

Examining public attitudes to deepfakes

November 2025

Crest Advisory was commissioned by the Office of the Police Chief Scientific Adviser to research the social and emotional impact of deepfakes on victims, with a focus on violence against women and girls

Crest is an independent crime and justice consultancy.

We are experts in **justice, policing, and public safety**, working with partners in the charity sector, the police, local government, and central government to create positive change - impacting both **policy** and **practice**.



Key context and terminology

Deepfake

Digitally created and altered content, often in the form of fake images, videos, and audio recordings that are made to look real.

VAWG

Violence against women and girls.

Deepfake VAWG

Non-consensual deepfake content that is sexual/intimate in nature and gender-based. Intimate is defined by the victim.

Legislative framework

Legislation related to sexual/intimate deepfakes is **evolving**. At the time of writing, the following legislation was in place:

- [Online Safety Act \(2023\)](#) made it an offence to share non-consensual intimate images, including deepfakes.
- [Data \(Use and Access\) Act \(2025\)](#) includes provisions to supplement the Online Safety Act (2023) by making it illegal to create an intimate image of another person without consent. However, at the time of writing, this section of the Data (Use and Access) Act is not yet in force.
- [Crime and Policing Bill \(2025\)](#) currently at its second reading in the House of Lords, proposes to provide police with further powers to tackle intimate image abuse more broadly (and inclusive of deepfakes).

This report covers the findings from our nationally representative survey and rapid evidence review to understand public attitudes to deepfakes

Crest used three main methods* in this project: **(1) a nationally representative survey** of the British public; **(2) a rapid evidence review** of existing research about the **social and emotional impact of deepfakes**, with a focus on violence against women and girls (VAWG); and **(3) engagement with practitioners and victims/survivors of intimate deepfakes**. This report focuses on the first two methods.

1. Nationally representative survey

This survey asked a representative sample (n=1,700) of people in England and Wales about their understanding and attitudes towards deepfakes, including sexual/intimate deepfakes.

The sample was representative on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity and home region.

2. Rapid evidence review

We reviewed existing evidence to understand what is currently known about the scale, nature and impact of deepfakes. Through this, we identified a knowledge gap around public attitudes toward deepfakes which gave impetus to our survey.

The evidence review also provided context for the findings of our survey.

* See Annex for detail on these methods

Executive Summary: Key findings of our nationally representative survey

- Around two thirds of our respondents have **heard about deepfakes** and three in five **are worried** about being a victim of a deepfake of any type. However, most people were **not aware of the legislation** around deepfakes.
- While the public think **sexual/intimate deepfakes are harmful**, they think other crimes (including other VAWG and non-VAWG offences) are **more harmful**. However, research shows that non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes can **cause significant harms to victims** comparable with contact VAWG such as sexual assault.
- 7% of our respondents (n=102) indicated that they had a sexual/intimate deepfake made of them. Of these, 60% contacted a support service, a tech platform or told friends and family and **51% reported to the police**. The **main reasons for not reporting were embarrassment or uncertainty about the offence being treated seriously**.
- While most respondents were opposed to creating or sharing intimate/sexual deepfakes, **a sizable minority (1 in 4 respondents) felt there is nothing wrong with, or felt neutral about**, creating and sharing sexual/intimate deepfakes.
- **Those who considered it to be morally and legally acceptable to create, view, share and sell sexual/intimate deepfakes** were more likely to **agree with beliefs** that would commonly be regarded as misogynistic and hold more positive views about AI.

Public awareness of deepfakes

Research questions:

- Have the public **heard** of deepfakes and have they **seen** them?
- What **types** of deepfakes are the public viewing?
- **Where** are the public seeing deepfakes?
- Are the public aware of any **legislation** around deepfakes?

Most people responding to our survey had heard of deepfakes before.

Certain groups were more aware than others: men were more likely to have heard of deepfakes than women

Findings from our survey

68%

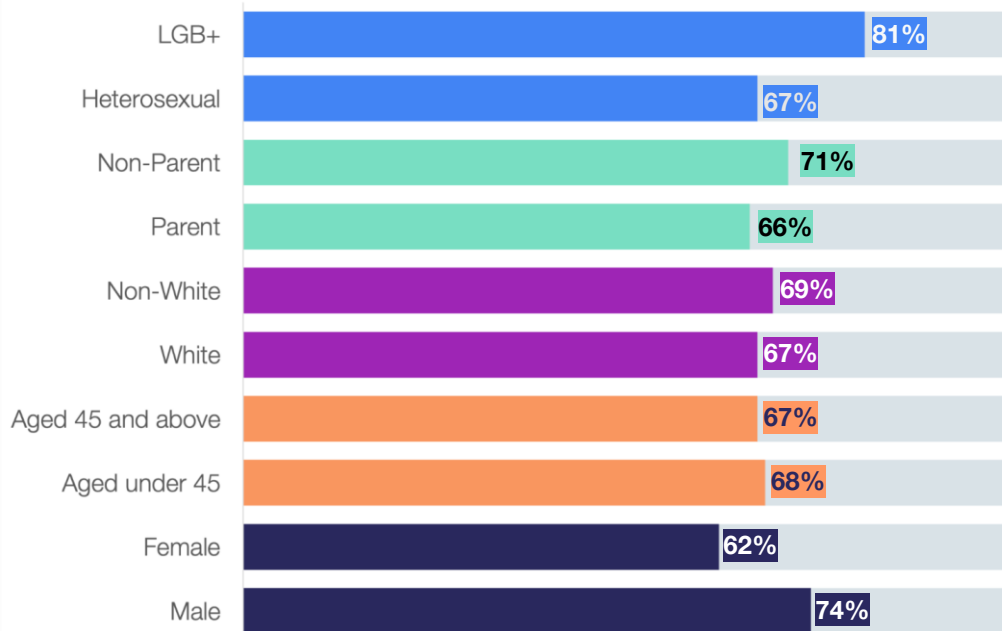
(n = 1,150)

The majority of respondents in our survey said they **had heard of the term “deepfakes” before**

Wider research

Other published research also supports our findings that **more men and boys are aware of deepfakes than women and girls**. Among adults, one large-scale study (n=16,000) conducted across 10 countries (excluding the UK) found that men were more aware of deepfakes than women ([Umbach et al., 2024](#)).

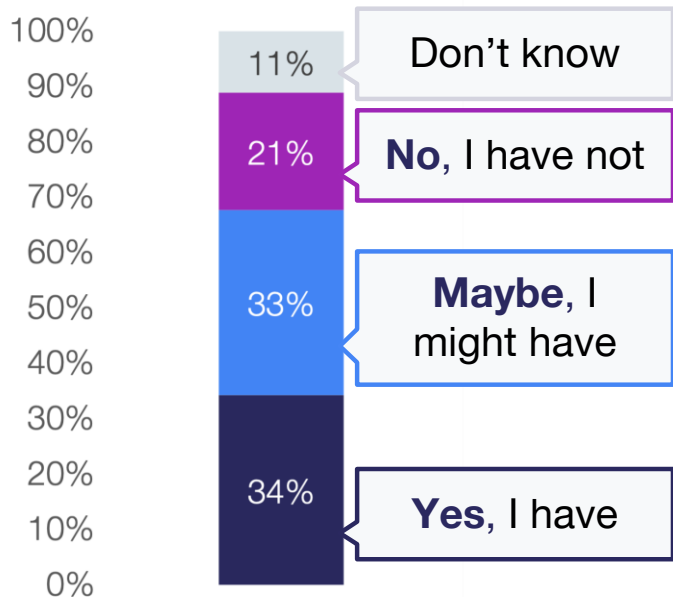
Proportion (%) of survey respondents that had heard of deepfakes before by demographic group*



*LGB+ includes those who identified as gay or lesbian, bisexual or any other gender identity other than heterosexual.
Non-White = Asian, Black, Mixed, Any other ethnic group

Most people answering our survey said they had seen or might have seen a deepfake before, with humorous, scam and political deepfakes being the most common type seen

Proportion (%) of survey respondents by whether they had seen a deepfake or not*



Findings from our survey

In our survey, **men (74%)** were more likely to report that they had **seen or may have seen a deepfake** than women (62%). **People aged under 45 (81%)** were also more likely to say this than people aged 45 and over (57%).

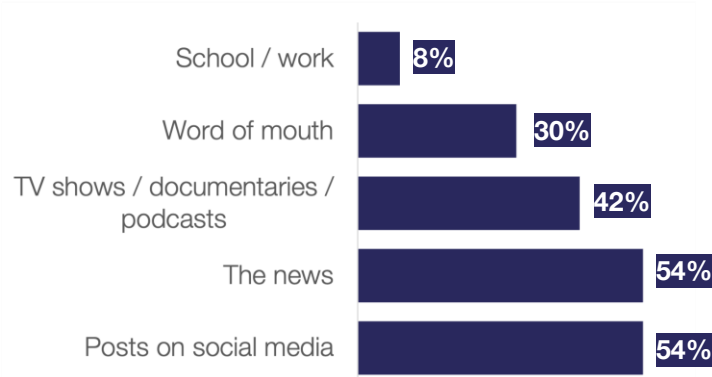
Twice the number of people responding to our survey said that they had seen **humorous** (43%), **scam** (43%) or **political** (42%) deepfakes than sexual/intimate deepfakes of **someone they do not know** (21%) or **someone they do know** (14%).

Wider research

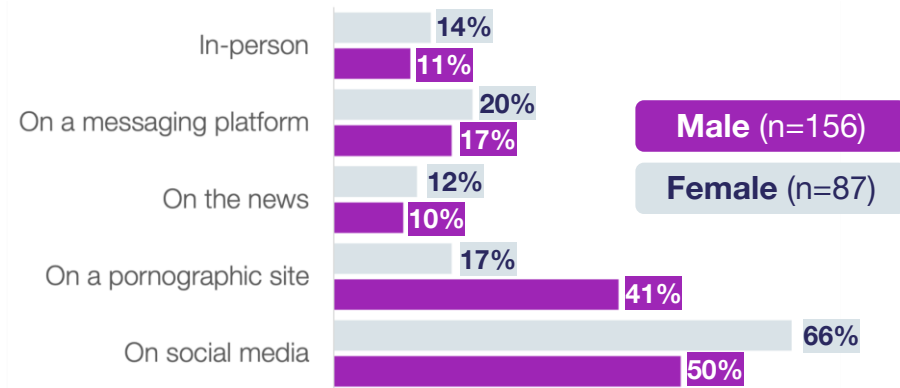
Since 2017, **access and exposure to deepfakes has proliferated**. Deepfakes are legal to view and easily accessible on platforms like Google, Telegram, X, and pornography sites.

Posts on social media were the most common medium through which people in our survey had heard about and seen deepfakes

Proportion (%) of survey respondents by the source(s) through which they heard about deepfakes*



Proportion (%) of survey respondents by gender and the source(s) through which they had seen a sexual/intimate deepfake of someone they do not know

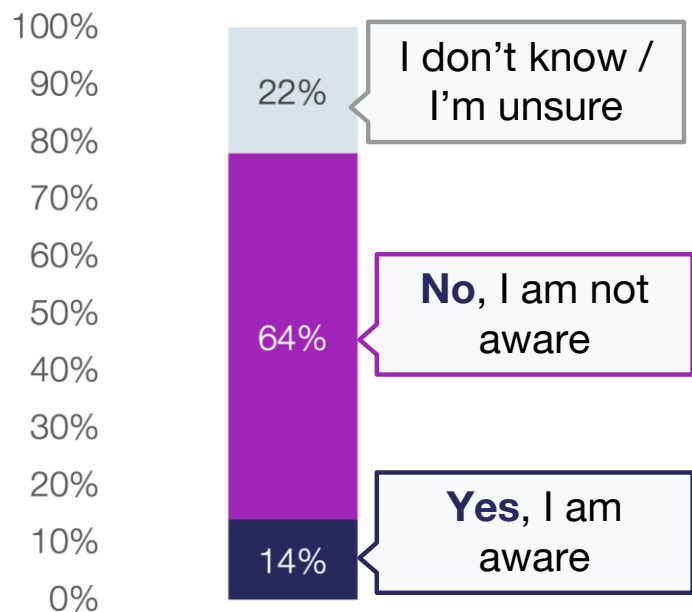


Findings from our survey

Social media was the most common platform where people had heard about and seen deepfakes. Porn sites appeared to reflect a key distinction in how men and women had seen sexual/intimate deepfakes, especially when the content concerns someone they do not know. Of men and women who saw a sexual/intimate of someone they did not know, 41% of men and 17% of women saw them on porn sites.

Despite most people in our survey being aware of deepfakes, most were not aware of deepfake-related legislation in England and Wales

Proportion (%) of survey respondents by whether they were aware of deepfake legislation or not*



Findings from our survey

Our survey highlights a relatively widespread awareness of deepfakes, but **the lack of awareness regarding deepfake legislation is troubling**. People aged under 45 (25%) were more likely than people aged 45 and over (5%) to be aware of deepfake legislation.

Current legislation on deepfakes

While the legislative state of deepfakes is in flux as bills progress through the Houses of Parliament, current and prospective legislation, such as the Online Safety Act, Data (Use and Access) Act and the Crime and Policing Bill, go some way to **criminalising and providing powers to tackle deepfake VAWG**.

Experience of deepfakes

Research questions:

- How do victims of deepfakes **react**?
- How can victims be encouraged to **report**?
- What proportion of the public **has created a deepfake**?
- What proportion of the public **want to create a deepfake**?

7% of people in our survey said that a sexual/intimate deepfake had been made of them and most had told someone about it

7%

(n = 102)

7% of people in our survey said a **sexual/intimate deepfake had been made of them**

Findings from our survey

These people were also asked whether they **agreed to the creation of that deepfake**. 68% said they did agree, while 31% had not agreed to its creation.

Findings from our survey

Of survey respondents who had had a sexual/intimate deepfake made of them, **61% contacted the platform that their deepfake was on, 60% contacted a support service, 58% told friends and family and 51% reported to the police**. Among those who told **no one** about the deepfake, the most commonly cited reason was **embarrassment** (53%).

Wider research

Shame and embarrassment is a widely-documented impact of sexual/intimate deepfakes and of wider image-based sexual abuse on victims. This can **silence victims**, damaging their confidence to report the abuse. Victims may **fear being blamed for their victimisation** or being perceived as precipitous or an undeserving of support (Brooks, 2014; Vera-Gray & Kelly, 2020).

The most common reason why respondents did not tell the police when a sexual/intimate deepfake was made of them was because they were worried that they would not be taken seriously

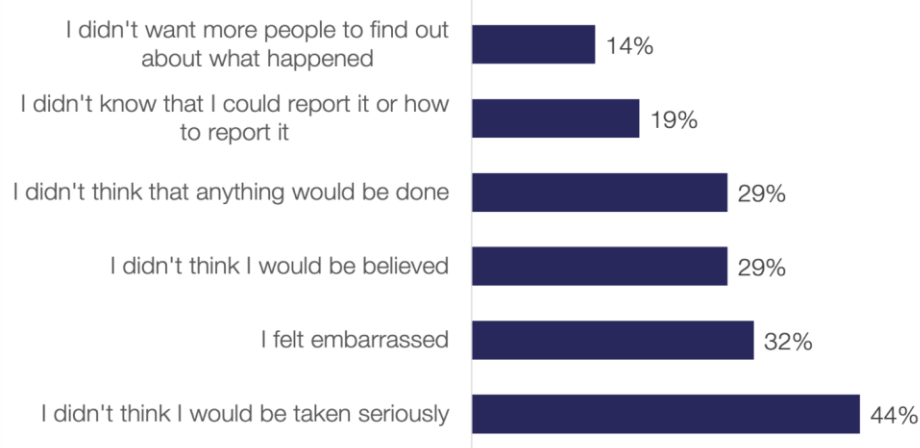
Findings from our survey

Of respondents who had had a deepfake made of them and did **not** report it to the police, respondents most commonly cited the reason that **they did not think they would be taken seriously** (44%).

Findings from our research with practitioners

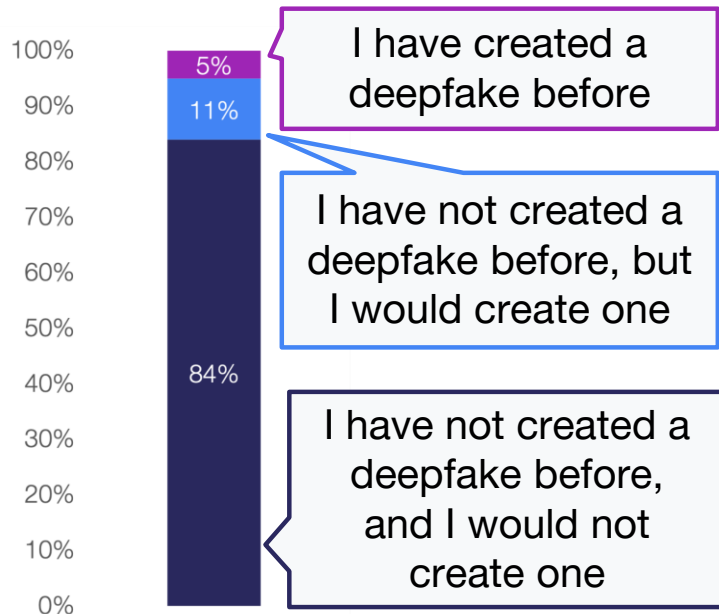
Practitioners who work with victims of image-based abuse, including sexual/intimate deepfakes, told us that victims are often worried that they won't be taken seriously, and are relieved to hear that what they have experienced is illegal.

Proportion (%) of respondents who stated that they had a sexual/intimate deepfake made of them by their reason(s) for not telling the police about it (n=38)



Almost one in every six people in our survey said that they had created or wanted to create a deepfake (of any type) in the future. This is enabled by cheap and accessible tools and software

Proportion (%) of survey respondents by their experience/attitudes towards creating deepfakes*



Findings from our survey

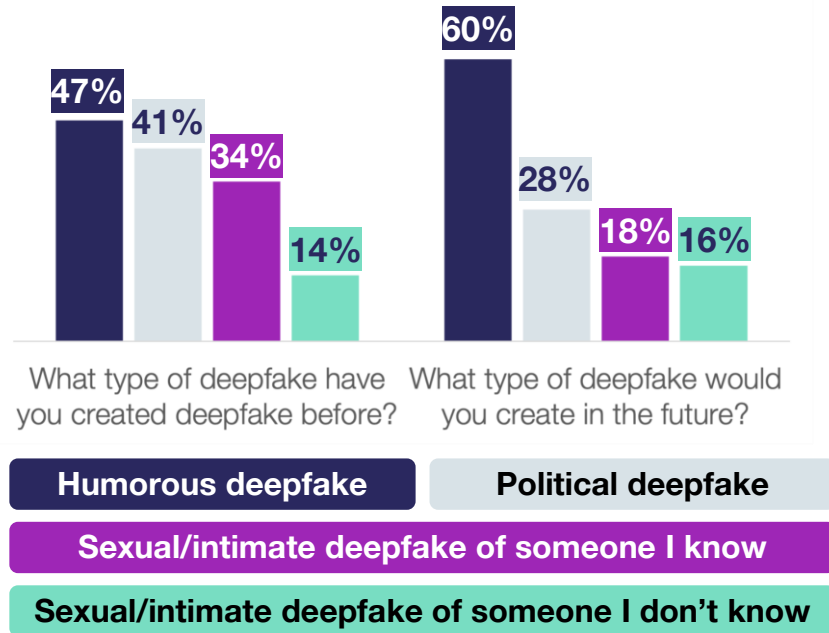
Almost one in every six people that responded to our survey said that they had created any kind of deepfake before or would do so in the future.

Wider research

Users can **create their own deepfakes for a small or no charge in seconds** in dedicated tools and software in apps, on Telegram, and in forums ([Deeprtrace, 2019](#); [Security Hero, 2023](#); [McAfee, 2025](#)) using mainstream payment methods such as Visa, Mastercard and cryptocurrency. Within this ecosystem, there is an economy around the commissioned creation of deepfakes ([Tenbarge, 2023](#)).

Of those people who said they had created a deepfake, over a third said they had created a sexual/intimate deepfake of someone they know

Proportion (%) of survey respondents who said they have created or would create a deepfake by type*



Findings from our survey

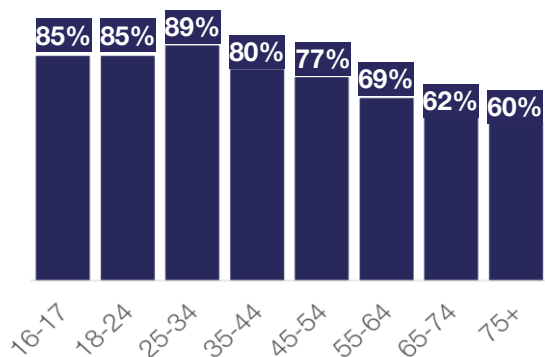
Of those people who said they had created a deepfake, over a third said they had created a sexual/intimate deepfake of someone they know. Humorous deepfakes were the most common type of deepfake that people in our survey had created and would create in the future. The creation of deepfakes was more common among younger respondents.

Wider research

There is **limited evidence on the creators of deepfake content and perpetration of deepfake VAWG**. However, more widely, the existing literature is clear that **power, control and sexual gratification are key motivations for the perpetration of intimate image abuse** and VAWG more broadly (Henry and Beard, 2024).

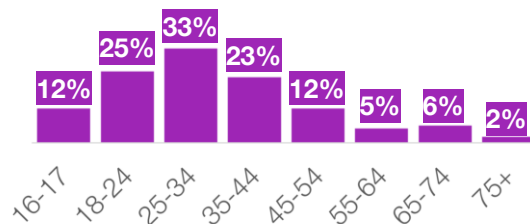
Our survey consistently found that younger people were more likely to have seen deepfakes, have created or want to create deepfakes, and had a greater awareness of deepfake-related legislation

Proportion (%) of survey respondents saying they had seen or may have seen any type of deepfake by age*



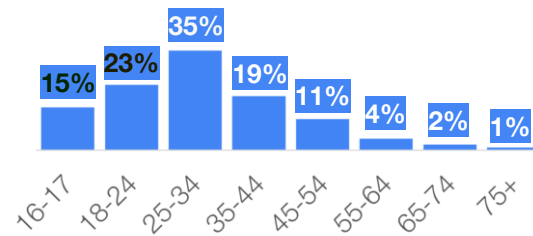
Proportion (%) of survey respondents saying they had created or would create any type of deepfake by age

Base sizes range from n=44 for 16-17 to n=278 for 25-34.



Proportion (%) of survey respondents saying they were aware of deepfake-related legislation by age

Base sizes range from n=48 for 16-17 to n=282 for 25-34.



Findings from our survey

In our survey, **younger respondents** displayed a **greater awareness and experience** of deepfakes and generally displayed **more positive attitudes** towards deepfakes. This is explored further in the next section.

Wider research

A recent Ofcom survey (2024) found that 24% of 18-24s had seen a sexual deepfake, compared to 14% of older adults.

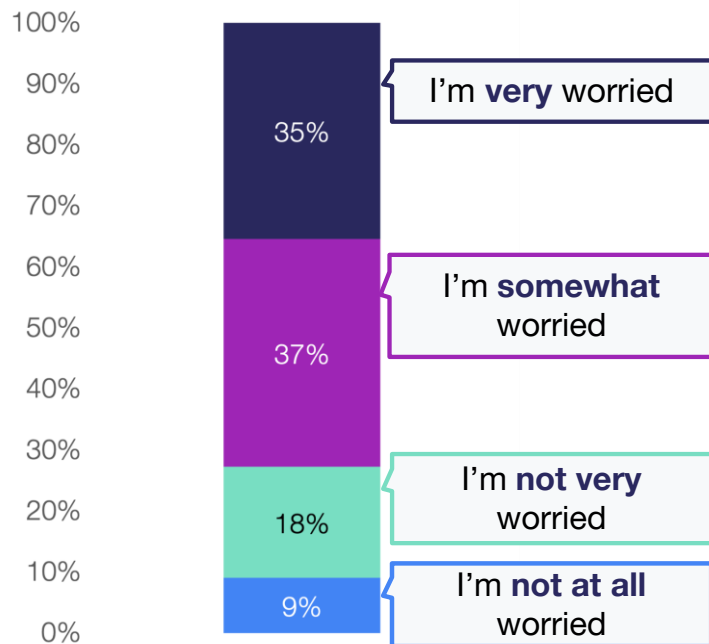
Attitudes to deepfakes

Research questions:

- What proportion of the public are worried about:
 - Being **mised** by a deepfake?
 - Being the **victim** of a deepfake?
- What are public attitudes to the **level of harm** caused by deepfakes?
- What do the public think is **morally and legally acceptable** in relation to deepfakes?

Almost three quarters of respondents were worried about being misled by deepfakes (of any type)

Proportion (%) of survey respondents who worried about being misled as a result of a deepfake (n=1,682)



Findings from our survey

Almost three quarters (72%) of people who responded to our survey said that they were “very” or “somewhat” worried about being misled as a result of a deepfake.

Wider research

The majority of public are concerned about the spread of deepfakes for reasons including the risk of adding to **child sexual abuse material**; **distrust in information**; **manipulating public opinion**; and **increasing misogyny** and **online VAWG** (Sippy et al, 2024).

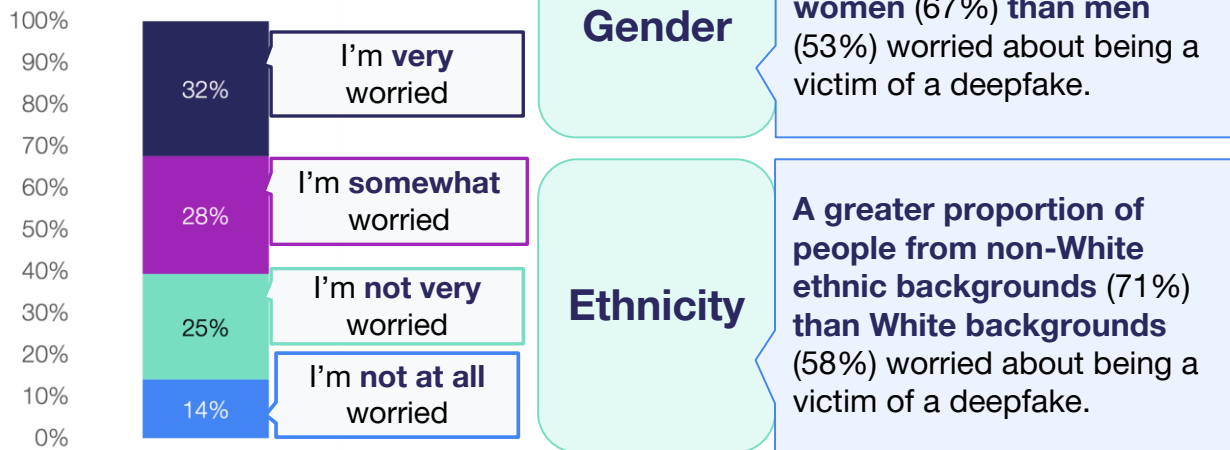
Three in five people were worried about being a victim of a deepfake.

Women and non-White* respondents were more worried about being a victim of a deepfake than their male, White counterparts

Findings from our survey

Three in five people (60%) who responded to our survey said that they were “very” or “somewhat” worried about being a victim of a deepfake.

Proportion (%) of survey respondents who worried about having a deepfake made of them (n=1,674)



Wider research

This **gendered association** aligns with findings that **women and girls** are disproportionately victimised by deepfakes. One report (2019) analysed 14,678 deepfake videos from across the internet and found that 96% were sexual and of women ([Deeptrace, 2019](#)).

The **association with race** aligns with findings that **Black and minoritised women** are disproportionately victimised by deepfakes ([Glitch UK, 2023](#)).

Our evidence review found that the psychological and emotional impacts of non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes can mirror the harms caused by other contact VAWG offences, such as sexual assault

Wider research

Research suggests impacts of deepfake VAWG frequently include **high levels of stress, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, insecurity, paranoia, obsessive behaviour, and suicidal thoughts** ([Huber, 2022](#)). Victims have also reported feelings of humiliation, violation, fear, helplessness, and powerlessness ([O'Malley et al., 2020](#)).

Many of the psychological and emotional impacts of deepfake VAWG described by victims and practitioners **mirror the impacts reported by victims of sexual harassment and contact VAWG offences, like sexual assault and rape**. Image-based sexual abuse was found to cause a “feeling of vulnerability...distrust...and being unsafe” that “affects you potentially forever”, which speaks to the lived experience of rape ([McGlynn et al., 2020](#)).

However, while almost all people who responded to our survey believed sexual/intimate deepfakes were harmful, they considered other offences, including both VAWG and non-VAWG offences, to be more harmful

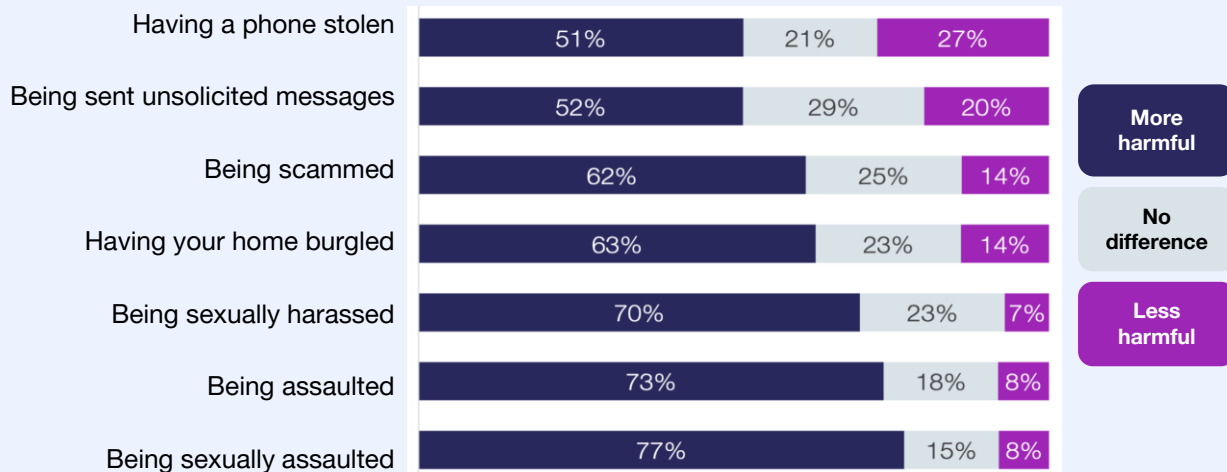
Findings from our survey

More than 9 in 10 survey respondents (92%) stated that sexual/intimate deepfakes were harmful. **72%** thought they were **very** harmful, **20%** thought they were **somewhat** harmful, **5%** thought they were **not very** harmful, and **3%** thought they were **not at all** harmful.

Findings from our research with practitioners

The **online** and **synthetic** nature of deepfake abuse can lead the public to **underestimate the impact of this crime on victims**.

Proportion (%) of survey respondents who thought each offence type caused more, less, or an equivalent harm as compared to sexual/intimate deepfakes*



Across each of the listed offences, **sexual/intimate deepfakes were considered less harmful** by the majority of respondents.

*Base sizes range from n=1,592 (Being sent unsolicited messages) to n=1,627 (Being sexually assaulted)

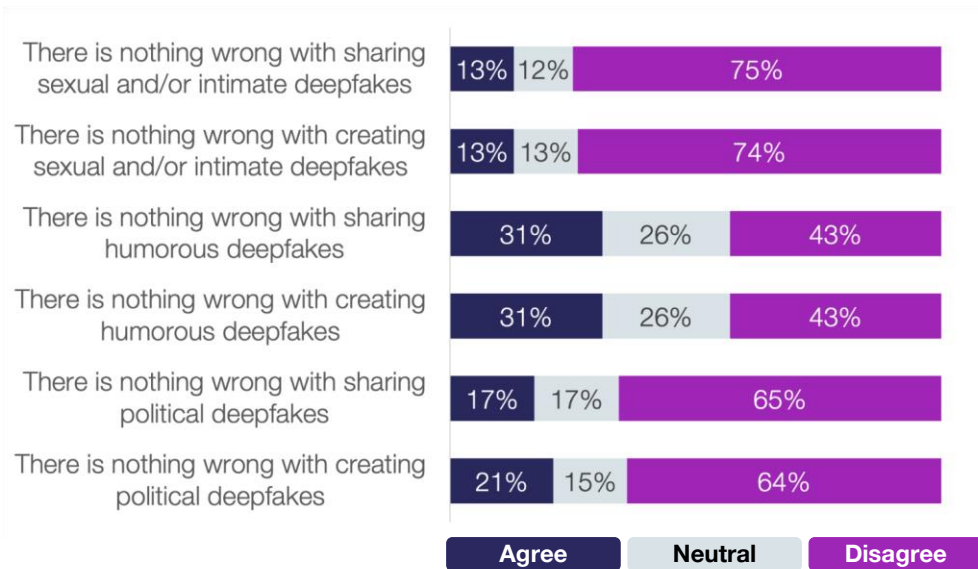
OFFICIAL Around 1 in 4 survey respondents agreed with statements that there is nothing wrong with creating and sharing sexual/intimate deepfakes, or felt neutral about these statements

Findings from our survey

While most respondents were **opposed to creating or sharing intimate/sexual deepfakes**, around 1 in 4 people felt there is nothing wrong with creating and sharing sexual/intimate deepfakes or felt neutral about this.

Attitudes towards the act of creating versus sharing a deepfake of any type did not elicit notably different responses.

Proportion (%) of respondents by their attitudes towards the creation and sharing of different types of deepfakes*



*Base sizes range from n=1,683 (...creating sexual and/or intimate deepfakes) to n=1,670 (...creating political deepfakes)

We asked people about whether they thought six scenarios, relating to non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes, were morally and legally acceptable

To further explore public attitudes towards the morality and legality of deepfake VAWG, **participants were given six different scenarios where non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes were created, viewed, shared or sold.**

Scenario 1

A 14 year old downloads an app where they can take pictures of their classmates and artificially manipulate these images to show their classmates in their underwear. They do not share these images with anyone else.

Scenario 2

An individual visits a pornography site, and searches for and views deepfaked pornography (i.e. realistic but artificially created) of a celebrity that they like.

Scenario 3

An individual gives money to someone online to create a deepfake of their friend performing a sexual act. They share it with their other friends, as they find it amusing.

Scenario 4

An individual creates an intimate deepfake of their partner and tells them about it. After an argument, the individual shares this intimate deepfake with other people.

Scenario 5

An individual creates a sexual deepfake of a politician whose views they do not agree with. This individual posts this deepfake online, which appears to show the politician performing a sexual act.

Scenario 6

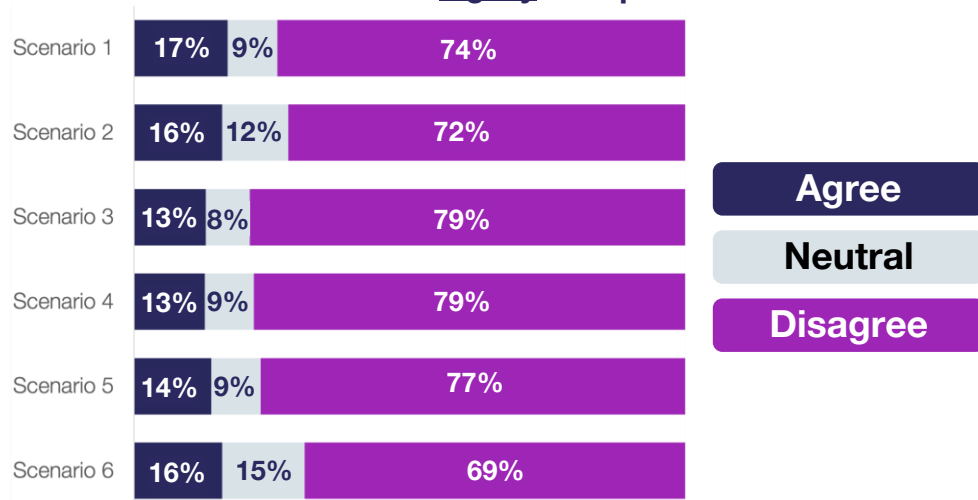
An individual receives a sexual video of someone that they do not know from their friend who tells them that it is a deepfake. The individual watches it.

While most people said that each scenario was not morally acceptable and should not be legally acceptable, a sizable minority thought that each scenario was morally and legally acceptable

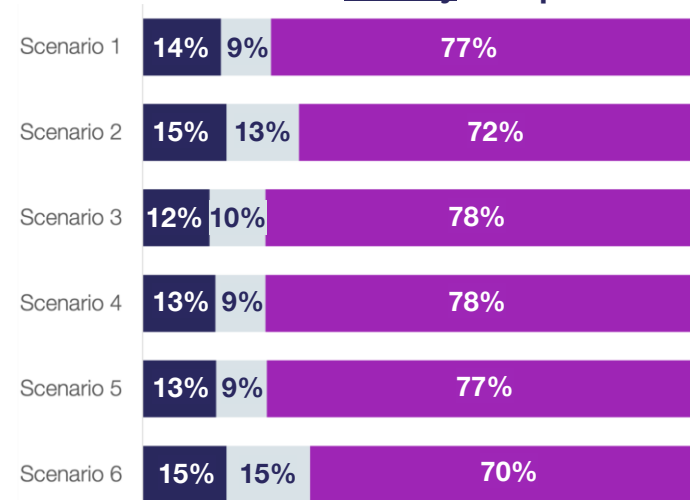
Findings from our survey

Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that each scenario involving **non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes** was morally acceptable or should be legally acceptable. Across all scenarios, **12% - 17% of people agreed** that the scenario was **morally acceptable** and should be **legally acceptable**.

Proportion (%) of survey respondents by whether each scenario should be legally acceptable



Proportion (%) of survey respondents by whether each scenario is morally acceptable



However, those who found it morally and legally acceptable to create, view, share and sell sexual/intimate deepfakes held views that were aligned with misogyny, watched pornography and felt positively about AI

Findings from our survey

To understand what may be driving attitudes towards sexual/intimate deepfakes, we compared people's responses to the scenarios with their **thoughts about AI**, their **use of pornography** and the extent to which they held views which aligned with **misogynistic beliefs**. The sensitive nature of these topics means that that some survey responses may be subject to **social desirability bias**. In particular, this may be the case for questions relating to pornography use and misogynistic beliefs.

We found that **those who considered it to be morally and legally acceptable to create, view, share and sell sexual/intimate deepfakes...**

Misogyny*

...were more likely to **agree with beliefs** that would commonly be regarded as **misogynistic**

Pornography

...were more likely to **currently watch pornography**

Artificial Intelligence

...and tended to hold **more positive views about AI**

* See Annex for detail on these survey questions

Further research is needed to understand how age and gender may moderate attitudes toward deepfakes. In our survey, higher proportions of male, younger respondents found the scenarios acceptable

Findings from our survey

Younger, male respondents were **more likely to think scenarios** where sexual/intimate deepfakes were created, viewed, shared and sold **were morally and legally acceptable**; and were more likely to think there was nothing wrong with creating or sharing different types of deepfakes (political, humorous or sexual).

However, the strength of the associations with age and gender were weak, suggesting that the **findings from our sample may not be replicated more broadly**. It is possible that these attitudes could be driven by marginal differences in the perception of harm associated with deepfakes, or by one's previous experience of and interest in creating deepfakes. **Further investigation may be warranted** to understand whether true differences by gender/age exist in public attitudes toward deepfakes.

Future research

Future research may look to **substantiate these claims** before **exploring why** higher proportions of male, young people hold these views.

Conclusion

- Around two thirds of our respondents have **heard about deepfakes** and three in five **are worried** about being a victim of a deepfake of any type. However, most people were **not aware of the legislation** around deepfakes.
- While the public think **sexual/intimate deepfakes are harmful**, they think other crimes (including other VAWG and non-VAWG offences) are **more harmful**. However, research shows that non-consensual sexual/intimate deepfakes can **cause significant harms to victims** comparable with contact VAWG such as sexual assault.
- 7% of our respondents (n=102) indicated that they had a sexual/intimate deepfake made of them. Of these, 60% contacted a support service, a tech platform or told friends and family and **51% reported to the police**. The **main reasons for not reporting were embarrassment or uncertainty about the offence being treated seriously**.
- While most respondents were opposed to creating or sharing intimate/sexual deepfakes, **a sizable minority (1 in 4 respondents) felt there is nothing wrong with, or felt neutral about**, creating and sharing sexual/intimate deepfakes.
- **Those who considered it to be morally and legally acceptable to create, view, share and sell sexual/intimate deepfakes** were more likely to **agree with beliefs** that would commonly be regarded as misogynistic and hold more positive views about AI.

Annex slides

Methodology

- **Nationally representative survey:** The research team utilised quota sampling to recruit a nationally representative sample of the population of England and Wales on the basis of key characteristics. These characteristics were: gender; age; ethnicity; and geographical region. **This means that the breakdown of results for other groups including those by sexual orientation and by parent/non-parent status are not necessarily representative of these groups in England and Wales.**
- **Misogyny statements:** Our survey contained nine statements that were designed to understand how closely respondents aligned with typically misogynistic attitudes. The research team used several sources to help guide the development of these statements, particularly Rottweiler and Gill's (2021) Misogyny Scale and Syzmanski *et al.*'s ([2009](#)) Internalised Misogyny Scale. The statements used in the survey were:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Women should not speak over men in public | 6. Whistling at a sexy woman in the street is a compliment |
| 2. I would prefer having a man as a boss | 7. It is okay for someone to regularly check their partner's mobile or social media |
| 3. In England and Wales, women are an oppressed group | 8. It is okay for a man to expect his partner to dress in a way that he likes |
| 4. Women should spend a lot of effort trying to be pretty | 9. Women sometimes act 'hard to get', saying no when they mean yes |
| 5. It is not sexist to rate a woman's appearance out of 10 | |

Limitations

- **Generalisability of the findings:** The survey is nationally representative as defined by the following identity markers: gender, age, ethnicity and geographical region. However, views and experiences on deepfakes may vary by other characteristics, like employment status, occupation, sexuality, political affiliation and access to the internet. **Therefore, it is possible that findings from this survey are not fully generalisable to attitudes to ‘deepfakes’ of people aged 16 or older in England and Wales.**
- **Social desirability bias:** The sensitive nature of deepfake VAWG means that some survey responses may be subject to social desirability bias. **In particular, this may be the case for questions relating to pornography use and misogynistic beliefs.** The research team worked to reduce the likelihood of social desirability bias by avoiding value judgements in the wording of all questions, and reverse scoring some questions.

For more information please contact

callyane.desroches@crestadvisory.com

jessica.hull@crestadvisory.com

www.crestadvisory.com