



UN COVID-19 Response
and Recovery Fund
— #RecoverBetterTogether —

Handbook for Civil Society Organizations on Building Women's and Girls' Knowledge and Skills to Understand, Detect, Prevent and Respond to **Cyberviolence**



This guidance note has been produced by UN Women and UNICEF under the joint UN project 'Accelerating Women's Empowerment for Economic Resilience and Renewal: The post-COVID-19 reboot in Armenia', implemented by UNDP, UNIDO, UNICEF and UN Women. This joint project is possible thanks to the contributions to the UN Response and Recovery Fund by the governments of Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, Republic of Korea, Finland, New Zealand, Croatia, Iceland, Thailand, Slovak Republic and Cambodia. Funded by the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (UN COVID-19 MPTF), the project will advance priorities set out under the UN's COVID-19 Socio-economic Response and Recovery Plan for Armenia (SERRP).

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November 2021

*This guide was
developed as part of*



**United Nations
MPTF Office**

Handbook for Civil Society Organizations on Building Women's and Girls' Knowledge and Skills to Understand, Detect, Prevent and Respond to **Cyberviolence**



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INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

Restrictions, lockdowns and other response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have increased people's already-growing online presence and their interactions and reliance on digital services. Information and communications technologies (ICT) hold enormous potential to empowering women and girls; ICT expands access to public services, creates opportunities for education and skills development, enables social engagement at a distance, provides a wealth of entertainment and open doors to employment and entrepreneurship.

An article on how the Internet benefits and empowers women shares that “many women delay or completely sacrifice motherhood because they wish to succeed in their careers,”¹ while many more sacrifice their careers for motherhood and family life. The article further shares how “the Internet enables women to work from almost any location easily, and thus makes it easier for them to manage their families.”²

Unfortunately, the same aspects that lead to these advantages can also lead to cyberviolence — harms such as online bullying, harassment, loss of privacy and in some cases, direct, offline violence. Women and girls who are just crossing the digital divide are particularly exposed to these risks. These risks must be minimized so that women and girls have equal access to and use of digital tools and can equally benefit from growth in the digital economy — and so they can safely circumvent a new avenue of violence against women.

Cyberspace is becoming an anarchistic haven for those seeking to take revenge, to humiliate and to threaten; cyberviolence is an increasingly common phenomenon, particularly in youth interactions. As far back as 2015, the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development found that globally, 73 per cent of women online had

been exposed to or experienced some form of cyberviolence.³ In 2017, the European Institute for Gender Equality estimated that 10 per cent of women over the age of 15 had already experienced some form of cyberviolence.⁴ The Institute also found that people who committed of-line violence against their intimate partners often also committed online violence against them.

Cyberviolence has grown dramatically since then. In a 2020 Plan International survey of 14,000 girls from 31 countries, more than 50 per cent of respondents reported that they had been subject to online harassment or abuse.

Although data on gender-based cyberviolence in Armenia is sparse, the risks remain high; 83 per cent of the population use the Internet daily.⁵ Armenia has a high level of mobile broadband coverage. By 2018, 3G was available for almost the entire population. The country's 4G LTE coverage is above the Commonwealth of Independent States regional average.⁶ The most used social media channels in Armenia include Facebook (61 per cent), Instagram (13 per cent), Pinterest (12 per cent), Twitter (11 per cent), YouTube (5 per cent) and Tumblr (3 per cent).⁷

According to publications by the University of Armenia (2018)⁸ and UNESCO (2019),⁹ bullying is a reality in Armenia, particularly among adolescents and youth. A 2019 UNICEF press release warned “of the dangers posed by online violence, cyberbullying and digital harassment for the 82 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 years old who are online in Armenia” and “called for concerted action to tackle and prevent violence against children and young people online.”¹⁰

A comprehensive strategy to prevent cyberviolence against women and girls in Armenia should include measures to build the skills of women and girls and civil soci-

1 Horres, V. (2010) [Online and Enabled: Ways the Internet Benefits and Empowers Women](#)

2 Ibid.

3 ITU/UNESCO (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development) (2015) [Cyberviolence against women and girls: a world-wide wake-up call](#)

4 European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) [Cyber violence is a growing threat, especially for women and girls](#)

5 World Bank (2020) [Internet use in Armenia: How do individuals and businesses use the internet to access opportunities?](#)

6 ITU (2018) Measuring the Information Society Report 2018 – Volume 2- Country profile: Armenia.

7 Statcounter <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/armenia> (accessed on 30 September 2021)

8 Albina Gevorgyan - American University of Armenia (2018). [Is Cyberbullying a Common Problem in Armenia?](#)

9 UNESCO (2019) [Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying.](#)

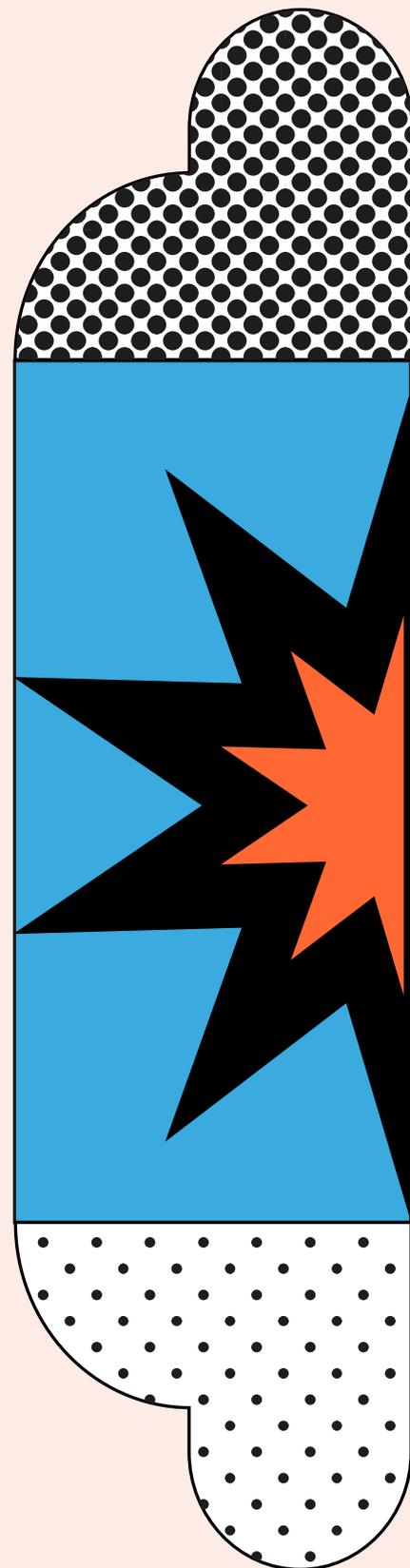
10 UNICEF (2019) [Safer Internet Day: UNICEF calls for concerted action to prevent bullying and harassment for the 82 per cent of young people online in Armenia](#)

ety and women’s rights organizations on digital safety and measures to “educate the next generation of ICT users, both boys and girls, through their parents, teachers and wider communities, as well as police authorities and the justice systems.”¹¹ Given this comprehensive approach, it is important that strategies include an awareness-raising component.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of this handbook is to help CSO efforts to galvanize women and girls as active agents of change in creating safer digital spaces and in addressing gender-based cyberviolence. This will ultimately lead to an online environment where women and girls can access information, services and rights with dignity.

This handbook will help CSOs build women’s and girls’ knowledge and skills to understand, detect, prevent and respond to cyberviolence. Because the guide includes essential practices and strategies to minimize being subjected to cyberviolence and information on responding to it in case it happens, it can also be directly used by women and girls (and men and boys) who face cyberviolence.



11 ITU/UNESCO (UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development) (2015) [Cyberviolence against women and girls: a world-wide wake-up call](#)

RECOGNIZING CYBERVIOLENCE

DEFINING CYBERVIOLENCE

Cyberviolence is when a person (or group of persons) uses an online-connected device to cause someone to suffer sexual, psychological, economic or any other form of harm, often by exploiting their target's circumstances, characteristics or vulnerabilities.¹² Cyberviolence also includes actions that help to cause harm or merely threaten to cause harm. Though it takes place online, cyberviolence can often lead to direct physical harm. Though anyone can experience cyberviolence, women and girls are at greater risk, especially to severe harassment and sexualized abuse.¹³

Cyberviolence often involves the mass dissemination of information or images without the consent or control of the victim. Once spread, even the perpetrator lacks control; content often remains online long after the harassment stops.

FORMS OF CYBERVIOLENCE

Cyberviolence takes many, often overlapping, forms. The most common types of cyberviolence include cyber harassment; cyberbullying; revenge porn; cyberstalking; online child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and child pornography; and sextortion.

Cyber harassment includes threats of physical or sexual violence; statements or defamatory falsehoods that embarrass their victim among family, friends and co-workers; unwanted sexually explicit emails or other messages; offensive advances on social media and other platforms; requests to send personal photos; and hate speech that targets someone based on factors such as their race, sex, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation. Cyber harassment often comes in a terrorizing 'storm of abuse' that combines several of these actions.¹⁴

Cyberbullying is "an aggressive, intentional act or behaviour that is carried out by a group or an individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over

time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself."¹⁵ "It can take place on social media, messaging platforms, gaming platforms and mobile phones. It is a repeated behaviour, aimed at scaring, angering, or shaming those who are targeted."¹⁶ Cyberbullying involves acts such as sending unwanted, hurtful or threatening messages; teasing or ridiculing; spreading rumours; making unpleasant comments; sharing pictures or video without consent; stealing an online identity and using it to hurt others; and deliberately ignoring someone or leaving them out of activities in order to hurt their feelings.

Revenge porn is "the online distribution of sexually graphic photographs or videos without the consent of the individual in the images."¹⁷ Perpetrators are often ex-intimate partners who obtained the files during a relationship or are friends or acquaintances (and even strangers) who gained unauthorized access to the victim's private files. Reasons for distributing revenge porn include retaliating against someone for ending a relationship, publicly

12 Council of Europe (2018) [Mapping study on cyberviolence](#)

13 Canadian Women's Foundation (2019) [The Facts about Online Hate and Cyberviolence Against Women and Girls in Canada](#)

14 Council of Europe (2018) [Mapping study on cyberviolence](#)

15 Smith et al. (2008) [Cyberbullying: What does the research say?](#)

16 UNICEF (2021) [Cyberbullying: What is it and how to stop it](#)

17 European Institute for Gender Equality [Glossary & Thesaurus](#)

shaming and humiliating the victim, and basic cruelty (e.g. 'trolling'). Revenge porn can inflict substantial damage on the target's offline life, including creating rifts or ending relationships with the target's new partners, upending family ties, and getting targets fired from their job.

Cyberstalking is "stalking by means of email, text (or on-line) messages or the Internet. Stalking involves repeated incidents, which may or may not individually be innocuous acts, but combined, undermine the victim's sense of safety and cause distress, fear or alarm."¹⁸

Online child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and child pornography are major forms of cyberviolence that use online technologies to target children, often involving "the use of information and communication technology as a means to sexually abuse and/or sexually exploit children."¹⁹ Forms include soliciting children for sexual purposes, recruiting, or coercing a child into prostitution and pornography and live streaming of child sexual abuse. Child pornography is "the representation, by whatever means, of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or representation of the sexual parts of a child for primarily sexual purposes,"²⁰ as well as the use of a child to create such a representation.

Sextortion is "a term in popular discourse that encompasses activities that (a) involve manipulation or coercion to perform sexual activities for the benefit of the perpetrator and/or to create sexually explicit images of the victim and (b) the traditional crime of extortion."²¹ Sextortion includes the threat to expose sexual images in order to make a person do something.

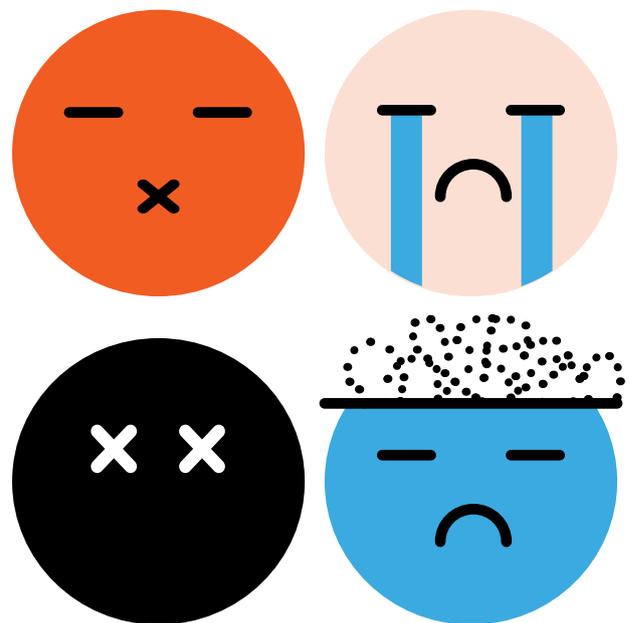
PERPETRATORS OF CYBERVIOLENCE

Cyberviolence can come from anyone: strangers met on- or offline, friends, colleagues or once-intimate partners. It can happen between peers and between different generations. Some perpetrators never reveal their identity, remaining anonymous behind a pseudonym. Cyberviolence often involves power imbalances between the victim/survivor and the perpetrator. Evidence has demonstrated that men and boys are the primary perpetrators of cyberviolence, particularly in the case of intimate partner stalking.²² This calls for more engagement of men and boys in the prevention of cyberviolence.

THE IMPACTS OF CYBERVIOLENCE

Although cyberviolence can affect anyone, women and girls are more vulnerable and experience different and more traumatic forms. The long-lasting effects of cyberviolence include a wide variety of behavioural, emotional, mental, physical and social impacts.

Behavioural impacts include quietness or, conversely, aggressiveness; poor school attendance; isolation or withdrawal from a group of people; and substance abuse or addiction. **Emotional impacts** can include feeling upset, embarrassed, stupid or angry and feelings of insecurity. **Mental impacts** often include anxiety and fear, lowered self-esteem, lack of trust in others, self-harm and suicidal thoughts, decreased interest in activities and a decline in academic or job performance. **Physical impacts** can include sleep disturbances, fatigue, changes in activity patterns or habits and increased depressive symptoms, including stomach aches and headaches. **Social impacts** can include being laugh at, a tarnished reputation, violations of intimacy, invasions of privacy, stigmatization and ostracization.



18 CYBERSAFE (2017) [Cyberviolence against Women & Girls report](#)

19 UNODC (2020) [Online child sexual exploitation and abuse](#); Interagency Working Group (2016) [Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#)

20 OHCHR [Article 2, UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography](#)

21 Law Insider (2018) [Sextortion definition](#)

22 Council of Europe (2018) [Mapping study on cyberviolence](#)

PROHIBITION OF CYBERVIOLENCE IN ARMENIA

While there is no specific or comprehensive law on cyber violence, the Constitution of Armenia and the Criminal Code contain provisions related to cyber violence. Articles 33 and 34 of the Constitution respectively recognizes individuals' right to freedom and confidentiality of correspondence, telephone conversations and other means of communication and the right to data protection. Chapter 24 of the Criminal Code and Articles 251 to 257 addresses crimes against computer information security.

Armenia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. In 2015, Armenia adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG Goal 5 on Gender Equality aims to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. SDG Target 5.b. aims to "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women." SDG Goal 16 on Promoting Peaceful and Inclusive Societies aims to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere.

In 2006, Armenia ratified the 2001 European Convention on Cybercrime²³ and its 2003 Additional Protocols²⁴. These instruments require Member States to take measures against cybercrime, including child pornography and racist and xenophobic-motivated threats and insults. Armenia also ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.²⁵ It adheres to the 'Resolution of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on Violent and Extreme Pornography'²⁶ and the 'Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) of the Committee Ministers to Member States on Preventing and Combating Sexism',²⁷ which call for measures to prevent and combat pornography and sexism, including in social media and other online networks.

Armenia's Department for Investigation of Cybercrimes and High Technology Crimes (which operates within the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia)²⁸ can investigate and prosecute acts of cyber violence. However, there is no direct reporting line from the community to the Department.

23 Council of Europe, [Convention on Cybercrime \(Budapest 2001\)](#)

24 Council of Europe, [Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, concerning the criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems \(Strasbourg, 2003\)](#)

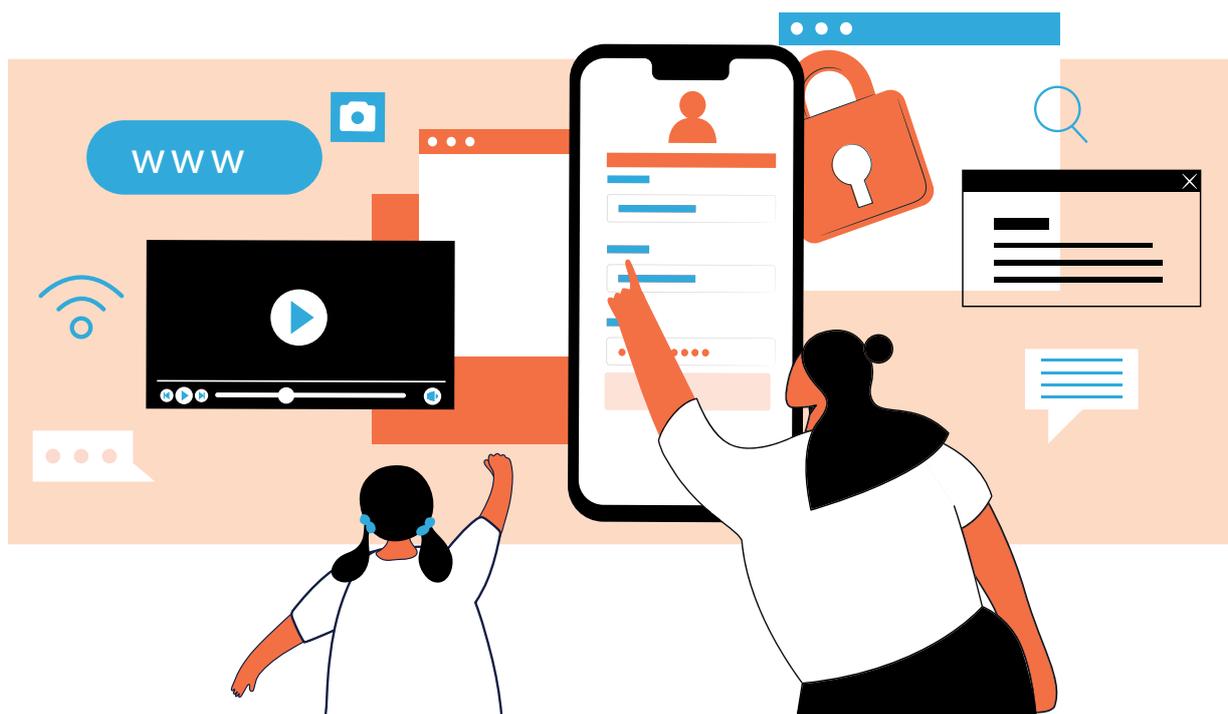
25 [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(Istanbul, 2011\)](#)

26 Council of Europe, [Resolution 1835 \(2011\) Final version Violent and extreme pornography](#)

27 Council of Europe, [Recommendation CM/Rec \(2019\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism](#)

28 CIS Legislative (2021) [About the Investigative Committee of the Republic of Armenia](#)

TIPS IN BUILDING WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES FROM AND RESPOND TO CYBERVIOLENCE



In addition to cyberviolence support services (see Resources section), CSOs to have a role in building knowledge and skills of women's own cyber safety, promoting cyberviolence awareness and creating safer digital spaces for women and girls.

Through nationwide and localized programmes and trainings addressing internet vulnerabilities of women and girls and their digital protection, CSOs can promote the following 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' which offer ways that women and girls can take action to prevent cyberviolence and effectively respond to it.

DOs

PREVENTING CYBERVIOLENCE

- ✓ **DO consider using a pseudonym instead of your real identity** as your personal email address or username, particularly if you feel uncomfortable when using online sites.
- ✓ **DO avoid using your professional email address** for personal Internet activities.
- ✓ **DO always set up your social media and online profiles yourself** so that you have control over the information you want to share.
- ✓ **DO consider with whom you share** your phones and other personal data.
- ✓ **DO make the best use of your devices' security settings**, following instructions to better protect yourself.
- ✓ **DO use security measures on all your digital devices**, such as antivirus software to protect against malicious programs (particularly keystroke loggers) and two-factor authentication to protect your login credentials (especially in common areas/hotspots and when granting third-party permissions to apps).
- ✓ **DO ensure your password is strong and kept secure.** Create strong passwords that are unique to each site, service and account and that are easy to remember so you don't have to write them down.
- ✓ **DO regularly change your passwords** to maximize your personal devices' security.
- ✓ **DO keep your software updated** in order to ensure that exploits and vulnerabilities are quickly patched.
- ✓ **DO transmit sensitive information only when connected to secure, known networks.** Even if a public network has a password, it is not necessarily secure. If possible, prioritize private networks (e.g. from your own devices, your family's or your workplace's network) over public networks.
- ✓ **DO be cautious and wary** of requests you receive online, particularly those asking for personal information. Even simple questions like "where do you live" or "where do you work" can reveal personal information that can be used to stalk or harass you.
- ✓ **DO make ample use of available security tools and settings.** Most social media apps and services allow you to block people who send you unwanted messages or comments — you can often block a person before it becomes harassment. You can also report problems to service providers or local authorities.
- ✓ **DO reset all your account passwords** (from your email and social media accounts to your bank accounts) **when separating from a relationship or partner**, especially if they are behaving in an abusive, worrisome, threatening or difficult manner.
- ✓ **DO regularly conduct Internet searches on your name** and check the sites where you appear online. If you find unauthorized information about yourself, immediately contact the site moderator to have it removed. Many services can be slow to respond; remain steadfast and persistent in your efforts until the content is taken down.
- ✓ **DO limit the information your devices share**, such as location or phone number. If you need to share information for business purposes, be sure to separate your personal information from your professional information.

DO NOTs

PREVENTING CYBERVIOLENCE

- ⊗ **DO NOT share intimate pictures** with anyone online (even a trusted individual).
- ⊗ **DO NOT share picture or video files of your friends and family without their consent;** you cannot control the way other people will use the files.
- ⊗ **DO NOT share your or your friends' personal information** on public forums or chat servers.
- ⊗ **DO NOT feel obligated to provide personal information** when filling in optional fields when registering with online sites (optional fields are typically not marked with an asterisk).
- ⊗ **DO NOT give your passwords to anyone,** even persons you know.
- ⊗ **DO NOT use personal information in your password** (such as birth date, name or nickname). Avoid frequently used passwords and never use the same password on more than one platform. Never record passwords in a written diary or computer file unless you can ensure their secure, encrypted (and password-protected) storage.
- ⊗ **DO NOT attack or insult anyone while participating in discussion groups.** If you disagree with the person, state your position objectively and factually; being as polite online as you would be in person minimizes the occurrences of online retaliation.

DO

RESPONDING TO CYBERVIOLENCE

Remember: there is no reason for you to ever put up with any kind of cyberviolence

- ✓ **DO seek help from someone you trust;** this is one of the most important first steps you can take.
 - **For girls,** speak to a trusted adult that you feel safe talking to. It can be your parents, a close family member, another trusted adult or a school counsellor or a favourite teacher.
 - **For women,** it can be your husband, a family member, your employer, a religious leader or a trusted friend.

- ✓ **DO clearly express dislike and ask the person to stop.** If you do not express it explicitly, the perpetrator may believe that by not complaining, you are consenting.

- ✓ **DO prevent further communication from the perpetrator** by blocking their email address, cell phone number and by deleting/blocking them from your social media contacts. Social media companies are obligated to keep their users safe and usually offer reporting links; look for links to formally report inappropriate behaviour.

- ✓ **DO save evidence.** Keep abusive emails, text messages or screenshots of social media posts to show what took place when you seek support from services providers or the police.

- ✓ **DO distance yourself from phones, laptops and technology** and spend time doing alternative activities with trusted friends and family. The more time you spend with activities that relax you, the less significance cyberviolence will have on your life. This will boost your self-esteem, increase your resilience and lessen the sense of being overwhelmed by the negative impacts of cyberviolence.

- ✓ **DO share your feelings.** Expressing what you've experienced and what you're going through can make a huge difference in the way you feel, even if it doesn't change the situation. By speaking out about your experience, you may encourage others to report cyberviolence they are enduring.

- ✓ **DO seek help from a professional counsellor** if you are not comfortable talking to someone you know. A professional is trained to effectively manage trauma and stress; trusted confidants are not necessarily sources of good advice.

- ✓ **DO contact the police** if you feel unsafe or the abuse worsens. They may help protect you, open an investigation and may bring criminal charges against the perpetrator.

DO NOT

RESPONDING TO CYBERVIOLENCE

Remember: there is no reason for you to ever put up with any kind of cyberviolence

- ⊗ **DO NOT blame yourself.** It is not your fault. No matter what a perpetrator says or does, you should not be ashamed of who you are or what you feel. The bully is the person with the problem, not you.
- ⊗ **DO NOT let the situation get you down.** The perpetrator is often an unhappy, frustrated person who wants to have control over your feelings so that you feel as badly as they do. Do not give them the satisfaction.
- ⊗ **DO NOT make a cyberviolence incident worse by dwelling on it** or reading related messages over and over. Instead, try to stop and instead focus on the positive experiences in your life. There are many wonderful things about you, so be proud of who you are.
- ⊗ **DO NOT respond by email or text when you are angry or upset.** Wait until you are calm and composed to decide on what to do. You can decide to not respond or just respond to clearly express that you dislike the situation and request the person to stop. Sometimes a reaction is what the perpetrators are looking for because they think it gives them power over you. This can generate a chain of reactions that may be harmful to you. Do not engage in any question-and-answer scenarios that will make you feel uncomfortable.
- ⊗ **DO NOT seek revenge.** Getting back at a perpetrator for retaliation will likely make the problem worse and could result in serious — and even legal — consequences for you.

For cyberviolence to stop, it needs to be identified, and reporting is key. Reporting can also help to show the perpetrators that their behaviour is unacceptable. If you do not report incidents, the perpetrator may continue and become more aggressive.

If you feel that you are in immediate danger, do not hesitate to contact the police

Take action if someone you know is being subjected to cyberviolence!

Don't be a perpetrator of cyberviolence!

Share this guide with the person.

There are limits to freedom of expression with respect to others; it's imperative to respect the privacy of others in order to claim respect for one's own personal space.

Listen and be supportive—your support can help the person to overcome the situation.

The main elements of privacy — the boundaries that should be respected — include physical, sexual and civil identity, contact information, lifestyle, family, friends, romantic relationships, personal and religious beliefs, health and image.

Do not blame or stigmatize the person.

You should consider privacy implications before you put anything on the Internet, and you should avoid publishing sensitive or sexually suggestive information or images of other people. Even if it is already posted online, you could still be contributing to cyberviolence.

You can help the person to think about practical solutions.

Just because you are writing online or via a cell phone does not mean you can insult or threaten someone with impunity. Cyberviolence is legally punished in Armenia; you may be prosecuted.

You can help the person to seek help with another trusted person, counsellor or authority.

You shouldn't do to others what you do not want to be done to you.

RESOURCES FOR HELP AND MORE INFORMATION

Resources available in Armenia

The **Safe You mobile app** provides information and awareness on gender-based violence for women and girls (including cyberviolence against women and girls). The app facilitates contact with police and support service organizations for support services.

Download the app at <https://safeyou.space>

The following organizations are Safe You services providers that provide support for cases of cyberviolence. You can directly reach out to them.

Women's Resource Centre
+374-77-991280
womenofarmenia@gmail.com
<https://womenofarmenia.org>

Women's Rights Centre
010 54 28 28
info@wrcorg.am
<http://www.wrcorg.am/en>

Sexual Assault Crisis Centre
0 800 01 280 / 077 99 12 80
sacc.arm@gmail.com
<http://www.saccarmenia.org/>

Other resources

Instagram:

- <https://about.instagram.com/community/parents>
- <https://about.instagram.com/community/safety>

Facebook:

- <https://www.facebook.com/safety/bullying/teens>
- <https://www.facebook.com/help/?page=214189648617074>

Twitter:

- <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/blocking-and-unblocking-accounts>
- <https://help.twitter.com/en/safety-and-security/report-abusive-behavior>

Websites offering information and awareness

Stompoutbullying.org is a website that spreads information and supports parents and young people to reduce and prevent cyberbullying, sexting and other forms of digital abuse. The organization deters violence in schools, online and in communities and educates against homophobia, LGBTQ discrimination, racism and hatred.

Webwise.ie offers advice and support for young people, teachers, youth workers and parents through information, advice and free education resources that address a range of Internet safety concerns.

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