Violating Network

Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space

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November, 2022

7amleh –The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement

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Executive Summary

Gender-based violence has seen a dramatic increase in the Palestinian digital space over the last several years. This rise can be attributed to the Israeli colonial policies, social and political tensions in Palestinian society, as well as the increased use of online platforms and the isolation experienced as a result of movement restructions which resulted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, gender-based violence limits personal freedoms, and particularly targets women, girls and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) community, which limits their rights to expression and privacy. Unfortunately, there are numerous incidents such as the events that unfolded at the Nabi Musa Shrine near Jericho, the detention of activists who demanded investigations into the assassination of activist Nizar Banat, as well as the confiscation of female activists' phones, and subsequent blackmail based on information obtained through privacy violations, all of which point to the prevalance of gender-based violence within the Palestinian context. The dynamic use of social media and engagement in the digital space as a means to shape the Palestinian public discourse, illustrates the importance of digital rights protection. But in order to create such a protected digtial space, it is essential to note that the digital rights of Palestinians are impacted not only by the Israeli authorities and communication companies, the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank, and the de facto authority in the Gaza Strip, but also the customs, traditions, and dominant Palestinian social discourse. These factors have significant ramifications for Palestinian gender justice, which is highly influenced by these power holders and the shifts and challenges that exist within the society itself.

This research aims to monitor gender-based violence in the Palestinian digital space, also known as cyber or online gender-based violence. Placing a niche focus on the Palestinian context, it canvasses the causes, impact, and repercussions of this phenomenon in an attempt to branch out into concrete and hands-on recommendations to combat and limit its adverse effects. In doing so, this research taps into references and literature on online gender-based violence, including laws, research, and governmental and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports in the field of online gender-based violence prevention. The paper is also informed by a survey of female stakeholders, among others, in Palestinian society, focus groups, and in-depth personal interviews with female activists and experts from Palestinian civil society.

The main findings of the research show that the danger of online gender-based violence lies in its rapid expansion and dissemination due to massive technological developments, the growing demand for digital spaces, fake accounts and screen-based anonymity enabling fraud and concealment, and the ubiquity of smart devices across all the sections of society. The results also demonstrate the lack or delay in reporting online violence due to mainstream culture and a lack of confidence

in the police and the judiciary. This passive dynamism encourages aggressors to continue violating the privacy of others—especially women—fueling other adverse social, economic, and legal impacts. These include psychological effects on victims, such as social isolation, loss of confidence, withdrawal from public space, and negative social spirits. These consequences may further develop in more dangerous and pervasive ways; online gender-based violence often paves the way for all other forms of violence, from physical and sexual blackmail to suicide and murder.

The main results of the research indicate the following:

About **90%** of female respondents **use their real names** on social media.

About **65%** of female respondents **do not use their personal photos** as profile pictures.

About **28%** of female respondents **have experienced attempts to hack their accounts** on social media platforms.

About **17%** of respondents **were exposed to attempts to leak their photos** on social media.

About **87%** of respondents **check privacy settings** on social media.

About **16%** of female respondents **have been subject to blackmail attempts** on social media platforms.

About **36%** of respondents **who experienced blackmail via social media indicated that it was sexual in nature**.

About **50%** of female respondents **feel they are being watched** through social media.

About **25%** of female respondents **have been subject to misogynistic comments or harassment, including mocking and degradation.**

About **40%** of respondents **who were subject to offensive and misogynistic comments or harassment on social media indicated that they did not know the perpetrators.**

About **33%** of respondents who were harassed on social media **deleted the perpetrator's account only and did not take any other action**.

About **16%** of female respondents **have personally experienced some form of online harassment**.

About **75%** of respondents **support parental supervision** on social media.

Overview

This research focuses on online gender-based violence against Palestinian women. In essence, gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. This global phenomenon stands as a flagrant violation of human rights. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence defines gender-based violence as "all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts."[1]

Violence against Women[2] and gender-based violence are often used interchangeably, although the latter encompasses all forms of gender-based violence both against men and women. Notwithstanding, according to a UN report,[3] Women are twenty-seven times more likely to be harassed online than men, and about 73 percent of women were exposed to electronic aggression.

Gender-based violence, as an umbrella term, covers any harmful acts directed at any individual who does not conform to prevailing gender norms or defines their gender identity in ways that do not subscribe to mainstream, present gender identities—including queer people and transgender men and women.[4] It is perhaps fitting to note that this research focuses on violence against women and, in some parts, on gender-based violence at large.

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."[5] This definition implies that violence against women includes different forms and is reflected in a spate of praxes that are created, renewed, and adapted in pace with the development of methods and tools, including the means of communication.

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1. Council of Europe, *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, November 2014, ISBN 978-92-871-7990-6, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/548165c94.html

2. According recent data released by the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners, "Across their lifetime, 1 in 3 women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner – a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade." For more information, see: World Health Organization "Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence." March 9, 2021. https://www.who.int/news/item/09-03-2021-devastatingly-pervasive-1-in-3-women-globally-experience-violence

3. Simonovic, Dubravka, UN. Human Rights Council. Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, its Causes and its Consequences UN. Human Rights Council. Secretariat, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences on Online Violence against Women and Girls from a Human Rights Perspective*: Note / by the Secretariat. (Geneva: UN, June 18 2018). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641160?ln=en

4. Muhammad Abu Ramlieh, "Madkhal ela qaḍāya at-ta'dudiya al-jinsiya w-al-jindariya l-lmihanīn fy majāl aṣ-ṣiḥḥa an-nafsiya w-al-mujtama'iya [Introduction to gender and sexual diversity for social and mental health professionals.]" Al-Qaws, February 28 2018. http://alqaws.org/news/alQaws-Publishes-Guidebook-for-Mental-Health-Professionals?category_id=16

5. UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, December 20 1993, A/RES/48/104, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f25d2c.html.

In light of the foregoing, gender-based violence has several shades, including verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and social forms. And come digital space and tools have to lend gender violence a new setting to expand. Terms and synonyms abound, including technology-facilitated violence, ICT-facilitated violence against women, cyber violence, online violence, digital gender violence, and online violence against women; for consistency, online gender-based violence is used for the purpose of this research.

Although international human rights treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979,[6] have recognized emotional and psychological abuse as a form of violence long ago—including technology-facilitated abuse. Questions such as "is it really violence?" remain a key dilemma that presents itself every time online gender-based violence is considered.

The lack of national (local) legislation criminalizing online gender-based violence reflects the reluctance to consider harmful acts enabled by technology as violence.[7] Still, "one in five female internet users live in countries where harassment and abuse of women online is extremely unlikely to be punished."[8] This de facto impunity leaves victims of online gender-based violence in the middle of the road, with no mechanism to report online gender-based violence or hold perpetrators accountable. Given that digital space mirrors systemic gender-based discrimination, women's rights defenders, journalists, and politicians are particularly vulnerable to ICT-related violations due to their involvement in public life and their regular use of the internet.[9] The interrelated components of marginalized women's identity, such as trans women, women with disabilities, or women of color, make them easy targets for online gender-based violence in a space where abusers can act anonymously and escape punishment.[10] Consequently, the impairment of democracy and violation of the right to expression are among the major repercussions of digital gender-based violations.

Therefore, online gender-based violence against women is defined in the same way as physical violence against women, without excluding any type of harm covered

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6   UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html

7   Suzie Dunn. "Is it Actually Violence? Framing Technology-Facilitated Abuse as Violence," in *The Emerald International Handbook of Technology-Facilitated Violence and Abuse* (Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 2021): 25–45. https://shortest.link/8mHG

8   Chloe Messengerm, "Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls Exacerbates Digital Exclusion," *DAI*, November 2017. https://dai-global-digital.com/cyber-vawg-what-are-the-implications-for-digital-inclusion.html

9   "Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein at the end of his mission to El Salvador," (statement) United Nations Human Rights Office of the Higher Commissioner, November 17 2017. https://shortest.link/8LPK

10 Ruth Lewis, Michael Rowe, Clare Wiper, "Online Abuse of Feminists as An Emerging form of Violence Against Women and Girls," *The British Journal of Criminology* 57, Issue 6 (November 2017) 1462–81.

in this definition. Acts of online gender-based violence that create defamation, for example, might result in physical harm, even killing, depending on the social and cultural context. Along the same lines, it may lead to sexual abuse—rape included and the psychological and economic harm of online gender-based violence, e.g., loss of work, blackmailing, and intimidation, have already been demonstrated.

online violence is characterized by its accessibility because perpetrators can conceal their identities on the internet,[11] which reinforces their sense of impunity and ability to avoid punishment. That being the case, the digital space becomes a safe locus for perpetrators to barricade their identities behind screens, pseudonyms, fake accounts, and fake profile pictures. This category of perpetrators may refrain from offline forms of violence for several reasons—including legal deterrence. online violence is also defined by persistence and, thus, longer-term impacts. Given that it can be copied, circulated, and restored an infinite number of times and in many ways, online content cannot be removed for certain, whether through automatic means or concerted efforts. As a result, harmful content continues to haunt its victims for long periods, creating cumulative adverse effects and damages.

Although technology-facilitated and-enabled violence is recognized as a form of violence, there is still a need to understand the gendered background that characterizes online violence when directed at women. On this note, experts advise against considering online violence against women in isolation from violence in the real world, highlighting that online violence is an extension of offline violence, given that it is based on and maintains the same offline social norms and structural discrimination. For example, stalking current and former partners (i.e., spouses and intimate partners) takes on the same patterns online and offline. Therefore, this act should fall under intimate partner violence when practiced online or enabled by technology.

The United Nations recognizes the relationship between online and offline realities,[12] as the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights Online (2016) stated clearly and unmistakably that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online."[13] This assertion includes women's right to be protected from all forms of gender-based violence in the digital space and on the internet. It also underscores that online gender-based violence against women is as grave as physical violence, highlighting the paramount need to protect women both online and offline.[14]

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11 While competent authorities and companies can identify online violence perpetrators, this step, most of the time, requires police intervention and would take more time. By "accessibility," this research refers to the fact that the perpetrator's identity can be easily covered by creating a fake account.

12 Lewis et. al, "Online Abuse of Feminists as An Emerging form of Violence Against Women and Girls."

13 Article 19: Human Rights Council adopts an important resolution reenshrining human rights on the internet.

14 "Urgent Action Needed to Combat Online Violence against Women and Girls, Says New UN Report," UN Women, September 24 2015, updated October 12 2015. https://shortest.link/8mKK

online gender-based violence infringes on freedom of expression in disregard of Article 19, which states that every person has the right to freedom of expression through any platform,[15] including the digital space.[16] On this note, Suad from Gaza indicates that many women are forced, in one way or another, to limit their use of social media, whether partially or completely, because of violence on these platforms and—as she puts it—"to preserve their mental health and lives often, especially in the more conservative areas in the Gaza Strip." Somaya, also from Gaza, refers to selecting content and avoiding engaging in controversial topics. In her words, "I chose to cover sports news over political and social news because it is less problematic… Still and all, I'm not spared from attacks because I am a woman working in this field and of color." This environment expands the exclusion zone for women in the public debate.

Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space

In the Palestinian context, social media are an important and necessary outlet and breathing space, given the complex political situation, the multiple authorities controlling the public space, and the restrictions and siege that fragment Palestinians and prevent them from meeting and getting to know each other closely. Therefore, social media has become loci for meeting and exchanging information and opinions. In a political context rich in daily events, such as the Palestinian context, social media are considered one of the easiest and fastest ways to impart information. Indeed, social media platforms are appropriated into an avenue for alternative media, expressing opinions, and raising the voice in the face of the Israeli occupation authorities, the PA, and the de facto authority in the Gaza Strip.

It is no secret that digital technology and the rise of social media have provided women, girls, and oppressed and marginalized groups with a space and a platform to express their opinion. However, the dynamics of the digital space have also opened the way for the perpetration and practice of acts of violence against women—in other words, cybercrimes.

Cybercrime is an evolving actus reus. It takes place in a digital space that has no borders. The perpetrators of cybercrime and their victims can be present in distant regions under different jurisdictions, and the effects of the crime can extend through societies worldwide. Unlike crime in the real world, physical proximity is

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15 UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html

16 Amirta Choudhury and Nadira al-Araj, "Views and Perspectives on Gender Rights Online, For The Global South: Redefining Rights for a Gender Inclusive Networked Future," (Melville: Association for Progressive Communications, 2018). https://shortest.link/8mLk

not a condition for a crime to take place. These dynamics make cybercrime need an urgent response.

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) defines online violence as an act of threatening, blackmailing, ill-treatment, and harassment through the use of social media; it is a new form of violence that can affect all individuals of all age groups and sections given the widespread use of internet in Palestinian society."[17]

Online violence—including threatening, blackmail, ill-treatment, and harassment through the use of social media—is considered one of the modern forms of violence that individuals of all age groups may be exposed to due to the widespread use of the internet in societies in the world—including the Palestinian society. According to the published data by the Cybercrime Prosecution, the number of complaints received by the cybercrime unit in the Palestinian police increased from 2,420 in 2019 to 2,720 in 2020—a rise of 11.2 percent, including online gender-based violence cases. The complaints were distributed as follows:

- 1,392 complaints[18] made by men, equivalent to 51 percent;
- 1,130 complaints made by women, 42 percent;
- 198 complaints made by men and women, 7 percent.

The most prominent method of violence was intimidation (599 complaints), followed by piracy (475). Extortion came third with 414 complaints. Last came the breach of conjugal bond (57).[19]

In 2019, the PCBS published the results of a survey of violence survey in Palestinian society, including online violence. The survey indicated that 8 percent of Palestinian women (in the West Bank and Gaza Strip) who are married or were married have been exposed to a form of online violence on a social media platform—9 percent in the West Bank and 5 percent in Gaza Strip. The rates are higher among young women (18–29 years) at 10 percent. The rate rose among women who had never been married, reaching about 14 percent in the West Bank and 5 percent in the Gaza Strip.[20]

According to A Violent Network: Gender-Based Violence Against Palestinian: Women

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17 The Palestinian Statistics of Bureau Central. *Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society*. (Ramallah: PSBC 2019). https://shortest.link/8MUF

18   We noticed that the Palestinian police does not distinguish between cases and complaint in its summary of the cybercrime unit's activities and operations, which increases confusion in dealing with online gender-based violence and monitoring data.

19 "Al-jarīma al-iliktrūniya fy aḍ-ḍiffa al-gharbiya bayn al-wāqi' w-al-mūājha [Cybercrime in the West Bank: Facts and counter measures," The Palestinian Police, 2022. https://www.palpolice.ps/content/425828.html#

20 The survey covers only the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2019 provides an annual qualitative survey. It is the third in a series that started in 2005, and the second was carried out in 2011. The survey is of particular importance because it shines a light on violence in Palestinian society, including domestic or social violence.

in Virtual Space, survey research published by 7amleh - the Arab Center for the Development of Social Media and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in 2018,[21] 16 percent of the respondents were subjected to online sexual harassment and 5 percent of them to sexual blackmailing.

Along the same lines, the Sawa Foundation's monthly report of September 2022 indicates an increase in the calls related to online violence (31 percent), especially against women, as shown in Chart 1 below. Sawa reported five cases of online blackmail to Facebook in September 2022.

Figure 1: Comparison of the percentage of incoming calls to "Sawa" related to digital violence in September during the years 2020/2021/2022[22]
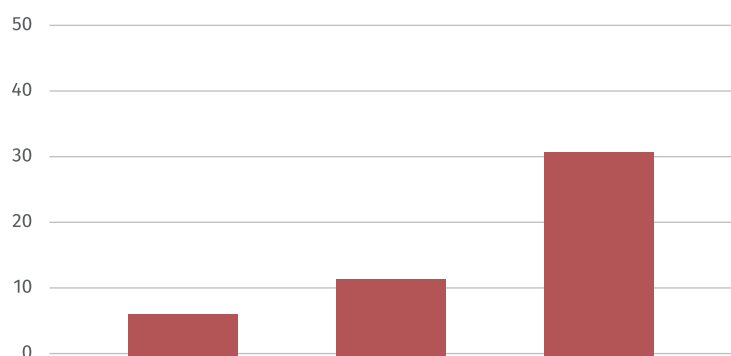
Palestinian women suffer from accumulative multilayer forms of violence. On the one hand, they suffer from the Israeli colonial, authoritarian policies and practices that violate human rights. On the other hand, they suffer from the patriarchal, gender-biased discourse exacerbated by a legal framework that does not comply with the relevant international standards.

According to Palestinian researchers in the field of women's rights, violence resulting from Israeli practices fuels patriarchal power relations and perpetuates the cycle of domestic violence against Palestinian women. Although Palestine has acceded to twenty-one international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. However, the absence of a sovereign Palestinian state prevents the Palestinian authorities from fulfilling their obligations to prevent violence against women and protect them against it. The geographical fragmentation

21 Shahrazad Odeh, A Viollent Network: Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in Virgual Space, (Ramallah: 7amleh: The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, 2018). https://7amleh.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Report_7amleh_English-1-1.pdf .

22 Sawa Foundation, Factsheet No. 39 of September 2022; Listening Center 121; (from the declaration of the State of Emergency since March 2020 through the last war on the Gaza Strip. (Facebook post)

of the Palestinian territories and the political division undermine women's access to community support protection mechanisms and receive necessary social services. This situation is reflected in the PCBS data: more than half of Palestinian women prefer to remain silent about the assault they experience and not to report or share it with anyone. This percentage is higher among married women or those who were married, standing at around 60.6 percent. This data indicate, among other things, that the real rates of violence, including online gender-based violence, are higher than the declared rates.[23]

Although Article 9 of the 2003 Amended Basic Law, the PA's provisional constitution, provides "Palestinians shall be equal before the law and the judiciary, without distinction based upon race, sex, color, religion, political views or disability,"[24] the Palestinian corpus of legislation constitutes a major obstacle to the alignment of the national laws with CEDAW. Furthermore, it does not facilitate the implementation of measures that would protect women's rights. For example, the Penal Code of 1960 applies in the West Bank, while the Penal Code of 1936 applies in the Gaza Strip. And the Israeli Penal Code applies in force in East Jerusalem and inside Israel.

Despite the enshrinement of the principle of non-discrimination in the Basic Law and the ratification of CEDAW, the PA has not adopted any legislation on violence against women. An umbrella penal bill was drafted in 2003 with improved protections for women, yet it has not been adopted. A bill on domestic violence is underway to be signed into law. It is expected to provide for the protection of women against domestic and sexual violence[25] While this bill is to be implemented in the West Bank, the Egyptian Law of Family Rights of 1954 remains in force in the Gaza Strip; either instrument does not guarantee gender.

In relation to electronic issues, the PA adopted Law-by-Decree No. 10 of 2018 on Cybercrime.[26] Like similar legislation in other countries in the region, the decree provides for the establishment of a cybercrime unit under the supervision of the public prosecution and punishes any illegal access to or use of the web and electronic data as well as the disruption of the access to devices and data. Notwithstanding, this decree lack gender perspective. Human rights activists also argue that this decree restricts the freedom of expression and privacy because the public prosecutor can obtain data related to communication traffic or the users.[27]

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23 PBCS. Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society.

24 2003 Palestinian Basic Amended Law, Pub. L. (2003). https://www.palestinianbasiclaw.org/basic-law/2002-basic-law.

25 UNDP. Gender Justice & the Law: Palestine, December 8 2018. https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/gender-justice-and-the-law-study.html

26 Law by Decree No. 10 of 2018 on Cybercrime. Pub. L. No. 18. (2018). https://security-legislation.ps/sites/default/files/law/Law%20by%20Decree%20No.%2010%20of%202018%20on%20Cybercrime.pdf.

27 "ICHR Welcomes the Issuance of Law by Decree No. 10 2018 on Electronic Crimes and Introduces a Series of Observations and Reservations." (Statement) Independent Commission for Human Rights, May 20, 2018. https://www.ichr.ps/en/media-center/2595.html.

Research Objective

While the digital space provides instrumental loci for the Palestinians to band together, express their opinions, and engage in digital activities, it lends itself as an arena for interactions that echo and shape the dynamics of Palestinian society—including gender-based violence—given the larger geographical, sociopolitical Palestinian context. This research aims to understand and analyze the phenomenon of online gender-based violence against women in the first place and tackle gender-based violence in the Palestinian digital space. This is done by monitoring gender-based violence in the Palestinian digital space, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. In so doing, the research arrives at a set of recommendations to minimize gender-based violence in the Palestinian digital space.

Significance of Research

The significance of this research lies in the need to foster a safe, fair, and free digital space for all. To that end, individual digital rights must be enshrined and safeguarded as part and parcel of human rights (Palestinians' rights in this context). It also drives further impact by attempting to identify the scale and impact of the online gender-based violence on that on the ground. Investigating the effects of online gender-based violence because it incites violent practices or reinforces the dominance of exclusionary discourse and behavior and systemic silencing by means of threatening and intimidation, this research also stands relevant. Besides, the projections of sustainable digital gender-based crimes warrant an informed identification of the problem in order to effectively clear up its causes and limit and minimize it.

Methodology and Research Tools

This study follows quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to engender reliable results that reflect reality, taking into account the analysis of the experience of the participants in the study. In so doing, this research relies on three research tools:

1. A survey: The author, in cooperation with 7amleh staff, developed a survey geared to measure gender-based violence against women and gender-based violence at large in the Palestinian digital space. Carried out in September 2022, the survey measured gender-based violence against women on social media in the Palestinian society in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and Israel. The survey sample comprised 1,000 female citizens aged over 18 years old with an interest in gender-based violence on social media in Palestinian society. The data were collected by electronic means and over the phone (180 electronic surveys and 820 telephone surveys).

Table 1 below shows that the largest percentage of the participants in the survey aged between 18 and 30 years (69.5 percent). Researchers explain that this age group is the most using social media, followed by those aged 31–45 years (27.7 percent).

Table 1: Respondent by age group

Age Group (Year)	Number	(%)
18-30	695	69.5
31–45	277	27.7
46–60	26	2.6
61+	2	0.2

2. Three focus groups: Meetings were held with three focus groups representing three regions: the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and with Palestinians in Israel. The participants were brought together through invitations addressed to civil society organizations (CSOs) and others via social media and personal networks. As a result, all the participants in the focus groups took part voluntarily in the research. However, in order to maintain privacy, the full/real names of the participants in the research are not used. All focus group meetings were held via Zoom due to several obstacles, including Israeli occupation checkpoints and geographical fragmentation imposed by the Israeli occupation. Each focus group meeting was carried out in two hours at the maximum. The meetings were held through the prism of non-structured interviews and preset guiding questions, which serve the purpose of investigatory research and encourage participants to reflect and participate. Once the focus group meetings were transcribed, the main lines of research were identified to monitor online gender-based violence on social media among Palestinians and to be used in data analysis. Forty-three participants partook in the focus groups. Table 2 shows the dates of the audiences and the number of participants per group.

Table 2: Details of focus groups

Focus Group	Date	Number of Participants
West Bank, including Jerusalem	August 9	19
Gaza Strip	August 29	13
Palestinians in Israel*	September 5	11

*The focus group from Israel was the only interview that included two male participants.

3. In-depth interviews: Personal interviews were conducted with eight female experts and activists from six CSOs active in Palestinian society, labor, and feminism (see Table 3). The duration of each interview was about an hour and was held in Arabic via Zoom. At the interviews, key questions were raised to explore the participating CSOs' work, cumulative experience, challenges, and recommendations for online gender-based violence prevention. The interviews were recorded—except for the interview with alQaws at their request. The interviews were also transcribed to collect key information.

Table 3: Details of In-depth Interviews with the participating CSOs

#	CSOs	Participant(s)	Date (2020)
1	**SAWA Foundation** "Sawa is committed to providing support, protection and social counseling to survivors of violence. It works to provide community awareness services. Its most important priority is to combat all forms of violence, abuse and neglect against women and children, and it seeks to network with society and decision-makers to spread human values and equality." gender equality to create a dignified life and a safer society."	Aohaila Shomar	September 13
2	**7amleh - The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media** 7amleh's mission is to create a safe, fair and free digital space for Palestinians. 7amleh studies and researches issues related to Palestinian digital rights, provides digital rights, digital activism and digital security capacity-building opportunities to Palestinian activists and civil society, and manages local and international advocacy campaigns. Recently, 7amleh launched its signature platform, the Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or) as the first open-source online platform to monitor, document, and follow up on digital rights violations of Palestinians. If you are Palestinian, 7or helps you document and follow up on any online violation that you have been through, including defamation, hate speech, gender-based violence, or detention or attack on the grounds of freedom of expression and opinion on social media, as well as privacy breaches, content removal, and account deletion.	Ahmad Qadi	September 15

3	**Assiwar – The Feminist Arab Movement:** Assiwar is an Arab feminist movement that struggles against all forms of violence, particularly sexual abuse of women in the Arab Palestinian society in Israel. Assiwar believes that feminism is a revolutionary sociopolitical movement that strives to change the power and control relations in society. In this pursuit, it operates through several projects, including a real-time support chat and a helpline that operates twenty-four to receive help calls from the victims of sexual assaults and support them to take proper actions against abusers.	Lamia Naamnih	September 22
4	**The Association of Women Against Violence (WAV)** WAV aims to organize and revitalize all sections of society, especially women, to (1) achieve full equality for Palestinian women in Israel in all walks of life; (2) promote equal participation and representation of women in decision-making and community leadership positions; (3) remove all social and institutional obstacles, (4) unveil and eliminate all forms of violence against women; and (5) provide support and professional services to female violence victims.	Linda Khawaled and Kamli Tayyoun	September 22

5	**Muntada Al-Jensaneya** Muntada is a NGO with a niche interest in community development by meeting the educational and counseling needs and aspirations related to reproductive health and sexuality of Palestinian individuals and families through the prism of open social dialogue in an effective partnership with relevant CSOs. Muntada is also driven to raise gender awareness, combat all forms of sexual exploitation, promote the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, enhance the individual right to choose a life partner, build up advisory frameworks for different age groups in the field of sexuality, and enhance the social status of women by challenging misconceptions and prevailing stereotypes that perpetuate their inferiority and create a context conducive to infringing on their human and sexual rights.	Wafi Blal	October 11
6	**alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society** alQaws is a group of LGBT activists, questioners, people of different sexual and gender orientations, and their friends. alQwas is an open locus with a firm popular base that absorbs, receives, contains, engages, and gets involved in the effort geared to shake and break the systems of sexual and gender oppression and the tools of control over bodies and sexualities—from the patriarchal and capitalist discourse to the colonial one—and reshape the subsequent power relations to create a pluralistic society inclusive of all shades of sexual and gender orientations	Represen-tatives[28]	October 21

28 alQaws representatives opted not to disclose their names.

Data Analysis and Results

Section 1: Monitoring of Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space

This section is given over to monitoring gender-based violence as indicated by the results of the survey, focus groups, and in-depth interviews. The first part of this section presents the facets and characteristics of online gender-based violence in the Palestinian context. The second part moves to the most common forms and manifestations of online violence against Palestinian women. Last but not least, the section shines a light on gender-based violence in the Palestinian digital space during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Gender-Based Violence in the Palestinian Digital Space: Facets and Characteristics

Aohaila Shomar, Director of the Sawa Foundation, indicates that since the beginning of 2022, 16,798 counseling calls[29] were addressed from 9,842 people who have been subject to gender-based violence. Shomar also highlights that there is a rise in requests lodged by men—6,288 calls have been received from males and 3,382 from females. Young guidance and those seeking counseling[30] range between 15 to 20 percent. The majority of calls revolve around psychological, physical, and sexual violence. The organization also receives cases of technology-enabled forms of violence. In addition, Sawa's monthly report for December 2022 shows an increase of 31 percent in calls related to online violence compared to the past two years (see Figure 1). Shomar asserts that "there is a difference between offline and online realities in terms of tools and mechanisms. But without doubt, they derive from similar gender-based violence bases, including an authoritarian, patriarchal, misogynistic approach."

The interviews conducted with active women's organizations in Palestinian society cite digital illiteracy and the lack of knowledge of foreign languages (especially for adjusting settings and reading social media corporate policies and other information circulated in the digital space) as stimuli for increasing the circle of victims and perpetrators in the digital space. In the same vein, the interviews highlight the deep generational gap among the underpinnings. These factors can also be seen as catalysts for the surge in online violence in the Palestinian context, including gender-based violence. On this note, Shomar relates:

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29 This number includes follow-up and frequent calls.

30 Aohaila Shomar did not define the age group of the young guidance seekers.

Two weeks ago, we held a workshop featuring women from different regions. While they have accounts on Facebook and other social media, they do not know a single English word as well as settings. They let their children or grandchildren download the application to start using it without knowing what it is and how it works. All that they know is how to send messages or like posts or other content.

The lack of awareness that controls online behavior in the Palestinian digital space is not the only reason for expanding the circle of victims and perpetrators. Naivety and lack of knowledge that is reflected in blind trust and readily sharing of personal information play a role. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness about the issue of privacy to address digital illiteracy and provide digital protection for women.

Ahmed Qadi, Monitoring and Documentation Officer at 7amleh and the head of the Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or)[31]indicates that since 2021 up to the time of writing, 1,853 digital violations have been documented; 134 of which are cases of online gender-based violence. Seventy of them were documented in May and June 2021 that is, during the political tensions that swept the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and Israel.

Qadi refers to challenges in reporting digital violations, which are the backbone of 7or's mission. He attributes this to social differences and the pluralistic character of Palestinian society, which reacts differently to gender-based violence, from covering up to revealing. This dynamic has an impact on reporting online gender-based violence. "For example, in the south, the West Bank, Gaza, or Negev, I noticed that this issue can be very sensitive in certain contexts in ways different from those observed in northern regions, Ramallah or areas that have some sense of openness," as he puts it.

Palestinian gender violence on the internet increases amid political events, which characterize the volatile Palestinian political scene. In all focus groups, participants overwhelmingly reported gender-based violence and online harassment faced by politically active women. For example, in the events of Sheikh Jarrah in May 2021, Israeli authorities directed its battery of institutional violence at young activists for their heightened digital activity. Data published by Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association indicate that about 300 Palestinians have been detained since the end of 2014, as the Israeli occupation has escalated its arrest campaigns over social media posts, especially Facebook.[32]

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31 "Who We Are?" The Palestinian Observatory of Digital Rights Violations (7or), 7amleh, 2022. https://7or.7amleh.org/en/page/663u4e6f73q/about

32 Addameer, *Arrests on Charges of "Incitement" on Social Media Platforms and Israeli Government Policy: a Facebook Case Study*, (Ramallah: Addameer, July 7 2019). https://www.addameer.org/sites/default/files/publications/facebook_paper.pdf

Along the same lines, Participants in the focus groups agreed that women and others who do not comply with societal norms around gender are the most often harassed online. Maya, one of the focus group participants, says "The most vulnerable group on the basis of gender are gays, lesbians, transgender men and women, and those who do not fit the social gender constructs or expectations... such as revolutionary women. The feeling of insecurity in the digital space is reflected in the threats directed at women, especially activists in the field of feminism and women's rights. By the same token, Manal, from the West Bank and Jerusalem focus group, says:

> Recently, there have been a lot of attacks on women's rights defenders. My former director at the Women's Studies Center received death threats on Facebook because of her posts that advocate women's rights. She received death threats on her messenger... Any post, whether a cartoon, saying, poetry verse, or anything about women's rights, faces fierce attacks. Sadly, this can also be seen in the comments on posts about femicide cases, like "Who knows what she had done," or "there must be another story about her." You will find such attacks from very young to very old men and women.

Online Violence against Women in the Palestinian Context: Most Common Forms

Forms of online gender-based violence in the Palestinian context do not differ from other contexts in the world. They are characterized as misogynistic, collective—and in a colonized space. These dimensions overshadow any societal phenomenon, including online violence. Interviews with active Palestinian women's CSOs and focus groups reveal four central forms of online gender-based violence in the Palestinian context:

1. Catfishing and Sexual Blackmail

The results show that female participants from Israel are the most exposed to blackmail attempts on social media; about 26.4 percent of them reported that they went through blackmail attempts on social media. This group is followed by participants from the Gaza Strip (18%). Female participants from Jerusalem came third with 9 percent, while 1.9 percent of participants from the West Bank reported that they were subject to a blackmail attempt on social media. That being the case, the participants from the West Bank could be considered the least exposed to blackmail attempts on social media—according to their statements.

When participants who faced blackmail attempts via social media (15.4%) were asked about the form of blackmail: about 35.7 percent answered that it was sexual, followed by blackmail on political grounds (27.9%) and financial blackmail (18.8%), as Figure 2 below shows.

Figure 2: Forms of Digital Extortion
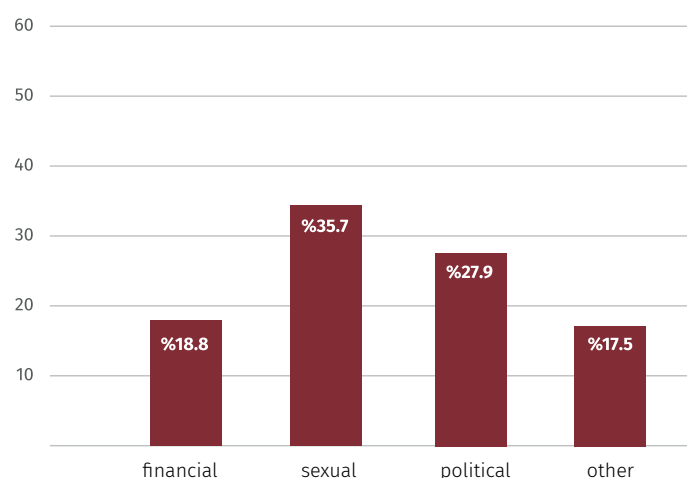
Women's CSO activists refer to double blackmail against women, one that involves criminal gangs and weapons, which are rampant in Palestinian society in Israel. While taking place in the cyber world, this form of blackmail against women threatens them and their families if relationships with gang members does not continue or if they do not yield to the dictates of criminal gangs that might extend beyond sexual blackmail.

Contrary to the expectation that girls would be the most vulnerable to black, especially sexual ones, given their lack of experience in dealing with adult men. Women Against Violence (WAV) indicates that there are no specific characteristics of victims. As their figures stand, most of the cases they receive are made by women aged between 35 and 55 years old. For illustration purposes, consider one of the most complicated cases WAV received: a 38-year-old teacher:

Her life was made a living hell because of this man... She lost a lot of money to him, and he also sexually abused and photographed her... Eventually, she realized she had no choice except to report him... If her family finds out today, her life might be at stake. He threatens her that he will not leave her once he gets out of prison. Imagine that he is on the inside yet able to send threats. I mean, in today's world, women suffer from a slew of complications. Not to mention that criminals have weapons.

Economic and sexual blackmail aside, Palestinian homosexuals face a political form of blackmail for their sexual orientation. On this one, Shadi from Jerusalem reflects that he was subjected to a political blackmail attempt for being gay, especially after a video of him was circulated on social media. According to his statements, an Israeli police investigator tried to intimidate him by threatening to expose his

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gender identity. "When they took me to interrogation, they made remarks implying I'm not like my other male siblings, indicating that I'm different... But I knew how to act if I found myself in such a situation."

Shadi's experience sheds light on the political blackmail that homosexual Palestinians face through institutional violence, represented by the Israeli military institution's ability to monitor the Palestinian digital space and accounts and glean and exploit a mine of information—including sexual orientation. With this personal information, individuals are threatened with gender-based pressure and blackmail to expose their intimate lives.[33] When interviewing alQaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society, their cautious behavior was clear. alQaws representatives stressed the paramount significance of digital security and personal safety. It is perhaps fitting to highlight that alQaws's support chat has been operating since 2010. The representatives of the association indicated that most of their activity is focused on advocacy and awareness.

2. Online Gender Harassment

Harassment is the most common form of gender-based violence in the digital space. The results of the survey show that online harassment varies in its methods and content. According to the results of the survey, 15.4 percent of respondents were subjected to at least one form of harassment. This harassment may be inappropriate messages with sexual content (24.8%), inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature (24.8%), or direct sexual content (22.2 percent), including inappropriate or sexual images, videos, or both (see Figure 3).

Harassment on the internet takes many forms, the most important of which can be summarized as follows:

· Unsolicited email or text messages with sexually explicit content.

· Rude or hostile advances on social media or in chat rooms.

· Threats of physical violence, sexual violence, or both through email or text messages.

· Hate speech and offensive and derogatory language that threatens or targets females based on their gender identity and other characteristics (e.g., sexual orientation or disability).

Through the prism of geographical variation analysis, it was found that the female participants from the Gaza Strip are the most exposed to cyber harassment, with

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33 Marwa Fatafta and Nadim Nashif, "Surveillance of Palestinians and the Fight for Digital Rights," *Al-Shabaka - The Palestinian Policy Network*, October 23 2017. https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/surveillance-palestinians-fight-digital-rights/.

21 percent indicating that they were subjected to some form of online harassment. Palestinian women in Israel followed with 17.6 percent. As for female participants from Jerusalem, 10.5 percent said that they were exposed to harassment on the internet. Only 3.8 percent of the participants from the West Bank indicated that they have been through an online harassment experience. That being the case, female West Bank participants are the least likely to face online harassment.

Although the above may be true, it may not necessarily reflect reality. Focus group participants indicate several factors that affect the monitoring of data. Most importantly, reporting to competent authorities, i.e., police or women's rights organizations. Linda Khawaled, from WAV, says that about half of the inquiries they receive are about online violence, often of threats and blackmail.

Figure 3: Forms of digital gender-based harassment
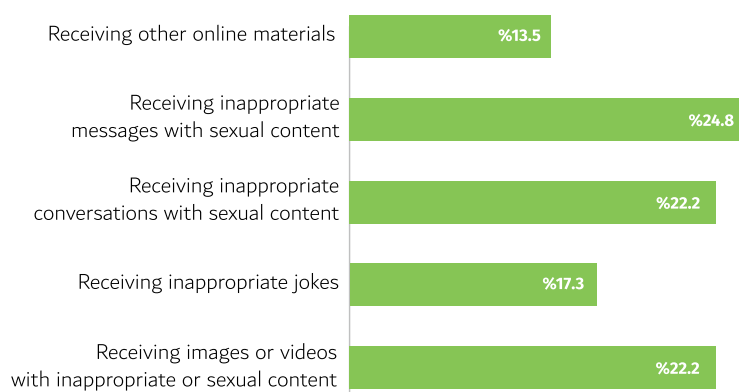
Causes of Harassment:

About 16.4 percent of respondents answered that the main reason for harassment is the absence of parental supervision. The reason, according to 15.9 percent of them, is deviance. In the opinion of some 12.6 percent of respondents, excessive openness is the reason. Only 8.4 percent cited the lack of understanding of the nature and purpose of social media as the reason for the harassment. Lack of knowledge that these acts are criminalized and punishable by law was cited as a reason by 7.4 percent. These data are consistent with the statements of CSOs (15.8 percent) that the cause of harassment is digital illiteracy—the issue women's CSOs cite as a major cause of the exacerbation of online violence, particularly gender-based violence.

The data show that a significant section of participants blames the victim. For example, about 8 percent said that an appealing profile picture serves as a reason for digital harassment. By a similar token, about 6 percent of respondents said that the extravagance of material published by women is the cause of the harassment. At first glance, these inputs imply a self-exclusion process from the digital space. Nevertheless, the Sawa Foundation considered that the hasty disclosure of private information on social media exposes women to the danger of being "catfished" by blackmailers and harassers who use this information to break the victim's privacy.

Figure 4: Causes of gender-based harassment in the digital space

Cause	Percentage
Severe political events such as in the summer of 2021	%1.4
Increase/doubling of internet usage during the COVID-19 pandemic	%2.4
Over-openness	%12.6
Displaying images in indecent dress	%4.4
Masculinity	%9.5
Delinquency	%15.9
Poor understanding of the nature and purpose of social media	%8.4
Lack of knowledge that what he is doing is a crime	%7.6
High unemployment rates and unused time - especially during the COVID-19 pandemic	%7.4
The extravagance of material published by women	%6
Using sexy profile picture	%8
Lack of family supervision of youth	%16.4

### 3. Cyberstalking

Digital stalking or cyberstalking is defined as the repeated use of electronic communications using emails and text messages. It may include abusive and nonabusive acts together; however, they impact the victim's sense of safety and cause them distress, fear, and anxiety. Acts of cyberstalking may include:

· Sending abusive or threatening emails and texts or instant messages.

· Posting offensive comments about victims online.

· Sharing intimate photos or videos of the victim online or via mobile.

The results of the survey showed that about (25.7 percent) have been subjected to comments or harassment (mocking or contempt) at least once, just because they are women.

Figure 5: Exposure to cyber harassment and stalking
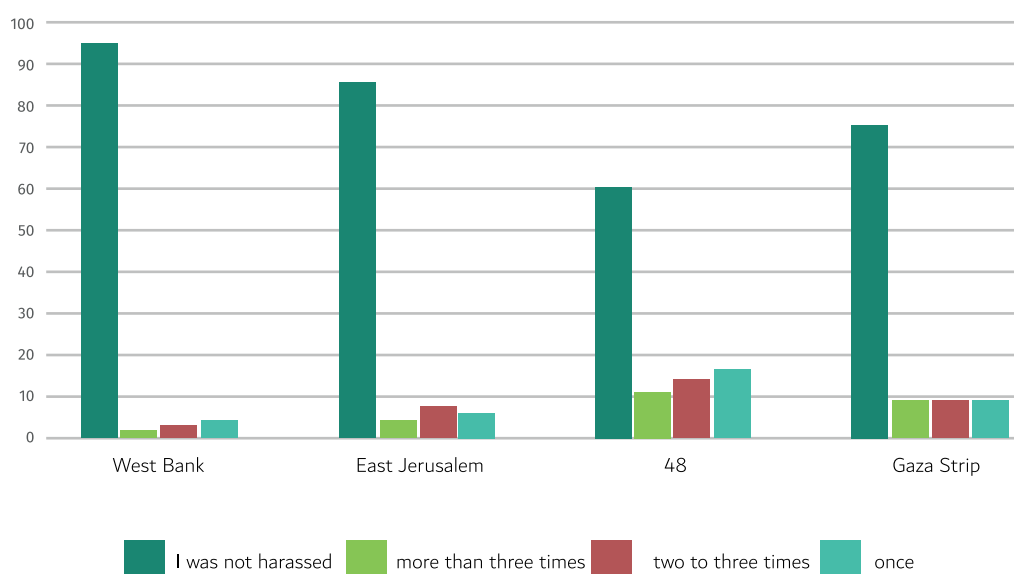
Through the prism of geographical variation analysis, it was found that the Palestinian female participants from Israel are the most vulnerable to gender-based offensive and derogatory comments or harassment, with some 40.4 percent. Female participants from the Gaza Strip came second with 26 percent. Some 16.3 of the participants indicated so, and around 6.9 percent of those from the West Bank indicated that they were subject to gender-based offensive or derogatory comments or harassment online. Thus, female participants from the West Bank can be considered the least exposed to comments or harassment on the violent network. These data do not negate or contradict the bleak picture presented by the focus group participants from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem, who focused on copying the traditions and patriarchal control structures from the real world to cyberspace. This reaction puts them under societal and family control, forcing them to behave in keeping with the social bounds of proper and acceptable behavior. It is also reflected

in the words of Latifa from Gaza, "Many women in the digital space, which is supposed to be free and safe, find themselves alone when they are subjected to cyberattacks and campaigns of defamation and incitement. This is enough to create an atmosphere of intimidation and deterrence for other women." This notion resonates with alQaws representatives' indication of being left alone by allies and partners in the face of many gender-based attacks.

Participants were also asked about the number of times they faced online offensive comments or harassment because they were women. The majority (75.3%) responded that they did not experience this type of harassment, and around 6.9 percent answered that they had been subject to more than three times of this form of harassment.

In the same vein, when respondents were asked about the identity of the harasser or the suspect, roughly 40 percent indicated that they had received messages from someone they did not know. This piece of information is very important and can easily be explained by the fact abusers barricade behind IT screens through the means of fake accounts.

Besides, 17.2 percent of respondents highlighted that they knew the harasser on and via social media; and 38.3 percent indicated that they knew the abusers personally (e.g., work colleagues or relatives).

Figure 6: The identity of the sender of inappropriate content
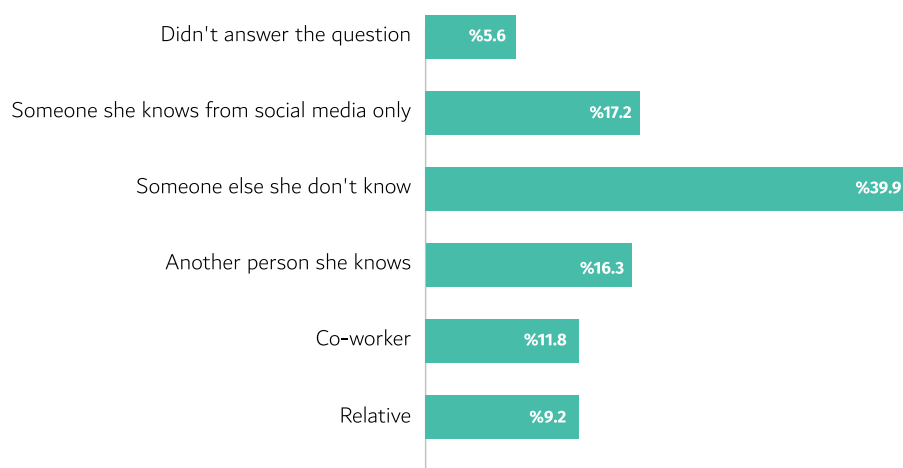
4. Nonconsensual Pornography Dissemination

Nonconsensual pornography, also known as cybersex or revenge porn, refers online distribution of images or videos of sexually explicit content without the consent of the victim that appears in the distributed content. The perpetrator is often an ex-partner who obtains images or videos during a prior relationship. However, perpetrators are not necessarily partners or ex-partners, and the motive is not always revenge. Images can also be obtained by hacking into the victim's or current/former intimate partner's computer, social media accounts or phone. Motives for committing this actus reus also vary. For example, in addition to defaming the victim and tarnishing their name, the end may be to expel them from their workplace. In recent years, details of many nonconsensual pornography crimes have been brought to light. Research indicates that about 90 percent of victims of these crimes are women.[34] Research also indicates that the number of this type of crime is on the rise and that the number of websites geared to spread revenge porn is also taking an upward curve. The users of these spaces publish pornographic content accompanied by the victims' data, including but not limited to their emails, social media usernames, and home and work addresses. In the Palestinian context, there is not enough data on this matter, although CSOs that participated in this research clearly stated that part of the cases and complaints they receive fall within the scope of revenge porn.

The goals of committing this type of crime may also vary. For example, in addition to defaming the victim and tarnishing her name, the goal may be to expel her from her workplace. In recent years, details of many crimes of publishing pornographic content without the consent of one of the parties have been published, and research indicates that about (90 percent) of the victims of these crimes are women. Research also indicates that the number of this type of crime is increasing and that the number of websites specialized in spreading revenge porn is also increasing, as its users publish pornographic content accompanied by the victims' data, their emails, the names of their accounts on social networking sites, and the addresses of their homes and workplaces on for example. In the Palestinian context, there is not enough data on this matter, although the CSOs that participated in this research clearly stated that part of the cases and complaints they receive fall within the crime of "revenge porn."

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34 "Cyberviolence Against Women and Girls," Masaar - Technology and Law Community, August 15 2022. https://masaar.net/en/cyberviolence-against-women-and-girls/

Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Although the study results show that 2.4 percent of female participants blame the increase in internet use during the COVID-19 pandemic for the rise in online violence, 7.4 percent attribute the increase in unemployment rates during the pandemic to worsening gender-based violence.

Focus group participants agree that online gender-based violence has increased in 2020 and beyond, attributing this upward curve to three main reasons:

I.   The length and intensity of time spent in the digital space, particularly as jobs and education became virtual.

II. The lack of necessary skills to protect user privacy, despite the sharp surge in the use of various digital platforms.

III. The transformation of digital space and social media platforms into a key breathing space for violence victims, especially women and the LGBTQ community, to raise their voices and seek help. This development made these groups more vulnerable to online violence. On this note, alQaws highlights the impact of the return of many LGBTQ community members to their homes and families with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this status quo, social media and digital space have become the only breathing space for communication with the outside world. Consequently, the presence in the digital space has grown more pervasive. On this wave of change, alQaws representatives reflect, "On the one hand, violent praxes have increased, and on the other, digital communication platforms evolved into a primary means for reaching out to competent authorities and seeking help."

In this context, Raneen, from the Palestinian citizens of Israel focus group, relates:

Some of my close friends had no choice but to move back in with their abusive parents. And as the COVID-19 epidemic has progressed, so has the severity of violence directed against women. It also lent some darkness for culprits to hide, given that people's activity on the ground lessened—instead, people surfed and navigated social media. I watched videos of girls held during the pandemic, sharing what they were subject to.

Against this rapid development and surge in the use of digital space during the first year of the pandemic and the ensuing challenges and violence, many organizations and women's rights organizations have branched out into new digital communication mechanisms. The live chat service was one of these mechanisms that helped women

reach out by writing, given that they could not speak while locked in the same space with their abusers. These organizations also monitor complaints or calls for help related to gender-based violence in the digital space, either by direct reporting, as is the case on the 7or platform, following up on the content in circulation in cyberspace, or confronting discourse with discourse through targeted awareness campaigns, such as those spearheaded by alQaws and Assiwar. If any, this case reflects how the digital space has become a public avenue in which content is circulated. On the other hand, it reflects that it is a space that provides hands-on mechanisms for tracking such content and reaching out to online gender-based violence victims.

The transformation into the digital space during the COVID-19 pandemic affected all sections of Palestinian society, given that they neither had the necessary skills nor were prepared to protect themselves in the new space.

On this note, Amena, from Haifa, reflects:

> The COVID-19 pandemic has turned many people who did not use the internet into using the internet. I expect this new segment to include people who do not have the skills to use the internet or how to protect themselves while navigating websites. In addition to women being the group with the least internet access, women are also the most exposed to violence. It is also likely that violence has increased due to COVID-19, especially against women. In my opinion, those who are violent offline would also bring up their violence on the network. And with the screen as a cover, they do not beautify their truth and let their violent character loose.

Moreover, the participants indicated that the COVID-19 period and the transition to work and learning in the digital space revealed another facet of gender-based violence against working women, especially female teachers. According to Nisreen, from the West Bank focus group, the use of Zoom and the camera has turned into a mechanism for breaching and violating the privacy of female teachers, and it has become easy to take pictures of them and circulate them without their knowledge or permission.

In reference to reproductive and sexual health during the pandemic, a report by the United Nations[35] on the gendered impacts of the pandemic in Palestine indicates that Palestinian women—especially from the West Bank and Gaza Strip—could not access sexual and reproductive health services due to the lockdown measures. On a similar note, the Muntada published several simplified articles on the issue on its website to raise gender awareness in Palestinian society through a creative and

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35 UN Women, COVID-19: *Gendered Impacts of the Pandemic in Palestine and Implications for Policy and Programming*, (Palestine Country Office: UN Women, 2020). https://palestine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Palestine/Attachments/Publications/2020/4/COVID%20 19%20-%20UN%20Women%20Rapid%20Gender%20Analysis.pdf

constructive educational prism based on partnership and gender equality, starting from family through school to society at large. Wafi Blal highlights that most help calls the Muntada receives via the support chat are addressed from an educational perspective, emphasizing the importance of consulting a specialist doctor, given that the bulk of the calls is about physical conditions. While the Muntada does not have data on online gender-based violence, it has an authentic experience with the attacks and violent actions that raged against it with each digital campaign it spearheaded. Blal also notes that the attacks come from all over the world, not just Palestine.

Section 2: Impacts and Implications of Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space

1. Insecurity: Complications of Psychological Pressures and Stress

The survey results show that most respondents (89.4 percent) use their real names on social media platforms. However, more than half of the participants (about 55.8 percent) said they do not use their personal photos as identification images on social media. As the survey results stand, about half of respondents using social media (50.2 percent) attributed their choice to their sense of insecurity, while about 22.4 percent of them said that they do not want anyone to identify them (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Respondents' reasons for not using personal photos as profile pictures online

Legend:
- I don't feel safe
- I don't want anyone to know me
- I don't have an answer

%50.2 — %22.4 — %27.4
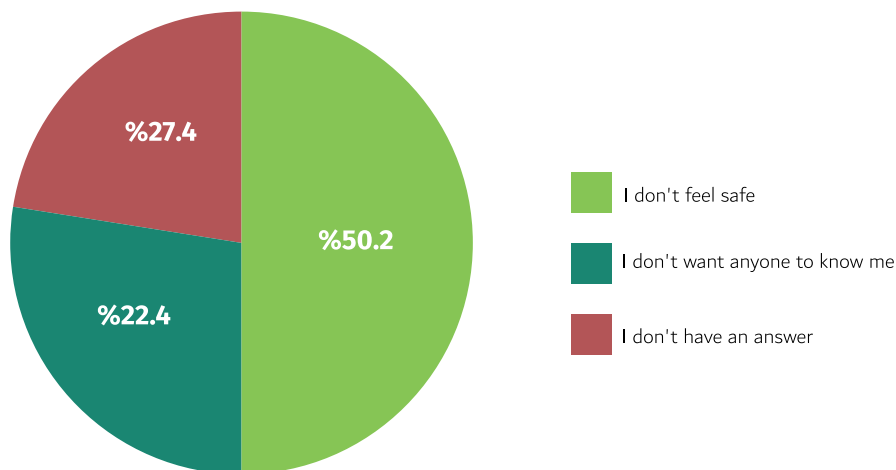
Tapping into the survey results, this sense of insecurity among female users, which turns them from sharing personal images on social media, may be explained by the frequent attempts to hack their personal accounts—this is the opinion of some 28 percent of respondents—or due other attempts to leak their personal photos (about 17 percent).

Respondents and interviewed gender-based violence prevention experts all believe the victim's experience of digital insecurity turns into a general state of mood, haunts them, and undermines their psychological health. The lack of insecurity harms the mental health of women seeking aid and support and pushes them to develop a sense of loss of control over their lives and a lack of trust in everyone around them. According to Linda Khawaled, from WAV:

> This experience shapes their lives… They never put down their smartphones, checking their emails, Facebook, and Instagram… They are always anxious, confused, and scared because they have no idea what the future holds for them and when. You can't dictate who must or must not see it once it's been out.

According to the survey results, almost half of the participants believe they are being observed on social media, although to varying degrees. This form of surveillance manifests itself in the form of societal control exercised by those in one's innermost social circles, starting with parents and extending to one's extended family and the larger community. This dynamism feeds and reinforces victims' insecurities.

On this note, Yara from the West Bank focus group reflects:

> In our community, even with the rise of social media, women still face significant barriers to speaking freely in their homes with their families. The same applies to their attempts to write a post about their feelings or ideas. They would be questioned by those closest to them: "Why doing this?" "Are you trying to embarrass and shame us?" "Why are you putting these up on social media?" or "Why would you put your personal thoughts and feelings out there for the world to see?" Against this line of question marks, social media cannot be seen as a space where women can speak up.

On the other hand, the participants were asked to what extent they support parental control of social media use. About 75 percent answered that they support this form of control, though their support varied: some said they support it in rare situations, some occasionally, and some always. This divide reflects their sense of fear and violation of their freedom in the digital space, as well as their recourse to replicating the same censorship and control mechanisms utilized offline in the digital space. Yara's words reflect this uncertain position:

Given the widespread attempts to exploit and catfish women on social media, parental supervision can be justified as a form of protection in some cases. But if the woman is a self-aware adult who knows how to take charge of her life, she may find this supervision suffocating; in this scenario, it would be more stifling and restrictive than protective.

2. Online Gender-Based Violence and Offline Complications: Serious Threat to Women's Lives

Arguably, gender-based discrimination that leads to offline violence is often reproduced and sometimes given a greater scale and semantics in the digital space. It is often difficult to separate the consequences of actions initiated in digital environments from offline realities. Lamia Naamnih, from Assiwar, refers to this overlap:

> Most cases nowadays do not fall solely within the umbrella of online gender-based violence. They have a hybrid slant, which means that the issue emerges in the digital domain but does not stay there; it creeps into real life. I mean, the women that reach out to us are aware that their abusers may track them down and show up at their homes.

These notions go in line with the inputs of the interviewed feminist organizations which imply that online gender-based violence transcends geography and time. WAV's Linda Khawaled notes that in many of the cases they receive, the criminal or blackmailer is based abroad, making prosecution costly, complicated, and complex.[36] This extra dimension makes online gender-based violence more difficult to prevent and mitigate its impact. In Linda's words:

> When you face violence on the street or are attacked by a neighbor, a colleague, or a shopkeeper, you know the person. Therein lies the rub with online gender-based violence; the issue extends beyond pseudonyms to fake photographs, among others. There is one to report...On the internet, situations unfold in the public eye on the internet—what a brazen breach of privacy!

This statement is consistent with survey findings, which show that 40 percent of respondents do not know who their internet harassers are.

In this regard, Lamia Naamnih, from Assiwar, highlights that online gender-based violence increases access to the female victim's circles, and she feels a constant threat that may haunt her for years.

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36 One case was mentioned as an example of a legal prosecution outside the country, specifically Britain, which cost the woman a lot of money. Source: Personal interview with Women Against Violence Association.

> There is no separation. When you know your assailant. He's someone you're familiar with; he has personal footage of you two on tape and is using it to blackmail you. You should know right from the bat that this video won't be deleted. Second, he may keep quiet for a decade, then show up on your wedding day with the film and threaten you. It's easy for the blackmailer to get the video to the girl's family and right to her doorstep, so she never feels safe.

Even in cases where the immediate family understands and supports their daughter if exposed to cyber violence or blackmail, the threat remains from the extended family, such as cousins, uncles, and relatives. These social dimensions keep women's and girls' lives at stake. At that point, women need to disappear or resort to safe homes, shelters, or protection centers, according to the statements of participants from CSOs.

Real-world implications of online gender-based violence take several forms—including the social exclusion of victims, dropout from school or university, submission to blackmail, mental health deterioration, severance of ties with family and friends, suicide, and femicide. Sharing a personal experience, Najwan, from the Gaza focus group, shines a light on real-world complications of online gender-based violence:

> I began my career with a critical, bold program, but it was cut short when influential figures launched a concerted online campaign to discredit me. Threats were transferred from the internet to the real world. I had a case filed against the government, but I dropped it for the safety of my children and husband.

3. Systematic Silencing and Normalization of Violence and Self-Censorship

While explicit forms of violence on social media include threats, insults, and some forms of harassment, there is another form of implicit violence that is just as destructive. This shadow of violence against women comes wrapped in "jokes," and some women find themselves tolerating or unintentionally complicit in it, pushed by the fear of being labeled with excessive sensitivity and overreaction. Many participants regarded this as a social inaction when such content is normally brought up and becomes material for interaction.

The survey results showed that the highest percentage of female participants, about 33.2 percent, react indifferently to violent content and block the perpetrator's account if they receive inappropriate content on social media. This indifference, as described by a participant from Gaza, is caused by the inability to prevent online gender-based violence as it rapidly escalates and

becomes viral. She also emphasized the gendered nature of this violence against women in a society characterized by the suppression of women. For this reason, Nariman, from Gaza, would rather avoid fighting a battle she knows she can't win, as she puts it. Nariman's words reflect the adoption of self-censorship, which deepens women's silence in the digital space.:

> Every time I sit down to write a post, I ask myself a million questions, given the potential defamation, personal attacks, insults, and foul language on social media. No matter how open a person is, it is often difficult to accept and grasp such reactions, especially because we live in an eastern society that throws the burden on us, women.

In light of the proceeding, online gender-based violence promotes self-censorship and systematic and conscious silencing, and hence normalization of online gender-based violence. Samah, from Gaza, analogizes this dynamic to "an invisible policeman that crawls beneath our skins and tells us to do this, do not do that."

Linda Khawaled, from WAV, adds another aspect to the understanding of this indifference, especially in light of the fact that 91 percent of the respondents have dropped the complaints with the police concerning gender-based violence. Female complainants prefer not to go to the police more often than not, especially in light of the Israeli police's complicity with criminal organizations in Israel, where the data indicates that 56 percent of Palestinian women from Israel who died were killed with firearms. The data also indicates that 83 percent[37] of victims of violence, crimes of assault and sexual harassment avoid going to file an official complaint with the Israeli police in Israel because they do not trust the police due to the delay in handling complaints and the lack of exhaustion of criminal procedures against the perpetrators.

Interestingly, the survey results shed light on the tendencies to seek aid and help in the study population; 22.4 percent of respondents would delete the abuser and talk to a family member. About 11.1 percent prefer to talk to a friend. Around 10.7 percent turn to the police, and only 9.9 percent prefer to turn to women's rights organizations and violence victim's helplines. These figures are consistent with a notion made by Aohaila Shomar, director of Sawa Foundation, that many of the cases turn at a late stage to Sawa. In other words, the blackmail would be in advanced stages and after the damage has occurred. Table 5 shows the respondents' answers to a question about their reaction if they were exposed to inappropriate content on social media.

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37 "At-taḥrush al-jinsy fy al-mujtama' al-'araby: Jrā'im fy ṭay al-kitmān [Sexual harrasment in the Arab society: Crimes under wraps,] *48 Arab*, October 15 2020. https://shortest.link/8RBC

Table 4: Reaction when exposed to inappropriate material in the digital space

Response	Number	%
I would delete the sender of the inappropriate content and talk to a family member.	338	22.4
I would delete the sender and talk to a friend.	168	11.1
I would delete the sender and talk to his brothers and family members to hold him accountable.	130	8.6
would delete the sender with indifference.	501	33.2
I would delete the sender and turn to one of the helplines for the victims of abuse or a women's association.	150	9.9
I would delete the sender and report the incident to the police, and file a complaint against him.	161	10.7
I would deactivate my account.	60	4.0

According to the results, 4 percent of respondents opted to deactivate their personal accounts on social media in response to online gender-based violence. This choice, in fact, highlights the extent of self-censorship among victims.

In this regard, Dima, from the West Bank focus group, says:

> What we see on social media are only matters of public opinion, but what happens behind closed doors and never makes it to social media is far more. In my opinion, social media is a double-edged sword. First, it shined a light on the injustice and assaults women suffer and some stories that could have been covered up. Second, people have started using social media to put undue pressure on women, such as through cyber harassment and cyber blackmail, which can drive some young women to suicide and give some parents justification to murder their daughters. This includes the issues that arise from the inappropriate use of images of young women. Indeed, not only is society unsafe but so too is social media for both young women and married women.

On a positive note, Afifa, from the West Bank focus group, reflects:

> In recent years, women have become more daring to speak up and express their disapproval. At the very least, we need to work together to find solutions. In what ways can we proceed? Whom do we lodge our grievances with in order to get these wrongs rectified? The backing of our loved ones, the people we associate with, and our communities is also an important factor: Are they supportive? How do they see these matters? Do they perceive them from a misogynistic perspective? Because if you live in a masculine society, it will

overrule your right to be on these platforms in exchange for sparing you from violence and assault. Instead of helping you learn how to face and get rid of this violence. This is how I see it. Girls' efforts to communicate their disapproval of certain practices and attitudes have increased in recent years. They don't always get what they want, and it's not always easy for them to get. I see a little wave of change that is still surrounded by too many forces that impact this transformation, but it is growing.

4. Restriction on Freedoms of Expression and Opinion

In political contexts riven by conflict and geographical fragmentation, like the Palestinian situation under the Israeli occupation, digital technology has provided a new means and space for advocating, defending, and exercising human rights. Beyond that, it provides tools to influence all rights, civil, political, cultural, economic, and social. Still and all, it is used to suppress, limit and violate rights through online surveillance and harassment, which in turn makes the digital space unequal and discriminatory and affects the right to the freedom of expression and speech.

In addition to gender-based violations, Palestinian female human rights defenders, activists, and journalists are subject to disruptions and violations because of their professional activities in an attempt to double the severity of the violation. We cannot ignore the digital violations that target Palestinian content, especially when it comes to Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people. These infringements come to follow the algorithms of social media platforms or Israeli reports to these firms that are biased to the Israeli side.

A prominent example of these practices is the arrest of journalist and professor at Birzeit University Dr. Wadad Barghouthi in 2019. At that time, the occupation authorities filed an indictment against Barghouti that included an item of "incitement on social media,"[38] claiming that she published posts on Facebook that supported hostile activities and organizations. The Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association describes this charge as a manifestation of the occupation approach that is aimed at suppressing and repressing freedoms of opinion and expression that are guaranteed under international conventions and agreements.[39]

Furthermore, journalists or activists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may be exposed to a campaign of digital incitement practiced by various influential parties if they do not agree with the opinions of those in power. A prominent example is the theft of the mobiles of Palestinian female journalists and activists at a demonstration

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38 "Tamdīd i'tiqāl al-asīra Wadad Barghouthi l-'usbū'yīn wa-niyābit al-iḥtilal ttahimuha b-taḥrīd [Widad Barghouthy [Detention of Widad al-Barghouthy to extend two weeks, and the occupation's prosecution files charges against her for incitement.] Asra Media Office, September 11 2019. https://shortest.link/8sIM

39 Addameer, *Arrests on Charges of "Incitement".*

in Ramallah in June 2021 against the killing of late Palestinian activist Nizar Banat at the hands of the PA security services. On that day, parties affiliated with the PA security services deliberately used means of violent repression and the use of social and family blackmail by stealing the phones of protesters, especially females and female journalists, leaking and publishing pictures that affected their privacy on social media, inciting against them, and harassing them physically and verbally.

Before moving on to the recommendations to reduce online gender-based violence, some points should be made to understand the data that we noticed while writing this research. The results of the survey and interviews show a composite picture: The survey shows that the West Bank is the least vulnerable to online violence, while the Palstinians in Israel are the most vulnerable to violence and blackmail. These results can be explained by openness and the use of digital space more frequently. In addition, and as mentioned previously, the excessive caution in the West Bank—including not sharing profile pictures on social media platforms and constantly reviewing privacy settings or even supporting parental control as a form of protection. Besides, the chronic power outages in the Gaza Strip may affect access to the internet and, thus, less presence in the digital space and less exposure to online gender-based violence. However, it is possible to read the results as describing the state of subjugation of women, the restriction of their visibility in the public space, and the lack of effort to protect women by companies, legislation, and the law enforcement authorities represented by the police and societal oversight. Or, for example, tolerating online gender-based violence; Or simply not knowing how to act in the event of exposure, which is reflected in delayed seeking for help and the fear of stigmatizing women or questioning their honor, as mentioned by one of the participants from Gaza.

In order to identify the phenomenon of online gender-based violence in the Palestinian context and ways to confront it, it is also important to understand gender-based violence in the digital space through power structures, patriarchy, and the dominance of traditions and societal norms—not only as a reflection of figures and percentages. In this context, the focus groups constituted an important source for presenting the contradictions and structures in Palestinian society.

This research shines a light on the trap Palestinian women are caught in with everything related to online gender-based violence. On the one hand, being in the digital space is a legitimate right and a public space that is supposed to be free, safe, and equal for all. On the other hand, the mechanisms of control and oppression against women in the real world are imported into the digital space. Experts on women's activism in Palestine and members of women's organizations have come to a consensus on the necessity of constantly raising awareness about digital security

and stressing the values of equality, freedom, and the right to freedom of expression, while also protecting privacy, in order to overcome this snare.

In any event, the findings of this study pave the way for future studies that will help us better understand the dynamics of gender-based violence in the digital space, while the rise of this phenomenon parallels the development and expansion of technology into our daily life.

Recommendations for Prevention of Gender-Based Violence against Palestinian Women in the Digital Space

The survey results show that the prevention and mitigation of gender-based violence in the digital space require more concerted efforts on the civil society side to raise awareness, according to 30.1 percent of respondents, followed directly by enhanced parental role in relation to awareness raising and guidance, according to 29.1 percent of respondents. Third comes the promotion of legislation and legal procedures, according to 20.5 percent. A portion of 5.8 percent of respondents chose the withdrawal of women from social media as a solution to reduce online gender-based violence, which can be seen as an extension of the exclusion of women from the public sphere (see Table 7).

Table 5: online gender-based violence prevention steps

Response	Number	%
The parental role should be enhanced in terms of education and guidance.	490	29.1
The legislation and legal procedures should be reinforced.	344	20.5
Violence should be directed at the perpetrators.	159	9.5
Women should withdraw from cyberspace and social media.	98	5.8
CSOs should increase and concert their effort to raise the awareness of youth through specialized workshops.	506	30.1
Other solutions	85	5.1

The survey's findings on the value of education, the significance of parents' roles, and the need to enhance laws and legal procedures overlap with those of the focus groups and individual interviews with members of women's organizations. The

following are some of the other recommendations that were explored by the focus groups:

1. Awareness Raising

1.1. Triangle of Awareness: Schools, Parents, and Women

The participants in the research indicate the need to build—what can be called—an awareness triangle that comprises schools (staff and students), parents, and women. Creating educational workshops and strategies that showcase the value side of technology beyond its use as a means of communication is essential for the growth of this network. The different stakeholders of this triangle should cooperate and work in parallel.

Maya, from Nazareth, says:

> As a teacher, I think it is important to raise awareness by addressing the topics of bullying, cyber violence, and harassment. There is also a need to emphasize values. It is important to try to change each from their position and mission. If someone is subjected to specific violence and harassment, it is beneficial that we raise awareness and try to be supportive… I mean, if I want to think positively, we should try to help, guide, and do awareness seminars about digital security and privacy and how to protect ourselves online.

Lamia Naamnih, director of Assiwar, seconded that parents provide a good example for their children:

> There needs to be a set of values to adhere to and follow. When you instill a clear value in your son, your son or daughter acquires it. But if you always have double standards and use one standard for a million things, even our children will mock you. Children nowadays are intellectual powerhouses, but if they lack moral principles, they can easily fall into the depths of despair.

Rola, from the West Bank focus group, stresses the role of schools in raising generations and strengthening the mother-daughter relationship:

> The first thing I want to say is that we should raise awareness in schools. We explain to the students that there are limits and that without them, we will have problems. The second thing is that the relationship between the girl and her mother must be stronger. For example, if someone blackmails her on the internet, she must go tell her mother, and her mother will help her. If the girl feels that the mother is not going to help, she may turn to different and wrong ways to protect herself. She may turn to bad friends or yield to the blackmailer. But if the mother listens to her daughter, the problem can be solved in a simpler way.

1.2. Awareness Campaigns for Women About online violence and Combating Mechanisms

All the organizations that participated in this research agreed that women should be more careful and not give their blind trust to anyone they interact with, especially in the digital space. Tapping into WAV's experience, Linda Khawaled says when we go to the police:[40] "Do you know what the police tell us? They tell us to educate women that they should not let themselves be dragged into such situations. "It has spread, it has spread, so what should we do?" they add." Aohaila Shomar, director of the Sawa Foundation, who also works to provide awareness workshops for women, stresses the need to increase awareness raising workshops and training courses on digital safety, internet safety, online gender-based violence, and ways to avoid and combat it.

> My advice is that we think about what we write. Preserving privacy is a very important thing. We should not disclose personal information about ourselves and our psychological state because it can be used against us in a bad way, socially and politically.

1.3. Constant Presence in the Digital Space: Digital Awareness Campaigns in the Digital Space

Participants also highlighted the need to maintain a consistent online presence in addition to one's physical presence in the public sphere. Therefore, digital awareness campaigns on online gender-based violence must be geared up and continued while sharing information about organizations or entities women can turn to receive support, counseling, and court accompaniment. Also, it is important to promote simplified digital awareness campaigns to explain the fundamentals of privacy and how to deal with the digital space in Arabic, targeting women of different ages, in addition to providing direct content that promotes gender equality. Societal pluralism must also be taken into account and aligned with the group and region to which it is directed.

Amna, from the Palestinian citizens of Israel focus group, says: "Awareness campaigns must be built in a targeted manner... because each specific region (e.g., Negev, the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and northern regions) has its own characteristics."

The representatives of the alQaws stress the important role of awareness campaigns on social media platforms, as they put it: "There is a significant trait shared by the venues through which gender-based violence is committed against us and through which we are attacked: they allow us to reach a wider audience." This notion is

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40 The Israeli police in this case.

reflected in the number of participants in the digital awareness campaigns, which reached 40,000 participants.

2. Promotion of Taking Actions before the Police

All interviewed CSOs and many focus group participants agree on the importance of the role of the police and the implementation of deterrent provisions to counter online gender-based violence. Despite the lack of trust in the police institution, as evidenced by interviews with CSOs and focus groups, they see the police as the body authorized to prosecute perpetrators. Maya, from the Palestinian citizens of Israel focus group, says that she does not trust the Israeli police. The lack of trust between the Palestinian citizens of Israeland the Israeli police is a central dilemma that needs further study, yet it goes beyond the bounds of this research. However, the lack of trust is reflected in the limited attempts to reach out to the police institution and its digital security authority. Palestinian women in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip share similar reactions to the police's handling of online gender-based violence and harassment: disillusionment and a lack of faith in the police as an organization. Afifa says in this regard:

> The cybercrime unit in any place is supposed to have an active role, but here you're going to lodge the complaint once, twice, three or four times. What is more? They keep telling you to lodge complaints, yet to no avail. I'm afraid that at certain stages, they will use this against us.

Afifa's statements indicate that there is a real fear that the details of complaints submitted by women to the cybercrime unit will be used against these women later, especially if they are political, social, or human rights activists.

Moreover, Israa, from the West Bank focus group, brings up the role of law and the power of tribal law in the West Bank and does not see it as a deterrent. It stresses the need to resort to the law and enforcement of deterrent punishments to reduce online gender-based violence. According to her statement:

> It is possible that the tribal law solves the problem, but it will all go to a cup of coffee or a small amount of money, and they forget the issue, but where is the solution? We stand in need of solutions; if we have a punishment or a law that prevents this adverse phenomenon, it may end or be reduced.

Despite the lack of confidence in the police institution, Lamia Naamnih from Assiwar notes that she notices more seriousness in dealing with cases of gender-based violence when women's organizations provide legal accompaniment to the victim. Therefore, it is important to strengthen work in exchange for the police by strengthening and expanding the legal accompaniment teams for women in

women's organizations that deal with combating gender-based violence, including online gender-based violence.

3. Immediate Reach out for Help and Support as Soon as Exposed to Cyber Blackmail

A quick reach out for assistance and support from effective organizations will solve the problem, even if in partial, through psychological and legal accompaniment. In addition, some CSOs have direct relations with social media platforms and can request the removal of offensive content. For example, the Sawa Foundation, which operates in the West Bank, is a trusted partner of Meta. Therefore, the faster the call for help, the more effective the result. However, WAV says that it does not resort to using this mechanism first because these files cannot be removed completely. In many cases, the perpetrators save and store these files on their computers or a USB, and Meta cannot or the police completely remove them. Second, the removal and deletion of these files may hinder the judicial process in prosecuting the perpetrators. However, in certain cases, this mechanism is necessary due to the effects and dangers the crime carries on women's lives. In this regard, Assiwar indicates that it handles some cases before they resort to the judiciary by adopting the method of exorbitant consequences that could cost the offender in the event of going to court in order to deter the blackmailer from practicing sexual or economic blackmail. For example, Lamia Naamnih, director of Assiwar, says:

> If the blackmailer is a university student, for example, the institution's lawyer turns to him, and when he knows that the price is lodging a file with the police, which could make him lose his education and future job prospects, this proves to be a deterrent in some cases.

4. Creating Safe Spaces and Sisterhood Solidarity

Safe and supportive spaces for women should be created and adapted to community building and the region. Hanan, from the Negev, says:

> Negev society is a traditional society. For example, many women who are subjected to violence may not even know that they have been subjected to gender-based violence because, in the culture around them, there is no discussion of this term. Or if she knew that she was subjected to excessive gender-based violence, in some cases, she would be afraid and could not reveal the matter to her family, and if she revealed it to her family, the matter might be covered up, or she may be held responsible for what happened. For a conservative society, I might suggest that matters dealt with through the family can help the existing social structures by referring the matter to the sheiks.

On the other hand, Amina, from the West Bank, points out the need to create alternative and supportive safe spaces to be incubators that intervene in the right way according to the situation.

> Only one girl had her experience of harassment in a women's group, after which the experiences of girls poured in to share their experiences in this space, and they launched moral support and practical steps to take action. I think if it wasn't for this kind of space that we're participating in that was really safe, it wouldn't have been a confrontation of this violence.

5. Promotion of Digital Literacy and Serious Consideration of Privacy Settings

The results showed that the largest percentage of participants (86.8 percent) check privacy settings on social networking platforms, and this is a very good percentage and reflects the level of awareness of the importance of privacy on social networking sites. By analyzing the variance between geographical regions, we find that participants from the West Bank regions examine privacy more than other regions, with a percentage of about (91.1 percent), and perhaps this explains the results that show that they are the least exposed to attempts to leak photos and hack their accounts. While we find that the Palestinian female participants from Israel are the least concerned with privacy on social media platforms, with a percentage of (82.4 percent). About (38 percent) of the participants from Israel stated that they had previously been exposed to the hacking of their accounts on social media platforms for one time or more, and about (28.4 percent) had been exposed to attempts to leak photos on social media platforms for one time or more.

These data reflect the strong relationship between electronic knowledge or the application of privacy settings and the preservation of digital security in reducing the privacy violation of women in the digital space, which would combat online gender-based violence or at least reduce its size.

6. Enhancing the role of companies in combating online gender-based violence

The digital world still offers spaces for women, and therefore, protecting their rights and safety on these platforms is required and necessary to make the digital space safer, fairer and more equal. Four recommendations emerged from the research regarding the role of communication companies in combating digital gender violence:

6.1. Activating algorithms or methods to block offensive content to women, taking into account the freedom of expression: Afifa from the West Bank say that companies bear a great responsibility for blocking offensive content to which women are exposed, and they are able to do so - and the evidence is the ease of blocking Palestinian content. Research participants suggest lobbying and advocating for

companies to change their policies regarding the presence of violent and offensive content directed against women. However, it does not overlook the lurking price of not discussing and drawing the line between hate speech and gender-based violence on the one hand, and freedom of expression, on the other hand.

6.2. Cooperation with the local police: Active feminist organizations that legally accompany cases of online gender-based violence suggest that social media companies facilitate their cooperation with the police in cases of online gender-based violence, especially in cases that come from outside the country and the local police do not have effective and effective authority over the perpetrator in space. Digital. And the development of law enforcement mechanisms in cases of transnational gender-based online violence.

> When there is something that is proven to be in great doubt, the investigation process must be facilitated, and the second concern is that if there are cases between countries, there must be a link between the law enforcement authorities between the different countries... I mean, if there is a complaint from a woman in the country and the police go to Facebook, and Facebook takes responsibility and goes to the police in Morocco, For example... Since it is a communication network, it must be a communication network for the enforcement of justice.

6.3. Emphasis on the specificity of the Arabic dialects: in the case of this research, the Palestinian dialect, employing specialists in the Palestinian dialect and culture, would explore offensive gender content in the digital space.

6.4. The need to clarify the laws and the language of Meta itself and make it equally effective: Companies are trying to adopt a single general policy in force for the Middle East and North Africa region without taking into account the specificity of countries. For example, Ahilah Shomer, director of the Sawa Foundation, notes the language that Meta uses to explain its policies, which is unclear; although the terms and definitions are translated correctly - but it is not understood and is unclear.

7. The Need to Monitor and Document Gender Violations in the Digital Space

Although there is a lot of data on sexual and physical violence, there is scarcity in monitoring and sorting data according to form of violence, and therefore there is a lack of data related to online gender-based violence. As the exact information and figures vary between the institutions that were interviewed, especially since they operate extensively on more than one axis. Intensifying efforts to monitor online gender-based violence enable us to understand, study and track this phenomenon, which is necessary to understand ways to reduce it. Therefore, the work of CSOs and the "7ur" platform, which monitors digital violations, including gender-based

violence, is very important and must be supported in order to build a database on which to base any proposal to social media companies and to legislative authorities in case of advocacy to legalize online gender-based violence and when studying the phenomenon.

Helpful contact details for organizations that offer assistance to victims and survivors of gender-based and sexual violence:

West Bank:

- Sawa, https://sawa.ps/
- Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, https://www.wclac.org/
- The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development, https://pwwsd.org/ar
- Psycho-Social Counseling Center for Women, https://www.psccw.org/ar/

Gaza Strip:

- Women's Affairs Center – Gaza, https://new.wac.ps
- Women Affairs Technical Committee, http://watcpal.org/
- Center for Women's Legal Researches and Consulting, http://cwlrc.ps/

Galilee area:

- Assiwar, https://assiwar.com
- WAV, https://wavo.org/ar
- Kayan Organization, http://www.kayanfeminist.org/ar
- alQaws, https://alkhat.org/
- 7or Platform, https://7or.7amleh.org