

FEMINIST ACTIVISM TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

WORKING PAPER

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December 2022



Publication information

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Suggested citation and permalink

Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, D. (2022) *Feminist activism to end gender-based violence in the public sphere*. ALIGN Working paper. London: ALIGN/ODI (<https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-feminist-activism-end-gbv-public-sphere>)

Acknowledgements

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The author appreciates the work of Ella Williams and Juliana Woodland for their initial scoping research upon which this report develops and builds. Thank you to Simamkele Dlakavu and Ana Prata Pereira for being critical friends and for the thorough peer-review, their comments have made this a much stronger text. Thank you also to the ALIGN team: Caroline Harper, Rachel Marcus, Evie Browne and Ján Michalko for their comments and guidance, Emilie Tant for final review and strategic communications support, and Emily Subden for production management. The editorial contributions of Terese Jonsson were also vital to the finished version of this working paper.

Lastly, the author would like to acknowledge all the feminist activists featured in this report, and whose vital work is contributing to ending gender-based violence across the world.

Cover image: DESIGNBYMAIA 2022

Design: Squarebeasts.net

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Acronyms

ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms	NCDII	non-consensual distribution of intimate images
APC	Association for Progressive Communications	NGO	non-governmental organisation
GBV	gender-based violence	OGBV	online gender-based violence
ICT	information and communications technology	OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ILO	International Labour Organization	UK	United Kingdom
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex (+ denotes that the acronym is non-exhaustive and can also include other identities)	UN	United Nations
		US	United States
		VACS	Violence Against Children and Youth Survey
		VAWIP	Violence against women in politics

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Glossary

Cis/cisgender – Refers to people whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.

Feminist activism – Activism to advance women's rights and gender justice, whether or not it uses the label 'feminist' explicitly.

Femicide – Refers to the gender-motivated murder of (perceived) women. The term femicide is preferred by various authors such as Fregoso and Bejarano (2010) and Felman-Panagotacos (2021) as they consider speaking of 'femicide' instead of 'femicide' highlights gender as a social construct, and thus as distinct to biological sex.

Gender-based violence – Violent acts (including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic harm) directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their (perceived) gender.

Gender non-conforming – Expressions of gender identity that do not conform to dominant binary expectations of 'appropriate' gendered behaviour or appearance.

Gender norms – Socio-culturally defined rules about how a person should behave and present themselves, as well as interact with others, in accordance with their perceived gender. They also inform social expectations of others according to their perceived genders.

Intersectionality – Concept, originating in Black feminism, and coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), which explains how social categories interconnect to produce intersecting experiences of oppression and privilege for differently marginalised groups of people (such as depending on their race/ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality).

Lad culture – An often-desired form of masculinity among young men (mostly in university communities) that is heavily supported by, and promotes, women's objectification and the normalisation of sexual violence.

Obstetric violence – Harm that is 'inflicted during or in relation to pregnancy, childbearing, and the post-partum period' (Chadwick, 2021), or during the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

Rape culture – Normalisation and trivialisation of sexual violence, which manifests in attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes that legitimise rape.

1 Introduction

The pervasiveness of gendered violence continues to be a shocking reality in today's world, leaving no country untouched. After centuries of feminist activism to demand a radical transformation of gender relations, patriarchal violence still permeates people's everyday experiences all over the globe – albeit in different ways.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is both a consequence of, and an instrument to maintain and reinforce, patriarchal power. It is sanctioned by harmful **gender norms** – such as those that dictate male superiority and dominance, male control over economic and financial resources, ideas of toughness and strength as male qualities,¹ and gendered notions of honour and shame – as well as of the material structures that sustain these norms. It also enforces and reproduces gender norms, by punishing or disciplining people who are perceived as transgressing or challenging them (hooks, 1984; Segato, 2013; Gqola, 2015; Kuriakose et al., 2017; Bates, 2020).

For these reasons, GBV has always been a central concern of women's and feminist movements worldwide. Women's and **feminist activism** in this area has led to the creation of key international instruments, such as the Convention for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UN General Assembly, 1979), the Maputo Protocol (African Union, 2003) and the Convention of Belém do Pará (Organization of American States, 1994). They have also led to changes in national legislation in many countries such as the United Kingdom, South Africa, Guatemala, China, India, Ghana, Turkey, Colombia and South Korea (see for example Lewis, 2020; Bennett, 2007; Cagna and Rao, 2016; Musalo and Bookey, 2014; Küçükalioglu, 2018).

Public policy and development interventions have tended to focus mostly on GBV against women. Within that, they have focused mostly on domestic violence and intimate partner violence – that is, the violence that occurs within the private sphere – and more specifically, physical violence. Most interventions have focused on the violence experienced by women in heterosexual relationships, despite the fact LGBTQI+ people also experience high rates of intimate partner violence (Chen et al., 2013; Brown and Herman, 2015). This limited view comes from an analytical separation between the private and the public sphere, despite their blurred boundaries and consistent feminist critiques of this distinction (see Section 1.1). The COVID-19 pandemic may have also recently contributed to maintaining the focus on GBV in the private sphere, as reports have emphasised the increase of domestic and intimate partner violence as a result of lockdown measures (e.g. Rowan, 2021; Guidorzi, 2020).

While addressing violence in the domestic sphere is crucial, as it remains one of the most common forms of gendered violence,² feminist activists have also long called attention to the multiple forms that GBV takes and its pervasiveness through all the spheres of life, beyond that of the home. LGBTQI+ activists also continue to call attention to how GBV not only affects **cis**, heterosexual women, but also LGBTQI+ and **gender non-conforming** people across a range of spaces.

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- 1 This gender norm frames vulnerable emotions as feminine, and thus as emasculating, hindering men and boys from expressing their emotions in a healthy way.
 - 2 According to the World Health Organization (2021), physical and sexual violence by partners affects around 641 million women worldwide. It also estimates that one in four young women between the ages of 15 and 24 years who have been in a relationship will have experienced violence by a partner by the time they are 25 years old.

This working paper explores what is known about how women and other marginalised genders experience GBV across different spaces within what has been conceptualised as the ‘public sphere’. How are women and social movements responding to it? What have they achieved? And, what are the challenges they face when pushing for transformative change?

Approaching women’s and feminist activism against GBV through an intersectional lens, the paper examines and calls attention to the ways in which various forms of social and structural difference shape gendered experiences of violence and of feminist activism. The concept of intersectionality was coined by Black feminist legal scholar Crenshaw (1989) – echoing previous works by authors such as Beale (1970) and King (1988) – to call attention to the way in which gendered and racialised forms of oppression cannot be treated as separate or cumulative but need to be understood as mutually constitutive.

The paper understands the public sphere as comprising spaces that are shared with strangers and where activities pertaining to life in common are carried out. It focuses on four main areas:



1. **Common public spaces:** streets, public transport, parks and markets.



2. **Online spaces:** virtual platforms for interaction that are enabled by internet connection and digital technologies, such as social media and websites.



3. **Workplaces:** any space where paid or unpaid work is carried out.³



4. **Educational institutions:** schools, universities, professional/vocational colleges and any other institution of lifelong learning.

More briefly, the paper also discusses social movements and activist groups, religious spaces and healthcare institutions (see Section 2.5).

While these spaces were chosen as they represent a vast portion of the public sphere, this choice was also dictated by the information available. Due to a lack of information, social and entertainment spaces (such as clubs, restaurants, theatres, bars and so on) are missing from the paper. These are key areas of the public sphere where women and other marginalised genders are present in other capacities than workers.⁴ Moreover, while activism often involves a vast constellation of actors – such as governments, intergovernmental institutions and development organisations (e.g. Dunkel-Graglia, 2016) – this working paper focuses exclusively on women’s and feminist activism, as part of ALIGN’s ongoing effort to increase knowledge of the impact of this activism on transformative gender norm change. To recognise the broader constellation in which women’s and feminist movements operate, Annex 2 provides some examples of interventions organised by other actors.

³ The paper, however, does not discuss in much detail where this overlaps with domestic violence or intimate partner violence, for example for people doing unpaid domestic work.

⁴ When these spaces are discussed, it is in relation to women’s experiences as workers (see Section 2.3). Only Yang et al. (2020), who look at GBV against female solo travellers, discuss women’s experiences in these places as customers.

The findings presented are based on a rapid non-systematic literature review of both academic and grey literature on GBV and feminist activism in the spaces mentioned. Searches were carried out in English and Spanish in two rounds: a more general search in English, followed by more targeted searches in both languages. The working paper includes material published between 2011 and 2022, as well as information from across regions and different countries. When searching and writing, attention was paid to geographical diversity and to covering feminist activism across different global regions. The paper is not aimed to be comprehensive of all feminist initiatives and movements that are working worldwide on this issue, but rather paints a picture of gendered violence in the public sphere and examples of feminist activism in response to it across regions.

While the paper covers violence against women and other marginalised genders in each of the public spaces discussed, it does not include LGBTQI+ movements and/or activism, as their breadth and impact merits a more detailed discussion in future research. It is important to note that the results obtained through searches performed (see Annex 1) focused mostly on GBV experienced by women and girls, information that tends not to specify whether this encompasses only cis, heterosexual women or also includes trans and LGBTQI+ women. Separate searches were therefore conducted on LGBTQI+ experiences of GBV in the spaces discussed. The need to perform separate searches shows, however, that undoing the conflation between GBV and violence against (cis, heterosexual) women and girls is still an area that needs further work. For a more detailed discussion of the methodology, please refer to Annex 1.

The remainder of this introduction discusses key concepts for the working paper as well as some theoretical background on how feminist and women's activism brings about change. Section 2 discusses in detail each of the areas of the public sphere, including what is known about GBV in each area, feminist responses to it, their main achievements and the main barriers they face when organising against violence in these spaces.



Posters calling for justice by relatives of victims of sexual abuse and feminicide in Mexico on the wall of the National Human Rights Commission building. © Alfredo Hernandez Rios / Shutterstock.com

1.1 Conceptual framework

Gender-based violence

GBV can be understood as harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is conceptually different to violence against women and girls, as GBV encompasses harms perpetrated against people who identify/are perceived as women as well as LGBTQI+ people. As Gqola (2022) argues, GBV is the violence directed at people who have been 'made female', regardless of their gender. For example, norms of heterosexual, cis masculinity render gay boys and men and gender non-conforming people as 'socially female' (ibid.) and thus subject to GBV.

GBV encompasses physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic harm, and instances can entail one form of harm or a combination of them (see Box 1). Regardless of the type of harm inflicted, GBV tends to entail significant emotional and psychological costs for the victim/survivor.

Box 1: What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their perceived gender. As well as violence against women and girls, it includes violence perpetrated against LGBTQI+ and gender non-conforming people – including men and boys.

The feminist movement has shown that GBV encompasses a wide range of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic harm, either separately or in combination, including:

- **verbal and online harassment or abuse**
- **sexist bullying and intimidation or humiliation**
- **unwanted touching and sexual advances**
- **predatory/sexualised staring and indecent exposure**
- **homophobic or transphobic attacks**
- **aggravated assault and stalking**
- **threats of rape, violence and/or destitution**
- **coercive control**
- **sexual assault and rape**
- **femicide or murder.**

These can be viewed as being on a spectrum, from one-off experiences of verbal harassment through to murder. GBV is most commonly perpetrated by men and boys, sometimes individually, sometimes collectively. Within institutions it can become systemic, whereby the institutional culture normalises abusive behaviour and abuse of power, as for example, in police cultures in many countries (HRW, 2013, 2020).

GBV needs to be understood through an intersectional lens. Misogyny entangles with, and reinforces, other forms of discrimination and/or hatred, including race, ethnicity, class, caste, sexuality and disability (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2020; Hill Collins, 2022; see also Ging, 2019; Imkaan, 2019; Bates, 2020). These intersecting forms of structural oppression render marginalised groups of women more exposed to the risk of GBV. For example, undocumented migrant women are more likely to experience violence in the workplace than documented and non-migrant workers (see Section 2.3) and racialised, disabled and poor women are more likely to experience **obstetric violence** by healthcare professionals (see Section 2.5). Black and indigenous women have been historically hypersexualised, initially in contexts of colonialism and slavery (Behrendt, 2000; Smith, 2005; Seshia, 2010; García-Del

These intersecting forms of structural oppression render marginalised groups of women more exposed to the risk of GBV.



Moral, 2011; Gqola, 2015; Helman, 2018). White men perceived them to be 'unrapeable' vis-à-vis white women – that is, as bodies and psyches upon which violence can be enacted with impunity, and thus as bodies upon which the concept of rape is not even applicable (MacKinnon, 1989; Arnfred, 2004; Gouws, 2018; Gqola, 2022). As a result, GBV has also been instrumental in sustaining other systems of oppression (Gqola, 2015).

GBV is understood as a continuum that begins with harassment and ends with murder (femicide) (Kelly, 1988; Anitha and Lewis, 2018). This framing helps highlight the significance of sexual harassment and other forms of GBV that are often perceived as minor, as it shows how what is considered a trivial offence is part of, and helps sustain, forms of harm that are perceived as more serious. It also a phenomenon that reaches across spheres and spaces. For example, as discussed in Section 2.2, online GBV (OGBV), while usually dismissed as 'unreal' or 'harmless', often spills into violence in offline spaces (Barr, 2021). Likewise, female workers may experience GBV in interrelated settings – their physical workplace, when travelling to and from work, when attending work-related events, or through digital technologies and online platforms – and gendered violence in their private lives may spill over into their working lives or vice versa (UN Women, 2019a).

While GBV results from unequal gender relations and the specific sets of gender norms that sustain them, it is also instrumental to maintaining asymmetric power relations. As Segato (2013, 2016) argues, acts of gendered violence perform and communicate a relation of power and produce implicit patriarchal norms within a given space. In this sense, GBV asserts and protects male authority and control over women, as well as the social norms that sustain this, aiming to silence and force people perceived as female into acceptance of violence. It also sends a message to other men about male authority and control (see also Brickell, 2000; Gqola, 2015; 2022; Buarque de Almeida, 2019).

GBV in the public sphere aims to protect and maintain the patriarchal logic of these social, political and economic spaces. As Gqola (2022: 22) writes, GBV has a political purpose: it says to women and other marginalised genders that 'public spaces are not theirs', and intends to make them feel out of place and at risk. Fear is central to this enterprise: GBV in public spaces routinises and normalises fear and limits the freedom of those targeted by it to inhabit and traverse these spaces (i.e. their mobility). Gendered violence in these spaces thus aims to limit women and other marginalised genders' ownership of, and presence in, the public sphere. This reinforces male control over public spaces, imposing a (male) public/(female) private divide and disciplining women for transgressing it through the use of violence.



Women in South Africa protest 'enough is enough' is response to the rape and murdered of a woman in Cape Town, South Africa. © Roxane 134 / Shutterstock.com

Private and public sphere

Feminist theory has shown how gender relations have depended on, and enforced, a socially constructed separation of life and space into two spheres: the private and the public. This binary and the private sphere – conceptualised as encompassing the domestic family realm and the unpaid economy – has, in the Western philosophical tradition, long been framed as women's place and responsibility. In parallel, the public sphere – usually referred to as encompassing the state, the formal (paid) economy and all spaces for political discussion (Fraser, 1990) – has been framed as the space of and for men.

This separation of social life into the public and the private, and their association with the masculine and the feminine, has served to exclude women and other marginalised genders from participating in political and economic activity and decision-making. This has sustained male control, the social, political and economic dependence of women, and the exclusion of other marginalised genders (Pateman, 1988, 1989; Okin, 1989; Marshall and Anderson, 1994). In addition to being a male space, the public sphere has also long been constructed as a cis, heterosexual space (Brickell, 2000; see also Padgug, 1992; Richardson, 1996), thereby also excluding LGBTQI+ people from political and economic activity and decision-making.

Feminist scholars have problematised this separation of social life. At a basic level, it is important to understand that these spheres are not neatly separated, but porous. COVID-19 has furthered the porosity between both spheres, as it has led to increased digitalisation. The private and public spheres, moreover, cannot be defined as spaces where politics are respectively absent and present, as feminists have long emphasised (Fraser, 1996). Rather, politics and power relations permeate both spheres (i.e. the personal is always political) and the boundaries between these spheres need to be understood as varying, shifting and open to contestation (Brickell, 2000: 165).

Other feminist scholars (e.g. Pateman, 1988, 1989) have argued for the complete abandonment of the distinction between the public and the private in favour of politicising the private sphere. They argue that the separation of social life into these two spheres has been instrumental in shaping oppressive gender norms and power asymmetries. Separating life into the public and the private has been complicit in the framing of unpaid work and subsistence economies as non-work, and thus its devaluation vis-à-vis wage labour.

It also runs the risk of obscuring spaces that are not easily mapped onto one category, such as prisons or detention centres – spaces that, as the recent murder of Mahsa Amini in police custody in Iran show, are common sites of GBV. Likewise in Chile, the protest song *Un Violador en tu Camino* ('A rapist in your path') created by the feminist group Las Tesis, points to how the police can be perpetrators of sexual violence, as the public institution was indeed accused of, during the 2019 social uprising (Bonnefoy, 2019). It runs the risk therefore of simplifying the dynamics at play in spaces that are at times private and at times public, such as restricted or online spaces (Acoso.Online, 2020).

The paper, however, takes on the concept of the public sphere for analytical reasons. Firstly, it calls attention to how the public/private divide has constructed GBV as a problem mostly occurring in the private sphere. Secondly, it calls attention to the presence of GBV in this other, often more neglected, sphere, highlighting how gendered violence in the public sphere acts as a tool to enforce and maintain patriarchal control over key social, economic and political spaces.

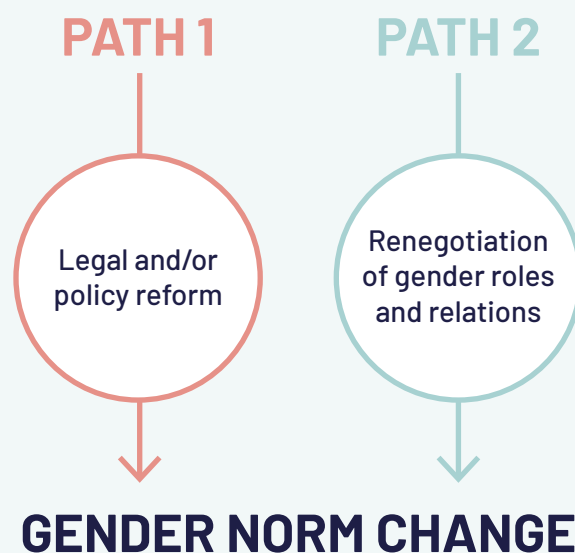
1.2 Women's and feminist activism

This working paper looks at women's and feminist movements. It understands women's movements as those mostly composed of, and led by, people who identify as women, where women participate based on their gender identity and interests as 'women' but do not always necessarily have feminist agendas. It understands feminist movements as those that seek to improve all people's rights and wellbeing by contesting gender inequality and injustice and demanding an end to sexist oppression (hooks, 1984). Feminist movements tend to work mostly with and for people who identify as women (Molyneux, 1998, 2000; Beckwith, 2000; Horn, 2013). Most of the movements and initiatives discussed in the paper are explicitly feminist – except for women's trade unions (see Section 2.3).

Women's and feminist movements have been key to bringing about transformative change (Hassim, 2006; Htun and Weldon 2018; Weldon and Htun, 2013; Gouws, 2016; Macaulay, 2021; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021). Their efforts ultimately contest oppressive gender norms – the different sets of formal or informal social rules that shape gender roles and relations in an unjust and unequal manner – as well as institutions that shape and sustain these norms.

Women's and feminist movements advocate for change mainly through one or both of the following pathways:

Figure 1: Pathways to changing gender norms



Source: Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021.

Legal and policy frameworks reflect and establish 'normative social orders' (Htun and Weldon, 2012), thus efforts to achieve legal and/or policy change aim to institutionalise new social norms (Marcus and Harper, 2014). Efforts to contest dominant gender roles and relations, on the other hand, directly challenge the beliefs and behaviours that underpin gender injustices in everyday life and thus aim to transform social gendered expectations and ultimately gender norms (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021).

The variety of collective feminist responses discussed in the following sections engage in these two pathways of change. However, they also contest gender norms directly. Campaigns, initiatives or mobilisations against GBV in the public sphere tend to emerge around individual cases, or several cases occurring within a short period, seen and framed as emblematic of the experiences of GBV facing women and other marginalised genders. As will be discussed, feminist responses to gendered violence across the public sphere use a wide variety of strategies, from self-defence, visibility campaigns and educational and training initiatives, to lobbying governments, creating art and occupying the streets with protests and other interventions. Digital activism has become central to most of these strategies as a key enabler of mobilisation and a key platform for contesting oppressive gender norms.

The working paper approaches political mobilisation as a spectrum, including activism by individuals, small collectives and mass movements, as well as work at different scales. Thus, it discusses both mass-scale feminist movements against GBV in public spaces as well as smaller-scale actions.



Women protest by a mural wall with the names of victims of femicide painted on it on International Women's Day in Mexico City, Mexico. © clicksdemexico / Shutterstock.com

2 Gender-based violence in the public sphere

The following sections discuss the four spaces of the public sphere outlined in the introduction – common public spaces, online spaces, the workplace and educational institutions (Sections 2.1-2.4) – as well as (more briefly) social movements, religious spaces and healthcare settings (Section 2.5). Each section discusses available evidence of GBV in that space and how it affects different groups of women and other marginalised genders. It then discusses feminist activism against it – its aims, strategies and achievements – and the challenges that activists face when organising in that space.



2.1 Common public spaces

GBV in common public spaces, such as streets, public transport, parks, markets and public toilets, is a global reality. It can take the form of harassment, sexual and physical assaults, attacks (such as acid attacks, discussed in Box 2) and murder. In the United Kingdom (UK), estimates suggest that two-thirds of women have experienced sexual harassment in a common space – this number rises to 86% for women aged 18–34 (APPG, 2021).⁵ In New Delhi, the estimate of women who have experienced sexual harassment in common spaces is as high as 92%; in Ecuador, a survey found around 70% of women had experienced sexual harassment and/or abuse in public spaces in the last year; in Rwanda, a study by UN Women showed 42% of women were concerned about GBV when commuting during the day and 55% when commuting at night (UN Women, 2014; Stop Street Harassment, 2022).⁶

Street harassment includes unwanted comments and gestures, such as whistling and sexualised comments (also known as ‘catcalling’), as well as persistent requests for personal information, incidences of stalking and indecent exposure. In New Delhi (India), it is estimated that 79% of women have experienced visual and verbal sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime; in Thailand, this estimate is 86% and in Brazil it is 89% (ActionAid, 2016).⁷ Sexual assaults can scale from unwanted touching to rape. A survey conducted in six markets of Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) found that 55% of women had experienced some form of sexual violence in these spaces in a one-year period (UN Women, 2012).⁸

⁵ Results based on a survey with more than 1,000 respondents.

⁶ Survey details not available for either of these statistics.

⁷ Results based on a survey with 2,500 women aged 16 and over in major cities across Brazil, India, Thailand and the UK.

⁸ Survey details not available.

Box 2: Acid attacks in South Asia and other regions

Acid attacks, also known as vitriolage or vitriolism, are physical assaults where a corrosive substance or acid is thrown over a person (usually a woman). Acid attacks often result in 'severe, permanent, disfiguring and incapacitating injuries with loss of tissue and organ function' (Byard, 2020) and when severe can lead to death. Yet, the aim of these attacks is not necessarily to kill, but to maim (Yi, 2015; ActionAid, 2017).

As a study with survivors in Bangladesh shows, it is common for victims/survivors to suffer anxiety, depression, social isolation and post-traumatic stress, as well as financial harm and social stigma (Ahmad, 2012; ActionAid, 2022). Carried out most commonly against people perceived as female (it is estimated that women are 75% of the victims), the aim of these attacks is usually to punish or to enact revenge.

While acid attacks occur in the context of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, they also occur in the public sphere and are perpetrated by others than intimate partners (Jolin, 2016). In these cases, victims/survivors tend to be younger women and attacks tend to be perpetrated in retaliation for refusing sexual advances or rejecting marriage proposals (Ahmad, 2012; Byard, 2020; UN Women Africa, 2021; ActionAid, 2017, 2022). Men who perpetrate acid attacks tend to feel entitled to women's bodies and, when rejected, feel wronged by them – echoing the claims made by 'incels' and other misogynist groups (see Section 2.2).

Acid attacks aim to punish women by targeting normative aspirations of female beauty – in other words, acid attacks aim to 'take beauty' away from women (Rosete, 2022; ActionAid, 2017).

As beauty (and female sexuality) is often perceived by various groups of men as women's 'source of power over them' (Bates, 2020), acid attacks can be understood as attempts to render women powerless vis-à-vis men, and thus as an attempt to reinforce male domination over women.

Acid attacks have also been perpetrated against women in retaliation for property and business issues, sometimes to punish women for transgressing into male space or to hinder their economic autonomy (Acid Survivors Foundation, 2011; Ahmad, 2012; Byard, 2020). As acid attacks have also been specifically targeted against trans women (Galvan, 2021), they are also used as means to punish the transgression of gender norms and to sustain the public sphere as heterosexual.

It is estimated that approximately **1,500 acid attacks take place worldwide every year** – however, this number may be much higher considering unreported instances (ActionAid, 2022). There is no disaggregated data on the occurrence of acid attacks by perpetrator-victim relation, space and motive.

After public streets, public transport is the second most common place where GBV occurs in common spaces (USAID, 2020). In 2014, a poll conducted across 16 cities with 6,500 women found that sexual assault on public transport was most acute in Mexico City (Mexico), Bogota (Colombia), Lima (Peru), New Delhi and Jakarta (Indonesia) (Boros, 2014). In a survey conducted in France in 2015, 100% of female respondents reported having been sexually harassed or assaulted at least once while using public transport (Haute Conseil à l'Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes, 2015).⁹ In 2012, a young woman in New Delhi was physically assaulted and raped by a group of men on the back of a public bus, resulting in her death – an attack that became known as the Nirbhaya case (Udwin, 2015).

Homophobic and transphobic violence also frequently takes place in common spaces – in many contexts it is also commonly perpetrated by members of police forces (HRW, 2020). According to a study by Stonewall, LGBTQI+ people in the UK often experience verbal abuse on the streets (Bachmann and Gooch, 2017; see also Arndt, 2018). This research also found that 30% of LGBTQI+ people do not feel safe on the streets, and as a result 36% avoid certain paths or holding hands with their partners – a number that increases to 44% for trans people.¹⁰

In the European Union, a 2012 study with over 93,000 LGBTQI+ people found that 50% of respondents avoided common public spaces because of fear of harassment (cited in Roenius, 2016). While there is less statistical evidence of the violence LGBTQI+ people experience in common spaces, anecdotal evidence abounds, testifying to the prevalence of harassment, sexual violence, physical assault and murder, with transgender people particularly at risk (Fedorko, 2016; GFW, 2016; UNFE, 2017; HRW, 2020). Cis, straight women and other marginalised genders (especially those that are Black, indigenous, disabled and/or poor) are also vulnerable to abuse from police and/or security forces (HRW, 2013; Srinivasan, 2021). This risk is particularly acute in contexts of conflict or its aftermath (e.g. Vajpeyi, 2009; Rohwerder, 2017; Burt, 2019), as sexual violence has historically been deployed as an instrument of warfare (Enloe, 2000; Alison, 2007; Boesten, 2014).

Other groups, such as homeless people, ethnic and/or religious minorities, people with disabilities and refugees, are also at increased risk of gendered violence in common spaces, yet there is little statistical information available.¹¹ Marginalised urban spaces where there are poor transport links, low levels of police presence and poorly lit streets may also place women and others living in these areas at increased risk of GBV (ActionAid, 2016).



Men who perpetrate acid attacks tend to feel entitled to women's bodies and, when rejected, feel wronged by them.

⁹ Survey details not available.

¹⁰ Results based on a survey with more than 5,000 LGBTQI+ participants.

¹¹ A UN Women (2019b) report, for example, mentions, anecdotally, GBV experienced by Roma women in Serbia. Over the years, there had been frequent rapes and attacks on the road linking the Roma settlement with the urban parts of Zemun Polje because of poor transport links into the Roma communities. In respect to refugees, Akhter and Kusakabe (2014) show how Rohingya women in Bangladesh are vulnerable to GBV perpetrated by members of the refugee community as well as outsiders.

Femicide – the gender-motivated murder of (perceived) women – has long been identified as a problem of the private sphere, as a large proportion of this crime is perpetrated by women’s (ex)intimate partners. However, femicide is not exclusive to the private sphere. In some countries, common spaces are also significant sites of femicide (see Box 3 for a discussion of the case of Mexico). Moreover, women from racialised or structurally marginalised ethnic minorities are likely to be more at risk of femicide in common spaces. For example, indigenous women in Canada are more likely to be murdered by strangers than by intimate partners (García-Del Moral, 2018).

GBV in common spaces aims to limit women’s and LGBTQI+ people’s mobility, and often succeeds in doing so. It can also hinder their presence and participation in other public spaces, such as work, education, politics and so on. In fact, in some cases, GBV in common spaces is also work-related. As discussed in more detail in Section 2.3, this is the case for sex workers, of which trans women are a significant proportion in many contexts. GBV in common spaces, despite being predominantly imagined as an urban problem, occurs both in rural and urban settings (UN Women, n.d.). However, GBV in common spaces is often neglected and few laws or policies exist and/or are successfully implemented to prevent and address it (ibid.).

Box 3: The long trajectory of femicide in Mexico

There is a long history of femicides in Mexico, particularly in common public space with women abducted on their way to school, home or work.

In the 1990s femicide began to be registered as a wider phenomenon in Juarez, a city located along the Mexico–United States (US) border, where the then new free trade agreement had promoted the establishment of the textile and garment industry (known as *maquilas*). The industry relied on cheap female labour and motivated the migration of a large number of people to the border in search of economic opportunities (True, 2012).

As the *maquilas* were in the outskirts of the city, companies usually provided collective transport very early in the morning and late at night in accordance with the long shifts imposed on female workers. Femicides during this period involved mostly young women and girls who were travelling to and from these sites of work, and their murders were characterised by their brutality (True, 2012; Segato, 2013, 2016).

Numbers vary greatly depending on the source, but estimates place the number of murdered women between 1993 and 2005 at more than 300, 500, 700 or 800, with some sources claiming femicides from 1993 to date reach up to 2,300 women (Guillen, 2022).

Since then, femicide has extended throughout the country – a process that Segato calls Mexico’s ‘juarization’ (Moran Brena, 2021). In 2013–2015, there was a wave of similarly brutal abductions and femicides in the State of Mexico, particularly of young adolescent girls (Carrion, 2018). More recently, waves of disappearances and femicides in public spaces have emerged in cities like Monterrey and Guadalajara (Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez, 2022).

Feminist responses to GBV in common spaces

Feminist responses to GBV in common spaces include campaigns, street protests and the creation of tools to increase women's safety. They are mostly youth-led, rely on the use of social media and digital technologies (see Box 4) and, in some regions, increasingly use art. Feminists aim to challenge perceptions of GBV in common spaces as normal, as well as gender norms of decency and shame that sanction gendered violence and deflect responsibility from perpetrators. They aim to reclaim (or occupy) common spaces for women and other marginalised genders, and to demand legal and/or policy changes so that people can denounce and seek justice for violent experiences. Thus, while these responses respond to their unique contexts, there are similarities among them in how they are challenging the framings, stereotypes and meanings associated with GBV and victims/survivors.

Feminist activists are increasingly organising against street harassment by challenging its framing as harmless romantic behaviour. An example of this form of activism is the movement *RopaSucia* ('Dirty Clothes') in Mexico City, which has created art installations to challenge the normalisation of verbal harassment as compliments and/or jokes (Roldán and Malak, 2019). Similarly, the feminist initiative *Chega de Fiu Fiu* ('Stop catcalling') in Brazil used photographs and illustrations to call attention to, and denounce, the normalisation of sexual verbal harassment (Desborough, 2018; Buarque de Almeida, 2019).

Box 4: Digital activism against gendered violence in common spaces

Social media and digital technologies have increasingly played a key crucial role in feminist mobilisations to end GBV in common spaces (see Section 2.2 for a more detailed discussion).

Feminist groups in India have used Twitter to challenge the practice of blaming women for sexual harassment (Gurman et al., 2018). Likewise, the movement #DontTellMeHowToDress in Thailand shows how victim-blaming can be challenged online – in this case, through online versions of their exhibitions. Significantly, social media have increased the visibility of feminist efforts against GBV in public spaces.

This is evident in Barbados, Brazil and Mexico, Senegal, Tunisia and Morocco, where the hashtags #LifeInLeggings, #Primeiroassedio or #MiPrimerAcoso ('My first harassment'), #Nopiwouma, #EnaZeda and #Masaktach (respectively) played a key role in facilitating the call to women to denounce their experiences to take off, as well as in providing a mechanism through which they could easily do so (Mackintosh, 2018; Ochieng'-Springer and Francis, 2019; Petersen, 2019; El Asmar, 2020; Williams, 2020). In most cases, online activism has also resulted in, or been accompanied by, onsite protests and interventions.

Social media and digital technologies have also allowed feminist movements to expand their projects beyond their initial scope. The Blank Noise Project, for example, transformed its public clothing installation into the online campaign 'Did you ask for it?', which encouraged women to email images of clothes they had worn when being harassed. Moreover, feminists have also used digital technologies as key instruments when responding to GBV in public spaces (see Section 2.1).

Feminist activists are increasingly organising against street harassment by challenging its framing as harmless romantic behaviour.



Similarly, there has been a growing volume of feminist activism contesting victim-blaming in relation to GBV in streets – mostly around instances of sexual assault and rape. For example, the #DontTellMeHowToDress movement in Thailand emerged after local authorities issued a recommendation for women ‘not to dress sexily’ during *Songkran*, Thailand’s New Year Water Festival, in order to prevent sexual harassment. The movement organises exhibitions featuring the clothing and testimonies of survivors of sexual assault, which have been shown in Thailand and abroad (DTMHTD, 2022). This strategy has also been used by the Blank Noise Project (Mitra-Khan, 2012).

Feminist activism against GBV in common spaces has also focused on increasing its visibility. This is usually done through digital platforms, as they enable people to share their experiences more quickly and widely (see Box 4). *RopaSucia* has gathered and shared women’s testimonies from their exhibitions (Roldán and Malak, 2019). *Chega de Fiu Fiu* has also collected responses from nearly 8,000 Brazilian women regarding their experiences of sexual harassment (Buarque de Almeida, 2019). Another example is that of *Las Victorias* in Mexico, a small feminist collective that is no longer active, which sought to record on the street (usually by drawing flowers with chalk and markers) where incidents of gendered violence had taken place.

Las Victorias’ project resembles other feminist initiatives centred around the creation of harassment maps. These initiatives aim to increase the visibility of GBV in common spaces, by giving victims/survivors of violence platforms through which they can anonymously report, record and share their experiences. People can also use these maps to protect themselves and one another – maps are usually real-time and able to show ‘harassment hotspots’. For example, women in Egypt can use HarassMap to report incidents of violence via text, voicemail or email. This has inspired other similar initiatives: the HarassTracker in Lebanon (which, besides aiming to create a tool for women, also seeks to produce evidence for advocacy and policy recommendations) and the ‘fiu fiu’ map in Brazil, created by *Chega de Fiu Fiu*, first for São Paulo and then for other Brazilian cities (Skalli, 2014; Langohr, 2015; Desborough, 2018; Buarque de Almeida, 2019; Hunt, 2020).

Feminists have also responded with street protests to GBV in common spaces, expressing widespread public condemnation for this form of violence and the beliefs that underpin it, while also physically occupying and reclaiming these spaces. The #MyDressMyChoice protests, for instance, erupted in Kenya after a woman waiting at a stop in Nairobi was stripped and assaulted by a group of men for wearing a miniskirt (Nyabola, 2015; Santos and Seol, 2015).¹²

¹² This is known as ‘stripping’ and is an issue also present in Malawi, Cameroon and Zimbabwe (Ellis and Karimi, 2014).

Protests condemning GBV on public transport and streets also took place in New Delhi in 2012 in response to the Nirbhaya case (Taneja, 2019; Dey, A., 2020; John, 2020) and in 2013 in Hyderabad, where protests and public interventions known as 'Take Back the Night' were organised (Madabhushi et al., 2015). In 2017, moreover, across 30 cities in India, women took to the streets in response to cases of mass sexual assault and public declarations by the police blaming the victims/survivors for their 'Western clothing'. In these protests, known as 'I Will Go Out', women purposefully wore varied attire challenging victim-blaming and the gender norms that dictate what women should wear (Titus, 2018). Similarly, the first Slutwalk was organised in Canada in 2011 as a response to comments from police officers that placed responsibility for GBV in common spaces on women and their choice of dress. Slutwalks have been replicated in more than 10 countries (McCormack and Prostran, 2012; Herriot, 2015). All these protests seek to reclaim women's and other marginalised people's bodies as sources of personal empowerment rather than vulnerability and fear.

Feminists activism has also advocated for legal/policy change as a way of gaining recognition for experiences of gendered violence experienced by women and other marginalised genders, as well as to counter impunity. In Mexico, following the feminicides in Juarez (see Box 3), a group of feminist academics and activists pushed for the recognition and incorporation of the term of *feminicidio* (feminicide)¹³ in national law, as well as for the creation of the Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence, passed in 2007 (Lagarde y de los Rios, 2012; Benitez Quintero and Vélez Bautista, 2018; Araiza et al., 2020).

In Kenya, the protests of #MyDressMyChoice led to the implementation of the Sexual Offences Act (2006), through which the perpetrators were prosecuted and convicted (Santos and Seol, 2015), as well as to the criminalisation of forcible stripping (ITDP, 2018). In India, similarly, the protests that erupted after the Nirbhaya case aimed at, and achieved, the enactment of the Criminal Amendment Act (2013) and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013) (Taneja, 2019; Dey, A., 2020; John, 2020). Further protests in 2017 gathered 38,500 signatures demanding a public apology from the police, as well as easier mechanisms to report crimes committed against women. Similarly, feminist activism against acid attacks has in part focused on its incorporation in national criminal codes, such as in Colombia (Jolin, 2016).

Lastly, feminist activists have also worked with government officials – mostly transport operators and police – to transform the gender norms that influence their perpetration of, or responses to, GBV. For example, the protests in Kenya in 2014 and the protests in India in 2017 led, respectively, to the incorporation of gender training for public transport drivers, and for comprehensive and compulsory gender sensitive training for the police force (ITDP, 2018; Titus, 2018). Likewise, the feminist organisation Sonke Gender Justice (n.d.) in South Africa has been working since 2016 with the South African National Taxi Association through the Safe Ride Campaign, which aims to engage taxi associations, owners and drivers in preventing GBV.

¹³ *Feminicidio* is translated as either 'feminicide' or 'femicide'. However, this working paper follows Felman-Panagotacos (2021) in their preference for 'feminicide', as this term highlights gender as a social construct (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010).

Challenges in addressing GBV in common spaces

The ubiquity of gendered violence and the many forms it can take is one of the main challenges activists face in addressing it. Activism against verbal harassment does not necessarily use or require the same strategies as mobilising against murder and femicide. This may explain why the initiatives, campaigns or groups discussed in the previous section tend to focus solely on one form of GBV in common spaces. However, focusing on one expression only can limit the transformative capacity of feminist responses. As such, feminist groups face the challenge of how to contest specific expressions of gendered violence while contesting the phenomena in its entirety. This is complicated further by the multiple spaces that make up this part of the public sphere.

Another challenge is that some forms of GBV in common spaces (verbal and sexual harassment, for example) are often perceived as trivial or harmless. As a result, efforts to contest them are dismissed. This speaks, for example, of the reluctance in many countries to criminalise street harassment. Thus, for feminists to contest GBV in its entirety, they first have to contest prejudices regarding its severity, or lack thereof. Feminist movements, however, are well positioned to address this challenge, as they are already aware of the need for working towards wider cultural transformations that challenge harmful gender norms.

More information is also required regarding some forms of GBV in common spaces. Many victims/survivors do not report their attacks, as they do not trust authorities or believe reporting will make a difference or be inconsequential (ActionAid, 2016; Stop Street Harassment, 2022). There are gaps in information on acid attacks and femicides, including a lack of disaggregated data regarding where these are taking place. To effectively address these forms of violence, it is crucial to know what proportion is happening in the private versus the public sphere and who the perpetrators are.

Lastly, feminist movements working against GBV in these spaces have been criticised for holding an implicit class bias. This critique for example has been made for example of the Slutwalk movement, whose political aim to reclaim the word 'slut' has alienated Black and Latinx women (Nguyen, 2013; O'Keefe, 2014; Gouws, 2018). The probable class bias of feminist movements working against GBV in common spaces can be seen in the cases that have sparked protests, in many cases young women on their way to work or school. As such, feminist movements may need to strengthen an intersectional approach to GBV in common spaces and expand their solidarity beyond middle class heterosexual women.

For feminists to contest GBV in its entirety, they first have to contest prejudices regarding its severity.





2.2 Online spaces

The internet and social media have been recognised as important spaces for feminist activism – for organising political action, for challenging dominant gender norms and for renegotiating gender relations (O'Donnell and Sweetman, 2018; Washington and Marcus, 2022). GBV in the public sphere has become one of the issues at the centre of online feminist activism (see Boxes 4, 11, 16, 17). Digital spaces, however, have also become sites where GBV is perpetrated (see Box 5), and digital technologies have enabled new forms of GBV – such as the threat or act of non-consensual distribution of intimate content obtained with or without consent (also known as image-abuse), online stalking, theft of identity and/or private data, and the creation of fake images or videos of a person without consent (Kee, 2005; O'Donnell and Sweetman, 2018; Thakur, 2018; UNHRC, 2018).

Online gender-based violence (OGBV) can be defined as acts of GBV that 'are committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of ICT [information and communications technology], such as mobile phones and smartphones, the internet, social media platforms or email' (UNHRC, 2018).¹⁴ OGBV includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech, sexual exploitation or any other

Box 5: Some key statistics on the prevalence of GBV in online spaces

- **52%** of young women and girls have experienced some form of online abuse, according to a survey with 8,109 participants across 180 countries (WWF and Girl Guides, 2020).
- **58%** of young women between the ages of 15 and 25, surveyed across 22 countries (with a total of 14,071 participants), reported having experienced online harassment on social media. By region, **63%** of women in Europe, **60%** in South America, **58%** in Asia Pacific, **54%** in Africa and **52%** in North America reported having experienced OGBV (Plan International, 2020).
- **23%** of surveyed women in Denmark, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US reported experiencing online harassment or abuse (Amnesty International, 2017).*
- **28%** of 3,306 women surveyed in Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa, and Uganda had experienced some form of OGBV (Iyer et al., 2020).
- According to 2019 data, **60%** of female respondents in Turkey, **81%** in Jordan, and **42%** in Egypt reported experiencing OGBV (Iannazzone et al., 2021).*
- **31%** of young women have experienced OGBV in India, according to a survey with 881 college students across six cities and towns in the country (Gurumurthy et al., 2019).
- In the UK, women are **27 times** more likely to be harassed online than men and Black women are **84%** more likely than white women to experience online abuse (EVAW, 2022).*

* Survey details unavailable.

¹⁴ The definition used by the United Nations (UN) is specific about OGBV as violence that targets and/or affects women. However, this working paper understand GBV as violence that is committed against any person for gender-related reasons.

controlling behaviour (Iyer et al., 2020). In other words, OGBV refers to cases where digital technologies are involved in 'offline' violence, and where gendered violence is committed in online spaces. This section deals with the latter – that is, with OGBV committed in online spaces.

As COVID-19 lockdown measures increased online activity in the past few years, OGBV is estimated to have increased (UN Women, 2020; Iannazzone et al., 2021). For example, in the first week of lockdown in March 2020 in the UK, the Revenge Porn Helpline saw nearly a two-fold increase in the number of calls regarding non-consensual distribution of intimate images (NCDII) – that is, image-based abuse perpetrated by a previous romantic and/or sexual partner in retaliation for a breakup or conflict (Boseley, 2020).¹⁵ This was also the case in Australia, where there was a 210% increase in the weekly average of cases between March and May 2020 in comparison to 2019 (Courtney, 2020; Powell and Flynn, 2020).

OGBV aims to subjugate and silence women and other marginalised genders and exclude them from social life as well as from public forums (Vlahakis, 2018; UNHRC, 2018). It is present throughout social media, comments on digital content (e.g. news articles and blogs), discussion websites and dating apps. For example, trans people in Eastern Europe, particularly trans women and those who are sex workers, frequently report receiving threats on dating apps and related websites (Fedorko, 2016).

OGBV, moreover, often particularly (although not exclusively) targets women and other marginalised genders in public life, such as those in politics, media, activism and academia. This is not to say that (perceived) women in public life do not experience gendered violence elsewhere (see Section 2.3), or that only women in public life experience OGBV, but rather that gendered violence in online spaces against women in these roles has become pervasive (see Box 7).

Box 6: Digital technologies feeding offline GBV

Digital technologies have been found to increase or aggravate 'offline' GBV:

- Mobile phones have been found to increase levels of conflict in gender relations in Mozambique, as they facilitate the spread of information about people (Archambault, 2011).
- Digital technologies have enabled the emergence of misogynist groups of men within which sexual and physical assault of women is normalised and encouraged (Bates, 2020).
- Mobile phone tracking devices and location sharing features in apps can promote stalking, harassment, privacy violations, increased surveillance over women and greater control of women's mobility (Thakur, 2018).

¹⁵ This has also been termed 'revenge porn'. However, feminist activists have pointed out how this term is harmful and have advocated for the use of 'NCDII' or other similar terms instead. This is because the term 'revenge' assumes victims/survivors have committed an original harm for which they are owed retribution and the term 'porn' implicitly frames the content as having the purpose of being for consumption and entertainment, among other reasons (Maddox, 2019).

Box 7: Online spaces and violence against women in public life

A report by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE, 2021) calls attention to the high levels of online violence faced by people in public office, especially women. Email and social media appear to be the primary channels by which women in politics are threatened.

According to a 2018 survey with female parliamentarians, **58%** of respondents had received abusive, sexual, or violent comments and/or images about them online (ibid.). In the six months leading up to the 2017 election in the UK, an analysis of 177 Twitter accounts of female politicians found **25,688 abusive tweets** directed at them – half directed towards Diane Abbott MP, Britain's first Black female Member of Parliament, and 35% were directed to other Black and Asian women when excluding those directed at Abbott (Dhrodia, 2017).

The OSCE (2021) report also calls attention to OGBV targeted at women journalists. In 2018, a survey of 600 women journalists revealed that during their careers:

- **64%** of the participants had been threatened or harassed online at least once
- **10%** had received death threats online (IFJ, 2018).

A more recent global survey with 901 journalists found online violence against women journalists had increased, as **73%** of them reported having experienced online violence (Posetti et al., 2021).

Feminist activists experience high rates of OGBV in response to their political work (Han, 2018; O'Donnell and Sweetman, 2018; SIDA, 2019; FAU, 2020; Maaranen and Tienari, 2020; Nazneen and Okech, 2021; Washington and Marcus, 2022). Laura Bates (2020) is a UK example of a feminist activist and writer who has been subject to death threats and harassment online numerous times.

In a survey with 18 activists in **Zimbabwe, Nepal and Kenya**:

- **89%** of activists reported witnessing another female activist subjected to online violence
- **50%** had experienced online violence themselves (Vlahakis, 2018).

In Nepal, similar results were found, where in a survey by LOOM Nepal (2017) with 99 gender and sexual rights activists:

- **88%** of respondents reported witnessing someone being subjected to online violence
- **52%** said they have experienced online violence themselves.

Lastly, female and feminist academics have also been the target of gendered violence online, although less attention has been paid to their experiences (Lyons et al., 2016; Campbell, 2017; Lewis et al., 2017; Vera-Gray, 2017; Ringrose, 2018). A small-scale study found that women who had shared their work online often experienced abuse. As a result, they were fearful for their physical safety, apprehensive of their physical appearance and insecure about their academic ability (Savigny, 2020).

When targeted at women in public life, OGBV tends to be of sexual character and is meant to silence women, dissuade them (through intimidatory and shaming techniques) from engaging in these roles and discredit them in order to thwart their professional careers (Ferrier, 2018; UNHRC, 2018; Vlahakis, 2018; Barr, 2021; OSCE, 2021).

In the case of feminist academics, for example, OGBV hinders their ability to disseminate their work (Kavanagh and Brown, 2020), affecting their performance reviews if they choose to disengage from social media (Savigny, 2020). Perpetrators of OGBV against women in public life aim to discourage and bar women from participating in the public sphere and to reinforce oppressive gender norms that demarcate this sphere as a male domain (see George et al., 2021 and Phillips and George, 2022 for further discussion of violence against women in public life and local governance).

Where criminalisation of online gendered violence has been achieved this has been the direct result of feminist activism.



Online spaces have also enabled the growth of anti-feminist and men's rights activism, which aims to repeal gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights and restore heterosexual male authority. This may be done by trolling and abusing feminist activists (see Box 7) and by flagging feminist content as violating community standards (Diepeveen, 2022). However, it is also done through the orchestration of violence against women

– whether inside or outside online spaces (Marwick and Caplan, 2018). Laura Bates (2020) shows how digital technologies and platforms have enabled and emboldened what she calls the 'manosphere' – misogynistic networks made up by a range of male groups – which normalises online aggression and abuse against women as well as promotes abuse and violence outside online spaces (see also Ging, 2019; Van Valkenburgh, 2021).¹⁶

Despite increasing growing global attention to OGBV,¹⁷ it is not yet clearly defined or enshrined in most national laws and policies. In some of the cases where criminalisation of online gendered violence has been achieved (whether fully or partially) this has been the direct result of feminist activism, as discussed in the next section. Moreover, at the current moment, OGBV has been mostly approached as a problem affecting cisgender women and girls, and there needs to be greater attention to how LGBTQI+ people, who are at high risk, are targeted. A study in the UK found that, while 1 in 10 LGBTQI+ people had experienced online abuse in the previous month, the numbers increased to 1 in 4 for trans people and 1 in 5 for Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBTQI+ people (Bachmann and Gooch, 2017).¹⁸ In some contexts, digital technologies are also used by government officials to track and persecute LGBTQI+ people (Iannazzone et al., 2021).

Feminist responses to gendered violence online

As a result of the increasing prevalence of OGBV, feminist activists have increasingly turned their attention to this issue. On one hand, feminist activists are developing techniques or strategies to counteract it, such as appropriating derisive terms, resorting to humour and following feminist guidelines of self-defence (Sundén and Paasonen, 2018). On the other hand, feminist activists are organising concerted collective action against it. Collective responses can be classified in two categories: advocacy for legal and/or policy change, and provision of information and support.

Feminist advocacy for legal reform is geared towards achieving the recognition of OGBV as a form of *gender-motivated* violence and thus distinct from other forms of online abuse, such as trolling, harassment, or bullying. Feminists have campaigned to amend legislation to clearly include OGBV within wider definitions of GBV in order to achieve its criminalisation.

¹⁶ This literature also highlights the links between the 'manosphere', masculinities and neoliberalism.

¹⁷ For example, in 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women published a report specifically on OGBV against women and girls (UNHRC, 2018). Also, that year both the G7 and G20 committed to taking action to end GBV, abuse and harassment in digital contexts (G7, 2018; G20, 2020).

¹⁸ Results based on a survey with more than 5,000 LGBTQI+ participants.

Of the cases of feminist advocacy for legal reforms on OGBV, that of Mexico stands out. In a country where it is estimated that nine million women have been subject to OGBV (Barrera, 2017), ‘digital gender-based violence’ has been fully recognised in the country’s federal law. In 2021, digital violence was incorporated in the country’s Federal Criminal Code and in the national legislation on GBV – the 2007 *Ley de Acceso General de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* (General Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence Law).¹⁹

This legal success has been attributed, for the most part, to feminist activist Olimpia Coral Melo Cruz, who in 2014 – when she was 18 years old – was a victim/survivor of NCDII. Melo Cruz decided to campaign for legal change after she tried to file a charge against her ex-partner for sharing intimate videos without her consent, but her case was dismissed because there was no ‘crime’ according to Mexican authorities. Before achieving national legal reform, Melo Cruz and others succeeded, in 2018, in promoting a reform of the regional Criminal Code of Puebla, the state where she lived at the time, to recognise and criminalise digital violence. The set of reforms that achieved these legal changes at the regional and national level are known as *Ley Olimpia* (Law Olimpia) (Fernandez-Cuevas et al., 2022; BBC News Mundo, 2019).

Feminist activists have been crucial in the achievement of, or have been seeking to achieve, legislation against digital violence, including NCDII, in a number of other countries:

- **Argentina:** *Activismo Feminista Digital* has been campaigning for a legal reform that recognises and protects people’s digital rights and that incorporates a gender perspective.
- **Bolivia:** The feminist group *Ciberwarmis*, supported by the UN Population Fund, has been campaigning for legal reforms to the country’s legislation on GBV and pornography to have digital violence included. Their campaign uses the hashtag #AlertaAnteLaViolenciaDigital.
- **South Korea:** In 2020, the existence of a Telegram chat group was made public in which thousands of non-consensual and sexually exploitative videos of women and girls were being sold using cryptocurrency. The case known as ‘Nth Room’ caused a national outcry and the feminist mobilisations that followed led to the creation of a NCDII prevention law. The law, known as the Nth Room Prevention Law, requires online platforms to appoint a staff member to the prevention of NCDII and establishes criminal punishment if they fail to stop the circulation of NCDIIs (see Joohee and Chang, 2021).
- **UK:** Refuge (a charity) and victims/survivors of online abuse organised a campaign for the criminalisation of NCDII, achieved in 2015. They are actively campaigning for the Online Safety Bill, which aims to improve the safety of internet users.
- **Zimbabwe:** Katswe Sistahood has been calling on the Parliament to enact laws that criminalise NCDII.

¹⁹ The General Law incorporates the concepts of digital violence and media violence. Digital violence is defined in the law as ‘any malicious action that is carried out through ICTs, that exposes, distributes, transmits, offers, exchanges or shares images, audios or videos (real or fake) of a person’s intimate sexual content without their consent, approval or authorization, and that results in psychological and emotional harm...’. Media violence is defined as ‘any act which, through any communication technology, indirectly or directly promotes sexist stereotypes, sanctions violence against women and girls, produces or allows for hate gender speech, gender-based discrimination and gender inequality, that causes psychological, sexual, physical, economic, patrimonial or ‘femicidal’ harm’ (see *Ley de Acceso General de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*, 2007).

Activists and organisations that do not position themselves as explicitly feminist have also campaigned for legislation against online violence, including Internetlab (Brazil), Hiperderecho (Peru) and Amnesty International (South Korea and India). Non-feminist organisations, such as TEDIC (Paraguay), also provide information on cybersecurity and how to identify online violence.

Feminist responses to OGBV have also concentrated on documenting online violence, providing information on how to identify, prevent and/or respond to abuse, and supporting victims/survivors. Many of these initiatives are concentrated in Mexico, Central and South America, and feminist groups often frame this mode of work as being about ‘resistance’, whether resistance to violence or resistance to the gender norms which perpetuate GBV.

Feminist initiatives that document instances of OGBV aim to make visible the occurrence of this form of abuse, as well as to provide a space for victims/survivors to share their experiences (and in some cases organise concerted action in response). An example of this type of work is that of the Facebook group ‘*Signalí Féministement*’, run by a Tunisian activist. Members can screenshot and share experiences of online abuse and if a person is a victim of NCDII, group members report the publication *en masse* so that it is taken down by the platform. Kurasawa et al. (2021) call this ‘evidentiary activism’.

Feminist initiatives that revolve around sharing information aim to better enable women and girls to protect themselves against abuse. *Ciberseguras*, a Latin American feminist network, for example, provides a comprehensive glossary of OGBV that aims to help women and girls name the type of abuse they experience. It also provides guides and workshops on ‘cybersecurity self-defence’ – how to protect personal digital devices and how to set up privacy settings on social media platforms, for example. *Luchadoras* (fighters), a feminist group in Mexico, also aims to raise awareness about OGBV and share information on how to identify and respond to it. It also shares alerts of known abuses and extortions as well as toolkits of how to ‘self-defend’ in online spaces. Other examples of groups that take this approach include *Ciberfeministas* (Guatemala) and *MariaLab* (Brazil), which, in addition to providing guidance on cybersecurity, conducts research and promotes debate about OGBV and internet governance.

‘We want to hack the patriarchal code, re-appropriate and decolonise technology’

CiberfemLab, Guatemala

Lastly, feminist activism against OGBV also takes the form of support provision. This includes providing support to victims/survivors, as done by the Mexican organisation *Vita Activa*, which, in addition to providing resources on cybersecurity and online abuse, provides a helpline for women and LGBTQI+ people who have experienced GBV (including online abuse). This is also the case of the South Korean feminist group DSO (Digital Sexual crime Out), which provides legal and technical support to victims of OGBV. Support can also be provided by hosting safe online spaces for feminist activism. For example, *CI4ndestina* (Brazil) is a feminist server that offers safe online spaces for feminist groups and projects (Lobato and Gonzalez, 2020).

Feminist activism that documents online violence, provides information on how to identify, prevent and/or respond to abuse and supports victims/survivors aims to transform gender norms – as do campaigns for legal reform. In fact, many of these organisations frame their work as having the goal of creating a ‘feminist internet’: an internet that is safe for women and others and over which women feel the same ownership as men.²⁰

Feminist activism that focuses on sharing tools with women and others to help them identify OGBV can be understood as aiming to create and provide the necessary vocabulary and knowledge needed to demand justice. As Fricker (2007) argues, understanding our experiences as influenced by wider social structures and having the vocabulary to name them as such is central to the pursuit of justice. Thus, feminist activism that creates a vocabulary of OGBV and shares it with women and others (along with guidance on how to identify it) aims to understand and conceptualise how harm in online spaces is gendered. This enables those affected by it to make sense of these experiences which result from, and aim to sustain, gendered inequalities – a necessary step for people to then demand, and work towards, change.

Activism that teaches women self-defence in online spaces aims to increase women’s ability to resist patriarchal backlash from those seeking to maintain/(re)establish male authority by silencing women and dissuading them (through intimidation and shaming) from being in online spaces. As OGBV in part aims to discourage and bar women from participating in the public sphere, feminist activism to increase women’s self-defence in these spaces seeks to protect women’s presence and participation within them – and thus, to protect the progress made in changing gender norms. Strategies that focus on self-defence can also be understood as contesting gender norms that associate femininity with subordination and powerlessness.

Feminist activism that seeks to increase the presence of women in ICT environments can also make an indirect impact in contesting OGBV. As more women, girls and other marginalised genders are present within these spaces and use technology as a tool and space for gender justice, gender biases in software and hardware development are expected to become rarer, and links between technology and gender inequality are more likely to be addressed. Work in this area directly challenges the gender norm that technology is men’s domain.

²⁰ In this line of work, the ‘Feminist Principles of the Internet’ (n.d.) were drafted in 2014 at the first Imagine a Feminist Internet meeting, which was organised by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), with 50 activists participating from around the globe. In 2016, the principles were revised during a second encounter.

Challenges to confronting and reducing OGBV

Currently there is a lack of aggregated and disaggregated data on OGBV in most contexts (Vlahakis, 2018; OSCE, 2021). Moreover, OGBV is for the most part carried out with impunity (George et al., 2021) and is often dismissed as illusory, unreal and therefore harmless (FAU, 2020; Barr, 2021; Bates, 2020). The feminist activism discussed in the previous section aims to address these challenges. Because of the characteristics of digital technologies, however, OGBV can be particularly challenging to combat.

Firstly, the anonymity that digital technologies bestow can represent an obstacle to the promotion of gender norm change. By being anonymous, users do not have to contend personally with social disapproval. In other words, being anonymous reduces the personal costs of perpetrating GBV and as a result may foster it. In fact, according to Diepeveen (2022), the majority of perpetrators of abuse on social networks are anonymous. In addition, available reporting mechanisms are often ineffective in stopping this form of violence (Plan International, 2020; Banet-Weiser, 2021; Diepeveen, 2022; Washington and Marcus, 2022).

Secondly, the viral nature of social media amplifies harm. In other words, OGBV may be committed by a single individual, but harm is not restricted to this first act (FAU, 2020). As other users share, comment or like the content, the victim/survivor is likely to continue experiencing harm. This poses important questions regarding the legal responsibility of users who did not commit the initial offence but participated in its dissemination. As such, aiming to shift gender norms through legal and/or policy reform may be limited. The viral nature of social media and digital technologies also presents practical challenges on how to remedy instances of OGBV.

Thirdly, while increased monitoring of digital technologies, and criminalisation of misuse, has been proposed as a mechanism to reduce OGBV, this may produce tensions between different sets of rights. Decreasing anonymity in, and increasing surveillance of, online spaces, for example, has been criticised for the potential negative effect it can have on the safety of social justice activists (e.g. APC, 2017; Suarez Estrada, 2022). This discussion surrounds, for example, the proposed Online Safety Bill in the UK.

Fourthly, as OGBV can be collectively organised, measures to address its occurrence would need to tackle its loose networked, and often transnational, character (Marwick and Caplan, 2018; Bates, 2020). Moreover, as much OGBV is motivated by misogyny, measures need to recognise how this form of abuse is not only encouraged by gender inequality but also by outright hate towards women and other marginalised genders (Bates, 2020). To stop this violence, strategies are needed to engage and neutralise misogynistic narratives, and work with these male communities.

Lastly, in some contexts, a gendered digital divide restricts the presence of women and marginalised genders in online spaces and thus their ability to claim these spaces. Women are 7% less likely than men to own a mobile phone and there is a total of 372 million women worldwide still without a cell phone, according to an industry report (GSMA, 2022). The same report indicates that the mobile internet gender gap is widest in South Asia and across the African continent, where it has remained unchanged since 2017. There are 912 million women in the latter region ('sub-Saharan Africa') who do not use mobile internet, which represents a gender gap of 37%. Moreover, inequalities in literacy and digital skills may further the divide, as access does not guarantee successful use of these technologies. In fact, the report stresses that women tend to use their mobile phones in a narrower way than men. The divide, thus, may limit feminist activism against OGBV (ibid.).

In addition to lobbying states, it may also be fruitful for feminist movements to address technology companies, to pressure them to put mechanisms in place to stop online violence.



Protester holds up a sign in a #HokKolorob rally against police atrocities towards students in Kolkata, India in September 2014. © arindambanerjee / Shutterstock.com



2.3 Workplaces

Workplace GBV is experienced widely by women and other marginalised genders – whether they work in the private, public or civil society sector, or in the formal or informal economy. Box 8 summarises selected evidence of the incidence of workplace GBV. Gendered violence at work usually manifests as unwanted sexual advances, such as inappropriate jokes, insinuations, sexualised comments, sexualised gestures, requests for sexual favours and unwanted physical touch – all of which can amount to harassment and/or assault (HRW, 2022). When experienced by LGBTQI+ people, it often entails bullying and demeaning comments or jokes (TUC, 2019). Workplace GBV can thus create psychological damage (increased levels of stress, depression and emotional fatigue), result in social isolation at work, hinder performance and impair professional and career growth, and/or lead people to quit their jobs, creating personal and overall economic losses (UN Women, 2019a; Peña, 2021). Violence and discrimination in the workplace have particularly affected LGBTQI+ people (TUC, 2019), pushing them out of these spaces and pushing them into riskier professions, such as sex work (Fedorko, 2016), and even to migrate (HRW, 2020).

Employment status, the type of work being carried out and the conditions in particular sectors may increase women's and other marginalised genders' vulnerability to GBV in the workplace (Cruz and Klinger, 2011; UN Women, 2019a; Paesani, 2020). For example, industries with poor labour conditions and low management accountability tend to have higher rates of GBV in the workplace (UN Women, 2019a; ITUC, 2016).²¹

Box 8: Key statistics on gendered violence at work

It is estimated that between 40–50% of women worldwide have experienced workplace GBV at some point in their work lives (ITUC, 2016).*

- In **Australia**, almost **two in five women** experienced sexual harassment in the workplace between 2012 and 2017 (AHRC, 2018).
- In **Uganda**, out of women surveyed, **90%** reported having been sexually harassed at work by their male seniors (ITUC, 2014).*
- In **France**, surveys found **30%** of women reported experiencing sexual harassment and/or assault at work (French Institute of Public Opinion, 2019, cited in HRW, 2022).*
- In a **UK** survey with 1,533 women, **more than 50%** had experienced sexual harassment at work (TUC and Everyday Sexism, 2016).

In another study with over 1,000 LGBTQI+ participants (TUC, 2019):

- **68%** reported having experienced sexual harassment at work.
- **27%** reported receiving unwelcome verbal sexual advances).
- **LGBTQI+ women** are more than **twice as likely** than straight women to experience unwanted touching, as well as to experience sexual assault or rape.

* Survey details unavailable.

²¹ In contexts of modern slavery – such as forced and bonded labour – GBV can become more acute (Cruz and Klinger, 2011). Likewise, children working in the worst forms of child labour also tend to be more vulnerable to gendered violence, although this may vary depending on the conditions and site of labour (USDOL, 2021).

GBV is prevalent in the textile and garment industry, for instance. In surveys in India and Bangladesh, approximately 60% of female workers reported having experienced some form of workplace GBV (Fair Wear Foundation, 2013).²² In Cambodia, approximately 33% of female garment workers surveyed reported experiencing sexual harassment in the previous 12-month period (CARE International, 2017). Healthcare workers are also particularly at risk of workplace GBV, as violence can be perpetrated by both colleagues and patients, and is exacerbated by lack of public investment (Di Martino, 2002; ITUC, 2016; ILO, 2018). The same applies to workers in the hospitality sector. A 2018 survey in the UK found that 89% of hospitality workers had experienced at least one instance of GBV at work: 56.3% perpetrated by a customer and 22.7% by a manager (Topping, 2018; see also Koppa and Duffy, 2020).

Box 9: GBV against women in politics and media

Research on violence against women in politics (VAWIP) shows how, besides being targeted by members of the public (most often online – see Box 7), women in politics and media also face GBV in their workplace. A report by OSCE (2021) highlights how female legislators tend to face sexual harassment by colleagues, as well as hostile working conditions in the legislative assembly or council chambers.

A survey of women in office across 39 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) found that:

- **82%** had experienced psychological violence
- **26%** had experienced physical violence
- **22%** had experienced sexual violence

In fact, the survey found that many female parliamentarians considered sexual harassment a common practice in their working environment. The survey found that these forms of violence were mostly perpetrated online (in the case of psychological violence), by male colleagues and law enforcement officers, or by anonymous perpetrators (in the case of physical violence) (OSCE, 2021).

In a 2018 survey of female parliamentarians in Europe (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2018, cited in OSCE, 2021):

- **41%** indicated that they had experienced harassment at work.
- **69%** of those incidents were indicated as being perpetrated by a male colleague.

The risk for female politicians may increase when they are working on controversial subjects, belong to the opposition party, perform at higher levels of leadership (see also George et al., 2021) or belong to minority groups, and/or during election periods (OSCE, 2021). For example, a number of female politicians belonging to the political opposition (Citizens Coalition for Change) have recently faced alleged police brutality in the context of Zimbabwe's upcoming parliamentary and council elections (Marima, 2022). GBV may also be experienced differently by older and younger women.

Surveys with female journalists show similar results. According to a 2017 survey across 50 countries:

- **38%** of instances of workplace GBV against female journalists were perpetrated by male supervisors and 17% by male colleagues (IFJ, 2017).
- **51%** of respondents in a survey by Reporters Without Borders (2021) who had experienced sexual violence, indicated that the perpetrator was a superior.
- **50%** of women working in the media sector reported the same in a Women in News Survey across the African continent (WANNP, 2021).

²² Based on 110 workers in Bangladesh and in India.

Women in the informal economy are at higher risk of workplace GBV because of the absence of institutional monitoring and reporting mechanisms. For example, workplace GBV tends to be high among domestic workers – many of whom are migrants, a condition that increases vulnerability to workplace violence, as discussed later in this section. As indicated in a survey by the International Domestic Workers Federation (cited in UN Women, 2019a), domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to GBV in their place of work because of the privacy of the domestic sphere, the lack of effective legal protection, poor access to services, the existence of discriminatory social norms against them and the lack of privacy for those who live with the families with whom they work. Moreover, for women in the informal economy (though not solely), the private sphere tends to also be their workplace, conflating domestic and workplace violence. This is also the case for women involved in unpaid domestic care work, as one of their places of work is precisely the domestic sphere.

GBV against women and LGBTQI+ people also tends to be higher, and less likely to be reported, in settings where workers are barred from forming and/or joining trade unions, as this constrains collective bargaining power (ITUC, 2016). Likewise, GBV tends to be higher in industries that have high levels of gender segregation (ibid.; FLEX, 2018; UN Women, 2019a). In industries with predominantly female workforces – such as the textile and garment, care, hospitality, flowers and tea industries – women are positioned in roles lower down the hierarchy while supervisory and managerial positions tend to be occupied solely by men. This places women in these industries at a disadvantage, as men's dominance in managerial positions may leave gender norms that endorse GBV unchallenged, sanctioning and dismissing instances of gendered violence in the workplace.

For example, while there is no recent statistical evidence available, anecdotal evidence suggests that violence against women working in the flower industry in Tanzania is pervasive (Vox, 2018).²³ In industries that are male dominated, such as the construction, security and transport sectors, women may be sexualised and/or perceived as trespassing on male space, prompting violence (ITUC, 2016; FLEX, 2018). A survey in 24 European countries found that 25% of female workers in the transport sector think GBV is prevalent in their workplace (ETF, 2017).

More generally, incidents of GBV at work are aggravated when women work in environments that are intimidating, humiliating or outright hostile (HRW, 2022). For example, work-related GBV tends to be particularly acute for sex workers, and more so for HIV-positive workers, as the context in which they work can be disempowering and unregulated. As a result, sex workers – a significant constituency of whom are trans women – are exposed to physical and sexual violence from clients and brothel owners (Fedorko, 2016). As their work is considered illegal in many countries, they are also a risk of abuse at the hands of the police (UNAIDS, 2009; ITUC, 2016; Shaffi Nuhu, 2020). A study in Eastern Europe found that trans women sex workers are at higher risk of violence from the police as well as of being illegally detained (Fedorko, 2016).

²³ The only statistical information found about this industry dates back to 2005. This study found that more than 50% of female workers in Ecuador's export-oriented flower industry had experienced sexual harassment at work (Mena and Proaño, 2005).

The structural position of the worker herself may also increase her vulnerability to GBV at work (Paesani, 2020). This is the case, for example, for many migrant workers, as their legal residency and life projects outside of their countries of origin tend to depend on their work. This is even more acute for undocumented migrants, as they often cannot access the justice system without risking deportation. In a survey with female hotel workers in Chicago (US), most of whom were immigrants and women of colour, more than 50% indicated having experienced sexual harassment and/or assaults (Unite Here, 2016). Factors such as sexuality, age and experience also heighten or diminish the prevalence of GBV in the workplace (Cruz and Klinger, 2011; ITUC, 2016). For example, the prevalence of GBV in the workplace in the UK rises from 50% to 66% for women between the ages of 18 and 24 (TUC and Everyday Sexism, 2016) and the number of women that have experienced sexual harassment and/or abuse increases from 53% to 68% for LGBTQ+ women (TUC, 2019).²⁴

Moreover, in some cases, women and other marginalised genders may be either more vulnerable to profession-related risk or be vulnerable in different ways to men, as violence takes on a gendered nature. This is the case, for example, for female journalists. From January to November 2021, the Coalition for Women in Journalism documented more than 790 cases of violence against female journalists and found that nearly all the cases carried a misogynistic undertone (CFWIJ, 2021). Moreover, when women journalists face risks of physical violence and state-backed repression in the field and on frontlines, this carries the added risk of sexual violence (ibid.; OSCE, 2021). As with women in politics, the risk of violence increases when female journalists are working on controversial issues and/or in conflict zones (CFWIJ, 2022).

”

The Coalition for Women in Journalism documented more than 790 cases of violence against female journalists and found that nearly all the cases carried a misogynistic undertone.

Box 10: GBV in the online workplace

As work has increasingly moved to hybrid and/or remote settings – partially motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic – online spaces are increasingly becoming the ‘workplace’. As a result, online and workplace GBV may intersect in new ways, transforming GBV in the workplace.

Currently, many employers do not have guides of conduct for remote online work. Moreover, as in the case of informal work, this configuration can intertwine GBV in the private and public sphere more tightly, as working from home may increase controlling behaviours of abusive partners over women (Peña, 2021; see also APC, 2017; Jane, 2018; UNHRC, 2018; UN Women, 2019a).

²⁴ Based on surveys with over 1,500 women and 1,000 participants, respectively.

As of 2018, 59 countries did not have any form of legislation against GBV in the workplace (Rubiano-Matulevich, 2018). However, this may change in the coming years, as in 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) passed Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment (also known as C190). The Convention went into effect in June 2021. This is the first international legal instrument to set international standards for preventing and responding to workplace GBV. Only 20 countries have ratified C190 to date, and it is only in force in only 5 of those. Accompanied by a recommendation and resolution, C190 explicitly recognises:

'... the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, [as it] ... can constitute a human rights violation or abuse, and... [be] a threat to equal opportunities ... and [is] incompatible with decent work.'

Feminist responses to GBV in the workplace

Feminist activism against workplace GBV has focused on contesting institutional cultures that normalise GBV, as well as on advocating for legal and/or policy change. As a poll carried out in eight countries shows, a significant proportion of men believe it is acceptable to sexually harass and abuse women at work:

- **25%** of men responded that it is acceptable for an employer to ask or expect an employee to have intimate interactions with them, a family member or a friend;
- **39%** of men in **India** believed it was 'acceptable to catcall colleagues';
- **36%** of men aged 25–34 in the **UK** believed it is acceptable to 'pinch a colleague's bottom in jest';
- **44%** of men between aged 18–34 in the **US** responded that it is 'acceptable to tell a sexual joke to a colleague while at work' (CARE International, 2018).

Victims/survivors of workplace GBV often do not report incidents for fear of disbelief, blame, social, legal and/or professional retaliation, and, in some cases, loss of legal residency status.



These beliefs are supported by gender norms that dictate male dominance and superiority and that objectify women for male pleasure, as well as power asymmetries between men and women (ibid.). Moreover, victims/survivors of workplace GBV often do not report incidents for fear of disbelief, blame, social, legal and/or professional retaliation, and, in some cases, loss of legal residency status (HRW, 2021). The use of non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) has also been instrumental, particularly in Global North contexts, to creating institutional cultures where GBV is not reported (Ayers, 2018; Ence, 2019; Rondeau, 2019). LGBTQI+ people may be particularly reluctant to report incidents of GBV in their workplace. A study in the UK found that around 66% of LGBTQI+ individuals who were harassed at work did not report it – 25% of whom did not do so for fear of being 'outed' or 'outing' themselves at work (TUC, 2019).²⁵

²⁵ Based on a study with 1,000 participants.

In light of this, feminist activism has focused on advocating for institutional cultural change, which involves encouraging victims/survivors to report incidents and thus to speak up – for which social media has been key (see Box 11). An example of feminist activism in this line of work is the Time's Up movement, which was created by over 300 women in the entertainment industry, calling for safety and equality in the workplace by working towards the disruption of the status quo. Among other actions, the organisation supports survivors to demand justice through their Legal Defence Fund and it has successfully achieved the conviction and sentencing of numerous perpetrators (Time's Up, 2022).

In the last decade, feminist activism has also focused more strongly on legal reform. C190 (see previous section) was adopted by the ILO after years of advocacy, mostly from women's trade unions and negotiations (HRW, 2022). The Convention, as mentioned, sets standards for preventing and responding to violence and harassment in what the ILO calls 'the world of work' – a term that seeks to capture how women do not only work in the public sphere and that also encompasses GBV on the way to and from work, extending employers' responsibility for women's safety to a wider geography. Feminist activists have now turned their focus towards ratification by member states and the amendment of legal and policy frameworks. Feminist activists have also been key in achieving stronger legislation against workplace GBV in Pakistan, where the government passed the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Amendment Bill in 2022. This legislation expands the definition of the workplace to recognise both formal and informal spaces, expands the definition of harassment and explicitly includes paid domestic work (Ijaz, 2022). Following the #MeToo movement, in the US and elsewhere, feminist groups have also pushed for legal reform on non-disclosure agreements (Ayers, 2018; Ence, 2019; Rondeau, 2019).

Box 11: #MeToo and online activism to end workplace GBV

The #MeToo movement was not originally motivated by GBV at work but by gendered violence in the private sphere: it was created by activist Tarana Burke after learning from a 13-year-old girl that she had been abused by her mother's boyfriend. However, the movement gained global attention after allegations of sexual harassment and assault against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.

Numerous other women have since further denounced their experiences of workplace GBV through the #MeToo hashtag. For example, Reporters without Borders (2021) document how women in the media have decided to speak out against workplace GBV – partly motivated by the #MeToo movement. #MeToo digital activism has, thus, greatly contributed to giving women a voice and community, rendering visible the pervasiveness of workplace GBV and calling for it to be addressed through a cultural transformation (Langone, 2018; OSCE, 2021).

This is also the case for the French feminist campaign #BalanceTonPorc (Har-Peled, 2018), and for the #SportsToo campaign, which calls attention to the prevalence of GBV in professional sport (Abrams and Bartlett, 2018).

Box 12: Legal reforms to address violence against women in politics

Feminist activists in Mexico, Central and South America have had significant success in campaigning for the creation of legal instruments to address VAWIP. Bolivia was the first country in 2012 to pass a law – Law 243 – prohibiting and criminalising it. Largely, this was the result of years of documenting and advocacy work led by the Association of Councillors of Bolivia (Brechenmacher, 2017).

Their success motivated similar initiatives in Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Peru and Ecuador. In 2015, regional activism resulted in the passing of the Declaration on Political Harassment and Violence against Women as a Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention on GBV. The instrument defines VAWIP as including any action, conduct or omission, that is individual or collective, that is motivated by gender and that has the purpose of, or results in, undermining, annulling, impeding or restricting women's political rights. VAWIP includes physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic and symbolic violence (Trujillo, 2021). Legal reforms were passed to recognise, prevent and criminalise VAWIP in Mexico in 2020 (Ballinas and Becerril, 2020) and in Costa Rica in 2022 (efeminista, 2022).

Parliamentarians often object that existing laws already cover violence against female politicians. Moreover, current laws have significant gaps. For example, Bolivia's Law 243 does not provide mechanisms to protect the person who reports incidents of abuse from potential reprisals, does not consider the specific risks to indigenous women, and fails to cover women active in social organisations – despite the fact that civil society organising often is an entry point into political life.

Women's trade unions have been central to achieving both legal and policy changes and to transforming institutional cultures. For example, global advocacy by numerous national domestic workers unions, mostly comprising women, was central to the creation and passing of ILO Convention 189 on the Rights of Domestic Workers, which include protections from violence, harassment and abuse (EPSU, 2021). Likewise, the South American movement of domestic workers has been central in the ratification of ILO Convention 189 in various countries, such as Bolivia and Ecuador (2013), Argentina, Costa Rica and Chile (2014), Brazil (2018) and Mexico (2020) (Loose and Vazquez, 2017), and the South African Domestic Workers Union played a crucial role in the country's ratification of the Convention in 2008 (Fish, 2006). National domestic workers unions worldwide continue to play key roles in advocating for national level ratification of C190 (HRW, 2022).

In India, for example, international and national trade unions supported Jeyasre Kathiravel, a 21-year-old Dalit woman working in the garment industry who began organising and mobilising support after being sexually harassed at her job in Tamil Nadu. Kathiravel was murdered by her supervisor because of her activism in January 2021. The #JusticeForJeyasre campaign – which includes protests and vigils – culminated in April 2022 in a landmark agreement to eliminate workplace GBV in India, signed by textile labour unions, H&M and other garment manufacturers/retailers and suppliers. The coalition continues to work on industry monitoring and accountability (Justice for Jeyasre, 2021). The All India Network of Sex Workers is another union that has been actively campaigning against workplace-related GBV – in this case, that against sex workers (Kotiswaran, 2014).

Challenges in addressing GBV in the workplace

Under-reporting is one of the greatest barriers to tackling workplace GBV (ITUC, 2016). As discussed, people may decide to not report an incident out of fear for the consequences this might produce – professional, social or legal retaliation and/or employment loss. Under-reporting not only makes it harder to have a clearer understanding of the magnitude and scope of the problem, but also to monitor and enforce institutional and/or legal instruments. Thus, it is crucial for feminist activists to focus on pushing for institutional cultures where people feel safe denouncing violence perpetrated against them, where they are protected and where they have strong institutional and legal mechanisms to refer to in case there are any negative consequences. Feminist action is needed at the institutional level; however, this poses a challenge to creating collective power and collective action, as it may atomise feminist action across separate institutional spaces. Industries or sectors that prohibit the formation and/or participation of workers in trade unions restricts people's ability to organise political collective action at this level.

As workplace GBV tends to positively correlate with precarious working conditions, the structure of the global economy also represents a major challenge for feminist activism on this issue. In other words, the degree to which the global economy relies on cheap and exploitative labour creates structural incentives for companies to impede improved working conditions – in turn, this impedes improvements to women's safety in the workplace.

Lastly, feminist action against GBV in the workplace has also been criticised for holding racial and class biases. This critique has been made in particular of the #MeToo movement, as Tarana Burke (see Box 11) – a Black anti-violence campaigner – had denounced racialised GBV against Black women and women of colour 10 years prior without receiving the same support and solidarity as that galvanised by the abuses perpetrated by Weinstein (Srinivasan, 2021). As such, there is a need to strengthen intersectional approaches to GBV in the workplace, and to build solidarity across racial and class lines.



It is crucial for feminist activists to focus on pushing for institutional cultures where people feel safe denouncing violence perpetrated against them.



2.4 Educational institutions

GBV in schools, universities and other educational institutions is prevalent in numerous contexts. Box 13 shows incidence rates in various countries. GBV in educational institutions comprises physical, sexual and/or psychological harm (Samati, 2021). It includes aggressive acts and behaviours, such as sexist name-calling, spreading rumours about girls and women's sexual activity, making unwanted and/or inappropriate sexual remarks, bullying, pinching, humiliating, pushing, insulting, harassing, coercing and threatening and/or committing physical or sexual violence (Adjuković et al., 2021; Weale, 2021).

GBV in educational institutions mostly affects girls and young women, as well as LGBTQI+ students. As UNESCO and UN Women (2016) document, 'children and young people who are perceived as resisting, or as not fitting into traditional or binary gender norms, are at high risk of violence' in schools (see also UNESCO et al., 2014; Plan and ICRW, 2015).

Box 13: Global statistics on sexual and gender-based violence in schools

In the UK:

- At least **169 allegations of sexual harassment**, violence or misconduct against academic and non-academic staff in were made by students in 120 universities between 2010 and 2017, as revealed by freedom of information requests (Batty et al., 2017).
- **One-third of female students** in mixed-sex schools have experienced some form of sexual harassment according to research with 1,508 students (UK Feminista, 2017).

In a set of country-studies by UNGEI into sexual violence at school, results indicated that around:

- **19% of girls** in school experience sexual violence in **Cote d'Ivoire**
- **16%** in **Honduras**
- **25%** in **Nigeria**
- **16%** in **Kenya**
- **35%** in **Uganda**

Boys also experience sexual violence in school but at a lower rate than girls. It is estimated that:

- **11% of boys** experience sexual violence in **Nigeria**
- **6%** in **Kenya**
- **10%** in **Honduras**

Available evidence in some countries show that sexual violence, whether against boys or girls, tends to be perpetrated by male instructors (UNGEI, 2020a, 2020d).*

Sources: (UNGEI, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e).

* Estimates in Cote d'Ivoire are based on the 2019 World Bank database on Health, Nutrition and Demographic Statistics. Estimates in Honduras are based on the 2017 Government of Honduras Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS). Estimates in Nigeria are based on the 2014 Government of Nigeria VACS. Estimates in Kenya are based on the 2018 Government of Kenya VACS and estimates in Uganda are based on the 2016 Government of Uganda VACS. All VACS surveys included children and young people aged 13–24. The study in Malawi involved 600 students aged 10–17+ and 36 teachers at 16 primary schools across the country.

For example, in Chile, Mexico and Peru over 60% of LGBTQI+ students reported being bullied (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). In Thailand, this figure was 55%, while in the UK more than 90% of secondary school students reported witnessing bullying against LGBTQI+ classmates in their schools. LGBTQI+ students

in New Zealand were three times more likely to be bullied at school than their heterosexual classmates (UNESCO, 2016).²⁶

GBV against LGBTQI+ people has been documented to drive children out of school (HRW, 2020). Children with disabilities are also more vulnerable to violence in schools – which may acquire a gendered motivation and/or expression (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). For example, one study found that, of 3,706 primary schoolchildren in Uganda, the rate of GBV for girls aged 11–14 with some form of disability was double that of non-disabled girls (24% compared to 12%). People with disabilities may also be particularly vulnerable to gendered violence in this space (Salome et al., 2013).

GBV in educational institutions tends to be perpetrated mostly by male colleagues and superiors (teachers, instructors, lecturers, professors, etc.). As such, it results from either asymmetrical power relations, or from a culture of masculinity that sanctions it. It tends to occur during lunch breaks, school assemblies and/or sport classes, and most commonly in toilets, empty classrooms and a school's surrounding areas (Samati, 2021). However, as Box 14 discusses in more detail, violence among peers in educational institutions also takes place in online spaces.

Box 14: School-related online violence

In most contexts, adolescents and young people are among the most prolific users of digital technologies and social media. Online platforms are therefore important spaces for interaction between peers, and between peers and teachers – and ones where gendered violence is also present. Plan International (2020) has found that girls and young women aged 15–25 in high and low-income countries are routinely subjected to explicit messages, pornographic photos, cyberstalking and other forms of abuse on social media. For example, in Mexico in early 2022, social media users denounced the existence of a WhatsApp group named 'Zorritas de la UAM' ('Bitches of UAM'). The group had more than 1,280 members – all male students of the University Anahuac Merida – where more than 3,000 intimate photos and 481 videos of female students were shared, as well as personal information on how to 'seduce' individual women to have sex (Bote, 2022). The case has been reported to the university and police; however, so far no consequences have been borne by the members of the group. Similar cases have been found in UK schools, and a review by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, found that 9 out of 10 girls and 5 out of 10 boys have received unsolicited sexually explicit photos and/or videos (Weale, 2021).*

Online GBV in many cases may not happen in isolation but rather as continuation of gendered violence happening at school. A study in the US found, for example, that 60% of high school students who had been victims of cyberbullying were also bullied at school (Schneider et al., 2012).**

* Findings based on interviews with more than 900 children and young people across 32 schools.

** Findings based on surveys with 20,406 students (grades 9–12) in Massachusetts (US).

²⁶ Survey details for studies cited in UNESCO and UN Women (2016) are unavailable.

Victims/survivors of GBV in educational institutions are often dissuaded from raising formal complaints at the institutional and legal level, and are pressured to settle for informal resolutions or to withdraw their complaints altogether (Batty et al., 2017). Moreover, many cases remain unreported. This is often the result of structural institutional barriers (i.e. institutional misogyny), victims'/survivors' fear of potential negative effects on their education and career or because gendered violence is so normalised in educational contexts (ibid.; Weale, 2021). In addition to the consequences of GBV discussed in the introduction, experiences of gendered violence in education settings can affect the academic performance of children and young people. It can hinder their ability to concentrate but also motivate them to not attend school and/or to drop out altogether (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Yet, in 123 countries, there is no legislation against sexual harassment (Rubiano-Matulevich, 2018).

Box 15: Women working in educational settings

Women working in educational settings – female academics and administrative personnel – also face gendered violence in schools, colleges and universities. In the US, for example, it is estimated that more than 50% of all female employees in the education sector experience sexual harassment at work (Johnson et al., 2018). In the UK, freedom of information requests revealed that, between 2011 and 2017, members of staff in 120 universities made at least 127 allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct and GBV by colleagues (Batty et al., 2017). Women with insecure contracts may be particularly vulnerable to violence in this space (Nayak and Sheehy, 2018).

Feminist responses to gendered violence in educational institutions

Feminist responses to GBV in education range from individual actions, such as filing complaints or publishing exposes,²⁷ to collective actions, such as protests or consciousness-raising workshops. Online activism has also played an important role (see Box 16).

Both students and members of staff have organised against GBV in educational spaces – through student or worker's unions in some cases. As with other spaces of the public sphere, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international organisations have led action to contest GBV in educational institutions (see Table A2.4 in Annex 2). Feminist activists and NGOs focus on different educational spaces: feminist movements tend to occur at the university level, while NGOs and other institutions tend to work more on GBV in schools.

²⁷ Ahmed (2018) writes how filing complaints of GBV perpetrated in institutional spaces are 'means of feminist pedagogy', as they challenge gender norms by labelling certain expectations and behaviours as unacceptable.

Box 16: Online activism to end GBV in educational institutions

Online spaces have been key for feminist activism against GBV. Similarly to activism against workplace GBV, the #MeToo movement has denounced sexual harassment and/or abuse in educational institutions, showing how digital technologies and social media can act as important channels and tools to contest the culture of silence that surrounds gendered violence.

In India, the #MeToo movement started mostly with the denouncement of male academics by young female students. The actions of law student Raya Sarkar was key: in 2017, Sarkar published a crowdsourced list (known as 'Sarkar's List') on social media of male academics who had allegedly harassed women, with the aim of contesting silence about GBV as well as providing women with information that could increase their safety (Shankar, 2017; Anitha, 2020). Online activism by Indian students has led to increasing attention to the problem within universities and increasing discussion about the persistence of patriarchal culture in higher education institutions (Dey and Mendes, 2022; Anitha, 2020).

In 2016 in South Africa, what came to be known as the #RUPreferenceList was published on a Facebook group for students from Rhodes University. The list named 11 male students who had seen their actions met with impunity. This list quickly galvanised feminist mobilisation across universities in the country (Chengeta, 2017a, 2017b; Gouws, 2018; Mail and Guardian, 2018). In 2018 in South Korea, students at more than 65 schools throughout the country used the hashtag #SchoolMeToo to denounce GBV perpetrated by teachers. This later galvanised a protest in Seoul and complaints to the UN Commission on Human Rights (Kim, 2019).

Online activism has also been key to pushing for legal reforms on GBV in educational spaces. An example is the #StandByMe campaign, organised in 2015 by the National Union of Students in the UK (in collaboration with Rape Crisis England and Wales) to advocate for the derogation of the Zellick guidelines. Created in 1994 in response to a high-profile rape case, the Zellick guidelines provided universities with advice on how to handle sexual abuse; however, investigatory and disciplinary procedures were not recommended unless the complaint was formally filed with the police. The campaign was successful in the creation of more robust guidelines for educational institutions (NUS Connect, 2015).

Student-led feminist activism against GBV in universities usually takes the form of onsite and online protests. These movements have been prominent in South Africa (see Box 17). In Nigeria, in response to a 2019 documentary called *Sex for grades*, which emphasised the pervasiveness of GBV in educational institutions (around 80% of female students reported experiencing sexual harassment when studying), an online campaign emerged under the same name (Rubiano-Matulevich, 2018). #SexforGrades led to the dismissal of various male academics implicated in cases of GBV, as well as to the passing of the Tertiary Education Sexual Harassment Bill (Daikpor, 2021).

Examples of activism from other regions include #Hokkolorob ('Let there be noise'), a student-led movement that took place in Kolkata (India) in 2014 in response to Jadavpur University's improper handling of a case of sexual harassment. The movement achieved the arrest of the two perpetrators (Ghoshal, 2014; Dey, S., 2020). Another example is PinjraTod ('Break the cage'), a feminist collective of female college students in Delhi aiming to transform patriarchal institutional cultures in university/college accommodation (known as 'hostels')²⁸ that has called out the lack of institutional response to cases of sexual harassment claims therein

²⁸ The collective originated in 2015 in response to gendered surveillance and moral policing at university campuses, including the imposition of curfews and mandatory dress-codes for female students only, as well as the lack of recognition of their autonomous decision-making power (Barua, 2020; Zahan, 2020).

(Barua, 2020; Zahan, 2020). Similar online campaigns and in situ protests have also taken place in Costa Rica, where students organised under the hashtag #MePasoEnLaUCR ('it happened to me at the University of Costa Rica') (Suárez-Cao and Arellano, 2019), in Mexico at the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (Castañeda, 2022) and in the US at Tufts University, where feminist activists Wagatwe Wanjuki and Kamilah Willingham started the #JustSaySorry campaign as part of Survivors Eradicating Rape Culture, demanding apologies from universities for mishandling cases of GBV (Wanjuki, 2022).

Feminist activists campaigning in this area also tend to work through educational strategies focused on challenging sexism and/or **rape culture** – that is, the normalisation and trivialisation of sexual violence, which manifests in attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes (Gouws, 2018) – in these spaces. How feminist groups choose to frame their work can depend on the level of education they are working from/on – the term 'rape culture' is commonly used by university student activists, while 'sexism' is used in movements/initiatives working with schools.

For example, Pinjra Tod, besides demanding the creation of institutional mechanisms to report GBV, also engages in feminist rewritings of popular Bollywood songs that contain gendered violence and victim-blaming messages with the goal of contesting rape culture among college students (Barua, 2020); UK Feminista (2022), a feminist pressure group working on GBV in schools aims to tackle sexism therein by supporting research on this topic, offering training to teachers and creating in-school resources for both teachers and students; and Survivors Eradicating Rape Culture also work to understand and address the roots of GBV in educational institutions (Krause et al., 2017).

Some movements working through educational strategies also tackle sexism in educational institutions more broadly. For instance, feminist protests in Chile occupied various universities (see Box 17) to demand 'non-sexist education' changes to curricula, and UK Feminista works more broadly to tackle sexism in schools. When led by staff members, feminist activism is carried out through advocacy and educational strategies. An example of this type of activism is that undertaken by the Education Unions Take Action to End School-Related Gender Based Violence, a movement composed of teachers' unions and organisations in seven African countries. The movement, created in 2016, centres on the role of teachers to build political will, increase knowledge of, and foster dialogues about, school-related GBV, among other goals (UNGEI et al., 2018).

There are also male-led initiatives directed at men for the prevention of GBV in education. This type of work is usually directed at challenging **lad culture** – an often-desired form of masculinity among young men (mostly in university communities) that is heavily supported by, and promotes, women's objectification and the normalisation of sexual violence (Buchanan-Parker, 2012). Examples of this type of activism is Beyond Equality, a UK charity (previously the Good Lad Initiative) and the White Ribbon Alliance, which aims to engage boys and men in universities and schools through workshops and community leader training to help them challenge harmful ideas about masculinity.

Box 17: Feminist activism in South Africa and Chile against GBV in universities

Student-led protests against GBV on university campuses have been particularly notorious in two countries: South Africa and Chile.

There is a strong student movement in South Africa. In 2015, within a larger student movement that demanded the decolonisation of higher education in the country, the #FeesMustFall movement emerged in response to the government's plan to increase higher education fees. In this context, in 2016, mostly female Black students protested at Rhodes University in Makhanda against sexual violence and the negligence of the institution to create and implement the necessary policies and mechanisms.

The movement, known as #RapeMustFall, spread to other universities of the country, such as the University of Cape Town, the University of Witwatersrand and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as protesters in Makhanda faced police brutality and their concerns were dismissed by the university (Dlakavu, 2016; Hussen, 2018). The movement has relied on political protests and performances that rely on the female naked body, seeking to counter the vulnerability and sexualisation of female bodies, the prevalence of 'victim-blaming' culture, as well as to reclaim ownership of the female body. They have also relied heavily on social media activism through a variety of hashtags, such as #NakedProtest, and #IAmOneInThree (the then-current statistic about the prevalence of sexual violence in the country) (Hussen, 2018).

In 2016, student protests also took place at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. These began with the publication of a list of male perpetrators known as the #RUReferenceList (see Box 16). Students demanded a revision of the university's GBV policies, the appointment of a task team to investigate GBV and for implicated students to be removed from leadership positions (Dlakavu, 2016; Gouws, 2018; see also Chengeta, 2017a, 2017b). In the same period, the Unashamed movement emerged at Stellenbosch University, using the campaign hashtag #Chapter212 (referring to the constitutional chapter that guarantees personal freedom and security) to denounce rape culture on university campuses as unconstitutional and the fact that it was less likely to be punished than plagiarism (Daikpor, 2018; Gouws, 2018).

More recently, in 2018, Chilean students at various universities throughout the country successively occupied higher education facilities. Starting at the Austral University in the city of Valdivia, this feminist response to inadequate institutional action to cases of sexual harassment and abuse then spread to the Metropolitan University of Technology and the University of Chile in Santiago. The protests called for the transformation of existing patriarchal institutional cultures in universities and their lack of policies and procedures to deal with cases of sexual harassment, abuse and gendered violence. They also campaigned for wider reforms such as advocating for *educación no sexista* ('non-sexist education') in the curricula.

Before the occupations, only 7 out of 60 universities had policies in place. Within some universities, such as the University of Valparaíso, institutional authorities agreed to improve policies and procedures regarding GBV and in many cases to create a gender equality committee. The movement also sought to raise awareness of GBV and to promote physical integrity and sexual health among female students. For this, groups at universities have organised a range of activities, such as resistance embroidery, feminist stand-up comedy, debates on feminism, self-defence courses and gynaecology lessons (Dessi, 2018).

Challenges in addressing GBV in educational institutions

To address GBV in educational institutions, feminist action is needed at the institutional level. While this should pose the same risk of atomising feminist activism as it does for feminists contesting GBV in the workplace, this does not appear to be the case. As evident in the preceding section, feminist collective action has successfully challenged individual institutions while building a movement across them.

Yet, feminist activism against GBV in this space faces other significant challenges. Women in these spaces, as those in, or when in, workplaces, face numerous institutional barriers and pressures when reporting an incident, and they may fear or anticipate different forms of retaliation (social exclusion, unfair treatment, re-victimisation, etc.). This creates once again a problem of under-reporting, which not only promotes impunity, but also results in a lack of knowledge about the prevalence and manifestations of gendered violence in a particular space. Having a clearer understanding of the scope of GBV in primary and secondary institutions is often more complicated as it involves children – for whom it is often harder to report and recognise instance of GBV. Moreover, more vulnerable children – such as disabled and migrant children – can be at increased risk of GBV while having fewer tools to challenge it or routes to denounce it. For example, refugees and children with insecure migration status may prefer not to report instances of violence in order to avoid attracting attention to themselves.



2.5 Other public spaces

GBV is also prevalent in other spaces within the public sphere, such as within activist or civic groups, religious spaces and healthcare settings.

Social movements and activist spaces: Existing literature on social movements has long documented exclusions and discrimination experienced by women within activist spaces. For example, Campbell (1996) found this to be the case for women in the rubber tapper's movement in Brazil in the 1980s; Asher (2007) discusses the same in the context of the Black ethnocultural movement in Colombia; and Linder and Johnson (2015) document the prevalence of 'microaggressions' from male activists to female peers in feminist spaces in the US (for more examples, see Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021; Jiménez Thomas and George, 2022).

Existing literature, moreover, has documented the presence of concerns and instances of GBV within activist circles – including feminist ones. For example, Mugo (2016) and Dlakavu (2016) document the prevalence of GBV perpetrated by fellow activists in the context of the #FeesMustFall student protests in South Africa, and Linder and Johnson (2015) also find this is the case within feminist activist spaces against GBV in the US. In fact, concerns about violence is often one of the reasons why feminist movements choose not to include men as fellow activists (ibid.; Burrell and Flood, 2019).

Religious spaces: GBV has been prevalent in churches and other religious groups. Various studies have found instances of gendered violence in a variety of faiths, such as Catholicism (McPhillips and McEwan, 2022), Buddhism (Gleig and Langenberg, 2021), Judaism (RCIRCSA, 2015a) and Jehovah's Witnesses (RCIRCSA, 2015b), to mention a few examples. LGBTQI+ people are particularly at risk of experiencing verbal and/or physical abuse in religious spaces, as communities can be discriminatory or outright hostile towards this population (Bachmann and Gooch, 2017). Women in religious communities may be more hesitant than secular women to speak out about abuse in their community if there is a strong link within it between female sexuality and notions of honour, shame, purity and chastity, if the abuse is perpetrated by a religious authority and/or if they fear being ostracised (Nason-Clark, 2003; Nason-Clark et al., 2018; Allison, 2021). Children, as previously discussed, are less likely to report instances of abuse than adults as they may not have the necessary tools to identify and/or communicate abuse. Moreover, leaders in religious spaces often do not have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond adequately to cases of GBV (Nason-Clark et al., 2018). This is usually related to a lack of external regulatory mechanisms and of reporting duties to independent bodies, which can result in a lack of transparency, as organisations deal with instances of abuse internally (McPhillips and Page, 2021; McPhillips and Goldenberg, 2021).

Healthcare settings: Healthcare, particularly when related to the sexual and reproductive health of women and other marginalised genders, has historically often been a site of gendered violence. Obstetric care (health services related to reproduction and childbirth) has a long history of misogynistic practices and beliefs (Chadwick, 2021; O'Brien and Rich, 2022). For example, in the second half of the 20th century, women in both the US and the UK reported being strapped down, threatened and physically assaulted in maternity wards – experiences which they often described as analogous to rape (Hillan, 1992; Wolf, 2009; Chadwick, 2021). Obstetric care also has a long history of racism, and violence against racialised women has been central to both the practice and development of obstetrics and gynaecological medicine. In the US, enslaved African American women were forcefully subjected to experimental surgeries to develop new obstetric techniques (Roberts, 1997; Owens, 2017).

This form of violence, termed **obstetric violence**, encompasses intentional harm, or that which results from discriminatory beliefs and behaviours, or as recently highlighted in the UK, racially biased negligence (MBRRACE, 2018; Birthrights, 2022) which is 'inflicted during or in relation to pregnancy, childbearing, and the post-partum period' (Chadwick, 2021). This harm occurs during, sexual and reproductive healthcare provision for women and other marginalised genders – such as during routine gynaecological check-ups and contraception consultations. Obstetric violence occurs in cases when consent is not requested or when the withholding of consent is ignored (e.g. for performing vaginal examinations and caesarean sections), when patients are not provided with enough information to make informed decisions, when more procedures than necessary are performed (e.g. carrying out unnecessary vaginal examinations), when pain relief is insufficient and when there is verbal, physical and/or sexual abuse (Annborn and Finnbogadóttir, 2022; Mayra et al., 2022).

Reproductive violence has also been perpetrated by states against more marginalised groups of women (and often also of men).²⁹ This includes forced sterilisations and coerced procedures, often as part of poverty and family planning programmes. Forced sterilisation has been mostly used against indigenous, tribal, lower-caste and poor people, as well as against people with disabilities. This has been the case, for example, in India since the 1970s, where it has mostly been targeted at women and men from lower castes, tribes and lower classes (Biswas, 2014; Wilson, 2017). In Peru, it is estimated that more than 270,000 women and 22,000 men – mostly indigenous and/or lower-class – were sterilised between 1996 and 2000, during the government of Alberto Fujimori (Ballón Gutiérrez, 2014; Molina Sierra, 2017; BBC, 2021). In Kenya, around 40 HIV-positive women were sterilised in 2011–2012 (Kasiva, 2012; Chan, 2015). In Denmark, Sweden, Canada³⁰ and the US,³¹ forced sterilisation programmes targeting women and girls with disabilities were implemented during the first half of the 20th century, continuing up to the 1970s in some cases (CBC News, 1999; Koch, 2006; HRW, 2011; Manjeshwar, 2020; Stern, 2020; O'Brien and Rich, 2022).

LGBTQI+ people have also historically experienced violence in relation to healthcare provision, from conversion surgery and/or therapy, refusal to provide treatment, forced physical examinations, unnecessary testing, gratuitous enquiries about sexual orientation and aggressive and demeaning consultations, among other issues (Browne, 2018, 2019). A survey with over 5,000 LGBTQI+ people in the UK, for example, found that 23% of LGBTQI+ patients had witnessed discriminatory remarks from healthcare staff while accessing services, and 14% had avoided treatment for fear of discrimination (Stonewall, 2018).

Feminist responses to GBV in social movements, religious spaces and healthcare settings

There have been a variety of feminist responses to GBV in these spaces of the public sphere. Many of the responses discussed in this section used social media as a strategy for denouncing incidents and galvanising action.

Feminist activism against GBV within social movements can be seen in the case of the #RepeatAzania campaign, which denounced sexual violence within the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa as well as the lack of safe spaces for women after a member was assaulted by a male peer in 2015 (Mugo, 2016). Feminist activism against GBV in these spaces targets members of the movement in question. As these spaces are informal, protests and campaigns do not aim to create formal mechanisms to address GBV but rather seek to challenge its normalisation, by making a normative statement about its unacceptability. Activists may also aim to achieve a formal conviction of the perpetrator, in order to boost their normative claim.

²⁹ While forced sterilisations have also been carried out against men, fewer men have been affected than women. Sterilisation programmes often focus on women even though sterilisation procedures are easier to perform on men. In India, for example, this is likely the case because it is assumed that women are less likely to protest (Biswas, 2014).

³⁰ Sterilisation programmes have also targeted indigenous women and forced sterilisations continue to be reported (Rao, 2019).

³¹ There have also been recent reports of forced sterilisations being carried out at Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centres in the US against undocumented migrant women (Manjeshwar, 2020). Reports of this type of abuse in relation to migrant women dates back to the 1970s with the case *Madrigal v Quilligan* (O'Brien and Rich, 2022). Forced sterilisations in the US were also carried out against Native American women during the 1970s. It is estimated that 25% of Native American women of childbearing age were sterilised during this period (ibid.).

The #ChurchToo and #MosqueMeToo movements are examples of feminist activism against GBV in religious spaces. The first started in 2017, when Emily Joy Allison (2021) denounced her abuser through Twitter, also commenting on rampant abuse within American Christian purity culture more widely. The movement has spread globally and has been particularly strong in Nigeria since 2019, following a rape perpetrated by a religious authority (Ajayi, 2019). #MosqueMeToo was started by Mona Elthawy, who denounced her abuser on Twitter for committing sexual abuse against her during Haj (Tong, 2018).

Feminist activism against GBV in religious spaces often aims, as these two campaigns do, to break a culture of silence and thus to motivate other people to speak out against their abusers. By breaking the silence, victims/survivors disrupt a key factor that enables the reproduction of gendered violence in these spaces. These feminist campaigns are sometimes underpinned by feminist theology – such as Christian feminism or Islamic feminism – that aims to transform institutional patriarchal cultures and beliefs (e.g. Badran and Cooke, 2004; Badran, 2008; Seedat, 2013).

Lastly, feminists campaigning against obstetric violence have discussed and pushed for recognition of the term of ‘obstetric violence’ itself, which, despite being coined in the early 20th century, is not unanimously recognised by healthcare communities (Chadwick, 2021). This discussion has been mostly taking place in magazines, newspapers and social media (e.g. Ricoy Olariaga, 2016). Feminist organisations and groups have also been advocating for the recognition and incorporation of the concept of ‘respectful maternity care’, for example in the sustainable development goals (El Parto es Nuestro, 2020).

In this sense, feminist responses to GBV in healthcare (like those to OGBV) focus on producing a vocabulary that recognises and expresses women’s experiences of violence in these spaces and that can be used to demand change. Feminists organising against obstetric violence have also focused on providing information to help women identify instances of violence and demand their rights. *El Parto es Nuestro* (‘Childbirth is ours’), a feminist organisation in Spain, for example, uses this approach. Feminist collectives also focus on creating sexual and reproductive healthcare alternatives for women. This includes, for example, a movement of autonomous midwives and the feminist collectives *Parteras en Bici* (‘Midwives on Bicycles’) and *Morada Violeta* (‘Purple Home’) in Mexico (Laako, 2015).

Challenges in addressing GBV in social movements, religious spaces and healthcare settings

The challenges feminist activists face when organising against GBV in these spaces varies. In activist spaces, one major challenge is the pervasive perception that raising gendered concerns can be divisive for a social movement’s cohesion and focus (e.g. Campbell, 1996; Deere, 2003; Asher, 2007; Ramisetty and Muriu, 2013). For that reason, women may decide not to speak out and/or movements may dismiss their demands. In religious spaces, one challenge may be a heightened level of reticence on the part of fellow members to recognise the occurrence of GBV within these spaces, as they may fear damage to the reputation and image of the religious community as a whole. Lastly, in healthcare spaces, feminists face the challenge of holding the state accountable for many of these practices – either because healthcare practitioners and professionals may be part of public healthcare systems or because obstetric violence was directly devised and implemented by the state.

3 Conclusion

Feminist activists are not only concerned with gendered violence in the private sphere, but also with that taking place in the wide variety of spaces that make up the public sphere.

As the movements, groups and/or initiatives discussed in this paper show, activists contest gendered violence through legal and/or policy change and by renegotiating gender roles and relations, but also by directly challenging underpinning gender norms. This is the case, for example, with activism against GBV in common spaces, which, besides advocating for legal change, also challenges the normalisation (and in some cases romanticisation) of gendered violence in these spaces as well as gender norms that sustain victim-blaming. This is also the case with activism against GBV in workplaces and educational institutions. In both these spaces feminist activists have targeted cultures – such as lad culture or rape culture – that uphold beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that condone or encourage gendered violence.

The cases discussed further show how institutional change is not only sought at the level of the state, but also at an institutional level. This is most clearly seen in the case of activism against GBV in the workplace and in educational institutions, where feminist activism has demanded the creation of adequate reporting and monitoring mechanisms, as well as the dismantling of institutional barriers and misogyny which create pressures around reporting GBV.

The cases discussed also show: how a crucial part of activism against GBV entails creating and sharing a vocabulary that enables people to identify, name and denounce instances of gendered violence as such (particularly in the cases of OGBV and obstetric violence); the significance of occupying and claiming spaces of the public sphere, making explicit that women and other marginalised genders will not give up their right to be in those spaces (particularly evident in the case of activism against GBV in common spaces and online); and the importance of prompting women and others to speak up about their experiences and thus break the silence that contributes to the normalisation of this violence.

Lastly, feminist initiatives and mobilisations against GBV in the public sphere contest the fear that perpetrators of GBV aim to normalise and routinise in order to (re)produce patriarchal control over social, political and economic spaces (Gqola, 2022). There are however significant challenges, beyond the ones discussed in each section.

A crucial barrier to legal and/or political change, which aims to contest, in part, impunity, is the frequent lack of enforcement and implementation of such changes. As a result, feminist activists need to continue their work and advocacy after achieving legal change, as institutional sexist biases often hinder the enforcement of new legal mechanisms (Faith, 2018; Jiménez Thomas Rodriguez et al., 2021). With emerging evidence of the effectiveness of gender-specialised state organisms and mechanisms (McGinnis et al., 2022), advocacy for their creation may be important. Moreover, as pursuing legal change calls upon the coercive power of the state, activists need to be critical and mindful of the ways in which criminalisation of GBV might increase the vulnerability of already vulnerable groups and thus reinforce inequalities among women and other marginalised genders (Bernstein, 2007; Srinivasan, 2021). They also need to be critical of the ways in which legal and policy change can frame GBV as an individual rather than structural problem (Srinivasan, 2021).

Moreover, women and other marginalised genders are vulnerable to violence – which often takes the form of gendered violence – when undertaking activist work (briefly discussed in Section 2.3). Violent retaliation and/or repression is often perpetrated by colleagues, peers, citizens and/or security forces. For example, in India, the students involved in #Hokkolorob were physically and/or sexually assaulted; in South Africa, various students involved in the #RUGReferenceList protests faced criminal charges, were violently repressed by the police and were harassed by the men they were denouncing (Ghoshal, 2014; Pilane, 2016). As such, people confronting GBV are vulnerable to the gendered violence that is often perpetrated in response. As GBV is often an instrument to enforce male privilege, authority and control, it is likely that, as feminist activism successfully challenges and dismantles patriarchy, patriarchal backlash will increase. Lastly, it is important to bear in mind that, while GBV is strongly dictated by gender norms, it has a political economy (True, 2012; Segato, 2013). The political and economic structures that render women and other marginalised genders exposed or vulnerable to violence must therefore also be tackled.

Knowledge gaps

In the process of searching material for and writing this working paper, various knowledge gaps became evident. This follows the call of Hardt et al. (2022) for more research on GBV in public spaces, theorisation to better identify, understand and address it, improved measurements through definitional clarity, and improved understanding of root causes and consequences, as well as of the impact of initiatives and efforts to contest it.

First, it is crucial to address the lack of knowledge about GBV in social and entertainment spaces. This gap signals the persistence of gendered norms of decency and respectability, which have been instrumental to obscuring violence and deflecting responsibility away from perpetrators. As such, research on GBV committed in spaces where women and others go to have fun and enjoy themselves is necessary.

Second, it is crucial to pay more attention to GBV experienced by LGBTQI+ people, as well as to the myriad of ways in which they contest it. There is currently limited understanding of how LGBTQI+ movements contribute to the contestation of the gender norms underpinning GBV, as well as a gap in literature about how feminist movements and LGBTQI+ movements work together to address GBV and spur gender norm change.

There is also still limited understanding of the effectiveness of strategies used by feminist movements/activists and how this differs across spaces of the public sphere. Intersectional differences must also be considered more carefully. Feminist movements against GBV may need to implement different strategies in different contexts, as tools that are transformative for some women may reinforce the oppression of others (Nguyen, 2013; Gouws, 2018).

Rehabilitation/reinsertion programmes directed at men who have committed GBV focus on those that have committed violence within the private sphere. As a result, there is also an opportunity to increase our understanding of how to engage with men who commit GBV in the public sphere, as well as with men driven to commit these harms by outright misogyny rather than broader societal sexist norms.

There is also an opportunity to increase our understanding of the way in which feminist movements/ groups are part of, and interact with, a wider constellation of actors.

Likewise, in some of the spaces discussed there is a lack of data on the incidence of GBV, particularly for forms that have been recently recognised as such or are still contested (i.e. OGBV and obstetric violence) and in cases where data focuses on the type of violence (i.e. acid attacks) rather than its place of occurrence. There is also a lack of data regarding other spaces within the public sphere, such as social spaces, as well as on the ways in which people with disabilities experience gendered violence across the public sphere, as most existing literature focuses on the private sphere.

Lastly, the role of feminist activism in promoting and achieving legal reform needs to be better documented. This opens an avenue for further research to document and understand how legal changes have been brought about and who we owe them to. This relates more broadly to the absence of a gender norm lens in most literature on feminist activism, which opens an opportunity to continue examining the links between gender norms and social movements in more depth. Further research is also needed to explore the incremental impact of feminist activism on the transformation of gender roles and relations, which is more difficult to evaluate because of its longer time frame.



Activists in Chile march on the street to call 'For a popular feminist education'. © erlucho / Shutterstock.com

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Annex 1: Notes on methodology

The rapid, non-systematic literature review conducted included both academic and grey literature on GBV in different spaces of the public sphere and on feminist activism on this topic, published between 2011 and 2022. No geographical focus was determined a priori; rather, attention was placed on gathering evidence from different countries and regions.

The search engines used were Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO), HOLLIS (Harvard Library Catalogue), Google Scholar and Google. The latter was used mainly to identify feminist movements and/or initiatives as many of them are not listed in existing literature, but information about them is available through webpages and/or social media belonging to the movement/group in question. Searching on Google also surfaced news articles, some of which are also used in this working paper due to their relevance.

An initial search in English was carried out over four days by two research assistants. Around 200 articles were downloaded, and a final selection of 100 were entered into an evidence table. Following this, an additional search was conducted by the author in both English and Spanish with more specific targets in order to cover gaps in the literature found or to enquire deeper into a particular subject. Table A1.1 shows the term searches used in the first and second searches.

Table A1.1 Search terms

GBV and feminist movements	TS= 'women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' AND TS= 'gender-based violence' OR 'violence against women' OR 'GBV' OR 'violence' AND TS= 'public sphere' OR 'public spaces' TS= 'movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' AND TS= 'violencia de genero' OR 'violencia contra las mujeres'
Public spaces	TS= 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'sexual assault' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' OR 'acid attacks' AND TS= 'public spaces' OR 'street' OR 'streets' OR 'public transport' OR 'public toilets' TS= 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'violence' OR 'homophobic violence' OR 'transphobic violence' AND TS= 'LGBTQI+' AND TS= 'public spaces' OR 'street' OR 'streets' OR 'public transport' OR 'public toilets' TS= 'women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND TS= 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS= 'public spaces' OR 'street' OR 'streets' OR 'public transport' OR 'public toilets' TS= 'women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND TS= 'eve-teasing' TS= 'movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' AND TS= 'violencia de genero' OR 'violencia contra las mujeres' OR 'acoso' AND TS= 'espacios publicos' OR 'transporte publico' OR 'calle' OR 'calles' OR 'banos publicos' TS= 'movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' AND TS= 'acoso callejero'
Online violence	TS= 'online gender-based violence' OR 'digital gender-based violence' TS= 'online gender-based violence' AND 'COVID-19' TS= 'online gender-based violence' AND 'LGBTQI+' TS= 'homophobic violence' OR 'transphobic violence' OR 'violence' AND TS= 'LGBTQI+' AND TS= 'online' TS= 'women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND TS= 'online harassment' OR 'OGBV' OR 'online gender-based violence' TS= 'movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' AND TS= 'violencia de genero online' OR 'violencia digital' OR 'violencia de genero digital' TS= 'ley Olimpia Mexico'

Education	<p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'sexual assault' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='school' OR 'college' OR 'university' OR 'educational spaces' OR 'educational institutions'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'violence' OR 'homophobic violence' OR 'transphobic violence' AND TS='LGBTQI+' AND TS='school' OR 'college' OR 'university' OR 'educational spaces' OR 'educational institutions'</p> <p>TS='women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' OR 'student feminist activism' AND TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='school' OR 'college' OR 'university' OR 'educational spaces' OR 'educational institutions' OR 'education'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo estudiantil' OR 'activismo feminista estudiantil' AND TS='violencia de genero' AND TS='escuela' OR 'universidad' OR 'espacios educativos' or 'educacion'</p>
Workplace	<p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='work' OR 'workplace'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='informal work' OR 'informal jobs'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='sex work'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'violence' OR 'homophobic violence' OR 'transphobic violence' AND TS='LGBTQI+' AND TS='work' OR 'workplace'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'violence' OR 'homophobic violence' OR 'transphobic violence' AND TS='LGBTQI+' AND TS='sex work'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='domestic workers'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='women in politics' OR 'government'</p> <p>TS='violence against women in politics' OR 'VAWIP'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='women in media'</p> <p>TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='activists'</p> <p>TS='women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='work' OR 'workplace' OR 'informal work' OR 'informal jobs' OR 'sex work' OR 'domestic work' OR 'women in politics' OR 'women in media'</p> <p>TS='feminist activism' AND 'ILO CONVENTION 190'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo feminista' AND TS='violencia de género' OR 'acoso' OR 'acoso sexual' AND TS='trabajo' OR 'laboral' OR 'lugares de trabajo'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo feminista' AND TS='violencia política'</p>
Other spaces	<p>TS='GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' OR 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' AND TS='religious spaces' OR 'religious institutions' OR 'church'</p> <p>TS='GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' OR 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' AND TS='religious spaces' OR 'religious institutions' OR 'church' AND TS='LGBTQI+'</p> <p>TS='GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' OR 'harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' AND TS='social movements' OR 'activist spaces'</p> <p>TS='obstetric violence'</p> <p>TS='obstetric violence' AND TS='LGBTQI+'</p> <p>TS='women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND TS='harassment' OR 'sexual harassment' OR 'GBV' OR 'gender-based violence' AND TS='social movements' OR 'activist spaces' OR 'religious spaces' OR 'religious institutions' OR 'church'</p> <p>TS='women's movement' OR 'feminist movement' OR 'feminist campaigns' OR 'feminist activism' AND 'obstetric violence'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo feminista' AND TS='violencia obstetrica'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo feminista' AND TS='violencia de género' OR 'acoso' OR 'acoso sexual' AND TS='movimientos sociales' OR 'grupos activistas'</p> <p>TS='movimiento feminista' OR 'colectivos feministas' OR 'feminismo' OR 'activismo feminista' AND TS='violencia de género' OR 'acoso' OR 'acoso sexual' AND TS='iglesias' OR 'espacios religiosos'</p>

Annex 2: Interventions led by other actors

The tables include key initiatives led by other NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, think tanks and national governments to counter GBV in each of the spaces of the public sphere covered in the report. However, as discussed in Section 1.2, feminist collectives and activists may also be involved in these initiatives.

Table A2.1 Key initiatives against GBV in public spaces

Initiative	Background	Focus
Spotlight Initiative	Global initiative of the United Nations funded by the European Union.	Aims to eliminate violence against women and girls. It particularly focuses on domestic violence, femicide, trafficking, and sexual and labour exploitation. It supports work across six areas: laws and policies, women's movements, data collection, services, prevention efforts and institutional strengthening.
Viajemos Seguras	Projects run by INMUJERES in Mexico City.	The project implemented women-only, pink subway cars and taxis in the city. A study, however, showed them to be ineffective. In 2008, a new campaign was launched targeting the cultural embeddedness of GBV on public transport. Women-only transport was coupled with a large public campaign, including billboards, posters and a 24-hour hotline to report incidents of violence. In 2010, INMUJERES launched the Athena bus programme, which was not women-only transport, but buses were bright pink and had historical women on the side. The programme aimed to change the perception of women's role in the public sphere (Dunckel-Graglia, 2016).
Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls	Project run by UN Women with various partners.	Aims to develop, implement and evaluate approaches to prevent and respond to sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces. The project now runs in over 50 cities, including Quito (Ecuador), Cairo (Egypt), New Delhi (India), Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) and Kigali (Rwanda). In Ecuador and Mexico, the project has prompted the criminalisation of sexual harassment in public spaces (UN Women, 2020).

Table A2.2 Key initiatives against GBV in public spaces

Initiative	Background	Focus
Take Back the Tech	Founded by the APC Women's Rights Programme in 2006, as a result of research looking at the connection between ICT and GBV. It is a global campaign present in 18 countries, regarded as the first major initiative tackling OGBV.	Seeks to: create safe digital spaces addressing OGBV; realise women's rights to shape, participate, use and share ICTs; and promote the recognition of the historical contribution of women to ICTs. Take Back the Tech produces resources to help women stay safe online. It has also created global spaces for dialogue among feminist activists, which, for example, resulted in 2014 in the creation of the 'Feminist Principles of the Internet' (n.d.).
GenderIT	Also a project of APC, which functions as a think tank on feminist intersectional rights and justice on the internet.	Aims to provide a space for thought and advocacy on women's rights in relation to the internet and online spaces. GenderIT hosts blogs on these topics and provides a space called 'Feminist Talk', where readers and blog authors can engage in dialogue.
#DigitalHifazat	Online campaign against OGBV in India, run by Feminism India and the Government of Canada.	Aims to analyse the threats that women, girls, and other marginalised groups of people in India face in online spaces. It also aims to understand how Indian legislation addresses the problem and how it can better respond. Provides information online about how to identify OGBV and how to reduce the likelihood of its occurrence. They also organise dialogues to shed light on how different groups of women and other marginalised groups in India experience online spaces.

Initiative	Background	Focus
Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)	Think tank that works on human rights and digital governance in Pakistan.	Aims to increase protection of human rights activists in digital spaces by raising awareness about digital security and advocating for relevant policies. They explicitly research the roots and patterns of OGBV and gendered disinformation in Pakistan. They produce policy papers and campaign around better legislation and enforcement of internet safety. DRF also has a daily cyber harassment helpline to support people affected by online violence.
#WomenatWeb	Regional project founded in 2018, led by Media Convergence (an ICT company) and funded by Akademie and German Cooperation. #WomenAtWeb pushes for the transformation of the internet into a safe space for women. The project takes places in Tanzania (Women at Web Tanzania) and Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda (Women at Web East Africa).	#WomenatWeb mentors women on digital security, teaching women skills about how to protect themselves from cyberbullying and online gendered violence. They also offer peer-to-peer support groups. #WomenatWeb also work on capacity building and stakeholder engagement with government actors, such as the Tanzanian police force, and other key media actors.
Acoso.Online	Project created in 2017 and led by a regional network comprising 14 organisations mostly in South America (with the exception of Spain and Barbados). Members include <i>Hiperderecho</i> (Peru), TEDIC (Paraguay), Internetlab (Brazil), ELA (<i>Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género</i> - Argentina) and NOAH (No! to Online Abuse and Harassment - Barbados), among others.	The project consists of a website with information on how to identify OGBV and how to proceed in case of abuse. It provides a detailed guide of the legal resources available on NCDII in a number of South American countries, Barbados and Spain, as well as guides on how to collect and keep evidence of the abuse.
Glitch	Organisation founded in 2017 in the UK by local politician, Seyi Akiwowo, after experiencing online abuse. Glitch works to build safe online spaces.	Glitch works through awareness-raising, advocacy and direct action. They are currently leading a petition to the UK prime minister to ensure a gender lens is included in online safety legislation. They also run 'Digital Defense' workshops for young people, as well as advocate for change within companies in the private sector, such as Meta.
Tecnoresistencias	Project led by <i>Hiperderecho</i> in Peru in collaboration with feminist activists and victims/survivors of OGBV.	The project focuses on three axes: identification, 'resistance' and reporting. It provides information on how to identify abuse, how to increase one's safety in online spaces, and how to report cases to the corresponding authorities. It seeks to raise awareness of women's and girls' rights in online spaces.
Women's Special Interest Group	Group founded in 2017 at the Internet Society, a global NGO.	The group seeks to support women's empowerment in technology. In various countries in South America, for example, they have organised 'FemHack Parties' – events seeking to create a space for dialogue on how to create a feminist internet and for feminist activists (working or wanting to work in this area) to meet.
End Violence Against Women	Coalition formed in 2005. It comprises NGOs, academics, activists and survivors.	The Coalition does not focus specifically on OGBV but on GBV generally. It does, however, have specific campaigns against OGBV. One such campaign centres on advocacy for legal reform in the UK.

Table A2.3 Key initiatives against GBV in the workplace

Initiative	Background	Focus
Streetlink	StreetLink is a project run by Breakthrough India since 2017.	The project aims to end GBV experienced by female workers in the Indian apparel industry – in their workplace, homes and on their journeys to and from. The project uses in-person and online activities such as: capacity building and training workshops for both employees and factory management; social media activism; community mobilisation; and sharing of testimonies.
Breaking the Silence: The FWF Violence and Harassment Prevention Program	Project run by The Fair Wear Foundation (FWF), an independent actor working with garment brands, factories and workers to improve the industry. It started in 2012 in Bangladesh and India.	The project focuses on the most labour-intensive parts of textile production, such as sewing and trimming – work that is usually performed by female workers. The project organises workplace harassment and sensitivity training with employees and management, in which role-play activities are used. It also supports the formation of harassment committees within garment factories with the goal that these groups will monitor industry performance.
Preventing Violence and Harassment at Work	Run by CARE International in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. It focuses on women in garment factories in these countries.	The project has developed standardised guidelines for addressing sexual harassment at work, improved companies' responses to sexual harassment by sharing examples of best practice and supported collective mobilisation of female workers.

Table A2.4 Key initiatives against GBV in educational institutions

Initiative	Background	Focus
Mobilising Men in Practice Challenging Sexual and Gender-based Violence	Programme established in 2009, led by the Institute of Development Studies (UK) and implemented in India, Kenya and Uganda.	In India and Kenya, the programme includes campaigns against GBV on university campuses. The programme aims to make men aware of the impact of gender in their personal lives and prompt them to become gender activists by working first and foremost on themselves. This is done through toolkits, dialogue and in-person workshops, which include role-play and journaling. The ultimate goal is to create strong gender alliances for gender equality and ending GBV (Grieg and Edstrom, 2012).
Coaching Boys into Men	Programme founded in 2001 by Futures Without Violence, an NGO founded by Esta Stoler. The project has been adapted in India, where it holds the name of Parivartan.	Provides resources (online and in-person) to sports coaches with the aim that they become positive mentors in young men's lives on topics such as respect, integrity, dating, violence, racism in sports and consent.

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About ALIGN

ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that is creating a global community of researchers and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – patriarchal gender norms. Through its vibrant and growing digital platform, and its events and activities, ALIGN aims to ensure that the best of available knowledge and resources have a growing impact on harmful gender norms.

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ALIGN is a research platform currently supported by the Ford Foundation and is led by ODI.