



# INTERNET SAFETY GUIDES FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Arise Reporter

The onset of the internet on the Ugandan scene was accompanied by unparalleled excitement, particularly among the young generation. No doubt the internet is of great use in the contemporary world not only for research purposes, but also to establish job connections and, obviously, relationships, both personal and official.

Regarding relationships as facilitated by internet platforms, for many internet users, life before the internet was quite like a prison hemmed in so many physical boundaries. The internet, therefore, felt like a 'prison break' of sorts, considering that the physical boundaries of homes and offices were bypassed, overtaken by the new innovation. Similarly, society, which has traditionally been helpful in nurturing its people, has significantly been cut out through the creation of a

fairly private environment, only being dragged into the fray when things go wrong.

To further put this discussion into perspective, let us analyse one high-profile example of how the internet has been used, with a woman on the receiving end. A few years ago, a Princess from one of the kingdoms got married to an American at a classic wedding attended by thousands, and graced by the President of Uganda, H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Before long, he American husband, using his Facebook account, announced that his marriage to the Princess was over, and went on to expose his personal grievances. By the mere click of a button, he had wreaked enough havoc. Even when the princess attempted to fight back via the same medium, the damage was already done.

Two wrongs do not make a right, and soon the entire world would know what really ought to have been a bedroom affair. This is just how the internet has sometimes been used to promote OVAW - like a match setting an entire forest on fire.

It ought to be highlighted that women and girls remain key drivers on the internet, majorly social media platforms, not necessarily as users, but as targets of abusers. While one cannot claim that men are hell bent on abusing women per se, it is a fact that women and girls generally receive a great deal of attention from men, and are objectified both by those seeking genuine relationships and those hitting on them for the fun of it, plus, of course, the obvious....sexual interest, and harassment. Often when relationships go wrong, women and girls



**My Yes  
means Yes and  
my No means NO.  
Its my body, my  
equipment and  
my right to be  
online.**

suffer an unfair share of the fallout, as their image is so easily tarnished as the men simply move on. Even when there is no relationship to talk of, women are still sexually harassed, simply because of who they are. It is not uncommon for a woman to receive friendship invites or needless compliments from total strangers who just saw her picture online. Some care not about her qualification or even marital status; all they look forward to is an opportunity to take her to bed.

At this point, therefore, the question of protection becomes essential. The following are some of the possible internet protection mechanisms that women and girls could take advantage of:

- Women and girls should avoid sharing passwords even with the closest of friends and relatives, as this may pose a risk even long before relationships break up.
- Ample care must be taken regarding how much information is shared online, including pictures and videos, particularly material that may bounce back some day to embarrass and haunt.
- Avoid meeting online acquaintances alone, especially on the first date. So many people are capable of perfecting a pseudo-identity behind the virtual online curtain to woo their targets, and harm them if they so wish.
- Double-check friend requests before accepting them, even if you are a celebrity. Many times there is a tendency to easily let people in, just because you share similar contacts, but it is best to open up to people you have met personally before or whose identities are obvious.
- Do not accept freebies, both as online gifts and unwarranted gifts and offers from online friends. Remember the popular saying that 'free things are expensive'. Someone may want to make you pay in the long run for what you received.
- Block stalkers and any other people you don't wish to interact with, with commonsense being your first line of defence. Your instinct is very critical in this, and you do not have to explain yourself or your reasoning to anyone.
- When using video recording services like Web cam or WhatsApp video or even Skype, be very careful as these may easily be hacked by spammers. Be sure to appear before the camera as decent as you would in everyday life.
- Be careful not to Geotag by exposing your current location as this may play into the hands of your enemies.
- Above all, and as a golden rule, women using the internet must act 'official' even when conducting unofficial engagements online.