# Fewer than half of revenge porn cases in Scotland reach court despite rising reports



Fewer than half of the revenge porn cases reported to the police in Scotland make it to court, raising serious concerns about the adequacy of legal protections for victims of intimate image abuse. Recent figures reveal a stark discrepancy between the number of incidents reported and the limited actions taken by the authorities. In the last full year, just 781 incidents were reported to Police Scotland—down from 912 two years earlier—yet only a fraction resulted in legal action. Specifically, only 215 charges were filed under the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Act 2016, reflecting ongoing challenges in securing convictions.

The conviction rate is particularly alarming; only 51 individuals were found guilty in 2023-24, and of those, just one received a custodial sentence. The data starkly contrasts with the estimated 22,000 individuals seeking support from the Revenge Porn Helpline in 2024, highlighting a significant discrepancy between reported incidents and the justice obtained. This increase in demand, up from 18,000 the previous year, suggests a growing awareness among victims of available support, yet the justice system's response appears inadequate.

The impact on victims is profound. Advocates argue that low prosecution rates may discourage individuals from reporting such crimes, as many may feel abandoned by the legal system. Scottish Conservative MSP Sharon Dowey emphasised the emotional toll on victims, stating that they would "rightly feel abandoned" and question the point of reporting these offences. The overall message from campaigners is clear: the current legislative framework appears insufficient to address a "horrendous crime" that is increasingly prevalent in our digital society.

Comparative data reveals that sexual crimes—now encompassing a significant number of cyber incidents—have spiked in recent years. In the 2023-24 period, sexual offences comprised 5% of all crimes in Scotland, with a notable portion linked to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Indeed, 30% of sexual crimes are classified as cyber-crimes, indicating the urgent need for a more robust legal approach to these offences. The difficulty in establishing guilt in such cases, combined with the emotional and psychological toll on victims, complicates matters further for law enforcement and the judicial system.

Scottish Government officials acknowledge the increasing complexity of prosecuting these cases. Emma Forbes, procurator fiscal for domestic abuse, pointed out that action was taken in 86% of charges over the past few years, suggesting a commitment to prosecutorial action. However, she also noted that this must be balanced with the necessity of sufficient evidence and public interest. Detective Inspector Alasdair Penny reinforced this by stating that police are experiencing a rise in reports and that each case is thoroughly investigated.

Yet, the messaging from authorities has not alleviated the fears of critics who argue for swifter legislative reform. The landscape of revenge porn litigation remains fraught with limitations, gaps in understanding, and a societal need for urgent change. The overwhelming sentiment among advocates is that unless systemic changes occur, many victims will continue to feel isolated and vulnerable—a reality that highlights a broader societal issue in confronting digital abuses.

To improve victim support and legal recourse for non-consensual sharing of intimate images, experts and campaigners have called for more clear-cut policies, increased public awareness, and stronger resolutions from the Scottish Government. It is imperative for both law enforcement and legal systems to evolve alongside the rise in digitally mediated crimes, ensuring that justice not only serves the interest of the community but also restores faith in the mechanisms intended to protect the most vulnerable.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
2. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3
3. Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
4. Paragraphs 1, 3
5. Paragraph 4
6. Paragraph 2
7. Paragraphs 1, 4

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14698903/Revenge-porn-victims-feel-abandoned-critics-warn-half-reported-crimes-end-court.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2023-24/pages/6/> - This official Scottish Government report provides detailed statistics on sexual crimes recorded by the police in Scotland for the year 2023-24. It highlights that sexual crimes accounted for 5% of all crimes, with a slight decrease from 14,602 in 2022-23 to 14,484 in 2023-24. The report also notes that 5% of these sexual crimes were related to 'threatening to or disclosing intimate images,' indicating a significant concern regarding non-consensual sharing of intimate images in Scotland.
3. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2023-24/pages/14/> - This section of the Scottish Government's Recorded Crime report focuses on cyber-crimes in Scotland for the year 2023-24. It estimates that 16,890 cyber-crimes were recorded, marking a 13% increase from the previous year. Notably, 30% of sexual crimes were identified as cyber-crimes, underscoring the growing prevalence of online-based sexual offenses, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2023-24/pages/2/> - This overview from the Scottish Government's Recorded Crime report provides key points on crime statistics for 2023-24. It highlights that cyber-crimes accounted for an estimated 6% of all crimes recorded by the police, with a significant portion being sexual crimes. The report emphasizes the increasing trend of cyber-crimes, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, reflecting a broader societal issue.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-42689607> - This BBC News article reports on the detection rates of 'revenge porn' cases in Scotland. Between July and December of the previous year, 225 complaints were reported to Police Scotland, with only 39% being referred to prosecutors. The article discusses the complexities involved in prosecuting such cases and the challenges faced by law enforcement in addressing non-consensual sharing of intimate images.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-62383737> - This BBC News article reveals that the number of 'revenge porn' cases in Scotland has doubled over the past five years. It reports that police recorded 912 incidents in the last year, up from 421 in 2017/18. The article highlights the increasing prevalence of non-consensual sharing of intimate images and the legislative measures in place to address this issue.
7. <https://www.scotland.police.uk/access-to-information/freedom-of-information/disclosure-log/disclosure-log-2024/august/24-1528-crime-stats-non-consensual-sharing-of-intimate-images-revenge-porn-2023-incl-outcomes/> - This disclosure from Police Scotland provides detailed statistics on non-consensual sharing of intimate images ('revenge porn') for the year 2023, including outcomes. It offers insights into the number of reported cases, detection rates, and the challenges faced in prosecuting such offenses. The document serves as a resource for understanding the scope and handling of these crimes within Scotland.