

THE MANY HANDS ON YOUR INTIMATE DATA

Lots of mobile phone apps are designed to support your sexual and reproductive health ... but what else do they know about you?

Period tracking apps

With these apps you can track your menstrual cycles for free*. Such as: Clue, Eve, Flo, MIA Fem, Maya, Lunar.

Sexual health guides

Focusing on advice around sexual health and sexual transmitted diseases. Such as: Safe, Vamos, Female Body Diseases

Contraceptive & Fertility apps

These apps provide contraceptive information. Such as: Glow, Premom, Birth Control Pill Reminder, Natural Birth Control, Safe Abortion, Ovia Fertility, Lady Pill Reminder, Femometer

STD dating apps

These apps are built to help individuals with STDs find partners. Such as: Plus Side, HSV-Date

Pregnancy monitoring apps

These apps help track pregnancy. Such as: Healofy, HiMommy, Pregnancy Week By Week, Pregnancy +, The Bump.

* 150,000,000+ DOWNLOADS

Some pregnancy apps provide an email ID for users to opt out of data collection and deletion requests. But they also specify that they could still retain data on deletion request. They claim: "All information is saved and stored on servers, which are secured with passwords and pins to ensure no unauthorised person has access to it."

Other apps have a dedicated data protection officer and follow the data protection laws of the US and EU.

Some apps require the least amount of permissions and collect almost no personally identifiable information according to their privacy policy.

Do you know what data is collected by apps you are using and who they share them with?

Do you know if the privacy policies are there to protect you or to protect the company?

* IN-APP PURCHASES

Just because an app is free to download doesn't mean it won't cost you money to use it — in-app purchases prompt users to spend money on add-ons, subscriptions, premium features, and more. These extra costs can go straight on credit cards, often without any alert to the card owner. Information about credit card purchases is also sold by data brokers to advertisers.

What you get for free*

What you give away *

IDENTITY PERMISSION

Permission that allows the addition or removal of an account, but also allows accounts to be found on your device.

This permission allows the app to obtain the list of accounts known by the phone. This may include any accounts created by other applications you have installed. It also allows the app access to your unique device identifier (UDID), which makes it easy to track your device across services and web sites.

GOOGLE PERMISSION

With this permission you give an app authorisation to access private data from Google services. This includes access to your location data. Some might ask for full access to your Google account. Did you check which apps have access to your account?

STORAGE CONTENT PERMISSION

This indicates that the application is able to create, modify, or delete any files that reside in your phone memory and often your SD card. Do you know what files are stored on your phone? Some of these files can remain inside your card even after you uninstall the app.

PHONE PERMISSION

This could include permissions to access your text messages, phone call details, and the remote phone number of a caller. It also allows the reading of your contacts list, and in many cases, sharing it with third parties without your confirmation.

DEVICE CONTROL PERMISSION

Grant the app permission to access the Bluetooth configuration, to prevent the device from sleeping, use your device's camera and video, record audio, control your phone and monitor its status, run the app whenever you turn on your device, access the history of your app and many other actions.

A request for permission should occur only when required. So if your app requires the camera to take a picture, the camera permission should be asked for only when the user wishes to take a photo with the app.

Permission granted... Now what?

Contraception is a political topic and the use of contraceptives may place users at risk in certain countries. Women's reproductive rights - including access to abortions - is restricted in some countries. As a result, period tracking apps or apps that collect and share information about a woman's fertility may put their users at risk.

The organisations Privacy International and Coding Rights examined the way several of these apps monetise the data they collect. Over the years most **popular period-tracking apps** have implemented better privacy policies, data management and informed consent. Most period tracking apps still share the data they collect for research purposes or collect personal data such as location and contact details that are irrelevant to the functionality of these apps but expose their users.

Pregnancy apps help track a user's pregnancy and collect a lot of information about her daily activities. These apps are not as well monitored for privacy and several applications have issues with respect to data privacy. Similarly abortion rights are hugely debated and several countries have serious restrictions. Inadvertently collecting data might expose unwanted pregnancies and reproductive decisions.

Your usage patterns on a dating app, together with data from other apps, can give a pretty good indication of your relationship status, as well as your dating activity. The collection of detailed location information is also used to create profiles, audience segments, or aggregated data sets. Your location information can include very detailed histories of your movements, including hospital stays or visits to mental health professionals. Apart from this, several data brokers have been historically known to compile lists of consumers using segments such as "rape sufferers" and "AIDS/HIV sufferers".

So it is very important that while using **STD dating apps** you choose an app with good data practices. Any app that collects excessive data like detailed location, professional network or social media accounts could add risk to its users. Most of the apps we found in the store also do not provide for protections or anonymisation of users, which places them at risk of being ostracised and some even prosecuted by law. Previous studies around **LGBTQ dating apps** have shown the usage of these apps to threaten or harm the user of the apps. STD apps could also place their users at risk in a similar manner.

Sexual health guides provide information and medical advice for sexual health issues. Some of these applications are supported by foundations. This information is often sensitive and in many countries is used to conduct surveillance. Usually this information is shared with physicians and/or local governments. Several of these apps seem to have built-in trackers which share information with data aggregators such as Facebook.

Besides quantifiable data, these apps can also gain insights into women's intimate lives, including recording their emotions, moods, sexual activity, and more. This data can be used to improve targeted advertising, but also to create detailed personal profiles that can be used for other things, such as behavioural influencing.

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