



FIGHTING ONLINE HARASSMENT

Combating Online Harassment of Woman Journalists

Online abuse is a form of gender discrimination and violence against women, and must be prevented in order to ensure women's right to safety in the digital space. To force women to opt out of digital media is to rob women of the right to operate in a legitimate public space. When the voices of women journalists go missing from online spaces, their information and perspective on any event or issue is also silenced.

Abusive behaviour online, like abuse in the real world, is NOT normal. It is NOT acceptable. We can do something to stop it. It is a social problem arising out of power hierarchies and inequity. As a social problem, it must be tackled collectively through various means: technological, legal and social.

Women should not be forced to abandon the virtual space, but should be enabled to occupy it with confidence and safety. Women need to strengthen their voices on digital media platforms and need tools to make their voices heard.



What can you do if you are being harassed online?

- Ignore:** 'Don't feed the trolls' or, ignoring trolls and deny them publicity as a first step. Yet, most often, trolls don't give up.
- Block:** Mute, block or 'unfriend' an abusive online presence.
- Report:** Register complaints about abuse comments to moderators of social media platforms.
- Name and shame:** Retweet an abuser's comments or write a post to point out the abuse, find support from other users and publicise every instance of an abuser backing off or being forced to delete offending tweets/comments.
- Gather evidence:** Document the abuse by saving screenshots and web pages to gather evidence of harassment before it is deleted by the perpetrator.

- ✓ **Shout it out:** Garner support online from colleagues and the public, and stand up to the harasser. Speaking out is important to stop the harasser in his tracks.
- ✓ **Legal Remedies:** When threats of physical assault are made and especially when attackers resort to stalking or doxing or any other criminal activity, report it to the police, even though the process is cumbersome.
- ✓ Use Apps like Everyday Sexism and Trollbusters (online pest control!).
- ✓ **Safety features:** Social media platforms are responding to growing online abuse:
 - **Twitter** has started a Safety council, an initiative in conjunction with academics, non-governmental organisations, women's groups has launched a series of new features including a 'report abuse' option in every tweet, a 'mute' feature that helps filter misogynistic words, phrases and conversations, quality filter etc.
 - **Facebook** is collaborating with women's groups and is launching a safety section on their website that helps educate women and other groups susceptible to abuse about various features on the platform to deal with online abuse.
 - Other social media platforms including **Instagram, Snapchat** etc. have also introduced safety features to deal with this menace. The effectiveness of these measures is yet to be tested.

Collective Actions

#DONTTROLL

- ✓ **Helplines:** For example, Pakistan's cyber harassment which was launched on December 1, 2016 by the not-for-profit Digital Rights Foundation. Anyone facing online harassment can call in on 0800-39393 to talk in a "free, safe and confidential" environment. The service aims to provide legal advice, digital security support, psychological counselling and a referral system to victims.
- ✓ **Media organisations,** unions and colleagues must step up support. Often, women journalists may fear that they will not get the assignments they want if they report abuse. Whether or not a targeted journalist has supportive colleagues and managers is a crucial factor. Without them, she is more likely suffer. With them, she is more likely to continue voicing her opinion and telling the stories the world needs to hear.

Whatever the strategy, do not back down or be forced offline!