

Digital Space Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGVB): A Project for Empowering Girls and Women to Address and Respond

Dilogini S

Project's Resource Person, Save a Life, Non-government organization (NGO)

Corresponding email: dilo.kuru@univ.jfn.ac.lk

Introduction: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in cyberspace is a growing issue, with online platforms increasingly serving as arenas for harassment, exploitation, and discrimination. Women and girls in marginalized regions, such as Jaffna, Sri Lanka, face heightened challenges due to limited knowledge of digital safety and inadequate legal protections. To address these concerns, save a Life NGO, supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands, launched an 18-month project titled "Empowering Girls and Women in Jaffna to Effectively Address and Respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Cyberspace" on August 1, 2024. The initiative aims to raise awareness, equip participants with essential digital safety skills, and foster proactive responses to online SGBV.

Project Implementation: The project features workshops, training-of-trainers (TOT) sessions, and community engagement programs to enhance digital literacy and awareness of legal protections against cyber violence. Training topics include identifying and reporting cyber harassment, securing online identities, and using digital tools for self-defense. Expert facilitators in digital safety, legal rights, and gender studies guide participants in acquiring practical skills and technical knowledge. Outreach efforts extend to schools, community organizations, and law enforcement, fostering a comprehensive approach to combating online violence.

Impact Assessment: The project's effectiveness is measured through participant feedback, the number of women trained, and community involvement in addressing SGBV in cyberspace. Early results indicate increased awareness of online harassment and strengthened capacity among women and girls to safeguard themselves digitally. Support networks for cyber violence victims have been established, offering legal and psychological assistance. Community advocacy has also grown, with local leaders promoting online safety and supporting the initiative.

Findings: Initial findings reveal that women in Jaffna often struggle to identify and address online harassment due to limited digital and legal knowledge. The project effectively bridges these gaps through practical training and education. It also underscores the critical role of families and community leaders in overcoming societal stigma and fostering support for victims.

Recommendations: To enhance impact, the project should expand its reach to rural areas within Jaffna District and conduct follow-up training to reinforce learning. Policymakers should be engaged to strengthen legal protections and expedite justice for victims. Additionally, integrating schools and universities into the initiative could instill lifelong online safety habits among younger generations.

Keywords: Community-level, Digital space SGBV, Empowering Girls and Women, Training of trainers (TOT), Workshop sessions