



XXXI BPW International Congress

17 – 21 November 2024

Resolutions

6.1 7. External Resolution: Ending Online Harm

Title of proposed resolution	Ending Online Harm
Proposed by	BPW New Zealand
Seconded by	To be confirmed
Supported by	
Financial Impact	None

MOTION:

Recognising the increasing prevalence and breadth of online harm and technology facilitated gender-based violence and the exacerbated impact on women, children, and many other vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the breadth of harm facilitated through digital platforms and the internet, including but not limited to Cyberbullying, Hate Speech and Discrimination, Misinformation and Disinformation, Online Grooming, Human Trafficking and Exploitation, Cyberstalking and Harassment, Privacy Violations and Data Breaches, Online Radicalisation and Extremism.

Acknowledging existing BPW International policy: Violence, Video Films and Television (1983-14); Pornography and the Media (1989-05); Violence on Television (1996-15)

Recognising international mechanisms calling for state parties to address online harm, including: the Commission on the Status of Women Agreed Conclusions 2024; General Recommendation no. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular: 5.b and 9.c; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Be it Resolved:

That BPW International and its Affiliates advocate that governments legislate with urgency for:

- a. stronger regulation of online platforms, including introducing global standards for social media reform to ensure effectiveness, connectedness and consistency (e.g. the Center for Countering Digital Hate’s STAR Framework);
- b. improved transparency requirements, human rights protections and independent oversight around the algorithms, advertising, and rules enforcement for online platforms;
- c. rigorous government content filtering systems particularly for child abuse sexual material, with independent accountability mechanisms;
- d. requiring internet service providers to filter with rigour illegal content, with independent accountability mechanisms;
- e. strong civil and criminal penalties for people and organisations who commit online harm;
- f. strong civil and criminal penalties for online platforms that fail to create safe spaces and/or respond adequately when harm occurs;
- g. improved national-level data gathering and reporting on online harm with a socio-demographic lens; and



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- h. more investment in education around online harm that considers how to communicate effectively with target audiences such as young people, other vulnerable groups and potential perpetrators.

RATIONALE FOR THE RESOLUTION:

This resolution is asking for targeted and urgent action to prevent and reduce online harm. This asks for state parties to legislate and act in a number of different ways because this is a complex issue that requires a multi-pronged approach. A 2022 UN report, *Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women A/77/302* which cites a global study and country specific studies that indicate more than 30% of women personally experience online violence. In 2023, the international association of online abuse reporting hotlines, INHOPE, reported that 83% of child sex abuse material (CSAM) depicts children under 13 years of age and 95% of victims were girls. They note that “self-generated CSAM content figures remained consistently high according to hotline analysts”, and “the notable rise in CSAM appearing on mainstream online platforms registered by INHOPE member hotlines in 2023 and an increase in cases related to messaging applications such as Discord, Telegram, Signal, and Enigma.” According to the International Telecommunications Union, around 80% of children in 25 countries report feeling at risk of sexual abuse or exploitation online, while over a third of young people in 30 countries have experienced cyberbullying, with such distressing experiences leading one in five of them to skip school.

In 2023, the Expert Group Meeting on Removal of Child Sexual Abuse Material from the Internet reported that “for every image of child sexual abuse there are two components. There is the effect of the original abusive act depicted and there is the additional layer of harm caused by the child knowing or later learning that images of their abuse, pain and humiliation are now in circulation on the internet.” The Centre for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), an international NGO, has found that 1 in 15 messages to the women in a study, breached Instagram’s community standards and “Instagram failed to act on 9 in 10 abusive messages and violent threats over direct message (DM) reported using its tools and failed to act on any image-based sexual abuse within 48 hours.” The CCHD also report that young women are targeted with eating disorder, self-harm, mental health and suicide content within minutes of joining TikTok. Meta’s internal research (shared via a whistle blower) found that 13.5% of teen girls said that Instagram makes thoughts of suicide worse and 17% of teen girls said that Instagram makes thoughts of eating disorders worse.

As April 2023, two out of three of the global population — over 5 billion people — utilize the internet (Statistica). Globally, legislative action has not kept pace with the role that online platforms play in our lives. In most countries, under the existing regulatory frameworks, there is little that can be done after online harm and abuse has occurred - after something harmful is posted, it can be very difficult to get it taken down and the ramifications can keep re-traumatizing a victim over and over. Women and children have a right to online safety as much as we do in all other spheres of our lives.



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IMPLEMENTATION:

BPW International and its Affiliates:

1. Increase awareness of the impact of online harm on women and children and other political groups through all levels of political engagement.
2. Support and lobby governments to pass legislation.
3. Collaborate with other organisations and NGOs with expertise in online harm to support their work.