United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

CYBER-THREATS AGAINST WOMEN
Capacity Building Workshop on Promoting a Safer Cyberspace in the Arab region

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Cyber-threats against women

General aspects of gender and cybercrime

- 72% of men and 65% of women experience cybercrime
- Possible reasons:
  - Access to the Internet
    - MENA Region 2 out 3 Internet users are men
  - Online behaviour
    - Men: website with adult content, dating online, gambling, using free wire-less, talking to strangers, etc.
    - Women: Communicating with, social networking, shopping
- 95% of online aggressive behaviour is toward women
  - Men against women
  - Women against women: peers, friends and family
  - Includes harassment, stalking, abusive language, degenerating images, and many more

Technology and Violence Against Women (VAW)

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty whether occurring in public or private life."

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

Role of cyberspace

- Tool for committing violence
  - Directly
    - send messages to a person,
    - altering photo’s of women and hacking social media sites to post them
  - Indirectly
    - using mobile technologies to coordinate the trafficking of women

- Mechanism to fight violence
  - Raise awareness
  - Provide services
Cyber-threats against women

**Violence Against Women-related Cybercrimes**

- **Cyber-stalking**
  - Repeated actions, by the same person
  - Sending offensive/threatening emails, SMS or instant messages
  - Posting offensive comments about a person
  - Sharing intimate photos or videos of the person
  - Internet or mobile phone
  - EU: 4% of women 18-29 experienced in 12 months period

- **Cyber-harassment**
  - unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages
  - inappropriate advances on social networking websites
  - EU: 11% of women experienced 1 or 2 forms since they were 15 yrs old

Other violent crimes toward women are:
- Intimate photos and video blackmail
- Manipulating photographic images
- Fraudulent postings and advertisements: promise work, but is front for human trafficking.

Type of crime is influenced by age of women
- Younger women, aged 18-30, more likely to be targeted as they live much of their lives online or via mobile technologies.
- Women over 60 are less likely to experience such crimes.

Rate of Internet access
- Higher rate of Internet access, the higher the rate of technology driven VAW
Cyber-threats against women

Impact of cyber-oriented VAW

- Cause emotional, physical and psychological trauma

- “Multi-channel” violence
  - Social media, SMS, messaging, telephone calls, e-mail
  - Instantly accessible, any place, anywhere, anytime (inescapable)
  - Sometimes in combination with physical violence
  - Develops an online-offline-continuum of VAW

- Additional cyber-component worsen the trauma:
  - Wide distribution of photo’s and comments
  - Anonymity of attacker(s) makes them difficult to find
  - Propagation of the crime and re-victimization
  - Perpetrators store images and re-use them later

Impact of cyber-oriented VAW (cont.)

- Social and economic impact
  - VAW, especially sexual abuse, undermines women's sense of security in public areas and can cause them to restrain from entering public life and using their political voice.

  - Victims/survivors of technology related VAW reduce their online activities or withdraw from social networks completely

  - Could hold victims/survivors back from taking part in political, social and economic life, which is increasingly taking place online

  - The withdrawal from online life could worsen the impact as it reduces a mechanism that can offer support and help
Cyber-threats against women

Mechanism for fighting VAW

• Cyberspace can be an aid in combating VAW, especially in areas where physical services are limited, such as rural areas

• Raise awareness
  • Online Radio Station in Costa Rica, Radio FIRE
    • Promote awareness on women’s rights
    • Located in a rural town

• Provide service to victims/survivors
  • Brazil the Special Secretariat for Women’s Policies
    • Challenges posed by the issue of VAW
    • “National Covenant on Addressing Violence against Women” (2007)
    • Online assistance network to help victims/survivors of VAW

Conclusion

• Need better data
  • Numbers of women and men affected, types of cybercrimes, etc.

• Planning of awareness programmes and education:
  • Men and women are both affected similarly and differently
  • Trained professionals that understand the encompassing nature of cyber-related violence
  • Necessary for all components in legal and judiciary systems

• Adopting and adapting regional legislation
  • Many of these crimes happen across borders
  • Legal systems and legislation should take this into consideration

• Actively develop Internet as mechanism to fight cyber-related VAW

• Cyber-related violent crimes evolve
  • In some cases women are the perpetrators and young men and boys are the victims

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Resources and Further Reading


