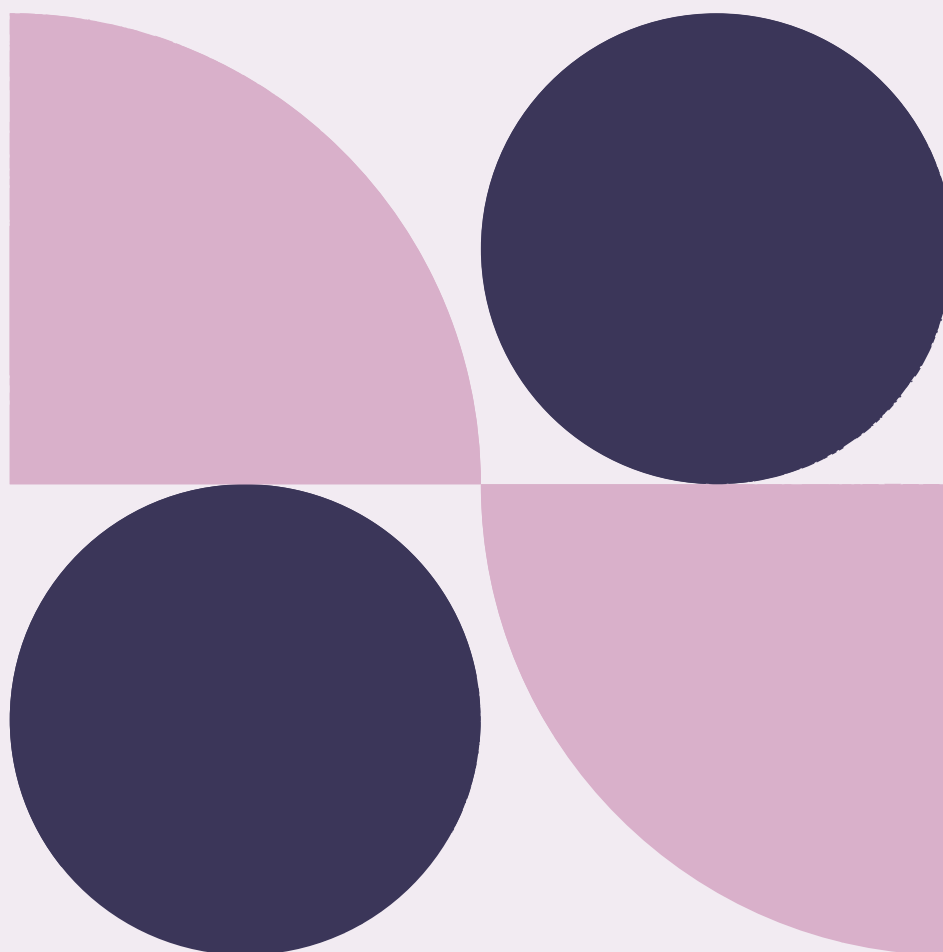**Executive Summary**

Digital Violence
as a Mirror to Offline Realities

What does the public in Turkmenistan think about the status of women?

Executive summary

The findings from the first-ever social media listening project demonstrate that women and girls in Turkmenistan are not safe online, and their chances of encountering hateful content have been increasing over the last two years.

Saglyk's research team conducted social media listening and monitoring in Turkmenistan and among its diaspora to understand how women and girls feel about their status in society. We also focused on adding men's perspectives on the issue, which have been absent in research and public discussion in Turkmenistan. Data collected from social media was used for this research because these sources provide the public with a forum to express opinions (by allowing anonymity), which is almost non-existent in offline Turkmenistan.

Our research shows that it is urgent and vital for the government of Turkmenistan to acknowledge the problem and take immediate action by guaranteeing the protection of women's and girls' rights in digital space. Having the right policies in place will ensure safe spaces online and offline and hold perpetrators accountable.

Currently, no laws on domestic violence and sexual harassment exist in Turkmenistan. And vital statistics regarding the current realities of gender-based violence (GBV) are sparse. By listening to the public, we identified significant trends and attitudes towards women and girls and GBV in Turkmenistan's society. These data have been long-awaited and needed in the public domain.

For this research, a team of social media monitors collected the data manually from 44 relevant sources. We gathered 1,904 posts and comments shared by the public in Turkmen, Russian, and English over two years: January 2020 to August 2022.

KEY FINDINGS

Our findings show that online space provides opportunities for considerable hateful content toward women and girls. Moreover, reflecting on recent restrictions imposed by the government, the government's actions may have exacerbated the situation,[1] as tendencies toward harmful content are growing over time. In addition, most of the hateful content comes from those identified as male social media users, whereas women advocate against GBV.

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1. Although no direct evidence of this has been found

A positive finding concerns extreme content that poses a high risk to public safety: while present, it is currently an insignificant amount. To clarify, the examples of violence these extreme high-risk comments implicate are striking because they contain intentions of direct harm toward women and girls.

It is important to emphasize that the report's findings are not representative or exhaustive because the data set does not capture the broadest sample of possible content shared online, in private channels, and in messaging applications. Besides, the data are limited to those with internet and social media access in Turkmenistan and its diaspora. Therefore, the report lacks representation across all communities in Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, these findings and recommendations can initiate public discussion and support further discussion regarding domestic violence and cyber violence in Turkmenistan. The findings could facilitate the creation of a platform for continuing dialogue between civil society organizations, the government of Turkmenistan, and international organizations.

KEY NUMBERS

- **most** posts and comments indicated **negative trends** toward women (44.5%) compared to **positive** (24.6%) and **neutral** (31%) content

- significantly **more negative content** was found from those that identified as **men** (483 of posts and comments), and **women's** comments contained a nearly **even** distribution of **neutral** and **positive** content (242 and 279 of posts and comments, respectively).

- **harmful** or **violent** content constituted a **relatively small proportion** of the sample: 2.5% (high risk) to 5% (medium risk).

- **two** topics **dominated conversations**: **hate speech** against women and **gender roles**.

- "**hate speech**" was the **dominant** theme among content sources identifying as **male** (42.4%), while content from **women** mainly focused on **gender roles** (30.8%).

- a large proportion of content from **women** advocates **stopping violence** (157 posts and comments), whereas many more of those shared by **men** **encourage violence** (112 posts and comments).

KEY TRENDS

- **content encouraging violence** against women and girls (**VAWG**) takes up to **18%** of the collected data for **2022**, while in 2021 it was only 2.8%, and in 2020 it was 10%.

- **hate speech** consistently took up a **large proportion** of the conversations: **27%** in **2022**, 36% in 2021, and 21% in 2020.

- **hate speech** dominated the **YouTube** and **Instagram** platforms, and **Facebook** had more discussions on **gender roles** than others.

- content on **women's success** stories was typical in **English**, **hate speech** was predominant in **Turkmen**, and **gender roles** were more often discussed in **Russian**.

The full report provides detailed information on the purpose of this research and its methodology and offers specific recommendations to the government of Turkmenistan, international organizations in Turkmenistan, and readers.

PROGRES

SAGLYK

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