

Top line results of Countryside Alliance online bullying survey 2018

August 2018

We received over **500** responses to the online bullying survey.

When asked: **“Have you experienced any online bullying or harassment related to your support for country sports?”**

62% said yes and 28% said no. The majority of it was related to either hunting (47%) or shooting (32%). Respondents commented that:

- "My pictures have been manipulated and posted on social media, my front door picture has been posted on social media and my children's pictures have been posted on social media with comments calling me a paedophile"
- "I Had a really bad experience last winter with regard to the hunting debate. I was called a criminal a murderer and likened to a paedophile. I found the whole experience very distressing and I am now seriously considering keeping my views to myself. These anti-hunting people can be violent, aggressive and downright cruel. I also had a threat to my property and my 3 beautiful Labradors. One of whom is a rescue dog."
- "I think, it's getting worse. The comments I'm getting its makes me feel ill, very nasty and shocking. To be honest it is scary."
- "It seems that rural concerns are an outlet for vile hatred that would (quite rightly) never be acceptable in any other area."

When asked: **“If you have experienced online bullying or harassment, what format was it in?”**

57% answered comments in posts, 22% private messages, and 15% being tagged in posts. Specific forms of abuse respondents highlighted included:

- Death threats on online forums
- Sharing addresses and car number plates
- Taking people's personal details and photographs, including photographs of people's children and posting them elsewhere on social media to generate abuse and death threats
- Using social media to generate emails and telephone calls to people's employers trying to lose them their jobs
- Falsified Facebook accounts
- Creation of groups and pages to direct abuse at people involved in country sports

When asked: **“Have you changed your behaviour on social media as a result of bullying or harassment?”**

49% said yes and 51% said no. This change of behaviour has predominately resulted in members blocking individuals (28%), engaging less with posts (27%), not uploading pictures (27%) and posting less (26%). Specific changes respondents told us about include:

- Deleting all social media accounts

- Creating a second account, in order to keep personal and family relationships completely separate from any discussion of country sports
- Changing profile pictures to remove references to country sports
- Changing name or removing surname to prevent identification
- Increasing security settings

When asked: **“From your personal experience do you believe online bullying or harassment has got worse over the last year?”**

78% said yes and 22% said no.

Businesses related statistics:

- 89% of businesses that responded said they had received online abuse. Of them 77% received it in the form of comments on posts, 35% had received private messages, 26% had been tagged in posts and 33% had received negative reviews.
- 73% of businesses have changed their behaviour online as a result of online bullying.

When asked how abuse has affected their businesses, owners responded that:

- "I received hundreds of terrible reviews on Tripadvisor for our hotel in one evening after I mentioned hunting on social media."
- "I have made my business group 'closed'
- "I don't put up photos of some of my products, as I am too scared I would get death threats again"
- "We have removed the ability to leave reviews"
- "We have taken down our Facebook review scoring system. We have a wedding photography business and were targeted for posting a picture of a foxhound."
- "I have a working gun dog and was bullied on a Labrador Facebook page when I posted pictures of her. A vile man accused me of being a killer and then went on to say awful things about people who train gundogs. I left the group as the moderators ignored my request to remove the man. I worry about commenting on posts as I have a business page as well as a personal one and don't want anyone to complain to Facebook about me and cause my account to be frozen."
- "We [a vet] closed our Facebook page"
- "It is frightening to advertise anywhere on social media"
- "Online abuse has been a huge influence in my decision last year on going self-employed that my business is absolutely NOT on social media at all. It is taking far longer than I think it otherwise would have to get established through word of mouth, but is worth every lost £1 for peace of mind; and that, in itself, is wrong."
- "I removed my name from social media to prevent individuals creating links to my business"

Comparison of how social media companies are tackling online abuse:

- Have you ever reported content that you felt was online bullying or harassment related to country sports on...?
 - **Facebook- Yes: 38%**
 - Twitter- Yes: 12%
 - Instagram: Yes: 4%
 - TripAdvisor- Yes: 8%

- Do you believe they are doing enough to protect the expression of views related to county sports?
 - **Facebook- No: 87%**
 - Twitter- No: 82%
 - Instagram- No: 77%
 - TripAdvisor- No: 77%
- If you have reported a post, how would you rate your experience?
 - **Facebook- 75% said 'very poor' or 'poor', and just 20% said 'adequate'.**
 - Twitter- 59% said 'very poor' or 'poor', 25% said 'adequate' and 9% 'good'.
 - Instagram- 52% said 'very poor' or 'poor', 21% 'adequate', 16% 'good' and 11% 'very good'.
 - TripAdvisor- 41% said 'very poor' or 'poor', **37% 'adequate' and 22% said 'good' or 'very good'.**

Respondents also felt the Government could do more. When asked: **"Do you believe the Government are doing enough to combat online bullying?"**

88% said no and 12% said yes.

Commenting on the failure to address abuse, respondents commented:

- "I received a threat to me and my family via Private Message after I commented on a post about the sad death of somebody who was on a hunt. I reported it to Facebook and the police and the police were the only ones that dealt with it. Facebook did nothing and didn't think respond to multiple reports I made."
- "I have received threats, incitement to violence and attempts to get my daughter expelled from college. I reported all this reported to the police – we were told we just had to put up with it even though some people physically turned up at my home and photographed us. The police couldn't have been less interested. I contacted my MP - no action. I contacted solicitors but they were reluctant to take case and warned of astronomical costs. Result: I live in isolation, don't compete any more, don't ride any more, don't go out any more. Keep curtains drawn all the time and been on medication for 4 years. Too afraid to go out to work. Lives totally destroyed and no-one cares."
- "I received death threats on Facebook. I reported it but nothing was done about it."
- "I received Death threats to myself, my hawks and dogs, I had to involve police in the end as Facebook ignored it."
- "I have been subjected to not only online bullying but my phone number was leaked and I received death threats and threats to my family. I had to change the number it got so bad. I visited the police on numerous occasions but they were unable to help me and it resulted in me needing to visit the doctor. The online abuse continues, with photographs and comments about me out hunting during the season."