

Online Gender-Based Violence against female politicians in Ghana:

evidence from selected online platforms
- December 2024



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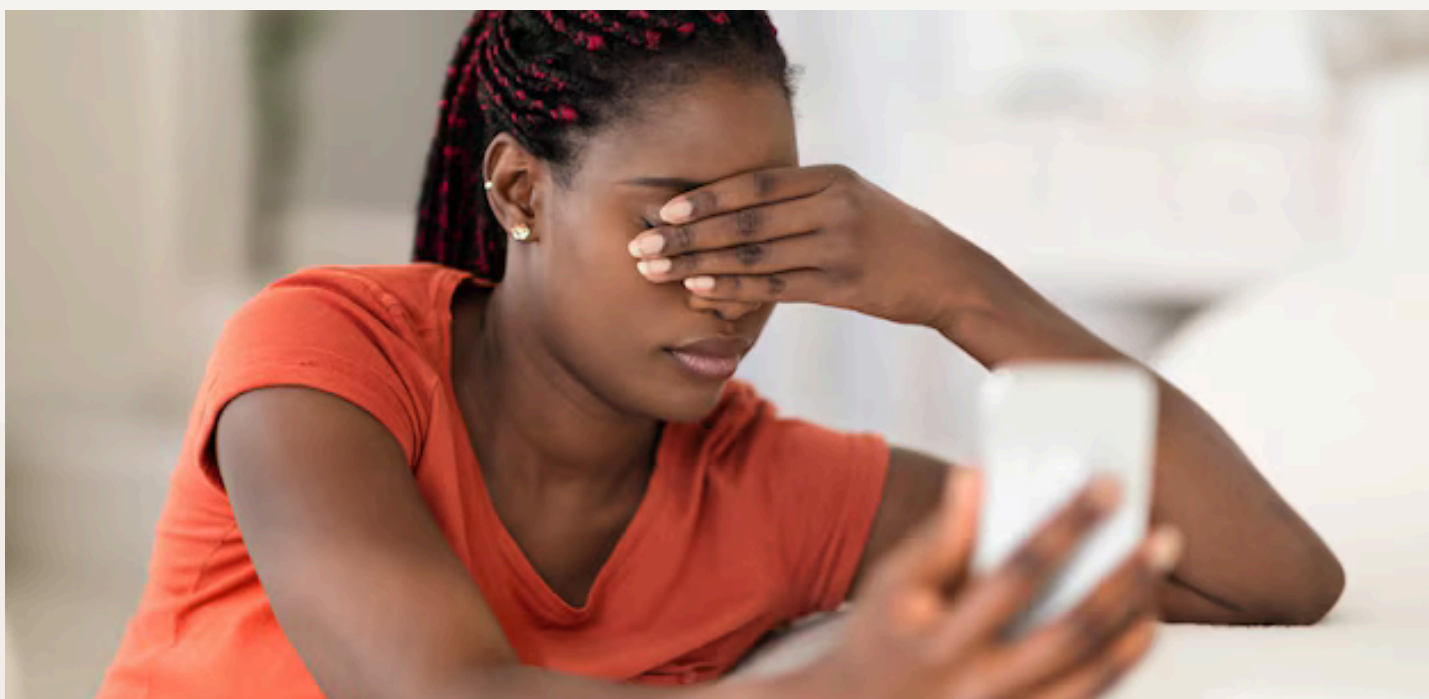


Kingdom of the Netherlands



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
<hr/>	
METHODOLOGY	3
<hr/>	
FINDINGS	5
<hr/>	
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	11
<hr/>	



INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) is one of the major barriers limiting women's participation, inclusion and empowerment in online and digital spaces. Online gender-based violence, along with other factors such as accessibility and affordability, and digital literacy, continues to reinforce systemic inequalities, including the digital gender divide, which culminates in the marginalisation of women's voices and perspectives on issues. Perpetrators of OGBV often employ tactics aimed at undermining women's confidence and credibility, attacking their intelligence, character, and physical appearance. By eroding their confidence, OGBV deters women from pursuing their dreams, ambitions, and leadership aspirations. This, in turn, perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions, thereby entrenching existing power dynamics and reinforcing patriarchal norms.

Thus, although internet penetration rates continue to rise and access and ownership of internet-enabled devices continue to grow, OGBV and other



inhibiting factors such as accessibility and affordability, and digital literacy, continue to limit women's engagement in online and digital spaces. A lot needs done, therefore, to curb the OGBV menace to ensure that more women, especially female politicians, are able to use the internet to connect with their constituents, increase their visibility, and ultimately improve their electoral prospects.

Since August 2024, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) has been monitoring and reporting on incidents of OGBV on five selected online platforms in Ghana. The monitoring, which forms part of activities under the project, *Improving the safety and use of social media for female politicians in Ghana*, is aimed at discouraging the practice, and gathering scientific evidence on the issue to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

A mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana has been produced as part of the project to highlight the nature, prevalence and experiences of female politicians. Over 200 female politicians have been trained on social media use and safety practices online. The MFWA has also trained 30 social media influencers and women's rights activists on countering OGBV. The monitoring and reporting on the use of OGBV is the other layer of the project that seeks to complement and consolidate evidence about the menace to shape and inform advocacy and policy interventions.

This report highlights findings from the monitoring in the month of December 2024. The daily monitoring reports received from recruited and trained monitors have been collated and analysed. The methodology used and the findings from the monitoring are presented below.



METHODOLOGY


The monitoring and reporting of OGBV in Ghana is guided by a monitoring instrument that was developed and validated by experts in academia and industry. The content of the instrument, especially the definition and operationalisation of the different types or categories of OGBV, were informed by existing literature on the subject. Once the instrument was validated, monitors were selected through a competitive process of publishing a call,

shortlisting applicants and interviewing. A total of 10 monitors were recruited for the task. The monitors were trained on the validated instrument, and carried out pretesting sessions before the actual rollout of the monitoring exercise.

Five online platforms have been selected for the monitoring – Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok and Ghanaweb. The selection of these platforms was informed by existing literature, findings of MFWA's recent mapping report on OGBV against female politicians in Ghana, and experiences and learnings from the social media context in Ghana. Whereas four of the



platforms (Facebook, X, Instagram and TikTok) are social media platforms that allow for content generation and engagement, Ghanaweb is an online news portal. Ghanaweb was added because its comments section functions in a similar pattern as the other social media platforms. It allows for conversations around specific themes. Ghanaweb was also added because from findings of MFWA's previous monitoring of social media platforms during electioneering campaigns, a lot of conversations



(including some OGBV content) take place at the comments section of the platform.

The accounts being monitored were purposively sampled to ensure that as much as possible, the accounts of many female politicians in the country could be covered. The accounts selected include those of all female parliamentarians on the four social media platforms selected and that of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the major political parties in the country: New Patriotic Party (NPP), National Democratic Congress (NDC), Convention Peoples' Party (CPP), People's National Convention (PNC), Movement for Change and one of the four Independent Candidates recognised by Ghana's Electoral Commission. Also, the social media accounts of political party communicators and the spokespersons of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates on the four social media platforms were monitored. The social media accounts of some social media influencers and popular individuals were also sampled for the monitoring. The social media accounts were randomly assigned to the trained monitors.

Using the validated instrument and a coding schedule, the monitors undertake daily monitoring (morning, afternoon, evening and night) and record their findings. Each monitor submits daily monitoring reports to the MFWA accompanied by URLs, screenshots and videos for crosschecking. The reports are vetted, collated and analysed monthly using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) by a team of researchers who use the findings to produce monthly reports. The reports are then designed and published to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

The monitoring spans, five months (August to December 2024). The report below covers findings from the monitoring undertaken in the month of December 2024.

FINDINGS

Findings from the December 2024 daily monitoring of the five online platforms selected for the monitoring activity are presented below under two broad subheadings: Incidents of OGBV and Types of OGBV recorded.

Incidents of OGBV Recorded

Three hundred and forty-eight (348) monitoring reports were received from the monitors assigned to the sampled accounts being monitored under the project. Some of the social media accounts sampled for the monitoring were very active and others posted content occasionally. But for some of the accounts, they were inactive throughout the monitoring period. For the sampled accounts on Instagram and TikTok, a good number of them were inactive.

Thirty (30) posts containing Online Gender-Based Violence were captured in December 2024. The 30 OGBV posts recorded is a further reduction to the incidents of OGBV over the past four months (from September to December 2024) by 153 incidents as illustrated in Table 1 below. This marks a four-month consecutive decline in the incidents of OGBV. Table 1 below presents a brief outlook of the reduction in the incidents of OGBV since September 2024.

Table 1: Reduction in incidents of OGBV from September – December 2024

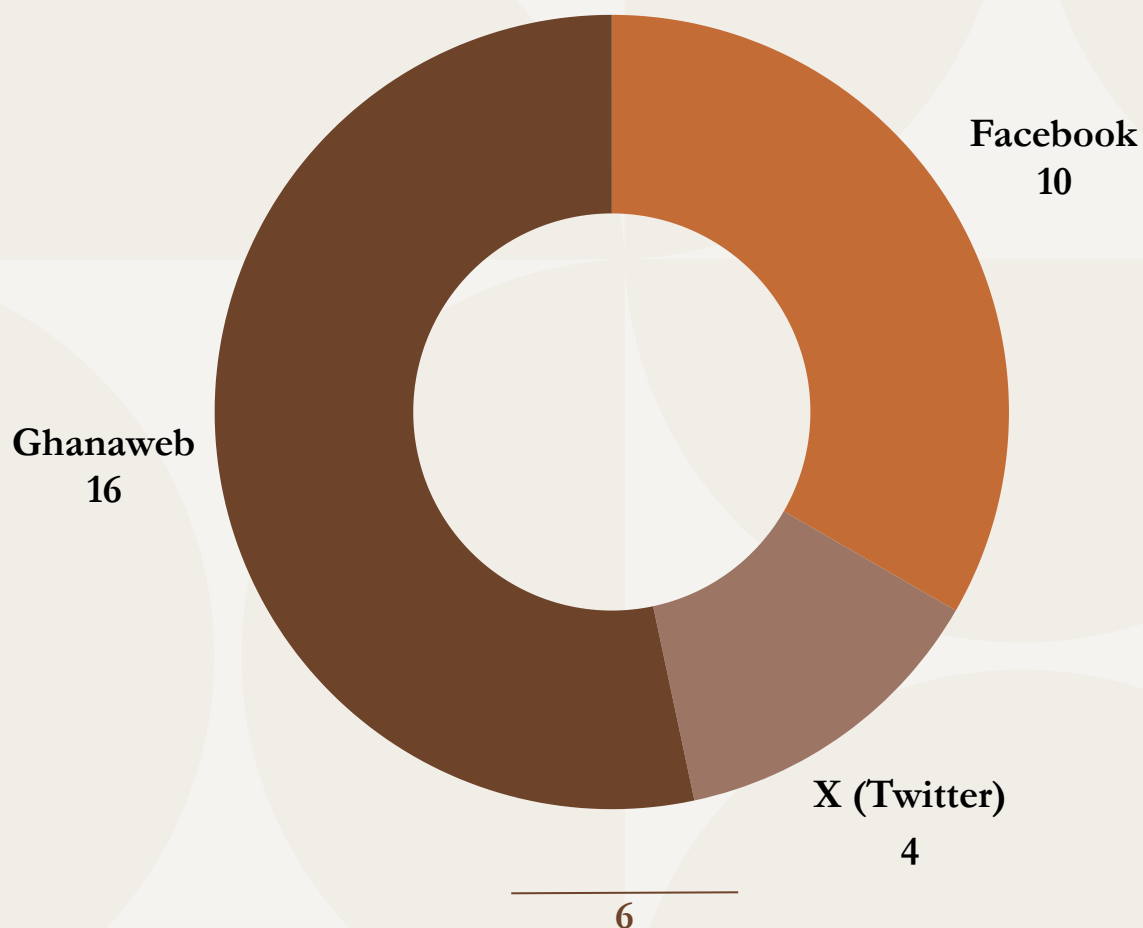
MONTH	OGBV INCIDENTS RECORDED	MARGIN OF REDUCTION
September 2024	183	
October 2024	114	69 (37.71%)
November 2024	66	48 (42.11%)
December 2024	30	36 (54.55%)




The 30 OGBV posts were cited on three online platforms: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Ghanaweb. TikTok and Instagram did not record any incident of OGBV. This is largely as a result of inactivity of a lot of the sampled accounts being monitored on the two platforms. Also, for the few accounts that were occasionally active on the two platforms, neither the original posts made, nor the commentary on the original posts contained OGBV.

For the three platforms that recorded OGBV posts, Ghanaweb recorded the highest incidents of OGBV posts, whereas X which until November 2024 had been recording the highest incidents of OGBV, rather recorded the least incidents of OGBV during the period under review (December 2024). The frequencies of OGBV recorded on each of the three platforms are presented below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Frequency of OGBV recorded on Platforms monitored






Two broad issues elicited about 83 percent of the OGBV posts captured. General politicking, especially campaign activities by the wife of the Vice President of Ghana, who is also the presidential Candidate for the ruling New Patriotic Party [NPP]), and other members of the NPP elicited more than half (53.33%) of the OGBV cases cited. Discussions around four vacant seats in Parliament also elicited 30 percent of the OGBV cases cited. The remaining 16.67 percent occurred during other discussions, such as the posture of some female MPs after losing Parliamentary seats, some social issues and a random post. Table 1 details the issues and frequencies of OGBV recorded around the issues.

Table 2: Subjects of discussion that elicited OGBV

ISSUES	FREQUENCY
General politicking by the NPP & the NDC	16
Vacant seats in Parliament & matters arising	9
Other issues (including posts about the posture of some female MPs after losing parliamentary seats)	5
Total	30

Three out of the 30 OGBV posts cited had a direct relationship with the particular subjects raised in the original posts, while six of them indirectly related to some of the issues raised. The remaining 21, however, had no relationship whatsoever with the issues highlighted in the original posts. Many of such OGBV comments that were made without recourse to the issues at stake were usually made in response to earlier comments others had made, and it was from such commentary that majority (76.67) of the OGBV cases were cited. The remaining 23.33 percent (7 incidents) were OGBV posts made from original posts.

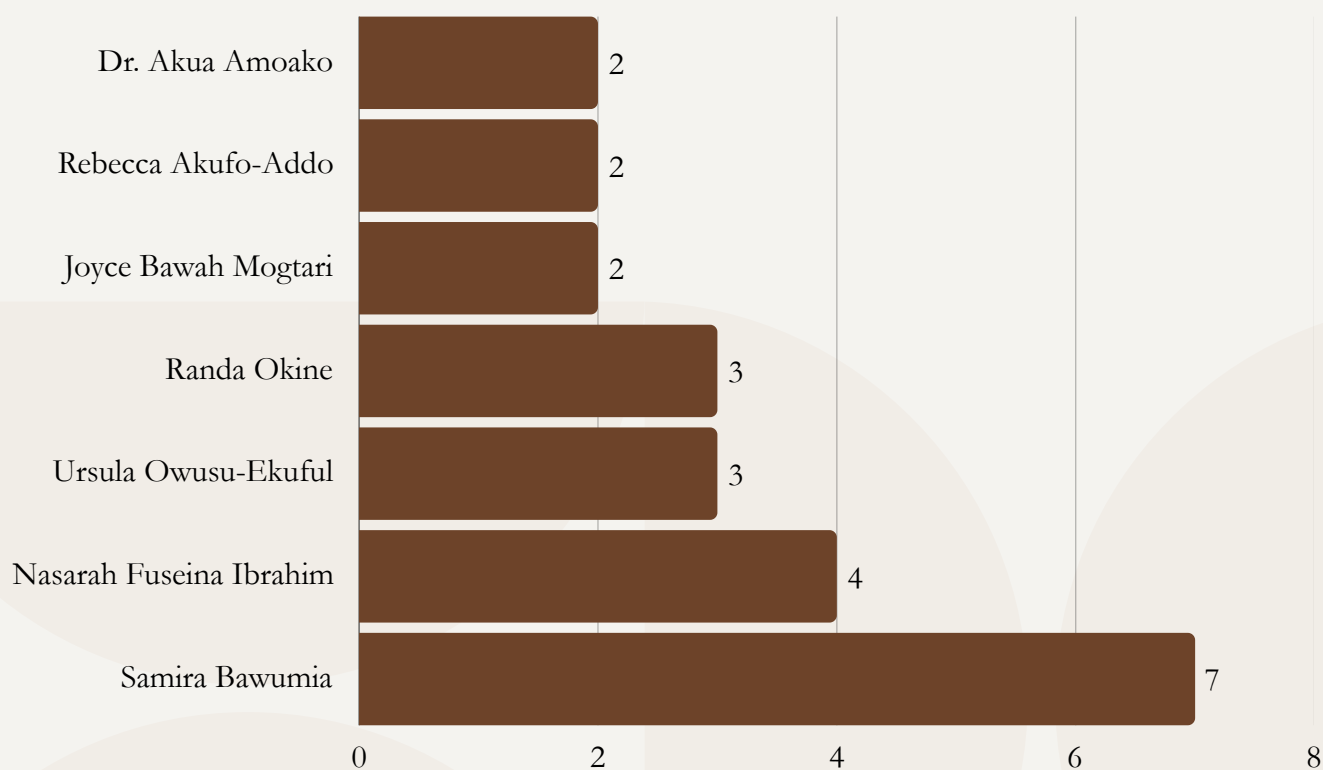


All the 30 OGBV cases cited were made by individual accounts. A number of the accounts, however, bore pseudo names making it challenging to identify the real people behind the accounts. For those who could be identified, 12 were identified as males who made 12 OGBV posts; and seven were identified as females who posted seven OGBV content. The remaining 11 OGBV posts were made by untraceable accounts with pseudo names. For political affiliation, out of the 19 accounts that could be identified, 13 were affiliates of the major opposition party, National Democratic Congress (NDC) while five were affiliates of the ruling NPP. The affiliation of the rest was not clear.

The main victims of the OGBV attacks were females who identify with the two major political parties in the country, the NPP and the NDC. Seven of such women were targeted with more than one OGBV post. The wife of the Vice President of Ghana (who is also the presidential Candidate for the NPP), Samira Bawumia, was the main target for a number of the attacks. Almost a quarter (23.33%) of the OGBV posts recorded were targeted at her. The wife of Ghana's President, Rebecca Akufo-Addo, was also targeted with two OGBV posts. Nassarah Fuseina Ibrahim, an affiliate of the NDC, was also targeted with four incidents of OGBV. Although she was not the subject of any issue, nor had herself made a comment about something for the period under review, Randa Okine, wife of presidential staffer, Kwabena Krobea Asante, was attacked three times following some comments her husband had made. In Figure 2 below, the politically exposed females who were targeted with more than one OGBV content are presented, along with the frequency of OGBV targeted at each of them.



Figure 2: Frequency of OGBV targeted at specific females



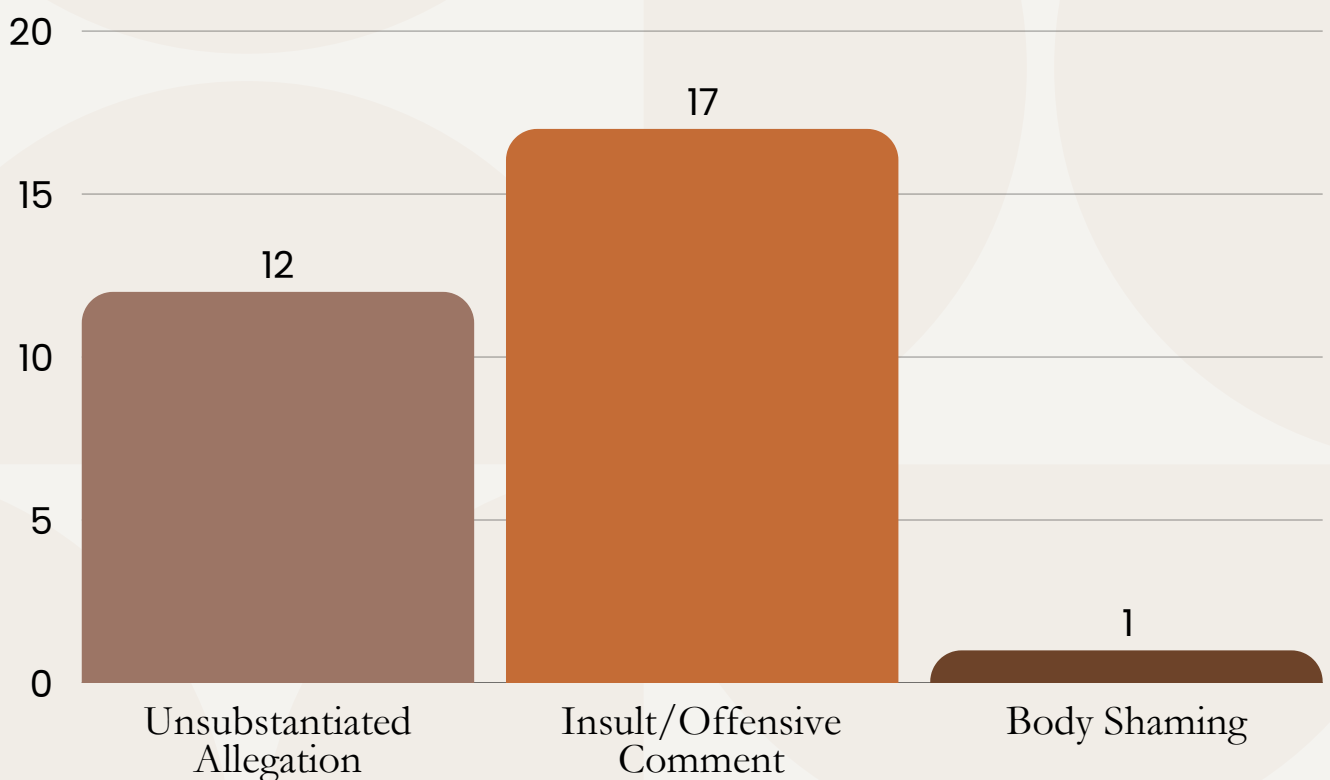
Although this session highlights those targeted with more than one OGBV, it is worth mentioning that Ellen Ama Daaku of the NPP communication team was targeted with the only body shaming OGBV recorded in the month. Although it is a significant reduction of the frequency of attacks targeted at her over the past four months, it appears that the body shaming campaign directed at her is persisting.

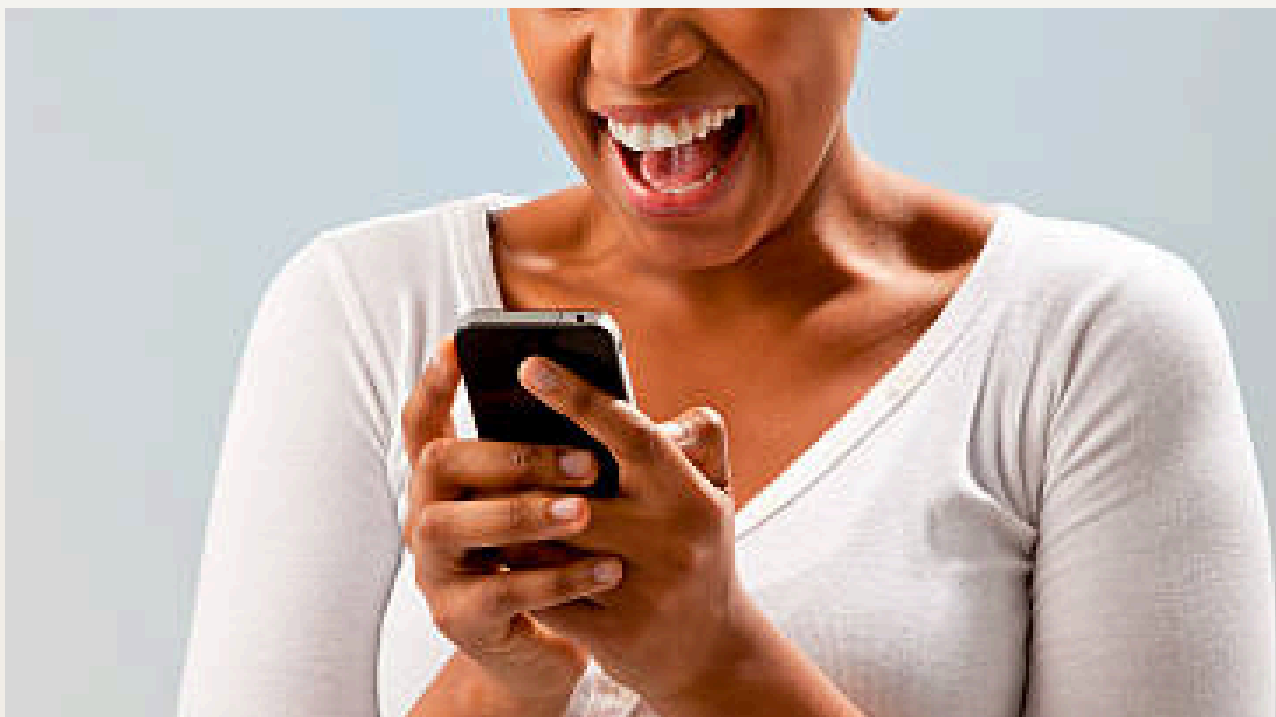
For this month's (December) monitoring, all the OGBV posts recorded were directed at the targets only. Neither the family nor political party of affiliation of the targets were directly or indirectly targeted with any of the OGBV cases cited.

Types of OGBV recorded

The types of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) recorded during this monitoring period were three – Unsubstantiated allegation, Insulting/offensive comments and Body shaming. Insulting and/or offensive remarks once again dominated the OGBV cases cited. This category of OGBV (insulting and/or offensive comments) has been the major form of OGBV used to attack targets since the monitoring started in August 2024. A little over half (54.84%) of the OGBV cases cited in the month under review (December 2024) were insulting and/or offensive in nature. Figure 3 displays the frequency of OGBV cases recorded against each of the three categories.

Figure 3: Categories of OGBV recorded





CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The sustained reduction in the incidents of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) over the past four months is highly commendable. From 183 OGBV incidents in September 2024 to 30 incidents in December 2024 (with December being an election month with high stakes), the monitoring has seen a consistent reduction in the frequency of OGBV posts made. To consolidate the gains, the following are recommended:

1. Sustained sensitisation and advocacy against OGBV on all platforms: Using findings from the monitoring reports, civil society organisations, the media and content creators should continue to sensitise against the use of OGBV. More emphasis should be placed on the need to focus on issues-based public discourse, tolerance of opposing views and counternarratives against OGBV. The harmful ramifications of OGBV must also be highlighted in advocacy interventions for people to get a better understanding of the depth of the menace. Policy dialogues and public

forums should also be organised periodically to highlight the issues for policy consideration.

2. Government must pursue necessary and proportionate regulatory and policy framework to curb OGBV and its implications. The regulatory and policy interventions must ascribe hefty punishments for perpetrators of OGBV and ensure enforcement to deter the culprits and others from the practice.

3. There should be more investment in the capacity strengthening of women, especially female politicians, so they can be empowered to participate in online spaces safely. Capacitated female politicians can then engage their constituents confidently and solicit for their support and votes in online spaces. Political parties should be at the forefront of this intervention. The parties should, also, provide social support by publicly condemning OGBV against female politicians and supporting them to pursue justice through legal procedures.

4. There should be improved engagements with tech and social media platform owners, along with other relevant stakeholders, to explore rights-respecting content moderation strategies that can help mitigate OGBV and their impact without compromising rights and freedoms, especially the right to expression, information and privacy.

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