SUDANESE WOMEN DIGITAL REVOLUTION AND BACKLASH
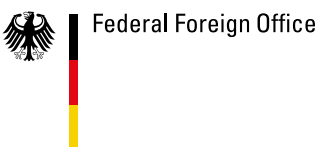
2023

Abstract

Sudan's political and security instability, coupled with its patriarchal social system, puts its women and girls in great danger both in the physical and online worlds. The 2019 revolution has especially put Sudanese female activists and journalists at the forefront of the turmoil, subjecting them to great violence on many digital platforms. This study surveys 83 Sudanese women of various backgrounds and geographies and interviews ten experts with background in violence against women (VAW), activism, journalism, and development work to understand the extent of digital violence against women (DVAW) in Sudan, its forms, drivers, harms, and impact on the women's lives, as well as potential solutions for it. Findings from this study agree with existing, albeit limited research, that the majority of Sudanese women are subject to at least one form of DVAW because of their gender. Facebook and WhatsApp were the platforms where most DVAW incidents occurs. Common forms of violence include sexual harassment, unwanted advances, and defamation. Recommendations from the Study's participants include more support at the legal, technical, and psycho-social levels, as well as national campaigns to raise awareness, especially in educational institutions.

Dr. Nadia Al-Sakkaf (@nadiasakkaf) is the director of 21 Century Forum, a UK based media and research organisation specialising in media, digital safety, gender, democratic transitions, climate change, and socio-economic development. She was the first woman appointed as Minister of Information and before that was Chief Editor of the country's first English language newspaper, The Yemen Times. She is co-founder of the Connecting Yemen initiative to advocate for accessible and affordable Internet in Yemen.

SUDANESE WOMEN DIGITAL REVOLUTION AND BACKLASH

Executive summary

Digital violence against women (DVAW) is still not fully understood, in part because of cultural taboos, lack of data, and women's lower rates of Internet usage in Sudan. However, as more women use the Internet, the cases are growing. At the same time, there are not enough protection tools and mechanisms for the victims to maintain their personal security, such as laws that forbid DVAW. A 2020 UN Women study claims that because of their public identities, women in politics and media are more likely to experience online and ICT-facilitated abuse.[1]

One definition of DVAW, which is adopted in this study, states that it is "*any act of violence that is committed, assisted, or aggravated by the use of information and communication technology (mobile phones, the Internet, social media, computer games, text messaging, email, etc) against a woman because she is a woman*."[2] Understandably, intersectionality is recognised in DVAW because women could be targeted for other aspects of their identities such as religion, race, origin, political position and even disability. However, being female becomes a compounding factor as they receive a certain type of digital violence that their male counterparts of similar backgrounds do not receive.

In Sudan, DVAW is a growing concern with many women and girls facing various forms of online abuse, harassment, and intimidation. While there have been some efforts to address this issue, such as the recent criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM) and the establishment of a national commission for women, much more needs to be done to protect women's rights, especially in the digital sphere.[3] These are examples of the overall movement towards empowering women in real life, even though similar achievements are not reflected online.

One case study that highlights the seriousness of DVAW in Sudan is the story of Hiba Omer.[4] Hiba Omer is a Sudanese feminist and human rights activist who has been a target of online harassment and threats. In 2020, she received death threats on social media platforms after speaking out against sexual violence and harassment in Sudan. She reported the threats to the authorities but received little support, and the perpetrators were not held accountable.

Hiba Omer's case is not unique, as many women in Sudan face similar forms of online abuse and violence. A recent study by the Sudanese Organization for Research and Development (SORD) found that DVAW in Sudan is prevalent and has severe consequences for women's physical and psychological well-being.[5]

The prevalence of DVAW in Sudan is partly due to the country's patriarchal social norms, which perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination. Women who challenge these norms and speak out against injustice are often subjected to online abuse, which is used to intimidate and silence them.[6]

Furthermore, the absence of legal and institutional frameworks that protect women's rights in the digital sphere is another factor that contributes to the

1   UN Women. (2020). Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Brief-Online-and-ICT-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-COVID-19-en.pdf

2   Suzie Dunn, "Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview" (2020) Centre for International Governance Innovation: Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No. 1

3   UN Women. (2019, August 21). Sudan takes steps to address gender-based violence. Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/8/news-sudan-takes-steps-to-address-gender-based-violence

4   Amnesty International. (2021, June 15). Sudan: Five reasons why human rights defenders are still at risk. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/06/sudan-five-reasons-why-human-rights-defenders-are-still-at-risk/

5   Society for Democratic Sudan. (2021). Digital violence against women in Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.sord-sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Digital-Violence-Against-Women-in-Sudan.pdf

6   Society for Democratic Sudan. (2021). Digital violence against women in Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.sord-sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Digital-Violence-Against-Women-in-Sudan.pdf

high prevalence of DVAW in Sudan. The legal context surrounding DVAW in Sudan is complex and inadequate. Sudan's legal system has yet to adopt a comprehensive legislation that addresses such forms of violence, and there are no specialised institutions that provide support to victims of online abuse. While Sudan has ratified international human rights instruments that protect women's rights, including the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), the country has not yet incorporated these instruments into domestic law.[7]

The absence of a legal framework that protects women's rights in the digital sphere has left women and girls vulnerable to various forms of online abuse, including cyberbullying, harassment, and revenge porn. Victims of online abuse often face significant challenges in seeking justice because of this lack of clear legal provisions that address these issues.

Certain positive efforts are being made to address the legal vacuum surrounding DVAW in Sudan. In 2019, the Sudanese *Ministry of Justice* established a committee to review laws related to gender-based violence and make recommendations for legal reform. The committee was expected to address the issue of DVAW in its review. Furthermore, Sudan's *Transitional Government* has committed itself to promoting women's rights and gender equality, and progressive steps are taken to incorporate women's rights into the country's constitutional reforms. For example, a special *Commission for Women and Equality* was developed in 2019 post the revolution, and, most importantly, a 40% quota for women's political participation was introduced. Furthermore, a new *Interim Constitution* that emphasises women's rights was drafted, but it remains an interim constitution, and so it is threatened by the current conflict.[8]

There are relevant institutions at the federal and state levels responsible for protecting women and girls, such as the *National Committee for the Advancement of Women*; however, their effectiveness is challenged by the prevailing cultural norms and practices.[9]

In order to hear from the Sudanese women themselves, including field experts, this study surveyed 83 women and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 10 women experts from various backgrounds including politics, media, activism, civil society, professionals, and artists. The results confirm the findings from the literature and shed some more light on the nature, causes, and harm of DVAW in Sudan. The survey respondents also provided examples of their reaction to incidents of DVAW and how they sought help, if at all, and they evaluated recommendations to combat this issue in Sudan.

Of the 83 respondents, more than half confirmed being a victim of one or more forms of DVAW. The interviewees confirmed the prevalence is much higher than this, indicating that some women deny what they have faced or understate it. This is potentially caused by not only the stigma against the topic in general, but also the fear of backlash of the society against those speaking up.

However, some cases of DVAW were very severe that they required victims to change their work, accommodation or flee the country. The most common forms of violence were harassment, including repeated and unwanted contact, especially of a sexual nature, such as through sending indecent photos. Women complained that they are intimidated and attacked on issues relating to their femininity or because they are women, and interestingly, many respondents complained of emotional manipulation and targeting through social engineering and phishing.[10]

The results also show that the more active and visible the woman is, the more brutal the DVAW is and more organised. For example, activists were exposed to doxing, photoshopping in indecent positions, circulating rumours concerning honour, and instigating violence in the real world by calling on the male relatives of that woman to discipline her.

The interviews detailed this by showing how the patriarchal culture in Sudan weaponizes womanhood against women. This trend saw an increase since the revolution in 2019, as women's influence in the public sphere has increased tremendously challenging the social norm and the Islamic regime.

Most of the DVAW took place on Facebook, including messenger, which means it is exercised both publicly and privately. Facebook was followed by WhatsApp and SMS and, to a lesser extent, Twitter. Other platforms were not as popular in Sudan and/or women did not face significant violence on them. The direct targeting through messenger, WhatsApp, and SMS indicates that the perpetrators are not afraid of being identified and use the private channels to isolate the women and attack them. This was confirmed by almost 40% of the respondents who said they knew

---

7   Retrieved from https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/8/news-sudan-takes-steps-to-address-gender-based-violence

8   Sudanese Constitution. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Sudan_2019.pdf?lang=en

9   The African Development Bank and UN Women. (2020). Country Gender Equality Profile: Sudan. Prospects of change in a new era? Available at https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/file/131638/download?token=DN73be2w

10   Social engineering is the psychological persuasion of individuals into taking certain activities or disclosing sensitive information in the context of information security. Phishing is a type of social engineering in which attackers trick victims into disclosing private information or downloading software like ransomware.

who was attacking them either at the personal or the professional level and that they were predominantly male.

In their responses, women either ignored the act, especially if it were limited to private harassment or it would not compromise their reputation, or they surrendered to the extortion and pay off the perpetrators hoping the whole ordeal would end with it. In general, being subject to DVAW made women more reluctant to engage online and many deleted their accounts or changed their privacy settings to avoid being reached or recognized.

The relation between online and offline violence was clearly displayed in their responses as around one third of the respondents confirmed that DVAW transferred to the offline world.

The research found that less than half of the survey respondents knew of existing sources of legal support, compared to only 10% knowing about technical and/or psychological support providers. Among those who used services, less than one quarter reported satisfaction with the results. These results indicate that there is need for increased awareness raising of the available services and increased coverage and quality especially regarding technical and psycho-social services.

The most support the respondents got was from their friends and women in their families. This was followed by co-workers and some empathy from the public forum where the DVAW occurred. Further investigation as to the social support structures needs to be done to better understand this trend.

The research participants agree that to address this issue, Sudan needs to adopt a comprehensive approach that includes legal, policy, and programmatic interventions, as well as awareness-raising campaigns that promote respect for women's rights and gender equality. The government must take action to enforce existing laws that criminalise violence against women and girls, including DVAW, and ensure that women have access to justice and support services. Civil society organisations (CSOs) must also play a critical role in advocating for women's rights, promoting gender equality, as they have done in the case of Hiba Omer, and providing psychological support.

Furthermore, it is essential to involve women and girls in decision-making processes that affect their lives and ensure that their voices and experiences are taken into account. Women's rights activists and workers in CSOs must be supported and protected, and harmful social norms and gender stereotypes must be challenged.

When these solutions were ranked in terms of their potential to combat DVAW in Sudan, the respondents decided that raising awareness, encouraging women to come forward, removing the stigma of this issue would yield the highest impact, followed closely by a strict implementation of legal consequences, including this issue in the education system and its curricula, better training of officials at the receiving end of the complaints, and developing institutions to provide free legal, technical, and emotional support. The role of the platforms themselves, although was seen by at least 50% of the respondents as useful, was the last resort in terms of impact. It was interesting to note that 32% of the respondents did not have the technical knowledge of the platform's affordances and moderation responsibilities especially towards harmful content. However, of the 68% that did, a significant 37% reported that the platforms were either unhelpful or that their experience with them was very bad. Alternatively, 26% reported their experiences with reporting harmful content to the platforms was either useful or very useful. These findings show that there is potential in technical education for the 32% that did not know about it, and in advocacy with the platforms to improve their services for the 26% that reported a negative experience.

Specific policy recommendations to address the issue of DVAW in Sudan include the following:

1. Develop awareness-raising campaigns that educate the public on the harms of DVAW and promote respect for women's rights and gender equality.

2. Enact comprehensive legislation that addresses DVAW, including provisions that criminalise cyberbullying, revenge porn, and other forms of online abuse.

3. Establish specialised institutions, such as hotlines or support centres, to provide legal assistance, counselling, and other forms of support to victims of online abuse.

4. Provide training and capacity-building programs to law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges to help them effectively investigate and prosecute cases of DVAW.

5. Incorporate women's rights and gender equality into the country's constitutional reforms, ensuring that women's rights are protected in the digital sphere.

Introduction

The 5th of the 17 Goals stated by the United Nations in the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' in 2015 aspires to empower all women and girls and achieve gender equality.[11] In order to support women's empowerment, Target 5.B asks for increasing the use of enabling technology, particularly information and communications technology. However, there are a number of obstacles that prevent women in eastern Africa from using digital technology. These obstacles frequently mirror the limitations that women have in the offline world; either in terms of access to education and employment opportunities or civic engagement, or in terms of the stigma women face against freedom of expression or activism that challenges the socially endorsed gender power balance.

In Sudan, there were at least 14 million Internet users by January 2022, at a 31% Internet penetration rate of the total population. Considering that 34.4% of the country's 45.5 million population is ages 12 and below and 3.8% are above 65 years of age, it is reasonable to estimate that only 61.8% of the population (around 28 million) are the population expected to be main users of the Internet, especially since Internet access through mobile phones is the dominant tool at a share of 78% of the country's web traffic.[12] This means that only half of the population expected to have Internet access actually does.

In terms of the digital gender divide, despite lack of accurate reports, it is possible to deduce that women have much less access to the Internet than men. A 2022 report on digital access and barriers in displacement-affected communities in Sudan, showed that in the White Nile area only 16% of women had access to the Internet compared to 48% of men.[13] Similarly in West Darfur, 17% women compared to 39% for men use the Internet.[14] Furthermore, according to *Start.io*, a mobile marketing and audience platform, women comprise only 12.6% of the smartphone users in Sudan, considering that smartphones are the main devices used to access Internet.[15]

The Internet in Sudan is expensive and of bad quality.[16] It is subject to government control, a recent example of which was the Internet blackout following a military coup in October 2021,[17] including blocking WhatsApp and Telegram on some Sudanese networks.[18] In terms of calling and messaging apps, WhatsApp is the dominant tool followed by the telecom based calling and messaging services. Yet, Facebook is the most popular social media platform in Sudan followed by Twitter and YouTube.

As such, the country is currently going through an armed conflict even though Sudan was supposed to be transitioning towards democracy based on peace talks and a draft constitutional charter[19] that was

11   United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goal 5. Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5.

12   Datareportal. (2022). Digital 2022: Sudan. Retrieved from https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-sudan

13   GSM Association & NRC. (2022). Digital Access and Barriers in Displacement-affected Communities in White Nile, Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CoNUA_WhiteNile_R_Web.pdf

14   GSM Association & NRC. (2022). Digital Access and Barriers in Displacement-affected Communities in West Darfur, Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CoNUA_WestDarfur_Web.pdf

15   Start.io (2023), Smartphone Users in Sudan. Retrieved from https://www.start.io/audience/smartphone-users-in-sudan

16   Statcounter Global Stats. (n.d.). Social media stats in Sudan - January 2021. Retrieved from https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/sudan

17   Reuters. (2021, November 9). Court orders restoration of Sudan internet access. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/court-orders-restoration-sudan-internet-access-2021-11-09/

18   Khattab Hamad, tweet on 18 November 2021. Available at https://twitter.com/ga800I/status/1461354300995604489

19   Reeves, E. (2019, August 6). Sudan: Draft Constitutional Charter for the 2019 Transitional Period. Retrieved from https://sudanreeves.org/2019/08/06/sudan-draft-constitutional-charter-for-the-2019-transitional-period/

signed in August 2019. The peace talks were a result of popular protests since 2018 triggered an surge in the costs of living.[20] Sudanese women activists and journalists widely took part in the protests signifying a new era for the women's movement in the country.[21] On the Internet, a young female activist Alaa Salah was dubbed the symbol of the revolution and she and other women leaders took it upon themselves to pioneer public engagement in an unprecedented manner.[22] This in turn caused a significant backlash especially by the conservative leaders who felt threatened by the changes on the political and the cultural levels.

Violence against women (VAW) escalated since the coup in October 2021, especially against women human rights defenders as the military used their vulnerabilities as women against them.[23] Incidents of rape, sexual harassment, and other types of gender-based violence continue to be reported. This trend has moved online as more and more female activists found themselves facing vicious campaigns. This trend has moved online as more and more female activists found themselves facing vicious campaigns. This is a form of Digital Violence against Women (DVAW) is often defined as "*any act of violence that is committed, assisted, or aggravated by the use of information and communication technology (mobile phones, the Internet, social media, computer games, text messaging, email, etc) against a woman because she is a woman*."[24]

There have been attempts by civil society to fight DVAW back such as the Facebook initiative *Inboxat* in which the women are asked to take a screenshot of the messages they receive in private and post them to expose the abuser and warn others about the account the violence came from. A similar initiative on twitter was created in Sudan under the title '*expose a harasser*'. However, questions were raised on whether this vigilantism violates any freedom of expression or privacy laws and whether it could create a backlash on the vigilantes seeking to take matters into their own hands.

The online-offline circle of violence continues for women as instigations online cause extremists to attack them offline.[25] A critical example is the whipping trend where some fanatic Sudanese men started distributing whips to other men asking them to flog their women into submission as flogging remains a legal practice against women for so-called immodest acts.[26] This was encouraged by a call of a religious leader on Facebook as well as dedicated pages to incite against feminists as will be shown in the case studies in the following sections.

In general, the many types of DVAW (such as 'revenge pornography,' trolling, and threats), as well as the lack of adequate in-country reporting channels, are not officially addressed by law, which makes women more likely to practise self-censorship. The lack of formal reporting procedures and a culture of silence, among other restraints, also make it difficult to quantify these cyberthreats and attacks.

However, there have been numerous instances of online abuse and harassment that have been doc-

20   Al Jazeera. (2018, December 20). Protests over rising prices spread in Sudan's Khartoum. Retrieved from https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/protests-rising-prices-spread-sudan-khartoum-181220132130661.html

21   Pramanik, A. (2019, May 15). A Women's Revolution in Sudan. McGill International Review. Retrieved from https://www.mironline.ca/a-womens-revolution-in-sudan/

22   Hamdan, A. (2019). Sudanese Women's Revolution for Freedom, Dignity, and Justice Continues. CMI Brief, 18(7). Retrieved from https://www.cmi.no/publications/7355-sudanese-womens-revolution-for-freedom-dignity-and-justice-continues

23   International Service for Human Rights. (2020, September 23). Sudan: Stop escalation of violence against women. Retrieved from https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/sudan-stop-escalation-of-violence-against-women/

24   Suzie Dunn, "Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Overview" (2020) Centre for International Governance Innovation: Supporting a Safer Internet Paper No. 1

25   Bryant, L. (2021, May 7). Sudan's women flogged in public by young men inspired by violent social media campaign. The National. Retrieved from https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/sudan-s-women-flogged-in-public-by-young-men-inspired-by-violent-social-media-campaign-1.1215635

26   The Arab Weekly. (2019, September 22). Sudanese women can still be whipped for wearing pants. Retrieved from https://thearabweekly.com/sudanese-women-can-still-be-whipped-wearing-pants

umented. Such incidents occur continuously, leaving victims with few options for legal action or resources to seek redress. In addition, many women are unaware of their online rights and the resources available to protect themselves. Women in African countries, including Sudan, find themselves forced to leave the digital spaces in order to avoid being victimised.[27]

Although the Sudanese government produced the national strategic framework to protect children and youth online in December 2016, its 2018-2020 work plan failed to protect women against the various forms of DVAW.[28] Similarly, while the 2007 Cybercrime Act,[29] the 2018 amendments, and the 2018 Information Technology Crimes Law,[30] together provide a legal framework that could be used to protect women online, the legal system is far from adequate due to inadequate penalties, vague language, and lack of awareness about digital violence within the judicial system, which is influenced by conservative cultural norms.

Existing research on DVAW in Sudan shows that the problem is not legal, it is rather socio-cultural. Al Khatim Adlan Centre (KACE) implemented a project entitled '*Using Violence and Mobilising Anxiety: Repressing Feminist Activism Online*' which resulted in a policy brief: '*Battle of the screenshots*', one of the very few research papers on DVAW in Sudan.[31] This research finds that although the Internet provides great opportunities for women such as advocacy platforms for women activists and markets for business women, it has also become extremely hostile against women invading their privacy and putting them at risk. It has been argued that *"[t]he war on women that was waged in the public and private domains through a discriminatory legal framework and the normalisation of misogynistic culture has moved online to the pages of Facebook and other outlets*."[32]

A 2021 qualitative assessment of DVAW, '*Voices from Sudan 2020*' by the UNFPA in partnership with the *Unit of Combating Violence Against Women and Children in Sudan*, found that domestic violence against women is not considered a severe violation of women's rights. Therefore, by comparison, DVAW is even considered less significant.[33]

Research questions

The current research aims to find answers to the following main questions:

6. To what extent are women exposed to DVAW in Sudan?

7. What are the most commonly experienced forms of DVAW?

8. What are the driving forces behind the spread of the phenomenon?

9. What are the reactions of women to incidents of DVAW?

10. What impacts does DVAW have on women and what support systems are available to them?

11. What solutions are accessible to women to limit DVAW and protect them?

12. What are practical and policy recommendations needed to foster a safe online environment for women and girls?

Research methodology

This research relies on a number of different data collection tools to provide a comprehensive understanding of DVAW in Sudan. It includes a desktop search to understand the local context of gender issues in Sudan in general, taking into consideration the legal, social, and political contexts. The focus was then narrowed down to exploring DVAW by examining existing literature on the issue, perceptions, trends, and statistics.

For primary data, the study aims to gather insights directly from Sudanese women regarding the issue of DVAW. Therefore, it employed a mixed-methods approach with quantitative data generated from surveying 83 women living in Sudan, complement-

27   Collins, M., & Mwesiga, E. C. (2020). In search of safe space online: Research summary. Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA). Retrieved from https://cipesa.org/2020/03/in-search-of-safe-space-online-research-summary/

28   Government of Sudan. (n.d.). Sudan Computer and Internet Penetration National Strategy. Retrieved from http://www.cert.sd/pdf/legislation/Sudan_COP_National_Strategy.pdf

29   United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2007). Cybercrime Act, 2007. https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/document/sdn/2007/cybercrime_act_2007_html/Sudan_Cybercrime_Act_2007_EN.pdf

30   Mansour, M. (2020, August 24). Do New Sudanese Laws Regulate Digital Space or Limit Freedom of Expression? SMEX. https://smex.org/do-new-sudanese-laws-regulate-digital-space-or-limit-freedom-of-expression/

31   KACE Sudan. (n.d.). Cyberbullying for Women Activists in Sudan. KACE Sudan. https://www.kacesudan.org/cyberbullying-fo-women-activists-in-sudan/

32   KACE Sudan. (n.d.). Cyberbullying for Women Activists in Sudan. KACE Sudan. https://www.kacesudan.org/cyberbullying-fo-women-activists-in-sudan/

33   Suliman, N., Osman, N., Ali, N., Ahmed, O., Eldaw, M., & Ahmed, N. (2020). Voices from Sudan 2020: A Qualitative Assessment of Gender-Based Violence in Sudan. Centre for Strategic Studies - Sudan. Retrieved from https://csf-sudan.org/library/voices-from-sudan-2020-a-qualitative-assessment-of-gender-based-violence-in-sudan/

ed by qualitative in-depth interviews with 10 women experts from diverse backgrounds such as politics, media, art, activism, civil society. The purpose is to obtain firsthand accounts and expert perspectives to delve into the nature, causes, and consequences of DVAW in Sudan.

The survey was electronic and anonymous, but it gave respondents the option to share their details should they accept to be interviewed. Data from the surveys was collected from December until mid-February and included 26 questions in Arabic, mostly multiple choice, and some open-ended questions. It was mainly divided into three parts: online behaviour and trends; aspects of DVAW including type, frequency, platform, perpetrators, and reaction; and impact, support, and solutions.

The interviews built on the structure of the surveys and went deeper reflecting findings of the surveys, triangulating the data and identifying solutions through the reflection of the stakeholders themselves. By engaging with women from various fields and backgrounds, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive view of the issue and validate existing findings from the literature and the surveys while uncovering new insights. The participants experiences and perspectives shed light on the prevalence and impact of DVAW, explore how women in Sudan respond to such violence, and understand whether they seek help. Furthermore, the participants were asked to share their recommendations on addressing and combating DVAW in Sudan.

The findings of the study provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of DVAW in Sudan, highlighting its various manifestations and consequences. The firsthand accounts and expert perspectives obtained through interviews and surveys offer valuable insights that can contribute to efforts aimed at preventing and addressing DVAW. The study's recommendations, based on the perspectives and experiences of the respondents, may inform strategies and policies to combat domestic violence and violence against women in Sudan.

Research findings

There were 83 responses to the survey from Sudanese women. Nearly 60% of them were single and 32% married, while the rest were either divorced or widowed. Majority of the respondents were young or on the younger side as 48% were between 18 and 29 years of age, 45% between 30 and 49 years and

only 7% 50 or older. The research sample was highly educated as 60% had a university degree and 38% had postgraduate qualifications. Their professional backgrounds varied significantly with many being part of the private sector, civil society and working with international organisations. It was interesting to note that against the expected narrative, 15% of the respondents lived on their own. Further research is warranted to explore the potential relationship between independent living and victimisation of women online and offline, and how relevant it is to the support these women may or may not have access to due to their living circumstances.

Most of the respondents used their personal smartphones to access the Internet. Facebook & FB Messenger, WhatsApp, and emails were the dominant platforms for digital communication. This was followed by meeting platforms such as Zoom and Teams, text messaging, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Telegram. Most of their online activities were re-cycling existing content, such as reposting material, as well as posting pictures of a general nature and generic comments or videos. Posting personal information was rare, especially videos.

Exposure to DVAW: where, what, by whom, why?

As to being victims of online violence because they are women, 52% responded with a 'yes' while 48% with a 'no'. The most frequent types of DVAW were harassment, including persistent, unwelcome sexual contact like sending pornographic photographs. Interesting to note, several respondents complained of emotional manipulation and targeting through social engineering and phishing. Women complained of being intimidated and assaulted on account of their femininity or simply because they are women.

According to the survey results, the majority of DVAW occurs on Facebook, including Messenger, thus both public and private acts are committed there. WhatsApp, SMS, and, to a lesser extent, Twitter came next. In Sudan, other platforms are less well-liked and/or few DVAW were experienced on them. The attackers are not frightened of being caught, as seen by their direct targeting of the ladies via Messenger, WhatsApp, and SMS.

Hajer Adlan is a young online content creator who likes sharing personal photos from her life. She

thinks this has brought her unwanted attention online: "*By virtue of the fact that I am an open person and I post my pictures on social media a lot, as a reaction, I find pornographic pictures and movies on my Facebook page posted by others, and many ask me to have sex in exchange for an amount of money.... to them, because I publish my pictures, I am available to everyone.*"

She uses her voice online to speak about women's issues and harassment, criticise some societal behaviours through comic videos, and deliver subversive messages through her illustrations. Hajer faces this objectification in the real world as well and always finds harassment on the ground from young people because she does not wear a hijab: "*The violence I face online and offline makes me just want to leave, I want to be somewhere else where I am not judged because I am a woman and allowed to be me. People in Sudan do not believe in freedoms and believe that publishing something that belongs to you on your personal account gives them the right to insult and offend.*"

Hana is a young Sudanese woman who faces similar challenges. She recalls one incident recently when she posted a comment on a sports post on Facebook, where it encourages and motivates everyone to lose weight. "*My comment was about the motives that enabled me to stick to sports with the addition of a sarcastic comment about my lack of commitment to sports. After that, I received messages from a man who liked my comment in the post and sent me unsolicited indecent messages about having fun with curvy women. I did not reply to the messages; I just blocked the page from communicating with me,*" Hana says this is a trend and it keeps repeating.

She remembers something similar on WhatsApp, where an unknown number contacted her with romantic messages. When she asked to know the person who sent them or else, she would block his number. He responded that it is better to share love with a stranger, to which she responded by blocking the number.

Even during her high school days, Hana remembers how young girls would receive calls at odd hours late at night in which the caller would use sexually suggestive language, such as 'what are you wearing' and 'how can I make you feel sexual pleasure.' If she were a man, she argues, she "*would not have been subjected to such violence, because Sudanese women and girls are considered permissible and weak in the eyes of the majority of Sudanese men who think they can do whatever they want.*"

Although it was disturbing to find that 13% of the women have received repeated threats of physical harm including murder and rape, the most uncommon violations were technical related, such as fabrication of content and hacking or organised attacks that include assassination of character. This variation may be a reflection of the diversity of the sample. Closer inspection showed that active women such as journalists, human rights defenders, and especially feminists, receive harsher acts of violence proportional to the women's influence and their disruption of the gender power balance in the country.

Tahani Abbas is a journalist, lawyer, and women's rights campaigner in Sudan. She is involved in the investigation of human rights violations with a specific focus on sexual violence, and she coordinates support for women victims through several civil society organisations, including *No to Women's Oppression*. She also leads reconciliation initiatives and advocacy campaigns. Through her work, she has been able to highlight cases such as that of Noura Hussein, who was sentenced to death before her punishment was reduced to 5 years in prison. Currently, Tahani Abass is working with women victims of rape committed during the bloody repression of 3 June 2019 in Sudan.

Because of her activism, Tahani was threatened with death and an assassination was attempted of her along with another female activist. Her reputation was defamed, and compromising photos of her

were fabricated:: "*My pictures were posted, stating that I run a prostitution network with foreigners, and I recruit girls and deceive them with issues such as human rights, and so on*." She took legal action as she filed a case to the *Cybercrimes Prosecution* with support from some lawyers. "*When I left the prosecution, I was chased by an army vehicle... they terrorised me and tried to open the door of my car. The case is still open, but nothing happened, as is the case with such cases in Sudan,*" She said.

On the online-offline cycle, it was evident that there is a connection between the two and that this is proportional to the influence the women have in both the real and online worlds. The research shows that in general, many Sudanese women face DVAW in both their real life and online. However, the impact of violence in both spheres is limited to those who challenge the status quo. Tahani Abbas, explained that violence directed against her on the Internet is linked to her activity on the ground since she publishes about political, feminist, and human rights issues and monitors human rights in the country. Because of this her pictures were posted and lies about her were fabricated online. The reason is the patriarchal mentality and the constant attempts to limit the participation of women in the public sphere, she explained.

Nahla Yousif Mohammed is an activist and feminist who was arrested in 2016 because of her activism: "*I published a post on Facebook about civil disobedience at the start of the revolution and hell broke loose. I was arrested, my organisation's activity was frozen and the sources of all assets and funds were also confiscated. My WhatsApp account was hacked, my personal picture was deleted from my profile, and my contacts were stolen from my phone and distributed in groups by an unknown person*." Because of this organised attack, her family put so much pressure on Nahla, especially her siblings and children. "*Even my husband was being attacked; he and received posts on Facebook telling him that if he can't control his wife (me) they will control me*

for him!" She added "*Even my children were insulted in schools because of my activity, and my son's hair was shaved in the classroom because of a post I made about corruption in schools, which made him hate the teacher and the school.*"

Later in 2020, she was attacked again and beaten more than once because of her activism. She explained the harm the attacks inflicted on her: "*I had to change my workplace and my home address, and I went into depression for some time. But overall, I became very careful regarding what I post online and changed my accounts to use pseudonyms especially after being pressured by my family.*" However, this did not deter her from carrying on her work, but she takes more precautions. Nahla uses pseudonyms now and has to change all her social media accounts to be safe online. She believes that had she not been a woman, the violators would not have had the audacity to do what they did. "*The society is male dominated and men can't accept that women have opinions about politics or civil demonstrations, carrying arms, or influential people in power,*" she stated. She suggests that the reason for the spread of violence against women on the Internet in Sudan, especially on social media platforms, is that the number of women using the Internet is very low and that they lack proper technical skills to stay safe online, especially in rural areas in the states. Any woman who writes on public matters or publishes her photos or videos is considered deviant and attacked in the name of religion.

The following chart, Figure 1, details the survey responses to the common forms of DVAW and the frequency with which they were experienced.

Below are some examples of DVAW testimonies from the survey:

• "Men attempt to start up romantic relations online, but this quickly turns into abusive and harassing calls if you do not accept their advances."

- "I was threatened with murder, rape, threats to kidnap my child, and sexual extortion."

- "My Facebook account was hacked several times, inappropriate messages were sent on Messenger, I was monitored by my brother on WhatsApp."

- "I was subjected to threats of murder and rape, and I was also subjected to an assassination attempt, and the report is still with the prosecution, they have done nothing."

- "I have been exposed to many acts of violence, including death threats, threats to kidnap my children, defamation, and the use of my personal photos in disgraceful rumours."

- "I was verbally abused, insulted, threatened and harassed a lot by the male community, just because I am a woman."

- "I received harassment from some men on WhatsApp."

- "A lot of abusive and embarrassing comments are presented to me, sometimes in private, and sometimes messages of abuse were sent to my husband. And lots of hacking attempts continuously."

- "I do not believe that there is a Sudanese woman who has not been exposed to any kind of violence. One of the things I am exposed to on a daily basis is because of my outward appearance because I am a girl of average beauty according to societal beauty standards. I am a dark-skinned girl, so I am always subjected to verbal violence and mocking."

- "Every day we are exposed to abuse online and offline, with or without intention, in the form of ridicule, and we are exposed to abuse from those closest to us under the pretext of the woman being an object that cannot be taken seriously and many, many, many other discriminations based on our gender."

- "I was subjected to sexual verbal harassment by sending messages via Messenger, and some inappropriate comments on my responses to some public posts, and some of them were communicating with me via Messenger after I ignored the bad comment on the public chat."

- "I was threatened and blackmailed through the Internet, and he asked me for a large amount of money, and that he had an indecent video of me. I told him to publish the video, because I know that he does not own anything, and I informed the police."

- "I suffered from continuous telephone calls, sending pornographic images via WhatsApp, cursing and slandering, indecent replies and pictures, account hacking..."

As for the source and motivation behind the violence, there is an overall consensus that violators are mostly anonymous and that they prefer to attack in public platforms; however, 36% explained that they knew the perpetrator as 66% confirmed the attacks often took place in private channels, although rarely by a relative. Around 62% of the responses stated that the violence is culturally motivated, 70% said it was religiously motivated, and 48% said it was triggered by political factors.

A recent example of religiously driven attack was the death threats journalist Safaa Al-Fahal received in January 2023 through an email message from an individual affiliated to a religious group in Sudan.[34]

34   Published on Facebook (META) https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10230640691580441&set=a.2326421199450&type=3&theater

According to the Sudanese Journalists Network, "*[t]he Email message stated that the journalist's writings in Al-Jareeda newspaper were targeting the Mujahideen and that they were aligned with anti-Shariah forces.*" As a response, Al-Fahal filed a case at the Cybercrimes Prosecution with the details of the threat. She received a case number (365), but nothing much has happened since then.

An overwhelming 74% identified the perpetrators as male and 22% said violence originated from men and women at similar percentages. Yet, many respondents commented that sometimes they could not tell the gender of the person or that the perpetrators may be projecting a different gender than the real one.

This type of violence is directed more towards women because of customs and traditions, and also because of society's view of women as fragile and inferior compared to men. The presence of men at the top of the social hierarchy gives them a leverage to control women on the ground and online in particular because they are sure that women would fear sharing such incidents, whether with family members or to the police and others, for fear of a 'scandal' or the 'blame culture'.

All of the survey respondents and the interviewees confirmed that them being women was a determinant factor in the intensity and nature of digital violence they are exposed to, while acknowledging that there is an intersectionality with other characteristics such as being politicians or advocates for cultural freedoms.

When asked whether she would have faced similar DVAW incidents had she been a man, an interviewee, who wishes to remain anonymous, said 'no', although she confessed that men are also subject to violence online, but it is not based on their gender: "*Of course not, because we live in a society with a purely masculine mentality that respects and sanctifies men and believes that the man has the right to practise all customs by virtue of being a man only and not out of religion. I don't think so, but this does not mean that some men do not also suffer violence online.*"
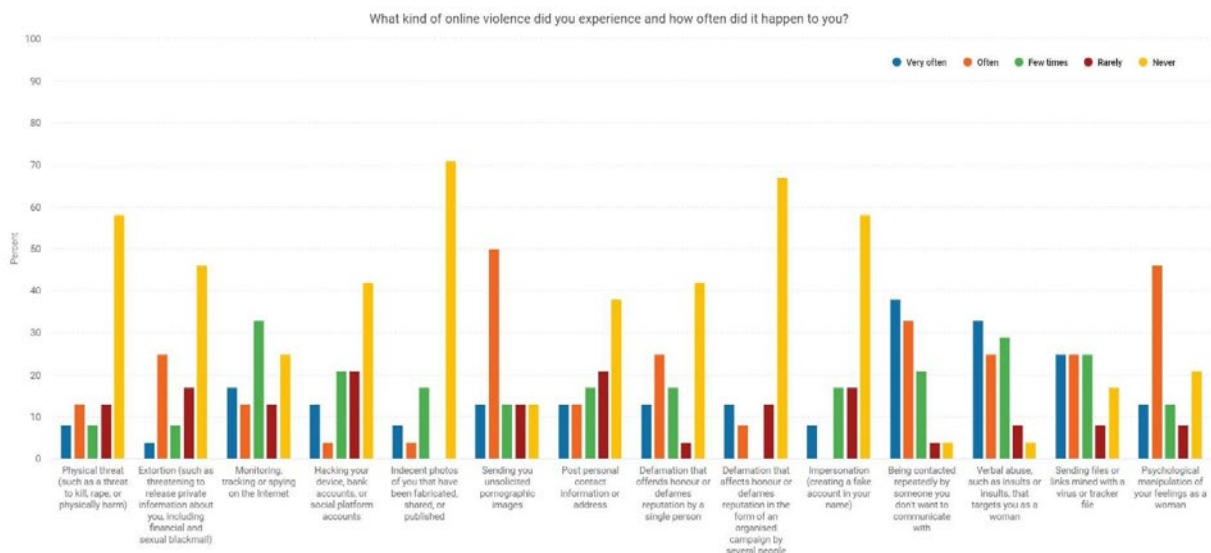

Figure 1: The forms of DVAW experienced by respondents in percentages.

Women's reactions to DVAW and its impact

The reaction that women have to occurrences of DVAW differs significantly across the board, however, visible trends show that women tend to avoid utilising available tools such as reporting to the platforms or to officials. They prefer to ignore or block the account. The chart in Figure 2 below shows the overall picture of the sample´s reactions based on the type of harm.

It was interesting to note that 60% of the respondents said that their reaction would have differed, and they would have become braver and more confrontational had they known the identity of the attacker. This seems to be an opportunity for combating digital violence should the authorities make it easier for the women to report and expose their attackers. However, it is not as easy as it seems, explains human rights activist Reem Abbas who has been a victim of an organised DVAW attack: "*Even if you know who is behind it, unless the authorities support you and the legal system vindicates you, it doesn't make a difference.*"

Reem was one of the victims of the Sudanese women activist defamed on a Facebook page under the name '*Sudaniat against Hijab*,' which was created in 2016. Their photos and fake statements on their behalf criticising the Hijab and the traditional Suda-

nese values and customary dress code for women were posted. The person behind the page was never prosecuted despite several reports against him. "*The page used Sudanese sentiments to turn the public against us, claiming that we as feminists are destroying the culture and calling for un-Islamic practices and, therefore, associating our activism with negative values,*" said Reem. Such a tactic would not have been used or useful had they been male activists. Because of her connections to international human rights organisations, such as *Front-Line Defenders*, Reem was able to close the page down. However, not many have such access and the doxed images of her, and other activists, would remain circulating online for weeks because of Facebook's slow reaction.

Another offline-online connection was also established when a religious Shiekh with many followers launched a campaign against Reem and others and used his position as an Imam to instigate violence against them. She explained how it affected her: "*Unfortunately, the anti-campaign was successful and got a lot of attention, as the page had over 20K followers and more than 7000 comments included death threats. Our real names, and sometimes personal details such as locations, were spread and many of us could not leave our homes for weeks fearing for our safety.*"

Unfortunately for Reem, this was repeated in 2018 as another Facebook attack was launched against her and a female journalist, publishing their names and photos and claiming that they are atheists and im-
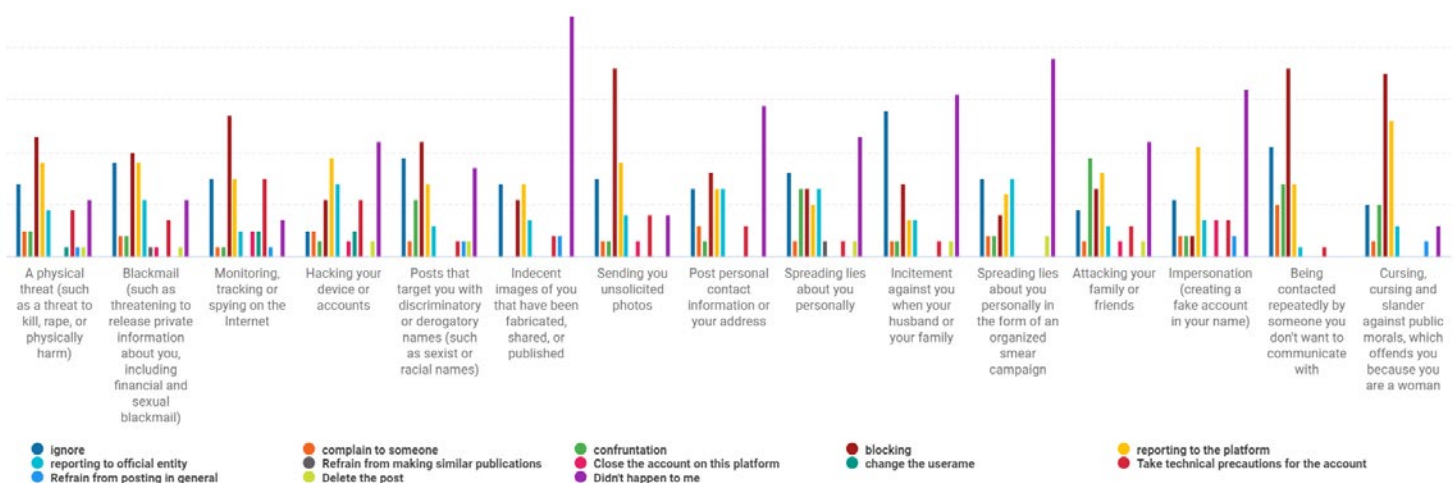

Figure 2: A breakdown summary of the respondents' reactions to their DVAW experiences in percentages

moral. Even though she filed a court case against the Facebook page, the *Cybercrimes Prosecution* told her it was her responsibility to identify the culprit. Even when she did, they could not do anything as he was residing in another country. Consequently, she expanded, "*[a]s women activists and journalists in Sudan, we are very tired of having to fight daily just to be. It has become hard to do everything on our own, fighting many battles on many fronts, so I decided to take a break, focus on my family and my mental health for a while*."

The response Reem had from the *Cybercrimes Prosecution* was the reason why Hana, as explained earlier, had problems when reporting her harasser on WhatsApp to the police. Similarly, testimonies of many of the participants in this study show that the telecommunications companies and police authorities do not cooperate with the complainants. They shift the burden of identifying and dealing with the abuser onto the victims themselves. Even when the women are able to find some evidence of the culprits and report them, nothing happens, which discourages them from reporting.

Similarly, although she was not an activist or a feminist, a young IT specialist in the private sector, who requested to remain anonymous, said that a person whom she knew approached her online and threatened her to publish an explicit video of her if she did not meet him in a certain location. She refused because she knew that he intended to molest her. "*He was sending me text messages via WhatsApp and Face-*

book. I blocked him and informed the police. After he knew that I had informed the police, he disappeared," she said. However, he returned a few months later with a new number and tried to emotionally manipulate her again but she blocked him again. What this indicates is that some men are not afraid of their identity being exposed as they target women directly through personal communication. The threat of being reported to the police does not seem to be a deterrent.

This participant believes that the toxic environment she faced online is a reflection of that she faces offline, which forced her to live a more secluded life. "*I am subjected to harassment in transportation, work, and many other places. I even refused to work on a full-time basis and decided to work online as a freelancer*."

The chart, Figure 3, below shows the impact of DVAW on women and the level of harm it caused to them. It is clear that the most common harms were related to the behaviour online. This agrees with literature arguing that DVAW drives women offline and makes them more reluctant to digitally engage. That the highest response to the question was that women became very careful online, followed by changing the way they express themselves. Demonstrates how the Internet has become a hostile space for women. However, it is also clear from the findings that grave harms also occurred especially relating to physical health, depression, becoming withdrawn in real life, and facing pressure from family and work.
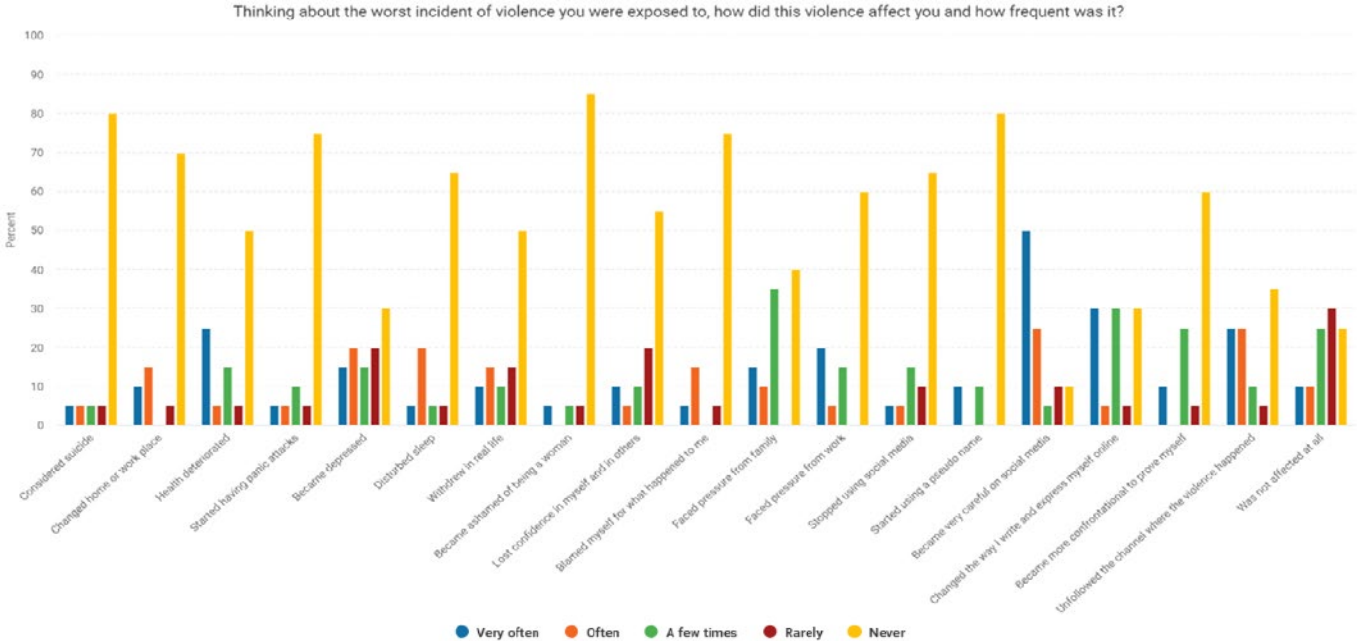

Figure 3: The harmful effects experienced after DVAW in percentages.

Solutions to DVAW

Before discussing solutions to DVAW in Sudan, it was essential to explore the support options provided to women who experience it. An interesting observation was made regarding the awareness of women in Sudan about their rights as victims of digital crimes. While they were aware of their rights, their knowledge and utilisation of other available services was significantly lower. The results presented in the following chart on Figure 4, indicates a gap between the knowledge of the existence of a service or tool and its actual usage.

ing the availability of services and tools that can assist them as victims of DVAW in staying safe online or seek redress. Such efforts could help bridge the gap between knowledge and usage, ensuring that women have access to the necessary support and resources to protect themselves against digital crimes.

Women need to have the awareness and learn the digital skills to protect themselves online, too. Participants call for better training for women in digital protection, especially female activists who need to protect themselves as they are vulnerable to being hacked, and for raising awareness to change the customs, traditions, and masculine habits which pre-
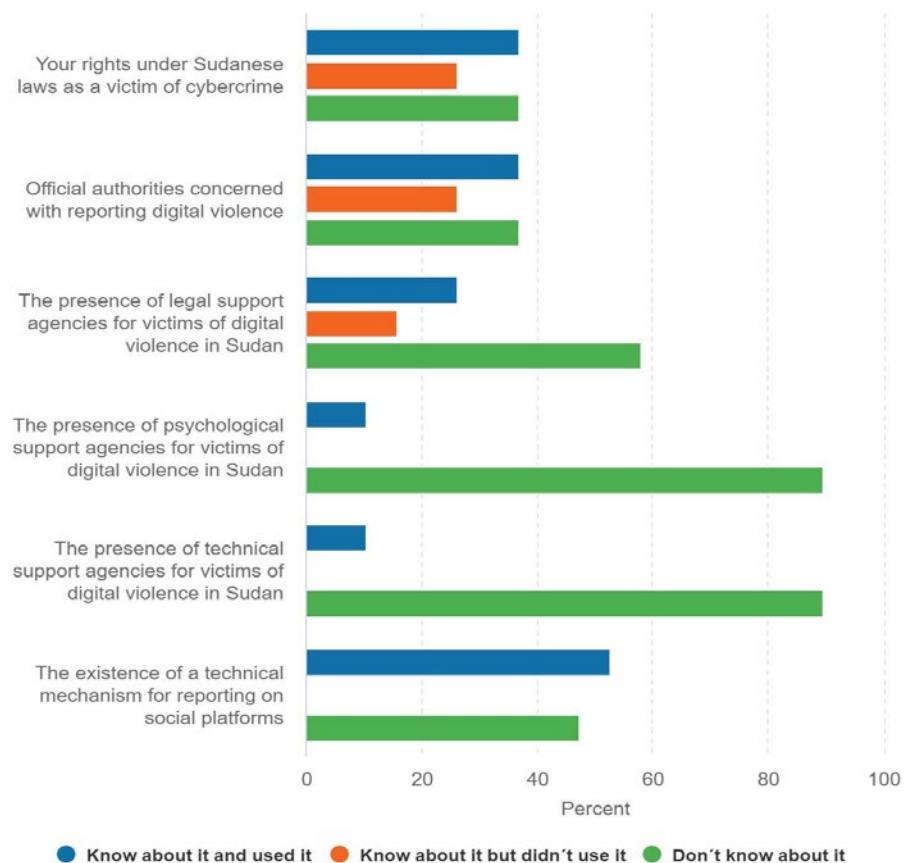

Figure 4: A summary of the awareness of the existence of and use of various support mechanisms to survivors of DVAW in Sudan in percentages.

In terms of support, a staggering 90% of the respondents reported that they do not know of any technical or psychological support providers. Nearly 60% said the same for legal support. However, regarding their awareness of their legal rights and the official entities to report to, the percentages were higher (58%), and some have even used the services (42%) of which 26% reported they were useful or very useful and 16% reported that their experience was very bad.

This finding suggests that although women are aware of their rights, there is a need for more cybersecurity education and awareness-raising initiatives regard-

vent Sudanese women from posting pictures or videos of themselves on their own pages.

The responses clearly show mistrust of state institutions regarding support for women who face DVAW. The interviewees suggest that those responsible for protecting women are often influenced by the patriarchy and cultural norms that caused this violence in the first place. Therefore, there was a large percentage of the women knowing about the legal or official services and preferring not to use them. However, this was not the case in terms of services provided by non-governmental entities offering psychological,

technical, or legal support, in addition to the platform related mechanisms. Those who knew of the existence of such services used them, which indicates a clear need for affirmative action where there is a desire to use such services should they be available.

Ilaf Nasreldin is a women's rights advocate who is the Co-Founder and Strategic Advisor of *AMNA*, an organisation that advocates ending violence against women (VAW) in Sudan. She is an activist for human rights, peacebuilding, social justice, and development with a special focus on gender-related issues. Through her organisation and through research, she found that DVAW is prevalent in Sudan as a reflection of the spread of VAW in real life. This motivated her to co-found *AMNA* in 2017 to provide help to women who need support.

"*In Sudan there are not a lot of service providers for victims, and we end up not being able to accommodate their needs. Sometimes, we try to seek legal action but the governmental bodies that are concerned with these issues are not reacting and it's just a very frustrating position to be in*," she said. According to Ilaf, another factor that deeply influences the work is the social stigma that comes with the kind of work that she does and the kind of ideals that they stand for, "*because in Sudan being a feminist or being an activist for women's rights comes with a lot of negative connotations*."

Ilaf added that laws do not protect women in Sudan from DVAW, as they do not include prevention measures. In digital crimes related to honour or sexual harassment, the harm is already done. Even if the perpetrator is punished, from a social perspective, the victim's reputation is already damaged, putting her under much social pressure: "*Even for digital crimes that are not related to honour, the emotional damage is done, and the law does not deal with this. This is why we need civil society organisations to support women, especially from a psychological point of view*."

This argument agrees with the other finding regarding not receiving much support. Yet, the respondents reported receiving support very often (47%) and often (37%) from their friends and, to a slightly lesser extent, from the women in their families (very often at 32% and often at 21%). At the other end of the spectrum, the respondents mentioned they never received support from mental health providers (79%), official entities when approached (74%), civil society (74%), the platform where the violence occurred (53%), or from technical support providers (53%). It was alarming that 37% of the women needed help and did not know where to find it.

In terms of evaluating the support provided once sought, only 15% said that the service provided by official entities was very bad compared to 10% saying it was very useful and 15% saying it was relatively useful. This indicates that the problem with official entities is both a perception problem and a quality-of-service issue as well. This is an opportunity in its own right as there is significant room for improvement with training and awareness raising among the service providers. Over 20% of the women used legal services and found them very effective; however, the experience with the digital platforms themselves were predominantly negative at 37% bad or unhelpful, compared to 26% positive.

Finally, as regards ways forward and policy recommendations, there is consensus between the respondents that criminalising digital violence, creating awareness and community advocacy, creating service providers among civil society for mental health, technical skills, and legal support in addition to training digital security officials to become more gender sensitive would be very helpful interventions.

Sabah Adam is a prominent and active journalist. She has observed a recent increase in the number of women in the media in Sudan and in their influence in the public sphere. This explains why the former regime targeted activists and journalists in particular because they were amongst the main advocates for political change. She feels that change is on the horizon and that there is good community awareness on the role of women in the public sphere; yet more needs to be done. "*The basis of the law is equality, so what we need now is to create a system that is sensitive to women's issues and creates gender responsive platforms through the training of service providers, especially in the digital safety domains*." She believes that the Sudanese feminist movement is going strong and cited achievements in changing the laws criminalising rape and sexual harassment. Despite the spread of DVAW, Sabah believes the digital sphere is important to push forward human rights and press freedoms in Sudan, and that it is important that there are sufficient regulations and systems to make it an environment supportive of women.

These findings indicate that there is general interest in changing the situation through seeking help if it were to exist, but the solution that received the most supporters was related to awareness raising and changing the community's attitude towards women online and offline. The respondents asked for more institutions to provide them with support and a stronger legal action against perpetrators. A specific recommendation was related to the coordination between the authorities and the telecommunication service providers to identify the abusers and bring them to justice. Also, it is important to raise awareness regarding existing services and platforms and making them more accessible to online users, especially women.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the alarming prevalence of DVAW in Sudan. The findings indicate that the issue is deeply rooted in unjust cultural norms and gender inequality, which has been exacerbated by the widespread use of digital platforms. While efforts have been made to address the issue, they have been limited and have not resulted in significant progress. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more comprehensive measures, including awareness campaigns, legal reforms, civil society support systems, and technology-based solutions, to combat DVAW in Sudan. It is crucial to recognize that DVAW is a form of violence that can have severe consequences on women's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Thus, it is the responsibility of the government and society as a whole to take active steps towards preventing DVAW and promoting gender equality in all spheres of life.

Based on the findings of this research, there are several policy recommendations that can be made to address the issue of DVAW in Sudan. These include:

Legal Reforms: There is a need for legal reforms to address the gaps in the existing legal framework that does not sufficiently protect women from DVAW. This includes the introduction of specific provisions in the law that criminalise digital violence and provide women with legal remedies when seeking redress. These reforms should also oblige telecom companies to investigate digital violence through their networks and coordinate with the relevant authorities to take action against the offenders.

Awareness Campaigns: Awareness campaigns should be launched to educate women on the risks of DVAW and the measures they can take to protect themselves. It is also essential to sensitise men and boys on the negative effects of DVAW on the well-being of women and the importance of respecting women's rights and boundaries online and offline.

Capacity Building: Capacity building initiatives should be implemented to enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of VAW/DVAW.

Technology-based solutions: Technology-based solutions, such as the development of digital platforms that can be used to report and track incidents of DVAW, and the deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to detect and prevent DVAW, should be explored.

Collaboration with social media companies: Social media companies should be more invested in the fight against DVAW. This includes the establishment of government partnerships with social media companies to develop policies and mechanisms for detecting and removing violent or discriminatory digital content and for providing support to victims.

Research: Further research should be conducted to understand the nature and extent of DVAW in Sudan, and to identify the most effective strategies for addressing the issue. It is recommended to explore the potential relationship between independent living and the victimisation of women online and offline, and how relevant it is to the support these women may or may not have access to due to their living conditions. Additionally, studying the impact of any present or future law amendments, awareness raising campaigns, or digital reporting or supporting services on the number of DVAW incidents would be useful.

Any of the policy recommendations outlined above can serve as a starting point for addressing the issue of DVAW in Sudan. Any progress towards a safer online environment for women counts. It is essential to recognize that the fight against DVAW requires a

comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach that involves the government, the civil society, the private sector, and the international community. By working together, we can ensure that women's rights and well-being are protected in the digital world, and that they live a life free from aggression and harassment.

DIGITAL arabia network