

Online Hate Crimes Against Women (CYBER VAWG)

3

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INTRODUCTION

Misogyny takes numerous forms in the context of social systems and organisations. Manne (2018) describes it as a serious issue that results from discomfort and hostility when a well-entrenched system of social norms is challenged. Women who challenge gendered norms or expectations, who disrupt or pose a threat to gendered social hierarchies or powerful women who do not yield their power in service of men's interests face misogyny (ibid.) or cyber violence (cyber VAWG). The key objective in this article is to provide a detailed meaning and consideration of cyber VAWG with numerous real-life examples provided in literature and to analyse its potential impacts. A literature review of academic and non-academic articles has been undertaken to identify the meaning of cyber VAWG, its impacts and recommendations to tackle cyber VAWG.

BACKGROUND

The increasing availability of internet and access to social media by the masses has resulted in the increasing occurrences of cyber violence against women and girls (cyber VAWG). The term cyber VAWG encompasses multiple forms of exhibitions of violence against females in the online environment ranging from hostility to threats, exploitation and sexual harassment. Cyber VAWG is an additional layer of misogynistic practices, undertaken in the online environment. Manne (2018) has critically described misogyny as a branch of a patriarchal order with the objective of exercising control, power and subjugation, while maintaining the governing ideology of hostility against females. Gender imbalance, gender inequality and gender segregation in the real world, in organisations and professions impact the content which is produced, commercialised and disseminated; misogynistic behaviours are now rapidly increasing online (Swaminathan, 2014).

According to Ging and Siapara (2018) certain types of females have become key targets for online shaming, or "digital pillory." Hess and Waller (2014) have identified these females as social justice warriors (SJW), the "slut" (as labelled by misogynists)- women in tech and gaming who have dared to challenge entrenched norms of the IT industry which is still male dominated, or any woman who is perceived as publicly questioning or disrupting gendered power relations. The "slut" is a derogatory term used for a woman who promotes any aspect of feminism or women's rights in the online medium.

The disciplining function of online discourses against these women as Alvares (2018) has identified, becomes a means of violent reinforcement of gendered power relations through online misogyny. Cole (2015) has captured the experiences of women who publicly promote women's rights or any aspect related to feminism through the following quotes: Christina (2012), a blogger "get[s] this all the time. I get this so often, I've lost track. As has every other woman I know who speaks publicly about feminism."

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Journalist and blogger Jessica Valenti (2014) has been quoted by Cole (2015) about projecting her views on Facebook: “I spen[t] the better part of the day fielding tweets and messages about what a slut I am. That I should be ‘jizzed on’ ... that I want to be gangbanged, that I’m worthless.” As identified by Cole (2015) and in various other published works on misogyny through social media, rape is the most frequently used threat in response to women online (Stanton, 2011). The threat of rape in a large portion of tweets is often accompanied by an emoticon or an acronym such as “LOL,” or a joke; humor is used in order to make the violence socially acceptable and remains as a part of the disciplining process (Cole, 2015). Doyle (2011) re-emphasizes the gendered nature of violent discourse committed online as “What matters is not which guys said it: What matters is that, when you put their statements side-by-side, they all sound like *the exact same guy*. And when you look at what they’re saying, how similar these slurs and insults and threats we get actually are, they always sound like they’re speaking to *the exact same woman*. When men are using the same insults and sentiments to shut down women ... we know that it’s not about us; it’s about gender”. Regardless of which legislation is looked at, threat to commit rape is considered a sexual offence. Rape threats are not the only forms of cyber VAWG undertaken in the online environment. There are numerous other types of cyber VAWG. The objective of this Chapter is to consider cyber VAWG in detail based on a review of prior academic and non-academic literature. Numerous real-life examples of cyber VAWG and cyber misogyny are provided to highlight types of cyber VAWG and the extremely negative impacts of VAWG crimes.

METHODOLOGY

Searches were undertaken in Google Scholar and Google using search terms such as Cyber violence against women and girls, ‘cyber bullying’, ‘cyber violence’, ‘cyber violence against women and girls’, ‘online harassment’, and iterations thereof between October and November 2018. Multiple government reports and media coverage as well as academic literature on the topic of cyber VAWG were identified. These have been cited. The approach adopted in this article has been a review of academic and non-academic literature on cyber VAWG.

Cyber Misogyny/VAWG Hate Crimes

Gender violence has been defined by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), general Recommendation 19 as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty (CEDAW, 1992). CEDAW’s general recommendation 35 extends gender-based violence against women to multiple forms including in technology mediated settings and redefines gender based violence through technology mediated environments occurring in internet and digital spaces as cyber VAWG (CEDAW, 2017).

There are numerous terms which are used to describe online hate crimes specifically targeted against women including: gendered cyber hate, technology-facilitated violence, tech-related violence, online abuse, hate speech online, digital violence, networked harassment, cyber bullying, cyber harassment, online violence against women (VaW), and online misogyny (Ging and Siapera, 2018). References to these multiple terms as used in literature are used to capture the forms of gendered online abuse, the impacts of the abuse, implications as well as recommendations to mitigate the issue. Technology related human rights violations are defined in UN General Assembly’s (2013) Consensus Resolution as “

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