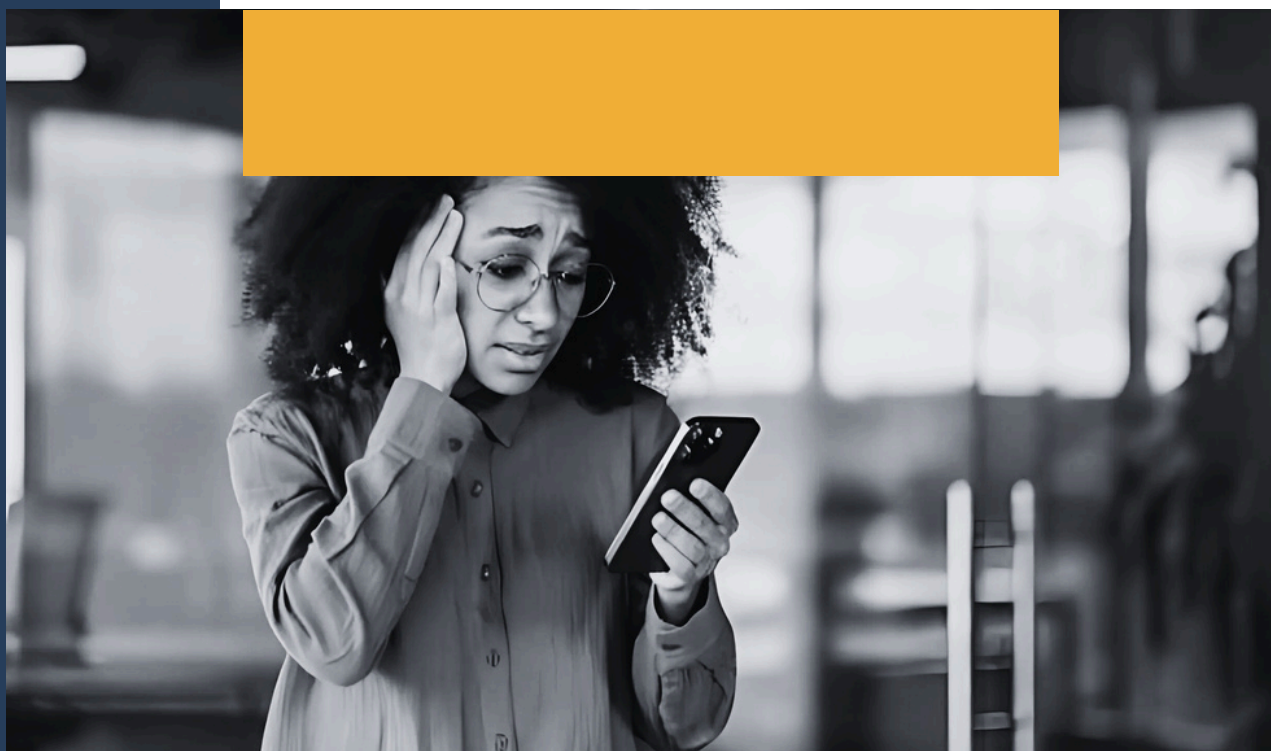


Online Gender-Based Violence against female politicians in Ghana:

Evidence from selected online platforms
- January 2025



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INTRODUCTION

Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) has been identified as a threat to achieving gender parity. OGBV discredits, intimidates, humiliates and forces women into silence along offline patriarchy patterns. Thus, OGBV facilitates the reinforcement of inequalities that traditionally existed offline in online spaces. This is a big challenge as it threatens women's use of the internet and digital spaces. Whereas the internet could facilitate women's personal development, career advancement, participation in public discourse, and the pursuit of political ambitions, OGBV are causing the few women online to self-censor or exit the online space; a situation that will further exacerbate the disparity between men and women in the use of the internet and digital spaces.

Online Gender-Based Violence also curtail women's ability to fully exercise and enjoy their rights, including the right to freedom of expression and opinion; access to information; privacy and "the right to participate in public and political life." For female politicians, in particular, who need to leverage the

limitless potential of the internet to engage, mobilise, campaign and boost their visibility in galvanising for votes, OGBV remain a major barrier. As perpetrators of OGBV continue to exploit online platforms to malign and discredit outspoken women, especially journalists, public figures and female politicians, the ambitions of young women who have similar aspirations are quelled.

The 2024 general elections are over, but the need to create an enabling environment for existing and prospective female politicians remain crucial. More advocacy and engagements need to be pursued to mitigate the OGBV menace and minimise the harms to ensure inclusivity in online spaces, public discourse and politicking for all, especially women. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is, therefore, continuing its project on Improving the safety and use of social media for female politicians in Ghana.

Accordingly, the organisation is continuing the monitoring and reporting on the use of OGBV on online platforms to highlight the issue and gather scientific evidence to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations.

Under the project, the MFWA has produced a mapping report that highlights the nature, prevalence and experiences of female politicians in Ghana when it comes to OGBV. The MFWA has also built the capacity of over 200 female politicians across the country on social media use and safety practices online. In addition, 30 social media influencers and women's rights activists have been trained on countering OGBV. Through the project, the organisation aims to mitigate OGBV and promote women's participation in online spaces; and foster a more inclusive and equitable digital environment that ultimately contribute to bridging the gap between men and women in the digital world.

This report highlights findings from the online monitoring undertaken in the month of January 2025. The report makes a number of recommendations based on the findings.

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 originally spanned five months (August to December 2024). However, it has been extended for additional three months (January to March 2025) to ensure additional data gathering. Data from the eight-month period will, thus, provide a more holistic overview of the phenomenon, trends and other dynamics necessary in shaping advocacy and policy interventions. The report below covers findings from the monitoring undertaken in the month of January 2025.

FINDINGS

The findings from the 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.

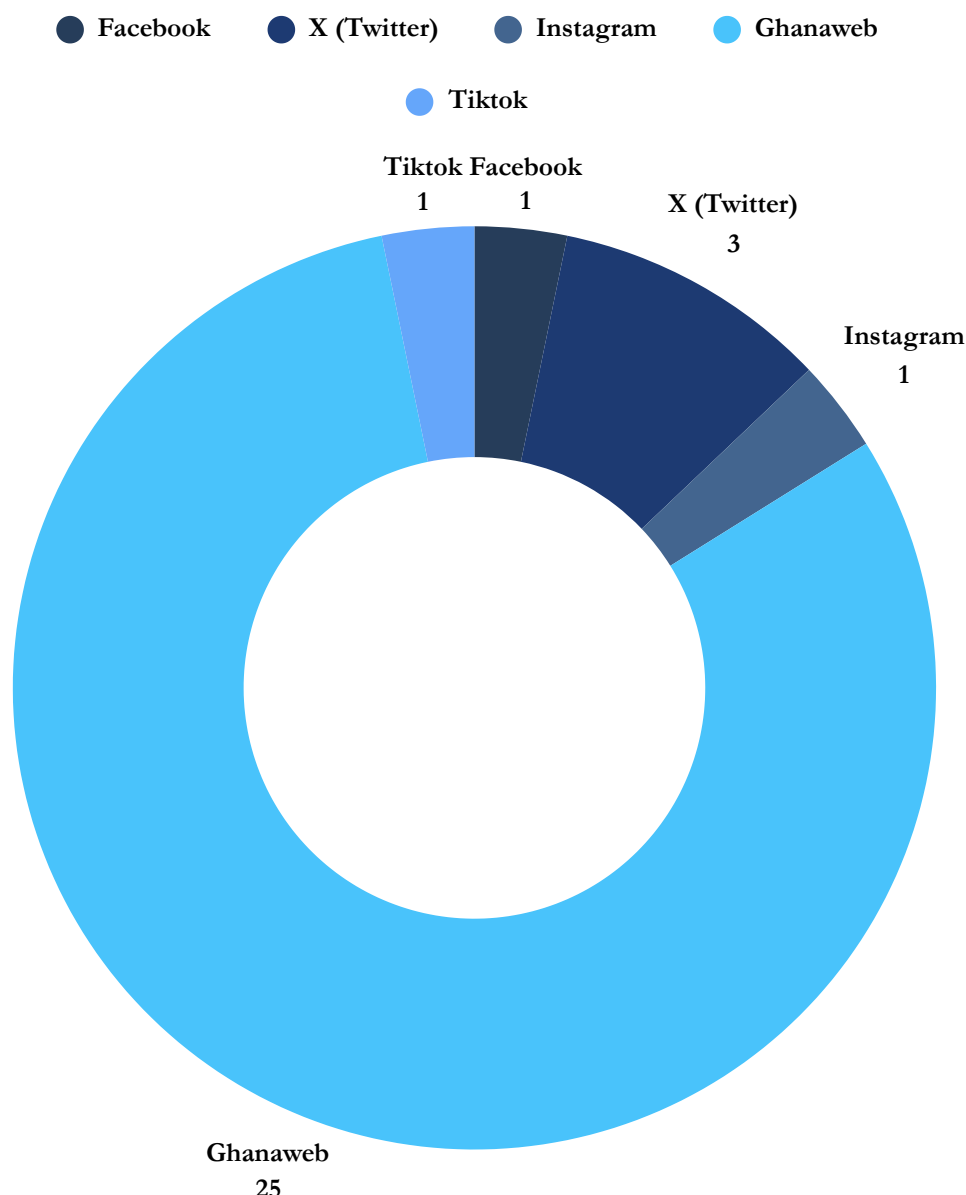
Incidents of OGBV Recorded

For the month under review (January 2025), the total number of monitoring reports received from the daily monitoring of the sampled accounts being monitored under the project were 297. For the first time in six months (since the monitoring started in August 2024), all the five online platforms being monitored (Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok and Ghanaweb), recorded OGBV posts. For Facebook, X and Ghanaweb, incidents of OGBV have been recorded on each of the three platforms since August 2024. TikTok was only cited in the month of November 2024. The record of OGBV on TikTok in January marks the second time that the platform has been cited for OGBV in six months. For Instagram, however, the platform has not been cited for any OGBV until the month under review (January 2025) where an incident of OGBV was captured on the platform.

Some of the social media accounts sampled for the monitoring were very active, but for other accounts, content was posted occasionally. The remaining accounts were inactive throughout the monitoring period. For the sampled accounts on Instagram and TikTok, in particular, a good number of them were inactive.

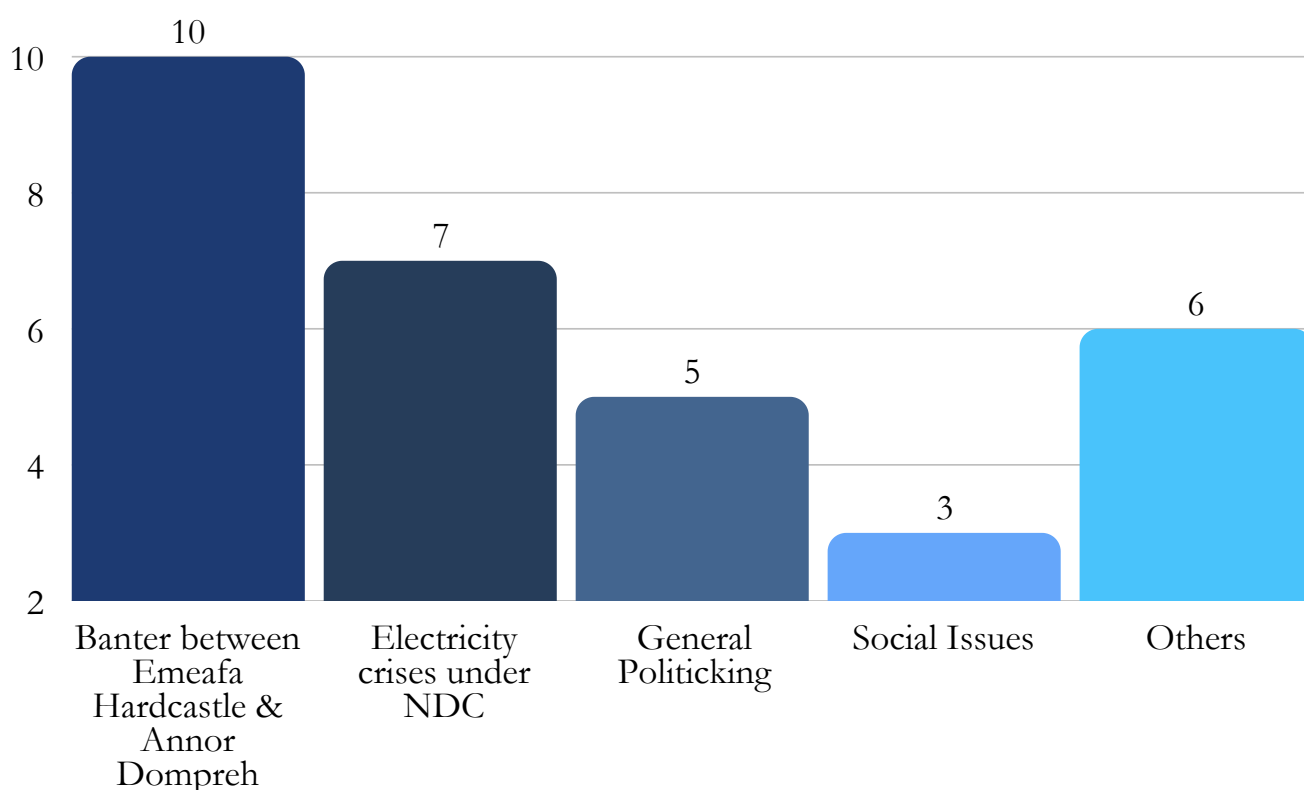
For the month of January 2025, 31 posts containing Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) were recorded on the five platforms. A little over 80 percent of the OGBV cases were captured on Ghanaweb. The remaining cases were captured on X, Facebook, TikTok and Instagram. Figure 1 below provides the frequencies of OGBV recorded on each of the platforms.

Figure 1: Frequency of OGBV recorded on Platforms monitored



Majority of the 31 OGBV incidents were recorded during discussions around matters arising from a banter between the the Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Petroleum Commission, Emeafa Hardcastle, and the MP for Nsawam/Adoagyiri, Frank Annor Dompreh. The other issues discussed around which OGBV were recorded included electricity crisis under the new NDC government, general politicking, social and others issues (including issues about vacant seats in Parliament, Ablekuma North re-election and other random posts). The frequency of OGBV recorded during discussions around the aforementioned issues are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Subjects of discussion around which OGBV were recorded



All the OGBV posts cited in this report were comments made in response to other posts or comments other people had made. That is, no original post in the form of an article or an opinion about an issue in and of itself contained an OGBV. However, primary commentary on the original posts, and secondary commentary on some of the primary comments were the sources of the 31 OGBV content. With the exception of two OGBV posts that had a direct bearing on the subject raised in the original posts, and four OGBV content that had indirect relationship with the subjects in the original posts, the remaining 25 OGBV posts cited had no relationship whatsoever with the issues highlighted in the original posts.

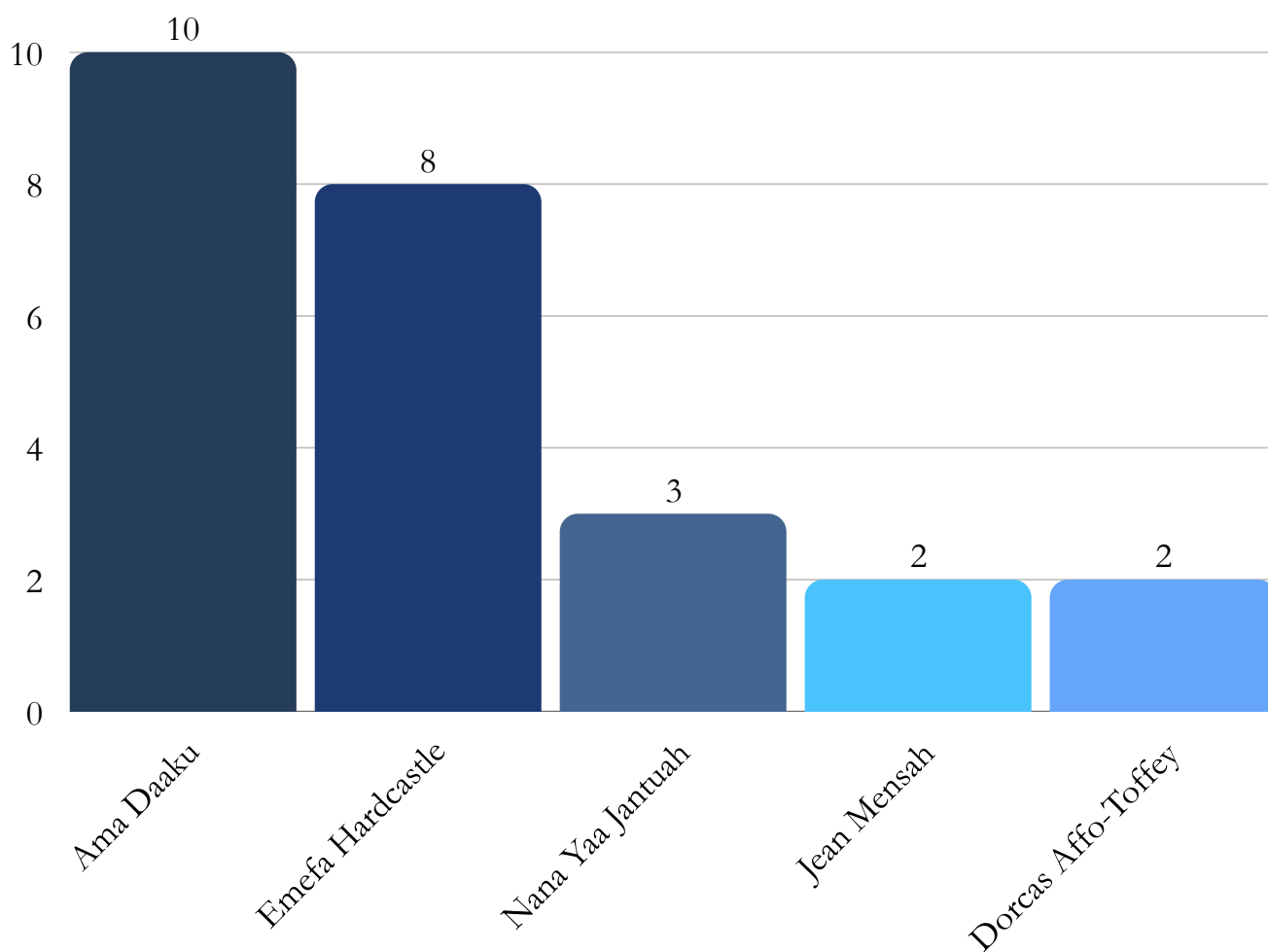
All the OGBV cases cited in this report were made by individual accounts. Fort 10 of the accounts that made the OGBV posts, the real people behind them could not be ascertained as they bore pseudo names. The remaining 21 accounts could, however, be identified.

Seven of the OGBV posts were made by individuals affiliated to the current ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC); and seven were made by affiliates of the now major opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP). The political affiliation of the others could not be established. Nineteen (19) of the OGBV posts cited were made by males and two made by females. The gender of those who made the remaining 10 OGBV posts could not be established.

Five women were targeted with a little over 80 percent of the OGBV cases recorded. Each of the five women were targeted with at least two OGBV posts. Four of them were politically exposed females: Ellen Ama Daaku of the NPP Communications Team; Emeafa Hardcastle, an appointee of the NDC government, Nana Yaa Jantuah, former General Secretary of the Convention People's Party (CPP); and Dorcas Affo-Toffey, an NDC MP. The Commissioner of Ghana's elections management body, Jean Adukwei Mensa, was the fifth female targeted.

About a third (10) of the OGBV posts were targeted at Ellen Ama Daaku, and half (5) of those OGBV attacks body-shamed her as a "Man Woman," a tag that has been thrown at her over the past six months since the OGBV monitoring started in August 2024. Emeafa Hardcastle was also attacked with eight (8) OGBV posts; and these posts were largely as a result of a verbal exchange between the MP for Nsawam/Adoagyiri, Frank Annor Dompreh, and her. Nana Yaa Jantuah was the object of attack for three (3) posts following her appointment to the office of the President. With the exception of four OGBV attacks, all the OGBV posts recorded were directed at the targets only. Figure 3 below displays the frequency of attacks leveled at the five females who were attacked with more than one OGBV.

Figure 2: Subjects of discussion around which OGBV were recorded



Types of OGBV recorded

Four categories of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) were recorded during the monitoring period. These were – Insulting/offensive comments, Unsubstantiated allegations, Body shaming and Hate Speech. Insulting and/or offensive remarks dominated the OGBV cases cited. For each of the five platforms cited in this report, at least one incident of insulting and offensive comment was recorded on it, an indication of how widely used this category of OGBV is. Figure 4 below displays the frequency of OGBV cases recorded against each of the four types of OGBV. Following Figure 4 is Table 1 that presents a frequency distribution of the four categories OGBV on the five platforms monitored.

Figure 4: Categories of OGBV recorded

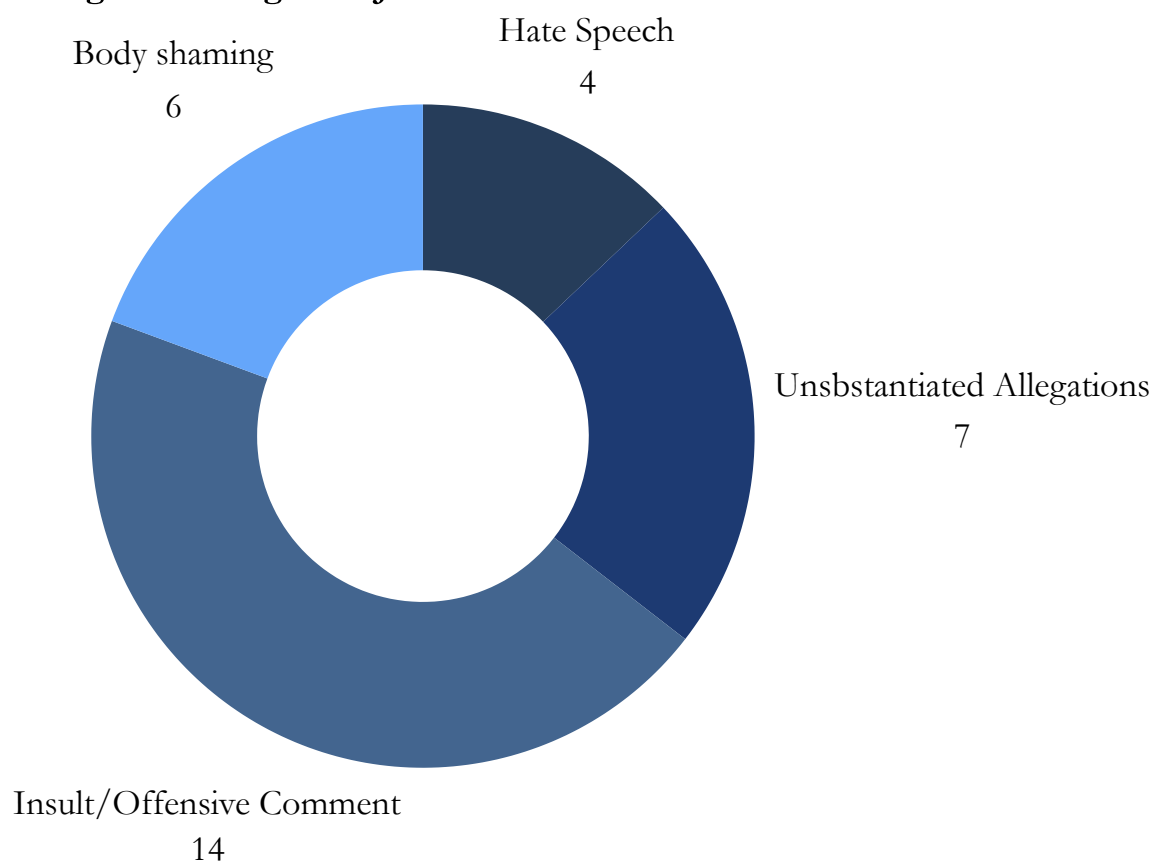
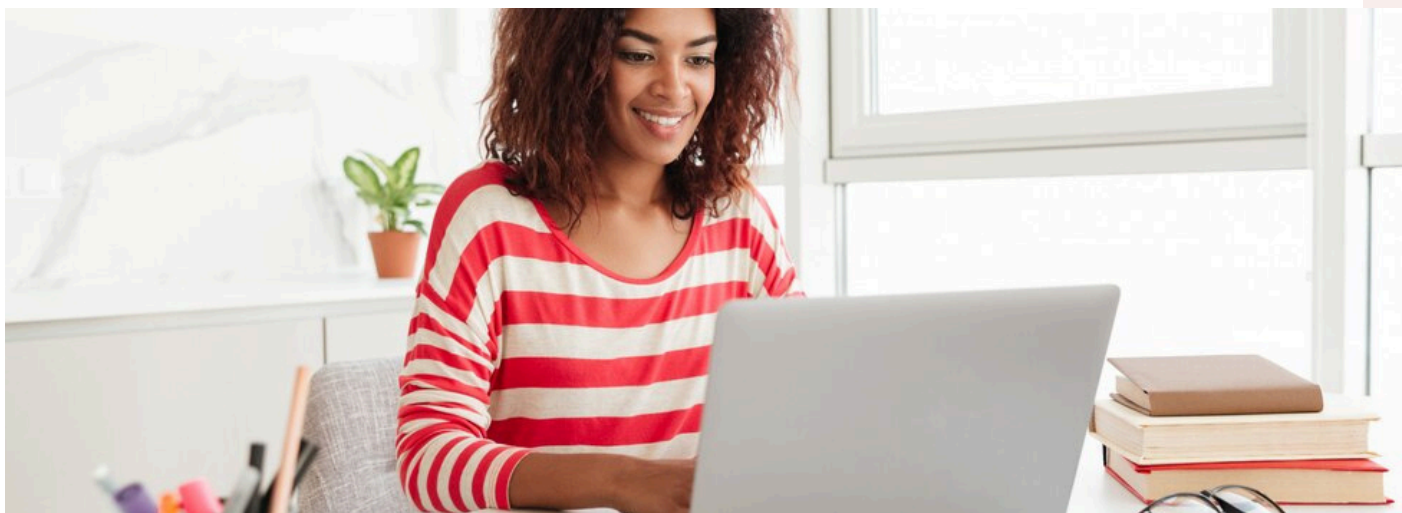


Figure 4: Categories of OGBV recorded

CATEGORIES OF OGBV RECORDED	ONLINE PLATFORM MONITORED					TOTAL
	Facebook	X(Twitter)	Instagram	TikTok	Ghanaweb	
Hate Speech	0	0	0	0	4	4
Unsubstantiated allegation	0	1	0	0	6	7
Insult/ offensive comment	0	2	1	1	10	14
Body shaming	1	0	0	0	5	6
Total	1	3	1	1	25	31



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There has been a relatively sustained reduction in the incidents of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) from September 2024 to January 2025. Although this is commendable, 31 incidents of OGBV in a month literally suggests that not a day goes by without one female or another being abused online. A collective effort can help bring the menace under control. Already, findings from the monitoring reports have shown a decline from 183 OGBV incidents in September 2024 to 30 incidents in December 2024 and now 31 in January 2025. Consistent awareness creation about the menace and its implications, advocacy and policy direction will go a long way to consolidate the gains and reduce the incidents and impact of OGBV. The following are recommended, thus, made:

There should be a coordinated and sustained awareness creation about the issue of OGBV and its implications for women. Then there should be targeted sensitisation and advocacy campaigns against OGBV on all platforms. Civil society organisations, the media and content creators can use the findings from the monitoring reports to inform their advocacy campaigns. Such sensitisation and advocacy interventions should place more emphasis 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.

There must be policy direction from government targeted towards addressing the OGBV challenge. Although Ghana's Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038) make explicit provisions for child online protection and the non-consensual distribution of images and videos (Sections 62-68), not much attention is given to the other online abuses women are subjected to online in the Act. It is recommended that government considers expanding Act 1038 to cover other OGBV issues or considers other regulatory or policy framework that can deal with OGBV from a policy/regulatory point. And such regulatory and policy response(s) must ascribe hefty punishments for perpetrators of OGBV and ensure enforcement to deter the culprits and others from the practice.

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. Knowledgeable and well-equipped women, including female politicians, can engage and navigate online spaces safely to achieve their objectives; and even where they are attacked, they will be able to confront the culprits or report them to appropriate authorities. Political parties should, also, be at the forefront of this intervention. The parties should provide social support by publicly condemning OGBV against female politicians and supporting them to pursue justice through legal procedures.

Tech and social media platform owners should engage more with 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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