



Consultation Response
Ministry of Justice Consultation on Revenge Porn

September 2014

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imkaan



**Girls
Against
Gangs
Project**

About Us: The MsUnderstood Programme aims to improve local and national responses to young people's experiences of gender inequality. The MsUnderstood Partnership is a three year partnership between the [University of Bedfordshire](#), [Imkaan](#) and the Girls Against Gangs Project, to improve responses to peer-on-peer abuse in young people's relationships and peer groups through:

- Intensive support of local areas to review and improve their strategic and operational response to peer-on-peer abuse
- A national assessment of provision for boys and young men who perpetrate gender-based violence
- Paid internships and volunteer placements for young people to influence policy and service development locally and nationally

[The MsUnderstood Programme](#) is founded and headed by [Carlene Firmin MBE](#), Research Fellow at the University of Bedfordshire

The MsUnderstood Partnership welcomes the Ministry of Justice consultation on this important issue, which is particularly relevant to young people's relationships and peer networks. While it is crucial to ensure that all cases involving this form of abuse are taken seriously and responded to appropriately, there are several points to address before an offence can be introduced in law.

1. Posting an image online without the consent of the person/people depicted is a form of harassment and abuse. The term 'revenge porn' removes the wider context of abuse, shifting attention away from the motivations and actions of the perpetrator, onto the actions of the victim. For example:
 - The term does not reflect that while an image may have been produced within a sexual context, sexual activity may not have been consensual.
 - Posting the image(s) online is much more likely to have been done to bully, control and harass the victim, rather than for pornographic purposes.
 - The term also suggests that the victim has behaved in some way that has instigated 'revenge'.

For these reasons, the current term is potentially harmful and could contribute to victim blaming attitudes. It is important that this issue is reframed to ensure that it is recognised and responded to as a form of abuse.

2. The MsUnderstood Partnership has wider concerns about the general safety of young women in online spaces. Existing laws on harassment and abuse must be implemented effectively and with a specific approach to young people, to ensure that online abuse is taken seriously whilst also recognising the specific context and power dynamics at play within young people's relationships and peer networks. This should include mandatory and on-going police training and teacher training to equip relevant professionals to respond appropriately to online abuse. This should also include online safety classes in schools.
3. The introduction of a new offence is not enough on its own to send a message that this issue – and all forms of violence and abuse – are unacceptable. Government commitment is required to drive a cultural change in attitudes that facilitate and justify abuse and victim blaming. This should start with the introduction of compulsory Sex and Relationships Education as part of the national curriculum, including sessions on respectful relationships, consent and gender identity. If a new offence is introduced, the government must also ensure that the offence is implemented effectively, alongside wider campaigns to raise awareness and shift public perceptions around abuse, consent and victim blaming. If the introduction of a new offence is to apply to young people, an approach must be taken which

recognises the specific context of young people's relationships and peer networks and responds appropriately. As such, the design and implementation of the offence must be developed in consultation with children and young people's services and experts.

4. We would agree with the introduction of a specific offence to tackle this form of abuse, given the limitations of existing law outlined in the recent [briefing by Professor Clare McGlynn and Professor Erika Rackley](#) (University of Durham, 2014). We fully endorse this briefing and encourage the Ministry of Justice to consider all issues raised in the briefing, when coming to a decision on the introduction of a specific offence.

To discuss anything from this consultation response in further detail please contact Lia Latchford, Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator, at lia@msunderstood.org.uk.