

# Digital Violence Against Youth in Morocco

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# Acknowledgment

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*This study was originally written in Arabic. You can find the original version [here](#).*

## The SecDev Foundation

The SecDev Foundation's Salama@ team supported this research as part of a [series of 20+ studies](#) on the psychosocial and legal dimensions of digital violence against women across the MENA region. Responsibility for any views expressed in this study rests with the research and editorial teams. Since 2011, this Canada-based NGO has worked globally to promote digital resilience among vulnerable populations—especially women, youth and at-risk civil society organizations.



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## Introduction

Violence is a sociological and humanitarian phenomenon that has been extensively studied to better understand its scope, dimensions, and relationships with other human phenomena.

A common understanding of violence<sup>1</sup> includes acts of aggression, unkindness, blaming, and scolding. Technically, it refers to the use of pressure or force that is illegal or contrary to the law to influence the will of individuals. These definitions have undergone significant transformations due to advancements in human and scientific development.

With the rise of the Internet as well as the widespread use of mobile devices and social media, a new form of violence has emerged, known as virtual or digital violence. This phenomenon has become pervasive and affects individuals and communities across demographics and geographies. The increase in the availability and accessibility<sup>2</sup> of the Internet and social media has contributed to the normalization and acceptance of digital violence, making it a complex and pressing social issue. This issue has been exacerbated by the prevalence of violent content in various forms of media, including video games, televisions, and films.

The difficulty of understanding and examining the phenomenon of violence is becoming increasingly challenging, owing to its inherent ambiguity and resistance to being subjected to scientific statistical analysis. This limits our ability to interpret the data obtained from digital statistics, leading to an inaccurate representation of its scope and detrimental consequences. This is attributed to the unavailability of official statistics and reluctance of many victims to report incidents. Despite the various rates of violence across different societies, there is consensus regarding the gravity of this phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

The report issued by the High Commission for Planning in 2019, which addressed violence against women in Morocco, including "digital violence," comprised a sample of 12,000 women and 3,000 men aged between 15 and 74 years. The prevalence of digital violence was 14 %. That is, nearly 1.5 million women were victimized through digital means such as email, phone calls, and SMS messages. The likelihood of experiencing digital violence increased to 16% among urban women, 29% among young women aged 15-19, 25% among women with postgraduate degrees, 30% among single women, and 34% among male and female students.<sup>4</sup>

In 77% of the identified cases, perpetrators of digital violence were unknown to victims. The remaining cases were divided roughly equally among individuals with a pre-existing relationship with the victim, including partners (4%), family members (4%), co-workers (4%), friends (4%), and those in the same field of study (4%).

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<sup>1</sup> The word violence comes from the Latin word *violentia*, which means brutal features in addition to force, and the verb *violare*, which means to act with roughness, violence, desecration, violation, and violation. Violence refers to a group of activities that expresses an emotional state accompanied by harm or harm directed against an individual or group. The meaning of the word in the Arabic language is close to its English counterpart, violence, which refers to the illegal use of physical force in several ways to harm people and damage property.

<sup>2</sup> The Internet is increasingly viewed as a necessity and a basic human right; therefore, it has become necessary to ensure that this digital public space is a safe and empowering place for everyone, regardless of gender and age.

<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that one in ten women has been a victim of some form of digital violence.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the High Commission for Planning on Violence Against Women for 2019.

This study sought to elucidate the intrinsic nature of the psychological and social consequences of digital violence as a new form of aggression by critically examining its forms, root causes, and existing coping mechanisms, whether at the legal or institutional level.

This field study was conducted under the supervision of the "Salamat" program administered by [The SecDev Foundation](#), which involved a sample of 100 individuals between the ages of 16 and 21, representing approximately one-third of Morocco's total population in that age range. Despite Morocco's enactment of legislation criminalizing violence against women and the implementation of numerous reforms and measures to mitigate this issue in recent years, a significant proportion of women still experience digital violence in various forms.

This study also encompasses the perspectives of 15 distinguished professionals and activists regarding combating all forms of violence and discrimination against women, including digital violence.

It is worth mentioning that the Digital Safety Program/Morocco is developing user-friendly electronic platforms for digital safety guidelines and offering training courses on the fundamentals of digital safety. They also provided direct online training to support the expansion of local networks for digital advocacy and awareness.

## Aim of the Study

This study aimed to investigate various aspects of digital violence and understand its nature, diverse forms, root causes, and the age groups that are most susceptible to it. Additionally, it examines the legal strategies employed to combat it, and the psychological and social support provided to victims. To this end, a questionnaire was used to address a crucial set of inquiries.

## Research Questions

To address the issues related to this study, six pivotal questions were posed.

1. What are the digital risks associated with social media use among young people in Morocco?
2. What percentage of young individuals in Morocco is exposed to digital violence?
3. What are the most common types of digital violence experienced by young people, and do these types differ between men and women?
4. How do young men and women react to digital violence, and are there any differences in reactions between the sexes?
5. What are the psychological and social impacts of digital violence on young men and women and are there any differences in the effects between the sexes?
6. Are young people in Morocco aware of legislation and programs designed to protect themselves from all forms of digital violence?

## Methodology

The present investigation comprised three distinct phases, namely, a thorough review of previous reports and studies on digital violence, a questionnaire administered to a sample of individuals aged between 16 and 21 years, and interviews with key stakeholders in the field.

Gender		Age Groups			Education			
Men	Women	16-18	19-21	21>	Elementary	High School	University	Vocational
27%	73%	21.9%	15.5%	62.5%	10%	15%	67%	8%
Regions								
Casablanca-Settat	Rabat-Salé-Kénitra	Béni Mellal-Khénifra	Drâa-Tafilalet	Souss-Massa	Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceïma	Fès-Meknès	Guelmim-Oued Noun	Marrakech-Safi
12%	28%	4%	3%	12%	31%	2%	1%	6%

### Desk Review

This study utilized previous studies on youth, the digital world, use of social media platforms, digital violence, and cybersecurity legislation. Of particular importance were the findings of the High Commission for Planning on violence against women in 2019, a study on digital violence against women in Morocco conducted by the Challenge Association for Equality, and another study conducted by the SecDev Foundation and Academy of Education and Training of the Fez-Meknes region investigating Law No. 103.13, related to combating violence against women; and Law No. 05.20, related to cybersecurity and criminal law, respectively. Relevant legal texts and studies were examined to accurately define the legal elements of certain forms of digital violence that fall within the realm of criminal law.

### Field Work

Field research incorporates two approaches to defining research questions, using quantitative and qualitative data.

### Questionnaire

This study included a sample of men and women aged 14–21 years who resided in urban and peri-urban regions and were recruited through the project's partner associations and educational institutions. The questionnaire was crafted by considering several critical factors, including the prevalence of social media, diversity of social media platforms, complexity of digital violence, various forms of abuse, and risk-reduction strategies. The questionnaire also accounted for the situation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions on social interactions.

The questionnaire included the following questions.

- Demographic factors of respondents
- Use of digital platforms.
- Type and frequency of use.
- The purpose of using social media platforms.
- Time spent by young people on digital platforms.
- Topics of interest.
- Exposure to digital violence.
- Forms of digital violence.
- Perceptions of digital violence.
- Psychological impact of digital violence.
- Social impact of digital violence.
- Awareness of legislation or digital risk reduction programs.

To further understand digital violence, the questions included the following forms of digital violence:

- Cyberbullying.
- Intimidation, threat, or blackmailing messages.
- Sexual harassment through non-consensual sexual messages that include explicit images without the recipient's consent.
- Disclosure of personal information.
- Negative impact through games that lead to psychological violence.
- Hate speech.
- Violent extremism.

## Individual Interviews

Fifteen experts and activists were identified to conduct further research on initiatives and programs that have been launched or can be developed to guide and protect young people in the digital world (Appendix 2). The interviews enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind digital violence as well as the methods used to protect young people from this type of violence and to report incidents of violence. Additionally, we gathered information on the difficulties faced by associations in supporting DV victims and proposed programs, policies, and legislation to address this issue. A guide outlining the central questions addressed during the interviews was prepared (see Appendix 3).



# Part 1: Definitions, Types, and Characteristics of Digital Violence

## Definition of Digital Violence

Definitions of digital violence are an essential requirement for comprehending the phenomenon, irrespective of the challenges involved in defining its meaning, owing to the disparate scientific approaches used to define it and its connections to other concepts, as well as the various intellectual and ideological starting points of researchers. Disciplines, such as psychology, law, politics, sociology, anthropology, and education, play a role in understanding digital violence, which involves the use of electronic means to cause harm or exert pressure on another individual, either morally, psychologically, materially, physically, or through coercion. This form of violence is symbolic in nature<sup>5</sup>, but can result in physical violence, and its perpetrators use modern communication and information technologies to impose their ideas and beliefs and dominate others by robbing victims of their will. The technologies involved include electronic devices, social media platforms, and text messages to achieve diverse objectives.

According to the most recent report from the High Commission for Planning,<sup>6</sup> which analyzed the results of national research on violence against women and men in 2019, including digital violence, it showed that approximately 1.5 million Moroccan women are victims of digital violence, representing a prevalence rate of 13%, the majority was in urban areas. Furthermore, the report indicates that digital violence is particularly prevalent among young women aged 15–24 years, those with higher education, single women, and male and female students. The commission attributes these rates to the widespread use of communication technology and social media platforms among this demographic, with the perpetrators of digital violence being predominantly men (86.2%) and unknown men (72.6%) being the most common perpetrators.

On Tuesday, December 7, 2021, the Digital Development Agency and the National Coordination Committee introduced the National Platform for Electronic Protection, e-Himaya, with the objective of safeguarding children from digital violence while adhering to relevant laws and institutional efforts in this field. This platform was designed to promote the dissemination of digital tools and enhance their utilization among citizens.

The initial version of the "e-Himaya" platform is available in both Arabic and French. This platform provides a wealth of useful information and advice, presented in a fun and engaging manner, in addition to practical tips and techniques for enhancing digital security and safeguarding children from the dangers of the internet.

The content is designed to support and foster the education of children and young people through digital technology, and it provides a means for them to take advantage of digital technology while also enabling and encouraging parents and guardians to supervise and guide their children's use.

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu described it as "a quiet, hidden violence that is dormant, invisible and imperceptible even to its victims."

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.hcp.ma/attachment/1813186/>



## Digital Violence According to the Interviewed Sample

The majority of the sample respondents perceived digital violence as a new and emerging form of violence committed by utilizing information and communication technologies, either through the Internet or mobile phones. The respondents believed that women are typical and potential victims of digital violence, transforming it into an extension and translation of reality as it represents a continuum of offline violence.

In addition, most respondents in this study were women, accounting for 72% of the total, while 27% were men. Several factors, including social and cultural influences, have contributed to these percentages. The educational level of the respondents was also examined, with 68% of them being educated. Most respondents (66%) held a university education, 10% held a middle school education, and 14% held a high school diploma. A small percentage (8%) of the respondents held vocational training. These percentages are consistent with the findings of the High Commission for Planning, which concluded that a higher educational level does not necessarily protect women from violence.

## Forms of Digital Violence

Digital violence is not distinct from real violence, except for the methods used by perpetrators. An examination of the most prevalent forms of violence, as documented in the questionnaire and through individual interviews, led to the identification of various forms of violence (see Appendix 1), the most prominent of which are:

- Virtual sexual harassment.
- Cyber stalking.
- Abusive direct text messages.
- Posting offensive comments.
- Sharing intimate photos or videos of the victim via either the Internet or mobile phones.
- Sarcasm, mockery, and bullying.
- Sending pornographic materials.
- Posting personal information.
- Cursing.
- Slandering.
- Verbal violence on social media sites, whether against natural or legal persons, for example, students towards their institutions or professors.
- Sexual blackmail.
- Threatening to publish disgraceful matters.
- Increase in cyber harassment.
- Threat of physical or sexual violence.
- Incitement to hatred.
- Insults due to gender or personal circumstances, such as disability.
- Live broadcast of sexual harassment or assault.

## Characteristics of Digital Violence

Digital violence possesses a set of characteristics that differentiate it from conventional violence, which can be summarized as follows:

- The crime scene is a virtual space.
- The perpetrator needs a computer, phone, or an electronic device.
- The perpetrator is characterized by intelligence.
- The victim is alone in front of a computer or a phone.
- Most of the perpetrators are educated.
- Experience and skills with information, especially in some types of digital violence.
- Transnational behavior.

## Reasons for Digital Violence<sup>7</sup>

This study revealed that the diversity and multiplicity of digital violence can be primarily attributed to the following factors:

- Information technology has invaded human life and created new relationships and phenomena.
- Disclosing the perpetrator's virtual identity is challenging.
- Imitation of digital violence by teenagers.
- The desire for revenge and the ease of executing it via the Internet.
- Committing digital violence is often perpetrated through amusement or vanity.
- Feelings of inadequacy or inferiority may prompt individuals to seek validation, albeit negatively.
- Environmental and societal factors have been attributed to the steady increase in digital violence practiced in society.
- The desire to accumulate wealth is a potent motivator for perpetrators to engage in sexual extortion, which, in some instances, is transnational.
- A societal culture exists wherein certain members engage in digital violence as an acceptable behavior, particularly towards specific groups, owing to their sexual orientation or beliefs.

## Legislative Control of Digital Violence

In accordance with similar regulations, the Moroccan legislature has implemented a range of measures and legislative instruments to address digital violence against women, which often involve the exploitation of inappropriate images for the purpose of extortion, coercion, or violation of one's dignity.

With regard to Law No. 103.13, enacted in 2018, aims to combat violence against women, including digital violence, and includes a range of important protective and injunctive measures. Specifically, the first article of the law criminalizes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence regardless of the means used. Furthermore, Chapter 404 of the law criminalized violence perpetrated

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<sup>7</sup> Voir: Roland Coutanceau, Joanna Smith, *Violences psychologiques, comprendre pour agir*, Édition Dunod, 2014.

Digital violence in Morocco: An analytical study prepared by the Challenge Association for Equality and Citizenship on digital violence against women in Morocco, 2020.

Sexual violence against women and girls in the Middle East and North Africa: A study prepared by the Nazra Group for Feminist Studies, 2016.

against a woman due to the victim's gender or any special circumstances such as disability, mental weakness, or being a minor.

Under the provisions of Chapter 88-1 of the Criminal Code, a range of offenses against minors, including harassment, assault, sexual exploitation, mistreatment, and violence, are criminalized, regardless of their nature. In addition, the Code has also criminalized insults and defamation against women based on their gender under Articles 444-1 and 447-1. The issue of blackmail and threats of posting victims' matters, which impose a sentence of imprisonment for one to five years, has also been addressed under Article 538 of the Code.

According to the Moroccan Law, reference to digital violence was not explicitly stated as one of the four forms of violence, namely economic, psychological, sexual, and physical, but was mentioned in miscellaneous legal texts under Law No. 103.13, which is considered of low importance given the significant nature of digital violence.<sup>8</sup>

**The discussion of digital violence penalties is presented below, in accordance with the provisions of the law:**

Chapters 1–447 state that any individual who unlawfully, by any means including information systems, captures, records, broadcasts, or disseminates private or confidential statements or information without the consent of the owner, shall be subject to imprisonment for a term ranging from six months to three years and a fine ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 dirhams (USD 193-1933).

The same penalty shall be applicable to any individual who intentionally and through any means records, broadcasts, or distributes the image of an individual in a private place without their consent.

Chapter 2-447 states that any individual who unlawfully, by any means including information systems, broadcasts, or disseminates compositions, including those that consist of a person's words or images, without their consent, distributes, or broadcasts false allegations or claims intending to harm a person's private life, reputation, or defaming them, shall be subject to imprisonment for a term ranging from one year to three years and a fine ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 dirhams (USD 193-1933).

Chapter 1-1-503 states that any individual is considered to have committed the crime of sexual harassment and shall be punished by imprisonment from one month to six months and a fine of 2,000 to 10,000 dirhams (USD 193-1933) or by one in the following cases:

- In public spaces or elsewhere, verbal, physical, or gestural actions of a sexual nature or with the intention of a sexual purpose.
- Through written, telephone, or electronic messages, recordings or images of a sexual nature or for sexual purposes.

Morocco has enacted additional legislation to complement its cybersecurity regime, including Law 07-03, which complements the criminal code to address disruptions to automated data processing systems, as covered in Chapters 3-607 to 11-607 of the law, which provides punishment for offenses and their corresponding penalties.

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<sup>8</sup> Statement by Hamad Al-Maliki, a lawyer at the Casablanca Authority, to Channel 2M on December 13, 2020.

Law No. 53.05, which pertains to the electronic exchange of legal data, was enacted, in addition to Law No. 08.09, which was implemented to safeguard personal data by prohibiting unlawful violations or misuse of such information.

In addition, Law No. 31.08, emphasizes measures to safeguard the interests of consumers in the specified category, which aim to ensure the protection of consumers engaged in online transactions.

To complement this legislative arsenal, Law No. 05.20, related to cybersecurity, aimed to protect the information systems and networks of institutions as well as operators of public transportation networks, Internet service providers, cybersecurity service providers, digital service providers, and Internet platform publishers.

## Part 2: Digital Violence from the Perspective of the Research Sample

The results of this study, which were conducted in accordance with the previously mentioned methodology and mechanisms, indicate that digital violence is a pervasive social problem, and that a digital phenomenon that is growing in scope (all age groups, both sexes, and all educational levels) in the world is facilitated by the increasing prevalence of virtual or digital interactions in human relationships.

**Based on gender, the survey included 100 individuals, with 72.9% women and 27.1% men.**

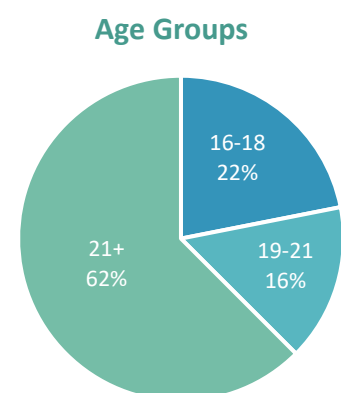
The results show that women's participation is higher than that of men and that the percentage of women who are more susceptible to digital violence is significantly higher than that of men. This can be attributed to several factors.<sup>9</sup>

- Women tend to use electronic communication channels more than men.<sup>10</sup>
- Women's beliefs about the usefulness of field studies in providing realistic solutions to this phenomenon.
- The psychological impact of digital violence on women is because of their fear of disclosing such incidents.
- Dominance of Male Culture.
- Discrimination against women's exposure
- Women's personalities and psychological and physiological makeup make them vulnerable to societal pressures and challenges.

**The respondents were classified into three age groups:**

- The first group, encompassing those aged 16 to 18, comprised 22% of the sample.
- The second group (between 19 and 21 years) comprised 16% of the sample.
- The third group (aged >21 years) comprised 62% of the sample.

The age group of 21 years and older was described as the adult sample and was the most vulnerable to digital violence. This is consistent with the group's willingness to use computers and mobile phones, with their availability on social media platforms where networks of multiple relationships are created, including people from different directions, even if they are anonymous or pseudonyms. This category uses various online applications that do not provide personal data.



<sup>9</sup> These determinants were inferred from the results of the questionnaire and interviews.

<sup>10</sup> This idea is consistent with research by the National Agency for the Regulation of Transport in 2020, which stated that the percentage of female participation in social media networks was 98%, compared with 97.9% for males.

Most of the respondents did not take the necessary precautions to protect their private data. They often use their real names, pictures, and private information; thus, they are vulnerable to sexual blackmail or the threat of exchanging pornographic images in exchange for money, as confirmed by experts.

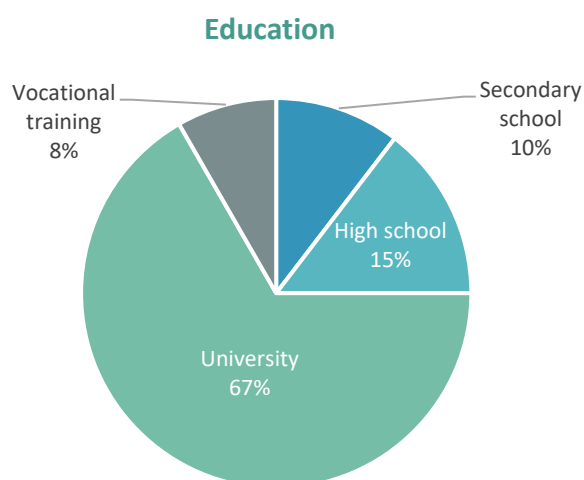
With regard to the age group encompassing 16–18 years (21.9%), it was observed that they had a keen interest in communication technology services, particularly electronic games. However, they remain susceptible to various forms of digital violence owing to the lack of awareness campaigns targeting Internet users regarding the potential dangers of the Internet.

Concerning the age group between 19 and 21 years, which comprised 15.6% of the sample, it is worth noting that this is the lowest among all age groups. An explanation for this, as experts in the field have observed, is that this particular age group tends to benefit from awareness campaigns conducted within educational institutions, particularly at the secondary level. In addition, they received training in information technology, which enabled them to safeguard their personal data by setting robust passwords for their electronic accounts.

### Their educational backgrounds were as follows:

- Secondary school: 10%
- High school: 15%
- University: 67%
- Vocational training: 8%

Based on the data, it is apparent that a substantial proportion of victims are affiliated with universities, which is attributed to the excessive and unintentional utilization of information and communication technology coupled with the lack of digital security measures to prevent exposure to digital violence. Additionally, trust in virtual relationships is a contributing factor, as noted by experts. Secondary and high school students are preoccupied with academic pursuits and achievements compared with university students. The vocational training group recorded the lowest percentage at 8.3%, which may be due to a lack of interest in information technology or having received technical training that equips them to avoid digital threats, as indicated by the sample group interviewed.

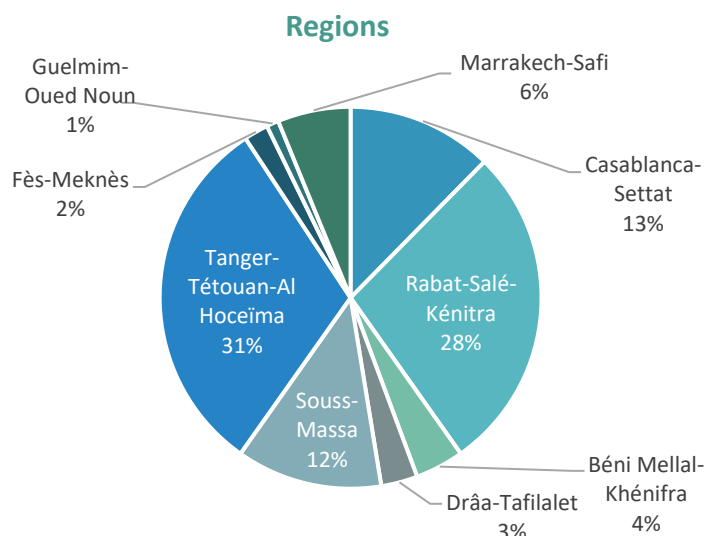


### Exposure by region:

- Tanger-Tetouan: 31%
- Rabat-Salé-Kénitra: 28%
- Casablanca-Settat: 13%
- Marrakesh-Safi: 6%

Respondents from the regions with the largest population densities, namely the Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, and Casablanca-Settat regions, recorded the highest rates of exposure to digital violence in the sample population. This is due to the prevalence of a culture of openness

and civil sense in these regions, which has resulted in increased vulnerability to acts of violence, both in reality and virtual spaces. Conversely, other regions with more conservative cultural backgrounds are less susceptible to such acts of violence because of their limited access to information technology. This disparity highlights the social and material factors that play a fundamental role in possessing information technology devices, which are not available to those who suffer from isolation, marginalization, and difficult social reality in some areas.



### Exposure by employment field:

- Civil society organizations: 22%
- Unemployed: 18%
- Academic field: 9%
- Legal field: 7%
- Medical field: 5%

The data indicate that individuals employed in civil society organizations, the medical sector, and academic circles are at high risk of experiencing digital violence because of their strong and continuous interaction with the public. As such, incidents of digital violence have increased as these individuals engage more frequently with them. For example, human rights activists—both men and women—have been exposed to defamation, bullying, insults, blackmail, and other forms of digital abuse because of their civil work in defending human rights.



## Forms of digital violence:

- Comment or message: 31%
- Sending photos: 22%
- Sending links: 7%
- Sending pictures or emoticons: 6%

Comments and messages ranked highest in the form of digital violence at 31%, and their content often included derogatory language, hate speech, bullying, threats, and blackmail. The widespread occurrence of this form of violence is attributed to a lack of awareness among Internet users, particularly those on social media, regarding the legal and ethical dimensions of virtual communities. In the absence of digital citizenship education and the consequences of such behavior, users tend to engage in irresponsible digital activities, thereby victimizing other users, primarily women.

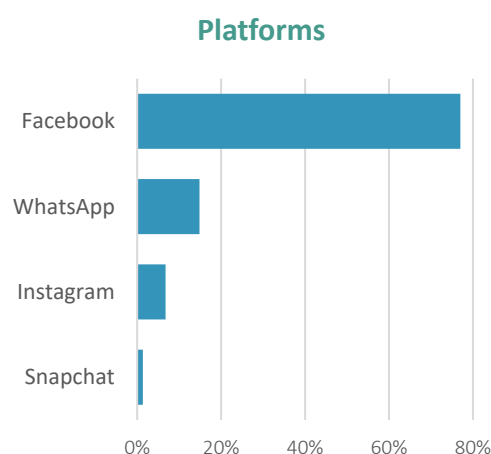
Second, sending sexually explicit images at a frequency of 22% is commonly used as an introduction to sexual harassment or to express the desire for a sexual relationship. This may be followed by repeated communication, whether in the form of voice or video, to harass the other parties. Additionally, these images may contain speech that promotes hatred, bullying, misogyny, or incites violence against certain values.

The third ranking is sending links, which accounts for 7% of all forms of digital violence. These are easily accessible to anyone seeking to victimize others digitally. For example, a perpetrator may use these links to hack a victim's personal accounts such as social media accounts, bank accounts, or email. To accomplish this, perpetrators may use techniques such as social engineering to manipulate the victim's thoughts and actions, leading them to click on the link without realizing danger. Unfortunately, many individuals are unaware of digital safety and security measures, making them vulnerable to digital violence.

## Social media platforms used:

- Facebook: 77%
- WhatsApp: 15%
- Instagram: 7%
- Snapchat: 1%

The findings indicate that Facebook remains the most prevalent social media platform utilized by respondents and is also a platform where various instances of digital violence occur, as the majority of respondents reported experiencing such incidents on this platform. Conversely, the lack of digital security awareness among young individuals exposes them to the risk of digital violence as technology advances and modernizes. WhatsApp, a popular instant messaging application, is utilized by a significant number of users because of its capability to transmit text, images, and video messages. In addition, it is a technical application linked to the phone lines. However, obtaining a SIM card without identifying the owner can result in anyone creating a WhatsApp account anonymously, potentially trapping unsuspecting victims. Under these circumstances, the platform remains a potential space for perpetrating such harm, especially in the absence of a digital safety consciousness.



### Person committing the violation:

- Someone I don't know: 64%
- Someone I know online: 23%
- School/work colleague: 5%
- Friend: 4%
- Relative: 4%

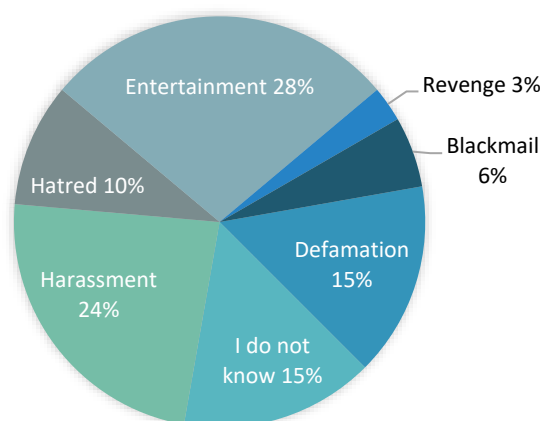
Among social media users, anonymous individuals were perceived as the most egregious violators of freedom. This is because hackers typically aim to lure victims into open links that may contain malicious software or sexual blackmail, or exploit rumors to persuade victims to provide personal information. The perpetrator may also impersonate a close friend or a family member in various ways. These numbers highlight the prevalence of these deceptions. Social media users must exercise caution when using the Internet to avoid falling victim to the deception of those with whom they communicate.

### Perpetrators' motives:

- Harassment: 24%
- Defamation: 15%
- Hatred: 10%
- Entertainment: 28%
- I do not know: 15%

The primary motivation driving perpetrators to commit violence was entertainment, as indicated by the sample. This motive can only be fully understood within the context of addiction to the Internet and a lack of education on digital citizenship, which encompasses the rights and responsibilities of users of social media. It also highlights that virtual space is a legal space regulated by legislation and laws that protect women, children, and all groups from various forms of violence. The widespread disregard for the legal and moral dimensions of the digital space has led to a culture of tolerance for violence, with users becoming accustomed to the production and practice of such behavior. As a result, numerous victims may be subjected to further violations, such as harassment, character defamation, hate speech, financial or sexual extortion, and revenge.

**Perpetrator's motives**

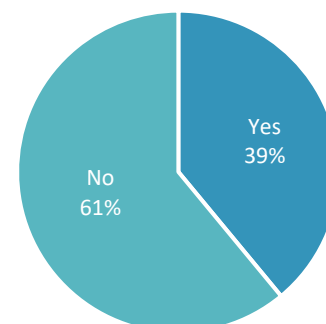


## Legal knowledge of penalties:

- Knowledge of the law: 39%
- Ignorance of the law: 61%

The ignorance of penalties for digital violations under the Moroccan law is widespread among the sample population, with 61% of respondents being unaware of these penalties. This lack of awareness can be attributed to the rapidly changing and unregulated digital environment, where users may feel that they have a newfound freedom to express themselves and exchange information freely, with no legal or moral restrictions to guide the digital behavior of citizens in a society that is increasingly digitized. In the absence of digital safety education and educational institutions' lack of interest in incorporating this knowledge as a cognitive and behavioral subject in their curricula, the potential for ignorance of law and responsible authorities remains high. Therefore, it is imperative that efforts be made to secure legal protection and educate individuals, especially women, about their digital rights and responsibilities to ensure their safety and well-being in the digital world.

**Do you know the penalties for digital violence?**



## Victims' reaction to digital violence:

- Reporting digital violence: 38%
- Not paying any attention to the incident: 34%
- Communicating with perpetrator: 25%
- Not changing my previous practices: 31%
- Continuing to use social media platforms: 28%
- Not taking any action: 13%
- Telling friends: 12%
- Telling someone: 5%
- Telling the mother: 4%
- Telling siblings: 3%

Based on the recorded data, it is obvious that the culture of reporting digital violence and its associated behaviors has begun to take shape among victims despite the lack of comprehensive knowledge regarding the relevant laws and regulations that protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable. The reported incidents of digital violence accounted for 38.2% of the total, indicating the importance of addressing this issue in a society where victims often fear the repercussions of coming forward and speaking out.

However, 25% of the victims chose to communicate directly with the perpetrator, which may be attributed to the specific type of digital violence they had previously experienced. Additionally, 34.2% of the victims opted not to give the matter any further consideration and continued to use social media without any changes to their previous habits. These findings highlight the urgent need for digital citizenship education.

### Victim-blaming culture:

- No one blamed me: 74%
- Blamed by friends: 10%
- Blamed by myself: 9%
- Blamed by family: 6%
- Blamed by institution I contacted: 1%

Based on the analysis of results, it is evident that blaming and scapegoating victims are still prevalent, although at a minimal percentage compared with the percentage of victims who were not blamed. This suggests a promising trend in the treatment of victims of digital violence, considering their psychological and social circumstances. The recorded percentage of those who were blamed by friends is primarily attributed to the fact that victims typically turn to their closest confidant immediately following a digital violence incident to seek guidance, and are subsequently exposed to criticism and disapproval.

The Challenge Association for Equality and Citizenship conducted a study in December 2020 using mobile and constant listening mechanisms to gather information from 215 female victims of digital violence. The study revealed that the means of digital violence were numerous and diverse, with WhatsApp accounting for 43%, Facebook for 22%, Instagram for 17%, and Messenger for 14%. The total number of traces monitored was approximately six per victim, and nearly 87% of the victims reported having thoughts of suicide, with 20% attempting it.

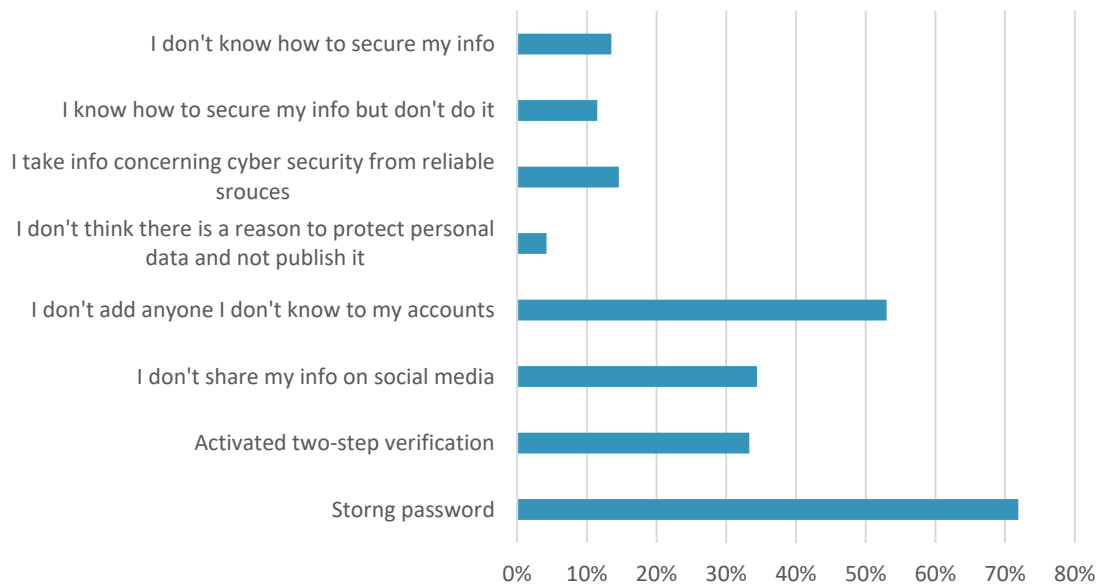
The lack of knowledge regarding the actual number of victims of digital violence is primarily attributable to women's apprehension about the potential backlash they may face from society and family, as well as the intimidation tactics employed by the perpetrator, which impede their ability to seek effective solutions and receive support.

### Electronic protection:

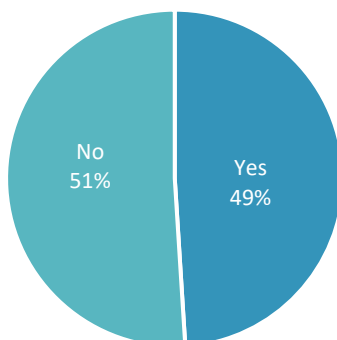
- 49% encounter challenges with regards to safeguarding their personal information,
- 51% did not encounter any difficulty in safeguarding their personal information.
- 68.8% had experienced bullying or other violations.
- 31.3% did not experience bullying or other violations.

This indicates that approximately 50% of Internet users have become increasingly vigilant about protecting their personal data. However, a significant portion (51 %) still find it challenging to safeguard digital information. This is because of the lack of understanding of digital technologies and information systems in a society with a high level of illiteracy, including digital illiteracy. Consequently, many individuals have experienced privacy breaches and cyberbullying compared with those who have been successful in safeguarding their data.

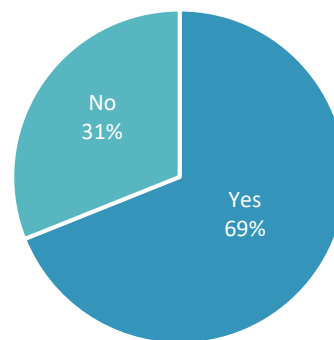
### How do you protect your data?



### Do you have difficulty protecting your personal data?



### Have you experienced digital violence?



## Psychological effects:

- Fear: 11%
- Avoid social media: 11%
- Sleep disorder: 7%
- Depression: 5%
- Isolation: 1%
- Other psychological effects: 15%
- No impact: 50%

This indicates that there are multiple psychological impacts of digital violence on victims, including the potential for threats to their physical health due to sleep disturbances resulting from the accumulation of fear caused by the perpetrator's pressure. This may lead to loss of confidence in others and increased isolation, which is characterized by depression, anxiety, and fear. The adverse effects of digital violence also vary among individuals and can differ based on factors such as personality and social class. Victims may experience psychological pressure to avoid virtual communication, suicide, or even death.

Description of victims' experiences: The majority of those who experienced digital violence and reported their incidents confirmed that they were intimidated by fear of the public scandal. This fear caused a state of terror and a sense of anger among victims. Some directly confronted the perpetrator, requesting that the offending content be removed, and threatened legal recourse. Others experienced feelings of disgust, fear, and loss of confidence, and chose to isolate themselves from others for an extended period. Among these victims were those subjected to sexual harassment, blackmail, or the receipt of pornographic images from unexpected sources. Most victims reported experiencing oppression and loss of confidence due to these incidents.

## Legal and institutional knowledge:

- Legal knowledge of penalties for digital violence: 39%
- Ignorance of the penalties resulting from digital violence: 61%
- Institutional knowledge: 3.3%

The weakness of legal knowledge of the legal ramifications of violence is primarily attributed to the fact that digitalization education has become imperative for contemporary elites, with little emphasis on legislation or judicial proceedings. Consequently, the general public, who lack familiarity with the basics, become victims of legal literacy, which in turn impairs their understanding of their rights and obligations under law. This is further compounded by the ineffectiveness of awareness campaigns focusing on the legal implications of digital violence. As a result, a significant proportion of individuals remain ignorant of the penalties associated with such behavior.

The previous analysis showed a lack of familiarity with institutions that specialize in research and cybercrime investigations, particularly because they were recently established to have been assigned the duty to study and probe such crimes, such as the cybercrime squad, which is responsible for investigating all offenses committed through computers or means of communication.

## Testimony of Digital Violence

*"A disagreement regarding an issue during a discussion with a close friend who did not accept my position resulted in my friend insulting me and describing me as using the ugliest male-oriented slanders (women like you, who are sexually proficient). When I responded to his accusations as an excuse discouraging me from continuing my discussions, the situation escalated to the point where he took my pictures and posted them on Facebook, accompanied by insulting words written about me on his account. In response, I commented on his posts and unfriended them. This behavior angered me, especially coming from a close person who claimed to embrace equality between women and men and considered himself a progressive fighter. However, I remained confident in myself and considered this behavior to be very backward, stemming from hatred and an inferior view of women."*

*"I was exposed to bullying by a prominent person. He responded to a comment on one of my friend's social media pages in a manner that was highly insulting, comparing me to a "cow after giving birth." I believe that in our society, individuals with no real talent or merit are often given a platform to gain fame and attention. As a result, I told him that I could take legal action against him but ultimately decided not to pursue it because of the many messages I received asking me to ignore him. Instead, I reported it to the platform and removed offensive messages from my account after taking a screenshot. I also chose to share my experiences in posts on my personal accounts."*

*"The inappropriate display of private photos on websites is a part of bullying and mockery campaigns. When I learned about this violation, I got angry, expressed great anger, and confronted the individual responsible, demanding that they remove the post immediately or take further action. Furthermore, this individual attempted to breach my email security on multiple occasions; however, the advanced system successfully prevented any compromise with sensitive information."*

Respondents described their experiences as horrific due to the loss of trust in others, as some experienced the threat of physical harm and potential for arrest. Furthermore, female respondents reported feeling disgusted when they received unsolicited pictures, including a picture of a male sexual organ, accompanied by a brief message.

It is a common experience among young women to be afflicted by deep-seated psychological disorders, such as anxiety, fear, disgust, and loss of confidence in people around them, particularly men. This often leads to a period of social isolation and self-blame, during which time they may find it difficult to extricate themselves from their situations.



## Part 3: Digital Violence from the Perspective of Activists and Experts

### Results of Individual Interviews

Number of respondents: 26

**Analysis of the results:** Moroccan youth experience a sense of insecurity in the digital space and believe that it has contributed to a crisis within their families because of the negative consequences that can sometimes arise from it. The following conclusions were reached through individual interviews with experts and social professionals:

- The vulnerability of youth, particularly young girls, to digital violence is caused by the prevalence of a male-centric culture and lack of legal and institutional safeguards that address the unique challenges faced by women in the digital realm.
- The weakness of awareness campaign services and the established protocol for the treatment of victims, which prohibits any form of blaming or degrading behavior, has not been adhered to.
- The fear of disclosing instances of digital violence perpetrated against young girls has resulted in a significant number of abusers evading punishments. This, in turn, leads to an expansion of the black number, which represents the disparity between reported instances of digital violence and actual instances of digital violence, creating a distorted picture of the phenomenon.
- Encourage victims to report incidents, inform them of their legal rights, and provide them with necessary protection while their cases are being heard.
- The participation of educational establishments in initiatives aimed at raising awareness and promoting sensitivity towards the serious consequences of digital violence.
- Ensuring legal safeguards for victims of digital violence.
- In accordance with the provisions outlined in Law 103.13 regarding the prevention of violence against women, specifically, Article 10 of this law, the establishment of cells to provide care for individuals affected by digital violence is deemed necessary.
- Maintain ongoing and attentive engagement with young girls who have experienced digital violence and provide continuous emotional and moral support.
- Educate the public concerning respect for privacy and commitment to social values based on respect, safety, and responsible digital communication.
- It is imperative that necessary legislative and institutional support be provided to address the impact of this digital boom, which has permeated all aspects of life and requires caution from all individuals.

Considering the individual interviews, civil society organizations are making commendable strides in promoting awareness and education services to counter digital violence, encompassing the following:

- Educating students to be aware of the significance of the responsible utilization of social media, particularly regarding the avoidance of uploading or sharing private pictures and videos with people on online platforms.
- Spreading legal awareness pertaining to the criminalization of various forms of digital violence as well as measures for protection and the importance of reporting such incidents (law to combat violence against women).
- Offering psychological and emotional support to students who have experienced violence and assisting them in navigating and overcoming the resulting psychological distress.

A significant number of respondents indicated that prevalent societal culture creates obstacles in their work due to the fear and panic experienced by victims of digital violence. The prevailing societal culture, which views women as the primary cause of violence when they experience digital violence, makes victims hesitant to report or disclose their experiences. Moreover, the respondents indicated that families were unlikely to accept such incidents, thereby contributing to the dominance of these practices, particularly among young men.

## Challenges in Dealing with Cases of Digital Violence:

- Victims lack the courage to seek psychosocial support from their offices to disclose the violence they have experienced.
- Victims refuse to disclose incidents to their parents because of concerns about their lack of understanding and the potential consequences of hindering their education.
- Fear of family breakdown or loss of employment.
- There was a lack of support from family members.
- Substance abuse, homelessness, exposure to mental health and psychological disorders, depression, suicide.
- Parents may not understand this type of abuse and may not provide necessary support for their children.
- There is reluctance to file a complaint against the perpetrator because of a lack of awareness of the culture of rights and law.
- However, psychological support specialists are scarce.

Regarding the procedures for receiving complaints about digital violence, activists underscored the following:

- Attentively listen to victims' accounts of violence and evaluate their nature and means of exposure in a manner that maintains their privacy and safety.
- Targeted campaigns providing comprehensive psychological, social, and legal support must be arranged.
- Communicate with the parents of the victims in a manner appropriate to their intellectual and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that they are informed of the situation.
- When necessary, promptly inform administrative or local authorities of the situation.

Regarding support centers, certain associations have established offices for psychological and social support, providing listening and counseling services during scheduled sessions aimed at addressing various issues and combating all forms of school violence, including digital violence. Additionally, various civil initiatives have focused on providing listening centers for victims of violence in general. These initiatives address digital violence as a

### Testimony of a Civil Society Activist

*"Recently, I met a 17-year-old woman who was subjected to digital violence. The perpetrator took photographs of her with her boyfriend in front of high school, created a fake Facebook account, and threatened her by sharing these pictures with her family, prohibiting her from forming relationships with young men. The abuser exploits this for his advantage. The victim stated that the perpetrator was well-acquainted with her and her family. He then began blackmailing her, threatening to send her photos to her family and publish them online if she did not send him nude videos or pictures of herself. I provided psychological support and explained the legal procedures that she had to follow to pursue the perpetrator. However, she refused to file a complaint or inform her family, fearing blame and shame."*

component of broader forms of violence, whereas other initiatives collaborate with volunteer doctors to provide psychological support to victims.

Notwithstanding the various obstacles impeding the progress of these associations, the aforementioned ones are diligently striving to disseminate the culture of digital legal protection, which encompasses organizing interviews and workshops hosted by psychological and legal experts with the following objectives:

- The consequences of digital violence and legal protection have been introduced.
- Encourage young girls, who are particularly vulnerable to such incidents, to take necessary precautions.
- Observe dedicated days to raise awareness of digital violence through educational institution clubs.

Activists have argued that young people's level of awareness regarding the dangers of digital violence has decreased. Moreover, young people lack legal knowledge, and there is a legal vacuum, despite the existence of laws that protect them from digital violence. Considering these findings, activists argue that it is necessary to integrate mechanisms to manage digital violence and to implement legal procedures with clear procedural controls.

- Educational institution clubs.
- Listening centers.
- Legal and professional associations.

## Part 4: Conclusions and Recommendations

No one is immune to digital violence. Regardless of gender, age, or geographical location, everyone is a potential target or victim of this threat. The increase in the use of digital violence has become an intrinsic characteristic of the contemporary era. This is a form of criminal activity that cannot be eradicated, especially given the decline in moral values and increasing craving for digital interaction globally. Accordingly, to reduce these negative effects, it is necessary to consider the following aspects:

- At the political level, legislative laws are objectively and directly related to digital violence.
- Raising political elites' awareness of the validity of digital safety advocates at the partisan, parliamentary, and governmental levels.
- At the legal level, strengthening the legal system with a culture of safe use of digital space.
- The Moroccan legislator keeps pace with the emerging types of digital violence.
- Promoting a culture of respect for individual freedoms, rights, and differences through citizenship education and political programs, with the dissemination of these programs starting at the primary education level.
- At the institutional level, a security system related to establishing legal oversight to reduce digital violence should be strengthened and developed.
- Providing greater protection for women, as they are the group most vulnerable to digital violence.
- At the educational level: Combating legal illiteracy by introducing injunctive legal penalties related to digital violence.
- Education on the rational use of the Internet and social media, raising awareness of the dangers of cybercrime in general, and encouraging young girls to report digital violence through awareness campaigns.
- Training courses should be organized for young men to strengthen their capabilities in the fields of digital security and protection of personal data.
- Training social assistants and psychological support specialists in listening techniques for youth victims of digital violence.
- Strengthening laws related to combating digital violence against women.
- At the awareness educational level: Paying attention to digital education for young people, especially concerning their use of the phone and Internet.
- Organizing media campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of digital violence in young men and women.
- The family's role is to monitor the behavior and actions of their children, extend bonds of trust, and use the language of reason and logic in persuasion to identify the problems they face when using social media platforms.
- Encouraging the use of multimedia information for creativity and not engaging in activities that are harmful to society.
- Encouraging women to disclose digital violence through continuous awareness-raising campaigns.
- Encouraging religious tolerance and coexistence among students to avoid hate speech.
- Using media to raise awareness of the dangers of digital violence by broadcasting awareness-raising advertisements.
- Achieving a balance in the relationship between young people and the surrounding environment, whether it is a family, university, or school, addresses the problem of phone addiction.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms<sup>11</sup>

**Digital sexual harassment:** One or more people continue to target women through e-mail messages, comments, or pictures with sexual connotations. Digital sexual harassment is a behavior with a sexual orientation that is undesirable and unwanted and does not receive a response. This represents unacceptable and non-reciprocal actions. It involves subjecting a person or group to small electronic continuous attacks or subjecting a person to continuous requests, criticism, or continuous pressure to obtain a specific goal. Therefore, it is an act that requires continuity, that is, repeating an attack or disturbance, or constant exposure to repeated attacks, that is, rapid and continuous attacks.

**Internet stalking:** This occurs via SMS or email repeatedly, causing bouts of fear and panic in the victim. The stalker is often anonymous and uses pseudonyms and fake identities, which makes him unbound to moral restrictions and societal values. Stalking may be accompanied by harassment, which may turn into blackmail, as the perpetrator often commits a series of crimes.

**Inappropriate direct text messages:** This is a general expression that may include insults, slander, or abusive epithets intended to offend victims and make them feel ashamed.

**Posting offensive comments:** The aim is to reduce the victim's status, degrade his dignity, and make him an object of ridicule by his followers and friends on his page or by direct followers of his activities.

**Sharing intimate photos or video clips** of the victim, either via the Internet or mobile phones: This is often done by a former partner who photographed and recorded intimate moments between the two parties. The main motive for this is often to offend, insult, and humiliate another person or pave the way for blackmailing the victim.

**Sarcasm and ridicule:** This involves sending emails or publishing tweets that disparage a victim's characteristics, appearance, or actions.

**Sending pornographic materials:** Broadcasting images and video clips to humiliate and take revenge may cause the victim to commit suicide or disappear completely, especially because it is difficult to control or stop the spread of these pornographic images and clips.

**Dissemination of personal information:** The perpetrator resorts to collecting personal information and documents about the target person and inquiring about the details of their lives, preoccupations, and inclinations. The perpetrator later intends to reveal details of the victim's personal life via the Internet, which causes a blatant and clear violation of the victim's privacy and may expand. This act may affect people associated with the victim, whether family members or friends.

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<sup>11</sup> To define the terms mentioned in this appendix, we relied on the following references:

- Youssef Muhammad Reda: Dictionary of Classical and Contemporary Arabic, Lebanon Library, Beirut, 2006.
- Al-Munajjid in Language and Media: Dar Al-Mashreq, Beirut, 2006
- Ahmed Zaki Badawi: Dictionary of Social Science Terms, Lebanon Library, Beirut, 1982.
- Munir Karadsheh: Domestic violence, the sociology of the violent man and the abused woman. Modern World of Books, Irbid, Jordan, 2009.
- Manal Muhammad Abbas University Knowledge House, Alexandria, 2016.
- Muhammad Abu Zaid, A Dictionary of Legal Sociology and Punishment, Dar Al-Kitab for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 1999.

**Insult:** Any disgraceful expression or expression of contempt or slander that does not include attribution to any specific incident; statements made by the perpetrator that are offensive to the dignity and honor of the victim; or offensive expressions or obscene words that are offensive to the dignity and legal status of the person or include a reprehensible description of the victim.

**Slander:** This is the use of information and communication technology to publicly attribute a specific incident to the victim; for example, accusing victims of bad morals or being a former criminal.

**Verbal violence on social media platforms;** for example, students towards their institutions or professors.

**Sexual blackmail:** This is currently one of the most dangerous and widespread types of violence, and victims are often male. It is the act in which the perpetrator aims to pressure the victim to force them to hand over money, conclude some legal action, or submit to their whims in exchange for not disclosing information or attributing shameful matters that harm them. The most common image is when a person enters social media platforms or chat rooms to impersonate a girl. After the relationship with the victim, who is often a male, is strengthened, he lures him into a sexual conversation, either with a picture, a picture, or a sound, and then reveals his real identity and demands that he send sums of money in exchange for not publishing what he has recorded. A male may also record a girl in an intimate situation and blackmail her or exploit her sexually in exchange for not broadcasting the recording in his possession. Mostly because of her state of weakness, she responds to his desires, so exploitation turns into sexual slavery that ends with her surrendering to him.

**Threatening to publish indecent matters:** Posting insulting or false information about a person through a web page, email, or personal message.

**Persistent electronic harassment:** Sending electronic messages repeatedly without receiving a response from the sender.

**Threatening physical or sexual violence:** The perpetrator resorts to sending violent threatening messages in which he threatens the victim to subject them to beating, harm, or sexual assault, whether rape or indecent.

**Incitement to hatred:** These are electronic messages or writings that incite discrimination, contempt, and hatred towards some minorities or groups and promote them publicly.

**Insult because of gender or personal circumstances such as disability:** These are messages that target the victim because of her gender or personal circumstances; for example, insulting a woman and degrading her dignity simply because she is a woman or because the victim has special needs.

**Bullying:** Cyberbullies tend to trick their victims by making them angry so that they react with angry or violent remarks, or send offensive messages to a person chosen as a target.

**Live broadcast of sexual harassment or assault:** An incident of a young man harassing a girl on a street in the city of Tangier, north of the country. The video shows a young man lifting a girl's dress and attacking her on a public road while another person filmed the incident. Internationally, there were two major cases in 2017, one in Sweden and one in the United States of America, of victims whose rape was broadcast live over the Internet using Facebook's "Live Broadcast" feature.

## Appendix 2: Question Guide

Question Guide for individual interviews on digital violence against young men and women.

Directed to experts and social professionals.

\* Gender: Man/Woman

\* Adjective: -----

1. What do you know about digital violence? -----

2. In your opinion, are youth more vulnerable to digital violence?

\* If yes, what are the forms of violence?

- Cyberbullying
- Blackmail
- Sexual harassment via electronic messages
- Threats and intimidation
- Other types -----

3. Which gender is most vulnerable to digital violence?

- Females
- Males

If the answer indicates that females are more vulnerable to digital violence, do you mention the main reasons?

4. Do you provide awareness and protection services against digital violence in your organization or association?

\* If yes, what are these services?

5. Do victims, especially girls, find it easy to disclose the digital violence they are exposed to?

Yes No

\* How did you do that?

\* If the answer is no, why do you not provide these services?

6. In your opinion, what are the psychological and social effects of digital violence on the youth?

7. Has your organization undertaken initiatives for youth to introduce digital violence and ways to protect against it?

Yes No

\* If yes, what are these initiatives?

8. How do you evaluate the reality of youth legal protection against digital violence?



9. Do you have procedures for receiving complaints about digital violence?

Yes No

If the answer is yes, what are these procedures and is there sufficient awareness of these procedures?

10. Compared to other cases of violence, do you think that addressing forms of digital violence is important today in Moroccan society in light of the transformation

Have you personally witnessed any case of digital violence?

Yes No

If the answer is yes. What steps did you take?

12. What challenges do you encounter in dealing with violent cases?

13. If you witnessed cases of digital violence, were there practices blaming the victims? etc.? Is victim blaming more common among women and men?

14. In your opinion, what are the governmental or non-governmental organizations working on digital violence in Morocco? Have you worked with one of them? Do you think that its work is sufficient or are there other measures that must be taken to be more effective?

15. Do you have any reception or listening centers for cases of violence?

Yes No

16. If you receive victims of violence, is it possible to explain the cases accurately—the relationship of violence to the victim, the reaction of the family and the police, and so on—while maintaining confidentiality?

Yes No

17. Do you use any information system or technology to monitor cases of digital violence?

Yes No

18. Do you have any suggestions or recommendations to reduce digital violence?

Yes No

\*If the answer is yes. mention it.

## Appendix 3: Study Questionnaire

The research form included sending a questionnaire to 300 young men and women between the ages of 14 and 21 in urban and semi-urban areas through the project's partner associations and educational institutions.

The survey design was based on key factors, such as social media reach, diversity of forms of social media platforms, complexities of digital violence, nature of abuse, and risk-reduction strategies. The survey also considered the epidemiological situation caused by Covid-19 and related restrictions on social interaction.

The questionnaire included the following questions:

- Demographic factor of the sample.
- Use of digital platforms.
- Type and frequency of use.
- The purpose of using social media platforms.
- Time spent by young people on digital platforms.
- Topics of interest.
- Exposure to digital violence.
- Forms of digital violence.
- Perceptions of digital violence.
- Psychological impact of digital violence.
- Social impact of digital violence.
- Awareness of legislation or digital risk reduction programs.
- Special impact of COVID-19.

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