

Invisible and relentless: psychological violence against women in the digital environment

Francisco Valente da Silva¹

Raylene Rodrigues de Sena²

Professional Master's Program in Public Security, Citizenship and Human Rights (PPGSP/UEA)

Scientific article

Original material authorized for its first publication in the Journal de Ciencias Sociales, the Academic Journal of the Social Sciences School of Universidad de Palermo.

Received: 2025-09-30

Accepted: 2026-04-27

Abstract: This article examines psychological violence against women in the digital environment, amplified by anonymity and immediacy. It analyzes impacts, typologies, and response mechanisms in light of Brazilian legislation. We adopt a qualitative, bibliographic, and documentary approach, reviewing instruments such as the Maria da Penha Law, the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet, and the Carolina Dieckmann Law, alongside scholarship on harassment, stalking, humiliation, defamation, manipulation, and non-consensual exposure. Findings indicate that, despite normative advances and protective measures (restraining orders, legal and psychological assistance), limitations persist: difficulties identifying anonymous perpetrators, the speed of content circulation, low digital literacy, and insufficient mechanisms for swift takedown and accountability. Gaps are particularly evident in practices such as “revenge porn” and “sextortion,” where emotional, social, and economic harms accumulate and endure. Severe impacts on mental health — anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress — intersect with disruptions to social life and professional trajectories, including withdrawal, isolation, and material loss. Effective responses require fine-grained

¹ Master's student in Public Security, Citizenship and Human Rights (Stricto Sensu) at the State University of Amazonas (PPGSP/UEA). Licensed lawyer. Completed postgraduate studies (Lato Sensu) in Tax Law at Damásio de Jesus Law School (São Paulo) and in Public Security at Focus Education Group (Paraná). Holds a Law degree from the Lutheran University Center of Manaus (CEULM/ULBRA/AM) and a Finance degree from the Brazilian School of Public and Business Administration of Fundação Getúlio Vargas (EBAPE/FGV/RJ). Bachelor in Accounting Sciences and Business Administration from the Open Higher School of Brazil (ESAB/ES). Holds Professional Qualification Certificates in Business Management and Financial Management, both from EBAPE/FGV/RJ. Email: adm.fco@gmail.com

² Ph.D. in Administration from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Master's in Regional Development from the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM). Bachelor's degree in Economics from UFAM. Professor in the Professional Master's Program in Public Security, Citizenship and Human Rights (PPGSP/UEA). Email: rsena@uea.edu.br

legislative adjustments, inter-institutional protocols, technical cooperation and transparency from platforms, continuous training for legal practitioners, and sustained public awareness. We also recommend expanding psychosocial support networks and investing in empirical research to inform evidence-based public policies, ensuring effective protection and respect for women's rights in the virtual sphere. As a contribution, the study systematizes categories of technology-mediated psychological violence and highlights the need for coordinated action among prosecutors' offices, public defenders, specialized police units, and application providers, alongside standardized protocols for preserving digital evidence and accessible, responsive reporting channels.

Keywords: psychological violence; women; cyber environment; brazilian legislation.

Invisible e implacable: la violencia psicológica contra la mujer en el entorno cibernético

Resumen: Este artículo examina la violencia psicológica contra las mujeres en el entorno digital, amplificada por el anonimato y la inmediatez. Analiza impactos, tipologías y mecanismos de afrontamiento a la luz de la legislación brasileña. Se adopta un enfoque cualitativo, bibliográfico y documental, con revisión de la Ley Maria da Penha, el Marco Civil de Internet y la Ley Carolina Dieckmann, junto con estudios sobre acoso, persecución, humillación, difamación, manipulación y exposición no consentida. Los hallazgos indican que, pese a avances normativos y medidas protectoras (órdenes de alejamiento, asistencia jurídica y psicológica), persisten limitaciones: dificultad para identificar agresores anónimos, velocidad de circulación de contenidos, baja alfabetización digital e insuficiencia de mecanismos ágiles de retirada y rendición de cuentas. Las brechas son más evidentes en prácticas como la "pornografía de venganza" y la "sextorsión", donde los daños emocionales, sociales y económicos se acumulan y perduran. Se observan impactos severos en la salud mental —ansiedad, depresión y trastorno de estrés postraumático—, en la vida social y en las trayectorias profesionales, con retraimiento, aislamiento y pérdidas materiales. La efectividad de las respuestas exige ajustes legislativos finos, protocolos interinstitucionales, cooperación técnica y transparencia de las plataformas, capacitación continua de operadores del derecho y campañas sostenidas de sensibilización. Asimismo, se recomienda ampliar redes de apoyo psicosocial e impulsar investigación empírica para fundamentar políticas públicas basadas en evidencia, garantizando protección efectiva y respeto de los derechos de las mujeres en el ámbito virtual. Como contribución, el estudio sistematiza las categorías de violencia psicológica mediada por la tecnología y subraya la necesidad de una acción coordinada entre las fiscalías, los defensores públicos, las unidades policiales especializadas

y los proveedores de aplicaciones, junto con protocolos estandarizados para la preservación de pruebas digitales y canales de denuncia accesibles y eficaces.

Palabras clave: violencia psicológica; mujeres; entorno cibernético; legislación brasileña.

1. Introduction

This study addresses the impacts of psychological violence against women in the digital environment, focusing on Brazilian legislation. This form of violence, marked by the complexity of electronic crimes, transcends physical boundaries and requires a coordinated response, since, although it does not leave physical marks, it can produce consequences as serious as—or even more serious than—physical assaults (Rosas et al., 2021).

Recent scholarship also shows that communication technologies provide new means through which people may threaten, harass, and control others (Iroegbu et al., 2024). Accordingly, what occurs online cannot be treated as irrelevant to offline life, because digital interactions produce concrete social and psychological consequences beyond the screen (Fairbairn, 2015).

From a gender perspective, these dynamics are especially significant because many forms of violence against women and girls continue to be structured by gendered inequalities that are reproduced in digital settings (Pande, 2024).

The research is justified by its legal relevance, since recent technological advances have significantly transformed the nature of crime, with a substantial portion of harmful conduct migrating to cyberspace, and by its social relevance, given the centrality of the internet in everyday life and the increasing migration of social interaction to environments that connect the physical and the virtual (Fórum brasileiro de segurança pública, 2023; Vieira, 2020).

The research problem guiding this study was defined by the following question: How has Brazilian legislation addressed the challenges of psychological violence against women in the cyber environment, and what are the main impacts of this violence on victims' mental health and social lives?

The overall objective is to present and analyze how Brazilian legislation addresses the challenges of psychological violence against women in the cyber environment, examining its scope, limitations, and the impacts of this form of violence on victims' mental health and social lives.

The specific objectives are: 1) to describe the concepts and characteristics of psychological aggression against women in the cyber context; 2) to list the forms of

psychological abuse against women and the legal safeguards provided; and 3) to estimate the psychological and social impacts of digital psychological violence on victims.

The methodology adopted in this research, considering the problem and objectives, is bibliographic regarding technical procedures, qualitative in approach, basic in nature, and descriptive in its aims.

Thus, the article is organized around the following analytical sections: 1) concepts and characteristics of psychological violence against women in the cyber environment; 2) forms of psychological violence and their framing in Brazilian legislation; and 3) the possible impacts of psychological violence against women in cyberspace on victims.

As for the hypothesis, the research shows its confirmation; that is, cyber psychological abuse causes serious impacts and, despite legal protections, the effectiveness of strategies is limited by lack of awareness, practical constraints, and technological barriers, requiring improvements and greater coordination.

2. State of the art

The digital environment has brought conveniences and transformations, but it has also enabled new forms of violence, especially against women.

Recent literature defines technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as conduct committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by information and communication technologies and other digital tools, with potential physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic consequences (Hameed et al., 2025). This definition is useful because it shows that digital violence is not isolated from broader gender-based violence; rather, it extends and intensifies it.

Complementing this perspective, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025) understands TFGBV as part of the continuum of gender-based violence and stresses that online abuse can silence women, restrict their participation in public life, and undermine democratic inclusion. This broader understanding helps situate the discussion beyond individual episodes of abuse and highlights the structural effects of digital violence on rights, visibility, and participation.

Recent data help situate the scale of this problem. In Brazil, the 2025 National Survey on Violence against Women, conducted by DataSenado in partnership with the Observatory of Women against Violence, estimated that 8.8 million Brazilian women aged 16 or older—10% of the female population in this age group—experienced some form of digital violence in the previous 12 months (DataSenado, 2025). This prevalence-based evidence is reinforced by official public security records: the Brazilian Public Security Yearbooks reported 95,026

women victims of stalking and 51,866 victims of psychological violence in 2024, compared with 56,560 and 24,382, respectively, in 2022. The Yearbooks also stress that stalking deserves increasing attention in a context in which crime has adapted to virtual modalities, since it may occur not only through physical presence, but also through telephone calls, text messages, e-mails, and social networks (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2023, 2024, 2025).

Taken together, these sources capture the problem from complementary angles: DataSenado captures self-reported victimization, whereas the Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública data show how closely related forms of abuse appear in official public security records. At the international level, the OECD (2025) notes that women—particularly those in public life—are disproportionately targeted by online abuse, with technology-facilitated gender-based violence documented across G7 countries and with measurable consequences for their participation in public and digital life.

The use of social networks and other online platforms has expanded the reach and intensity of digital abuse, making it more invasive and more difficult to combat. As technology develops, it broadens opportunities for violence by exacerbating conventional forms of gender-based abuse and enabling qualitatively new practices that depend on digital mediation (Hameed et al., 2025).

Alongside traditional forms of aggression, the digital age has given visibility to new manifestations of gender violence, including technology-facilitated sexual violence, image-based abuse, online sexual coercion, and other forms of harassment mediated by digital tools (Pande, 2024; Pak et al., 2024; Zhang & Mo, 2025).

Because online content is persistent and rapidly disseminated, harassment in digital spaces may be experienced more pervasively than face-to-face abuse, especially when offensive material can be stored, shared, and revisited indefinitely (Iroegbu et al., 2024); at the same time, technologies commonly used to maintain social networks and perform daily tasks may also be converted into instruments of domestic and family violence, reinforcing control, humiliation, and surveillance (Douglas et al., 2019).

Violence against women therefore manifests in the virtual sphere through a wide range of practices—including harassment, stalking, humiliation, assault, and defamation—that reproduce and amplify harms already observed in offline settings (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023).

These situations illustrate how the virtual environment extends the abuser's presence beyond physical limits, creating a sense of permanent exposure and fear. In this way, technology may extend spatial and temporal control over victims and transform ordinary activities into sources of anxiety (Douglas et al., 2019), and sustain a persistent dynamic of

threat and emotional manipulation through which aggressors may humiliate, intimidate, or control victims, directly interfering with their dignity, autonomy, and emotional stability.

Brazilian studies note that cybercrimes have grown partly because they do not depend on the aggressor's physical presence and are often accompanied by a false sense of impunity associated with anonymity. They also observe that the immediacy of digital circulation allows images, videos, and messages to spread quickly, making it difficult to identify the original source and to contain the resulting harm once exposure has occurred (Stoco & Bach, 2018).

The internet and social networks have thus become frequent means for misconduct, providing aggressors with new modes of control and humiliation. Digital platforms often intensify exposure and visibility, so the same tools that could strengthen support networks may also be misused to disseminate violence and threats (Romeiro & Pimenta, 2021).

Since the enactment of the Brazilian Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11.340/06), violence against women has been more widely discussed as a recurrent social problem, and the virtual environment has increasingly become one of the means through which such violence is practiced. Even so, research indicates that many victims remain silent and few report the aggression — a pattern especially pronounced when the aggressor is an intimate partner — suggesting that the gap between the actual prevalence of violence and its formal registration remains significant (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023).

3. Theoretical Perspective

Psychological violence against women, criminalized in Article 147-B of the Brazilian Penal Code, refers to conduct that causes emotional harm, disturbs psychological balance, undermines personal development, or seeks to degrade or control women's conduct, beliefs, and decisions (Nucci, 2023). Although it may occur without physical contact, this offense cannot be treated as a lesser form of aggression, because its effects operate precisely through humiliation, intimidation, manipulation, and the erosion of self-determination (Nucci, 2023).

The Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11.340/06), enacted in 2006, represents the central legislative milestone in the protection of women against psychological violence in Brazil. It formally recognizes psychological violence as a serious modality of abuse and provides a broad definition: conduct that causes emotional harm, diminishes a woman's self-esteem, or seeks to control her actions, behaviors, beliefs, and decisions through practices such as threat, humiliation, manipulation, isolation, surveillance, stalking, insult, blackmail, violation of privacy, ridicule, exploitation, and restrictions on freedom of movement (Law No. 11.340/06). The law also establishes consequences and protective measures, including the removal of

the aggressor and the provision of legal and psychological assistance to victims (Correia, 2023).

However, the Maria da Penha Law was conceived primarily to address domestic and face-to-face violence; it does not establish specific provisions for the digital environment. While its broad definition of psychological violence can, in principle, be applied to online conduct, the law does not directly address the particular dynamics of virtual aggression — such as anonymity, the speed of content dissemination, or the transnational nature of cyberspace. These practices may, in the virtual environment, become even more persistent and invasive than offline aggression, given the reduction of physical and temporal distance enabled by electronic resources, especially the internet (Garcia et al., 2017). These forms of aggression encompassed by that framework include various practices occurring on social networks, where psychological control and manipulation are common; yet the absence of digitally specific provisions creates an enforcement gap.

The Brazilian Penal Code also typifies conduct that, although originally conceived for the physical environment, may be applied to the virtual context. Crimes against honor — such as insult and defamation — are frequently perpetrated on social networks, aggravating victims' emotional impact. The transposition of these provisions to digital cases, however, is not straightforward: the speed, scale, and anonymity of the internet create conditions that differ substantially from face-to-face interactions, which is precisely why digitally specific legal frameworks became necessary to ensure that the virtual environment is adequately regulated and that victims can access effective protection (Garcia et al., 2017).

Responding in part to these gaps, the Carolina Dieckmann Law (Law No. 12.737/12), enacted in 2012, introduced the specific typification of cybercrimes in Brazil, including the unauthorized invasion of computer devices. This legislation became especially relevant in cases involving non-consensual disclosure of intimate content and other forms of digital exposure. In practice, conduct often described as "revenge porn" represents an extreme form of psychological violence because it seeks to humiliate, constrain, and socially isolate the victim, generating emotional destabilization and loss of self-determination (Correia, 2023; Masson, 2023). The Carolina Dieckmann Law thus represented a significant step forward in addressing practices the Maria da Penha Law and the Penal Code could not adequately reach.

A further development came with the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet (Marco Civil da Internet — Law No. 12.965/14), enacted in 2014. This legislation regulates internet use in Brazil, establishing rights and duties for users and service providers, and provides guidelines on privacy and content liability — aspects directly relevant to cases of digital psychological violence. By defining the responsibilities of platforms in relation to harmful

content and user privacy, the Marco Civil da Internet created a legal basis for demanding accountability from both aggressors and intermediary platforms, complementing the protection already offered by the Maria da Penha Law and the Carolina Dieckmann Law.

Despite these successive legislative advances, Brazilian law still presents significant gaps, particularly regarding violations such as "revenge porn," "sextortion," and virtual sexual violence. Although the Carolina Dieckmann Law addressed specific cybercrimes and the Marco Civil da Internet established platform accountability standards, the digital environment continues to generate new forms of harm that exceed current typifications: the specific legal framing of image-based abuse and online sexual coercion remains incomplete. As a result, the legal system still needs to evolve in order to fully encompass these newer forms of digital violence (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023).

Furthermore, even the protective measures already available — such as the removal of the aggressor under the Maria da Penha Law — face practical barriers in the digital context. Psychological aggression, including insults, humiliation, threats, and stalking, is especially facilitated by the sense of impunity afforded by online anonymity, which leads aggressors to believe they can act behind a screen, aggravating victims' suffering and hindering accountability when false identities are used.

Thus, the cyber environment has transformed social relations, allowing new forms of psychological violence to emerge. The anonymity and identity manipulation enabled by digital interaction increase the risks faced by women and girls and complicate the identification of aggressors (Pande, 2024). This does not mean that every online conflict constitutes violence, but serious threats uttered through digital channels can be as harmful as those made in person, by telephone, or in writing (Fairbairn, 2015).

This chronological and normative framework underpins the analysis of the results and the subsequent discussion, allowing us to understand how Brazilian legal instruments have progressively responded to — yet still fall short in addressing — the reality of psychological violence in the digital environment.

4. Possible Impacts of Psychological Violence in the Digital Sphere on Victims

Psychological violence, including that carried out by digital means, tends to affect women's mental and emotional health, harming psychological well-being, since the perpetrator seeks to cause emotional damage to the woman, compromising her development or aiming to degrade and control her actions through humiliation, intimidation, and manipulation (Nucci, 2023).

Emerging international evidence also indicates that women, young people, persons with disabilities, sexual, gender, religious, and ethnic minorities, First Nations peoples, and those with intersecting marginalized identities may be especially vulnerable to online violence (Hameed et al., 2025).

This increased exposure to harm reveals how digital spaces reproduce existing inequalities and systemic discrimination, extending gender-based violence into the online sphere. In this regard, the OECD (2025) emphasizes that TFGBV may undermine rights and freedoms, threaten well-being, and restrict equal and meaningful participation in public life and democratic processes. This means that the consequences of TFGBV extend beyond individual suffering and may also erode participation, visibility, and democratic inclusion (OECD, 2025).

Such findings reinforce that digital psychological violence disproportionately affects groups already marked by social vulnerability, intensifying their exposure to harm and limiting their access to safe digital environments.

Psychological violence, although it leaves no physical or visible marks, can produce consequences as severe as those caused by physical assaults. In many cases, victims develop conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, which may require long-term treatment and can persist throughout life (Rosas et al., 2021).

This pattern is also observed in empirical research. Douglas et al. (2019) report that monitoring and stalking were among the most frequently identified forms of technology-facilitated abuse, followed by isolation, social-media-facilitated abuse, and image-based abuse. These findings reveal that online psychological violence frequently involves persistent surveillance, contributing to emotional exhaustion and feelings of helplessness.

The same study also indicates that everyday technologies may become recurrent instruments of coercion. In their interviews, Douglas et al. (2019) found that mobile phones were repeatedly used by aggressors as tools of abuse, showing how ordinary communication devices can be turned into mechanisms of surveillance and psychological domination.

Digital violence employs the dissemination of personal information and psychological manipulation as central tools, allowing aggressors to spread rumors, disclose private data, and monitor victims with limited possibilities of immediate intervention. The digital sphere has therefore become a space that facilitates the spread of violence against women, where psychological violence manifests in forms such as stalking, humiliation, assault, and defamation.

The situation becomes even more serious because social networks combine extensive reach with rapid circulation of information, which intensifies reputational damage and contributes to an environment of constant suffering for victims (Oliveira & Mendes, 2023).

In addition to emotional consequences, the social impact can be devastating. Victims often isolate themselves for fear of new aggressions or out of shame, which harms their interpersonal relationships and, in many cases, also affects their professional lives. Cyberbullying, for example—one of the most common forms of virtual abuse—tends to extend beyond the school environment through social networks and digital communication devices, broadening the impact of violence beyond the physical environment. This shows that psychological violence in the digital environment not only affects the victim at the moment it occurs but can also have long-lasting effects in various areas of life (Schreiber & Antunes, 2015).

The Maria da Penha Law recognizes the seriousness of psychological violence, considering it a form of abuse that can generate harm to victims' psychological health and self-determination (Law No. 11.340/06). However, the practical application of this legislation in the digital context still faces many challenges. In this regard, the OECD (2025) argues that responses to TFGBV must be integrated into broader legal and policy frameworks on gender-based violence, digitalization, data collection, justice systems, and platform accountability.

Likewise, Iroegbu et al. (2024) note that victims may perceive substantial difficulty in bringing perpetrators to justice and may experience a profound sense of loss of control and powerlessness over victimization.

Therefore, the impacts of violence occurring in the digital environment go beyond immediate harm, affecting women's lives broadly and durably. Psychological violence online is particularly insidious, as it often leaves no visible marks but causes deep and lasting damage to victims' mental health and social lives. Although Brazilian legislation offers protective resources, it still struggles to keep pace with the complexity and speed with which this form of violence develops in the virtual environment.

5. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this research was designed to analyze psychological violence against women in the digital environment, focusing on the impacts and the response strategies provided for in Brazilian legislation. This study employs bibliographic and documentary research, with a qualitative and exploratory approach, which is especially appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena such as digital psychological violence, where context and subjectivity are essential for data interpretation.

Documentary research is based on data collection limited to documents—written or otherwise—considered primary sources. These documents may be produced at the moment when the event or phenomenon occurs or afterward (Lakatos, 2003).

Bibliographic research, also known as secondary-source research, encompasses all material already published on the topic under study. This includes everything from stand-alone publications, bulletins, newspapers, magazines, books, research, monographs, theses, and cartographic materials to oral communication content such as audio recordings and audiovisual resources such as films and television programs. The goal of this approach is to allow the researcher direct access to everything that has been written, discussed, or recorded about the subject, including conferences and debates that have been transcribed or recorded, whether published or not (Lakatos, 2003). Therefore, this research is exploratory or bibliographic in nature, as it seeks to assist in defining objectives and collecting information on the topic under analysis. This type of research is characterized by the search for answers to a question or knowledge gap through documents, using published theoretical references without the need to formulate hypotheses (Michel, 2015). The choice of exploratory research was based on the need to clarify the phenomenon of psychological abuse in the cyber environment, which is relatively new and has a dynamic different from psychological violence in the physical environment. In addition, the research is based on an extensive literature review, including academic articles, books, and Brazilian legislation.

The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the focus on interpreting and understanding the nuances of virtual abuse against women. Qualitative research seeks to collect and analyze descriptive data obtained directly from the context studied, focusing more on process than on results. This type of research observes reality in its natural context, interpreting phenomena according to the meanings attributed by the people involved. Its main objective is not to showcase opinions or specific individuals but to explore the diversity of opinions and representations on the topic under analysis (Michel, 2015). In this sense, psychological violence in the cyber environment involves subjectivities and specific contexts that can only be properly analyzed through a methodology that allows investigation of the factors related to the practice. The qualitative approach therefore makes it possible to explore the experiences and subjective impacts of this type of violence, offering a more complete and detailed view of the problem.

Qualitative research becomes relevant when considering that the individual is embedded in a unique context, with specific realities that differentiate them from others. Quantitative methods, in turn, depend on qualitative ones to explain phenomena more completely and contextually (Santos & Nascimento, 2021).

Data collection was carried out through bibliographic research, using secondary sources as the basis for the study. Scientific articles, books, and reports published by institutions operating in the areas of women's rights and cybersecurity were consulted. The aim of this review was to gather information on the characteristics of psychological violence, the applicable legislation in Brazil, and the impacts of the digital environment in perpetuating this type of violence. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the topic and the timeliness of the data, with special consideration for studies and publications from the last five years, ensuring that the information is up to date with technological developments and changes in the cyber environment.

A significant part of the analysis focused on studying Brazilian legislation relevant to the topic, with emphasis on the Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11.340/06) and the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet (Law No. 12.965/14). The Maria da Penha Law was examined in relation to its provisions on psychological violence and the protective measures available to victims. This law was analyzed regarding its application in cases of digital violence and the effectiveness of its measures in the cyber context. In addition, the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet was included in the analysis due to its importance in regulating internet use in Brazil and defining the rights and duties of users and service providers. This legislation provides guidelines on privacy and content liability, which is essential for the study of cyber psychological aggression.

The documentary analysis also included the Carolina Dieckmann Law (Law No. 12.737/12), which typifies cybercrimes in Brazil, focusing especially on device invasion and unauthorized disclosure of content. This set of laws was studied with the aim of mapping the existing legal protections and identifying possible gaps in tackling digital aggressions.

It is important to highlight some limitations of the methodology adopted. As this is a bibliographic study, the analysis depends exclusively on secondary data, which limits the possibility of directly verifying victims' experiences of digital abuse. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of technologies and the dynamics of the digital environment can quickly render some data outdated, reinforcing the need for future empirical research that can complement the results presented here with data collected directly from victims and from institutions active in protecting rights in the cyber environment.

The methodology adopted was essential to ensure a comprehensive and detailed understanding of psychological violence against women in cyberspace and of the legal challenges to confronting it in Brazil. By adopting a qualitative and bibliographic approach, the study was able to address the complexities of the phenomenon and explore the nuances of the emotional and social impact on victims. The documentary analysis of Brazilian legislation

provided a critical view of legal protections and the challenges of their application in the digital context, offering a solid basis to discuss improvements and strategies for response.

In summary, the methodology allowed for an in-depth and detailed analysis of the topic, grounded in a robust theoretical and legislative basis that served as the foundation for the discussions presented in this study. However, the importance of future studies that incorporate empirical methods is recognized, in order to broaden understanding of the topic and provide data that can help in formulating more effective public policies to combat this type of violence in Brazil.

Due to the selection of secondary bibliographic data without access to any form of personal identification, there was no need for approval by a Research Ethics Committee.

6. Results and discussion

The results confirm that psychological violence against women in the digital environment generates significant emotional, social, and economic impacts, and that the response strategies provided by Brazilian law—though relevant—face significant limitations. Online emotional abuse is facilitated by the nature of the virtual environment, where anonymity and immediacy amplify the potential for aggression and hinder the control and punishment of offenders.

The analysis of impacts reveals that psychological violence, even without leaving physical marks, causes severe damage to victims' mental health. As indicated by Rosas et al. (2021), this form of violence may produce consequences as serious as, or even more serious than, physical aggression. Victims often develop conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, which may persist throughout life. These findings reflect the severity of digital violence and reinforce the need for a more robust and effective legal response to protect victims and mitigate these harms.

In the legal context, the Maria da Penha Law (Law No. 11.340/06) provides support for women victims of psychological violence, including measures such as removal of the aggressor and the provision of legal and psychological support. The law adopts a broad understanding of psychological violence, covering conduct aimed at causing emotional harm, reducing self-esteem, or controlling women's actions, behaviors, beliefs, and decisions. However, although the legislation provides a protective framework, its practical application faces challenges, especially in the digital environment. The technical complexity of cybercrimes—such as the difficulty of identifying anonymous aggressors and the speed with which offensive content spreads—limits the effectiveness of these measures.

The study also shows that anonymity and the perception of impunity are determining factors in the perpetuation of emotional harassment in the virtual environment. Stoco and Bach (2018) argue that the digital medium has become a favorable space for the spread of violence against women, since aggressors may hide behind fake profiles, making accountability difficult and increasing victims' suffering. This dynamic prevents many women from reporting their aggressors because they fear reprisals and the public exposure of private information. The study therefore indicates that, although Brazilian legislation seeks to offer protection, it still lacks sufficiently specific provisions to address the particularities of digital violence, such as "revenge porn" and "sextortion," which continue to pose complex legal challenges.

Comparative evidence suggests that more integrated approaches may offer concrete paths forward. The OECD (2025) has documented policy responses to TFGBV across G7 countries that include specialized reporting platforms, platform liability frameworks requiring faster content removal, coordinated training for law enforcement and the judiciary, and victim-centered support services that combine legal, psychological, and digital assistance. Brazil's legislative trajectory — from the Maria da Penha Law through the Carolina Dieckmann Law and the Marco Civil da Internet — shares some of these structural priorities, but the integration between legal instruments, digital platforms, and support institutions remains incomplete. Strengthening these connections, including through inter-institutional protocols and greater accountability of application providers, would constitute concrete steps toward more effective responses to digital psychological violence.

The dissemination of private information and psychological manipulation are common tactics used by aggressors in the digital environment. This affects not only victims' mental health but also their social and professional lives. Schreiber and Antunes (2015) observe that cyberbullying—a common form of virtual psychological abuse—often surpasses the school environment and spreads through social networks, increasing the impact of violence on victims' daily lives and hindering their recovery. The lack of specific regulations to combat these cyber abuses creates a continuous sense of vulnerability for women, who often find themselves isolated and unsupported.

In short, the results indicate that, despite legislative advances and existing response strategies, psychological violence against women in the cyber environment remains a complex and multifaceted problem. Brazilian legislation, although relevant, needs improvements that consider the specificities of digital violence and enable more effective application of legal protections. Furthermore, closer collaboration between the legal system, digital platforms, and civil society is essential to strengthen support networks and ensure a safer and more respectful digital environment for all women.

7. Conclusion

Psychological violence against women in the cyber environment is a worrisome and growing phenomenon, driven by technological advances and the integration of technology into daily life. This study revealed that, although Brazilian legislation—such as the Maria da Penha Law and the Civil Rights Framework for the Internet—provides a structure to protect women against digital violence, there are significant gaps in the application of these laws, which limits the protection and support offered to victims. The complexity of online psychological aggression lies in its capacity to cause deep emotional and psychological suffering without leaving physical marks, thus making recognition and punishment of the aggressor more difficult.

The research confirms that the impacts of emotional abuse in the virtual environment are profound and long-lasting. Women who are victims of harassment, stalking, and emotional manipulation online often develop conditions such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which affect their mental health and interfere with their personal and professional lives. These impacts show that such aggression should be treated with the same seriousness as other forms of violence, requiring a legal system adapted to respond effectively.

One of the main obstacles identified in the application of the law is the difficulty of holding aggressors accountable due to the anonymity offered by the digital environment. As Stoco and Bach (2018) point out, the digital environment facilitates the spread of violence against women because aggressors may hide behind screens and false identities, which makes it more difficult to identify and punish those responsible. This sense of impunity encourages abuse, while the rapid dissemination of content on social networks can intensify the victim's suffering within seconds.

The research also reveals that, although Brazilian legislation includes protective measures – such as removal of the aggressor and legal and psychological assistance – its effectiveness in the digital environment is still limited. The Maria da Penha Law, although essential in combating gender-based violence, was conceived mainly to deal with domestic and face-to-face violence, and does not always adequately cover the challenges of digital abuse. Other laws, such as the Carolina Dieckmann Law, which typifies cybercrimes, still do not encompass all forms of digital violence, such as “revenge porn” and “sextortion,” practices that cause serious psychological and social harm to victims. The need for new regulations that consider these specificities is therefore evident.

Another important aspect discussed is the role of social actors—such as digital platforms—in confronting digital psychological violence. Social networks and other platforms have policies for reporting and blocking abusive users, but these measures have proven

insufficient given the magnitude and complexity of the problem. The research suggests that closer collaboration between public authorities and technology companies is essential for developing tools that facilitate the identification and removal of offensive content, in addition to protecting victims' privacy. This becomes even more necessary considering that offensive content can often remain accessible and shareable, increasing victims' exposure and suffering.

The study also highlights the importance of awareness campaigns aimed at encouraging victims to report and society to support these reports. Such campaigns help to break the cycle of silence and isolation, creating a support network that is essential for victims to feel safe and encouraged to seek help. Public awareness of the impacts of virtual aggression and the importance of a safe digital environment is a crucial step toward transforming the culture of impunity that still exists around this type of violence.

In sum, this study concludes that, despite legislative advances and response initiatives, psychological violence against women in the cyber environment remains a complex and multifaceted challenge. Brazilian legislation provides a basis for victim protection, but technological barriers, lack of awareness, and difficulties in practical application limit the effectiveness of these laws. A continuous effort to adapt legal standards and digital security policies is necessary to ensure that women can access and use the digital environment without fear of psychological abuse.

Additionally, a collaborative approach involving the judicial system, technology companies, NGOs, and civil society is essential to build a safer and more welcoming digital environment for all women.

In this regard, Iroegbu et al. (2024) warn that the trauma and shame associated with severe cyber-sexual harassment may lead women to avoid digital spaces altogether, which shows that the consequences of online abuse include not only immediate suffering but also exclusion from environments that are increasingly central to social participation.

For this reason, cyberspace must be treated as a space in which women and girls are entitled to safety, and effective responses depend on active online communities and coordinated action against digital violence (Pande, 2024).

Finally, this study points to the need for new research and policies that consider the particularities of psychological violence in the digital context, with the aim of improving legislation and developing protection strategies that ensure the safety and well-being of women in all spaces, physical and virtual. As Fairbairn (2015) argues, violence should be understood as an abuse of power that compromises people's physical and emotional safety, including in internet environments.

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