



TFGBV REFERRAL PATHWAY TOOLKIT

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCE

TFGBV and Women in Public and Political Life

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Transform TFGBV Referral Pathway Toolkit: Supplemental Resources, TFGBV and Women in Public and Political Life

The Transform TFGBV Referral Pathway Toolkit: Supplemental Resources, TFGBV and Women in Public and Political Life reflects the collaboration and contribution of many people and organizations engaged in preventing, responding to, and mitigating Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence. All sources have been cited.

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Contents

- Contents2
- Acronyms3
- Icon Key (in order of use).....4
- Introduction5
 - Who are Women in Public and Political Life?5
 - Call Out Box 1: “Regular” Women Are also at Risk of TFGBV when Participating in Public Life**5
 - Overview of Women in Public and Political Life and TFGBV6
 - How TFGBV Affects Women in Public and Political Life7
 - Reasons Women in Public and Political Life Report TFGBV8
- Illustrative Profiles of How TFGBV is Used Against Women in Three Types of Public and Political Roles9
 - Women in Politics9
 - Women in Media Roles..... 14
 - Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) 17
 - Definitions21

Acronyms

EMB	electoral management body
GBV	gender-based violence
NGO	non-governmental organization
TFGBV	technology-facilitated gender-based violence
WHRD	women human rights defenders

Icon Key (in order of use)



Information Relevant to Women in Public and Political Life



Terms included in the Definitions section (indicated at first use of the term in the document)



Women in politics



Women in media roles



Women human rights defenders (WHRD)

Introduction



Who are Women in Public and Political Life?

“Women in public and political life” is a term that describes an array of roles that women hold in the public domain that involve leadership, decision-making, and expressing opinions that inform public thinking and actions. These roles include professional careers and more informal activities, including women who work in politics or government through political or elected roles or as civil servants; women who work in media jobs such as news reporters, TV news anchors, print or online journalists, or other roles in newsrooms; and human rights defenders and other advocates and activists. Depending on the political and social context, women in public life can also include women who attend public protests, teachers, academics, subject matter experts, political or social influencers, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, and women who are active in public discussions on social media (see Call Out Box 1: *“Regular” Women Are also at Risk of TFGBV When Participating in Public Life*).

Call Out Box 1: “Regular” Women Are also at Risk of TFGBV when Participating in Public Life

Increasingly, it is not only women who participate in high-profile public roles, such as politics and journalism, or leaders in advocacy movements, who are targeted with TFGBV in attempts to silence them. Women who participate in popular protests or resist laws, policies, or practices that they disagree with by voicing their dissent on social media or through other channels, for example, can be attacked through TFGBV in an attempt to pressure them into stopping their activities. This can include having their personal information, videos, images, communications, or other materials circulated publicly without their consent. It can also include information spread about them that is manipulated and/or untrue, potentially prompting dangerous outcomes for these women. These negative outcomes can be the result of actions taken by family or community members in the form of reprisals in response to accusations of women’s activities that are deemed socially unacceptable, loss of employment based on shaming women for their personal activities, or putting women at risk of legal action and/or imprisonment.

Overview of Women in Public and Political Life and TFGBV



According to USAID’s 2022 *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*,¹ **technology-facilitated gender-based violence** (TFGBV) is “A threat or act of violence committed, assisted, aggravated, and amplified in part or fully by using information and communication technologies or digital media that is disproportionately targeted at women, girls, and gender non-conforming individuals. It is a continuum of multiple, recurring, and interrelated forms of gender-based violence that takes place both online and offline. Examples can include online harassment and abuse; non-consensual distribution of intimate digital images; **cyberstalking**; sextortion; **doxing**; malicious **deep fakes**; livestreamed sexual violence of children, youth, and adults; rape and death threats; disinformation; intimate partner violence; and recruitment into trafficking and abusive labor.”



In addition to causing harm, TFGBV can discourage women, girls, and gender-diverse persons from engaging in the digital ecosystem. While TFGBV can be directed at people of all genders, women, girls, and persons of diverse genders are more likely to be targeted by perpetrators of TFGBV with highly sexualized, misogynistic, and threatening forms of violence. Additionally, women in public and political life are even more likely to be targeted for TFGBV if they are from one or more groups that are discriminated against or stigmatized.

The goal of TFGBV, when it is directed at women in public and political life, is to silence, discredit, undermine, and delegitimize their activities, and to pressure them to mediate or end their participation in public roles, by using threats, intimidation, harassment, and manipulation of information.

In countries around the world, a number of factors put women at higher risk of TFGBV, including being active in public spaces, engaging in public decision-making, and holding leadership roles are activities that continue to be viewed as more suited to men than women. This gender bias reflects discriminatory and inequitable gender and social norms that TFGBV perpetrators leverage.

Perpetrators who use TFGBV to silence or control women’s public participation can include government representatives, security forces, anti-gender groups, faith leaders, community

¹ https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/GBV-Global-Strategy-Report_v6-Accessible-1292022.pdf

leaders, family, community members, individuals with misogynistic views, as well as regional or foreign actors who target women as part of strategies to advance restrictive geopolitical agendas, such as by influencing elections, policy making, and social stability.

How TFGBV Affects Women in Public and Political Life

Many women in public and political life do work that depends on using digital tools and online platforms. For example, some women's careers may rely on analytics that indicate the success of their online content with target audiences (such as journalists) or their ability to reach constituents through an active online profile on social media or other channels (such as politicians). Women in these roles cannot easily step back from engaging online. Additionally, even when women in public and political life do not use online platforms, they still can be attacked online with harmful outcomes.

Women in public and political life are visible and their voices are amplified in public spaces and forums. Societies around the world are strengthened by inclusive participation in public life. Yet, women from groups that are discriminated against, including gender diverse women, must contend with online and in-person attacks that compound harassing and/or abusive language directed at their gender as well as their ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender identity, ability status, and other identity factors. For women in public roles who experience intersecting forms of structural inequality and violence, it is essential to have access to resources, tools, legal recourse, and mental health support that address the layered forms of violence which perpetrators of TFGBV use to attack women in public and political life.

In addition to personal threats, perpetrators of TFGBV will often target the families, children, communities, and other social connections of women in public and political life. This heightens stress, security concerns, and pressure on women in public roles as they must take steps to protect their own safety as well as that of the people they are connected to. Additionally, when TFGBV includes publicly disclosing women's private data, images, communications, and other information without their consent, there are significant negative impacts on women's public lives as well as their private lives and relationships. Women in public roles can also suffer social, professional, psychological, reputational,

and economic harm if TFGBV perpetrators circulate manipulated images, deepfakes, disinformation, or fabricated sexualized claims about them.

Like other forms of GBV, TFGBV survivors are frequently impacted by feelings of shame and stigma for being targeted with these forms of gendered violence. Women in public and political life may not have a detailed awareness of what TFGBV is, and thus may be unaware of available support services or ways to access justice. Additionally, authorities including the police and the judicial system may not be well trained on how to handle cases of TFGBV or how to determine which of the acts involved in a TFGBV attack may be illegal and subject to legal recourse. In some communities, religious and community leaders may also be unaware of TFGBV, its consequences, and ways to address it, which limits the support available to women in public and political life who are affected by these forms of violence.

When perpetrators of TFGBV encourage others to commit violent acts against women in public and political life and/or publish information about where they live or can be found, the line between online and in-person violence becomes blurred. There is often a continuum of gendered violence between online and in-person spaces, including when perpetrators of TFGBV carry out or prompt in-person violence after online attacks, or when they encourage others to use **physical violence** against a woman in public or political life. Additionally, TFGBV can prompt in-person violence enacted by family or community members who seek to control a woman's public participation as a way to enforce restrictive gender norms. It is important that service providers understand the different kinds of threats and harm that potentially can occur in order to provide meaningful support to survivors of TFGBV who are women in public and political life.



Reasons Women in Public and Political Life Report TFGBV

The three profiles below provide illustrative examples of why women in public and political life choose not to report TFGBV. However, it is important to also note some of the reasons that women in public roles *do* report TFGBV.

For example, women who view themselves as public role models for other women and girls may want to demonstrate the importance of standing up for themselves and condemning gendered forms of violence. Some women in public and political life may report TFGBV to seek recourse or justice for themselves and/or for other women, or to push for changes in policies or laws. In other cases, reporting TFGBV may be an avenue through which women can access support or resources, such as through their employer or by prompting legal

action from authorities. Women may report TFGBV as part of their decision not to be silenced or pushed out of public roles.

Ultimately, the choice to report TFGBV or not should be made by the survivor as they consider the factors that affect them, such as safety and what they see as the best option. Whether or not women in public and political life choose to report TFGBV, they should have access to resources and tools to help them protect themselves from further TFGBV attacks and to support their well-being.

Illustrative Profiles of How TFGBV is Used Against Women in Three Types of Public and Political Roles

To illustrate how women in public and political life experience TFGBV, below are overviews of the contexts, common types of TFGBV experienced, frequent perpetrators, and other considerations for three public and political roles that women participate in: women in politics, women in media roles, and women human rights defenders (WHRD).



Women in Politics

Women in political roles are subjected to high levels of misogynistic and sexualized forms of TFGBV, which far exceeds similar types of TFGBV perpetrated against their male peers in politics. Women tend to have less power in political parties and administrations, which increases their vulnerability to violence and limits their options for effectively addressing it, especially when perpetrated by a supervisor or colleague. For example, in countries where political parties must meet gender quotas, women are frequently included in political lists, but ranked so that they are very unlikely to receive nominations or be elected, or are given roles that are low level and with less importance.

Women in political life are always vulnerable to TFGBV attacks, and women who are from groups that are marginalized or discriminated against are even more vulnerable. Before and after elections, violence against women in politics tends to escalate. Nomination periods are also found to be times when female candidates are publicly attacked and/or intimidated both in-person and online.²

TFGBV is a harmful way that political rivals and members of the public who disagree with women politicians often seek to discredit women in political life. Women in politics can also be targeted for TFGBV by members of their own political party, as well as contending with in-person forms of gendered assault, harassment, and exploitation from their colleagues. The combination of online and in-person gendered violence make it even more difficult for women in politics to report TFGBV, particularly in terms of trusting reporting mechanisms that are available through the political party whose members may be participating in the TFGBV or in-person attacks against the survivor.

Common Perpetrators and Forms of TFGBV for Women in Politics

Table 1 provides an illustrative outline of perpetrators frequently involved in targeting women in politics with forms of TFGBV. It also notes the types of TFGBV that women in public and political life frequently contend with (repeated across all three profiles).

² <https://rm.coe.int/fighting-sexist-violence-against-women-in-politics-at-local-and-region/1680a061c3>



Table 1: Women in Politics



Perpetrators	Frequent forms of TFGBV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political parties (rival parties and the women politician’s own party) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cheap fakes or memes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rival political candidates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cybermobbing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ruling government or parties who are in opposition to the government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cybersecurity attacks, including hacking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interest groups (oligarchs, lobby groups, corporations, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyberstalking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepfakes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious or community leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defamation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security forces or militia groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doxing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Malignant foreign actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gendered disinformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People acting on strongly held harmful gender and/or social norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gendered hate speech, stigmatization, othering, dehumanization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media content creators receiving monetary incentives or meeting advertising revenue goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impersonation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media users, including women and men who are constituents, voters, or community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual harassment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threats of physical violence including death threats (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threats of sexual violence (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gendered trolling

Common Reasons for Why Women in Politics Do Not Report TFGBV

Women in politics often do not report TFGBV because they are not confident that their reports will be taken seriously. They may also be subjected to further harm from the police, by their political party, or others when they report TFGBV. Other common barriers that women in politics face when considering if they should report TFGBV include:

- Some political parties have reporting mechanisms (e.g., a grievance officer), but many women in politics do not know that these options are available. Additionally, women politicians do not always trust these mechanisms, having concerns such as

not knowing how they will be treated after reporting or if these mechanisms are truly confidential.

- Women politicians operate in contexts where voters prefer “strong” candidates. Reporting TFGBV to the police or through other mechanisms can result in further traumatization or harm done to women politicians if they are not taken seriously, and they can also lose voters’ confidence by appearing weaker and more vulnerable than their male counterparts. When women in politics do report, according to one survey, 20% reported to a women’s organization rather than to the police or through other reporting mechanisms.³
- Women politicians who identify with multiple groups that experience marginalization and/or discrimination are exposed to higher levels of TFGBV and must contend with racism and other forms of discrimination as well as with misogynistic attacks.
- Due to the structures of political parties which privilege men, women frequently have less access to power, decision-making, status, and leadership roles compared to their male peers, which further impedes women’s access to recourse and justice following political violence, including from within the political party itself.⁴
- Women in politics are often unsuccessful in reporting violence and seeking redress when it occurs in non-physical forms, as these types of violence can be discounted as not “real violence.” There are also inaccurate beliefs that political violence is not gendered, but that it affects women and men in politics in the same ways.
- Due to social and gender norms that normalize violence against women in countries around the world, many women in political life do not see the TFGBV they experience in politics as acts of violence. When women politicians do report TFGBV, they are told that violence is the “cost” of being in politics.⁵
- Sexist, homophobic, racist, and other pejorative media representations of women politicians reinforce harmful gender and social stereotypes that make it increasingly difficult for women politicians to report violence, especially if they identify with groups who are frequently discriminated against, such as people with disabilities, or ethnic and religious minority groups.

³ https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_No_Party_to_Violence_ReportFinal.pdf

⁴ https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_No_Party_to_Violence_ReportFinal.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

- Victim blaming, which can have severe consequences for women politicians if they are publicly accused of having “caused” the TFGBV perpetrated against them, is common.
- When the families of women in politics are also targeted by perpetrators of TFGBV, the women are frequently blamed, as their public participation is seen as the factor that prompted the abuse their families or communities are exposed to.
- Often, women in politics work in a context where the people perpetrating violence against them, including from their own political parties, do so with impunity and with the knowledge that women’s reports of any type of GBV are not taken seriously.⁶

Potential Resources for Women in Political Life

Each country has its own configuration of organizations and units within political institutions to manage elections and to oversee the conduct of political parties, candidates, and representatives. Not all resources are available in all countries, but some potential resources include:

Electoral management bodies (EMBs) may be able to help women in politics report and find redress for TFGBV.

For example, EMBs may refer cases of violence to security and justice authorities and provide evidence in cases. Similarly, some EMBs can impose sanctions on perpetrators of violence within political systems.

Political parties’ codes of conduct and ethics offices can promote greater gender equality across all parts of the electoral process.

See *Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation* (UNDP, UN Women, <https://bit.ly/4h4zq4y>)

National human rights commissions may track human rights violations including violence against women during the electoral cycle, and may have a reporting mechanism for GBV, including TFGBV.

⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/fighting-sexist-violence-against-women-in-politics-at-local-and-region/1680a061c3>



Women in Media Roles

Women in media roles are often targeted by perpetrators of TFGBV when they report on issues that are considered “hard hitting.” This can include reporting on conflict, culturally or politically sensitive topics such as sexual violence, stories that hold powerful people accountable including corruption, or otherwise address areas of public interest that are traditionally viewed as issues represented by men or which “shouldn’t” be portrayed by the media at all.

Attacks on women journalists are often politically motivated,⁷ and are attempts to silence and discredit women journalists and media workers. TFGBV against women in media roles occurs in contexts of increasing migration of news media onto online and digital platforms paired with rising global and local impunity for violence against women and gender diverse people in online and digital spaces. In some contexts, perpetrators’ impunity is so assured that online threats are made without perpetrators attempting to conceal their identities.

Similar to other women in public life, when women journalists report online violence, they are told to “toughen up,” rather than authorities taking TFGBV as a serious risk.⁸ Women journalists are often given the advice to not respond to trolls or online hate. This leaves women unprotected and more vulnerable to attacks and diminishes the seriousness of TFGBV.⁹

Common Perpetrators and Forms of TFGBV for Women in Media Roles

Table 2 provides an illustrative outline of the common perpetrators of TFGBV against women in media roles. It also notes the forms of TFGBV that women in public and political life frequently are targeted with.

⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/publications/thechilling>

⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/we-must-do-more-address-online-harassment-women-journalists>

⁹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383043.locale=fr>



Table 2: Women in Media Roles

Women in Media Roles	
Perpetrators	Frequent Forms of TFGBV
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Governments or political administrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cheap fakes or memes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Security forces or militia groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cyberstalking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Interest groups (oligarchs, lobby groups, corporations, etc.) who are the subjects of exposés	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cybermobbing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Media managers or colleagues who may also enact workplace violence including physical harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cybersecurity attacks, including hacking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Members of media regulation bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Deepfakes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Religious or community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Defamation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Malignant foreign actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Doxing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Online audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered disinformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Disaffected individual perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered hate speech, stigmatization, othering, dehumanization
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Impersonation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sexual harassment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Threats of physical violence including death threats (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Threats of sexual violence (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered trolling

Common Reasons for Why Women in Media Roles Do Not Report TFGBV

Similarly to women in politics, women in media roles contend with multiple barriers to reporting TFGBV. Common among these include:

- Women journalists can struggle to report TFGBV in newsrooms where managers can be unsympathetic and misogynistic in their responses to reports of TFGBV, or where there are newsroom structures and practices that privilege men and create hostile environments for women journalists.

- Clear and established reporting procedures often are not in place, nor are formal protocols for addressing TFGBV.
- Women may hesitate to report TFGBV as managers or head editors may view them as “weak” or “not competent,” especially in a context where women journalists are not frequently assigned serious stories.
- When women journalists do report TFGBV, they often experience victim blaming by their employers, indicating a lack of seriousness in how TFGBV is viewed.
- Women journalists with intersectional identities are exposed to higher levels of TFGBV and must contend with racism and other forms of discrimination as well as misogynistic attacks both online and in newsrooms.
- Press associations or journalists’ unions may not have the resources to respond to reports of TFGBV or may not take them seriously.

Often, women journalists do not have clear avenues through which to report TFGBV or to access the support they need from managers to reduce re-traumatization from current TFGBV and protect themselves from further TFGBV attacks. This includes managers not providing TFGBV survivors with work-based solutions, including time away from reporting on the topics that elicited violence, not providing support when reviewing gendered trolling and violent messages for credible threats to inform security responses, telling women to ignore TFGBV and continue with their work, and not adopting newsroom policies, protocols, or training to create survivor-supportive, trauma-informed, and rights-based workplace environments that address TFGBV.

Potential Resources for Women in Media Roles

Women in media roles may have different types of protections depending on the country where they live and/or work. Women in media roles are vulnerable to weaponized uses of information and internet laws against them, both in response to their work and as a form of TFGBV. Some potential resources include:

Press unions or journalists’ professional associations

Journalists’ networks

The International Women’s Media Foundation

The Rory Peck Trust

Legal aid organizations



Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD)

WHRDs are often accused of damaging traditional gender and family roles and are targeted for TFGBV to prevent them from continuing their work promoting the rights of women, girls, and persons of diverse genders and sexual orientations. Frequently, perpetrators of TFGBV target WHRD to promote traditional values, anti-feminist narratives, and narratives that seek to restrict the rights of minority groups. This includes targeting by far-right groups including religious fundamentalists, nationalists, and anti-rights groups, claiming that WHRD engage in deviant behavior.

TFGBV is infrequently recognized as an attempt to silence or stop WHRD's public advocacy, but instead is minimized or dismissed as non-political violence (or "normal" violence) against women and LGBTQI+ people.¹⁰

WHRDs work in a number of different professions to promote women's rights and the rights of LGBTQI+ groups, including in conflict contexts.¹¹ This includes as NGO workers, lawyers or judges, journalists, teachers, artists, trade unionists, health workers, social workers, grassroots leaders, environmental and climate activists, and whistle-blowers among others.¹² WHRDs are often targeted with TFGBV in closing civic spaces based on their work advocating for rights.

Common Perpetrators and Forms of TFGBV for WHRD

Table 3 provides an illustrative outline of the common perpetrators who target WHRDs with forms of TFGBV. It also notes the frequent forms of TFGBV used against women in public and political life.

¹⁰ <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/the-state-of-women-human-rights-defenders-2023/#:~:text=The%20harassment%20against%20activists%20is,of%20an%20activist's%20everyday%20life>

¹¹ https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Right%20To%20Safety_FINAL.pdf

¹² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/11/from-slurs-to-sexual-violence-women-human-rights-defenders-come-under-global-attack/>



Table 3: WHRD

WHRD	
Perpetrators	Frequent Forms of TFGBV
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Radicalized groups, including religious fundamentalists, ultra-nationalists, and anti-rights groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cheap fakes or memes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Anti-gender groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cyberstalking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Government and non-government actors opposing rights agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cybermobbing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Security forces or militia	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Cybersecurity attacks, including hacking
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Religious or community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Deepfakes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Transnational and national corporations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Defamation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Colleagues who may also enact workplace violence including physical harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Doxing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Online audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered disinformation
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Disaffected individual perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered hate speech, stigmatization, othering, dehumanization
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Family or community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Impersonation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sexual harassment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Threats of physical violence including death threats (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Threats of sexual violence (including against her family)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Gendered trolling

Common Reasons Why WHRD Do Not Report TFGBV

WHRDs infrequently have access to protection mechanisms that respond to the violence they experience.¹³ They also face barriers to reporting in the mechanisms that do exist. Some of these barriers include:

- Distrust of state institutions due to the violence that government officials enact against them. WHRD at times prefer safety mechanisms developed or endorsed by WHRD organizations and networks, or by women's organizations.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/women-human-rights-defenders>

¹⁴ https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Right%20to%20Safety_FINAL.pdf

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- WHRD from indigenous groups or who identify as members of groups that experience discrimination, racism, and structural exclusion may be wary of the police and other authorities due to past experiences of violence from authorities, restricting their willingness to report TFGBV.

 - WHRDs who live in rural areas may not have ready access to police or other mechanisms for reporting violence, or may not speak the national language required for reporting to police or engaging with justice systems.

 - WHRD may be targeted with TFGBV while also having limited or restricted access to internet connectivity (such as not having internet in their homes or remote places where they work), which limits their access to digital resources to respond to how they have been targeted.

 - Civil society organizations can be a source of support and provide services, but WHRDs also may be vulnerable to violence from the organizations in their communities if these organizations do not support the work of human rights defenders.

 - Protection from the state, such as from police or other security forces, may be experienced as a form of monitoring, surveillance, and as a threat.¹⁵

 - Accusations of mental illness can result in discrediting and delegitimizing WHRD, which can make it harder for them to access support, reporting mechanisms, and services from the police and in their communities or workplaces.

Potential Resources for WHRD

Because of the nature and severity of threats that WHRD receive both online and in-person, their need for services can differ from what other women in public and political life require. Many WHRD are members of communities that are discriminated against, underrepresented, or otherwise marginalized. Their intersecting identities can expose them to more intensive forms of violence and harm that require support to address.

Additionally, governments frequently target WHRD for violence, which complicates their ability to trust or use police or protection services. Finally, the pressure that WHRD experience from the threats of violence they encounter makes confidential and quality mental health and psychosocial support even more critical for them, as well as for their families who are often also targeted for violence.¹⁶

¹⁵ https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Right%20To%20Safety_FINAL.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid.

Many of the referrals and services that WHRD need are holistic, and their families also at times require services such as assistance with well-being and access to safe spaces. WHRD often benefit from security training and protection, as well as legal services that can help them address attempts to criminalize their work and the weaponization of judicial processes to silence them.

Definitions



Term	Definition
Cheap Fakes	A video with faked content that is created by a person using non-AI technology to edit the images or video to create content that is not accurate or factual. ¹⁷
Cybermobbing	Consists of organized, coordinated, and systematic attacks by a group of people against particular individuals or issues, such as by groups that target feminists or individuals who post about racial equality issues online. Outrage or shame mobs are a form of “mob justice” focused on publicly exposing, humiliating and punishing a target, often for expressing opinions on politically charged topics or ideas the outrage mob disagrees with and/or has taken out of context in order to promote a particular agenda. ¹⁸
Cybersecurity Attacks	An intentional effort to steal, expose, alter, disable, or destroy data, applications, or other assets through unauthorized access to a network, computer system, or digital device. ¹⁹
Cyberstalking	A severe form of an online obsessional pursuit, motivated by relational control or destruction, that consists of the use of technology to repeatedly stalk and monitor someone’s activities and behaviors in real-time (or historically) and that causes the survivor to feel fear. ²⁰
Deepfakes	Digital images and/or audio that are artificially altered or manipulated by AI and/or deep learning to make someone appear to do or say something he or she did not actually do or say. Pictures or videos can be edited to put someone in a compromising position or to have someone make a controversial statement, even though the person did not actually do or say what is shown. Increasingly, it is becoming difficult to distinguish artificially manufactured material from actual videos and images. Deepfakes are increasingly being used to create non-consensual sexual imagery that depict the target in a sexual way, for example, by placing women’s faces on pornographic images or videos. ²¹
Defamation	Defamation involves the public release and spreading of exaggerated or false information that damages a person’s reputation and that has the intention of humiliating, threatening, discrediting, intimidating, or punishing the survivor and in particular public figures (e.g., public officials, activists, and journalists). ²²
Doxing	A gendered form of online harassment that consists of non-consensual disclosure of personal information involving the public release of an individual’s private, personal, and sensitive information, such as home and email addresses, phone numbers,

¹⁷ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lanceeliot/2024/06/25/cheap-fakes-and-rescuing-humankind-via-generative-ai/>

¹⁸ <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>

¹⁹ <https://www.ibm.com/topics/cyber-attack#:~:text=A%20cyberattack%20is%20any%20intentional%20effort%20to%20steal,>

²⁰ <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-making-all-spaces-safe>

²¹ Ibid.

²² https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/SaferInternet_Paper_no_1_coverupdate.pdf

	employer and family member’s contact information, or photos of their children and the school they attend with the purpose of locating and causing physical harm. ²³
Gendered Disinformation	False or manipulative information that: 1) attacks or undermines individuals (particularly public figures) based on their gender; or 2) weaponizes gendered narratives and stereotypes to promote political, social, or economic objectives. ²⁴
Gendered Hate Speech	Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behavior, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, their sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Gendered and sexist online hate speech reinforces systemic sexism while dehumanizing and encouraging violence against women, girls, and LGBTQI+ persons. ²⁵
Gendered Trolling	Online abuse or harassment for “fun”. Trolls deliberately post comments or messages, upload images or videos and create hashtags for the purposes of annoying, provoking, or inciting violence against women and girls. Many trolls are anonymous and use false accounts. ²⁶
Hacking	Use of technology to gain illegal or unauthorized access to systems or resources for the purpose of attacking, harming, or incriminating another person or organization by stealing their data, acquiring personal information, altering or modifying information, violating their privacy, or infecting their devices with viruses. ²⁷
Impersonation	Process of stealing someone’s identity to threaten or intimidate, as well as to discredit or damage a user’s reputation. ²⁸
Meme	An image or video, or piece of text that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users, often with slight variations. ²⁹
Physical Violence	Including physical acts meant to intimidate or harm, including slapping, punching, choking, shoving, or burning as well as other acts.
Sexual Harassment	Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. It includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sex-based harassment can happen to people and be perpetrated by people of any sex. ³⁰
Sexual Violence	Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching and other non-contact forms. ³¹

²³ <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/flr/vol85/iss5/44/>

²⁴ https://intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/248/21181

²⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/hate-speech-strategy.shtml>

²⁶ <https://www.esafety.gov.au/women/why-women>

²⁷ <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>

²⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1ccedce6-c5ed-11e8-9424-01aa75ed71a1>

²⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/meme>

³⁰ <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/harassment/index.html#:~:text=Sexual%20harassment%20is%20unwelcome%20conduct%20of%20a%20sexual>

³¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women#:~:text=Violence%20against%20women%20%E2%80%93%20particularly%20intimate%20partner%20violence>

