



Technology Driven Violence Against Women

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Foreword

This report on technology driven violence against women in Pakistan is based on issues and trends identified in three in-depth case studies carried out by us. Gender-based violence is, tragically, not a new phenomenon, whether in Pakistan or elsewhere in the world. However, rapidly increasing penetration of technology, in particular mobile telephony and the Internet and social media, have introduced yet unstudied dimensions to this abhorrent and unacceptable practice in societies. Consequently, technology driven violence is a little understood, and therefore entirely un-provisioned for, crime in most countries and especially in Pakistan.

At Bytes for All, Pakistan we take pride in defining the frontiers where human rights issues intersect with technology. This report presents the ground-breaking research that attempts to begin developing an understanding of how technology is used to inflict violence on women; of the terrible harms that women experience as a consequence; of how society, law and government has neither understanding nor preparedness to tackle it. In particular, the research focuses on the state of women's access to justice, through domestic legal remedy and through corporate remedy. This aims to explore ways forward to combat the scourge of technology as facilitator of violence on women.

We are grateful to the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) for selecting us as partners to conduct this research in Pakistan. We are proud that this report will also inform APC's global report and recommendations on technology driven violence against women.

This report, and the case studies that form the basis of this report, are valuable evidence that we present before you. And in our efforts to bring about positive change, we would request civil society, parliament, government, law enforcement agencies and media to seriously consider the issues highlighted herein and join us in ending impunity with which these horrific crimes are perpetrated.



Shahzad Ahmad,
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TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

COUNTRY REPORT – PAKISTAN 2014

Research objectives and methodology

The aims of this research on technology driven violence against women were multifold. On the one hand it attempts to discover and document in detail how technology driven Violence Against Women (VAW) takes place, whilst on the other, it tries to identify the technologies/ platforms used for the purpose, and the types of harms experienced by women, i.e., emotional, psychological, physical social and/or economic harm. Further, it attempts to explore the barriers to, or opportunities for, effective legal and/or civic remedies as well as corporate remedies available to women as measures for redress. The overarching aim of the study is to inform the substance and direction of our advocacy on technology driven VAW.

The methodology used was the case study method, such that rather than capturing quantitative data, we could capture qualitative material for a deeper understanding of issues surrounding technology driven VAW. Hence, the research neither captures all types of violence nor studies all possible intermediaries (for example ISPs) etc. It takes a look at three cases of technology driven violence against women and traces the women's attempts at obtaining remedy and the results they obtained – to exemplify issues. Summaries of the case studies are appended to this report. However, the detailed and complete case studies titled '*Aisha - A pilot case study on access to justice for technology driven violence against women - 2013*', '*Bayhaya – A case study on access to justice for technology driven violence against women - 2014*' and '*Baaghi – A case study on access to justice for technology driven violence against women - 2014*' have also been published and are accessible here: bytesforall.pk/resources. Primary method of data collection in this portion of the research was interviews of survivors and relevant people related to the cases. Case selection depended on several criteria, including but not limited to the presence of tech-driven VAW, attempt at access to legal/corporate remedies, and the willingness of survivors to be case studies.

Separately, mapping of the domestic legal framework was carried out to provide context to the endeavours of obtaining remedy by the survivors. This study is titled '*Cyberspace and Violence Against Women – A review of existing legislation in Pakistan – 2013*' and available at: bytesforall.pk/resources.

In addition a mapping of VAW policies of the largest Internet service provider and sole provider of landline telephony, the Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL), of the telecommunications and Internet services regulator, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA), and of a privately owned intermediary were also carried out via desk review of publicly available information on these companies' websites. In the case of the privately owned intermediary, the research was helped by a short interview as well. This study is titled '*Violence Against Women – A review of the policies of ICT intermediaries in Pakistan – 2014*' and available at: bytesforall.pk/resources.

Policy/ Political background

With violence against women having strong cultural and religious roots in the country, over time it has gained firm legal moorings as well. Women's rights organisations have struggled as much for enactment of pro-women laws as they have fought off anti-women laws. Given high levels of religio-cultural tolerance for it, the incidence of VAW not only remains high in the country, but has also become one of those crimes that benefit the most from the culture of impunity. Societal unwillingness to punish crimes against women is often aided by certain aspects of the legal framework and/or weaknesses in the law enforcement and/ or judicial processes. Within these state institutions (of law enforcement and the judiciary), a lack of capacity and/or will are both in evidence particularly in relation to dealing with VAW.


Against this background, the increasingly fast penetration of mobile telephony and Internet technologies in the country seems to be exacerbating the on-ground situation. It certainly appears as if the penetration of these technologies is adding to the existent violence against women, not just mirroring it. Indeed, the nature of crimes of violence against women emerging now would not have been possible without the technologies being used to perpetrate them.

Yet, recognition of technology driven/enabled violence against women as an evolved and separate type of violence remains low at societal as well as institutional levels. As a consequence of this, appropriate legislation or corporate liability or responsibility remain almost entirely non-existent. The cases studied bring to the fore the need for better recognition, sensitization and legislation including a pro-people, pro-women cyber-crimes law that addresses technology driven violence against women. In addition, this research also accents the need for corporate and judicial policies and processes to keep pace with advances in technology and its effects on the social contract.

Summary of key themes/ trends in cases

In the three cases studied, the range of ways in which VAW was committed, enabled or compounded by technology was surprisingly wide. In one case (Aisha), surreptitious recording of an intimate act with mobile phone cameras was carried out to invade privacy. The recording was then used to blackmail the woman to rape her repeatedly over several months. Later, phone to phone Bluetooth technology was used to disseminate the recording far and wide. Allegedly, Facebook was also used to upload the video to harm the reputation of the woman. It is hard to imagine how this survivor could have been violated and harmed without the technologies used to hand.

In another case (Bayhaya), social media was used to hurl sexualized abuse and threaten the survivor with violence (rape and murder). The Internet was also used to discover and broadcast her physical address. Further, social media and intermediary websites were used to accuse the survivor of blasphemy – and incite violence against



her by third parties. In this case technology was effectively used to fetter the woman's freedom of speech.

In a third case (Baaghi), social media i.e., Youtube, Twitter, Facebook and blogs etc. were used as the medium to harass and sexually abuse the survivor, including dissemination of images carrying her face morphed onto bodies of porn stars. Multiple fake twitter accounts in their dozens were made in her name over time to abuse and degrade her and/or send obnoxious/ pornographic material to her friends and acquaintances. In addition, all these mediums/ platforms were used to threaten extreme sexualized violence, including rape and murder. The survivor is regularly abused, threatened and attacked in a similar manner on email as well. Further, a blog was used to publish detailed personal information about her and her immediate family members with edicts to kill them all. Almost within a month of the blog's appearance, the survivor and her husband came under a gun attack but survived. The abuse and violence directed at this survivor was directly due to her political and social views, and was meant to silence her.

For detailed information and deeper understanding of the cases, please refer to the full case studies.


Harms

Contrary to common perceptions about online or tech-violence, our research revealed almost the entire spectrum of conceivable harms having been experienced across the three case studies when taken together. From physical harm, including rape, and long term insomnia and migraine, to psychological harm including extreme stress, feelings of intense fear, isolation, inability to socialize and changes in personality, to emotional harm like consuming anger, to social and developmental harm to include loss of education and freedom to go out of the home, to economic harm to survivor and their families including loss of jobs, to financial costs of redress were all in evidence in just a total of three case studies.

In aggregate, many fundamental human rights of the survivors were violated. The right to security, the right to privacy and to dignity were violated in almost every case. In two of the cases freedom of speech was severely fettered.

Actors

Three out of three women thought of accessing legal remedy. Only two, however, attempted it. Noteworthy for not attempting to obtain legal remedy is the case of the survivor who was accused of blasphemy (Bayhaya). Her primary 'remedial measure' was to try to hush down everything, to disappear from public space and social media so to speak; to deactivate all her social media accounts and in particular, to delete the 'view point' that had caused her to be attacked, such that even the hint of the



accusation of blasphemy against her is forgotten. Such are the consequences in Pakistan of being accused of blasphemy that the survivor did not think it safe to take her case to law enforcement for fear and risk of incurring their extra-judicial wrath and retribution. She did seek out friends in media circles (who often have to deal with extreme threats of a similar nature at times) to ‘counsel’ her and her co-workers.

Indeed, her supplication to Facebook for corporate remedy resulted in satisfactory results for her. Facebook removed pages identified by her as inciting violence and/or abusive. It is noteworthy that she did not seek remedy from Twitter because the process was deemed too lengthy and cumbersome by the survivor to undertake in her circumstances.

Interestingly, none of the survivors reached out to NGOs or other civil society organisations, nor did any come forward to offer help. The rape survivor (Aisha) reached out to the primary law enforcement agency, the local police, and the justice system by taking her attackers to court. But for any emotional support, only the family and family-friends’ network was available.

One survivor (Baaghi) approached the police in the assassination attempt case, and the cyber-crime circle of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for the online attacks and threats against her. In addition, this particular survivor also approached a large network of civil society organisations. Fascinatingly, the approach to civil society was not for any material, psychological or emotional support, but for validation. It was psychologically and emotionally important for her to know that the network of human rights workers did not disapprove of her political views that she was repeatedly coming under attack for. Once again, both Twitter and Facebook were approached to access respective corporate remedies offered by them, but in this case both failed to provide redress.

The legal framework

A standalone snapshot

As detailed in Bytes for All’s study *‘Cyberspace and Violence Against Women – A review of existing legislation in Pakistan – 2013,’* the existing legal framework does not include any laws that specifically cater to electronic or cyber-crimes. Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance (PECO), promulgated in 2007 and re-promulgated in 2008, lapsed the year after. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) had been (and still is) entrusted the area of cyber or technology enabled crimes. Thus PECO gave the FIA exclusive powers to investigate and charge cyber-crimes - crimes that may not necessarily be effectively dealt with under the provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code.

PECO covered a wide range of crimes, but certain Sections, particularly Section 13 of PECO titled ‘Cyber stalking’ covered several crimes often in evidence in technology driven or online VAW, such as harassment, invasion of privacy, distribution of photographs without consent etc. However, as mentioned earlier, the Ordinance was

never passed into law and as such was criticized widely for vague terminology in several sections allowing state control over interpretation of its provisions. Of particular concern was the Section of PECO entitled Cyber Terrorism that posed serious risks to fundamental human rights.

A new cyber-crimes draft bill (PECA 2014), once again not widely consulted upon, and therefore having some of the same pitfalls as the lapsed Ordinance of 2007, has not been tabled in the legislating bodies yet.

Another Ordinance, The Electronic Transactions Ordinance (ETO) passed in 2002, and made permanent later via a constitutional amendment, caters to ‘Violation of privacy of information’ via its Section 36, but remains untested in cases of VAW.

Separately, The Telegraph Act of 1885 (Telegraph Act), which is still in existence, provides the edifice upon which telecommunications law is based in Pakistan. Indeed, Sections 25D (Penalty for causing annoyance) and 29 (Sending fabricated or obscene messages) are well suited for prosecuting some of the technology enabled or technology driven VAW crimes common in Pakistan.

The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) also has several provisions that may be extended to the Internet to cover online harassment and abuse against women, for example Section 506 (Punishment for criminal intimidation), Section 507 (Criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), Section 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman), and Section 384 (Punishment for extortion) etc.

Legal framework in context of the three cases

For a variety of reasons, a common theme emerging from the study of the three cases was that of impunity in cases of violence against women, whether the crimes committed were limited to cyber space, or whether they spilt over into the physical realm (two out of three cases) having been driven by technology in some way or another.

Though in entirely different ways, and because of substantively different reasons, the survivors in all three cases saw the law enforcement agencies as part of the problem to not finding legal remedy. In Aisha’s case, the police apprehended the perpetrators but charged them only with rape, which in her case would prove almost impossible to establish given the nature of evidence available (or lack thereof). The failure to charge the accused with violation of privacy, dissemination of ‘obscene’ and injurious material, blackmail and attempt at extortion, and damage and harm to the survivor’s reputation emerged as serious lapses on part of the police. These charges related to the technology enabled violence/crimes against the survivor and could have been prosecuted with help of the PPC. Several Sections of the PPC were also applicable to the physical violence in her case, yet these were not cited in the ‘Challan’, or the final report, to the magistrate on the basis of which legal proceedings are initiated. Furthermore, neither the police nor counsel hired by the survivor’s family were aware of the provision of ‘statutory rape’ within the PPC, which would have been the appropriate

Section to book the accused under, instead of the Section dealing with ‘rape’ only.

These lapses pointed, at the very minimum, to the lack of capacity/knowledge and/or will on part of the local police. The research team also came away with a distinct suspicion of the police actively shielding the suspects. Two junior police officers, interviewed separately, claimed to have had the intimate video of the survivor taken off by Facebook. Separately interviewed and therefore unaware of what his juniors had already revealed, the most senior police officer in charge of the case denied any knowledge of the video having been uploaded to the Internet/Facebook. The unsympathetic attitude was reflected in his demand for the victim to furnish the evidence. Furthermore, despite the accused being on record as having shared and disseminated the video via Bluetooth technology, the officer in charge of the case had ignored this fact, and possibly concealed evidence of dissemination via Facebook. This led us to believe there was reasonable ground to suspect complicity to prevent remedy at some level. The family of the survivor also reported pressure and intimidation tactics from the families of the accused to drop the case. They felt the police was ‘mishandling’ the case due to some ‘pressure’. Police is generally believed to be prone to financial inducements, pressure from influential persons and/or from political quarters in Pakistan. Indeed, the lack of independence of the police force is a generally well known and acknowledged issue in Pakistan.

Anecdotal evidence from two unconnected and separate cases revealed that police in smaller stations are not even aware of all of the sections of the PPC that may be used to book some very common crimes. In the words of a senior police officer, ‘we rely on a total of 35 to 40 sections (out of thousands) of the penal code to deal with any and all crime in Pakistan’.

In Baaghi’s case, after she and her husband came under a gunfire attack pursuant to hate speech and incitement to violence against her on the Internet, she sought remedy from the police. After a year and a half, the one and only eye witness to the shooting had ‘died of unknown causes”, ballistic and forensic evidence was ‘lost’ and so was the entire police file dealing with her case. For the crimes committed online against her, she had approached the FIA (the Federal Investigation Agency). Despite generally tall claims from the agency, violent abuse and incitement to violence as well as degradation against her continues to date. None of her attackers have either been traced, or indicted. The FIA cited its inability to require Facebook or Twitter to disclose identities/IP addresses of offenders, given Pakistan was not a signatory to relevant mutual legal assistance treaties (MLAT). In the absence of being a signatory to such treaties, Pakistani authorities are required to obtain a court order from a Pakistani court that may be presented to international intermediaries. However, in Baaghi’s case the FIA simply did not try to obtain any court order either. Nor was the FIA effective in either blocking or having removed the particular blog calling for her and her family to be shot and killed wherever found. Once again – the reason cited was the blog being hosted in the U.K. and a lack of any bilateral treaty with the relevant authorities in Britain to be able to intervene. The result is that all offending material, as well as offending Twitter accounts and Facebook pages remain active and abusive and indulgent in hate speech against

the survivor with impunity.

The impunity in the third case arose from the most bizarre, perhaps most alarming reasons: VAW against Bayhaya quickly evolved into accusations of blasphemy. Interestingly, the same accusation was levelled at the intermediary that ran her 'counter-narrative' to the traditionalist, Islamist view. Having witnessed scores of people having been killed after merely being accused of blasphemy (many of whom were never charged, or under trial or had been acquitted by courts), she decided not to apprise law enforcement of the accusation against her. Nor did she report the rest of the violence and abuse for fear of the whole story being revealed. Only a few years previously, the governor of the largest province of Pakistan had been killed by one of the personnel in his own security detail for being seen as sympathetic to a Christian woman incarcerated for allegedly having committed blasphemy. Bayhaya did not feel confident enough that law enforcement would not turn on her instead of helping her ward off, or trace, her attackers. The corporate intermediary, too, dealt with the attacks on its own and eventually offered a public apology for having run Bayhaya's content on its website. Her fear of law enforcement as a unique hurdle to accessing remedy was a significant reason for selecting this case for research.

In an unconnected case reported in the press in 2014, a blasphemy case against a young woman was registered by the man she had refused to marry. Thus, whilst blasphemy is used to settle all manner of scores, it is now gaining popularity as one weapon in an arsenal used in misogyny.

Women are often at the forefront of human rights causes in Pakistan. And online violence, sexualized abuse and misogyny is one of the latest tactics to gag their voices and opinions. Where the gagging attempt includes accusations of blasphemy, legal impunity against the violence becomes almost guaranteed, as normally the accused scramble to quieten and smother the controversy in order not to fan the blasphemy issue.

Corporate redress

Of the three cases this report is based on, one (Aisha) did not directly attempt to access corporate remedy, being a non-user of ICTs from a rural background.

Whilst for one survivor (Bahaya) Facebook appeared to provide adequate remedy, that is, deleting the pages identifying her and calling for physical violence on her including killing her, the survivor found it was akin to playing 'whack the mole' at a time she was dealing with several different serious aspects of the sudden onslaught on her. Initially, though the Facebook pages clearly appeared to be abusive in nature, with arrows pointing to an image of the survivor while most of the text was in Urdu, Facebook did not take down the pages upon dozens of friends' reports. Each time a new page appeared, friends alerted the survivor who would then report it to have it deleted – a situation that clearly caused unnecessary stress to the survivor. Thus while the remedy

was 'adequate' it was not entirely 'satisfactory' in that presumably the same group of people were able to repeatedly make new pages attacking the survivor with hate speech as older pages were deleted. Hence, there was added stress of continually worrying about, and searching for, newer pages calling for the survivor to be killed wherever found.

Taking this case in point, the question then arises as to whether there might be a way of circumventing the whack a mole type of situation where the offender(s) continue to make new pages that indulge in hate speech and/or violate Facebook's stated policies/terms of service. An underlying assumption is that Facebook has the information and the capacity to block repeat offending IP addresses from making new pages.

One question that came up repeatedly was Facebook's capacity to understand and or evaluate content uploaded by its users in languages other than English. In Bayhaya's case, content recognition was helped by an accompanying graphic poster. But in Baaghi's case, not only was repeated reporting to Facebook of hate speech pages against her futile, but it also appeared there was a lack of capacity on part of Facebook to translate/ comprehend content. According to Baaghi, hundreds of reports against a page is normally a successful tactic in having offensive pages deleted. But in her case it did not work: either a crucial number did not report, or Facebook could not comprehend the abuse and hate speech, which was in Urdu. The question this poses then is whether Facebook ought to have a process or mechanism in place to be able to evaluate content in all the languages its users use/upload material in. Noteworthy is the fact that Facebook requires 'copy/ paste' reporting of offensive material, not a translation.

One intriguing and worrisome aspect that came to light during Aisha's case was that Pakistani authorities have some kind of arrangement with Facebook, where they can have material blocked or deleted without any due process. Indeed, there were strong indications that the police had had the video of the survivor blocked/removed from Facebook, but with the intent of destroying/ disappearing evidence with the purpose of shielding the accused from prosecution for committing a criminal offence. Whilst on the one hand it was helpful that a damaging video was swiftly removed, it was disquieting that authorities had likely misused this power to protect criminals.

Indeed, in the following months during late 2013 and mid 2014 it became an open secret that the PTA (regulator of the telecommunications and Internet industry) had an 'understanding' with Facebook of some sort whereby the PTA only had to identify pages that supposedly violated local laws, for Facebook to either block viewership in Pakistan, or delete entirely. A bemusing series of confessions and denials during Bytes for All's Youtube court case, and during the public controversy^{1,2,3,4} surrounding the blocking

¹ PTA denies blocking rock band Laal's Facebook page (<http://www.dawn.com/news/1111000>)

² 'The government's role is very negative' (http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/pakistan/2014/06/140607_facebook_pages_ban_disco_tim.shtml)

³ Facebook Under Fire for Temporarily Blocking Pages in Pakistan (<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/07/world/asia/pakistan-facebook-blocked-users-from-political-pages->

of progressive and liberal anti-Taliban Facebook pages (by Facebook at the request of PTA) confirmed the fact. This ‘understanding’ does not appear to have a foundation in any law conferring such authority on the PTA, nor is it embedded in any transparent process. Thus, apart from other wide ranging repercussions of this ‘understanding’ such as unlawful censorship, it appears that law enforcement can, and possibly does where it wishes to, use this arrangement to ‘disappear’ evidence to suit its own narrative in criminal cases.

One survivor, Bayhaya, did not access Twitter’s corporate remedy mechanisms because it appeared too lengthy and time consuming. Since the ‘Report’ button/facility did not seem to obtain any results, the alternative of filling out a form and faxing over to Twitter appeared too taxing at a time she was dealing with physical threats to her life due to hate speech on Facebook and Twitter. From the experience of Baaghi, in her attempts to obtain corporate remedy from Twitter, it appears just as well that Bahaya did not invest her time in filing a complaint with Twitter.


Twitter’s requirement to send complaints by fax, each and every time, made it near impossible for Baaghi to obtain redress. It took a month of repeatedly trying to fax from commercial centers to have the fax received by Twitter and have one account impersonating her deleted. Despite Twitter’s commitment to consider receiving subsequent complaints via email, once user details were authenticated via fax for the first complaint, Baaghi continued to receive automated sounding emails as responses from Twitter to ‘send a fax’.

Reporting online for deletion of accounts clearly attacking her with hate speech also met with complete failure, even though in her estimate several dozens, if not hundreds, of her followers would have reported such accounts at her request. One particular form of abuse against Baaghi was impersonation of her account. Her request for a verified account also went unmet. At the time she had over 75, 000 followers, yet Twitter informed her every time that her ‘account following’ did not warrant a verified account.

Even though none of the survivors attempted to access remedy from any local corporate, we did attempt to map policies of the regulator as well as the largest ISP in Pakistan in the context of VAW and remedy as mentioned earlier (*‘Violence Against Women – A review of the policies of ICT intermediaries in Pakistan – 2014’*). Briefly, the review reveals that the regulator for telecommunications and the Internet, Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) rules provide for ‘protection from obnoxious calls’ in requiring ‘the licensee (to) take all reasonable steps to protect its customers from harassment on account of obnoxious calls’. The rules also stipulate ‘protection from spam, unsolicited, fraudulent and obnoxious communication,’ defining obnoxious communication as the ‘transmission of message/statement with the intent to cause harassment or disturbance.’ The rules further stipulate in a separate clause for ‘all

[and-outspoken-rock-band-laal-against-taliban-.html\)](#)

⁴BBC Urdu Sairbeen (http://www.bbc.co.uk/urdu/multimedia/2011/10/000000_sairbeen_saturday.shtml)



Operators (to) set up a standard operating procedure to ensure that all possible technical solutions are available to subscribers in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner to control obnoxious communication.’ The rules also prescribe a detailed mechanism to deal with and resolve complaints in instances of ‘obnoxious calls.’ To quote from the report, the ‘regulations directly call for active monitoring of any instances of harassment by every operator, stipulating them to take adequate measures to either blocking of outgoing communication or blocking of the subscriber IMEI number based on the activity of the offender’s activity after the complaint.’

A disturbing fact to note however is that whilst PTA sets out apparently reasonable guidelines for intermediaries to follow against harassment, its own complaints mechanism whilst referring to obnoxious, unsolicited & fraudulent calls/SMSs, does not expressly cater to harassment via the Internet. Though there has been increasing awareness of technology-driven/ online VAW, PTA’s website does not demonstrate recognition of it. It is alarming to say the least when this lapse is compared with a section of the website dedicated specially to registering complaints of ‘blasphemy’ directly with the regulator.

Majority owned by the government, Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) is the leading ISP in Pakistan as the leading provider of broadband services. A review of its publically available policies on its website reveals a number of statements of values and ethics, particularly with regard to its own employees, but lacking in any concrete policies catering to harassment or VAW as an intermediary. To quote from Bytes for All’s review document, ‘PTCL also appears to lack an effective or comprehensive complaints mechanism online, with a single email address which may be used to send ‘valued feedback and other queries’.

From the desk review of its policies, it does not appear that PTCL has adequate policies or mechanisms complying with PTA rules. As market leader, PTCL has a critical role to play in terms of setting a standard of responsibility to its customers, for smaller, private players in the industry. With the advent of 3G and 4G mobile telephony services in the country, the private players are set to gain a far larger share of the Internet services market. And with the government owned market leader setting a poor standard, future trends from private companies remain a serious concern.

We also conducted a desk review of the policies of a media organisation in the capacity of an ‘intermediary’ (findings included in *‘Violence Against Women – A review of the policies of ICT intermediaries in Pakistan – 2014’*). Many media organisations such as newspapers and television channels, including the one we studied, now have a significant online and social media presence. Given the sizable chunk of user generated content (Blogs, Op-eds, readers’ comments and discussion forums etc.) on their websites, we felt it appropriate to include one such organization (henceforth referred to as the Intermediary) in our research as an example of a new type of intermediary emerging. Indeed, one such intermediary was connected with one of the case studies done for this report.

A desk review of the Intermediary's publicly available policies reveals explicitly stated policies and guidelines against discrimination or discriminatory language of any sort, hate speech, harassment and intimidation etc. overlooking editorial as well as freelance content. Significantly, the editorial policy explicitly states with respect to comments that those that 'make fun (of) or degrade another person's race, colour, religion or sexual orientation' will not be printed.

In terms of a mechanism, casual interviews revealed that the Intermediary's editors attempt to neutralize all hate speech including against women through filtering and censorship of user feedback/ comments. Meanwhile, victims of hate speech are informed/ alerted of any trends such that they might take whatever action they deem appropriate including removal of their content. Beyond this, the Intermediary does not take any remedial measures such as reporting abuse or hate speech to ISPs or PTA to follow up. Also, the policies are not couched in terms of VAW, but in general terms applying to any and all individuals.


However, it has been observed that at times the Intermediary's website has fallen short of the stated standards it aspires to. At times, extreme abuse and violence was evidenced before any notice was taken, or before the Intermediary itself was targeted with hate speech and the content/ feedback taken down. Having said that, in recent months the Intermediary appears to have tightened its mechanisms to better reflect its stated policies and guidelines.

By contrast, we have generally observed extremely poor or non-existent moderation on innumerable websites, discussion forums, video sharing sites etc. with rampant hate speech and bullying as an acceptable feature of these intermediaries.

Dynamics of justice

In all of the cases studied, the women did not feel they had obtained either 'justice' or 'remedy'. Aisha wanted the offenders punished with exemplary jail sentences. However, the case was in its initial stages but she and her family did not think it was taking a desirable direction. An informal legal review of her case obtained by Bytes for All was of the same view. Speaking to journalists and community members, and members of the police force unrelated to the case, we were told that in such cases more often than not the law enforcement and judicial systems conspire to force the survivors' or victims' families to 'reach a compromise' with offenders i.e., an out of court settlement that may not amount to much given dismal chances of serious convictions.

To Baaghi, justice was multidimensional. It meant having the mental, psychological and emotional abuse via online sexualized violence and rape and death threats stopped; it meant having morphed pornographic images of her being stopped from circulation on the Internet; it meant having offenders of these crimes traced and apprehended; it meant having her would-be assassins caught and punished. None of these things happened. Indeed the online abuse continues unabated on Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and Youtube etc.



In Bayhaya's case wanting 'justice' was a far cry – she was struggling to hush up all traces of her own speech and presence online to avoid being lynched, shot or hauled up by law enforcement under the charge of blasphemy. One of the intermediaries, too, removed content created by her and made a public apology to avoid having the blasphemy accusations stick. In this case, the mere hint of attempting 'justice' or 'remedy' was fraught with danger.


Other key themes

Apart from impunity, which is a very strong theme that emerges in cases of VAW in Pakistan, a couple of other interesting trends were observed.

At a superficial level we find that to a large extent the misogyny prevalent in society has found a natural avenue in online space, hence giving rise to the notion that the online VAW is merely a reflection, or extension, of what happens in real life in society. However, our case study research revealed some very interesting lacunae in that notion. We found that had technology not been an enabling agent, none of these particular VAW cases we studied would have come about; that technology in fact made these crimes possible; that this possibly means an increase in VAW per se because of the new tools available to do so; that even the physical, real-world violence in these cases would not have had the reason and opportunity to take place had technology not provided the impetus for it. For example, Aisha could not have been blackmailed or raped had she not been recorded first with the use of technology, or threatened with dissemination of the intimate video over the Internet.

A key finding, from two of the cases studied, is that women are coming under violent and/or sexualized attacks online and offline for the exercise of their freedom of speech. These attacks are different from the attacks on women for just being women (as in the more typical Aisha case). Baaghi and Bayhaya are both educated, independent and vocal human rights defenders. Both were attacked for their political views, and for the audacity of airing their opinions. But the attacks on them were not only severely sexualized, but also far more severe than those on men airing similar views. This was demonstrated clearly in Bayhaya's case where her male colleagues did not come under the same kind or severity of abuse for propagating the same counter-narrative. The males were almost ignored by comparison.

A most fascinating finding from two of the cases, and borne out by unrelated events in recent years, is that hate speech online has a significant potential to lead into physical violence, given its tremendous staying power. Because of its almost eternal nature, speech online becomes an ongoing gathering point for anyone to come and be part of without any geographic or time boundaries. This allows criminal elements or bigoted minds to find online expressions of thought or speech they may not have had the opportunity to access otherwise in real space and time. Without the permanence, or longevity, offered by the Internet, such events would remain transitory in comparison



and difficult for these elements to react to. A remarkable example of this phenomenon was presented in the Bayhaya case. At the physical events she held, the reaction she got from the public was that of amusement or of being ignored. However, when coverage of her event made an online appearance, reaction evolved from mixed responses, to hate speech, to an organized campaign against her and the intermediary. It attracted certain groups always on the lookout to attack people with liberal/progressive values. These groups then began to incite violence against the survivor and the intermediary.


Baaghi's case demonstrates the same. She has been a very vocal activist for a range of human rights issues, yet the attacks on her were near non-existent until television programs and newspaper content began to be uploaded to online forums with the facility to comment. Since then however, the mere fact that her views could be accessed anywhere, anytime, and did not disappear with the newsprint they were printed on, or with the television program with a life cycle only as long as its duration, facilitated hate speech targeted at her. Audiences could build, stay and increase after the event, precipitating a phenomenon whereby lynch mobs formed on the Internet, targeting her with hate speech and inciting violence against her for her political views.

The Pakistan specific issue with online incitement of violence, or assignment of labels such as 'blasphemer', 'Shia', 'Ahmadi', 'Indian agent', 'apostate' etc. is that online incitement to violence has often resulted in physical violence with tragic consequences. Inciters most often do not commit physical violence themselves, but can almost always depend on some vigilante or another to do so. The continuing presence of hate speech online acts as a catalyst, as a continuing congregating point for those that might take offence to the extent of becoming vigilantes.

The importance of hate speech being removed from the Internet is underscored by the experience of a woman unconnected with these cases. She received death threats for her political views in the feedback/comments section in the online version of the newspaper she wrote in. To prevent it spiraling out of control into the Twitter/ Facebook arenas, the feedback function of the web version of the newspaper was disabled within minutes of hate speech coming in. This action appears to have circumvented the death threats evolving into a campaign on social media, with a potential to spill over into the physical world.

The culture of impunity, both towards incitement as well as towards commitment of physical violence, gives online hate speech in Pakistan a dimension unseen and unencountered in countries where rule of law is not weak.

Baaghi's case revealed yet another interesting phenomenon: that the brevity, disembodiment and distance inherent to social media could in and of itself be a cause for polarized, extreme or violent behavior. Her physical interaction and lengthy conversations with a certain group of her political detractors substantially reduced online abuse and hate speech from their party. Indeed, one particular politically right wing personality is said to have reversed his opinion of her entirely after personal interactions



– and is on record as having said the ‘electronic’ Baaghi is a poor reflection of the real one, that now he is able to agree to disagree because he understands her viewpoint and intent properly; that now he disagrees not with her intent and motives, but only with her method. This may be a crucially important point: in Baaghi’s case this meant the difference between seeing her as treasonous/ a traitor, and seeing her as a well-intentioned person or ‘patriot’ but with a different perspective and approach to resolving issues. It may be a matter for further thought, but one potential reason could be that in lengthier physical interactions, nuances of positions, or more importantly of reason and intent, can be understood better, impacting reactions and behaviours. This (online perceptions) should not be confused with the entirely different phenomenon of online criminal/violent behavior indulged in because of the relative anonymity / safety of the online environment.

Another plausible reason could be that Pakistani society is very ‘relationship-based’. Personal interactions often result in social relationships that are often difficult to transcend or set aside to attack people or abuse them - for their views, gender, race, orientation etc. Indeed, it is to preserve relationships and avoid awkwardness that discussions and arguments on emotive subjects are often curtailed before becoming uncomfortably heated.

Hence, though offline interaction with aggressors cannot be thought of as a broad remedial tool or strategy, it would be useful to bear in mind that it can and does prove useful in certain situations. We have seen evidence of this phenomenon beyond Baaghi’s case.

Recommendations

This research makes self-evident several recommendations for the key actors connected with the phenomenon of online or technology driven violence against women:

- **Government of Pakistan**
 - must sign relevant international conventions and treaties to facilitate its law enforcement agencies in combatting cyber-crime which includes technology driven gender based violence
 - must consult widely on the draft Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2014 before presentation to law making bodies to ensure safeguarding of human rights and women’s rights
 - must undertake reforms to make the police service independent of political influence
 - must undertake to create awareness of norms of human rights and gender sensitization in police cadres as it appears to be severely lacking
- **The parliament**
 - should consider making amendments to existing statutes to bring

cyberspace within their jurisdictions in instances where the new cyber law does not address specific issues for example:

- Telegraph Act 1885
 - Pakistan Penal Code 1860
 - Electronic Transactions Ordinance 2002
 - Defamation Ordinance
- should ensure that the new cyber-crimes statute is human rights friendly, provides for technology driven violence, gender based and otherwise, and devises a special court for cyber-crimes with an Additional Sessions and District Judge specially for this purpose
- **International intermediaries like Twitter and Facebook**
 - must understand that for victims of online hate speech in countries like Pakistan, the problem transcends psychological and emotional torture and degradation (which is not to denigrate this class of abuse); that online hate speech does not just engender discrimination and hatred towards the targets, but also instigates physical violence that in extreme cases may result in loss of life
 - must, therefore, review their policies and mechanisms which have clearly been demonstrated to be not effective enough on the ground
 - must make their complaints and remedies mechanisms more user friendly. For example, Twitter's requirement to fax complaints in the 21st century when even large financial transactions are executed online, appears to be designed to discourage complaints from users. Where fake accounts are clearly becoming a tool of harassment, extension of verified accounts should be made easier
 - must recognize their responsibility to their international users where rule of law standards may vary widely from those of the United States, given that VAW appears to be increasing due to the ease of doing so over social media
 - **Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA)**
 - must extend its anti-harassment policies explicitly to cover online harassment, abuse, hate speech and incitement to violence
 - must recognize VAW being facilitated by those it regulates and have a complaints mechanism specifically designed to cater to hate speech, especially that incites violence. This mechanism must become a prominent part of its complaints redressal system
 - should take notice of ISPs not following its stringent guidelines and monitor and/or penalize them for transgressions
 - must make available for scrutiny its 'agreement' with Facebook and any other intermediaries such that it might be ensured that these agreements are subject to due process and not prejudicial to principles of fundamental human rights

- **Pakistan Telecommunications Company Limited (PTCL) and other ISPs and Intermediaries**
 - must comply with PTA rules and guidelines on consumer protection and
 - must develop standards of responsibility towards consumers with particular regard to violations of human rights with particular regard to hate speech, abuse and incitement to violence
- **The interior ministries of all provinces**
 - must take cognizance of the lack of knowledge in individual police stations of all the laws that may be utilized to deal with crimes in general, and crimes of violence against women in particular, and institute a mechanism of regular training in this regard, in addition to a mechanism of notification of new laws to all police stations SHOs
 - to instruct the provincial and capital police services to refer cyber-crimes/ victims to the FIA instead of trying to handle cases outside their expertise
 - must modernize police services and require maintenance of crime records in researchable, analyzable, track-able databases
- **The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)**
 - cyber-crime unit should maintain data in a researchable form, whereby crime statistics may be easily analyzed, reported and monitored for trends over the years
 - should raise public awareness of its cyber-crime unit. This unit, unlike the FIA's other areas of coverage, caters to crimes common against ordinary people. Yet there is very low public awareness about this function or unit within the FIA
 - should consider provision of a conceptually proactive, 'one stop shop' approach towards cyber-crimes that involve hate speech, incitement to violence and/or violence, whereby approaches to third parties / intermediaries are not left to victims / survivors to make
- **Relevant civil society organisations, such as Bytes for All**
 - should undertake further in-depth research focused at law enforcement agencies to probe the on ground causes/ impediments to effective service to citizens especially in the area of violence against women

Case Summaries

Aisha

Profile

Aisha is a young girl, legally a minor at the time of being subjected to various forms of violence. She comes from a very low income family in rural Punjab, but all her siblings have been through/ or are currently obtaining formal education. Her father is a labourer who works in a city a couple of hours away from their village, and mother a housewife who appears to be simultaneously submissive to her husband yet progressive in her outlook on life. Aisha does not appear to have a high degree of agency, and her decisions and public statements appear to be guided by her family.

Nature of violence

Due to discrepancies in Aisha's own statements, as well as contradictions in those of others', there is some uncertainty as to the case facts. However, the following can be largely pieced together (for details please refer to the full case study):

Surreptitious recordings of sexual intercourse between Aisha and a man (accused to be the initial rapist) with the help of mobile phone cameras was carried out by friends of the man - and her privacy invaded. This man was a college student she had met on her daily, unchaperoned, commutes to school. The recording was then used by those several 'friends' of the man in question to blackmail Aisha and to rape her repeatedly over the next several months.

Several months later, due to her sister (who had left the village to obtain college education in a city) returning to the village to teach in the same school Aisha was studying in, and the consequent unintentional chaperoning of Aisha's commute to school, Aisha was unable to bunk school to accede to the demands of the rapists to meet them.

Some of these boys then threatened to expose Aisha's video. At her continued inability to meet their demands, they brought the video to her father and demanded ransom in return for not making the video public. He in turn was unable to meet their demands, and this led to them disseminating the incriminating video via phone to phone Bluetooth technology. Allegedly, Facebook was also used to upload the video to harm her reputation and as revenge for not being able to continue to rape her.

Harms

Aisha has suffered a whole range of harms due to this incidence, including physical harm due to repeated rape. Aisha and her family continue to suffer emotionally and psychologically. They report a sense of guilt, shame and isolation and feel difficulty facing outsiders due to a perceived loss of honour. Aisha's formal education has been

discontinued after this incident, as has been her sister's teaching career. Thus, the women of the house remain sequestered within the four walls of their home and feel unable to speak much even to each other.

Access to legal remedy

At the time of writing the case study the court case was in its initial stages, but the following points regarding access to legal remedy, in brief, are noteworthy in this case:

- The family would have been unable to afford or sustain any attempt at legal remedy without the support of comparatively well off community elders;
- The legal framework for prosecution of cyber/technology based crime is weak and inadequate;
- Police work is visibly sloppy and/or corrupt: lines of inquiry and investigation are inadequate, sections of law used to frame charges would render Aisha's legal case weak;
- Prosecution service has neither identified nor deployed sections of law available that are likely to strengthen the prosecution's case; and the implications of the combined factors outlined above make for a poor prognosis for the outcome of her case;
- Legal advice available to Aisha and her family is of alarmingly poor quality – counsel was unable to differentiate between legal and religious criteria of attaining majority status, and therefore the applicability of statutory rape in her case (detailed in case study). This is likely to bear a significantly negative impact on her case.

Access to corporate remedy

Aisha and her family do not have/ use computers or have access to the Internet, nor are they able to appreciate the difference between Facebook and the Internet. Such circumstances obviate any attempt at access to corporate remedies.

Key issues

- Aisha or her family have not been offered either legal aid, counselling, or therapy. Despite the case being well publicized in the mainstream media, no women's organisations or other government or non-government organisations have come forward to offer Aisha any kind of support.
- Electronic media outlets failed to protect Aisha's identity. Yet, no media outlet has been charged with invasion of privacy, or damage of reputation of the survivor and her family, by any party.
- Misogynist societal attitudes were evident within the police force as well as others outside Aisha's close community circle. Claims of rape by a woman perceived to be of 'loose morals' face barriers of disbelief and derision.
- Police appeared to be incompetent at best, and/or biased under power/political influence at worst – a not uncommon phenomenon in Pakistan.

Bayhaya

Profile

Bayhaya is a liberal, educated, urbane woman in her late thirties based in one of Pakistan's metropolises. She is a human rights activist, who sees herself as an 'active citizen', with a responsibility to take a moral stand on issues she thinks are important.

Nature of violence

In keeping with her interest in human rights issues, Bayhaya had attempted to present a counter-narrative to a campaign she perceived as an infringement of human rights, by certain conservative, religious groups. Her counter-campaign activity was carried out in physical spaces, and later publicized on social media and other online spaces.

Whilst the physical activity in public spaces did not elicit any reaction, the publicity of the events online elicited a sharp response. Bayhaya was attacked with sexualized abuse, threatened with rape and death, and eventually accused of Blasphemy. Her work address was also advertised. Some other activists in the campaign also became targets of abuse and violent threats. One of the intermediaries involved in circulating news of the event online was also accused of blasphemy.

Harms

The accusation of blasphemy introduced a unique element into the harms experience and potential risks posed, because of Pakistan's socio-legal and political contextual background. Those accused of blasphemy are often killed extra-judicially by mobs, or languish in prison for years in Pakistan. Lower courts do not risk acquitting such accused and being attacked themselves by vigilantes.

Bayhaya reported experiencing extreme fear and stress. The trauma was multidimensional: she feared for her own and her mother's safety (who lives with her) as well as her employees' safety. She disappeared from online spaces, deactivated all her social media profiles, and stayed away from work for several days.

The intermediary connected with this case feared physical attacks by extremists as a result of the accusations, and apologized to the public for hosting news of the event. Indeed, this fear appears justified because of the frequent attacks on media persons and companies evidenced in Pakistan.

Access to legal remedy

After much consideration, Bayhaya did not access legal remedy. She did not make a formal report of the sexualized abuse or the threats of physical violence to any of the law enforcement agencies for fear of them turning on her. Her fear was rooted in the law-enforcement agencies somehow considering her a blasphemer and instigating her murder. The detailed case study references the murder of the governor of Punjab for merely speaking up in defence of an alleged blasphemer.

Access to corporate remedy

Bayhaya reported Twitter's complaint mechanism to be too lengthy and cumbersome for her to have dealt with at a time she was already under immense stress and pressure to deal with the dangers posed. She did seek remedy from Facebook, which responded to her request to repeatedly take down pages inciting violence against her.

Key issues

- The sexualized attacks and threats of physical violence against Bayhaya represent the onslaught on the progressive segments of society, on freedom of expression and freedom of speech especially with regard to religion, its practice and interpretation in Pakistan. Given that in Pakistan women are almost always at the forefront of human rights movements, such attacks make for an important element of violence against women. Bayhaya's case study indicates that men espousing similar political thought usually face far less abuse, and almost never any sexualized abuse.
- Speech or activism on the Internet appears to obtain vastly different responses to that in physical spaces. The potential of wide and speedy reach of information, as well as the near permanence of an 'event' on the Internet, and the infinitely continuing opportunity for congregation of responders, appears to allow for greater potential of violence and abuse as a response to speech or expression on the Internet.
- The accusations of blasphemy, and consequently the need to hush the whole affair ensured impunity against the violence perpetrated on all.
- The corporate intermediary apologized to the offenders, not the survivors of violence and abuse. Corporates, too, operate in an environment of fear and impunity, not having any assurances of protection from the state.

Baaghi

Profile

Baaghi is an educated, professional, social media savvy woman. She has several years' experience in working on human rights, women's rights, religious minorities' rights, and strengthening of political and democratic institutions. She is an outspoken critic of the state's policy of Strategic Depth Policy (foreign policy for Afghanistan) and the Two Nation Theory (the basis for a theocratic state) espoused by right-leaning, religious political parties and the conservative establishment of the country.

Nature of violence


Baaghi has been speaking out for many years on the issues she works on, and her views widely known courtesy the birth of vibrant electronic media in 2002. However, it was not till 2010/11 when Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led the wave of social media popularity that Baaghi's views began to reach huge audiences. This was the time she began to become the target of serious technology-driven abuse and violence.

She was subjected to extreme sexualized violence and graphic abuse on Youtube, her own blog, other blogs, Facebook, Twitter and via email. The attacks were in their "*hundreds*", many threatening rape and murder. The abuse peaked in 2011/12 and includes accusations of her being anti-Pakistan, of committing treason, of being an 'Indian agent', of being anti-Islam, of being blasphemous, of indulging in promiscuous sexual behavior, of 'sleeping with' politicians and parliamentarians, of being a woman of loose morals, of running 'brothels', of being a prostitute; it includes her photographs being harvested and morphed onto bodies of porn stars and circulated; and it includes fake accounts in her and her daughter's names circulating pornographic pictures and/ or abuse.

One blog-post leaked her authentic personal documents (e.g., birth certificate, government issued ID card etc.), photos of her and her family, her and her parents' and parents-in-law's addresses, and called for her, her husband and daughter to be "shot at sight". Exactly one month later, Baaghi and her husband came under a gun attack while travelling by car which they survived.

Harms

The continuous emotional and psychological abuse and attacks on her led to Baaghi suffering from depression. Her daughter, too, has been subjected to emotional and psychological abuse, having had her social media accounts hacked, and having seen her mother abused. The daughter now hates her own country, a terrible personal setback for Baaghi. She suffered nightmares of being raped, of her family members being harmed because of her. She has restricted her daughter's movements, who is not allowed, for example, to visit shopping malls or cinema theatres. Both mother and daughter suffered from low self-esteem for a period of time, made better eventually by the support of friends.



The distress and depression caused Baaghi severe sleep difficulties, resulting in migraines. Her work routine and work ethic suffered due to these. Whilst she has overcome her sleep difficulties, she is now a sufferer of regular migraines. Baaghi feels her personality has been affected and she feels much older than her years; feels that she is not the happy, carefree soul she used to be. She has feelings of guilt and blames herself for the emotional abuse her daughter suffered.

Access to legal remedy

Baaghi reported the online violence, threats and incitement to physical violence to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA). She was supported in this effort by the Federal Interior Minister who took personal interest in her case, at the behest of the then President of Pakistan. Yet, despite pursuing her complaint for over a year, nothing came of it. Neither were her attackers identified and apprehended, nor did the abuse stop. She finally gave up on the FIA. The details of seemingly absurd responses and the sluggishness exhibited by the FIA is recorded in the full case study.

Baaghi also registered a case with the police related to the assassination attempt on her and her husband. The net result of that particular case was that in the span of one and a half years, all forensic and circumstantial evidence collected by the police from the site of the shooting ‘disappeared’, police files of her case ‘stolen’, eight investigation officers changed, and the single eye witness to the shooting found dead of ‘unknown causes’.

Access to corporate remedy

Baaghi had a particularly bad experience in trying to obtain remedy from Twitter. Her repeated use of Twitter’s mechanisms to report abuse, incitement to violence, impersonation etc. failed to obtain any results whatsoever. Neither were these accounts suspended, nor did the abuse stop. The mechanism to report impersonators and have their accounts suspended, in particular, was onerous in the extreme and therefore largely useless as a remedial tool. Baaghi, with a following of over 70,000 at the time of case writing was also unable to obtain an authenticated or ‘verified’ account for herself from Twitter. Her failed attempts, Twitter’s responses and the spectacularly unhelpful policies of Twitter are recorded in detail in the case study.

Baaghi’s experience with Facebook was not positive either. Pages inciting violence and/or misogynist/ abusive in nature were not blocked by Facebook (details in the case study).

Key issues

- Baaghi, despite being one of the more influential citizens of Pakistan, with the then President and Interior Minister supporting her efforts, was unable to obtain any legal remedy via the police or the FIA. The case study details certain political contexts and a clash of doctrines between important stakeholders that may help explain this rather inexplicable outcome of impunity.

- The violence appears to be targeting her for her political views, and meant to silence her.
- The violence and abuse is not just facilitated by social media, but seems to have been caused and increased by the use of social media, almost exactly in the same way as in the Bayhaya case. Baaghi's television appearances airing similar views did not trigger abuse on the scale witnessed after use of social media became widely popular in the country.
- Whilst the legal or corporate routes failed to provide any remedy, other strategies employed that did help are noted below:
 - Baaghi was able to get one Twitter account, threatening to take her to Taliban held area and rape her to death, blocked with the help of the social media cell of a political party.
 - Blocking thousands upon thousands of accounts appears to have reduced attacks.
 - Stating her views more obliquely, and not naming anyone, also appears to have helped.
 - Interacting with some of her detractors offline has helped her to gain better understanding for the positions she is known for having, and thus helpful in reducing abuse.
 - At the height of the onslaught on her, abstinence from airing her opinions on social media whilst continuing to write her newspaper columns and appearing in television talk shows, also drastically reduced the abuse.



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Bytes for All (B4A), Pakistan is a human rights organization and a research think tank with a focus on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). It experiments with and organizes debate on the relevance of ICTs for sustainable development and strengthening human rights movements in the country. Its strategic plan delivers in following key result areas (KRA), which include:

- Securing digital rights and freedom of expression for civil liberties;
- Strengthening digital security of human rights defenders & media professionals;
- Ending technology-driven gender-based violence;
- Network building at national, regional and global level; and
- Community development and communications for environmental sustainability

To deliver above-mentioned KRAs, B4A conducts research for evidence-based policy advocacy and capacity building of human rights defenders on their digital security, online safety & privacy.

Globally acclaimed Take Back The Tech Campaign is the flagship of Bytes for All, which focuses on strategic use of ICTs by the women and girls to fight violence against women in Pakistan.

For its work, B4A partners and collaborates with a large number of civil society organizations. B4A's team is dedicatedly committed towards civil liberties in Pakistan.

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