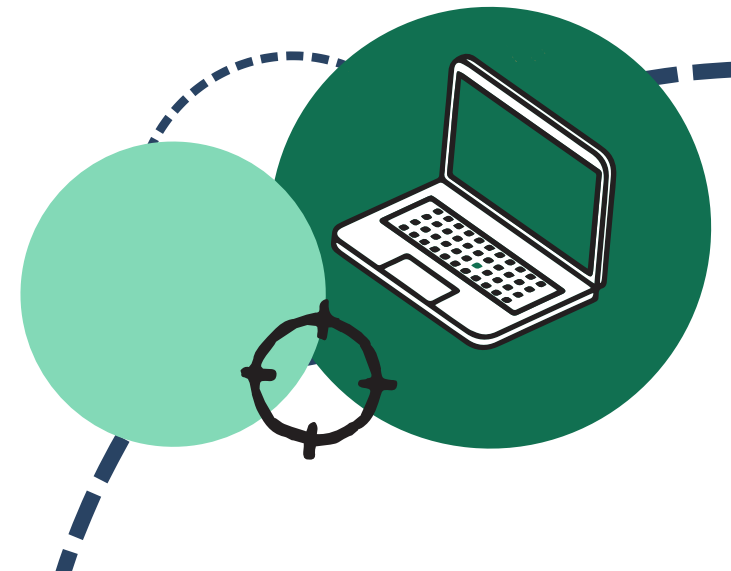


# Insights and Trends: Analysis of Report Harmful Content 2023



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# Executive Summary

Report Harmful Content is a national alternative dispute resolution service provided by the UK Safer Internet Centre and operated by SWGfL, empowering anyone over the age of 13 and living in the UK to report harmful content online.

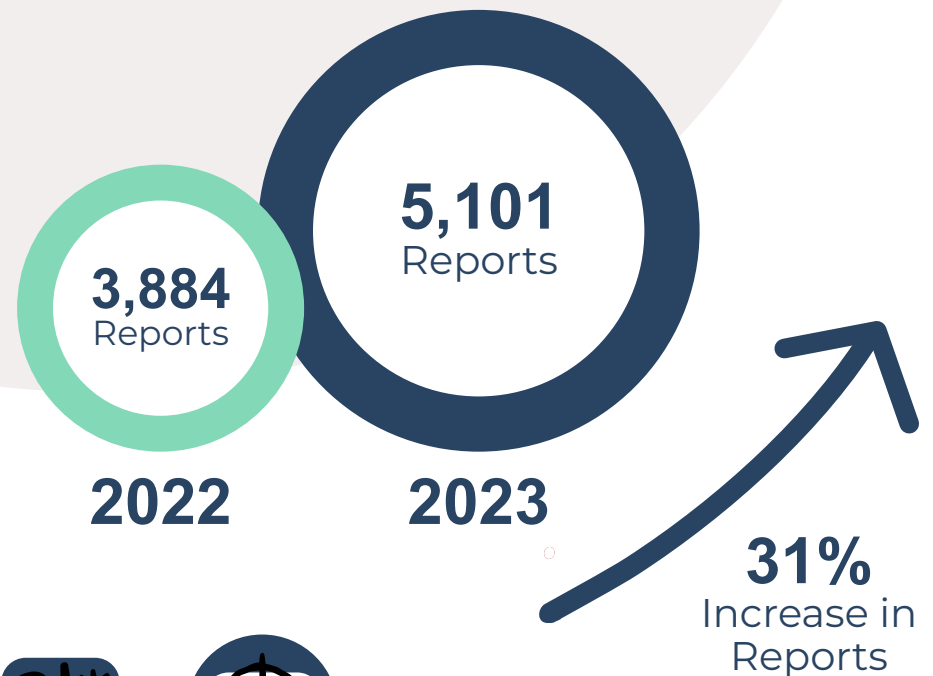
Report Harmful Content acts in mediation between users and 25 industry platforms, with whom it has a trusted flagger partnership. The service provides up-to-date information on community standards, with direct links to the correct reporting facilities available on the Report Harmful Content website. The service also provides support to clients who have already submitted a report to a participating platform but would like their outcome reviewed.

This analysis considers cases from the service between January to December 2023. During this period, Report Harmful Content supported 5,101 cases made through website and chatbot reports. This includes cases that fall outside of the service's remit, such as non-participating platforms, illegal harms (e.g. terrorist and child sexual abuse material), and reports made outside of the UK. **In 89% of cases, the service was able to successfully encourage industry to remove harmful content.**

Reports were made against a range of online services, with major social media platforms making up the minority of cases. Some of the most harmful content reported manifested on smaller, independent platforms, with nearly half of reports to the service encompassing violent, pornographic and self-harm/suicide-related content on these websites. This highlights the need for a more inclusive regulatory framework and an independent single point of contact service, rather than assuming that signposting to major platforms is all that is required.

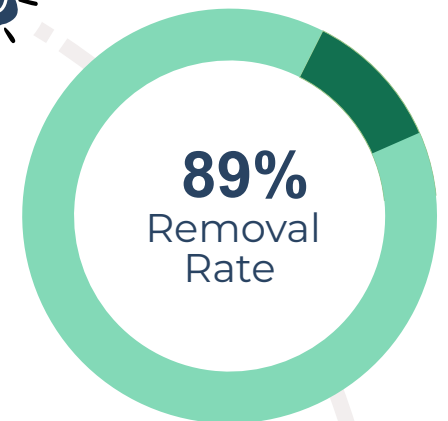
Report Harmful Content can only respond to cases where online harm has occurred on one of 25 industry platforms. This analysis will centre on cases that have fallen within the remit of the service, and where the service was able to intervene.

## Analysis

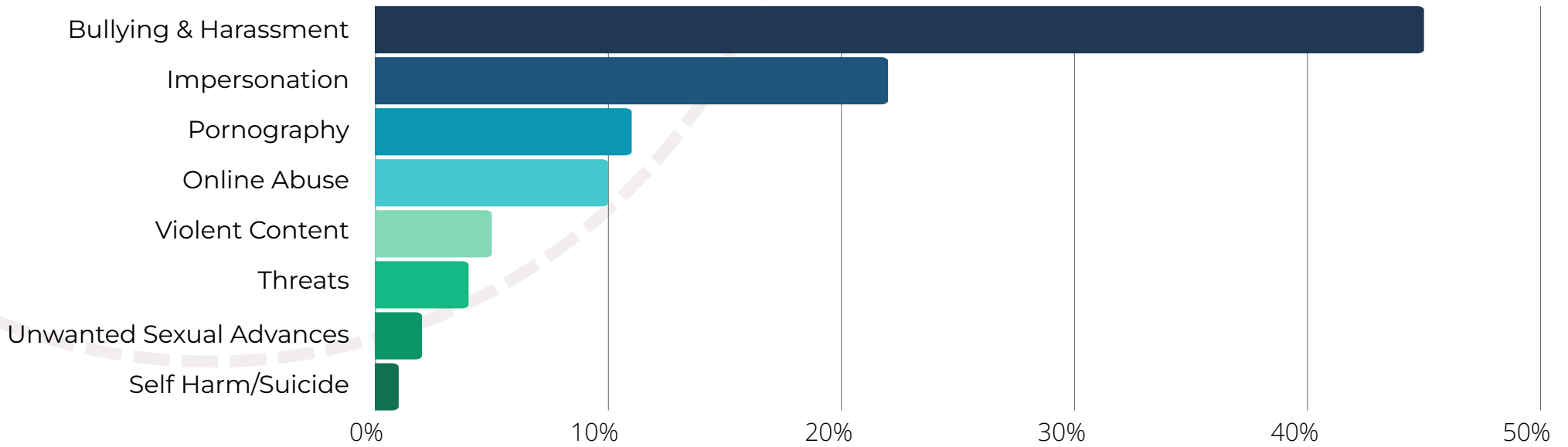


## Top Trends

1. Animal Abuse
2. Image Abuse
3. Allegations of Abuse



## Cases



## Website Data

Compared to 2022 data.

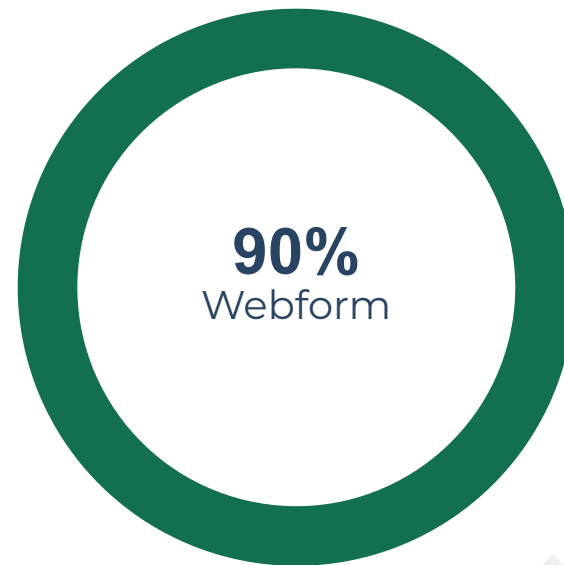
**7,700**  
Visits from  
RHC Button

**16%**  
Increase

**226,000**  
Website Visits

**44%**  
Increase

## Contact Method



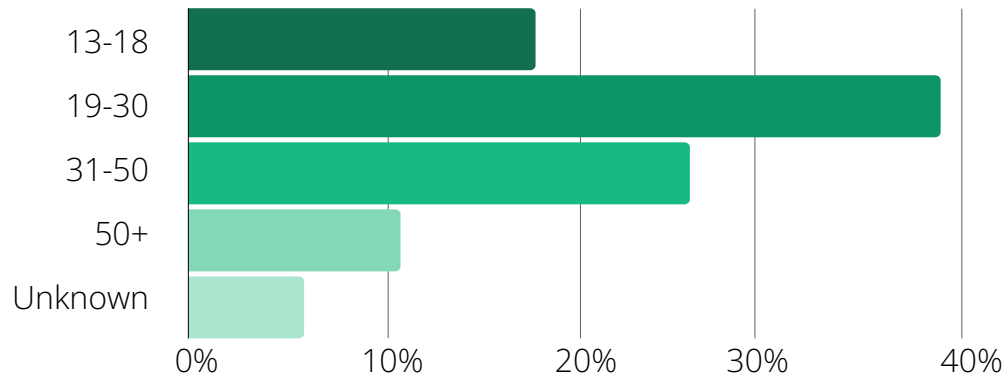
## Demographics

**37%** of reports are clients reporting **on behalf** of someone else.

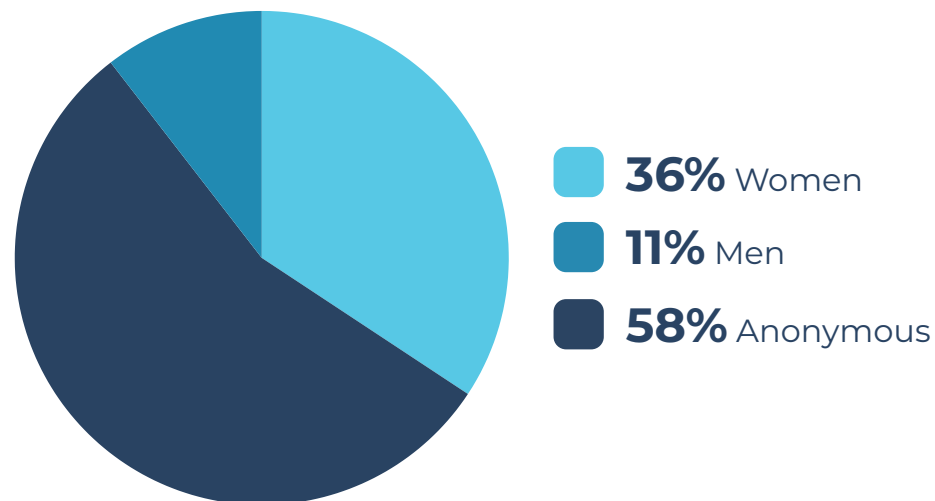
**59%** of reports are client reporting **for themselves**.

**13%** of clients did not disclose.

## Ages



## Gender



# Case Studies

## Cultural Sensitivity

A disturbing trend of harassment has impacted women from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds where individuals are being maliciously impersonated on social media by ex-partners, friends, or family members. The images being used on the profiles are exploiting images that may carry cultural or personal significance, such as those depicting individuals without culturally specific dresswear or engaged in public displays of affection. In 2023, Report Harmful Content successfully removed 253 profiles designed to harass and degrade these victims/survivors across multiple social media platforms.

The following case delves into the profound impact this had on a client from a culturally sensitive background:

Aaliya (*pseudonym*) found herself in a distressing situation when her images were maliciously shared onto a social media profile by an ex-partner. The original account was created using both her name and images to impersonate her, including captions such as 'your local bisexual mommy.' We strongly believe this behaviour aimed to harass, shame, humiliate, and ostracise her from the community, causing significant emotional distress.

In 2023, the Report Harmful Content service escalated and removed 188 individual impersonation accounts across various social media platforms for Aaliya. However, the repercussions have been severe, not only for Aaliya, but for many others who have been affected by this. Some have found themselves unable to return to their home countries due to the shame brought upon their families.

# Case Studies

## Animal Abuse

A concerning 36% of cases reported to Report Harmful Content in November to December 2023 unveiled distressing instances of various forms of animal abuse spanning multiple social media platforms. While some of this content depicted extreme forms of bestiality, a substantial portion of the reports highlighted the disturbing physical and psychological mistreatment of monkeys. Even more troubling, the service discovered an alarming trend wherein viewers actively participated in and endorsed the torture of animals, showcasing a disconcerting pattern across global social media platforms.

The cruelty depicted in many of these cases is not only graphic but also easily identifiable, causing significant distress and concern to users who witness it online. Despite the deeply unsettling nature of this content, certain profiles also feature seemingly innocent videos of monkeys dressed in infant clothing or engaged in playful interactions with toys. Unfortunately, this type of content is also contributing to misconceptions about the welfare of these animals.

While most social media platforms strictly prohibit content involving animal cruelty, Report Harmful Content has noted a rise in platforms failing to take appropriate action when content is reported to them. Fortunately, from November 2023 the service has been able to remove 84% of reported content from social media platforms.



## Shaping the Online Safety Act

Earlier in 2023, we became aware that the UK government was looking to remove an essential safeguard (that already existed in VSP regulation) from the Online Safety Bill. This safeguard essentially provided online users with an alternative dispute resolution process to appeal decisions that were made by a number of online platforms in regards to harmful online content. It could ultimately support with getting online content removed, and indeed, allowed individuals to know they had somewhere else to go when they needed to make an appeal.

In response to this, the UK Safer Internet Centre started the *Don't Steal My Right to Appeal* campaign in early May. We wanted to ensure that this obligation was included in the Online Safety Bill with the support of peers as well as the general public. There were numerous debates within the House of Lords and the campaign was aimed to bring this necessity to the forefront of consideration.

When the amendment was finally brought forward in the House of Lords, it was decided that Ofcom would report on their ongoing enforcement of harmful online content and would review whether an alternative dispute resolution was needed after a period of two years.

While it wasn't the concession that would actively ensure individuals would be supported when the Online Safety Bill is enforced, we welcomed the amended strategy to include the potential inclusion of an alternative dispute resolution process at a later time. This concession was recognition by the Government that this was one of the very few points that warranted change and indeed showed that the campaign was an ultimate success.



## Report Harmful Content Resources

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[Report Harmful Content](#)

[Report Harmful Content Button](#)

[Report Harmful Content Annual Report 2022](#)

## Further Resources

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[SWGfL](#)

[Revenge Porn Helpline](#)

[Professionals Online Safety Helpline](#)

[UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

[Childnet](#)

[Internet Watch Foundation \(IWF\)](#)

[Action Counter Terrorism \(ACT\)](#)



**NOMINET**

