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A VIOLENT NETWORK

Gender-Based Violence Against Palestinian: Women in Virtual Space

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Summary

This publication aims to present the findings from field research and a survey on Palestinian women's experience of gender-based violence on the Internet, particularly in social media. For this study, we held six focus groups in different areas throughout Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt); the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem, Haifa, and the Galilee. As a part of several semi-structured interviews in different focus groups, we interviewed women and girls whose age ranged from 15 to 30 years old. In parallel, we conducted a comprehensive survey in the same areas and with the same age group, comparing the focus group results with the results of the survey, in order to analyse the different results. Additionally, we also conducted desk research in order to strengthen our analysis.

One of the main findings of the "A Violent Network: Gender-Based Violence Against Palestinian Women in Virtual Space" research is that gender-based violence in virtual space mirrors the violence in public space. Despite the accessibility of virtual platforms, women are still subject to patriarchal authority in virtual space, which limits their freedom and shapes how they interact online and their freedom of expression. Furthermore, the research appears to show that

Palestinian women and girls are exposed to various types of gender-based violence, particularly on social media, including from what they called the "surveillance tower," familial and social surveillance that monitors [and intervene in] their moves online, resulting in increased pressure to censor themselves. Sixteen percent of women surveyed said they'd been sexually harassed online, while all focus groups, from various geographic locations, confirmed that they were aware of at least one case of sexual harassment or extortion on the web. The research also reveals that Palestinian women often deal with sexual harassment or gender-based violence online similarly to how they deal with it in reality; resorting primarily to their families in order to solve digital harassment issues instead of going to the police due to the lack of trust in the police. The survey results indicate that 56% of participants did not see the police as trustworthy, while 78% of them noted that the lack of family supervision is considered to be one of the reasons for the growing digital harassment phenomenon. To solve the problem of online harassment, 96% of the participants encouraged parents to increase their knowledge about online harassment.

The research concludes that Palestinian women and girls' freedom of expression is impacted by both the patriarchal society and the Israeli occupation; between a reliance on their family to deter and deal with the violence they experience in the virtual space, as well as a the lack of trust in both Israeli and Palestinian institutions ability and willingness to solve such cases. This mistrust results in further dependence on patriarchal family structures at the expense of women and girls' freedom of expression.

General introduction

This research addresses gender-based violence on the Internet, particularly on social media. Gender violence is based on gender differences between males and females.[1] Gender differences are not only derived from biological differences, but also stem from the expectations, roles, and constructs defined by society for women and men.[2] Gender restricts members of society to such standards and limited roles. The system may use violence against non-stereotyped gender expression that departs from such limited roles and standards,[3] such as 'feminine', 'masculine', and/ or 'transgender'.[4] Although international standards often refer to gender-based violence as 'violence against women,'[5] gender-based violence targets both

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1   Major Conventions on gender-based violence: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) (1979): http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/0360793A_.pdf ; Equal Remuneration Convention 1951:https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_228608.pdf; Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages 1964: https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/MinimumAgeForMarriage.aspx; Convention on Political Rights of Women, 1964: http://hrlibrary.umn.edu_/arab/b023.html
2   Abu Rumailah, M. (2018) Introduction to the issues of sexual and gender pluralism for professionals in the field of mental health and community, Al-Qaws. February 2018.
3   If the expression is in the form of style/body language/other that goes beyond stereotypical. See Muhammad Abu Rumailah, 2018.
4   Abu Rumailah, M. (2018)
5   The definition of gender-based violence in the United Nations is linked to violence

gender-based and gender-specific individuals who do not conform to society's dominant identities, such as homosexuals and transgender people.[6]

Gender-based violence is defined as a violent act resulting from sexual neurosis and almost often leads to sexual or psychological harm or suffering for women, including threats of violent acts or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, in public or private life.[7] It includes domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment, stalking, women trafficking, forced prostitution and other harmful practices. These violent methods affect one's rights, whether directly or indirectly, to freedom of expression that is not consistent with patriarchal social concepts.[8] According to these concepts, "such persons are prohibited from participating and practicing several acts which are considered male privileges, solely because they are not men.[9]

Sexual violence, defined by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993 (b):

Any sexual relationship, attempt to obtain sexual relations, any comments or sexual advances, or any acts aimed at trafficking one's sex, or acts directed against one's sex by coercion, committed by another

person, anywhere, and despite the relationship between them. Sexual violence includes rape, defined as the sexual penetration of the penis, or body parts or external devices, into the vagina or anus by coercion. [without consent].[10]

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35% of women in the world may get sexually assaulted during their lifetime.[11] According to the Association of Rape Crisis Center, one out of three women is subject to at least one instance of sexual harassment in their lives, and one out of seven women is raped.[12] In 2017, a total of 450 Palestinian women[13] and girls sought support from ASSIWAR FEMINIST ARAB MOVEMENT ("ASSIWAR") center.[14] According to ASSIWAR, 79% of those incidents will not be reported to police. The type of attack varies; 29% physical and psychological abuse, 19% attempted rape, 26% rape, and 26% threatened with personal photos.[15] In 2017, a total of 3720 women and girls sought support from the Sawa Organization hotline.[16] 4.5% out of the calls reported various forms of rape; 1% attempted rape; while 45.5% were physical and psychological abuse; 10% were of sexual harassment; 3% reported of being bullied and stalked.[17]

against women, according to the United Nations General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993.
https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx

6 Abu Rumailah, M. (2018)

7 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. (1993).

8 Heise, Lori, "Gender-based Abuse: the global epidemic" (1994). 10:1 Cad. Saúde Pública 135:145: http://www.scielo.br/pdf/csp/v10s1/v10supl1a09.pdf

9 Jodi O'Brien, ed. The Encyclopedia of Gender and Society. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications: 2009) vol 1-2

10 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993.

11 World Health Organization, Global and regional estimates of violence against women, 2013. http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/

12 General Statistics, The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (ARCCI) https://www.1202.org.il/en/union/info/statistics/general-statistics

13 These women are usually Palestinians citizens or residents of Israel.

14 ASSIWAR- Center FEMINIST ARAB MOVEMENT (2017) Activity Report. Al-Siwarar - Arab Feminist Movement, 2018. p. 6

15 Ibid, p. 8

16 Mainly women from the Gaza Strip, the West-Bank and Jerusalem.

17 Statistics of 2017 provided to the author by SAWA Organization, October 10, 2018.

Palestinian Police Spokesperson, Loay Zureikat said, **"There has been an increase in the rate of cyber-crime in Palestine following the technological development and spread use of Internet and social media. The governorate of Hebron witnessed ... 1020 cyber crimes in 2015, and 922 cyber crimes in 2014".**[18] In the first quarter of 2017, 850 cases of cyber crime were reported in the West Bank, most of them were sexual extortion or blackmail of women and girls in order to obtain their photographs.[19]

Gender-based discrimination and racism in reality reflects on the virtual space, Digital rights are regarded as human rights according to international law.[20] in its resolution "the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet", the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) recognized that, "The same rights that people have offline must also be protected online" [21] Article 19 states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression through any platform,[22] including digital

platforms.[23] Furthermore, the HRC resolution 2/23 on the role of freedom of opinion and expression in women's empowerment calls on States to "promote, respect and ensure women's exercise of freedom of expression and opinion and, on the internet and beyond, including as activists and members of non-governmental organizations.[24]

Although there has been an increase in the number of Internet users, there is a marked difference in male mobility and use of Internet compared to females.[25] This digital gap between genders is increasing, especially in the Global South, leading, particularly to the exclusion of women.[26] Despite the gendered discrepancies in access to the internet, women and girls are subjected to gender-based violence online. Gender-based violence online includes discrimination against users, exclusion from virtual spaces, sexual abuse, extortion, exposure to sexual content and images, and other harmful practices that target the user who does not identify as a man. The first step toward addressing gender-based violence on the Internet is to recognize that it mirrors gender violence on the ground.[27]

Gender-based violence, in both reality and virtual space, has many forms and is rooted in colonial

18 Melhem, Ahmed (2016) "High rates of cybercrime in Palestine amid the absence of a deterrent law". Al-Monitor.

19 Ramallah Mix (2017) "A Story of a Palestinian who paid 90 thousands shekels and 64 thousand dollars for not publishing her photos on the internet (http://www.mix.ps/archives/106916); Marwa Fatafata, Freedom of the Internet in Palestine: Survey Violations and threats;
Digital Rights, "Hashtag Palestine" Palestinian digital activism report 2017, 7amleh 2018 (7amleh (2018).

20 38th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Item 3 - Joint Oral Statement. (38th UN Human Rights Council) https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/HRC38-OS-Panel-OnlineVAWHRD-FINAL.pdf

21 Article 19, "United Nations Human Rights Council: Important Resolution Reaffirming Human Rights on the Internet", adopted on 2012-07,
https://www.article19.org/resources/unhrc-significant-resolution-reaffirming-human-rights-online-adopted/

22 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html

23 Choudhury Amrita & AL-Ara Nadiraj, Views & Perspectives on Gender Rights Online, For The Global South "Redefining Rights for a Gender Inclusive Networked future, Association for Progressive Communication, July 2018. (APC, July 2018) https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/Report_of_Study_on_the_Views_and_Perspectives_on_Gender_Rights_Online_for_the_Global_South_Final.pdf

24 7amleh (2018) (Arabic) ; Shawna Finnegan, United Nations resolutions recognising human rights online, APC May 2014. https://www.apc.org/en/blog/united-nations-resolutions-recognising-human-rights-online

25 (APC, July 2018)

26 Ibid

27 38th UN Human Rights Council

history, the structure of the Israeli occupation, and in patriarchal social and family structures.[28] The Israeli occupation restrict freedom of movement, expression of opinion[29],and choice of different and safe spaces for self-expression.[30] It also reinforces existing social structures, and limits the paths of change and growth within the community, thereby increasing the nexus of violence within the society for 'vulnerable' individuals such as women, transgender people, and homosexuals.[31] As for how the family's impacts individuals, it treats individuals as less important than the family's interests and reputation, and thus reduces individuals' personal freedom.[32]

This research attempts to show different aspects of gender-based violence online by giving a platform to Palestinian women across the oPt and Israel to share their experiences. The research included focus groups and conversation about Palestinian women's use of the Internet, experiences of limited virtual freedom, and cases of e-harassment. Lastly, the study will present causes and solutions to the phenomenon of virtual harassment, reflecting the views of participants, and attempting to answer the question of whether Palestinian women share some responsibilities, if partial, in promoting obstacles to their social liberation.[33]

This research used aliases to protect the participants' identity.

28 Lewis, Lewis, (2014) Gender Violence on Social Media, Al-Qaws
    http://www.alqaws.org/ Articles / Violence-gender-in-the-media-social? category_id = 0
29 According to the report, in 2017, IOF arrested around 300 Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, on their facebook posts.
30 Al-Qaws (2014)
31 Ibid
32 Ibid
33 Abu Amr, Z. (1995). Civil Society and the Democratic Transition in Palestine. Muwatin. 64.

Research Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research methodology, which lies in what is heard and seen by researchers who are partners in the study context. In order to document and analyze the experience of Palestinian participants in the field research the qualitative research methodology was chosen as it documents processes, meanings, and attitudes towards a particular socio-political phenomenon and behavior. The study focuses on experiences of Palestinian women and girls from various areas of Israel and the oPt and includes participation from the Gaza Strip, Ramallah, Hebron villages, Jerusalem, and Haifa. The study was conducted in 2018, and meetings with focus groups were held between June - September 2018.

Research Tools

Semi-structured interviews were used in focus groups and supported the collection of quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to understand and monitor the experiences and point of views of individuals related to the phenomenon presented.[34] Interviews focused on three main themes; 1. Internet access and use, 2. Impact of family and social relations on Palestinian women's use of the Internet, especially social media, and 3. Participants' experiences and/or others with sexual e-harassment of all kinds and how to fight it. In each dimension, there were 3 - 4 basic questions.

In addition to the interviews in focus groups, the study relied on a survey of 1200 young women between the ages of 15 to 30 years old; the sample was distributed by age to 32.4% (15 - 19), 30.5% (20 - 24), 37.1% (24 and over). Geographical areas covered by the survey include Jerusalem and the West Bank (which were divided into north, center, and south); The Gaza Strip (the northern governate including, Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah); In Israel proper the Palestinian towns of the Galilee,

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34   Nashif, Suhad Thaher. (2014) "The experience of Palestinian girls in the civil service"

the Triangle (a collection of Palestinian towns in the north), the Naqab (Negev), and several coastal historically Palestinian cities. A literature analysis was also used to engage with secondary resources including academic research articles, reports and news pieces related to the subject to support the development of the analysis in the research.

Research Characteristics

For this study we interviewed 80 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 30 years old who particip focus groups in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jerusalem, Haifa, and Galilee. Participants were reached through their participation in active groups of varying types. In Haifa, it was a group of female university students, in Ramallah a group of participants who play sports together, in Jerusalem participants in youth movements. Focus groups in Hebron and Gaza were created from groups with previous personal connections. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information, following participants' approval. In addition, interviews were conducted in participants' places of activity, associations, sports clubs, and in the home of one

of the participants. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. All participants agreed to be audio recorded. Interviews were transcribed.

Data Analysis & Results

In order to analyze the interviews from the focus groups, the researcher adopted content analysis mechanisms and predefined topics.

Table 1. Generation

Generation	15-18	19-22	23-26	27-30
Number of participants	16	34	17	13

Table 2. Town

Area	Gaza Strip	Ramallah	Hebron	Jerusalem	Haifa & Galilee
Number of participants	34	10	15	10	11

Table 3. Occupation

Occupation	School student	University student	Employee	Homemaker	Not working
Number of participants	16	35	10	16	3

All participants had social media accounts, especially Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. The vast majority of participants had private accounts on social media. In all groups, participants shared stories of sexual harassment and extortion, from personal experiences or experiences of close friends and family members.

Family and Social Surveillance: First Step to Understanding Gender-Based Violence Online

Despite the increased opportunities for freedom of expression that have emerged as a result of increased internet access, the internet and social media also facilitate increased surveillance and censorship. This surveillance is not only conducted by governments, but by people in the society who monitor how other people are using social media. This creates an increasingly complex privacy situation for many women, especially when people use new surveillance and tracking technologies such as mySpy[35], Teen Safe[36] and Family Tracker[37], which allow family members or other people to monitor calls, text and social media, and identify the locations of users and their telephone numbers.[38]

While such digital means allow parents to increasingly monitor women's lives in order

35 More on "My Spy": https://www.mspy.com/

36 More on "Teen Safe": https://www.teensafe.com/

37 Weir Kirsten," Parents shouldn't spy on their kids Apps that make it easy to invade kids' privacy are a recipe for arrested development", NAUTILUS (14 April 2016) http://nautil.us/issue/35/boundaries/parents-shouldnt-spy-on-their-kids; More on " My Family Tracker" https://www.myfamilytracker.com/

38 Musallam, Ahmed Hamdi. (2017)"Violated Privacy: Parental Limits in Surveillance and Snooping"https://manshoor.com/life/spying-monitoring-kids/

to 'protect' them, there is a fine line between supervision and surveillance. New digital 'spy tools' create a dilemma for families and may negatively impact their relationship with women, particularly with their teenage daughters who are in the process of developing their independent personality.[39] Sandra Petronio, Professor of Communication, points out that privacy is crucial for adolescents, more of a right and a duty for them, explaining that adolescents' 'job' is to be unique and try to push parental control away, and demand a private space.[40] Petronio stresses that parents' interference in their daughters' and children's privacy may cause a loss of trust.[41]

Based on the results of the interviews and focus groups, the research shows that women and girls' personal freedom in the virtual space is greatly influenced by who is in their online social circles. As was apparent from the survey, there is a strong sense of social and family control among all participants, especially among 44%[42] of participants who confirmed that they are 'friends' with family on social media. As long as the participant was living 'under the parents' roof', she was more likely to have virtual friendship with her parents.[43] Additionally, the discussion in the focus groups revealed that these 'friendships' on social media merely reflected a

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39 Ibid

40 Petronio, S. (2006). Communication privacy management theory: Understanding families. In D. O. Braithwaite & L. A. Baxter (Eds.), Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives (pp. 35–49). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (Peronio 2006)

41 Ibid

42 Mohammed, Ahmed Al-Sheikh. (2018) Report on Gender-Based Violence on the Internet, (September 2018). P. 69. (2018 7amleh Survey)

43 Ibid

healthy 'friendship' and rather are a form of parental control.

Social status	Single	Engaged	Married	Seperated	Divorced	Widowed
Percentage of friends withparents on Social media	49%	49%	38%	23%	18%	0%

Maryam from Beit Hanoun in Gaza says: "Oh, of course parents, uncles, and the whole family. You cannot receive a family friend request and not accept it, or else it's going to be a huge issue…If you don't want us to see what you are doing, it means you're doing something wrong". In other words, accepting friend requests is not optional, it is by force and does not necessarily stem from woman and girl's desire to introduce their virtual life to their family.

Many participants explained that women who censor themselves, who are more submissive to societal norms, feel more comfortable accepting parents' friend requests. Nihad from the Al-Shate' refugee camp in Gaza answers: "It's okay to have them [parents], if I'm hiding something from them, I must be doing something wrong."

Allen explained in return: "Sometimes having them [as friends] is better, it means I am not doing anything wrong. However, they keep asking questions like, 'Who is this, who liked your post, who commented on it, how do you know them, etc.'"

This participant confirms that having her parents among her virtual friends on social media is detering her from committing a 'mistake.' This shows that a

relationship with parents is considered 'natural' in real life but takes on another dimension of control or observation online, regardless of women and girls' background or age.

Susan from Ramallah adds: "Having your parents on facebook has its effects, you start rethinking about the posts you want to write, or photos you want to share, or people you want to connect with."

The sense of censorship was mutual among most participants. Even when the answer was "Of course I'm friends with my family," interviews in the focus groups in Jerusalem and Beit Ummar (Hebron) clearly show that accepting parents in the virtual world is due to participant's submission to certain social norms and that it shapes their engagement online towards things that would be approved by their parents.

Even if digital surveillance means are not available to all parents, participants in the focus groups and the survey, confirmed that their parents surveilled their internet usage:[44]

Sense of parental censorship	Parents interfere in personal virtual space
49.5% [45]	61%

The research indicated that 25% of participants in the survey chose one of their parents as a virtual friend, usually the mother. One of the participants in the Beit Ummar focus group stated that she had blocked her father from Facebook adding: "In order

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44 Ibid
45 19% of them have this feeling permanently.

for him not to not see or follow what I post. If I post a photo of myself, it will become a huge issue. This way he doesn't follow anything". The same participant later explained that she decided to block her father on Facebook due to his constant interfering -- once he even called her to express his discontent with a facebook post she had posted and asked her to delete it.

Although parental supervision can be understood as 'disciplinary' or 'pedagogical', participants have also referred to the extended family's role in constructing what they've called a 'surveillance tower' to watch their actions and moves in the virtual life.

Family and Social Censorship: Post-Surveillance stage

In his book "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison," [46] Michel Foucault notes that 'punitive sentencing' has altered the tools of libelous punishment, in which offenders were punished for their actions before the public.[47] It is this punishment that deters a person from committing 'wrongdoing' out of fear of societal or systemic punishment. The fear of this systematic or societal punishment happens in virtual space on a daily basis, especially in social media, where female users censor and 'control' themselves, spending time calculating what they want to publish, in order to prevent themselves

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46 Foucault, Michel, Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison (NY: Vintage Books 1995:) pp. 195-228 translated from the French by Alan Sheridan 1977
47 Ashraf, Mohamed (2017) "A good Citizen gets Candy: how does the state keep us watching ourselves?". Manshoor (December, 2017). https://manshoor.com/people/self-monitoring-community-surveillance/

from making 'mistakes' that they will be held responsible for later.[48] And as many participants in the focus groups echoed, "I'm not doing anything wrong", they're fully aware of how their virtual freedom will end if they commit a 'mistake'. Focus group participants noted that the notion of 'mistake' is widespread and can vary from a place to another. The different values, even among relatives, might result in a different interpretation of what is considered wrong. As Huda from Jerusalem notes: "I have relatives who live faraway, whose cultural background is not similar to ours, and I sometimes get criticized for something 'normal.'"

The social pressures to censor oneself increased with the size of the social circles, even among relatives, either as a result of many different definitions of 'mistake', or as a result of the control imposed by them. One of the participants in Jerusalem said: "I'm only friends with my mother, the rest [of the family] are more like 'surveillance towers.'" Another participant assured: "You can't accept everyone, it's invasion of privacy". In order to protect themselves from surveillance and pressure to censor themselves, some participants sought to remove members of extended family or their surrounding environment from their virtual space, while others chose to further censor themselves social media.

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48 Ibid

Limited Communication as a Result of Censorship

Studies has shown that women in Global South and Third World countries suffer from digital exclusion. This exclusion is either limited to women's access to the digital world, or their limited use of this space.[49] Gender exclusion is the result of women's exclusion in public sphere in reality, and stems necessarily from their social status and available gender roles.[50] Under international laws and treaties, the exclusion or restriction of women's freedom of expression in the digital world is a violation of a human rights.[51] Only 39.8% of Palestinian women, and 56.2% of their male counterparts,[52] feel safe with sharing personal information and photos on social media, and 42.9% of them are self-censoring on Internet.[53]

The results of the survey indicate that most of the participants have a private account on social media, while personal smartphones were the most popular means of browsing Internet, as indicated by 83% of the survey sample. As for the goal of using the Internet, 74% of study's participants expressed that their goal is social communication. The most frequently-used website or application was:

Means of communication	Facebook	Instagram	Whatsapp
Percentage	78%	56%	43%

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49 APC, July 2018
50 Ibid
51 Ibid
52 https://issuu.com/7amleh/docs/
53 7amleh poll (2017) https://issuu.com/7amleh/docs

Despite the remarkable use of social media by women, such use is still subjected to similar social norms as they experience in the real world and only 35% of women have private accounts on social media. Despite the need for privacy in virtual space, focus group conversations and survey results showed that motivation to preserve one's privacy stems from being subject to communal censorship.

"I had a private account on Instagram, I once decided to go public, and lasted for less than a day. Since Tamra, where I'm from, is a conservative village, the word spread fast and I started hearing comments on my photos, it was back to a private account in less than a day," said Ranin from Haifa. Hiba from Ramallah reports: "We, girls, sometime have certain reservations, we face some difficult situations, which we learn from". The experiences that Hiba refers to are no only limited to shared posts, but also include users identities on social media. The survey indicates that the percentage of those who will not share their personal photos has exceeded those are willing to:

Sharing personal photos in profile	Won't share own photo	Shares own photo	Rarely
Percentage	50%	38%	12%

As for the reasons behind answering (rarely or no) on sharing a personal photo, the feeling that their lack of safety dominated the conversation and drove participants not to share her personal information [54]

54 7amleh poll (September, 2018)

Reason	Don't want people to recognize them	Don't feel safe	Don't know the reason
Percentage	10%	71.4%	18.9 %

Hiba from Ramallah pointed out that she used to use her own personal photo as a profile picture, and then started using a distant image to hide her features, but now she replaced her personal image with other pictures in order to limit facebook comments and stalking. Hiba explains that Facebook space is becoming more public and she does not feel safe publishing her photos: "Yes, I share my photos on Instagram because it's has more privacy than facebook … and even snapchat, I don't accept just anyone. A lot of girls who wear hijab share their photos, I try not to open their photos if there's a man next to me".

Many participants, especially participants who wear hijab, have indicated that, in addition to publishing pictures, they will not use video-chat, even with their closest girlfriends, fearing to be seen without hijab, or in a not modest dress, by a male, or fear of falling a victim of social media catfish, when a man disguised as a woman might catch her in a compromising situation, such as without a veil. Sara from Beit Hanoun tells the story of a blackmail situation, in which one of her friends had fallen victim to:

"My friend had two facebook accounts, once she started getting threatening messages, a man was threatening her to publicly post her photos if she doesn't do what he asks her to. While she was crying, I advised her to speak to Counselor Sua'd… the counselor attacked my friend and blamed her

for posting pictures in the first place. She was afraid because none of her family members knew she had another facebook account where she posts pictures of herself. She left a comment on the faculty's facebookpage, and that's how he found her."

These pressures and social controls greatly affect user's freedom on social media, as virtual space becomes subordinate to social controls subjecting users to them. However, such limitations and social controls are not the sole regulators of the use of social media, as freedom of speech and opinion is also limited, especially in political and social issues.

Limited Freedom of Expression Subject to Gender-Based and Authoritarian Violence

Hegemonic patriarchy excludes women from public space and reinforces men's control over women.[55] Studies on freedom of expression suggest that in patriarchal societies, such as the Palestinian context, that freedom of expression does not necessarily correlate with female representation in public sphere, especially in political spheres. Since nationalism often correlates with masculinity, as Palestine became increasingly nationalist (and at times militarized), the political sphere became increasingly male-dominated and patriarchy has been reinforced.[56] This male hegemony is rooted in French and industrial revolution and historically

nationalism has represented the main component for the development and reform of policy.[57]

This discourse is reflected again online and in social media, and can be demonstrated in many situations of women's political or national participation. Although Palestinian history and struggle is rich with well-known women activists, this dynamic of action was altered after the first intifada, even in terms of women's quality of participation, awareness and political background.[58] Since the first Intifada the identity of women activists has changed drastically [59]they are younger and less politically experienced. They are also more susceptible to pressures from Palestinian society, which is generally conservative on gender issues. Despite the shift that occurred and the gender gaps in political participation, the Palestinian feminist struggle continues to exist in both real and virtual spaces. As can be seen below, the survey results indicate that the map of political participation on the ground is consistent with participation in virtual space:

Participation in political discussion	Takes part in political discussions on social media	Takes part in political discussions occasionally	Seldom participate in political debates	Do not participate in political discussions
Percentage	6%	14%	14%	66%

55 Connell, R.W & Messerschmidt, James W. (2005) "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" http://gas.sagepub.com/content/19/6/829.short
56 Makarem, Ghassan & Rizk, Anthony. (2015) Masculinity-under-threat

57 Nairn, Tom. (1998) "The Dissolution of Britain: A Renewable Crisis and Nationalism" , London, New Left Books, p. 333
58 ADDAMEER- Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. "In Need Of Protection", Palestinian Female Prisoners In Israeli Detention, 2008. Accessed April 30, 2016 http://www.addameer.org/files/Brochures/palestinian-women-political-prisoners-december-2010.pdf
59 Odeh, (2017). 'Am I a Warrior Yet?' Female Palestinians in Detention, Journal of Academic Perspectives, Vol. 2017, No. 2. 1-30

Women participants in focus groups also explained that their reasons for not participating in political debate. Participants from Beit Ummar (Hebron) noted that fear of arrest, or being subjected to various other problems, or the suspension of social media accounts, deters them from participating in political discussions. Asmaan from Beit Hanoun, Gaza, added: "No for me, I have nothing to do with politics, perhaps [sharing] something comical, but other than that, no, too afraid." Angham from Al-Shae' refugee camp said: "I'm one of those who stays away from politics and is afraid to engage or talk politics ". Amany from Beit Hanoun was more precise on her fears, adding: "Also, If they want to criticize something happening in Gaza, they are afraid of Hamas' government."

The fear of political persecution has its reasons, as according to a report by 7amleh, "Hashtag Palestine 2017", Israel has arrested more than 300 Palestinians last year on charges related to social media posts.[60] Haaretz newspaper reported that numbers of arrests, by both Palestinian Authority and Israeli military, on "incitement" charges on social media has reached 800 cases between 2015 - 2016.[61]

The overwhelming majority of participants in all focus groups have indicated that while social surveillance may be inevitable and occur because you are a female, political surveillance is a direct result of participation in political debates and political or national events online and offline. "Fearful; I feel like those who talk politics are monitored by security agencies, if you talk about cut salaries, they'll cut yours," said Ibtihal from Al-Shate' refugee camp in Gaza.

Even those who identify as politically and socially active, such as the participant of the group in Haifa, [62]have noted the low frequency of participation in political discussions on social media, due to increased politically motivated criminalization and security surveillance, despite considering the Israeli authorities' surveillance on social media accounts as inevitable. Razan from Al-Shati' refugee camp (Gaza) explained that the political targeting doesn't end with female activist ,rathar it may also affect men in her family, adding: "it happened before a lot, a [female] engages in politics, and they arrest her father or brother. And perhaps in order save your family from troubles, you remain silent".

In fact, Palestinian women's body and reputations are used by security agents in interrogations about their male counterparts political behaviors.[63] As a result, social media participants see the need to remain silent and to reduce, once again, their digital freedom. Others have pointed out that gender exclusion in the political arena is the main deterrent to their participation in political debates. Roba from Beit Hanoun (Gaza) said: "No, we don't share political content. It's none of our business, we can't do much, where are the men? What can we, girls, do, other than

60 Hashtag Palestine, 2017
    http://7amleh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Palestine-2017-arabic-final.pdf
61 Haaretz (2017) Arrest of Palestinians for Potential Terror Attacks Brings New Meaning to ‹Minority Report›: https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-arrest-of-palestinians-brings-new-meaning-to-minority-report-1.5464664

62 Focus group of socially active university student.
63 S. Odeh, (2017). 'Am I a Warrior Yet?' Female Palestinians in Detention, Journal of Academic Perspectives, Vol. 2017, No. 2. 1-30

social media". Marwa, from the same group, pointed out that there is no place for women to participate in politics in virtual space, as it is the case in reality, further reinforcing the patriarchal discourse which claims that women do not have the power to participate in the political and national struggle: "As a woman, I feel like we have a limited role, whereas men can take the lead in political discussions, not like us. If it has an effect, I'll take part, but take the Great Return March as an example, women took part, right? What is the point? If I participated and ended up getting injured, I'll lose my future. Even without being injured, I'm already considered a "burden" because I'm a woman."

When women take part in political debates and events, they are accused of seeking attention in order to increase their followers. Such scrutiny prevent them from participating in the virtual political space as well. In the Jerusalem group, Natalie mentioned a few of the comments she faces when photos of her, or others, participating in national forums or demonstrations start circulating on social media, comments like "As if we need women to free us," or another comment blaming men, "The country is a mess, no men left." From Beit Ummar (Hebron), Anwaar said, "If you intervene or take part, some men will think you're doing so for different reasons." This increased attention also makes women more likely to be subject to unwanted friendship requests, messages, and comments.

We see that participants, whether active or political activists, may exclude themselves from digital political activity, either out of fear of political persecution or fear of social exclusion, and are victim of undermining or derogatory comments for crossing the gender limits set to them.

Sexual Harassment and Extortion in the Virtual Space

In recent years, and in regards to growing methods and means of using internet and the development of many techniques and applications, new types of sexual abuse have developed, in which the majority of victims are children.[64] ASSIWAR Center data indicate that 26% were threatening female users to publish a compromising images of them[65]. While in the occupied territories including Gaza, 3% of the Sawa hotline callers reported of being bullied and stalked.[66] Moreover, there is an increase in e-crime rates in the West Bank as in the first quarter of 2017, 850 cases of cybercrime were recorded. Most of them were sexual extortion after obtaining photographs.[67]

Overt and Covert Harassment

Virtual space has become an essential part of our lives.[68] The wide variety of means of communication that allow internet browsing have increased the possibility of sexual assault. In contrast, the virtual

64 Kezvich - Pressler (2015), Sexual Abuse Among the 'S' Generation, Smartphone, Sexting, Social Media & Sexualy Explicit Websites, A Network Without Protection-Sexual Violence in the Internet and Social Media, The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, (2015)
65 Al-Siwar (2017) Activity Report. Al-Siwarar - Arab Feminist Movement, 2018. p. 6
66 Statistics of 2017 provided to the author by SAWA Organization, October 10, 2018.
67 Ramallah Mix (2017) "A Story of a Palestinian who paid 90 thousands shekels and 64 thousand dollars for not publishing her photos on the internet (http://www.mix.ps/archives/106916)
68 Pressler, K (2015)

sphere provides space for aggressors to do things they may not necessarily dare to do in reality. As the Internet provides the possibility of maintaining an anonymous identity, generating users a sense of profitability to do what they want.[69] The virtual space also allows the aggressor to witness the result of his actions or the reaction of the victim, thus easing committing the crime.[70]

Sexual harm may occur in the virtual space, be experienced in real space and reflected in the virtual world.[71] Sexual harassment, sexual assault, defamation, sexual extortion, blackmail to send nude pictures, and even persistent or violent courtship are all examples of sexual assaults that take place in virtual space and are now part of the social media experience.[72]

Stalking is defined as any harassment, interest, unwanted contact, or behavior towards a particular person in a manner that causes fear and is repeated continuously.[73] Although there are no official statistics on the number of cases of surveillance in the world, studies show that in the United States of America for example, nearly seven point five million cases are monitored annually[74], and in Britain about seven hundred thousand cases.

The survey data indicated that:

Stalking case	Endured persistent friend requests	Haven't endured persistent friend requests
Percentage	45%	55%

Although there is no significant disparity between those exposed or subject to persistent friendship requests, this state of surveillance has not yet been addressed. The results of the survey indicate that 20% of participants, who rejected persistent friendship requests, report that insistence continued despite the rejection. The following steps taken by the participants in the survey afterward were:

Step following persistence	Accepted the friend request	Didn't accept the request	Blackmailed to accept friend request	Have not been blackmaled
Percentage	7%	93%	9%	91%

Above figures indicate that participants try to maintain their own space on social media, as much as possible, and despite the harassment, 93% of women will not accept friendship requests. However, although participants were keen to preserve the privacy of their own space and to select their friends, 11% of them indicated that they were subject to comments or harassments mainly for being a women.[75] 12% of survey respondents indicated that they received out of tact comments on their photos.[76] Hence, we can conclude that although Palestinian participants want to to protect their private space, they will not be able

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69 Ibid
70 Ibid
71 Ibid
72 Ibid
73 Stalking Resource Center. Information accessed at: http://victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center/stalking-information/stalking-statistics
74 Harris, S. Express. "Upto 700,000 women are victims of stalking every year as police predict growing problem". (2004). Accessed at: https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/517195/Stalkers-target-up-to-700-000-women-every-year

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75 12% note that they have been subject to derogatory comments, 77% were not subject to such harassment.
76 17% reported they had been rarely commented on in an untactful way, while 72% had not been subject to such comments.

to protect themselves completely from surveillance, harassment, and digital crimes.

Sexual Abuse

Official statistics do not accurately indicate the status of sexual harassment in Palestinian society along all sides of the "Green Line", and there are no exclusive statistics that examine the issue of digital gender safety in Palestinian society as a whole. Therefore, we discussed the issue of sexual harassment on the Internet more generally. The results of the survey showed that one-third of girls were subjected to sexual violence or harassment through the Internet:

Type of sexual abuse	Internet sexual abuse [76]	Content of sexual nature [77]	Sexual blackmailing
Exposure rate	16%	34%	5%

During the group conversation, most participants from all regions confirmed that they knew a girl or woman who experienced sexual harassment or extortion through the Internet.[79] Some participants in the Hebron group and Beit Hanoun group in Gaza also reported that they've been victim of extortion and sexual abuse online. E'taf from the Al-Shate' Refugee camp [Gaza] pointed out:

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77 7amleh (September, 2018) p. 118-119

78 6% of female participants had been sexually harassed through social media at a high rate, and 11% had been subjected to cyber harassment at a very low rate. Read more: Ahmad Al-Sheikh Mohammed (September 2018)

79 Participants did not count number of posts that were subject to harassment, nor were they directly asked about the subject, due to the context sensitivity and privacy of posts.

"Sometimes, when you're a member of a big group, and someone wants to draw your attention, or if you have been deliberately ignoring their friend requests or messages, they cyberbully you, and target you with comments and bad words. In this case, you can only delete such comments, and report their accounts," referring to a stalking experience that evolved into sexual extortion.

While participants did not share personal experiences on sexual harassment or extortion, stalking was mutual among many of them. Especially when we are talking about a person who has been rejected in a relationship and got rejected when trying to reconcile, leading to intensified anger and a desire to seek revenge. Such revenge would be a threat or extortion. Nisreen from Beit Hanoun said:

"I know a girl, who shared her story on the group. She used to know a guy and was in a love relationship, she later got engaged to someone else. After taking a decision to end her relationship, he started to threaten her with photos and conversation if she doesn't stay with him and end her engagement."

As for Siham from Beit Hanoun, she shared an experience of a friend from Gaza,who had an intimate and virtual relationship with a young man from Egypt, who later avenged her. "He hacked her account to find out that she's been speaking to someone else and sending him photos. He lost his mind and posted naked photos of her on her account and sent them to her friends, he even created a group called "xxxx" and added all her friends before sending the photos and texts. She was working, and her colleagues saw everything. She is currently arrested and is being

interrogated with, because he works with Egyptian security forces."

Studies indicate that most vulnerable users of sexual harassment and extortion through social networking sites are boys or girls, however participants of Haifa group indicated that the large proportion of aggressors are older men. Study suggests that the virtual space facilitates adult masquerade as boys, and may even end up suggesting meeting minors in the real world, sometimes using extortion and intimidation,[80] or pushing minors to send naked pictures of them.[81]

Participants in focus groups referred to another type of virtual disguise [catfish]: a man disguises as female, in an attempt to try to lure female users to have a chat, send her own pictures, or even to create a video call. Many Participants, who own private and public accounts, expressed that their concerns about falling in such traps prevent them from using video calls. One of the participants who wears hijab reported that answering such video calls could put her in a difficult position if she wasn't wearing head scarf. Therefore, and because they cannot confirm caller's identity, participants would not answer video calls. The results of these surveys confirm these concerns and demonstrate that 72% of cases of exposure to inappropriate material, were by unknown users.

The above-mentioned findings indicate that although there are adequate tools to protect women from such attacks on social media, they are not excluded

from being victims of sexual assault even in the virtual space. According to a UN report, presented by article 19 at the 62nd session of the United Nations Women's Commission; most threats on the Internet turn into actual crimes on the ground.[82] Internet space is a mirror of non-feminist real life that constantly controls and generates patriarchal concepts.[83]

Causes & Solutions

Participants' views on sexual harassment ratio may differ in virtual space. Some believe that the Internet accessibility has led to an increase of e-sexual harassment, while others believe that social media provide ways of protecting users from sexual harassment and information. Reasons behind the increase of e-harassments can be divided into two factors, including blaming the victim, as results show:

80 Pressler, K (2015)
81 Clien. (2015). "The Curse of the Bliss - The Information revolution and changes occurring as a result of violence in Israel."

82 Interview with a feminist activist. "Over 60". Accessed at: https://soundcloud.com/ ikhtyarcollective/aztgrzhfjrdo
83 Hamdi, Yamine "Women's enemy chasing her into the virtual world":

Causes of increased electronic harassment	Lack of family supervision	Use of 'provoking' identity by female	Excessive posts by females	Publishing photos in immodest outfit	Excessive openness
Percentage	78%[83]	80%[84]	70%[85]	74%[86]	75%

The latter results were echoed by others in the focus groups; Nihad, from Al-Shate' refugee camp said: "Problem is that girls are no longer shy about such issues, they even tell each other, as a sort of bragging, that her boyfriend asked for this and that, or comments he made on her photos or body. Even married women are no longer embarrassed to speak about lovers." In Jerusalem,Sawsan believed that girls' lack of awareness of the concept of sexual harassment is one of the reasons, adding, "what you wear is not the case. She can upload a photo and gets comments despite what she's wearing. However, in order for her to set limits "as raised by parents",she needs to know what is harassment." We can also see conflicting standards of responsibility and causes, as Salam from Beit Hanoun said: "Increasing openness on the Internet without supervision. Everyone looks down their phone. Neither the mother nor the father know what their children are doing online."

In contrast, the results of the survey showed another aspect of this phenomenon:

84 Supervision on female and male youth.
85 50% believe the use of an erotic identity by the girl is a significant reason that leads to an increase in the phenomenon of e-harassment significantly. 30% blame the girl on average. In other words, we can see that 80% of the poll sample blames victims of harassment.
86 37% believe this cause has a significant impact.
87 52% believe this is a huge reason

Causes of increased e-harassment	Chauvinist upbringing	Perversion	Lack of knowledge of punishable crimes by law	High unemp-loyment rates	Lack of awareness
Percentage	62%	82%	81%	82%	85.5 %

These results have also echoed in focus groups, as one participant, from Al-Shate' refugee camp, explained, "The lack of awareness is a fundamental reason for the escalation of harassments, in terms of awareness on use of Internet, which was mainly made to extend knowledge and social circles. Unfortunately, we treat is as an isolated world for chat and nonsense". Nisreen from Hebron acknowledged that high unemployment rates, and increasing leisure time, is considered another cause for e-harassments. Both victims and aggressors are blamed for harassments, showing that society remains incapable of recognizing a silent victim. On one hand, society blames the victim, who cannot stop a crime she's unaware of, and blames the aggressor, who isn't aware that such acts are considered a crime, on the other hand.

As for solutions, participants resorted to parents, as the first option to solve harassment. The role of father and or brother appears to be the person whom girls resort to in distress, as found in focus groups from Gaza to Haifa. A participant from Beit Hanoun explained: "… when we face a problem we go to our father or brother, who are aware of our accounts, without fear". Results confirm these views:

Solution	enhancing parents' roles as guidance and awareness	use of violence against aggressors	exclusion of women from internet and social media	enhancing legislation and punitive measures
Support Rate	96% [87]	44%	16%	88%

On executive authorities, poll results show that 55.6% do not believe that police is a source of trust. And despite consensus, mistrust in police varies from an area to another, reaching 93% in Haifa, the Galilee, 44% in Gaza, and 29.5% in West Bank:

Area	Police is always trustworthy	Police is sometimes trustworthy	Police is rarely trustworthy	Police is not trustworthy
West Bank	31.5	19.5	19.5	29.5
Gaza	20.5	25.3	9.8	44.5
Haifa & The Galilee	2.3	1.3	3.3	93.2

Mistrust in police has also reflected in focus groups. Those who trusted the police, such as two participants in Jerusalem group and one in Beit Hanoun, said that the Palestinian electronic police are technical and confidential, "They solve the problem without letting the family know", said Suha from Beit Hanoun.

The rest of suggested solutions revolved around raising awareness, giving civil society institutions responsibility for raising awareness with a percent of 87%, proving

88 88% believe parents' role has a great impact.

Conclusions & Summary

women's trust in society's institutions compared to police. Despite the spread and accessibility of Internet, Palestinian women, like other women across the globe, are limited when it comes to accessibility. Participants explained how such limitation, and patriarchal hegemony are also present in virtual space, urging that their freedom is bound to not committing "mistakes". Thus enhancing women's self-censorship on their own digital activities, and holding themselves accountable prior to publishing anything that may lead them to fall into "wrongdoings". Many women have indicated that social censorship prevents them from sharing some of their own matters, such as statuses or private images on social media.

The submission of girls and women to gender-based and sexual violence on the Internet, leads to increased self-censorship, especially among women. Participants noted that one of the main reasons for not publishing images on social media or using private accounts is the fear of becoming a victim of sexual violence such as harassment and extortion. Another reason that participants noted is the need to minimize pressures and social control. The lack of a sense of safety while using social media is a reason why the Internet is

not free on one hand, and is considered to be a manifestation of increasing gender-based and sexual violence on Internet and social media, on the other hand.

This self-censorship resulting from patriarchal and social control, is one of the components of gender-based violence against women in both public and virtual spheres, which excludes them from public political and social sphere spaces. Here, we must emphasize the rooted, mutual reinforcement, and interactive nexus between the Israeli occupation and patriarchal structures, and how it impacts the virtual space, as described by participants.

Makram Ghassan and Anthony Rizk (2015) point out that women's effective political participation produces a repressive rhetoric, calling for women's exclusion from political space for fear of men's powerlessness; 'Manhood in danger.' Several participants stressed that their motives behind not participating in political debates are due to their status as women, which do not require participation in political debates and discussions, as long as there are men. As for security authority, it is yet another mean of suppressing women from participating in political sphere (Odeh, 2017). As a result of security surveillance and political prosecutions, many participants stated that they do not participate in politics for fear of political persecution. Abu Amr argues that women's commitment to self-silencing and self-censorship boosts authorities' power on them, and reinforces their repression, making them partners in oppression.[89]

Interviews and surveys show that there is a large ratio

of harassment and extortion, as some participants shared and detailed experiences of sexual harassment and extortion suffered by others. It should be noted that many Palestinian women and girls, who have been sexually blackmailed and extorted on Internet, are afraid to speak up and report these crimes due to social restrictions and mistrust in police and judiciary system.

There is no doubt that patriarchal authority in Palestinian society has a great deal of control over social behavior and marginalizing Palestinian women in all aspects of life.[90] This study confirms that marginalization of women is reflected in the virtual space.

Even in discussing causes and solutions, survey and focus groups' participants blamed both the perpetrator and victim at the same time. Not only does such statements serve patriarchal discourse, but also promotes objectification of women,[91] and therefore women's contribution to fostering barriers to their social liberation.[92]

Internet space is a reflection of non-feminist real life that constantly controls and generates patriarchal notions, and inhibits women's freedom even in private sphere, making them subject to social, familial, authoritarian, and self-censorship. Furthermore, existing tools used by police do not provide Palestinian women with a sense of safety in virtual space. Women are increasingly distrustful of state institutions' effectiveness in gender justice processes.

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89 Abu Amr (1995); Thahir-Nashif (2014)

90 Haj-Yahia (2003); Shalhoub-Kevorkian, (1997); Abu-Baker (2005)
91 Bevens CL, Brown AL, Loughnan S (2018) The role of self-objectification and women's blame, sympathy, and support for a rape victim. PLoS ONE 13(6). https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0199808
92 Abu Amr (1995)

Recommendations

While women are subjected to social and political control, digital crimes targeting women and are increasing on Internet, especially through social media. Although many women and girls undergo gender-based and/or sexual violence in virtual spaces, the concept of gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and its impact on both victims and society, is still limited. Therefore, and consistent with participants' views in the focus groups and survey, it is necessary to establish targeted campaigns and trainings for each group in the society in order to raise awareness on gender-based violence and sexual harassment on social media and Internet, and create awareness campaigns about digital security and safety.

Furthermore, police should be able to create a complaint register and develop a proper mechanism to back up, support and protect women in the legal process, against the aggressor or social pressure. It is also crucial to intensify the role of civil society organizations and women's and human rights organizations that provide education, psychological and legal assistance to those who suffer from harassment and sexual abuse on the Internet, by disseminating support lines, especially in schools, social venues and online.

Further studies are needed to focus on gender-based violence against LGBTQ community in Palestinian society, as part of other studies on gender-based violence in virtual space..