ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST

Policy
Briefing

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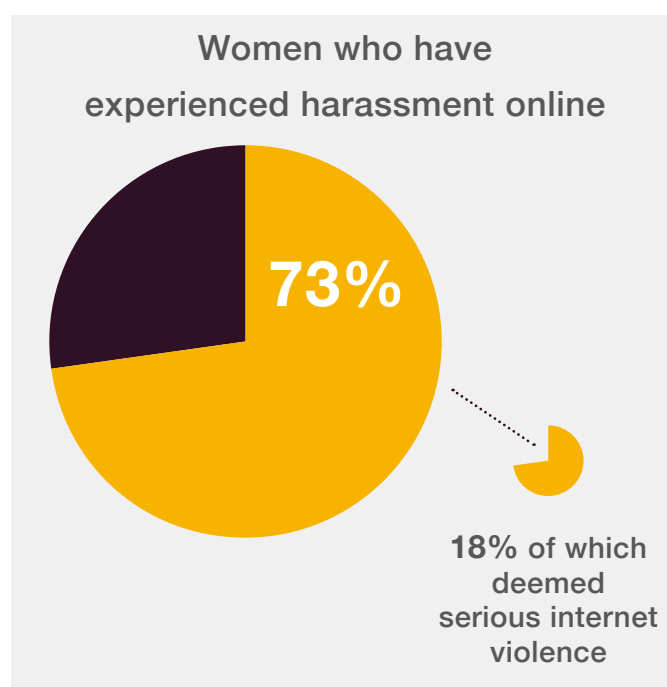
MISOGYNY AND ANTISEMITISM

Sexist Abuse: Online, Offline and Antisemitic

There are inherent and historic structural discriminations that render women's harassment as essentially gender-based. Harassment of women often targets their gender directly, as is rarely the case for men. Gendered slurs, objectification and the minimisation or denial of female agency are commonplace, particularly in online abuse.

The internet has provided new, more opaque channels for perpetrating violence against women and girls; *"[w]hile abusers use different tactics and means, the goal remains the same: to embarrass, humiliate, scare, threaten, silence women and girls, or to encourage mob attacks or malevolent engagements against women and girls".*[1] The oppression of women that existed in the 'real world' was simply transferred and translated to online frameworks.

The European Women's Lobby identified the three-pillars of impunity for online abuse against women: mob mentality, anonymity, online permanency of outrage.[2] In her book 'Gendertrolling: How Misogyny went Viral', Karla Mantilla identified many dimensions of the 'gender trolling' phenomenon: it is targeted at women asserting their opinions, it features graphic sexualised and gendered insults, it occurs at unusually high levels of intensity and frequency, it exists for an unusually long duration (months or even years).[3]

Research carried out by DEMOS in 2014[4], examining the prevalence of misogyny on Twitter, found that in an approximate 6-week period, the word 'rape' was used from UK Twitter accounts around 100,000 times, with 12% estimated as threatening. The oppression of women that existed in the 'real world' was simply transferred and translated to online frameworks.

Women who have experienced harassment online

73%

18% of which deemed serious internet violence

Research carried out by one UN Commission in 2015 found that 9 million girls in Europe experience some kind of cyber violence before turning 15 years old. Further it was discovered that, globally, women are 27 times more likely than men to be harassed online.[5] Worldwide, 73% of women surveyed had reported experiencing abuse online, with 18% (around 9 million women) deeming it serious internet violence.[6]

In November 2017, Amnesty International published the results of its research into online abuse against women. Amnesty similarly found a staggering prevalence of women's experiences of abuse online; 21% of respondents indicated that they had experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, with 36% of this cohort stating that such online experiences made them feel that their physical safety was threatened.[7] Of the women who had

1   https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf

2   https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf

3   Quoted in https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf

4   https://demos.co.uk/project/misogyny-on-twitter/

5   http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?vs=4259

6   http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/cyber-violence-report-press-release

7   https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/Resources/OVAW%20poll%20report.pdf

experienced online abuse, 47% found the harassment to have misogynistic elements, and 27% received some form of threat of physical or sexual assault.[8] As Amnesty's Laura Bates has said, the psychological impact of such abuse is not necessarily recognised.[9] Amnesty has been criticised for omitting antisemitism from this and subsequent reports.[10]
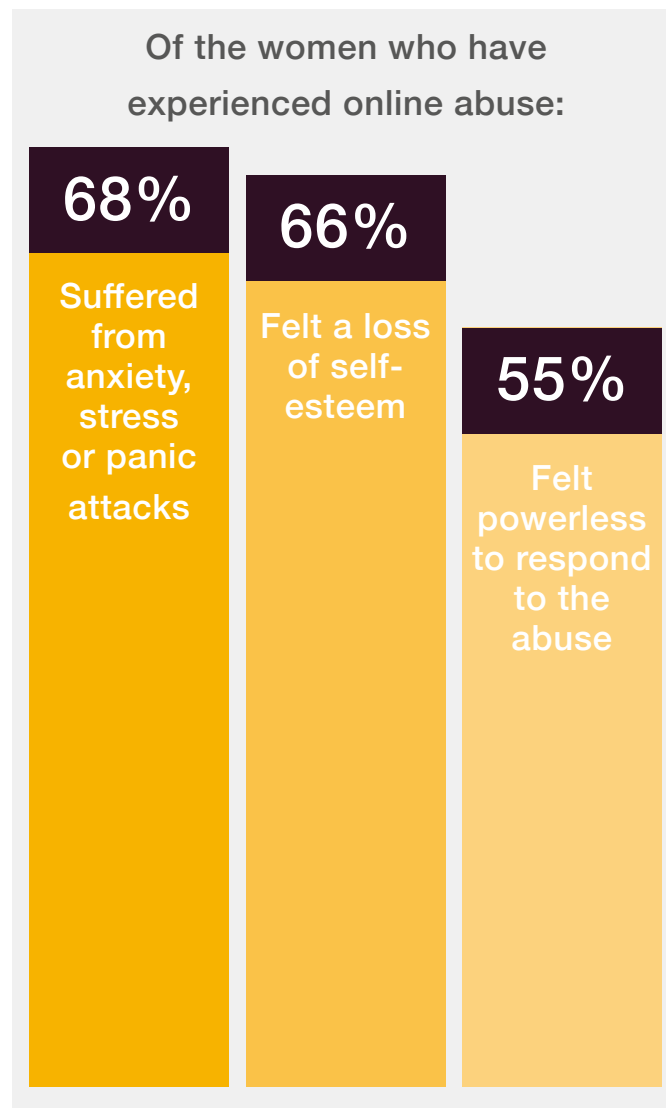
Violent trolling is not the only abuse women have to contend with. As Global Fund for Women, Women's Aid and others have demonstrated, there are links between online and offline abuse in domestic violence, stalking and sexual violence.

UN Women have continually emphasised that online violence against women is just as harmful and damaging as physical violence.[11] Of the victims of image based online sexual abuse (revenge porn), 93% said they suffered significant emotional distress due to being a victim.[12] Amnesty's 2017 research revealed that of the women who were victim to online abuse and harassment, 55% said they experienced anxiety, stress or panic attacks as a result, 68% felt a loss of self-esteem, and 66% felt powerless to respond to abuse.[13]

For politically active women more specifically, online abuse acts as a direct barrier to their freedom of expression and political participation. As outlined by founder of Glitch!UK, Seyi Akiwowo, the *"anti-democratic impact of…violence through digital technology undermines a women's sense of personal security that leads to women's self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse and correspondence"*.[14]

Amnesty found that around two-thirds of women who had experienced online abuse in the UK felt

apprehensive about using the internet or social media.[15] The European Women's Lobby recognised that this, in turn, isolates women from the social fabric; *"[t]o be disconnected from technology in the 21st century, it's like having your freedom disrupted: your right to work, your right to meet people, your right to learn, your freedom of speech"*.[16]

Of the women who have experienced online abuse:

68% Suffered from anxiety, stress or panic attacks

66% Felt a loss of self-esteem

55% Felt powerless to respond to the abuse

8   https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/more-quarter-uk-women-experiencing-online-abuse-and-harassment-receive-threat

9   Quoted in https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/Resources/OVAW%20poll%20report.pdf

10   https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/amnesty-international-criticised-for-not-including-antisemitism-in-report-on-online-abuse-1.474093

11   http://www.unwomen. org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/ publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report. pdf?vs=4259

12   https://www.cybercivilrights.org

13   https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/Resources/OVAW%20poll%20report.pdf

14   https://seyiakiwowo.com/2018/06/21/founder-director-glitchuk-seyi-akiwowos-intervention-notes-at-un-human-rights-council/

15   https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-abuse-women-widespread

These on-and-offline attacks are impacting public participation and democracy. In the UK, numerous female MPs have been victim to perpetual antisemitic abuse. On 17 April 2018, a general debate on antisemitism took place in the House of Commons, during which female MPs movingly recounted their experiences of antisemitism.[17] Luciana Berger MP spoke of the torrent of antisemitic abuse she has been victim to, the extremity of which is evidenced in the four convictions (including three imprisonments) which have been implemented for the racist abuse directed towards her since 2013. Ruth Smeeth MP also emphasised the obscenity of the antisemitic abuse she had been victim to, reading out the gravely abusive tweets she had received, including: *"The gallows would be a fine and fitting place for this dyke piece of Y*d s**t to swing from"*. Female MPs, including Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge, Dame Louise Ellman, Stella Creasey and Jess Phillips, for example, have encountered

similar abuse. Antisemitic abuse towards female public figures is not a new phenomenon, and not only cause psychological distress, but in some cases also inhibits their full democratic freedom.

This overlap between antisemitism and sexism was shockingly articulated by Kevin Myers in a column for the (Irish) Sunday Times headlined *"Sorry ladies, equal pay has to be earned"*. He wrote *"I note that two of the best-paid women presenters in the BBC - Claudia Winkleman and Vanessa Feltz, with whose, no doubt, sterling work I am tragically unacquainted - are Jewish. Good for them. Jews are not generally noted for their insistence on selling their talent for the lowest possible price, which is the most useful measure there is of inveterate, lost-with-all-hands stupidity. I wonder, who are their agents?"* Myers was sacked from the column and offered an apology which itself was considered controversial.[18]

The Intersection of Antisemitism and Sexism: Gender-Based Antisemitic Stereotypes

Research into the intersection of antisemitism and sexism within stereotypes has predominantly focused on the 'Jewish Princess'. The 'princess' stereotype is *"an insult, an injury, and violence that is done to Jewish women…misogyny combined with Jew-hating creates the Jewish American Princess"*.[19] The image of the Jewish Princess remodels the traditional antisemitic tropes onto a female form: she is materialistic, money-grabbing, manipulative, shallow, crafty and ostentatious.[20]

According to Professor Deborah Lipstadt, the Jewish Princess stereotype *"is no less offensive just because the…Jew has been updated and put into a skirt"*.[21] Yet this female version of the stereotype is significantly less challenged and met with substantially less outrage. This may be due to its internal usage within Jewish communities, or perhaps its apparent acceptance reflects society's inherent structural sexism. Further, not only is the stereotype widely deemed socially acceptable, it is often exploited by the media, most notably within mainstream TV or film.

16   https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_report_2017_for_web.pdf

17   https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-04-17/debates/9D70B2B4-39D7-4241-ACF8-13F7DFD8AEB2/Anti-Semitism

18   https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/kevin-myers-anti-semitic-sunday-times-apology-jewish-bbc-claudia-winkleman-vanessa-feltz-a7873336.htm

19   Evelyn Torton Buck, 'From 'Kike to Jap': How misogyny, anti-semitism and racism construct the Jewish American Princess'

20   Ibid

21   Deborah Lipstadt, 'Anti-Semitism Plays Coy in 'Jewish Princess' Jokes'

Gender Gap in Experiences of Antisemitism

There is a gender gap in both the experience and perception of antisemitism within the UK. In 2014, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) commissioned research into the sentiments among Jews in the United Kingdom, including an analysis of disparities between men and women.[22] Interestingly, a larger proportion of women than men believed antisemitism to be a problem in the UK (52% compared to 45%), and more women than men believed antisemitism to have increased (69% compared to 63%). Despite women being apparently more fearful and sceptical about antisemitism, in 2014 fewer women than men reportedly experienced antisemitic harassment (17% compared to 24%). These results could evidence a greater threat generally felt by women during periods of disruption or it might signify significant under-reporting.

A staggering proportion of online abuse goes unreported. Amnesty's 2017 research found that 20% of women who experienced online abuse or harassment on social media took no action whatsoever, only 20% reported the abuse to the relevant social media platform, and just 6% reported to the police. The most common response to such experiences was to block the abusive account, with 56% of women taking this course of action.[23]

Better Understanding and Addressing Antisemitism Against Women

In 2018, the year that marked 100 years since women finally, albeit partially, secured the right to vote, the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism, with support from the Antisemitism Policy Trust and the UK Government, hosted the 'Sara Conference'. The aims of the event including to offer solidarity, increase awareness, and to examine the intersectionality of misogyny and antisemitism.

The Antisemitism Policy Trust, together with the Community Security Trust (CST) commissioned data scientist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz to probe the nature of gendered antisemitism online.[24] Davidowitz investigated the neo-Nazi web forum Stormfront. He found more than 9,000 threads related to feminism since its inception. Of those threats, more than 60% mentioned Jews. For context, Jews are mentioned in 39% of all threads on Stormfront on any subject; while 33% of threads on all subjects mention *"blacks"* (a significant shift from what some might perceive as traditional racism). Stormfront members think that Jews are leading the feminist movement.

In general, Jewish female entertainers were found to receive fewer mentions on Stormfront than Jewish male entertainers. However, female Jewish politicians were mentioned more often than male Jewish politicians. The report cited 14% more mentions of female Jewish MPs than male Jewish MPs. The two Jewish parliamentarians with the most mentions on Stormfront since the website was founded in 1996 were Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge MP and Luciana Berger MP. Their mentions exceeded those of Commons Speaker Rt Hon John Bercow MP and former opposition leader Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP.

The fact that Stormfront users are more interested in female Jewish MPs than male Jewish MPs, while the reverse is true for Jewish entertainers, suggests that women with political power are particularly subject to antisemitic abuse. These mentions can include negative comments about their appearance,

22   http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Perceptions_and_experiences_of_antisemitism_among_Jews_in_UK.pdf

23   https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/Resources/OVAW%20poll%20report.pdf

24   https://www.antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/APT-Google-Report-2019.1547210385.pdf

which suggests an overlap between sexist attitudes towards women and antisemitism. For example, on Stormfront, Luciana Berger is called an *"equine-faced Zionist."* Berger's appearance is also a major theme of Google searches about her. Overall, there are more searches for *"Luciana Berger Jew"* than *"Luciana Berger policy,"* or *"Luciana Berger Brexit."* About 3.3% of searches for Luciana Berger are looking for information related to mental health, even though this is a policy area of particular interest to Berger and which she represented in Labour's shadow cabinet from September 2015 to June 2016.

Another piece of research conducted for and revealed at the Sara Conference, by American NGO Media Matters, focussed on gendered antisemitism on online message boards and its subsequent distribution. Media Matters president Angelo Carusone explained that mens' rights activists, white supremicits and others gather in echosystems online and overlap, leading to conspiracism, harassment and efforts to frustrate public engagement.

Antisemitic and misogynistic posts on 4Chan: 2015 and 2017
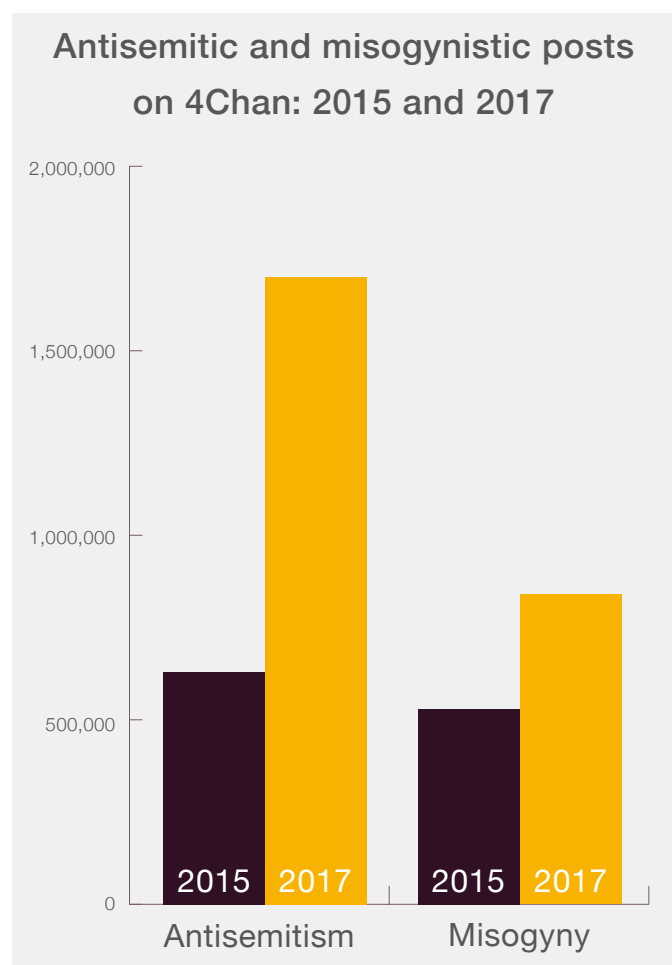
Focussing on one such message board, 4chan, Media Matters found there were, conservatively, 630,000 antisemitic posts in 2015, rising to 1.7 Million in 2017. There were 530,000 misogynistic posts in 2015 and 840,000 in 2017. Looking at posts containing both misogyny and antisemitism, there was an 180% increase from 2015 to 2017.

Jon Boyd from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research explained to the Sara Conference that in statistics JPR has researched, it found those holding antisemitic attitudes to constitute 2-3% of the British population but the diffusion of such attitudes across society to be up to 30%. He noted that YouGov data has indicated British misogynists constitute 2-3% of the population whilst misogynist ideas are held by some 30% of British people. The point being that women, in this case Jewish women, will encounter gendered antisemitism more than misogynist antisemites.

Antisemitic and sexist discriminations involve the notions of power, control, and domination. Jewish women are at the intersection of both antisemitism and sexism. They are considered as different, forced to place their Jewish identity at the forefront of their activism and commitments, rejected in their identity from the common space. The voice of Jewish women is disempowered as a Jew when discussing antisemitism and attacked when defending women's rights. It is being removed from the public space under this dual attack. To this end, the Sara Conference called on individuals, groups and governments to refuse to engage in abuse, set appropriate rules or standards, to educate, expose and explain to those levelling abuse why they are wrong. The Sara Conference was the beginning of a conversation and there must now be a consistent effort to mainstream concerns about gendered antisemitic abuse.

For further details of the Sara Conference or any of the research presented to the conference, or for transcripts, please contact the Antisemitism Policy Trust.

The Antisemitism Policy Trust's mission is to educate and empower parliamentarians, policy makers and opinion formers to address antisemitism. It provides the secretariat to the British All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism and works internationally with parliamentarians and others to address antisemitism. The Antisemitism Policy Trust is focussed on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism.

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