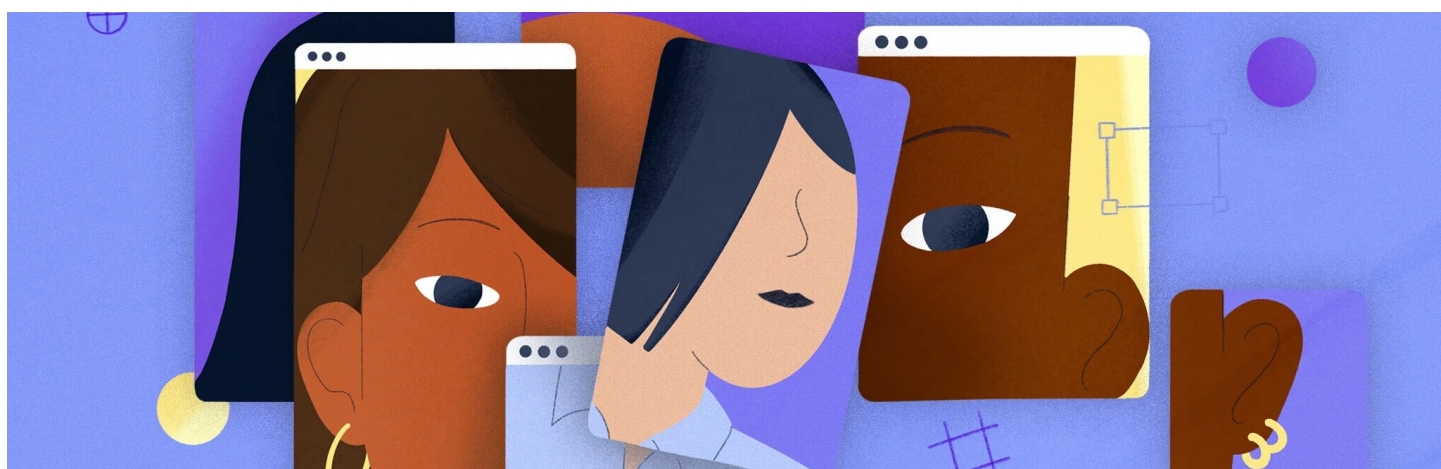# FAQs: Trolling, stalking, doxing and other forms of violence against women in the digital age

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As digital technology mediates more and more of our daily lives, it is also facilitating new and heightened forms of gender-based violence. Online violence against women and girls, though not a new phenomenon, has escalated rapidly in recent years posing significant threats to women's safety and well-being both online and off. This underscores the urgent need to protect and uphold women's rights in

the digital era.

How prevalent is online and digital violence against women and girls?

According to the Institute of Development Studies, between 16-58 per cent of women have experienced technology-facilitated gender-based violence. The Economist Intelligence Unit found that 38 per cent of women have had personal experiences of online violence, and 85 per cent of women who spend time online have witnessed digital violence against other women.

The most common forms of violence reported were misinformation and defamation (67 per cent), cyber harassment (66 per cent), hate speech (65 per cent), impersonation (63 per cent), hacking and stalking (63 per cent), astroturfing (a coordinated effort to concurrently share damaging content across platforms, 58 per cent), video and image-based abuse (57 per cent), doxing (55 per cent), violent threats (52 per cent), and unwanted images or sexually explicit content (43 per cent).

Data from different regions point to a universal problem. A UN Women study in the Arab States region found that 60 per cent of women internet users had been exposed to online violence. A study of five countries in sub-Saharan Africa found that 28 per cent of women had experienced online violence. A 2017 survey of women aged 18 – 55 in Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA found that 23 per cent of women reported at least one experience of online abuse or harassment.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased digital violence as women and girls moved online for work, school and social activities. In Australia, there was a 210 per cent increase in image-based abuse linked to the pandemic. Data from India, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia showed a 168 per cent increase in the volume of misogynistic online posts during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Prior to the pandemic, <u>38 per cent of women surveyed experienced online abuse</u>, with 27 per cent reporting increased online abuse during the pandemic. Black and minoritised women reported higher rates: 50 per cent reported online abuse before the pandemic and 38 per cent reported an increase during COVID-19.

Who is at risk of online and digital gender-based violence?

It affects women and girls in all their diversity, but certain groups are at heightened risk. Women who face multiple forms of discrimination, including <u>women with disabilities, Black and indigenous women and other women of colour, migrant women and LGBTIQ+ people, are all disproportionately affected</u>.

Young women and girls, who are more likely to use tech for learning, accessing information and connecting to peers, also face increased exposure to online violence. One global study found that <u>58 per cent of girls and young women have experienced some form of online harassment</u>.

Women in public life—human rights defenders, activists, journalists and lawmakers—face increased rates of violence too. UNESCO found that <u>73 percent of women journalists experienced online violence</u> in the course of their work.

What is UN Women doing about violence in the digital age?

Addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence is part of UN Women's broader approach to ending violence against women and girls. This includes developing and adapting laws and policies to prevent and respond to digital violence, bridging data and research gaps, adapting essential services to support survivors, and working to prevent technology-facilitated gender-based violence in the first place by transforming social

norms and engaging men and boys.

The [67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67)](#) acknowledged the critical role of technology and innovation in achieving gender equality and pushed for more investments to reduce the gender digital gap, inclusive innovation environments, and safe, gender-responsive technology and innovation.

UN Women is also addressing the issue through [Generation Equality](#) by scaling up prevention programming, boosting survivor services, providing support to feminist organizations and more.

What more needs to happen to eliminate violence in the digital world?

1. **Enhance cooperation** between governments, the technology sector, women's rights organizations and civil society to strengthen policies.
2. **Address data gaps** to increase understanding about the drivers of violence and the profiles of perpetrators and to inform prevention and response efforts.
3. **Develop and implement laws and regulations** with the participation of survivors and women's organizations.
4. **Develop standards of accountability** for Internet intermediaries and technology sector to enhance transparency and accountability on digital violence and the use of data.
5. **Integrate digital citizenship and ethical use of digital tools** into school curricula to foster positive social norms online and off, sensitize young people—especially young men and boys—caregivers, and educators to ethical and responsible online behaviour.
6. **Strengthen collective action** of public and private sector entities and women's rights organizations.
7. **Empower women and girls to participate and lead** in the technology sector to

inform the design and use of safe digital tools and spaces free of violence.

8. Ensure that public and private sector entities **prioritize the prevention and elimination** of digital violence, through human rights-based design approaches and adequate investments.

Additional resources

- Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General (2022)
- Accelerating efforts to tackle online and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls: UN Women policy brief
- Stepping up action to prevent and respond to online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls
- Normative frameworks on gender perspectives in technology and innovation
- Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19
- Online violence against women in Asia: A multicountry study
- Violence against women in the online space: Insights from a multi-country study in the Arab States
- Violencia contra mujeres y niñas en el espacio digital: Lo que es virtual también es real

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