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# MIND THE GAP

**Lessons on Overcoming Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence**



## Background

Over the past few months, the gender justice team has been conducting desk reviews and consultations to understand the current knowledge and magnitude of technology facilitated gender-based violence. This document is developed from publications by UNFPA; UN women; center for information resilience and from research and articles presented during the SVRI forum 2024 and other similar learning events.

We hope that this document will serve as a resource to CARE country teams as well as other members who are seeking to learn the prevalence and existing approaches that are being undertaken to tackle TFGBV.

## Executive summary

The journey of new and emerging digital transformation is spawning extensive excitement and eagerness around the potential input of technology into society. While a lot of focus and work is being done around designing new tech and advancing existing ones to address social issues; we are learning that the same is being applied to programs and initiatives implemented by non-profit organizations. Although the speed of the digital era has transformed the world; it has also created new platforms of harm in the form of TFGBV (technology-facilitated facilitated gender-based violence). As a result of TFGBV, multiple reports and assessment findings confirm that women and girls are primary victims. In certain scenarios, there is also a visible link between TFGBV and GBV occurring in an offline setting.

Addressing TFGBV, as a growing area of critical concern, is no longer negotiable. Ensuring that everyone can freely participate online and without fear of violence and abuse is vital to ensuring that women and girls can effectively exercise their right to freedom of expression<sup>1</sup>. The United Nations Human Rights Council stated that “the same rights people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one’s choice, in accordance with articles 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”.

Facebook recently announced that it will significantly alter the way that posts, videos and other content are moderated online, Meta will adjust its content review policies on Facebook and Instagram, getting rid of fact checkers and replacing them with user-generated community notes( CNN). Fact-checkers play a crucial role in identifying and flagging harmful content, including that which contributes to TGFVBV. Their removal could weaken existing safety mechanisms and make it harder to identify and remove harmful content quickly. Without independent fact-checkers, misinformation and harmful stereotypes about women and gender could proliferate more easily on the platform.

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1 [UNFPA-TFGBV-Making All Spaces Safe.pdf](#)



Technology-facilitated GBV can have severe impacts on victims/survivors. Impacts include emotional distress, loss of status, decreased productivity and suicide.<sup>2</sup> Instead of becoming a tool for oppression, violence, and the silencing of women in all their diversity, technology and online platforms should be used to accelerate the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment.

## Definition

The absence of a single, precise definition of TFGBV is one factor that makes it difficult to have a comparable and targeted intervention.

UNFPA defines TFGBV as: ***“An act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender.”***

In November 2022, UN Women convened a diverse set of global experts to develop a shared term and common conceptual definition of online violence against women. This built on work from academics, governments, national statistical offices, feminist movements, international organizations and other gender equality advocates. Using the term, technology-facilitated violence against women (TFVAW), the definition that emerged from their process is ***“any act, that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICTs or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms”***<sup>3</sup>

The international Center for Research on Women (ICRW) defines it as ***‘an action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation.’***

## Type and Characteristics of TFGBV

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence takes many forms, including sextortion (blackmail by threatening to publish sexual information, photos or videos); image-based abuse (sharing intimate photos without consent); doxxing (publishing private personal information); cyberbullying; online gender and sexual harassment; cyberstalking; online grooming for sexual assault; hacking; hate speech; online impersonation; and using technology to locate survivors of abuse in order to inflict further violence, among many others.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [ICRW\\_TFGBVMarketing\\_Brief\\_v8-Web.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-shared-research-agenda-en.pdf](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threa](#)

Below are the characteristics of TFGBV:

**Anonymity:-** The perpetrator or abuser can remain anonymous.

**Action at a distance:** It can be perpetrated at a distance, from anywhere in the world and without personal or physical contact with the survivor.

**Accessibility and affordability:** It is accessible and affordable to perpetrators, since information and communications technology have reduced the cost and difficulty of producing and distributing information at scale.

**Propagation:** It is constant and easily propagated through the Internet, retraumatizing survivors. The ease, efficiency and affordability of automating and multiplying instances of abuse against a particular group or individual means that it is an effective form of violence in wielding harm.

**Impunity:** It is often perpetrated with impunity. Given that TFGBV can be committed anonymously and from a distance, there are difficulties in law enforcement across countries and jurisdictions that limit judicial systems' ability to hold abusers accountable for their actions



**Automation:** It can be automatic and easy to perpetrate, and allows perpetrators to control women's movements, monitor their online activity and distribute images or information, among other harmful abusive actions, with limited time and effort.

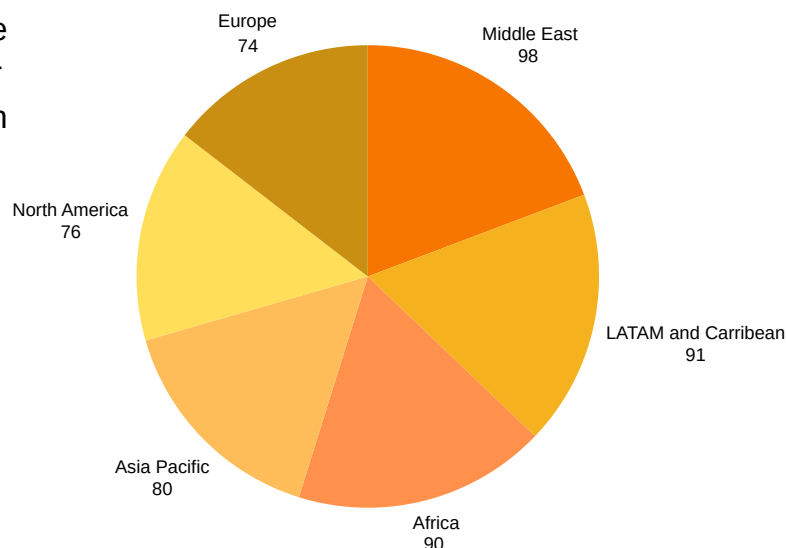
**Collectivity:** It can be collectively organized and perpetrated by a large number of individuals.

**Normalization of violence:** TFGBV contributes to the normalization of violence against women and girls. Physical violence against women is often normalized and justified, particularly by women themselves. It is likely that this normalization of violence is exacerbated in the digital space, and that TFGBV is perceived as less serious, harmful or dangerous to survivors.

**Perpetuity:** It can be committed in perpetuity, as images and digital materials used to perpetrate abuse are likely to exist indefinitely or for long periods of time.

## Prevalence of TFGBV

A study covered by the economist intelligence unit; targeting 51 top countries by the number of persons online found that 98% of women in the Middle East, 91% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 90% in Africa, 80% in Asia Pacific, 76% in North America, and 74% in Europe have faced online violence. These alarming figures underscore the urgent need to address TFGBV and create safer online spaces for adult women. Plan international's report also reveals that 58% of women and girls aged 15-25 have experienced online harassment.



The pervasive nature of TFGBV is a significant cause for concern. The data indicate prevalence estimates of online abuse as high as 58%, which is far in excess of current global estimates of the lifetime experience of IPV and non-partner sexual violence which is 31 percent of women aged 15–49 years.<sup>5</sup>

This implies that where internet access is increasing and as women and girls are the users; the rate of TFGBV is almost doubling. We have learned that among the reports and assessments women and girls' attitudes towards tolerating the act and thinking it is not too serious shows that there is a limited understanding of the magnitude of TFGBV.

Similar report from the economist intelligence indicates the following:<sup>6</sup>

80 per cent of images of cases of child sexual abuse materials are of girls aged 11–13 years

73 per cent of women journalists had been subjected to online violence, and 20 per cent were attacked offline as a result

Among those who experienced IPV. 92.6 percent also experienced TFGBV demonstrating the continuum of violence.

**The most common perpetrators of TFGBV are *Intimate partners or ex-intimate partners, State actors and Strangers.***

<sup>5</sup> UNFPA-TFGBV-Making All Spaces Safe.pdf

<sup>6</sup> Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women

Below is a table summarizing important findings from multiple sources

Source	Findings	Quotes
<p><b>Child safe net (Nepal)</b></p>	<p>Intimate partners violence against teens and young people in Nepal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 in 4 participants in relationships experienced online IPV: This indicates that a significant portion of the study participants faced OIPV.</li> <li>• 27% of males and 21% of females faced online IPV: This suggests that both males and females are affected by OIPV, although males reported slightly higher rates.</li> <li>• 16-17-years-olds were more vulnerable than 18-24-years-olds: This finding highlights the vulnerability of younger age groups to OIPV.</li> <li>• Ex-partners were more likely to inflict online IPV: This suggests that OIPV can continue even after a relationship has ended.</li> </ul>	
	<p>Attitude and perceptions towards IPV Online:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IPV is not considered a serious issue.</li> <li>• Acceptance of IPV among dating relationships.</li> <li>• Social media password sharing as a sign of commitment.</li> <li>• Most partners did not seek consent for sex.</li> <li>• Short-term relationships had higher prevalence of online IPV.</li> <li>• Online platforms used for hook-up relationships and sex education.</li> </ul>	
	<p>Drivers of online intimate partner violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness of online IPV and support mechanism.</li> <li>• Patriarchy in the online world.</li> <li>• Traditional parenting styles.</li> <li>• Early and unguided access of devices.</li> <li>• Inadequate legal protection.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Leaked and Evident (Global)</b></p>	<p>Understanding the issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8% of the study groups believe internet usage is immoral, inappropriate or unnecessary for women and girls. (Europe)</li> <li>• 9% are internet users who have felt pressured or forced to take or share explicit images of themselves or others. ( Pacific and Asia )</li> <li>• 26% indicate the percentage of people who have allowed their partners or others to see them naked during vide calls. (Pacific and Asia)</li> </ul>	
<p><b>The FEDISA Modikologo (South Africa)</b></p>	<p>Access to mobile phones and social media accounts: This finding focuses on the prevalence of mobile phone and social media usage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 82% have social media accounts.</li> <li>• 70% use Facebook and WhatsApp.</li> <li>• 49% experienced social media-facilitated intimate partner violence (IPV) in the past year.</li> <li>• 23% were humiliated online by their partner.</li> <li>• 31% were contacted on social media by their partner pretending to be another man.</li> <li>• 29% had their social media hacked by a partner.</li> </ul>	<p><i>"Even now I have so many different account invites pending. I suspect it is him" 81204.</i></p>
	<p>Pornography-related intimate partner violence (IPV).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 33% experienced porn &amp; filming-related IPV in the past year.</li> <li>• 19% were forced to watch and enact porn against their wishes.</li> <li>• 10% were forced to make a sex video.</li> <li>• 20% had sexual photographs demanded of them by their partner.</li> <li>• 18% were sent unwanted sexual photographs or videos</li> </ul>	<p>"He takes the videos of us having sex then he threatens me that if I leave him, he will show his friends the videos." 51274</p>
	<p>Phone checking and tracking: prevalence of partner control through technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 92% of respondents said their partner checked or tracked their phone.</li> <li>• 12% had a tracking app installed on their phone.</li> </ul>	<p>"He always buys airtime or data for both of us in order for him to know where I am, I going to check that I am at the place I claim I went to." 30104</p>

<p><b>UNFPA</b></p>	<p>Extended reality consent and TFGBV shows that 49% of regular XR users report experiencing sexual harassment. The aggressive and invasive data collection of XR technologies, and its potential misuse, raises offline dangers of surveillance and targeted attacks, profiling, and violations of "mental privacy," putting women and marginalized people at risk of offline violence.</p> <p>The aggressive and invasive data collection of <u>XR</u> technologies, and its potential misuse, raises offline dangers of surveillance and targeted attacks, profiling, and violations of "mental privacy," putting women and marginalized people at risk of offline violence.</p>	
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## Current laws against TFGBV

**Germany** has put in place the “Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks”, or Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz (NetzDG). This law requires social media platforms like Twitter, Reddit and Facebook to remove hate speech and other offensive content within 24 hours. Failure to remove banned content can lead to fines of up to €50 million. Social media platforms are therefore complying – for example, by setting up deletion centers to monitor content and enforcing their own community standards to a larger extent. In 2020, the law was amended to require stronger accountability by social media companies, who are now obligated to report harmful content to the German Federal Criminal Police Office to enable criminal prosecution. That said, the success of the NetzDG in reducing hate speech and harmful and violent content is difficult to monitor and evaluate.

In the **European Union**, the proposed Digital Services Act (2020) explicitly recognizes the systemic harms that digital platforms may cause and places greater obligations on large online platforms, to regularly assess and respond to risks that stem from the use of their services.

In Australia, online safety regulation has, and continues to be, an ongoing priority for regulators. Indeed, the Online Safety Act 2021 (Cth) (the “Act”) which was recently passed in July 2021 will require that online service providers, social media service providers and other designated Internet service providers have the next six months to ensure their policies and procedures are up to date and compliant with Australian law.

7 Extended reality (XR) is an umbrella term for any technology that alters reality by adding digital elements to the physical or real-world environment to any extent. It encompasses various technologies, including: Virtual Reality (VR); Augmented Reality (AR); and Mixed Reality (MR)



## Approaches and Recommendations

Center for resilience<sup>8</sup> and UNFPA have outlined what are the approaches and recommendations in place to address TFGBV as below:

**Social Media Monitoring, Data Gathering, and Trend Identification:** This involves tracking social media platforms to identify potential threats and patterns related to TFGBV. Data is gathered and analyzed to understand the scope and nature of the problem. Trends are identified to inform targeted interventions and strategies.

**TFGBV Detection and Reporting:** This involves developing tools and techniques to detect incidents of TFGBV on social media and other online platforms. It includes reporting mechanisms to flag and address such incidents.

**Image-Based TFGBV Detection and Reporting:** This specifically focuses on identifying and reporting instances of non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos.

**Training, Knowledge Sharing, and Capacity Building:** This involves providing training and education to individuals and organizations on how to recognize, prevent, and respond to TFGBV. It also involves sharing knowledge and best practices to build capacity in the field.

**Actor Identification and Mapping:** This involves identifying individuals and groups who are involved in perpetrating or facilitating TFGBV. It also involves mapping their networks and relationships to better understand the dynamics of TFGBV.

**Tools, Toolkits, and Expose Playbooks:** This involves developing and sharing tools, resources, and strategies for addressing TFGBV. It may include playbooks with step-by-step instructions for responding to specific types of TFGBV incidents.

**Context-Specific Lexicon Development:** This involves developing a shared understanding of the terminology and language used to describe TFGBV in different contexts. It may include creating glossaries or dictionaries to ensure consistent communication and understanding.

**Advocacy for policy change and Partnership with Media Organizations:** This involves advocating for policies and practices that address TFGBV. It also involves partnering with media organizations to raise awareness about the issue and promote responsible reporting. Recognizing and integrating TFGBV across existing laws, regulations, and policies, regulating private technology companies, and holding offenders accountable.

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<sup>8</sup> [TFGBV in Ethiopia | CIR](#)

<sup>9</sup> [UNFPA\\_SafeEthicalGBVTechGuide\\_Summary\\_2023.pdf](#)

## Sectoral Learnings

**Food and water systems:** - In the strive to include women farmers access internet to ensure food and water systems, maternal nutritional and reproductive health, financial inclusion, and economic justice is in place – women from low-income rural communities have lower levels of experience with smartphones and/or the internet. Their knowledge and the skill gap to these devices and services expose them to dealing with GBV within their homes given the social norms dictating that women should not own mobile devices. In addition; they remain susceptible to online scams, misinformation, and fraudulent schemes.

**Climate:** The CARE's 2020 report has underscored that “all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls spike during disaster and conflict” and the “climate extremes exacerbate existing inequalities, vulnerabilities and negative gender norms<sup>10</sup>. Climate justice also means making sure women access the necessary information on how much rain is not safe and when to prepare to migrate. Online harassment, misinformation and disinformation are among the forms of TFGBV targeting female farmers hindering their ability to make informed decisions.

**Education and skills:** - majority of the findings from our research show that adolescent and young women are highly subjected to cyber bullying; harassment and threats. 18% of young women and girls globally who have been subjected to technology facilitated gender-based violence have since experienced challenges at school<sup>11</sup>. Among the most common platforms for online harassment are social media, video streaming and content sharing and jobs and educational platforms. These threats are reportedly discouraging young women and girls from participating on online learning and limiting their education and skills opportunities.

**Health:-** During the crisis of COVID both female health workers and women have been affected with misinformation and delayed information on how to protect themselves from the transmission. Women are exposed to lack of information that can potentially lead to poor health decisions and increased risk of illness. The majority of the front-line health care workers were women who were exposed to online harassment and abuse that resulted in hindering their ability to provide quality care and support to their patients.

Workplace violence (WPV) against Healthcare Workers (HCWs) has emerged as a global issue. Emergency Department (ED) HCWs as front liners are more vulnerable to it due to the nature of their work and exposure to unique medical and social situations. In most cases, the perpetrators of these acts of violence are the patients and their attendants as families.

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<sup>10</sup> [01202020\\_Report\\_SufferingInSilence2019\\_webversion.pdf](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Ending VAWC Helpdesk Report 32 Global Prevalence of Online VAWG](#).

The causes of this rise are multifactorial; these include the inaccurate spread of information and rumors through social media, certain religious perspectives, propaganda and increasing anger and frustration among the public.<sup>12</sup>

**Women economic justice:** - our findings from studies shows that among the barriers of digital inclusion is women lacking access to digital tools limiting their opportunity to access financial services. In many scenarios women do not fully own mobile devices; sharing with intimate partners. Research in Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka found that, in many households, women and girls depend on the permission of men in their house to use a mobile phone . This is therefore a concern to address when engaging women entrepreneurs<sup>13</sup> and farmers in financial systems and digital economic opportunities. Knowledge and skills on how to maintain and protect strong passwords and the skills to identify and report hacking are among the highly recommended safety measures.

## Using technology for tackling TFGBV

There are many scenarios technology can be harnessed for good. Even though TFGBV resulted from building technologies; solutions and services swiftly and lacking human centered designs – there are also possible scenarios technology can be harnessed for good; below are examples:

**[Safe OnLine Colombia](#)**; a project on child abuse and exploitation leverages AI to study conversations among abusers, use these insights to improve Latin American report lines' work, and help authorities find patterns of abuse so they can set up early warning mechanisms.

The **[State of American Men](#)** revealed compelling trends related to the isolation, mental health struggles, and restrictive worldviews among many 18-23 year old men in particular. This finding has initiated a conversation among many partners on the necessity of designing a social media intervention to create positive shifts in men's attitudes and adoption of healthier masculinities.

Bullyid Indonesia [bullyid.org](http://bullyid.org) designed an application to raise awareness and advocating for safer digital spaces and polices. The app also provides education and empowerment through digital resources and customized trainings.

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<sup>12</sup> [Perceptions, challenges and experiences of frontline healthcare providers in Emergency Departments regarding Workplace Violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: A protocol for an exploratory qualitative study from an LMIC | BMJ Open](#)

To effectively address Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV), leveraging technology while simultaneously bridging the gender digital divide is a prospect. This requires prioritizing the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls in the development and implementation of technological solutions. By investing in safe and inclusive technologies and ensuring their equitable access, we can enhance online protection, mitigate risks, and improve responses to both TFGBV and GBV.



## Way Forward

**Digital literacy programs to build participant skills and confidence** will be essential to empowering women and girls with the knowledge and skills on how to keep safe online; from using educational and skills-building innovations to digital financial services, climate-smart initiatives, cash transfer offers, and access to emergency response services. What we have learned is the more we put women and girls' data and information on digital devices and internet access in place the higher their chance of being exposed to tech facilitated gender-based violence.

**Re-envisioning gender norms and combating TFGBV;** we have learnt that women and girls face significant barriers to accessing technology and the internet resulting from the existing gender norms. The deeply ingrained social norms that perceive women and girls' use of the internet as unnecessary and inappropriate are also the leading contributors to the risks of TFGBV. Through community-based awareness programs and household dialogue promotion; Revisioning these norms and addressing barriers to safely accessing products and services will ensure that there is a safe space for women and girls to reflect and seek support during these occurrences.

**Policy advocacy through partnerships with WROs:** influencing global laws and policies that respond to the transnational crimes of TFGBV through joint advocacy building upon the knowledge and voices of WROs is a two-layered approach. This will assist CARE building WRO's capacity while laterally mobilizing public opinions and influencing decision makers.

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<sup>12</sup> [Perceptions, challenges and experiences of frontline healthcare providers in Emergency Departments regarding Workplace Violence during the COVID-19 pandemic: A protocol for an exploratory qualitative study from an LMIC | BMJ Open](#)

<sup>13</sup> (Kamran, H (2022) 'Access Denied: Gender Digital Divide as a Form of Violence in South and Southeast Asia' genderIT. org, 12 December 2022 [https://genderit.org/editorial/access-denied-gender-digital-divide-form-violence-south-and\[1\]southeast-asia](https://genderit.org/editorial/access-denied-gender-digital-divide-form-violence-south-and[1]southeast-asia))





## Resources

[UNFPA-TFGBV-Making All Spaces Safe.pdf](#)

[ICRW TFGBVMarketing Brief v8-Web.pdf](#)

[Technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-shared-research-agenda-en.pdf](#)

[Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threat](#)

[UNFPA-TFGBV-Making All Spaces Safe.pdf](#)[Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women](#)

[TFGBV in Ethiopia | CIR](#)

[UNFPA SafeEthicalGBVTechGuide Summary 2023.pdf](#)

[Technology-Facilitated GBV: What is it, and How do we measure it? - ICRW](#)

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