UNDERSTANDING ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

50-70% The Covid-19 pandemic led to significant increase in internet usage further increasing women's vulnerability to online abuse.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) survey conducted in 2021 shows that after witnessing or experiencing harassment,

32% of women reconsidered posting a comment online.

30% reduced their online presence

20% of women stopped using that online platform entirely

A study from the research institute Data & Society suggests that

40% of women surveyed had been harassed online.

41% of women between the ages of 15-29 self-censor to avoid being harassed online.

85% had witnessed harassment or some other form of online violence.

We created this toolkit to help individuals and organisations guide their members in identifying online abuse, what to do and how to seek help.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Women at Web is an organisation that promotes women's digital participation through digital literacy training and advocating for safe spaces online.

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DEFINITION

ONLINE ABUSE

is the "repeated or severe targeting online of an individual or group through harmful behaviour."
Violence against women: harmful action by one or more people directed at women based on their gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms.

CYBERSTALKING

is stalking through email, text (or online) messages, or the Internet. E.g. sending emails, text messages (SMS), or instant messages that are offensive or threatening. To be considered cyberstalking, these acts must occur repeatedly and be perpetrated by the same person.
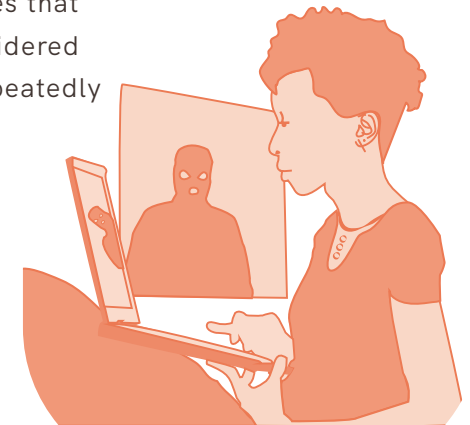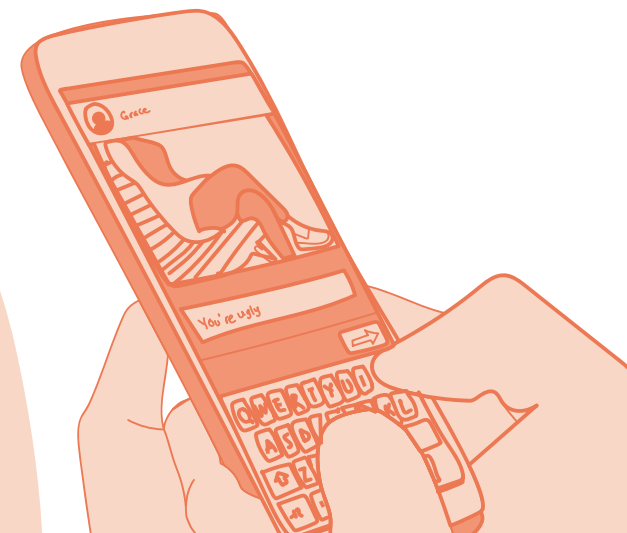
CYBER HARASSMENT

includes unwanted sexually explicit emails, text (or online) messages, and inappropriate or offensive advances on social networking websites or internet chat rooms. E.g. Threats of physical and/or sexual violence by email, text (or online) messages, or hate speech.

ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women is committed through the use of media such as texting, email, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and others.

CYBER BULLYING

is an act of regular harassment and bullying of a victim through a digital communication device by posting abusive and misleading content, pictures, or videos and sending rape and death threats.


DOXING

the act of revealing someone's personal information publicly without their permission. This includes; their real name, home address, workplace, phone, financial, and other personal information.

Name: Doe Uwineza
Address: 13 Kr 155, Kicukiro
Email: doeneza@gmail.com
Workplace: KFC
Income: 500,00|

Post

NON-CONSENSUAL PORNOGRAPHY

also known as cyber exploitation or 'revenge porn', non-consensual pornography involves the online distribution of sexually graphic photographs or videos without the victim's permission.
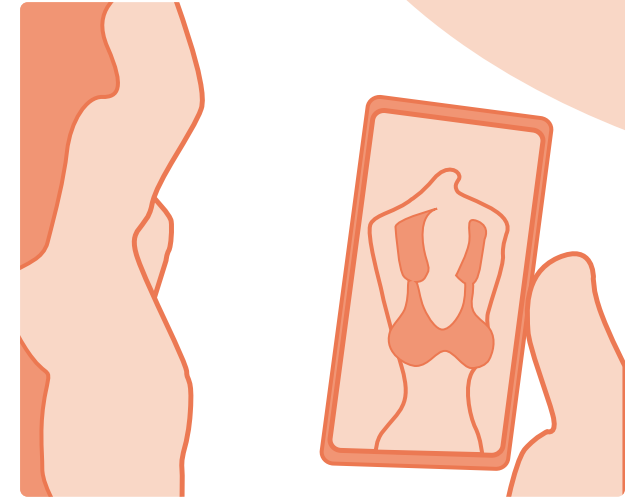

SEXTORTION

occurs when a fraudster threatens to circulate your private and sensitive material online if you do not provide images of a sexual nature, sexual favours, or money.

Hey
How is it going
What are you up to?
Can I get some pics?
Nice pics bit if you don®send money I am going to share them with everyone you know

DEFINITION

CYBER FLASHING

happens when someone intentionally sends an unsolicited sexual image through the internet, messaging applications, online platforms, Bluetooth, or other file-sharing applications. For example "dick pics".
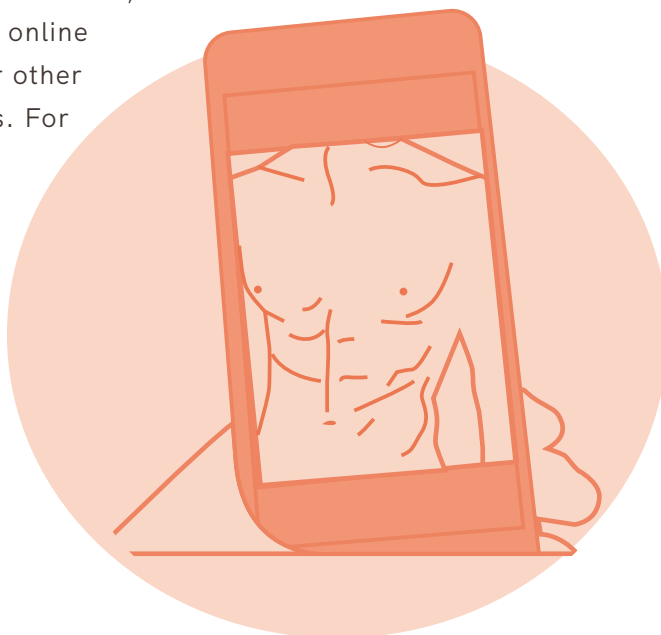
CYBER HACKING

can occur when asked to click on an unauthorized link or download apps that can leak all their personal information on their phones.

IMPACT: HOW ONLINE VIOLENCE AFFECTS WOMEN

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT
causes low-self esteem, stress, anxiety, depression and suicide.

SELF-CENSORSHIP
limits women's right to express themselves equally, freely and without fear.

SOCIAL IMPLICATION
deters women from digital participation in political, social and cultural life.

FINANCIAL LIMITATION
Online abuse causes isolation from online spaces and limits the use of digital platforms for economic gains.

MAKES GENDER-BASED AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WORSE
Perpetrators of domestic violence use online tools to abuse their victims and women are less likely to report them due to fear.

GENDER EQUALITY & EQUITY GAP
Misogynists use online platforms to advance harmful gender ideologies and delay the full realization of gender equality and violate women's rights.

PROMPT QUESTIONS
1. What are some examples of online violence?
2. What are some types of online violence you have experienced or witnessed?
3. Who is mostly affected by online harassment and abusive behaviour?

PROMPT QUESTIONS
1. What are the consequences of facing OVAW?
2. How would you feel if you were flooded by negative comments, and hateful speech and targeted because you were a woman?
3. What should be done to protect young girls online?

HERE ARE 6 WAYS YOU CAN PRACTICE DIGITAL SELF-CARE AND COMMUNAL CARE

1

AVOID DOOM SCROLLING

Pay close attention to how social media and online content are influencing your emotions, thoughts or actions. Identifying why you are online and how it makes you feel can help you set the right personal limits on how much time you spend on social media or other apps.
Try muting or limiting content from accounts that are not making you feel good.

2

PROTECT YOURSELF

Check the privacy settings on all your social media profiles. Be careful when signing up for apps and services online especially providing your full name, address or photo.

Enable two-factor authentication on work and personal email. Make sure you are the only one with access to them.accounts that are not making you feel good.

3

PRACTISE KINDNESS

If you find yourself responding to a message or post with something negative, pause and consider whether you could frame it in another way or have an in-person conversation instead. If you see or receive messages or content you consider to be bullying or abusive, you should block and report it.

4

STAY PRESENT AND CONNECTED IN REAL LIFE

Live in the present and keep in touch with people physically. Looking for activities such as meditation, going for a walk, or calling a friend will help provide a similar stimulation but leave you feeling more focused and relaxed.

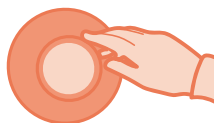# HERE ARE 6 WAYS YOU CAN PRACTICE DIGITAL SELF-CARE AND COMMUNAL CARE

5 PRACTISE DIGITAL SELF-CARE

Make time for self-care. This can include anything from meditation or cooking to listening to music or going for walks. Whatever you choose, it must involve taking regular breaks from your devices.

6 SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If you can afford it, seek mental health care from a professional or therapist to deal with the consequences of online abuse.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH ONLINE VIOLENCE?

There are concrete steps you can take to defend yourself and others.

1. IDENTIFY ABUSE

Is it bullying, harassment or doxing? This will help you know which category to report the offence to.

3. BLOCK, MUTE, REPORT

Blocking, muting, and reporting abuse on social media platforms are each distinct actions;

- You can block accounts to limit their access to your account.
- Mute accounts or specific posts or words so that you don't have to see them.
- You can report abuse that violates terms of service to try to get a post taken down or an account suspended. Ask others to rthe account or post to ensure it's taken down or suspended.

2. DOCUMENT AND REPORT THE ABUSE

Keep a record of the abuse you are experiencing. Save emails, voicemails, and texts. Take screenshots on social media and copy direct links whenever possible.
If you're being abused repeatedly by a specific individual or group, you may want to create a log, which can help you see patterns and build up evidence.
Report the abuse on the platform you are using under the right category.

4. REACH OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

While discussing online abuse can bring up feelings of fear and shame, remember that abuse is intended to isolate you. You are not alone. Seek support from friends, family, colleagues, and civil organisations that work for digital rights.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. List ways you can be safer online.
2. How can you protect your mental health online?
3. How can you support other women who are being abused online?
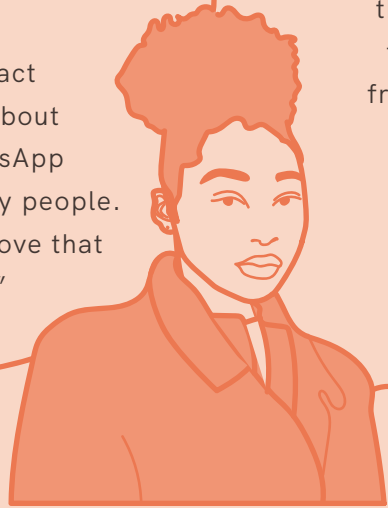
PROMPT QUESTIONS

4. What should be done to end OVAW?
5. How could the government and social networks prevent and end OVAW?
6. How would you contribute to ending OVAW in your community?

I shared an opinion on a WhatsApp group that had more than 100 members. It started off as sarcasm but quickly escalated into insults. It was done by a man who, at first, made negative comments about my work but quickly started to insult me.

I was shocked by the fact that he was so direct about it and did it on a WhatsApp group that had so many people. enough evidence to prove that I had been attacked."

I got angry and decided to report him at Rwanda Investigative Bureau. In the end, he apologized, and he was punished by paying me an amount of five hundred thousand and thirty thousand Rwandan francs (530,000Rwf)

This experience showed me that, if not armed with the right tools, such as knowledge of your rights as a woman, it is so easy to be dragged into worse, as the abuser keeps coming for you.

UMWALI KEZA

"I CHOSE THE LEGAL WAY BECAUSE I ALREADY KNEW WHAT THE LAW SAID ABOUT SUCH INCIDENTS AND I HAD ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT I HAD BEEN ATTACKED."

I have developed thick skin because online violence is something that I live with on a regular basis. There was a time that I was attacked constantly on Twitter, on every single tweet I posted, so many comments would come to bash my tweet and also attack me. I was body shamed for sharing my ideas and instead of people critiquing me, they choose to abuse me and other women for sharing their ideas and views on different topics on life and in society.

Further, online violence is not only done by men but also women, though it is often done by men online. These men register fake accounts and put photos of girls on their accounts, but when you read through their tweets, you recognise that it is done by men. In the past, I never considered reporting these cases of abuse done against my person, it just felt exaggerated and "doing too much" but in the future, I intend to report extreme cases. That will discourage online violence.

UMULISA JOANNE

IF YOU AS A GIRL OR WOMAN ARE ABUSED ONLINE, TRY YOUR BEST TO NOT READ THOSE COMMENTS. THEY ARE VERY HARMFUL.

SINCE ONLINE VIOLENCE HAS BECOME NORMALIZED AND PART OF OUR ONLINE EXPERIENCE, TRY TO STAY AWAY FROM SUCH NEGATIVE CONTENT BY BLOCKING THE ABUSER, AND NOT READING THOSE NEGATIVE MESSAGES.

NOTE FROM A PSYCHIATRIST

In this age of social media, many have confused freedom of speech with hate speech. As a result, online abusers of women and girls tend to take it so far beyond simple misunderstanding to abusing women, attacking their person and making them victims.

As a result of online abuse, girls and women develop anxiety and depression, without even realizing that online abuse is part of the reason why they suffer.

Younger girls in secondary school and university tend to be more affected by this abuse since they are the most active on different online platforms.

Since most cases involve male abusers, these girls and women tend to leave those spaces convinced that all men are the same and likely to abuse them.

**DR EMMANUEL MUSONI RWIRIRIZA (PSYCHIATRIST AT CHUK & SOLID MINDS)**

NUGGETS OF WISDOM

"Above all else, do not give up being authentic and sharing your ideas; they matter and mean a lot because not everyone is a troll."
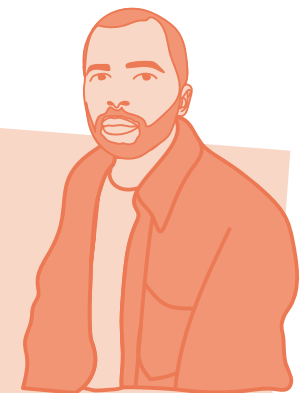
UMULISA JOANNE

"I encourage women to educate themselves on the law as well as their rights. This is a powerful tool that will forever change how they view any form of abuse."
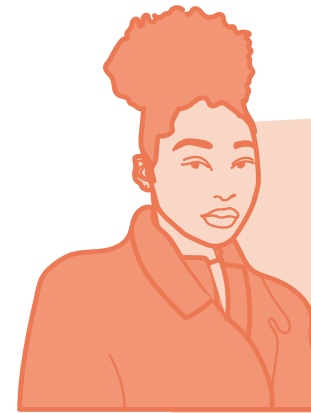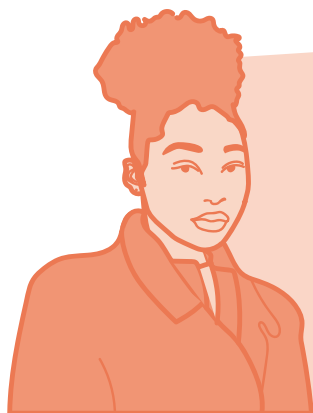
UMWALI KEZA

"When abused online, one should seek mental health care to help them sort out the issues that they have encountered as a result of the abuse."

DR EMMANUEL M.R

NUGGETS OF WISDOM:

"We should all work towards ending the culture of protecting abusers and passive spectator of abuse, as this empowers abusers to keep abusing; thus, abuse not being done on one person only but amassing victims, as the abuser goes unchecked or unpunished."

UMWALI KEZA

"During those times of intense online violence, I got inbox messages of support from both men and women, telling me to keep soldiering on. Surprisingly, my family and friends never attacked me but would at one time inform me that they saw what I tweeted."
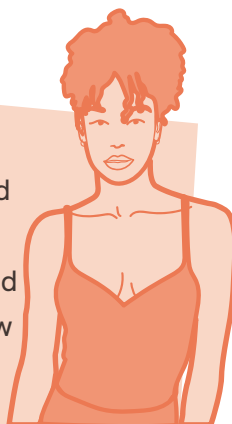
UMULISA JOANNE

In many ways this violence is the same as other types of violence against women, whether it is physical abuse, or sexual assault, in that violence is wielded as a tool to control and have power over women, to maintain men's dominance over women as a class, and to reinforce patriarchal norms, roles and structures.

To seek professional help you can reach out to

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