Research on Technology Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in Georgia

Study Report

2024

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This research report delves into the issue of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in Georgia, focusing on its prevalence, forms, and impact within the business environment, particularly affecting women-led SMEs in the tourism and agriculture sectors. Commissioned by Mercy Corps and the Georgian Center for Strategy and Development as part of their "Safe Online" program, this study aims to enhance understanding of TFGBV and foster multi-stakeholder engagement for improved policies and safer digital business practices.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to provide both a quantitative understanding and qualitative insights into TFGBV. The quantitative component involved an online survey targeting women leading SMEs in agriculture and tourism sectors across six regions of Georgia. Qualitative data were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with women on senior corporate roles, women in digital business, women content creators and stakeholders, providing a nuanced exploration of personal experiences, awareness, and impact of TFGBV in business settings.

Technology Utilization in Business
The study revealed that a substantial majority (88.6%) of surveyed women utilize technology daily for business operations, with phones (77.2%) and the internet (76.3%) being the most common tools. This usage varies with business size and market demands; smaller enterprises frequently leverage social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for outreach, while larger businesses opt for specialized software suited to their specific needs. Despite high engagement with technology, significant challenges persist, including a lack of expertise in social media management and digital communication, alongside substantial concerns about digital security and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. These challenges underscore the need for enhanced resources and training to better manage digital interactions and safeguard online environments.

Awareness and Experiences of TFGBV
Awareness of TFGBV varies significantly, with 60% of respondents acknowledging familiarity with TFGBV incidents, though understanding is deeper in urban areas like Tbilisi compared to rural regions. The study highlighted that TFGBV is mainly associated with online bullying. About 76% of respondents reported personal experiences or awareness of others facing TFGBV, with bullying, defamation, and stalking being the most prevalent forms, often facilitated through hacking and unwanted messaging. When it comes to the TFGBV experiences in business context, defamation turned out to be the most commonly experienced form, with 9.2% of respondents personally experiencing it and 13.6% knowing someone who has, conducted through hacking and unwanted messaging tactics. Notably, 40.2% of TFGBV instances involve unknown individuals not associated with the business. Furthermore, women have experienced TFGBV from their ex-partners, influential people, and powerholders. The anonymity provided by digital platforms and the lack of effective support mechanisms embolden perpetrators and

leave victims isolated and unsupported, with societal gender stereotypes and gaps in the online safety knowledge further increasing women's vulnerability to TFGBV.

Impact of TFGBV and Coping Strategies

TFGBV significantly impacts the mental health and professional productivity of victims, with 54.9% reporting increased anxiety and related distress. This often leads to self-censorship and withdrawal from online professional networks, which contributes to professional isolation and diminished career advancement opportunities. Only 12% of study participants reported utilizing legal mechanisms to seek help for TFGBV. Among the reasons for not pursuing legal recourse, 63% of women did not consider their case serious enough to warrant a complaint, while others cited lack of information about existing mechanisms (25%) and uncertainty about whom to approach for help (24%). The majority of women with TFGBV experience seek support outside the legal system, with 33% sharing their experiences with friends and 23% with family members. Common coping strategies include ignoring incidents, using safety measures, controlling the information shared online, and seeking community support through online women's groups or professional networks.

Policy and Institutional Response

Despite Georgia's ratification of international conventions like the Budapest, Istanbul, and Lanzarote Conventions, domestic legislation remains inadequately equipped to address TFGBV explicitly. Current legal frameworks often fail to capture the specificities of TFGBV, resulting in challenges in prosecution and support. The newly established Special Investigation Service shows promise but requires ongoing support to enhance trust and effectiveness in handling TFGBV cases. This situation highlights the critical need for legislative updates and more robust institutional responses to better support victims and address the unique challenges of technology-facilitated violence.

The report outlines detailed recommendations to legislation, data collection, and research methodologies, alongside bolstering internal policies and support frameworks. It also emphasizes the critical role of education and awareness initiatives.

1. Introduction

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is an increasingly recognized issue that poses significant challenges for women and girls, impacting individual safety, well-being, and equality. As digital platforms become more integrated into business operations, they open new avenues for harassment and abuse. Within business environments, TFGBV not only violates individual rights but also acts as a barrier to gender equality and economic development. Such violence is often under-reported and inadequately addressed by current policies and frameworks, highlighting the need for a detailed examination of how these incidents occur and are managed within the Georgian context.

This research was commissioned under the framework of Mercy Corps and the Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (GCSD)'s "Safe Online" program. This initiative aims to foster multi-stakeholder engagement and establish a comprehensive understanding of how digital exclusion and Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence impact access to and safety within the digital economy. The study focuses on the prevalence, types, and impacts of TFGBV in business environments across Georgia, with a particular emphasis on women-led SMEs in the tourism and agriculture sectors.

Through the complex mix-methods approach the study aimed to contribute valuable insights into the mechanisms of TFGBV and offer targeted recommendations to enhance policies, improve interventions, and increase online safety and digital inclusion.

The objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

- Identifying the prevalence and types of TFGBV incidents, especially in business environments.
- Examining the impact of TFGBV on survivors and the broader society.
- Analyzing the existing policy/legal/formal mechanisms/tools related to addressing and reporting TFGBV in Georgia and assessing the effectiveness of current preventive measures and support systems.
- Exploring how additional resources and tools can increase resilience against TFGBV.

This report is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of TFGBV in the business context. It begins with defining and understanding TFGBV, followed by an explanation of the research approach, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, research limitation and ethical considerations. The report then examines the Georgian context, presents research findings on TFGBV's prevalence and patterns, as well as impact on women in business. The report concludes with an analysis of existing policies and recommendations for improvement.

2. Unpacking TFGBV

While TFGBV is getting widely recognized as a growing issue along with the development of the technologies, there remains notable gaps in the evidence and common understanding of its nature. Only in recent years has there been a convergence towards a common definition, reflecting the evolving understanding of how digital technologies intersect with gender-based violence. The consensus on what constitutes TFGBV encapsulates the complex interplay between digital advancements and societal norms concerning gender. In November 2022, UN organized an expert group meeting where the common definition for TFGBV has been elaborated. According to this definition:

> *Technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW)* is any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.*
>
> **Noting violence against women can be substituted with gender-based violence (TF GBV), whilst maintaining the common definition describing the phenomenon.*
> *UN Women and WHO Joint Programme on VAW Data*

At its core, TFGBV is acknowledged as a form of discrimination that adversely affects a range of human rights, emphasizing the right to live free from violence, privacy, freedom of expression, and access to digital technologies. It is differentiated from traditional offline gender-based violence by its medium—the digital realm—where acts of violence can be perpetrated with increased anonymity, reach, and speed. This digital context amplifies the potential harm to victims, offering perpetrators various tools from low-cost, easily accessible technologies to more sophisticated means. Such a spectrum of technologies facilitates a wide range of abusive behaviors, from image-based abuse and cyberstalking to more insidious forms like doxing and gendered hate speech. These forms of abuse not only have distinct characteristics but also often overlap, as perpetrators may employ multiple behaviors and tactics in their abuse, contributing to a continuum of violence that spans both online and offline spaces. The anonymity and ubiquity of digital platforms further complicate efforts to address TFGBV, often leaving harmful content online indefinitely and contributing to the perpetuation of violence.[1] Furthermore, the advent of generative AI technologies threatens to compound these issues, introducing new forms of harassment and amplifying existing vectors of TFGBV through the creation of realistic fake media and automated harassment campaigns.[2]

The primary victims of TFGBV are disproportionately women and girls, a reflection of existing gender inequalities in society. However, the impact on LGBTQI+ individuals and those not adhering to traditional gender norms is also significant, pointing to a broader issue of digital inclusion and the intersectionality

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[1] The Global Partnership. Technology-facilitated gender Based Violence: Preliminary Landscape Analysis.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64abe2b21121040013ee6576/Technology_facilitated_gender_based_violence_preliminary_landscape_analysis.pdf
[2] UNESCO. 2023. Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence in an Era of Generative AI.

of online violence.[3] Furthermore, according to the analysis conducted by IREX, in geographical areas with high internet penetration and smaller gender divides, incidents of TFGBV are nearly double compared to regions where a significant gender divide persists. The fear of receiving unwanted messages and being exposed to harmful content acts as a significant barrier to technology use among women, overshadowing challenges related to digital literacy or affordability.[4]

This violence not only affects individuals on a personal level, causing emotional, psychological, and sometimes physical harm, but also has broader societal implications. It undermines democratic participation, exacerbates gender inequalities, and restricts the ability of affected groups to fully engage in digital and public life. The economic costs associated with TFGBV, including loss of employment opportunities and financial well-being, further highlight the pervasive impact of this form of violence.[5] This form of violence effectively relegates women and girls to a secondary status, not only online but in society at large, inhibiting their full participation and engagement in public and political discourse. The predominant response to such online abuse—diminished online activity or complete withdrawal from digital platforms—limits victims' ability to influence public opinion, engage in activism, or advocate for change.[6]

Understanding TFGBV within the broader spectrum of gender-based violence necessitates a comprehensive framework that addresses the motivations behind such acts, the nature of the relationship between perpetrator and victim, and the specific behaviors employed. The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) offers a conceptual framework (figure 1)[7] that delineates this complex landscape, from the motivations and intents of perpetrators to the varied impacts on victims and their coping mechanisms. This framework illustrates how TFGBV spans a continuum of relationships, with motivations ranging from revenge to ideological agendas, and behaviors including stalking, harassment, and exploitation. Importantly, it categorizes

Figure 1: TFGBV conceptual framework by ICRW

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[3] Khoo C. 2021. Deplatforming Misogyny. Report on Platform Liability For Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence. Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

[4] IREX. 2023. Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence as an Attack on Women's Public Participation: Review of Global Evidence and Implications. https://www.irex.org/Technology-Faclitated-Gender-Based-Violence-Review-of-Global-Evidence.pdf

[5] The Global Partnership. Technology-facilitated gender Based Violence: Preliminary Landscape Analysis. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64abe2b21121040013ee6576/Technology_facilitated_gender_based_violence_preliminary_landscape_analysis.pdf
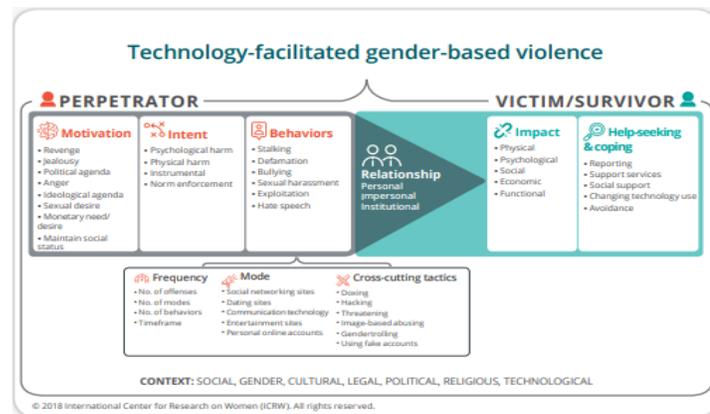
[6] Khoo C. 2021. Deplatforming Misogyny. Report on Platform Liability For Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence. Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF)

[7] Hinson L, Mueller J, O'Brien-Milne L, Wandera N. (2018). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it? Washington D.C., International Center for Research on Women. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICRW_TFGBVMarketing_Brief_v8-Web.pdf

the impact on victims into psychological, physical, functional, economic, and social outcomes, underscoring the extensive harm inflicted by TFGBV.

3. Research Approach

To thoroughly explore the complex issue of TFGBV, particularly its impacts on women in the business sector, we employed a mixed-methods approach. This strategy was designed to capture both the broad quantitative scope and the in-depth qualitative aspects of TFGBV. The study focused on women in the business environment across six regions in Georgia: Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Tbilisi.

In collaboration with GCSD, we have specifically defined our primary target group as **women leading SMEs in the tourism and agriculture** industries. Additionally, to enrich our understanding and add depth to the perspectives gathered, we collected qualitative data from several related other subgroups, such as women in senior corporate roles, women in digital business and women social media content creators, and thematic experts and stakeholders.

3.1. Quantitative component

Questionnaire Development

To develop the questionnaire, we primarily used the ICRW framework, supplemented with elements from other definitions. We identified various forms and tactics of TFGBV and formulated specific indicators to describe associated behaviors (table 1). Based on these definitions, we developed a survey with three sections: respondent demographics, technology integration in business, and experiences with TFGBV. The questionnaire was translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani, enabling ethnic minority participants to respond in their preferred language.

Table 1: Operationalization of TFGBV forms and tactics

Forms	Tactics
Stalking: Repeated actions to contact a person against their will or invade their life, leading them to feel endangered.	**Doxing:** Sharing someone's personal information online without their consent.
Defamation: Efforts to tarnish someone's reputation through online platforms, phone calls, or other technologies.	**Hacking:** Unauthorized access to digital devices or online accounts.
	Image-based Abuse: Continuously posting someone's photos, videos, or highly personal information.
Bullying and Hate Speech: Actions aimed at harassing, ridiculing, or intimidating an individual or group through online platforms, phone calls, or other	**Threats:** Consistently making obscene, threatening, or nuisance calls, either silently or through phone and

technologies.	online platforms.
Sexual Harassment: Unwanted sexual advances or behavior, whether verbal or non-verbal, conveyed online, over the phone, or through other technologies that result in feelings of harassment.	**Unwanted Messaging or Posting:** Repeatedly sending unwanted, offensive, or threatening messages, including those via social networks, emails, or SMS.
Exploitation: Forcing someone to engage in activities against their will through the use of online platforms, phone calls, or other technologies.	

Quantitative data collection and analysis

To collect quantitative data, we used a computerized self-administered questionnaire via Google Forms. We surveyed women leading SMEs in tourism and agriculture across Kakheti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli, Kvemo Kartli, and Tbilisi. Our sampling universe was initially identified through Geostat's business registry, and we distributed the survey to all SMEs using the provided email addresses and contact details.

Due to low engagement, we implemented multiple strategies to enhance response rates. Local coordinators worked closely with SMEs to encourage participation and meet regional response targets, also facilitating in-person or telephone interviews as needed. We collected 253 responses, filtering out 24 that were irrelevant to our sampling group.

Quantitative analysis was based on the remaining 229 cases. The data was cleaned and organized in an Excel spreadsheet before being transferred to SPSS for further analysis. We primarily used descriptive statistics methods, such as frequencies and cross-tabulations.

The surveyed respondents' business coverage across regions is as follows: Samtskhe-Javakheti (25.4%), Tbilisi (24.5%), Kakheti (14.5%), Kvemo Kartli (11.0%), Mtskheta-Mtianeti (10.1%), Shida Kartli (9.2%), Multiple Regions (3.1%), and Other (2.2%). The figure 2 provides descriptive statistics of the characteristics of our sample.

Figure 2: Demographics of surveyed respondents

Study Respondents by Age

- 18-24: 4.4%
- 25-34: 28.5%
- 35-49: 43.4%
- Above 50: 23.7%

Study Respondents by Ethnicity

- Armenian: 9.2%
- Azerbaijani: 1.3%
- Georgian: 87.3%
- Other: 2.2%

Study Respondents by Business Industry

- Tourism: 43%
- Agriculture: 36%
- Other: 18%
- Both: 4%

Study Respondents by Role in the Business

- Co-Owner: 19.7%
- Employee: 4.8%
- Manager: 9.7%
- Other: 0.4%
- Owner: 65.4%
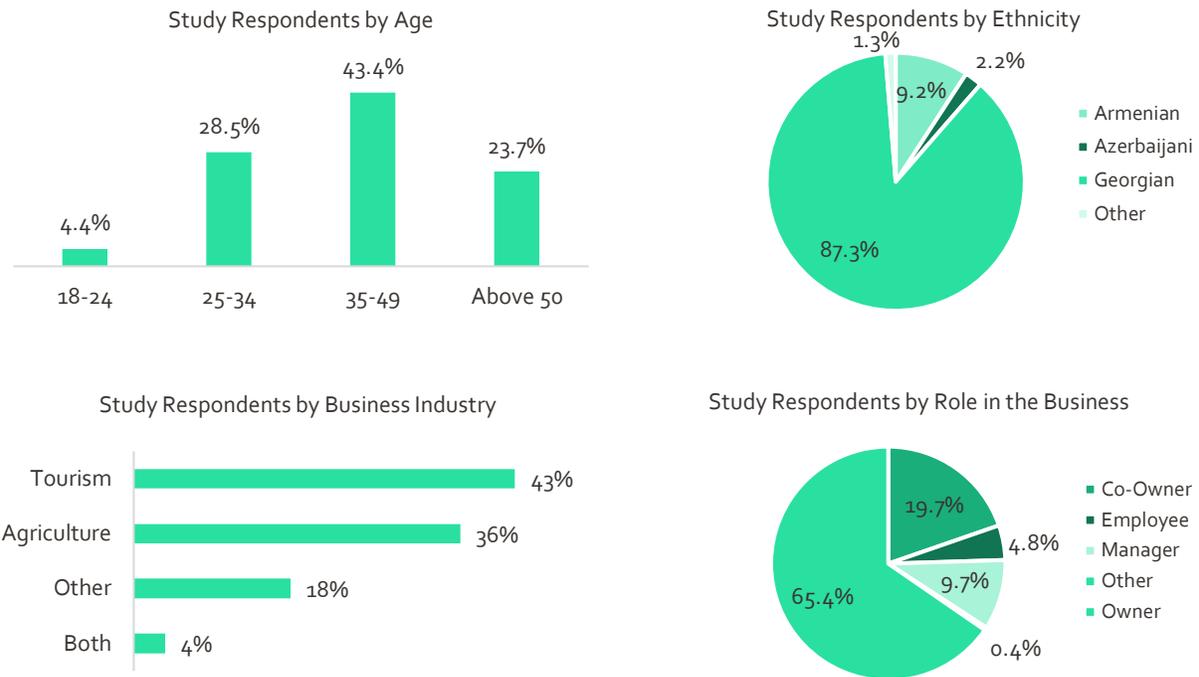
3.2. Qualitative Component

To collect nuanced information on unique TFGBV experiences within the research target group we used Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews (IDI). The information collected through these methods was used to enhance the quantitative survey data by exploring various dimensions such as the awareness and perceived prevalence of TFGBV, personal encounters with TFGBV, considering the ongoing social and political context in Georgia, relationships with the perpetrator, psychological impacts, the effect on professional and career trajectories, coping mechanisms, and the availability of support resources.

In addition to above, we conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII) to gather comprehensive information about existing policies, legal frameworks, and institutional supports related to TFGBV. The interview questions involved identifying gaps and formulating recommendations for improvements by consulting with experts who provide insights into the effectiveness of current resources and suggest strategies for enhancement.

Qualitative data collection and analysis

The primary target group—women leading SMEs—was also included in the FGDs. A total of six FGDs were conducted, one per region. Participants were selected through purposive sampling (8-10 participants per group), ensuring a diverse range of backgrounds. In total, 45 participants took part in the FGDs, including 6 ethnic minority representatives. Four FGDs were conducted in-person, while two (in

Tbilisi and Shida Kartli) were conducted online due to participant preference. Each discussion lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The sessions were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed later.

In addition to the FGDs, we conducted 34 interviews: 7 with women in senior corporate roles, 14 with social media women influencers and women in digital business, and 13 with thematic experts and relevant stakeholders. Interview respondents were selected using a combination of purposive sampling and the snowball method.

We employed thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data collected from FGDs and interviews. This method involved systematically identifying and analyzing patterns (themes) within the data. Initially, all transcripts were carefully read and coded by the researchers to highlight significant statements and concepts. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that captured the recurring ideas and insights across the participants' discussions.

The table 2 below summarizes the overall data collection and the number of research participants involved.

Table 2: Data collection per target group

Target Group	Data Collection Method	Number	Mode of Conduct
Women leading SMEs in the tourism and agriculture	Survey	228	Online
	FGD	6	In-person/online
Women in senior corporate roles	IDI	7	Online
Women social media content creator and women in digital business	IDI	14	Online
Thematic experts and stakeholders	KII	13	Online

3.3. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to every aspect of the study, guiding data collection, methodology, and participant interactions. We ensure data quality and confidentiality by adhering to ethical data principles, protecting individuals affected by TFGBV. Our survivor-centered methodology prioritized participants' voices and safety, emphasizing intersectionality to acknowledge diverse experiences. Obtaining informed consent was critical; participants were fully briefed on the study's nature, risks, and benefits, and empowered to make informed decisions.

3.4. Research limitations

This study encountered several significant limitations that impacts the interpretation and generalizability of the findings:

Firstly, the absence of a unified approach to measuring (operationalizing) the constructs of interest, particularly in the context of Georgia, posed a challenge. The lack of standardized measurement tools and methodologies hindered the ability to accurately assess and compare the prevalence and nature of TFGBV across different contexts within the country.

Secondly, reaching the target group (women leading SMEs) was a considerable challenge for the research team. The Geostat business registry, which was used to establish the sampling universe, proved ineffective due to largely inaccurate contact information, making it difficult to reach respondents. As a result, the research team had to employ various strategies, including leveraging business associations and personal contacts, to collect responses. It was particularly challenging to engage ethnic minority women, resulting in a small number of participants from ethnic minority backgrounds in the sample.

Moreover, the target group displayed a lack of interest in the research, often actively refusing to participate. This disinterest was primarily due to the high season for their businesses, general busyness, and a lack of interest in the research topic. Additionally, the data collection coincided with a politically critical period in Georgia[8], involving massive protests, which further decreased the relevance of the research for participants. During this time, Georgian citizens were also receiving politically motivated threatening phone calls from unknown numbers[9], leading to a low response rate as respondents avoided unfamiliar contacts.

These factors influenced the research sample, particularly in the quantitative component, resulting in a smaller sample size that may not adequately represent the target population. This smaller sample size complicates the analysis and interpretation of the survey data and does not provide sufficient statistical power to perform disaggregated analyses for sub-groups.

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[8] On 14th May, the Georgian Government finally adopted its controversial draft legislation "on the transparency of foreign influence" into law. It compels civil society organizations receiving foreign funding to register as an "organization carrying out in the interests of a foreign power." This was the second attempt to introduce such legislation in the face of significant public online and offline protests.
[9] Opponents of Georgia's "foreign agent" bill face threats and insults via phone calls: https://jam-news.net/opponents-of-georgias-foreign-agents-bill-threatened/

4. Georgian Context

4.1. Data on TFGBV in Georgia

The review of studies related to TFGBV in the Georgian context revealed a significant research gap, with no comprehensive studies primarily focusing on this issue. This research gap not only hampers our understanding of the issue but also limits the effectiveness of policy responses and support mechanisms for victims of TFGBV in Georgia. However, several related reports provide valuable insights into the emerging landscape of online violence against women in Georgia. As TFGBV continues to emerge as a pressing concern, there is a clear need for dedicated studies and evidence-based interventions tailored to the Georgian context.

A key source of information comes from the "National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia 2022", conducted by UN Women in partnership with the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT) and WeResearch. Although not specifically focused on TFGBV, this study highlighted the growing recognition of online violence against women, including online sexual coercion or extortion, blackmailing and doxing.[10]

Building on this broader context, the Media Development Foundation's (MDF) report on "Sexist Language and Gendered Disinformation 2023"[11] provides a more focused examination of gender-based online aggression. The report identified 5,695 cases of sexist and homophobic statements during the reporting period, with spikes during politically charged events such as Pride Week and discussions around Georgia's EU candidacy.[12] Additionally, 62 cases of gendered disinformation were identified in 2023, with 37 being homophobic and 25 containing signs of attacks on women based on moral criteria[13].

Complementing these findings, "The Experience of Cybercrime in Georgia" by Jarnecki, Seskuria, and Chikhladze offers insights into group-specific vulnerabilities, including those faced by women and SMEs. While the report did not exclusively focus on TFGBV, it noted that nine out of 12 women focus group discussion (FGD) participants stated that women are more likely to be victimized by cybercrime, with experiences including cyber harassment by current or former romantic partners and cyberbullying[14]. This data underscores the heightened risk faced by women in online spaces.

The latest study by "Sapari" identified legislative gaps and systemic issues in law enforcement practices, emphasizing inadequate victim support and coordination challenges between agencies, while also

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[10] National Study on Violence against Women in Georgia 2022. pp.140 https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-12/georgia_vaw_survey_report_eng.pdf
[11] MDF. Sexist Language and Gendered Disinformation. 2023 https://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Genderl%20Report-ENG.pdf
[12] Ibid. pp.7
[13] Ibid. pp.8
[14] "The Experience of Cybercrime in Georgia" by Jarnecki, Seskuria, and Chikhladze. pp.16 https://www.riss.ge/en/publications/the-experience-of-cybercrime-i.html-1

noting positive efforts to address gender discrimination motives and improve victim-centered investigative approaches within the Special Investigation Service[15].

While these reports collectively provide valuable insights, the absence of comprehensive, TFGBV-specific research in Georgia underscores the urgent need for further exploration.

4.2. Women in Business in Georgia: Overview

The business landscape in Georgia reveals a significant gender disparity, with men-founded businesses more than doubling the share of women-owned enterprises. In 2022, only 24.7% of newly established enterprises were owned by women.[16] The Women Entrepreneurs Survey conducted by UN Women and the ILO in 2023 shows that women own just one-third (33%) of economically active enterprises in the country.[17] Despite higher educational levels among women compared to men, only 11.5% of companies have a predominantly female workforce, and a mere 16.5% feature women in top management roles, highlighting a critical underrepresentation in leadership positions and ownership.[18]

Women typically manage smaller enterprises, with less than 20% of businesses having a female top manager, and this figure drops to just 10% among medium and large firms. Moreover, less than 1% of large firms have a predominantly female workforce. The sector distribution shows a concentration of women-led businesses in the trade sector, which comprises 59% of these enterprises, often indicating their small size.[19]

Most women-led businesses are independently started (89%), frequently operating as sole proprietorships. Additionally, many women entrepreneurs are responsible for domestic care, with 22% caring for children or other family members, which presents significant challenges in balancing business and family responsibilities.[20]

The survey also explored how women entrepreneurs in Georgia utilize technology in their businesses. According to the survey, a significant 76% of these women use digital devices like smartphones, computers, and tablets for business purposes. Smartphones are the most popular, used by 60% of the entrepreneurs, followed by laptops (37%) and desktops (33%). However, digital engagement beyond mere device usage is less common. Only 32% have an internet presence through websites or social media, and a smaller fraction, 23%, sell their products or services online.[21]

Younger women, those in the capital city of Tbilisi, and those with higher educational backgrounds are more likely to utilize these digital tools. These groups are also more active in online sales and the use of

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[15] Sapari. 2024. Response to crimes related to violation of women's privacy: https://sapari.ge/kvleva-kalta-mimart-piradi-cxovrebis-khelkopastan-dakavshirebul-danashaulebze-reagireba/
[16] Geostat, Gender Portal, Business Statistics, 2022: https://gender.geostat.ge/gender/index.php?action=Business%20Statistics
[17] UN Women and ILO. 2023. Survey on Women Entrepreneurs in Georgia. https://georgia.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/05/survey-of-women-entrepreneurs-in-georgia
[18] Ibid
[19] Ibid
[20] ibid
[21] Ibid

online financial services. The study also reveals a general enthusiasm among women entrepreneurs for enhancing their ICT skills, with a significant majority interested in and confident about using technology in their business operations.[22]

The study analyzed the digitalization level of the women-led SMEs by introducing a digitalization index ranging from 0 (no digitalization) to 38 (complete digitalization), assessing the extent of digital tool use in business operations, online presence, and e-commerce activities. The average score is notably low at 10.2, indicating a modest level of overall digital adoption among the entrepreneurs surveyed. This index further highlights disparities based on age, education, and geographic location, with younger, better-educated, and Tbilisi-based entrepreneurs showing higher digital engagement.[23]

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[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid

5. Research Findings

5.1. Utilization of Digital Technologies in Business

> **KEY MESSAGES:**
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> ➔ The majority (88.6%) of surveyed women use technologies for their business operations, with 60% using them actively almost every day. The most commonly used technologies are phones (77.2%) and the internet (76.3%), highlighting the reliance on these tools for business activities.
> ➔ Women in business use digital platforms differently depending on their business size, target audience, and familiarity with technology. While small enterprises often use social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for promotion, larger companies use niche programs tailored to their specific needs.
> ➔ Despite the widespread use of technology, many women face challenges such as a lack of knowledge in social media management, digital communications, and handling negative feedback online. There is also significant fear and a lack of information regarding digital security and TFGBV, highlighting the need for specialized personnel and better resources to manage digital interactions effectively.

The majority (88.6%) of the surveyed women use the technologies for their business operations, out of which 60% use it actively almost everyday, 22% use it but not for everyday operations. 3% mentioned that they use it rarely, while 15% mentioned that their business is completely digital business. The most used technologies are phones (77.2%) and the internet (76.3%), followed by digital platforms and laptops (figure 3).

Figure 3: Use of technology and digital platforms by the survey respondents

Use of Technology

Technology	Percentage
Phone	77.2%
Internet	76.3%
Digital Platforms	70.6%
Laptop	69.0%
Other	1.8%

Use of Digital Platforms
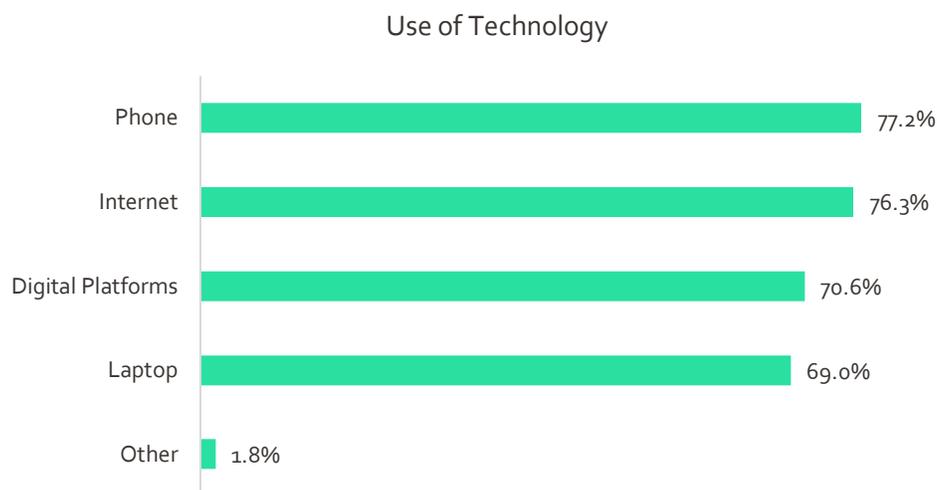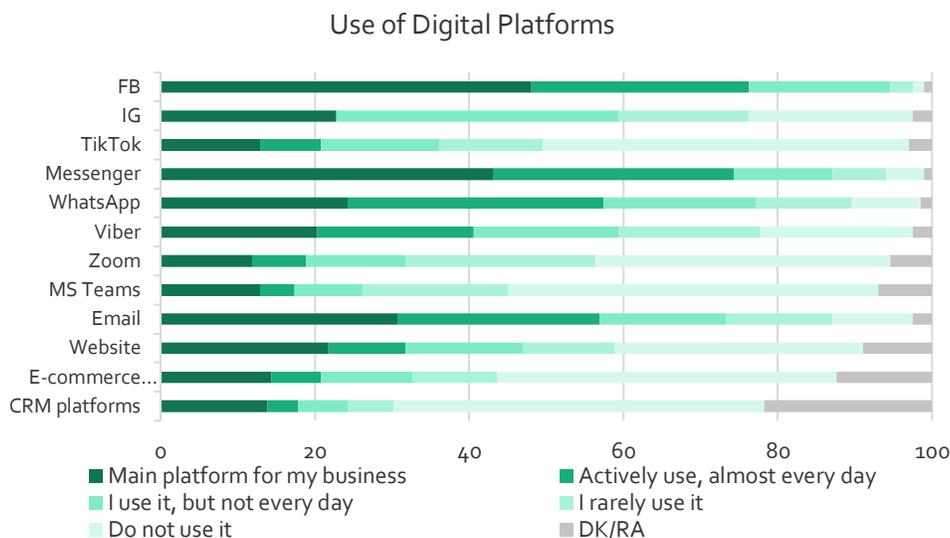
The use of digital platforms by women in business varies widely, depending on the nature of their operations, their target audience, and their level of familiarity with digital tools. Practicality drives the use of social media platforms for business promotion among smaller enterprises. Proved by both quantitative and qualitative data, many women entrepreneurs choose platforms like Facebook and Instagram due to their large user bases and the ease of reaching potential customers. When it comes to the large companies they often use niche programs tailored to their needs for specialized tasks. Furthermore, since our sample targeted women in the tourism industry, Booking.com was frequently mentioned as an actively used platform by the participants.

> *"Since I have friends on Facebook, I started my business there, and it was easy to find information. Facebook also offers a manager to connect to Instagram, which I did. I chose Facebook because it has a large number of users, and my target customers also use it." (IDI, Digital Business Owner)*

According to the survey, respondents mainly use technologies for marketing and sales (68%), communication and service with customers (51%), searching and communicating with potential suppliers (34%), and internal communications (36%). Qualitative data revealed that technologies are also utilized for information gathering and knowledge sharing. Some respondents mentioned using YouTube and Messenger to learn about agricultural practices and share experiences with other farmers.

There was a small share of women in the research who do not use technologies for their business. In some cases, they just rely less on digital tools due to established customer bases and word-of-mouth referrals.

Figure 4: Reasons for not using technology for business

Reason	Percentage
Do not need/Not useful for my business	25.3%
Do not know how to use technology	16.9%
Too Expensive	13.5%
Do not have access to infrustructure (internet, laptop, smartphone)	10.1%
To avoid security related risks	8.4%
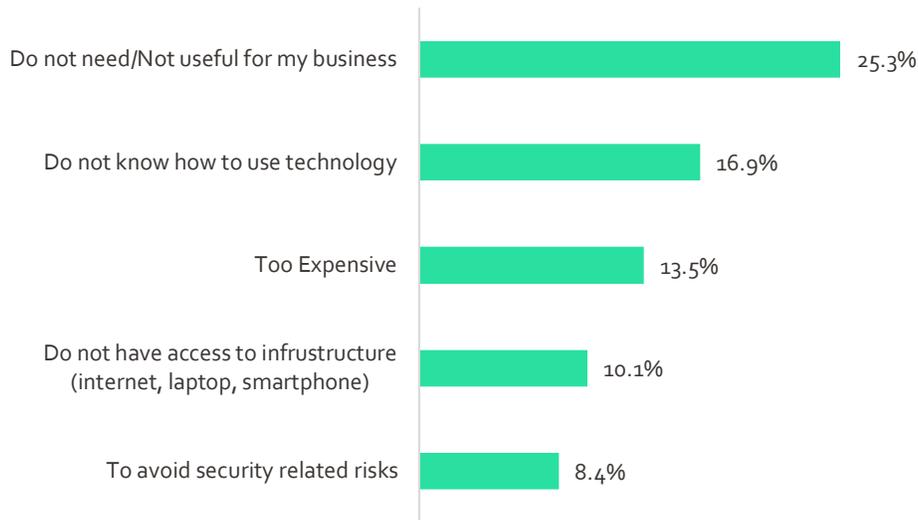
"I don't use technologies for business because we have had a lot of customers for years who come from Armenia, from Tbilisi, and other places to take freshly picked strawberries directly from the yard. I just sometimes use Facebook to communicate. When I start picking strawberries, I post them on my FB story, and customers write to me asking if I have strawberries for sale. Otherwise, I don't use it for sales or business." (FGD participant)

Many women noted difficulties such as a lack of knowledge about social media management, digital communications, and handling negative feedback online, which contributes to related stress. Research participants highlighted the necessity for specialized personnel to manage digital communications and customer service effectively. Additionally, there is significant fear and a lack of information regarding digital security and TFGBV. This fear stems from a perception of the digital world as dangerous and uncontrollable, with risks of exposing personal information. The rapid development of digital technologies also contributes to the difficulty in keeping up with best practices for digital safety.

5.2. TFGBV in business environments in Georgia

KEY MESSAGES:
➔ Awareness of TFGBV varies significantly among women in business environments, with 60% of respondents aware of TFGBV cases and notable differences between urban (Tbilisi) and rural areas. Many participants associate TFGBV primarily with online bullying, often failing to

> identify the gender dynamics involved. Furthermore, there is a difficulty in framing general challenges faced by women in business in terms of TFGBV.
>
> ➜ 76% of respondents have either personally experienced or know someone who has experienced at least one form or tactic of TFGBV, whether in or outside a business context. Bullying and hate speech, defamation and stalking are the most commonly experienced forms of TFGBV, while hacking and unwanted messaging are the tactics research participants have encountered most often.
>
> ➜ When it comes to the TFGBV experiences in business context, defamation turned out to be the most commonly experienced form, with 9.2% of respondents personally experiencing it and 13.6% knowing someone who has, conducted through hacking and unwanted messaging tactics.
>
> ➜ The most common perpetrators of TFGBV are unknown persons not related to business (40.2%), which is explainable given that online bullying is a primary form of TFGBV considered by the research participants. Furthermore, women have experienced TFGBV from their ex-partners, influential people, and powerholders.
>
> ➜ The anonymity provided by digital platforms and the lack of effective support mechanisms embolden perpetrators and leave victims isolated and unsupported, with societal gender stereotypes and gaps in the online safety knowledge further increasing women's vulnerability to TFGBV.

5.2.1. Awareness of TFGBV among women in business environments

The data indicated that research participants have varied levels of understanding and awareness of TFGBV. According to the survey, 60% of respondents have heard about TFGBV cases, while nearly one-fifth (18%) have not. Notably, there is a difference between settlement types: participants from Tbilisi show higher awareness of TFGBV cases compared to those from the regions (80% versus 63%, p<0.05), as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Awareness of TFGBV among survey participants
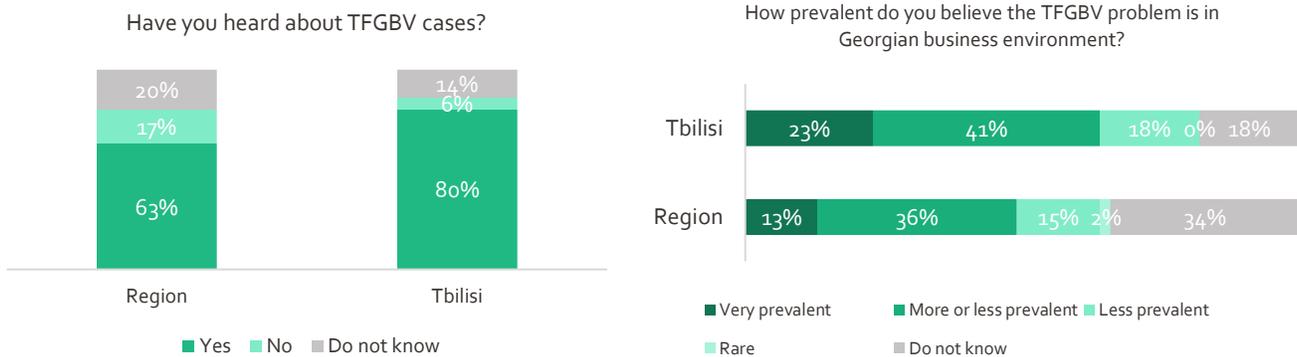
Furthermore, overall 53% of the surveyed women believe that TFGBV is a very or somewhat prevalent problem in the Georgian business environment. However, almost one-third have no opinion on this matter, with a significantly higher proportion of these respondents in the regions compared to Tbilisi (34% versus 18%, respectively).[24]

While the quantitative data showed that the majority of survey respondents have heard about TFGBV cases and half perceive it as a prevalent problem in Georgian business environments, the in-depth qualitative analysis revealed that the general understanding of the TFGBV phenomenon is still quite limited. Research participants mainly associate TFGBV with *online bullying* experiences and struggle to identify gender dynamics involved in it. However, the examples they provided often included gendered content, recognizing that such bullying often targets individuals based on gender-specific expectations and stereotypes.

> *"[TFGBV] can take many forms. For instance, someone might post a photo on Facebook and receive comments like, 'What kind of mother are you? What are you doing on FB at 2 am? Go take care of your children,' or comments like, 'You look ugly,' or 'You've gained weight.'" (FGD participant)*

Furthermore, discussions in FGDs and interviews indicated that participants perceive TFGBV as a problem primarily for high-profile individuals, such as social media influencers, or content creators. They recognize the higher risk of online bullying for high-profile individuals due to their visibility, and do not necessarily associate TFGBV with the business or professional context. Moreover, as discussed by the research participants, in some cases, influencers might use online bullying to increase engagement and visibility. These discussions suggest that online bullying may be normalized to some extent and not perceived as a form of violence.

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[24] The breakdown analysis showed that Georgians have higher awareness of TFGBV compared to ethnic minorities: 70% versus 52%. Nearly one-third (31%) of ethnic minority representatives have not heard of TFGBV, compared to only 11% of Georgians. Awareness is also higher among those using technology in business (70%) compared to non-users (46%). However, the data is calculated from a small sample, n (ethnic minority) = 29 and n (technology non-users) = 26, so the results are not statistically significant. While it cannot be generalized to the entire population, it is useful for identifying trends and further exploration.

"I think [TFGBV is more prevalent] on entertaining platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, where the user's profiles are public and it's easier [to get bullied] " (IDI, Digital Business Owner)

When discussing TFGBV specifically in the business environment, participants tend to focus on general challenges and problems that women in business face, as well as cybersecurity issues, but find it difficult to frame these issues in terms of TFGBV. For example, participants mentioned prevalent stereotypes about women in business, such as not being taken seriously, and how these stereotypes can manifest as online bullying. In overall, the discussions revealed that research participants perceive TFGBV as the least concerning issue for women in business, emphasizing other more urgent needs they have.

Experts and stakeholders interviewed during the research highlighted the limited awareness of TFGBV in Georgia. They consistently mentioned that, although large business corporations often invest in digital safety and security training for their employees, these training are less likely to include gender aspects. Furthermore, they emphasized that violence is mostly perceived to occur in physical spaces, and since TFGBV does not necessarily involve physical abuse, it is not perceived as a form of violence.

"In general, online violence is not perceived as real violence by the public; it is seen as normal. When it occurs, it is not recognized as a form of violence. Violence is only acknowledged when it turns physical, and by then, it is already too late. The early stages of violence are not taken seriously, not only by society but also by our legislation." (KII, Stakeholder)

5.2.2. Prevalence and patterns of TFGBV in Georgian business environments

In the online survey, respondents were provided with the forms and tactics of TFGBV, as defined in the research (see chapter 3.1), and asked if they had personally experienced any of these in a business or outside business context, and if they knew someone who had experienced it in a business or outside business context. The results showed that 76% of respondents have either personally experienced or know someone who has experienced at least one form or tactic of TFGBV, regardless of the context. Notably, 45% of the women surveyed reported *personal* experiences with at least one form or tactic of TFGBV, either in their professional or personal lives.

Bullying and hate speech, defamation, and stalking were the most commonly reported forms of TFGBV, while hacking and unwanted messaging were the most frequently mentioned tactics. Most TFGBV forms and tactics are reported or known to occur more frequently outside a business context (figure 6). This result aligns with the qualitative finding that research participants found it challenging to link TFGBV specifically to the business context.

Figure 6: Most commonly reported forms and tactics of TFGBV

Most Commonly Reported Forms of TFGBV

Bullying and Hate Speech: 7.5% | 15.8% | 13.2% | 21.1%
Defamation: 9.2% | 9.6% | 13.6% | 21.5%
Stalking: 6.6% | 19.3% | 13.2% | 13.6%
Sexual Harassment: 4.8% | 14.9% | 11.4% | 18.9%
Explotiation: 2.6% | 4.0% | 15.0% | 12.8%

■ Personally experienced in a business context   ■ Personally experienced outside a business context
■ Know someone who experienced in a business context   ■ Know someone who experienced outside a business context

Most Commonly Reported Tactics of TFGBV

Hacking: 6.1% | 9.6% | 11.4% | 19.3%
Unwanted Messaging: 6.1% | 13.2% | 9.2% | 17.5%
Impersonation: 3.9% | 9.2% | 10.1% | 21.5%
Threatening: 2.6% | 6.6% | 11.0% | 20.6%
Doxing: 3.5% | 10.5% | 21.9%
Image-based Abuse: .9% | 1.3% | 14.5% | 18.0%

■ Personally experienced in a business context   ■ Personally experienced outside a business context
■ Know someone who experienced in a business context   ■ Know someone who experienced outside a business context

Interestingly, respondents were more often able to recall personal or others' experiences when asked about the forms of TFGBV compared to the tactics of TFGBV. This could be explained by the lower level of awareness and knowledge of TFGBV among respondents. Forms of TFGBV, such as sexual harassment or stalking, might be more widely recognized and understood, while tactics, on the other hand, could be more specific or nuanced, making them harder to identify and recall. Furthermore, the respondents were more likely to recall others' experiences of TFGBV than their own, which does not necessarily indicate that others experience TFGBV more often. Rather, it suggests that respondents may be more comfortable discussing others' experiences due to psychological defense mechanisms, social stigma, or a natural bias towards external events.

Similar to the survey results, **bullying and hate speech** were among the most frequently recalled forms of TFGBV by research participants, often manifested through negative comments on social media. Women become targets of bullying and hate speech in various circumstances. For instance, if a woman is a content creator sharing different types of content on social media, there is a high risk that she will be bullied. In such cases, the content of the bullying and hate speech is often gendered, focusing on the woman's appearance or her abilities to create content. In some cases, this bullying would escalate into physical space, with abusers visiting their targets in person to continue the harassment.

> *"Negative comments are quite frequent, especially from a gender perspective. I produce humorous content, and comments suggesting that women can't joke and should be silenced are very common. Additionally, there are comments about my appearance. For example, I don't have breasts, and that often becomes a target of criticism. These comments come from both fake accounts and men." (IDI, content creator)*

Women recalled experiences of bullying and hate speech when they expressed their opinions on various topics on social media. Both FGD participants and interview respondents mentioned experiencing bullying based on their political views, especially during the recent political crisis in Georgia. This bullying was experienced not only by high-profile content creators but also by regular social media users who expressed their opinions in comment threads under posts. Influencers would get bullied even when they did not respond to political processes through their content, being criticized for their silence.

In some cases, the bullying escalated and combined with other forms and tactics of TFGBV, as abusers continued to call and threaten them. For example, one FGD participant shared her recent case, which combined bullying and hate speech, stalking and harassment, as forms of TFGBV, and doxing and unwanted messaging/calls as tactics of TFGBV. This case highlights the complex nature of TFGBV, where digital harassment can escalate from online bullying to more invasive and threatening behaviors.

> *"I had a case around 20 days ago. There was a discussion on [social media] about the 'Russian Law' between a man in Abkhazia and a girl who didn't understand Russian. The man replied to the girl [in Russian] that 'Putin is a world president.' I usually never engage in comment threads, but in this case, I replied to that man, trying to shame him [for this opinion]. After that, he turned his attention to me. He checked my friend's profile and asked for my number, lying that he was my relative and wanted to visit me. He called me and still calls me now. I have blocked him, but I can still get his calls from a Russian number. First, he swears at me, then he tells me how beautiful I am." (FGD participant)*

Women recalled cases where they experienced bullying, hate speech, and impersonation, often conducted through doxing and image-based abuse tactics. They mentioned instances where their photos were taken and posted in various social media groups, leading to bullying, or used for malicious purposes.

> *"I had a case where my photos were used on many dating platforms. They would post terrible comments using my name and photo, asking men for meetings. These are the risks that come with being online." (IDI, content creator)*

Stalking through unwanted messaging was another recurring form of TFGBV shared by research participants. Women often experienced unsolicited and sometimes offensive text, photo, or video messages from both familiar and unknown people on social media. These unwanted messages frequently made them feel embarrassed and uncomfortable, feelings often exacerbated by a victim-blaming culture that causes recipients to worry about the reactions of family members and of being blamed for the experience. Furthermore, the discussions revealed that many women lack sufficient knowledge and skills to protect themselves digitally from such cases and often had to seek help from others to block stalkers.
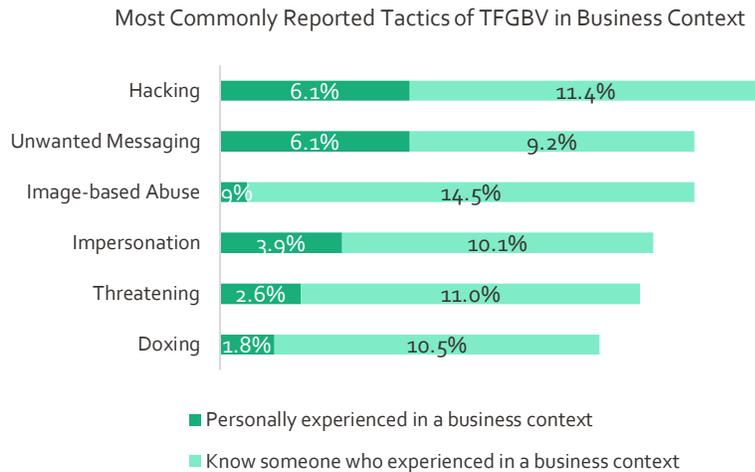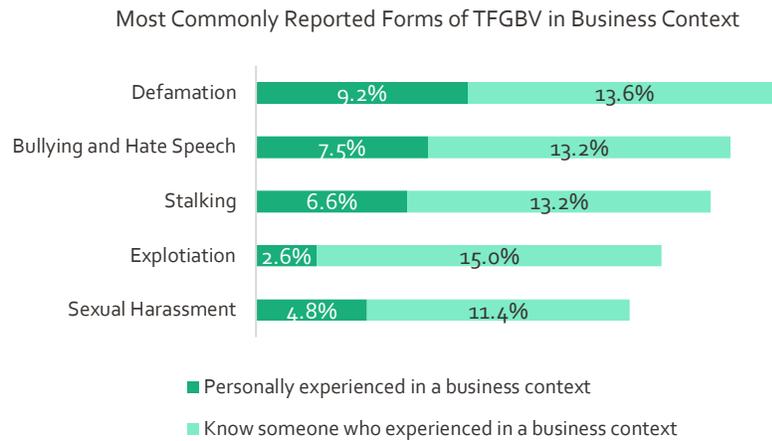
> *"It was night, and I was lying in bed when an unknown man started messaging me. I deleted the messages, but he kept messaging me repeatedly. I couldn't stop him. I was worried about what would happen if my husband took my phone and saw the messages—how could I convince him that I didn't know that person? I didn't know how to block someone on this phone. I took the phone to another room and put it on silent mode. I didn't want my children to find out about this. It would be shameful for a woman of my age to receive such messages from a man. In the morning, I went to my neighbor and asked for help. She blocked and deleted the messages. It was so stressful; I couldn't sleep the whole night. It felt worse than violence." (FGD participant)*

Participants also frequently experienced stalking through a combination of different tactics, such as doxing and unwanted messaging. This involved a person obtaining personal information of the target, such as their phone number, social media profile, or even their address, and repeatedly attempting to connect or communicate. For example, participants shared instances of being stalked by a taxi driver after using their service or by a police officer.

> *"I had a stalking experience where a policeman stalked me. He obtained my personal information based on my car number and started calling me, writing to me on Viber, and threatening me because I refused to meet him. He threatened to find out my address. I didn't even know this person or who he was; I hadn't even talked to him. He just saw me while I was sitting in my car, checked the car's number, and contacted me. I blocked him, he didn't get my address or anything. This happened a few years ago." (IDI, Digital Business Owner)*

When focusing specifically on *experiences within a business context*, defamation through the spreading of false or inaccurate information about them online stands out as the most commonly reported form, with 9.2% of respondents personally experiencing it and 13.6% knowing someone who has. This is followed by bullying and hate speech, with 7.6% having personal experience and 13.2% knowing someone who has experienced it (figure 7). Defamation in a business context can be particularly damaging, as it harms professional reputations and career prospects. Hacking is the most commonly reported tactic, with 6.1% of respondents personally experiencing it and 11.4% knowing someone who has. This is followed by unwanted messaging and image-based abuse.

Most Commonly Reported Forms of TFGBV in Business Context

Form	Personally experienced	Know someone who experienced
Defamation	9.2%	13.6%
Bullying and Hate Speech	7.5%	13.2%
Stalking	6.6%	13.2%
Explotiation	2.6%	15.0%
Sexual Harassment	4.8%	11.4%

■ Personally experienced in a business context
■ Know someone who experienced in a business context

Most Commonly Reported Tactics of TFGBV in Business Context

Tactic	Personally experienced	Know someone who experienced
Hacking	6.1%	11.4%
Unwanted Messaging	6.1%	9.2%
Image-based Abuse	9%	14.5%
Impersonation	3.9%	10.1%
Threatening	2.6%	11.0%
Doxing	1.8%	10.5%

■ Personally experienced in a business context
■ Know someone who experienced in a business context

According to the qualitative research participants, they experienced ***defamation*** in situations where their direct colleagues disagreed with their suggested processes or when competitors in the industry aimed to harm their business. Furthermore, women were threatened when they commented on or shared critical opinions about their colleagues' or competitors' products.

> *"I had a case when I wrote a critical comment about a craftsman in a [FB] group, stating that he did something wrong, his customer was dissatisfied, and there was fraud and money extortion involved. This craftsman, knowing I was a member of the administration [of the group] with public contact information, decided to threaten me personally. I had to run to the police. It was a tense moment, realizing how easy it is for someone to call and threaten you." (IDI, Digital Business Owner)*

Women experienced ***bullying*** in the context of their business through the use of hate speech in criticism of their products. They also faced bullying due to their positions or decisions, often involving doxing and image-based abuse. ***Stalking*** through unwanted messaging was frequently mentioned, with women

sharing instances where customers continued to communicate with them even after the service had been provided.

Sexual harassment was more prominent when discussing TFGBV experiences in a business context. Women often faced harassment related to existing stereotypes around women in business, receiving comments on their appearance and sexuality rather than their business achievements.

> "*I had a case when I shared a media report about my business (cherry), and I got a message instantly. At first, they asked questions about the cherries, such as the breed, etc.; but then, he started commenting on how beautiful I am. I think this is a kind of violence. I was not perceived as an entrepreneur, and my role and business were overlooked, with the focus shifting to my appearance. It was a very unpleasant experience." (FGD participant)*

Women also mentioned experiencing attempts to access their data with malicious intent. Hacking was a recurring theme during the FGDs, with participants sharing instances of being targets of hacking attacks. They emphasized the importance of knowing how to act and protect themselves and their business profiles from such attacks. Furthermore, women shared cases of impersonation, where their earned trust through business dealings was exploited for money extortion.
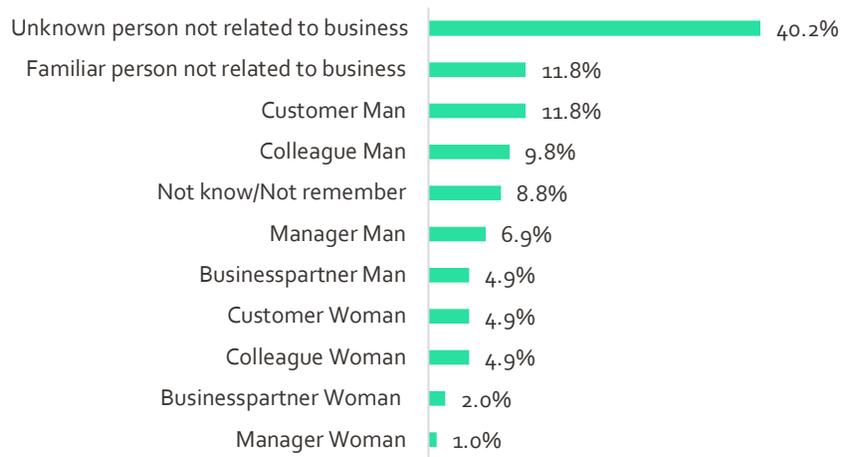
> "*I had a case where someone, using my name, contacted companies and extorted money. Because I had that [popular] online group, these companies trusted me and didn't even verify my identity."*
> *(IDI, content creator)*

The research showed that TFGBV often manifests in multiple forms and tactics simultaneously, continuing across different contexts, including physical spaces. This multifaceted abuse can extend its impact beyond the primary targets, affecting family members as well. Women during the discussions shared that TFGBV often does not remain confined to digital interactions but spills over into their personal lives, causing widespread distress.

Relations between victims and perpetrators in TFGBV cases

In an online survey, respondents who reported personally experiencing TFGBV were asked to identify their abusers. The results revealed that the most common perpetrators were unknown persons not related to business (40.2%). Given that online bullying is a primary form of TFGBV considered by the research participants, this result is explainable. This was followed by familiar persons not related to business and male customers, both at 11.8%. Male colleagues were identified as the abusers in 9.8% of cases, while 8.8% of respondents could not remember or did not know the identity of the abuser.

Figure 8: Relationship with perpetrators in reported TFGBV cases

Relationship	Percentage
Unknown person not related to business	40.2%
Familiar person not related to business	11.8%
Customer Man	11.8%
Colleague Man	9.8%
Not know/Not remember	8.8%
Manager Man	6.9%
Businesspartner Man	4.9%
Customer Woman	4.9%
Colleague Woman	4.9%
Businesspartner Woman	2.0%
Manager Woman	1.0%

Qualitative data supports the finding that participants do not necessarily consider the gender of the abusers, emphasizing that an abuser can be either a man or a woman, especially when it comes to online bullying.

Furthermore, the experiences shared by women during interviews and FGDs revealed that they often became targets of TFGBV by their ex-partners, influential powerholders, and even journalists.

"When someone writes to me, I always check who they are, and usually, they are people with some status, working in force structures, and they feel entitled to abuse their power." (IDI, digital business owner)

"I had a case where a person threatened to publish my personal intimate photos. He was not a stranger; he was my ex-husband."(IDI, digital business owner)

5.2.3. Enablers of TFGBV in Georgian Business Environments

As discussed by the FGD and interview participants TFGBV can be driven by a combination of factors, including anonymity, gender-based stereotypes, envy, political motives, and the need to express repressed aggression. The analysis highlights the complex interplay of personal, social, and political factors that contribute to women's vulnerability to TFGBV.

Sociocultural factors and gender stereotypes play a significant role in TFGBV, particularly in the business context. These are simultaneously enablers for abusers to commit TFGBV and vulnerability factors for women. As participants mentioned during the interviews and FGDs, traditional gender roles and expectations may limit women's perceived authority in business spaces, as well as cultural norms regarding women's public presence and voice can increase vulnerability to online harassment. Women shared that their professional efforts are often undermined or dismissed due to prevailing sexist attitudes. For example, FGD participants shared that they often encountered non-serious attitudes

towards a business run by a woman. Such stereotypes contribute to a culture where women entrepreneurs face undue criticism, are not taken seriously, and in some cases, resort to self-censorship to protect themselves from potential TFGBV.

> *"When I say that I am an entrepreneur, I often catch men laughing. They seem to think, 'What kind of entrepreneur can she be?' There is a very superficial attitude because I am a woman." (FGD participant)*

> *"What I've seen, women tend to be the target [of online abuse] more often. And then there's this whole other layer when it comes to business. There's this historical distrust, you know? Like, 'What does a woman know about running a company?' or 'A woman can't possibly manage this.' I can't tell you how often I've been asked, 'Is this your business? Or is your husband the one really running things?" (IDI, Digital Business owner)*

Envy and a desire to oppress successful women were also highlighted as common motivations. Some participants believed that abusers target women who appear confident and successful out of jealousy. As one digital business owner described, *"All these bullies are very weak people who try to blackmail you in all their ways."* This desire to undermine women's achievements is often rooted in a broader societal reluctance to accept women's growing roles and freedoms.

This is closely linked to the recurring concern about women's reputational damage, which emerged during interviews and FGDs. Women in Georgia face heightened sensitivity to reputational damage due to societal double standards. There's a widespread worry that TFGBV incidents could disproportionately harm women's professional credibility. The same findings reveal that women are concerned not only about their reputation but also about their family members and particularly about their partner's reputation, as in the patriarchal culture, women's reputation is linked to their partner's.

> *"The reason people commit violence is to take away our self-confidence. The thing they dislike most is seeing someone who is self-confident." (FGD participant)*

> *"The biggest concern is reputation damage. When you're active in online business, you try to be constantly visible to keep high demand. Publicizing your chats could harm your reputation, impacting your business. While this may not be directly related to your business, it's always there with women. The more active and competitive you are, the more likely you'll encounter these situations." (IDI, Digital Business Owner)*

Various features available at digital platforms, such as anonymity further emboldens perpetrators, while the lack of effective support mechanisms leaves victims isolated and unsupported. TFGBV often serves as an outlet for individuals to express repressed aggression and frustration. The anonymity provided by social networks acts as a shield for abusers, allowing them to project their internal anger and contempt onto others without fear of immediate consequences. This ability to hide one's identity emboldens perpetrators to insult and degrade others more freely, believing they are unlikely to encounter their victims in real life. However, as mentioned above, TFGBV can often escalate and spill over into the physical space, a threat more acutely perceived in rural areas where personal connections are prominent.

"Technology allows people to show the aggression and anger they have accumulated. What they can't express in their real life, or wouldn't dare to say in person, they will pour out on you online through an anonymous profile." (IDI, content creator)

The anonymity feature of online platforms potentially diminishes the perception of TFGBV as a serious act of violence or deviant behavior that requires active measures to protect and support targets. Due to this women frequently express a **lack of confidence in existing protection mechanisms** against TFGBV. They fear that reporting incidents may not lead to effective action or support. Besides, there is a perception of **inadequate community or family support** and collective action against TFGBV. This leaves women feeling isolated when facing and addressing online harassment.

"There are a few factors at play here. First, you don't have much hope of achieving anything - like finding justice. Second, you'd rather just endure what happened than have it become a topic of public discussion. So, you know, you go for the easiest option - you block them and try to move on, but you're still left dealing with the aftermath. And it's not like you feel any real positive support out there. That's just the reality we're living in these days." (FGD participant)

Among other factors, research participants also discussed the lack of technical skills among women. As they mentioned, potential gaps in digital literacy and online safety knowledge and a lack of awareness about available digital protection tools and strategies may increase vulnerability.

"I am sharing my personal experience with you. This certainly doesn't apply to everyone, but women are relatively less informed, especially regarding advanced technologies. If we compare men are generally more tech-savvy, capable of troubleshooting or blocking something, for instance." (IDI, Senior Corporate Role)

Research participants also discussed a political dimension to TFGBV, where abusers aim to silence influential voices that challenge the status quo. Influencers and content creators who express critical opinions are often targeted to prevent them from influencing public discourse and maintain control over the narrative. The current political context in Georgia, particularly the government's recent adoption of a law on the transparency of foreign influence, has significantly increased the risks of technology-facilitated violence in general, including TFGBV, due to increasingly polarized opinions and heated political discussions on social media. As discussed in the previous chapter, women talked about various experiences, and they mentioned that whether they expressed opinions about current political events or not, they felt pressure and were bullied in different forms.

"I believe women face insults in a different context. Male content creators who participated in the rally were called 'gay' if they wrote about the protest, whereas female content creators were labeled as 'stupid' for speaking out about it, accused of not understanding why we were there, and accused of merely standing for content, and so on." (IDI, Content Creator)

The factors that enable perpetrators and increase women's vulnerability to TFGBV in Georgian business environments are deeply interconnected. They not only increase vulnerability to TFGBV but also influence how it will impact different aspects of women's lives and how women respond to and cope with

such experiences. Addressing these factors for developing policies and strategies to combat TFGBV is crucial, requiring interventions at various levels—from individual empowerment and skill-building to broader societal changes in attitudes and support systems for women in professional settings.

5.3. Impact of TFGBV on women in business environments

> **KEY MESSAGES:**
> - ➔ Women with the experience of TFGBV are often impacted psychologically, reporting increased anxiety (54.9%) and other forms of psychological distress. This significantly affects overall workplace productivity and the ability to focus.
> - ➔ Self-censorship is another significant impact that women experience as a result of TFGBV incidents. They tend to withdraw from online professional spaces and networks, leading to persistent self-censorship, professional isolation, and reduced opportunities for networking, collaboration, and career advancement.
> - ➔ TFGBV substantially affects women's ability to fulfill professional responsibilities, sometimes leading to job loss and difficulty in trusting colleagues and forming workplace relationships, which in turn limits networking opportunities and career advancement.
> - ➔ Only 12% of survey participants reported utilizing legal mechanisms to seek help for TFGBV. Among the reasons for not pursuing legal recourse, 63% of survivors did not consider their case serious enough to warrant a complaint, while others cited lack of information about existing mechanisms (25%) and uncertainty about whom to approach for help (24%).
> - ➔ The majority of TFGBV survivors seek support outside the legal system, with 33% sharing their experiences with friends and 23% with family members. Common coping strategies include ignoring incidents, using safety measures, controlling the information shared online, and seeking community support through online women's groups or professional networks.
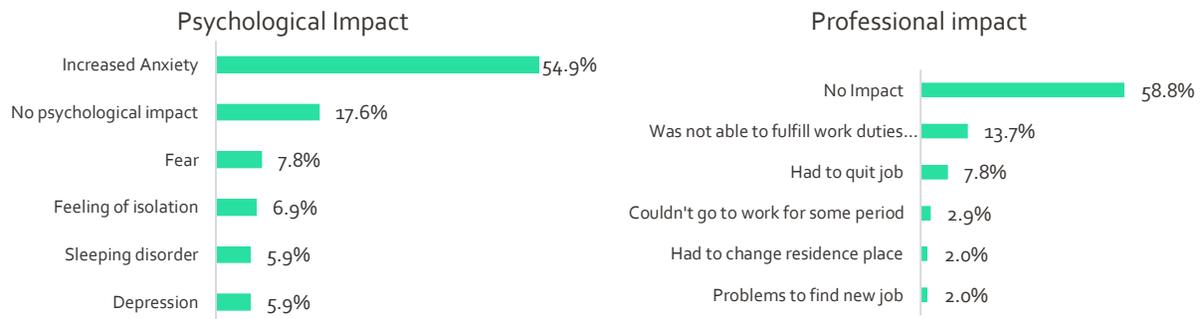
This chapter will discuss the immediate and long-term impacts of TFGBV on women, and how it influences their career trajectories and business relationships. We will also explore the help-seeking and coping strategies women use to overcome the impact of TFGBV.

The analysis revealed that TFGBV can significantly hinder women's professional growth and success. The ongoing stress and safety concerns can limit women's willingness to take on high-profile roles and pursue ambitious career goals, increase their online presence, and strengthen their voices and business sales. It may also impact their ability to form professional relationships and networks crucial for business advancement.

Quantitative survey results indicate that the most frequently named impact on women with experience of TFGBV is psychological, including increased anxiety (54.9%) and other forms of psychological distress. These impacts influence overall workplace productivity and the ability to focus. Notably, 13.7% reported

an inability to properly fulfill their work duties (figure 9). The qualitative findings corroborate these quantitative results.

Figure 9: TFGBV impact on women who has experienced it

Psychological Impact

Increased Anxiety	54.9%
No psychological impact	17.6%
Fear	7.8%
Feeling of isolation	6.9%
Sleeping disorder	5.9%
Depression	5.9%

Professional impact

No Impact	58.8%
Was not able to fulfill work duties...	13.7%
Had to quit job	7.8%
Couldn't go to work for some period	2.9%
Had to change residence place	2.0%
Problems to find new job	2.0%

During the FGDs and interviews, women identified various *immediate and long-term* impacts of TFGBV. The analysis highlighted **emotional distress and anxiety** as the most common immediate effects in both business and private situations. This might suggest that emotional distress is the most recognizable and easiest to articulate. Other impacts, while mentioned less frequently, may be equally serious but harder to express due to stigma or difficulty in articulation.

> *"It was incredibly distressing and left me traumatized. It's tough to show up at work every morning knowing the whole town is gossiping about you. I'm still baffled by his motives, especially since I had no prior interaction or conflict with this person whatsoever." (IDI, senior corporate role)*

Another common impact mentioned by interview and FGD participants is **withdrawal from online professional spaces** and networking. The trauma from TFGBV pushed them to avoid expressing their opinions online, maintaining an online presence, and even decreasing their social circles in real life. This withdrawal can lead to serious long-term impacts, such as persistent self-censorship, professional isolation, and reduced opportunities for networking, collaboration, and career advancement. **Self-censorship** limits creativity, innovation, and the exchange of ideas, hindering the utilization of various online business strategies and potentially impacting business growth and sales opportunities. In extreme cases, victims opt for complete disengagement from online spaces, exacerbating professional isolation. This isolation is particularly damaging in industries where online presence is crucial for visibility and success, indicating TFGBV's potential economic impact, especially for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

> *"It definitely affects you. You become more reserved and less likely to share information so freely. [...] You want to avoid the headache, especially since your husband or relatives might see those comments, and that's just uncomfortable. [...] To sidestep all that, I prefer to keep a low profile online." (FGD participant)*

> *"I've been through this too. I shared a small opinion online about some issues and was shocked at how embarrassed I felt by the nasty comments. It taught me that if you keep it*

to yourself and don't voice your thoughts publicly, you can avoid this kind of thing. Basically, if you want to protect your mental health, you've got to hold back from expressing your views openly." (FGD participant)

"The psychological impact was pretty severe, though I only realized it later. Over time, it made me want to interact less with people. My social circle shrank to just my workplace and three or four people outside of work. I noticed I'd become more reserved and less open with others, which I'm sure was connected to that experience." (IDI, Senior Corporate Role)

A significant impact of TFGBV frequently reported by FGD and interview participants is **decreased productivity and focus at work**. Respondents indicated that the psychological stress from TFGBV substantially affects their ability to fulfill professional responsibilities, sometimes leading to job loss, especially when the employer is involved. Another long-term impact reported is difficulty in trusting colleagues and **forming workplace relationships**, which often extends to personal relationships. This difficulty can lead to increased professional isolation, limiting networking opportunities and career advancement.

"We've got real-life examples - I can't name names for privacy reasons - but we've seen cases where online bullying has actually cost people their jobs. In one instance, a woman's boss decided that the online harassment she was facing was damaging the organization's reputation, so he fired her. It's that serious." (KII, Stakeholder)

The qualitative research findings also indicate that experiences of TFGBV in professional settings have significant and multifaceted impacts on victims' work lives. TFGBV experiences substantially affect interactions with colleagues and customers, potentially altering the dynamics of professional networks. In response to TFGBV, some victims modified their working styles, suggesting adaptive behaviors to mitigate or avoid further incidents. In other cases, some participants reported declining professional engagements as a preemptive strategy to avoid potential TFGBV situations. The findings suggest that TFGBV can significantly alter the perceived safety and comfort of the work environment.

"After that last [TFGBV] incident in my professional life, I went out of my way to avoid any contact with this person. […] I handed off all dealings with this [abuser's] contract to other people. I just wanted to avoid any interaction with him whatsoever." (IDI, Senior Corporate Role)

"I don't use my own name on Facebook; I use my husband's instead. I don't want to draw attention to myself. I've seen the kind of negative comments people write, and I want no part of it. I'd rather avoid the whole mess so no one gives me trouble." (FGD participant)

The analysis of interviews and FGD materials revealed that the risk of TFGBV or TFGBV experiences plays a role in **shaping career choices,** potentially limiting professional opportunities or altering career paths, and indicates that women may avoid certain industries or roles seen as having a higher risk for abuse. Research participants shared that the stress induced by TFGBV can be severe enough to impact their business activities significantly. The enduring effects of TFGBV extend well beyond the immediate incident and might shape their personal and professional trajectories over time.

"In my view, the impact can be devastating, especially psychologically. It really messes you up. If you're a victim of bullying, you lose all motivation to grow your business. You might even decide to shut down completely, whether it's a shop or whatever kind of business you've got." (FGD participant)

Another long-lasting impact shared by research participants is the **persistent fear of reputational damage** that a single instance of TFGBV could indefinitely define their professional or personal lives. The fear is almost always present, no matter whether respondents have experienced TFGBV or not. This apprehension acts as a deterrent, inhibiting their online presence and activity. Participants expressed concern about the lasting impact of TFGBV on their personal and professional reputations.

"My biggest fear is becoming a victim of online bullying. Some people wield this incredibly dangerous weapon; your credibility is shot if you slip up even once. What makes online bullying so terrifying is that once something's out there, it's out there forever. You can't take it back. For instance, if someone drops your name online, that information could pop up anytime someone searches for you. That's why I'm always a bit on edge about it." (IDI, Digital Business Owner)

These observations underscore the profound influence of TFGBV on professional lives, extending beyond immediate psychological distress to shape concrete career decisions and work practices. The findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive workplace policies and support systems to address TFGBV, protect employees, and maintain healthy professional environments. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of considering TFGBV as a significant factor in workplace safety, professional development, and career counseling discussions.

5.3.1. Help-seeking and coping strategies among women in a business environment

The research findings indicate some trends regarding the practice and perception of handling TFGBV, such as **the normalization of online harassment;** despite acknowledging its negative impact, many participants perceived TFGBV as an inevitable aspect of online presence, a phenomenon to be individually managed rather than systematically addressed which leads to **underestimation of severity**. TFGBV frequently does not receive the seriousness it warrants, often failing to prompt official reporting or intervention. The quantitative survey results suggest that law enforcement institutions are not the primary resource to seek help for victims of TFGBV. Only 12% of participants reported utilizing legal mechanisms. Among the most frequently cited reasons for not pursuing legal recourse, 63% of survivors did not consider their case serious enough to warrant a complaint. On the other hand women often remain silent about TFGBV incidents rather than seeking help or reporting cases to law enforcement due to lack of information of available protection and community support, or distrust in its effectiveness. Survey also showed that 25% lacked information about existing mechanisms, while 24% were uncertain about whom to approach for help (figure 10). This silence potentially perpetuates the cycle of TFGBV by

masking its true prevalence and impact. Moreover, it may reinforce the perception that support systems are inadequate, further discouraging reporting and help-seeking behaviors.

Figure 10: Reasons for not applying legal mechanisms by women with TFGBV experience
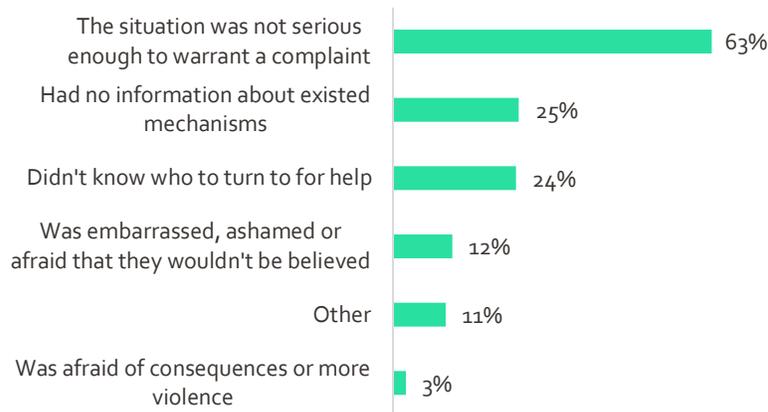
The research results from both quantitative and qualitative surveys indicate that the majority of TFGBV survivors seek support outside the legal system. According to the survey, 33% of respondents reported sharing their experience of TFGBV with friends. Notably, more than every-fourth of survey participants who personally experienced TFGBV stated they had not disclosed their experience to anyone. Family members were the third most common confidants, with 23% of respondents sharing their experiences with them (figure 11).

Figure 11: Sharing about TFGBV experiences
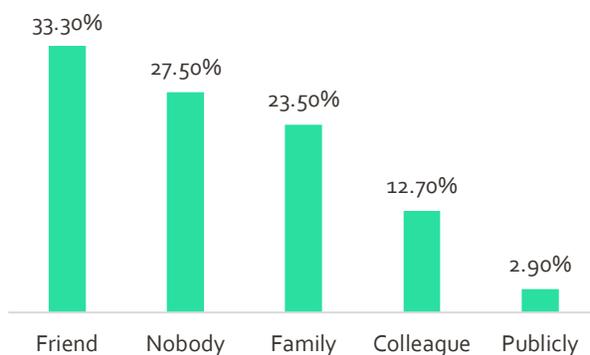
The survey results align with the findings from the FGDs and interviews. Research participants described various practices they employ to protect themselves from TFGBV, prevent such incidents, or cope with the aftermath of these experiences. Women not only talked about their own coping mechanisms but also shared their opinions on the best ways to prevent and combat TFGBV effectively.

Women in the qualitative study highlighted several **individual strategies** they use to cope with and prevent TFGBV. These personal approaches fall into two main categories, such as **ignoring incidents and safety measures**. Some women simply ignore TFGBV cases. While this isn't always the best solution, it can sometimes help preserve mental health, especially for minor incidents. Other individual strategies that women outlined are **safety measures** and information control; many women have developed careful strategies about what information they share online and how they share it. They're thoughtful about when and where they post and what details they reveal about themselves or their work.

Interestingly, we found a potential gap in awareness and skill level regarding using social media safely. Influencers and women who actively use social media for sales seem to understand these tactics more nuanced. They're generally more savvy about managing their online presence and protecting themselves from potential TFGBV.

> *"On TikTok, you can do duets, and when someone shares your video in a different context to an audience that doesn't know you, they often start insulting you. In these situations, I simply turn off notifications, avoid watching those videos or reading the comments, and try not to dwell on any negative feedback. Ignoring it is my best approach." (IDI, content creator)*

This knowledge gap suggests there's room for improvement in educating other groups of women about safe and strategic social media use. While individual strategies shouldn't be the only line of defense against TFGBV, they can be an important part of a woman's toolkit for navigating online spaces safely. It's worth noting that while these individual approaches can be helpful, they shouldn't replace broader systemic changes to address TFGBV. The burden of prevention shouldn't fall solely on potential victims. However, empowering women with these skills can provide an added layer of protection along with the systemic solutions.

Women in senior corporate roles at large companies shared some interesting insights into how their organizations address TFGBV. It appears that many of these corporations have established their own protocols and procedures, such as an internal ethical code of conduct, to protect their staff from various forms of unethical behavior and harassment, including technology-facilitated misconduct. However, none of them mentioned a specific protocol to prevent TFGBV. For example, in one case, the respondent mentioned that when misconduct has been done through technologies, IT staff should be involved to decide if there was misconduct or not, which raises a lot of questions about whether IT staff has enough capacity to identify TFGBV, and act properly.

Research participants stressed the importance of **awareness raising about women's rights and TFGBV**. Interestingly, these women also stressed the importance of **sharing personal experiences with TFGBV**. They believe that by speaking out, they're not just telling their own story—they're giving other women the courage to act, too. It shows other women that they're not alone and that there are steps they can take to fight back against TFGBV. Some of the women also emphasized the need for awareness raising on perpetrators' behaviors.

> *"People lack awareness about TFGBV, and there's a lack of information. Personally, I never imagined I would encounter such a situation… Many more institutions should provide training and raise awareness by sharing examples and discussing it openly. If it weren't for your research initiative, I wouldn't have recognized it as violence; without a name for it, it's harder to acknowledge." (IDI, Senior Corporate Role)*

Research participants identified **community support** as another valuable help-seeking and coping mechanism against TFGBV. This support manifests in various forms, such as online women's groups or professional networks. As they mentioned, women's groups or professional groups provide a safe space

for sharing experiences, strategies, and resources related to TFGBV. As well as the backing of family members also emerges as a crucial element in coping with and addressing TFGBV incidents. In addition, male allyship is another support practice they have experienced, as support expressed by male peers, colleagues, or followers plays a significant role in combating TFGBV, highlighting the importance of cross-gender solidarity.

The complex nature of TFGBV requires multilayered approach. While some strategies focus on prevention and awareness, others aim at providing support and coping mechanisms. The effectiveness of these strategies may vary depending on individual circumstances and organizational contexts. It's crucial to note that a combination of these approaches, tailored to specific situations, is likely to yield the most positive outcomes in combating TFGBV in business environments.

6. Overview of Existing Policies and Mechanisms

KEY MESSAGES:

➔ Georgia has ratified key international conventions like the Budapest Convention, Istanbul Convention, and Lanzarote Convention, which, despite not explicitly mentioning TFGBV, provide relevant frameworks for addressing online harassment and abuse. Integrating these conventions into domestic law highlights the importance of comprehensive and cooperative approaches to combat TFGBV.

➔ Georgia's domestic laws lack specific provisions for TFGBV, making it difficult for legal practitioners to effectively prosecute such cases. Articles like 126, 1261, and 1511 are used but often prove inadequate due to high evidentiary requirements and a lack of focus on technology-facilitated violence.

➔ Various Georgian institutions play key roles in addressing TFGBV, but gaps in coordination, data collection, and specialized training hinder their effectiveness. The new Special Investigation Service, though promising, needs ongoing support to build trust and capability in handling TFGBV cases.

This chapter will review Georgia's regulatory standards regarding Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV), considering insights from international conventions alongside domestic legislation and policy frameworks.

At the international level, Georgia ratified significant agreements, notably the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime in 2012[25]. While primarily focused on cybercrime, the Budapest Convention[26] indirectly touches upon TFGBV, particularly through its provisions addressing forms of sexual harassment occurring online and via new technologies, such as non-consensual image or video sharing, and coercion

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[25] Spînu, N. (2020). Georgia Cybersecurity Governance Assessment, p. 7. Available at:
https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/GeorgiaCybersecurityGovernanceAssessment.pdf [Accessed 19.04.2024]
[26] Council of Europe, Convention on Cybercrime Budapest, 2001. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/1680081561 [Accessed 19.04.2024]

or threats. Furthermore, the 2017 ratification of the Istanbul Convention[27] on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence fortified Georgia's legal framework by offering a holistic approach to addressing gender-based violence. Despite the Istanbul Convention's lack of explicit mention of TFGBV, its provisions on psychological violence, stalking, and sexual harassment remain pertinent to TFGBV cases, underscoring the essential contribution of these provisions to understanding the phenomenon of online and technology-facilitated violence against women. Moreover, the strategic integration of provisions from both conventions ensures a robust approach to combating TFGBV, with consideration given to areas such as procedural law and international cooperation.[28] Additionally, Georgia ratified the Lanzarote Convention[29] on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in 2014, which indirectly addresses TFGBV by criminalizing acts of online sexual exploitation and abuse, thereby contributing to efforts to combat this form of violence. But despite these international commitments, there is recognized room for greater synergy between international conventions and domestic legislation to effectively address TFGBV.

In the national legal landscape of Georgia, the regulation of TFGBV presents complex challenges, which are primarily addressed through a combination of legal provisions found in Articles 126, 126^1, 151^1, and 157-159 of the Criminal Code[30], alongside specific chapters within the criminal code of Georgia focused on Cybercrime.[31] Feminist legal practitioners[32] often gravitate towards Article 151^1[33] concerning stalking to tackle instances of TFGBV. This article encompasses various forms of unwanted surveillance and communication, aligning closely with the modes of harassment and abuse prevalent in TFGBV cases. Additionally, Articles 126 and 126^1[34] of the Criminal Code are frequently invoked in TFGBV contexts, despite their inherent limitations. While these articles cover various forms of violence, such as psychological and economic, their high evidentiary threshold—requiring evidence of resulting physical pain or anguish—poses challenges, especially in cases involving predominantly psychological or economic harm inflicted through technology. On the domestic front, Georgia's legislation currently lacks specific provisions directly addressing TFGBV. Instead, existing laws on violence, such as those concerning stalking and disclosure of private information, are applied to TFGBV cases:*"There are no specialized services in this field at all. However, the services that generally exist for the prevention and suppression of violence against women, sexual harassment, and other forms of harassment can potentially be used for these types of violence forms as well." (KII, Stakeholder)*

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[27] Council of Europe. Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. 2011 https://rm.coe.int/168008482e [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[28] Van Der Wilk, A. (2021). Protecting Women and Girls from Violence in the Digital Age, p. 37. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/the-relevance-of-the-ic-and-the-budapest-convention-on-cybercrime-in-a/1680a5eba3 [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[29] Council of Europe. Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. 2007. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/1680084822 [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[30] Criminal Code of Georgia. Available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16426 [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[31] Ibid. CHAPTER XXXV – Cybercrime

[32] In this context, we define this term as lawyers from women's rights and feminist organizations specializing in gender-based violence cases.

[33] Ibid

[34] Ibid

Moreover, the comprehensive Law of Georgia on the Elimination of Violence against Women and/or Domestic Violence[35] serves as a conceptual framework within the legal landscape, complementing provisions outlined in the Criminal Code. This law, together with international conventions ratified by Georgia, including the Istanbul Convention, provides a comprehensive approach to addressing gender-based violence, including TFGBV.

Furthermore, within the Cybercrime chapter, certain provisions indirectly relate to TFGBV. While addressing cybercrimes, Articles such as 284, 285, and 286²[36] target unauthorized access to computer systems, illegal use of computer data, and the creation of fake official computer data, respectively. Moreover, Articles 157-159[37] of the Criminal Code, addressing the disclosure of private information and violation of secrecy in communication, also intersect with TFGBV concerns. These articles encompass unlawful obtaining, dissemination, and use of private information, which are common tactics in perpetrating TFGBV, particularly through digital platforms. Despite these legal measures, the challenges of regulation persist, requiring ongoing adaptation to address the evolving landscape of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Despite the existence of some legal instruments, there is a clear need for greater alignment between international commitments and domestic legislation and practice to effectively address TFGBV. Legal practitioners, in particular, face significant challenges when trying to apply these laws in real-world scenarios:

> *"In practice, it's very difficult to assign qualifications to such cases and define them as punishable acts under the Criminal Code. We've had several instances where fake profiles were created, and sexual context was added to photos/videos. Qualifying such cases and fitting them into the Criminal Code is challenging for us, and we face difficulties. We have articles in the Criminal Code that we can try to apply, but some casuistic cases don't fit under any article." (KII, Stakeholder)*

Stakeholders emphasize the importance of cooperation among legal authorities, women's rights organizations, and other stakeholders to effectively respond to TFGBV and highlight the need to adapt existing legislation to focus specifically on TFGBV, as there is currently no separate article addressing this issue:

> *"Since we currently do not have legislative regulation regarding gender-based violence conducted online, it is very important to make amendments to the existing legislation on violence against women and domestic violence to specify that these forms of violence also apply to violence conducted online and through the use of technology." (KII, Stakeholder)*

As for institutions, since TFGBV encompasses both criminal and administrative offenses, various institutions are responsible for crime prevention and suppression. Key players include the Ministry of

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[35] Law Of Georgia On The Elimination Of Violence Against Women And/Or Domestic Violence, And The Protection And Support Of Victims Of Such Violence. Available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/26422?publication=18 [Accessed 19.04.2024]
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid

Internal Affairs, the Labor Inspection Office, the Public Defender's Office, the Court, and the Prosecutor's Office, all of which play crucial roles in reviewing TFGBV cases.

Until March 1, 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was responsible for investigating crimes related to the invasion of personal life. However, since then, these crimes have been investigated by the Special Investigation Service[38], which an independent state authority. This transfer included the investigation of crimes such as the illegal acquisition of personal information and the violation of the secret of private life, as specified in Articles 157-159[39] of the Criminal Code. With its hotline (119), the Special Investigation Service has shown promising results in Georgia in 2023. An investigation was initiated into 167 cases of possible violations of personal life, and criminal prosecution was pursued against 41 individuals[40]. Despite the fact that this agency is relatively new and does not yet have much trust of the population, stakeholders positively evaluate its work:

> *"In this regard, I would positively assess the fact that a separate investigative body is working, and by the way, last year they created a specialization, and now only specialized investigators work on these crimes, which is good because if there are 10 people who are the only ones authorized to work on these types of crimes, it's easier to strengthen these 10 people, retrain them, make them empathetic, and consequently, work well from the state's perspective." (KII, Stakeholder)*

A critical examination of assessments by international bodies and national authorities provides invaluable insights into the efficacy and challenges of Georgia's efforts to combat TFGBV.

The GREVIO evaluation report on Georgia's compliance with the Istanbul Convention provides a detailed assessment of legislative measures and practical efforts. Commending legal reforms addressing violence against women, it identifies critical gaps in addressing intersecting forms of discrimination and providing specialized support services for various forms of violence, including TFGBV. It urges immediate action to enhance coordination, involve NGOs, and address challenges such as underreporting and insufficient resources for victim support.[41] Furthermore, GREVIO emphasizes aligning criminal laws with the Istanbul Convention's provisions, particularly regarding psychological violence and stalking, including their online dimensions. It stresses improving data collection, strengthening legal frameworks, and building the capacity of legal professionals to handle TFGBV cases effectively. In summary, the documents underscore the significance of a holistic approach encompassing legal, policy, and practical interventions to address TFGBV in Georgia, calling for urgent action to fill existing gaps and strengthen frameworks to combat TFGBV.[42]

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[38] Law Of Georgia On The Special Investigation Service. 2021. Article 2. Available at: https://www.matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/4276790/6/en/pdf [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[39] Criminal Code of Georgia. Available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/16426 [Accessed 19.04.2024]

[40] Special Investigation Service 2022 activity report: https://sis.gov.ge/uploads/files/642b00b19d11a_specialuri-sagamodziebo-samsaxuris-2022-wlis-saqmianobis-angarishi.pdf

[41] GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report Georgia. 2022. https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-georgia-2022-1680a917aa

[42] Ibid

Instances of TFGBV in Georgia are highlighted by reports from authoritative sources. The Public Defender of Georgia's report[43] reported launching investigations into 95 cases of stalking under Article 151^1[44] of the Criminal Code. However, the absence of specific efforts to investigate online stalking raises questions about the adequacy of the response to TFGBV.

To summarize, while Georgia's legal framework provides some aspects for addressing TFGBV, there's a pressing need for specific provisions tailored to this modern form of violence. By recognizing the gendered dynamics inherent in TFGBV and establishing clear legal mechanisms and implementation to combat it, the legal system can better protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable in the digital age. Additionally, efforts to raise awareness and enhance legal practitioners' capacity to recognize and address TFGBV are vital for ensuring effective legal responses to this emerging threat.

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[43] the Public Defender of Georgia on the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia 2020, pp. 156. https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2021070814020446986.pdf
[44] Criminal Code Of Georgia, Article 151^1 https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/16426/157/en/pdf

7. Recommendations for Policy and Intervention Improvements

This section outlines key recommendations for enhancing the response to TFGBV. It covers proposed updates to legislation, improvements in data collection and research, and the strengthening of internal policies and support mechanisms. Additionally, it highlights the importance of education and awareness-raising. We encourage all stakeholders, including state institutions, businesses, educational organizations, and NGOs/INGOs, to adopt these measures. Detailed recommendations are provided below:

State Policy and Legislative Framework for Addressing TFGBV in Georgia						
RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
It is recommended to amend existing laws on violence against women and domestic violence to explicitly include TFGBV, as current legislation does not address online gender-based violence. The legal framework should be adapted to cover online incidents, such as the non-consensual distribution of intimate images causing significant harm and etc. To address the challenges of qualifying and prosecuting TFGBV, it is recommended to revise criminal code provisions to better capture the nuances of online violence. Additionally, updating law enforcement procedures is recommended to reflect the specific challenges of TFGBV, recognizing that traditional proof standards for offline cases may not be suitable. Such legislative and procedural adjustments are essential for effective enforcement and protection.	✓	✓				
The state should establish laws and regulations that mandate private companies to develop and implement mechanisms for preventing and addressing TFGBV. This requirement should be explicitly stated in the law to ensure that companies do not rely solely on voluntary measures. Additionally, it is essential to ensure rigorous monitoring and enforcement of these regulations, with labor inspections playing a pivotal role in overseeing compliance. Clearly defining the private sector's obligations in preventing and responding to TFGBV is vital for effective implementation and accountability.	✓	✓			✓	

RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
TFGBV should be integrated into various state policy documents, strategies, and concepts related to gender equality. This includes incorporating TFGBV-related provisions into key documents such as the human rights action plan and the violence against women action plan. Ensuring that TFGBV is addressed within these strategic frameworks is crucial for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to combating this issue.	✓	✓				
To effectively address TFGBV, it is recommended to delineate responsibilities among law enforcement institutions, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prosecutor's Office, and the Special Investigation Service, and to enhance interagency coordination. In light of GREVIO's recommendations, it is crucial to establish specific protocols for these agencies to record, monitor, and address TFGBV cases. This should involve analyzing criminal cases, studying crimes driven by intolerance, and reviewing applicable criminal law articles on online violence. Clearly defined roles and improved coordination will lead to a more effective and comprehensive response to TFGBV.	✓	✓				

Internal Prevention and Support Mechanisms for Addressing TFGBV

RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
Organizations and bussineses should develop a comprehensive internal policy specifically for preventing and addressing TFGBV. This policy should include clear guidelines for reporting incidents, investigating claims, and taking disciplinary actions. Organizations that have already implemented mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment should also extend these measures to cover online incidents.			✓		✓	

Businesses should set up secure and anonymous reporting mechanisms, such as hotlines or online forms, where employees can report TFGBV incidents confidentially. These reporting channels should be well-publicized and designed to be accessible to all employees, including those with disabilities. Ensuring accessibility might involve providing options such as text relay services, accessible web forms, or other accommodations to meet diverse needs.			✓	✓	✓	
Businesses should appoint internal focal points responsible for handling TFGBV cases and providing support to affected employees. Additionally, it is advisable for businesses to establish external partnerships with experts or organizations specializing in TFGBV prevention. These partnerships can be particularly beneficial for accessing supplementary resources, support, and expertise. For larger businesses, this may involve more extensive collaborations with specialized agencies, while smaller businesses can engage with local community groups or NGOs. Such external support helps to strengthen the business's internal mechanisms and enhance its overall response to TFGBV.			✓	✓	✓	
Organizations should engage IT professionals to assess and enhance the security of their digital platforms, tailoring measures to their specific needs and challenges. This includes safeguarding websites, social media accounts, and internal communication systems against misuse. Each organization should develop a customized cybersecurity strategy that addresses its unique vulnerabilities and ensures robust protection against potential threats.			✓		✓	
Organizations should conduct mandatory training sessions for all employees on how to recognize, prevent, and report TFGBV. Training should include practical examples, role-playing scenarios, and instructions on using the reporting channels. Materials should be updated regularly to reflect new information and best practices.			✓	✓	✓	
Big businesses should designate a Personal Data Protection Officer (DPO) to oversee the management of personal and sensitive data. The DPO should ensure compliance with data protection regulations, implement privacy			✓		✓	

policies, and provide guidance on safeguarding employee and customer information.	

	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
Business associations should create a comprehensive platform to assist both small and large businesses in addressing TFGBV. This platform should provide essential resources such as guidelines and best practices, training sessions, needs assessment and a resource hub with access to external experts and legal advice. It should also facilitate networking opportunities with local and national organizations specializing in TFGBV prevention and offer benchmarking tools to help businesses assess and improve their internal mechanisms. Such a platform will support businesses in implementing effective TFGBV policies and foster a safer work environment across all sectors.	✓				✓	

Strengthening Education, Awareness, and Digital Security Against TFGBV

RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
It is recommended that TFGBV prevention and response be incorporated into professional training and retraining programs. Educational institutions and Skills Agencies should integrate this component into their curricula to ensure that individuals entering the workforce are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to address TFGBV effectively.	✓	✓			✓	✓
It is recommended to develop and distribute educational modules — both online and offline — that focus on TFGBV, digital hygiene, and security. These modules should be tailored to address the specific needs of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, covering safe online practices, the protection of personal information and devices, and the identification of potential risks. The aim is to enhance digital literacy and empower all individuals, including those from vulnerable groups, to effectively protect themselves from online threats.	✓	✓				✓

RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
It is recommended to raise awareness about digital security risks and the importance of protecting personal information through targeted campaigns and training programs. Collaborate with schools, human resource services, and community organizations to develop and implement these initiatives. Such efforts should focus on educating the public about the legal and ethical implications of distributing or storing someone else's personal data, with particular particular attention of the needs of minors and vulenerable groups.	✓	✓				✓
It is recommended to focus on improving digital literacy and online safety skills, particularly among ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. Providing targeted training and resources will help individuals understand and utilize digital protection tools and strategies, thereby reducing their vulnerability to online exploitation.	✓	✓				✓
It is recommended to encourage the formation of community support groups, including online women's groups and professional networks, to provide safe spaces for discussing and addressing TFGBV. Additionally, promoting male allyship by engaging male peers, colleagues, and community members in supporting and advocating against TFGBV is essential.	✓				✓	

Research and Data Collection on TFGBV

RECOMMENDATIONS	NGOs/INGOs	State Institutions	Large Business Companies	Small and Medium Business	Business Associations	Educational/ Research Institutions
Integrating TFGBV data collection into national surveys is crucial. It is recommended to incorporate TFGBV-specific questions into existing national surveys, collaborate with Geostat for proper integration, ensure data is disaggregated by key demographics, train survey enumerators on sensitive data collection, and establish a regular reporting mechanism for analysis and dissemination of TFGBV data.	✓	✓				✓

Recommendation						
Establishing a national TFGBV research and knowledge-sharing platform is recommended. This platform should create a Georgian network of academics, researchers, NGOs, and government agencies. Its key goals should be to develop and monitor national TFGBV indicators and enhance regional and international collaboration, including comparative studies with Caucasus neighbors, participation in regional forums, sharing best practices, and forming a regional research consortium to secure international funding.	✓	✓				✓
It is recommended that educational institutions in Georgia actively engage in investigating and addressing TFGBV by exploring its intersections with gender norms, societal attitudes, and its effects on diverse demographic groups, including urban and rural populations, ethnic minorities, women and LGBTQ+ communities. To enhance their contributions, these institutions should integrate TFGBV studies into their curricula, develop specialized research programs, and establish partnerships with international research institutions to create knowledge and methodologies in this field.		✓				✓
Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment on TFGBV across various business sectors. This involves identifying the specific needs and challenges faced by businesses in addressing TFGBV. Use the findings to develop guidelines and best practices for companies, including small businesses, to effectively address and support employees affected by TFGBV.			✓	✓	✓	
It is essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing TFGBV legislation and practices in Georgia, including a review of current cases. Additionally, an assessment of international best practices should be undertaken to identify gaps and areas for improvement in Georgian policies and enforcement strategies. This in-depth evaluation should aim to align local legislation with effective global standards, ensuring that Georgia's approach to TFGBV is both robust and contextually relevant.	✓	✓				✓

Research into the impact of TFGBV on ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups within Georgia should be conducted. This research should examine how TFGBV affects various demographic groups, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, individuals with disabilities, and other marginalized populations. The findings should address specific vulnerabilities and needs of these groups and inform targeted interventions and policies to address the unique challenges they face in relation to TFGBV.	✓	✓				✓

SAFE ONLINE: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

A 3-year program (started in September, 2023), "Safe Online: Empowering Women in the Digital Economy" operates in targeted areas of Georgia and Armenia to advance inclusive economic growth through democratizing digital transformation and online safety for women in business.

In Georgia, the program works with Center for Strategy and Development (CSD), a leading human rights organization and in Armenia with Impact Innovation Institute's Initiatives Foundation (IMINI), a leading local CSO working on gender equality.

A program "Safe Online: Empowering Women in Digital Economy" funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and implemented by Mercy Corps' representation office in Georgia.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor *was created in 1977 to help advance individual liberty and democratic freedoms around the world. It addresses the fundamental freedoms set forth in the founding documents of the United States and the complementary articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other global and regional commitments. The United States supports the aspirations of those persons who long to live in freedom and under democratic governments as a means of combating terrorism and the spread of authoritarianism and advancing a free, peaceful, and prosperous world on behalf of the American people.*

Mercy Corps *is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, Mercy Corps partners to put bold solutions into action—helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.*