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Is technology a perpetrator of trafficking and sexual violence?

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Technology could be the problem and the solution to sexual violence against women. On one side, it's the reason why rape, pornography and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation occur and on the other hand it's most wide impacting tool for spreading awareness against it.

French researcher Claire Quidet, who works with CAP International and is a spokesperson for a French frontline NGO is fighting the causes and consequences of prostitution. At the Apne Aap conference, she articulated how online prostitution is a big reason for women being sexually exploited. The discussion was focussed on prostitution as an industry and the role tech plays.

GIRLS OF PARADISE

This is an award winning campaign in which Claire Quidet's NGO created an awareness program to make customers of prostitution aware of the fallouts. Titled Girls of Paradise, the NGO created a fake escort website in France to sell prostitution. Except that all the women they put on it were those who had been killed by customers' violence. The pictures were kept intact, and real of the women as pretty women when customers first logged on.

"Only difference was when they clicked on the picture on Girls of paradise, it shows a picture of the girl already dead but the client doesn't know that until they click on the girls' pictures," said Claire. The other pictures would make their stomach squirm because they were shocking images: women being beaten up by customers.

The objective? To make customers aware of what the escort business leads to. The organisation answered 600 calls in the first week and one thousand chat messages during the course of the

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experiment. The outcome was mixed the NGO admits but one where they succeeded in making customers realise what prostitution was leading to.

Lorraine Questiaux, Legal advisor of Mouvement du Nid said that the pimps use the same strategy to trap girls online as they use in street prostitution. "How technology is being used in the form of pornography on the internet is exactly the same as street prostitution. It is just the traffickers are educated and well-organised and there is a lot of money in the end from that," articulated Lorraine.

Lorraine further added that it was difficult to track records of how many traffickers were online. They did a research and established that 60% traffickers are using the internet which is a majority and quite a substantial figure.

She also raised the issue of corporate (such as those offering parlour, massaging, spa services) using improbable ways to hide their presence in the prostitution business. She said, "There are new businessmen who are actually infiltrating the business of prostitution and are hiding behind legal businesses."

But tech on one hand has become a medium to perpetrate this violence. On the other hand, it's a great tool for campaign and awareness building. Shaili Chopra, founder of SheThePeople.TV talked of location mapping and social media campaigns to make people more aware.

She said, social media was also evolving to allow more relevant and focussed conversations around important issues in 'closed-user groups rather than generically, said Shaili.

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