Research Findings: Online Violence Against Women in Bangladesh

Overview

To assess the rate, nature, and remedies for online violence against women in Bangladesh, ActionAid Bangladesh conducted online research in 2022. With a structured survey questionnaire, stratified random sampling by using Computer Assisted Web-Interviewing (CAWI) method was used to conduct the study where in total, 514 online users responded and participated. Among the respondents, 359 people provided complete answers and were considered as an achieved sample. In addition, a brief qualitative analysis of six focus group discussions with adolescent and women groups in six districts at rural or thana levels were also conducted. The completion rate of the responses was 82%.

Findings

1. **Prevalence**

   - **63.51%** of (228 out of 359 in total) women faced online violence. That means around 64 out of every 100 women have to face online harassment and violence in some form in Bangladesh. This is an increase from the prevalence rate of 50.19%, a result from last year's survey conducted in November 2021.

   - Out of the 228 respondents who faced online violence, 67.81% faced online violence 1-5 times, 21.89% faced it 5-10 times, and 10.30% faced it more than 10 times in the last one year.

2. **Online/Social Media Platform where respondents were harassed the most**

   Most of the women faced online violence on Facebook (47%) and Messenger (35%). Other platforms where women faced online violence were Instagram (6.11%), IMO (3.06%), WhatsApp (1.75%), and YouTube (1.31%).
   We didn't analyse the responses on TikTok, YouTube, Linkedin, Google, Blog, Phone, Telegram, Skype, Viber, and Quora, due to lack of representational data.

3. **Typology of Violence**

   The top 12 types of *online violence against women* are -
   i.   Received lewd, offensive, sexual, or (to women) hateful comments (80.4%)
   ii. Received sexually explicit pictures in inbox, were asked for sex (53.3%)
   iii. Received discriminatory behaviour (19.2%)
   iv. Fake ID created in their name (17.5%)
   v.   Had their activities continuously followed in cyber-space (16.2%)
   vi. Were personally attacked for speaking out on gay rights (13.1%)
   vii. Had their private photos posted without their consent (11.8%)
   viii. Received threats of sexual assault (11.8%)

ix. Received sexually suggestive comments or gestures during Facebook LIVE or educational sessions (5.2%)
x. Forced to have sex in exchange for work (4.8%)
xi. Photographed or recorded during sexual assault and the photo or recording were posted later in online platforms (3.1%)
xii. Cheated with tempting offers to participate in showbiz (3.1%)

4. **Impacts**

The most severe impact of online harassment on women's life is psychological trauma, including depression and anxiety (65.07%). The 2nd highest impact is loss of confidence in being active or expressing opinions online/in social media (42.79%), followed by being traumatized (25.33%) and losing self-dignity (24.89%).

It is therefore evident that the emotional distress caused by online violence and harassment is alarmingly impacting women's self-confidence and independence.

5. **Formal Complaint**

Only around 15% of women submitted formal complaints, which is insignificant, and the silent survivours were alarming in number in both 2022 and 2021 surveys (more than 85%).

6. **Complaint Submission Entities**

In both the years, the automated reporting system of social media (Facebook) was found to be the most popular form of formal complaint submission process (55% in 2021 & 44.12% in 2022).
This year, findings suggest that the Facebook page of Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW) was also popular with 20% of complaints submissions. Usage of National Emergency number was also prominent (at 15%) and more than last year (11.76%).
It is notable that no data was found for the national helpline port of Center for Violence Against Women and Children (CVAWC) & the Child helpline numbers 109 and 1098 in the last 2 years' survey.

7. **Reason for Not Submitting Complaints**

- The study reveals that 64.71% of women did not find any redressal or action against their submitted complaints

- Most of the women think that the complaining mechanism doesn't work. So, they did not have any interest in submitting complaints (28.87%). Moreover, there was uncertainty as well as unawareness among respondents about the result or action taken after complaints (21.13% and 19.59% respectively)

- Respondents expressed fear of social stigma, victim blaming and privacy loss (7.22%, 5.15%, and 4.12% respectively). Therefore, 75.77% of women mentioned they wanted to submit complaints anonymously

8. Preferred Ways to Report Complaints

Women preferred calling a 3-digit hotline number like 999 or 109 (47%) and chatbot options (42%), such as Police cyber support for women, for filing complaints than in-person complaint submission (12%) process at the police station.

9. Awareness Raising Campaigns

Out of all the respondents, 43.45% said that they have seen some social awareness campaigns regarding online violence and harassment against women promoted by Private/Corporate institutions or organisations (36.79%), Development Organisations/NGOs (33.49%), Government Agencies/Institutions (22.17%) and from other sources (7.55%).

Recommendations Based on Findings

- Identifying fake accounts and eliminating them can significantly reduce criminal activities. Two-factor authentication should be made compulsory.

- Creating safe space for the sufferers to go public and developing guidelines for publishing news about the sufferers and witnesses in a dignified way.

- Boosting higher confidence of the sufferers on law-enforcement authorities.

- Ensuring speedy actions to ensure justice. The justice system should be public and well-portrayed in the media.

- Restricting internet access of the offenders by developing online usage guidelines for social behaviour and policy, with outlines of Dos and Dont's.

- Developing user-friendly mobile app for an easy complaining mechanism, with a prompt on the screen, in both English and Bangla version.

- Increasing digital literacy training and strengthening digital awareness activities.

- Conducting massive awareness campaigns for social and community awareness.

- Enhancing awareness on digital media usage, behaviour and security for adolescents, by deploying special curriculums for all educational mediums.

- Encouraging positive change in political culture and stopping rewarding the bad guys. Stopping local goons in recruiting adolescent boys and making them a part of 'Kishore Gangs'.

- Sponsoring TV/YouTube fiction for moral broadcasting. Encouraging parents to give more time to their children for counselling on safe use of internet.

- ▪ Conducting research on best practices adopted in other countries, especially in South Asia, to address online violence, along with in-depth research on case-to-case sufferer and perpetrator socio-cultural qualitative behavioural analysis.