

### **Module 3 video 1: Who are your trolls?**

Hello and welcome to the first video of week three for Online harassment: journalists' strategies for defence. I'm Ela Stapley, a digital security advisor working with the International Women's Media Foundation.

Over the past weeks, you have discussed well-being strategies for dealing with online harassment and looked at what data is best kept private online. This week we will be examining who is harassing you, the tactics that they use, and finally how to document your abuse and why that can be important.

Before we get started talking about types of trolls, let's look at the words we use to describe who targets us online. The word troll is often used to describe people who attack others online. But is this the correct term to use? Does it show the seriousness of what is happening? The language we use is important because it helps us to describe what is happening to us both to ourselves and to others. Using vocabulary, such as online abuser, and online harasser instead of the word troll, allows us to portray to others the seriousness of the situation.

When you are being targeted and the abuse is relentless it can be hard to know who is attacking you and who may be behind them. What may appear to be random attacks can actually be coordinated threats with groups of online abusers operating together. Understanding who is behind the online abuse won't stop it, but it can help you build up a picture of where the abuse is coming from.

If you have been targeted by online attackers you may have started to notice patterns in their behaviour. For example, you receive more trolling after publishing an article on a particular topic. However, many attacks online are simply happening because you are a woman. A recent study by the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll Busters during which they surveyed 597 women journalists found that gender was a significant factor when it came to being attacked online.

There are several types of online abusers and it will come as no surprise that there are people who attack you because of your gender, your race, or your sexual identity. Another type of harasser are those that target you for political or other interests. Their likely aim is to silence your reporting or to try and change the narrative around the story. They will use a range of tactics to do this, including focusing on your gender. More about that in video two. Some people are attacking you online because they think it is fun to do so. This is known as trolling for the lolz or laughs. These people could either be working alone or operating in groups. You are likely being attacked by all of these groups and they are likely to be focusing on your gender as a way to harass you.

So who is behind these troll attacks? It may be that the person attacking you is a lone actor and just simply enjoys harassing people online. This is the type of troll that is discussed in this week's set reading text. However, it is likely that some of the abusers who attack you belong to Internet subcultures. These are groups of people who meet online in chat sites and on threads to discuss a common interest. Most Internet subcultures are harmless but others

are not. Some of those who troll and abuse you are likely to be organized online groups who are united in their objective of attacking you.

You may also be targeted by governments, government supporters, or members of other political parties. These attacks, by so called digital armies, are likely to be coordinated, and may, in some cases, be funded by the authorities. Those who are attacking you on behalf of governments may be doing so for personal reasons or they may simply be being paid to harass you.

Then there are interest groups. These are organised groups of people who want to change public opinion on a subject, an example of this could be climate change deniers. These groups can be well organized and attack in a mob. They attack both men and women journalists, but the comments directed at women are also misogynistic and sexist.

The list of people supporting online harassment is long, including organised crime, private business, conspiracy theorists, fan groups, and people who troll because they have nothing else to do. There are many more and I'm sure you have other examples from the regions where you live and work.

And what about bots? These are automated accounts run by machines and not real people and are often used to spam your accounts making it almost impossible to use them. Often employed by governments and private companies to try and keep you quiet online.

So how can you tell who is harassing you? You can study the accounts of regular abusers. Check to see if they know each other or if they are retweeting each others' content. Look for symbols and images that affiliate them with others, for example an interest group or ideology. They are also likely to be using similar words and phrases in their messages.

And why would you want to do this? You may not want to or feel able to do so and that's fine. But, mapping attackers can help you to prepare for future trolling attacks and also to gauge whether an online attack could move offline and become a real physical threat. It can also be helpful to have an idea of who is attacking you in case you need to present evidence of online attacks to editors, organisations that support journalists, and the authorities.