

Cyber violence is a growing threat, especially for women and girls



Since more and more people can easily access the internet and social media, cyber violence against women and girls is an increasing concern. Despite the lack of data, EU estimates show that one in ten women have experienced some form of cyber violence since the age of 15.

“Women are more likely than men to be victims of severe forms of cyber violence and the impact on their lives is far more traumatic”, said Jurgita Pecuriene, EIGE's programme coordinator for gender-based violence.

Experts warn us not to think of cyber violence as a separate phenomenon to real-world forms of violence. Women and girls who have experienced sexual harassment, stalking or violence from an intimate partner 'offline' are also often victims of 'online' violence from the same person. As with all types of violence, cyber violence affects the lives of victims tremendously and comes in many forms.

Cyber stalking, for example, refers to a person repeatedly sending unwanted e-mails or text messages to their victims. Cyber harassment relates to offending a person online with unwanted sexually explicit messages, threats of violence or hate speech. One of the most disturbing forms of online violence is non-consensual pornography, which former partners often commit. This means posting or distributing sexually graphic images or videos online without a person's permission. Research suggests that up to 90 % of non-consensual pornography victims are women and the number of cases is rising.

More information and awareness needed

The EU does not yet have a common approach or even a common definition for cyber violence, which means that each country defines and punishes it differently. Some countries do not even consider it a crime. Furthermore, many cases of cyber violence are not reported to the police. In cases where victims do report cyber violence, police and justice may not take it as seriously as real-life incidents of violence. All of this results in data gaps and a lack of comparable statistics at EU-level, which means we cannot show decision makers how frequently it happens. This is a serious concern, as it means that victims often have to make do with inadequate or sometimes even zero protection.

To shed more light on this rapidly growing challenge, EIGE has published a paper focusing on the need for gender-disaggregated data on cyber violence. It finds that although cyber violence affects women and girls in different ways to men and boys, studies tend not to differentiate between women and men victims or perpetrators.

A few Member States such as Germany, France and the UK have adopted interventions and good practices to address this issue, however more research and action is needed to tackle cyber violence and the threat it poses. The recommendations outlined in EIGE's paper highlight the need for better policy responses, more prevention measures and awareness raising. For example, educating women and girls, as well as gender sensitive training on cyber violence for the police.

You can find EIGE's paper on cyber violence against women and girls [here](#)

Read the results of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) 2014 survey on violence against women in the EU, including cyber violence [here](#)

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