

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

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# INTRODUCTION

- The home is often equated with a sanctuary, a place where individuals seek love, safety, security and shelter. For some women, the home is a place that imperils lives and breeds some of the most drastic forms of violence perpetrated against girls and women.
- Violence is usually perpetrated by males who are, or who have been in positions of trust and intimacy and power e.g. husbands, fathers, fathers-in law, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, sons, or other relatives.

# INTRODUCTION

- Digital technologies have expanded informational and communicative capabilities of women and girls. By making boundaries between the private and public more fluid, they have **enabled greater opportunities for women's self expression and public-political engagement**. Ironically, the characteristics that make Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) a **strategic instrument for women's empowerment** have also led to their persecution.

# INTRODUCTION

- The cloak of online invisibility encourages patriarchal attitudes of entitlement over women, hounding out those women who are seen as threatening prevailing gender norms. A toxic dis-inhibition is evident in the online public sphere, lowering thresholds for sexist and misogynistic speech and behaviour. Technology-mediated VAW (including DV) may be defined as **“acts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as phones, the Internet, social media platforms, and email.”**

# INTRODUCTION

- **The internet is available to everyone, and so is its violence.** The perpetrators are no longer limited by geographic or physical boundaries," Baroness Patricia Scotland, former UK attorney general and founder of the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence.
- **But violent online behaviour ranges from virtual harassment and public shaming to the desire to inflict physical harm** - and the internet may then become a tool to turn virtual violence real.

# Some common forms of technology-mediated DVAW include:

- 1. Harassment on web and mobile platforms, whether sexual or not. This may escalate to cyber bullying and trolling.
- 2. Creating fake profiles of women with the intent to harass – by discrediting, defaming and damaging their reputations.
- 3. Non-consensual circulation and malicious distribution of private material, including intimate photographs and sexually explicit imagery/text.

# SOME NUMBERS

- A 2016 survey on Violence Online in India conducted by the Feminism in India portal on 500 individuals (97% women and 3% trans-genders) found that 58 percent of respondents “had faced some kind of online aggression in the form of trolling, bullying, abuse or harassment”.
- Many a time, these acts are committed by intimate partners or former partners. For example, a 2014 study conducted by the Association for Progressive Communications on 500 cases of technology-mediated VAW across 7 countries found that the perpetrator was **known** to the victim in 40% of cases. Also, in many of these cases, **women experienced violence as a continuum stretching from offline to online spaces.**

# Contd...

- In India too, this is emerging as a key issue – as revealed by even a quick study of proceedings and judgments of family courts on intimate partner violence.
- The pervasiveness of technology-mediated DVAW thus requires urgent action



# CAMPAIGNS

- Some of the contemporary ones are ‘Bell Bajao!’, ‘50 Million Missing Campaign’, ‘Men Against Rape and Discrimination’ (MARD), ‘Laadli—A girl child campaign’, ‘Say NO - UNiTE | End Violence against Women’, ‘Stop Acid Attacks’, ‘Safe Delhi Campaign’ and ‘I am Nirbhaya because I am not Alone’. As illustrations of cyber-campaigns taking place in India reaching people worldwide, these campaigns are changing the trends in online people’s participation in cyber-movements and people’s increasing sensitivity to issues of VAW in India. Taking these as cases of conductive cyber-activity, cyber-campaigns can become a sources of bringing people together (mass-mobilisation) to lobby for women rights and VAW in India.

# CAMPAIGNS

- A major study which has rightly described how social media has been instrumental in the direction of maligning the status of women, thus affecting their position in society was done by Halder, D. The author cited certain examples of women celebrities who are female journalists and how they have been harassed due to the damaging impact of social media. The author has criticized social media by commenting that the advent of digital communication technology has made **the attack on women more frequent, more viral, organized, personal and with a set pattern.**
- The author by citing the example of Sagarika Ghosh, a senior woman journalist tried to draw the attention of the masses towards how women are harassed and have been the victims of social media abuse, specially twitter

# CAMPAIGNS

- Christine Fox, a young woman who regularly tweeted under the handle @ steenfox, had to face an argument from a follower that women were themselves responsible for all these assaults as they often wear revealing clothes and then they are assaulted. She strongly contradicted by replying that most of the women who are raped are decently dressed and added a hastag: # RapeHasNoUniform.

# Bell Bajao! Campaign

- Developed by Breakthrough, a US and India based non-profit agency, working for women's rights issues and eliminating VAW worldwide; Bell Bajao!(BB) campaign is a cultural and media campaign focusing on domestic violence awareness and behavior change, launched in 2008, targeted at boys and men appealing them to intervene, if they witness domestic violence around them. The campaign takes a simple intervention 'ringing the doorbell when they witnesses domestic violence taking place'; **by altering the behaviour of the men in the society.**

# INDIAN VALUES

- In India, victimization in the cyber space had remained a subject of great trepidation, but lacks awareness.
- Bizarre combination of nature of attacks; ever changing trends of the victimization, limited knowledge about direct laws and rights of victims in cases of cyber-attacks, contribute greatly towards forming a weird approach to cyber victimization scenario.

# INDIAN VALUES

- It is the traditional Indian family structure that sanctions the domination of women through the socialisation and conditioning of the children from an early age through adulthood, instilling in them cultural norms, values, traditions and religious practices in sync with social acceptance. These norms, values, traditions and religious practices socially nourish the patriarchal dominance amongst males and inferiority amongst females, made to be practiced all through their lives.

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- Domestic violence (DV) is becoming more prevalent in social media as well as academic literature. Based on the astonishing prevalence rates of DV there are good reasons to consider this issue an **epidemic. DV is normalized and desensitized in the public's eye.** There are mechanisms through which DV is normalized and condoned through the media. These media outlets unfortunately tend to address DV by portraying sexism, devaluation of women, and most importantly, violence against women.

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- **One of the most influential factors influencing social acceptance of DV is a society's understanding of gender roles and the implications of marriage.** A notable instance in which gender roles normalize DV within a society can be seen in many Arab cultures, in which women are thought to belong to their husband's agnatic group and may be controlled as necessary. A similar example can be seen in Hispanic culture: the concepts of machismo and marianisma normalize many violent patterns of behavior that Westerners might consider DV.



# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- Hispanic men are expected to be sexually aggressive, dominant, and maintain control of their wives, whereas Hispanic women are expected to be chaste, subservient to their husbands, and endure a certain degree of suffering for the good of the family [26]. **In like fashion, Indian women are expected to maintain a harmonious atmosphere within the family unit—often to their own detriment—which may reinforce cultural expectations that men have control .**

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- Furthermore, the tendency for many cultures to value **family privacy and prioritize the good of the family above that of the individual**, referred to as **familism**, contributes to **continued acceptance of abusive behavior**
- . Commonly observed in collectivist cultures, familism can facilitate and perpetuate physical and emotional abuse within families by effectively preventing victims from seeking outside help or even perceiving their treatment as abusive

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- Although a belief in God may serve as a protective factor for intimate partner violence, other research suggests that religious leaders may hinder a woman's decision to leave an abusive relationship.
- The family structure can contribute to and perpetuate cycles of abuse, especially in circumstances where victims are dependent on the abuser. Child abuse and intimate partner violence are most prevalent, as children are highly dependent on their caregivers to survive and abusive partners tend to isolate their significant other to gain control over their social, financial, and other aspects of life.

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- In addition to cultural factors playing a role in normalization of DV, **social media reports on DV have the power to desensitize the public's perception of violence via repeated exposure.** Chronic and repeated exposure to domestic violence is believed to cause changes in affective, cognitive, and behavioral processes. Specifically, these effects are considered to foster adoption of desensitized thoughts and reactions to DV.

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- Moreover, consistent portrayals of violence are considered to create public acceptance of violence. While there is rising research on how humor is used to portray sexism, devaluation of women, and most importantly, violence against women, the comedic portrayal of DV is under-researched.

# FACTORS PERPETUATING DV

- In addition, misrepresentation of DV as romantic and attractive translates that violence against women is acceptable. Minimizing the gravity of DV can lead to troubling outcomes such as underreporting of DV; this can impact the amount of individuals seeking treatment and result in victims of DV being unacknowledged.

# Key legal provisions that can be invoked to address online DVAW

- **IT Act Section 66E** The capture and electronic transmission of images of private parts of a person, without his/her consent. - Non-consensual circulation and malicious distribution of sexually explicit photographic and video material about an individual.
- **Section 67** The publishing or transmission of obscene material in electronic form. - Graphic sexual abuse on social media and blog platforms, including trolling. - Sending emails/social media messages with sexually explicit content and images to an individual, against his/her will.

# Key legal provisions that can be invoked to address online DVAW

- **Section 67A** The publishing or transmission of sexually explicit content in electronic form. - Graphic sexual abuse on social media and blog platforms, including trolling. - Sending emails/social media messages with sexually explicit content and images to an individual, against his/her will.
- **IPC Section 354 A** Sexual harassment, including by showing pornography against the will of a woman - Graphic sexual abuse on social media and blog platforms, including trolling. - Sending video and pictures with sexually explicit content and images to a woman, against her will.



# Key legal provisions that can be invoked to address online DVAW

- **Section 354 C Voyeurism**, including watching or capturing the image of a woman engaging in a private act in circumstances where she would have a reasonable expectation of not being observed; and dissemination of images of a woman engaging in a private act under circumstances where she has agreed to the capture of the images but not to their dissemination.
- - Non-consensual production, circulation and malicious distribution of sexually explicit photographic and video material about a woman

# Key legal provisions that can be invoked to address online DVAW

- **Section 354D** Following a woman, contacting/ attempting to contact her to foster personal interaction repeatedly despite a clear indication of disinterest by such woman, or monitoring the use by a woman of the Internet, email, or any other form of electronic communication. - Cyber-stalking. Only women are recognized as potential victims by the law.
- **Section 499** Criminal defamation that leads to reputational harm. - Though this is a gender neutral provision, it could be invoked by women bloggers and women on social media fighting slander and libel.

# Key legal provisions that can be invoked to address online DVAW

- **Section 507** Criminal intimidation by anonymous communication.- Though this is a gender neutral provision, it could be invoked by women fighting trolls issuing threats, whose identities are often anonymous.
- **Section 509** Word, gesture, act or exhibition of an object intended to insult the modesty of a woman. - Though this provision does not explicitly address online sexual harassment and abuse, it could be invoked in such cases

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Online verbal harassment and abuse that does not involve sexually explicit content is not adequately addressed. Sections 499 and Section 507 of the IPC pertaining to criminal defamation and anonymous criminal intimidation cover only those acts of trolling that contain personal threats, and fail to address generalized, misogynistic abuse.

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- **Similarly, acts of doxing that do not involve the circulation of sexually explicit imagery and are unaccompanied by intimidation/slander are not covered. Though the IT Act does have a provision which criminalizes hacking (Section 66), it does not explicitly mention hacking for the purpose of doxing. Sections 499 and Section 507 of the IPC and Section 66 of the IT Act construct online verbal harassment, abuse, trolling and hacking of personal information as “isolated and individualised crimes”. They fail to recognize that such acts of violence are systemic in nature, and are “directed at a woman because she is a woman and affect women disproportionately”. Anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that abuse or violation directly targets women’s social identity and location (particularly sexual orientation and caste).**

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Violence against women is not framed as violation of a woman's bodily integrity and personal autonomy by all sections under the IT Act and IPC. The exceptions are Section 66E of the IT Act and Sections 354C, 354D of the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2013, but they focus narrowly on physical privacy, ignoring thereby the breach of informational privacy. Note that though Section 509 mentions the word 'privacy', it equates intrusion of privacy with the violation of womanly modesty. Sexual violence is largely viewed from the standpoint of maintaining public decency through curbing obscenity and protecting the modesty of women.

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Feminists have also highlighted that the general experience across countries is that **'consent'** may not be interpreted as a multilayered act, whereby a woman can withdraw at any point, consent that was previously given. Consequently, the need to address sexual violence is conflated with the need to regulate the enactment and representation of sexuality. This ends up reinforcing prevailing gender social norms and controls over women's sexuality rather than protecting women's bodily integrity and/ or their informational or decisional privacy.

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

Breach of privacy and confidentiality (Section 72) and data theft (Section 43 read with Section 66) in the IT Act is seen as an economic offence, and not in social or gendered terms.

Psychological violence resulting from violation of informational privacy – such as unauthorized access to, and circulation, of personal information that is not sexually explicit in nature – is not acknowledged.

Also, laws that focus on psychological violence within the home and in intimate partner relations, such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, lack provisions that explicitly deal with technologically-mediated forms of such violence.



# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Unfortunately even though Chapter XI of the IT Act deals with the offences such as
- Tampering with computer source documents (s.65),
- Hacking with computer system (s66),
- publishing of information which is obscene in electronic form (s.67)
- Access to protected system (s70),
- Breach of confidentiality and privacy (s. 72), Publication for fraudulent purpose (s.74)
- IT Act 2000 still needs to be modified. **It does not mention any crime specifically as against women and children**

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Today with the growing arms of cyberspace the territorial boundaries seems to vanish thus the concept of territorial jurisdiction as envisaged under S.16 of C.P.C. and S.2.of the I.P.C. will have to give way to alternative method of dispute resolution.
- Again, under no section in IT ACT 2000, Obscenity personal viewing is an offence, in fact like in IPC 292 again if it is proved that you have published or transmitted or caused to be published in the electronic form only then under Section 67 it can be an offence.
- Last but not the least, the IT Act 2000 does not mention the typical cybercrimes like cyber stalking, morphing and email spoofing as offences. Mainly these are the provision which are taken care this kind of cybercrimes in cyberspace.

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Gap between Legal Actions & Technological Advancement One of the main reasons behind the increase of cybercrimes against women in India is the less legal protection
- Halder and Jaishankar, in their book “Cyber Crime and the Victimization of Women: Laws, Rights and Regulations”, have said that, “The issues of women’s rights in cyber space could be contributed largely to the sluggish modes of the governments in executing the gender equality and gender justice promises made by the States in the form of fundamental rights” .

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- They have also reported in India cyber gender harassment is often seen as “less important sexual harassment”. Laws related to cybercrime in different countries like Canada, Australia, USA, UK, India etc. are mainly associated with the augmentation of e-commerce, and for this reason, the laws mainly covered commercial and financial crimes, which include hacking, deception etc.
- Some laws have been designed for email spoofing, cyber-sex, trespassing into others’ privacy etc. However, the laws related to cybercrime against women are correlated to sexual crime and abuses on the internet, but there are many practical difficulties associated with punishing the miscreant. **Primarily, many women are not aware of the laws against cybercrime.**

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- The report presented by CCVC has also shown that among the 73 respondents 80.8% has no knowledge of the fact that cyber stalking, cyber bullying, sending threatening mails etc. if reported are penalized. Moreover, among women only 8.3% has reported to the police. If a crime is not reported, no action can be taken against it. This also results in increase of cybercrime against women as the miscreant's goes scot free.

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- In 2008, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act was shaped mainly to deal with representation of women, which perhaps do not come under the scope of 'obscenity.' Halder puts forth that, "It is definitely a welcome move as India may get a law focused solely on the victimization of women through indecent portrayal, but at the same time, the concept of indecent representation of women must be freed from patriarchal meanings of social value and morality".

# Gaps in existing provisions of the law

- Apart from the legal gap the provision of anonymity by the cyber space is a reason for the victimization of women. The cyber world is a virtual space where it becomes very easy **for the perpetrator to manipulate his identity and hide**. The reason behind it is that even if the **source** from which the offensive matter has been posted can be detected, the police find it difficult to trail the offender.

# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- Legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms to tackle technology-mediated VAW can involve reform of existing laws (a piecemeal approach) or enactment of a new legislation specifically addressing technology-mediated VAW (a holistic approach).
- Option 1. Possibilities for reform of existing legal provisions, especially the IPC (not exhaustive) This option is based on the understanding that the real problem in the Indian context in dealing with violence against women has been one of enforcement and not the lack of legal frameworks. Introducing new legislation to address particular types of systemic discrimination or marginalization has not historically proved effective in ensuring justice for the most oppressed. On the contrary, proliferation of legislation can result in a plethora of scattered legal provisions, without improving implementation by law enforcement agencies.



# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- Specific sections of the IPC need to be revised as follows:
- The existing provision on hate-speech must be amended so that it covers generalized, misogynistic abuse offline and online. Section **153A** of the IPC attempts to check speech that incites hatred “**on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language etc.**” and “doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony”. In its current form, this provision has two critical drawbacks.
- Firstly, it fails to acknowledge that different groups, castes, and communities are not on an equal footing and therefore does not adequately account for misuse by dominant sections of society. Secondly, it does not address hate-speech linked to two other key markers of a person’s identity: **gender identity and sexual orientation.**

# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- Section 153A could be re-framed to cover gender-based hate-speech, in a manner that does not enable its invocation/ misuse by self-styled men's rights groups.
- Section 509 of the IPC needs to be changed so that it adequately covers all online and offline acts that constitute a criminal breach of privacy.

# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- Option 2. Introducing new legislation that specifically addresses technology-mediated violence The introduction of new legislation that specifically deals with technology-mediated VAW including DVAW is guided by the school of thought that online contexts create new structures of communication and social interaction. Therefore, technology-mediated VAW must be understood and interpreted in law and jurisprudence for the specific nature of patriarchal norms and controls arising in and through digital spaces. Interestingly, some scholars have also argued that structures of communication also shift the norms and rules of social behaviour;

# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- for instance, digital spaces reduce the threshold for abusive action. Digitally mediated 'speech' and 'action' must therefore be evaluated distinctly and the law has to take a nuanced approach. This option also takes cognizance of the recent indications from the Ministry of Women and Child Development to move forward in the direction of putting in place a new legal framework on VAW, a pragmatic consideration for feminist advocacy.

# Can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- The ten communication principles laid down by New Zealand's Harmful Digital Communications Act 2015, are listed below:
- Principle 1 - A digital communication should not disclose sensitive personal facts about an individual.
- Principle 2 - A digital communication should not be threatening, intimidating, or menacing.
- Principle 3 - A digital communication should not be grossly offensive to a reasonable person.
- Principle 4 - A digital communication should not be indecent or obscene.
- Principle 5 - A digital communication should not be used to harass an individual.

# can we overhaul existing legal frameworks?

- Principle 6 - A digital communication should not make a false allegation.
- Principle 7 - A digital communication should not contain a matter that is published in breach of confidence.
- Principle 8 - A digital communication should not incite or encourage anyone to send a message to an individual for the purpose of causing harm to the individual.
- Principle 9 - A digital communication should not incite or encourage an individual to commit suicide.
- Principle 10 - A digital communication should not denigrate an individual by reason of his or her colour, race, ethnic or national origins, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability."

# SOME GOOD DEFINITIONS / PRACTICES

- In the state of California, the current Health and Safety Code defines DV as “the infliction or threat of physical harm against **past or present** adult or adolescent intimate partners and shall include physical, sexual and psychological abuse against the partner and is a part of a pattern of assaultive, coercive and controlling behaviors directed at achieving compliance from or control over, that partner”.

# SOME GOOD DEFINITIONS / PRACTICES

- Equally as broad as California's definition of DV are the charges through which acts of DV may be prosecuted— from felony corporal injury to a misdemeanor 'simple' domestic battery . However, when the relationship to the victim cannot be substantiated, alternative or creative penal codes are often used for prosecution, including aggravated battery , assault , battery , elder abuse , child abuse , child endangerment , and criminal threats .



# Internet intermediaries

- Internet intermediaries refer to “technical providers of Internet access or transmission services, and providers of content hosting services”. The liability that should be fixed on such actors for unlawful or harmful content created by users of their services has been a subject of debate – especially when it comes to discussions on VAW. Experiences from across the globe reveal that broad liability regimes which impose contributory liability on intermediaries for actions of users (such as that adopted in China and Thailand) lead to over-censorship and preemptive content blocking that lead to unjustifiable curbs on citizens’ free expression.

# Internet intermediaries

- Safe harbour regimes which provide immunity to intermediaries for the actions of their users, as long as certain conditions laid down in law are met, have proven a better approach to effectively balance the **right to free expression with freedom from violence**. Broadly, the conditionalities imposed by safe harbour regimes can be classified into the following categories:
- (a) Regimes that require Internet intermediaries to take down objectionable content, only on the basis of an order by the **judiciary and competent executive authority**. Eg. **Chile, India**
- (b) ‘Notice and Take-down’ regimes that require Internet intermediaries to take down content that is classified as obscene, harassing or violent or impermissible according to an existing law, once they **are notified about such content by a user**. Eg. **United States**.
- (c) ‘Notice and Notice’ regimes that require Internet intermediaries to **notify the author of a piece of content against which** a complaint has been received, and then proceed to take down the content subject to certain conditions (such as the author failing to respond to the notice with an explanation of why the particular piece of content should not be taken down). Eg. **New Zealand**.

# Internet intermediaries

- India has adopted a safe-harbour approach to intermediary liability, and the safe-harbour has been strengthened by the Supreme Court judgment in **Shreya Singhal vs Union of India**. Section 79 of the IT Act provides immunity from legal liability to intermediaries, with the following exceptions: - conspiracy/abetting in the commission of the unlawful act [Section 79 (3)(a)], and - failure to expeditiously remove/ disable access to the unlawful material – which may be information, data or communication links, upon receiving actual knowledge about this or being notified by the appropriate government or agency [Section 79 (3) (b)] In the Shreya Singhal judgment which struck down Section 66(A) of the IT Act (an overwhelmingly generic provision that penalized electronic communication of a ‘grossly offensive’ or ‘menacing’ character) for its unreasonable and excessive curbs on the right to free speech,

# WHO

- Due to the increasing attention to the high prevalence of DV and its serious consequences on victims' health issues World Health Organization has developed some strategies to prevent and respond to DV that includes:
- (1) media and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness and the knowledge base, to promote social and economic empowerment of women.
- (2) Early intervention services for at-risk families and increase access to comprehensive service response to survivors, called Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS).
- However, victims have barriers to access the formal services due to the victims' demographic factors such as **race, beliefs and attitudes, income and fear of negative consequences of help seeking** .

# WHO

- This results in underutilization of the specialist support services over the past several years. Hence, the online support of DVCS is promoted for safe advertisement of DV resources, awareness promotion about the need for a compassionate support to the victims, resource sharing and buddying between survivors, and non-professional mentoring .
- The **accurate identification** of critical posts are crucially important for DVCS to direct their limited resources to support those in critical need. Manual browsing through a large amount of online posts is time consuming and inefficient to identify critical posts. As such, a tool that can filter the online posts relevant to DV and flag those critical posts is needed.

# IDENTIFYING CRITICAL POSTS

- The use of online posts to support decision making in crisis has been investigated in the literature, such as during natural disasters of floods and earthquakes.
- In the DV corpus, words such as linguistic dimensions (**I, she, he, my, him**) and time oriented tenses (**was, is, were**) are more associated with critical posts.
- We may understand that, when the victims or survivors post about their abusive experience, they use more past tense (**was, were**).
- “**She, he**” notions are often used to refer the abusive partners.
- “**I, me, my**” are often used by the victims to express their sufferings.
- Besides, the words year, abuse, time are most likely to occurred in critical class than uncritical class with large differences. Those words usually appear in critical post, when victim made a post online to seek help from DVCS groups.

# IDENTIFYING CRITICAL POSTS

- The word “**husband**” appears more in critical posts as male partner violence is predominant. Many posts mentioned that husband is abusive. Similarly, the word “**friend**” is used often in critical posts.
- The words “domestic, violence, abuse” have high support in both critical class and uncritical class. Because, these terms domestic violence and domestic abuse are commonly used in difference context in relation to domestic violence. They are often used in uncritical posts to create awareness messages such as (lets spread the word on domestic violence against women, please share this page with your friends.)

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# CONCLUSION

- **1. Online abuse must be recognised by the Government, judiciary and all relevant agencies as a harmful form of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.** The crime must be sanctioned robustly, without blaming victims. Policies, strategies, training and awareness-raising on domestic abuse and coercive control by Government, statutory agencies and support services – including specialist domestic abuse services – must routinely cover the nature and impact of online abuse, and highlight the extent of the overlap between offline and online forms of the crime.



# CONCLUSION

- 2. There is a compelling case for **reviewing the legislative framework** that deals with online forms of domestic abuse – to ensure it provides parity of protection between the online and offline worlds. Specifically, the Government should support the Law Commission to review the law on online communications, and strengthen the law on image-based sexual abuse (“Revenge Porn”) – including by granting victims anonymity.

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# CONCLUSION

- The use of **online technology** to continue perpetrating abuse, coercion and control must be **barred** through criminal and civil measures, in the same way as these behaviours are prohibited in the ‘real world’.
- It must be ensured that relevant restraining orders – including Non Molestation Orders and Domestic Violence Prevention Orders – **explicitly restrict online abuse and indirect contact between a perpetrator and a victim through social media**. Any breach of a restraining order, including a DVPO, must be a criminal offence.

# CONCLUSION

- 4. Improvements in the consistency of how online providers prevent, prohibit, and respond to the crime are required. The Government must convene a cross-sectoral working group – including industry and other stakeholders – to establish guidelines for online providers in preventing and tackling gendered online abuse, and responding to domestic abuse and VAWG cases.
- New obligations must be imposed on **online providers to: publish clear and simple information – and deliver training to the police, prosecutors and the judiciary – on how their products and services work; consult with specialist services to ensure the safety risks of new products are assessed, tested, and resolved at the design stage; and work in partnership with specialist services to ensure that online support teams understand the nature and impact of these crimes, and respond to victims effectively.**

# CONCLUSION

- 5. The police are currently required to respond to a rapidly growing area of crime, with huge increases in volumes of reporting. Although police forces are often the first point of contact for victims, many state that they are not adequately equipped or resourced to tackle online abuse. It is critical that **police training, resources, tools and expertise are commensurate with burgeoning levels of online abuse, so forces can deliver an effective response. Police Forces must also ensure that action to tackle online abuse is a central part of their domestic abuse and VAWG strategies, and is appropriately funded and prioritised at the local level.**

# CONCLUSION

- 6. Survivors of online abuse require dedicated and specialist support for safety and long term recovery. The Government must establish a sustainable long-term funding model for specialist services that alleviates current funding pressures, and provides security and consistency for the future. This should be delivered alongside additional support from online providers – such as technology user guides and manuals – to enable specialist services to effectively safeguard survivors.

# CONCLUSION

- **7. Prevention must be the cornerstone of the response. The Department for Education must urgently introduce statutory sex and relationships education, covering online abuse and healthy relationships, as part of a whole school approach to tackling sexual harassment and violence against women and girls now and preventing it in the future. Empowering women and girls with digital skills is also a priority for developing their confidence to communicate freely and safely online.**

# Facebook

- When and how do you file a complaint?
- How much information do I need to file a complaint?
- Does the Government have the power to monitor my internet usage. Does this amount to stalking?
- Can I remove and report an offending post on Whatsapp and other social media platforms?
- Someone is commenting unpleasant comments which are abusive in nature on my Facebook post. What do I do? You can report to the Facebook authorities in the following manner:
  - Click at the top right of the post.
  - Click 'Report post' or 'Report photo'.
  - Select the option that best describes the issue and follow the on-screen instructions
- You can also report fake profiles, posts, posts on your timeline, photos and videos, messages, pages, groups, events and ads. To know more, click [here](#).

# Abusive Language and Photoshopping

- If someone uses abusive language against you online or photoshops your image into content which is abusive or sexually coloured, then under the Information Technology Act, that person can be punished for transmitting or publishing any obscene material online. The abusive language or picture or video should :
  - Relate to a feeling or revealing of a sexual interest or desire against you or;
  - Relate to any excessive interest in sexual matters or;
  - Relate to content which would deprave or corrupt you, if you read or saw it online.
- The punishment for the first conviction is jail time up to three years with a fine up to 5 lakhs and for the second conviction, a jail time of a term which may extend to five years and a fine up to 10 lakhs.
- Share
-



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THANK YOU