

**Forum:** General Assembly

**Issue:** Combating gender-based violence facilitated by digital platforms

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## Introduction

The innovative rise of digital platforms, specifically social media, has made it easier than ever to share one's life experiences with friends and connect with new people. However, an unfortunate result of that has been the spike in Gender-Based Violence. Gender-based violence, abbreviated as GBV is the act of violence, the spread of information with the intention of hurting one's social life, and acts with malicious intent against someone based on their gender. This noticeable rise in digital GBV has posed a significant number of challenges due to the accessibility of perpetrator anonymity, complex systems of legislature, and the constant activity on digital platforms. As a result, although digital platforms have become more convenient than ever, so have convenience for those who wish to harm the digital well-being of others; this was incredibly evident when the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality (UN Women) observed a 210% rise in GBV on digital platforms corresponding to a 70% rise in the use of social media in Australia.

The United Nations General Assembly has recognized the urgent need to address this modern form of violence, having published a number of resolutions and treaties on this very matter. However, it has not come without consequences and difficulties. Over the years, the implementation of legal reforms and social movements have caused a divide between the genders, resulting in the growth of both misogyny and misandry. As a result, both men and women globally have become increasingly afraid of one another, sources show that both men and women have increasingly become fearful about working with one another, with 34% of women stating that they are afraid of possible harassment and sexual assault, and 81% of men increasingly becoming more anxious about working with women for the possibility that they could be unjustly accused of GBV.

As such, the issue of GBV on digital platforms has called for a difficult goal, a solution that addresses the very core of the issue without leading to unintended outcomes, empowering both men and women to prevent and deal with such instances from happening. Over the years, the General Assembly

has been the leading forum for practical discussions on combatting GBV on digital platforms and continues to be the initiator of solutions for such topics.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Perpetrator Anonymity

Perpetrator Anonymity, for the sake of this chair report, will be defined as the ability to conceal one's identity online. This often leads to additional difficulty in the process of authorities holding the violators accountable for their actions.

### Digital Jurisprudence

The body of law and legal principles that apply to digital interactions and offenses.

### Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

For this scenario, Gender-Based Violence will be defined as the conduction of violence, the spread of information with the intention of hurting one's social life, and acts with malicious intent against a particular person based on their sex.

### Cyberstalking

Cyberstalking is defined as the use of the internet and any digital form of media to stalk or harass an individual, group, or organization.

### Doxxing

The legal definition of doxxing refers to the intentional spreading of harmful information without the individual's consent.

### Deepfake

Deepfake will be referred to as a form of synthetic media that uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to generate realistic but false content, specifically in the realm of videos, photos, and audio.

### Incels

Although defined as "misogynistic men who blame women and feminism for different kinds of personal and social problems" by the UN, for greater consistency and fairness, incels will be defined as those that are involuntarily celibate and have decided to vent their frustration and failures on those of the opposite sex or those who are more successful than them in their intimate life.

## Misogyny

The condemnation of women as a whole as a result of sexism.

## Misandry

The condemnation of men as a whole as a result of sexism.

## Background Information

### Rise of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) on Digital Platforms

The issue of addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has become increasingly more relevant with the rise in the prevalence of social media; social media allows both greater anonymity and freedom, an exploit for many perpetrators. With digital platforms having become increasingly vital in daily life, it is unfortunate to say that it has also opened up new avenues for perpetrators to commit acts of violence based on gender (most commonly women and girls). This phenomenon encompasses a range of harmful behaviors, including cyberstalking, online harassment, doxing, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, and the use of deepfake technology. Though systemically flawed, the United Nations General Assembly has recognized the urgency of addressing this form of violence, seeing the serious threat that it poses to the everyday life of individuals globally.

#### *Rise of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Digital Platforms*

Noting with discontent that nearly 7.5 million people experience cyberstalking each year, with 80% of them being conducted through digital media and 69% stating that they are under substantial emotional distress; as a result, it is essential to look at the rise of GBV on digital platforms.

First beginning as a method for government researchers to share information, the invention of the internet in the 1960s was without a doubt, one of if not the most innovative inventions of modern history. However, with the invention of the internet came a double-edged sword, with the same technologies used to share information between researchers being capable of sharing malicious content. The additional invention of social media came to highlight the significant challenges that women faced online as a result of GBV.

#### *Impact of Technology on Gender-Based Violence (GBV)*

Today, the impact of technology on gender-based violence is complex and significant, with digital platforms becoming a hotspot for not only traditional forms of violence but also the birth of new ones, generally more pervasive and persistent. The ensured anonymity and global

reach through the use of digital platforms have opened up ways for perpetrators to target victims without immediate repercussions, often resulting in high levels of damage being done psychologically, emotionally, and in certain cases, even physically toward the victim. An example of this occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, which highlighted the rise in digital GBV cases as people became more reliant on social media, where the rates of gender-based violence rose by up to 33% globally by mid-2020, ironically nearly identical to the percentage of the global population that was under lockdown at the time (37%). Over the entire pandemic, it is estimated that there was a 58% increase in the prevalence of online violence against women on top of what was already pre-existing, meaning the rate at which women were getting harassed, doxed, stalked, and nearly doubled. As such it is no surprise that the surge in digital GBV calls for a number of legal, educational, and technological measures to protect individuals across both genders on digital platforms.

Over the years, the General Assembly has been at the forefront of addressing these challenges, frequently advocating for stronger international cooperation and stricter policies to combat digital GBV. These include a number of resolutions that addressed promoting digital literacy, enhancing cybersecurity measures, and urging digital platform providers to adopt comprehensive safety and reporting mechanisms. These resolutions highlight the prevalence of GBV against women and the measures that can be taken to prevent it.

## Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Over the years, the legal sector has played a significant role in preventing GBV across all nations and districts. These legal amendments span from those effective in multiple nations such as the Istanbul Convention and European Union (EU)'s Digital Services Act (DSA), to those that are directed domestically such as that of the UK's Online Safety Bill and the US's Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013. However, a number of these changes led to a net-negative effect where instead of problems being solved, pent-up frustration and resulting hostility from the lack of effective action in resolving the issue ended up fostering misandry.

### *International Legal Changes*

Over the years, a number of both international and national legislative changes have been made to address GBV; one of the most notable of the few was the Istanbul Convention. This very summit played a significant role in protecting women from all forms of violence. These included measures to prevent and prosecute online gender-based violence and obliged signatory countries to adopt necessary legislative measures to criminalize online harassment, stalking,

threats, etc. Additionally, the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) aimed to create a safer digital space where the fundamental rights of the users are protected. This act included provisions that specifically targeted online gender-based violence by holding the very platforms that these actions occur on accountable for the illegal content, harassment, and abuse it left available. However, a certain caveat of international legal changes is the fact that it must be suitable for all nations to whom it may apply, resulting in a less direct and more generalized action in order to apply for all. However, this same limitation does not apply with the same weight in domestic laws.

### *Domestic Laws and Policy Changes*

In national legal systems, changes can be made much more easily due to the streamlined nature of changing the legislature for an individual country. As a result, this has been by far the more common route for nations addressing the issue of GBV on digital platforms. Some of these include Australia's Enhancing Online Safety Act of 2015, one of the earliest comprehensive approaches to online safety, having established an actual office of the eSafety Commissioner, allowing for rapid takedown powers for cyberbullying material; India's Information Technology (Amendment) Act, essentially making identity theft, cyber stalking, cyber bullying, cyber harassment, identity theft, breach and violation of privacy/confidentiality, voyeurism revenge pornography all illegal; the United States passed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 which introduced specific measures to address stalking through digital means, preventing the start of cases of GBV on digital platforms from being initiated in the first place; Canada passed the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act (Bill C-13) which established comprehensive laws targeting cyberbullying and the distribution of non-consensual intimate images and videos, while even empowering courts with the ability to order the removal of such content from the internet; the UK have passed 2 notable acts, the Malicious Communications Act of 1988 and the Communications Act of 2003 which originally addressed the use of letters to send offensive, indecent, obscene, or menacing pieces. However, this was later then updated to also account for those happening online; the Philippines have also taken a stance on the matter through the Safe Spaces Act (Republic Act No. 11313), an act which addressed all forms of sexual harassment, both online and offline; Kenya also addressed the issue of cyberbullying and online harassment, including those of cyberstalking and the distribution of intimate images without consent through the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act of 2018; Brazil's Maria Maria da Penha Law and Internet Law (Marco Civil da Internet) also took a strong stance on the form of domestic and online violence against women. It highlighted the translation of traditional domestic violence online, calling for changes to their Internet Law. Despite the number of examples that were named and the impacts that it has had, it can be perceived quite clearly that member states prefer to address their own laws to solve the issue of GBV on digital platforms individually. Given this, it is highly likely that although a universal adoption of a set of laws—those that address

gender-based violence—may be the most effective solution, it may not be the most realistic solution.

## Previous Social Movements

Throughout the years, there have been a number of social movements that have surfaced as a result of cases of sexual abuse and harassment that have been given the spotlight. Thanks to the initiation of these movements, there has been a rise in the rallying for the support of women against GBV. Most notable of these are the #MeToo movement which gained traction after its connection to Hollywood, and the #TimesUp movement which was able to shine thanks to the initiation of the #MeToo movement. Through the initiation of movements that have opened the world up to supporting women who have gone through the unbearable consequences of GBV, opportunities for more movements and further raising of awareness on GBV have become available, creating a butterfly effect of women's help movements. However, there are certain consequences that get overshadowed by the positives of help movements—the rise of misandry as a result. Most important to note though, is the impact that each and every movement has in shaping the narrative of society, although a movement may not look significant, the impact and reach it has should not be underestimated. Through time and time again, it has been evident that insignificant movements that seem unimpactful have set precedence for many more movements to follow.

### *#MeToo Movement*

The #MeToo movement was a movement that gained popularity thanks to the spotlight it was shone through its connection to Hollywood. With the legal case of Harvey Weinstein becoming mainstream and actresses coming out on the number of times, they have felt that they were a victim of GBV. With this being born, the #MeToo movement came into full effect where sex crimes were being reported at a rate 10% higher than before, inspiring other women to come out on their experiences. However, there were some consequences as a result. This included a minute yet impactful shift in the way judiciaries judged sexual harassment cases. As a result of the high rising numbers of movements and pressure from the public, certain cases internally overruled the fifth amendment which stated that those indicted with a crime are innocent unless proven guilty, but due to the rising pressure from the public cases seemed to reminisce a different approach for men, guilty unless proven innocent. Although this may sound similar, this was a huge shift in the way cases were conducted against men. By putting the defendant in a situation where they were the ones that had to prove their innocence instead of the prosecution having to prove the defendant to be guilty. This additional room although it lowered the possibilities of someone getting away with committing a crime, increased the likelihood of someone innocent being convicted of a crime. This in turn ended up not only negatively

impacting men but also negatively impacting women, creating a situation where women were losing out on work opportunities as men started becoming afraid of working with women for the possibility of being accused of harassment.

### *#TimesUp Movement*

The #TimesUp movement was launched in Hollywood as a response to the Weinstein Scandal. With the blooming of the #MeToo movement, there was more light to be shed around the world for other cases against women who faced GBV. This sparked another similar movement to the #TimesUp movement, which was further directed in Hollywood, focusing on the sexual harassment that women faced as a result of men in the same workspace as them. This movement highlighted the soft power of celebrities and influencers in shifting the narrative of the public as this was the second major movement that was able to come into the spotlight as a result of the endorsement of celebrities.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States of America (USA)

The United States has by far been the most involved in the issue regarding the issue of gender-based violence, having been the most influential and leading a number of resolutions to address GBV. The United States has been involved in all 3 of the most influential movements raising awareness for GBV and has put into effect at least 3 legal changes.

### United Kingdom (UK)

The UK has been one of the most progressive countries in finding solutions to GBV. Most notable were the #TakeBackTheTech movement aimed at reclaiming technology to end violence against women and the #ReclaimTheInternet movement which aimed to tackle online abuse and harassment. With the highly developed society of the UK along with the reliance on digital platforms for social life, the UK has been one of the most active, voiced, and at the forefront nations to tackle GBV.

### Australia

Australia has been one of the most heavily focused nations on combatting GBV; outside of participating in the global #MeToo movement and other movements, Australia has launched a number of studies that have helped set precedence on setting legislatures that have a positive lasting impact. These include the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022), which reduced physical violence rates from 4.7 to 2.9% for women and from 10.4 to 6.1% for men; intimate partner violence rates from 2.3 to 1.5% for women; cohabiting violence rate from 2.8 to 2.5% for

men and 4.7 to 3.9% for women; and sexual harassment cases from 14.8 to 12.6% for men and 6.6 to 4.5% for women. These adoptions within the Australian legislature were only possible and stemmed from the studies conducted nationally.

### United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

UN Women, formally known as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is the UN office that most directly focuses on the empowering of women and has had arguably the most direct impact on combatting GBV. UN Women focuses on solving these issues by upholding international agreements regarding violence and discrimination against women. They cite that only 40% of women seek help after experiencing violence, trying to increase accessibility to such help sites. The UN Women function through partnerships with governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and other institutions whose goals align with theirs, a unique privilege that they have been given as a UN entity, giving them greater exposure that is unique to them. It was through the utilization of their privileges that the UN Women were able to conduct studies that highlighted the impact of GBV online, the development and implementation of changes in legislation, and a number of awareness campaigns (most notably the HeForShe Campaign which included the likes of then U.S. president Barack Obama, heads of states, CEOs, university leaders, and millions of boys and men.)

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
June 21 <sup>st</sup> , 1946	Establishment of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW).
March 8 <sup>th</sup> , 1975	Creation of International Women's Day as Submitted by the UN General Assembly.
May 11 <sup>th</sup> , 2011	The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is opened for signatures.
July 25, 2011	The Cybercrime Prevention Act begins and was passed later in 2012 in the Philippines.



January 30 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	The UN General Assembly adopts resolution A/RES/68/181 on the protection of women human rights defenders
October 2015	The United Nations Broadband Commission for Digital Development publishes a digital paper to call attention to the rising trends of gender-based violence
December 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2020	Passing of the UN General Assembly Resolution on Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Digital Contexts.
January 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2021	The UNIFORM NON-CONSENSUAL DISCLOSURE OF INTIMATE IMAGES ACT is adopted by the Canadian Criminal Code

## Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Generally, the UN has taken a relatively liberal stance with multiple resolutions addressing the issue of violence against women, most notably resolutions A/RES/48/104 and A/77/302. The first states the declaration on the elimination of the use of violence against women and the latter states the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It should be noted that the first was passed in 1993 before digital media became mainstream. Due to this, the resolution focused on forms of physical violence against women rather than the use of digital media. However, resolution A/77/302 stated the use of efforts to eliminate all violence against women (published in 2022). Due to the more recent timeframe and the global situation at the time—heavy reliance on Zoom for both online education and work, there were a number of stated methods to address the concerns of violence against women. Most notable mentions which depict the political stance of the resolution being tilted toward being left-winged include the words such as incels and trolling which were defined as "short for "involuntary celibates", are misogynistic men who blame women and feminism for different kinds of personal and social problems." Trolling is defined as "the posting of messages, images or videos and the creation of hashtags for the purpose of provoking or inciting violence against women and girls." Throughout the resolution, all definitions of negatively connotated jargon throughout the resolution being definitions that only apply to men and not women, whilst all definitions that apply to victims are directed towards women, ironically adding to the stereotype of men abusing women on digital platforms.

- Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, 18 August 2022 (**A/77/302**)

- Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, 23 December 2020 **(A/RES/75/161)**
- Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment, 11 January 2019 **(A/RES/73/148)**
- Promotion of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms: Protecting Women Human Rights defenders, 30 January 2014, **(A/RES/68/181)**
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 20 December 1993 **(A/RES/48/104)**

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There have been a number of attempts to solve the issue regarding gender-based violence against women, most notable of which include at least 5 UN resolutions, 7 changes in both international and national legislature, and countless movements. However, these have still not managed to solve the issue as a whole. The downfalls of such attempts generally stemmed from the difficulty of finding ways to empower women without going too far on one spectrum. Due to the nature of the law and specifically the way that it sets precedence for similar cases, any changes in legislature oftentimes result in impacts far greater than was intended and thought of. As a result, it is essential to not only consider the literal changes and impacts of a resolution, but the precedence that it may bring.

## Possible Solutions

There are a number of possible solutions to solve the issue of Gender-Based Violence, spanning from those in the sector of legislature and technological solutions, to those through education. However, it should be noted that each and every single solution has its own flaws and that it will set precedence for future cases (in the form of legislature or resolutions) and the impact that such solutions may bring to future generations (in the form of education). As such, it is essential to consider the extent to which each solution will.

The first mentioned solution is a solution through legislature, specifically both nationally and internationally. Nationally, there are a few examples that seem most successful—the Cybercrime Prevention Act of the Philippines and Canada's amendment to Bill C-13. These criminal codes allow for more flexibility under the judiciary's judgment (as any court does) whilst allowing the judge to convict

those for the spreading of non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Although this may not directly lower crime rates, it certainly mitigates the impacts of such events. However, international treaties are also options. The most successful of the bunch was that of the Istanbul Convention, where nations mandated the protection of women from all sources of violence as a whole, which included those conducted digitally. Through this, nations were able to bring a halt to the very source of where the issues stemmed from, lessening the number of such situations from happening as a whole. Through these methods, nations were able to lower the number of GBV occurring as a whole while also developing better methods to deal with them, especially with the help of technology.

Technology and changes in legislature are only ways to deal with GBV cases happening presently. However, through education, future cases of such violence can be negated altogether; through public implementation of widespread educational initiatives, awareness regarding digital GBV can be developed, teaching one how to recognize, report, and protect oneself from such online abuse. Additionally, certain schools have implemented the use of digital safety lessons in order to better educate students on how to be responsible digital consumers. Through education, future potential victims can be informed on the ways to handle instances of GBV while potential perpetrators can be inspired otherwise.

In conclusion, there are a number of approaches to stopping GBV. However, the concern should be the impact and precedence that it may set, resulting in future impacts that were unintended. The goal of such solutions should not be to sacrifice the rights of a certain gender over another, but rather to find a method to prevent GBV and address cases altogether.

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## Appendix or Appendices

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- II. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/47>
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