

The Experiences of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence (TFSV) on Ontario Post-Secondary Students:

Impacts, Safeguards, and
Policy Recommendations

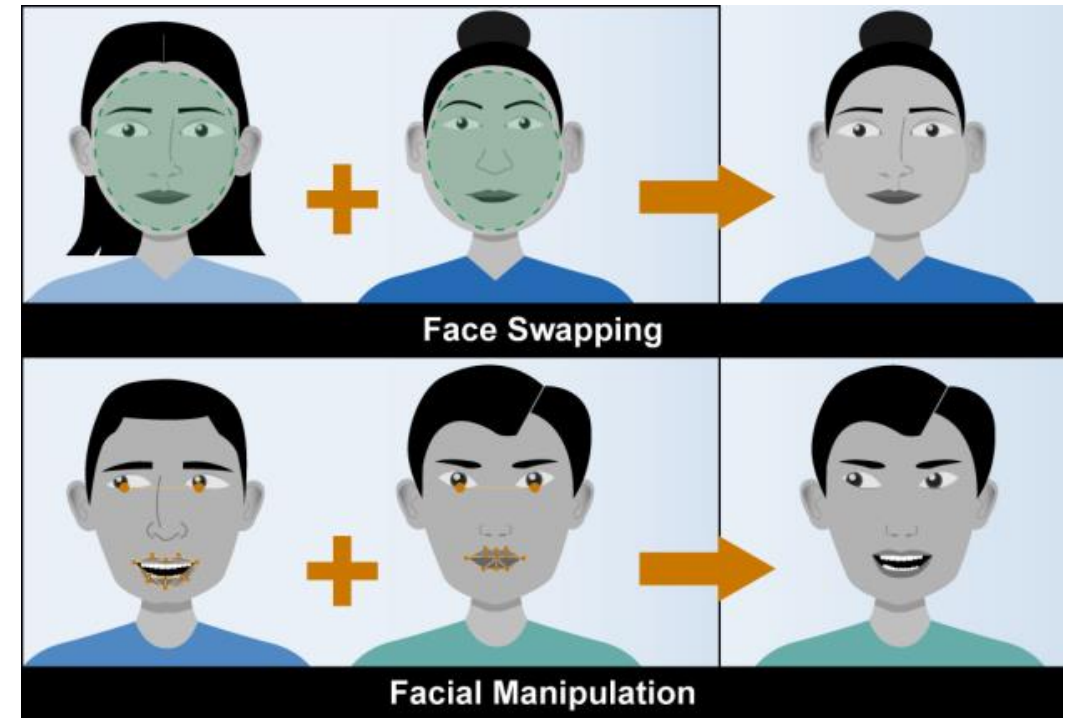
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TFSV, Deepfakes & the Current Landscape

- The most recent research on **Canadian post-secondary students** indicates that **four out of five Canadian undergraduate students** have **experienced TFSV**, which is significantly higher than traditional in-person sexual violence (Snaychuk & O'Neill, 2020).
- Over 96% of deepfake videos found online are nonconsensual pornography (Ajder et al., 2019).
- The top 4 websites that specialize in nonconsensual deepfake pornography had over 134 million views in 2019 (Ajder et al., 2019).



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-379SP

Research Questions

- R1: Are first-year students at Brock University educated on TFSV, including issues associated with digital consent and AI?
- R2: Do first-year students acknowledge the harms and experiences of TFSV utilizing AI?
- R3: What are first-year student experiences and impacts of TFSV utilizing AI?

Research Design



Recruitment

- September – November 2025
- 4 first-year course visits
- Approx. 800 students reached

Survey Sample

- 85 completed surveys
- 133 started / partial completed

Interviews

- 11 hour-long interviews
- Inductive and Deductive coding

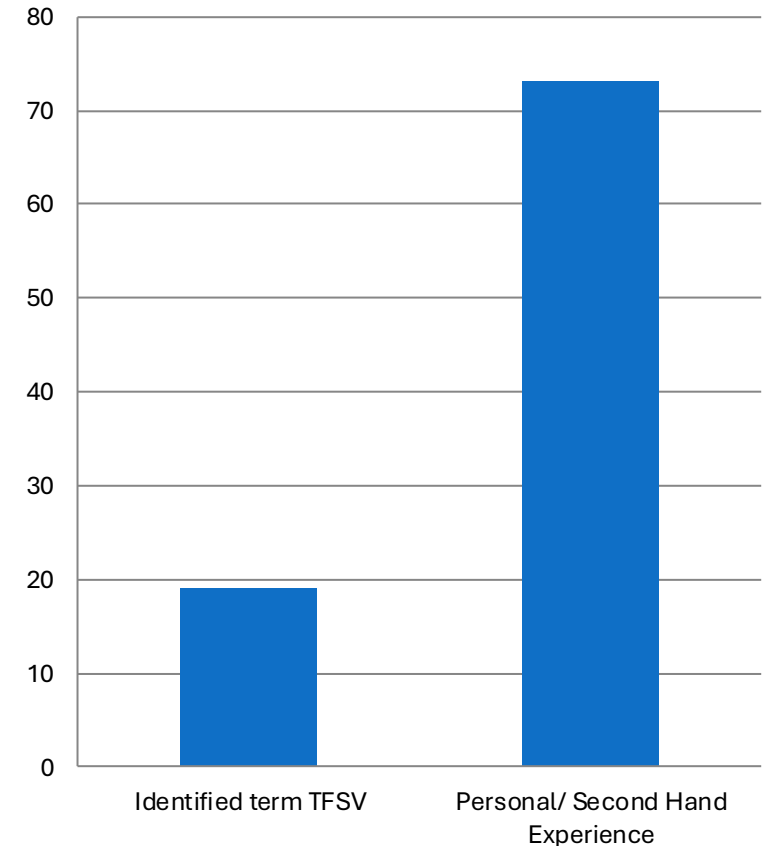
Survey Data

Awareness of TFSV

- **56 out of 69 (81%)** participants did not know of the term Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence.
- In contrast, **51 out of 70 (71%)** participants identified having personal experience or know of someone who has experienced a form of TFSV.
- **61 out of 66 (92%)** respondents would find a situational scenario of nonconsensual deepfakes as a form of violence, despite not having language to describe the experience.

This preliminary analysis shows within Brock University's first year students, there is a significant gap between the education and awareness of TFSV and the first-hand experiences of TFSV; This reveals a disconnect between lived experience and conceptual awareness.

TFSV Awareness vs Experience



Emerging Themes

- THEME 1: Normalization and Limited Recognition of Digital Harm
- THEME 2: Digital Duality, Blurred Consent and Relational Boundaries
Online
- THEME 3: Digital Sociality and Hyper-Vigilance
- THEME 4: Mixed Foundations of Digital Safety Education
- THEME 5: Peer-Based Digital Harm and Social Dynamics
- THEME 6: Institutional Barriers to Support and Reporting



Emerging themes are interconnected and mutually reinforcing

Theme 1: Normalization and Limited Recognition of Digital Harm

- **Affective shorthand / limited language**
- **Minimization as humour**
 - When asked about receiving unsolicited nude images (cyber-flashing), *“I think there was a couple times where I was like with friends, like when stuff like that happened and we just kind of like laugh about it and be like, Oh my God. But I don't think it was ever like brought up again. It was just kind of like funny.”*
- **Desensitization over time**
- **Low recognition/ later recognized harm**
 - When speaking on repeated unwanted sexual advances over snapchat, *“I mean, I was pretty young and I at the very start of it, I...almost...this is gonna sound horrible, but I almost took it as a compliment and then as it started to consistently happen and I said no.”*

Theme 3: Social Pressures and Online Hyper-Vigilance

- **Pressure to participate**
- **Hyper-awareness / self-monitoring**
 - When the participant spoke on the impacts from AI-generated nude images spread about a classmates, *"I was definitely more aware of [posting myself] and more like conscious about it, because I did know a few of the girls closely that were like in the AI images and it kind of made me rethink a lot of things it kind of made me double think or rethink on who I had on my phone."*
- **Resigned risk acceptance**
- **Persistent digital stress / lingering fear**
 - When the participant spoke about her name and a partially clothed video of herself was posted on Discord, *"So, I had no clue if the video, if it was even taken down to begin with. And so for like a year, I was not that I ever had any encounters, but I was I just looming in the back of my head. I'm like, what if somebody is looking for me?"*

Theme 6: Institutional Barriers to Support and Reporting

- **Low visibility of resources / Accessibility barriers**
 - When asked if they know of TFSV resources at Brock University, *"Trainings and resources aren't always at accessible hours. They a lot of times happen during lectures. So I can't really go to them.... But the posters are just like on the wall when I'm walking to class, I'm just kind of walking by. I'm not like looking at the posters."*
- **Unclear reporting pathways**
- **Shame/embarrassment as reporting barrier**
 - When asked if they would report a deepfake: *"I just think it's something that I wouldn't want people to like, know about myself. I know that it doesn't reflect on me as a person, but I don't want...people to know that that those exist...Yeah, that that would really affect me."*
- **Institutional distrust**
- **Conditional reporting logic**

Implications and Outcomes

- Institutional support systems exist but are not functionally accessible to students.
- Harm is often experienced before it is recognized or named.
- Social normalization diminishes perceived severity and contributes to delayed reporting.
- Significant exposure to TFSV prior to entering university.
- **Students navigate AI-facilitated harm within a system characterized by:**
 - Uneven awareness
 - Widespread normalization
 - Unclear support pathways

At present, many forms of technology-facilitated sexual violence remain unregulated in law or policy. These findings underscore the need for the creation and implementation of targeted legal and policy responses.

References & Further Reading

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