# Legal experts urge tougher laws on virtual sexual assaults in the metaverse



A growing body of concern surrounding virtual sexual assaults in the metaverse has prompted legal experts to call for a reevaluation of how such incidents are treated under the law. Professor Clare McGlynn, a law expert at Durham University, has suggested that individuals who carry out virtual rapes should face charges equivalent to those for real-life sexual assaults. Her remarks come in the wake of increasing reports of abuse in digital environments where users engage through avatars.

In her recent paper published in the *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Professor McGlynn, alongside Carlotta Rigotti from Leiden University, describes the metaverse as a “ticking time bomb.” She predicts a significant rise in reports of virtual sexual assaults, known as 'meta-rapes', as the technology evolves and user engagement increases. According to McGlynn, existing laws could potentially be applied to these cases, arguing that the law currently addresses physical contact in broad terms, stating it covers "touching with any part of the body, with anything else and through anything."

The issue has been highlighted by recent cases, including a notable police investigation into a virtual gang rape attended by a teenager. While the investigation marked a significant step in recognising the severity of such online offences, it also raised questions about the psychological impact on victims. Police concluded that the teenager experienced trauma akin to that of a physical assault.

The *Daily Mail* reported that another case involved Nina Jane Patel, a 43-year-old woman from south London, whose avatar was sexually assaulted by male characters while she was actively engaged in Facebook’s metaverse, Horizon Venues. Patel described the experience as horrifying, particularly as she watched her avatar being groped by three male figures in front of other users.

The current state of moderation in virtual environments has been called into question, especially with regards to the ease with which younger users can access these spaces. Although platforms like Horizon Venues have implemented measures such as safe zones to protect users from unwanted interaction, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of these safeguards.

A spokesperson for Meta, Facebook's parent company, stated that they are "committed" to user safety and will continue to make improvements based on user interactions and experiences. Meanwhile, police leaders, including Graeme Biggar of the National Crime Agency, have urged for updated legal frameworks to ensure that online incidents are adequately recognised and addressed as crimes. They emphasise the need for law enforcement to adapt to the changing digital landscape, as the consequences of online abuses can have profound effects on victims in the real world.

As discussions about the legal implications of virtual assaults continue, experts and policymakers are emphasising the necessity of establishing guidelines that adequately protect users in increasingly immersive online environments.

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

## Bibliography

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