



**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN  
THE ONLINE SPACE:  
INSIGHTS FROM MULTI-COUNTRY  
RESEARCH IN THE ARAB STATES**



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# ACRONYMS

<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organization
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>VAW</b>	Violence against women

<b>ROAS</b>	Regional Office for the Arab States
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>RIWI</b>	Real-Time Interactive World-Wide Intelligence

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Technology and the Internet have revolutionized possibilities for knowledge and interaction in the Arab States and around the world. For many women and girls, online spaces have opened unprecedented scope to express themselves, including to engage in political struggle and protest. The Internet is also a place, however, where gender discrimination and multiple forms of online violence against women occur.

Since online violence against women is not yet well understood or even defined, this report offers new knowledge on the issue in the Arab States. Based on comprehensive research, an innovative survey and in-depth discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs), it makes recommendations for governments, Internet service providers and civil society organizations to counter a phenomenon that is severe and escalating.

Among women Internet users in the Arab States, the research found that 49 per cent do not feel safe from online harassment. Among the types of violence experienced, women most often reported receiving “unwanted images or symbols with sexual content”. Sixty per cent indicated that the person behind the online violence was anonymous.

Concerns are particularly acute among women’s activists and human rights defenders, for whom attacks can quickly become vicious, degenerating to virulent sexual content and threats to rape and kill. Activists described attacks as resulting from the perception that women online have transgressed social norms. This may trigger outrage and actions to silence or even remove them from online spaces. The study showed that over 1 in 5 women (22 per cent) who experienced online violence deleted or deactivated their accounts. Online violence poses a serious threat to women’s physical safety, a connection that was particularly pronounced during COVID-19 lockdowns and movement restrictions. Among women who experienced online violence in 2020, 44 per cent said that the incident moved offline, compared to

15 percent of women who had experienced online violence at other points in time.

The toll on women’s mental health from online violence is pronounced, with 35 percent of women who had experienced it reporting that they felt “sad/depressed” and 12 percent indicating having had suicidal thoughts. Many women described being afraid of using the Internet because of online abuse. Some have suspended or closed their social media accounts or refrained from sharing certain content. This pattern is particularly worrisome since the Arab region already has the largest gender gap in Internet penetration, at nearly 60 per cent for men and just under 45 per cent for women. Online violence may worsen this digital divide and undercut access to services such as for health care and social protection as well as opportunities for education and employment. This in turn multiplies gender inequalities.

When women experience online violence, they find little support. Only 31 per cent reported the incident, for reasons that include victim-blaming, concerns around privacy and confidentiality and the fear of retaliation by perpetrators. One sign of the lack of an effective response is that some women’s activists have developed their own protocols to manage constant attacks, such as ignoring harassment and bullying and reporting only the gravest violations.

Some Arab countries have made progress in addressing online violence against women through legislative changes to penal codes and sexual harassment or domestic violence laws. But no country yet has a stand-alone law on online violence. Often, online violence against women is viewed as a cybercrime, which reduces attention to specific gender dimensions.

Government-provided services have made concerted efforts to respond to online VAW. Some 16 countries, for instance, have introduced help-lines for survivors of violence, including online violence. There are generally not stand-alone chan-





nels to report online violence, however, and law enforcement and judiciary officials have limited understanding and guidance on online VAW. Information on how to access services is reported through some government websites or the media but remains unstructured and sporadic. Services are minimal for counselling, mental health and legal aid.

CSOs have substantially contributed to combating online VAW, complementing government-provided services. They have made commendable efforts to raise awareness, support reporting and provide helplines as well as legal and psychological aid. But they as well as government authorities often operate in silos. Responses are not adequately coordinated overall.

The research in this report leads to several main conclusions. First, online and offline violence are interconnected. It is often difficult to distinguish the consequences of actions initiated in digital realms from offline realities and vice versa. This underlines the need to address violence against women in a comprehensive manner, online and offline. It calls for engaging multiple actors, including government service providers, the police and judiciary, civil society organizations and Internet service providers.

A second conclusion is that online violence results in multiple harmful consequences. Women survivors report not only serious psychological impacts but also that they felt forced to silence themselves by deactivating or deleting their social media accounts or being cautious about what they posted online. Furthermore, women are disproportionately blamed for incidents of online violence, which may lead to unjust legal actions, family sanctions or, in the most serious cases, threats to their lives and suicide. The impact of online violence on women is more severe due to the absence of gender specific legal framework on online violence in the Arab states.

Based on the research and consultations with key stakeholders, the report makes the following recommendations to address online violence against women. They are directed to governments, Internet intermediaries and CSOs:

- Adopt a survivor-centred approach in responding to online VAW.
- Introduce specific national legislative frameworks on online violence against women:
- Repeal discriminatory provisions in criminal law



Photo: UN Women/Emad Karim

- Ensure alignment of cybercrime laws with international good practices with specific definitions and mandate
- Regulate internet intermediaries' companies under the law
- Establish institutional capacity dedicated to responding to online VAW.
- Develop cross-border coordination.
- Make reporting easier and safer.
- Inform all Internet users about their rights and where to report cases.
- Deepen collaboration between governments and CSOs.
- Encourage Internet intermediaries to become responsible guardians committed to upholding the safety of women and girls in online spaces.
- Urge service providers to continue to develop solutions to online violence.
- Call on media to play a socially responsible role.
- Conduct more research on online violence against women and girls to explore the interface between online and offline violence, effective intervention points, and an in-depth assessment and understanding of how laws and services responding to online violence are implemented.



# INTRODUCTION

Technology and the Internet have revolutionized possibilities for knowledge and interaction in the Arab States and around the world. For many women and girls, online spaces have opened unprecedented scope to express themselves, including to engage in political struggle and protest. Arab women have been among the pioneers of digital activism globally, from the earliest days of the Arab Spring.

As much as it offers, however, the Internet is also a place where gender discrimination flourishes. While the digital realm is often idealized as a neutral space,<sup>1</sup> misogyny and patriarchal norms familiar in the offline world transfer readily online. Among other consequences, these manifest in the perpetration of multiple forms of online violence against women and girls. Those who openly discuss gender equality, challenge male authority or simply voice their ideas in public forums are particularly vulnerable to attacks, losing rights to speak as well as safety.

Violence against women and girls has long been one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can include physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It takes place in the home and in schools, workplaces and public places – and now online. While the Internet and mobile technologies have presented new opportunities to address violence, such as by reducing barriers to assistance and unifying women in calling for a stop to it, they also are spawning many new forms. These include hacking, trolling, cyberattacks, online blackmailing, extortion and sextortion.

Online violence against women and girls can be as harmful and injurious as offline violence, and sometimes more so as the harm can be multiplied through the continual sharing of content across different platforms. Technology may even facili-

tate violence by reducing inhibitions among perpetrators and increasing access to victims. With cyberspace still poorly regulated, users have relatively free rein to take actions that might be socially or legally penalized in the non-virtual world.

Many of these concerns worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, including in the Arab States. As millions of people across the region used computers and mobile devices to cope during lockdowns, online violence against women and girls exploded. UN Women began tracking the issue from the start of the crisis, finding that online violence was the highest reported form of violence against women and girls in the first months of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> The same trend was noted by civil society organizations in the region as they pointed out an increase in online violence against women.<sup>3</sup>

To better understand online violence in the Arab States, a subsequent research project explored its prevalence, impact and consequences and the barriers to services and reporting. Three complementary exercises comprised a quantitative web-based survey in eight countries<sup>4</sup> with nearly 12,000 respondents, examining the prevalence, perceptions and implications of online violence; qualitative research to explore experiences of online violence through the lens of civil society organizations, women's activists and service providers; and a mapping of existing laws and services related to online violence against women.

This report presents key findings, offers new

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<sup>1</sup> Fraser, N. (1990). Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. *Social text*, (25/26), 56-80.

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, rapid assessment, the effects of covid-19 on violence against women and gendered social norms, a snap shot from nine countries in the Arab states, 2020, available at: <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/08/brief-the-effects-of-covid-19-on-violence-against-women-and-gendered-social-norms>

<sup>3</sup> The Impact of COVID-19 on Violence against Women and Girls in the Arab States through the Lens of Women's Civil Society Organizations, available at <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/12/brief-the-impact-of-covid19-on-vaw-in-the-arab-states-through-the-lens-of-women-csos>

<sup>4</sup> The countries included were those with UN Women presence in the Arab States: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, and Yemen.

knowledge on online violence against women and girls in the Arab States and makes recommendations for governments, Internet service providers and civil society organizations to counter it.

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### Online usage in the Arab States

About 75 per cent of people, or 200 million in total, are online in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Yemen. These countries have 145 million Facebook users. In North Africa, both Morocco and Tunisia have Internet penetration of about 68 per cent, at 25.6 million and 8.2 million people, respectively. Morocco has 21.7 million Facebook users and Tunisia approximately 8.2 million Facebook users. Internet penetration in Libya is just over 46 per cent with 3.19 million Internet users.

**Sources:** [Internet World Stats](#) (all countries except Libya); Simon Kemp, [Digital 2021: Libya](#).

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### Defining online violence against women and girls

While online violence against women poses its own challenges, it is related to other forms of violence against women. The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women and girls as an act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts,

coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Common forms of offline violence that are linked and move to the online space include intimate partner violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, harassment based on gender, stalking and inciting others to commit violence against women.

Violence against women is one of the most serious, life-threatening and widespread violations of human rights worldwide. It occurs in the home, in public spaces and online. According to the World Health Organization, globally, 27 per cent of women aged 15–49 have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former husband or intimate partner, or sexual violence from a non-partner, or both in their lifetime. In the Eastern Mediterranean region, this figure is higher, at 31 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

Three types of violence against women include physical violence, psychological/emotional violence and economic violence, which may overlap. Community and cultural attitudes towards women's status and role in society as well as the lack of condemnation and acceptance of VAW drive offences online and offline. There is no globally agreed definition or term for online VAW, although there is growing recognition that this is needed. Such a definition is critical to advocacy for minimum standards, measurement and effective laws and services to prevent and respond to online VAW. Moreover, there is not yet a universal typology of behaviours constituting violence against women perpetrated online.

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5 World Health Organization. (2018). Violence against Women prevalence estimates. 2018. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. Geneva.

# METHODOLOGY

The following study involved three sources of research.

A quantitative web-based survey used an innovative method invented by RIWI Corp. [RIWI](#) technology allows for the rapid capture and assessment of large samples of broad, truly randomized opinion and perceptions data on an ongoing basis. Anonymous opt-in surveys are delivered to web users who land on one of the hundreds of thousands of domains that RIWI temporarily controls at any given moment. These random, anonymous and non-incentivized users are filtered through proprietary algorithms and invited to participate in a language-appropriate survey. The audience is geographically representative of the online population of any given region. RIWI uses continuous bot-filtering and anomaly detection to ensure answers are authentic human responses.

Ethical considerations were well taken into account to avoid any potential harm to study respondents or any misuse of the data. Strategic security measures operate at all levels of the survey design, respondent experience and data storage. No personally identifiable information is collected, stored or transferred, and all data are fully compliant with all applicable laws. Respondents are advised of their anonymity, security and privacy when they randomly access a survey. The technology does not capture any personally identifiable information whatsoever, and never prompts respondents with a request for their identity, therefore, it is possible to ask extremely sensitive questions, garner honest responses and maintain the respondent's safety.

Due to the number of Internet users, and the ability of the technology to randomly sample the entire Internet-using population of a country, it is possible to collect very large data samples in a short amount of time, including previously unengaged or silent voices. An Internet-based technology, however, cannot reach someone who has no online access. Further, with no identifiable information about a respondent, it is not possible to follow up later on. Since respondents may leave the sur-

vey at any time, many measures are employed to engage participants, including by optimizing the survey instrument for ease of participation on all device screens and bandwidths, and using clear, concise language for immediate comprehension.

For the survey on online violence against women, the targeted sample size was 1,000 respondents, with two strata of 500 men and 500 women, in each of eight Arab States- Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen. A total of 11,497 respondents took part, including 4,187 women.<sup>6</sup> A questionnaire included 22 questions for all respondents and up to 38 questions depending on skip logic and country. The survey was administered in Arabic, English and French between 26 July and 2 September 2021.

The distribution of the sample was 64 per cent male and 36 per cent female. Among female respondents, 44 per cent were under age 25 and 75 per cent were under age 35. Among male respondents, 33 per cent were under age 25 and 64 per cent were under age 35. In terms of marital status, 53 per cent of female respondents and 46 per cent of male respondents were single and never married; 32 per cent of female and 37 per cent of male respondents were married.

On education, 7 per cent of female respondents and 8 per cent of male respondents had only completed primary school; 29 per cent of female respondents and 31 per cent of male respondents had completed only secondary school; and 47 per cent of female respondents and 39 per cent of male respondents had a university degree. In terms of location, 56 per cent of female respondents and 54 per cent of male respondents lived in a big city, 7 per cent of female respondents and 8 per cent of male respondents lived in a refugee or IDP camp; and 38 per cent of all respondents lived in a small town, village or rural area.

Qualitative research explored experiences of on-

<sup>6</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, rates of mobile ownership and mobile use of the Internet are below the global average by 1 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively. Women in the region are 9 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile and 20 per cent less likely than men to use the mobile Internet.



line violence by surveying and interviewing CSOs, women's activists and service providers. A mixed methods approach used both a review of secondary materials and primary data collection looked at challenges and issues faced by women subjected to online VAW as well as their interactions with measures put in place by government and ICT intermediaries. Data were collected between 16 July and 3 September 2021 through an online survey administered to 67 civil society organizations and 90 women's activists and human rights defenders from 14 countries<sup>7</sup> in the region. The surveys probed their handling of cases of online violence against women, how it was committed and by whom, the platforms where it was committed, the help-seeking behaviour of survivors and suggestions on improving online safety and support services.

In addition, focus group discussions and key informant interviews with CSO respondents working on VAW assessed their perceptions of online VAW its perpetration and impact on women and girls. Among individual CSOs providing services for survivors, the discussions sought insights into the actions of survivors, governments, and ICT intermediaries in dealing with online violence against women. Eighteen interviews and discussions were held with CSOs: five from Tunisia, three from Lebanon, two each from Jordan, Libya, Morocco and the State of Palestine, and one each from Iraq and Yemen.

Key informant interviews in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya

and f Palestine took place with officers from the security forces/police officers (cybercrime and family units), general directorates for combatting violence against women and cybercrimes prosecutors who handle online violence against women, and public and private providers of psychosocial support services. The objective was to obtain insights on the availability, accessibility, and efficacy of services for survivors and to assess collaboration (if any) between first responders, service providers and ICT intermediaries.

To obtain information from survivors, CSOs providing support services were approached to refer survivors assessed as empowered enough to discuss their experience. Two survivors completed questionnaires. Ethical considerations were employed to respect and protect survivors and minimize possible harms. Sixteen female advocates who were interviewed or took part in group discussions shared that their organizations and at times they themselves personally have experienced online violence. They shared the forms of violence, their responses and protection strategies.

A mapping of existing laws and services related to online VAW reviewed legal texts on government websites, focusing on resources provided by ministries of justice and ICT agencies as well as online legal databases such as Natlex. A desk review of secondary data mainly involved online Google searches of government-provided services using the following keywords: "report"; "online violence"; "online harassment"; "online embezzlement"; "cyber harassment", and "cybercrime" in English, Arabic and French.

The mapping covered all 22 Arab States<sup>8</sup> and aimed to highlight good practices from the region and beyond. It covered policy and legal frameworks as well as service provision by governments and CSOs. It focused on laws and services enforced and developed in the last 10 years while emphasizing more recent efforts to ensure a current overview.

7 Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Somali, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

8 Member States of the League of Arab States

# KEY FINDINGS

The following findings highlight common issues that emerged from the three streams of research.

## Women in the arab states do not feel safe online

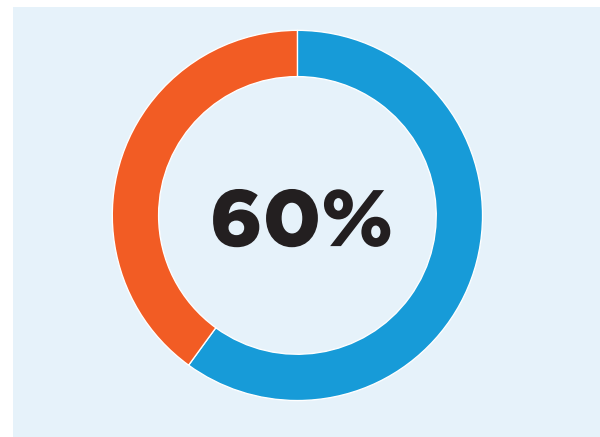
Online violence is escalating. Among women Internet users in the Arab States, 49 per cent reported they do not feel safe from online harassment. Around 16 per cent of women reported experiencing online violence at least once in their lives; 60 per cent of them have gone through it in 2020, the year preceding data collection, suggesting how rapidly online violence against women and girls has increased. Almost half said this was the only time they had experienced online violence.

During the national pandemic-related lockdown in Lebanon, internal security forces statistics indicate that cybercrimes as a whole rose by 184 per cent. An NGO study echoed these findings specifically for online violence against women and girls, confirming a 180 per cent rise.<sup>9</sup> In other countries, evidence of the growth of online violence was evident even before the pandemic. In Palestine in 2017, for example, 35 per cent of sexual assaults were committed through some form of technology, a 14 per cent rise in just one year.<sup>10</sup> Although all women and girls are vulnerable to violence, women in the Arab States who are employed are more likely to feel safe online than students or people who are unemployed, a possible indicator of the role of empowerment in increasing a sense of safety.

The largest share of women who experienced online violence encountered it on Facebook (43 per cent) followed by Instagram (16 per cent) and

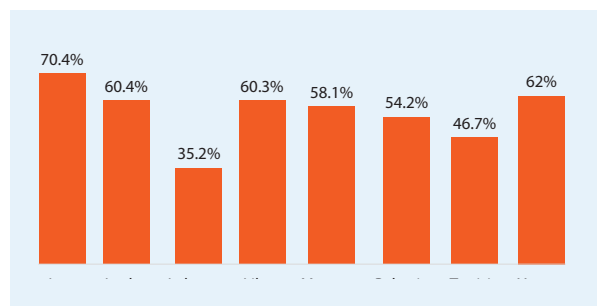
**FIGURE 1:**

Proportion of women who experienced online violence and who have reported exposure to online violence in the past year.



**FIGURE 2:**

Proportion of women who reported having been exposed to online violence in the past year, per country.



WhatsApp (11 per cent). All of these are owned by one company, Meta, supporting the need for on-line platforms to be responsible for acting to stop online violence.

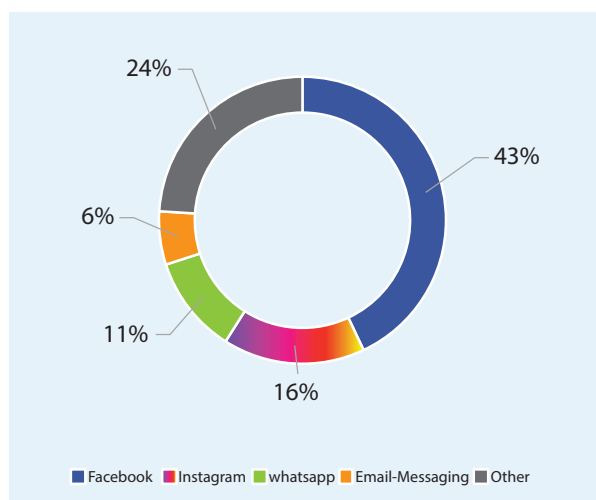
<sup>9</sup> Consultation with Lebanese CSOs, August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> 7amleh – Arab Center for Social Media Advancement, Online GBV in Palestine means losing out on women's participation, Gender IT.Org, 11 June 2018. <https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/online-gbv-palestine-means-losing-out-womens-participation>.

**Exposure to online violence is usually not limited to a single incident.** Among women who have experienced online violence, 44 per cent said they have confronted it more than once.

**FIGURE 3:**

Platforms where women in the Arab States experience online violence.



**Among male survey respondents, 27 per cent said that they had perpetrated online violence.**

Younger people are more likely to perpetrate online violence, especially young men. Over 1 in 3 men aged 18-24 had perpetrated some kind of online violence. Male students and unemployed men were the most likely to say they had done so (30 per cent). Men who have only completed primary education were the most likely to perpetrate online violence while men who have completed tertiary education were the least likely.

## Violence is often worse for women with a public presence

**A feeling of being unsafe was greater among women's activists and human rights defenders.**

Seventy percent said they had received unwanted images or symbols with sexual content, 62 percent had received insulting and/or hateful messages, and 58 percent reported annoying phone calls or inappropriate or unwelcome communications. In 2020, for instance, two female Al Jazeera journalists who report on women's rights and covered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi

were subjected to an online smear campaign by thousands of verified Saudi Twitter users.<sup>11</sup>

**Women's activist and human rights defenders described how attacks can quickly become vicious.**

Some attacks merely dismiss gender equality as unworthy of public discussion. But many become personal and degenerate to virulent sexual content and threats to rape and kill. Each misogynistic comment is reinforced by other misogynistic comments to generate a bandwagon effect, creating a hostile environment that silences many women.

**Activists who serve as spokespersons for their organizations or visibly lead campaigns are singled out for cyberattacks.**

Accusations have included spreading "Western" ideas and transgressing religious edicts and social-cultural norms. These attacks can be through multiple platforms and networks, sometimes even reaching the survivor's personal account and personal mobile.

Through the in-depth key informant interviews conducted in Tunisia, participants shared a story of a women's human rights advocate who was the target of online violence when she campaigned for gender equality, mainly through Facebook. The attacks included calls to kill her, and her photo was edited to add an open wine bottle (meant to imply that she was not a good Muslim). In a campaign related to penalties for rape, the perpetrators mocked that no one would rape the advocate. Most of the threats were issued by unknown people or people with fake profiles, although some came from political groups that were against gender equality.

## Online violence takes different forms but with similar drivers

**Among the types of violence experienced, women most often reported receiving "unwanted images or symbols with sexual content"**

at 43 per cent. This was followed by "annoying phone calls, inappropriate or unwelcome communications" at 38 per cent and "insulting and/or hateful mes-

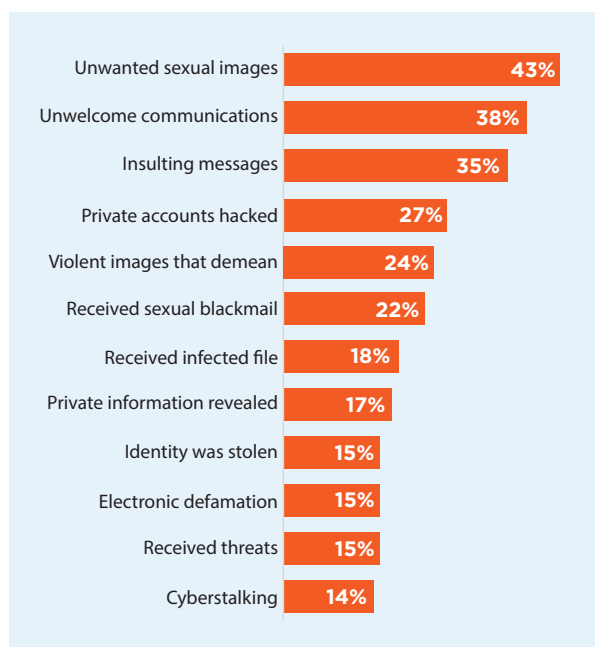
11 Allouche, Y.(2020). 'Silent pandemic': How women in the Middle East and North Africa are threatened online, Middle East Eye, July 13, 2020. <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/women-middle-east-north-africa-threats-harassment-abuse-sexism-online>>



sages” at 35 per cent. Among women experiencing online violence, 22 per cent had faced sexual blackmail.

**FIGURE 4:**

Women are most likely to experience receiving unwanted sexual images, or communications



Sixty per cent of women indicated that the person behind the online violence they experienced was anonymous. Where they knew the perpetrator, 24 per cent said that person was a friend, followed by a colleague or school mate at 21 per cent or a relative at 14 per cent. For 13 per cent, the online violence was carried out by a former partner.

Women’s activists described frequent experiences with blackmail, extortion and sextortion scams. These usually begin with the perpetrator setting up a fake account and reaching out to befriend unsuspecting women and girls, sometimes under the guise of looking for love or marriage and profiling himself as a wealthy man. The online relationship becomes more serious with an exchange of photos and videos. The perpetrator will then ask for more explicit photos and videos. Eventually, he will extort money (and possibly sex or sexual favours) in exchange for not disclosing the

relationship or uploading sexually compromising images, audio clips or videos. Traffickers may employ the same tactics to entrap women and girls.

According to women activists, in many instances of blackmail, extortion and sextortion, perpetrators use fake photos and profiles to create social media accounts. Interviewed activists and CSOs in the regional study mentioned one example where the police identified the person in the photo but that person was not the perpetrator. One CSO related a case where the male perpetrator pretended to be female and targeted a 60-year-old woman.<sup>12</sup>

Just over half of women who experienced online violence said they were attacked for “no specific reason”. Among women who said they know why they were subjected to online violence, the largest share, 23 per cent, believed it was because of their physical appearance. This was followed by being a feminist, at 16 percent, indicating the gendered nature of online attacks.

Drivers of online violence include gendered and unequal power relations that privilege some voices over others. Among perpetrators, the largest share, 26 per cent, said that the main reason they perpetrated online violence was “because it is their right”. This is followed by 23 percent who said that they perpetrated online violence “because it was fun”.

Activists described attacks as resulting from the perception that women online have transgressed social norms. This may trigger outrage and actions to silence or even remove them from online spaces. Perpetrators seek to control and dominate women based on varying rationales, such as religious views, the inability to confront women in person, the preference to remain anonymous, a sense of entitlement, a belief that controlling women’s behaviour is their right and/or a perception that women are “asking for it”.

<sup>12</sup> Discussion with CSOs, August 2021 (on file with author). These include anti-femicide campaigns, campaign for gender equality law, 16 days activism against violence and release of video campaigns against cyber-bullying in schools.

One survivor whose husband disseminated their intimate photos stated that her husband's actions were aimed at dominating and controlling her. She described his assumption that he owns her and is entitled to dictate the spaces she occupies, both in public and in private.<sup>13</sup>

CSOs also suggested that perpetrators may commit online violence against women out of boredom, with the confidence that they will not be prosecuted and possibly without awareness that these are prosecutable actions.

The online world has provided a license for perpetrators. Activists suggested that online interaction has opened up whole new avenues of communicating, obtaining information, working and performing daily tasks. In the Arab region, this form of communicating has yet to be fully accepted or understood. Some perpetrators feed on support from like-minded individuals, which encourages attacks. Research has shown that comments and arguments made anonymously are more likely to reflect bigotry.<sup>14</sup>

As part of the qualitative regional study survivor questionnaire, one survivor said that when a person sits behind a computer, he is in a "parallel universe", free to do whatever he pleases with "fake courage". She also said that this fake courage is better understood as cowardice in the offline world. It is easy to threaten and harass another just by typing, swapping and clicking.

## Online violence threatens women's physical safety and mental well-being

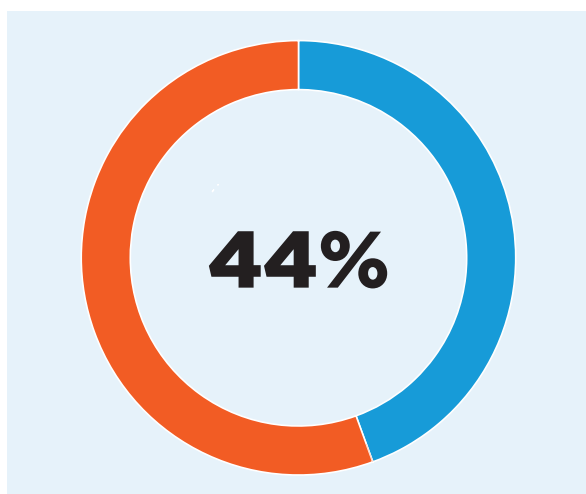
**Online violence represents a serious threat to women's physical safety.** Of women who experienced it, 33 per cent reported that some or all of it moved offline. Just over half of women who experienced online violence by someone they knew offline reported that the incident moved offline. Furthermore, 12 percent of women who experienced online violence reported being subjected

to physical violence after reporting the incident to family members.

Research uncovered incidents of how violence that starts with technology can have devastating repercussions. In Yemen, for instance, a woman sent her mobile phone for servicing and the technician stole her photos, which included some of her without her veil. After he uploaded the photos on Facebook, the victim's husband found out and killed his wife. He was charged, but Yemen has no law to hold the technician accountable.<sup>15</sup>

**FIGURE 5:**

Proportion of women who experienced online violence in the past year and reported that the incident moved offline



In some cases, perpetrators use online violence to achieve offline outcomes. One example is threatening to publish intimate images to force women to agree to a divorce or child custody settlement favouring the husband.

**The connection between online and offline violence was particularly pronounced during COVID-19.** Among women who experienced online violence in 2020, 44 percent said that the incident moved offline, compared to 15 percent of women who had experienced online violence at oth-

<sup>13</sup> Survivor questionnaire respondent.

<sup>14</sup> (Slatcheva-Petkova 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Discussion with Yemeni advocate, August 2021.

er points in time. This reflects how the pandemic exacerbated physical harm. Similar trends were noted by women's activists and human rights defenders, with 35 per cent stating they experienced a continuum between online and offline VAW and 6 percent indicating that all online VAW continued offline.

Online violence takes a toll on women's mental health, with 35 percent of women who had experienced it reporting that they felt "sad/depressed", 35 percent stating that they "lost trust in the people around them" and 12 percent indicating suicidal thoughts. In a recent case, a young Egyptian woman committed suicide after being blackmailed with fake photos. The perpetrator threatened to publish the photos if she were to refuse a date with him. After she refused, he published the photos, and the 17 years old victim ended her life.<sup>16</sup>

## Online violence stifles women's participation and voice

**Number of women reports being afraid of using the internet because of online abuse.** Some women have suspended or closed their social media accounts while others have refrained from sharing certain content, even in private message contexts.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, families limit or forbid women's and girls' access to digital devices.

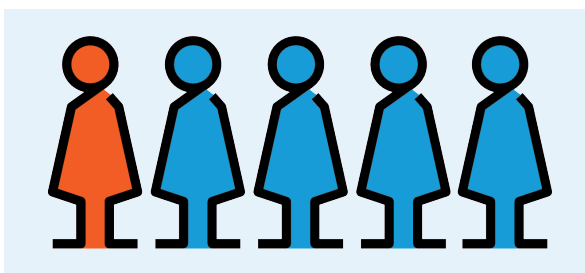
In qualitative research, a survivor described being afraid that the online violence she experienced would become known to her employer and result in her losing her job and income. An activist stopped writing her blog on women's issues and gender sensitivity after it was repeatedly hacked, and she grew concerned that the online violence could spill over and affect her children's safety. One of the survivors interviewed in the regional study shared that she was unable to even hold her

mobile any longer and deleted all the sites that were on her phone to avoid seeing the photos the perpetrator published.

**Women who have experienced online violence said they found little support.** This may contribute to self-censorship or exclusion entirely from online spaces. Of those who experienced online violence, 22 per cent deleted or deactivated their social media accounts, while 26 per cent reported being careful about what they put online. These tendencies were particularly relevant during the pandemic, when women who experienced online violence were slightly more likely to deactivate or delete their accounts than at previous points in time, 27 per cent.

**FIGURE 6:**

1 in 5 women who experienced online violence deleted or deactivated their social media accounts.



Far-reaching impacts of online violence against women and girls include a worsening digital gender divide. Among world regions, the Arab States has the largest gender gap in the Internet penetration rate, at nearly 60 per cent for men and just under 45 per cent for women.<sup>18</sup> While roughly equal shares of women and men use the Internet in some Arab States, such as Kuwait, there are wide disparities in others. In Iraq, the shares are 67 per cent of women compared to 84 per cent of men, and in Egypt, 47 percent of women compared to 69 per cent of men.

Since violence often drives women and girls away from the digital realm, it may worsen the digital divide and reduce access to services such as for health care and social protection benefits that have moved online, and to opportunities for ed-

<sup>16</sup> Discussion with Yemeni advocate, August 2021.

<sup>17</sup> News article can be accessed through this link: <https://www.egyptindependent.com/young-egyptian-woman-commits-suicide-after-being-blackmailed-with-fake-photos/> Cheikh, S.B., (2021). "As COVID-19 accelerates digital transformation, is the internet safe for women in the Middle East?" Global Voices ADVOX, June 1, 2020. <<https://advox.globalvoices.org/2020/06/01/as-covid-19-accelerates-digital-transformation-is-the-internet-safe-for-women-in-the-middle-east/>> Last accessed April 22, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2019.pdf>

ucation and employment.<sup>19</sup> This ends up multiplying gender inequalities and constricting economic and social development at large. It can undercut rights to information, use of technology for advancement and freedom of expression.

## Online violence is trivialized and normalized

**Violence online is shaped by various social norms but is mostly considered a “women’s issue”.** As with other forms of violence against women, women are blamed for it and expected to accept it. Among women who experienced online violence, 36 per cent were told to ignore it, 23 per cent were blamed for it and 21 per cent were told to delete their social media accounts. Only 20 per cent reported that their family supported them and 32 per cent that their friends were supportive. As one advocate commented, “Girls [and women] are too often perceived as guilty and not considered enough as victims.”<sup>20</sup>

Among survey respondents, 1 in 2 men and 4 in 10 women stated that “women who display their photos and videos should accept that the material could be used against them by the viewers”. Forty-eight per cent of men and 41 percent of women agreed that “online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online”.

CSOs shared that sometimes survivors are perceived as having brought disrepute to their family even if they are victims of online violence. This leads to seeing the victim as having caused the violence and may result in her being subject to more violence, amid fears of scandal and damage to the family’s reputation.

**FIGURE 7:**

Following an online violence experience.

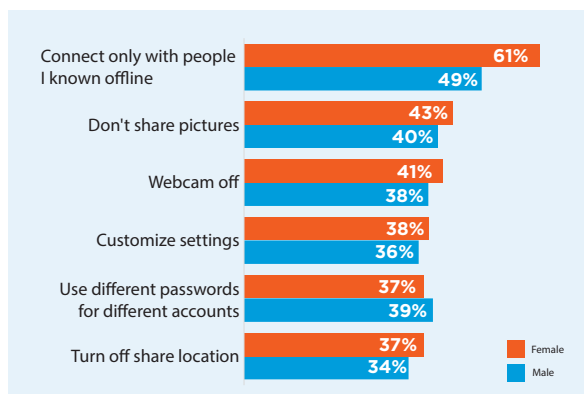


### Women feel more compelled to take multiple safety precautions online compared to men.

They are more prone to turning off location-sharing and only communicating with people they know offline. Women who have experienced on-line violence are even more likely to take safety precautions than those who have not, such as by customizing their settings (43 per cent compared to 37 per cent) and turning off location sharing (44 per cent compared to 35 per cent).

**FIGURE 8:**

Women are more likely to carry out online security measures



<sup>19</sup> <https://www.arabbarmeter.org/2020/09/the-mena-digital-dive/>

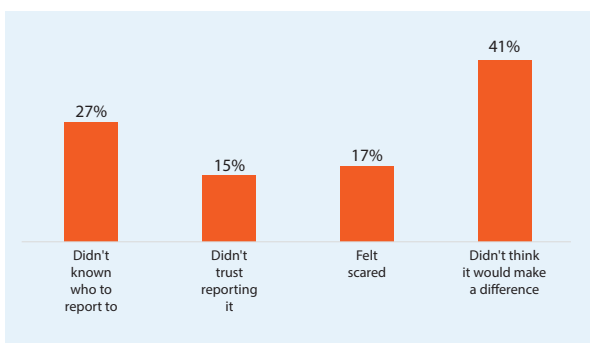
<sup>20</sup> Salomé, C. (2021). Cyberbullying of women: The long road for victims in Morocco, Azikia, 14 April 2021. <https://azikia.org/cyber-bullying-of-women-the-long-road-for-victims-in-morocco?lang=en>.

## Lack of trust, victim-blaming and fear of retaliation prevent reporting

**Among women who experienced online violence, only 31 per cent reported the incident.** Fifty-five per cent of women who reported online violence did so on the platform where they experienced it; only 23 per cent reported the incident to the police and 14 per cent to an NGO. The most common reason women gave for not reporting online violence was that they “didn’t think it would make any difference”, at 41 per cent. This was followed by 27 percent stating they “didn’t know who to report it to”.

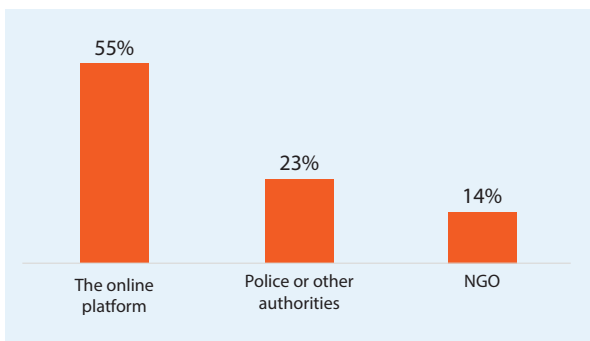
**FIGURE 9:**

Reasons for not reporting online violence



**FIGURE 10:**

Reporting points by women who were subjected to online violence



**Victim-blaming is a critical reason for women not seeking help for online violence,** according to CSOs. Survivors are afraid of being reproached for having shared their images or being bold about their activism. They also fear that the police may blame them or inform their families of their predicament. CSOs also identified concerns about privacy and confidentiality as major reasons for survivors not to report or seek services for online VAW, followed by fear of retaliation by perpetrators.

In Morocco, a 2019 study of 1,794 women found that a mere 10 per cent of survivors of online violence had reported it.<sup>21</sup> Seventy per cent remained completely silent about their ordeal.<sup>22</sup> Among women who did report cases to the authorities, 8 out of 10 were dissatisfied with the response, stating that they were not taken seriously or accused of being at fault themselves.

CSOs noted that they often will work with a survivor and her family to resolve the matter without police intervention. If the survivor eventually decides to report, the CSO will support her. Because of this, CSOs who provide intervention services maintain good rapport with the internal security forces.

## Women say addressing impunity is the best way to stop online violence

**Women are more likely to believe that the best way to combat online violence is “police taking action against perpetrators of online violence”,** at 36 percent compared to 28 percent of men. This was particularly the case Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and the State of Palestine. Men are more likely to believe that online platforms should improve their policies to protect users, at 40 percent compared to 35 percent of women. Efforts to provide education and raise awareness were in general not seen as effective methods to combat online violence.

21 Cheikh, S.B. (2020). “As COVID-19 accelerates digital transformation, is the internet safe for women in the Middle East?” Global Voices ADVOX, June 1, 2020. <<https://advox.globalvoices.org/2020/06/01/as-covid-19-accelerates-digital-transformation-is-the-internet-safe-for-women-in-the-middle-east/>>

22 Mobilising for Rights Associates 2019)./qualitative study

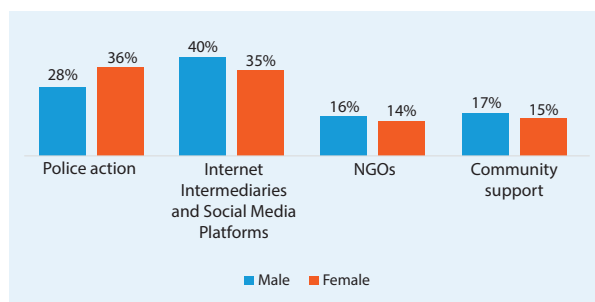
The sensitivity and efficacy of police responses depends on individual officers, according to civil society organizations, who described the attitude and sentiments of individual police officers as ranging from excellent to alarming. Some officers engage in victim-blaming or consider reports of online violence a low priority if they do not result in physical harm. Civil society groups reported establishing personal working relationships with individual officers whom they know are more gender-sensitized, non-judgmental and victim-centric in their approach.

As an example of a more comprehensive government response, Palestine has prioritized survivor safety through the coordinated intervention of two units of the internal security forces, the Family Protection Department and the Electronic Crimes Unit. Through a joint response to reports of online VAW, they assist in investigation, provide service referrals and work with the family if needed.

An alarming sign of impunity is that some women's activists have developed their own protocols to manage constant attacks. They report that a common strategy is to ignore harassment and bullying as part of the risks of their work, reporting only the gravest violations. This is seen as allowing advocates to focus on their activism, but it comes with a cost since they modify their behaviour. Some become more circumspect, for example, in using language that they know will be less likely to trigger a response. Beyond self-censorship, some activists reduce or withdraw from online activities. One CSO advocate said, "At the beginning of my activism, when I received online harassment and bullying, it was a tough experience. Now I ignore everything and report only the more serious threats."

**FIGURE 11:**

Recommended actions to combat online violence in the Arab States, by sex



## Countries have made some efforts to improve LAWS AND SERVICES

**Countries generally take three approaches to laws on online VAW:** In the first case, domestic violence, and sexual harassment extend to online violence and include civil offenses. The second approach is a comprehensive law addressing all types of VAW; this implies the inclusion of online violence, such as in Tunisia. A third approach centres on adopting cybercrime laws to address online violence.

**Some Arab countries have adapted their penal codes, sexual harassment and domestic violence laws to include explicit reference to some forms of online VAW.** Morocco's Penal Code refers to various types including "written messages by phone or any other electronic device, recordings, and procurement or creation images of a sexual nature for sexual purposes". Legal texts in Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia, criminalize online violence and penalize harassment occurring through "social media platforms" and "modern technology".

**Government-provided services have made concerted efforts to respond to online VAW.** Some 16 countries have introduced helplines for survivors of violence, including online violence. They include Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

**Some countries have set up online portals, forms or emails to report incidents.** These may widen the scope for survivors to report and seek help for online violence. Dedicated online portals to report online violence include the portal of Morocco's Commission Nationale de Contrôle de la Protection des données à Caractère Personnel. It provides advice on how people can protect themselves against misuse of their personal data and has investigative powers in terms of processing personal data in line with Law 09-08 of 2009. Bahrain's General Directorate for Anti-Corruption and Economic and Electronic Security allows survivors to file an online complaint with the Anti-Electronic Crime Directorate. Jordan's Cybercrime Unit



allows users to contact it via its Facebook page. Police websites in Lebanon, Oman and the State

of Palestine also offer email services for reporting online VAW.

**Table 1**

List of countries with laws that directly mention online violence

Country	Do laws mention online VAW?	Law description
Egypt	Yes	Penal Code (Articles 306 bis(a) and 306 bis(b)) recently acknowledged harassment through social media platforms; it has penalties for sexual harassment that include imprisonment.
Lebanon	Yes	Sexual harassment law 205/2020, particularly article 1, define sexual harassment to include acts by any means including electronic/digital means.
Morocco	Yes	The Penal Code criminalizes sexual harassment (Article 503) and defines sexual harassment to include “written messages by phone or any other electronic device, recordings, and procurement or creation images of a sexual nature for sexual purposes” and “the distribution of someone’s messages and photos, without prior consent, and the dissemination of false allegations aimed at harming or defaming someone’s private life, by any means including digital tools” (Articles 447-2, 447-3 and 503-1-1).
Saudi Arabia	Yes	Sexual harassment was criminalized in 2018, with the law defining harassment as any word, act, or sign with a sexual connotation by a person to any other person that harms their body or modesty by any means, including through modern technology.

**CSOs have substantially contributed to combatting online VAW,** complementing government-provided services. Their efforts reflect their on-the-ground understanding of the gravity of online VAW and the urgent need to respond to it.

**Many CSOs provide case management and psychosocial support.** Yemen’s Yodet handles cases through social media and an online portal dedicated to survivors. It also has a podcast on online security to raise awareness and has developed guidelines for human rights activists on online safety. In the State of Palestine, SAWA Women’s

organization provides services to survivors, including of cyber violence, and has a partnership agreement with Facebook to remove harmful posts used for blackmail. KAFA in Lebanon provides legal aid for survivors of online violence. A helpline receives complaints and provides psychosocial support and case management. Algeria’s The Wassila/Avife Network provides medical, psychological and legal support. Egypt’s Qawem NGO provides psychological support for survivors and rehabilitation for perpetrators of online violence to reduce reoffending.

**Some organizations advocate for digital literacy and narrowing gender gaps in the ICT field.**

Motoon in Egypt advocates for closing the gender gap in technology by providing scenario-based workshops where women learn to use different digital tools. It drafted a digital security manual and supports women public figures, journalists and digital activists, who are among the most frequent survivors of hacking and blackmailing.<sup>23</sup>

## Multiple barriers curtail justice and support

**There are no stand-alone laws on online violence in the Arab region.**

Relevant domestic and sexual harassment laws that might be used in online violence cases usually do not refer explicitly to online violence. Often, online violence against women is viewed as a cybercrime, which reduces attention to specific gender dimensions. As a result, law enforcement may overlook the nuances of how online VAW operates and affects victims. Without a gender lens, online VAW may not be seen as an issue that disproportionately affects women and girls.

**Introducing online violence clauses in cybercrime laws comes with some contradictions.**

While criminalizing online violence is a positive development, cybercrime laws have been widely criticized in the Arab States for their infringement on privacy and speech rights. Instead of focusing on the non-consensual nature of the dissemination of intimate images, for instance, prosecutors target survivors for debauchery or crimes against morality.<sup>24</sup>

**There are generally not stand-alone channels to report online violence.**

Most government services to respond to online VAW are provided through the security apparatus, such as via websites run by the Ministry of Interior or General Security Directorate, or physically in police stations or public security directorates. In some cases, cybercrime directorates, like Jordan's Cybercrime Unit, have

expanded their mandates to address VAW but the department's main function is cybercrimes such as online embezzlement.

**Law enforcement and judiciary officials have limited understanding and guidance on online VAW.**

Without standard guidelines or protocols on responding to victims or handling online VAW cases, responses vary widely, influenced by factors including gender discrimination. One common perception is that male judges interpret the law in a conservative manner based on tradition and religion. In many countries, victims cannot remain anonymous when filing a complaint, a high barrier to reporting.

**A lack of awareness of services is compounded by limited access**

to online portals, helplines and complaint mechanisms. Further, while information on services is reported through some government websites or the media, it remains unstructured and sporadic. There may be no details on how services operate and how to reach assistance, making reporting more difficult. Some services are hard to find, even through a simple Google search.

**Services are minimal for counselling, mental health and legal aid.**

Without legal aid and other assistance, poorer women in particular may not be able to pursue their complaints. Survivors in some countries have civil remedies that require a lower burden of proof, but most cannot afford the expenses of a civil suit that could go on for years.

**Gaps remain in protective measures**

to uphold confidentiality, privacy and survivors' human dignity during investigations. In many countries, survivors cannot remain anonymous when filing a complaint.

**Responses to online violence across borders**

are often insufficient. Taking legal action against a perpetrator can be difficult even with an appropriate law in the survivor's own country.

**Overall, responses to online VAW are not adequately coordinated.**

CSOs have made commendable efforts to raise awareness, support reporting and provide helplines as well as legal and psychological aid. But they as well as government authorities often operate in silos.

<sup>23</sup> Lannazzone et al., 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Farouk, M.A. (2020) Egypt jails five women influencers over TikTok posts, Reuters, 27 July 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-women-socialmedia-trfn/egypt-jails-five-women-influencers-over-tiktok-posts-idUSKCN24S2E4>

# DISCUSSION

This study of the Arab States confirms the urgency of action on online violence against women, given the evidence of how pervasive online VAW has become and the number of rights violated, and lives harmed in the process. Increasingly research is becoming available that highlights the prevalence of online violence against women. For example, [Amnesty International survey](#) on women's experiences of abuse and harassment on social media that included Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and United State of America. The survey showed that nearly a quarter (23%) of the women surveyed across these eight countries experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, ranging from 16% in Italy to 33% in the US. Moreover, according to the [European Union Fundamental Rights Survey](#) on Violence against Women, 20% of young women in the European Union had experienced some form of cyber sexual harassment. A recent study conducted by the [Economist Intelligence](#) Unit in 2021 showed that the prevalence of online violence in the Latin American and Caribbean region has reached 91%, while the overall prevalence of online violence against women globally is 85%.<sup>25</sup>

However, research usually uses different methodologies and survey tools as well as targets different population groups and measures only specific forms of online violence. Measuring the extent and the impact of online violence is a daunting task with an absence of a specific definition of online violence and with the ever-emerging forms of online violence as new technologies emerge and new digital and online spaces become available. There is a limited availability of comprehensive studies on online violence at regional and global levels. A deeper knowledge can be unfolded from a regional comparison and a global analysis of this new emerging form of violence against women.

## Continuation of violence against women offline to the online space

UN Women Asia study on online violence against women and girls in Asia concluded that offline violence has moved seamlessly online, stemming from the same causes of male entitlement and power over women's decision-making.<sup>26</sup> It stressed the importance of safety measures, but without losing sight of tackling the drivers of violence against women. Similar to the Arab region online violence study which also shows that online violence is a continuation of the various types of offline violence against women. Additionally, in a study that asked men in the Arab States as to why they commit sexual harassment in public spaces against women, the vast majority said they did it for fun, with two thirds to three quarters blaming women for dressing 'provocatively'. These studies' findings indicate the interlinked sources and drivers of all forms of violence against women that are rooted in the discriminatory attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequality. The normalization of these behaviors greatly impedes the recognition, prevention, and adequate response to online violence. According to the [Economist Intelligence](#) study, women in countries with long-standing or institutionalized gender inequality tend to experience online violence at higher rates. Moreover, nearly three-quarters of women surveyed in the global Economist Intelligence study (seventy-four per cent) expressed concern about online abuse escalating to offline threats.

In the Arab states, the connection between the online and offline violence was particularly relevant for women who experienced online violence

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<sup>25</sup> Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women, The Economist Intelligence Unit study Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women (eiu.com).

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<sup>26</sup> India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea.

during COVID-19 as their experience were more likely to move offline. 44 per cent of women who experienced online during the year of 2020 reported that the incident moved offline in comparison to 15 per cent of women whose experience was in a different year. This shows the greater threat on women during emergencies and when they needed to use the online space more during lockdowns. The continuum between online VAW and offline VAW also means that the former can lead to physical and sexual harm, and vice versa. In many instances of online blackmail, extortion and sextortion, online violence spills over from the digital/cyber space into the offline space in a continuum of violence between online and offline, and vice versa. Amnesty International survey shows that between one-fifth (nineteen per cent in Italy) and one-quarter of women who had experienced abuse or harassment said it had included threats of physical or sexual assault.

As in this study on the Arab States, the regional and global studies in Asia and the Pacific, Economist Intelligence, and Amnesty international survey found that online VAW was common, driven by gender inequality, misogyny and negative cultural perceptions of women.

## Narrowing the space of women

Women are usually blamed on online violence, asked to delete their accounts and/or ignore online violence. They face serious psychological and sometimes physical consequences and find limited support as the regional and global studies show. Online VAW can be used to control, intimidate, micromanage, dominate, and isolate victims in a continuum of coercive control and in some cases physical violence. Moreover, when women experience online violence, they tend to impose self-censorship or delete their accounts which results in their exclusion entirely from the online space. In Europe, one in five victims of online violence (twenty-three per cent) had to change their email address or phone number as a result of the incidents.<sup>28</sup> The Economist global study shows that nearly 9 in 10 women restrict their online activity, limiting their

access to employment, education, healthcare, and community which also contributes to increasing the global digital gender divide. Moreover, seven per cent of women surveyed lost or had to change their jobs due to online violence, and one in three women (33.3 per cent) think twice before posting on social media as a result of an online violence experience. Amnesty study demonstrates that over three quarters (76 per cent) of women who said that they had experienced abuse or harassment on a social media platform made changes to the way they use the platforms. This included restricting what they post about for example, thirty-two per cent of women said they had stopped posting content that expressed their opinion on certain issues. Therefore, online violence narrows and hampers women's full participation in the society and contributes to silencing their voices.

## Perpetrators' punishment and perceptions on online violence

The research in Asia and the Pacific noted that the most effective way of punishing perpetrators of online VAW has yet to be defined. It underscored that taking down harmful content should be part of the punishment, and that incarceration may be appropriate in some cases. Sanctions could also include apologies and measures to help survivors rebuild their online presence. Internet intermediaries have a role including through suspending or banning perpetrators from a given platform. In the Arab States, an interesting gender difference emerged with women more likely to call for the police to take action against perpetrators, compared to men, who maintained that online platforms should do more to protect users. This also indicates the different perception of men versus women on the significance of online violence and the appropriate reporting response. Furthermore, Amnesty survey also indicates that eighty-two per cent of women feel social media companies need to do more.

Online violence is usually trivialized and normalized and perceived as a "women issue" that is not serious. [The European Union Fundamental Rights study](#) concluded that three quarters (74 per cent) of online stalking cases never come to the attention of the police, even the most serious cases of

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28 According to the survey study of the European Union Fundamental Rights

stalking that the respondents refer to in the survey.

Moreover, a common factor between perpetrators is their sense of entitlement, thinking it is their right, and the perception that women are “asking for it”. These perceptions feed into women blaming and contribute to women hesitation to reporting, feeling unsafe online and not supported.

## Specific accountability measures on online VAW are missing

There have been some legal reforms in response to online VAW; however, countries often struggle to keep up with the gender dimensions of online VAW, which is often still viewed as a generic cybercrime. This tendency obscures gender drivers and the fact that women and girls are the primary victims. In sixty-four out of the eighty-six countries studied in the Economist Intelligence Web Index, law enforcement agencies and courts appear to be failing to take appropriate corrective actions to address online violence against women.<sup>29</sup> In the surveyed countries of Amnesty study, significantly more women said government policies to respond to abuse were inadequate versus adequate, with five times as many women in Sweden stating the policies were inadequate (57 per cent compared to 11 per cent). Around one third of women in the UK (33 per cent), USA and New Zealand (32 per cent), stated the police response to abuse online was inadequate.<sup>30</sup>

Legal systems have also not yet caught up to issues that are common in online VAW, such as secondary perpetration where bystanders download, forward and share content that is violent and/or not shared with the subject's consent. In the

Arab states, the law usually does not cover threats of online violence that women face in the online space.<sup>31</sup> In Asia and Arab states regions, women expressed a common lack of confidence in judicial systems and expressed concerns about privacy and confidentiality which affects reporting behaviour among survivors. Often, women are blamed and withdraw from digital spaces, which deprives them of access to justice in addition to the loss of many opportunities from being online.

In Asia and the Pacific, State prevention programmes often inform girls about how to stay safe online, but without delving into Internet etiquette and culture or toxic online behaviour, much less prohibitions on online VAW. Broader public awareness programmes on Internet safety and the dissemination of disinformation typically ignore online VAW. On the other hand, in the Arab states there are services and government helplines available to women survivors of violence, yet usually it is not focused on online violence. As a result, service providers are not necessarily equipped enough to deal with cases of online violence and provide the required support to survivors.

Finally, there is a global and regional call for governments, internet intermediate companies, CSOs and relevant stakeholders to ensure that adequate laws, policies, practices, and training are in place to prevent and end online violence and abuse against women. However, it is critical to have restrictions or penalties that are focused on online violence against women while not impinging upon the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression. Tackling online violence against women must not be used as an excuse to reduce the enjoyment of freedom of expression.

29 The Economist Intelligence global study: Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women (eiu.com)

30 Amnesty International study on the prevalence of online violence: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/11/amnesty-reveals-alarming-impact-of-online-abuse-against-women/>

31 OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). 2018. 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. A/HRC/38/47. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23231&LangID=E>.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Arab States, where women's participation in public life has long been undermined by patriarchal social norms and high rates of sexual harassment and domestic violence, online spaces initially emerged as safe havens for women to connect and express themselves. This is no longer the case. Online violence against women is a serious concern, threatening women's physical safety and mental well-being. It constricts women's participation online, silences their voices and prevents access to the many opportunities that technology can offer. In short, online violence against women is a violation of their rights on many fronts, including to be safe, to express themselves, to obtain information and to realize dignity and well-being.

With the continuation of COVID-19 crisis and inevitable shift to the digital space, online violence may exacerbate an already wide digital divide in the Arab States. Better understanding of the phenomenon is key to taking effective measures to uphold women's rights and prevent further erosion of development gains.

## **Online and offline violence are interconnected.**

It is often difficult to distinguish the consequences of actions initiated in digital realms from offline realities and vice versa. This underlines the need to address violence against women in a comprehensive manner, online and offline. This calls for engaging multiple actors, including governmental service providers, the police and judiciary, civil society organizations and Internet service providers.

**Online violence results in multiple harmful consequences.** Survivors, and disproportionately female survivors, report not only serious psychological impacts but also that they felt forced to silence themselves by deactivating or deleting their social media accounts or being cautious about what they posted online. Furthermore, women are disproportionately blamed for incidents of online vio-

lence, which may lead to unjust legal actions, family sanctions or, in the most serious cases, threats to their lives.

The following recommendations to address online violence against women emerged from several sources from the online violence research study project and the initiated regional dialogue UN Women ROAS facilitated with the key stakeholders. They are directed to core stakeholders, namely, governments, internet intermediaries, and civil society organizations.

## **Adopt a survivor-centred approach in responding to online VAW.**

Grounded in principles of gender justice, this would prioritize empowering women and realizing their rights, needs and wishes. It would ensure all women survivors receive a full complement of psychological support, legal services (including pro-bono legal aid when needed), and security and health-care services. This approach should inform all elements of the response to online VAW, including legislation, training for the police and judiciary and awareness campaigns.

## **Introduce specific national legislative frameworks on online violence against women.**

Governments should prohibit and criminalize all types of online VAW under existing laws or by introducing new legislation. Laws or amendments should explicitly refer to online VAW and acknowledge its different forms and gender dimensions.

## **Repeal discriminatory provisions in criminal law,**

in particular the broad laws that facilitate crimes against women in the name of honour or violating family values and principles; ensure the equal treatment of women before the law and the abolition of the diluted criminal-law liability and strengthen the penalties imposed on perpetrators of VAW, including online VAW.



**Ensure alignment of cybercrime laws with international good practices with specific definitions and mandate** so they are not used against women as a form of political violence (especially activists) and don't hinder freedom of expression.

**Regulate internet intermediaries' companies under the law** by impose clauses on provider liability requiring Internet intermediaries to disclose the identity and location of perpetrators. Specific guidance on implementing these laws is also needed to avoid their misuse to hamper women's full participation in society and freedom of speech.

**Establish institutional capacity dedicated to responding to online VAW.** Specific agencies or units should be created, if they do not already exist, with the mandate to receive reports of online violence and provide support to survivors. Personnel should be well trained on women's rights and gender responsiveness. Training for magistrates, lawyers, police and front-line workers should ensure their ability and willingness to investigate and prosecute perpetrators. Special judges and prosecutors sensitized on online VAW should be appointed, along with more female judges and prosecutors.

**Develop cross-border coordination.** Since online violence can easily cross borders, perpetrators may not live in the same country as their victims. Assisting the latter may require the involvement of a ministry of foreign affairs and police collaboration with Interpol. Better sharing of information on online VAW is needed among security forces, backed by broader cross-regional cooperation. In general, global and regional responses involving all relevant stakeholders from governments, CSOs and internet intermediaries will be crucial.

**Make reporting easier and safer.** Multiple means should be in place to receive complaints about online VAW, such as through helplines, email, the submission of forms and online chat support. These should comply with clear guidelines and standard procedures that are gender-responsive and rooted in human rights principles. Quick turnaround is critical since violence can spread rapidly through networks and platforms. Transparent, regular and widely shared information that demonstrates the impact of reporting may help overcome skepti-

cism around the value of the process.

**Inform all Internet users about their rights and where to report cases.** Awareness raising should take place on multiple levels, such as through government portals and in schools, media outreach and CSO campaigns. It should aim to break the silence around online abuse, improve understanding of what it is, and inform women on how they can protect themselves and obtain recourse if needed.

**Deepen collaboration between governments and CSOs.** More coordinated responses to online VAW would encourage learning from successes in service provision and help develop referral pathways to reach more women. Much depends on governments providing space for CSOs to freely operate in addressing online VAW and other gender justice issues<sup>32</sup> and taking a consistently strong stand against any form of attack against defenders of women's human rights.

Encourage Internet intermediaries to become responsible guardians committed to upholding the safety of women in online spaces. Service providers have a responsibility to balance their business imperative to encourage traffic with protections for freedom of speech and guarantees that harmful content will be removed. They should commit to operating in line with international human rights norms such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights<sup>33</sup> This includes having accessible and transparent reporting and complaints procedures for VAW, and cost-free helplines and age-appropriate services in local languages. Algorithms need to be conversant in Arabic and attuned to local nuances, dialects and accents to pick up online VAW when it occurs.

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32 UN Women, 2019.

33 Ruggie, J. (2011). Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Respect, Protect and Remedy Framework," UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, (2011). The Guiding Principles were proposed to the United Nations Human Rights Council as part of the 2011 report to the Council by the then UN Special Representative on business & human rights, John Ruggie: Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Issue of Human Rights and Transnational Corporations and Other Business Enterprises, John Ruggie, UN Doc. A/HRC/17/31, March 21, 2011. Available at [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf). See also Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact, available at <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles>.

**Urge service providers to continue to develop solutions to online violence.** Collaboration with feminist tech companies and civil society organizations is critical, particularly in countries where national institutions are weaker. In four countries surveyed, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, more women expressed a preference for Internet platforms improving their policies to stop violence over police intervention. The share of women in Yemen preferring action by platforms was twice the share calling for police involvement. Women in Libya also expressed a strong preference for measures by platforms.

**Call on media to play a socially responsible role.** They should publicize the dangers of online violence against women and share successful stories of responding to online violence to encourage women to report and seek help.

**Conduct more research on online violence against women.** This current research has broken new ground in providing initial findings on how violence is escalating in the Arab States, and how measures to prevent and respond to it are not yet sufficient. Some further actions to counter online violence are already well understood, as elaborated in these recommendations. Other dimensions require more assessment and understanding, however, such as the interface between online and offline violence, effective intervention points, and an in-depth assessment and understanding of how laws and services responding to online violence are implemented. Self-censorship is another concern. While some of this might decline through more respectful and rights-based responses by judicial systems, it also needs to be better understood and addressed in terms of social norms that lead women to silence themselves, including within families.

# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Country profiles from web-based survey

### Iraq

In Iraq, 1,444 respondents completed the survey, including 507 women.

#### Characteristics of respondents

##### Age:

46% are aged 18-24, 27% are 25-34, 14% are 35-44, and the remaining 14% are over 45 years old.

##### Residence:

65% live in a big city, 18% live in a small town, and 11% live in a village or rural area, and 6% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

##### Marital Status:

57% are single, 35% are married or engaged, and 9% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

#### Exposure to Online Violence

21% of women in Iraq are exposed to online violence. 31% of men say that they have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

Yes, once    Yes, more than once    No, but I know someone who has    No, and I don't know anyone who has



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

43% of women experienced it more than once

#### Perceptions of Online Violence

39% of women and	47% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
38% of women and	45% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
59% of women and	57% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
47% of women and	60% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 43% of women compared to 32% of men believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence. 36% of men compared to 30% of women believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence.

## Jordan

In Jordan, 1121 respondents completed the survey, including 517 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

40% are aged 18-24, 29% are 25-34, 17% are 35-44, and the remaining 14% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

59% live in a big city, 18% live in a small town, and 18% live in a village or rural area, and 6% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

49% are single, 41% are married or engaged, and 9% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

18% of women in Jordan are exposed to online violence. 27% of men say that they have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

**Yes, once** **Yes, more than once** **No, but I know someone who has** **No, and I don't know anyone who has**



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

38% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

44% of women and	50% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
40% of women and	44% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
69% of women and	64% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
54% of women and	63% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 41% of women compared to 36% of men believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence. 33% of men compared to 27% of women believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence.

## Lebanon

In Lebanon, 1198 respondents completed the survey, including 514 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

35% are aged 18-24, 30% are 25-34, 18% are 35-44, and the remaining 17% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

43% live in a big city, 25% live in a small town, and 23% live in a village or rural area, and 9% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

45% are single, 45% are married or engaged, and 10% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

11% of women in Lebanon are exposed to online violence. 25% of men say that they have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

Yes, once Yes, more than once No, but I know someone who has No, and I don't know anyone who has



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

47% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

42% of women and	50% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
41% of women and	43% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
69% of women and	62% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
55% of women and	61% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 35% of women compared to 37% of men believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence. 27% of men compared to 30% of women believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence.

## Libya

In Libya, 1362 respondents completed the survey, including 507 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

30% are aged 18-24, 35% are 25-34, 21% are 35-44, and the remaining 14% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

58% live in a big city, 22% live in a small town, and 16% live in a village or rural area, and 4% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

49% are single, 41% are married or engaged, and 10% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

16% of women in Libya are exposed to online violence. 28% of men say that they have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

**Yes, once** **Yes, more than once** No, but I know someone who has No, and I don't know anyone who has



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

46% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

43% of women and	55% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
39% of women and	53% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
59% of women and	59% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
52% of women and	58% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 39% of women compared to 41% of men believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence. 24% of men compared to 31% of women believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence.



## Morocco

In Morocco, 1686 respondents completed the survey, including 605 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

39% are aged 18-24, 27% are 25-34, 17% are 35-44, and the remaining 17% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

58% live in a big city, 24% live in a small town, and 12% live in a village or rural area, and 6% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

54% are single, 35% are married or engaged, and 11% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

17% of women in Morocco are exposed to online violence. 29% of men say that they have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

**Yes, once** **Yes, more than once** **No, but I know someone who has** **No, and I don't know anyone who has**



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

58% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

36% of women and	48% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
37% of women and	45% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
68% of women and	62% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
48% of women and	51% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 42% of women compared to 33% of men believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence. 40% of men compared to 36% of women believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence.

## State of Palestine

In the State of Palestine, 1231 respondents completed the survey, including 517 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

41% are aged 18-24, 31% are 25-34, 15% are 35-44, and the remaining 13% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

39% live in a big city, 22% live in a small town, and 20% live in a village or rural area, and 19% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

45% are single, 43% are married or engaged, and 12% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

14% of women in the State of Palestine are exposed to online violence. 29% of men have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

Yes, once Yes, more than once No, but I know someone who has No, and I don't know anyone who has



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

43% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

35% of women and	45% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
41% of women and	47% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
73% of women and	65% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
49% of women and	55% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 41% of women compared to 35% of men believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence. 33% of men compared to 34% of women believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence.

## Tunisia

In Tunisia, 1284 respondents completed the survey, including 510 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

34% are aged 18-24, 30% are 25-34, 19% are 35-44, and the remaining 17% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

51% live in a big city, 27% live in a small town, and 17% live in a village or rural area, and 4% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

55% are single, 36% are married or engaged, and 9% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

19% of women in Tunisia are exposed to online violence. 29% of men have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

**Yes, once** **Yes, more than once** **No, but I know someone who has** **No, and I don't know anyone who has**



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

41% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

35% of women and	47% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
39% of women and	43% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
70% of women and	61% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
46% of women and	52% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 39% of women compared to 42% of men believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence. 25% of men compared to 35% of women believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence.

## Yemen

In Yemen, 2172 respondents completed the survey, including 510 women.

### Characteristics of respondents

#### Age:

34% are aged 18-24, 37% are 25-34, 22% are 35-44, and the remaining 7% are over 45 years old.

#### Residence:

60% live in a big city, 13% live in a small town, and 21% live in a village or rural area, and 7% live in a refugee or IDP camp.

#### Marital Status:

38% are single, 48% are married or engaged, and 13% are divorced, separated, or widowed.

### Exposure to Online Violence

11% of women in Yemen are exposed to online violence. 21% of men have perpetrated online violence.

#### Have you ever been subjected to online violence?

**Yes, once** **Yes, more than once** **No, but I know someone who has** **No, and I don't know anyone who has**



#### Of those who have experienced online violence...

34% of women experienced it more than once

### Perceptions of Online Violence

53% of women and	56% of men believe	"Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material could be used against them by the viewers."
56% of women and	55% of men believe	"Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online."
60% of women and	58% of men believe	"Women are exposed to online violence more than men."
59% of women and	64% of men generally	"feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online"

**Respondents' recommendations on best way to address online violence:** 43% of women compared to 47% of men believe that platforms improving internet policies are the best way to combat online violence. 18% of men compared to 21% of women believe that police action is the best way to combat online violence.

## Annex 2: Qualitative study questionnaires and discussion points

### Points for discussion with survivors of online VAW

Online VAW includes all acts of gender-based violence against women 'committed, abetted or aggravated' in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies.

#### Incidence of online VAW

1. Have you experienced online VAW? Please describe.
2. Did you know the perpetrator?
3. Why did you think the perpetrator committed online VAW?
4. Did you experience online with VAW because of your job/activity? Please describe.
5. What did you do after you experience online VAW?
6. Did you know that that you can report online VAW?
7. In your experience, what causes online VAW?
8. In your opinion, what should be done to prevent online VAW or protect women against online VAW (or describe good practices).

#### Reporting online VAW to the Police

1. If you had reported the online VAW to the police/relevant authority, can you please relate your experience with the police/authorities. Were you satisfied with your interaction with the police? Why/why not?
2. Was your case heard in court? If so please describe the process. Were you satisfied with the outcome? Why/why not?

#### Redress and Needs of Survivors

1. In your opinion, what do survivors need?

#### Confidential

1. Do you wish your identity to be kept confidential?

### Points for discussion with CSOs on online VAW

Online VAW includes all acts of gender-based violence against women 'committed, abetted or aggravated' in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies.

#### Incidences of online VAW

1. Has your organization ever handled cases of online VAW? Can you please share examples?
  - a) How was the online VAW resolved?
  - b) What role did your organization play in the incident?
2. Has anyone in your organisation/other organisations been targeted online with VAW? Please describe.
3. In your experience, are women in certain professions/jobs especially targeted/exposed online with VAW?
4. Please describe incidences handled/experienced/reported in mass media/relating to other activists.

#### Survivor's point of view

1. In your experience, do women know that that they can report online VAW?
2. If women do not report online VAW, what do they do when they face online VAW?
3. In your experience, do survivors know the perpetrator? If so, how do the survivors know the perpetrator?

### **Perpetrator's point of view**

1. In your experience, why do perpetrators commit online VAW?

### **Causes of online VAW**

1. In your experience, what causes online VAW?

### **Response online VAW**

1. In your experience, what actions can be taken to decrease/eliminate incidences of online VAW?
2. In your opinion, what should be done to protect women against online VAW (or describe good practices).

### **Preventative programmes**

1. Are there preventive online VAW programmes by govt e.g. Ministry of Women, Human Rights, Ministry of Communications/Multimedia? Or general VAW programs which include online VAW? If so, how?
2. Does your organization undertake preventive online VAW programmes? Examples?
3. Can you think of any good examples of preventive online VAW programmes?

### **Reporting online VAW to the police**

1. Has anyone in your organization dealt or accompanied the survivor when dealing with the police/authorities on online VAW? Please relate your experience.
2. Other than police, have you dealt with any other government agencies e.g. line ministries, commissions, agencies, service providers.

### **Legal Framework**

1. Are there special laws on online VAW? If so, please describe.
2. What other laws are applicable to online VAW?

### **Capacity of First Responders**

1. Do you know if and how the officers are trained? Is there a special agency/department that handles online VAW?

### **Accessing the Courts**

1. Has/have your organization/you assisted victims/survivors in the court? Please share your experience(s).

### **Redress and Needs of Survivors**

1. In your experience what do survivors need?

### **Secondary perpetrators**

1. How about the individuals who disseminate content that were produced by perpetrators of online VAW. Those who share/forward/upload the content? Should they be made accountable?

### **Punishment**

1. Please give two examples of good practices in punishment (civil/administrative/criminal etc) of perpetrators (whether or not it is available)

### **Confidential**

1. Do you wish your and/or your organization's identity to be kept confidential?



## Annex 3: Surveys questions of activists and CSOs, and Web-survey

### Understanding Online Violence against Activists, Human Rights Defenders, and Influencers survey questions

This survey is part of a UN Women regional office multi-country study on online violence against women. The study aims to provide an understanding of the experiences of women survivors of online violence, its consequences, and barriers to report or seek support. In this survey, we are targeting in particular women activists, influencers, and human rights defenders who have been subjected to online violence in the Arab States region. The survey aims to enquire the act of online violence against activists/influencers, the threats it represents to their careers/lives and its impact. The findings of the survey will be used to complement the undergoing study of online violence in the Arab States. Your participation in the research study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from answering the survey at any time. Your responses will be confidential, and we do not collect identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address.

1. What is your age?
2. What is the highest level of education that you completed?
3. What is your nationality?
4. What country & city & village do you live in?
5. What is your current occupation?
6. How long have you been a social media influencer/activist/human right defender?
7. What is your main source of income?
8. Which topic is of interest to you as a social media influencer?
9. How much time do you spend connected to internet every day due to work in activism/influencing (inclusive of usage of time on all devices)?
10. What are the applications you use the most (chose the top 3)?
11. Do you have an active public profile online for your activism/influencing work (Ex: Social media account, blog, etc.)?
12. How many friends/ followers do you have in your public profile across all your social media accounts (TOTAL NUMBER)?
13. Generally, do you feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online?
14. Online Violence is defined as “targeted harassment and prejudice through technology which may cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm”. Have you ever been a victim of online violence as a result of the work you do in activism/influencing?
15. What types of online violence were you exposed to? [Select all that apply]
16. Who was behind the online violence you were exposed to? If you had multiple experiences in the past year, please refer to the most recent experience
17. What is the main reason you know them? They are:
18. Why do you think you have been subjected to this violence?
19. On which platform have you experienced online violence (the most)?
20. How did you feel after experiencing online violence? (Select all that apply)
21. (Share a Story): Please write about any other feeling, impact or consequences on your career/life that you have experienced due to online violence that weren't captured in the choices above- You can write it in a Story if you wish (Optional)
22. Has online violence ever moved offline? (e.g. experienced being stalked at your house after being attacked online)
23. How does the level of online violence you experienced affect/changed your activism/Influencing practice and audience engagement?
24. Which of these resulted from your experience of online violence? Select all that apply
25. Did you report your experience of online violence?

26. Where did you report online violence? (Select all that apply)
27. Have you ever received a response after reporting the online violence?
28. Was the response satisfactory to you?
29. Why do you think the survivors of online violence not report it to relevant institutions?
30. Would you say Activist and influencers face each of the following much more often, somewhat more often, somewhat less often, much less often, or is there no real difference in the last year?
31. What would be your proposed recommendations/suggestions to make the online space safer for women and girls in the region? (Please give 2- 3 recommendations/suggestions)
32. What would be your suggestions for supporting services to enhance, and/or launch support against online violence particularly online services? (Please give 2- 3 suggestions)

### **Survey questions to Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on online violence against Activists and influencers**

This survey is part of a UN Women regional office multi-country study on online violence against women. The study aims to provide an understanding of the experiences of women survivors of online violence, its consequences, and barriers to report or seek support. In this survey, we are targeting in particular Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to get their perspective on Women Activists, influencers, and Human Rights Defenders who have been subjected to online violence in the Arab States Region. The findings of the survey will be used to complement the undergoing study of online violence in the Arab States. Your participation in the research study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from answering the survey at any time. Your responses and all information collected will be confidential.

1. Name of your organization:
2. Country & City & Village where you operate
3. Name and position of person who filled the questionnaire
4. Which areas of work does your organization engage in?  
Online Violence Online VAW includes all acts of gender-based violence against women 'committed, abetted or aggravated' in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies
5. Has your organization ever handled cases of online VAW against activists/influencers?
6. Who was behind the online violence towards women activists/influencers?
7. What are the main reason women know them? They are:
8. In your experience, do activist women know that they can report online VAW?
9. Why do you think the survivors of online violence do not report it or seek services from relevant institutions?
10. If activist/influencers women do not report online VAW, what do they do when they face online VAW?
11. In your experience, why do perpetrators commit online VAW? Select the main three top reasons that apply
12. On which platform have activists/influencers experienced online violence the most, from your experience?
13. What would be your proposed recommendations/suggestions to make the online space safer for women and girls in the region/in your specific context/country?
14. What would be your suggestions for supporting services to enhance, and/or launch support against online violence particularly online services?

### **Web-survey questions to explore women experience of online violence**

1. What is your age and sex?
2. How much time on average do you use the internet (such as social media, online messaging, browsing, etc)? (excluding time spent watching movies, shows etc).
3. Which three applications do you most use? Please select up to three.

4. Do you have an active public profile online? (E.g. social media account, blog, etc)
5. How many friends/ followers do you have in your public profile across **all** your social media accounts? (TOTAL NUMBER)
6. What is your marital status?
7. What is your Nationality?
8. Do you agree or disagree?
9. Women who display their photos and videos should accept the material is used against them.
10. Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online.
11. Women are exposed to online violence more than men
12. What is the best way to combat online violence?
13. What is the second best way to combat online violence?
14. What is the third best way to combat online violence?
15. Generally, do you feel safe from harassment and violence when you are online?
16. Which of these safety precautions do you take when you go online? Select all that apply
17. Have you ever been subjected to online violence? Online violence is targeted harassment and prejudice through technology which may cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm.
18. Have you been exposed to any form of online violence in the last year?
19. What types of online violence were you exposed to in the last year? Select all that apply
20. Who was behind the online violence you were exposed to in the past year? If you had multiple experiences in the past year, please refer to the most recent experience
21. What is the main reason you know them? They are:
22. Why do you think you have been subjected to this violence?
23. On which platform have you experienced online violence?
24. How did you feel after experiencing online violence? Select all that apply
25. Has online violence ever moved offline? (e.g. experienced being stalked at your house after being attacked online).
26. What did you do after experiencing online violence? Select all that apply
27. Which of these resulted from your experience of online violence? Select all that apply.
28. Did you report your experience of online violence?
29. Where did you report online violence? Select all that apply
30. Why didn't you report it?
31. Have you ever received a response after reporting the online violence?
32. Was the response satisfactory to you?
33. Why do the victims of online violence not report it to relevant institutions?
34. Have you used the internet to do any of the following? Select all that apply
35. Why did you undertake this act? Select all that apply
36. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
37. What is your current primary occupation?
38. Where are you living/residing currently?
39. What is your sexual orientation? (Was only asked in Tunisia and Lebanon)

# **UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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