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# Online Violence Against Women in the Nordic Countries

Online

Violence

Against

Women in

the Nordic

Countries





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# I. INTRODUCTION

# Framework of the Project

This report consists of the work of three NGOs in Denmark, Iceland and Norway, Kvenréttindafélag Íslands, Kvinderådet and KUN. Each country conducted a study of survivors' experience of online violence and their search for protection from and justice for that violence, as well as interviewing police and legal actors who have worked with cases of online violence.

In this introductory chapter, we begin by placing our study in an international context, as well as giving an overview of Nordic studies that have been conducted on online violence. We then explain the aims and focus of our study and the methodology used during the research. We finally summarize the three country reports, analyze them, and map out several concrete propositions for change.

The main section of the report are the country reports from Denmark, Iceland and Norway. There are differences between these three reports, due to different situations in each country. Norway, for example, has had a government strategy on dealing with online violence for some time now, and the legal framework around these cases is further developed than in Iceland and Denmark. The Icelandic report, unlike the reports from Denmark and Norway, does not include a summary of each case. This is done for the protection of the participants, due to the small population of Iceland.

*Appended to the end of this report are the interview guides used during interviews.*

# International

# Context

The rise of online violence cases on a global scale has sparked research on the phenomenon, its scope and effect. This report is our addition to this important conversation.

Rapid changes in technology and the rise of social media has created new means of communication... and new means to commit violence. The first smartphone was introduced only a decade ago, in 2007. Now, smart phones that can take high definition photographs are so ubiquitous, that they are in the hands of even small children in the Nordic countries. Facebook first launched thirteen years ago, in 2004, and in 2006, registration was opened for everyone. The vast majority of people in the Nordic countries are active on Facebook and other social media, 96% of young people (16-29 years old) in Iceland were active on social media in 2014, 96% of young people in Norway in 2016 and 95% of young people in Denmark in 2016 (*Eurostat – Data Explorer, n.d.*). With the rapid changes in the ways we communicate and easy access to new technologies, it is hardly surprising that we have had to face various problems in how we incorporate these technologies into our daily lives.



New technologies facilitate different forms of violence including harassment, stalking, blackmail, threats, identity theft, accessing or disseminating private data, child pornography, threats of sexual assault or rape, and altering and or uploading photos and videos without consent (Citron, 2014). All these forms of violence conducted using new technologies are part of a wider phenomenon often called “cyber violence” or “online violence”. There is no international consensus on exactly which forms of violence should be included in the definition of online violence. Indeed, the development of our understanding of online violence is connected to the development of the internet and other information and communication technologies, which are relatively new phenomena that are evolving fast.

One social problem which has been replicated online is misogyny and the hatred of women. Misogyny has moved online, says Danielle Keats Citron, as the internet has become a place where people can express misogyny with little personal cost (Citron, 2011). Research shows that women, regardless of social status, are subjected to forms of online violence to a greater extent than men. Indeed, they face misogynistic contents that make online spaces a hostile environment for them.

Online violence is a gendered issue. According to the European Commission, one in ten women has experienced sexual harassment or stalking through new technologies (*Zero Tolerance of Violence Against Women – European Commission, 2016*). A 2014 survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights showed that 4% of 42.000 European women interviewed had experienced cyberstalking in the 12 months before the survey, while 11% reported having experienced cyber-harassment through e-mails, text messages or social networking sites (*Violence Against Women; an EU-Wide Survey, 2014*).

Online harassment can and has been used to drive women and women’s rights activists offline. Some examples of this are the online harassment campaigns waged against activist Carolina Criado-Perez and the game developer Zoe Quinn.

In 2013, the feminist activist and writer Carolina Criado-Perez campaigned successfully to convince the Bank of England to make Jane Austen the new face of 10 pounds note. Following the success of her campaign, Criado-Perez received online threats of violence and death that forced her to close her Twitter page (Topping, 2014).

Another example of online harassment against activists is the so-called Gamergate controversy, a sustained online harassment campaign that targeted several women in the video game industry. The first target of this campaign was the game developer Zoe Quinn. In 2014, Quinn became the recipient of extensive misogynistic harassment on Twitter after a former boyfriend of hers wrote a lengthy blog post, alleging she had sex with a journalist in exchange for a favorable coverage of her video game. Tweets at Quinn were characterized by the use of the hashtag #Gamergate and escalated into anonymous threats so severe that Quinn feared for her life and had to flee her home (Dewey, 2016). People who spoke out in support of Quinn were also targeted by this campaign, with heavy consequences to their personal and working life (Tognotti, 2014).

Online violence has a severe impacts on its survivors, and changes the way that they engage with the world and participate in democratic conversations. Violence or threats of violence discourage people from using the internet, that is, targets of online violence shut down their blogs and social network profiles (Citron, 2011). Online violence also affects their lives offline. People targeted by harassment and threats change their daily routines or withdraw from social activities, with some victims of online violence eventually committing suicide (Penney, 2016; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017).

As a result of online violence, women are unable to fulfil their potential as active citizens (Citron, 2011), an important safeguard for the social processes of democracy (Citron & Franks, 2014). In a recent study, 27% of participants stated they self-censor their online posting out of fear of online harassment, and if we look at just women 15–29 years old, 41% of them self-censor to avoid online harassment. This research also found that 26% of survivors of online violence or harassment changed their use of the internet, either quit social media, stopped using

smart phones, or completely stopped using the internet altogether (“Online Harassment, Digital Abuse, and Cyberstalking in America”, 2016). Looking at such statistics in a historical context, Rachel Hill argues that online violence against women can be seen as a “depressing reflection of hostility directed towards women”, used to silence women’s voices (Hill, 2015, p. 119).

In the report *Take Back the Tech!*, data concerning violence against women online was collected using the Association for Progressive Communications’ (APC) online mapping tool. The data was analyzed for the period of 2012–2014, when 1126 cases were reported. A majority of those cases were reported to authorities, or 69% of the cases, of which less than half (41%) were investigated. The authors of the report suggest a legal disconnect between online violence and authorities such as the police; that survivors are either not taken seriously enough by the police or that sufficient policy environment is lacking (“Analysis of incidents reported on the *Take Back the Tech!*”, 2015).

Online sexual violence, often referred in a public discourse as “revenge porn”, can be defined as “sexually explicit images, shared publicly online without the subject’s consent” (Hill, 2015). The term “revenge porn” is, however, a problematic one, because it is not always revenge which is the drive behind the act of sharing of those images. The term can refer to a variety of scenarios, such as images being obtained by hacking, images being captured without the person’s knowledge, or as the documentation of sexual assault (Hill, 2015). With such wide variation in circumstances and claims that the term is inherently misleading, there has been a criticism of the term, resulting in requests for a different terminology, such as “non-consensual pornography” or NCP (Bjarnadóttir, 2016).

Critics argue that this kind of non-consensual creation and distribution of sexual images “has largely been framed in public discourse as a problem of user naiveté, rather than one of gender-based violence” (Henry & Powell, 2015, p. 104), which can result in victim blaming, as if women fail to somehow take precautions and are responsible for their online sexual assault, with survivors of NCP being blamed by the media and online communities (Bates, 2017).

Rachel Hill states that NCP is just one form of cyber misogyny, where the sole purpose is to humiliate, intimidate, silence and degrade women (2015). When viewed from a feminist perspective “NCP can be considered as an online example of gendered hatred, harassment and abuse” (Hill, 2015). NCP is about asserting control over women and disrespect for women’s autonomy. There seems to be increased acknowledgement from women’s organizations, police, legal actors and the community that “email, the internet and mobile phone technologies are being used as a tool to harass, intimidate, humiliate, coerce and blackmail women” (Henry & Powell, 2015, 115). Along with this identification, studies have been conducted on survivors’ experience of NCP, which show that survivors of online sexual violence suffer from a number of mental health issues following their assault. They have trouble trusting, show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder and suffer from anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. These findings reveal the seriousness of online sexual violence, as well as the similarities between sexual assault and online sexual violence (Bates, 2016).

# Nordic

# Context

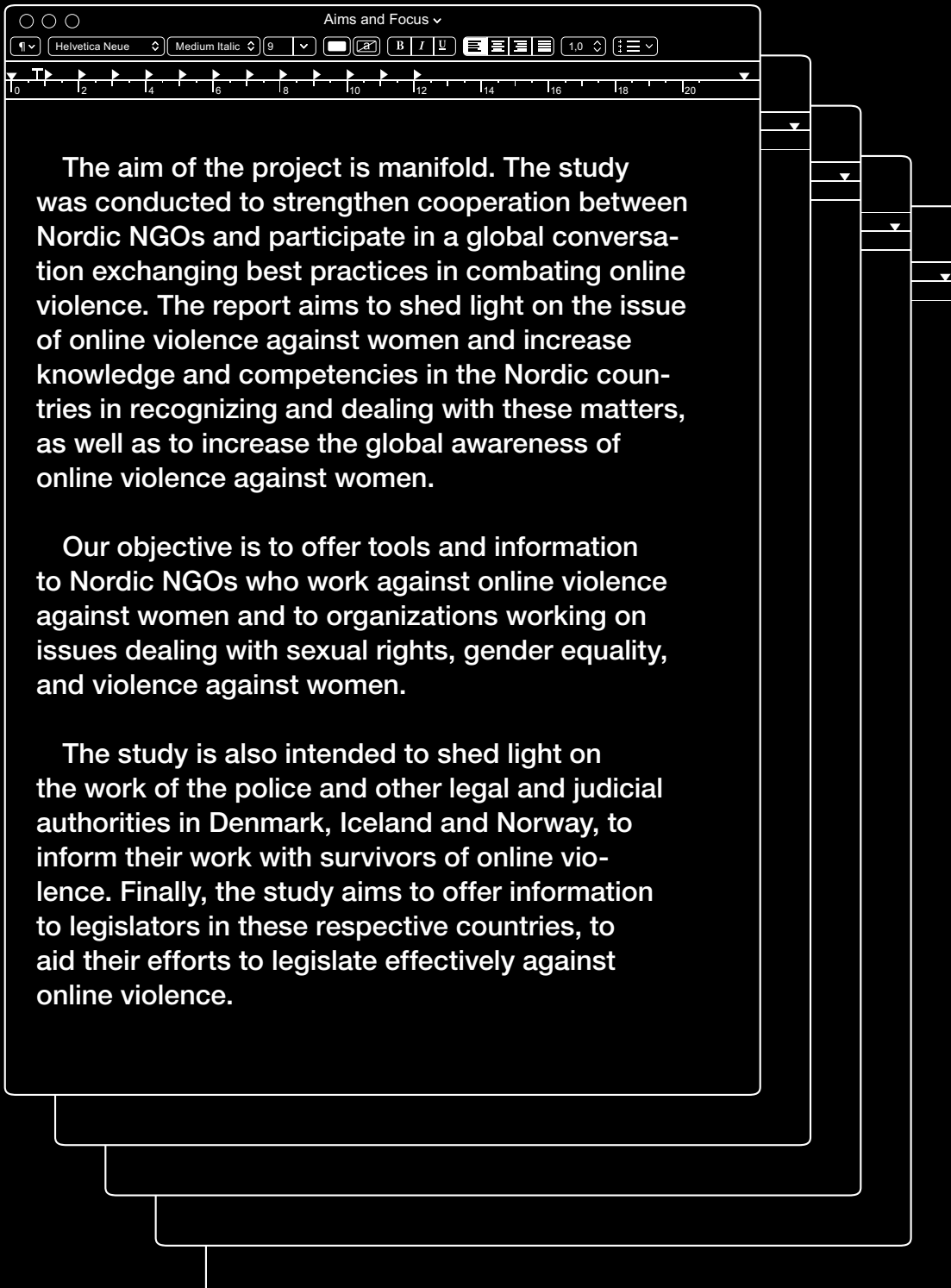
Few studies on online violence have been done in Iceland, but public interest is growing as indicated in the several student dissertations that have been submitted at the country's universities in the past few years at the BA and MA level. One of these dissertations indicates just how widespread the problem of online sexual violence is in Iceland, Hildur Friðriksdóttir, an MA student in Social Science at the University of Akureyri, has studied websites posting non-consensual images of Icelandic girls.

Hildur focused her research on one particular website, a chat board which has an Icelandic section, and analyzed the first ten pages of the Icelandic forum. On these first ten pages she found 483 photographs: 148 of them were nude photos, 97% of which were of a female subject. 25 of the women in the photos were girls under the age of 18. The discussion on the chat board showed the normalization of sexual violence, the objectification of women and blatant misogyny (Friðriksdóttir, 2016).

Kvenréttindafélag Íslands issued a report written by Vigdís Fríða Þorvaldsdóttir, a young researcher, on the subject of non-consensual pornography and the legislation in Iceland, indicating that cases of non-consensual pornography have increased in Iceland. Focus groups of university students were conducted to gain insight into their views on non-consensual pornography, and the majority of the participants thought that sexting was a normal gesture and experienced a big generational gap in regard of views towards sexting. Participants also claimed that boys were more active in sending naked photos, but that it was mostly girls who were shamed by these pictures, and also that girls were more often subjected to non-consensual sharing of images (Þorvaldsdóttir, 2015).

Just as in Iceland, public interest in Denmark in online violence is on the rise. The documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet* from 2016 focuses particularly on online sexual violence (2016). The Danish National Institute of Human Rights published a report in 2017 focusing on hate speech in the online public debate (*Hadefulde ytringer i den offentlige online debat*). They collected comments from the Facebook pages of two news media, *DR Nyheder* and *TV 2 Nyhederne*. Their study shows that 15% of the comments are hate speech aimed at individuals or groups. Male commenters were responsible for 76% of the hateful comments. Areas of discussion that often draw hateful comments are religion and ethnicity, however, hate speech based on gender is more often targeted at women (Zuleta & Burkal, 2017).

# Aims and Focus



# Data and Methodology

This study presents data gathered from in-depth interviews with survivors of online violence in Denmark, Iceland and Norway, analyzing their experiences seeking justice. The target group of the study was “women who have sought justice for or protection from online violence within the legal system, such as by going to the police and/or seeking legal aid or advice.” No restrictions or guidelines were set for which kind of online violence these women had experienced. The only requirement for participation in the study was that they had at some point attempted to seek justice for or protection from the legal and/or judicial system.

The study also presents data gathered from interviews with representatives of the police and representatives of local legal aid centers about internal guidelines in dealing with online violence, any action plans, numbers of survivors seeking aid, and their experiences with dealing with survivors of online violence.

The method used in this study is a qualitative one, where the experience of participants is in focus. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted with survivors of online violence, with the focus on their experiences seeking justice for and protection from that violence (see Appendix I). Semi structured interviews are useful to study a phenomenon openly and allow participants to express their experience in their own words (Esterberg, 2001; Flick, 2014), and to explore the perceptions and understanding of things that participants have a personal stake in (Braun & Clarke, 2013), such as the experience of online violence.



# The Research Process

Three women were interviewed in Iceland. Two women were interviewed in Denmark, and they also used a survivor story from the documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet* (2016). The Norwegian contribution to this report are interviews conducted for an earlier study, *Erfaringer med digitale krenkelses i Norge* (Eggebo, Lindis & Aarbakke, 2016), a larger project on the topic of digital harassment in Norway. For the purposes of this study, interviews with three women who had experienced different kinds of online violence were selected from the material, but relevant issues gleaned from nine other interviews were added to the final analysis.

In Denmark two out of three participants had experienced online sexual violence. This was also the case in Iceland, while Norway had one participant with this experience.

All the participants in this report are anonymous and have been given pseudonyms.

In Denmark, it proved to be very difficult to find suitable participants. Before the study began, researchers estimated that they would be able to find a comfortable number of informants through their professional and personal network or through their contacts in the feminist sector. However, the study stipulated that participants had to have attempted to seek justice for and protection from online violence, and few survivors of online violence fell into that group, which correlates with experiences from Iceland. Other explanations for the difficulties in finding participants may be that survivors of such abuses do not want to confront these past events, but rather want to forget what happened.



In Iceland, open calls for interviews were advertised and numerous women were contacted using the researchers' professional and personal network, but six months passed before the first interviewee agreed to participate. The majority of the women who had experienced online violence and were contacted had not sought justice, and when asked why, claimed that they believed that the system does not work, so they did not see the point in seeking help or pressing charges. This shows a lack of faith in the justice system is emblematic of a larger problem and is reflected in other studies (see for example Citron, 2014).

The interview with the police in Iceland was conducted in person, using the semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix II). In Denmark, the responses to the questions were written, and in Norway, the report *Hatefulle ytringer på internett. Omfang, forebygging og juridiske grenser* (Nadim, Flatmoe & Wessel-Aas, 2016) was used as basis for that section of the country report, as it contained thorough interviews with the Manglerud hate crime section.

Interview with a representative from a legal aid organization was conducted in person in Iceland, using the semi-structured interview guide. In Denmark, researchers give an overview of resources and help available through the organization Save the Children, and in Norway a representative from JURK was interviewed.

This is a small qualitative research, and as such is not intended to have explanatory meanings beyond its scope. There are all in all 9 interviews with survivors, three interviews with police, although only one conducted in person with written responses from the Danish and Norwegian police, and two interviews with representatives of legal aid organization, in Iceland and Norway, and summary of legal aid available in Denmark.

# II. SUMMARY

# The Impact of Online Violence on Survivors

All the participants in the study experienced physical symptoms due to their experience with online violence. The consequences on their lives differed, depending on the nature of the violence. The participants who had experienced online sexual violence reported more severe consequences than survivors of other kinds of online violence. Participants of online sexual violence, whose images had been shared online without their consent, reported a fear of repetition of the crime, that photos or videos would materialize online again and again.

Participants in all countries reported physical symptoms, such as anxiety, unexplained pains, lack of energy and fatigue. One participant in Denmark shared that she had a nervous breakdown following her experiences, something that she had never experienced before, and another participant quit her job and isolated herself from the outside world. One participant in Norway reported fearing for her life and health for some time after her experience with online violence, glancing around when approaching her home, thinking about how she could defend herself in case of an attack.

These physical consequences are also known to occur with survivors of physical sexual violence (Bates, 2016). In the case of two Icelandic participants who had experienced online sexual violence, their experience of these symptoms came as a great surprise to them and they had difficulties in comparing their experience of online violence to sexual violence offline. They reported feeling that violence without touching should not affect them as much.

In some cases, there were financial consequences to online violence, whether directly or indirectly. Indirect costs include survivors being forced to quit their jobs or school because of psychological issues. Direct costs include legal costs, the expenses for psychological treatment, and so forth.

Two participants in Iceland reported severe financial loss due to direct costs as a consequence of online violence, they had to pay legal fees and expenses for psychiatric treatments. One of them also faced the additional costs of being ordered to pay the legal fees of her extorter. Both participants experienced these financial liabilities as a great injustice.

# Survivors' Experience of Justice

The way the police handled their cases had a meaningful effect on survivors' experience, whether they felt that they gained control over the situation or not. Most of the participants did not experience that justice was being done in their cases.

Some participants described an ideal of what justice meant to them, while others talked about a lack of justice. When describing what they perceived as justice they simultaneously described injustice. For example, when describing how she wanted the police to show interest in her case, Anna from Iceland describes the feeling of being unjustly treated, feeling that she was not being heard. She mentions that she would have liked the police to show interest in who the person blackmailing her was, by asking the name of that person, which they never did. Anna also mentions that the police did not seem to know or refused to acknowledge that what had happened to her was on-line sexual violence, which she found unacceptable.

The experiences of Vala in Iceland are similar. Talking to a lawyer at the police station, she was told that the police could not pinpoint what the violation was, that her case could be a violation against privacy laws or against modesty laws. These experiences indicate that a clear legal framework is necessary, for both survivors as well as the police and the judiciary.

Participants in Denmark reported similar feelings of injustice. They complained about the attitude of the police and reported feelings of not being heard or protected. Participants both in Iceland and Denmark described how the police asked them to gather evidence themselves instead of conducting their own investigation. This is in many ways problematic, and one survivor in Denmark described it as “being in hell again”.

Being in hell again.

Some of the Norwegian participants described disappointment with the police, but many of them experienced that cases were being dealt with in a serious manner and that their appeals were being listened to. Even if their cases ended up unsolved, participants’ feelings of being heard and taken seriously was evident. One of the informants who had positive experience had her case handled by the special hate crime section in Manglerud. The police in Manglerud stresses the importance of survivors being seen and heard, therefore some measures have been made in educating the police on the importance of these crimes.

# The Viewpoint of the Police

There is an increased awareness on online violence in all three countries. This raised awareness has increased pressure on the police and government in dealing with online violence. Representatives of the police in Denmark and Iceland report similar experiences of somehow feeling paralyzed, of not being able to do all they want in regard of issues of online violence. The director of the National Cyber Crime Center in Denmark states:

I do not hope that young girls feel rejected by the police. If you report a case, you are entitled to get the case processed. A server in Denmark is easier, but outside the borders of Denmark we do not have control of the servers. We work together with police in other countries. We are on terror alert in Denmark and have to prioritize differently. There are cases that have to wait, also this type of cases, I certainly admit that...

We continuously hear about new groups being established [for the purposes of sharing illegal photos]. If we find something illegal, we try to pursue it, according to the extent of time and resources. We have to consider our capacity. I'm sorry. That's reality. I can see such a page, but do not have any people – and then the case waits half a year. Those are the harsh realities.

*(Ung, nøgen og udstillet, 2016)*



The Danish police explain the lack of action in cases of online violence as a result of the terror alert, with the fight against terror being prioritized over cases of online violence. Representative of the police in Iceland reports a similar lack of priority in cases of online violence. However, in Iceland it is not terrorism which is prioritized, but rather that the police is drowning in physical sexual violence cases, which makes it hard to put the effort needed in cases of online violence.

Interviews with representatives of the police in Denmark and Iceland show that online violence is not taken as seriously as other crimes, and shows that there is great need for improvement in how the police view the severity of the crime. The lack of emphasis being placed on cases of online violence and harassment is not unique to Denmark and Iceland, as is indicated by other research (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017). Online violence has serious consequences on its survivors, as both shown in this study and others (see for example, Bates, 2016), and there needs to be a change of attitudes within the police regarding these crimes.

The Norwegian police (at least the police department in Manglerud) sees the necessity in acknowledging the experience of survivors of online violence and that they experience that the police take these cases seriously. This approach is validated by the experience of the Norwegian participants in this study, as most of them feel that the police handle their cases relatively well. This is not the experience of the Danish and Icelandic participants, as noted in their country reports. However, it must be noted that the Manglerud police does state that more effort is needed in order for the police and the government to gain the public's trust in these matters. They say that these cases are not as hard to investigate

nor to pursue legally as people would believe. However, to give this work priority does involve a fight for already scant resources that “real world crimes” feel habitually entitled to.

The police in Denmark has a section called the National Cyber Crime Center which specializes in investigating cybercrimes and serving as an expert advisor to other police sections. However, it is the local police which deal with most cases of online violence. This is similar in Norway, where they have a special hate crime section in Manglerud serving the entire police of the capital Oslo, but online violence cases are usually first reported to the local police, and then sometimes assigned to the special hate crime section. The same goes for Iceland, where a special hate crime section was only opened in 2016.

Police districts are not equally equipped to handle these kind of cases, and this is the situation in all countries. However, the police in Denmark has IT technicians in every police district to support the technical angle of investigations. Representatives of the police in Denmark and Iceland both complain of lack of manpower and funding, a lack which government of these countries should immediately look to address.

# Cyber Misogyny and Gendered Hate Speech

Online violence and digital harassment are gendered phenomena where sexism and misogyny, the hatred against women for just being women, is manifested online as offline. As stated above, studies have shown women are disproportionately affected by digital harassment and hatred online, such as the study by APC showing where 69% of cases of online violence reported were perpetrated against women (“Analysis of incidents reported on the *Take Back the Tech!*”, 2015), and similar statistics are also shared by the European Commission (*Digital Agenda*, 2017).

One survivor of online violence in Iceland described how women are treated differently than men online, with a batch of sexism – not to mention the threats of violence women in the gamer society who dare discuss the representation of women in computer games. Her experience is supported by other research, which shows that women who talk about video games on social media face criticism, harassment, even threats, while men largely don’t (Dougherty & Isaac, 2016).

The representative from the Icelandic police describes seeing online misogyny in their work and shared concerns about the sexism and the dehumanizing of women, the effects of porn on society, and worries that with the internet, there is greater supply of pornographic material. The representative states that the demand for rape videos and other violent videos “actuates impulses that would otherwise just have dozed [...] I can see that porn has a significant effect on sexual behavior”. The representative of the police in Iceland speculated that dehumanization of women online might be a part of another problem, how people use the internet, for example in the comment section in online media, to communicate in a way they would not face to face. What compounds the problem

I can see that porn has a significant effect on sexual behavior.

is the sexualization of the non-consent, which the Icelandic representative of the police claims is manifested in the excitement for matching names with photos of girls;

“It’s finding the name and that seems to give someone some... I don’t know, stimulation or something... this act... if you connect a name [...] and it is someone you know”.

The Danish and Norwegian police did not discuss misogyny and the reason for that might be the fact that their responses were in the forms of written statements, and therefore more formal, while the Icelandic police was interviewed personally, and the things could be discussed at length.

What seems to occur in cases of online violence is both the dehumanizing of women and a blatant sexism, which enables men to feel powerful as well as sexually excited. The concerns of the representative from the Icelandic police about the link between online violence and sexism are echoed by international studies. Citron (2014) has drawn attention to the problem of cyber misogyny and online violence against women. These concerns were also stressed in a UN Broadband discussion paper about online violence against women and girls (*Cyber Violence against Women and Girls: A World-Wide Wake-Up Call*, 2015) where the scope of these crimes was highlighted, suggesting that 57% of Americans experiencing online harassment are women.

Online violence against women and girls is emerging as a global problem with serious implications for societies and economies around the world.

# Legislations

## Dealing with

### Online Violence

No legislation which specifically addresses online violence has been passed in Denmark, Iceland or Norway. However, cases of online violence have been successfully prosecuted in all three countries.

In Denmark, cases of online violence have been prosecuted using legislation in the Danish penal code, specifically the penal code on disclosure of private photos, penal code on indecent exposure, and the Penal code section 235 on distribution and possession of child pornography. In January 2017, the Danish government launched new initiatives on digital sex violations. These included a range of initiatives regarding prevention and knowledge aimed at teachers, parents and students; initiatives to improve survivor support by offering police training on how to meet the survivors, and making it easier for them to file a complaint; and initiatives to improve the prosecution's handling of cases and higher penalty. Not all of these initiatives have yet been carried out (Justitsministeriet, 2017).

In Iceland, there is no specific legislation which deals with online violence. Cases of online violence have, however, been prosecuted and other laws are used to bridge the gap. The law used in those cases is criminal law regarding sexual assaults and violation of privacy (Benediktsdóttir & Gunnlaugsdóttir, 2015).

In Norway, the relevant legal framework for online harassment and violence are the Norwegian penal code paragraphs "Defamations", "Violation of privacy", "Threats", "Hate speech", "Sexual abuse", and "Forgery of identity and documents" (Eggebo et al., 2016).

# Propositions for Change

## Online violence is a gendered problem and should be regarded as such.

What is at stake is that the democratic participation of women in online discussions is being undermined and women are being silenced. Online violence is a threat to the civic participation of women and needs to be regarded as such.

All participants, in all three countries state that change is needed regarding legislation on online violence against women. Even though there has been awakening as to the significance of online violence, and a legislative change is being lobbied in Norway, there is still a long way to go. A more clear legislation would help the police recognizing the online violence as well as helping them build a case. This would also be beneficial to the court and prosecutors in prosecuting these crimes.

Cases of online violence need to be given priority within the political system, the judicial system and with the police. There needs to be a guaranteed funding to combat online violence, both to public authorities to investigate these crimes and to independent actors to offer guidance and legal aid to survivors.

As is evident in our study, there is a need for change in attitudes among the police. The successful education of the Manglerud department in Norway shows that these changes are possible.

Education is perhaps the most effective means to fight injustice such as online violence, and to help people realize the seriousness of those crimes as well as the impact it has on women's participation in online spaces. Educating young people in gender studies and computer literacy would serve as useful in changing misogynistic attitudes and increasing awareness in how to behave online. Educating the general public about online violence, cyber harassment, and how to act online while respecting other people's autonomy is also essential and could work as a preventive measure. By committing resources to education and awareness raising, we could change social attitudes that trivialize cyber harassment and online violence, preventing them from becoming rooted. In the future, online violence could then conceivably be regarded as a disgraceful remainder from the early history of the internet.

Online violence and online sexual violence is a relatively new phenomenon, and knowledge about its scope and effects is greatly lacking. More research is needed to examine the scope and effects of online violence, both quantitative and qualitative research that sheds light on the system responses, based on the perspectives of survivors.

# III. DENMARK





## Context

In recent years, the focus on sexism has increased in Denmark, especially the focus on everyday sexism, including sexism in nightlife and sexism on the internet (digital sexism, cyber violence) in particular. Several incidences on social media have received public attention and websites have been established where sexism is debated and where people can report their experiences anonymously. Examples of such websites are <http://everydaysexism.com/country/dk> and the closed Facebook group *Stop Sexism*. In addition, the sharing of private photos without consent, or so-called “revenge porn”, has caused public attention, not least thanks to the activist Emma Holten’s project “Consent” which created enormous public attention. Pressure from activists, combined with a great deal of media attention, has contributed to everyday sexism becoming a focus area in the government’s gender equality action plan:

Everyone, regardless of gender, should be free to participate in society, be out in the public space and participate in the debate without fearing threats and assaults. Sexism and online sharing of intimate pictures without consent, also known as ‘revenge porn’, is a problem. Furthermore, it seems that women are overrepresented when it comes to crime and harassment on grounds of gender. At work, five times as many women as men experience sexual harassment. Especially women’s autonomy and basic democratic rights such as freedom of expression are put under pressure when those who engage in public debate are facing attacks or harassment on grounds of their gender. There is a need to focus more on and to prevent sexism and hate speech on grounds of gender.

(Minister for Children, Education and Gender Equality, 2016, 5).

In 2014, the television station DR2 aired the documentary *Ti Stille, Kvinde* (Shut up, Woman) where famous female politicians told about how they are harassed. In September 2016, the television station DR aired the documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet* (Young, naked and exposed), where survivors, perpetrators and police spoke about illegal sharing of photos.

During 2016, the minister for gender equality as well as the minister for justice commenced various initiatives including development of an ethical code for post-compulsory education. On 25th January 2017, there was a public hearing organized by the Gender Equality committee in Parliament on online harassment.

# The Process

On the basis of the increased public interest in the subject of online harassment and violence, we were hopeful at the start of the study that we would be able to locate a reasonable number of informants through some of the networks mentioned above and our contacts in the feminist sector. However, it turned out to be extremely difficult to locate suitable persons to interview. Some cases were too old and would thus not be able to contribute to our study, with a relevant picture of their encounter with the police. The main problem, however, was that the study was limited to persons who had reported their case to the police, which few people do. Other possible reasons for our difficulties finding suitable candidates to interview could be that survivors of this type of violation do not wish to revisit the events but rather wish to forget what has happened.

We found one person to interview through Emma Holten's Facebook followers and two through our contacts in the *Stop sexism* network. A Facebook post on Kvinderådet's open Facebook page posted in relation to the airing of the documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet* resulted in many shares but no concrete requests. We chose to use the mentioned documentary to supplement the two interviews.

We contacted the Institut for Menneskerettigheder as possible informant on the section of our study dealing with counseling following online violence. The institute has mandate to carry out counseling. The Institute stated that they have not received any requests of this sort.

We subsequently contacted the organization Red Barnet, who for a number of years, among other things, has been occupied with stopping child pornography, and for several years have had a letterbox on the website

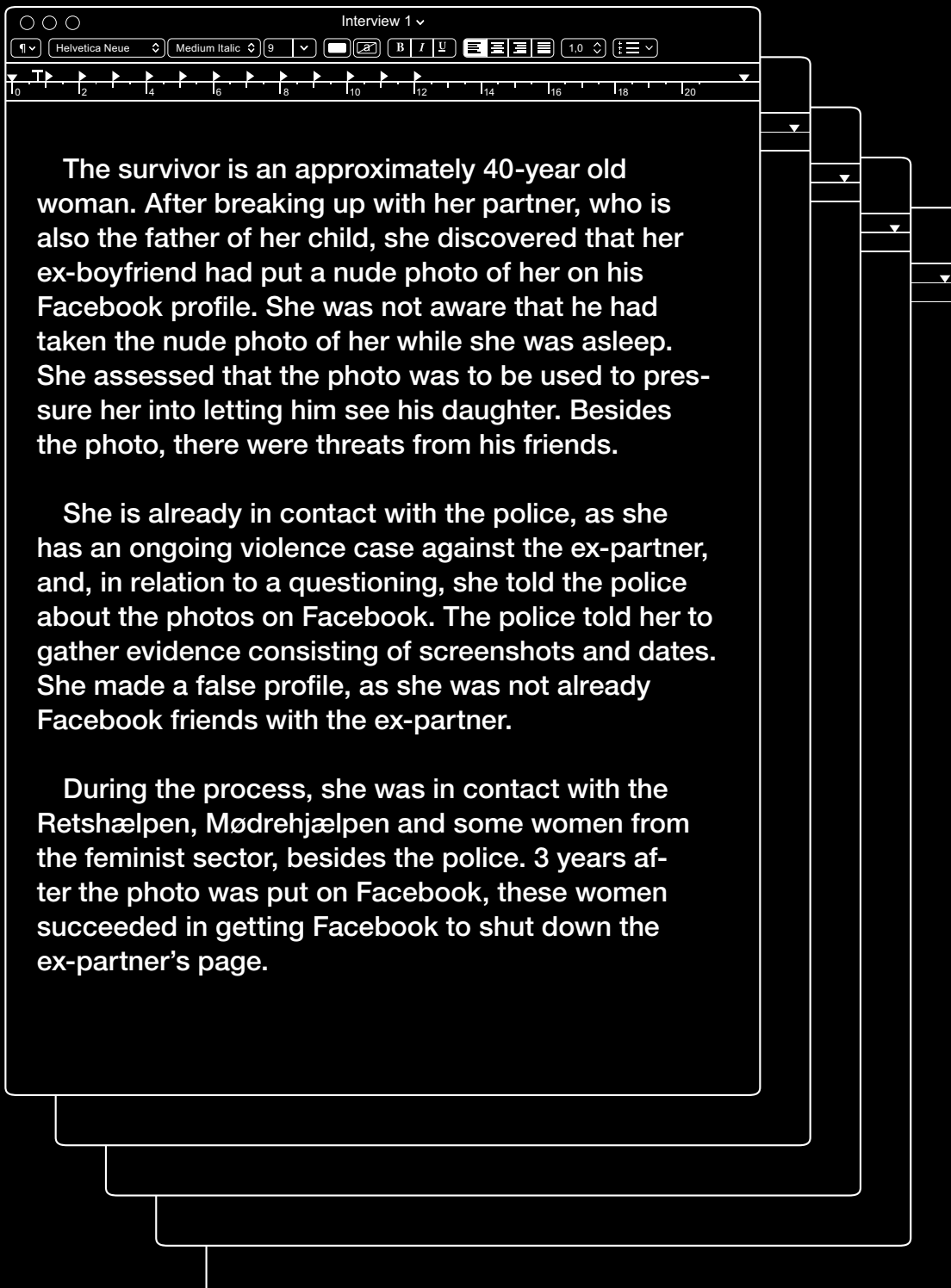
[www.sikkerchat.dk](http://www.sikkerchat.dk) and, since the spring of 2016, have developed a more focused section, [www.sletdet.dk](http://www.sletdet.dk), on [www.sikkerchat.dk](http://www.sikkerchat.dk) about sharing of private photos, etc. We interviewed Red Barnet for this study.

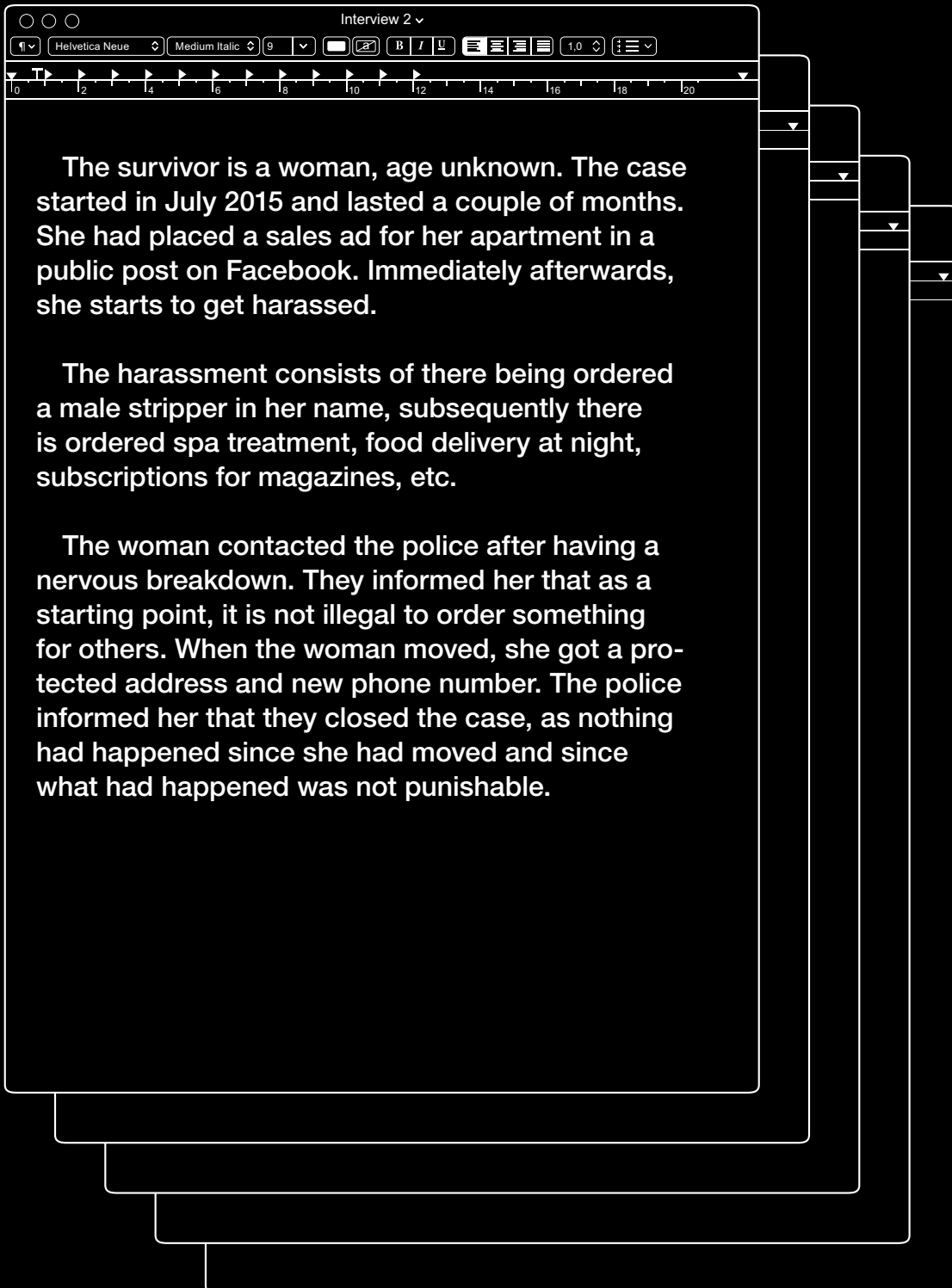
We contacted the National Police in September 2016 in order to request them to answer questions for this report. We wanted to get in touch with NC3 (National Cyber Crime Centre) or another relevant department or person. This request was submitted to the National Police communication department, which is the way of communication that we were told to use. After several reminders for the subsequent two month period, we finally succeeded in getting in touch with a legal supervisor in NC3, and her written reply contributes to this report.

The police justified our long wait for an answer to our request with significant activity within the police and that we therefore “had been at the bottom of the pile”. During the process, we were offered an interview with a police employee who would be able to inform us about police work regarding stalking. But it was too late in the process for us to be able to schedule time for an interview. It is our opinion that it has been outrageously difficult to get through to the right person within the police.

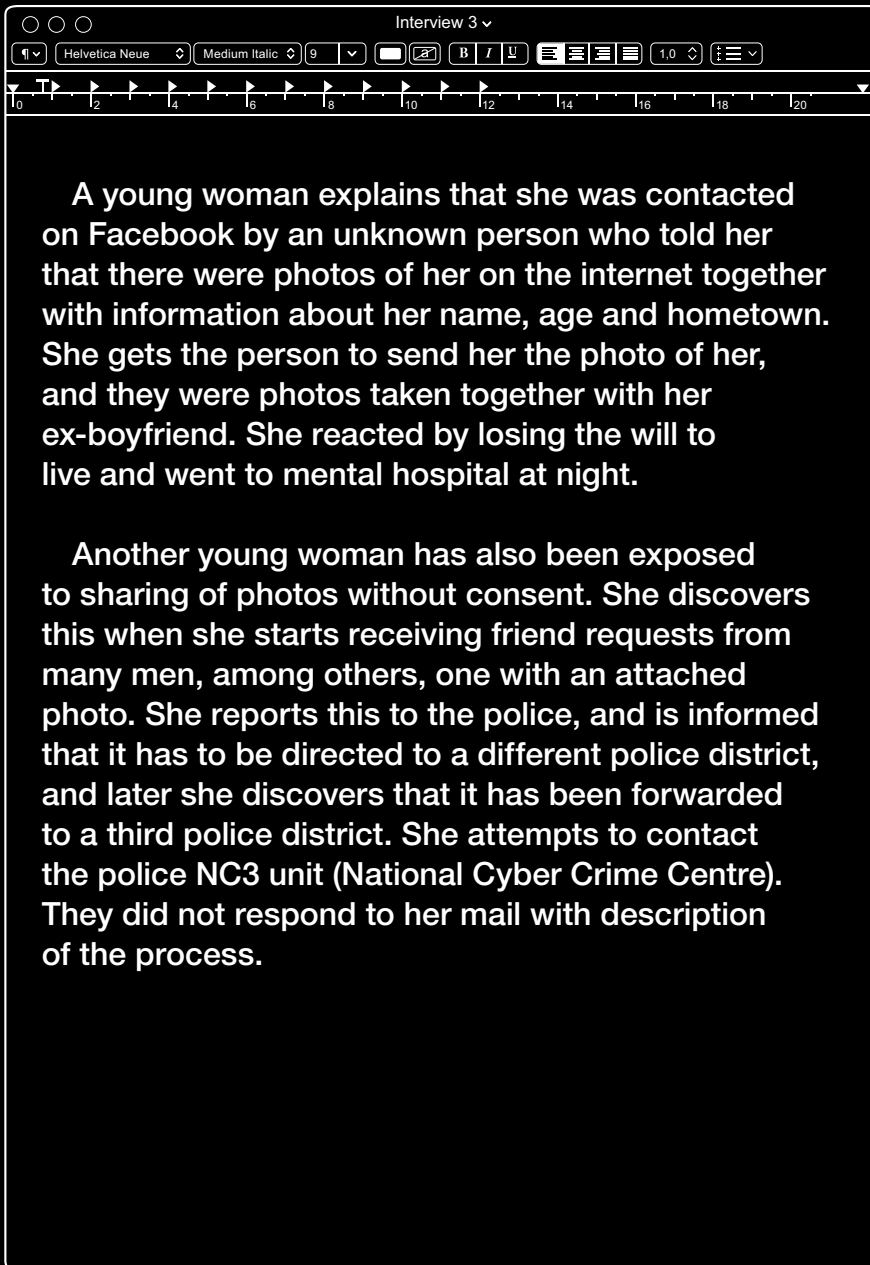
Two interviews with survivors were completed orally (semi-structured interviews in accordance with the interview guide), two interviews with police and counseling have been completed in written format (in accordance with the interview guide), one interview with survivor, perpetrator and police is provided via a transcript from the TV documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet*.

# Interviews with Survivors of Online Violence





(from the documentary  
*Ung, nøgen og udstillet*)



The image shows a screenshot of a video player interface. At the top, there are window control buttons (minimize, maximize, close) and the title "Interview 3". Below the title is a toolbar with various editing and playback icons, including font selection (Helvetica Neue, Medium Italic), bold, italic, underline, and zoom (1.0). A timeline at the bottom of the toolbar shows markers from 10 to 20. The main content area contains two paragraphs of text, which are highlighted in white against a dark background. The text is presented as if it were a transcript of the video content.

**A young woman explains that she was contacted on Facebook by an unknown person who told her that there were photos of her on the internet together with information about her name, age and hometown. She gets the person to send her the photo of her, and they were photos taken together with her ex-boyfriend. She reacted by losing the will to live and went to mental hospital at night.**

**Another young woman has also been exposed to sharing of photos without consent. She discovers this when she starts receiving friend requests from many men, among others, one with an attached photo. She reports this to the police, and is informed that it has to be directed to a different police district, and later she discovers that it has been forwarded to a third police district. She attempts to contact the police NC3 unit (National Cyber Crime Centre). They did not respond to her mail with description of the process.**

# Analysis and Summary of Interviews with Survivors

## LOSS OF CONTROL

The informants' description of personal feelings in connection to the incidents stresses that being unintentionally exposed nude on the internet is experienced as a loss of authority, that the picture you wish to convey of yourself as a woman is contested by others who you cannot control. Survivors lose the self-determination of how they want to appear. At the same time, it is especially offensive that survivors do not know how many people see the photos. To be portrayed nude is perceived by the survivors as something that takes away their ability to show who they are. It is associated with shame:

I fear to walk on my own. I feel that people look and judge me. I felt empty and weak in my body.

(Interview 3)

It felt as bad as walking naked down Strøget. And worse, because then it would be limited who saw it. On the internet, everyone can find it.

(Interview 3)

I did not feel like I had any authority as a woman when my nude photo was on the internet so everyone could see it.

(Interview 1)

“What if they have seen the photos? Then they might have an impression of me that isn't correct – and that is very far from what I have to offer as a human being with personality.”

(Interview 3)



The uncertainty of the surroundings, i.e. one's own relation to the people one knows, also plays a role in the example of harassment, which does not involve the sharing of nude photos:

I had a nervous breakdown, something that I had never experienced before. I am not in conflict with anyone and I cannot think of anyone it could be, I began to cast suspicion on everyone around me.

(Interview 2)

The loss of control is also apparent in regards to the informants being afraid that the photos might appear again:

It is dormancy; the photo can always appear again.

(Interview 1)

### **CONSEQUENCES FOR WORK, EDUCATION, DAILY LIFE**

Digital harassment and violence can have very concrete consequences on survivors' education and work. One of our informants had to quit her job because the nude photos were incompatible with the role she plays in her job with young girls and boys. Another stated that she felt so bad that she had to quit her education. She has isolated herself from the outside world and cannot go shopping by herself.

### **SURVIVORS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE POLICE**

The informants express that the way the police deals with the reports are unsatisfactory, and that the help the police provides does not correspond to the help the informants need. Directly questioned if she received decent help from the police, one informant replies:

"The police cares a lot about why I, 'a woman like you, a social worker' could fall for him. There wasn't any help with how I move on"

(Interview 1)

Another informant replied to the question about whether the police took her request seriously:

No they did not, I understand, we always hear that the police are being pressured, so many things happen, it might be sort of trivial for them. They were sympathetic and said that it was really tough.

(Interview 2)

A third informant stated:

I reported it to the police, then I was told that it had to be sent on to a different police district because that was where I belonged. I don't hear anything for a long time. Then it was sent on to a third police district. I don't hear anything.

(Interview 3)

And in relation to her trying to get in touch with the police department for Cyber Crime (NC3):

I investigate who might know about such a matter. I call the police and ask for the number to the NC3-unit. They can't give me that. I get an e-mail address. I write a long e-mail and explain the whole process. I would like to get in touch with them, but never receive a reply. Not even a receipt that they received it. Nothing whatsoever. You lose faith in the whole system. You lose faith that anyone can help you.

(Interview 3)

The problems that are emphasized by survivors in relation to reporting these cases to the police are as such:

- The police are lacking in giving feed-back about the course of the case to the ones reporting the case
- The focus is placed on the responsibility of the one reporting the case
- Trivialization of the case

This indicates that management of the reporting situation is not good enough.

The concrete help that is offered to the women is also experienced as unsatisfactory. In two cases, the police urged the one reporting the case to gather evidence, but there is no concrete help to stop the violence or harassment that is at the basis of the reports. The police help seems to be directed towards getting the survivors to protect themselves through address protection and a secret phone number, along with handout of written material on how to protect oneself. The women, on the other hand, wish that the police would use the funds they have (or the funds the women believe the police have) to stop the harassment. This gives the feeling of “not being heard, not being protected”.

For one participant, the appeal to protect oneself through secret address and a new phone number is an advice which is problematic, because she, because of her job, is dependent on being easy to get in touch with. The same informant also indicates that having to gather evidence was “like being in hell again”. She could not cope with being confronted with the photos of herself on Facebook, and she gave up gathering evidence.

Summarizing the women’s experiences with the help offered by the police, the women’s answers indicate that:

- The police is doing too little to stop the assaults
- It entails that the perpetrators are not punished
- The police leaves evidence gathering to the ones reporting the case
- Thus, the police put strain on the ones reporting the case
- It may entail that some cases are never dealt with

In none of the cases of the women in this study, did contact with police lead to a lawsuit. In one case, the police said that the offence was not criminal. In one case it seems that the case was not followed up by police, except by advising the survivor how to gather evidence herself.

# Interview with the Police

For this report report, we submitted questions to NC3 (National Cyber Crime Centre) that falls under the National Police.

We chose this department, among other things because of a statement made by the director of NC3 in the documentary *Ung, nøgen og udstillet*, where the director was confronted with a young woman's critical of the fact that NC3 did not react to an e-mail she sent them. In response, the director said:

I do not hope that young girls feel rejected by the police. If you report a case, you are entitled to get the case processed. A server in Denmark is easier, but outside the borders of Denmark we do not have control of the servers. We work together with police in other countries. We are on terror alert in Denmark and have to prioritize differently. There are cases that have to wait, also this type of cases, I certainly admit that...

We continuously hear about new groups being established [for the purposes of sharing illegal photos]. If we find something illegal, we try to pursue it, according to the extent of time and resources. We have to consider our capacity. I'm sorry. That's reality. I can see such a page, but do not have any people – and then the case waits half a year. Those are the harsh realities.

The answers to our questions to NC3 are related to the “illegitimate sharing of nude photos”, i.e. the answers do not relate to the whole spectrum of online violence against women.

## REPORTED CASES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE INCREASING

Regarding the extent of this type of online violence, the police states that:

The crime phenomenon is a growing area and where there can be significantly underreporting. The aggrieved are typically young women between 15–35 years. The perpetrators are typically men. There is a big difference in the severity of the material... The perpetrators are getting better and better at covering their identity, and the placement of the photos on the internet is blurred and changed continuously.

During the first half of 2016, there were lodged twice as many reports compared to the same period the year before, and the National Police consider that it is both a growing criminal area and that it, to a certain extent, can be ascribed to an increased tendency to report, because of the enormous media attention during the past year.

Besides their own internal data, the police refers to two outside studies conducted in Denmark, and from these studies, the NC3 consider that the sharing of intimate photos has become part of the youth culture.

The police states that, during the past six months, they have increased work regarding unjustified sharing of sexually abusive photo material. The unit had previously only had to handle work in relation to online sexual abuse of children.

## **NC3 WORK ON CASES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE**

The police states that the work of NC3 consists of developing preventive measures along with various forms of damage control or disruptive activities, monitoring of development in the area, preparation of investigation presentations for political committees, and participation in international police cooperation. When the National Police becomes aware of sexually abusive photo material on the internet, they seek to cooperate with internet providers in Denmark as well as abroad to the widest extent possible, in order to get the material blocked or removed, so the continuous abusiveness can be minimized as much as possible.

The employees in the police service center have gone through an education course training them to handle reports and requests about IT crimes correctly, including securing digital traces as fast as possible.

The police states that each police district has been provided an IT engineer who can support the investigation of cases IT, including, for instance, unjustified sharing of sexually abusive photo material on the internet.

The police states that, through education, improved registration possibilities in the police systems, and an improved and extended reporting portal for IT crime on the police website, they are now working on enabling the police to receive and process reports more professionally, thus ensuring that reports are recorded and registered correctly. These efforts are meant to ensure a better basis for identifying perpetrators. They will furthermore ensure that people reporting cases are better informed on what they can do themselves in order to minimize the consequences of the crime.

# Summary of Interview with the Police

Recognition of the fact that these types of cases are not being treated well enough within the police is implicit in the responses offered by NC3 to our questions. From the perspective of the survivors, it is important that the police can gather evidence and secure digital traces so this is work not left for the survivors. It is also important that the cases are processed quickly and that harassment is stopped quickly by removing photos and ensuring that they do not pop-up in new places. It is furthermore important that the perpetrator is prosecuted. Some of the improvements that NC3 is now working on corresponds to the survivor's wishes of an improved effort.

From the answers offered by NC3 to our questions, we are not able to see how many resources will be devoted to these types of crimes, and when resources are crucial for the work, both centrally in NC3 and within the individual police districts, we must establish that it is uncertain whether police efforts will be significantly improved. This uncertainty is underlined by the police often referring to not having enough resources because of terror alert and border control. But there is no doubt that the public debate about online harassment has had an effect on the police.

# Interview with Red Barnet (Save the Children)

Since 2001, the organization Save the Children has worked in close cooperation with the National Police and an international network on collecting reports about photos and films of the sexual abuse of children (child pornography). For several years, Save the Children has had a letterbox on the website [sikkerchat.dk](http://sikkerchat.dk), where children and youth can address online-related problems, including bullying, sexual abuse, but also questions of a technical character.

During the last couple of years, there have been more and more requests submitted about the sharing of private or intimate photos without consent. Save the Children has sent out material on this subject, targeted to children, youth and professionals. During the spring of 2016, they chose to develop a more focused section, [www.sletdet.dk](http://www.sletdet.dk), on [www.sikkerchat.dk](http://www.sikkerchat.dk), which offers advice and guidance for those who have experienced that private, personal or intimate content has been shared without consent. The website also gives out a phone number.

Save the Children advise children and youth to involve their parents (if they are not under suspicion) or other trusted persons. Where required and possible, Save the Children ensures that there is a notification. They also give advice in relation to the possibility of filing a report with the police.

Save the Children's data confirms an increase in the number of requests. They explain the increase, because they began to have a special focus on non-consensual sharing of images, and therefore receive more reports of those types of harassment. They also confirm that there is a gender disparity when it comes to who are exposed to harassment, with more women contacting them than men.



# IV. ICELAND



Three women who are survivors of online violence were interviewed in Iceland. Two out of three participants had experienced online sexual violence.

It proved hard finding participants for the study. Open calls for interviews were advertised and numerous women were contacted using the researchers' professional and personal network, but six months passed before the first interviewee agreed to participate. The majority of the women who had experienced online violence and were contacted had not sought justice, and when asked why, claimed that they believed that the system does not work, so they did not see the point in seeking help or pressing charges.

A representative from a legal aid organization was interviewed conducted in person in Iceland, using the semi-structured interview guide, as well as a representative from the Reykjavík Police.

This Icelandic report, unlike the reports from Denmark and Norway, does not include a summary of each interview. This is done for the protection of the participants, due to the small population of Iceland. The survivors of online violence are anonymous and have been given pseudonyms, Anna, Rebekka and Vala.

# Online Violence Cases in Iceland

The representative from the Reykjavík Police estimates that they get around 3 to 4 notifications a week of online violence. Most of the reports of online sexual violence come from young women between the age 15 to 25 years old and very few of those notifications end in prosecution.



Both the representative from the police and representative from a legal aid organization say online crimes are often a part of other sexual violence cases. The violence is for example recorded and used to threaten the person under attack. They also state that these kind of cases can be linked to a breakup, where jealousy or revenge dominates the act (i.e. “revenge porn”), but also that the main drive is just plain old sexism, objectification of women and the sexualization of the non-consent.

# Online Sexual Violence as Manifestation of Sexism

Online sexism is common and Rebekka says that this is evident in how, when stating a question online, women or men are answered. For example, if a woman asks when the next season of a television show is aired, a typical answer would be: “shut up you dumb bitch, go google it”. Rebekka also mentions the situation in the gamer society, where women who discuss the representation of women in computer games are under constant treats of violent acts.

Shut up you dumb bitch, go google it

The representative from the police expresses worry about the sexism and the dehumanizing of women online, the effects of porn on society, and worries that with the internet, there is much more supply of various pornographic stuff. The representative says that the demand for rape videos and other violent videos “actuates impulses that would otherwise just have dozed [...] I can see that porn has a significant effect on sexual behavior”.

I can see that porn has a significant effect on sexual behavior.

This dehumanization on women online might be a part of another problem, how people use the internet and comment sections to communicate in a way they would not face to face. What adds to the problem is the sexualization of the non-consent, which according to the representative from the police manifests in the great excitement for matching names with photos of girls: “It’s finding the name and that seems to give someone some... I don’t know, stimulation or something. This act... if you connect a name [...] and it is someone you know”. The representative from the police continues:

Then there is this massive discussion online and on the social media sites [...] there the connection of names to photos might happen and there seems to be a whole lot of excitement for men to find out who is on what photo and linking the two.

**What seems to occur is both the dehumanizing of women and a blatant sexism, which enables men to feel powerful as well as sexually excited.**

# Slut Shaming of Survivors of Online Sexual Violence

It seems to be difficult for survivors of online sexual violence, the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, to step forward. One reason might be, as Vala mentions, that women fear that the violence will increase if they come forward. That is, people start to look for the video or photo and it gets distributed more. This echoes the concern of the representative of the police.



When looking for participants, it became clear exactly how hard it is for survivors to step forward. Despite the anonymity of the research and despite the number of reports to the police, it was extremely difficult to find participants in this study.

Anna mentions slut shaming as the biggest reason women will not talk openly about this experience. Girls and women are condemned for “being so stupid to let someone take their photo” or for sending their photo to their boyfriend. Both Vala and Rebekka agree. Even though Rebekka’s experience was not a sexual violence, she did experience feeling a victim’s responsibility, i.e. “why is she talking to a strange man the internet”.

...being so stupid to let someone take their photo.

Why is she talking to a strange man on the internet?

All three survivors feel that society has come a long way in rejecting slut shame in other sexual violence cases, but society has still not reached that point in cases of online sexual violence cases. The representative from a legal aid organization agrees and states that the focus is rarely placed on the one distributing the material, but on the person who is portrayed in the images.

# Psychological and Physical Consequences in Survivors of Online Sexual Violence

Psychological and physical consequences of physical sexual violence are reflected in, for example, unexplained pain, lack of energy, fatigue and great anxiety. These consequences are known to occur with other survivors of online sexual violence.

The two participants in this study who suffered online sexual violence reported similar psychological and physical consequences. These consequences came as a great surprise to them and they had difficulties in comparing their experience of violence without touch, to physical sexual violence offline.

Self-blame is a big factor in the experience of survivors of online sexual violence. Anna describes how she blamed herself:

I am such an ass you know, why did I allow him to take those... this is all my fault [...] why did I let him do this and why... why didn't I try to break into his computer.

This description from Anna fits well with the experience of Vala, who also suffered online sexual violence.

Self-blame did not seem to bother Rebekka (even though people tried to blame her for her harassment), but she did not encounter sexual online violence.

# Experience and Expectations of Psychological Relief

Anna described being greatly helped by attending counseling in Stígamót, an Icelandic Education and Counseling Center for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Violence. She felt more at ease dissecting her difficult experiences there than with her psychologist. However, she felt that the work she was doing with the psychologist was more systematic and focused towards her recovery. She stated that in Stígamót, she felt like she was always there for the first time:

It is very important and good to know that you can go to Stígamót and just unload you know... all your barrels... and get feedback on all that shit. But I think I might need more focused process. You know they do not write anything down. It is because of confidentiality or something like that. But it kind of makes me feel like a stranger when I go back.

She adds that both Stígamót and a psychologist have helped her a lot in overcoming self-blame in regard of the online sexual violence. Helped her “take the power back”, as she put it. She does add that, unfortunately, she is not “there yet”, and that there are still issues she needs to work through.



Vala is personally not a fan of Stígamót and has doubts about the usefulness for herself personally:

I do not want to be a victim, in that definition and maybe that is just my prejudice talking but I feel like Stígamót... they are probably great for a lot of people. But I feel... I feel that they talk a lot about that you should live with the trauma, that you should... I think there is so much focus on the damage and I think there is too much focus on being a victim. And I started to think if this was maybe not the way to go in treatment of such trauma.

She is optimistic about a violence center which opened its doors in 2016, Bjarkahlíð:

It is interdisciplinary... run by the state and the city. There you can... see social workers, psychologists and doctors. Contacts to the police and just all kinds of counselling. This is totally what was needed. For example, there you could get help in making the internet “forget you”. There you can ask how to deal with the police... what lawyer you should talk to and so forth... this is a huge improvement!

# Survivors' Experience of the Police

Going to the police was overall not a positive experience for the participants. Anna submitted an enquiry to the police, explaining her case. Her ex-partner held photographs of her naked and was blackmailing her into paying off some loans she had co-signed. When she called the police, they did not know exactly where to direct her, and sent her back and forth. The focus of the police was on the economic aspect of the crime, not on the photos he threatened to reveal. Vala had videos of her published online. She pressed charges, but the police did not bring the suspect in for questioning until much later. This gave him a chance to come up with a story. He had earlier confessed to her, and she had his confession in writing, but by the time the police brought him in for questioning, he had contacted a lawyer who recommended that he not confess.

The financial loss of Vala and Anna was considerably high, because of legal fees, expenses for psychological treatment. Anna also paid her abuser the extortion. Vala and Anna experience this financial loss as a great injustice.

# Authorities – Responses and Expectations

Participants' expectations towards the police were not great beforehand, and this fits well with what the representative from police states in the interview. The representative reported staff shortages, lack of technical knowledge and lack of technological resources. However, both the representative from a legal aid organization and Rebekka stated that the technology to find perpetrators and trace websites was available to the police. The representative from the legal aid organization furthermore brought up the police and judicial response to the economic crisis of 2008, when a Special Prosecutor was appointed, who got full permission to search for digital information that had been deleted. The resources were available for this investigation, and the representative added that this was just a matter of political will of the government.

As stated above, when researchers were searching for participants, it came as a surprise how few of the survivors contacted had actually gone to the police. The researchers contacted numerous women that were found using their professional and personal network. The researchers started contacting participants in February 2016, but only took their first interview in September 2016. The criteria for participating in the study was the experience of seeking justice. The majority of the women contacted had not sought justice, and when asked why, they claimed they know that the system does not work, so they did not see the point in seeking help or pressing charges. This is an important finding and tells us a lot about the situation.

As noted, the representative from the Reykjavík Police estimates that they get around 3 to 4 notifications a week of online sexual violence. Very few of those who report online sexual violence go on to press charges. When asked why, the representative from the police said that it is probably a common knowledge amongst the public that the police can't be of much help in these matters.



When the representative from the police is asked about what kind of legislation they think can help in dealing with online violence, the answer is that the legislation needs to be consistent with neighboring countries, that Iceland needs to have similar legislation to other European countries and North America. Also, there needs to be more collaboration between countries. Police already collaborate heavily internationally, but in these cases, they need to collaborate to be more.

The representative from the police stated that they need a computer department which is dedicated to work just on cases of online violence, and that they need more money to do the technical work needed. The rapid changes in computer science calls for more intensive training of police officers, so the police is not always one step behind. One big problem that the representative from the police points out, is the fact that it is not always possible to find the original distributor of online material. People can log in to open networks where their IP address are not registered. Also, it has become more common that people in Iceland have foreign IP-address.

There are technical things people can do to protect themselves. For example, Google can be asked to erase specific search results for a person's name, something the police advises people to do that. However, they are not able to assist in that process, and survivors need to figure that out themselves.

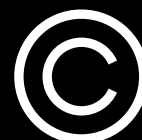
# Survivors' Experience of Justice

When the participants were asked about justice, how they would have wanted the police or the judicial system to respond, Anna answers that she would have liked the police to show interest in who the person blackmailing her was, asking the name of that person, which they never did. Also, she mentions as a big failure the fact that the police did not seem to know or acknowledge that what had happen to her was online sexual violence. Anna went to the police in 2013, and it is possible that the police today is more experienced to recognizing online sexual violence in the light of enormous public discussion about these types of crimes.

Vala's experience of justice was similar. When she talked to a lawyer with the police, she was told: I can't really tell you what the violation is here, it could be privacy violation or violation against modesty". However, for Vala, the case was simple, and she saw that she would not get the help she needed at the police station.

Both Vala and Anna state that they realize that the police is starved for money and in need of more staff, but neither of their complaints are in regard to those issues. Their complaints are not about lack of resources, but about how the police address these crimes, that the police address these crimes like they do not matter. Anna and Vala feel that the police needs to handle these issues more firmly.

Rebekka speculates how we could deal with the unlawful distribution of photos: That people have copyright over themselves, and therefore all their photos (whether you or someone else took them). "Then, they themselves would get the copyright and could make the claim that it should be removed". When asked by the researcher whether this is because of copyright laws, Rebekka continues:



“it would be so simple for them to seek justice and just say ‘here I am, this is a photo of me’. Obvious that they would get a court order or something [...] I think it would be the simplest way”.

Rebekka’s idea is a practical one, focusing on how the police and the courts could force to removal of pictures from the internet. How it would go in practice is hard to tell, but there is one aspect missing in this context, and that is the act of violence that is committed in sharing images without consent.

Vala thinks we have to change the way we think about perpetrators:

Then there is no gain in stepping up and admitting you did something wrong. We need to build a system around this... professionals, health professionals who understand that these people are... we need something that makes acknowledging your crime, not the end of the world. I am not saying that sexual violence is all based on a misunderstanding, but not all perpetrators are monsters. So we need to re-channel things so that it would not ruin your life to confess to your crime.

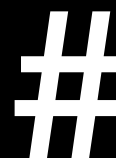
Vala also states that we must define online sexual violence as a sexual violence, it won’t do “just adding some letter to the law, it won’t do”. Anna agrees with this assessment, and adds that it is not enough changing the legislation to deal with online offenses, but also that the police department that handles sexual offenses needs to be supported.

Vala states that it is essential that survivors are active participants in the criminal cases:

“It is completely ridiculous that survivors are not a member in their case, they are set aside and become just a crime scene”.

# Social Media & Online Violence

Social media and its impact was discussed at length both by survivors and by the representative from a legal aid organization. This discussion was positive and the focus was placed on the empowering aspect of social media. They mentioned the movements in Iceland around the hashtags #beautytips and #freethenipple.



The empowered effects of the social media revolts like #freethenipple and #beautytips was evident especially with Vala, who felt great empowerment by participating in #freethenipple. Many Icelandic survivors of online sexual violence stepped forward in the debate around #freethenipple and shared similar experience as Vala (Annadís G. Rúdólfsdóttir & Ásta Jóhannsdóttir, 2017). Rebekka described this feeling very well; “I am so happy that these girls did #freethenipple you know... they were taking the power over their bodies back and just ‘my nipple is not so important’”.

The representative from the police discussed the social media more in context of the possible danger it can pose, said that they were used for distributing photos and linked the increased usage of social media to the increase in online sexual violence.

# Preventing Online Violence

All participants in this study stated that preventive measures and education are important factors. They agree that we need to teach young people to respect boundaries, that we need to teach about boundaries from kindergarten and up.

Vala disparages the educational effect of lenient sentences in sexual violence cases:

“Lenient sentences and no rehabilitation and very small compensations [...] show that this is not a serious crime in the eye of the court. And if that is the message, why should you respect boundaries?”

The representative from the police thinks the educational system should evolve to include computer literacy:

I was at a conference where one of my colleague said... he was talking about computers, that this is just like... he lived in London [...] ‘I teach my kids not to go in some neighborhoods in London. Because I know that if they go there, something is going to happen to them’ [...] that it is the same with computers, you need to learn to use it. Where you can be and where you should not be.



# V. NORWAY



# Definition, Legal Framework and Strategy

Digital harassment is an issue that has been widely discussed in Norwegian public debate during the past few years. Many high-profile individuals, mainly women, have gone public with their stories of massive and serious offending messages and threats they receive due to their participation in public debate. Offences are often linked to gender, their bodies and sexuality, or to ethnicity or skin color. New technology also presents additional means for control, threats and manipulation in abusive relationships. The internet is also widely used for bullying.

There is an emerging field of research focusing on digital harassment and freedom of speech. Many forms of online communication can be seen as digital harassment, yet not be defined as illegal. The relevant legal framework for online harassment and violence that we have identified are the Norwegian penal code paragraphs “Defamations” (§§ 246-254), “Violation of privacy” (§390), “Threats” (§ 227), “Hate speech” (§135 a), “Sexual abuse” (§§ 204a og 201a) and “Forgery of identity and documents” (§§ 190 a, 182, 185) (Eggebø et al, 2016).

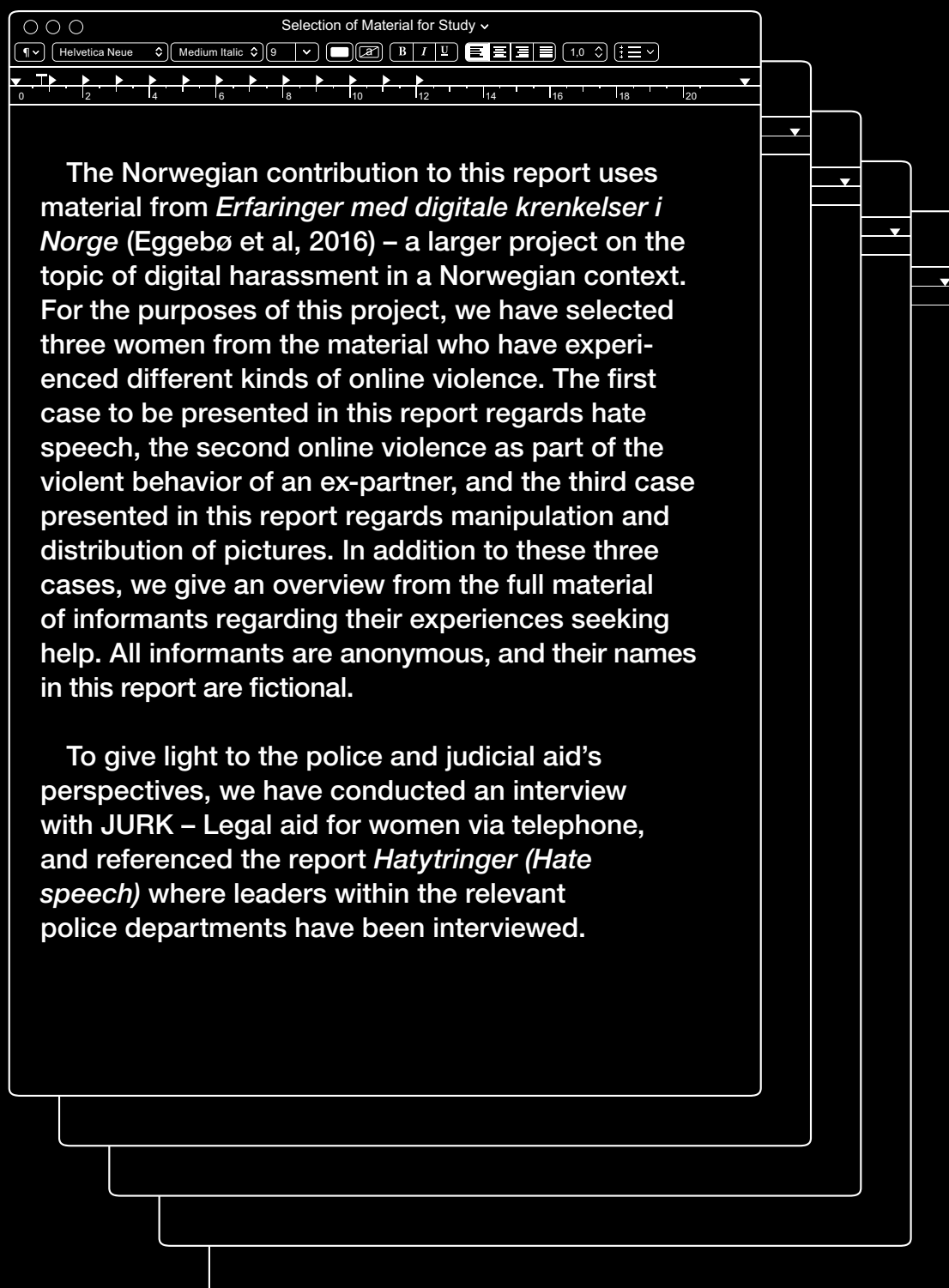
The paragraph on “Hate speech” (§135a) does not apply to discriminatory speech on the basis of gender, gender expressions or gender identity. Herein lies a discrepancy between civil and legal rights in the field of discrimination, which has been pointed out by many organizations and institutions, including KUN in its report from 2016 (Eggebø et al, 2016). There is an ongoing discussion on whether to include gender, gender identity and gender expressions in the hate speech and hate crime paragraphs in the Norwegian penal code. The debate has been refueled by the *Government strategy against hate speech 2016–2020* stating that they wish to see legal rights in a better compliance with civil rights on this matter.

*The Government's strategy against hate speech 2016–2020* states that only 17% of hate speech offenses have been reported to the police. A lack of trust in the police and of confidence in police methods are listed as the main reasons for the low report rate (2016).

*The Government's strategy against hate speech 2016–2020* lists four main actions to be taken on the judicial level. These are strengthening the police's competency on relevant law, improving police routines in registering offenses, more accurate national statistics on hate speech, and a better correspondence between civil and judicial rights.

In 2017, the police will hold a national seminar on hate crime. There will also be a new student program in the Police Academy regarding the prevention and investigation of hate crime.

# Selection of Material for Study



# Cases

## **CASE 1 HATE SPEECH, RACIALIZED AND SEXUALIZED THREATS**

Monica, a young white woman, has experienced an individual episode of digital harassment that she has taken very seriously. Someone online has seen a picture of her and her black boyfriend, and sent her a death threat containing both sexual and racist images.

She has taken action on several levels to seek justice for herself. She began by finding the IP-address and user name linked to the death threat, and contacted the police. They said they didn't have anything to go on, so the informant found a way to lure her offender to her blog website for a second time. She then found a connection between the user name and a personal user's account, thus unveiling the true identity of her offender. After finding the offender's identity, she filed a report on him with the police. Her experience at the police office was not very positive:

When I first came to the police, they said they didn't have time for this, but I demanded that they read my report. I had been real thorough in writing it, proposing what paragraphs of the law they should apply and everything (laughter). And then she [the policewoman] read it, and I could see her face turn white.

Her case was then handled by the special hate crime section, localized at the Manglerud police district in Oslo, where she said she felt very well taken care of. The police interviewed the suspect, and looked through his computer. They could not find anything linking him to the accusa-

tions, and let him go. They reported back to Monica that the suspect had seemed very surprised, intelligent and resourceful, “like they had expected someone quite different”, the informant said. She said his appearance was probably what saved the suspect from further investigation; that he did not match the police’s image of a digital racist serving death threats.

The informant said she did not feel reassured by the police saying there was probably no real danger to her. For some time after the incident, she feared for her life and health, glancing around when approaching her home, thinking about how she could defend herself in case of an attack. She said the fear was not as intense today, but she still hoped her offender would write more to incriminate himself, so that she could “get him” and gain a sense of justice as well as regain her sense of security.

However, her efforts to gain evidence and expose her offender has served as a way of claiming control. After being confronted by her online, he quickly deleted several profiles. She also shared her story of harassment online, addressed to him, and made sure he read it. It also comforted her to imagine that he got a real scare from the sudden involvement of the police, questioning him and confiscating his computer. She said “I halfway feel like I have gotten him already”.

I halfway feel like I have gotten him already.

## **CASE 2**

### **VIOLENCE IN A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP**

Three women from the larger material of informants have experienced online violence as one of many forms of violence from a partner or former partner. Their stories show how technology and electronic communication is an integral part of harassment, control and violence in a number of different arenas.

Zeinab is a young woman of minority background. Her ex-husband tried to surveil and control her through access to her personal pages online:

He always wanted to check my pages [...] He changes passwords to my pages [...] On Saturday, I found out somebody had ordered WhatsApp in my name. [...] He has also got hold of the password to my pages with the [Phone company]. He used to have access to my Facebook and e-mail accounts. He has always tried to scrutinize my activities [...] When my phone would lie there, he would check it while I was in the shower.

Zeinab recounted the different methods her ex-husband would use to control what she was doing, and how he has misused her personal information. This was in addition to him cross-examining her regularly about what she had been doing, and waiting outside her office or calling her boss to find out where she was and what she was doing. He had also used physical violence as well as threats, even in front of their children. Zeinab was now divorced, stating she “cannot live in a prison”. She had a restraining order against her ex-husband, but Zeinab had recently received three friend requests from strangers on Facebook, and was convinced it was him trying to contact her through fake profiles.

### CASE 3 MANIPULATED PICTURE POSTED ONLINE

Mariell, a middle-aged white woman, recounts the story of how her husband's Twitter account was suddenly sent a link to a picture supposedly showing her engaged in sexual activity with a group of men. The picture was manipulated, but in such high-quality that she said it caused her to stop and think for a second – have I ever done anything like that? She asked herself if she was “ever that out of it”, acknowledging that she was young and wild once. She had to sit down with her husband and show him the physical details in the picture confirming this was not her body. The situation was an ordeal for both, she said.

Have I ever done anything like that?

The picture was shared online, tagged with her name and linked so that it kept popping up. She ended up having to go to her boss and explain the situation, to avoid rumors at work. She also had to take the matter to the police, whom she deals with in a professional capacity. She found this extremely humiliating. The way she described it, she was sitting there, knowing these guys she worked with were watching – had to watch – a picture of her engaged with something that was “bigger than my arm! It had to be manipulated!”

Mariell never found out who created and shared the picture. The police thought that the perpetrators were targeting her because of her high-profile job, but she did not want to believe that. She thought nobody with that kind of skill and opportunity would be after her because of her job, and assumed it was personal. She had to tell her children about it, just in case the picture would pop up in their lives in future. “It is never gone for good”, she said.

It is never gone for good.

And just remember how easy this is to do – the police found out where the original picture of me was from, it was from a regional newspaper. A picture of me giving a lecture. How many pictures of me, talking, are there? A woman with her mouth open – of course it's easy to manipulate that.



Mariell's case was reported and investigated. The police followed up on every clue, but could get no further. Even though the case ended up shelved, Mariell's experience was positive. She said she felt seen, heard and taken seriously. Should there be similar events in future, the police had assured her that they would reopen her case and investigate thoroughly. She said she was confident in the police's methods.

### **SEEKING HELP (FROM THE LARGER MATERIAL)**

9 out of the 18 informants in our material say they have been in contact with the police regarding the digital harassment they have been subjected to. Opinions differ on the experience; some feel greatly helped and taken seriously, while others express frustration at not being taken seriously.

Two of the informants who have experienced violence in a close relationship have sought help at a women's shelter, and have also contacted the police. One informant comments on having contacted the public service [www.SlettMeg.no](http://www.SlettMeg.no):

"I find that slettmeg.no has a limited mandate, [...] I do get specific tips and advice, and basically don't expect more from them."

Another informant has contacted the owner of the relevant media. Her comment to one of their publications had caused massive harassment, yet she was not met with any understanding. Her complaint was refuted, and there was no attempt to support her, nor to moderate the discussion site or prevent further offenses.

## EXPERIENCES CONTACTING THE POLICE (FROM THE LARGER MATERIAL)

One woman, Eva, received threats and contacted the police. She felt taken seriously by the police, and the threats have stopped after that. Another woman, Aisha, filed a report about the threats she received, and was given a violence alarm directly linked to the police. She was also advised to keep a low profile, and Aisha questioned this, saying “I want to know that they are willing to stand in the battlefield with you”, and concluded that “I don’t feel like I got the support I needed”.

Sigrid, a third informant, also reported threats, and was happy with the way police handled her case:

I was scared, and brought my boyfriend when I was going to report it. I remember it as a very positive experience. I thought the police handled it surprisingly well. He was really taking me very seriously. The police were clear about there not having been a violation of the law, but it felt good that they still approached it with seriousness. I had expected them to tell me to just deal with it.

Sigrid ended up not filing a report, but as her quote shows, she felt taken seriously. Police assured her that the person who had threatened her was now in their systems and their gaze, and this comforted her. But Sigrid was obviously not expecting them to take her case seriously, and she is not alone about that. Cecilie says:

I didn’t feel like there was any point in acting upon it. I talked to my mother about it, and she urged me to report it [...] I regret it now, but I still don’t think the police would have done anything.

Bente was contacted by the police when the conflict peaked between her and the people she described as her violators. The officer asked her to back away from the conflict. He appealed to her self-image as strong and reasonable, a key in calming the situation. She said this approach was very successful. “Wise man, that police attorney!”.

# Experience of Police and Legal Aid

## **SOURCE MATERIAL FOR POLICE EXPERIENCES**

The police identified its special hate crime section, localized at the Manglerud police district in Oslo, as the best source to share information about how the police work regarding online violence. Simultaneously, a Norwegian report on hate speech online was published (Nadim, Flatmoe, & Wessel-Aas, 2016). It included thorough interviews with the Manglerud hate crime section. As we were perfectly able to use these answers for the purposes of our report, it rendered our need for a separate interview superfluous. While we recognize that the definitions of hate crime and hate speech do not cover all phenomena tied to online violence, most importantly gender based offenses and violence against women, the structures within the police for working with crime online are the same.

## **HOW POLICE MEET THE PEOPLE REPORTING CASES**

The special hate crime section within the police was constituted after pressure from civil society and the State Attorney. The group focuses on a good relations with the offended party, and they have a special program for strengthening this work. If a case is being shelved or dismissed, the police should stress to the person under attack that the case was nevertheless taken seriously. They say that police used to be criticized about not taking these survivors and cases seriously, and that turning this around has a preventive effect as well as an effect in the case in question (Nadim et al, 2016).

The ideal goal is that local police should be able to handle these cases, and provide equal treatment for survivors across the country. Currently, there is big variation in the competency of each district regarding hate crime. This

results in what is called “double dark figures”, where police do not report a case because they don’t recognize it as hate crime, resulting in even fewer cases being reported. Seminars are conducted on how to understand the phenomenon – what hate speech and hate crime is, how it can manifest itself, how to attack it and why prioritize it. The hate crime section says that prioritizing hate crime and hate speech is a question of changing attitudes and seeing the long-term effects for the individual and society (Nadim et al, 2016).

## **INVESTIGATION AND TRIAL**

The representative of the hate crime section is clear about using a broad definition of hate speech in the preventive work, but when it comes to investigations, they use the strict legal definitions. They want the public to have an accurate understanding of what kinds of speech and actions are covered by the law, so that they do not get a lot of insecurity and dismissal of cases (Nadim et al, 2016).

The efforts of this police group have resulted in many more cases being tried in court, thus giving a broader basis of verdicts and legal precedence in an area that used to have very little. They say that they try many ways to deal with a case, exemplifying it with intimidation that is not grave enough to be defined as threats or violence, but that they try in court as “ruthless behavior” within the so-called “ex-partner paragraph”. They conclude that it is a lot easier to investigate and bring to court the cases regarding online crime than the general impression in the judicial system and the public will have it (Nadim et al, 2016).

## **JURK – LEGAL AID FOR WOMEN**

JURK (Legal Aid for Women) is a student run legal aid office that provides free legal aid and legal advice for all women. Online violence is not a separate category in their statistics over cases they receive, and they say the relative amount of cases concerning online violence is low. In the previous months, they can recall a couple of cases with that kind of thematic headline, saying this is representative. Most of the relevant cases concern financial violence online – commonly a partner or former partner emptying the women’s online bank account, mortgaging property and taking up loans in their name. JURK advises the women to report to the police, and hand the case over to them.

# Discussion and Conclusions

Monica's case argues that police involvement is highly dependent upon the survivors' resourcefulness and determination. Once involved, however, the special crime section at Manglerud is described as friendly, invested and efficient. She does, however, question their prejudice towards offenders. The case also demonstrates how a determined survivor can fight online to gain some sense of personal justice.

Zeinab's story shows how the digital arenas provide efficient tools for a violent and controlling partner. Having some personal information, like a personal identification number, can grant offenders access to more information, give them the opportunity to change passwords and in many other ways gain control and betray the survivors' trust.

Mariell's case underlines how easy it is to gain access to and change the context of "harmless" pictures. It also stresses the impact such pictures have on life by never really going away. Mariell feels forced to tell her boss, her family and children. Her case is an example of how central the police's attitude is to the survivors' experience of the situation. Even if her case ended up shelved, she feels safe, taken seriously, and that the police handled her case well.

## LEGAL PROSECUTION

In our material there appears to be a common notion that digital offenses are difficult to investigate, and not a priority with the police. In the recent report *Hatefulle ytringer på internet*, police within the National Criminal Investigation Service (KRIPOS) and the hate crime section say that both in the public and within the police force one finds a notion of the lawless or free internet, where police cannot and should not work the way they do in real life (Nadim et al, 2016). Their message, however, is that these cases are not as hard to investigate nor to pursue legally as their reputation will have it. To give this work priority does involve a fight for already scant resources that the “real world crimes” feel habitually entitled to.

What is especially interesting about case 1 in this report, is that the internet proves the more tangible “crime scene”. The informant and her boyfriend have previously experienced a lot of random hatred towards their transracial relationship, mainly through grown men in the streets shouting offensive messages after them. On these occasions, the informant has never taken action, but when the same kind of message reaches her online, she is both alert and aware of many ways to pursue her harasser. Contrary to the idea that online crime is much harder to act upon, what with anonymity and international territory, this woman sees the online harassment as the more tangible and pursuable offense. In many ways, this makes sense, as the hateful threat is in writing, with an address linked to it. As opposed to the “live” incidents, this one is not a question of her word against the offender’s, and there is no need for witnesses or other visual recognition.

## **BEING SEEN**

One very important finding from this material and one that the police itself stresses, is that of taking each case and each survivor seriously, and treating them with respect and understanding. Whether a case is shelved, tried in court or even if the offense is not technically illegal, the way survivors are met is crucial to how they feel about their situation in particular, but most likely also to how they view the legal system in general. Furthermore, this is a very important way to get more survivors to report their cases, leading more cases being tried in court, more legislation being developed and adapted to the online context – and, in short, helping police and the legal system gain the public’s trust in these matters.

## **GENDERED HATE SPEECH**

In the more extensive material that this report is based on, we see that the larger part of digital harassment and online violence is rooted in gender. Both women and men are faced with harassment and violence online, but in different ways. The hate against women seems generic: hatred against women for being women. When men experience online violence that involves their gender, it seems to depend upon a breach of expectations, that these men are somehow treading outside a traditional and very confined masculine norm: that they are feminized, homosexual, trans, supporting liberal family values or “siding with” women. Gender is thus a major part of digital harassment and hatred online, in a way that we see gender expression and gender identity as a basis for discrimination, being also intertwined with other grounds for discrimination.

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# Appendix I – The Interview

## Guide for Survivors

### I Main question:

- Can you tell us about your experience with cyber violence? For instance about a specific episode.

### I Follow up what the informant said:

- Ask the informant to tell more about specific episodes.
- Ask the informant to elaborate or reflect around what he or she has told.

### Questions posed if it has not already emerged: More about cyber violence:

- What was written / said / sent / posted?
- Has it happened once or several times?  
When and how often?
- Has the violence influenced your behaviour on the internet?

### I Who violates?

- Do you know the identity of the person(s) attacking you? Is it somebody you know?  
If so, what relationship do you have?
- What was the gender of the person attacking you?
- Do you have any thoughts on what might be the basis of the incidents?
- What was your impression of the perpetrator?

## I Which type of media?

- Is the offense communicated through telephone, internet, or other media?
- In which social media have you experienced abuse, and in what media have you not experienced such events? (Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, online dating sites, newspaper's commentary field, closed discussion forums).

## I Seeking justice:

- When asking for help, did you prosecute your offender?
- Where did you go?
- Can you tell me about that experience?
- Were there any legal action? Did you get any kind of help or advice?
- How did the protocol of the police seem to you?

## I The experience of the judicial system:

- Did you feel a sense of justice?
- Is there anything else that would serve better your sense of justice?
- What would you have done to fulfil your sense of justice?
- Do you feel you had relevant options outside the police (NGOs/low-threshold agencies/etc.)?
- Did you speak to friends or family of your experience?

## I Stopping the violence:

- Has the violence stopped?
- Are you still being harassed – are there still photos of you on some sites?
- How would you want your case being handled – that is, in how to stop the violence?
- Did you do anything technical to stop the violence i.e blocking the person, from Facebook, mobile phone, etc.

## I General thoughts on the subject:

- Do you know a lot of cases similar to yours?
- What would you suggest the police and policy makers do to prevent and to seek justice for sufferers of online violence?

## I Background information:

- Gender
- Age
- Education
- Online activities, i.e Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, online dating sites, newspaper's commentary field, closed discussion forums.

# Appendix II – The Interview Guide for the Police and Legal Aid

- What cases are the most common *in your experience* when it comes to cyber violence?
- (How many cyber violence cases are there every year?)
- (Are there certain similarities or distinct profiles on cyber violence victims, in your experience?)
- What options do you have for sanctions, measures, etc., when a cyber violence case is reported? What route do you usually follow, and why? What options or measures are more rarely used, and why do you think that is?
- Is there NGO's or low-threshold agencies that you can refer victims to for help?
- Registration: How do you register reported cases? When they are accepted/rejected/with drawn. What system of classifications do you have? Do you register relationship between victim and possible perpetrator?
- What kind of legal assistance can victims get? Before a case is reported and during the handling of the case?
- Do you have sufficient resources and technical expertise to pursue all relevant cases?

