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Navigating the Digital World Safely: Understanding and Fighting GBTDV

In today's world, our lives are increasingly connected online – from social media to gaming, it's where we spend time, learn, and express ourselves. However, just like in the real world, the digital space presents its own challenges. One big one is **Gender-Based Technology-Driven Violence (GBTDV)**, also known as Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV). It sounds serious, and it is, but understanding it is the first step to staying safe and helping others.

What is GBTDV? GBTDV is when digital tools – like social media, messaging apps, and online forums – are used to hurt people based on their gender. This isn't just about mean comments; it includes really serious stuff that can lead to physical, emotional, or even financial harm. It affects everyone, but **it disproportionately targets women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other marginalized groups**. Globally, **66% of women have reported experiencing TFGBV**, including instances of cyber-harassment, stalking, doxxing, and image-based sexual abuse.

Here are some common ways GBTDV shows up:

- **Cyberstalking:** This is persistent, unwanted surveillance or contact online, like someone constantly tracking your online movements or sending threatening messages.
- **Online Harassment:** Sending offensive, threatening, or abusive messages through digital platforms. Imagine getting a flood of hateful comments just for sharing your opinion.
- **Doxxing:** This is super dangerous – it's when someone shares your private information (like your home address or phone number) online without your permission.
- **Non-consensual Sharing of Intimate Images (Revenge Porn):** This is when someone shares private, explicit photos or videos of you without your consent, often to shame or get revenge.
- **Deepfake Technology:** AI-generated fake videos or images used to harm individuals, often for non-consensual explicit content. Did you know that **90% of deepfake videos involve non-consensual explicit content, and nearly all of them target women?**
- **Gender-based Hate Speech:** Spreading mean or violent content targeting people because of their gender.

Why Does This Matter to You? GBTDV isn't just a distant problem; it's a significant threat to **personal safety, mental health, and freedom of expression**. Victims often experience emotional distress, damage to their reputation, and in extreme cases, even physical harm. Because it's online, this kind of violence can spread quickly, last a long time, and be hard to control.

Another thing to be aware of is how misinformation and fake news tie into this. **False news spreads six times faster than real news, especially on social media. Be critical about the content you read** – sometimes false news or advertisements can appear even in publicly trusted sources. Gender-based misinformation, like fake stories, can gain traction because it plays on emotions and biases. And guess what? This fake news and gendered misinformation actually **fuel online harassment**.

How to Protect Yourself Online: You have the power to protect yourself and help create a safer online space!

- **Boost Your Privacy:** Always use **strong, unique passwords** (min. 8 characters including Capital letters, small letters, numbers, and special signs) and enable **two-factor authentication (2FA)** on all your accounts. Regularly check and tighten your **privacy settings** on social media platforms.
- **Think Before You Share:** Be really careful about what personal information you share online, especially intimate images or sensitive details. Once it's out there, it's hard to get back. If you get any violent message, report it to the respective authorities, yet don't forward it further to anyone else, even your friends or family members (e.g., by complaining about the messages you get) – if you do so, you are a part of the crime.
- **Recognize the Red Flags:** Be aware of patterns of control or intimidation, and how technology can be used to harass or monitor others.
- **Don't Engage with Trolls:** If someone is harassing you, **do not engage with them** – it often makes the harassment worse. Instead, **document and report threats** by taking screenshots and reporting them to platform administrators or, if necessary, law enforcement.
- **Use Digital Self-Defense Tools:** There are apps and browser extensions designed to help. For example, **Block Party** helps filter toxic messages on Twitter/X, and **StopNCII.org** helps victims of non-consensual image abuse remove their photos from the internet. **Google Reverse Image Search** can help you verify if images are fake or manipulated.
- **Seek Support:** Remember, **you are not alone**. If you or someone you know is experiencing GBTDV, **you can find support and report it**. Organisations like **Cyber Civil Rights Initiative**

(CCRI) offer support for victims, and online therapy and support groups are available. Don't be afraid to reach out to helplines or counselling services.

By being mindful of our online actions, understanding the risks, and knowing how to respond, we can all contribute to a safer and more respectful digital environment.

👉 The Erasmus MEDEA project: Developing Media Literacy to debunk gender-related media manipulation and fake news n. 2024-1-LV01-KA210-ADU-000243248 - deals with these topics. To learn more, visit the Facebook page and the project website to access the Media Literacy Toolkit and utilize its contents.

👉 For more information about the MEDEA project and to access the Toolkit, visit <https://www.facebook.com/MedeaErasmusProject> and <https://www.jelgavaszontaklubs.lv/projects/>

References:

Block Party App: <https://www.blockpartyapp.com/how-it-works>

Cyber Civil Rights Initiative: <https://cybercivilrights.org/>

FAQs: Digital abuse, trolling, stalking, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>

STOPC NCCI Org: <https://stopncii.org/>