

Mapping the intersection of technology and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is still one of the most under-reported crimes. Reasons include shame that is associated with being a victim of gender-based violence, normalisation or daily tolerance and acceptance of violence against women, and that perpetrators are rarely brought to justice – epitomised in the case of Iraqi teenager Rand whose father murdered her for talking to a British soldier. The father says that not only does he not face prosecution, he was congratulated by police for his actions. This goes beyond impunity for murder.

Technology aiding abuse

In Argentina, a 16 year old girl faced a year of harassment from her teacher. The girl's mother had unsuspectingly invited the teacher into their home to give extra tuition. The teacher pressed sexual advances on the child, and began a series of harassing mobile phone calls and texts. It was only after a year of torment that the girl showed the messages to her mother and action was taken against the abuser.

Technology presents a powerful tool for ending gender-based violence, by allowing access to resources and support both online and offline. It helps to publicise abuses, which can bring pressure to bear on the authorities to take action. However, the anonymity of the web, and its ability to shrink distances, also mean that perpetrators can use it to harass, stalk and find victims. Technology also heightens problems of privacy, evidence and recompense evident in traditional gender-based violence.

Take Back the Tech! (TBTT) is a campaign that aims to empower users to use new information technologies for ending violence against women. One important step in this is mapping the intersection between gender-based violence and technology. This allows campaigners and policy-makers to get a sense of the scale of gender-based violence online, see which are the most prevalent abuses and come up with strategies for addressing the problem.

On 25 November 2011, TBTT has developed an interactive map based on Ushahidi that allows internet users to share their stories, local news and personal experiences of gender-based violence using technology. This map was launched on the first day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, which also marks the International Day on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. As of 7 December, it has recorded 103 stories from across the globe, with the majority of stories coming from Africa, Latin America and Asia.

What is monitored

The TBTT! map organised technology-related violence against women into 5 broad categories. They are:

1) Culturally justified violence against women which includes cases where culture or religion is used as a reason to justify, ignore or accept acts of violence against women, or when technology plays a role in creating a culture of violence against women.

2) Online harassment and cyberstalking which constitutes one of the most visible forms of



technology-related VAW

3) Intimate partner violence where technology is used in acts of violence and abuse in intimate or spousal relationships

4) Rape and sexual assault where technology plays a role in tracking the movement and activities of the victim, to provide location information, posting of false solicitation for sexual violence or when the violence continues because of digital recording and distribution of the violence.

5) Violence targeting communities includes cases where communities face targeted online attacks and harassment because of their gender or sexual identity and political stand.

Aside from the types of violence against women, the map also monitors 4 other broad categories:

- 1) Act of violation, or what the abuser or violator did
- 2) Harm faced, ranging from physical harm to inability to participate meaningfully in online spaces
- 3) Technology platform which was implicated or used in the incidence of VAW
- 4) Abuser or violator, which range from known and unknown persons, to state and non-state actors.

A snapshot of the stories so far

The TBTT map allows users to select multiple answers for each category. So, for example, a story was shared about marriage practices from the Karamajong people of Uganda which was flagged as involving three types of harm: emotional or psychological harm, sexual harm and limiting mobility. This means that each column will add up to more than 103, though based on 103 stories shared.

Type of technology-related VAW

Type of VAW	Total cases	Country	Platform	Violation
Other	80			
Online harassment & cyberstalking	39	Malaysia (6)	Mobile phone (14)	Repeated harassment (24)
		Argentina (6)	Facebook (13)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (12)
		Brazil (5)	Other social networks (6)	Monitoring & tracking (9)
		DRC (4)	Email (6)	Taking photos/ video without consent (6)
		USA (3)	Twitter (5)	Faking personal information (6)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Forum listing (5)	Sharing private information (6)
		South Africa (2)	Online chats (4)	Accessing private data (4)
		Uruguay	Youtube (4)	Stealing identity/ money/ property



				(4)
		Chile	Other (3)	Other (3)
		Guatemala	Webcam	
		Ecuador	Television	
		Philippines	Radio	
		South Africa		
		England		
		Uganda		
		Mexico		
Sexual assault & rape	29	Congo (8)	Mobile phone (10)	Repeated harassment (12)
		Argentina (5)	Facebook (7)	Other (9)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (5)	Other (7)	Monitoring & tracking (5)
		Malaysia (2)	Twitter (3)	Sharing personal information (5)
		Brazil (2)	Youtube (3)	Taking photo/ video without consent (5)
		USA (2)	Other social networks (2)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (4)
		Egypt (2)	Forum listing (2)	Accessing private data (3)
		New Zealand	Email (2)	Faking personal information (2)
		South Africa	Online chats	Stealing identity/ money/ property
		Canada	Television	
			Newspaper	
Intimate partner violence	17	Congo (8)	Other (8)	Sharing private information (5)
		Philippines (2)	Mobile phone (5)	Other (5)
		Argentina (2)	Facebook (2)	Repeated harassment (5)
		South Africa	Youtube (2)	Monitoring & tracking (3)
		Malaysia	Webcam	Taking photo/ video without consent (3)
		DRC	Forum listing	Threats of violence/ blackmail
		New Zealand	Email	Accessing private data
		Bosnia Herzegovina		Faking personal information



Violence targeting communities	14	Bosnia Herzegovina (4)	Mobile phone (7)	Other (7)
		Malaysia (2)	Facebook (4)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (6)
		DRC (2)	Other (3)	Repeated harassment (4)
		USA	Twitter (3)	Taking photo/ video without consent (3)
		Egypt	Youtube (2)	Monitoring & tracking (2)
		Uganda	Email (2)	Sharing private information (2)
		England	Newspaper (2)	Faking personal information
		Brazil	Online chats	Stealing identity/ money/ property
		Mexico	Forum listing	Accessing private data
			Other social networks	
			Radio	
Culturally-justified VAW	11	DRC (3)	Other (4)	Other (4)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Mobile phone (2)	Repeated harassment (4)
		Uganda (2)	Youtube	Accessing private data (2)
		Brazil	Facebook	Threat of violence/ blackmail (2)
		Congo	Television	Stealing identity/ money/ property
		Malaysia		Faking personal data
				Taking photo/ video without consent
				Monitoring & tracking

Of all the cases listed, the most common violation is repeated harassment, with a total of 43 cases compared with 19 threats of violence or blackmail. The anonymity and burden of proof can potentially make repeated harassment easier online than offline. However, though as the case in the text box reveals this is not always the case – the large number of people who have access to an individual's private data also makes it easier for abusers to find loop-holes in security systems.

Online harm: A continuation of harm offline

A woman in South Africa was abused by the man she had come to love and rely on after finding that she was HIV positive. Nok'bekezela (pseudonym) was abandoned by her son's father after he discovered she was HIV positive, and thought she had found her 'true love' online through Facebook. But her lover read conversations between Nok'bekezela and her friends, accusing her of having affairs, publishing private information and pictures, and



abusing her both physically and emotionally. Even after they no longer lived in the same town, he continued the abuse over Facebook. Nok'bekezela felt she had no choice but to wait until he tired of her – which he eventually did.

What is worrying from this table is the prevalence of sexual assault and rape, forming almost a third of all cases. This amply demonstrates the 'real-world' implications of what happens online – what starts online doesn't necessarily end there. It's also interesting to note the high correlation between sexual assault and rape and repeated harassment, suggesting a potential escalation of sexual violence beginning from repeated harassment. This indicates the need to pay serious attention to the prevalence of online harassment, and to take concrete measures in responding to these situation. One of the main considerations is greater protection and awareness on the issue of right to privacy.

What did the violators do

The most common offence was repeated harassment, which as noted above often coincided with emotional, physical or sexual harm. There were a total of 44 cases of repeated harassment. The second most common was threatening violence or blackmail, with 20 cases. Identity theft was the least common of the offences that TBTT offered as a choice to users.

Repeated harassment: A case from Malaysia

P was in the process of leaving her abusive husband when she received an SMS from him stating he had her phone records and accusing her of having an affair. P was very disturbed as she had not given him her new phone number. When she asked him how he had obtained her number, her husband refused to tell her.

Eventually she discovered that her husband had bribed someone at her mobile phone service provider. Using her private details, he had managed to secure a print out of all the calls she had made and received. He then proceeded to threaten all the people whose numbers were on the record.

When P found this out, she wrote to the service provider and demanded they change her number and make her records private. This ended the harassment and she proceeded with the divorce.

Harm faced

Type of harm	Total cases	Where	Technology involved
Emotional or psychological harm	73	Argentina (17)	Mobile phone (30)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (10)	Other (14)
		Brazil (8)	Facebook (14)
		Congo (7)	Other social networks (8)
		Malaysia (6)	Youtube (7)
		Democratic Republic of Congo (6)	Forum listing or ads (6)
		USA (3)	Email (5)
		South Africa (3)	Twitter (5)



		Guatemala (2)	Television (4)
		Canada (2)	Online chats (4)
		New Zealand (1)	Radio (3)
		Gabon (1)	Newspaper (2)
		Chile (1)	Webcam (2)
		Uganda (1)	
		Egypt (1)	
		England (1)	
		Uruguay	
		Mexico (1)	
Harm to reputation	45	Argentina (11)	Mobile phone (14)
		Brazil (9)	Facebook (14)
		Malaysia (8)	Other (12)
		Congo (7)	Forum listing (7)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (2)	Other social networks (7)
		Democratic Republic of Congo (2)	Email (5)
		Uruguay (2)	Online chats (5)
		Uganda (1)	Youtube (4)
		South Africa (1)	Twitter (4)
		New Zealand (1)	Newspaper (2)
		USA	Radio (1)
			Television (1)
			Webcam (1)
Physical harm	36	Congo (10)	Other (12)
		Argentina (8)	Facebook (8)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (7)	Mobile phone (8)
		Brazil (2)	Twitter (4)
		USA (2)	Email (4)
		Egypt (2)	Other social networks (3)
		Malaysia (1)	Youtube (2)
		South Africa (1)	Forum listing (2)
		Canada (1)	Online chats (2)
		Colombia	Television (1)



		Mexico	
Sexual harm	26	Congo (4)	Mobile phone (9)
		Argentina (4)	Facebook (7)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (4)	Other (5)
		Brazil (3)	Youtube (3)
		USA (2)	Forum listing (2)
		South Africa (2)	Other social networks (2)
		Malaysia (2)	Twitter (2)
		Democratic Republic of Congo (2)	Online chats (1)
		Uganda (1)	Email (1)
		Canada (1)	Newspaper (1)
		Egypt (1)	
Loss of identity	9	Congo (3)	Other (5)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Facebook (3)
		Democratic Republic of Congo (1)	Forum listing (2)
		Brazil (1)	Mobile (2)
		Argentina (1)	Other social network (1)
			Youtube (1)
			Online chats (1)
			Email (1)
Mobility limited	6	Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Mobile phone (2)
		Uganda (1)	Other (1)
		Democratic Republic of Congo (1)	Facebook (1)
		USA (1)	Online chats (1)
			Email (1)
Censorship	6	Guatemala (2)	Forum listing or ads (3)
		Brazil (2)	Other social networks (3)
		Chile (1)	Youtube (3)
		Argentina (1)	Television (2)
			Other (2)
			Email (2)
			Twitter (2)



			Facebook (2)
			Online Chats (Skype, IM) (1)
			Mobile phone (1)
Loss of property	1	Mexico	Mobile phone
			Facebook
			Email

It is clear from these figures that the harm that is happening to women online is generally not the harm that is being addressed by international conventions on internet rights and related issues – censorship and identity loss form a small fraction of the cases reported.

Far more prevalent is harm that falls under more widely known areas of violence against women – emotional, physical or sexual harm. This suggests that despite the online nature of the violation, the harm that is faced has serious offline repercussions. Attention is urgently needed to address physical, emotional or sexual harm faced by women that is perpetrated through new technologies - an area that still receives relatively little attention [in policy discourse around cybercrime](#) or internet rights issues.

The other area of harm which is significant is harm to reputation.

Technology platform

The most common technology platform where the violence took place, or the ICT tool which was used to perpetrate harm is the mobile phone – 67 of the above cases, compared to 50 for Facebook and 51 other. "Other" is a category that was used mainly on reports of violence against women that was not related to ICT. This points to both the value of an accessible and open mapping platform to monitor and document cases of violence against women where women can report violence and harm anonymously, as well as a need for it, which the TBTT map addressed although this was not the focus of the platform. These cases were primarily from Congo and Bosnia Herzegovina.

A story without technology: Why more spaces are needed for online sharing

From the Congo, the story of Mamie

When she was 10 years old, Mamie was sent to the shops to buy drinks for some family friends who were visiting. On the way, a man – a friend of her father's – waylaid her, forced her into his car and took her to an isolated spot – the city cemetery. There, he slapped her and forced himself onto her. She was later found, in tears, by a family who came to the cemetery. They took her to hospital, where her family found her. The abuser was prosecuted and received a two-year sentence, while Mamie continues to live with shame and the inability to engage in loving sex well into her adult life.

Perpetrator/Violator

Abuser	Total	Country	Platform	Type of violation
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	cases			
A group of people	21	Malaysia (4)	Mobile phone (7)	Repeated harassment (9)
		Brazil (3)	Facebook (7)	Other (7)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Television (3)	Taking photo/ video without consent (6)
		Argentina (2)	Newspaper (3)	Sharing private information (4)
		USA (2)	Youtube (3)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (3)
		Egypt (2)	Other social networks (3)	Accessing private data (2)
		Uganda (1)	Other (2)	Stealing identity, money, etc
		Guatemala	Twitter (2)	Faking personal data
		Uruguay	Online chat (2)	Monitoring & tracking
		South Africa	Forum listing (2)	
		Canada	Webcam	
			Radio	
	Email			
Government/ State	10	Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Mobile phone (2)	Other (6)
		Argentina	Email (2)	Repeated harassment (3)
		Guatemala	Television (2)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (2)
		Malaysia	Twitter (2)	Taking photo/ video without consent
		USA	Facebook	
		Egypt	Forum listing	
		England	Newspaper	
		DRC	Youtube	
Internet platform	8	Malaysia (3)	Facebook (3)	Repeated harassment (5)
		Argentina (2)	Other social networks (2)	Sharing private information (3)
		Uruguay	Online chats (2)	Monitoring & tracking (3)
		USA	Forum listing (2)	Accessing private data
		Guatemala	Youtube	Other
			Webcam	Taking photo/ video without consent
			Mobile phone	Faking personal information



			Youtube	Threats of violence/ blackmail
			Email	
			Television	
Someone known	53	Congo (13)	Mobile phone (23)	Repeated harassment (28)
		Argentina (10)	Other (17)	Other (11)
		DRC (7)	Facebook (6)	Monitoring & tracking (11)
		Malaysia (6)	Other social networks (6)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (9)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (5)	Youtube (5)	Sharing private information (9)
		Brazil (4)	Online chats (3)	Taking photo/ video without consent (9)
		Philippines (2)	Forum listing (3)	Accessing private information (5)
		South Africa (2)	Twitter (2)	Faking personal information (2)
		Uruguay	Radio (2)	Stealing identity/ money/ property
		New Zealand	Television (2)	
		Uganda	Newspaper (2)	
		Chile	Webcam (2)	
		USA	Email (2)	
		Canada		
Someone unknown	31	Malaysia (6)	Facebook (12)	Repeated harassment (10)
		Argentina (6)	Mobile phone (10)	Threats of violence/ blackmail (9)
		Brazil (5)	Forum listing (6)	Other (8)
		Bosnia Herzegovina (3)	Other social networks (5)	Sharing private information (5)
		USA (2)	Email (5)	Monitoring & tracking (5)
		Colombia	Twitter (4)	Taking photo/ video without consent (4)
		DRC	Other (3)	Faking personal data (4)
		Uganda	Online chats (3)	Stealing identity/ money/ property (3)
		England	Newspaper (2)	Accessing private data (3)
		Mexico	Youtube (2)	



	South Africa	Television	
	Uruguay		
	Philippines		
	Egypt		

From this table, we find that the abuser or violator is consistent with what is reported in offline violence against women: the person you're most likely to be abused by is someone known to you, not the stranger lurking on Facebook.

In cases where the abusers were a group of people, the cases were split between groups of people known to the victim (schoolmates, family, friends) and strangers. Often when abusers were a group not known to the victim, the abusers were targeting women due to their opinions, for example, journalists who have faced sexual abuse as a result of their work, or Egyptian bloggers who have been assaulted.

It is interesting to note that out of all the cases reported, 10 cited the government as the abuser/violator, while 8 named internet service or platform providers as being responsible for the violation. Most of these stories point to the failure by authorities to take action despite reports, ranging from reports to the police that were not followed up, to internet platforms like YouTube and Facebook lack of response when their platform is being used to publish and disseminate images, video or content that constituted an act of violence. This indicates that greater clarity and commitment is needed to establish proper accountability models to ensure that survivors of technology-related VAW are able to seek adequate redress and justice.

Conclusion

The picture that is emerging from the stories and experiences reported through the TBTT mapping platform provides invaluable insight into the dimensions of technology-related violence against women.

They provide a sense of what is the scope of the issue, the linkages between online and offline violence, the real and material harm faced by survivors and the need for greater measures to first, recognise the gravity of the issue, and secondly, measures to ensure that survivors are able to gain support and access to justice.

It also indicates that ICT and online spaces have become a significant component and extension of the reality of violence against women, and thus far, insufficient attention has been paid to it by state, non-state and civil society actors who are committed to addressing and eliminating violence against women, as well as who are engaged in debates around internet rights and policy.

The TBTT map is a pilot effort to provide a collaborative monitoring platform that focuses on the role and connection between ICT and violence against women. It is made possible through the commitment, engagement and participation of the campaign partners in Asia, Latin America and Africa who work on issues of violence against women as well as internet rights from feminist



perspectives. Campaigners provided translation into their local languages, organised trainings and discussions on the issue and brought the mapping platform to their communities and partners through their Take Back the Tech! 16 days campaign activities.

Beyond this year's campaign, it is hoped that the map will continue to grow and become a sustainable and useful platform for the documentation, monitoring and surfacing of experiences of technology-related VAW that women and girls face in different parts of the world, and stand also as a testimony to their stories of survival.

