GENDER VIOLENCE

on the Internet in Paraguay

An Exploratory Study

Gender Violence on the Internet in Paraguay - An Exploratory Study
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TEDIC is a non-profit organization that defends and promotes human rights on the Internet. It seeks to foster the production of free knowledge and culture on the Internet on law, technology and gender.

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Abstract

Digital technology has the potential to play an important role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. However, women's ability to access, use and benefit from the transformative power of digital technology is increasingly undermined by digital violence, facilitated by Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) against women.

During the COVID19 pandemic, social distancing and quarantine were put in place as population safety measures. However, the impact of these measures has not only relegated women to the private sphere, but has also triggered an increase in gender conservatism and a rollback of women's rights around the world, including Paraguay.

In that framework, this research seeks to explore steps to address digital gender-based violence facilitated by the ICT in Paraguay. It also provides data on women's access and evidence on digital gender-based violence in Paraguay, to broaden the focus of the definition of cyber violence in Law 5777/16 (Law for the comprehensive protection of women against all forms of violence). It also seeks to contribute to generate a baseline of analysis on online violence against women in Paraguay, which motivates new studies of greater scope and, above all, debate for the generation of public policies focused on the issue.

This study gathers the main results of the qualitative research on online violence against women in Paraguay. It describes the types of intimidation, violence and abusive experiences identified, as well as their effects or damage caused. At the same time, it shows how cyber violence occurs to a greater extent towards women with a political position and those who are public opinion leaders.

Keywords: *gender-based violence, gender on the Internet, online harassment*
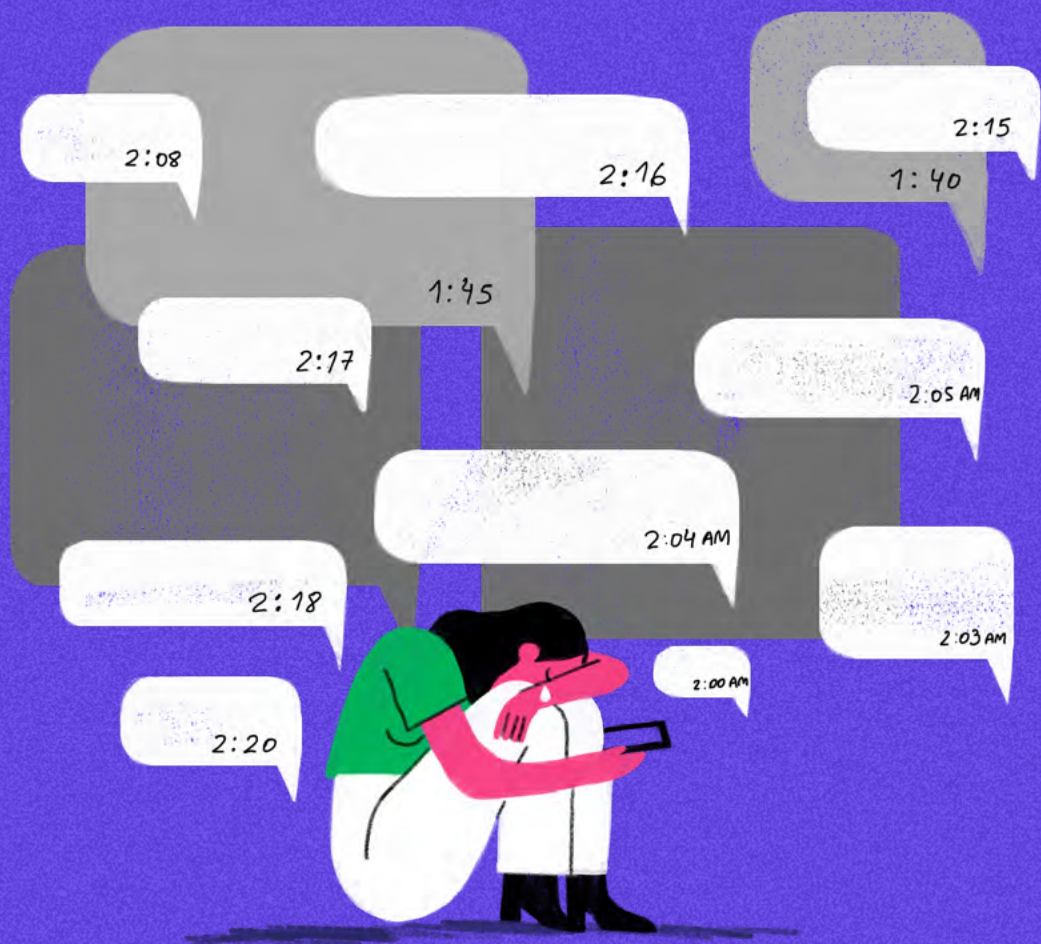
1. Introduction

In order to develop the research on digital violence against women in Paraguay, it is necessary to develop some definitions. To date there is no global consensus on the definition of digital violence, however for this research we take the definition of digital gender violence developed by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), which expresses the following:

"Acts of gender-based violence that are committed, instigated or aggravated, in whole or in part, through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as cell phones, the Internet, social media platforms and email" (APC, 2015)[1]

Therefore, digital gender-based violence can be defined as violence that is committed and spread through digital media, against a woman -because she is a woman-, or when it affects women disproportionately (UN Women, 2020). This violence causes psychological and emotional harm, reinforces prejudices, damages reputation, causes economic losses[2] and poses barriers to participation in public life. It can also lead to forms of sexual and other forms of physical violence (Barreras 2017).

During the COVID19 pandemic, violence against women has manifested itself in different forms, including domestic violence and online violence that is also facilitated by ICTs. These forms of violence and abuse take place in a context of systemic gender discrimination. The consequences and harms caused by the different manifestations of online violence are closely related to gender: women and girls suffer particular stigma in the context of structural inequality and discrimination.

Another consequence of digital gender-based violence is that it impedes the digital inclusion of women and diverse communities. By not having free access to ICTs and the digital ecosystem, essential rights for full development are lost, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to privacy, the right to information, sexual and reproductive rights and the right to non-discrimination. In other words, any woman or girl with or without access to technology is exposed to being a victim of this type of violence, which has a direct impact on women's capacity for empowerment or equality.

One of the forms that digital gender-based violence takes is the dissemination of non-consensual intimate images aimed at stigmatizing women for exercising their sexuality on the networks (Sequera, 2021).

Other associated types of violence are state surveillance (state spying) and the resulting violations of due process. These serious transgressions can hide situations of oppression of women, such as harassment, extortion and intimidation. An example of this is the case of military espionage on a journalist of ABC Color[3] that remains unresolved in the Paraguayan justice system.

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1   TEDIC has been a member of APC since 2018.

2   The economic cost of online violence could also skyrocket at a time when the use of the Internet is increasing. For example, online abuse and trolling in Australia already costs the economy about 3.7 billion. UN Women. Online and ICT* facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19. Date: 2020. https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2519

3   TEDIC. 2016. Spying on journalist confirms that the Paraguayan State illegally intercepts communications. https://www.tedic.org/espionaje-a-periodista-confirma-que-el-estado-intercepta-comunicaciones-ilegalmente/

In addition to this, there is a lack of transparency and accountability of the institutions and authorities involved in the purchase and use of surveillance software[4]. There are no diagnoses of the risks involved in requests for information from users of the Attorney General's Office to ISPs (Internet Service Providers) without a court order[5]. All these facts affect the constitutional guarantees of citizenship, and in particular way, the security and well-being of 50% of the population who are women in Paraguay[6].

In terms of regulations and public policies in the country, there is no regulatory harmonization that considers digital violence as an extension of physical violence. This lack of consideration leads to the invisibility and lack of protection of women in the digital environment. There are no studies or epistemic reference points that recognize the problem in the country. To date, there is no representative data production in the Women's Observatory[7] of the Ministry of Women's Affairs on digital gender-based violence. Therefore, there is no institutional evidence to generate public policies and thus safeguard, protect and repair women and girls from this violence in a comprehensive manner.

Along the same lines, there is insufficient government information regarding the gender digital divide and women's access to technology. There are also no statistics on cybersecurity with a gender perspective. In addition, women's lack of access to tertiary careers in science and technology further exacerbates the digital lag.

Public policies such as the Digital Agenda of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MITIC), as well as its National Cybersecurity Plan still lack inclusion and gender policies, beyond connectivity and access.

In this sense, the research results presented in this document contribute to prompt a baseline for the analysis of online violence against women in Paraguay. This seeks to motivate new studies of greater scope and, above all, to generate debates for the creation of public policies focused on the issue.

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4   TEDIC. 2016 More questions and doubts about malware purchased by SENAD. https://www.tedic.org/mas-preguntas-y-dudas-sobre-software-malicioso-adquirido-por-senad/

5   Sequera. 2020. Who defends your data? https://qdtd.tedic.org/

6   Paraguay's total population in 2021 is 7,353,038 inhabitants. The population by sex is distributed in 50.4% men and 49.6% women. https://www.ine.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/documento/7eb5_Paraguay_2021.pdf

7   Observatory of the Ministry of Women in Paraguay: http://observatorio.mujer.gov.py

2. Background information

2.1. Digital violence as a continuum

The great challenge is to understand digital violence against women as a continuum of the violence suffered by women "offline". Moreover, this phenomenon should not be considered distinct, but should be included as an extension of violence through technology (APC, 2015).

The particularity of technology lies in its borderless nature, its infrastructures and technical actors, as well as physical absence and anonymity; these elements little known to traditional actors make it difficult to translate virtual violence as an extension of physical violence.

One of the common elements between digital violence and physical violence are the types of aggressors. Violence is mostly perpetrated by people close to the victim: partners or ex-partners, or belonging to the immediate circle such as family members, co-workers or friends, and to a lesser extent by strangers (anonymous).

On the other hand, physical violence can also include virtual violence. In cases of domestic violence, where women are subjected to physical harm and sexual violence, it can also include digital violence, such as insulting, threatening or violent text messages, phone calls or emails.

According to a publication of the Center for Documentation and Studies[8], the National Police has an important record of family violence complaints: from January to September 2020, 2,208 cases were reported (an average of 8 complaints per day). Graph 1 shows that, of the total number of reported cases, 84.8% of the victims are women and girls, compared to only 15.2% of male victims of family violence. However, this data does not distinguish the means by which the aggression was carried out, i.e., whether it was digital or physical violence. The lack of official statistics represents a challenge to know the dimension of online violence against women.

As a preliminary conclusion, it can be stated that in order to know and act against digital violence against women, it is necessary to name and categorize it in statistical records. This will allow a better understanding of the dimension of this phenomenon as well as its relationship with traditional violence against women.

8   CDE (2020) Insufficiency of the system of protection against gender, domestic and intra-family violence - Annual Human Rights Report of CODEHUPY. https://www.cde. org.py/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/IGUALDAD-Mujeres__WEB.pdf

2.2. How do women in Paraguay access the Internet?

Our country has regulations against all forms of violence against women, which also include "cyber violence"[9]. On the other hand, digital content providers have "community standards"[10] in which they address digital violence against women and dissidents with a gender perspective. Both initiatives join a major global effort to reduce this complex and structural issue of gender-based violence, which is also exercised at the digital level.

The normalization of gender-based violence on the Internet has prevented women from meaningfully exercising their right to freedom of expression: an essential precondition for equal participation. For this reason, the director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka states that "Gender violence is a shadow pandemic, as devastating as coronavirus" (El País - Spain, 2021). This considerable increase in digital violence and gender conservatism on the Internet, as well as the various resistances towards women's rights online, are largely due to social inequality, power asymmetries and a patriarchal society that transfers its violent behaviors to the digital world and is increasing due to the high penetration of the Internet in the world in recent years (UN Women, 2020).

According to a publication of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2020 the proportion of women using the Internet globally was 48% compared to 55% of men. However, this sample has some gaps, as it claims to measure all people who have used the Internet once or more in the last 3 months (ITU, 2020)[11]. For its part, Intel Corporation published a research in 2021[12] that women in developing countries are 23% less likely than men to be connected to the Internet.

In the most updated report on technology and access, from the Permanent Household Survey corresponding to 2018, the following data are presented (DGEEC, 2019):

Out of a total of 5,588,529 in 2018:

2.793.708 men	64,3% "used the Internet"
2.794.821 women	65,7% "used the Internet"

The same report states that 92.8% of the people surveyed access the Internet daily from a cell phone; 5.6% access it between 2 and 3 times a week; and 0.6% access it once a week from mobile devices. When accessing the Internet from a PC, 49.9% connect daily, 23.5% between 2 and 3 times a week, and 25.3% do so once a week. When accessing the Internet from laptops, 39.9% connect daily, 35.6% between 2 and 3 times a week, and 22.3% once a week.

In relation to social networks, the only data obtained via the State is the "Survey on access and use of the Internet in Paraguay" of 2017 (MITIC, 2017). However, they only present a general age percentage split between messaging applications and social networks, as well as the percentage of commercial use of social networks.

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9 Legal term of law 5777/16 Article 6 inc L.

10 Examples of "community standards" are Twitter's "Policies regarding hate speech: https://help.twitter.com/es/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy and the Facebook document "Violence and criminal behavior". https://www.facebook.com/communitystandards/violence_criminal_behavior

11 The Alliance for Affordable Internet now suggests measuring daily usage. Available at https://www.apc.org/en/blog/inside-digital-society-digital-divide-or-digital-continuum

12 UN Women campaign on this publication: https://twitter.com/ONUMujeres/status/1416462717012127747?s=20

Regarding social media network —according to users, age and gender— the Latamclick consulting firm states that in Paraguay in 2020[13] the distribution of users is as follows:

Facebook
3.850.000 USERS

Instagram
1.500.000 USERS

LinkedIn
500.000 USERS

Facebook: 22%, 42%, 38%
Instagram: 25%, 27%, 48%
LinkedIn: 9%, 31%, 60%

Ages
- 13 - 21
- 22 - 33
- 34 - 65+

Facebook gender: 48%, 52%
Instagram gender: 55%, 45%
LinkedIn gender: 54%, 46%

Gender
- Femenine
- Masculine

Twitter
480.000 USERS

TikTok
67.400 USERS

No disaggregated data
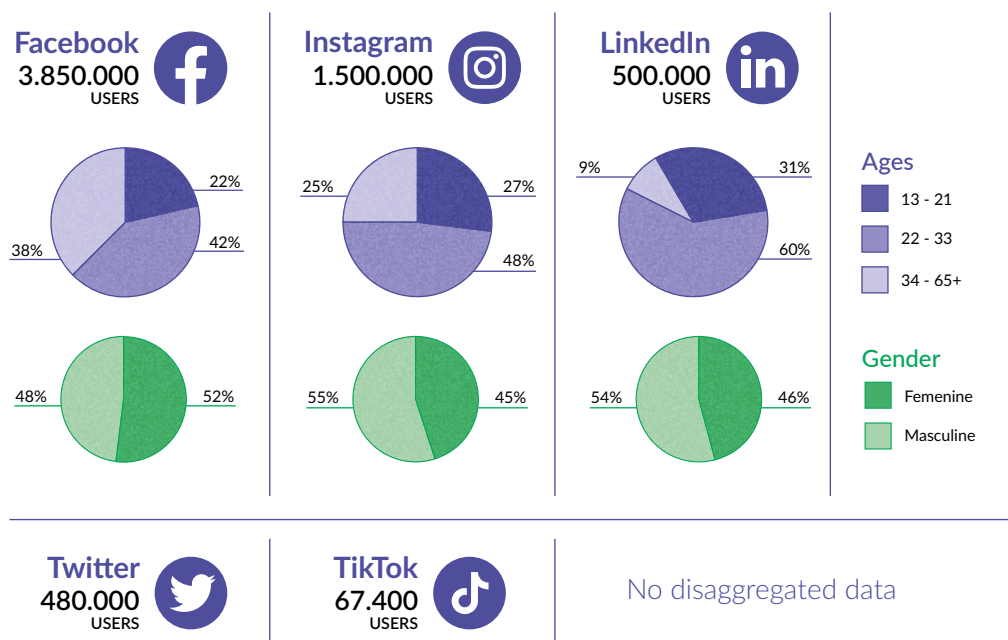
2.3. The gender digital gap in Paraguay

The report prepared in 2015 by SENATICs (now MITIC) and by the Ministry of Women sent to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (Resolution 32/13) acknowledges that there are no publications and evidence on the gender digital divide in Paraguay[14]:

"Empirical data suggests that women use ICTs for activities more closely linked to their traditional roles: motherhood, family, home, education and care. The more specialized or advanced the skills required, the more the gap tends to widen. There is a deficit of women in scientific and technological fields, so it is necessary to stimulate girls and young women in the use of ICTs, as well as in training in technological university careers.

Other obstacles identified are historical discrimination and invisibility. There are few female role models, and almost no women in technical and political spaces related to the development of the information and knowledge society, and problems in the social-ization of women in the use of technology. Public policies for equality are key and still insufficient. It is evident that the gap between men and women in other areas is also reflected in the habits and uses of ICTs".

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13 Statistics of social networks in Paraguay. Latamclick 2020. https://www.latamclick.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Estad%C3%ADsticas-Digitales-Paraguay-2020.pdf

14 The digital gap is understood as any unequal distribution in the access, use, or impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among social groups. These groups can be defined on the basis of gender, geographic or geopolitical, cultural, or other criteria. Due to the high cost of ICTs, their adoption and use is highly unequal around the world. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brecha_digital

It is also noted that the current focus of MITIC's Digital Agenda for connectivity[15] is on access and connectivity. This same focus is observed in Paraguay's 2016 National Cybersecurity Plan, which also lacks specific policies for the inclusion of women. In this new stage of the Digital Agenda and re-elaboration of the cybersecurity plan, it is suggested to include a national diagnosis on the gender digital gap[16]. In this new stage of the Digital Agenda and the re-elaboration of the cybersecurity plan, it is suggested to include a national diagnosis on the gender digital gap.

It is necessary to have more specific data so that public policies for digital inclusion, such as MITIC's Digital Agenda, can be effective. There are structural factors that affect the access and use of ICTs, in this case by women: it is not enough to provide them with the Internet. Their appropriation depends on several conditions, such as the socialization of technologies by gender roles, or acts of violence that inhibit them from expressing their opinion on the network.

Without a Cybersecurity Plan with a gender perspective, the Digital Agenda policies will increase the gender digital divide and will expose more and more girls and women to forms of gender-based violence online.

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15 MITIC Digital Agenda: https://www.mitic.gov.py/agenda-digital/que-es

16 Looking for women in the National Cybersecurity Plan. https://www.tedic.org/buscando-a-las-mujeres-en-el-plan-nacional-de-ciberseguridad/

3. Objectives and research questions

The main objective of the research is to initiate baseline studies to characterize online violence against women in Paraguay.

Specific objectives include:

a. Identify available national legal remedies to be applied in cases of technology-related violence against women.

b. To provide contextual information based on data that will make it possible to expand studies and design public policies to combat online violence.

c. Provide qualitative information on perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards situations or experiences of online violence.

The questions that oriented the study were:

- What is the level of awareness of cyber violence against women in Paraguay?

- What are the types of intimidation, violence and abusive experiences identified? What is the gap with offline experiences?

- What effects or damages are recognized by victims of cyber violence?

- How and in what way do victims process/report cyber violence?

- Is cyber-violence more prevalent among women with positions in public opinion or with greater exposure in the media and social networks?

- Is cyber violence greater when a woman assumes a public position? Does it have an impact on grievances?

- What is the relationship between online and offline violence?

- What is the degree of knowledge of Law 5777 on Integral Protection of Women against all forms of violence?

4. Methodological approach

4.1. Legal framework: regulatory background and public policies

This research aims to explore technology-related violence against women on two levels. The first level involves mapping existing domestic legal remedies. This involves examining existing laws in Paraguay to assess the protection they offer in cases of technology-related violence against women. The second level involves qualitative research.

This section seeks to identify which domestic laws may apply to harm resulting from technology-related Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), as well as the processes, mechanisms and institutions through which women can seek remedies and access justice.

4.2. In-depth interviews and focus groups

For the survey of qualitative information on knowledge, attitudes and experiences of cyber violence against women in Paraguay, in-depth interviews and focus groups with women were chosen, according to the profile of cases and theoretical sample corresponding to the object of the study. The categories of analysis designed for this study will allow a triangulation to be carried out in the future, complementing the findings with quantitative studies. The methodological design was based on the study on online gender violence in Peru, called "Knowing to resist"[17] led by Denisse Albornoz and Marieliv Flores, also inspired by the research conducted by Ruth Lewis, Michael Rowe and Clare Wiper, where they used mixed methods to collect testimonies of women who were victims of digital gender violence.

Focus groups and in-depth interviews allow the description of processes and understanding of causal relationships attributed to social phenomena, based on the group and individual accounts constructed in conversations. The conversation space makes it possible to access explanations, i.e., the meaning and significance given, from the group account, to experiences, phenomena and events. The qualitative techniques, in their proposal and dynamics, made it possible for the women interviewed to freely elaborate a story based on questions and situations that produce a frame of reference to inquire about what was constant and disruptive in the consultations carried out.

Interviews were arranged through key informants who are part of the TEDIC and VOZDATA network of contacts, as well as associations, guilds and foundations with activities in the selected municipalities. These informants collected information and provided lists with the profile of potential participants.

The work of organization and interpretation of the contents was carried out by transcribing the accounts of the focus group conversations and in-depth interviews, and then coding, categorizing and inferring the contents using a results matrix. Once the classification of the qualitative information was completed, a cross-sectional analysis of the accounts was carried out in order to reflect the points of coincidence and divergence in them.

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17 Albornoz Denisse y Marieliv Flores (2018) Knowing to Resist: Gender Violence Online. https://hiperderecho.org/tecnoresistencias/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/violencia_genero_linea_peru_2018.pdf

Analysis Category	Indicators
Perception and assessment of the general context of action.	Socio-economic context country, city, workplace
Access and use of networks	Type of use Perception of access and mass use of networks
Cyber violence	Perception Knowledge Attitudes
Expectations	Proposal to confront cyber violence

The presentation of the sentences corresponding to fragments of the stories that illustrate the findings of the groups and interviews are in accordance with the principle of confidentiality[18] and have the informed consent of the women. Research on violence against women requires ensuring both the safety of the women and the quality of the data[19].

4.3.   Regulatory background and public policies

For this study, the most relevant UN regulations and international reports were identified in order to address digital gender-based violence from a human rights perspective. Each of them is described below.

4.3.1. International regulations

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and is included in the constitutions of most democratic systems. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1976), on the other hand, recognizes freedom of expression in Article 19 and establishes restrictions: for respect of the rights or reputations of others, and/or to protect national security or public health and morals. If restrictions are necessary, they must be established by law.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) The main standard for women's human rights (UN, 1979)

This convention, which came into force in 1981 and was ratified by Paraguay through Law No. 1215/8, highlights violence as a form of historically unequal power relationship between women and men, emphasizing that women have the right to live free from violence and discrimination. In this regard, General Recommendation 19/1992, which for the first time makes the States responsible for situations of violence against women and obliges them to adopt the necessary measures for its elimination, stands out.

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18 Confidentiality means that what has been discussed will not be repeated or at least not without permission to achieve anonymization of the locations of individuals and places, as well as the identity of subjects, groups and institutions so that they cannot be recognized by outsiders.

19 Watts, C., Heise, L., Ellsberg, M. y Moreno, C. (2001). Putting women first: ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women. World Health Organization, Geneva.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to the States of Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2017)

This document develops a more precise term on the causes and effects related to gender-based violence: "gender-based violence against women". It reinforces it as a systemic and social problem and suggests that States seek comprehensive responses (Line Bareiro, 2017).

Recommendation 35 of the CEDAW Convention (CEDAW, 2017)

Recommendation 35 is a document that highlights violence as a form of historically unequal power relationship between women and men, remarking that women have the right to live free from violence and discrimination.

Convention of Belém do Pará: Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women

This convention was ratified by Paraguay through Law 605/1995. It was the first international treaty on violence against women that affirms that this violence constitutes a violation of human rights.

The Convention establishes for the first time the development of mechanisms for the protection and defense of women's human rights, in the fight to eliminate violence against their physical, sexual and psychological integrity, both in the public and private spheres. It also establishes recommendations on the generation of measures and public policies that seek to eradicate violence against women.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective

The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) has focused their 2018 thematic report on this type of online and ICT-facilitated violence. The report notes that the consequences and harms caused by different manifestations of online violence are closely related to gender. This is because women and girls suffer particular stigma in a context of structural inequality and are therefore disproportionately affected by online violence. They also suffer extremely serious consequences as a result (Dubravka Šimonović, UN, 2018).

Eradicating violence against women journalists

The Special Rapporteur outlines how the exacerbation of gender-based violence against female journalists through the use of digital technologies, specific types of threats, harassment and surveillances that are transferred to the Internet and endanger female media professionals (Dubravka Šimonović, 2020).

4.3.2. National Regulations

Constitution of the Republic of Paraguay (Constitution, 1992)

Article 4: Right to life, physical and psychological integrity; Article 24: Religious and ideological freedom; Article 26: Freedom of expression and press; Article 33: Privacy; Article 28: Right to equality and non-discrimination; Article 60: Right to protection against domestic violence.

Law No. 1600/2000 "Against Domestic Violence" (Congress, 2000) and Law No. 6568/2020 amending Article 2 of Law 1600/2000 "Against Domestic Violence" (Congress, 2020)

Both laws address the protection of persons who suffer injuries, physical, psychological or sexual mistreatment by any of the members of the family group.

In 2020, urgent protection measures are modified.

Law 5777/16 Law for the integral protection of women against all forms of violence

In Article 5 inc L of the law defines cyber violence as follows:

"It is the action by means of which messages, photographs, audios, videos or others that affect the dignity or intimacy of women are disseminated or published through current information and communication technologies, including the use of these media to promote the objectification, submission or exploitation of women. 'Reification' shall be understood as the action of reducing women to the condition of a thing."

While it is welcome that this type of violence has been included in the law, its definition is incomplete as it focuses only on the dissemination of non-consensual images and exposure by the media. It leaves aside online harassment, threats, monitoring and access, discriminatory expressions, discrediting, unauthorized access, impersonation/ identity theft, abuse and sexual exploitation related to technologies and affecting the channels of expression.

CEDAW Recommendation to the Paraguayan State

In 2017[20] and 2020[21] CEDAW issued a recommendation to the Paraguayan State and in the latter stated before the Commission on Human Rights (fourth periodic report) the need to:

> "(a) Intensify its efforts to prevent, combat and punish femicides and all acts of violence against women, girls and adolescents, including through the collection of statistical data, and ensure that the institutions and programs intended for this purpose have adequate human, financial and technical resources."

Table 1. Summary of existing laws that may address technology-related violence against women.

Country	CEDAW Ratification	Gender equality Law	Law on violence against women	Law on ICT-related violence against women	Civil remedies
Paraguay	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

At the time of closing this research. A bill to prevent, punish and eradicate gender-based political violence against women is being discussed in the national congress[22].

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20 The recommendation states, "(e) Establish a unified, coordinated and consistent system of data collection on gender-based violence (CEDAW/CPRY/CO/6, para. 20) and allocate sufficient resources for its operation..." CEDAW/C/PAR/CO/7, 2017.

21 Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Paraguay. Document CCPR/C/PRY/CO/4, para. 19. CO/4, para. 19: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2fC%2fPRY%2fCO%2f4&Lang=en

22 Draft law. File: S-2110141 http://silpy.congreso.gov.py/expediente/123379

4.4. Selected cases

4.4.1. In-depth interviews with women politicians, activists, influencers and public managers

Studies in the region show the existence of a greater exposure to situations of cyber violence against professional women with a public profile who participate in communication spaces (journalists, researchers, activists and artists). In order to investigate these situations in our country, the aforementioned profiles were taken as inclusion criteria for in-depth interviews.

In November 2020, 4 (four) interviews and 1 (one) interview in April 2021[23] were conducted with women communicators, politicians and influencers; all of them public figures who use digital platforms as tools to disseminate political positions or express opinions.

Profiles of in-depth interviews	
Identification: women	Inclusion criteria
1. Communicator with recognized trajectory and reference in the CMMs.	Public profile Active participation in networks Victim of cyber violence
2. Journalist. Feminist. Politician	
3. Feminist Politician. Ex minister	
4. Social media influencer	
5. 5. Feminist - Director of communication in the public sector	

4.4.2. Focus group with young women from Asunción, Ciudad del Este, Villarrica, Caaguazú and Encarnación

For the selection and invitation of the participants to the focus groups, a non-probabilistic directed theoretical sampling was applied. The criteria for the formation of the groups were: women, age between 18 and 30 years and area of residence (urban and rural). Extended lower middle-low socioeconomic level (NSE), with Internet access, communication device (phone, computer, tablet), having a profile in social networks and with frequent online interaction.

In the month of April and in the first week of May 2021, 4 (four) focus groups were conducted with women residents in urban localities of Asunción (including the Central Department) and Ciudad del Este (Alto Paraná), Villarrica (Guairá), Encarnación (Itapúa) and 1 (one) rural focus group, in the town of María Auxiliadora (Department of Caaguazú). The focus groups were carried out in the localities following the Health Protocol established by the MSPyBS (see Appendix).

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23 Due to schedule problems, one of the interviews corresponding to the profile of a woman senator of the republic was replaced by that of a woman communications director of a municipality.

Group	Locality	Composition	Selection criteria	Code
1	Asunción	8 to 10 participants Women 30 distributed equally in the groups (4 women from 18 to 24, and 4 women from 24 to 30) Extended middle SES High school education completed Family income more than two minimum wages.	Internet access, communication device (phone, computer, tablet), have a social media profile and with frequent online interaction	GA1
2	Ciudad del Este			GCD2
3	Villarrica			GV3
4	Caaguazú			GC4
5	Encarnación			GE5

5. Results of the qualitative study

5.1. Social context: perception and evaluation of Internet and social network use and access

The initial questions about the current situation, the way of experiencing the pandemic and Internet access allowed us to generate the necessary trust for the development of the conversation and discussion about gender-based violence online. In this sense, most of the women pointed out that the pandemic of covid-19, in addition to causing a socio-economic crisis and health confinement measures such as "staying at home" or "working or studying at home", represent an overload of tasks for women.

On the other hand, they perceive an increase in the use of digital tools for online shopping, sales and training. They also expressed "feeling fed up" with the saturation of information and false news related to the development of the pandemic:

- *V: "I can really tell you that you are more tired. You have to work and study, everything at home, and when you stay, they tell you: why don't you cook? (LAUGHS), clean this or that a little" (GE5, Encarnación Group)*

- *It is hard, because at home there is more noise, they interrupt you when you are in class (GV3 Villarrica)*

- *There is fake news and a demonstration of this is the context of the covid that evidenced all the disinformation that mobilized people, installed a sense of alarm for all the people (GA1, Asunción Group)*

- *I stopped following the news on Facebook because everything is lamentation. I got out of it. It consumes you a lot, it affects you (GE5, Encarnación Group)*

Regarding the perception of Internet use, they characterize the differentiated use of platforms and digital tools according to activities, ages, social stratum and types of content. WhatsApp (WP) is the most used platform for daily communication and interaction with family, friends and co-workers. It is the channel through which "news of all kinds arrive". They consider the use of WP as necessary, useful and almost indispensable.

In comparison, other platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, are associated with a space and time for entertainment. Young women in Asunción, Encarnación and Ciudad del Este prefer to use the Instagram platform because of the type of content published, the greater selectivity of users and interests. They see Facebook as different because they identify it as massive in terms of type of users and variety of content.

It is worth mentioning that rural women indicated that they reduced their use of the Internet for entertainment and socializing due to greater data consumption for educational activities.

- *Interviewer: Which of the social networks do you use the most?*

- *M1: Instagram*

- *M6: Depends on age*

- *M9: Facebook because of business, sales.*

- *M5: WhatsApp is also used all day long, but more for chatting, even though it included the topic of statuses, but it is used more for chatting, groups (GCD 2 Ciudad del Este Group).*

- *Among young people my age of upper middle class, using Facebook. It's like using your mom's social network. I have many friends from public or subsidized private schools who use Facebook. You can see the social strata.*

- *I use TikTok because I gave up on millennials and I'm trying with centennials. It's a much more positive social network. But it's also a social network where the little ones are now debating and are experiencing their first debates.*

- *I mostly use Instagram. I had Facebook, but some time ago I deactivated it because I felt very vulnerable, very exposed on the networks (GA1 Asunción Group).*

- *For their part, the women interviewed who have a public professional profile (journalist, feminist politician and influencer) use their personal Twitter accounts to disseminate and express positions on certain issues or express political opinions. All of them consider that the virtual public space that this digital platform enables is hostile and imponderable in terms of possibilities of being exposed to aggressions and digital violence.*

- *V: On Twitter, there is usually an attack. I am broadcasting an opinion on television and I get a response on Twitter. But since I don't follow that kind of toxic conversations, I avoid them and don't answer. I always look at who the person who is insulting me is, how many followers they have. Usually the photo is an egg, so there is no one behind it; it is either an algorithm or a troll or we know it is part of a campaign.*

- *Because when they attack for the sake of attacking, it is definitely not someone who deserves my respect, so I automatically ignore them. I pretty much ignore it. If I block in my life, I will have done it twice, in general I don't do it. What I do is mute these profiles that are annoying. I prefer to mute.*

- *For opinion, yes, definitely. Instagram is another language, another communication. Also to express opinions, but not so much. That network is more social, it's something else; even more commercial as well.*

- *But yes, Twitter is the network I use to give my opinions or to retweet things I find interesting. With the retweeting you also mark a line, you mark the type of opinions you share and, in general, I do not answer, unless there is a respectful question, where there is someone who gives you an argument. When I give my opinion on issues that are a bit controversial, there is always an insult in the middle, there is no interest in dialogue (Epe1).*

5.2. Cyber violence against women: knowledge, perception and assessment

In general terms, the participants in the groups show a certain distance and lack of knowledge when asked about the expression: "What do you know about cyber or digital violence against women?". In this sense, in more than one group, they associate this notion with cases published in the mass media of women who were deceived through social networks to become victims of human trafficking or were murdered. In other words, cyber violence as a term is associated with events with the purpose of offline violence, of an extraordinary nature, as something far away: something that "I saw, heard on the news".

However, all the women interviewed in the groups, and those with a public profile, stated that they had experienced violent, aggressive and harassing situations online.

The participants in the different groups agreed in recognizing the existence of digital violence in our country and stated that they had experienced various types of online aggression through information and communication technologies. The logic of violence that occurs online seems to have a greater tolerance and limits, subjectively defined in each act of aggression or harassment. In this sense, the phrase "when they cross the line" indicates that each one, depending on how she feels, decides to block or denounce the aggressor. It would seem that, since these situations are committed in the virtual space, they are less real or have fewer consequences for the women.

- *C: Do you think there is any other type of violence or aggression in the networks?*

- *Group answer: yes*

- *C: How does this violence happen?*

- *M2: all the time, in my case I had to block 3 people.*

- *M9: I have 25 people blocked.*

- *M9: when you are in a group, people get a group number and write to you. Out of the blue someone writes to you: "how are you doing", or "what are you doing". 3 lines is enough for me: I don't have time and I'm not interested in talking, so I block them. It makes me uncomfortable because they send you "I just want to meet you", and immediately they send inappropriate photos and are aggressive if you don't answer them.*

- *M7: Another way is from mega fake profiles that write to you in English; I think that happened to most people. I have never responded to those messages, it's scary, why don't you show your face? Why are you hiding behind a fake profile? Why are you hiding? You get the feeling he's going to do something bad.*

- *The group agrees (it's like that) (GCD2, Ciudad del Este Group).*

Women with a public profile report that they have faced several situations of aggression and digital violence, generally after making a comment, political positioning or political opinion through the Twitter platform. They report having been mostly harassed, slandered and victims of smear campaigns when they defend women's rights, LGBTI collectives and freedom of expression.

5.3. Situations, experiences and experiences of cyber violence situations

One of the most significant results of the research is the characterization or description of the type of online violence according to the virtual space of interaction in which the situation is perpetrated. That is, there are higher degrees of violence when the harassment, bullying and threats are carried out in private chats or private messaging systems of digital platforms and come from a known aggressor, or a fake profile, seeking to establish a private conversation.

In this sense, there seems to be a simile reference, or extension, of the public and private fields and the types of violence against women offline. Thus, offline domestic violence or those experienced in private chats, generate greater affectation towards women and are perceived as intimate, without the possibility of others to act.

- *M2: Yes or yes they send you private messages, and in some messages they are exaggerated with their intentions, on FB, IG or also someone gave them your WP, it is something common.*

- *C: What would be exaggerated?*

- *M3: The classic one who is from another country, writes in English or Arabic and sends you pictures of his ...(genitals).*

- *M1: They send you private messages, for example, they write to you and say "I want to give you this, so you can wear this". Or suddenly they offer you something in exchange for being with you.*

- *M2: In my case it was with acquaintances, and I curse and block them....*

- *M3: There are many degenerate men, that just for seeing you with sexy clothes in the pictures you post on the networks, they think they can tell you anything, and they show you their private parts. And without sincerely it is not fun, it is annoying, so I block them. This happens more on Facebook (GV4, Villarrica Group).*

The private sphere represented by the chat is in opposition to the "wall" or visible content sections of the platforms, associated with the public sphere. In fact, if the aggression is generated on the walls or public sphere, the aggressor(s) is blocked immediately and they are generally unknown profiles.

The situation is very different when the aggression is perpetrated in private chats with a known aggressor, since the blocking is not immediate, because an interaction is established due to fear, threat or other factors, as expressed by the women. Some women stated that the cut or blocking of the aggressor in the private chat is established after telling an acquaintance, friend or family member about the situation of violence they have experienced.

Rural women reported that harassment by known ex-partners begins in the private chat room and then continues with threats through telephone calls.

- *M1: There is a lot of violence in social networks, but there are people who think they can say anything from the networks, when they see comments that they would not say in front of you. On the Facebook wall, there is no choice but to block.*

- *Group response, some of them nod.*

- *M2: In my case, an ex who was toxic, as they say. He wrote to me privately, all the time and if I didn't answer he became more and more aggressive, "why don't you answer, bitch?" In that tone he would write me. Or he would threaten me, saying he wouldn't leave me alone. It stopped when I told him and showed the chat to a mutual friend. I think these things happen because you leave, you file a report and they don't pay attention to you. The policeman tells you it's bullshit, or laughs.*

- *M3: I have an experience of a guy who saw me at a social event. I didn't even talk to him, but he got my number and started calling me. He followed me on all the social networks, wrote me messages, and I became afraid, afraid to go out. The guy lived half a block from my house, and since I didn't pay attention to him, I blocked him from everything and he sent messages to the neighbor across the street saying, please, that he wanted something with me. He was obsessed, and I was afraid (CCE2, Ciudad del Este Group).*

- *M5: He wrote to my private Facebook account, it was a profile I didn't know. At first he spoke nicely to me, but then I realized it was him (reference to the ex-partner). Because he started insulting me and wanted to know where I was. So I blocked him and he started calling me non-stopping. You will not believe, I had more than 50 missed calls, so I had to change my phone number and chip (GC4, Caaguazú Group).*

Prevention and protection actions are individual and focus on blocking the aggressors' accounts, especially those of TW. However, it is a time-consuming and impractical action for a public figure with a large following. They point to spams containing aggressive comments as impossible to stop.

Two of the women with public profiles reported having received threats of deaths, and physical and sexual aggression after posting political positions on their public social networks:

> "I use Twitter more for political and ideological positioning and all that. When it was the case of a femicide, we went to protest and I posted on my networks. That same night, when we came back from the protest, I received a super intense message on TW, from a guy who told me that he was going to look for me, that he was going to kill me, that he knew where I was, that he was going to cut me and cook me. Like that, super intense messages" (Journalist, Feminist MMC, EPe2).

5.4.   Characterization of the situation of digital violence and profile of the aggressor

Women with a public profile expressed that digital violence is greater when they issue political positions on issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, gender violence, feminism or even when they give their opinion on certain issues or action interests that "do not concern women" such as soccer and politics. Aggressions on women's social networks come from real profiles, mostly men, some identified with anti-rights groups.

After giving their opinion and maintaining a political line, women suffer an escalation "of harassment and threats", especially when the harassment moves from Twitter to WhatsApp or private messages on Facebook. In general, the comments and verbal aggressions refer mainly to the body as an object of attack (ugly, fat, black), sexual orientation and political position.

Among the situations of digital violence suffered by women, it should be noted that in the accounts there is no clear typification or differentiation between situations of harassment, threat, online control. However, it is possible to list those that were pointed out:

- *Harassment, insults or verbal aggression: towards the body or because of women's physical condition, sexual orientation or political affiliation.*

- *Assaulting and attacking women because of their physical appearance.*

- *Image and identity theft for use in fake profiles, especially on FB and IG platforms.*

- *Surveillance through the sending of images or geo-referencing the place where the woman is located to know her location*

- *Posting non-consensual intimate images by ex-partners*

- *Smear campaigns, defamation of women with a public profile, via spamming by hate speech groups*

- *From online threats to harassment of the victim in public spaces.*

- *Password theft to control and extort the partner.*

- *And regarding the types of stalkers or aggressors were identified:*

- *Anonymous stalker or fake profile. Acts harassing with sexual content in private chats and intensifies aggressive comments.*

- *Fake profile that belongs or ascribes to a hate culture with expressions of discrimination, threat and verbal aggression.*

- *Known stalker with own or fake profile (ex-partner, bosses or acquaintances)*

Here are some phrases that illustrate the types of digital violence experienced:

- *M2: In my case, my Instagram account was stolen 3 times, that is, they impersonated me. A friend told me that they were using my photos under a different name, so I asked my contacts to report the account (GE5. Encarnación Group).*

- *M3: A boy who was from my school, without consent, starts sending me photos of his private parts on Instagram out of the blue. I did not give him consent, I never gave him a word. That for me is too serious the situation that was generated because obviously I got angry, I told him. Then I blocked him. Then he got my WhatsApp number and was writing me on all the social networks. I had to block him from everywhere.*

- *I couldn't do much because of fear, which is the first thing you feel when this kind of situation happens, because of the things he says to you: "if you do such and such, I will do such and such". It is a bit difficult this part... (her voice breaks).*

- *And then there is always that feeling of fear, of what will happen to you if you denounce him or go public, or make an exposure protest? Although I try to fight against that, there is always society that will tell you that you must have been looking for him, that you did this and that you did that, and then there is another kind of harassment. And why do you upload such kind of photos, etc.? What made him stop was that I threatened to show his messages to his girlfriend. That's when he stopped. I did not make a public complaint (GA1. Asunción Group).*

- *M4: It also happens that when a couple breaks up, the guy sends photos or videos of his ex-girlfriend in groups of guys, because he is angry that she left him, so he spreads intimate photos in WP groups, generally of men (GCD2, Ciudad del Este Group).*

5.4.1. Affectation and damage produced

Young women with a public or political profile expressed greater affectation towards aggressions and digital violence. These situations provoke anxiety, temporary abandonment of the Tw account and fear of the possibility that the online aggression will be transferred to the offline field. Especially when physical threats and harassment are made from the aggressor's account or profile with messages such as: "knowing where they live" or "what places they frequent".

- *V: Yes, an aggression that went up in tone, that escalated, that is already very violent, actually started in 2017. A furious, massive, massive, organized, synchronized attack and there they took a topic that is definitely controversial, as is the issue of abortion, about which -in parentheses- I had not spoken or even raised anything about.*

- *They made a material gathering opinions, they reconstructed something that had neither head nor tail, and they attributed that to me. And when I wanted to react, it was too late to do so because the issue was already very well established. They started to attack me saying that I was an abortionist, the Mengele, that I wanted to kill children, that I wanted children with disabilities to die and a whole gigantic ball was generated.*

- *Later I made some material in which I stated my position, but since these people do not want to dialogue, they want you to shut up and not to talk anymore and not to raise the problem, so things continued (Communicator MMC, EPe1).*

Women with a longer history of political militancy during the dictatorial regime show a lower affectation to situations of digital violence as they consider that they have suffered worse forms of offline political violence.

- *V: Now all this is much more widespread and is more evident in social networks. Previously, a woman who was in politics, who had positions, was placed as a certain target, "the one who manipulated, the one who did this or that", but it was of other characteristics. Today the aggression is like to the body, but through the networks.*

- *I say to the body because it is directly to the person, from the threats, the aggressions "we are going to hit you, we are going to kill you", "ugly, bad, fat, old", whatever, "cake", no matter what your sex life is, your orientation, nothing matters. "Lefty", "communist", as insults, which for me they are not, but they are direct aggressions.*

- *If I refer to the previous aggressions or how I lived my whole life, they were of a different nature. Well, yes, when I was 20 years old they painted all over my wall saying "someone's bone and whore" and I don't know what else, but let's say it was an episode, which lasted a long time, but it was an episode. Now all that is more widespread, more massified. Those of us who lived through the times of other characteristics will have a thicker skin for that, but it is quite worrying for those who are just starting out (Feminist Politician. Efe3).*

All the women who suffered some type of online violence indicated that this situation affected them physically and psychologically, and that they faced states of insecurity, stress, shame, fear and depression due to the damage to their reputation, image or dignity:

- *It affected me, it affected me. I was really beaten, beaten, beaten. Because there is also an issue, unfortunately the media where you work do not protect you either, you do not feel protected by the media, you do not feel protected. They leave you adrift. As if they disappear: there is no institutional defense and you feel very lonely, deep down.*

- *It is very hard because you gave years and years of work, and it turns out that when the chips are down, they are not able to give something back in that sense, that is, they have all the power that the media itself implies, and yet they turn their backs on you (Communicator MMC, EPe1).*

- *M2: Yes, it hurts you. You say "I'm fine," but it is not like that. I felt like I was worthless. That's why he was offering me things, it affects you psychologically (GV4. Villarrica Group).*

- *V: I started to receive threats for the simple fact that they uploaded a video of me reacting fervently while watching a soccer game. From there I got scared, because I really had a bad time, I closed all my networks, I felt attacked from all sides and from there I said "enough, no more". As much as I accept myself or I enjoy doing this kind of things, or I consider it a nice moment, people don't take it that way and I prefer to try to avoid that kind of things or talk about certain things. The only thing I managed to do was to close all my networks and uninstall from my cell phone.*

- *I didn't file a complaint because first, it didn't occur to me. I honestly didn't think about it because there were too many attacks. It wasn't one specific one, it wasn't two or three profiles, it was 120 profiles. Then it became very overwhelming and I saw no other option but to close my networks and disappear for a while and then come back with a private account, no longer addressing certain topics (Influencer in social networks. EI4).*

One of the consequences of the damage and affectation is to limit freedom of expression. In other words, in a situation of constant surveillance or unlimited harassment, there is an effective and real abandonment of digital platforms as a result of women's self-censorship.

- *V: Social networks I had a time when I thought it was possible to debate in social networks, and I wrote and thought that I could generate public debate, exchange ideas. But I realized that it did not work because people reproduce a speech, or defend an idea to death. They don't listen to you, they don't read you, they spend a lot of time arguing, and they don't read you. So I said "no more Facebook". And I am not on TW because I consider it is the most violent network, which wears you down emotionally, and I see other colleagues who go through that, you get the violent mass comments. That's why I don't debate on FB and TW.*

- *This decision is recent, two years ago I have not debated in networks. I publish my own positions, positioning and reflections, a more testimonial question and to establish a position, but not to debate. Today, I demand face-to-face debate (Feminist - Director of communication in the public service Efe5).*

On the other hand, women with public profiles consider that, similar to the violence against women perpetrated in the public sphere (the street, institutions, etc.), it occurs in the virtual space. It is the same practice of denigrating, assaulting and excluding women from political opinion and expression.

5.4.2. Digital and offline violence. Link and trajectory

Some women expressed a greater disregard for digital violence compared to physical, offline violence. This is due to the association of offline violence with physical harm and online violence with a psychic affectation that produces less harm to women. This appreciation is common in institutions and in the general perception of common sense and is expressed in the phrases: "one puts up with more when you are assaulted on the networks", friends and authorities "they tell you that it is a little thing".

Regarding the relationship, link or existing circuit between online and offline violence, women characterized two situations from their experiences:

a. Violence first originates on the Internet and then moves to offline physical violence. For example: When the aggressor is blocked from social networks (ex-partner or known stalker) and the victim publishes information about her current location, photos of a family event or public place in the statuses or walls of the platforms, the aggressor becomes present on the site generating situations of physical harassment or stalking.

- *M2. A niece posted my photo, when we were in the house of XX and then appeared at the birthday and came drunk to run over, scream, luckily they did not let him in. For that reason, I stopped posting my photos on Facebook for a long time (GC4 Caaguazú Group).*

b. Violence originates in the physical space and moves to the Internet. For example: When the aggressor is denounced for violence, has a restraining order, he approaches and harasses through the networks. Especially in Wp or Messenger chats with fake profiles.

- M5:   He already had a restraining order from the peace court for domestic violence, however, he would write me on my wp, fb, on any line, I showed it to a lawyer friend who advised me, and he told me that it is difficult for them to take this as evidence for a lawsuit. (GA1, Asunción Group)

Confronting digital violence: Between institutional negligence and impunity and community reports

The ways of facing and reacting to situations of digital violence are different. However, women agree on two assessments: first, that online aggressions and violence are aimed at silencing and excluding women by psychically exhausting them and causing them to withdraw their voices. The second is the doubt and distrust towards the possibility that reporting the facts of digital violence – before the competent institutions – will be effective or modify the situation of violence in any way.

Therefore, the mechanisms for prevention or confrontation in these situations are blocking the aggressor accounts, reporting the account to TW or, in some cases, denouncing and publishing the aggressors in networks in front of followers or in virtual communities.

Women in the groups indicated that the most effective way to stop online aggressors is to expose them publicly, for example, by sharing screenshots on social networks and in group chats.

- *M1: I said one day I can't do it anymore, and I went to his wife and told her how her husband harassed me, and that I didn't want to stain his name, but that was the end of it, but before that I suffered a lot, I wanted to stop it. Because she threatened me that my photos were going to be posted, that I was going to be fired from my job, and that I was an easy woman. At the time, I did not know what to do, I felt bad, I cried all the time, because I was creating an image that I was not, it made me feel very bad, I went into depression. And the only thing I could do was to go one day, to talk to his wife, holy remedy, he disappeared. (GE5 Encarnación Group)*

- *M4: I posted on his FB all his chats where he threatened me and what he said about his son. He said he was going to sue me, but nothing like that, after that he never came back. (GC4 Caaguazú Group)*

- *M1: It happened to me that a person followed me on the networks, wrote to my private, gave me my wp number, offered me this, and that, I invite you to such and such a place, I give you everything you want, but I didn't like it. First, I took it normal, but then it was already very heavy, it already affected me, it was already a lot of harassment, and I had to make public his messages, and he stopped, but recently I saw that he did the same with other people. I did not think of reporting him, because it would not be something deeper, it is something judicial, and I did not want to get to that, some friends told me, not to get to that because it is a very long process (GC3. Villarrica Group).*

Therefore, the more personal or community instances have greater legitimacy than public institutional ones. Resignation is perceived in the face of institutional impunity. They consider that filing a complaint with public agencies and the justice system is unfeasible, is a waste of time that generates frustration and does not stop the aggressor.

- *M2: The problem with denouncing is that if the guy has more money, you won't be able to win, or if he has political contacts, he will win. Or he can even sue you, saying that you made a whole circus to get money from him. That's why you are afraid to sue.*

- *M3: My ex-partner posted an intimate, non-consensual video. It was made from a fake account. We proceeded to raid the home of this person, everything was checked and the procedural solution I obtained was the payment of 800,000 Guaraníes by this person to settle his debt with society. Suddenly this is what makes us afraid to denounce, to expose ourselves and the social pressure. The complaint process was closed, I obtained a restriction for the complaint of physical violence and for the video, that procedural solution. The video was deleted from Facebook, but once it was uploaded to the Internet, you cannot stop its dissemination because it is uncontrollable and you do not know who downloaded it. That was what they explained to me in Computer Crimes. (GA1. Asunción Group)*
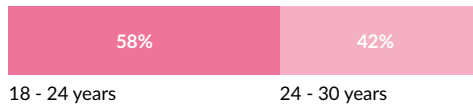
It is worth mentioning that in response to a death threat made through a social network to the woman journalist interviewed, she said that she filed a formal complaint with the public prosecutor's office, under the protocol for the protection of journalists and accompanied by the union. However, she considers that the case did not succeed and remained "nothing" (in Guaraní oparei).
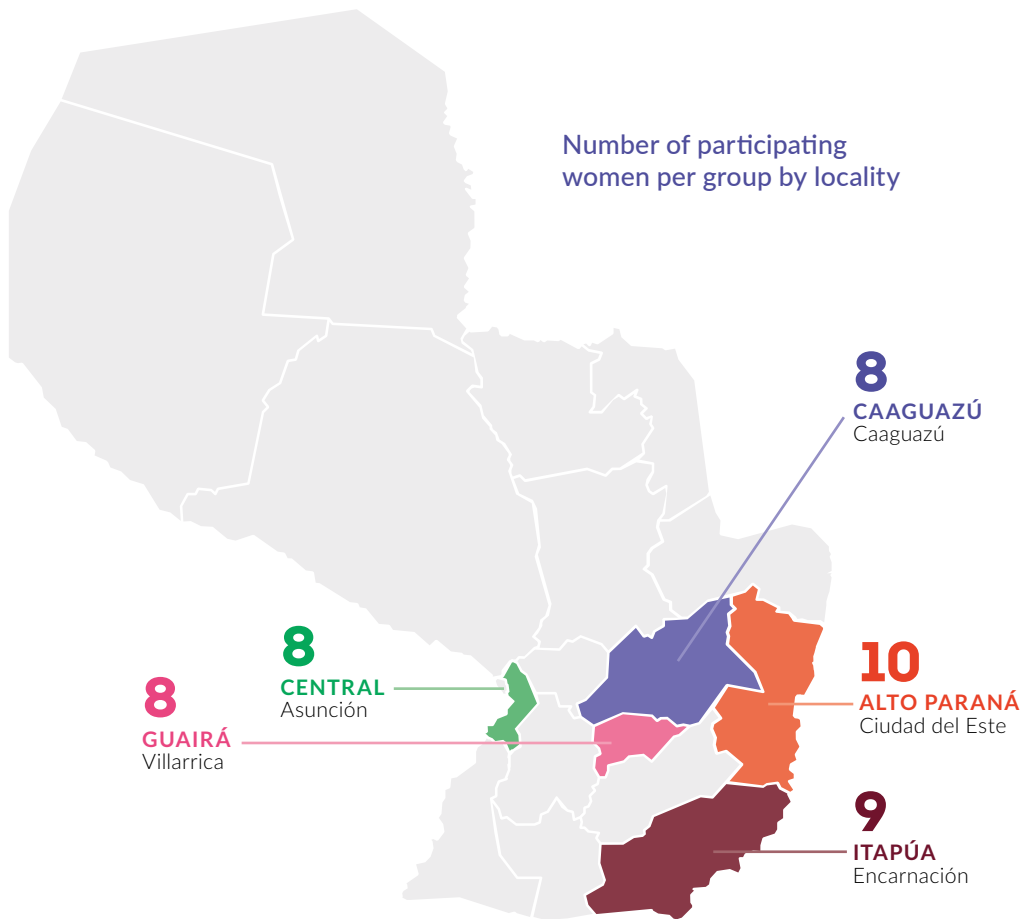
6. Findings in general

43 women who participated in the group sessions and responded to the questions

Ages

58%	42%
18 - 24 years	24 - 30 years

Zones

63%	37%
Urban	Rural

Number of participating women per group by locality

8
CAAGUAZÚ
Caaguazú

8
CENTRAL
Asunción

8
GUAIRÁ
Villarrica

10
ALTO PARANÁ
Ciudad del Este

9
ITAPÚA
Encarnación

Results of surveys conducted at the end of the sessions

YES	NO	
100%	0%	Have you ever felt offended or attacked on social networks?
86%	14%	Do you know other people who have experienced online abuse or violence?
16%	84%	Are you familiar with Law No. 5777/16 on the Comprehensive Protection of Women against all forms of Violence?

Most recurrent, coincidental and representative phrases referred to by the majority of women in all groups.

What are the most common situations of violence?	Harassment in private messaging	""I have 25 people blocked. Out of the blue someone writes to you: 'how are you'. It makes me uncomfortable because they leave you with "I just want to get to know you". And they immediately send inappropriate photos, and are aggressive if you don't respond (Ciudad del Este Group). "There are many degenerate men who, just because they see you with sexy clothes in the photos you upload on the networks, they think they can tell you anything, and they show you their private parts (Villarrica Group). "He was writing to my private Facebook, it was a profile that I did not know, first he spoke to me well, but then I realized that it was, him (reference to the ex-partner), because he started to insult me and wanted to know where I was. So I blocked him (Caaguazú Group).
How does experiencing violence online affect you?	Insecurity Impact on self-esteem Anguish	"If it hurts you, you say I'm fine, but it's not like that. I felt like I was worthless, that's why he was offering me things, he works on you psychologically (GV4. Villarrica Group). "I felt bad, depressed. I didn't know who to talk to, because you feel anguished, and on top of that they tell you, "they are just messages". But it's not like that, it's bad for you (Encarnación Group).
What to do before a violent situation?	Self-censorship in networks Public Exposure of the Aggressor	"I published on FB all his chats where he threatened me and what he said about his son. He said he was going to sue me, but nothing like that, after that he did not come back (Caaguazú Group). "It affected me as things were happening, every time he wrote to me, but I consider that I was emotionally strong so that it did not affect me in my day-to-day life. What made him stop was that I threatened him that I was going to show his messages to his girlfriend. That's when he stopped. I did not make a public complaint" (Asunción Group).

7. Conclusions

Digital gender-based violence is a continuum of violence against women and girls in the physical world. The Internet is not a space free of violence and the violence identified in this research does not operate in isolation from physical violence. They are connected, overlapping and reinforcing each other. Therefore, it can be affirmed that digital violence is real.

This increase in digital gender-based violence in Paraguay is due to the fact that violence is transferred and reproduced in new spaces and together with the culture of impunity remains strong. The ease of accessing the Internet today and the pandemic are some of the factors by which Paraguayan society inhabits the Internet and virtualizes its relationships. These factors lead to the replication of the structural practices of systematic violence from the offline to the online world.

Among other points to highlight is the role of the State. It does not recognize online gender-based violence as a type of violence with a unique and direct impact on the rights, freedoms, emotional health and safety of women in all their diversity. This lack of clarity of effective reporting routes strengthens the impunity of this systematic aggression. There is an incomplete definition of violence against women in Law 5777/16. All of the above is evidence that the public policies and legal reforms that have followed one another lack a prior and rigorous analysis of the complexity of the ways in which the Internet is inhabited as well as its own functioning. In other words, the current regulations on violence against women in the country have not addressed in depth the technical configurations of how the Internet works and how rights are exercised and guaranteed on the network.

One of the ways forward is the implementation of comprehensive strategies that focus on prevention, mitigation and concrete responses to protect women's rights in digital spaces. It is very worrying that the first action in the prevention of this phenomenon are punitive proposals. The response should not only lie in criminal law but also in other forms of prevention and reparation that allow for the protection of the victim of digital gender-based violence.

As was observed among the findings, only 2 of the in-depth interviews expressed comprehensive knowledge of Law 5777/16 and cyber violence. Therefore, it is urgent to expand the information on this law.

Other findings include the ways in which women minimize or tolerate the impact of online violence, as do nearby communities and state authorities. Since these aggressions are committed within the "virtual" sphere, they are not considered "real" because they occur in spaces that are considered very personal. Hence the importance of making this form of violence visible and highlighting the serious impact it has on women's real lives.

Among the common elements identified in the focus groups and in-depth interviews was the way in which aggressors use digital spaces to shame, denigrate, silence, delegitimize and subordinate the ideas of women and girls. The most recurrent violence identified was online harassment.

It was also identified that the effects generated by this digital violence have an impact on their freedom of expression and mental health. Victims censor themselves on the Internet and in turn are affected in their emotional security, generating emotional instability, exhaustion, permanent alertness and feelings of insecurity.

And finally, the lack of a diagnosis of the gender digital divide in Paraguay can lead to the inefficiency of the connectivity policies that are being developed in the MITIC Digital Agenda. The digital divide exacerbates social inequalities in the country, leaving aside the basic needs of women and girls with respect to their digital rights, especially affecting indigenous and rural women. A call is made for the development of public policies with a gender perspective, as well as the creation of specific gender objectives in policies related to technology: broadband, Internet infrastructure, and privacy, among others. If Paraguay does not have this comprehensive policy, it will continue to exclude the other half of the country's population because without effective routes of inclusion and mitigation of digital violence, the State will continue to strengthen the impunity of structural violence.

8. Recommendations

- Recognize online gender-based violence as a violation of human rights and as a continuum of aggressions experienced by women in physical spaces, which are complexified and amplified through the use of technology.

- Create evidence-based public policies. The realization of a diagnosis on the gender digital divide that includes divisions such as: urban and rural areas, age range, women, men and others, rich and poor, educational level, literacy level, degrees of use, type of devices, bandwidth, prices etc. The effectiveness of public policies and even the business plans of companies should consider this key information to adopt comprehensive measures to mitigate gender-based violence in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets (SDGs).

- Generate statistical records that allow to know the dimension and characteristics of digital gender-based violence in Paraguay.

- Strengthen inclusive public policies, such as improving resources to address the historical, structural and underlying causes of inequalities, as well as the risk factors for violence against women and girls.

- Adopt measures to implement Law 5777/16, as well as the redefinition of Article 6 inc. L to include the various forms of violence against women that constitute cyber violence.

- Contribute to characterize and typify the forms of online aggression against women, in order to generate effective strategies for prevention and protection. That is, to carry out communication campaigns to characterize and illustrate situations of digital violence such as: unauthorized access to accounts, control, improper use of images, harassment, discriminatory comments, among others.

- Address violence against women online from international human rights commitments harmonizing regulations and public policies in Paraguay.
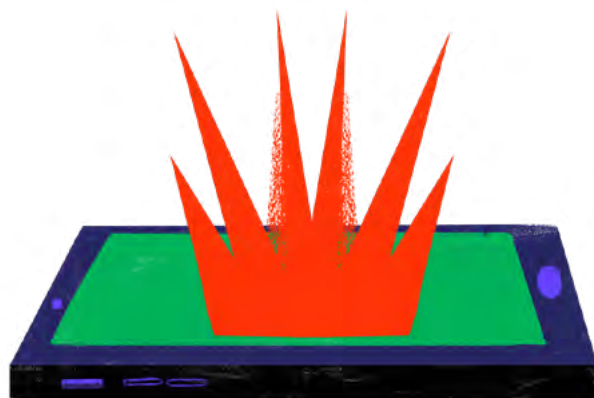
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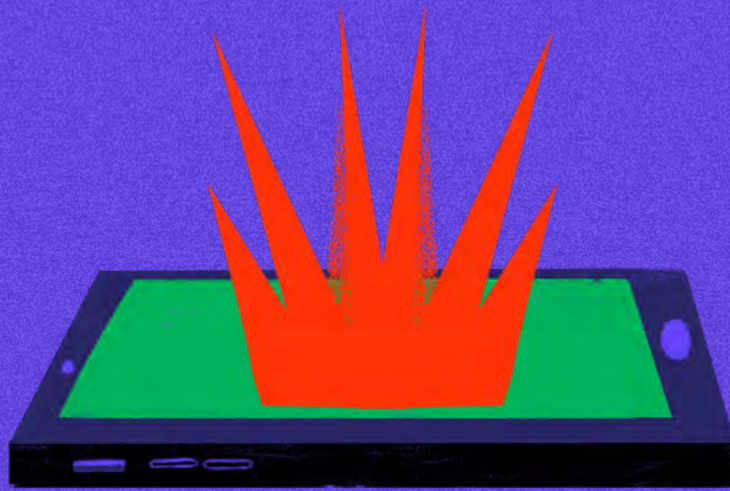
Appendix

Focus group guidelines

Category of Analysis	Indicators	Questions	Observations
Identification	Family Trajectory	How would you introduce yourselves? What do you spend most of your time doing?	The formulation of the questions will take into account the rapport and the particularities of each group.
Perception and assessment of the general context of action	Socio-economic context, country, city, workplace.	What is the city of … like? in Paraguay? What are the main advantages of living here? What are the main difficulties of living here?	
Access and use of networks and the Internet	Type of Use Perception of mass access to and use of social networks.	When did they start connecting to the Internet, how do they currently connect, from what devices, and what do they do? Which social network do they use the most, and why? Explore differentiated uses What type of content do they post? Do they share content, post content? Do they consider that network usage changed during the pandemic? What changed?	

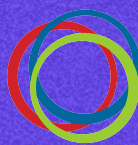|		FOCUS QUESTIONS	FOCUS QUESTIONS DEBATE
Cyber violence	Perception Knowledge And Attitudes	In your opinion, is there aggression, violence on the Internet, networks? Explore response What type, where, to whom from whom. What else do you see here? Do you know of any cases? What about aggression, violence against women, is it the same or in what way? How would you qualify it? Is it different from offline violence? Why? Explore types of aggression, dissemination of images, affecting women's dignity or submission? Has anyone had an experience in which they felt assaulted or violated on the networks? Inquire about the story (situation, aggressor, motives, degree of affectation? How did you deal with the situation of online violence? Did you report it? where and why? And in case you are faced with such a situation, what would you do? Do you know the law 5777 of Integral Protection of Women?	
Expectations	Proposal to confront cyber-violence	From your experience, what do you think should be proposed to address online violence?	Closure

GENDER VIOLENCE

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