

## Gender Based Violence Takes Many Forms

Despite watching cyber forensic science and murder mystery television shows, acknowledging online bullying has taken lives, consulting my son-in-law regarding emails I have received that state that I need to pay the sender or my homemade porn movies will be released, and reading about and hearing of online harassment of female politicians and candidates, I have given little thought, if any, to the fact that these are actually forms of Gender Based Violence (or Violence Against Women and Girls).

**The UN defines** the above acts and others as digital violence: specifically an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is rooted in gender inequality and gendered norms and that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communications technologies or digital media (online or ICT facilitated violence), against a person on the basis of their gender.

**Digital violence is increasing**, in part due to Covid which moved so many of us online. It affects women's personal lives, relationships, mental health, as well as employment. In the UK where it is considered a weapon of domestic abuse, one in three women reported online harassment and amongst younger women this increased to one in two. (The perpetrator is often known by the victim.) Dating sites are a particular source of perpetrators, who, in relative anonymity, 'violate' women repeatedly. One in 10 victims of digital violence in the UK have considered suicide.

**Online violence takes many forms** – cyberstalking, doxing (publicly revealing private personal information to a wide (or, in some cases targeted) internet audience), trolling (spreading conflict by posting inflammatory or off topic messages in an online community), cyberbullying, public shaming, morphing (editing original photographs), cyberflashing (male sends pictures of genitals to females in the hopes the recipient will send nude pictures back) and email spoofing (a technique used in spam and phishing (attempt to gain sensitive information such as usernames and passwords or credit card numbers or bank account number) attacks to trick users into thinking a message came from a person or entity they either know or trust).

**Why** do people (usually men, but not exclusively) do this? Sometimes it is for illegal gain, but more and more it used for insult or defamation, sexual exploitation, blackmail, revenge, prank satisfaction of control or to incite against a community (white supremacists use this technique). Its use is increasing because of updated technology which makes tracking the digital trail extremely difficult.

**Digital violence is grossly underreported.** It requires a great deal of human resource time and financial investment (no, it can't be solved in a matter of an hour episode like on tv) to track down and charge the perpetrator. Additionally there are poor or nonexistent laws or laws without teeth to be used to extract justice. Program providers, if an act is reported to them, act slowly or not at all. Additionally, there is an associated stigma. In short, it can be done with impunity.

Unfortunately, we, as the public, lack recognition of digital violence as a form of gender based violence, and if we do know about it, we are undereducated about the forms used, their impact on the victim or victims, how to protect ourselves and others from this form of violence and how to go about reporting it and obtaining justice. There is much to do in this arena from awareness building to lawmaking.

For additional information and an excellent overview, please see:

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Brief-Online-and-ICT-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-COVID-19-en.pdf>,

and

<https://www.refuge.org.uk/refuge-publications-2/>.