

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MOROCCO

Action Research Report Executive Summary

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TFGBV is the use of information, digital and/or communication technologies to cause physical, psychological, economic, social, moral or sexual harm, directed at or disproportionately affecting women. Law 103-13 recently criminalized certain forms of TFGBV. This action research aims to produce a knowledge base on TFGBV in Morocco and promote State accountability for its response. It included interviews, group discussions and an online survey with 1794 women, men and public actors in the law enforcement, justice and health care sectors from 39 diverse sites across the country.

Women's experiences with TFGBV

- Over half of aggressors are unknown to the victim or act anonymously. Aggressors known to the victims represent a wide diversity of men from intimate, personal and professional relationships.
- Most prevalent motives for committing TFGBV are pressure or coercion for sexual relations, extortion or fraud for money, and avoiding legal obligations in family matters.
- TFGBV is omnipresent and pervasive across a wide range of online spaces, most frequently via messaging applications, phone calls, text messages and social media platforms.
- Numerous forms of violent behaviors reported include harassment, threats, abusive comments, insults, defamatory lies, blackmail, and nonconsensual sharing of private images or communications.
- TFGBV is characterized by its frequent and repeated nature, with 35% of respondents reporting several incidents per day. It tends to persist over time, with 57% of respondents reporting violence that lasts from one month to more than a year.
- There is a close link between “online” TFGBV and “offline” violence in the “real world.” Initial online violence frequently escalates into physical violence, violent incidents such as rape are recorded and distributed online, and victims often abused by their entourage for having “caused” the violence.

Impacts on women's lives and their reactions

- Violence in the “virtual” world causes real harm in the “real world,” with women suffering a host of psychological, economic, physical, familial, social, sexual, and professional prejudices as a result of TFGBV. Several attempted suicide, others left school, quit or lost their jobs, or were forced to move.
- Women most often respond to TFGBV by making changes or sacrifices in their own lives, including reducing or cancelling participation in online spaces, and changing certain key elements of their identity, such as their phone numbers or profiles.

Responses of women's entourage

- 70% of women interviewed and 35% of respondents to the online survey remained silent about the TFGBV, not reaching out to anyone in their personal or professional entourage for help.
- Women remain silent out of fears of being considered at fault, blamed for the violence, deprived of their telephone, and having their movements and activities restricted by their families.
- Reactions from families were quite mixed, most often resulting in a weak to no response, followed by reactions punishing the victim, and in only a few cases action against the aggressor.

Responses of public actors-law enforcement, justice and health systems

- Only 10% of women reported the TFGBV to public authorities, primarily to law enforcement.
- Women do not report TFGBV to authorities due to a lack of knowledge of laws and procedures, fears of being blamed, judged, or even prosecuted themselves, pessimism about the usefulness of reporting violence, skepticism that reporting would lead to any outcome, long and complicated procedures, lack of confidence in the system, and the impossibility of obtaining the evidence requested by authorities.
- The majority of women who reported the TFGBV received no results or follow-up. Aggressors were arrested in a mere handful of cases, while in several instances the victims themselves were prosecuted for illicit sexual relations.
- 8 out of 10 women reporting TFGBV expressed their dissatisfaction with the public actor response, and described not being taken seriously, accusations that they themselves were to blame, and the burden placed on them to bring proof of the aggressor's identity.

Responses of telephone companies and social media platforms

- It was extremely rare that women reported the TFGBV to either the relevant local telephone company or social media platforms.
- Women do not seek assistance from the telephone companies and social media platforms out of a lack of knowledge of any mechanisms or procedures, fears of being blamed, and a sense that it would be useless and that neither platforms nor telephone companies would do anything to help.
- In the handful of cases where women sought assistance, telephone companies told them they could not help or intervene to stop the abuse without an order from the prosecutor.

Recommendations for developing recommendations

- Recognize that TFGBV is real violence that causes real harms in the real world;
- Understand how TFGBV undermines women's ability to exercise a diversity of other human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Hold aggressors, not victims, responsible for causing TFGBV, and end the culture of impunity;
- Hold public State actors, not victims, accountable for finding solutions to TFGBV, and for preventing, protecting, punishing, prosecuting and providing remedies;
- Develop holistic strategies that respond to all of the reasons women do not report TFGBV, addressing issues of knowledge, of fears, and of inadequate policies, procedures and practices defining public actor roles and responsibilities.