
Abuse Is Not Love: Failure to Recognize Technology-Facilitated Intimate Partner Violence

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Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence (TFIPV) refers to the use of digital technologies, including smartphones, social media, messaging applications, location tracking services, and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools, to monitor, coerce, harass, or control a current or former intimate partner. Across 10 countries, nongovernmental organization (NGO) partners of the YSL Beauty Abuse Is Not Love program consistently find that young people aged 16 to 24 do not recognize TFIPV. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 10 NGO experts working in domestic violence prevention and survivor support, this commentary suggests that surveillance may have become normalized to a degree that makes it difficult for many young people to distinguish love from abuse. The analysis identifies four thematic areas of recognition failure: normalization, parent/caregiver modeling, a language gap in naming abuse, and legal enforcement failures. A fifth emerging theme, AI-generated harms, is also discussed. The commentary presents the nine warning signs of abuse adapted to TFIPV as a practical heuristic for making digital control visible. A surveilled relationship is not a safe relationship. Ending TFIPV requires shifting the social, legal, and technological structures that have erased the distinction between love and abuse.

1 Introduction

In Greece, Vasiliki Liafou, Head Psychologist at Women's Issues Now (W.I.N.) Hellas, recounted that a 22-year-old client asked her: "Am I allowed to say no?" As if consent were a right her partner held, not her own. In Spain, Ana Bella, Founder of the Ana Bella Foundation, described a young woman who gave her boyfriend her phone for three days to prove her loyalty. He was still not satisfied. "You probably told your lovers not to text you while I had the phone," he said. No amount of transparency could satisfy him. In Indonesia, Danika Nurkalista, Psychologist at Yayasan Pulih, described a young woman who erased every male contact from her phone. Her boyfriend said it was because he loved her. She did not see this as abuse.

These vignettes are drawn from insights shared by nongovernmental organization (NGO) experts partnered with YSL Beauty's Abuse Is Not Love program, working in domestic violence prevention and survivor support, and they illustrate the pattern this commentary examines. They are not isolated cases. They are manifestations of technology-facilitated intimate partner violence (TFIPV): the use of digital technologies including smartphones, social media, messaging apps, location tracking, and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools to monitor, coerce, harass, or control a current or former intimate partner (Boxall, Lawler, and Morgan 2025; Koukopoulos, Janickyj, and Tanczer 2026; Refuge 2026; Citron 2019; Dragiewicz et al. 2019). Such behaviors include demanding passwords, tracking location, monitoring messages, threatening to share intimate images, generating sexualized deepfakes, and isolating a partner through digital surveillance (Flynn et al. 2025; Henry, Flynn, and Powell 2020). These behaviors are not separate from offline intimate partner violence; they are psychological violence adapted to new tools (Henry, Flynn, and Powell 2020; MacDonald et al. 2023). TFIPV referrals increased by more than 62 percent in 2025, with a 24 percent rise among survivors under 30 years of age (Refuge 2026). Young people aged 16 to 24 are disproportionately affected, yet they are also the least likely to recognize digital control as TFIPV (Borrajó, Gámez-Guadix, and Calvete 2015; McMillan et al. 2025; Patel and Roesch 2022).

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are critical periods for relationship formation, yet young people are learning to navigate intimacy, boundaries, and trust while living in highly digital environments (McMillan et al. 2025). Young people may be socialized to accept surveillance as normal: parents/caregivers often track their locations, monitor messages, and demand passwords in the name of safety (Stephenson et al. 2023).

Researchers have developed robust behavioral taxonomies documenting how perpetrators use technology to monitor, coerce, and control intimate partners (Boxall, Lawler, and Morgan 2025; Kim and Ferraresso 2023; Koukopoulos, Janickyj, and Tanczer 2026; Rogers et al. 2023). Yet existing scholarship lacks a psychological framework for understanding how victims experience these harms, particularly how young people recognize, or fail to recognize, digital control as TFIPV. Definitional ambiguity surrounding TFIPV further hinders recognition and reporting (McMillan et al. 2025; Stephenson et al. 2023). This gap is critical because TFIPV can be established before, or even without, physical violence, making it invisible (Koukopoulos, Janickyj, and Tanczer 2026).

To address the absence of a psychological framework for understanding how young people recognize or fail to recognize digital control as TFIPV, this commentary draws on semi-structured interviews with 10 NGO experts across 10 countries who work directly with young people aged 16 to 24 experiencing intimate partner violence. It first presents four themes of recognition failure from the interviews: normalization, parent/caregiver modeling, language gaps, and legal enforcement failures. It then presents the nine warning signs of abuse (YSL Beauty 2020) as a practical heuristic for recognizing TFIPV, and closes with recommendations for policy, prevention, and research.

2 Data and Methods

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 NGO experts working directly with young people (aged 16 to 24) experiencing intimate partner violence. The interviews took place between April and May 2026 and lasted 45 to 55 minutes. Participants were recruited through YSL Beauty's Abuse Is Not Love partner program. All interviewees gave informed consent for attribution by name and organization; ethical procedures followed standard social research protocols, including anonymization of incidental personal data. Table 1 lists the participating organizations, locations, descriptions, and experts.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Thematic analysis was performed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software (Lumivero 2025). A hybrid coding approach was used: a preliminary codebook derived from the interview guide was supplemented with inductive codes as new themes emerged. Quotations presented are representative of patterns that recurred across interviews. Minor edits for clarity (e.g., removal of speech fillers) were made without changing meaning.

3 Findings

From the thematic analysis, four core themes of recognition failure emerged:

- **Normalization:** digital control is so routine that young people do not question it as abusive.
- **Parent/caregiver modeling:** parents normalize surveillance through location tracking, password demands, and message monitoring.
- **Language gaps:** young people lack the vocabulary to name digital control as TFIPV.
- **Legal enforcement failures:** laws against digital abuse exist but are not enforced; victims are often revictimized.

The sections below unpack each theme in turn. A fifth theme, AI as an accelerant of harm, is then presented as an emerging concern that adds urgency to the findings.

3.1 Normalization: TFIPV as Invisible Abuse

Across all 10 countries, experts reported that young people do not recognize digital control as TFIPV. This does not appear to reflect a failure of intelligence or awareness, but rather a pattern consistent with behaviors so deeply embedded in the fabric of daily life that they may go largely unquestioned. The normalization of surveillance appears to begin subtly and operate invisibly, which may erode the possibility of recognition.

In Greece, Vasiliki Liafou, Head Psychologist at W.I.N. Hellas and one of the 10 experts interviewed for this study, observed that her service users experience location sharing

Table 1: Participating organizations and experts, by country. Information was compiled from expert interviews conducted between April and May 2026 and from organizational websites accessed May 2026.

Country	Organization	Description	Expert
Brazil	Cruzando Histórias	Nonprofit organization that promotes professional development, employability, and financial autonomy for women through active listening and psychosocial support.	Bia Diniz, Founder and President
Czech Republic	proFem	Nonprofit organization providing support, counseling, and crisis intervention for victims of domestic and sexual violence.	Daniela Klézlová, Head of Legal Services
England	Women's Aid Federation of England	National charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children; a federation of nearly 180 organizations providing over 300 local services.	Maia Samuel, Research and Evidence Manager
France	En Avant Toutes	A feminist association that promotes gender equality and works to end violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people through advocacy, education, and an online support chat.	Ynaée Benaben, Co-founder and CEO
Greece	W.I.N. Hellas (Women's Issues Now)	NGO working to eliminate violence against women through prevention, support, and gender equality promotion.	Vasiliki Liafou, Head Psychologist
Indonesia	Yayasan Pulih (Pulih Foundation)	NGO providing psychosocial support and psychological counseling for victims of violence, conflict, and natural disasters.	Danika Nurkalista, Psychologist
South Africa	Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training (ADAPT)	Nonprofit organization focusing on gender-based violence awareness, counseling, and training since 1994.	Sidwell Sehoana, Community Programs Facilitator
Spain	Ana Bella Foundation	Survivor-led foundation that uses peer support and positive testimonies to empower women who have experienced gender-based violence.	Ana Bella, Founder and Ashoka Fellow
Sweden	1000 Möjligheter (1000 Opportunities)	Sweden's first youth helpline, focusing on intimate partner violence prevention among young people.	Zandra Kanakaris, Secretary General
United States	It's On Us	National nonprofit program dedicated to college sexual assault prevention, engaging students through grassroots organizing and education.	Tracey Vitchers, Executive Director

as a persistent source of pressure between young couples: “if you don’t share, then you get accused that you made something wrong... and if you say you’re in place A but you get found in place B, you need to excuse why you’ve been there.” This demand for transparency was not seen as control but as a default condition of intimacy.

In the United States, Tracey Vitchers, Executive Director of It’s On Us, described university students who often attend campus support groups not with complaints but with questions: “Is it okay that my partner wants to know where I am all the time?” Students are confused, not alarmed. The behaviors of real-time location tracking, constant check-ins, and demands to know who they are with feel intrusive, but they often cannot decide whether such actions cross a line. It is commonly perceived as acceptable that friends share their locations with each other. When a new intimate partner demands the same access, it may not feel like a violation; it may instead feel familiar.

In South Africa, Sidwell Sehoana, Community Programs Facilitator at ADAPT, reported that young people regard technology-facilitated control as “a way of life within a relationship.” The behavior is so ordinary, checking messages, demanding passwords, tracking location, that it is not recognized as a problem unless physical violence is also present. Sehoana described one young woman who explained that she gave her partner her phone password because “that’s what couples do.” She did not see the constant monitoring as abusive; she saw it as proof of love. Zandra Kanakaris, Secretary General of 1000 Möjligheter (1000 Opportunities) in Sweden, identified that the absence of a bruise makes the TFIPV invisible.

These accounts suggest a pattern of recognition failure across disparate cultural contexts. Surveillance may have become normalized to a degree that makes it difficult for some young people to distinguish abuse from love (Gillespie 2018). Tracey Vitchers shared that “when TFIPV intercedes with other problematic behavior, that light bulb goes off and they think, ‘This might not be right.’ But because they’ve grown up with this technology, it becomes difficult for them to disentangle and understand that it can be used as a tool for abuse.” It’s On Us service users describe the experience of location tracking, demands for passwords, questioning of every like on shared photos as simply how things are. This pattern is consistent with normalization: surveillance appears to have become routine enough that these actions may go unrecognized as TFIPV.

3.2 Parent/Caregiver Modeling

If young people cannot recognize digital control as TFIPV, part of the explanation lies at home. Zandra Kanakaris of 1000 Möjligheter in Sweden observed that parents “groom [children] to learn to be controlled” through constant tracking and monitoring, adding that “they think this is what love looks like.”

Imagine learning what love looks like from someone who tracks your every move. A young person receives a smart mobile device for their birthday. A parent texts to ask

where they are, who they are with, when they will be home. The phone is not a private space; it is a shared device, open for inspection. The message is always wrapped in care: “I just want to know you are safe.” This is not abuse. It is parenting. But it carries an unintended lesson: if you love me, you have nothing to hide.

Across 9 of 10 countries, experts observed that young people carry this lesson directly into their intimate relationships. The behaviors parents/caregivers model as safety (location tracking, password sharing, constant check-ins) become the behaviors partners demand as proof of love. Young people do not experience a shift because there is no clear boundary to cross. They have never known a different way.

Tracey Vitchers, in the United States, described a generation raised in what she called a “complete surveillance state.” The line between care and control was never drawn. Vasiliki Liafou, in Greece, traced the chain: what begins with parents/caregivers moves to friends, then to partners. “Whoops, then you are in,” she said. In Indonesia, Danika Nurkalista observed that location sharing is so thoroughly normalized as a safety practice within families that young people do not question it. She noted that in Jakarta, parents and children share locations so that each family member knows where the others are, especially when working late at night. This framing of surveillance as care, she explained, may make it substantially harder for young people to later recognize when a partner’s similar demands cross the line into control.

None of this is an argument against parental monitoring. Location tracking and shared passwords can be legitimate expressions of care in families with clear boundaries and mutual consent. The problem is not the technology. It is the transmission of behaviors from one relationship context to another without the language to negotiate when those behaviors become coercive. A young person who has never been asked whether they want to share their location will not, as a young adult, think to ask themselves the same question. A teenager who has never been allowed to say no to a parent’s digital demands will not know that saying no to a partner is even an option.

When young people finally do speak up, the adults around them often fail them. Maia Samuel, Women’s Aid England, described a common scene. A young person discloses TFIPV, a partner demanding passwords, tracking location, monitoring messages. The parent or teacher listens, then gives the only advice they know: “Just get off your phone.” The advice is well-intentioned but ineffective. Samuel explained that this response misses the point entirely. The device is not the abuser; the person holding it is. Telling a young person to disconnect does not teach them to recognize control; it teaches them that the problem is their own presence online. It blames the victim for the space where the TFIPV happens, rather than naming the TFIPV itself. Worse, it isolates the young person further. For young people today, their smartphone is not a luxury. It is their connection to friends, to school, to the world. Taking it away feels like punishment, not protection. Many choose to endure the TFIPV rather than lose their digital life.

Ana Bella, Founder of the Ana Bella Foundation in Spain, warned that this generational gap has real consequences. “If an 11-year-old girl thinks giving her Instagram password is a proof of love,” she said, “she is being trained to accept TFIPV as a lifestyle.” The training begins not with peers but with the family’s unexamined norms. Parents and caregivers who refuse to educate themselves about digital safety, or who default to confiscation rather than conversation, leave their children vulnerable to those who will exploit that same trust.

Bia Diniz, Founder and President of Cruzando Histórias in Brazil, added another layer: parents and caregivers are often unable to read the digital codes young people use. Emojis, stickers, internal group chats—these can carry violent or sexualized meanings that adults cannot see. A parent who cannot recognize the signs of abuse cannot intervene. A parent whose first instinct is to take the phone away ensures that the next time something goes wrong, the young person will not come to them at all. The tragedy is that parents and caregivers are not malicious. But their own mechanisms of parental control, the tracking, the monitoring, the expectation of total transparency, appear to have normalized the very behaviors that may later be used for TFIPV.

3.3 Language Gap: No Words for the Harm

Across all 10 countries, NGO experts in domestic violence prevention and survivor support described what is best understood as a language gap: not a barrier of spoken or written language, but an absence of vocabulary for naming digital control as abuse. In the Czech Republic, Daniela Klézlová of proFem recounted a young woman who wrote, in a support chat: “He gets angry when I don’t reply fast enough. He wants to know where I am all the time. He says it’s because he loves me.” She did not write “abuse.” She wrote “jealousy.” She wrote “intensity.” She wrote “I don’t know if this is normal.”

Maia Samuel, Research and Evidence Manager at Women’s Aid England, observed that young people “know something feels wrong but don’t have the language.” This is the language gap. Across all 10 countries, experts reported that young people feel the weight of TFIPV long before they can name it. The anxiety, the hypervigilance. Checking their phones constantly, dreaded notifications, pressure to respond immediately, exhausted by proving their innocence on video calls that serve as evidence of where they are and who they are with. They have the symptoms, but not the diagnosis. The words they reach for are not the words of violence; they are the words of romance gone slightly wrong.

In Spain, Ana Bella hears the same phrases repeatedly: “He’s just a bit intense.” “He’s protective.” “He cares too much.” These are not lies. They are the closest approximations available to someone who has never been told that demanding a password may not be love, that tracking a location may not be safety, that a video call at midnight may not be affection. Bia Diniz, in Brazil, sees this language gap consistently: “The language of violence often arrives late.” By the time a young person learns the word “abuse,” the pattern is already entrenched. Survivors come to her workshops thinking their

relationships were “complicated” or “dramatic,” not abusive. They must be taught the name for what they endured. Diniz recounted one survivor who, after a session, said: “I thought he was just jealous. I didn’t know that was violence.”

Ynaée Benaben, in France, quantified the gap: 40 percent of the young people who contacted her support chat only realized they were experiencing violence through the conversation itself. They arrived with a problem they could not name, “he’s too jealous,” “he’s insecure,” “he doesn’t trust me,” and left with a new vocabulary: gaslighting, digital stalking, coercive control. The shift was not gradual. One moment they were describing discomfort; the next they identified TFIPV. In Greece, Vasiliki Liafou noted that young people freely apply the word “toxic” to relationships, to friends, to online spaces, but rarely reach for “abusive.” As she described it, “toxic” names a feeling of harm without assigning it to a specific person, whereas “abusive” and “TFIPV” are direct: they name a perpetrator. There is an abuser. There is a victim.

3.4 Legal Gaps: Laws without Enforcement

In Brazil, Bia Diniz of Cruzando Histórias recounted a young woman walking into a police station with screenshots of threatening messages, call logs showing 50 missed calls in a single night, and evidence of a partner tracking her location through an app she never consented to. She had evidence. She had courage. She had a name for what happened to her. The officer listened, nodded, and said: “Have you tried blocking him?”

The law often fails young people experiencing TFIPV. In England, Maia Samuel of Women’s Aid explained that domestic abuse legislation only applies when both parties are over 16. A 15-year-old whose partner tracks her location, demands her passwords, and isolates her from friends has no legal recourse under domestic abuse law. She is not old enough to be a victim. Her experience, no matter how controlling, does not officially count.

In the Czech Republic, Daniela Klézlová, Head of Legal Services at proFem, described a different but equally troubling paradox. Laws against deepfakes and nonconsensual intimate image sharing exist, adopted because the European Union required them. But the laws sit unused (Citron 2019; Suzor 2019). Police do not apply them. Instead, they reach for older statutes, such as the pornography law, and in doing so, turn victims into defendants. A young woman whose ex-partner threatens to expose her photos can find herself prosecuted for the creation of those images.

The same story echoes in Indonesia. Danika Nurkalista, Psychologist at Yayasan Pulih, explained that a 2022 law criminalizing deepfakes remains unenforced. The police do not use it. The courts have no precedent. When a young woman reports that her face has been superimposed onto explicit content, officers ask her: “Did you take the original photo?” The implication is clear: you are complicit. The victim is blamed for the existence of the image, while the perpetrator—the one who manipulated it, who threatened to share it, who weaponized her face—faces no consequences.

Part of the problem is the enduring stereotype of domestic violence that dominates public consciousness. Ynaée Benaben of En Avant Toutes in France put it bluntly: when people think of domestic violence, they picture a 35- to 40-year-old woman, married with children, bruised in a kitchen. That is the stereotype. That is what the law is designed to see. A 21-year-old with no children who has never lived with her partner, controlled not through physical force but through constant texting and location tracking—she does not recognize herself in that picture. And neither, often, does the legal system.

This gap is not only cultural but procedural. In the United States, Tracey Vitchers of *It's On Us* highlighted how Title IX, the federal law governing campus sexual violence, has been amended to make it harder for survivors to report and for institutions to hold perpetrators accountable. Under the current interpretation, a student must experience “ongoing and often escalating” experiences of sexual assault or intimate partner violence before a school is legally required to investigate. As Vitchers explained, this is particularly challenging for TFIPV because administrators often do not understand the nuances of how it plays out, which may mean young people experiencing digital abuse do not meet that standard. Consequently, schools are not empowered to intervene, leaving young people vulnerable.

Across 7 of the 10 countries, a common theme emerged: laws alone are insufficient. As Sidwell Sehoana of ADAPT in South Africa observed, even when legal frameworks exist, police often lack the training to recognize TFIPV, and victims are frequently told to “just block him” rather than being taken seriously. The experts in this study did not simply call for new legislation; they asked for enforcement of existing laws, for police training, for prosecutor education, and for judges who understand that a string of text messages can be as coercive as a raised fist. They asked for a legal system that does not require physical evidence of violence before it takes young people’s experiences of TFIPV seriously.

3.5 AI as Accelerant

Across 6 of the 10 countries, AI is being used as a direct tool for TFIPV. Experts reported three main AI-facilitated harms:

- **Deepfake extortion:** abusers generate nude images from ordinary photos and threaten to share them.
- **Chatbot validation of TFIPV:** AI chatbots have told jealous partners that demanding passwords is reasonable, reinforcing controlling behavior as care.
- **AI-generated deception:** young men use large language models (LLMs) to craft dating messages, undermining authentic communication and trust.

The tools are free, widely available, and require limited technical skill. For young people already struggling to recognize TFIPV, AI adds a further dimension of harm that is difficult to identify and name.

4 Discussion: Recognition Failure as a Systemic Problem

The four themes presented above, normalization, parent/caregiver modeling, language gaps, and legal enforcement failures, converge on a shared pattern: young people may struggle to recognize digital control as TFIPV, which could reflect conditions for recognition being eroded across social, familial, legal, and technological structures. This does not appear to be an individual deficit but may instead reflect a broader pattern in which surveillance comes to be framed as love.

The finding that young people routinely accept location tracking, password sharing, and constant messaging as normal reflects a broader socialization process. Parents/caregivers model these behaviors as safety measures, using location tracking and message monitoring without negotiating consent (Stephenson et al. 2023; boyd 2014; Suzor 2019). Children may internalize this as a condition of intimacy. When partners later demand the same access, young people may experience this as continuity rather than a violation. The present study extends the literature by suggesting that this normalization may be widespread across the cultural contexts examined, appearing in accounts from all 10 countries in this sample.

The language gap observed here corroborates clinical and educational research showing that victims often experience hypervigilance and anxiety without being able to name the source of harm (McMillan et al. 2025). The present findings add that young people actively reframe TFIPV to terms such as “jealousy,” “intensity,” or “protectiveness,” vocabularies of romance that obscure the violent dynamic. This linguistic gap may have direct consequences: without a name, victims may struggle to search for help, articulate their experience to peers or professionals, or recognize escalation.

The legal failures reported across 7 of the 10 countries do not appear to be idiosyncratic. Global research indicates that enforcement of laws against TFIPV remains weak (UN Women 2024; Dragiewicz et al. 2019; Citron 2019). The Czech Republic and Indonesia cases illustrate a recurring pattern: legislation exists on paper but is not applied, and victims are sometimes revictimized by legal systems that default to older statutes such as pornography laws. Moreover, Ynaée Benaben, Co-founder and CEO of En Avant Toutes, observed, from her experience supporting female intimate partner violence survivors, that the enduring stereotype of domestic violence (a middle-aged, married woman with visible bruises) may exclude young people’s experiences of TFIPV. As a result, Benaben reported that young women who report digital abuse are often told to simply block their abusers or delete their apps, with no acknowledgment that a crime has occurred.

The emergence of deepfakes, AI-powered undressing apps, and validating chatbots adds urgency to these systemic failures. While the tools are new, the underlying dynamics of control, coercion, and humiliation remain unchanged. The present findings suggest that AI-facilitated harm may already be present in 6 of the 10 countries, which may warrant closer attention from trust and safety researchers and practitioners. However, as Zandra

Kanakaris of 1000 Möjligheter observed, “perpetrators will always find new ways. Today it’s this [technology]. Tomorrow it will be something else. But the behavior behind it is the same.” Prevention and intervention should therefore focus on the behavior, not the platform or the device.

5 Recommendations

As discussed in Section 3.3, this language gap means young people can describe controlling behaviors but cannot name them as TFIPV. One practical response is already available. Since 2020, YSL Beauty’s Abuse Is Not Love program has raised awareness of nine warning signs of intimate partner violence, originally developed through the work of En Avant Toutes (Livingston, Delavier, and Benaben 2021; YSL Beauty 2020) and reproduced here as published, applied for the first time to TFIPV specifically.

It is worth noting that several of these signs, by their nature, involve inferring a partner’s intent from behavior, a judgment shaped by an observer’s own background and assumptions. The vignettes and expert testimony presented in Section 3 and Section 4 are intended to illustrate the pattern, escalation, and context in which each sign becomes recognizable as TFIPV, rather than to suggest that any single instance of the underlying behavior is definitionally abusive.

- **Ignoring:** deliberately leaving messages unanswered or turning off notifications as a form of punishment.
- **Blackmailing:** threatening to share private photos, screenshots, or AI-generated deepfakes to coerce compliance.
- **Humiliation:** posting embarrassing content, sharing intimate images without consent, or rating a partner in public channels.
- **Manipulation:** using phrases such as “if you loved me, you would give me your password” or feigning concern to justify tracking a partner’s location.
- **Jealousy:** interrogating a partner about why they liked a post, followed someone, or viewed a story; accusing a partner of disloyalty based on ordinary online interactions.
- **Control:** dictating who a partner can follow, what they can post, which apps they can use, and demanding approval of photos before posting.
- **Intrusion:** demanding phone passwords, checking messages and direct messages, and tracking a partner’s real-time location.
- **Isolation:** forcing a partner to delete social media accounts, block friends or family, and leave group chats, thereby severing connections.
- **Intimidation:** sending constant, demanding messages, using read receipts to punish delayed replies, or threatening to share private information.

Read in isolation, some of these signs can appear to describe behaviors that are common in healthy relationships and only become concerning in context. Ignoring, for instance, describes a pattern of using silence as deliberate punishment, typically recognizable by its timing, such as notifications disabled immediately following a disagreement, rather than an isolated delay in response. Humiliation's reference to "rating a partner in public channels" concerns negative or degrading commentary, not affectionate public statements. Manipulation's reference to "feigning concern to justify tracking" describes cases where location tracking is used as leverage in an argument or as a means of control, distinct from location-sharing practices many couples adopt by mutual agreement. Jealousy, as NGO experts across the 10 countries described it, is best understood not by whether a specific online interaction is "ordinary," but by whether a partner is monitoring the other's activity at all. The surveillance itself, rather than any specific post or interaction, is the marker of concern. Jealousy and Control, along with Intrusion and Manipulation, overlap conceptually as behavioral categories; they are retained as separate signs here in keeping with the published framework, but experts in this study frequently described them as co-occurring rather than distinct.

These signs are accessible, behavior-focused, and directly observable in digital interactions. Abuse rarely begins with severe violence; it often has early warning signs that may intensify as a relationship grows. Recognizing these signs early can be a powerful prevention tool, yet they are often hard to identify because they are masked as love. By spreading awareness of these nine signs, the program aims to destigmatize the topic and give survivors a language to speak about their experiences. Across the 10 countries in this study, experts confirmed that each of these nine signs maps directly onto the digital behaviors young people experience but cannot name. The nine signs do not solve the systemic failures documented here, but they provide a low-cost, scalable heuristic for helping young people recognize when digital control crosses the line into TFIPV.

6 Limitations

This commentary draws on the expertise of 10 NGO practitioners who work directly with young people experiencing intimate partner violence. Their insights are rich, but they are not the same as hearing from survivors themselves. The stories that appear in these pages come secondhand; a survivor's own voice would add a dimension that expert interviews cannot fully capture.

The 10 countries included here are not representative of the world; they are predominantly European and anglophone, with one African, one Asian, and two American nations. Furthermore, the selection of NGOs was not random. All 10 organizations are partners of YSL Beauty's Abuse Is Not Love program. All NGOs support only victims who identify as female. Future research should test the nine-signs heuristic.

7 Conclusion

The accounts from experts across 10 countries suggest that digital surveillance may have become normalized as an expression of care to a degree that makes it difficult for young people to recognize it as TFIPV. This pattern of recognition failure does not appear to be attributable to individual deficits in young people. Rather, it may reflect a systemic pattern in which social, legal, and technological structures have contributed to blurring the distinction between care and control. When password sharing is equated with trust, location tracking with safety, and constant messaging with intimacy, young people may lack the conditions necessary to recognize TFIPV.

The implications for trust and safety research and practice are clear. First, recognition of TFIPV cannot rely on victim self-identification alone; proactive tools and educational heuristics are required. The nine signs presented herein offer an accessible, practical framework that makes the invisible visible. Second, legal enforcement must prioritize existing laws and train law enforcement to recognize TFIPV as seriously as physical violence. Third, AI-generated harms appear to already be a feature of TFIPV. AI guardrails are urgently required to prevent the creation and dissemination of harmful content, to ensure chatbots do not validate TFIPV, and to provide young people with safe, reliable sources of support. Fourth, cross-national comparative research is essential to understand how systemic recognition failure operates across different legal and cultural contexts. Mitigation of TFIPV demands a shift in the social, legal, and technological structures that have contributed to blurring the distinction between love and abuse. A surveilled relationship is not a safe relationship. Abuse is not love.

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Keywords

Technology-facilitated intimate partner violence; digital abuse; digital control; violence against women and girls; gender-based AI harm