

Cyber Harassment Helpline

1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Digital Rights Foundation

The Cyber Harassment Helpline (“Helpline”) is a project of the Digital Rights Foundation (“Organization”). DRF was founded in 2012, and is a research-based, advocacy organization that works on issues of online free speech, privacy, surveillance, and cyber harassment.

1.2 Cyber Harassment Helpline

The Helpline will provide free, safe and confidential service to victims who face harassment in digital spaces. The Helpline will operate on several channels, a toll-free number and email address.

The Helpline will provide services to victims of **online harassment**, both recognised by the law as well as any other behaviour that the victim identifies as harassment.

The Helpline will consist of a toll-free number [0800-39393] where victims can call from across Pakistan in between the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Monday to Friday. The Helpline will not be in service on weekends and on public holidays.

The services of the Helpline staff will be available on other platforms. The Helpline staff will respond to complaints through our email address [helpdesk@digitalrightsfoundation.pk]. While the Facebook Page is open for complaints, however as per company policy Facebook is not the preferred medium for communication with victims for reasons of privacy and confidentiality so victims will be redirected to use the email address or helpline number instead.

1.3 Policy

The Policies contained in these documents will apply to the operations of the Helpline. These Policies are consistent with the ethics and principles of the Organization, and have been reviewed by the entire organization and its Board members.

The Policy is a living and evolving document, and will be subject to periodic revision and review by the Organization.

This Policy was last updated: February 28, 2017.

1.4 Ethics and Principles

Objectives of the Helpline

*To EDUCATE our people to be informed, effective and empowered users of the internet;

*To PROMOTE the Helpline as a resource for those who have questions or problems;

*To AID those users who experience harassment or violence in cyber spaces;

*To INFORM internet users about the legislative protections available to them;

*To FACILITATE victims in finding the relevant digital security, psychological and legal support that they need;

*To ADVANCE the perspectives and rights of internet users into the mainstream and political dialogue around cyber harassment.

Ethics and Principles of the Helpline are as follows:

- * The **interests of the victims** shall guide every decision and their interests will have priority over the interests of the organization or community;
- * The victim will have the **final say** in every decision affecting them. Every such decision shall be taken with their complete, affirmative and informed **consent**;
- * Every interaction with victims shall be **confidential**, and measures shall be taken to ensure their right to **privacy**;
- * Our aim is to educate and assist in a manner that will capacitate the victim as much as possible, so that they can take **independent, informed decisions**;
- * We will provide our services **without discrimination** to gender, age, class, profession, race, ethnicity, caste, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We show **respect** for individual, religious, cultural and familial norms when dealing with victims;
- * Protection, physical and mental **well-being**, of the victim shall be given the utmost priority;
- * We shall have in place mechanisms and measures to ensure that the victim has access to consistent and quality service;
- * It is our belief that **right to the internet** and online spaces is the right of every one, and that online harassment is a form of violence;
- * We are committed to **open and free access to information**, however this does not clash with our commitment towards the absolute confidentiality of the victims we deal with.

2: SYSTEMS AND PROCEDURES

2.1 The Organization shall ensure that the Policy is readily accessible, available, read and understood by all of its staff members. Furthermore, mechanisms will be developed and in place to ensure that the Policy is implemented and followed.

2.2 The Policy will be accessible to all its stakeholders. The Policy will be available on the official DRF website. It will also be made available upon request.

2.3 All interactions with the victims shall be private, confidential and secure. Measures will be taken to ensure that client is comfortable and safe when dealing with Helpline staff.

2.4 The Helpline will ensure, given the nature of online harassment cases, that the first point of contact shall be female support staff.

2.5 The Helpline centre shall be in an enclosed space, separate from the regular operations of the rest of the Organization. The dedicated Helpline room(s) shall be accessible exclusively to the Helpline support staff. There shall be no distractions when the support staff is dealing with a victim so as to ensure confidentiality and quality service.

2.6 In case of scheduled suspension of services of the Helpline, such as on public holidays, notice of suspension of service shall be given in advance. There shall be a

taped message on the Helpline detailing information regarding the closure, resumption of services and alternate avenues of contact during the period of suspension. In case of unplanned suspension, measures will be taken to place the taped message as soon as possible.

2.7 In case a formal case or complaint is pursued by the client, the Helpline staff shall provide guidance regarding the procedure of filing a complaint. The Helpline staff shall also provide preliminary legal advice and inform the client of possible challenges. The Helpline will not, however, provide representation, financial support or physical attendance at law enforcement offices and courts.

2.8 The Helpline staff shall ensure that all digital communication and physical literature clearly displays the Helpline toll-free number. However to ensure that calls intended for the Helpline but received on the Organization's other phone numbers are not heard by unauthorised personnel, all calls will be screened by the exchange device, operated by Helpline staff, before being routed to its intended destination.

2.9 The Policies relating to data usage and informed consent, will change when the victim is a minor. A minor will not be assumed to have given informed consent, even if communicated by the minor himself/herself. The Helpline will have a higher threshold to determine a minor's informed consent. In situations where the minor volunteers to obtain informed consent from his/her guardians, the Helpline will assess the situation to ensure that there is no exploitation or coercion. It shall be the policy of the Helpline not to share Personally Identifiable Information (PII) regarding minors and that unless it is to ensure compliance with the law, minors will not be encouraged to obtain informed consent from their guardians, nor will they be put in situations where informed consent is needed.

2.10 Helpline Support Staff

2.10.1 The Helpline support staff shall be subject to these policies and will be contractually obligated to comply. The job descriptions and employment contracts of the Helpline support staff dealing directly with the victims shall include a section on the endorsement of these Policies.

2.10.2 The Organization shall ensure that all staff of the Helpline has undergone training. The training will focus on dealing with victims, counselling skills, self-care, gender sensitization, cyber security, cyber harassment, cyber law in Pakistan, law enforcement mechanisms, operation of a helpline and simulation-based exercises.

2.10.3 Helpline staff members shall go through thorough background checks and will be subject to a rigorous interviewing and selection process before being hired, given the highly sensitive nature of their job.

2.10.4 When dealing with cases of online abuse and harassment, the Helpline staff is directed to be non-judgmental and empathetic. The Helpline staff is trained not to impose their own beliefs and preconceived notions of a situation onto the caller—the staff must play the role of facilitators, not controllers.

2.10.5 The Helpline staff shall not discriminate between victims based on their personal biases and all calls will be dealt without prejudice. Helpline staff members

shall not refuse service on the basis of any grounds that could be deemed as discriminatory as outlined earlier in the Ethics and Principles of the Helpline.

2.10.6 In cases where a communication received by the Helpline is abusive, offensive or threatening, it may be deemed appropriate for a helpline staff member to terminate the call (after following proper protocol i.e. waiting for the caller to calm down and/or informing the caller that they should call back when they have their emotions in check and are better ready to talk etc.). A review of such calls shall be done at the supervisory meetings, and the Helpline staff should be given adequate feedback on the best course of action in such circumstances.

2.10.7 In case of threats or legal intimidation against a Helpline staff member, the Organization shall provide appropriate support to the staff affected. The Organization is entitled to hold its internal inquiries to ascertain there has been no impropriety on part of the staff member, however such an inquiry is required to be done with the utmost sensitivity and will be used as an excuse to deny support to the staff member.

2.11 Services and Referrals

2.11.1 The Organization will develop an extensive referral system across the country, catering to the possible needs of the victims. This referral system should be based on assurance of quality of service, gender-sensitive operations and capacity of the individual/organization to handle the complaint.

2.11.2 The Organization/Helpline will provide digital security assistance, legal advice and emotional support to the victims; for all extended services, such as legal help, in-person/phone psychological support, law enforcement action, shelter, law enforcement complaints, etc., the Helpline will refer the victims to relevant local organizations. Referrals will be made keeping in mind the needs of the victim so they can be better facilitated. In case the referrals are charging a fee, the support staff shall inform the victim so they can make an informed choice.

While referral services will be checked for quality service provision, the Organization/Helpline will not be directly responsible for any transgressions on part of the external organizations and individuals.

2.11.3 It is the caller's prerogative to or not to act on the referral made by the Helpline.

2.11.4 Referrals shall be made to organizations/service providers after taking into account all quality, time, and financial concerns. In case a suitable referral cannot be made, the Helpline support staff should inform the victim of all risks and benefits of any alternative service which may be pursued. Full disclosure of the kind of service that the client may receive should be made in order to facilitate an informed decision.

2.11.5 After a referral is made, the Helpline support staff may conduct follow ups of the cases, both with the victims and the service providers. This is to ensure that the victim is being facilitated with the highest quality of service that is needed for their particular situation, and so that the referral system drawn up by the Organization is constantly evaluated to maintain predetermined certain standard. A time period between follow ups will be ascertained after discussion with the victim and the service provider.

If in the course of follow-ups it is revealed that the referral is unable to deliver quality services, then a reappraisal shall be done to remove them from the referral list.

2.11.6 For purposes of quality control, the Helpline staff might require the client to participate in a quality control survey on calls and/or over email. The timing of these surveys will depend on the sensitivity of the situation, to be avoided when the victim is going through emotional disturbance. The consent of the client shall be taken before beginning the survey and no Personally Identifying Information (PII) shall be required nor obtained.

3: CONFIDENTIALITY

3.1 All **personally identifiable information** (PII) will be obtained and shared through **informed consent**.

3.2 The calls shall not be recorded under any circumstances and only authorised and trained Helpline support staff shall have access to the calls and email communication.

3.3 The Helpline has enabled CLI technology so that phone numbers of callers are displayed and callers can be contacted only in cases of emergency that involve physical safety of the caller. Phone numbers however are not retained or stored, either manually or automatically. In case the call requires follow-up, the Helpline support staff shall request the caller to call back at a later time. If the caller insists on the Helpline staff calling back, then phone numbers will be retained temporarily with explicit and informed consent.

3.4 The victims will not be required to provide the Helpline staff with photographic evidence (picture, screenshots, links to content, etc.). However, depending on the nature of the case, the Helpline staff can encourage the victim to maintain records and evidence. The Helpline staff shall guide the victim so as to store the evidence securely.

3.5 In cases where evidence is shared with the Helpline staff through informed consent or unilaterally by the client, measures will be taken to store it securely. It will be ensured that only essential staff members dealing with the case have access to that material. Such evidence shall be destroyed and permanently deleted once the case is marked as resolved within the Helpline tracking system.

4: DATA USAGE POLICY

4.1 The Helpline strives to give the callers choice and control over the information they share with us, and how that information is to be shared. Our aim is to communicate why the information is needed and what it shall be used for at the time of obtaining that information, in order to ensure maximum transparency. However in emergency situations or circumstances it would not be appropriate to communicate policies for counselling reasons, we will make sure that it is communicated as soon as appropriately possible.

4.2 The Helpline shall only collect non-personally identifiable information, and if personally identifiable information (PII) is needed for matters relating to the case then informed consent will be taken.

4.3 The information collected and recorded by the Helpline staff shall be limited to: age, location, gender, the nature of the complaint, duration of the call, number of calls and emails received, number of calls attended by a staff member, feedback from clients (obtained through informed consent), how the client found out about the helpline, number of cases referred and to whom. This list stands to be amended if the victim/survivor volunteers information through informed consent. Refer to media and publicity policy (section 4.9) for specific policies in such circumstances.

4.4 When PII is volunteered, the Helpline support staff may record some of the information for the purpose of adequately following and quality analysis of the case. In such a circumstance, measures will be taken to ensure security of the information. The Helpline staff shall maintain the victim's confidentiality by keeping their files in a separate and locked cabinet. It is our policy to destroy all PII, both physically and digitally, after the case is resolved or if the information is no longer essential before resolution.

4.5 The aforementioned information will not be shared with anyone outside the Organization, or with non-essential members of the Organization. The Organization will not rent or sell this information to third parties. We will not transmit or share this information unless required by law. In such cases we shall vigorously challenge any legal notice or other demand by government or private organizations or individuals to access this information.

4.6 Pertaining to the prior clause, a victim's information shall only be shared with external organizations, especially law enforcement and health agencies, without having obtained their consent if the support staff believes the victims life to be in immediate danger or under immediate threat. The threat may be to either the victim or someone else.

4.7 All information collected and stored in the course of communications, whether over email or through calls, will be subject to our confidentiality policy. It is the Helpline's policy not to backup data relating to these cases, and data is only retained till the case is resolved or if the information is no longer essential before resolution, whichever comes first. Till this information is on our record the Helpline support staff will work to secure it both physically and digitally.

4.8 Non-personally identifiable information will be used for internal record-keeping, review and shared with donors. This information, though non-personally identifiable, will be further **anonymised** to remove any data that might reveal the victim's identity indirectly.

4.9 If information needs to be shared with referral partners, it is the preferred policy that the victim should share the information and data themselves. Under exceptional circumstances, if the victim is unable to share the information and authorises the Helpline to do so, this exchange can only happen when informed and express consent has been given. The victim shall be required to fill out a consent form before the transfer of information can take place, and should be made aware of all the possible consequences of sharing the information. The victim will be updated on the status of the transfer at every point of progress.

4.10 The Organization might use certain cases as “cases studies” for academic, awareness-raising, fund-raising or advocacy purposes. The Organization shall be required to gain informed consent from the victim and/or survivor. The Organization will be required to take measures to ensure that privacy is guaranteed at all times. It will be ensured that all personal identifying information is anonymised.

4.11 The Organization shall have in place measures to secure its communications and storage of data from breaches. External attacks on its communications shall be dealt with immediately and given the highest priority within the Organization.

4.12 **Media**

4.12.1 Case will be discussed with any media member or organization only under specific circumstances. Publicity of a case should happen only when the victim or survivor initiates it, there is informed consent and all the risks of going public have been communicated to the victim. The survivor/victim reserves the right to withdraw consent at any time. The Organization shall not provide access to victims out of its own volition.

4.12.2 Those survivors/victims requesting media coverage and exposure shall be made aware of the possible problems that can arise from approaching the media. In case the victim/survivor has to appear for press conferences or media interviews, the victim/survivor must be prepared for the possible type of questions s/he will have to face. The victim/survivor will be made aware that they reserve the right to decline to answer questions and to exit the interview/press event at any time if they feel uncomfortable. The Organization shall take measures to vet media personnel allowed to approach the victim/survivor and will debrief them regarding the ethics of dealing with such sensitive topics.

4.12.3 The victim or survivor will never be used for advancing the interests of the Organization. The interest and well-being of the survivor must be the top priority at all times. The Organization shall designate a person who shall be responsible for keeping the victim/survivor updated, act as a focal point of contact with the media and, if need be, issuing a statement with the full knowledge and consent of the victim/survivor.

4.12.4 The Organization or the assigned focal person shall at no point pressurise the victim/survivor. The Organization shall restrict its role to supporting, facilitating and protecting the victim/survivor in their wish to approach the media.