

ALGERIA

**Digital Violence Against
Women in Algeria:
Psychosocial Impacts**

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INTRODUCTION

The risks and harms women face in the digital spaces they access in their personal and professional lives are considerable and impose a lasting impact. The paper authors, in partnership with the SecDev Foundation Salam@ project, conducted a study on the experiences and impacts of technology-facilitated violence against women in Algeria; this is the first known data set on the topic.

Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women

The use of digital technologies has become an integral and unavoidable part of the lives of women and men, in both personal and professional contexts. Digital spaces have created new levels of professional, social, personal opportunities and have transformed the way in which people interact and operate their daily lives. Along with opportunities, digital spaces have also presented new forms of threat and harm. Digital harms and cybercrimes largely reflect the social challenges and violence present in offline spaces. In the context of violence against women, online spheres in some ways amplify gender power imbalances and patriarchal structures. Attacks against women in the digital realm have added layers of complexity and harm. For this reason, it is important to explore the issue of technology-facilitated violence against women (TFVAW).

TFVAW may include many elements of harmful and illegal digital behavior: harassment, threats, phishing, data and identity theft, defamation, blackmail, sextortion, non-consensual sharing of images, among others. The online nature of these harms is uniquely dangerous. First, the speed of online information dissemination is exceedingly rapid. Defamatory information, reputation attacks, and images shared without consent can flood the online sphere in a few minutes and become embedded in the digital memory indefinitely. Most users are aware that information or images released about them online cannot be fully retracted. This awareness means that even the threat of sharing personal images or damaging messages is terrifying to victims, adding weight and power to instances of blackmail, extortion, and sextortion. Second, the anonymous nature of the internet feeds into acts of violence; the online sphere enables users to mask or alter their identity. Through digital tools, perpetrators are able to address their potential victims anonymously, making it difficult for victims to protect themselves (Slonje and Smith, 2008). An attacker's digital skills, equipment, anonymity, and the uncontrolled and viral nature of online data are all factors that can create a sense of helplessness for victims of TFVAW (Langos, 2012; Hinduja, Patchin, 2015).

Unfortunately, many women find themselves facing violence, in its different forms, in concrete public and private spaces as well as in digital public and private spaces. TFVAW has emotional, psychological, and psychosocial impacts on victims which worsen in patriarchal societies that promote toxic masculinity standards. Individual impact varies based on the specific case of violence and the familiar and cultural situation of the victim. The study sought out insight and perspectives from Algerian women on their experiences with TFVAW. The analysis in this paper will explore the psychosocial implications of the TFVAW and discuss opportunities for mitigating future harm.

Algerian Context

As of January 2020, Algeria's population was nearly 44 million (50.7% male and 49.3% female). Languages spoken are Arabic, Tamazight and French.¹ The Algerian constitution guarantees fundamental freedoms and equality between citizens, without discrimination based on gender. Article 42 states that "*All political, economic, social and cultural rights of Algerian women are guaranteed by the Constitution.*" The country's guarantee of the protection of women's rights and their integrity is reflected in the implementation of several specific laws and legislations. The provisions of the 2020 constitution reinforce this stance by introducing articles related to the protection of women's rights:

Article 40 - The State protects women against all forms of violence in all places and in all circumstances in the public space, in the professional sphere and in the private sphere. The law guarantees victims' access to shelters, care facilities, and legal assistance.

Article 59. - The State promotes the political rights of women by encouraging their access to representation in elected assemblies.

Article 68 - The State shall promote parity between men and women in the labor market. The State encourages the promotion of women to positions of responsibility in public institutions and administrations as well as in companies.

Additionally, there are national laws in support and protection of women's rights. For example, sexual harassment is criminalized by the penal code. However, laws prohibiting sexual harassment include a "victim forgiveness" clause can end legal proceedings and/or reduces the sentence for cases of violence. With regard to technology-facilitated violence, there are some punitive provisions in the law that can offer protection for women. For the purpose of the study, a lawyer was interviewed on the application of such laws; the findings are reflected in the discussion section.

The state has also adopted strategies and action plans for gender equality and has ratified international treaties and UN human rights mechanisms.² Among the most relevant strategies:

- The National Strategy for the Integration and Promotion of Women (2008-2013) and its Action Plan (2010-2014)
- The National Family Strategy (2010 - 2014)
- The National Strategy for the Fight against Violence against Women (2007 - 2013)
- It should be noted that no national strategy has been produced since 2014, in favor of the rights of Algerian women.

¹ National Statistics Office

² Maternity Protection Convention, 1962

Equal Remuneration Convention, 1962

UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1968

ILO Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, 1969

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (reservations on certain articles, in particular those obliging States to implement all legal and regulatory measures that would eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in national law), 1996

Solemn Declaration of African Heads of State on Equality between Men and Women, 2004

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (Maputo Protocol), 2016

At the international level, Algeria has taken part in major world conferences on women's rights, such as the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the 1995 Beijing Conference; the country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) in 1996 with reservations on articles "2, 9-2, 15-4, 16, 29", relating to marriage, adoption and the family.

Despite State endorsement of laws and international treaties that promote women's rights and gender equality, there is criticism of a commitment to women's protection in Algeria. The Algerian Women's Movement condemned the lack of application of the abovementioned legal protections as well as the delayed procedures and the lack of platforms and support mechanisms available to women.³ Further, the Algerian Family Code, adopted in 1984 and revised in 2005, is considered by civil society organizations to be unconstitutional, as it designates women as subordinate to their male family members.⁴ The Code links family organization to the patrilineal, agnatic type (kinship by males), following the Shari'a as a reference model. As a result, the sacredness of marriage is based on a system of guardianship that empowers men over women.⁵ The embedded gender power dynamics can lead to discrimination of women and normalization of violence and oppression.

Despite modest legal advances protecting and promoting the status of women, gender inequality is a cultural and societal norm and Algerian women face discrimination in the private and public spheres on a daily basis. In addition to the legal shortcomings, there is still social and institutional resistance to achieving gender equality and to the practical application of the limited legal mechanisms available to women. This leads to a continuation of violence in the private sphere, which remains significantly under-reported by women, particularly those in situations of economic and social dependence.⁶

METHODOLOGY

The study was designed with consideration of the local cultural, legal, and social context with regard to TFVAW. Global definitions and concepts of TFVAW were utilized and adapted to design a study specific to the context of Algeria and the surrounding region. Data was collected between September and December 2021 using the following three methods:

1. Anonymous online questionnaire

- a. Questionnaires were completed by 112 Algerian women who were victims of some type of online violence. Overall, 74 surveys were completed in French, 38 in Arabic.
- b. Each questionnaire contained 27 questions in three main sections:

³ "La Violence à l'égard des femmes, j'en parle", Nadia Ait-Zai, CIDDEF's publication, https://ciddef-dz.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/formes_violence_contre_les_femmes.pdf

"Les féministes algériennes toujours dans la rue : une révolution avec et pour les femmes"
<https://information.tv5monde.com/terriennes/les-feministes-algeriennes-toujours-dans-la-rue-une-revolution-avec-et-pour-les-femmes>

⁴ Family Code: based on the precepts of the Sharia, a set of laws governing marriage, conjugal life and inheritance.

⁵ Algeria: Women and families between law and reality - Zahia Ouadah-Bedidi and Nourredine Saadi, 2014

⁶ In Dec. 2021, the feminist group "Femicides Algeria" counted 55 women killed by male violence, nearly 5 women per month.

- i. Demographic information and use of digital platforms.
 - ii. Experiences and impact of TFVAW.
 - iii. Response to TFVAW and support accessed/needed.
- 2. Focus Groups
 - a. One focus group was conducted in Algiers with 8 participants; all participants were women who experience technology-facilitated violence
 - b. Objectives of the focus group were:
 - i. Identify and discuss approaches to protect and defend against TFVAW.
 - ii. Collect case examples.
- 3. Interviews
 - a. In-depth interviews were conducted with 8 women to better understand experiences with TFV.
 - b. All interviewees had directly experienced violence online and were and/or were advocates for protection of women's rights.
 - c. An interview was conducted with one lawyer in the field of defense of women's rights in Algeria to discuss legal protections specific to violence and harassment of women in digital spaces.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographics, Internet User Habits, And Gender Reflections

Study participants were ages 18 to 64 years. For the surveys, the majority of the respondents were from urban areas, in particular large cities such as Algiers, Oran and Constantine. The rest of the respondents were from small towns and cities such as Laghouat, Tougourt, Tiaret, Skikda, Tizi Ouzou and Mostaganem. Interviews and the focus group discussion were conducted with women from Algiers and Oran.

Regarding the social status of women, 71.44% of the respondents were single, 12.5% were married and had children, 6.25% were married without children, 8.03 % of the women were divorced, and 1.78% were in a non-marital relationship. As for the economic status, 69% of respondents were in paid employment (47% private sector, 22% public sector), 16% were students and 15% were without paid work (unemployed and/or housewives). Overall, 95% of the survey respondents use social networks on a regular or occasional basis; the remaining 5% reported to have stopped using social platforms. One common reason for cessation of social networking included social and professional burden and limited time. Another reason for discontinued use was negative experiences encountered on social media platforms, as explored under the discussion section of this paper.

Platforms Used

Results regarding platform usage were similar among interviews and surveys. The respondent age and type of activity affected the choice of the platform most commonly used. Survey responses demonstrated that most utilized platforms were: Facebook Messenger⁷ (88%),

⁷ Instant chat platform owned by Facebook.

Instagram (87%), WhatsApp (84%), Viber (64%), Snapchat (28%) and Twitter (21%). In addition, 11% of the survey respondents use the secure platform "Signal". SnapChat was used by the youngest respondents and Twitter was used by respondents who are professionally active in areas such as journalism and the information economy domains. Among the interviewees, Instagram and instant messaging applications (WhatsApp, Messenger, Viber) were used on a daily basis to share various content, learn about topics that interest them, interact with others (friends, family, work), and keep up with current events. Only 3 out of 8 women interviewed reported using Twitter as a quasi-main source of information. Negative sentiments were expressed regarding Facebook, by both interviewees and survey participants; Facebook was the most criticized application, for its negative atmosphere, the violence that can be experienced and/or observed, and the limited information resources it offers.

Awareness of Technology-Facilitated Violence

The study explored the awareness and knowledge of respondents with regard to TFVAW, as well as their ability to recognize their own risk and exposure. Of note, a few survey respondents denied experiencing digital violence, however endorsed experiencing harassment and attacks that would be considered digital violence, suggesting a lack of awareness of what constitutes TFVAW. However, 88% of the survey respondents declared that they were completely or somewhat aware of the concept of TFVAW. An effort was made to disseminate survey among women who previously experienced digital harms, and as a result, 97% of respondents indicated that they experienced online violence, specifically:

- Sexual harassment and blackmail⁸ (83%)
- Insults and harassment (60%)
- Harassment and intimidation (54%)
- Threats/blackmail/explosion (to divulge photos, to send exchanges to family, etc.) (42%)

Online Communication Patterns

In terms of communicating with the public, the survey results showed that respondents err on the side of caution. Although 85% reported that they communicate with strangers regularly or occasionally, 97% indicated that they take precautions when sharing their personal information in social networks and instant messaging platforms. There were three major precautions respondents take with regard to sharing information online: 1) only share photos or personal/sensitive information with "trusted" people 2) only share information with people the user knows in person, and 3), only share photos or videos in which the user is unrecognizable. These results indicate that even when respondents communicate with strangers online, they do so cautiously, without sharing personal information.

⁸ These two forms of violence were systematically clustered together in the responses, particularly in regards to demanding sexual favors which is both a sexual harassment and blackmail behavior.

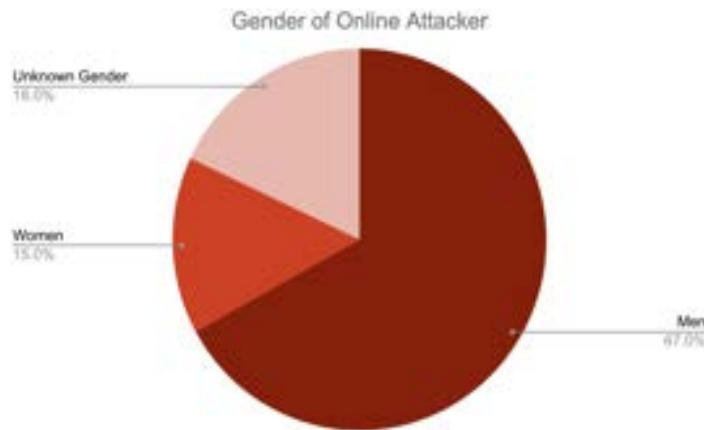
Interviews showed similar patterns, where 6 out of the 8 interviewed women stated that they had exchanges, occasionally, with people they do not know in person. Of note, the two women who refrained from such exchanges are both in serious relationships (one is married and one is in a long-term relationship). One of these two women clarified that she refrains from talking to strangers online to avoid conflict with her partner. The 6 women who did communicate with strangers, showed the same caution as indicated in the survey results; they reported first “investigating” the person before messaging them. Only three of the eight interviewees allowed public access to their social media accounts. All three noted that they have public profiles because of their jobs: one is a journalist, one is a lifestyle influencer, and one is the director of a cultural organization. The other five women had private accounts accessible to people they know or people they have vetted. All women interviewed, excluding the lifestyle influencer, posted very few personal pictures online, and they all did it in a very controlled way, so as to avoid negative and/or violent reactions, as well as non-consensual use of these pictures by others. Only three of the interviewees had their first and last name displayed on their social media accounts. The others used their first name and a pseudonym as a last name. None of the interviewed women put their personal contacts on their social media profiles.

While all interviewed women indicated that they sent their family and friends private pictures over social media, they also all confirmed that they only choose the pictures that would not be “controversial” if shared publicly. All of the women either had a direct experience or witnessed an experience of a woman/girl whose private photos had been shared without their consent.

User caution with using pseudonyms online or avoiding use of personal photos can be considered a form of strong digital safety practice. At the same time, there are elements of self-censorship to these practices. The self-prohibition exercised by women online to preserve their safety and reputation mirror the regulation of behaviors women practice in offline spaces, as a result of toxic masculinity and social expectations. Often, the regulation women practice is in response to negative experiences and/or fear of conflict and consequences demonstrate a control over women and their activity by their partners, family, and communities.

Offenders

Results of the survey indicated that most perpetrators (67%) are men, or people who identified as men; 18% of perpetrators were an unknown sexual/gender identity, and 15% were women or people who identified as women. Some survey respondents reported that their attackers/perpetrators were people that they trusted; 60.91% of attackers were known to the victim. In these cases, the trusted individual manipulated the victim and then used their personal data to harass them. Others reported that they were targeted because of their stance on political and/or social issues, or because of their profession or activism (journalists, activists, organizers, etc).



PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACT OF DIGITAL HARMS

As expected, online violence had a negative impact on all interviewed and surveyed women. Their reactions to the violence were generally based on the type of attack they experienced, and the impact, as well as other social factors. Most respondents report taking an action in response to the violence: 52% of survey respondents reported the aggressors' accounts on social media platforms. 12% of the respondents went to the police station to file a complaint and 16% confronted their aggressor.

Psychologically, fear was strongly associated with all forms of violence. Interviews demonstrated that the fear generated from an online attack extends beyond the online sphere. Three out of the eight women interviewed reported being afraid of physical attacks as a result of threats made by men online. These findings correlate with a Plan International study investigating TFWAW experiences with more than 14k girls, which found that 24% of those who experienced online harassment, reported feeling physically unsafe.⁹

The impact of digital violence also prompted significant changes in the digital practices of both interviewees and survey respondents. As a result of an attack, 48% of the women surveyed stopped using social media networks temporarily or permanently. Similarly, of the eight women interviewed, six said that they took breaks/withdrawals from their online accounts when experiencing or witnessing online harassment or violence caused too much psychological or emotional strain; breaks lasted a few days or several weeks. Seven of the eight interviewees also reported that they no longer engage with sensitive or controversial topics online, out of concern for negative or violent reactions from other users. Some of the avoided topics include religion, current events, feminism, and politics. One interviewed woman, a lifestyle influencer, reports highly regulating the topics and format of her photos/videos and ensuring she is modestly dressed, to mitigate negative responses from the public. Avoiding negative attention is a priority of the journalist interviewed as well, who posts information, news, and updates without her personal comment.

Survey respondents reported incidents against them having a negative psychological impact, with 48% indicating a deterioration of their emotional and psychological as the biggest impact of TFV;

⁹ <https://plan-international.org/publications/freetobeonline>

45% reported that TFV contributed to the deterioration of their professional, family, and/or social life.

Commons Psychosocial Impacts of Digital Violence

Individual interviews provided insight into cases of TFVAW and the individual consequences. Several themes were identified:

Silence and Isolation: All of the women interviewed reported that they do not disclose online harassment, violence, or attacks to their family, out of fear of negative response. As a result of keeping the harm to themselves, the individuals report feeling isolated.

Insomnia: Half of the interviewees reported periods of insomnia while experiencing online attacks and while dealing with the aftermath.

Anxiety & Stress: Two out of eight interviewees reported having physical symptoms of anxiety as a result of being the target of online violence. Symptoms include difficulty breathing, tachycardia, gestural tics, and clammy hands.

Panic Attacks: Two of the interviewees experienced panic attacks as a consequence of their experiences online.

Fear: Half of interviewees reported having fear of being recognized in-person in relation to the online attacks; the same women reported fear of being out in public alone. Nearly all of the women (7 out of 8) said they are fearful of their family and personal networks being exposed to their personal photos, videos, or communications.

Breakdown of Personal Relationships: Breakdown of relationships was discussed in the context of trusted contacts sharing information/photos without the victim's consent. Half of the women discussed cases where a formerly trusted contact distributed their photos, information, or communications without consent.

Loss of Confidence: All interviewees expressed a loss of confidence in people and distrust of strangers are negative experiences and cyberattacks or harassment.

Restrictions in Social Media Use: All interviewees reported that they censor their photos, posts, online communications, and social media engagement and interactions as a result of experiences with digital violence. Three of the women described their approach to online activity as "hypervigilance" and "paranoia".

Avoidance: All of the interviewees noted that they avoid encounters online, especially with strangers. Some admitted that this avoidance has reduced their social and professional opportunities.

Trivialization and Desensitization of Violence: Seven of the eight interviewees concurred that they trivialized and downplayed the violence that they experienced in order to move on and recover from the encounter.

Self-blame: The majority of the interviewees (6 of 8) questioned how their own actions and choices provoked violence. The women also expressed self-blame for allowing the incident to affect them psychologically.

In general, survey respondents discussed the psychosocial impacts of experiencing digital violence, and reported having anxiety, depression, fear, and a loss of trust in others and their decision-making. Some of the comments included:

“I no longer talk to people I don’t know.” - participant, 25 years old

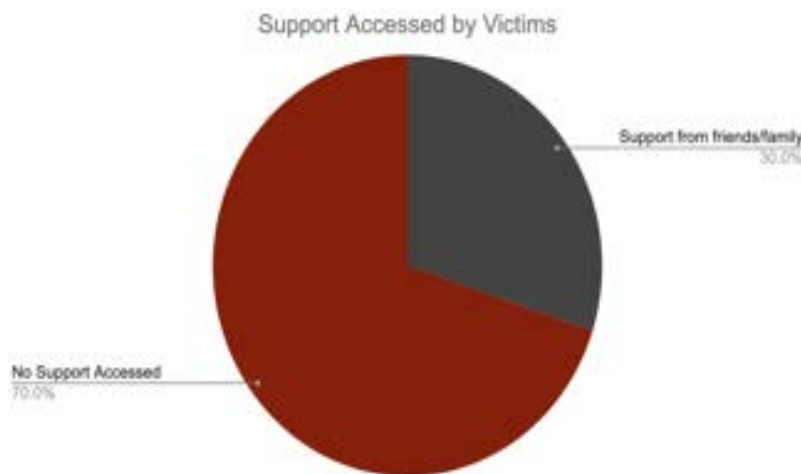
“I feel bad about myself.” - participant, 54 years old

“I noticed that the virtual world is even more violent than the real world.” - participant, 45 years old)

“I entered a circle of fear and anxiety.” - participant, 25 years old

Access to Support Following Instances of Online Violence

Enduring the challenges of TFV, victims accessed limited psychosocial support from family and friends. Very few of the survey respondents turned to family members for support: around 30% of women targeted by TFVAW sought support from friends or family. Overall, about 70% did nothing, indicating that they were afraid of the consequences of disclosing the event, because they did not think it was necessary to report the event, or they were unsure how to access support. Of the women who did disclose their abuse to their family/friends, a few reported experiencing further emotional or physical abuse in response.



Gender Dynamics in Online Space

The dynamics behind digital harms is an extension of gender norms in offline spaces. When women feel unsafe in the public sphere, they avoid harm or violence by leaving the public space altogether. For women who experience physical harm, threats, or harassment, there are often elements of victim-blaming, which deter people from reporting or sharing the attacks against

them. Furthermore, women often change or limit their activities and behaviors to avoid dangerous or uncomfortable situations. This creates a culture in which women do not express their opinions publicly out of fear of harassment or harm, effectively silencing women in some public spaces.

Sexuality and Threats to Women Online

Results from both questionnaires and interviews highlighted the sexualized nature of much of violence and harassment that women face online. In the survey responses and interviews, participants shared how the threats, harassment, and attacks against them were sexualized by the attacker. In cases of nonconsensual sharing of images, videos, or information, the threat almost always targeted the woman's sexuality; images or videos of the woman that were stolen/hacked or obtained on a false pretense were most threatening if they were deemed to be of a sexual nature or presented the woman in an immodest light. The participants also described receiving unwanted and persistent sexualized messages, photos, and harassment from their attackers. When attackers sent hateful messages or insults to or about the victim, the comments were often sexist or homophobic; many of these comments also had elements of racism. In extreme cases, women were threatened in public digital forums or through private channels with calls for physical violence, sexual assault, and death.

It is unsurprising that sexuality and sexism are present in most online attacks against women. All of the women interviewed for the study stated that men's unwanted or negative comments towards them online were systematically sexist or sexual. Even if the attack is driven by a political or social element, the harassment and negative comments almost always included sexist or sexualized comments/threats. For example:

"It's not just you're an enemy of the country, it's you're a whore AND an enemy of the country." - comment made online to a study participant, 34 years old

Threats and Silencing

In many cases, an attacker attempts to silence and control a woman's activities, through the use of threats and fear mongering of what may happen if they released her information, images, or communications. Attempts at silencing or controlling women's activities online extend beyond blatant attacks as well; survey participants describe that when posting content or interacting online, they have been approached by contacts and strangers advising them that their content is improper or likely to provoke a public response, advising them to remove or modify it. Survey respondents had similar experiences and some were advised by their contacts or family to limit and regulate their online content and activities, in order to avoid violence. Some participants endorsed this suggestion as well. While the intention of these comments are to protect women from digital harms, it creates an expectation that women should silence or censor themselves in order to avoid harm.

Intimate Partner Violence in Digital Spaces

Interviews showed that gender power dynamics in intimate relationships also extend to the online sphere, especially regarding male guardianship and control patterns. Of the eight women

interviewed, seven described having a partner who wanted to control their online activity and accounts, through regulating the types of images and content shared, restricting public images of the woman, and monitoring interactions and communications with people online. For relationships where intimate partner violence is present, the abuse, harassment, and control almost always involves technology, either through control of online activity and accounts, harassment conducted in online spaces, threats of non-consensual sharing using digital platforms, and hacking/theft of personal information and accounts, among others.

Gender Identity of the Attacker

The majority (67%) of attacks were reported as perpetrated by men and some by an unknown gender (18%). While women are not often highlighted as perpetrators of online attacks, 15% of violent acts were reportedly carried out by women. In the interviews, the motives of woman-facilitated violence were described as jealousy, wanting to harm the other person, revenge, and reputational attack. Participants felt that women rarely send private messages of violence but rather participate or lead in defamation campaigns and non-consensual sharing of images/information.

PROPOSED REFORMS

Study participants were asked for their input on solutions and techniques for preventing and responding to TFVAW. Several strategies were identified:

Role of Social Media Companies

Participants felt that social media companies have a role in responding to digital harms, specifically violence on their platforms. Platforms can take steps to improve the process for removing harmful content and accounts. Suggestions included automatic suspension of accounts when sexual harassment complaints are reported, as well as hotlines to access the social media platforms for faster support.

Strengthen Legal Protection and Build Gender Sensitivity Capacity

There are some protections under article 40 of the Algerian constitution to protect citizens from violence of all kinds, in addition to articles 30, 31, 32, 33 and 34 of the Algerian penal code that criminalize and penalize discriminatory and hate speech. Specific to digital context, Law 09-04 was passed in 2009 to prevent and combat offenses related to “Technologies of Information and Communication.” Several police and gendarmerie units respond to cybercrime in Algeria; Algerian lawyer Sihem Hammache describes the function of the legal process:

“Cybercrime is a broad and fairly new phenomenon. The penal code was amended a few years ago to include new concepts such as invasion of privacy, hate speech, etc. Filing a complaint is the only way to start a legal procedure against the perpetrator of technology-facilitated violence. If a person is a victim of any form of violence--such as insults, threats, theft and dissemination of photos with consent--they can file a complaint with a unit specialized in cybercrime. These complaints are taken very seriously and conviction often takes place. The offender risks up to one year in prison when the victim is minor.”

The law now covers all offenses related to cybercrime, the security services have specialized units, and the professionals who work there (judges, experts, police officers, gendarmes) receive regular technical training on the issue. However, there are two major issues with regard to the legal response to cybercrime. First, complaints are rarely filed, and second, people working in this unit lack gender sensitivity.

Interview participants gave the following reasons for not reporting crimes to authorities: lack of awareness of the fact that the violence they experience constitutes a criminal offense, the length of the procedure, fear that the people around them will be informed and will therefore have access to the content that has been disseminated, and finally, fear of victim blaming. From the survey, some respondents pointed to a need to strengthen the legal mechanisms responding to TFVAW, whether preventive or punitive, with dedicated laws that are accompanied by implementation strategies. It is possible that respondents are not aware of the existing laws, or that they feel the current laws are insufficient. It is also possible that authorities are not trusted to implement the law, and may cause secondary victimization to women who decide to report, such as the example below from an interviewee:

“There was an awareness campaign on cyber-stalking against women in my school. There were police officers and law enforcement, all I could remember was that whatever the situation was, it was the girls’ fault and the guy would just be considered crazy. They explained that we could file a complaint ‘but...’ There was always ‘but’ it will be your fault. So, I understood that I would never file a complaint, they wouldn't do anything and that they would blame me. Their response to the girls who presented their problems was "Why did you post that? You have to be careful how you dress, you don't have to take off your hijab." It was a bit like propaganda. We were shocked a little bit but I saw that the majority agreed with the ‘It's true, it's her fault’ approach because of the internalized misogyny. Even the principal and the supervisor supported the fact that "you have to be careful too." -participant, 18 years old

Apart from the police/gendarmerie's cybercrime services, there are no specialized services for TFVAW. Victims can access the same support services available for victims of offline violence, which are limited and not comprehensive across the country, particularly outside of major cities. There are only five national shelters for women survivors of violence supported by centers owned by women's/feminist associations. These shelters will receive women who were subjected to cybercrime *only* if they were subjected to other forms of violence. Also, their employees are not trained in TFVAW and its unique psychosocial consequences. While services specialized in TFVAW may not be necessary, it is crucial to equip all service providers of gender-based violence (GBV) support with the necessary knowledge and tools to be able to support victims of TFVAW.

Psychosocial Support for Victims of TFV

Other responses from the survey focused on the need for care and support to victims of TFVAW. Suggestions included the creation of specialized gender-sensitive care and support units within government agencies for victims/survivors, to avoid secondary trauma/victimization during the reporting process. Group therapy and peer support groups were also suggested, as a way for women and girls to process the negative emotions associated with the violence. Many of the study participants described lasting psychosocial impacts from the digital harm they experienced;

integration of TFVAW-support into all GBV programming would be an important step in supporting victims.

Awareness Raising

Public awareness of TFVAW was also indicated as a key step for preventing and responding to digital harms targeting women. Awareness raising should cover the basic concepts of TFVAW as well as promote available support for victims. This study demonstrates the urgent need for the general public to better understand and recognize TFVAW, its forms, and repercussions in order to reduce victim-blaming and improve the community response. There have been recent examples of public institutions (the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family and Women's Affairs, etc.) implementing awareness campaigns on digital violence. In addition, there are some initiatives for awareness-raising undertaken by activists and civil society actors. However, these efforts can be increased, reinforced, and more inclusive.

Awareness raising becomes crucial for vulnerable groups. The study revealed that girls are targeted online as young as 13-18 years old. It is critical that school-aged boys and girls are aware of TFVAW, the risks, and the impact on victims. While awareness efforts do currently take place in school, study participants describe problematic messaging that perpetuate the idea that women and girls are responsible for the violence inflicted on them.

CONCLUSION

The study allowed for an initial exploration into the experiences of Algerian women and digital harms. Though non-exhaustive, the study provided insight on the psychosocial consequences of TFVAW and how some women have responded, with many shared themes and impacts as violence conducted in physical spaces. Digital harms are as dangerous as violence in the public sphere and, in fact, have their own unique challenges and risks. As discussed, the anonymity afforded to attackers online and the rapid spread of information online are two major factors in the severity of digital threats to women. Further, legal and social structures do not adequately support women who are victims of digital violence.

Gender power dynamics were also endorsed by the survey and interview responses. Male superiority and guardianship over women, the masculinity of the public space and women's submissiveness are all issues that emerged from the study, confirming that the offline gender dynamics extended to the online sphere, in some cases to a greater extent. Technology is another tool to control and subordinate women, and it is being used for this purpose every day.

The study has generally found that the road is still long to achieve the desired levels of awareness of TFVAW as well as adequate responses on the part of state officials, civil society, society and social media platforms. Many women do see the digital sphere as a space where they can access opportunity, community, and freedom of speech; ensuring online spaces is safe for women is an absolute necessity.

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