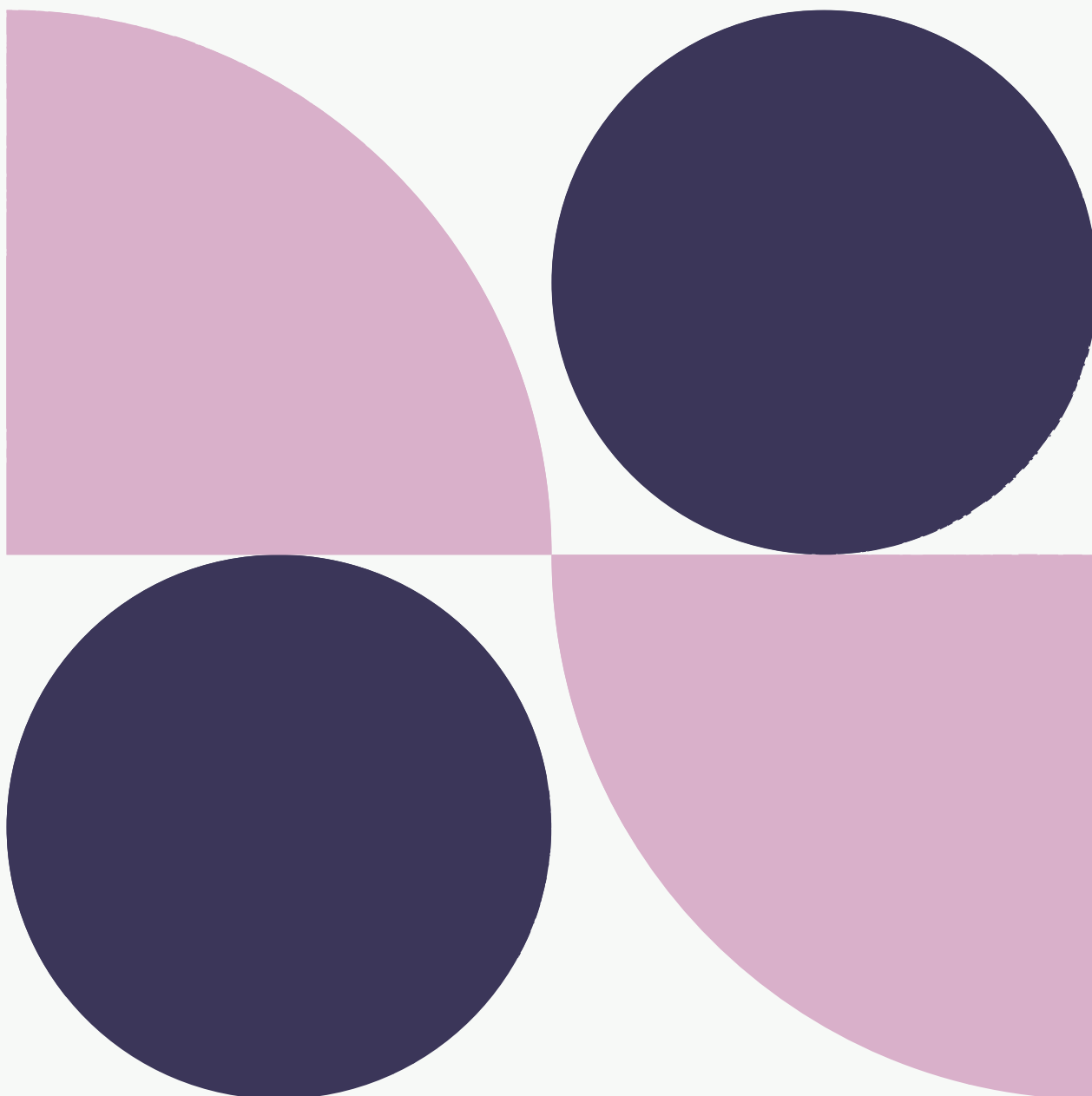


Digital Violence

as a Mirror to Offline Realities

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



Progres Foundation works to support various progressive initiatives that benefit the public in Turkmenistan. [Progres.online](#) is an online analytical journal that promotes a nuanced understanding of the societal trends in Turkmenistan by providing quality research and policy analysis.

Progres Foundation's flagship program **Saglyk ([Saglyk.org](#))** has been working on improving public health literacy since 2009. With the pandemic, Saglyk became a leading source of COVID-19 information in the Turkmen language. One of the focus areas of our work is to provide the public in Turkmenistan with access to quality information about sexual and reproductive health education and rights. To date, [Saglyk.org](#) is the only website where Turkmen-speaking women and men can learn about such information, which is science and evidence-based. With more than ten years of work, we have developed over 700 articles on specifically these topics in the Turkmen language.

Read more about Saglyk initiatives on the last page.

Acknowledgments

Progres Foundation and Saglyk are grateful to many whose ideas, inspiration, and contribution have shaped this report and remain anonymous by choice.

We acknowledge that the publication does not represent the views of all people who agreed to be engaged in different stages of the research process for this report.

This publication may be redistributed non-commercially in any media, unchanged, in whole, or only as a summary with key findings, with credits given to Progres Foundation and Saglyk.

Progres Foundation welcomes opinions, suggestions, and collaborations.
Please contact us at turkmen.progres@gmail.com.

2023 Published by Progres Foundation

List of Acronyms and Key Terms

used in this report

ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| CEDAW | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CoE | Council of Europe |
| CSO | Civic Society Organisation |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| MICS | Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys |
| PII | Personal Identifiable Information |
| SGDs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| UN | United Nations |
| UN Women | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VAWG | Violence Against Women and Girls |
| VPN | Virtual Private Network |

KEY TERMS

Cyber Violence

The use of computer systems to cause, facilitate, or threaten violence against individuals, likely resulting in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering, and may include the exploitation of the individual's circumstances, characteristics, or vulnerabilities.¹

Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls

Gender-based violence that is perpetrated through electronic communication and the internet.²

Feminism

Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and achieve full gender equality in law and practice.³

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. GBV is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience GBV, but most victims are women and girls.⁴

1. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cyberviolence>

2. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/cyber-violence-against-women>

3. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/feminism-and-women-s-rights-movements>

4. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.⁵

Hate Speech

Any speech, writing, or behavior that communicates attacks or uses pejorative language, including prejudiced, contemptuous, demeaning words, and discriminatory language that is biased, bigoted, or

or intolerant regarding a person or a group based on identity.⁶ This UN interpretation has been expanded using the Sexist Hate Speech definition from CoE to include misogyny, a judgment of women's behavior and appearance, and objectification/sexualization of women.

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and girls, including 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, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.⁷

5. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

6. <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech>

7. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1426>

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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 situation⁸ 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.

8. 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.

Introduction

This research aims to identify trends on social media and online sources related to perspectives around women and girls and their roles and rights. Drawing upon discourse analysis as the primary method for examining available posts and comments on social media, this research is one of the first studies of modern Turkmenistan from a critical gender perspective that situates discourses about Turkmenistan's women in the context of reproductive rights, violence, hate speech, gender roles, and gender equality. In addition, this research is one of the first efforts to examine granular social media data in Turkmenistan to understand societal perspectives, trends, and shifts.

In Turkmenistan, there is little focus on online dynamics and their effects on the public; thus, understanding overall trends and attitudes towards women and patterns of GBV online is critical. Equally important to understand is that the underlying reasons for GVB online are similar to offline reality, which is maintaining power.⁹

Although women and men can be victims of cyber violence, evidence shows that women and girls are more often exposed to it than men. Not only are women and girls more likely to experience GBV online, but they can also suffer severe consequences, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm and suffering.¹⁰ Hence online rhetoric impacts people's lives directly, especially younger women, due to their age category, frequent access, and active presence on the internet compared to women of older generations.¹¹

Based on the 2020 Plan International research and survey conducted across 22 countries indicated, that 58% of girls have personally experienced some form of online harassment, with 47% of them being threatened with physical or sexual violence. In addition, 50% of girls experience online harassment more often than street harassment.¹²

This study investigates trends and attitudes towards women and girls and GBV in Turkmenistan's society shared by the public in online spaces. Unfortunately, the existing data on trends and attitudes, provided by international organizations and civil society groups inside and outside Turkmenistan, is often limited due to the restrictions imposed by the Turkmenistan government.¹³ Moreover, the information from these sources is often shaped by the organizations' interests, priorities, and capacities.

For example, such limitations are apparent on the UN Women page dedicated to Turkmenistan's implementation of gender-related SDG commitments. Data are available only for 20.6% of gender-specific indicators, with gaps in critical areas, in particular: VAWG), unpaid care, and domestic work,

9. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/no-space-for-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-digital-world>

10. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

11. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/no-space-for-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-digital-world>

12. Meaning how CSOs and international associations, working in the field of human rights, operate in the country but also government control of the access to information, <https://www.civicus.org/documents/Turkmenistan.CIVICUS.UPRSubmission2017.pdf>

13. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/turkmenistan>

and key labor market indicators, such as the gender pay gap. Additionally, the data collected on mentioned topics lack comparable methodologies for regular monitoring.¹⁴

Another gender-related data source, UNICEF MICS, is limited to specific topics and lacks the necessary gender balance in reports on Turkmenistan. For example, the MICS 2019 survey in Turkmenistan showed that 59% of women aged 15-49 believe that husbands have the right to hit their wives. Identifying women's attitudes toward domestic violence is essential in preventing and controlling the consequence and determining the areas of focus, such as strengthening women's awareness toward norms that justify wife beating.¹⁵ However, having responses only from women can be interpreted against them as something women themselves want and allow. MICS has a methodology and practice incorporating male attitudes toward domestic violence in its surveys in other countries, but this was never implemented in Turkmenistan. By keeping men out of the question, such a survey allows perpetrators to stay unaccountable as it shifts responsibilities onto women. Hence, while creating a platform for women to address gender-related topics is crucial, excluding men from the conversation is not only a short-lived solution but also damaging. Especially considering that most of the norms and attitudes have been shaped by a male-dominant society, involving men in the dialogue is essential for a greater understanding of gender equality and domestic violence issues.

While this study was in process, long-awaited research on the health and status of women in the family in Turkmenistan was published in August 2022. This report contained overdue progress in understanding women's and girls' status and urgent issues in the country, as well as accepting the problem of domestic violence in Turkmenistan.¹⁶ Although the report provides previously unavailable statistics, how the survey was conducted during COVID-19 restrictions is questionable.

Despite promising plans for integrated sexual and reproductive health services in Turkmenistan based on the UNFPA program activities data, women in Turkmenistan still struggle with an unmet need for family planning and access to contraception. Today, only 50% of women have access to contraception, and 1 in 8 are struggling from an unmet need for family planning.¹⁷

Additionally, Turkmenistan's Committee on Statistics has made no apparent effort to conduct or publish information on SDG 5-related topics. In addition, recent developments in the country, such as restricting access to abortion care by reducing gestational term from 12 weeks to 5 weeks, policing women's bodies and duties, and rising traditionalism, have exacerbated GBV and women's rights concerns in Turkmenistan.

While online spaces such as the online campaign against violence, Dymma, and the educational project for teens, Jora, allow people to share stories of discrimination and violence anonymously and provide support, no mechanisms, policies, and political will exist to address these issues.

14. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6354873/>

15. <https://www.saglyk.org/makalalar/articles-in-english/2353-wake-up-call-health-and-status-of-a-woman-in-the-family-in-turkmenistan.html>

16. [https://mics-surveys-](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia/Turkmenistan/2019/Survey%20findings/Turkmenistan%202019%20MICS%20SFR_English.pdf)

[prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia/Turkmenistan/2019/Survey%20findings/Turkmenistan%202019%20MICS%20SFR_English.pdf](https://mics-surveys-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/MICS6/Europe%20and%20Central%20Asia/Turkmenistan/2019/Survey%20findings/Turkmenistan%202019%20MICS%20SFR_English.pdf)

17. Ibid.

On the positive side, Turkmenistan joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 and signed its Additional Protocol in 2009. On April 20, 2021, Turkmenistan was also elected as a member of the UN Women's Executive Board, a UN agency on gender equality issues and promoting women's rights and opportunities. And in the same year, Turkmenistan committed to advocating for the protection of women's rights and opportunities by initiating a "National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025." ¹⁸

Furthermore, Turkmenistan specified in its Constitution that women and men are equal (Article 29).¹⁹ In 2015, Turkmenistan also adopted a law to allow women and men to enjoy equal rights and opportunities and prohibit discrimination at home, work, and in society.²⁰ In addition, Criminal Code and Administrative Law on Violations also protect against discrimination.

On this seemingly extended level of protection, demonstrated commitment, and openness towards creating a safe space for women with equal rights and opportunities, there remains no law on domestic violence and sexual harassment in Turkmenistan.

Gender-based cyber violence is a relatively new phenomenon; only a few countries have legal regulations to address it directly. In Central Asia, all five republics contain legal remedies in their criminal codes to prosecute some types of online attacks, but all five need to do more. For example, although Turkmenistan, like Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, criminalizes insult and defamation, their definitions in the Criminal Code are vague. In addition, the law in Turkmenistan, as in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, prohibits the "illegal collection or storage of confidential, personal or family secrets" without a person's consent. Yet, none of them has a law targeting sexual harassment, let alone online harassment. Therefore, cyber VAWG is not defined by the law in Central Asia.²¹

Methodology

The danger of online GBV also lies in the many online spaces that do not have sufficient rules and regulations to protect women and girls from violence. Because technology and online spaces intensify GBV and make it easier to perpetuate, we built our methodology around collecting data from conversations happening on social media.

Social media provides people a forum to express opinions (allowed by anonymity and distance) that is almost non-existent in offline Turkmenistan. Moreover, while certain behaviors may be exaggerated in cyberspace;²² social media interactions of users from Turkmenistan give a unique opportunity to study and evaluate the existing dynamics on the relevant topics.

18. <https://www.saglyk.org/makalalar/siz-oz-hak-hukuklarynyzy-bilyanizmi/30-umumy/2240-gender-denligi-name.html>

19. https://constituteproject.org/constitution/Turkmenistan_2016.pdf?lang=en

20. https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=102409&p_country=TKM&p_count=91

21. <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-cyberviolence-is-a-curse-for-women-in-central-asia>

22. As studies show, online technologies changed society's communication patterns and disrupted the expression of empathy. Instant sharing of thoughts, feelings and behaviors in social media happen fast and often without the empathetic social filter that accompanies traditional communications. Devoid of the emotional cues in face-to-face

By focusing on trends and attitudes towards women and GBV in Turkmenistan's society shared by the public in online spaces, this project analyzed online posts and comments in private and public spaces on Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, and other available online platforms, used by the public and diaspora of Turkmenistan.

For this research, the data were collected manually by a social media monitoring team from 44 relevant sources identified on social media. These sources together reach almost 1,5 million social media users from Turkmenistan and its diaspora.

The most significant component of collected data comes from Instagram – the most used social media platform, with over 308.4 thousand users in Turkmenistan in early 2022. Whereas Facebook, the third most used platform, had only 20.5 thousand users at the start of 2022.²³ LinkedIn figures indicated 35 thousand “members” in Turkmenistan in early 2022. However, the proportion of relevant research information was significantly smaller due to its career-oriented focus. In early 2022, Twitter had only 2,650 users in Turkmenistan,²⁴ contributing to a smaller portion of the research.

The data were collected from July 2022 to August 2022 and focused on content published within the past two years²³. The earliest post/comment analyzed was from February 26, 2020, and the latest post/comment was from August 24, 2022.

The research focused mainly on posts and comments in Turkmen and Russian and their combination as the primary **communication languages** for Turkmenistan's society. However, English, Turkish, and a combination of Turkmen-Turkish, Turkmen-English, and Russian-English were also considered and included as the languages of Turkmenistan's diaspora.

To ensure that content in the Russian, Turkish, and English languages was relevant to the context of the research, the data was collected from pages that are run by those from Turkmenistan or by the accounts presenting themselves as a Turkmen diaspora and hence designed either for people from Turkmenistan and its diaspora or contain posts explicitly focused on Turkmenistan.

Including the diaspora in this research is crucial because of their continuing ties and high volume of interactions with Turkmenistan communities, which affects the formation of opinions and attitudes in the country.

settings, digital communication often leads to more impersonal interactions, where people lose their inner constraints and feel less self-aware, inhibited, and responsible for their behavior when they are anonymous. In the anonymous online context, studies also show, people experience greater feelings of disinhibition, which make them express or do things that they would not say or do face-to-face, such as the use of uncivil language, harsh criticism, threats, or hate speech in online comments. Thus hatred directed at certain groups including gender takes on a new dimension in the online space, by involving the denigration, harassment, exclusion, and advocacy of violence. This is a very important difference between many women and girls who often feel unsafe in online spaces and perpetrators for whom social media removes inhibitions, and they are able to abuse people without consequences and without revealing their identity. For the harasser, it is a very safe space indeed. (To read detailed studies on behaviors in social media, see here: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2056305116664220>; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6163978/>; and <https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/02/sotwqr2020-commsreport-en-2.pdf>)

23. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-turkmenistan>

24. Ibid.

For this report, a sample of **n=1904** social media posts and comments published by and for Turkmenistan's population and its diaspora was analyzed regarding their **themes** concerning

- reproductive rights
- violence and call for VAWG
- hate speech
- against VAWG and hate speech
- gender roles
- gender equality and feminism
- women's success stories

Theme selection was based on the existing work conducted by Saglyk and engagement from the public on Saglyk's social media pages, recent policy changes in the country concerning reproductive rights, absence of the law on domestic violence, government promotion of the traditional role of women in the society, and the recent introduction of regulation on policing women bodies.

These themes were separated into three **content types**: negative, positive, and neutral. Deviating from traditional sentiment categorization which focuses on tone, our team analyzed data points based on the content itself and the value positions they represented. For example, against violence and hate speech or for gender equality was categorized as positive, whereas against equal employment and gender equality overall, as well as content advocating for violence, was evaluated as negative. The content was considered neutral in cases where the messages took no stance. In addition, informative content originating from media and awareness-raising content from civil society organizations or international organizations were also categorized as neutral because, in most cases, their purpose was informing society about certain aspects related to this research topic rather than demonstrating a specific position on these topics.

The content was also evaluated based on the **risk levels**: low, medium, and high, to assess the likelihood for the post to be believed and shared and the potential impact on the community or targeting specific groups, as well as the danger of the information posted. For example, violence and threats were identified as high-risk level, problematic content was classified as medium risk, and content potentially problematic but will not necessarily have a negative impact on the community was indicated as low.

Collected comments and posts were selected for evaluation based on the criteria mentioned above and were later disaggregated based on language, gender, location, risk levels, and themes. The Personal Identifiable Information (PII) of people posting or commenting was concealed for ethical reasons and safety concerns.

The data sample was based on the preliminary social media influence mapping, which strategically identified the most active and vocal sources, accounts, and pages that share information relevant to the research and have a wider audience and active engagement. An exception was made for those cases when information had a positive trend/content type but low engagement to compensate for the lack of balance in the information ecosystem.

Research Scope Consideration & Limitations

Notably, the data set for this research is not representative or exhaustive in capturing the various content shared online, in private channels, and in messaging applications because much of the potential sample is inaccessible. However, the finding represents a subset of existing conversations and perspectives centered on women and girls within Turkmenistan's society.

In addition, due to limited access to social media among some poor or remote communities (61.9% of the total population does not use the internet)²⁵ and women in these communities experiencing GBV more frequently than those in urban areas,²⁶ the findings of this research are limited to insights from groups and individuals that have access to social media and represent a more progressive demographic. Therefore, the research is not representative of all the communities in Turkmenistan.

In early 2022 the number of active social media users in Turkmenistan was over 338 thousand, which also increased by 125% between 2021 and 2022. The total number of social media users in Turkmenistan is equivalent to 5.5% of the total population, with women having less access to social media than men, 40.6% versus 59.4%.²⁷

Turkmenistan also has one of the world's highest internet access costs, with a minimum of 100 TMT/month (5.26 USD) for 256 Kbit/s speed internet.²⁸ To put it in perspective, the minimum salary in Turkmenistan in 2022 was 1050 TMT = 55 USD²⁹ (19 TMT = \$1 rate).³⁰ Therefore, the minimum monthly internet cost is 10.50% of the minimum salary, while in the US, it is only 4%, in Germany, only 1.5%, in the UK, it is 2%, and in Russia, the cost is 3.75% of the minimum salary. The high cost is coupled with a slow internet speed of 0.77Mbps compared to the global average is 34.79Mbps. This slow speed is due to underdeveloped network infrastructure and the low uptake of digital services among the population in Turkmenistan.³¹

Turkmenistan is also known for its unprecedented online censorship within the country and on the internet. Hence, not only sites like Facebook and other META social media, YouTube, and Wikipedia are banned, but also sources that offer circumvention tools like Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) are blocked. Unfortunately, as soon as the population adapts to these limitations by finding new tools, the government also blocks these services.³²

25. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-turkmenistan>

26. https://turkmenistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/report_health_and_status_of_a_woman_in_the_family_in_turkmenistan.pdf

27. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-turkmenistan>

28. <https://telecom.tm/en/internet/>

29. <https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/tk/habar/57684/turkmenistanyn-prezidentinin-turkmenistanda-zahmet-haklarynyn-pensiyalaryn-dowlet-komek-pullarynyn-talyp-we-dinleyji-haklarynyn-mocberlerini-yokarladyrmak-hakynda-permany>

30. The exchange rates are based on the black market rate as of November 2022, the official rate is 1 USD = 3,5 TMT <https://progres.online/en/palaw-index/palaw-index-november-2022/>

31. <https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/speed/worldwide-speed-league/#speed>

32. <https://www.accessnow.org/turkmenistan-internet-shutdowns/>

Findings

DOMINANT THEMES

We categorized 1904 social media posts and comments according to seven themes designed to capture how distinctive discussions about women and GBV are framed in online conversations (Table 1). This method gave us an overview of the dominant topics of conversations.

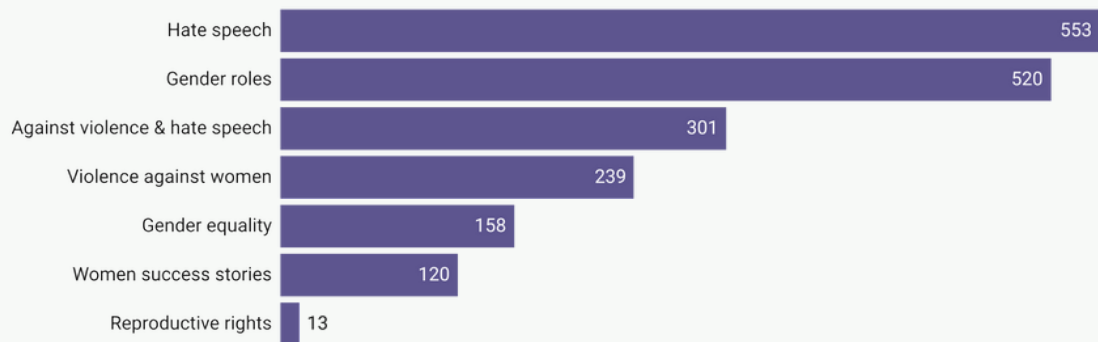
Table 1:

| Themes | Description |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Reproductive rights | <i>Posts concerning the number of children women should have, contraception and abortion</i> |
| VAWG | <i>Posts advocating VAWG, and/or containing calls for VAWG, and harassment</i> |
| Hate speech | <i>Posts referring to offensive discourse targeting women and girls and that “attack or use pejorative or discriminatory language...on the basis of ...gender”.</i> |
| Against violence & hate speech | <i>Posts pertaining to concerns against VAWG and hate speech</i> |
| Gender roles | <i>Posts concerning women’s daily life duties and related to the ongoing mobility and bodily/ beauty restrictions</i> |
| Gender equality & feminism | <i>Posts containing any concerns, either negative or positive, about gender equality and feminism, and their value in Turkmenistan</i> |
| Women’s success story | <i>Posts containing stories about successful women that focus on women</i> |

Two topics were dominant among the 1904 posts and comments we analyzed: 1) hate speech against women; 2) gender roles (Graph 1).

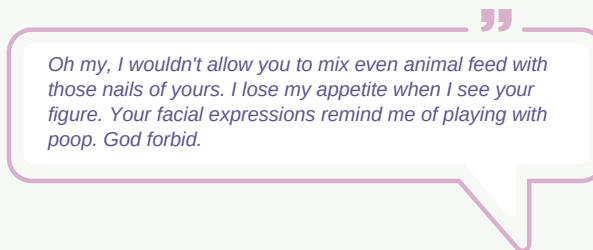
Graph 1: Breakdown of existing themes

by number of posts and comments



46 posts and comments in this data contain awareness-raising and informative content, which was not separated from the data due to its low number.

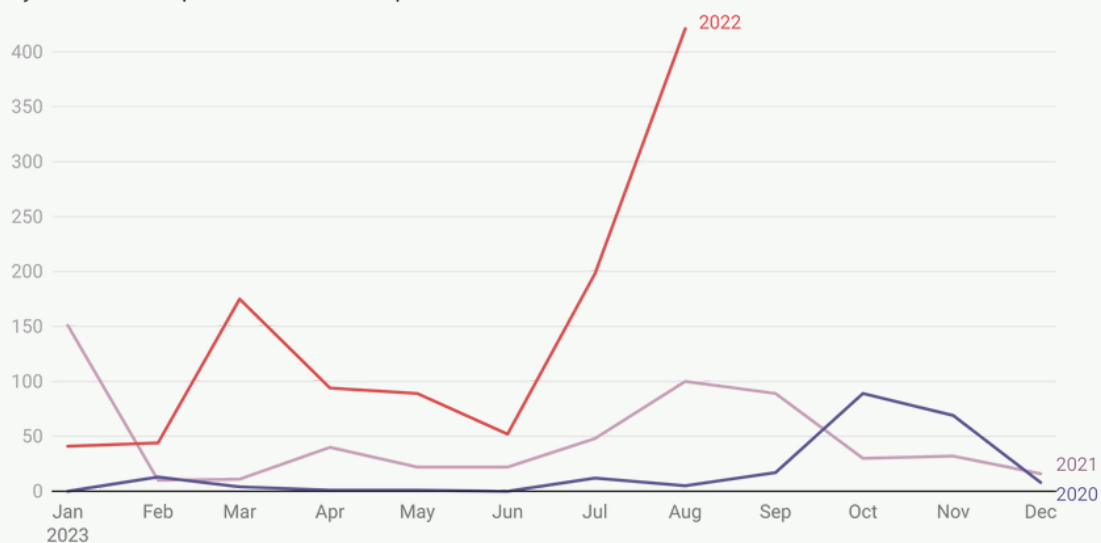
example of posts or comments



Based on the posts and comments in the last two years, the amount of information concerning the themes of interest has been increasing, reaching an apex in 2022, with a total of 1114 post comments, versus only 219 in 2020 and 571 in 2021 (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Relevant posts and comments across time

by the number of posts and comments per month

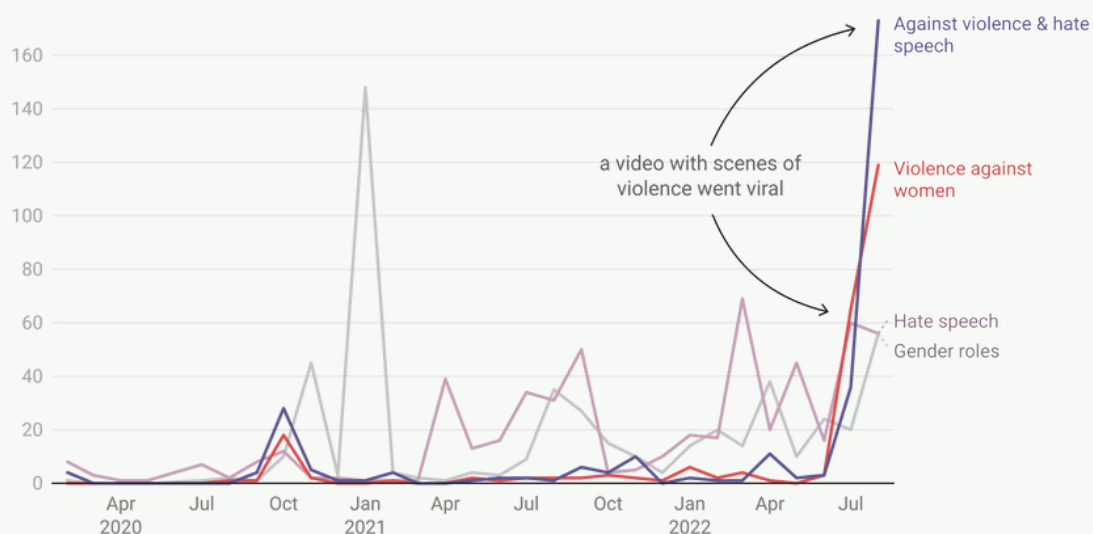


Content related to hate speech gradually increased over time with frequent spikes. However, content on gender roles, and gender equality, for and against VAWG had few spikes over time.

A recent spike (July – August 2022) with an increase in most of the themes occurred at the time of a release of a video containing scenes of domestic violence in a public space. The video was first published by the independent media and then went viral for awareness-raising purposes, as well as on meme pages. This case was the first time in the last ten years that such a video has been shared on social media, raising much public debate (Graph 3 a - b) (See case study section for more details).

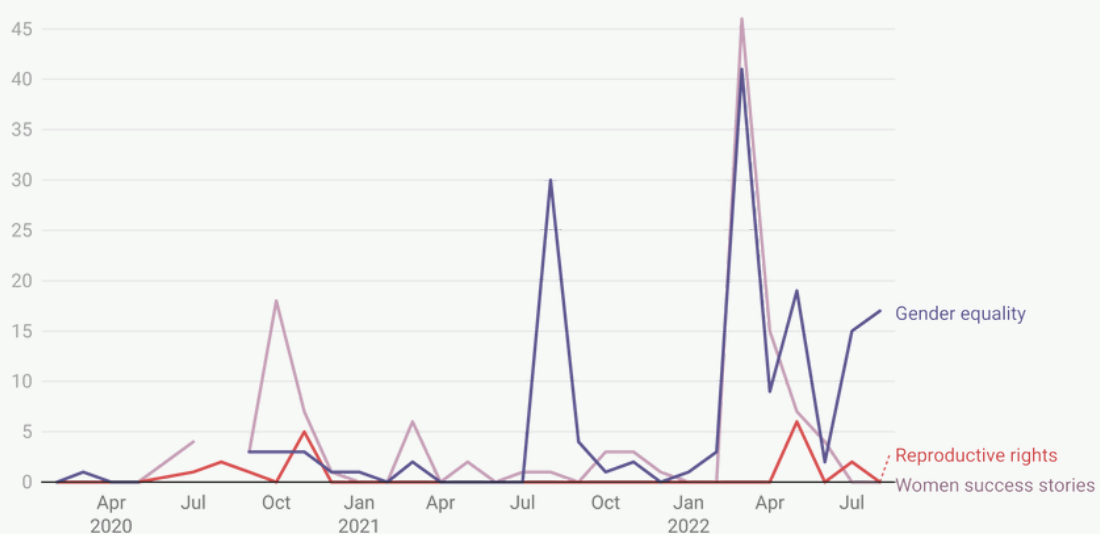
Graph 3a: Most common themes across time

by the number of posts and comments per month



Graph 3b: Least common themes across time

by the number of posts and comments per month



Since proportionally, the data collected for 2022 (58.5% of the total collected data) is larger than for 2021 (30%) and 2020(11%), when looked at each year separately, we see that the posts and comments containing hate speech have been consistently taking up a large proportion of the conversations: 27% in 2022, 36% in 2021, and 21% in 2020. Content encouraging VAWG takes up to 18% of the collected data for 2022, while in 2021 it was only 2.8%, and in 2020 10%. Content on gender roles varied from 45% in 2021 to 17% in 2022, and 28.8% in 2020. Content against VAWG consistently was close to 20% in both 2022 and 2020, significantly dropping to 5.4% in 2021. (Table 2).

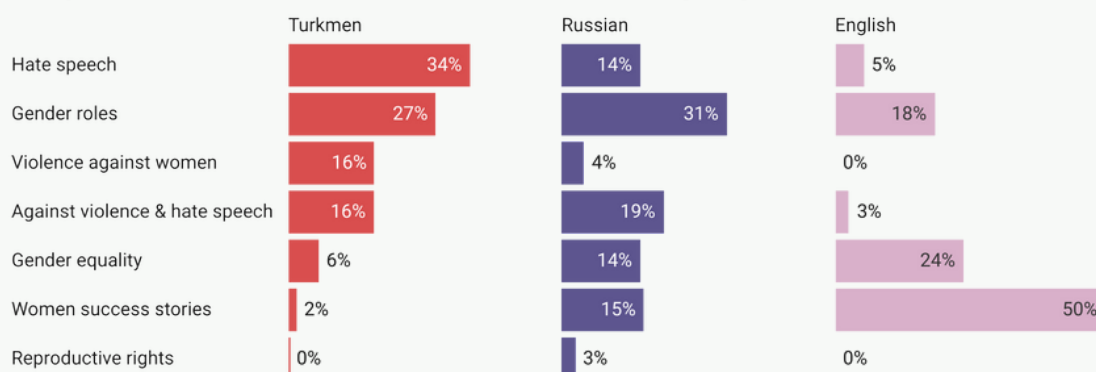
Table 2:

| Themes | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|--------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Hate speech | 21% | 35.9% | 27% |
| Gender roles | 28.8% | 45.9% | 17.6% |
| Against violence & hate speech | 19.2% | 5.4% | 20.6% |
| VAWG | 10% | 2.8% | 18% |
| Gender equality | 5% | 7% | 9.6% |
| Women success stories | 13.7% | 3% | 6.6% |
| Reproductive rights | 2.3% | 0% | 0.7% |

LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Although the two dominating themes were found in content posted in the three most used languages (Turkmen 1368 posts and comments, Russian 442, and English 38), some were more common to a specific language. For example, women's success stories were mainly in English, and hate speech was predominant in Turkmen, whereas gender roles were more often discussed in Russian (Graph 4). Based on our observations, international organizations in Turkmenistan that produce content in English primarily target international audiences and aim at projecting a more positive image of development in Turkmenistan.

Graph 4: Themes across most common languages



example of posts or comments

A plow should be attached to her back and she should be forced to plow the land. Then she would lose weight

Posted in Turkmen

I totally encourage and support anybody who is learning mechanical systems. So proud of seeing Turkmen women handling this field and skill...

Posted in English

It's not a woman's job to go abroad alone and earn money if she has a family. She should have stayed at home and looked after her children and sent her husband to work abroad. Such women leave for years, leaving their husbands with children and then they complain here in public, saying that they are working hard. Oh, poor thing! How she behaved there is another big question. We have seen and heard a lot about such women.

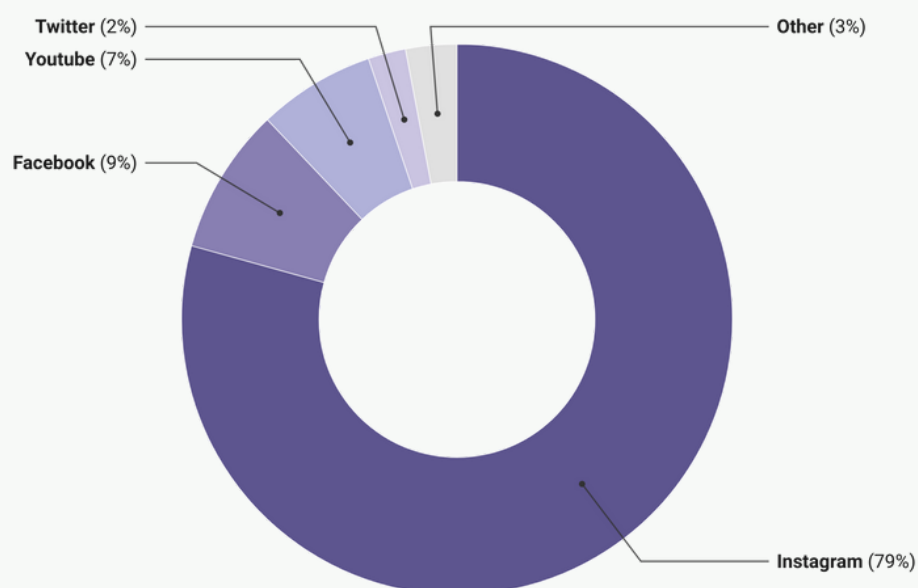
Posted in Russian

PLATFORM DIFFERENCES

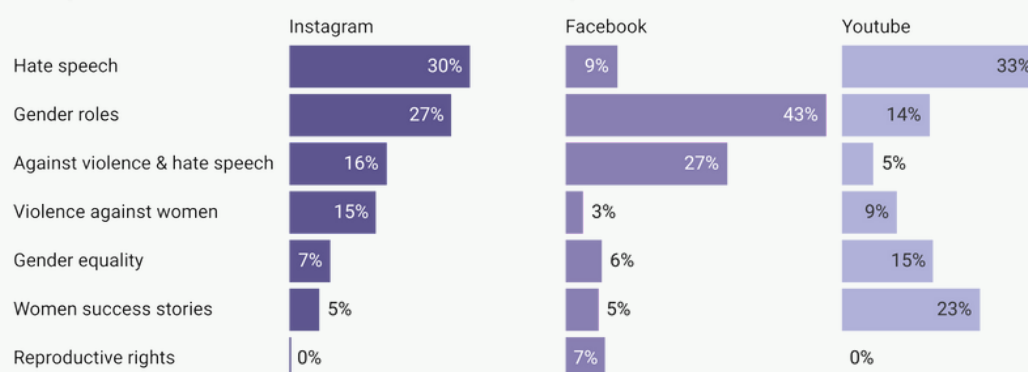
Instagram had the largest number of relevant content. The platform accounted for 79.4% of posts and comments, with 259,472 interactions (as measured by likes, shares, comments, reactions, and views) generated by the 1511 sampled posts and comments (Graph 5).

However, themes were distributed differently on each platform. For example, hate speech dominated YouTube and Instagram, yet it was among the least frequent themes on Facebook, where gender roles theme dominated. Facebook is also a platform where the Russian language is chiefly used (Graph 6).

Graph 5: Proportion of platforms of the collected data



Graph 6: Themes across most used platforms



example of posts or comments

Always a dissatisfaction, I personally think that they [the government] are doing the right thing, they [women] have completely lost their shame.

Posted on Facebook

I say to myself that sometimes even if some girls are [fat] like a cow, they have a beautiful face, but this girl has no good parts. I wonder what sin could she have committed because God has taken everything from her.

Posted on Instagram

example post or comment

Isn't there anything thick within your hand's reach? You should stick that up to your p*** so that there won't be fire. Weren't the two people with d*** of any use to you? Chickenhead!

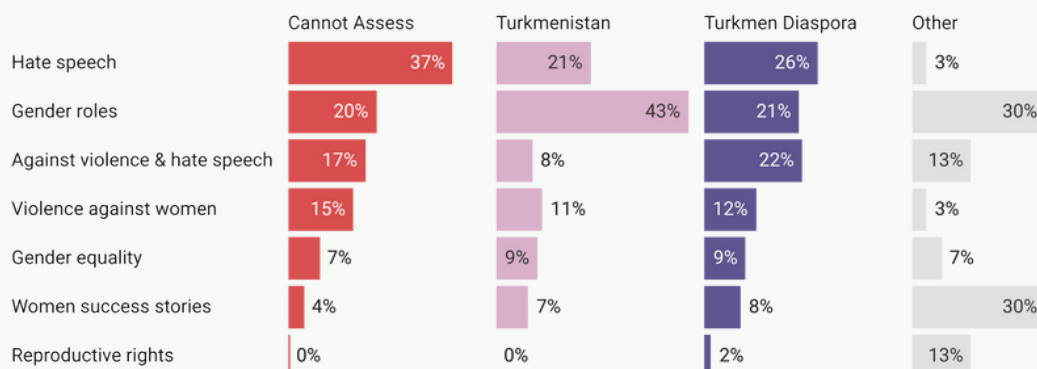
Posted on Youtube

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Distribution of content between Turkmenistan and its diaspora was almost even (29.4% vs. 25.26%, respectively), with only 1.6 % coming from other countries. The rest 43,8%, we were unable to identify, as they were either private accounts, did not have content on the accounts, or were fake. Despite being unidentifiable, consistent with this research, these accounts contained comments in the Turkmen online space on the relevant themes and spoke to the general discourse about women and girls shared by Turkmenistani people and engaged with/by them.

Interestingly, those unidentifiable sources shared content with hate speech against women most frequently, with Turkmenistan or its diaspora having an almost equal amount of such content. However, the dominating theme from Turkmenistan, as a content source, focused on gender roles. (Graph 7).

Graph 7: Themes across sources



example of posts or comments

How stupid, this moron doesn't behave according to her age.

Source: Cannot Assess

The guy has 100% right to demand it [for the girl he wants to marry to be a virgin].

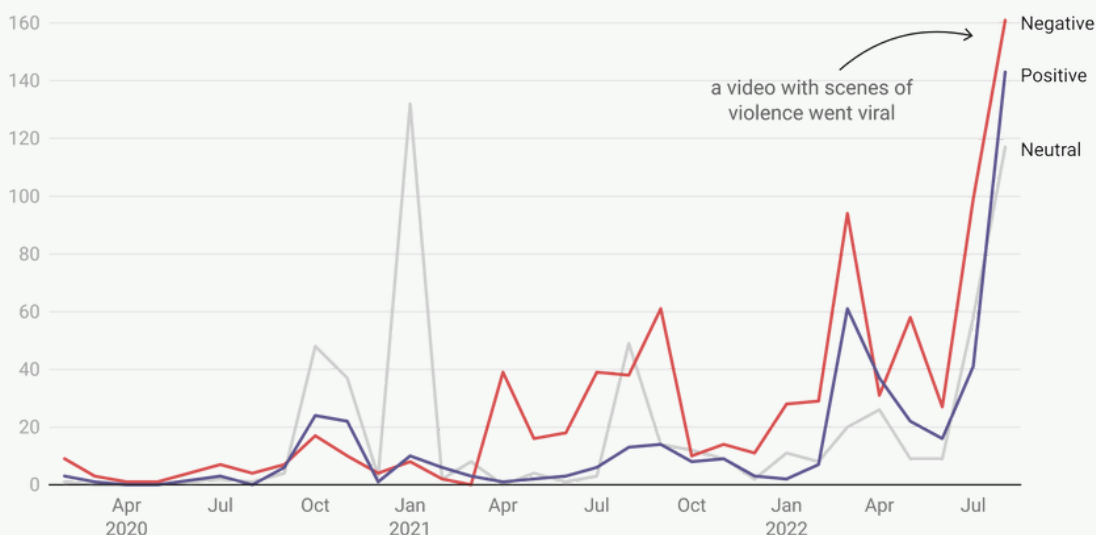
Source: Turkmenistan

CONTENT TYPE BREAKDOWN

The research findings show that based on the dominating themes, the majority of posts and comments indicated negative (44.46%) trends toward women in online conversations. (Graph 8). On the other hand, positive content types had been less frequent in online conversations, totaling only 24.6% of all posts and comments.

Graph 8: Content type across time

by the number of posts and comments per month



Throughout the two years, the negative content type amounted to 845 posts and comments, whereas positive was almost half of it, 468 posts and comments. While neutral content type stayed almost the same in 2022 (258 posts and comments) comparatively to 2021 (237), negative and positive had a significant increase of posts and comments in 2022, jumping from 256 posts and comments under negative content type in 2021 to 526, and from 78 posts and comments under positive content type in 2021 to 330 (Table 3).

Table 3:

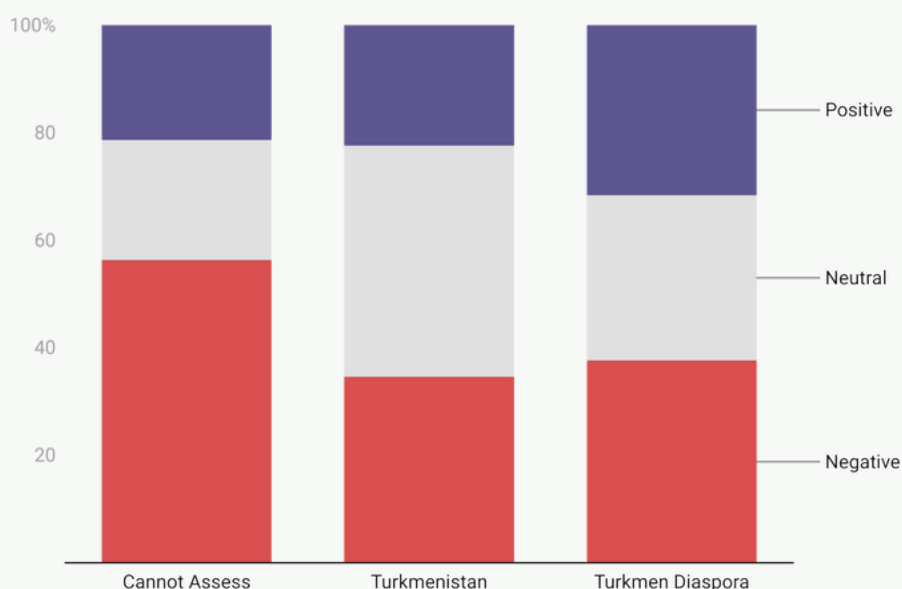
| Year | Negative | Neutral | Positive |
|------|----------|---------|----------|
| 2020 | 63 | 96 | 60 |
| 2021 | 256 | 237 | 78 |
| 2022 | 526 | 258 | 330 |

Regarding content type across sources, neutral content was dominant in Turkmenistan (Graph 9). This may signify a range of things, such as indifference of the audience, or fear of government surveillance. However, the analysis of behavior is out of the scope of the current research.

As shown above, in Graph 7, hate speech was dominant among unidentifiable sources (“Cannot Assess” - the geo-location/residence of the source). Similarly, negative content type dominated the unidentifiable sources.

This result could lead to the conclusion that often, such information is spread by those hiding their identity, using online space to spread misogynistic content and fuel negativity and hate without accountability. (Graph 9).

Graph 9: Content type across geography



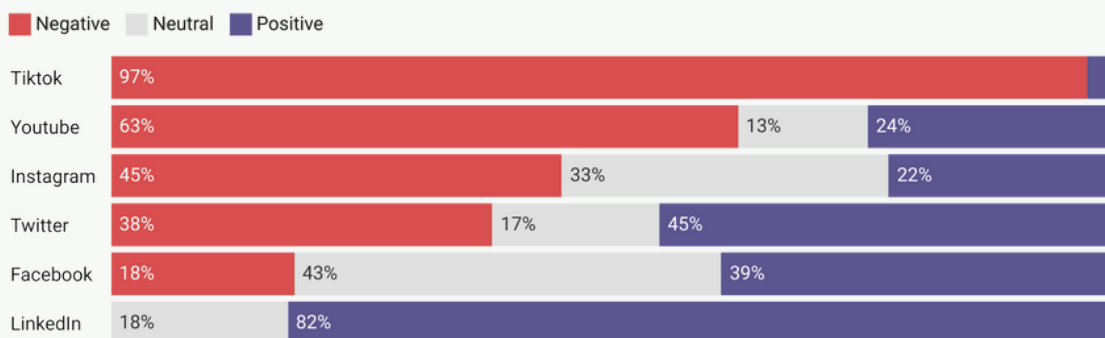
Another example that caught our attention shows that even in cases of seemingly positive content, there are some traces of internalized misogyny or toxic femininity, which reinforce unhealthy expectations from women and girls. However, this content was rare, and such posts were marked as neutral.

Of course combine! After all, a woman can do everything, and children and a house and a husband, all together! We don't whine when it's hard for us, we don't lie under a blanket when we have 39.9, we are full when there is only one pie left in the refrigerator, after all, we are not men, we are WOMEN ♥. Shout out to all moms!!!

example of posts or comments

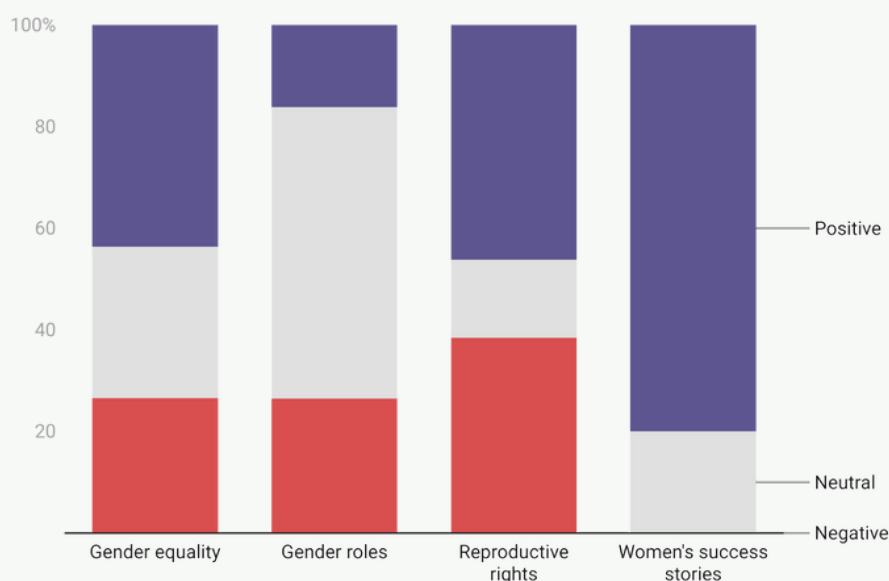
Considering the platform and content type, negative content types prevailed on TikTok and YouTube, both video-based social media platforms. Although a smaller proportion of content included in the research was taken from these platforms (39 and 131 posts and comments, respectively), these tendencies may indicate an existing pattern and reflect the typical dynamics of TikTok and YouTube because the selection of sources was based on the highest followership or engagement regarding the topic of the research. Other platforms, such as Facebook (164), LinkedIn (17), and Twitter (42), also represent a small fraction of the sample yet demonstrate far less negative content (Graph 10).

Graph 10: Content type across platforms



Unlike content encouraging VAWG, containing hate speech, or against VAWG & hate speech, with the rest of the themes (gender roles, gender equality, women's success stories, and reproductive rights), the sentiment remained ambiguous. Thus, we analyzed a selected group of themes, to have a better understanding of where the content was positive, neutral, or negative. The findings indicated the majority of the content was neutral (372 posts and comments) in this set, positive content type was the second largest (255). In none of the themes, the negative content type was a dominating sentiment, while the positive content type dominated women's success stories, reproductive rights, and gender equality (Graph 11).

Graph 11: Content type behind a selected set of themes

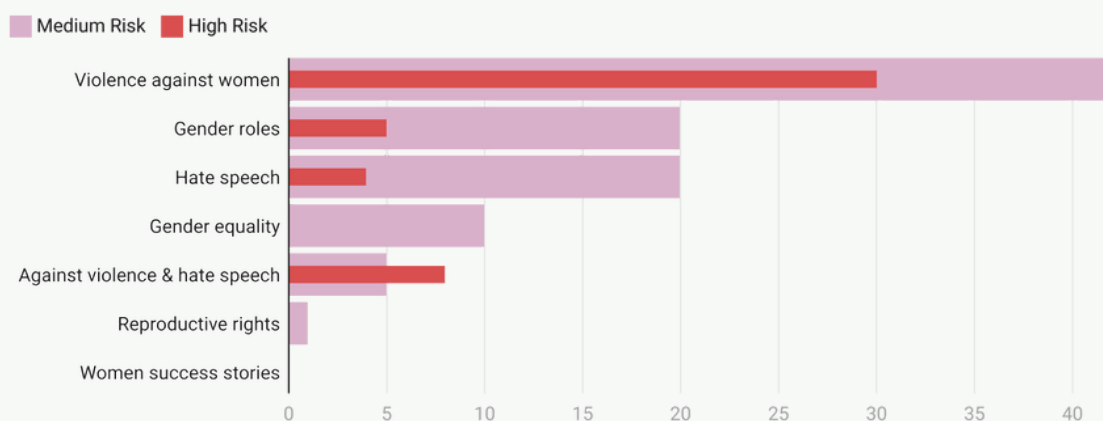


RISK LEVEL ASSESSMENT

Despite the negative nature of the content shared online, the content of significant concern that poses a high to medium risk level, such as harmful, violent, or imminent threat, constitutes 2.5% (high risks) to 5% (medium risk).³³ The small amount of it does not imply such content is not harmful to women. We should beware that in online spaces such content may spread fast and lead to irreversible harm. Generally, even with low-risk examples, the content may normalize misogyny, discriminatory attitudes toward women, GBV, harassment, objectification, and inequality, and thus be harmful. (Graph 12).

Graph 12: High and Medium risk levels across themes

by number of posts and comments



example of posts or comments

If she has really chosen the path of prostitution/ adultery, then even beating is not enough for her

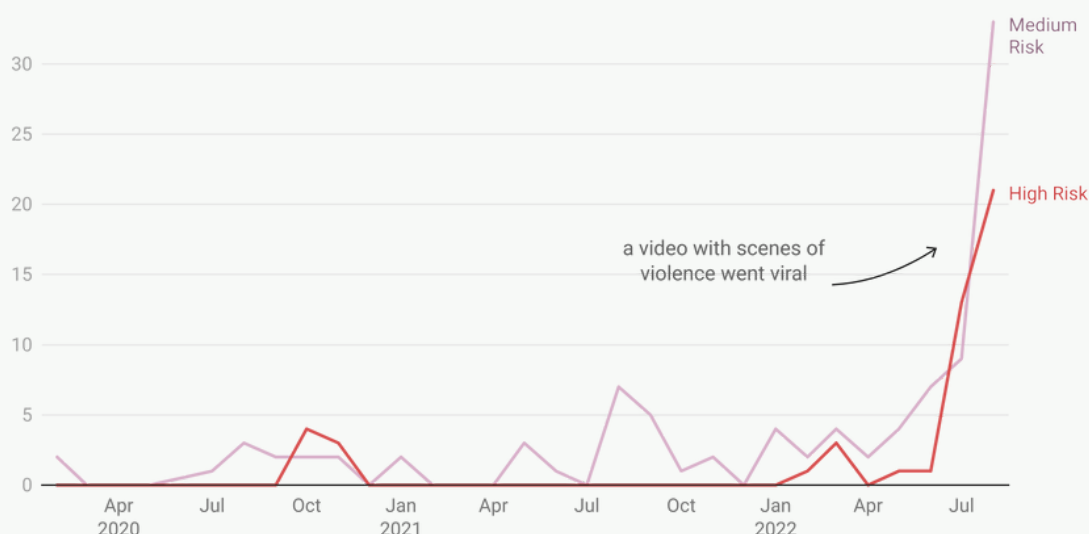
May his hand be broken, cow bastard. [This man] should be executed by firing squad (sentenced to death), if he doesn't like [her], divorce her, creature. It's pitying me that I breathe the same air with such people

Although very few, there were instances of high to medium risks level content from those advocating to stop VAWG but encouraging aggressive measures toward abusers. For example, this outcome was found among posts and comments concerning the above-mentioned video that went viral in August 2022. (Graph 13).

33. As of February 27, 2023, out of 47 posts and comments with high risk level, 32 still remain on social media, as they most likely were not reported. 14 of the removed ones are from a deleted post of a viral video with the scenes of domestic violence shared in the meme page. Out of 98 posts and comments with medium risk, 67 still remain on social media. From the removed, majority: 24 posts and comments also from a deleted post with a viral video on the meme page.

Graph 13: High and Medium Risk levels across time

by the number of posts and comments per month



The high or medium-level risk content may appear relatively small, however, the examples of violence implicated, particularly by higher risk content, are striking, as they relate to direct harm towards women, livelihoods, careers, bodily autonomy, and even life.

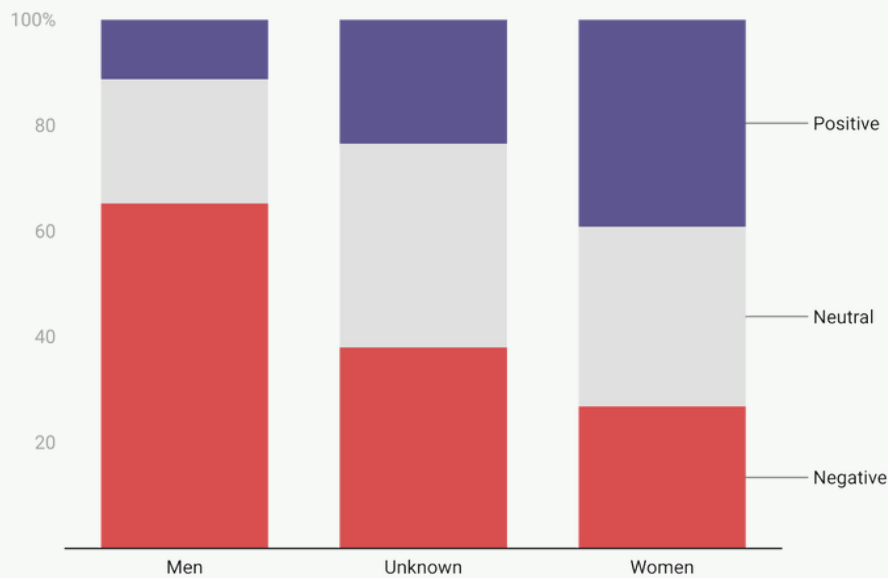
If the woman were well-behaved, he wouldn't beat her like that. He is beating her because she goes out and comes home whenever she wants without telling him. We don't know what happened. May God put nobody in such situation. But the man should have held his anger in public and instead beheaded and buried her at home. The woman obviously dishonored him. A man cannot hold it when he is angry. It is very bad to be dishonored.

example of posts or comments

GENDER DIFFERENCES

The information collected about gender is based on how social media users self-identified online, but in some cases, users' actual gender might not match their profile. Considering these nuances, much more negative content originates from those who self-identify as men than women (483 posts and comments). Alternatively, women have an almost even distribution of neutral and positive content of posts and comments (242 and 279, respectively) and much less negative content than men (Graph 14). These findings only confirm the need for safer spaces for women and girls in social media due to the prevalence of negative content targeting women from those identifying as men.

Graph 14: Content type across respondents



example of posts or comments

Woman, a question for you: when did you lose your virginity? At what age did they penetrate you?

Posted by man

As always, we clash with the interests of this or that society, our conservatives, raised on the ideas of "Turkmenchilik" will say that it is better for a woman to stay at home and raise children, and another more liberal type would say career first, a woman should be self-sufficient and our hero is Clara Zetkin. I personally adhere to the opinion that a woman is the keeper of the home, a friend, and an educator of her children.

Posted by Unknown gender

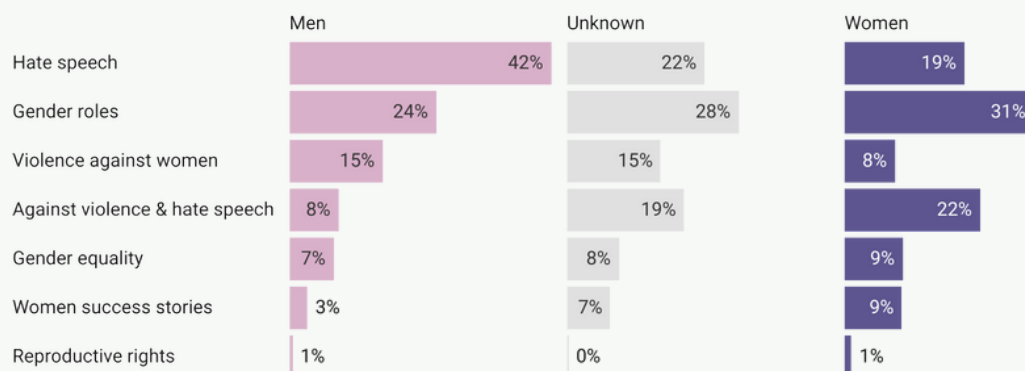
Do not go down to such low levels where your value will be measured with a piece of tissue and show the right path to those who put you down. What makes you YOU is your beautiful heart, your dreams and goals about the future, and making the world a beautiful place with your dreams and humility. So-called "ethical people" will never respect you as a human being and you will never be more than a piece of meat in their eyes. You shouldn't love someone who wants to cut your wings and make you his maid, you should love someone who respects you as a human, who makes your life equally easier and more beautiful.

Posted by woman

While two themes, "hate speech" and "gender roles," are dominant across genders, including those whose gender is unidentified, "hate speech" is particularly a dominant theme among male content sources. (Graph 15).

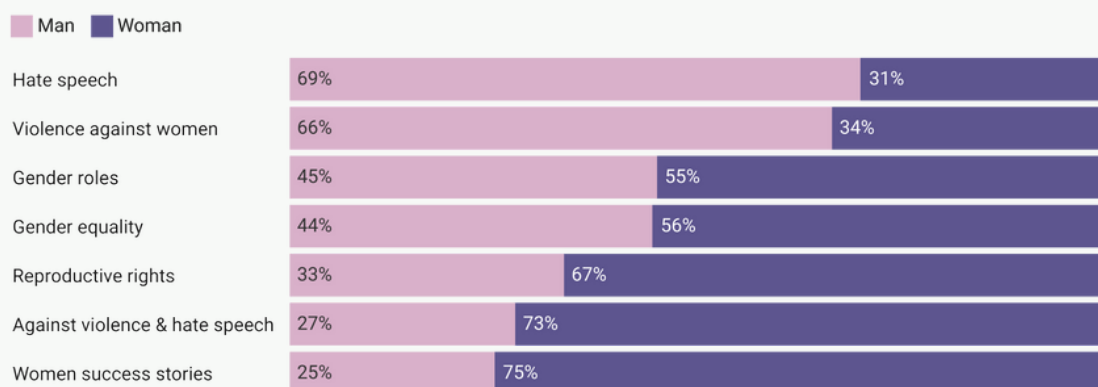
The distribution of specific themes by gender, not including those of unidentified gender, follows the trend described above. However, the results also found a second dominant theme for each gender.

Graph 15: Themes across gender



“Women’s success stories” for women and “violence against women” for men. In addition, the finding indicated that many more women engage in the content advocating to stop violence than men, and more men than women advocate for violence against women (Graph 16).

Graph 16: Gender across themes



example of posts or comments

There is a place called a salon that spoils women and removes the glow from their faces. Perhaps, she went there without permission. If my opinion is right, the man is not guilty! Because in our religion man can beat woman if: 1. she wears a thing which is told not to wear; 2. If she goes where she is told not to go, 3. If wife refuses man without any reason when [he] gets closer!

Posted by man

For some reason, we don't see women beating up their husbands for disloyalty. (So why should men be allowed to beat women for disloyalty?) Why going to a beauty salon without telling your husband is a sign of disrespect? Should a woman get permission for every step she wants to take? Are women your slaves that they cannot even go to a salon without your permission? It is not like she is going to a big event or to a different city. Do you (men) inform your wives about every step you take? If we say that her going to a salon without telling her husband is disrespectful, then is husband's beating is a sign of respect? DO NOT FORGET: both men and women are equal in front of God, actually women are even higher than men for being able to give birth to men. Hide your patriarchal attitudes a bit further away!!!

Posted by woman

Case studies:

Case study 1: Viral video with scenes of domestic violence in public space

1.1: Implicit Sexism of anti-GBV advocates

The video of August 2022, which spread first in the independent media and then across various social media, was a rare case when such instance made it to the public, as result generating much discussion among social media users both from in and outside of Turkmenistan.

In addition to familiar counterparts to such discussions -- VAWG supporters, those against abusers, and those in the middle, another group emerged during the initial analyses. This group of commenters was categorized as those who stood against VAWG. However, further phases of the textual analysis revealed a group of comments with implicit sexism under a layer of anti-violence vocabulary/rhetoric.

The shortest and most explicit example of this is, “A real man would not beat a woman.” The sexist views in the notion of a “real man”

are easy to miss when coupled with an anti-violence sentiment. However, the implicit idea that a real man must be intellectually superior to have the patience and ability to convince women to obey rather than force, especially physically, is tightly linked to the Turkmen notion of “Ejize - ganym bolma” — “Don’t hurt those that are more vulnerable/weaker than yourself.” In this context, women are the more vulnerable/weak ones, and thus, the idea is steeped in the sexism of male superiority.

An even more complex layer is that this notion is one of the social pressures placed on men and boys. They must be strong and resilient to all hardships, the opposite of which is attributed to feminine traits. These differences in gender attributes reflect complex gender role dynamics in Turkmenistan but are relevant globally.

1.2: Domestic Violence is a private matter - It is NOT!

Most of those who positioned themselves as neutral under a video with scenes of domestic violence also expressed an idea engrained in Turkmen and other conservative cultures: family matters are private and sacred; they should never be up to public discussion. Comments typical of this sentiment were addressed to the page or account owner/admin and the rest expressed the general idea of not getting involved in family matters.

Examples: “In my opinion, you shouldn’t have shared this video with the public” or “No need to get into other people’s lives and put it on display, ...” or “No, at least smooth things out at home, why [you] need to do this in public.”

However, there was a fair amount of counter-response on the importance of sharing this publicly to keep the abuser accountable.

1.3: Contextual discussion - for or against recent government restrictions on beauty salons

The timing of the video going viral coincided with ongoing discussions about government restrictions on beauty salons and specific cosmetic surgeries in April-May 2022.

Although the number of comments mentioning current restrictions on beauty salons under the viral video posts³⁴ was small compared to other conversations, a more extensive discussion of these restrictions is worthy of an in-depth study.

Those social media users, whose comments supported the government's restrictions expressed opinions such as, "There is a place called a salon that spoils women and removes the glow from their faces. Perhaps, she went there without permission. If I am right, then the man is not guilty! Because in our religion man can beat a woman if 1. she wears a thing which is told not to wear; 2. If she goes where she is told not to go, 3. If a wife refuses a man without any reason when [he] gets closer!".

Case study 2: Intergovernmental organization's choice for campaigns

Intergovernmental organizations and embassies in Turkmenistan often focus on campaigns that provide positive examples of successful women from various fields. Intended to encourage young women to pursue various professions and excel regardless of societal norms, these campaigns involve role models to promote gender equality. But in at least one example, the role model conveyed the opposite. In this example, the post included a person or so-called role model supposed to be an exemplar of gender equality, but according to the comments and rage raised in response to the post, this role model — a well-known public figure — promotes somewhat regressive values characteristic of gender inequity. Whether this is a genuine mistake due to a lack of due diligence or intentional choice, this suggests carelessness in devising such campaigns. Moreover, the results imply that the campaign might only be for

publicity and visibility of the organization. Another critical factor is that despite the public's current concerns, the issues raised under the post were never addressed. As a result, public response was ignored, and the comments that questioned the choice of the role model were often deleted.

While our research captured only one instance of such a case, unfortunately, this is not a single example but a common practice. International organizations in Turkmenistan that appear to advocate for gender equality often partner with individuals and groups that promote misogynistic and homophobic views. The practices lead to questioning whether background checks are consistently conducted to ensure that individuals or companies that they involve in campaigns do not contradict the values promoted in the campaigns.

34. <https://www.currenttime.tv/a/turkmenistan-asia-women-rights/32028786.html>

Case study 3: Media, CSOs, and intergovernmental organizations

The posts and comments shared by media, CSOs, and intergovernmental organizations collected for this research were slightly more than 40.

While intergovernmental organizations and state media mostly focused on women's success stories, independent media, and CSOs were the only sources of information that addressed urgent topics of repression and policies that limit women's rights, including questions concerning women's

mobility, beauty, and body policies, abortions, and domestic violence.

Although the independent media primarily focused on newsworthy relevant content, the CSOs typically addressed long-term issues affecting women. Moreover, very few of these organizations deliberately addressed the roots of the problems. Most of the time, only symptoms are reported in a general or even sensationalized way.

Recommendations for 2022-2027

How can we make a digital space safer for women and girls in Turkmenistan?

Fighting the digital dimension of VAWG requires systematic and comprehensive responses from all actors involved. The lack of clear and accessible language on the issues and the lack of laws on GBV add to the sense of impunity for perpetrators of violence. The lack of attention sends the message that women and girls in Turkmenistan can be victims of online violence without consequences, encouraging perpetrators to continue committing harm.

Impunity linked to GBV can lead to deadly consequences. The lack of consequences for perpetrators can lead to a loss of trust in national authorities, with women and girls tending to underreport threats and violence against them due to the potential for inadequate assistance and fear of facing prejudice and re-victimization.

Saglyk views digital violence on a continuum with offline violence and harassment faced by women and girls in Turkmenistan. Social media platforms and other websites do not always act effectively to remove hateful content in Turkmen. These platforms should not be places where online abuse proliferates without consequence.

We understand that more research and recommendations for action are needed in the long term. However, we aimed to use our results in feasible ways to improve the conditions for women and girls. Hence, the recommendations below are made to the government of Turkmenistan, civic society, and international organizations. We also identify ways internet and social media users can help address the challenges.

We suggest these recommendations are achievable by 2028.

To the Government of Turkmenistan (ministries and ombudsperson)

Create and adopt laws and policies that

- Recognize that VAWG in the digital sphere is yet another manifestation of GBV that, like any other, hampers the full realization of gender equality and violates women's and girls' human rights.
- Include a comprehensive law on domestic violence based on the best practices in consultation with the public and civil society. This law should define the terms legally and shape national policies and laws against cyberbullying.
- Define and determine in national laws that cyberbullying women and girls is a criminal offense.
- Publicly accept and implement CEDAW recommendations from 2018 and measure the impact of activities.

Work with stakeholders to

- Develop and disperse a toolkit for media and train state media journalists to cover the stories of domestic violence and GBV objectively, without sexist language and victim blaming.
- Develop publicly available protocols for police on how to deal with such content in line with human rights norms.
- Educate and involve medical/mental health professionals in supporting girls and women facing GBV (online and offline).
- Provide teachers with tools and information to assist them in educating the younger population about GBV online, safety online, and reporting GBV online.
- Assist social workers in designing strategic social work management principles in digital VAWG
- Ensure that the Ministry of Statistics takes immediate steps to fill the gaps in SGD 5 and provide disaggregated data on GBV.

Communicate with the public by

- Designating and funding a government entity responsible for public communication and education on GBV issues.
- Ensuring access to justice for girls and women who are targets of online harassment and violence: including increasing awareness of reporting mechanisms, training law enforcement and judicial officers, and establishing helplines.
- Requiring education institutions to develop and deliver digital³⁵ curricula on online safety, equipping students with the knowledge to recognize, avoid, and prevent online harassment and VAWG, including the ability to use reporting mechanisms.
- Setting up a hotline and other means of communication where the public can report³⁶ incidents of violence anonymously. Guarantee easily accessible, safe mechanisms enabling women to report abuse and obtain the removal of harmful materials.

Work with civil society to

- Show genuine political will to work on the issues by engaging with civil society and partnering with and supporting NGOs working on GBV in the cities and rural areas.
- Establish a mechanism where government agencies meet regularly with civil society experts.
- Support and fund further research on GBV and gender-based cyber violence. Include men in conversations and research on GBV
- Work with internet service providers and social media platforms to raise women's and girls' awareness about online safety and their digital rights.

35. <https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/02/sotwgr2020-commsreport-en-2.pdf>

36. Ibid.

To international organizations in Turkmenistan

- Build the capacity of government agencies to conduct further research on this topic.
- Assist the tasked government agency in developing a toolkit for media and journalists.
- Support the recommendations to the government mentioned above.
- Request the Committee on the Rights of the Child to ensure that the draft General Comment No. 25 on children's rights concerning the digital environment gives more attention to online harassment.³⁷
- In partnership with the government and civil society, develop digital citizenship education and awareness-raising initiatives so that communities, families, and civil society are better informed on the opportunities and risks of being online, focusing on online abuse.
- Facilitate broader discussions on the issue of online harassment and violence aimed at eliminating gender inequality, harmful gender norms, and violence against women and girls.
- Involve both men and women in the informational campaigns modeling positive behavior

To civil society working inside and outside Turkmenistan

- Show solidarity by sharing information and data.
- Proactively engage with groups working on similar issues.
- Initiate and conduct research addressing the root causes of attitudes and problems.
- Develop and launch counter-abusive misinformation campaigns online targeting women and girls.

To tech companies and social media platforms

- Increase the number of content moderators in the Turkmen language so abusive and hate speech can be removed promptly.
- Consult and cooperate with local experts and CSOs to understand the local context and to tackle GBV online on their content policies.
- Hold violators accountable and responsible for their actions online, including by timely sanctioning of perpetrators, consistent with other platform violations.³⁸
- Provide more effective reporting mechanisms on GBV online that are responsive to all girls' needs and experiences, considering intersecting identities (disabilities, age, ethnicity, refugees, stateless, minorities, etc.), as well as enhance capacity in different languages, remove content from platforms that indicate risks and post warnings.
- Organize a social campaign on how to minimize and report GBV online.

³⁷.Ibid.

³⁸.Ibid.

To the public

- All members of society should recognize the harm and the effects of online harassment and VAWG, show solidarity, report abuse responsibly, and amplify girls' voices.³⁹
- Schools and families should create safe spaces for engagement with girls where they feel secure to speak up about online harassment and know they are supported.⁴⁰
- Think and talk about the results of this research. Share this research and write your opinion. It matters.
- Model the behavior by supporting counter-abusive online misinformation campaigns targeting women and girls.
- Report abusive content online.
- Remember that attitudes and actions can only improve when we talk about them, not when we hide them.

³⁹. Ibid.

⁴⁰. Ibid.



Due to the absence of any other educational resources in Turkmenistan, **Saglyk** remains the only place where a Turkmen speaker can learn about domestic violence and its impact, with an emphasis on public health costs for society and families. We consistently develop content explaining that domestic violence should not be a private family matter as it is now. Our content includes lawyers' and doctors' advice, an explanation of the cycles of violence, and types of violence. We also provide comparisons and examples of the level of protection from intimate partner violence in our region and globally (in English).

In addition, the Saglyk team has developed comprehensive content concerning women's health, access to abortion, contraception, family planning, and child mortality and its causes.

Since 2020, Saglyk's runs the **Dymma!** (Don't be silent!), a campaign where we publish anonymous stories from our readers who are victims or witnesses of various forms of domestic violence (physical, psychological, sexual), harassment, and discrimination against women in public and private spheres. The stories resonate with our followers on social media, and the campaign quickly became one of the most-read sections on our website and social media.

'BIL'IM (can mean either "period" or "knowledge," depending on which syllable you emphasize in Turkmen) is the first mobile period tracker app with content on women's and girls' health and rights in Turkmenistan.

The app offers information on

- abortion rights,
- violence against women and children,
- the phone hotline for the victims of domestic violence in Ashgabat,
- gender equality (education, employment, health, divorce) in national laws,
- sexual harassment in the streets and workplace,
- harmful cultural practices such as virginity tests,
- reproductive rights,
- consent,
- dangers of sexting,
- online bullying,
- first aid and help for rape victims,
- and date violence.

Finally, Saglyk has developed 100 answers to 100 questions on sexuality and reproductive health that Turkmen teens are too ashamed to ask their parents and teachers. In addition, because information on sex education is nonexistent in Turkmenistan, Saglyk provides a space for Turkmen-speaking young men and women to access science-based sex education in their language.



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