



November 2022

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Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence Data and Measurement: Methodology Matters

Overview: This document presents the summaries of ten seminal resources related to defining and measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), the ethical and safe collection of GBV-related data, and emerging practices and principles of data ethics and data feminism. The purpose of the upcoming discussion is to build consensus on **best practices for ethically engaging with TFGBV data** – from deciding the data needs through data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Note: We acknowledge that “data” can have different meanings and serve different actors. For this discussion, we can reflect on all types of data related to technology-facilitated GBV including but not limited to quantitative and qualitative survey data (e.g., from interviews with women leaders), population-level data (e.g., DHS, UN statistics), data from technology platforms, and country and government data (e.g., census).



Resources that define technology-facilitated GBV

1. Hinson L, Mueller J, O'Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. (2018). *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it?* Washington D.C., International Center for Research on Women.

Summary: This article was one of the first to propose a definition of and measurement framework for technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV): “*Technology-facilitated GBV is action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation.*” Based on global stakeholder interviews and formative research in Uganda and India, the framework highlights an experience of technology-facilitated GBV based on different conceptual domains, beginning with a *relationship* (personal, impersonal or institutional). Perpetrator domains include the *motivation* and *intent* behind the attack and focus on *cross-cutting tactics* (e.g. doxing, image-based abuse) that facilitate *behaviors* such as stalking, defamation, bullying, sex-based harassment, exploitation and hate speech. The framework also considers the *mode* (e.g., social networking sites) and *frequency* of the experience, as well as the *impact* and *help-seeking and coping* behaviors of the victim/survivor.

2. Dunn, S. (2020). *Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No. 1. Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: An Overview.* Center for International Governance Innovation.

Summary: This paper introduces TF GBV and the concepts underpinning the two-year project jointly funded by CIGI and IDRC that will sample people from 18 countries to learn about people’s experiences with TF GBV. The paper reviews common forms of TF GBV and also identifies who is most at risk of being targeted, including those with intersecting marginalized identities. It also highlights individual and systemic harms like emotional and psychological effects, concerns related to privacy and safety, economic impacts, and the silencing of voices in the public sphere.

3. Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021). *Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women.*

Summary: This report summarizes global research that the EIU completed related to the prevalence of online violence from 51 countries. They found that 85% of women reported witnessing online violence against other women (including from outside their networks, or themselves). They found regional differences, with nearly 98% of women in the Middle East to 76% of women in North America that were surveyed reported witnessing or experiencing online violence. Women living in countries with longer-standing or institutionalized gender inequality tended to experience higher rates. Most government responses focused on response and regulatory policies are nascent. Few women are aware of options to report their experiences and most women are turning to informal support systems for help. Women feel a sense of helplessness. More than half of the targeted women knew the perpetrator, and nearly three quarters of the same women expressed concerns about escalation offline. Impacts include an increasing gender digital divide, macroeconomic repercussions and a more limited diversity of online spaces.

Resources that propose safe and ethical GBV data collection methodologies

4. World Health Organization. (2007) *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*. Geneva, Switzerland.

Summary: WHO's recommendations for the research community on conducting work on "domestic violence against women" are:

- a. "The safety of respondents and the research team is paramount, and should guide all project decisions;
- b. Prevalence studies need to be methodologically sound and to build upon current research experience about how to minimize the under-reporting of violence;
- c. Protecting confidentiality is essential to ensure both women's safety and data quality;
- d. All research team members should be carefully selected and receive specialized training and on-going support;
- e. The study design must include actions aimed at reducing any possible distress caused to the participants by the research;
- f. Fieldworkers should be trained to refer women requesting assistance to available local services; and sources of support. Where few resources exist, it may be necessary for the study to create short-term support mechanisms;
- g. Researchers and donors have an ethical obligation to help ensure that their findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development; and
- h. Violence questions should only be incorporated into surveys designed for other purposes when ethical and methodological requirements can be met."

5. World Health Organization. (2007) *WHO ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies*. Geneva, Switzerland.

Summary: This document provides guidance for stakeholders involved in ethically and safely obtaining information about sexual violence in humanitarian emergency settings, including armed conflict and natural disasters. The eight recommendations – which draw from common data-collection need scenarios are:

- a. "The benefits of documenting sexual violence must be greater than the risks to respondents and communities;
- b. Information gathering and documentation must be done in a manner that presents the least risk to respondents, is methodologically sound, and builds on current experience and good practice;
- c. Basic care and support for survivors/victims must be available locally before commencing any activity that may involve individuals disclosing information about their experiences of sexual violence;
- d. The safety and security of all those involved in information gathering about sexual violence is of paramount concern and in emergency settings in particular should be continuously monitored;
- e. The confidentiality of individuals who provide information about sexual violence must be protected at all times;
- f. Anyone providing information about sexual violence must give informed consent before participating in the data gathering activity;
- g. All members of the data collection team must be carefully selected and receive relevant and sufficient specialized training and ongoing support; and development; and
- h. Additional safeguards must be put into place if children (i.e. those under 18 years) are to be the subject of information gathering."



Resources that explain the key principles and tools of data ethics and data feminism

6. United Nations Development Group. (2017) *Data privacy, ethics and protection: guidance note on big data for achievement of the 2030 agenda.*

Summary: This document provides guidance on data privacy, protection and ethics for the UNDG related to big data, collected in real time by private sector entities and shared with UNDG members to support achievement of the 2030 agenda. The aim is to establish common principles on the operational use of big data, serve as a risk-management tool considering fundamental rights, and set principles for obtaining, retention, use and quality control for private-sector data. Principles include: lawful, legitimate and fair use; purpose specification, use limitation and purpose compatibility; risk and mitigation, harms and benefits assessment; sensitive data and contexts; data security; data minimization; data quality; open data, transparency and accountability; and due diligence for third party collaborators.

7. Broad E., Smith A., and Wells P. (2017) *Helping organizations navigate ethical concerns in their data practices.* Open Data Institute.

Summary: This paper explores the relationship between data ethics and legal compliance, presents existing ethics frameworks, and discusses sharing/use considerations. Data ethics is defined as “a branch of ethics that evaluates data practices with the potential to adversely impact on people and society – in data collection, sharing and use.” The authors put forward an approach, the Data Ethics Canvas, for organizations to identify and manage ethics considerations. This tool focuses on the people and communities affected, prompts discussion and critical thinking, and considers that one type of data activity can have many outcomes (and consequences).

8. D’Ignazio C and Klein L. (2020) *Data Feminism.* The MIT Press. + Dunn A., Peck K., and Greer J. (n.d.) *Data Feminism Study Guide.* A Data Feminism Network & Toronto Womxn Network in Data Science Collaboration.

Summary: The study guide reviews key concepts and principles from the accompanying book entitled Data Feminism (DF), defined as “a way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action and by intersectional feminist thought.” DF isn’t only about and for women and gender, but it is about power – who has it, and who doesn’t. DF begins by analyzing how power operates in the world (chapter 1), presenting a matrix of domination that shows how those with power uphold privilege and unfairly oppress. In Chapter 2, four methods of challenging unequal power structures are introduced: collecting counter data (i.e. data that prove rather than mask oppression), analyzing inequitable outcomes and holding institutions accountable, imagining co-liberation, and teaching to shift the demographics of new wave data feminists. Chapter 6 reminds us that data are not neutral or objective but rather products of unequal social relationships, and context is essential for conducting accurate, ethical analyses.



9. Iyer N., Achieng G., Borokini F., and Ludger U. (2021) *Automated Imperialism, Expansionist Dreams: Exploring Digital Extractivism in Africa*. POLICY.

Summary: Digital extractivism is “a form of exploitation based on the virtualization or digitization of commodities and services through a borderless digital capitalism that perpetuates pre-existing colonial practices of value grabbing and wealth accumulation.” This paper identified nine methods of digital extractivism in Africa, including: digital labor, illicit financial flows, data extraction, natural resource mining, infrastructure monopolies, digital lending, funding structures, beta testing and platform governance. Existing or potential policy responses are provided for each, as well as recommendations for citizens, governments, civil society, technology companies and government actors on how to achieve digital sovereignty.

10. Guide to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Summary: This guide explains the general data protection regime that applies to most UK business and organizations, tailored by the Data Protection Act of 2018. The seven principles of the GDPR include:

- a. lawfulness, fairness and transparency,
- b. purpose limitation,
- c. data minimization
- d. accuracy
- e. storage limitation
- f. integrity and confidentiality (security) and
- g. accountability.



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Common themes across resources

On terminology and theoretical underpinning:

The “gender” aspect of TF GBV is inclusive and comprehensive. Women and girls, minorities and LGBTQIA+ are differentially impacted by it, and therefore we must take an intersectional approach to defining, understanding, measuring and addressing it. Technology-facilitated GBV is not a new phenomenon but rather an extension of physical GBV and should be understood as such. This has implications for data in terms of assessing determinants of violence and measuring impact.

On data itself: We must think about data using an intersectional approach – we should understand how power influences the type of data we collect (and don’t) and how this upholds privilege and oppresses. Data are not neutral, and context and reflection are essential for conducting accurate, ethical analyses and dissemination.

On data ethics: We must consider the ethics of data collection, sharing and use. When thinking of data, we must assess the risks and benefits of collecting and using it. Guidelines specify that data should be collected only to the extent that it is useful/needed in the communities where it was acquired (i.e., with purpose), it should be done with transparency and accuracy.

On the protection of survivors who share

their stories: Everyone has an obligation to safeguard those that provide the data to ensure full confidentiality and consent/assent. For research with GBV survivors specifically, confidentiality, privacy, and linking to resources are essential components of ethical data collection.



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Discussion: Deep Dive into Methodology

For TF GBV data, we need to carefully consider a wide range of components in the data collection, use and analysis process including the purpose and value-add of data collection, collection and storage of data all the way through dissemination, analysis and ownership. It is only through consideration of these aspects that we can collect ethical, safe and robust data on this important topic. Many of these resources put forward valuable guidelines, principles and considerations for the following data considerations, yet some are missing.

Below is a table of data phases. The considerations for each phase will change slightly depending on the type of data being examined (e.g., individual surveys versus big data), the actors involved, and the amount of control over the data. For example, more of the considerations below are relevant if you are designing a survey and conducting primary data collection as compared to analyzing existing, anonymized data from a large, representative survey.



For each data consideration answer the following questions:

- What considerations are missing?
- What are practical guidelines or solutions we can recommend for those looking to collect or use data on tech-facilitated GBV?

| Data phases | Considerations | Practical guidelines or solutions |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Information Needs | What do we already know (i.e., does this data need to be collected or does the answer to our question already exist?) Why do we need to know it? Who or what are we trying to influence (and will this data get us there?) Who is at the table when deciding data plans? Who defines what data is being collected? | |
| Collection methods and practices | How are we collecting data? Who are we collecting from and who are we missing? How do we include those who are missing? What are our potential biases and how can we mitigate them? How is the consent/assent process managed? How are we communicating our intentions and risks (and to whom)? What are the potential harms to respondents and how can we prevent, mitigate and respond to them? | |
| Storage and Management | How are we storing and managing data that is being collected? Who has access to it? For what purpose and for how long? | |
| Analysis | How are we analyzing our data? How is it being verified by those from whom we are intending to collect data? | |
| Dissemination and Ownership | Who owns the data that is being collected? How do we ensure that survivors retain control of their data? How is the data and insights being disseminated: by whom, where, and to/for what purpose? | |



List of resources

1. Hinson L, Mueller J, O'Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. (2018). *Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it?* Washington D.C., International Center for Research on Women.
2. Dunn, S. (2020). *Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No. 1. Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: An Overview*. Center for International Governance Innovation.
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4. Iyer N., Achieng G., Borokini F, and Ludger U. (2021) *Automated Imperialism, Expansionist Dreams: Exploring Digital Extractivism in Africa*. POLLCY.
5. World Health Organization. (2007) *Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence Against Women*. Geneva, Switzerland.
6. World Health Organization. (2007) *WHO ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies*. Geneva, Switzerland.
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10. Guide to the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).



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