Inclusive Technology:
The Gender Digital Divide, Human Rights & Violence Against Women

Overview

America's 21st century diplomacy relies on science, innovative technology, and access to an open, interoperable, reliable and secure Internet. However, with 250 million fewer women online globally than men,[i] and over 1.7 billion women not owning a mobile phone,[ii] the gender digital divide poses a threat to economic, social, and political progress. Restrictive social norms and structural inequalities offline and online contribute to discrimination and violence against women and girls. Globally, this exacerbates the gender digital divide and threatens human rights.

Defining the Problem

The Gender Digital Divide refers to women and girls lack of access to, use and development of information communication technologies (ICTs). Social norms refer to responsibilities, roles and behaviors associated with being a man or a woman. Commonly around the world, these tend to restrict women and girls' full participation in formal economies, constrain equal access to legal and financial institutions, limit their access to education, or control their social interactions outside the home. These norms can widen the digital divide, and contribute to gender-based violence (GBV).

Gender-based violence, including violence against women and girls, is violence that is directed at a person based on their sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity.[iii] It is characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social and other forms of control or abuse. It can occur in public and private settings, such as digital and online spaces, schools, the home, workplaces, and in transit.

> **Violence against women and girls both offline and online undermines global growth and stability.**

Some specific examples of violence facilitated by ICTs includes stalking, threats, hate speech, breaches of privacy, blackmail, account hijacking, impersonation, non-consensual sharing of explicit images, human trafficking, and terrorist recruitment.

Connecting offline and online violence

Online violence perpetuates existing offline gender inequality between men, women, boys and girls, spanning the continuum from physical to digital spaces. For example, in-person stalking is often accompanied by stalking online or via text message, and women commonly face sexualized threats offline through ICTs.

Human Rights, Rule of Law and Transparency

Offline and online violence is a barrier to women and girls' access to ICTs and the internet, and their broader human rights, stifling freedoms of expression, association and assembly. Human rights apply equally offline and online,[iv] yet, in 74% of countries, law enforcement and courts are not taking appropriate actions when web-enabled ICTs are used to commit acts of GBV. [v] Likewise, the private sector has a role to play. For example, Internet service providers took action in less than one third of reported cases of online violence.[vi]

> **Human rights and the digital divide are negatively impacted by restrictive social norms, discrimination, and violence against women**

Multi-stakeholder Action Needed

To build a more democratic and prosperous world, the private sector, governments, and civil society can work together to enhance women and girls' access to, use and development of technology. Offline or online, multi-stakeholder focus on GBV prevention, protection for those targeted, and accountability to perpetrators, is key to bridge the global gender digital divide.

[i]International Telecommunication Union, Gender Dashboard: Women in ICTs and Connectivity (2016) https://www.itu.int/en/action/gender-equality/data/Pages/ie.aspx?/en/action/gender-equality/data/Pages/default.aspx

[ii]GSMA- Bridging the gender gap: Mobile access and usage in low- and middle–income countries (2015) https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/programme/connected-women/women-are-left-out-of-the-digital-revolution-in-low-and-middle-income-countries

[iii] U.S. Strategy To Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally (2016) http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258703.pdf

[iv]United Nations Resolution A/HRC/20/L.14 on The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet (2012) A/HRC/20/L.14 http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session20/A.HRC.20.L.14_en.doc

[v] The Web Index: The Web and Gender Inequality (2015) http://thewebindex.org/report/#4._the_web_and_gender_inequality

[vi]Association for Progressive Communications: End violence: Women's rights and safety Online From impunity to justice: Improving corporate policies to end technology-related violence against women (2015) https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/impunity-justice-improving-corporate-policies-end-0