



BIT



FINAL REPORT 2026

Understanding tech-based abuse of women on dating platforms



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Executive Summary

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) is a form of abuse where digital tools are used to inflict harm based on gender. This report captures a wide spectrum of these harms, including:

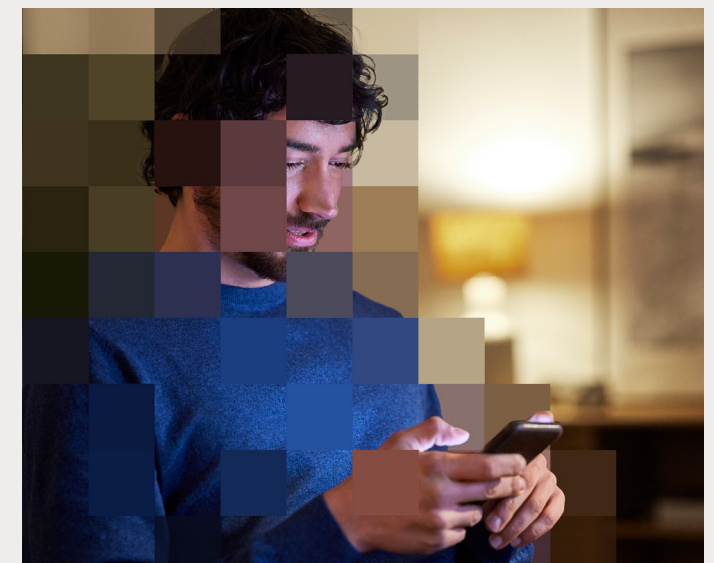
Overt behaviours

Clearly identifiable violations, such as catfishing, sending unsolicited explicit images, or making direct threats.

Psychological and emotional experiences

Subtler, often normalised patterns of abuse, such as 'love-bombing' (excessive flattery to manipulate), 'negging' (subtle insults designed to undermine confidence), or gaslighting.

This project, funded by the Minderoo Foundation and led by the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), aimed to develop an understanding of abuse on dating platforms, in order to help policymakers and dating platforms to intervene. This project produced two practical resources that translate our research insights into tools for understanding how tech-based abuse of women manifests on dating platforms (see, below).



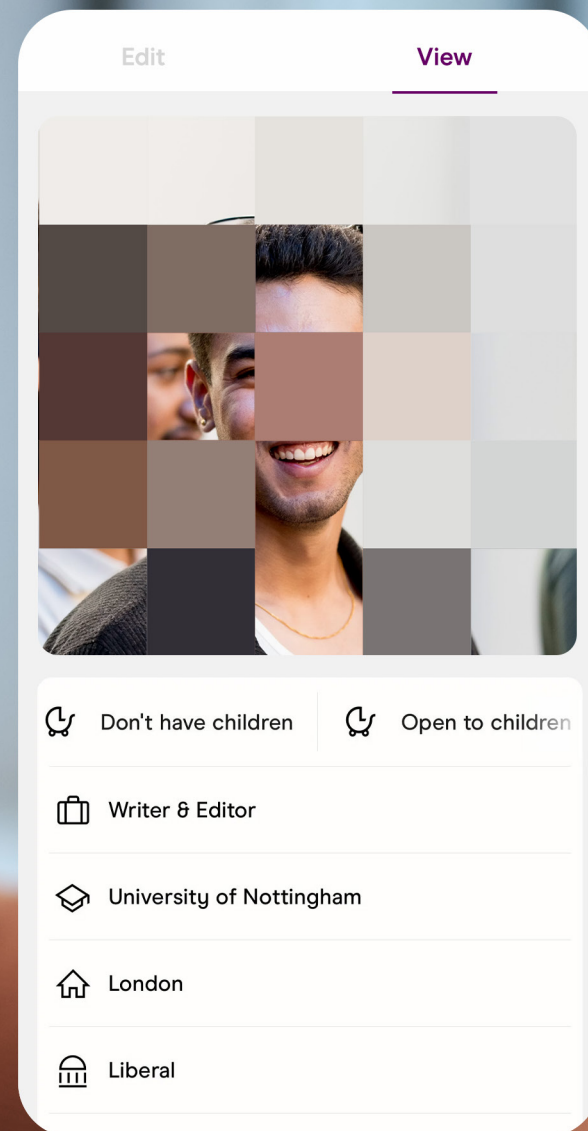
The Tech-Based abuse Experience Map

We developed an Experience Map that traces women's experience of abuse on dating platforms. The map highlights where risks emerge, how harms are experienced, and opportunities for platforms and regulators to strengthen women's safety.

The Gendered Abuse on Dating Apps Scale (GADA Scale)

We developed and tested a scale that measures the prevalence and nature of women's experience of abuse on dating platforms. This scale captures a full spectrum of harm, allowing experiences and behaviours to be compared across types, severity, and impact.

This can be used by researchers, advocacy bodies, and regulators to provide a clearer picture of how pervasive different forms of harm are, how different forms of harm can escalate and compound, and how women experience and respond to them. The scale can also be used directly by platforms to report on the current state and progress of their efforts to combat abuse. The GADA Scale aims to support standardised measurement by platforms or third parties as platforms change and evolve, and support ongoing research and analysis in the wider field.





Population scope

Tech-based abuse disproportionately affects women, particularly on dating platforms. This project focused on abuse occurring on dating platforms in Australia, and for the purpose of this research project, the scope was narrowed to heterosexual women.

Behaviours

This project investigated abuse occurring on dating platforms. This project did not include abuse occurring outside of dating platforms (e.g. in-person or on other platforms).

To create the map and GADA Scale we conducted a series of research activities to understand how abuse of women emerges and escalates on dating platforms. These research activities included:

- › A **literature scan** of existing evidence and abuse-escalation scales
- › **Consultations** with 11 subject matter experts
- › **Semi-structured interviews** with 12 women with lived experience of abuse on dating platforms
- › **User experience (UX) research and a platform walkthrough** with Bumble to map existing safety features and risk points
- › An **online survey** of the prototype GADA Scale with 1,008 heterosexual women in Australia.

This report has been written for dating platform designers and their safety and trust teams, for regulators and policymakers, and for researchers and advocates. It aims to:

1. Guide dating platforms toward harm-prevention features and safety interventions
2. Highlight reforms that regulators and policymakers can pursue to address systemic, underlying harms, and provide a shared evidence base for civil society, government, and industry collaboration.

FINDINGS

Women's experience of abuse on dating platforms

Mapping women's experiences of tech-based abuse on dating platforms revealed 9 key findings:

1. Women do extensive safety work to anticipate and filter out risk, i.e. they undertake ongoing, often invisible actions to detect, and manage potential harms and threats to safety and wellbeing
2. The emotional burden of safety work and anticipating risks causes fatigue
3. Onboarding and registration processes encourage disclosure of information which can increase women's vulnerability
4. Without proper implementation, safeguards like verification processes can cause unease or introduce risks
5. Some design features – such as unsolicited messages or activity indicators – can unintentionally enable harm...
6. ...While novel safety features – such as content flags and restrictions – can have unintended consequences
7. Platforms are underselling their current safety features and this adds to women's burden of safety work
8. Process barriers can prevent women from reporting incidents of abuse to the platform
9. Unclear reporting and automated moderation processes for abuse can cause distress.

The process of developing and testing the prototype GADA Scale revealed 4 key findings:

1. 99% of women experienced at least one instance of tech-based abuse on dating platforms in the last three months
2. The most common category of tech-based abuse experienced was psychological / emotional, followed by monitoring / surveillance
3. Overt behaviours (such as receiving explicit images) were more often reported to the platforms, compared to psychological and coercive behaviours (such as love bombing or contact policing)
4. Sexual behaviours were often experienced repeatedly, for example, being manipulated into sending sexual content, or receiving unsolicited sexually explicit text, images, or video.

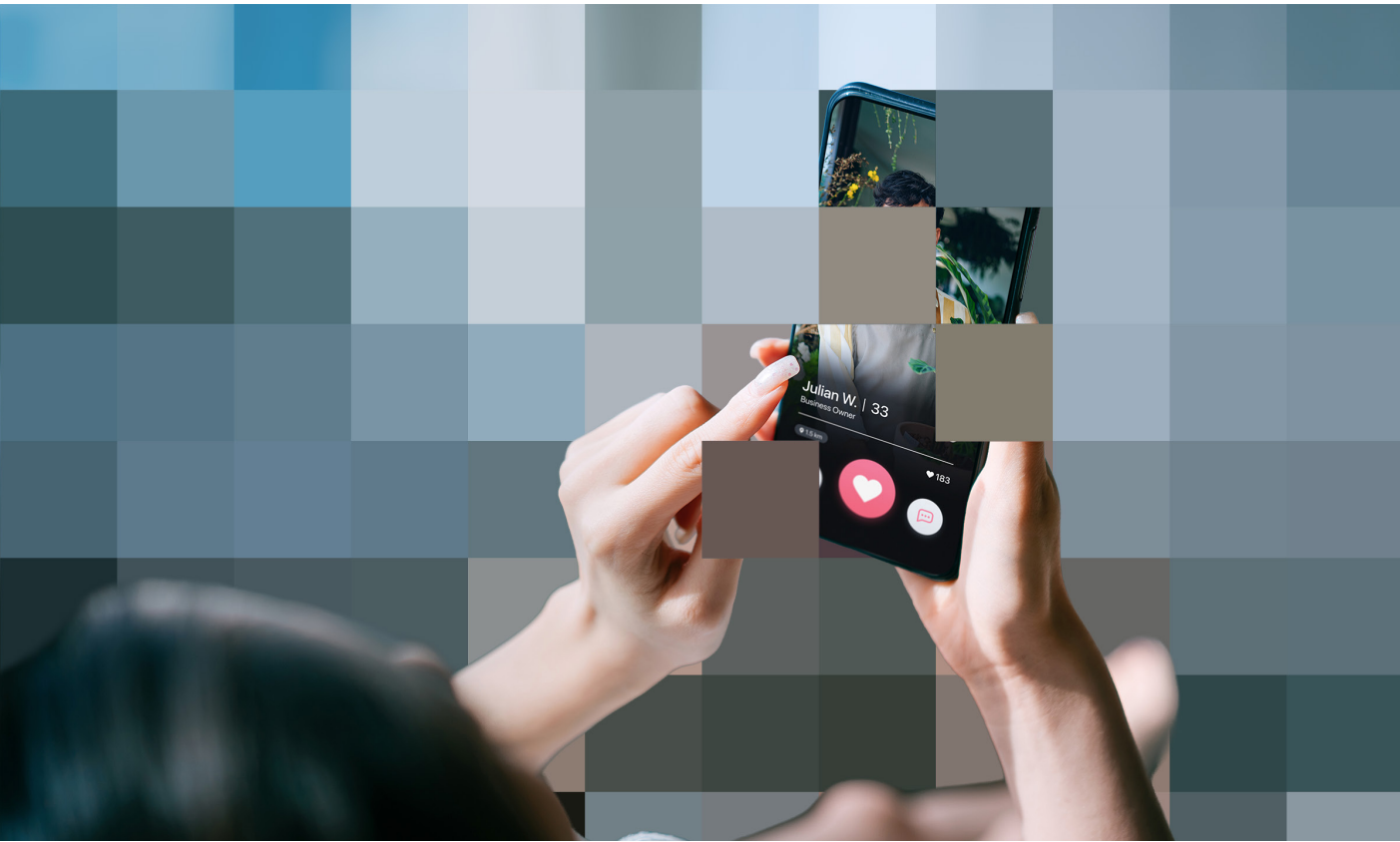
RECOMMENDATIONS OVERVIEW

Recommendations for platforms

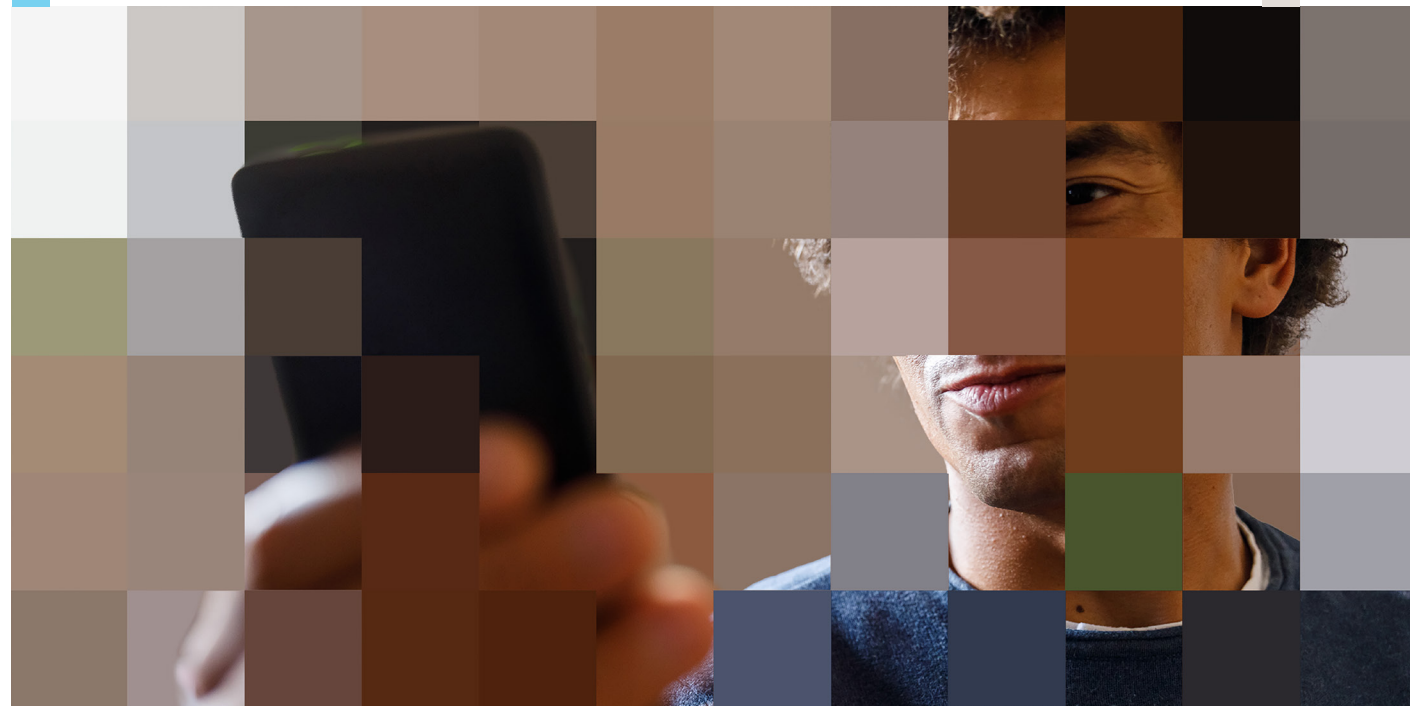
1. Incentivise safety-informed ID verification for users
2. Leverage timely intervention points for behaviour change
3. Monitor potential precursors through proactive detection and flagging
4. Improve women's visibility and understanding of behavioural red flags
5. Boost autonomy over safety settings
6. Clearly communicate safety features at onboarding
7. Increase data ownership and access to personal data
8. Improve transparency in reporting channels
9. Improve accountability to prevent perpetrator account-hopping
10. Conduct initial benchmarking using validated GADA Scale

Recommendations for regulatory bodies

1. Develop consent-based risk frameworks
2. Ensure platform safety considerations are subject to stricter regulator enforcement
3. Improve data, privacy, and information transparency
4. Facilitate cross-sector collaboration, data sharing, and tracking
5. Validate, publish, and disseminate the GADA Scale



Introduction



Background

Project context

Increasingly, violence against women is taking place in new spaces, including online and digital environments, in the form of tech-based abuse. These environments require novel forms of governance and accountability mechanisms. One such digital environment is dating platforms. There is increasing recognition that harmful behaviours occurring in these digital dating environments can evolve and escalate into other forms of abuse, ranging from harassment and coercion, to threats and offline or in-person violence. With the introduction of the Australia Online Dating Voluntary Code of Conduct in October 2024, platforms are encouraged to take greater responsibility for preventing and responding to online harm.

Because dating platforms facilitate introductions between strangers, a degree of uncertainty and risk is unavoidable. Platform safeguards can mitigate harm, but they must be designed with clear trade-offs in mind, including impacts on privacy, access and inclusion, and user autonomy. As a result, the objective is not to eliminate all risk, but to reduce foreseeable and preventable harms in a way that is fair, usable, and proportionate.

Australia's Voluntary Code of Conduct

The non-statutory Australian Online Dating Code of Conduct is a voluntary, industry-led initiative aimed at reducing online-enabled harm and abuse. Key players like Match Group (Tinder, Hinge), Bumble, Grindr, and eHarmony are signatories. The Code of Conduct sets out minimum standards for how signatories should prevent, detect, and respond to harmful behaviour on their platforms. Key requirements of the Code include implementing accessible reporting tools, responding to reports of harm in a timely and appropriate manner, taking action against repeat or harmful users, and cooperating with law enforcement where necessary and appropriate.

Signatories are also required to publish annual, publicly available transparency reports outlining their safety systems, and how they enforce safety standards on their platforms. An independent Code Compliance Committee oversees the industry's self-assessed compliance and investigates violations.

Project scope and sample

The scope of this project was limited to heterosexual women's experience of technology-facilitated gender based violence (TFGBV) on dating platforms. We exclusively focused on behaviours and interactions that happen on the platforms. In line with this scope, any instances of abuse that happen in-person or on a different platform were not considered in scope.

We did not investigate the experiences of men who perpetrate abuse, women's experience of other types of abuse online (such as race or sexuality-based abuse), or women's experience of abuse outside of dating platforms (e.g. on other platforms, or in-person). We recognise these are important forms of abuse in and of themselves, and whilst these forms of abuse may overlap with TFGBV, they would require distinct methods and ethical considerations beyond this project's scope. However, the survey sample included culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations women, supporting a diverse sample within the defined scope.

Project approach

We conducted a series of research activities in order to investigate women's experience of abuse on dating platforms, and identify high-impact opportunities for intervention and advocacy to inform future work. Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Bellberry Human Research Ethics Committee.

Project aims

The project aimed to address a critical evidence gap on the harms experienced by women on online dating platforms. The findings of this project will inform safer platform design, stronger regulatory responses, and more effective, coordinated advocacy efforts.

How this report is structured

Section 1 presents an experience map tracing behavioural patterns, escalation points, and safety strategies across stages of dating.

Section 2 presents the Gendered Abuse on Dating Apps (GADA) Scale, guided by insights from the mapping to measure women's exposure to abuse on dating platforms.

Section 3 presents recommendations for platforms and regulators to increase women's safety on dating platforms.

Project outputs

Two key resources were produced as part of this project:

The Tech-Based abuse Experience Map

Using insights from our research, we created a resource which maps women's experience of abuse on dating platforms. The Experience Map follows women's experience through 'themed' stages of their journey. It highlights points at which risks of victimisation emerge, how women experience harms associated with abuse on the app, and opportunities that could be leveraged to enhance women's safety.

[Click here to explore the full Experience Map](#) in the Appendices section of the report.

The GADA Scale

We developed a scale to measure the prevalence and nature of women's experience of abuse on dating platforms. The scale captures a spectrum of harms experienced by women, recognising that these often occur along a continuum from experiencing subtle boundary-testing and discomfort through to being subject to coercive, threatening, or violent behaviour. We aimed to focus our GADA Scale at the platform level (i.e. women's cumulative experiences on a platform), providing a clearer picture of how widespread different forms of harm are on different platforms, how harms escalate over time, and how women experience and respond to them in practice. The GADA Scale allows for more consistent measurement and comparison, creating a foundation for analysis, monitoring, and future evaluation.

1. Findings from the Experience Map

Mapping women's experience of abuse on dating platforms



Introduction to the Experience Map

The Experience Map highlights where risks emerge, how harms are experienced, and where interventions could strengthen safety. The findings in this section represent a synthesis of the lived experiences and perceptions shared by our research participants, our subject matter experts, and the available academic and grey literature. While these insights highlight systemic issues, they are primarily reflective of how women navigate, interpret, and are impacted by dating platform design. We recommend reading this section alongside the full Experience Map to gain a richer understanding of the research and findings.

The map follows a woman's experience of dating apps through 'themed' stages. Note this is not a journey map, as women's experiences of abuse on dating apps may not be linear, and will be very varied for each user.

Therefore, we have grouped insights according to different phases of their experience in a broadly sequential pattern, which may not necessarily be chronological. Each lane or layer of the map highlights a different perspective.

METHODOLOGY

The Experience Map was developed through the following research activities.

We made sure to embed expert stakeholder perspectives throughout the project. A full list of organisations and individuals consulted can be found in Appendix F.

1

Literature scan

We reviewed existing misogyny and gender-based violence scales, existing features and interventions on dating platforms (and their evidence base), behavioural risk indicators for abuse, and a policy review of relevant regulatory reforms and advocacy. We prioritised Australian-based evidence, supplemented with international research where culturally comparable and relevant. The findings helped us design the interview guides.

2

Lived experience interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve heterosexual women with lived experience of abuse on dating platforms. The interviews aimed to investigate women's experience with harmful behaviours and risk of abuse on dating platforms, including their perspectives on onboarding, matching and interacting, behavioural escalation, and experiences of available safety features.

3

Platform walkthrough

To gain experience of the different design and safety features available to users, we conducted desktop research on a number of major platforms including Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, eHarmony and Plenty of Fish.

We walked through the user experience and navigated the platforms based on publicly available information and reviews of features. Additionally, Bumble provided a guided walkthrough of safety and design features (front and back-end).

SME consultations

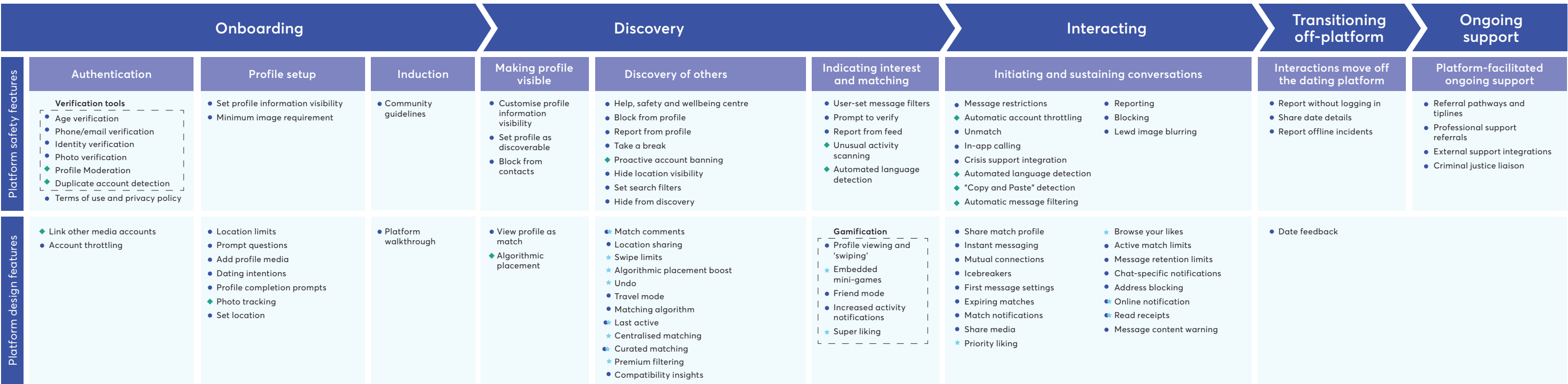
We conducted semi-structured consultations with 11 subject matter experts, ranging from academic researchers, advocacy bodies, victim-survivor support services, and policy experts. These consultations helped us embed academic and advocacy perspectives into the experience map findings, and identify impactful leverage points to develop our recommendations.

Advisory Committee meetings

From the outset of the project, we established a project Advisory Committee comprising 8 key stakeholders and subject matter experts. We consulted the Advisory Committee to verify the findings and recommendations we developed on the Map.

Tech-Based Abuse of Women: Summary of Experience Map*

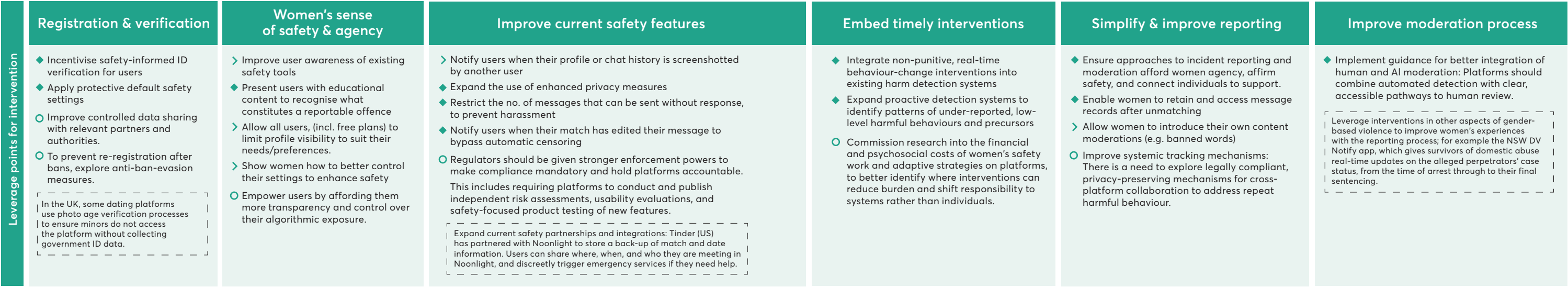
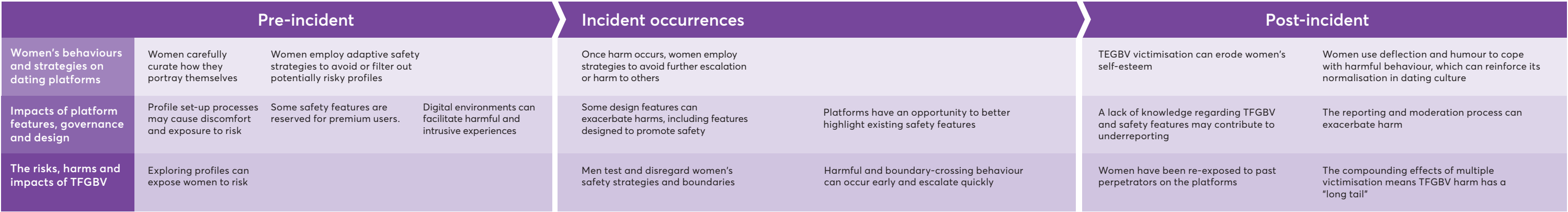
*The map is abbreviated for clarity. [Click here to explore the full Experience Map.](#)



Key

Platform design features: ● Premium features: ★ Back-end features: ◆

Please note that feature availability varies across platforms. See appendix, page 42.



Key

◆ Platform-level opportunities to introduce features improving user safety ➢ Platform-level opportunities: "quick wins" for acute harm prevention features ○ System-level opportunities to improve safety outcomes

Initiatives from analogous policy areas or other jurisdictions

How to read the Experience Map

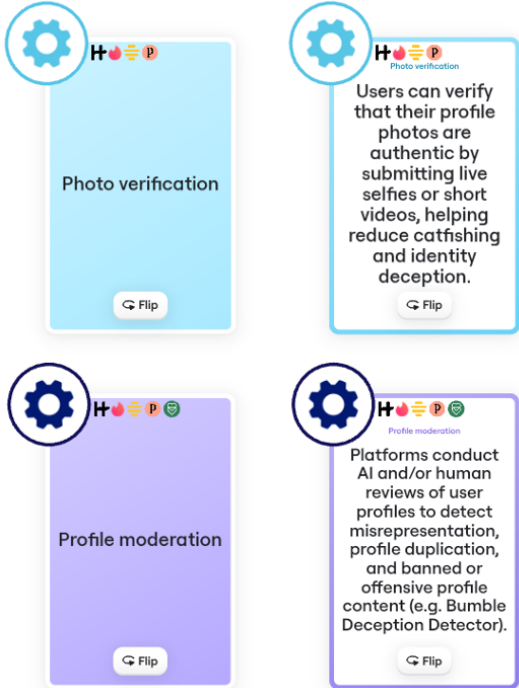
- 1

The first layer maps out existing features on dating apps that influence a woman's experience of risks or harms. This includes:

 - › **Platform safety features:** features that are designed to keep users safe from abuse, violence, or harm.
 - › **Platform design features:** features influence a woman's experience of risks or harms. This includes matching and interaction features.

We have also split these into **user-facing front-end features** (the parts of a platform that users directly see and interact with), and **back-end features** (the behind-the-scenes systems, processes and data management infrastructure, functionality, and safety processes).

Refer to the appendix for examples of dating apps that provide these features. The examples are based on publicly available information in February 2026. Note that platforms may not publicly advertise some features and may change their available features.



- 2

The second layer of the map translates our findings from desktop research, consultations with subject matter experts, and interviews with women with lived experience of abuse into thematically grouped insights that map onto women's experiences as they navigate dating platforms. This spans the strategies they adopt to try and filter out harm, through to their immediate and longer-term experiences of harm once it has occurred.

Pre-incident

Women carefully curate how they portray themselves

Quotes from women with lived experience of TFGBV on dating platforms.

Women censor what information they share about themselves on their profiles, even if it means sacrificing authenticity:

I didn't want to tell people that I own properties. I didn't want them to know I was a single mother. But it's tricky because they're also two big things that are a big part of my life.

Lived experience interviewee, aged 43.

Adaptive behaviours to decrease risk through profile curation don't always work:

I've had a lot of different profiles over the years, from not having anything showing and being very modest to having corsets and underwear kinds of photos, because I'm personally interested to see if it changes things. And it doesn't seem to matter for how many gross messages I get.

Lived experience interviewee, aged 37.

Women feel pressure to curate approachable but safe profiles, balancing ingenuity and authenticity with personal safeguards. They carefully select photos to prevent or avoid deepfake image generation, identity misuse, oversexualisation, or doxxing from male users.

Women carefully consider not only which photos of themselves to upload, but also how their social group is portrayed in group pictures (for example, whether they appear to drink or go out frequently).

Women avoid being active on dating apps late at night to reduce the risk of sexualised expectations, unsolicited sexual messages, or non-consensual sexual images.

Experience Map Key

1	Maps out existing features on dating apps that influence a woman's experience of risks or harms.
2	Translates our findings from desktop research, consultations with subject matter experts, and interviews with women with lived experience of abuse into thematically grouped insights
3	Distils the findings in the first two layers, suggesting leverage points where changes could disrupt or better respond to women's experiences of abuse on dating apps

- 3

The final layer of the map distils the findings in the first two layers, suggesting leverage points where changes could disrupt or better respond to women's experiences of abuse on dating apps. This includes platform and systemic actions to drive a whole-of-system approach to tackle abuse on dating apps.

Platform-level opportunities to introduce features improving user safety

Platform-level opportunities: "quick wins" for acute harm prevention features

System-level opportunities to improve safety outcomes

Initiatives from analogous policy areas or other jurisdictions

Opportunities to embed timely interventions

Integrate **non-punitive, real-time behaviour-change interventions** into existing harm detection systems, using moments when messages are flagged to provide in-context education on respectful communication, consent, and boundaries. For example, when a message is flagged as potentially offensive or sexually explicit content is detected, platforms could link out users to complete a brief module on respectful communication and consent. The chat would be temporarily locked until the user engages with the content.

Expand **proactive detection systems** to identify patterns of under-reported, low level harmful behaviours and precursors, enabling earlier intervention, improved reporting prompts, and efforts to disrupt norms that allow harm to escalate or become normalised. (For example, flag persistent messaging as cause for concern e.g. "You've received a lot of messages from this person. Is this bothering you?")

Commission research into the **financial and psychosocial costs of women's safety work** and adaptive strategies on platforms, to better identify where interventions can reduce burden and shift responsibility to systems rather than individuals.

FINDINGS

The findings in this section represent a synthesis of the lived experiences and perceptions shared by our research participants, our subject matter experts, and the available academic and grey literature.

1

Women do extensive safety work to filter out risk

Women use a range of strategies and heuristics to identify risky profiles

Women's experiences on dating platforms are underpinned by the time and effort they spend undertaking safety work. Safety work refers to the ongoing, often invisible actions that women take to anticipate, detect, and manage potential harms and threats to their safety and wellbeing.

Safety work often starts from the moment women complete onboarding, in the way they curate their own profiles. Women tend to censor how they portray themselves in order to avoid known risks (for example, in the types of photos they include, or how much of their life they divulge).

Some women employ strategies such as intentionally curating their profile to include baiting content. This baiting content is used by women to expose any misogynistic views held by the man messaging them, earlier rather than later in a conversation.

Women intentionally portray certain values (e.g. labelling themselves as "feminist" or including their pronouns on their profile) to eliminate men who look down upon those values, or have sexist or misogynistic views. They are aware this could also increase their exposure to abusive messages from men who disagree with their values.

Examples of values that women portray on their profile to filter out potentially harmful individuals:

I say that I like horoscopes (on my profile); I'm not passionate about horoscopes, I think they're something silly and fun, but I sort of use that as a screener. If men have messaged me and been like "that's so stupid that you believe in that", I'm like "Okay, out you go".

Lived experience interviewee, aged 32

I use some kind of double entendre on my profile where you could either take it sexually or take it at face value to suss out who is more of a pig (based on how they react).

Lived experience interviewee, aged 54.

2

Anticipating risks of abuse causes fatigue

The emotional labour of safety work causes stress

We heard from women that once they start discovering men's profiles, they are on constant alert, scanning for red flags. The need to be alert continues into the conversations women have with matches, carefully managing their tone and pacing to avoid triggering aggression or to defuse escalating behaviour.

It's a very tiresome process to have to be constantly vetting people. Even if you don't scroll through, it's tiring to have to be taking in that amount of information.

Lived experience interviewee, aged 29

The emotional and cognitive load of safety work shapes how women navigate dating platforms, and this safety work can lead to significant stress.

Women use a range of **strategies and heuristics** to **screen out** profiles with potential red flags, such as:

- › Profile information that is vague, unclear, or appears incorrect (e.g. age)
- › Profiles with no biography or prompts
- › No photos of the person whose profile it is
- › Sexually explicit usernames
- › Biographies or prompts that use dismissive humour or subtle put-downs (negging), particularly targeting interests that are frequently gendered or socially coded as "feminine" (e.g. astrology).
- › Photos that depict social groups or environments where they might feel unsafe (e.g. large groups of intoxicated men or settings that appear rowdy)
- › Biographies or prompts that include sexually suggestive comments
- › Biographies or prompts highlighting misogynistic ideals (e.g. "looking for a woman who doesn't take herself too seriously.")

3

Onboarding and registration processes encourage risky disclosure

Women are encouraged to disclose information on their profile, increasing their vulnerability

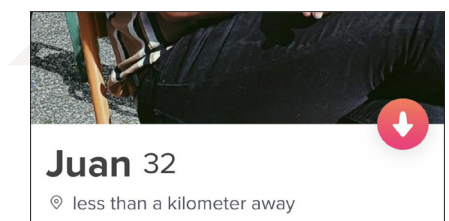
Women face several risks that shape their sense of safety from the outset of their online dating journey. Platforms will often prompt users to complete a minimum amount of information on their profile, showing the user percentages of 'profile completeness'.

These prompts can make women feel pressured to add more personal information than they feel comfortable sharing, including details about their job, education, or life that can make them more identifiable and in turn, vulnerable.

Many platforms encourage users to fill in information that, when combined, allow for people to monitor or triangulate a woman's whereabouts. For example, displaying live location updates such as 'less than 1km away' when users are nearby, or specific job information paired with location details that can give away where they work.

Some apps can get a little bit demanding for fairly detailed information, especially on Tinder. Tinder has a percentage of how much you've filled out your profile, and it wants to know things like schooling and jobs and things like that. So some of that information can get quite concerning I suppose, in that it encourages you to be quite specific.

Lived experience interviewee, aged 37.



Tinder profile showing how far away other users are. Source: Reddit. Note: this image has been edited to maintain anonymity.

4

Without proper implementation, safeguards can cause unease

Poorly implemented verification processes create risks

Verification processes by which a user submits identification to the platform are often optional. Universal or more rigorous verification processes introduce frictions to the onboarding process that may deter users, including those seeking to misrepresent themselves. However, verification processes can be unreliable or easy to bypass. Even when implemented, verification can create a false sense of security. Some women interpret a verification badge as a trust signal, even though harmful behaviour can still occur by a user with a verified profile.

Surveillance does not equal safety. Just because you know that someone is a verified user or person doesn't mean they can't send you an abusive message.
Hannah Robertson/subject matter expert

Some safety features end up making women feel more exposed:

(To safeguard myself) I hid the pictures of myself on my profile but it kept asking me for one, and when I put up a picture of a sunrise, they'll just take the picture away and closed the account.
Lived experience interviewee, aged 60.

Some women may wrongly interpret verification badges as seals of approval from the platform.

Verification helps women feel safer:

I feel safer seeing that verification tick because there have been instances where catfishing has happened to me.
Lived experience interviewee, aged 32.

Hannah Robertson would like to acknowledge the research of Stardust, Z., Gillett, R., & Albury, K. (2022). Surveillance does not equal safety: Police, data and consent on dating apps. Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal, 19(2), 274-295

5

Some design features unintentionally enable harm...

The matching mechanism of some platforms allow for unsolicited messages that contain abuse

Some platforms allow users to send messages to each other before matching. This feature inadvertently bypasses women's control over who can initiate contact. For example, users on Hinge can include a message when they like a profile which could include abusive, aggressive or triggering content, meaning women don't have the chance to vet who contacts them. This feature allows for harassment before women have any meaningful opportunity to opt into a conversation or filter out a profile.

Some platform features create privacy risks and enable surveillance

"Active now" or "last active" indicators on profiles can create a surveillance risk, allowing others to track women's behavioural patterns. Some women have experienced escalating coercive dynamics or anger from matches as a result, for example, matches feeling entitled to a response (e.g. "You were online but didn't reply").

Women feel vulnerable when platforms allow strangers to message them without a mutual match or prior consent:

On Hinge anyone can like your profile and they're allowed to send you things at the same time (...) I think I'd rather that only be the case if I've agreed (to match with them). Sometimes there's some really creepy stuff that just gets said in that initial prompt that I don't get the choice over seeing.
Lived experience interviewee, aged 32.

(On some apps) people can put a comment on the image before you match with them, (...) but someone might just send you a like and they'll send a really sexual comment which is just not asked for.
Lived experience interviewee, aged 27.

6

...While novel safety features can have unintended consequences

Content flags can undermine women's autonomy

Some platforms have introduced backend systems that automatically detect and flag potentially harmful, offensive, or abusive language. This feature encourages users who have had their draft message flagged by the backend systems to reconsider the content of their message before hitting send.

However, women do not know which individuals they matched with have edited their messages before sending. While reducing the number of potentially harmful messages women receive, this feature can also mask potential perpetrators.

Some women expressed that they would like the autonomy to discern potential matches based on unfiltered comments, even if these messages are offensive.

Content restrictions can incentivise harmful behaviour

Some platforms have restrictions in which users can not take screenshots or send images. These features help to protect women from image-based abuse. For example, by preventing a woman's images or content from being used without permission. However, these features can also introduce new harms. When women cannot document abusive messages or threatening behaviour, they lose a key tool for reporting, evidence-gathering, or seeking external support. Perpetrators may also feel emboldened, knowing their behaviour cannot easily be captured or verified.

For users who want to exchange photos, blanket photo bans encourage users off the dating platform and onto other platforms which may put women at further risk. For example, exchanging phone numbers or other social media can escalate coercion, manipulation or surveillance.

7

Platforms are underselling their current safety features

Existing safeguards fail when users don't know the safeguards exist

When prompted about ideas for features that would improve their safety on dating platforms, multiple women suggested features that already exist on most mainstream platforms. For example, interviewees wanted the ability to report or block users after unmatching, or to retain messages after blocking someone, both of which exist on most platforms. If women don't know they can still access their conversation history after unmatching, harmful behaviour is more likely to go unreported.

Similarly once their profile is made visible, women feel they have little control over who their information is exposed to, including unwanted or risky individuals. Blocking from contact lists are available on some platforms and can help women prevent access from known abusers or ex-partners, but these tools rely on women knowing the option is available, and having complete, up-to-date information in their blocked lists.

Backend safety features are not adequately communicated to users

Our research shows that although most platforms give users an induction walking through their design and matching features, few give users a comprehensive walkthrough of the features that exist to keep them safe. Many interviewees were unaware of backend features or systems that work to detect, manage, and respond to harmful behaviour. Because some platforms have safety features that are not highlighted, women assume that the safety features don't exist and undertake unnecessary additional activities, increasing stress and safety work.

He eventually just unmatched me. So, (...) I had no proof of him and I wanted to take that information further, I would probably like to go to the police about this. But I didn't have any photos. I could have taken screenshots of his profile, but I didn't at the time, I didn't think to do that.
Lived experience interviewee, aged 27.

8

Process barriers can prevent women from reporting incidents

Opacity in reporting systems invalidates women's experience

Many women we spoke with who have experience making reports on platforms found the process to be unclear. The women we spoke with said they received little to no follow-up about the process, how their case was reviewed, or actions taken (or not taken) as a result of their report. Women felt that after reporting distressing or threatening interactions, a lack of communication and transparency from the platform invalidated the seriousness of their experience. Uncertainty over whether action was taken on the back of their report eroded trust in reporting systems. This lack of feedback discouraged women we spoke with from reporting, believing that raising concerns will not lead to meaningful action.

Across all Match Group platforms, 64% of account bans were executed by automated processes (426,714 out of 662,112 total bans).
Match Group 2025 Transparency report.

Many women are not aware of platforms' information retention policies:

(When I've wanted to report someone) for the most part it's already been too late so we've already unmatched and then I can't flag them (...). I haven't really looked into it but there's one person I would have reported, but it deletes all your messages.
Lived experience Interviewee, aged 37.

9

Unclear moderation processes can cause distress

Over-reliance on automated moderation risks eroding confidence in platform safety

Automated moderation and the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) systems can help fast-track the review and moderation process by reducing the delay between reporting and decisive actions being taken. When the outcomes of reports are left to up automated or AI-driven moderation processes, women may feel reported experiences are not fully understood.

Less overt forms of abuse often require a more nuanced or contextual understanding of how behaviour and interactions affect the user, and may not be obvious from a single message or short set of messages. For example, automated moderation of reports may miss patterns of coercion, boundary-testing, or psychological abuse that compound over time.

Automated or AI-driven moderation can erode confidence in platform safety when women feel their reported experiences are not fully understood (and less overt TFGBV needs nuanced, contextual review)

Women feel that automated moderation systems lack sufficient human oversight and follow-up:

(When I reported someone), there was no real follow-up. I was just a chat bot automated response.
Lived experience Interviewee, aged 54.

2. Insights from the GADA Scale

Developing a scale to measure women's experience of tech-based abuse on dating platforms

Women experience a wide range of harmful and unsafe behaviours on dating platforms, many of which are normalised, under-reported, or dismissed as "part of online dating." Measuring these experiences systematically makes them visible, helps quantify their prevalence, and creates an evidence base for improving platform safety and accountability.

There are several existing measures that touch on tech-based abuse of women (e.g. the Technology-Facilitated Abuse in Relationships scale, or the Composite Scale of Abuse). Another major piece of Australian research in tech-based abuse was the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) 2022 report, based on survey data from 2021, which focused on capturing overt harms (e.g. verbal abuse, stalking, sexual assault).* These existing measures have often been designed to assess abuse within ongoing relationships, sometimes include offline behaviours, and none cover the early, ambiguous, or unique behaviours that unfold on dating platforms. Previous measures also focus on individuals or partners, rather than how platform design and norms shape risk and harm across users. Our scale, the Gendered Abuse on Dating Apps (GADA) Scale, was designed to focus exclusively on online behaviours, and to capture more subtle instances of abuse that unfold at the platform level.

*Wolbers H, Boxall H, Long C & Gunnoo A 2022. Sexual harassment, aggression and violence victimisation among mobile dating app and website users in Australia. Research Report no. 25. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

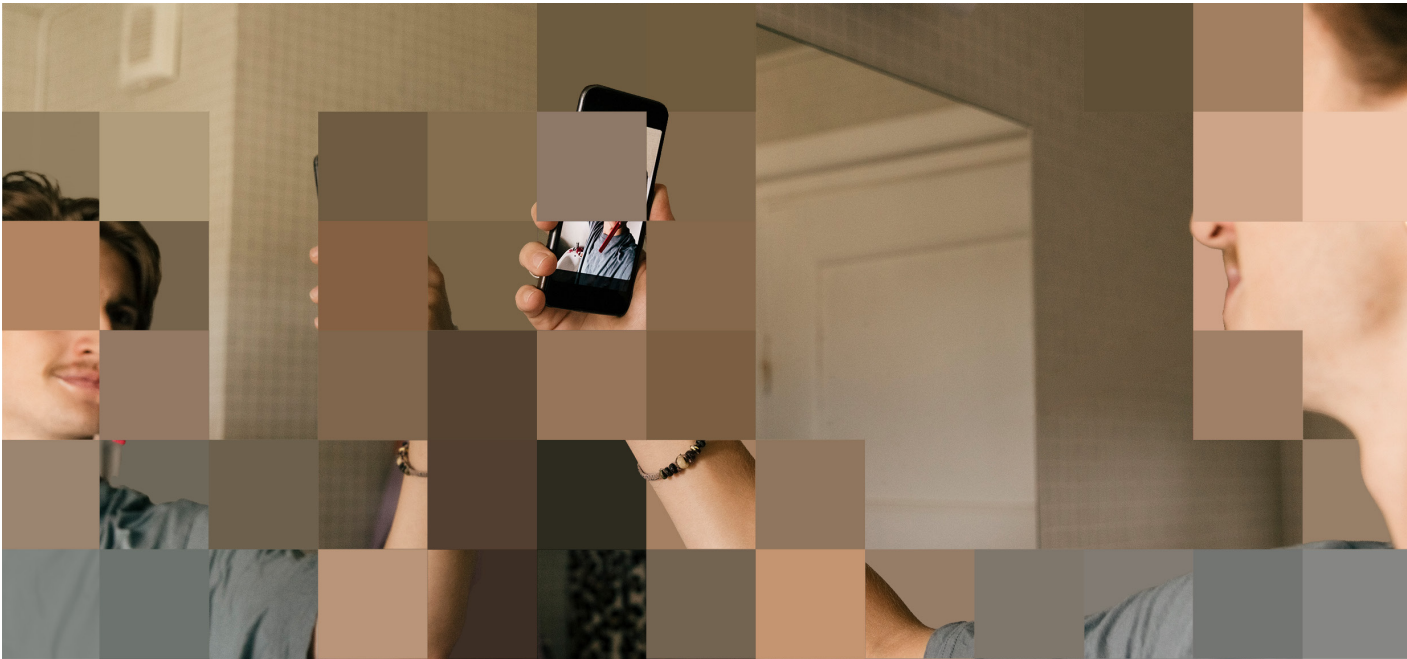
We developed the Gendered Abuse on Dating Apps (GADA) Scale to:

- › Capture women's experiences with newer features on dating platforms
- › Include subtler behaviours such as love bombing, hot-cold emotional shifts, and excessive criticism
- › Measure women's experience of abuse at the platform level, allowing a view of how different apps enable, discourage, or respond to harmful behaviours
- › Allow for benchmarking across platforms, supports population-level prevalence estimates, and provides data that platforms and regulators can directly act on



METHODOLOGY

How we developed the prototype Scale



Our primary goal in developing the GADA Scale was to create a short survey scale that could be used by researchers, policymakers, and platforms.

To achieve this goal, we created an initial list of 39 questions about experiences on dating apps and web platforms. This became the "prototype" GADA Scale (see Appendix C). The questions were developed based on our literature scan, lived-experience interviews, platform walkthrough, SME consultations and discussion with our Advisory Committee (see pages 14-15). Questions covered a range of categories (see examples, right). Some questions constituted clear abuse, but some were also common experiences that may be precursors, or "red-flags" (e.g. "How often have you had someone criticise or speak negatively about their ex-partners or past relationships?").

We asked how often these experiences occurred, and whether they resulted in reporting to the platform, unmatching, or deleting the app. In addition to these questions, we included demographic questions, the Technology-facilitated Abuse in Relationships (TAR) scale, and the Subjective Numeracy Scale (SNS), in order to conduct validity tests to see whether results were appropriately similar or different, respectively (see Appendix D for more details). We then asked these questions to 1,008 heterosexual women across Australia who had used a dating platform in the past three months (see Appendix B for demographic summary of our sample).

Question categories and examples:

Deception e.g. "How often have you discovered that someone was lying about their relationship status or other life circumstances?"
Monitoring / surveillance e.g. "How often have you been pressured to share personal contact details when you didn't feel it was appropriate?"
Psychological / emotional abuse e.g. "How often have you had someone push back or persist after you indicated you were not interested, unmatched them, or asked them to stop?"
Financial abuse e.g. "How often have you been incentivised or threatened financially on the platform?"
Threats e.g. "How often have you had someone threaten to harm you?"
Sexual abuse e.g. "How often have you received sexually explicit images or videos that you did not ask for?"

We then shortened the GADA Scale using the following criteria

Very similar questions

Some questions were conceptually similar and responses correlated together (e.g. "How often have you been impersonated by someone on the platform?" and "How often have you had your image or likeness used in ways you did not consent to?"). We combined questions like these into a single question.

Many "Not sure/Prefer not to say" responses

Some questions asked about experiences that women might not have direct experience of, or that required speculation (e.g. "How often have you felt like you were being monitored or watched by someone on the app...?"). We removed these questions.

Strong relationship to latent factors

We ran exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify groups of questions (factors) that respondents tended to answer similarly. EFA found two underlying factors (one reflecting common behaviours, one reflecting rarer experiences; see Appendix C). Questions that didn't clearly fit into one of these factors were considered for removal or combined.

High impact/low reporting

Some experiences were rarely reported to platforms, yet resulted in avoiding or unmatching (see page 35). This pattern may indicate behaviours women found problematic but didn't report. High impact/low reporting questions were retained because they identify behaviours that wouldn't otherwise be detected through platform reporting data.

The following pages present findings from the initial validation exercise as examples of insights the scale can provide.

FINDINGS

Tech-based abuse of women is universally prevalent

99%

Experienced at least one abusive behaviour in the last three months.

19

Average number of different abusive behaviours women experienced.

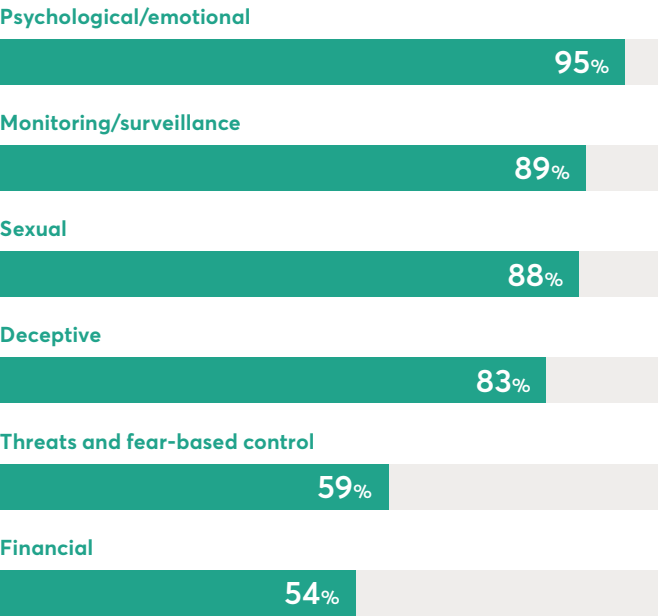
Nearly all (99%) of women in our sample had at least one experience of abuse in the last three months. The highest-prevalence category was psychological / emotional abuse, with 95% of women having experienced this. This category includes subtler forms of violence that can be normalised or overlooked in interactions:

- › Love bombing was experienced by 68% of women ("How often have you had someone display signs of affection that you thought were excessive?")
- › Negging was experienced by 56% of women ("How often have you had someone be inappropriately critical of you or other people, including backhanded compliments or subtle insults?")
- › Gaslighting was experienced by 53% of women ("How often have you had your concerns dismissed, been called crazy, or been blamed for someone else's behaviour?")

Although financial abuse was the least prevalent category, it was still experienced by more than half of respondents (54%). Of the 39 behaviours we asked about, on average women had experienced 19 of these.

Prevalence of abuse on dating apps

Key insights from GADA Scale



Based on our sample of 1008 heterosexual women. Denominators include respondents who were unsure or did not disclose information.

FINDINGS

Women experience abuse frequently

Beyond prevalence, we also measured frequency of experiences of abuse by asking women how many times they experienced each behaviour on a single platform in the last three months.

Sexual behaviours were the most frequently experienced, with 1 in 7 women receiving unsolicited messages more than five times in three months. This was followed by psychological / emotional and monitoring / surveillance behaviours.

Financial exploitation and threats had the lowest repeat rates, likely because these are higher-stakes behaviours that perpetrators use more selectively.

Our data shows that abusive behaviours are not just widespread but also persistently experienced.



How often are abusive behaviours repeated?

Abusive behaviours that women experienced more than five times in three months

1 in 7 were repeatedly sent sexually explicit messages they did not ask for.



1 in 8 were repeatedly asked intrusive personal questions they weren't comfortable with.



1 in 9 were repeatedly love bombed with excessive flattery and/or gifts.



1 in 10 repeatedly received degrading messages or slurs.



Based on our sample of 1008 heterosexual women. Denominators include respondents who were unsure or did not disclose information.

FINDINGS

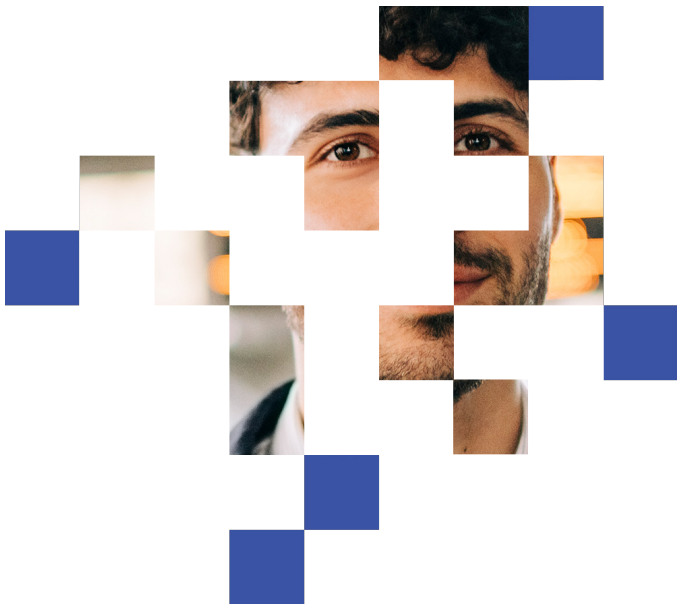
There are differences in types of abuse across platforms

Experiences of abuse were widespread across the most commonly used dating platforms.

This challenges the idea that “relationship-focused” apps (such as eHarmony or Hinge) are meaningfully safer than “casual” platforms (such as Tinder). It also suggests that, even after the introduction of the voluntary Australia Online Dating Code of Conduct (which sets clearer expectations for preventing, detecting and responding to online-enabled harm), harmful behaviours remain common across platforms.

At the same time, the mix of behaviours differed by platform. This could reflect differences in user bases, norms and cultures, or the design of onboarding and safety features. These platform-level differences mean meaningful cross-platform comparison is possible, and the GADA Scale could be used to benchmark performance and drive continuous improvement in women’s safety.

The graph shows examples of 4 abusive behaviours across the 4 most common platforms in our sample.



Prevalence ranges for selected abusive behaviours

Experienced at least once, from the lowest to the highest of the four most commonly used platforms in our sample.

Been asked personal questions when it didn’t feel appropriate?

65%-80%

Had someone try to manipulate you into sending sexual images or videos?

53%-64%

Had someone push back or persist after you indicated you were not interested?

61%-69%

Received sexually explicit images or videos that you did not ask for?

53%-67%

FINDINGS

Responses to experiences of abuse differ

Women were most likely to report clear, discrete violations, e.g. catfishing (34%), unwanted explicit images (32%), threats (22%), and financial scams (22%). In contrast, psychological and coercive behaviours were reported far less despite being highly prevalent (see right).

These may be harder to recognise or evidence, may not fit platform reporting categories, or are managed by disengaging rather than reporting. Almost all women (99%) had reported or unmatched/avoided as a result of at least one abusive behaviour (with a median of 1 reported and 5 unmatched/avoided). Among women who did make reports to the platform:

- › 64% felt that reports were taken at least “somewhat” seriously, 19% felt that reports were “barely” or “not at all” taken seriously
- › 61% felt at least “somewhat” safer, but 25% reported little to no improvement in perceptions of safety
- › 35% felt more confident after the platforms response, 23% less confident

Around 15-17% selected “not sure/prefer not to say” when asked whether their report was taken seriously or helped. This suggests platform responses may be inconsistent or unclear.

How women respond to abusive behaviours

How many women report perpetrators to platforms vs. unmatched or avoid them after experiencing an abusive behaviour.

Based on our sample of 1008 heterosexual women. Denominator is of those who experienced each behaviour. Percentages reflect the total proportion of women who took each action, with some women both reporting and avoiding the perpetrator.

Has had someone shift very quickly emotionally from being warm or affectionate to distant, cold or angry

Experienced by 697 women



Has discovered that someone was lying about their relationship status or other life circumstances

Experienced by 712 women



Has been met with anger or frustration when they thought you did not respond fast enough

Experienced by 652 women



Has experienced someone try to manipulate you into sending sexual text messages (e.g. repeated requests, guilt-tripping)

Experienced by 605 women



Reported only Reported AND unmatched/avoided Unmatched/avoided only Took no action

SUMMARY

The GADA Scale provides a consistent, usable, comprehensive tool to measure women’s experience of abuse on dating platforms

The resulting GADA Scale has been designed to be relatively short and usable by a range of stakeholders, while still comprehensively capturing the most critical aspects of abuse on dating platforms.

The GADA Scale creates a foundation for analysis, monitoring, and future evaluation of safety features and interventions. The prototype provided some insights into women’s experiences, including that:

Experiences of abuse are widespread and persistent:

99% of women experienced at least one abusive behaviour on dating platforms in the last three months, validating previous research on abuse of women on dating apps and web-platforms. Women experience these behaviours repeatedly, on average on a weekly basis.

Psychological and emotional abuse are most common:

We measured behaviours not previously captured in large-scale Australian research on dating-platform safety. We found that subtler forms of harm, or precursors (such as gaslighting, negging, love-bombing) are commonly experienced.

There are substantial differences in responses to abuse

Overt behaviours (e.g., catfishing, explicit images, threats) were more often reported to the platforms, while psychological and coercive behaviours were often not reported, but results in avoidance behaviour like unmatching. This suggests either a perceived distinction in thresholds of harm, or a strategic avoidance of “red-flag”-like precursor behaviours.

Platform-level measurement is valuable:

While women report abusive behaviours across all platforms, each platform has a slightly different profile of experienced behaviours. This shows that the scale has potential in platform-level comparison, or in the evaluation of safety features or user culture.

3. Recommendations

How to translate these findings to combat abuse of women on dating platforms



This section outlines our recommendations for regulators, dating platforms, and the broader sector to strengthen responses to TFGBV.

Each recommendation responds to a key gap or finding identified in the research and is aligned with a relevant Safety by Design principle to clarify its purpose and practical application. In total, **15 recommendations are presented:**

- 10 recommendations for platforms
- 5 recommendations for regulatory bodies

How we developed these recommendations

We collated insights from across our research activities to identify a set of thematic recommendations, drawing together those surfaced in the Experience Map and the GADA Scale development. For more detail on where these recommendations map onto women’s experience of abuse on dating platforms, read this section alongside the ‘Leverage points for intervention’ section of the Experience Map.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Three principles of Safety by Design

eSafety's Safety by Design principles set out foundations for embedding user safety at the core of digital platform development. They focus on anticipating online harms and investing early in strategies to mitigate risk.

Platform responsibility

"Put processes in place to detect, surface, flag and remove illegal and harmful behaviour, contact and content with the aim of preventing harms before they occur."

User empowerment and autonomy

"Leverage the use of technical features to mitigate risks and harms, which can be flagged to users at relevant points in the service, and which prompt and optimise safer interactions."

Transparency and accountability

"The publication of information relating to how companies are enforcing their own policies and data on the efficacy of safety features or innovations will allow accurate assessment of what is working."

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of recommendations

Recommendations for platforms

Platform responsibility
1. Incentivise safety-informed ID verification for users
2. Leverage timely intervention points for behaviour change
3. Monitor potential precursors through proactive detection and flagging
User empowerment and autonomy
4. Improve women's visibility and understanding of behavioural red flags
5. Boost autonomy over safety settings
6. Clearly communicate safety features at onboarding
7. Increase data ownership and access to personal data
Transparency and accountability
8. Improve transparency in reporting channels
9. Improve accountability to prevent perpetrator account-hopping
10. Conduct initial benchmarking using validated GADA Scale

Recommendations for regulatory bodies

Platform responsibility
1. Develop consent-based risk frameworks
2. Ensure platform safety considerations are subject to stricter regulator enforcement
Transparency and accountability
3. Improve data, privacy, and information transparency
4. Facilitate cross-sector collaboration, data sharing, and tracking
5. Validate, publish, and disseminate the GADA Scale

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Platforms

We collated insights from across our research activities to identify a set of thematic recommendations, drawing together those surfaced in the Experience Map and the GADA Scale development.

1

Incentivise safety-informed ID verification for users

Incentivising users to verify their identity would help reduce the veil of anonymity that enables abusive behaviour to occur (such as deception or catfishing). Most mainstream platforms already offer some form of optional verification often via third party providers. However, these processes could be made more accessible, and appealing to users.

The first step to making verification more ubiquitous is for more platforms to offer both document and photo or video based identity verification. Offering both options would allow more people to use these systems across all dating platforms. Verification processes should be accompanied by clear privacy messaging, including how the use of central third party providers reduces the risk of data breaches.

The second step is to make sure that identity checks are translated into visible verification badges, and that the value of these is emphasised (e.g. filtering or prioritised matching for verified users, blurred photos for unverified users). Clear explanations of what this badge does (and does not) mean should be signalled to all users. While forms of identity verification can help to reduce risk, this is not a guarantee of safe behaviour, and platforms should differentiate between identity verification and safety checking.

Identity verification processes should remain optional, as compulsory verification could cause harm to already vulnerable individuals (e.g. via discriminatory lack of access to those without valid ID, or via the unlikely chance of data breaches).

2

Leverage timely intervention points for behaviour change

Most platforms currently have systems in place to detect potential harm that, for instance, flag offensive or dangerous messages. The point at which these harms are picked up by the platform presents a key opportunity for intervention before harmful attitudes have the chance to snowball into more abusive behaviour and interactions. Platforms could embed behaviour-change interventions in real time to help users understand the impact of their behaviour while it is still modifiable. Implementing these interventions could also contribute to a growing evidence base on the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs (MBCPs) as one means to address domestic, family, and sexual violence.

What this could look like in practice

When a message is flagged as potentially offensive or sexually explicit content is attempted, platforms could link out users to complete a brief module on respectful communication and consent, temporarily locking the chat until the user engages with the content. The fictional mock-up on the right provides an example of what this could look like. The user is presented with a non-punitive message and asked to interact with an educational chatbot to learn about respectful communication, consent, and digital boundaries.

3

Monitor potential precursors through proactive detection and flagging

Our survey findings suggest that relying solely on user reports provides an incomplete picture of harmful behaviour on dating platforms. Many behaviours that lead women to unmatch or disengage are not formally reported, yet still contribute to fear, discomfort, or withdrawal. This points to an opportunity for platforms to monitor and better proactively flag patterns of under-reported behaviours (such as repeated unmatched following specific interaction types). While some platforms already have systems in place to detect harmful behaviours, there is more work to be done to expand the scope of these systems to include detection of the more 'low-level' precursor harms that can escalate to downstream harm. This information would then help identify further opportunities for proactive interventions (for example, prompts to encourage reporting or reduce reporting friction), and help platforms identify and challenge norms that allow harmful behaviours to become normalised over time.

Platforms could also strengthen prevention by clearly communicating, at onboarding or profile finalisation, that behaviour is monitored for patterns of harm and that repeated concerning conduct may trigger review. Transparently signalling detection mechanisms may help incentivise respectful behaviour and reinforce expectations around community standards before harm occurs.

Amelia

Bet you'd look better without that top on...

This message was held before sending and your chat has been temporarily locked.

Why? Messages that focus on someone's body or appearance in sexual ways without consent can make people feel unsafe.

This type of comment can be interpreted as harassment under our safety policy.

[Talk to Haven](#) to unlock this chat.

4

Improve women's visibility and understanding of behavioural red flags

Data from our GADA Scale shows that many more subtle abusive behaviours experienced by women are often not reported, but that women will unmatched or avoid men after experiencing these. Examples of these behaviours include psychological harm or coercive behaviours such as negging, love-bombing, or boundary-testing messages framed as jokes. These behaviours may act as red flags for women, but don't reach a 'harm threshold' that they consider 'worthy' of reporting. However, this underreporting normalises lower-level or precursors abusive behaviours. Underreporting also enables potentially harmful individuals to persist on the apps, which potentially facilitates escalation of precursors to more egregious harms later on.

This points to a significant information gap to support newcomers to dating platforms, and to validate women's experience of harm. Educational materials presented during registration could provide examples of these under-reported behaviours, and encourage reporting where appropriate. For example, platforms could add to their existing onboarding processes to surface walkthroughs of different reportable behaviours, including examples of lower-level abusive behaviours or precursors accompanied by explanations of why this constitutes harm and the benefit of reporting these interactions. Platforms could also nudge women to report these low-level harms with pop-up messages surfaced when potentially harmful behaviours are detected (this relies on improved systems to monitor potential precursors).

5

Boost autonomy over safety settings

Whilst most platforms allow users to edit their discoverability and safety settings, there is room for improvement in the extent to which these settings can be modified by users, and how guidance to do so is communicated to users. Platforms could introduce more fine-tuned user-controlled settings enabling users to filter out their own individual perceptions of risk (e.g. filtering out profiles with multiple reports or very few photos, allowing users to hide their profile from certain locations, or block profiles that use user-selected trigger words).

Core protective safety settings should also be enabled by default and designed as opt-out rather than opt-in, so safety does not depend on users actively searching for and configuring protections. Examples of these include restricting messages from individuals pre-matching, hiding location or activity indicators, and hiding key identifiable details such as employer or education details. Clear explanations of these defaults, and how to modify them, can help ensure informed choice.

Some platforms place certain safety features behind paywalls, such as visibility filters that let users control which profiles they are exposed to and who can see them. When it comes to safety, platforms should ensure that user-controlled settings are made available to all users.

Finally, platforms should also make sure they implement design choices to reduce re-traumatisation for victim-survivors of abuse, such as allowing women to limit who appears in their feed, removing profiles associated with unresolved reports or adjusting visibility and interaction settings following an incident.

6

Clearly communicate safety features at onboarding

Most women we spoke with were unaware of the full suite of safety tools that already exist on mainstream apps. When protections are not clearly explained or are surfaced only at specific moments, users may not fully benefit from them. Strengthening user understanding of existing features is therefore a low-cost, high-impact opportunity to enhance both perceived and practical safety. Clear, accessible guidance about what tools are available, how they function, and when they may be useful can increase user confidence, encourage more effective use of protections, and build greater trust in platforms' commitment to safety.

What this could look like in practice

Platforms could embed safety walkthroughs at onboarding (or re-onboarding when a user returns to the platform after an extended break), explaining how different safety features work.

Timely safety reminders could also be surfaced contextually. For example, after repeated messages, blocking, or unmatched, to prompt awareness of relevant tools.

7

Increase data ownership and access to personal data

Once women lose access to their message history or match records, they may feel disempowered and feel unable to report behaviour or interactions that made them uncomfortable. Giving users clear control over retaining and accessing their information (and not just saving archives without telling users) strengthens women's ability to document harm, and increases the likelihood of making informed decisions to report abuse on their own terms.

Transparent data retention policies and user-controlled archives reduces fear that evidence will disappear and reinforces women's sense of agency over their personal data.

What this could look like in practice

Platforms could allow users to retain access to their conversation histories and match records, even after unmatched, reporting, or blocking someone. Users could also be informed or reminded what data will be retained, for how long, and how they can access it later at the point of unmatched or blocking.

Frank

Bet you'd look better without that top on...

Unmatch

Once you unmatch, this conversation will be removed from your main inbox.

A copy of your messages will remain securely stored for three months from when you unmatch. You can find or download this record from your Safety & Privacy settings if you need to access this interaction later.

If this person made you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, you can also report them.

8

Improve transparency in reporting channels

Our GADA Scale data shows that women tend to respond to lower-level harms by blocking or unmatching, instead of reporting perpetrators. This is at least partly due to low trust in the reporting and moderation system. In our interviews, women described rarely receiving follow-up after making a report, which makes reporting feel futile and invalidating. Automation also plays an important role in detecting risk at scale and enabling faster responses, and current systems rely on these automated processes to expedite reporting outcomes. However, women's trust in platforms might erode if their reports are handled without clear human review or explanation. Platforms should communicate transparently with users about how automated and human systems interact in moderation decisions, so efficiency does not come at the expense of care, accountability, or trust. This also helps build platform accountability, signalling a wider commitment to user safety.

What this could look like in practice

Platforms could provide users who submit reports with time-bound updates to users after a report is submitted (e.g. confirmation of receipt, review in progress, outcome reached). Outcome notifications should clearly outline what action was taken, within appropriate privacy limits, so users understand that their report was reviewed and addressed.

Reporting interfaces could also include visible information about how moderation works, explaining how automated systems are used to triage or detect risk and when human moderators review cases. Where automation informs a decision, this could be stated transparently, alongside confirmation of human oversight where applicable. Providing estimated response timeframes, the option to request further review, or access to a brief rationale for decisions would further reinforce accountability.

9

Improve accountability to prevent account-hopping

Disrupting repeated harm requires that perpetrators face timely and meaningful consequences. Most platforms have policies and systems in place to prevent known perpetrators from account-hopping to evade sanctions. However, our research suggests these systems are not always effective at preventing prior perpetrators of abuse from resurfacing on women's feeds after they unmatch, block, or report them. Better accountability from platforms in these account restriction processes would help prevent harm from compounding. Platforms should have clearer policies in how they enforce penalties or bans when patterns of abuse are identified. Platforms may need to review the threshold at which repeated reports trigger sanctions for perpetrators, and applying sanctions more consistently to interrupt repeat offending.

10

Conduct initial benchmarking using validated GADA Scale

The GADA Scale provides a foundation for ongoing analysis and public communication. Initial data collection and exploration can establish baseline prevalence rates, identify which groups are most affected, and highlight where platform interventions are failing. Repeated data collection can then track whether behaviours are increasing or decreasing over time.

The 2022 AIC report brought significant attention to abuse on dating platforms, and regular data collection using a validated GADA Scale could help to maintain that focus. Findings can support advocacy efforts that inform policymakers, educate the public and maintain pressure on platforms to improve.

1

Develop consent-based risk framework

Platforms should work with third-party identity verification providers to ensure that verified identity information can be lawfully, securely, and rapidly accessed in situations where a credible and serious safety report is made.

Given the prevalence of serious but under-reported harms, platforms should also work with third-party identity verification providers to develop a consent-based framework where behavioural flags (not full reporting histories) can be securely shared across platforms in a privacy-preserving way. This should be overseen by an independent body, such as eSafety Australia. This would enable early intervention while minimising legal and ethical risks.

What this could look like in practice

Platforms could submit reports of serious harms associated with a verified user to the third-party identity verification provider. These reports are anonymised flags, or a severity score, rather than behavioural reports (which would constitute personal information).

This information is stored in a common database or ledger. If users re-verify on the same or a new platform, they are asked to agree to a disclosure framework during the identity verification process. Platforms then receive flags or risk scores which they can act on.

This mirrors models used in fraud detection, fintech "bad actor" registries, or trust and safety systems in digital labour 'gig' platforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Regulators

We collated insights from across our research activities to identify a set of thematic recommendations, drawing together those surfaced in the Experience Map and the GADA Scale development.

2

Ensure platform safety considerations are subject to stricter regulator enforcement

As part of the new Online Dating Code of Conduct, platforms are required to publish yearly transparency reports detailing systems they have in place to detect harm, and how they have taken action to address these incidents.

Currently, regulators such as eSafety have no role in enforcing the requirements of the Code of Conduct, and platforms face no formal consequences for the outcomes they publish in their transparency reports. Moreover, compliance with the Code is currently only voluntary for platforms, although a review will be taking place in 2026 to assess whether to make its implementation mandatory. As part of this review, more power should be given to regulators to take action in order to ensure platforms are taking safety and incident reports seriously.

What this could look like in practice

Standardised data and metrics:

The 2025 transparency reports platforms published showed significant inconsistencies in how platforms detect, report, and respond to incidents, limiting cross-platform comparison and obscuring evaluation of safety practices. Regulators such as eSafety should be empowered to mandate standardised transparency data. Using tools like the GADA Scale would enable consistent assessment of platform performance and support clearer analysis of trends and progress in addressing online harms experienced by women. Once meaningful comparison is possible, regulators could apply behaviourally informed incentives to encourage platforms to adopt Safety by Design principles. For example, publishing an annual performance "leaderboard" based on measures such as the GADA Scale could harness social comparison to drive competition between platforms, motivating platforms to embed safety into product design and improve outcomes for users.

3

Improve data, privacy, and information transparency

Strengthening safety principles goes beyond the actions of individual platforms. At a system level, improved data and transparency standards and information sharing can support more consistent responses to harm and enable more oversight from regulators and government. Wider system stakeholders, such as policymakers and researchers, lack visibility into how platforms use data to prevent (or possibly enable) harm. Stricter regulatory mechanisms such as standardised, more granular mandatory transparency on incident reporting and moderation outcomes, and public data accessibility, could help fill this gap. This information transparency would also create greater platform accountability, building on the current voluntary code of conduct policies.

4

Facilitate cross-sector collaboration and data sharing

There is a gap in data sharing and systematic tracking between platforms that could enable early detection of perpetrators when perpetrators move between platforms. Platforms could explore carefully governed data-linkage partnerships to better detect repeat patterns of harmful behaviour across services—for example, where users opt to link social media accounts to dating profiles; by matching abuse reports across dating platforms using the same phone number or email; and, where lawful and appropriate, by flagging users banned on other services for comparable online abuse (for example, Instagram) to the same individual on dating platforms.

5

Validate, publish, and disseminate the GADA Scale

Validation of the shortened GADA Scale on a new sample should be done to check if the shortened scale remains a valid measure, and whether the proposed factor structure holds. Where feasible, repeat measures over time would help test if behaviours such as boundary-testing are genuine precursors to more exploitative behaviours.

Consideration should be given to category-specific versions of the GADA Scale. Given the observed gap between reporting and unmatching behaviour, items in the psychological/emotion category may be of particular standalone value.

Once validated, the GADA Scale should be made freely available to researchers, and platforms should be encouraged to use the scale internally. This would enable benchmarking across platforms and clearer accountability against consistent standards.





Conclusion

Conclusion and next steps



Summary

The findings of this project point to a need for significant structural change in order to shift the burden of safety away from women and onto platforms, supported by stronger action from regulators. While there are clear steps that can be taken in the short term to manage the 'pointed edge of harm' associated with abuse, such as investigating safety-informed mandatory ID verification and strengthening user safety controls and autonomy, these measures alone are not sufficient.

In the longer term, safety needs embedding into dating platforms, which requires a shift from reactive, report-led responses to encompass proactive, preventative design. This shift will require platform-level changes to core design mechanisms, alongside systems and regulations that ensure accountability.

Ultimately, improving safety at scale demands a coordinated, cross-sector approach, with sustained investment in collaboration between platforms, regulators, researchers, support services, legal and justice reforms, and any other stakeholders in the system.

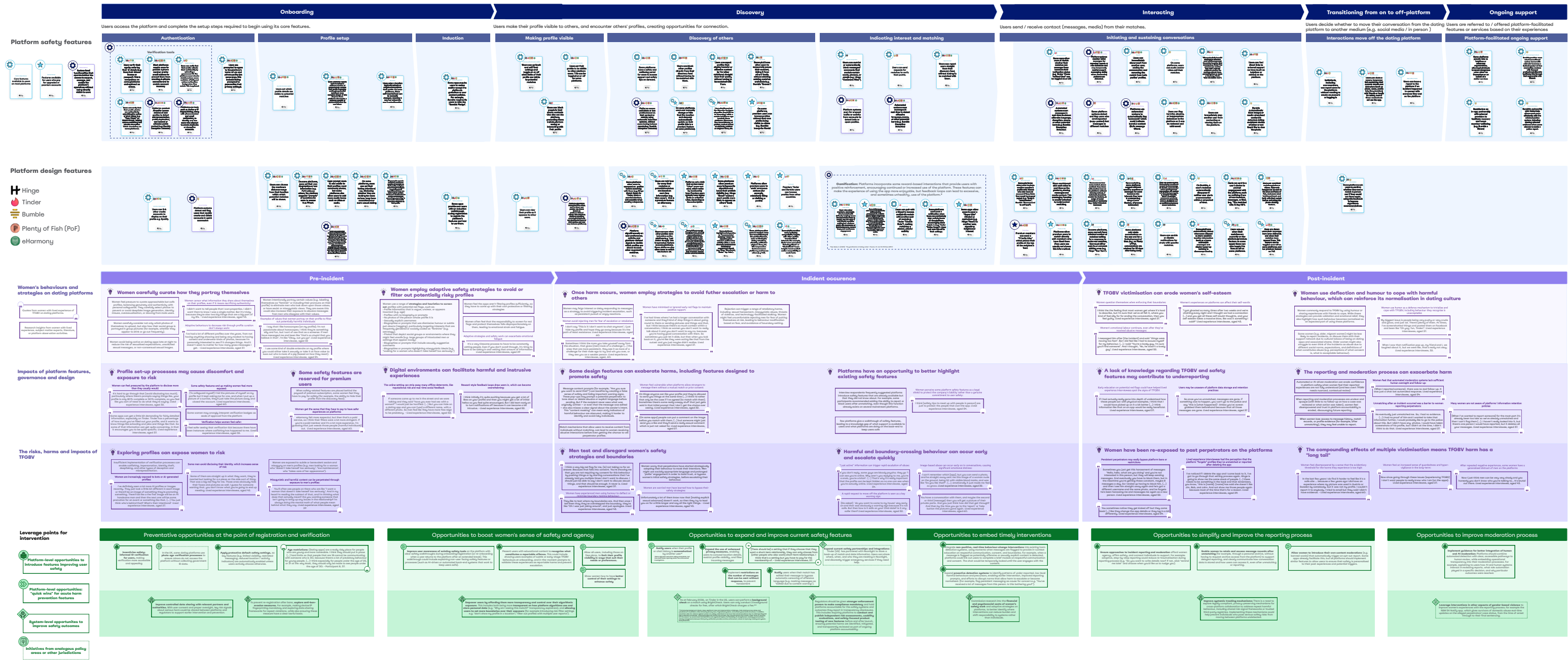
Next steps

These findings will inform future research. Our intention would be to design, develop, and test practical mechanisms that strengthen women's safety on platforms. We will also seek to validate and further refine the GADA Scale to ensure it robustly captures the prevalence and lived experience of harm over time.

Beyond individual interventions, the work ahead recognises that improving safety online also requires addressing the gendered, social, and cultural norms embedded in platform design and digital interactions. These norms extend beyond dating platforms, and call for broader engagement with how societal attitudes and beliefs are reproduced (and more importantly, how these attitudes and beliefs can be rewritten) across online environments.

Appendices

Explore the Experience Map in full



Feature integration by platform

Legend  Hinge  Tinder  Bumble  Plenty of Fish  Eharmony

					
Authentication					
Age verification	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Photo verification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Phone/email verification	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Identity verification	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Profile Moderation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Duplicate account detection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Terms of use and privacy policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Link other media accounts	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Account throttling	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Profile setup					
Set profile information visibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minimum image requirement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Location limits	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Prompt questions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Add profile media	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Dating intentions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Profile completion prompts	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Photo tracking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Induction					
Community guidelines	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Platform walkthrough	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Making profile visible					
Customise profile information visibility	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Set profile as discoverable	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Block from contacts	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
View profile as match	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Algorithmic placement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

					
Discovery of others					
Help, safety & wellbeing centre	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Block from profile	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Report from profile	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Take a break	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Proactive account banning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hide location visibility	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Set search filters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hide from discovery	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Match comments	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Location sharing	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓*
Swipe limits	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Algorithmic placement boost	✓	✓	✓	✓*	✗
Undo	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Travel mode	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Last active	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Matching Algorithm	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Centralised matching	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Curated matching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Premium filtering	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Compatibility insights	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Indicating interest & matching					
User-set message filters	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Prompt to verify	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Report from feed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unusual activity scanning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Automated language detection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Profile viewing and 'swiping'	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Embedded mini-games	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Friend mode	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Increased activity notifications	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Super liking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗



GADA respondent demographics

Indicating and sustaining conversation					
Message Restrictions	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Automatic account throttling	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Unmatch	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
In-app calling	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Message content warnings	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Crisis support integration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Automated language detection	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
"Copy and Paste" detection	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Automatic message filtering	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Reporting	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Blocking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lewd image blurring	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Share match profile	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Instant messaging	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mutual connections	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Icebreakers	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
First message settings	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Expiring matches	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Match notifications	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Share media	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Priority liking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Browse your likes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Active match limits	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Message retention limits	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Chat-specific notifications	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Address blocking	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Online notification	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Read receipts	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Interactions move off platform					
Report without logging in	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Share date details	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Report offline incidents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Date feedback	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Platform-facilitated ongoing support					
Referral pathways and tiplines	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Professional support referrals	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
External support integrations	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Criminal justice liaison	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗

Data presented was correct, to the best of our understanding, at time of drafting (February 2026)

Characteristic	No.	Pct.
Age (years)		
18 – 24	96	9.5%
25 – 34	329	32.6%
35 – 44	301	29.9%
45 – 54	176	17.5%
55 – 64	73	7.2%
65 +	33	3.3%
State		
NSW	308	30.6%
VIC	287	28.5%
QLD	177	17.6%
SA	73	7.3%
WA	107	10.6%
ACT	20	2.0%
TAS	29	2.9%
NT	7	0.7%
Born overseas		
Yes	147	14.6%
No	852	84.5%
Prefer not to say	9	0.9%
Main language spoken at home		
English	943	93.6%
Language other than English	59	5.9%
Prefer not to say	6	0.6%
Ethnicity and/or cultural background		
Australian background only	635	63.0%
Australian background and additional background(s)	68	6.7%
Background(s) other than Australian	229	22.7%
Aboriginal	47	4.7%
Torres Strait Islander	1	0.1%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	4	0.4%
Prefer not to say	24	2.4%

The long-form prototype GADA Scale

Survey structure

Women completing the survey were first asked which platforms they had used in the last three months and felt confident answering questions about.

Based on their selection, respondents were then asked to answer all subsequent questions about their experiences on that specific platform (if they chose multiple platforms, then one was randomly assigned).

Responses were recorded on the following scale: Never, Once, 2-3 times, 4-5 times, More than 5 times, or Not sure/Prefer not to say. Questions were randomly ordered.

In addition to the GADA Scale items, the survey also included questions about:

- › Demographic information
- › Which behaviour led the respondent to unmatched or avoid further engagement with someone
- › Whether the respondent had ever reported these behaviours to the platform
- › Their experience reporting the behaviour

Validation measures

To check that our GADA Scale actually measures tech-based abuse of women on dating apps, participants also completed two well-established questionnaires. We would expect the GADA Scale to be strongly related to similar concepts (technology-facilitated abuse in relationships), but not to be related to unrelated concepts (maths ability).

Technology-facilitated Abuse in Relationships (TAR):

Participants completed a shortened TAR Scale which included 6 questions about technology-facilitated abuse in intimate relationships. Our scale was strongly related to TAR ($r = 0.70$)*, meaning women who experienced more violence on dating apps also reported more abuse in their relationships.

Subjective Numeracy Scale (SNS-8):

Participants also completed a numeracy scale measuring their ability to work with numbers (e.g., calculating percentages, reading graphs). As expected, our scale showed no relationship with numeracy ($r = 0.02$)*.

* r is the correlation coefficient (ranges from -1 to +1) and shows how strongly two things move together: positive values mean they increase together, negative values mean one increases as the other decreases. The closer the r is to 1 or -1 the stronger the relationship and values near 0 mean little to no relationship.

Factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

We used EFA to understand how the 39 behaviours naturally group together based on women's experiences. EFA identifies which behaviours tend to co-occur. EFA identifies behaviours that are more strongly related (i.e., often reported together), suggesting they reflect the same underlying pattern. It is called 'exploratory' because we don't pre-decide the groups, instead the data suggests the most likely structure. The analysis revealed two main patterns (factors) of behaviours:

Factor 1 (11 items): These behaviours were all rarely experienced with only 31% of women experiencing at least one. These behaviours include things like identity theft, doxxing, threats of harm, and financial abuse. When these behaviours do occur, they were more likely to be isolated incidents.

Factor 2 (23 items): Contains more common behaviours including psychological manipulation, monitoring, and sexual pressure. 62% of women experienced at least one of these behaviours. These behaviours are also more likely to happen repeatedly. **Five items showed overlap across both factors.**

The following pages group the 39 items in the long-form prototype GADA Scale into six categories.

- › Deception
- › Monitoring / surveillance
- › Psychological / emotional abuse
- › Financial abuse
- › Threats
- › Sexual abuse

In the item list we also indicate which factor each item falls under as:

- › **Bold** = Factor 1 (11 items)
- › Unmarked items = Factor 2 (23 items)
- › [†] = items that relate to both factors (5 items)

Deception items

Been impersonated by someone on the platform (e.g. someone used your photos or details without permission)?

Discovered someone who was using a fake profile (catfishing)?

Had your image or likeness used in ways you did not consent to (e.g. a deepfake)?

Been repeatedly messaged by the same person who was using a different or new profile? [†]

Discovered that someone was lying about their relationship status or other life circumstances?

Financial abuse items

Been pressured to share personal details like passwords or bank details when you didn't feel it was appropriate?

Been asked for money or financial help on the platform when you thought it wasn't appropriate?

Been incentivised or threatened financially on the platform (e.g. 'If you don't respond, I'll stop sending money')?

Had someone repeatedly mention Bitcoin, cryptocurrency, or other investment opportunities when it didn't seem appropriate?

Monitoring / surveillance items

Been pressured to move off platform before you felt it was appropriate?

Been pressured to share personal contact details when you didn't feel it was appropriate (e.g. phone number, address)?

Felt like you were being monitored or watched by someone on the app, for example monitoring when you were shown as active or nearby?[†]

Been questioned about who else you are talking to on the platform, or had it implied you shouldn't be talking to others?

Been asked personal questions (e.g. whether you live alone, how many previous sexual partners you've had, how many children you have), when you didn't feel it was appropriate?

Been pressured to share your location or been repeatedly asked about where you live or work, when you felt it wasn't appropriate?

Had someone screenshot or record your text messages, images, or video without your consent? [†]

Threat items

Were concerned about blocking or reporting someone because you were worried about retaliation? [†]

Had someone threaten to harm you?

Received images or video depicting physical violence that you did not ask for?

Been threatened (via text message within the platform) with having your profile, messages, or private images shared unless you did something the other person wanted?

Sexual abuse items

Encountered profiles using sexually explicit or graphic usernames or profile names on the platform?

Received unwanted messages or questions of a sexual nature that made assumptions about your race, ethnicity, or cultural background (i.e. fetishisation)?

Received unwanted messages or questions that made assumptions about your sexual orientation?

Had someone behave in ways that were sexually inappropriate on a video call within the app (e.g. exposing themselves without consent)?[†]

Had someone try to manipulate you into sending sexual images or videos (e.g. repeated requests, guilt – tripping)?

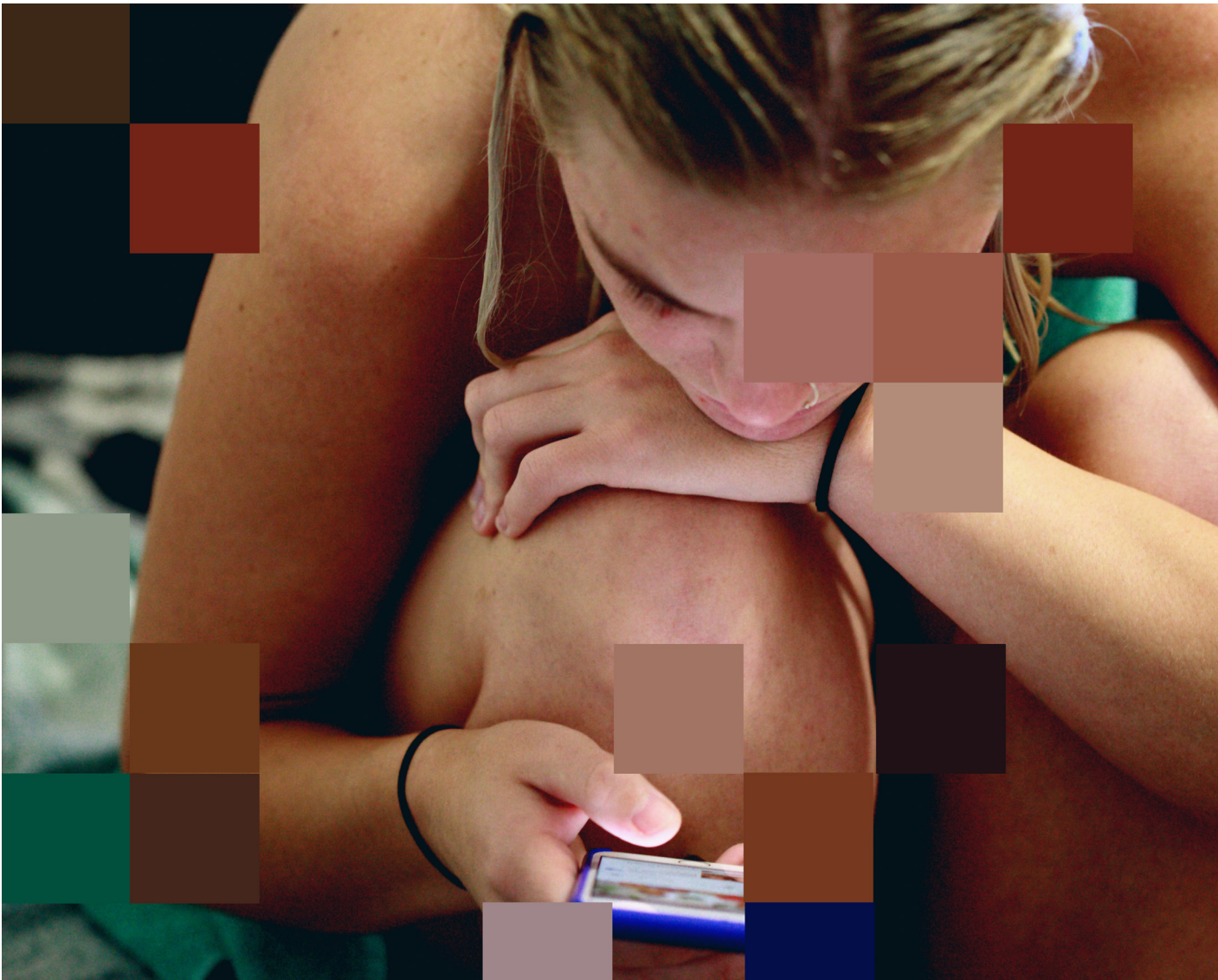
Received sexually explicit images or videos that you did not ask for?

Had someone try to manipulate you into sending sexual text messages (e.g. repeated requests, guilt-tripping)?

Received sexually explicit text messages that you did not ask for?

Psychological / emotion items

- Had someone criticise or speak negatively about their ex-partners or past relationships, including past matches?
- Had your concerns dismissed, been called crazy, or been blamed for someone else’s behaviour (e.g. saying you were too sensitive or overreacting)?
- Had someone push back or persist after you indicated you were not interested, unmatched them, or asked them to stop?
- Received repeated messages in a short period, and then been met with anger or frustration when they thought you did not respond fast enough?
- Had someone be inappropriately critical of you or other people, including backhanded compliments or subtle insults (i.e. negging)?
- Been told offensive or upsetting ‘jokes’ or sarcastic comments on the platform that you felt were made in order to see how you would respond?
- Had someone shift very quickly emotionally from being warm or affectionate to distant, cold or angry, in response to something you did?
- Had someone display signs of affection that you thought were excessive (flattery, gifts or other forms of love bombing)?
- Received unwanted degrading messages or slurs?
- Had personal information shared publicly without your consent (i.e. doxxing)?
- Had private images or video of you shared publicly without your consent?



The shortened GADA Scale

The 39 item long-form GADA Scale was then shortened to the 19 items presented on the following pages. See page 31 for the criteria used to shorten the scale.

Deception items

- Been repeatedly messaged by the same person who was using a different or new profile?
- Discovered that someone was being deceptive about their identity, relationship status, or other life circumstances (e.g., using a fake profile)?

Monitoring / surveillance items

- Been pressured to share personal contact details when you didn’t feel it was appropriate (e.g. phone number, address, other social platform)?
- Been questioned about who else you are talking to on the platform, or had it implied you shouldn’t be talking to others?
- Been asked intrusive personal questions when you didn’t feel it was appropriate (e.g. where you live, whether you live alone) ?

Threats items

- Had someone threaten to harm you?
- Received images or video depicting physical violence that you did not ask for?
- Been threatened (via text message within the platform) with having your profile, messages, or private images shared unless you did something the other person wanted?

Sexual abuse items

- Received unwanted messages or questions of a sexual nature that made assumptions about your race, ethnicity, or cultural background (i.e. fetishisation)?
- Had someone try to pressure or manipulate you into sending sexual content (e.g., sexual images / videos or sexually explicit messages)
- Received unsolicited sexually explicit content that you did not ask for (e.g. sexually explicit images / videos or sexually explicit messages)?

Psychological / emotion items

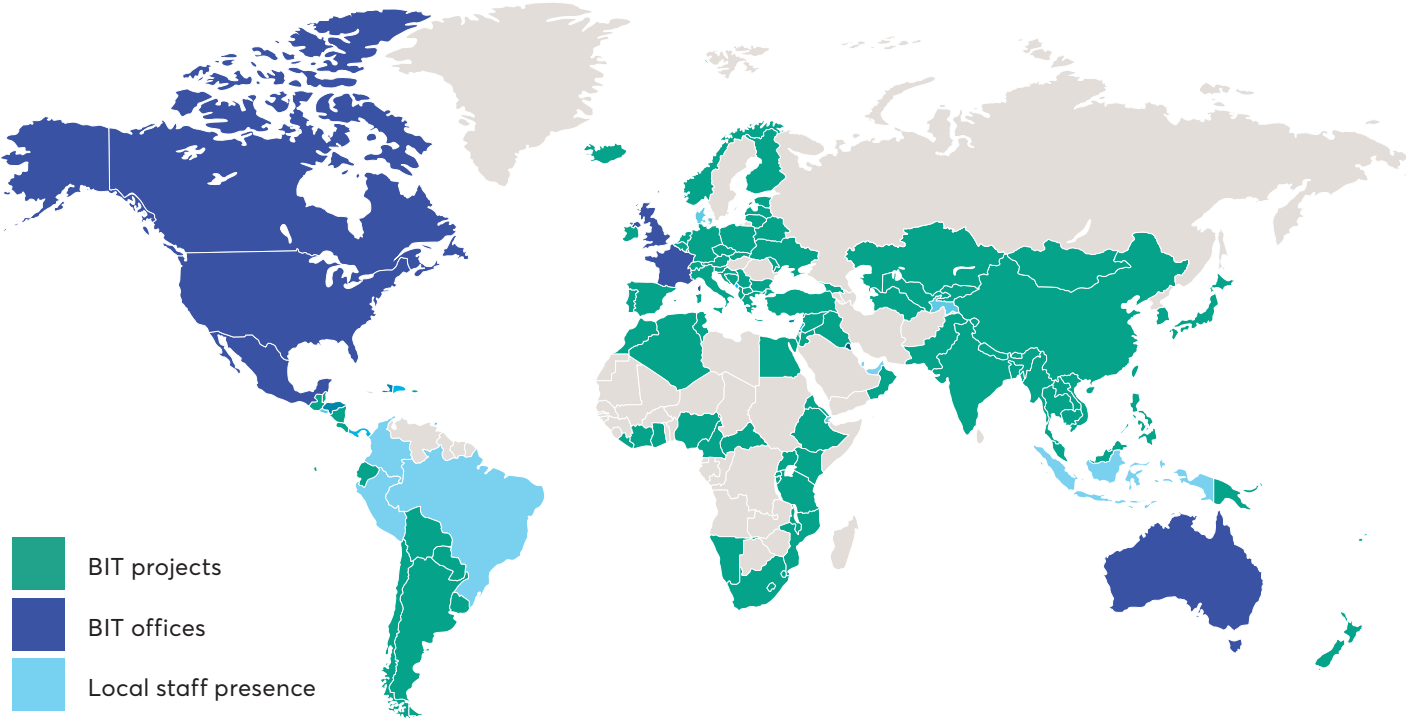
- Had your concerns dismissed, been called crazy, or been blamed for someone else’s behaviour (e.g. saying you were too sensitive or overreacting)?
- Had someone push back or persist after you indicated you were not interested, unmatched them, or asked them to stop?
- Received repeated messages in a short period, and then been met with anger or frustration when they thought you did not respond fast enough?
- Had someone be inappropriately critical of you or other people, including backhanded compliments or subtle insults (i.e. negging)?
- Been told offensive or upsetting ‘jokes’ or sarcastic comments on the platform that you felt were made in order to see how you would respond?
- Had someone shift very quickly emotionally from being warm or affectionate to distant, cold or angry, in response to something you did?
- Had someone display signs of affection that you thought were excessive (flattery, gifts or other forms of love bombing)?
- Had your personal information or private images / videos shared publicly without your consent?

Subject matter experts consulted

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Chanel Contos	Teach Us Consent
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The Behavioural Insights Team is an applied **research and innovation consultancy**, specialising in **social and behavioural change**.





Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is a global research and innovation consultancy which uses deep understanding of human behaviour to improve people's lives.

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