The shadow pandemic: Online and ICT*-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19

Women are exposed to high levels of violence through mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms and email.

- In Canada, **ONE IN FIVE** women experienced online harassment in 2018
- In Pakistan, **40%** of female college students faced harassment on the internet in 2016
- Online abuse and trolling in Australia already costs the economy up to **AUD 3.7 BILLION**

With more than **half** of the world’s population under lockdown conditions more women and girls are using Internet with greater frequency:

- By early April 2020, internet use can increased between **50%** and **70%**
- From March to April 2020, there was a **535%** rise in daily traffic to Zoom.us – a popular and free video-conferencing service.

During the pandemic, online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls continue to be heightened:

- This includes: physical threats, sexual harassment, sex trolling, sextortion, online pornography, zoom bombing among others.
- In Australia, online abuse and bullying have increased in the past month by **50%**
- In Northern York County, Pennsylvania there was a **700%** increase of online harassment for the period of April 1-20, 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.
- In the United Kingdom, traffic nearly **DOUBLED** to the government helpline for adults experiencing intimate image abuse in the week of March 23, 2020.

**Increased online violence facilitated by ICT during COVID-19 may impact:**

- Women’s access to online services
- Education and employment opportunities
- Women’s participation as active digital citizens

Responses to COVID-19 must include:

- **For Government:**
  Strengthen capacity of and protocols for law enforcement officials addressing online violence against women

- **For Women rights organizations, and other civil society organizations:**
  Strengthen the awareness and capacity of women advocates, educators, and Internet users to identify, report online and ICT facilitated violence and how to access essential services online during COVID-19

- **For Internet intermediaries:**
  Set high-level and clear commitments to upholding women’s safety in online spaces during the pandemic and provide accessible and transparent reporting and complaints procedures


*ICT Information Communication Technology*