Navigating Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH) in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Scope, Impact, and Coping Strategies

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Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH) is a pervasive global issue, particularly impacting Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) due to the rapid expansion of technology. This study presents a comprehensive analysis of DSVH, focusing on its prevalence, impact on victims, and coping mechanisms in LMICs. The literature review highlights the wide range of definitions and categories of DSVH, including online sexual harassment, image-based abuse, coercion, and monitoring using digital technology. Perpetrators utilize various platforms such as social media, messaging apps, and websites to carry out DSVH, with motivations ranging from financial gain to maintaining patriarchal power structures. Results from the study reveal the diverse impacts of DSVH on victim-survivors, including psychological trauma, social isolation, reputational harm, financial repercussions, and physical injuries. Victim-survivors employ coping mechanisms such as self-censorship, seeking support from family and friends, and engaging in direct actions like blocking perpetrators. The study underscores the urgent need for effective interventions and policies to address DSVH in LMICs, ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals vulnerable to digital sexual violence and harassment.

Keywords: Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH), Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), Online sexual harassment, Image-based abuse, Coercive control, Monitoring using digital technology, Perpetrator motivations.

Introduction:

Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH) is a widespread and pressing issue globally, affecting not just developed regions but also countries in the Global South. The rapid expansion of technology, including the internet and mobile devices, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, has created more opportunities for online sexual violence, abuse, and harassment worldwide. This trend is particularly notable in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), where access to digital technologies is growing rapidly compared to other parts of the world. This growth has increased the potential for using digital platforms to perpetrate sexual violence, abuse, and harassment, especially in societies already grappling with high levels of gender inequality and sexual violence against women due to entrenched patriarchal norms, limited social support, and economic challenges [1].

LMICs, as defined by the World Bank based on Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, encompass countries with varying income levels, including lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries. These countries collectively face challenges in combating DSVH due to the diverse misuse of digital technologies. Examples of DSVH include sending unsolicited sexually explicit content, persistent harassment for relationships, sharing intimate media without consent, monitoring and tracking individuals' digital activities, and coercive control over digital devices [2].

The use of digital technologies spans a wide range, from social media and artificial intelligence to GPS tracking and smart home technology. These technologies are often exploited to perpetrate DSVH, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of online sexual violence and abuse [3].

Irrespective of the location, gender-based violence that inflicts or is likely to inflict bodily, sexual, or psychological injury or suffering against women and girls is designated by the UN as violence against women and girls. Violence against women and girls is a significant issue that goes beyond national, racial, social, age, and religious boundaries. It is well recognized that violence against women and girls significantly hinders women's involvement in various aspects of society, such as politics, economics, and social spheres. The numerous adverse consequences of this can be attributed to the potential fatality it poses, as well as the subsequent physical, mental, social, and economic repercussions it has on women, children, and broader communities [4].

Comprehending the scope and impact of violence against women and girls necessitates the utilization of surveys focused on this matter. This information is crucial for delivering care to survivors and for effectively distributing resources to address disparities in both practice and policy. International research indicate that a minimum of 33% of women globally experience violence directed towards women and girls [5]. Although the bulk of research and meta-analyses on violence against women and girls have been conducted in Western countries, this issue is more prevalent in low- and middle-income nations. This is especially accurate in countries where patriarchal systems, societal factors, and a lack of adequate legal safeguards for victims have resulted in widespread gender discrimination. Many women in North Africa and the Middle East are victims of gender-based violence. It is important to also keep in mind that data from these specific regions, where violence rates are quite high, may sometimes be considered as exaggerated [6]. This underscores the necessity for meticulous interpretation. The acceptance and normalization of violent behavior, along with the associated social disapproval in traditional or patriarchal societies, may contribute to the devaluation of violence. In these societies, individuals who have experienced violence are often blamed for the harm they have suffered, leading them to be hesitant to report such incidents to avoid further mistreatment or harm [7].

Objectives:

The objectives of this study encompass a comprehensive exploration of Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH) in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs). The primary goal is to investigate the prevalence, types, and dynamics of DSVH experienced by women and girls in LMICs, shedding light on the platforms, methods, and perpetrators involved in perpetrating such acts. Another key objective is to assess the multifaceted impact of DSVH on victim-survivors, including its psychological, social, behavioral, financial, and physical consequences. By understanding the coping mechanisms utilized by victim-survivors, this study aims to provide insights into mitigating the adverse effects of DSVH. Furthermore, this research seeks to

evaluate the feasibility and ethical considerations of conducting research and recruiting participants through social media platforms, addressing privacy, consent, and safety concerns in online research on DSVH. Ultimately, the study aims to enhance understanding and awareness of DSVH among stakeholders and policymakers, contributing empirical data and analysis to the existing literature while informing advocacy efforts, policy interventions, and support services aimed at combating DSVH and promoting gender equality and women's rights globally.

Literature Review:

Prior research has mostly focused on intimate partner violence, sometimes neglecting to include the different forms of abuse that women may experience from other family members or in non-domestic settings. The limited availability of funding has restricted the extent of research due to small sample sizes. Multiple studies examine the phenomenon of individuals utilizing services, such as those employed by forensic medical centers or health service providers, who may choose not to disclose specific information to the authorities [8].

In addition, the high expenses, dependence on government funding, and safety concerns associated with face-to-face interviews, which are the preferred method for collecting data on violence against women and girls, pose challenges in countries such as Iran. Conducting research on violence against women and girls (VAWGs) necessitates ensuring safety and anonymity, as emphasized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in its recommendations. However, adhering to these standards might pose challenges, especially when dealing with delicate information such as the revelation of violence. This requires exercising utmost caution and thoroughly contemplating ethical concerns. Within a nation characterized by stigmatization and cultural constraints, such as Iran, revealing personal information to an interviewer has the potential to escalate violence, particularly for women who have experienced violent relationships [9]. While this issue is not exclusive to Iran, the challenges faced by the victims and researchers may be exacerbated by insufficient legal assistance. This poses logistical and ethical concerns as undertaking a study to accurately portray the nature of violence against women and girls may expose both respondents and researchers to the risk of further harm. This could dissuade countries such as Iran from excessively relying on face-to-face interviews as their primary method of data collection [10].

These limitations have demonstrated that despite the good intentions of researchers who employ conventional methodologies to collect data, instances of violence may nevertheless remain undetected. Within the field of Iranian studies, paper-based surveys have emerged as the prevailing method for gathering data, primarily driven by safety considerations and cost limitations. However, the current evaluation frameworks, which mainly originate from the perspectives of industrialized nations, may not be suitable in the Iranian environment. The differences in ideas, experiences, social systems, and gender expectations between Iran and developed countries may undermine the accuracy of measures used to assess interpersonal relationships and social conditions [2].

Due to the aforementioned limitations, Iranian women who have encountered gender-based violence are scarcely acknowledged in scholarly research, which diminishes the significance of their experiences and perspectives in broader societal conversations, policy formulation, and public discourse. Their underrepresentation can be attributed to various factors, such as ethical considerations, legal limitations, safety apprehensions, and cultural conventions. The victims' restricted access to services, support networks, and resources intensifies their isolation and hinders their ability to engage in advocacy

and education. Consequently, there has been a scarcity of study conducted on this particular culture, with the existing studies often relying on limited sample numbers and qualitative methodologies. This limitation hinders the ability to fully comprehend the extensive range of experiences that this group has to offer [11].

Researchers facing difficulties in recruiting volunteers, especially from underrepresented or marginalized communities, are utilizing innovative methods such as online data collection and social media recruitment. Conducting research with marginalized and diverse groups has numerous advantages, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, ethical and secure social media recruitment methods have been employed to collect data on susceptible populations, such as South Asian women in the UK who have experienced gender-based violence, as well as hard-to-reach victims, including those who have been sexually assaulted. These achievements emphasize the necessity of employing diverse methodologies to examine the indicators of violence against women and girls in communities that have received less research attention [10].

While social media is utilized for participant recruitment and internet platforms are increasingly favored for data collection, the majority of research in this domain has been conducted in affluent countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The literature notably lacks the inclusion of these methods for gathering information from individuals residing in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), such as Iran, who are seldom given a voice. The majority of social media networks are accessed through mobile devices. Ownership of mobile phones among women in LMICs varies. Between 2017 and 2019, 82% of women in the Middle East and North Africa possessed a mobile phone. This figure surpasses the percentage of women in Sub-Saharan Africa (74%) and South Asia (65%), but falls short of the proportion of women in LMICs in East Asia and the Pacific (92%).

Based on data from LMICs in 2019, there exists an 8% disparity in mobile phone ownership across genders. This implies that women have an 8% lower probability of owning a phone compared to men. However, this disparity is slowly diminishing. As smartphone usage and mobile internet usage increase, the disparity in internet access between genders is decreasing [12]. The growing accessibility of mobile phones and mobile internet in low- and middle-income countries provide an opportunity to do research on disadvantaged individuals who would otherwise remain unheard, despite the less than optimal circumstances.

This study aims to bridge the gap by analyzing the use of social media in documenting instances of Violence against Women and Girls in Iran. The objective was to augment comprehension of the characteristics of these conversations and to amplify the significance of victims' voices and presence, which they could otherwise lack. This study comprehensively assesses the feasibility, benefits, limitations, and ethical considerations of conducting online research and recruiting volunteers through social media platforms in the context of violence against women and girls [13].

Methodology:

Study Design: This study adopts a scoping review methodology, known for its transparency and suitability for addressing broad research questions and identifying evidence gaps.

Guidelines: The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews (PRISMA) guidelines were followed to ensure comprehensive reporting and transparency in the review process.

Search Strategy: In November 2022, a systematic search was conducted in several

databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, PubMed, Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts, and the University of Sheffield library (Star Plus). Google Scholar was also searched for additional relevant literature. Two search strings were used to capture a wide range of data related to Digital Sexual Violence and Harassment (DSVH) and online gender-based violence.

Search String 1: ("technology-facilitated sexual violence" OR "technology-facilitated abuse" OR "technology-facilitated intimate partner violence" OR "technology-facilitated domestic violence" OR "technology-facilitated domestic abuse" OR "technology-facilitated gender-based violence" OR "technology-facilitated coercive control")

Search String 2: ("online gender-based violence" OR "online harassment" OR "digital harassment" OR "cyber violence" OR "image-based abuse" OR "Non-consensual intimate image sharing" OR "ICT-based harassment")

Inclusion Criteria: Studies were included if they focused on victim-survivors of DSVH aged 18 and above, were based in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), and were published in English between January 2005 and November 2023.

Exclusion Criteria: Studies involving participants below 18 years old, non-empirical research, and those not clearly related to DSVH or not based in LMICs were excluded.

Study Selection: The initial search yielded 1500 studies, which were screened based on titles, abstracts, and context relevance to LMICs. After removing duplicates and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria, 82 studies underwent full-text review. Ultimately, 15 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the review.

Data Extraction and Analysis: Data from the included studies were extracted and organized in an extraction table using Microsoft Excel. Categories included author(s), publication year, and country of origin, study aims, sample size, methodology, key findings, and themes. NVIVO software was utilized for data analysis and synthesis.

Quality Assurance: Screening conflicts and data extraction were initially conducted independently by two team members, with a third member available to resolve conflicts. Full-text screening conflicts were resolved collectively by the researchers.

This methodology ensures a comprehensive and systematic approach to reviewing literature on Digital sexual violence and harassment, focusing on LMICs and relevant empirical studies published within the specified timeframe.

Results:

DSVH encompasses a number of definitions, including broad descriptions that include harmful acts as a type of violence (such as cyber abuse) and more specific activities (such as sextortion). A variety of words were employed in several research to describe the same conduct. Approximately half of the studies utilized phrases such as online, cyber, or digital abuse or violence, or made reference to DSVH. In one study, the phrase "non-consensual sharing of intimate images" was employed as a substitute for "revenge porn" to encompass the unauthorized sharing of intimate images by either strangers or individuals in close relationships [14]. The DSVH categories encompassed seven issues, namely: online/digital sexual harassment, image-based sexual abuse, impersonation/doxing, hate speech, trolling, and meme violence, physical and rape threats, coercive control, and monitoring using digital technology. It is crucial to acknowledge that there are areas of overlap between these categories; they are not completely separate from one other.

The study covered multiple research that demonstrated the various ways in which women in low- and middle-income countries are subjected to digital or online sexual harassment. Instances of digital or online sexual harassment encompass various forms, such as unsolicited sexually explicit content in the form of photos, emails,

comments, videos, links, or text messages. It also includes persistent unwanted sexual solicitations through social networking sites, emails, text messages, or phone calls. Additionally, it involves publicly posting offensive or sexually explicit comments online, as well as sharing personal information on social media or online platforms with the intention of indicating availability for sexual encounters or dating. In a study conducted by [15], it was discovered that women who expressed their views on socio-cultural structures and the objectification of women in the media faced online sexual harassment as a form of punishment.

Sexual exploitation through the use of images

The majority of the studies included in the analysis revealed instances of non-consensual acquisition, distribution, or threats to distribute personal and intimate photographs or videos. These findings emphasize the use of intimate image-based sexual abuse as a means to extort, shame, or inflict emotional harm. In a study conducted by [16]on a sample of 375 Egyptian women, it was discovered that a majority (49.9%) of the participants reported instances of non-consensual pornography. Female survivors recounted instances of being subjected to coercion or extortion by their present or past relationships, who demanded the sharing of their private photographs or films on the Internet. Frequently, these private images or films were captured with consent within the context of a romantic partnership, albeit sometimes under coercive circumstances as a means of establishing "proof of love" or "proof of trust". Subsequently, the victim-survivors were manipulated into providing additional photos or videos or compelled to sustain the connection through blackmail.

Explicit content was disseminated over the internet, occasionally within a restricted community. This form of harassment and abuse was perpetrated by those who were familiar to the victim, including acquaintances, coworkers, friends, and even relatives. In a study conducted by [17], it was discovered that during the COVID-19 pandemic, fictional agencies in Indonesia were involved in illicit operations by disseminating intimate photographs online without obtaining approval. In a study conducted by [18], it was shown that women in South Asian countries experienced instances of deepfake harassment. Deepfakes are a form of artificial media where the appearance of a person in an original image or video, typically of a sexual nature, is substituted with the resemblance of another individual. In their study, [19]discovered that 5% of the participants (n = 182) reported instances where their images were altered or edited and then posted on social media. Harassment involving hate speech, trolling, and/or memes that target individuals based on their gender.
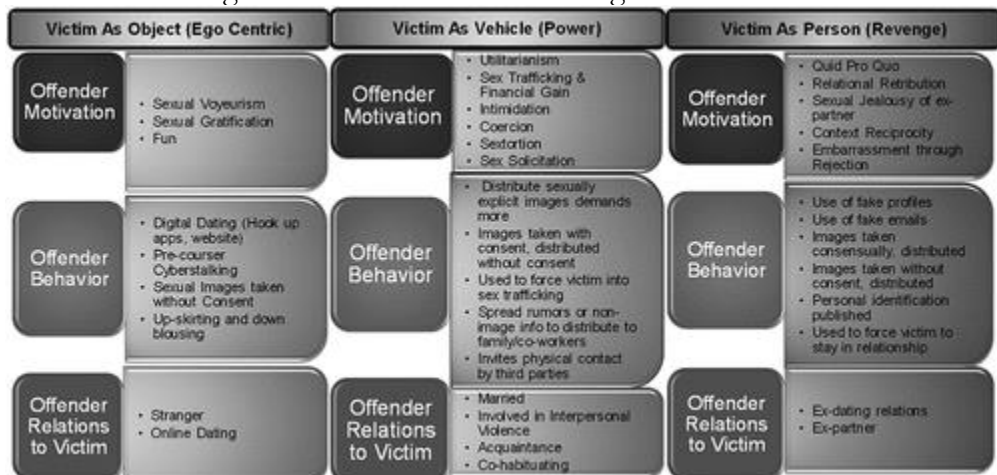

Figure 1: Technology Facilitated Violence against Women [20].

Multiple studies have documented instances of online hate speech targeting women in low- and middle-income countries. This hate speech encompasses a range of behaviors, including misogynistic, degrading, or offensive comments, body shaming, remarks about physical appearance or clothing, as well as religious or caste-based insults (such as labeling women as Satan, promiscuous, or atheist). Other forms of harassment include public humiliation, trolling, and the use of memes. A meme is a visual, audiovisual, or textual content that is created to be sexually hilarious and is then replicated and disseminated rapidly by internet users, frequently with minor alterations. Harassment of this nature can be orchestrated or instigated by individuals in positions of authority, such as politicians and government officials. In Turkey, top individuals arranged insulting comments against the physical appearance of female sports journalists on social media, as documented by [17].

The study conducted by [21] revealed that approximately 51% of the comments directed towards female journalists in Bangladesh can be classified as misogynistic. Furthermore, 14% of these comments were identified as religious "tags," such as referring to a woman as "Satan," a symbol commonly associated with malevolence or evil in various religions and belief systems, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. In Islam, it is perceived as the act of treating anything as an object, representing a hostile and destructive power. In their study, [22]discovered that out of the 85 women surveyed, 20 of them reported experiencing online harassment in which religious tags or attitudes were employed.

An often seen occurrence documented in the studies was the utilization of digital technology to fabricate malevolent accounts or counterfeit identities on social media platforms, as well as the unauthorized utilization or theft of victim-survivors' information or photographs. Perpetrators replicated the identities or personal data of victim-survivors to fabricate deceitful, malevolent, degrading, or sexually explicit profiles on social media platforms. In the majority of instances, the victim-survivors remained oblivious to the existence of these profiles. Another instance of misconduct documented in the research pertained to the unauthorized release of personal information, such as address or phone number, as well as chat or telephone logs on social networking platforms. This activity is commonly referred to as doxing (or doxxing)[10]. In a study conducted by [4] in South Asia, it was discovered that 10% of the participants experienced defamation through the fabrication of false identities on social media. Another study by [9] revealed that 12% of women (n=321) reported being subjected to defamatory content on social media, with 8% stating that their personal information was accessed and shared online without their consent.

Multiple research included in the evaluations have revealed that women in low- and middle-income countries are susceptible to physical harm and rape threats using digital technologies, such as phone calls, messaging apps, and social networking sites. In the study conducted by [9], a total of 139 female respondents reported experiencing online threats of physical or sexual violence, which accounted for more than 3% of the participants. This threat occasionally encompasses the possibility of abduction, homicide, or assassination. Women in the public eye, such as journalists, bloggers, and advocates for women's rights on social media, are more likely to face physical threats. Specifically, 5% of comments on women journalists' social media accounts involve threats of rape or sexual humiliation, while 1.5% of comments involve threats of killing. A study conducted by [7] found that the incidence of this specific form of physical intimidation is increasing, especially among female journalists employed in Turkey.

Additionally, it was discovered that digital tools and technology are being utilized

for coercive controlling behavior. Coercive control is commonly carried out by abusive individuals who are in close, romantic, or sexual relationships. Coercive control refers to a series of actions, such as physical assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation, or other forms of abuse, that are employed to damage, punish, or instill fear in the victim. Its purpose is to foster dependence by separating them from their social circles. Online coercive control was carried out by engaging in activities such as online stalking, monitoring one's movements or activities, covertly recording intimate moments, unauthorized access to social media or online accounts, threatening to disclose personal information, photos, or videos without consent, and making threats to share intimate images or videos. An Indian qualitative study documented how technology was utilized by intimate partners as a tool for intimidating and coercing sexual acts, as well as capturing private photographs.

Several investigations have discovered that women were subjected to surveillance or had their actions watched using digital tools and technologies. A poll conducted online among Egyptian women revealed that 9% (n=129) reported being subjected to monitoring or tracking of their online and offline activities. Additionally, 6% stated that their private data and/or images were accessed and shared without their consent, while 5% reported being tracked in terms of their physical movements. In a study conducted by [1], it was discovered that in 20% of Sub-Saharan nations, women reported unauthorized access to their online/email accounts.

The majority of the research in the study indicated that there were multiple platforms and methods used to carry out Digital sexual violence and harassment (DSVH). These included the misuse of social networking sites, dating sites, blogging, cellphone calls, SMS, personal online platforms, websites, GPS, emails, and other communication technologies. Nevertheless, no study has discovered any indication of the utilization of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence or drone technology. Facebook, Messenger app, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter were the primary places where DSVH occurred, out of the several social networking sites and social media platforms available. Perpetrators in several studies utilized pornographic websites to distribute explicit photographs, although a significant portion of harassment occurred privately through personal messaging applications, such as WhatsApp, as reported by numerous victims.

The studies documented a wide array of individuals who commit acts of harm, including the current romantic partner of the victim-survivor, former partners, acquaintances, mutual acquaintances, online acquaintances, classmates, family members, stepfathers, neighbors, supervisors, and colleagues. In a study conducted by [23], it was discovered that 79% of Brazilian women (total n = 151) who had been victims of non-consensual sharing of personal photographs were able to identify the person responsible. According to a separate investigation, female journalists specifically characterized their harasser as a manager or senior officer. Nevertheless, the majority of studies reported that the attacker was unfamiliar or unidentifiable to the survivors. Perpetrators of DSVH were motivated by various factors such as financial gain, extortion, blackmail, threats, sexual exploitation, and invasion of privacy, desire for revenge, jealousy, political agenda or support, anonymity, gender-blaming culture, hegemonic masculinity, and the desire to maintain a patriarchal power structure.

Research findings have documented a diverse array of effects that individuals who have undergone DSVH (Trauma from Sexual Violence and Abuse) undergo both during and after the traumatic event. These affects can be observed at the personal, familial, and occupational levels. Several incidents were considered trivial, while others

were characterized as more severe and, in certain instances, enduring. The repercussions can be categorized into five key areas: psychological and emotional, social, behavioral, financial, and bodily injury. Several studies have illustrated the psychological or emotional damage suffered by victim-survivors as a result of DSVH. The psychological and emotional implications were diverse and included short-term effects such as wrath, tension, anxiety, anguish, fear, insecurity, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, uncertainty, reluctance, disbelief, and guilt. The enduring consequences encompass suicidal ideation, disgrace, post-traumatic stress disorder, and a sense of seclusion.

A study conducted in Brazil discovered that 33% of individuals who were subjected to the non-consensual distribution of personal photos suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Victims who have survived DSVH also exhibited feelings of powerlessness, emotional exhaustion, and self-blame. According to a study conducted by [24], women, especially female journalists, perceived DSVH as an inevitable aspect of their profession. Several studies have documented the social consequences of technology-facilitated violence against women in low- and middle-income countries. These consequences include women withdrawing from online social interactions and public platforms, experiencing academic underachievement, facing social isolation, decreasing their use of social media and digital technologies, dropping out of educational institutions, relocating their residences, enduring public harassment and humiliation, and suffering reputational harm as victim-survivors.

The study conducted by [25]examined the impact of online sexual harassment on victim-survivors, revealing that it led to a phenomenon known as "self-censorship." This resulted in the emergence of a "new-self," which altered the manner in which individuals interacted both online and in their daily lives. A study conducted by [26] in South Asia revealed that reputational harm, such as negative social talk, can lead to a decline in the number of arranged marriage prospects. The reputational harm was caused by the suspicion that a woman was involved (due to supposed sexual and premarital relationships, which are considered socially unacceptable for most women). The study found that women, especially those from minority populations and those with impairments, were at the highest risk of experiencing coercive sexual or romantic interactions.

Three studies included in the evaluation revealed that victim-survivors had encountered financial ramifications as a result of DSVH. These consequences encompassed job loss, challenges in securing alternative employment, limitations on professional endeavors, and financial expenditures for psychological treatment. In their study, [6] discovered that of the 139 individuals in their sample who experienced non-consensual sharing of personal photographs, 7% reported job loss, and an additional 7% had challenges in securing new employment following victimization. A separate study discovered that 12% (with a total sample size of 132) of individuals who had experienced DSVH chose to allocate funds toward counseling or psychiatric therapy to address the consequences of their traumatic experiences.

The reviews have identified many effects, such as aggressive conduct, eating disorders, frequent smoking, and violence. [19]discovered that the victim-survivor's trauma led to the development of eating disorders. The study also revealed that individuals who have been victimized by online dating violence exhibit altered behavioral patterns, including the development of violent or aggressive behaviors towards those in their immediate vicinity.

Three investigations investigated the physiological consequences of DSVH victimization, encompassing sleep disturbances, alterations in dietary patterns,

unexplained reduction in body weight, and temporary rapid heart rate. In [22] study, it was discovered that 4.1% of women (n = 148) experienced physical repercussions as a result of cardiovascular issues. In the study conducted by [22], individuals who experienced domestic violence reported several physical symptoms associated with stress, such as difficulty breathing, loss of consciousness, and sleep disturbances.

Women in the studies exhibited various coping mechanisms in response to DSVH, such as remaining silent, refraining from taking any action, implementing risk-reducing strategies, distancing themselves from virtual life, seeking informal assistance, or reporting the incident through professional and formal channels. These acts, or lack thereof, are directly or indirectly linked to several factors, such as cultural context, access to family or professional assistance, concern about potential physical injury as a result, and knowledge about DSVH and reporting.

Various individual acts were identified as victim-survivors disconnecting or disengaging themselves from virtual life. These activities include disabling, deleting, or altering social media profiles or phone numbers, as well as ceasing to access the internet. In order to mitigate the possibility of harassment, individuals have adopted self-censorship techniques such as limiting their use of social media and the internet. This includes uploading fewer photos, videos, and comments, as well as erasing personal photos or using non-face images on social networking platforms. Victim-survivors also engaged in direct action, including as barring perpetrators from their contact lists or on a device or app, and even addressing the offender and requesting that they cease their actions. In a study conducted by [27], it was found that over 81% of the participants (n = 139) reported using the action of blocking the offender as a response to DSVH.

Multiple studies have discovered that victim-survivors of harassment often employ the approach of "ignoring the harasser or harassment" or growing a "thick skin" in order to perceive this form of harassment as a normal part of women's daily existence. Occasionally, the higher authority enforced the approach of disregarding the abuse, or family members observed that certain victims who survived the abuse resorted to self-distraction techniques to deal with their victimization. These techniques included activities such as exercising, shopping, sleeping excessively, taking sedative medication, and seeking advice from medical professionals. In [28] research, it was discovered that 4% of the participants (n = 329) engaged in therapy sessions with someone they were connected to, such as family members, friends, classmates, or clergy members. Additionally, the survey revealed that certain participants admitted to employing a tactic of apologizing to their acquaintances on social media, claiming that their accounts had been compromised.

The study revealed that victim-survivors most frequently sought support from their family members, friends, and other close individuals. Specifically, 49% of the victim-survivors (n=150) mentioned the incidences to their family members or friends. Research conducted by [29] revealed that survivors of online harassment employed the strategy of leveraging the perpetrator's acquaintances or others with shared trust to persuade the offender to delete the distributed photographs from social media platforms. Research indicates that women who have experienced DSVH (Digital sexual violence and harassment) in Low- and Middle-Income Countries are reluctant to report such instances through official channels. Multiple studies have indicated that individuals who have been victimized and managed to survive did not disclose their experiences to law enforcement authorities. Conversely, [30] conducted a study which revealed that just a minority, specifically 4% of participants (n = 197), chose to report the incident to the police. Nevertheless, individuals who survived the event also indicated their inclination

to maintain its confidentiality. The reduced frequency of reporting to the police can be attributed to various factors, such as familial pressure, apprehension of being victimized again, unfavorable perceptions of law enforcement agencies, concerns about inadequate justice, and challenges in verifying the authenticity of evidence, such as screenshots.

Certain female professionals who encountered DSVH sought assistance or reported mistreatment to their supervisor or employer. Research findings indicated that while higher authorities acknowledged online sexual harassment as a significant concern, they often lacked the necessary resources and expertise to effectively address such issues. Consequently, complaints were frequently resolved with minimal penalties. Additionally, a study found that individuals who experienced harassment preferred seeking assistance from non-governmental organizations due to their ability to provide convenient and confidential support. The investigations discovered several obstacles that prevent people from getting help. Several individuals have reported that a significant number of survivors of traumatic and forced sexual violence choose not to disclose their experiences for various reasons. These reasons include the fear of facing social stigma and being labeled as a survivor, a cultural environment that promotes shame and fear of tarnishing one's reputation, pressure from employers, concerns about family honor, and pressure from family members to remain silent. Two studies have indicated that distrust or unfavorable attitudes/experiences act as obstacles to reporting incidents to the police.

Multiple studies have highlighted obstacles rooted in deeply ingrained patriarchal or gender stereotypes, misogynistic societal standards, attitudes that blame women for being victims, and cultures that shame women for their sexual behavior. Several research have indicated that a deficiency in adequate understanding of victimization and reporting serves as an obstacle to obtaining help. Additionally, the phenomenon of "moral panic" has also resulted in increased instances of assigning blame to victims and subjecting them to further persecution. Additionally, it was discovered that the fear of experiencing physical danger as a consequence of revealing an incident was a significant obstacle [31]. Occasionally, victims who have survived the incidents have reported them to the appropriate web venues. Nevertheless, it was noted that the reluctance of platforms to acknowledge the victim-survivor's perspective, along with the issue of "community standards," dissuaded them from lodging complaints. This poses a challenge for women in low- and middle-income countries since although pictures of fully clothed women may not technically violate the platform's rules, they can nonetheless be employed to subject women to harassment within a South Asian cultural context.

Various studies have identified several factors that facilitate help-seeking and disclosure of DSVH. These include exposing the culture of harassment, whistleblowing to alert others, relieving the burden of proof, challenging victim-blaming cultures by exposing perpetrators, utilizing professional and online support groups, providing media literacy training for female journalists, and receiving government support. Comprehending the sociocultural environment of technology for social and behavior change interventions in low- and middle-income countries.

The review found that socio-cultural circumstances and gender inequality have a significant influence on DSVH in low- and middle-income countries. The socio-cultural factors that were specifically identified include gender norms, the acceptance of sexist or sexual behavior towards women, traditional power structures that favor men, dominant perspectives that uphold male dominance, cultures that blame victims based on their gender, the presence of moral panic in society, conservative religious beliefs, social

stigma, and prevailing attitudes of male dominance. These factors have been discussed in various studies.

Several studies have shown that the pervasive acceptance of sexism and misogynistic behavior towards women, which occurs both online and in physical environments, is essentially the same. This online behavior is an extension of the offline behavior that is considered socially acceptable. In conservative Islamic societies, women are often solely held responsible for their victimization online, particularly in the context of online dating, which is deemed unacceptable prior to marriage. The presence of victim-blaming or slut-shaming culture, along with the patriarchal power structure within families and the normalization of gender-based violence, not only contributes to a prevailing culture online but also obstructs women from coming forward and reporting incidents of DSVH to the police and relevant organizations.

Discussion:

Digital sexual violence and harassment (DSVH) encompasses a variety of destructive actions carried out using digital platforms, including social media, messaging applications, and online forums, with the intention of targeting and victimizing individuals. The increasing incidence of Digital sexual violence and harassment (DSVH) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is a significant issue, mirroring the global trend of technology being used for harmful reasons. Gaining a deep understanding of the intricacies of DSVH is essential for creating impactful treatments and policies that may effectively tackle the distinct obstacles experienced by victims in low- and middle-income countries.

DSVH has various manifestations, such as the unauthorized dissemination of intimate photographs or videos (often referred to as "revenge porn"), online harassment and stalking, manipulation using digital methods, and the utilization of technology to regulate or surveil victims' actions. These actions can cause significant psychological, social, and economic consequences for victims, worsening their underlying weaknesses and obstacles to getting assistance. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where there may be little availability of legal and support services, the repercussions of DSVH can be very grave.

An essential obstacle in tackling technology-enabled sexual violence and abuse (DSVH) in low- and middle-income countries is the requirement to overcome cultural norms, social attitudes, and legal frameworks that may not sufficiently acknowledge or address instances of abuse facilitated by technology. The perception and handling of DSVH within communities might be influenced by cultural views around gender roles, privacy, and relationships. This highlights the significance of employing culturally sensitive strategies that involve local stakeholders, such as community leaders, advocacy groups, and government agencies, in order to increase awareness and facilitate substantial transformation.

Furthermore, the digital environment in low- and middle-income countries has distinct obstacles and prospects in addressing the issue of tobacco, alcohol, and substance use (DSVH). Although the availability of the internet and widespread usage of smartphones have boosted options for connection and economic involvement, they have also opened up new channels for carrying out abusive actions. This emphasizes the necessity for all-encompassing digital literacy initiatives that enable persons to securely navigate online environments, identify indicators of DSVH, and avail themselves of support resources when necessary.

Aside from preventive measures and awareness campaigns, there is an urgent requirement for strong legal and policy frameworks that thoroughly tackle the issue of

DSVH. This encompasses unambiguous delineations of DSVH transgressions, protocols for reporting and probing occurrences, and procedures for aiding victims and ensuring culpability of wrongdoers. Enhancing cooperation among law enforcement, technology corporations, civil society organizations, and foreign partners is crucial for creating and executing efficient strategies to combat Digital sexual violence and harassment in low- and middle-income countries.

Additionally, tackling DSVH necessitates a comprehensive approach that combines health, justice, education, and social welfare measures. Health systems must possess the necessary resources and capabilities to offer trauma-informed treatment and mental health assistance to survivors. It is important for these systems to acknowledge the interconnectedness of trauma from sexual violence and other types of violence and discrimination. Legal reforms should provide primary importance to the rights and protection of victims, with a focus on implementing measures like as restraining orders, evidence preservation, and accessible and culturally acceptable channels for seeking reparation.

To effectively address Digital sexual violence and harassment in Low- and Middle-Income Countries, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive and tailored approach that encompasses prevention, education, legal reform, and support services. Through the active involvement of various stakeholders, the promotion of digital literacy, and the support for comprehensive changes, it is feasible to establish online settings that are both safer and more inclusive. These environments would allow individuals to freely exercise their rights and live without experiencing violence or exploitation.

Conclusion:

Population surveys using probability sample methodologies are widely regarded as the most reliable method for obtaining accurate data on violence against women and girls. However, in situations where conducting such surveys is not possible, social media recruitment can be a viable alternative. This approach is a viable strategy for doing sensitive research without face-to-face encounters, especially in situations when conventional survey methods are hindered by financial limitations, political influences, or concerns over the safety of participants and researchers. An internet-based survey on Violence against Women and Girls in Iran was conducted, and the results were reported. The survey was carried out utilizing a sample acquired from social media. The findings offer significant insights into the frequency and consequences of various types of violence against women and girls among Iranian women. Social media recruitment is a very efficient strategy that specifically focuses on reaching a wide range of persons from different and underprivileged backgrounds. An in-depth understanding of the intricacies of violence, including its different forms, possible connections, the individuals accountable, and the surrounding circumstances, can greatly improve the efficacy of specific preventive actions and support provisions. Although the preliminary findings may appear encouraging, we contend that it is important to be cautious when analyzing social media data and making conclusions about the whole victim community. Further study and improvement are necessary to improve the efficiency and dependability of social media recruiting tactics for collecting varied accounts of violence against women and girls.

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