

Global Study on Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence Online

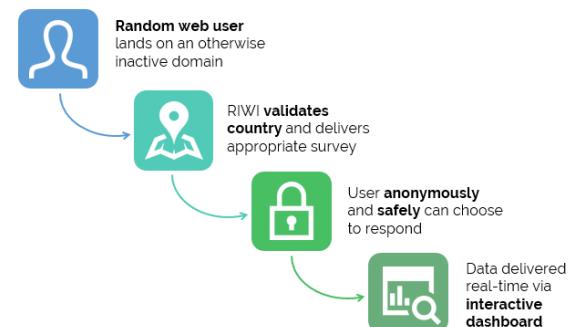
Program Description

The Internet has transformed the world in many positive ways. It has become a key platform for information-sharing, civic mobilization, and human rights advocacy by billions of people around the globe. It has also been used to expand the delivery of essential services to the poor and underserved. However, the Internet's role as a catalyst for freedom of expression and innovation is being undermined by a growing epidemic of online violence, which disproportionately targets women and minority groups, amplifying existing inequalities, harmful social norms, and hatred. While the phenomenon is on the rise, concrete data on its prevalence and impact is scarce. To address this data gap, in 2018 the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI), and RIWI Corp. entered into a unique private-public partnership to conduct a global study on perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated online, i.e., through social media, email, messaging, knowledge-sharing, dating, and other online platforms. To gather this invaluable data, the partners built a Web-based survey with 17 questions about the nature, prevalence, impacts, and responses to GBV online. Using RIWI's global trend-tracking and predictive technology, the survey was administered to over 40,000 Internet users from 15 developing countries across the globe, resulting in the largest and most unique study on the subject of GBV online to date. The countries covered by the study included Bosnia & Herzegovina, Ghana, Indonesia, India, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Nigeria, Nepal, Peru, Serbia, Tunisia, Uganda, Vietnam, and South Africa. The program was implemented within the USAID-funded Human Rights Support Mechanism (HRSRM), under the PROGRESS consortium managed by Freedom House.

What is GBV Online?

The program defined GBV online as the use of the Internet to engage in activities that result in harm or suffering to a person or a group of people online or offline because of their gender.

Using Cutting-Edge Technology to Measure Perceptions of GBV Online



Program Highlights

Online survey translated to **11 languages** and administered in **15 developing countries**

17 questions about the nature, prevalence, impacts, and responses to GBV online

Separate survey module for respondents who indicated they have personally experienced GBV online

40,000 completed surveys

Engagement from over **170,000** respondents

No personally identifiable information gathered, stored, or transferred



Key Findings

- **Prevalence of Online Violence.** Nearly 40% of respondents reported not feeling personally safe from harassment and violence while online. Approximately 30% of respondents have experienced or witnessed online violence or have someone close who has been affected by it. 3% of the respondents admitted having been violent online toward someone else.
- **Prevalence of GBV Online.** Approximately 44% of respondents who have experienced online violence believed they were targeted because of their gender. Among the 15 surveyed countries, India and Uganda had the highest reported rates of GBV online (13% of all respondents), and Kazakhstan had the lowest (6% of all respondents).
- **Perpetrators.** According to respondents who have personally experienced GBV online, complete strangers are most commonly the perpetrators of such acts.
- **Effect of GBV Online.** Over 85% of respondents who have experienced GBV online reported tangible impacts, primarily fear for their own safety (17%) or for the safety of a person close to them (13%); feeling sad, anxious or depressed (13%); and going online much less (13%). The most commonly reported reaction was blocking, muting, or unfriending the abusive user. Approximately 19% of respondents affected by GBV online reported it, primarily to the online service provider (50%), to the police or other authorities (27%), or to a non-governmental organization (23%).
- **Digital Safety Measures.** Approximately 42% of respondents reported not taking any safety precautions online. Respondents who have experienced GBV online were most likely to take safety precautions online, for example by customizing their privacy settings, turning off “share my location” feature, or not sharing personally identifiable information.
- **Online Platforms.** Across all demographics and in 13 out of 15 countries, respondents cited Facebook and similar platforms connecting family and friends as the most common online settings where they have experienced GBV online. The percentages were considerably lower for Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, email, messaging applications, group chats, discussion forums, online dating and knowledge-sharing platforms, and online games, news sources, and blogs.
- **Reducing GBV Online.** Respondents, particularly those who have not experienced GBV online, believed that public awareness campaigns would be among the most effective ways of preventing GBV online. Respondents who have experienced GBV online were relatively equally divided as to what they thought would be most effective in reducing GBV online, with stricter monitoring of online behaviors being slightly more commonly selected. Over 30% of respondents believed that Internet users have the primary responsibility for reducing GBV online, followed by companies (online platforms), governments, schools, and non-governmental organizations.

Program Partners



ABA ROLI is a development organization with a mission to promote justice, economic opportunity, and human dignity through the rule of law. ABA ROLI works with local partners in over 50 countries to build sustainable institutions and prosperous societies. ABA ROLI has worked extensively to improve the global response to GBV, particularly domestic violence and systematic rape used as a tactic of war, since 1996. ABA ROLI's interventions in this area rest on three pillars: prevention, protection, and accountability. ABA ROLI is also a leader in promoting legal reforms aimed at adopting and implementing comprehensive laws and national action plans that adequately respond to GBV. For more information, please contact Paulina (Paula) Rudnicka, Legal Advisor, ABA ROLI, at paulina.rudnicka@americanbar.org.



USAID is the world's premier international development agency and a catalytic actor driving development results. USAID's work advances U.S. national security and economic prosperity and promotes a path to recipient self-reliance and resilience. For more information, please contact Chaitra (Chai) Shenoy, Gender-Based Violence Advisor, USAID, at cshenoy@usaid.gov.



RIWI Corp. is a global survey technology and sentiment analysis firm that gathers citizen opinion data and accelerates engagement initiatives in every country in the world using its patented technology. To date, RIWI has received more than 1.2 billion answers to surveys, digital campaigns, and message-tests in over 75 languages. RIWI's patented technology works by inviting randomized Web users, on any Web-enabled device and in any geo-targeted area in the world, including hard-to-reach regions, to safely and anonymously participate in a language appropriate survey or specific citizen engagement initiative. For more information, please contact Mercedes Fogarassy, Portfolio Manager, RIWI Corp., at mercedes@riwi.com.