

Panel 2 – Sharing knowledge and information to advance the gender equality agenda and implement the Council of Europe Strategy: the impact of social media

Daria Manshina

Russia has neither signed nor ratified the Istanbul Convention. In Russia there's no legislation against domestic violence. Recently the State Duma has been considering decriminalization of beating someone for the first time, as well as of death threats. I love this example because it's very sobering: every 40 minutes a woman dies of domestic violence. This panel lasts supposedly 90 minutes. Som by the end of it three women in Russia will be dead.

In February, 2014 I started collecting anonymous stories about gender-based violence, abuse, sexism and other related issues. I named this collection "Shut your sexist mouth up" (SYSMU). Within these 2,5 years I've managed to gather over 11 thousand anonymous stories. Two days ago the amount of SYSMU subscribers reached 28 thousand. Girls and young women write me: "Thank you, I became a feminist because of you", "Thank you, I stopped self-harming", "Thank you, I exited abusive relationship".

But not everything is cloudless in the Russian part of the Internet. In the same social network there are other pages, like "Real rapes" (and you can guess what kind of content gets posted there) or "Notes of a young abuser". This one makes reposts from pro-feminist groups and public pages and writes derogatory comments. As a result, girls and women who were brave enough to share their experience, their pain, get retraumatized.

After reporting such content as abusive you only get one answer from the website administration: if you don't like it, don't look at it. This was when I understood that we need a completely different approach. Maybe the only way to achieve something is to stop appealing to "common good" whatever this is and to human rights. Every social media is a commercial organization, so we need statistics: women are about half of world's population and therefore about half of online users. If they don't feel safe online, if their rights are violated there, they leave. And how profitable is that?

What else can be done? I don't know. I can do only this much myself. But I will definitely go on gathering stories and listening to women and girls, who are fierce, who are outraged. And maybe one day we will see a better future.