حملـة – المركـز العربـي
لـتطويـر الإعـلام الاجتماعـي

7amleh - The Arab Center for
the Advancement of Social Media

A Guide to Combating Digital
Gender-Based Violence

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Introduction:

This guide is issued by 7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, to address gender-based violence in the digital realm and explore strategies for combating and confronting it. Indeed, digital violence is one of the widespread forms of harmful practices in the Palestinian digital space. This guide holds significant value as it serves as a concise reference, offering a direct definition of gender-based violence in the digital space. Additionally, it outlines the legal and rights framework that empowers individuals to confront and address such instances. It also presents concrete examples and practical steps for dealing with gender-based violence digitally, in light of its prevalence, and the exposure of a very large percentage of users on social media platforms to various forms of harmful speech and practices.

This guide is issued as part of a series of publications on all forms of digital rights violations. Hence, it is the second guide in the series after the special guide on Combating-Online Hate Speech that was issued by 7amleh in 2022.

*Definitions

Violence is defined by the WHO as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, deprivation or death.

Racial discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on inherent personal characteristics of race, color, descent or national or ethnic origin and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields, or in any other field of public life.

As for gender-based violence, it is the deliberate use of power (political, cultural, social, economic, physical, etc.) with the aim of harming a person or a targeted group based on gender. Typically, women and people who identify as gender expansive are more vulnerable than others to forms of violence. In the digital context, power is used for online abuse in the digital space, but in many cases, it can have repercussions on the ground.

What sets gender-based violence apart from individual incidents is its manifestation as a consequence of power imbalances and a systemic lack of equality between those how identify as men and all other gender identities. This form of gender-based violence is a form of discrimination against women.

*Legal Framing

Digital gender-based violence encompasses diverse forms of human rights violations. What sets it apart from other violations is its intentional targeting of a particular gender or sex, rooted in discriminatory attitudes based on gender.

Article (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates the right to equality, and Article (2) also prohibits any form of discrimination, including discrimination based on gender. Article (3) of the same declaration also stipulates the right to security of person and freedom.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also stressed in Article (3) equality between men and women, and Article (9) also affirms the right to freedom and security, and Article (17) of the same Covenant indicates the obligation to protect people from interference with privacy and prohibit this type of Intervention.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in Article 3, addresses gender equality at the economic, social and cultural levels.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women obliges the state to take all measures and procedures to prevent discrimination against women in all fields and achieve equality between men and women.

This is emphasized in Article (9) of the amended Palestinian Basic Law of 2003, which prohibits discrimination based on gender, among other forms of discrimination. Article (16) of Law by Decree No. 10 of 2018 on Cybercrimes prohibits sending sexual content via electronic means to adults without their consent or to children.

While "the same rights that people enjoy offline must also be protected online." According to a 2012 Human Rights Council resolution, all of these legal foundations apply to safety in the digital space from all harmful practices, including hate crimes.

*Digital gender violence in the Palestinian context

The results of a survey conducted by 7amleh indicate that **50%** of female respondents feel that they are being monitored through social media. Also, **28%** of them had previously been subjected to attempts to hack their accounts on social media platforms, while about **25%** of the respondents had been exposed to comments or harassment (mockery or contempt) because they were women.

As for dealing with the phenomenon of gender-based violence, **33%** of the female respondents who were subjected to harassment via social media only deleted the sender's account and did not take any further action. In addition to that:

- about **65%** of female respondents do not use their personal photos as a profile picture.
- **17%** of them had previously been subjected to their photos being leaked on social media platforms.
- **16%** of them had previously been subjected to a blackmail attempt on social media platforms.
- about **36%** of them were subjected to electronic blackmail on social media - namely sexual blackmail.[1]

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1 "Violated network :Gender Violence Against Palestinian Women in the digital Sphere, " 7amleh .
https://7amleh.org/2022/11/28/mrkz-hmlh-ysdr-bhtha-banwan-shbkh-mnthkh-hwl-alanf-aljndry-fy-alfdhaa-alrqmy-alflstyny

Forms of Digital Gender Violence:

The most prominent digital forms of gender-based violence include:

- Digital voyeurism: Posting, viewing, or sharing visual material about other people's bodies online, whether the visuals are real or fabricated, regardless of how they were obtained.
- Cyberflashing: Sending images of sexual organs, usually via Airdrop or Bluetooth, to threaten and intimidate victims based on their gender.
- Cyberbullying: A loose term that means an organized digital attack on specific individuals or entities using various strategies of humiliation, embarrassment, and harassment of the target. The ultimate goal is often revenge, intimidation, or similar motives.
- Morphing or transmogrification: It denotes the act of altering images and video clips through techniques such as merging, overlapping, and cutting, leading to the creation of what are commonly referred to as "deep fakes." These videos are subsequently disseminated on pornographic platforms on the Internet, with the malicious intent of objectifying and distorting the image of the targeted individual, potentially exposing them to abuse.
- Gender-based hate speech: A type of speech that targets people or groups based on their sex or gender. It includes offensive, racist, and discriminatory statements that target sexual identities, sexual roles, or gender identities. These speeches include many forms such as racist comments, threats, misinformation, and negative criticism based on sex or gender. Gender-based hate speech is extremely harmful and contributes to discrimination and sexism.
- Unsolicited sexual comments or messages, and misogynistic comments: Characteristics or behaviors that show hostility or hatred toward women and gender expansive individuals in general. It includes thoughts or attitudes that tend to express ridicule, contempt, or disrespect for women and gender expansive individuals or a belief in male superiority. The term "misogynic" is used to describe cultures, behaviors, or individuals that hold negative attitudes toward women and express sexism or discrimination against them.
- Identity theft, impersonation, and the creation of fake profiles: Online impersonation or stealing accounts to impersonate someone based on gender.
- Online sexual harassment: Sexual harassment and cyberbullying refer to the use of digital means such as social media, email, and messaging apps to engage in undesirable behavior and sexual acts that are often offensive or embarrassing. This includes online bullying and sexual harassment and the use of these digital means to harass others with the intent to harm, intimidate or exploit them in a sexual or non-sexual manner.
- Non-consensual dissemination of intimate photos and videos: Spreading intimate content without consent includes publishing private photos, videos, and audio recordings of individuals without their consent. It can also include threatening to disclose or disseminate them widely, in addition to using them in extortion operations with the aim of achieving certain gains from the victim.
- Sexploitation: It is a term used to describe a type of sexual exploitation that appears in media and entertainment platforms. This term refers to the use of sexual elements, pornographic or erotic content with the aim of attracting an audience or making a profit without regard to the ethics or consequences of such use. Such as displaying sexual scenes or pornographic images in an erotic manner in new media or advertisements to increase sales of a specific product.
- Zoom bombing: Joining digital gatherings with the aim of publishing pornographic, racist, discriminatory, or other content to disturb the participants and disrupt the session.
- Sextortion: A term used to describe a type of online extortion crime. It refers to a process in which a person is threatened to post sexual information, pornographic pictures or videos of another person online unless a sum of money is paid, or a certain service is provided to the blackmailer. In this context, the blackmailer takes advantage of sexual information or images that they obtained illegally or by enticing the victim to provide them. They then threaten the victim to post this information or photos online or share them with their friends and family if the individual does not meet financial or personal demands.
- Doxing: a form of digital harassment basically through the systematic disclosure and dissemination of someone's private information online without permission. This personal information typically includes full names, addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and similar information.
- Cyberstalking: Monitoring and following someone, usually through digital means, to ensure they are not

out of control or do not deviate from the extortion they are subjected to. It usually includes the following activities: Repeatedly sending spam messages, monitoring online activities via social media, forums, and personal websites, posting private personal information or threatening.

- Online grooming: Cultivating a digital connection with someone to foster trust and build a relationship, often with the motive of initiating a sexual relationship or coercing the victim into engaging in sexual activities by taking advantage of the digital relationship that has been built.
- Digital Threat: It is the use of digital means such as emails, social media, or text messages, to threaten or inform of the intention to harm or potential harm to another person. This could include threats of physical or verbal violence, hacking, or leaking confidential information.
- Digital Blackmailing: It is the use of digital means to blackmail another person by threatening to reveal sensitive or embarrassing information or to carry out harmful actions against him or her unless the blackmailer's demands are complied with. This blackmail can be related to things like videos, private photos, or sensitive personal information.

Examples:

- A person sends messages via WhatsApp or Messenger to another person claiming to have private information or photos about them.
- A person impersonates another person through an account on a social media platform and posts information or pictures and corresponds with others pretending to be that person.
- A person hacks into another person's account, possesses private photos or materials, and demands money or sexual services in exchange for refraining from posting.
- A person insists on adding another person on a social media platform even though the other party refuses to add them.
- Exploiting the sexual allure of individuals in entertainment or media to gain fame or personal advantage.
- Publishing private photos, videos, and audio recordings of individuals without their consent.

Companies' Policies on Digital Gender Violence:

Social media companies have adopted various policies and taken various actions related to digital gender violence issues, regardless of whether or not these policies are adequate or effective enough. The following are the most important policies:

*Meta prohibits:

- Posting content for the purpose of sexual extortion on its various platforms.
- Sharing or requesting intimate photos without the owners' consent.
- Threatening to share private sexual conversations.
- Sharing surreptitiously taken photos of body parts, whether to mock or expose individuals.
- Posting content that advocates, threatens, or mocks rape or any form of forced sexual contact.
- Sharing content of coercive harassment with a sexual dimension, such as forced cross-dressing.[2]
- Sharing nude images.
- Sharing images of sexual activity.[3]
- Sharing content offering or requesting sexual services.
- Sharing content that coordinates adult sexual activities or contains sexual solicitation.
- Sharing content that displays or requests pornographic material.[4]

*X prohibits:

- Publishing sexual/intimate photos and videos taken or published without the consent of the owner.
- Sexual content or nudity taken using a hidden camera, or any clips and photos taken surreptitiously that contain sexual connotations or genitals.
- Images and clips that have been manipulated and superimposed on the body of another person.
- Requesting intimate video clips in exchange for a sum of money, a prize, or something else.[5]
- Intercourse content and simulation of sexual acts or any other sexual act.
- Content depicting rape.
- Targeting people with inappropriate graphic content.[6]

*ByteDance (TikTok) prohibits:

- Sexual exploitation and gender-based violence.
- Sexual abuse and use of explicit images.
- Extortion, sexual assault, and any intimate acts without consent.
- Any form of sexual harassment.
- Any form of harassment and bullying.
- Nudity, display of body parts, and sexually provocative content.[7]

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2 Adult Sexual Exploitation ,Facebook,
https://transparency.fb.com/ar-ar/policies/community-standards/sexual-exploitation-adults/
3 Adult nudity and sexual activity ,Facebook
https://transparency.fb.com/ar-ar/policies/community-standards/adult-nudity-sexual-activity/
4 Sexual Solicitation ,Facebook,
https://transparency.fb.com/ar-ar/policies/community-standards/sexual-solicitation/
5 Non-consensual nudity policy ,X Platform
https://help.twitter.com/ar/rules-and-policies/intimate-media
6 Sensitive Media Policy ,X Platform
https://help.twitter.com/ar/rules-and-policies/media-policy
7 Community Guidelines ,TikTok,
https://www.tiktok.com/community-guidelines/ar-ae/overview/

Google Prohibits the following on YouTube:

- Hate content based on physical characteristics.
- Harassment and Bullying.[8]
- Content aimed at satisfying sexual desires.
- Obscene or exploitative content.
- Pornographic materials.[9]

How can you confront digital gender violence across the digital space?

1. Request assistance from official authorities.
2. Request assistance from a family member or trusted individual.
3. Document all digital threats and attacks.
4. Communicate with institutions that provide assistance and support, such as 7amleh, through 7or Platform.
5. Report the assault through the same communication platforms.
6. Review the account's security and privacy settings to verify the integrity of the account and data.

Precautionary measures:

- Avoid creating more than one personal account on the same platform.
- Use a strong password.
- Use 2 step verification.
- Use password management software.
- Transfer confidential information and photos using secure and encrypted tools.
- Check links before opening them.
- Check your privacy and security settings before publishing.
- Do not publish or send confidential information or images to any person or entity that is not completely trusted.
- Refrain from dealing with the blackmailer.
- Do not be lenient in dealing with any suspicions of account hacking or any illegal access.
- Do not deal with any messages or materials from unknown parties.
- Educate yourself and raise awareness through educational paths about gender-based violence and ways to confront it.
- Purchasing devices from trusted sources.
- Do not leave devices out of our sight, especially when crossing borders/checkpoints.
- Update programs continuously. Update your operating system and all installed applications instantly.
- Remove suspicious devices. Check if instant messengers and online accounts are connected to unknown devices.
- Use anti-malware software.
- Do not use software from unreliable sources.
- Change passwords periodically.
- Use VPN or Tor.
- Get emotional support.

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8 Policies regarding online harassment and bullying ,YouTube,
https://:support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802268?hl=ar&ref_topic=9282436
9 Nudity and sexual content policy ,YouTube
https://:support.google.com/youtube/answer/2802002?hl=ar&ref_topic=9282679

Documentation:

To document Gender-Based Violence, the following data should be collected:

- Victim's Information: The name of the victim/affected person, the email address to contact them, and their occupation including if the individual is an activist, journalist, academic, etc., age, gender, geographical location, phone number.
- Harmful event information: On which platform did the violation occur? Date of violation, type of violation, type of platform, type of content, description of the context in which it occurred, and content format.
- Violator's Information: The name of the violator, the name of the user across the platform they used to post the harmful content, the type of account, the link to the perpetrator's account, the link to the harmful content, a screenshot of the content, a screenshot of the account, the nationality/context of the violator's presence (Palestinian or Israeli).
- Documentation and Follow up Information: Report date, action taken, result.

How do we collect this information?

- Take a screenshot of the content, whether it is a comment, post, photo, message, or other form of content, provided that the screenshot shows the content itself and the name of the publisher.
- Copy and save the content if it is a text and save it if it is an image or video clip.
- Click on the post time above the content and below the publisher's account name, and then copy and save the link to the post itself.
- Click on the name of the person who posted the content to access their personal account and take a screenshot of the account.
- Save the link of the account or page.
- Write down the user's name, their email address, if any, and write down the victim's name and information.
- Record the date of publication and the affiliation of this party, whether it is - for example - Palestinian or Israeli.
- Save any information or description that can be found on the account, such as the geographical location, who is behind the account, the nature of their activity, etc.
- If it is a page, check the "Page transparency" section and save any existing information.

Reporting:

How do we report digital gender-based violence?

- Direct reporting of content by clicking on the report button on the content itself on the platform on which it is published.
- Reporting via platforms such as the 7or platform affiliated with 7amleh.[10]
- Submit an official complaint to the police or cyber crimes prosecution.

The most prominent measures taken by civil society organizations to confront digital gender-based violence:

- Monitoring and documenting content.
- Submitting requests to social media companies to remove violent content on their platforms.
- Organizing a mass reporting campaign against violent content.
- Demanding that those responsible for violent speech and practices be held accountable through official bodies.
- Providing technical, psychological and legal support to victims.
- Raising awareness on the nature and risk of gender-based violence in the digital space.
- Managing and organizing advocacy campaigns to impose pressure on authorities and companies
- to take preventive action and hold those responsible for gender-based violence accountable in the digital space.

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10 The Palestinian Observatory for Digital Rights Violations) 7or (stands as the pioneering open platform dedicated to monitoring ,documenting ,and tracking digital rights violations since 2021 .It is affiliated with the 7amleh Center .Explore our platform at 7or.7amleh.org.

#Recommendations and References:

Recommendations

1. Applying gender-based violence standards and the legal and human rights frameworks to the digital space.
2. Studying forms of digital gender-based violence and collecting data and indicators on the magnitude of the phenomenon.
3. Developing formal legislation, policies and practices that provide protection for women and gender expansive individuals in the digital space.
4. Developing partnerships and a referral system between institutions to address all impacts of these forms of digital attacks.
5. Social media companies must deal with these gender-based attacks seriously.
6. Companies need to take further action to ensure transparency and intensify the policies that address gender-based violence in the digital space.
7. Providing educational and awareness-raising resources about the forms and dangers of digital gender-based violence and ways to deal with it.
8. Establishing a coordination mechanism for submitting reports at the governmental level.
9. Creating and adopting codes of conduct that protect against gender-based violence.
10. Training media outlets to integrate issues of digital gender-based violence into programs and media coverage.

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