

# Invisible Violence: New Forms of Gender-Based Violence in the Digital Era

**Invisible Gender-Based Violence: One of the most common and harmful forms of gender-based violence, often overlooked due to its subtle and less visible nature, profoundly impacting the mental health, self-esteem, and autonomy of victims.**

Violence Against Women and Girls continues to be one of the most persistent and devastating human rights violations worldwide. Every day, millions of women face physical, psychological, and economic violence that impacts their lives and limits their ability to fully participate in society. These aggressions not only harm the victims but also have profound effects on their families, communities, and the social fabric as a whole.

Despite progress in the fight for gender equality, the emergence of digital technologies and the growing use of online platforms have given rise to new forms of violence that amplify and perpetuate existing inequalities. These dynamics pose an urgent challenge for governments, human rights organizations, and tech companies, as digital violence can be just as harmful, if not more so, than violence in the physical world.

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a turning point in the dynamics of gender-based violence

in the digital sphere. It highlighted how digital platforms, while offering opportunities for connection and mutual support, can also be used as tools to perpetuate abuse. This phenomenon has been especially evident among young women, adolescents, and girls, who, due to their increased interaction with social media, are more vulnerable to these forms of violence.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, defines gender-based violence as “any act of violence based on female gender that causes or may cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering, whether in public or private life.” This definition has expanded to include a digital dimension, encompassing abusive behaviors facilitated by the internet and social media.

Digital Gender-Based Violence encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors carried out

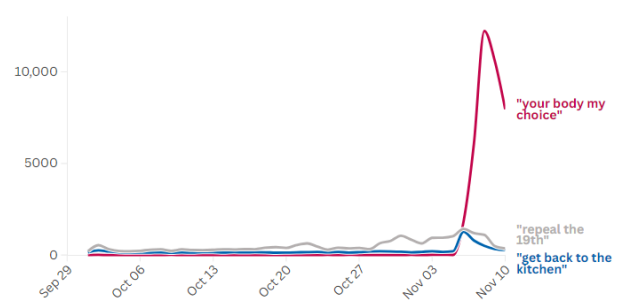
through the internet, social media, or mobile devices. These include harassment, intimidation, hate speech, control via tracking apps, non-consensual sharing of intimate content, emotional blackmail, cyberextortion, and identity theft. According to the Institute of Development Studies, between 16% and 58% of women globally have experienced some form of technology-facilitated violence.

A particularly alarming aspect of digital gender-based violence is the proliferation of online misogynistic communities. These communities, ranging from anti-feminist groups to openly violent movements, promote hate speech that perpetuates gender stereotypes and justifies abuse against women.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) describes the "manosphere" as an ecosystem of online communities that share misogynistic ideologies and foster dangerous attitudes toward women. These platforms are used by extremists to organize harassment campaigns and spread messages that normalize violence.

A recent example is the surge in misogynistic content on platforms like TikTok and X (formerly Twitter) following Donald Trump's reelection, an event many saw as a referendum on women's reproductive rights.

Comments like those made by the supremacist Nick de la Fuente, who claimed that "men own women's bodies" and that "there will never be a female president," reflect a deeply ingrained narrative of gender inequality. This was evident after Donald Trump's reelection, when phrases like "my body, my choice" and "get back to the kitchen" began gaining popularity on platforms like TikTok and X (formerly Twitter). These messages not only represent a setback in the progress toward gender equality, but also legitimize a hate speech that has real consequences for the safety of women.



A report from The Economist's Research Unit revealed that 38% of women have been victims of online violence, while 85% have witnessed abuse directed at other women. These figures reflect a systemic issue that affects not only the direct victims but also the perception of safety and equality in digital spaces.

For younger generations, the digital space has become a natural reality where relationships are formed, identities are built, and experiences are shared. However, this familiarity with digital technologies can lead to the normalization of practices that, although dangerous, are not perceived as such.

The sharing of private information, controlling a partner through social media, sexting, and



meeting strangers online are increasingly common practices among young people. While these activities may seem harmless, they often become the starting point for dynamics of abuse and violence.

It is crucial to understand that digital violence is not separate from physical or emotional violence. Both are part of a continuum of abuse that limits women's autonomy and perpetuates unequal power dynamics.

The impact of digital gender-based violence goes beyond the immediate harm it causes to the victims. Many women who face online harassment experience symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress. Furthermore, the fear of social judgment and the lack of effective responses from authorities cause many victims not to report these abuses.

Digital Gender-Based Violence also has a deterrent effect on women's participation in public and political spaces. Constant harassment and online threats discourage many women from expressing themselves freely or engaging in public debates, reinforcing their exclusion from decision-making processes. An example of this is the arrest of a man who was making death threats via Instagram to political leaders in Spain, such as Ione Belarra and Irene Montero.

In response to this issue, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that combines legal, educational, and technological measures. There is a need to update regulatory frameworks to address new forms of digital violence, while tech companies have the responsibility to ensure safe spaces for their users.

Finally, it is necessary to promote a culture of respect and equality in digital spaces. This involves not only sanctioning abuse but also promoting narratives that challenge gender stereotypes and support the full participation of women in all areas of life. The digital space should be a place of empowerment and connection, not a stage for abuse and harassment. The fight against digital gender-based violence requires a collective commitment to transform our technologies into tools of equality and justice.

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