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THE RISE OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

What's happening, why it matters and what we can do

OVERVIEW

In 2021 alone, AWARE's Sexual Assault Care Centre saw 191 cases of technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV).

This number has risen steadily over the past 5 years.

Administrator of sex-themed SG Nasi Lemak Telegram chat group gets jail and fine, had 8,000 obscene images

NUS student who secretly filmed women in dorm showers jailed 12 weeks

'Make your username obscure': Telegram chat groups circulating obscene material re-emerge

Repeat offender back in jail for 16 weeks over upskirt videos

Telegram chats like SG Nasi Lemak circulated sexual images and videos of women alongside their personal details without their consent. Non-consensual online circulation soon led to offline abuse like stalking, sexual harassment and assault.

DEFINITION OF TFSV

What is Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence?

Unwanted sexual behaviour enabled by **digital communications technology.**



E.g. Unwanted explicit sexual messages and calls, including attempts to coerce sex or a relationship



E.g. **Image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)**: the non-consensual creation, obtainment and/or distribution of sexual images or videos of another person, or threat to do any of the above (e.g. voyeurism, sextortion)



E.g. Social media, messaging platforms, dating apps and digital cameras

HARMS OF TFSV

TFSV is just as harmful as physical forms of sexual violence, like assault.

"Victims of TFSV do not always have the option to move on. [They experience] levels of trauma comparable with survivors of physical assault, isolation from loved ones and potential professional repercussions, victims of TFSV also face the constant, inescapable threat of being violated repeatedly - whenever their photos or videos are shared non-consensually with new recipients."

- Shailey Hingorani, Head of Research and Advocacy at AWARE



Psychological, emotional and/or physical harm



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



Isolation and/or self-blame



Threat of photos/videos being re-circulated even after they have been taken down

VICTIM-BLAMING

However, not everyone sees TSFV as being as harmful as physical sexual violence.

Responders might blame the victim – and despite any good intentions on the responder’s part, **victim-blaming is harmful.**



Some blame or shame victims for taking intimate photos or sharing these photos with their partners rather than questioning the perpetrator. This transfers the responsibility of the perpetrator to the victim.



Consent is specific. A person sending intimate images to another person does not preclude the implicit consent to share these images with anyone else.

Victims should not be responsible for their perpetrator’s actions.

Victim-blaming also **discourages victims from filing a police report and seeking support** for their recovery journey.

CURRENT LAWS AND POLICIES

What are the current laws and policies surrounding TFSV?

The Singapore Penal Code now criminalises voyeurism, and the non-consensual creation and distribution of intimate images.



The newly established **Protection from Harassment Court** includes a simplified and faster process for victims of harassment and stalking to file claims.



Institutes of higher learning have reviewed and revised their policies for sexual harassment and assault cases.

However, bystander intervention programmes and mandatory sexual harassment and assault trainings for staff and students remain limited.

Private universities are also not held accountable by any government agency when handling sexual harassment and assault cases. Few private universities have well-defined policies against sexual harassment and assault, or victim care protocols.

LAW AND POLICY SUGGESTIONS

What more can be done?

AWARE suggested the following law and policy changes:



The Protection from Harassment Court should **process cases** filed and **takedown requests** within **48 to 72 hours**.



The government should introduce and enforce a **National Code of Conduct**, and hold all IHLs accountable to the Ministry of Education and Law. The Code should:

1. Include clear definitions for different types of sexual harassment
2. Establish strict standards for reporting, investigation, staff response and survivor-support protocols
3. Mandate same standard of sexual harassment training across universities



Social media should be mandated to share the **digital footprint** of non-consensual images, to prevent them from being uploaded on other platforms after already being taken down once on other platforms.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS (CONT.)

What more can be done?

AWARE suggested the following law and policy changes:



Report and redress procedures should focus on a survivor's recovery process, in addition to enforcing punitive measures against perpetrators. This can be done by:

1. Consulting a survivor before proceeding with case investigation
2. Providing regular updates on a survivor's case-progress
3. Provide gender-sensitive and trauma-informed support



Mandatory regular bystander intervention and anti-harassment training for all employers and employees across all industries



Public education campaigns on respect, consent, and what constitutes a criminal offence

WHAT CAN I DO?

Policy alone cannot deal with TFSV. Here are some suggestions on how to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

AS AN INDIVIDUAL

If you come across a case of TFSV:

- Do not further circulate images, videos or messages
- Report images, videos or messages to the administrator of the platform
- Inform the survivor if you know them
- You can speak up about the inappropriateness of creating or sharing images / videos non-consensually in the comments



If you know a survivor of TFSV:

- Offer support by listening and validating their feelings and experiences without judgement
- Provide resources like <https://www.solidground.sg/> (a step-by-step guide for those facing online harassment or abuse in Singapore) for survivors without prescribing their course of action
- Learn how to support survivors through AWARE's Sexual Assault First Responder Training



AS AN ORGANISATION

- Consider AWARE's workshops for schools <https://www.aware.org.sg/training/workshops-for-schools/>
- Consider AWARE's corporate training programmes, Catalyse.sg, for you and your company



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CAPE, or the Community for Advocacy & Political Education – a student organisation based in Yale-NUS College – was founded in 2017 by students from Yale-NUS College and the Law Faculty of the National University of Singapore (NUS). An independent and non-partisan community, we aim to build capacity for political literacy and constructive participation in Singapore’s civic democracy.



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