Breaking the Silence:

Ending online violence and abuse against women's rights activists

A policy briefing highlighting the silencing effect of online violence and abuse against women's rights activists in Zimbabwe, Nepal and Kenya, and implications for women's rights and movement-building.

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"Until we realise that we need an online space that works for us, on our terms, then we will continue to have patriarchal norms that dominate how we exist on social media."

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

Over the last thirty years women's rights organisations, activists and feminists have used information and communications technologies (ICTs), including the internet and social media, to access and share critical information on their rights, organise and mobilise for activism and engage in advocacy. However, despite their benefits and potential to support women's rights and movement-building globally, these new technologies have also created significant challenges for women's rights organisations and movements, including the emergence of new forms of violence and abuse against women online. These new forms of violence and abuse online are being used to subjugate and silence women, limiting their ability to meaningfully participate in public life and discourse and shrinking the space for civil society.

This briefing aims to highlight women's rights activists' and feminists' experiences of online violence and abuse across a number of Womankind's focus countries, particularly Zimbabwe, Nepal and Kenya. It looks at the psychological harm and distress it causes survivors, their coping mechanisms, including support from other feminists, and the effectiveness of responses from governments, law enforcement, and internet service providers and social media companies. It draws on new research resulting from a partnership between the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Leeds in the UK and Womankind Worldwide (Womankind), alongside existing research by Womankind partners and others working in the field of human rights and violence against women and girls. The briefing ends with a series of policy recommendations for state and non-state actors.

Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread human rights violations worldwide.[1] Globally at least 35% of women experience violence in their lifetime and 30% experience intimate partner violence.[2] The rise of the use of the internet and other ICTs has led to the emergence of new forms of violence and abuse against women in online spaces. These newer forms of violence and abuse are a manifestation of existing discrimination and violence in society and are rooted in the same systems of patriarchy, oppression and gender inequalities, which are underpinned by unequal power relations and discriminatory social norms.[3]

There is growing global attention on the issue of online violence and abuse against women including from United Nations (UN) agencies and international government fora such as the G7 and G20. In June 2018 Dubravka Šimonović, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, submitted a report to the Human Rights Council highlighting the importance of applying a human rights-based approach to online violence against women.[4] In her report she is clear that online violence should be dealt with in the broader context of efforts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In June 2018, the G7 committed to take action to end sexual and gender-based violence, abuse and harassment in digital contexts.[5] In August 2018, the G20 committed to 'address cyber violence towards girls and women to facilitate their online participation.'[6] However, despite increasing global commitments and some regional initiatives in this area, actions are not yet clearly defined or enshrined in national laws and policies.

Access to and use of the internet remains gender unequal. Globally, women are 12% less likely to use the internet than men and whilst the gender gap has narrowed in most regions since 2013, it has widened in Africa where the proportion of women using the internet is 25% lower than that of men.[7] The Association of Progressive Communications (APC) has described the gender digital divide as both a symptom and cause of women's human rights violations. On the one hand, women's ability to meaningfully access the internet is driven by intersecting discriminations and inequalities that women face in society at large. On the other hand, it also causes further rights violations by leaving women who are denied this access less able to exercise their human rights and participate in public life.[8] Women are also under-represented when it comes to participation and leadership in internet governance, including the design and development of technologies and policies.[9]

Globally, women are **12% less likely** to use the internet than men. In Africa the gender gap has widened to **25%**.

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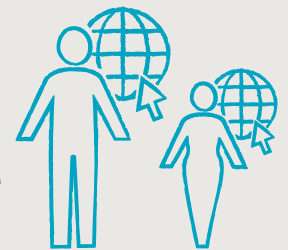
1. In this briefing we use the term 'women' to be inclusive of girls and we recognise that girls face specific risks of online violence and abuse.
2. World Health Organisation Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council. *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.* 2013.
3. For further information on more traditional forms of violence against women and girls and Womankind's work to prevent these see: https://www.womankind.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/women's-rights/violence-against-women.
4. UN Human Rights Council. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective.* June 2018. 38th session.
5. G7 Charlevoix. *Charlevoix Commitment to End Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, Abuse and Harassment in Digital Contexts.* June 2018. Available online at: https://g7.gc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/EndSexualGenderBasedViloenceAbuseHarassmentInDigitalContexts.pdf.
6. G20 Argentina. *G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Declaration.* August 2018. Available online at: https://g20.org/sites/default/files/media/g20_detf_ministerial_declaration_salta.pdf.
7. International Telecommunication Union (ITU). *ICT Facts and Figures 2017.* July 2017.
8. Association for Progressive Communications (APC). *Bridging the gender digital divide from a human rights perspective: APC submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.* February 2017.
9. Spuy A, Souter D. *Women's Digital Inclusion: Background paper for the G20.* APC and the Internet Society (ISOC). September 2018.

There are significant gaps in data on the prevalence and impact of online violence and abuse against women and limited research has been carried out on the experiences of women in Africa and Asia. Data collection is not yet coordinated at regional or global level, and countries measuring the prevalence of online violence and abuse use different indicators and definitions.[10] However, existing research suggests that women are more likely to experience online violence than men and face more serious consequences.[11] Research by Amnesty International revealed that nearly a quarter (23%) of women surveyed across eight countries said they had experienced online abuse or harassment at least once.[12] Women experience more severe forms of online violence compared to men, including physical threats, harassment over a sustained period, sexual harassment or stalking.[13]

Initiatives like Amnesty International's 2018 *#ToxicTwitter* campaign[14] have been crucial in highlighting the harmful impact of violence and abuse against women online on their right to freedom of expression and in holding actors, including social media companies, to account. Other examples like APC's 'Take Back The Tech!' campaign[15] and the 'Feminist Principles of the Internet'[16] are helping to pave the way for a feminist internet, which is free from violence and one where women can participate equally with men.

There is recognition by the UN and human rights organisations that women's rights activists are being targeted by online violence and abuse because they speak out about rights, equality and justice.[17] With increased global and political attention to violence and abuse against women online, Womankind and our partners have been taking a closer look at what this means for women's rights activists in the countries where we work. By doing so, we hope to add to the evidence base and demonstrate that online violence and abuse against women truly is a global issue that affects all women, including women's rights activists, wherever they live and work. We also set out what we think needs to happen in order to eliminate online violence and abuse against women.

Feminist Principles of the Internet[18]

The 'Feminist Principles of the Internet' are a series of statements that offer a feminist lens on critical internet-related rights. They were drafted at two 'Imagine a Feminist Internet' meetings in Malaysia 2014-2015 by a group of up to 50 activists and advocates and include:

Principle 5: Movement-building

The internet is a transformative political space. It facilitates new forms of citizenship that enable individuals to claim, construct and express selves, genders and sexualities. This includes connecting across territories, demanding accountability and transparency, and creating opportunities for sustained feminist movement-building.

Principle 17: Online violence

We call on all internet stakeholders, including internet users, policy makers and the private sector, to address the issue of online harassment and technology-related violence. The attacks, threats, intimidation and policing experienced by women and queers are real, harmful and alarming, and are part of the broader issue of gender-based violence. It is our collective responsibility to address and end this.

10. Van der Wilk A. *Cyber violence and hate speech online against women*. September 2018. European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs. Available online at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses.

11. Supra note 4; Henry N, Powell A. Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence: A Literature Review of Empirical Research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2018. 19(2): 195-208.

12. Amnesty International press release. *Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women*. November 2017. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/.

13. Pew Research Centre. *Online Harassment*. October 2014. Available online at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/

14. Amnesty International. *Toxic Twitter - A Toxic Place for Women*. 2018. Chapter 1. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/.

15. Take Back the Tech! was initiated in 2006 by the APC Women's Rights Programme. Further details are available at: https://www.apc.org/en/project/take-back-tech.

16. APC. *Feminist Principles of the Internet – Version 2.0*. August 2016. Available online at: https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/feminist-principles-internet-version-20. The first version of the FPIs is available at https://www.genderit.org/node/4097/.

17. Supra note 4; Al Wasmi N. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights says women are being silenced. *The National*. September 2018. Available online at: https://www.thenational.ae/world/the-americas/un-high-commissioner-for-human-rights-says-women-are-being-silenced-1.774871; Brown L. *Honouring Women Human Rights Defenders*. 2017. Womankind Worldwide. November 2017. Available online at: https://www.womankind.org.uk/blog/detail/our-blog/2017/11/28/honouring-women-human-rights-defenders.

18. Supra note 16.

1. What is online violence and abuse against women and girls?

Online violence and abuse against women is a form of discrimination and negatively impacts the enjoyment of human rights. It is part of the continuum of violence and discrimination that women and girls face offline and online throughout their lives.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other regional and international frameworks include violence against women within their definition of discrimination.[19] Whilst the Convention pre-dates the emergence of the internet and other ICTs as we know them today, it is fully applicable in online spaces.[20] In 2016 the UN Human Rights Council affirmed that the same rights that are in existence offline must also be protected online.[21] This includes a woman's right to live a life free from violence, the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy and to have access to information shared through ICTs.

Online violence and abuse against women can be sexual, psychological or emotional. It can also lead to physical harm and has the potential to result in violence and abuse offline.[22] The same patterns can be found online and offline, for example technology facilitates intimate partner violence online. Therefore, online violence and abuse against women cannot be separated from what happens offline; violence that happens online can be taken into offline spaces and vice versa. Online violence and abuse against women must be seen as part of the real world of violence and abuse.

However, online spaces can amplify the reach of transmission and the harm caused to survivors. Violence and abuse against women online can be carried out at increased distance, speed and rates, whilst anonymity and encryption can protect perpetrators from being known to both survivors and authorities.[23] Whilst anonymity can conceal the identities of perpetrators, it is also crucial to women's rights organisations and women who want to speak out about issues without fear of backlash, as well as to survivors wanting to re-enter online spaces anonymously.[24] Online violence and abuse can result in multiple layers of perpetration as offensive or threatening content and images are disseminated and shared by others, and violence and abuse repeated.

> *We didn't start with online, we started with offline environments. We see forms of oppression in society and these are exported to social media and online space.*
>
> **Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe**

> *"Online it is easier to talk about some topics, for example, sexuality and abortion, because in online spaces we feel more comfortable and safe talking about difficult issues. Anonymity is important. The LGBTI community uses different identities because of the threats they might feel physically."*
>
> Women's rights activist, Nepal

19. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). *General recommendation No 19: Violence against women*. 1992. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/52d920c54.html.
20. UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). *General recommendation No 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No 19*. 2017. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/gr35.aspx.
21. UN Human Rights Council. *The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet: resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 1 July 2016*. A/HRC/RES/32/13. Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/57e916464.html.
22. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). *Cyber violence against women and girls*. 2017.
23. Aziz Z. *Due Diligence and Accountability for Online Violence against Women*. July 2017.
24. Ibid; UN Human Rights Council. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye*. 22 May 2015. A/HRC/29/32 Available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5576dcfc4.html.

Different terms are used in relation to online violence and abuse against women, including cyber violence, technology-facilitated/assisted violence, ICT-facilitated violence and online violence. The range of terms used, a misunderstanding about what online violence and abuse actually is and the absence of a comprehensive definition present challenges for measuring and documenting the experiences of violence and abuse that happens online.[25] Defining these terms, including online harassment, is a contentious issue with concerns that this may be used to restrict legitimate freedom of expression.[26] In this briefing Womankind has chosen to use the term 'online violence and abuse against women' with the intent to capture the full range of violations and abuse that women experience throughout their lives, both offline and online.

Useful definitions of online violence and abuse against women

- Online violence against women…extends to any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part of fully by the use of ICT, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the internet, social media platforms or email, against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately.

  UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in her report to the Human Rights Council 28th session June 2018 [27]

- Technology-facilitated [gender-based violence] GBV is action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation"

  International Centre for Research on Women, 2018 [28]

- Technology-related violence against women – such as cyber stalking, harassment and misogynist speech – encompasses acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of information and communication technologies, such as mobile phones, the internet, social media platforms, and email. Technology-related violence against women is part of the same continuum of violence against women offline

  Association for Progressive Communications, 2015 [29]

- Violence and abuse against women online may include, among other things: offensive or abusive language; sharing of sexual or private images without consent; threats (direct and indirect) of physical or sexual violence; or online harassment with an intention to cause distress.

  Amnesty International, 2017[30]

25. Supra note 10.
26. Karaman S. Section 3: How do civil society and intergovernmental organisations define online harassment? *Online Harassment of Politically-Active women: An Overview.* Tactical Technology Collective XYZ project. Available online at: https://xyz.informationactivism. org/en/online-harassment-of-politically-active-women-definition.
27. Supra note 4.
28. Hinson L, Mueller J, O'Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it?* International Centre for Research on Women. 2018.
29. APC. *From impunity to justice: Exploring corporate and legal remedies for technology-related violence against women*. March 2015. Available online at: https://www.genderit.org/onlinevaw. More recently however APC refer to 'online gender-based violence' as set out in their submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women. See full reference in note 54.
30. Amnesty International UK. *Social media can be a dangerous place for UK women*. November 2017.

2. The experience of women's rights activists in Africa and Asia

In 2018, Womankind supported a piece of feminist research on online violence and abuse against women on social media with our partner women's rights organisations and activists in Africa and Asia. The research was carried out by Bronwen Embleton for her final dissertation project on the MA Global Development programme in POLIS at the University of Leeds and was carried out in partnership with Womankind. Sections 2-5 of this briefing highlight some of the key findings from the research resulting from this partnership (referred to as 'our research' in this briefing paper). Whilst focused on social media these findings have implications for ICTs and the internet more broadly. These findings are supplemented by research carried out by our partner LOOM Nepal and other organisations working on human rights, women's rights and violence against women and girls.

Methodology and ethics

This research involved a mixed method approach, including a literature review, an online survey distributed to former and current Womankind partners, and semi-structured interviews with seven women's rights activists in Zimbabwe, Nepal and Kenya. Eighteen women's rights activists and feminists from across six different countries completed the survey.[31] Both the researcher and Womankind triangulated the research findings with results from other similar

89% of women have witnessed another woman being abused online.

studies, a number of which are referenced in this briefing. The project received approval by the Ethics Committee of the University of Leeds.

2.1 Online violence and abuse is common amongst women's rights activists

Online violence and abuse against women's rights activists and feminists is widespread on social media. **89% of women** who responded to the survey have witnessed another woman being subjected to online violence and abuse. **50% of women** have experienced online violence and abuse themselves.

These experiences reflect a similar trend in research by other feminist and women's rights organisations. For example, research carried out by LOOM Nepal for the APC's EROTICS project on internet usage among gender and sexual rights activists in Nepal in 2017 had very similar findings.[32] Other studies in Africa and Asia have raised similar concerns for women more broadly. For example, one study in Uganda found that 45% of women said they had experienced threats or direct personal bullying on the internet.[33] Research in India found that more than half of respondents (most of whom were women) had faced some kind of online aggression in the form of trolling, bullying, abuse or harassment.[34]

50% of women have personally experienced online violence and abuse.

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31. Survey responses were received from women's rights activists and feminists in Nepal, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia.
32. In LOOM Nepal's research for the APC's EROTICS project 88% of respondents reported that they had witnessed someone being subjected to violence on the internet and 52% said they have experienced such violence themselves. 99 gender equality and sexual rights activists took part in the survey. See full reference at note 36.
33. Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET), Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA). *Women's Rights and the Internet in Uganda: stakeholder report to the Universal Periodic Review 26th Session Uganda.* March 2016.
34. Pasricha J. Violence Online In India: Cybercrimes Against Women & Minorities on Social Media. *Feminism in India.* 2016. Available online at https://feminisminindia.com/2016/11/15/cyber-violence-against-women-india-report/.

The most common social media platform highlighted – for both experiencing and witnessing abuse – was Facebook. Other social media platforms highlighted where abuse took place included Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. However, women in this research also cited other ICTs where abuse takes place, including on the internet, mobile phones, messaging services such as WhatsApp and email.

2.2 The gendered nature of violence and abuse

Women survivors who took part in our research consistently highlighted the gender inequality and discrimination that they face in offline spaces and how online violence and abuse is a continuum of the violence and abuse they face offline. Harmful and discriminatory social norms and gender roles and stereotypes about women offline are reflected online and women who don't conform are targeted for abuse. Online violence and abuse against women is normalised and often accepted by women and men as 'what happens online.' A number of the women who took part in our research also highlighted the role of the media in fuelling survivor blaming and the silencing of women, a trend which is found in other research.[35]

> *I have noticed from Facebook that when women post something, especially if they are known feminists, they get a backlash, mainly from men and sometimes from other women.*
>
> **Women and disability rights activist, Zimbabwe**

Patterns of violence and abuse most commonly reported in our research included **sexual harassment, cyber stalking** and **threats of violence** (direct and indirect) against survivors or their familes. Other forms of violence and abuse mentioned included cyber bullying, non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos (also known as 'revenge porn'), and hate speech.

35. Supra note 10.

The women who took part in our research highlighted that the attacks they experienced or witnessed were often highly sexualised and focused on a woman's body, appearance or sexuality. Threats of physical violence are often sexual in nature, reflecting the gendered nature of violence and abuse against women.

"Women usually get attacked about how they're not doing what they should be doing and this leads to attacks about how they look in photos. It is mostly men who attack women online, but some women also attack other women. Whenever there's an attack on women it's about her looks and appearance, shaming her about her sexuality, not what she has written or said."

Women's rights activist, Nepal

"It was an indirect threat to silence the other lady and I. He also said he knew where we lived and worked…it made us scared because I never shared my address with him."

Women and disability rights activist, Zimbabwe

"Usually there's a comment about a woman's body, saying [she's] not fit to be a woman if she doesn't have such a body. And threats of violence against you, and your family, if they know who they are"

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

If your Twitter profile is a bit different you get more reaction and attacks. Those that fit into certain stereotypes get fewer attacks.

Women's rights activist, Nepal

Types of online violence and abuse experienced or witnessed

- **Unwanted sexualisation**: including receiving attention, comments and content of a sexual nature that were unwelcome. Several women spoke of receiving unsolicited sexual messages or images ('sexting') on their phones or over the internet. Examples were also given of the alteration of images on Facebook to make them sexual in nature.

- **Non-consensual sharing/distribution of intimate images and videos**: including those taken with consent but shared without consent (also known as 'revenge porn') and acts of offline domestic and sexual violence recorded digitally and shared. Non-consensual sharing of intimate data can be an extension of intimate partner violence online.

- **Cyber stalking**: repeated unwanted contact by the same person, either through email, text messages or on the internet. One woman in Zimbabwe said it started off as 'innocent' but then quickly escalated to a man in a position of power and known to her sending pictures of himself to her inbox along with requests to meet at a hotel.

- **Threats of violence**: several women spoke of receiving direct or indirect threats of violence with many in fear of violence offline because of threatening behaviour online. One woman said she received a lot of hate speech in her inbox and that threats were also made against her children in an attempt to silence her. Another woman felt threatened because the perpetrator knew her address.

- **Cyber bullying**: Examples were given of female politicians and women leaders in Kenya and Zimbabwe facing online bullying over a sustained period of time often comprising attacks on their sexuality and appearance.

I have hate speech coming into my inbox, targeting my femininity. I have learnt to expect this and have upped security at my house, as some of the threats say they want to kill me and shoot me.

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

LOOM Nepal research for the EROTICS South Asia exploratory research project[36]

- 100% of transgender respondents reported having been subjected to violence online.

- 84% of respondents who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other non-heterosexual orientation reported having been subjected to online violence.

- Gender identity, class, sexual orientation and caste all underpin women's experiences of online violence, with a disproportionately high number of people reporting online violence identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) or Dalit.

2.3 Intersecting identities

In addition to the gendered nature of online violence and abuse, many of the women who were interviewed also highlighted the discrimination they face as a result of their other identities, including sexual orientation, gender identity, race and age. From this research it was not clear how a woman's disability status affected the violence and abuse she received or witnessed.

"I am a member of the LBT community and an out lesbian and sometimes I will post things about the rights of sexual minorities. I have faced most online abuse about this, for example people ask me if I am a lesbian with a derogatory undertone and religious fundamentalists tell me to burn in hell....Gay women who are friends get extra bullying because they're from the LBT community and because they're a woman. [Being a lesbian] increases the chance of being bullied online."

Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya

"The women who tend to be publicly shamed and abused online are Black, there seems to me to be a peculiar form of abuse tied to the post-colonial realities of Zimbabwe. I think this is important. Race is therefore a factor."

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

Separate research by Womankind partner LOOM Nepal with gender and sexual rights activists also highlights that sexual orientation, gender identity, class and caste all contribute to the experiences of online violence and abuse against women in Nepal.

Gay women get extra bullying because they're from the LBT community and because they're a woman.

Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya

In Amnesty International's *#ToxicTwitter* research, almost all women who had experienced multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination offline stated that the violence and abuse they experience on Twitter reflect these same forms of discrimination.[37]

36. Nepal I. The internet and sexual expression: Exploring the use of the internet among gender equality and sexual rights advocates in Nepal. *EROTICS South Asia exploratory research: Sex, rights and the internet.* Association of Progressive Communications. 2017. LOOM Nepal carried out the research for the EROTICS project in Nepal.

37. Supra note 14. Chapter 2. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-2/#topanchor.

3. The impact of online violence and abuse against women

Women face significant **psychological and physical harm** as a result of experiencing and witnessing online violence and abuse. This affects their health and wellbeing, as well as their ability to voice their opinions and participate in public life. Evidence suggests that the psychological and physical consequences of online violence and abuse are more severe for women than for men.[38] Online violence does not have to be experienced directly to have an impact.[39]

> *It is very intimidating and disheartening. I start to feel insecure because that person...has the potential to harm you.*
>
> **Women's rights activist, Nepal**

In addition, online violence and abuse – or the threat of online violence and abuse – is resulting in women **self-censoring** themselves online, changing their technology use, and in some cases withdrawing from the debate altogether or online spaces. This silencing of women online is affecting their right to participate in public life and also their freedom of expression.

Many women survivors who were interviewed felt that the abuse was intended to shame, humiliate and intimidate women, undermine their character and silence them from expressing their opinions. Several women talked about these attacks taking place when they voiced opposing views, including on matters of politics, or discussed issues of women's rights, particularly in relation to sexuality, sexual health, abortion or rape. Notably, one participant highlighted that this online attack on women's rights is linked to

the shrinking space for civil society and the silencing or negating of views that are not socially conservative.

3.1 Psychological and emotional harm

Women interviewed for this research reported a range of offline psychological consequences as a result of experiencing or witnessing online violence and abuse. Women reported feeling threatened, drained, anxious, angry, sad, insecure, fearful about their physical safety and had a sense of helplessness and powerlessness. Several women talked about the need to feel mentally prepared before accessing online spaces and said they had to use a lot of energy to engage or 'fight' in online spaces and conversations, either for themselves or on behalf of other women.

> *I felt really scared. In our country there are just certain people one does not want as enemies because they will find a way to punish you.*
>
> **Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe**

"As a woman and someone who works on women's rights I am in a constant rage and sense of helplessness. At times I do intervene and tell them [perpetrators] it's wrong and they shouldn't be doing this. But I can't respond to everyone because of my mental health. I wouldn't be at peace."

Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya

38. Staude-Müller F, Hansen B, Voss M. How stressful is online victimization? Effects of victim's personality and properties of the incident. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*. 2012. 9:2, 260-274.

39. Pew Research Centre. *Online Harassment 2017*. July 2017. Available online at http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/.

"It is very intimidating and disheartening. I start to feel insecure because maybe that person has your number. They have the potential to harm you and seem to be very unhappy with what you say. I think, 'what if they have taken a screen shot of my picture' or hacked into my phone?'"

Women's rights activist, Nepal

"I felt really scared. In our country there are just certain people one does not want to cross as enemies because these people will find a way of using their political connections to punish you in some way. It was an indirect threat of violence. He also said he knew where I lived and I got worried and emotional. What if he comes to my house after the social media discussion."

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

"I feel negative energy and that really disturbs my day. It also gives me some anxiety."

Anonymous, survey of women's rights activists

Research by Amnesty International found that 55% of women experienced anxiety, stress or panic attacks as a result of experiencing online abuse and harassment, and 36% felt that their physical safety was threatened. Many faced other psychological consequences, such as loss of self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness in their ability to respond to the abuse.[40] LOOM Nepal's research found that many women report mental health problems, including depression and a feeling of shame and guilt.[41]

71% of women who took part in the survey said the threat of online violence and abuse affects their participation on social media.

3.2 Self-censorship

As well as having the right to live free from violence, women have the right to freedom of expression. However, many women who took part in this research reported that they are self-censoring what they say on the internet and social media. This resultant silencing of women is a violation of their right to freedom of expression, which is protected by international human rights frameworks including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.[42]

I choose not to comment on certain topics because of my gender and the attacks I will face thereafter.

Anonymous, survey of women's rights activists

71% of women who took part in the survey said the threat of online violence and abuse affects their participation on social media. Responses included being less willing to engage in public discourse and speak up and voice their opinions. Some women withdrew from certain conversations, thereby not expressing their opinions on these issues, others withdrew from the internet or social media altogether, while yet others reported self-censoring their response.

"On certain days I want to speak about something but I choose not to because of the backlash. It changes how I engage, what I choose and choose not to say. I want to speak a lot more about [LGBT rights] but I pull back from this. I can speak about women in development and women's leadership but when I speak about other issues it has to be on a day when I'm ready to fight."

Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya

40. Supra note 12.
41. Supra note 36.
42. Enshrined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. For further information see http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/, https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx and https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx.

> *[I am] less willing to engage in public discourse, less willing to speak up and out or voice opinion. I feel unsafe in everyday situations.*
>
> **Anonymous, survey of women's rights activists**

> *"I tend to self-censor what I say, especially if [sending something] from an organisational aspect. It's kind of draining. I don't find the internet very comfortable now."*
>
> Women's rights activist, Nepal

3.3 Withdrawal from the debate

In some cases women withdrew completely from the debate, either for a temporary period or from certain issues altogether.

> *"I decided not to do anything online during the elections. Social media was depressing for me at this time and I couldn't use it. I didn't need to be in that toxic space. I didn't want to get backlash. I already have this label of being a feminist and I might drag this organisation into it. I blocked everybody who had strong political opinions about any political party – I didn't want to see any fundamentalism about politics. I reduced my rate [of online interactions] but didn't suspend my account or make it go dormant. I didn't want to be involved in any conversation that was political."*
>
> Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

> *"I am no longer a very active member on Facebook."*
>
> Anonymous, survey of women's rights activists

As set out by Amnesty International, ensuring that everyone can freely participate online and without fear of violence and abuse is vital to ensuring that women can effectively exercise their right to freedom of expression.[43] In a joint statement the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on freedom of expression and on violence against women both commented on the negative impact of online violence abuse on the right to freedom of expression online for women.[44]

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43. Supra note 14. Chapter 5. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-5/#topanchor.
44. UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. *UN experts urge States and companies to address online gender-based abuse but warn against censorship*. March 2017. Available online at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21317&LangID=E.

4. Seeking help and coping mechanisms

The women who took part in this research sought help in different ways and adopted a range of coping mechanisms, with the most common being blocking their abusers, reporting to social media companies, altering their technology use, and seeking support from online feminist networks. Other examples included avoidance of the perpetrator ("I can post and comment as long as I avoid that guy") or the issue, deleting the conversation, and attempting to improve data security at an individual and organisational level.

4.1 Blocking and reporting to social media companies

The majority of the women interviewed for our research did report the violence or abuse to the social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter. However most were not satisfied with the response and did not feel that enough was done once they had reported the issue. Women were often advised to block the perpetrator and/or avoid looking at the content. In one case, the woman was told the content could be taken down if she herself could find the source. One interviewee was still waiting for a reply from Facebook several weeks later.

"Usually, if I don't like someone I just block them."

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

Even when a page has been set up to harass you, the response is that you can block the person and not look at the page.

Women's rights activist, Nepal

"I mostly received abuse on Twitter and Tinder. I received a response [from the companies] but I wasn't satisfied with how it was handled. Even when a page has been set up to harass you, the response is that you can block the person and not look at the page. In some cases content has been taken down and in other cases I have been notified to block the person."

Women's rights activist, Nepal

"My organisation reported [a video] of an adolescent couple having sex which was shared without their consent. We reported the incident to Facebook and they said they can block the video if they knew who sent it but it was difficult to identify the source. Facebook said they can help us but we need to find the source. This is one of the challenges of online abuse."

Women's rights activist, Nepal

Whilst the women interviewed for our research did report the abuse to social media companies, other research has shown that most online violence and abuse goes unreported.[45] This may be explained by the nature of the work that women's rights activists do and their increased exposure to online violence and abuse and companies' complaints and reporting mechanisms.

Women interviewed for our research described the internet and social media as being patriarchal spaces, reflective of society offline. As previously mentioned, the internet is gender unequal with gender bias in the design and development of technologies, including in algorithms, which perpetuate gender stereotypes and sexist and misogynist behaviour online. Systemically, women are not meaningfully involved in internet governance and decision-making, including around moderating abusive content.[46] This is reflective of the structural gender inequality in the technology sector which must be addressed if the internet is to become a safe space for women to interact and express themselves freely.

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45. Amnesty International's #*ToxicTwitter* research revealed that in the UK only 20% of women who experienced abuse or harassment on social media reported it to the company running the website or social media platforms. Supra note 30.

46. See for example: Sinders C. *Machine Learning Harassment*. Tactical Technology Collective. June 2018. Available online at: https://xyz.informationactivism.org/en/machine-learning-harassment; Nagarajan C. What does a feminist internet look like? *The Guardian*. September 2016. Available online at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/12/feminist-internet-empowering-online-harassment; Supra note 10.

> *In a country where feminism is viewed with so much hate and negativity I feel secure by finding other Ethiopian feminists and that small circle comes to your defense and really becomes a point of connection.*
>
> **Anonymous, survey of women's rights activists**

4.2 Seeking support from other feminists

A number of the women interviewed for our research highlighted their membership of feminist groups online, which creates both a safe space and a supportive network. One woman said that while she wouldn't discuss politics linked to the ruling party on public groups on social media, she didn't mind discussing these topics in her online feminist group. These groups were seen as an essential part of women's coping mechanisms in the face of threatening or abusive behaviour online.

> *"Because I have a community of feminists online with me I feel ring-fenced in social media. When you pick a fight with me you pick a fight with the community and others will get on the bandwagon. Our feminist movement is very much a sisterhood. I didn't need to answer for myself, others would say it's not OK."*
>
> Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

> *"I don't mind discussing [party politics] in our feminists groups because there are rules to be followed…and we can discuss anything freely without fear. We have female lawyers, activists, women's rights people in the group. It is secure. People in the group signed the African Feminists Charter so outsiders can't get in. We might be in different areas but we know who is who in the group."*
>
> Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

> *When you pick a fight with me you pick a fight with the community…Our feminist movement is very much a sisterhood. I didn't need to answer for myself, others would say it's not OK.*
>
> **Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe**

5. Barriers to accessing justice

Women have limited and inadequate measures to recourse and redress when they experience online violence and abuse. There is an overwhelming sense of impunity, which is exacerbated by the anonymity that the internet affords perpetrators (though as mentioned previously anonymity is itself crucial for women's rights activists).

Previous research by Womankind partner the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) demonstrated that survivors of offline violence face stigma and survivor blaming, which leads to under-reporting of cases.[47] This is no different for women who experience violence and abuse online. However, women who experience online violence and abuse are even more likely to be blamed than women who experience offline violence and abuse because they are not able to demonstrate physical harm.[48] Moreover, evidence can be deleted, in addition to the abuser's ability to close their account. A lack of trust in the state and law enforcement agencies can also contribute to the under-reporting of online violence and abuse.

5.1 Inadequate response from social media companies

As set out in section 4.1 of this briefing, most of the women who were interviewed for this research did not feel they had received a satisfactory response from the online social media company or platform, with many citing that the company or platform does not understand the nature of gender-abuse. In Nepal a particular issue in relation to language was identified, with several interviewees citing that the online platform struggled to deal with abusive content that was in Nepali.

"Mechanisms for recourse online are insufficient. I reported two users on Twitter and they decided the language wasn't abusive. Twitter doesn't understand my context and doesn't understand what gender abuse is and how it takes place."

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

Mechanisms for recourse online are insufficient. Twitter doesn't understand what gender abuse is and how it takes place.

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

"If the post is in Nepali Facebook don't understand. Language is a barrier."

Women's rights activist, Nepal

"I reported an image or video to Facebook showing domestic violence, and also reported a sexist comment on Facebook. They took action and I think the accounts were suspended. They responded in about 36-48 hours but they should be able to respond within 12 hours. I was happy with the initial response but I have seen one of the individuals continue to post content online. Once an individual has had 2-3 warnings they should be taken out of the platform."

Women's rights activist, Kenya

The experiences of these women shows the difficulty that women face when reporting the abuse to social media platforms. These experiences reflect the findings of other research which show inadequate response from companies in dealing with reports of online violence and abuse against women.[49] Amnesty International's *#ToxicTwitter* research found that despite having policies in place to act on online violence and abuse Twitter appears to be inadequately enforcing these policies.[50]

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47. Zimbabwe Women's Lawyers Association (ZWLA). *Routes to Justice: Response to Violence Against Women*. 2017.
48. Supra note 23.
49. Fawcett Society and Reclaim the Internet. *Twitter is 'failing women' experiencing online threats and harassment*. August 2017. Available online at: https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/News/twitter-failing-women-experiencing-online-threats-harassment.
50. Supra note 14. Chapter 4. Available online at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-4/#topanchor.

5.2 Gaps in legislation and ineffective and unequal implementation of existing laws

In response to new forms of violence and abuse online, some countries have introduced new laws criminalising online violence against women, and others use existing legislation, including laws which cover offences such as stalking, sexual harassment and hate speech.[51] However, even when laws (existing or new) are used to address online violence and abuse against women they are not effectively implemented, for example as a result of weak political infrastructure and the inaction of law enforcement.[52] Recent research in Kenya by HIVOS and International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Kenya found a lack of legislation and policies that identify and address online violence and abuse against women and inadequate implementation of existing laws.[53]

Unfortunately laws are still inadequate in online spaces and the burden of proof is on women to record their experience and take it to offline courts.

Women's rights activist, Zimbabwe

Other research has found that women's access to justice in cases of online violence and abuse is frequently limited due to inflexible interpretation of existing legislation addressing gender-based violence, data privacy and cybercrime.[54]

There is ongoing concern from UN agencies and human and women's rights organisations that some governments and other state actors are using legislation or other measures in the name of addressing online violence and abuse with a view to silencing dissenting voices or curtail freedom of expression.[55] For example, while Nepal's Electronic Transactions Act 2016 contains provisions that can be used to address online violence and abuse against women, this Act, the Constitution of Nepal and the Public Offences Act all contain 'public morality or decent behaviour' clauses which are being used to restrict civil liberty, particularly in relation to sexual rights and sexual expression.[56] In Zimbabwe there is a similar concern that the intention behind the Computer Crime and Cybercrime Bill introduced in 2017 is to restrict space for democratic debate and civil society.[57] Similarly in Kenya, sections of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act 2018 were recently suspended following fears that they restricted the right to freedom of opinion and freedom of expression online.[58]

The APC has suggested that adapting existing gender-based violence and cybercrime legislation, or opening interpretation to encompass technology-related gender-based violence, may be more practical than creating new legislation.[59] The UN Special Rapporteurs on violence against women and on freedom of expression have both emphasised that all efforts to limit or prevent online violence and abuse should comply with international human rights law.[60]

51. Countries introducing new laws include England, Canada, Germany, Israel, New Zealand and South Africa.
52. Nyst C. *End Violence: Women's rights and safety online: Technology-related violence against women: Recent legislative trends*. APC. As cited in the APC paper on due diligence and accountability for online violence against women. Supra note 23.
53. HIVOS and International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Kenya. *Ending Technology-Assisted Violence Against Women in Kenya*. December 2016. Available online at: https://www.hivos.org/sites/default/files/policy_brief.pdf.
54. APC. *Online gender-based violence: A submission from the Association for Progressive Communications to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*. November 2017.
55. O'Brien D, Kayyali D. Facing the Challenge of Online Harassment. Electronic Frontier Foundation. January 2015. Available online at: https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2015/01/facing-challenge-online-harassment; Maskay J, Karmacharya S, Kirven S. Online violence against women: A continuum of offline discrimination. *EROTICS South Asia exploratory research: Sex, rights and the internet.* Association of Progressive Communications. 2017.
56. Rana K. The Internet, Sexual Expression and Online Violence in Nepal: Interview with LOOM, Nepal. December 2017. *GenderIT.org*. Available online at: https://www.genderit.org/es/node/5044.
57. Zimbabwe Democracy Institute. *THE CYBERCRIME & CYBERSECURITY BILL: Grave Consequences on Internet Freedoms in Zimbabwe!* Advocacy paper. February 2018. Available online at: http://kubatana.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/zdi_mc_cybercrime_bill_analysis.pdf.
58. Nanfuka J. *Sections of Kenya's Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, 2018 Temporarily Suspended.* CIPESA. May 2018. Available online at: https://cipesa.org/2018/05/sections-of-kenyas-computer-misuse-and-cybercrimes-act-2018-temporarily-suspended/.
59. Supra note 54.
60. Supra note 44.

5.3 Inadequate law enforcement response

None of the women we interviewed reported the violence they experienced to the police. Women from Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nepal reported that the police do not have the right training, skills or resources to protect women survivors of online violence and abuse or bring the perpetrators to justice. A common theme was around the attitudes of law enforcement officers, particularly the police, who tend to trivialise online violence and abuse against women. The trivialising of online violence and abuse against women was also seen as a wider societal issue where harmful and discriminatory gender norms, roles and stereotypes reinforce gender inequality and unequal power relations.

Negative attitudes of law enforcement towards women survivors and limited capacity undermine access to justice for women. This is the case both offline and online. Even where countries have put in place specific law enforcement mechanisms they are rarely gender sensitive. For example, in Nepal a cyber-crime unit has been established, however, women and girls who report cases of online violence and abuse are often blamed and their character questioned, rather than focusing on the perpetrators.[61] In addition, whilst the police monitor cybercrimes in Nepal they do not have a gender-disaggregated data system.[62] Moreover, women who want to report online violence and abuse are required to travel to Kathmandu to report their case, presenting an additional barrier to accessing justice.[63]

61. Supra note 55 (Maskay J, Karmacharya S, Kirven S only).

62. Dhungana S. Public awareness against cybercrimes increasing in Nepal (With video). *My Republica*. May 2017. Available online at: https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/public-awareness-against-cyber-crimes-increasing-in-nepal/.

63. Khanal K. Seeking Justice for Cybercrimes in Nepal Begins with a Trip to Kathmandu. *Global Press Journal*. August 2017. Available online at: https://globalpressjournal.com/asia/nepal/seeking-justice-cybercrimes-nepal-begins-trip-kathmandu/.

Conclusion: what does the silencing of women mean for women's rights and movement-building?

ICTs, including the internet and social media, are increasingly used by women's rights organisations to support advocacy and activism. In today's digital age, a lot of movement-building, including for young feminists, is carried out online as well as offline. Used in the right way the internet and social media can be transformative spaces for women's rights activists and feminist movements. They can also help counter the shrinking space for civil society and women's rights offline.

> *"You can look at the bad side of social media but there has been a lot of movement building and citizen reporting which can bring attention to thousands immediately…Social media plays a key role for young feminists and youth movements. It has enabled us to take ideas from around the world and replicate them in our own spaces. It has been a driving force for change, including in the cultural sphere."*
>
> Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya

> *"Used correctly social media gives people a good platform to discuss issues, find solutions to global problems, innovate new ways through sharing but on the other hand if it is used by the wrong people it has negative consequences."*
>
> Feminist, Zimbabwe

The women's rights activists we spoke to for this research want the internet to be a safe space for them and for women in general. However, as our research and this briefing paper shows, a feminist internet is far from realised. Women's rights activists and feminists are being silenced when they speak out about their rights online and are facing increasing backlash from men and sometimes also from women. The violence and abuse that women are experiencing on the internet and social media is causing serious psychological harm and distress to women and is limiting the enjoyment of their rights, including the right to live free from violence, the right to freedom of expression and the right to participate equally in public life.

Despite increasing global and political attention on the issue, the current response from governments, internet and social media companies and law enforcement is inadequate. There need to be increased efforts and

a multi-stakeholder approach to eliminating online violence and abuse against women, and upholding women's rights online. Governments, law enforcement agencies and internet and social media companies all have a responsibility to prevent and respond to online violence and abuse against women, and ensure transparent, swift and adequate measures to recourse and redress. A more comprehensive definition, increased funding for research and improved data collection are also crucial to ensure that all actors better understand and more effectively respond to the issue, as set out further in our Recommendations section.

As we have shown in this briefing, online violence and abuse against women is part of the continuum of violence and abuse that women and girls face offline and throughout their lives. It cannot be separated from their experiences of violence and abuse offline and should be seen as 'real world' experiences. Patriarchy, structural gender inequality and unequal power relations underpin violence and abuse against women everywhere, online and offline. This manifests itself in online violence and abuse but is also reflected throughout the online space through the 'gender digital divide.' Therefore, in addition to eliminating online violence and abuse against women, all stakeholders must pay attention to creating a positive enabling internet environment, one which is inclusive of all women and one which increases women's meaningful access to and use of the internet and other ICTs, as well as their participation and leadership in decisions over how the internet is governed. Only by taking a holistic approach to addressing gender inequality and ending patriarchy, offline and online, will women be able to realise their human rights.

> *Social media plays a key role for young feminists and youth movements. It has been a driving force for change, including in the cultural sphere.*
>
> **Gender and sexual rights activist, Kenya**

Recommendations

Womankind puts forward six overarching recommendations for all actors (governments, internet and social media companies, donors, and women's rights organisations and activists) to focus on in a **multi-stakeholder approach to eliminating online violence and abuse against women and countering the deliberate silencing** **of women's rights activists**. We believe these will go a long way to improving our collective understanding of the issue, raising awareness and crucially ensuring that policy, programme and funding responses adequately meet the needs of women survivors, including means of swift redress, and avoiding causing further harm and distress.

These six overarching recommendations provide scope for different entry points for each actor:

1 **Agree a comprehensive definition of online violence and abuse against women,** which recognises it as part of the continuum of violence and abuse against women and rooted in the same systems of patriarchy, oppression and discrimination.

2 **Challenge harmful and discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes** that perpetuate gender inequality and violence and abuse of women online and offline.

3 **Increase funding for research** into the scope, nature and impact of online violence and abuse against women and the effectiveness of prevention and response interventions.

4 **Improve national level data collection and disaggregation** on online violence and abuse against women, in line with commitments in key international human rights standards.

5 **Ensure meaningful consultation** with women's rights organisations, women survivors, and women users of ICTs on prevention and response measures and strategies.

6 **Create a positive enabling internet environment,** which increases women's meaningful access to and use of the internet and their participation and leadership in decision-making over the development and design of new technologies and how the internet is governed.

In addition, Womankind would encourage specific actors to prioritise the following actions:

Governments

Governments should ensure that **national legal frameworks and policies protect women's human rights,** including a life free from violence, the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy. In addressing online violence and abuse against women, governments should **consider** **whether they can improve or adapt existing legislation** and any new laws should not result in unlawful censorship and should comply with international human rights standards.

Governments should facilitate and simplify **access to justice for women survivors** of online violence and abuse. This includes **improving law enforcement response** (for example through police training) and **evaluating the effectiveness of the criminal justice system's response** to

women survivors' needs. Womankind supports the exploration of the creation of specialised and fast-tracked agencies and courts to support women survivors of online violence and abuse.[64]

Internet and social media companies

Internet and social media companies should meaningfully involve women's rights organisations, women survivors, women users and other stakeholders in **how to improve their policies and implementation,** and **consistently enforce their policies** on discriminatory, hateful and abusive conduct. They should also ensure **accessible and transparent reporting and complaints procedures** for women survivors, which are tailored to the country context and local languages.

Internet and social media companies should make **clear commitments to upholding women's rights, including in online spaces**, particularly the right to live a life free of violence, the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy, and **apply international human rights standards** throughout their corporate activities**.**

In addition, they should improve organisational culture by ensuring **all staff understand the gendered nature** of online violence and abuse and increasing the number of **women involved in the development and design of technologies and software, and in decision-making** within companies.

Donors

Donors should **fund research** that helps all actors understand the nature, scope and impact of online violence and abuse against women in **different country contexts and languages**. They should also fund research into the **effectiveness of existing VAWG prevention and response interventions**, including the support and services available to women survivors of online violence and abuse.

Womankind would urge donors to pay particular attention to funding research into the intersectional nature of online violence and abuse against women and the experiences of online violence and abuse of women in Africa and Asia.

In addition, donors should **increase flexible, core and long-term funding for women's rights organisations**, recognising the challenging nature of their work to shift social norms and transform gender relations in society which are reflected online.

Women's rights organisations and activists

Women's rights organisations and activists should **include online violence and abuse in their wider programme of work** on women's rights and ending VAWG, including advocacy and activism. Womankind is committed to working together with women's rights organisations and activists in solidarity and to being inclusive of women in all their diversity.

64. Supra note 9.

About Womankind

Womankind Worldwide is a global women's rights organisation working in partnership with women's rights organisations and movements to transform the lives of women and girls. Our vision is of a just world where the rights of all women are respected, valued and realised. We support women's movements to strengthen and grow by providing a range of tools, including technical support, communications, connectivity and shared learning, joint advocacy and fundraising.

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