



DigitalRightsFoundation
"KNOW YOUR RIGHTS"

DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION PUBLIC COMMENT ON META'S OVERSIGHT BOARD CASE 2023-006-FB-UA ON IMAGE OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (IRAQ)

Submission Author: Noor Waheed

Submission Date: 2nd May, 2023

When determining whether or not a satirical post about GBV should be allowed to stay on its platforms, Meta should consider the following criteria: (1) the intent of the post (i.e. is it genuine satire, raising awareness, artistic license) (2) the potential to do harm (i.e. does it demean or diminish the severity of GBV and undermine victims of GBV).

The prevalence of gender based violence (GBV) globally is alarming enough to be deemed a “public health emergency” according to the United Nations. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 1 in 3 women worldwide will experience physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime.¹ In Iraq, of the 1.32 million people that are estimated to be at risk of different forms of GBV, more than 75% of them are women and adolescent girls. 77% of GBV incidents are linked to domestic violence.² In light of these statistics, Meta should consider posts diminishing the severity of GBV the way it would treat other endemic public health crises. In determining whether or not a post joking or mocking GBV is against community standards, Meta should not only apply the Bullying and Harassment Community Standard but also its standards regarding Misinformation. Especially in cases such as this one, where an image of a notable activist was used as an accompaniment to a “joke” that both normalizes and trivializes GBV. The image may have been misappropriated from either a GBV campaign, taken out of its original context completely or even digitally altered. Misappropriation of an image in this context can perpetuate misinformation, false narratives and can perpetuate destructive stereotypes such as “if your wife accidentally insults you it is totally normal and okay to beat her” or that GBV is “deserved” by the victim.

However, not all forms of satire and joking regarding GBV fall within this category. For example, survivors of GBV may turn to satire or joke online about their own experiences as a coping mechanism. Or people may say things sarcastically or ironically that appear to make light of GBV but to the opposite intended effect. Whether or not something meant as a joke or satire, especially when it comes to serious issues, and be removed should be assessed by its potential to do harm online and offline. In Iraq, where a humanitarian crisis exacerbates an already bleak GBV situation, normalizing/trivializing GBV poses

¹ [Stand With Her: 6 Women-led Organizations Tackling Gender-based Violence](#)

² [First Gender-Based Violence Strategic Plan launched in Iraq](#)

harms that transcend the post itself. It can also have the intended or unintended consequence of survivors of GBV being treated non-seriously, especially in a cultural context where violence against women is already considered the norm. Additionally, the perpetuation of anti-women narratives on online spaces also leads to other non-tangible harms like increased bullying and harassment online especially against women and activists. Amongst those harms such as in this case is making jeering comments, that are forms of harassment in the guise of “humor” or “jokes”. Depiction of notable figures in this context may also be abused and used as a form of intimidation. It would also make it more difficult for survivors of GBV to share their experiences online in fear of backlash disguised as humor. In the interest of freedom of expression and safety in online spaces any post joking or mocking GBV that gets reported should be subject to human review for a contextual harm assessment.

Insofar as making Meta’s platforms safer spaces for survivors of GBV, all content which depicts GBV particularly of graphic nature should have a warning screen so that users have discretion on whether they want to view and engage with the content or not. Furthermore, if such a post is to remain on the platform after being flagged, users should be directed to information regarding GBV awareness and prevention in their region/country to provide greater context to interpret the post with.

*To read the Oversight Board’s full decision on this case:

<https://www.oversightboard.com/decision/FB-1RWWJUAT>

**To see all submitted Public Comments:

<https://oversightboard.com/attachment/295372496346189/>