



A GUIDE TO CYBERSECURITY

WRITTEN BY:

HERlead Fellow Carisa Shah

In September of 1995, over 45,000 people streamed into Beijing to witness the opening of the Fourth World Conference on Women. These participants and activists came from around the world with the sole purpose of identifying actionable steps to achieve both gender equality and empowerment of women on a global scale. After two weeks of intense, heated political debate between representatives of 189 countries, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was conceived. With comprehensive commitments under twelve targeted areas, ranging from women and poverty to violence against women, this document served as a defining framework for the advancement of women's rights.

In the years following the conference, individual governments translated the Platform for Action's commitments into concrete changes that have affected widespread change. The most recent five-year review of progress on fulfilling the Declaration's promises indicates that women, now more than ever before, are serving in political offices, are legally protected against gender-based violence, and are abiding by constitutions that guarantee gender equality. While notable, the commitments made by the 189 member countries were meant to permeate all walks of life. Women often work insecure, low-wage jobs with low rates of upward mobility. Every day, 830 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth because of gaps in reproductive healthcare. And a third of all women suffer physical and/or sexual abuse.

Now, with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Platform for Action fast approaching, we can not only reflect on how much progress has been made towards achieving gender equality but also on how much more still needs to be done. Our society has become increasingly digital since the creation of the 1995 blueprint and with that comes unique challenges. One of the twelve targeted areas, violence against women, now has an expanded scope to include violence against women online. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, so much of our lives have transferred to the digital space, making cybersecurity more necessary than ever before. With our dependence on the internet, it is increasingly important to take all necessary precautions when it comes to cybersecurity with the goal of increasing security for women online.

At the highest level, the two most common cyber threats are **cyber attacks** and **cyberbullying**. Cyber attacks include social engineered trojans, unpatched software, phishing, network traveling worms, and advanced persistent threats. Cyber attacks can cause failure of military equipment, nationwide blackouts, or even breaches to national security. On a smaller scale, cyber attacks also include hacking of email and social media accounts. The easiest way to protect yourself against hackers is to secure your devices and accounts with a password.

Below is a **guide to passwords** - some points may seem intuitive but it is important to be exhaustive when securing your data.



- Passwords are private - never share them with anyone else.
- Always log off when you are done using an account.
- Use different passwords for all accounts.
- Change your passwords frequently (every 6 months at the minimum).
- Passwords should not be common dictionary words (ex. “email”, “password”).
- Passwords should contain at least 8 uppercase and lowercase characters, numbers, and symbols.
- Security questions should not contain information that is publicly available.

To read more about ways to secure your personal devices and check your own device’s security, take a look at these articles:

<https://howsecureismypassword.net/>

<https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-free-password-managers>

<https://www.techspot.com/tag/antivirus/>

The second type of threat that is extremely common on the Internet is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is the use of electronic communication, be it through social media, text, email, or another form, to

- (1) send mean-spirited or intimidating messages,
- (2) make cruel remarks about someone else,
- (3) post photos without an individual’s consent, or
- (4) make direct threats to another individual.

In the United States alone, over **a fourth of female students have reported being cyberbullied**, many of whom indicate that they stopped going to school following the incident. Cyberbullying has many negative downstream effects including depression, anxiety, maladjustment, and prolonged victimization. These consequences directly hinder the mission of the Platform for Action, especially given that education and wellbeing are fundamental in affecting sustainable change. Here are some helpful tips and figures that may be useful if you encounter cyberbullying as you continue navigate the digital space.

- If you see something, say something - be an active bystander. A study published in *Social Development* indicates that when bystanders intervene, the bullying stops within 10 seconds 57% of the time.
- There is a fine line between teasing and bullying. If you are not sure if something can be classified as bullying, it is still important to speak up - the worst thing that happens is you have a slight misunderstanding on your hands.
- If you are uncomfortable confronting a bully, there are steps you can take to still hold the person accountable for their actions. Depending on the platform, you can use the “Report” feature on social media or contact your phone service provider. Many websites/services have a Terms of Use statement that expressly prohibits harassment of any kind - report content through the



designated pathways to have the content and / or bully removed from the platform.

- Whenever possible, keep all evidence of the bullying. This may help in confronting the bully directly or reporting them through the established mechanisms.
- Check state laws – some states have laws against cyberbullying.

Outlined above are just some of the ways that we can protect ourselves and those around us in this increasingly digital world. Working together, we can make online spaces safer for women and play a small part in the global effort to achieve gender equality.

Source: UN Women