



UK Sex Workers' Perceptions of Image Based Sexual Abuse Protections on Digital Platforms

by Dr. Josie West

About Image Angel

Image Angel is a cutting-edge deterrence tool designed to combat image-based abuse. It works by embedding invisible and non removable watermarks into every image downloaded from supported platforms. Each watermark links the image to its specific recipient.

If the image is later shared without consent, the watermark provides undeniable proof of who was responsible, removing deniability and shifting accountability onto the perpetrator.

Developed in direct response to the rise in intimate image offences, Image Angel empowers victims with forensic evidence. It deters abuse by eliminating anonymity and supports safer digital environments, without compromising privacy laws.

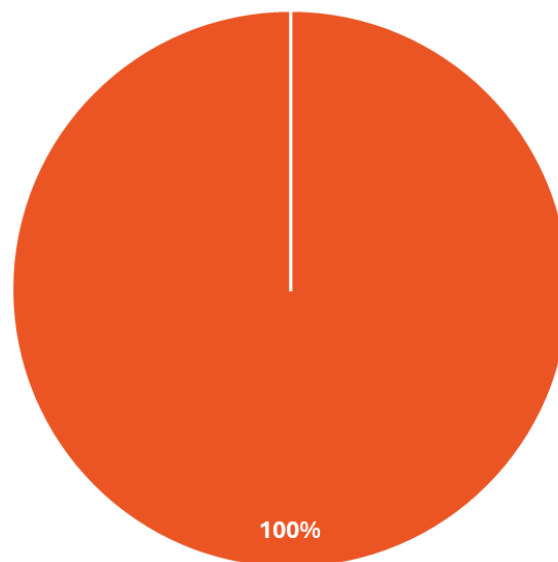
Table of Contents

<u>About Image Angel</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Image-Based Sexual Abuse Fear is Widespread</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Deterrent Tech Available Yet Underused</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Platform Failures</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Safety Remains Central to Workers' Rights</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Ethical Leadership is Absent</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Concluding Remarks</u>	<u>8</u>

Image-Based Sexual Abuse Fear is **Widespread**

Image-based sexual abuse refers to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos and is an illegal practice in the UK. This crime is endemic in the sex industry, due to stigma, unchecked misogyny towards sex workers and a dearth of labour rights regulations.

Our survey results show this causes a significant culture of fear, with **100% of our survey participants supporting the statement** *'I worry that my content will be leaked or shared without my consent.'* This exposes an urgent need for rapid industry-wide change.



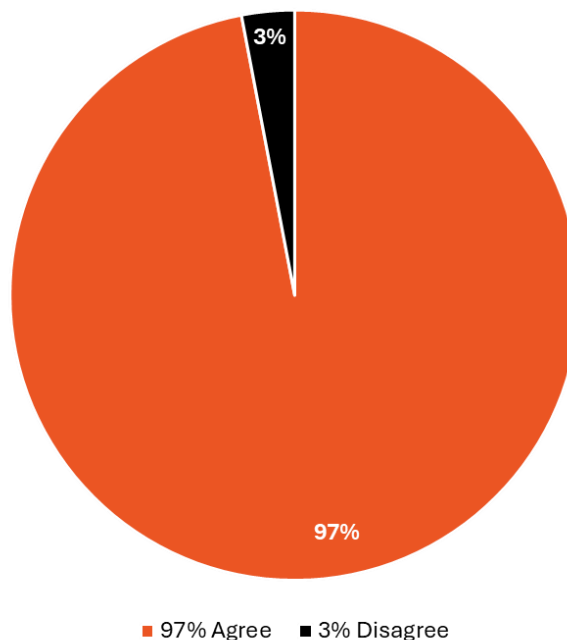
■ 100% Agree ■ 0% Disagree

I worry that my content will be leaked or shared without my consent.

Deterrent Tech Available Yet **Underused**

While preventative technology already exists, platforms are failing to adopt digital safety measures that would offer urgent protection to the sex work community. Failure to do so is not simply a missed opportunity—it is evidence of accountability for this crime.

Content creators overwhelmingly agree. In our recent poll, **97% supported the statement:** “*Platforms should install technology to help trace leaks.*” Image Angel provides exactly that. Our system embeds invisible, unremovable data into the pixels of every image or video *at the point of access*. This data links each file to its recipient—ensuring that, if content is shared without consent, the perpetrator can be identified. This is not surveillance. This is protection. And it works

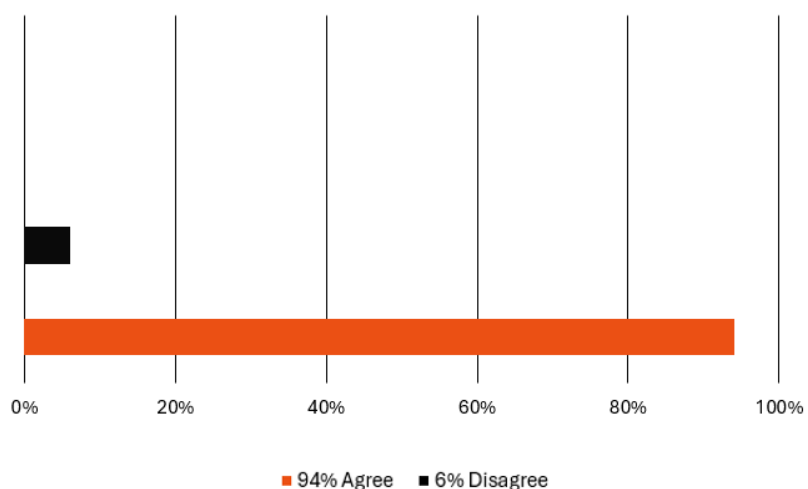


**Platforms should install technology
to help trace leaks.**

Platform Failures

Image-based sexual abuse is a major symbol of platform governance failure. It is worth remembering that content creators who identify as sex workers are especially vulnerable to psychological and physical trauma due to the deeply entrenched stigma associated with this industry. Yet, adult platforms continue to neglect them. **94% of content creators agreed with the statement** *'platforms do not do enough to prevent image-based abuse.'* There is an urgent need for legislative action that mandates all adult platforms install deterrent technology.

Section 2.15 of the Online Safety Act refers explicitly to the use of technical measures to prevent image-based abuse—yet uptake across high-risk platforms remains inconsistent, unregulated and largely invisible to those most at risk. The law is clear. Platforms must do more than react, image based abuse must be proactively prevented. Prevention means embedding accountability into the architecture of content sharing, including forensic watermarking. Image Angel stands at the forefront of such change. The system does not rely on user reports or pre-existing hash libraries. It embeds traceability at the point of access—transforming each file into silent evidence, if abuse occurs. This is not a tool of surveillance. It is a system of protection, already being used by platforms committed to user safety, not just compliance. Legislation must catch up with what the technology can already do. Deterrent tools exist. The only barrier is political will.

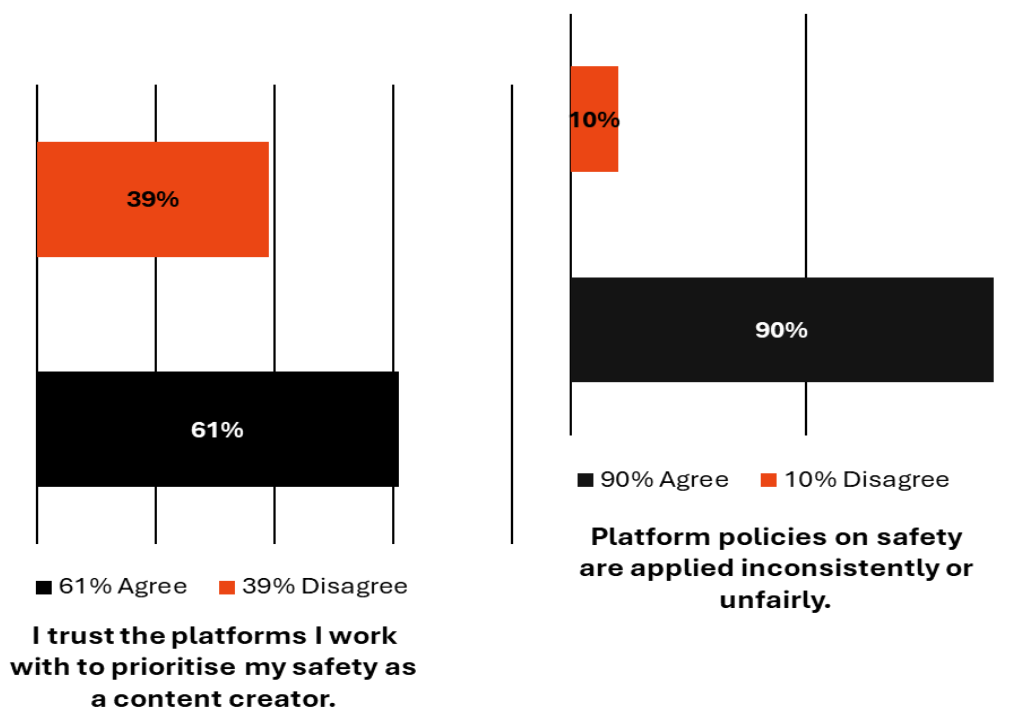


Platforms do not do enough to prevent image-based abuse.

Safety Remains Central to **Workers' Rights**

Content creators, especially those working in the adult industries, face heightened data privacy risks and are forced to adopt creative strategies to protect themselves. This occurs in a context where platforms do very little to build safety mechanisms into their digital infrastructures. This emerged in the data from our survey. **90% of content creators who work within adult industries said they agree with the statement 'platform policies on safety are applied inconsistently or unfairly,'** while 39% disagreed with the statement *'I trust the platforms I work with to prioritise my safety as a content creator.'*

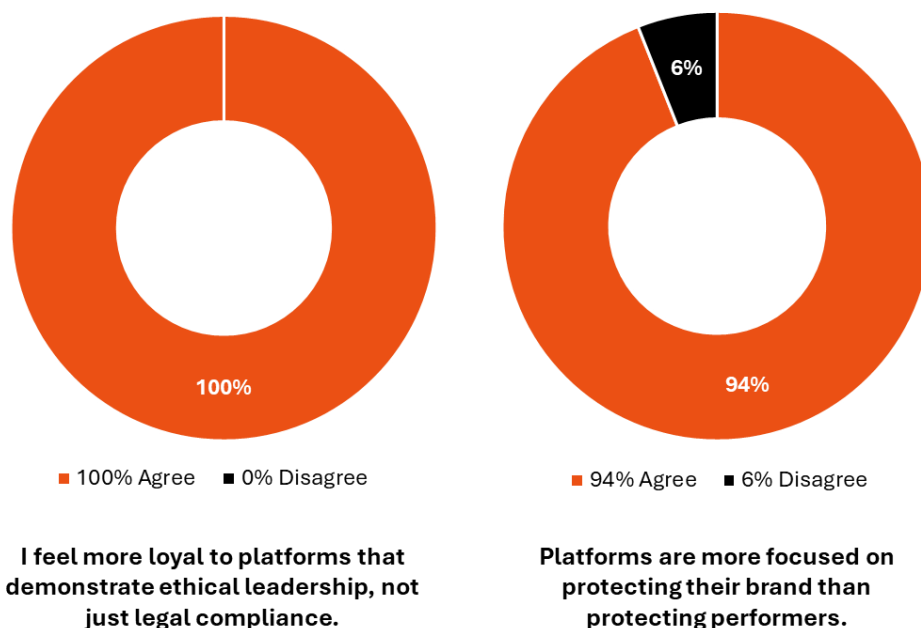
This would not be possible in a context regulated by labour protections. UK labour law must adapt to novel gig economy dynamics by requiring platforms to implement robust safety policies.



Ethical Leadership is Absent

Our survey exposes widespread dissatisfaction with platform governance across the online creator industry. This term acknowledges how platforms manage online performers, despite their legal status as ‘intermediaries’ simply connecting consumers and providers in the market. In practice, platforms set the rules, shape user behaviour, control payouts and determine access to visibility and support. This is governance in everything but name and the result is a clear power imbalance. Performers must abide by policies they did not co-create, enforced by systems they cannot audit. And when harm occurs, it is often unclear where accountability lies.

The desire for change is clear. **100% of respondents agreed with the statement** *‘I feel more loyal to platforms that demonstrate ethical leadership, not just legal compliance,’* while **94% expressed** that *‘platforms are more focused on protecting their brand than protecting performers.’* These findings represent increasing rejection of governance models that prioritise platform optics over user protection. Adult platforms, in particular, profit from highly personal, stigmatised labour. Yet too often they fail to implement even basic safety mechanisms that would mitigate risk. There is a clear appetite for a new standard: one in which ethical leadership, survivor-informed design and digital safety are not optional values but structural expectations.



Concluding Remarks

This whitepaper reveals a stark reality: image-based sexual abuse is not merely an unfortunate by-product of the online sex industry but a predictable outcome of systemic neglect, insufficient regulation and platform inaction. The overwhelming consensus among content creators shows a persistent anxiety about privacy violations, coupled with profound dissatisfaction with current governance structures. While the Online Safety Act acknowledges the necessity of technological safeguards, it is clear that both platforms and policymakers have an urgent moral and legal obligation to protect those who are most exposed to harm. They can do this by legally requiring platforms to adopt deterrent technology like Image Angel. Failing to act is a choice that will continue to perpetuate stigma, fear and exploitation.

Recommendations

Mandate Adoption of Preventative Technology: Require all adult platforms operating in the UK to implement deterrent technologies to trace and prevent non-consensual sharing of intimate content.

Strengthen Labour Protections for Sex Workers: Modernise UK labour laws to explicitly cover the gig economy dynamics of online sex work, including clear obligations on platforms to create safe working environments.

Establish Consistent Safety Policies: Develop and enforce uniform, transparent safety protocols across platforms to ensure fair application of policies protecting performers' data privacy and wellbeing.

Introduce Independent Oversight Mechanisms: Create independent bodies to audit platform compliance with safety standards and provide recourse for workers whose content is misused.

Prioritise Ethical Leadership: Encourage platforms to move beyond minimal legal compliance by demonstrating proactive ethical leadership—placing performer safety above brand protection.

Increase Government Accountability: Ensure the UK government acts decisively to close regulatory gaps, investing in education, enforcement and support services to address the psychological and social impact of image-based abuse.