

# Digital Violence Against Yemeni Women Leaders: a Field Study

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## Authors

Rana Ahmed Ghanem



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## Executive Summary

Yemen is widely recognized as one of the least developed countries globally, and the prolonged period of war of eight years and instability has significantly exacerbated its precarious state, rendering it one of the most fragile nations in the world. This state of fragility is particularly reflected in the condition of women, as Yemen ranks at the very bottom of countries globally in terms of the gender gap.

Violence against women, in all forms, is a prevalent issue in Yemeni society, and the phenomenon of digital violence against women has recently become widespread. This is because of the ease with which it can be practiced, particularly in a conservative and closed society where strict customs and traditions prevail. This type of violence poses a significant danger to women, including the risk of blackmail and [suicide](#). Given these circumstances, this study aimed to investigate digital violence against Yemeni women, including the methods, motivations, effects, and ways in which women respond to it. To this end, a field questionnaire was administered to 41 women from five Yemeni governorates who had experienced various forms of digital violence. In other words, a digital questionnaire was administered to these individuals and follow-up calls were made to gather more information. The study also focused on two particularly notable cases that garnered local public attention.

This study demonstrated that the most prevalent means of online communication utilized by the respondents was their personal mobile phones. It also showed the various forms of digital violence, with abuse by unwanted contact by anonymous individuals, who do not wish to communicate with being the most common, followed by insults, cursing, and defamation that violate societal morals and are directed towards women because of their gender. The results further showed that digital violence escalated to the level of financial or sexual blackmail, including threats of murder or rape. The majority of perpetrators of digital violence were men, reflecting the societal norms of male guardianship over women, followed by unknown individuals. This highlights the danger of such violence, as social media has facilitated its practice, even by unknown persons. Most practices occur in private rather than in public forums.

This study also found that the majority of respondents believed that this violence has a cultural nature, resulting from customs and traditions, and then a political and institutional nature, resulting from women's activities in the public and political spheres. In addition, it revealed that the most common social media platforms where digital violence occurred are WhatsApp, text messages,<sup>1</sup> and Facebook. The respondents confirmed that this type of violence is directed towards them specifically because of their gender, and that it would not have been experienced with the same severity of violence if they were men. This study categorized the reasons behind violence into cultural, social, legal, political, institutional, cognitive, and economic factors.

Regarding women's responses to various forms of digital violence, the most common response was to block the perpetrator and disregard the violence perpetrated against them. In the event of account hacking, the preferred course of action is to seek the assistance of a specialist to enhance the security of the account. Moreover, it has been observed that a minimal number of women opt to file a complaint with the social media platform because of inadequate management of such complaints by the platform's management. Women are less likely to file legal complaints, except in cases of severe digital violence such as continuous harassment, death threats, and exposure to personal secrets.

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<sup>1</sup> This reflects the reality of women leaders or activists who have a societal presence; therefore, their personal numbers are available to the public by virtue of the nature of their work.

Women noted that seeking legal recourse is often costly, time-consuming, and complex, discouraging many from pursuing this option.

Most respondents in this study exhibited a high degree of caution when using social media, which ultimately resulted in significant physical and emotional psychological impacts. Furthermore, the psychological impact of digital violence often leads to social isolation both digitally and in daily life.

Regarding receiving support, the majority of the respondents, despite their level of education and social mastery, required assistance but were unsure of where to obtain it. They often seek support from friends, families, and colleagues. To mitigate digital violence, the respondents indicated that it is imperative that women take proactive measures to reduce their occurrence. The three most critical recommendations include the establishment of institutions that provide free legal support, empowering women both digitally and psychologically to confront such abuse, and the criminalization of digital violence through the implementation of deterrent penalties for its perpetrators.

This study advises that, in addition to the direct recommendations from the respondents, pressure needs to be exerted on decision-makers to enact a special law for perpetrators of such violence and to enhance coordination with telecommunications companies and the police to safeguard the rights of women. Furthermore, it advocates the establishment of mechanisms that promote access to justice for women and calls for social media platforms to give due consideration to complaints submitted by women and address them seriously.

The current study highlighted the pervasiveness and scope of digital violence in Yemen while also highlighting the correlation between digital violence and physical violence. However, to gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research could expand the sample size and geographic reach of this study. Given the ongoing conflict and instability in Yemen, it is essential to investigate the role of armed violence in the propagation of digital violence, particularly given the lack of functional state institutions that provide protection and support to women. Targeted studies could focus on the impact of digital violence on displaced women, female breadwinners, and women who have been forced into the workforce due to economic hardship and the absence of a breadwinner, whether due to war or immigration, without being practically prepared or able to enter the public sphere, which makes them more vulnerable to violations. Additionally, the response of Yemeni women living abroad to this study warrants further examination, particularly regarding the digital violence that transcends geographical boundaries and affects Yemeni women in the diaspora.

In addition to conducting direct questionnaires of the intended targets, it is essential to scrutinize official and informal institutions, as well as individual initiatives that contribute to mitigating digital violence in Yemen, to gain valuable insights into effective measures for reducing the prevalence of digital violence.

## Introduction

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in the realm of human rights globally. Women worldwide continue to suffer from various forms of violence, which hinders their ability to contribute fully to their societies. Violence against female activists and workers in the public sphere has a detrimental impact on women's enjoyment of equal citizenship rights and limits the encouragement of others to engage in the public sphere. Furthermore, it deprives countries of male and female citizens' contribution to development, progress, and prosperity.

Yemen, a country that has been embroiled in conflict for nearly eight years, is considered one of the poorest and most fragile countries in the world. Violence against women is a widespread problem in Yemeni society and is exacerbated by ongoing conflict and instability.

Through the analysis of relevant data and demographic characteristics, it is possible to evaluate the magnitude of adversity faced by women in Yemen. As of January 2022, the total population of the Republic of Yemen was estimated to be 30.82 million, with 49.6% of the population being women. Furthermore, 59.7% of the population was aged 13–54 years, and approximately 39.2% of the population resided in urban areas.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Economic and Social Developments Questionnaire 2019-2020 compiled by ESCWA, Yemen was ranked 153<sup>rd</sup> in terms of gender equality indicators, representing the lowest ranking among the 153 countries included in the questionnaire.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the data provided by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2017, the rate of illiteracy among women was reported to be 60%,<sup>4</sup> with the previous questionnaire being conducted in 2004. It is anticipated that the percentage of educated women has surpassed this figure since then.

With regards to political empowerment, Yemen has been ranked as 151<sup>st</sup>, at the very bottom of the sub-index for women, with a score that is among the lowest of all countries, as women are not present<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, according to the 2013-2014 questionnaire, women comprise only 4.5% of the workforce aged 15 and above, while men comprise 57.3%.<sup>6</sup>

Previous data suggest the fragility of the overall situation in Yemen and the particularly dire circumstances faced by women in this environment. The increase in the use of the Internet in Yemen has exacerbated this issue, as it has facilitated targeting women and the perpetration of violence against them. In fact, the utilization of various digital social media platforms for the purpose of perpetrating digital violence has become a widespread phenomenon in Yemen due to the ease with which it can be used to attack female activists in both the public and private spheres. This has become a convenient means of intimidation and has limited women's capabilities and contributions to society.

It is important to note that there are no official statistics available to accurately determine the number of Internet users in Yemen, particularly because of ongoing conflict in the country. However, an estimate can be derived from the mobile companies in Yemen regarding the number of SIM cards sold. Recently, the largest and oldest mobile companies in Yemen reported that they sold ten million SIM cards. If we also consider that the three other mobile companies in Yemen have sold an additional ten million SIM cards, it can be assumed that there are approximately 20 million mobile users in Yemen, which translates to approximately 20 million Internet users. It must be acknowledged that the quality of the Internet and the number of platform users in Yemen are both subpar. The following table provides information on the number of users on the various platforms.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> [Digital 2022: Yemen — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://publications.unescwa.org/projects/escwa-questionnaire/sdgs/pdf/ar/ESCWA-Economic-Social-Questionnaire-2019-2020-AR-CHAPTER%203.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cso-yemen.com/content.php?lng=arabic&id=690>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Labor Force. Statistics Yearbook 2017. <http://www.cso-yemen.com/content.php?lng=arabic&id=690>

<sup>7</sup> [Digital 2022: Yemen — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights](#)



### Number of Social Media Platforms Users

Platform	Number of Users	Users' Gender of Ads	
		Female	Male
Facebook	2.85 million	13.3%	86.7%
Instagram	657.6 thousand	28.4%	71.6%
Facebook Messenger	826.7 thousand	17.3%	82.7%
LinkedIn	320.0 thousand	50%	50%
Twitter	599.7 thousand	NA	NA

Recently, digital violence has become increasingly prevalent, giving rise to several concerns, including instances of blackmail and attempted suicide by women and activists in the public sphere. This study aimed to investigate these events and provide insights into the experiences of Yemeni women who have been subjected to digital violence. The spread of false information and the ease with which reputations can be damaged on social media platforms have contributed to the rise of this phenomenon, and its impact on the status of women and their families in a conservative and tribal society such as Yemen is significant. Therefore, the goal of this study was to shed light on this issue and gain a deeper understanding of its various aspects from the perspective of women directly affected by it.

## Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study was to examine digital violence perpetrated against Yemeni women, including its underlying methods, forms, motivations, consequences, and strategies employed by women to respond to it. In pursuit of this goal, the study utilized a comprehensive methodology to gather and analyze relevant data and subsequently formulated recommendations to help reduce the prevalence of such behavior.

## Methodology

This study employed a descriptive approach to explore the issue of digital violence perpetrated against Yemeni women by analyzing relevant data, including digital data, studies, and various activities, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

This study conducted a field study using a purposeful sample of 41 Yemeni women who had experienced digital violence via social media platforms. The questionnaire utilized a digital questionnaire consisting of 13 complex questions that encompassed both quantitative and qualitative information to identify the form of digital violence, the platforms on which it occurred, the

mechanisms for addressing it, and the motivations behind it. Additionally, the questionnaire aimed to assess the level of knowledge the respondents had of their perpetrators and their suggestions for reducing such violence, in addition to collecting personal data from the sample. The questionnaire was accompanied by follow-ups for clarification purposes when necessary.

The results of the questionnaire were corroborated by the findings from desk research, the researcher's expertise, and detailed personal interviews conducted with two of the case studies examined in this study.

## Definitions

### *Violence against women*

The Universal Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (December 1993) outlines in Article 1 defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Digital violence in the present study*

In light of the previous definition, digital violence, which is the focus of this study, can be defined as acts of violence committed against women through the use of technology, specifically social media platforms via the Internet or telecommunications companies utilizing mobile phones. Such actions may include, but are not limited to, the use of profanity, threats, blackmail, or any other form of communication that has the potential to cause harm or suffering to women, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or economic in nature.

## Section 1: The Reality of Digital Violence and its Impact on Women in Yemen

The increase in the use of mobile devices, access to the Internet, and social media platforms has created avenues for the perpetration of violence against women, including blackmailing them and undermining their dignity in the Arab world, including Yemen, to such an extent that digital violence has become a widespread issue in the region. In a study conducted by the UN Women's Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa in 2022 on eight Arab countries, including Yemen, on the prevalence and impact of digital violence, 70% of female activists and human rights defenders stated that they did not feel safe in the electronic space. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents reported experiencing violence online, with Yemen ranking second after Iraq in terms of the percentage of women exposed to online violence.<sup>9</sup>

In a study conducted by Platform 30 of the Youth Platform Foundation in Yemen in 2022, involving 1,172 respondents, of whom 32% were women, it was found that the most prevalent forms of cyberbullying against women were the fabrication and dissemination of false images or videos, as well as impersonation to harm women online. The questionnaire results also indicated that societal attitudes towards women and their digital identity were the primary reasons for cyberbullying against women, followed by a lack of deterrent laws. To address this issue, 93% of the respondents expressed

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<sup>8</sup> [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women | OHCHR](#)

<sup>9</sup> [https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Summary\\_Keyfindings\\_Arabic\\_Final\\_2022.pdf](https://arabstates.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Summary_Keyfindings_Arabic_Final_2022.pdf)



the need for legal reform and 83% supported the implementation of advocacy campaigns to combat this phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

While there are no official statistics available on the prevalence of electronic blackmail operations in Yemen, the testimonies of Yemeni activists involved in such cases may provide insight into the scale of the problem, as stated by Mukhtar Abdel Moez, an expert in information protection and security who is working on a voluntary basis with his team, exposed a gang. That is, through Electronic Blackmail and Victim Support, they report to Al-Sharaa newspaper, which has assisted in over 15,000 blackmail cases within a period of less than three years, resulting in an average of 535 cases per month.<sup>11</sup>

Ahmed Al-Nadhari, a Yemeni activist combating electronic blackmail crimes, has highlighted the severity of the issue to Al Ain News website. He stated, "The situation has become quite intimidating. To be frank, I receive more than 300 blackmail cases per month, with a minimum of 10 cases per day. As an individual, it is a daunting task to deal with all these cases and allocate sufficient time to resolving them."

Al-Nadhari also confirmed the presence of a dedicated cybersecurity unit within the Houthis group, who controls the northern regions of Yemen that has a high population density, to combat such a phenomenon. Unfortunately, this unit is primarily designated as a prosecute activist, politician, and opponent. In addition, the families of victims often refrain from informing the authorities because of concerns about the way they address issues. The activist Ramiz Ibn Al-Maqtari, who is active in combating blackmail on social media, also confirmed this, stating, "The Sarah Alwan case is not the first, but that there are six women who have already committed suicide in more than one governorate, and we do not have the right to publish without the family's approval."<sup>12</sup>

Given the prevalence of digital violence against women, various youth-oriented initiatives, platforms, and cyber campaigns have emerged to raise awareness and educate the public about the hazards of electronic blackmail and how to deal with them. These include the Elite Youth Initiative,<sup>13</sup> My 30 Platforms,<sup>14</sup> the For Her Initiative,<sup>15</sup> the Yemeni Youth Initiative to Combat Cybercrimes,<sup>16</sup> Siraj.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the youth of Sheba<sup>18</sup> and several media outlets are collaborating on the (Don't Be Afraid) campaign<sup>19</sup> through Hodge, Naseej, Qarar, the Center for Studies and Economic Media (SEMC), and the Cultural Media Center (CMC).

Recently, increased attention has been paid to digital violence against women, as reflected in various articles and seminars.

<sup>10</sup> <https://manasati30.com/society/17222/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://alsharaeanews.com/2022/11/17/68590/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://al-ain.com/article/sarah-alwan-suicide-blackmail>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Elite99999?mibextid=ZbWKwL>

<sup>14</sup> <https://manasati30.com/society/17222/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100082224910802>

<sup>16</sup> <https://yyitcc.com/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/siraj.yemen/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.shebayouth.org>

<sup>19</sup> @nasijmedia or @hodjnet

## Case Studies

Incidents of digital violence against women from various backgrounds and for different purposes have been reported, including instances of material blackmail for economic purposes, cultural and social violence to limit women's participation in society, and political differences where cultural and social aspects are utilized to achieve political goals. Thus, the factors causing digital violence against women are intertwined. This research specifically examined two cases of digital violence that have recently emerged in Yemeni society: Sarah Al-Alwani and Dr. Olfat Al-Dabai. The parties involved were interviewed as part of the case study.

### *Sarah Alwani's case:*

To gain insight into the specifics of Sarah Al-Awani's case, the researcher reached out to Ms. Al-Awani's legal representative, Tahani Al-Sarari, and conducted a face-to-face interview with her. Furthermore, Ms. Al-Sarari kindly requested Ms. Alwani to record her story for the purpose of this study.

Ms. Al-Alwani is a 27-year-old Yemeni woman from the Taiz Governorate. She is employed in the humanitarian sector and maintains a Facebook page<sup>20</sup> that showcases her humanitarian activities. Ms. Al-Alwani was subjected to financial blackmail by an anonymous man (back then) who threatened to publish her private photographs and information that she kept on her phone if she did not pay the required sum of money. As Ms. Al-Alwani wears the niqab in public, as is the case with the vast majority of Yemeni women, the distribution of her private photographs, which spread widely on the Internet, placed her in an unusual psychological state and caused her significant privacy concerns. In response to blackmail, Ms. Al-Alwani initially kept the matter hidden from her brothers and spoke with her father, who subsequently notified the police. However, due to the lack of effective communication and follow-up from authorities, Ms. Al-Alwani experienced increased psychological pressure. Despite her efforts to obtain the names of the individuals responsible for blackmail, she faced significant obstacles due to the divided management of communication and security institutions resulting from the ongoing conflict between the Houthi-controlled areas in the north and the legitimate government-controlled areas in the South and some of the Northern part.<sup>21</sup> The lack of cooperation from both departments in the Telecommunications Corporation led Ms. Al-Alwani to rely on her expertise and the support of her family members who worked at the company. Through their efforts, they were able to identify the individuals responsible for the blackmail, a man, and a woman from a neighboring family who resided in the same building as Ms. Al-Alwani and her family. The blackmailers were able to obtain the contents of Ms. Al-Alwani's phone by stealing the external memory to which she transferred the data. They then gave this memory to a relative to blackmail, Ms. Al-Alwani, and hacked her phone to obtain additional information and pictures that had not been transferred to external memory.

A Yamani man residing in Qatar also attempted to extract money from Ms. Al-Alwani. Unfortunately, she was unable to identify this person due to the lack of cooperation from the Yemeni embassy in Qatar and her own lack of knowledge regarding his identity. As a result, she was unable to determine whether this individual was connected to the blackmails operating within Yemen.

Due to a multitude of complications and legal processes, the police department's limited interaction with Ms. Al-Alwani, the dissemination of her personal photographs and information by blackmailers, the negative impact on her reputation, and the loss of her employment caused immense psychological and nervous pressure, which ultimately led to a suicide attempt in the streets of Taiz

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100005378389514>

<sup>21</sup> Taiz Governorate is divided between the control of the Houthis and legitimate government, and it has been a governorate besieged by the Houthis since the beginning of the war.

Governorate. She was immediately attended by passersby and transported to a hospital, where she is currently recuperating and regaining her health. If the bullet she shot herself had not missed her heart, it would have been impossible to survive.<sup>22</sup> She retained a lawyer, Tahani Al-Sarari, to represent her, uncover all parties involved in the blackmail schemes, and make it a public case.<sup>23</sup> One of the blackmailers was taken into custody, but the case has not yet been referred to court because of protracted procedures.

### *Dr. Olfat Al-Dubai's Case:*

Dr. Olfat Al-Dubai, a professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of Taiz, was subjected to a malicious campaign aimed at undermining her reputation because of her political views, advocacy for women's rights, and active participation in the "My Passport Without Guardianship" campaign, organized by organizations and Yemeni women to obtain a passport without requiring the approval and attendance of a guardian. Dr. Al-Dubai expressed that the campaign against her was a broader attack on all women, aimed at restricting their roles, diminishing their rights, and imposing guardianship over their public activities. The Yemeni electronic newspaper Akhbar Al-Youm, published by Al-Shumu' Foundation for Press and Media, headquartered in Ma'rib Governorate, and headed by its editor-in-chief Saif Al-Hadhri, dedicated an entire page to inciting against Dr. Al-Dubai, the "My Passport Without Guardianship" campaign, and feminist organizations and activists, falsely accusing them of attacking the Islam. The newspaper also published a picture of Dr. Al-Dubai with derogatory captions describing her as a beggar and woman of questionable character.<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Adel Al-Shuja, a highly regarded Yemeni academic with 81,822 followers on his Facebook account, expressed concerns regarding Dr. Al-Dubai promotion of homosexuality and the LGBT community as well as her participation in questionable conferences and campaigns. Furthermore, Dr. Al-Shuja alleged that Dr. Al-Dubai sought to undermine the traditional Yemeni family structure through her support for the "My Passport Without Guardianship" initiative.<sup>25</sup>

A number of mosque preachers, who maintain Facebook accounts, disseminate sermons and promote them on social media platforms, which included inflammatory rhetoric against Dr. Al-Dubai and the spread of misguided non-Islamic ideas. This exposed Dr. Al-Dubai to significant danger due to the religious authority held by clerics over the public, which could embolden an extremist individual to harm her, if not endanger her life, in the name of Islam.<sup>26</sup>

It is worth noting that Dr. Al-Dubai submitted multiple legal proceedings against those who opposed her, and additionally, she initiated a case against Akhbar Al-Youm newspaper, which was submitted to the Ma'rib Governorate. The case has already been transferred to Public Prosecution in accordance with the provisions of Law No. 25 of 1990 regarding the press, publications, and law. No. 12 of 1994 regarding crimes and penalties.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Al-Dubai also filed a case against Dr. Adel Al-Shujaa in Egypt, where he resides in Internet investigation intelligence. As Dr. Al-Dubai told the researcher, the case has been transferred to Public Prosecution and is currently awaiting its referral to court.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.aremnews.com/entertainment/society/f8nau1ka1>

<sup>23</sup> Interview by the researcher with lawyer Tahani Al-Sarari, who the case of Sarah Al-Alwani.

<sup>24</sup> [https://fb.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0CgP3kb9sckg6E4xVgSYfHK2qQAAYHsLdj8EPg9LkWmwJLi1MECNbp7WV8FioXv79I&id=545375016](https://fb.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0CgP3kb9sckg6E4xVgSYfHK2qQAAYHsLdj8EPg9LkWmwJLi1MECNbp7WV8FioXv79I&id=545375016)

<sup>25</sup> <https://fb.com/545375016/posts/pfbid02xPh86JRGHRBDR5Ziy4MThH5KhmotCGiRxjEoTqmexMC7QGWRbTA7oLuesPNeek1RI/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://fb.com/545375016/posts/pfbid0RRBvAaVdPr1oUoGt6Zg5921QBQFBVuFdPgKxcod4BHjJLPfqMCZhl6SkjygCnW5I/>

<sup>27</sup> See references 12 and 13.

<sup>28</sup> <https://fb.com/545375016/posts/pfbid02xPh86JRGHRBDR5Ziy4MThH5KhmotCGiRxjEoTqmexMC7QGWRbTA7oLuesPNeek1RI/>

Dr. Al-Dubai filed a formal complaint with the Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs against Yahya Gobar, the Consul at the Embassy of the Republic of Yemen in India, regarding his comments on her post regarding the initiation of legal proceedings against Adel Al-Shuja. The complaint alleged that Gobar accused her of working for suspicious organizations that were reportedly paying her litigation fees.<sup>29</sup> Despite being followed up with the Ministry and requesting a response, Dr. Al-Dubai did not receive any official communication from the Ministry. Furthermore, the Ministry issued a circular to all its employees in embassies, instructing them to refrain from expressing political opinions on social media platforms that the country is currently experiencing.<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Al-Dubai's response to the various forms of violence directed against her serves as a notable example of perseverance in utilizing legal means and pursuing those responsible for defaming her, regardless of location or political affiliation. Despite the complexities, lengthy procedures, and significant financial costs, Dr. Al-Dubai has remained dedicated to her cause and has continued to follow up in all cases. Additionally, the psychological pressure caused by defamation campaigns further complicates this struggle. Dr. Al-Dubai's commitment to combating digital violence and defamation campaigns, which are motivated by political, social, and cultural factors, stems from her belief that her cause is not solely a personal matter but rather a matter of suppressing women's participation and expression in the public sphere. She recognizes that politics often prevents women from fully participating in public discourse and seeks to undermine their calls for equal citizenship rights. Therefore, Dr. Al-Dubai called for the activation of official national mechanisms, including government ministries and the judiciary, to address incitement, defamation, and violence against women. By promptly determining cases and making them public, this approach serves as a deterrent for those who would target Yemeni women and activists in the public sphere.<sup>31</sup>

## Section 2: The Legal Context

Undoubtedly, the legal system plays a crucial role in addressing the violence against women. The higher the values of equality, protection, and positive discrimination for women enforced in the constitution and the law, the more it will decrease the incidence of violence against women and mitigate the influence of other cultural and social factors that negatively impact the position of women and perpetuate violence against them in society.

Scrutinizing the Yemeni Constitution reveals a notable decline in the recognition of gender equality, as evidenced by the amendments made to the Constitution in 1994. Specifically, Article 27 of the 1991 Constitution, which stipulated that "all citizens are equal before the law and are equal in public rights and duties, with no discrimination on the basis of sex, color, origin, language, profession, social status, or belief," was deleted from the 1994 Constitution.<sup>32</sup> Despite the deletion of this article, most provisions in the 1991 Constitution remain in effect.<sup>33</sup>

The Constitution of Yemen, in Article 24 ("The state guarantees equal opportunities for all citizens politically, economically, socially, and culturally, and issues laws to achieve this") and 25 ("Yemeni society is based on social solidarity based on justice, freedom, and equality in accordance with the law,") guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens in all aspects of life, and yet the addition of Article

<sup>29</sup> [https://fb.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0ohAprFPWPAkdY3msy4nH8MeonU2tDpJ5WB637hxsS1TH2PChuekT4dfovvbnVrWl&id=545375016](https://fb.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0ohAprFPWPAkdY3msy4nH8MeonU2tDpJ5WB637hxsS1TH2PChuekT4dfovvbnVrWl&id=545375016)

<sup>30</sup> [nabd.com](http://nabd.com) (صحيفة الوطن، العنصرية / تعميم لوزارة الخارجية اليمنية بمنع الآراء السياسية لمنتسبيها - وثيقة)

<sup>31</sup> An interview conducted by the researcher with Dr. Olfat Al-Dabai.

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen\\_2015.pdf?lang=ar](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Yemen_2015.pdf?lang=ar)

<sup>33</sup> Because of the events and war that Yemen is going through, constitutional terms of reference were added to the 1994 Constitution, such as the Gulf Initiative in April 2011 and the announcement of the transfer of power in April 2022.

31 in the 1994 Constitution, which states: “Women are the sisters of men, and they have rights and duties guaranteed and required by Sharia and stipulated by law,” made the traditional religious interpretation of the Yemeni legislator a reference in all matters. Consequently, many laws remain discriminatory against women, such as the Personal Status Law, the Nationality Law, the Crimes and Punishments Law, and others, under the pretext of being based on Islamic Sharia, whose tolerance purposes are not dealt with, and enlightened religious thought is not used in their interpretation, reflecting their purposes in the legislation in a way that enhances women’s status, rights, and roles in the law. These laws are claimed to be based on Islamic Sharia, but they do not reflect its tolerance and enlightened religious thought, instead perpetuating outdated traditional ideas and jurisprudence. This has resulted in a wide gap between legislation and requirements of reality, particularly those related to women's rights and protection from violence.

It is imperative to note that the draft of the new Yemeni Constitution,<sup>34</sup> which was formulated based on the results of the National Dialogue,<sup>35</sup> was impeded by the Houthis' coup d'état in 2014, and the subsequent war in Yemen. This draft aimed to bring about a constitutional shift regarding women's rights, their empowerment, protection from violence, and their enhanced role in society, but unfortunately, this has yet to be realized.

With regard to digital violence against women, the laws in Yemen are still inadequate to address this issue, and there is a lack of legislation specifically related to cybercrimes and their consequences. The Press Law cannot be used in these cases, as social media content is not considered within the scope of the Press and Publications Law, unless the incitement or violence published is in an electronic newspaper. The delay in updating Yemeni laws and creating a law for cybercrimes was caused by the country's current state of war, which lasted nearly eight years, during which most state institutions have been disrupted, including the Yemeni parliament, whose sessions have been repeatedly disrupted, and no draft or amendment to the law was proposed during this period.

The Crimes and Penal Code No. 12 of 1994<sup>36</sup> is utilized to address instances of cybercrime, blackmail, threats, bullying, and violations of citizens' privacy. This legal code contains provisions that are applicable to a wide range of offenses, such as insult and defamation (Article 291 defines insult as “attributing an offensive incident to another that, if it were true, would have required the punishment of the person to whom it was attributed by law or would have necessitated his contempt by the people of his country, as well as any insult to another in a way that offends his honor or reputation, without that including attributing a specific incident to him.”), the penalty for an insult is determined in accordance with Article 292, which stipulates, “Any individual who insults another in a manner other than slander shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or by a fine, even if the incident attributed to the victim is true.” In addition, this legal code contains provisions that are also applicable to intimidation through the threat of harm (Article 313 stipulates: “Any individual who intentionally instills in a person the fear of harming him or any other person he cares about and thus forces him, in bad faith, to surrender him or any other person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or a fine. Money, a legal document, or anything that he signs with a signature or stamp that turns it into a legal document.”) and the use of force or coercion to obtain a signature or other legal document.

<sup>34</sup> The first draft was submitted to the President of the Republic on January 7, 2015. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session32/YE/A\\_HRC\\_WG.6\\_32\\_YEM\\_1\\_Yemen\\_Annex\\_1\\_A.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session32/YE/A_HRC_WG.6_32_YEM_1_Yemen_Annex_1_A.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> The Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, which was held between March 18, 2013 - January 25, 2014, after the popular youth revolution in February 2011. <http://www.pdf-yemen.com/PDF/Democratic/NDC%20Final%20Document.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Yemeni Crimes and Penal Code. [https://yemen-nic.info/db/laws\\_ye/detail.php?ID=11424](https://yemen-nic.info/db/laws_ye/detail.php?ID=11424)

Article 256 of the criminal code prohibits violations of the sanctity of private life. This law stipulates, “Anyone found guilty shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine for breaching the privacy of another individual by one of the following acts committed in circumstances other than those authorized by law or without the consent of the victim: eavesdropping, recording or transmitting via a device, regardless of its type, conversations that took place in a private place or by phone, or capturing or transmitting via a device, regardless of its type, a picture of a person from a private location. If the actions referred to previously occurred during a meeting within the earshot or sight of those present, their consent was presumed. A public employee who commits one of the acts set forth in this article, relying on the authority of their position, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years or a fine. In all cases, a ruling shall be made to confiscate the equipment and other things that may have been used in the crime, as stipulated, by erasing the recordings obtained from it or destroying it.”

Regarding the violation of correspondence, Article 255 of the Code of Crimes and Penalties specifies the penalties for such actions: “Anyone who opened a letter that was not intended for them or withheld a telegraphic or telephone message is subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or a fine. Similarly, anyone who embezzled, destroyed, or disclosed the contents of these correspondences to others, even if the message was sent open or opened by mistake or coincidence, was also subject to the same penalties. If the crime was committed by a public employee in violation of their job duties, the penalty is imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or a fine.”

With regards to the disclosure of private information, Article 257 of the Penal Code stipulates: “Anyone who broadcasted, facilitated the broadcast, or used, even non-publicly, a recording or document obtained by one of the methods specified in the previous article or without the consent of the person concerned, shall be punished with imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or a fine. Anyone who threatened to disclose a matter obtained by one of the methods referred to in order to force a person to do or abstain from doing an act shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding three years. A public employee who committed one of the acts set forth in this article in reliance on the authority of his position, and in all cases, a ruling shall be made to confiscate the devices and other things that may have been used in the crime or obtained from it, and the recordings obtained from the crime shall be erased or destroyed.”

In Yemen, there are no officially designated institutions that specialize in addressing digital violence. Such cases are generally handled by standard judicial authorities, including prosecutors and courts, who use the provisions of the Crimes and Penal Codes when processing these cases.

It is imperative to expedite the evolution of Yemeni laws to keep pace with advancements in technology and the increasing use of social media by citizens. Furthermore, the formulation of a precise and comprehensive legal language that is suitable and encompasses various issues that arise from the utilization of communication technology and modern means of communication is of utmost importance. This includes measures to curb the prevalence of digital blackmailing against women and the perpetration of digital violence against them, which is a matter of great concern for feminist and human rights civil society organizations. These organizations consistently advocate stricter regulations to address rampant digital violence against women and girls in Yemen.



## Section 3: Field Results

### The Study Sample

The researcher conducted online interviews with 15 women who had been exposed to digital violence. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed to a diverse range of WhatsApp groups of Yemeni women involved in civil society and the public sphere, and those who had experienced digital violence were invited to participate. A total of 56 women from five targeted governorates completed the questionnaire.

Fifteen respondents were excluded from the study due to their residence outside Yemen, which falls outside the scope of this research. Therefore, the final study sample consisted of 41 women, two of whom were contacted directly and provided additional information, including explicit citations of their cases, within the context of this study.

The following table displays the distribution of the 41 female respondents based on age group, marital status, governorate, and educational level.

**Social Factors of the Participants**

Age Group		Marital Status		Governorates		Educational Level	
19-20	4	Single	20	Sana'a	14	Elementary	3
21-30	15	Married	13	Aden	11	High school	8
31-40	14	Divorced	4	Taiz	6	B.A.	28
41-55	8	Divorced	2	Hadhramaut	5	M.A.	1
		Widow	1	Marib	5	Ph.D.	1
		Not specified	1				

Based on the responses, it can be observed that the respondents fell within the age range of 21–40 years. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents were single.

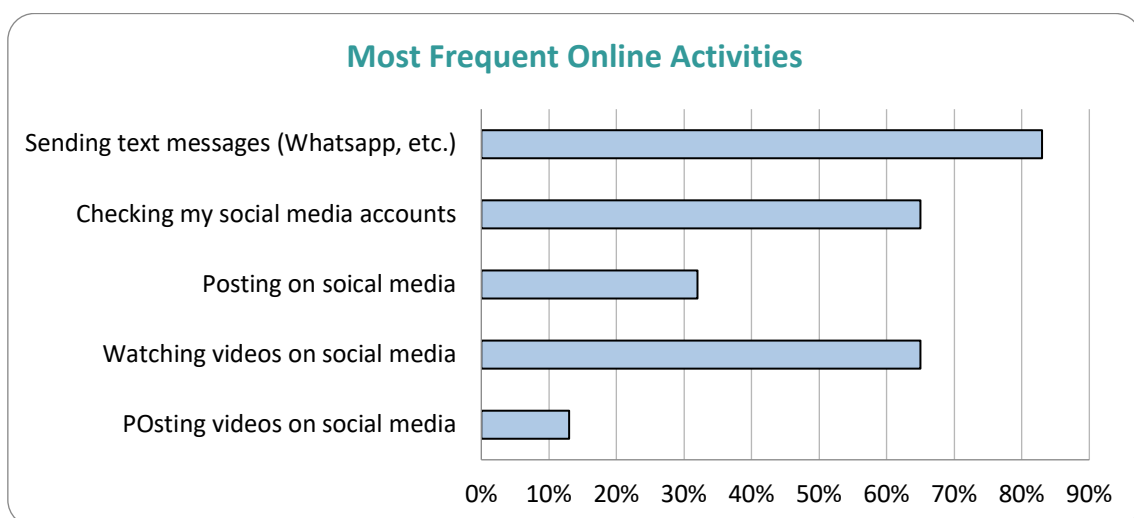
Regarding governorates, only five were selected: the capital, Sana'a, and the temporary capital, Aden, where the most prominent and visible women in the public sphere are from these two governorates, followed by Taiz, which has the largest population of women with regard to education and employment, Ma'rib, which is characterized by its tribal nature, witnessed a significant turnout of displaced individuals during the years of conflict, and many active women emerged in the public sphere, and Hadramaut, which is one of the most conservative southern governorates with regard to

women's employment and activities in the public sphere. It is worth noting that the highest response was from Sana'a, followed by Aden and Taiz, which is logical because women in these three governorates are more interactive and have access to the Internet, although the years of war have adversely affected Internet service in Yemen in general and in Aden in particular.

With regard to education, the majority of the respondents possessed university qualifications. In terms of employment, the sample primarily comprised individuals working in the private sector, inclusive of civil society and academics.

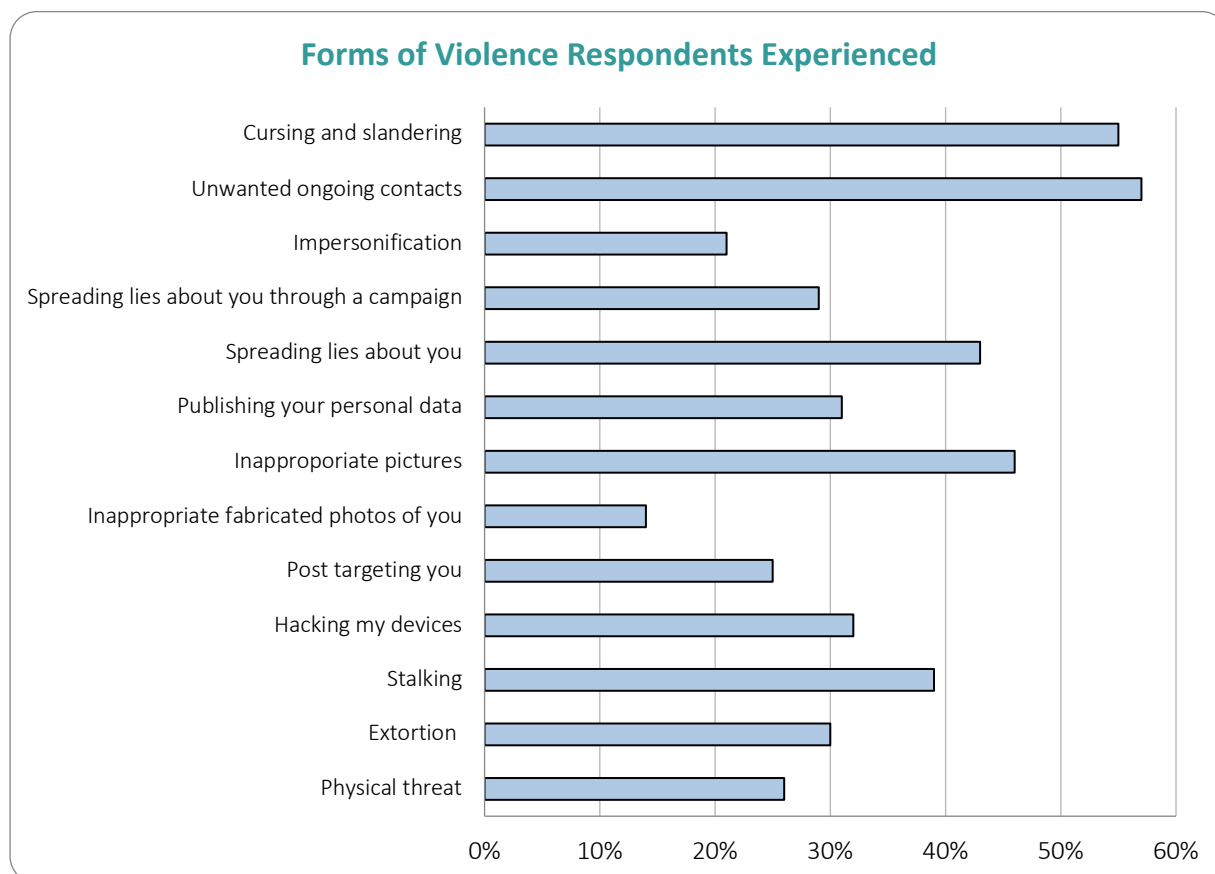
It is evident from the questionnaire results that the use of personal phones is the most prevalent method, as personal phones are ubiquitous and the most commonly used devices. In contrast, the use of public computers in Internet cafés is the least prevalent, as Yemeni women rarely visit such public places. This is due to the convenience and privacy of using a personal phone, as well as the sensitivity of the strict social and cultural reality towards the presence of women in such places.

According to the data presented in the graph, the most prevalent mode of communication was WhatsApp messaging, with a rate of 83%. This preference for WhatsApp as a means of communication is not surprising given its widespread popularity and accessibility in Yemen. Furthermore, the use of WhatsApp is facilitated by the fact that it does not require a strong Internet connection, thus making it a suitable choice in light of the subpar Internet infrastructure in Yemen. In addition, checking Facebook accounts or watching videos on various platforms ranked second at a rate of 65%, which means that most interactions with other social media are negative, as most women who have accounts on social media watch content and know what is going on. This largely reflects the extreme caution that women working in the public sphere deal with these means, and the percentage of women expressing their opinions and posting publications is 32%, which is low compared to using WhatsApp. As the majority of women active in the public sphere do not express their opinions on social media platforms, it can be said that using WhatsApp was the most comfortable method for the sample.



## Dimensions of Digital Violence: Forms and Severity

To determine the forms and extent of the respondents' exposure to digital violence, a question was posed that encompassed the various manifestations of digital violence to which they may have been exposed. Six options were provided to assess the extent of exposure to each form of digital violence, ranging from a very high degree to no exposure. The respondents were given the opportunity to write additional comments or clarify their selections. The following graph illustrates the form and extent of the respondents' exposure to various forms of digital violence:

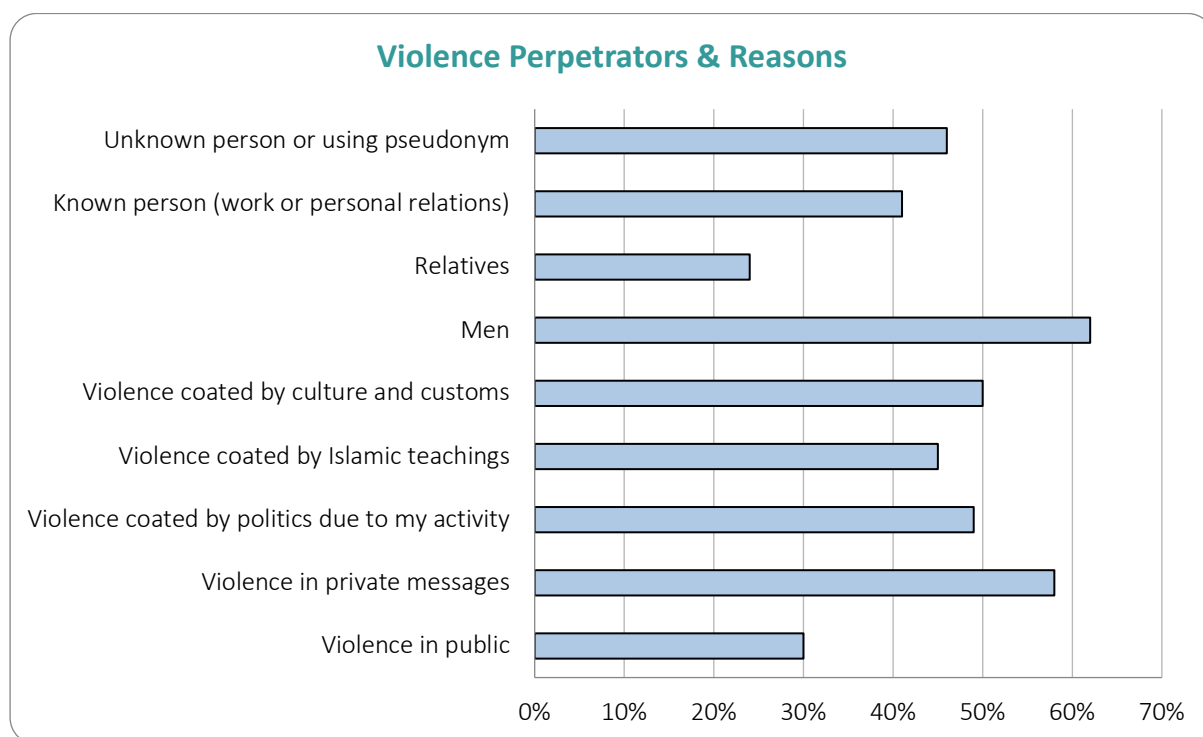


The figure above shows that the most prevalent form of digital violence experienced by the respondents concerned ongoing contact with unknown individuals or those with whom they did not wish to communicate, which occurred at a rate of 57%, resulting in psychological, mental, and nervous harm and discomfort. This is a common occurrence for political and working women who are often subjected to insults, cursing, and defamation in the public sphere of society, with 55% reporting exposure to such violations of public morals and offenses against their gender. This type of abuse is easily facilitated through various and widespread means of social media, where women are frequently defamed and have their reputations and images sullied. A false or fabricated phrase shared on platforms such as Facebook can quickly spread and distort a woman's reputation and image.

The results indicate that a significant proportion of the respondents (30 %) had experienced financial or sexual blackmail, while 26% faced threats of death or rape. These statistics highlight the prevalence and widespread nature of digital violence against women, which can be perpetrated by anonymous individuals through various methods and forms.

## Causes Of Violence and Platforms on Which It Occurs

This section aims to gain insight into the perpetrators, motivations, and platforms on which digital violence occurs, which includes examining whether it occurs in private or public settings and whether it is committed by known or unknown individuals. The following graph indicates that the respondents confirmed that 60% of digital violence was committed by men, which reflects the prevalence of male guardianship over women in society. Additionally, 46% of digital violence was committed by unknown individuals or from fake accounts, while 41% was committed by people known on a professional or personal level. The study also found that 24% of digital violence came from relatives. The study also found that 24% of digital violence came from relatives.

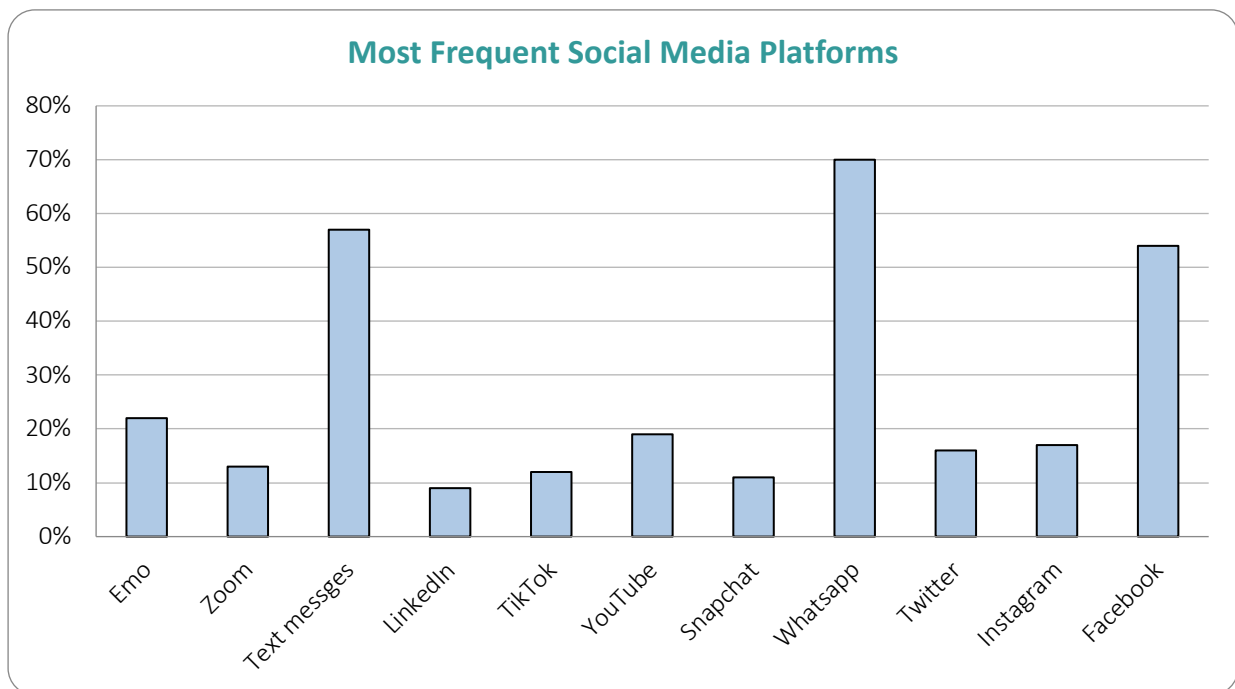


In terms of the causes of digital violence, the respondents noted several reasons, including:

- Cultural due to customs and traditions.
- Political or institutional issues
- Religious.

With regard to the setting in which violence is perpetrated, the percentage of respondents exposed to digital violence in a private setting reached 58%, and its objective was typically to blackmail and the spread of fear and terror. Furthermore, 30% experienced public digital violence in the presence of others, with the aim of damaging their reputations through defamation and distortion.

To identify social media platforms where digital violence is most prevalent in Yemen, a comprehensive list of all platforms utilized in the country was compiled, and the respondents were requested to evaluate the occurrence of such behavior on each platform. The evaluation scale consisted of six options, ranging from very much to never, with the addition of the option "I do not use this platform" as the final alternative. The following graphs illustrate these results.



WhatsApp, a popular social media platform, has become a source of digital violence against women in Yemen owing to its widespread usage and accessibility. This aligns with the response to the sixth question, which indicates that perpetrators use WhatsApp followed by text messages to engage in such acts. Furthermore, the results of the third question show that the respondents primarily engaged in sending messages via WhatsApp and text messages, with Facebook being the second most frequently used platform.

## Reasons for the Increase of Digital Violence Against Women

To assess whether the respondents experienced digital violence due to their gender, they were asked the following question: "If you were not a woman, do you believe you would have been subjected to such violence? How?"

Thirty-nine female respondents provided a response to this question. Of these, 36 indicated that they had experienced violence due to their gender, thereby suggesting a significant consensus that women are subjected to violence because of their gender. Only two respondents opined that everyone is exposed to violence, regardless of gender, with one attributing this to success and the other stating, "I don't know."

The majority of respondents who indicated that they experienced violence due to their gender emphasized the specific impact of such violence on women's social status and activities, which differs from the impact on men. For example, one respondent stated, "Violence affects both men and women, but when it is directed at women, it targets the social constraints that limit their mobility, and it impedes their activism and engagement." Another respondent commented, "Yes, violence against women is a widespread and organized form of violence perpetrated by society, families, and individuals. Men are less frequently subjected to such violence."

Respondents were queried on their perspective regarding the prevalence of violence against women on the Internet in Yemen, with particular emphasis on social media platforms. The respondents provided a range of reasons for this trend, which were categorized into five broad categories.

### *Social and Cultural Reasons*

- The misconceptions perpetuated in the minds of society against women, the male mentality, and the stigma placed on the family of abused women.
- Women's weak relationships with her family and her fear of her family and society.
- The social idea about strong women as rude, bold, and not respecting anyone.
- Extremism and misunderstanding of religion.
- Weak religious morals and caring about what is traditionally unacceptable rather than what is religiously forbidden.
- Family's lack of trust in women and their inability to defend themselves.
- Lack of awareness and widespread ignorance.
- Upbringing.
- Sometimes blackmail involves women because of jealousy and envy.
- Poor quality education in Yemen.

### *Political and Institutional Reasons*

- The ongoing war doubled the deterioration of men's morals and their level of awareness.
- Going against the political mainstream.
- Militia control in the north and south of Yemen.
- Lack of specialists in this field among security and judicial authorities.
- Lack of dialogue.
- Spread of hate speech.
- Failure to activate the government's role, led by the Ministry of Human Rights and Social Affairs, in taking necessary measures to protect women from digital violence.
- Failure of international organizations to support issues related to digital violence against women.
- Weakness of civil society organizations.

### *Legal Reasons*

- The absence of a law that protects women's rights.
- The absence of cybercrime laws and specialized security units deal with them.

### *Knowledge and Awareness Reasons*

- Most women do not understand the methods of hacking and safe use of the Internet.
- Illiteracy is widespread among women.

### *Economic Reasons*

- Poverty.
- Unemployment.
- Lack of activities and events that absorb energy from young people.
- Wide use of drugs.



The multiple factors that contribute to digital violence and violence against women in Yemen highlight the severity of the issue and its rootedness in Yemeni society. Cultural and social attitudes that devalue the role of women and consider them a source of shame and honor for the family are prevalent. Consequently, families are sensitive to even the most trivial matters that could harm a woman's reputation, leading to increased male dominance over females in the family and female anxiety about potential harassment. In many cases, families resort to depriving women of access to phones or social media as a means of protection, which can limit their access to education and work. Even highly educated and professional Yemeni women are subjected to traditional customs and norms, which give male dominance and decision-making power to the family and are a source of honor and shame for the family. The ongoing war in Yemen, now in its eighth year, has exacerbated the problems of violence to which women are exposed and has hindered the development of institutions dedicated to protecting citizens, such as the judiciary, police, and security agencies. This has also prevented the issuance of new laws that keep pace with the evolving needs of the Yemeni society, including the Digital Protection Law. Given the cessation of development and the prevalence of poverty and unemployment resulting from the war, electronic blackmail has become increasingly prevalent as a means of obtaining money. Women, the easiest targets, were often subjected to blackmail. Therefore, effective measures and strategies must be employed to address the root causes of violence, both physical and digital, to mitigate its impact on women and society as a whole.

## How Do Yemeni Women Deal with Digital Violence?

To understand the respondents' reactions to the different forms of digital violence, detailed questions were posed to them to provide their reactions to each form of violence presented. A variety of forms of digital violence were presented, and a comprehensive list of possible responses and reactions was provided for each form, allowing respondents to select one or more options for their reaction to each type of violence.

As shown in the table above, the most prevalent reaction was blocking perpetrators, with 76% of the respondents reporting the receipt of obscene and unwanted photos; 73% reporting repeated contact with someone they did not want to talk to; 61% reported exposure to insults, cursing, and defamation; and 51% reported that their personal information was posted online, including their address.

In particular, the reaction rate of ignoring these forms of digital violence reached 49% when lies were spread about them; 44% when they were exposed to physical threats, such as threats of death, rape, or physical harm; and 41% when they were targeted with discriminatory names or derogatory language, such as sexist or racist names.

The reactions, whether blocking or ignoring the perpetrator, suggest that the majority of women prefer to resolve the issue the safest way to avoid potential further complications and difficulties, including the fear of filing a report or complaint. This is due to the perception that justice will not be served and that there are no protective laws in place, along with the additional pressures of social stigma that may arise if the matter is further publicized. Consequently, it is more convenient and less detrimental for women to block or ignore the perpetrators.

In contrast, 41% of respondents reported seeking support from specialists to take technical precautionary measures in the event of device or account hacking, which is a safe way to deal with digital violence. It is worth noting that a number of specialists, including women, have emerged in Yemen who work in digital protection. As previously mentioned, voluntary personal initiatives have also been established to assist women.

## Forms of Violence and Respondents' Reaction

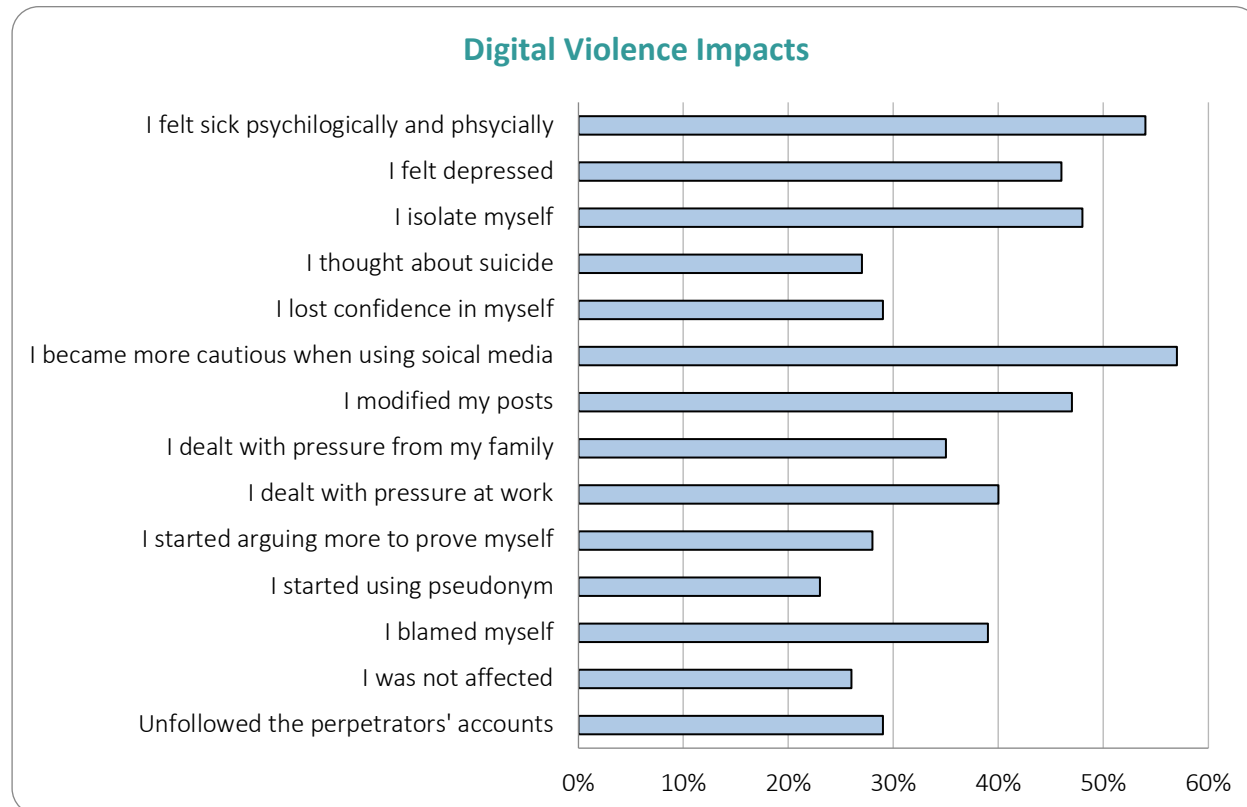
Forms of Violence	Respondents' Reactions											
	Ignoring	Telling someone	Responding directly to the perpetrator	Blocking perpetrators	Reporting him to social media platforms	Reporting him to government institutions	Stop posting similar contents	Deleting my account	Stop posting anything	Taking precautions measurement	Deleting the original post	Did not happen
Physical threat	44%	29%	15%	41%	20%	20%	5%	10%	10%	22%	7%	24%
Extortion	32%	24%	29%	49%	17%	20%	7%	7%	7%	15%	5%	24%
Stalking	27%	17%	10%	34%	17%	10%	5%	12%	5%	27%	5%	22%
Hacking my devices	7%	12%	7%	20%	22%	12%	2%	15%	2%	41%	2%	27%
Post targeting you	41%	7%	7%	34%	12%	12%	0%	10%	5%	12%	10%	29%
Inappropriate fabricated photos of you	12%	7%	5%	34%	22%	15%	0%	5%	5%	10%	7%	46%
Inappropriate pictures	41%	12%	2%	76%	29%	10%	2%	7%	2%	12%	10%	7%
Publishing your personal data	27%	15%	10%	51%	24%	7%	0%	5%	0%	5%	10%	27%
Spreading lies about you	49%	20%	15%	29%	20%	12%	5%	7%	2%	7%	5%	22%
Spreading lies about you through a campaign	29%	12%	22%	24%	12%	15%	2%	5%	5%	10%	12%	44%
Impersonation	15%	5%	7%	12%	20%	12%	0%	7%	0%	7%	2%	59%
Unwanted ongoing contacts	39%	5%	12%	73%	15%	7%	0%	7%	0%	5%	2%	5%
Cursing and slandering	32%	17%	22%	61%	27%	15%	0%	10%	2%	10%	5%	10%
Inciting husband or family against me.	17%	15%	12%	10%	2%	5%	0%	2%	0%	2%	2%	41%
Attacking my family or friends	17%	15%	17%	15%	10%	12%	0%	5%	0%	5%	2%	34%

This study revealed a discouraging statistic, with the highest rate of 29% indicating the likelihood of submitting a complaint to the platform in the event that the perpetrator post lies about her, which underscores the inadequate response of various platforms to digital violence against women, as well as the lack of clarity in the mechanisms for filing complaints. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that many women opt to delete their accounts, even those with experience and knowledge of submitting complaints. The disappointment and frustration resulting from the ineffective response to these complaints is evident in the vitriolic and degrading responses directed towards feminist activists, who are subjected to obscene language that impugns their reputation, dignity, and femininity. Once limited to public spaces, this form of verbal violence has now become elevated to cyberspace, where it can be perpetrated with ease and force.

The rate of reporting incidents of digital violence to official authorities was as high as 20%, with the most severe forms of violence including threats of death, rape, or physical harm, as well as sexual or financial blackmail. Given the serious criminal implications of such behavior, such violence cannot be overlooked by these women. Therefore, victims seek help from the authorities. Unfortunately, women do not seek help when violence is less serious because of the lack of an adequate response from official authorities with such forms of violence and the length and cost of the procedures involved.

## Impact of Digital Violence on Yemeni Women

The graph below illustrates the percentages of the relative impact of digital violence on the respondents.



It is evident that women's exposure to digital violence has a profound impact on their well-being, both psychologically and physically. This can make them less engaged with society and affect their abilities to express themselves. As a result, they may choose to use pseudonyms to protect their identity and feel more comfortable sharing opinions. This can lead to a lack of participation in social activities and reinforcement of gender-based stereotypes, which can have severe consequences including depression, suicidal thoughts, and social isolation. The effects of such violence can be so severe that it can prevent women from fully participating in society, hinder their ability to contribute, and perpetuate male-dominated authority in society. It is essential to address this issue to promote a more inclusive and equitable social environment.

Consequently, it is imperative to draw attention to the dire and perilous effects of digital violence on the Yemeni women. This includes the detrimental impact on their psychological and physical well-being, their confidence in expressing themselves, and elevated pressures from families and society, particularly in traditional settings such as Yemen's, which is currently facing war and instability.

The respondents were requested to recount one or more instances of digital violence to which they had been subjected. The answers provided by the sample were numerous and varied, encompassing different forms of digital violence, perpetrators, and their impacts on victims. Some respondents focused on a particular incident, while others described a series of events. The following are some examples of specific incidents of digital violence that the respondents highlighted in their narratives.

#### *Death threat:*

One respondent experienced digital violence in the form of death threats and was forced to relocate but did not disclose the reason or how it started. Specifically, she said, "I received warnings that her personal photos would be published on Facebook and other platforms. I was compelled to move from Ma'rib to Hadramaut, with the threat of death if I returned to Ma'rib."

Another participant reported, "I was targeted by a concerted effort to malign my reputation and end my life, and various societal entities, including political parties and civil society organizations, supported me."

#### *A smear campaign by official and well-known bodies:*

Another reported that she is still the target of a deliberate and systematic campaign of violence, which includes defamation, insults, and slander by known and unknown parties. She asserted, "the campaign was instigated by the editor-in-chief of a newspaper, mosque preachers, and political figures from both government and opposition. Legal action has been taken in response to these allegations."

#### *Digital violence may be related to the following factors:*

Another participant, who was subjected to blackmail by a family member, was coerced into silence because the family member was the perpetrator. She indicated, "Blackmail or harassment can be a prevalent issue within the family itself. I was a victim of harassment by a family member and was compelled to refrain from reporting the matter to anyone."

Here, the deleterious consequences of familial violence, wherein the victim is often compelled to maintain familial harmony by remaining silent, even if it means sacrificing her own dignity and well-being.

*Focus on the impact of digital violence:*

Another respondent recounted the distressing details of blackmailing by an individual who had access to her phone and was aware of her personal relationships, including those with her brothers and son. She stated, "The blackmailer was privy to all the information on my phone and would flirt with all my male neighbors. This resulted in tension between me and my neighbors and a rift between me and my brothers and son."

Another indicated that digital violence had escalated to the level of defamation and financial blackmail, preventing her from engaging online through her social media accounts, saying, "I was threatened with the release of private photos and subjected to financial extortion using these photos and spreading rumors and lies about me in my workplace or on Facebook. I was prevented by my husband and relatives from engaging in any public activity through social media."

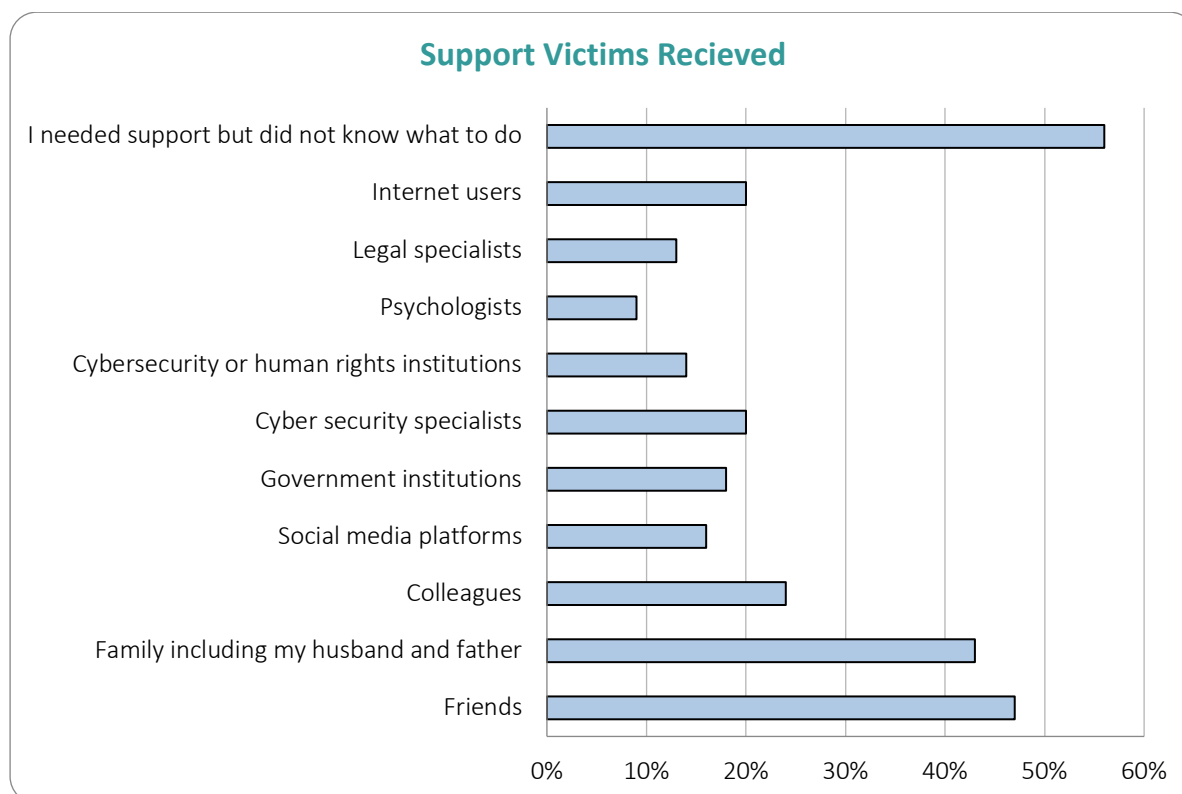
*Dealing Roughly with Digital Violence:*

One of the respondents was able to firmly address those who disrespected Yemeni women, and she successfully closed the perpetrator's account. She stated, "I have a friend on Facebook who wrote a post about Yemen, and I commented on his post. Another individual commented on my comments, and he was from a neighboring country. The content of his message was highly offensive to Yemeni women using derogatory language and comparisons. I refused to remain silent and engaged in lengthy conversations with him in the comments section. Eventually, his anger threatened him by closing my account, but I took the necessary action. I want to make it clear that I am neither passive nor incapable of taking action."

The examples mentioned above serve as a testament to the prevalence of digital violence towards women, which manifests in various forms, such as defamation, false campaigns, blackmail, and death threats. This violence is not limited to any particular group, as it can be perpetrated by both well-known and unknown official entities, including family members and even official parties during targeted campaigns. The impact of such behavior extends beyond the individual victim, affecting her relationships with both the broader community and those closest to her, potentially leading to a decline in her relationships with her siblings and children. However, victims rarely confront their abusers successfully.

## Support, Protection Measures, and Recommendations

This section investigates the sources of support for women who have experienced digital violence and the level of assistance provided. The graph below displays the percentage of respondents who received support from various organizations.

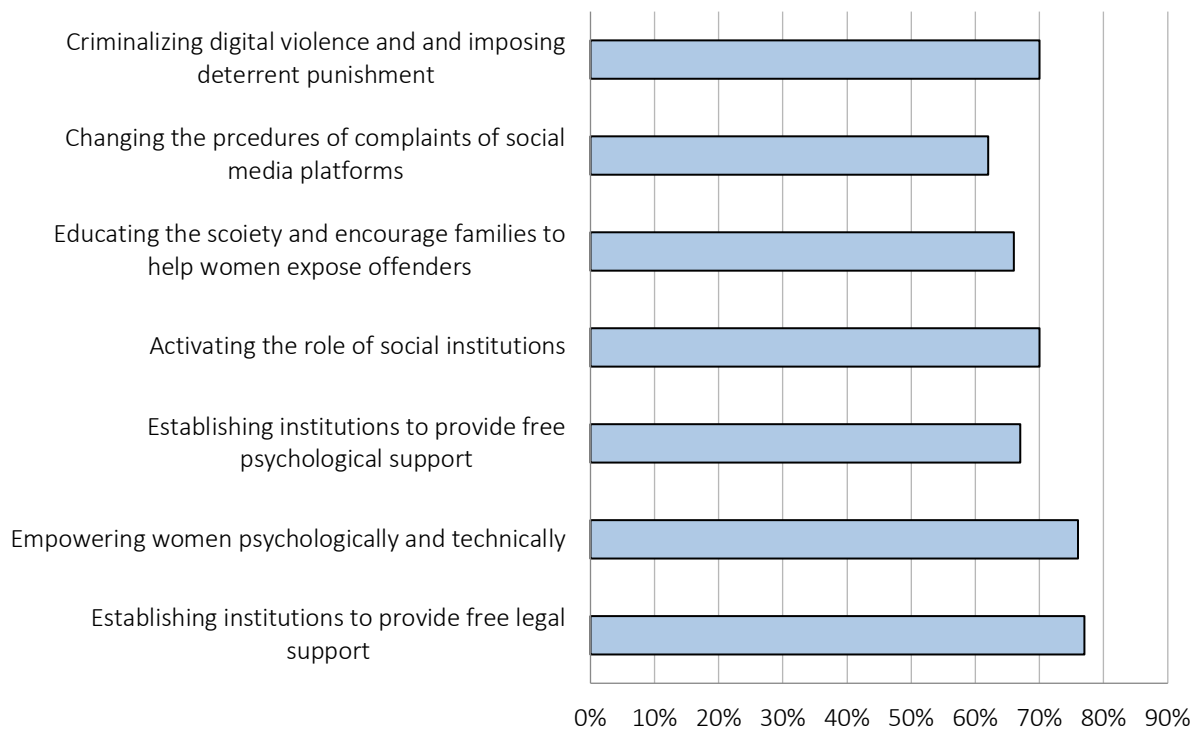


Based on this information, it is evident that a significant proportion of women who have experienced digital violence and require support are unaware of the resources available to them. This is despite the fact that 33 respondents had university education or higher. The most common sources of support for women are friends, family, and colleagues. This suggests that social media platforms are inadequate in protecting users from bullying and violence, particularly women. Furthermore, it indicates the inaccessibility of legal protection services from official authorities. The financial burden of obtaining legal or psychological support is also a major obstacle that weakens women's recourse to these services. This finding is consistent with the previous responses provided by the respondents, wherein the majority reported resorting to safe methods of blocking or ignoring the perpetrator.

Regarding the significance of various safeguards to shield women from digital violence, the questionnaire results indicated that all the measures presented were crucial in promoting women's safety. The questionnaire utilized a multi-tier approach, encompassing five levels of feasibility for each measure, starting with 'the most feasible' option. The fourth option was 'unfeasible,' while the fifth option was 'unknown.' The accompanying graph provides a visual representation of the feasibility of the mechanisms, as perceived by the respondents.



### Necessary Measures and Initiatives



The data indicated that the majority of respondents sought institutions providing free legal assistance to abused women as well as empowering them both technically and psychologically. This is likely due to the high financial costs of seeking legal resources and increasing poverty levels. Additionally, the respondents expressed a strong need for increased awareness and knowledge of digital protection mechanisms to prevent hacking and avoid exposure to digital violence. Furthermore, the majority of respondents believed that the enactment of a law criminalizing digital violence and imposing deterrent punishments on offenders would be instrumental in reducing such incidents.

Although women often do not seek legal support except in cases of blackmail and threats, it is imperative that institutions providing free legal support to abused women be strengthened and supported, as this will not only empower women to confront and respond to the violence they face but also alleviate the financial burdens on them and their families. The use of social media and the Internet, which have become ubiquitous in daily life, has made women vulnerable to electronic violence. To effectively reduce digital violence, institutions must be found that provide free legal support and empower women digitally and psychologically to confront it. This can be achieved through the activation of civil society organizations, criminalization of digital violence, and reform of platforms for complaints. While these solutions can have a rapid impact, the root cause of violence against women must be addressed through education and encouragement of families to support women who have experienced violence. This requires concerted effort from the state, which must dedicate resources to education, media, culture, arts, law, and other areas as well as the involvement of civil society, the private sector, activists, and others. Only through such a comprehensive approach can we hope to achieve a fundamental shift in society's attitudes towards women and increase the acceptance of laws and procedures that protect them.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to shed light on the digital violence faced by Yemeni women and address the gravity of this phenomenon, which requires concerted efforts to combat and mitigate its consequences. The causes of digital violence are varied and multifaceted, encompassing perpetrators, victims' coping strategies, and the psychological impact that exacerbates women's reluctance to engage in public discourse.

Given the urgency of the situation, it is imperative to identify effective mechanisms to reduce the prevalence of digital violence. Beyond the preventive measures suggested by the respondents, this research endorses the following recommendations:

- Pressure decision-makers to enact cybercrime laws that include explicit provisions and harsher penalties for digital violence against women because of their severe impact on them.
- Pressure decision-makers to issue the necessary directives to police departments and prosecutors to prioritize and sensitively handle women's complaints of digital violence while ensuring that their privacy is protected, and coordinate with telecommunications companies to reveal the identity and number of perpetrators.
- Rapid response from social media platforms to complaints submitted by women and dealing with them seriously.
- Activate and support the role of civil society organizations, both through providing technical, psychological, and technical support to women who have experienced violence and by raising awareness of the dangers of the phenomenon and its effects. In addition, personal initiatives that aid female victims of digital violence should be encouraged.
- Pressure decision-makers to adopt the state's comprehensive policies, plans, and strategies, which would enhance society's awareness in reducing violence against women in general, enhance the status and role of women in society, promote the concept of equal citizenship, protect women, and improve access to justice for them.
- Conduct studies on digital violence, including a field study on a larger sample and a broader scope that includes all governorates of Yemen, to generalize the results. A study showing the impact of the ongoing conflict and war on digital violence against women, including those who lost the head of the family due to the war and had to work, displaced women, and women inside the Houthi-controlled area as a result of their restrictions on women, needs to be conducted. In addition, a study targeting Yemeni women in the diaspora and digital violence against them, whether they lived in Yemen or during their stay in the diaspora, was conducted to uncover the impact of being in safe environments where they are free to express their opinions, identities, and political views on social media. Further research can be conducted on the role of official state institutions such as police departments, prosecutors, and the judiciary in addressing issues of digital violence against women and the challenges that limit women's access to protection and support from the perspective of those working in these institutions. Additionally, a study can be conducted that focuses on the role of voluntary youth initiatives in alleviating digital violence and identifying mechanisms for developing, supporting, and disseminating these initiatives.

In light of the findings of this study, it is evident that the ongoing conflict and war in Yemen has exacerbated the issue of violence against women, particularly digital violence. The effects of this violence have been devastating, resulting in death, displacement, destruction, poverty, disability, and instability in the general situation. The multiplicity of authorities in the country and the spread of armed forces and militias have further exacerbated this situation. Social media and the Internet have

also facilitated the practice of violence and digital blackmail against women due to the lack of updated laws and means of protection to suit the entry of the Internet into people's lives. Furthermore, the spread of various digital platforms for social communication has occurred without sufficient awareness and knowledge of the methods and means of protection for the use of digital devices. Given these circumstances, there is an urgent need to address the deteriorating situation in the country and to take measures to reduce violence against women, particularly digital violence.