

TECHNOLOGY- FACILITATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (TFSV) AND COVID-19

ENHANCING VICTIM
SERVICES PROJECT

CENTER ON VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN AND CHILDREN
RUTGERS SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

SUPPORTED BY A VICTIMS OF CRIME
ACT (VOCA) GRANT: VOCA - V-84-18
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Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Internet usage has increased[1], making college students more vulnerable to sexual violence online. Rutgers is committed to creating a safe environment for students, both offline and online, by providing the following information about technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV).

WHAT IS TFSV?

There are four types of TFSV:[2]

- Digital Sexual Harassment: Unwanted or unwelcome sexual behavior conducted online, such as sexual photos or texts
- Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Distributing sexually explicit images of another person without their consent, often referred to as revenge pornography
- Sexual Aggression and Coercion: Pressuring someone for sex online, using an online platform to meet someone and then sexually assault them, or sharing images of sexual assault
- Gender and Sexuality-Based Harassment: Harassment based on one's gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation that occurs online

HOW OFTEN DOES IT OCCUR?

Studies show that prevalence rates vary based on the type of violence, ranging from 20%[3] to 62%[4].

WHO ARE MOST AT RISK?

- Women more often than men experience TFSV[5]
- Those who identify as LGBTQ+ more often experience TFSV than those who do not[6]
- 18-24 year olds experience online sexual violence more than older age groups[7]

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF TFSV?

- Worsens mental health, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem[8],[9]
- Reduces Internet usage, which prevents victims from accessing online services and supports[10] that are especially prevalent during COVID-19[11]
- Associated with risky behaviors including binge drinking, substance use, and contracting an STI[12]
- Interrupts professional, academic, and social lives, which have moved primarily online, through a new phenomenon called "zoombombing,"[13] where an uninvited person disrupts a video conference call

HOW DOES TFSV IMPACT MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES?

Students of various identities may face multiple forms of violence online, magnifying the effects of TFSV:

- One out of four Black Americans and one out of 10 Hispanic Americans report online harassment due to their race/ethnicity[14]
- Online racism against communities of color, especially Asians, has increased during COVID-19[15]
- LGBTQ+ youth experience nearly three times the amount of online bullying and harassment than non-LGBTQ+[16]

These forms of violence can occur simultaneously with TFSV, worsening the impacts on the victim

HOW CAN POLICY MAKERS ADDRESS TFSV?

UN Women recommends the following strategies:[17]

- Use evidence-based measures to address TFSV
- Inform Internet users about how to report TFSV and access services online
- Strengthen commitment to addressing online sexual exploitation of children
- Share examples of best practices of addressing TFSV
- Collaborate with women's rights organizations to develop best practices of fostering safe online communities

HOW CAN VICTIM SERVICES PROVIDERS ADDRESS TFSV?

UN Women recommends several strategies: [18]

- Prepare helplines to respond to victims of TFSV
- Strengthen awareness of TFSV and how to report it
- Provide strategies and resources to identify, document, and report TFSV
- Include incidents of TFSV in bystander intervention trainings
- Understand that certain communities experience multiple forms of violence online that combine with sexual violence

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF TFSV

Visit the RAINN at:
<https://www.rainn.org/>



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