

Online Space Impact on Human Rights Female Activists in Jordan

Jordan Woman Association

Prepared by:

Dr. Riyadh Suboh

2024

Introduction

The major advances in technology, namely social media have presented individuals and groups vast opportunities to express and share thoughts and views with others, promoted freedom of expression political and social opinions and even boosted political and public participation that weighed in favor of promoting human rights and democracy.

Nevertheless, these developments came with side effects; promoted freedoms were exploited in negative practices and even gave way to the merge of cybercrimes such as money laundry, fraud, sexual exploitation, hate speech and many other negative practices such as online bullying.

Human rights activists in Jordan are attacked, abused and loyalty questioned by many bodies or individuals that are either completely reject or have reservations human rights.

Whenever Jordanian women attempt to express an opinion or view, they are usually met with discrimination, violence and/ or bullying. Things only get worse if women are expressing views as activists and believers in human rights on social media platforms such as Facebook, X (Formerly Twitter) ...etc.

In recent years, Jordanian women activists and human rights defenders have seen increased wave of abuse that often rank up to hate speech, harassment and threats to life and reputation. That called for investigating and learning more whether this is becoming a phenomena that poses serious threat to women and human rights. Hence the study came about to further analyze and suggest recommendations to tackle this issue.

Study Methodology

The study follows a descriptive, analytical approach including all relevant aspects through tackling the following themes:

- Definition of online violence against women
- Online violence against women situation
- Online violence against activists in Jordan: with the following sub-topics:
 - o Effect of online space on boosting freedoms and crimes.
 - o Reasons of using social media to commit violence against women
 - o Forms of violence against women activists in an online space.
 - o National laws and protection of women activists.
 - o Law enforcement, parents and families reaction to violence against women activists.

Recommendations

The study attempts using the following methods in the study analysis:

- Desk analysis of the available literature on the topic.
- Legal analysis of the national laws in light of Human Rights international standards and related recommendations to Jordan
- Focus groups of activists who were victims of violations to learn their opinion of the matter.
- Interviews with a number of activists victims of violations and documenting cases.

Study Sample:

Women activists victims of violations in the online space due to defending human rights are members of the following:

- Female working with human rights and women organizations
- Women activists and human rights defenders in their own careers, specially lawyers and journalists.
- Women activists and human rights defenders in political parties (women politicians)
- Women human rights defenders active on social media platforms. **Definition of online violence against women**

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world. It occurs every day, multiple times, perpetrated against women and girls in all walks of

life; in political, security, social, and economic spheres. It has serious short- and long-term physical, economic, and psychological consequences for women and girls, preventing their full and equal participation in society.

One of the newest form of violence can be called online space violence due to the technology advances and internet revolution. This new form of violence that affects everyone and specially women is yet controversial; while researchers haven't agreed on a name for it. Cyber bullying was also countered with e-violence, online violence, digital violence, internet violence and mobile violence, online bullying, online harassment and online subjugation among others.

However, online violence remain more dangerous than the conventional forms of violence due to three main factors: difficulty of refrain from using, the most likely large audience and invisibility of the perpetrators¹.

According to the UN: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence refers to any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.

While many other terms – such as digital or online violence – are commonly used, “technology-facilitated gender-based violence” better reflects how technology can enable harm, both online and offline.

Take doxing, for example, which is the act of sharing someone's personal information online. It can lead to real-life consequences such as stalking, threats, and even physical violence. Or consider deepfake abuse, where manipulated images or videos of someone published online can then result in offline reputational damage with lasting and devastating effects on a person's life. These examples show the complexities of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and how its scope can be harder to define, as harm often permeates both online and offline spaces.

¹ Nawal and Sar: Digital Violence Against Women Phenomena Expanding Multiplying forms. Ruwaq Humanitarian and Social Studies, Um Bawaqi University. 2023 p. 262-263.

While all women and girls may experience digital abuse, online violence, or technology-facilitated gender-based violence, some groups are at greater risk. Including women who have presence online including Women in political and public life: Human rights defenders, activists, journalists and lawmakers face increased rates of violence both online and offline too.²

ESCWA defines cyber harassment against women as "Harassment by means of email, text (or online) messages or the internet. It can take many forms, including but not limited to: Unwanted sexually explicit emails, text (or online) messages; Inappropriate or offensive advances on social networking websites or internet chat rooms; Threats of physical and/or sexual violence by email, text (or online) messages; Hate speech, meaning language that denigrates, insults, threatens or targets an individual based on her identity (gender) and other traits (such as sexual orientation or disability)."³

Online violence against women situation:

Women around the world suffer from online violence, hence it is not a Jordanian or Arab only issue. Huge proportion of that violence fall under sexual harassment or hate speech and in essence a gender base violence. Online violence reflect violence against women in public spaces. For example 65% of women in the USA were sexually harassed in the street. 55% of women in EU were exposed to a form of sexual harassment, the highest is 82% in Sweden and lowest in Bulgaria with 24%. While 99.3% of women in Egypt reported they were victims of sexual harassment. In Jordan women who were exposed to a form of sexual harassment reached 75.9%⁴.

On the level of online violence UN Woman stats show proportion of women survivors in the Arab states who reported having been exposed to online violence in 2020; Iraq came first with

² FAQs: Types of violence against women and girls. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence>

³ UN ESCWA: <https://www.unescwa.org/ar/sd-glossary/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A>

⁴ Sexual Harassment in Jordan, 2017 The Jordanian National Committee for Women p.4-6

70.4% followed by Yemen 62.0%, Jordan 60.4%, Libya 60.3%, Morocco 58.1%, Palestine 54.2%, Tunisia 46.7% and Lebanon 35.2%⁵.

According to a study in Algeria. 83% of Algerian women were victims of sexual harassment and blackmail, 60% exposed to defamation and verbal abuse, 54% were subjected to intimidation, 42% were threatened to have photos posted and calling their parents⁶.

The prevalence of social media platforms has been one of the tools exploited to perpetrate violence against women in modern different way. Social media are widespread and used every day.

More than 58.4% of the world population uses social media. The average daily social media usage is 2 hours and 27 minutes.

Digitalization indexes shows that in early 2023 there are 9.95 million internet users in Jordan. Internet connection reached 88.0% and social media users are 6.61 million by January 2023 or 58% of the population.

More broadly, 66.4 percent of Jordan's total internet user base (regardless of age) used at least one social media platform in January 2023.

At that time, 45.4 percent of Jordan's social media users were female, while 54.6 percent were male⁷. These figures point out that women are increasingly using social media and that the gender gap in social media is narrow compared to the public space. Up to October 2024 social media platforms ranking in Jordan were as follows⁸:

Social Media Platform	Percentage (%)
Facebook	85.12
Instagram	9.39

⁵ Al Karak Consultations and Training Centre, Online Violence against Women in Jordan, 2022 p.5.

⁶ Sana Hamadoch and Fireal Kassay, Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Algeria: psychosocial

⁷ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-jordan>

⁸ <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/jordan>

YouTube	3
Twitter	1.24
Pinterest	0.93
LinkedIn	0.2
reddit	0.09
Tumblr	0.02
Other	0.01

These indexes shows that the majority of Jordanians are using Facebook as platform to communicate, i.e. most online violence will mostly take place on Facebook.

Online violence against activists in Jordan

In light of the focus group, individual interviews and inputs and references we can tackle the issue and outcomes as follows:

Effect of online space on boosting freedoms and crimes

Access to internet is an expression of human wish to communicate with one another. Thus, interaction with online space may be considered a human right; since it entails enjoying freedoms of expression, belief and personal freedom among others fundamental

human rights. Therefore, it is considered a criteria measuring a state's commitment to human rights.

No doubt that accessing internet and social media platforms contributed to overcome many of the conventional practices that prevented women from engaging in the public space or any space outside the house.

On the other hand, internet has been a great tool to empower people by education and accessing knowledge, although without constantly insuring high quality of education or knowledge.

Sure, some is accessing valuable and fairly accurate information from multiple sources from all corners of the globe. However, the majority of internet users consume information similar to fast food meal; taking the shortest or briefest form of information rather than thorough research that enriches one knowledge and hones the critic and research skills.

At the same time, its considered a valuable tool to document many data and information that a person use to express and can retrieve for any scientific, legal, economic or even personal.

The Internet has also helped bring women's voices to society and made them aware of women's potential, opportunities, and success stories. At the same time, there are large groups that still see no point in women's participation and have weaponised the Internet to attack them.

To most people, social media gives the first impression that it is positive, but if you start questioning some of its effects and impact, you will find that these impressions turn to adverse views with many reservations. Many see that social media has negative impact on privacy and children education and cognitive development. In addition to cultural appropriation, giving a platform for "absurd" behaviors, replacing direct with virtual communication, opening doors for abuse, discrimination, blackmailing, harassment and many other unwelcomed behaviors.

Online space revolutionize freedom of expression. It is a powerful and effective tool in directing public opinion through the opportunities it is offering for individuals to express their opinions,

transforming them into collective action. Similar to the events that formed what is now known as “Arab Spring” social media was used to convey ideas and organizing the community and initiate a dialogue to achieve political demands that may be lawful or extremist and violent.

Both sides who peacefully demanded freedoms and those who committed violent criminal acts used social media to communicate their ideas and mobilize the masses.

Online space has changed the structure of society, not only in terms of the traditional civil and political institutions, but also in terms of their effectiveness. It has come to compete with political parties and unions, and has diminished the importance of political representation, such as parliament, because individuals (especially activists) feel they are far more influential than the elected "representatives" in these institutions.

With that we can say unequivocally that online space promoted freedom in many ways. Nonetheless, conversely gave rise to many issues such as attacking other irrationally and an opportunity to invade privacy, disregard professionalism, intellectual property and stealing data and plagiarism. Sometimes, it creates self-censorship over the content that can be expressed in the public space.

Consequently, the probability of exposing personal data by electronic or security environment departments or by IT "hackers" have made some users vulnerable to these entities, leading them to abandon this space, reduce its use, or limit activities within a specific social context. Thus the conflict underling practicing freedoms online.

Online space has provided an alternative to traditional institutions for exercising freedom. It doesn't require significant effort, but rather interaction—anywhere and anytime—with given society. It's a great opportunity to maximize individual role.

IT and its manifestations such as email and social media provided the "visibility" advantage, and the user transform into a virtual or pseudo persona, whether that by using an account with real name and information or by different names and information; one have the ability to express opinions away from the people on the other screen who receive comments or messages. This has

built up courage to express freely and feeling that such opinions are important. Especially when such posts start receiving likes and gaining followers.

Conversely, these IT tools gave way to abuse and inappropriate behaviors, statements or even acts such as bullying, trolling, defamation, sexual harassment, discrimination and hate speech. While the perpetrator is not met with any reaction except similar reaction with the same tools from the victim.

This boldness made possible by online space has created a parallel illusion that is that change is possible by only expressing political or social views. A convenient alternative to engagement in the actual public space and taking part in protests and sit-ins, enrolling in civil society organizations or political parties, or doing community service. This may be considered a fake change by many while many others, on the other hand see as molding a new form of community communication⁹. Online space can make a "star" out of person who deserve to be one by revealing their potentials, and also can "glorify" the mob. Equating the intellect, creative people and scholars with the insignificant, plagiarizer and racists granting fake euphoria to those who don't have much of a content but express their behaviors to pass the time or attract fans and followers.

The other form of communication is that novel pattern described by Alvin Toffler as "electronic cottage", which entails a transformation of society identity and a shift away from mass society toward more individualized work and lifestyles. Therefore the huge flow of information can create ample chances of knowledge and education to individuals and at the same time chances of cognitive and behavioral chaos. Meaning that a social media user feels his/ her emotions can momentarily change due to the diverse information constant flow; emotions of appreciation and surprise can switch to sadness for someone or urge to share an exciting topic or bullying others to compassion with vulnerable people somewhere in the world to admiration of a certain character to simply enjoying new cultures and civilizations to just passing time on "trivial" ...etc. an individual may share those emotions or thoughts with others locally or even further around

⁹ Toffler, Alvin, 1990, *The Third Wave* Translated by Issam Sheikh Qasem, Benghazi, Jamahiriya Publishing House. Page 18.

the world. These data can color one's emotions and reactions rapidly and with no discipline and often portrays a diverse but somewhat disoriented and changeable identity.

The owners of IT and this online space can influence the users and society in general by blocking or shadowing some views and highlight others. Specially the content that Facebook inquire about your interests and needs so that they can cater information and links that accommodate to those interests and needs.

While the online space has provided the opportunity for "individuality," meaning that it has given each individual the ability to express themselves, and through which you can attract like-minded fans and friends from any region or location they may be in, it has at the same time created an opening for collective influence without direction, the possibility of adopting ideas without much thinking or scrutiny.

The Psychology of Crowds found its way from the public sphere to the online space only to go deeper. Once a piece of information or idea found to trigger reactions of the people for any religious, political or cultural considerations, you will face a "revolution" of emotions and sharing information without any scrutiny, using the most basic research skills or checking relevant sources. It generates a domino effect moving the masses by provoking their subconscious instincts.

All these changes that online space introduced to freedom and crime will reflect on women either by empowering her with freedom of speech or by making her a victim of violence.

Reasons of using social media to commit violence against women

Women in all societies suffers from violence and discrimination and Arab women are no exception. Therefore, that aggressive attitude against women move to the online space has a very expected outcome; new forms of violence against women and women activists in particular. The violence took new forms from bullying to sexual harassment, questioning loyalty among others. So the violence may not have increased but merely behaviors expanded from one space to a new space. Nevertheless, this move has confirmed one thing that the society does not want

or not yet accustomed to hear a woman's view that do not align with the views of that society. Social media made that possible for women. It successfully managed to introduce change among youth who got the chance to learn about the women potential and became more accepting to women participation against the groups who opposed that.

As a result, social media has exposed the division in society between those who oppose and those who support women's rights.

Accordingly, social media has opened a space for opponents of women's equality rights to express their discontent with intense hate speech sometimes. The definition of hate speech in international human rights standards calls into question whether online sexist hate speech should be treated differently from offline hate speech. While treaties affecting rights in cyberspace are increasingly being adopted—again primarily at the European level—the general approach in international human rights law is that the existing legal framework applies equally online. Therefore, the general provisions of the Treaty apply online, including to hate speech and gender stereotyping. This does not mean that contextual differences are not recognized. Context, for example, is relevant with regard to harm. Gender-based hate speech, whether online or offline, undermines gender equality and access to human rights. In the meantime, online gender-based hate speech has particular consequences in that it limits women's access to the important public sphere, which has been used as an argument for promoting content regulation. The rapid and global access to information—which is also difficult to permanently remove—increases individual and collective harm. Gender stereotypes may gain credibility through wider audiences and radicalization processes¹⁰.

The public space for social and political interaction, such as seminars, popular cafes, guest houses, sports clubs, and others, is almost entirely occupied by men. Nevertheless, now, men have yet a new space: the online space, in which they practice their activities. However, it has allowed a large percentage of active and inactive women to express themselves, which has left the “male society” with an unfamiliar challenge compared to the traditional public space, and a

¹⁰ [Maria Sjöholm](https://www.qil-qdi.org/regulation-of-online-gender-based-hate-speech-and-international-human-rights-law-current-status-and-challenges/) , Regulation of online gender-based hate speech and international human rights law: Current status and challenges. Mar 31, 2024. <https://www.qil-qdi.org/regulation-of-online-gender-based-hate-speech-and-international-human-rights-law-current-status-and-challenges/>

question is posed to them: should men accept this “new” actor, or should they retreat to the conservative position that rejects the role of women, i.e., reject it in both the public and online spaces.

However, it is noted that despite the prevalence of sexual harassment against women in the Jordanian and Arab environment, it is socially unacceptable. In contrast, the level of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and the use of obscene sexual language is more available but less rejected by the male society in cyberspace when compared to the public space. If sexual harassment is observed or witnessed in a public space such as the street, workplace, means of transportation, etc. by others, it becomes a scandalous behavior and it is expected that the harasser will be criticized, rejected, or perhaps assaulted, considering his act immoral and completely condemned against women and the public space. Here, the sanctity of women is equal to the sanctity of public places.

While harassment in cyberspace does not enjoy the same degree of sanctity, if obscene language is uttered or accusations of dishonor, honor, etc. are made, and despite the fact that they are documented, public, and witnessed by many, the reaction to the harasser is less severe or can be overlooked, given that the harasser is hidden behind a screen and is not present in the public space, on one hand.

On the other hand, it is justified to remain silent if the activist is defending women's rights or tackling issues that contradict the prevailing views of the Islamic religion or are related to the "national" dimension in its conservative and security concept, or raises issues of human rights or women's equality with men, which are usually considered to touch the core of religion, and which are by nature more related to customs and traditions than to religious texts, but religion is used as a pretext because it carries a sanctity more than customs.

Perpetrators of violence against women, particularly those who engage in such profanity and sexual harassment, are often young, unemployed, or have ample free time. However, this does not prevent older people from same behaviors violence. Given the significant influence of social media on society, it is an effective means of igniting feelings toward behavior that reflects intense

misogynistic rhetoric. This transforms the social media abuser into someone who displays their pent-up hatred of women, contrary to their public persona.

Given the significant impact social media has on society, it is an effective means of igniting feelings toward behavior that reflects extreme hate speech against women activists. This transforms the person on social media into another person entirely, displaying his repressed hatred toward women, contrary to his personality in the public sphere.

Spare time role is confirmed to have influence on online violence by a study that suggested that COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to an increase in cases of online violence against women. This is due to the nature of the changes necessitated by the pandemic in various aspects of life, and the accompanying shift of many jobs and tasks to the online space. In addition, the free time the pandemic left for some during the home quarantine period, which in turn increased the rate of use of social media sites, increasing the likelihood of the occurrence of the phenomenon of cyber violence¹¹.

All of this is expressed through hate speech that has been enabled by cyberspace, and discussions about the merits and feasibility of regulating gender-based hate speech—both locally and internationally—have emerged with the increased dependence on the internet.

Hate speech in general, and sexist speech in particular, has increased dramatically with the development of social media. While gender inequality is the primary underlying cause of gender-based hate speech, several social and technical factors are also responsible for the growth of online hate speech. These include user anonymity, mob behavior, the ease with which information can be rapidly disseminated globally, and the lackluster regulation of cyberspace¹².

Social media has helped people with conservative views on women's participation in public life to share their opinions and ideas, which may contradict many of the beliefs held by a large

¹¹ West Asia and North Africa (WANA), Online Violence on Facebook against Women during COVID 19 in Irbid Governorate October 2021.

¹² [Maria Sjöholm](#) , Regulation of online gender-based hate speech and international human rights law: Current status and challenges. Ibid.

segment of society, or those raised in a conservative family environment. This has led to a sense of shock when people discover their opinions, which are characterized by criticism, frankness, and demands for human rights concepts. This has increased the intensity of the reaction, which is protected by the person behind the electronic device. If it succeeds in influencing others, questions arise about who is behind it and who supports it! It is as if she is incapable of doing so in the first place because she is a woman and because she is calling for change. If she fails, the call to "send them back home" increases.

Women politicians are particularly targeted by online hate speech, but women in politics are even more vulnerable due to their presence in public spaces, particularly if they advocate for women's human rights. Online violence against women extends across all sectors of politics—civil society, political parties, elections, and governance—posing a major challenge to women's full and equal participation in public life. Data reveals that female politicians are more likely than men to receive online threats, often in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, derogatory images, harassment, intimidation, and threats¹³.

In some cases where women are particularly active during election campaigns or when they campaign to advocate for a cause such as amending a law or raising specific human rights issues, the aggressor's behavior becomes a mixture of harsh criticism of her as part of the criticism permitted to be directed at public figures, given that the activist has perhaps attained the status of a public figure, and attacks on her because she is a woman rather than a public figure. Examples of this behavior include posting photos on social media where the activist's image is superimposed on the body of a famous woman with a "bad reputation," or "abusing" photos of female candidates in election campaigns, or bullying and mocking the candidate's appearance and criticizing why the woman is a candidate herself, as she is not qualified. The overlap between these factors increases when activists express their opinions in public, particularly on the street during demonstrations. Social media frequently alleges the possibility and likelihood of women

¹³ UN Women, eliminating online Hate Speech to Secure Women's Political Participation. [://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA](https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA%20Asia/Docs/Publications/2021/04/ap-WPP_online-hate-speech_brief.pdf)
[sia/Docs/Publications/2021/04/ap-WPP_online-hate-speech_brief.pdf](https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEA%20Asia/Docs/Publications/2021/04/ap-WPP_online-hate-speech_brief.pdf)

being harassed, despite the absence of female complainants. These allegations are used as a means to "alienate" people from these demonstrations, reinforcing the stereotype that women are sexually targeted by their male fellow demonstrators, and that their place is not on the street but at home to preserve their "dignity." This recycles the notion that men protect women to protect their daughters' shame. Here, it can be argued that these attacks on targeted activists are used to achieve a political goal: to undermine the right to demonstrate. As a result, opposing a woman's political opinion doubles the likelihood of the same political opinion held by a man. This can be considered violence or compounded discrimination, further reinforcing the hate speech that is prevalent when women participate in demonstrations and are shared on social media.

The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression has noted the danger of undervaluing the term hate speech, especially in the digital age, as it could lead to excessive restrictions on freedom of expression.

To date, gender-based hate speech has been mentioned intermittently by UN bodies, albeit with increasing frequency. Broadly—and without a link to a specific treaty—the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech includes "gender" as a protected ground. UN treaty bodies have also applied treaties in a manner that includes gender-based hate speech. One approach has been to adopt an intersectional approach, addressing hate speech against women of a particular race, nationality, or religion. This involves linking "gender" to the identity characteristics more broadly accepted within the hate speech community. An intersectional approach is necessary as studies indicate that certain groups of women are particularly targeted. This includes women of certain ethnicities and women active in the public sphere, such as journalists, human rights defenders, and politicians. However, intersectionality has been applied primarily in the form of adding "women" to other laws¹⁴.

¹⁴ [Maria Sjöholm](#), Regulation of online gender-based hate speech and international human rights law: Current status and challenges. Ibid.

All of this has contributed to strengthening the process of tracking and monitoring activists on social media, unlike the public sphere, which requires going to forums, attending meetings and meetings, and reading articles and books to know their opinions, which requires time and effort. Meanwhile, social media provides this at the lowest financial costs, is documented, can be accessed at any time, and gives you the opportunity to interact through commenting, expressing admiration, insulting, or even sharing it. In other words, these media have strengthened the opportunities for tracking, interaction, and monitoring, which has made it possible to assault and pressure them, in addition to appreciating their work and positions.

The speaker gender can be seen in the different reactions on social media. For example, two members of the Royal Committee for Political Reform expressed their opinions on social media and the media that differed from the opinion of a significant segment of the Jordanian public. They are both well-known figures: Oraib al-Rantawi and Wafaa al-Khadra. Oraib expressed his political opinion, which is considered controversial among the people, and as a result, he was attacked and criticized, which led to his expulsion from the committee. Meanwhile, Wafaa al-Khadra posted on Facebook criticizing the unhealthy method of slaughtering sheep on Eid. However, she was subsequently subjected to a severe attack, to the point of being threatened. This was due to her being a woman and because she addressed a topic related to religion, despite the fact that her statement was not intended to offend religion as much as it was related to health and environmental reasons only. Here, we note that the intensity of the attack on women was more intense than on men. On the other hand, it was noted that a large portion of those who instigated this criticism and attack on social media were intent on attacking the committee and its composition. Consequently, the two activists were victims of this stance, and women in particular were the ones paying the heaviest price.

One of the ready-packed accusations for women activists and many human rights defenders without any clear cut difference between genders is the "betrayal" or connections to foreign bodies. Despite the fact that everything activists are advocating for is derived from international conventions, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which the state has ratified and which has passed through its constitutional stages, This brings only resentment and astonishment. How can accusations of treason and links to foreign

entities be made when these principles have been approved in accordance with the Jordanian constitution? Perhaps this is because attacking an individual or group of activists, especially if they are women, is easier than attacking the state that ratified these conventions.

Here, attacking women activists and male human rights activists becomes an easy tool to attack the government, while the latter does not seek to defend its ratification of these agreements or to protect the activists.

Forms of violence against women activists in an online space

Men and women may be equally accused of betrayal and collaboration with foreign bodies, whether embassies or international human rights organizations. However, "Betrayal" is more targeted at men while women we can see that honor related accusations are more prevalent.

Since women activists are more likely than men to experience violence and cyberattacks, however diverse and somewhat different from that experienced by men, especially those related to sexuality. These forms of violence include sexual harassment, verbal abuse, insults, humiliation, defamation, and comments about their image and appearance, usually using harsh and hurtful language.

In addition to abuses, one form of sexual harassment is the use of devious methods like asking a question of a sexual nature or sending sexual images. The second form is fishing for anything in that activist's personal life, such as her family or marriage, and then post that on social media. Using expressions that aims at belittling the opinion of women's rights activists, alleging they have failed in their marriage or they are divorced, whether that is true or not, they always assume that women rights activists are divorced women, playing on the given that being called a divorcee is considered negative for women, not men. The third form relates to their appearance and dress. For example, if they don't wear the hijab, they describe them as "dressed with no veil; unveiled," or they choose to post inappropriate photo of them on social media, making them look ugly or funny. Their opinions are also gauged based on the activists age. If an activist is young they would say "Go away, you don't understand," and if an activist is older, they mock her by saying, "You're

closer to death." Even those who adhere to modest dress may not be spared harsh criticism, such as when activists who participate in demonstrations or express their opinions on social media are told, "You should adhere to morals and modesty by not shouting."

Another way is stalking her in her own circles, at work, or sending messages via WhatsApp and/or other apps for further inconvenience and harassment, insulting her family, or reporting her posts as inappropriate to social media admin, blocking her from that platform and denying other users from following her.

Some people seek to privately communicate with women, activists and influencers. One example is sending sexual images on Snapchat, because Snapchat messages quickly disappear. If she does not respond positively as the sender wants, then he goes further, by cursing, sending sexual images, and attacking her, etc.

However, not all private messaging content can be dismissed as negative. In some cases it is intended to start discussion on the topic or respectfully offering advice to the activist to avoid abuse.

Surprisingly, some of those who perpetrate violence against activists and use obscene language are very conservative in their daily life, amidst their social circles or in the public sphere. However, because they feel they have a space where they can free to express themselves, this has given them this "right", being on social media and as something new, to use bad and harsh language.

Of course, any activist, male or female, discussing religious issues is unacceptable and exposes the activist to attack. However, the criticism is less directed at men, given that women either do not understand religion or seek to do so in order to be free of "religious moral values," especially if she is not wearing a "veil". It is also an attempt to reduce the moral concept to the sexual aspect, as it indicates the inferior view of women's abilities to deal with standard issues of value. It is worth noting that women are not appointed to positions of a religious nature, such as a Mufti or a Sharia judge, despite the fact that Jordanian law does not specify the gender of those who fill these positions. However, failure to appoint women in such positions reflects the same negative attitude that they are "not qualified" for this, which reinforces rejection of women right to discuss these religious issues.

If a woman criticized terrorism and ISIS, she is attacked as an agent of the Americans and foreign bodies. However, female activists who express or represent political Islam and discuss religious or political issues are not subjected to the same level of bullying or violence, especially insults and sexual profanity, because they are conservative or religious women, compared to other female activists who do not belong to political Islam.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) emergence has added new layer to attacking opponents, especially female activists, such as the possibility of using AI to generate images and then a perpetrator would post snippet for marketing, attracting attention and suspense, such as "Live: photos of a specific woman soon", although these photos are often not posted. However, the purpose behind them is relatively well served by suggesting sexual "innuendo", even without providing the alleged "evidence".

Even female activists who try to highlight social issues that women face, such as divorce and looking for a job, are not immune to the harsh attacks that express an inferior prospective of women. One activist posted a video of herself, to encourage young people, especially young females, to work. She sold coffee on the street, and posted it on social media. However, the sheer amount of harsh comments that the video received was astonishing. One of the comments was, "Do you know what this girl does? At night, she works in a nightclub and in the morning, she sells coffee to show that she is decent." These comments, and many others, had a negative impact on her.

The same activist also made another video about "divorced women," addressing their issues. Surprisingly, what provoked the viewer's rage was the title, given that it is forbidden to use such a term, "divorced women" as if the word were obscene, uncommon, or do not exist in law or even religion! Some media people even criticized the platform's owner for allowing such a title!

It is also noted that when a male activist is attacked, he is also violently attacked and insulted by including female family members, i.e. his mother, sister or wife with obscene words relating to their honor, since the man is deemed the "protector" of the woman, by insulting her, the man is insulted as well.

Some view the campaigns against female activists as guided and organized, as it is difficult to describe them as individual acts, because such description allude that only limited an few cases happened. While the majority of female activists believe that they stem from viewing women as inferior and "enjoying" freedom irresponsibly.

Therefore, it is behavior that can be described as chaotic and not guided in an organized manner, but rather in the value sense, that is, the position on the issues raised and the gender or person addressed: women.

Oppression against women activists by the community serves a political goal despite that the motives behind that may be social, cultural and conservative. However that deepens the suppression of the society's freedoms, political and civil participation. i.e. those who believe that only men are entitled to public and political roles will take a taste of the same practice against women because suppression of freedoms will be applied on everyone. Needless to say that no political freedoms without civil rights.

National Legislation and Protection of Female Activists

In Article 15 of Title "Rights and Duties of Jordanians", the Constitution of Jordan safeguards the freedom of opinion and expression, which provides for "The state safeguards the freedom of opinion, where every Jordanian may freely express the opinion thereof by speech, writing, photography and all other means of expression, provided that not to be in violation of the law." Recently, an amendment was made to Article 6 of the Constitution to provide for "The state safeguards the empowerment and support of women to play an active role in building the society in a way guaranteeing equal opportunities on the basis of justice and equity and protecting them from all forms of violence and discrimination." The purport thereof is that the freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the equality and empowerment of women is constitutionally safeguarded and must be protected by law.

Moreover, the Jordanian Penal Code regulates the crimes and stipulates for suitable penalties. Although the law clearly specifies certain crimes, yet some of them requires clarification, such as the definition of the conception of "Undermining the regime of government" as in Article 149 thereof, and the crimes in prejudice of the national unity as in Article 150, which provides for: "Any writing, speech or action aiming at or resulting in stirring sectarian or racial prejudices or the incitement of conflict between various sects or components of the nation, shall be penalized by imprisonment for a term not less than one year nor exceeding three years and a fine not exceeding two hundred Dinars."

Furthermore, in Article 188, it defines the slander, libel and defamation, yet Article 467 *bis* limits the scope of hate speech within the educational institutions and sport facilities as it provides for "Any person who causes riot or incites hatred by whatever means within the educational institutions, sport facilities or any other place to which such riot has extended shall be subject to the penalty of imprisonment for a term that is not less than three months nor exceeding one year." This indicates that it lacks coverage of the cyberspace and has not defined the incitement of hatred, many examples of which we see on the social media.

The technological transformations gave rise to the need for the developing the legislation as they opened the room for new field of crimes; one of these transformations is the internet, which is, de facto, is mostly controlled by private corporations, where the control of the State over the used content is limited, and principally undermined by ineffective jurisdiction of the State over the cyberspace. Simultaneously, the expansive differences at international level as to the restrictions imposed on the freedom of expression presume that international regulation of the harmful speech, including the hate speech, is controversial per se. And this is the most controversial point on the internet.¹⁵

The other law is the Cyber Crime Law, which the government enacted a new version in Summer 2023, and was ratified by the House of Representatives. However, this law was received with a

¹⁵ [Maria Sjöholm](https://www.qil-qdi.org/regulation-of-online-gender-based-hate-speech-and-international-human-rights-law-current-status-and-challenges/) , Regulation of online gender-based hate speech and international human rights law: Current status and challenges. Mar 31, 2024. <https://www.qil-qdi.org/regulation-of-online-gender-based-hate-speech-and-international-human-rights-law-current-status-and-challenges/>

major debate in the Jordanian circles due to the effect thereof on the cyberspace freedom and freedom of opinion and expression.

This law accompanied the changes in the world in which the states endeavor to regulate the cyberspace, as there are 137 cyber-crimes law worldwide, including 13 Arab states that enacted such a law. There are also common features in these laws incriminating actions in which those with criminal tendencies use this technology to commit crimes such as extortion, fraud and threat.

However, certain laws, including the Jordanian law, are characterized by incriminating actions that fall within the scope of freedom of political opinion and expression, and impose on the violators aggravated penalties of imprisonment and overpriced fines with a view to protect the governmental official in a way restricting the space of freedom, which resulted in imprisoning several journalists, members of parties and activists, including women, because of their opinions on the public issues. The more dangerous thing is that the law allows for detention (pretrial custody) in these cases even before entering a judgment.

The law further allows the government to arbitrarily apply the law due to the loose terminology such as dissemination of false and fabricated news, character assassination and contempt for religion, without providing for clear definitions, the matter that allows for expanding the interpretation of the criminal actions and lack of accurate designation of the legitimization and incrimination.

The Cyber Crime Law expanded the scope of offenses and authorities permitting the public prosecutor to initiate legal actions against individuals without having a personal complaint when the crime ascribed thereto is relating to governmental personalities or entities. The Law further created aggravated penalties for loosely forged crimes, such as "dissemination of false news", "Instigation of sedition", "targeting the community peace", and "contempt for religion".

The most notable provisions of the law that were subject to objection by the civil society organizations and activists are those providing for "Any person who deliberately sends, re-sends or publishes data of information via the information network, information technology, information system, website, or social media platforms, involving false news, libel, slander or

scorn of any person shall be subject to the penalty of imprisonment for a term that is not less than three months, a fine in amount that is not less than 5 thousand Dinars nor exceeding 20 thousand Dinars, or both penalties." ¹⁶

The Cyber Crime Law of 2023 is a newly enacted law, as it addresses the so-called newly-created offenses, not in the nature of the action, yet in terms of the tool used in the criminal action, i.e. information technology.

There is no doubt that certain aspects of the law legitimize it, being the approach of dealing with criminal actions used via the cyberspace, such as the financial and sexual exploitation, encroachment upon third party property, swearing, libel, slander, violation of privacy, and causing damage to third party data. Although these actions are already incriminated by other legislation, namely the Penal Code, yet what this laws adds is not the criminal description, but rather applicability of those crimes to the cyberspace, rendering the possibility of substantiation of the crime relying thereon.

Perhaps there are no sufficient information and statistics on the extent of applicability of the law after more than one year as of the promulgation thereof, as communication was made with the Directorate of Public Security to obtain data on application of the law in terms of the filed cases and the entered judgment thereunder against women, but the request was disapproved without a justification. ¹⁷ However, the initial data show that there are good -cautious- applications to several cases that is not relating to the freedom of opinion and expression, such as the encroachment upon property and sexual violence, such as sexual exploitation, where it is noticed

¹⁶ Yahia Shuqeir, Jordanian Cyber Crime Law: Solution by Repeal of Amendment https://www.alaraby.co.uk/entertainment_media/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%91-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%84%D8%BA%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A3%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%84

¹⁷ A correspondence by Jordanian Women's Union to the Directorate of Public Security was made on 24/09/2024, requesting information on: 1- number of complaints filed by women relating to being subjected to cyber crimes in the last five years, the number and destiny of cases referred to the courts, and the number of closed files without reference to courts. The response of the Directorate of Public Security under Letter No. J/9/27/78291 dated 09/10/2024 was as follows: "Kindly accept the apology of the Directorate of Public Security for disapproving the request subject of your letter."

that the complaints filed by women who were exposed to sexual exploitation via the cyberspace have received with attention and follow up, yet the other cases including libel, slander, defamation and threat to people, males and females, to which activists having their own political or intellectual opinion, namely those opposing the government stance and the public mood, were exposed have not been subject of attention, but rather possibly ignored. This implies that the problem of the law is not only relating to the provisions thereof, but also the application thereof on basis of equality.

In terms of provisions, this law has several issues; the first of which is that it incriminates the act of criticism by persons who criticize those entrusted with enforcement of law; and the second is that the law has loose provisions such as "incitation of libertinism, seduction of another person, or actions in turpitude of public morals," "character assassination", "Instigation of sedition and feuds or undermining the national unity" and "contempt for religion". Reference to the foregoing was made by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in their statement issued in August 2023 "These phrases target the expression online content, and they are loose, subject to expansive interpretation, and do not comply with the requirements of the International Human Rights Law relating to legitimacy, legitimate target, necessity and proportionality to the restrictions imposed on the right to freedom of expression", rendering the application of this law more discretionary, temperamental and interpretable in favor of the authorities in addition to undermining the freedom of opinion and expression.

The third matter is the penalty of imprisonment and fine for all these cases, as the penalty of imprisonment also applies to the cases of libel, slander and defamation, whose penalties should be civil rather than custodial in accordance with the best international practice.

The foregoing made OHCHR in their statement, the conclusion of which we emphasize, stress the necessity of reviewing this law to become in harmony with the International Human Rights Law, along with emphasizing the right of the state to guarantee the cyber security, yet the

provisions of the law have to be clearly amended to safeguard the right of opinion and expression and the remaining human rights system.¹⁸

The main problem of this law is the overlap between the plain criminal cases provided for by the Penal Code and the effect and overlap thereof with the right to freedom of opinion and expression, especially with respect to the criticism to the authorities; while the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights safeguards the freedom of expression in Article 19 thereof, which Covenant was ratified by Jordan without reservation, yet the understanding and application of this right in many country, including Jordan, entail a significant issue, as states resort to Clause 3 of this Article which allows the chance for arbitrarily restricting the freedom of expression based thereon, rendering the purpose of this permitted restriction lost, as the international comments and interpretations indicate that any restriction to this right should not affect the essence of the right, but rather has to be for a purpose supporting the same. These include the definition of the national security on which some states usually rely as a justification to impose restrictions on freedoms the purport of which, according to Siracusa Principles is the protection of the states territorial integrity, part of the population or the system against the use of force, i.e. the criticism and sharp expression should not be subject to restrictions because these are peaceful means.¹⁹

Moreover, the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1999, contains provisions protecting those advocating human rights, such as Article 1 which provides for "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels." Other Articles also guarantee the right of every individual to peacefully meet or assemble; to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups; and to communicate with non-

¹⁸ OHCHR, Jordan: Concerns over Cyber crime legislation and shrinking civic space. 15/08/2023
<https://www.ohchr.org/ar/press-briefing-notes/2023/08/jordan-concerns-over-cybercrime-legislation-and-shrinking-civic-space>

¹⁹ chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/1984/07/Siracusa-principles-ICCPR-legal-submission-1985-eng.pdf

governmental or intergovernmental organizations. Article 6 safeguards the right thereof to obtain information, to publish views and information relating to human rights; and to develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance; the right of individuals to submit to international agencies criticism and proposals; the right of anyone whose rights have been violated to access to means of justice; the right to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession; the right to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights, where the authorities of the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration. Individuals further have the right to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the purpose of promoting human rights. The Declaration further stresses that individuals, non-governmental organizations and relevant institutions have an important role to play in contributing to making the public more aware of questions relating to human rights.

To this end, the posed question is relating to the extent of Jordan's compliance with these international human rights standards and the Jordanian Constitution which guarantee without discrimination those rights to male and female activists, by respecting them without committing any actions or practice by the authorities to unlawfully undermine and restrict these freedoms, and protect them from assaults by other individuals? Upon perusing the opinion of the Human Rights Committee in their recommendations for Jordan, it stresses that "the State party should guarantee the right to peaceful assembly, in conformity with article 21 of the Covenant and international standards. The State party should not use security laws and measures to intimidate members of civil society who exercise this right and should ensure that they are able to operate freely, with access to funding."²⁰ This implies that the national laws have not actually guarantee the free exercise of rights.

²⁰ Human Rights Committee: Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Jordan, 2017.

The most urgent question is what the objective of this cyber crime laws based on these gaps to which we have referred? is it for the protection of the individual or the official? The criterion this lays in application of this law.

The Jordanian National Plan for Women (202- 2025) contained a component relating to promoting the concept of respect based relationships which renounce gender-based violence within communities and address the various dimensions thereof in the public and digital spaces. It also states that the required initiatives are "review of the legislative framework, including the laws, regulations and instructions relating to gender-based violence in public spheres, including work places, and through the cyberspace, so that to cover all forms thereof, and provide suitable and sufficient protection to the survivors from violence, without impunity or toleration with the perpetrators of gender based violence, and addition to providing sufficient deterrence for protection from GBV and ensuring non- repetition thereof, and ensuring the enforcement of all relevant legislation by the authorities in charge of enforcement thereof," and "organizing popular awareness campaigns at the national and local level through mainstream and social media to ; raising the awareness of institutions active in confronting GBV, and conducting awareness campaigns through mainstream and social media to include women, women, girls and boys in schools, universities, and religious, social and cultural institutions, aiming at the methods of protection, confronting and combating gender based violence in both the public and digital spaces in addition to raising the awareness about the forms and reasons thereof." ²¹ This National Strategy stresses the existence of gaps in terms of lack of accountability and the need for reconsidering the legislation relating to protection of women, including in the cyberspace.

Interaction of Law Enforcement Authority, Family and Clan as to Violence Against Activists in Online Environment

Interaction of Law Enforcement

²¹ The Jordanian National Commission for Women. General Framework of the National Strategy for Women in Jordan (2020- 2025)

Female activists face challenges relating to the interaction of law enforcement with their cases; despite some advantages in applying the Cyber Crime Law concerning the prosecution of some perpetrators, yet it is safe to say that this law was not in favor of the people in general, and the activists in particular. While those criticizing the official are held accountable as perpetrators, responsiveness to the complaints of female activists have not been dealt with at the same level of attention; if the complaints are relating to sexual assaults such as extortion, display of indecent or improper photos of women, slander, and the like, the Cyber Crime Unit at the Directorate of Public Security does not hesitate in accepting the complaints and earnestly follow up the same with a kind of empathy and compassion with their cases. However, if the complaint is filed by activists having a political or right related opinion, dealing with the same varies from a case to another yet generally characterized by slackness and procrastination in many cases.

The other problem is that the process of substantiating the complaint relating to cyber crimes, especially those relating to women, involves prolonged procedures between the initial investigation at the Cyber Crime Unit, then reference to the public prosecution, the trial proceeding and up to the judgment and appeal. These procedures are of course normal in legal terms, but the abused female activists face several challenges on this path, starting with the low financial potentials of some of them to retain a lawyer, and that the course of justice requires trials in open courts which necessitates disclosing the details and circumstances of the case which entail evidence on sexual behaviors that women do not prefer to be publicly disclosed.

It is noteworthy to indicate that this law which addresses a newly created matter, i.e. crimes of cyberspace in a context where people feel enthusiastic to express their opinions, makes many of them unaware of the gravity of violation of the law; while a professional journalist can often avoid the violation thereof to a certain extent, yet the law at the end pressures the freedoms, whether of the public or the activists and journalists. What is interesting is that the public generally support the Cyber Crime Law despite that many of them are unaware of its potential repercussions thereon.

Thus, the Cyber Crime Law in general would not guarantee protection to the abused female activists as incriminating aggressive behaviors against women, because the loose nature of

provisions thereof that allows for discretionary application thereof would result in accumulating violence against women, namely the activists, and encourage people to file complaints against each other in many cases, such as slander, libel, defamation, sexual exploitation and claims that undermine the freedoms, and thus all these cases are equally treated under the same law.

An example of the negative applications that undermine the freedoms is the story of a Jordanian female activist of a certain nationality who shared a post written by a man of the same nationality, in which he criticized an author of another essay about a man who had criticized this nationality; however, the author of the essay considered that this post is offensive, and instead of filing a complaint against the author of the post, he filed a complaint against that woman of the same nationality because she shared the post. Although there were around 19 men who shared that post as well, but he did not file a complaint against any of them. The reason for doing so appears to be that he wanted to punish the male author of the post by punishing that female activist for being a woman and of the same nationality, so that to cause severer damages to him. Although the judge entered a judgment of no responsibility vis-à-vis the woman, yet one can assess the magnitude of suffering and psychological and social damages which that female activist sustained during the legal prosecution, noting that the administrative governor was thinking about detaining her under the Law on Preventions of Crimes after entering the no responsibility judgment by the court, but he abstained from doing so at the end. This is an example on how the law encourages the people to complain against each other without a reason, and places people under prosecution and detention, noting that the victim here is a woman who was not the original author of the essay, since the law penalizes those who shared the post which is considered offensive.

As we have already indicated, if the complainant is a woman in cases of harassment, abuse or extortion nature on the social media, the actions and follow up by the Cyber Crime Unit is indeed rapid, effective and professional, but if the complainant is an activist, the equation would be different sometimes in applying the legal procedures.

In one the cases, a female activist was subjected to attack, assaulted on the social media, and was exposed to threat, which case received public attention; civil society organizations filed a

complaint, then the public prosecutor referred the matter to the Cyber Crime Unit for investigation, which in turn gathered data on the subject and referred the file with the suspects to the public prosecutor who referred the matter to the court. However, since there is no complaint for personal right in the case of defamation, because the complaint was filed by civil society organizations , the case could not be prosecuted by the court.

Statistics in Jordan confirm that there is a challenge relating to the mechanisms of reporting the cases of violence against women in the cyberspace, with lower rates regarding reporting the matter to the Cyber Crime Unit or even filing a complaint with the security authorities. Most of the results that the complainants had was "refusal to accept the complaint for lack evidence" at 21.2%, while the places in which harassment was committed were on the cyberspace at 54.1%.

22

All these issues that we have mentioned in the provisions of the Cyber Crime Law and the problems of application thereof make us conclude to the same result emphasized by the female activists that the Cyber Crime Law is inconsistent with human rights, that they do not prefer to rely thereon, and that their objectives is not to imprison people based thereon, yet the people and the activists should safeguard their rights from assault, where the possible alternative for the same is to have the offender delete the offending post, and apologize on the same website on which the offense was posted in the same size, method and timing as used for publishing the offense and abuse post rather than sending people to prison.

It is noteworthy to indicate in some cases, the authorities have positively applied the law and its procedures once things were of real gravity. One of the stated positive experiences is that security protection was provided to one of the famous female activists twice due to the existence of threats to murder her and proscribing her by some radicals in the online environment for her stance regarding the religions issues, by comparing her to Nahedh Hattar who was assassinated for his political views, a matter with which conclusion can be made that she would have the same fate of Nahedh Hattar. According to her, the order to provide protection was given by the prime minister, and that the security forces were treating her with utmost respect. But after filing the

²² The Jordanian National Commission for Women, Phenomenon of Harassment in Jordan, 2017, pp 6-7.

complaint and verifying the statements and evidence that she produced, the case was referred to the public prosecutor but then the complaint unexplainably disappeared. Thus, we cannot confirm that all cases are addressed with the same level of follow up.

As for the complaints filed against the same activist, the judgment in all of them was pronouncing her not responsible for the crime ascribed thereto, except for one complaint, due to the lapse of the term for appeal which she failed to submit within the deadline, and she was sentenced to pay a financial amount, were a group of "Illuminati"- according to her description, managed to collect and pay the financial amount. All complaints had the charge of "contempt of religion" and "instigation of sedition" in accordance with the Penal Code. She described those practices saying "the government provides me with protection from any assault by the people, by some people are sent to prisons for expressing their opinions."

We still have to stress of the importance of having no exaggerated sensitivity to any assault to which the female activists are exposed, i.e. there are grave assaults such as sexual harassment, extortion and threats in matters that actually necessitate legal prosecution, but if the activist has become a public figure, she has to understand and expect that she might be exposed to confrontations, attacks and criticism which can be considered as harsh, which means some of the activists, especially who have become public figures (as a member of the parliament) or a partisan leader, should not often or always refer any attack or confrontation to which she is exposed to the courts, because she is a public figure and has to be open to a lot of criticism, in addition to expanding the cycle of accepting the other opinion, where frequent complaining would be in prejudice of the woman's image as a weak person who does not accept the harsh criticism while the man can take a lot of that criticism.

Family and Clan Reactions

The reaction of the family toward their activist daughter when she is exposed to an assault on the cyberspace is varies based on the nature of the family; some would defend their daughter while others hold her responsible or impose restriction on her as well. These restrictions include closing the account of the social media, making her express less sensitive topic, or limiting the friends on the account to close ones and the family.

This discontent stance toward the view of the women, by the way, is often adopted by the family members who refuse discussing certain issues relating to the culture, religion, and traditions, namely those concerning inheritance, polygyny, woman battery for discipline, marriage conditions, etc.

It is noticed that the husband of the activist may play a role in supporting her and providing a protection shield against any assaulter if he has a social stature or an authority standing, or if he is a descendant of a big clan; but if she was not married or has a small clan, the possibility of getting exposed to harsh attack is bigger.

It is noticeable that the standing of the clan overpower the standing of the political opinion. For example, if a man has a political view different from that of a female activist of the same clan, and that activist was subjected to attack by someone on the cyberspace, despite her opinion is dissenting from that of the male clan member, he would advocate and defend her. However, the clan is a two-edge sword, as from one point they might defend the woman and from the other the woman would be blamed and held responsible for inciting others against her and exposing the clan and "her honor" to assault, the matter then leads to exerting pressure on her in order to limit her exercise of the freedom of expression and holding her accountable for the same (she brought it to herself).

An activist from a large clan and whose clan's name appears in the username on the social media is exposed to less violence than the woman of a small clan or whose name does not display her clan name. The clan serves as a deterrent from a lot of attempt to insult any activist whose name appears on the cyberspace coupled with a clan name, especially the large ones.

Reaction of the Civil Society Organizations

As for the civil society organizations, a significant part thereof advocated the female activists since many activists are either involved with or members of the civil society organization. Some of the civil society organizations had filed reports with the judicial and security authorities on exposure of activist to assaults and that their lives are endangered. But at a later stage, it is noticed that the civil society organization have become more hesitant in handling the cases which the activists addressed such as the gender issues, child rights, or matters relating to religious

topics or personal status in fear of getting assaulted similar to those activists, and thus it is safe to say that those assaults have succeeded in achieving their purpose in certain cases.

Civil Society organizations assume the role of awareness raising and education of various groups of the civil society, law enforcement personnel and others in relation to the issues of human rights and freedoms, and some have a role in monitoring the violations to which male and female activists are exposed.

In general, the female activists do not have a nurturing environment because the civil society does not collectively act in an adequate way to contribute to incubating and advocating the activists. When a female activist is subjected to any attack for the first timer and finds herself alone, she would feel lonely the matter that would not give her enthusiasm to complaint to the Cyber Crime Unit or makes her mitigate the expression of her opinion. Thus, the civil society join forces in some cases only based on the nature of the topic or the funded projects and therefore the support is seasonal and not consistent based on a clear collective vision.

Impact on the Online Abused Activist

Some of the activists who were exposed to online violence have ceased discussion or even writing on the social media pages, while some continue to express their opinions and do not generally pay attention to the comments, because some comment can be described as unreasonable, and cannot be accepted at all, the purpose of which is provocation and defamation, which would draw the activist to discussions that can be labeled as trivial, the aim of which is to have her speech become of a low level. Those activists who have awareness and ability to maintain self-control to overlook the possibility of getting involved in such "altercations" should not pay attention to that and work on prompting self confidence and self reconciliation.

Nonetheless, some female activists decided to return to the mainstream media instead of the cyberspace, for their desire to avoid assaults for which the cyberspace allows room, while the mainstream media does not allow the same for censorship.

One of the experiences of a female activist on the social media was her being subjected to several threats during the period when "ISIS" was in the region, which made her avoid writing on the social media and stick to the mainstream media.

The reaction of a large portion of the women who were subjected to online violence was to make block and report the matter to the administrator of the social media. Statistics show that block for those who have committed harassment on the cyberspace in Jordan was the highest, whether for the first time or in case of repetition at 30.5% and 29.5%, respectively. ²³

According to UN study, the percentage of activists and human rights female advocates who reported feeling unsafe on the cyberspace is 70%, where online violence represents a grave threat to the physical integrity of the woman and her psychological health; and at 33%, where the women who was subjected to online violence reported that some or all of their violence experiences on the internet followed them outside them. Most of the women who were subjected to online violence by someone they know outside the internet reported that the violence moved beyond that framework; most of the women who were subjected to online violence reported that they were subjected to violence on Facebook at 43%. The correlation between online violence and violence beyond the internet was of special significance for the women who were subjected to online violence during the COVID-19 Pandemic, where 44% of the women who were subjected to online violence reported that the incident was transferred outside the internet. Moreover, women are more exposed to violence than men, where 66% of them were subjected to that violence while men were subjected at 60%. The effects of the digital violence to which the women exposed are manifested in making women subject to social reproach, where 36% of the women who were subjected to online violence were told to ignore the matter, while 23% of them were blamed, 21% were told to delete their accounts on the social media, 20% of them reported that they were supported by their families, and 32% of the female victims reported that their friends were supporting them. ²⁴

²³ The Jordanian National Commission for Women, Phenomenon of Harassment in Jordan, 2017, p 6.

²⁴ UN Women: Violence Against Women on the Digital Space: Visions from Multi-countr Study in the Arab States. chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Summary_Keyfindings_Arabic_Final_2022.pdf

Recommendations:

- 1 - Review the Cyber Crime Law in order to guarantee the rights on one hand, and protect the victims who are subjected to assault by others through non custodial penalties such as alternative penalties (community penalties) and/ or making an apology under certain conditions for the committed assault; and elimination of the duality of legislation between the Penal Code and the Cyber Crime Law.
- 2 - Awareness raising and education about the Cyber Crime Law and the concept of violence against women by the civil society organizations for all segment of the society; and awareness raising of the female activists of the legislation, namely the Cyber Crime Law for them to know their rights and duties.
- 3 - Activation and facilitation of the procedures of complaint for cyber crimes for the female activists on equal basis with the other cases to which women are subjects, with the possibility of appointing female police in the Cyber Crime Unit.
- 4 - Communication by the government and law enforcement authority with the female activists to know their needs and suggestions with respect to the online violence and method of application of the Cyber Crime Law.
- 5 - Review of the policies of social media management so to be effective, quick, and objective by deleting all offensive and insulting comments, and those involving threat, based on any complaint or report.
- 6 - Reconsidering the orientation learning technique towards promoting methodology and research rather than instruction and memorization; in addition to the role of religion teaching as to not labeling the dissenting opinion as unbeliever; working on teaching philosophy to promote the critical and scientific approach, the dialogue approach without assault.

- 7 - Penalizing by law any person who fakes an account on the social media using other people's names.
- 8 - Creating a hotline by the civil society organizations to monitor the online violence against the male and female activists, receive the complaints and provide legal and psychological assistance, taking into consideration the requirements of privacy and confidentiality; and indicate the same in the reports, especially with the international human rights mechanism.
- 9 - The need for women's alliances from all sectors, for the professional, discrimination or harassment issues or protection at work, etc. in order to provide a nurturing environment supportive to the woman when exposed to online violence.
- 10 - The state has to raise the awareness with respect to the use of the public space. The National Center for Human Rights, as well as the Ministry of Education, have to play a role in raising the awareness in their curricula for the best and proper use of the social media, by raising the awareness of the people from the adolescence years, where the family has to monitor their children when browsing the social media.

List of Activists Interviewed through Focus Group or by Personal Interviews:

	Name	Capacity
1	Hala Ahed	Lawyer ad activist in the field of human and women rights.
2	Hebatullah Ubeidat	Journalist and rights activist
3	Taqwa A-Btoush	Journalist and activist
4	Alaa Salhab	Journalist, Chair of Women and Family Affairs Committee in the Islamic National Party
5	Areej Saleem	Head of Tamkeen Unit in Municipality of Irbid
6	Manal Kasht	Activist in the field of women right advocacy
7	Banan Abu Zainuddin	Activist in the field of women right and works for Takatoat Organization
8	Asma Al-Safi	Activist in the field of human rights and journalist
9	Amal Al-Harethi	Columnist and activist in the field of women right
10	Duaa Al-Azzam	Youth and feminist activist
11	Aya Abu Atteileh	Activist in the field of women right
12	Rawan Al-Jayyousi	Journalist and manager
13	Tahani Al-Qatawi	Activist and media woman
14	Zuleikha Abu Risheh	Author and political activist
15	Nour Al-Salahat	Parliamentary candidate/ Taqadum Party
16	Abeer Al-Najjar	Parliamentary candidate/ Taqadum Party

