

Understanding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Central and West Africa

SUMMARY VERSION



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Introduction

We live in an era often described as postdigital, where digital technology has become so embedded in daily life that it is routine, abundant, and almost invisible, no longer experienced as separate or novel². While the benefits of digital technologies in advancing health, learning, and communication are well established, there is growing concern about the harms that technology facilitates. Much of the documented evidence of these harms originates from the Global North.

Recognising the increasing prevalence of this issue in West and Central Africa, yet constrained by limited evidence to guide interventions and advocacy, this research set out to fill this gap. We conducted a regional survey across five countries—Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Benin, and Togo—with the aim of understanding the prevalence, forms, and impacts of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). In this survey, TFGBV is defined as 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 gender³.

This research was guided by three core questions:

- 1** What is the prevalence of TFGBV in West and Central Africa?
- 2** What are the main forms, platforms, and perpetrators of TFGBV in these regions?
- 3** What are the reported impacts of TFGBV on survivors, and what barriers exist to reporting incidents?

² https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/57885242/Jandri_EtAlIEPT2018PostdigitalScienceAndEducation.pdf

³ <https://www.unfpa.org/TFGBV>

Methodology

From February to May 2025, we conducted a multi-country anonymous online survey to understand the prevalence and experiences of TFGBV across five countries: Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. The survey, which was disseminated via social media, mailing lists, and established networks, yielded 1,157 responses from participants aged 18 years and above.

The data collected included demographics, awareness, and experiences of TFGBV, perpetrators, forms, platforms, impacts, and reporting behaviours. Responses were analysed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations used to explore patterns across age and gender.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymity, and provision of support. The study adhered to the standards for sensitive research, ensuring confidentiality and minimising potential distress.

Key Findings

Prevalence of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

Among the 1,157 participants surveyed, over 90% reported daily or frequent internet use. This high level of engagement with the Internet shapes online exposure to both opportunities and risks. In terms of awareness, more than 95% of the respondents reported having heard of TFGBV, highlighting a growing recognition and concern regarding this issue. Overall, over 90% of the respondents (n= 1065) reported experiencing at least one form of TFGBV, indicating its prevalence in these countries.



90%

reported daily or frequent internet use



95%

of the respondents reported having heard of TFGBV, highlighting a growing recognition and concern regarding this issue



90%

of the respondents (n= 1065) reported experiencing at least one form of TFGBV, indicating its prevalence in these countries.

Gender differences

Gender differences in the experience were also evident. Analysis of the survey data showed that male participants accounted for the majority (54.4%) of those who reported ever experienced TFGBV compared with 28.9% of female respondents, while around 16.7% preferred not to disclose their gender. This finding suggests that men are at a risk of experiencing TFGBV. However, the higher proportion of male experiences may partly reflect the composition of the survey sample, where 53.3% of respondents were male compared to 30.3% female. Our analysis also shows that the Internet is largely dominated by males who access it daily or several times a week, increasing their exposure to online risks. More importantly, female respondents reported lower levels of awareness of TFGBV. This may have contributed to the under-recognition or under-reporting of the incidents they experienced. By contrast, male participants demonstrated greater awareness of what constitutes TFGBV, making them more likely to have identified and reported such experiences.

Reported Experiences of TFGBV



MALE
54.4%



FEMALE
28.9%



Insight: Men reported higher experiences of TFGBV than women. However, this may be influenced by the survey composition — 53.3% male vs 30.3% female respondents.

Awareness Gap

- Females: Lower awareness of what constitutes TFGBV → possible under-recognition or under-reporting.
- Males: Higher awareness → more likely to identify and report TFGBV experiences.

The age patterns provide further insights. The highest prevalence of reported TFGBV was among adults aged 25–30 years (36.6%) and 31–35 years (33.8%), while only 14.7% of those over 35 years reported such experiences. Interestingly, participants aged 18–24, often considered “digital natives”; reported fewer experiences (14.8%) with a lower awareness of TFGBV. This result does not necessarily mean that younger people are safer online; rather, it could mean that many in this age group do not recognise or label harmful and abusive online behaviours as TFGBV. Therefore, the data highlight both a higher observed prevalence among 25–35-year-olds and a potential under-recognition of online abuse among younger adults, underscoring the need for awareness and education initiatives tailored to all age groups.

36.6%

25–30 years –
Highest prevalence
of reported TFGBV

33.8%

31–35 years –
Second highest
prevalence

14.8%

18–24 years –
Fewer reports and
lower awareness

14.7%

Above 35 years –
Least reported
experiences



Insights

- Adults aged 25–35 years experience the highest levels of online abuse.
- Younger adults (18–24) may face abuse but often fail to recognize or label it as TFGBV.
- Older adults (35+) report fewer incidents, possibly due to lower online engagement.

Forms and Platforms of TFGBV

The most common forms were online sexual harassment (56.2%), doxxing (39.5%), and nonconsensual sharing of intimate images (38.8%). Gender-based hate speech was reported by 27.8%. Other forms include deepfakes, cyberstalking, sextortion, and economic abuse. Platforms: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram were identified as the most common platforms where TFGBV occurred. Facebook emerged as the most pervasive space for such abuse, with 49.7% of respondents reporting incidents there, followed by WhatsApp (46.6%), and Instagram (42.2%). A relatively small proportion (15 %) reported experiencing the TFGBV on Twitter. These findings suggest that popular social media and messaging platforms are key sites for online abuse and harassment, highlighting the need for platform-specific literacy and prevention measures.

52.6%

Online Sexual
Harassment

38.5%

Nonconsensual Sharing
of Intimate Images

39.5%

Doxxing (Sharing
Private Info)

27.8%

Gender-Based
Hate Speech

Platforms Where TFGBV Occurs Most Frequently

- Facebook – 49.7%
- WhatsApp – 46.6%
- Instagram – 42.2%
- Twitter (X) – 15%



Insights

- Popular social media and messaging platforms—especially Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram—are primary spaces for online abuse and harassment.
- This underscores the urgent need for platform-specific safety literacy, reporting mechanisms, and prevention strategies.

Perpetrators of TFGBV

By gender: Of those who reported having experienced TFGBV and disclosed the gender of their perpetrator, 47.9% identified males as the main perpetrators, 27.4% identified females, 7.4% preferred not to say, and 17.3% were unsure of the perpetrator's gender. This uncertainty or reluctance to disclose may reflect the challenges of online environments, where identity concealment and anonymity are common and distinguishing names or profiles can be difficult. These patterns highlight that TFGBV is shaped by the unique dynamics of online spaces, where anonymity and varying levels of digital literacy influence both the experience of abuse and whether perpetrators are known/recognised.



47.9%

Male perpetrators



27.4%

Female perpetrators



Insights

- Almost half of the respondents who experienced TFGBV identified men as the main perpetrators, while over a quarter pointed to women.
- A notable proportion were unsure or unwilling to disclose, underscoring the complexity of identifying abusers in digital spaces.
- TFGBV thrives in anonymity — understanding digital identity dynamics is key to designing effective prevention and accountability mechanisms.

Perpetrators of TFGBV

By relationship, perpetrators fell into several categories including strangers, peers or colleagues, romantic partners or ex-partners, online groups, and public figures or influencers. More than half of the respondents reported experiencing TFGBV from strangers online (55.1%), followed by peers, acquaintances, or colleagues (33.6%). Additionally, 22.7% identified romantic or ex-partners as perpetrators, 19% reported anonymous users or groups, and 2.3% cited public figures or influencers. These findings highlight that TFGBV can originate from multiple sources, both known and unknown, reflecting the diverse ways in which abuse and harassment manifest in digital space.

Strangers online (highest category)

55.1%

Peers, acquaintances, or colleagues

33.6%

Romantic or ex-partners

22.7%

Anonymous users or online groups

19.0%

Public figures or influencers

2.3%



Insights

- Over half of all reported TFGBV incidents were perpetrated by strangers, underscoring the risks of online anonymity.
- A significant portion also came from personal relationships, revealing that TFGBV isn't limited to unknown aggressors.

Impact of TFGBV

Among the respondents who reported experiencing TFGBV (n=1,065), emotional distress and online isolation emerged as the two most critical consequences. More than two in five experienced fear, anxiety, or depression as a result of the incident (43.4%), while a similar proportion (42.9%) reported avoiding certain online spaces. In addition, 27.5% of respondents reported financial losses due to blackmail. These impacts often extended to behavioural changes: nearly half of the survivors (47.6%) reported changing their privacy settings, 31.2% reduced their online presence, and 18.3% abandoned certain platforms altogether.



Emotional & Psychological Impact

- 43.4% experienced fear, anxiety, or depression
- Emotional distress identified as the most severe consequence



Online Behavioural Impact

- 42.9% avoided certain online spaces
- 31.2% reduced overall online activity
- 18.3% completely abandoned specific platforms



Financial Impact

- 27.5% suffered financial losses due to blackmail



Behavioural & Privacy Adjustments

- 47.6% changed their privacy settings after the incident

Underreporting of TFGBV

Despite the high prevalence and impact of these incidents, most respondents did not formally report their experiences. Only 39.2% reported incidents to the platform where the abuse occurred, 37% to law enforcement, 30% to civil society organisations (CSOs), and 20.1% did not report at all. Several barriers to reporting were identified, including fear of retaliation from perpetrators, distrust in authorities or reporting mechanisms, and a lack of knowledge about where or how to seek help. These findings highlight the urgent need for safer, more accessible, and more trusted reporting pathways to support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

39.2%

Reported to the platform where the abuse occurred

37%

Reported to law enforcement

30%

Reported to civil society organisations (CSOs)

20.1%

Did not report at all



Barriers to Reporting

- Fear of retaliation from perpetrators
- Distrust in authorities or reporting mechanisms
- Lack of knowledge on where or how to seek help



Insights

The data underscores the urgent need for safer, more accessible, and trusted reporting pathways to:

- Encourage survivors to come forward
- Strengthen institutional response mechanisms
- Ensure perpetrators are held accountable

Recommendations

With over 80% of the surveyed participants believing TFGBV to be a significant issue in their country, yet more than half were unaware of relevant laws, the findings point to urgent priorities.

1

Raise Awareness and Build Digital Literacy

Implement gender- and age-sensitive campaigns and digital literacy training to help users recognise and prevent TFGBV, with a focus on younger adults and women.

2

Strengthen Reporting Mechanisms

Establish secure, confidential, and accessible reporting channels for survivors.

3

Safety by Design Platforms

Increase advocacy for human-centred platform-based safety features such as customisable privacy settings and abuse alerts.

4

Strengthen Legal Frameworks and Policy Awareness

Advocate for clear laws addressing TFGBV in all focal countries and conduct public campaigns to ensure citizens are aware of legal protections and avenues for redress.

5

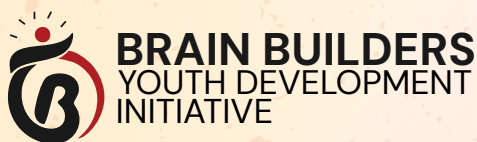
Monitor, Research, and Evaluate

Continuously track TFGBV prevalence, trends, and emerging risks, particularly among underrepresented groups.

6

Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Engage community leaders, religious and traditional leaders, influencers, and relevant stakeholders to promote positive online norms.



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