

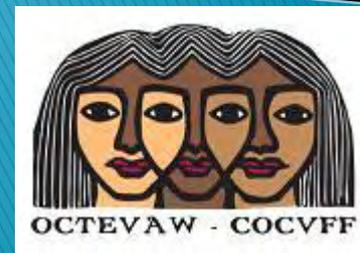
# Sexual Violence and Social Media: Building A Framework for Prevention

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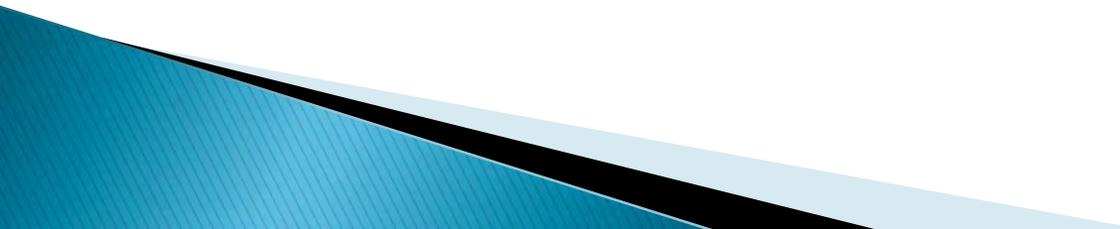
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In partnership with Crime Prevention Ottawa &  
Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW)

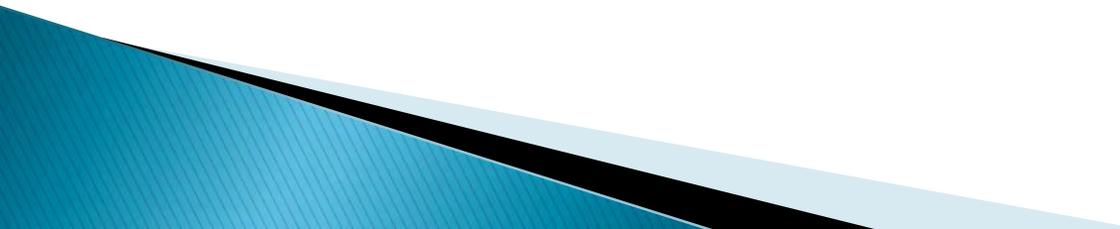


# Research Aims

- ▶ Explore connections between sexual violence and social media with a focus on youth.
  - ▶ Stimulate discussion and planning for a prevention framework for program development and evaluation in Ottawa.
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# Sexual Violence

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the survivors/victims, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.



# Social Media: Our Focus

Type of social media	Description	Popular examples in Canada
Social network sites	Individuals create a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and connect with other users with whom they share a connection.	Facebook, LinkedIn
Media-sharing sites	Users post videos or photographs that others can share, comment, or 'like'.	YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest
Status-update services	Micro blogging services, allow users to share short updates (e.g. tweets) and to see updates of others.	Twitter

# Literature Review

- ▶ Draws from several overlapping areas:
  - Cyber/online bullying and harassment
  - Non-consensual sharing of sexual images
  - Recording and distribution of sexual assault
  - Intimate partner violence and cyberstalking
  - Luring/online exploitation of minors
  - Sex trafficking
  - Virtual sexual assault

# What Does the Literature Say?

## Sexual violence related to social media:

- ▶ Sexual nature of much abuse and harassment
  - ▶ Low reporting rates
  - ▶ Abusive relationships
  - ▶ Gender analysis needed
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# What Does the Literature Say? (cont.)

## Youth and Prevention:

- ▶ Media literacy
  - ▶ Healthy relationships
  - ▶ Bystander intervention
  - ▶ Youth-driven initiatives
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# Survey

- ▶ Objectives:
    - Collect information about sexual violence associated with social media;
    - Identify any existing prevention strategies;
    - Gather recommendations to aid further development of prevention programming.
  - ▶ Sent to Ontario community organizations, resource providers, front-line workers, and educators in February and March 2013.
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# Survey Respondents

Type of organization	Portion of total respondents (N=187)
Community resource/recreation centre	21%
Shelter/family and child services	19%
Sexual assault support service	14%
Educational institution/school board	12%
Violence prevention coalition/network	11%
Community health centre	7%
Criminal justice program	6%
Aboriginal centre	5%
No affiliation/other	5%

# Survey Findings

- ▶ 79% aware of social media use to control, harass, or stalk a current or former intimate partner.

*“Clients have had programs installed on their computers, so that their abusers can see any communications they may have, including learning their passwords...Abusers have posted slanderous things about their former partner on their own Facebook pages, or have distributed nude images of their former partners.”*

# Survey Findings (cont.)

- ▶ 76% aware of posting or sharing intimate photos or text messages without consent.

*“Young girls do not necessarily view obsessive partners as abusive – despite the escalation. This also applies to less overt photos that get shared and sent widely.”*

- ▶ 65% aware of posting or sharing sexually harassing or violent texts or images.

*“When we do presentations in high schools, it is quite alarming how many teen girls get harassed via text message and Facebook.”*

# Survey Findings (cont.)

- ▶ 52% aware of social media use for the sexual exploitation of minors.
  - *“There appears to be ongoing issues with sexual exploitation of minors via digital images in the form of luring from someone who pretends to be something or someone they’re not in order to **gain trust and access sexual photos** of the victim.”*
- ▶ Overlapping relationship between cyberbullying & sexual violence.
  - *“I think that sexual violence would be on a continuum of cyberbullying. For example, **slut shaming via social media** can be considered sexual harassment.”*

# Survey Findings:

## Data Collection and Evaluation

- ▶ Most knowledge of sexual violence related to social media appears to be collected informally.
  - *“It is difficult to place a “number” per say on how often this happens because it is usually tied in with a host of other experiences...”*
- ▶ Formally evaluated prevention efforts still to come.
  - *“We have not had any measured success in terms of quantitative data. However, we have had positive feedback from clients and community members (teachers) about the importance of resources and education about the connection between sexual violence and social media.”*

# Survey Findings: Prevention Challenges

- ▶ Rapidly changing media environments.
  - ▶ Need for technology training and support for staff and volunteers.
  - ▶ Lack of data and/or evaluation.
  - ▶ Need for collaboration and parental engagement.
  - ▶ Challenges getting the message out to a wider audience.
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# Interviews: Key Themes

## ▶ General awareness

- *“It is ok to [report abuse]...even in this medium, it is abuse. It is sexual harassment...to know that it’s not something to be dismissed, and it’s not something to say, ‘oh it’s ok, it will go away’...the education piece of what it is, what it actually is, that it is abuse.”*

## ▶ Online anonymity and cruelty

- *“The amount of people that can sit behind closed doors and do it on their computer...We still look for perpetrators outside, and lurking in the dark alleys, and still don’t really think those trolls could be that perpetrator.”*

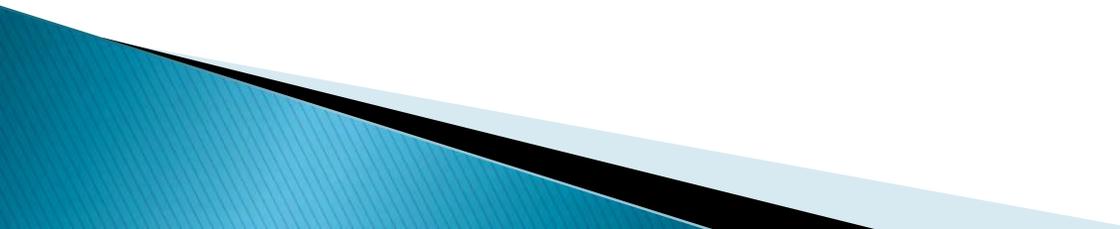
# Interviews: Key Themes (cont.)

- ▶ Self-protection and victim-blaming.
  - “[It is] the difference between ‘hey young women, this is how you can protect yourselves’, as opposed to *putting the onus on everybody in the online community to take responsibility for what they’re doing.*”
- ▶ Consent
  - “*Informed consent would definitely be a key piece..the language or the skills to help them figure out in their own minds what are they comfortable doing..helping them establish some boundaries...that *consent does apply to social media.*”*

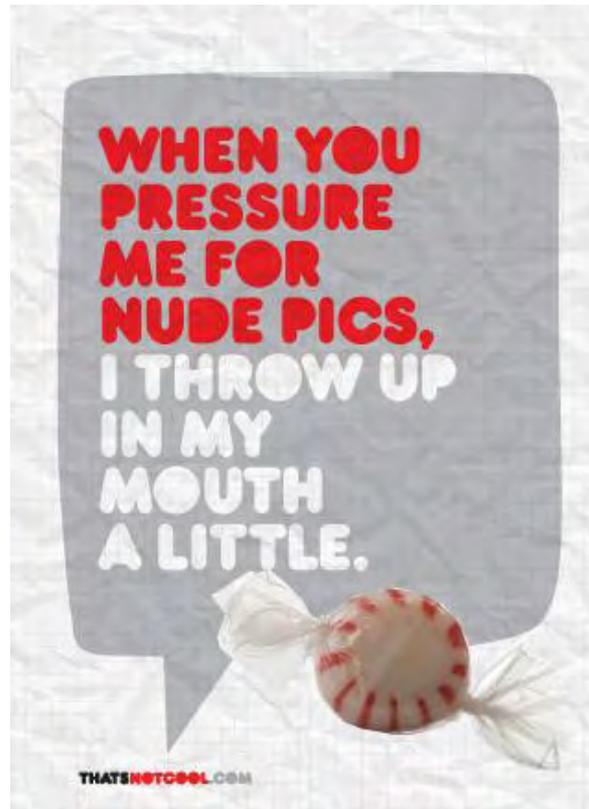
# Interviews: Key Themes (cont.)

- ▶ Engaging parents and bystanders.
  - *“Targeting the bystanders, the people who are the ones who got the message and just forward it on, for example, instead of stopping and thinking about what are the implications of doing this, can I take a stand here...we have to engage people in those discussions in a meaningful way.”*
- ▶ Need for training and resource development.
  - *“If there’s a concern around safety, around physical safety...we would know that we can bring in [the authorities, counseling]. But it feels...it feels huge. ...it’s layered, and re-traumatizing all the time...It’s really complex...and we’re not necessarily well prepared to deal with it.”*

# Social Media Scan

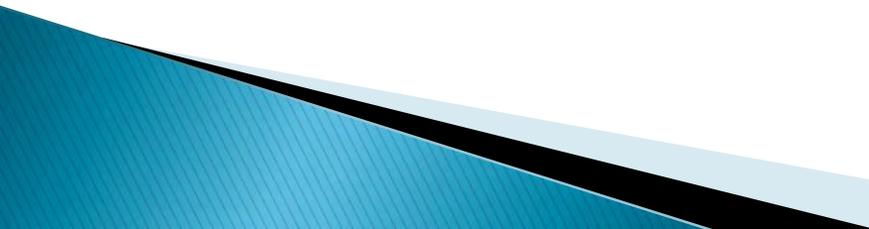
- ▶ Offline prevention campaigns moving online.
  - ▶ Focus on raising awareness, offering resources, or debunking myths.
  - ▶ Some include a component specific to sexual violence and digital media/social media.
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# Campaign Examples



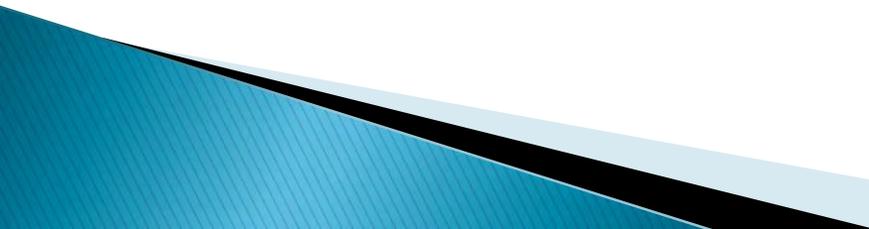
# Recommendations (1)

## Understanding sexual violence involving social media:

- 1) Approach prevention by recognizing that **youth are not a homogenous group** and that their experiences with sexual violence and social media are affected by many factors. These include gender, experiences of racism, sexual orientation, ability, and mental health.
  - 2) Think about **social media as a tool** that facilitates sexual violence, or is associated with it. It does not cause it.
  - 3) **Avoid victim-blaming** in situations involving youth, their sexuality, and sexual exploration. Online safety advice can offer protection, but it is not a road to prevention.
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# Recommendations (2)

## Identifying sexual violence involving social media:

- 4) Foster **knowledge-sharing and collaboration** among those working towards the prevention of cyberbullying and sexual violence prevention.
  - 5) Encourage youth and parents to **define and develop healthy relationships** generally as well as in social media contexts.
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# Recommendations (3)

## Preventing sexual violence involving social media:

- 6) Identify measures linked to sexual violence and social media and develop program evaluation strategies.
  - 7) Support and build youth and parental digital media literacy.
  - 8) Provide opportunities and resources to educators and frontline workers for social media training and programming.
  - 9) Look to social media as a prevention tool and move beyond using offline strategies online. Aim to provide interactive, multi-site programming when possible.
  - 10) Focus on ground-up approaches that engage youth in all aspects of prevention programming.
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Thank you!

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