



# FIGHTING ONLINE ABUSE SHOULDN'T BE UP TO THE **VICTIMS** AND/OR **SURVIVORS**

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**W**hile taking no pleasure whatsoever in resurrecting the story of a certain Martha Kay, there cannot be a better real-life example than this to exemplify the pangs of online violence against women.

Both women and men anywhere in the world, sane and perhaps insane alike, will clearly understand how important privacy is, to especially a woman's body. To wake up one day and find your entire nakedness is trending all over social media, is akin to being killed by firing squad

when you have committed no crime. No amount of words could quantify the magnitude of pain Martha suffered on that fateful day, and I suppose subsequent months. That is if she will ever get over it in her lifetime. And, one needn't even have known her

prior to the incident in order to feel the torture meted out to her. Yet this was but one example of so many other women whose images, knowingly and unknowingly, have been splashed all over online media by men seeking to satisfy their sexual ego, without caring at all about the person at the receiving end.

The public was definitely, though not surprisingly, divided in opinion about the above development. To some people, Martha Kay was blamed in the first place for posing before a camera to have her nudity captured. Never mind that this could originally have been in her private space. To those, who suspected the photo to have been leaked by a boyfriend, this was a deplorable and needless act by a very mean man. Others would have done the same to hurt their own girlfriends once the relationship went awry. Yet others simply enjoyed visual satiety as they were treated to image of the body of a beautiful naked young woman. What all this means is that no matter how careful Martha or, for that matter, any woman tries to be in life, in the contemporary digital world, such incidents may never be ruled out provided no deliberate safeguards are in place. And how unfair it is that a person cannot even afford to be naked in their own house! Yes, someone may be peeping through the window with a digital camera, now readily available even on the cheapest smartphone.

Oftentimes, there is a tendency for people to want to hurt someone, because they feel distant in terms of human relations. Similarly, a boyfriend will not expose his girlfriend's nakedness except after they have split up. At this point, they feel like strangers to each other. However, I always like to emphasise that a woman anywhere is a woman

everywhere. That woman being exposed is a mother, sister, cousin, auntie, friend, workmate, employee, grandmother to someone. As human beings, therefore, we must never do unto others what we would never wish done unto us or our very own.

Of course, all this is not to say that there are no women out there who wilfully expose their nakedness either for money or showbiz, but still that doesn't make it right. The fact is that some innocent soul is being scandalised somewhere, especially children. Those who are already parents or those aspiring to be parents should never be party to hurtful online acts, because it could happen to your own child someday. It is therefore important that we all exercise maximum restraint.

Yet while it may not be easy to stop online violence against women, considering how fast information flows, each one of us could play a role in reducing the magnitude of its effect. This could be done by using our own social media platforms to condemn the violence in question, by way of emphasising the danger it poses to our children, for example. We should also desist from the objectification of women and girls through fantasy by deleting such images and videos from our phones and other electronic gadgets, and avoiding forwarding any such information no matter how far-fetched or unreal it may appear to be. Yes, I know that there are hundreds of easily accessible online resources that on the surface look innocent or computer-generated, including blue movies, but while that may be the case, in other cases it could be real, like in Martha's case.

Thus, the need to totally guard against tainting of the mind by

rejecting such resources that promote or those that may trigger online violence against women. Finally, considering the immense undesirability of online violence against women and girls, it ought to be criminalised and therefore be punishable by law. Members of society should then report all suspected culprits to the relevant authorities or flag them as wrong elements to be shunned. Otherwise, just as online violence against women is not an individual problem, in the same way addressing the same should not be entirely left to the victims. An English adage says, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' We could have the saying adapted to read thus: 'It takes a whole village to protect a girl child/woman from online violence.'

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