



RESEARCH ARTICLE

‘This is going to be with me for the rest of my life’: perceived barriers to reporting technology-facilitated abuse

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Technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) is increasingly prevalent and has devastating impacts, yet policy, criminal justice and practice responses have historically left victim-survivors vulnerable to escalating abuse. The authors conducted a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) of interviews with ten UK-based victim-survivors and professionals to explore their perspectives on barriers and unmet support needs.

RTA findings are summarised through four themes, highlighting the harms and injustices linked to experiences of victimisation, reporting and help seeking. These included navigating hostile terrains, seeking support in the face of inconsistent and ‘patchwork’ provision, and negotiating restrictive and hierarchical understandings of gender-based violence (GBV). The final theme explores the role of TFVA and GBV-specific voluntary sector services (VSO); this was a double-edged theme, indicating that while victim-survivors value VSOs as sites of specialist knowledge and support, professionals delivering these services identified challenges such as the need to keep pace with rapid technological and legislative change and a mounting demand for specialist TFVA support.

Participants’ perspectives are analysed through the lens of empirical and theoretical literature on TFVA and GBV, focusing on the continuum of GBV, and the epistemic, procedural and distributive injustices linked to ‘thin’ conceptions of violence and harm. The analysis is further contextualised in relation to recent legislative and regulatory changes (Online Safety Act 2023).

The authors conclude further research is merited to investigate victim-survivors’ experiences of TFVA reporting and help seeking in relation to the construct of violence work, as part of the nuanced, ‘thick’ conception of harms advanced by TFVA and GBV theorists.

Keywords technology-facilitated abuse • image-based sexual abuse • gender-based violence • violence work

Key messages

- Victim-survivors' and professionals' perspectives underline that TFVA forms part of a continuum of gendered violence, and is linked to significant and long-lasting harm.
- Victim-survivors report engaging in extended and costly efforts to obtain support, which can be interpreted as a form of 'violence work'.
- VSOs are valued for the specialist support they provide, but contend with resource and training issues.
- Further research is needed to elucidate the material impacts of violence work in TFVA victim-survivors' lives.

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Introduction

The past two decades have seen exponential growth in the use of digital technologies, with the internet's 'sociospatial' realm becoming increasingly entangled with our everyday lives (Henry and Powell, 2015). This change has been accompanied by a similarly precipitous increase in the use of technology to perpetrate gender-based violence (GBV), including the non-consensual production and/or dissemination of intimate images (McGlynn et al, 2017) and intrusive cyber monitoring of current or former partners (Brem et al, 2019), in addition to an explosion of harmful but (at least sometimes) lawful speech including misogynistic 'e-bile' directed at women in online spaces (Jane, 2014). Meanwhile, the institutions tasked with supporting victim-survivors and preventing perpetration find themselves in an arms race, outpaced by emergent harms and technological developments.

This article extends the literature on institutional responses to technology-facilitated violence and abuse (TFVA) in a UK practice and policy context, exploring ten victim-survivors' and professionals' perspectives on help and justice seeking, the barriers to accessing safety and support, and the personal cost of reporting through a reflexive thematic analysis of interview data. Our analysis contributes to feminist literature on procedural injustice (Smith et al, 2025), and 'violence work' (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020; Lombard and Proctor, 2025) in relation to GBV.

Literature review and policy context

TFVA encompasses a constellation of unwanted, unjust and intimidatory behaviours which disproportionately harm and/or endanger women and girls and impede their right to safely navigate online and offline spaces. There is an extensive global evidence base regarding TFVA, including prevalence and patterns of victimisation, emotional, social and professional impacts on victim-survivors (Dreißing et al, 2014; Campbell et al, 2022), and perpetrators' instrumentalisation of specific platforms and technologies to exert power and control (Dragiewicz et al, 2019; Eckstein, 2020).

Commonly-recognised forms of TFVA include online sexual harassment and coercion (Drouin et al, 2015; Henry and Powell, 2015), cyberstalking (Alexy et al, 2005), technology-facilitated intimate partner abuse, surveillance and coercive control (Brem et al, 2019), and image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) involving the non-consensual production, sharing, distribution, or threats to distribute, intimate images (Henry and Powell, 2015; Campbell et al, 2022).

TFVA is associated with far-reaching psychological, financial, reputational and interpersonal repercussions (Maple et al, 2011; Henry and Powell, 2015; McGlynn et al, 2019), and is commonly linked with a range of emotional impacts including fear, anxiety, depression, distrust, and anger (Dreißing et al, 2014; Branch et al, 2017; Campbell et al, 2022). However, many support services lack the technological expertise to deal appropriately with those experiencing TFVA (Tanczer et al, 2021), a systemic gap which may prevent victim-survivors from accessing timely and informed support.

Moreover, recent evidence points to a ‘justice gap’ for victim-survivors of TFVA, which parallels failings characteristic of criminal justice responses to other forms of GBV (Temkin and Krahé, 2008). This includes high attrition and a low conviction rate (HM Government, 2021; Refuge, 2023), widespread procedural injustices (Huber, 2025; Smith et al, 2025), and gatekeepers adhering to deep-rooted societal myths about what ‘real’ violence looks like (Gekoski et al, 2023; Gjika, 2024).

Criminal justice frameworks developed in relation to physical violence can also be ill-equipped to conceptualise, recognise and address harms which can occur ‘beyond geographic borders, at vast speeds, to diverse audiences, and often with unparalleled impunity’ owing to digital anonymity (Henry and Powell, 2015: 759). The significance of the deeply ‘embodied’ harms linked to TFVA can elude institutional gatekeepers adhering to a dichotomous view of the ‘real world’ versus the virtual realm ((Henry and Powell, 2015: 759), contributing to epistemic, procedural and distributive injustices for victim-survivors.

In a national context, a report by Egelton (2021) found that 36% of UK women have experienced online abuse. Minoritised women and those in rural areas were found to be disproportionately affected (Egelton, 2021). Glitch UK & End Violence against Women (2020) and Horeck et al (2023) found that online abuse increased or worsened during COVID-19 lockdowns, in line with the increase of offline intimate-partner violence (Bradbury-Jones and Isham, 2020) and internet use (Ofcom, 2020).

This article is situated within the UK context, exploring themes from interviews undertaken during a period of political mobilisation around online and technology-facilitated harms in the UK, on the cusp of major legislative change in the form of the (then) Online Safety Bill.¹

The Online Safety Act (OSA) 2023 seeks to protect UK adults and children by closing gaps in existing legislation and holding technology companies to account, instituting a duty of care for digital platforms providing user-to-user or search services (Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2025). New duties for providers include an obligation to assess and mitigate risk regarding illegal content and activities, as well as a wider responsibility to safeguard children from harmful content ((Department for Science, Innovation & Technology, 2025).

In relation to TFVA, the Act amended the definition of IBSA to remove the ‘intention to cause distress’, and categorised IBSA as a priority offence mandating proactive risk assessment and prevention by platforms. Such changes have been

heralded as bringing UK legislation into closer alignment with ‘the realities of digital harm’ and the needs of victim-survivors (Mortimer et al, 2025: ch 3). However, improvements in ‘legislative form’ are most effective when adequately resourced, underpinned by robust ‘practical function’ and reinforced by a range of remedies outside the criminal justice system (Mortimer et al, 2025: ch 4).

Our analysis speaks to similar complexities in policy and practice, illuminating areas of progress linked to the OSA, such as the redefinition of IBSA to fall more closely in line with victim-survivors’ needs and experiences, as well as institutional challenges currently beyond the scope of the Act, including the persistent minimisation of non-physical coercion and abuse, and the prolonged, under-acknowledged ‘violence work’ associated with TFVA victimisation and help seeking.

Aims of the study

Between March and July 2022 researchers interviewed ten TFVA victim-survivors and professionals as part of a wider study, exploring participants’ perspectives on barriers to disclosure and pathways to accessing safety and support.

Researchers conducted an RTA of this interview data in late 2023, following the passage of the Online Safety Act and ongoing contention around implementation and the horizons of regulatory oversight. The aim of the analysis was to explore the experiences of victim-survivors and professionals from a feminist perspective, with specific attention to interpersonal, cultural, structural and systemic barriers to help seeking, including evolving legislative and regulatory frameworks.

The present article represents a contribution to the burgeoning literature on TFVA, shedding further light on how victim-survivors and professionals perceive and navigate the barriers to, and costs of, help seeking. Further, in light of ongoing contention about the reach and impact of the OSA, the authors sought to amplify the voices and perspectives of those at the frontline: women who had experienced significant and, in many cases, long-lasting harms as a result of TFVA, and the professionals who work to address these harms.

The research questions guiding the RTA were as follows:

1. What do victim-survivors and professionals perceive as the major barriers to reporting and accessing support in relation to TFVA?
2. How do their experiences relate to the continuum of gender-based violence, and the cultural conditions that form a conducive context for GBV?

Theoretical framework

Influential feminist accounts re-envisioned sexual violence as a continuum of interrelated experiences, rather than clearly-defined analytic categories which can be straightforwardly graded by severity or aberrance (Kelly, 1988). Feminist theorists challenged definitions of GBV which privilege isolated instances of extraordinary physical force or criminality, and regard them as distinct from more routine transgressions against women’s sense of safety and agency. In contrast, these theorists

emphasised how patterned, ‘minor’ acts of intimidation and coercion cumulatively shape and constrict women’s ‘ongoing “everyday” reality’ (Kelly and Westmarland, 2016: 114). Contemporary researchers specialising in TFVA have advocated for a similar understanding of IBSA, arguing that such a conceptualisation would more adequately reflect the nature and range of harms experienced and facilitate more comprehensive policy and legislative responses (Henry and Powell, 2015; McGlynn et al, 2017; McGlynn et al, 2021).

Approaching their analysis from a feminist theoretical framework, authors were similarly attentive to potential interconnections and areas of overlap between TFVA and other forms and experiences of GBV, as well as points of distinctiveness and particularity.

Methods

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with five women who had experienced TFVA and five professionals whose roles involved TFVA policy and prevention work or supporting victim-survivors of TFVA. To promote geographic reach and demographic and sectoral inclusion, researchers recruited victim-survivors and professional interviewees through multiple avenues, including volunteer sampling via two UK-wide surveys and purposive snowball sampling through organisational ‘gatekeepers’ at a specialist IBSA support service.

Interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, recorded, and recordings were uploaded to a secure speech-to-text platform. Each transcript generated was reviewed in depth by researchers and corrected to produce accurate verbatim transcripts.

Participants

All participants were women aged 18 and above. Additional demographic details regarding ethnicity, age, sexuality and disability were not solicited prior to interviews, owing to the desire to make the experience as ‘light touch’ and non-invasive as possible, particularly for victim-survivors.

Participants’ lived experiences of TFVA included technology-facilitated stalking and harassment (n = 4), coercive control (n = 1), and IBSA (n = 2). Several interviewees had experienced more than one form of TFVA (Table 1). Professional interviewees occupied a range of roles and sectors, including a specialist online harms service (n = 3), telecommunications (n = 1) and GBV support service (n = 1).

The low number of participants, and the qualitative paradigm within which authors undertook their analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), means that interview findings should not be interpreted as flawed or would-be generalisations about the experiences of all UK victim-survivors or professionals; rather, the present analysis explores the rich and unique perspectives of participants, analysing these in light of the wider theoretical and empirical literature on TFVA, feminist conceptualisations of GBV and social injustice, and institutional and societal responses to these harms.

Table 1: Participant information

Participant number	Lived experience	Sector
VS1	Technology-facilitated harassment and coercive control	
VS2	Technology-facilitated stalking and harassment	
VS3	Technology-facilitated stalking and harassment	
VS4	Image-based sexual abuse	
VS5	Image-based sexual abuse, Technology-facilitated stalking and harassment	
P6		Telecommunications
P7		Specialist online harms
P8		Specialist online harms
P9		Specialist online harms
P10		Specialist GBV

Analysis

The authors chose to conduct an RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022). RTA is a theoretically-flexible and iterative six-stage method for analysing qualitative data which involves: 1. data set familiarisation; 2. data coding; 3. preliminary theme generation; 4. theme elaboration and review; 5. refining, defining and naming themes; and 6. writing up (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Familiarisation, memo creation and coding were undertaken using qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. All coded extracts were iteratively reviewed in relation to codes, candidate themes, the wider dataset and final themes to gauge fit, specificity and significance. The authors created a thematic map to name and disambiguate developing themes and subthemes and visualise their interrelationships.

RTA is grounded in a ‘qualitative sensibility’ or paradigm which understands researcher subjectivity not as a drawback but as a crucial analytical resource, with themes being actively produced by the researchers ‘through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset’ (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 9).

Its theoretical flexibility as an approach left room for both experiential and critical ways of ‘reading’ data, which was beneficial as it enabled authors to develop themes grounded in interviewees’ own words and perspectives, while situating these in relation to sociocultural and discursive contexts.

A critical-realist onto-epistemological framework underpins the present analysis (Gorski, 2013). The authors share a feminist positionality, which takes GBV to be a meaning-laden social phenomenon which emerges from, intersects with and reinforces, material and structural inequalities.

Findings

All themes developed from a mixture of semantic and latent codes but, broadly speaking, two themes – ‘Hostile terrains’ and ‘The internet’s a really big place’ – were based on a more semantic ‘reading’ and exploration of coded extracts, while the remaining two themes – ‘These people know what they are doing’ and ‘Hierarchy of harms’ – were grounded in the text but gained additional shape and resonances

from researchers’ feminist positionality and familiarity with the specialist violence against women and girls (VAWG) sector and wider literature on GBV. See [Figure 1](#) for a thematic map visualising the four themes and their relationship to the two research questions.

Theme: Hostile terrains

One of the earliest and most vivid themes identified during the RTA process was the notion that victim-survivors of TFVA find themselves inhabiting a transfigured world, traversing unfamiliar and often hostile terrains. Participants specifically noted the complexity of available reporting routes and the variability of support services, which left some participants feeling that they were ‘going nowhere’. Others reported encountering overtly hostile digital architecture and gatekeepers, further compounding the harms of TFVA and intensifying the sense of being adrift in an alien landscape.

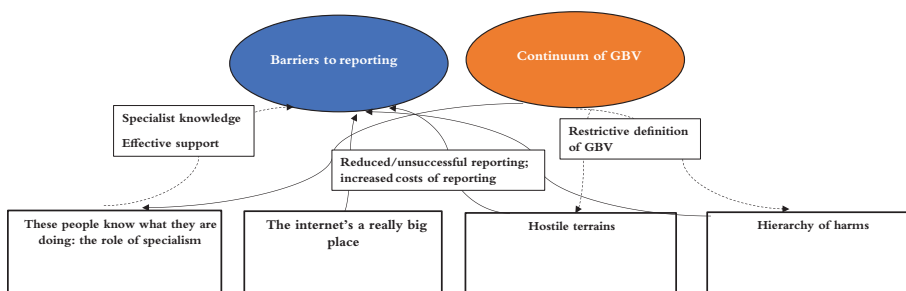
Complex reporting routes

The complexity of available reporting routes was found to deter or complicate formal help seeking, and increase the emotional costs of reporting, at multiple points in victim-survivors’ journeys.

One interviewee recalled her experiences of trying to report persistent and unwanted digital contact by an ex-partner who was living outside of the UK. She described how prior experiences with the options available for reporting harmful or offensive content on social media platforms had deterred her from utilising these to address cyberstalking: ‘Usually you get an automatic response saying “We’ve viewed this and it doesn’t breach our guidelines” ... those smaller incidents and stuff like that, it’s never, never really gone anywhere’ (VS2).

This quote evokes social-media platforms as permissive, minimally-responsive spaces, where tolerance of ‘smaller incidents’ suggests that reporting ‘serious’ incidents is likely to go nowhere. This sense of continuity between ostensibly minor online harms that do not meet the threshold of illegal (or even reportable) conduct, and those which are currently recognised as criminal offences, resonates with feminist

Figure 1 : Thematic map



accounts positioning TFVA as part of a wider continuum or ‘spectrum of harms’ (Harris and Vitis, 2020: 1).

The same participant made initial efforts to report the stalking to the police but encountered barriers owing to its transnational nature:

So I did reach out to the police, but there was a big problem with it being overseas. They couldn’t really do anything. They were just like, ‘Well, we can contact the [other country local] police and it’s up to the [other country local] police if they want to take it further’. (VS2)

While this interviewee was eventually able to regain a sense of safety, she attributed this not to any actions taken by police or other agencies, but to chance; at the point that the stalking began escalating, the COVID-19 pandemic precluded international travel: ‘Luckily, it was during the pandemic, and [other country] closed its borders, but I wouldn’t have put it past him at that stage, that he could have just flown here’ (VS2).

In addition to the specific reporting challenges associated with the ‘borderlessness’ of TFVA, interviewees described tortuous and recursive journeys to access support, sometimes terminating in rebuffs or dead ends. One interviewee, who had experienced intermittent ongoing online harassment linked to IBSA, recounted abortive experiences of trying to access support: ‘The police have put me on to, like, Victim Support before I did contact one at the time ... but it was a [regional] one and they said, “Oh, well, we’ll contact the [adjoining county] one for you”. And they never really got in touch’ (VS5). One professional interviewee shed light on this barrier from a contrasting perspective, arguing that mis-directed referrals can contribute to the recursive and at times frustrating nature of victim-survivors’ help-seeking journeys.

Victim-survivors may have a justifiable sense of being ‘palmed off’ (P7) when moving (or being moved on) from service to service seeking support: ‘People will ... ring up and say, “We’ve been signposted to you by such and such”. But actually their case is not in our remit, which is really frustrating’ (P7). As this quote underlines, help-seeking trajectories were complicated not only by victim-survivors’ own lack of prior knowledge regarding legal frameworks or available services, but by gaps, limitations and/or inconsistencies in professional practice.

Inconsistencies in practice

Another interviewee who had experienced technology-facilitated harassment and coercive control by an ex-partner recalled making multiple reports to police, with varying results:

The police here were quite they were good.... But then it went to the police department [in a] different part of the country. ... And it just like, I really had to push for them to do anything about it. So it’s just kind of hit and miss really. (VS1)

This quote illustrates that reporting TFVA to police can be a demanding and ‘hit-and-miss’ process for victim-survivors, requiring knowledge, evidence collection,

self advocacy and the tenacity to keep ‘pushing’. While there are clearly pockets of good practice, those who choose to report may equally encounter procedural injustice in the form of ineffective, uninformed and potentially even retraumatising practice; safety for the victim-survivor and/or accountability for the perpetrator is therefore by no means a foregone conclusion. Notably, while the interviewee described experiencing a reduction in TFVA over time, she did not view this diminution as the result of any actions taken by the police; rather, she attributed it to inertia on the part of her ex-partner: ‘He’s kind of backed off a bit but has given up like he’s getting remarried I think he’s after all this time eventually he’s kind of given up’ (VS1).

This sense of variability and happenstance in the outcomes for victim-survivors was echoed by one professional interviewee:

It starts with that first response. If someone says, ‘Oh, well, what do you really think the police are going to do about this? ... They’re not going to have a good experience. But if they speak to someone who really understands it ... then they’re gonna have a very different experience. So I think it’s so potluck. (P9)

Hostile by design

Aspects of interviewees’ experiences also illustrated deeper concerns regarding how historically male-dominated institutions conceive of, define and (fail to) react to TFVA, ranging from oversights in design or legislative frameworks to overtly coercive and revictimizing responses by sites hosting stolen content. Such concerns were particularly prominent among professional interviewees, perhaps owing to their greater familiarity with the wider systems that victim-survivors found themselves navigating and the recurring issues that they can experience.

When asked about gaps in the system, one interviewee evoked a spectrum of masculine positionalities, describing how predominantly male technology workspaces can establish path dependencies promoting gender-insensitive design.

The workplace is predominantly men and it suits their agenda for some of them. ... There’s the cohort that just are naive. There’s a cohort that – especially in like tech companies – that are basically probably not the most socially aware ... they’re just not thinking about it So it is just not there by design The design decisions that are made in this kind of, you know, environment [are] defining the opportunities that aggressors and abusers have to attack women. (P6)

Meanwhile, other interviewees observed deficiencies in the legal definition of IBSA, which they felt was rooted in a ‘simplified narrative’ (P8) of what defines and motivates ‘revenge porn’. At the time, the legislation criminalised ‘disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress’ (Criminal Justice and Courts Act, 2015, Sections 33–35). In practice, this definition served to ‘define out’ common, and deeply harmful, patterns of abusive behaviour:

The law in England and Wales is very patchwork. ... It's not fit for purpose ... Really, the intent to cause distress is so detrimental in so many cases ... I've heard everything from 'It's a fetish of mine to share intimate images'. 'Okay. Well, that's, that – you're not causing distress then, so never mind'. (P9)

This statutory emphasis on a narrowly-defined form of *mens rea* associated with rancorous former partners enabled those engaging in 'collector culture' and motivated by, for example, sexual entitlement and homosocial competition and/or camaraderie rather than vengefulness (see [Hall et al, 2022](#)), to evade criminal censure.

Similar shortcomings were identified in relation to commercial content creators whose sexual content had been non-consensually shared in hostile spaces, engendering harassment.

We have girls come in and say that they found their OnlyFans images on another site and we can't help with that because it's not classed as private, sexual, which then obviously once those images are out there, leads to more online harassment and abuse. So it's kind of a vicious circle just because their images are on a public platform, even though it's a paid- behind a paywall, it's not considered private. So I think the law, again, is very narrow. (P7)

The implied dichotomy between deserving/private victims and undeserving/public victims evokes feminist analysis of how some women are constructed as 'unrapeable'. The archetype of the 'legitimate' victim has historically excluded those engaging in sex work, who are seen to have transgressed by 'trespassing the dangerous boundaries between public and private'; still bound by the law, but no longer deemed worthy of its protection ([McClintock, 1992](#): 73).

The final, and most overtly malicious, instantiation of this theme was a subcategory of adult websites who hosted and, in some instances specialised, in non-consensually distributed sexual images. Both victim-survivors and professional interviewees highlighted this issue, noting how, in contrast to the more reputable 'mainstream' adult sites, these marginal sites were less responsive to removal requests, and could be actively hostile.

They're allowing people to post these photos and comments, these nasty, nasty, horrible comments They need to be more accountable. ... It's not only my ex and all these other people that are sharing them. It is these sites that are allowing it. (VS5)

Barriers with the adult sites. They ... make it so difficult. They kind of hide their contact details It can be really time consuming, just finding a contact email address to make that report They'll come back and say, 'Oh, I need your full name. I need a picture of you holding your passport. And I need you to hold up a sign saying this is my content'. They ask for really horrible, like over the top things. (P8)

Notably, these patterns of adversarial or non-response do not smoothly fit into familiar narratives of secondary or re-victimisation; rather, by providing a tolerant or even enthusiastic forum for non-consensual dissemination of intimate images and obstructing removal efforts, such sites become powerful actors in

ongoing victimisation. These accounts also trouble linear understandings of victimisation and recovery, underlining how the distinctive ‘affordances’ (action possibilities; [Norman, 1988](#)) and rhythms of various digital spaces can condition TFVA victim-survivors’ experiences of abuse and help seeking. The second theme further expands upon this finding.

Theme: The internet’s a really big place

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of everyday life, leading to increased internet use and widespread uptake of established and emerging technologies for work, education, commerce, leisure and socialising ([Amankwah-Amoah et al, 2021](#); [Vargo et al, 2021](#)).

As one victim-survivor interviewee noted, there may be unforeseen consequences associated with this rapid transformation, such as the pace and reach of non-consensual image distribution increasing in step with wider use of social-media platforms: ‘In recent years, it’s kind of gone crazy with these photos being shared on this, that and the other. Because obviously, there’s a lot more, you know, online social platforms to use now’ (VS5).

A professional participant specialising in TFVA echoed this sense of escalation, observing that their service had ‘changed a lot in the four years I’ve been here’ (P9). They described how the increasingly ‘linked-in’ nature of social and professional life was placing victim-survivors in a vicious double bind: withdraw from online spaces and forego crucial opportunities for professional and social networking, or refuse to cede these spaces and risk encountering intensifying online and offline abuse.

The more people will share online, the worse it’s going to get because we’ve linked in now Like you can’t win, can you? ... We’ve had people who ... have actually changed their names because they don’t want to be associated with the content anymore. There’s, we’ve had girls, women who can’t apply for jobs So it’s hugely detrimental to careers, how they feel they can express themselves, whether they have any social media. (P9)

This increased connectivity and convergence of professional, personal, virtual and offline identities contrasted with an equally vivid sense of the internet as a borderless and de facto lawless space ([Steel et al, 2023](#)). As one interviewee noted, police may have limited capabilities to intervene when non-consensually distributed images are continually ‘popping up’ on different websites (VS4). Another interviewee described how intimate images which had first been non-consensually shared by a former partner more than a decade ago continued to manifest in the present as uncanny echoes:

This is something that’s going to be with me for the rest of my life As for the reporting, yeah, I mean, a lot of them are taken down I think there’s a 90% removal rate at the moment. But I asked for a recent report off them for the police and yesterday they messaged me to say this month alone the images had been shared hundreds of times. (VS5)

The same interviewee experienced more disruptive intrusions or forced collisions between private and public, subject to ongoing contacts about or linked to IBSA: 'Fake Facebook profiles keep being made as well, which are then messaging people I know. ... I've had friends and strangers messaging me through messenger or you know, someone has even emailed my work email, the one from the [workplace], and they've seen photos of me' (VS5).

Specialist professional interviewees also attested to the unpredictable afterlife of stolen content, and the slim likelihood of ever achieving 100% removal: 'The internet's a really big place. So actually, regardless of when that harassment stops or those images aren't being shared anymore, they're always out there. And it's very unlikely that everything's going to get removed' (P7).

These comments underline how unique temporal and spatial aspects of the internet may facilitate increasingly enduring, complex and malicious forms of harm; as noted in the wider literature, digital technologies enable instantaneous, borderless and anonymous contact (Henry and Powell, 2015; Harris and Vitis, 2020; McGlynn et al, 2021), affording access to victims and reduced visibility and accountability for perpetrators. In relation to IBSA specifically, interviewees described concerted efforts by individuals involved in 'collector culture' to exchange and piece together snippets of information about victims, triangulating their identity and whereabouts. In such cases, digital spaces function like a one-way mirror, allowing perpetrators to surveil victim-survivors while themselves remaining faceless, creating a sense of uneasy omnipresence and impunity.

It's an anonymous board, there's several people commenting, you don't know who they are or where they are ... but they're posting your intimate images. But they're also posting your dog-walking routes. They've seen you in a cafe. They've seen you there. So that's kind of where the physical and online world meet. (P9)

Notably, as this quote also vividly illustrates, TFVA cannot, however, be cleanly separated or delineated from other forms of GBV, including those that are more widely recognised as criminal and/or significant; non-consensual intimate image distribution may shade into or engender 'real-world' stalking and harassment and, even in cases where victim-survivors remain physically unharmed, inevitably evokes the spectre of physical and sexual violence or even femicide. The next theme demonstrates this conceptual and experiential blurriness.

Theme: Hierarchy of harms

The costs of reporting and the toll of engaging in 'violence work'

One of the experiential parallels identified between TFVA and other forms of GBV was the risks and difficulties associated with recognising and reporting abuse, and the heavy costs associated with reporting. While the wider evidence base suggests that there are specific reporting challenges in relation to TFVA linked to the trivialisation of virtual forms of harm (Henry and Powell, 2015; Douglas et al, 2019; Flynn et al, 2022), there are also striking commonalities linked to a more pervasive cultural minimisation of GBV, particularly regarding routine, 'minor' and non-physical

instances and their cumulative effects on victim-survivors. Victims, supporters and institutional gatekeepers alike may struggle to recognise the harmfulness of non-physical acts, or to ‘connect the dots’ between apparently innocuous or minor incidents to discern an overarching pattern of abuse. Equally, when victim-survivors choose to disclose their experiences (whether formally or informally), they may face responses which amplify, rather than prevent, harm, and which stem from the same toxic gender norms that underpin TFVA.

As professional interviewees noted, there is a prevailing cultural attitude that ‘because it’s online, it’s not as bad’ (P9), and that blocking the perpetrator/s or ignoring TFVA will resolve the issue. Victim-survivors themselves may minimise or deprioritise their experiences of TFVA when disclosing to services, regarding them as less urgent relative to physical violence and abuse.

In the course of making that disclosure [of domestic abuse], they will say all kinds of things. And at times, you know, the contact by tech is the last thing they mention. It’s almost like, well, I know this is happening, but I can’t control it. And then you realize they’ve had like 300 text messages in an afternoon. And I think at times you have to almost point out the danger of that. (P10)

Equally, as interviewees’ experiences suggest, reporting cyberstalking or harassment during its early stages can seem unthinkable or like an overreaction; it is only once a pattern of behaviour crosses the Rubicon into the clearly excessive and alarming – involving threats or incursions into the victim-survivor’s social or familial life – that it feels like ‘enough’ to report.

At first I didn’t think to report. It was only when it was incessant, basically. And he started going to my friends and family and then I was like, Oh, no, that’s enough. (VS3)

I was just thinking am I overreacting? Like it’s just, it’s just a couple of emails. But then the, just the bombardment and it was getting to a point where he was saying, ‘I’ll see you soon’. (VS2)

Another interviewee observed that even when victim-survivors feel able to report, there can be limited understanding of TFVA as a purposive and deeply harmful course of conduct, enabling perpetrators to operate beneath a veil of confusion and ‘plausible deniability’ (VS1).

The problem with coercive control, it can be so severe, but you look at each incident on its own. So you go and you try to report it ... you talk about an isolated incident or a string of isolated incidents. But the problem is that these are part of a pattern of coercion and control and intimidation. It’s very difficult to get it across without somebody being there, almost seeing the full context for themselves. (VS1)

Reflecting on her initial thoughts about reporting online stalking and harassment, one interviewee recalled weighing up her options as to whether or not reporting would be worthwhile, fearing that she would meet with disinterested or dismissive

responses that would leave her no safer than before: ‘To be honest, I didn’t really think it was going to be worth it. You know, you hear all these things about, oh, no one pays attention. And, you know, people will just think you’re seeking attention and stuff like that’ (VS2).

Concerns about being perceived as a malicious or attention-seeking complainant or recast as the abusive party – and the legal and material consequences of such a perception – infused another interviewee’s experiences of documenting and reporting technology-facilitated coercive control by a former partner:

This whole thing about parental alienation, that an abuser will do, as soon as you try to set any kind of boundaries to stop the harassment, ‘You’re a hostile mother’. And unfortunately, that does have traction in the courts. ... It’s going on for years and years and years and having to document every single bloody interaction. (VS1)

Such concerns chime with feminist philosophical analyses of the epistemic injustices faced by victim-survivors in relation to identifying and speaking out about experiences of GBV, particularly regarding hitherto minimised or unarticulated forms such as workplace sexual harassment (see [Fricker, 2007](#)), and navigating systems designed by and for a ‘universal yet masculinised generic subject’ ([Cahill, 2001](#): 12). In addition to the plethora of positive and negative/deprivational harms associated with secondary victimisation, such as encountering doubt or disbelief or receiving denied, limited or ineffectual support ([Campbell and Raja, 1999](#)), there is a corresponding family of harms linked to post-victimisation ‘violence work’: the work ‘women do in the aftermath of violence to rebuild their sense of self and belonging’ ([Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020](#): 222). This can involve ‘invisible’ and purely internal work such as reflecting on and making sense of their experiences, or more behaviourally visible forms of help seeking, such as finding and contacting support services ([Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020](#): 222).

In relation to TFVA, interviewees’ experiences suggest that one can conceive of victim-survivors’ efforts to report abuse as a form of unjust and uncompensated labour, potentially including: ‘joining the dots’ to detect a pattern of abuse; engaging in an initial cost benefit analysis (‘Is it worth it’ to report?); time-consuming, and emotionally distressing, documentation of abuse; and negotiating byzantine reporting routes and ignorant or judgemental organisational gatekeepers. This finding resonates with feminist interventions from the wider literature, which highlight the limitations of prevailing ‘medicalised trauma’ models for capturing the depth and range of harms linked to TFVA, and which divert attention from TFVA as a manifestation, and driver, of social injustice ([McGlynn et al, 2021](#)).

When considering this pattern of harms and societal (non-)recognition in a UK policy and practice context, emerging evidence from those impacted by TFVA, specialist practitioners and academics indicates that victim-survivors may be better served by expanded avenues for civil redress and a more holistic, victim-survivor-centred vision of justice. For example, the literature suggests that many IBSA victim-survivors experience criminal justice processes as lengthy, intrusive and retraumatising, and instead prioritise the swift takedown of non-consensual intimate images, which may be more achievable via a dedicated civil legal process ([Mortimer, 2025](#); [Rigotti and McGlynn, 2025](#)).

‘Thin’ conceptualisations of violence and risk

As explored throughout the first and second themes, interviewees’ accounts suggest that victim-survivors may experience a range of suboptimal responses to disclosures, some of which appear to be informed by ‘thin’ concepts of violence and risk that leave victim-survivors exposed to ongoing harm.

One interviewee recalled the unsatisfactory outcome of her report to police, which concluded with a perfunctory and risk-focused call.

With the police, I filed a report online. They sent me a follow-up email asking for more information, which I provided. And after that they wanted to talk to me on the phone for my welfare risk assessment It was a very short five-minute conversation on the phone, basically asking me routine questions. At the end, she said, ‘You’re low risk. There’s nothing more we can do’. (VS4)

Another recalled a friend’s response to her disclosure of cyberstalking by a former partner, which contributed to a sense that the costs of reporting were likely to be greater than the costs of continuing to manage the escalating harassment on her own.

I spoke to my best friend about it. And they were like, ‘Just ignore it. Just ignore it. It’ll go away’ And it doesn’t, it gets worse and worse

I thought that I would get that quite a lot because everybody, you know, thinks well he’s in another country. He can’t hurt you. ... It just felt that it’s easier to just deal with it alone. (VS2)

Professional interviewees also felt that people and services alike could be less responsive to TFVA owing to a narrow construal of risk.

I do think that people don’t realize the gravity of this constant ... contact. You know I have heard in my own private life as well. You know things like, well, just don’t answer, you know, block him or do this. (P10)

I think from a police perspective ... because it’s online, it’s not deemed as kind of as much of a importance or a priority So the risk of actually physical harm in their eyes potentially is a lot less likely. (P7)

Prioritising immediate and readily-measurable risks to physical safety and well-being while determining how to allocate time and resources is not necessarily inappropriate; however, an overreliance on such risk appraisals to delimit what is or is not serious, harmful or worthy of criminal justice or community-based interventions is associated with hazards of its own. Risk indicators are an interpretative technology, producing knowledge in part by ‘announcing what [they] measure’ (Merry, 2011: 84). Yet they can create an illusory sense of objectivity, eliding the fact that there are other ways of conceiving and capturing harm.

GBV researchers such as Walklate et al (2021) advocate for an extended or ‘thick’ conceptualisation of violence which is better attuned to non-physical and accretive forms of harm; for example, the ‘slow femicide[s]’ that represent the

‘culmination of a process rather than a standalone incident’, linked to the health and well-being impacts of victimisation (Walklate et al, 2021: 14). Such an account might more accurately reflect the spectrum of harms described by participants, including the practical and emotional ‘violence work’ associated with documenting and reporting abuse.

In relation to the evolving UK policy context, the OSA formally recognised TFVA as GBV, arguably fulfilling an important expressive function by marking these behaviours as abusive and socially unacceptable, notwithstanding subsequent challenges in implementation and enforcement (McGlynn et al, 2017). However, when it comes to remediating the harms associated with TFVA, there are remaining practical disparities which point to the persistent influence of ‘thin’ conceptualisations of violence; for instance, IBSA victim-survivors may be denied financial recompense as it is not categorised as a violent offence under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme (Ost and Gillespie, 2024; Mortimer et al, 2025).

Theme: These people know what they are doing: the role of specialism

Specialist voluntary sector organisations (VSO) have historically played a critical role in the UK response to GBV, emerging as part of the grassroots 1970s women’s liberation movement (Jones and Cook, 2008; Hague, 2021). While the UK government has recognised VAWG as a ‘national threat’ (Home Office, 2022), and committed to increasing access to specialist support, VAWG-sector VSOs remain financially embattled following more than a decade of austerity-driven funding cuts, with disproportionate impacts on ‘by and for’ services (Hague, 2021).

Meanwhile, TFVA is a relatively novel phenomenon which may crosscut and impact multiple existing areas of GBV specialism, in addition to technological and legal expertise. The wider literature suggests increasing demand for specialist support in relation to TFVA, but suggests that many voluntary and statutory sector organisations presently feel under-equipped to meet this need (Tanczer et al, 2021).

Interviewees’ accounts indicate that specialist VSOs can fulfil several crucial functions for victim-survivors, including validating their experiences, signposting to relevant services and providing practical support with documenting and reporting abuse.

In contrast to anticipated or actual interactions with police, which were often shadowed by concerns about being dismissed or disbelieved, interviewees described their encounters with VSOs in a positive light.

Women’s Aid were really good They’re really supportive, they’re really good. Because you’re believed basically. (VS1)

The only people that really made me feel and understand how serious and important the situation was, was the National Stalking Helpline. (VS2)

These [specialist] organisations and hotlines were super helpful because they were so knowledgeable about this I was kind of like ‘Amazing. These people know what they are doing’. (VS4)

Without the support of the Revenge Porn [Helpline] I really don’t know where I’d be now. ... They give me the reassurance that they’re fighting my corner. (VS5)

Interestingly, participants’ experiences suggested that even VAWG-sector VSOs without particular expertise in relation to technology and/or TFVA were valued owing to their specialist knowledge of GBV, and their perceived tendency to believe victim-survivors and take their reports seriously. This finding underlines the parallels between experiencing TFVA and other forms of GBV, and the common underlying needs of victim-survivors subject to these forms of violence and abuse, further emphasising that TFVA should not be siloed or neglected within broader policy and practice discussions around GBV.

A professional interviewee working in the wider VAWG sector characterised VSOs with specific expertise in TFVA as well-placed first responders to time-sensitive reports of IBSA, owing to their perceived agility, specialism, dedicated resources and relationships with platforms: ‘When we came across the Revenge Porn Helpline. It was amazing what they can do The powers they have that the police don’t. Or the urgency with which they can act They have access to more social media platforms than the police do’ (P10). Another interviewee described having positive reciprocal relationships and knowledge exchange with other VSOs, including specialist ‘by and for’ services such as Galop and the Muslim Women Network (P8).

Notably, however, professional interviewees’ experiences also spoke to some of the practical and emotional challenges associated with an ever-burgeoning need for support and signposting around TFVA, including a sense of running in place; striving to maintain up-to-date training in response to evolving threats: ‘It’s become a lot more malicious and it is becoming a lot more complex what we’re seeing. Training’s never finished, I don’t think’ (P9). ‘I would like to think that we are a helpline that never stands still You never stop learning in this job’ (P10).

Moreover, managing service-user expectations constituted a significant aspect of TFVA specialists’ role. Interviewees described the challenges of navigating this part of their work, which required them to gauge an individual’s emotional readiness to ‘take in’ (P8) difficult information, offering transparency about the range of possible outcomes without deterring service users from reporting or engaging with criminal justice processes.

I don’t think we’ve ever had like a 100% success rate [removing non-consensually distributed intimate images] It’s always about managing that and just trying to be really, really straight with that person from the get go. And that’s quite a difficult thing to navigate sometimes. (P8)

People have very high expectations of the police and more formal legal routes You’re told from a child that if something wrong happens, you report it to the police and ... you get justice for that So I think that this huge, huge managing expectations there. (P9)

There is an extensive body of literature examining the ‘cost to caring’: the occupational hazards that can impact helping professionals, including burnout, secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma (Figley, 1995: 1). It is noteworthy that none of the

interviewees engaged in frontline work with victim-survivors expressed any concerns in relation to these issues, and described receiving appropriate organisational support (for example, peer support and clinical supervision). However, given the cumulative impacts of secondary exposure to trauma and injustice, particularly when staff are subject to heavy caseloads (see [Horvath et al, 2021](#)), it is plausible that repeatedly taking on a ‘buffering’ role between victim-survivors and the sharper edges of the internet and criminal-justice system could heighten risk over the longer term, resulting in adverse changes to cognitive schema and well-being.

Such risks may also be compounded in light of the sectoral challenges earlier highlighted, with limited capacity for necessary training and upskilling among statutory and VAWG-sector organisations resulting in increased referrals for, and pressure on, specialist TFVA services ([Tanczer et al, 2021](#)).

Discussion

Interview findings were organised and interpreted in relation to four key themes. Spatiality was identified as a keystone concept underpinning the first two themes. The accounts of both victim-survivors and professionals evoked a shifting, jurisdictionally complex and uncertain landscape, with (at times intentionally) obscure and difficult-to-navigate reporting routes, and a patchwork legal framework. Victim-survivors’ help-seeking trajectories were at times thwarted or frustrated by inconsistencies in professional practice, particularly among police, and by permissive or overtly-hostile digital spaces. In contrast to archetypical narratives of crime and disclosure, which invoke a predictable causal link between an agent taking action by reporting to police and subsequently ‘get[ting] justice’ (P9), several interviewees explicitly attributed their regained safety to happenstance. This loss of agency, and sense of displacement in an ‘alien world’ governed by chance rather than benevolence or reason, echoes familiar narrative evocations of personal experiences of trauma and gendered victimisation ([Brison, 2002: 8](#)). As further discussed in relation to the third theme, these experiences also underline the need for a victim-centred and ‘thick’ conception of harm capable of reflecting the lived significance of TFVA.

While expanding on the first theme’s emphasis on spatiality, the second theme highlights how the distinct affordances of new technologies and online spaces – combined with their increasing centrality in our ‘linked in’ lives (P9) – facilitate novel forms of abuse, leading to non-linear patterns of (re)victimisation, and a blurriness between off- and online harms. This finding chimes with contemporary criminological accounts of technology-mediated harms, which emphasise that ‘technical practices are not simply neutral means to an end’ ([Wood, 2021: 639](#)): rather, certain technologies, while not explicitly designed for malign uses, may ‘promote values and actions that foster such behaviours’ ([Wood, 2021: 640](#)). This also aligns with the first theme’s commentary in relation to male-dominated technology workforces and gender-insensitive design: ostensibly ‘neutral’ technologies and online spaces are not ungendered but ‘rather unmarked, in an implicitly masculine default’ ([Kraemer, 2021: 4](#)).

In line with prior feminist articulations of TFVA ([Henry and Powell, 2015](#); [McGlynn et al, 2017](#); [Harris and Vitis, 2020](#); [Rindestig et al, 2023](#)), the third theme explored TFVA as part of the continuum of GBV, with victim-survivors reporting common struggles with identifying, disclosing and accessing

support for abuse, interpreted by authors as a form of ‘violence work’ (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). Interviewees’ experiences were consistent with those of victim-survivors of ‘course of conduct’ GBV offences including coercive control (Stark, 2007) and stalking (Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2023), which may be deprioritised by police and other institutional gatekeepers owing to the non-injurious or ‘minor’ nature of individual incidents (Stark, 2007; Suzy Lamplugh Trust, 2023). TFVA is an umbrella term which, like stalking and coercive control, can encompass a vast array and/or combination of behaviours, many of which may appear low-risk or inoffensive when taken out of context, but which can collectively wreak extensive, and even life-threatening, harms. Recent changes in government terminology around domestic abuse-related fatality reviews suggests a widescale shift in thinking about GBV to recognise hidden harms, up to and including deaths by suicide linked to ongoing victimisation (Home Office and Farris, 2024). Findings from the present study underline that the social, emotional and health impacts of TFVA – including the laborious and emotionally-costly help-seeking journeys reported by some participants – are not consistently recognised by institutional gatekeepers, leaving some victim-survivors exposed to ongoing harm. The final theme explored the role of specialist GBV services in responding to TFVA. Victim-survivors’ accounts characterised specialist VSOs as fulfilling several crucial functions, including validating their experiences, providing practical support, and giving a sense of reassurance that there is someone ‘in their corner’. Notably these benefits were attributed both to TFVA specialist services and to services with specialism around GBV more broadly, as well as services offering different kinds and durations of support (for example, helplines offering short-term signposting, practical and crisis support, versus services providing longer-term emotional and psychoeducational support). This finding aligns with wider literature affirming the importance of the specialist VAWG sector in the UK for women affected by GBV (WRC, 2018; Gunby et al, 2024).

There is also extensive evidence in the wider literature underpinning the vital role of ‘by and for’ (or lived experience) services which provide tailored support for victim-survivors affected by intersecting forms of marginalisation; for example, Black, Asian, racially-minoritised, LGBT+, Deaf and/or disabled community members. However, this was not identified as a salient theme in the present analysis, perhaps owing to the small number of interviewees overall, and the lack of professional participants working within ‘by and for’ organisations. This represents an area to explore in future larger-scale research, employing purposive sampling to elicit the perspectives of a diverse group of victim-survivors and professionals.

Professionals’ perspectives provided an additional angle on the experiences of those working in and with specialist VSOs, pointing to some of the challenges faced when scrambling to fill gaps in statutory provision, seeking to stay up-to-date with training in a rapidly-evolving technological and legislative landscape, and managing the expectations of those currently in crisis. While interviewees felt that they received adequate intra-organisational support, and spoke positively about their relationships with other specialist VSOs, they also described mounting demand for specialist support, which should be considered against a wider context of inconsistent and risk-focused statutory provision and ‘chronic underfunding’ of the VAWG sector (Barter et al, 2018: 32). These systemic issues have implications for the sustainability and resilience of specialist TFVA and GBV services, and warrant additional consideration in upstream policy/commissioning spaces.

Limitations

This article is based on the perspectives of a small group of female victim-survivors and professionals. It is important to note that 'bigger isn't necessarily better' in relation to qualitative research sampling (Braun and Clarke, 2016: 742). Positivist-empiricist approaches to thematic analysis conceive of themes as ontologically 'real' entities discoverable through their frequency across a data set, and therefore seek to 'capture a selection of data items/participants that ideally provide a representative subset from a larger population' and/or allow for theoretical saturation (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 28). By contrast, the RTA approach developed by Braun and Clarke entails 'active, creative and reflexive' theme development by the researchers (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 741), and participant numbers are guided by alternative considerations such as the 'information power' of a given sample (its capacity to address research questions in light of the specificity and salience of participant experiences, the application and elaboration of relevant theoretical frameworks and the 'quality of dialogue' between researchers and participants, among other factors) (Malterud et al, 2016: 1756).

According to such a rubric, while ten participants is a small sample, this does not in itself constitute a methodological weakness, given the richness of participant contributions and their relevance to key research questions. However, authors note that the recruitment strategy and target participant number for the study were informed by pragmatic and ethical considerations, designed to facilitate safe participation by individuals with insights into a specific, potentially highly-sensitive topic within a short timeframe. Therefore, while authors identified the interview data as sufficiently 'rich, complex, nuanced and detailed' to merit an in-depth, reflexive analysis, it is likely that a wider range of participants with more heterogeneous backgrounds, expertise and experiences would further enrich the analysis, shedding light on here-unexplored areas of lived experience (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 27).

The RTA was primarily undertaken by the lead author, while engaging in ongoing consultation with the second author to promote rigour and reflexivity as codes and themes were developed. Both authors approached the study from a feminist theoretical framework, which could lead to analytical 'oversights' due to a broadly-shared viewpoint. However, each author starts from different disciplinary perspectives, which enriches the analysis and mitigates the risk of analytical staleness: KA is a philosopher and social-policy researcher, while MH is a social psychologist.

Suggestions for future research

Further mixed-methods research is needed to investigate victim-survivors' experiences of TFVA reporting and help seeking in relation to the construct of violence work as part of a 'thick' conception of GBV harms; for example, quantifying the demands on their time and exploring resultant impacts on their social, familial and professional lives and well-being. This evidence building is particularly important considering ongoing disparities in response to victim-survivors of non-contact abuse (such as criminal injuries compensation), despite increased recognition of the grave and pervasive social, emotional and economic harms associated with TFVA. This research should be undertaken with a purposive sample of participants, with particular attention to intersectionality.

Research with VAWG-sector professionals, funders and commissioners should further explore the specific challenges associated with the increased need for TFVA support, investigate how professionals can best collaborate within and across organisations to meet their training and knowledge exchange needs and reduce the risk of burnout and secondary and vicarious trauma, and build evidence to support increased financial investment.

Conclusion

Findings from the present study extend feminist accounts of TFVA as part of a continuum of GBV. Participants described a range of barriers and inequities when reporting and accessing support, including the labour associated with help and recognition seeking. Authors construe these trajectories as a form of violence work, underlining the need for a more joined-up understanding of and response to TFVA as a form of GBV, and a ‘thick’ conception of harm capable of encompassing the full range of impacts described by victim-survivors.

‘Place’ and ‘pace’ developed as overarching motifs across multiple themes, evoking a sense of rapid technological, cultural and legal change and boundaryless, unpredictable, and often hostile, spaces. The affordances of proliferating platforms and technologies were linked to the emergence of more complex, malicious forms of abuse, and increased challenges in removing harmful content, while male-dominated workspaces were invoked in relation to gender-insensitive design and exclusionary practices. At a sociocultural level, descriptions of the ‘patchwork’ (P9) legislative framework defining IBSA resonates with feminist accounts of hermeneutical and testimonial injustice in relation to women’s experiences of sexual violence (Fricker, 2007). Specialist VSOs emerged as a place of belief, validation and reassurance, as well as repositories of expertise.

The research was completed prior to the OSA receiving royal assent in October 2023. However, findings remain resonant in a post-OSA world, speaking to areas of progress related to the passage of the OSA, including the formal recognition of TFVA as part of the continuum of GBV, and the closure of definitional gaps that created a conducive context for perpetration. Findings also chime with ongoing concerns regarding complexities in implementation and enforcement, including how institutions conceptualise and respond to non-contact abuse, and the need for a more expansive vision of justice (and a better-resourced infrastructure) to adequately address the pattern of harms experienced by victim-survivors.

Note

¹ Now passed into law as the Online Safety Act (2023).

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Contributor statement

KA and MH conceptualised and designed the study, and collected qualitative data. KA led on the reflexive thematic analysis, with contributions and feedback from MH. KA and MH co-wrote the initial article draft, with KA leading on revisions following peer review.

Research ethics statement

Ethical approval was sought (reference number RETH(S)21/048) and granted by the University of Suffolk Research Ethics Committee in April 2022.

Permission to conduct the interviews for the purposes of this research was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed about the purposes of this research and how their responses would be used and stored.

Data availability statement

Data sharing is not available to preserve participant confidentiality. If you would like more information about the nature of the data, please contact the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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