



Understanding tech-based abuse of women on dating platforms

Background

Gender-based violence is unfortunately not a new concept but an ever-growing scourge in our society. However, how perpetrators inflict their abuse in the modern world is ever changing, and tech-facilitated gender-based violence is the new frontier.

We are in a period of accelerated social change, where technology is advancing and providing many benefits, but also facilitating and accelerating harmful attitudes and beliefs, misogyny, and strengthening the conditions that cause gender-based violence. Technology is at the heart of this acceleration, influencing ways that we communicate and behave towards others.

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a significant and growing challenge that affects both women and children across Australia. Around one in two Australian adults have experienced some form of technology facilitated abuse (TFA) in their lifetime, and women are significantly more likely to experience it as part of a pattern of co-occurring abuse from the same perpetrator. TFGBV is not a distinct category of violence, but an extension of existing patterns of GBV, enabled, amplified, and perpetuated through digital technologies and increasingly co-occurring with offline harm.

Key findings

Minderoo Foundation wanted to understand how exactly these harms were occurring in the tech environment and so commissioned the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to undertake research on 'tech-based abuse on dating platforms.' The BIT report, *Understanding tech-based abuse of women on dating platforms*, reveals technology-facilitated abuse is widespread and universal on dating platforms.

The research, based on a survey of 1,008 women who identify as heterosexual in Australia, found that 99% of women surveyed had experienced at least one form of tech-based abuse on dating apps in the three months before the survey (conducted at the end of 2025).

The research also found:

- › Women bear an exhausting, invisible burden of "safety work" constantly screening, filtering and anticipating risk just to use these platforms
- › Platform design features such as activity indicators and unsolicited messaging are actively enabling harm
- › Verification and safety tools, when properly implemented, can increase vulnerability rather than reduce it
- › Women are frequently deterred from reporting abuse due to confusing processes and automated, impersonal responses
- › Platforms are failing to communicate the safety features they already have – adding further to the burden faced by women.

The most frequent forms of abuse included psychological manipulation, surveillance, unsolicited explicit content and coercive control. These are also the types of harms that platforms are least likely to ever hear about, as they are often not reported, meaning the true scale of harm is significantly undercounted.

Implications for policy

Australia has committed to ending gender-based violence (GBV) in a generation. That goal cannot be met while technology keeps expanding the reach, scale and speed of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and abuse. The BIT research demonstrates this problem in action. It emphasises that the responsibility for safety should shift from individuals to platforms as individuals have been bearing the brunt of these harms for too long.

TFGBV is not a separate category of harm, it is an extension of existing GBV, enabled and amplified through digital technologies and increasingly linked to offline harm. Emerging technologies are intensifying the risk.

National Cabinet has agreed the priorities for the Second Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children which included for the first time, at a national level, 'preventing, responding to and countering online harms'.

The proposed Digital Duty of Care (DDoC) is the main lever currently available to change this trajectory. It would shift online services from reacting to harm after the fact, to proactively assessing and mitigating the risks created by their own design.

Policy recommendations

Tranche 2 of Privacy Act Reforms

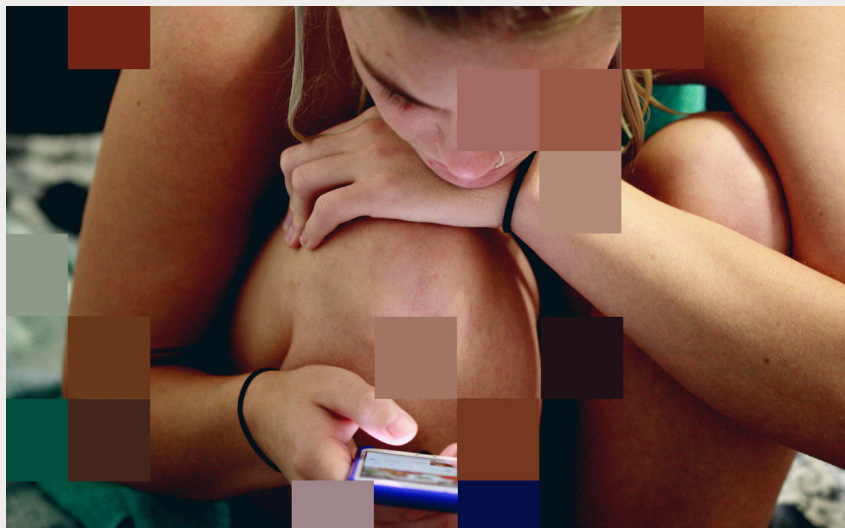
The amendments to the Privacy Act through tranche 2 need to be considered alongside the DDoC because the two policy areas govern different points in the same pathway of harm: the handling of personal data and the platform design and risk mitigation. Addressing TFGBV effectively will require alignment between the two reforms. **Two key recommendations would support this:**

1. Extend the "fair and reasonable" test to explicitly cover gendered harms. Require entities to assess whether collection, use, or disclosure of personal information could facilitate stalking, doxxing, intimate partner surveillance, or image-based abuse
2. Right to erasure that covers AI training data and derived outputs, not just source records. As drafted, erasure rights typically stop at raw data. Ask for erasure to extend to images/data used to train generative models (including "nudify" tools) and to any synthetic outputs derived from a person's likeness.



Digital Duty of Care

Much of the harm women and girls experience online falls below the criminal threshold. Current efforts react to harm after the fact and do nothing to prevent them. To deliver a generational reduction in violence, a digital duty of care should go beyond removing illegal content to prevent harm at the source.



1. Name GBV and TFGBV explicitly in risk assessments

The Digital Duty of Care does not name GBV or TFGBV as a required risk category meaning assessments of harm will likely miss gendered patterns such as coordinated harassment, coercive-control messaging, and image abuse. The legislation should also require providers to specifically assess the risk of GBV and TFGBV arising from their content, design features, and systems, and to identify women, girls, and gender-diverse users as a distinct affected group.

2. Add image-based sexual abuse to the harm list

Non-consensual intimate imagery and AI-generated deepfake sexual material are not covered in the "seriously harmful material and conduct" categories that trigger the proactive duty. They are addressed only through reactive tools, like takedown notices and removal requirements. This excludes mainstream platforms where this content circulates as a secondary use. Image-based sexual abuse, including synthetic and deepfake material, should be added as its own category.

3. Extend the "hostile attitudes towards women" category to adults

The harm "hostile attitudes towards women" is currently only covered in relation to harms to children. This leaves platforms with no duty to assess or mitigate recommender-driven exposure of adults to misogynistic content, despite its established link to TFGBV perpetration. The harm should be included, replicating the coverage for adults as well as children. Broaden the "hostile attitudes towards women" harm category to explicitly include hostile attitudes towards transgender and gender-diverse people, ensuring the provision captures gender-based hostility beyond a binary framing of gender.

4. Extend the design features list to include dating-specific risk drivers

Women are at high risk of TFGBV on dating platforms. While dating apps would be captured under the proposed bill, it is not clear if it would appropriately cover the design features of dating platforms. Dating platforms' primary risk drivers of matching algorithms, identity verification (or lack of), and location-sharing aren't currently named, meaning these providers only adhere to mitigating "all reasonably foreseeable risks." It is recommended that the digital duty of care include matching/discovery features, verification features, and location-sharing features as defined design features, so providers of dating and similar relevant electronic services are required to name and risk-assess them directly, rather than leaving their inclusion to the discretion of each provider's own assessment.

Conclusion

We have a critical opportunity to make online spaces safer as the Parliament considers inclusions for Australia's Digital Duty of Care as well as the Privacy Act reforms. These reforms, working together, will legally require tech companies and online platforms to take reasonable steps in identifying, preventing and reducing serious harms, like those experienced by women on dating apps, as well as giving victim survivors the right to erase their data. Australia has the chance to create a robust policy framework across the Digital Duty of Care and Privacy Act, so that these operate in tandem to become genuine national prevention infrastructure against TFGBV.



BIT is a global research and innovation consultancy which combines a deep understanding of human behaviour with evidence-led problem solving to improve people's lives. We work with all levels of government, nonprofits and the private sector, applying behavioural science expertise with robust evaluation and data to help clients achieve their goals.

We operate from eight offices around the world, providing behavioural science expertise built through more than 2,000 projects delivered in over 100 countries. Whether improving essential public services or helping shape emerging technologies, we help organisations turn evidence into practical solutions that deliver measurable impact.



Minderoo Foundation is committed to building a bright future where people, communities and the environment we depend on can thrive. Our work focuses on backing community-led change, building a liveable future and keeping people safe as technology advances, alongside longstanding work on gender equality and ending modern slavery. We pursue change that lasts by addressing the underlying causes that hold back progress, and we act when urgent challenges arise, including humanitarian crises and natural disasters. We drive change by working alongside those closest to the challenge, advocating for reform, building evidence for what works and developing solutions when none exist.

In late 2025, Minderoo convened SafeAI to bring its work on AI policy and technology-facilitated harms together around a practical objective - helping Australia capture the benefits of AI and technology while putting the right safeguards in place. SafeAI brings together evidence and research, international AI experts, civil society and decision-makers to advance a balanced approach to AI policy that protects people, builds confidence and enables responsible innovation. This includes strengthening safeguards against technology-facilitated harms, particularly those affecting women and children, as digital technologies evolve.