

Technology- Facilitated Gender- Based Violence: Preliminary Landscape Analysis

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About the Global Partnership

The Global Partnership, a government-to-government body, was launched at the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2022. To date, the Global Partnership is made up of the following member states: Australia, Canada, Chile, Denmark, Iceland, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Global Partnership is supported by a multi-stakeholder Advisory Group, led by a steering committee made up of UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF and the Association for Progressive Communications.

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Acronyms

AI	Artificial intelligence
APC	Association for Progressive Communications
CDC	The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSA	Child sexual abuse
CSAM	Child sexual abuse material
FMA	The Foundation for Media Alternatives
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBVIMS	Gender-based Violence Information Management System
IBSA	Image-based sexual abuse
ICT	Information and communications technology
ICVAC	International Classification and Operational Definitions of Violence Against Children
IoT	Internet of Things
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LBTQIA women	Lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual women
LBQ women	Lesbian, bisexual and queer women
LGBTQIA+ people	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, plus people
LMIC	Low- and middle-income country
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics
SVRI	Sexual Violence Research Initiative
TFGBV	Technology-facilitated gender-based violence
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAC	Violence against children
VACS	Violence against children and youth surveys
VAW	Violence against women
WHO	World Health Organisation

Foreword

Recent years have seen staggering rates of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). An Economist Intelligence Unit report found 85% of women globally have witnessed or experienced online violence.¹ This has severe consequences for individuals and wider societies, with disproportionate impacts on groups who face intersecting systemic forms of discrimination and oppression, as digital technologies amplify and intensify pre-existing inequalities.

The harassment and abuse that women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons experience online frequently silences them, causing them to self-censor and withdraw from online civic and political spaces, disengage from school or work, and suffer setbacks to their careers, as well as causing harms to their mental and physical health. This violence doesn't stay online. For example, 20% of women journalists participating in a UNESCO global survey said that offline attacks were directly linked to online violence targeting them².

TFGBV is driven by the same structural gender inequalities as other forms of GBV. Yet with billions of people using digital technologies, social media, and mobile internet devices, and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI), women, girls and LGBTQI+ persons face a proliferation of threats, as these tools are weaponised against them. These harms are compounded by the persistence of a global, gender digital divide, in which women are under-represented in the design, application, and governance of digital technologies and the content they disseminate.

On a daily basis, women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons around the world, as well as the communities that support them, face targeted, gender-based attacks facilitated by digital technologies. These include, for example: cyberstalking; online harassment; death and rape threats; and the non-consensual sharing or threatened distribution of intimate images, including deepfake 'pornography' created or altered by generative AI. Each of these forms of TFGBV can be intertwined with misogyny-driven hate speech and gendered disinformation campaigns. Left unchecked, this online misogyny threatens to reverse progress towards gender equality globally. Already, TFGBV has been seen as a tactic by both state and non-state actors to spread division and destabilise democratic debates. In democratic societies, TFGBV is being recognised as a growing national security threat, serving as a pathway to radicalisation to violence and violent extremism, with gender-based hate often prevalent across violent extremist ideologies.

We do not accept these outcomes as inevitable, nor do we accept them as acceptable.

Formally launched at the 66th Commission on the Status of Women in March 2022, the [Global Partnership](#) for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership) has grown to 12 countries that together have committed to prioritize, understand, prevent, and address the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. It works with a multistakeholder Advisory Group composed of survivors, leaders, and experts from civil society, research and academia, the private sector, and international organizations.

As a Global Partnership, we are delighted to have commissioned this preliminary landscape analysis on TFGBV to contribute to the development of a global shared research agenda and complement the work of other multi-stakeholder initiatives.¹ This analysis synthesizes relevant research from across different sectors and disciplines, including digital development, gender-based violence, and countering violent extremism, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of TFGBV throughout the life course. It sets out a review of the current evidence base and emergent gaps, recognising, for example, the need to better understand the political and economic drivers of TFGBV. It identifies emerging evidence and research priorities which will inform and be built on by a range of different stakeholders working on the global shared research agenda.

We are grateful to the team at Social Development Direct for carrying out the analysis, to all those who participated in consultations related to this work, the Global Partnership Advisory Group, and members of the Christchurch Call Community who provided invaluable feedback on early drafts.

We also acknowledge the specific contributions of victim-survivors and those with lived experience of technology-facilitated gender-based violence. We thank the victim-survivors who have spoken out and shared their stories, and the particular strengths it takes for them to contribute to these kinds of processes.

Drawing on this paper, the Global Partnership has identified the following priorities to guide its research and data objectives in the coming year, complementing the goals laid out in the [2023 Roadmap](#).

¹ This paper was commissioned by the Global Partnership, funded by the UK's International Cyber Values campaign but does not necessarily represent views of the Global Partnership's member states or Advisory Group.

Statistical definitions, measures, and data collection:

- Continue to support work led by UN Women to develop a statistical framework for TFGBV, including through the UN Statistical Commission;
- Support relevant UN Special Rapporteurs to develop a common definition for gendered disinformation;
- Explore the feasibility of integrating TFGBV into Global Partnership countries' own statistics and data collection frameworks, research strategies, and processes.

Supporting Evidence to Practice & Advancing What Works to Address TFGBV

- Build up a rigorous evidence base on what works to prevent and respond to TFGBV, and mobilise additional funding to fill evidence gaps;
- Promote and build the evidence base for safety by design, risk-based, proactive and systemic approaches to addressing TFGBV, including by supporting innovation in the safety technology sector.

Multistakeholder Engagement

- Meaningfully engage and partner with survivors, civil society actors and Indigenous and other underrepresented communities from lower and middle-income countries to ensure their voices, cultural and political contexts are represented in TFGBV research efforts;
- Mobilise broad, multistakeholder calls for platform accountability and transparency measures and access to data from technology service providers (with safeguards for users' privacy) for researchers and civil society groups;
- Work collaboratively with researchers, survivors, civil society experts, and online service providers to identify common priorities and opportunities to address TFGBV, including through the misuse of new and emerging technologies like generative AI, to translate evidence to practice and to support multi-stakeholder research projects.
- Coordinate with complementary initiatives to further build a research agenda that fills critical gaps in the evidence base on TFGBV, such as the Global Research Priorities work led by Sexual Violence Research Institute, and the Christchurch Call to Action, which is working to deepen the evidence base on the links between online gender-based hate, and terrorism and violent extremism.

Despite the scale of the problem, TFGBV is preventable, and should not take generations to eradicate. Everyone – governments, online service providers and industry, civil society, international organizations, academia, and researchers – has a role in preventing, responding, and protecting women, girls, and LGBTQI+ people from TFGBV. Together, we must all do our part to advance a shared global agenda to promote peace, security, and stability, recognising that the chilling effects of online harassment and abuse on the civic and political participation of women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons undermine our collective goals.

Executive Summary

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a **pervasive problem worldwide**. The rise of the use of the internet and other digital technologies presents significant benefits and opportunities for women and girls in all their diversity, helping many access information, education, skills and employment opportunities, socialise, and carry out advocacy and activism. Technology is also increasingly being used to help prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). However, the design and use of digital technologies - and wider internet and technology governance - facilitating new ways in which GBV is perpetrated.

TFGBV is recognised as a form of discrimination and **negatively impacts on a wide range of human rights and freedoms**, including: the right to access and use digital technologies; the right to a life free from violence; the right to freedom of expression; the right to privacy; and the right to participate in public and political life. In addition, TFGBV has **serious and long-lasting impacts** for many individuals, communities and wider societies, including: a 'chilling effect' on democratic participation;³ the normalisation of violent, misogynistic beliefs and behaviours; and is contributing to the rollback of women's and girls' rights and advancements in gender equality.

The **existing evidence base** on the prevalence, forms, drivers and impacts of TFGBV is growing, particularly for some forms of TFGBV such as gendered disinformation, and an important body of evidence now exists for policy action. However, data collection and research on TFGBV as a whole is **not yet coordinated at global and regional levels**, and different studies use different concepts, definitions and measures which make it hard to establish reliable global prevalence estimates and compare data across studies and countries.⁴

1. Prevalence, forms and drivers

Existing global and regional prevalence estimates of **TFGBV are high**, though estimates vary across the different forms of TFGBV measured (with most focusing on online spaces),⁵ the questions asked, and the locations and demographic features of the respondents.⁶ For example, a recent global survey in 45 countries found that **38% of surveyed women reported personal experiences of online violence**,⁷ whereas another survey conducted across eight countries found that 23% of surveyed women had experienced online abuse or harassment.⁸ It should be noted that these data are based on slightly different internet penetration rates.

Existing prevalence data is likely to underestimate the scale of the problem for many reasons, including under-reporting of the issue, as is the case with other forms of GBV, and a lack of standardised definitions and measures, as well as other methodological challenges.

Forms of TFGBV are wide and varied, and, like other forms of GBV, can be sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, and can result in physical harm.⁹ Some of the more common forms of TFGBV can include: image-based abuse; harassment and abuse; stalking and monitoring; device and app control; public disclosure of private information and doxing; impersonation; threats of violence; hate speech; misinformation and disinformation; and misogyny linked to radicalisation and violent extremism.¹⁰

TFGBV reflects and exacerbates **existing forms and patterns of GBV**, including intimate partner violence (IPV), and political violence, and new forms and patterns of GBV have emerged that can only take place through technology and online spaces, such as image-based abuse through artificial intelligence (such as sexual deepfake videos or virtual reality pornography).¹¹ As well as sharing many of the same characteristics as other forms of GBV, TFGBV has **distinct characteristics** related to the digital nature of abuse, including the scale, speed and impact with which violence can happen. TFGBV can result in multiple layers of perpetration as harmful and threatening content and images are disseminated, shared or threatened to be shared by others, and violence and abuse repeated and victims-survivors retraumatised.¹²

TFGBV is driven by **structural gender inequality and unequal power relations**. Deep rooted and systemic gender discrimination, intersecting with other systems of oppression and wider political and economic factors, shapes the design and use of technology and online spaces, and women's participation in digital life. It is important therefore that efforts to understand, measure and address TFGBV are considered within **both the contexts of GBV and digital exclusion**.

Some of the **risk and protective factors** for TFGBV are the same as other forms of GBV (e.g. harmful gender norms),¹³ however further research is needed in relation to how these are changed due to the digital nature of abuse. Other risk and protective factors are unique to TFGBV (e.g. online communities that normalise misogyny and masculine grievances, enable anonymity,¹⁴ and provide opportunities for geographically disparate individuals to convene and connect).¹⁵

2. Who is disproportionately affected by TFGBV?

Evidence shows that women and girls are predominantly affected by TFGBV due to structural gender inequalities between women and men, and this has been the focus of most research on TFGBV to date. Evidence also shows that TFGBV affects LGBTQI+ people, including transgender people and gender diverse people, and men and boys who do not conform to patriarchal gender norms, though there is less available research on this.

Though all women, girls, trans, and gender diverse people are at more likely to experience TFGBV, some are disproportionately affected:

- **Women who are or have been in abusive intimate relationships** can experience higher levels of TFGBV as current and former partners are, in many cases, the perpetrators of TFGBV.¹⁶

- **Women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people who face intersecting systemic forms of discrimination and oppressions are more likely to experience TFGBV.** This includes women who are Black, Indigenous, from ethnic and religious minorities, women with disabilities, and women with diverse SOGIESC.¹⁷
- **Young women and girls** are more likely to experience TFGBV, partly related to their frequent use of social media.¹⁸ A global survey with women aged 18-74 found that younger women were more likely to have experienced online violence – 45% of women from generation Z and Millennials compared to 31% of Generation X and baby Boomers had personally experienced online violence.¹⁹
- **Women in public and political life**, including journalists, politicians and parliamentarians, and women and LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders and activists, are more likely to experience TFGBV due to their roles and public visibility.²⁰ A recent global survey with women journalists found that the majority of respondents (73%) had experienced online violence in the course of their work.²¹

3. Individual and societal impacts

For victims-survivors, TFGBV can cause **sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, social, political and economic harm**.²² Most of the existing global evidence focuses on public figures, particularly women journalists and politicians.

At a societal level, TFGBV is **a threat to open, peaceful, democratic societies**. Evidence shows that gendered disinformation and targeted hate campaigns form narratives that go beyond attacks on individual women and LGBTQIA+ people, to attacking their rights more broadly, often with an end goal of polarising and destabilising democratic societies.²³ It can erode individual and collective rights to participate in shared civic spaces and discourage women from being involved in public life or cause them to self-censor.²⁴ It can also **increase tensions that lead to violent conflict**, with some arguing that online threats against women in public roles should be included as a gender-sensitive early warning indicator for conflict.²⁵ There is also a growing body of research showing the **specific security threat** posed by individuals who perpetrate acts of targeted violence, many of whom display concerning online misogynistic behaviour, domestic violence, or threatening online communications.²⁶

There is also some evidence that online attacks against women are **deepening and changing harmful social norms**. This includes the normalisation of sexual violence through mediums like social media and violent online pornography and abuse material (including the crossover between these two, for example, as increasingly sexually violent pornographic content and abuse material is disseminated via social media),²⁷ weakening norms around inclusion and civil discourse.²⁸

TFGBV also has **economic costs**. For example, research in Australia estimated that the cost of online harassment and cyberhate is AUD \$3.7 billion (£2.1 billion pounds) in health costs and lost income.²⁹ Although not disaggregated by gender, the findings build a powerful case for investment in measures to address online abuse.³⁰

4. Accessing justice

Victims-survivors of TFGBV face **multiple barriers to accessing justice**. There is an overwhelming sense of impunity for online harms, which is exacerbated by the anonymity by which perpetrators can carry out their abuse. There is a disproportionate burden on victims-survivors to identify and report TFGBV to online service providers and law enforcement.³¹ The digital nature of abuse can enhance barriers victims-survivors face in accessing justice and the impunity of perpetrators.

Governments and their regulators are expanding their mechanisms to address online harms, including forms of TFGBV, though many of the legislative and regulatory responses are yet to be substantially reviewed. Nonetheless, comparative analyses of some legal frameworks to address TFGBV reveal that, where new and existing **criminal laws** are used to address TFGBV, they are not effectively implemented, including as a result of inadequate law enforcement responses, weak political infrastructure, and limitations with existing legal provisions across GBV and cybercrime laws.³² **Civil remedies** are also available in some contexts, including suing for defamation, applying for protection orders and to address the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.³³ In some jurisdictions, options may be limited and expensive, and may not be victim-survivor-centred, and may fail to take into account the long-lasting impacts of abuse.³⁴

The legal system can also be **weaponised against women**, including to intimidate, harass and silence them, as documented in relation to the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and defamation lawsuits against women journalists.³⁵

5. Perpetrator profiles and behaviours

Perpetrators of TFGBV include **current and former intimate partners** who misuse and abuse technologies, including to control, harass, intimidate and monitor the movements of victims-survivors, carrying out the same well-known behaviours using new and different tools at their disposal.³⁶ TFGBV can also be perpetrated by those **unknown to victims-survivors**, including for the purpose of sexual harassment.³⁷

There is a continuum of online behaviours, attitudes and beliefs among men, particularly young men, that can escalate into more extreme views and expressions of violence against women. At one end of that continuum is the '**manosphere**' whose ideologies and related content cut across different online service providers and audiences and is highly visible to the general population. Public figures and **online influencers** can also reproduce harmful norms around gender and violence amongst their followers, as well as the public, including through misogynistic content.

The evidence on the interconnected nature of online-offline violence and **perpetrator pathways to violent extremism and TFGBV** is at an early stage,³⁸ however there is evidence that some incels (involuntary celibates) have been inspired to commit extremist violence in part by the violence of other incels.³⁹

There is also evidence that **political actors** use TFGBV as a tactic against women, to undermine the realisation of women's rights more broadly and to advance wider political, economic and social goals, which is threatening to destabilise democracy.

6. The role of online service providers in the proliferation and amplification of TFGBV

A number of **common features** have been identified in relation to the role of online service providers in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV. These include: advertising-driven business models; prioritization of business growth over safety, ethics and consumer protection; design choices and algorithmic preferences; ease, efficiency, and affordability; the ability of perpetrators to hide behind anonymity and commit TFGBV from a distance, and say and do what they would not do offline (the online disinhibition effect); and the ability of perpetrators to 'game' content moderation features.⁴⁰

A number of providers now publish **transparency reports** that outline how they are enforcing their own content policies and rules. However, these reports provide very little information regarding particular forms of abuse, and they do not detail what providers are doing to address the *gendered* nature of abuse, as data is not disaggregated by gender.

7. Evidence gaps and research priorities

Despite the growing evidence base on TFGBV, there is a need to improve the collection of **reliable, disaggregated and comparable global and regional data on prevalence, forms, impacts and drivers of TFGBV**.⁴¹ There are also gaps in official data and transparency from governments and online service providers. In addition, there is a lack of data, resources and geographical focus on evidence from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), particularly community-led research conducted by researchers in LMICs.

Other evidence gaps include: an understanding of the intersectional nature of TFGBV; adolescent girls' and young women's experiences of TFGBV; specific risk and protective factors associated with both victimisation and perpetration of TFGBV; individual and societal level impacts; what works to prevent and respond to TFGBV, including how technology could be harnessed to prevent TFGBV and promote social norm change; the gender digital divide and how it contributes to the prevalence of TFGBV and acts as a barrier to addressing TFGBV; the role of technology and online service providers in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV; and the use of strengths-based approaches analysis of legal and regulatory approaches to effectively address TFGBV through accountability and transparency for individuals and online service providers.

This paper sets out some emerging evidence and research priorities on TFGBV, responding to consultations with stakeholders and this initial assessment of evidence gaps. These priorities will be built on further through continued dialogue and research priority setting, as set out in the main body of this paper. There are considerable ethical and safety challenges with collecting data on TFGBV, and also methodological challenges, which are explored further in this paper. It is therefore essential that risks are carefully considered and mitigated, with additional considerations for children, younger adolescents, and populations that are highly marginalised.



Introduction

This preliminary landscape analysis is part of the Global Partnership's commitment to help develop a **global, shared evidence base** and expand the collection of more reliable, disaggregated and comparable data on TFGBV, laying the groundwork for shared advocacy and action around a normative agenda. It sets out a review of the evidence base on TFGBV, an assessment of evidence gaps, and emerging research priorities. It also sets out some of the key methodological and ethical challenges in accessing and collecting data on TFGBV. The Global Partnership hopes that this paper will help raise awareness of TFGBV, inform other ongoing efforts to establish research priorities, and lay the foundation for partnerships across all sectors and actors. It also helps take forward one of the Christchurch Call's Leaders' Summit 2022 key actions to deepen the evidence base on the links between targeted violence and online gender-based hate and ideological movements as potential vectors for terrorism and violent extremism.

Like all forms of GBV, TFGBV is driven by **structural gender inequality** which intersects with and is shaped by other systems of oppression, including racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism and colonialism. TFGBV shares many of the same characteristics as other forms of GBV and must be considered with the broader context of GBV. However, TFGBV also has distinct characteristics which amplify the reach of transmission and harm caused to survivors and must be considered within the broader context of structural gender inequality in the design and development of technologies and in internet governance. TFGBV has **devastating impacts** across the social ecology, including a chilling effect on democratic participation⁴² and normalising violent, misogynistic beliefs and behaviours. In addition, TFGBV contributes to the rollback on women's rights and gender equality.

Women-led and women's rights organisations and advocates around the world have been at the **forefront of efforts** for TFGBV to be recognised as a form of discrimination, a human rights violation, and as part of the continuum of violence that women and girls in all their diversity experience throughout their lives. This includes collecting data and evidence to support advocacy at the international level. This activism and advocacy, supported by evidence generation, has led to greater recognition at the international level that TFGBV is a form of GBV and resulted in, for example, the Human Rights Council recognising in 2018 that GBV against women and girls is inclusive of digital contexts.⁴³

As a result, there is now **growing global attention** from policy and decision makers on the need to address TFGBV. For example, in 2020, TFGBV was included in the Generation Equality Action Coalitions' blueprint for action;⁴⁴ in 2021, the G7 committed to addressing online violence against women and girls, and to coordinate and share insights into the nature, scale, and cost of the harms caused;⁴⁵ and in 2022 the [Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse](#)

(Global Partnership) was launched as a government-to-government body specifically set up to bring together countries, international organisations, civil society, and the private sector to better prioritize, understand, prevent, and address TFGBV. More recently, in 2023 the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67 has recognised the severe impacts of TFGBV on women and girls, and the need to 'improve coherence of policy actions for the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence, including gender-based violence that occurs through or is amplified by the use of technologies around principles focusing on victim- and/or survivor-centered approaches with full respect for human rights, access to justice, transparency, accountability and proportionality.'⁴⁶

A **burgeoning evidence** base on the nature (forms, drivers and impacts) and prevalence of TFGBV has informed global attention and policy commitments and is making the case for action now. However, evidence on TFGBV in its broadest sense is still in its early stages and there are important evidence gaps which need to be addressed for more targeted and context-specific policy action, and to determine what interventions and prevention approaches work to address TFGBV.



Scope and methodology

As set out in this paper, there is currently **no globally agreed definition of TFGBV** which presents challenges in understanding, measuring and addressing these forms of GBV. A recent global review of terms and definitions highlighted the wide array of definitions that are used around the world to describe TFGBV and its different forms.⁴⁷ To address this, UN Women and the World Health Organisation (WHO), as part of their global Joint Programme on Violence against Women (VAW) Data, convened an expert group in November 2022 to look at how to develop a common comprehensive definition of TFGBV.⁴⁸ The proposed global definition of TFGBV is currently being consulted on further with additional stakeholders, including from LMICs, and has been used by the Global Partnership to inform this paper:

“Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)⁴⁹ is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies 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.”

UN Women and WHO Joint Programme on VAW Data

Like other forms of GBV, evidence shows that **women and girls are predominantly affected** by TFGBV due to structural gender inequalities between women and men, and this has been the focus of most research on TFGBV to date. Evidence also shows that TFGBV **affects members of the LGBTQIA+ community**, including transgender people and gender diverse people, and men and boys who do not conform to patriarchal gender norms, though there is less available research on this population. Women, girls, and the LGBTQIA+ community, including transgender people and gender diverse people, who experience intersecting forms of oppression are disproportionately affected by TFGBV, as are women in public and political life and women in intimate relationships.

Due to the sheer numbers affected and the current state of evidence, this paper primarily focuses on TFGBV against **women and girls in all their diversity**, applying an intersectional gender lens to explore the disproportionate impacts of TFGBV on women and girls, including those who experience intersecting forms of oppression (e.g. where patriarchy intersects with homophobia, transphobia, ableism, racism and colonialism). While the majority of research cited in this paper relates to women’s and girls’ experiences of TFGBV, including women and girls with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), such as lesbian, bisexual, queer, and trans women, it also includes research relating to the wider LGBTQIA+ community, where there is evidence that they are targeted due to intersecting forms of oppression.

This analysis has been informed by in-depth interviews held in January 2023 with over 30 stakeholders, including representatives from civil society (women's rights and digital rights activists and organisations, NGOs and INGOs), youth representatives, research institutions, UN agencies and online service providers; and a rapid review of secondary literature. The analysis builds on a Wilton Park event, co-hosted by the Global Partnership and UN Women in August 2022, that brought together over 50 international stakeholders to discuss this topic; and was informed by a Symposium held by UNFPA on TFGBV measurement in December 2022. The UK Government also commissioned the Violence against Women and Children Helpdesk to carry out two evidence reviews to inform the development of this paper: on global prevalence estimates⁵⁰ and societal impacts.⁵¹

Limitations of this analysis include:

- The rapid literature review took place in February 2023 and was limited to published and unpublished materials in English. The researchers and authors of this paper recognise that sources of evidence exist in other languages that were not reviewed for this analysis, and that subsequent material has or is soon to be published after the review took place. Researchers made a deliberate effort to highlight evidence from LMICs, where that is available in English, and to engage actors in LMICs during the consultations. However, further validation of priorities with stakeholders in LMICs will be necessary.
- It was outside the scope of this project to carry out a detailed mapping of evidence gaps for TFGBV and specific forms, and assess the quality of evidence available.
- This analysis focused on broad gaps in the existing evidence base and did not look at interventions that work – or do not work – to prevent and respond to TFGBV. The Global Partnership will be drawing on other recent and ongoing reviews of the emerging literature on what works to provide guidance on effective programming and evaluation to address TFGBV.
- The prevalence section focuses on evidence that contributes to global and regional prevalence estimates, including multi-country studies. The research did not focus on national or sub-national prevalence studies. National studies and smaller quantitative and qualitative studies contribute important evidence that help us to understand the scale and nature of TFGBV, but it was beyond the scope of the research to review this body of evidence in a systematic way. However, some national studies are referenced where there are particular evidence gaps at regional and global levels.
- Consultations were carried out with a wide range of stakeholders, however in the timeframe available the number of consultations with each stakeholder group was limited.
- The research team made a deliberate attempt to identify research studies carried out collaboratively between GBV practitioners, researchers and technologists, however these are limited. Research tends to consider TFGBV within a broader GBV framework or within a digital framework. More collaboration is needed between GBV practitioners, researchers and technologists.

- This analysis looked at evidence on political violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people, however it did not carry out a detailed political economy analysis.

In addition, this paper delves into an issue that is generally under-researched, with definitions and typologies of harms still being developed and discussed. It provides a snapshot of current evidence at this particular point in time and acknowledges that collective understanding of TFGBV is evolving. As such, the paper draws on multiple sources to illustrate these relatively recent and emerging forms of GBV, through a GBV and digital lens.



A note on definitions and terms used in this paper

- **TFGBV** is used as an overarching term in this paper, rather than 'online violence', 'online GBV', 'cyber GBV,' or 'technology-facilitated VAW' to reflect the wide range of different technologies that can be used to perpetrate abuse and the intersectional nature of abuse women and girls in all their diversity can experience. This paper uses the term 'TFGBV' to be inclusive of all forms of GBV that are facilitated online and through digital technologies, including those that do not make use of the internet. Individual sources of evidence cited throughout this paper use a variety of terminology and definitions to describe different forms of violence and abuse. When citing evidence, the paper uses the same terms as in the original sources (e.g., online GBV, online harms) and when discussing this evidence or synthesizing findings, the paper uses TFGBV as an overarching term.
- **Women and girls in their diversity** is used to describe women and girls (cisgender and trans women) with different identities, from different walks of life, and across different geographies. This terminology is particularly useful to draw attention to the diversity of women and girls, and the intersecting forms of oppression many experience.
- **Gender diverse** is used to refer to people whose gender identity, including their gender expression, does not conform to what is perceived as being the gender norm in a particular context at a particular point in time, including those who do not place themselves in the male/female binary. This includes but is not limited to non-binary and gender queer people.⁵²
- **LGBTQIA+**: There are a wide variety of acronyms used in different contexts to describe persons with diverse SOGIESC, and there is no one acronym that can capture the full diversity of identities and experiences within LGBTQIA+ communities. This report uses the term LGBTQIA+ when referring to the wider community. When referencing specific studies, the report uses the same acronym as in the source to accurately reflect the populations in focus.
- **Gender digital divide** is used to refer to the gap between women's and men's ability to access and use the Internet and digital technologies and contribute to and benefit from their development.⁵³ The term is used inclusively in the paper to refer to cis and trans women and men.
- **Technology** is used to refer to a wider range of digital technologies, including those that do and do not use the internet. This includes phones (location sharing features, private messages, phone calls, etc.), gaming, the internet of things (headphones, security devices, appliances, home devices), drones, virtual reality, augmented reality, amongst other technologies.
- **Online service providers** is used to refer to all services that facilitate access to the internet for the purpose of online communication and interaction between people. This includes providers of social media, search engines and app distribution, as well as the manufacture, repair and maintenance of digital devices and technologies.⁵⁴ Whilst many of the examples highlighted in this paper relate to online spaces, TFGBV can be committed through other technologies which do not make use of the internet or take place on social media platforms, such as phone calls, texts and GPS tracking, which are also misused and weaponised.

What is TFGBV?

TFGBV is a complex problem that needs to be understood both in relation to its similarities to other forms of GBV and its distinct differences. This section sets out that TFGBV shares many of the **same characteristics** as other forms of GBV, reflecting and exacerbating existing forms and patterns of GBV. However, there are **distinct differences** which relate to the digital nature of the abuse and the wider internet and technology governance, which is facilitating new ways in which GBV is perpetrated against women and girls. It is important therefore that efforts to understand, measure and address TFGBV are considered within both **broader GBV and digital contexts**. TFGBV is part of the continuum of violence that women and girls in all their diversity experience or witness throughout their lives. It is part of 'real world' violence and cannot be separated from what happens offline.

TFGBV as a form of discrimination and gender-based violence

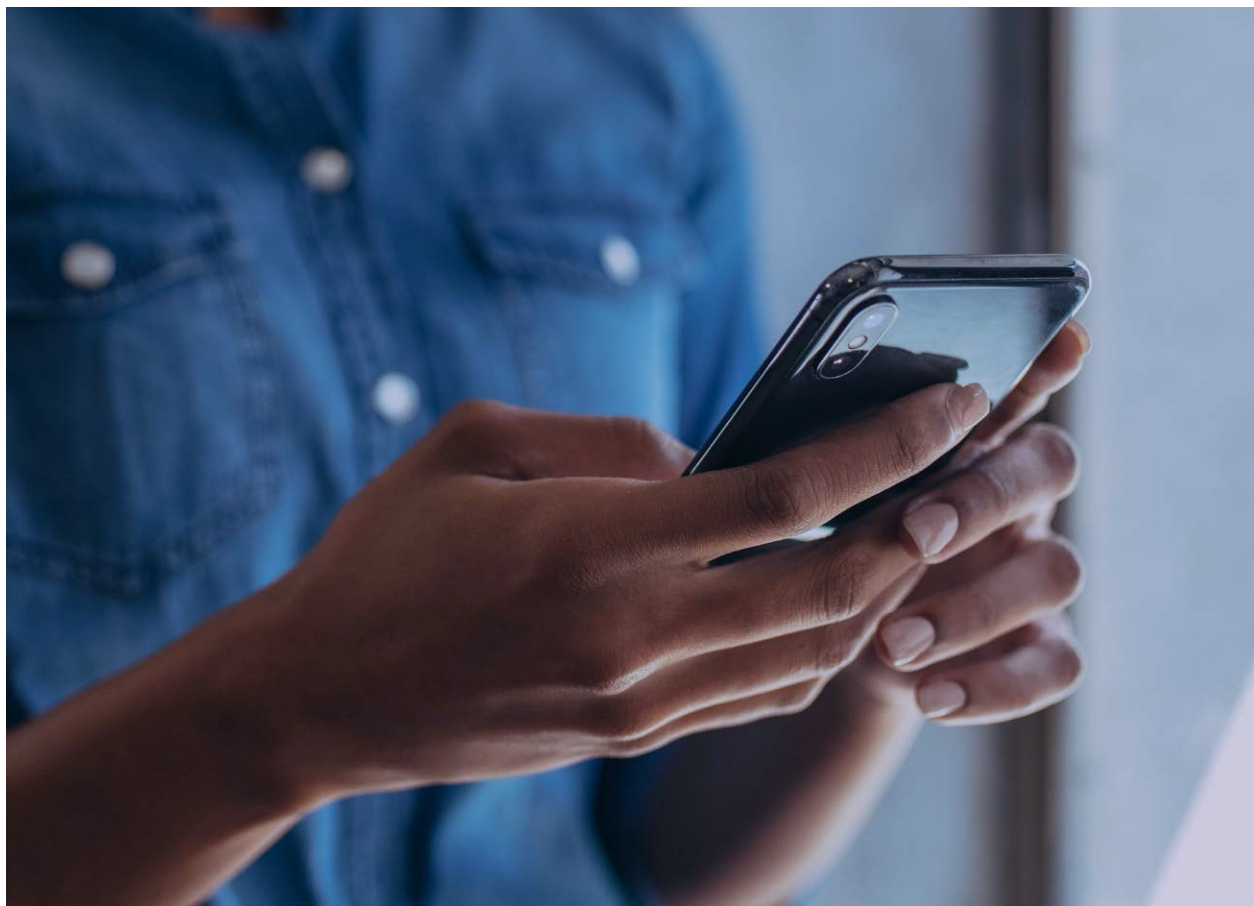
GBV against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations. Structural gender inequality drives all forms of GBV against women and girls in all their diversity; it is underpinned by imbalances of power between men and women, and gender diverse people, and embedded and reinforced through formal and informal institutions, structures and norms at all levels of society. The rise of the use of the internet and technologies have enabled perpetrators to broaden their scope of violence against women and girls and find new ways to abuse victims-survivors as well as engage in well-known abusive behaviours, such as stalking, controlling, and threatening through technology.⁵⁵

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women describes violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."⁵⁶ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other regional and international frameworks include violence against women in their definitions of discrimination.⁵⁷ Whilst the Convention predates the emergence of the internet and other digital technologies as we know them today, the UN CEDAW Committee has confirmed that it is fully applicable in online spaces.⁵⁸ Furthermore, in 2016 the UN Human Rights Council affirmed that the same rights that are in existence offline must also be protected online, including the right to live a life free from violence.⁵⁹

TFGBV is therefore recognised as a **form of discrimination** and **negatively impacts a range of human rights**, including the right to a life free from violence, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of expression, the right to participate in public and political life, and the right to access and use digital technologies. The UN Special Rapporteur for VAWG has called for TFGBV to be considered within the broader context of GBV and gender-based discrimination.⁶⁰

Existing forms and patterns of GBV are reflected and exacerbated by the design and use of technology and online spaces, including intimate partner violence (IPV), gendered hate speech and political violence. For example: current and former intimate partners use technologies, including phones and computers, to carry out stalking and surveillance of their current or former partner; doxing (publicly posting victims/survivors personal details and location) can result in physical harm and is often carried out with malicious intent. However, in addition to this, **new forms and patterns of GBV have emerged** that can only take place through technology and online spaces, such as image-based abuse through artificial intelligence (deepfake videos or virtual reality pornography), online harassment, and the use of technology for surveillance and stalking.⁶¹

TFGBV shares many of the same characteristics with GBV, however it also has number of **distinct characteristics** related to the digital nature of abuse. For example, TFGBV can amplify the harms and impacts caused to victims-survivors through the reach of transmission, and can be carried out at increased distances, speed and rates. It can also be carried out anonymously, shielding perpetrators' identities from victims-survivors and authorities, across jurisdictions and across different platform. TFGBV can result in multiple layers of perpetration and can be collectively organised (a tactic also described as "networked abuse"),⁶² as harmful and threatening content and images are shared or disseminated, or threatened to be shared by others, leading to repeated instances of violence and abuse and retraumatising victims-survivors. In many cases, there is a permanent digital record that places the burden on victims-survivors to try and get content removed.



Distinct characteristics of TFGBV

- TFGBV can **amplify the harm** caused to victims-survivors through the **reach of transmission**.
- TFGBV can be carried out at **increased distance, speed and rates**.
- TFGBV can be **easily perpetrated** using low-cost technology, limited skill, time and effort, as well as through high-cost and more complex technologies.
- **Anonymity and encryption** can protect perpetrators from being known to victims-survivors and authorities.²
- TFGBV is commonly perpetrated in **public spaces**, amplifying the impacts and harms, but can also be perpetrated covertly and in private spaces and within IPV relationships and families.
- As well as primary perpetrators there can also be a large number of **secondary perpetrators** when people download, forward, and share harmful content, who can be collectively organised.
- There are often **delays and difficulties in removing harmful content**, and content may remain available for a long time, sometimes indefinitely.

Adapted from: APC (2012) [Voices from digital spaces: Technology related violence against women](#); Aziz (2017) [Due Diligence and Accountability for Online Violence against Women](#); UNFPA (2021) [Making All Spaces Safe](#); GBVAoR Helpdesk (2021) [Learning Series on Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence](#).

TFGBV within the broader context of digital exclusion

TFGBV also needs to be considered within the **broader context of digital exclusion** which prevents women and girls from benefiting from the opportunities afforded by digital technologies. As digital technologies increasingly become the default way of communicating and doing business, excluded groups may have less access to previously available opportunities. This gendered digital exclusion, also known as the '**gender digital divide**,' is also rooted in structural gender inequality and is both a symptom and cause of violations of women's and girls' human rights.⁶³ It disproportionately affects women and girls who experience intersecting oppressions.⁶⁴

There are **multiple overlapping barriers** which prevent women and girls in all their diversity realising their digital rights, including: availability and affordability of digital technologies; gendered social norms; capacity and skills; availability of relevant content and applications; and availability of relevant policies.⁶⁵ TFGBV, or the threat of, is also a significant barrier to women's digital inclusion, as set out in this paper, with safety and security one of the top three barriers to mobile phone use.⁶⁶

² Anonymity and encryption can also be used by women and girls to protect themselves.

The gender digital divide manifests in many different ways. This section looks briefly at two aspects – namely, access to and use of digital technologies, and women’s under-representation – and some of the key ways in which TFGBV and the gender digital divide intersect. Other factors of the gender digital divide were not in scope of this report, however they need further consideration in relation to impacts on TFGBV.

First, **access to, control and use of digital technologies and online spaces remains gender unequal**. Globally, women are 18% more likely than men to be ‘offline’, up from 11% in 2019, with greater gender gaps in LMICs.⁶⁷ Across low and middle-income countries, women are 16% less likely than men to use mobile internet, and 7% less likely to own a mobile phone.⁶⁸ For example, 4 out of 10 women in Latin America and the Caribbean are not connected and/or cannot afford connectivity.⁶⁹ Particular considerations in relation to TFGBV are:

- Women can experience violence and fear for their personal safety when trying to access and use ICTs, for example when visiting an access point, engaging in online spaces or using mobile phones.⁷⁰
- Women’s and girls’ access can be restricted in some contexts. 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.⁷¹ Research in Lebanon⁷² and India⁷³ has highlighted men, other family members and caregivers exercising control over and monitoring women’s and girls’ use of phones.
- Women and girls who experience intersecting oppressions often have more limited access and face greater restrictions on their use of mobile phones and the internet. For example, research with adolescent girls in Lebanon found that married girls reported more restrictions on their use of technology, with very few owning their own mobile phones.⁷⁴ Research with refugees in the Kiziba Refugee Camp in Rwanda found that refugee women with disabilities were less likely to own a mobile phone than women and men without disabilities.⁷⁵
- As women’s and girls’ access and use to ICTs increases, so does their exposure to TFGBV.⁷⁶

Second, **women are under-represented when it comes to participation and leadership in the technology industry and internet governance**, including in relation to the design and development of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) technology. Whilst historically women have provided a substantial contribution to technological innovation as programmers and computer scientists, they remain under-represented in decision-making roles today.⁷⁷ This matters because structural gender inequality in the technology industry has direct implications for replicating structural inequality in the design and implementation of technologies, including AI, and challenging gender stereotypes.⁷⁸ For example:

- In 2022, men held 3 out of 4 (74.5%) leadership roles in the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) – one of the internet’s governance coordination bodies.⁷⁹

- In the mobile industry, globally women are 20% less likely to hold a senior leadership position than men, falling to 10% in Africa.⁸⁰
- Research suggests that women make up 26% of workers in data and AI roles, 15% of workers in engineering roles, 13% of Android developers, and 18% of robotics engineers.⁸¹ Diversity is also important in content moderation, including of language skills and cultural knowledge, to be able to identify and respond to abuse against marginalised groups.⁸²

Evidence shows that **TFGBV and the gender digital divide intersect** in a number of mutually reinforcing ways, compounding the impacts of structural gender inequality on women and girls in all their diversity, particularly for women and girls who are subject to intersecting oppressions.⁸³ However, further research is needed to better understand the impacts of the gender digital divide on TFGBV.

Forms of TFGBV

Forms of TFGBV are wide and varied, and, like other forms of GBV, can be sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, and can result in physical harm.⁸⁴ New and emerging forms of TFGBV are constantly evolving due to advances in technology and digitalisation. This report draws on a significant body of work that now exists on forms of TFGBV, including from women's rights organisations and UN bodies.⁸⁵

TFGBV is an overarching term that is inclusive of a wide range of behaviours and acts of GBV amplified and/or enabled by digital technologies. As with overarching definitions, there is not yet consistency in terminology and definitions used for typologies of TFGBV. However, some of the most common forms of TFGBV can include:⁸⁶

- **Image-based abuse:** consists of a broad range of abusive behaviours, including sexual abuse, through the creation and non-consensual distribution of images, or threats thereof. This includes non-consensual creation and distribution of intimate images (also known as non-consensual pornography), voyeurism/creepshots (also known as "upskirting" or "downblousing"), sexual extortion, unsolicited sexual images (also known as cyberflashing), the documentation or broadcasting of sexual violence, and non-consensually created artificial sexual media, including sexual deepfakes. This also includes images and videos taken with prior consent but shared without consent. Non-consensual sharing of intimate images can be an extension of intimate partner violence.
- **Harassment and abuse:** encompasses a variety of unwanted digital communication, which can range from a single incident or comment, to coordinated, long-lasting attacks. Digital harassment against women and girls can consist of a range of messages and communication, and is often gendered or sexualised in nature.

- **Stalking and monitoring:** can be perpetrated through the misuse of technology, including monitoring someone's activities on social media, and stalking and surveillance through tracking someone's location through existing software on their digital devices or through installing stalkerware. Stalking and monitoring is often repeated, and can be an extension of IPV. In addition to stalking and monitoring through phones and personal digital devices, perpetrators can use other technologies, including the internet of things, such as smart home devices and drones to monitor and control women.
- **Device and app control:** includes a range of acts which are part of perpetrators' controlling behaviours of victims-survivors. This can include destroying or hiding mobile phones so that survivors cannot maintain contact with family and friends; restricting the amount of data available, or time spent on a shared device; controlling who someone can contact and through which means this can occur; and changing and/or controlling passwords on devices and/or certain apps including banking apps to prevent the someone from accessing personal accounts, information and finances.
- **Public disclosure of private information and doxing:** consists of the non-consensual publication of private information online such as a person's address, phone number, driver's licence or other personal documents or personal information. This can lead to further online as well as offline harassment and violence, as well as threats of in-person violence. This can force the victim-survivor to have to change their phone number, legal name, and to move temporarily or permanently to escape the threats and abuse.
- **Impersonation, including catfishing:** is the use of digital technology to assume the identity of a person or someone else to access private information, exploit, embarrass, discredit, or shame them, contact or mislead them, or create fraudulent documents. Gendered examples include creating fake social media accounts and websites to groom and recruit girls and women into sex trafficking, and romance scams where women are scammed out of money.
- **Threats of violence, including rape and death threats:** is a common type of TFGBV which includes a range of threats of violence, including sexual violence, and death threats. The threats can be posted online and/or received through personal messages on social media, phone calls, texts and messaging services. Women public figures have noted these threats also tend to target their children.
- **Gendered hate speech:** Gendered hate speech specifically targets women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people and is based on patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and can further intersect with hate and prejudice against other structurally marginalised groups and communities. Technology-facilitated hate speech can range from dehumanising and derogatory statements to threats and incitements of violence and can lead to offline violence against individuals belonging to the targeted groups and communities.

- **Gendered disinformation:** is the use of false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere and to promote political, economic, or social objectives. Gendered disinformation is also used in hateful echo chambers to dehumanise women, including trans women and men. This disinformation socialises men towards seeing violence as not only acceptable but necessary, through dehumanising them as a subject.⁸⁷

These forms of TFGBV have their own distinct characteristics. However, many of these **overlap** as perpetrators use multiple behaviours and tactics to target victims-survivors, misusing and abusing different technologies and online spaces, often as part of a continuum of online-offline violence.

Different forms of TFGBV also intersect with **other types of harm**, both online and offline. One area with emerging evidence is the link between extreme misogynistic views and violent extremist ideologies.⁸⁸ Misogyny and gender-based hate, like dehumanisation in general, is present across a significant majority of terrorist and violent extremist ideologies. There are also groups or ideologies dedicated specifically to extreme misogyny and gender-based hate. For example, views expressed in incel communities can be a form of extremism which has led to multiple instances of offline extremist attacks. There is also evidence that these online groups have links to racially or ethnically motivated violent extremist groups.⁸⁹ Not only is gender-based hate prevalent across violent extremist ideologies, there is an increasing cross-pollination of ideologies, mixed with personal grievances (the foundation of incels and other groups).

1. Current state of evidence on TFGBV

There is a **large and growing body of evidence on TFGBV** collected mainly by women and human rights organisations, the UN, and academia over the last 20 years. While acknowledging that these data sources have used a variety of terms, and have not always explicitly referred to TFGBV as defined in this paper, the evidence shows high rates of different forms of TFGBV against women and girls in different contexts, disproportionately affecting those who face intersecting oppressions and women working in particular sectors and publicly visible roles. It also shows that, like other forms of GBV, there are multiple risk and protective factors, and that TFGBV has long-lasting impacts at individual and societal level.

The existing evidence base clearly highlights that TFGBV is a global problem and that multi-stakeholder action is needed. However, there are significant gaps in the evidence base which present challenges in understanding, documenting, measuring and addressing TFGBV, and there are methodological and ethical challenges in collecting data. Addressing these evidence gaps will help **improve policy, programming and regulation** on TFGBV prevention and response.

Evidence cited in this paper uses a variety of terminology and definitions. When citing evidence, the paper will use the same terms as in the original sources, while in discussions of this evidence, this paper will refer to TFGBV as an overarching term. To provide insight into the nature of the problem on a global level, this paper predominantly draws on studies conducted at global and regional level, focusing on multi-country studies and reviews.

Global and regional prevalence of TFGBV

Evidence on **prevalence of TFGBV** is growing, though remains limited. The evidence base largely consists of country-specific research and regional and global studies that attempt to establish prevalence rates and improve understanding of different forms of TFGBV. While the evidence on global and regional prevalence of TFGBV is limited, there is a broader evidence base of country-level and contextual evidence which provides important insights into the scale and nature of TFGBV around the world – however, this is beyond the scope of the research informing this paper (see limitations). There are also important conclusions to draw on from the wider evidence base on GBV, as some of the risk and protective factors for TFGBV are the same as other forms of GBV, including harmful gender norms (see table/figure X).⁹⁰

Data on TFGBV is largely collected through surveys carried out by civil society, international organisations, and academia. However, data collection on TFGBV is not coordinated globally, and studies that attempt to measure and understand TFGBV use different definitions and methods, which make it difficult to compare prevalence rates between different contexts and to establish reliable regional and global prevalence estimates. The rapidly evolving nature of technology, and thus different forms of

TFGBV, also makes it challenging to accurately measure different forms of TFGBV.⁹¹ Despite growing evidence, existing prevalence data is likely to **underestimate the scale of the problem** due to under-reporting of the issue, as well as methodological challenges collecting data.

Global and regional studies consistently show that **prevalence of TFGBV is high**. However, **prevalence estimates vary** across studies, which is not surprising given the different methods and definitions used. Efforts to synthesise prevalence data on online GBV at the global level have found that estimates range from 16% to 58%, varying with the forms of online GBV measured, the questions asked, and the locations and demographics of the respondents.⁹² For example, a recent global survey in 45 countries found that 38% of surveyed women reported personal experiences of online violence.⁹³ Another survey across eight countries, all in the Global North, found that nearly a quarter (23%) of surveyed women between the ages 18-55 had experienced online abuse or harassment at least once, ranging from 16% in Italy to 33% in the US.⁹⁴

Studies indicate that **there are differences in prevalence between different forms of TFGBV**. In a recent global survey in 45 countries, women reported high rates of different forms of online violence, with the most common including misinformation and defamation (67%), cyber-harassment (66%), hate-speech (65%) and impersonation (63%).⁹⁵ UNFPA's (2021) 'Making all spaces safe' report provides an overview of the prevalence of different forms of TFGBV as captured in regional and national surveys.⁹⁶

In addition, studies have found **variation in the prevalence rates within specific forms of TFGBV**. For example, a global systematic review of TFGBV and experiencing intimate partner violence found that prevalence rates of specific acts of TFGBV experienced by women in their intimate relationships varied significantly. Sexual harassment was reported by less than 1% to up to 70% of women in the reviewed studies, and the two studies that examined stalking found prevalence rates of 6 to 78%.⁹⁷

A number of **regional and multi-country studies** also contribute to existing understanding of prevalence of TFGBV, including:

- **A survey with women in 14 countries across the Arab States** which found that 16% of women had experienced online violence at least once in their lifetime.⁹⁸ 60% of those who had experienced online violence had experienced this in 2020-2021 illustrating the high levels of online violence against women since the onset of COVID-19. The most common forms of online violence that women experienced were receiving unwanted images or symbols with sexual content (43%), 'annoying' phone calls, inappropriate or unwelcome communications (38%), receiving insulting and/or hateful messages (35%), and direct sexual blackmail (22%).
- **A survey with women in five cities in five sub-Saharan African countries** which found that 28% of women had experienced online gender-based violence, including sexual harassment (36%), in their lifetime.⁹⁹

It is crucial to understand TFGBV from a **life cycle perspective**. Evidence shows that different forms of TFGBV start affecting girls at an early age¹⁰⁰ and continues throughout adolescence and adult life. Some of the evidence on TFGBV against girls comes from studies which explores online harms against children more broadly, and which provide gender disaggregated data. Evidence which shed light on the experiences of TFGBV among girls and young women include:

- Nationally representative surveys with children 12-17 years old in six countries in East Asia Pacific¹⁰¹ and seven countries in Eastern and Southern Africa¹⁰² which measured the prevalence of having experienced **online sexual exploitation and abuse among girls** in the past year. The highest rates were found in Uganda (21%), the Philippines (19%) and Mozambique (16%).¹⁰³
- A global survey with **young women and girls** aged 15-25 found that more than half have been harassed and abused online – 58% of girls and young women across 22 countries reported that they had personally experienced online harassment on social media platforms.¹⁰⁴ Among the forms of TFGBV measured, girls and young women were most likely to have experienced purposeful embarrassment (41%), threats of sexual violence (39%), body shaming (39%), and sexual harassment (37%). The survey found only minor regional differences.¹⁰⁵

Evidence on prevalence of **TFGBV in humanitarian, conflict, and refugee settings** is very limited. However, recent research and practice evidence has found that it is not only present, but can be exacerbated in these contexts, as are other forms of GBV that are exacerbated by the erosion of protective factors in emergency and crisis situations.¹⁰⁶ A study in Uganda found that women refugees in the country faced high rates of 'online GBV' – 75% of women refugees in urban areas had experienced online GBV, including abuse, stalking, unwanted sexual advances, and hacking of social media accounts.¹⁰⁷

Who is disproportionately affected by TFGBV?

Women and girls in all their diversity are disproportionately affected by TFGBV and can be affected through experiencing and witnessing abuse. Women and girls do not need to have access to or use the technologies to be targeted for TGFBV. For example, women and girls can be subjected to stalking and monitoring through perpetrators' use of technology and can have their private information published online without their consent.

Despite all women and girls being at risk, some women and girls are more likely to experience TFGBV, including due to the intimate partner violence they have experienced and due to the work that they do. Adolescent girls and young women are disproportionally targeted by TFGBV.¹⁰⁸ Women, girls, trans, and gender diverse people who are subjected to intersecting forms of oppression, such as gender inequality and SOGIESC based oppression, are also more likely to experience TFGBV.¹⁰⁹



Women in abusive intimate relationships

Women in or who have been in abusive intimate relationships can experience higher levels of TFGBV as current and former partners, who are predominantly men, are in many cases the perpetrators of TFGBV (see section on perpetrator pathways and behaviours).¹¹⁰ Recent research synthesising the evidence in this area identified studies that found that the majority of online abuse experienced by women was carried out by current or former partners, and that a high number of young people are reporting experiences of TFGBV in intimate partner violence.¹¹¹ Intimate partner abuse, including TFGBV, has different characteristics to abuse carried out by strangers, as perpetrators use technologies and personal information they hold to control victims-survivors.¹¹²

Women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people who experience intersecting forms of oppressions

Research shows that **women who are Black, Indigenous, from ethnic and religious minorities, women with disabilities, and women with diverse SOGIESC** are more likely to experience TFGBV because of the intersecting oppressions they experience.¹¹³ For example, 58% of surveyed women in eight countries who had experienced online abuse or harassment said that it had included racism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia.¹¹⁴ Research in Nepal with gender and sexual rights activists highlighted that sexual orientation, gender identity, class, and caste all contributed to the experiences of TFGBV.¹¹⁵

There has been less research globally on how **women and girls with disabilities** are targeted by TFGBV. However, a qualitative study in Australia indicates that women with intellectual or cognitive disabilities can experience technology-facilitated abuse from almost anyone in their lives and surroundings, including children, parents, carers, strangers, and even service providers. Forms of technology-facilitated abuse experienced by respondents included misuse of their online accounts, being monitored using spyware and tracking devices, and having their intimate images or videos shared without their consent.¹¹⁶

Research shows that **young women and adolescent girls** are more likely to experience online violence, in part related to their frequent use of social media.¹¹⁷ A global survey with women aged 18-74 found that younger women were more likely to have experienced online violence – 45% of women from generation Z and Millennials compared to 31% of Generation X and baby Boomers had personally experienced online violence.¹¹⁸ Young women and girls' experiences of TFGBV is also shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination. For example, a global survey with girls and young women found that those who are Black, from an ethnic minority, living with disabilities, and who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community reported that they are specifically targeted for online harassment due to facets of their identity.¹¹⁹

Members of the LGBTQIA+ community are disproportionately targeted by TFGBV. Trans people are particularly targeted online in many contexts.¹²⁰ For example in the UK, 93% of trans people in a survey reported experiencing online abuse in the past five years compared to 70% of cisgender LGB people.¹²¹ This and other

studies¹²² note the importance of understanding online abuse targeting members of the LGBTQIA+ community from an intersectional perspective, including how lesbian women can be subjected to intersecting homophobia and misogyny online.¹²³

TFGBV against LGBTQIA+ people is part of an offline-online continuum, which can pose **unique risks** to those affected due to the intersection of homophobic and misogynistic attitudes. For example, technology can be used for 'outing' LGBTQIA+ people, which risks causing further online and offline violence, with the risk of particularly severe consequences in contexts where sexual and gender diversity is criminalised and hostile attitudes widespread. A study on the lived realities of LBQ women in Uganda sheds light on this issue, and furthermore found that cisgender, heterosexual men were often the perpetrators of outings targeting LBQ women.¹²⁴ Technology is also used to facilitate offline violence against individuals with diverse SOGIESC, for example through the use of fake identities on dating apps to arrange in-person meetings with the intent to perpetrate violence, including by intimate partners.¹²⁵

Women in public and political life, including the workplace

A growing body of research looking at the experiences of TFGBV among **women in their professional and political lives** highlights that women journalists, women politicians and parliamentarians, and women and LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders and activists are particularly targeted, especially those who are subject to intersecting oppressions.^{126 127}

A global survey with **women journalists** found that the majority of respondents (73%) had experienced online violence in the course of their work.¹²⁸ Among the various forms of TFGBV reported by women in the study, almost half (48%) of the respondents reported experiencing harassment through private social media messages and a quarter (25%) had been targeted with threats of physical violence, including death threats.¹²⁹ The highest rates of online violence were experienced by women journalists identifying as Black (81%), Indigenous (86%), Jewish (88%), lesbian (88%), and bisexual (85%) as compared to white (64%) and heterosexual (72%) women.¹³⁰ The study also found that Arab women were disproportionately reporting offline violence which could be associated to the online targeting.

Another global study spanning 39 countries across the world found that the majority of **women parliamentarians** surveyed had experienced psychological violence, which was primarily perpetrated through social media, followed by telephone and email.¹³¹ Among the respondents, 44% had received threats of death, sexual violence, beatings or abductions during their parliamentary term, and 42% had seen images or comments with sexual, defamatory, or humiliating connotations of themselves on social media.

A study in the Arab States region found that **women activists and human rights defenders** face high rates of online violence – 70% of the surveyed women activists and human rights defenders had received unwanted images or symbols with sexual content, 62% had received insulting or hateful messages, and 58% had received other inappropriate or unwelcome communication.¹³² A global survey with activists working

on LGBTQI rights and sexuality rights issues, many of who identified as LGBTQI, found that the majority of respondents had experienced threats and harassment online, including online harassment (75%) and intimidating comments (63%).¹³³

Most evidence examining women's experiences of TFGBV in their professional and public lives focuses on the three sectors mentioned above. However, women also experience TFGBV in other occupations and roles. For example, there is evidence of TFGBV against women in the **gaming sector**, who experience TFGBV from online communities, including long-term and large-scale organised attacks, as seen during 'Gamergate'.¹³⁴ This included the organised targeting of female gamers, game developers, and game critics using different tactics ranging from discrediting their work to death and rape threats.

Female **sex workers** are another group more likely to experience TFGBV.¹³⁵ As with other forms of GBV during COVID-19, TFGBV against female sex workers reportedly increased when many shifted to online and phone-based work. For example, female sex workers in India have reported that this shift increased their vulnerability to clients taking photos or screenshots of them without consent,¹³⁶ and sex workers in the UK have reported increasing cases of doxing and stalking since the onset of COVID-19.¹³⁷

Risk and protective factors

Preventing TFGBV requires an understanding of the different risk and protective factors in a specific context. Given the complex interplay of factors at various, intersecting levels from the individual to the societal level, violence prevention often uses a socio-ecological model to understand the factors that put people at risk of violence or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating violence. Whilst there has been limited research specifically in relation to the risk and protective factors of TFGBV, there is a significant body of evidence in relation to GBV more broadly that could be adapted.¹³⁸ Application will need to take into account the distinct characteristics of TFGBV, including the digital environment in which it takes place and wider political, social and economic factors.

Evidence that is available on TFGBV indicates that there are **multiple risk and protective factors** associated with both experiences and perpetration of TFGBV. Some of the risk and protective factors for TFGBV (e.g. harmful gender norms) are the same as other forms of GBV¹³⁹ - though further research is needed in relation to how these are changed due to the digital nature of abuse - while other risk factors are unique to TFGBV (e.g. online communities that normalize misogyny and masculine grievances). Further research is needed to better understand the risk and protective factors associated with TFGBV, based on an understanding of TFGBV within the broader GBV and digital contexts.

Table: Risk and Protective Factors for Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence

	Risk factors	Protective factors
Individual	<p>Attitudes condoning or justifying violence as normal or acceptable (victimisation and perpetration)</p> <p>Childhood experience or exposure to violence (both online and offline) (perpetration and victimisation)</p> <p>Public / professional role in male-dominated professions (e.g. journalists, politicians, activists) (victimisation)</p> <p>Psychosocial dysfunction / poor emotional health (perpetration)</p> <p>Overlapping identities and personal characteristics exposing people to intersecting discrimination (victimisation)</p> <p>Impulsivity/risk-taking behaviour (perpetration)</p>	<p>Gender equitable attitudes (perpetration)</p> <p>Digital safety awareness and skills (victimisation)</p> <p>Experience of non-violent means of communication and conflict resolution/ emotional self-regulation (perpetration)</p> <p>Psychosocial wellbeing (perpetration)</p>
Interpersonal	<p>Peers that engage in the expression of online misogyny</p> <p>Social isolation and lack of social support (both online and offline)</p> <p>Cross-platform networked abuse</p>	<p>Intimate and peer relationships characterized by gender equality</p> <p>Social connectedness and support (both online and offline)</p>
Community	<p>Sexist and misogynistic discourse</p> <p>Harmful gender norms that maintain and tolerate online violence and harmful discourse against women and minorities</p> <p>Online communities that normalize misogyny and masculine grievances</p> <p>Platform management that does not respond to abuse</p>	<p>Norms that support non-violence and gender equality</p> <p>Norms that support female participation and leadership in politics and public discourse</p> <p>Social sanctions for people who spread online hate/misogyny</p> <p>Clear community guidelines and policies, and their effective enforcement</p>

Societal	<p>Gendered disinformation (also a form of TFGBV)</p> <p>Authoritarian political climates / governments that drive online hate speech and misogyny</p> <p>Absence or lack of enforcement of protective policies and laws for individual perpetrators</p> <p>Absent or weak regulations, and their effective enforcement, of the technology sector regarding accountability for online harms</p> <p>Conflict and violent extremism that exacerbates online hate speech</p> <p>Limited participation of women in the tech sector</p> <p>Limited transparency of big tech companies</p> <p>Sharing/hosting of abusive material and violent pornography</p>	<p>Laws and policies that promote gender equality and address online violence against women</p> <p>Education that promotes digital citizenship</p> <p>Resilience and capabilities of women-led civil society, LGBT+ rights activists and human rights defenders</p> <p>Strong and enforced regulation by accountable, transparent platforms</p> <p>Increased participation and diversity of women in the tech sector</p> <p>Collective action from tech industry, governments, civil society and researchers</p>
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Impacts

Evidence reveals that TFGBV has **serious and long-lasting impacts** for individuals, communities and wider societies. In many contexts, these impacts will overlap. For example, studies focused on online spaces have found that online violence against public figures has severe impacts for individuals, as well as having a ‘chilling effect’ on women’s meaningful participation in their local communities as well as wider political and civic spaces.¹⁴⁰

For victims-survivors, it can cause **sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, social, political and economic harm**, and prevent the realisation of a wide range of their human rights, including the right to freedom of expression and participation in public and political life.¹⁴¹ TFGBV does not have to be experienced directly to have an impact, as witnessing the abuse can result in harm.¹⁴² Most of the evidence to date has focused on public figures, particularly journalists and politicians, with few studies exploring the experiences of women human rights defenders, activists or the everyday experiences of women, girls and gender diverse people. There are even fewer studies focused on women and girls who experience multiple forms of oppression or discrimination.

Several studies have observed severe **mental health impacts** on survivors. For example, a survey with women in eight countries showed that 54% of survivors of online abuse or harassment experienced panic attacks, anxiety or stress¹⁴³, and a survey with girls and young women in 22 countries found that 44% reported that their experiences of online harassment had resulted in mental or emotional stress.¹⁴⁴ TFGBV can result in **physical harm**, highlighting the continuum of online and offline violence. For example, in Malawi, a survey found that over half (54%) of women experienced physical abuse exacerbated by online violence.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, a multi-country study in the Arab States found that 1 in 3 (33%) of women who experienced online violence reported that their experience was a precursor to offline violence.¹⁴⁶ A significant proportion of the global evidence to date has focused on public figures, particularly journalists and politicians. Additional research is needed to explore the everyday experiences of women, girls and gender diverse people.

A survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries found that online attacks have the following impacts:

- **Physical threats:** 13% had increased their physical security.
- **Mental health impacts:** 26% had mental health impacts, with 12% seeking medical or psychological help.
- **Silencing:** 30% self-censored on social media and 20% withdrew from all online interaction.
- **Employment and productivity impacts:** 38% made themselves less visible, 11% missed work, 4% quit their jobs, and 2% abandoned journalism.

Source: Posetti J, Shabbir N, Maynard D, Bontcheva K and Aboulez N (2021) *The Chilling: Global Trends in Online Violence against Women Journalists*; Research Discussion Paper, Paris: UNESCO.

At a societal level, **TFGBV is a threat to our values and ability to achieve open, peaceful, democratic societies.**¹⁴⁷ Gendered disinformation and targeted hate campaigns often 'exist at the crossroads with disinformation and online violence'¹⁴⁸ and are both driven by and reinforce rollbacks of human rights, erosion of democratic principles and freedom of expression. These campaigns form narratives that go beyond attacks on individual women and LGBTQIA+ people, to attacking their rights more broadly, often with an end goal of polarising and destabilising societies.¹⁴⁹ Several studies have documented the use of these techniques by Putin in Europe, Duterte in the Philippines, Orban in Hungary, Bolsonaro in Brazil and Erdogan in Turkey to attack both female critics and feminism itself.¹⁵⁰ In Ukraine, gendered disinformation campaigns have been used by Russian sources to emasculate Ukrainian men as 'weak' and sexualise Ukrainian women, increasing their risk of conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁵¹

TFGBV can also increase tensions that lead to violent conflict, with some arguing that online threats against women in public roles should be included as a gender-sensitive early warning indicator for conflict.¹⁵² The evidence here remains at an early stage, particularly in relation to TFGBV, although some studies highlight the role of online hate speech in fuelling intergroup tensions in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.¹⁵³

Evidence continues to emerge linking online misogyny and TFGBV with violent extremism. For example, a 2022 US Secret Service report details the specific security threat posed by individuals who perpetrate acts of targeted violence, often displaying gender-based ideologies or concerning behaviour, including hate-based beliefs, domestic violence, harassment, and threatening online communications. It notes that men who have committed misogynistic violence (typically mass shooting and stabbings) have histories of concerning and threatening online communications, as well as other risk factors (history of being bullied, financial instability, interpersonal difficulties).¹⁵⁴ Most of the evidence on links with violent extremism comes from North America, Australia, New Zealand and Europe (see the next section on perpetrator pathways), although there is some research from East Africa on how the Islamic State and al-Shabaab use social media to amplify, coordinate, and promote messages calling for violence, with the most popular video claiming that western governments were promoting 'gender politics' in an attempt to undermine Islam in Somalia.¹⁵⁵ However, there is currently limited evidence from other contexts or types of extremist groups.

TFGBV can erode individual and collective rights to participate in shared civic spaces by discouraging women from standing for office or being involved in public life, and causing women to self-censor or step away from public-facing roles including journalism and advocacy.¹⁵⁶ Research in Indonesia, Colombia and Kenya found that politically-active young women experienced high levels of online violence, which led to them pausing, decreasing or completely stopping their social media activity.¹⁵⁷ In India, 1 in 7 tweets mentioning women politicians was abusive, with Muslim women politicians and women politicians from marginalised castes at the highest risk of online abuse and disinformation.¹⁵⁸

Violence targeted at women with intersecting marginalised identities, including younger women, women with disabilities, and women with diverse SOGIESC, **limits the diversity of voices in public discourse**, and increases the risk that their needs will not be represented.¹⁵⁹ For example, in a global survey of 14,000 girls and young women aged 15-25 across 22 countries, around half had experienced online violence for their opinions before they were of voting age, causing 18% to stop sharing their opinions online.¹⁶⁰ There is also some evidence that online attacks against women are normalising misogynistic language and narratives while weakening norms around inclusion and civil discourse.¹⁶¹

TFGBV deepens discriminatory social norms around gender and sexuality, including norms that maintain and tolerate sexual violence, such as lack of respect for sexual consent and sexual entitlement. Researchers and activists have expressed concern about the normalisation of sexual violence in consensual sex—choking, in particular—through mediums like social media and online violent pornography.¹⁶²

The impact is likely to be greatest during adolescence – a formative period for the emergence of norms and shifts in existing ones – and there are growing concerns about the potential scale and impact of adolescents' exposure to sexual violence on smartphones and other digital devices.¹⁶³ For example, in India, a survey of 3,500 college students aged 16-21 found around 30% of male students watch videos of rape, viewing an average of 19 rapes per week. Boys begin watching these videos at around 9 years.¹⁶⁴

Whilst an under-researched area, there is evidence that harmful online discourse and behaviour, supported by the infrastructure of online service providers, **exacerbate the same social and gender norms** that underpin other forms of GBV, often in racist and discriminatory ways.¹⁶⁵ For example, algorithmic systems, through their design, amplify harmful norms and perpetuate gender bias. By feeding more extreme content to a user, it can start to change a person's beliefs about what is typical and appropriate behaviour (i.e. social norms).¹⁶⁶ One study found that YouTube's algorithms (and particularly YouTube shorts) were 'luring' boys and young men into the manosphere by serving misogynistic content without being prompted that became more extreme over time, including recommendations for Incel, neo-Nazi, and white supremacist content as well as harmful attitudes towards women. The algorithm did not distinguish between the underage and adult accounts in terms of content.¹⁶⁷ There is also some evidence that online attacks against women are **changing social norms**, giving strength to latent norms through the dissemination and normalisation at scale of misogynistic language and narratives, and weakening norms around inclusion and civil discourse.¹⁶⁸

Evidence shows forms of online harassment and online hate also have **economic costs** to individuals and their families, to businesses, and to the wider society and economy. For example, research in Australia estimated that the cost of online harassment and cyberhate is AUD \$3.7 billion (£2.1 billion pounds) in health costs and lost income.¹⁶⁹ The study does not disaggregate data by gender; however, the researchers acknowledge that women and young people were more likely to experience online harassment. Despite these limitations, the findings build a powerful case for investment in measures to address online abuse and suggest that the costs to the global economy, if it were to be measured, would be billions if not trillions.¹⁷⁰

In a world that is increasingly using technologies, including the Internet, TFGBV **restricts how women and girls can fully participate in society and in the workplace**. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to be online and it is estimated that 9 in 10 future jobs will have a digital component.¹⁷¹ Recent research in Australia found that more than a third (35%) of the 1,491 women surveyed (being women who had an online or media presence for work) experienced professional or work-related online abuse, increasing to 43% of 18-34 year olds, 57% of women with disabilities, and 51% of those who identified as LGBTIQ+.¹⁷² The report found that this abuse was often violent, sexualised and focused on appearance, women's roles or their virtue, having severe impacts on their mental health, causing reputational damage and undermining their confidence.



Accessing justice

Victims-survivors of TFGBV face **multiple barriers to accessing justice**, with limited and inadequate measures to recourse and redress. Whilst many of the examples highlighted in this section relate to online spaces, it is equally important that victims-survivors are able to access justice when they experience TFGBV through other technologies which do not make use of the internet, such as basic phones and the internet of things, which are also misused and weaponised.

The digital nature of abuse can enhance barriers victims-survivors face in accessing justice and the impunity of perpetrators. There is an overwhelming sense of impunity for online harms, which is exacerbated by the anonymity by which perpetrators can carry out their abuse and also made worse by the lack of responsiveness by online service providers to reports of abuse. There is a disproportionate burden on victims-survivors to identify and report TFGBV to online service providers and law enforcement.¹⁷³ Evidence suggests that women who experience TFGBV are more likely to be blamed and less likely to be believed or taken seriously than women who experience offline violence because they are not always able to demonstrate physical harm.¹⁷⁴

There is significant **under-reporting of TFGBV** which presents barriers in accessing justice. Reasons for under-reporting include: victim-survivor blaming; not knowing where to report; lack of awareness of what constitutes TFGBV; perceptions that TFGBV it is not 'real world' violence or significant enough; stigma and shame related to acknowledging and sharing experiences of TFGBV in research; fear and distrust of law enforcement; potential for self-criminalisation for people experiencing TFGBV in same-sex relationships in jurisdictions where such relationships are criminalised; inadequate response from law enforcement when violence is reported to them; the burden on victims-survivors and users to report abuse they experience; and inadequate policies, procedures and response mechanisms that facilitate the reporting of abuse to online service providers (in cases of online abuse), recognising that there is variation among providers and services. In addition, under existing legislation in many jurisdictions, victims-survivors are not granted anonymity when pursuing legal action and the prospect of being publicly named may deter them from reporting it.¹⁷⁵

Evidence on the **response from online service providers, particularly social media platforms**, largely comes from women's and human rights activists, the UN and academia. This evidence reveals that victims-survivors do not feel they have had a satisfactory response and often find reporting processes convoluted, with reports that online service providers do not understand the gendered nature of abuse.¹⁷⁶ Cultural and linguistic issues have been highlighted in relation to the need for providers to have contextually appropriate responses, with language barriers in responding to abuse in non-English speaking countries.^{177 178} The role of online service providers is set out in more detail later in this paper.

Governments and their regulators are expanding their mechanisms to address online harms, including forms of TFGBV. While many new legal and regulatory responses to online harms have not been subject to substantive review, emerging evidence suggests that there **are gaps in legislation and inconsistency in implementation of some existing criminal laws** in dealing with different forms of TFGBV. Whilst some countries have introduced new legislation which criminalises some forms of TFGBV against women, others use existing legislation, including laws which cover offences such as stalking, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, hate speech and disinformation. Comparative analyses of particular legal frameworks to address TFGBV reveal that where new and existing laws are used to address TFGBV, some of them are not effectively implemented, including as a result of inadequate law enforcement responses, weak political infrastructure and limitations with existing legal provisions across GBV and cybercrime laws.¹⁷⁹ Other research has found that women's access to justice in cases of TFGBV is often limited due to inflexible interpretation of existing legislation addressing GBV, data privacy and cybercrime.¹⁸⁰ Victims-survivors are often left navigating this patchwork of inadequate laws, with the burden placed on them to protect themselves.¹⁸¹

Civil remedies are also available in some contexts. A comparative analysis of legal frameworks in Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda, found that victims-survivors can sue for defamation under common law, with other civil remedies including victims-survivors applying for protection orders from the courts. In some jurisdictions, options may be limited and expensive, and may not be victim-survivor-centred, perpetuating structural gender inequalities, and may not take into account the long-lasting impacts of abuse.¹⁸² Other examples of civil remedies have been noted elsewhere. For example, research in Canada and the U.S. has focused on civil remedies available to victims-survivors who have had their intimate images shared without their consent:¹⁸³ in 2022, the reauthorisation of the Violence Against Women Act in the U.S. established a federal civil cause of action for individuals whose intimate visual images are disclosed without their consent, allowing a victim-survivor to recover damages and legal fees.¹⁸⁴

To address gaps and limitations with legislation, self-regulation, and voluntary standards set by the technology industry, a number of countries have introduced a **regulatory response** to online harms. For example, under Australia's Online Safety Act 2021, the eSafety Commissioner (Australia's independent regulator for online safety) administers complaints schemes for victims-survivors of image-based abuse, serious cyber abuse of adults, and cyberbullying of children. If a complaint meets the regulatory threshold, the eSafety Commissioner has the authority to require technology platforms to remove seriously harmful content within 24 hours and to impose civil penalties on technology platforms who fail to comply.¹⁸⁵ A comparative analysis of the legal situation in Australia, France, Germany, Singapore, US, EU, Ireland, and the UK has found that while there are some commonalities in approach, there is no consensus across countries on how to regulate online content.¹⁸⁶

The legal system can also be **weaponised against women**, including to intimidate, harass and silence them. There is evidence that some governments and other state actors are using legislation or other measures introduced in the name of addressing TFGBV or laws designed to protect excluded populations to **silence dissenting voices or curtail freedom of expression** with examples documented in a number of countries, including in South Asia and Africa.¹⁸⁷ Evidence is growing that women who experience intersecting oppressions and women in public and political life, including women journalists, women politicians and women human rights defenders, are more likely to be targeted by punitive laws.¹⁸⁸ For example, recent research highlights the use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and defamation lawsuits against women journalists.¹⁸⁹

Perpetrator profiles and behaviours

Understanding perpetrators and their behaviours is important in designing interventions to prevent and respond to TFGBV and ensure victims-survivors can access justice. Emerging evidence suggests there are some common risk factors and behaviours, such as low self-esteem, feelings of shame and inferiority, escalating anger, concerning communications, and interpersonal difficulties,¹⁹⁰ that could be identified to prevent violence. Innovative studies are demonstrating the potential to work with young men to reduce the risks of perpetration, change attitudes around harmful gender norms, and support behaviour change, taking a strengths-based approach focused around common interest areas, such as online gaming and sports. However, further research is needed to understand what works and with whom.¹⁹¹ This section explores the initial evidence for what is known about perpetrators, their behaviours and pathways to perpetration.

The **evidence base on perpetrators of TFGBV is limited** and largely focused on a few high-income countries. However, existing evidence indicates that perpetrator profiles and their pathways to perpetration vary depending on the type of TFGBV committed and the individual(s) targeted, and patterns of behaviours can be identified.

Perpetrators of TFGBV include **current and former intimate partners**, who often engage in a continuum of abusive and coercive behaviours, both online and offline, including misusing and abusing technologies to control, harass, intimidate and monitor the movements of victims-survivors, carrying out the same well-known behaviours using new and different tools at their disposal.¹⁹² TFGBV can also be perpetrated by those **unknown to victims-survivors**, including for the purpose of sexual harassment.¹⁹³ Motivations include anger, a desire to control others, sexual entitlement, as well as entertainment.¹⁹⁴ As set out earlier in this paper, there are multiple layers of perpetration involved in TFGBV, which can amplify the reach of transmission and harm caused to victims-survivors.

There is a continuum of online behaviours, attitudes and beliefs among men, particularly young men, that can escalate into more extreme views and expressions of violence against women. At one end of that continuum is the '**manosphere**' – an umbrella term referring to interconnected online communities inspired by male supremacy, an extremist ideology advocating for the subjugation of women and

rigid gender roles.¹⁹⁵ The mansphere, its ideologies and related content (including memes, coded language and symbols that communicate, express and celebrate violence) cut across different online service providers and audiences and is highly visible to the general population. It hosts sub-sets of related but distinct ideologies. These communities and related discourse and content can inspire violent acts.

Incels ('involuntary celibates') are a well-known example of a subset of the mansphere. They are usually young men who forge an identity around a perceived inability to form sexual relationships with women. They may blame themselves, society, feminism and women for this.¹⁹⁶ Some use online forums to perpetrate TFGBV, partly motivated by perceptions of injustice, sexual entitlement,¹⁹⁷ and the need to increase their own self-esteem.¹⁹⁸ Analysis of the major incel online spaces between 2014 and 2022 shows that violent extremist language has steadily increased in the main online spaces since 2016.¹⁹⁹ The evidence on the interconnected nature of online-offline violence and **perpetrator pathways to violent extremism and TFGBV** is at an early stage,²⁰⁰ however there is evidence that some incels have been inspired to commit extremist violence in part by the violence of other incels.²⁰¹ Research in Australia shows how online gendered narratives, often rooted in misogyny, shape the offline activities of far-right actors, both inward-facing (community-building) activities and public-facing extremist activities.²⁰²

Manosphere type ideologies permeate outside of these communities and are themselves a reflection—though exaggerated—of prevailing social norms and attitudes. The role of public figures in shaping social norms is well-established, and positive role models can be used for violence prevention. However, public figures and **online influencers** can also reproduce harmful norms around gender and violence amongst their followers, as well as the public. They can inspire their followers to re-share misogynistic content, participate in pile-on attacks (where a large number of people attack someone on social media) and encourage low-level networked abuse and harassment. Some followers have been described as displaying 'toxic parasociality' – an intense, one-sided form of social interaction which often fills the gap of real-life relationships, suggesting loneliness may factor in the pathway to perpetration.²⁰³

As mentioned earlier in this paper, there is evidence of systemic attempts by **political actors** to use TFGBV as a tactic against women, to attack women's rights more broadly and to advance wider political, economic and social goals, which erodes democratic norms. Examples are documented in the Philippines, Hungary, Brazil, Turkey, India, Mexico, South Africa, Malta and the UK, amongst others.²⁰⁴ As set out above, there is also evidence that the legal system is being weaponised against women, include to silence them and curtail freedom of expression, with women and sexual rights activists, women journalists and women politicians particularly targeted.²⁰⁵

The role of online service providers in the proliferation and amplification of TFGBV

TFGBV is carried out through the use of a variety of different technologies and online spaces, from basic digital tools, such as texting, email, and social media, to more advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI).²⁰⁶ As mentioned above, research on the range of different technologies and tools used by perpetrators of TFGBV is limited; however, it is important that online service providers proactively address and mitigate the risk that technologies can be misused and weaponized against women and girls in all their diversity, including in different geographies, when designing and deploying new technology products, and by reviewing the design and deployment of existing technologies.²⁰⁷ New guidance highlights the importance of ensuring that ethics, safety and privacy are built into the design of all technologies from the outset and is featured later in the paper.²⁰⁸ This section takes a specific look at the role of online service providers in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV.

There are an important but limited number of studies, largely from high income countries, that look at **the role of online service providers** in the proliferation and amplification of TFGBV. These studies highlight a number of important considerations that need to be taken into account when considering the role of platforms, including platforms' design choices, business models, content moderation policies (including the ratio of human moderators and AI), cultural values and platform governance.²⁰⁹

A number of studies look specifically at **the role of social media providers in amplifying the ability of IPV perpetrators** to harass and humiliate partners,²¹⁰ often alongside other ways in which perpetrators' misuse digital technologies. These reveal that IPV harms can be amplified by providers due to the way in which people's social worlds converge online, particularly through social media and networking sites. For example, through the non-consensual sharing of intimate images where perpetrators upload personal information, images or videos, often sexual in nature, with a view to humiliating victims-survivors – which are then shared, including by misogynist peer networks.

Victim-survivor-centred research, including with women journalists, women's rights activists and women politicians, highlights that the response to TFGBV from many online service providers remains highly inadequate.²¹¹ These, and other studies, have made a number of important **recommendations** in relation to providers' policy development and implementation, safety and privacy by design approaches, design of algorithms, content moderation processes, reporting systems, the need for proactive measures and cross-platform collaboration, amongst other things²¹². For example, research in Australia on experiences of violence among mobile dating app users recommends that platforms embed safety by design principles and identifies safety features that may have a positive impact.²¹³

Online service providers are not monolithic and cover a very wide range of different business models, offering different services and products. A recent study highlights a **distinction between different types of online services provided**, with some services designed to encourage and profit from TFGBV (such as 'The Dirty' and 'She's A Homewrecker') and other services which do not exist exclusively for TFGBV (such as

Facebook and Twitter) but where large volumes of TFGBV occurs.²¹⁴ In addition, some providers have an advertising-driven business model, whereas others do not, which therefore affects financial incentives.²¹⁵ The business model is therefore an important factor when considering legal, regulatory and policy responses to TFGBV.

Despite provider differences, a number of **common features** have been identified in relation to providers' role in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV, which include:²¹⁶

- **Advertising-driven business models**, which maximize user engagement in a way that favours more outrageous and sensationalized content.
- **Prioritization of business growth over safety, ethics and consumer protection.**
- **Design choices and algorithmic preferences**, which amplify and promote harmful misogynistic narratives and behaviours, and shape social interactions and access to information. This includes entrenched gender and cultural bias designed into algorithms.
- **Ease, efficiency, and affordability** of automating and multiplying TFGBV against a particular group or individual;
- The ability of perpetrators to **hide behind anonymity** and commit acts of TFGBV remotely;
- The ability of perpetrators to **'game' content moderation features**, for example misusing flagging and reporting mechanisms to further abuse women and coordinate with others to evade AI moderation detection.

Online service providers' **policies and processes** to address TFGBV are complicated to navigate and generally not specific to TFGBV, relying on voluntary mechanisms and self-regulation.²¹⁷ Research by human rights activists and organisations has highlighted inconsistent and inadequate enforcement of terms of services and community guidelines, as these are generally drafted in broad terms to give companies flexibility in interpreting them.²¹⁸ In addition, without external monitoring and enforcement, the burden lies on victims-survivors to report to individual providers, with the process made more complex by the fact that abusive posts can migrate from one provider's platform to another.

A number of online service providers, including Meta, Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, now publish **transparency reports** that outline how they are enforcing their own content policies and rules. These reports include broad categories of online harms, for example hate speech and bullying and harassment. However, they do not detail what providers are doing to address the *gendered* nature of abuse on their sites as they do not include gender disaggregated data.

Where providers have published data on their actions against abusive content, it is unclear how prevalent this is in relation to **overall content** as platforms tend not to share how much content they host,²¹⁹ and because laws that apply to the content differ by jurisdiction. There are calls for technology platforms to provide more transparent data on TFGBV, in relation to country-specific disaggregation and more disaggregation on the types of TFGBV, target groups and perpetrators, as well as calls to introduce standardised reporting across platforms to allow for comparisons.

Regulatory mechanisms, such as enforceable reporting requirements, can also provide an effective way to engage with platforms to encourage greater transparency in how they address a range of online safety issues, including TFGBV.²²⁰

Evidence gaps

This preliminary analysis has identified a number of important evidence gaps on TFGBV, which need to be explored for improved understanding, measuring and addressing of TFGBV. This analysis looks at evidence gaps broadly across different forms of TFGBV, and is not an assessment of evidence gaps on each form of TFGBV.

In particular, there is a need to improve the collection of **reliable, disaggregated and comparable global and regional data on the prevalence, forms, impacts and drivers of TFGBV**.²²¹ Whilst some countries have national prevalence data and there are some regional and global studies, data collection on TFGBV is not yet coordinated at global or regional levels. In particular, there are no standardised concepts, definitions and measures which make it hard to establish reliable global prevalence estimates and compare data across studies and countries. Whilst data already shows the pervasiveness of the issue, the true extent is unknown which also affects understanding of different typologies of TFGBV.

In relation to sources of data, there are gaps in **official government statistics on TFGBV**. There is currently no global database of official government statistics, and whilst government data is available in some countries, these statistics should be treated with caution due to the under-reporting of TFGBV and because official reports only tend to capture illegal activity.²²² In some contexts, there are also issues in relation to the capacity of national statistics offices and law enforcement agencies to collect data.

There are also gaps in relation to **data from online service providers**, including what data they collect on TFGBV, how it is collected, why and how they use this data, and how they are responding to TFGBV. Data from platforms is potentially an important source to assist understanding of forms and impacts of TFGBV. However the lack of access to this data by researchers, and general lack of transparency, makes it difficult to understand the scale of the problem and providers' role in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV, as well as their role as potential partners in preventing and responding to it. It is important that data on TFGBV from online service providers is not weaponised against women.²²³

Another key gap is evidence from LMICs, as most published evidence focuses on high-income countries. The report from the 2022 Wilton Park event on this topic highlighted that most published evidence cites sources from English-speaking countries, even though feminist, women's and digital rights organisations in LMICs are and have been working on this issue for many years and have produced studies from non-English speaking countries.²²⁴ Those who took part in the consultations for this analysis highlighted a lack of resources available for researchers in LMICs.

Other evidence gaps on TFGBV include:

- The **intersectional nature of TFGBV**, in relation to prevalence, forms, risk and protective factors, and impacts as experienced by diverse and often under-represented women, girls and gender diverse people, including older women, women and girls with disabilities, migrant and refugee women and girls, and women and girls with diverse SOGIESC. There are gaps about the everyday experiences of women and girls in all their diversity.
- **Adolescent girls' and young women's experiences of TFGBV**. There is limited evidence on younger adolescent girls' experiences of TFGBV and how different forms of TFGBV affect adolescent girls and what the impacts of this are, including on adolescent girls' mental and physical health. Data on adolescents is not currently captured in national prevalence VAW survey tools (WHO and DHS).
- **Specific risk and protective factors associated with victimisation and perpetration of TFGBV**: Whilst there has been considerable research on risk and protective factors for GBV victimisation and perpetration, particularly IPV, there has been limited research in relation to specific risk and protective factors for TFGBV, including how these factors overlap and are different to those for other forms of GBV. The exception is a number of research initiatives seeking to measure online violence against children and young people, where risk factors have been looked at, such as Disrupting Harm and the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS).²²⁵



- Impacts on **mental health**. Whilst some of the impacts on mental health have been set out earlier on in this paper, there is limited evidence in relation to the long-lasting impacts on mental health, from both experiencing and witnessing TFGBV. Gaps include understanding the mental health impacts on adolescent girls and young women who experience TFGBV.
- **Societal impacts** and the connections between targeted hate, gendered disinformation, conflict and violent extremism. There is also limited evidence on the societal impact of TFGBV on discriminatory social norms around gender, sexuality and violence.
- **Economic costs** for individuals, businesses, wider society and the economy. Although some studies have attempted to calculate the health costs and loss of income, these are not disaggregated by gender.
- **What works** to prevent and respond to TFGBV, including safety and privacy by design approaches, social norms approaches, what remedies survivors want, and working with young men to reduce the risks of perpetration and support behaviour change. Examining what works and effective interventions on TFGBV were not part of the scope of this analysis, however an evidence gap was identified in relation to understanding effective interventions to prevent and respond to TFGBV.
- **The broader gender digital divide and how it impacts on TFGBV** and vice versa, including how women's and girls' access to ICTs, including what is known about who is using technology and who is not, and how a lack of access and/or ability to meaningfully use technology might make some women, girls and gender diverse people more or less likely to experience violence.
- **The role of technology and online service providers** in proliferating and amplifying TFGBV. There is limited evidence on how different digital technologies facilitate different forms of TFGBV, how they are misused and abused. There are also gaps in the evidence base on what online service providers are doing to prevent and respond to TFGBV on their sites and through their platforms, including integrating a safety and privacy by design approach, providing reporting processes, using content moderation strategies, acting against reports of abuse and perpetrators of abuse, and collaborating with other companies to address the cross platform nature of abuse. There are also gaps in the analysis of the weaponization of gender narratives for political, social or economic gain, including how attacks against women, for example in politics, are coordinated by illiberal actors that take advantage of algorithmic designs and business models that incentivize fake and outrageous content.
- What works in relation to **legislation and regulatory approaches** to address TFGBV, including through measure to promote online service providers' accountability and transparency. There is limited strengths-based approaches in the existing evidence base.

2. Evidence and research priorities

This section sets out some emerging **evidence and research priorities on TFGBV** that the Global Partnership has identified through this preliminary analysis in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, as set out in methodology section. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and will feed into a longer term global shared research agenda on TFGBV.

In particular, these emerging research priorities will inform and be built upon by the research priority setting work being carried out by a range of stakeholders from civil society, international organisations, governments and academia. For example, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) and partners, UN Women, the Association for Progressive Communications, and the Global Partnership are facilitating the co-creation of a global research agenda on TFGBV, which will be completed in early 2024. The research agenda will be developed through a priority setting exercise that will identify where major gaps lie and what major questions need to be addressed to advance our knowledge on how to respond to and prevent TFGBV, using a methodology that ‘crowdsources’ multiple opinions and ensures the inclusion of diverse voices from across the TFGBV research, practice, funding, and policy-making fields, including voices from cybercrime, law enforcement and big tech.

Across all these areas, different data methods can be employed, with an emphasis on a mixed methods approach, including longitudinal studies, formative research, multi-country studies combining survey data and qualitative methods to explore the impact in different contexts, and ‘big data’ analysis.²²⁶

A number of different actors need to be involved in taking forward new research (civil society, including women’s rights organisations; academia; government; online service providers), with new research partnerships established that include collaborations between the GBV and technology fields, partnerships with LMIC countries, and collaborations with online service providers. In taking forward research priorities and gathering new data, it is critical to maintain a focus on the safe and ethical data collection on TFGBV and ensure a do no harm approach. See below for further details. It is also important to prioritise victim-survivor-centred research and **feminist participatory action research** to address the structural nature of gender inequality through research practice.²²⁷

A global, collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach to research in this area is important to set research priorities, share findings and best practices with a focus on safe and ethical research that mitigates harm.

Emerging areas of focus

1. Prevalence, forms and drivers of TFGBV

Expand evidence on the nature, forms, impacts and prevalence of TFGBV, particularly in LMICs and based on a global TFGBV typology for research. High income countries are heavily over-represented in the current evidence base on TFGBV. More research is needed to establish the prevalence of TFGBV in countries in LMICs, as well as for understanding the surrounding context such as how technology is used in different contexts and how it relates to TFGBV, and what different forms of TFGBV are present as some may be context specific.

Understanding the intersectional nature of TFGBV. Evidence shows that women who experience intersecting inequalities, for example where gender inequality intersects with racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism, colonialism and other systematic oppression, are disproportionately impacted by TFGBV. However, more can be done to expand and nuance this understanding, including through improving data disaggregation in quantitative surveys and exploring the intersectional nature of TFGBV through in-depth, strengths-based, community-led, qualitative research.

Risk and protective factors associated with TFGBV victimisation, how this intersects with risk and protective factors associated with other forms of GBV, commonalities and differences. This should be informed by an improved understanding of prevalence rates, so that research can examine risk factors where there is highest prevalence to understand increased risk.

What works to prevent and respond to different forms of TFGBV. This could include evidence from programme and evaluation data from prevention, early intervention, response and systemic change initiatives that highlights approaches, processes and resources that are effective in addressing TFGBV, as well as a focus on social norms approaches.

Expanding understanding of TFGBV in humanitarian contexts. To date, there is limited evidence on TFGBV in humanitarian contexts. Although prevalence research on GBV in humanitarian contexts is often not recommended due to ethical concerns, GBV data is collected through for example through service providers using the Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS). This could present a potential area for integrating a focus on TFGBV which could generate insights into the number and types of TFGBV incidents.

2. Impacts across the social ecology

How social norms are changing through the use of technology and online spaces. The development of tools to measure norms is at a nascent stage, although there is some evidence that harmful online discourse and behaviour is changing social norms that: (1) maintain and tolerate sexual violence; (2) encourage impunity and a lack of social sanctions; and (3) reduce female participation in civic discourse. More research is needed to understand how social norms are changing (both online and offline) and how they are exacerbated by the way in which technologies are designed

and misused, and the role of online service providers, including decision-making, design of algorithms, anonymity of online spaces, and the role of content moderators, amongst others.²²⁸ This should include an intersectional focus on how social norms are changing for women and girls in all their diversity, including adolescent girls and youth.

Understanding the relationship between targeted hate, disinformation and gender.

Although there is growing evidence on the overlaps and the impact for individual women, more evidence is needed at scale to understand how disinformation campaigns and targeted hate, which include networked online attacks, impacts on the rollback of women's rights, particularly the rights of women from marginalised communities and those facing intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression, and the erosion of democratic principles. This includes the relationship between TFGBV and violent extremism. Most research focuses on the links with misogynistic extremism in Europe, Australia and North America, with few studies exploring the evidence from other contexts.

Impacts on human rights and democratic freedoms. Further research to understand how different forms of TFGBV impact on a range of individual and collective rights and freedoms, including the rights to participate in shared civic spaces, access and use digital technologies, freedom of expression, privacy, rights to dignity and security. Although there have been several studies of women in public and political life (journalists, politicians, activists), there is limited evidence on the impacts on the human rights and democratic freedoms of everyday women and girls in all their diversity.

How TFGBV and conflict reinforce each other. Existing evidence suggests that violent conflict and community tensions are likely to lead to higher rates of TFGBV, while TFGBV is often used as a method of oppression that may fuel conflict dynamics.²²⁹

Everyday impacts on women and girls in all their diversity at an individual, societal and economic level. In relation to economic costs, there are both direct and indirect economic costs to victims-survivors, their families, communities, businesses, and wider societies. Most studies are based in high-income countries and not gender-disaggregated. Few GBV studies specifically consider technology-facilitated aspects and forms of GBV.

Understanding the relationship between TFGBV and the gender digital divide. This includes looking at the impacts of the gender digital divide on TFGBV, and how TFGBV impacts the digital economy and the digital inclusion of women and girls in all their diversity.

3. Pathways to perpetration

Analysis of the pathways to perpetration, including risk and protective factors associated with perpetration of TFGBV. This includes an analysis of different forms of TFGBV, perpetrator profiles, how perpetrators are using different technologies and tactics, the importance of strength-based and community-led research with some perpetrator cohorts, and the role of technology platforms in amplifying risks, as well as potential action platforms could take to enhance protective factors. Early research

on programs addressing TFGBV with young people suggests that strengths-based approaches to research with this cohort would be particularly worthwhile. This priority also includes examining TFGBV perpetration links with the perpetrator pathways to violent extremism. Building on the work underway with the [Christchurch Call Initiative on Algorithmic Outcomes](#), potential areas to focus research on include the characteristics of how different online spaces impact perpetrator pathways, as well as analysis of cross-platform migration between online spaces. It could also be useful to explore how pathways vary according to different cultural contexts and violent extremist groups.

Online/offline nexus. Further research is needed to understand the interconnected nature of the online and offline dimensions of TFGBV related to online violent extremist language and offline behaviours. For example, whether more frequent posters are more likely to perpetrate offline violence (whether there is a 'dose effect' of exposure).

4. Technology and online service providers

Investigate specifically how the lack of safety considerations in the design and deployment of different types of technology can exacerbate and facilitate GBV.

This should include AI algorithms amplifying gender norms and GBV, chatbots, offline tech like phones text messages, tracking devices, internet of things, drones, etc.

Examine the role of online service providers in addressing TFGBV. This could include an analysis of what providers are currently doing to prevent and respond to TFGBV through the provision of their services and products, as well as what more they can and should be doing, including preventing features and functions from proliferating and amplifying TFGBV. As well as responding to TFGBV, research could investigate the ways in which providers can address the culture of misogynistic discourse on their platforms. This includes an assessment of the risks associated with asking providers to collect data on TFGBV. This research could also look at providers' role in prevention efforts.

Investigate the effectiveness of legal frameworks, voluntary mechanisms and regulatory approaches to addressing TFGBV. This includes looking at legal approaches and regulation, including the EU's Digital Services Act, and how online service providers' policies and practices are being enforced and what more needs to be done. It also includes learning from work on online child sexual abuse material (CSAM) in relation to transparency reports and voluntary mechanisms.

Ensuring safe and ethical data collection on TFGBV

There are considerable methodological and ethical challenges with doing research and collecting data on TFGBV. Some of the key challenges are summarised below.

Ethical and safety challenges:

- **Possible re-traumatization of victims-survivors and their families:** It is important that research and data collection is victim-survivor-centered, culturally-safe, strengths-based and trauma-informed. Researchers should be trained to refer victims-survivors to available local services and sources of support, while recognising that there is often a lack of GBV services and that even where services exist, these are often not used to supporting victims-survivors of TFGBV and often do not offer specialist support for marginalized communities. Where few resources exist, it may be necessary for the study to create short-term support mechanisms.
- **Researcher safety:** Researchers can become targets of TFGBV, including coordinated attacks.²³⁰ Furthermore, many people working in this space, including researchers, are victims-survivors. It is therefore essential that all researchers receive specialized training and access to ongoing support.
- **The ethics of doing research with children and younger adolescents** also applies to TFGBV but may have additional dimensions due to the online dimension. For example, young people consulted for this paper observed that they preferred in-person research as online surveys do not have any follow-up or aftercare. All data collection efforts must adhere to global standards on the safe and ethical collection of data from children.²³¹ and get ethical clearance.
- **Protecting confidentiality of user data collected by online service providers.** Many users have not knowingly consented to data being collected about them, nor do they understand what a platform can do with their data. It is important to ensure any additional data requests of technology companies in relation to TFGBV data is in line with international standards of research ethics for adults and children and child safeguarding principles, and that any TFGBV is categorically 'sensitive' and should be securely stored. However, even the most secure systems are not 100% safe, and GBV data can be potentially life-threatening. It is therefore essential that risks are carefully considered and mitigated.²³²
- **Weaponization of data by state and non-state actors,** with risks that data could be used to attack and silence researchers or participants in some contexts. This is particularly the case for research with marginalised groups or in sensitive contexts around peace, conflict, justice organising, where there is some evidence from recent leaks that military or police track online activity of researchers, hack emails, and access research data remotely.²³³

- **Challenges of ensuring data collection is culturally safe, inclusive and intersectional:** There are ethical and methodological challenges on researching some groups that are known to experience high levels of TFGBV, such as women with disabilities and LBTQIA+ people and gender diverse people's experiences, particularly where it is criminalized or highly stigmatized. There are also methodological considerations for researching the experiences of women and girls with disabilities. It is important to include community representatives in research governance mechanisms, such as advisory boards and partnership structures, while also ensuring appropriate cultural and community supervision. It is also important to collaborate closely with representative civil society organisations in such research to understand ethical considerations and risks, in order to ensure a do-no-harm and victim-survivor-centered approach in the data collection. Research teams are advised to ensure adherence to data sovereignty principles, particularly in research involving Indigenous communities²³⁴.

Methodological considerations:

- **Challenges of data access for third party researchers** which would enable more in-depth investigation of the prevalence and prevention of TFGBV and other online harms.
- **TFGBV is rapidly evolving, but research takes time.** This is a fast-moving field with TFGBV occurring and spreading at a scale and speed that is hard to track in real time. In addition, perpetrators can rapidly shift between new platforms and technologies – often at a faster pace than data collection and analysis, with implications for policy and programming response.
- **Under-reporting** of TFGBV is due to a range of factors, including the multifaceted nature of TFGBV experiences which can make it hard for women to identify TFGBV, lack of awareness of how to report it, the normalisation of TFGBV online, shame, stigma, fears of retaliation or not being believed, language barriers, as well as inadequate responses from social media platforms.
- **Evolving terminology and lack of common definitions** which can be exacerbated by language issues / translation of terms.
- **Practical barriers which restrict research** including technological barriers (e.g. encryption, AI-generated content, blockchain), ethical and legal barriers (e.g. privacy issues on messaging apps), and fragmentation of platforms.²³⁵
- **Methodological considerations vary by the type of data collection**, for example population surveys vs. big data, the actors involved, and the amount of control over the data.²³⁶ There are also challenges with using quantitative data without qualitative research to contextualize it.

Data collection principles: Research and data collection on TFGBV should be guided by existing best practice from the GBV and data fields, as well as wider best practice for online data collection.

Table: Safe and Ethical Use of Technology to Address GBV and Harmful Practices ²³⁷

Core GBV Principles	Data-specific principles	Underlying considerations to meet global ethical and safety standards
(1) Do no harm	(1) Safety by design	(1) Do no harm
(2) Victim-survivor-centred approach	(2) Purpose limitation	(2) User integration / participatory approaches
(3) Informed consent and transparency	(3) Data minimization	(3) Use and accessibility
(4) Participatory approaches	(4) Proper use of data	(4) Safeguarding / managing risk
(5) Rights-based approach	(5) Fairness	(5) Data analysis
(6) Advance gender equality	(6) Informed consent, transparency and ownership	(6) Consent
	(7) Accuracy and data quality	
	(8) Security: integrity, confidentiality and availability	
	(9) Accountability	
	(10) Unconditional service	

Source: UNFPA (2023), [Guidance on the Safe and Ethical Use of Technology to Address Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices](#)

Endnotes

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