



Technology-
facilitated Gender-
based Violence

Making all spaces safe

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Acknowledgements



As the world continues to evolve and expand in the use of technology and platforms, so too does the expansion of spaces through which violence can be perpetrated. This was evidenced no more so than during the COVID-19 pandemic where containment efforts reduced access to information and services driving increased use of technology and online spaces. This paper serves as an alarm bell for the international community, digital and feminist movements, private technology companies and national Governments to act in unison to end the rising scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

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Part 1



What is TFGBV?

Definition,
Prevalence and
Impact



Background

The emergence of, and the increasing reliance on digital technology and spaces, is a global megatrend,¹ a universal phenomenon that is shaping our current world. Digitalization is driving structural changes in how people communicate, work, learn, produce and consume. Technological innovation and digitalization are opening a window of opportunities for sustainable development, in a time when many aspects of human life are being radically transformed.² Technology has the potential to foster economic growth; to expand access to education, information and knowledge; and to give voice and power to those furthest left behind and those whose voices were not traditionally heard, thereby enhancing participation in public life and democratic processes.

However, while the digitalization of the world represents significant opportunity, it is also a space through which harm may be perpetrated. Research indicates that at least 38 per cent of women globally have personally experienced

online violence and that this rate is rising.³ Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) targets all women who use technology, including both cis and trans women and people who present as feminine, non-binary or gender-diverse individuals.⁴ Certain groups of women are at a higher risk because of what they do, who they are or if they access certain information and services. This includes women journalists, politicians, women activists and feminists, academics and young people for example.⁵ Of those adolescent girls who do have access to digital technologies, 64 per cent are high users and are particularly vulnerable to TFGBV.⁶ The violence against women and girls is more frequent if they have a disability, are racialized, LGBTQIA+, socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or politically outspoken.⁷

In the words of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund:

[t]he ubiquity of the Internet means that TFGBV can become omnipresent and relentless, infiltrating a victim's most intimate physical spaces, such as their home or bedroom. Users engaging in TFGBV can also leverage their own and targeted individuals' online social networks to further the abuse, by recruiting others to knowingly or unwittingly share abusive material, and by contaminating the targeted individuals' own online spaces and communities. The online permanence of abusive material – which is exceedingly difficult to completely eradicate once shared online – also ensures continued revictimization, resulting in lasting psychological and other damage.⁸



Furthermore, TFGBV can take many forms and is committed across a continuum. That is, it is committed as part of a pattern of violence perpetrated both online and offline.⁹

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 can effectively exercise their right to freedom of expression. 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”.¹⁰

More specifically, the principle that human rights and women’s rights protected offline must also be protected online should fully integrate the right to live free from emerging forms of online and information and communication technologies-facilitated violence against women, while respecting the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy and data protection.¹¹

The use of technology and online spaces should serve as a tool for accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women instead of a tool of subjugation, the perpetration of violence and silencing of women in all their diversity.



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