

[← Back to News](#)

Egypt: Online Violence Against Women on the Rise

Cybercrime

Egypt

Gender-Based Violence



Written by

Published on

Asmaa Fathy

30 Jan 2024

 Copy link



“As I was checking my phone before bed, I stumbled upon pornographic images of me, accompanied by lewd comments that left me trembling in fear,” recounted Ola (a pseudonym chosen for her safety), a young Egyptian woman who reported to SMEX this incident of online sexual harassment.

[Online violence](#) manifests in various forms, from non-consensual sharing and

exploitation of images to bullying and stalking. Women are often the ones to bear the brunt of these violent acts, often enduring severe consequences that could culminate in death.

Inconsistent Experiences

"I spent an entire night at the police station, questioning the validity of my decision. I regretted filing the report about what I had endured, only to end up in jail. This was deeply frustrating. I was disillusioned, not anticipating a fair resolution," Ola added in her conversation with SMEX.

Marwa (pseudonym, another Egyptian lawyer who underwent two similar experiences, told SMEX about the inherent inequities of the legal process and its failure to deliver justice. In 2017, an unidentified individual attempted to blackmail Marwa, fabricating false conversations to tarnish her reputation and exert pressure. Although she had decided to file a report, she eventually abandoned the pursuit since the Cybercrime Police station was very far from where she lived.

That same year, the Egyptian lawyer, along with several fellow women's rights defenders in Egypt, faced an intense online attack labeled by the local press as the "Telegram attack." Reluctantly, she approached the authorities to report the incident, but, as she confirmed to SMEX, her report amounted to nothing more than a written piece of paper.

Meanwhile, Shaima al-Shawarbi, a journalist and writer specializing in feminist affairs, shared with SMEX the details of a defamation incident that targeted her on a social media platform. The incident was instigated by a former classmate.

"One day, I woke up to a message containing a barrage of insults and crude language from a classmate with whom I had no relationship. He had separated from his wife, who was in our class too, and he accused me of being the cause of their crisis, even though I knew nothing related to the incident," Shaima recounted to SMEX.

Despite the distressing experience, Shaima spoke highly of her interactions with the [Internet Police](#), describing it as "very positive." She added that the employees not only guided her through the subsequent steps but also provided crucial support to pursue her complaint.

The Egyptian Law

Navigating the [legal](#) processes is complex for those seeking justice for such crimes. Despite the Egyptian law's [penalties](#) for those misusing information technology to compromise personal data, punishing blackmailers remains challenging. These penalties include imprisonment for a duration ranging from two to five years, along with a fine ranging from 100,000 to 300,000 pounds for individuals found guilty of using communications to frame someone as publicly immoral or to damage their "reputation and honor."

Furthermore, there is a near consensus that a [unified law is indispensable in combating violence against women](#). Seven feminist organizations collaborated on formulating such a law, championed by MP Nashwa al-Deeb. She garnered support from over 60 parliamentarians, and the proposed legislation is anticipated to be deliberated in the Egyptian House of Representatives.

Once approved, the proposed law will address various deficiencies resulting from the fragmentation of current legislation on violence. It aims to address critical needs by incorporating community protection mechanisms, recognizing the pivotal role of relevant committees in raising awareness, providing rehabilitation for victims and their families, and establishing shelters for those facing threats. The legislation also endeavors to criminalize domestic violence and marital rape while bolstering procedures that not only encourage reporting but also safeguard individuals and their families.

Informal Initiatives to Contain Reality

Numerous feminist organizations in Egypt are actively engaged in offering legal, technical, and psychological support to women facing cybercrimes, recognizing online violence as a pervasive threat to their psychological and physical well-being.

In an interview with SMEX, lawyer Hala Douma, coordinator of the support offices at the [New Woman Foundation](#), disclosed that approximately 90% of support requests are from women who have experienced online violence. The foundation also handles cases of blackmail separately, extending legal, psychological, and technical assistance to the victims.

Similarly, the [Egyptian Women Lawyers' Foundation for Women's Rights](#) plays a crucial role in supporting women who have been blackmailed online. Heba Adel,

a cassation lawyer and the head of the foundation, shared some recent cases with SMEX. One instance involved a girl whose photos were illicitly obtained by a friend, who then demanded money to refrain from publicizing them.

Unable to pay the blackmailer, the victim turned to the foundation for help. According to Adel, the situation escalated when the blackmailer started pressuring the victim to steal her mother's jewelry. Adel explained, "We filed a report on the incident, but the criminal decided to visit the victim's house and expose her in front of her family and those around her. Subsequently, both girls were taken to the police station, where the blackmailer filed a report against the victim, resulting in both spending the night in the same cell."

The incident occurred almost a year and a half ago, yet it remains under investigation. The victim continues to grapple with psychological trauma stemming from her arrest and enforced proximity to the girl who had blackmailed her, as per Adel's account shared with SMEX.

Adel observed that cybercrimes against women surged with the onset of isolation measures implemented globally in 2020 to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased reliance on the internet during this period prompted many individuals to be more present and seek companionship online as a substitute for their tangible reality.

"[Virtual communication](#) has played a role in cultivating unreal relationships, ultimately leaving many women vulnerable to exploitation. Blackmail, in various forms, tends to target specific groups, including children, elderly women, and married women," said Adel. She explained that the sensitivity surrounding [cybercrime](#), further complicated by societal stigma, contributes to the situation's complexity.

Adel points out that additional factors, such as the absence of psychological and forensic clinics in proximity to reporting centers, have adversely impacted the efficiency and expediency of investigations. This, in turn, hinders the potential for swift results. It also compromises the privacy of those who report such incidents.

In a report released last March, the [United Nations](#) highlighted that 37% of women refrain from using the internet, citing a lack of security as one of the reasons hindering the development of their digital skills. This limitation

subsequently diminishes their opportunities for securing employment, as outlined in the report.

The gender [digital divide](#) is stark, with approximately 259 million fewer women accessing the internet than men. This accounts for only 63% of the total percentage of women in 2022. In low-income countries, internet access among women is notably low, with only about 21% having access—an indicator that has shown little improvement from 2019 to 2022.

Compounding the issue, real challenges hinder the accountability of those responsible for launching electronic blackmail attacks. This underscores the imperative for individual and non-governmental initiatives to address this reality. These initiatives primarily focus on conducting studies on gender-based violence and intensifying efforts to establish a unified law that safeguards women from violence in its various forms.

This article can be found in Arabic [here](#).

Asmaa Fathy

About the author

Egyptian Journalist based in Cairo.



SMEX

[Helpdesk](#) [News](#) [About Us](#) [Get Involved](#)

Subscribe

© 2024 SMEX. All rights reserved.

[SMEX's Website Privacy Policy](#)



This website is licensed under [Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International \(CC BY-SA 4.0\)](#)