



GENDER
EQUITY
VICTORIA

ADVANCE EQUITY. PROMOTE HEALTH. PREVENT VIOLENCE.

MEDIA RELEASE

1 June 2018

A new approach to preventing online harassment of women

With funding from the Victorian Government announced today, Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is leading a new initiative to combat sexism and harassment of women online.

Almost half of all Australian women have experienced online harassment, commonly occurring on social media and online discussion forums. Women under 30 are particularly vulnerable to online abuse, with over three-quarters experiencing harassment.

Online sexism and harassment is often targeted at women, and it can quickly escalate to more extreme and threatening forms of online abuse underpinned by misogyny, racism and homophobia.

“The internet provides ways for women to connect, express opinions and thoughts and be heard online, but it can also contribute to a culture of gender inequality, disrespect and violence against women.

We need to make the internet safe for women,” said Kristine Olaris, GEN VIC Convenor.

“We know that it's women who are primarily the targets of online gender-based abuse and that it can have a range of negative psychological, professional and financial impacts. We also know that this abuse censors women's voices. That's why we're so pleased to lead this innovative project to help create a culture of respect, equality and safety in online spaces,” said Ms Olaris.

The Gender Equity Victoria *Online Active Bystander Project* will support people who believe in equality and respect for women to be active bystanders, and to collectively get behind and support people who receive online gender-based abuse in a safe way.

Bystander strategies have been successfully used to address sexism in the workplace and in sporting institutions. This exciting new project will test these strategies in the new terrain in an online context. Bystander action works by encouraging bystanders to identify, speak out about or engage others in responding to sexism, discrimination or violence against women. The active bystander who calls out abusive behaviour can affect not only individual change, but can positively influence community and social-level change.

“We believe the *Online Active Bystander Project* has the potential to transform how people interact online. We're honoured to be working alongside our expert partners –Guardian Australia, Domestic Violence Victoria, Women's Health Victoria, Dr Nicola Henry from RMIT University and the newly formed NOW Australia led by Tracey Spicer – to create this much-needed change,” said Ms Olaris.

The Gender Equity Victoria *Online Active Bystander Project* will commence in July 2018.

-ENDS-

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Kristine Olaris
GEN VIC Convenor
Ph. 9851 3700
genvic@genvic.org.au

ABOUT GENDER EQUITY VICTORIA

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) the Victorian peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women.

Our vision is equality, wellbeing and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in every community of Victoria.

GEN VIC's key priorities are to:

- Advance gender equity
- Promote women's sexual and reproductive health
- Prevent violence against women
- Build an influential and sustainable peak body.

www.genvic.org.au

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON ONLINE GENDER-BASED ABUSE

- 76% of Australian women under 30 and 47% of all Australian women experience online harassment. Social media and online discussion forums are key platforms used to carry out online gendered harassment.
Norton by Symantec (2017) Online Harassment: The Australian Women's Perspective, Symantec, Australia.
- In an online context, for those users who challenge gender norms, behaviours and practices, resistance can quickly elevate into extreme forms of online abuse informed by misogyny, racism and homophobia. It is such online backlash that is increasingly reported in academic literature as an emerging form of violence against women.
Lewis, R, Rowe, M and Wiper, C (2016) Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls, British Journal of Criminology, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom.
- Women targeted for online abuse suffer a range of psychological, professional and financial impacts.
Hess, Amanda. 2014. "Why Women Aren't Welcome on the Internet." *Pacific Standard*, April 3. <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/health-and-behavior/women-arent-welcome-internet-72170/>;
Battersby, Lucy. 2013. "Twitter Criticised for failing to Respond to Caroline Criado-Perez Rape Threats." Sydney Morning Herald, July 29. <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/twitter-criticised-for-failing-to-respond-to-carolinecriadoperez-rape-threats-20130729-2qu8d.html>.
- Online abuse can cause women to self-censor or withdraw from social media altogether to avoid abuse.
Jane, E (2016) Online misogyny and feminist vigilantism, Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, Taylor and Francis Group, United Kingdom.
- Online sexism and gendered abuse is the product of gender inequality.
Fox, J, Cruz, C, Young, Lee (2015) Perpetuating online sexism offline: Anonymity, interactivity, and the effects of sexist hashtags on social media, Computers in Human Behavior, School of Communication, The Ohio State University, Columbus.