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SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Ms. Reem Alsalem

UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls

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Conference on "Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights: Opportunities, Risks, and Visions for a Better Future"

Good afternoon,

I would like to thank all organizers for this important event, including the Qatari National Human Rights Commission.

I will focus my presentation on how AI can increase the risks of violence and abuse for women and girls.

AI and digital technology have a disproportionate impact on women and girls and impact them in very specific ways. A 2023 report found that 99% of violence in digital technologies targeted women. Furthermore, according to another report, 97% of the child sexual abuse imagery seen in reports showed girls.

Though tech-facilitated violence against females is an increasing concern, it remains unrecognized and underreported.

In my brief intervention, I will focus on four gendered harms of Artificial Intelligence:

1. It can amplify misogyny, sexism and harmful stereotypes

Social media algorithms, such as those on platforms like YouTube or X, have been shown to promote content that often objectifies women; dehumanises them, or glorifies violence against them.

Laura Bates, in her book The New Age of Sexism, describes how such technologies, including AI-driven chat systems that are integrated with female human-sized dolls, can blur the line between real and robotic interactions. It can reinforce harmful attitudes, such as the expectation that women and girls should be obedient, and that women and girls will do what you want.

2. It can deprioritize female-specific issues/problems

A number of countries use AI for predictive policing. Some predictive policing tools, used by law enforcement in various countries, rely on historical crime data that may reflect systemic biases. It can also lead to underreporting of domestic violence in certain communities or to de-prioritising interventions in those areas.

3. Facilitating and increasing harassment, abuse and violence

A 2021 study on online violence against women in 45 countries worldwide found that 85% of the women surveyed had encountered online violence, including harassment, the sharing of intimate and sexual content through social media, sextortion, cyberbullying, and sexual exploitation.

An emerging form of sexual exploitation of females comes in the form of AI-generated manipulated images and videos based on sexual abuse, commonly referred to as “deepfakes”, though using this term is misplaced as it could be perceived as seeking to minimize or normalize the gravity of the abuse being portrayed. These images and videos are being used for malicious purposes, giving rise to sexual or pornographic content aimed at extortion or coercion.

Perpetrators of such crimes have even devised guides for others on how to create and use such “nudifying” applications.

4. AI is increasingly enlisted as a tool of coercion, manipulation, and stalking of women and girls

AI-enabled tools, such as stalker ware or tracking apps, are used by perpetrators to monitor, control, or intimidate women and girls, facilitating domestic violence or stalking. They make it easier to access women’s locations, addresses, and routines.

The impact of this has been severe. In some countries, girls have been blackmailed to carry out sexual acts and self-harm on camera by teenage boys. The trauma of the diffusion of “deepfake” or blackmail has inflicted severe violence and even driven them to suicide.

It should be mentioned that AI is increasingly used as a tool of discrimination and abuse against minority women, but also against women who are visible in public, ultimately undermining the participation of women and girls in society.

The use of AI in such a way poses significant challenges for the administration of justice, as it allows easier access to the victim and makes it difficult to identify aggressors who are often based in other jurisdictions.

Recommendations

I also wish to briefly share the following recommendations on how to stem these harms:

1. Ensure AI systems are trained on diverse, representative datasets and regularly audited for gender bias, gender and sexual based violence. Doing so requires the involvement of women and marginalized groups in the design process to address their specific needs and risks. Developers should disclose how AI models are trained and make decision-making processes clear to users and regulators, increasing accountability in cases of harm.

2. Use the correct terminology that correctly describes the nature of the crimes being committed against females online. For example, describing crimes of sexual digital forgery as only “deepfakes” dilutes the unlawfulness and seriousness of the crime

3. Enact and enforce comprehensive legislation criminalizing all forms of digitally facilitated sexual violence, recognizing that they are committed almost entirely against females and are perpetrated by males.

4. Develop and deploy AI tools that better identify and remove harmful content, such as misogynistic hate speech or sexual digital forgery.

5. Enhance digital Platform Accountability. Digital platforms, including AI, should implement stricter policies against gendered abuse.

6. Invest in human moderators to complement AI systems. For example, while you can use AI to provide some support to victims, I would caution against farming this function out to AI. The human touch for a victim-centred approach is still needed.

7. Establish international protocols to facilitate cross-jurisdictional investigations and prosecutions, ensuring perpetrators are identified and held accountable, while providing victims with access to justice and reparations.

8. Recognize schools as places that are cohabited by perpetrators of abuse (creators of sexual abuse images) and victims. Education must be trauma-informed, with indications provided to families and teachers and children on how to deal with abuse and tackle victim blaming.

Thank you.