

## **Stop Online Violence Against Women**

An important meeting was convened at the Knesset last Tuesday, by the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality, on the growing phenomenon of violence against women on the internet and in social networks. A', our client, bravely stood up and spoke about the nightmare that she is living through, as the violence that she was used to during her marriage now has become a public attack totally exposing her and her children and the people she loves, causing unknown damage to her now and possibly to her family in the future.

A' suffered from violence since the beginning of her marriage 7 years ago. Her husband then had hit her, and was verbally and sexually abusive. She eventually managed to escape to the safety of a women's shelter with her two young children. During the divorce process her ex-husband even kidnapped her son and hid away with him for months, before, through the Police and with help from The Rackman Center, her son was found and safely returned to her. Since that event, her ex-husband has been under house arrest. However, no restraining order or arrest has put an end to his ability to maliciously attack her. This time, however, it is not physical, but written online for anyone to see. He continues to abuse her by spreading lies, sharing personal information, posting up photos of her and her children and falsifying photos to make it look like her naked.

A' was interviewed by YNet on Sunday, where she said, "I am divorced for almost a year. I lived in the shadow of violence for seven years, physical violence, verbal, sexual violence, and even today, after I divorced, my divorcee and is currently under house arrest handcuffed – but I still suffer every day from violence in the social network."

She added: "It's a humbling experience. Every day I get up in the morning to face new publications, on all kinds of sites, including Facebook, simply distributing all kinds of information about me, most of which are false. There is exposure of the photos - of my little children, of my family, of people who are close to me. Recently he published pictures including nude photos, and seeing what he writes is very difficult. This is violence in every respect. When violence is physical or verbal, usually it happens within four walls, indoors, and it is possible to hide, and for no one to find out. But as soon as things are posted on a social network, the post rises into the air and there is no way to stop it. To put it simply, my private life is now exposed to everyone's opinions. Everyone in the world sitting at a computer, can view the pictures he claims are of me naked and know the personal details about my life. It shakes me – my life is trampled on".

A' continued to say how she had tried to stop this on-going attack by turning to the police, but they have not been able to control it. In fact, by filing her complaint, it further exposed all the images and writing online that is mortifying to see. She is waiting for an indictment which may well take a long time while in the meantime she suffers constant fear every day and it is ruining her life. "I feel threatened every day and I consider and check my every move. My fight is to live in dignity, not just to live."

A' is by far not the only one suffering from this type of violence and this has come to the forefront because it is a growing phenomenon. A' has bravely come forward in the hope of protecting not just herself, but also others who suffer like her. The Rackman Center stands by her side and is providing her legal and emotional support through this ordeal. We very much hope that we will see a change very soon and that A' can finally enjoy life and not live in fear of violence anymore.



*Violence on the internet. "It shakes you to the core, my life is crushed" (Photo: Eli Mandelbaum)*

As the YNet article states, not only the Knesset is trying to find a solution to this problem. State Prosecutor Shai Nitzan yesterday issued a new directive regarding the Video Act, designed to deal with the growing phenomenon of posting photos, videos or recordings of sexual nature to networks and via applications, when advertising was done without the consent of subjects.

As stated by the State Attorney's Office, the new directive emphasizes the public interest to prosecute this offense, given the rising phenomenon and the significant violence towards the victims. Alongside criminal enforcement and investigation processes, the new directive also refers to the need to remove the offending content from the Internet.

The "Video Law", enacted in January 2014, states that sexual harassment also includes "publishing a photograph, film or recording of a person that focuses on his sexuality, in circumstances in which the publication is likely to humiliate or degrade, and where consent was not given to the publication." For this offense, the law provides a penalty of five years in prison. There has been a huge increase in the number of reports of these offenses since the law was passed three years ago. It was reported that since the law was passed, the State Attorney's Office received dozens of investigations for violations of this nature and so far only 30 have been filed for indictments.

The Rackman Center will continue to fight for our client, and for the protection of all women (and all people) against this violence on the internet.

The content for this article was written by the Rackman Center with translations from the YNet article in Hebrew [here](#).