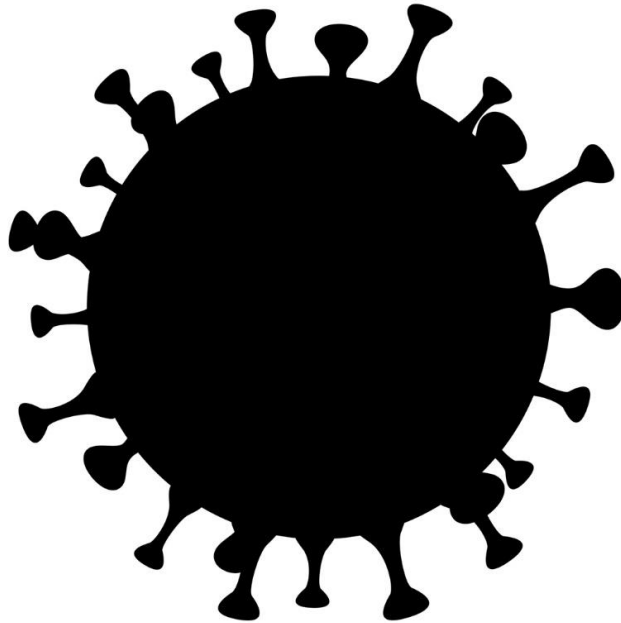


COVID 19 and Cyber Harassment




This policy brief provides information and identifies a number of key recommendations to assist governments and other stakeholders in designing COVID-19 policy responses that can help to prevent and respond to cyber harassment against vulnerable and marginalized communities. In Pakistan technology-related violence against women is burgeoning; cyber harassment is a gendered issue affecting women and children disproportionately.¹ In Pakistan, 70 % of the female population experiences sexual or physical violence at least once in their lifetime,² this abuse is not just offline but is interlinked with online spaces as well.



¹ Festl, R. and Quandt, T., 2013. Social relations and cyberbullying: The influence of individual and structural attributes on victimization and perpetration via the internet. *Human communication research*, 39(1), pp.101-126.

² Sanayah Malik, "Measuring Pakistani Women's Experience of Online Violence", Digital Rights Foundation, 2017, <http://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Hamara-Internet-Online-Harassment-Report.pdf>.

Three Years of the Helpline

- . The figures outlined in this summary pertain to the three years starting from December 1, 2019 until December 31, 2019
- . Total number of complaints managed by the helpline in three years **4492**
- . Percentage of cases from women **40% 1785** 
- . Percentage of cases from men **32% 1411** 
- . Percentage of cases reported by men on behalf of someone else **6% 258** 
- . Percentage of cases by gender and religious minorities **.01%**
- . Number of cases from cities without cybercrime office **15% 654 cases**
- . Platform on which most complaints were received **Facebook and WhatsApp**

COVID 19 and Cyber Harassment: Issues and Trends

Harassment/violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, a universal issue, with great impact on victims/survivors, their families, and communities.³

An analysis of the Cyber harassment Helpline's data during two months of the COVID 19 lockdown (March and April 2020) reveals that the highest number of complaints were received from women 74%. A total of 136 complaints were received during the months of March and April, compared to 47 in the prior two months (January and February 2020). Meanwhile 19% percent of the helpline's cases were received by men and 5% by gender non-binary individuals.

These numbers only depict the cases received through digital mediums primarily through email as Helpline's toll free number was temporarily unavailable due to lockdown and resumed in the last week of April (27th).

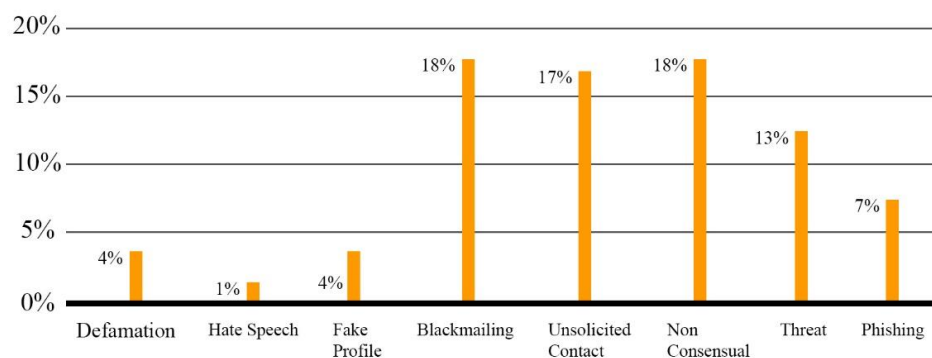
Month-wise breakdown of emails received at the Helpline in 2020.

Before Lockdown		During Lockdown	
January	February	March	April
30	17	58	78

The forms of gendered violence that are largely directed at women in the digital sphere include sexual harassment, surveillance, unauthorized use and dissemination of personal data, and manipulation of personal information including images and videos. This form of violence acts as a significant barrier to women's expression of themselves as well as meaningful engagement with the internet. A majority of the cases that the Digital Rights Foundation's cyber-harassment helpline received digitally during lockdown (months of April & May) pertained to blackmailing through non-consensual sharing of information, intimate images and videos.

³ <https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/3>

Complaints



Recommendations for policy makers and law enforcement

1. Streamlining the online complaints system to ensure that complaints can be lodged and case updates can be obtained virtually, ensuring social distancing and minimizing physical contact in the reporting and investigation process. Furthermore there should be clear, explicit and public SOPs for the operations of cybercrime wings to ensure that complainants are able to follow the required procedures effectively.
2. Inclusion of cybercrime laws, internet governance, digital forensics and digital rights into the curriculum of the judiciary and law enforcement.
3. Gender sensitization for law enforcement, prosecutors, court staff and judges in order to handle cases relating to online violence with effectiveness, sensitivity and an understanding of the gendered risks that women and gender minorities face online.
4. Adoption of technology and video-based testimony to ensure timely hearing of cases by courts while ensuring public health and safety protocols during the pandemic.

- 5.** Develop a mechanism to deal with cases in foreign jurisdictions, i.e. cases where: either the accused or the complainant is located outside Pakistan. Pakistan is not a signatory to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which sets up a regime for international cooperation on cybercrime.
- 6.** Develop a Rapid Response Cell which can respond to urgent cases where leaked information can harm personal safety or cause immediate reputational harm, a rapid response cell that is operational 24/7 should be established in addition to the regular operations of the NR3C. Cases marked as urgent should be expedited and dealt with on a priority basis.
- 7.** Greater technical expertise for digital forensics and investigation: Several complaints to the NR3C experience a substantial investigative delay or are dropped altogether due to lack of technical abilities of officers and technologies available to the FIA.
- 8.** Develop a case Management system: complainants should be able to track and receive updates periodically on the status of their case through an online system. Digital copies of the case file and evidence filed should be stored on a secure server to ensure reliable duplicates in case the original case file is lost or tampered with.
- 9.** Develop clear, accessible and publicly available Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on privacy, confidentiality, and protection of evidentiary data and identity of the complainants at FIA
- 10.** Performance review of investigators and prosecutors: complainant should be able to register concerns regarding their assigned officers to a presiding officer for each regional zone, which should automatically trigger independent and transparent inquiry.
- 11.** Establish channels of communication between police stations and cybercrime stations to ensure that cases can be easily transferred and there is clarity as to where a particular case should be registered, investigated and prosecuted.
- 12.** Data protection legislation should be promulgated to protect the fundamental right to privacy of citizens

13. More collaboration with civil society organizations through public-private partnerships to ensure that public institutions work collaboratively with civil society and academia to complement each other's work. Potential collaborations on awareness campaigns on digital safety during Covid-19 are recommended.

14. Pakistan Telecommunication Authority should facilitate and develop mechanisms to ensure uninterrupted remote operations of state and non-state telephonic Helplines in order to provide support and help to the victims/survivors of violence and harassment, which has increased under lockdown.

Cyber Harassment Helpline

Gender-sensitive, confidential & free helpline

0800-39393

Our gender-sensitive, confidential, free-of-charge helpline aims to provide callers with a safe space where they can easily share their problems regarding online harassment. We can be reached through phone, Facebook and emails five days a week from 9am to 5pm. Callers can speak to a helpline support staff trained in handling cases of cyber-harassment, who will assess the best means of helping the caller with their problem. The helpline is dedicated to helping vulnerable and marginalized communities in Pakistan.



Services

Digital Safety

Legal Advice

Psychological Counselling

Internet Watch Foundation Portal
for removal of child sexual exploitative content



Ab Aur Nahin

referral network of lawyers: <https://www.abaurnahin.pk/>.

About Digital Rights Foundation

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a not-for-profit organization based in Pakistan working on digital freedoms since 2013. DRF envisions a place where all people, especially women, can exercise their right of expression without being threatened. We work on protecting online freedom of expression, the right to privacy, access to ICTs and protection against online violence.

www.digitalrightsfoundation.pk



DigitalRightsFoundation
"KNOW YOUR RIGHTS"