from most ethnic backgrounds, including African American, Latina or Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and mixed ethnic backgrounds, all reported experiencing cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and hate speech most frequently, though to varying degrees:

Chart 4

Types of online abuse women have experienced, by race



Answers to "What kind of online abuse or harassment have you experienced personally?" Multiple choice. Respondents could select multiple answers.



- African American – cyberbullying (9%), sexual harassment (9%), and hate speech (9%)
- Latina or Hispanic – cyberbullying (13%), sexual harassment (13%), and hate speech (10%)
- Asian or Pacific Islander – cyberbullying (12%), sexual harassment (10%), and hate speech (8%)
- Mixed – cyberbullying (23%), hate speech (21%), and sexual harassment (16%).

White women experienced similar types of online harassment most frequently. However, they experienced significantly lower levels of hate speech. Compared to other types of abuse, White women reported

cyberbullying (9%), sexual harassment (8%), and trolling (8%) most often.

Women from other or unknown ethnic backgrounds also deviated slightly from the rest, reporting hate speech (11%) and cyberstalking (11%) the most frequently, compared to other forms of online abuse.

When looking at variations in the responses of women from different ethnic backgrounds within each category, women of mixed ethnic backgrounds experienced significantly higher rates of abuse in most categories, especially cyberbullying, hate speech, trolling, and online impersonation.

Latina or Hispanic women also experienced elevated rates compared to women from most other ethnic backgrounds, especially in cyberbullying, sexual harassment, and online impersonation.

Women from other or unknown ethnic backgrounds also collectively experienced high rates of online abuse, especially in cyberstalking, physical threats, doxxing, and AI deepfakes.

When it comes to sexually-motivated online abuse, sexual harassment stands out in each of the ethnic groups, with women with mixed racial backgrounds and Latina or Hispanic women being affected the most. Latina and Hispanic women and women with other or unknown ethnic backgrounds reported relatively often revenge porn and AI deepfakes relatively often, with 4% and 5% making such claims, respectively in both cases.

2.3. Age

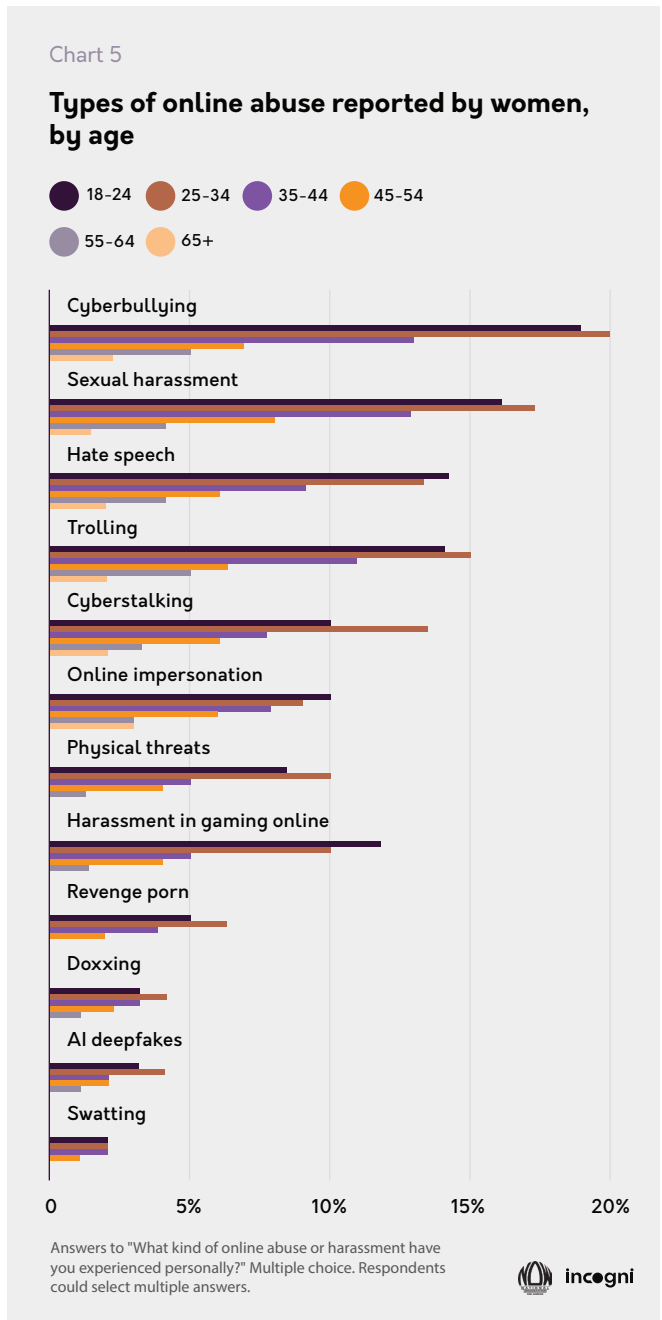
Women aged between 18 and 24 also showed high rates compared to other age groups, with 12% experiencing harassment in online gaming, compared to 10% of the age group with the second highest rates (25 – 34). 14% of them also experienced hate speech, compared to 13% of women with the second highest rates in this category (25 – 34).

Also, younger women were experiencing visibly more often sexually-motivated online abuse, with sexual harassment occurring most frequently among women aged 25-34 (17%), 18-24 (16%), and 35-44 (13%), and revenge porn reported among 6%, 5%, and 4% respectively. The occurrence of AI deepfakes stood out among women aged 25-34 (4%).

Overall, the percentage of women who report most types of online abuse goes down with each age group. This is most readily exemplified by the percentage of women who experienced hate speech:

- 14% of women aged 18 – 24

- 6% of women aged 45 – 54
- 4% of women aged 55 – 64
- 2% of women aged 65 years and older.



- 13% of women aged 25 – 34
- 9% of women aged 35 – 44

Swatting appears to deviate from this, with women from 18 – 44 experiencing the same rates, and women 55+ experiencing none.

This pattern roughly correlates with how much time individuals generally spend online, with studies showing that younger age groups spend significantly more time online compared to older groups.⁴ Individuals who spend more time online have more opportunities to be exposed to online harassment and are

2.4. Location

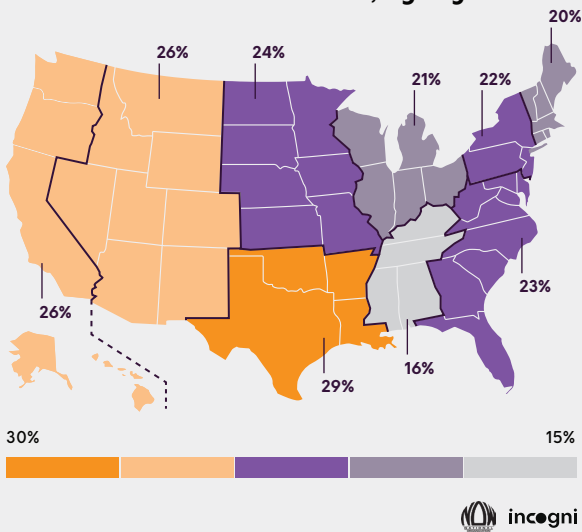
Table 2

Women who reported suffering online abuse or harassment across the US, by state

State	Women that experienced abuse online	State	Women that experienced abuse online
Washington	34%	Illinois	24%
Nevada	30%	Oklahoma	24%
Louisiana	30%	Ohio	23%
Texas	30%	Georgia	23%
Utah	28%	Florida	23%
Oregon	27%	North Carolina	20%
Missouri	26%	Wisconsin	20%
Colorado	25%	Massachusetts	20%
Pennsylvania	25%	Maryland	19%
Arkansas	25%	Connecticut	19%
Virginia	25%	Michigan	19%
California	25%	Kentucky	18%
South Carolina	24%	Indiana	18%
New York	24%	Tennessee	14%
Arizona	24%	New Jersey	10%

Map 1

Women who reported suffering online abuse or harassment across the US, by region



Women from Washington state experienced the highest rates of online abuse with more than 1 in 3 reporting having dealt with some form of online harassment. Nevada, Louisiana, and Texas were tied for the second-highest rates with 30% of women from each state claiming they've experienced online abuse.

Women from the West South Central states, also known as South Central states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas) collectively reported having experienced online abuse at the highest rates (29%)

compared to the national rate (23%) and compared to other regions.

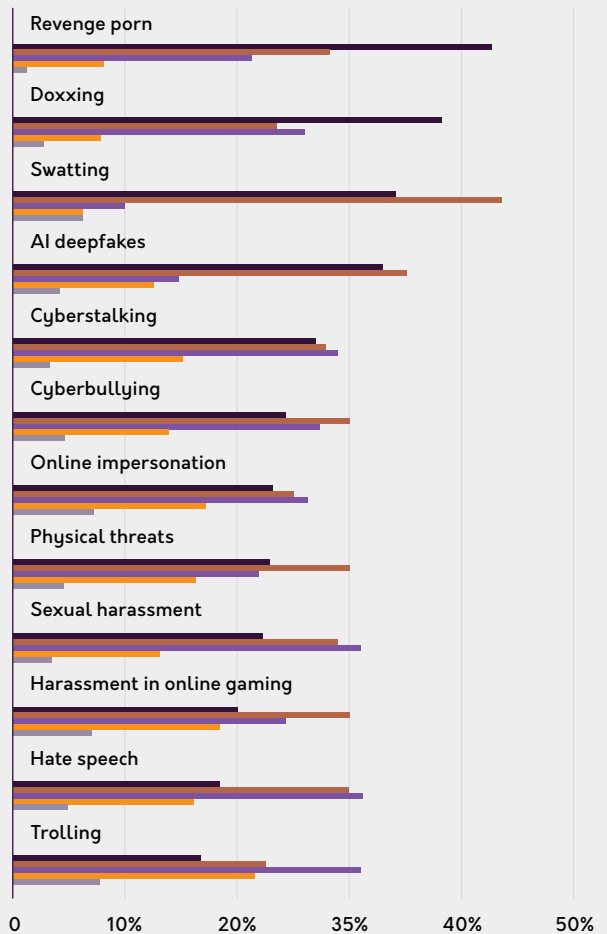
Interestingly, all four of these states are included in the National Organization for Women's list of the 15 worst states for women, based on factors such as homicide rates, intimate partner violence, wage gaps, and access to reproductive healthcare.⁵ While these factors are not covered by our study, there may be some correlation with the occurrence of online harassment that women from these states face.

2.5. Online harassment and its impact on women's lives

Chart 6

How different types of online abuse have affected women

Severely (dark purple), Significantly (orange), Moderately (purple), Slightly (light orange), Not at all (lightest purple)



Answers only by those who indicated having experienced some form of online abuse or harassment. For each form experienced, Respondents had to select one severity level.

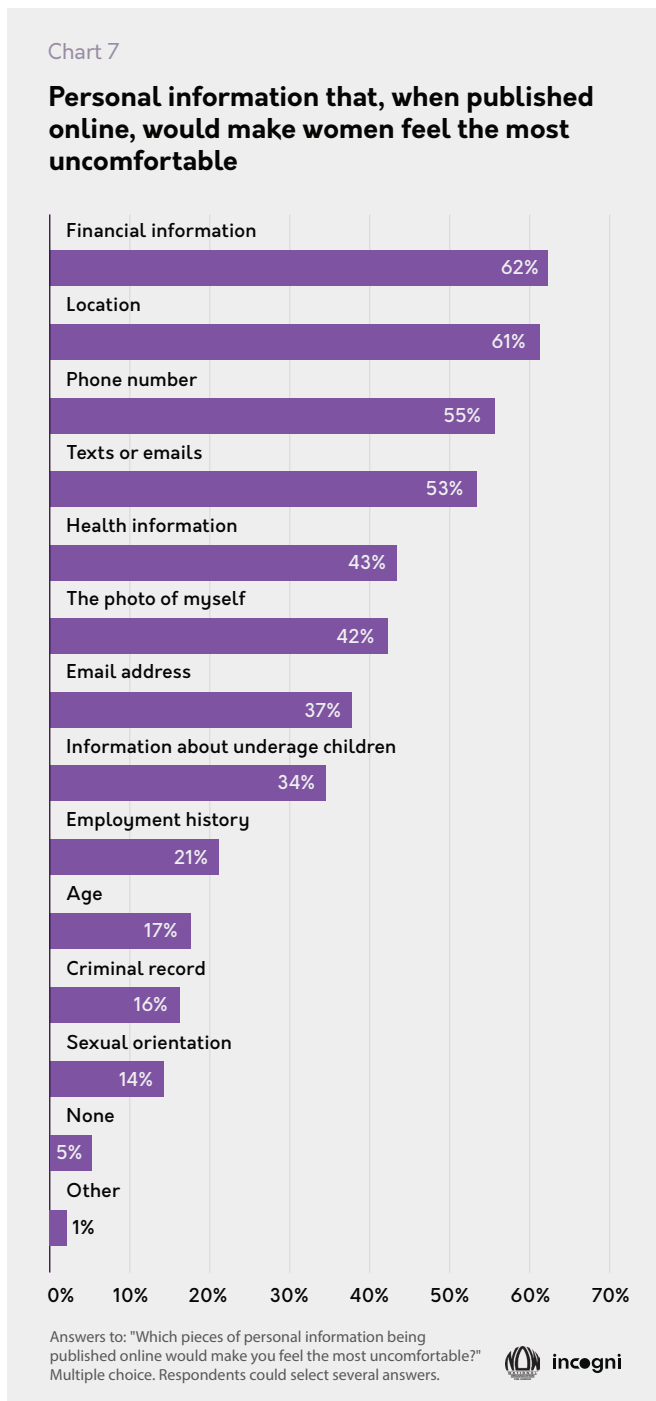


For most types of online harassment, roughly 50% of respondents claimed they were affected either severely or significantly. More severe forms of online harassment were also significant among respondents, with 78% claiming they were severely or significantly affected by swatting, 70% claiming they were severely or significantly affected by revenge porn, and 68% claiming they were severely or significantly affected by AI deepfakes.

Looking only at responses indicating that respondents were severely affected, the most damaging type of cybercrime that has severely affected the lives of victims is revenge porn, followed by doxxing and swatting.

Other types of crime that were indicated as extremely harmful were AI deepfakes, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking.

2.6. Personal data exposure and its role in cybercrimes



When asked about different types of personal information being published online, 62% of respondents indicated that financial information would make them the most uncomfortable, while 61% indicated location information. Many of the women surveyed also expressed concerns about their phone numbers (55%), texts and emails (53%), and health information (43%) being exposed online.

Conversely, age (17%), criminal records (16%), and sexual orientation (14%) were among the least concerning pieces of personal information.

Only 5% of the women surveyed claimed there was no information that would make them uncomfortable if published online.

Which piece of information, if published online, would make respondents most uncomfortable varied significantly between age groups.

The youngest age group (18 – 24) claimed they would be most uncomfortable if their location information was made available online, with 63% indicating this answer. This was followed by texts or emails (54%) and financial information (51%).

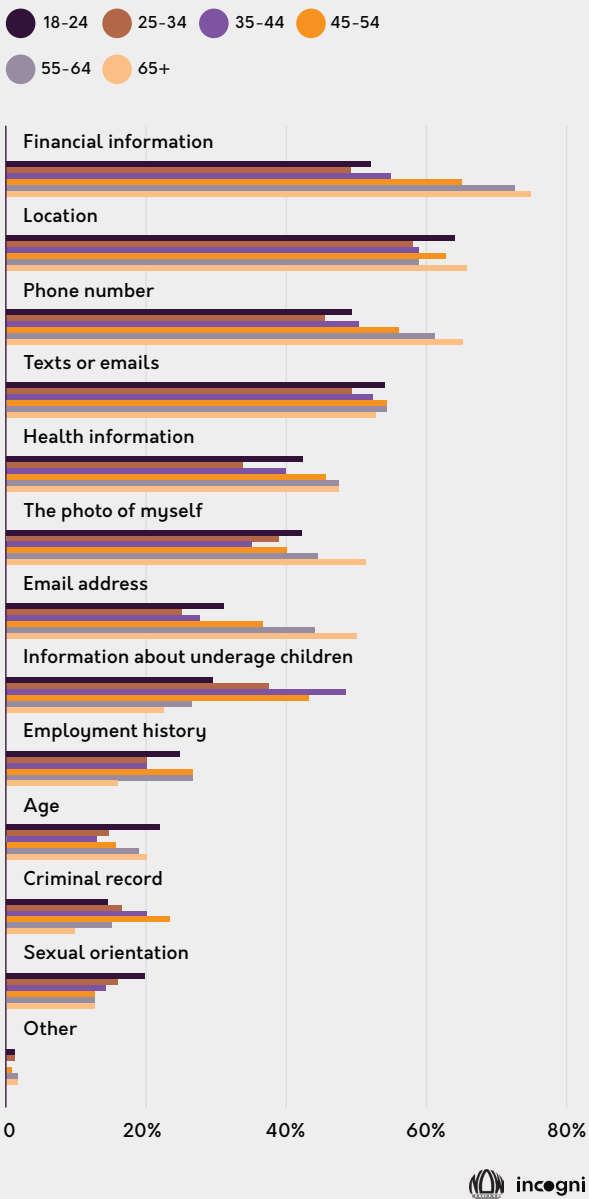
The answers were similar for women aged 25 – 34, with 58% claiming location, 50% texts or emails, and 49% financial information would make them the most uncomfortable if published online.

Women over the age of 65 expressed the most concern over their financial information, with 74% agreeing this would make them the most uncomfortable. This was followed by location (65%) and phone numbers (64%).

Older women expressed more concern than younger women for most types of information. However, the inverse was true for some types of data, including sexual orientation, which would make 20% of women between ages 18 – 24 most uncomfortable, compared to only 13% of women 45 or older.

Chart 8

Personal information that, when published online, would make women feel the most uncomfortable, by age group



How personal data might facilitate cybercrimes

The survey also explored the potential connection between exposed personal data and cybercrime. Most respondents (85%) stated they think hackers use personal information to target victims.

When it came to personal experience, more than 1 in 4 (29%) of the women surveyed stated they have been negatively affected by their personal information being available online and more than 1 in 8 (13%) stated it resulted in cybercrime, highlighting the role

exposed personal information plays in this issue.

Most women (69%) also agree that the law doesn't sufficiently protect victims of cybercrime.

Chart 9

Do you think that cybercriminals or hackers use the information available online to choose potential victims?

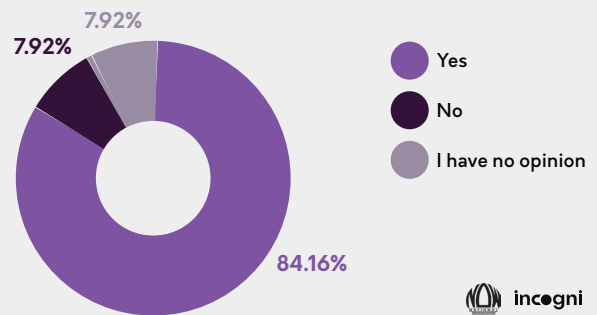


Chart 10

Did you ever become a victim of cybercrime as a result of having personal data available online?

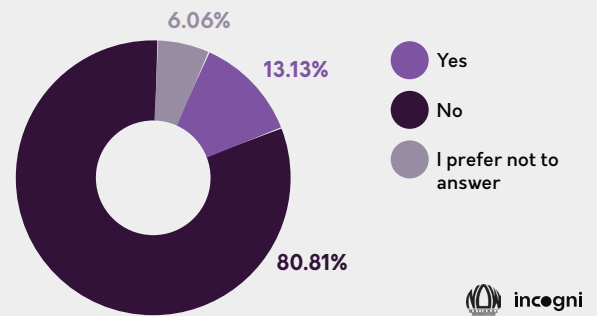


Chart 11

Were you negatively affected in any way by having your personal information available online?

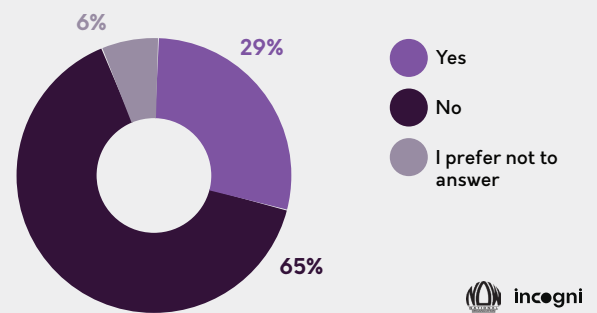
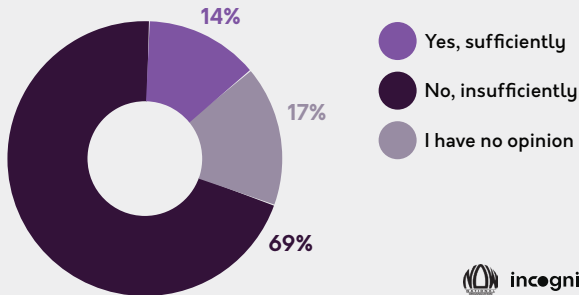


Chart 12

Do you think the law sufficiently protects victims of cybercrime?



Women from other or unknown ethnic backgrounds also collectively reported experiencing negative effects at high rates (41%).

Chart 14

Have you ever tried to get your personal data removed from a service or a website?

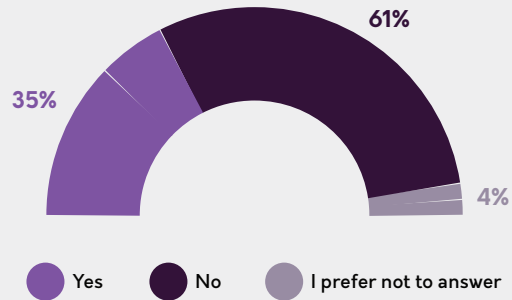
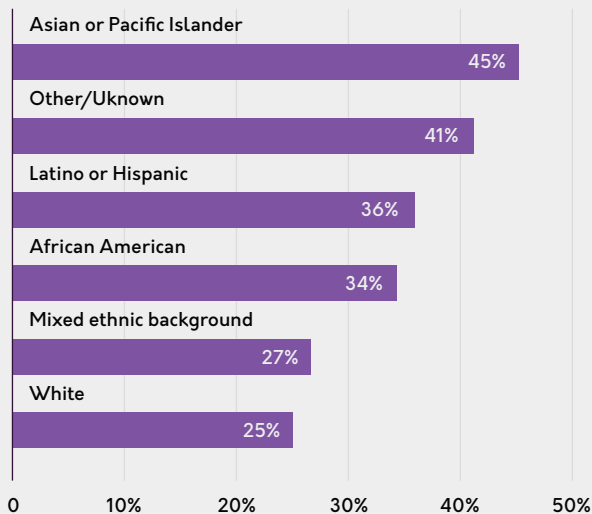


Chart 13

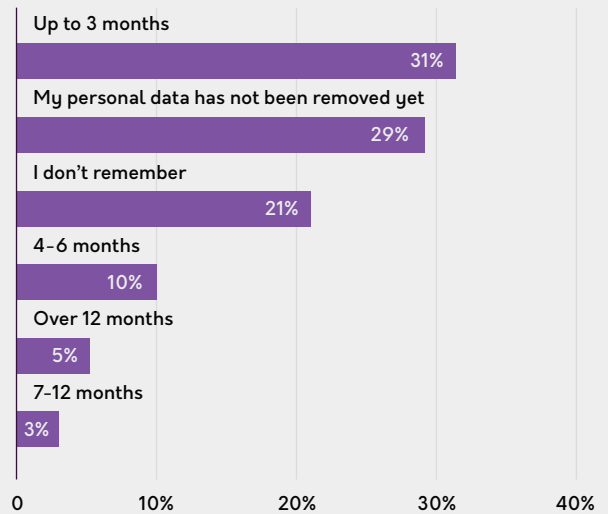
Women who have been negatively affected by having their personal information available online



Answers to "Were you negatively affected in any way by having your personal information available online?" Multiple choice. Respondents could select multiple answers.

Chart 15

If so, how long did it take for your personal data to be removed the last time you requested data removal?



There was significant variation between women from different ethnic backgrounds in whether they were negatively affected by having their personal information available online.

Asians or Pacific Islanders were most affected by exposed personal data, with nearly half (45%) of them reporting they have been negatively affected, almost double the percentage of White women (25%).

More than 1 in 3 Latina or Hispanic women stated they were negatively affected by the availability of their personal information online, followed closely by African American women (34%) and women from mixed ethnic backgrounds (27%).

More than 1 in 3 (35%) of the surveyed women have tried to remove their data from a service provider or website.

Of those, 31% stated their data was removed within 3 months, 10% stated it took 4 – 6 months, 3% stated it took 7 – 12 months, and 5% stated it took more than a year.

Many of the women (29%) are still waiting for their

data to be removed and 21% don't remember how long the process took. This highlights the issue of removing personal data and the low compliance and responsiveness of these service providers and websites.

3. Discussion

3.1. The intersection of race and online harassment

This study highlights significant disparities among women from different ethnic backgrounds, suggesting broader social patterns may be contributing to digital harassment.

Women of color, particularly mixed, Latina or Hispanic, and African American women, experienced the highest rates of online abuse overall, as well as within most categories of online harassment, including sexually-motivated types of abuse.

This roughly aligns with other studies examining the violence women from different ethnic backgrounds face. Women from many marginalized groups experience rates of intimate partner violence that are between 30% and 50% higher than other ethnic groups, for example.⁶ African American and Hispanic women also experience higher rates of chronic and persistent victimization compared to other races.⁷

3.2. Younger women are at higher risk

Online harassment also seems to affect women from certain age groups disproportionately, with those aged 18 – 34 reporting the highest rates of online abuse.

This trend is likely influenced by their greater online presence and engagement with digital platforms. However, previous InCogni research suggests that younger demographics are generally less concerned about data privacy and that there's a growing acceptance of routine data sharing in digital life, raising important questions about the role of digital literacy and online safety education.⁸

While younger women are more likely to be technologically adept, they may also have a lower perception of risk, leaving them more vulnerable to threats. Strengthening public awareness campaigns focused on data security and digital self-defense could help mitigate some of the risks associated with online abuse.

3.3. Geographic disparities

The prevalence of digital abuse also varies significantly by region. While the reason for these differences is uncertain, certain factors such as political attitudes toward gender equality, the presence (or absence) of legal protections, and broader social trends affecting women's safety likely play a role.

Women in the West South Central states—Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas—collectively report the highest rates of online harassment compared to other regions. The exact reasons for this are outside the scope of our research, however, it's likely due to a combination of factors that may also influence other markers for the quality of life of women. All four states in this region are also on NOW's list of the 15 worst states for women, according to factors such as intimate partner violence, the wage gap, and access to reproductive healthcare.⁵

3.4. The societal impact of online harassment

Beyond individual victims, online harassment has influenced broader societal dynamics. Many forms of digital abuse, such as AI-generated deepfakes and targeted harassment campaigns have become powerful tools in silencing women and reinforcing gendered power imbalances in male-dominated fields.

AI-generated deepfakes are already being used to discredit and intimidate women in leadership roles, with 1 in 6 active congresswomen having fallen victim to this type of abuse, potentially deterring their participation in public life and influence on government policy.¹

Similar tactics have also been observed in other spaces. Sustained online harassment has been highly effective in pushing women out of online gaming spaces, for example. One of the most vocal advocates for inclusivity in

gaming recently shut down her organization and harassment hotline due to the ongoing strain on her mental health after nearly a decade of harassment.⁹

3.5. Legal gaps and the need for stronger protections

Survey respondents overwhelmingly expressed dissatisfaction with the level of protection US laws are able to provide victims of online harassment. Indeed, despite the growing prevalence of online abuse, the US legal system has yet to fully address many of the threats women face in digital spaces.

Three major gaps in federal legislation leave women particularly vulnerable:

- 1. The lack of a federal data privacy law** – The absence of a comprehensive federal data privacy law means that personal information, including details like addresses and phone numbers, is widely available. While some states have data privacy laws in place, enforcement remains inconsistent, which allows data brokers to continue selling personal data and people search sites to publish it online, providing nearly unrestricted access.
- 2. No federal anti-doxxing law** – Although doxxing (the act of publishing private information to encourage harassment) is widely recognized as a form of digital abuse, it still is not explicitly illegal in many states. Even in states where doxxing is illegal, the fact of personal data being published is often not enough. Victims must also be able to prove it was done with malicious intent.
- 3. Unclear legal status of AI deepfakes** – Existing privacy and defamation laws do not adequately cover AI-generated deepfakes. While some states have introduced legislation that restricts deepfake pornography, broader protections against AI-based digital impersonation are still absent at the federal level.

As digital spaces continue to evolve, ensuring that they remain safe and accessible for all users remains a complex, ongoing challenge. It requires a multifaceted approach that includes legislative action that keeps up with technological advancements, enforcing platform accountability, and raising public awareness.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questions

1. Have you ever heard about the following forms of online aggression and abuse?
 - Cyberbullying: bullying or harassment through social media, messaging apps, or online forums
 - Doxxing: public release of private information about an individual without their consent
 - Swatting: a false report to emergency services to prompt a SWAT team response at the target's location
 - Trolling: posting offensive or inflammatory comments to provoke reactions and disrupt discussions
 - Online impersonation: creating fake profiles or accounts to impersonate and defame an individual
 - Hate speech: offensive views against a particular race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation group
 - Sexual harassment: unwanted and inappropriate sexual comments
 - Cyberstalking: persistent and unwanted attention, monitoring, or contact online
 - Revenge porn: sharing intimate images or videos of an individual without their consent
 - Harassment in online gaming: harassment, bullying while playing online games
 - Physical threats: death threats, sexual threats
 - AI deepfakes: content depicting real or non-existent people in unfavorable ways that is created with the help of artificial intelligence tools
2. Have you ever personally suffered from online abuse?
3. What kind of online abuse or harassment have you experienced personally? [Responses as in Question 1.]
4. % from those who experienced the mentioned type of abuse
How have the following forms of online abuse that you experienced affected your life? [Responses as in Question 1.]
 - Severely
 - Significantly
 - Moderately
 - Slightly
 - Not at all
5. Which pieces of personal information being published online would make you feel the most uncomfortable?
 - My age
 - My sexual orientation
 - My location
 - My phone number
 - My email address
 - My financial information
 - My criminal record
 - A photo of myself
 - Information about my underage children
 - My health information
 - My employment history
 - My texts or emails Other
6. Do you think that criminals or hackers use the information available online to choose potential victims of cybercrimes?
7. Were you negatively affected in any way by having your personal information available online?

8. Did you ever become a victim of cybercrime as a result of having personal data available online?
9. Do you think the law sufficiently protects the victims of cybercrime?
10. Have you ever tried to get your personal data removed from any service?
11. How long did it take you to get your personal data removed the last time you requested it?
 - My personal data has not been removed yet
 - Up to 3 months
 - 4-6 months
 - 7-12 months
 - Over 12 months

Sources

1. Ali, Amanda. "AI-Generated Deepfakes Are Targeting Women in Congress." The 19th, December. <https://19thnews.org/2024/12/ai-sexually-explicit-deepfakes-target-women-congress/>.
2. Wilson, Abby. "What Was Gamergate – and Why Are We Still Talking About It?" The Week, August 5, 2024. <https://theweek.com/culture-life/what-was-gamergate-and-why-are-we-still-talking-about-it>.
3. Incogni. "The Startling Connection Between Dating Apps and Online Harassment – Users Almost Twice as Likely to Be Victims." Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://blog.incogni.com/dating-apps-online-harassment-research/>.
4. Statista. "Daily Time Spent Online By Users Worldwide Q3 2024, by Age and Gender." Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1378510/daily-time-spent-online-worldwide-by-age-and-gender/>.
5. National Organization for Women (NOW). "The Fifteen Worst States for Women to Live In – By the Numbers." Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://now.org/blog/the-fifteen-worst-states-for-women-to-live-in-by-the-numbers/>.
6. T, Buddy. "How Domestic Violence Varies by Ethnicity." Verywell Mind, October 25, 2023. <https://www.verywellmind.com/domestic-violence-varies-by-ethnicity-62648>.
7. Semenza, Daniel K., Alexander Testa and Dylan B. Jackson, "Intersectional Differences in Serious Violent Victimization Trajectories Across the Life Course." Preventive Medicine Reports 26, April (2022). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335522000390>.
8. Incogni. "Almost Half of Americans Want to Remove Personal Data from the Web." Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://blog.incogni.com/almost-half-of-americans-want-to-remove-personal-data-from-the-web/>.
9. Feminist Frequency. "Shutting Down Feminist Frequency." Last modified August 1, 2023. <https://feministfrequency.com/2023/08/01/shutting-down-feminist-frequency/>.