



FRAUENHAUS-  
KOORDINIERUNG e.V.

## INFO SHEET

# Technology-facilitated gender-based violence in women's shelters

## Instances of technology-facilitated abuse are steadily increasing

Women, girls, and marginalised groups are especially vulnerable to technology-facilitated abuse. It's clear from the figures: the number of women subject to technology-facilitated abuse has seen a sharp rise.

What does this mean for violence protection work in women's shelters and how can those affected receive the best possible support?

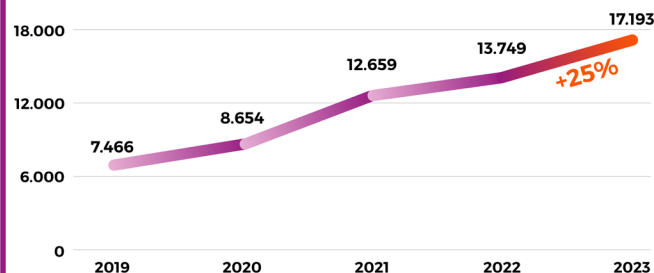
## What is technology-facilitated abuse?

Technology-facilitated abuse encompasses various forms of violence. Perpetrators use technical devices such as smartphones, laptops or tracking devices to monitor victims, isolate them from their social circle, blackmail them or damage their reputation. This is often carried out via apps and platforms, e.g. messenger apps, social media or cloud services.

Perpetrators in violent (ex-)relationships use digital means as a way to have more control and surveillance of their victims. Technology-facilitated gender based violence (TFGBV) usually goes hand in hand with physical and psychological violence.

Children are also often affected by TFGBV, for instance in cases where perpetrators monitor the whereabouts of their (ex-)partner using digital devices that they have given to their children.

### Female victims of technology-facilitated abuse 2019 - 2023



Overview Report "Gender-Motivated Offences Against Women 2023" in Germany

## The repercussions

Technology-facilitated abuse can have devastating repercussions for those directly affected as well as for their friends and family. This form of violence must be taken just as seriously as other forms of violence.



**Feelings:** e.g. helplessness, fear, shame, anger



**Physical and psychological consequences:** e.g. panic attacks, sleep disorders, and symptoms of depression



**Financial consequences:** e.g. loss of income due to being unfit to work or defamation



**Social consequences:** Isolation from friends and family, withdrawal from the digital sphere

## Technology-facilitated abuse in women's shelters

Unlike other forms of violence, technology-facilitated abuse doesn't stop at the doors of women's shelters. Increasingly, offenders are threatening, tracking, and monitoring victims through their mobile devices during their stay. A lack of protective measures means that the risk that technology-facilitated abuse will continue to take place in women's shelters is high. This can jeopardise the victim herself as well as the secret location of the shelter she is staying at, putting all the residents and frontline workers in the shelter at risk.

## The most common forms of technology-facilitated abuse in women's shelters



Unwanted communication



Surveillance and localisation



Identity theft and fraud



Publication of intimate photos and videos



Unwanted posts on social media

## Frontline workers in women's shelters possess a wide range of expertise

They have psychosocial expertise, an understanding of the dynamics of abuse that takes place digitally, and, often as a result of many years of experience, can provide personalised advice.

For holistic, survivor-centred, and effective protection in women's shelters, counselling is needed in the following four areas:



### Psychosocial

**Trauma-informed counselling:** What needs and resources does the survivor have?



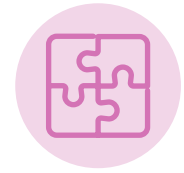
### Legal

**Can the legal system support the survivor? Does the survivor want to press charges?**



### Technical

**What technical measures can be taken to increase or restore the safety of those affected?**



### Media education

**How can potential protective measures be communicated in a way that's accessible and easy to understand, including to children?**

## Needs and challenges in counselling

- Those who are affected by technology-facilitated abuse have a right to access and use digital technologies, which is a necessity for many residents of women's shelters. It's needed for social contact, finding a job or housing and leisure time.
- In some cases of technology-facilitated abuse, in-depth technical expertise is required to be able to provide adequate protective measures. In such cases, support from external specialised experts will be sought as this level of technical expertise is usually beyond the professional remit of the frontline workers who are typically trained in pedagogical fields.
- Counselling should adopt an intersectional approach to take into account all facets of the lives of those affected: their lived experience, experience of discrimination, and needs.
- New developments in technology afford offenders new ways of perpetrating TFGVB through digital means. To fully protect those at risk, counsellors need up-to-date knowledge in four key areas: psychosocial counselling, legal knowledge, technical knowledge, and media education.

## Women's shelters offer advice for those affected and can refer them to other centres of support. The frontline workers can provide counselling on a broad range of topics:



## Our demands at Frauenhauskoordinierung e.V.

Initial reception at the women's shelter takes time. Risk assessments and the implementation of safety measures are an essential part of the process. Providing additional advice about digital safety requires capabilities above and beyond current capacities in women's shelter's.

Due to the chronic underfunding of the social services system, the frontline workers in women's shelters often do not have the time to be able to provide those affected by technology-facilitated abuse with sufficient information about possible protective measures. The social services system currently lacks funding as well as specialised knowledge. Resources are therefore needed for:



**Experts on the topic of technology-facilitated abuse in every women's shelter**



**More frontline workers so that counsellors have time to provide specialised advice on technology-facilitated abuse**



**Technical equipment, e.g. mobile phones for the frontline workers, secure devices that may be lent for backups and the preservation of evidence**



**Regular training to ensure that the counselling team's knowledge of technology-facilitated abuse is up to date**

## In addition to adequate funding for women's shelters and specialised counselling centres, we also need:

- Support for the frontline workers with technical queries from IT experts who have knowledge about technology-facilitated abuse and gender-based violence services
- Basic knowledge and understanding of TFGBV amongst the police and judiciary
- More research and public relations work on TFGBV
- The adoption of intersectional approaches across the entire support system

We call upon national, regional, and local authorities to provide support. Implementing these measures necessitates a victim-centred approach.

## Legal obligations for national, regional, and local authorities

These legal frameworks provide guidance for the urgent action required:

In January 2025, the **Violence Assistance Act** was passed in the Bundestag. From 2032, the Violence Assistance Act will guarantee women and children who have been affected by violence the right to receive protection and counselling, regardless of their health, place of residence, residence status or language skills. These rights must be extended to explicitly to include technology-facilitated forms of violence.

By signing the **Istanbul Convention**, Germany has also committed to taking action against all

forms of gender-based violence, which includes preventing and combatting technology-facilitated abuse.

The **EU Directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence** includes measures to combat violence and aims to protect women from harassment, abuse and other forms of violence, including in the digital space.

These legal obligations for national, regional, and local authorities provide a framework for the comprehensive structural development necessary to combat technology-facilitated abuse.

## Further information

- The report "Bewohner\*innenperspektiven auf den Schutz vor digitaler Gewalt im Frauenhaus" focuses from the perspective of survivors how women's shelters could enhance their support regarding TFGVBV
- The study "(K)ein Raum: Cyber-Gewalt gegen Frauen in (Ex-) Beziehungen" analyses data on TFGVBV in the context of domestic violence
- The policy paper "Digitale Gewalt ernst nehmen!" provides an in-depth overview of issues and political demands for better support of TFGVBV survivors in Germany

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### About Frauenhauskoordinierung e.V.

Frauenhauskoordinierung e.V. (FHK) was founded on the initiative of the welfare organisations (AWO Bundesverband e.V., Diakonie Deutschland e.V., Der Paritätische Gesamtverband, Sozialdienst katholischer Frauen Gesamtverein e.V./Deutscher Caritasverband e.V.) in order to work on behalf of its members to combat cases of violence against women and to improve help for both those affected and their children. FHK coordinates, links, and supports the social system, promotes professional cooperation, and pools practical experience to channel it into political decision-making processes and discourses on specialised policy.

This information sheet was developed as part of the FHK project "Building confidence in dealing with technology-facilitated abuse in women's shelters".

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**FRAUENHAUS-  
KOORDINIERUNG e.V.**

Gefördert vom:



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung, Familie,  
Senioren,  
Frauen und Jugend

