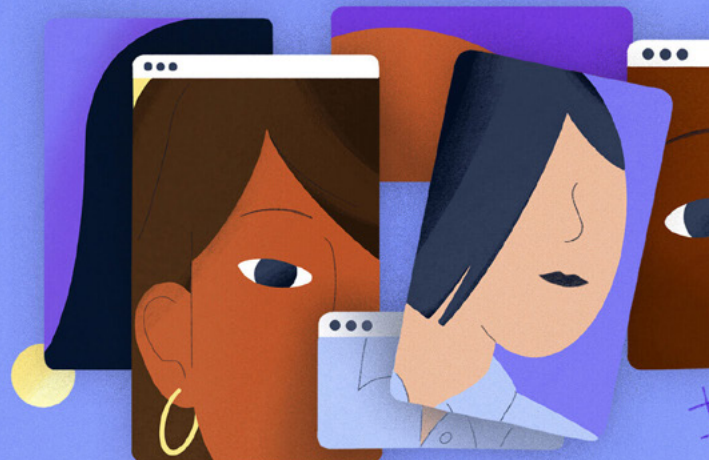


ISSUE BRIEF

UNDERSTANDING AND MEASURING TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN FOR BETTER PREVENTION AND RESPONSE



THE ISSUE

The rapidly growing access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has had multiple impacts on gender equality and women's rights, including the further exacerbation of existing forms of violence against women (VAW) and the emergence of new forms of VAW, such as non-consensual image-sharing.

Available evidence confirms high prevalence rates of technology facilitated VAW (TF VAW), with national data ranging from 16 to 58%. And yet, accurate, reliable and comparable data on the extent of TF VAW are lacking to effectively inform and monitor targeted policies and programmes.

The 2022 [UN Secretary-General's Report](#) on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls highlights the absence of agreed definitions and methodologies for measurement to understand the true prevalence of violence against women and girls in digital contexts. The same concern has been repeatedly raised by global and regional bodies such as the [UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences](#), the [European Parliament](#), the [African Union](#) and the [Council of Europe](#).

BUILDING ON TF VAW DATA EFFORTS FROM CSOS, NGOS, ACADEMIA AND STATISTICAL OFFICES

Women's rights and civil society organizations are relentlessly working on the prevention and response to VAW, including through their advocacy and provision of essential services. Through their continuous direct contact with survivors of VAW, they are often the first to identify trends and emerging forms and drivers of VAW.

Community-based research has been an important source of quantitative and qualitative evidence to grasp the forms and extent of TF VAW. In Morocco for instance, a 2019 mixed-methods research confirmed that

TF VAW takes many forms, including harassment, threats, abusive comments, insults, defamatory lies, blackmail, and the non-consensual sharing of private images or communications.

Researchers and academics face similar concerns over the lack of a standard definition of TF VAW. A [2018 study](#) identified six dedicated hate speech conferences, 18 unique studies and seven publicly available datasets showcasing the growing work on TF VAW.

Informed by emerging and field research, researchers such as the [International Center for Research on Women](#) proposed methodological tools to frame global research, including a comprehensive definition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV), a conceptual framework (described below) and a draft set of quantitative measures testing to be used during focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

In the same vein, countries have increasingly started to include questions related to TF VAW in their national violence against women prevalence surveys, notably in [Georgia](#), [Morocco](#), [Albania](#), [Uganda](#), [Canada](#), [Guyana](#), [Grenada](#) and countries of the [European Union](#). Questions vary across questionnaires, covering mainly sexual cyberharassment, cyberstalking and controlling behaviours of partners.

While these research and data-collection initiatives help better understand the manifestations and extent of TF VAW, the lack of a commonly agreed definition still results in significant gaps and the availability of comparable, comprehensive and population survey-based TF VAW data remain. As the methodologies used differ (definition, reference period or population, intersectionality lens) – scope, quality and reliability also vary. The specificities of TF VAW have also led researchers to explore new methods and data sources.

To ensure that the safety and ethical principles that are core to any research on VAW are prioritized, women must be at the centre of the initiative, and must ultimately

benefit from the use of the findings. An updated version of the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) [ethical guidelines](#) will soon be released under the [UN Women and WHO Joint Programme on VAW data](#), reflecting recent developments in research methods.

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A COMMON DEFINITION TO MEASURE TF VAW

Along with [evidence](#) suggesting a rise in TF VAW during the COVID-19 crisis came increased calls to prevent and respond to this scourge. As part of the Generation Equality Forum held in 2021, the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality identified technology-facilitated gender-based violence as one of its four priority action areas.

In 2022, the [Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse](#) (Global Partnership) was launched to address significant gaps in research, policy and evidence-informed practices to understand and address this issue. Jointly with Wilton Park and UN Women, in August 2022 the Global Partnership co-hosted a first [multistakeholder event](#) towards the standardization of TF VAW measurement, as well as its ethical considerations.

Further, a [multistakeholder expert group](#) was convened by UN Women in November 2022. It gathered 29 diverse stakeholders from 26 inter-governmental organizations, government agencies, civil society and academia, including gender policy specialists, researchers and statisticians, to share learnings and advance collective knowledge. This resulted in a proposal for a common comprehensive TF VAW definition that considers the unique specificities of digital technologies:

*“Technology-facilitated violence against women is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of ICTs or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.”**

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION

At the recently concluded [54th Session of the UN Statistical Commission](#), the need for methodological work to measure TF VAW and existing efforts to address this gap were noted, and the Commission was asked to include this item in next year's Session. To this end, and to drive the shared agenda on the standard and ethical measurement of TF VAW, continuous collective efforts by UN Women and partners include:

- **Convening inclusive and multi-stakeholder consultations** to validate the proposed definition and to reach global agreements on indicators, taxonomy and tools adapted to different surveys and methods.
- **Establishing a repository on existing plethora of TF VAW data work.** Utilizing the numerous TF VAW studies conducted by field experts, UN Women is compiling measurement resources and has produced a [scoping study on the state of evidence and data](#).
- **Continuing support for national data collection.** UN Women continues to support VAW prevalence surveys, including in 12 additional countries in Phase II of the [Women Count Programme](#), and the strengthening of administrative data systems.
- **Partnering to highlight knowledge gaps** and co-create a global shared research agenda on TF VAW to fill knowledge gaps and produce prevalence data, to inform policies and programmes. This is currently being done in partnership with the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, the Association for Progressive Communication, and the Global Partnership.
- **Amplifying global advocacy.** By uniting with key partners in the Action Coalitions, the Global Partnership and the UN system are working to amplify global advocacy throughout the year and seize the momentum at strategic upcoming opportunities, including the 67th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), which focused [on innovation and technological change](#).

** While the group acknowledged that technology-facilitated violence disproportionately impacts women in all their diversity and gender non-conforming individuals, the definition maintains the language of VAW rather than GBV for measurement purposes, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals and existing survey tools and methodologies. It was noted that, in the proposed definition, violence against women can be substituted with gender-based violence, whilst maintaining the common definition describing the phenomenon.*

This issue brief was prepared by Ramya Emandi, Jessamyn Encarnacion, Kalliopi Mingeirou, Raphaëlle Rafin, and Papa Seck

Note: The draft definition of TF VAW for statistical purposes is work-in-progress and being subjected to wider consultations. We thus welcome any views/comments on the draft definition to further enhance its relevance and practicality in measuring the extent of TF VAW; please feel free to email any of the authors.
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