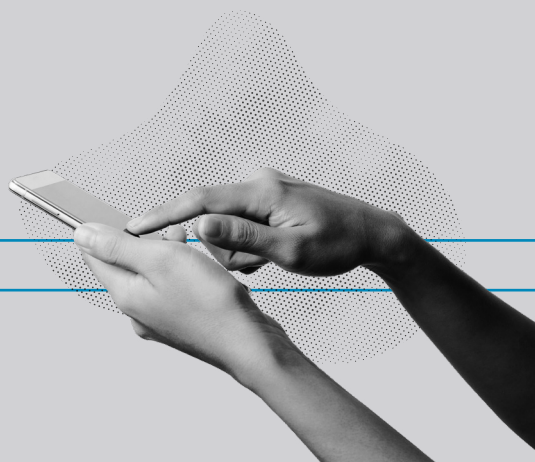




Project facts

Key words

Digital platforms, Intimate partner violence, Vulnerable women

Behavioral themes

Help-seeking
Digital behavior

Research design

Randomized feasibility trial embedded within a volunteer-run digital support platform

Scope

Start date: January 2024
End date: July 2024
n=316

Location

Brazil (national study using the Mapa do Acolhimento digital platform)

Partner

Mapa do Acolhimento

Ethics approval

Federal University of Paraná Ethics Committee

Can digital platforms safely support hard-to-reach IPV survivors at scale?

Digital support works only when implementation barriers are designed around. Digital IPV platforms can successfully reach vulnerable women nationwide, but implementation challenges—not intervention quality alone—determine whether digital services can be evaluated and scaled. Privacy-sensitive follow-up, adaptive recruitment, streamlined volunteer systems, and platform stability are essential design features.

Background: Designing digital support for IPV survivors

Digital services are increasingly used to reach survivors of intimate partner violence, particularly in settings where access to formal support is limited. Yet most evidence comes from high-income countries and focuses on intervention effectiveness rather than whether digital systems can reliably recruit, retain, and support survivors under real-world conditions. This study examined whether Brazil's volunteer-run Mapa do Acolhimento platform could serve as a feasible model for delivering and evaluating remote psychological and social work services.

Conducting the research

Researchers embedded a randomized trial within Mapa do Acolhimento's existing service platform. Women who registered for support but had not yet been matched with volunteers were randomly assigned to receive online psychological counselling, online social work navigation, or standard referrals. Following major operational changes within the platform that reduced recruitment, the project pivoted from an effectiveness trial to a feasibility study examining recruitment, randomization, retention, implementation, and measurement performance.

- » **Digital recruitment is scalable but not equally accessible.** The platform successfully recruited hundreds of survivors from across Brazil, but participants were overwhelmingly concentrated in areas with reliable internet access, highlighting persistent digital inequalities.
- » **Retention, not recruitment, became the critical bottleneck.** Follow-up completion reached only 14%, with attrition highest among women experiencing greater anxiety and those using shared devices. Safety concerns, privacy constraints, and digital insecurity strongly influenced continued participation.
- » **Implementation systems matter as much as interventions.** Volunteer reporting burden, changing platform algorithms, and communication design substantially affected the study's feasibility. Simple behavioral improvements, including shorter survivor communications and streamlined reporting workflows, showed immediate operational benefits.

Implications

For digital service providers: Digital platforms should prioritize privacy-sensitive follow-up, adaptive communication strategies, and mobile-first service design. Operational systems, including volunteer reporting and platform management, are central to successful implementation.

For policymakers: Expanding digital IPV services requires addressing digital exclusion alongside service availability. Hybrid recruitment strategies and investments in connectivity remain essential for equitable access.

For researchers: Future digital IPV evaluations should plan for substantial attrition, monitor implementation changes continuously, and treat platform operations as an important part of study design rather than background conditions.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should identify which implementation strategies most effectively improve survivor retention while maintaining safety. More evidence is also needed from low- and middle-income countries to understand how digital interventions perform across different technological, social, and institutional contexts.

Further reading

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Study team

The study was led by Busara Center for Behavioral Economics in partnership with Mapa do Acolhimento, who collaborated throughout implementation by integrating the research into its national digital support platform.

Research team: Emiliano Díaz, Isabella Pileggi, Daniel Mellow, and Joaquín Blanco.

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The aha! moment summarises key facts and insights from Busara's research projects.

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38 Apple Cross Road, Nairobi, Kenya www.busara.global