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Online Image Abuse and Exploitation Impacts More than 1 in 5 Americans According to Groundbreaking Report

By ImageShield | September 1, 2023

Millions Are Victimized By Misuse Of Images They've Shared Online

ImageShield, a pioneering image abuse prevention platform, has released a first-of-its-kind study revealing that more than one in five Americans (22%) surveyed had experienced some form of photo exploitation, with intellectual property theft or impersonation being the most common problem. The number increased to nearly one in four (24%) for women 18-30 years old. For the study, photo abuse was defined as when a photo someone has shared is reused without permission for commercial purposes, used to facilitate identity theft or misuse (e.g., catfishing), or when intimate photos are shared without consent.

VICTIMS OF PHOTO ABUSE

22% OF AMERICANS

24% OF AMERICAN MOMEN 18–30 YEARS OLD

32% SHARE PHOTOS MORE THAN TWICE A WEEK

49% KNOW SOMEONE WHO HAS HAD AN IMAGE ABUSED

10.3% THE MOST COMMON PROBLEM IS IMAGES BEING USED **TO IMPERSONATE** THE INDIVIDUAL FOR FRAUDULENT PURPOSES

MEN WERE 6.9% MORE LIKELY TO REPORT INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THEFT OR BEING IMPERSONATED THAN WOMEN

10.7% FOR MEN VERSUS 3.8% FOR WOMEN

ImageShield Study of 1,006 Americans

Before the groundbreaking study, the size and scope of image abuse in the U.S. was unknown. The data is based on research with more than 1,006 Americans.

Key findings include:

- **More than one-fifth of the Americans (22%)** surveyed *know* they have experienced photo abuse.
- **49% of respondents said they know someone** who has experienced image abuse, so the percentage that has actually been affected is likely much more extensive.
- **Nearly one-fourth of American women 18-30 years old (24%)** surveyed say they have experienced photo abuse.
- **32%** of respondents said they **share photos online more than twice a week.**
- 58% agree that when they share photos via text, they expect that the photos will remain private.
- Even if not personally affected, Americans feel this kind of abuse is a significant problem, rating it between an average of 5.25 and 5.76 on a 7-point scale (depending on the type of abuse).
- The most common problem reported (10.3%) was images posted on social media used to impersonate the same individual for fraudulent purposes.
- Men were 6.9 percentage points more likely to report intellectual property theft or impersonation than women (10.7% for men versus 3.8% for women).

"One of the most alarming findings is that while 22% of Americans are aware they've had images abused, nearly half of those surveyed know someone who has (49%). This underreporting issue speaks to our suspicion that there are many more people who have experienced this violation but are unaware of it," said Cathy Pedrayes, online safety advocate and chief spokesperson for ImageShield. "Given the scope, we should be most concerned about the potential to normalize this issue. Taking and misusing personal images is a violation of privacy and shouldn't be considered normal or tolerated."

Victims of image abuse report devastating consequences, from loss of employment or education opportunities to social ostracism and long-lasting psychological effects.

The growth of digital technologies such as "deep fakes" and artificial intelligence tools represents a newer and even more problematic pathway for the expansion of image abuse. There are currently countless easy-to-access tools and apps that enable users to manipulate images, from AI image enhancers to deep fake generators. The implications of these technologies are far-reaching, requiring image owners to exert more active diligence over the images they share online.

Addressing the issue of image abuse calls for increased education and awareness-raising efforts, better resources and support for victims, and better technology and policies to detect and prevent the spread of manipulated or unauthorized images or videos online. ImageShield is addressing image abuse by focusing on prevention since the digital nature of the issue makes it difficult to identify perpetrators or remove the content easily.

"While ImageShield's study covers a broad range of demographics, we believe the data shines a bright light on the growing epidemic of image abuse in America. Most importantly, our focus should be on reclaiming control over our images, which starts with having a clear understanding of where they end up when taken without permission as well as having a say in the distribution of images that were taken with our consent," added Pedrayes.

"I founded ImageShield to create a solution for the image abuse epidemic that impacts tens of millions of people each year," said Michael Gallagher, Founder & CEO of ImageShield. "While there have been solutions to help professional photographers and content creators monitor and protect their content for a while now, there has been nothing for the average person who wants to safely and securely share photos with family, friends, and the world at large. ImageShield is the first platform to help them do that."