



PANEL DISCUSSION REPORT

Digital Violence, Collective Shaming, and Justice for Women in Online Space

Organized by WOREC Nepal:

Facilitated by Sunita Mainali; Executive Director of WOREC

13 April 2026 (30 Chaitra 2082BS)

Executive Summary

This report documents the proceedings of a virtual panel discussion organized by the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC) Nepal, focused on the intersection of digital platforms, democracy, and gender-based violence. The discussion brought together a researcher and feminist activist, a journalist, an artist-activist, and a legal practitioner, each offering a distinct vantage point on an increasingly urgent concern: the systematic use of online spaces to silence, shame, and surveil women and marginalized communities in Nepal.

The discussion surfaced a pattern that extends well beyond individual incidents of online harassment. Panelists documented how the same power structures that constrain women's participation in public life politically, socially, and culturally are now finding potent expression in digital spaces. The mechanisms differ; the intent does not. Whether through coordinated trolling of women politicians, the circulation of manipulated videos, or the routine dismissal of women's intellectual contributions as fodder for body-based commentary, these acts share a common logic: to establish the terms on which women may, or may not, speak.

The panelists called for digital violence to be treated as a state emergency, and for a feminist movement that is as active and organized in digital spaces as it is in physical ones.



Speaking Up, Silenced Online

Digital Violence, Collective Shaming & Justice for Women in Nepal

VIRTUAL PANEL DISCUSSION



11:00AM - 12:30 PM



Meeting ID: 926 8117 8744
Passcode: 991298



13th April 2026

Moderator



Sunita Mainali
WOREC

Speakers



Rita Sah
Researcher/ Activist



Nisha Adhikari
Artist/ Activist



Aarya Chand
Journalist



Sushmita Chhetri
Lawyer

Background and Context

The rapid expansion of internet access and social media usage in Nepal has brought with it a corresponding expansion of the spaces in which women are subject to harassment, surveillance, and reputational attack. What might once have been confined to the street, the home, or the workplace has found new and often more virulent expression online, where anonymity, scale, and permanence combine to amplify harm significantly.

The panel discussion was convened to examine these dynamics to name them, document them, and articulate a framework for response. Participation was drawn from activists, legal professionals, journalists, and civil society stakeholders, reflecting an understanding that digital violence is not a narrow technical issue but a structural one with implications across law, culture, media, and governance.

The discussion was facilitated by Sunita Mainali, ED of WOREC Nepal, an organization with a long-standing commitment to documenting and responding to gender-based violence in its various forms.

Panelists

The panel comprised four practitioners whose work spans the fields most directly implicated in digital violence: legal practice, journalism, activism, and feminist research.

Panelist	Designation	Area of Focus
Rita Sah	Researcher & Feminist Activist	Political representation, intersectionality of online and offline violence

Nisha Adhikari	Artist & Activist	Psychological impacts of digital harassment, moral policing of women
Aarya Chanda	Journalist	Media representation, gendered online discourse
Sushmita Chhetri	Legal Practitioner	Legal frameworks, justice mechanisms, and victim/survivors support

Key Themes and Analysis

1. The Migration of Patriarchal Violence to Digital Spaces

Researcher and feminist activist Rita Sah opened the analytical frame for the discussion by drawing a direct line between the harassment women have historically experienced in homes, communities, and public institutions, and its current manifestation in digital environments. This is not a new phenomenon in kind, she argued; it is the same phenomenon in a new form, one that benefits from the reach, speed, and deniability that digital platforms offer perpetrators.

The targeting of women in politics was a particular focus. Sah cited the cases of Rubi Thakur and Kamini Chaudhary as instructive examples. Thakur was subjected to coordinated ridicule for her Maithili-influenced Nepali speech, an attack that was, at its core, an attack on her regional and linguistic identity, deployed to undermine her public standing. Chaudhary faced the circulation of manipulated videos designed to discredit and intimidate her. In both cases, the mechanism of attack was the perceived transgression of speaking with authority in public: a transgression that patriarchal norms, online and offline, have long sought to punish.

"The violence we used to experience in society and within the family is now being experienced through digital mediums... Patriarchy, in the name of love, family, and tradition, controls women."

— **Rita Sah, Researcher and Feminist Activist**

The concept of “unequal power dynamics” was central to Sah’s analysis. Online harassment does not occur in a vacuum: it reproduces, and in some respects amplifies, the hierarchies already present in offline society. Women who assume leadership roles, express independent views, or claim public visibility do so in the knowledge that these acts may be met with coordinated, often

sexualized, attacks. This awareness itself constitutes a form of structural constraint on women's participation in public life.

2. The Psychological Toll: Visibility as a Risk

Artist and activist Nisha Adhikari contributed a critical dimension to the discussion: the lived psychological experience of those subjected to digital violence. Her account moved beyond the structural to the personal, detailing how sustained online harassment reshapes the inner life of its targets, and, in doing so, reshapes their public lives too.

Adhikari described the range of mental health consequences that commonly follow from online harassment: severe anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and social withdrawal. These are not incidental outcomes. They are, in many cases, the intended outcomes - harassment campaigns designed precisely to make continued public participation feel untenable. Women who are driven to abandon their platforms, alter their routines, or withdraw from public spaces do not do so freely: they do so under duress.

Adhikari also drew attention to the institutional failures that compound this harm. Her account of navigating the Cyber Bureau, where she was effectively told that suffering online abuse was a natural consequence of being a public figure, illustrates a systemic problem: that the institutions nominally responsible for protecting victims are often, in practice, invested in normalizing the abuse they suffer.

"Visibility comes with a cost... We really need to understand that digital violence is real violence. It has real consequences, real trauma, and real voices are silenced."

— **Nisha Adhikari, Artist and Activist**

Her argument against dismissing online harassment as mere “gossip” or “trolling” is, at its core, an argument for taking women's experiences seriously. Language that minimizes digital violence - that frames it as trivial, inevitable, or self-inflicted - is not neutral: it serves to excuse perpetrators and to burden survivors with the costs of others' behaviour.

3. The Media's Role in Sustaining Gendered Silence

Journalist Aarya Chand examined the particular position of media institutions in this landscape both as sites of failure and as potential sites of redress. Her analysis began with an observation about the absence of women in editorial and decision-making roles across Nepal's media sector, and the consequences of that absence.

When women contribute to public debate online, Chanda noted, the response is rarely an engagement with the substance of what they have said. Instead, discourse moves to their

appearance, their relationships, their bodies- a pattern that serves to communicate, repeatedly and publicly, that women's intellectual contributions are not the point.

"When women put forward their opinions, the debate online isn't about their thoughts... it is reduced to their bodies and sexual appearances."

— **Aarya Chand, Journalist**

Chand situated this not only as a legal failing but as a cultural one, rooted in traditions across literature, art, and media that have historically rendered women as objects of representation rather than as agents of it. Addressing digital violence, she argued, requires confronting these cultural substrates, not only the laws and platforms that govern online behaviour, but the norms and narratives that shape it.

4. Legal Frameworks: Provisions, Gaps, and Systemic Failures

Legal practitioner Sushmita Chhetri provided a detailed account of the legal landscape as it pertains to digital violence in Nepal, revealing a significant gap between the protections that exist on paper and the experience of those who attempt to access them.

Nepal's legal framework does contain relevant provisions: constitutional rights to privacy, and the Electronic Transactions Act, which provides for penalties including up to five years' imprisonment and fines of up to NPR 500,000 for digital harassment. These are not insignificant. What is inadequate is their implementation.

Chhetri outlined the practical barriers facing survivors who attempt to use these mechanisms:

- The evidentiary burden placed on victims, requiring them to compile and preserve screenshots, URLs, and other digital evidence, is substantial, and is typically borne without institutional support.
- Approximately 40% of complaints are rejected by police on grounds of "insufficient evidence," a figure that points to either inadequate training or inadequate willingness to engage with digital cases.
- Victims/Survivors frequently encounter victim-blaming attitudes at police stations and in courts, which compounds the harm they have already suffered and deters others from coming forward.

"The greatest success of patriarchy is if you are able to make women exercise patriarchy."

— **Sushmita Chhetri, Legal Practitioner**

Chhetri's observation about internalized misogyny, the role that women themselves sometimes play in sustaining online harassment of other women, is analytically significant. It underscores that digital violence is not simply the product of individual bad actors, but of a culture in which the policing of women's behaviour and appearance has become widely distributed and, in some respects, socially rewarded.

Calls to Action

The discussion concluded with a set of concrete demands that span the immediate and the structural. These were not offered as a comprehensive policy agenda, but as a baseline a statement of what is necessary, not merely what is possible.

Immediate Measures

- Treat digital gender-based violence as a state emergency, commensurate with its scale and severity.
- Establish dedicated, accessible online reporting mechanisms for digital violence that are available outside Kathmandu and designed with survivors' needs in mind.
- Develop survivor-centric legal processes that reduce the evidentiary burden on survivor and provide institutional support throughout.
- Mandate training for police and judicial officers on digital violence, including its psychological impacts and the standards required for evidence assessment.

Structural and Legislative Changes

- Incorporate strong gender-responsive provisions in the forthcoming IT and Cyber Security Bills, including clear definitions of digital violence and proportionate accountability mechanisms for perpetrators and platforms alike.
- Require social media platforms operating in Nepal to implement accessible and responsive complaint mechanisms for cases of gender-based digital violence.
- Invest in gender-disaggregated data collection on digital violence to enable evidence-based policy development and public accountability.

Cultural and Movement-Building

- Build an active feminist movement presence in digital spaces, capable of immediate and organized counter-response to coordinated harassment campaigns.
 - Challenge the cultural narratives, in media, literature, and public discourse that normalize the reduction of women to their bodies and the punishment of women for public visibility.
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- Increase the representation of women in editorial and decision-making roles in media institutions, as a structural condition for more equitable public discourse.

Conclusion

The panel discussion surfaced a conclusion that is difficult to avoid: that the problem of digital violence against women in Nepal is not, at its root, a technical problem. It is a political one. The tools and platforms are new; the power dynamics they express are not.

What is new, and what this discussion made clear, is the scale and the speed at which harm can now be inflicted, and the degree to which institutional responses have failed to keep pace. The gap between what Nepal's legal framework promises and what survivors experience is not merely an implementation gap: it reflects a deeper failure to take seriously the violence that women face when they enter, and attempt to participate in, public life.

Closing that gap will require action on multiple fronts simultaneously: legal reform, institutional accountability, platform regulation, cultural intervention, and organized feminist solidarity. None of these alone is sufficient. Together, the panelists suggested, they constitute the minimum conditions for a digital public sphere in which women can participate without fear.

WOREC and the panelists unequivocally called on the government to recognize digital violence against women and girls as an urgent national issue and to commit to immediate, concrete action, encompassing both short-term protective measures and long-term structural reform. They further demanded that survivors be meaningfully included at the table when policies are being drafted, insisting that no law or framework addressing digital violence can be credible or effective without the voices of those who have lived it.

The discussion itself, 75 voices convened to name this problem and demand its redress, was, in that sense, already part of the answer.
