

**B****Y****T****E****B****A****C****K****C****A****M****P****A****I****G****N****FIGHTING ONLINE HARASSMENT**

The virtual world mirrors the ‘real’ world, where women, and other disempowered sections can be harassed, excluded and subjected to violence with impunity.

Women journalists who are in the public eye as columnists, visible on television as anchors, guests on talk shows or correspondents or who blog on different issues – in short, any journalist who has an opinion and isn’t frightened of expressing it, is fair game for trolls and online harassers.

Women’s struggle to occupy their rightful space on the digital platform takes many forms, and is developing as new technologies emerge. Women journalists are fighting threats, intimidation and violence online using strategies ranging from open discussion and humour to legal remedy and police action.

#DEFENDMYVOICEONLINE

But first, what exactly is online abuse?

- At the extreme end of the spectrum, online abuse can take the shape of **death threats**, rape threats or threats to maim or disfigure.
- ‘Author abuse’** or demeaning and insulting speech targeted at the writer of the article or another comment.
- Cyber bullying** or repeated harassment displaying of power to threaten and intimidate.
- Cyber stalking**, or stalking the target using electronic means.
- Attacks unrelated to content, and directed at women such as “You are so unintelligent”, “Call yourself a journalist?” or “Do you get paid for writing this?”
- ‘Dismissive trolling’** or comments such as “Calm down, dear”, “go home to your children” which mock or trivialise the journalist rather than engage with the content.
- ‘Doxing’** where private or identifying information is disclosed online so as to harass and intimidate her, besides providing pointer to others who join in the attack.
- ‘Sly tweeting’** or indirect abuse without mention of the name, but women know they are the targets



BYTEBACK CAMPAIGN

FIGHTING ONLINE HARASSMENT

- ☑ **Hate speech** is not aimed at a particular person, but the community that the person belongs to. It could take the form of sexism, casteism, xenophobia, racism and homophobia. If the target belongs to a minority group, ethnicity or gender, the abuse can be intimidating and threatening.
- ☑ Abuse that uses photographs:
 - ▶ images from the net, such as Facebook photos or profile pictures are lifted, manipulated and used to blackmail women
 - ▶ **defaced photographs** of women are used to intimidate, humiliate and embarrass or create 'hate pages' on Facebook.
 - ▶ the growing phenomenon of '**revenge porn**', or former boy friends/husbands uploading intimate photos/videos with malicious intent to harass and blackmail.
 - ▶ **body shaming** and misogynist comments related to appearance

Why is online abuse so dangerous?

#DONTTROLL

The impact of online harassment can be as severe as harassment and abuse in the 'real' world. Many women journalists subjected to online harassment and trolling often experience fear, insecurity, psychological and emotional stress on a daily basis, severely hampering their ability to work efficiently and creatively.

This concerted attack can end up seriously destabilizing one's life and derailing day to day activities, forcing those attacked to give up and suspend or deactivate their online accounts, either temporarily or even permanently.

Online abuse is difficult to ignore because it can cross over into the real world. In extreme cases, for example when a person is doxed (personal information such as address, phone number is revealed online); or SWATed (false reporting to the police or emergency services); or when nude or intimate photos or photoshopped photos of the person are posted; identity theft or stalking. These are threats in the real world.

Self-censorship and even being forced to abandon the digital space altogether, are disturbing consequences of online harassment and women journalists are prevented from fully exercising their fundamental right to free expression. Simultaneously, the public is denied their right to hear diverse voices.