

May 2020

BATTLE OF THE SCREEN SHOTS

HOW CYBERBULLYING INTIMIDATES,
THREATENS AND ENDANGERS
WOMEN ACTIVISTS IN SUDAN

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Executive Summary

Story after another, the women of Sudan tell the details of the career-ending, family-tearing, aggressively pursued harassment they endure everyday in the streets of the city, and on the various social media platforms. Sometimes an online campaign against the victims leads to the victims losing their jobs, to threats of violence, and to death or complete societal suicide. Some women were harassed because they held opposing religious or political opinions. Women Human Right Defenders and activists were subjected to online shaming and character-smearing campaigns simply because they advocate for women rights, a topic often seen by the now-ousted regime as an uprising against the religion, Islam, and not against the government and the patriarchal society.

The Public Order and the Cyber Crime Laws made matters worse. Law-enforcement officers often use the "Indecent and morally against public order" standard when they make discretionary and subjective decisions to arbitrarily stop, beat, rape and harass women on the streets. The practical implementation of this law made it so that if a woman photographs herself at home, and the photo is used to blackmail her, she will suffer legal consequences for taking the picture and storing it in her phone - and act deemed indecent and against public order. As for the harassers, they are often not pursued. In fact, women are asked to provide identifying information about their harassers so that law enforcement could begin its work. Most times, women are discouraged and told that their actions are the reason for their situation and that they have to simply endure it as it is well-deserved.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The current laws do not protect women. They are too vague and arbitrary and need to be revised. Moreover, they are not uniformly interpreted and enforced, nor are prosecution units available to people outside the State of Khartoum and a small number of nearby cities.

When women tried to take matters into their own hands by creating a Facebook group for purposes of sharing incidents of harassment and pertinent information, the group founders were harassed and silenced. The founders decided to be quiet before the group got in more trouble. Men who were angry at the women for creating the group launched an attack and created a similar group to “expose” these women by sharing photos or screenshots of conversations. It became clear to the women that this is a battle they will not win.

We recommend that the laws are reformed to account for the current gaps, and that the government builds capacity among law enforcement officers to notice and recognize biases, and to work on helping women overcome cyberbullying. Psycho-social assistance should be provided to the victims who have suffered and have had their lives destroyed because of cyberbullying and other forms of harassment. It is also crucial to give people a tool, like a hotline, to use to report incidents of harassment.

Introduction

For decades, under the now defunct Islamist rule in Sudan, women were subjected to intimidation, arbitrary detention and violence at the hands of the State. Under the notorious Public Order Regime (POR), which consists of Khartoum State public order law of 1996, the public order laws in the 1991 criminal law, and law-enforcement agencies, women were arrested, detained and flogged for indecent clothing and behavior. They were also sentenced to stoning for adultery whereas the men involved with these victims got away with it unscathed. The POR has its own law, with its arbitrary articles, its own separate courts, police stations and forces. This regime victimized tens of thousands of women every year around the country.

Moreover, women faced other discriminatory laws such as the family law, which allows girls 10 years and younger to get married and offers little protection to women who are subjected to domestic violence. These laws which were part of a State-wide policy called the “civilizational project” along with socio-economic policies and the rise in religious fundamentalism in the region created a polarized society that devalues women and seeks to limit their presence in the public sphere.

The heavy participation of women in the Sudanese revolution that began in December, 2018, and culminated into the removal of the government in April 2019 was not a coincidence. It was a manifestation of generations of women fighting for decades to exist as they are, speak their minds and realizing their potential.

INTRODUCTION

Continued

Every time the noose got tighter, women fought, and the thousands of women who were sentenced to lashings every year were a reminder to the authorities that women have not been tamed and were willing to pay the price of freedom every single day by risking their lives and bodies.

Technological advancement came to greatly benefit women in Sudan and helped them secure a louder voice, as well as increase both their incomes and their awareness of rights and social issues. With the rise of women using the internet and the growing reputation of women-only Facebook groups - where women sell their products, share beauty tips and discuss issues such as sex, divorce and reproductive health - the backlash against women turned into an online battle to silence, intimidate and limit their online presence.

Many Sudanese women turned to the digital world to gain a sense of security and have a safe space to share their opinions and acquire new knowledge. However, they found themselves targeted with the same values and social norms that targeted them at their homes and on the streets.

INTRODUCTION

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This briefing paper is based on a roundtable discussion with Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and activists that took place in December 2018 as well as several interviews that were conducted between November 2018 and January 2020 with women who were victimized by cyberbullying.

The briefing is part of a project with Urgent Action Fund (UAF-Africa) entitled "Using Violence and Mobilizing Anxiety: Repressing Feminist Activism Online". This document seeks to report back on the impact of cyberbullying and provide specific and detailed cases of studies, including interviews with women who have been victimized online in Sudan, with a particular focus given to WHRDs and activists, as they were and continue to be a target.

Objective

The objective of this document is to act as an advocacy piece on cyberbullying in Sudan, and attempt to seek a more suitable and just modification of the cyber-crimes laws, in an effort to protect victims of cyberbullying and support the efforts aiming at curbing this phenomenon.

Findings

The main findings of the paper are outlined below:

- *Cyberbullying severely targets WHRDs and is perpetuated by male activists as well as governmental authorities, specifically the NISS.*
- *The 2007 (modified in 2018) cyber crimes law does not protect women from cyberbullying and women are often intimidated and blamed by police officers when they report a case.*
- *Cyber-bullying impacts women socially as they are ostracized, and it limits their social media presence as well as the economic opportunities that come with doing business online.*



“

Each spinster who lost hope of getting married came out with the excuse of women's freedom. We do not want freedom; our freedom is in our respect for our religion only

”



Cyberbullying From a Sudanese Lens



CYBERBULLYING FROM A SUDANESE LENS

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU), a body that produces annual statistics on internet penetration around the world stated that in 2017, internet penetration in Sudan was at 30.9%. In 2017, almost 70% used the internet through mobile data.

A report published in 2018 called “the State of Sudan Digital” offered statistics to back-up this, as it reported that 22% of Khartoum inhabitants have a smartphone, 16% in Khartoum have access to home internet and 82.23% access internet on their mobile phones. Only 3% of Khartoum residents have a fixed phone, whereas 91% have mobile phones. On social media, by December 2017, at least 3.2 million Sudanese users were on Facebook.

This number is set to grow as Zain, one of the four telecommunications giants operating in Sudan, began offering free access to Facebook (without mobile data) to its users. Although there are no statistics yet, the most popular social media networking platform for Sudanese users is WhatsApp, followed by Facebook and then other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

CCYBERBULLYING FROM A SUDANESE LENS

Continued

When it comes to Facebook, Sudanese users organize in mixed lifestyle groups such as Galaxy, and Fantastic, and in women-only lifestyle groups such as Monbarshat, F and G, Al-Radmia etc.

Social media outlets are very critical in Sudan for a number of reasons.

Firstly, many women use social media platforms such as Facebook groups to sell items such as cookies, clothes and lifestyle products from the comfort of their homes, and this has created many jobs for young women. Students can now earn money as social media marketers who help businesswomen sell products online.

Secondly, the groups are used to provide awareness and information and this was critical at a time when the media was heavily controlled and monitored. In women-only groups, and especially those tailored to women who have concerns or problems they want others to help them solve. Taboo topics such as abortion were discussed and women who were having problems with abusive husbands were able to find legal assistance online through volunteer women lawyers.

CYBERBULLYING FROM A SUDANESE LENS

Continued

Thirdly, social media was critical to the Sudanese revolution that began in December 2018, and brought down the regime a few months later as it helped people organize, mobilize and share information when there were no other platforms. At times, social media helped people secure themselves and their information through secure and anonymous surfing.

For women, social media became a safe haven. A place where they can speak their minds and have free discussions. This proved to give them a breathing space especially in a conservative society where some families do not give girls and women the chance to express their opinions. It also gave women confidence to market and monetize their skills as aspiring make-up artists. Other creatives gained clientele through going live on Facebook.

With the rise of women using social media and sharing their pictures and personal information, the online war began, and women, particularly influencers and activists, found themselves targeted with cyberbullying.

CYBERBULLYING FROM A SUDANESE LENS

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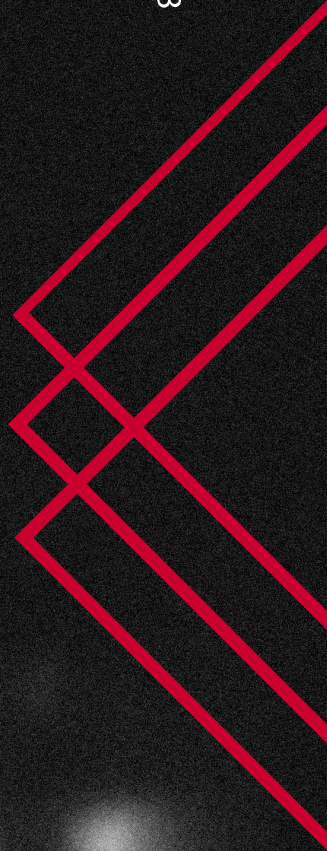
Billy Belsey, a prominent advocate on bullying and cyberbullying, defined cyberbullying as an act that involves “the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is intended to harm others.”

In the digital age, this could mean everything from sharing conversations and information shared privately in text messages, pictures and emails and making it available to the public without consent from the other party, to cyberstalking or blackmailing someone over private data the bullying party has access to. It is also harassment and online impersonation.

A research project on cyberbullying by the Pew Research Center found two main characteristics of the phenomenon. The first being that girls are more likely to be targets, and secondly, that more vocal women who “share their identities and thoughts online are more likely to be targets than are those who lead less active online lives.”

Based on the research conducted throughout the course of this project, it was evident that although women from different backgrounds could be targets, female influencers and women activists receive the most cyberbullying due to their loud voices and their strong stances. In the words of one of the activists interviewed in this project, “I use my Facebook account as a platform to voice out my opinions and share my thoughts and not just as a way to communicate with people.”

Cyberbullying Through a Legal Lens



INTRODUCTION

The first legislation in Sudan on combating information crimes was issued in the year 2007 under the name "Information Crime Law of 2007", also referred to as the IT Crime Act or the Electronic Crimes Law. The law included thirty articles divided into eight chapters addressing various topics such as crimes of systems, media, networks of information, financial crimes, crimes of public order and morals, crimes of human trafficking and various other topics.

However, practical experience has shown that the law contains fundamental legislative defects on the one hand, and that the accelerating development in the field of technology and means of communication required fundamental amendments to keep pace with this development on the other hand.

These defects subsequently prompted the legislator to cancel the Act and issue another law to replace it. For example, Article 14 (1) of that law states that: "Everyone who produces, prepares, creates, sends, stores or promotes through the information network or one of the computers or the like, any content that violates the modesty or public order or etiquette, is punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years, or with a fine or both."

In this provision, and even though the penalty reaches five years in prison, the experience has proven that the storing of immoral content (such as a video or image) can be done automatically by simply clicking on the image or video, even without knowing the content. Likewise, the law did not define content that violates morals and public decency, which makes the criterion for defining it subjective, meaning that the person entrusted with implementing the law determines the extent of the breach of decency. In despite of, and perhaps because of, these challenges, a special prosecution unit was established to prosecute cyber crimes cases.

INTRODUCTION

continued

In the year 2018, the Sudanese parliament passed the "Information Crime Law of 2018", which in turn repealed the "Information Crime Law of 2007". This law included forty-eight articles distributed in eight chapters, i.e. an increase of eighteen articles in addition to amending the texts of other articles in the previous law. The articles include ones against "fake news" and electronic publishing. The law is also referred to as Cyber Crime Law.

The penalties in this law were very severe, amounting to life imprisonment. A number of politicians and activists considered that the law in its new form threatens to pursue its opponents inside and outside Sudan, and it significantly limits freedom of expression, and it also enables the government to control social media and online newspapers, and reflects a government desire to circumvent rights. This was especially apparent given the political circumstances in the country were very critical at the time, and it was the beginning of the December revolution that toppled the regime a few months later. What confirmed this trend is that the phones and electronic devices of the detainees are searched immediately upon the execution of the arrest and that many cases were subject to this law.

The first chapter of the Cyber Crime Law included preliminary provisions, and the second chapter included crimes of information and communication sites, systems and networks. Chapter three deals with crimes against oneself, money, data, and rights such as impersonation, fraud, extortion, inciting hatred against sects, groups, and foreigners, interfering with financial transfers, and violating intellectual property rights.

INTRODUCTION

continued

The fourth chapter is the controversial chapter credited for recreating a dispute that is taking place in the legal and political circles regarding crimes of public order and moral turpitude. This chapter included eight articles described as violating public order and morals, expanding greatly the criminalization of additional acts as compared to the previous law.

The new law was also affected by the mistakes in the previous law in tightening the penalty for actions that are still in dispute, such as possession of content that violates public order and morals, while leaving the act without a clear definition as we will show later. The fifth chapter included the crimes of terrorism, money laundering and human trafficking, and the sixth chapter included crimes of drugs and alcohol.

The crimes against children and those with diminished capacity came in the seventh chapter, while the eighth and final chapters included various provisions and topics.

MECHANISM FOR IMPLEMENTING THE LAW

Articles (45), (46) and (47) of the Information Crime Law stipulate that the chief justice may establish specialized courts for the crimes codified in the law, and the public prosecutor and the interior minister may also establish a specialized prosecution unit and specialized police for the same purpose . In practical terms, there is one specialized court and its location in the Khartoum district (2) in Khartoum, one specialized prosecution unit and one police department located in the Al-Danagla neighborhood north of the city of Khartoum.

CYBERBULLYING FOR WOMEN

bullying is an old issue and is due to the hidden social tendencies of prejudices and discrimination, and often affects people who have protected characteristics such as race, religion, sexual life, gender identity, and disability, more than others. As for cyberbullying as a term, it has recently emerged with the development of means of technology and communications, and therefore, it is an extension of the same words or sayings that include prejudices and discrimination against others, but through modern electronic means. But what distinguishes cyberbullying is the speed of its spread across different media, which makes it more devastating for the victim.



CYBERBULLYING FOR WOMEN

Continued

One of the most prevalent cases is hate-based bullying that abuses women, and can be described as the use of mobile phones, instant messages, e-mail or social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to harass, threaten, and blackmail women by posting names, comments, or content related to any personal characteristics of women from anywhere in the world. It may be by using expressions that undermine the dignity of women as a group such as describing them as not qualified to talk about a specific matter, take on particular job-related positions, navigate the streets at night, participate in general political acts or any other matter in which the bully believes women have no right to participate.

For example, over a four-year period, after analyzing 19 million tweets, the "Ditch the Label and Brandwatch" report found that there were nearly five million cases of women hate on Twitter alone. In Sudan, there are very large numbers of cyberbullying complaints filed by women with the Cybercrime Prosecution Office. These complaints represent only a small number of the women who were bullied. Most do not file a complaint. On the other hand, these complaints often fail, and women stop pursuing them to a natural conclusion for many reasons. Moreover, sexual harassment of women in all its forms is considered an electronic bullying when it is used through electronic media. All laws in Sudan lack a clear definition of sexual harassment of women.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

There are a couple of reasons leading to the failure of these types of cases or causing women who filed complaints to abandon their cases at certain stages. One reason is related to the legislation itself. The other is practical and relates to the procedures of conducting and investigating cases.

Specifically, cases fails due to the following:

- **Failure due to legislation**
- **Failure due to investigational Procedures**
- **Police, public prosecutions and specialized courts**

These reasons are discussed in detail next.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

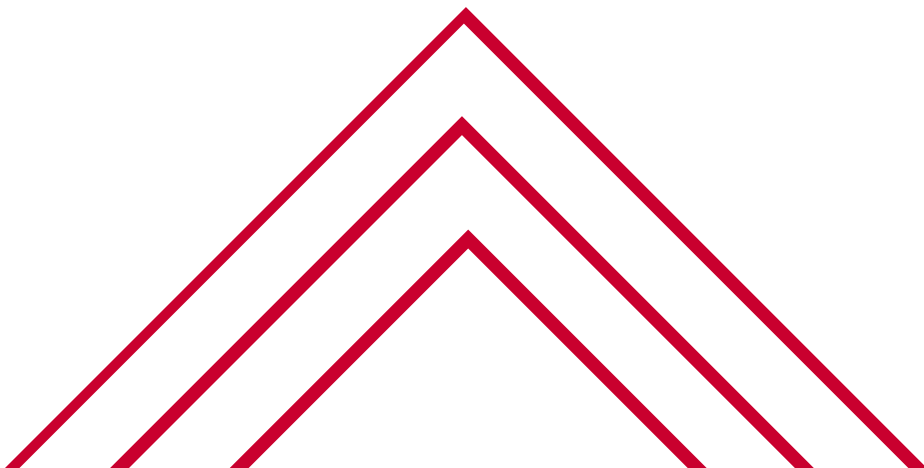
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I. Failure Due To Legislation

The Acts (information crimes for the year 2007) and (fighting information crimes for the year 2018) are void of any explicit text addressing electronic bullying of women. The last law introduced provisions criminalizing hatred against sects, groups, and entities (Article 14) and hate against foreigners (Article 15), but the legislator did not single out text for hate against women or hate based on gender, nor did it provide provisions for the sexual harassment of women.

Some of the texts of the law do not at all address the issue of cyberbullying. For examples, the text of Article (10) that punishes a "threat" using the information or communication network, and Article (13) that punishes blackmailing people for the purpose of obtaining money or otherwise.

These general texts, although they suggest providing a degree of protection to women and men together, do not explicitly address bullying or blackmailing of women, which leaves them in a very weak position in front of the law enforcement agencies. Let us take as an example the text of Articles (10) and (13) of the Information Crime Prevention Law of 2018. Article 10 reads as follows: "Whoever uses the network of information or communications or any other means of communication to threaten any person, in order to make him do or refrain from doing an act is punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years ... etc."



WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

I. Failure Due To Legislation

Part 2

Article 13 reads as follows: “Anyone who uses the information network, telecommunications, or any of the means of communication to blackmail any person by causing the person to fear harm to himself or any other person and ill-intentionally compelling the person to hand over to him or others any money, instrument, bond or any other method of payment, data or information or any interest shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years ... etc.” When these two texts are applied to specific cases where there is a threat and extortion for women, they find themselves in the face of many obstacles stipulated in the law itself.

The law against informational crimes sets up these nets that can trap unsuspecting women because of the way it is drafted. For example Article (19) which is read as follows: “Whoever produces, prepares or administratively or artistically creates or sends, publishes, or promotes any content that violates modesty, morals, or public order through the information network, communications, or any means of communication or applications, is subject to punishment by imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years ... etc.” This text did not define the phrase (modesty, morals, or public order), but relies on the same definition or description stipulated in paragraph 2 of Article (152) of the Criminal Code, which reads: “The act is considered to be contrary to public morals if it is in the criterion of the religion that the perpetrator embraces or defines the country in which the act is located.” This criterion is very broad, and therefore its control and determination are entirely left to the discretion of the law enforcers, who are the policeman, the prosecutor, and the judge. There is no consideration for context.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

I. Failure Due To Legislation

Part 3

Many women who were bullied or blackmailed abandoned their complaints based on the advice of the policeman or their prosecutor regarding the consequences of proceeding with the case. Sometimes they abandon the complaint because they are directly accused of breaking the law because of the content of the photo or video.

Ironically, the maximum punishment for a person who practices threats or blackmail against women using a photo or video is imprisonment for a year, while the maximum punishment for the owner of the photo or video, if the court determines that he is in breach of modesty or morals, is imprisonment for five years. This reveals why women repeatedly give up bullying or refrain from complaining at all.

The Information Crime Law stipulated the crimes of defaming reputation in Articles (25) and (26), but they do not address the issue of bullying or real harassment against women because the law links the definition of these terms with the definition and description contained in the Criminal Law of 1991. Consequently, the two texts address abuse and causes in their general sense and apply to both men and women, but they have nothing to directly protect women from bullying or sexual harassment.

Due to this ambiguity and lack of explicit laws, women who filed complaints under the cyber-defamation laws did not find justice. In fact, women were shamed, harassed and mocked when they tried to report cases at the cyber-crimes prosecution office or they were not assisted at all for infrastructural reasons.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

II. Failure Due to Investigational Procedures

When investigating types of bullying or electronic harassment, the prosecution refers the mobile device or the Computer to the Communications and Post Regulatory Authority (formerly the National Communications Authority) or to forensic evidence. The reason for this is that presenting a paper image of a phone or computer screen is not conclusive evidence and forensic evidence is required. In the case of conversations that take place through a digital application such as WhatsApp or Messenger, the only way to provide evidence is by examining the electronic device of the complainant to ensure the authenticity of the talks. If necessary, prior conversations are sometimes retrieved via technical means. This method of authentication and retrieval of historic data has often resulted in the women fighting an accusation of a crime because the content in their phone, which is sometimes unrelated to the complaint, was deemed by law enforcement to be indecent and contrary to morals and public order.

On the other hand, Article (24) of the law deals with the issue of spreading false news if it threatens public peace and detracts from the prestige of the State, and punishes the convicted with imprisonment for a period not exceeding a year or flogging. It even had articles that criminalized the establishment of websites that criticized the government. There is no doubt that this article was developed for purely political purposes, and this practice proved this matter especially during the period of the popular revolution that erupted in the country. At that time, the security services were examining the phones of detainees by force and bringing them to trial on the basis of this loose article. The Act was especially used against Human Rights Defenders.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

II. Failure Due to Investigational Procedures

Part 2

Oftentimes, policemen and prosecutors held negative opinions about women's ability to bring such cases to litigation and in many cases, while disregarding contexts, facts and reason, told the women that they would not have been exposed to such harassment or bullying if they obeyed the limits set by society and religion.

In 2017, at least a dozen women activists were targeted in a vicious cyberbullying campaign by a Facebook page called "Sudanese Women against the Hijab". The page was low-profile until it began stealing pictures of activist women in particular and writing fake quotes against the Hijab and religion. The pictures and quotes were not only shared without the women's consent, but in a country ruled by an Islamist government and with rising fundamentalism, the pictures did critical damage and put the women at risk. Some feared for their lives and others stopped going to work for a few days after their pictures were posted.

Two victims reported this incident to the cyber-crimes prosecution office which not only took no action, but told the two women to stop posting their pictures online. The administrators refused to remove the picture and began blocking the users who protested against the page and particularly the women whom he/they had targeted. The page was removed after months of advocacy through international human rights organizations with Facebook, which, when initially contacted by Sudanese activists, viewed the incident as freedom of speech and did not understand the cultural environment that makes this group dangerous.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

III. Police, Public Prosecutions, and Sepcialized Courts

The law stipulates that courts, prosecutors and police specializing in informational crimes be established. In practical terms, the courts and prosecutors are not available in all the States in Sudan. In the State of Khartoum, for example, there is one court specializing in information crimes and its headquarters are in the Khartoum district (2). There is also one prosecutor and one police department, located in the Al-Danagla neighborhood north of Khartoum North. This makes litigation difficult and costly for litigants, and therefore many litigants abandon their cases.

An example of this is R. M's story. R.M, a writer and novelist, found herself a target of harassment. An unknown person kept manipulating a photo of her face onto nude models and sending her the pictures and threatening to spread them and defame her reputation. When she went to the prosecutor in the State where she lived, she was told that her State does not have a cyber-crimes prosecution office and that she needs to file a complaint in the capital. As a working mother, she had no time or means to do so and was unable to pursue the case.

WHY CYBERBULLYING CASES BY WOMEN FAIL

Continued

III. Police, Public Prosecutions, and Sepcialized Courts

Part 2

In States where there are no specialized courts or prosecutors, cases are heard before public courts, and the procedures before them are considered legally valid under the Act. However, the consideration of this type of case by untrained prosecutors and in the absence of technical agencies, puts the complainants in a vulnerable position because they are often unable to prove the case before the prosecutor or the court.

An activist, finding herself in a position where she was being harassed, said in an interview for this report that the cyber-crimes prosecution office is not interested in investing any resources into the cases of women, and when they do, they ask the women to identify or provide the full names of the accused, which, in many cases, is impossible as the harassers are anonymous or do not use their full name. The victims are expected to invest their own resources to find the personal information of their harassers. Even when the women find the information, they are often asked to stop posting their pictures or sharing their information online and nothing is done to bring the accused to face the law or bring the women justice.

The Cyber Crimes prosecution office, regardless of its limited and even damaging role, has become a strong player in the area of cyber crimes in general.

In November 2014, the office saw 200 cases filed in total, but three years later, in 2017, 10 cases were filed daily in the Khartoum North prosecution office and this number has likely increased, however, no up-to-date statistics were available.

CASE STUDIES

"I WAS IMPERSONATED"

"In 2014, my pictures were stolen. A woman who sells skin-bleaching creams started using my picture to sell her products. I woke up to find many messages and screenshots from friends warning me about this issue. I sent her a message and she was unresponsive, and she kept denying that this is my picture and started sending me cruel messages. I had no choice but to send a message with the screenshots to different groups where she advertises her products, tagged her and told my story. I had no other alternative. She got scared and sent me a private message and because she sells products, she apologized and took down my pictures. I was very angry because I speak out against skin-bleaching creams and I am staunchly against them, so I felt that this brought me more problems."

S.A. WHRD, 27 years old.

"I WAS BLACKMAILED, TWICE!"

First time

"My Facebook account and my email were hacked in 2010. I was hacked by a man who wanted to enter into a relationship with me and I refused. Shortly after that, he began threatening to tell my family about my activities and that he will tarnish my reputation. I became scared not because I had something to hide from anyone, but because he was intimidating me. He hacked my Facebook account and email and I didn't know what to do.

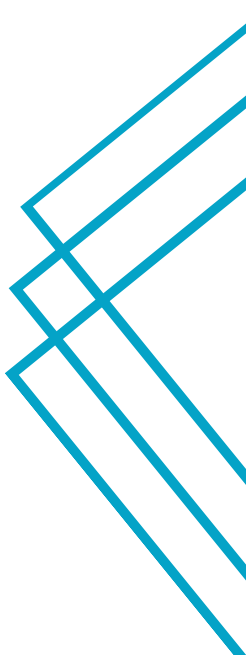
I spoke to a friend of mine about this and she told me that her friend is a good hacker and he can help me. She put us in touch, and I told him the story of why this happened. He offered to help, and we began to speak. After that, he started stalling and I was surprised when he asked me for a picture of my buttocks in order to help me. I said I will not send any pictures and I don't want my account back.

He then asked me to send a picture of my face or my breasts or anything. At the end, he did retrieve my account, but I never used it again as I didn't trust him. He is now a famous artist, I never shared this story even though it would impact his career."

Second time

"I was in a relationship with this man and after our breakup, he threatened to send my messages and personal conversations we had together to my brother. I was really scared and felt intimidated as my brother is difficult, but I took a bet. I told him that my brother knows about us and that he is now waiting for him at our house and that he should come and speak to him. This was untrue, but it strengthened my position and he left me alone."

S.A. WHRD, 27 years old.



"OFFLINE I AM BULLIED, ONLINE I AM BULLIED"

This case is of a prominent and vocal activist. Her case is one of the most popular cyberbullying cases . She is often applauded by women for her strength in dealing with this situation.

"I faced cyberbullying many times. The worst period for me was during my trial under article 152 on indecent clothing which is one of the public order laws. I speak my mind and I share pictures online, so many people use the information I share against me. I use my Facebook account as a platform to voice out my opinions and share my thoughts.

The most cyberbullying I've received is from a well-known activist and poet, A.A. He was a good friend of mine and a mentor to me at some point. Our friendship deteriorated when he sexually harassed a friend of mine. She told me what had happened and made me listen to the voice recording she had, documenting the case. This incident greatly affected my friendship with him. Many problems happened after that and he started a war against me.

The bullying was offline. He spread rumors that I am promiscuous, and worked to ensure my alienation from political work and especially the political party he belongs to. I also lost friends from the activist community and online. He began writing posts on Facebook and he referenced me using sexual connotations and said that I came on to him and this was untrue. He said this in a comment in a post written by someone else and the person chose to delete the post . It was obvious to everyone that he was referring to me.

For five years, I did not want to respond or "clap back" and this made people believe that he has personal pictures and information that he can use against me. I began writing about this experience and that he is part of a larger problem of men who support each other when they harass and bully women.

He began sending screenshots of our conversations to a mutual friends. They told me that he will share them publicly and that he also has pictures of me that he will share. I think the pictures he was referring to were pictures of me that he probably took during skype conversations we had together when I was in the dorms. He also began sending me screenshots. I wrote on Facebook that if I found them published anywhere, I will file a complaint and I am not scared."

H.H, 26 years old.

"OFFLINE I AM BULLIED, ONLINE I AM BULLIED"

Continued

"I have been the victim of cyberbullying many times. When I was working on a high-profile women's rights case, I was basically targeted by members of an ethnic group as they believed I was spreading rumors about them. Many men from this group sent me vile and threatening messages through my Facebook account. I received rape and death threats more times than I could count, and this affected my family. I felt scared for my children and sent them to a safe location temporarily. Another time, someone stole pictures from my Facebook account and posted them on a page for Sudanese diaspora and called me "a lesbian, a whore and a criminal". Again, it was depressing and damaging and my privacy was invaded."

T.A, activist.

"Three years ago, I was engaged to a man and as much as I regret this now, we recorded several intimate videos together. When things didn't work out and I married another man, he began threatening me with the videos (one is very sexually explicit and the other two are also unacceptable in this society). He ended up sending the videos to my husband and his sisters.

My husband passed away and his sisters began threatening me with the videos until one day, they spread them online. This was the most difficult time of my life. All of a sudden, I was the subject of a terrible online campaign and my name and personal information were shared.

My family locked me in the house and they wanted me to marry my cousin who provided himself as a savior. They were too embarrassed to leave the house. Family members wanted to kill me and I was on the verge of suicide several times. In three months, I only left the house twice and both times, I was wearing a niqab. I could not bear it anymore and borrowed money to leave the country. I could not survive in Sudan anymore."

S.K., 25 year old.

IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

To Live As Wi'am Shawqi is to be a Constant Target of Cyberbullying

Wi'am Shawqi, a 29- year-old feminist, activist, poet and media personality tells her story of enduring endless and senseless cyberbullying.

On the 20th of September 2018, Deutsche Welle Arabic, a German TV channel that had just launched an Arabic version, aired an episode of a show called "Shabab talk". This episode was filmed in Sudan and its general theme was on women's rights with a focus on sexual harassment. The show featured a gathering that was organized by the producers and it had brought women's rights activists from different backgrounds and ages as well as religious clerics and more conservative pundits. Wi'am Shawqi who was 28 years old at the time, stood up and spoke her mind about the discriminatory laws against women in Sudan and the restrictions that women face in the public space. She was loud, confident and her tone expressed her frustration and outright anger.



IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

Shawqi didn't see the episode when it aired. It instigated a huge cyberbullying campaign against her on social media. Everyone that night began talking about the episode and sharing and re-sharing the clip that featured Shawqi, and a cyberbullying campaign, possibly the largest in Sudan, began that day.

Shawqi was awakened by a phone call from her friends when she was told about the campaign against her online. She decided to order a taxi to go to her job. She owns a popular cafe and cultural venue in Khartoum.

Below she tells her story and how her life was changed up-side down and had to live in exile for six months as she feared for her life.



IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

Continued

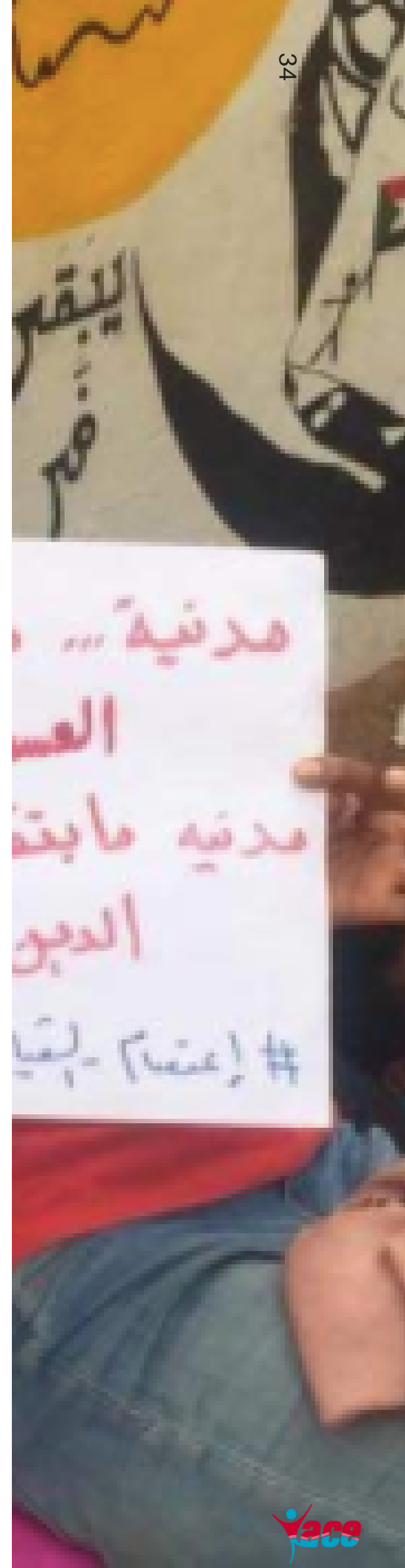
“When the taxi arrived, he saw me, cursed me out and said that I have no morals. He refused to give me a ride. Then, I went to the supermarket to get phone credit to call my friends and he refused to sell me anything.

My friend sent me a car to take me to the cafe and when I arrived, there was a fight and people were saying terrible things about me. The minute I entered, a group of men and women said “this is the whore, she is now here.” I left the place I love and never came back until April 2019.

On social media, it was crazy, they were digging up my personal pictures and videos. Then, there was a video which is still on you-tube of a man standing in front of my cafe and saying that they will burn it down. I tried to file a complaint against him but was asked to get his name and details. It was risky and I was under pressure. I didn’t pursue the case against him.

Facebook shut down my account as thousands of people filed reports against my page. This was terrible because I was unable to follow up on what was happening and what was said about me online. I failed to retrieve my account for two whole weeks because many fake accounts with my name and picture were created and Facebook was unable to determine the real Wi’am Shawqi until I sent them pictures of visas I have received and many documents.

I emailed Facebook and told them that I could be killed, and I need to know what is happening on my page and on Facebook, I need to monitor how dangerous the situation is for me. I told them that I will sue them if they do not unlock my account.



IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

Continued

Then another video by Al-Mahata TV was out, it was filmed after the DW video and I was stressed out and said something I shouldn't have said as I spoke out against the veil.

I tried to ask the creator to put down the video but he refused. I wrote an apology on this video and said that I was angry during its filming and what I said does not reflect my opinion and as I was drafting the apology statement, five fundamentalists (salafi group) kept knocking on my door at 5 a.m., and they were trying to break it down until a neighbor told them that I was not home.

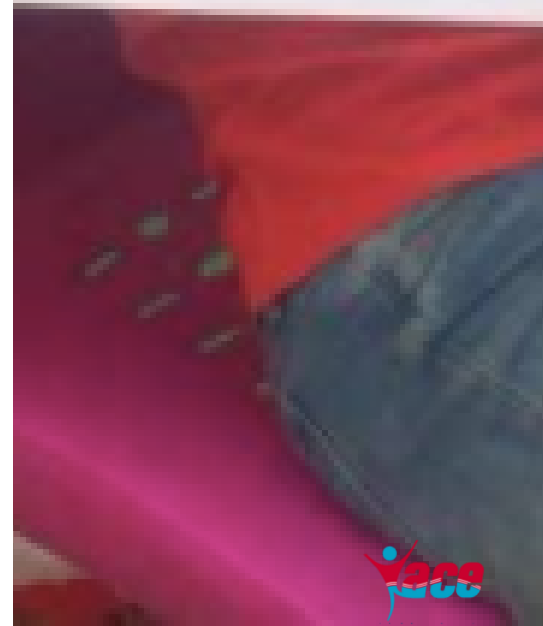
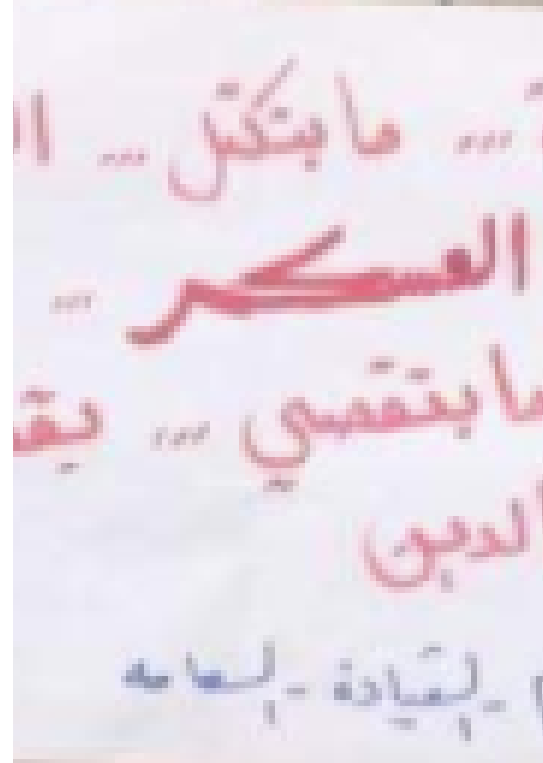
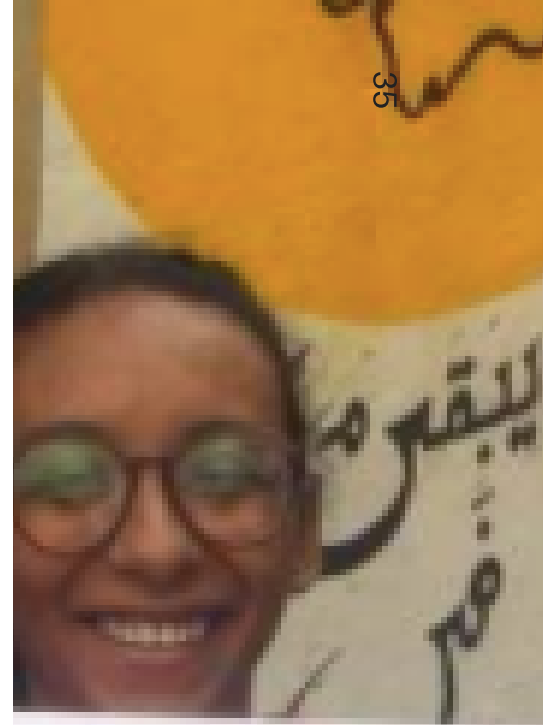
That day, I left my house and stayed with family until I left the country. The fundamentalists kept coming back for months after that until the sit-in in front of the army headquarters.

My family was affected by this. My father's livelihood was threatened and he was told that he would lose his job.

My family lives abroad, and sadly, I now can not even think of visiting them as there are threats against my life there as well. Until now, my family continues to live through the repercussions of the campaign against me.

I limited my Facebook presence to my personal page and I've left all groups I was part of on Facebook.

After I travelled, the NISS began investigating me for "atheism" and I found out about this when staff members from my cafe were attempting to get a permit for a small concert and they were told that no permits will be issued as I am being investigated.



IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

Continued

Actually in early 2018, I had changed the ownership of the business to my partner's name in anticipation because I was threatened by the NISS when a protest wave erupted in January 2018. We were visited by the head of the NISS in person at the time and I was told "it is either your opinions or your business". The next day, they began harassing us and we received a huge bill from the locality for 50,000 SDG and we were told to pay, or they would shut us down.

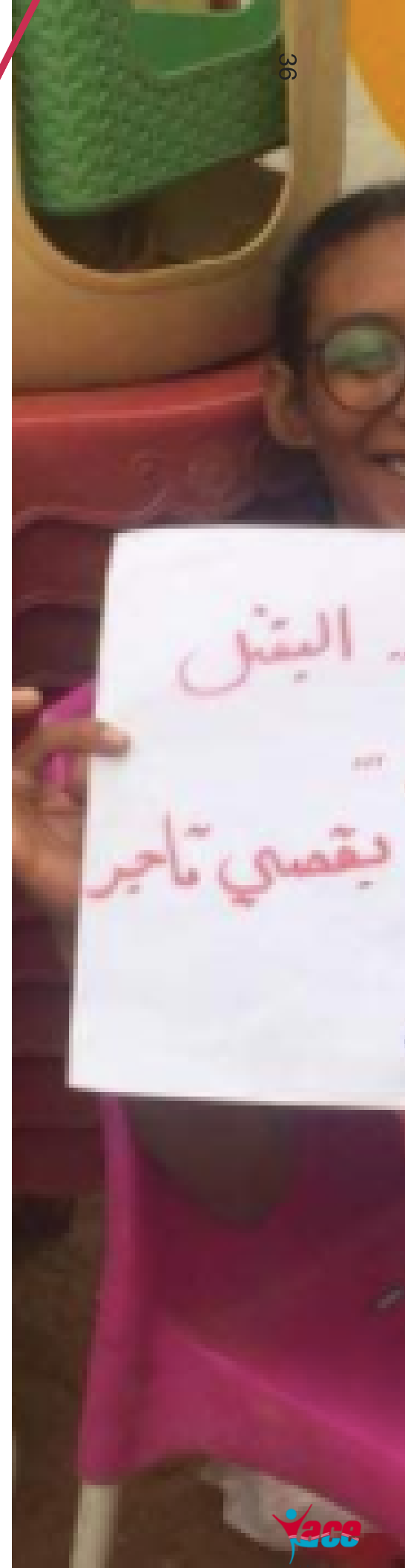
It was very stressful as we had to bribe our way out of the huge fine, but I decided then to stop affiliating myself with the cafe to save it from destruction.

ISIES cafe, my business, my dream, my life and the source of my livelihood suffered from collateral damage in the next few months, until we had to shut it down a few months ago. It was a very painful move, but the campaign against me took its toll and we lost clients and we lost a huge stock of material we had bought but had expired.

The whole world was against me after the show was aired. On the first Friday after the show, the Imam in the mosque in my neighborhood was saying "this whore, it is a religious duty to kill her". It was painful that people were saying that the NISS recruited me to distract people from the epidemic going on in Kassala state in Eastern Sudan.

The Sit-ins and my life after the revolution

Until now, very few people know that I came back when the sit-in began. I could barely stay away while the protest movement was going on. When the sit-in began on April 6th, I got on the first plane home. I came back wearing a niqab and entered the country discreetly and told a few people about this.



IN DEPTH CASE STUDY

Continued

During the sit-in, it was a little bit different, I remember being in a car and driving by and overhearing a group of girls. One of them said "look this is Wi'am, she is alive, she is not dead." One woman came up to me and said " I protested for you and what you stand for".

A man also came up to me and introduced himself and apologized for writing terrible things about me online. An older man looked at me and said "this girl right here she is the first to stand up and speak up and we said she has no morals. We have to apologize to her." I decided to forgive everyone hoping that the campaign will never resume again, but things quickly changed. When the sit-in was dismantled on June 3rd, many people were spreading rumors that I was raped.

The cyberbullying campaign was back on full-throttle after the protest we held in front of the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), and a picture of me holding a sign that read " down with the patriarchy" went viral. Just like last time, it took a toll on my friends and family. I had lost people. A few weeks later, I was invited for a panel discussion on feminism at a bookstore in Khartoum. The owner told us that for our safety, he will only let in women and some of his male friends. When we arrived at the venue, we were told that people were lining up from 4 pm and I was terrified and literally forgot what I had to say.

The discussion was fruitful and since we didn't say anything controversial to the standards of the society watching the episode through the live feed, the cyberbullying campaign this time targeted the men who were attending the event. One man in particular was filmed clapping for us at the end of the event and is now at risk of losing his job and he is currently facing harassment in public and at work.

The cyberbullying campaign against me picks up sometimes and I find myself harassed and my whole personal life scrutinized by strangers on social media.



THE INBOX BECOMES INBOXAT

انبوكسات ااا
سكرين شوت المتحرشين

"Inboxat!!! Screenshot the harrassers"

INBOXAT

In 2017, a group of girls started a Facebook group called Inboxat. The group was basically a platform for women to share screenshots of harassing messages and foul conversations they've received in their inboxes from men. The group became a sensation as many women felt that it represented them and began sharing stories of how they get very disturbing images and messages in their Facebook inboxes. The group which works through the "naming and shaming" approach was an attempt for women to find a way to stop this invasion of their privacy as well as a way to fight against cyberbullying and online harassment.

For many of the users, a common feeling was that such messages would impact their online activities and make them feel that someone was scrutinizing their online behavior.

In an investigative article published in Al-Sudani newspaper in March 2017 and re-posted on Al-Nilin online newspaper around the same time, the group was well-received by the thousands of young women who joined it in a matter of weeks, but it also received backlash as young men began trying to hack the Facebook accounts of its administrators and even created a group called "Inboxat for men" as a way to intimidate girls that their private messages will also be shared.

Additionally, an article called "Sudanese women facing harassment with 'inboxat'" was published in the same month on Sky News Arabia, which had different perspectives on the group, with several people saying that it could help combat cyber-bullying.

INBOXAT

Continued

Looking at the group two years later, the group's header reads "Inboxat: screen-shoting the harassers". In its heydays, the group was active and had several postings a day.

Now, it still has members, but it is abandoned, and the only posts are advertisements for products and miscellaneous videos. For the group members, it was clear why its demise was quick and inevitable. A group member spoke of an incident that made it clear that the group was going to fall in trouble.

She said that, "when a young poet was accused of sexual harassment and a young woman shared screenshots in the group, he had many female supporters and friends take part in slandering this woman. He also dug-up screenshots of conversations they had much earlier which showed that they shared a relationship.

She was speaking of the present and he brought back the past and she was heavily attacked. The group became unsafe and we found ourselves harassed instead of dealing with harassers."

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSION

When the revolution began in December 2018, cyberbullying against WHRDs significantly increased as the regime invested heavily in the NISS to fight the expanding and thriving protest movement. As a result, women activists found themselves under attack by the cyber-jihad unit and their personal pictures and information were spread online. Unfortunately, the regime-change that happened in April 2019 did not change the situation as the incidents of cyberbullying continue to happen and WHRDs continue to find themselves targeted.

The difference is, now, this targeting is specifically linked to the political change as former government loyalists believe and perpetuate the theory that women fought for political change to get their personal freedoms, and this clashes with religious values and societal norms.

As a result, there is technically more freedom on the streets as the authorities suspended the Khartoum State Public Order Law. However, there is also rising fundamentalism. As the belief that the role of women continues to be significant and women need to continue fighting online and offline, a Taskforce was created in the roundtable discussion in December 2018.

The task-force viewed itself as a force that will work behind the scenes to offer support and assistance to victims of cyberbullying in the form of material support when needed as well as legal aid, psycho-social support and providing victims a safe place to stay. The Taskforce offered tremendous support to S.K as she was facing death threats. They helped to provide counseling to S.K and her family and assisted her in leaving the country to a safer destination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Civil Society Organizations

- Advocate for the reform of the 2007 (modified in 2018) cybercrime law and add a clear article that criminalizes cyberbullying in all of its forms.
- Offer psycho-social support, legal aid and relocation support to victims of cybercrime who are at risk.
- Advocate the establishment of a secure and/or confidential hotline with telecommunications companies to support victims of cyberbullying.
- Conduct a study of the harassment and bullying of women in Sudan on a wider scale.
- Examine the psychological and social impact of bullying in general on women in Sudan.

Recommendations to The Transitional Government of Sudan

- Reform the 2007 (modified in 2018) cybercrime law and add a clear article that criminalizes cyber-bullying in all of its forms.
- Build the capacity of the forces affiliated with the cybercrime prosecution office in cyberbullying, gender-sensitive investigations and gender-based violence (GBV).