CSW 70 Justice for Women Brief

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

Michaela Moura-Koçoğlu, Ph.D. and Mary Adams

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is best understood as an amplification of offline gender-based violence into digital spaces.[1] It refers to "*any act, that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified by the use of information and communications technology, that is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or* economic *harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms."*[2] Women and girls - particularly those facing intersecting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation - are disproportionately affected.[3] Women of color are 34% more likely, and Black women in particular are 84% more likely, to be targeted in harmful online posts.[4] Digital tools are used to stalk, harass, monitor, or disseminate private images of victims, undermining women's safety, dignity, education, employment, and civic participation.[5] The harms are profound: victims frequently report fear, anxiety, depression, PTSD, and even chronic illness.[6] The young are particularly at risk, since TFGBV affects girls and young women more than older women due to different digital habits, social environments, and vulnerability factors.

Lack of Federal TFGBV Definition. As of 2025, there is no federal definition or policy framework addressing TFGBV—a critical gap that weakens legal protections for women, hinders enforcement, and denies victims access to redress and support services. While current U.S. legislation addresses some types of online violence, it fails to recognize TFGBV as a systemic form of gender-based harm. The absence of a federal definition of TFGBV creates significant barriers to justice for victims: jurisdictional challenges, inconsistent enforcement or prosecution, unclear reporting mechanisms, and inadequate protection for victims which undermines access to justice and safety.

National data collection on TFGBV is fragmented. As of mid 2025, the U.S. has made progress in elevating the TFGBV issue nationally, but underreporting is pervasive. The absence of standardized data and monitoring systems prevents disaggregation by gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation. Timely, high-quality disaggregated data is essential for efficient, evidence-based responses in policymaking.

Lack of legal and regulatory framework for coordinated action. Without a legal framework, the U.S. faces serious challenges such as jurisdictional complexity, gaps in prevention and digital literacy, and no legally binding mechanisms for tech sector accountability. The 2023 *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* constitutes a critical federal instrument for coordinated action, but no reports, including on TFGBV, have been publicly shared to date. Policies such as the *2025 Take It Down Act* mark an important first step by criminalizing the publication of nonconsensual intimate imagery and mandating platforms to remove such material. However, the law's scope remains limited, not accounting for abuse that doesn't involve qualifying images—such as doxing or text threats.[7]

Victims face structural barriers in pursuing redress. Women often do not report TFGBV because of a lack of awareness of their rights and resources. The absence of standardized reporting mechanisms, coupled with insufficient law enforcement training on digital abuse, leads to inconsistent and inadequate responses from police. **Until legal protections are strengthened, institutions become more trauma-informed, and tech platforms are held accountable, many victims will continue to suffer in silence—without justice, protection, or healing.**

Fast Facts

- **25%** (1 in 4) adult women in the U.S. have experienced some form of online abuse, including among others cyberstalking, sexual harassment, doxing (publicly revealing personal information without consent, often with malicious intent), and trolling (inflammatory online posts with the purpose of provoking or inciting violence).[8]
- **33%** of women aged 18–34 have experienced **sexual harassment online**, more than three times the rate of men (11%) in the same age group.[9]
- The overall **prevalence of online violence against women** globally is very high, with **85%** of women reporting witnessing such violence. **Girls and young women** are disproportionately targeted – 45% of women ages 13-44 have personally experienced online violence compared to 31% of women 45 and older.[10] In one study, **58% of women and girls** aged 15-25 personally experienced online harassment. The abuse included purposeful embarrassment (41%), threats of sexual violence (39%), body shaming (39%), and sexual harassment (37%).[11]
- 1 in 3 individuals report being victims of **non-consensual distribution of intimate imagery (NDII).** Women constitute **99%** of victims of **sexually explicit digital forgery** ('deepfakes').[12]
- **Cyberstalking** (use of technology to harass, harm, or create fear in victims) is estimated at around 1.1 million.[13] One in three women and one in six men experience cyber or in-person stalking at some point in their lives.[14] One study reported that half of victims experienced cyberstalking as juveniles (age 9-17).[15]

Recommendations

1) **Adopt a Federal TFGBV Definition**. Develop and codify a federal definition of TFGBV to ensure legal and research clarity, consistency across jurisdictions, and improve law enforcement response. U.S. laws have not kept pace with rapid technological change, leaving survivors unprotected and underscoring the urgent need for continual legal updates in the age of AI.
2) **Expand Legal and Regulatory Frameworks**. Incorporate a federal definition to legally recognize TFGBV as a form of harm enabling more comprehensive protection, enforcement, and accountability across the U.S. legal system. The *Take It Down Act*, the federal initiative to combat online distribution of sexually explicit images of minors, could be expanded by using federal definitions of TFGBV classifications to account for diverse tactics of online violence beyond qualifying images. The *DEFIANCE Act* (Disrupt Explicit Forged Images and Non-Consensual Edits) passed the Senate in 2024 but not the House and was reintroduced in May 2025. We urge Congress to pass this Act to provide victims with a civil remedy for justice and compensation.
3) **Standardize Data Collection and Establish a TFGBV Monitoring Infrastructure.** Create a coordinated multi-agency TFGBV taxonomy aligned with legal definitions and uniform codes for law enforcement and researchers. Standardize data collection on TFGBV to understand its scope, inform policy, and improve responses. Establish dedicated institutional mechanisms with assigned resources to monitor systematically TFGBV prevalence, responses, and outcomes.[16]
4) **Strengthen Existing Victim Service Providers**. Partner with civil society organizations and victims to equip victim support centers with training in specialized digital safety, legal aid, and trauma-informed medical care.[17]
5) **Invest in Capacity Building and Training**. Fund mandatory, trauma-informed TFGBV training for judges, criminal justice actors, healthcare providers, and law enforcement to eliminate revictimization, address misconceptions, and strengthen stakeholder capacity for effective response and victim support.[18]

Key Resources

National Organization for Women (NOW) & Incogni. (March 2025). *Online abuse against women in the US.*
UN Women (2025). *Digital abuse, trolling, stalking, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women.*
UN Women & WHO (2023). *Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women: Taking Stock of Evidence and Data Collection*.

---

[1] Backe et al. (2018). *Networked Individuals, Gendered Violence;* Vickery el al. (2018). *Mediating Misogyny: Gender, Technology and Harassment;* UN Women & WHO (2023). *TFGBV: Taking Stock of Evidence and Data Collection.*
[2] UN Women Expert Group (2023). *Technology-facilitated Violence against Women: Towards a common definition;* UN Women (2025). *Digital abuse, trolling, stalking, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women*.
[3] Hicks (2021). *Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online GBV.* Institute of Development Studies.
[4] Amnesty International (2018). *Toxic Twitter – A Toxic Place for Women.*
[5] Citron (2014). *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace*; Henry & Powell (2015*) Embodied Harms: Gender, Shame, and Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence;* Dunn (2020). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview.*
[6] Baekgaard (2024). *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence*; Carlyle (2017). *The role of social media in promoting understanding of violence as a public health issue*; Torp Løkkeberg et al. (2024). *Digital violence and abuse: A scoping review of adverse experiences within adolescent intimate partner relationships*; Khoo (2021*). Deplatforming Misogyny.*
[7] Cyber Civil Rights Initiative. (March 6, 2025). *Statement on the Passage of the Take It Down Act.*
[8] National Organization for Women (NOW) & Incogni. (March 2025). *Online abuse against women in the US.*
[9] Pew Research Center. (2021*). The State of Online Harassment*.
[10] Economist Intelligence Unit (2021). *Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women.*
[11] Plan International (2020). *Free to be online? Girls' and young women's experiences of online harassment.*
[12] Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, New York State. *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence.*
[13] Morgan and Truman (2022). *Stalking Victimization, 2019.* U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics.
[14] Smith, Basile, and Kresnow (2022). *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Stalking.*
[15] Walsh et al. (2024). *Characteristics and Dynamics of Cyberstalking Victimization Among Juveniles and Young Adults.*
[16] UN Women & WHO (2023). *Technology-facilitated violence against women: Taking stock of evidence and data collection*; (2022*). Improving the collection and use of administrative data on violence against women: Global technical guidance.*
[17] Baekgaard (2024); Carlyle (2017); Torp Løkkeberg (2024); Khoo (2021).
[18] O'Brien & Maras (2024). *Technology-facilitated coercive control: response, redress, risk, and reform*.