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HAMARA INTERNET

MEASURING PAKISTANI WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY ON ONLINE GENDER-BASED HARASSMENT IN PAKISTAN – BY DIGITALRIGHTSFOUNDATION

Digital RightsFoundation

"KNOW YOUR RIGHTS"

ABOUT

Digital Rights Foundation envisions a place where all people, and especially women, are able to exercise their right of expression without being threatened. Digital Rights Foundation believes that a free internet with access to information and impeccable privacy policies can encourage such a healthy and productive environment that would eventually help not only women, but the world at large.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SUMMARY

Over the course of 2016, Digital Rights Foundation trained close to 1,800 women throughout the length and breadth of Pakistan. This report compiles together data collected during the 17 sessions that had been conducted in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Gilgit, to create the first ever set of data around online harassment and electronic violence against women [e-VAW] in Pakistan. The study will map different aspects of online harassment and e-VAW, along with a look at how women use digital tools on the whole.

INTRODUCTION

Digital spaces and tools have evolved in Pakistan at a rapid pace. Protection measures, adequate laws, and responsible habits around ownership of these digital tools and spaces, however, have not progressed at a pace that would protect users of these spaces and tools.

Through its work, Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) has continually reached out to and worked alongside marginalized communities learning how to fight back and keep themselves secure in online spaces.

In a 2013 survey, the Express Tribune – an English-language Pakistani news daily – measured internet use in Pakistan and found that approximately 70% of users on Facebook were men.[1] In 2015, during a session on tackling online misogyny, the author of the report went on to reiterate that 75% to 80% of the users online were men. This effectively renders women a minority, and turns them into a marginalized community online.[2]

Through *Hamara* Internet, DRF initiated a campaign specifically targeted towards young women across Pakistan. The workshops helped to raise awareness, train women how to safely use digital spaces, and teach them how to fight online abuse and tech-related violence. The campaign ran throughout 2016 and conducted sessions in 17 different institutes, training more than 1,800 young women. Data was collected from the sessions to measure their habits online, experiences with harassment, and knowledge of protection measures.

The need for this research presented itself when DRF originally began working with women as a core focus of its mission. Since its inception, the organization has conducted several different types of workshops and trainings, including with human

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[1] Haque, Jahanzeb and Popalzai, Shaheryar. "Pakistan Internet Use Survey 2013," *The Express Tribune*. August 20, 2013, Accessed January 14, 2017, https://tribune.com.pk/story/591004/pakistan-internet-use-survey-2013.

[2] Zahid, Luavut. "Tackling online misogyny," *The Friday Times*. September 25, 2015, Accessed January 10, 2017, http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tft/tackling-online-misogyny.

rights activists, professional women, and female journalists. Whenever any effort was made to quantify the problem of online abuse and harassment, the organization ran into a roadblock – the data simply did not exist. This research is an effort to create a set of data that can help shed light on the issues surrounding online harassment and tech-related violence faced by women in Pakistan.

This report uses quantitative data from Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit to help map the experiences of the women in online spaces. The subjects included students from public, private, and mixed universities. An effort was made to ensure that the sessions were held in both women-only and co-educational institutes, in order to obtain a diverse range of experiences. The respondents also included female teachers that were part of the trainings and workshops being conducted.

The main motivation for this study was the lack of existing data. It is pertinent to note, however, that this lack of data is not a problem that Pakistan is facing alone. Haider, et al. point out that in South Asian countries, i.e. Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, there are no official statistics covering online victimization, in any form. This research aims to fill that gap.

OBJECTIVES

This research report seeks to analyse the gendered access to technological tools of communication and the barriers that women face in accessing digital spaces. Furthermore, the study also analyses digital spaces themselves. It makes use of quantitative data to assess cyber harassment and digital literacy with regards to young women in the country. Finally, it aims to initiate a politicized and informed discussion about gender empowerment within the virtual space by advocating for an equitable access to technologies of communication and an improved understanding of digital rights and security amongst the young women in Pakistan. The research is designed to be used in advocacy for digital rights and for better policies and practices to address cyber harassment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A rapid and extensive increase in usage of the Internet over the past decade has also given rise to new challenges, one of which is regulation of online behavior. Even more recently, the widespread utilization of mobile information and communication technologies, coupled with a diffusion of social media, has led to growing calls for a paradigm shift in the way that online behavior is addressed and regulated.

A report by Women's Aid[3] looked into online harassment, stalking and abuse. The report defined online abuse as: 'the use of the internet or other electronic means to direct abusive, unwanted and offensive behaviour at an individual or group of individuals.'

The UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on Broadband and Gender report[4] defines cyber violence against women to include: 'hate speech (publishing a blasphemous libel), hacking (intercepting private communications), identity theft, online stalking (criminal harassment) and uttering threats. It can entail convincing a target to end their lives (counselling suicide or advocating genocide). The

Internet also facilitates other forms of violence against girls and women including trafficking and sex trade.'

The concept that offline "real world" human rights apply to the digital world is now widely accepted[5]. However, the underlying reasons and approach towards

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[3] Laxton, Clare, "Virtual World: Real Fear: Women's Aid Report into Online Abuse, Harassment, and Stalking", *Women's Aid*, September, 2013, Accessed on May 22, 2017, https://1q7dqy2unor827bqjls0c4rn-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Women_s_Aid_Virtual_World_Real_Fear_Feb_2014-3.pdf.

[4] "Cyber Violence against Women and Girls: A world-wide wake-up call," *Broadband Commission Working Group on Gender*, September 2015. Note that at time of publication of Draft F, the report had been withdrawn with the aim to update and fix mistakes. As at 26 November 2015, the report remained available online at: http://www.unwomen.org/~/media/he9adquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259.

[5] UN HRC (29 June 2012). The Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/20/L.13). Available online: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/alldocs.aspx?doc_id=20280.

understanding the nature of online harassment is different from that of offline harassment. This is because online platforms in general have historically provided anonymity, invisibility and asynchronicity. Examining the approach taken towards the nature of many online platforms provide an insight into the way that an individual can behave offline, and though the Online Disinhibition Effect[6] may offer plausible reasons for why online harassment exists, it does in no way detract from the issue of harassment itself.

Almost from its inception, the internet has been viewed as a neutral space for all, irrespective of one's gender, caste, class, and other social indicators. This idealistic view, however, is one whose flaws and inaccuracies have become more evident in recent years. Due to these perceptions, inequalities in digital spaces are neither adequately acknowledged nor dealt with. Digital spaces around the world are lopsided, seemingly favouring and rewarding the behaviours and trends that benefit dominant ideologies, and acts as a primary reason behind forms of harassment that prevail online and occur on a vast scale. In order to truly tackle the origins and outcomes of online violence, we must first take a more critical approach to the degree of intersectionality in online spaces and the experiences of users whose identity is not the dominant one.[7]

Women in Pakistan are a numerical minority in online spaces, and as such are not generally seen as owners or in control of said spaces. If and when they try to assert their right over these spaces, there is often swift action against them in the form of gendered harassment. With around 75-80% of online users being male, the systems of oppression that exist in offline spaces replicate themselves online to become dangerous for women.[8]

Furthermore, online abuse is not perceived as a serious form of violence or an issue that warrants serious action. Bailey notes that, "[o]ne of the most common methods

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[6] Suler, John, "The Online Disinhibition Effect", *Cyber Psychology and Behavior*, 2004, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 321, Accessed on May 22, 2017, http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/1094931041291295.

[7] Poland, Bailey, "Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online," Potomac Books, University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

[8] Haque and Popalzai, "Pakistan Internet Use Survey 2013."

for dismissing the effects of online abuse is to insist that the internet is not a space that we should take seriously. In this approach, the internet is presented as an unreal or liminal environment that cannot have offline effects, because internet harassment is not as "real" as offline harassment."[9]

While men also face online harassment, studies have shown that online abuse is overwhelmingly faced by women, with the nature of the harassment being gendered in terms of language et al. A 2016 study conducted in Australia found that 76% of women under 30 had faced abuse and harassment online. Similar trends can be observed all over the world.[10] The Pew Research Centre also released an in-depth study on the subject in 2014. It found that young adults were more likely to experience online abuse and harassment. The research also went onto highlight that while men and women may both be harassed online, the nature of harassment for women is very different. While men in general experience "less severe" forms of harassment, women, on the other hand, experienced sustained harassment in higher numbers. It was found that women were sexually harassed and stalked more often than men.[11] While women are harassed on the basis of their gender, men often face gender-neutral abuse. In its report "Gendered Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan", Digital Rights Foundation found that the abuse faced by women is of a different nature than men—gendered abuse directed at women takes on a more psychological shape than that of abuse directed at women.[12]

[9] Bailey, "Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online," p. 112.

[10] Hunt, Ellie. "Online harassment of women at risk of becoming 'established norm', study finds," *The Guardian*. March 7, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/mar/08/online-harassment-of-women-at-risk-of-becoming-established-norm-study.

[11] Duggan, Maeve, "5 facts about online harassment", Pew Research Center. October 30, 2014, Accessed May 22, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/10/30/5-facts-about-online-harassment/.

[12] "Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan," Digital Rights Foundation. December 31, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, http://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Surveillance-of-Female-Journalists-in-Pakistan.pdf.

Studies that measure harassment have focused on the impact on college and university students, given that they are more prone and susceptible to online harassment and abuse, due to their extended and prolific use of digital spaces.[13]

In Pakistan, despite the dearth of data around online harassment, the official reporting figures provides some insight into the extent of the problem. The Federal Investigation Authority (FIA) has stated that in 2015 only five per cent of cases of harassment were reported and followed by legal action of any kind.[14] The authority has also separately pointed out that during 2015 around 3,000 crimes were reported, and 45% of these consisted of women being targeted on social media.[15]

This intersection of online and offline spaces has often had serious, even deadly, consequences offline, at times turning lethal for women in Pakistan. Qandeel Baloch, a social media icon in Pakistan, received a barrage of abuse and harassment for her bold online persona. The manner in which Qandeel reclaimed online spaces for herself did not just unsettle societal norms, but also resulted in her own brother murdering her in cold blood in June 2016.[16] Qandeel's case is not unique, in April of the same year, a teenage man stabbed his sister and left her to bleed to death at the footsteps of their home after he found her using a mobile phone to talk to a man.[17]

The infamous Kohistan Case is another incident involving violence, gender and technologies. A short clip of five young women laughing and dancing was circulated in 2010, which resulted in an honour killing of all five girls. It was claimed that the 'honour' of the families had been tarnished because the video was distributed and

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[13] Alexy, Eileen M., Burgess, Ann W., Baker, Timothy, Smoyak, Shirley A., "Perceptions of Cyberstalking Among College Students", Oxford University Press: Brief Treatment and Crisis Intervention 2005 5(3):279-289; doi:10.1093/brief-treatment/mhi020.

[14] "Social Media harassment in Pakistan: only 5% cases registered in 2015", More: Technology and Business Magazine. Accessed May 22, 2017, http://www.moremag.pk/2015/12/18/social-media-harassment-in-pakistan-only-5-cases-registered-in-2015/

[15] "Cyber harassment in Pakistan", *Al-Jazeera*. December 13, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/201612130107-0025335.

[16] Gabol, Imran and Subhani, Taser, "Qandeel Baloch murdered by brother in Multan: police", *Dawn*. July 23, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1271213.

[17] AFP and Summers, Chris, "Man stabs his 16-year-old sister to death in Pakistan 'honour killing' - because she was using a mobile phone," *Daily Mail Online*. April 28, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3563679/Pakistan-police-arrest-man-honour-killing-sister.html.

seen by a large number of people. The case took a bizarre turn after the people of the village, along with the families of the women, claimed that the girls had not been killed and were in fact still alive. A second set of similar looking women were introduced to the commission constituted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, however it was later found to be fabricated evidence. One of the young women even had her thumbprint disfigured so that her identity could not be confirmed.[18]

Honour killings, however, are only at the extreme end of the spectrum of abuse that women in Pakistan – and indeed all across the world – face online. It is extremely important to measure just how much online spaces are being used by women in Pakistan, and how their use is stymied because of safety and security concerns.

The subject of online harassment is complex and multifaceted. Due to the social power dynamics that exist in Pakistan, incidents of gender-based online violence and abuse cannot be separated from structural inequality of women in society, sexual discrimination, disparity in access, and gendered participation and decision-making in policy of the country. Moreover, online violence encompasses and is encompassed by offline socio-cultural issues such as domestic abuse and sexual harassment, and it is further buttressed and aggravated by factors that prevent women from exercising their right to justice, such as lack of familial support and ineffective platforms that can ensure redress. Not only that, it is posited that online abuse and gender-based violence disproportionately affects women because of the existing structural inequality and discrimination vis-a-vis men.

In our conversations with young women during the data-gathering phase for this study, we came across women from various backgrounds and walks of life who told us their stories. There were those who faced extreme humiliation on account of online abuse because of conservative familial structures, or lack of a decent support system; there were also stories of tribal courts meetings and honour, issues of job security because of defamation, blackmail, and even abuse from law enforcement officials.

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[18] Constable, Pamela, "In Pakistan, five girls were killed for having fun. Then the story took an even darker twist," The Washington Post. December 17, 2016, Accessed May 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-pakistan-five-girls-were-killed-for-having-fun-then-the-story-took-an-even-darker-twist/2016/12/16/f2adbd5e-c13a-11e6-92e8-c07f4f671da4_story.html.

While this report identifies a wide array of issues and consequences related to online harassment, at the same time, it is important to note that each case of harassment is unique and its reality complex. This report in no way aims to negate the significance of other aspects, or experiences of online harassment, that cannot be accommodated within its scope.[19]

Some different forms (although not mutually exclusive or an extension to offline abuse and existing gender based violence) of online gender based harassment are:

I) HATE SPEECH

Online hate speech is any electronic communication that attacks a person on the basis of their identity, opinions, religious views, backgrounds, etc.

II) DOXXING[20]

Doxxing is the practice of leaking and publishing an individual's personally identifiable information. This information is meant to target, locate and contact an individual, usually through social media, discussion boards, chat rooms and the like; and more often than not, it is accompanied by cyber bullying and cyber stalking.

III) ACCESSING AND DISSEMINATING PRIVATE DATA WITHOUT CONSENT

This involves viewing, using, sharing, disseminating and manipulating data such as photographs, personal information, etc. without consent. This breach of personal

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[19] "Online Harassment a Form of Censorship", *Software Freedom Law Centre, India*, 2016, http://sflc.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/OnlineHarassment_SFLCin.pdf;

"Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2015: Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women," Accessed on May 22, 2017, http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file.

[20] Bailey, "Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online".

privacy is often done by stealing passwords, hacking, identity theft. The practice involves using personal data for the purposes of defaming the individual or harnessing personal profits. It may exist over social media in the form of fake profiles through the use of an individual's pictures and personal information, or even take the form of illicit and illegal transactions when perpetrators get hold of back details and national identity data.

IV) CYBERBULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Cyberbullying is the practice of deliberately abusing or harassing someone over the Internet. This form of harassment can include threats, incitement to physical violence, vandalism, blackmail, sexual remarks and false accusations that are meant to humiliate, threaten or discredit the victim.[21]

V) CYBERSTALKING

Cyberstalking is the practice of tracking, monitoring and collecting information or pictures of an individual to monitor their daily activities. This is done through the use of blogs, photo-sharing websites and social media. It usually involves sending individuals threatening instant/text messages, emails and social media posts. In this sense, cyberstalking is often accompanied by cyberbullying and harassment offline.[22]

UNDERLYING FACTORS

As laid out by the UNHRC, human rights apply both offline and online, with "fundamental freedoms", such as free speech and right against discrimination, and the obligations that accompany them, being applicable online as well. All internet users have certain freedoms and obligations with respect to others that they must take into consideration when using the Internet.

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[21] Mantilla, Karla, "Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media," Feminist *Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 2013, pp. 563-570, Accessed May 22, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23719068.
[22] Mantilla, "Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media".

It is not always necessary for women to have an online presence in order to suffer gendered violence that originated online. For those that do, however, online and offline spaces are interconnected and interrelated,[23] as there is usually a calculable link between online and offline harassment. As noted earlier, offline sociocultural issues extend to the online sphere, and the sociocultural backdrop of Pakistan, with its prevailing notions and realities of gender disparity and discrimination, feeds online gender-based violence. For a lot of women there is a lack of awareness about what constitutes online abuse and the action that can be taken to prevent or report it.

There are several reasons why online gender-based violence exists, such as: socioeconomic status, accessibility to Internet, ineffectiveness of platforms and organizations that can provide redress and justice, lack of digital literacy and awareness on how to protect individual rights, normalization of online abuse, existing inequalities and cultural norms, unequal participation in decision making policies, and reluctance to report abuse because of social stigma.[24]

WHY DO WE NEED TO COMBAT ONLINE VIOLENCE?

The nature of online harassment that most women face in the country may take any number of forms: from name calling, sexual remarks and rape threats, to honour killing. Depending upon magnitude, severity, form of the harassment and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, online environment can become hostile, resulting in intimidation and censorship of women's voices. Furthermore, a link can be drawn between cyber harassment and emotional trauma and mental stress. Online abuse can be extremely emotionally and physically exhausting for women's well-being as well as threatening to her ego, confidence and self-respect. Online harassment discourages women from fully using technology, violates human rights, and instead works to reaffirm and perpetuate gender stereotypes and discrimination.

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[23] "Internet Governance Forum (IGF) 2015: Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women," Accessed on May 22, 2017, http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file.
[24] Bailey, "Haters: Harassment, Abuse, and Violence Online".

The Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF) noted that:

> 'Gender-based violence can, among other things, limit women's ability to take advantage of the opportunities that ICTs provide for the full realisation of women's human rights, act as a barrier to access that can exacerbate the gender digital gap, violate women's human rights, and reproduce gender stereotypes and discrimination.'[25]

Studies and resources used for this literature review have focused either on the global north in terms of their results and potential lessons to be learned, or aided in highlighting how relevant data is missing in this part of the world. This study is trying to address these gaps in data. Substantial evidence towards online abuse and harassment in Pakistan has never been quantified in this manner before. The evidence found through this report adds to meaningful discourses and advocacy on how we can tackle these issues.

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[25] "IGF Best Practice Forum on Gender: Gender and Access (2016): Overcoming Barriers to Enable Women's Meaningful Internet Access," Accessed on May 22, 2017, http://www.intgovforum.org/multilingual/index.php?q=filedepot_download/3406/437.

RESEARCH METHODS

Given the purpose of the study and the large number of respondents, it was decided that the research would be quantitative in nature. This method is most appropriate for our study because it helps measure the variables in a uniform manner across the country.

These surveys were conducted during the Digital Rights Foundation's digital security awareness raising sessions at universities as part of the organization's campaign, '*Hamara* Internet' ("Our Internet"). The campaign, specifically catering to colleges and universities in Pakistan, was launched in 2016 and serves to bridge the gender digital divide through capacity building with regards to using the internet securely, promoting equitable access to technology, fostering digital literacy and networking for advocacy around the issue digital rights of women.

Most importantly, the campaign purpose was multifold. Firstly, it is part of a larger effort to participate in digital rights debates within the local context of Pakistan. This is extremely necessary for the civil society, and especially given the lack of voices stemming from the Global South. Secondly, the campaign gives an opportunity for an increase in education, knowledge, skills and capacity for engagement amongst young female Pakistanis as part of a larger agenda to cooperate and collaborate with the civil society on tackling cybercrime and security.

The digital security awareness raising sessions were conducted at the following universities:

1. City University, Peshawar
2. Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar
3. Bacha Khan University, Charsadda
4. University of Sindh, Jamshoro
5. Sindh Agriculture University, Tandojam
6. Habib University, Karachi

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7. Institute of Business Management, Karachi

8. NUST, Islamabad

9. Model College for Girls, Islamabad

10. GC University, Sialkot

11. Fatima Jinnah University, Rawalpindi

12. COMSATS, Lahore

13. FC College, Lahore

14. Karakoram International University, Gilgit

15. BUITEMS, Quetta

16. University of Balochistan, Quetta

17. Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

The sample size for this report is large, and contains a variety of female college students from varied backgrounds, educational institutes, places of origin and age brackets.

The participants consisted of both young women students and their female teachers, specifically those teachers that were present during the *Hamara* Internet sessions. It was decided that the study would be conducted through these sessions, with these particular participants, because as previously outlined in the literature review, this segment of the population is the most active in digital tools and spaces.

While the campaign has trained more than 1,800 students and teachers across the country, the report only makes use of approximately 1,400 survey responses. This is in part because the results of the pilot survey disseminated in City University Peshawar were not included with the rest. The pilot survey was developed to gauge attitudes and behaviours, however, many parts of it were lacking and had to be revised based on the feedback that we received during the first session. Apart from this, the number of surveys also fell as the exercise was made voluntary and some students opted not to fill out the surveys following the trainings.

The surveys used for the purpose of this study were double-blind questionnaires. This was because issues relating to online violence, abuse and harassment are still

considered taboo in certain areas of public discourse in Pakistan. Women often opt not to engage in conversations surrounding these issues for fear of retribution. Furthermore, it was due to this reason that the campaign was restricted to women, as the presence of men more often than not ensures that women self-censor or simply do not speak. In the same vein, the double-blind surveys – which effectively ensured that neither the participants nor the researchers could tell the other's identity – helped the participants feel safe while providing answers. Moreover, the nature of the survey also helps remove the chance of placebo effects and experimental bias. Given the sensitivity of the issues in question, we posit that this was an appropriate research method for this study.

The surveys were collected and tabulated after each workshop. The results were collated and analysed against various indicators. The data was further broken down by age - where students were divided into three groups: below the age of 18, between the ages of 18 and 25, and above the age of 25 - and by region: Lahore, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Gilgit, Charsadda, Multan and Sialkot.

DATA ANALYSIS

1. DIGITAL LITERACY

Our research for this study contextualizes the use of Information Communications Technology (ICT's) to broadcast threatening, humiliating and abusive content that targets women in Pakistan. When such incidents do occur, many victims feel vulnerable and are unaware of their rights, the actions that they can take to address the issue, and unfamiliar with the ways that they can report complaints or access justice. Online abuse may occur, concurrently or otherwise, through various avenues, such as over email, social media and chat rooms. Depending on the nature or magnitude of the problem, the type of abuse can include solicitations for sex, vandalism, false accusations, defamation and identity theft. Therefore, it is critical that women know the various actions that they can take to address such situations. It may be important here to note that with the evolution in technology, strides in improving the connectivity and access for internet users around the world, equal focus needs to be given to the increased use of technology that is used to abuse and jeopardize the rights of others.

1.1 LAWS AGAINST CYBER HARASSMENT

Respondents were asked if they were aware of the laws that existed regarding cyber harassment in Pakistan *(Figure 2).*

At 72%, a majority of the women said that they were not aware of any laws relating to cyber harassment. This statistic is startling given that knowing the relevant laws is the first step in being able to protect one's self. It is also telling that the women largely did not know about the laws given that the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill (now Act) was repeatedly making headlines in the mainstream media throughout 2016.

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The Article 14 of the Constitution of Pakistan grants all citizens the right to privacy and this right is available to all citizens, irrespective of gender (Article 25). The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) enacted in August 2016 extensively covers many aspects of online harassment and abuse. Section 21, "offences against modesty of natural person and minor," relates to the misuse of pictures and videos online and section 24 deals with the offence of "cyber stalking." Moreover, some parts of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 such as, "Abuse of authority" and "Creation of Hostile Working Environment" can also be invoked as protective measures when it comes to online harassment and abuse.

Of the respondents that did know of the laws, 81% belonged to the 18-25 age bracket, while 10% were below the age of 18 and 8% were above the age of 25. 14% of these women were from Quetta, 12% from Islamabad, 8% from Lahore, 7% from Karachi, 6% from Peshawar, 5% from Charsadda, 5% from Gilgit, 4% from Multan, 4% from Rawalpindi and 4% from Sialkot.

Figure 1: Women who knew about the cyber harassment law in Pakistan

Of those who did not know about the cyber harassment laws, 88% were between the ages of 18 and 25, while 6% were below the age of 18 and 5% were above the age of 25.
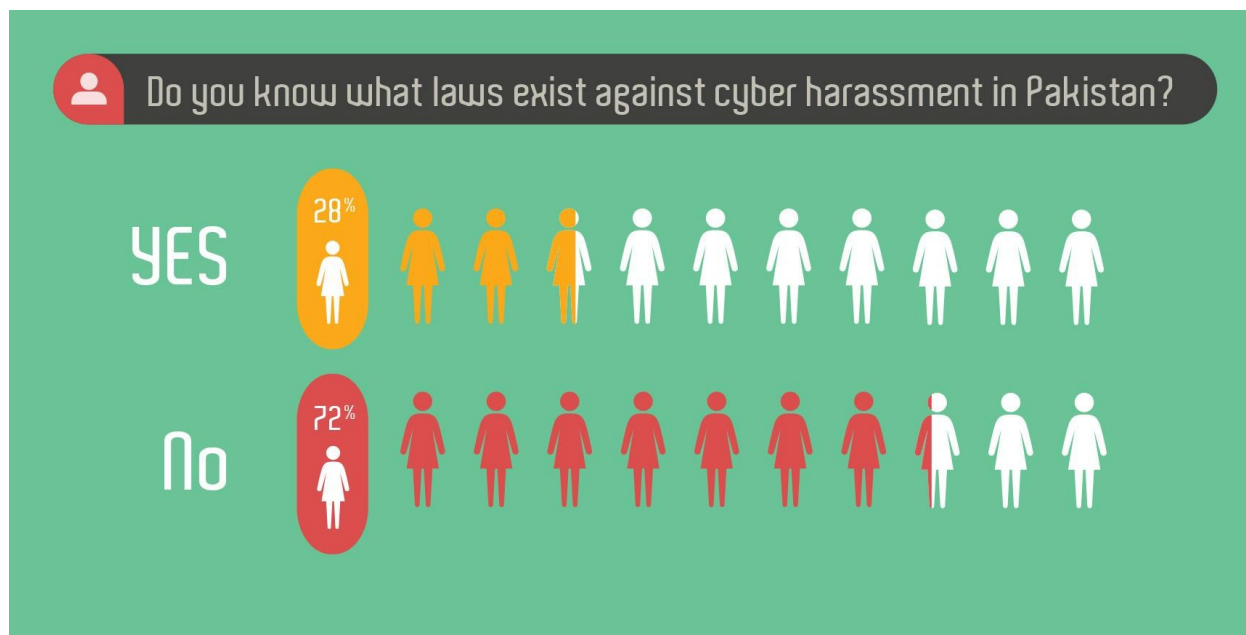

Figure 2: Knowing what laws exist against cyber harassment in Pakistan

1.2 TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA WEBSITES

The respondents were asked if they were aware of the terms and conditions of the social media websites that they use *(Figure 3)*. A total of 351 (25%) women responded that they understood the terms completely. Out of these, 85% were between the ages of 18 and 25, 9% above the age of 25 and 5% of these below the age of 18.

Of the total number of women who said they were completely aware of the terms and conditions of social media websites, 14% from Quetta, 10% from Karachi, 9% from Peshawar, 7% from Lahore, 7% from Gilgit, 2% from Islamabad, 2% from Multan, 2% from Rawalpindi, 1% from Charsadda and 1% from Sialkot.

A total number of 703 (51%) of the respondents said that they understood the terms a little, out of which 86% fell in the 18-25-age bracket, 9% were below the age of 18 and 5% above the age of 25. Of these women, 11% were from Gilgit, 11% from Islamabad, 11% from Quetta, 9% from Karachi, 7% from Charsadda, 6% from Lahore, 6% from Peshawar, 6% from Multan, 6% from Rawalpindi and 3% from Sialkot.

Out of those who did not understand them at all (a total of 146 (11%) respondents), 86% were between the ages of 18 and 25, 8% below the age of 18 and 4% above the age of age of 25. 23% of these women were from Gilgit, 14% from Quetta, 11% from Charsadda, 8% from Islamabad, 5% from Multan, 3% from Karachi, 3% from Lahore, 3% from Multan, 3% from Peshawar and 2% were from Sialkot.

Only 183 (13%) of the total number of respondents said that they did not read the terms and conditions of social media websites, and 90% of these from ages 18-25, 5% above the age of 25 and 4% below the age of 18. 15% of these respondents were from Karachi, 10% from Rawalpindi, 9% from Lahore, 8% from Quetta, 6% from Sialkot, 5% from Gilgit, 5% from Charsadda, 4% from Islamabad, 4% from Multan and 3% from Peshawar.
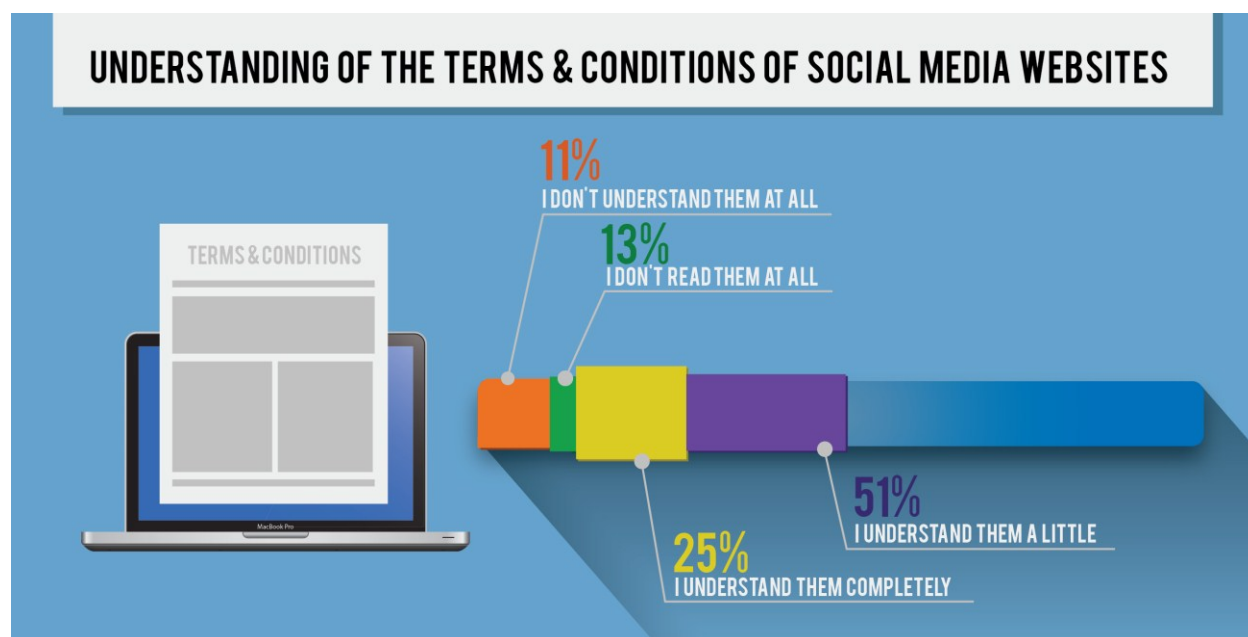

Figure 3: Understanding the terms and conditions of social media websites

The fact that only a fourth of the total sample that was surveyed felt that they knew and understood social media terms and conditions points to a problem. Taken in the context of results which reveal that most women surveyed did not know about the laws that could protect them, this must also raise alarm.

It is made worse by the fact that 59% acknowledged that they understood the terms and conditions only a little. Often, when tackling abuse, the users do not realize that the platform that the abuse has taken place on can be used to report and stop that activity. The 11% of respondents who never read the terms and conditions, along with the 15% that never understood them, are likely to have little understanding of the kind of protection that the platform offers against abuse. Facebook, for instance, has community standards that it tries to maintain, and while its systems are not without problem, given that they are yet to offer locally contextualised protection measures, the systems still do offer some help. The issue at hand is that if women do not understand these systems to begin with, they effectively forgo whatever means of protection they could have otherwise evoked.

This points to another issue as well. The respondents largely do not know what they are signing up for when they are using an online medium or tool. This means that they are handing over personal data without understanding how it will be stored, used and the consequences that can ensue. In Pakistan, a picture circulated without consent can lead to honour killings, abuse and violence. Women often have no idea how their data is being used, for how a platform manipulates the data they have given up or what dangerous may follow from the sharing of such data. A particularly relevant example of this is Facebook's policy which states that any current profile picture always remains public, irrespective of whether it is safe for the user or not.

2. USING THE INTERNET AND RELATED TOOLS

Although the access and penetration of the internet and mobile technologies has increased in recent years, a gender digital gap still persists. When addressing this gap, it is necessary to explore a meaningful access for women, which demands an

approach located within economic, social, political and cultural contexts. This includes taking into consideration the impact of online abuse and gender-based violence as a barrier to access, as well as the creation of enabling environments for the protection of women's rights online. Likewise, it is impossible to address online abuse and gender-based violence without addressing the issue of gender digital disparities.

The World Bank notes that there are 'persistent digital divides across gender, geography, age, and income dimensions within each country'. Barriers towards access include the quality and speed of access of technological developments in remote areas of Pakistan, the affordability and availability of devices in these areas, insufficient knowledge or awareness with regards to relevance of the internet and related tools, lack of digital literacy amongst women and family support to address this literacy, fear or lack of trust in technology or surveillance by family or state, security threats faced online, cultural roles and responsibilities assigned to women that prevent them from accessing technology.

2.1 ACCESS TO INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

In order to gauge how young women in Pakistan use technology, our respondents were asked about what devices they used on a regular basis. Women were told that they could select more than one option where applicable for this particular question.

The most popular response was 'smartphone' at 48%, followed by 'laptop or PC at home' at 24%, 'laptop or PC at work' at 13% and 'basic cellphone' at 15% *(Figure 4)*.
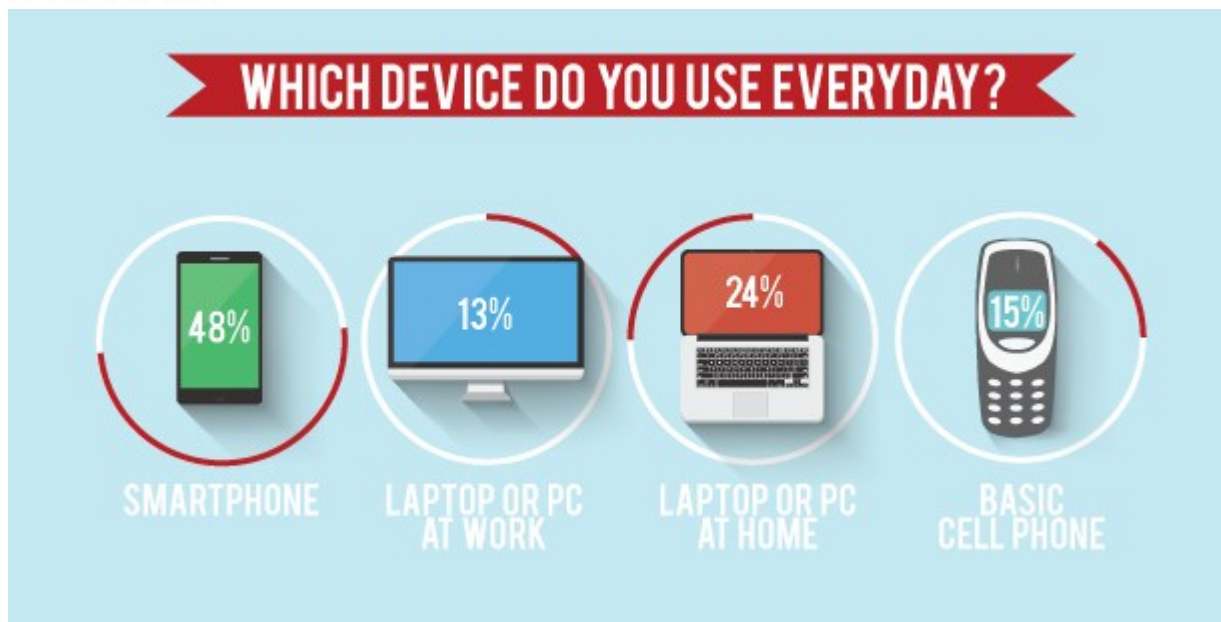
Figure 4: Which device do you use every day?

At ages below 18, 55% women used a 'smartphone', 21% used a 'laptop or PC at home', 3% used a 'laptop or PC at school', while 33% used a 'basic cellphone'. At ages between 18 and 25, 70% women used a 'smartphone', 34% used a 'laptop or PC at home', 19% used a 'laptop or PC at school', while 21% used a 'basic cellphone'. At ages above 25, 81% women used a 'smartphone', 55% used a 'laptop or PC at home', 42% used a 'laptop or PC at school', while 22% used a 'basic cellphone'.

Similarly, women were also asked about social media websites and communication apps that they used regularly. With regards to social media, the most popular response was 'Facebook' at 67%, followed by 'YouTube' at 23%, 'Twitter' at 6% and 'Instagram' at 3% *(Figure 2).* At ages below 18, 55% women used 'Facebook' and 15% used 'YouTube'. At ages between 18 and 25, 77% women used 'Facebook', 7% used 'Twitter', while 25% used 'YouTube'. At ages above 25, 81% women used 'Facebook', 53% used 'YouTube', and 14% used 'Twitter'.

On the other hand, the most popular responses for messaging apps were 'WhatsApp' at 79%, 'Skype' at 15%, and 'Viber' at 6% *(Figure 5).* At ages below 18, 81% women used 'WhatsApp', 15% used 'Skype' and 4% used Viber. At ages between 18 and 25, 83%

women used 'WhatsApp', 15% used 'Skype', while 4% used 'Viber'. At ages above 25, 93% women used 'WhatsApp', 36% used 'Skype', and 35% used 'Viber'.
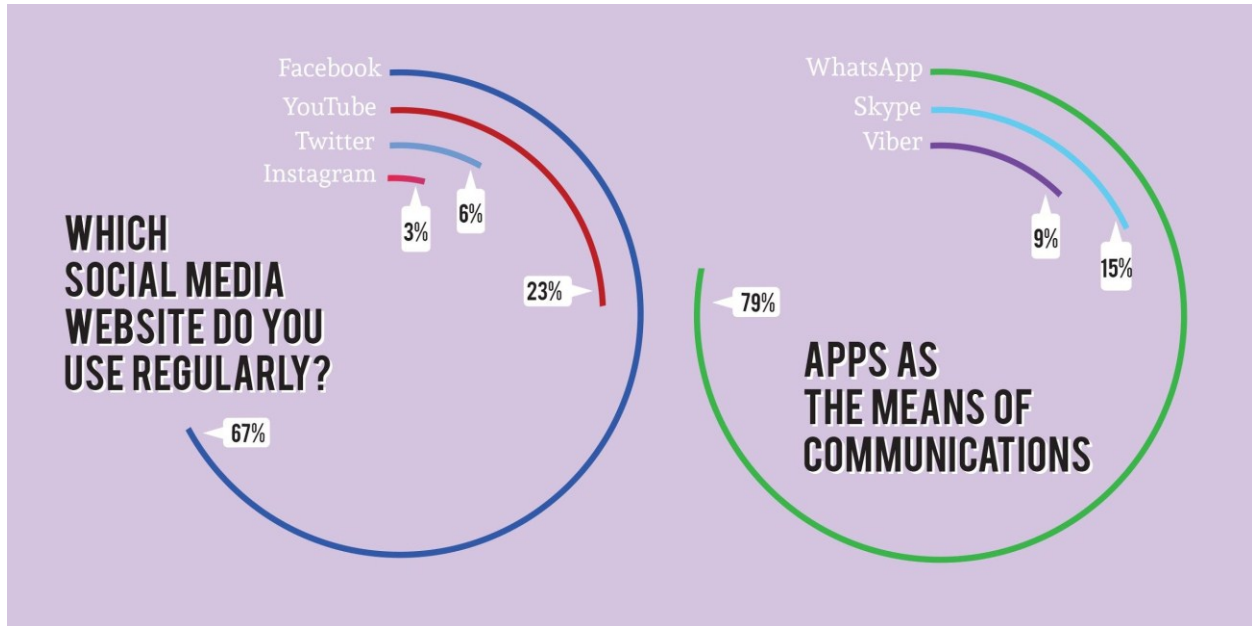

Figure 5: Using social media websites and communication apps

The numbers that we have encountered for Facebook correspond with FIA reports which state that a majority of the harassment cases they come across are taking place on Facebook. Facebook is the most used platform for various age groups that we were surveyed through this study.

WhatsApp, which is also owned by Facebook, is another extremely popular platform and at the heart of many cases of harassment, reported or otherwise. Both the platforms are user favourites, which means that any form of strategy to help women reclaim online spaces, and fight back against abuse, needs to take into account the sheer numbers in which the platform is being used. Women need to be better educated in terms of not just the policies that these platforms have, but also how their data is being used, how they are disseminating their own information online, and how they can fight back if that data or their online presence ever comes into jeopardy.

2.2 FREQUENCY OF USE

In order to gauge how college and university-going women in different regions of the country accessed the internet, respondents were asked various questions that determined how often they used the internet and related technological tools. 79% of the respondents said that they used technological devices such as computers and cell phones on a regular basis, while 21% said that they did not *(Figure 6)*.

Figure 6: How often do you use technological devices?

Out of the respondents who did use technology on a regular basis, the highest percentage of women were between the ages of 18 and 25 at 89%, followed by women above the age of 25 and women below the age of 18 at 7% and 4% respectively. Out of the women who used technology regularly, 7% belonged to Lahore, 10% to Karachi, 11% to Quetta, 6% to Peshawar and 6% to Gilgit. Of the women who did not use technology on a regular basis, the highest percentage was from Gilgit at 19%, followed by Quetta at 8%. Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar stood at 1% each.

2.3 PERSONAL INFORMATION ONLINE

When asked about how much information they thought existed about them online, 35% said that there was "very little", 34% said that there was "little", 25% said that there was "some" and 6% responded that there was "a lot" *(Figure 7).*
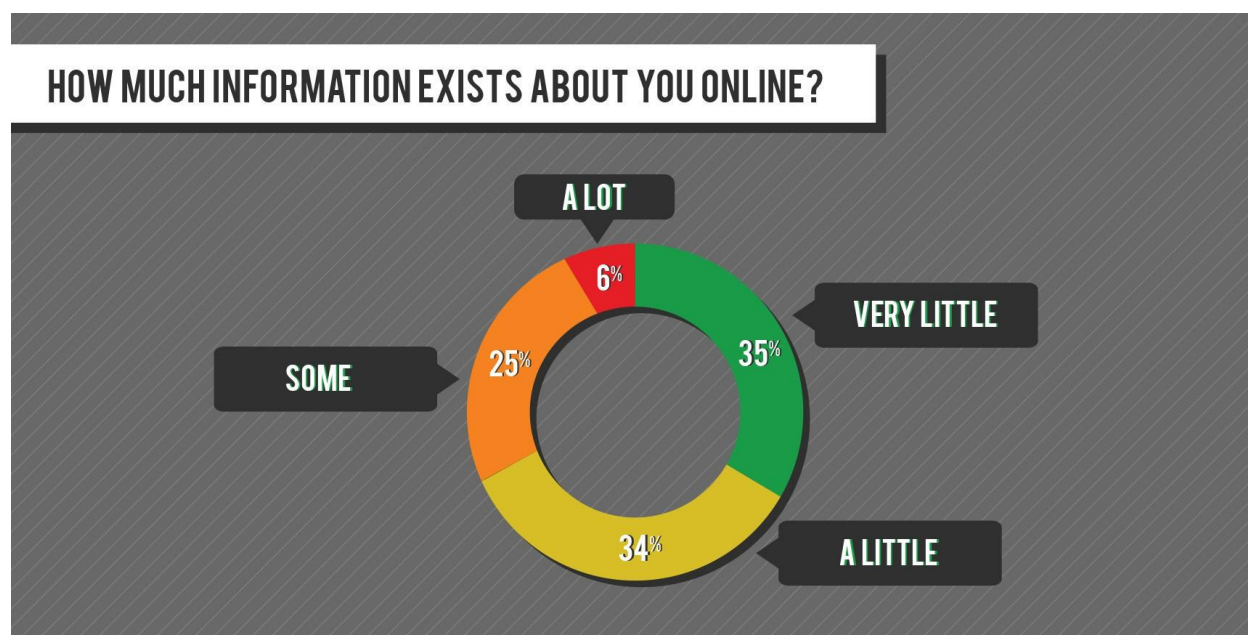
Figure 7: How much information about you exists online?

Despite these numbers, it is important to mention that often these young women did not realize what data trails they were leaving behind – a fact uncovered during our trainings. To add to this, many women have also opted to use digital tools and spaces anonymously owing to fears for their own security and safety. This suggests some knowledge on part of those women about digital privacy, digital shadows and the consequences of their online presence.

3. ENGAGING WITH ONLINE GENDER BASED HARASSMENT

Online harassment is a loaded term, and has different connotations for different people. We asked our respondents various questions about how they engaged with the internet, and how well they understood what harassment itself entails.

3.1 DEFINING ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In order to understand how young women in Pakistan understand and perceive cyber harassment, respondents were asked to select the definition(s) of online sexual harassment they identified most closely with. The most popular response to this question was, 'misusing someone's online data' at 33%, while 'calling someone offensive and abusive things in the comments sections of Facebook posts or websites' was at 20%, 'getting into contact with someone's family or friends and disclosing their personal photos and information' was at 18%, 'threatening someone with physical violence for their views' was at 15% and 'accessing someone's email or online accounts without their permission' was at 14% *(Figure 8)*.

ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT CAN BE DEFINED AS:

20% CALLING SOMEONE OFFENSIVE AND ABUSIVE THINGS IN THE COMMENT SECTIONS OF FACEBOOK POSTS OR ON WEBSITES

18% GETTING INTO CONTACT WITH SOMEONE'S FAMILY OR FRIENDS AND DISCLOSING THEIR PERSONAL PHOTOS AND INFORMATION

33% MISUSING SOMEONE'S ONLINE DATA INCLUDING THEIR PHOTOS, POSTS ETC. AN EXAMPLE WOULD BE PHOTOSHOPPING SOMEONE'S PICTURES

14% ACCESSING SOMEONE'S EMAIL OR ONLINE ACCOUNTS WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION

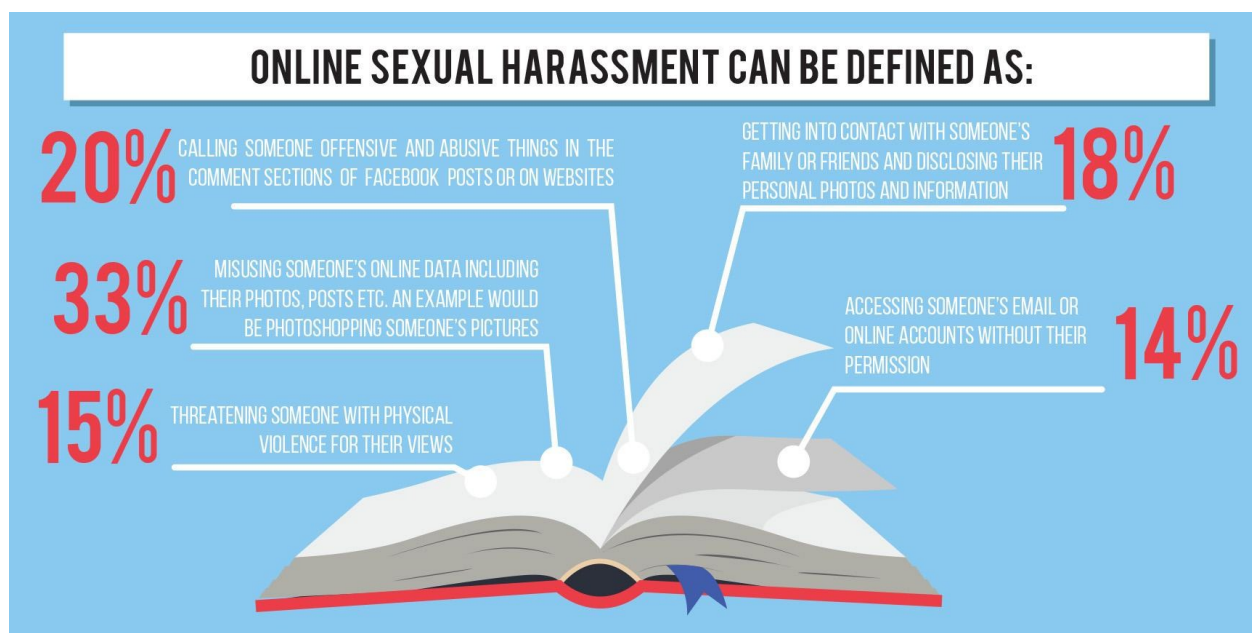**15%** THREATENING SOMEONE WITH PHYSICAL VIOLENCE FOR THEIR VIEWS

Figure 8: Defining online sexual harassment

The wide range of responses, with close margins between each, shows that there are different understandings amongst young Pakistani women about what constitutes online harassment. The fact that different perceptions about online sexual harassment exist means that the lines between the forms of online harassment are blurry, which makes the issue of online sexual harassment extremely complex and all the more necessary to be investigated.

It can be argued that the perception of what online harassment is has a lot to do with first or second hand experience of our respondents. As a result, 'threatening someone with physical violence for their views', a less common occurrence compared to, 'calling someone offensive and abusive things in the comments sections of Facebook posts or websites' accounts for its low percentage of 15% for this question. At the same time, hacking or 'accessing someone's email or online accounts without their permission', although a generally common phenomenon, is at 14%, and the lowest for this question. This discrepancy in the results shows that the various respondents have different thresholds for how they engage with and respond to different forms of online harassment. While this can be due to lack of knowledge about individual rights, education and awareness about negative consequences of online harassment, it is also due to normalization of certain conducts with regards to the internet.

Our respondents live in a culture where the distinction between private and public can or may be blurred, so that the 'accessing someone's email or online accounts without their permission' or 'getting into contact with someone's family or friends and disclosing their personal photos and information' does not necessarily construe 'harassment', and hence, accounts for the lowest percentages for this question. It may as well be true that a lot of the respondents could have taken the word 'harassment' in question quite literally, which explains the high figures for the two most popular responses, 'misusing someone's online data' at 33%, and 'calling someone offensive and abusive things in the comments sections of Facebook posts or websites' at 20%.

3.2 IDENTIFYING PLATFORMS PRONE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In another question, respondents were asked about what platforms they thought were most prone to harassment in order to further gauge how they identified with and recognized online sexual harassment.

Out of the total number of responses, 50% were 'social media', 22% were 'comment sections on websites or blogs', 14% were 'online forums and chatrooms' and 14% were 'messaging apps like WhatsApp or Viber' *(Figure 9)*.

Figure 9: Platforms worse in online harassment

Once again, these figures may be attributed to first and second hand experiences of our respondents. The large numbers of the young Pakistani women in our sample size that use of social media extensively (as discussed earlier) explains the large percentage of respondents who believe that social media is most prone to sexual harassment. Unfortunately, the numbers also somewhat correspondent with FIA's

earlier released data stating that 45% of all cases of harassment on social media had women as victims.

Women are not seen as owners of online spaces, and as more and more women make their way into the digital realm it is no surprise that the amount of electronic violence against women also rises.

3.3 PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to understand how women engage with various internet tools, survey respondents were asked about how they felt when using the internet and what protocols they followed. When asked about whether they feel comfortable and safe using social media *(Figure 11)* and whether they feel comfortable sharing their pictures and posts with others *(Figure 12)*, there was a varied response across the board.

While several respondents gave a neutral response to feeling comfortable and safe on social media (39%), an almost equal percentage of them reported that they do not. An overwhelming percentage disagreed (36%) or strongly disagreed (10%) with the fact that they felt safe. This stands in a stark contrast to the percentage of respondents who agreed (10%) or strongly agreed (5%). Moreover, in another question, a large majority (70%) of the total number of respondents who participated in the survey stated that they were afraid of posting pictures online because they could be misused.

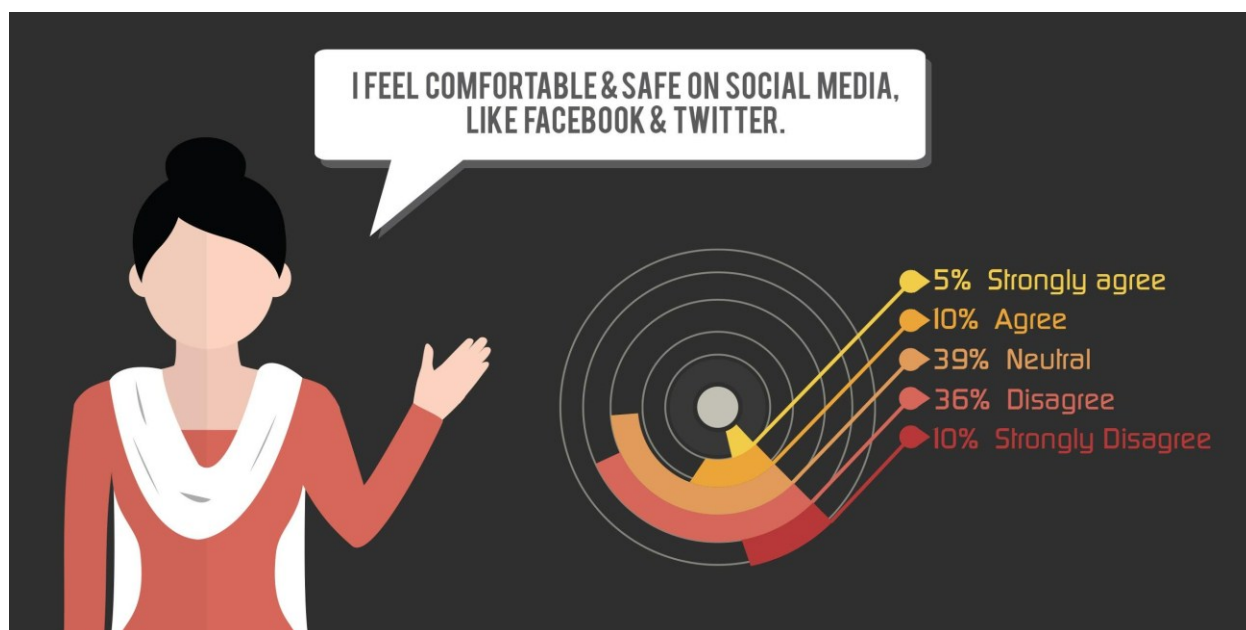*Figure 10: Whether women are afraid of posting pictures online*

Figure 11: Feeling comfortable and safe on social media

Similarly, when asked if they felt they could share their pictures and posts with others, most of the respondents disagreed (37%) and strongly disagreed (29%). A mere 3% of the respondents strongly agreed, 12% agreed, while 19% were neutral. This means more than 60% of the respondents do not think that they should share their pictures

and posts with too wide an audience. Given that women have been blackmailed and pushed to do countless unspeakable things because of leaked and even doctored pictures – these statistics are not a surprise, rather they are a call to action. Online spaces should be safe enough for women to be able to use them in the same way that men do.

Once again, the fact that women do not see themselves as owners of online spaces is a recurring problem. The prevalent feeling of insecurity amongst such a large sample of women points to the hostility that they face in these spaces.
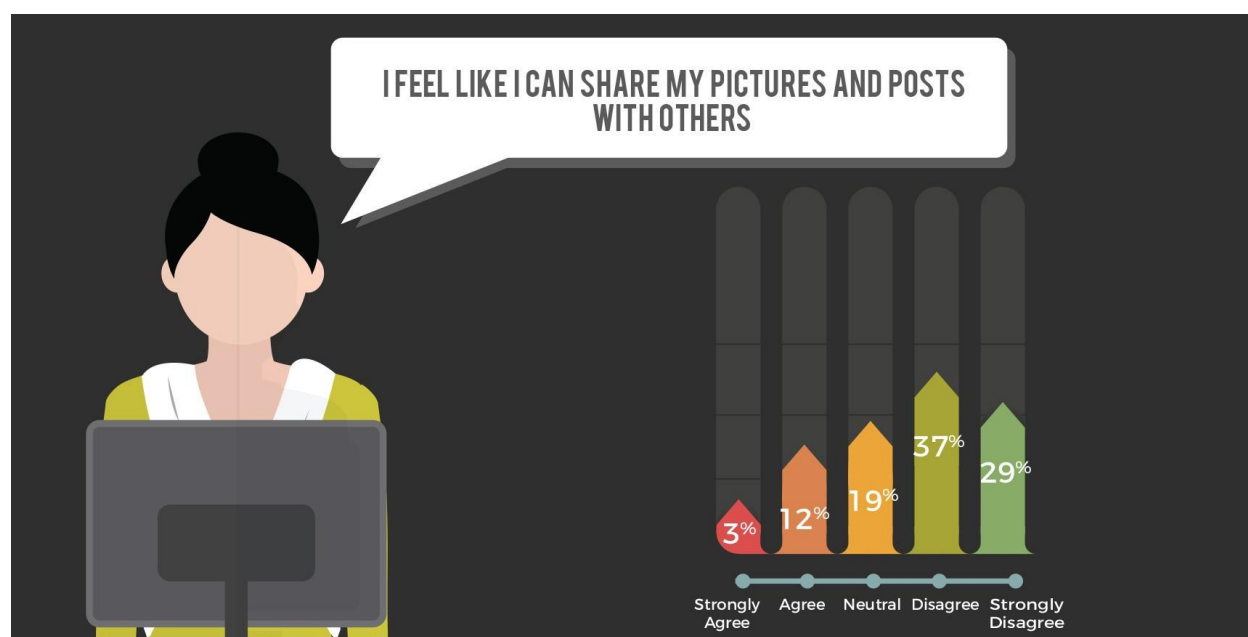

Figure 12: Sharing pictures and posts with others

On a similar note, 35% of the respondents stated that they 'strongly agree' and 43% stated that they 'agree' with the fact that while using the internet, they made sure that only their friends could see their posts online because they felt unsafe otherwise *(Figure 13)*. This confirms the idea that women often limit or restrict their presence online so as to avoid threats and dangers online.

As compared to these figures, there was a small number (5%) who strongly disagreed, (6%) who disagreed and (11%) who were neutral with the statement. It is encouraging to see that some proportion of women, albeit small, felt safe sharing their posts publicly. However, just barely 11% of the total sample is an extremely small number of women – often these are the women who bear the brunt of trying to break stereotypes and taboo.

Figure 13: Making sure that only friends can see posts online

The results for the questions above reveal a similar pattern: the perceived danger of social media presence. While the large figures can, once again, be a product of the high number of respondents who have access to social media, they may also reflect the lack of knowledge and confidence with regards to reporting harassment over social media.

At the same time, it may be worth noting that the topic of online sexual harassment is multifaceted, and can trigger varied responses from people based on the different contexts and situations. We therefore asked respondents how they felt about online harassment and taking action against it. 39% of the women said that they felt

reporting online harassment tarnishes their name and reputation, and 33% said that reporting online harassment could put them in more danger. This doesn't just point towards women's attitudes, but also shows that we do not truly know how large the number of women that face harassment really is.

There was a varied response to when respondents were asked about whether girls that are harassed online are at fault *(Figure 14)*, the majority however, disagreed at 30% and strongly disagreed at 28%, while some agreed at 15%, strongly agreed at 8% or were neutral at 19%. Moreover, when asked about whether they thought girls should abstain from social media if they were harassed, the majority of the respondents, strongly disagreed at 45%, disagreed at 32% to the fact that girls that are harassed should stop using social media *(Figure 15)*. A small number of respondents agreed at 6%, strongly agreed 8% and were neutral 9%.

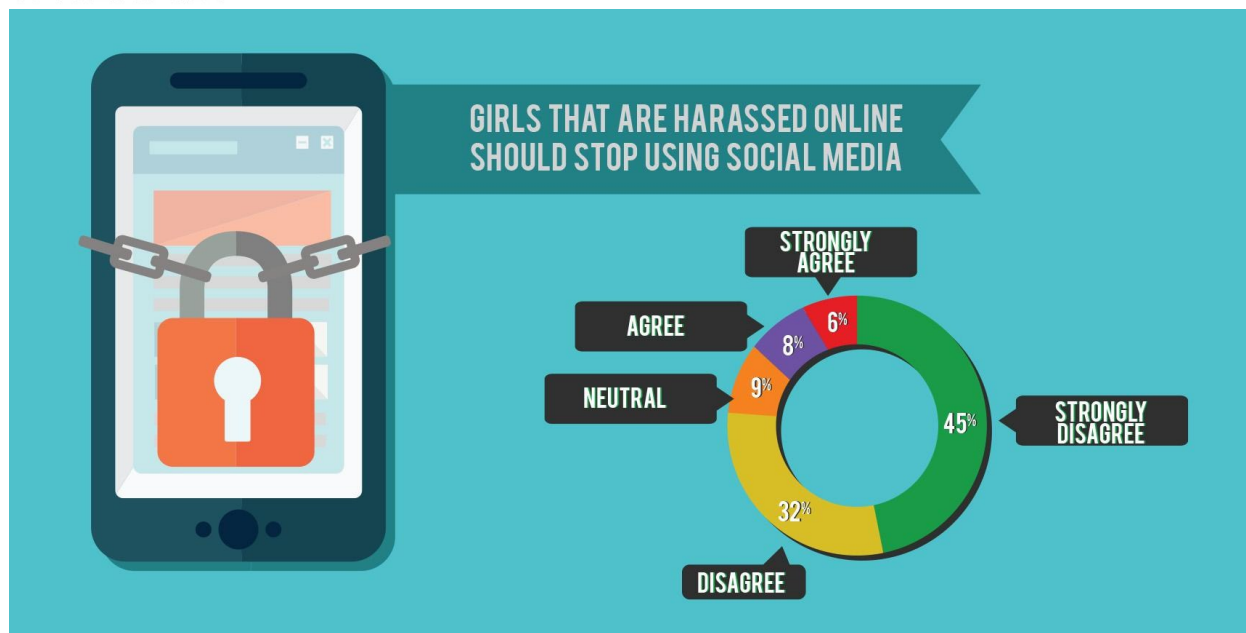*Figure 14: Girls that are harassed online are at fault*

Figure 15: Girls that are harassed online should stop using social media

Pakistan's cultural taboos and stigmas are at play where women, despite being the victims, are often seen as being the root cause of their own harassment. Women who believe reporting only puts them in danger are also speaking from some kind of experience – even if it's not first hand. That experience is rooted in the fact that Pakistan has seen many murders that have digital roots. This is one of the core reasons that women do not see themselves as owners of online spaces, since these are spaces that endanger them just as much as they facilitate them.

However, that being said, our study also found some positive results. When asked if girls that are harassed are at fault the women being surveyed strongly sided with the victims. The same was the case with whether harassed women should quit social media. This is a positive sign that a significant number of women are now seeing online spaces as perhaps their own – despite the abuse and harassment they face.

4. TALKING ABOUT PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

In order to gather data about and investigate incidents of online sexual harassment concerning young women in Pakistan, we asked our respondents various questions about their personal experiences with regards to using the internet. Our research highlights two major things:

1) Girls and young women, regardless of age, are extremely prone to online gender-based harassment.
2) There is generally a larger percentage of online harassment cases in major, more progressive cities when compared to those in smaller cities. However, this is offset by the fact that there is a greater penetration of internet and ICTs in these cities.

4.1 ONLINE HARASSMENT AND ABUSE BY MALE USERS OF THE INTERNET

Our research results from the survey show that 485 (34%) of the total number of women surveyed had experienced online harassment and abuse by men. Out of these, 90% were between the ages of 18 and 25, and 5% below the age of 18 and 5% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 12% were from Quetta, 11% from Karachi, 8% from Lahore, 8% from Islamabad, 8% from Multan, 7% from Rawalpindi, 7% from Peshawar, 5% from Gilgit, 3% from Sialkot and 3% from Charsadda.

There were also large percentages of women who said that they had witnessed other women being bullied and harassed by men online *(Figure 16),* of which 25% had strongly agreed and 30% had agreed that they had. On the other hand, 19% disagreed, 9% strongly disagreed and 17% were neutral.
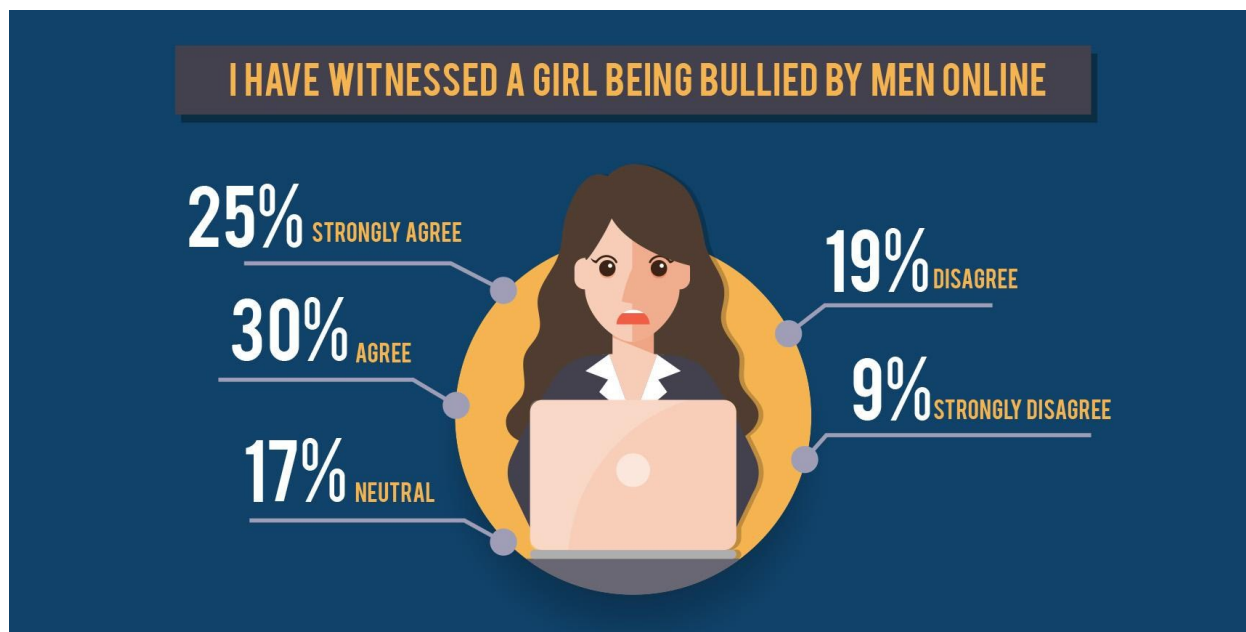
Figure 16: Witnessing a girl being bullied by men online

Communication apps such as WhatsApp and Viber are also a medium for abuse. Of the total number of young women surveyed, 567 (40%) had been stalked and harassed via messaging apps. For those women who had been, 89% were between the age of 18 and 25, 6% were below the age of 18 and 5% were above the age of 25. The majority of these women were from Quetta at 13%, followed by Karachi at 9%, Lahore at 8%, Peshawar at 8%, Gilgit at 7%, Islamabad at 4%, Multan at 4%, Rawalpindi at 4%, Charsadda at 2% and Sialkot at 1%.

Given how prevalent the use of messaging apps has become, it is important for these spaces to be safe for women. However, the results show that even here women are stalked and harassed. The 18-25 age group is the most active on digital tools, and it knows how to get the most out of it. Women use apps such as WhatsApp to share personal details, maintain friendships, conduct business, coordinate educational activities, and more. In the event that they cease or limit the use of such an app, women lose out on a lot more in exchange for reduced harassment.

Figure 17: Percentage of women talked and harassed through messaging apps

4.2 ONLINE THREATS OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Respondents were also asked about whether they had been threatened with physical violence online. While 227 (16%) of the women out of the total number who took the survey responded that they had, 85% of these women were between the ages of 18 and 25, and 9% below the age of 18 and 5% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 18% were from Quetta, 10% from Islamabad, 8% from Gilgit, 7% from Karachi, 7% from Multan, 6% from Lahore, 6% from Sialkot, 5% from Peshawar, 4% from Rawalpindi and 4% from Charsadda.

Moreover, when asked about whether they had seen other women get threatened with physical violence online, 558 (39%) women had said that they had. The majority of 88% of these women were between the ages of 18 and 25, followed by 8% below the age of 18 and 4% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 11% were from Quetta, 10% from Karachi, 7% from Lahore, 7% from Gilgit and 6% from Peshawar.

It is interesting that only 16% of the sample acknowledged harassment, whereas a staggering 39% reported that they knew someone else that had faced the threat. In Pakistan, this has been a recurring problem where women can often discuss an issue in light of someone else's experience, however, when time comes to share their own they shy away.

4.3 ONLINE STALKING

A total number of 686 (48%) women who took the survey have been stalked online, and 91% of these are between the ages of 18 and 25, and 5% above the age of 25 and 4% below the age of 18. Out of these women, 22% were from Rawalpindi, 18% from Multan, 13% from Karachi, 11% were from Quetta, 10% from Sialkot, 9% from Lahore, 8% from Peshawar, 6% from Islamabad, 4% from Gilgit and 3% from Charsadda.

This means that across the country, almost half the sample that was surveyed has faced this form of online harassment. Often, women do not understand what stalking entails to begin with. During the sessions, when milder forms of harassment were mentioned women dismissed them as though they were a joke. It is nothing new for women to downplay or ignore threats and abuse that they face on a daily basis. Often the only form of abuse, even in the case of stalking, that is acknowledged is when it poses a credible threat of physical violence. Otherwise it is not something women take seriously enough to report.

4.4 UNWANTED MESSAGES FROM STRANGERS

A total of 994 (69%) of the survey participants had received unwanted messages from strangers against their will, of which 89% of these are between the ages of 18 and 25, 6% above the age of 25 and 4% below the age of 18. Out of these women, 11% were from Quetta, 11% from Karachi, 9% from Lahore, 7% from Rawalpindi, 6% from Peshawar, 6% from Gilgit, 6% from Islamabad, 6% from Multan, 4% from Charsadda and 3% from Sialkot.

With regards to communication apps, like WhatsApp and Viber, 731 (51%) of the total number of survey participants said that they had received unwanted and lewd messages from strangers. Breaking this down, 90% of the women who received indecent messages were between the ages of 18 and 25, 5% above 25 and 5% below the age of 18. 12% of these women were from Quetta, 10% from Karachi, 8% from Lahore, 6% from Peshawar, 5% from Gilgit, 5% from Islamabad, 5% from Multan, 5% from Rawalpindi, 3% from Sialkot and 2% from Charsadda.

In response to whether they had been sent inappropriate pictures from men against their will, 422 (29%) women said that they had. The percentage of women who were between the ages of 18 and 25 was the highest at 91%, followed by those above the age of 25 at 5% and those below the age of 18 at 4%. The majority of these women were from Quetta at 14%, followed by 10% from Karachi, 9% from Peshawar 8% from Lahore, 8% from Gilgit, 3% from Multan, 2% from Islamabad, 2% from Rawalpindi, 1% from Charsadda and 1% from Sialkot.

Forced communication was another aspect that was important to measure. More than two thirds of the sample have been approached by complete strangers with messages that they did not ask for. In some cases, women can push back against this, but in many other situations fighting back is not an option, due to lack of effective countermeasures. More than half the sample received unwanted and lewd messages that they most likely did not know how to react to, or what to do with.

This is another tactic that is often used by men to silence women's voices in the digital realm. This form of interaction forces many women to take a step back, and many actually cease use of their digital tools till they feel secure again. This is essentially a method to remind women that they do not own the digital spaces that they take up, and that intrusion and abuse can take place in a matter of seconds whether they like it or not.

4.5 DATA BREACH

The women surveyed were also asked if they had been victims of online pages that leaked sensitive information about women. Of the total women surveyed, 332 (23%) women responded with a positive, out of which 88% were between the ages of 18 and 25, and 6% below the age of 18 and 6% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 16% were from Quetta, 11% from Gilgit, 7% from Peshawar, 6% from Lahore, 3% from Karachi, 2% from Charsadda, 2% from Islamabad, 2% from Multan, 1% from Rawalpindi and 1% from Sialkot.

Moreover, when asked whether they knew of someone who had had a similar experience, 694 (48%) said that that they had. 90% of these women were aged 18-25, 5% were below the age of 18 and 4% were above the age of 25. 10% of these women belonged to Karachi, 10% to Quetta, 9% to Gilgit, 8% to Peshawar, 8% to Lahore, 5% to Islamabad, 5% to Multan, 4% to Rawalpindi, 3% to Charsadda and 2% to Sialkot.

The "Gangdageer Khan" Facebook page is a prominent example of a page where women's information can be leaked to cause them harm, blackmail, harass, and force them to give up their own or other women's personal data in return for safety. This particular page resorted to extorting women into giving money, providing phone balance, other women's pictures and more in exchange for having their data removed. While the FIA did eventually bust the ring that was behind the page, much of the data that was already disseminated and it still exists in other similar pages.

While almost a fourth of the sample had experienced leaked information first hand, over half knew someone who had gone through it as well. The numbers speak for themselves. Making matters worse is the fact that women often do not know how to guard their data, or how it could be compromised because of the digital shadow they themselves have left behind.

4.6 MISUSE OF PERSONAL DATA

Out of the total number of respondents surveyed, 353 (25%) of the women had faced experiences where someone they trusted with their passwords misused their personal data. 87% of these are between the ages of 18 and 25, 8% below the age of 18 and 5% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 14% were from Gilgit, 13% from Quetta, 7% from Karachi, 5% from Peshawar, 5% from Lahore, 2% from Charsadda, 2% from Islamabad, 2% from Multan, 2% from Sialkot and 1% from Rawalpindi.

Often women's passwords are taken from them under the pretext of 'trust'. They are told to share their details to prove that they trust their partners/ boyfriends/ friends/ husbands/etc. Later it is this very practice that lands them into trouble as their data is stolen or duplicated. During the sessions that DRF conducted, this practice came to light repeatedly with some women also positing that in the patriarchal structure that they exist in, not sharing their passwords with their significant others could lead to the end of their relationship. Some women truly feared that they would be divorced or their engagements would be dissolved if they were to keep their personal data private.

Moreover, a times, women are also forced to give up their passwords to their own families. In these cases eve if their own digital hygiene kept as updated as possible, but what of the person who has taken their password. These are issues that women face on a regular basis that impede their privacy and access to ICTs.

4.7 FAKE SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES

Lastly, women were asked if they had had fake profiles made of themselves, and 334 (23%) responded with an affirmative. 91% of these women were between the ages of 18 and 25, 5% below 18 and 3% above the age of 25. The largest percentage of these women was from Karachi at 12%, followed by Quetta at 11%, 8% in Lahore, 8% in Peshawar, 7% in Gilgit, 2% in Islamabad, 2% in Multan, 2% in Rawalpindi, 1% in Charsadda and 1% in Sialkot.

Almost a fourth of women have had to deal with fake social media profiles. In Pakistan, this can lead to murder, false accusations, the loss of one's "honour", and systematic long-term abuse.

5. RESPONDING TO ONLINE GENDER BASED HARASSMENT

It is important to situate and contextualize these results within the sociocultural backdrop that our respondents are coming from in order to fully understand the survey results. For a lot of the women that we surveyed, reporting online harassment to the FIA or other law enforcement authorities was unattainable because of reasons such as family pressure, honour or loss of respect. Women, situated in a patriarchal society, are considered to be upholding moral and cultural values of the society, and resisting or deviating from any assigned norms is strongly condemned. Thus, in some cases, complaints about online sexual abuse are counterproductive and lead to victim-blaming, loss of family or social support, and even result in threats of acid attacks or honour killing.

Simply abstaining from social media, according to some women, may not be viable solution after they have experienced online sexual harassment. For one, deactivating social media accounts is a temporary solution, and as already established, women may still experience online abuse even when they are not using the internet or internet related tools. For another, a lot of the women use social media as platform to promote themselves, their ventures, express themselves and connect with likeminded people; thus abstaining from social media impedes their social and economic progress in that regard.

5.1 ABSTINENCE FROM THE INTERNET

The students were asked if they stopped using the internet as a reaction to the harassment that they had faced, and 295 (21%) of the respondents said that they had. The majority of these were in the age bracket of 18-25 at 90%, followed by 7% below 18 and 3% above the age of 25. Out of these women, 14% were from Quetta, 12% from Gilgit, 6% from Karachi, 5% from Peshawar, 4% from Lahore, 2% from Islamabad, 2% from Multan, 2% from Rawalpindi, 1% from Charsadda and 1% from Sialkot.

Figure 18: Whether women stopped using the internet due to online harassment

Moreover, when asked whether they knew of anyone who had stopped using the internet because of online dangers, 690 (48%) of them said that they had. 90% of them were between the ages of 18 and 25, 7% were below the ages of 18 and 5% above the age of 25. 12% of these women were from Quetta, 9% from Karachi, 8% from Gilgit, 7% from Lahore, 6% from Islamabad, 6% from Peshawar, 4% from Multan, 4% from Rawalpindi, 3% from Charsadda and 3% from Sialkot.

These results are quite worrying because they highlight how easily women retreat from whatever little space they have managed to take up or carve out for themselves. Despite not being at fault, they are the ones to step back and give up the space – while the perpetrators often barely suffer a scratch because of their actions.

5.2 REPORTING TO LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Law enforcement and their perception among young women was an extremely important part of our study. After trying to understand how much women understood the law, where they faced abuse, and which policies they knew about, the next step was to gauge their reactions to abuse and where they placed the blame. The last step (covered in this section) has been figuring out whether women were reporting the abuse they were facing.

The respondents were asked questions regarding the FIA, the designated law enforcement agency under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016, and reporting of harassment incidents to law enforcement agencies (*Figure 19*). 15% of the female respondents said that they or someone they knew had made reports to the FIA.

70% of the women responded that neither they nor anyone they knew had reported to the FIA. The following questions also helped us see precisely why the reporting numbers are so low. Out of the total number of women, 11% said that they or their acquaintances did not think reporting online harassment to the FIA would help.

Out of the total number of women who responded to this question, 4% said that they or their acquaintance did not think it was necessary to report online harassment to the FIA. A total number of 57 (4%) participants responded that they or their acquaintance did not report online sexual harassment because they did not know how. While the *Hamara* Internet campaign was aimed at educating women on how to report, there has been a dire lack of an initiative from the government itself to educate and sensitise women on how official resources can be used to report abuse and gain protection. Such a government-led effort is severely needed and the gap that exists without it cannot be filled by any entity except the state.
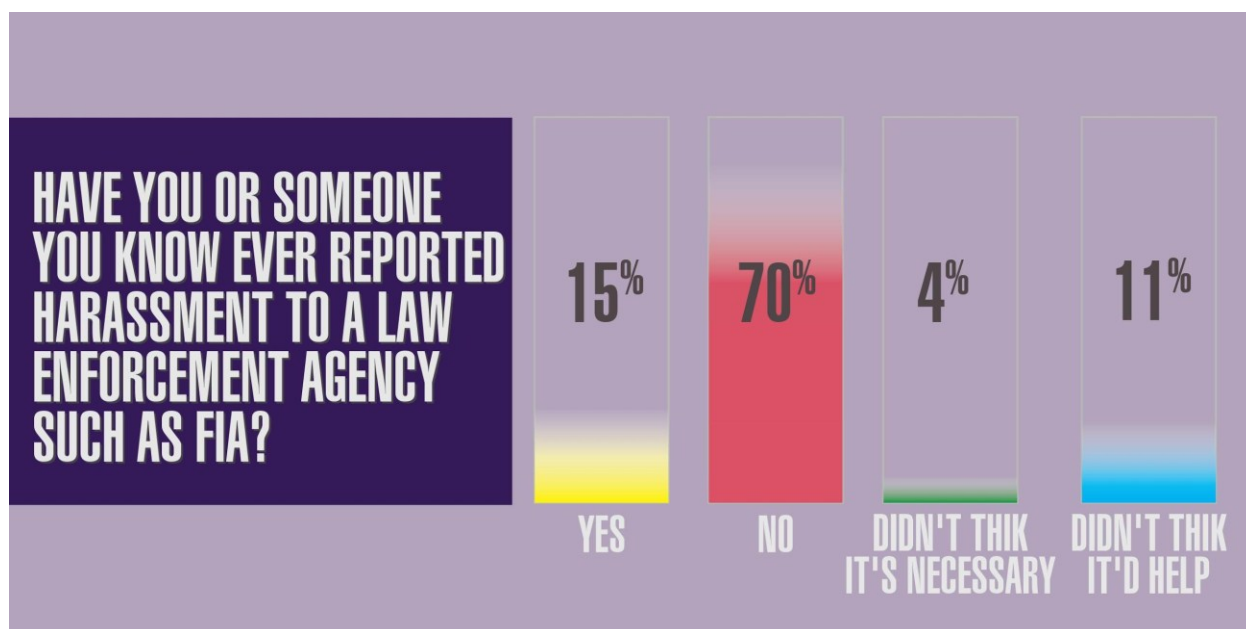
Figure 19: Reporting to law enforcement agencies

A follow up question required the respondents to state whether the law enforcement agency was helpful when they or anyone they knew did report *(Figure 20)*. Of the participants who answered this question, a disturbing 53% said that it wasn't helpful at all, while 47% said that it was. The FIA has been repeatedly highlighted for its lack of response to many cases. Lack of gender sensitivity training, resources, and proper mechanisms has in many cases made it impossible for the authority to tackle the problem properly.
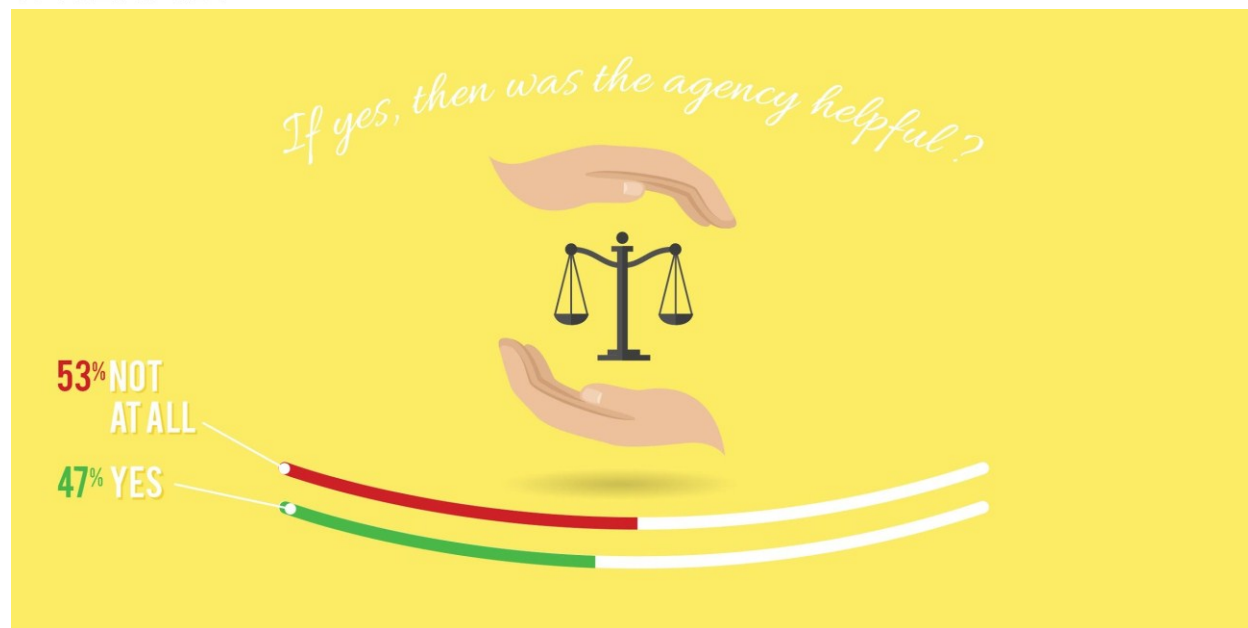
Figure 20: Measuring the helpfulness of the FIA

When asked about why they thought women did not report harassment, 45% of the total sample suggested that it was embarrassing to do so, while 47% of the sample thought that it was because they thought their complaints will not be taken seriously, and 9% thought that it would be a waste of time (*Figure 21*).

These responses provide a much-needed insight into how women see issues relating to online violence. The results are almost an even split between women either thinking their issues are not important enough, or swinging towards thinking that their issues will somehow tarnish or embarrass them.

Other responses that took into the context of the victim's socio-cultural background also suggested defending honour, fear, victim-blaming, lack of knowledge of the process, lack of awareness about individual rights and lack of support from family as barriers to reporting.

Figure 21: Why do you think women do not report harassment?

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

1. This quantitative research is a culmination of data gathered through surveys. Although there are huge advantages in collecting data through this method, there are also several disadvantages. Firstly, respondents may not feel obliged to provide accurate or honest answers when filling out surveys. Moreover, they might not feel comfortable in presenting themselves in an unfavourable manner. Since surveys are used to record answers at a given point in time, responses may be affected by the respondents' mood at the time.

2. It is possible that some of the respondents were not able to fully engage with the survey and comprehend all the questions. However, DRF's team was on hand to clarify any confusions on the spot.

3. Since the surveys are conducted post-session, a lot of the students' responses were influenced by the workshop content during the session and by the responses of their peers, as opposed to their individual points of view.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the research presented above and the experience of Digital Rights Foundation through extensive work in the field of cybercrime and online harassment we posit some recommendations for various stakeholders. The issue of cyber harassment can be addressed on multiple levels:

INTERMEDIARIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Make security features when producing cyber products and services, enable easy and accurate reportage by Internet users. These features should be easy to use and accessible for users.
- Share learned industry best practices and solutions that can implemented during or after an incident of online harassment by internet users.
- Facilitate courts with the required information upon demand in cases of online abuse and harassment.
- Work with the public sector to educate users and improve digital literacy levels.
- Formulate and regularly revisit content regulation, available remedies and privacy policies with social and cultural contexts in mind.
- Formulate and make publicly available privacy and data protection policies for users.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

- Maintain well-trained authorities and who can address complaints, provide assistance and redress.

- Conduct gender-sensitization training of all authorities and equip them to do psychological counselling.
- Development of applications and technology solutions that provide certain tracking, monitoring, reporting mechanisms and case management.
- Well-staffed and trained courts and agencies that investigates claims and responds to redress rather than victim blame those who approach them.
- Create high-quality and 24-hour services for victim complaints.
- Increase staff, resources and capacity of the FIA to tackle cases of cyber harassment.
- Improve response time in urgent cases to ensure rapid response in situations where physical safety endangered.

GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SECTOR

- Conduct and supervise capacity building programs so that is there is improved digital literacy, security and awareness about the various forms of harassment and how individuals can take action against it.
- Create awareness about digital security and safety among the public at large.
- Include digital security components in school curriculum to ensure responsible usage of the internet and coping mechanisms to deal with cyberbullying and harassment.
- Aid in investigation of reported offences and perpetrators and facilitate access to justice for survivors.
- Address the root causes that enable online and gender based violence, especially gender inequalities.
- Set up initiatives that encourage dialogue, monitor and research on incidents of harassment.

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