Domestic violence and its online manifestations *in the context of a pandemic*

A submission from Acoso.Online to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences

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I. Introduction

As has been happening all over the world, most Latin American Governments have followed suit in taking different measures to enforce confinement, such as declaring quarantine, establishing curfews, and promoting social distancing. Some of them have been stricter in regards to the free movement of people, including penalties and fines for those who do not abide by the regulations. On the other hand, some others have opted for suggesting - instead of forcing- people to stay at home.[1]

Regardless of their nature, all these measures prevent people from having physical contact person to person, which has impacted the use of the Internet. Accordingly, when it comes to activities ranging from work, education, conferences, entertainment, dates, delivery of products, and communication, digital services have become a viable option for many social and cultural relations in times of COVID-19. In fact, many countries in the region have increased their Internet traffic since the implementation of confinement measures.[2]

The intensive use of these Internet services in the context of pandemics must be examined with a gender and intersectional lens. From those who have access to the Internet to how the appropriation of those services could vary, there is a wide scope in which groups in vulnerable situations could see their human and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ESCR) severely affected. In this context, **this submission seeks to call for attention on how domestic violence in the context of confinement has worrying online manifestations that need to be addressed urgently by States**. We based our report on evidence from countries in Latin America.

As it is not common to have official statistics about online gender-based violence (GBV) in Latin America and because COVID-19 is still a developing pandemic in the world, Acoso.Online (www.acoso.online) used two methods to collect information. The first method consisted of doing desk research to review the documentation on how online GBV has increased in the context of pandemics in Latin America (based on media reports and public data provided by victims through social media and other platforms). Secondly, it was carried out the analysis of responses received through our survey, which was directed to twelve key informers (activists and researchers working on online GBV) from 10 different countries in the region.

Acoso.Online[3] is a collective project of activists and researchers from Latin America working to give reliable information to victims of non-consensual sharing of intimate images on the Internet (NCSII). Since 2017, we have provided resources on our website for victims from eighteen countries in the continent.

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1   BBC News. 2020. *Coronavirus: el mapa interactivo que muestra las medidas o distintos tipos de cuarentena que adoptaron los países de América Latina.*
     https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-52248497

2   Forbes. 2020. *Coronavirus: generando nuevo tráfico en América Latina*
     https://forbescentroamerica.com/2020/04/06/coronavirus-generando-nuevo-trafico-en-america-latina/

3   Access Now. 2018. *Acoso.Online: Supporting victims of online harassment across Latin America*
     https://www.accessnow.org/acoso-online/

II. Online GBV as a form of domestic violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is recognized as one of the most serious and prevalent human rights violations in the world and a form of discrimination against women. Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women specifies that violence against women is any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of committing such acts against women, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

GBV can take different forms. Domestic violence against women includes all acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence that occur within the family, domestic unit, or between intimate partners. Another type is online GBV, which has been defined by the same Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequence as:[4]

> "[...] any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of ICTs, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email against a woman because she is a woman, or which affects women disproportionately."

These two types of online GBV are related. It has been observed that in some contexts, rates of online violence may correlate with high rates of offline violence and intimidation against women, together with intimate partner abuse. Moreover, domestic violence perpetrators are also taking advantage of their Internet affordance and their insider knowledge of intimate partners to increase their capacity to control and harm their targets.[5]

A special report in 2015 on online abuse and gender-based violence from the United Nations initiative, the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), acknowledges that "online abuse and gender-based violence disproportionately affect women in their online interactions; these phenomena encompass acts of gender-based violence such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and violence against women in times of conflict, which are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of ICTs".[6]

In a Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council (HRC) on 2 July 2015, it is recognized "that

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4   *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective.* 2018. A/HRC/38/47

5   See the work of: Freed, D., J. Palmer, D. Minchala, K. Levy, T. Ristenpart, and N. Dell. 2017. "*Digital Technologies and Intimate Partner Violence: A Qualitative Analysis With Multiple Stakeholders.*" *Proceedings of the Association for Computing Machinery on Human-Computer Interaction 46 (1):* 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1145/3134681; Woodlock, D. 2016. *The Abuse of Technology in Domestic Violence and Stalking. Violence Against Women,* 23(5), 584–602. doi:10.1177/1077801216646277; Machirori, Fungau. 2017. *Towards a gender-just internet: Combating online violence against women* https://www.africaportal.org/features/gender-just-internet-how-do-we-combat-online-violence/

6   Internet Governance Forum (IGF). 2015. *Best Practice Forum (BPF) on Online Abuse and Gender-Based Violence Against Women.* https://www.intgovforum.org/cms/documents/best-practice-forums/623-bpf-online-abuse-and-gbv-against-women/file

violence against women, including domestic violence, can take the form of an isolated act or a pattern of abusive behavior that may occur over a period of time, which as a pattern constitutes violence against women, and can include acts such as cyberbullying and cyberstalking[7]. According to the Association for Progressive Communications (APC):[8]

> "This resolution was particularly significant as its articulation of cyberstalking as being part of a pattern of domestic violence explicitly reinforces the framing of online GBV as being part of the continuum of violence against women, and as such it is already the state's responsibility to prevent and address this violence."

More recently, researchers have named this violence as "technology-facilitated coercive control" (TFCC) to refer to violence and abuse by current or former intimate partners, and facilitated by digital media, including behaviors such as:[9]

> "[...] harassment on social media, stalking using GPS data, clandestine and conspicuous audio and visual recording, threats via SMS, monitoring email, accessing accounts without permission, impersonating a partner, and posting private information (doxing) or sexualized content without consent."

For the purpose of this report, we understand domestic violence in the digital context as "technology-facilitated coercive control" (TFCC) suggested by M. Dragiewicz et al[10] in relation to violence and abuse by current or former intimate partners and facilitated by digital media. In this sense, it is critical to understand that the online manifestations of domestic violence are located in a framework of coercive control used by the aggressors to try to intimidate but also to micromanage, dominate and isolate victims. Here, digital technologies increase the scope of this control and abuse, making it harder for women to protect themselves.

More concretely, Delanie Woodlock[11] states that perpetrators of domestic violence apply technologies in three ways to use their coercive power over women, being one of them the creation of a sense of omnipresence. Indeed, perpetrators want women to know that they are under constant surveillance. Accordingly, the aggressor uses mobile technologies to create a sense of being ever-present in the victim's life. This could include acts like continuous calls and messages and all forms of technology to track women, including the use of GPS mobile technology as well as the surveillance of the victim's online activity through social media. Another way is to use technology to isolate women from their support systems through direct or indirect harassment of friends and

7   Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 2 July 2015. A/HRC/RES/29/14

8   APC. 2017. *Online gender-based violence*: A *submission from the Association for Progressive Communications to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.* https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/online-gender-based-violence-submission-association-progressive-communications-united-nations

9   Molly Dragiewicz, Jean Burgess, Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, Michael Salter, Nicolas P. Suzor, Delanie Woodlock & Bridget Harris. 2018. *Technology facilitated coercive control: domestic violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms, Feminist Media Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1447341

10   *Ibídem.*

11   Woodlock, D. 2016. *The Abuse of Technology in Domestic Violence and Stalking. Violence Against Women*, 23(5), 584–602. doi:10.1177/1077801216646277;

family, including text messages, deleting or deactivating their Facebook accounts, etc. The third one is the use of technology to punish and humiliate women; for example, posting abusive messages or comments to smear and embarrass victims. The ultimate goal of this behavior is to demean women to the point of shutting them up.

III. Domestic violence in the context of a pandemic: its online manifestations

1. A worrisome context

Domestic violence and its online manifestations in times of pandemics do not occur in a vacuum. As the same "Report of the Special Rapporteur on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective" from 2018 states:[12]

> "When women and girls have access to and use the Internet, they face online forms and manifestations of violence that are part of a continuum of multiple, recurring and interrelated forms of gender-based violence against women. Despite the benefits and empowering potential of the Internet and ICTs, women and girls across the world have increasingly voiced their concern at harmful, sexist, misogynistic and violent content and behavior online."

In this sense, it is essential to state in this report that domestic violence on the Internet is happening amidst the increase of online attacks against women. It is yet to be studied if these aggressions are influenced by each other; however, for any analysis, it is crucial to understand that domestic violence is not an isolated event on the Internet.

For Acoso.Online, it is concerning how the pandemic has also underscored worrisome trends of online GBV. For example, the current and growing online harassment of women renowned as human rights defenders and women with prominent roles in the public sphere in the context of COVID-19 (as journalists, politicians, and academics). Examples abound across countries. In Brazil, the black women movement website, Articulação de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras (AMNB), was hacked. As they declared on a Facebook post about the incident, "it is known by the entire Brazilian society that the increase of racism in people's daily lives has also generated violent reactions in online spaces. In the current situation, facing the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 and the institutional negligence to deal with the gravity of the situation, online spaces have been fundamental to enhance the actions and complaints carried out by the black population".[13] In El Salvador, national and international organizations have denounced an increase in violence, especially digital violence, against women and organizations that defend Human Rights as a result of the measures implemented by the Government of the president Nayib Bukele, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: "The President has also used digital media to delegitimize those who criticize his policies, including messages that discredit human rights organizations and the use of misogynistic language."[14] In Chile, Izkia Siches, president of the Chilean Medical Association who has had a highly public role

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12   Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective. 2018. A/HRC/38/47

13   AMNB-Articulacão. 2020. Facebook post https://www.facebook.com/320675438088728/photos/a.328154794007459/1680914028731522/?type=3&theater

14   Revista Digital Feminista. 2020. *Denuncian incremento de violencia digital contra defensoras por el gobierno de Nayib Bukele* https://revistalabrujula.com/2020/06/19/denuncian-incremento-de-violencia-digital-contra-defensoras-por-el-gobierno-de-nayib-bukele/

during the pandemic, has denounced the hacking and impersonation of her Instagram account,[15] as well as dead and sexual threats sent to her email.[16]

Another worrisome trend in Latin America in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is what is called *zoombombing*, which refers to a disruptive and unwanted intrusion into a video conference call made by a third person or group with the aim of hijacking it by the insertion of material that, as Wikipedia states, "is lewd, obscene, racist, or antisemitic in nature."[17] In weeks of confinement, these attacks against groups of people in vulnerable situations have multiplied in Latin America. In Brazil, the media reports the multiplication of racist groups and Nazi intrusions to teleconferences of black feminisms.[18] In Chile, multiple reports of *zoombombing* to feminist meetings have been reported by activists.[19] However, one of the most noteworthy cases for its impact on the public opinion was the *zoombombing* of a teleconference coordinated by the Chilean Congress to present the agenda made by the Covid-19 Gender Commission to face the impact of the health, economic and social crisis on women's lives.[20]

These attacks seek to intimidate women. Testimonies from victims reinforce the feeling of vulnerability in the public space. "Apparently, the one who had internalized the aggression was me. One of these people's voice, using that tone they use in Latin America, that pitch we know well. The tone of the person who is about to assault you, who calls your house to threaten you, the perpetrator who lives to disturb you, to steal your calm", says one of the public testimonies.[21] Another victim in Brazil sated: "I am traumatized. I was terrified and burst into tears. There were still 40 minutes to go and I, as a black woman, was unable to continue. I did not have the strength to position myself on my social media and I do not know how I will be able to deal with this in the future. I'm not even able to stay home alone".[22]

For Lorena Peralta, a psychosocial companion, there is no single answer as to why the attacks are done since the range is as wide and complex as who is the actor, the situation and the impact that

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15   La Cuarta. 2020. «*Se hizo pasar por mí*»: *Izkia Siches reveló hackeo e improperios en su contra* https://www.lacuarta.com/cronica/noticia/izkia-siches-hackeo-improperios/486526/

16   Cooperativa. 2020. *Ordenan medidas de protección para Izkia Siches tras amenazas de muerte y violación* https://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/salud/medicos/ordenan-medidas-de-proteccion-para-izkia-siches-tras-amenazas-de-muerte/2020-04-23/155318.html

17   Wikipedia. 2020. Zoombombing https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zoombombing

18   BBC News Brasil. 2020. *Invasão com suásticas e vídeos de decapitação interrompe reunião virtual de mulheres sobre racismo.* https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-53030511

19   Movimiento Feminista UC - MAFI. 2020. Facebook post https://es-la.facebook.com/mafiuce/posts/2688186341468462?__tn__=-R

20   Pagina19. 2020. A *Pesar del Ciberataque, Mesa del Senado Presenta Agenda de Género Covid-19* https://pagina19.cl/genero/a-pesar-del-ciberataque-mesa-del-senado-presenta-agenda-de-genero-covid-19/

21   Vita Activa. 2020. *Lo llaman Zoombombing o Troleo en Zoom* https://vita-activa.org/tag/zoom/

22   BBC News Brasil. 2020. *Invasão com suásticas e vídeos de decapitação interrompe reunião virtual de mulheres sobre racismo.* https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-53030511

the work of the victims is having: "It is a sample of the power they have to deliver the message 'here we are, we can do it.' And doing so has a high bearing on who experiences it. The perception of online platforms as a safe space fades; there is a tension in believing that it should be taken seriously. It is not just a bad joke, we should move away from the disbelief that it transcends the online sphere and goes to the physical field."[23]

According to an anonymous source from the Acoso.Online survey, we are not necessarily seeing an increase of online GBV. Rather, we are facing the same structural violence that, because of confinement, has a much more significant impact on a local and collective level.

2. Online manifestations of domestic violence

The Inter-American Commission of Women (OAS-CIM) in its report on COVID-19 in the continent recognized the increase in violence against women and girls on the Internet (cyber violence): "At this time of emergency and isolation, technology stands for a fundamental tool of access to information, education, and work. It even facilitates access to services for women victims of violence; however, it also opens new paths for perpetrators. This leads to greater exposure of victims on networks at the time it activates the network of sexual predators."[24]

In order to determine more exactly what those new paths mentioned by the OAS-CIM are, in Acoso.Online we use Woodlock's framework[25] to analyze the evidence collected. Thus, according to the evidence, during the COVID-19 pandemic the most prevalent aim in the use of technology by domestic violence perpetrators is to punish and humiliate women. This is produced primarily through what the Special Rapporteur has defined as the "non-consensual accessing, using, manipulating, disseminating or sharing of private data, information and/or content, photographs and/or videos, including sexualized images, audio clips and/or video clips or Photoshopped images."[26]

In the case of violence being perpetrated in the domestic context, aggressors do ponder on the reputational damage they can cause to women and girls when personal information, images or videos are made public. Hence, they use social media platforms to amplify their ability to harass and humiliate their partners.[27]

Reports on different media and information from various key informers note an increase of the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (NCSII) in the context of confinement. For example,

23   Pikara Magazine. 2020. *Trolls pandémicos*
      https://www.pikaramagazine.com/2020/05/trolls-pandemicos/

24   OEA-CIM. 2020. COVID-19 *en la vida de las mujeres. razones para reconocer los impactos diferenciados* https://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-ES

25   Woodlock, D. 2016. *The Abuse of Technology in Domestic Violence and Stalking. Violence Against Women*, 23(5), 584–602. doi:10.1177/1077801216646277;

26   *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective.* 2018. A/HRC/38/47

27   Molly Dragiewicz, Jean Burgess, Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández, Michael Salter, Nicolas P. Suzor, Delanie Woodlock & Bridget Harris. 2018. *Technology facilitated coercive control: domestic violence and the competing roles of digital media platforms*, Feminist Media Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2018.1447341

SaferNet in Brazil informed that in April 2020, there was an increase of cases of exposure of intimate images, growing 154.90% compared the same month in 2019; not surprisingly, 70% of the victims are women.[28] In Chile, activists think that it is impossible to "stay at home" for women if the penal law does not properly treat NCSII.[29] Nevertheless, it is not always clear who the perpetrator is, whether a third person or group, or a current or ex-partner. For example, Anais Cordova from Taller Comunicación Mujer, Ecuador, reports an increment of the NCII cases they are following; however, the majority are not made by ex-partners.[30] In Mexico, Angélica Contreras, part of a feminist group in the State of Aguascalientes, has alleged an increment of the distribution and publishing of private content without authorization on social networks as a way of extortion and blackmail.[31] Moreover, it was found that the prevalent aggressors are ex-partners.[32] The same occurs in Nicaragua; in April 2020, a group of men was accused of storing and sharing non-consensual intimate images of their current and ex-partners on WhatsApp.[33]

It is important to note that NCSII attacks are not necessarily isolated. Aggressors not only use the threat of NCSII to extort and/or blackmail (as well as sexual blackmail) the victim. In fact, all too often the aggressor commits NCSII including and leaking other types of private or identifying information (especially personally-identifying information such as the victim's name, address, and social media handles) in what is also known as a doxing attack.

Nowadays, the uses of technology to create a sense of omnipresence or to isolate women from their support systems are more challenging to distinguish and determine because these attacks have a more private side. However, local activists as MariaLab from Brazil have published a guide to report domestic violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic for Latin American victims, including digital security advice to prevent stalking from aggressors. This initiative acknowledges the fact that in confinement we also use the Internet more heavily and that this could be a new field for aggressors to deploy their violence-based relationships.[34]

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28   O Globo Celina. 2020. *Violência contra a mulher na internet cresce na quarentena. Saiba como identificar e se defender* https://oglobo.globo.com/celina/violencia-contra-mulher-na-internet-cresce-na-quarentena-saiba-como-identificar-se-defender-1-24438989

29   El Desconcierto. 2020. *La pandemia invisible: violencia sexual en ámbito digital* https://www.eldesconcierto.cl/2020/04/25/la-pandemia-invisible-violencia-sexual-en-ambito-digital/

30   Testimony from Acoso.Online survey.

31   El Heraldo. 2020. *Feministas denuncian que filtración de fotos íntimas aumentó en cuarentena* https://www.heraldo.mx/feministas-denuncian-que-filtracion-de-fotos-intimas-aumento-en-cuarentena/

32   Testimony from Acoso.Online survey.

33   La Prensa. 2020. *Redes sociales, el espacio que han encontrado las mujeres nicaragüenses para denunciar a sus agresores* https://www.laprensa.com.ni/2020/04/14/nacionales/2662961-redes-sociales-el-espacio-que-han-encontrado-las-mujeres-nicaraguenses-para-denunciar-a-sus-agresores

34   MariaLab. 2020. *Cuidados durante a pandemia: como denunciar uma violência doméstica?* https://www.marialab.org/cuidados-durante-a-pandemia/denuncia-violencia-domestica/

3. State responses

Online GBV and its manifestation as domestic violence are produced in a context of increasing recognition of the problem by the States of Latin America. This means legal frameworks, justice systems, and national and local public policies which unfortunately are not always prepared, nor well-grounded. In fact, as the Organization for American States (OAS) acknowledges in a paper from November 2019, "the Inter-American human rights system has not yet established an agreed definition of the multiplicity of behaviors that constitute "online violence" against women within the framework of existing legal instruments such as the Belém do Pará Convention. There is an urgent need to set these standards in order to provide a solid conceptual and normative basis for public policy and other actions that aim to address online violence against women."[35]

In this context, and according to our survey, States do not understand the problem of online GBV in its complexity as they fail to acknowledge it as part of the continuum of violence against women. To some extent, it is not clear whether States realize that online platforms and devices could be a powerful instrument to control victims on the part of domestic violence perpetrators. This is evinced in two ways:

1. The almost nonexistent mention, in campaigns against domestic violence, of the fact that digital platforms and devices per se can constitute a way of perpetrating domestic violence.

2. The creation of online help channels to report domestic violence without considering that the victim's electronic devices could be under the control and surveillance of the perpetrator.

This last point is of paramount importance. In addition to hotlines, many States have enabled online ways to report domestic abuse. For example, in Brazil the Government created a mobile application to help victims report domestic violence. Damares Alves, minister of Human Rights, Family, and Women, declared: "We believe that in this way, the person, even inside the house, can go to a corner, to a bedroom or to a bathroom and, even being under the same roof as the aggressor, can record her rights being violated and thus report their abuser."[36] In Chile, the Government launched a special WhatsApp channel, "WhatsApp Mujer," to support victims. The then surrogate minister of Women and Gender Equity, Carolina Cuevas, remarked: "We needed a way of silent communication through which women did not need to speak, so that's why we devised this WhatsApp, which is a tool that complements the ones we have previously announced."[37] Pablo Bello, director of Private Messaging Policy, Facebook Latam, asserted that this WhatsApp channel is a "silent, encrypted solution that guarantees the security and privacy of the conversation."[38]

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35   OAS. 2019. *Combating Online Violence Against Women: A Call for Protection. White paper series.* Issue 7 https://www.oas.org/en/sms/cicte/docs/20191125-ENG-White-Paper-7-VIOLENCE-AGAINST-WOMEN.pdf

36   Correio Braziliense. 2020. *Mulheres poderão denunciar violência doméstica por app, anuncia Damares* https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2020/04/02/interna_politica,842004/mulheres-poderao-denunciar-violencia-domestica-por-app-anuncia-damare.shtml

37   Meganoticias. 2020. "*WhatsApp Mujer*": *Gobierno lanza número para ayudar a víctimas de violencia* https://www.meganoticias.cl/nacional/300103-numero-whatsapp-mujer-chat-ministerio-de-la-mujer-maltrato-violencia-cuarentena-coronavirus.html

38   Radio Usach. 2020. Pablo Bello por WhatsApp Mujer: "*Había otra pandemia que era la violencia contra la mujer*" https://www.radiousach.cl/pablo-bello-encargado-de-politicas-de-mensajeria-para-whatsapp-habia

In Acoso.Online we value the diversification of help communication channels enforced by Governments. However, these tools can be problematic if a risk-assessment with gender perspective and the intersectional lens are not considered. Some issues to ponder:

- In abusive relationships, the use of devices and even the connection to the Internet can be under the control and surveillance of the aggressor. Indeed, a perpetrator can know the victim's password of the device, social networks, and email, among other services. They can also have access to the mobile phone GPS and know where the victim exactly is, or even install a keylogger software to control what the victim writes in their devices.[39]

- In this sense, public statements asserting that these channels guarantee the victims' security and privacy could be problematic; as a result, they may create a false sense of protection. Even if communication with digital helplines is encrypted, the conversation will not be private if the aggressor can have access to and open the communication device.

- Moreover, digital means of communication imply access and a decent connection to the Internet and, even more importantly, adequate appropriation of those technologies, which goes hand in hand with the victims' diversity of realities. As a case in point, young women in big cities do not necessarily have the same access and appropriation of those means as poor women in rural areas.

- Digital applications must assure high standards of personal data protection. Concretely, software development must take all the security measures to collect, store, and manage victims' data. Besides, the App's data collection policy needs to comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality.

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39   C.A. Goldberg. 2019. *NOTE TO CREEPS: DIGITAL STALKING IS STALKING*
       https://www.cagoldberglaw.com/wtf-is-a-keylogger/

IV. Recommendations to States:

According to the scope of the call made by the Special Rapporteur, and in the context of emergency caused by COVID-19, in Acoso.Online we urge States to do the following:

a. **Build digital security capacities with a gender perspective for people working in the domestic violence and abuse hotlines**. Helplines must have the ability to respond to digital manifestations of gender violence, including the possibility of providing digital emergency care to victims and legal and judicial information for these events.

b. **Strengthen civil society initiatives working on online GBV in order to adequately respond to the growing demand during this emergency.** No State -especially in developing countries- is prepared for the catastrophic effects of the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is essential for States to decentralize their efforts. One way is to allocate funds for civil society organizations -with experience in the online manifestations of domestic violence and abuse- to design, implement or fortify emergency initiatives with territorial characteristics that respond to the victims' demands and needs.

c. **Expand the information and reporting channels in order to not depend exclusively upon digital methods**. With the aim of facing the increase of domestic violence due to confinement, many States have concentrated their efforts in multiplying the helpline channels, including methods such as WhatsApp and digital applications. The problem is that the perpetrator can easily control the devices. Furthermore, this plan ignores the unequal access and appropriation of people's technology from an intersectional perspective. To these channels, it is suggested that the information and reporting platforms should be diverse and based on local realities.

d. **Increase domestic violence campaigns with specificity in digital care.** Electronic devices and digital platforms may be subject to surveillance by the aggressor. Consequently, States must ensure that women become aware of digital self-care in order to understand these aggressor's abusive behaviors, and as a form of basic protection.

e. **Ensure the protection of the personal data collected in the digital help channels available.** The health crisis brought about the pandemic emergency cannot be an excuse for not handling victims' personal data responsibly, especially considering that any leak could potentially become a social stigma against victims and even put their lives at risk. Thus, States must assess the risks of digital platforms from a gender and human rights perspective, establish digital security protections, and design personal data policies that comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality.

f. **Avoid hasty legislation on online GBV.** Many States do not have comprehensive GBV online laws in place, and this emergency may stand for a temptation to hurry the enactment of laws that, for example, criminally penalize the unauthorized dissemination of intimate images. However, hasty and ill-considered legislation, even made on behalf of women victims of domestic violence, can end up having undesirable effects on issues related to freedom of expression on the Internet, for instance. Indeed, passing laws without careful consideration might affect women's freedom of sexual expression by criminalizing legitimate exercises such as sexting, which could both constrain women and underscore their victim status. Thus, States must make their public policy tools available to women victims of domestic violence: if legislation is possible, they must convene a broad call for experts in the field that allows legislating from a human rights and gender perspective. Furthermore, the legal path is not the only answer. States should design and implement other repertoires of public policies, such as educational campaigns or capacity building to the criminal justice, among many others.