

# A Crisis Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

## Gender Violence



Since the onset of COVID-19, gender violence has significantly increased, affecting the lives of cis and trans girls and women due to the lack of visibility and overall normalization established through several patriarchal patterns in society. In a free article, Maven Road analyzed the 8.6M million social media mentions on the topic that occurred in the US since March 2020 to understand what conversations during the pandemic reveal about this type of violence.

# 8.6M

Mentions in the US surrounding violence against cis and trans girls and women

THESE CONVERSATIONS WERE AUTHORED BY

**1.9M** UNIQUE USERS

**60.0%**

OF THESE MENTIONS OCCURRED ON TWITTER

## These were the most-mentioned keywords

*sexual violence*  
*shot and killed*  
**Black Trans Lives Matter**  
*women and girls*  
*protection of Black women*

*Police shot*  
**Black women**  
*Breonna Taylor* *Black people*  
*Sandra Bland*

*years in prison* *sexual harassment*  
*Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*

**16-year-old Black girl**  
*Violence Against Women Act*  
*Attorney General*  
*#16DaysOfActivism*  
*women and children*  
*support women*

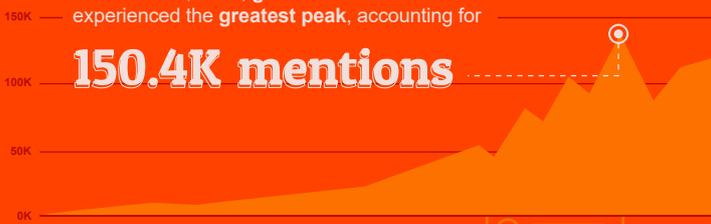
*women reporter*

**domestic violence**



On June 5th, 2020, gender-based violence conversations experienced the greatest peak, accounting for

**150.4K mentions**



Users mourned the death of Breonna Taylor, a Black medical worker who police officers shot and killed in March 2020. They remembered her on what would have been her 27th birthday, and encouraged others to demand action and accountability.

Mentions also peaked on June 15th, 2020, accounting for

**149.8K conversations**



mainly due to cases of violence against Black women

Following the murder of Dominique "Rem'mie" Fells and Riah Milton, two Black trans women, a Black Trans Lives Matter rally took place on June 14th in NYC. Users demanded protection for Black women.

#SayHerName

Users also claimed justice for the murder of Oluwatoyin Salau, a 19-year-old activist who used her voice to fight for the Black community

#JusticeForToyin

# A Crisis Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

*Maven Road, a global business intelligence firm, analyzed the 8.6 million mentions on violence against cis and trans girls and women that occurred in the US since March 2020 to understand what conversations during the pandemic reveal about this type of violence.*

Violence against women is defined by the **UN General Assembly** as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, **physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women**, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

This type of violence has a direct impact on the lives of cis and trans girls and women, and is a blatant violation of human rights.

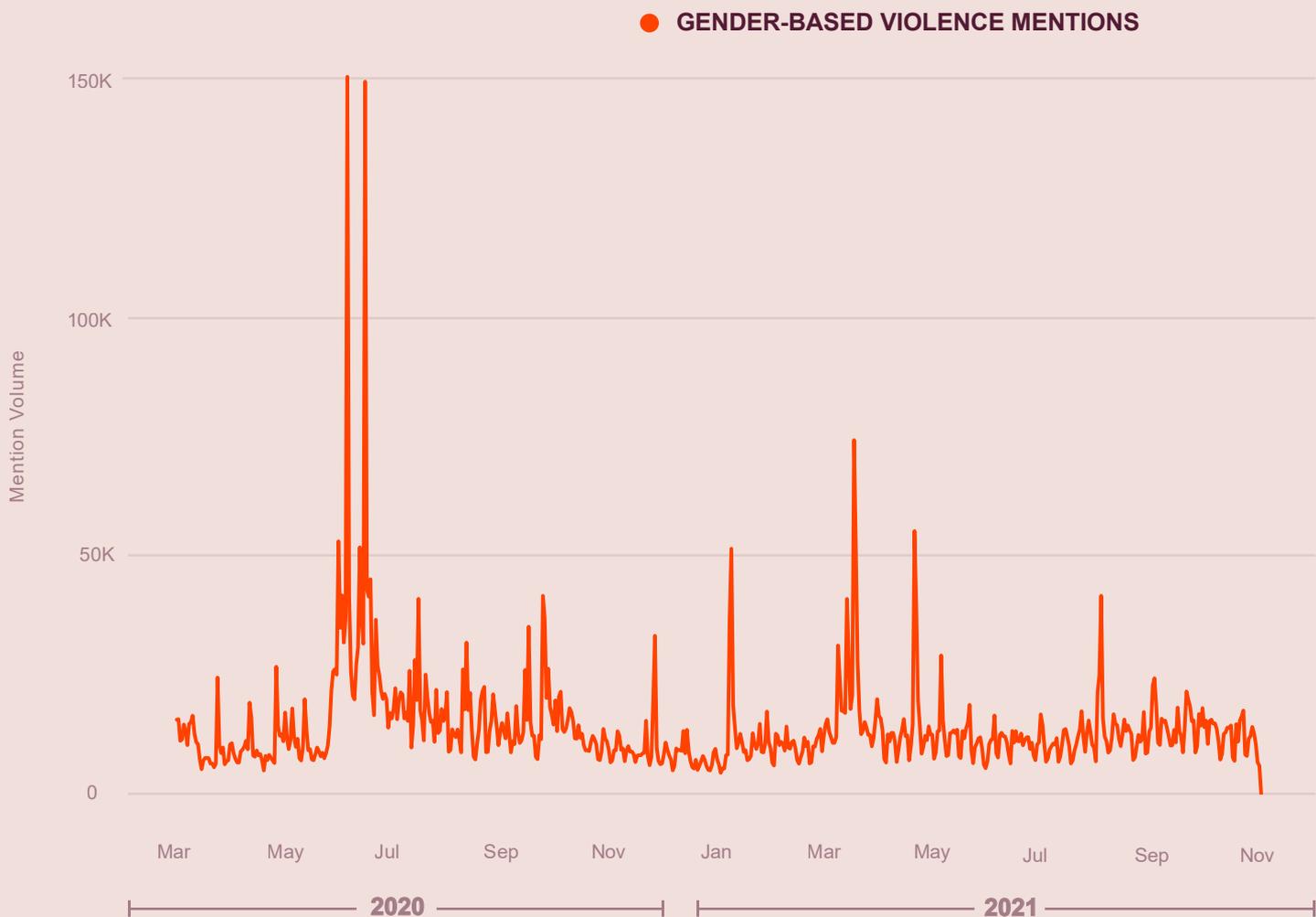
Since the onset of COVID-19, violence against cis and trans girls and women has significantly risen. This has mainly been the case with **domestic violence**, as the lockdown imposed by governments to contain the virus put girls and women in violent households at risk by increasing exposure to their abusers. Additionally, lockdown restrictions made it more difficult to denounce these crimes, causing gender-based violence to be widely under-reported.



This has led feminist organizations, collectives and civilians to take to digital spaces to raise awareness of violence experienced by cis and trans girls and women, as well as their efforts to challenge and eradicate it. Maven Road analyzed **8.6 million conversations** in the US surrounding gender-based violence from March 2020 to October 2021 to understand what conversations during the pandemic reveal about this type of violence and its perpetrators.

**4.2 million conversations** were related to accusations of violence against cis and trans girls and women

**3.7 million mentions** referenced initiatives to challenge and eradicate gender violence



# Users denounced the authorities for failing to protect cis and trans girls and women

While domestic violence may be the source of rising cases on the ground, online conversations were dominated by discussions of violence either facilitated or perpetrated by institutions and authorities, mainly against girls and women from minority or marginalized groups.

Many users were critical of the **appalling conditions** of migrant women in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities, as they have allegedly been forced to **undergo medical procedures**, including hysterectomies, without their consent. A **post** by Journalist Maria Hinojosa expressing anger about their conditions received considerable attention, garnering **22.6K Retweets**:

*“I have been reporting on women immigrants being systematically raped & abused in detention facilities for over a DECADE-DO NOT BE SURPRISED BY THIS NEXT LEVEL OF ABUSE OF FORCED STERILIZATION. BE ANGRY some of us have been pointing this out yet no one seemed to take it seriously.”*

Her censure was echoed by many users, who also shared information about ICE centers **refusing to test** and provide treatment to detained women who had showed symptoms of COVID-19.

Users’ criticism also extended to policy-makers. They expressed **disapproval** of Republican opposition to the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, which aims to create and support responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking. 172 Republicans voted against the legislation. However, it was reauthorized, and users shared the **announcement** while highlighting the need for **policies to protect victims**, mainly after the increase in domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis.

# Users focused their ire on the violence suffered by Black cis and trans girls and women

Users expressed outrage at the cases of Black cis and trans girls and women who have experienced gender-based violence. Users discussed the murder of Ma'Khia Bryant, a 16-year-old Black girl who was **shot by a police officer** after calling the Columbus police department to **ask for help**.

They condemned the system and the officer's response, stating that armed white men in similar situations are usually apprehended without the use of **excessive violence**. They were also critical of other police officers on the scene who yelled "**blue lives matter**" next to the victim.

**Intersectionality** is useful when considering "how different identities impact access to rights and opportunities", **determining privileges or obstacles** that characterize one's experience.

The case of Cassandra Jackson, a working mother seeking to obtain a restraining order against her partner, also gained considerable attention on social media, as users criticized the authorities for subjecting her to further abuse. A **post** about the harassment she endured from a judge and court officers present on the day of her hearing received considerable attention, accounting for **81.4K Retweets**:

*"This broke my heart. A Black woman tried to get help from the system that's supposed to protect us from danger for a domestic violence restraining order against her partner and received the same physical abuse she was trying to prevent. **The system truly fails Black people**"*

# Breonna Taylor was a symbol of violence against Black women, sparking national movements that transcend the pandemic

The most-discussed case of gender violence throughout the study period was that of Breonna Taylor, a Black medical worker who police officers shot and killed in March 2020. Nearly 10% of the users discussing this type of violence over throughout the pandemic mourned her death, raising awareness of the violence experienced by Black women at the hands of authorities.

Most users also shared their condolences on June 5th, 2020, on what would have been her **27th birthday**, encouraging others to **demand accountability** from authorities.

The murder of 19-year-old activist Oluwatoyin Salau months later also enraged users, with **37.0K** demanding **justice** for the activist who used her voice to fight for the Black community. Those users employed the **#JusticeFor-Toyin hashtag** to rally around the cause. Users emphasized the need to create policies to ensure the protection of Black women.

Users also advocated for the **protection** of Black trans women. Dominique “Remmie” Fells and Riah Milton were killed the same week that Trump revoked discrimination protections for trans people in health care and health insurance, sparking a Black Trans Lives Matter rally on June 14th in New York City. Users argued that excluding trans women when referring to violations of women’s rights **increases the severity** of the violence experienced by Black trans women.

Several users discussing these cases have utilized **#SayHerName**, which was created by the African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies to “bring awareness to the often invisible names and stories of Black women and girls who have been victimized by racist police violence”. Many users were also critical of its misuse, after some included it in mentions surrounding the death of Ashli Babbitt, a white woman and Trump supporter. They highlighted the importance of using **#SayHerName** to visibilize **Black women killed by the police** and mentioned it was **offensive** to use it when referring to Babbitt.

# A day for the elimination of violence against cis and trans girls and women

November 25th has long been a day dedicated to the **prevention of violence** against women. It was intended to **honor the Mirabal sisters**, three political activists from the Dominican Republic who were murdered in 1960 by order of the country's president. However, it was only on February 7th, 2000 that this day was **formally recognized** as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Many initiatives and events related to the prevention of gender violence occurred on November 25th, 2020, as users took to social media to raise awareness of gender-based violence, **encouraging others** to take action and support victims of abuse. Many users utilized #16Days of Activism to **motivate others** to raise their voices and defend the rights of girls and women to live free of violence.

This day is currently considered the **“Orange Day”**, as it is a bright and optimistic color, showing a *“future free from violence against women and girls”*.

While COVID-19 has significantly impacted the lives of cis and trans girls and women, research showed that conversations about gender violence transcended even the pandemic and its fallout.

User conversations were framed by the crisis but not dominated by it; it was the context not the content of their mentions. In their discussions, users demonstrated their concerns about policies and authorities in place supposedly for their protection, and expressed growing concern for minorities and marginalized groups within their community. Despite the pandemic, they mobilized for change.

To build on momentum as we take our first steps in returning to pre-COVID-19 life, it is more important than ever to contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence. Social media analysis provides us a unique glimpse into the issues and concerns of most relevance on the topic. Further analysis could yield even more insights on user perception, which could be used to inform policies and reforms or grassroots campaigns.

# Endnotes

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