

Report on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Ghana

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For sexual and
reproductive health
and rights

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List of Abbreviations

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
COVID-19	-	Corona Virus
CSA	-	Cyber Security Authority
CSIRT	-	Cyber Security Incident Response Team
DHS	-	Department of Homeland Security
DOVVSU	-	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
GBV	-	Gender-Based Violence
GNCC	-	Ghana's National Cybersecurity Centre
ICT	-	Innovation Communication Technology
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
NC3	-	National Cyber Security Centre
OSGBV	-	Online Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
PRISMA	-	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses
SGBV	-	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TFGBV	-	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
UN	-	United Nations
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	-	United Nations Population Fund
UNRIC	-	United Nations Regional Information Center for Western Europe
VAW	-	Violence Against Women
VAWG	-	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	-	World Health Organization

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We sincerely appreciate the collective efforts of all stakeholders who contributed to the success of this initiative.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The nature of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Ghana's increasingly digitalized society, with a specific focus on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). Drawing from an extensive literature review, the report highlights the complex interplay between technological advancements and gender-based violence, exposing the challenges posed by anonymity, accessibility, and the borderless nature of digital platforms. It underscores the urgent need for systemic interventions to address the growing prevalence of TFGBV.

TFGBV encompasses acts such as cyberstalking, online harassment, image-based abuse, and digital intimate partner violence. The prevalence of these issues in Ghana reveals the unique vulnerabilities of women, girls, and marginalised groups such as LGBTQ+ individuals. Key research objectives focused on the current state of TFGBV in Ghana, existing legal and institutional frameworks, and the role of civil society and advocacy in addressing these challenges.

Critical gaps in national legislation and policy implementation currently need to address the specificities of TFGBV. Despite laws like the Data Protection and Cybersecurity Act, enforcement remains weak, and the institutional capacity to handle TFGBV cases is underdeveloped. Cultural and societal norms compound the issue, leading to widespread underreporting and a lack of confidence in the justice system. Prevention and response initiatives are examined, including government programs, civil society interventions, and public awareness campaigns. However, the findings indicate that these efforts need to be more cohesive and sufficient to tackle the systemic nature of TFGBV. The report calls for a comprehensive, multisectoral approach integrating legal reform, public education, victim support, and technological innovation to create safer digital spaces and promote gender equality.

The research concludes with actionable recommendations, emphasising the importance of collaboration among government agencies, civil society, and private sector actors. Strengthening institutional frameworks, addressing resource constraints, and challenging societal attitudes are critical steps toward combating TFGBV and protecting vulnerable populations in Ghana's digital age.

1.1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses all harmful acts directed against an individual due to their biological sex, gender identity, or expression, often manifested in either economic, emotional, physical, psychological, or sexual form (Department of Homeland Security [DHS], 2023). Social media has been associated with a higher prevalence of online sexual harassment (Desilver, 2021; Muqoddam & Maghfiroh, 2019; Wohler, 2018). With the increasing possibility of employing anonymous and multiple fake social media accounts, have 24 hours a day accessibility to social media, receiving unsolicited nude pictures (or requests for same), as well as the possibility of communicating on social media across geographic boundaries, social media poses a novel challenge for law enforcement's chances at preventing, curbing or punishing its use for violence. Although sexual harassment in online communities is only as old as the media itself, it is quickly developing into a central and escalating challenge. Realising that the internet can be used as an altar image of one's actions, making it difficult, if necessary, to prosecute the criminal, regulating online harassment demands an emphasis on limiting personal exposure.

This study is essential because the advancement of the internet and its driving tools facilitate both reasonable and harmful uses, among which the latter has been an ever-increasing complaint globally (Sheikh & Rogers, 2024). Generally, technological advancement has transformed human interaction, providing a platform for unprecedented access and connectivity within human societies (Anonymous, 2023). This advancement extends to almost all aspects of human endeavour, including the design and execution of violence (Mitchell, Wood, O'Neill, et al., 2022). The past decade ushered in the first generation of the digital revolution in low and middle-income countries, where less than 80% of most such countries had access to the internet (Wolf, 2022). However, COVID-19 immediately led to a worldwide lockdown, which led to a heavy reliance on digital communication, which increased exposure to online harassment and digital violence. This imposed a limit on direct human contact but introduced with it a different kind of opportunity for technology-based violence – a quantitative increase and a conceptual expansion of existing technology violence practices. At the outset of this conceptual expansion, we were quick to qualify any form of violence as technology-facilitated; rape is raping no matter how 'smart' the phone is. However, as ably vocalised by survivors, activists, and advocates who lead the understanding, discussion, and portrayal of this violation, qualitative differences exist (Dunn 2020; UNESCO 2023; Doreen 2019).

The harassment and abuse of women in cyberspace, in the form of the exposure of their images, degrading comments, stalking, objectification of women's bodies, or the use of open spaces to organise physical violence against women, among others, have become matters of great concern as disproportionately impact women and girls (UN Women & World Health Organization, 2023). The situation is not different in developing countries like Ghana. Online spaces in artificial intelligence (AI) arenas can be enabling environments for personalised offensive behaviour and conduct of abuse with anonymity, posing a unique threat to women

and making it difficult to prosecute or discipline perpetrators (UNESCO 2023).

In this regard, NORSAAC, as the lead partner, along with the Ghana SRHR Alliance for Young People, Songtaba, and their global partners Rutgers, implemented this intervention with youth at the centre. The initiative aimed to amplify the voices of adolescent girls and young women, particularly in research on sexual and reproductive health and rights. As part of this effort, selected youth researchers received capacity development in research ethics, literature reviews, data collection guidelines, citations and referencing, and collaborative knowledge creation by the consultants in the assignment process. This approach strengthens their research skills and enhances their ability to contribute to future technical and academic research initiatives.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research will explore key questions based on the COR TFGBV and online SGBV learning document:

1. What is the current state of TFGBV and online SGBV in Ghana?
2. What national policies and frameworks exist to combat TFGBV and online SGBV in Ghana?
3. What protection mechanisms, including cybersecurity units and law enforcement initiatives, are in place to address TFGBV in Ghana?
4. How are NGOs, civil society groups, and social media campaigns contributing to addressing TFGBV in Ghana?
5. What gaps are in addressing TFGBV and online SGBV, and what recommendations can strengthen national responses and advocacy?
6. How can PtY and civil society groups enhance their advocacy around TFGBV?

1. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Within the context of the reviewed contract, this study operates primarily within the scope of a qualitative literature approach. In line with this, the study systematically reviews literature and documents to explore TFGBV & Online SGBV in Ghana. The process involves locating all relevant published work that addresses research questions outlined in the terms of reference. From these, a comprehensive summary of all the available primary research responding to the study's research questions is being delivered, along with information generated in that regard. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) framework has been employed to conduct systematic reviews in line with Moher et al. (2009). The subsequent sections below detail the approach to databases, search keywords, and inclusion and exclusion criteria

2.1 Databases for Study Selection

The study review is based on an extensive literature search using various academic databases and search engines. Additionally, institutional reports and websites have been reviewed. Furthermore, a back snowballing approach is employed to account for grey literature. Back snowballing involves reviewing the reference lists of identified relevant articles to find others not located through initial database and search engine queries. Academic databases: Taylor and Francis Search engines: Google Scholar Research Gate and Grey literature sources: Organizational websites and reports (e.g., UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, Ghanaian government websites, NGOs such as ActionAid, Star-Ghana, NORSAAC, CAMFED) Policy documents and legislation

2.2 Search Keywords

Various terminologies referring to Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and online SGBV are interchangeably used in the literature. These include technology facilitated sexual violence, cyber-based sexual violence, digital gender violence, and cyber based gender violence against women. Based on these, a combination of these keywords is employed in the search to obtain relevant literature.

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Table 1: List of Keywords for the Literature Search

Date (Search Database)	Keywords
Elsevier Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (tech* OR digital OR online OR cyber*) AND (sex* OR gender*) AND (violence*) AND (Ghana*))
Taylor and Francis	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (tech* OR online OR cyber*) AND (sex* OR gender*) AND (violence*) AND (Ghana*))
Google Scholar	technology facilitated sexual violence in Ghana OR sexual violence in the digital age in Ghana OR Cyber-Based Sex Violence in Ghana OR online-based sexual violence in the digital age in Ghana
Back Snowballing	technology facilitated sexual violence in Ghana OR sexual violence in the digital age in Ghana OR Cyber-Based Sex Violence in Ghana OR online-based sexual violence in the digital age in Ghana

2.3 Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established: firstly, articles related to TFGBV; secondly, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers and book chapters with empirical research or comprehensive reviews on TFGBV. Among the exclusion criteria are articles published in other languages, publications unrelated to Ghana or joint publications where Ghanaian content cannot be isolated, publications that did not address issues around TFGBV and online-based sexual violence, and articles published before 2010.

Table 2: Literature Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Systematic Review

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Article related to TFGBV and online SGBV	Articles unrelated to TFGBV and online SGBV
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Books/chapters, reports, conference papers
Publication in the English language	Publications in other languages
Publication related to Ghana only	Publications unrelated to Ghana or joint publications where Ghanaian content cannot be isolated
Published from 2010 to the present	Published before 2010

2.4 Data Extraction

Data for the study was extracted from selected studies using the PRISMA framework. This follows the inclusion and exclusion criteria meticulously. Upon selection, data extraction is conducted based on meta-data groupings.

The extracted data includes:

- General study characteristics:
 - Location
 - Year of publication
 - Research approach
 - Data collection and analysis tools/methods
- Research-specific characteristics:
 - Definitions of TFGBV/online SGBV used
 - Forms of TFGBV/online SGBV studied
 - Prevalence or incidence rates (if available)
 - Key findings related to research questions
 - Policy recommendations (if any)

A standardised data extraction form is used to collect this information systematically.

2.5 Quality Assessment

The quality of included studies is assessed using appropriate checklists based on the study design (e.g., the Mixed Methods Quality Appraisal Tool for mixed-methods studies and the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist for qualitative studies).

2.6 Capacities Development of Youth Researchers

As signposted in the background statement of this report, the youth researchers were trained in literature review techniques, covering both empirical and grey literature sources in systematic forms. The training includes:

Use of Database

- Critical appraisal of sources
- Data extraction and synthesis
- Developing themes/concepts, etc.
- Ethical considerations for researching sensitive topics such as gender-based violence

Understanding TFGBV: Concepts, Types, and Scope

- Definitions of TFGBV and related terms.
- Types of technology-facilitated violence (e.g., cyberstalking, online harassment, image-based abuse).

Ethical Considerations and Challenges in Research on TFGBV

- Ethics in researching sensitive topics
- Safety and confidentiality considerations
- Addressing biases and ethical challenges in literature review

Introduction to Desk Reviews: Purpose and Methodology

- Importance of desk reviews in TFGBV research
- Key components of a desk review (scoping, searching, synthesising)
- Approaches to identifying reliable sources and data quality checks

Hands-on Activity: Identifying Key Themes in TFGBV Literature

- Group exercise to review sample articles and identify key themes
- Discussion on common patterns and gaps in TFGBV literature

Research Tools and Strategies for TFGBV Desk Review

- Using academic databases, open-access resources, and specialized journals
- Boolean search techniques and keyword optimization
- Tools for organizing references (e.g., Zotero, Mendeley, etc.)

Evaluating and Analysing Literature for TFGBV

- Assessing the credibility and relevance of sources
- Identifying patterns, contradictions, and research gaps
- Techniques for synthesizing information
- Writing with clarity and purpose for diverse audiences
- Organizing findings coherently (e.g., introduction, literature review, analysis, conclusion).

Additionally, each youth researcher was given specific topics to review and share with the consultants, and they were assigned to consultants for guidance and mentoring and broadly involved in co-creating this reporting.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (TFGBV)

3. Introduction

This section provides a contextual overview of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). It narrowed down to a country-level understanding by looking at Ghana's legislation and policy framework and the challenges to dealing with TFGBV in the Ghanaian context.

3.1. General TFGBV Overview

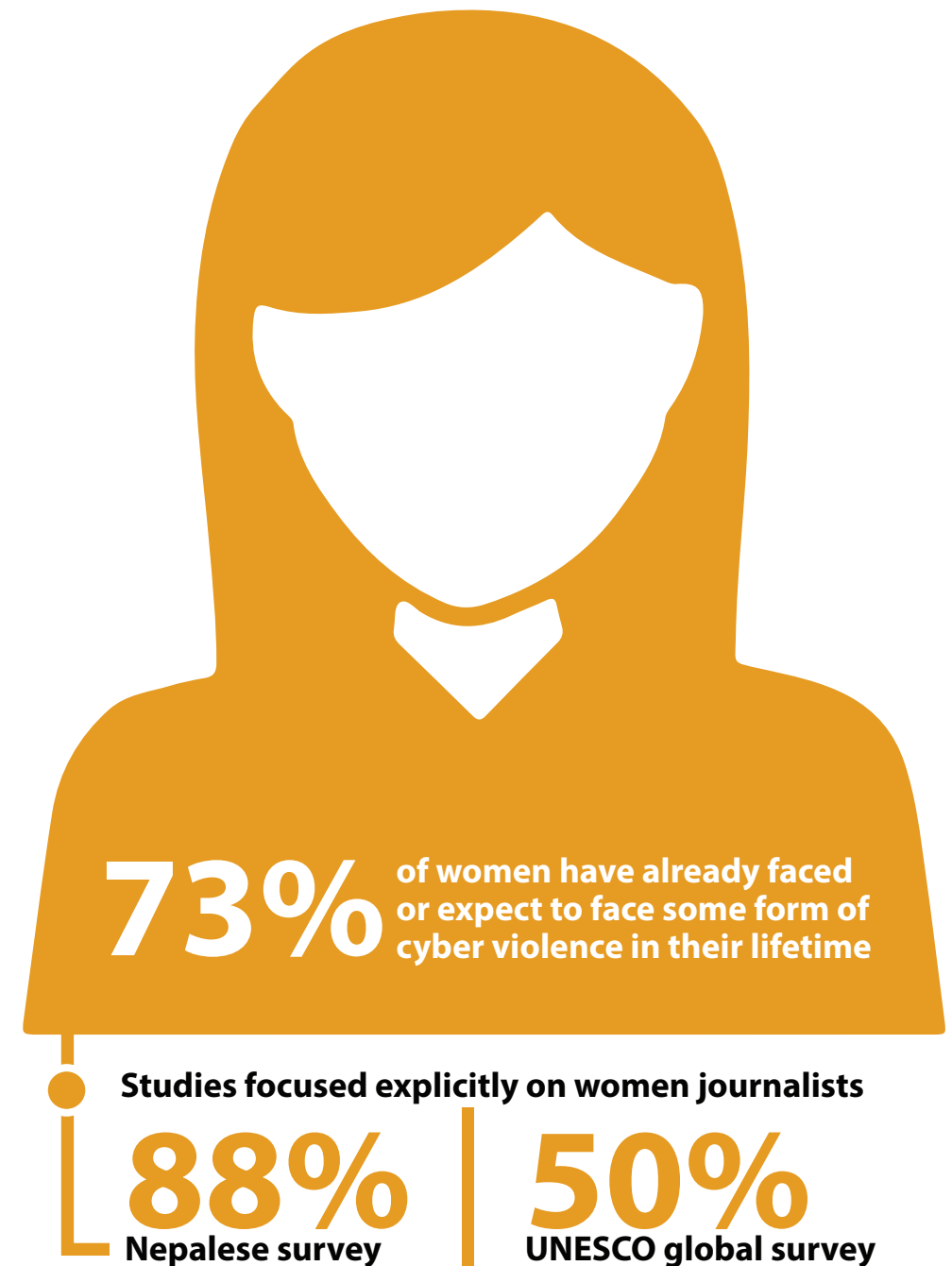
Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), according to UNFPA, is “an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender” (UNFPA, 2021). It also encompasses such abuses on social media platforms, text messages, websites and tracking apps (Dunn, 2020; Hinson et al., 2018). In other words, women, girls, and LGBTQI+ communities can be targeted as groups. The rights of women and girls in all spaces, physical and otherwise, including digital and offline spaces, are required to be defended and ensured. The repetitive nature of TFGBV means that most women experience multiple types of abuse.

Globally, research indicates that TFGBV has emerged as a significant threat to safety that disproportionately affects women and girls across diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on a 22-country survey, girls and young women are frequently vulnerable to online attacks, with attackers having the opportunity to photoshop and manipulate victims' photos (Plan International, nd). The girls are targeted online for no apparent reason but because they are young and female, with worse-case scenarios among the politically outspoken, disabled, black or LGBTIQ+ individuals or groups (Plan International, nd).



Based on a
22-country survey,
girls and young women are frequently
vulnerable to online attacks

An estimated 73% of women have already faced or expect to face some form of cyber violence in their lifetime, according to a global survey, with women in leadership roles facing heightened risks (Hassan et al., 2022). Studies focused explicitly on women journalists reveal disturbing statistics, including 88% in a Nepalese survey and nearly 50% in a UNESCO global survey reporting experiencing online harassment and attacks (Ankrah, 2024). It is revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns led to spikes in cases of technology-enabled abuse against women across age groups as digital connectivity increased (Ankrah, 2024; Hicks, 2021). A cyclical relationship often exists between online and offline violence; whereby cyber abuse escalates into physical attacks or leverages digital tools to track and inflict harm on survivors of domestic violence. TFGBV thus imposes direct health costs alongside economic consequences estimated in the billions stemming from lost educational and employment opportunities for victims (Hicks, 2021).



COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns led to spikes in cases of technology-enabled abuse

Despite growing attention globally, examination of TFGBV remains limited across African countries, including Ghana, where digital adoption continues upward. As connectivity expands through mobile platforms and social media, online violence targeting women and girls has emerged as a challenge across Ghana's digital ecosystem. It is revealed that online threats encompass concerns around cyberbullying, online sexual harassment, hacking of accounts, impersonation, surveillance by intimate partners, and image-based abuse resulting from relationship breaches (CIPESA, 2024). Notably, high-profile women figures like journalists, activists, and politicians face escalated risks of TFGBV, often perpetrated to intimidate, threaten and silence them from public participation. A Media Foundation for West Africa survey indicates that such individuals adopt cautionary approaches, including self-censorship, to avoid provoking attacks (Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021). Targeted online violence also extends to marginalised and vulnerable populations, for instance, with LGBTQ+ groups facing heightened harassment and "outing" campaigns in Ghana's socio-cultural context, where same-sex relations remain widely discriminated against (Bichanga, 2024). With the internet as the most widespread communication platform, SGBV perpetrators exploit its reach and anonymity to commit these crimes with little fear of repercussions (Ndawana & Chisambiro, 2024; Amaechi, 2024; Polyzoidou, 2024).

While recent news analyses reveal increasing civil society and media attention toward pervasive digital harassment issues, precise data on prevalence rates specific to Ghanaian contexts remains limited within academic scholarship. By 2018, the Ghana Statistical Service estimated that Ghana had nearly 10 million social media users - a figure that has since rapidly grown, pointing to vast populations of women and girls now navigating cyber-social realities where violence permeates boundaries between online and offline spaces (CIPESA, 2024).

Online threats



Cyber Bullying



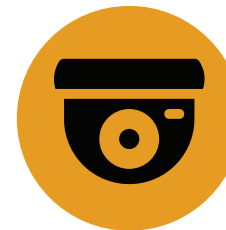
Online sexual harassment



Hacking of accounts



Impersonation



Surveillance



Image-based abuse

Natable facing escalated risks of TFGBV
**Journalists, Activists,
and Politicians**

Digital media facilitated by the internet can empower young people to combat online sexual abuse by enabling them to report incidents swiftly. Reporting helps victims take a stand, raises awareness, and deters perpetrators (Miller, 2023). Young people are encouraged to report offensive incidents to law enforcement, alert platform regulators, seek mental health support and follow up to ensure action is taken (Willmott et al., 2023; Patterson et al., 2022; Hamilton-Giachritsis et al., 2020; Agha et al., 2023; Akeusola, 2023; Huang et al., 2022; Barker and Jurasz, 2021; Addis & Snowden, 2023; Jankowicz, 2022). Evidence suggests digital harassment exerts detrimental psychological impacts, including anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress, while also enabling real-world stalking, sexual coercion, blackmail and physical attacks that threaten victims' safety and well-being (Patel & Roesch, 2020). Documented cases demonstrate the agility of perpetrators exploiting digital tools for gender-based violence through tactics like impersonation, viral rumour-spreading and screenshot leaks that attack victims' dignity, privacy and livelihoods in profoundly harmful ways (United Nations Population Fund, 2024).

Effective countermeasures require a joint effort from both law enforcement and the public. Accurate, up-to-date information on SGBV must be widely disseminated, and victims and perpetrators must be addressed to combat these crimes. Telecommunication networks, internet websites, and social media platforms are crucial in managing and potentially curbing SGBV (Repetto et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Caniglia et al., 2021). Their policies and functionalities can either contribute to safety or, if inadequate, foster environments where gender-based harassment thrives. A unified approach involving communities, authorities, and platform managers is essential to reduce the prevalence and impact of online SGBV (Olatunji et al., 2024; Sudiantini & Rizky, 2023; Wu et al., 2022).

Combat online sexual abuse



Report it

Speak up: Use platform tools, law enforcement, or peer channels to document and report abuse.

Follow up: Keep pressure on systems to ensure action is taken, not just acknowledged.



Support Survivors

Through youth-friendly services, peer-led digital communities, and confidential help lines matter.



Demand Justice & Accountability

Advocate for clearer laws and definitions: Legal ambiguity gives abusers cover.

3.2. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence- Ghana Context

Technology-facilitated violence targeting women and girls manifests through various behaviours and platforms within Ghana's digital ecosystem. While data on the prevalence of TFGBV remains limited, some evidence reveals diverse experiential patterns across online harassment, sexual coercion, privacy breaches and abuse adoption distinctly through social technologies. Government and media reports chronicle concerns around image-based violations, cyberstalking, hacking, defamation and sexualised bullying affecting female public figures and ordinary citizens alike in distinctly gendered ways. The following analysis details major TFGBV categories documented in recent literature in Ghana.

In Ghana, there is relatively little research on TFGBV—the existing literature on TFGBV reports on cyberstalking, internet trolling, and dating fraud. Cyberstalking is understood as the use of the internet or electronic devices to monitor a person's activity (Terrance et al. 2021), while internet trolling involves posting irritating comments, often to get others into an argument (Zagurny et al. 2021; Addis et al. 2013). Concerning stalking, Zagurny et al. (2021) used a mixed-methods approach to determine the levels of stalking among university students in Ghana. Their results suggest that (80.3%) of the respondents reported being targets of stalking within the last six months. The study also found a significant correlation between stalking behaviours, depressive symptomatology, and unwanted monitoring. Likewise, dating fraud or Romance Scams is another form of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Ghana (Addadzi-Koom, 2021).



As stated earlier, Nigeria has become popular with this scheme; however, similar cases are also pervasive in Ghana (Addadzi-Koom, 2021). Moreover, in Ghana, women searching for partners for romantic relationships in the Global North are mainly at the receiving end of the problems that come with online dating (Ngo et al. 2017). Similarly, men are not an exception because some fraudsters use fake female accounts to defraud male victims in developed countries (Adu-Gyamfi, 2024). The modus operandi of dating scams is to engage with the target victims by convincing them to get into long-term romantic relationships, where the target victims are led to believe the affection is genuine. Tragically, many victims are manipulated into transferring large sums of money before realising they have been scammed. Beyond financial and emotional losses, dating scams often leave victims with lasting psychological trauma. The consequences of these scams extend beyond immediate impact, affecting victims' mental well-being and overall quality of life. It also affects the immediate family and close friends.

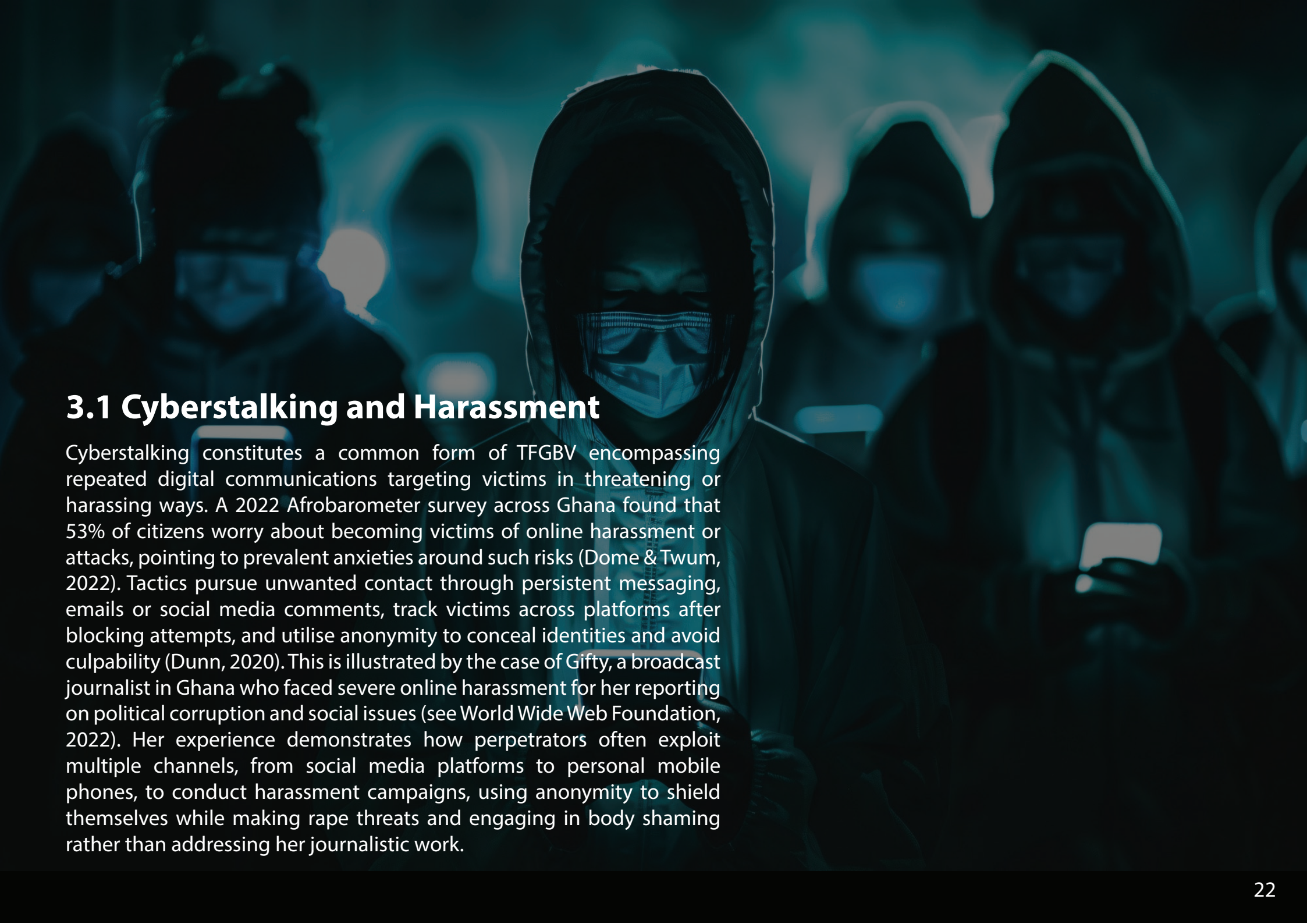


Modus Operandi



Impact

- **Financial loss**
- **Emotional distress**
- **Psychological trauma**



3.1 Cyberstalking and Harassment

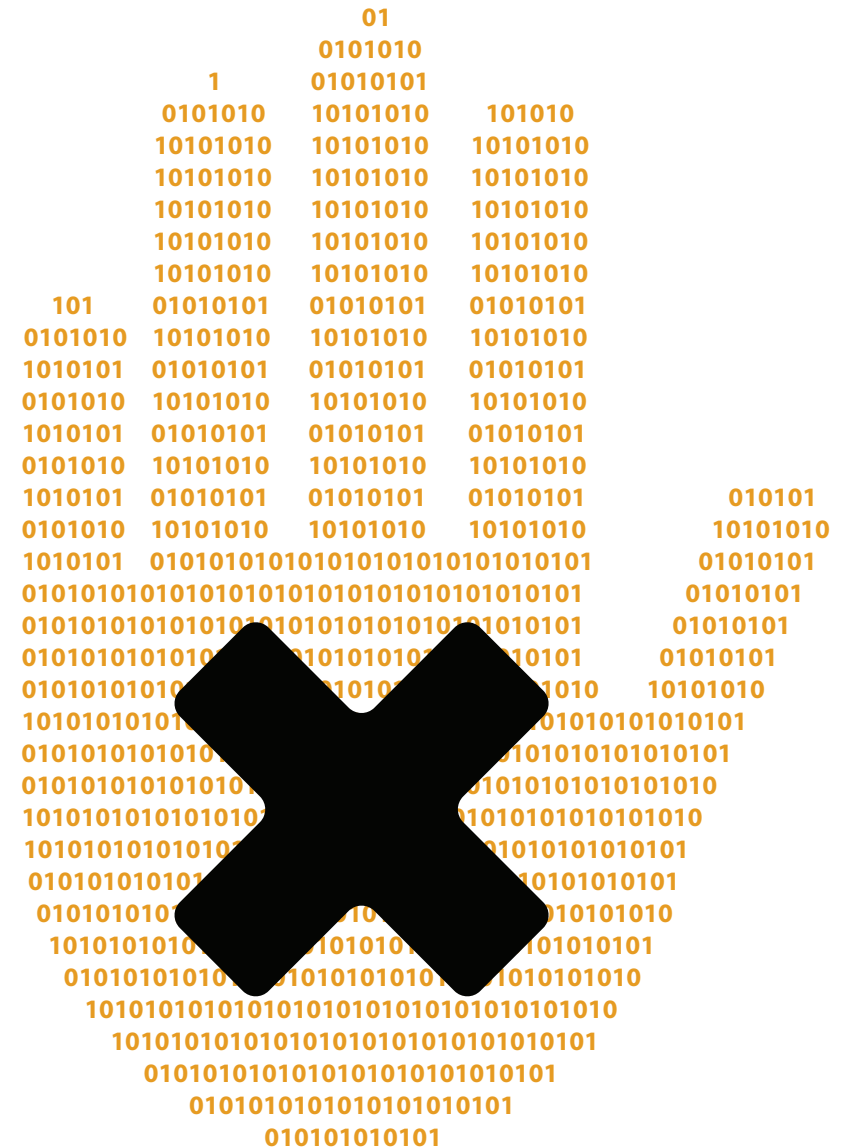
Cyberstalking constitutes a common form of TFGBV encompassing repeated digital communications targeting victims in threatening or harassing ways. A 2022 Afrobarometer survey across Ghana found that 53% of citizens worry about becoming victims of online harassment or attacks, pointing to prevalent anxieties around such risks (Dome & Twum, 2022). Tactics pursue unwanted contact through persistent messaging, emails or social media comments, track victims across platforms after blocking attempts, and utilise anonymity to conceal identities and avoid culpability (Dunn, 2020). This is illustrated by the case of Gifty, a broadcast journalist in Ghana who faced severe online harassment for her reporting on political corruption and social issues (see World Wide Web Foundation, 2022). Her experience demonstrates how perpetrators often exploit multiple channels, from social media platforms to personal mobile phones, to conduct harassment campaigns, using anonymity to shield themselves while making rape threats and engaging in body shaming rather than addressing her journalistic work.



Research on women's experiences in professional fields like media and politics also reveals heightened risks of orchestrated harassment involving high-volume coordinated attacks, threats of sexual violence, and technological means like hacking attempts, exposure of private location data or targeting family members as extensions of the victim (Parliament of Ghana, 2020). Cyberstalking and online harassment are prevalent concerns impacting ordinary citizens and public figures alike in gendered ways that demand policy interventions enhancing cybercrime response and prohibitions against technology-facilitated intimidation enacting gender discrimination (ABANTU for Development, n.d.).

3.2 Online Sexual Harassment

Online sexual harassment constitutes a disturbing manifestation of TFGBV reported across global contexts and is increasingly visible within Ghana's burgeoning digital ecosystem. Literature defines this as unwelcome sexual conduct targeted at victims through technological channels, encompassing behaviours like unsolicited sharing of pornographic content, propositions for sexual activities, degrading gendered insults, and threats of sexual violence (Shukla, 2024). Information gathered from frontline organisations indicates explicit imagery and coercion attempts often involving extortion schemes where compliance gets demanded to prevent images' online distribution without consent. The practices may take on different forms, such as anonymous threats, the release of videos/photos online, child grooming, and cyberstalking. Cyberspace presents opportunities and challenges (Sugiura & Smith; Gjika and Marganski, 2020). It allows perpetrators to exploit its loosely regulated environment to carry out acts of sexual violence under the cover of anonymity, leading to significant harm and stigmatisation for victims. However, the internet, particularly social media, can also be used as a powerful tool for empowerment. Digital platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Snapchat enable victims to amplify their voices and advocate for change. Movements such as #MeToo and #NoExcuse have gained prominence as global campaigns against all forms of sexual violence and harassment, including online SGBV (Jain, 2020; Maier, 2023; Harris et al., 2020; Ciszek et al., 2023).



Meanwhile, racial and gender discrimination are also concerted issues relative to SGBV since victim-blaming is associated with unequal power relations, and most victims are women. TFGBV rewards those who use or threaten violence, causing fear and humiliation while reflecting global inequalities (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Despite these challenges, online media also provides a platform for education and advocacy, enabling youth to combat SGBV by raising awareness and offering support to victims. Campaigns like **#MeToo** and **'Pepper dem'** movements have demonstrated the transformative power of online movements in bringing global attention to SGBV, fostering open discussions, and destigmatising survivors (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019).



3.3 Image-Based Abuse and Cyberbullying

On the one hand, sextortion is defined as “the threatened dissemination of explicit, intimate, or embarrassing images of a sexual nature without consent, usually to procure additional images, sexual acts, money, or something else” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2018 p. 2). Image-based sexual abuse, known as “revenge porn”, represents an emerging TFGBV issue involving non-consensual distribution or threats of sharing compromising photos online (Ankrah, 2024). Media reports estimate that some 80-90% of Ghanaian women suffer image-based abuse, although empirical confirmation remains limited (Ankrah, 2024). Experts describe tactics like coercing women into sharing intimate photos that get published or sent to family members after relationships end (Hassan et al., 2022). Documented cases reveal friends, colleagues or employers encountering victims' vulnerable moments without consent (Hassan et al., 2022), suggesting this technological enablement of intimacy betrayal risks reinforcing gender inequality by constraining women's mobility out of shame (Hassan et al., 2022). Most online platforms lack straightforward reporting procedures to erase content (Hassan et al., 2022), leaving few pathways to permanent removal for victims. While exact prevalence remains uncertain given limited data, news analyses convey norm acceptance around non-consensual photo sharing as a profound privacy violation with lasting impacts on victims' well-being and participation (Ankrah, 2024; TV3 Network, 2019).



Cyber Bullying



Online sexual harassment



Hacking of accounts



Impersonation



Surveillance



Image-based abuse

With the increasing access and ability to use a camera and video-enabled cell phones, images and videos are often made with the consent of everyone involved. However, when the relationship goes sour, one involved may threaten to use the image against the other unless the other person meets some specified demands (Addadzi-Koom, 2021). In addition, there are currently more than 100 revenge porn sites operating in Ghana, and at least three cases of revenge porn are reported on social media daily (Addadzi-Koom, 2021; Mensah & Donkor, 2017). One example is the 'kitchen stool sex tape scandal which illuminates the increasing menace of revenge porn or non-consensual pornography in cyberspace in Ghana (Addadzi-Koom, 2021).

Also, Mensah and Donkor (2017) noted that in January 2018, the headmaster of Adumanu D/A Basic School and his former student girlfriend filmed themselves while making love on a kitchen stool. Both partners had agreed to make a video of the act to be watched later. However, the video was leaked and published on social media platforms. A preliminary investigation by the Ghana Education Service (GES) revealed that the young woman's brother's friends released the video in revenge for her refusal to engage her (My Joy Online, 2018). Similarly, in 2016, a young lady committed suicide after her boyfriend posted her sex video on the internet (News Ghana, 2017). In the first quarter of 2017, two young men were arrested for posting nude pictures of a young girl on Facebook after she dumped her boyfriend. In this regard, (Addadzi-Koom 2021) pointed out that the risks of revenge porn are persistently being positioned against the female gender.



Examination of bullying issues surrounding gender and disproportionate risks for girls and women remains limited across interventions (Hassan et al., 2022). Documented concerns around body-shaming and criticism of feminine appearance/behaviour from male peers illustrate issues manifesting distinctly for adolescents across online spaces, requiring tailored responses addressing healthy identity without victim-blaming attitudes (Hassan et al., 2022). Further work lies in sensitising educators on identifying verbal sexual harassment, increasingly common in youth digital communications and on developing consent parameters and empathetic online conduct vital within formative interventions attentive to TFGBV risks (Hassan et al., 2022). Broader estimates indicate that 90% of Ghanaian youth encounter online insults or threats (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). However, scholarship examining technological threats shaping girls' self-esteem, academic participation, and resilience pathways warrants emphasis (Hassan et al., 2022).



90%

of Ghanaian Youth exposed to online insults or threats



Underexplored impacts on girls' self-esteem, academics and resilience

Implication for policy & practice



Educator Training



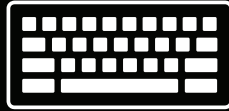
International Research



Youth-Centered Interventions

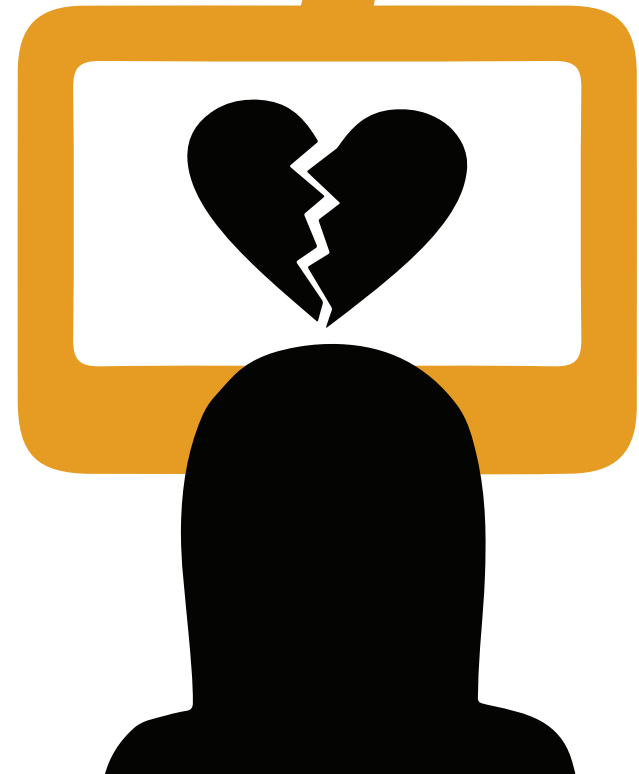


Community Engagement



3.4 Digital Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking

While Ghana's Domestic Violence Act establishes important protections for victims, its application becomes complicated regarding technology-facilitated forms of intimate partner abuse and marital violence as digital tools introduce new controlling tactics and surveillance means without physical trace. Studies focused on college students reveal online dating violence as disturbingly pervasive through impersonating fake accounts, tracking locations without consent and circulating sexual images following breakups (Hinson et al., 2018). Such behaviour extends beyond adolescence into adult relations, enabled through smartphones and apps fostering constant connectivity with implicit expectations of perpetual availability and inciting jealousy without context. This manifests through males monitoring female partners via spyware attacks on devices, social media account breaches, and tracking activities via unauthorised device installs or location access extraction (Henry & Powell, 2018).

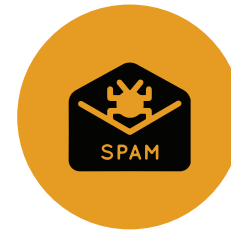


Experts note that domestically abusive partners exploit victims by surveilling activity, restricting access to support networks through blocked contacts and perpetuating control through persistent messaging, preventing separation by heightening omnipresent digital visibility (Hinson et al., 2018). Victims also report their online identities getting compromised to share intimate photos without consent or contact past partners in harassing ways after device access breaches. Although exact statistics remain unavailable, practitioner accounts convey increasing client concerns around managing safe exits from abusive relationships with children involved, given the complexity of maintaining digital boundaries and establishing evidence trails required for legal protections when intimate partners adopt sophisticated, coercive technological means.



Surveillance

Tracking a victim's activity and location



Persistent Messaging

Sending incessant and controlling messages



Compromised Identity

Using accounts to impersonate or share private images

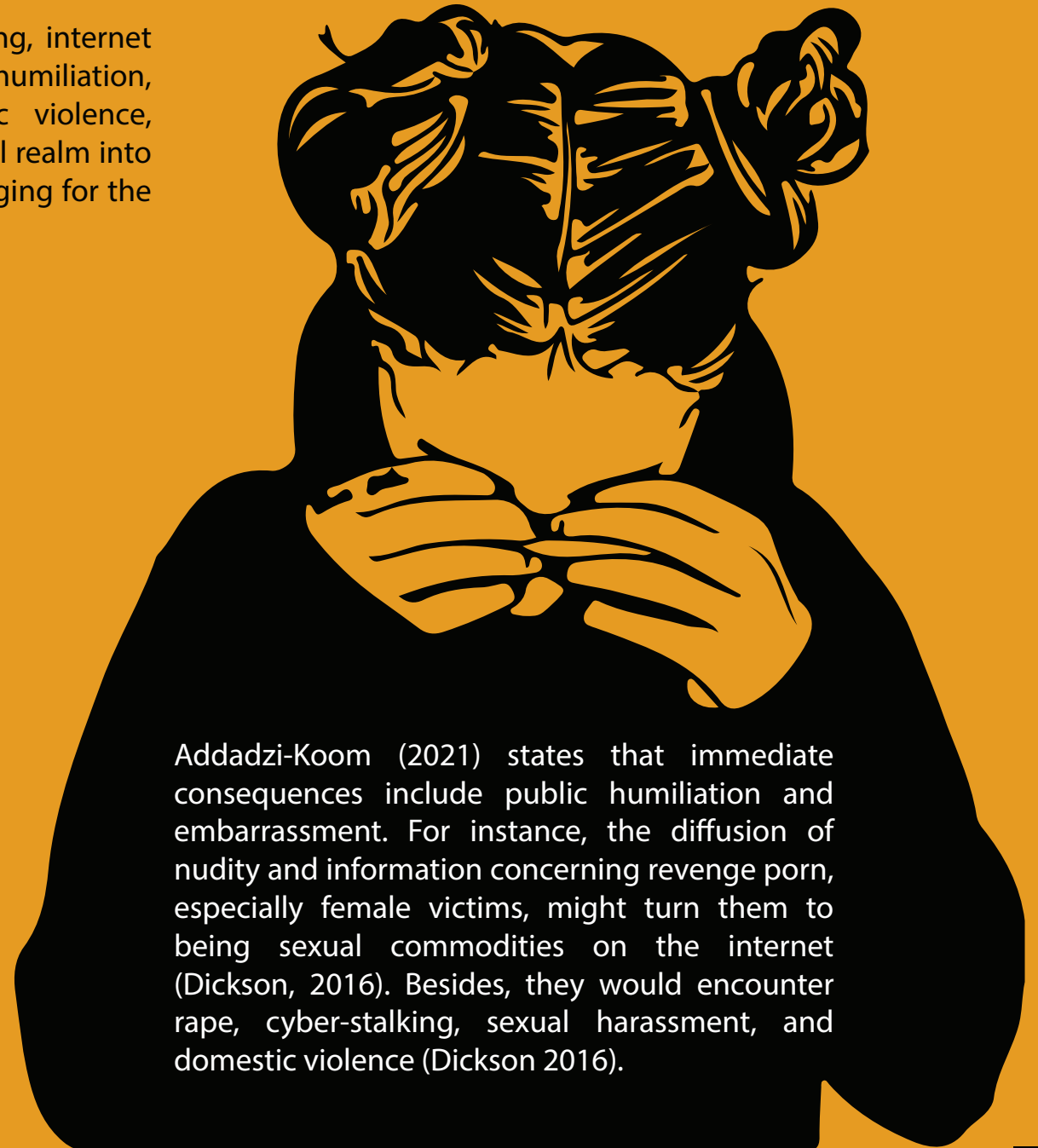


Disrupted Support

Isolating victim by blocking contacts or access

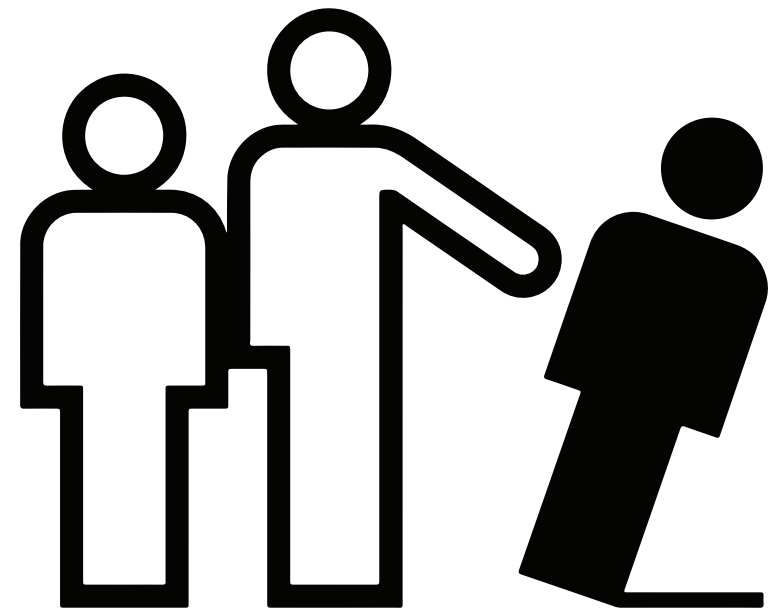
3.5. Impact

Some of the ramifications of TFGBV (e.g. cyberstalking, internet trolling, revenge porn etc.) include public humiliation, embarrassment, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, among others. Some of them translate from the digital realm into the physical world, which makes it even more challenging for the victims of TFGBV to deal with.



Addadzi-Koom (2021) states that immediate consequences include public humiliation and embarrassment. For instance, the diffusion of nudity and information concerning revenge porn, especially female victims, might turn them to being sexual commodities on the internet (Dickson, 2016). Besides, they would encounter rape, cyber-stalking, sexual harassment, and domestic violence (Dickson 2016).

Furthermore, Addadzi-Koom (2021) explained that in some cases, the humiliation of victims of TFGBV is extended to the victim's close family relations, friends, and employers. Given this, relationships are broken, and friendships are lost (Dickson, 2016). In most cases, once sex images go online, they cannot be retrieved, no matter how hard people try to erase the images. It should be noted that the injury inflicted on the victims is irreversible. To put an end to the humiliation, therefore, some of the victims of TFGBV have been compelled to not only change their identity but also change locations. In some instances, some have thought of committing suicide (Addadzi-Koom, 2021; Dickson, 2016). These consequences may even be more damaging in collectivist societies (Addadzi-Koom, 2021). In Ghana, for example, the communal residential arrangements, the extended family systems, and the religious environment mean that TFGBV information will spread not only to strangers but to family, friends, co-tenants, neighbours, and religious group members that the victim encounters regularly.



4. Legal and institutional policy framework

Ghana has established various legal and regulatory mechanisms with provisions that can be applied to address the emerging issues surrounding technology-facilitated violence targeting women and girls. Key national laws and policies include the Data Protection Act 2012 (Act 843), the Electronic Transactions Act 2008 (Act 772), the Cybersecurity Act 2020 (Act 1038), and the Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732). Each of these legislative instruments provides valuable frameworks for personal data privacy, electronic transactions security, cybercrime response, and domestic abuse prohibition, all of which are relevant to preventing or responding to incidents of TFGBV (Ennin & Mensah, 2019; Cyber Security Authority, 2024).

The Electronic Transactions Act 2008 (Act 772) governs online transactions and communications, enabling secure electronic interactions. It protects unauthorised access and ensures the integrity of electronic messages, which can be relevant in curbing anonymous abusive communications often seen in TFGBV cases (Parliament of Ghana, 2008).



The Cybersecurity Act 2020 (Act 1038) focuses on national cybersecurity development and crime mitigation. It provides mechanisms to protect victims of cybercrimes, such as non-consensual image sharing, but does not explicitly classify gender-based digital violence as a distinct category requiring tailored interventions (Cybersecurity Act, 2020).

The Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) addresses various forms of gender-based violence within intimate and familial contexts. While it includes protections against emotional and psychological abuse, it is limited in addressing technology-facilitated forms of intimate partner.

violence, such as digital surveillance or online harassment (Parliament of Ghana, 2007). Across-cutting gap remains, as none of these legislative instruments explicitly addresses gender-based violence enacted through digital means. Additionally, there is a lack of policy guidelines outlining how women and girls vulnerable to such abuse can access remedies and support (Dome & Twum, 2022; Media Foundation for West Africa, 2021).



4.1. Data Protection Act 2012 (Act 843)

The Data Protection Act 2012 (Act 843) regulates the processing of personal and sensitive data, safeguarding privacy rights that may be violated through TFGBV. The legislation aligns with international standards around the lawful use of data, purpose limitation, data security safeguards, and prohibitions on transfer to unauthorised entities (Data Protection Act, 2012). Key principles require that personal data is only processed with the individual's consent, under official authority or for legitimate interests, necessarily and proportionately.

The Act also restricts access specifically for sensitive categories of data encompassing areas like health, sex life, religious beliefs, race/ethnicity and biometrics that relate closely to common avenues exploited in TFGBV attacks. Data Protection Act 2012 (Act 843). Significant requirements include mandatory security protocols when handling sensitive information and obtaining explicit consent for specific processing activities. Relevant provisions here could apply to certain aspects of TFGBV, such as the non-consensual sharing or unauthorised access of victims' private images or location data. Breaches would violate consent requirements and potentially attract sanctions under the Data Protection Act, depending on the scope. However, gaps persist regarding domestically focused personal violations that remain unpublished or procedures for victims to report data-related aspects of experienced abuse.



4.2. Electronic Transactions Act 2008 (Act 772)

The Electronic Transactions Act 2008 provides the primary legal basis governing online transactions and digital communications within the beautiful country of Ghana. It plays a crucial role in facilitating the validity of electronic transactions, enabling electronic contracting, and establishing clear expectations surrounding the transmission of messages, including their attribution and integrity. Importantly, this Act also includes provisions that require named contacts in commercial electronic interactions, which can help prevent abusive anonymous communications that are often characteristic of situations of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). Additionally, the Act sets forth requirements regarding the origin authentication of data messages, accuracy checks before retransmission, and limits on unsolicited communications (Electronic Transactions Act 2008). These provisions are important as they establish transparency procedures that effectively counter disinformation strategies frequently employed in instances of technology-enabled abuse. The Act, however, does not broadly cater to current issues raised about gender-based violence targeted at women in online spaces. However, it is crucial to recognise individual online communications within the definitions of "electronic transactions" to deal with harmful and targeted online communication towards women. This limitation in straightforward applicability presents a significant concern, mainly when addressing individually targeted non-economic abuse through digital means.



Validity of electronic transactions

Tracking a victim's activity and location



Electronic contracting



Includes provisions requiring named contacts in commercial electronic interactions to prevent abusive anonymous communications, characteristic of TFGBV



Does not include adequate address technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)

Gaps in applicability allow for legal but harmful speech towards women through annais like social media, messaging apps, and emails

It leaves gaps in the legal framework, allowing for demonstrably harmful but technically legal speech to occur through various channels such as social media platforms, messaging applications, and emails. These are the very mediums on which TFGBV extensively relies. Therefore, regulatory authorities and policymakers must meticulously evaluate and update the Electronic Transactions Act 2008, ensuring it remains adaptive and resilient to the evolving challenges posed by technology-facilitated abuse. By addressing the gaps in the existing legislation and enhancing its scope to encompass a broader range of harmful online behaviours, Ghana can take significant strides towards curbing TFGBV and fostering a safe digital environment for all its citizens (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2024; Nsubuga et al., 2024; Jibril et al., 2020; Yidana, 2020; Dzisah, 2022; Ofori-Acquah et al., 2023).

4.3. Cybersecurity Act 2020 (Act 1038)

Ghana's recent Cybersecurity Act establishes a framework governing national cybersecurity through provisions across critical infrastructure protection, cybercrime mitigation, child online safety and professional capacity development. The Act identifies key cybersecurity principles related to interactions across physical spaces and digital networks, including availability, confidentiality and integrity. Requesting the take-down of leaked private images or disabling accounts responsible for sharing non-consensual intimate content could be argued as aligning with breach confidentiality and integrity parameters applicable to victims suffering technology-facilitated violations. However, the lack of specific classification for TFGBV incidents technically locates much gendered cyber violence within legal grey areas, better recognised as domestic violence or generalised online abuse falling under other acts.



Key Cybersecurity principles

- Availability
- Confidentiality
- Integrity



Critical infrastructure protection



Cybercrime mitigation



Child online safety



A significant contribution lies in the Act's emphasis on online child protection with requirements for educational programs, reporting mechanisms, and privacy-preserving age verification systems that provide valuable models applicable to TFGBV response development. The Act also enables significant monitoring and compliance powers for the National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA) to regulate cyberspace against various cyber offences, including safety guards against online child sexual exploitation in multiple forms (Cyber Security Act Sections 61-66 of Ghana). It is also instructive to note that the Cyber-Security Act (Section 67-68) also deals with the non-consensual sharing of intimate images and threats to distribute intimate photos. There have been a few cases of prosecution under this Act in the case of the Republic of Ghana versus Joshua Asiedu (nee Kwame Ketewa), who was prosecuted and convicted for sharing non-consensual images of various offences under this Act and other criminal codes in Ghana. There was also a case of the distribution of intimate photos of a popular journalist in Ghana named Serwaa Amihere by an ex-lover of hers, indicating that the issue may become pervasive.



4.5. Analysis of policy gaps and implementation challenges

Examining provisions across these key legislations about TFGBV's contemporary permutations exposes significant gaps in Ghana's protection frameworks, requiring urgent attention from policymakers. Firstly, while legal instruments such as the Cyber Security Act have some aspects covering OSGBV, some of the laws regulating the digital space do not seem to incorporate gender-based violence within that space. The Domestic Violence Law does not include language explicitly involving online-related SGBV. The legal instruments explicitly addressing technology-mediated elements of gender-based violence limit straightforward access to justice and the applicability of sanctions for victims unless cases directly qualify under adjacent cybercrime clauses. While Ghana has tried to promulgate some cyber-related laws, there is still a gap in the number of qualified and trained personnel who can manage these investigations (Apau & Koranteng, 2018).

Additionally, prevalent social barriers around reporting intimate partner abuse manifest similarly or even worse in reporting online TFGBV, especially when the perpetrator may be challenging to locate. Similarly, aligning rights-based legal paradigms with Ghanaian communal values and norms regarding privacy, consent, and access in interpersonal exchanges may be an area to explore in discouraging both online and offline gender-based violence. Using contextually accepted values and rules that conform with the legal standards and laws will be one sure way of rallying more people to understand the unacceptability of gender-based violence both online and offline.



Further policy gaps surround practical issues of digital rights enforcement, given the involvement of transnational technology companies and websites hosting abusive platforms. Navigating takedown requests, account restrictions, and content moderation relies extensively on private sector community standards that vary in definitions, procedures, and effectiveness. Clarifying reporting pathways from national entities to facilitate harmful content removal or termination of offending accounts represents an ongoing challenge. However, examples of proactive government efforts, like Australia's Safety Commissioner, illustrate applicable notification and blocking models for policy emulation.





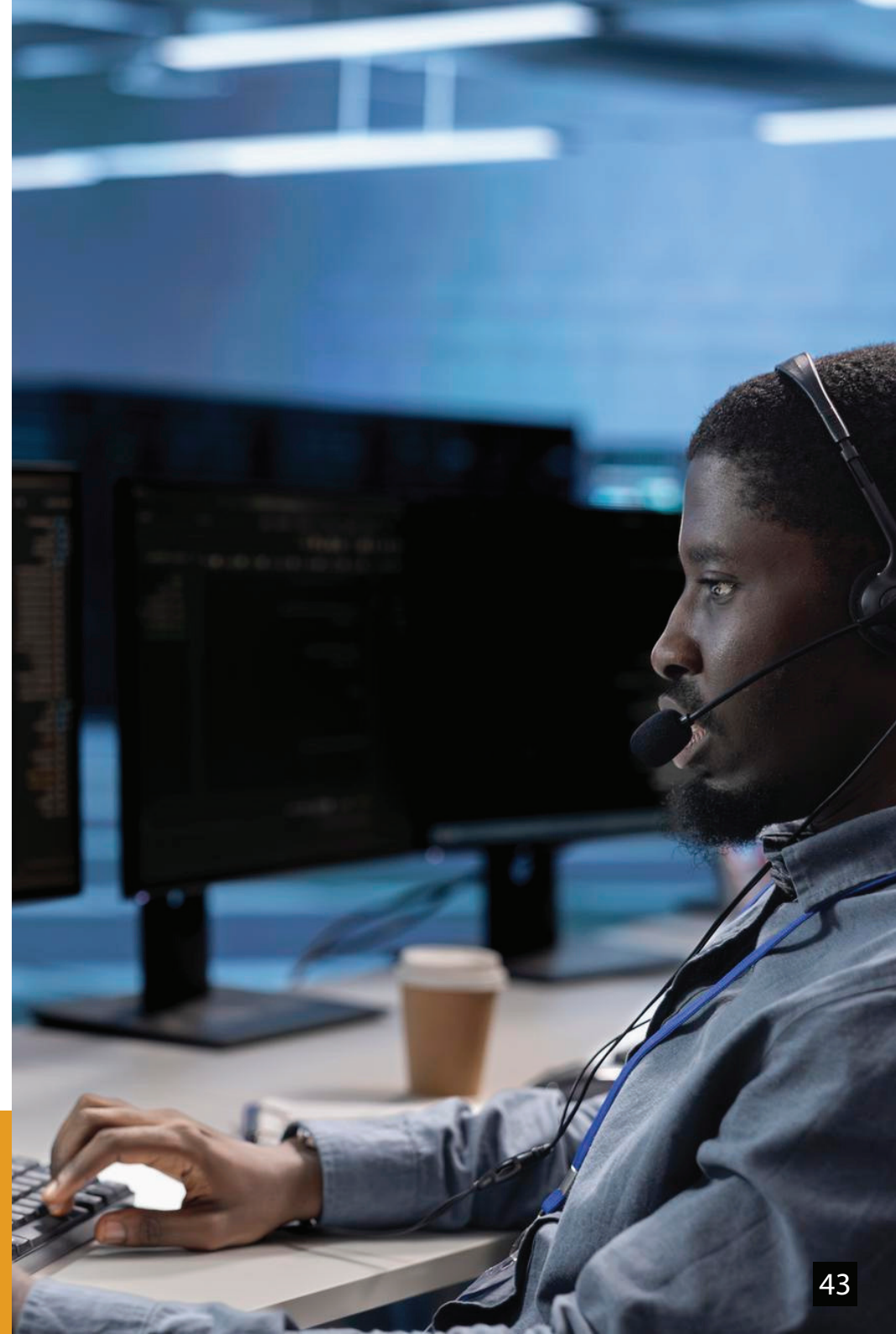
4.6. Institutional Framework and Response Mechanisms

Ghana has established various institutional bodies with mandates encompassing cybersecurity oversight, cybercrime response, and other criminal issues, including domestic violence case management. They are stakeholders in addressing TFGBV through enforcement assistance, policy interventions, and support provision pathways. Major players discussed here include the Cyber Security Authority (CSA), National Cyber Security Centre (NC3), Ghana Police's Cybercrime and Domestic Violence Units and the Domestic Violence Secretariat. Each agency faces capacity and resource constraints, inhibiting comprehensive response scaling. However, combined efforts enable emerging foundations for multi-agency coordination, given proper investment and prioritisation by Parliament and responsible ministries.

4.7. Cyber Security Authority

Ghana's Cybersecurity Act 2020 established the Cyber Security Authority (CSA) as the national body responsible for cybersecurity development, which includes strategy formulation, critical infrastructure oversight, and capacity building for law enforcement and public agencies regarding cybercrime mitigation. The CSA's mandate includes extensive monitoring authorities over digital networks and services necessary for evidence gathering in sophisticated technology-mediated crimes with cross-jurisdictional complexities. Provisions for licensing cybersecurity professionals also enable expertise nurturance for addressing gendered violations online involving specialized tactics like spyware exploitation and revenge porn imagery distribution across diffuse platforms.

By housing units like the Cybercrime/Cybersecurity Incident Response Team (CSIRT) under its organizational structure, the CSA concentrates significant technical capabilities for forensic analysis on reported digital abuses (Cyber Security Act, Act 1028). Literature also emphasizes CSA's concentration on policy leadership for online child protection and youth cyber-awareness through school-based programs and media outreach regarding safe digital conduct involving responsible information sharing, security best practices and ethical engagement norms across networks (Fusheini & Marnoch, 2020).



However, as a nascent agency still developing operational protocols and resourcing adequate technical teams, applying oversight capacity for addressing extensive TFGBV case volumes poses immense resource challenges currently inhibiting the institutionalisation of gender-mainstreamed reporting channels and procedures. Clear pathways remain lacking for interpersonal digital rights violations reaching initial police contacts through victims and CSA's role assisting investigations on referred technology-enabled threats, such as profile cloning, deepfakes or hacked private data exposures, exceeding police capacities. Here, the CSA's potential rests in extending resources through external partnerships, including specialist advocacy groups and corporate collaborations with social media platforms such as the National Cyber Security Centre.

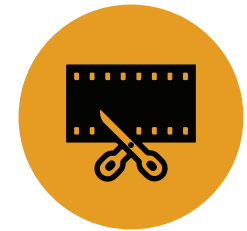
Ghana's National Cybersecurity Centre (GNCC) is the predecessor organisation to CSA, which focuses purely on operational coordination rather than oversight and policy formulation responsibilities. However, technical facility engagement and trusted information-sharing platform provision remain vital for law enforcement and corporate players in managing threats. As Ghana progresses with plans to roll out 5G to accelerate mobile access alongside corresponding expanded digitalisation, the NC3 retains importance for detection and response support to counter advanced cyber-attacks. This encompasses working jointly with telecommunications industry players and financial sector leaders to manage fraud risks requiring continued vigilance.



Profile cloning



Private Data
Exposures



Deepfake



The GNCC represents a valuable nexus for standardising policies regarding platform companies' management of digital violence issues, including TFGBV. It retains collaborative ties with agencies like the Criminal Investigation Department's Cybercrime Unit. It is an alternate first contact point for complex violations involving interpersonal data abuse across digital networks and applications. However, its operational effectiveness remains constrained by legacy resourcing gaps that inhibit scaling response mechanisms to extensive online violence incidents against vulnerable populations without partnerships enabling corporate social responsibility activations. GNCC leadership is collaborating with international agencies and specialist civil society groups to build awareness programs addressing knowledge gaps across judicial and educational sectors that require addressing to strengthen user protections.



4.8. Cybercrime Unit, Ghana Police Service

The Cybercrime Unit, under the Criminal Investigation Department of the Ghana Police Service, serves as the primary public investigative agency mandated to examine technology-facilitated crimes across the country through its central and regional offices. However, persistent under-resourcing amidst exponentially growing digitalisation hampers current effectiveness in managing vast incident volumes, despite recent capacity-building initiatives training over 150 personnel across Ghana's 16 regions. The lack of dedicated Digital Forensics Laboratories nationwide poses barriers to timely evidence extraction and analysis for reported violations to ensure successful prosecutions, given criminals' agility in exploiting anonymising apps and porous platforms. However, most police officers need to be made aware of the referral pathways that forensics procedures demand and instead attempt generalised interrogations before recognising technological sophistication exceeding standard approaches.

Training over
150
personnel

across Ghana's
16
regions



Establishing streamlined escalation protocols for TFGBV cases, warranting CSA forensic support and victim sensitivity, is required for effective law enforcement and convictions. However, lengthy delays managing court cases, even in prosecuted instances, diminish deterrent effects without overhauls addressing judiciary clogs through alternative dispute mechanisms tailored to cybercrime specifics. Without key performance improvements, police units' roles remain limited to reporting documentation rather than genuine preventive effects in inhibiting technology-facilitated gender violence reaching epidemic proportions across Ghana's vibrant online ecosystems, enabling user-generated content broadcasts sans oversight.



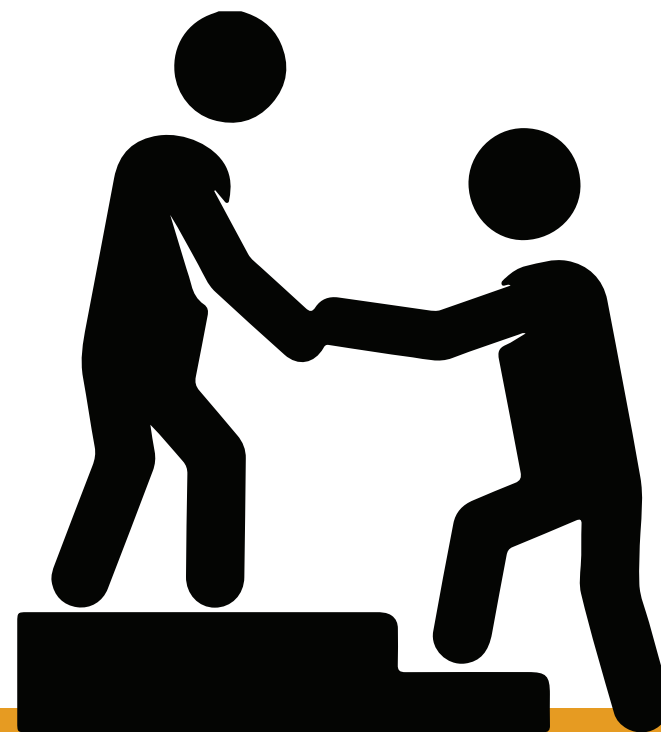
4.9. DOVVSU, Ghana Police Service

Ghana Police's Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) represents the main public investigative and support referral body for various forms of gender-based violence nationally through specialised units across all districts. DOVVSU professionals manage sensitisation programs regarding domestic violence and provide crucial psychosocial support connections for survivors, including temporary shelters, legal aid, livelihoods assistance and counselling partnerships for victims escaping abusive home environments. Guidelines also assist hospitals with examining sexual violence cases to enable court evidence regarding physical trauma, documenting abuse for successful criminal prosecutions, although adherence and staff knowledge gaps persist (DOVVSU, n.d).

However, DOVVSU currently lacks the technical capacities to address emerging technology-facilitated aspects of domestic abuse. The lack of established procedures catering explicitly to intimate partner violence enacted through social media breaches, unauthorized location access or image-based exploitation endemic in modern relationships conflicts with global shifts adopting "tech abuse" encompassing terminologies. Tailoring training and nationwide sensitisation for law enforcement personnel to recognise TFGBV Nuances stands vital alongside streamlining escalation pathways, tapping CSA capacities required. Harmonising initiatives coordinated across agencies involved in online safety and domestic violence management represent ongoing development priorities for a comprehensive, survivor-centred TFGBV response nationally.



DOVVSU
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND VICTIM SUPPORT UNIT



5. Inter-Agency Coordination Challenges

While Ghana's designation of institutional roles across cybersecurity, cybercrime and domestic violence response units enables functional specialization catering to multi-disciplinary skill demands that TFGBV incidents warrant, persistent coordination deficits remain across bureaucratic structures that dampen effectiveness in managing such abuse. Domestically focused DOVVSU units lack formal partnerships harnessing CSA oversight capacities for seemingly interpersonal violations manifesting distinctly through digital channels but exceeding localised forensic resources (CHRAJ, 2022). Similarly, limitations persist regarding streamlined reporting protocols from police units less digitally specialised, managing initial complaints toward CSA escalations that resource constraints necessitate, given the inability to duplicate technical expertise nationwide.



Additionally, corporates' extensive data access positions technology companies and telecommunications operators as key partners within collaborative frameworks, requiring sensitization and standardization efforts aligning private sector procedures to national agency mechanisms. Guidelines uniformly recognise and investigate TFGBV, thus representing a need for inter-ministerial coordination. New legislation and associated implementation Committees must prioritise bridging through multistakeholder involvement. Resolving such coordination failures across Ghana's institutional landscape to support comprehensive sector-wide responses to fast-evolving digital violence deployments is vital. Cultural resistance barriers risk leaving victims constrained and lacking viable support conduits and resolution pathways (Kwao and Amoak, 2022; Asante, 2023).





6. Vulnerable Groups and Impact

TFGBV assumes distinctly gendered dimensions in Ghana, disproportionately affecting women, girls and sexual minorities across online and offline spaces because of existing gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms that technology channels exploit and amplify. Key vulnerable populations discussed here encompass female public figures and young women facing threats to mental health, socioeconomic participation and expression freedoms through digital violence



6.2. Women in Public Roles

Experts observe that women politicians, journalists, activists, artists and organisational leaders face escalated TFGBV risks, with online attacks often explicitly targeting gender and sexuality through sexualised visual depictions, rape/death threats and abuse incorporating private family members (Parliament of Ghana, 2020). Apparent incidents involved female parliamentarians facing manipulated nude imagery circulated across social media to undermine their reputations during active legislative duties (Rutgers, 2024). Similarly, prominent journalists report persistent online harassment encompassing threats, unauthorised private data publication and dehumanisation through viral hashtags across networks (Bichanga, 2024). Literature attributes such backlash to perceived respectable women leaders transgressing traditional gender expectations through authoritative public roles, provoking violent humiliation attempts and reinforcing gender hierarchies deemed disrupted (Bichanga, 2024).



6.3. Adolescent Girls and Young Women

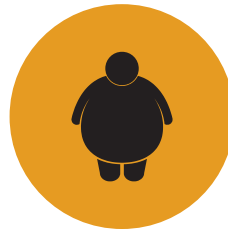
Rapid mobile device diffusion and expanding Internet adoption increasingly interconnect Ghanaian youth across unregulated digital spaces, lacking oversight for healthy relationships and identity development. Studies document adolescent girls facing technology-exploited harms encompassing online coercion, visual privacy breaches, sexualised body-shaming, harassment over activism participation and obsessive male peer surveillance through unauthorised contacts (Henry & Powell, 2018).



Online Coercion



Visual Privacy Breaches



Sexualised Body-Shaming



Harassment Over Activism Participation



Obsessive Male Peer Surveillance

However, sensitisation programs addressing technology-facilitated abuses tailored for parents and educational authorities remain limited despite disturbing violence reports (Henry & Powell, 2018). This prevents young survivors from receiving support, given their reluctance to report feared restrictions from their only conduits accessing expanding opportunities, otherwise empowering them through digital fluency. Addressing complex questions around youth consent, privacy, and ethical engagement stands vital before pervasive abuse erodes optimism in entire generations' increasingly centralising online interactions (Kyei-Arthur et al., 2024). Countering online grooming risks and fostering trauma-informed disclosure pathways requires investment in prioritising girls' uninterrupted education and skill-building using technologies safely and responsibly.

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While Ghana progressively connects citizens through digital transformation investments, women report lacking equal opportunities in harnessing online platforms, given pervasive digital violence muzzling their participation and threatening nascent enterprises (Dunn et al., 2019). Studies document female public officials and professionals utilising increased security measures, including abandoning identifiable posting, limiting commentary and resorting to anonymous accounts for fundamental interactions, given that constant harassment risks compromising careers when reputations suffer through orchestrated attacks (Kyei-Arthur et al., 2024). Victims are losing economic independence and social networks when intimate photos get leaked, resulting in broken marriage prospects, especially across rural regions, indicating profoundly disempowering repercussions constraining ambitious trajectories (Kyei-Arthur et al., 2024).



Prevention and Response Initiatives

7.2. Government Programs and Strategies

The Government of Ghana has implemented measures to address technology-facilitated harms against women and girls, including provisions within the country's data protection regulations (Data Protection Act 2012). These regulations, outlined in the Data Protection Act 2012, establish standards for using personal information and require consent for processing sensitive information such as biometrics and location data, which are often exploited in digital rights violations. The Act also includes protections for children's information by implementing stricter consent procedures. However, effectively implementing these protections is currently challenged by the substantial regulatory scope of the Data Protection Act 2012 (Makinde et al., 2021; Thomasen & Dunn, 2021; Dunn, 2021).



Additionally, Ghana's domestic violence response architecture notably houses a dedicated Domestic Violence Secretariat managing programming for awareness, psychosocial support and shelter coordination across Ghana through partnerships enabling survivor rehabilitation (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2017). However, the lack of coordination between gender response frameworks and national cybersecurity strategy limits addressing emerging threats at the intersection, requiring partnerships harnessing specialized capacities like the Cybersecurity Authority's forensic analysis resources. Harmonizing gender mainstreaming efforts with digital governance initiatives focused on online child protection and cybercrime mitigation is vital for operationalizing legal safeguards and social support for women and girls facing digital violations manifesting in intimate partner violence dynamics that demand sensitisation (Alshabib & Martins, 2021; Bechara & Schuch, 2021; Saleem et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2021).

Therefore, the Gender and Social Protection Ministry and other gender-sensitive organisations need to engage in more sensitisation programmes on the various judicial and law enforcement remedies and processes to encourage the reporting of the phenomenon. The Ghana Police Service and the judicial system should also train their staff to prosecute better and be responsive when those issues are reported to them. The system's responsiveness to reports of such abuses will further engender confidence in victims to report.



7.3. Civil Society and NGO Interventions in Ghana

Ghana boasts a vibrant and rapidly growing civil society mobilisation dedicated to addressing the pressing issue of gender-based violence. Through awareness campaigns and advocacy programs, valuable foundations are being laid to tackle the emerging technology-facilitated dimensions of this problem, which currently lack tailored prioritisation. The Ark Foundation, among other groups, plays a crucial role in implementing school-based education initiatives that focus on fostering consent, promoting ethical relationships, and preventing violence among adolescents (Anyidoho et al., 2021; Teiko, 2022; Bedu-Addo et al., 2020; Shahadu, 2023). These initiatives are particularly crucial in addressing the growing concern of technology-mediated dating abuse or coercion among young people in today's society. It is evident that the adoption of popular apps, driven by peer pressure, has increased the vulnerability of this demographic (Ankrah, 2024). Despite the ongoing efforts, there are still substantial gaps in the preparedness of parents and educators regarding effective strategies to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of youth networks and promote safe technology usage. Consequently, there is a pressing need to seize unique intervention opportunities and integrate updated civic curricula that prioritize the development of digital citizenship skills. By doing so, we can equip young individuals with the necessary knowledge and self-protective tactics to responsibly navigate the complexities of the digital world (Watson et al., 2022; van de Werfhorst et al., 2020).



Fostering consent



Promoting ethical relationships



Preventing violence

Additionally, groups such as the Coalition Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence partner with international agencies like UN Women and key government stakeholders in sensitisation and services expansion for survivors, including crucial psychosocial support and emergency response mobilization when needed (Shukla, 2024). Such partnerships could be extended through working groups explicitly dedicated to technology-enabled forms of violence against women, currently lacking cohesive action among dispersed digital rights groups and gender sector organisations nationally. Specifically, collaborations with agencies like the Cybersecurity Authority that concentrate specialized technical expertise regarding forensic analysis for identifying culprits adopting anonymising technologies hold immense potential to expand support for victims facing expanded threats but limited viable pathways addressing grievances currently across diffuse digital networks (Slakoff et al., 2020; McLaughlin et al., 2021).

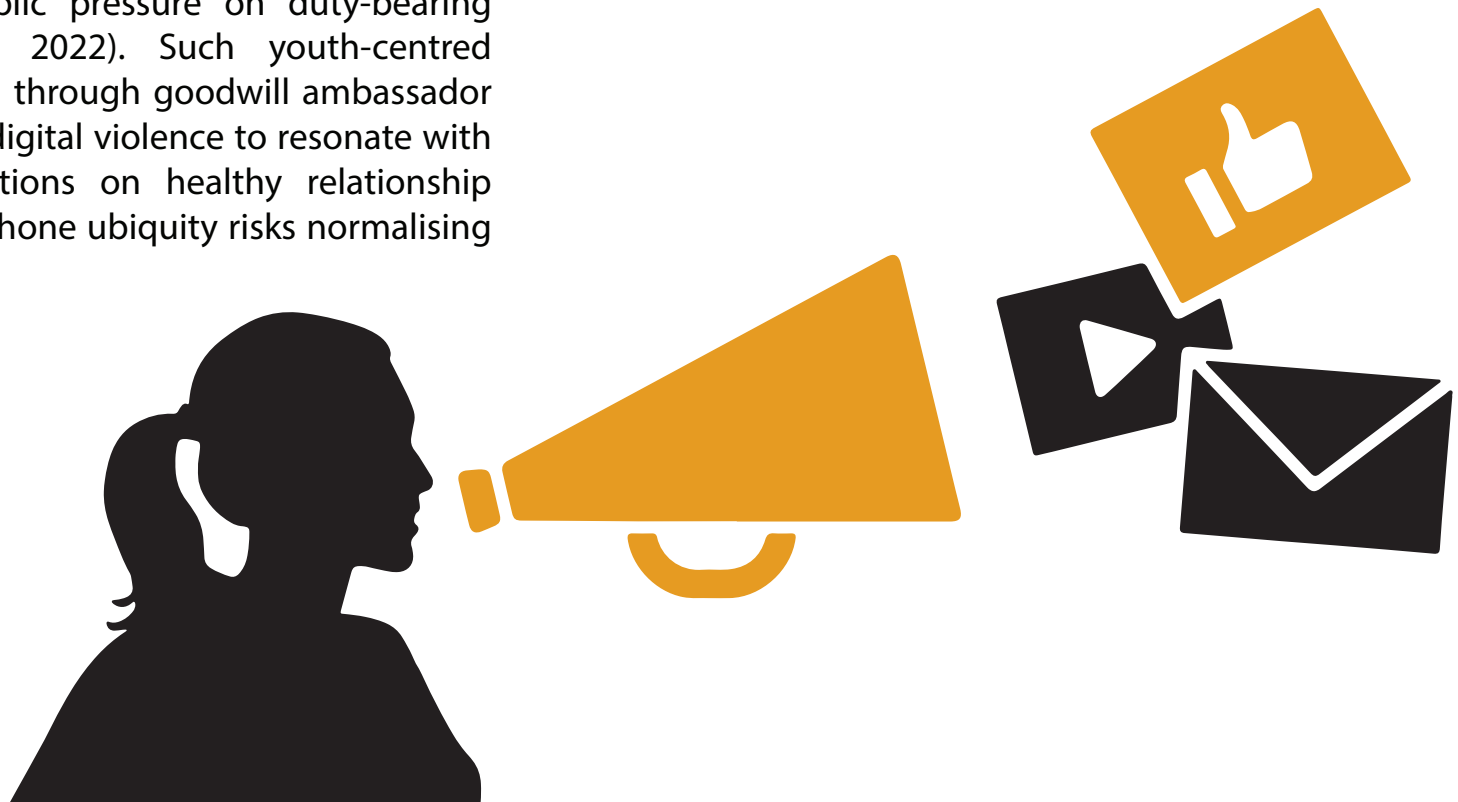


United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women



7.4. Media Campaigns and Public Awareness

Ghana boasts growing media attention and prominent civil campaigns dedicated to barriers to gender equality and women's empowerment in contemporary society, providing useful platforms for technology-facilitated violence issues and giving suitable capacity support and partnerships. For instance, renowned actress Joselyn Dumas leads visible public activations through the "Youth in Ghana's Population Stands at risk" campaign under the auspices of the United Nations Fund for Population, demanding action on Sexual Gender-based Violence through solidarity marches, television and radio discussions alongside ongoing community engagements sustaining informative discourse and public pressure on duty-bearing institutions (Dome & Twum, 2022). Such youth-centred mobilisation could be extended through goodwill ambassador programs explicitly addressing digital violence to resonate with digitally native young generations on healthy relationship foundations vital amidst smartphone ubiquity risks normalising abuse and coercion online.



7.5. Capacity Building Programs

Strengthening institutional readiness addressing technology-facilitated Violence issues demands expanding dedicated Training and sensitization programs tailored for frontline professionals managing gender-based violence cases across health, police, social services and educational sectors. This encompasses updating curricula and response protocols catering explicitly to, particularly, youth navigating sexuality safely across peer networks (Hassan et al., 2022). For instance, equipping teachers with programmatic modules covering consent, privacy ethics, and minimization response behaviours stands vital for early interventions reaching vulnerable adolescents online, requiring non-judgmental reporting mechanisms when abusive incidents manifest.



Additionally, programs upskilling counsellors addressing psychological trauma recovery must likewise incorporate contexts and outcomes specifically stemming from digitally mediated abuse through visual rights sabotage of interpersonal betrayal, given that lasting harms technology exacerbates through instant virality absent victims' control. Similarly, workshops enhancing digital literacy tailored to police investigators, prosecutors and social workers constitute immense value in delivering rehabilitation-centred support sensitive to confronting survivors rather than resorting to simplicity, victim-blaming assumptions, and diminishing empathy to arouse acknowledgement of discomforting socially conservative environments. Addressing complex questions around youth development and gender rights amidst expanding digital citizenship thus warrants prioritisation through national capacity-building efforts underpinning legislation and technological oversight through structured competency advancement, sustainable for dynamic, complex violence ecosystems online.



Survivor Support Services

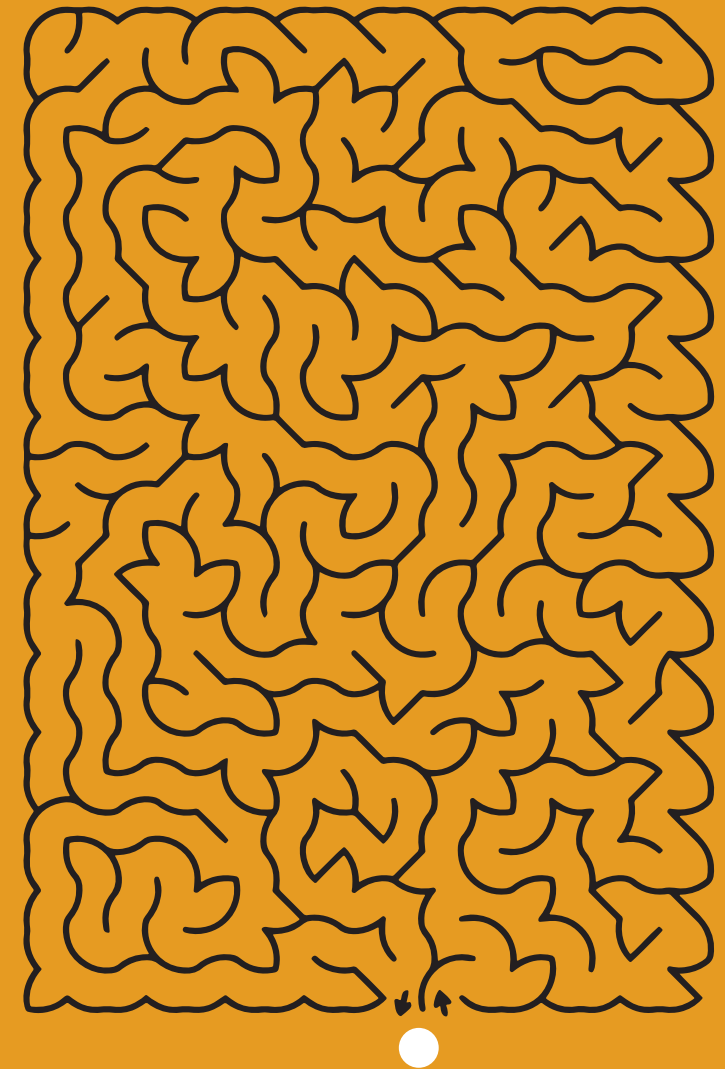
Amidst expanding connected environments introducing emergent violence forms against vulnerable populations through screens ubiquitously accessible globally, Ghana requires rapid development of dedicated survivor support infrastructures providing psychologically safe pathways assisting disclosure and recovery from trauma associated with technology-facilitated abuse (Jankowicz et al., 2024). Tailoring existing services like domestic violence support centres and child helplines to incorporate trained personnel equipped with digital violence modules can provide functional foundations, with examples like South Africa's Gender Based Violence Command Centre demonstrating models integrating cyber-safe assistance requested anonymously online for sensitive matters (Rahayu et al., 2022; Arthur, 2023; Midani et al., 2024; Jankowicz et al., 2024).



Promoting decentralised networks through local women's advocacy chapters and educational alliances addressing GBV stands vital for community-embedded assistance, avoiding risks of exposure by seeking distant contacts. Notably, training mother groups and Female teachers sensitively handling adolescent concerns around consensual image sharing amidst emergent relationship uncertainties online is vital for early intervention, avoiding further escalations through confidential guidance on self-protective safe behaviours and limiting risks on unfamiliar networks (Harris et al., 2020; Bidwell, 2021). Additionally, expanding anonymous national helplines explicitly dedicated to offering advice on responding to cases of image-based abuse, hacking violations, stalking, and defamation represents considerable value. Increasing support accessibility to victims requires managing complex emotional stresses related to breaches of intimate rights digitally mediated across porous global networks (Bidwell, 2020; Razavi et al., 2020). Overall, improving both survivor support dispersal and specialisation handling multifaceted technology-facilitated violence cases holds immense preventive value in tackling escalators abuse women and girls presently absorbing given entangled barriers around viable reporting and accountability-seeking pathways currently constrained limiting genuine societal progress otherwise promised through national cybersecurity and digitisation drives (Harris et al., 2020; Bidwell, 2021; Bidwell, 2020; Razavi et al., 2020).

Challenges And Barriers

Addressing manifestations of technology-enabled violence currently overwhelming women and girls across unregulated digital spheres warrants acknowledging multidimensional barriers at societal, institutional and individual levels that constrain genuine progress in securing participative justice and rehabilitation pathways victims require. Assessments reveal extensive underreporting of online harassment, visual rights violations and intimate surveillance as online normalized behaviours mainly affecting young citizens and marginalized groups, lacking genuine recourse mechanisms given constrained legal understandings, resource limitations and pervasive rape culture assumptions devaluing consent across digital boundaries. Tackling emergent violence terrains exploiting popular networks like TikTok and SnapChat relies upon youth identity construction, demanding policy interventions to reconcile through participatory approaches, aligning lived technological realities with appropriately sensitised institutional systems.



9.2. Limited Reporting Mechanisms

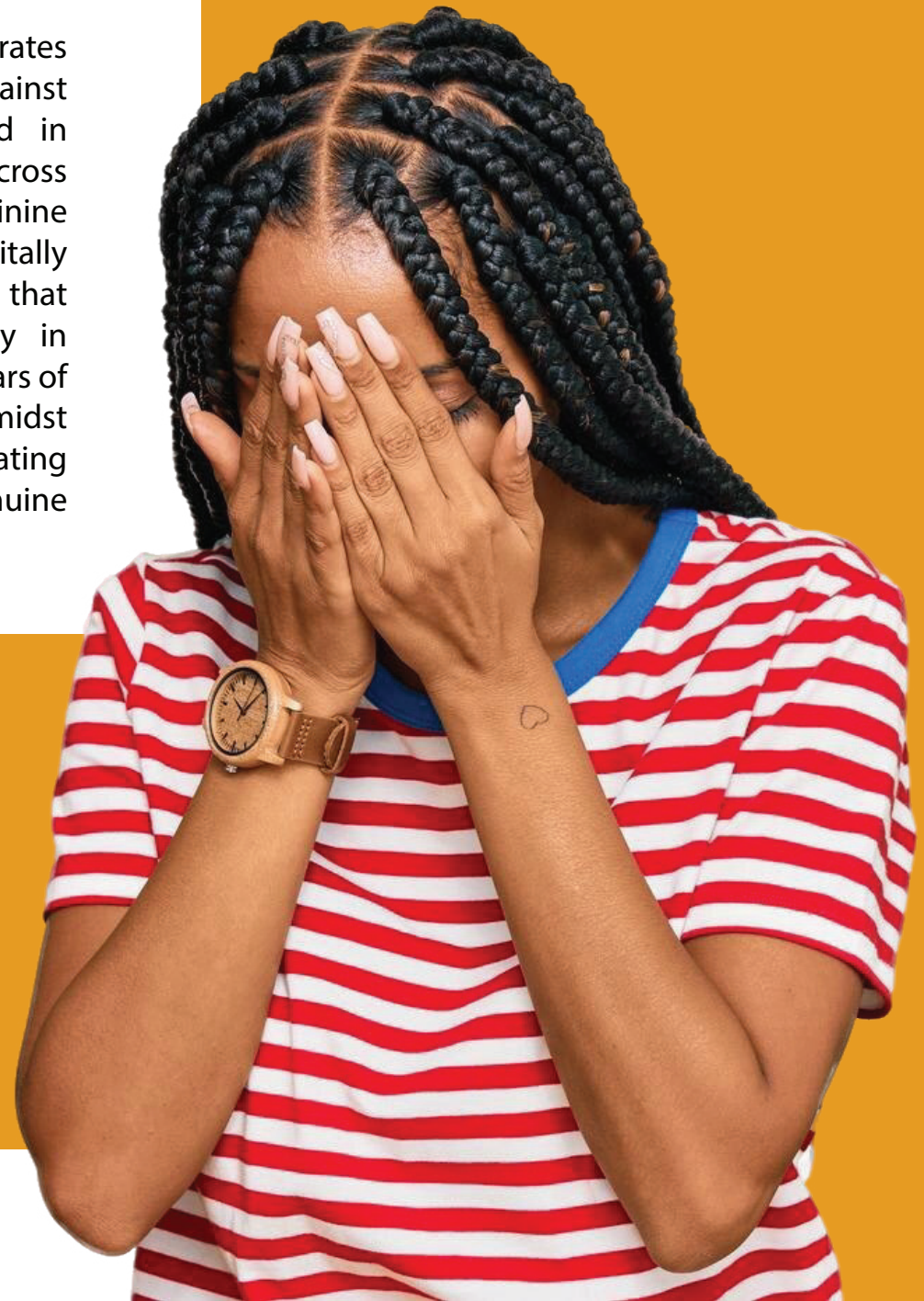
A significant barrier inhibiting effective TFGBV response is a lack of or ineffective reporting mechanisms across key institutional points when managing victim interactions, including police departments, social media companies, and educational authorities. Assessment data indicates that some 90% of online violence incidents remain undisclosed, given futility perceptions, concerns around victim-blaming attitudes and potential exposure risks seeking resolution through bureaucracies currently ill-equipped to handle complaints (Amnesty International, 2021). Where systems exist like online content moderation forms, opaque procedures, and inconsistent outcomes diminish survivors' agency while enabling transnational platforms to circumvent domestic accountability. Similarly, attempts leveraging existing channels like SMS-based GBV helplines face barriers to adapting protocols covering emergent consent complexities and evidentiary procedures involved in documenting cybercrimes.



9.3. Cultural and Social Barriers

Despite expanding internet connectivity and mobile penetration rates nationwide, addressing technology-facilitated violence against Ghanaian women and girls faces complex barriers rooted in sociocultural belief systems that normalise or justify abuse across digital boundaries through problematic assumptions around feminine behaviours that warrant controlling or consent parameters digitally remain vaguely demarcated through private usage agreements that platforms dictate. Assessment data reveals victim hesitancy in reporting online harassment and relationship violations, given fears of facing stigmatisation or family honour compromises, especially amidst intimate rights sabotage adopting diffuse networks, indicating profoundly internalised rationalisations for avoiding genuine resolution pathways (Foundation, 2020).

Assessment data reveals victim hesitancy in reporting online harassment and relationship violations, given fears of facing stigmatisation or family honour compromises



Literature argues reform requires confronting pervasive rape culture tenets that exonerate perpetrators through implicit victim-blaming norms embedded through childrearing, religious indoctrination and media tropes that weaponise feminine characteristics provoking retaliation deviating sanctified codes governing desire management and interpersonal engagements across public/private binaries with distinctly gendered accountabilities (Marhia, 2021). Addressing complex questions around dignifying multifaceted survivor experiences thus relies upon participatory education and community dialogues embracing empowered digital citizenship foundations aligned with values promoting collective accountability and progress measured through universal wellbeing indices beyond productivity outputs alone. This encompasses awareness and advocacy partnerships leveraging influential groups like faith networks, educational institutions and media personalities towards culture change, addressing misogynistic rhetoric and stereotypical messaging that currently constrain addressing online violence issues.



Childrearing



Religious
indoctrination



Indoctrination and
media tropes

9.4. Technical Capacity Gaps

A consistent challenge highlighted across Ghana's emergent digital policy frameworks lies in pronounced technical capacity gaps inhibiting enforcement and oversight across exponentially growing networks, applications and user bases currently comprising vibrant online ecosystems with limited oversight. Assessments show key agencies like Cybercrime Units across regional police commands struggling with inadequate tools, forensic expertise and infrastructure for extracting, preserving and analysing digital evidence required to link offenders with abusive behaviours across porous technology systems enabling anonymity or attribution ambiguities around virtual identities (Ennin & Mensah, 2019). Such limitations severely impact successful prosecutions and convictions required to establish credible deterrence effects countering online violence adopted through diffuse channels.

Assessments show key agencies like Cybercrime Units across regional police commands struggling with inadequate tools, forensic expertise and infrastructure for extracting, preserving and analysing digital evidence



Likewise, implementing policy provisions around personal data protections, child online safety, gender mainstreaming mandates, and platform regulations relies upon advanced competencies around trend identification, network analytics, machine learning and data visualisation techniques that presently concentrate scarce skill sets nationwide. Addressing complex questions and navigating rights frameworks amidst dynamic environments equally necessitates participatory inputs shaping governance balancing investigations impacting information freedoms privacy represents. Overall, prioritising sustainable capacity-building programs grows operational abilities commensurate with expansive connectivity ambitions that national digitisation drives and currently emphasises for prosperity visions.

However, genuine inclusion remains compromised through profound marginalisation facing vulnerable groups like women and children facing unchecked violence trends adopting emergent unregulated digital channels every day.

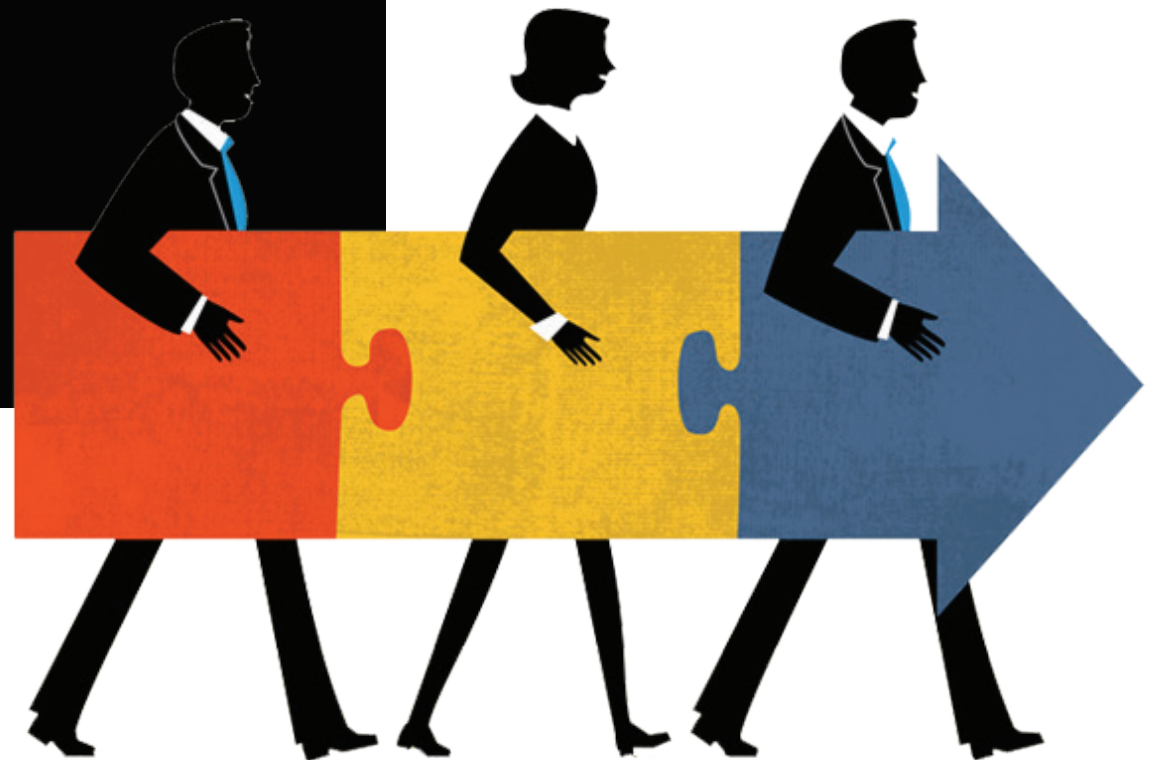


9.5. Resource Constraints

A consistent finding across literature examining Ghana's institutional responses addressing technology-facilitated violence lies in persistent resource constraints severely limiting organisational abilities to implement comprehensive prevention and response at a scale matching rapidly evolving threat levels that expanding Internet adoption introduces across unregulated spaces. The analysis finds key agencies like DOVVSU and regional police commands lacking essential infrastructural capacities, digital forensics laboratories, survivor shelters equipped to handle technology-mediated abuse and structured case management systems tracking offences for pattern identification that proactive threat mitigation necessitates (Amoakohene, 2004). At policy levels, realising provisions around privacy, online civility, and cybersecurity relies upon advanced oversight tools only nascent developed by research centres like the National Cyber Security Center that require extensive investments operationalizing proposed legislation given dynamic technological terrains legislative framings struggle to keep pace with internationally.

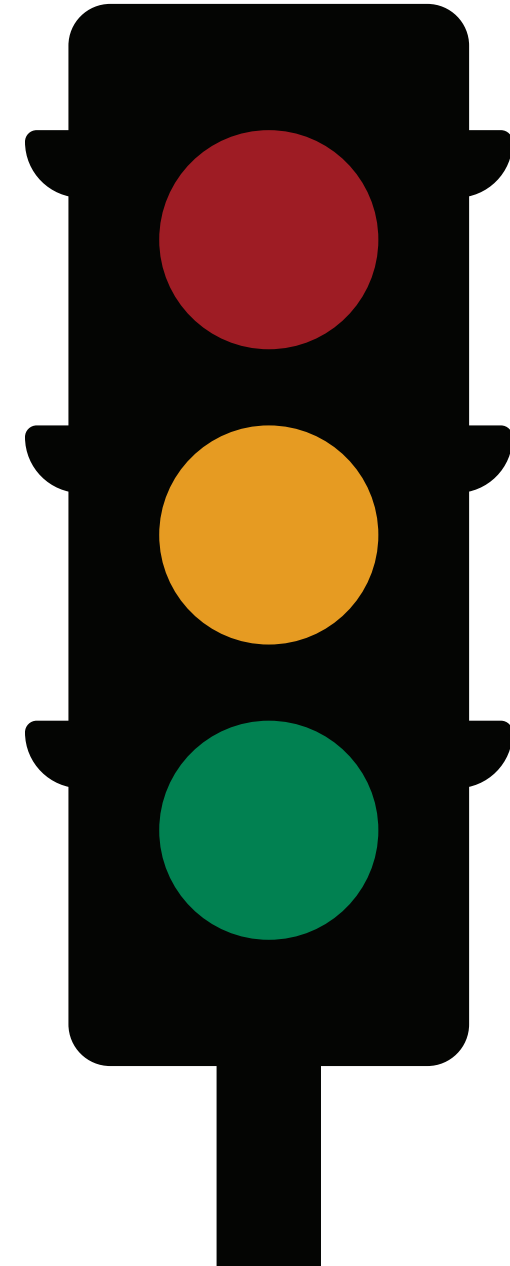


Likewise, scaling training and sensitisation programs rely upon partnerships with specialist groups and private industries that can navigate complex questions around reconciling monitoring requirements and data ethics for contextual integrity. However, overreliance on external donor resourcing risks project discontinuities once funding ends without structured local resourcing pipelines established through government commitments guaranteeing stabilization, securing institutional readiness, and keeping pace with digitisation exponential trajectories that expanding Internet adoption brings.

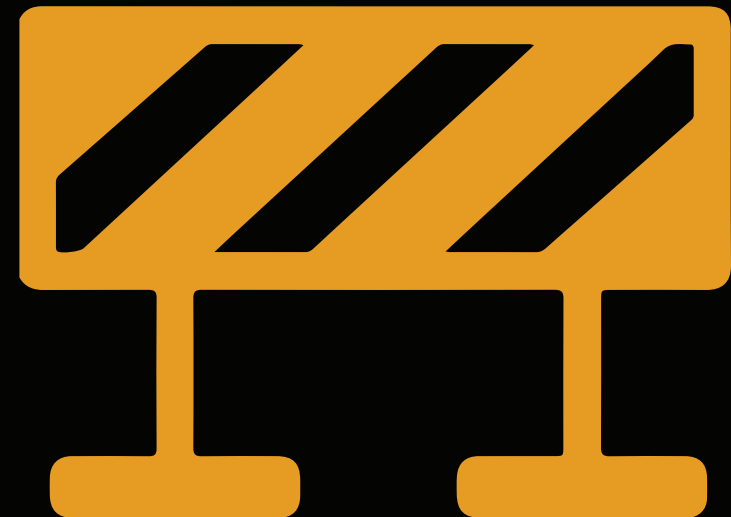


9.6. Enforcement Challenges

A consistent challenge observed across cybersecurity scholarship involves limited enforcement of legal prohibitions and oversight systems regulating online behaviours to match policy ambitions around content controls, privacy preservation and consensual conduct upholding dignity across digital interactions. In the context of addressing technology-facilitated gender violence often manifesting distinctly through non-consensual porn distribution, cyber harassment and intimate partner stalking behaviours, factors inhibiting successful prosecutions encompass attributions challenges behind screen pseudonyms, jurisdictional questions across global platforms and rights concerns balancing complex questions consent established through usage agreements rather than explicit mutual discussions characterising healthy engagement foundations (Alobo & Kun, 2022). Additionally, cultural taboos discussing sexually explicit media usage combined with limited law enforcement capacities managing digital forensics hamper directive investigation pathways, attributing culpability in reported technology-exploited violations.



Beyond ineffective enforcement risks diminishing legal instrument deterrent effects lies refractory realities that prosecutions alone poorly reconcile across diffuse global networks, enabling interpersonal violations adopting porous architectures with sophisticated exploitative capacities persisting despite specific policy prohibitions and website moderations attempting to safeguard vulnerable user groups (Ennin & Mensah, 2019). Instead, preventive approaches tailored to adopt multidimensional lenses encompassing socio-culturally resonant education, ethical design advocacy and youth participation shaping institutional systems stand better poised to interrupt Normalisation trends through continuous constructive dialogue addressing complex questions of consent, privacy and access priorities, participatory pathways balancing rights tensions, and emergent realities introduced. This encompasses multistakeholder involvement in crafting context-specific governance frameworks that legislation enables but requires participative engagement, realising that technological complexities exceed standard compliance imposition alone.



Conclusion

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is a growing concern in Ghana, driven by the widespread adoption of digital technology and internet access. It encompasses acts such as cyberstalking, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and the use of social media platforms to perpetuate abuse. TFGBV disproportionately affects women, girls, and marginalised groups, amplifying existing gender inequalities and societal norms that condone or trivialise violence against women.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is increasingly prevalent in Ghana, particularly on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram (Makinde et al., 2021; Winiecki; Jankowicz et al., 2024; Daniel, 2023). Typical forms of TFGBV include cyberbullying, sexual harassment, revenge porn, and threats of violence. While women, especially young girls, are the primary targets, men also experience TFGBV, though often in different manifestations (Makinde et al., 2021; Winiecki; Jankowicz et al., 2024; Daniel, 2023; Sundani et al., 2022; Bolinger, 2022).

Societal norms in Ghana, which discourage victims from speaking out about gender-based violence, also influence the handling of TFGBV (Fusheini et al., 2024; Tontoh, 2024; Bazaanah & Ngcobo, 2024). The stigmatisation of victims and limited understanding of the issue contribute to underreporting and restricted avenues for redress. Ghana's legal framework, although addressing general gender-based violence, falls short of addressing the unique challenges posed by TFGBV (Fusheini et al., 2024; Sikweyiya et al., 2020; Stiles-Ocran, 2021; Alo et al., 2023).

Law enforcement and judicial systems frequently need more expertise to investigate and prosecute TFGBV cases effectively. Victims often express low confidence in the justice system, citing delays, inadequate support, and a lack of sensitivity to their experiences. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are pivotal in bridging these gaps by raising awareness, conducting digital literacy campaigns, and providing support through initiatives such as hotlines for reporting online abuse (Shah, 2024; Bolinger, 2022; Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, 2024; Buehlow, 2023; Quijano et al., 2024; Quijano et al., 2024). TFGBV disproportionately affects marginalised groups, including rural women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, making it a critical issue of equity and inclusion (Raney & Collier, 2024; Harris & Woodlock, 2023; Overton & Powell, 2024; Wilkinson et al., 2024).



The anonymity and reach provided by digital technologies have enabled new forms of violence that exploit vulnerabilities and create significant barriers to justice and victim support. Ghana's legal and institutional frameworks, while addressing general cybercrimes and domestic violence, fail to cover the unique dynamics of TFGBV adequately. Challenges such as resource constraints, limited technical expertise, and cultural norms normalising online abuse further exacerbate the issue.

Addressing TFGBV in Ghana requires more than reactive measures; it demands systemic changes that promote equity, justice, and inclusion. A comprehensive approach involving legal and policy reforms, societal change, and technological interventions is essential.



Equity



Justice



Inclusion



Recommendations

• Legal and Policy Reforms

Legal and policy reforms should focus on strengthening Ghana's legal framework to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) explicitly. Existing laws on cybercrimes, data protection, and gender-based violence must incorporate provisions that recognise digital violence as a serious offence. Furthermore, enforcement mechanisms for regulations such as the Cybersecurity Act and the Domestic Violence Act should be improved to ensure victims receive adequate protection. Law enforcement agencies must also be provided with clear guidelines on investigating and prosecuting TFGBV cases, ensuring a more effective legal response.

• Building the capacity of law enforcement

Building the capacity of law enforcement and judicial officers is crucial in addressing TFGBV. Specialised training should be provided to police officers, judicial personnel, and prosecutors to enhance their ability to handle digital gender-based violence cases effectively. Additionally, developing digital forensic capabilities will aid in tracking and investigating perpetrators of cyberstalking, online harassment, and image-based abuse. Dedicated cybercrime units should be established within law enforcement agencies to strengthen enforcement efforts further, focusing specifically on TFGBV cases.



• Public awareness and digital literacy programs

Public awareness and digital literacy programs are essential in preventing and addressing TFGBV. Nationwide awareness campaigns should educate individuals on recognising and reporting digital violence. Moreover, digital literacy programs should be integrated into school curricula to equip young people with online safety and knowledge of privacy protection. Engaging traditional and religious leaders in sensitisation efforts will also be instrumental in challenging societal norms that normalise online violence and fostering a culture of accountability.



• Victim Support Services

Victim support services must be strengthened to provide comprehensive assistance to victims of TFGBV. This includes enhancing helplines, counselling centres at the district assemblies and ministries, and legal aid services to ensure survivors receive the necessary support. Collaborations with civil society organisations should be fostered to provide psychosocial support to victims. Additionally, safe reporting mechanisms, including anonymous complaint platforms, should be established to encourage survivors to report incidents without fear of retaliation or stigma.





• Use of Technology and Social Media for Mitigation

The technology industry and social media platforms must actively mitigate online abuse. Stronger collaboration among government agencies, social media companies, and internet service providers is necessary to enhance reporting mechanisms for online abuse. Advocating for improved content moderation policies will help swiftly remove harmful content. Furthermore, technology companies should be encouraged to bolster platform security features, such as enhanced privacy settings and automated detection of abusive content, to foster a safer online environment.

• Stakeholder Partnership

A multisectoral approach is essential to effectively combating TFGBV. Partnerships between government agencies, civil society organisations, academia, and the private sector should be fostered to develop a coordinated response. Establishing a national task force will allow for continuous assessment and response to emerging trends in digital violence. Additionally, engaging with international organisations will help align Ghana's policies with global best practices in addressing online gender-based violence.



• Monitoring and Research

Continuous monitoring and research are necessary to inform policy decisions and measure the effectiveness of interventions. Regular research and data collection should be conducted to understand the prevalence and impact of TFGBV.

A centralised database should document reported cases and track response outcomes. Evaluating current interventions will also enable policymakers to refine strategies and improve the overall response to digital gender-based violence.



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