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OGBV //

ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION TO DECONSTRUCT // ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
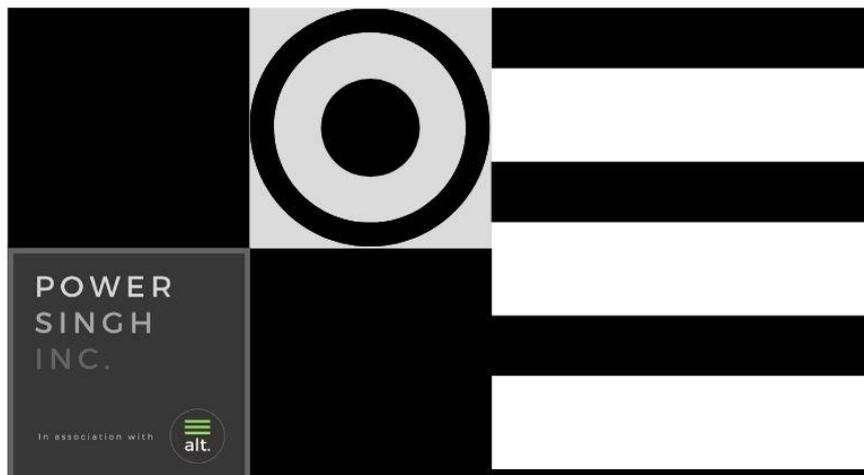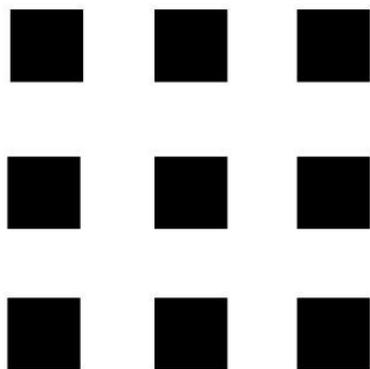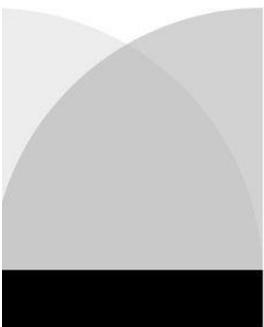
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DECONSTRUCT // Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV)

Introduction to Deconstruct | Online Gender-Based Violence

A Power Singh Inc. Special Project

South Africa, 2021

ABOUT POWER SINGH INC.

Power Singh Inc. is a public interest law firm based in Johannesburg, South Africa seeking to ensure public and private sector accountability and the full realisation of fundamental rights and freedoms. Our mission is to offer legal services to underrepresented people and causes, to defend and develop the Constitution and the rule of law, and to ensure just and equitable outcomes for our clients. Visit Power Singh Inc. for more information.

DISCLAIMER

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WHAT IS DECONSTRUCT?

In 2020 Power Singh Inc, a public interest law firm embarked on a special project called **Deconstruct** in which we break the law down into its constituent parts to provide accessible and meaningful legal resources to the public. Recognising that many people view the law and legal processes as intimidating and overwhelming, Deconstruct seeks to change that narrative and empower people by providing tangible and accessible explanations that will allow people to use the law to protect and promote their rights. Accordingly, Deconstruct encourages people to understand their legal options by providing detailed guidance and resource documents.

WHAT IS DECONSTRUCT // ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (OGBV)?

Gender-based violence has seeped into every aspect of society, with women, children, gender and sexual minorities, and vulnerable members of our community's facing daily threats to their safety, dignity, and bodily integrity. The internet, initially envisaged as an accessible and safe space, has in many ways become yet another realm in which misogyny, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are not only amplified but supported, and defended. We are seeing a rise in new forms of harm and violence that is committed, abetted or aggravated by the use of the internet, social media platforms, and other information communication technologies (ICTs).

Based on our lived experiences, our work, the clients we support, the partner organisations and members of society we have engaged with, coupled with our collective research domestically, regionally, and internationally we know that the insidious assault of one's dignity and bodily integrity through online and offline harms is a reality for many, yet victims, survivors and affected persons are not always certain of the availability of resources, remedies, and support structures.

In response to the rise of new forms of violence that are emerging as technology advances and access to the internet increases, the first instalment of our Deconstruct project focuses on gender-based violence in an online context. **Deconstruct // Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV)** seeks to empower survivors, victims, and persons affected by online harms with an understanding of the different options available to them.

As part of Deconstruct // OGBV, we conducted a series of interviews with feminists, activists, legal professionals, researchers, and victims and survivors to get a better understanding of the realities of online gender-based violence. We set out to find clarity on the different legal remedies, as well as the technical options and psychosocial support structures.

Following the interviews and internal research, we decided to develop a set of toolkits that we hope will be a source of empowerment and agency for victims' survivors and persons affected by OGBV and its various forms and manifestations.

WHAT ARE THE TOOLKITS ABOUT?

The current batch of toolkits focus on:

- Online gender-based violence
- Online sexual harassment
- Children's safety online

The toolkits, in their own ways, address the following:

- Contextual understandings of the topics
- Legal definitions and available legal options
- Explanations of technical options
- Discussions on psycho-social support structures

These toolkits are living documents that will be updated from time to time to reflect the changing legal positions, as well as the emergence of new challenges, opportunities and responses. These toolkits are not meant to be prescriptive guides on what you must do, they are meant to provide you with information and resources so that you can make an informed decision about your responses in light of your realities. Over time we develop these toolkits will be supplemented with additional multimedia resources including video explainers and infographics.

WHO ARE THE TOOLKITS FOR?

These toolkits are designed with survivors, victims, and persons affected by OGBV in mind. They are for everyone and anyone who is looking for information, resources, or guidance on issues relating to OGBV. The toolkit on children's online safety is geared towards parents and caregivers. In time, we will develop resources that are child friendly and can assist children as they navigate the complexities of the online world. Ultimately, the toolkits are set to be user friendly and accessible and provide helpful information to those in need of some guidance or support. These toolkits discuss gender-based violence and sexual violence against children. Some readers may want support as they work through the content. We have included links to various resources and support structures that may be able to help.

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKITS

The toolkits can be read collectively or selectively depending on your needs. It is worth noting that there are certain commonalities across the toolkits. Where there are overlaps we will refer you to the toolkit that addresses a specific topic in the most detail. In addition to the toolkits, we have included key resources that may assist you as you consider your options and responses. These will be updated from time to time to ensure accuracy and accessibility.
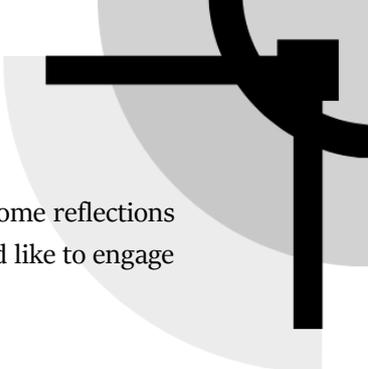
These toolkits are designed to be shared, disseminated, discussed and debated. We welcome reflections thoughts and comments on the toolkits and encourage you to reach out to us if you would like to engage on the topics covered in the toolkits.

POINTS TO NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Words matter. We recognise that terminology can have a significant impact on a person's engagement with content. We are particularly mindful of this in the context of online gender-based violence and are cognizant of the different connotations and implications words can have on those who have experienced gender-based violence both on- and offline. We do not seek to impose definitions, identities or responses on those who may be impacted by this topic. Throughout the toolkits, we refer to victims, survivors, and affected persons. In addition, we note that terminology is often reflective of changing societal attitudes and understandings. We undertake to regularly reflect on our terminology, and where necessary will update the toolkits in line with contemporary understandings of key terms.

POINTS TO NOTE ON LEGAL AND TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS

South Africa's legal landscape is constantly evolving and changing. This is particularly true for the legal frameworks relating to gender-based violence and the legal frameworks that address ICTs. We will endeavour to update the toolkits when legal changes occur. In addition to the legal fluctuations, ICTs, and their use and misuse, are rapidly transforming. Along with legal updates, we will reflect on technological advancements that may be relevant for the purposes of these toolkits.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED

Deconstruct // OGBV is in many ways informed by the inputs of a group of phenomenal individuals who generously shared their personal experiences, expertise, insights, and time. A significant thanks go to Avani Singh, Ben Winks, Bonnie Meyersfeld, Chenia Chair, Christy Alves Nascimento, Kwazi Nwana, Neema Iyer, Michael Power, Muchengeti Hwacha, Rethabile Mosese, S'lindile Khumalo, Tanveer Jeewa, Tina Power, Tshepiso Hadebe, Vuyo Mntonintshi, Wendy Trott, and William Bird.

We are truly thankful to all of you for your invaluable contribution to this work. Your insights, participation, and the information and stories you shared have helped us create resources that we hope will be of use to those in need of guidance, support, and safe spaces.

For updates on Deconstruct visit: https://powersingh.africa/
If you would like to get in contact with us please send us an email at connect@powersingh.africa.

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