Causes and forms of virtual violence against women

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Abstract: Although technological development has opened a window of freedom for some women through freedom of expression, communication, and work that was not available to them without it, it has opened another window for a new form of violence against women, which is what the report issued by the United Nations in 2015 on virtual violence against women and girls indicated through public opinion polls, the results of which were that 73% of women were subjected to abuse, and the report on virtual violence adds that this type of violence is an extension of emotional violence, as it can be used by the partner in order to continue the emotional relationship as a means of pressuring the woman and controlling her; The study indicated that virtual violence has psychological effects, including distorting the self-image of the girl or woman, which leads her to commit suicide or self-harm behavior, and she may also run away from home as a result of feeling humiliated and afraid of scandal. As for its economic effects on women, they include losing their jobs through defamation and publishing revenge pornographic images. Given the lack of studies conducted on this topic, this study came to stand on its causes and identify its most important types, especially the virtual violence that the university girl may suffer from, the current research aims to:

-    Identify the causes of virtual violence to which the female university student is exposed.

-    Identify the forms of virtual violence to which the female university student is exposed.

Accordingly, the sample consisted of (100) female university students who were directed to an open survey questionnaire about the reasons for the virtual violence they are exposed to and its common forms. The results showed that the most common causes of digital violence are: weak family supervision, which came at a rate of 98%, and the least common is the need for love among girls, at a rate of 30%, while the most common type of digital violence appeared to be electronic blackmail. The study presented a number of recommendations to reduce digital violence, including: establishing and creating specialized centers in psychological counseling that care for victims of electronic crimes in general and women in particular, to reduce cases of suicide and running away from home.

Keywords: Causes and forms of virtual, violence against

1. Introduction:

Virtual violence and abuse against women have recently spread widely in light of the great technological openness, and its forms include: blackmail, threats of violence, collecting documents, harassing messages, exchanging pornographic content, and sexual harassment. In this regard, a study conducted by the United Nations on virtual violence indicated that this type of violence is an extension of emotional violence, as it can be used by the partner in order to continue the emotional relationship as a means of pressuring the woman and controlling her. The study indicated that electronic violence has psychological effects, including distorting the self-image of the girl or woman, which leads to suicide or self-harm behavior, and she may also run away from home as a result of her

feeling humiliated. As for its economic effects, they are in losing her job through defamation and publishing revenge pornographic images.

Although the Internet has opened a window of freedom for some women through freedom of expression, communication and work that would not have been available to them without it, it has, in return, opened a door to a new form of violence against women, as indicated by a study issued by the United Nations in Arab countries in 2020 during the Corona pandemic on electronic violence against women and girls through public opinion polls that included a number of Arab countries (Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Yemen). The results showed that 70% of women were subjected to abuse and violence through the Internet. The results also showed that the highest percentage of digital violence against women is in Iraq, at 70.4%. The study also indicated that electronic violence led to depression and sadness in most women, and that some of them had suicidal thoughts as a result of this violence. other studies also recorded an increase in the percentage of women being exposed to digital violence, including a study conducted in Tunisia by (Al-Alani), Director of the Center for Research, Studies, Documentation and Media on Digital Violence against Women, in which she indicated that four out of five women were subjected to violence through the digital space. The results also showed that 95% of women are victims of digital violence, and most of them prefer not to resort to the judiciary for fear of society's view or their ignorance of the law. Some of them justified the reasons by saying that the current laws are general and do not keep pace with the development of society, as they deal with these crimes as communication crimes rather than gender crimes. (Daghrash, 2016)

In Algeria, (Wasar, 2021) conducted an analytical study in which the researcher aimed to investigate the reasons for the spread of digital violence against women and what are the deterrent means for it. She concluded that its reasons are women's failure to maintain their privacy and the details of their private lives. As for the deterrent means, it may be to review the laws that limit this phenomenon, which is to impose penalties on individuals who practice digital violence on electronic communication sites (Wasar, 2021, p. 278).

In Iraqi society, studies that tried to highlight virtual violence have addressed it from anthropological rather than psychological frameworks, including: the study (Farhan, 2016) that tried to present an anthropological vision of the topic of virtual society through a descriptive field study according to the anthropological approach, which aimed to focus on women in virtual society, and it concluded that virtual society lifted social restrictions in real society to build social relations between the sexes, as (79%) of the sample formed relationships with both sexes. (Farhan, 2016) Therefore, the current research sheds light on electronic violence from the psychological aspect, trying to identify its causes from the point of view of female students at the university level and its most common forms. Therefore, the importance of this research comes as a result of the scarcity of research conducted in Iraq in the field of virtual violence directed against women from a psychological point of view, which is a new violence that we are trying to shed light on in order to limit its negative effects and develop psychological treatments and increase awareness for individuals in order to realize its societal and psychological risks.

Definition of terms:

The following is a definition of the terms used in the current research:

Violence Against Women: United Nations 1993: "It is any gender-based violence that is likely to result in physical or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts and arbitrary or coercive deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in a public place or in private life" (United Nations General Assembly, 1993: 3).

Digital violence: A form of violence practiced through electronic communication sites and includes all deliberate and repeated behaviors that take the form of a threat directed by an anonymous person and the victim is characterized by her inability to defend herself. (Wasar, 2021, p. 263) The researchers adopted the definition of Wasar, 2021 as a theoretical definition.

Research objectives

- Identify the causes of virtual violence to which the female university student is exposed.

- Identify the forms of virtual violence to which the female university student is exposed.

Research limits: The current research is limited to female students of Al-Mustansiriya University for morning studies for the academic year 2021-2022.

First: Virtual violence

In the beginning, as specialists, we must ask ourselves what virtual violence means? If virtual reality creates a strong sense of "presence" in individuals, do virtual experiences seem similar to their physical counterparts? Can virtual violence have psychological consequences similar to physical violence? Let us clarify the concept of virtual, as it appeared in the late eighties to indicate the imagination caused by technological means, allowing it to be called by name as much as it relates to the effect or result, then establishing a new type of communication, within a virtual context, and is the beginning of a stage of rupture with traditional communication models in perceiving and managing reality and establishing a new vision based on interactivity and communication. (Mahmoud, http://pulpit.alwatenvoice.com).

The term virtual reality was coined by Jaron Lanier in the late 1980s, and virtual reality in this sense is often considered a visual construct that is perceived based on spatial dimensions in length, width, and depth (Piet et al., p. 106). Perhaps one of the rights that women obtain in the virtual community is the right to communicate and confidentiality of correspondence, as programs provide privacy and women determine its nature through what they want to appear from the components of their accounts and to specific people they specify, in addition to the confidentiality of the conversations they conduct. Therefore, women feel more freedom when speaking on communication programs. Despite the cultural restrictions that determine the nature of dialogues, conversations that do not occur face-to-face give a greater ability to express themselves through written correspondence. Virtual communities give women the ability to work and trade widely and to a large audience by publishing products or goods through the social sites in which they participate, which is something that women are bound to do in their real community. Women in the virtual community are committed to a set of duties to ensure the continuation of interaction, as the other party must be respected. The other in interaction and respecting the ideas of others and trying to express an opinion without imposing it, otherwise this will lead to the interruption of the communication channel between the two parties, as social networking sites and their programs give the possibility of blocking subscribers from personal accounts to ensure the right to freedom of communication and correspondence, as anyone can block any unwanted account or that could cause harassment to the participant (woman or man) permanently or temporarily, so these sites give a set of universal rights shared by all participants in them of different nationalities, ages and gender, but the prevailing culture to which the women participating in the communication process belong is what determines the form and nature of these rights permanently and formulates them in its own mold; The virtual world is a social world that opens up on the Internet, spacious

for hundreds, thousands, even millions of network users, and hidden_real personalities grow in a social atmosphere with its own specifications that often resemble real specifications in normal life. (Farhan, 2016, p. 25)

When violence moved from the real, lived reality to the virtual reality produced by globalization and modern technology, it acquired other features, methods, and new types, imposed by this space through its characteristics that allow perpetrators of violence to escape their crimes without any punishment, and also make its commission an easy process that does not contain great danger.

In this regard, a study was conducted (Khadda and Muhammadiyah, 2018) that aimed to investigate the nature of the impact of electronic violence on social networking sites on social relationships among a sample of young people, as well as to reveal the difference in this impact according to the variables of age and gender. We adopted the exploratory descriptive approach and used a questionnaire that was conducted. Designed for the purpose of conducting applied studies. Through the results obtained, it was found that the nature of the impact of electronic violence practiced on social networking sites on social relationships is negative, and it was also shown that the nature of this impact does not differ according to gender, nor does it differ according to age. (Khadda and Muhammadiyah, 2018), (Sun, et al, 2023)

The causes of virtual violence against women

There are several factors that contributed to the practice of violence against women, and we can divide them into two sub-factors:

1. **The family:** The family represents the first social system that the individual knows, and it has its own characteristics and functions that affect society. The family is the basic building block that gives the individual the culture, values, customs and trends prevailing in society. Most researchers confirm that the role of the family in raising the individual and its success is that it is a body of social control. It is an important factor, as when the family fails in socialization, no other social system will be able to compensate for this failure, and this is confirmed by a study (Cooley, 1995), (Hamad et al.2022) in America that disintegration in the family is a strong cause of deviance and individuals falling into violent and aggressive behavior.

2. **Social factors outside the family include:**

   Media: The media is one of the main components and the most profound in influencing the individual. Sociologists view the media as the most prominent external factors associated with the spread of violence in many societies. The media also broadcast images and practices of violence against women and publish morally obscene pornographic images that offend women. Which contributes to the continuation and spread of violence through its negative impact on women**.**

   Political tyranny: It is one of the causes of violence against women, which prevents the development of society in general, which stands as a stumbling block, and the frequent wars and the culture of violence they leave behind, the widespread killing and violation of human rights, and the destructive results they produce for stability, cohesion, security, and social peace, and the unemployment, poverty, and need of all of this. It leads to frequent violence against women (Al-Kaabi, 2018, pp. 21-22).

3. Theories that explain virtual violence against women

The Frustration-Aggression Theory

The theory is based on the assumption that there is a link between frustration and aggression, as there is a link between frustration as a stimulus and aggression as a response. The essence of the theory is that all frustration increases the likelihood of an aggressive reaction, and that aggression is a normal behavior for the individual to maintain his self-esteem if he is frustrated (Abdul Ghaffar, 1996, p. 112).

Among the conclusions about the relationship between frustration and aggression, which can be considered as the specific psychological foundations of this relationship, are the following: -

First: The intensity of the desire for aggressive behavior varies according to the amount of frustration that the individual faces.

Second: When the individual is exposed to frustration and responds aggressively against the source of his frustration, the psychological energy that he possesses is released, and the tension caused by frustration goes away, so the individual's internal balance returns.

Third: Stopping aggressive behavior in situations in which the individual is exposed to frustration makes him feel new frustration; because preventing aggression is considered new frustration that increases tension and develops the desire for aggression, which makes the person Ready for aggression for any simple stimulus from the environment.

Fourth: The person falls into a conflict due to frustration if his desire to attack the source of frustration is equal to his desire to suppress aggression, and this conflict is resolved by giving one of the two desires precedence over the other. If he cannot, he feels a new frustration. (Al-Tawab, 1994: p. 199), and there are two types of frustration: material frustration, which appears as a result of some material factors that prevent the individual from achieving his work, and social frustration, which is related to society and its culture, especially the individual's relationships with others (Fayed, 2005, p. 237), (R. Singh et al., 2022)

In 1964, the theory was modified by Berkowitz, who indicated that it is necessary for the individual to have an incentive for aggression for it to occur. He discussed the modification of the frustration/aggression hypothesis and indicated that aggressive behavior arises from internal forces such as anger, aggressive habits, and external stimuli. This hypothesis (aggressive signals) was refuted; and then the importance of aggressive signals for aggressive behavior was removed; This means that the target that causes anger, will show aggression even if the "aggressive signals" are absent, and who added to frustration the characteristic of legitimacy and illegitimacy, and showed that the individual shows a greater reaction when frustration is illegitimate (http://www.gulfkids.com Al-Zaghbi, Ibtisam Abdullah) Previously, a greater external reaction was shown, which is explicit punitive measures towards the innocent partner; and the group that suffers from previous legitimate frustration does that, the theory explained that the individual resorts to directing his aggression to a party other than the party responsible for the frustration, and this means emptying the emotional charge coming from frustration, so according to this theory, stopping or preventing aggression leads to frustration, and since frustration leads to aggression, stopping aggression causes aggression to be provoked again. (Zeigler & Hjelle, 1988:216).

The scapegoat theory

This theory assumes that the weak individual may be a target for aggression because he cannot respond to the aggression in return, and this is done by blaming him because he represents an outlet for the feelings of failure and frustration felt by others (Delicio et al., 2022, p. 7), (Ramesh et al,.2022)

It can be said: The woman becomes the scapegoat or a vessel for frustrations, and in this way others protect their ego and maintain a certain sense of control and self-efficacy, as they tell themselves that if things go wrong, it is not our fault but someone else's.

This mechanism develops unconsciously through projection, which is a psychological mechanism through which we transfer the feelings of discomfort we feel, such as anger, frustration, guilt, shame, insecurity, or envy, to a person (the woman), who is weaker and has few weapons to defend herself.

Here, the woman becomes a vessel for those negative feelings of the individual or society, and thus the scapegoat becomes a means of explaining failure or bad deeds, while maintaining a positive image of oneself. If a person does not get what he wants from the woman in terms of concessions by any name, for example, he can blame her and accuse her without evidence that she was disobeying him because she feels more responsible than him, and then he pressures her through violence and aggression. In this way, he does not even have to think about the possibility that he did not act morally or that he demanded things that are not manly.

We can explain through the theories reviewed above that a frustrated man as a result of any circumstances he is exposed to is able to direct his aggression towards the weaker woman in front of him, regardless of the place, at home or at work, and whether he directs it to his wife, daughter, colleague, or lover, and society does not feel this because they are accustomed to not speaking up and not talking as long as males dominate, especially since our society is tribal and clannish.

Materials and Methods

1- Research sample

To achieve the objectives of the current research, the researchers selected a random sample of female students at Al-Mustansiriya University from the colleges of (Science, Arts, and Education) morning studies for the academic year 2021-2022 and for the third and fourth stages.

2- Questionnaire of the reasons that make women victims of virtual violence from the point of view of the university girl:

It required constructing a questionnaire to achieve the research objectives, and this took place through the following procedures:

A. **Preparing the questionnaire paragraphs and their instructions:** One of the basic steps is to collect the paragraphs and formulate them in an understandable and clear manner after planning the scale and determining the meaning of the concept. This is done by reviewing the literature, previous scales, and studies that dealt with that concept. The researcher reviewed the literature on violence against

women in general and digital violence in particular. The researchers formulated a set of questions that were presented to the students and were clear and understandable to them. After transcribing the data and using percentages to arrive at the most common reasons for women becoming victims of digital violence.

Results

The questionnaire was applied to a sample of (100) female students at Al-Mustansiriya University. The data was transcribed and after using statistical methods, the following results were reached, according to the table below:

Table 1: The reasons why women become victims of digital violence from a university girl's point of view

No	Reason	Percentage
1	Weak family control over girls	98%
2	Girls' lack of awareness of the dangers of misusing social networking sites	80%
3	The expansion of the digital environment and the increase of Internet applications	80%
4	Lack of awareness among parents in helping their children when they are exposed to electronic problems	76%
5	Feeling lonely, isolated and empty	72%
6	Audacity, recklessness and misunderstanding of freedom	70%
7	Girls' lack of awareness of the need to maintain personal privacy	60%
8	Decline of the moral value system among young people	45%
9	Caller anonymity and identity concealment	30%
10	The emotional gap between girls and parents	30%

While the results related to the nature of the question about the most common type of virtual violence indicated that electronic blackmail.

Recommendations:

Establishing and developing centers specialized in psychological counseling that care for victims of electronic crimes in general and women in particular to reduce cases of suicide and running away from home.
Spreading awareness in Iraqi families by holding awareness seminars in the media explaining the danger of electronic violence and that women must be more careful in preserving their privacy and personal information.

The capabilities of community police personnel should be strengthened in order to confront virtual violence, especially since Iraqi society has recorded the highest cases of violence.

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