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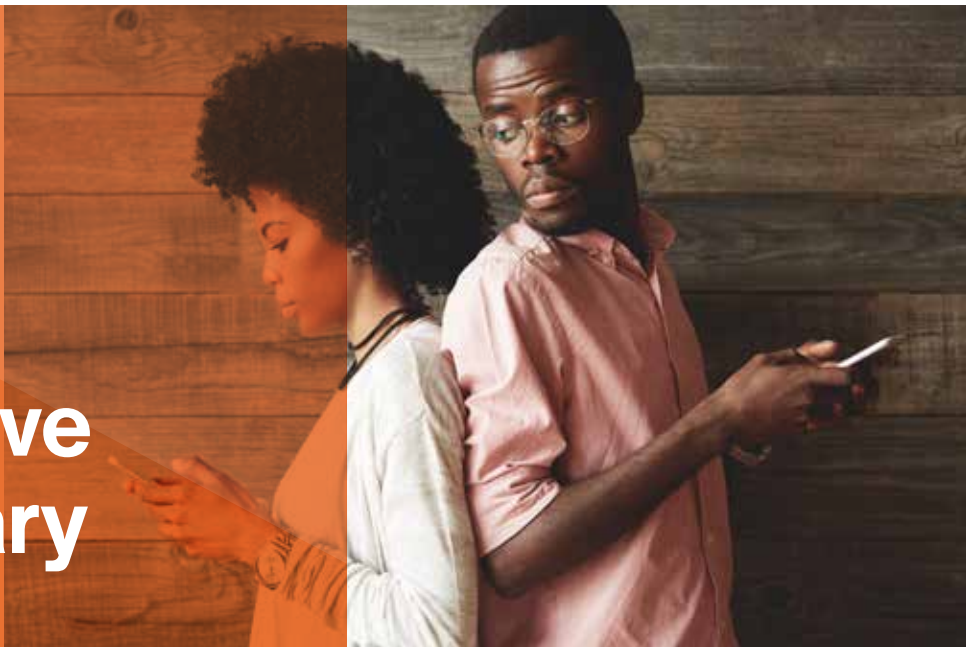
POLICY BRIEF

Online Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria:

Evidence, Gaps and Priorities for Reform



Executive Summary



Online gender-based violence (OGBV), an abuse committed or amplified through internet-based platforms -is a significant but under-measured form of violence against women and girls in Nigeria, closely related to the broader concept of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV),¹ with which it is often used interchangeably. The 2024 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) gives the first nationally representative estimate: 1.6% of women aged 15–49 have ever experienced TFGBV, with strangers the most common perpetrators (60% of cases, against 14% for current or former boyfriends) (NPC & ICF, 2025). Other evidence shows women account for 58% of documented online harms, and that harm concentrates on a few platforms, chiefly X and Facebook, which together carry roughly two-thirds of reported incidents (Gatefield, 2025; Adamu, 2025). OGBV disproportionately harms women, while legal and institutional responses have not

kept pace, and AI-generated image-based sexual abuse is emerging as one of the fastest-evolving forms of abuse, exposing a clear gap in current law, which criminalises synthetic sexual imagery of children but not of adults (Brown, 2026; Cybercrimes Act, 2015, s. 23(4)).

The brief sets out five priority actions: (1) enact a standalone offence covering image-based sexual abuse, including AI-generated content, through the pending amendment to the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act; (2) strengthen national measurement via the NDHS TFGBV module and the National Electronic GBV Dashboard; (3) build digital-forensics and digital-evidence capacity across law enforcement and the justice system; (4) strengthen enforcement of the Nigeria Data Protection Act for victim protection and content takedown; and (5) expand survivor-centred reporting, legal assistance and psychosocial support.

¹ This brief uses online gender-based violence (OGBV) for abuse occurring on internet-based platforms, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as the broader term covering abuse committed or facilitated through any digital technology, including SMS, phone calls, GPS or location trackers, stalkerware, and offline-but-technology-enabled harassment. Where a cited source uses the terms interchangeably, that usage is followed.

What OGBV is, and why it is a distinct policy problem

OGBV is abuse or violent acts directed at people because of their gender, carried out or amplified through digital technology (APC, 2017; UNFPA, 2026). It sits on the continuum of violence against women and girls, rather than constituting a separate category. It causes real offline harm such as psychological trauma, reputational destruction, loss of employment, intimate-partner violence, forced migration and, in some cases, suicide (UNFPA, 2024; Agbana, 2023; Osemobor & Journalists for Christ, 2025). It also silences women, driving them out of public life, politics, journalism and online economic activity to escape abuse (UNFPA, 2026; Osemobor & Journalists for Christ, 2025).

Nigeria is a strategic case: Africa's most populous country and one of its

fastest-growing digital markets, with roughly 103 million internet users as of January 2024 (Statista, 2024; DataReportal, 2026). Yet women are already markedly less likely than men to be online (Brown, 2026; UNFPA, 2025). For those who are, abuse compounds existing barriers to women's digital participation, making safe and inclusive online spaces an urgent policy priority.

OGBV takes many forms, including online harassment, cyberstalking, sextortion, non-consensual intimate image sharing, impersonation, doxxing and technology-enabled trafficking (Brain Builders, 2025; UNFPA Nigeria, 2023).

The state of the evidence

Nigeria's data consist of **one nationally representative survey estimate** plus higher figures from sectoral and civil-society studies. These are **not directly comparable**: they measure different populations, behaviours and definitions. The 2024 NDHS is the only probability-sample survey measuring TFGBV, interviewing 27,692 women aged 15–49 about four acts, public humiliation online because she is a woman, threatening messages, and non-consensual sending or sharing of sexual images (NPC & ICF, 2025). On that basis, 1.6% of women have ever experienced at least one act (1.2% in the past year), and 60% of survivors named a stranger as perpetrator, against 14% a boyfriend and 11% a male friend.

Other Nigerian and regional studies report much higher “digital abuse” figures typically 45–60% because they use broader definitions and draw on women already active online or already seeking support (Gatefield, 2025; Derex-Briggs, 2026; ActionAid in Brown, 2026). One survey of 223 women across all 36 states found abuse near-uniform across regions and classes, with women aged 15–25 most exposed; its independent agreement with the NDHS on the dominance of stranger perpetration strengthens that finding (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2025).

TABLE 1 - National and Supporting Evidence on Online Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Tier	Indicator	Figure	Year
A	Women 15–49 who have ever experienced TFGBV (national baseline)	1.6% (12-mo: 1.2%)	2024
A	Of survivors, share naming a stranger as perpetrator	60% (boyfriend 14%)	2024
A	Total GBV cases recorded federally in nine months	10,326	2025
B	Documented online harms in Nigeria targeting women	58% (men 42%)	2024
B	Nigerian women online experiencing ≥1 form of digital abuse	60% (6 in 10)	2021
B	Nigerian women experiencing cyberstalking	45%	2026
B	States (of 36 + FCT) meeting any of five OGBV-response essentials	0 of 37	2025
C	Deepfake sexual content that targets women (global)	90–95%	2025
C	Nigerian women/girls exposed to AI-facilitated abuse yearly by 2030	70m (projected)	2026

Sources: NDHS 2024 (NPC & ICF, 2025); Gatefield 2025, 2026; TechHer 2021; FMoWA 2025; Fall 2025.

Where the harm happens

Harm concentrates on a small number of platforms, though evidence strength varies. Nationally comparable evidence shows that X accounts for 34% of documented harmful experiences, followed by Facebook (29%), WhatsApp (12%), and YouTube and Snapchat (1% each). Responsiveness is poor: Instagram is judged the most responsive (26%), while X is the least responsive (24%) (Gatefield, 2025). Reach differs from harm: the platforms women use most are WhatsApp (91.9%), Instagram (51.8%), YouTube (50.9%), TikTok (47.7%), Facebook (47.3%) and X (41.4%) (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2025).

Beyond social media, Nigerian legal and policy texts recognise abuse through mobile calls, SMS and email - harassment via repeated calls, texts and emails is explicitly treated as technology-enabled abuse (APC, 2017; Cybercrimes Act, 2015). A Nigerian text4life pilot received 3,403 SMS reports over 27 months, 34.9% of them GBV-related, evidence that SMS is a valuable reporting channel, not a measure of its prevalence as a channel of perpetration. Unlike X and Facebook, no nationally representative data estimate the contribution of phone, SMS or email.

TABLE 2 - Online Gender-Based Violence by Platform: Patterns, Forms and Evidence Status

Platform / channel	National share	Dominant forms & evidence status
X (Twitter)	34%	Pile-ons, doxxing, misogynistic attacks, AI image abuse. Lowest responsiveness (24%). MEASURED.
Facebook	29%	Impersonation, sextortion, trafficking recruitment, comment-thread shaming. MEASURED share.
WhatsApp	12%	NCII forwarding, sextortion, group harassment in encrypted chats. MEASURED share.
Instagram	-	Sextortion, impersonation, NCII via DMs/stories. Most responsive (26%). Share only in samples.
TikTok	-	Non-consensual filming/posting, comment harassment; 4.8m+ Nigerian videos removed Q1 2026. GAP in national share.
YouTube	1%	Re-uploaded NCII (often monetised), hostile comments, smear content. MEASURED low share.
Snapchat	1%	Youth-focused; harmful content circulates; limited TFGBV-specific analysis. Evidence thin.
Phone / SMS / Email	-	Threatening calls, texts and emails; cyberstalking. Recognised in law; channel evidence only, no national %.
All platforms	-	50% of Nigerians face online abuse regularly; 58% of harms target women; 31% say content is never removed. SYSTEMIC.

Sources: Gatefield 2025, 2026; Akiyode-Afolabi 2025; Ibeh 2026; NDHS 2024.

The evidence demonstrates the scale of the problem. The next question is whether Nigeria's legal framework is equipped to respond.

Emerging trends and policy gaps



Current legal framework and remaining gaps

Nigeria has several applicable instruments: the Cybercrimes Act 2015, the Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act 2024, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 and the Nigeria Data Protection Act 2023. Together they give partial protection, covering cyberstalking, identity theft, unlawful data processing and some harassment but none was designed for AI-generated sexual imagery or coordinated image-based abuse. The Cybercrimes Act is the principal criminal statute: s.24 criminalises cyberstalking and threats, s.22 identity theft, and s.23(4) child sexual abuse material including realistic synthetic images of a child. The 2024 amendment extended liability for insider disclosure of personal data beyond financial institutions (ss.4 & 6). The Data Protection Act adds civil remedies: erasure (s.34), objection (s.36), complaints (s.46) and cease-and-desist orders (ss.47–49) but is

built to regulate organisations, not prosecute individuals.

Three gaps remain. First, there is no standalone offence for non-consensual intimate images or AI-generated sexual imagery involving adults synthetic images of children are covered under s.23, but equivalent adult protection does not exist, forcing reliance on indirect provisions. Second, the law does not reach coordinated attacks by hundreds or thousands of accounts, so organised pile-ons fall outside most provisions. Third, enforcement capacity is weak: limited digital-forensics capability to authenticate AI content, no standardised evidence-preservation protocols, and few specialist investigators and prosecutors (Adamu, 2025). These legal and institutional gaps are further exposed by the rapid emergence of AI-enabled image-based abuse.

AI-generated abuse is reshaping online gender-based violence

Recent Nigerian cases show how generative AI has created new forms of abuse. In late 2025, AI-generated nude images of a prominent Nigerian musician circulated on X after users employed image-editing tools to "digitally undress" women, while a well-known actress faced similar abuse earlier that year (Adamu, 2025). Investigative reporting also documents the growing use of "nudify" applications to generate synthetic sexual images from ordinary photographs of women and girls. Although these cases do not measure national prevalence, they

demonstrate how rapidly AI-enabled abuse is evolving and why existing legal protections are becoming inadequate. (Gatefield, 2026; UNFPA, 2025).

Nigeria reflects a global trend: 90–95% of deepfake sexual content targets women (Fall, 2025). Gatefield (2026) projects that by 2030 roughly 70 million Nigerian women and girls could be exposed annually to AI-facilitated abuse, with around 30 million directly targeted, the modelled projections, not current prevalence, but indicative of the scale of risk.

Where remedies fall short

Legislative reform alone will therefore not suffice. The question is not only whether remedies exist in law, but whether survivors can access them and barriers appear at almost every stage. Survivors continue to face barriers throughout reporting, investigation and access to justice. At the platform, 31% of Nigerians say harmful content is never removed; only 24% find X responsive, and even Instagram, the best performer, is judged responsive by just 26% (Gatefield, 2025). "No policy violation" responses to AI abuse show self-remediation cannot be relied upon (Brown, 2026). At reporting, only 16% of abused respondents went to the police and 39% did not know where to report; the

barriers were social such as fear of stigma (59.5%), lack of evidence (45.8%) and fear of retaliation (44.4%) (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2025).

At the level of the state, an assessment of all 36 states and the FCT against five response essentials returned a negative on every one, in every jurisdiction: no trained digital-forensics teams and no standardised evidence protocols, so even a willing investigator lacks the tools to build a case (Adamu, 2025). For LGBTQ+ survivors of "kito" entrapment, reporting is effectively impossible, exposing them to prosecution under the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013.

The cost of inaction

The harms are often dismissed as “just online,” but the documented consequences are material. At the individual level, survivors face reputational destruction, loss of income, isolation and severe psychological harm; officials have noted that non-consensual image sharing and online blackmail have caused severe trauma and, in some cases, fatalities (FMoWA in Falaju, 2025). Image-based abuse is especially damaging because content persists and re-circulates indefinitely, the harm does not end when a post is removed.

Beyond individual harm, widespread online abuse undermines public trust in digital platforms, weakens women's participation in the digital economy, and increases the long-term costs of prevention, law enforcement and victim support. (UNFPA, 2024, 2026). These effects weaken Nigeria's digital economy, reduce women's participation in innovation, and erode trust in digital governance and are likely to intensify as technology evolves (Gatefield, 2026; Brown, 2026).



Recommendations

The actions below are set out in the order a policymaker would act on them, each naming a responsible body and a specific mechanism.

A. Legislative reform

The National Assembly should enact a standalone offence of image-based sexual abuse through the pending amendment to the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015. It should cover three things current law does not: non-consensual sharing of real intimate images; the threat to share them (the mechanism of sextortion); and synthetic or AI-generated sexual imagery, defined by absence of consent rather than authenticity of the image, so that an adult deepfake is caught on the same terms s.23(4) of the Cybercrimes Act already applies to a child.

The Senate–UNODC framework in development through 2026 (ADBN TV, 2026) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s 2026 model provisions supply drafting language, and the offence should carry both a criminal penalty and a fast civil takedown order a survivor can obtain without waiting for prosecution. In parallel, the Assembly should amend s.24 of the Cybercrimes Act to name gendered online abuse as a distinct category and reach coordinated harassment by multiple actors, aligning with CEDAW General Recommendation 35 (LIRAD, 2025).

B. Data and monitoring

The 2024 NDHS proved a national TFGBV measure is feasible; the task is to deepen it. The National Population Commission should retain and expand the TFGBV module in the next DHS round, widening the act list beyond the current four to capture doxxing, impersonation and coordinated harassment, and disaggregating findings by state and complementing them with periodic surveys

of women who are active online. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs should give the relaunched National Electronic GBV Dashboard an explicit technology-facilitated category, with sub-fields for platform, abuse type and perpetrator relationship, so administrative case data can finally be separated from the general GBV count (NPC & ICF, 2025).

C. Enforcement capability

A new offence without capacity to enforce it changes little. The Nigeria Police Force and NAPTIP need trained digital-forensics capacity able to authenticate AI content and preserve platform evidence to an admissible standard under s.84 of the

Evidence Act. The Ministry of Justice should issue a standardised evidence-preservation and chain-of-custody protocol for OGBV cases, and a designated cadre of prosecutors should be trained in digital-evidence cases.

D. Regulation and survivor response

The Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) should actively enforce its March 2026 consent directive by pursuing content takedowns, publishing the outcome of its TikTok investigation as a precedent, and prioritising cases involving insider data leakage. The Commission already has important powers under the Nigeria Data Protection Act, including cease-and-desist and erasure orders (ss.34, 47), making data-protection enforcement the most immediate mechanism for removing harmful content while criminal law reforms are pending.

Funders and civil society should expand survivor-facing services that the state does not yet provide, including incident-response

platforms such as BBYDI HerSafeSpace Chatbot "Kemi", volunteer legal assistance and psychosocial support, with case-level information managed under survivor-consent protocols and secure data storage.

The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and its partners should run sustained public legal-awareness campaigns to improve knowledge of reporting mechanisms, legal protections and available support services. Because only a minority of survivors know that protective laws and services exist (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2025), increasing awareness is essential if legal reforms are to translate into remedies that survivors actually use.

Priority and sequencing

As an immediate step requiring no new law, civil society and researchers should file Freedom of Information requests for s.24 prosecution data disaggregated by victim sex and whether the existing law is used for OGBV at all is currently unknown, and that answer shapes the case for reform. The fastest wins do not depend on legislation.

The two green actions need no new law and can start now with existing powers; the amber actions are achievable this cycle given a decision or budget line; the single red action is tied to an external survey cycle. Beginning with the green actions also produces evidence that strengthens the case for the slower reforms.



TABLE 3 - Implementation Roadmap for Priority Reforms

Action	Horizon	Lead	Depends on
Use the NDPA consent directive for takedowns	Now	Data Protection Commission	Nothing — powers exist
FOI request for s.24 prosecution data by victim sex	Now	Civil society / researchers	FOI Act 2011
Add a TFGBV category to the GBV Dashboard	0–6 months	Ministry of Women Affairs	Dashboard relaunch
Digital-evidence protocols & investigator training	6–18 months	Justice / police / NAPTIP	Budget allocation
Image-based sexual abuse offence (incl. AI)	This cycle	National Assembly	VAPP amendment passage
Expand NDHS TFGBV module & disaggregate by state	Next round	Population Commission	Survey cycle & funding

Green = immediate, no new law. Amber = achievable this cycle. Red = tied to survey cycle.

Conclusion

Nigeria now has sufficient evidence to justify decisive action. Nigeria now has sufficient evidence to justify decisive action. Implementing the reforms proposed in this brief would strengthen prevention, improve

survivor protection, close critical legal and institutional gaps, and ensure that Nigeria's response keeps pace with rapidly evolving forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Limitations

This brief draws on published evidence and nationally representative survey data. The 2024 NDHS provides the first national TFGBV estimate but measures only four forms of abuse, and should be read as a conservative baseline (NPC & ICF, 2025). Comparable national data are not available for all platforms; some figures come from

secondary reporting and should be verified against primary sources. Evidence on emerging AI-enabled abuse is drawn largely from documented cases, investigative reporting and expert analysis rather than representative surveys, reflecting the rapidly evolving nature of the phenomenon.

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