



# ENGAGING MEN, ENDING VIOLENCE: PATHWAYS TO SAFER DIGITAL FUTURES

Caroline Hayes, Taveeshi Gupta, Cailin Crockett, and Vaiddehi Bansal

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**ON BEHALF OF:**

**Equimundo: Center for Masculinities  
and Social Justice**

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The issues of online misogyny and digital violence against women and girls demand urgent attention and collaborative action. We hope this desk review contributes to a deeper understanding of these phenomena and supports efforts to create safer digital spaces for all. Any errors or omissions in this report remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence
<b>CSAM</b>	Child Sexual Abuse Material
<b>CVE</b>	Countering Violent Extremism
<b>ECPAT</b>	End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT International)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence
<b>IBA</b>	Image-Based Abuse
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMAGES</b>	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
<b>Interpol</b>	International Criminal Police Organization
<b>ISD</b>	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Others
<b>MGTOW</b>	Men Going Their Own Way
<b>MRAs</b>	Men's Rights Activists
<b>NCII</b>	Non-Consensual Intimate Images
<b>NetzDG</b>	Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz (Network Enforcement Act, Germany)
<b>NGO</b>	Nongovernmental Organization
<b>NORC</b>	National Opinion Research Center (at the University of Chicago)
<b>OCSEA</b>	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>Ofcom</b>	Office of Communications (United Kingdom)
<b>TF VAWG</b>	Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence Against Women and Girls
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Male-driven, technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TF VAWG) is an urgent and growing global challenge, reshaping how violence manifests across digital and physical spaces. Online environments – ranging from mainstream social media platforms to fringe forums – can amplify misogynistic content, enable harassment, and normalize abuse. Globally, women, girls, and non-binary individuals are most affected by online violence. This disproportion is more extreme for women in the Global South, where patriarchal norms, economic precarity, and weak legal protections heighten vulnerability. While technology-enabled violence can affect people of all gender identities, including men and boys, because women and girls (particularly outspoken activists and those in public life) experience the highest levels, male driven TF VAWG will be the focus of this report.

This report addresses a critical gap in the global TF VAWG discourse: a deeper and more nuanced look at perpetration of TF VAWG, aimed at understanding why men encounter harmful narratives of masculinity in digital spaces and how these dynamics fuel the perpetration of online and offline violence against women and girls. **Using a masculinities lens reveals that men are the primary perpetrators of TF VAWG as well as participants in a broader social ecosystem where masculine identity formation, economic pressures, and digital culture intersect.** While women remain the primary targets of TF VAWG, many young men themselves experience forms of gendered harm online – such as body-image pressures, sextortion, social isolation, and psychological manipulation – that both reflect and reinforce rigid gender norms. After women and girls, men and non-binary individuals who do not conform to the masculine ideal experience the most online violence. That said, it is important to affirm that based on anecdotal and existing research, the majority of online TF VAWG – and against boys and

men – is perpetrated by men. Thus, understanding which men carry it out and the factors that encourage it, drive it, or hinder it, is critical to designing effective prevention and response approaches. Therefore, throughout this review, online violence refers to male driven TF VAWG.

The analysis highlights several key findings:

## 1. THE ROLE OF MASCULINITY IN TF VAWG

- Rigid gender expectations that equate masculinity with dominance, sexual entitlement, and emotional suppression create conditions that can lead young men toward online misogyny.
- Economic precarity, declining educational outcomes, and social exclusion leave many young men vulnerable to recruitment by online communities – such as those including involuntary celibates (incels), men’s rights activists (MRAs), white supremacists, far-right groups, and some “manfluencers” – that offer belonging and validation while promoting hostility toward women.

## 2. THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM OF VIOLENCE

- Online misogyny thrives in the “manosphere,” a loosely connected network of forums, influencers, and social media spaces that normalize anti-feminist narratives and facilitate TF VAWG particularly against feminists, women’s rights advocates, and women in public life.
- The nature of online spaces, offering anonymity, and the lack of accountability allow TF VAWG to happen. These online spaces become, in some ways, new “locker rooms” where sexist banter can easily turn into harmful acts.

- Algorithmic amplification, monetization structures, and globalized cultural flows accelerate exposure to harmful content, often escalating young men's exposure from benign online interests (gaming, fitness, and self-improvement) to explicitly misogynistic and violent material.
- Because online spaces involve overlapping systems – of commerce and culture, among others – it is particularly important to understand how women and girls (and young boys and non-binary individuals) are most at-risk online when profit and digital cultures intersect and create ripple effects of harm.

### 3. THE ONLINE–OFFLINE CONTINUUM OF HARM

- The impacts of TF VAWG are not confined to digital spaces. Online harassment, doxxing, image-based abuse, and gendered disinformation often translate into offline harm, including intimate partner violence and public attacks on women's participation in social and political life.
- The harms of TF VAWG are intersectional: women and girls are not affected equally. Young women and adolescent girls experience disproportionately high levels of online harassment and sexualized abuse, and risks intensify for other marginalized groups, including women of colour, LGBTIQ+ individuals, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and women with limited digital literacy. Public-facing women – such as journalists, politicians, activists, and athletes – are additionally targeted as a means of silencing and disciplining their visibility, voice, and participation in public life.

### 4. PREVENTION THROUGH A MASCULINITIES LENS

- Effective prevention requires engaging men and boys not only as potential perpetrators but also as bystanders, allies, and individuals

shaped by harmful gender norms. Young men experience frequent online bullying, often homophobic related, and nearly always from other men. These young men may be ready to engage in making online spaces safer for all.

- Programmes that promote emotional literacy, positive models of masculinity, and healthy digital engagement can disrupt pathways to misogynistic radicalization and encourage active online positive moderation that engages young men in calling out harm they see.
- Interventions must address the structural drivers of young men's vulnerabilities – economic insecurity, social disconnection, and limited access to mental health support – alongside online and offline strategies to hold perpetrators accountable and support survivors.
- Technology platform leaders must seek to understand young men, patterns of some young men's use of TF VAWG, and young men's stake in change as part of their policies and duty to ensure safe online spaces for women and girls and everyone.
- By situating TF VAWG within the broader social and digital systems that shape masculine identity, this report calls for comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that: address both perpetration and prevention; engage men and boys as part of the solution by leaning into their own stake in safer, respectful online spaces; strengthen global definitions, measurement tools, and legal frameworks; and build resilient, equitable online environments that advance gender justice.

Ultimately, addressing TF VAWG through a masculinities lens not only protects women and marginalized groups but also promotes the health, well-being, and social inclusion of men and boys – fostering safer digital and physical communities for all.

# 1



## INTRODUCTION

Global data reveal that men's perpetration of intimate partner violence remains alarmingly high worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that one in three women have experienced some form of violence and that most often it was perpetrated by a male partner, with little evidence of decline in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> In fact, during the COVID-19 pandemic, data from 142 studies across 44 countries showed an alarming increase in men's violence against women.<sup>2</sup>

With the rise of technology and increasing time spent in digital spaces, the development sector has expanded its focus to examine the ways in which violence occurs online. Male-driven TF VAWG has emerged as one of the most urgent challenges in advancing gender equality, reshaping how violence is perpetrated and experienced across both the digital and physical spaces. **One global survey suggests that, 85 per cent of women report experiencing or witnessing online violence, with the impacts particularly acute in the Global South, where patriarchal norms, economic precarity, and limited legal protections amplify vulnerability.**<sup>3</sup> TF VAWG exists within a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem increasingly **shaped by the rise of the “manosphere” underscoring the critical need for evidence-based and gender-responsive prevention strategies.**

Equimundo's International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), conducted in more than 50 countries, examined multiple forms of violence perpetration, finding that many men exert power and control through sexual, psychological, economic, and physical violence. Sexual violence is the least reported form by men, with significant gaps between women's reports of experiencing it and men's admissions of perpetrating it.<sup>4</sup> The data show substantial regional variation, with the Arab States showing particularly high levels of traditional gender attitudes that normalize violence. Critically, the research revealed a strong intergenerational pattern: men who witnessed violence against their mothers during childhood are significantly more likely – often double the likelihood – to perpetrate intimate partner violence in their own adult relationships. This cycle of violence is compounded by the fact that many respondents experienced multiple

overlapping forms of violence in childhood, including direct physical violence and witnessing violence against their mothers, creating normalized patterns that persist in adulthood. The findings underscore how violence is a learned behaviour that transmits across generations, making violence prevention that addresses childhood trauma essential to breaking these cycles.

Addressing TF VAWG requires an understanding of how masculine norms influence the behaviours, vulnerabilities, and experiences of men and boys online. Research shows that rigid masculine norms – emphasizing dominance, self-sufficiency, emotional repression, and sexual entitlement – can constrain young men's development while contributing to harmful behaviours, including online harassment and participation in misogynistic communities.<sup>5</sup> **These norms are increasingly exploited (and even monetized) in digital spaces where extremist and anti-feminist networks offer a sense of belonging, scapegoats for personal frustration, and pathways to radicalization that can spill over into offline violence. Recognizing how these systems exploit women, men, girls, and boys is key to creating change and reducing male-driven TF VAWG.**

The absence of a universally recognized definition of TF VAWG complicates international coordination and policy development. UN Women defines TF VAWG as “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information and communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm”.<sup>6</sup> This definition highlights the continuum between online and offline violence and encompasses a wide spectrum of behaviours, including image-based

sexual abuse, doxxing, cyberstalking, sextortion, and coordinated harassment campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Yet the rapidly evolving technological landscape – from advanced tracking devices to generative artificial intelligence (AI) – continues to produce new forms of harm that challenge measurement, legal accountability, and cross-border enforcement. Without harmonized definitions and frameworks, global responses remain fragmented.

**Applying a masculinities lens to TF VAWG shifts the research focus from victims alone to the broader ecosystem that includes perpetration and socialization. While women, girls, and gender-diverse people are the primary targets of TF VAWG, men and boys are central actors in this digital landscape – as perpetrators, bystanders, and, in several cases, as secondary victims of body-image pressures, sextortion, and psychological manipulation.** Further, public discourse often simplifies “perpetrators” as isolated individuals involved in specific events rather than as participants in cultural and structural systems that normalize misogyny and violent versions of masculinity. Understanding the socialization processes and vulnerabilities that draw young men into harmful online behaviours is critical to designing effective prevention strategies that can benefit all users of online technologies.

Economic and social disruptions further fuel these dynamics. While the gender gap favours men and boys in several indicators, in many high-income countries men are falling behind on several social and economic indicators. In particular, in more than two-thirds of countries, men complete secondary and tertiary education at lower rates than women, and in the Global South, youth unemployment disproportionately affects young men.<sup>89</sup> The decline of traditional male breadwinner roles – driven by deindustrialization, increased automation, and economic precarity – has left many young men struggling with identity, self-worth, and belonging. **Without supportive social structures, rigid masculine norms and emotional repression compound feelings of dislocation, fuelling resentment and susceptibility to manosphere narratives that scapegoat women and feminism.**<sup>10</sup> These dynamics not only increase

the risk of TF VAWG perpetration but also intersect with known drivers of offline violence and intimate partner abuse.<sup>11</sup> **Research has found that men who feel more economically precarious are more likely to support anti-feminist, misogynist views or are more susceptible to misogynist content online.**<sup>1213</sup>

Further intersectional distinctions are relevant. For instance, **understanding TF VAWG in Global South contexts is especially critical.** These regions – home to two-thirds of the world’s population and majority of the rising youth generation – remain underrepresented in research, despite facing unique cultural and economic conditions that shape both online perpetration and victimization.<sup>14</sup> From “honour-based” violence triggered by digital content in the Middle East to machismo-influenced, image-based abuse in Latin America, TF VAWG reflects the interaction of global digital cultures with local gender norms. Community-based prevention initiatives and digital rights advocacy emerging from these contexts offer innovative, culturally grounded strategies that can inform global solutions.<sup>15</sup>

This report situates male driven TF VAWG within the social, economic, and digital systems that shape young men’s experiences and behaviours. By integrating a masculinities lens, to TF VAWG, the report explores:

- The structure and influence of the manosphere and its role in normalizing misogyny and violence against women and girls.
- The socialization environments, risk factors, and motivations driving male perpetration of TF VAWG.
- The lax regulatory environment for technology platforms that has exacerbated gendered harms.
- The various roles men and boys play: as participants in doing harm, experiencers of technology-enabled violence, and potential allies for prevention.
- Evidence-based strategies to promote healthier masculinities, mental well-being, and safer, more equitable digital spaces.

**IN INCLUDING BOTH THE VULNERABILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEN AND BOYS, THIS APPROACH ENABLES MORE EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS THAT REDUCE DIGITAL HARM, SUPPORT SURVIVORS, AND ADVANCE GENDER JUSTICE GLOBALLY.**



**METHODOLOGY**

**This analysis employs a systematic desk review methodology to synthesize existing research on TF VAWG and the manosphere, with particular emphasis on perpetrator psychology and prevention strategies working with men and boys.**

The review process involved comprehensive searches across academic databases, policy repositories, and organizational reports to identify relevant peer-reviewed and grey literature published mostly between 2020 and 2025, with foundational works from earlier periods included for theoretical grounding. Additionally, 17 key informant interviews were conducted to determine major themes and highlights of the research base, as well as to fill in knowledge gaps (the names of informant organizations appear in Appendix A).

Data sources included peer-reviewed academic journals, reports from international organizations (UN Women; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]; WHO, and the United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA]), research institutes, and regional organizations. Priority was given to sources with robust methodological approaches, large sample sizes, and evidence-based findings. The review process followed systematic protocols for evaluating source quality, including assessment of methodology, sample representativeness, and theoretical grounding. Where multiple sources addressed similar issues, preference was given to under-documented contexts, while findings were cross-checked across academic, policy, and media materials to triangulate insights.

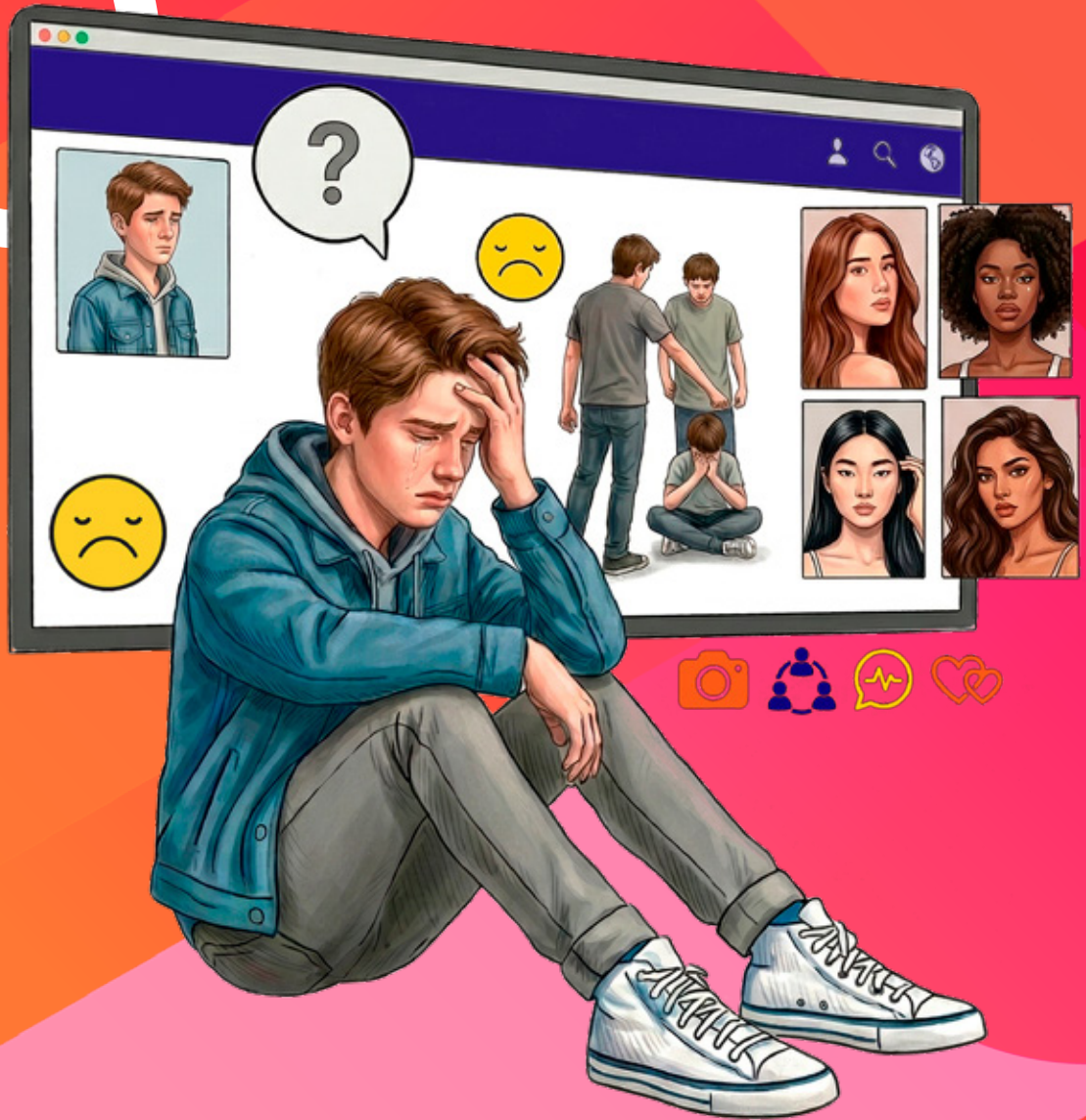
Several methodological limitations must be acknowledged. First, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technology and online platforms means that some findings may have limited temporal validity. The review prioritized the most recent and contextually relevant literature, policy reports, and case studies, ensuring methodological transparency, data quality, and institutional credibility. Where possible, findings were triangulated across multiple sources to ensure consistency, and attention

was drawn to enduring patterns – such as underlying gender norms; ideologies; individual-level risk factors, including the high association between adverse childhood experiences and social disconnectedness that drive risk for young men and boys as perpetrators of TF VAWG; and power dynamics – that remain relevant even as specific platforms or digital practices change.

Second, significant research gaps exist in Global South contexts, potentially skewing analysis toward Western perspectives despite efforts to prioritize diverse sources.<sup>16</sup> To strengthen inclusivity and mitigate bias, review efforts prioritized Global South perspectives by actively seeking out grey literature, academic researchers, nongovernmental organization (NGO) reports, and case studies of prevention initiatives beyond Western academic sources. Researchers conducted further outreach across organizations in the Global South to gather good practice examples of prevention that were not yet publicly available.

Third, the sensitive nature of TF VAWG research creates ethical constraints that may limit the depth of available data on perpetrator behaviour and experiences. The review applied a masculinities lens to avoid narrow assumptions about gendered behaviour, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the diversity of masculine identities and the structural contexts that shape them. Rather than framing violence as inherent to men, this approach situates perpetration within social norms, hierarchies, and digital subcultures that shape certain patterns of harm. This framing avoids stereotypes, acknowledges structural drivers, and highlights pathways for prevention and engagement by recognizing diverse, nonviolent expressions of masculinities alongside harmful ones.

3



# MEASURING TF VAWG: TOOLS AND CHALLENGES

## The measurement of TF VAWG presents distinct methodological challenges due to the complexity of the phenomenon and the rapidly evolving technological landscape.

Evidence gaps persist globally – particularly in Global South contexts where research infrastructure and resourcing may be limited – in understanding TF VAWG prevalence, perpetrator dynamics, and effective prevention interventions.<sup>17</sup> As with other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), TF VAWG is likely substantially underreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and ethical imperatives to minimize harm to survivors during data collection, especially for women, girls, and marginalized groups. Online environments further compound these challenges: they are borderless, facilitate anonymity, shift rapidly across platforms, often operate under uneven regulatory oversight, and regularly normalize harassment, which can obscure recognition of abuse by survivors and perpetrators alike. A review by the Global Partnership for Action on Online Harassment and Abuse underscores these limitations, highlighting insufficient comparative data across regions, weak understanding of perpetration pathways, and especially acute barriers to data collection in Global South contexts.<sup>18</sup> Several efforts have begun to address these challenges, including UN Women’s “Taking stock of evidence and data collection” review of existing TF VAWG measurement approaches, and a measurement framework development that UN Women is leading under the UN Statistical Commission in collaboration with WHO and UNFPA.<sup>19</sup>



### Definitions of online violence

Framing technology-facilitated abuse as TF VAWG provides strong strategic value. In 2022, UN Women held a meeting of an expert group to reach a common definition of the harms that women and girls face online. At this meeting of diverse experts from inter-governmental organizations, government agencies, civil society, and academia, including gender policy specialists, researchers, academics, and statisticians, the group decided on a definition for TF VAWG. It aligns online harms with established international legal frameworks and policy commitments on violence against women and girls, ensures accountability, maintains focus on the disproportionate impact of such violence on women and girls worldwide, and helps to ensure that resources are allocated to preventing such violence.

*“Technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW) is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.”<sup>20</sup>*

At the same time, while centering “women and girls” is crucial and aligns with global commitments, it may inadvertently overlook the experiences of other groups who face violence due to gender nonconformity. It is always important to remain attentive to broader dynamics to ensure that responses are inclusive and intersectional.

Emerging measurement approaches offer promising directions. Research on perpetration of TF VAWG – including non-consensual intimate deepfakes – requires methods that move beyond victimization surveys to capture how men and boys are recruited into, enabled by, and rewarded within digitally mediated abuse ecosystems. The strongest designs rely on mixed-method triangulation, combining:

- Administrative and criminal justice data (cybercrime complaints, arrests/charges, case files) to generate minimum perpetration estimates and offender profiles.
- Platform, hotline, and takedown data to quantify abusive content circulation.
- Open-source intelligence and digital ethnography to map perpetrator roles (creators, distributors, commissioners, facilitators).
- Ethically designed self-report perpetration surveys using behaviour-based questions and indirect techniques to reduce social desirability bias.

These designs are especially valuable when paired with qualitative research on peer norms, entitlement, and group-based misogyny. For example:

- **The Republic of Korea** has produced notably visible perpetration indicators through cybercrime reporting and policing, including rapid rises in recorded deepfake sex-crime cases and documented Telegram-based distribution ecosystems, highlighting how administrative data and platform-network mapping can reveal shifting perpetration patterns – particularly among youth and within peer-group contexts.<sup>2122</sup>
- **In India**, one of the strongest peer-reviewed examples uses platform data on X (formerly Twitter) to measure abusive dynamics (a key perpetration-adjacent method when offender identities are hidden), demonstrating perpetration-related measurement via content prevalence, abusive language patterns, and platform-level abuse trends – useful when justice data is incomplete.<sup>23</sup>

Together, these examples illustrate how perpetration measurement must combine legal/administrative evidence with online ecosystem analysis to understand pathways into harm – and to support prevention strategies that target the social normalization of abuse rather than treating perpetrators only as isolated individuals.

Despite these valuable approaches, measurement tools and methodologies have not adopted a masculinities lens to understand men’s roles in TF VAWG: existing data collection focuses on victimization rather than drivers of violence. **Current research frameworks largely focus on women and girls as targets of online harassment and abuse – a necessary and important investment given that they are overwhelmingly affected by it. Yet, major gaps remain in understanding how men and boys perpetrate, experience, or are shaped by online violence.** Notably, even fewer studies directly measure perpetration: there are currently no widely agreed or standardized methodologies for assessing men’s pathways into TF VAWG perpetration across contexts and platforms. **This includes limited inquiry into the pathways to perpetration and the ways online narratives of masculinity – such as those propagated by involuntary celibate (incel) forums, extremist networks, and the broader manosphere – contribute to men’s behaviours, desensitization to harm, and the normalization of abuse.**

**PROMISING WORK IS EMERGING: EQUIMUNDO’S RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE ON MASCULINITIES (INCLUDING IMAGES-STYLE SURVEY APPROACHES) PROVIDES**

**A FOUNDATION FOR MORE SYSTEMATIC MEASUREMENT OF MEN'S ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES,<sup>24</sup> AND EQUIMUNDO – TOGETHER WITH UN WOMEN – IS DEVELOPING SURVEY WORK THAT INCLUDES AN EMERGING MODULE RELEVANT TO MEN'S ROLES IN TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED VIOLENCE.**

In parallel, other actors are increasingly using big data approaches – including platform analysis, social listening, and social media scraping – to better understand trends, ecosystems, and patterns of misogynistic and violence-supportive content online. For example, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) mapped and analyzed the manosphere, illustrating the value of computational methods for tracking narrative and network dynamics at scale.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, there is minimal data on how boys and men experience certain forms of online harms – such as content promoting impossible body ideals, body dysmorphia and eating disorders, sextortion, and the psychological impacts of invasive tracking or surveillance technologies.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, women and girls have long been subjected to comparable (and often more severe) pressures without this translating into widespread perpetration of violence. This may suggest that the core issue is not individual but one involving the broader social systems and technology companies that actively monetize and amplify gendered insecurities, reward aggression and dominance, and provide boys with pathways to externalize distress as entitlement or harm. Therefore, effective solutions must focus on reshaping the digital and cultural infrastructures that produce these pressures – not on pathologizing boys and men themselves.

# 4



## THE MANOSPHERE AND THE MAINSTREAMING OF MISOGYNY

**The term manosphere has increasingly entered mainstream media and public discourse, often used as shorthand for the online ecosystem of male-dominated spaces associated with misogyny or anti-feminist sentiment.**

Scholars such as Laura Bates and Debbie Ging initially used the term manosphere to describe a select constellation of subgroups – like incels, men’s rights activists (MRAs), and pick-up artist forums – often promoting explicit anti-feminist rhetoric.<sup>27,28</sup> However, the discourse and narratives that once characterized these fringe spaces have increasingly migrated into mainstream online culture, blurring the boundaries between overtly extremist communities and broader male-oriented spaces.<sup>29</sup> Content that reinforces or challenges gender norms circulates across these spaces, creating a diffuse ecosystem that defies simple classification, complicating both research on online masculinities and efforts to identify early indicators of TF VAWG. **This evolution from isolated forums to mainstream content amplified by algorithms across major platforms demonstrates the power of digital networks to normalize previously marginalized ideologies and create pathways to offline violence.**<sup>30</sup>

## **DEFINITION AND STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS**

Most broadly, the term manosphere can be understood to encompass a varied collection of interconnected communities unified by core beliefs in male supremacy and opposition to feminism.

**Key communities include MRAs who claim societal bias against men, incels who believe men are entitled to sex and blame women for deprivation, men going their own way (MGTOW) who advocate for avoiding relationships with women entirely, pick-up artists who teach coercive sexual techniques, and fathers’ rights groups that focus on custody and divorce issues.**<sup>31</sup> Much of the literature on the manosphere reveals throughlines in ideological structure despite apparent fragmentation across different platforms and communities: many are undergirded by red pill beliefs, which assert that society is biased against men and that traditional

gender roles have been undermined by feminism, and biological determinism, which promotes male dominance due to inherent biological predisposition. The Southern Poverty Law Center’s analysis identifies the manosphere as rooted in “the belief of the innate superiority of cisgender men and their right to subjugate women, trans men, and non-binary people”<sup>32</sup>. This ideological coherence enables content pick-up and coordination across different platforms and communities while maintaining distinct tactical approaches and target audiences.

Since the term was coined, the manosphere has become an umbrella term to encompass a wide spectrum of content about masculinity – from fitness, sports, and self-improvement communities to explicitly extremist, misogynistic, or violence-promoting forums. This breadth makes it challenging to measure and study it systematically, as the boundaries between benign male interest spaces and harmful subcultures are fluid, overlapping, and constantly evolving. Researchers and practitioners working on healthy masculinities typically use the term manosphere to refer to harmful subcultures underpinned by misogyny – whose ideologies have increasingly permeated mainstream spaces, typically online, often intersecting with general male interest communities.

Although mainstream coverage often treats boys and young men entering the manosphere as passive recipients who uniformly absorb and act on misogynistic messaging, emerging research offers a more complex picture. Young men describe their online spaces as places of tension between freedom and harm, where they simultaneously resist, critique, and sometimes internalize harmful narratives.<sup>33,34</sup> Many actively seek out messages of self-improvement or belonging, even while recognizing the problematic nature of influencer content and algorithmic

bias. This suggests they are not merely recipients of harmful ideology, but also critical negotiators of identity in a conflicting digital landscape.

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND EVOLUTION

The manosphere's evolution traces back to the men's liberation movement of the 1970s, which initially critiqued rigid male gender roles and acknowledged that sexism harmed both women and men.<sup>35</sup> By the 1980s, a schism emerged: some advocates continued to pursue gender equality, while others embraced traditional masculinity and blamed feminism for men's perceived disenfranchisement.<sup>36</sup> This ideological split laid the foundation for the men's rights movement, which gained traction in the late-1990s and early-2000s through online forums and early pick-up artist communities. Websites like "Fathers' Manifesto" exemplified the blending of men's concerns around divorce and child custody with increasingly reactionary, anti-feminist rhetoric.<sup>37 38</sup>

The manosphere's history is deeply intertwined with economic, political, and technological shifts of the late-twentieth and early-twenty first centuries. Economic transformations in the late-1970s and 1980s – marked by dismantling stable labor markets and increasing workforce participation by women and ethnic minorities – fueled a reactionary movement that defined itself as much against feminism as for men's rights.<sup>39</sup> Neoliberal capitalism, emphasizing individual self-entrepreneurship and confidence as paths to success, both shaped and constrained contemporary masculinities. The failure of neoliberal promises left some men disillusioned, fostering spaces like incel communities that bond over shared inadequacy within a system that neither values care work nor provides vocabulary for it.<sup>40</sup>

The dot-com boom and Web 2.0 technologies accelerated ideological spread, with early men's rights websites and forums coining terms like "misandry," which gained traction on platforms like Reddit's r/mensrights and YouTube during the mid-2000s.<sup>41</sup> The late-2000s; early-2010s marked a tipping point when the manosphere shifted from internet fringe

spaces to mainstream visibility, amplified by social media dynamics and events like GamerGate (2014), which normalized manosphere tactics in broader online culture. The networked abuse and group trolling through gaming communities reflected desires to maintain all-male spaces and reactions against women gamers gaining prominence.<sup>42</sup> This is similar to how TF VAWG is leveraged against women public figures in other domains through online harassment and gendered disinformation to undermine, for instance, women elected officials' credibility – efforts to gatekeep and preserve male dominance across systems and institutions.

The rise of incel culture has been linked to violent extremism. In 2014, Elliot Rodger carried out a mass killing in Isla Vista, California, murdering six people and injuring 14 after posting a manifesto and video outlining his misogynistic motivations. Rodger's writings were later embraced by online incel communities, where he was mythologized as a martyr, fueling shared grievance narratives and inspiring subsequent misogynistic harassment and violence.<sup>43</sup> Four years later, Alek Minassian carried out a Toronto van attack, killing 10 people and injuring 16, linked to his incel community affiliation and its misogynistic ideology. These cases drew public attention to violent incel ideology, catalyzing both heightened scrutiny and recruitment within these communities.

While incidents like Rodger's 2014 killings and Minassian's 2018 attack are frequently cited in Western literature as formative flashpoints, far less is known about events, figures, or online moments that catalyzed similar dynamics in the Global South. This gap highlights the need to distinguish between Western-origin TF VAWG narratives and the diverse contextual drivers that shape TF VAWG's spread, adaptation, and impact in other regions.



## A systems lens in understanding the “manosphere”



### Mainstreaming pathways and algorithmic amplification

Recent technological developments in AI-driven recommendation algorithms and large platform monetization structures have accelerated the mainstreaming and normalization of manosphere content. Advanced recommender engines on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram actively learn and amplify engagement, creating self-reinforcing feedback loops that push boys and young men from innocuous interests toward increasingly misogynistic and extremist material.<sup>44</sup> At all ages, many men and boys are being exploited into consuming more extreme content as their age-appropriate searches for online communities and topics – such as sports, gaming, and even how to make friends – are increasingly becoming vectors to the manosphere.

Research by University College London and the University of Kent found a fourfold increase in misogynistic content on TikTok’s “For You” page after just five days of engagement, with content escalating from 13 per cent to 56 per cent misogynistic material. AI-powered curation prioritizes “sticky” content, rewarding outrage and emotional provocation, while short-form formats like YouTube Shorts and TikTok expedite exposure to extreme ideas without distinguishing between adult and underage users.<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, monetization models incentivize “manfluencers” to optimize content for virality and controversy through rage-baiting, pseudo-scientific claims, and covert ideological framing, transforming misogyny into a profitable engagement strategy.<sup>46,47</sup> These dynamics have propelled manosphere discourse from fringe forums into mainstream

digital ecosystems, where algorithmic amplification and monetization pipelines normalize its ideas within many young men’s everyday media. The absence of robust digital literacy education heightens this risk, as many users remain unaware of how algorithmic bias and profit-driven models shape what they see – underscoring the urgent need to invest in critical digital literacy skills as a form of prevention.

Many manosphere spaces now exist “aboveground” on mainstream platforms, increasingly permeating mainstream media through targeted advertising and integration with gaming communities, cryptocurrency spaces, and fitness culture.<sup>48</sup> Equimundo’s 2024 report *The Manosphere, Rewired: Understanding Masculinities Online & Pathways for Healthy Connection* revealed that many young men often enter online spaces with seemingly benign questions about dating, fitness, and self-improvement, seeking guidance on how to build confidence and succeed socially.<sup>49</sup> These queries frequently funnel them toward manosphere content that frames dating as adversarial, equates physical fitness with social dominance, and reinforces narrow, hypermasculine ideals that normalize misogyny and anti-feminist narratives.



### Monetizing misogyny

Monetization systems have turned the manosphere into what scholars describe as an “online protection racket,” where male anxieties and insecurities are actively commodified. Influencers in the red pill and incel-adjacent ecosystems monetize engagement through subscription models, courses, affiliate marketing, and donations, offering young men a sense of belonging and guidance in exchange for financial support.<sup>50</sup> This ecosystem thrives on cyclical fear and aspiration: algorithms funnel users toward content that frames

modern masculinity as under threat, while *manfluencers* present themselves as the only solution through exclusive advice, community access, or “success systems.” The profitability of outrage and misogynistic trolling, reinforced by platform advertising revenue and creator payouts, incentivizes increasingly extreme and emotionally charged content.<sup>51 52</sup> In this way, manosphere monetization structures not only sustain but also actively expand the cultural footprint of these communities, embedding gendered hostility into mainstream digital life.

Open-source and open-weight AI models that can generate text, image, and voice outputs, have become easier than ever to access, and can be downloaded and fine-tuned specifically to create image-based sexual abuse, spurring the rise of “nudification” apps and sites dedicated to the commercialization of non-consensual content, generating \$36 million a year, according to new research. Women and girls are the majority of victims (one study suggests 96 per cent of deepfakes are non-consensual pornography,<sup>53</sup> and a more recent report estimates 99 per cent of deepfake pornography targets women)<sup>54</sup>, while adolescent boys have been targeted by financial sextortion schemes, with predators pushing “nudify” apps to coerce and harass them into paying money.<sup>55</sup> One study found a link between the rise of manosphere culture and the normalization of these apps to target women and girls. One young woman interviewed for the study remarked, “In one of Andrew Tate’s quotes it says how men owned women, so they [young men/boys] could get into the mindset that because they own them, they have the right to share a picture of them.”<sup>56</sup>

## EXTREMITY SPECTRUM AND VIOLENCE POTENTIAL

**There is growing evidence of cross-pollination between the manosphere and the alt-right, underpinned by a shared narrative that white male identity is under siege by feminism, globalization, and multiculturalism.**<sup>57 58</sup> Alt-right figures gained early prominence during flashpoint events like GamerGate, using anti-feminist harassment campaigns as recruitment vectors, and portions of the manosphere have adopted racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Islamic rhetoric.<sup>59</sup> There is substantial ideological overlap between manosphere and far-right communities, with shared beliefs about women’s inferiority, traditional gender roles and the nuclear family, victim narratives, and conspiracy theories about feminist-led social destruction.<sup>60</sup> Research shows that participation in MRA spaces can serve as a gateway to far-right and white supremacist ideologies, with some manosphere communities – such as incels, MGTOW, and red pill groups – exhibiting higher levels of misogyny and direct violence than earlier pick-up artist or MRA groups.<sup>61 62</sup>

Scholars identify these kinds of shifts as “radicalization pathways,” where users migrate from milder communities toward more extreme spaces over time, creating a systematic funneling effect reinforced by algorithmic amplification and social isolation.<sup>63 64</sup> Many men and boys have migrated from older online communities toward more extremist ones, as deplatforming has led to the adoption of alternative platforms<sup>65</sup> and as the rise of *manfluencers* like Andrew Tate who mainstream extremist content through lifestyle and entrepreneurship messaging.<sup>66</sup> This evolution demonstrates the manosphere’s adaptability and its proponents’ strategic sophistication in maintaining influence despite increased platform restrictions.

In more extreme nodes of these spaces, where online narratives dehumanize women and normalize aggression that prime some members to move from rhetorical harassment to targeted harm, sustained harassment campaigns, disinformation, and

coordinated dogpiling (that is, when a large group of people coordinate to attack a single individual or target online, overwhelming them with insults, criticisms, harassment, or negative comments) create chilling effects for women and girls' voices, silencing them and pushing activists off public platforms. Anti-feminist narratives in the manosphere seek not only to discredit women but also to de-legitimize broader gender equality movements, reframing them as oppressive, corrupt, or anti-male.<sup>67</sup> As a result, the manosphere undermines advocacy for gender equity and equality by eroding public support, intimidating participants, and reinforcing structural barriers to women's political and social participation. This dynamic illustrates how digital misogyny functions as a form of political resistance to gender equity, reproducing patriarchal power in both online and offline arenas.

The "pipeline" from anti-feminist online spaces to more extreme ideological environments reinforces misogynistic worldviews and may also escalate the likelihood of physical and TF VAWG. Emerging evidence indicates that online misogyny, particularly when directed toward women in public and political life, is intertwined with extremist rhetoric and can serve as an early warning indicator of broader radicalization dynamics. For instance, a recent study examining Brazilian election candidates found that increased misogynistic attacks correlated with reduced online participation among women, effectively silencing their political engagement and diminishing their visibility in the public sphere.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, research on TF VAWG highlights that perpetrators often act from ideologically motivated positions, including explicit political or anti-feminist agendas, situating digital abuse within a broader ecosystem of extremist discourse.<sup>69</sup> Together, these findings suggest that digital platforms can facilitate the amplification of misogynistic narratives and enable extremist-adjacent harassment and intimidation that bridge online hate with offline harm, such as in the case of Elliot Rodger, reinforcing systemic gendered power imbalances and undermining democratic participation.



### **"Can you please turn off the manosphere?" Hold on: recognizing the complexity of men's online lives**

Despite some aspects of the manosphere showing extreme harm, evidence also indicates that many men and boys go online seeking support, connection, and advice on careers and relationships, entering these spaces looking for belonging and personal growth<sup>71</sup> rather than harmful content. While much attention focuses on the most harmful elements of male-dominated online spaces, this overlooks the reality that many of these digital environments serve as venues for generally positive male socialization and mutual support. Equipundo's *Manosphere, Rewired* report's findings demonstrate that young men often begin with well-intentioned searches for intimacy, peer groups, or information about life needs, suggesting a substantial foundation of men seeking constructive engagement online. To focus exclusively on the worst behaviours in male-dominated online spaces, misses critical opportunities to build upon the positive voices who exist in these communities – including those who actively call out violence and could be further engaged to combat impunity related to TF VAWG.

Ideological convergence between Western and Global South manosphere movements proves remarkably extensive, centered around what Rothermel (2023) terms "evidence-based misogyny" – a transnational strategy employing selective statistics and pseudo-scientific justification to support essentializing gender claims. Both contexts adopt identical red pill ideology frameworks, shared terminology including "alpha/beta" hierarchical classifications and "hypergamy" explanatory models, and common rhetorical strategies that mimic accepted knowledge presentation methods.<sup>70</sup>

This ideological alignment extends to organizational structures, with Global South movements replicating the Western manosphere taxonomy of MRAs, incels, MGTOW, and pick-up artists.<sup>72</sup>

**DESPITE EXTENSIVE  
IDEOLOGICAL OVERLAP,  
FUNDAMENTAL  
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WHEN EXAMINING GLOBAL  
SOUTH MANOSPHERE  
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SPECIFIC CULTURAL AND  
HISTORICAL CONTEXTS.**

Unlike Western movements operating within established democratic frameworks, Global South movements emerge from post-colonial contexts shaped by “colonial disruption and ongoing neo-colonial relationships.”<sup>73</sup> This creates unique hybrid ideologies that combine anti-feminist narratives with anti-colonial and cultural preservation themes, positioning movements as defenders of national culture against foreign influence rather than solely focusing on individual male rights.<sup>74</sup> Global South movements also demonstrate distinct organizational forms, operating more often through formal NGO structures and traditional authority systems rather than primarily digital platforms, as seen in India’s extensive legal advocacy activities.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, these movements must navigate complex intersectional hierarchies including caste, class, and ethnic divisions that create multiple competing masculinity constructions within single movements, adding layers of complexity absent from primarily race-based Western hierarchies.<sup>76</sup>

5



# UNDERSTANDING PERPETRATION OF TF VAWG

This section delves into the typologies, tactics, behaviours, motivations, risk factors, and drivers of TF VAWG perpetration.

## TACTICS AND BEHAVIOURS

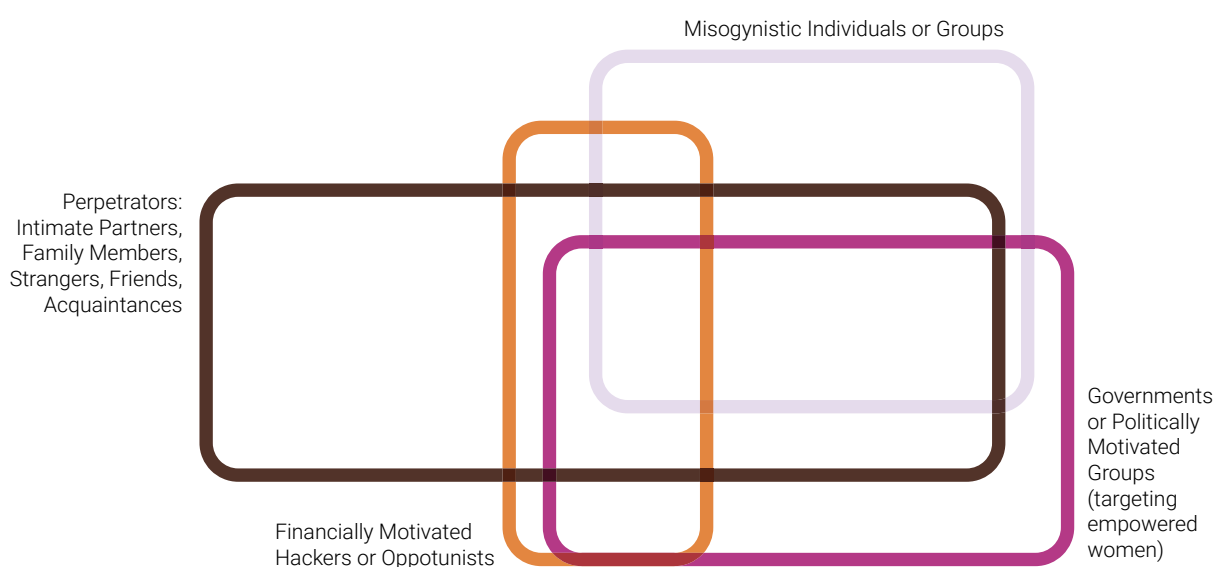
TF VAWG is a globally pervasive scourge of violence that reflects and exacerbates existing manifestations of GBV, including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and exploitation, stalking, and political violence. Increasing evidence indicates that TF VAWG can manifest in different evolving forms that have severely detrimental psychological, physical, economic, and functional impacts for survivors. Across reviewed literature, TF VAWG is most commonly perpetrated in the form of online harassment, image-based abuse, cyberstalking, doxxing, impersonation, hate speech, gaming violence, gendered disinformation, gender trolling, and restricting or controlling access to technology – some of which are detailed in Appendix B. Although these behaviours have their own unique markers, their impacts can be exacerbated when they overlap with other forms of TF VAWG and GBV or occur concurrently or as continuation of offline violence. The weaponization of AI has dramatically amplified digital abuse: up to 98 per cent of all

online deepfakes are non-consensual pornographic images, with 96 per cent to 99 per cent targeting women, and deepfake videos increasing by 550 per cent between 2019 and 2023.<sup>7778</sup>

## RISK FACTORS AND DRIVERS

Digital spaces reflect, reinforce, and exacerbate systemic structural gender inequality and patterns of harmful patriarchal norms that drive all forms of GBV. **Although TF VAWG shares many of the same risk and protective factors as other forms of GBV, it also has distinct characteristics that enable the digital nature of abuse, notably the scale, speed, ease, and anonymity of perpetration.**<sup>79 80 81 82 83 84 85</sup> Shielded from victims-survivors and authorities across jurisdictions and platforms, perpetrators can include individual actors, coordinated networks, state-linked actors, and other ideologically motivated groups that can be known to victims-survivors (current and former intimate partners, family, friends, or colleagues) or be complete strangers.<sup>86 87 88</sup> The anonymity (and pseudonymity),

**FIGURE 1**  
Threat actor mapping



Source: UNFPA Guide on the Safe and Ethical Use of Technology to Address Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices: implementation summary

propagation, and perpetuation of TF VAWG amplifies the reach of transmission and harm caused to victims-survivors. It is difficult to identify the primary perpetrator (the person who initiated the violence) as well as secondary perpetrators (the people who negligently or maliciously engage in the abuse).<sup>89 90</sup> This relatively concealed space allows perpetrators to commit multiple, coordinated, and geographically widespread acts of TF VAWG while obscuring evidence including their identity (gender, age, location, profession, and relationship with target).<sup>91 92 93</sup>

**Contrary to some assumptions, data from 2024 shows that in many cases the perpetrators of TF VAWG were known to survivors, which further complicates the measurement as not all instances are investigated thoroughly to reveal the perpetrator's identity.**<sup>94</sup>

**Risk factors for young women and adolescent girls are especially high due to their higher visibility on social platforms, while women human rights defenders, journalists, and politicians face coordinated harassment campaigns designed to silence them and deter broader participation in public life.**<sup>95</sup>

<sup>96 97</sup> A global survey of women journalists found 73 per cent had experienced online violence, with Black, Indigenous, Jewish, Arab, and lesbian journalists reporting the most severe impacts.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, a 2021 study of women parliamentarians in Africa found that 46 per cent of respondents had been the target of sexist attacks online.<sup>99</sup> More recent data from a 2025 survey by Posetti et al commissioned by UN Women reveals that 70 per cent of women human rights defenders, activists, and journalists have experienced online violence in the course of their work, with 41 per cent reporting offline harm – including physical assault, stalking, and verbal harassment – directly linked to attacks that originated online. Alarming, among women journalists specifically, the proportion experiencing offline harm connected to online violence more than doubled between 2020 and 2025, jumping from 20 per cent to 42 per cent.<sup>100</sup>

The design and use of technology is shaped by political and economic factors, gendered discrimination, and other intersecting forms of oppression.

As digital technologies increasingly have become the default form of communication and business, excluded groups often have less access to previously available opportunities. **This gendered digital exclusion, also known as the “gender digital divide,” is rooted in structural gender inequality and is both a symptom and cause of violations of women’s and girls’ human rights.**<sup>101 102</sup> **TF VAWG and the gender digital divide intersect in a number of mutually reinforcing ways, disproportionately affecting those who experience intersecting oppressions.** Researchers and practitioners note that in the case of TF VAWG, women and girls not only face gender-based abuse and harassment for reasons documented in other forms of GBV but also are attacked for having an online presence and access to digital technologies.<sup>103</sup> Researchers highlight that TF VAWG perpetrators are often driven by multiple motives, including inflicting harm, asserting control, seeking retribution, enforcing gender norms, or discrediting victims.<sup>104 105 106 107 108 109</sup> **These patterns reveal how online abuse often reflects broader efforts to police and restore hierarchical gender relations, with perpetrators seeking to reclaim power when it feels destabilized.** In abusive relationships, technology is used to exert coercive control such as monitoring movements, restricting interactions, and isolating victims, behaviours that align with traditional scripts of dominance.<sup>110 111 112</sup> At the collective level, online mobs and state-linked networks target women in politics, advocacy or activism, and journalism, weaponizing digital spaces to reassert male dominance and suppress women’s visibility and authority in public life.<sup>113 114</sup> The 2024 UN Secretary-General’s report on violence against women identifies three critical emerging challenges amplifying TF VAWG: growing backlash against women’s rights, the rapid rise of AI, and the expansion of the manosphere.<sup>115</sup>

In this report, data from the Movember Foundation cites that two-thirds of young men now regularly engage with masculinity influencers online, with manosphere content increasingly linked to radicalization, extremist ideologies, and acts of mass violence. Yet despite the expansion of digital participation, little data exists on boys and young men as

perpetrators, obscuring how masculinities are being reconfigured and expressed in younger cohorts.<sup>116</sup>

**Emerging research suggests that some dynamics of young men’s and boys’ perpetration of TF VAWG, particularly in relation to exposure to the manosphere, are increasingly understood as being driven not solely by hostility but also by a genuine desire for community, reassurance, or support.<sup>117</sup>**

Furthermore, as digital access expands globally, boys’ first encounters with sexuality are increasingly mediated by online pornography – often before they seek it out.<sup>118</sup> Once confined to regulated, print-based formats, pornography is now ubiquitous, free, and algorithmically amplified, shaping early ideas about intimacy, consent, and gender. Evidence suggests that boys’ exposure to violent, racist, and misogynistic content online distorts sexual development, normalizes aggression, and reinforces harmful gender norms.<sup>119</sup> These trends have deep implications for identifying the drivers of TF VAWG, as early exposure to demeaning or non-consensual depictions of sex can influence attitudes and behaviours across adolescence and adulthood.<sup>120</sup>

Boys and young men can also be driven toward TF VAWG as a response to their own online victimization: studies show that when boys are bullied or mocked in ways that undermine their masculinity – including homophobic harassment – they are more likely to participate in online harassment of women as a means of regaining social status and aligning with peer norms that equate dominance with belonging.<sup>121 122</sup> A growing body of research points to LGBTIQ+ men experiencing technology-enabled violence in disproportionate ways that often evoke their lack of masculinity as a negative trait.<sup>123</sup> According to the *“Double-Edged Sword”* study conducted by the Geena Davis Institute and Equipundo, streamers used homophobic or transphobic language in 10.1 per cent of gameplay segments analyzed on Twitch, demonstrating high rates of homophobic bullying in these chat room environments.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, in 2017, Equipundo conducted a study on cyberbullying and found that 42 per cent of young men reported being made fun of because of their sexual orientation online, with

a total of 448 men in the sample experiencing this form of harassment regardless of their actual sexual orientation.<sup>125</sup>

Recognizing and understanding the multiple drivers of TF VAWG allows for prevention efforts that can better redirect young people toward safer, more inclusive, and pro-social pathways that foster belonging without perpetuating harm. Addressing these harms requires coordinated, multisectoral action – from comprehensive sexuality education and digital literacy initiatives to regulation of exploitative online platforms and support for parents, educators, and caregivers. **In addition, effective prevention also requires being willing to see how men and boys are also harmed by patriarchal systems – and seeing that as a pathway to engaging men and boys in being part of the solution. As Laura Bates says in her recent book, *The New Age of Sexism*:**

**“OUR PATRIARCHAL UNWILLINGNESS TO RECOGNIZE THAT MEN HAVE REAL PROBLEMS PREVENTS FROM DIGGING MUCH DEEPER FOR REAL SOLUTIONS.”<sup>126</sup>**



## The Disrupting Harm Study and new data for more diverse and inclusive prevention efforts

Data from the Disrupting Harm research project – a collaborative effort between ECPAT International, the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Innocenti spanning 25 countries – provides important new evidence about how gender shapes experiences of online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA). Drawing from nationally representative household surveys with internet-using children between ages 12 to 17, the findings challenge long-held beliefs about which children face the greatest risks online.

While girls invariably bear the brunt of sexual exploitation, having nationally representative data is critical as it tells a more complex story. In several countries, such as Kenya, the Philippines, and Uganda, researchers discovered almost no gender differences in children’s experience of OCSEA, suggesting that vulnerability to online exploitation cuts across gender lines more evenly than many experts previously believed. Despite experiencing OCSEA at similar rates, boys remain largely silent about their abuse. Girls made 98 per cent of all reports in the study countries – a striking imbalance that points to a need for a masculinities lens to understand the patterns of reporting. Cultural expectations around masculinity likely play a role here, whereby boys are unwilling to see themselves as victims or may fear judgment for appearing vulnerable. Meanwhile, girls – while certainly facing their own stigma – seem more willing or able to seek support when victimized online.

What emerges from this research is that while biology may not dictate who is targeted for OCSEA, social attitudes about gender

profoundly shape how children experience and respond to these crimes. Effective prevention and response efforts must account for these dynamics, ensuring protection strategies work for all children while addressing the specific barriers that keep boys from coming forward.

## GENDERED AND INTERSECTIONAL PATTERNS OF HARM AND PERPETRATION

Technology-enabled violence manifests differently across contexts, with emerging data showing variation by gender. **For instance, studies in Australia, Canada, and China find that while men and women experience technology-enabled sexual violence at similar rates, the forms differ – women are more often subjected to image-based abuse, while boys are increasingly targeted for financial sextortion.**<sup>127 128 129</sup> A 2025 Thorn survey found 20 per cent of teens aged 13 to 20 had experienced sextortion, with boys more likely to be targeted for money, and one in 10 reporting demands for self-harm.<sup>130</sup> Social media and targeted advertising also fuel rising steroid use among adolescent boys, tied to body dissatisfaction and pressures to conform to hypermasculine ideals.<sup>131 132</sup> Understanding these dynamics highlights the need to address how masculinities shape both perpetration and vulnerability online.

**TF VAWG disproportionately affects marginalized and high-risk groups, including LGBTIQ+ communities, ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous peoples, refugees, and people with disabilities.**<sup>133</sup> Research across eight countries found 58 per cent of women experiencing online abuse also reported intersecting racism, sexism, homophobia, or transphobia.<sup>134</sup> Women with intellectual or cognitive disabilities face heightened risks of account hacking, spyware, and non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Furthermore,<sup>135</sup> **young women and adolescent girls remain especially targeted due to their higher**

**visibility on social platforms, while women human rights defenders, journalists, and politicians face coordinated harassment campaigns designed to silence them and deter broader participation in public life.**<sup>136 137 138</sup>

Perpetrators of TF VAWG are overwhelmingly men and boys, spanning current and former intimate partners as well as unknown men and coordinated groups in public online spaces. Evidence on men's perpetration shows that adherence to harmful masculinity norms is a strong correlate: in Equimundo's Man Box study, young men who most endorsed inequitable masculinity norms were about 10 times more likely to report sexually harassing someone; in Mexico specifically, one in five young men said they had made sexually harassing comments to a woman or girl they did not know in the previous month, and one in five had posted photos/messages to embarrass or harass someone, often in online spaces.<sup>139</sup> In the African five-country study (Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda), TF VAWG most often took the form of sexual harassment (36 per cent) and stalking (27 per cent); two-thirds of victims did not know the perpetrator's identity – pointing to anonymous men and mob dynamics – with Facebook and WhatsApp the most common venues.<sup>140</sup> In institutional settings, younger men and male peers are prominent: a 2024 UNFPA Kenya study of higher-education institutions identified male students as 78.6 per cent of TF VAWG perpetrators, with online defamation and non-consensual intimate imagery common – pointing to status competition, shaming, and coercion dynamics among men.<sup>141</sup>

Across these contexts, reported motivations align with emerging profiles – anger and perceived injustice, desire for control, sexual entitlement, and “entertainment” or peer-bonding – echoing broader research on hostile masculinities and incel subcultures. That said, there is a significant evidence gap on who perpetrates TF VAWG: most research focuses on victims rather than perpetrators, leaving age, racial/ethnic background, and social group

profiles of men who commit TF VAWG largely undocumented and under-analyzed, particularly in the Global South.

**Although prevalence data from conflict and humanitarian contexts is limited, evidence suggests that TF VAWG occurs at similar or higher rates in these settings, compounding risks created by conflict, disaster, and displacement.**<sup>142</sup> Women and girls – including refugees, trafficking survivors, and those in the sex trade – face heightened vulnerabilities, while men and boys are overwhelmingly the primary perpetrators, reflecting entrenched norms of control and entitlement that also underpin conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>143 144 145</sup> In Ukraine, Russian sources have deployed gendered disinformation campaigns to emasculate men and sexualize women, increasing their risk of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>146</sup> **VAWG in the context of conflict and disaster are shaped by intensified patriarchal norms, trauma exposure, and weakened legal and social structures.**<sup>147</sup> **Men who experience or witness violence are more likely to perpetrate it later, while trauma-related mental health issues can contribute to heightened digital harassment and coercion.** Effective prevention strategies exist to address harmful masculine norms that inhibit men from adequately coping with trauma in the context of conflict or post-conflict settings, yet few have been adapted to digital contexts.<sup>148</sup>

## LACKING PREVENTION AND RESPONSE SYSTEMS

TF VAWG persists in part because prevention and response systems remain weak: laws are outdated or poorly enforced, reporting mechanisms are fragmented, and victim support is limited or inaccessible. What does exist is often overwhelmed: referrals for technology-facilitated abuse to support organizations have increased 92 per cent between 2019 and early-2024.<sup>149</sup> Even as digital access expands for women and girls, the absence of robust accountability structures means that increased participation can actually heighten exposure to harm. Without strong legal protections, platform-level enforcement, and survivor-centered support,

women's access to digital spaces does not translate into digital safety – and can, in fact, deter their full and confident engagement online.<sup>150</sup>

Governments face ongoing challenges in developing comprehensive, timely policies suited to a borderless internet, where multiple offenders and victims may span platforms and jurisdictions.<sup>151</sup> In the absence of strong oversight, internet intermediaries are left to manage prevention and detection with minimal accountability. Research across seven countries shows that national laws remain fragmented and ineffective, failing to capture the continuum of online and offline violence.<sup>152</sup> Law enforcement often relies on patchwork regulations, resulting in survivor re-traumatization and impunity

for perpetrators. For instance, many laws focus on “social morality” rather than survivor protection. One study revealed that only 11 per cent of women journalists report online abuse due to a lack of trust in justice systems.<sup>153</sup> In some Arab States, victim blaming and shaming remain prevalent, leaving survivors silenced or pressured to withdraw from digital spaces.<sup>154</sup> Criminalization alone is insufficient.

**Structural reforms – including prioritizing stronger regulation of technology platforms, instituting transparent reporting mechanisms, and disrupting algorithmic systems that amplify harmful content – are critical to meaningfully reduce the prevalence and impact of TF VAWG.**

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# IMPACT OF ONLINE NARRATIVES ON MEN AND BOYS: SHIFTING NORMS AND ATTITUDES

## IMPACT ON MEN AND BOYS: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE AND NORM SHIFTS

Many young men engage with online spaces that are about masculinity with a mix of curiosity, critique, and caution. **Social media is central to their daily lives – offering friendship, connection, and a sense of belonging. Further, not all young men are passive consumers of content. While they join communities around shared interests and experiences, appreciating the support and acceptance these spaces can offer, many also recognize the harm and negativity that can circulate within them.**<sup>155</sup> Young men note that racism, sexism, transphobia, and other prejudices are often normalized online, and that platform structures and “bandwagoning” dynamics can intensify cycles of abuse.<sup>156</sup> As one of the first generations to navigate a landscape where influencers and masculinity discourse are both mainstream and algorithmically amplified, many young men are actively negotiating the tension between finding community and resisting the more harmful ideologies embedded in these online cultures.

Gendered differences in social media use reveal how platform design, social context, and user behaviours intersect to shape attitudes toward gender equality. **Research indicates that adolescent boys often engage with social media to expand connections beyond existing networks and to bond with peers, particularly for those who may be shy or socially isolated.**<sup>157 158</sup> While certain features like live videos or selfies can be used to subvert stereotypes and spark dialogue about gender inequalities, algorithmic amplification of sexist content risks reinforcing and radicalizing harmful attitudes among boys.<sup>159</sup> **Women and girls often experience social media as a double-edged space: while it enables activism and visibility, gendered online violence exerts a “silencing effect,” deterring participation in public discourse and reinforcing structural inequalities.**<sup>160</sup> These dynamics illustrate how social media infrastructures and practices reproduce and challenge gender norms in distinct, uneven ways across genders.

A global review of 51 studies on how social media use shapes adolescent boys’ gender norms including its potential links to sexist or misogynistic views and the influence of social, contextual, and platform-specific factors, found a complex mix of results. Boys’ engagement with social media influences their attitudes toward gender equality through a combination of personal experiences, social contexts, platform design, and peer interactions. While exposure to sexist content online is linked to some discriminatory gender norms, the relationship is not purely causal, as boys often seek or are served content reflecting preexisting interests. Features like anonymity and temporary content reduce social risks, allowing boys to express both pro-feminist and misogynistic views, often shaped by peer group pressures emphasizing risk-taking, appearance, and virility.<sup>161</sup>

## NORM SHIFTS TOWARD MISOGYNY AND GENDERED VIOLENCE

Engagement with manosphere influencers carries profound implications for boys’ and young men’s health, identity formation, and peer dynamics, with ripple effects across their social environments. Social media platforms amplify misogynistic and hypermasculine narratives, normalizing online abuse and weakening norms around inclusion and civil discourse.<sup>162</sup>

**Algorithm-driven exposure to polarizing or sensational content – ranging from misogynistic humour to violent pornography – shapes young men’s perceptions of what is typical and acceptable behaviour, reinforcing entitlement and gendered hierarchies.**<sup>163</sup> This digital environment intersects with offline behaviours: peer group dynamics, platform affordances, and the circulation of sexualized or abusive content increasingly translate into real-world harms. Recent international incidents, such as the Almadrejo case in Spain and similar cases in Brazil, Costa Rica, and the United States, where adolescents used AI deepfake technology to generate explicit images of peers, exemplify how hypersexualized, exploitative online practices are being normalized among youth, perpetuating cycles of TF VAWG.<sup>164</sup>

Emerging research further highlights that online misogyny is reshaping boys' social norms and school cultures. In Australia, teachers report a rise in school-based misogyny, including boys using manosphere-derived terminology, physically intimidating female teachers, and voicing anti-feminist views that were uncommon before the COVID-19 lockdowns.<sup>165</sup> 82 per cent of Australian teachers reported an increase in sexist language and misogynistic attitudes among boys since 2020; 67 per cent specifically linked this shift to online influencers such as Andrew Tate.<sup>166</sup> This aligns with evidence of a broader generational shift, with younger men increasingly endorsing stereotypical gender roles and expressing hostility toward feminism, even more so than older male cohorts. In the United Kingdom, 52 per cent of boys and men aged 16 to 29 agreed that feminism has "gone too far," compared to 35 per cent of men over age 60 – indicating younger men are more anti-feminist than older men.<sup>167</sup> The interplay between online and offline behaviours underscores that the internet is not just a mirror but an accelerant of prevailing social norms – its algorithmic and networked architecture enables the rapid amplification of deviant attitudes and the formation of geographically dispersed communities that legitimize harmful masculinities. Understanding these dynamics is essential to addressing the normalization of gendered abuse and the broader implications for public health, education, and gender equity.

Research demonstrates that traditional gatekeepers of masculine identity formation – fathers, teachers, coaches, and community leaders – have been substantially displaced by algorithmic curation systems that prioritize engagement over developmental appropriateness.<sup>168</sup> The resulting masculine identity formation processes occur within echo chambers that reinforce extremist messaging while isolating young men from alternative perspectives and healthy relationship models. Social media engagement patterns illustrate the problem: sexist comments on TikTok receive 60 per cent more likes than non-sexist comments, with hashtags like #RedPill thriving across platforms despite moderation efforts.<sup>169</sup> These dynamics normalize misogynistic tropes, embedding them into peer culture,

gaming communities, and sports environments, where they serve as markers of social belonging and masculine authenticity.

## MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

**Research reveals complex mental health impacts for both perpetrators and victims of manosphere-influenced behaviour.** In a survey of more than 3,000 young men (aged 16 to 25) across Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, researchers found that young men and boys who regularly watch these influencers report feeling more optimistic about their personal and social futures, suggesting that such content can foster a sense of hope or motivation.<sup>170</sup> At the same time, these young men were also more likely to experience poorer mental health outcomes, show a reduced willingness to prioritize their mental well-being, and engage in riskier health behaviours such as exercising while injured or using steroids. This dual effect underscores how the **appeal of certain masculinity content – framed around self-improvement, resilience, and achievement – can simultaneously inspire and endanger young men, revealing the nuanced impact these online communities can have on their overall health outcomes.** Young men following manfluencers demonstrate a higher likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours including performance-enhancing drug use, working out despite injury, and social isolation from family and female friends.<sup>171</sup> This represents an **"isolation paradox" where online communities promising connection actually increase psychological distress and social disconnection, creating cycles of dependency on extremist content for emotional regulation.**<sup>172</sup>

Many influencers in the manosphere frequently promote the idea that authentic masculinity is tied to being a dominant economic provider, framing financial success as both a prerequisite for male self-worth and a tool to control or attract women.<sup>173</sup> This narrative reinforces gender hierarchies by portraying men's social value as dependent on wealth accumulation, while devaluing emotional intelligence, partnership, and egalitarian relationships.<sup>174</sup> **With the heightened pressure to be a provider in many**

**economies around the world that have declining economic mobility for the working and middle class, these unrealistic expectations carry significant health risks for men and boys.** Equimundo's *State of American Men 2025* found that men experiencing economic insecurity are 16.3 times more likely to report suicidal thoughts, highlighting the intersection between economic precarity and mental health vulnerabilities.<sup>175</sup>

At the same time, many men and boys who frequent manosphere spaces are aware of their mental health challenges and seek support and community in digital spaces to feel seen. In Moonshot's countering violent extremism (CVE) research in Canada, researchers found that incels use symbolism through their user avatars and posts to express support for violent misogyny and other extremist groups, as well as to acknowledge their mental health issues.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, in a content analysis of top-performing posts from an incel forum on Reddit, the researchers found self-hatred and suicidal ideation (alongside hostile sexism and violent discussion of acts toward women) to be prevailing themes.<sup>177</sup>

**Emotional repression is a central theme within manosphere influencer content, where self-reliance and rigid emotional control are framed as hallmarks of authentic masculinity.** Young men immersed in this content are more likely to internalize the belief that men must solve their problems alone and that expressing vulnerability signals weakness.<sup>178</sup> This hyper-individualized approach to emotional management not only discourages help-seeking and impedes the development of supportive connections but also channels frustration into harmful gender dynamics. In these spaces, "solving" personal problems often

comes at the expense of women and girls – through blame, objectification, or hostility – while simultaneously eroding men's own mental health by reinforcing isolation and self-loathing.

**Additionally, body image content in online spaces significantly impacts the mental health and well-being of young men, often creating a public health concern.** Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube frequently amplify hyper-muscular and idealized male bodies, which can contribute to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and the development of muscle dysmorphia or disordered eating behaviours.<sup>179</sup> Research shows that exposure to these unrealistic standards is associated with increased anxiety, depression, and engagement in risky behaviours such as excessive supplement use or steroid consumption.<sup>180</sup>

Promoting digital literacy and healthy relationship skills for boys and men in the online spaces they frequent offers a dual public health benefit: it improves men's emotional and physical well-being while reducing risks of TF VAWG and violence against gender-diverse individuals. When men and boys are encouraged to communicate openly, seek help, and form equitable, respectful relationships, they are less likely to internalize the hypermasculine and misogynistic narratives that fuel resentment and violence. This approach not only supports men's mental health and social connection but also protects women by addressing the root causes of online radicalization and hostility, ultimately fostering safer communities and advancing women's health and safety goals.

# 7



## GLOBAL CONTEXTS AND CULTURAL VARIATIONS

**TF VAWG is a global phenomenon shaped by regional trends, political contexts, and cultural norms. Patriarchal and heteronormative social structures continue to influence digital technology access and usage for women, girls, sexual minorities, and other disenfranchised groups.**

#### ASIA

Social norms, class and caste divides, and the growing gender digital divide leave women and girls most vulnerable to technology-facilitated violence across Asia. Survivors from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Nepal, and Pakistan report high incidence of online sexual harassment and image-based abuse, including cyberstalking, unwanted sexual contact requests, and non-consensual dissemination of intimate images.<sup>181</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Wide dissemination through online platforms allows perpetrators to blackmail and shame targets to maintain romantic relationships or humiliate public figures.<sup>183</sup>

Familial power dynamics play important roles in “honour cultures” where male family members normalize policing and surveillance. Brothers position themselves as sisters’ protectors, guarding online activity for family honour.<sup>184</sup> Daily cyberstalking is particularly dangerous, as perpetrators find identifiable information to stalk targets offline. In Thailand, bullying and teasing of women is normalized in a culture where men are sexually adventurous while women must be reserved, with image-based abuse forcing some survivors to transfer schools.<sup>185</sup>

The manosphere’s global reach reflects both narrative adaptability and persistent ideological frameworks. In India, scattered 1990s actions evolved into organized movements by 2015, with groups like the Save Indian Family Foundation serving as umbrella organizations.<sup>186</sup> “Currycels” face compounded disadvantages, navigating feminist rejection and racial hierarchies within the global incel community. Local cultural dynamics – son preference creating skewed gender ratios,

sexual segregation, and joint family systems limiting privacy – reinforce manosphere narratives. Hindu nationalist manosphere accounts amplify these by attacking feminism and women’s autonomy, demonstrating intersections with religious extremism.<sup>187</sup>

Cybergrooming among minors is increasingly prevalent in Southeast Asia. The Philippines documented 280,000 cases of cybersex trafficking in 2020, facilitated by poverty and expanding internet infrastructure. Similar reports emerge from Cambodia and Indonesia.<sup>188</sup>

#### AFRICA

The manosphere is rapidly growing across Africa, with Kenya and South Africa linking online movements to violent, sexualized hate speech against women.<sup>189</sup> Masculinity sessions trend on X, where Kenyans believe men are socially and politically disadvantaged and must reclaim power. Men condemning the manosphere face contempt and are despised as effeminate, revealing how hegemonic masculinities stigmatize deviation from dominant masculine ideals.<sup>190</sup> Despite Kenya’s relatively low X user base (1.8 million), it consistently ranked in the top 10 countries using manosphere terminology in 2023. Kenyan influencers like Andrew Kibe and Eric Amunga promote misogynistic rhetoric and perpetuate hate speech. A study across five Sub-Saharan African countries found 28 per cent of women experienced TF VAWG, 36 per cent faced sexual harassment, and 27 per cent were victims of online stalking and doxxing.<sup>191</sup> In Uganda, election-period reporting documented organized online attacks; while not giving a

precise per cent demographic profiles, the abuse was attributed to political operatives and coordinated networks targeting women candidates – illustrating perpetrator type in African political arenas.<sup>192</sup>

#### THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

A UN Women study found 60 per cent of women internet users in Arab States experienced TF VAWG, primarily unwanted images, sexually explicit content, unsolicited requests, hateful messages, and sexual blackmail.<sup>193</sup> One in three women (33 per cent) reported online violence preceded offline violence – a continuum exacerbated during COVID-19. Women activists and human rights defenders are frequently targeted, with most reporting multiple TF VAWG incidents.

#### EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Here, most TF VAWG is perpetrated by unknown persons or those known only online, with nearly one-third by individuals in women's social proximity. A UN Women study across 13 Eastern European and Central Asian countries found unknown perpetrators more likely to hack accounts or share unwanted content, while partners use threats or control, family members combine control with sexual harassment, and bosses engage in sexual harassment.<sup>194</sup> Across Europe, manosphere content is increasingly transnational. In Estonia, manfluencers merge global manosphere ideologies with minimal local adaptation.<sup>195</sup> Similar trends appear in Germany's documented "Germanosphere" activity and Hungarian harmful relationship advice on TikTok that has garnered millions of views.<sup>196</sup> This globalized ecosystem uses shared English terminology and platform dissemination for cross-cultural recruitment while localized narratives enhance cultural relevance.

#### LATIN AMERICA

In Latin American TF VAWG investigations, 74 per cent of documented online abuse incidents

involved male peer groups coordinating harassment, not lone individuals.<sup>197</sup> Brazilian manosphere manifestations emerged recently, integrating with far-right political movements during the Bolsonaro era through self-help literature constructing "resentful subjectivities" that transform neoliberalism's systemic helplessness into anti-feminist political practices.<sup>198</sup> This demonstrates how Global South manosphere movements developed later than Western counterparts, typically emerging in the 2000s and consolidating in the 2010s alongside increased internet penetration. Recent doxxing attacks resulted in unwelcome deliveries to journalists' homes, including pizzas, sex toys, and offensive materials.<sup>199</sup>

**Online abuse increasingly targets sexual, religious, and ethnic minorities globally.** Many countries lack legal protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals against hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>200</sup> Indonesia has seen rising anti-LGBTIQ+ social media rhetoric attributed to political environments and increased media publicity. While LGBTIQ+ communities seek online friendships and resources, they face "cyber-homophobia."<sup>201</sup> Constant digital surveillance forces LGBTIQ+ individuals in Malaysia and Myanmar to over-analyze online activities and self-censor to avoid violence. In Bangladesh, ethnic minorities from the Chittagong Hill Tracts region face historical disenfranchisement and online discrimination.

The growing influence of these networks, alongside rising image-based abuse and targeted attacks, underscores the urgent need for context-sensitive interventions, global partnerships, and effective regulation. Addressing TF VAWG demands coordinated legal, technological, and social strategies to create safer digital spaces, challenge destructive gender narratives, and protect the rights and dignity of all individuals online.

8



**PREVENTION, RESPONSE,  
AND PROMISING  
PRACTICES**

**Addressing TF VAWG requires comprehensive, evidence-based approaches that integrate prevention, response, and structural change strategies. Effective interventions must be survivor-centered, culturally appropriate, and address root causes of gender inequality while adapting to rapidly evolving technological environments.<sup>202</sup>**

Strategies include community awareness and behaviour-change campaigns tailored to local contexts, clear laws that address acts like online harassment and non-consensual image sharing, and regulations for technology platforms to incentivize safety and privacy-by-design. **Multisector collaboration - among technology companies, governments, civil society, and service providers - is essential to mainstream prevention and ensure accessible, intersectional support for survivors.**

Michael Flood highlights that the same digital platforms that enable harmful masculinities and misogynistic content can also drive positive change if leveraged effectively. He emphasizes **strategies that engage men and boys through social media, video platforms, and interactive campaigns promoting gender equity, emotional literacy, and non-violence, while fostering peer-to-peer dialogue to counter toxic narratives.**<sup>203</sup> Together with Alan Greig, he argues that efforts must go beyond individual attitude change toward addressing the structural and ideological forces shaping masculinity in digital space.<sup>204</sup> As online environments increasingly replace traditional community structures, effective interventions must be sustained, culturally sensitive, and attuned to algorithmic influence and collective norm change to prevent the normalization of violence.

**Prevention frameworks increasingly recognize that technology amplifies existing gender inequalities rather than creating new forms of violence, requiring interventions that address both the technological and social dimensions of the problem.**<sup>205</sup> Evidence-based prevention models emphasize the importance of addressing structural inequalities that enable VAWG perpetration,<sup>206</sup> yet further evidence is needed on models that work in the context of TF VAWG. This includes challenging

harmful masculinity norms, promoting gender-equitable attitudes, and creating social environments where violence is unacceptable. By addressing these barriers, fostering confidence in support systems, and actively engaging men and boys as allies, communities can create environments where early, compassionate intervention becomes the norm and the cycle of violence is interrupted at multiple levels.

**The RESPECT Framework**, developed by WHO and UN Women, outlines seven key strategies for preventing violence against women:

- **R**elationship skills strengthened
- **E**mpowerment of women advanced
- **S**ervices provision ensured
- **P**overty reduced
- **E**nvironments made safe
- **C**hildren protected from abuse
- **T**ransformed attitudes.<sup>207</sup>

It prioritizes primary prevention through social norm change while incorporating secondary and tertiary interventions to ensure a comprehensive, multi-level impact. UNFPA's "Making All Spaces Safe" Framework offers a technology-specific approach that integrates digital literacy education, rights-based law reform, and safety-by-design standards for platform development.<sup>208</sup>

## **PLATFORM RESPONSES AND TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS**

**Despite the magnitude of the problem, platform responses to TF VAWG remain insufficient and fragmented. Across the technology industry, actions are too often taken reactively – triggered by major harms or public outcry – rather than embedding proactive, rights-based safeguards into platform design and governance.** Addressing this gap requires stronger regulatory frameworks,

mandatory accountability mechanisms, and cross-sector collaboration to ensure that protecting users from technology-facilitated violence is treated as a baseline standard, not an afterthought.



#### PROMISING EXAMPLE:

### Holistic Platform Best Practices

At the Christchurch Call Leaders' Summit in 2023, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue identified best practices and technical approaches for platforms to better prevent TF VAWG, including updating moderation policies and systems to explicitly recognize misogyny as a vector in the continuum of violence; incorporating intersectional feminist insights into algorithmic risk assessments, identifying how patriarchal norms and gender inequalities may be amplified by AI; and adopting a victim-survivor-centered "Privacy and Safety by Design" approach, enabling platforms to proactively respond to TF VAWG, support victims, and integrate cross-platform cooperation and standardized, gender-disaggregated transparency reporting.<sup>209</sup>

While it is encouraging to see that some technology companies have been implementing diverse approaches to addressing TF VAWG – including algorithmic and human content moderation systems and transparency requirements for content moderation policies and enforcement actions – these approaches remain largely reactive rather than proactive, addressing content after it has been posted rather than preventing its creation and dissemination. The development of safety-by-design principles represents a fundamental shift toward building platforms that prioritize user safety from inception rather than adding safety features as afterthoughts. For example, through extensive research and consultation, Australia's eSafety Commissioner promotes a safety-by-design approach, which

focuses on building platforms that prioritize user safety from the start rather than adding protections later.

Platforms continue to evolve and introduce promising technological solutions including AI-driven detection tools using machine learning to identify patterns of abuse, user empowerment features providing enhanced privacy controls and blocking mechanisms, and proactive design solutions advocated by the Integrity Institute that emphasize structural changes rather than reactive responses.<sup>210</sup> However, **key challenges in platform responses include balancing free expression with safety concerns, addressing cultural and contextual differences in content interpretation, managing the scale of content requiring moderation, and preventing algorithmic bias in automated systems.** Research suggests that effective platform responses require collaboration with GBV experts, investment in diverse content moderation teams, and transparent reporting on policy enforcement and effectiveness.<sup>211</sup>

Critically, there is little research and few guidelines for platforms or technology industries in addressing the specific gendered challenges of online harms related to men and boys. In 2025, **ECPAT International released guidance for game companies in order to provide insights and informed considerations to approaching game safety with a gender-sensitive lens.** This was developed with the intention of supporting adolescent boys, but the recommendations also contribute to making games more gender-inclusive across the spectrum of identities. As research shows boys are likely to first seek help in game ecosystems rather than through a clinical route, game environments can be leveraged positively to support help-seeking behaviours, such as designing reporting tools and game mechanics (such as customizable avatars or moderated community spaces) that promote peer-to-peer support. For instance, a game could offer specialized in-game prompts encouraging boys to reach out when exhibiting language or behaviour of distress.<sup>212</sup>



## Lessons from big data and social listening

The application of big data analytics and social listening approaches to understanding TF VAWG represents a rapidly evolving field that offers unprecedented insights into patterns, scale, and impacts of digital misogyny. Equimundo's pioneering work in this area, particularly through IMAGES, provides the world's largest dataset on men, masculinities, and gender equality, offering critical insights into the factors that drive TF VAWG perpetration.<sup>213</sup>

Equimundo's comprehensive research programme employs sophisticated big data approaches to understand the complex relationships among masculinity, technology use, and VAWG perpetration.<sup>214</sup> Equimundo's Manosphere, Rewired demonstrates a methodology that other organizations can adapt to better understand and counter harmful masculinities online. At its foundation, the research integrates big data collection and qualitative immersion: scraping and analyzing millions of data points from platforms like Twitch, YouTube, Discord, and Reddit while complementing this with hundreds of hours of participatory observation and expert interviews.

This combination provides both a macro-level view of narrative flows – how ideas spread, peak, and decline – and a micro-level understanding of community norms and influencer dynamics. Organizations such as ISD use similar approaches by leveraging AI-powered social listening, network mapping, and discourse analysis tools to detect when and where misogynistic or hyper-masculine narratives gain traction. Importantly, these methods help pinpoint not only harmful content but also neutral or positive entry points for young men seeking guidance, identity, or community.

To counter harmful masculinities, the study suggests that organizations can move beyond

content moderation to narrative intervention and digital redirection strategies. Once harmful or high-risk narratives are identified, organizations can collaborate with platforms, moderators, and micro-influencers to introduce alternative storylines emphasizing healthy, equitable masculinities. These interventions could take the form of algorithmically targeted campaigns, influencer partnerships, or narrative seeding within existing forums and streaming channels. By applying the same data-driven insights used to track the manosphere, organizations can design engagement strategies that meet young men where they are, rather than solely trying to pull them away from problematic spaces. The key is to combine real-time analytics with empathetic, community-oriented messaging, ensuring that counter-narratives feel authentic and offer belonging rather than judgment.

## LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

International frameworks provide important foundations for national policy development. While this is an evolving space to address prevention and response gaps, some signs of progress are emerging. Some examples include the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse – a government-to-government coalition with advisory committee participants from UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF and other civil society, NGOs – that coordinated international approaches to TF VAWG policy.<sup>215</sup> The European Union's Digital Services Act established comprehensive transparency and accountability requirements, and the recent UN Global Digital Compact established international standards for digital rights and safety.<sup>216</sup> Additionally, in 2024, the UN Cybercrime Treaty established non-consensual intimate images (NCII) and child sexual abuse material (CSAM) as internationally agreed information and communications technology-facilitated crimes.<sup>217</sup>

In Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, and South Africa, advocates are calling on governments to enact clear, survivor-centred laws specifically targeting online gender-based violence – ensuring legislative definitions, enforcement mechanisms, and civil remedies that reflect survivors’ lived experiences while holding perpetrators and platforms accountable. Additionally, they recommend strengthening public awareness and capacity through training for legal professionals, law enforcement, and communities, integrating reporting mechanisms and education campaigns to shift social norms and promote digital safety.<sup>218</sup> While global normative frameworks<sup>219</sup> are shifting, regional and national ratifications of these are yet to be achieved. UN Women worked with the Association for Progressive Communications to undertake research and expert consultations across all five world regions resulting in a brief model framework for legislation on technology-facilitated violence against women and is now working with Equality Now and UNFPA on a forthcoming supplement to the Handbook for Legislation on Violence against Women on Technology-Facilitated Violence against Women and Girls.<sup>220</sup>

**National legislative approaches reveal diverse strategies for addressing cybercrimes and digital regulation, though few governments are paying focused attention to online misogyny specifically.**

One notable exception is the United Kingdom, where the Office of Communications (Ofcom) recently launched a consultation with civil society to better understand the dynamics of misogynistic online spaces – the manosphere – and to inform future media literacy initiatives and platform guidance.<sup>221</sup> Ofcom intends to use the findings to inform and shape a broader strategy around media literacy, reinforcing critical reasoning skills and awareness among those vulnerable to harmful online content.

Elsewhere, countries are taking varied paths to online safety regulation. Australia’s eSafety Commissioner represents a world-leading model with comprehensive enforcement powers. Germany’s NetzDG compels swift removal of illegal content under threat of significant penalties, while the EU’s Digital Services Act takes a broader systemic approach, placing obligations on platforms to assess and

mitigate risks, including those linked to harmful recommendation algorithms. Canada’s social media transparency laws seek to hold platforms accountable through mandatory disclosure of moderation practices, and the Republic of Korea’s Cyber Crimes Commission focuses on prosecuting digital abuse, including gender-based online harassment.<sup>222</sup>



**PROMISING EXAMPLE:**

**Closing Data Gaps, Analyzing New Trends, and Developing Responses for the Public**

The eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) is Australia’s online safety regulator and educator. To ensure eSafety’s programmes, policies and regulatory functions are evidence-informed, eSafety regularly undertakes research to fill critical gaps in the evidence base and to remain responsive to the evolving digital landscape.

**Closing Data Gaps and Taking the Next Steps.**

To address a research gap in how to foster healthier masculinities, including in online spaces, eSafety conducted a qualitative study into the [online experiences of young men](#).<sup>223</sup> In Part 1, eSafety worked with academics from Deakin University and Queensland University of Technology to hear directly from young men about what it is like to be a young man online. In Part 2, eSafety worked with expert practitioners in the healthy masculinities space to confirm its findings in Part 1 and to understand how to support young men to have safe and positive experiences online that can help them to develop positive and healthy masculinities. The findings of this research revealed that young men and boys felt defensive and disenfranchised, and that harmful online content, creators, and communities could appeal to their needs for validation, guidance, and belonging. The studies found that being online is an important way that young men explore identity, sexuality, and social connection. Data from young men themselves and practitioners who work with this cohort showed that many

young men can be empathetic; can be curious about how to be a good, kind man; and can think critically about what they see online.

Findings also highlighted practitioners' observations that algorithms and recommender systems were pushing harmful content onto young men, even when they did not seek out this material.

Drawing on these findings, when engaging young men eSafety uses language that acknowledges and harnesses their strengths and speaks with them, not about them. eSafety also continues to reinforce technology platforms' responsibilities around algorithms and recommender systems.

**Researching and responses to sextortion, an emerging form of image-based abuse.** As the first statutory government body to provide a support-oriented response for victims of image-based abuse, eSafety [reviewed](#) the complaints system to examine changes over time.<sup>224</sup> Findings highlighted that reports had increased by more than 960 per cent from the system's inception, and that increasingly gendered patterns were emerging.

Sexual extortion (also known as sextortion) emerged as a new form of image-based abuse primarily reported by men. This is a form of blackmail where someone threatens to share a nude or sexual image or video unless certain demands are met, with perpetrators often having financial motivations. In contrast, other forms of image-based abuse, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, were more commonly reported by women. In sextortion cases involving women and girls, perpetrators were more likely to demand further intimate material, as opposed to having clear financial motivations. Sextortion is a priority policy area for eSafety, including investment in [further research](#), education on respectful online relationships, and clear advice on eSafety's [website](#) about dealing with sextortion.<sup>225 226</sup> This advice recognizes the different motivations and gendered patterns of this

harm type and incorporates these insights into relevant advice and includes guidance for young people and families, detailed advice on how to preserve evidence, and report cases (especially those involving under-18s) – underscoring “you are not alone” messaging and urging victims not to pay and to seek help immediately.

#### **Linkages to complementary programmes.**

The United States government has previously taken steps to address online harassment and abuse, including through initiatives such as the former White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse. While this specific task force is no longer active, efforts to combat online abuse continue through a range of federal agencies, policy initiatives, and partnerships with civil society and technology platforms.<sup>227</sup> Simultaneously, the Department of Homeland Security's Know2Protect campaign supports broader online safety strategies by promoting awareness, providing reporting resources like the Know2Protect Tipline, and delivering tailored education through its Project iGuardian outreach, which reached more than 122,000 people and generated numerous victim disclosures and investigative leads in Fiscal Year 2024. This U.S. approach – focused on empowering adolescents, encouraging help-seeking behaviour, and integrating prevention as part of mainstream online safety policy – provides an important counterpart to Australia's eSafety Commission.

Across these frameworks, effective policies must not only sanction perpetrators but also address the gender norms that fuel TF VAWG. This includes prevention measures engaging men and boys, mandating digital literacy on consent and respectful online behaviour, and supporting perpetrator rehabilitation programmes. Ultimately, robust responses must balance rapid intervention against emerging threats with respect for fundamental rights and sensitivity to cultural and legal diversity.



#### PROMISING EXAMPLE:

### NGO advocacy leads to enhanced public policy

Glitch!UK is an NGO advocating for ethical, equitable, and just internet technologies and information ecosystems. Glitch!UK uses an intersectional lens that brings the experiences and perspectives of Black women and gender-expansive people to the fore. Through six years of advocacy, campaigning, and awareness-raising highlighting the voices and experiences of Black women and girls, a strengthened [Online Safety Act](#) was passed by the Government of the United Kingdom government in October 2023.<sup>228</sup> Glitch!UK's work highlighted the importance of an intersectional, gendered approach to the problem of TF VAWG given that women and girls, and particularly Black women and girls and gender non-conforming people, are disproportionately affected by TF VAWG and other forms of online violence or harms. Updates to the Online Safety Act also included controlling and coercive behaviour as a priority offence and other new offences relating to intimate image abuse.

This pioneering Act aims to hold technology companies accountable for online safety. The Act requires the regulator to provide guidance – including best practice examples – on addressing TF VAWG;<sup>229</sup> providers to clearly and in one place describe all actions and mechanisms they take to address TF VAWG; and victims-survivors' voices to be heard during the consultation period for the development of codes of practice. Ofcom, the UK's independent safety regulator, has also provided guidance on engaging men interacting with the manosphere.<sup>230</sup>

While the Act was strengthened, Glitch!UK and other organizations are [continuing their advocacy efforts](#) to further strengthen policies and programs that effectively address TF VAWG including through strong implementation of the Act, implementing public health

programming to prevent TF VAWG using ring-fenced funds from technology industry taxes, and instituting AI regulation.<sup>231</sup> In addition, Glitch!UK facilitates workplace workshops to improve online safety and digital self-care.

## COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND GLOBAL SOUTH INNOVATIONS

Community-based approaches to addressing TF VAWG thrive in Global South contexts because local ownership and cultural adaptation enhance both sustainability and impact. Initiatives like the Latin American Women's Fund, which supports more than 100 civil society organizations in 14 countries, and the Digital Defenders Partnership, which applies holistic, de-colonial, and feminist strategies, demonstrate the power of grassroots, community-led solutions.<sup>232</sup> The Numun Fund further advances this work by supporting feminist technology initiatives in the Global South, resourcing women- and trans-led groups to develop digital safety interventions and generate evidence to address TF VAWG, especially counter-narrative work to combat gendered disinformation.<sup>233</sup>

Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, grassroots innovation networks drive localized responses, from digital literacy programmes and survivor-led peer support networks to awareness campaigns addressing the gendered dimensions of online harm. Indigenous approaches, like WEAVE's work with Chittagong Hill Tracts communities in Bangladesh, exemplify how combining traditional conflict resolution with modern digital safety builds culturally resonant interventions.<sup>234</sup> These strategies highlight the importance of transforming male participation from passive bystanders to active allies, disrupting cycles of digital and offline VAWG while strengthening community resilience.

In Kenya, a new coalition of civil society organizations has pledged collective action to counter gendered disinformation and hate speech on digital platforms, following a workshop convened by

UNESCO and the Association for Media Women in Kenya in November 2023. The coalition's 10-point resolution underscores the growing role of regional, multi-stakeholder collaboration in shaping digital safety frameworks across the Global South.<sup>235</sup>

These are promising developments to foster culturally appropriate responses that challenge harmful social norms and leverage traditional knowledge while integrating digital safety practices. Yet few interventions have emerged to engage men and boys in shifting patriarchal behaviours and fostering accountability within digital landscapes that would reinforce long-term prevention.



#### PROMISING EXAMPLE:

### Using regional and language-specific approaches in the Global South

[Tales of Turning](#) is an NGO in South Africa leveraging technology, social media, dialogue, and research to prevent violence and support social cohesion. The team has conducted a project to understand gender attitudes and discussions conducted online in South Africa.<sup>236</sup> Through the use of social media listening tools, it has built a nuanced and cutting-edge understanding of the slang or colloquial terms and narratives reflecting gender norms, practices, and attitudes in South Africa. Research on the “truth queries” methodology developed by the Tales of Turning team on social media has shown that simple responses to an online post that query its truthfulness rather than direct challenges resulted in more doubts about the post and fewer people likely to share it.<sup>237 238</sup>

The findings from these pieces of research come together to inform Tales of Turning's pilot digital dialogue approaches to address TF VAWG.<sup>239</sup> This initiative recruits and trains allies as voluntary digital dialogue facilitators. The facilitators' role is to be positive,

non-judgmental actors, helping people or groups with opposing views online to engage in self-reflection, critical thinking, and dialogue by neutralizing disinformation, hate speech, harassment, bullying, and incitements to violence.<sup>240</sup> Because this pilot is online, its geographic reach extends beyond South Africa and includes diverse urban and rural participants from across Africa. The dialogues can happen in multiple languages; in some cases, groups have created digital content in several standard and slang languages.<sup>241</sup>

Tales of Turning is also engaging with 60 male students on university campuses in South Africa and training them to facilitate self-reflective and healing dialogues among peers, and to amplify its GBV-prevention messages on social media platforms.<sup>242</sup> Additionally, the NGO has trained peer educators in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, taxi drivers, and community-based organizations to use this methodology. The next step is to build an early warning system to alert the dialogue facilitator coordinator to online attacks against women journalists and leaders and feminist organizations so that trained volunteer digital dialogue facilitators can be mobilized to use the methodology to defend women online.<sup>243 244</sup>

## TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

**In the digital age, organizations around the world are translating effective practices to meet boys and men where they are: online.** NGM Alliance represents a bold norm-change strategy aimed at preventing TF VAWG by cultivating positive, peer-centered masculine cultures online.<sup>245</sup> Through its moderated Discord server—open to boys in middle school and high school across Canada and the United States—NGM fosters safe, connection-based spaces where gaming and social interaction become vehicles for belonging, mental health support, and healthy expressions of masculinity.

The redirect method uses targeted online advertising to counter harmful ideologies by redirecting users searching for harmful content to credible alternatives. Diverting Hate intercepts online pathways that often lead young men from misogynistic and extremist content toward violence by redirecting them toward healthier narratives and communities, thereby reducing the risk of radicalization that can escalate into offline abuse. It intercepts identified at-risk users using carefully tailored advertisements placed in platforms like X, delivering alternative content – such as mental health support, positive male influencers, and community resources – that is designed to break the “rabbit hole” of escalating misogynistic content.<sup>246</sup> Another promising practice is Moonshot CVE’s work to develop and implement strategies to prevent online radicalization by using data-driven approaches, targeted content, and digital outreach to at-risk audiences. Its work focuses on redirecting individuals searching for extremist material toward safer, constructive resources and fostering community resilience against violent ideologies.<sup>247</sup>

Technology platforms and app-based interventions offer a promising avenue for engaging men and boys in TF VAWG prevention by directly addressing the online roots of abuse and reshaping gendered behaviours in digital spaces. For instance, StopNCII.org enables individuals to generate a digital fingerprint (hash) of intimate images and proactively share that hash with participating platforms so that non-consensual intimate images cannot be re-uploaded – thus disrupting a common tool of online abuse and shifting responsibility from victims to systems of protection.<sup>248</sup> Meanwhile, apps like QUITTR (aimed especially at young men) combine addiction-recovery tools, community support, and behavioural-change techniques to challenge pornography consumption and associated norms of entitlement and objectification, thereby intervening upstream in the attitudes and peer-dynamics that fuel abuse.<sup>249</sup>

Bystander and protection initiatives encourage users to intervene constructively in online harassment. The #iamhere movement empowers bystanders to counteract harassment with empathy and

counter-narratives.<sup>250</sup> ISD developed a counter-conversations approach with trained moderators challenging misinformation in online spaces.<sup>251</sup> UN Women and the Behavioural Insights Team developed and tested behaviourally informed messages across Bolivia and Guatemala intending to encourage men to intervene when witnessing digital violence against women and explored potential mechanisms to incentivize bystanders to intervene.<sup>252</sup>

Together, these examples show how technology industry solutions can:

- Reduce the availability and circulation of abusive content.
- Engage young men in self-reflection and peer accountability around digital behaviours.
- Rewire digital culture toward more equitable masculinity practices.

Implementation at scale will require partnerships between platforms, civil society organizations, and youth networks to ensure that these tools are accessible, relevant, and embedded in broader prevention ecosystems.

#### PROMISING EXAMPLE:



#### Partnering to create easy access to local resources

[Moonshot](#) tackles TF VAWG including online abuse, such as non-consensual image sharing and harassment, by deploying data-driven interventions, from de-escalating potential perpetrators to empowering victims and building resilience through large-scale outreach and risk detection models. Moonshot is partnering with four intervention providers across Canada to offer confidential and secure access to psychosocial support and resources to individuals consuming violent extremist content online and to concerned bystanders. By running online campaigns across mainstream and niche platforms, Moonshot has guided more than 7,500 Canadians toward its websites,

where they engage directly with partners and their resources. Moonshot has also joined forces with local partners in Guatemala to spotlight digital violence for its Transforming Digital Spaces programme, raising awareness around its impact on victims, and how people can take collective action. Moonshot ran digital campaigns reaching 8 per cent of Guatemalans with messages about digital violence and connecting more than 3,700 people affected by digital violence to crisis resources. They also built a strong network of organizations united against digital violence and ready to keep the momentum going long after the programme's completion.

# 9



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**TF VAWG represents a rapidly escalating threat to gender equality and human rights, blurring the lines between online and offline harm. This report demonstrates that TF VAWG is both a continuation of existing gender inequalities and a distinct phenomenon amplified by digital technologies, algorithmic systems, and cross-border networks.**

Women and gender-diverse individuals are its primary targets, particularly those in public life. Women and girls in the Global South – where there are strong patriarchal norms, widespread economic precarity, and weak legal frameworks - may also be at heightened risk for TF VAWG.

**A masculinities lens reveals that men and boys are central to this ecosystem – not only as the majority of perpetrators but also as bystanders, consumers of harmful content, and, in many cases, as secondary victims of the same online environments that foster hostility and isolation.**

The rise of the manosphere and manfluencer culture shows how rigid masculine norms – emphasizing dominance, sexual entitlement, and emotional repression – intersect with social exclusion, economic stress, mental health challenges, and digital platforms to produce environments where misogyny can flourish.

Crucially, these dynamics harm everyone. TF VAWG silences women, erodes democratic participation, and perpetuates and even exacerbates structural inequalities. Simultaneously, the same norms and digital cultures that drive online misogyny also undermine the mental health, well-being, and social connection of young men and boys, reinforcing cycles of alienation and hostility.

Preventing TF VAWG requires comprehensive, multi-level strategies that address both the social and technological drivers of violence, centering on the following insights:

**1** TF VAWG is not isolated from real-world impacts and physical forms of violence. Rather, an online–offline continuum requires responses that recognize its direct links to intimate partner violence, political harassment, and other forms of GBV.

**2** Men and boys must be engaged as part of the solution, not only as potential perpetrators, but also as bystanders, allies, individuals whose vulnerabilities and socialization experiences are a key to sustainable prevention, and, in certain contexts, victims of technology-enabled violence (such as sextortion).

**3** Digital spaces where TF VAWG and other online harms occur are unique, sociotechnical environments, shaped by algorithms, monetization models, and cultural contexts. Reducing the risk of TF VAWG requires coordinated efforts from governments, platforms, and civil society to increase safety and accountability for online spaces.

**4** Global and regional contexts matter, as technology-enabled violence manifests differently across cultures, communities, and economies, demanding both harmonized frameworks that tackle shared root causes and locally grounded strategies to deliver population-specific interventions. Entire continents remain chronically under-studied, including Africa despite high internet penetration rates in countries such as Nigeria and South Africa, Latin America beyond Brazil, and Asia-Pacific regions excluding India.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

To effectively prevent and respond to TF VAWG and other forms of violence, while promoting gender equity and positive masculinities, this report recommends coordinated action at multiple levels:



## 1. Strengthen Global and National Frameworks

- Reinforce the need for a globally harmonized definition of TF VAWG that captures online–offline continuities, intersectional impacts, and emerging forms of harm such as AI-generated abuse – with a specific focus on drivers of perpetration. This includes understanding how masculine identity formation, economic pressures, and digital culture intersect to fuel online and offline GBV, and how different forms of technology-enabled sexual violence manifest for men and women (for example, women are more often subjected to image-based abuse, boys to financial sextortion). Efforts to standardize definitions and metrics through multilateral bodies – such as the UN Statistical Commission that mandated UN Women to work alongside WHO and UNFPA to develop a statistical framework to measure TF VAWG – are critical.<sup>253</sup>
- Support governments to update and enforce laws addressing digital harassment, cyberstalking, image-based abuse, and gendered disinformation, ensuring protections and services for providers, and accountability for perpetrators. This should include addressing the transnational nature of TF VAWG and the challenges in tracking and regulating it due to the rapid evolution of technology and borderless online spaces.
- Promote cross-border collaboration for perpetrator accountability, data sharing, and platform regulation, recognizing the transnational nature of TF VAWG. Pairing regulations that set platform requirements for online safety with normative frameworks and guidance specific to TF VAWG, is needed. The EU has done this with the Digital Services Act and the forthcoming directive on combating violence against women, which sets minimum EU standards for several forms of cyberviolence.<sup>254</sup>
- Include explicit criteria for incel-related activities and GBV in extremist detection systems, recognizing the continuum between online and offline threats and technology’s role in spreading misogynistic ideology. This will help to enhance the risk assessment frameworks at national levels.
- Mandate technology intermediaries to proactively detect and address TF VAWG, with enforceable penalties for non-compliance and explicit recognition of misogyny as hate speech.
- Require technology companies to explicitly address misogyny and content normalizing VAWG within their hate speech and extremist content policies and codes of conduct.



## 2. Engage Men and Boys in Prevention

- Develop and scale programmes that promote healthy masculinities, emotional literacy, and equitable relationship skills for boys and young men. These programmes should explicitly challenge rigid gendered expectations that equate masculinity with dominance, sexual entitlement, and emotional suppression, as these create conditions that contribute to online misogyny and violent extremism.
- Leverage digital platforms to deliver counter-narratives that challenge misogyny and provide positive role models, drawing on influencers, gaming communities, and peer networks. Promising examples mentioned in this review can be replicated while additional support for initiatives like the Redirect Method and Moonshot CVE’s work are critical. These often use targeted online advertising to divert users searching for harmful content toward credible alternatives such as mental health support, positive male influencers, and community resources. Moreover, programmes like the Next Gen Men Alliance can foster safe,

connection-based online spaces where gaming and social interaction facilitate healthy expressions of masculinity.

- Invest in mental health and social support programmes for young men, recognizing that economic insecurity, social isolation, and emotional repression increase vulnerability to online radicalization and the network of manosphere influencers that prey upon men's and boys' desire for connection and validation. It is critical to create environments where men are encouraged to communicate openly and seek help, as emotional repression is a central theme in manosphere content.
- Encourage adoption of policies on men and masculinities in the primary prevention of GBV, with a specific focus on digital environments. Australia's OurWatch released a brief in 2025 recommending tangible steps, leveraging government coordination, procurement, grants, and legislation to promote positive masculinities – both online and offline – ensuring high-quality engagement with men and boys in prevention efforts, and harnessing fatherhood as a strategic opportunity to advance gender equality.<sup>255</sup> Policies should also support perpetrator rehabilitation programmes that target harmful masculinities.



### 3. Transform Digital Ecosystems Through Regulation and Voluntary Measures

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- Require platforms to audit and mitigate algorithmic amplification of misogynistic and harmful content, and promote transparency through periodic publication of risk assessments. This is critical since algorithms on platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram actively learn and amplify engagement, creating self-reinforcing feedback loops that can push boys and young men from innocuous interests toward increasingly misogynistic and extremist materials.

- Support safety-by-design approaches in technology development, including privacy tools, rapid response mechanisms for content removal, and transparent and accessible moderation policies. Invest, promote, and incentivize platforms that proactively prevent the creation and dissemination of harmful content, such as preventing image sharing in chats and integrating features in gaming environments to promote help-seeking behaviours for boys (for instance, specialized in-game prompts, customizable avatars, and moderated community spaces).
- Disrupt the mechanisms that monetize reinforced misogyny by engaging directly with technology giant c-suite leaders – including with gender-sensitive training and recommendations on how to shift their business model to realize a return on investment for safer and healthier online spaces for women, girls, and boys and men.
- Encourage partnerships between technology companies, civil society, and researchers to create early-warning systems for coordinated harassment campaigns and emerging trends. These systems should specifically monitor manosphere narratives and content to identify radicalization pathways and enable proactive intervention before violence escalates.



### 4. Prioritize Global South and Other Underrepresented Perspectives

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- Expand investment in regional research and data collection, including studies that examine both victimization and perpetration through a masculinities lens. This is particularly critical in regions like Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America, which remain underrepresented in research despite facing unique cultural and economic conditions that shape online perpetration and victimization.

- Support community-based and culturally specific interventions, such as digital literacy programmes, gender-equity workshops, and survivor support networks tailored to local contexts. These initiatives should transform male participation from passive bystanders to active allies, engaging them in shifting patriarchal behaviours and fostering accountability within their own communities.
- Elevate and resource innovative Global South initiatives that combine advocacy for gender equity and equality, digital rights, community engagement, and online safety.



### 5. Foster Multi-Sector Collaboration

- Build integrated prevention frameworks linking public health, education, digital governance, and gender equality initiatives. Additionally, focus on training for law enforcement and judicial personnel.
- Create multi-stakeholder task forces to coordinate responses, share knowledge, and monitor progress on TF VAWG prevention globally.
- Promote greater coordination and programmatic partnerships between the fields of children's online safety and wellbeing and TF VAWG, particularly to tackle shared root causes and enhance protective factors for child sexual exploitation and abuse and GBV. The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse highlighted the importance of this linkage during the first Global Ministerial Conference on ending Violence Against Children.<sup>256</sup> This is crucial given that young men also experience forms of gendered harm online, such as body-image pressures, sextortion, social isolation, and psychological manipulation, which reflect and reinforce rigid gender norms.
- Encourage longitudinal evaluation and learning to adapt programmes to evolving technologies and gender norms. This will help

understand the complex interplay of personal experiences, social contexts, platform design, and peer interactions that influence boys' attitudes toward gender equality online.

**ADDRESSING TF VAWG THROUGH A MASCULINITIES LENS IS NOT ONLY A STRATEGY FOR PROTECTING WOMEN AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS BUT ALSO A PATHWAY TO IMPROVING THE WELL-BEING, INCLUSION, AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE OF MEN AND BOYS. BY LINKING DIGITAL GOVERNANCE, SOCIAL NORM CHANGE, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, WE CAN DISRUPT CYCLES OF HARM, BUILD SAFER ONLINE AND OFFLINE SPACES, AND ADVANCE GENDER JUSTICE FOR ALL.**



# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A: ORGANIZATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Australian eSafety Commissioner
Center for Information Resilience
Christchurch Call Foundation
City of London Police Cyber Unit
Jo Cox Foundation
MenEngage
Moonshot
Oxford University Department of Computer Science
Pirth.org
Police Representative from Pakistan
Pollicy
Sonke Gender Justice
SVRI TFGBV Group
Tales of Turning
UK Government Representatives
United Nations Population Fund
Dublin City University School of Communications

# APPENDIX B: COMMON BEHAVIOURS AND DEFINITIONS OF TF VAWG

Behaviour	Description
Behaviours in the context of TF VAWG	
Cyberstalking	Cyberstalking is the use of technology to stalk and monitor someone’s activities and behaviours in real-time or historically. An extension of offline stalking, cyberstalking involves a set of unwanted, repeated, intrusive, and harassing behaviours. These can include constant messaging, tracking online activity, or even using digital tools such as smart home devices and drones to control and monitor women.
Gaming violence	Acts of aggression occurring within the virtual environment of video games, online gaming communities, or related platforms to target women primarily due to their gender.
Gendered disinformation	Gendered disinformation is a subset of misogynistic abuse and violence against women that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives, often with some degree of coordination, to deter women from participating in the public sphere. Both state and non-state actors strategically use gendered disinformation to silence women, discourage online political discourse, and shape perceptions toward gender and the role of women in democracies.
Gender trolling	Gender trolling consists of mobilizing a group of individuals across online platforms to target individuals active in social media and online spheres. This mass-organized act of misogynistic online violence is usually perpetrated by male-identifying strangers who come together to intimidate and distress the targeted individual or community through insults, slurs, provocative messages, and threats of violence.
Image-based abuse (IBA)	Image-based abuse involves creating, altering, sharing, or threatening to distribute non-consensual, intimate, sexual, or personal images. Image-based abuse has various manifestations including non-consensual distribution of intimate images (NCII), virtual voyeurism or creepshots (also known as “upskirting” or “downblousing”), sextortion, deepfakes, documenting or broadcasting of sexual violence, or coercing an individual to share nude or sexual images via digital platforms.
Cybercrimes that become a form of TF VAWG in a gendered context	
Defamation	Defamation involves the public release of false information that damages a person’s reputation and that has the intention of humiliating, threatening, intimidating or punishing the survivor. Given the strict gender norms that govern female sexuality, defamatory statements about women’s sexuality are particularly harmful to survivors’ reputations.
Doxxing	Doxxing is the non-consensual disclosure of private information online, such as a person’s legal name, address, phone number, contact information, government identification numbers, employment details, and other personal information. Perpetrated with the intention of undermining one’s privacy, safety, credibility and/ or reputation, doxxing is usually accompanied by other forms of abuse, forcing the victim-survivor to change their phone number, legal name, job, and even relocate to escape threats and abuse. Short for “dropping docs,” doxxing was a revenge tactic among 1990s computer hackers.

Behaviour	Description
Hacking	Hacking is the use of technology to gain illegal or unauthorized access to systems, accounts, and resources with the intention of acquiring, altering, or abusing the target's personal information, social media activity, internet search history, real-time location, bank accounts, and other sensitive information.
Hate speech	Hate speech in the context of TF VAWG encompasses insults, attacks, or discriminatory language against people based on their gender, sexual identity, religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, or other identity factor. Hate speech inciting physical violence or undermining participation in the public sphere is especially dangerous when combined with doxxing and cyber stalking. Gendered hate speech specifically targets women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ people and is rooted in patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia.
Impersonation	One of the most common manifestations of TF VAWG, impersonation is the use of digital technology to steal someone's identity with the intention of threatening, exploiting, embarrassing, discrediting their reputation, or creating fraudulent documents. Gendered examples of impersonation include romance scams; fake websites and social media accounts to groom, recruit, and traffic girls and women; and false advertisements of marriage, employment, or education opportunities.
Online harassment	Online harassment encompasses a variety of unwanted digital communication to repeatedly contact, annoy, threaten, or intimidate another person. Online harassment can also be sexual in nature and involve unwanted sexual solicitation and coercion, sextortion, gender and sexuality-based hate speech, rape threats, online grooming, live-streaming of sexual abuse, and online sex trafficking.
Phishing	Phishing starts as a form of digital communication that is designed to look like it comes from a trusted source. Perpetrators typically aim to trick the target into performing an action – usually clicking on a link or opening an attachment, which may automatically download a virus onto their device, compelling the target to share personal information and login credentials to gain control over online accounts to impersonate them or sell their information to others.
Extremist online threats	Violent extremism on technological platforms arises through the broadcasting of ideologies associated with extremism, inciting violence and radicalism. Most frequently targeting those with intersectional identities, extremist views online often aim to amplify existing communal prejudices and increase online violence against vulnerable groups.

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## INTRODUCTION

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# UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead United Nations entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social norms and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector, coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations, deliver lasting changes. We make strides in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and peace, security and humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.



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