Digital dimension of violence against women in Armenia

This report has been carried out as part of the Council of Europe project "Ending violence against women and promoting gender equality in Armenia" to analyse the dynamics and implementing mechanisms of the protection of women's rights in Armenia.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Digital dimension of violence against women in Armenia

Dr. Anahit Parzyan
National consultant, Council of Europe

Reviewer Louise Hooper
International consultant, Council of Europe

July 2024

Council of Europe

Cover design and layout
Antares Media Holding

Picture
© Shutterstock

Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
www.coe.int

Table of Contents

List of acronyms

AI - Artificial intelligence

CEDAW - UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CERT - Cybersecurity Emergency Rescue Team

ECRI - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

EDVAW Platform - The platform of independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women

GPS - Global positioning systems

GREVIO - Group of Experts on Violence Against Women

ICT - Information communication technologies

Istanbul Convention - Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence

NGOs - Non-governmental organisations

1. Executive summary

This report has been carried out as part of the Council of Europe project "Ending violence against women and promoting gender equality in Armenia" to analyse the dynamics and implementing mechanisms of the protection of women's rights in Armenia focusing on the digital dimension of violence, with a view to aligning them with international legal provisions and policy standards. The proliferation of digital services has led to an increase in cybercrimes, including gendered digital violence. Despite legislative frameworks, there is a significant gap in addressing and mitigating these threats. This report outlines essential legal and institutional changes needed in Armenia, emphasizes the importance of awareness and training for professionals, and offers recommendations to strengthen protections against digital violence. It also presents key findings from surveys conducted with legal entities, victims, and support organizations, revealing significant gaps in awareness, legislative frameworks, and support systems. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address digital violence against women.

Survey findings

The surveys reveal a pressing need for stronger legislative frameworks, increased awareness, and better support systems to combat digital violence against women in Armenia. Legal professionals, victims, and support organizations all point to significant shortcomings in current responses, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive education, legislative reform, and technological advancements to safeguard women in the digital age.

Law enforcement and judicial response

Awareness and legislative gaps

- 78% of legal professionals recognise that rapid technological advancements introduce new types of violence that current legislation does not adequately address.
- 82% believe expanding legislation on digital violence is critical, yet only 43% think it should be classified separately as gender-based violence.
- Surprisingly, 55% are unaware of the prevalence of digital violence against women, and only 13% see it as a complex issue needing specific intervention.

Need for capacity building

- 95% emphasise the importance of educational programs and international exchanges to enhance the capabilities of professionals in detecting and protecting victims of digital violence.

Victims' experiences

Prevalence of digital violence

- 98% of victims reported experiencing digital violence in addition to other forms of abuse.
- Cyberstalking was reported by 74% of victims, significantly affecting their social interactions and quality of life. Financial fraud was experienced by 34%.
- Most perpetrators were former partners, with only a small percentage involving unknown individuals from dating apps.

Lack of support and reporting challenges

- Victims noted a lack of targeted support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Women Support Centres for digital violence.
- Only 23% reported incidents to the police, with no responses received, highlighting a gap in law enforcement's ability to address these issues.

High-level female officials and public figures

Experience of digital attacks

- 78% of surveyed high-level female officials and public figures faced gender-based digital attacks.
- 68% considered leaving public life due to these attacks, indicating the severe personal and professional impact.

Case examples

- Instances of deepfake threats and unauthorised sharing of personal images were reported.
- Victims felt unsupported by law enforcement and often did not report incidents due to fear and shame.

NGOs and Women Support Centres

Awareness and technological capacities

- 100% of participants from NGOs and Women Support Centres recognise the problem of digital violence against women.
- 78% stress the urgent need for educational and awareness-raising materials for specialised Women Support Centres to detect and protect victims.
- 85% highlight the necessity of technological tools to track and stop cybercriminals, though only 25% emphasise the need for legislative improvements specifically addressing digital violence.

Conclusions

The survey results highlight significant gaps in awareness, reporting mechanisms, and support services available to victims. Additionally, the data underscores the urgent need for targeted educational campaigns, enhanced legal frameworks, and robust multi-sectoral collaboration to effectively address and mitigate the impacts of digital violence. These insights provide a critical foundation for shaping comprehensive strategies and interventions aimed at protecting the rights and safety of women and girls in Armenia's digital landscape.

2. Introduction

In the 21st century, a pervasive shift towards the digital realm has occurred, impacting various aspects of daily life. Industries across both private and public sectors, such as entertainment, dating, education, finance, healthcare, and food industries, have embraced this transition to the digital landscape. This transformation is driven by the rapid proliferation of digital services, an expanding user base, and the widespread availability of information technology including smartphones and primarily motivated by its speed, affordability, and inclusivity (Sahakyan, 2024). The digital dimension has accelerated violent and aggressive actions, enabling women to be targeted on an unprecedented scale due to affordable and accessible means.

Currently the forecast of mobile internet users in Armenia, the most economical and accessible form of internet connection, is estimated to be around 1.87 million. Total internet users in the country are expected to reach 2.44 million by 2024 (Statista 2024). This rapid growth will intensify online interconnection and activities which in turn could lead to a proliferation of cybercrimes and harmful online behaviour, including digital violence. While men are mostly targeted for financial or information fraud, women are more likely to be targeted for specifically gendered types of digital violence not limited to financial and information frauds. New forms of technology such as generative AI create opportunities to scale and automate abuse in novel ways posing further new challenges to law enforcement and the judiciary (Choudhury 2023).

Legislative frameworks often struggle to keep pace with the development and proliferation of cyber threats. Consequently, individuals subjected to economic, physical, and psychological cyberbullying and cyber-torture, particularly women and girls, often find themselves without adequate legal protections and encounter significant challenges in accessing protection and justice. Cybercriminals target their personal and professional lives, disrupting their career progression and personal well-being. This can lead to feelings of vulnerability, isolation, stress, and even result in unpredictable and extreme actions, including suicide.

Unlike the risk of physical violence and torture, which can sometimes be mitigated by changing one's location or addressing the source of the harm, cyber-torture and cyberbullying are not bound by geographical constraints and the suggestion that women go 'offline' is unrealistic. The digital dimensions of violence against women transcend borders and operate continuously, unaffected by time zones. Consequently, the intensity and persistence of such cybercrimes and harassment are significantly amplified, presenting unique challenges for victims.

This report outlines some initial key legal and institutional changes required in Armenia to tackle this emerging threat. In addition to those changes, it identifies additional efforts that are needed to raise awareness of the digital forms of violence against women and to ensure that all professionals working with victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence in digital dimension receive adequate training to be able to identify and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls that result from the fast development and adoption of technology.

3. Scope and methodology

The findings of this report are based on an analysis of the international and Armenian legislative frameworks, desk research and field work. This included consideration of written reports, parliamentary discussions, information gathered through media, personal interviews, and overall comparative analyses of social and cultural perceptions. In addition, surveys were conducted with the police, prosecution, judicial and other affliated bodes, as well as non-governmental organisations including the regional support centres for women subjected to domestic violence (Women's Support Centres).

In defining the scope and conducting the research, key Council of Europe documents considered include:

- Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) (the Istanbul Convention),
- GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women (GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1),
- the platform of independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women (EDVAW Platform) thematic paper on the digital dimension of violence against women (EDVAW (2022)); and
- the study 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age' (Council of Europe Study (Van der Wilke 2021)).

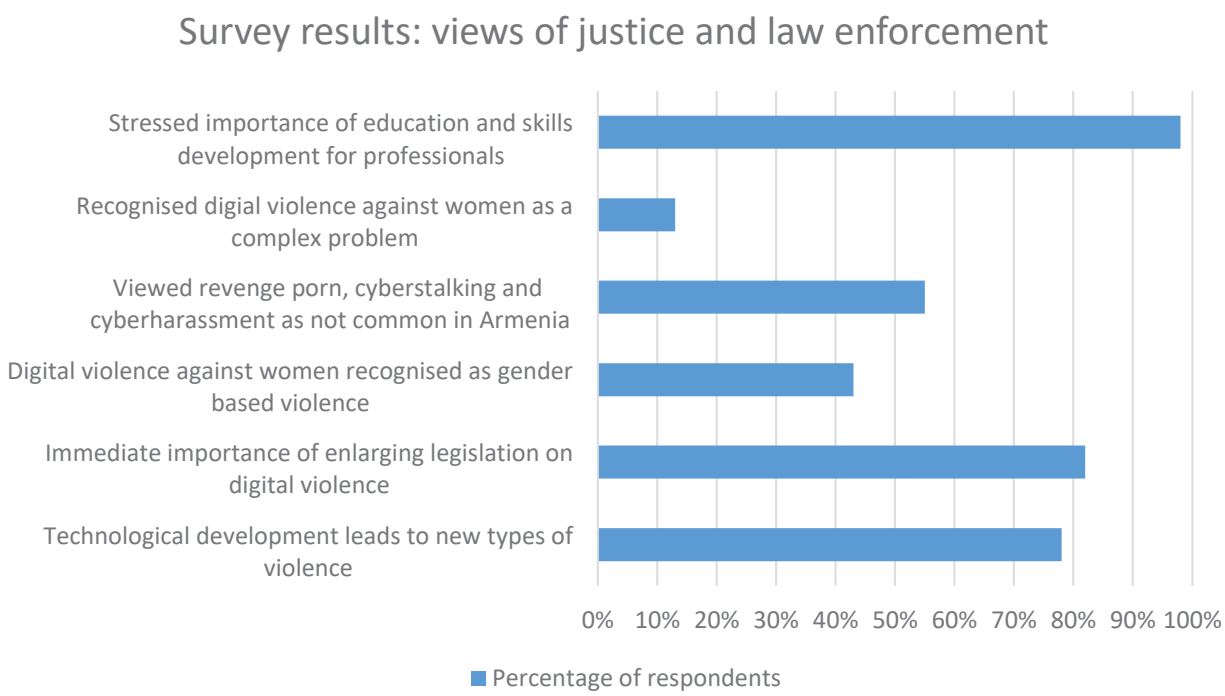
3.1. Survey: findings

The following surveys were conducted in Armenia to understand the capacity to respond to digital violence, vulnerabilities of victims and awareness of digital violence amongst stakeholders.

3.1.1. Questionnaire 1: views of justice and law enforcement

Responses to the questionnaire were received from prosecutors, police officers of different ranks, and legal professionals. The information about responsiveness of law enforcement agencies to reports of online harassment and abuse and the accessibility of legal remedies for victims, such as protection orders and restraining orders was evaluated.

The responses demonstrated that there are no clearly defined frameworks to sufficiently detect, protect and prosecute digital violence against women.



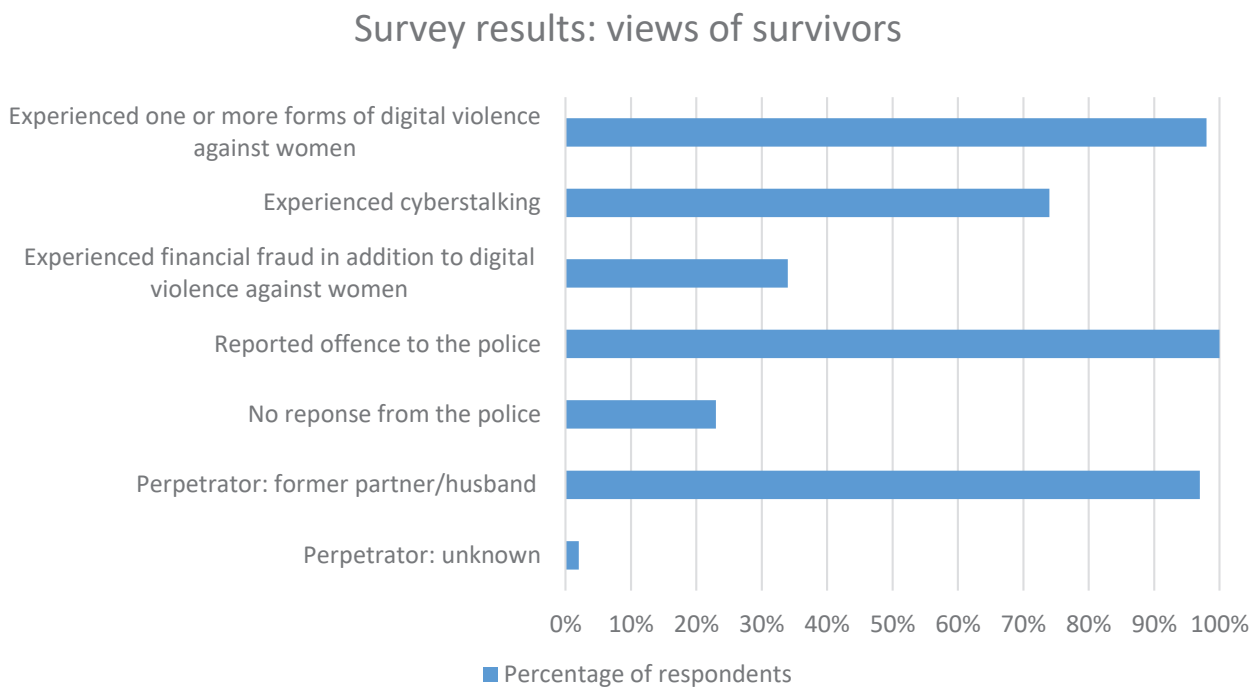
78% of the participants agreed that the rapid speed of the technology development brings new types of violence, and that the legislation does not provide tools and mechanism to adequately respond to these types of violence. It is of interest that although 82% mentioned the immediate importance of further enlargement of the legislation referring to digital violence, only 43% mentioned that digital violence against women must be addressed separately as a type of gender-based violence. Surprisingly, 55% mentioned that such violations as revenge porn, cyberstalking, cyber harassment between current/former partners directed to the female partner are not common in Armenia, and they have never been acquainted with it. Only 13% agreed that digital violence against women is a complex problem and that it must be addressed specifically. 95% of the responders mentioned the highest importance of educational and skill development for the professionals in parallel with the legislation improvements, particularly international exchange programs and exercises, designed to increase their capacities to detect and protect victims affected by digital violence.

3.1.2. Questionnaire 2: views of survivors

The second part of the survey was a questionnaire addressed to the victims of different NGOs and Women Support Centres to which they applied for assistance based on domestic violence incidents or gender-based violence incidents. The target group was asked whether they have experienced violence in digital dimension, as well as other forms of violence, whether they reported

the incidents and what were the results. The questionnaire was designed to identify whether they would describe any forms of violence perpetrated against them as digital.

This survey revealed that survivors of all forms of violence against women have usually encountered digital violence as part of their experience.



In contrast to the belief of 55% of law enforcement and justice professionals that digital violence against women was rare in Armenia, 98% of survivors and NGO workers mentioned one or more forms of violence in its digital dimension implemented against them/women they supported. 2% were not sure what that was, or how to name it. While 74% had experienced cyberstalking which limited social interactions and reduced their quality of life, 34% had also experienced financial fraud as well. In the cases of 97% of the victims included in the survey the perpetrator was their former partner/husband, whereas in cases of only 2%, the perpetrator was an unknown person from a dating app. The participants did not mention receiving any support from Women's Support Centres or any other organisations directly addressing digital violence. 23% of the respondents reported the case to the police, however, none of them got any response.

The same questionnaire was addressed to high-level female officials and public figures to see whether their social interactions and public activities were targeted in the digital domain to exclude, decrease, and silence their voices. Via personal interviews, they shared their personal experience of digital attacks and how they had overcome difficulties.

78% of these participants mentioned that they have experienced constant hatred and attacks towards their public selves particularly referring to gender discrimination. 98% mentioned

one or more than one type of cyber-attack directed to them throughout their career because of their gender. While 68% mentioned that they at least once thought about leaving public life, 32% mentioned that they felt hurt, but chose to exercise resistance.

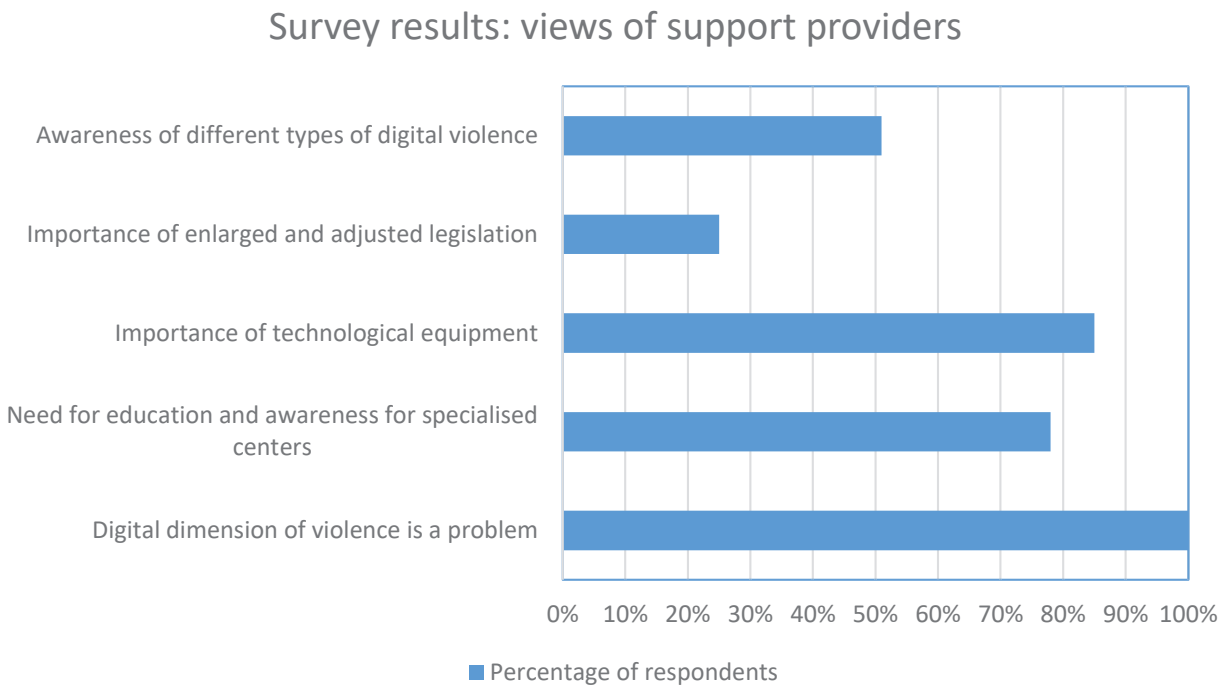
[redacted] A spokeswoman of a male official referred to her experience of becoming a target for a whole week just because of her business trip together with her supervisor. Photos from her personal digital album were circulated without her consent referring to and featuring her as a 'fiancé' of the supervisor. She felt depression, shame and was thinking about limiting her presence on social media at all. She did not report the incident to the police, because she was not sure if sufficient mechanisms were available to protect her. Although several years have passed, the blackmailing articles are still searchable online.

[redacted] Another public figure mentioned a threat to publicly release a video with sexual content generated by deepfake technology if she did not give the blackmailers a specific sum of money. The victim said that she turned to friends and publicly available professionals to close the channel and video but did not report to the police. She mentioned that she felt ashamed and frustrated and could not imagine her family and coworkers seeing that video. She chose to limit her activity online.

3.1.3. Questionnaire 3: views of support providers

The third questionnaire was designed to evaluate Women's Support Centres (NGOs) ability to respond to and guide victims of digital violence by providing protection and support and included measuring their awareness as well as technological capacities to identify violence against women in the digital domain. This included provisions for emergency hotlines, counselling services, legal aid, and shelters tailored to address the unique challenges faced by victims in the digital realm.

This survey revealed the overwhelming concerns of the Women's Support Centres (NGOs) with direct contact with victims that the digital dimensions of violence against women must be addressed.



100% of the participants identified the digital dimensions of violence against women as a problem to be addressed. 78% of the participants mentioned the urgent need for education and awareness raising materials for specialised centres to be able to detect, protect and help victims to recover. 85% mentioned the importance of technological equipment to be able to track and stop the cyber criminals. Even though only 25% mentioned the importance of amending legislation to specifically cover different types of digital violence, 51% mentioned that they know that such things exist, but have difficulties to see the difference between them and collectively called them cybercrime.

3.1.4. Survey's conclusions

The social and cultural context of a specific society are important factors in understanding the occurrence of gender-based violence and the response of law enforcement. Social perceptions and representations of women define and formulate social understanding of morality and justice sometimes in parallel with legal frameworks and can distort the reality of women's experience.

The survey indicated that violence against women in digital dimension is an accelerating issue in Armenia that is not sufficiently understood or addressed. The legal framework and prosecution mechanisms do not address in full the different forms and types of violence against women in digital dimension. Women themselves do not sufficiently identify digital violence as violence nor do they report such offences or seek protection and prosecution. In parallel, Women's Support Centres are

neither sufficiently aware of, nor have technology to be able to help in case of detecting digital violence. Moreover, there is a lack of established co-operation mechanisms between Women's Support Centres and police to detect and stop digital violence, provide protection, and ensure prosecution of cases.

3.2. International legal frameworks

Armenia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the Optional Protocol thereto in 2006, it is signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and signed the Istanbul Convention in January 2018 (although this is not yet ratified). Significantly, Article 5 of the Armenian Constitution provides that international norms shall prevail in case of a conflict between national law and ratified international conventions. Article 5(1) of the Armenian Law on International Treaties further provides for the direct legal application of ratified treaties.

Although CEDAW does not explicitly cover violence against women, since 1992 the CEDAW Committee through its General Recommendations has made clear that gender-based violence breaches specific provisions of the Convention (CEDAW 1992: para 6). General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence, updating General Recommendation No. 19 acknowledges that violence against women 'manifests itself on a continuum of multiple, interrelated, and recurring forms, in a range of settings, from private to public, including technology mediated settings' (CEDAW 2017a: para 6). Gender-based violence occurs in all spaces and spheres of human interaction whether public or private including through technology-mediated environments such as contemporary forms of violence occurring online and in other digital environments (CEDAW 2017a: para 20). The CEDAW Committee recommends States Parties to gather data on the digital dimensions of violence against women (CEDAW 2017a: para 34(b)) and to prompt the private sector, including businesses and transnational corporations, to implement suitable measures for eliminating violence against women on their services and platforms (CEDAW 2017a: para 30(d)). General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of women and girls to education refers directly to cyberbullying and requires states to enact legislation that defines and penalizes harassment through use of information and communications technologies and the online harassment of women and girls in all its forms (CEDAW 2017b: paras 70-72).

3.2.1. CEDAW 7th periodic report on Armenia

The CEDAW 7th periodic report on Armenia (CEDAW 2022a) noted a hardening of traditional and patriarchal attitudes that limit the enjoyment by women and girls of their rights. The Committee recommended expediting the proposed law on legal equality and the adopting of temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men. In the context of discriminatory stereotypes, the CEDAW committee recommended developing and

implementing a comprehensive strategy, including for the online domain, targeting community leader teachers, girls and boys, women, and men to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in a society.

In the context of protection from violence against women the committee identified with concern the absence of criminal law provisions criminalising all forms of gender-based violence together with inadequate levels of protection from those with intersecting forms of discrimination. A series of recommendations were made to amend the legislative framework to cover all forms of gender-based violence against women, ensure access to justice and the provision of effective protection. The need for women to be able to report without reprisal, stigmatisation or re-traumatisation was also stressed. The report also recommends measures to be taken in respect of hate speech and the introduction of measures to combat discrimination and hate speech against women engaged in politics. Additional measures recommended include awareness-raising and educational campaigns in schools, in the National Assembly and among the general public.

The Committee recommended ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

3.2.2. The Council of Europe: Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the most detailed binding framework in the domain of preventing and combatting violence against women. It delineates violence against women as a clear infringement of human rights and a manifestation of discrimination against women. The Istanbul Convention elaborates on this definition, specifying that such violence encompasses all forms of gender-based harm or suffering inflicted upon women, including physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm. This includes actions, threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, irrespective of whether they occur in public or private settings. Furthermore, the convention extends its purview to encompass domestic violence, which it defines in Article 3(b) as 'all acts of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence' occurring within familial or domestic settings. It emphasises that this violence can transpire between current or former spouses or partners, regardless of whether they cohabit or have cohabited in the past. Additionally, the convention underscores the importance of recognising domestic violence as primarily a gendered phenomenon, highlighting the disproportionate impact it has on women (Article 2). The convention is organised around four pillars: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and co-ordinated Policies.

In the context of the digital dimension of violence against women the provisions of the Istanbul Convention are complemented by the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (CETS No.185) (Budapest Convention), and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201) (Lanzarote Convention).

3.2.3. GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1

Due to the rapid spread of internet and technology related harmful activities within the newly emerged digital sphere, the Group of Experts on Violence Against Women (GREVIO) acknowledged the escalating global concern in respect of violence against women occurring in the digital realm and during its 21st plenary meeting decided to prepare a General Recommendation dedicated to the application of the Istanbul Convention in relation to the digital aspect of violence against women. Article 69 of the Istanbul Convention empowers GREVIO to make recommendations.

As outlined in the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, General Recommendations are intended to have a uniform interpretation for all parties involved, addressing articles or themes within the convention. While not legally binding, General Recommendations play a pivotal role as a crucial reference point for parties, fostering a deeper comprehension of convention themes and furnishing explicit guidance for effective implementation. They are structured to be incorporated into future monitoring endeavours.

General Recommendation No. 1 seeks to align the ICT discourse with the narrative of gender-based violence against women by clearly positioning manifestations of violence against women and girls in the digital sphere as expressions of gender-based violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO stressed the importance of separately defining violence in this newly formulated sphere. It places particular focus on all forms of online sexual harassment, online and technology facilitated stalking and the digital dimensions of psychological violence. The General Recommendation was adopted on 20 October 2021.

3.2.4. Other relevant standards

Other relevant standards include CM/Rec (2019) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism which includes a dedicated section on online sexist hate speech and CM/Rec (2022) 16 on combatting hate speech adopted 20 May 2022.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has issued Recommendation 2098 (2017) on ending cyber discrimination and online hate and two relevant resolutions, firstly Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2144 (2017) on ending cyber-discrimination and online hate and secondly Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2177 (2017) on putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space.

Finally, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has produced General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech which also covers hate speech in the digital sphere.

3.3. Definitions and terminology

Some of the most important issues to address when seeking to combat forms of violence against women are the definitions and terminology used. The lack of standardised and known terminology makes it difficult for victims to properly articulate their personal experience, creates disparities in stakeholders' understanding, measurement and evaluation of such abuse and impacts on the ability of parties to effectively respond to such violence.

Both internationally and locally, conversations and legal frameworks surrounding information and communication technology, participation, access rights, and online safety often lack a gender-informed perspective and understanding of women's vulnerability to online violence despite its prevalence. GREVIO has observed that international and European legal norms pertaining to women's rights do not adequately address the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence. This oversight creates a perceived gap in regulations (GREVIO 2021).

Digital violence may refer to types of technology or digital harm widely known, types widely unknown and types still to be invented or generated. The rapid spread of technology coupled with access to technology becoming easier means there will be new types of both harm and technology developed in parallel to, and most likely faster than, the legislative and policy actions taken. This is especially so with the availability of generative AI (Choudhury 2023). As a result, it is very hard to define comprehensively either the types of harm or the technologies. Consequently, policy and law makers must ensure wider usage of general definitions to define the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence to also cover technologies and forms of violence that will be generated in the future.

The definitions used in this report align with GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women.

3.3.1. Forms of digital violence against women

The digital dimension of violence against women, often referred to as 'online violence' or 'cyber violence', encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviours and actions perpetrated against women in the digital sphere, leveraging various forms of technology and online platforms. The concept of violence against women in its digital dimension encompasses both online aspects (activities performed and data available on the internet, including internet intermediaries on the surface web as well as the dark web) and offline aspects (activities carried out with the use of technology and communication equipment, including hardware and software) of technology facilitated harmful behaviour perpetrated against women and girls. 'Internet intermediaries' refers to entities that facilitate interactions on the internet between natural and legal persons by offering and performing a variety of functions and services and include internet service providers (ISPs), search engines and social media platforms. Technological tools which may be misused by abusers to stalk, harass, survey, and control victims include smartphones, cameras and other recording

equipment, global positioning systems (GPS) or satellite navigators, other internet-connected devices such as smart watches, fitness trackers and smart home devices as well as software such as spyware or other mobile applications that may facilitate violence. (GREVIO 2021).

1. Online harassment and cyberbullying

Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention defines sexual harassment as 'any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'. General Recommendation No. 1 identifies five particular forms: i) non-consensual image or video sharing, ii) non-consensual taking, producing, or procuring of intimate images or videos, iii) exploitation, coercion and threats, iv) sexualised bullying, and v) cyberflashing.

With proliferation of technologies and affordability of internet connection, online harassment, and cyberbullying, including offensive comments, derogatory messages, and threats have become a new realm in Armenia as well. Social media platforms, discussion forums, and messaging apps are common spaces where such harassment occurs. This can take the form of abusive messages, threats, dissemination of personal information without consent, and the creation of fake profiles to harass victims. Women who express themselves online, including journalists, activists, and public figures, are particularly vulnerable to online abuse and threats. This can include misogynistic comments, threats of violence, and intimidation aimed at silencing women's voices and participation in public discourse.

2. Revenge porn and non-consensual image sharing

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images, commonly known as revenge porn, is a form of digital violence against women. The impact of this offence is exacerbated by cultural specificity in Armenia, as it puts victims into a shameful position that can harm them morally and result in double victimisation by the society. Perpetrators use this tactic to shame, control, or blackmail women, leading to severe emotional distress and damage to their reputation, within the family, at work or in their career. Non-consensual image sharing can be also used for blackmailing and terrorising through demanding money or some action in return to not disclose the intimate content. In some cases, women report constant manipulation by being asked for more nude photos, thus controlling them through possession of even larger content. It is of great importance to understand emerging technologies and the spread of generative AI tools which allow deepfakes to be made and adjustments to any photographic or video content of bodies or faces or other content. These kinds of technologies are available at a low cost to manufacture pornographic content and stream online both in open and dark webs. While this might be used in some cases for targeting men and

boys, globally around 90% of the victims of non-consensual intimate image abuse are women (Cyber Rights 2024). Women are also subsequently targeted by victim-blaming in society where they are sometimes stigmatised and criticised.

3. Stalking and surveillance

Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention defines stalking as 'intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person causing him or her to fear for his or her safety'.

Stalking women is not a new phenomenon in Armenia. Offline stalking is often wrongly seen as an expression of 'care' or 'masculinity' particularly in villages and small cities. Technology facilitated stalking is a new manifestation of this problem that enables stalking to continue irrespective of location. Women in Armenia may experience online stalking and monitoring, where perpetrators use technology to track their movements, monitor their online activities, and invade their privacy. It is ongoing even if the victim changes her residence (*Volodina v. Russia,* European Court of Human Rights). This can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and loss of control over one's personal information. Digital tools and technology are quite developed and very affordable, and so can be easily deployed for stalking and surveillance. Perpetrators may use GPS tracking apps, spyware, or social media to monitor women's movements and activities, leading to feelings of fear and insecurity. These mechanisms are not well known, so it is hard for a victim to identify, detect and shut the technology down.

4. Online sexual exploitation

Women may be coerced into sharing explicit content, which is then used for blackmail or exploitation. Vulnerable women, such as those facing financial difficulties, are particularly at risk. Women may face sexual harassment and exploitation online, including through unsolicited sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and the solicitation of sexual services. This can occur in various online spaces, including social media, dating apps, and online gaming platforms. Social messaging apps are also very popular. Although they can provide intimacy for the first interconnection, messages and images can be easily shared and are often accumulated via larger groups. The social engineering in this realm is quite sophisticated and women are usually targeted via specific posts on their social media platforms. These can be used to identify characteristics such as personal loneliness or hard financial and mental situations which lead them to be vulnerable to effective targeting by perpetrators.

5. Online dating violence

Dating apps and websites can be breeding grounds for digital violence against women, including harassment, abusive messages, and, in some cases, physical violence stemming from online dating encounters when individuals meet in person. Dating apps are starting to become more popular in Armenia, and include connections not only within Armenia, but also abroad, which can make it harder to track the crime. The geolocations are not always identifiable thus making the digital footprint even harder to track and to catch the criminals.

6. Online abuse in the context of domestic violence

Most of the time abusive partners extend their control and abuse to the digital realm. They might monitor woman's online communications, manipulate her through text or social media, or use technology to exert control and intimidation. This kind of online behaviour is constant and manipulates the victims for a long time. The victims are not able to have a normal life and to socialise freely.

7. Cyber extortion and financial exploitation

Women can also become victims of cyber extortion, where perpetrators demand money or personal information under the threat of exposing embarrassing or compromising online activities. Financial exploitation can also include hacking bank accounts with cyber viruses or social engineering.

8. Digital dimension of psychological violence

Article 33 of the Istanbul Convention defines psychological violence as 'the intentional conduct of seriously impairing a person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats'. All forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere have a psychological impact and could fall under this definition. Online psychological violence can also take the form of threatening the victim's family, insults, shaming and defamation. Incitement to suicide or self-harm is a specific behaviour online. Most forms of online violence are amplified by mechanisms of mob mentality and anonymity.

The digital dimensions of violence against women thus encompass a wide range of behaviours that falls under the definition of violence against women set out in article 3a of the Istanbul Convention. Non-consensual image or video sharing, coercion and threats including rape threats, sexualised bullying and other forms of intimidation, online sexual harassment, impersonation, online staking or stalking via the Internet of Things as well as psychological abuse and economic harm perpetrated via digital means against women and girls all comes under the article 3a definition. (GREVIO 2021).

3.4. Analysis of the legal and practical situation in Armenia

This section examines the gaps and challenges faced by Armenia in responding to the digital dimensions of violence against women using the framework of the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and coordinated Policies.

The first step in recognising and preventing the digital dimension of violence against women is to ensure that necessary legislative provisions are in place. This should be accompanied by other measures to ensure implementation including capacity building and awareness-raising amongst relevant actors and the population at large.

In essence the law must encompass and be operated to appropriately prevent, provide protection from, and prosecute the digital dimension of violence against women. In addition, measures are needed to ensure gender stereotypes are eradicated, gender equality is fostered and awareness-raising campaigns target women and men, girls, and boys to ensure understanding and awareness of the different forms of violence against women and girls perpetrated in the digital sphere and where to obtain protection and support. Professionals should receive training and digital literacy within education should be promoted. Tech companies also have a role to play and should be encouraged to make an active effort to avoid gender bias in their products.

3.4.1. Legal framework in Armenia

The analysis below aims to examine whether the existing legislation aligns with international standards and recommendations, such as those provided by GREVIO, to enable policy makers to identify gapes and shortcomings and develop strategies to strengthen legal protection for women in the digital realm. According to the CEDAW Committee, gender stereotyping in Armenia continues to be the main obstacle to the equality of women and men, and a cause for gender-based violence (CEDAW 2022a).

Armenia is still adjusting its legislation, both in terms of prevention and protection, and accountability mechanisms to address different forms of violence against women fully and sufficiently.

Current criminal law only partially addresses the specificity of gender-based violence. As of the already adopted laws, including following the ratification of the Budapest Convention (CETS No. 185), there is still lack of fully providing instrumental, legal mechanisms to define violations and harmful behaviour against women in digital dimension.

3.4.2. Online sexual harassment

As of 2020, the Armenian Criminal Code did not sufficiently address sexual harassment in a digital dimension (Council of Europe 2021b). Sexual harassment is defined in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men as a form of gender discrimination in Article 3(21) read in conjunction with article 6 (which prohibits gender discrimination). Discrimination is criminalised under Article 203 of the Criminal Code however this is not used in practice and no sanction is foreseen either under civil or criminal law. Furthermore, Armenia has yet to enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, which would likely include a prohibition on sexual harassment as a form of discrimination.

3.4.3. Online and technology facilitated stalking

Armenia adopted the Legal act on prevention of domestic violence, protection of victims of domestic violence and restoration of family solidarity in 2017. The digital violence, as a separate manifestation of violations of the rights of women is not specifically defined nor is the digital space labelled as a new domain where women and girls are specifically targeted because of their gender.

Stalking till 2024 was not specifically addressed in criminal provision While defining stalking some generic offences, such as infliction of severe physical pain or mental suffering (Article 119), extortion (Article 182) or threats (Article 137), might have targeted some behaviours that fell within the concept of stalking. Yet they fail to capture the specific nature of this crime. Moreover, in cases prosecuted within the scope of criminal law, direct physical harm was mostly the subject of investigation and stalking was just linked to the physical abuse.

Digital stalking in turn, often falls beyond the reach of standard investigative efforts. Several courses of conduct that constitute stalking were not addressed by the above-mentioned provisions, such as constantly following the victim or engaging in unwanted communication particularly in the virtual sphere. In fact, the component missing in the Armenian Code is the ability to target a course of conduct, rather than single, isolated events.

On 7 February 2024 Parliament Member Zaruhi Batoyan introduced a draft bill with recommendations to make changes in several laws directly or indirectly linked to the protection of the rights of women and girls. The authors introduced 'stalking' as a separately defined violent

action and suggested to include it within the scope of Criminal Law. Discussing amendments that strengthen the Domestic Violence Law, in an interview for this research Ms Zaruhi Batoyan mentioned, that within the scope of this legislative change 'stalking' is clearly defined and specified as a prosecutable crime. On the question whether or not cyberstalking is also defined within this legislative reform, she specifies that under the new definition, all types of stalking, including but not limited to cyberstalking will become criminalised. According to Zaruhi Batoyan's perspective, another valuable impact of the law is defining 'partner' as including an 'online partner' Previous legislative acts required the partner to be a person with whom the women was expected to have physical relations.

Before the adoption of the law there was a debate over whether there is a specific need to define what means are used for stalking. This is now stipulated in the amended Criminal code. Since the criminal law prohibits stalking equally for all, the initiators of the bill clearly articulated that Stalking must be considered a form of gender-based violence. These new legislative reforms, will mark a groundbreaking change in naming these actions as a violation of women's rights.

Tatevik Stepanyan, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, notes that in recent years, various laws, regulations, and methodologies have been strengthened concerning women's rights in Armenia. Digital services have been developed to transparently register, track, and respond to cases of violence, facilitating further prosecution. In 2024, the Ministry plans to launch a digital platform for tracking domestic violence cases, which will be utilised by multiple governmental entities. This joint platform is expected to provide new, accurate data for better reference to domestic violence cases. Additionally, Ms. Stepanyan emphasizes with current development of technologies, accessibility and availability of various platforms and gadgets, measures must be taken to raise awareness regarding digital violence.

3.4.4. Digital dimension of psychological violence

Article 119 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia criminalises only the infliction of severe physical pain or substantial mental suffering. However digital violence resulting in psychological harm is still difficult to prosecute because of the lack of understanding of the phenomenon and difficulty in evidencing 'substantial mental suffering'. Guidelines for law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary and training may assist in enabling prosecutions on this basis.

4. International co-operation and collaboration

Related to cyberspace regulations, Armenia's cybersecurity legislative situation is evolving, with efforts to enhance legal frameworks and policies for better protection against cyber threats. Currently there are initiatives to align with international standards and improve cybersecurity governance and resilience. Considering the fact, that cyberspace does not have specific boundaries like land and sea, it is of high importance to engage in international co-operation to promote collaboration in addressing online violence against women. This can involve mechanisms for sharing information and best practices among countries, as well as coordination in investigating and prosecuting cross-border cases of online harassment and abuse. If the existing mechanisms and frameworks provided for by the Budapest Convention are not applicable, it may be necessary to find ways to enable such co-operation to take place.

5. Report recommendations

5.1. Legal framework

The existing laws in Armenia need enhancing and updating to encompass the digital dimension of violence against women and to ensure effective prosecution and protection of victims. To be able to measure the dynamics of technology development and accompanying proliferation of digital violence, the legislation must include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating its implementation and its effectiveness in protecting women's rights in the digital dimension. This may involve establishing oversight bodies or commissions tasked with regularly reviewing and reporting on progress in addressing online violence against women and addressing digital violence from the perspective of structural discrimination and a battier to the realization of women's human rights.

Recommendations

- Review the existing laws to ensure that online and offline stalking in cases involving domestic violence and otherwise, online psychological violence and harassment are subject to appropriate sanctions.
- Review evidential and procedural law to ensure that forensic and other evidence is properly obtainable and admissible paying due regard to laws relating to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Empower judicial authorities to issue legally binding orders including to third parties, upon the victim's application, for the removal or disabling of access to non-consensual intimate material.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities with a view to ensuring simplified access to evidence held by service providers, including subscriber information to identify the owner of an account or of an IP address used in the commission of an offence.
- Ensure the institutional bodies provided for in the Law on equal rights and equal opportunities are given a mandate to work on gender equality and non-discrimination including addressing the digital dimension of violence against women from the point of view of structural discrimination as a barrier to the realisation of women's human rights.

5.2. Prevention

Awareness-raising, dissemination of information

The survey demonstrated that there is low awareness of the many forms of digital violence and of their prevalence in Armenia. There are no systematic state level awareness-raising campaigns to inform the public or specific groups about these types of crimes. This increases the likelihood of women falling victim to such crimes. Women also face barriers to reporting and law enforcement professionals who lack the awareness necessary to launch effective investigations.

Moreover, cultural norms and expectations may discourage women and girls from reporting incidents of digital violence due to fear of shame or retaliation, stigma, and victim-blaming attitudes prevalent in society. By raising awareness of the capacity of technology to distort the truth and manipulate images, it is possible to break harmful stereotypes about women and girls in Armenia.

Recommendations

- Include legal provisions and funding for preventive measures and educational programs aimed at raising awareness about online violence against women. This could involve integrating digital literacy and online safety education into school curricula and providing resources for public awareness campaigns.
- Implement awareness-raising campaigns targeting women and men, girls and boys at different levels of society on different forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere as well as the support services available to victims. Support the efforts of women's organisations towards this end and recognise and make use of their experience.
- Promote awareness campaigns that challenge harmful cultural norms and gender stereotypes and encourage victims to come forward without fear of stigma.
- Develop digital literacy programs targeting women and girls to foster responsible online behaviour and awareness of digital risks. Teach, share and show the capacities of technology to accumulate large amount of data and manipulate personal images, information and videos to produce fake products, distribute and target women and girls.

5.3. Protection

There is some cross over between the requirements set out above under prevention and the protection. In respect of protection the availability of support services is essential, and those services must be capable of understanding and responding to the problem.

Women's rights NGOs and Women's Support Centres that provide essential support services to women victims of violence receive very limited guidelines and technical tools or technology to be able to categorise, detect and help protect against crimes and violations of women's rights in cyberspace or to empower and help the victims to recover. Such support organisations should be assisted to provide care, trauma support, and psychological assistance, as well as to guide women in which cases to report to the police. Moreover, Armenia does not have any Cybersecurity Emergency Rescue Team (CERT)or referral centres at present that are specifically trained to recognise violence against women and able to provide help in case of need. Interagency co-operation between law enforcement, CERTs and relevant NGOs and support organisations should be developed to improve the effectiveness of digital forensic examinations to stop the digital crime and improve detection.

Women's rights NGOs and the Women's Support Centres identified a real need for training and capacity building, including investment in technical skills and equipment to enable cybercriminals to be traced, tracked and stopped. It is necessary to strengthen and expand support services'

awareness about digital violence, including counselling, legal aid, and safe reporting mechanisms through training and resources.

Recommendations

- Set up institutionalised co-operation and co-ordination structures involving all relevant statutory agencies, non-governmental bodies, and specialist support services.
- Provide training and build capacity of relevant organisations, general and specialist support services to enable the identification and ability to respond to instances of the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to national and local governance bodies and relevant support organisations including Women's rights NGOs to effectively prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women perpetrated online and through technology.

5.4. Prosecution

The survey disclosed a clear difference in perception of the scale of the problem between law enforcement officials, victims, and support services. Law enforcement officials did however recognise the need for training and capacity building. There appears to be an absence of expertise and resources on how to use existing law to address digital dimensions of violence against women and how best to gather, preserve and use electronic evidence without causing further harm to victims.

The survey also demonstrated that law enforcement professionals lacked knowledge of the extent of violence against women in the digital sphere and do not sufficiently understand that this must be addressed as a form of gender-based violence against women. 95% of responders identified skills training and education as of the highest importance and suggested international exchange programmes to enhance their capacity to detect the digital dimension of violence against women and protect victims. In 2020 and 2021 the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators contained courses concerning the prevention and fight against women and domestic violence (CEDAW, 2022(b)). These courses could be adapted to include training on the digital dimensions of violence against women and the cross-border issues arising.

Recommendations

- Review the existing criminal law and provide guidance to law enforcement and criminal justice actors on how it can be adapted to address the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Review the content of the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators and ensure it includes the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence and cross border dimensions.
- Ensure investigators are equipped with proformas for evidence gathering and use that respect the right to privacy of the victim. Provide training on forensic aspects of electronic evidence gathering and storage.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities of criminal justice actors.
- Develop co-operation mechanisms to enable inter agency co-operation between law enforcement and criminal justice actors, civil justice actors and general and special support services and organisations countering digital violence against women.
- Involve the ICT sector and internet intermediaries in efforts to hold perpetrator of violence against women in the digital sphere to account through complaint mechanisms for users to report harmful content, robust content moderation policies and collaborative working arrangements with law enforcement agencies.

5.5. Co-ordinated policies

Addressing the digital dimension of violence against women requires a comprehensive approach that integrates digital policies with existing legal frameworks on women's rights and criminal regulations. This integration is crucial for providing comprehensive protection, ensuring accountability, and promoting a safe digital environment. Armenia's revised legal framework, reflecting to both Criminal Law and Domestic Violence Law, includes provisions for prosecuting forms of violence against women and girls, however the inclusion of digital violence is often lacking in detail or insufficient. The methods by which digital violence against women is perpetrated, its investigation, forensic and prosecution protocols and the specific needs of victims require to be set out in policy.

Relevant national documents, programmes, action plans could be reviewed to ensure that they embrace the digital dimensions of violence against women and include the development of appropriate co-operation mechanisms to ensure engagement with the private and ICT sector.

Recommendations

- Ensure recognition of the digital dimensions of violence against women in national strategies, programmes, and action plans on violence against women
- Undertake or support quantitative and qualitative research programmes and studies on the digital dimension of violence against women to understand the extent and nature of the problem and measure the financial, personal, and social impacts of such violence including self-censorship and digital exclusion.
- Encourage the private and ICT sector to participate in devising and implementing policies and setting guidelines and self-regulatory standards in line with relevant European and human rights provisions to prevent and combat violence against women taking place in the digital sphere.

6. Conclusion

Digital violence against women is a pressing issue in Armenia, requiring comprehensive and multi-sectoral responses. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report and drawing upon the principles and guidelines set forth by the Council of Europe and other international instruments, Armenia can take meaningful steps towards preventing and combating the digital dimension of violence against women, ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of all women and girls in the digital age.

7. Summary of report recommendations

7.1. Legal framework

Enhance and update existing laws to encompass digital violence and ensure effective enforcement on digital violence against women and girls to sufficiently prevent, protect and prosecute. This requires a:

- Review of the substantive law to ensure stalking in cases involving domestic violence and otherwise, psychological violence and harassment are subject to appropriate sanctions.
- Review evidential and procedural law to ensure forensic and other evidence is properly obtainable and admissible paying due regard to laws relating to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Judicial authorities should be empowered to issue legally binding orders including to third parties, upon the victim's application, for the removal or disabling of access to non-consensual intimate material.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities with a view to ensuring simplified access to evidence held by service providers, including subscriber information to identify the owner of an account or of an IP address used in the commission of an offence.
- Ensure the institutional bodies provided for in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities are empowered and given a mandate to work on gender equality and non-discrimination to address the digital dimension of violence against women from the point of view of the structural discrimination and barrier to the realisation of women's human rights which it may represent.

7.2. Prevention

- Assess whether the legislation includes provisions for preventive measures and educational programs aimed at raising awareness about online violence against women. This can involve integrating digital literacy and online safety education into school curricula and providing resources for public awareness campaigns.
- Implement awareness-raising campaigns targeting women and men, girls and boys at different levels of society on different forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere as well as the support services available to victims. Support the efforts of women's organisations towards this end and recognise and make use of their

experience.

- Promote awareness-raising campaigns that challenge harmful cultural norms and encourage victims to come forward without fear of stigma.
- Teach, share, and show the capacities of technology to accumulate large amount of data and manipulate personal images, information and videos to produce fake products, distribute and target women and girls.

7.3. Protection

- Set up institutionalised co-operation and co-ordination structures involving all relevant statutory agencies, non-governmental bodies, and specialist support services.
- Provide training and build capacity of relevant organisations, general and specialist support services to enable the identification and ability to respond to instances of the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to national and local governance bodies and relevant support organisations including Women's rights organisations to effectively prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women perpetrated online and through technology.

7.4. Prosecution

- Review the existing criminal law and provide guidance to law enforcement and criminal justice actors on how it can be adapted to address the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Review the content of the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators and ensure it includes the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence and cross border dimensions.
- Ensure investigators are equipped with proformas for evidence gathering and use that respect the right to privacy of the victim. Provide training on forensic aspects of electronic evidence gathering and storage.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities of criminal justice actors.
- Develop co-operation mechanisms to enable inter agency co-operation between law enforcement and criminal justice actors, civil justice actors and general and special

support services and relevant organisations countering digital violence against women.

- Involve the ICT sector and internet intermediaries in efforts to hold perpetrator of violence against women in the digital sphere to account through complaint mechanisms for users to report harmful content, robust content moderation policies and collaborative working arrangements with law enforcement agencies.

7.5. Coordinated policies

- Ensure recognition of the digital dimensions of violence against women in national strategies, programmes, and action plans on violence against women.
- Undertake or support quantitative and qualitative research programmes and studies on the digital dimension of violence against women to understand the extent and nature of the problem and measure the financial, personal, and social impacts of such violence including self-censorship and digital exclusion.
- Encourage the private and ICT sector to participate in devising and implementing policies and setting guidelines and self-regulatory standards in line with relevant European and human rights provisions to prevent and combat violence against women taking place in the digital sphere.

8. References

The Council of Europe

CETS No. 185 Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

CETS No. 201 Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)

CETS No. 210, The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

CM/Rec (2019) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism available at: https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894 [accessed 2 July 2024]

CM/Rec (2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on combatting hate speech adopted 20 May 2022, available at https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a67955 [accessed 25 June 2024]

Council of Europe (2021a) 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age', Adriane van der Wilk, Council of Europe (2021) https://edoc.coe.int/en/violence-against-women/10686-protecting-women-and-girls-from-violence-in-the-digital-age.html [accessed 25 June 2024]

Council of Europe (2021b) Training Manual for Police Officers in Armenia on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, November 2021 available at: https://rm.coe.int/police-manual-eng/native/1680b166af

Council of Europe (2022), 'The digital dimension of violence against women as addressed by the seven mechanisms of the EDVAW platform', Council of Europe (2022) https://rm.coe.int/thematic-report-on-the-digital-dimension-of-violence-against-women-as-/1680a933ae [accessed 25 June 2024]

PACE 2017a, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation 2098(2017) Ending cyber-discrimination and online hate, available at https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23456 [accessed 25 June 2024]

PACE 2017b Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 2144(2017 on ending cyber discrimination and online hate available at: https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23456&lang=en [accessed 2 July 2024)

PACE 2017c, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 2177 (2017) Putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space, available at https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23977 [accessed 25 June 2024]

EDVAW 2022, The digital dimension of violence against women as addressed by the seven mechanisms of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence

Against Women (EDVAW platform)', Council of Europe (2022) https://rm.coe.int/thematic-report-on-the-digital-dimension-of-violence-against-women-as-/1680a933ae

ECRI 2015 ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate, available at https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.15 [accessed 25 June 2024]

GREVIO 2021, Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147 [accessed 25 June 2024]

Van der Wilke 2021, Study: 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age' Adriane van der Wilk, Council of Europe (2021)

European Court of Human Rights cases

Volodina v. Russia (no. 2) – App. No 40419/19, European Court of Human Rights, 14 September 2021 https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-6454727-8498144

United Nations

CEDAW 1981, United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf

Optional Protocol

Beijing Platform for Action 1995

CEDAW 1981 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf

CEDAW 1992 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, 1992, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/index.html [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2017a, CEDAW/C/GC/35 General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender- based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (1992) https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-35-2017-gender-based [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2017b, CEDAW/C/GC/36 General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of women and girls to education available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-36-2017-right-girls-and [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2022a, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/7 Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Armenia available at: https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/666/21/pdf/n2266621.pdf?token=TM6xrug1fUPfhxZpzy&fe=true [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2022b, 'Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Commend Armenia on Continuing to Uphold International Obligations Despite the Conflict, Raise Questions on Violence against Women and Family Planning Service', 13 October 2022 available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/10/experts-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-commend-armenia-continuing [accessed 25 June 2024]

Choudhury 2023, Choudhury, Rumman, Lakshmi Dhanya, UNESCO (2023) 'Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in an Era of Generative AI' available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387483

Armenian Laws

Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Republic of Armenia. Available at: https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=138982

Law on Prevention of family and domestic violence, protection of persons subjected to family and domestic violence, and restoration of family solidarity - https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=118672

Parliament of the Republic of Armenia, Domestic Violence Law amendments: http://parliament.am/draftreading_docs8/P-743_DR2.pdf

Literature

Sahakyan, M. Ed. Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003439110

Webpages

Statista 2024, Statista, Digital & Connectivity Indicators Armenia https://www.statista.com/outlook/co/digital-connectivity-indicators/armenia [accessed 2 July 2024]

Cyber Rights 2024, Official webpage 'Victims of the distribution on non-consensual intimate imagery' https://cyberights.org/ncii-90-of-victims-of-the-distribution-of-non-consensual-intimate-imagery-are-women/ [accessed 25 June 2024]

Digital dimension of violence against women in Armenia

Dr. Anahit Parzyan
National consultant, Council of Europe

Reviewer Louise Hooper
International consultant, Council of Europe

July 2024

Council of Europe

Cover design and layout
Antares Media Holding

Picture
© Shutterstock

Council of Europe
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex
www.coe.int

Table of Contents

List of acronyms

AI - Artificial intelligence

CEDAW - UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CERT - Cybersecurity Emergency Rescue Team

ECRI - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

EDVAW Platform - The platform of independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women

GPS - Global positioning systems

GREVIO - Group of Experts on Violence Against Women

ICT - Information communication technologies

Istanbul Convention - Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence

NGOs - Non-governmental organisations

1. Executive summary

This report has been carried out as part of the Council of Europe project "Ending violence against women and promoting gender equality in Armenia" to analyse the dynamics and implementing mechanisms of the protection of women's rights in Armenia focusing on the digital dimension of violence, with a view to aligning them with international legal provisions and policy standards. The proliferation of digital services has led to an increase in cybercrimes, including gendered digital violence. Despite legislative frameworks, there is a significant gap in addressing and mitigating these threats. This report outlines essential legal and institutional changes needed in Armenia, emphasizes the importance of awareness and training for professionals, and offers recommendations to strengthen protections against digital violence. It also presents key findings from surveys conducted with legal entities, victims, and support organizations, revealing significant gaps in awareness, legislative frameworks, and support systems. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address digital violence against women.

Survey findings

The surveys reveal a pressing need for stronger legislative frameworks, increased awareness, and better support systems to combat digital violence against women in Armenia. Legal professionals, victims, and support organizations all point to significant shortcomings in current responses, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive education, legislative reform, and technological advancements to safeguard women in the digital age.

Law enforcement and judicial response

Awareness and legislative gaps

- 78% of legal professionals recognise that rapid technological advancements introduce new types of violence that current legislation does not adequately address.
- 82% believe expanding legislation on digital violence is critical, yet only 43% think it should be classified separately as gender-based violence.
- Surprisingly, 55% are unaware of the prevalence of digital violence against women, and only 13% see it as a complex issue needing specific intervention.

Need for capacity building

- 95% emphasise the importance of educational programs and international exchanges to enhance the capabilities of professionals in detecting and protecting victims of digital violence.

Victims' experiences

Prevalence of digital violence

- 98% of victims reported experiencing digital violence in addition to other forms of abuse.
- Cyberstalking was reported by 74% of victims, significantly affecting their social interactions and quality of life. Financial fraud was experienced by 34%.
- Most perpetrators were former partners, with only a small percentage involving unknown individuals from dating apps.

Lack of support and reporting challenges

- Victims noted a lack of targeted support from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Women Support Centres for digital violence.
- Only 23% reported incidents to the police, with no responses received, highlighting a gap in law enforcement's ability to address these issues.

High-level female officials and public figures

Experience of digital attacks

- 78% of surveyed high-level female officials and public figures faced gender-based digital attacks.
- 68% considered leaving public life due to these attacks, indicating the severe personal and professional impact.

Case examples

- Instances of deepfake threats and unauthorised sharing of personal images were reported.
- Victims felt unsupported by law enforcement and often did not report incidents due to fear and shame.

NGOs and Women Support Centres

Awareness and technological capacities

- 100% of participants from NGOs and Women Support Centres recognise the problem of digital violence against women.
- 78% stress the urgent need for educational and awareness-raising materials for specialised Women Support Centres to detect and protect victims.
- 85% highlight the necessity of technological tools to track and stop cybercriminals, though only 25% emphasise the need for legislative improvements specifically addressing digital violence.

Conclusions

The survey results highlight significant gaps in awareness, reporting mechanisms, and support services available to victims. Additionally, the data underscores the urgent need for targeted educational campaigns, enhanced legal frameworks, and robust multi-sectoral collaboration to effectively address and mitigate the impacts of digital violence. These insights provide a critical foundation for shaping comprehensive strategies and interventions aimed at protecting the rights and safety of women and girls in Armenia's digital landscape.

2. Introduction

In the 21st century, a pervasive shift towards the digital realm has occurred, impacting various aspects of daily life. Industries across both private and public sectors, such as entertainment, dating, education, finance, healthcare, and food industries, have embraced this transition to the digital landscape. This transformation is driven by the rapid proliferation of digital services, an expanding user base, and the widespread availability of information technology including smartphones and primarily motivated by its speed, affordability, and inclusivity (Sahakyan, 2024). The digital dimension has accelerated violent and aggressive actions, enabling women to be targeted on an unprecedented scale due to affordable and accessible means.

Currently the forecast of mobile internet users in Armenia, the most economical and accessible form of internet connection, is estimated to be around 1.87 million. Total internet users in the country are expected to reach 2.44 million by 2024 (Statista 2024). This rapid growth will intensify online interconnection and activities which in turn could lead to a proliferation of cybercrimes and harmful online behaviour, including digital violence. While men are mostly targeted for financial or information fraud, women are more likely to be targeted for specifically gendered types of digital violence not limited to financial and information frauds. New forms of technology such as generative AI create opportunities to scale and automate abuse in novel ways posing further new challenges to law enforcement and the judiciary (Choudhury 2023).

Legislative frameworks often struggle to keep pace with the development and proliferation of cyber threats. Consequently, individuals subjected to economic, physical, and psychological cyberbullying and cyber-torture, particularly women and girls, often find themselves without adequate legal protections and encounter significant challenges in accessing protection and justice. Cybercriminals target their personal and professional lives, disrupting their career progression and personal well-being. This can lead to feelings of vulnerability, isolation, stress, and even result in unpredictable and extreme actions, including suicide.

Unlike the risk of physical violence and torture, which can sometimes be mitigated by changing one's location or addressing the source of the harm, cyber-torture and cyberbullying are not bound by geographical constraints and the suggestion that women go 'offline' is unrealistic. The digital dimensions of violence against women transcend borders and operate continuously, unaffected by time zones. Consequently, the intensity and persistence of such cybercrimes and harassment are significantly amplified, presenting unique challenges for victims.

This report outlines some initial key legal and institutional changes required in Armenia to tackle this emerging threat. In addition to those changes, it identifies additional efforts that are needed to raise awareness of the digital forms of violence against women and to ensure that all professionals working with victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence in digital dimension receive adequate training to be able to identify and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls that result from the fast development and adoption of technology.

3. Scope and methodology

The findings of this report are based on an analysis of the international and Armenian legislative frameworks, desk research and field work. This included consideration of written reports, parliamentary discussions, information gathered through media, personal interviews, and overall comparative analyses of social and cultural perceptions. In addition, surveys were conducted with the police, prosecution, judicial and other affliated bodes, as well as non-governmental organisations including the regional support centres for women subjected to domestic violence (Women's Support Centres).

In defining the scope and conducting the research, key Council of Europe documents considered include:

- Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) (the Istanbul Convention),
- GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women (GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1),
- the platform of independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women (EDVAW Platform) thematic paper on the digital dimension of violence against women (EDVAW (2022)); and
- the study 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age' (Council of Europe Study (Van der Wilke 2021)).

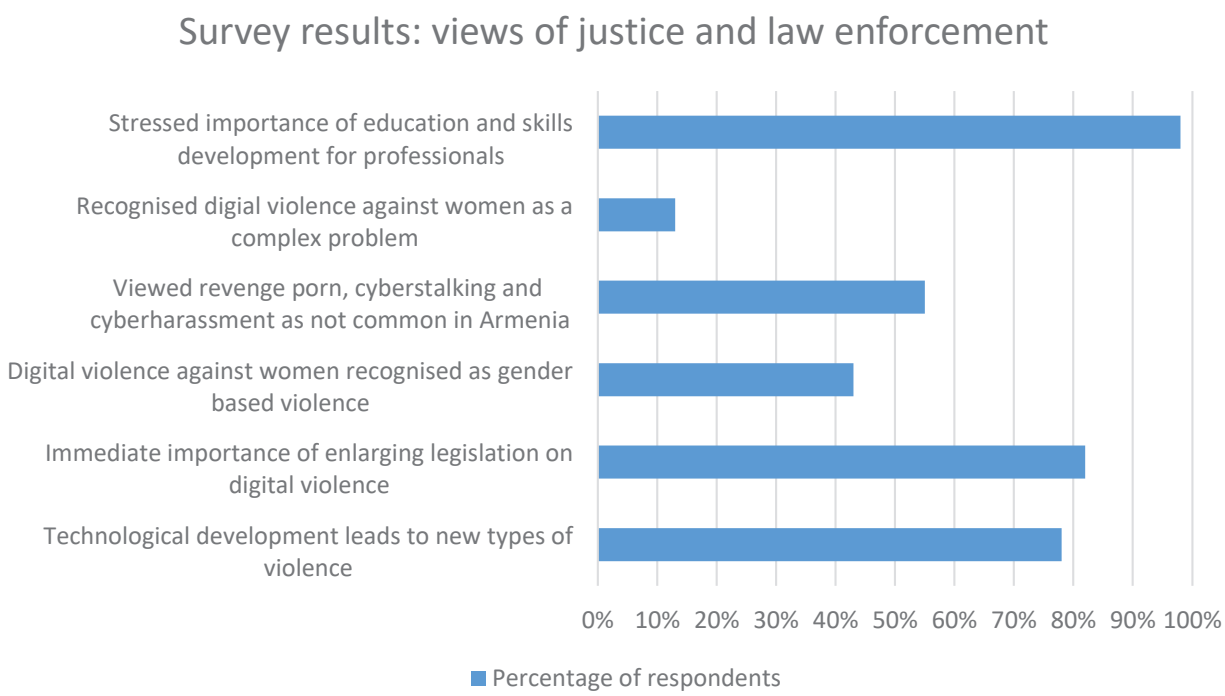
3.1. Survey: findings

The following surveys were conducted in Armenia to understand the capacity to respond to digital violence, vulnerabilities of victims and awareness of digital violence amongst stakeholders.

3.1.1. Questionnaire 1: views of justice and law enforcement

Responses to the questionnaire were received from prosecutors, police officers of different ranks, and legal professionals. The information about responsiveness of law enforcement agencies to reports of online harassment and abuse and the accessibility of legal remedies for victims, such as protection orders and restraining orders was evaluated.

The responses demonstrated that there are no clearly defined frameworks to sufficiently detect, protect and prosecute digital violence against women.



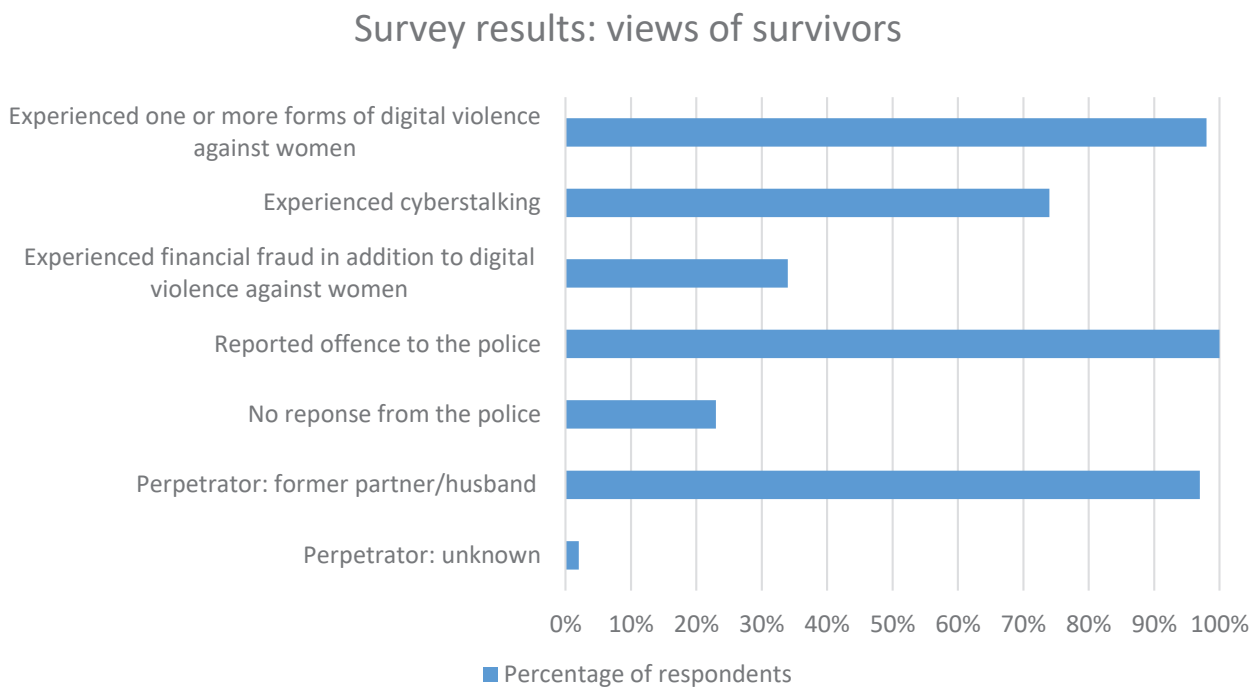
78% of the participants agreed that the rapid speed of the technology development brings new types of violence, and that the legislation does not provide tools and mechanism to adequately respond to these types of violence. It is of interest that although 82% mentioned the immediate importance of further enlargement of the legislation referring to digital violence, only 43% mentioned that digital violence against women must be addressed separately as a type of gender-based violence. Surprisingly, 55% mentioned that such violations as revenge porn, cyberstalking, cyber harassment between current/former partners directed to the female partner are not common in Armenia, and they have never been acquainted with it. Only 13% agreed that digital violence against women is a complex problem and that it must be addressed specifically. 95% of the responders mentioned the highest importance of educational and skill development for the professionals in parallel with the legislation improvements, particularly international exchange programs and exercises, designed to increase their capacities to detect and protect victims affected by digital violence.

3.1.2. Questionnaire 2: views of survivors

The second part of the survey was a questionnaire addressed to the victims of different NGOs and Women Support Centres to which they applied for assistance based on domestic violence incidents or gender-based violence incidents. The target group was asked whether they have experienced violence in digital dimension, as well as other forms of violence, whether they reported

the incidents and what were the results. The questionnaire was designed to identify whether they would describe any forms of violence perpetrated against them as digital.

This survey revealed that survivors of all forms of violence against women have usually encountered digital violence as part of their experience.



In contrast to the belief of 55% of law enforcement and justice professionals that digital violence against women was rare in Armenia, 98% of survivors and NGO workers mentioned one or more forms of violence in its digital dimension implemented against them/women they supported. 2% were not sure what that was, or how to name it. While 74% had experienced cyberstalking which limited social interactions and reduced their quality of life, 34% had also experienced financial fraud as well. In the cases of 97% of the victims included in the survey the perpetrator was their former partner/husband, whereas in cases of only 2%, the perpetrator was an unknown person from a dating app. The participants did not mention receiving any support from Women's Support Centres or any other organisations directly addressing digital violence. 23% of the respondents reported the case to the police, however, none of them got any response.

The same questionnaire was addressed to high-level female officials and public figures to see whether their social interactions and public activities were targeted in the digital domain to exclude, decrease, and silence their voices. Via personal interviews, they shared their personal experience of digital attacks and how they had overcome difficulties.

78% of these participants mentioned that they have experienced constant hatred and attacks towards their public selves particularly referring to gender discrimination. 98% mentioned

one or more than one type of cyber-attack directed to them throughout their career because of their gender. While 68% mentioned that they at least once thought about leaving public life, 32% mentioned that they felt hurt, but chose to exercise resistance.

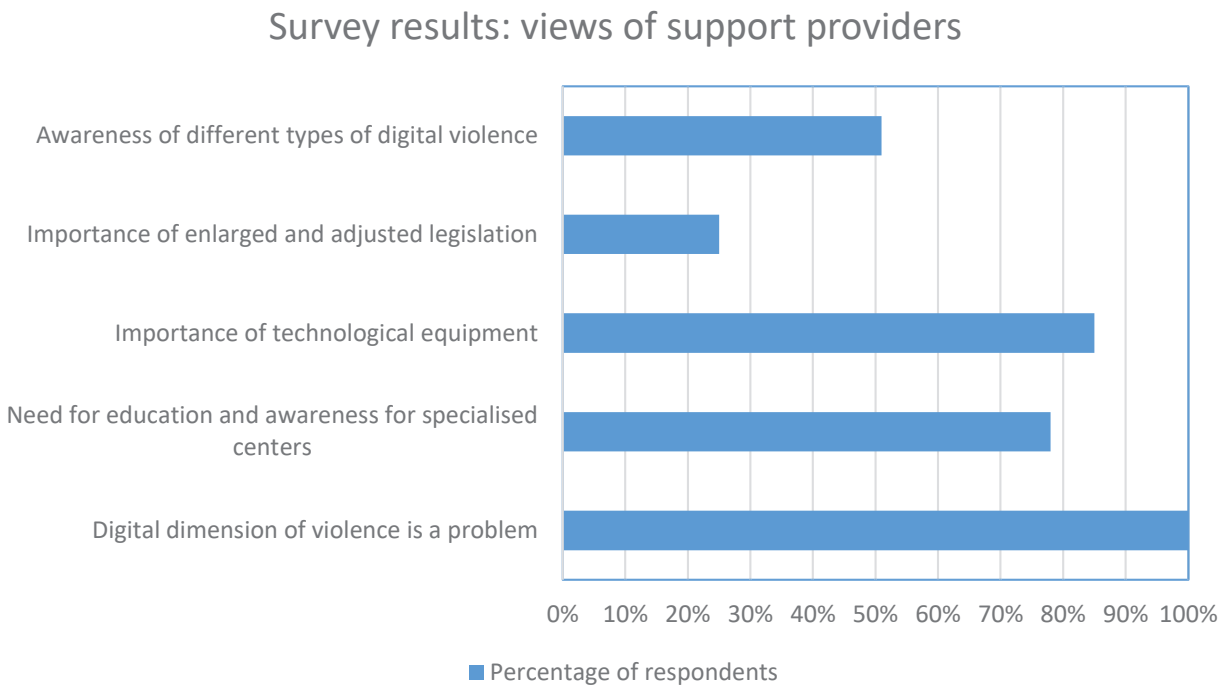
[redacted] A spokeswoman of a male official referred to her experience of becoming a target for a whole week just because of her business trip together with her supervisor. Photos from her personal digital album were circulated without her consent referring to and featuring her as a 'fiancé' of the supervisor. She felt depression, shame and was thinking about limiting her presence on social media at all. She did not report the incident to the police, because she was not sure if sufficient mechanisms were available to protect her. Although several years have passed, the blackmailing articles are still searchable online.

[redacted] Another public figure mentioned a threat to publicly release a video with sexual content generated by deepfake technology if she did not give the blackmailers a specific sum of money. The victim said that she turned to friends and publicly available professionals to close the channel and video but did not report to the police. She mentioned that she felt ashamed and frustrated and could not imagine her family and coworkers seeing that video. She chose to limit her activity online.

3.1.3. Questionnaire 3: views of support providers

The third questionnaire was designed to evaluate Women's Support Centres (NGOs) ability to respond to and guide victims of digital violence by providing protection and support and included measuring their awareness as well as technological capacities to identify violence against women in the digital domain. This included provisions for emergency hotlines, counselling services, legal aid, and shelters tailored to address the unique challenges faced by victims in the digital realm.

This survey revealed the overwhelming concerns of the Women's Support Centres (NGOs) with direct contact with victims that the digital dimensions of violence against women must be addressed.



100% of the participants identified the digital dimensions of violence against women as a problem to be addressed. 78% of the participants mentioned the urgent need for education and awareness raising materials for specialised centres to be able to detect, protect and help victims to recover. 85% mentioned the importance of technological equipment to be able to track and stop the cyber criminals. Even though only 25% mentioned the importance of amending legislation to specifically cover different types of digital violence, 51% mentioned that they know that such things exist, but have difficulties to see the difference between them and collectively called them cybercrime.

3.1.4. Survey's conclusions

The social and cultural context of a specific society are important factors in understanding the occurrence of gender-based violence and the response of law enforcement. Social perceptions and representations of women define and formulate social understanding of morality and justice sometimes in parallel with legal frameworks and can distort the reality of women's experience.

The survey indicated that violence against women in digital dimension is an accelerating issue in Armenia that is not sufficiently understood or addressed. The legal framework and prosecution mechanisms do not address in full the different forms and types of violence against women in digital dimension. Women themselves do not sufficiently identify digital violence as violence nor do they report such offences or seek protection and prosecution. In parallel, Women's Support Centres are

neither sufficiently aware of, nor have technology to be able to help in case of detecting digital violence. Moreover, there is a lack of established co-operation mechanisms between Women's Support Centres and police to detect and stop digital violence, provide protection, and ensure prosecution of cases.

3.2. International legal frameworks

Armenia ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the Optional Protocol thereto in 2006, it is signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and signed the Istanbul Convention in January 2018 (although this is not yet ratified). Significantly, Article 5 of the Armenian Constitution provides that international norms shall prevail in case of a conflict between national law and ratified international conventions. Article 5(1) of the Armenian Law on International Treaties further provides for the direct legal application of ratified treaties.

Although CEDAW does not explicitly cover violence against women, since 1992 the CEDAW Committee through its General Recommendations has made clear that gender-based violence breaches specific provisions of the Convention (CEDAW 1992: para 6). General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence, updating General Recommendation No. 19 acknowledges that violence against women 'manifests itself on a continuum of multiple, interrelated, and recurring forms, in a range of settings, from private to public, including technology mediated settings' (CEDAW 2017a: para 6). Gender-based violence occurs in all spaces and spheres of human interaction whether public or private including through technology-mediated environments such as contemporary forms of violence occurring online and in other digital environments (CEDAW 2017a: para 20). The CEDAW Committee recommends States Parties to gather data on the digital dimensions of violence against women (CEDAW 2017a: para 34(b)) and to prompt the private sector, including businesses and transnational corporations, to implement suitable measures for eliminating violence against women on their services and platforms (CEDAW 2017a: para 30(d)). General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of women and girls to education refers directly to cyberbullying and requires states to enact legislation that defines and penalizes harassment through use of information and communications technologies and the online harassment of women and girls in all its forms (CEDAW 2017b: paras 70-72).

3.2.1. CEDAW 7th periodic report on Armenia

The CEDAW 7th periodic report on Armenia (CEDAW 2022a) noted a hardening of traditional and patriarchal attitudes that limit the enjoyment by women and girls of their rights. The Committee recommended expediting the proposed law on legal equality and the adopting of temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of substantive equality between women and men. In the context of discriminatory stereotypes, the CEDAW committee recommended developing and

implementing a comprehensive strategy, including for the online domain, targeting community leader teachers, girls and boys, women, and men to eliminate discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in a society.

In the context of protection from violence against women the committee identified with concern the absence of criminal law provisions criminalising all forms of gender-based violence together with inadequate levels of protection from those with intersecting forms of discrimination. A series of recommendations were made to amend the legislative framework to cover all forms of gender-based violence against women, ensure access to justice and the provision of effective protection. The need for women to be able to report without reprisal, stigmatisation or re-traumatisation was also stressed. The report also recommends measures to be taken in respect of hate speech and the introduction of measures to combat discrimination and hate speech against women engaged in politics. Additional measures recommended include awareness-raising and educational campaigns in schools, in the National Assembly and among the general public.

The Committee recommended ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

3.2.2. The Council of Europe: Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the most detailed binding framework in the domain of preventing and combatting violence against women. It delineates violence against women as a clear infringement of human rights and a manifestation of discrimination against women. The Istanbul Convention elaborates on this definition, specifying that such violence encompasses all forms of gender-based harm or suffering inflicted upon women, including physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm. This includes actions, threats, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, irrespective of whether they occur in public or private settings. Furthermore, the convention extends its purview to encompass domestic violence, which it defines in Article 3(b) as 'all acts of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence' occurring within familial or domestic settings. It emphasises that this violence can transpire between current or former spouses or partners, regardless of whether they cohabit or have cohabited in the past. Additionally, the convention underscores the importance of recognising domestic violence as primarily a gendered phenomenon, highlighting the disproportionate impact it has on women (Article 2). The convention is organised around four pillars: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and co-ordinated Policies.

In the context of the digital dimension of violence against women the provisions of the Istanbul Convention are complemented by the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (CETS No.185) (Budapest Convention), and the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201) (Lanzarote Convention).

3.2.3. GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1

Due to the rapid spread of internet and technology related harmful activities within the newly emerged digital sphere, the Group of Experts on Violence Against Women (GREVIO) acknowledged the escalating global concern in respect of violence against women occurring in the digital realm and during its 21st plenary meeting decided to prepare a General Recommendation dedicated to the application of the Istanbul Convention in relation to the digital aspect of violence against women. Article 69 of the Istanbul Convention empowers GREVIO to make recommendations.

As outlined in the Explanatory Report to the Istanbul Convention, General Recommendations are intended to have a uniform interpretation for all parties involved, addressing articles or themes within the convention. While not legally binding, General Recommendations play a pivotal role as a crucial reference point for parties, fostering a deeper comprehension of convention themes and furnishing explicit guidance for effective implementation. They are structured to be incorporated into future monitoring endeavours.

General Recommendation No. 1 seeks to align the ICT discourse with the narrative of gender-based violence against women by clearly positioning manifestations of violence against women and girls in the digital sphere as expressions of gender-based violence against women covered by the Istanbul Convention. GREVIO stressed the importance of separately defining violence in this newly formulated sphere. It places particular focus on all forms of online sexual harassment, online and technology facilitated stalking and the digital dimensions of psychological violence. The General Recommendation was adopted on 20 October 2021.

3.2.4. Other relevant standards

Other relevant standards include CM/Rec (2019) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism which includes a dedicated section on online sexist hate speech and CM/Rec (2022) 16 on combatting hate speech adopted 20 May 2022.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has issued Recommendation 2098 (2017) on ending cyber discrimination and online hate and two relevant resolutions, firstly Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2144 (2017) on ending cyber-discrimination and online hate and secondly Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2177 (2017) on putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space.

Finally, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has produced General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on combating hate speech which also covers hate speech in the digital sphere.

3.3. Definitions and terminology

Some of the most important issues to address when seeking to combat forms of violence against women are the definitions and terminology used. The lack of standardised and known terminology makes it difficult for victims to properly articulate their personal experience, creates disparities in stakeholders' understanding, measurement and evaluation of such abuse and impacts on the ability of parties to effectively respond to such violence.

Both internationally and locally, conversations and legal frameworks surrounding information and communication technology, participation, access rights, and online safety often lack a gender-informed perspective and understanding of women's vulnerability to online violence despite its prevalence. GREVIO has observed that international and European legal norms pertaining to women's rights do not adequately address the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence. This oversight creates a perceived gap in regulations (GREVIO 2021).

Digital violence may refer to types of technology or digital harm widely known, types widely unknown and types still to be invented or generated. The rapid spread of technology coupled with access to technology becoming easier means there will be new types of both harm and technology developed in parallel to, and most likely faster than, the legislative and policy actions taken. This is especially so with the availability of generative AI (Choudhury 2023). As a result, it is very hard to define comprehensively either the types of harm or the technologies. Consequently, policy and law makers must ensure wider usage of general definitions to define the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence to also cover technologies and forms of violence that will be generated in the future.

The definitions used in this report align with GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women.

3.3.1. Forms of digital violence against women

The digital dimension of violence against women, often referred to as 'online violence' or 'cyber violence', encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviours and actions perpetrated against women in the digital sphere, leveraging various forms of technology and online platforms. The concept of violence against women in its digital dimension encompasses both online aspects (activities performed and data available on the internet, including internet intermediaries on the surface web as well as the dark web) and offline aspects (activities carried out with the use of technology and communication equipment, including hardware and software) of technology facilitated harmful behaviour perpetrated against women and girls. 'Internet intermediaries' refers to entities that facilitate interactions on the internet between natural and legal persons by offering and performing a variety of functions and services and include internet service providers (ISPs), search engines and social media platforms. Technological tools which may be misused by abusers to stalk, harass, survey, and control victims include smartphones, cameras and other recording

equipment, global positioning systems (GPS) or satellite navigators, other internet-connected devices such as smart watches, fitness trackers and smart home devices as well as software such as spyware or other mobile applications that may facilitate violence. (GREVIO 2021).

1. Online harassment and cyberbullying

Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention defines sexual harassment as 'any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'. General Recommendation No. 1 identifies five particular forms: i) non-consensual image or video sharing, ii) non-consensual taking, producing, or procuring of intimate images or videos, iii) exploitation, coercion and threats, iv) sexualised bullying, and v) cyberflashing.

With proliferation of technologies and affordability of internet connection, online harassment, and cyberbullying, including offensive comments, derogatory messages, and threats have become a new realm in Armenia as well. Social media platforms, discussion forums, and messaging apps are common spaces where such harassment occurs. This can take the form of abusive messages, threats, dissemination of personal information without consent, and the creation of fake profiles to harass victims. Women who express themselves online, including journalists, activists, and public figures, are particularly vulnerable to online abuse and threats. This can include misogynistic comments, threats of violence, and intimidation aimed at silencing women's voices and participation in public discourse.

2. Revenge porn and non-consensual image sharing

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images, commonly known as revenge porn, is a form of digital violence against women. The impact of this offence is exacerbated by cultural specificity in Armenia, as it puts victims into a shameful position that can harm them morally and result in double victimisation by the society. Perpetrators use this tactic to shame, control, or blackmail women, leading to severe emotional distress and damage to their reputation, within the family, at work or in their career. Non-consensual image sharing can be also used for blackmailing and terrorising through demanding money or some action in return to not disclose the intimate content. In some cases, women report constant manipulation by being asked for more nude photos, thus controlling them through possession of even larger content. It is of great importance to understand emerging technologies and the spread of generative AI tools which allow deepfakes to be made and adjustments to any photographic or video content of bodies or faces or other content. These kinds of technologies are available at a low cost to manufacture pornographic content and stream online both in open and dark webs. While this might be used in some cases for targeting men and

boys, globally around 90% of the victims of non-consensual intimate image abuse are women (Cyber Rights 2024). Women are also subsequently targeted by victim-blaming in society where they are sometimes stigmatised and criticised.

3. Stalking and surveillance

Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention defines stalking as 'intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person causing him or her to fear for his or her safety'.

Stalking women is not a new phenomenon in Armenia. Offline stalking is often wrongly seen as an expression of 'care' or 'masculinity' particularly in villages and small cities. Technology facilitated stalking is a new manifestation of this problem that enables stalking to continue irrespective of location. Women in Armenia may experience online stalking and monitoring, where perpetrators use technology to track their movements, monitor their online activities, and invade their privacy. It is ongoing even if the victim changes her residence (*Volodina v. Russia,* European Court of Human Rights). This can lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and loss of control over one's personal information. Digital tools and technology are quite developed and very affordable, and so can be easily deployed for stalking and surveillance. Perpetrators may use GPS tracking apps, spyware, or social media to monitor women's movements and activities, leading to feelings of fear and insecurity. These mechanisms are not well known, so it is hard for a victim to identify, detect and shut the technology down.

4. Online sexual exploitation

Women may be coerced into sharing explicit content, which is then used for blackmail or exploitation. Vulnerable women, such as those facing financial difficulties, are particularly at risk. Women may face sexual harassment and exploitation online, including through unsolicited sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and the solicitation of sexual services. This can occur in various online spaces, including social media, dating apps, and online gaming platforms. Social messaging apps are also very popular. Although they can provide intimacy for the first interconnection, messages and images can be easily shared and are often accumulated via larger groups. The social engineering in this realm is quite sophisticated and women are usually targeted via specific posts on their social media platforms. These can be used to identify characteristics such as personal loneliness or hard financial and mental situations which lead them to be vulnerable to effective targeting by perpetrators.

5. Online dating violence

Dating apps and websites can be breeding grounds for digital violence against women, including harassment, abusive messages, and, in some cases, physical violence stemming from online dating encounters when individuals meet in person. Dating apps are starting to become more popular in Armenia, and include connections not only within Armenia, but also abroad, which can make it harder to track the crime. The geolocations are not always identifiable thus making the digital footprint even harder to track and to catch the criminals.

6. Online abuse in the context of domestic violence

Most of the time abusive partners extend their control and abuse to the digital realm. They might monitor woman's online communications, manipulate her through text or social media, or use technology to exert control and intimidation. This kind of online behaviour is constant and manipulates the victims for a long time. The victims are not able to have a normal life and to socialise freely.

7. Cyber extortion and financial exploitation

Women can also become victims of cyber extortion, where perpetrators demand money or personal information under the threat of exposing embarrassing or compromising online activities. Financial exploitation can also include hacking bank accounts with cyber viruses or social engineering.

8. Digital dimension of psychological violence

Article 33 of the Istanbul Convention defines psychological violence as 'the intentional conduct of seriously impairing a person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats'. All forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere have a psychological impact and could fall under this definition. Online psychological violence can also take the form of threatening the victim's family, insults, shaming and defamation. Incitement to suicide or self-harm is a specific behaviour online. Most forms of online violence are amplified by mechanisms of mob mentality and anonymity.

The digital dimensions of violence against women thus encompass a wide range of behaviours that falls under the definition of violence against women set out in article 3a of the Istanbul Convention. Non-consensual image or video sharing, coercion and threats including rape threats, sexualised bullying and other forms of intimidation, online sexual harassment, impersonation, online staking or stalking via the Internet of Things as well as psychological abuse and economic harm perpetrated via digital means against women and girls all comes under the article 3a definition. (GREVIO 2021).

3.4. Analysis of the legal and practical situation in Armenia

This section examines the gaps and challenges faced by Armenia in responding to the digital dimensions of violence against women using the framework of the four pillars of the Istanbul Convention: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution and coordinated Policies.

The first step in recognising and preventing the digital dimension of violence against women is to ensure that necessary legislative provisions are in place. This should be accompanied by other measures to ensure implementation including capacity building and awareness-raising amongst relevant actors and the population at large.

In essence the law must encompass and be operated to appropriately prevent, provide protection from, and prosecute the digital dimension of violence against women. In addition, measures are needed to ensure gender stereotypes are eradicated, gender equality is fostered and awareness-raising campaigns target women and men, girls, and boys to ensure understanding and awareness of the different forms of violence against women and girls perpetrated in the digital sphere and where to obtain protection and support. Professionals should receive training and digital literacy within education should be promoted. Tech companies also have a role to play and should be encouraged to make an active effort to avoid gender bias in their products.

3.4.1. Legal framework in Armenia

The analysis below aims to examine whether the existing legislation aligns with international standards and recommendations, such as those provided by GREVIO, to enable policy makers to identify gapes and shortcomings and develop strategies to strengthen legal protection for women in the digital realm. According to the CEDAW Committee, gender stereotyping in Armenia continues to be the main obstacle to the equality of women and men, and a cause for gender-based violence (CEDAW 2022a).

Armenia is still adjusting its legislation, both in terms of prevention and protection, and accountability mechanisms to address different forms of violence against women fully and sufficiently.

Current criminal law only partially addresses the specificity of gender-based violence. As of the already adopted laws, including following the ratification of the Budapest Convention (CETS No. 185), there is still lack of fully providing instrumental, legal mechanisms to define violations and harmful behaviour against women in digital dimension.

3.4.2. Online sexual harassment

As of 2020, the Armenian Criminal Code did not sufficiently address sexual harassment in a digital dimension (Council of Europe 2021b). Sexual harassment is defined in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men as a form of gender discrimination in Article 3(21) read in conjunction with article 6 (which prohibits gender discrimination). Discrimination is criminalised under Article 203 of the Criminal Code however this is not used in practice and no sanction is foreseen either under civil or criminal law. Furthermore, Armenia has yet to enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, which would likely include a prohibition on sexual harassment as a form of discrimination.

3.4.3. Online and technology facilitated stalking

Armenia adopted the Legal act on prevention of domestic violence, protection of victims of domestic violence and restoration of family solidarity in 2017. The digital violence, as a separate manifestation of violations of the rights of women is not specifically defined nor is the digital space labelled as a new domain where women and girls are specifically targeted because of their gender.

Stalking till 2024 was not specifically addressed in criminal provision While defining stalking some generic offences, such as infliction of severe physical pain or mental suffering (Article 119), extortion (Article 182) or threats (Article 137), might have targeted some behaviours that fell within the concept of stalking. Yet they fail to capture the specific nature of this crime. Moreover, in cases prosecuted within the scope of criminal law, direct physical harm was mostly the subject of investigation and stalking was just linked to the physical abuse.

Digital stalking in turn, often falls beyond the reach of standard investigative efforts. Several courses of conduct that constitute stalking were not addressed by the above-mentioned provisions, such as constantly following the victim or engaging in unwanted communication particularly in the virtual sphere. In fact, the component missing in the Armenian Code is the ability to target a course of conduct, rather than single, isolated events.

On 7 February 2024 Parliament Member Zaruhi Batoyan introduced a draft bill with recommendations to make changes in several laws directly or indirectly linked to the protection of the rights of women and girls. The authors introduced 'stalking' as a separately defined violent

action and suggested to include it within the scope of Criminal Law. Discussing amendments that strengthen the Domestic Violence Law, in an interview for this research Ms Zaruhi Batoyan mentioned, that within the scope of this legislative change 'stalking' is clearly defined and specified as a prosecutable crime. On the question whether or not cyberstalking is also defined within this legislative reform, she specifies that under the new definition, all types of stalking, including but not limited to cyberstalking will become criminalised. According to Zaruhi Batoyan's perspective, another valuable impact of the law is defining 'partner' as including an 'online partner' Previous legislative acts required the partner to be a person with whom the women was expected to have physical relations.

Before the adoption of the law there was a debate over whether there is a specific need to define what means are used for stalking. This is now stipulated in the amended Criminal code. Since the criminal law prohibits stalking equally for all, the initiators of the bill clearly articulated that Stalking must be considered a form of gender-based violence. These new legislative reforms, will mark a groundbreaking change in naming these actions as a violation of women's rights.

Tatevik Stepanyan, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, notes that in recent years, various laws, regulations, and methodologies have been strengthened concerning women's rights in Armenia. Digital services have been developed to transparently register, track, and respond to cases of violence, facilitating further prosecution. In 2024, the Ministry plans to launch a digital platform for tracking domestic violence cases, which will be utilised by multiple governmental entities. This joint platform is expected to provide new, accurate data for better reference to domestic violence cases. Additionally, Ms. Stepanyan emphasizes with current development of technologies, accessibility and availability of various platforms and gadgets, measures must be taken to raise awareness regarding digital violence.

3.4.4. Digital dimension of psychological violence

Article 119 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Armenia criminalises only the infliction of severe physical pain or substantial mental suffering. However digital violence resulting in psychological harm is still difficult to prosecute because of the lack of understanding of the phenomenon and difficulty in evidencing 'substantial mental suffering'. Guidelines for law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary and training may assist in enabling prosecutions on this basis.

4. International co-operation and collaboration

Related to cyberspace regulations, Armenia's cybersecurity legislative situation is evolving, with efforts to enhance legal frameworks and policies for better protection against cyber threats. Currently there are initiatives to align with international standards and improve cybersecurity governance and resilience. Considering the fact, that cyberspace does not have specific boundaries like land and sea, it is of high importance to engage in international co-operation to promote collaboration in addressing online violence against women. This can involve mechanisms for sharing information and best practices among countries, as well as coordination in investigating and prosecuting cross-border cases of online harassment and abuse. If the existing mechanisms and frameworks provided for by the Budapest Convention are not applicable, it may be necessary to find ways to enable such co-operation to take place.

5. Report recommendations

5.1. Legal framework

The existing laws in Armenia need enhancing and updating to encompass the digital dimension of violence against women and to ensure effective prosecution and protection of victims. To be able to measure the dynamics of technology development and accompanying proliferation of digital violence, the legislation must include mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating its implementation and its effectiveness in protecting women's rights in the digital dimension. This may involve establishing oversight bodies or commissions tasked with regularly reviewing and reporting on progress in addressing online violence against women and addressing digital violence from the perspective of structural discrimination and a battier to the realization of women's human rights.

Recommendations

- Review the existing laws to ensure that online and offline stalking in cases involving domestic violence and otherwise, online psychological violence and harassment are subject to appropriate sanctions.
- Review evidential and procedural law to ensure that forensic and other evidence is properly obtainable and admissible paying due regard to laws relating to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Empower judicial authorities to issue legally binding orders including to third parties, upon the victim's application, for the removal or disabling of access to non-consensual intimate material.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities with a view to ensuring simplified access to evidence held by service providers, including subscriber information to identify the owner of an account or of an IP address used in the commission of an offence.
- Ensure the institutional bodies provided for in the Law on equal rights and equal opportunities are given a mandate to work on gender equality and non-discrimination including addressing the digital dimension of violence against women from the point of view of structural discrimination as a barrier to the realisation of women's human rights.

5.2. Prevention

Awareness-raising, dissemination of information

The survey demonstrated that there is low awareness of the many forms of digital violence and of their prevalence in Armenia. There are no systematic state level awareness-raising campaigns to inform the public or specific groups about these types of crimes. This increases the likelihood of women falling victim to such crimes. Women also face barriers to reporting and law enforcement professionals who lack the awareness necessary to launch effective investigations.

Moreover, cultural norms and expectations may discourage women and girls from reporting incidents of digital violence due to fear of shame or retaliation, stigma, and victim-blaming attitudes prevalent in society. By raising awareness of the capacity of technology to distort the truth and manipulate images, it is possible to break harmful stereotypes about women and girls in Armenia.

Recommendations

- Include legal provisions and funding for preventive measures and educational programs aimed at raising awareness about online violence against women. This could involve integrating digital literacy and online safety education into school curricula and providing resources for public awareness campaigns.
- Implement awareness-raising campaigns targeting women and men, girls and boys at different levels of society on different forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere as well as the support services available to victims. Support the efforts of women's organisations towards this end and recognise and make use of their experience.
- Promote awareness campaigns that challenge harmful cultural norms and gender stereotypes and encourage victims to come forward without fear of stigma.
- Develop digital literacy programs targeting women and girls to foster responsible online behaviour and awareness of digital risks. Teach, share and show the capacities of technology to accumulate large amount of data and manipulate personal images, information and videos to produce fake products, distribute and target women and girls.

5.3. Protection

There is some cross over between the requirements set out above under prevention and the protection. In respect of protection the availability of support services is essential, and those services must be capable of understanding and responding to the problem.

Women's rights NGOs and Women's Support Centres that provide essential support services to women victims of violence receive very limited guidelines and technical tools or technology to be able to categorise, detect and help protect against crimes and violations of women's rights in cyberspace or to empower and help the victims to recover. Such support organisations should be assisted to provide care, trauma support, and psychological assistance, as well as to guide women in which cases to report to the police. Moreover, Armenia does not have any Cybersecurity Emergency Rescue Team (CERT)or referral centres at present that are specifically trained to recognise violence against women and able to provide help in case of need. Interagency co-operation between law enforcement, CERTs and relevant NGOs and support organisations should be developed to improve the effectiveness of digital forensic examinations to stop the digital crime and improve detection.

Women's rights NGOs and the Women's Support Centres identified a real need for training and capacity building, including investment in technical skills and equipment to enable cybercriminals to be traced, tracked and stopped. It is necessary to strengthen and expand support services'

awareness about digital violence, including counselling, legal aid, and safe reporting mechanisms through training and resources.

Recommendations

- Set up institutionalised co-operation and co-ordination structures involving all relevant statutory agencies, non-governmental bodies, and specialist support services.
- Provide training and build capacity of relevant organisations, general and specialist support services to enable the identification and ability to respond to instances of the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to national and local governance bodies and relevant support organisations including Women's rights NGOs to effectively prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women perpetrated online and through technology.

5.4. Prosecution

The survey disclosed a clear difference in perception of the scale of the problem between law enforcement officials, victims, and support services. Law enforcement officials did however recognise the need for training and capacity building. There appears to be an absence of expertise and resources on how to use existing law to address digital dimensions of violence against women and how best to gather, preserve and use electronic evidence without causing further harm to victims.

The survey also demonstrated that law enforcement professionals lacked knowledge of the extent of violence against women in the digital sphere and do not sufficiently understand that this must be addressed as a form of gender-based violence against women. 95% of responders identified skills training and education as of the highest importance and suggested international exchange programmes to enhance their capacity to detect the digital dimension of violence against women and protect victims. In 2020 and 2021 the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators contained courses concerning the prevention and fight against women and domestic violence (CEDAW, 2022(b)). These courses could be adapted to include training on the digital dimensions of violence against women and the cross-border issues arising.

Recommendations

- Review the existing criminal law and provide guidance to law enforcement and criminal justice actors on how it can be adapted to address the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Review the content of the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators and ensure it includes the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence and cross border dimensions.
- Ensure investigators are equipped with proformas for evidence gathering and use that respect the right to privacy of the victim. Provide training on forensic aspects of electronic evidence gathering and storage.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities of criminal justice actors.
- Develop co-operation mechanisms to enable inter agency co-operation between law enforcement and criminal justice actors, civil justice actors and general and special support services and organisations countering digital violence against women.
- Involve the ICT sector and internet intermediaries in efforts to hold perpetrator of violence against women in the digital sphere to account through complaint mechanisms for users to report harmful content, robust content moderation policies and collaborative working arrangements with law enforcement agencies.

5.5. Co-ordinated policies

Addressing the digital dimension of violence against women requires a comprehensive approach that integrates digital policies with existing legal frameworks on women's rights and criminal regulations. This integration is crucial for providing comprehensive protection, ensuring accountability, and promoting a safe digital environment. Armenia's revised legal framework, reflecting to both Criminal Law and Domestic Violence Law, includes provisions for prosecuting forms of violence against women and girls, however the inclusion of digital violence is often lacking in detail or insufficient. The methods by which digital violence against women is perpetrated, its investigation, forensic and prosecution protocols and the specific needs of victims require to be set out in policy.

Relevant national documents, programmes, action plans could be reviewed to ensure that they embrace the digital dimensions of violence against women and include the development of appropriate co-operation mechanisms to ensure engagement with the private and ICT sector.

Recommendations

- Ensure recognition of the digital dimensions of violence against women in national strategies, programmes, and action plans on violence against women
- Undertake or support quantitative and qualitative research programmes and studies on the digital dimension of violence against women to understand the extent and nature of the problem and measure the financial, personal, and social impacts of such violence including self-censorship and digital exclusion.
- Encourage the private and ICT sector to participate in devising and implementing policies and setting guidelines and self-regulatory standards in line with relevant European and human rights provisions to prevent and combat violence against women taking place in the digital sphere.

6. Conclusion

Digital violence against women is a pressing issue in Armenia, requiring comprehensive and multi-sectoral responses. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report and drawing upon the principles and guidelines set forth by the Council of Europe and other international instruments, Armenia can take meaningful steps towards preventing and combating the digital dimension of violence against women, ensuring the safety, dignity, and rights of all women and girls in the digital age.

7. Summary of report recommendations

7.1. Legal framework

Enhance and update existing laws to encompass digital violence and ensure effective enforcement on digital violence against women and girls to sufficiently prevent, protect and prosecute. This requires a:

- Review of the substantive law to ensure stalking in cases involving domestic violence and otherwise, psychological violence and harassment are subject to appropriate sanctions.
- Review evidential and procedural law to ensure forensic and other evidence is properly obtainable and admissible paying due regard to laws relating to freedom of expression and privacy.
- Judicial authorities should be empowered to issue legally binding orders including to third parties, upon the victim's application, for the removal or disabling of access to non-consensual intimate material.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities with a view to ensuring simplified access to evidence held by service providers, including subscriber information to identify the owner of an account or of an IP address used in the commission of an offence.
- Ensure the institutional bodies provided for in the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities are empowered and given a mandate to work on gender equality and non-discrimination to address the digital dimension of violence against women from the point of view of the structural discrimination and barrier to the realisation of women's human rights which it may represent.

7.2. Prevention

- Assess whether the legislation includes provisions for preventive measures and educational programs aimed at raising awareness about online violence against women. This can involve integrating digital literacy and online safety education into school curricula and providing resources for public awareness campaigns.
- Implement awareness-raising campaigns targeting women and men, girls and boys at different levels of society on different forms of violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere as well as the support services available to victims. Support the efforts of women's organisations towards this end and recognise and make use of their

experience.

- Promote awareness-raising campaigns that challenge harmful cultural norms and encourage victims to come forward without fear of stigma.
- Teach, share, and show the capacities of technology to accumulate large amount of data and manipulate personal images, information and videos to produce fake products, distribute and target women and girls.

7.3. Protection

- Set up institutionalised co-operation and co-ordination structures involving all relevant statutory agencies, non-governmental bodies, and specialist support services.
- Provide training and build capacity of relevant organisations, general and specialist support services to enable the identification and ability to respond to instances of the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Allocate sufficient human and financial resources to national and local governance bodies and relevant support organisations including Women's rights organisations to effectively prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women perpetrated online and through technology.

7.4. Prosecution

- Review the existing criminal law and provide guidance to law enforcement and criminal justice actors on how it can be adapted to address the digital dimensions of violence against women.
- Review the content of the annual training programmes for judges, candidate judges, prosecutors and investigators and ensure it includes the digital dimensions of violence against women and domestic violence and cross border dimensions.
- Ensure investigators are equipped with proformas for evidence gathering and use that respect the right to privacy of the victim. Provide training on forensic aspects of electronic evidence gathering and storage.
- Enhance international co-operation and mutual legal assistance capacities of criminal justice actors.
- Develop co-operation mechanisms to enable inter agency co-operation between law enforcement and criminal justice actors, civil justice actors and general and special

support services and relevant organisations countering digital violence against women.

- Involve the ICT sector and internet intermediaries in efforts to hold perpetrator of violence against women in the digital sphere to account through complaint mechanisms for users to report harmful content, robust content moderation policies and collaborative working arrangements with law enforcement agencies.

7.5. Coordinated policies

- Ensure recognition of the digital dimensions of violence against women in national strategies, programmes, and action plans on violence against women.
- Undertake or support quantitative and qualitative research programmes and studies on the digital dimension of violence against women to understand the extent and nature of the problem and measure the financial, personal, and social impacts of such violence including self-censorship and digital exclusion.
- Encourage the private and ICT sector to participate in devising and implementing policies and setting guidelines and self-regulatory standards in line with relevant European and human rights provisions to prevent and combat violence against women taking place in the digital sphere.

8. References

The Council of Europe

CETS No. 185 Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

CETS No. 201 Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)

CETS No. 210, The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)

CM/Rec (2019) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism available at: https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894 [accessed 2 July 2024]

CM/Rec (2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on combatting hate speech adopted 20 May 2022, available at https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a67955 [accessed 25 June 2024]

Council of Europe (2021a) 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age', Adriane van der Wilk, Council of Europe (2021) https://edoc.coe.int/en/violence-against-women/10686-protecting-women-and-girls-from-violence-in-the-digital-age.html [accessed 25 June 2024]

Council of Europe (2021b) Training Manual for Police Officers in Armenia on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, November 2021 available at: https://rm.coe.int/police-manual-eng/native/1680b166af

Council of Europe (2022), 'The digital dimension of violence against women as addressed by the seven mechanisms of the EDVAW platform', Council of Europe (2022) https://rm.coe.int/thematic-report-on-the-digital-dimension-of-violence-against-women-as-/1680a933ae [accessed 25 June 2024]

PACE 2017a, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Recommendation 2098(2017) Ending cyber-discrimination and online hate, available at https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23456 [accessed 25 June 2024]

PACE 2017b Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 2144(2017 on ending cyber discrimination and online hate available at: https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23456&lang=en [accessed 2 July 2024)

PACE 2017c, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 2177 (2017) Putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space, available at https://pace.coe.int/en/files/23977 [accessed 25 June 2024]

EDVAW 2022, The digital dimension of violence against women as addressed by the seven mechanisms of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence

Against Women (EDVAW platform)', Council of Europe (2022) https://rm.coe.int/thematic-report-on-the-digital-dimension-of-violence-against-women-as-/1680a933ae

ECRI 2015 ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 15 on Combating Hate, available at https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/recommendation-no.15 [accessed 25 June 2024]

GREVIO 2021, Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147 [accessed 25 June 2024]

Van der Wilke 2021, Study: 'Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age' Adriane van der Wilk, Council of Europe (2021)

European Court of Human Rights cases

Volodina v. Russia (no. 2) – App. No 40419/19, European Court of Human Rights, 14 September 2021 https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-6454727-8498144

United Nations

CEDAW 1981, United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf

Optional Protocol

Beijing Platform for Action 1995

CEDAW 1981 Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf

CEDAW 1992 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against women, 1992, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/index.html [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2017a, CEDAW/C/GC/35 General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender- based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (1992) https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-35-2017-gender-based [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2017b, CEDAW/C/GC/36 General Recommendation No. 36 (2017) on the right of women and girls to education available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-recommendation-no-36-2017-right-girls-and [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2022a, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/7 Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Armenia available at: https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n22/666/21/pdf/n2266621.pdf?token=TM6xrug1fUPfhxZpzy&fe=true [accessed 25 June 2024]

CEDAW 2022b, 'Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Commend Armenia on Continuing to Uphold International Obligations Despite the Conflict, Raise Questions on Violence against Women and Family Planning Service', 13 October 2022 available at https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/10/experts-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-commend-armenia-continuing [accessed 25 June 2024]

Choudhury 2023, Choudhury, Rumman, Lakshmi Dhanya, UNESCO (2023) 'Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in an Era of Generative AI' available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387483

Armenian Laws

Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Republic of Armenia. Available at: https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=138982

Law on Prevention of family and domestic violence, protection of persons subjected to family and domestic violence, and restoration of family solidarity - https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=118672

Parliament of the Republic of Armenia, Domestic Violence Law amendments: http://parliament.am/draftreading_docs8/P-743_DR2.pdf

Literature

Sahakyan, M. Ed. Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003439110

Webpages

Statista 2024, Statista, Digital & Connectivity Indicators Armenia https://www.statista.com/outlook/co/digital-connectivity-indicators/armenia [accessed 2 July 2024]

Cyber Rights 2024, Official webpage 'Victims of the distribution on non-consensual intimate imagery' https://cyberights.org/ncii-90-of-victims-of-the-distribution-of-non-consensual-intimate-imagery-are-women/ [accessed 25 June 2024]

This report outlines some initial key legal and institutional changes required in Armenia to tackle this emerging threat. In addition to those changes, it identifies additional efforts that are needed to raise awareness of the digital forms of violence against women and to ensure that all professionals working with victims or perpetrators of gender-based violence in digital dimension receive adequate training to be able to identify and respond to all forms of violence against women and girls that result from the fast development and adoption of technology.

ENG