



# ***ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE ARAB STATES***

**INSIGHTS FROM A MULTI-COUNTRY STUDY**

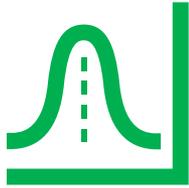
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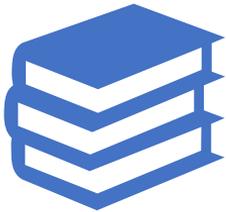


# CONTENT

1. Background – why?
2. Methodology- what and how?
3. Key results
4. Next steps



## METHODOLOGY



- Mixed method research with 3 components:
  - Quantitative web-based survey using an innovative data collection- web-survey (RIWI): ~ 11,500 respondents from 8 countries.
  - Qualitative Research on the experiences of online violence through the lens of CSOs, women activists and service providers: insights from 65 CSOs, 90 women activists, FGD and IDIs with service providers.
  - Mapping of existing laws and services related to online, and ICT facilitated violence against women.

## KEY RESULTS

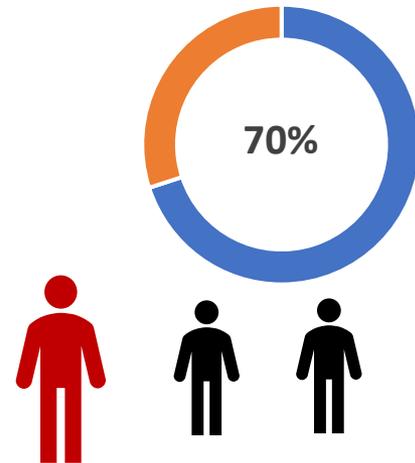
- **Situation:** online safety and exposure to violence.
- **Consequences:** implications on women in the region.
- **Perceptions:** how is online violence perceived in the region?
- **Help seeking behavior:** reporting and recommendations on best solutions
- **Efforts in the region to address the issue**



# THE ONLINE SPACE IS NOT SAFE FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB STATES

- Nearly half (**49%**) of women internet users in the Arab States reported not feeling safe from online harassment. This feeling of unsafety was more important among women activists and human rights defenders (**70%**).
- 16% of women in the Arab States reported having experienced online violence at least once in their lifetime. **60% of women who have experienced online violence at all, were exposed to it in the past year.**
- Over 1 in 3 men aged 18-24 say they have perpetrated some kind of online violence.

Proportion of women activists and human rights defenders who reported feeling unsafe online



## THE ONLINE SPACE IS NOT SAFE FOR WOMEN IN THE ARAB STATES (Cont')

- The largest share of women who experienced online violence, report experiencing it on Facebook (43%) followed by Instagram (16%) and WhatsApp (11%).



# ONLINE VIOLENCE IS A THREAT TO WOMEN'S PHYSICAL SAFETY

- For **1 in 3** women reported that some of all of their experiences of online violence have moved offline.
- 12% of women who experienced online violence reported having been subjected to physical violence following reporting the incident to family members.



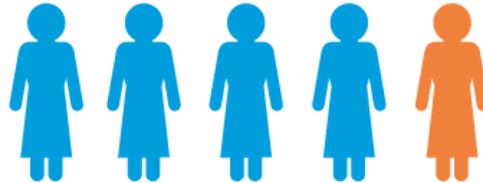
# ONLINE VIOLENCE IS A THREAT TO WOMEN'S MENTAL WELLBEING



- 35% of women who experienced online violence in the Arab States reported feeling “sad/depressed”, 35% reported that they “lost trust in the people around them”
- **12 % of women reported having suicidal thoughts following an incident of online violence.**

## ONLINE VIOLENCE HAMPERS WOMEN'S FULL PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIETY AND CONTRIBUTES TO SILENCING THEIR VOICES

- Women who experienced online violence were largely left unsupported and there is evidence that this contributed to their self-censorship or exclusion entirely from online spaces.
- Over 1 in 5 women (22%) who experienced online violence deleted or deactivated their accounts.



- Over 1 in 4 women (26%) who experienced online violence reported being cautious about what they put online.

# ONLINE VIOLENCE IS TRIVIALIZED AND NORMALIZED

- **Not a problem!**
  - Nearly half of the men (48%) and 41% of women agree that Online violence is not a serious matter as long as it remains online.
  - 36% of women who experienced online violence were told to ignore it.
- **It's definitely her fault!**
  - 1 in 2 men and 4 in 10 women from the eight participating countries agree that “women who display their photos and videos should accept that the material could be used against them by the viewers”
  - 23% of women who experienced violence were blamed for the incident
  - 21% were told to delete social media.

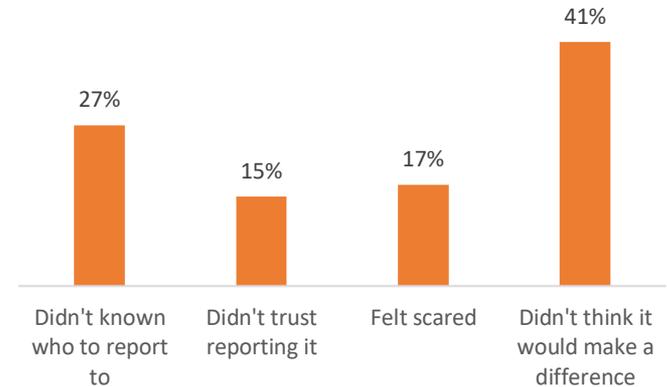
## ONLINE VIOLENCE IS TRIVIALIZED AND NORMALIZED (Cont')

- **It's fun!**
  - 51% of women who experienced online violence say they were attacked for “no specific reason” – 16% for being a feminist.
  - The largest share of perpetrators says that the main reason they perpetrated online violence is “because it is their right” (26%). 23% said they perpetrated online violence “because it was fun”.

# LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRUST, VICTIM-BLAMING AND FEAR OF RETALIATION PREVENT WOMEN FROM REPORTING ONLINE VIOLENCE

- **Less than 1 in 3 women who experienced online violence reported the incident.**
- Most common reasons for not reporting is the lack of trust (41%) and lack of knowledge on existing reporting mechanisms (27%).
- The majority of women who reported online violence, did so to **the platform itself** (55%); 23% reported **the incident to the police**.

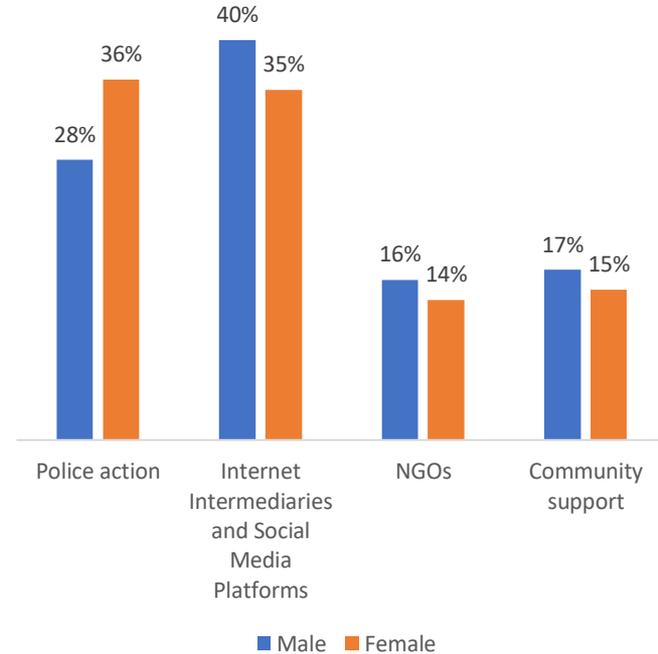
Reasons for not reporting online violence



## ADDRESSING IMPUNITY HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE BEST ACTION BY WOMEN TO RESPOND TO ONLINE VIOLENCE

- Women are most likely to believe that the best way to combat online violence is “Police taking action against perpetrators of online violence” (36 %of women vs to 28% of men).
- Men in turn are more likely to believe that online platforms should improve their policies to protect users.

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



# CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ADDRESS ONLINE VIOLENCE IN THE REGION

## Legal frameworks

- A number of Arab countries adapted their Penal Codes, sexual harassment and domestic violence legislations to include online VAWG.
- Art. 33 of Tunisia's Law No. 58 of 2017 allows victims of online violence to issue restraining orders against offenders, but only if the harm becomes physical.
- Legal texts in Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia specifically criminalize online violence and penalize harassment occurring through "social media platforms" and "modern technology".
- Morocco's Penal Code refers to various forms of online violence including "written messages by phone or any other electronic device, recordings, and procurement or creation images of a sexual nature for sexual purposes", "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".

# CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ADDRESS ONLINE VIOLENCE IN THE REGION (Cont')

## Available services

- 15 Arab States have introduced helplines for victims of online violence.
- Some countries introduced online portals, forms or emails to report online VAWG incidents.
- Government services that pertain to online VAWG are often provided through the security apparatus.
- Civil Society Organizations have made commendable efforts to raise awareness, provide online portals or complaint submission mechanisms and helplines as well as to provide legal and psychological aid.
- Nonetheless, these efforts need to be more organized and made known to the general public.



## | NEXT STEPS

- 1. Dissemination:** Results disseminated- Discussion held with media, academia, young activists, service providers, CSOs...
- 2. Identification of priority actions:** Regional consultation organized with key stakeholders in the region to discuss results- a roadmap with priorities identified.
- 3. Engagement with women's organizations, police and internet intermediaries:** Initial discussions held with Meta and representatives of women's networks in the region- regional roster of trained police officers established.
- 4. Piloting a response model:** Libya and Tunisia
- 5. Providing insights on what works**

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