

Self-Defense Instructor

Pakistan's Nighat Dad is teaching women how to protect themselves online

BY CHARLIE CAMPBELL/LAHORE

IN A FAUX-WOOD-PANELED lecture hall at Lahore's University of Engineering and Technology, Nighat Dad watches as a hundred or so young women raise a hand in the air. Dad is leading a workshop about online privacy and has just asked the room of female students, "Who among you has experienced harassment online or in person?"

The overwhelming response is why Dad, a 34-year-old lawyer who used to practice criminal and family law, set up the Digital Rights Foundation in 2012. The not-for-profit organization educates Pakistanis, particularly young women, about how to respond to online harassment. It also campaigns against legislation that gives the government broad powers of surveillance online, and it works to restrict the dissemination of personal information collected by telecom firms regarding customers' lives and habits to foreign and domestic state agencies and businesses.

"We tell Internet users how to adjust their privacy settings, to make sure they have secure connections, change their passwords regularly and not to share unnecessary information," she says. "And women should come seek help if they are targeted and not feel ashamed."

The problem of online harassment is global, and young women are particularly at risk the world over. A 2014 Pew sur-



vey found that 65% of Internet users ages 18 to 29 had been the target of online harassment, with young women suffering disproportionately high levels of online attacks. Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency says it investigates hundreds of cases of online sexual harassment each year, and says that many more likely go unreported. And in a country where more than 1,000 women are

murdered in so-called honor killings each year, and a woman is raped every two hours, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, online threats of harm can contribute to a culture of real-world fear.

One student in the Lahore audience, asking to remain anonymous, describes how she was duped into befriending a man on Facebook who subse-

quently stalked her online. "He took a photo of me and my sisters, pasted our faces onto naked women and posted the doctored photos online," she says. "He sent me the links and threatened to show my family."

Dad's organization also works to protect online freedom of speech in Pakistan. The government intermittently censors sites like the blogging platform WordPress and has banned YouTube since 2012. All forms of encryption are prohibited without prior state approval.

Dad's work has earned many admirers. Nobel Peace Prize-winning education activist Malala Yousafzai attended some of Dad's workshops prior to being shot by the Taliban in 2012. "Nighat has established herself as a recognized international leader in such a short period of time," says Gus Hosein, a co-founder of London-based NGO Privacy International, which advocates for enhanced privacy protections.

For fellow Lahori Mohammad Farooq, Dad has been a key mentor. Farooq, 31, also provides digital-security training to young people and writes a regular technology column for national newspaper *Dawn*. "Nighat's shared a lot of tips about how I can improve myself, and given me more confidence to write and share what I have learned," he says. "She's a symbol of hope for many young women in Pakistan."