

Internet Rights and Human Rights Training Module

Violence Against Women (VAW)
Online

Outline

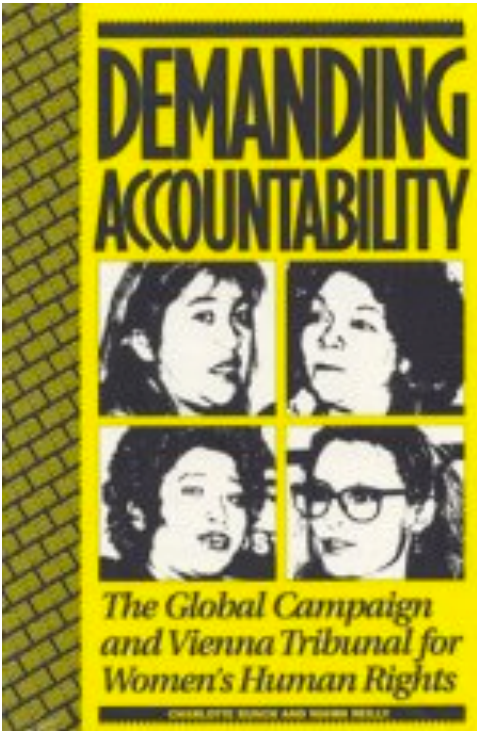
- **Section 1: Introduction**
 - Defining Violence Against Women (VAW)
 - How does VAW manifest in online spaces?
- **Section 2: Recognizing the Gendered Nature of VAW Online and its Impacts**
 - What makes these rights violations a matter of violence against women?
 - What are some of the impacts of VAW online on women's daily lives?
- **Section 3: International Law & VAW Online**
- **Session 4: Challenges to Redress**
 - Challenges in national legal frameworks
 - Challenges in corporate policies
- **Section 5: Resisting VAW Online**
- **Section 6: Group Work on Case Studies**
- **Section 7: Feedback & Wrap-Up**
 - Discussion of implications for your work
 - Feedback and conclusions
 - Evaluation

I. Introduction

Defining VAW Online

Defining Violence Against Women (VAW)

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign
NOVEMBER 25 - DECEMBER 10



UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (DEVAW, 1993)

- **Article 1.**

VAW is “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

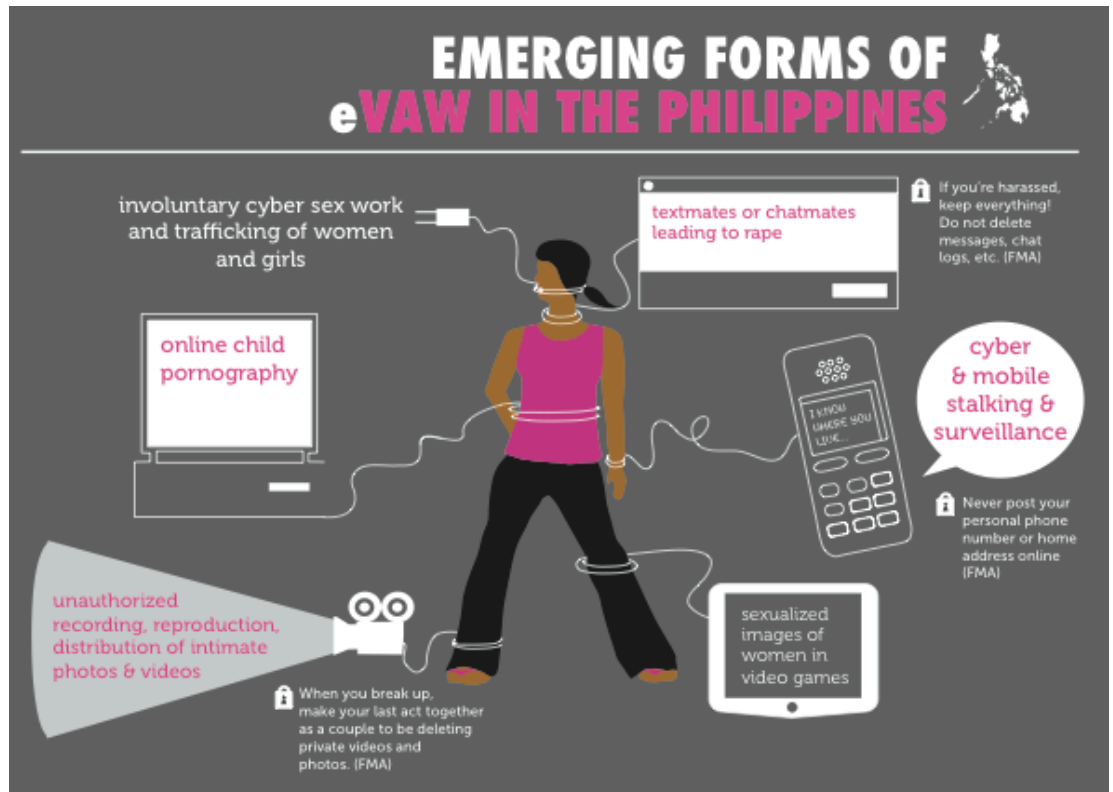
- Violence against women is not a natural condition or simply an expected outcome of challenging socio-economic inequalities.
- Violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, and a social mechanism by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

Defining Violence Against Women *Online*

- Acts of gender-based violence against women that are committed or exacerbated through the use of digital and online information communications technologies (ICTs).
- The '**borderlessness**' of the internet and the '**intractability**' of information circulated through ICTs present unique challenges to addressing VAW online.

Ways that VAW Manifests in Online Spaces

- Accessing, changing, faking, or stealing your personal data your personal data
- Taking/distributing photos/videos without consent
- Sexual assault and rape photos/videos
- Monitoring and tracking your movements and activities both online and offline.
- Abusive comments and graphic threats of violence



Infographic by Gaby Alegre, for Foundations for Media Alternatives (FMA), 2014.

- Blackmail, extortion, and entrapment; especially for the purpose of sexual exploitation and/or trafficking

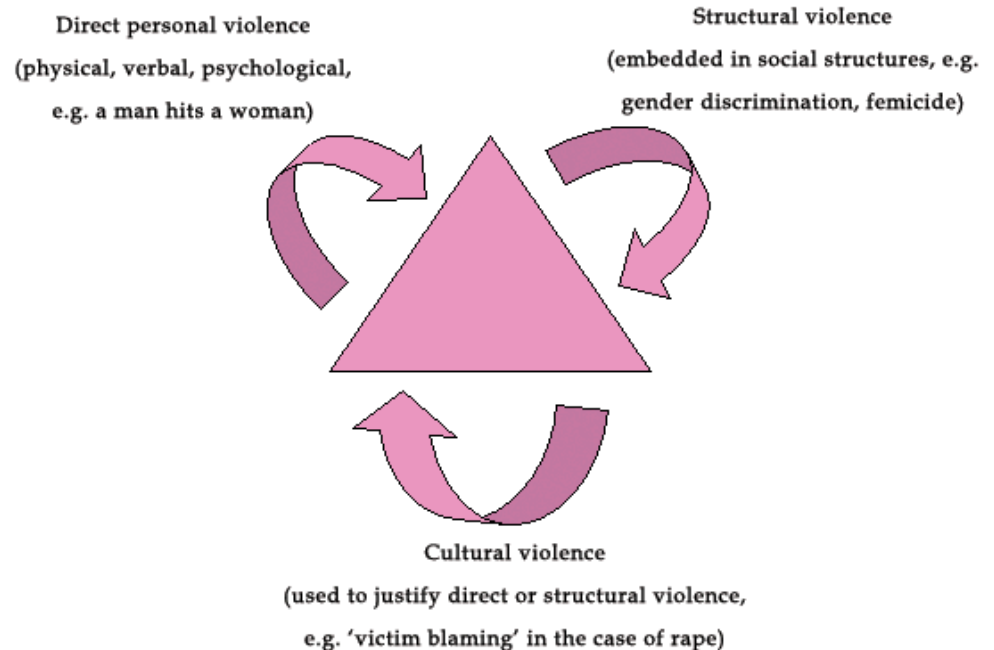
Reflection/Discussion

II. Recognizing the Gendered Nature of VAW Online

Recognizing the Gendered Nature of Abuse Online

What makes it VAW?

- Women are disproportionately targeted for violence through ICTs
- VAW online takes place in a continuum of VAW offline, often exacerbating it.
- VAW online is fuelled by a pervasive culture of sexism and misogyny, that is taken as a social 'norm'.



Graphic exploring the different levels of VAW by ENGENDER (South Africa), available at <http://www.engender.org.za/publications/engenderingsecurity.html>

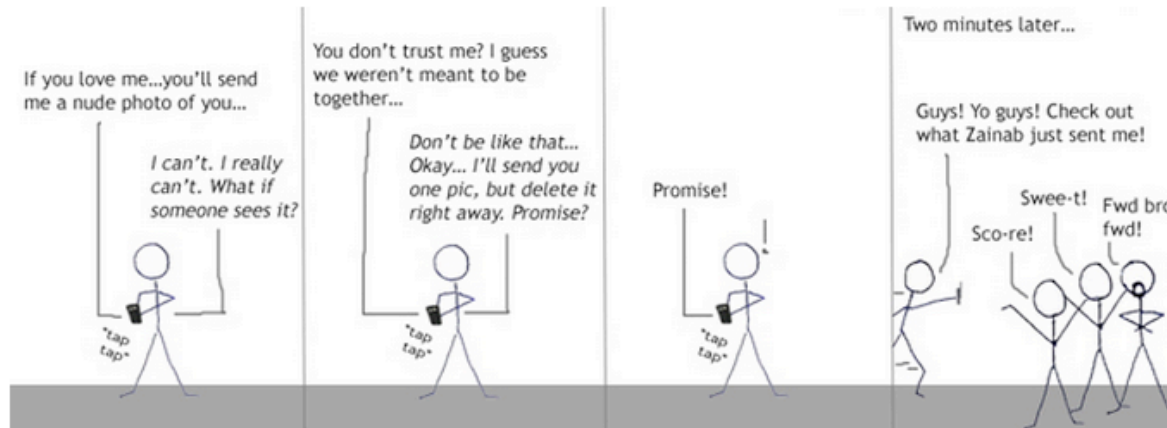
Example: Recognizing Gendered Nature of Abuse

In all fairness, Facebook can be used as a public tool for good (if people only see it that way)

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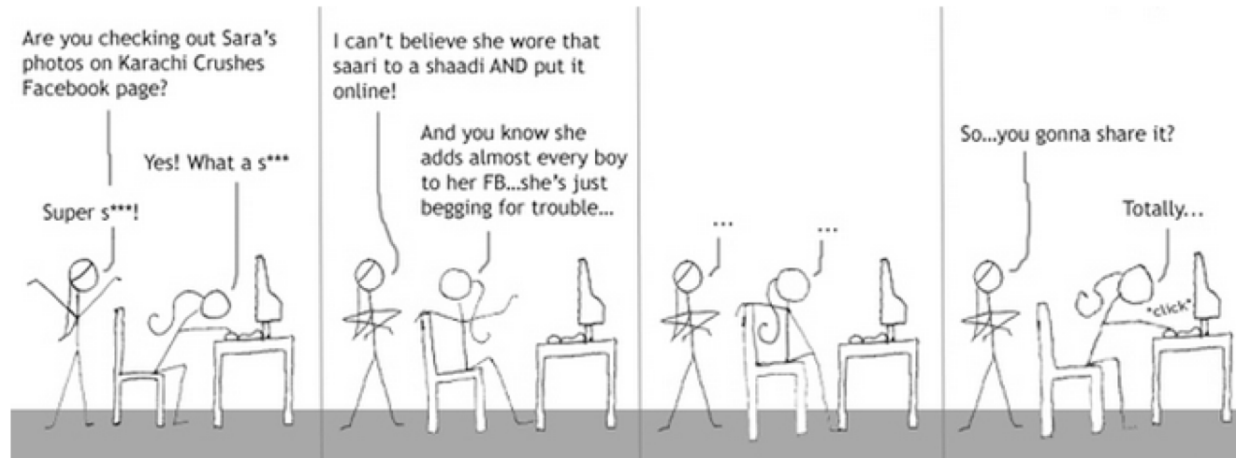


But there is a lot of exploitation of privacy, especially through mobile phones...

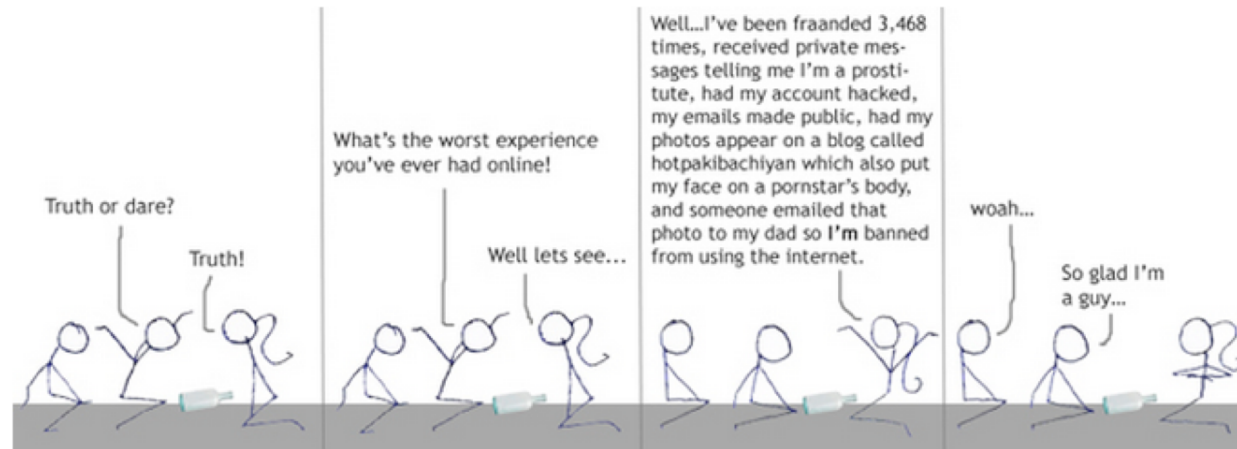


Example: Recognizing Gendered Nature of Abuse

Of course it isn't just males who play a negative role here...



Often us guys are unable to grasp how deeply this issue impacts the opposite sex...



What are some examples of the impacts of VAW Online?

Emotional and psychological violence

- Depression, fear, anxiety, self-censorship, nightmares, susceptibility to abusive relationships and exploitation. Continued emotional and psychological violence has in the worst cases led to suicide.

Economic harm

- Loss of employment or the refusal to be offered new employment because of a 'scandal', especially from photos/videos/personal information being leaked online.

Increased physical violence

- Being blackmailed into repeated rape and sexual servitude, or husbands/intimate-partners physically abusing women as a result of perceived immorality

Social isolation

- Being rejected by family, friends and community, being forced to leave home, for example when a story/photo/video of sexual assault or rape is circulated online

Impacts of VAW Online

“I felt like I lost something, perhaps my confidence. For one year, I did not talk to people. I felt there was nothing for me to say so I did not talk.” (Ruby, Philippines)

“Yes, I have been hesitant to use ICTs, out of fear of new digital aggression...I know that these virtual media were not designed to hurt women, that they are designed for communication, but the majority of men use them to cause us harm. I currently don't use them because I'm afraid of what could happen to me again.” (Martha, Colombia)

“I got so depressed - to the point where my employer actually forced me to go see a psychologist...I considered committing suicide, because I figured that this would send the message that this wasn't a game.” (Seraphine, Congo)

“My reputation and dignity are being affected and I am being seen by everybody without anyone doing anything about it...up until now the photographs remain there and day after day they are seen by more people and the number of followers grows.”

Women's testimonies after having private and intimate photos/videos posted online, taken from “End Violence: Women's Rights and Safety Online” research case studies, APC, 2014.

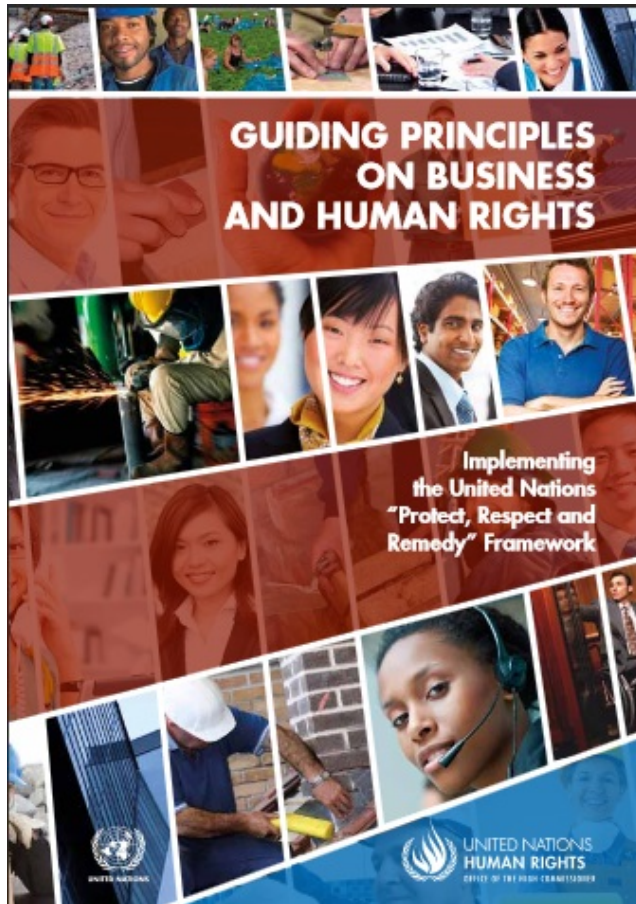
Reflection/Discussion

III. International Laws and VAW Online

International Agreements on Violence Against Women

- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (**CEDAW**, 1976)
- UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (**DEVAW**, 1993)
- UN **Beijing Platform for Action** (1995)
- UN **General Assembly** adopts **bi-annual resolutions on VAW**, most recently on addressing the violence faced by Women's Human Rights Defenders (2013).
- UN **Human Rights Council** adopts **annual resolutions on VAW**
- UN **Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW) adopted agreement on the elimination of VAW in 2013.

International Guidelines on Business & Human Rights



OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT
IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

IV. Challenges to Providing Redress

Challenges to Addressing VAW Online

- Legal Frameworks -

- Applying existing laws on VAW, privacy, defamation, to technology that did not exist when the laws were drafted
- Anti-VAW laws may not explicitly mention the use of ICTs to commit VAW, or recognize emotional & psychological harm.
- Lack of sensitivity and awareness on VAW online amongst law enforcement, staff of protective services, and policy makers.

Challenges to Addressing VAW Online

- Corporate Policy Frameworks -

- Unclear what training, if any, the staff handling reports receive on gender, human rights and VAW.
- No policy commitment to human rights, nor a policy commitment against VAW, despite international guidelines.
- Cooperation between US-based companies and law enforcement in other countries slow and ineffective
- English-language bias in reporting and redress mechanisms is an obstacle for many users .



V. Examples of Strategies for Resisting VAW Online

Strategies for Resisting VAW Online

➤ A Rights-Based Approach to Advocacy

- VAW is recognized as a cross-cutting human rights violation.
- UN Human Rights Council has agreed that human rights must be protected and respected in digital and internet spaces as well
- VAW online particularly infringes on women's rights to privacy, to freedom of expression & assembly, and to access justice



Strategies for Resisting VAW Online

- Encouraging bystanders to think more critically about what they consume online
- Lobbying companies to create practices and policies that address VAW and the respect of human rights.



Reflections/Discussion

VI. Case Studies