

Forging a Survivor-Centric Approach to Online Gender-Based Violence



Half-day event to launch IT for Change's **Judicial Resource Guide** on 'Forging a Survivor-Centric Approach to Online Gender-Based Violence' and **Research Report**, 'The Judiciary's Trust with Online Gender-Based Violence.'

Organized by IT for Change

Date: 4 November 2023

Time: 2.00 PM to 6.30 PM

Venue: India International Centre - Annex, Lecture Room I

Background

Rapid developments in digital technologies have seen our everyday lives become entrenched in online platforms and social media. This has also meant that the concerns of the 'real world' have been transposed online. Gender-based violence in online spaces is one such worrisome dimension. We see gender-based discrimination and violence perpetuated in online spaces – including, stalking, harassment, bullying, doxxing, unsolicited pornography, etc.

Online gender-based violence (OGBV) is a term employed to comprehensively address all forms of gender-based violence that happens online, examples of which include cyberbullying, doxing, and trolling. OGBV is deeply rooted in discriminatory social norms and gender inequality, and is often connected to offline violence. Women who are subject to online abuse and harassment suffer from direct and indirect violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of speech and expression, right against discrimination, particularly in the participation of political and public life, right to dignity, right to privacy and bodily integrity, the right to just and favorable conditions of work, and equal opportunity to access education. Research has shown that OGBV undeniably widens the gender digital gap, and ultimately, is a threat to peaceful, sustainable, and gender-equal societies.

As is acknowledged widely now, addressing OGBV requires a community-based, multi-pronged approach involving sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders, and addressing underlying risk factors for violence. Law plays an important role in delivering justice to victims/survivors of OGBV and in making the internet an inclusive and safe space for everyone. However, oftentimes, access to justice in cases of OGBV is not an easy path for victims/survivors due to various factors like inadequate understanding of the online public sphere by lawmakers, enforcers, and the judiciary, patriarchal and discriminatory social norms that underpin laws and legal institutions, victim-blaming, trivialization of online violence, difficulties with procurement and admission of digital evidence, delays in investigation and trial, and inadequate remedy, to name a few. In this context, the role of courts as ultimate dispensers of justice becomes crucial to ensure that the harm and rights violations suffered by victims/survivors of OGBV are adequately acknowledged, addressed, and remedied.

Against this backdrop, IT for Change undertook a systematic, empirical study in 2021-23 on the judicial attitudes of Indian courts in cases of OGBV. The study revealed that concerns surrounding access to justice in the offline realm are equally pertinent in cases of online violence. The findings of the study are captured in detail in our research report, 'The Judiciary's Tryst with Online Gender-Based Violence: An Empirical Analysis of Indian Cases.'

Building on the findings of the report, we developed an interactive portal to enable judges and lawyers to build a holistic understanding of gendered cyberviolence and find solutions within the law that are rights-based and survivor-focused. The portal serves as a Resource Guide and endeavors to challenge and transcend patriarchal notions of the law, offering practical frameworks for judges and practicing lawyers to approach OGBV cases.

Launch Event

We are delighted to launch our Report and the Guide on 4 November 2023 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. The launch event aims to enable critical discussion and deliberation on OGBV.

In particular, the event will:

- a) Facilitate an exchange of knowledge and experience among legal practitioners, scholars, gender equality advocates, and digital rights activists.
- b) Create the space to engage with IT for Change's research on OGBV and contemplate access to justice pathways for victims/survivors.

The event is structured as an expert dialogue with over 40 participants. The detailed agenda is below.

Agenda

1.30 – 2.00 PM

Registration

2.00 – 2.05 PM

Welcome and Introduction by IT for Change

2.05 – 2.25 PM

Presentation of IT for Change’s Research Report, ‘The Judiciary’s Tryst with Online Gender-Based Violence - An Empirical Analysis of Indian Cases’

Presenters:

- Malavika Rajkumar, Project Associate, IT for Change
- Shreeja Sen, Research Associate, IT for Change

2.25 – 3.20 PM

Panel Discussion I: Law as a Strategic Instrument to Address OGBV

This session will critically examine the divergent landscapes of online spaces, courtrooms, and real-world scenarios concerning gender-based violence. A pivotal focus of the conversation will be on the role of law in affirming the equal rights of women in digital society, including the right to freedom from violence. Experts will deliberate upon the evolving legal frameworks and their application.

Panelists:

- Arti Raghavan, Independent Lawyer
- Deepika Kinhal, Senior Resident Fellow & Team Lead (JALDI), Vidhi Center for Legal Policy
- Vrinda Bhandari, Advocate-on-Record, Supreme Court of India

Moderator: Nandini Chami, Deputy Director and Fellow, IT for Change

3.20 – 3.45 PM

Tea/Coffee Break

3.45 – 4.35 PM**Panel Discussion II: How do we Build Institutional Readiness for a Just Digital Society?**

This panel will engage with the key question of systemic transformation for a deeper understanding of digital changes. Panelists will focus on what is needed to equip stakeholders for gender-aware change-making.

Panelists:

- Lakshmi Lingam, Retired Professor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences
- Saumya Uma, Professor of Law, Jindal Global University
- Vaishali Bhagwat, Advocate
- Jhuma Sen, Advocate, Adjunct Faculty, The West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences

Moderator: Anita Gurusurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change

4.35 – 4.50 PM

Introduction to IT for Change’s work on OGBV and a Quick Tour of the Portal, Forging a Survivor-Centric Approach to Online Gender-Based Violence – A Judicial Resource Guide

Presenters:

- Malavika Rajkumar, Project Associate, IT for Change
- Merrin Muhammed Ashraf, Research Assistant, IT for Change

4.50 – 5.30 PM**Keynote Speech**

Vishal Gogne, Additional Sessions Judge

5.30 – 6.30 PM**High Tea**