

MEN'S DIGITAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

25th of November marks the beginning of Orange Week, as men's violence against women continues to be the lived reality of women and girls across the globe. With the need for yet another Orange Week, the work of the women's rights movement continues with full force. Through our EU-funded project MOTERIS, we recognize that men's violence against women and girls is creating barriers to our ability to enjoy our human rights. Misogyni and threats are expanding beyond the physical sphere.

What commonly falls in the shadows of technological progress is the upholding of a tradition that humans have kept all through history – misogyny, sexism and violence against women – and it is taking a new form under the new digital era.

Women are overrepresented as victims of online hate, compared to other exposed groups. Online hate directed at women often include degrading language, meaning often comparing women to objects or animals. Online hate frequently promotes and praises violence against women, while containing sexual undertones. The FRA reports that 1 in 10 women have faced at least one form of cyberharassment since the age of 15. Women are harassed simply because they are girls, because of their sex, a material reality that they can't identify their way out of.

Studies have shown that regardless of personal views on women and girls and our sex based rights, men in all categories view women as less capable of being elected officials – something that deeply affects the discourse on women's democratic participation in digital spaces. An EU-wide survey by The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) showed that 32% of women political representatives have been exposed to violence. Despite increasing numbers of women in high positions, an increasing number of women are silenced, scared to express their opinions and withdraw their participation in public debate.

Men also believe that hate towards women is less serious and damaging to society than other types of digital violence, which cements the normalization of violence and hate against women. Hate against women is different from other forms of hate, where women are subjects of digital violence not based on their opinions or statements, but simply because they are women.

It is not possible to separate hate and violence against women and girls in the digital sphere from the physical sphere. They are part of the same system that rewards misogynistic behaviors and lack legal and social protection towards us. When hate towards women and girls intensifies online, it also intensifies in the physical space, causing women and girls to fear for their lives and withdraw from public participation.

Fear is a very efficient tool for maintaining social control. It limits the freedom of expression and movement of all women and girls, everywhere. These power structures are used to silence and violate the opinions and statements of women, which strengthens the political control upheld by men.

44.2% of women within the EU avoid certain situations or places in fear of being exposed to violence, whereas one in seven women avoid leaving their home alone due to fear. When society and algorithms online promote violence against women, they become subjects of social domination through fear, which further exacerbates to what extent they can participate in democratic processes.

When women are subjects of dehumanization and violence, it compromises the capacity in which we can participate in political and social discourse, which is a **threat to democracy**. When society doesn't protect women in digital spaces, we are systematically pushed out of democratic spaces. This leads to our voices being weakened by both hate and fear, which affects our ability to speak up and participate in society.

This is not only a threat to individual women and girls, it is a threat to democracy.