

WHERE WE STAND

CYBERBULLYING

Where Things Stand

UN CEDAW General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of girls and women to education recognises amongst others the impact of cyber bullying and recommends that States, #3 “Develop comprehensive programmes that inform teachers, students and parents on the forms that cyber-bullying can take and its potential impacts as well as provide counselling and support for student victims of cyber-bullying;”

Gender-based violence against women continues to be pervasive in all countries, with high levels of apparent impunity. It manifests itself on a continuum of multiple, interrelated and recurring forms, in a range of settings, from private to public, including technology-mediated settings and in the contemporary globalized world it transcends national boundaries.

CEDAW Recommendation #36 observes that through the use of technology and social media various forms of cyberbullying are being carried out in order to intimidate, threaten, or harass women or girls. Gender based violence online has created an internet forum which is often used as a platform to defame or publicly shame, harass, stalk, exploit, blackmail, extort, intimidate, disclose confidential information, images or videos, threaten or advance hate speech, terrorism, cyber obscenity or pornography, revenge porn, doxing, trolling or sexual harassment and advances on women or girls often from strangers within the sanctuary of even their own homes. For example, today, it is possible for a young woman or girl to be harassed not only at school but on all forms of transportation or when they are alone in their bedroom, or even in clear sight of their parents or guardians without those adults ever being aware.

And what effect is it having on our girls and women? Common outcomes are social isolation, whereby victims or survivors withdraw from public life, including with family and friends, and limited mobility, when they lose their freedom to move around safely. Such acts can result, or are likely to result, in psychological, physical, sexual or economic harm anxiety and fear, and in some cases, may also result in suicidal tendencies.

It is reported that one in three victims of cyber-bullying have engaged in self harm as a result, and 1 in 10 has attempted suicide. In some instances, the threat of physical harm becomes a reality, when sexually explicit images or videos are posted on specialized advertising sites for prostitution together with private information, such as a victim’s home address. Economic harm can result in making it difficult for the victim to find employment, or even preventing the victim from even attempting to find employment because of the shame and fear of potential employers discovering the images. Internet violence or harassment can also affect a high percentage of girls’ or women’s health and academic work as well as create long-lasting consequences continuing throughout adulthood.

It is estimated that 23 per cent of women have reported having experienced online abuse or harassment and that one in 10 women has experienced some form of online violence since the age of 15. Other reports suggest that 73% of women have already been exposed to or have experienced some form of online violence. CEDAW Recommendation # 36 observed that while both boys and girls are involved in cyber-bullying, research shows that girls are almost twice as likely as boys to be both victims and perpetrators. Based on these observations it is apparent that we are now facing a significant risk that the use of ICT without a human rights-based approach to dealing with this

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In General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council, United Nations (ECOSOC); Operational Relations with the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO); Special List of the International Labour Organisation (ILO); Official Relations with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); Consultative Status with the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO); Consultative Status with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

emerging form of violence accompanied by the prohibition of online gender-based violence could broaden sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence against women and girls in society even further.

And Where Things Need to Go

Fundamental Action

Human rights and women's rights which are protected offline must also be protected online. This has to be balanced with respect for the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy and data protection.

Corporate entities providing ICT services must recognise their social responsibilities alongside Governments.

Additional Action

- Within their jurisdiction Member States should prohibit and criminalize online violence against women, in particular the non-consensual distribution of intimate images, online harassment and stalking.
- Member States should adopt or adapt (as appropriate) their civil and criminal causes of action to hold perpetrators liable and allow women victims to pursue legal action. Such legislative measures should be applicable also to threats of releasing harmful information or content online.
- Member States should provide victims with legal recourse and appropriate legal aid in order that they may pursue a relevant course of action against the perpetrator.
- Member States should provide reparation measures such as restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

Where Soroptimist International Stands

We urge Member States, with support from the United Nations and its agencies:

- Ensure that their present legal frameworks adequately protect all women's human rights online, including the right to life free from violence, freedom of expression and access to information, and the right to privacy and data protection.
- Take effective measures to prevent the publication of harmful material that comprises gender-based violence against women, and for their removal on an urgent basis.
- Provide protective measures and services for victims of online gender-based violence;
- Inform children and teenagers about the risks of taking, or allowing others to take, intimate images, and that the dissemination of such images is a form of gender-based violence and a crime. Girls should also learn about safety on social media platforms and the Internet, and how to protect their own privacy online.

We urge all corporate organisations providing internet platforms to

- Commit to eradicating online gender-based violence.
- Allocate resources to information and education campaigns on preventing ICT facilitated violence against women and girls
- Promote a 'human rights for all' based digital security system across their platforms.
- Adopt transparent complaint mechanisms for cases of online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls ensuring these are easily accessible for reporting and requesting removal of harmful content.