FACEBOOK LGBTQI+ **ONLINE SAFETY GUIDE**

"

In Africa, we have a collective responsibility to stand against bullying, harassment, and other acts that degrade the wellbeing of members of the LGBTQI+ community. Access to information, the right to information and the right to the protection of all people is instrumental.

— *Namibia Diverse Women's Association (NDWA)*

Homosexuality is largely criminalised in sub-Saharan Africa, with strongly enforced anti-LGBTQI+ laws in more than half of the African countries within the region. We all have a role to play in ensuring all people are protected from discrimination and harassment, both offline and online.

— *The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS)*

With over 200 million user accounts[1] , Facebook is one of the most popular social networks in Africa. Users rely on Facebook not only to connect with friends and family around the world, but also to find and create communities. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, in particular, Facebook communities offer a safe space for free self-expression, networking, community-building, and accessing judgement-free information about health and human rights.

Both offline and online, LGBTQI+ people experience homophobia, biphobia and transphobia and face discrimination through hate speech, intimidation, entrapment, blackmail, extortion, assault, invasion of privacy, mob attacks, and state-sanctioned brutality. Facebook strongly believes in the protection of sexual and gender minorities and our community guidelines prioritize protecting the rights and safety of all our users while celebrating diversity of opinion and freedom of expression.

It is important for us all to use our voices to fight against discrimination online and to practice compassion. In the face of online harassment or abuse, it is crucial to remember that you are not powerless. This online safety guide has been developed to assist LGBTQI+ persons, their families, friends and allies in accessing information that will help them safely navigate the digital space and protect themselves and others.

---

1   https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm

WHAT IS
ONLINE
BULLYING?
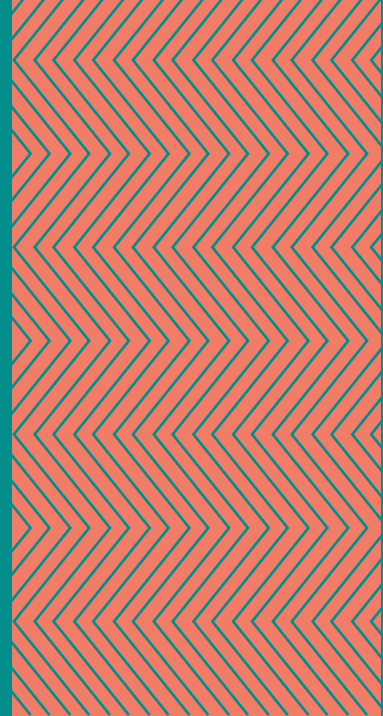
Online bullying is the use of a digital platform to intentionally offend, harass, or threaten someone. Individuals are targeted for a wide variety of reasons, including but not limited to their physical appearance, gender, political views, and sexual orientation. While many seek refuge in digital spaces and find solace within online communities, the internet has also become the setting for adverse experiences and LGBTQI+ people are among one of the most vulnerable populations when it comes to being targets of online bullying.

As access to internet and mobile technology increases in Africa more and more people are connecting online. As such, it is crucial to examine online bullying, its impact, and how it can be addressed. Online bullying affects people of all ages, orientations, genders and gender identities, races and it's a global issue.
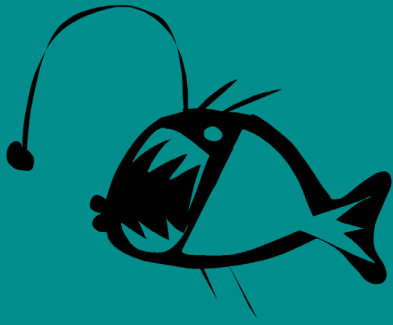
Catfishing

The creation of profiles using fake photos and personas to develop a connection with LGBTQI+ persons and then lure them offline. These encounters usually end in blackmail/extortion or violence.
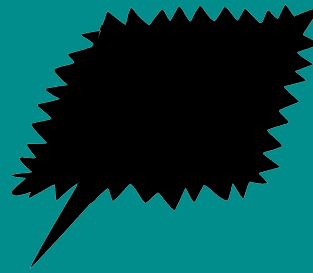
Hate Speech

The use of any kind of speech, writing, or behaviour that attacks or uses degrading and abusive language to demean an individual or group based on race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation. Oftentimes, this includes implicit or explicit threats of violence and/or arrest or reporting to authorities.

Targeted Harassment

Behaviour or language meant to intimidate, degrade, or attack someone with the objective of making them feel unsafe and excluded.

Non-Consensual Intimate Images (NCII)

Leaking or threatening to share/leak intimate images of someone without consent and with the intent to harass, bully, and shame them.

Impersonation/ Stolen Identity

Using stolen images and personas of openly LGBTQI+ people to catfish other individuals or hacking an individual's account and sending unpleasant messages, deleting information or making private information public.

Trolling

Reporting harmless pro-LGBTQI+ accounts and posts as spam or harmful content with the intent of having the accounts taken down by Facebook or Instagram.

For LGBTQI+ people, online bullying turns safe digital communities into spaces of fear and anxiety. But there are concrete actions we can take, individually and collectively, to address the issue.
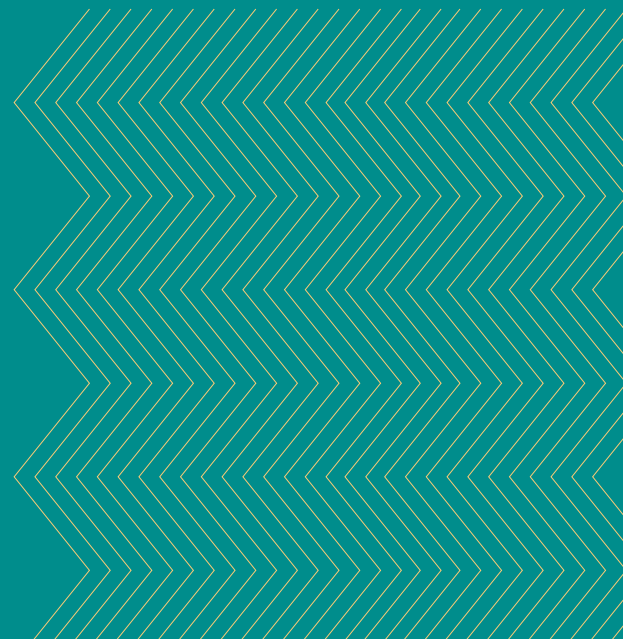
Forced Outing

Disclosing an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity without consent with the intent to cause harm and direct hate and intolerance towards the individual.

6

HOW DOES
ONLINE
BULLYING
AFFECT
PEOPLE'S LIVES?

Violence against LGBTQI+ identifying people is a real and ongoing issue and it is crucial that legal systems in Africa recognize online bullying as a criminal offense. Incidents of violations by both state and non-state actors have grown steadily over the last 5 years and there are countless stories from across the continent that illustrate the gravity and impact of this behavior

TOBI'S STORY

A student posted Tobi's nudes on a Facebook group identifying him as a gay man. This post included Tobi's class, school year registration and the caption carried a popular Yoruba slang (Egungun be kiaful) a warning that is usually followed with the pidgin phrase (Motor go jam you) which means, "You will get hit by a car."

TITI'S STORY

Titi is a young bisexual woman, who has a high-profile job and is a leader in her community. She is very protective of her private life, as she is afraid judgment from others will affect other parts of her life. One day when Titi is at a private gathering with her female partner, she runs into a member of the city council who has just discovered Titi's sexual orientation. This individual has a reputation for targeting LGBTQI+ people and threatening to expose them to their families and employers. After this party, the individual contacts Titi on FB Messenger, incessantly, threatening to out her. This affects Titi's personal life and her professional life, as she lives in constant fear of her world being turned upside down.

FRIDAY'S STORY

Friday recently moved to a new city and started looking to meet other queer men on Facebook. He connected with someone and, when he went to meet him in person, he was attacked by a group of five men, who beat him, took intimate photos of him, and then extorted him for being queer. He was held against his will and only released when he paid a ransom.
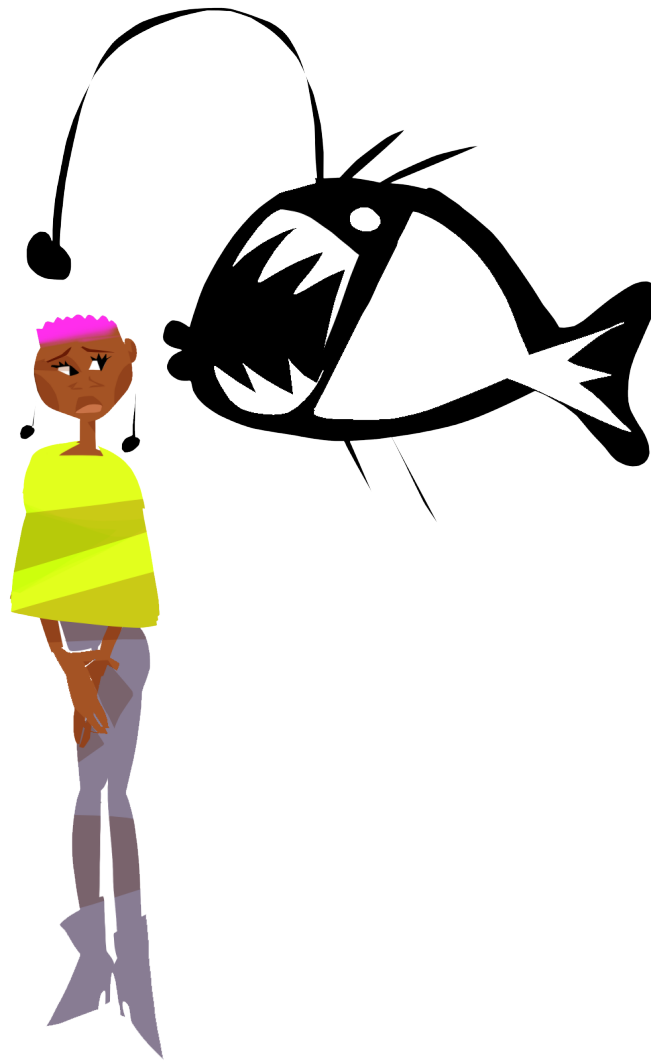
DOLAPO'S STORY

Dolapo connected with someone on Facebook that she thought was a lesbian, like her. They were chatting for a while and sending intimate photos to each other, and they eventually finally agreed to meet in public. When Dolapo arrived at their meeting place, she discovered that she had been chatting with a male military officer who was using stolen photos from another account to lure lesbians for blackmail. He extorted her and subsequently continued to threaten her life.

Targets of online bullying often suffer in silence while feeling isolated and alone. They avoid opening up for various reasons including shame, embarrassment, confusion, and/or fear of retaliation. This is even more complex for LGBTQ+ persons who may be trying to conceal the information being leveraged by their harassers/bullies for fear of being further victimized by family or law enforcement, based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Whether as direct targets or as witnesses, we have the power to call out online bullying and to promote a safe and compassionate online space.

WHAT CAN YOU **DO?**

IF YOU ARE BEING BULLIED

The feeling of being ridiculed, humiliated, and harassed can prevent you from speaking up or trying to deal directly with the issue. This, however, should not deter you from reclaiming your space, maintaining your self-worth, and seeking support. If you are being targeted, there are ways to help you deal with the attack and remind you that you are not alone:

Speak to someone you trust within your family or friend circle

Speak to a school counsellor, teacher, or sports coach that you know you can trust

Report the incident to relevant trusted organizations/institutions that offer protection and advocacy

Remember that you are not powerless and that there are support systems that exist to help you.

WHAT CAN
YOU
DO?

IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW
IS BEING BULLIED

When someone is being violated, it is important to defend them and to figure out how you can provide them with support. Though the issue of online bullying may seem daunting to confront, we have numerous tools at our disposal to confront it and to protect ourselves and others. When you witness online bullying, do not counter-attack. Take action through reporting abusive language and behavior and through posting positive and informative content.

PRACTICAL TIPS

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE WHEN YOU WITNESS ONLINE BULLYING

As a bystander and witness you have the option to intervene and act positively and speak out against bullying in order to protect the dignity of those being targeted. Here are some examples of actions you can take:

Do not forward or share content that constitutes bullying or harassment.

Do not engage and participate in discussions that enhance the acts or words of the bully.

Do not encourage others to log on, comment and see images shared about the victim.

Do take a stand against bullying and, if it is safe, make a direct comment condemning the actions.

Do report and flag the offending content so action can be taken by the platform.

Do reach out to the victim and find out if they're okay, what help they need and let them know you support them.

Do counter the narrative with accurate information where you can.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE WHEN YOU ARE THE TARGET OF ONLINE BULLYING

Being bullied on social media can be very harmful once you are targeted by others. It is important that you protect yourself from online bullying by ensuring you take actions to ensure your safety comes first. Here are some examples of actions you can take:

Do not retaliate harassment, as it is counterproductive and may make your experience worse.

Do avoid catfishing by making sure that when confirming friend requests, you have looked into the persons profile first in order to see if it is an ongoing profile or a recently created profile with little activity.

Do document the abuse (through screenshots, recordings, and copied links) so you can report it to appropriate authorities.

Do block and mute the offending individual(s) and report them formally.

Do report the account to the support team of the platform.

Do strengthen the security of your account by using strong passwords and 2 factor authentication.

Do immediately inform your trusted circle and enlist their help in reporting and condemning the actions of your harasser.

Do practice self-care. Take a few hours to go offline and find support from your friends and loved ones.

Do ask for help from relevant authorities including human rights organizations or security agencies if you feel like your safety is threatened.

If you are in imminent danger, contact the police or emergency services.

16

HOW TO STAY SAFE ON FACEBOOK

FACEBOOK RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS

How can I stay safe and what resources are available to me? There are quite a few ways to ensure that you stay safe online, including learning how to use Facebook's privacy settings and learning how to recognize and report online abuse. Learn more: bit.ly/safe_01

Is there a resource specifically for teens, parents and educators seeking support and help for issues related to bullying and other conflicts? Yes, the Bullying Prevention hub step-by-step plans, including guidance on how to start some important conversations for people being bullied, parents who have had a child being bullied or accused of bullying, and educators who have had students involved with bullying. bit.ly/safe_02

How do I report abusive behavior? The best way to report abusive content or spam on Facebook is by using the Report link near the content itself. Here are some examples of how you can report content to us: bit.ly/safe-03

How do I know what behavior and posts are or are not allowed on Facebook? Facebook has developed a set of Community Standards that outline what is and is not allowed on the platform. Our policies are based on feedback from our community and the advice of experts in fields such as technology, public safety and human rights. bit.ly/safe_04

How do I stay safe while dating on Facebook? While you are the best judge of your own safety, we have outlined some of the things you can do to help keep yourself and the Facebook community safe when using Facebook Dating. bit.ly/safe_05

What actions can I take to keep my account safe? There are several things you can do to keep your account safe and secure. Learn more: bit.ly/safe_06

As a parent/guardian, what should I do if someone is threatening to share something on Facebook that my child wants to keep private? If someone is threatening to share personal information about your child (asking for money or anything else), you have options: bit.ly/safe_07

FACEBOOK RESOURCES FOR GROUPS AND PAGES

What are the privacy options for Facebook groups? If you're a member of a group, you can learn more about how to check the privacy level of your group and whether your group is visible in search and other places on Facebook. If you're an admin of a group, you can learn more about how to change the privacy level of your group and manage whether

people who aren't in your group can find your group in search and other places on Facebook. Learn more: bit.ly/safe_08

How do I check the privacy level of a Facebook group? This depends on whether the group is Private or Public.
Learn more: bit.ly/safe_09

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR
PRIVACY AND SECURITY
ON FACEBOOK

Always remember to log out of your Facebook account when you are done using it on a shared or public device.

Do not share your account or account credentials with others.

If you don't always remember to log off, use incognito/private browsing mode so that your history is not saved on the device.

If a computer or mobile device you used to access your Facebook account is lost or stolen, use another device to initiate a password reset email.

Do not write down or store your password in your files or online accounts.

SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS)
https://theinitiativeforequalrights.org/

Namibia Diverse Women's Association
(NDWA) https://web.facebook.com/
NamibiaDiverseWomenAssociationNDWA