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# GENDER - BASED CYBER VIOLENCE ANALYSES



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## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Terminology .....	4
Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF GBV) .....	4
Understanding the Different Forms of Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (CVAWG) ....	5
Methodology.....	6
Regulatory Framework .....	7
International legislation .....	7
National legislation.....	9
Cases and impact on legislation .....	13
Database of key actors .....	14
Survey Findings.....	15
Survey of civil society activists on gender-based cyber violence against young women.....	15
Survey for psychologists/social workers on gender-based cyberviolence against young women.....	27
Conclusions .....	42
Recommendations .....	43
References .....	46

# Introduction

## Combatting Gender-based Cyber Violence Against Women in Digital Spaces

The Internet has completely transformed how we work, shop, learn, and interact, integrating itself into nearly every aspect of daily life. However, alongside these benefits, it has also become a tool for expressing negative emotions like anger and frustration, and even for exerting control or causing harm. Like traditional forms of abuse and crime, cyber abuse can lead to deeply unpleasant and traumatic experiences for victims<sup>1</sup>.

We live in an era where digital communications are developing at an incredible pace, making everything, everywhere, and for everyone much more accessible. However, alongside the enormous benefits in the fields of networking, information exchange, and freedom of speech, these same platforms are increasingly abused every day and have become places where cyber threats and violence are on the rise. There is always a thin line between what constitutes an offline and an online threat. It is evident that legislation globally moves slowly and does not keep pace with technological advancement.

Research shows that vulnerable groups, especially women and children, are the most common victims of cyber threats. The consequences are far-reaching, including psychological and emotional impacts, reduced quality of life, and effects on the educational process and professional careers of the victims. Cyber threats and cyber violence cannot be viewed as separate issues, as ICT technology is integrated into all spheres of everyday life, so are cyber threats increasingly present, with cyber violence having various and far-reaching consequences, both immediate and prolonged, affecting the future lives of victims. This creates the need to clearly define terms and make a clear distinction between what is and is not a cyber threat. Consequently, the different types of cyber threats that occur daily should be identified, including CVAWG, which is technology-facilitated using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Gender is one of the key factors in international cybersecurity. Integrating a gender perspective into cybersecurity policy is crucial to correctly understanding and addressing the differentiated risks and needs faced by complex subjects. With the right gender approach in cybersecurity practices and policies, legal frameworks will be inclusive and designed to protect everyone, especially the most vulnerable women and girls who are targeted by cyber threats at significantly higher rates than others. At the international level, global policies and measures have made progress, but many gaps still exist regarding good coordination and clear legal definitions of both terms and the measures that need to be taken for cyber threats against women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

In the Western Balkan countries, cyber threats against women and girls are closely tied to the patriarchal norms which still exist. Online threats in the Balkans are not gender neutral, and

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<sup>1</sup> Vakhitova, Zarina & Alston-Knox, Clair & Reeves, Ellen & Mawby, R.. (2021). Explaining Victim Impact from Cyber Abuse: An Exploratory Mixed Methods Analysis. *Deviant Behavior*. 43. 1-20. 10.1080/01639625.2021.1921558. Link: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352260407\\_Explaining\\_Victim\\_Impact\\_from\\_Cyber\\_Abuse\\_An\\_Exploratory\\_Mixed\\_Methods\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352260407_Explaining_Victim_Impact_from_Cyber_Abuse_An_Exploratory_Mixed_Methods_Analysis)

<sup>2</sup> Brown, D., Pytlak, A. (2020). Why Gender Matters in International Cyber Security, Link: <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmgsites/uk/pdf/2023/12/cybersecurity-gender-equality-and-social-inclusion.pdf>

it can be said that women and girls are much more frequently targeted and victimized by cyber violence. Furthermore, this report examines the critical gaps in legislation and its application, considering that cyber threats against women and girls are rapidly increasing and are becoming more prevalent both globally and in the Republic of North Macedonia.

Also, some effective recommendations and measures are proposed to effectively safeguard women and girls, aiming to strengthen strategies, supplement legal protections, with the exclusive purpose of creating a safer online environment that recognizes and protects their rights.

## Terminology

### Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) significantly affects women and girls, impacting their physical and mental health, well-being, safety, and reputation. While technology-facilitated violence is not always gender-based, data and survivor experiences indicate that women and girls are disproportionately affected. There is no universally accepted definition of GBV, though various international organizations provide different interpretations. Recognizing this gap, UN Women, as part of a joint data collection program, convened an expert group that proposed the following definition:

***Technology-facilitated violence against women (TF VAW) includes any act committed, facilitated, or exacerbated by digital tools, information, and communication technologies (ICT), causing or potentially causing physical, sexual, psychological, social, or economic harm, or violating rights and freedoms.***

The expert group also suggested that the term "**Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TF GBV)**" may be used interchangeably with TF VAW, as the broader definition encompasses the phenomenon. This definition will guide the present project.

At the international level, growing emphasis is placed on the necessity of criminal law responses to address TF GBV effectively.

In 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women emphasized the need to criminalize technology-facilitated violence to ensure that victims can "protect their rights to privacy and dignity." The Special Rapporteur further stressed that states should introduce new legal provisions or adapt existing frameworks, as necessary, to enable both criminal and civil proceedings against perpetrators. States should **explicitly prohibit and criminalize digital violence against women**, including **the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, online harassment, and cyberstalking**.<sup>3</sup>

In today's world, technology and digital communication tools are evolving at an incredible speed, enabling connections, discussions, and exchanges that were once unimaginable. However, these same platforms that offer unlimited access and freedom of expression have also become spaces where digital threats and forms of violence are increasing. For victims, the impacts are emotional, social, and economic, sometimes leading them to avoid certain online spaces. Victims defend themselves by reporting, seeking support, or changing their online

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<sup>3</sup> A/79/325: Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences - Violence against women and girls in sports; Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a79325-report-special-rapporteur-violence-against-women-and-girls-its>;



behavior. This approach makes it possible to see broader perspective on the issue, and thus the possibilities and opportunities to uncover the causes. This leads to a safer cyber environment for everyone.

These impacts are very serious because these online threats are leading to psychological and emotional harm, often discouraging women from engaging fully in digital spaces, which can, in turn, limit their educational and professional opportunities. Cyber violence against women and girls (CVAWG) is a growing issue, with many accessible ways to cause it from a technological point of view, from misinformation and harassment to online bullying, unauthorized sharing of personal images, and hate speech rooted in gender discrimination. That is the reason why this relatively new but rapidly spreading form of violence requires urgent attention and effective measures to protect vulnerable individuals online.

## Understanding the Different Forms of Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls (CVAWG)

The Council of Europe defines cyber harassment as a serious form of CVAWG, which is targeting women and girls through various abusive behaviors. These actions usually are in form of unwanted sexually explicit messages, offensive advances on social media and other platforms, and threats of physical or sexual violence. Cyber harassment also involves hate speech language intended to insult, demean, or intimidate individuals based on their gender or other characteristics, such as sexual orientation or disability. This type of harassment includes specific acts like “cyberbullying” and “revenge porn,” which overstep personal boundaries and cause lasting emotional harm.

**Cyber harassment** is perhaps the broadest form of cyberviolence and involves a persistent and repeated course of conduct targeted at a specific person that is designed to and that causes severe emotional distress and often the fear of physical harm. In practice, acts of cyberviolence may involve different types of harassment, violation of privacy, sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and bias offenses against social groups or communities. (Types of cyberviolence, Council of Europe)

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines CVAWG as a range of gender-based attacks carried out through digital means, often combined with factors like race, age, disability, sexuality, profession, or beliefs. Some of these acts begin online and move into physical spaces (workplace or home), while others start offline and then continue through social media, email, or messaging apps. Perpetrators may be anonymous (unknown) to the victim, or they may be familiar (former partner, classmate, or coworker). As the EU’s leading Knowledge Centre on Gender Equality, EIGE provides a clear framework for understanding the most common forms of cyber violence against women and girls. (EIGE, 2021) The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) describes most common types of cyber violence women and girls face, making it easier to understand how these harmful behaviors affect lives everyday:

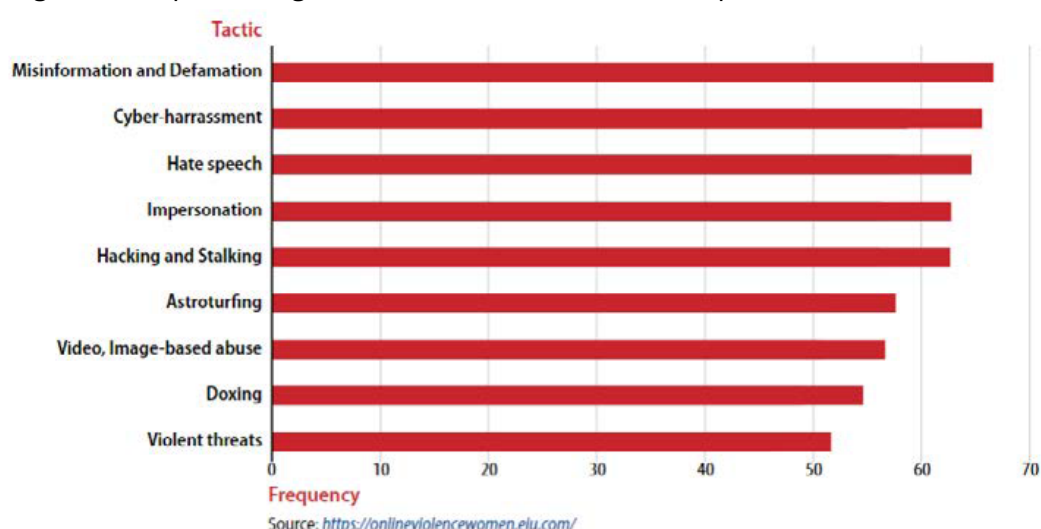
**Cyber Stalking:** This type of cyber violence involves persistent and targeted actions meant to harass, intimidate, or create unwanted contact with women and girls. Often fueled by gender bias and sometimes intersecting with race, age, or other factors, cyber stalking uses digital tools to make victims feel fearful, threatened, or unsafe in their daily lives.

**Cyber Bullying:** Unlike traditional bullying, cyber bullying extends into the digital world, where it can be relentless. There is many cases of harassment, blackmail, insults, and identity

theft that directly point at women and girls based on their gender, and often also target other aspects of their identity, such as sexuality or disability. These attacks aim to isolate, shame, and emotionally harm individuals, making them feel marginalized or attacked.

**Online Gender-Based Hate Speech:** This includes hateful or violent online content for women or girls, often due to their gender or in combination with factors like race or religion. Usually present on public platforms, this type of content can target women in high positions, presenting them as objects or victims of violence.

In addition, according to a 2023 report by UN Women (UN WOMEN, 2023), online violence against women takes many forms, with the nine most common types highlighted in their research. Notably, 66% of technology-facilitated gender-based violence begins with cyber harassment. This includes physical threats online, unwanted surveillance, receiving unsolicited images, and experiencing coordinated harassment across platforms.



Source: <https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/>

## Methodology

This research study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to examine gender-based cyber violence. A **desk review** will be conducted to analyze existing laws, strategies, and action plans related to violence against women, domestic violence, bullying, and violent extremism, identifying gaps, overlaps, and alignment with EU and international frameworks. A **database of key state and non-state actors** involved in prevention and protection efforts will be developed to map the institutional landscape.

To gain firsthand insights, a **questionnaire-based online surveys** will be designed and disseminated to CSO activists and psychologists working with victims, capturing their experiences and challenges. The survey data will undergo **quantitative and qualitative analysis**, with findings systematically integrated into the final report. Ultimately, a **comprehensive analytical report** will be compiled, synthesizing the desk review and survey results to provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening protection mechanisms against gender-based cyber violence.

# Regulatory Framework

## International legislation

International efforts to tackle cyber violence against women and girls (CVAWG) are making progress, but gaps in coordination and clear legal definitions persist. In the EU, although several regulations and directives address parts of CVAWG, but there is still no unified definition or specific legal framework. A new proposal from the European Commission for combating violence against women and domestic violence, which includes various forms of cyber violence, is a promising step forward. The Commission proposed new legislation on combating violence against women and domestic violence was adopted on 7 May **2024 (Directive (EU) 2024/1385)**. The EU now has the first ever law to effectively fight violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>4</sup> EU Member States have three years to transpose it. With this Directive it is introducing the term "cyberviolence" without providing a comprehensive definition. The Directive emphasizes various forms of cyberviolence, including stalking, harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and incitement to violence or hatred online. It proposes extensive protection and support measures for victims of gender-based violence, allowing them to file complaints online or through secure information and communication technologies, particularly regarding online crimes such as sharing intimate content without consent or harassment.

The **Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** recommends the term "cyberviolence against women," defining it as a form of gender-based violence executed through information and communication technology, which causes or may cause physical, sexual, psychological harm, or economic damage. Cyberviolence is viewed as part of a continuum of violence against women, not an isolated occurrence, and is linked to various forms of everyday violence. This Directive outlines practical steps of how to detect and prevent violence against women throughout the European Union, in a direction to provide consistent protections against both physical and digital abuse across member states. It states that "the provisions of this Directive should apply to all victims of criminal conduct which amounts to violence against women or domestic violence, as criminalized under Union or national law. This includes the criminal offenses defined in this Directive, namely the non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, cyber flashing, and cyber incitement to violence or hatred".

Several EU directives and regulations, including the **Victims' Rights Directive (2019/29/EU)**, the **Directive on combating child sexual abuse (2011/93/EU)**, and the **General Data Protection Regulation**, are applicable to technology-enabled gender-based violence.

On a broader scale, organizations like the Council of Europe and the United Nations have taken steps to address CVAWG. Some Council of Europe treaties cover certain aspects of cyber violence, and in 2021, the Council's Expert Group on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (**GREVIO**) issued **Recommendation No. 1** to emphasize the growing digital dimension of violence targeting women and girls. Data collection, however, is inconsistent across countries. In cases where information is available, proper classification and details are often missing and only covers specific types of cyber violence, and it makes it harder to understand

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<sup>4</sup> Combating violence against women and domestic violence, European Parliament, Briefing 30-05-2024, Link: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2023\)739392](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2023)739392)



and address the full scope of the issue. Developing a coordinated approach to policy and data collection at the international level will be essential in tackling CVAWG effectively.

GREVIO, the Council of Europe's expert body on violence against women, has observed that existing laws addressing online, or technology facilitated violence often center on protecting physical safety, reputation, or property. Unfortunately, these laws frequently miss other critical effects of such violence, including social, economic, psychological, and participatory harms, and rarely recognize the complex, cumulative nature of violence experienced by women and girls across all areas of life, including online. (GREVIO, 2021)<sup>5</sup>

**The Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011)** serves as a foundational legal framework to prevent and combat violence against women, increasingly addressing digital forms of gender-based violence. It situates online abuse within a broader continuum of violence that impacts women and girls in various spheres.

Then, **the Budapest Convention (Council of Europe, 2001)** which is the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime, offers measures to criminalize cyber violence, it supports gathering of evidence, and need to enhance international cooperation for investigating and prosecuting online abuse. This support is crucial for the effective investigation and prosecution of cyber violence cases.<sup>6</sup>

An important upgrade was **The Second Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime** (Budapest Convention) on enhanced co-operation and disclosure of electronic evidence (Protocol), which aims to further enhance cooperation on cybercrime and the ability of criminal justice authorities to collect electronic evidence for the purpose of specific criminal investigations or proceedings. The Protocol was opened for signature by the Parties to the Budapest Convention in May 2022.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the **Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)** (Council of Europe, 2019), still not mandatory, plays a key role as soft law by urging member states to prevent and combat sexism, with a special emphasis on online sexist hate speech. This recommendation, along with the **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)'s policies on hate speech**, enriches the legal and policy landscape and they are helping in promotion of a comprehensive approach to cyber violence.

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**

In 2017, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women adopted General Recommendation No. 35, which highlights the intersectionality of violence against women and expands the applicability of CEDAW to all environments where technology plays a mediating role. One of its most significant contributions is recognizing that violence occurs across all spheres of human interaction, explicitly stating that "modern forms of violence are perpetrated online and in other digital environments."

**The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women** examined the causes and consequences of digital violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective. The

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<sup>5</sup> GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women adopted on 20 October 2021, Link: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>;

<sup>6</sup> "Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls", European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022. Link: [https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/combating\\_cyber\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_girls.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/combating_cyber_violence_against_women_and_girls.pdf) ;

<sup>7</sup> European Union Agency for Justice Cooperation, July 2022, Link: <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/publication/second-additional-protocol-budapest-convention-cybercrime-and-cross-border-access>

report highlights the emerging challenges of online violence, focusing on prevention, protection, prosecution, and legal remedies. In 2018, the **UN Human Rights Council** provided a widely accepted definition of online gender-based violence:

*"Any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted, or aggravated by the use of information and communication technology—such as mobile and smart devices, the internet, social networking platforms, or email—targeting women because of their gender or disproportionately affecting them."*

While the Special Rapporteur does not aim to document all forms of digital violence, the rapid evolution of digital technology, online spaces, and artificial intelligence continues to generate new forms of online violence. The report prioritizes the most pressing concerns and highlights modern manifestations of digital violence against women and girls.

The Special Rapporteur's recommendations to UN member states propose a comprehensive approach to addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV). These include:

- Recognizing **digital violence as a human rights violation**,
- Strengthening **legal frameworks**,
- Promoting **education and technological development**,
- Ensuring **effective responses to online violence**.

## National legislation

This section of the analysis provides a detailed overview of the national legal and political framework related to gender-based violence (GBV) and assesses to what extent they are applicable and inclusive of digital gender-based violence.

**North Macedonia** has established a solid legislative framework for women's rights, with policies promoting gender equality and gender-based violence. Two Key laws reflect the commitment to improve women's rights. North Macedonia, as a signatory of the Istanbul Convention, aligned with it by adopting the **Law on the Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2021)**. This law marks a significant step forward in protecting women in the digital space. It explicitly defines "sexual harassment via the internet as any verbal, non-verbal, or other behavior of a sexual nature that aims to, or results in, the violation of dignity or the creation of a threatening, hostile, humiliating, or intimidating environment, access, or practice, through electronic means of communication."

**The Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia** includes physical, psychological, and economic gender-based violence in its definition, but does not specifically address technology-enabled gender-based violence. However, several criminal offenses in the Code are applicable to technology-enabled gender-based violence, the most important of which are as follows:

1. Article 144 addresses the criminal offense of endangerment of security, stating in paragraph 5 that anyone who threatens to commit a crime punishable by imprisonment for five years or more, using an information system due to a person's gender, will be punished with imprisonment from one to five years.

2. Article 144-a criminalizes stalking<sup>8</sup>, including the misuse of personal data, using media or other means of communication to psychologically abuse, harass, or intimidate another person, creating a sense of insecurity, distress, or fear for their safety or that of a close person. The penalty is a fine or imprisonment up to three years.
3. Article 149 is about abuse of personal data. This article stipulates that anyone who collects, processes or uses his personal data contrary to the conditions established by law without the consent of the citizen, will be punished with a fine or imprisonment for up to one year. The same criminal punishment applies to anyone who penetrates a computer information system with personal data with the intention of using it for himself or another to gain some benefit or to cause some harm to another. However, the mentioned Article does not have gender perspective and is lacking provisions of abuse of personal data as a form of digital gender-based violence.
4. Article 152 is criminal act regarding a person who makes unauthorized photographic, film or video recordings of another person or his personal premises without his consent, infringing his privacy or who directly transmits such recordings to a third party or shows them to him or otherwise makes him available with them to become acquainted, will be punished with a fine or imprisonment for up to one year. This article is also lacking a qualified offense and a more severe punishment if this crime is committed as a digital gender-based violence in form of cyberflashing, nonconsensual pornography and/or revenge porn.
5. Article 190-a criminalizes sexual harassment, including online harassment. The mentioned article states that anyone who by verbal, non-verbal or physical action, as well as through the use of electronic means of communication that have a direct or indirect, real or symbolic meaning of stating, indecent offer, luring, expression of sexual passion or any other action that clearly reminds of sexual intercourse or other sexual acts equated with him, and thus will injure his dignity, causing a feeling of discomfort, annoyance, humiliation or fear, shall be punished by a fine or by imprisonment for up to one year.
6. Article 193 criminalizes the display of pornographic material to minors, with imprisonment of three to five years if the offense is committed through public information means.
7. Article 193-a prohibits the production and distribution of child pornography, with imprisonment of at least eight years if committed via a computer system or other mass communication means.

However, within other criminal offenses covered by the Criminal Code, there needs to be more detailed regulation regarding the violation of rights in the digital space, particularly concerning offenses: misuse of personal data, unauthorized recording, mediation in prostitution, sexual display in front of another and other forms of online discrimination or abuse.

**The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** defines various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment via the internet. This is defined as any verbal, non-verbal, or other actions of a sexual nature intended to or resulting in the violation of dignity or creating a threatening, hostile, degrading, or intimidating environment through electronic communication means. However, the law lacks a detailed

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<sup>8</sup> Law on amendments of the Criminal Code, No. 08-789/1 from 13.02.2023, North Macedonia, <https://ldbis.pravda.gov.mk/PregledNaZakon.aspx?id=62139>

definition of technology-enabled gender-based violence (RBN) and its specific forms. The law prescribes protective measures against gender-based violence, which can be categorized into three main groups: measures to prevent re-victimization, emergency and temporary protection measures, and judicial protection. Although the law advocates for a multisectoral approach to implementing these protective measures, listing specific actions and relevant actors for their enforcement, it seems that these measures mainly focus on physical and psychological violence, without offering clear protection against digital gender-based violence. There is a gap in the law regarding specific measures for the protection from technology-enabled gender-based violence. Additionally, the law provides general and specific services for victims of gender-based violence.<sup>9</sup> Within the general services, the Law emphasizes health and social services for all victims of gender-based violence. Specific services for victims of gender-based violence are tailored to the needs of those who have experienced different forms of gender-based violence.<sup>10</sup> The Law<sup>11</sup> lacks specific measures for victims of technology-enabled gender-based violence.

The **Criminal Procedure Code** of the Republic of North Macedonia governs the procedural framework for criminal proceedings. It outlines the steps for investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of criminal offenses. Amendments may be needed to provide clearer guidance on how to handle technology-enabled violence cases.<sup>12</sup>

The **Personal Data Protection Law**<sup>13</sup> of the Republic of North Macedonia regulates the processing and protection of personal data in accordance with international standards, including the **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** of the European Union. The law is designed to ensure the privacy and security of individuals' personal data by setting rules on how data is collected, processed, stored, and shared. While the law primarily focuses on personal data protection, it is highly relevant to cases of technology-enabled gender-based violence (RBN) as it helps safeguard victims' sensitive information from unauthorized access, misuse, or disclosure. For example, it can be applied in situations involving the unauthorized sharing of intimate images or personal details without consent, ensuring that victims' privacy rights are respected. The law mandates that personal data must be processed lawfully, transparently, and securely, which is crucial in addressing the misuse of personal information in the context of online harassment, stalking, or other forms of technology-enabled violence. However, the bylaws that each “controller” has to adopt in relation to data protection frameworks could benefit from more explicit provisions addressing the intersection of data protection and digital gender-based violence to ensure comprehensive support for victims in the digital space.

The **Law on Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination** of the Republic of North Macedonia aims to prevent discrimination in all its forms and ensure equal opportunities for all citizens. The legislation focuses on protection against discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and other grounds, and includes mechanisms for submitting complaints and seeking legal protection. In the context of

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<sup>9</sup> Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Article 88

<sup>10</sup> Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Article 89

<sup>11</sup> LAW ON PREVENTION AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, No. 08-524/1, January 27, 2021, North Macedonia, Skopje. Link:

<https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2021/1a28a922f364401e94935d4d694b9d75.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Analysis of the legislation related to Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence, UNDP, December 2024, Link:

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-12/final-analysis-tf-gbv.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> LAW ON THE PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA, No. 08-1417/1, February 16, 2020, North Macedonia, Skopje. Link:

[https://azlp.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/zakon\\_za\\_zastita\\_na\\_licnite\\_podatoci.pdf](https://azlp.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/zakon_za_zastita_na_licnite_podatoci.pdf)

**technology-enabled gender-based violence (GBV)**, the Law can be crucial, as discrimination and violence against women in the digital space are often interconnected. Discrimination against women online, stalking, harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate photos, and gender-based hate speech can be identified as forms of discrimination that need to be addressed under this Law. For full protection of victims of GBV, it is necessary to include specific provisions related to technologies and the digital space as a basis for discrimination. These provisions could provide additional measures to protect victims of technology-enabled GBV and encourage institutions to protect victims in the digital realm just as they do in physical spaces.

The **Law on Free Legal Aid** of the Republic of North Macedonia provides citizens with the right to receive legal assistance free of charge under certain conditions, aiming to ensure access to justice for individuals who cannot afford to pay for legal services. The law applies to various areas of law, including civil, criminal, and administrative cases. For this Law to be fully effective in addressing technology-enabled GBV, it should include clear provisions for victims of digital violence and encourage specialized legal services for online forms of abuse, harassment, and privacy violations. This would empower victims to take legal action against perpetrators who use digital platforms for harmful purposes.

The **Protocol for Cooperation between Relevant Entities for the Implementation of Measures for the Prevention, Protection, and Combating of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** in the Republic of North Macedonia is a strategic document that outlines the responsibilities and cooperation of various institutions and organizations involved in tackling violence against women and domestic violence. The Protocol ensures a coordinated, multisectoral approach among law enforcement, healthcare, social services, the judiciary, NGOs, and other stakeholders to provide comprehensive protection and support to victims. In relation to **technology-enabled gender-based violence (GBV)**, the Protocol<sup>14</sup> plays a vital role in ensuring that relevant actors are aware of the emerging risks in the digital space. While the document focuses primarily on physical and psychological violence, it provides a foundation for incorporating specific measures for protecting victims of online harassment, cyberstalking, revenge porn, and other forms of cyber abuse. By including provisions for dealing with digital violence and training stakeholders to recognize and address it, the Protocol can enhance the response to technology-enabled GBV, ensuring that victims receive protection and access to justice in the digital realm.

The **Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027** (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2022) in North Macedonia<sup>15</sup> is a key policy framework focused on advancing women's rights and opportunities. Launched in July 2022, it outlines targeted goals to reduce gender disparities, enhance women's representation, and tackle gender-based violence across multiple sectors. On the other hand, the lack of specific regulations for digital violence against women contributes to cyberattacks, especially against women in public roles. The Gender Equality Index<sup>16</sup> These attacks often are targeting professional women, with purpose to silence and exclude them from public discourse. Motivated by political, social, or ideological

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<sup>14</sup> Protocol for mutual cooperation of competent entities for taking measures for prevention and protection against violence against women and domestic violence, Government of Republic of North Macedonia, 2023, available at: [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/Protocol\\_MKD.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/Protocol_MKD.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Gender Equality Strategy, MLSP, 2022, Link: [https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=116973](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=116973)

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Gender Equality Index, 2022, North Macedonia, Link: [https://cms.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2023/Gender-Index-2022\\_EN-web.pdf](https://cms.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2023/Gender-Index-2022_EN-web.pdf)



motives, these cyber harassers use intimidation to impose their beliefs and discourage women's participation in public life.

## Cases and impact on legislation

A **2022 OSCE study**<sup>17</sup>, *From Normalization to Self-Censorship – Analysis of Online Harassment in North Macedonia*, details the types of online harassment experienced by female journalists. The study finds that attacks are usually through social media and often carry sexist and misogynistic elements, which intensify the harassment these women face while simply performing their professional duties. This discrimination exposes a deep-rooted hostility targeted specifically at silencing women's voices in media and public spaces.

These cases on online violence against female journalists in North Macedonia highlights the pervasive issue of cyber violence against women and girls (CVAWG) in the country. The study highlights that such violence is a form of gender-based harassment, and that it requires a gender sensitive approach from institutions responsible for addressing these attacks.

The purpose of these online attacks extends beyond only quieting individual female journalists. It also aims to influence their audience, and in that way indirectly to affect other women who share similar views or work in public spaces. This ripple effect means that the impact of the harassment stretches beyond the journalists themselves, creating an atmosphere of intimidation for women in general.

In January 2020, a Telegram group called “Javna Soba” was discovered, in which private nudes, social media profiles, and private phone numbers of women and girls were shared among more than 7,000 male members of the group. At the request of the Ministry of Interior, the group Telegram was shut down, but none of the members were charged under a wave of public reactions, a constructive response from the legislative authorities followed.

In 2023, Macedonia made a significant **change to its Criminal Code** by introducing “stalking” as a criminal offense, a key move aimed at strengthening protections against cyber violence targeting women and girls (CVAWG). This new article (Art. 144 a) in the criminal code, which specifically addresses stalking within the context of online violence, was largely driven by public demand and protests that followed several alarming cases of gender-based violence, both online and offline. It states that “Anyone who persistently and over a long period unlawfully follows, stalks, or otherwise interferes in the personal life of another, or establishes or attempts to establish unwanted contact with them by moving through spaces where the person is located, by abusing personal data, by using telecommunications or other means of communication, or in other ways mentally abuses, harasses, or intimidates them, causing feelings of insecurity, distress, or fear for their safety or the safety of someone close to them, shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment of up to three years.” (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023).

The recent amendments to the Criminal Code are expected to play a crucial role in advancing legal outcomes for cases involving online violence against women. Previously, many reports would reach the Ministry of Interior or the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office, but only a few proceeded to court, with a significant number of cases either dismissed or left unresolved<sup>18</sup>. The

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<sup>17</sup> OSCE ANALYSIS of online harassment of female journalists in North Macedonia, 2022. Link: [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988_0.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Suzana Miceva, Veronika D., Media Article: “Системот не ги препознава жртвите на демнење и семејно насилство”, published 15/04/2024, available at: <https://lokalaktiv.mk/2024/10/15>

new provisions offer a framework to find a legal way to prosecute cyber violence cases, providing more robust legal protection for women targeted by online harassment and other forms of digital abuse. According to country's authorities, the new amendments add clarity to existing protections for women by introducing new offenses related specifically to cyber violence. This shift means women now have legal safeguards against various forms of online harassment and digital threats, marking an important advance in the country's response to cyber threads and cyber violence.

Currently, the Sector for Computer Crime and Digital Forensics remains the primary institution mandated to handle incidents of online violence and gather digital evidence. However, the prosecution still holds the responsibility of deciding whether a case has sufficient grounds to proceed to criminal prosecution. Challenges in evidence collection often arise, especially when perpetrators use anonymous profiles, private networks, or other privacy tools, which frequently require international legal cooperation to trace and verify. These complexities not only hinder evidence collection but also extend the timeline for case resolution, often resulting in case dismissals or unresolved investigations.

## Database of key actors

Here is a structured database design for key state and non-state actors involved in the prevention and protection of gender-based cyber violence. The database includes **type of organization and key areas of intervention**.

ID	Institution Name	Type	Key Responsibilities
1	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Mol)	Government	Investigation of cybercrime, law enforcement
2	Department for Computer Crime and Digital Forensics (Mol)	Government	Digital forensics, handling cybercrime cases
3	Regional SVR – Sectors for Internal Affairs Skopje Police Department – Unit for Economic and Computer Crime	Government	Investigation of economic and cybercrime and submission of criminal act to Public Prosecution
5	Investigative Centers within the Public Prosecutor's Offices in North Macedonia	Government	Support for investigations and prosecutions
7	Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth	Government	Social support for victims
8	Centers for Social Work	Government	Psychosocial support for victims
9	Basic Courts and Appellate Court Skopje	Government	Basic court cases and appeals in cyber-violence cases
10	Ministry of Justice	Government	Policy and legislative reforms
11	Agency for Electronic Communications	Government	Regulation of online communication and digital rights
12	Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination	Government	Handling discrimination complaints
13	Ombudsman	Government	Protection of human rights

14	National Committee for Gender Equality	Government	Policymaking for gender equality
15	Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	Non-Government	Awareness-raising, victim support, legal aid
16	Academic Community (Universities, Research Centers)	Non-Government	Research and policy recommendations
17	Media	Non-Government	Public education and advocacy

## Survey Findings

### Survey of civil society activists on gender-based cyber violence against young women

1. За каков тип организација работите?

19 responses



#### Question 1: What type of organization do you work for?

A total of 19 representatives responded. Of them:

- 84.2% are from the non-governmental sector and civil society activists
- 5.3% are from women's rights organizations
- 5.3% are from the health sector
- The rest are from other types of organizations.

#### Interpretation of the Data:

Most respondents (over 4 out of 5) work within the non-governmental and civil society sector, indicating that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals involved in advocacy, community engagement, or activism. This strong representation may reflect the relevance or interest of the survey topic within the NGO space.

Only a small percentage (5.3% each) are affiliated with women's rights organizations and the health sector, suggesting either limited outreach or a more general framing of the survey that didn't specifically target these sectors. The category "other" remains unspecified, but its small proportion implies marginal diversity outside the main groups listed.

This distribution may influence how the survey results are interpreted, as the perspectives shared are primarily shaped by civil society and non-governmental experience.

## 2. Колку долго сте вклучени во активизам против родово базирано сајбер насилство?

19 responses



### Question 2: How long have you been involved in activism against gender-based cyber violence?

Most respondents, 36.8%, have between 1 to 3 years of experience in activism against gender-based cyber violence.

Additionally:

- 26.3% have 4 to 7 years of experience
- 15.8% have over 8 years of experience in this field
- 10.5% have less than one year of experience

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

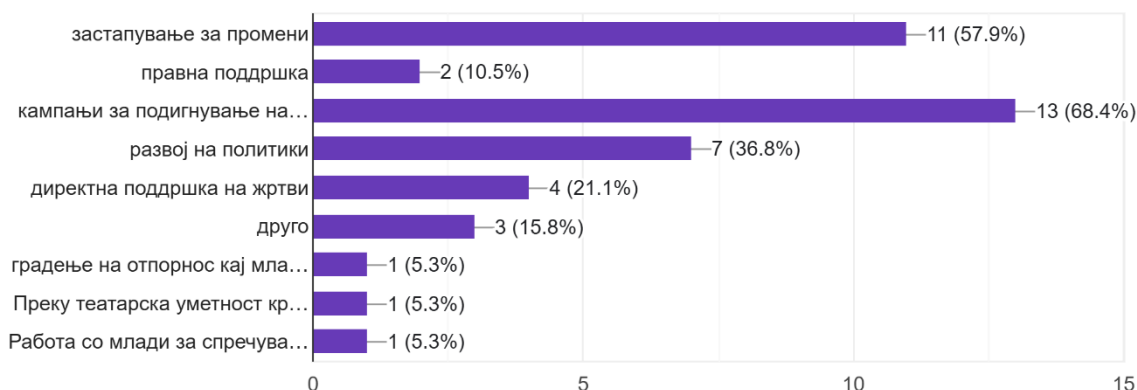
Most participants are relatively new to the field, with over one-third (36.8%) having 1 to 3 years of experience, suggesting a growing engagement in recent years. The second-largest group (26.3%) represents those with mid-level experience (4–7 years), indicating a solid core of activists with sustained involvement.

Notably, 15.8% have over 8 years of experience, showcasing a smaller group of long-term advocates who likely bring valuable institutional knowledge and historical context to the issue. Meanwhile, 10.5% are newcomers, having been involved for less than a year, which may reflect a rising awareness and emerging interest in addressing gender-based cyber violence.

Overall, the data illustrates a dynamic and evolving activist landscape, with a healthy mix of seasoned advocates and newer voices, indicating both sustainability and fresh momentum in the fight against online gender-based violence.

### 3. Која е вашата примарна улога на организацијата? Можни се повеќе одговори

19 responses



#### Question 3: What is your primary role within the organization? Multiple answers possible.

Most respondents, or 68.4%, work in organizations that focus on public awareness campaigns, advocacy for change, and policy development.

Only 21.1% are involved in providing direct support to victims, and 10.5% offer legal support. Very few organizations have a primary role in building resilience among youth or working directly with young people.

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

The findings reveal that the dominant focus (68.4%) of the participating organizations is on advocacy, awareness-raising, and policy development, suggesting a strategic and systemic approach to addressing gender-based cyber violence. These efforts likely aim at long-term societal change through influencing public opinion and legislative frameworks.

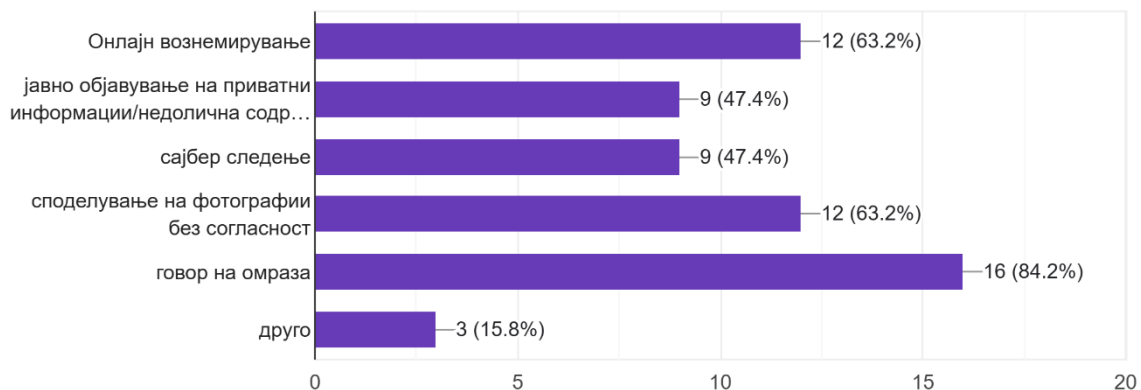
In contrast, only about one-fifth (21.1%) of organizations provide direct victim support, and an even smaller share (10.5%) focus on legal assistance. This indicates a potential service gap when it comes to on-the-ground, immediate help for individuals affected by cyber violence.

Furthermore, youth-focused initiatives are significantly underrepresented, even though young people are often among the most vulnerable to online abuse. The limited involvement in youth resilience-building suggests an area for future investment and program development to ensure more holistic and preventative approaches. Overall, while the advocacy and policy work is strong, the ecosystem could benefit from stronger victim support mechanisms and youth-centered interventions.



4. Кои форми на сајбер насилство најчесто ги доживуваат жртвите со кои работите? Можни се повеќе одговори

19 responses



**Question 4: What forms of cyber violence are most commonly experienced by the victims you work with? Multiple answers possible.**

The most common forms of cyber violence experienced by victims are:

- Hate speech – 84.2%
  - Online harassment – 63.2%
  - Non-consensual sharing of photos – 63.2%
  - Cyberstalking – 47.7%
  - Public disclosure of private information / explicit content – 47.7%
- Additionally, 15.8% of responses fall under "other", indicating forms of violence not specifically listed or detected.

Interpretation of the Data:

The data reveals a troubling prevalence of **hate speech (84.2%)**, making it the most frequently reported form of cyber violence among victims. This suggests that discriminatory or hostile language online remains a major threat, likely reflecting broader societal issues such as sexism, homophobia, or racism.

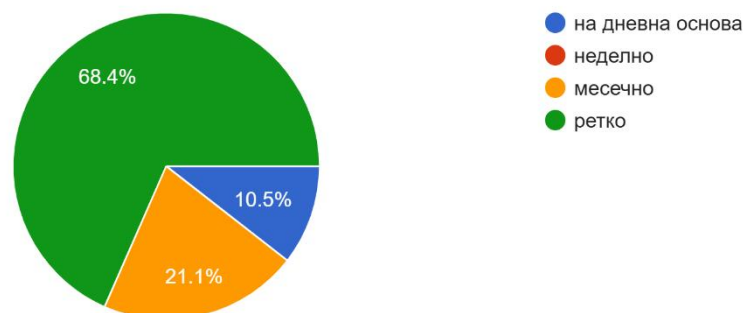
**Online harassment and non-consensual sharing of images are both reported by 63.2%** of respondents, highlighting the psychological and reputational harm victims often endure in digital spaces. These forms of abuse often intersect, compounding their impact.

Nearly half (47.7%) of the victims experience **cyberstalking and public exposure of private or explicit content, indicating serious breaches of personal privacy and safety**. The 15.8% marked as "other" points to a diversity of emerging or less recognized cyber threats that may fall outside standard categorizations, underlining the need for ongoing monitoring and nuanced understanding.

Overall, the data underscores the multi-layered and persistent nature of cyber violence, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive protection mechanisms, legal reforms, and victim-centered support services.

### 5. Колку често жртвите бараат помош од вашата организација?

19 responses



#### Question 5: How often do victims seek help from your organization?

- 68.4% of respondents stated that victims rarely seek help
- 21.1% reported that victims reach out on a monthly basis
- 10.5% said victims seek help on a daily basis

#### Interpretation of the Data:

The majority response—68.4% reporting that **victims rarely seek help**—points to a significant gap between the existence of support services and their actual utilization by victims. This could be due to a lack of awareness, **fear of stigma**, distrust in institutions, or limited accessibility of services.

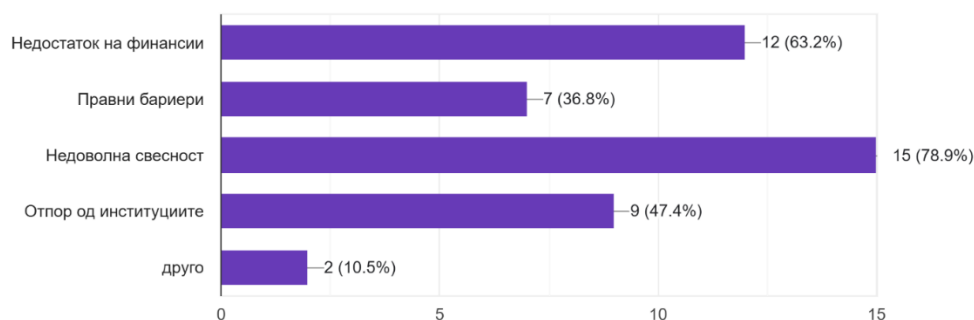
Only 21.1% of organizations receive monthly requests for help, suggesting a modest level of engagement, while a mere 10.5% experience daily contact from victims, likely indicating highly specialized or well-established services.

These findings highlight an urgent need **to strengthen outreach efforts**, build trust, and ensure victims are aware of and feel safe using **available support systems**. It may also suggest the importance of public education campaigns and streamlined reporting mechanisms to encourage help-seeking behavior.

### 6. Кои се главните пречки во обезбедувањето поддршка за жртвите? Можни се повеќе

одговори

19 responses



#### Question 6: What are the main obstacles in providing support to victims? Multiple answers possible.

- 78.9% of respondents said the main obstacle is lack of awareness
- 63.2% cited lack of funding
- 47.7% mentioned institutional resistance
- 36.8% pointed to legal barriers
- 10.5% identified other types of obstacles

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

The most pressing barrier reported by organizations **is lack of awareness** (78.9%), underscoring a critical need for **educational efforts** targeted both at victims and the general public. Without awareness of what constitutes cyber violence or where to seek help, many victims may remain unsupported.

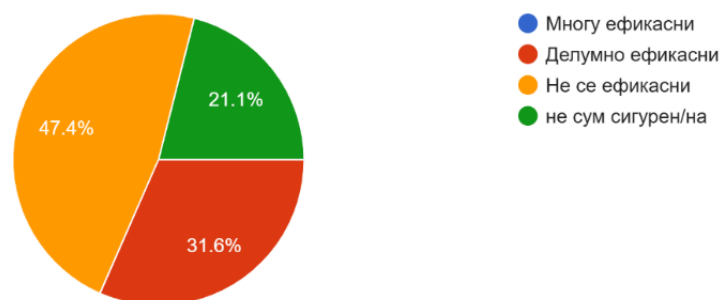
**Financial constraints** (63.2%) are also a major limitation, suggesting that even motivated organizations may struggle to provide consistent or quality services without adequate funding. Nearly half (47.7%) of respondents identified institutional resistance, which points to systemic challenges—such as lack of cooperation, slow responses, or bureaucratic hurdles—that hinder effective victim support. **Legal barriers (36.8%)** were also cited, reflecting challenges related to inadequate legislation, lack of enforcement, or limited legal remedies for cyber violence.

Finally, 10.5% noted “other” obstacles, implying there are additional, possibly context-specific, challenges not fully captured by the listed options.

In summary, these findings reveal a complex ecosystem of barriers, with awareness, funding, institutional cooperation, and legal frameworks all requiring coordinated improvement to ensure meaningful and accessible support for victims of cyber violence.

7. Според вашето искуство, колку се ефикасни постоечките закони во справувањето со родово базираното сајбер насилство?

19 responses



#### **Question 7: Based on your experience, how effective are the existing laws in addressing gender-based cyber violence?**

- 47.4% of respondents said the laws are not effective
- 31.6% said they are partially effective
- 21.1% said they are unsure about the laws' effectiveness

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

Nearly half of the respondents (**47.4%**) **believe** that existing **laws are not effective** in tackling gender-based cyber violence, indicating widespread dissatisfaction with the current legal

framework. This suggests a lack of adequate legal tools, poor implementation, or gaps in law enforcement practices.

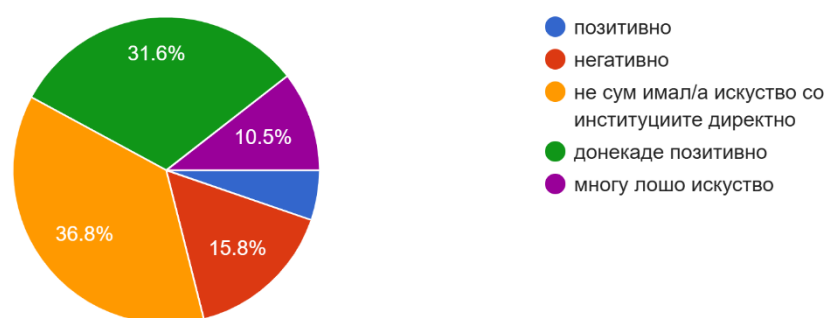
Another **31.6% consider the laws to be partially effective**, implying that while some progress has been made, significant improvements are still needed in areas such as enforcement, victim protection, and adapting laws to evolving forms of online abuse.

The remaining **21.1% are unsure**, which could reflect limited legal literacy, inconsistent application of laws, or a lack of visibility into how legal processes play out in practice.

Overall, the data reflects **a critical need for legal reform, improved enforcement mechanisms**, and better training for professionals, alongside stronger institutional coordination, in order to ensure laws serve as a real deterrent and source of protection for victims.

8. Какво е вашето искуство во соработката со државните институции за превенција и пријавување на онлајн насилство?

19 responses



**Question 8: What has your experience been with state institutions in the prevention and reporting of online violence?**

- **36.8%** stated they have had **no direct experience** with institutions
- **31.6%** reported a **somewhat positive experience**
- **15.8%** had a **negative experience** in cooperating with state institutions
- **10.5%** reported a **very poor experience**
- Only **5.3%** described their experience as **positive**

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

The results suggest **limited and mixed engagement** between civil society actors and state institutions regarding the prevention and reporting of online violence.

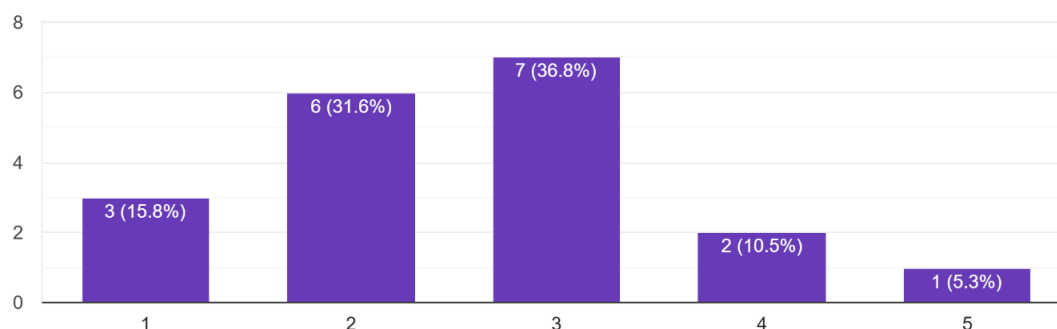
The largest portion—**36.8%**—have **no direct experience**, indicating a possible disconnect or lack of institutional outreach and collaboration mechanisms. Meanwhile, **31.6%** reported **somewhat positive experiences**, suggesting there are pockets of constructive interaction, though not consistently strong or widespread.

On the other hand, **a combined 26.3%** (15.8% negative + 10.5% very poor) **expressed dissatisfaction**, highlighting frustrations that may stem from bureaucratic inertia, lack of responsiveness, or insufficient institutional capacity.

Alarmingly, **only 5.3%** had a **truly positive experience**, which points to a **need for improved institutional trust, training, and communication**.

In summary, the data reveals that cooperation with state institutions is either **lacking, inconsistent, or problematic** for most respondents, emphasizing the need for **systematic capacity-building, partnership frameworks, and transparent protocols** to better support prevention and reporting of online violence.

8.1 Колку се ефикасни државните институции како што се Министерството за внатрешни работи (МВР), Центарот за социјална работа (Ц...вањето на овој вид насилство? Оценете од 1-5  
19 responses



**Question 8.1: How effective are state institutions such as the Ministry of Interior (Mol), the Center for Social Work (CSW), and others in handling reports of this type of violence? Rate from 1 to 5.**

- 36.8% gave a rating of 3
- 31.6% gave a rating of 2
- 15.8% gave the lowest rating of 1
- 10.5% rated the institutions with a 4
- Only 5.3% gave the highest rating of 5

#### Interpretation of the Data:

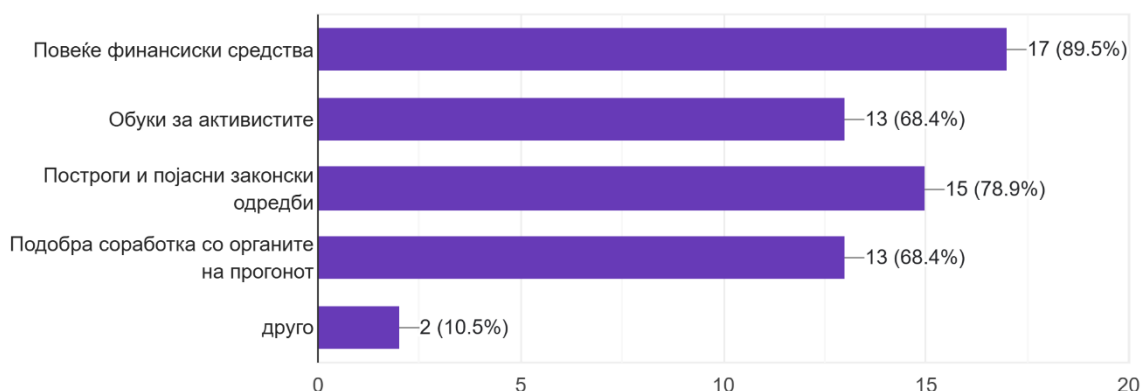
The majority of respondents rated the effectiveness of state institutions as mediocre or below average. The most common rating—3 out of 5 (36.8%)—suggests a **perception of moderate or inconsistent effectiveness**, while 31.6% rated them with a 2, and 15.8% with a 1, **indicating clear dissatisfaction** and a perception of ineffectiveness among nearly half of the respondents. Only a small number of participants had a more favorable view: 10.5% gave a rating of 4, and just 5.3% considered the institutions to be highly effective (rating 5).

Overall, the data points to a general **lack of confidence in institutions** such as the Ministry of Interior and the Center for Social Work when it comes to addressing reports of online gender-based violence. This highlights the need for institutional reform, **specialized training, better responsiveness**, and trust-building with affected communities to improve the quality of institutional responses.



9. Кои дополнителни ресурси или поддршка би ѝ помогнале на вашата организација да се справи со сајбер насилството поефикасно? Можни се повеќе одговори

19 responses



**Question 9: What additional resources or support would help your organization address cyber violence more effectively? (Multiple answers possible)**

- 89.5% stated that more financial resources are needed to help victims deal with cyber violence more effectively
- 78.9% called for stricter and clearer legal provisions
- 68.4% requested training for activists
- 68.4% also emphasized the need for better cooperation with law enforcement agencies

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Interpretation of the Data:

The overwhelming majority—nearly 90%—identified **financial support as the most urgent need**, highlighting that even highly committed organizations struggle to offer sustainable and quality services without adequate funding.

A significant portion (78.9%) **expressed the need for clearer and stricter legislation**, signaling ongoing concerns with legal ambiguity or loopholes that weaken protection for victims and accountability for perpetrators.

Furthermore, **capacity-building for activists** (68.4%) was also prioritized, indicating recognition of the importance of well-trained personnel in providing effective support and advocacy.

Equally, 68.4% of respondents also stressed the importance of improved cooperation with law enforcement, pointing to existing gaps in coordination and trust between civil society and state institutions.

In summary, the data reflects a **multifaceted demand for action—investment, legal reform, skills development, and inter-institutional collaboration**—in order to strengthen the overall response to cyber violence and better serve affected communities.

**Question 9.1: If you answered “other” in the previous question, you may provide a comment.**

Responses included:

- Regional and global exchanges of experiences for good practices
- Public awareness campaigns on the topic: what cyber violence means, how to recognize it, etc.
- Opening more support centers for victims

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Interpretation of the Data:

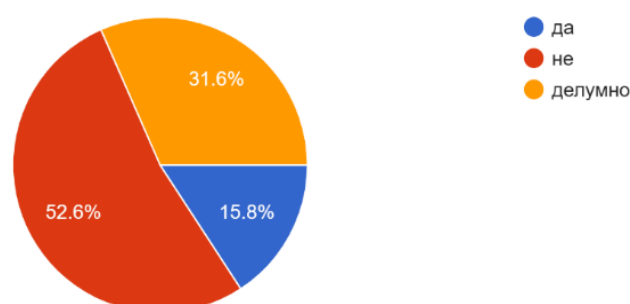
The additional comments emphasize the need for broader systemic and educational efforts to complement the previously mentioned resources.

- The suggestion for **regional and global exchange of good practices** highlights the importance of cross-border learning and networking, enabling organizations to adapt proven models and strengthen their strategic approaches.
- Calls for public information campaigns reflect a preventative approach, aiming to raise awareness among the general public about what cyber violence is and how to identify it—critical steps toward early intervention and support-seeking behavior.
- The proposal to open **more victim support centers** points to the need for localized, accessible services where victims can receive comprehensive assistance, including psychosocial and legal aid.

In essence, these comments reinforce the need for holistic strategies—combining funding, legal reform, public education, cross-border collaboration, and localized victim services—to effectively combat cyber violence.

10. Дали сметате дека социјалните мрежи имаат соодветни механизми за да се спротивстават на родово базираното сајбер насилство?

19 responses



**Question 10: Do you think social media platforms have adequate mechanisms to combat gender-based cyber violence?**

- 52.6% believe that social media platforms do not have adequate mechanisms
  - 31.6% believe that they partially have adequate mechanisms
  - 15.8% believe that they do have adequate mechanisms
-

#### Interpretation of the Data:

The data shows a clear **lack of confidence in social media platforms' ability** to effectively address gender-based cyber violence:

- A majority (52.6%) think that platforms lack **proper mechanisms**, indicating significant dissatisfaction with current reporting tools, content moderation policies, or responsiveness to abuse reports.
- 31.6% see the platforms as partially effective, which may reflect improvements in some areas but also inconsistency in enforcement, vague community standards, or **limited accessibility to support features for affected users**.
- Only 15.8% believe social media networks do have adequate systems in place, suggesting that positive experiences with platform responses are limited and not widespread.

This response pattern highlights **the urgent need for tech companies to improve transparency, user protection, and accountability**, especially in addressing gender-based abuse online. It also suggests a potential role for regulators and civil society in pushing for platform reforms and more robust safeguards.

#### **Question 11: What policy or legislative changes would have the greatest impact in combating gender-based cyber violence?**

Responses included a range of suggestions:

- Stricter penalties
- Public awareness efforts, campaigns, and educational programs (including school subjects from an early age focused on this and related topics)
- Some respondents noted a lack of legal expertise due to their backgrounds as artists and cultural activists
- Clearer legal definitions of cyber violence, tougher penalties for perpetrators, better victim protection, and intersectoral cooperation
- Justice enforcement
- Harsher punishments ("rigorous penalties," "more draconian measures")
- The need for cyber violence to be clearly defined in laws and included as a separate criminal offense in the Criminal Code
- A call to introduce a specific law for victims of cyber violence
- Recognition that cyber violence is still violence and should be treated as such, possibly even as a misdemeanor, with corresponding penalties
- Clear procedural steps for handling different cases
- A comprehensive recommendation: legal reforms should include clear definitions of all forms of cyber violence, including gender-based aspects, stronger sanctions, faster and more efficient mechanisms for reporting and investigation, obligations for digital platforms to take action against harmful content, better victim protection, including legal and psychological support, and education/prevention programs, particularly targeting youth and vulnerable groups
- Some pointed out that the main issue is not the lack of policies, but their poor implementation
- A repeated call for implementation of existing policies and laws

### Interpretation of the Data:

The responses reveal broad consensus on the urgent need for both legal reform and practical enforcement in the fight against gender-based cyber violence.

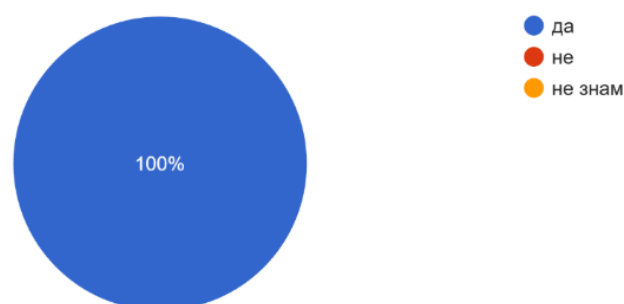
Several key themes emerge:

1. **Stricter Penalties:** Many respondents demand harsher punishments for perpetrators, believing that stronger deterrents are necessary to reduce online abuse.
2. **Clear Legal Definitions:** There is a consistent call for precise, legally recognized definitions of cyber violence and its gender-based forms—currently perceived as vague or absent in existing legislation.
3. **Implementation Gaps:** A notable number of comments highlight that existing laws and policies are not being properly enforced, suggesting that even strong legal frameworks can fail without effective institutional action.
4. **Victim-Centered Support:** There is strong advocacy for enhanced victim protection, including specialized services, legal aid, and psychological support, recognizing the complex needs of those affected.
5. **Prevention through Education:** Several responses emphasize early intervention through schools and public campaigns, showing a proactive vision to prevent harm before it occurs.
6. **Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Effective responses are seen to require interinstitutional coordination among law enforcement, judiciary, social services, and civil society.
7. **Digital Platform Accountability:** Some respondents underline the role of tech companies and suggest that laws should oblige platforms to act against harmful content.

In summary, the data points to the need for a comprehensive, multi-layered approach—one that combines legal clarity, strong enforcement, victim support, institutional cooperation, education, and platform accountability—to effectively combat gender-based cyber violence.

12. Дали мислите дека треба да има повеќе иницијативи или програми насочени кон охрабрување на младите луѓе/жени да пријавуваат сајбер насилство?

19 responses



**Question 12: Do you think there should be more initiatives or programs aimed at encouraging young people/women to report cyber violence?**

- 100% of respondents answered "yes."

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### Interpretation of the Data:

The unanimous response reflects a strong and shared conviction among all participants: there is a clear and urgent need for more initiatives and programs that empower young people, especially women, to report cyber violence.

This result highlights:

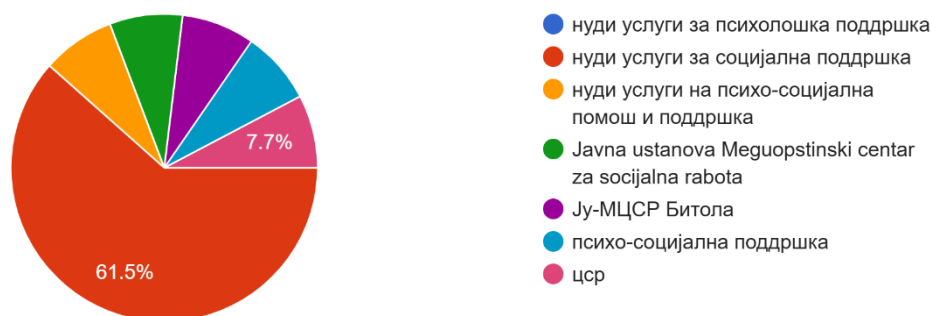
- A high level of awareness that current efforts are either insufficient or poorly targeted toward youth and women.
- Recognition that underreporting remains a major challenge—often due to fear, stigma, lack of information, or distrust in institutions.
- A collective endorsement for preventive and educational approaches, potentially involving peer networks, safe reporting channels, school-based education, mentorship, and public campaigns.

In summary, this 100% agreement sends a powerful message to policymakers, educators, and civil society: empowering youth and women through targeted programs is essential for improving the fight against gender-based cyber violence.

## Survey for psychologists/social workers on gender-based cyber violence against young women

### 1. За каков тип организација работите?

13 responses



### Question 1: What type of organization do you work for?

- **61.5%** responded that they work for an organization that provides **social support services**
- The remaining respondents work in **institutions that offer psychosocial assistance and support**

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### Interpretation of the Data:

The majority of participants (**61.5%**) are employed in organizations focused on **social support services**, indicating that most respondents are engaged in community-based work, possibly dealing directly with vulnerable populations.

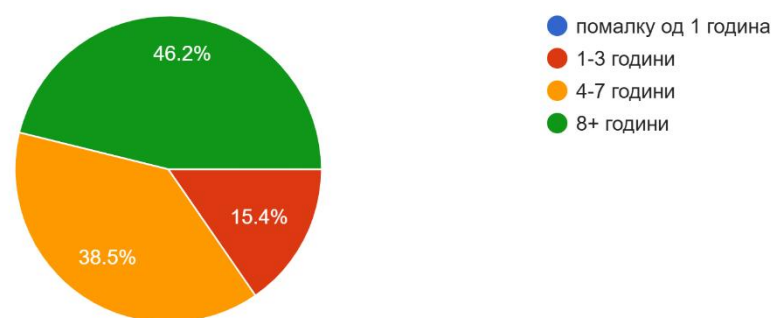


The rest work in institutions providing **psychosocial support**, such as counseling, mental health services, or trauma recovery, suggesting a focus on the **emotional and psychological well-being** of individuals, likely including victims of cyber violence.

This distribution reflects a **support-oriented professional background**, where both social and psychosocial services play complementary roles. It suggests that the respondents bring valuable frontline experience in dealing with the **complex impacts of cyber violence**, and are well-positioned to identify service gaps, institutional challenges, and necessary interventions.

## 2. Колку долго работите како психолог/социјален работник

13 responses



### Question 2: How long have you been working as a psychologist/social worker?

- **46.2%** responded that they have **more than 8 years of experience**
- **38.5%** have **4–7 years of experience**
- **15.4%** have **1–3 years of experience** as psychologists or social workers

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

The results show that the majority of respondents are **highly experienced professionals**, with **nearly half (46.2%)** having worked **over 8 years** in the field. This indicates a strong base of **seasoned practitioners** who likely possess deep insight into the needs of vulnerable groups and the dynamics of social or psychological support.

An additional **38.5%** have **mid-level experience (4–7 years)**, showing a well-established professional presence that complements the veteran group and contributes to a solid, skilled workforce.

Only **15.4%** have **1–3 years of experience**, which may represent newer professionals entering the field—potentially bringing fresh perspectives but also in need of mentorship and ongoing training.

Overall, the data suggests a **robust and experienced professional community**, well-positioned to address complex issues such as cyber violence and capable of offering informed recommendations for systemic improvements in support services.

3. Дали сте специјализирани за лекување и/или спречување и/или истражување траума или психолошки/социјални проблеми поврзани со сајбер насилство?

13 responses



**Question 3: Are you specialized in treating and/or preventing and/or researching trauma or psychological/social issues related to cyber violence?**

- **61.5%** responded that they are **not specialized** in treating or researching trauma or psychological/social issues related to cyber violence
- **23.1%** work in **direct victim support**, and therefore **address cyber violence when it arises**
- Only **7.7%** of respondents are **specifically specialized** in this area

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#### Interpretation of the Data:

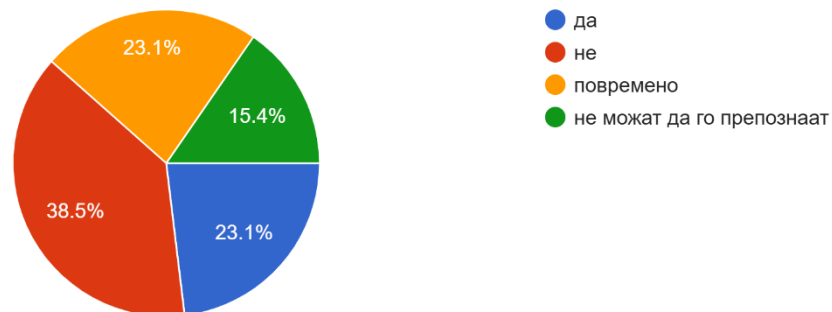
The results reveal a significant **specialization gap** in addressing the **psychological and social impacts of cyber violence**:

- A large majority (**61.5%**) lack formal specialization in the topic, suggesting that while they may deal with trauma or social issues in general, they **may not feel adequately trained or equipped** to handle the specific complexities of cyber-related abuse.
- **23.1%** engage with victims directly, and though their work includes cyber violence **on a case-by-case basis**, it appears to be **reactive rather than structured or specialized**.
- Only **7.7%** have undergone **specific training or specialization**, indicating a **critical shortage of targeted expertise** in the field.

This data points to a clear need for **capacity building, professional development, and targeted training programs** for psychologists and social workers. As cyber violence continues to rise, specialized knowledge is essential for effective prevention, intervention, and trauma-informed care.

4. Дали жртвите со кои работите пријавиле дека доживеале родово базирано сајбер насилство?

13 responses



**Question 4: Have the victims you work with reported experiencing gender-based cyber violence?**

- **38.5%** said victims **did not report such experiences**
- **23.1%** said victims **have reported** experiencing it
- **23.1%** said they **occasionally encounter such cases**
- **15.4%** stated that victims **cannot recognize it as violence**

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#### **Interpretation of the Data:**

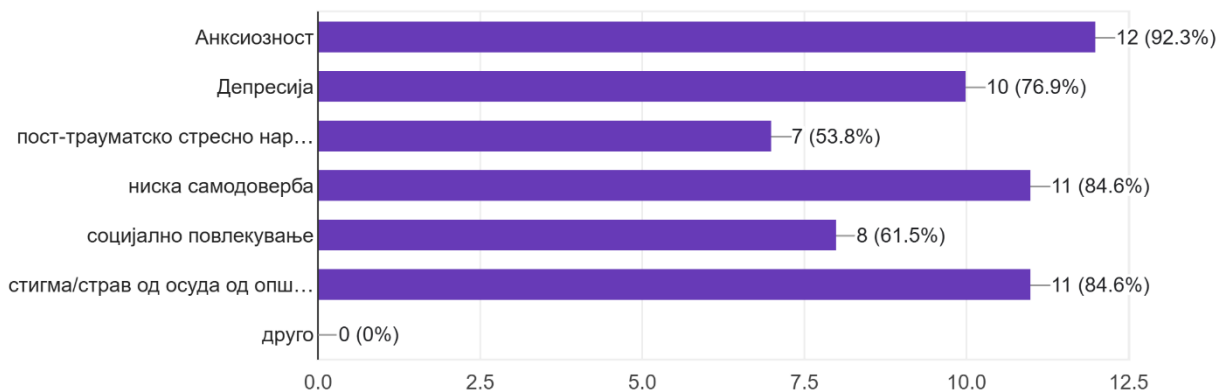
The responses indicate that **gender-based cyber violence often goes unreported or unrecognized** among victims:

- The largest group (**38.5%**) said that **no such cases have been reported**, which may reflect **underreporting**, a **lack of awareness**, or **reluctance to disclose** due to fear or stigma.
- A smaller but notable group (**23.1%**) confirmed that victims **have reported** these incidents, showing that some individuals are aware of and willing to speak up about cyber violence.
- Another **23.1%** experience such cases **occasionally**, suggesting **intermittent recognition or documentation**, possibly depending on the context or severity.
- Alarming, **15.4%** of respondents indicated that victims **do not recognize cyber violence as a form of violence**, highlighting a **critical knowledge gap** and the need for **awareness-raising and education**.

Overall, the data underscores the importance of **training both professionals and the public to recognize and respond to cyber violence**, particularly when it is gender-based. Better **identification, validation, and reporting mechanisms** are essential to ensure appropriate support and protection for affected individuals.

5. Кои се најчестите психолошки ефекти или социјални проблеми што сте ги забележале кај жртвите? Можни се повеќе одговори

13 responses



**Question 5: What are the most common psychological effects or social problems you have observed in victims?** (Multiple answers possible)

- **92.3%** identified **anxiety** as the most common psychological effect
- **84.6%** reported **depression, low self-esteem, stigma, and fear of social judgment**
- **61.5%** observed **social isolation**
- **53.8%** reported cases of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**

#### Interpretation of the Data:

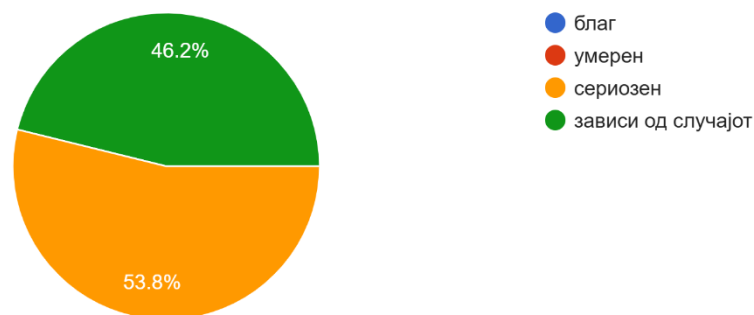
The responses reveal the **severe emotional and social toll** that gender-based cyber violence has on victims:

- **Anxiety (92.3%)** stands out as the **most frequently observed psychological consequence**, suggesting that ongoing fear, hypervigilance, and emotional distress are prevalent among those affected.
- A very high percentage (**84.6%**) also noted **depression, low self-worth, stigma, and fear of judgment**, pointing to the **deep impact on victims' mental health and social identity**. This combination can lead to withdrawal, loss of motivation, and reluctance to seek help.
- **Social isolation (61.5%)** appears to be a common reaction, likely stemming from shame, lack of support, or fear of repeated exposure, which **further deepens emotional distress and disconnection**.
- Over **half of respondents (53.8%)** have observed symptoms of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, indicating that for many victims, the impact of cyber violence goes beyond immediate emotional harm and can develop into **long-term psychological trauma**.

In summary, the data strongly emphasizes that cyber violence is **not a minor or isolated issue**, but one with **serious, lasting consequences** on victims' mental health and social well-being. It reinforces the need for **specialized trauma-informed services, psychological support, and public education** to reduce stigma and promote recovery.

6. Како би ја оцениле сериозноста на психолошкиот стрес предизвикан од сајбер насилство?

13 responses



**Question 6: How would you rate the seriousness of the psychological stress caused by cyber violence?**

- **53.8%** rated it as a **serious situation**
- **46.2%** said it **depends on the case**

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**Interpretation of the Data:**

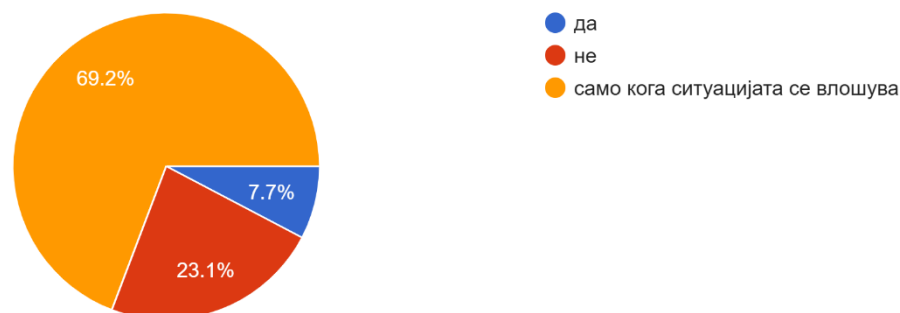
More than half of the respondents (**53.8%**) perceive the **psychological stress caused by cyber violence as serious**, indicating a strong professional consensus that the emotional and mental toll on victims should **not be underestimated**. This reflects an understanding that cyber violence can cause **deep and lasting harm**, often comparable to or exceeding the impact of offline violence.

At the same time, **46.2%** noted that the **severity varies by case**, suggesting that the **context, duration, and intensity** of the abuse—as well as the victim’s personal background and resilience—play important roles in determining the psychological impact.

Together, the responses highlight that **cyber violence is a significant mental health issue**, and while its effects can differ from person to person, **it often reaches serious levels requiring professional intervention**. This underlines the need for **individualized support**, access to **mental health resources**, and **greater recognition of cyber violence as a form of trauma** within the health and social support systems.

## 7. Дали жртвите често бараат професионална психолошка/социјална поддршка?

13 responses



### Question 7: Do victims often seek professional psychological/social support?

- **69.2%** responded that victims seek professional help **only when the situation worsens**
- **23.1%** said that victims **do not seek help at all**
- Only **7.7%** said that victims **proactively seek support**

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### Interpretation of the Data:

The findings reveal a concerning pattern of **delayed or limited help-seeking behavior** among victims of cyber violence:

- A majority (**69.2%**) report that victims **only seek professional support when the situation becomes severe**, indicating that many suffer in silence until they reach a critical point. This delay may be due to **stigma, fear of not being believed, or lack of awareness** about available services.
- **Nearly a quarter (23.1%)** said that victims **do not seek help at all**, which could point to serious **barriers such as mistrust in institutions, lack of access, or internalized shame**.
- Alarming, only **7.7%** noted that victims **proactively seek psychological or social support**, suggesting a **low level of early intervention**, which is vital for mitigating long-term mental health effects.

Overall, the data underscores the need for:

- **Improved public awareness** about the importance and availability of support services
- **Reducing stigma** associated with seeking help
- **Proactive outreach and early intervention strategies** by professionals and institutions

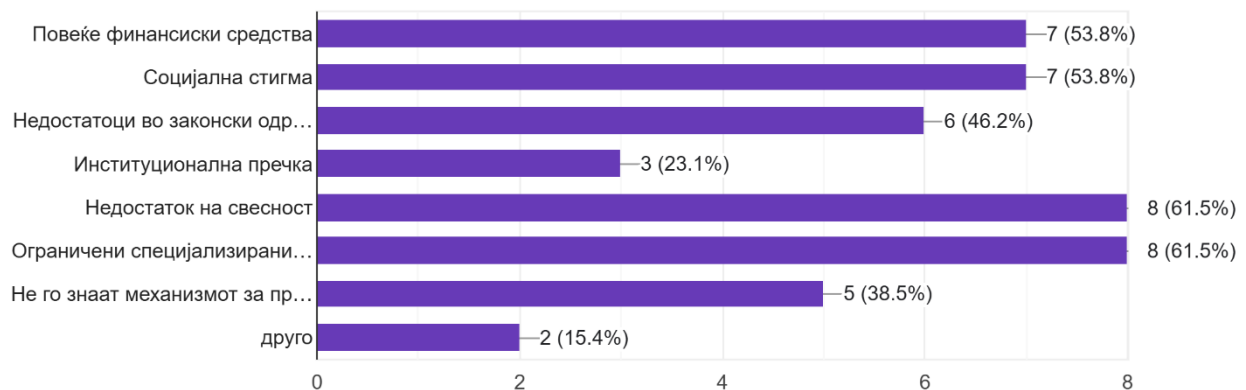
This could help create a more supportive environment where victims feel safe and encouraged to seek help **before reaching a crisis point**.



8. Кои се главните пречки што ги спречуваат жртвите да добијат психолошка поддршка?

Можни се повеќе одговори

13 responses



### Question 8: What are the main obstacles that prevent victims from receiving psychological support?

(Multiple answers possible)

- The main obstacles are **lack of awareness – 61.5%**
- **Limited specialized services and financial resources – 53.8%**
- **Social stigma – 46.2%**
- **Inadequate legal provisions – 46.2%**
- **Institutional barriers – 23.1%**
- **Victims not knowing the reporting mechanism – 38.5%**
- **Other reasons – 15.4%**

### Interpretation of the Data:

The responses outline a **multifaceted set of barriers** that prevent victims of cyber violence from accessing much-needed psychological support:

- **Lack of awareness (61.5%)** stands out as the most commonly cited issue, showing that many victims **may not even realize support is available** or **when/how to seek it**.
- **Limited specialized services and lack of funding (53.8%)** highlight structural problems in the support system, with **insufficient capacity to meet the specific needs** of cyber violence victims.
- **Social stigma (46.2%)** remains a powerful deterrent, as victims may fear being blamed, judged, or not taken seriously, especially in conservative or close-knit communities.
- **Gaps in legislation (46.2%)** further complicate access to justice and protection, making it harder for victims to have their experiences formally recognized or addressed.
- **Institutional barriers (23.1%)** and **lack of knowledge about reporting mechanisms (38.5%)** suggest that systems for help-seeking are **unclear, inaccessible, or poorly communicated**.
- A smaller portion (**15.4%**) indicated “**other**” issues, which may include personal, cultural, or situational factors not captured by the listed options.

Overall, the data indicates that both **individual-level and systemic obstacles** hinder victims from receiving psychological support. Addressing this requires:

- **Comprehensive public awareness campaigns**
- **Expanding specialized services**
- **Reducing stigma**
- **Improving legal clarity**
- **Ensuring institutions are approachable, responsive, and well-coordinated**

Only through **integrated and victim-centered responses** can these barriers be effectively reduced.

**Question 8.1: If you answered "Other" in the previous question, you may leave a comment.**  
(13 responses)

Examples of responses:

- **They do not trust institutions**
- **Shame is most often the reason for not reporting**
- **They are often ashamed in front of society**

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#### **Interpretation of the Data:**

The open-ended responses reinforce earlier findings and bring deeper insight into the **emotional and social barriers** that prevent victims from seeking psychological support:

- **Distrust in institutions** highlights a **critical lack of confidence in the system**, which may stem from past negative experiences, perceived inaction, or a belief that institutions won't take the issue seriously.
- **Shame** emerges as a **dominant emotional obstacle**, with several comments pointing to **social judgment and victim-blaming** as major deterrents. This indicates that cultural norms and societal attitudes continue to **silence victims**, especially when it comes to gender-based violence in digital spaces.

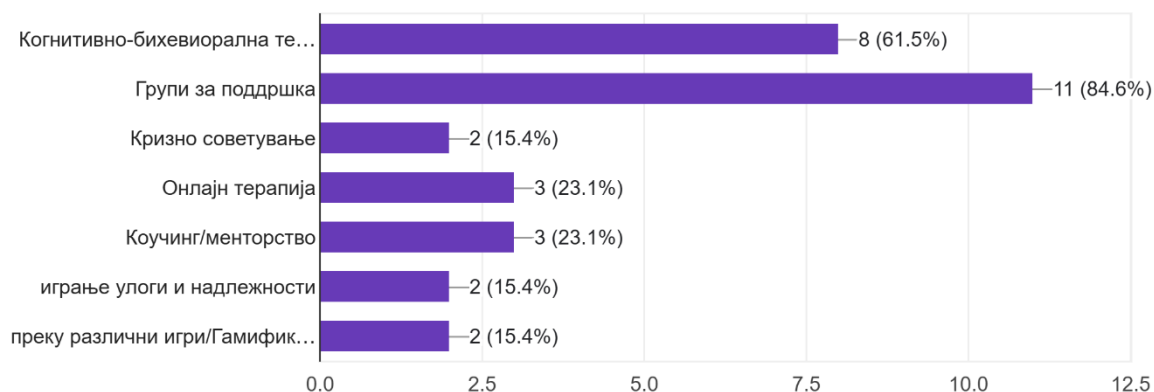
These responses emphasize the **need for systemic trust-building and cultural change**, including:

- **Institutional transparency and accountability**
- **Confidential and victim-sensitive reporting mechanisms**
- **Community education campaigns** to reduce stigma and normalize help-seeking behavior

In summary, beyond legal or logistical barriers, **psychological and societal pressures play a significant role** in silencing victims. Addressing these requires not only structural reforms but also **deep, sustained efforts in public education, empathy-building, and community support**.

### 9. Кои типови интервенции ги сметате за најефикасни за жртвите на сајбер насилство?

13 responses



### Question 9: What types of interventions do you consider most effective for victims of cyber violence?

- **84.6%** consider **support groups** the most effective intervention
- **61.5%** said **cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)** is most helpful
- **15.4%** indicated **crisis counseling**
- **23.1%** chose **online therapy**
- **23.1%** selected **coaching or mentorship**
- **15.4%** noted **role-playing and skills-building activities**
- **15.4%** also mentioned **games and gamification techniques**

### Interpretation of the Data:

The responses indicate a strong preference for **community-based and therapeutic approaches** to support victims of cyber violence:

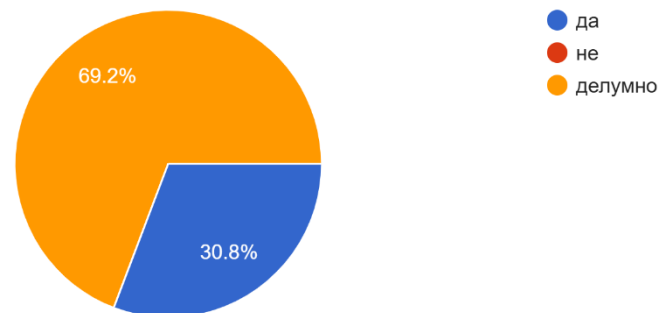
- **Support groups (84.6%)** were most widely endorsed, suggesting that **shared experiences and peer connection** are seen as powerful tools in helping victims feel less isolated and more empowered.
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy (61.5%)** is recognized for its structured approach in **helping victims process trauma, reduce anxiety or depression, and regain a sense of control.**
- **Crisis counseling (15.4%),** though less frequently selected, reflects the need for **immediate emotional stabilization** in acute situations.
- **Online therapy (23.1%)** and **coaching/mentorship (23.1%)** show growing support for **flexible, accessible, and guidance-oriented methods,** particularly relevant for victims who may be reluctant or unable to seek in-person help.
- **Role-playing (15.4%)** and **gamification (15.4%)** were less common choices but indicate openness to **creative, experiential learning and empowerment strategies,** especially useful in youth-focused interventions.

Overall, the data suggests that **a combination of emotional support, therapeutic tools, and innovative engagement methods** is considered most effective. It emphasizes the importance of

**holistic, trauma-informed, and victim-centered intervention models** in responding to cyber violence.

10. Дали сметате дека има доволно свесност меѓу професионалците за психолошкото влијание на сајбер насилството?

13 responses



**Question 10: Do you think there is sufficient awareness among professionals about the psychological impact of cyber violence?**

- **69.2%** responded that there is **partial awareness**
- **30.8%** believe there **is awareness** among professionals about its psychological impact

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#### **Interpretation of the Data:**

The results suggest that **awareness among professionals about the psychological consequences of cyber violence is present but limited:**

- The majority (**69.2%**) indicated that **awareness exists only to some extent**, pointing to **gaps in understanding, training, or prioritization** of cyber violence as a serious mental health concern.
- Only **30.8%** believe that professionals **are sufficiently aware**, which, while encouraging, also signals that **more comprehensive and widespread professional development is needed**.

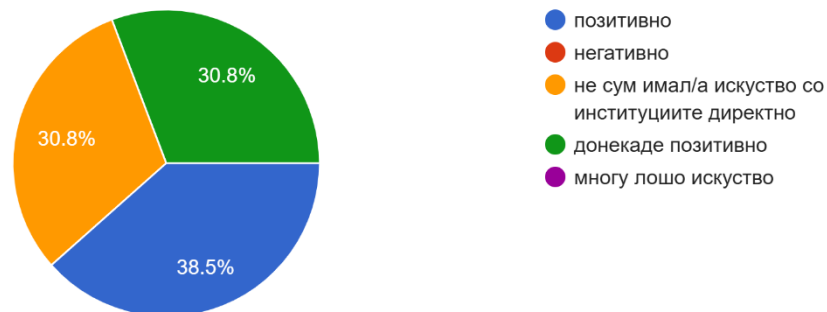
This data underscores the need for:

- **Ongoing education and training** for psychologists, social workers, educators, and institutional staff
- **Inclusion of cyber violence-related trauma** in mental health and social work curricula
- **Stronger integration of digital abuse issues** into professional codes of practice and national service protocols

In short, while some progress has been made, the **majority view is that professional awareness remains insufficient**, highlighting the importance of **capacity-building to ensure timely, informed, and sensitive responses to victims**.

11. Какво е вашето искуство во соработката со државните институции за превенција и пријавување на онлајн насилство?

13 responses



**Question 11: What has your experience been in cooperating with state institutions for the prevention and reporting of online violence?**

- **38.5%** responded that their experience was **positive**
- **30.8%** said they have had **no direct experience** with institutions
- **30.8%** said their experience was **somewhat positive**

*It is noted that a portion of respondents work within institutions themselves, which may explain the relatively high level of satisfaction with cooperation.*

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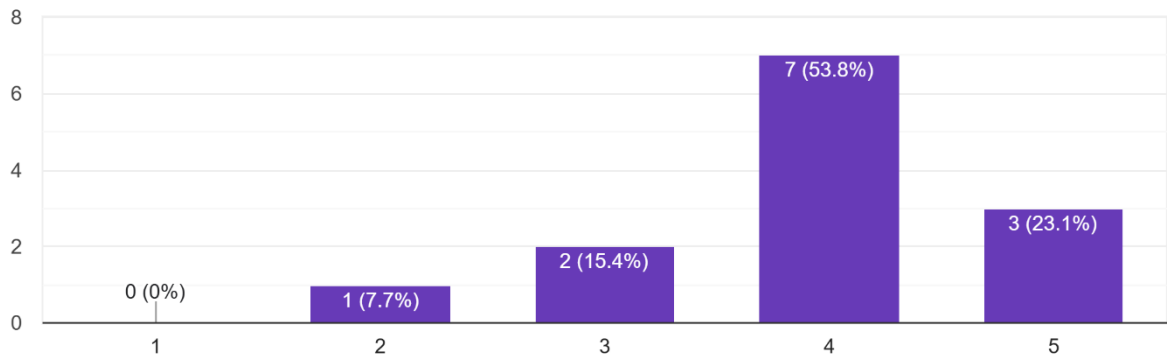
#### Interpretation of the Data:

The responses reflect a **generally favorable perception of cooperation with state institutions**, though it is important to interpret the results with nuance:

- **38.5%** reported **positive experiences**, indicating that where collaboration occurs, it is often effective—likely due to established protocols, mutual understanding, or institutional access.
- An equal number of respondents (**30.8%**) either had **no direct interaction** or **somewhat positive experiences**, suggesting that **collaboration is either limited or still developing** in many cases.
- The fact that **some respondents are institution-based** may explain the higher satisfaction levels, as internal actors typically have **better access, awareness, and influence** within the system.

Overall, while the data points to **potential for productive cooperation**, it also reveals **room for improvement in outreach, cross-sector communication, and inclusion of non-institutional professionals**. Strengthening institutional partnerships, especially with frontline workers in civil society, could **enhance coordination, trust, and responsiveness** in addressing online violence.

11.1 Колку се ефикасни државните институции како што се Министерството за внатрешни работи (МВР), Центарот за социјална работа (Ц...вањето на овој вид насилство? Оценете од 1-5  
13 responses



**Question 11.1: How effective are state institutions such as the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Center for Social Work (CSW), and others in handling reports of this type of violence? Rate from 1 to 5.**

- **53.8%** rated the work of institutions as **4**
- **23.1%** gave the highest rating of **5**

*Again, considering that a portion of the respondents work within institutions, this may explain the higher levels of satisfaction with state institution cooperation.*

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#### **Interpretation of the Data:**

The majority of respondents expressed **high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of state institutions** in dealing with online violence:

- **Over half (53.8%)** rated the institutions' performance with a **4 out of 5**, indicating they view institutional response as **generally effective but with room for improvement**.
- A notable **23.1%** gave the **maximum score of 5**, suggesting **strong satisfaction and trust** in how these institutions manage reporting and support procedures.

However, this **positive outlook should be interpreted in context**—the fact that **some respondents are institutional representatives** may influence these favorable ratings, potentially **reflecting internal perspectives rather than external user experiences**.

While the data points to **perceived institutional effectiveness**, especially from within the system, it also reinforces the need for:

- **Objective evaluation of services from victims' and frontline workers' perspectives**
- **Continued improvements in response times, victim care, and inter-agency coordination**
- **Efforts to build broader trust and transparency** beyond institutional stakeholders

In summary, while internal confidence is high, broader validation from diverse stakeholders remains essential to ensure **truly effective and trusted institutional responses** to cyber violence.

**Question 12: What additional resources or policies would help improve psychological/social support for victims?**

Examples of responses:

- More staff training and stronger focus on prevention
- Ban mobile phone use in schools (only allowed during transport to/from school); restrict apps like TikTok to users 18+; require parental monitoring, with financial penalties for non-compliance — as a way to raise awareness of acceptable online behavior
- Financial support for victims to afford longer-term psychotherapy
- Online violence should be **prohibited by law** and treated equally to other forms of violence (physical, psychological, economic, sexual, etc.)
- Psychologists in state institutions should be allowed to **focus on their professional role**, not be burdened with administrative tasks
- Access to psychotherapists
- Preventive activities starting from early childhood; **strict penalties for perpetrators**
- Employment and income opportunities; **housing resources** for victims
- More training programs
- Media coverage and public information
- Greater education, more surveys, **engaging youth in projects**, lectures, and **clear explanation of the seriousness and consequences** of cyber violence
- Awareness campaigns

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**Interpretation of the Data:**

The responses point to a **comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted needs** of victims of cyber violence, highlighting both **systemic improvements and practical interventions**. Key themes include:

- **Capacity building and training:** Several responses emphasize the need for **more training for professionals**, both in terms of technical knowledge and trauma-informed care. This reflects a desire to improve **institutional readiness and expertise**.
- **Early prevention and youth education:** Multiple comments call for **preventive efforts from an early age**, through **school policies, public education**, and **youth engagement programs**. These measures aim to cultivate **digital responsibility and awareness**.
- **Legal and policy reforms:** There is support for **legal recognition of online violence as equally serious as other forms of abuse**, with demands for **clearer legislation and stricter sanctions** for perpetrators.
- **Mental health infrastructure:** Respondents stress the need for **financial aid for victims**, **access to psychotherapists**, and **dedicated time for psychologists** in public institutions to provide real therapeutic care, rather than administrative duties.
- **Family and institutional accountability:** Suggestions include **parental monitoring responsibilities**, restrictions on harmful digital content, and disciplinary measures for neglect, highlighting the perceived **role of the family and schools** in prevention.
- **Economic and social support:** Employment, personal income, and housing assistance were also identified as critical, recognizing that victims often require **holistic recovery resources**, not just counseling.

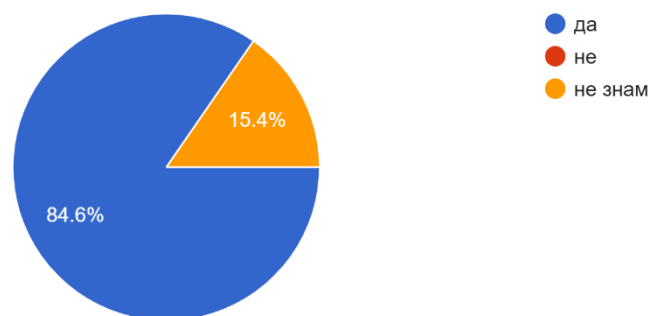


- **Public awareness:** Responses call for **media coverage, campaigns, and community surveys** to increase understanding and visibility of the issue.

In summary, the feedback shows that **improving support for cyber violence victims requires systemic, community, and individual-level interventions**—ranging from **legal reforms and institutional changes to family engagement, education, and access to mental health services**.

13. Дали мислите дека треба да има повеќе иницијативи или програми насочени кон охрабрување на младите луѓе/жени да пријавуваат сајбер насилство?

13 responses



**Question 13: Do you think there should be more initiatives or programs aimed at encouraging young people/women to report cyber violence?**

- **84.6%** responded **yes**, there should be more such initiatives
- **15.4%** said they **don't know** whether there should be

#### Interpretation of the Data:

The overwhelming majority (**84.6%**) of respondents support the creation of **more initiatives and programs** that encourage **young people and women to report cyber violence**. This reflects a strong recognition of the importance of **empowerment, awareness, and accessible reporting mechanisms**—especially for groups most vulnerable to online abuse.

The **15.4% who are unsure** may signal a need for **more information, research, or clarity** on how such programs can be designed and implemented effectively.

Overall, this data confirms a **broad consensus** among professionals on the importance of **proactive, youth- and gender-sensitive interventions**, particularly ones that:

- **Promote digital literacy and legal awareness**
- **Reduce stigma around reporting**
- **Ensure safe, confidential, and supportive channels for victims**

It reinforces the call for **systematic outreach and prevention strategies** that directly engage young people and women as part of a **comprehensive response to cyber violence**.

# Conclusions

## **1. Profile of Respondents**

The majority of respondents come from professional backgrounds in social and psychosocial services, many with extensive experience in their respective fields. Despite this strong foundation, few have received specialized training related specifically to trauma caused by cyber violence. This indicates a need for deeper professional development in the intersection of digital abuse and mental health.

## **2. Growing but Uneven Engagement**

Activism around gender-based cyber violence is on the rise, yet engagement remains inconsistent. Many victims continue to suffer in silence, often due to feelings of shame, societal stigma, or a simple lack of awareness that what they are experiencing constitutes cyber violence. These obstacles prevent timely reporting and delay access to support.

## **3. Common Forms of Cyber Violence**

Among the most commonly reported types of cyber violence are hate speech, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of images, and cyberstalking. These forms of abuse are not only pervasive but also deeply harmful, leading to serious emotional and social consequences for those affected.

## **4. Gaps in Legal and Institutional Response**

While some progress has been made in institutional cooperation, respondents still view existing laws as largely ineffective or only partially adequate. There is a pressing need for clearer legal definitions of cyber violence, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and more robust victim protections. The inconsistency in institutional responses remains a critical concern.

## **5. Psychological Consequences Are Severe**

The psychological toll of cyber violence is undeniable. Victims frequently report experiencing anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), social isolation, and a significant drop in self-esteem. Alarming, most individuals only seek psychological or social support when the situation becomes unbearable, rather than as a preventive or early intervention measure.

## **6. Barriers to Support**

Victims face a range of barriers that hinder access to the support they need. These include a general lack of awareness about available services, a shortage of specialized and adequately funded support programs, and widespread social stigma that discourages disclosure. Institutional mistrust and unclear or inaccessible reporting mechanisms further compound the problem.

## **7. Effective Interventions**

Support groups and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) are widely viewed as the most effective interventions for victims. However, newer approaches—such as online therapy, mentorship programs, and even gamification techniques—are gaining traction and offer promising avenues for engagement, especially with younger populations.

## 8. Need for Targeted Programs

There is a clear consensus on the need for more initiatives that directly encourage young people and women to report cyber violence. These programs should start early and be integrated into educational systems and public awareness campaigns. Building a culture of recognition, support, and proactive prevention is essential in empowering victims and reducing the long-term harm of cyber violence.

# Recommendations

## Recommendations for Action: Strengthening the Response to Gender-Based Cyber Violence

Professionals working in the field of cyber violence prevention and victim support have voiced the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated action across several key areas. At the forefront is the call for **stricter laws and more effective enforcement mechanisms**. Many believe that without clear legal definitions and consequences, efforts to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable remain insufficient. This must go hand-in-hand with **improved institutional coordination**, ensuring that relevant actors—from law enforcement to social services—work collaboratively and efficiently.

A crucial pillar of response lies in **capacity building**. Stakeholders emphasized the need for **specialized training for frontline professionals**, including psychologists, social workers, educators, police officers, and prosecutors. These trainings / **coaching** should cover trauma-informed care, the specific dynamics of digital violence, and victim-sensitive approaches to reporting and support. There is a clear need to **allocate dedicated resources** within institutions, particularly to allow psychologists to focus on therapeutic roles rather than administrative duties. The **coaching curriculum** can be a core pillar. To maximize its impact, the training should move beyond information-sharing and adopt **experiential methods** such as **role-playing, simulation of real cases, and guided discussions** based on anonymized testimonies. These methods foster empathy and retention and can empower participants to respond more effectively in real-life situations. Similarly, school interventions should go beyond theory. For young people, especially those already deeply immersed in digital spaces, **practical digital safety skills are critical**. Sessions could include how to report abuse on platforms like Instagram or TikTok, understanding data privacy settings, and recognizing manipulative online behavior. These tangible tools, delivered in relatable language, will resonate more deeply than generic awareness messaging.

Policy brief proposal: “**Designing a coaching curriculum for gender-based cyber violence**” targeting CSO activists, legal professionals, psychologists, and digital security experts requires a **blended, participatory, and trauma-informed approach**. There is a need for a tailored proposal for **learning methodologies, structure, and sample scenarios** that align with the NGO ecosystem, your project’s objectives, and the target groups.

Policy brief proposal: In addition, “**Mapping clear referral pathways for reporting mechanisms**” and tools and redress—both visually and through printouts—can equip both students and staff with a concrete action plan. This will help move the narrative from “this is what cyber violence is” to “this is what we can do about it.”

Additional, Policy brief proposal: “**Early Warning, Early Protection: Designing Indicators and Tools for Early Identification of Victims of Gender-Based Cyber Violence**”

This policy brief will explore the urgent need for developing and institutionalizing a set of **early identification indicators** and practical **screening tools** for recognizing individuals—particularly women and youth—who are at risk of or currently experiencing gender-based cyber violence.

The brief will provide actionable recommendations for frontline professionals (e.g., educators, social workers, youth workers, and CSO practitioners) and propose methods and tools for **early detection, intervention**, while aligning with data protection and trauma-informed principles.

Victim support must be both **accessible and long-term**. To this end, participants recommended expanding access to **free or subsidized psychological and legal assistance**, particularly for women and young people. The feasibility analyses of establishment of **local and mobile support centers**, especially in underserved communities, would greatly increase the reach and responsiveness of these services. Alongside this, the development of **confidential, user-friendly reporting mechanisms** and the promotion of **peer support groups and online therapy platforms** are seen as vital tools in empowering victims and breaking isolation.

Education emerged as another key area for systemic change. There is widespread agreement that **digital literacy and awareness about cyber violence should be embedded in school curricula** from an early age. Beyond formal education, professionals suggest the need for **public awareness campaigns** targeting parents, teachers, and young people, helping them recognize cyber violence and understand its psychological and legal implications. Programs should also incorporate **peer-to-peer learning, mentoring, and gamified education**, which are particularly effective in engaging youth audiences. Wherever possible, integrate **storytelling** into both policy and awareness content. Design AI tool in the form of an assistant or consultancy for gender-based violence, including cyber violence, could be piloted on a website or app, allowing the target group to inquire about cyber gender-based violence, with the AI providing responses based on statistics, case law, and protective measures. The tool could also guide users on appropriate actions and protections.

This synergy should be expanded by exploring how the developed coaching curriculum could be **institutionalized within national education or social work training systems**. Such integration would ensure that the impact endures beyond the project’s life span.

The support platform within Youth Counter is another promising development. Consider designing it in a way that makes it replicable. A standardized “toolkit” of its structure, services, and processes could allow other CSOs—regionally or nationally—to adapt the model in their communities. This would multiply the impact without the need for starting from scratch in new locations.

Finally, a robust response to cyber violence requires **broad, cross-sector collaboration**. Participants advocated for **multi-stakeholder partnerships** involving civil society organizations, government bodies, tech platforms, schools, and the media. These partnerships should be grounded in shared goals and coordinated strategies. Moreover, professionals encourage the **inclusion of young people and survivors in designing and leading programs**, ensuring that policies and interventions are grounded in real-life experiences and needs. On a broader level, **regional and international exchange of knowledge and best practices** should be facilitated to enrich local efforts and promote innovation.

In conclusion, the recommendations make clear that tackling gender-based cyber violence is not only a legal or technical issue—it is a societal responsibility. It demands coordinated effort, sustained investment, and above all, a victim-centered approach that prioritizes healing, empowerment, and justice.

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