

Digital Violence Against Women in Morocco

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Digital violence against women (DVAW) is a pressing concern that demands rigorous study and investigation due to its rapidly evolving nature, widespread reach, and significant impact on the well-being of women and their families. Despite the ongoing global health crisis, this field of research is still in its infancy in the Middle East and North Africa region. The constraints of the pandemic have facilitated the proliferation of harmful practices, which have fortunately attracted the attention of researchers to the transformative consequences that must be anticipated and addressed.

This study aimed to comprehend the nature of the digital violence perpetrated against women in Morocco, the depth of its impact on them, and the extent of their ability to confront it and the available solutions and resources. To achieve this, a methodological approach that combined quantitative analysis and the qualitative data comprised expert opinions and testimonies of victims are combined, revealing that DVAW in Morocco is anonymous, has the capability to extend from the virtual realm to reality, and is predominantly perpetrated by men who reflect the violent tendencies inherent in society. Furthermore, this study found that the geographical location (village or city) plays a role in exacerbating the impact of this violence and limiting women's capacity to respond to it. This study concluded that women's response to digital violence is often dominant by ignoring the violent act, as many choose not to report it due to a lack of trust, fear of further harm, or a lack of knowledge about the laws and regulations that could protect them. To break the cycle of digital violence, it is necessary to provide education and training on digital safety mechanisms, as well as education on human rights and the importance of equality at an early age. This will help create more just and equitable societies.



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Executive Summary

Violence seems to be omnipresent and constantly rearing its head around the world, posing a threat to the safety and stability of societies. The technological revolution that has been ongoing since the beginning of this century and continues to this day has only added to the confusion and ambiguity surrounding this issue.

Digital violence against women (DVAW) is a growing concern in Morocco, as well as in other nations. This serves as a testament to the fact that technology has transformed the world in a profound and irreversible manner, and that the communications technology revolution has fundamentally altered our relationships with all aspects of life. This has led to the exposure of various social, psychological, economic, and legal imbalances that were previously concealed or less pronounced, and in some cases, even exacerbated.

This research aimed to comprehend the position of women in the digital space in Morocco amidst the significant technical changes and the attendant challenges, taking into account the Morocco's enacted legislation to confront this pervasive threat. This study intended to uncover the nature of the digital violence inflicted upon women in Morocco, its impact on them, and their knowledge of the laws that would protect them. It employed a mixed methodology, combining a questionnaire survey involving 108 women of varying ages, educational and social backgrounds, and urban/rural locations, as well as 14 qualitative interviews with active professionals and women survivors of digital violence. The objective of this approach was to gain a diverse understanding of the problem of DVAW and to elicit insights from survivors of such violence in both urban and rural areas.

This research indicated that digital violence in Morocco is prevalent, as over 60% of women surveyed reported experiencing it, including those with limited and active online presence. This widespread violence, particularly on Facebook (55%), WhatsApp (46%), and Instagram (24%), is a reflection of deeply ingrained societal violence. It is imperative to address and dismantle the root causes of such violence, as well as challenge the justifications that have been made in its defense. The perpetuation of discrimination through structural barriers further hinders efforts to eradicate all forms of violence against women, including digital violence, which remains a fundamental obstacle to achieving gender equality.

Digital violence, which is often disguised as such, is committed in the majority of cases (77%) by individuals who are unknown to the victims. Of these individuals, the vast majority (75%) are male. This form of violence is capable of crossing (33%) from the digital realm to the physical world, and the location of the victim, whether in a rural or urban area, is an aggravating factor (56%) for women's exposure to violence and their ability to cope with it. The most common forms of violence that women in Morocco suffer from are harassment and stalking through unwanted communications (49%), followed by verbal abuse and insults related to the victim's gender (42%), then stalking on the internet (24%), and sending indecent pictures (22%), then defamation that affects honor and reputation (17%). These violent practices lead to a variety of negative consequences for the victims, including depression (40% of cases), isolation (46%), a loss of confidence in themselves and in others (40%), and blame from family and society (33%). The research also found that the majority of women in Morocco (91%) choose not to report instances of digital violence or seek help or support from the relevant authorities. This is often done in an attempt to avoid further harm, prevent additional suffering, or to escape moral condemnation from their immediate environment and society as a whole, including the reporting parties themselves.

The research found that a large proportion of women (between 68% and 77%) are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the legal protections available to them. This lack of awareness has been attributed to a range of factors, including a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of these mechanisms and the

inadequate performance of political actors, the media, and civil society in promoting public education, awareness, and campaign efforts.

The findings of this research indicated a broad agreement on the crucial importance of incorporating digital security awareness into the curricula of schools and universities, as well as providing training in this area for individuals working in both public and private sectors (84%). Furthermore, there is a strong consensus on the need to focus on raising community awareness in order to combat the prevalence of violence against women (71%). In addition, it is deemed essential to provide education on human rights and the principles of equality at an advanced age, with the aim of nurturing generations who are equipped to counter discrimination and able to reject violence in all its forms through the power of knowledge and the values of justice.

Based on the overall results, the research recommendations are listed as follows:

1. Incorporating education on human rights, gender equality, and their principles into the primary school curriculum as a fundamental aspect of character development. The discussion of violence, including digital violence, should be introduced in higher grades, in order to break the societal normalization of all its forms, particularly affecting children and women, which can have a significant impact on their psychological well-being and future behavior.
2. Establishing listening centers within educational institutions that enable students to report instances of harm exposure, replicating the functionalities of actual reporting mechanisms, with the aim of promoting the habitual reporting of harm.
3. Incorporating digital safety education into the primary, middle, and secondary school curricula is of utmost importance to keep pace with technological advancements that both boys and girls are provided with the tools and skills required to navigate the digital world safely.
4. Addressing DVAW as violence against women is deemed sufficient. The law should regard all types of violence as equal and imposes stricter penalties in accordance with the degree of harm inflicted.
5. Establishing confidential reporting mechanisms for cases of digital violence that enable victims to file their complaints remotely.
6. Establishing specialized law enforcement personnel in psychology and sociology to accompany and support victims in their pursuit of justice, with a focus on preserving their dignity and well-being. This approach would foster a sense of trust between victims of digital violence, the broader female population, and the designated authorities responsible for addressing such offenses. Additionally, penalties need to be increased for those who perpetrate violence against women directly or indirectly.
7. Supporting the public media to raise awareness of the risks of digital violence and the importance of reporting to curb its proliferation to give due prominence to the issue of violence against women in their programs.
8. Emphasizing the critical importance of holding Internet companies accountable for the protection of their digital platforms and urging these firms to prioritize the safety and well-being of all users, both men and women, by implementing robust measures against digital violence and other cyber threats.
9. Developing law to combat violence against women in a more comprehensive manner to encompass digital violence reporting system, with downloadable protection mechanisms being made available in all regions of Morocco and across diverse types of territorial groups. This is to ensure that perpetrators cannot evade accountability.

Introduction

The correlation between violence and humans has been established since the dawn of humanity, both as an unintentional byproduct of daily interactions and as a means of self-preservation.¹

The advent of human societies gave rise to the crystallization of the "natural" *entitlement* tendency within continental agricultural societies, where members were sorted based on perceived strength or weakness and social and cultural structures were organized accordingly. This paved the way for the tragic discrimination based on gender, which has persisted in various forms from the dawn of civilization to the present.²

A discussion on the contemporary issue of violence against women in the digital space cannot be undertaken without an understanding of its historical and psychological roots in all human societies. The perception of a natural hierarchy, with its accompanying gender-based stereotypes and prejudices, has contributed to the widespread prevalence of such violence, despite the legal deterrents that have been put in place. Gender-based violence is a persistent issue that affects the vast majority of nations, regardless of their level of development or commitment to justice and equality. This pervasive problem persists despite the legal measures that have been implemented in many countries for years. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in its first chapter, states: "The term "discrimination against women" means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex that has the effect or purpose of impairing women's recognition of human rights and fundamental freedom in terms of the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field, or impair her exercise any of these rights, regardless of her marital status and on the basis of equality between her and men."³

Morocco signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women with a reservation in 1993, and later returned in 2011 to express its objection to certain articles that conflicted with its domestic legislation, including Article 9 regarding a woman's right to transmit her nationality to her children and Article 16 concerning equality within the institution of marriage. After several years of negotiations, Morocco finally ratified the Optional Protocol in 2015, which grants the international and independent Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women the authority to investigate complaints related to serious violations of the Convention.⁴ This development marked the culmination of the efforts and struggles of the women's movement in Morocco during the second half of the twentieth century, and it coincided with the implementation of constitutional reforms in 2011 that forced Morocco to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including violence against women, which is a clear violation of their human rights.

In accordance with Chapter 19 of the Moroccan Constitution, it is hereby declared that "both men and women are entitled to the enjoyment of the civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights and freedom as stipulated in this section of the Constitution, as well as in its other provisions,

¹ Préhistoire de la violence et de la guerre, Marylène Patou-Mathis, édition Odile Jacob, 2013.

² Sex equality can explain the unique social structure of hunter-gatherer bands, M.Dyble, G.D. Salali, N.Chaudhary, A.Page, D.Smith, J.Thompson, I.Vinicius, R.Mace, Science Journal, 2015.

³ The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 18, 1979.

⁴ The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted by the General Assembly on 6 October 1999.

international agreements and covenants ratified by Morocco, and all within the scope of the provisions of the Constitution and the principles and laws of Morocco.”⁵

Law No. 103.13 was enacted in 2018, which entered into force the same year, with the aim of combating all forms of violence against women, including digital violence. This law criminalizes harassment in public and digital spaces⁶ and provides prevention and legal protection for women, ensuring that perpetrators will not escape punishment and taking care of victims when violence occurs. His Implementing Decree No. 2.18.856, which stipulates regulatory requirements for mechanisms for caring for women victims of violence, also established a national committee ensuring communication and coordination between various stakeholders to confront violence against women and establish mechanisms to improve and develop the system of caring for them. In 2021, this committee, with the support of the Council of Europe, issued a practical legal guide on the rights of women victims, providing guidance on how to obtain health and psychological support, and social, legal, and judicial services.⁷ The decree also established the work of regional and local committees at the level of courts of first instance, courts of appeal, and the central and decentralized departments of the sectors in charge of health, youth, and women, and within the General Directorate of National Security and the Supreme Command of the Royal Gendarmerie.⁸

On International Women's Day in March 2020, several government ministries including the Ministry of National Education and Health, Culture, Youth and Sports, Solidarity and Social Development, Equality and Family, the King's Attorney General at the Court of Cassation, the Chief Public Prosecutor, and the Supreme Authority for Audiovisual Communication, signed the "Marrakesh Declaration," which outlined a comprehensive sectoral commitment to combat violence against women by promoting a non-violence culture, challenging stereotypical portrayals of women in the media, and establishing support mechanisms for victims.⁹

Based on the information presented, it is evident that there are clear signs of a serious institutional commitment to improve the status of women in Morocco. However, the recent official reports indicate that the road ahead is likely to be challenging, with violence still prevalent, as noted in the report issued by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council on November 26, 2020.

The independent constitutional advisory body's report, citing statistics from the High Commission for Planning, noted that seven million six hundred thousand women were exposed to violence in the year 2019.¹⁰ Furthermore, the national research report issued by the Ministry of Family, Equality and Social Development for the year 2019, which included 13,543 women, found that more than half of women in Morocco are exposed to violence.¹¹ This is a concerning reality, considering that only 5% to 10% of women report the violence against them, as stated by the Minister of Justice in his answer to an oral question on the subject before the Moroccan Parliament on November 28, 2022. To further illustrate the prevalence of

⁵ The Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco was approved by referendum held on Friday, Rajab 28, 1432 (July 1, 2011). Released in Tetouan on the 27th of Shaaban (July 29, 2011).

⁶ Text of Law No. 13-103 related to combating violence against women, as published in Official Gazette No. 6655 dated 23 Jumada al-Akhir 1439 (March 12, 2018).

⁷ A guide to caring for women victims of violence issued by the National Committee for the Protection of Women Victims of Violence with the support of the Council of Europe.

⁸ Decree Law No. 2.18.856 of April 10, 2019 implementing Law No. 103.13 on combating violence against women.

⁹ Marrakesh Declaration 2020 to eliminate violence against women.

¹⁰ Opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council: ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN: A NATIONAL EMERGENCY. Report Unanimously Adopted During the 116th Ordinary Session of the General Assembly of the Economic Council, Held on November 26, 2020.

¹¹ The second national research on the spread of violence against women in Morocco. The preliminary results of the research were announced on May 3, 2019.

violence against women in Morocco, the second national research on the spread of violence against women, conducted by the High Commission for Planning and including 12,000 women and 3,000 men from urban and rural areas, found that 46% of women are exposed to violence within the family or marital space by their partner, either through psychological violence at a rate of 69% of cases, economic violence at a rate of 11%, physical violence at a rate of 12%, or sexual violence at a rate of 8%.

According to the report, violence against women in urban areas has decreased in comparison to that directed towards their rural counterparts. This decline is evident when comparing the data from 2019 with the figures recorded a decade ago during the completion of the first national research on the prevalence of violence against women. The National Committee for Supporting Women Victims of Violence has released its second annual report for the year 2021, which was compiled using statistical data from various sources including the Presidency of the Public Prosecution, the Ministry of Justice, the General Directorate of Homeland Security, the Ministry of Solidarity, Social Inclusion and the Family, the Royal Gendarmerie Command, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication. The report has now been concluded that women living in urban areas are more vulnerable to violence than women living in villages and desert areas. The number of files in the courts of first instance amounted to 15,744, and 1,503 files in the courts of appeal, with 98% of the latter being in urban areas and only 2% in rural areas.¹² It should be noted that the statistics on violence against women in rural and urban areas may not accurately reflect the true disparities between these areas. Rural women may have limited access to reporting mechanisms and facilities due to a variety of factors, including the cultural specificity of their communities, spatial justice, and high rates of illiteracy. According to a report by the High Commission for Planning in 2014, illiteracy, which is still widespread among rural women, reached to 60% compared to 30% for women in the urban area.¹³

The committee's report highlights the increasing prevalence of digital violence, which is beyond doubt. This issue has been recognized in a memorandum issued by the High Commission for Planning on International Women's Day in 2023, which states that digital violence accounts for 19% of all recorded cases of violence in the country. This figure rises to 29% among women aged 20-24 years and 34% among those aged 15-19 years.¹⁴ In 2021, a study conducted by the SecDev Foundation on the psychological and social impacts of digital violence on girls and youth in Morocco found that more than 50% of victims under the age of 21 experienced depression, fear, sleeplessness, and isolation resulting from exposure to digital violence.¹⁵

If we accept the official data above, noting that most studies on the subject date back to before the pandemic, that is, before people were forced to adapt to the digital world due to quarantine and general closure around the world, and the accompanying explosion in the use of technical communication media at an unprecedented pace in our contemporary history. This resulted in and is still causing psychological, social and economic changes that increased the speed of the profound transformations that had already begun since the second Internet revolution in the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century. This transformation has produced irreversible changes, such as the case with the transformation of communication models within social networks and the parallel “elites” they produced that established a new cultural system/non-system that blurred the lines between public and private space. It also made people’s lives a continuous, uninterrupted display, where “commenting” and “sharing” opinions, photos, video clips, have become new rights and freedom that cannot be compromised.¹⁶ The problem is

¹² The first (2020) and second (2021) annual reports of the National Committee to Care for Women Victims of Violence.

¹³ Report of the High Commission for Planning issued in 2014.

¹⁴ [News note by the High Commission for Planning on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2023.](#)

¹⁵ A field study on the social and psychological effects of digital violence on girls and youth in Morocco, Hoda Benmbarek and Karima Ghanem, 2021, SecDev Foundation.

¹⁶ The impact of user-generated-content over the behavior of media consumer in times of crisis, Halima El Joundi, LAP Publishing, 2011.

therefore real and complex, with general human commonality intertwined with specific local context, cultural, political, and economic factors. The consequences for women who experienced digital violence and those around them are social and psychological. The report of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council highlighted that discrimination has become a major public health issue in Morocco due to its detrimental impact on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals, particularly children. The High Commission for Planning has estimated the economic and social cost of violence against women in Morocco during the year 2019 to be 2.85 billion dirhams, a truly alarming figure.¹⁷

Therefore, it was crucial to conduct this study on DVAW in Morocco in light of the current technological and social transformations, to update the data and shed light on aspects that may have been overlooked during previous research efforts. In addition, this study aimed to offer an independent evaluation of the impact of previous efforts to combat violence against women and presenting recommendations that can benefit and assist those responsible for the file in Morocco, male and female activists, women, and the general public.

It must be emphasized that there is no universally accepted and comprehensive definition of digital violence against women.¹⁸ However, in the context of this research, digital violence refers to all actions and practices where information and communication technologies (ICTs) are partially or completely involved, starting with mobile and smartphones, extending to the Internet and linked social networks, email, and Global Positioning System (GPS) devices and programs, as well as photographic and recording media, artificial intelligence, and other technologies. This form of violence is an extension of the physical, psychological, and sexual violence that women experience offline, which stems from the same discriminatory context that exists both online and offline.¹⁹

The completion of this research was accompanied by the submission of a proposal to amend Law No. 103.13 on combating violence against women by the Istiqlal Party, a prominent political entity. The proponents of the amendment have incorporated the following statement into the proposed preamble: "Seeking to address the growing threat of digital violence against women as a new challenge to the position and stability of women."²⁰

This amendment proposal to Article 103.13, which incorporates several demands from the women's movement and the input of various jurists, aimed to modernize and improve the article's effectiveness, efficiency, and consistency with international standards.

This legislation, which will be referred to in multiple sections of this research, was enacted five years ago in September 2018. Despite its crucial nature, which encompasses various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, and its criminalization of abuse affecting women within the institution of marriage, such as forced marriage, expulsion from the marital home, or any violence resulting from gender or special status (such as a pregnant woman), as well as its criminalization of sexual harassment in public and digital spaces, and its establishment of procedural requirements related to violence prevention, the mechanisms for protecting and supporting victims are limited.²¹ Since its

¹⁷ Opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council: Eliminating Violence Against Girls and Women: A National Emergency. Report adopted unanimously during the 116th ordinary session of the General Assembly of the Economic Council, held on November 26, 2020.

¹⁸ UN Women annual report 2020.

¹⁹ Thematic paper adopted by the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) at its 14th meeting on 17 November 2022.

²⁰ A proposed law to amend and supplement Law No. 103.13 related to combating violence against women.

²¹ Law 103.13 on combating violence against women.

implementation, the law has faced several drawbacks, including its limited application, the difficulty of enforcing it, especially with regards to protection mechanisms and keeping the abuser away from the victim, the readiness of law enforcement agencies to receive victims' complaints, and the difficulty of victims' access to justice due to the lack of approved legal and judicial assistance and other necessary documents. Therefore, a review of this legislation is required to identify areas for improvement and enhancement.²²

The results of the amendment proposal perhaps include the prominence of digital violence as one of the most crucial problems of contemporary violence against women. This research endeavored to illustrate the state of digital violence against women in Morocco and to examine the factors contributing to its persistence in the face of current legislation and procedures. It also aimed to suggest possible solutions within the current landscape.

The difficulties inherent in such an endeavor were recognized and the limitations of the employed approach were acknowledged, including the small sample size, sensitivity of the topic, and constraints of time and resources. These challenges were addressed in greater detail in the research methodology.

Research Methodology

The quality, credibility, and validity of any study are contingent upon the fulfillment of a primary condition, namely the clarity of the problem and the purpose of its study. It is widely acknowledged that a well-formulated question is critical to addressing it satisfactorily. A well-formulated question needs to satisfy the essential requirements of being feasible, interesting, novel, relevant, and ethical.²³ Accordingly, this study meets all the essential requirements despite the simplicity of its formulation. This study aimed to address the following questions:

1. What is the status of women within the digital space in Morocco?
2. What is the nature of this violence inflicted on them?
3. How do they cope with it?
4. Are they aware of the legal measures that could safeguard their interests?
5. What are the potential solutions to combat DVAW?

To address the above questions, two methodologies were utilized. The first was quantitative and entailed the administration of a questionnaire that was randomly distributed to samples of women from diverse backgrounds. In addition, it aimed to examine their experiences within the digital space and evaluating their awareness, or lack thereof, of legal developments that would provide them with protection, as well as their level of engagement with the mechanisms and procedures governing such transactions, whether online or within official agencies.

The questionnaire offered the participants an opportunity to communicate their thoughts and feelings in a secure and confidential setting, free from the scrutiny of censorship or examination, which could have

²² The law to combat violence against women, one year after its implementation, Anas Saadoun, Maghreb Journal of Legal and Judicial Monitoring, fourth issue of 2020.

²³ Cummings, S. R., Browner, W. S., & Hulley, S. B. (2013). Conceiving the research question and developing the study plan. *Designing clinical research*.

induced discomfort, self-consciousness, or injustice, even if unintentional and rooted in prejudice, stereotyping, or evaluation.

To further elaborate and concentrate the research while enhancing its data sources, a qualitative methodology was chosen. This qualitative approach involved conducting interviews with individuals from diverse professional and knowledge backgrounds and display a keen interest in the issue of digital discrimination and violence against women. Specifically, some of the interviewees approach the topic from a civil or human rights perspective, while others draw upon their past or present professional roles. Additionally, victims of digital violence were also interviewed, albeit under the condition of anonymity.

The utilization of these two approaches was deemed necessary in order to broaden the scope of data sources and ensure a comprehensive analysis. The adoption of these approaches enables them to complement each other, resulting in a balanced and integrated approach to research. The utilization of these approaches also serves to enhance the quality of the research and control its outcome.

It is worth noting that the present research is founded upon a preceding framework, encompassing previous studies on this subject, the majority of which were conducted by official entities. Some of these studies were scrutinized earlier to ensure the accuracy of the figures and to utilize their comprehensive statistics, considering the diverse geographical scope and the multi-faceted contribution of data by various parties.

Given the nature of the case, the preparation of these reports preceded the development of the questionnaire, and prior to the identification of male and female participants in the interviews, the purpose of which was to serve as a reference point, thus, avoiding redundancy and repetition. This served as a support for the findings of previous reports and confirmed their validity.

It is imperative to note that the research was limited by its timing, which coincided with the summer break and holidays, resulting in a restricted circle of respondents. To overcome this obstacle, various distribution channels were utilized, such as social media, WhatsApp, and Facebook, which are widely used in Morocco. Additionally, direct electronic messages were used to reach groups and networks to ensure regional representation, ensuring that the survey participants were representative of the socially and economically diverse women of Morocco.

A total of 108 female participated in the questionnaire, with 74 from urban areas and 30 from rural areas. The group comprised female students, civil activists, journalists, doctors, engineers, politicians, employees from the private and public sectors, business leaders, farmers, housewives, and the unemployed.

The participants taking part in this study were from different age groups, educational and social backgrounds, with disparate levels of digital activity. While some are highly engaged in the digital space, others have a relatively minimal online presence. Nonetheless, a considerable number of these women have been subjected to digital violence and associated harm, despite their limited online engagement.

The qualitative research component involved conducting 14 interviews with both men and women who work across diverse fields, such as researchers in digital violence, journalists, female parliamentarians, human rights and legal professionals, and specialists in related fields. Additionally, the study also included interviews with survivors of digital violence.

Status of Women Within the Digital Space in Morocco: Results

The Nature of Digital Violence in Morocco

Digital violence as one of the most dangerous, harmful, and prolonged forms of contemporary violence is not an exaggeration. The danger posed by this behavior is compounded by its invisible nature, as aggressors conceal their true identities behind pseudonyms. This intentional concealment signifies a premeditated intention to cause harm. Furthermore, this behavior is adaptable and capable of reformulating itself to evade condemnation or criminalization. This quick development and progress are, however, counterbalanced by the slow reaction of society, awareness, and legislation. Law-issuing mechanisms often take time to respond to crises and developments, due to various political, social, or bureaucratic factors. This behavior has a lasting impact, in the literal sense of the word, as nothing on the internet can be entirely erased, even if it is proven to be false.²⁴ A fabricated conversation, photograph, or video clip can continue to haunt the victim for years, despite the violation of their right to be forgotten.

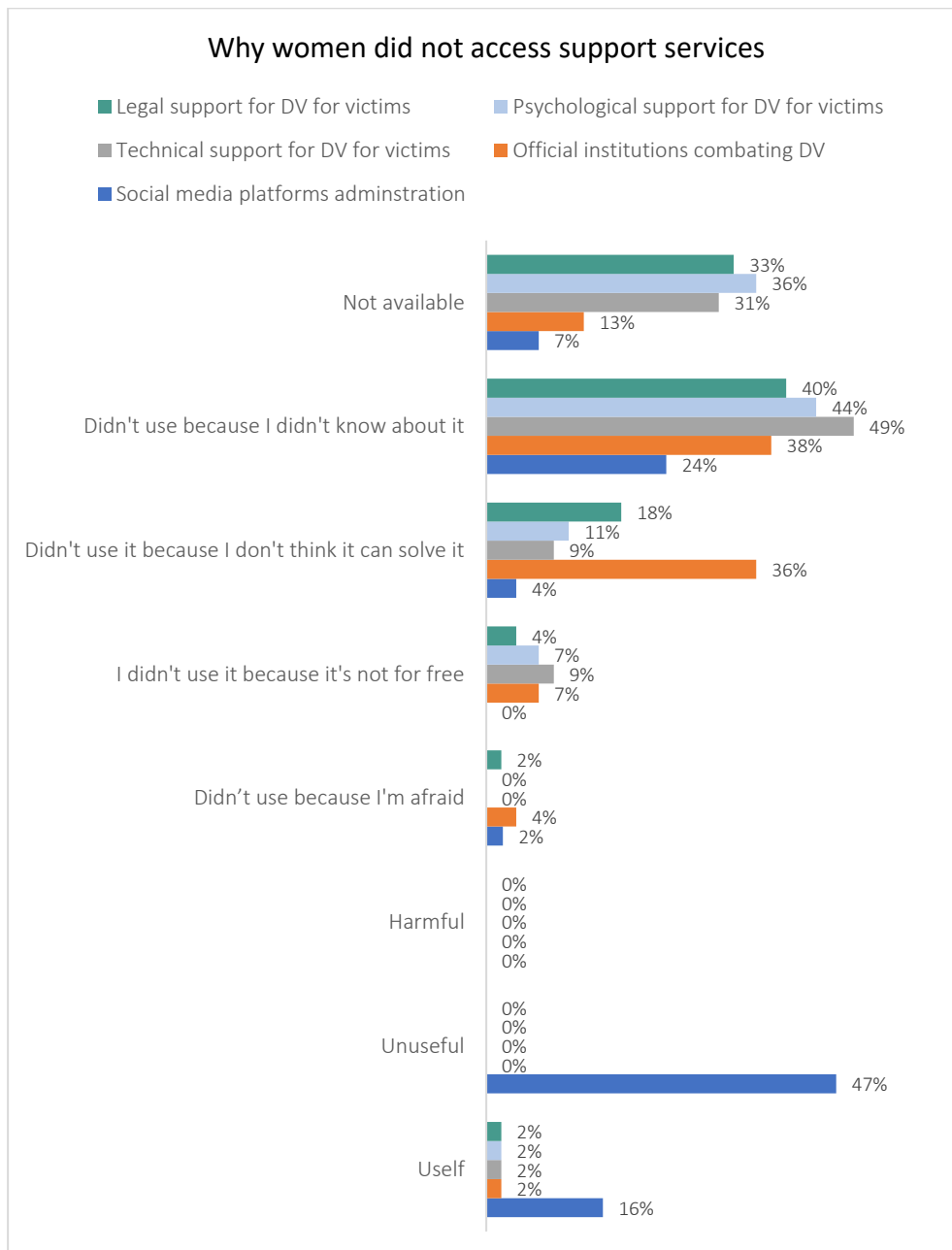
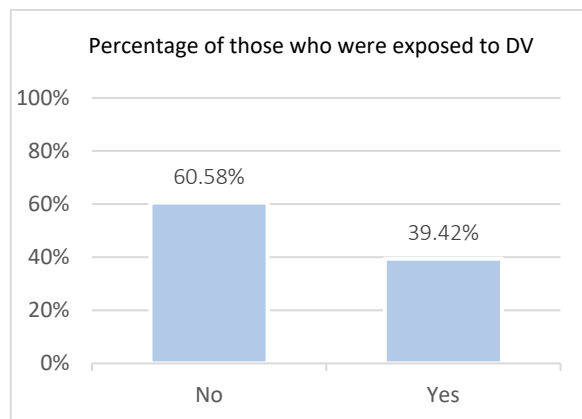
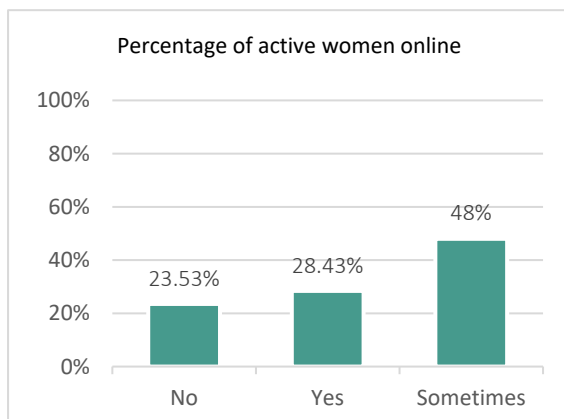
The gravity of the situation is further emphasized by the fact that, in the majority of instances, violence does not necessarily result in visible physical injuries such as bruises or blood. The use of deceptive pretense creates an additional psychological veil that may implicitly "lend" the criminal and increase the isolation of the victim, who is often seen as an accomplice or contributor to the infliction of harm, as is the case with most male and female survivors of sexual or other assaults who are and are being exposed. This reaction is viewed by psychologists as an ancient tendency in humans and a mechanism utilized by them to deal with reality, to convince themselves that accidents only occur to those who deserve them, in order to establish a sense of control and an illusion of immunity.²⁵ Nevertheless, the onus lies on women who are victimized by digital violence to prove that harm occurred to them. This is in addition to the violence, which prompts some victims to avoid seeking support or reporting their experiences out of fear, despair, or to avoid scandal or blame, which they believe will not result in justice or reward. As we will examine in the testimonies of some victims later, UN Women reported in a recent study that 60% of women in North Africa and the Middle East are subjected to digital violence, with 44% of them opting not to report due to fear or a lack of knowledge regarding appropriate channels or because they believed that reporting would not make a difference.²⁶

The results revealed that a significant proportion of participants, 60%, had been exposed to digital violence. Of these, only 10% reported or sought support after being exposed to violence. This low figure is further exacerbated by the fact that when asked, 91% of participants did not seek support from the competent authorities. Similarly, 88% did not seek support from specialists in psychological, legal, and technical support and civil society organizations, and 67% did not even seek support from their families, despite the fact that 75% of participants acknowledged the need for support. The lack of reporting and seeking support from relevant authorities was attributed by 37% of participants to a lack of knowledge about the relevant procedures, and 35% attributed it to a lack of confidence in the ability of these authorities to resolve their issues.

²⁴ On the Internet, Things Never Go Away Completely, Thomas P. Keenan, University of Calgary.

²⁵ On the Psychology of the Belief in a Just World: Exploring Experiential and Rationalistic Paths to Victim Blaming, Kees van den Bos, Utrecht University.

²⁶ UN Women report on violence against women in the digital space, insights from a multi-country study in Arab countries.



In the UN Women report, the reader encounters a concerning revelation regarding the motivations of perpetrators of digital violence against women. Specifically, 26% of the participants stated, "it was their right" as a reason for their actions, while 23% described the experience as "fun."²⁷

Although the responses may be considered crude, they are not unexpected, as they serve to reinforce the fact that digital violence is an extension of the violence inherent in society. A specialist in social history, who preferred to remain anonymous, stated that digital violence is a manifestation of the deep-rooted violence present within society, where women are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy due to historical gender roles. The specialist believed that the decline in moral values and economic crises, coupled with the psychological imbalance of individuals who found solace in the digital space, led to a rise in digital violence. Many individuals believe that this space is devoid of accountability and control.

The majority of the participants in this study agree with the specialist. Khadouj Al-Salasi, a Moroccan politician and legislator, noted that digital violence is rapidly spreading, unmonitorable, uncontrolled, and have a hidden intention, namely, the intention to harm the other, especially when this other is a woman, or a political woman. She also stated that women's success in various fields created an opportunity for bullying and harassment in their private lives. As a result, she believed that the private lives of female politicians are a source of vulnerability, as they are scrutinized for weaknesses in order to publicly discredit them.

Hoda Zakri, a prominent legal researcher and specialist in gender studies, emphasized that the most detrimental aspect of DVAW is the tendency to underestimate its severity.²⁸ This belittlement must be confronted, as evidenced by the Spanish model, which advocates for a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence and discrimination against women.²⁹ Furthermore, Hoda noted that in addition to the normalization of digital violence, there is also a systematic condemnation of women in cases of sexual crimes or assaults. This widespread feeling of guilt has led to the self-blame of victims.³⁰

Asiya Al-Omrani, a journalist and human rights activist, argued that digital violence is not dissimilar to traditional forms of violence, as "when a person who harasses women in the street will have the opportunity to harass other women in the digital space, he will not hesitate to do so. Furthermore, the anonymity afforded by digital platforms exacerbates the issue, as it allows perpetrators to practice violence with impunity."

It was stated by a survivor of digital violence, who agreed to share her experience on the condition of confidentiality, that violence is disguised and cowardly. This participant, who is in her fifties and has a limited presence on the Internet, primarily utilizing Facebook and WhatsApp for communication purposes, was a victim of impersonation and blackmail that significantly impacted her life. The perpetrator of violence carried out the attack because they wanted to and were able to do so, as the victim did not commit any sin or find herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Rather, she was exposed to the violence because the perpetrator saw it as his right and a source of pleasure, as highlighted in the UN Women report. According to Maryam Abelil, the academic and civil activist, this situation is due to the fact

²⁷ UN Women annual report 2021.

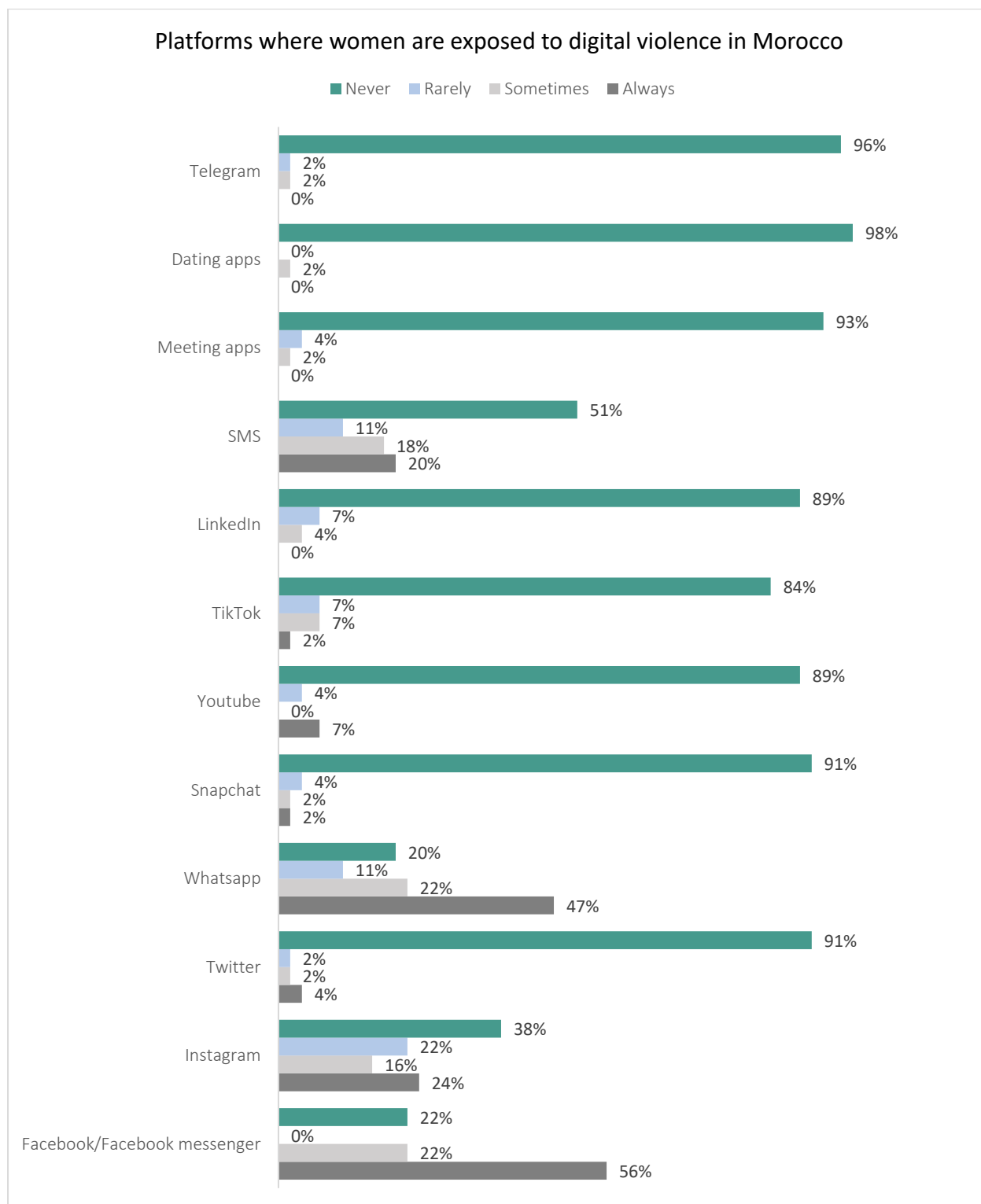
²⁸ "The most worrying aspect of this scourge is the trivialization of violence against women in the digital world" Houda Zekri.

²⁹ "The zero tolerance policy as it is called in Spain is vital. No aggression against women based on their sex can be tolerated" Houda Zekri.

³⁰ "To this we must add the systemic guilt of women when it comes to crimes with a sexual connotation. This guilt is so ingrained that even female victims believe it" Houda Zekri.

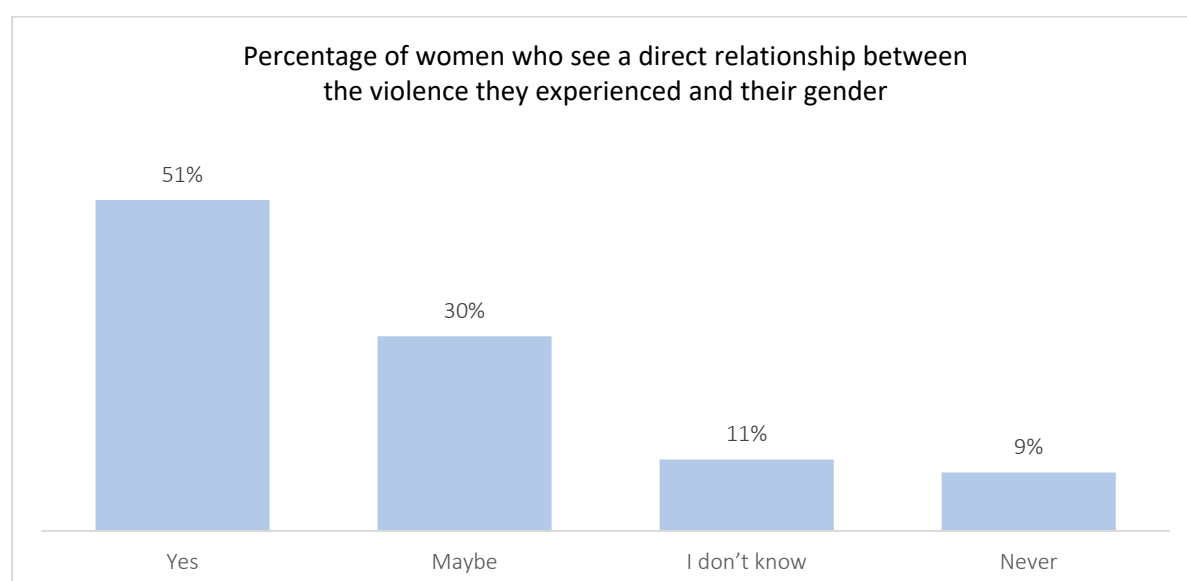
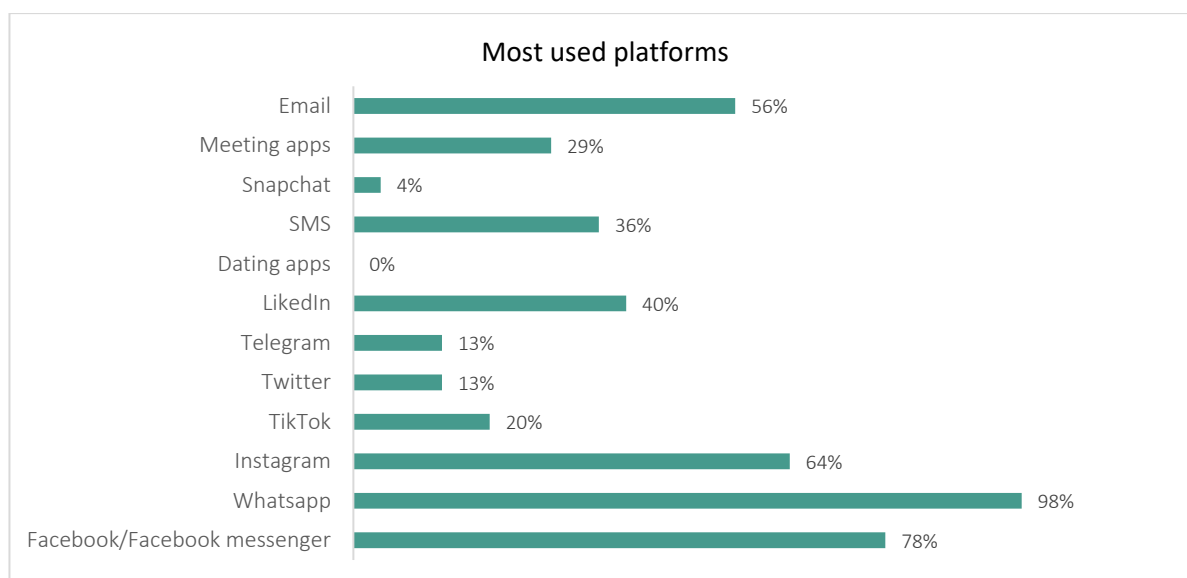
that "being behind the screen relieves the perpetrator of societal embarrassment," in addition to the limited effectiveness of laws in combating digital violence.

An analysis of the platforms where women in Morocco are subjected to violence revealed that Facebook tops the list with a risk rate exceeding 55%, followed by WhatsApp at 46%, Instagram at 24%, and text messages at 20%. It is worth noting that the likelihood of violence is relatively low on other platforms, as depicted in the graph below.



It must be noted here that the statistics indicating that Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram are the platforms where women are exposed to digital violence in Morocco do not exonerate other platforms from this charge, but rather are attributable to the fact that these media are the most popular and accessible, as evidenced by the questionnaire. WhatsApp is the most frequently used platform, with a rate of 21%, followed by Facebook with 17%, Instagram with 14%, and email with 12%. The remaining platforms share the remainder at minimal levels, including professional platforms such as LinkedIn or Zoom and platforms used by younger children and teenagers, such as TikTok and Snapchat, which were not included in this study. Therefore, it cannot be asserted that other platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram) are safer, but rather, the potential for exposure to digital violence in these platforms in Morocco is greater.

The study found that 50% of the participants perceived a direct correlation between the violence they experienced and their gender, as women.



This relationship between digital violence and the gender of the victim is agreed upon by our fifty-year-old survivor, whose confrontation with this violence, which, in her words, belongs to a “new time,” was a shock to her on several levels.

Our fifty-year-old survivor agreed that there is a relationship between digital violence and the gender of the victim, which she categorized as belonging to a “new time.” She was shocked by the ongoing violations, she thought she would have been safe by deactivating her social media account and withdrawing from Facebook. Yet, she discovered pages in her name on websites she had never visited or known. In an attempt to confront the attackers, she threatened them with legal recourse if they did not stop exploiting her photo, fabricating accounts, and blackmailing her. However, her threats only increased the harm inflicted upon her, as if she was part of a game that these individuals found entertaining. This situation caused her significant anger, which rapidly turned into depression, and she was blamed by people close to her indicating that she had nothing to do with the internet. They also objected to the idea of seeking help from the relevant authorities, as the victim must provide scandalous, fabricated photos to prove the violence, which is a daunting prospect that many are unwilling to undertake. Hoda Zakri highlighted this challenge, stating that victims are often held responsible for proving the violence they have endured, a process that requires them to face double harm (re-victimisation) when they seek support from the authorities. She explained, “we know that the victim is always blamed and held responsible for what she has been exposed to.”³¹

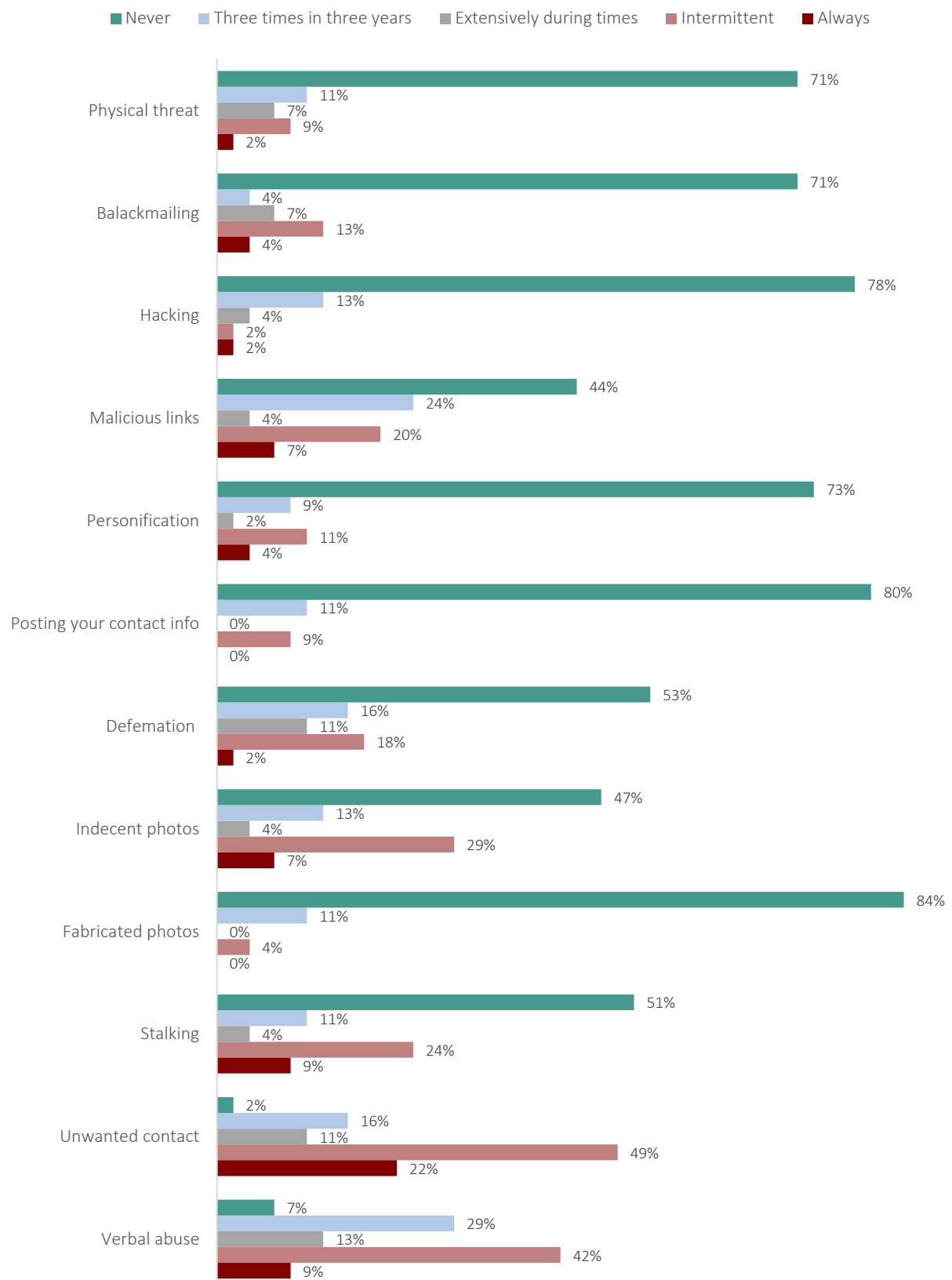
The survivor was left with no alternative but to conform to the existing state of affairs and endure the violence as if it had never occurred, in the expectation that the perpetrators would lose interest or be preoccupied with another victim. For her, ignoring what happened was the means of coping.

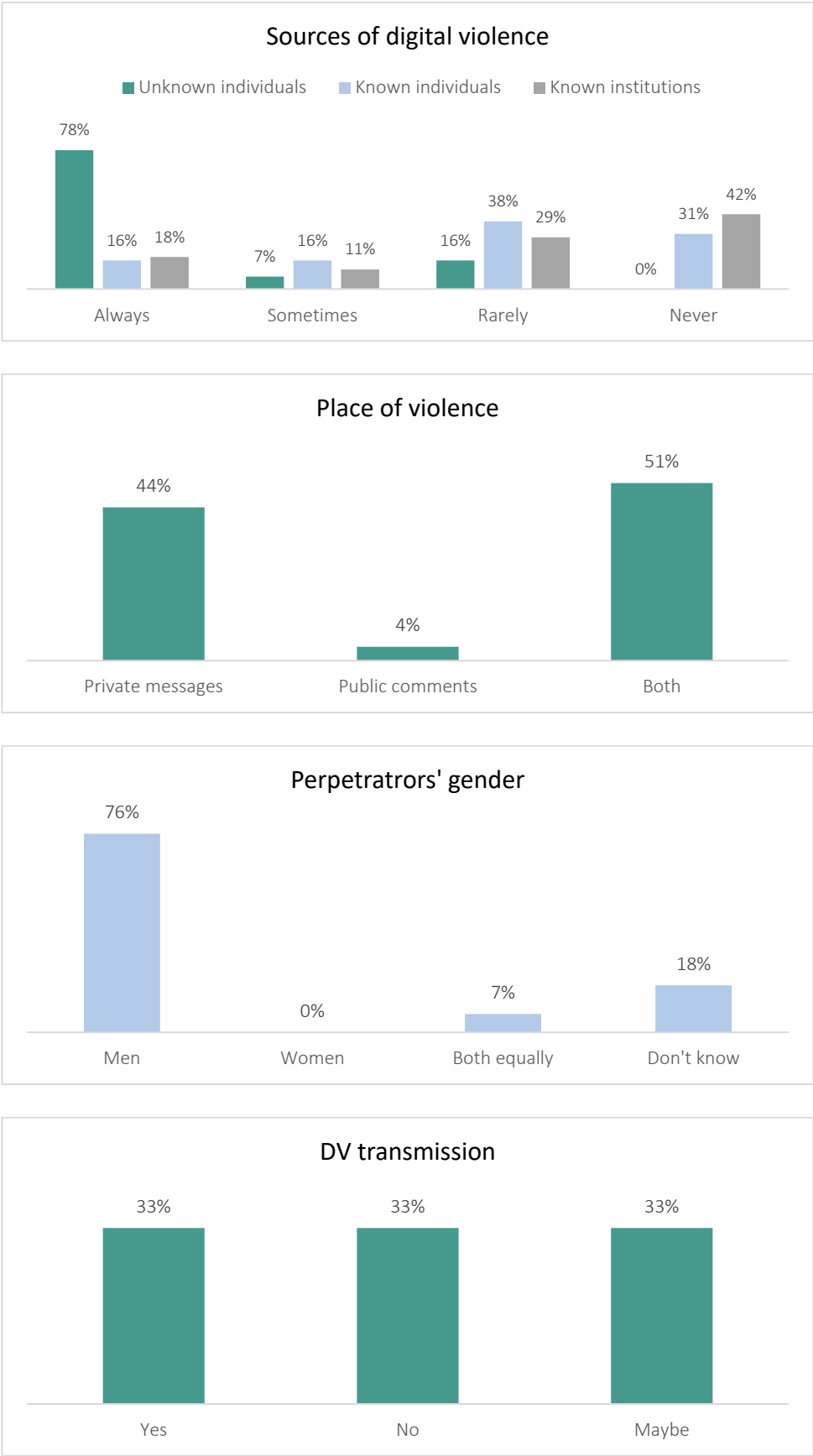
The questionnaire results indicated that harassment and stalking through unwanted communications are the most prevalent forms of violence against women on the Internet in Morocco, with an intermittent occurrence rate of up to 49%. Verbal abuse and insults related to a woman's gender follow closely, with a prevalence rate of 42%. Spying on the Internet is also common, with a rate of 49%, as well as the sending of obscene images at a rate of 22% and defamation that affects honor and reputation at a rate of 17%.

According to this research, it was found that in 77% of cases, the perpetrators of violence against women on the internet are unknown to the victims, and in 75% of cases, the perpetrators are male. This violence occurs in both private digital spaces, which are only accessible by the individual woman, and in public spaces, on pages and in full view of all users, at a rate of 51% of cases. Furthermore, in 33% of cases, the violence perpetrated in digital spaces was found to extend beyond the internet and into the real world, as confirmed by the testimony of a survivor, whose experience will be reviewed later.

³¹ il faut espérer que la victime ait assez de preuves contre le harceleur et surtout qu'elle ait le courage et la force de faire face à la re-victimisation par les autorités. Car nous le savons toutes et tous, la victime est souvent tenue pour responsable de ce qui lui arrive (surtout quand il s'agit de filles jeunes qui sont victimes de sexting, de outing, ou de slutshaming)» Houda Zakri.

Forms of violence that women are exposed to on the Internet





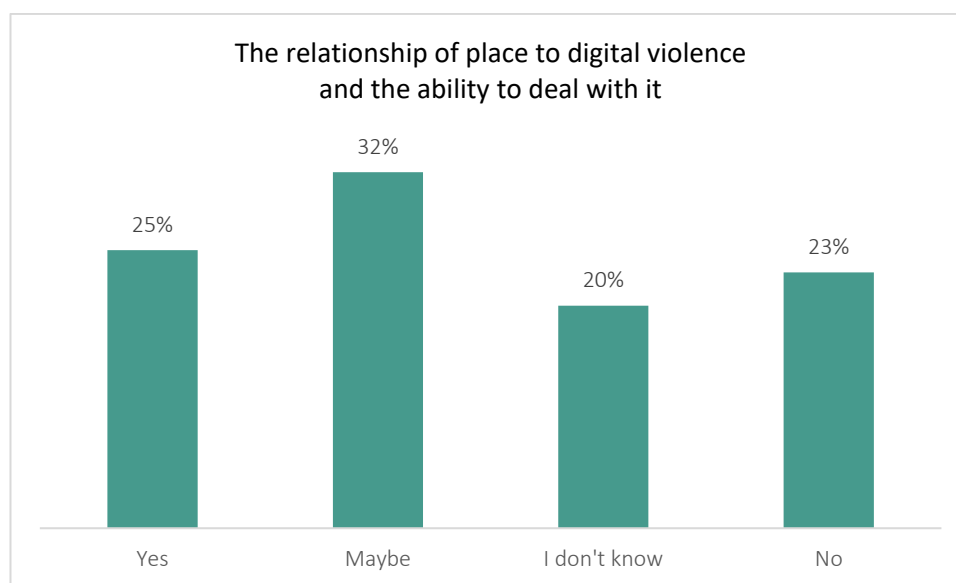
Impact of Digital Violence on Women in Morocco

According to Khadouj Al-Salasi, a significant number of women who withdrew from political life and deactivate their social media accounts did so as a result of being targeted and having their children and families harmed. Some found it difficult to confront the violent momentum on social media and chose to withdraw from public view. She believed that digital violence has a severe impact on women's ambitions and abilities and a violent violation of their freedoms. In some cases, this can lead to women committing suicide. The loss that results from this is not only a development loss, but also an economic loss, a political loss, and above all, a violation of human rights that contributes to the lack of parity and equality between men and women.

According to Nadia Bouzendoufa, a parliamentarian, the issue of digital violence is a growing concern and poses a threat to the psychological well-being of women in the political field. It can intimidate and negatively impact their performance, potentially leading to a reluctance to participate in public work, which contradicts efforts to empower women politically. Additionally, political women are subjected to various forms of digital violence that undermine their rights, belittle their efforts, and frustrate their attempts at reform. In light of these systematic campaigns, women in public work have no choice but to remain silent and disregard such behavior.

Khadija Boufos, a specialist in digital security, fake news, and hate speech, has expressed her concern that the exposure of female journalists to violence in the field of journalism and media reinforces the idea of "women's fragility" and negative stereotypes about women, which may hinder their advancement in prominent positions. She noted that female journalists are often subjected to digital violence by their employers, and many choose to remain silent to protect their positions and reputation. However, if their names become associated with harassment or similar incidents, the consequences could be severe. Boufos emphasized that any topic related to a woman becomes sensitive and taboo, particularly when it concerns her reputation.

With reference to the impact of the location in which a woman resides, either a desert or a city, on her susceptibility to violence and her ability to cope with it, 31 % of the respondents indicated that it was a plausible possibility. Conversely, 25 % of the participants held the view that the location exacerbated their vulnerability to violence and impaired their capacity to deal with it. On the other hand, 23 % of them believed that the location had no impact on digital violence, based on the statement that "harassment occurs in the digital space that has no geographical borders." It is worth mentioning that 20 % of the participants were undecided and did not provide a response.



Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy working with civil society through the National Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy, pointed out that violence directed against women, particularly in rural areas and provinces, remains a pervasive and persistent issue. He believed that digital violence is a natural extension of the physical violence that was prevalent during the 1990s, taking the form of preventing women (by husbands, fathers, sons, or tribes) from accessing literacy programs. Although eradicating illiteracy was sufficient to initiate discussions about women's rights and their place in society, further progress requires increased awareness and education.

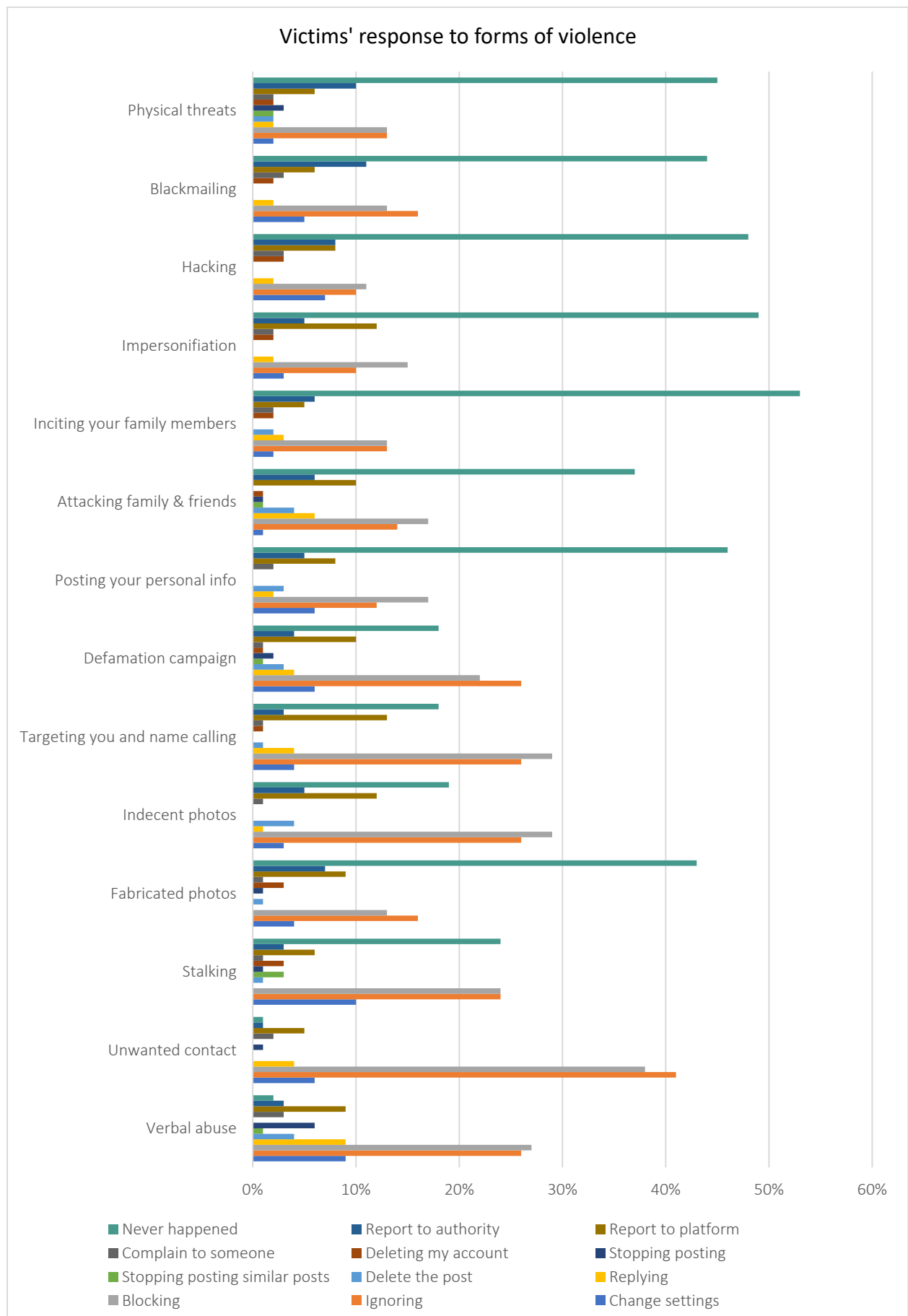
These reasons that had hindered women's access to literacy programs for decades continue to prevail in large segments of society, perpetuated by the values of upbringing and the media's narrow role in reinforcing stereotypes. Consequently, the number of pending cases in courts will not accurately reflect the differences in violence in general and digital violence in particular between urban and rural areas, due to the widespread illiteracy, which does not necessarily prevent women from using social platforms and smartphones, especially for exchanging voice messages or images, but it impedes women from fully comprehending their rights and the legal mechanisms available to them. The challenge of accepting the criminal nature of digital abuse and violations against women in the digital space is partly attributable to the difficulty in accepting alternative roles for women beyond the boundaries of their homes. This is due to the fact that society has become accustomed to normalizing certain forms of violence, which are traditionally considered positive in nature. In addition, perpetrators are aware of physical violence and often lack understanding of digital violence, perceiving it as an abstract concept, because people online are nothing more than pictures. Thus, women's choice of overlooking such violence, whether they are in the village or the city, is a safer option for fear of societal condemnation or revenge from perpetrators against any of the family members of the victim. A participant who was a victim of digital violence reported the matter despite facing opposition from her surroundings. She endured the difficulty of documenting the threats she received and indicated that the authorities took the situation seriously. However, indirectly they suggested that some of the responsibility lay with her for publishing private photos on Instagram. Her "audacity" to do so was the reason why she was targeted with bullying, attacks, and threats from various parties, which forced her to reconsider pursuing the matter legally. After a months-long hiatus during which she completely stopped her social media activity, she decided to block the abuser and ignore violence altogether. She stated that she cannot control what people say, but she can choose to ignore them.

If this survivor, who is an influencer with digital followers around the world, has become accustomed enduring verbal violence and insults that, according to her, do not exceed the boundaries of the screen, others have suffered tremendously from this violence and its emergence from its hiding place into the open. One of the survivors who was interviewed from a small community near the village had her place of residence targeted and defamed through graffiti on the walls in the same street in which she lives. Her phone number was also written on the wall alongside obscene language. This incident caused a significant rift within the traditional family of the victim, who accused her of having a relationship with the person responsible for the “scandal.” This unfortunate incident sparked a major rift within her conventional family, who blamed her for having an illicit relationship with the person who caused the “scandal.” Otherwise, how would he obtain her phone number? Despite her persistent efforts, she was unable to convince her family that she was, in fact, a victim of a digital stalker who hacked into her device and attempted to blackmail her into complying with his demands. When she refused, he made threatening remarks towards her. However, she never imagined that the perpetrator would show up at her doorstep.

Her attempts to convince her family were not successful and she did not receive any significant support. On the contrary, she was subjected to harassment and intimidation, preventing her from leaving her home for weeks under the guise of protecting her. Additionally, she was not permitted to report the incident to the authorities, despite her desire to do so in order to clear her name in front of her family. Her father and two brothers, especially during the night, tried to apprehend the perpetrator, but this was never achieved.

This experience, as a specialist in social history stated, exposes another form of discrimination against women within society. Rural women, who already suffer from geographical isolation, experience social isolation within her group, and psychological isolation in the digital space, are further marginalized by the emergence of photo-sharing platforms filled with content from those who call themselves influencers. These idealized images create a parallel reality that disturbs the lives of those who view them and can lead to depression in some cases, while others may become adventurous and try to imitate the depicted lifestyle, which can attract criticism from conservative environments. Women who belong to a nomadic community, as the survivor commented, may not always have control over their decisions and may face barriers in reporting digital violence, as their decisions may be influenced by male family members who prioritize preserving the family's “honor” and face. This can result in digital violence turning into harm on the ground, either by the perpetrator or family members who believe that the victim must be disciplined as punishment for their perceived lack of protection on the Internet. Therefore, women victims of digital violence in rural areas may be more vulnerable to harm from both online and offline sources.

The survey results indicated that a substantial number of women preferred to overlook digital violence directed towards them, with 41% opting for overlook unwanted communication, 26% in cases of verbal violence and insults based on gender, and 24% in cases of receiving obscene images. When asked why they chose to overlook the incident, participants provided thoughtful explanations. One remarked that overlooking incidents was a way to avoid a greater evil and not to provoke anyone, while another expressed concern that responding or confronting the perpetrator may cause more harm, as they were unsure of the person's identity behind the screen. One of the noteworthy comments was the response of a participant, who stated that overlooking incidents was the only available strategy. Despite her attempt to report the issue, she was met with a response that implied moral condemnation, as she expressed it in colloquial Moroccan meaning ‘she is indecent.’



This tendency of victims of overlooking digital violence was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire and the interviews of participants who shared their stories and experiences. This trend was described by one survivor as bowing one's forehead and lowering one's head in the face of a storm until it passes. This behavior is explained by a specialist in social history as a result of women's ambiguous relationship with public space, including digital space, in a societal context that remains structurally conservative and traditional. Despite the progress of time, societies are not necessarily evolving at the same pace, and some concepts deemed fixed and absolute, such as the belief that women belong in the home and are not suited for public spaces, remain prevalent and unchallenged among even young generations. These beliefs are reinforced by physiological differences between men and women. According to commonly held beliefs, religion, and society, women are considered to be weaker and of lower rank by nature. This mindset undermines efforts to radically combat violence, as it is widely believed that women are responsible for their own exposure to violence, regardless of whether it is expressed vocally or not. This belief extends to their immediate surroundings, families, and even official circles. As a result, women often hesitate to report violence and choose to overlook it, fearing the repercussions of exposing themselves to the group's ready-made rulings.

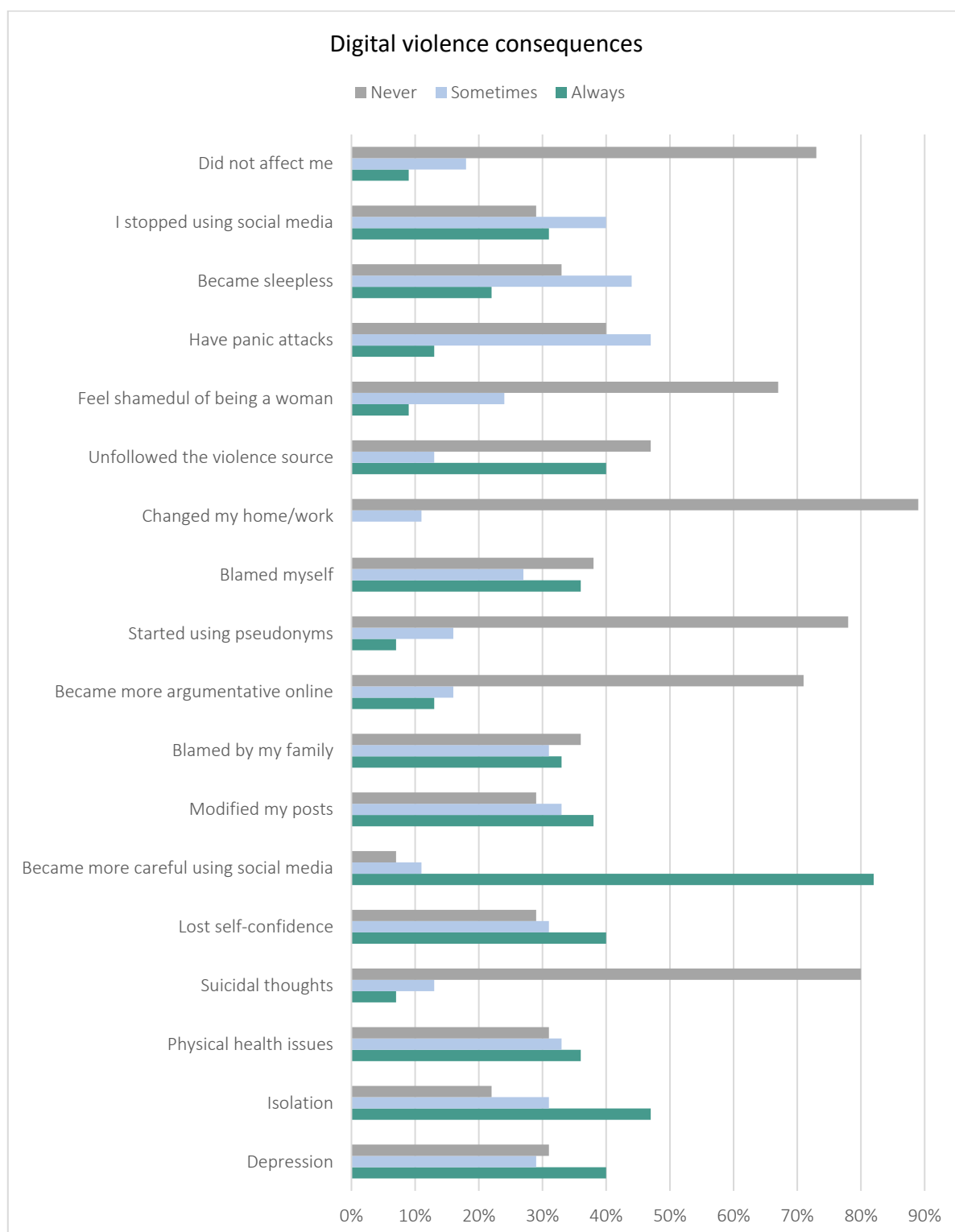
Youssef Ait Altaieb, the head of the Moroccan Center for Polytechnic Research and Innovation, who has dedicated fifteen years to addressing the issues of digital violence and cybercrime, emphasized that numbers alone without a connection to the broader social and cultural context are insufficient. This context remains a significant obstacle to reporting instances of digital violence, particularly sexual violence, which is still a taboo topic. This is evidenced by the fact that the majority of victims prefer to delete the offensive content and maintain anonymity, rather than pursue legal action or follow the perpetrator. He commented that it is not appropriate to overlook such an issue.

The tendency of women to overlook violence inflicted on them in the name of safety is misleading. This behavior has the potential to cause two significant types of harm. That is, it can cause psychological harm to victims, as they may struggle to overcome the trauma without "retaliation" from perpetrators. The feeling of injustice or unfairness that the victim experiences may hinder her interactions with others and lead her to blame them for the actions of the abuser. Additionally, by remaining silent about violence, women contribute to the perpetuation and expansion of the crime's impact on other victims. It is crucial for women to report such incidents to the law, as it is the only means for deterring the aggressor and protecting individuals and society as a whole. Hoda Zakry emphasized that the loss of generational memory, or the lack of awareness about past struggles for women's rights, is a major obstacle in the fight against violence against women. The rights of women are not an acquired achievement, but rather an ongoing battle that requires continuous support and action from women.³² In this sense, it is the responsibility of women to protect what has been achieved so far by expressing, rejecting, and reporting any violence, and not to remain silent, even when it is difficult to do so. One participant noted that this particular stance, which places the onus of reporting and proving violence on women without ensuring their safety, support, and legal and psychological care, is flawed. It can be perceived as blaming the victim, as society is likely to criticize and label as cowardly those who do not report their experiences. If a victim chooses to report violence, she may face negative consequences without any support or backing from others.

The results of the study indicated that the effects of digital violence on victims are evident in their responses to the question of its impact. A significant proportion of victims, namely 40 %, reported experiencing depression as a result of such violence, while 46 % reported feeling isolated. Furthermore, up

³² "If each generation forgets the fight led by the previous generation, it starts all over again and loses valuable progress. Young people today think that the right to vote or equality before the law are immovable achievements, but history has proven to us time and time again that when it comes to women's rights, nothing is taken for granted. 100%. It's a perpetual battle" Houda Zekri.

to 40 % of victims reported losing confidence in themselves and others. The results also revealed a notable proportion of individuals, namely 33%, who experienced increased familial pressure and blame. Moreover, self-blame tendencies among victims increased by 35 %, and there was a 37 % inclination observed among those surveyed to alter their social media communication style. According to the survey, the majority of victims, at a rate of 82 %, have reported increased caution when using social media platforms.

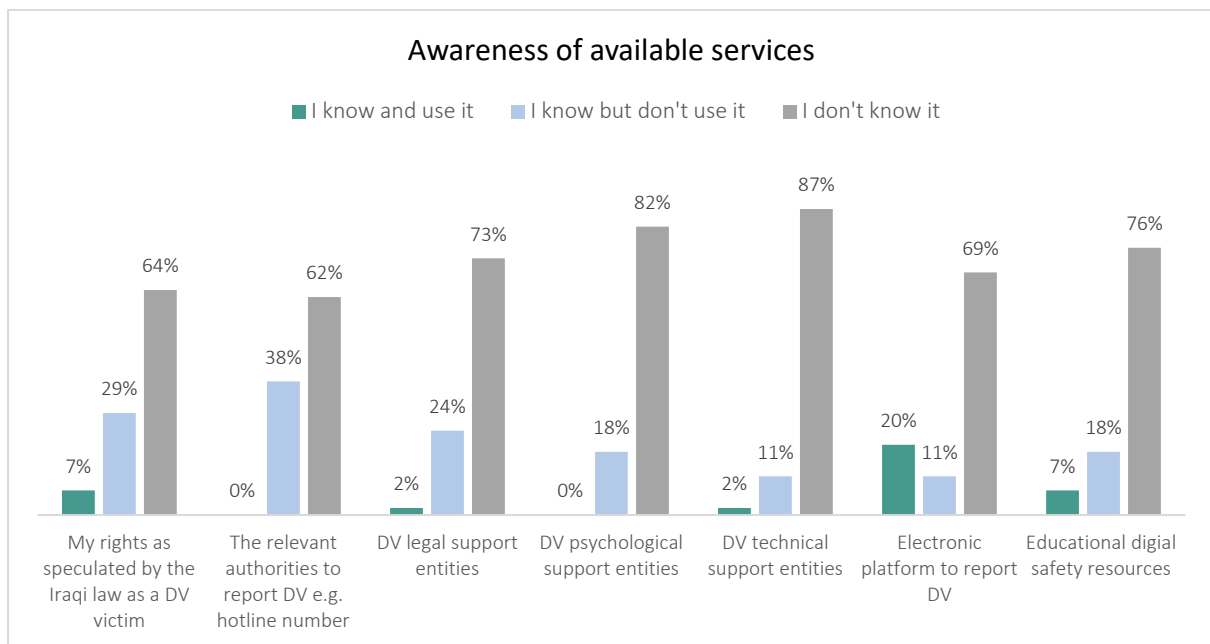


The representative, Khadouj Alsalasi, applauded Law 103.13 as a significant advancement in Moroccan legislation. It is the first law to address various forms of violence and specify its enforcement requirements. However, she believed that the law focuses on women and families, while neglects other forms of gender-based violence. It is insufficient. In her view, a specialized and exclusive law is necessary to address all forms of gender-based violence, especially digital violence, and provide comprehensive protection for women, including prevention, protection, and shelter services.

Ait Taleb holds the view that Morocco possesses an advanced legal framework with regards to cybercrime in general, and specifically in combating violence against women, through the provisions outlined in Law 103.13 related to combating violence against women. This framework includes the definition and injunctive penalties for sexual cyber-harassment, a topic that the Moroccan legislator has addressed for the first time. However, Ait Taleb believed that the issue of digital violence goes beyond the enactment of laws and requires a more comprehensive approach. In his opinion, the Moroccan criminal law is well-versed in the various aspects of digital violence and judges have sufficient discretionary authority to deal with new situations. Nevertheless, the problem lies in the application and procedures followed, which failed to differentiate between classical and digital violence, requiring swift intervention, technical expertise, and coordination among various stakeholders.

Khadija Boufos stated that regarding the journalistic aspect, there is a Press and Publishing Law, in addition to the Criminal Law, which applies to all individuals. However, she noted that the Press and Publishing Law does not include penalties that deprive individuals of their freedom, unlike the Criminal Code. This raises the question of which law is more suitable for addressing such situations. Furthermore, Boufos noted that the long periods of time required by the procedures, as well as the complexity and lack of clarity of the procedures, are factors that prevent these laws from effectively addressing the phenomenon of digital violence. Maryam Abelil also highlighted that although these laws are considered advanced, a large number of researchers and observers believe that the evidence system is weak, and that there is a delay in the authority's interaction with complaints. Similarly, Nadia Bouzendoufa believed that strengthening women's psychological immunity is crucial for confronting digital violence, which has no control or connection. Despite the current laws, digital violence remains a significant challenge that could undermine women's participation in political life.

It is imperative to note that Dr. Ait Taleb, along with the two representatives, Khadouj Al-Salassi and Nadia Bouzendoufa, the journalist Khadija Boufos, the academic Maryam Ablil, and the rest of the specialized participants are fully conversant with the legal weapons that can be employed in the fight against digital violence, given their area of expertise. However, the research findings revealed an alarming lack of knowledge among a large number of women pertaining to the laws and regulations that offer them protection against this form of abuse. Specifically, 64 % of the women interviewed were ignorant of their rights as victims of digital violence, while 62 % were unaware of the competent authorities to whom they could report such cases. Moreover, the majority of respondents were unaware of the existence of support bodies that offer psychological, legal, and technical assistance, ranging from 73% to 86%. The research also revealed that only 20% of the women were familiar with the reporting mechanisms on the platforms and actually used them.



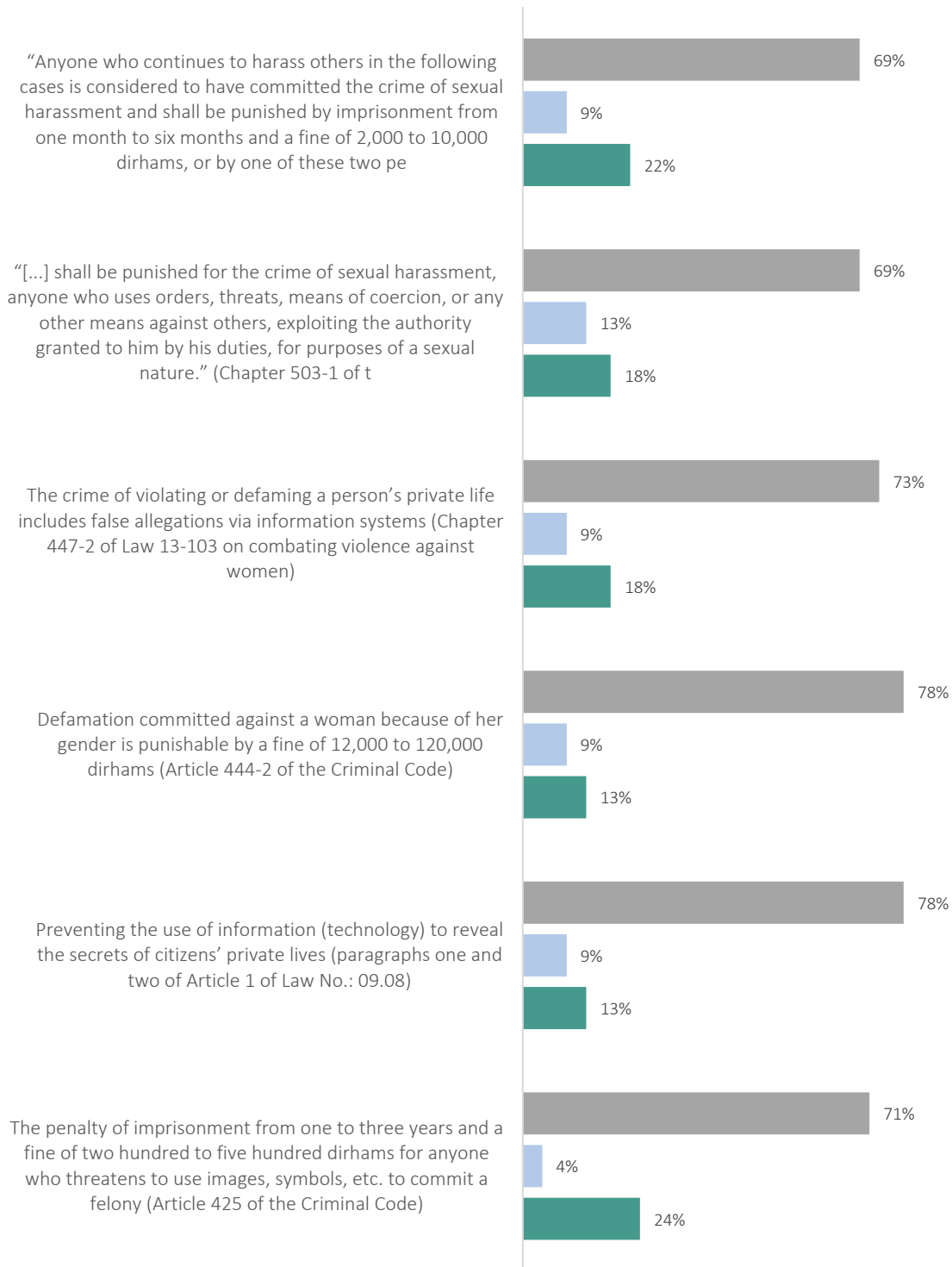
The results of the survey revealed a concerning lack of awareness among women of their rights and the resources available to support them in combating digital violence, as demonstrated by the low levels of knowledge regarding relevant legislation. Only 68% to 77% of participants indicated that they were unaware of laws such as Law 103.13 related to the protection of women against violence and Law 09.08 regarding the protection of private individuals' data processing. A more concerted effort is needed to educate women about their rights and the resources available to them in the face of digital threats. Some participants remarked that the critical aspect is the act of implementation of the laws, and one participant inquired: "Where is the implementation of the laws?"

As Saeed Zeroual pointed out, this lack of knowledge may be attributed to a deficiency in communication and a lack of diligence on the part of political actors, including parties, the media, civil society, and other stakeholders who are responsible for supervising society. The specialist in social history interpreted this reluctance or indifference towards learning the laws, which extend beyond digital violence and are a general phenomenon, as an indication of a low level of confidence in the effectiveness or usefulness of the laws. This lack of confidence often stems from personal experiences with the legal system or authority in general and may be an impression inherited from previous periods that the group has been promoting until it has become a widely held belief. Additionally, it may be evidence that women prefer to overlook and not report incidents, thus leading to a lack of awareness of their rights. In all cases, this ignorance of the laws should not be perceived as a failure on the part of women to know their rights, but rather as a defect that must be addressed.

The interview participants were also asked regarding the aforementioned laws. The response was consistent with the findings of the questionnaire, in that the participants were largely unaware of the laws. Some of them expressed their lack of familiarity with these laws, while others believed that the lack of widespread knowledge of them indicated a limited use by victims. This is a subjective view, but some may consider it to have validity.

Awareness of Laws

- I don't know this law
- I know this law but didn't know its relationship to DVAW
- I know this law & its relationship to DVAW



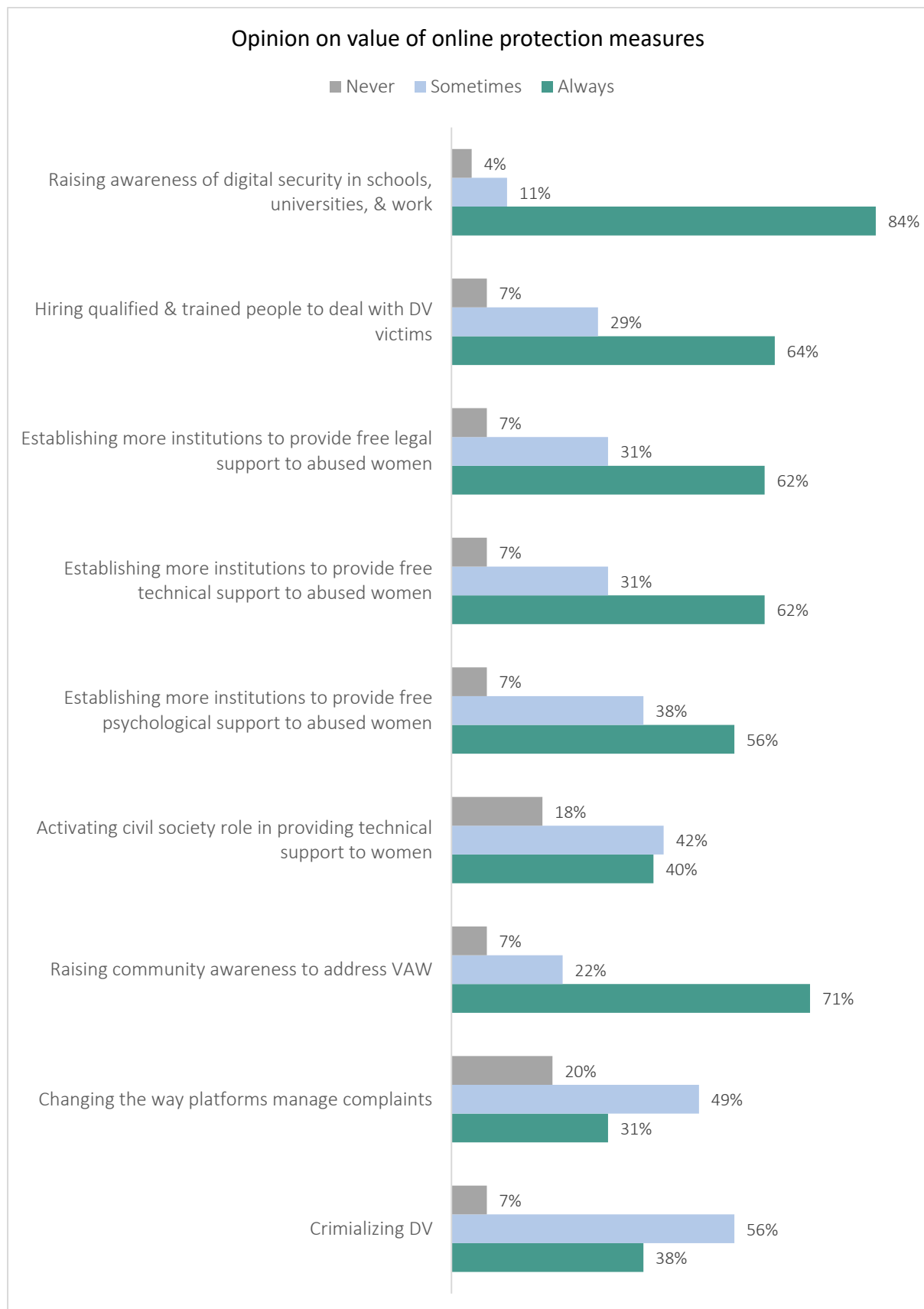
How to Break the Cycles of Digital Violence

In contrast to the limited understanding of digital rights and laws among women, which is reflected in the research findings, there is a general consensus that awareness of digital security should be integrated into the curricula of schools and universities. In addition, training on digital security should be provided in the workplace as well. Specifically, 84% of the participants agreed that this is an urgent priority. Furthermore, 71% of them believed that creating awareness in the community is essential to eliminate the culture of violence against women and to help them disclose their experiences. Additionally, 64% called for the training of complaints recipients in relevant institutions, 62% called for the establishment of legal and technical support institutions for battered women, and 55% called for psychological support institutions. Only 37% believed that digital violence should be criminalized and that deterrent penalties should be imposed on perpetrators. One participant provided insight into this issue, stating: "What is important here is education on rights at an early age so that girls and boys grow up aware of what is theirs and what is owed to them, and that the laws are implemented to become a deterrent, but its presence without its application or confidence in its effectiveness will lead to nothing." Another participant made a thoughtful remark regarding the imperative nature of educating individuals, particularly girls and boys in schools, about their rights and encouraging them to express themselves and object to any form of harm or oppression. She also emphasized the importance of translating these noble sentiments into concrete action and implementation, lest they remain mere platitudes on paper.

One of the comments that conveyed the sentiment of all participants was, "The most crucial aspect is to inspire self-assurance in girls so that they can speak without being blamed." Another individual noted, "It is imperative to introduce and educate about rights and laws." A second participant commented, "The solution lies in raising awareness and creating a robust and effective protection system," and another participant expressed, "What is necessary is application, application, and application."

There is widespread agreement on the importance of education on rights and the principles of equality at an advanced age. Hoda Zakri noted that the signs of misogyny and violent practices against girls and women begin to appear during the early teenage years, thus underscoring the need for education on the principles of respect and equality between the sexes to begin during childhood as part of the educational curriculum.³³ Representative Khadouj Al-Salasi believed that while legislative efforts are important, they are not sufficient in and of themselves to reduce the phenomenon of violence, including digital violence. Instead, awareness-raising efforts at the media and school levels, as well as education on equality and respect for the other as a free and independent individual, are necessary to create a more balanced and equitable society. The representative has committed to seeking new and explicit legislative requirements within Parliament to address all forms of digital violence, including at the level of the Family Code and the Criminal Code. Professor Khadouj emphasized the crucial role of women parliamentarians from all political backgrounds in the process of issuing a comprehensive and inclusive law. She highlighted that it is not possible to achieve this goal without the concerted efforts of both women and men. Therefore, women parliamentarians must assert their legislative beliefs to broaden the scope and number of such laws and ensure their passage.

³³ "Ultimately, this struggle cannot be successful without the inclusion of the principles of gender equality in our education system from an early age. The first signs of misogyny and violence against women/girls begin around puberty, which proves that we must start very early to build a society respectful of gender equality" Houda Zekri



From the perspective of Youssef Ait Taleb, addressing digital violence against women is tantamount to addressing traditional violence against women. To effectively combat digital violence, efforts must be made on two fronts: first, eradicating violence and discrimination against women in general through community awareness, campaigns, and accountability, and second, ensuring the protection of women in the digital space, which requires a shared responsibility between the state and digital companies, given that they are the owners of the platforms where digital violence is perpetrated. As such, they bear a proportionate share of responsibility and must contribute to safeguarding their users, particularly women, without overlooking the role of civil society organizations in raising awareness and advocating for change.

A participant, specialized in social history, highlighted the crucial role of companies that own social media networks and other platforms in addressing the spread of digital violence on their pages. These institutions play a central role in the economic system that thrives on increased use and must therefore prioritize the safety of their users in order to protect their unique commodity: information. To this end, cooperation between Facebook and UNICEF in India during the year 2021 to build a safe and healthy digital space for children and adolescents serves as an example of the importance of corporate social responsibility in protecting this valuable economic model. As part of this program, 100,000 children received training to confront digital violence.³⁴

The SecDev Foundation, through its Salam@ MENA digital resilience project, launched a platform for educating the public on digital safety. This platform provides access to a wealth of information and specialized knowledge that can aid in the responsible use of the internet.³⁵ In addition, the organization seeks to network and advocate with its partners in the region to incorporate digital violence into educational curricula.

The adoption of a comprehensive approach to combating digital violence through training, awareness-raising, and education from an early age is a decision taken by a woman who survived digital violence. Specifically, she was a victim of a widespread bullying campaign that involved the use of a photo of her child with autism, which she had posted to celebrate his birthday, and which was repurposed as a source of countless memes. Memes are cultural symbols that carry meaning and can spread rapidly, but they can also be used as a means of ridicule, slander, or insult by those with malicious intent. Unfortunately, the victim and her child were exposed to such an incident, despite the woman's efforts to remove the photos and avoid the platform where they had been shared (Instagram). Even after she deleted the photos, deactivated her account, and refrained from using the platform for an extended period of time, the memes remained available online, and her and her child's photos continued to spread. The woman now fears that her child may accidentally come across a picture that mocks him or his appearance and that of his mother.

Given the gravity of her guilt towards her son, the woman opted to undertake cybersecurity courses as a volunteer for young people of the same age as her child, and within schools for children with disabilities. Her aim was to provide these individuals with the foundational knowledge of digital safety, including the most crucial aspects of cybersecurity, as outlined by Mrs. Survivor, with the goal of building psychological immunity against certain forms of digital violence. The woman firmly believes that the digital world, like the physical world, should not be a hostile or unjust place for the weak, and that acquiring knowledge is the first step towards overcoming vulnerability and escaping cycles of violence.

³⁴ UNICEF and Facebook collaborate to build safer and healthier online experience for adolescent and children.

³⁵ <https://portal.salamatmena.org/>

Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the preceding results, it can be confidently asserted that the phenomenon of DVAW is only a small fraction of the total that is concealed by fear, confusion, and apprehension. The real and virtual worlds are rapidly converging, and our perceptions of these technological advancements are no longer limited to the realm of science fiction. The potential impact of artificial intelligence on society and its perceived threat is no longer a matter of the future.

This research on digital violence against women in Morocco revealed that despite legislative efforts to regulate and control it, the danger of exposure to the digital realm is growing. The human desire for freedom and the technology that enables it to make it difficult to control. Social media networks, with their inherent architecture, are free from censorship and have taken the lead in times of crisis, becoming a source of information, democratic and equal. On social media platforms, individuals can become leaders. Observers have been divided for nearly two decades, with some heralding an era of vigilant popular governance and others warning of potential cultural, social, and political chaos. It seems both parties were correct.³⁶

The research results suggest that digital violence, which exploits technology, is generally opportunistic and convincing, with an unknown source and capable of transforming from assumption to reality. This violence is an extension of the stable system of violence present in society and contributes to exacerbating its impact. This violence is not surprising in its prevalence, but rather underscores the need to dismantle the system of violence and address the cultural and customary defects within society, which are passed down through generations and normalized through practices that no longer have time or space. Women, in particular, are subjected to unequal views and multiple forms of violence, which must be addressed with restraining provisions that reflect the gravity of the harm caused to women, their families, and society as a whole. This harm includes the loss of a human resource capable of contributing to the group's renaissance through production and contribution.

This study revealed that a large proportion of women have experienced digital violence, and most of them choose to overlook it. This is another indication of the presence of obstacles that hinder the implementation of the law and the prosecution of offenders. When perpetrators go unpunished, it creates a risk of further harm to potential victims, exacerbating the situation. This leniency in deterrence may also indicate a lack of confidence among women in the efficacy of current laws to protect them, raising questions about the responsibility of law enforcement agencies and the effectiveness of their mechanisms for following up and providing protection to victims.

Based on the results of this study, a large number of women are still unaware of the existence of laws that are meant to protect their rights. This calls for a reevaluation of the role of the media in disseminating information, as access to constitutional rights is a fundamental responsibility of the media. The media's primary duty, before entertainment or any other purpose, is to educate society and promote awareness and sensitization. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the role of civil society as a partner in public action and awareness needs to be questioned in this context.

This study determined that imparting education on rights at an early age is likely to be instrumental in addressing the stagnation in the situation of digital violence against women in Morocco. This education would not only enable young people to understand self-protection mechanisms through the internet, but more importantly, it would inculcate in them a respect for gender equality and human rights, thereby

³⁶ The impact of user-generated-content over the behavior of media consumer in times of crisis, Halima El Joundi, LAP Publishing, 2011.

diminishing one of the primary causes of violence against women, which is their vulnerability and discrimination based on customs and inheritance. This education would encompass all forms of violence and promote a culture of respect for basic human rights.

Accordingly, the recommendations emerging from this study are summarized as follows:

1. To incorporate education on human rights, gender equality, and their respective principles within primary school curricula as a fundamental aspect of character development. The discussion of violence, particularly in its advanced stages, serves to challenge societal norms and eradicate all forms of violence, including digital, which can significantly impact the psychological well-being of children, particularly women, and influence their future behavior.
2. To establish dedicated listening centers within educational institutions to enable minors to report any instances of harm they may have experienced, replicating established reporting mechanisms in everyday life, so as to encourage the practice of reporting harm as a standard behavior.
3. To incorporate digital safety education into the educational curricula at primary, middle, and secondary levels with due seriousness and adequacy to keep pace with the advancements in technology, and to enable boys and girls to learn together how to safeguard and protect themselves online.
4. To recognize that DVAW as violence. That is, the legal system must hold perpetrators accountable with equal severity regardless of the form of abuse. The penalties associated with such offenses should be proportionate to the level of harm inflicted.
5. To establish mechanisms for secure and confidential reporting of cases of digital violence and enable victims to provide their testimony remotely.
6. To implement specialized personnel in education, psychology, and social sciences to provide support to victims of digital violence when giving testimony and other processes, ensuring that their dignity and psychological safety are preserved. Furthermore, penalties for individuals who commit direct or indirect violence against women who were exposed to violence need to be increase. This measure will foster trust between victims, women in general, and the authorities responsible for addressing such issues.
7. To support public media to raise awareness about the consequences of digital violence and the importance of reporting such incidents to curb its prevalence. The media must also make it a priority to highlight violence against women in their programming, as it is a significant and ongoing issue that requires attention.
8. To encourage Internet companies who own digital platforms to accept their responsibilities towards ensuring the safety and security of their users, both women and men, against digital violence and other cyber threats.
9. To reformulate the law on combating violence against women to ensure that it encompasses in a more comprehensive manner violence in its digital form. In addition, its implementation is supplemented by downloadable reporting, monitoring, and protection tools across all regions and diverse types of social groups in Morocco, thus preventing perpetrators from evading accountability.

At the end of this research endeavor, it is crucial to acknowledge that digital violence is a complex and uncharted territory that the human community has only recently navigated. The phenomena that have surfaced and circulated have caused confusion and instability, exposing the imbalances in our societies, and the potential outcomes will only become more pronounced. Given these circumstances, it is imperative for Morocco to prioritize intensifying research and study on this violence on a large scale, encompassing both women and men, and examining the societal context of violence in its various cultural and environmental contexts. A field study would be ideal, as the observer's perspective can capture nuances that may provide insight into what is difficult to discern through numerical data alone.

The urgent need also arises to address the digital dimension of violence that encompasses the technical aspects and the imminent threats it poses, ranging from artificial intelligence to its potential ramifications. The threat is no longer a hypothetical scenario, and we are oblivious to its indicators, including deep fakes and the simulation of human creative processes (ChatGPT).

The utilization of technology, particularly in its most advanced forms, necessitates the application of scientific research from an ethical and technological standpoint. The potential consequences of technological advancements on individuals and society at large must be evaluated to determine feasible safeguards for protection, to hold technology companies accountable, to regulate the pace of development, to monitor and track its progress, and to prompt the legislature to anticipate foreseeable outcomes.