



“I am drowning under the weight of hatred”: The scope and nature of TFGBV in Tajikistan

Study overview

The article examines the phenomenon of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) experienced by women in Tajikistan. It explores how digital platforms – social media, messaging apps, online comment threads – are used to target women, often in connection with their public presence, views, or perceived deviation from traditional norms. Through qualitative and quantitative data (including reported cases, interviews and digital evidence), the authors map out the scope, forms, and nature of online abuse, situating it within broader social, cultural, and structural patterns of gender-based violence in Tajikistan. The paper argues that TFGBV in Tajikistan is not a separate phenomenon but deeply intertwined with offline gender-based violence and patriarchal norms, serving to reinforce, magnify, and extend threats into the digital realm.

The current ‘Evidence Bits’ is based on the publication: “I am drowning under the weight of hatred”: The scope and nature of TFGBV in Tajikistan authored by Women’s Center “Gulrukhsor” Founder and Chair of the Board of Trustees, Gulbakhor Makhkamova, and Programmes Manager, Victoria Fletcher, published on 13th November by GenderIT.ORG: <https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/i-am-drowning-under-weight-hatred-scope-and-nature-tfgbv-tajikistan>

Women’s Centre “Gulrukhsor” is the leading provider of free of charge services to women victims of domestic violence in Tajikistan. The centre is based in Khujand, northern Tajikistan, in the grounds of the regional (oblast) maternity hospital. It is one of four shelters for women victims of domestic violence in Tajikistan, the only one in Sughd region, serving 2.7 million people. Established in 1996, the centre work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, taking calls to our hotline and accepting women and children into their shelter day and night. They work with both victims of violence and perpetrators of violence. Read more about at Gulrukhsor.org.

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What is the significance of this research?



Technologically Facilitated Gender Based Violence (TFGBV) in Tajikistan remains under-researched and under-recognised both within the country and internationally. Understanding it is critical because online abuse in this context is not merely “virtual”; it reinforces structural gender inequality, contributes to women’s social exclusion and directly influences their safety, mobility and freedom of expression. Highlighting these dynamics challenges assumptions that online harm is secondary or less serious and shows that digital violence must be treated as part of the broader landscape of gender-based violence. This perspective opens the door for more context-sensitive policy, survivor support, and advocacy.

Main research findings

The research reveals that TFGBV in Tajikistan is widespread, varied, and deeply harmful: it includes hate speech, defamation, doxxing (sharing private/personal information), sexualised insults, threats of violence or “moral punishment,” and is often motivated by control over women’s behaviour or reputations. The “online world” becomes an extension of social control and patriarchal surveillance – especially for women seen as challenging traditional norms (e.g. through public activism, non-traditional views, or simply by being visible). The impact is not just emotional or reputational: participants describe feeling fear, shame, self-blame, panic and, in some cases, self-censorship or withdrawal from public life.

What is missing in our discourse on TFGBV?

Current conversations often fail to recognise TFGBV as a form of gender-based violence deeply linked to patriarchal structures and offline harm. Existing definitions and policy discussions rarely reflect the cultural dynamics of Tajikistan, where honour, morality and gendered expectations shape the nature of violence. There is limited documentation and reporting mechanisms are weak, leaving the scale of TFGBV obscured and survivors without adequate support. As a result, many women navigate abuse alone, with few safe avenues for redress.



Online violence: a continuation of offline violence

Online harassment closely mirrors existing patterns of patriarchal control and gender-based violence. It often accompanies or precedes offline intimidation, extending coercion and psychological pressure across digital spaces. Anonymity and the reach of online platforms heighten harm, enabling both acquaintances and strangers to participate in harassment with limited accountability.

Hate speech, women's rights and the narrative of a stereotypical Tajik woman

Many incidents involve hate speech rooted in cultural stereotypes. Women are attacked for failing to conform to the idealised model of a “traditional Tajik woman,” with abuse framed as defence of morality, national values, or family honour. Moral policing becomes public and performative, using humiliation to enforce gender conformity and to punish expressions of autonomy or modernity. This dynamic situates TFGBV within broader debates about women's rights and gender norms in Tajik society.

Intersecting realities of TFGBV for women in Tajikistan

Experiences of TFGBV vary according to intersecting factors such as age, socioeconomic status, social visibility, and perceived modernity. Young, digitally active women and those who express non-traditional views are disproportionately targeted. Harassment is rarely a single event; rather, it reoccurs over time, generating a sense of constant surveillance, fear and vulnerability.

Magnification of impact

Digital platforms amplify the reach, speed and intensity of gender-based violence. Harassment spreads quickly, accumulates rapidly and creates a perception of inescapability. Survivors describe shame, panic, reputational damage and fear for their physical safety. Many are pushed into silence, self-censorship, or withdrawal from public engagement. The psychological toll is heavy, as online violence feels continuous, uncontrolled and deeply personal.



Key takeaways

RECOGNISE TFGBV AS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Laws and policies should explicitly address online harassment, doxxing, threats, and reputational attacks as forms of GBV, moving away from the idea that digital harm is less serious.

CREATE SAFER AND CLEARER REPORTING PATHWAYS

Survivors need confidential, stigma-free ways to report abuse. This requires coordinated responses between police, social services, and women's organisations, supported by training on digital forms of violence.

PROVIDE ACCESSIBLE PSYCHOSOCIAL AND DIGITAL SAFETY SUPPORT

Services should offer counselling, help with online security, and assistance removing harmful content, delivered in ways that protect survivors' privacy.

RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CHALLENGE HARMFUL GENDER NORMS

Community education should address the patriarchal beliefs that enable TFGBV, including moral policing and expectations of "traditional" womanhood, to reduce social tolerance for online abuse.

PROMOTE SAFER DIGITAL SPACES FOR WOMEN'S EXPRESSION

Platforms operating in Tajikistan should strengthen moderation of gendered hate speech and harassment. Support networks can help women stay active online without fear of retaliation.

IMPROVE DATA COLLECTION

Systematic documentation of TFGBV is needed to understand its scale and shape more effective responses.

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If you'd like to join our network of partners, contact us at idvrm.info@gmail.com