

# **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN JAMAICA**

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Regional Fund for Digital Innovation  
in Latin America and the Caribbean



The University of the West Indies, Mona

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# Violence against Women and the use of Information and Communication Technologies in Jamaica

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Most importantly, we recognize and are very grateful to those who participated in the research exercise including survey respondents, focus group participants, experts, and especially all the courageous women who were willing to share their difficult experiences with us. Their strength gives us hope that the findings of this research can increase awareness and action to address online abuse and the links to physical violence particularly against women in Jamaica.

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# Table of Contents

- 1. Executive Summary .....1
- 2. Background – VAW and ICTs in Jamaica .....3
- 3. Research Questions and Conceptualization .....5
  - 3.1. Conceptual Model.....5
- 4. Research Design .....6
  - 4.1. Methodology .....6
    - 4.1.1. National Survey .....6
    - 4.1.2. Structured Interviews .....7
    - 4.1.3. Focus Groups .....9
    - 4.1.4. Expert Interviews .....9
- 5. Research Findings – The Relationships between ICTs and VAW in Jamaica .....10
  - 5.1. Online Activities .....10
    - 5.1.1. Technology Habits .....10
    - 5.1.2. Online Interactions .....12
      - 5.1.2.1. Observing Abuse Online .....13
      - 5.1.2.1. Experiencing Abuse Online.....15
      - 5.1.2.2. Committing Abuse Online .....15
    - 5.2. ICTs and Risk Factors for VAW .....21
      - 5.2.1. ICTs as Tools of Control .....21
      - 5.2.2. Using Social Media to Inflict Harm .....21
      - 5.2.3. Online Interactions and Offline Violence.....22
    - 5.3. Practical Strategies for Individuals .....23
  - 6. Policy Recommendations – How to address the challenge of Cyber-violence and Online Harassment in Jamaica .....26

## List of Tables

Table 1 - Sample Size by Parish .....7

## List of Figures

Figure 1 – Number of Survey Respondents by Age Group .....8

Figure 2 – Median Age at which Persons start using Devices/Internet .....10

Figure 3 – Primary Location for Accessing the Internet .....11

Figure 4 – Activities on the Internet by Frequency .....11

Figure 5 – Non-voice related Activities on Phone by Frequency .....12

Figure 6 – Are certain platforms more friendly by Gender .....13

Figure 7 – Observing abuse or harassment online of others) .....14

Figure 8 – Relationship with perpetrator of online abuse .....16

Figure 9 – Location of online abuse).....16

Figure 10 – Committing Abuse Online .....17

Figure 11 – Whether different kinds of online abuse are morally wrong .....18

Figure 12 – Indirect types of online abuse .....19

Figure 13 - Whether different kinds of indirect actions are morally wrong .....19

Figure 14 – Views on online abuse and online sexual harassment in Jamaica .....20

Figure 15 – Knowing how to change or check privacy settings online .....24

Figure 16 – Precautions taken online .....24

## I. Executive Summary

Existing research points out that a large number of women and girls in Jamaica suffer from gender based violence. In fact, violence against women (VAW) is a problem throughout the Caribbean region. At the same time, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) have grown rapidly in recent years. We note that there is now some evidence, particularly from the media, to suggest that ICTs are being used to undermine the rights of women and girls and to promote violence online and offline. However, there is a lack of research in Jamaica on this topic that can inform policy-makers and those in support services. This research project addresses that gap through the collection of empirical data that included a national survey of Internet users, interviews with survivors of abuse, focus groups, and expert interviews.

Some of the main findings from our survey research include:

- People start using ICTs at a relatively early age. More importantly, the median age at which persons start using the Internet is 16 years.
- Approximately 65% or two-thirds of respondents report observing some kind of abuse or harassment online.
- In sum approximately 20% of respondents said they had experienced some form of harassment or abuse online. However, the group that was most likely to experience some form of harassment or abuse were women aged 18 to 29; 30% of these respondents reported experiencing online abuse
- Approximately 18% of respondents said that they had abused another person online. Men were more likely than women to physically threaten someone online or to com-

municate with someone in a way that made them uncomfortable.

- 13% of respondents said they had received and forwarded a nude video of others online and 48% said they had watched a video online of someone being physically abused.

Our research also highlighted the ways in which social media and phones are used as tools of control, particularly in abusive relationships. Social media is also used to directly attack the reputation of the individual. This includes the use of “revenge porn” or distributing sexually related material of someone online against his or her will. We should also recognize that social media is used to threaten homosexuals by “outing” them publicly. People in the trans-sexual community can also be singled out via social-media as well. Finally, we noted the ways in which online interactions are linked with offline sexual violence.

To address these challenges we outline several practical strategies to keep individuals safe online. These include:

1. A starting point is being careful on what materials you share online.
2. Ensure that you know how to manage the privacy settings of whichever app or website you are using.
3. Be careful about whom you share information with on social media applications.
4. Practice good digital security including using effective passwords and anti-virus software.
5. Knowing that it’s NEVER your fault. Indeed, the only person to blame is the harasser.

At a public level we highlight the need for action through several policy and other recommendations:

- As a first step the government, civil society, and the public in general need to recognize that this is a problem; which will only grow as most Internet users are young.
- One way to address this is to have a national campaign to raise awareness and educate users about the implications of our online activities and what we can do to be safer – ideally using social media.
- Another recommendation is to have workshops that target young girls in the secondary school system. We were given anecdotal evidence that this is a significant group as they are singled out for online harassment and for sexual violence offline.
- Given the number of women who make up their membership, churches are an ideal venue to not only raise awareness about the problems and strategies to address online harassment, but to also have broader discussions about VAW in the country.
- Another issue of particular importance is to improve the state’s legal apparatus to deal with sexual violence. However, addressing the problem of online harassment will require a multi-sectoral approach and it should not be defined as a “gender” problem that only a handful of agencies should address.
- Finally, we recommend that more research is needed on this issue – specifically with regard to how children (those under 18 years who were not included in this study) use the Internet.





## 2. Background – VAW and ICTs in Jamaica

There is growing recognition that the violence against women and girls can be perpetrated with the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in a very real way. This includes online stalking, harassment, invasion of privacy, “revenge porn,” and the unauthorized distribution of sexually and other personal material. While the full scale of the problem<sup>1</sup> is unclear in many countries, there is increasing evidence about the nature and extent of the problem. Also of note is a report by the World Wide Web Foundation that found 60% of women (and men) aged 18-24 years across nine cities in developing countries experience online abuse.<sup>2</sup> This is significant when we realize that abusing women online will limit the benefits of ICTs for the development for a significant part of the population.<sup>3</sup>

Within the Caribbean and in Jamaica in particular, there is insufficient recognition of the relationships between ICTs and violence against women (VAW), although there is significant attention (without the associated action) paid to the latter. VAW in its many forms continues to be a serious problem in Jamaica. For example, the UN Women Caribbean Office notes that the national reported incidence of rape was more than three times the global average in 2007.<sup>4</sup> A 2008 national survey reported that 35% of women experienced some form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> This is a

problem experienced in the wider Caribbean as, for example, 47% of adolescent girls in the region describe their sexual initiation as “forced”.<sup>6</sup>

These trends are detrimental not only for private lives but also for public life and ultimately the social, economic and political development of the country and region. One immediate impact is in terms of the costs of treating victims of intimate partner violence, which can amount to a significant proportion of a hospital’s operating budget.<sup>7</sup> There are of course other costs and economic impacts such as loss of productivity, job loss, lost income, legal fees, and costs for social services. These are distinct from the psychological and other inter-personal outcomes of VAW.

At the same time, the people of the Jamaica have registered an increased use in information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as Internet use and mobile phones (which is near universal). Given the pervasive nature of both gender based violence and ICT use in Jamaican life, there are areas of overlap. More specifically, technology can be used as a tool to effect violence against women.

A few examples are instructive. In August 2009, a Jamaican woman reportedly committed suicide in response to threats from her husband to post videos of her of a sexual nature on the

1. See for example [http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/casesummaries\\_tbt.pdf](http://www.genderit.org/sites/default/upload/casesummaries_tbt.pdf) (Accessed October 2015).

2. <http://webfoundation.org/about/research/womens-rights-online-2015/> (Accessed October 2015).

3. <http://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/480-bpf-online-vaw-synthesis26062015/file> (Accessed October 2015).

4. <http://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/caribbean-gender-portal/caribbean-gbv-law-portal/gbv-in-the-caribbean> (Accessed December 2014)

5. Jamaica National Family Planning Board. (2008). 2008 Reproductive Health Survey. Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica National Family Planning Board.

6. Amnesty International. (2006). Sexual Violence against Women and Girls in Jamaica: “just a little sex.” Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/44c5f2a24.html>

7. Mansingh, A., & Ramphal, P. (1993). The nature of interpersonal violence in Jamaica and its strain on the national health system. *The West Indian Medical Journal*, 42(2), 53–56.

Internet.<sup>8</sup> In 2006, several boys and a church deacon were charged with sexual assault of a 13-year old girl. The video of the assault was recorded on their mobile phones.<sup>9</sup> While recording violence is one issue, online interactions are another concern. In 2007, reporters from the Daily Gleaner newspaper in Jamaica posed as a 14-year girl on a popular social networking website to illustrate the high degree to which children are vulnerable to paedophiles and others online. Another article reported findings of the Jamaican Police who note that perpetrators use social media sites to meet victims offline and commit sexual violence.<sup>11</sup> Finally, one case that gained attention (in 2012) involved a man who hacked into the computers of women and stole among other things nude photos. He then attempted to extort money from these women by posting the photos online.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, there are in fact many such cases in the Caribbean and globally as well. Several observers have therefore pointed to the relationship between ICTs and VAW as a potential area for intervention and exploration.<sup>13</sup> The relationship can have both positive and negative effects on people's attitudes and actions towards men and women. For example, although ICTs can be used in a harmful manner, they can also be used to create spaces for adolescents to learn about violence against women, for survivors to articulate and broadcast their experiences in new ways, and to create online networks of groups working against VAW.<sup>14</sup>

Within the Caribbean, however, there is little empirical research on the relationship between these two phenomena. There is evidence to suggest that ICTs are being used to support other spheres related to women's empowerment such as women's livelihoods, advocacy efforts, and delivery of health-care.<sup>15</sup> Other research suggests differences in how men and women use mobile phones where for example, women are more likely to use mobile phones to participate in social networks.<sup>16</sup>

However, in general we argue that there is insufficient understanding of the social and individual implications of Internet use in the Jamaican society. Given that the anecdotal evidence mentioned above suggests that ICTs are being used to undermine the rights of women and girls and to promote violence, there remains a need to understand the relationship between ICTs and VAW in Jamaica. This study explores this relationship through the collection of empirical data and analysis that yields new insights into how ICTs are used to perpetuate VAW in the Jamaican context. This is the first such study of its kind in Jamaica and indeed the Caribbean. It provides theoretical contributions in terms of the causal links between the unique communication functions of specific ICTs and different forms of VAW. The research also provides practical recommendations for the government, civil society, and the public to reduce the potential for VAW based on online activities. It is hoped that these recommendations and analysis will bring greater public awareness and action around the issue of ICTs and VAW.

8. [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/westernnews/157363\\_-I-didn-t-kill-Patricia-](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/westernnews/157363_-I-didn-t-kill-Patricia-) (Accessed July 2014)

9. [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/108944\\_Deacon--three-teenage-boys-denied-bail](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/108944_Deacon--three-teenage-boys-denied-bail) (Accessed July 2014)

10. <http://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20070128/lead/lead4.html> (Accessed July 2014)

11. <http://old.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20110520/lead/lead5.html> (Accessed July 2014)

12. <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Man-arrested-for-posting-women-s-nude-photos-online> (Accessed July 2014)

13. Kee, J. S. M. (2005). Cultivating violence through technology? South Africa: Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme. Retrieved from [http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/VAW\\_ICT\\_EN.pdf](http://www.apc.org/en/system/files/VAW_ICT_EN.pdf)

14. Ibid.

15. Muturi, N. (2005). Gender, ICTs and health in the Caribbean. In S. Cummings, H. van Dam, & M. Valk (Eds.), *Gender and ICTs for development. A Global Sourcebook* (pp. 61–74). The Netherlands: KIT (Royal Tropical Institute), Oxfam GB.

16. Dunn, H., & Dunn, L. (2007). *Genderstanding mobile telephony. Women, men and their use of the cellular phones in the Caribbean* (p. 39). DIRSI - Regional Dialogue on the Information Society.

### 3. Research Questions and Conceptualization

#### 3.1. Conceptual Model

For purposes of this project, we draw from the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women to define VAW.<sup>17</sup> That is, violence against women includes physical, sexual, or psychological acts of abuse against persons based on their gender identity as well as threats of such acts. Such violence can occur in different spaces such as the private (e.g., the household), the public (e.g., at work), and via ICTs.

There is an emerging body of research, on the relationship between ICTs and VAW. Some of the major findings from this literature point to the various ways in which ICTs are used to in violence against women. This includes the distribution of illegal pornography; facilitating sex trafficking; verbal and other abuse in online forums; and stalking, all of which can lead to actual sexual violence.<sup>18</sup> Online stalking is additionally damaging as it can be associated with forms of cyber-crime such as disrupting the woman's Internet service, intercepting communications, or identity theft where the abuser steals private information to harass the woman.<sup>19</sup>

Another issue is that most users of the Internet in Jamaica are young<sup>20</sup> and are more likely to engage in behaviors such as divulging private information about themselves publicly. Alternatively, this may also imply that those who engage in online activities associated with VAW may also be young. Finally, an important feature of some online communications is anonymity which can also lead persons to be more aggressive online.<sup>21</sup>

However, as Southworth et. al. note there is still unfortunately very limited research in this area both in terms of quantitative data, and qualitative data.<sup>22</sup> Thus one research question that we attempt to address in this project is: **(1) What are the levels and types of online activities associated with VAW in Jamaica?**

In addition, we posit that as both phenomena are multi-dimensional there is also a limited understanding of the causal mechanisms that link online activities to VAW. For example, there are different risk factors (individual, community, etc.) that are associated with VAW. At an individual level these risk factors include witnessing or experience violence, educational attainment, and involvement in income generating activities. At a community level factors include membership in certain types of peer groups, norms that support violence or male dominance, and structural discrimination against women.<sup>23</sup> Based on this our second research question is: **(2) How can ICTs influence risk factors associated with VAW.**

For example, one such factor is the controlling behaviour by a husband over his wife. In what ways and under what circumstances do ICTs strengthen or weaken this behaviour. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different communication functions are related to VAW and can better inform interventions to deal with such actions.

17. United Nations General Assembly 1993 - <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm> Accessed July 2014.

18. Hughes, D. (2002). The Use of New Communications and Information Technologies for Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children. *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, 13(1), 129–148.

19. Southworth, C., Finn, J., Dawson, S., Fraser, C., & Tucker, S. (2007). Intimate Partner Violence, Technology, and Stalking. *Violence Against Women*, 13(8), 842–856.

20. See 2009 Caribbean Broadband and ICT Indicators Survey - [http://www.mona.uwi.edu/msbm/sites/default/files/msbm/uploads/Caribbean\\_ICT\\_and\\_Broadband\\_Indicators\\_Data\\_Sheet\\_Jamaica\\_2011\\_19-4-11.pdf](http://www.mona.uwi.edu/msbm/sites/default/files/msbm/uploads/Caribbean_ICT_and_Broadband_Indicators_Data_Sheet_Jamaica_2011_19-4-11.pdf)

21. Chisholm, J. F. (2006). Cyberspace Violence against Girls and Adolescent Females. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1087(1), 74–89.

22. Southworth et al., 2007.

23. Morrison, A., Ellsberg, M., & Sarah Bott. (2007). Addressing Gender-Based Violence: A Critical Review of Interventions. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 22(1), 25–51.



## 4. Research Design

### 4.1 Research Design

#### 4.1. Methodology

This study was based on a mixed methods design. Mixed methods designs helps to examine issues and research problems from multiple perspectives. For this particular study we interviewed survivors, conducted focus groups, interviewed experts, and surveyed the general Internet user population. The data collection methods and procedures are presented below. Using the mixed method design in combination with a triangulation approach the findings from each method are merged together into one overall interpretation.

##### 4.1.1. National Survey

The first component of our research project was a national survey that sought to ascertain people's experiences of online behaviours and perceptions and attitudes towards VAW. The survey instrument was designed and piloted between February and early March 2015.<sup>24</sup> The survey included questions around four major areas:

1. Technology Habits (what kinds of technologies are used and what do people use them for),
2. Online Interactions (personal experiences and observations of how people interact with others online including harassment and abuse),
3. Attitudes towards Gender and Online Behaviours (here respondents were asked a series of normative questions about the roles of men and women in society), and finally

4. A section on general demographic questions.

We employed a quota sampling approach for the survey. The study targeted persons 18 years and over who report being Internet users. The sample was drawn from the Jamaican populace (1,848,609<sup>25</sup>) above the identified cut off age. The determined sample size of 1000 was calculated at the 95% (1.96) confidence level and 5% (+/-5) confidence interval. A two stage cluster sampling strategy was used to select respondents. This facilitated the grouping of respondents in specified geographical region; major towns and cities as opposed to household sampling which would require respondents to visit different households across selected communities or electoral districts.

At stage one; the Jamaican population was divided into fourteen parishes. The quota of respondents for each parish was allocated based on population proportionate to size,<sup>26</sup> therefore Kingston and St. Andrew was allocated 25% of sampled respondents; whereas the remaining 75% of respondents were distributed among the remaining parishes (see Table 1).

At the second stage of sampling the parishes were divided into major towns/cities. A city or major town was randomly selected. Once the major town/city in each parish has been identified, respondents were drafted from each sample frame using the quota sampling technique. Respondents were selected based on their age, gender and income to ensure a national representative sample.

24. In designing the survey instrument we drew on existing surveys such as "Violence against women: an EU-wide survey" - see <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-survey-methodology-sample-and-fieldwork>; and Pew Research Center Survey on Online Harassment – see [http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2014/10/PI\\_OnlineHarassment\\_72815.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/2014/10/PI_OnlineHarassment_72815.pdf)

25. [http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo\\_SocialStats/EndofYearPopulationbyAgeandSex2008.aspx](http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo_SocialStats/EndofYearPopulationbyAgeandSex2008.aspx)

26. [http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo\\_SocialStats/populationbyparish.aspx](http://statinja.gov.jm/Demo_SocialStats/populationbyparish.aspx)



The survey was administered across the country over 3 weeks from the end of March to early April 2015. The total number of respondents was 909 with 60% females and 40% males. The average age of the respondents was approximately 33 years.<sup>27</sup> We grouped persons according to different age groups as illustrated in Figure 1, for purposes of analyses, which are presented later on. In addition, approximately 30% of all respondents reported being married. In terms of levels of education, 42% reported having at least a bachelors degree. **In sum, it is important to note that this sample is not representative of the population as a whole, and instead intentionally represents a younger and more educated sample (i.e., Internet users in Jamaica).**

#### 4.1.2. Structured Interviews

While the survey was able to assess views and experiences of online activities and attitudes associated with VAW, it is limited to short responses given the nature of the method. In addition to this we conducted a series of structured interviews with women who had experienced some form of gender-based violence. We believe this choice of method was appropriate for the Jamaican context. While there exist examples of national household surveys to examine VAW experiences<sup>28</sup>, these would be difficult to implement in a Jamaican culture that is reticent about discussing such matters in public. For example, although the Jamaica National Family Planning Board reported the results of a national survey on VAW in 2008, those results

Table 1 - Sample Size by Parish

PARISH	Total Population	Population Percentage	Sample Size
Kingston & St. Andrew	670,012	0.2473016	247
St. Thomas	94,854	0.035010636	35
Portland	82,777	0.030553012	31
St. Mary	115,056	0.042467199	42
St. Ann	174,536	0.064421282	64
Trelawny	76,107	0.028091113	28
St. James	185,605	0.068506853	69
Hanover	70,378	0.025976538	26
Westmoreland	145,926	0.053861324	54
St. Elizabeth	152,099	0.05613978	56
Manchester	192,155	0.07092446	71
Clarendon	248,112	0.091578203	92
St. Catherine	501,674	0.185168002	185
Total	2,709,291	1	1000

27. The median age of the survey respondents was 30 years.

28. Jamaica National Family Planning Board. (2008). 2008 Reproductive Health Survey. Kingston, Jamaica: Jamaica National Family Planning Board.

were one module in a much broader study looking at health and reproduction in the country. Conducting a household or similar national survey while focusing on VAW (as is the purpose of this project) would be difficult, as few persons would want to participate. Alternatively, by working with women support groups, survivors, and other stakeholders we were better able to recruit participants for more in-depth interviews.

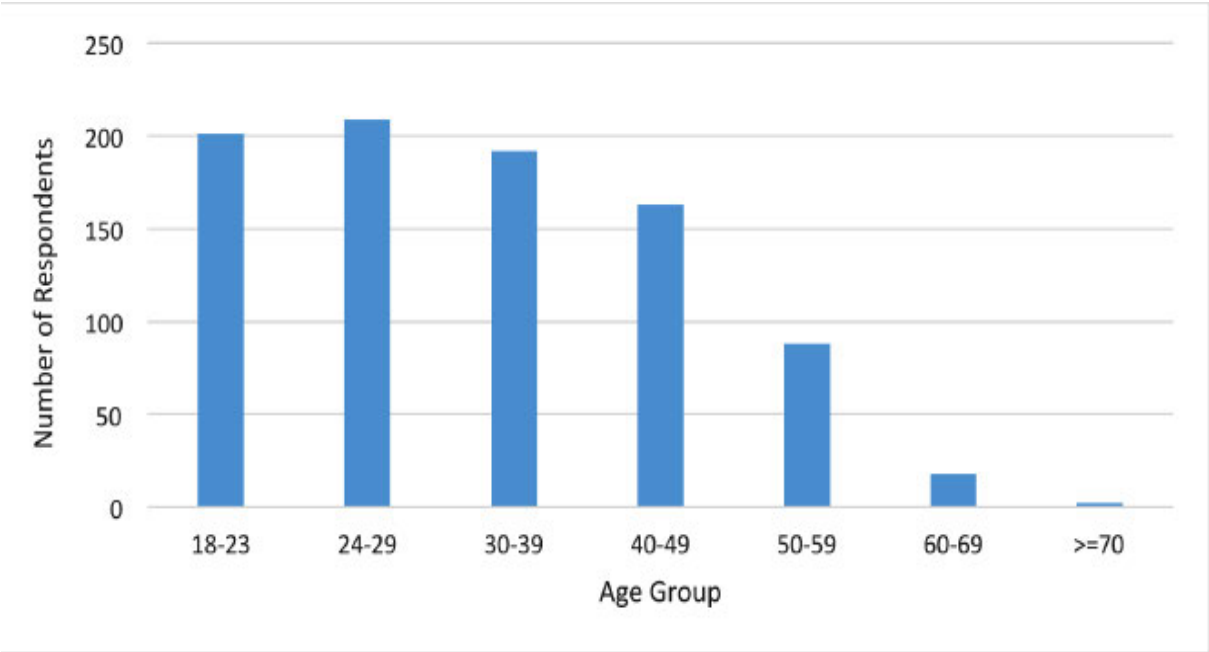
The sampling strategy for the structured interviews relied on both purposive sampling and snowballing approaches. That is we collaborated with women's groups while asking for volunteers to participate in our research project. These participants were then asked to suggest others that would be willing to discuss their experiences. We were able to interview eight women in total from different backgrounds, and

from the parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew, and St. Catherine.

All structured interviews were done in person after participants provided their informed consent to proceed. In addition, adequate measures were taken during the interviews to protect the participant's privacy and anonymity including the use of safe spaces to conduct the interviews. Accordingly, no personal identifiers such as names, birthdates, addresses, etc. were collected or stored. Only female interviewers conducted the interviews and individuals were selected after it was evident that their participation did not place them in any danger. All interviews were conducted between the months June and August 2015.

This interviews consisted of several modules which were used to answer the two main re-

Figure 1 – Number of Survey Respondents by Age Group



search questions of the project:

1. Attitudes towards gender relations
2. Experiences with gender-based violence
3. Levels and patterns of ICT use
4. Experience with sexual harassment while using ICTs
5. Social and demographic questions

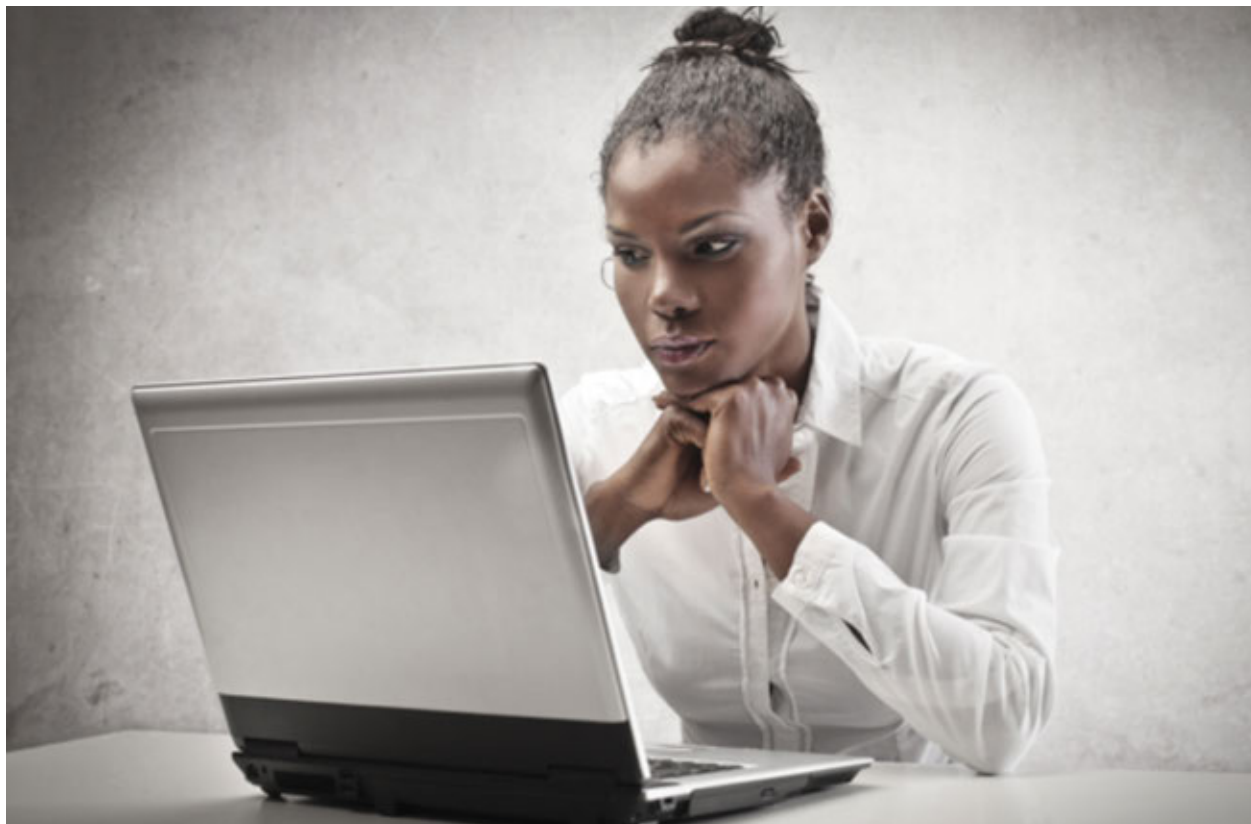
#### **4.1.3. Focus Groups**

The third component of the research project employed focus groups to discuss the relationships between ICTs and VAW. More specifically, the goal was to explore possible causes and impacts of online activities related to VAW among participants. To support the discussions we drew on preliminary results from our national survey. We completed a total of three focus groups which included persons from the professional community, middle class, rural and low socio-economic backgrounds. The sessions also in-

cluded persons from different age groups and both male and females were included. Two focus groups were conducted at the University of the West Indies Mona campus (Kingston) and the third at an elementary school in Tollgate, May Pen in the parish of Clarendon. All focus groups were conducted in April 2015.

#### **4.1.4. Expert Interviews**

Finally, the study drew on open-ended interviews with select persons who are knowledgeable of issues around VAW in both online and offline spaces. This included persons in national women's groups, legal and policy experts, youth leaders, and academics. The purpose of these expert interviews was to gain insight into possible policy and practical solutions to address the problem of the use of ICTs for VAW. These discussions were based in part on results of our research. In total we interviewed eight experts



## 5. Research Findings – The Relationships between ICTs and VAW in Jamaica <sup>29</sup>

between June and August 2015.

### 5.1. Online Activities

Our first set of results detail the platforms and tools that Jamaicans use online. These results are derived from our national survey. It is important to first note these patterns before further discussion on how people interact with each other online, especially with regard to harassment and abuse.

#### 5.1.1. Technology Habits

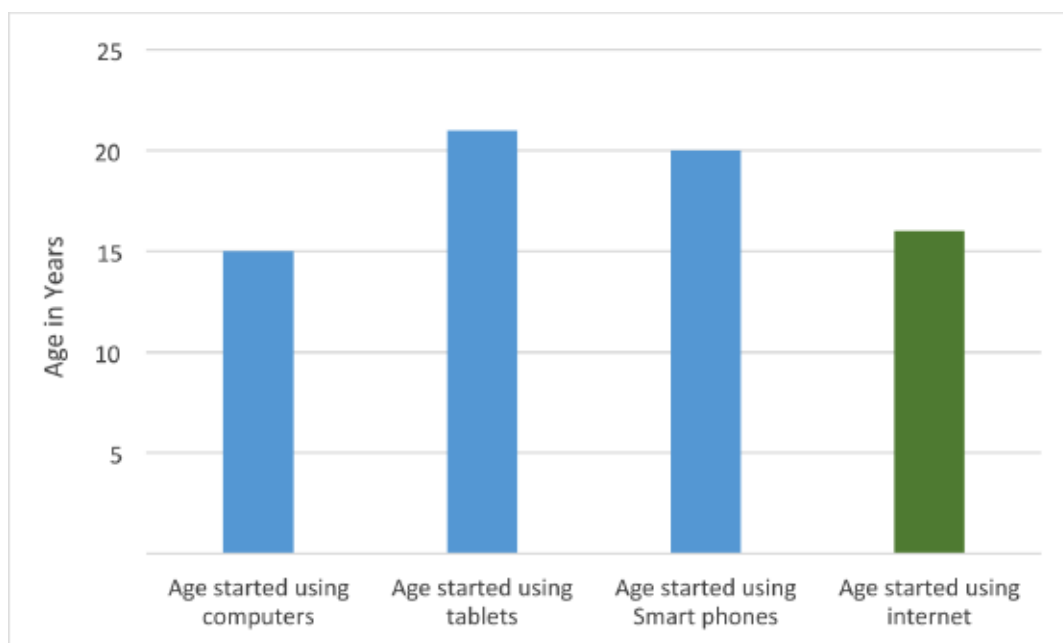
The vast majority (i.e., over 90%) of respondents to the survey reported using desktops, laptops, and smartphones as their main devices for accessing the Internet. A smaller proportion (64%) reported using tablets. **As we can see in Figure 2 people start using these devices at a relatively early age. More importantly, the**

**median age at which persons start using the Internet is 16 years.**

Most of the respondents to the survey (63%) said that they considered themselves to intermediate level users. That is, they do not consider themselves to be beginners or experts with regard to using ICTs. When asked where they access the Internet, most respondents reported from their home (70%), work (47%), or from school (26%) – see Figure 3.

We also asked survey respondents about the kinds of applications and websites they use when online. We first asked about Internet use generally as well as the frequency with which they use certain applications. The responses are summarized in Figure 4. **The most frequent online activities (i.e., those done every time the user is online) are using a search engine, email, and Facebook.**

Figure 2 – Median Age at which Persons start using Devices/Internet



Note that all statistical inferences made in this report are valid to at least the 95% level (i.e.,  $p < 0.05$ ).



Figure 3 – Primary Location for Accessing the Internet

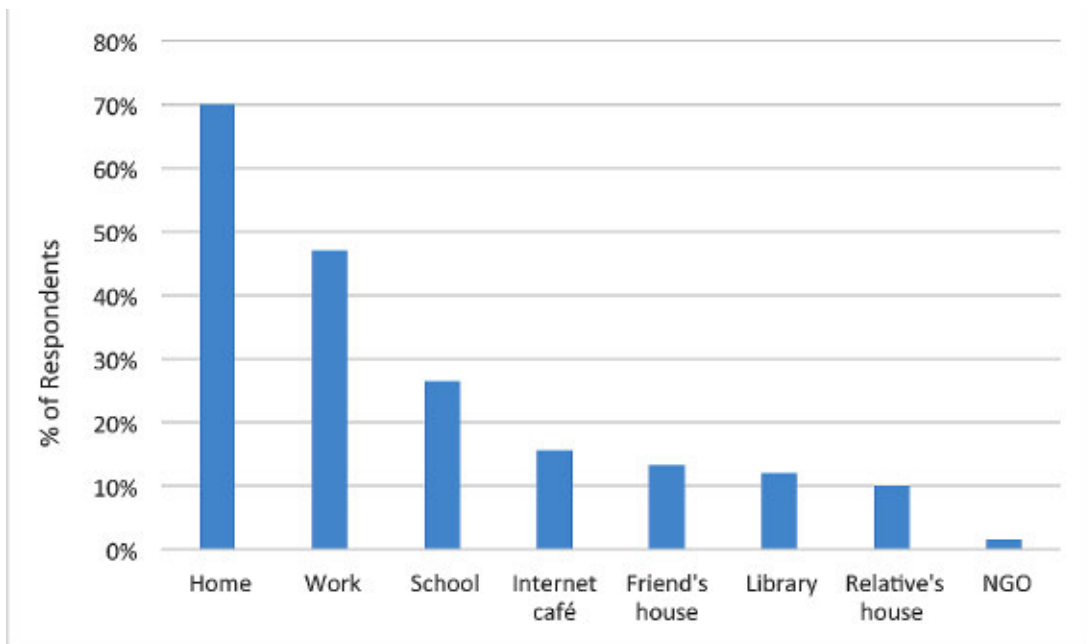
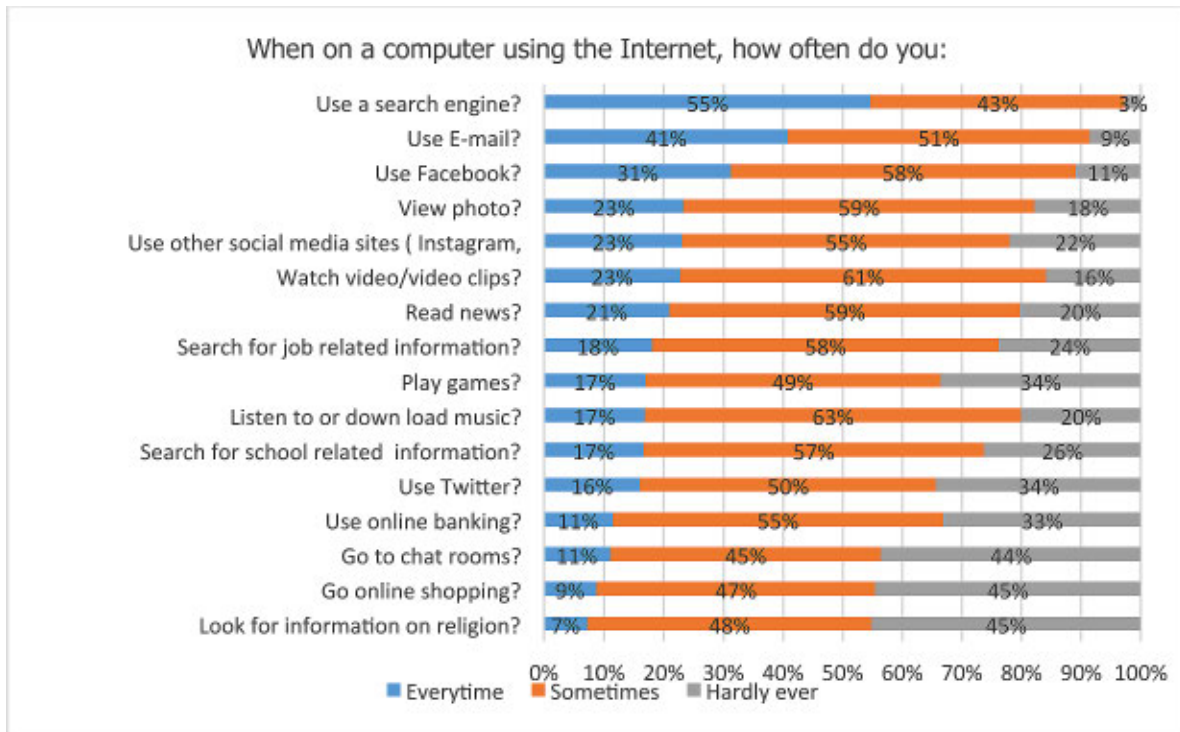


Figure 4 – Activities on the Internet by Frequency (every time, sometimes, hardly ever) - % of respondents



When asked about Internet related activities on their phones, the applications that respondents used most frequently were sending messages (including via Whatsapp), social networking sites (including Facebook), and email (see Figure 5).

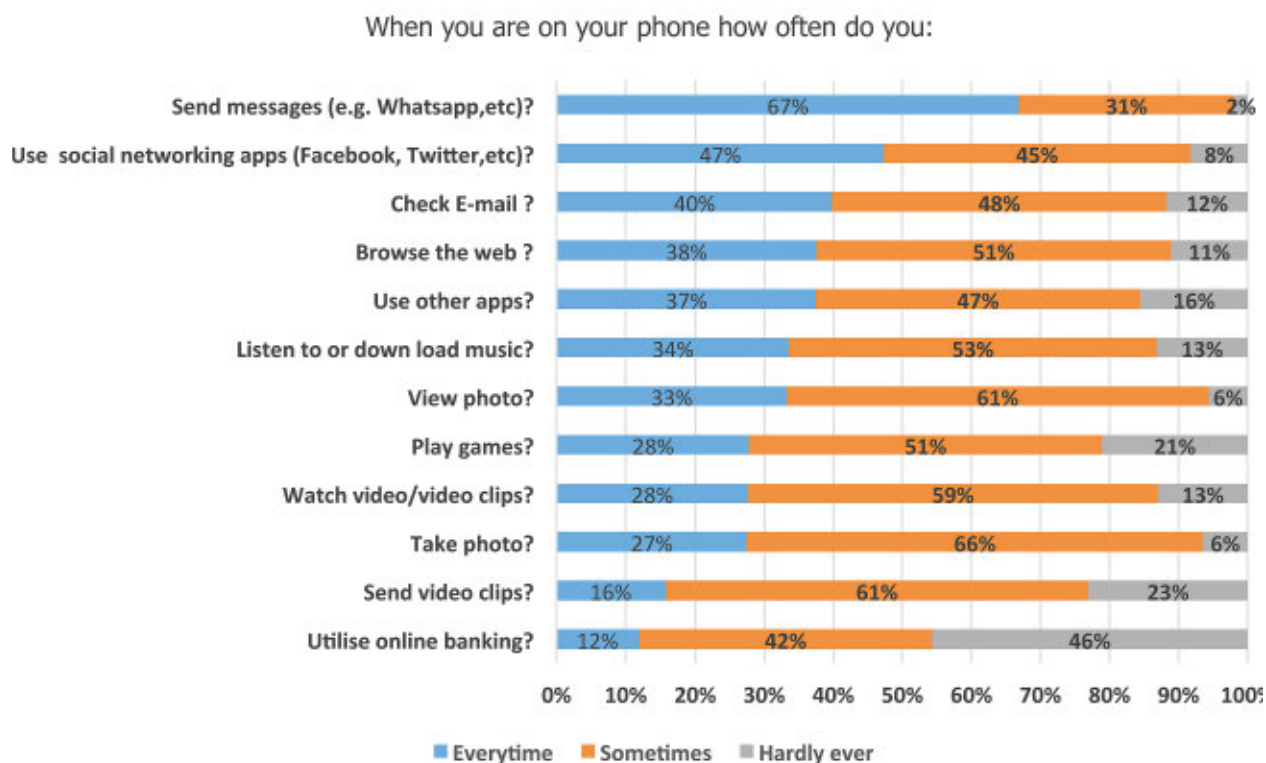
These patterns in Internet use are not that surprising as social networking, email, and web browsing (including search) are all popular and frequently used by respondents when on a stand-alone computer or on a phone. There are in fact similar to those reported in the 2009 Caribbean Broadband and ICT Indicators Survey.<sup>30</sup>

### 5.1.2. Online Interactions

Given these patterns in Internet use, an additional set of questions in the national survey asked about online interactions particularly with

regard to harassment and abuse. We began by asking persons to compare online and offline interactions. Here the majority of respondents (83%) felt that an online space allowed people to be more critical of others compared to offline spaces. A majority also felt that online spaces allowed people to spy on others (88%) and even bully others (72%). In most cases there were no major differences in the views of male compared to female respondents with the exception of being critical of others. Women were marginally more likely (85%) to report that online spaces allow persons to be more critical of others when compared to men (80%). However, this gap is much larger among younger men and women (i.e., those between 24-29 years). Here 91% of women felt that online spaces allow persons to be more critical of others compared to

Figure 5 – Non-voice related Activities on Phone by Frequency (every time, sometimes, hardly ever) - % of respondents



30. See [http://www.mona.uwi.edu/msbm/sites/default/files/msbm/uploads/Caribbean\\_ICT\\_and\\_Broadband\\_Indicators\\_Data\\_Sheet\\_Jamaica\\_2011\\_19-4-11.pdf](http://www.mona.uwi.edu/msbm/sites/default/files/msbm/uploads/Caribbean_ICT_and_Broadband_Indicators_Data_Sheet_Jamaica_2011_19-4-11.pdf)

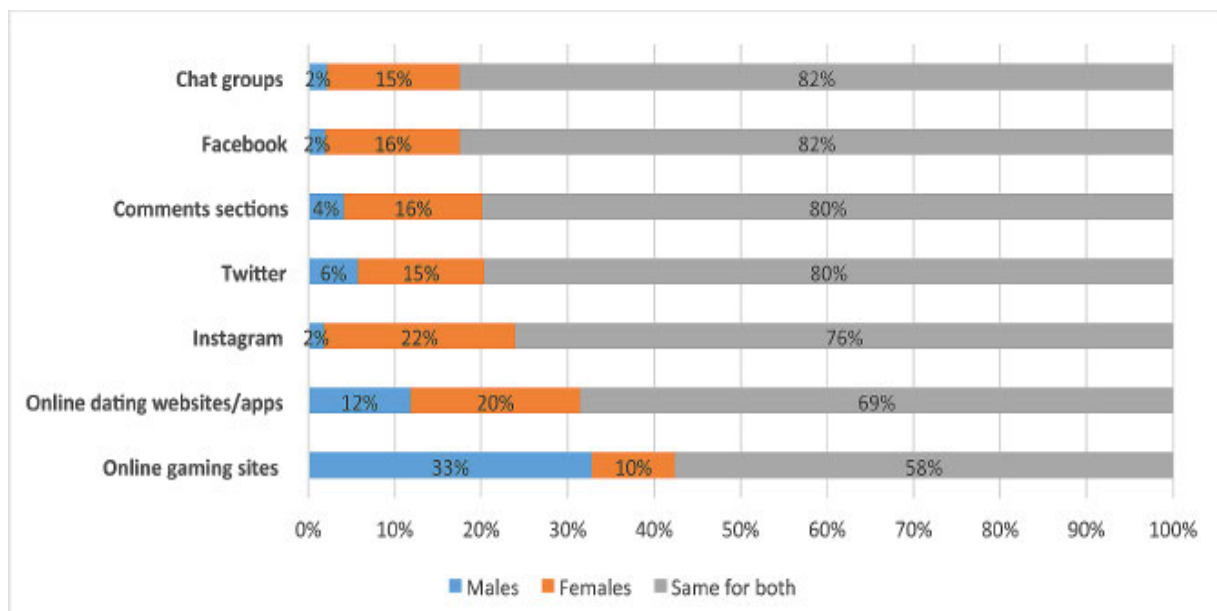
77% of men. The interaction between age and gender in how persons observe as well as interact with each other online is a recurring theme in our findings, a point we shall explore further. To explore how people perceived online spaces we also asked whether certain platforms were friendly for men or women, or whether there was no difference at all. In general, most people thought that most platforms were the same for both men and women as we can see in Figure 6. However, a third of all respondents felt that online gaming sites were friendlier for men. The next highest category of platforms that were reported as male friendly was online dating sites (12% of respondents thought these were more friendly for men). However, 20% of respondents also thought that online dating were friendlier for women. Indeed, apart from online gaming, wherever respondents felt that a platform was friendlier to one sex over the other, they stated that the platform was friendlier to females. For example, 22% of respondents felt that Instagram was friendlier to women, a finding which was supported by comments from participants in two of the focus group discussions.

**These results were dependent on the sex of the respondent. In fact, a male respondent was much more likely to report to that a platform was friendlier to females than the other way around.** This was the case for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, online dating, and online chat groups. The exceptions were online gaming and the comment sections of websites where both men and women responded in a similar way.

### 5.1.2.1. Observing Abuse Online

Going further, the survey also asked whether persons had observed different kinds of harassment or abuse of others online (i.e., an incident that where they were not directly involved). The most frequent response (approximately 53%) was observing someone being verbally abused online (see Figure 7). The least observed activity was sexual harassment of others. In instances where persons observed some kind of online harassment or abuse, 60% of respondents reported that the victim was female. However, 38% said that the perpetrator was male and 34% female. Thus, while the majority of the victims

Figure 6 – Are certain platforms more friendly for men, women, or is it the same for both? (% of respondents)



were female, there were approximately similar proportions of male and female perpetrators.

**In total approximately 65% or two-thirds of respondents report observing some kind of abuse or harassment online.**

While we did not define the terms “harassment” or “abuse” for the survey respondents, we should note that there maybe be different views on their meanings. This stems from a culture in Jamaica where some men feel that it is acceptable to call to women in offensive ways to gain their attention in offline public spaces. Thus, we can observe similar behaviour online. In our focus group discussion we asked participants how assertive should a man be to gain a women’s attention. One woman noted that:

*“He should be very confident but not forceful, because sometimes when u try to force something on someone you just might push*

*them away from you.”*

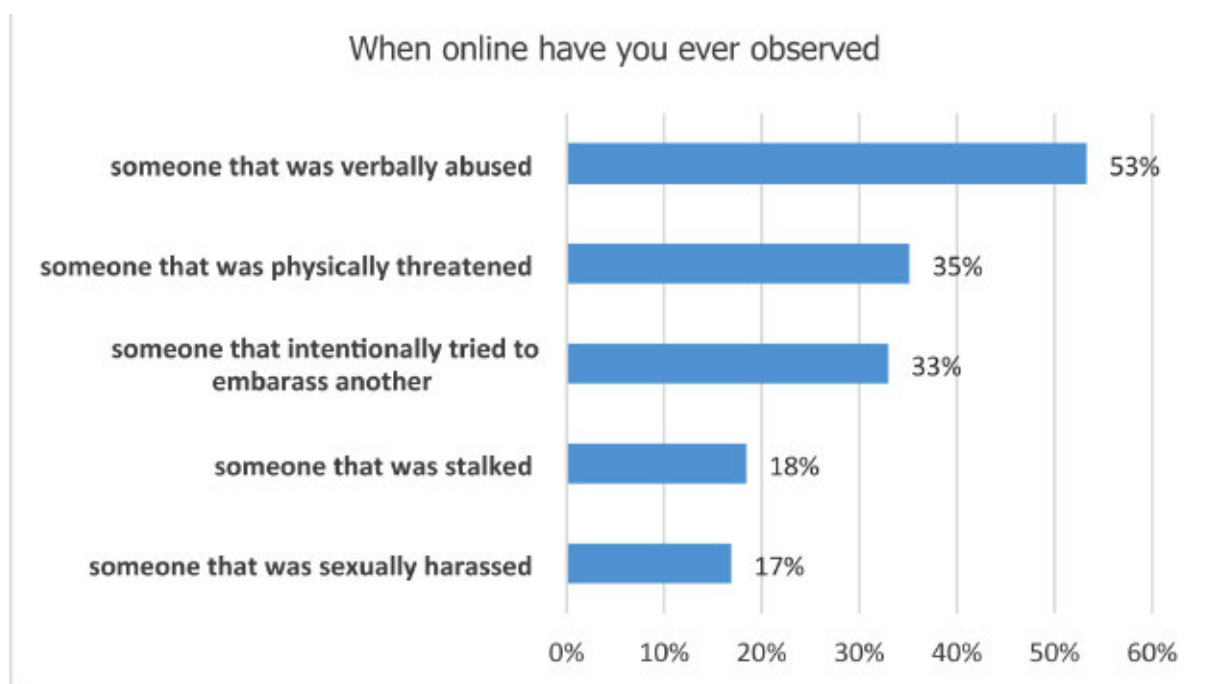
Another woman added to this by saying:

*“when the guy is too smooth she thinks he's too soft, you understand, like him too pale, of a better word to say. If a guy is aggressive or a guy is like “yow my girl me like you body”, you know you have females who like that approach. Well as for me, I prefer a more mild decent approach. So it depends on the woman and the background from which they are coming from.”*

One comment by a man in this same discussion agreed that it depends on the woman and her morals in particular:

*“Ok, because you know you have some guys, when they want to come on to a girl, the first thing they start to do is touching them, you know, in, in ways that the female don't want to be touched. If the girl has certain kind of principle about herself, brought*

Figure 7 – Observing abuse or harassment online of others (% of respondents)





*up in a certain kind of way, then she's going to feel as if, you know, this is some kind of abuse; and you know, because this guy like me "then why you touching me, why him touching me on my bottom" "why is he touching my breast" "why is he touching me on these parts."*

**We would argue that the key point here is that if someone feels that the interaction is no longer assertive but feels like harassment or is abusive then the interaction should be defined as such. Furthermore, regardless of the perception of the woman (or her beliefs), blame can never be placed on the person experiencing the harassment or abuse.**

#### 5.1.2.1. Experiencing Abuse Online

The survey also asked respondents if they experienced online abuse themselves. **In sum approximately 20% of respondents said they had experienced some form of harassment or abuse online.** This included:

- Verbal abuse
- Being physically threatened
- Online stalking
- Being embarrassed
- Sexually harassment

**The group that was most likely to experience some form of harassment or abuse were women aged 18 to 29: 30% of these respondents reported experiencing online abuse.** Note that given the large difference in what people observe and what people report experiencing themselves, there is a possibility that the number of persons who actually experience online abuse is underreported.

The survey respondents also provided brief examples of these experiences. Several of these involve persons sending unsolicited photos or videos over social media networks often seek-

ing sexual relations. For example as one person stated people are:

*"constantly sending photos and continuously expressing emotions and sexually intent even after request to desist."*

The harassment also occurs by just having a social media presence:

*"each time I put up a pic on social media, I'm harassed by people who like my figure and want me to be with them sexually."*

Similarly, men also report having to deal with the consequences of rejecting others. For example, one man reported that

*"I turned down a girl on Instagram and she cursed me calling me small and she would get her friend to beat me up."*

In terms of the sex of the perpetrator, approximately half of respondents said their abuser was male and half said they were female. There was no significant correlation between the sex of the respondent and the sex of the abuser. In terms of their relationship with the person committing the abuse the most common response (21%) was that they were a stranger (see Figure 8). This was followed by acquaintance and friend as the other most common responses.

For those that had experienced online abuse or harassment we asked where the most significant experience occurred. As summarized in Figure 9 below, the most common response unsurprisingly was Facebook (44%) followed by Instagram (10%), and Twitter (6%).

#### 5.1.2.2. Committing Abuse Online

Another aspect of online interactions is where someone actually harasses another person. This was also an issue we raised with the survey respondents. **Approximately 18% of respondents said that they had abused another person online.** Figure 10 details the various ways that this

Figure 8 – Relationship with perpetrator of online abuse (% of respondents)

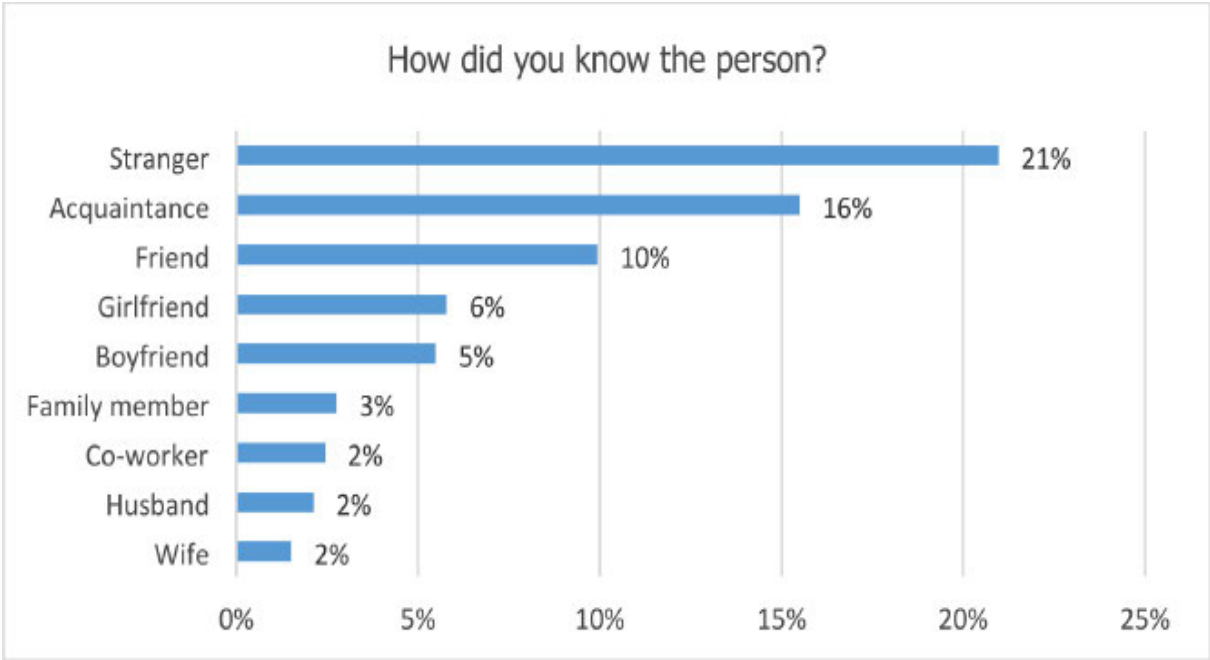
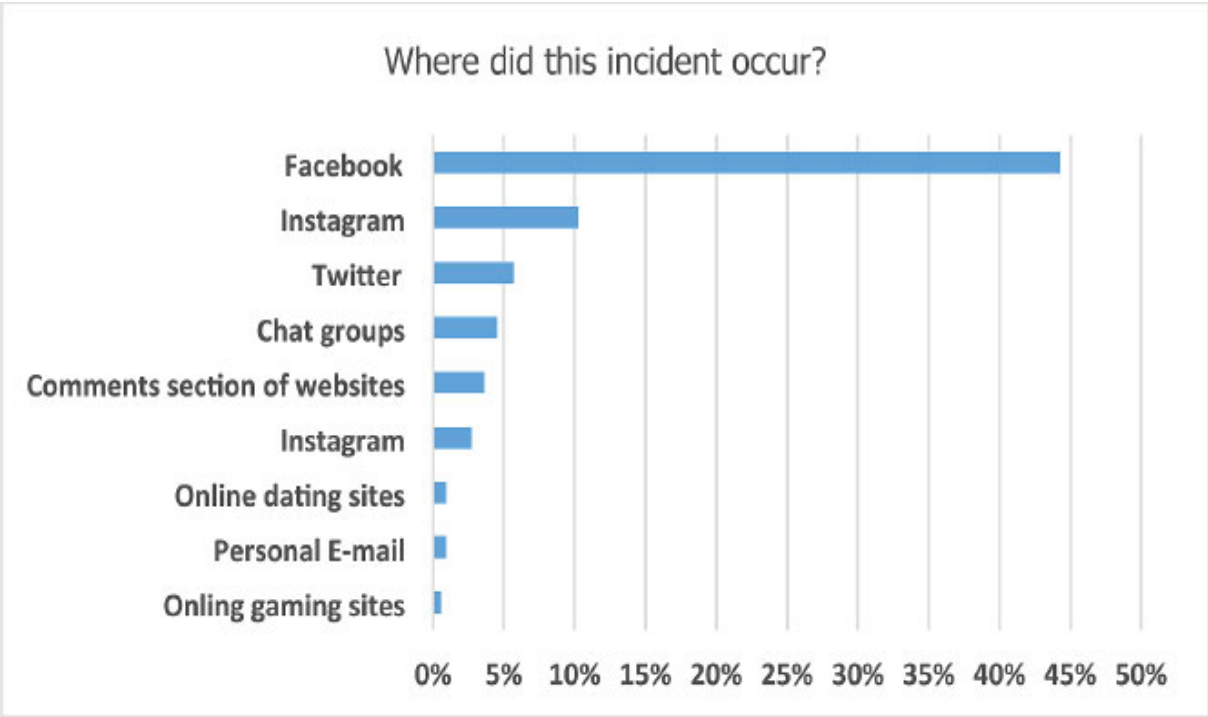


Figure 9 – Location of online abuse (% of respondents)



occurred; the most common response was that they cursed someone else online (15%).

**Men were more likely than women to physically threaten someone online or to communicate with someone in a way that made them uncomfortable. However, there were no real differences between men and women in terms of stalking or “cursing” others.**

**Age is also a factor as approximately 33% of those between 18-23 years said that they committed some form of abuse online.**

When asked to provide more details some respondents suggested their actions stemmed from an argument with another person. For example, one person said that

*“a man was telling lies on me and so I had to curse him out.”*

One man justified the threat of violence by saying that he had

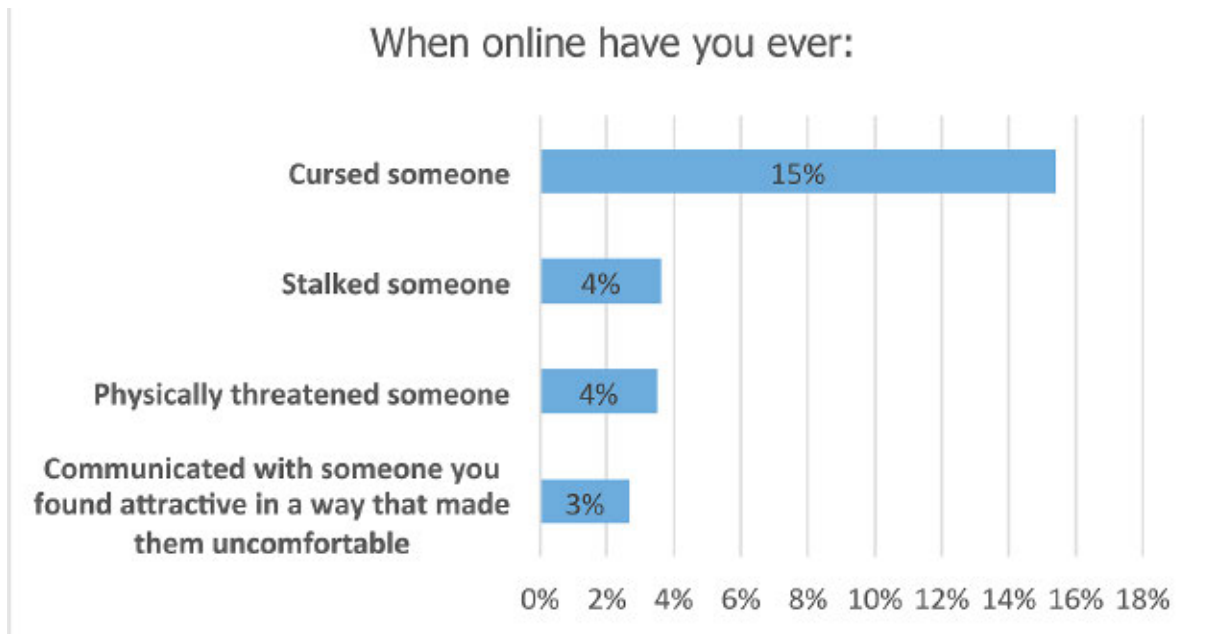
*“cursed out a female online because she was rude and I told her if I was near her I would box her down.”*

Most persons only gave examples related to cursing or threatening others. A different example, however, was related to communications with a person they found attractive. Here one person said

*“I messaged a female about how sexy I think she is and it appeared that she was uncomfortable about it.”*

At the very least, the man in this case appear to recognize that his behaviour was not welcome. In trying to understand the factors driving these behaviours we explored differences in the ways persons viewed the roles and men and women. To do this we asked respondents a set of 25 questions on the role of men and women in the family, the workplace, and society in children. This included who should have a greater say in the household. Each of the questions were graded on a 5 point scale which ranged from an answer that strongly agreed with greater decision-making and autonomy for women to an answer that strongly disagreed with any role for a woman than undermined a man’s decision-making power. This allowed us to create a gender

Figure 10 – Committing Abuse Online (% of respondents)



attitudes index from 0 to 100 for each respondent. The higher the index score the more likely they were to support increased decision-making and empowerment for women. There was a significant difference in the index scores for men and women – on average women scored much higher and were therefore more supportive of greater decision-making for women in public and private spheres. However, there was no difference between those who committed abuse online and those who did not in terms of the gender attitudes index score. Thus, strongly agreeing or strongly disagreeing with increased women’s empowerment had no relationship with whether or not someone would abuse another online.

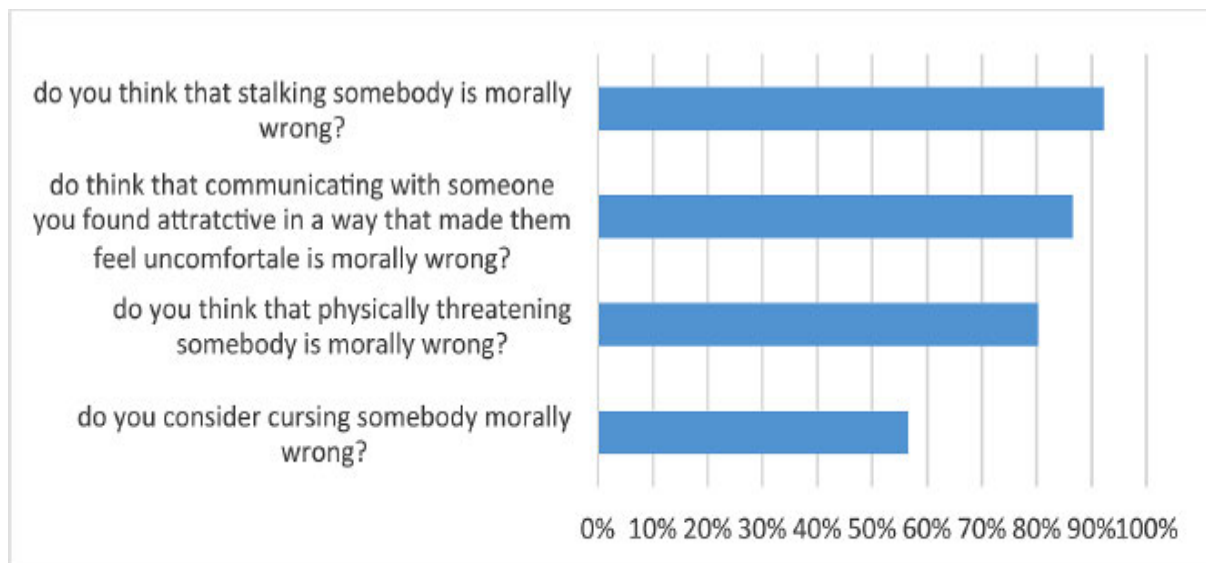
In addition, respondents were asked if they thought various forms of online abuse were morally wrong. Here the majority of the respondents said they thought so (see Figure 11). The category which the fewest number of respondents thought was morally wrong was cursing

someone online (57%); the act which respondents reported doing the most.

Another way in which online abuse can occur is through the indirect actions of an Internet user (see Figure 12). For example, persons often receive nude videos of others that they then forward to or share with other persons. The problem occurs when the person in the video does not consent to this distribution. **When asked if they did these or similar actions 13% of respondents said they had received and forwarded a nude video of others online.** A similar proportion reported doing the same for nude photos. Men were more likely than women to forward nude pictures of others, but there was no real difference between male and females in terms of forwarding videos online. In a focus group discussion, one man said he deleted such pictures while another offered a reason for forwarding images:

*“and he sent me pics and we forward it not out of a willingness to share the image, but more out of disbelief more time (i.e. usually).”*

Figure 11 – Whether different kinds of online abuse are morally wrong (% of respondents)





Thus, there may be no intent to harm the persons in the image or video by sharing it with others, but the indirect harm is often not considered.

While not as damaging as forwarding sexually related material of others without their consent, **the most frequent response of indirect actions was watching a video online of someone being physically abused (48%)**. Some of the descriptions of these videos were graphic.

Figure 12 – Indirect types of online abuse (% of respondents)

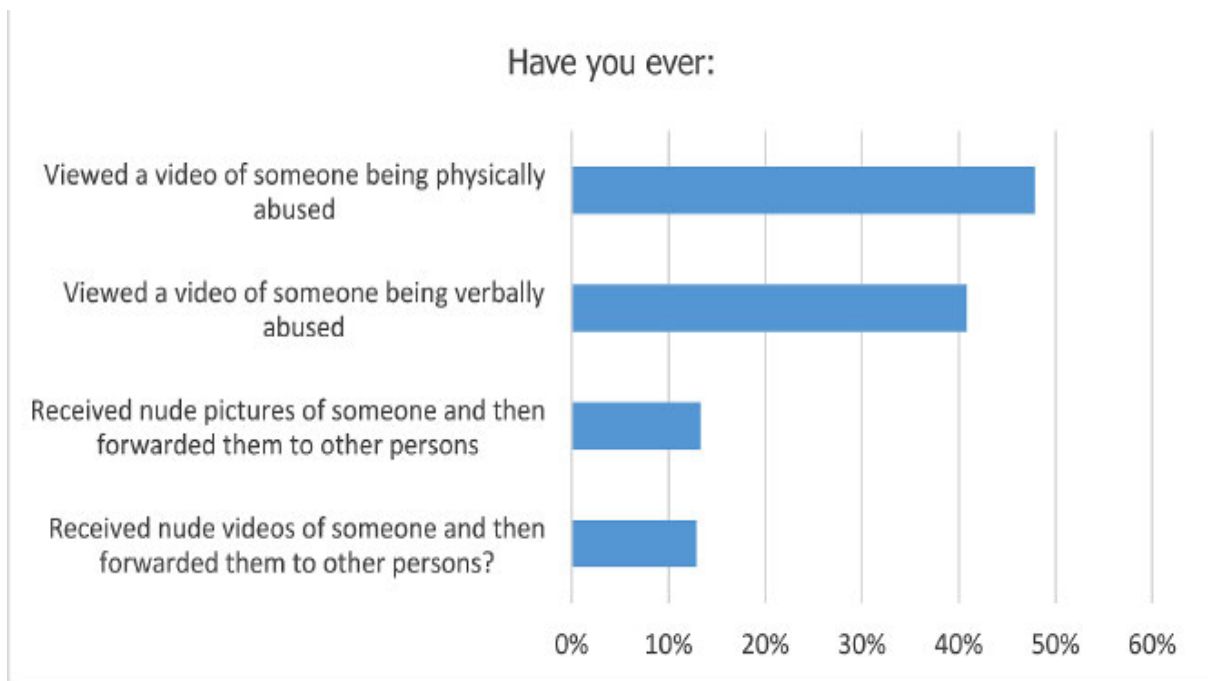
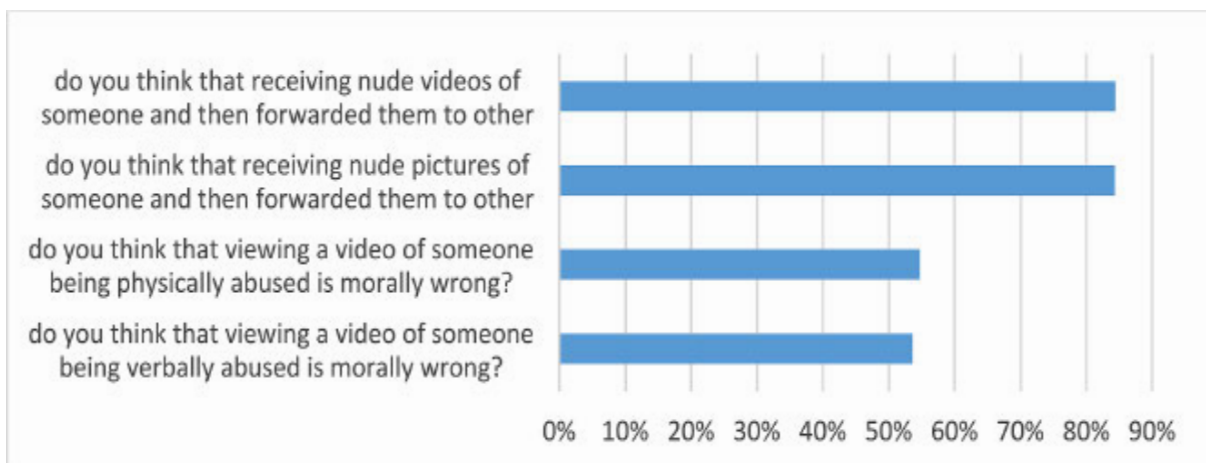


Figure 13 - Whether different kinds of indirect actions are morally wrong (% of respondents)



Examples include

- “a man was beating a woman with a piece of board and kicking her,”*
- “a child was beaten by her dad for eating all of the cornflakes”*
- “a father was beating his daughter”*
- “a mad man was being urged to abuse and have sex with a mad woman”*

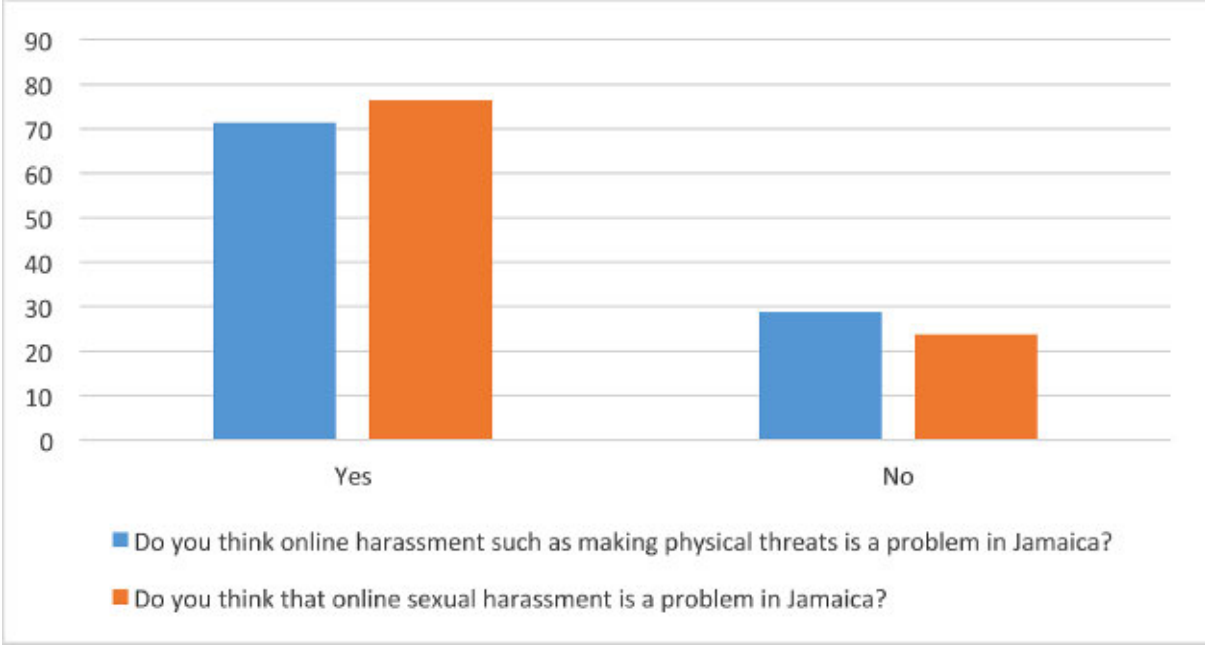
Given that almost half of respondents said they viewed these kinds of videos, we suggest that they also shared these videos with others as well.

We also asked respondents whether they thought such indirect actions were morally wrong. Figure 13 summarizes the responses for

this question. While most persons thought that forwarding nude photos or videos of others was morally wrong, only approximately 55% of respondents thought the same of watching videos with physical or verbal abuse.

Given this discussion we also asked respondents what they thought about the problem of online abuse (such as making physical threats) in Jamaica. As we can see from Figure 14 approximately 71% of persons think that it is a problem. Similarly, 76% thought that online sexual harassment is a problem in Jamaica. Its again worth noting that these figures are much higher than the reported rates of either experiencing or committing online abuse; suggesting that in both cases there could be under-reporting.

Figure 14 –Views on online abuse and online sexual harassment in Jamaica (% of respondents)



## 5.2. ICTs and Risk Factors for VAW<sup>31</sup>

We have so far looked at the nature of online abuse and harassment. This included the experiences of those who have observed abuse online, those who experienced it themselves, and also those who committed abuse against others online. Another area of concern is the relationships between these online experiences and the use of ICTs to commit violence against women. We start by exploring these connections through a series of interviews with female survivors of domestic abuse. One of the characteristics of abusers is the extent to which they seek to control the actions of their partner. This includes controlling whom the woman can befriend, her movements, and her finances. The women also reported that the attempts at control were often extreme. For most of the women we spoke to, the man would use the mobile phone or Internet as tools to maintain this control.

### 5.2.1. ICTs as Tools of Control

The use of ICTs as tools of control is important in this case as all the women we interviewed note that they were active users of the Internet. This included social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp (both of which are popular among Internet users generally in Jamaica as noted above). Indeed their partners (or former partners) were also active Internet users. As such, the men would use social media as an additional way of monitoring the women. This included keeping track of their partner's profile page on Facebook. In one case a women said that

*“He got so paranoid that he set up a fake facebook account and started to literally stalk me there.”*

Similarly, the phone was a tool for control. As another women noted:

*“him always search mi phone to, read every*

*single message, look through my pictures and delete what him feel like to delete; and is my phone.”*

In many ways the abuser not only sought to exert control over the woman using ICTs but also made sure to control the technologies as well. Controlling the ICT itself could become a source of contention as one woman reported:

*“he would always go on a check up what I’m doing and check my friends (so) I deleted my face book page just to have peace in the house. With my emails he used to search my emails and tell me what is in the emails before I even know it. I gave him my log in information because starting out in the relationships there were no secrets so he had access to most things. With my whatsapp he would question my display picture and status wanting to know why did I put up that and if it referring to somebody else. He would also check my text messages and calls. As soon as I put down the phone and turn my back he would search it and sometimes even search it before me.”*

### 5.2.2. Using Social Media to Inflict Harm

Apart from control, the abuser would use social media to publicly portray the way in which he viewed his relationship with his partner. For example, as one woman said:

*“He would also want me to make posts on his Facebook page to make it seem as if I was going crazy over him, and when I told him no he would get angry, and accuse me of having someone else.”*

Alternatively, the abuser in a few cases would intentionally post pictures or videos of a sexual nature that included the woman. One person described a situation where:

31. Note that all the examples in this section have been altered to remove details such as location, names, institutions, etc.

*“...(a woman) used to send like naked pictures to her boyfriend and onetime she make him video her giving him oral sex and when them argue the other day him post them on facebook and write up a lot of nasty things about her.”*

Interestingly enough, unlike much of the literature on ICTs that views these technologies as tools for empowerment, the phone and even social media in this case were tools of control. Indeed, a few of the women we interviewed thought that the Internet might have made their situation worse. That said, many of the women still thought there was significant potential to use the Internet to raise awareness of similar abuse and to potentially help others in similar situation.

As one of our expert interviewees noted the psychological effects of online abuse can be significant. This can occur where a person is betrayed by someone that they were close with (like their partner as described above). The consequences can be severe both emotionally and mentally. In addition, even where the abuser is not known to the victim, the public nature of the incident (such as distributing pictures online) can be severe. In a focus group discussion a participant provided this example:

*“Most recently, a young lady attempted suicide because of being harassed online. She went out with her friends to the beach and her bathing suit exposed her, and the pics were posted online. Persons online distorted the image with pictures of animals and made hurtful comments which drove her to attempt suicide.”*

As another woman reported:

*“.. nude pictures that I took and (I) sent him while he was away. The man just post them on facebook and that created a huge mess*

*and stir in my life because I had work friends, family and personal friends on my page and it was just a mess.”*

Another expert interviewee similarly noted that while online there maybe not be any direct physical violence. It is the emotional violence that is the problem. One example shared with us was a video portraying sex between young woman and a man that was shared online without her knowledge. The impact on her was significant as it took over a year for her to recover and return to her career and education.

Finally, as one expert interviewee noted, the problem of using social media to inflict harm is not just restricted to heterosexuals as we have implied thus far. We should recognize that social media is also used to threaten homosexuals by “outing” them publicly. Here the psychological effects can be severe but are different from the public abuse described above. This is so because of the problem of homophobia in Jamaica is so significant. In addition, people in the transsexual community can also be singled out via social-media.

### 5.2.3. Online Interactions and Offline Violence

**Outside of these cases of abuse, there are also instances where online interactions are done with the goal of creating offline violence.** One example given to us was a case where a woman met some persons in an online chat room and was then convinced to meet with them offline. This in turn led to a trap and sexual violence. In this case, women were specifically targeted in the online chat room. People will always use deception to harm others and this is no different in an online space.

It should also be noted that in abusive relationships, the nature of online interactions can also be triggers that lead to physical and sexual vio-



lence. Some of the women we spoke to gave examples of where their activity on Facebook lead to jealousy and arguments.

### 5.3. Practical Strategies for Individuals

Given the many challenges that both women and men face online and the real connection to physical and sexual violence, it is important for us to also talk about steps that individuals can take to combat these problems. Here we can start with advice from those women whom we interviewed about their experiences.

1. **A starting point is being careful on what materials you share online.** As two women suggested:

*“(people) need to be smarter, much smarter, you can’t just be sending people pictures of you, worse naked pictures because what go on the internet is there forever so you can’t do that.”*

*“just don’t put up any naked picture on the internet or don’t put any video of you and your partner having sex or anything like that because it will come back to haunt you.”*

Our expert interviewees also shared similar comments. That is, it is important that people consider what they share online. This does not mean we cannot share any media, but we have to be careful about how we do so. This includes knowing and understanding the privacy settings of the social media platforms we use.

2. **Ensure that you know how to manage the privacy settings of whatever platform you are using.** In fact, while most respondents in the national survey said they thought privacy was very important, not everyone

knew how to change or check the privacy settings of various platforms. Figure 15 below summarizes these responses. Most people (75%) knew how to check the settings on Facebook, but only 51% and 47% knew how to do this on Instagram and Twitter respectively. This suggests that many people who feel that privacy is important online are not fully aware of how to protect their privacy especially on social media platforms.

3. **Be careful about how you share information on social media applications.** Even when we are careful about the privacy its also important to be aware of how certain actions can make us more vulnerable to harassers. It’s important to note that we are not equating making oneself vulnerable online to the very mistaken “blame the victim” rhetoric we often hear. For example, women are falsely said to share the blame for sexual harassment because of the way they dress. Fashion is a form of expression, while how we share our information online is not.

More specifically, this includes who we “friend” or connect with social media. It is good to know something about the person, or ask our friends about them before connecting with strangers. We should also be careful in how we disclose our location online. This is linked to the privacy issue earlier. In other words we can consider who we want to get regular updates on our location (via status updates, tweets, etc.). Finally, another point to consider is the reputation of third-party applications that we install on our phones or on Facebook. It is always safest to install reputable apps (those we find in Google Play, iTunes, etc.). This does not mean that we should stop “friending” people online or stop installing new and in-

teresting apps – we just need to find the right balance between what is comfortable for us and what is safe for us.

We asked persons in our national survey whether they actually practiced any of these (see Figure 16). Approximately 80% said they were cautious about “friending” some-

one online. However, only 60% were careful about disclosing their location, and 56% careful about installing third-party apps.

**4. Practice good digital security.** One of the examples mentioned at the start of this report involved a man who hacked into the

Figure 15 – Knowing how to change or check privacy settings online (% of respondents)

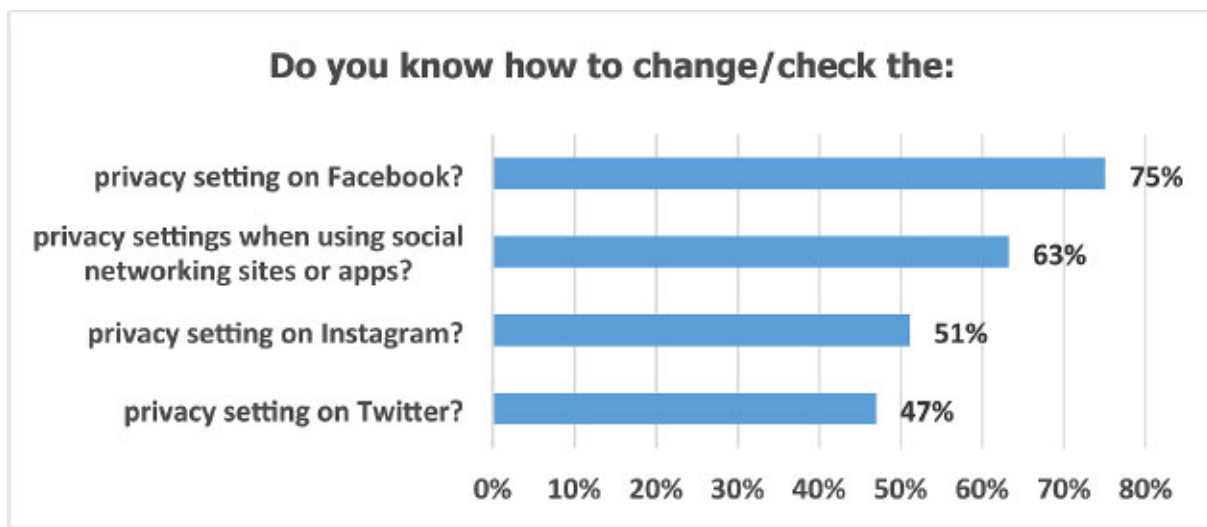
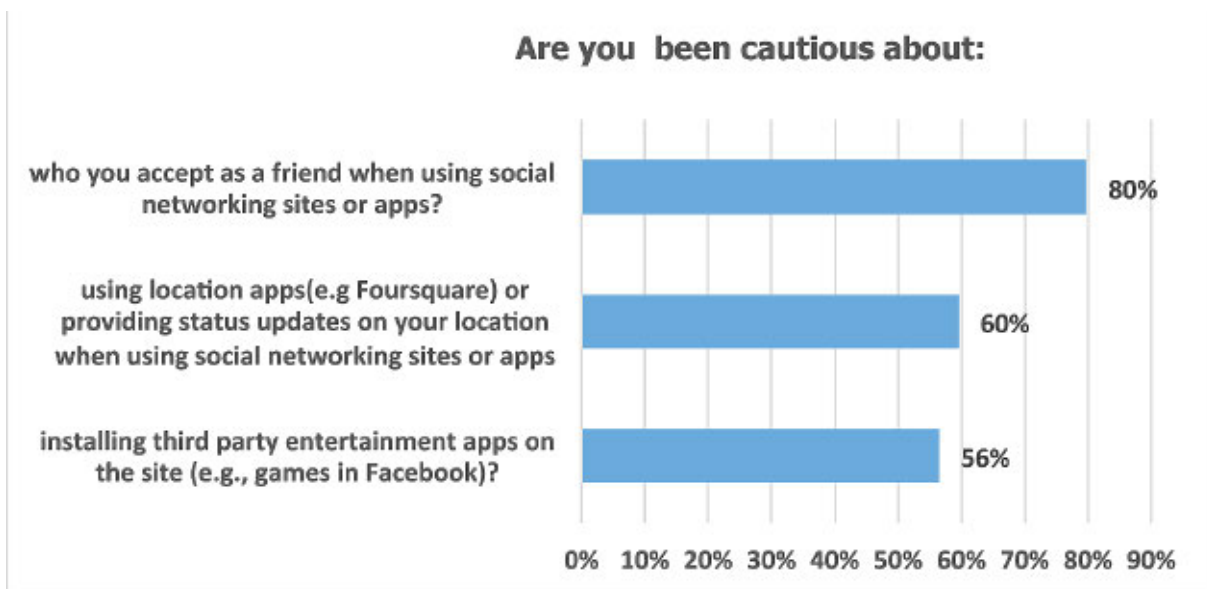


Figure 16 – Precautions taken online (% of respondents)



computers of several women, stole nude material, and then tried to extort money from the women. One thing that we can all do is to improve the passwords we use everyday – this means not using the same password for all the sites we visit or better yet using a password manager program. Another good practice is to always make sure that whatever device we are using (whether it's a phone, laptop, tablet, etc.) has an up to date anti-virus program. This last point is often overlooked but is very important to prevent people from accessing and stealing your data.

- 5. It's NEVER your fault.** Although we have listed steps that we can all take, its important to recognize that when we are attacked online it never our fault. Indeed, the only person to blame is the harasser.

One project that has developed a useful guidebook to address these and other forms of online harassment including stalking is the Take Back the Tech campaign. <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe>



## 6. Policy Recommendations – How to address the challenge of Cyber-violence and Online Harassment in Jamaica

It is important to recognize when ICTs are used for online harassment, to effect control on a women, or to create the conditions for sexual violence, it is occurring in a patriarchal society. Thus, they are more likely to be used as tools to perpetuate patriarchy and to reinforce gender norms online. Gender norms in Jamaica often place women at a disadvantage compared to men in a variety of ways that can lead to violence. We argue that they operate in a similar way in the online space. Thus, the potential for abuse also exists online and is influenced in part by existing gender norms.

It is within this context that we need to consider appropriate policy responses that can complement the individual level strategies that we mentioned in the previous section. One issue that was highlighted by different persons was the need first and foremost to raise awareness about the problem. This is in fact one of the aims of this project. As noted above a majority of the survey respondents and some of the persons we interviewed felt that this was a major problem in Jamaica. However, there seems to be very little recognition that online harassment and the links between ICT use and VAW are an issue at the government and civil society levels. **As a first step the government, civil society, and the public in general need to recognize that this is a problem, which will only grow as most Internet users are young (see Figure 1).**

Once we acknowledge that this is a problem, a national level strategy should involve raising

awareness particularly among young persons. As one expert interviewee noted (and as our survey results show) not everyone understands the implications of their actions online. One way to address this is to **have a national campaign to raise and educate users about the implications of our online activities and what we can do to be safer – ideally using social media.** It should be noted that global campaigns such as Take Back the Tech do exactly this and are one way of actually using ICTs to reduce VAW. Unfortunately, such campaigns are not yet present in Jamaica or the Caribbean.

Given that young women are more likely to be harassed online, **one suggestion raised by an expert interviewee is to have workshops that target young girls in the secondary school system.** These girls sometimes approach social media in a naïve manner, a fact that older men exploit. These workshops can include some of the specific steps to promote safe behaviour online (such as those described above). Although girls below 18 years were not included in this research we were given anecdotal evidence that this is a significant group to address as they are singled out for online harassment and for sexual violence offline. In addition, by targeting girls at a young age we can help reduce the possibilities of online harassment that might come when they are older.

As another expert interviewee noted, the majority of those who attend church on a regular basis in Jamaica are women. Although exact numbers do not exist, we suspect that young women (in-



clude those who are online) make up a significant part of this group. **Given their membership, churches are an ideal venue to not only raise awareness about the problems and strategies to address online harassment, but also broader discussions about VAW in the country.**

**Another issue of particular importance (and again raised by an expert interviewer) is to improve the state’s legal apparatus to deal with sexual violence. This includes both legislation and enforcement.** The current Sexual Offences Act still needs to be reformed and improved to better protect women and men against all forms of sexual violence. While the Cybercrimes Act does provide recourse against the theft of data (e.g., personal images and videos), it does not specifically address the issues of online harassment or abuse. It is unclear if the proposed Sexual Harassment bill (which focuses on work place harassment) will do so either.

In addition, both the National Policy on Gender Equality and the current national ICT policies would have to be updated to include the challenge of online harassment and abuse. Thus, addressing the problem of online harassment needs will require a multi-sectoral approach and should not be defined as a “gender” problem

that only a handful of agencies should address. Finally, when considering specific suggestions for legislation or policy, one issue is how to balance freedom of expression while stopping online harassment and abuse. That is, we have to distinguish between statements of general ideas (even if we disagree with them) and statements that are targeted at specific persons in harmful or negative ways.

**The final recommendation we wish to put forward is that more research is needed on this issue – specifically with regard to how children (those under 18 years who were not included in this study) use the Internet.** Recall that the median age at which people start using the Internet is 16. We argue that the findings provided here in terms of the number of people who are abused online will be much higher for those under 18 years of age. We also argue that in general, there needs to be more work on this subject particularly with regard to the appropriate national legal frameworks that are needed to protect people online as well as the psychological and economic impacts of online abuse. More research tied to the actions already recommended here will ensure that we address this problem before it becomes even more commonplace.

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