

Bloomfield: 'We absolutely need to do something' about gendered online abuse



ROBERT KITCHIN/Stuff

Dr Ashley Bloomfield described online abuse of his colleagues as “terrible” and “gendered”. (File photo)

Women working on the Covid-19 response have received “terrible” online abuse, said Dr Ashley Bloomfield in a press conference on Wednesday afternoon.

Asked about the “harder edge” of being a public figure in the pandemic, Bloomfield said the abuse he receives is nothing compared to his colleagues, who are women.

His comments show that the Ministry of Health is also affected by [pervasive online abuse](#) of women in [public](#)



ROBERT KITCHIN/Stuff

Dr Ashley Bloomfield said he tried not to pay too much attention to negative online comments. (File photo)

Women in central and local government recently spoke out about the problem of gendered abuse after Christchurch city councillor Sara Templeton shared her own experiences [to draw attention](#) to the culture of harassment and misogyny in politics.

Porirua's mayor Anita Baker revealed that she had been called a c... for the first time in her life, received death threats, and no longer wore leopard print in public due to ["appalling" online abuse](#).

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“One observation I would make, is abuse is very gendered,” Bloomfield said in the press conference, in response to a question about the toll his public-facing job has taken.

“I want to put that out there and say that the nature of the feedback I get is nothing compared with what my colleagues, who happen to be female, get,” Bloomfield said.

ROBERT KITCHIN/Stuff

The outgoing director-general of health has endured negative feedback, but it was nothing compared to that levelled at his women colleagues.

He described the online abuse as “terrible”.

“Any of that sort of behaviour is terrible in my mind, but the fact that it’s so gendered is something we need to do something about.”

Last week, researcher at The Disinformation Project Dr Sanjana Hattotuwa said online misogyny was established and expanding in New Zealand, particularly through anti-vax communities.

CHRIS SKELTON

Christchurch councillor Sara Templeton approaches Netsafe after a fake social media account was used to troll her and other female politicians.

Based on Hattotuwa’s research, pākehā men in online anti-

vax communities were mostly misogynists, and frequently commented about the rape and murder of women, especially Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Bloomfield commented that he did not pay too much attention to negative commentary. He said he didn't look at the abuse "too hard" so could not say whether the misogynistic abuse came mostly from men.

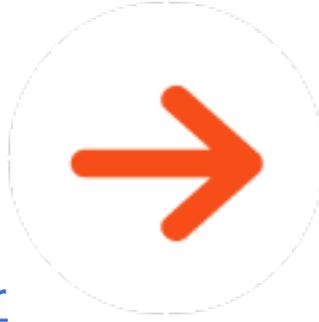
Last Thursday Christchurch Young Nat Jessee MacKenzie admitted having an anonymous account where he bullied female politicians including Templeton [with constant and toxic abuse](#).

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