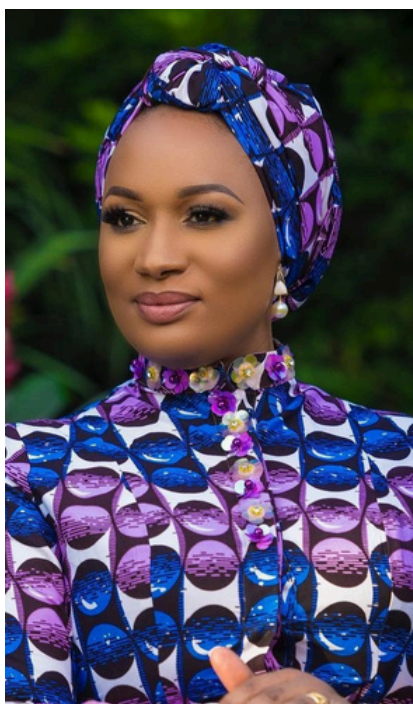
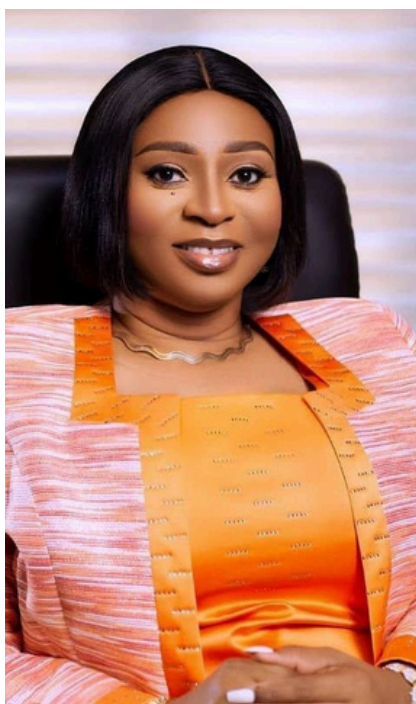


Online Gender-Based Violence against female politicians in Ghana:

evidence from selected online platforms



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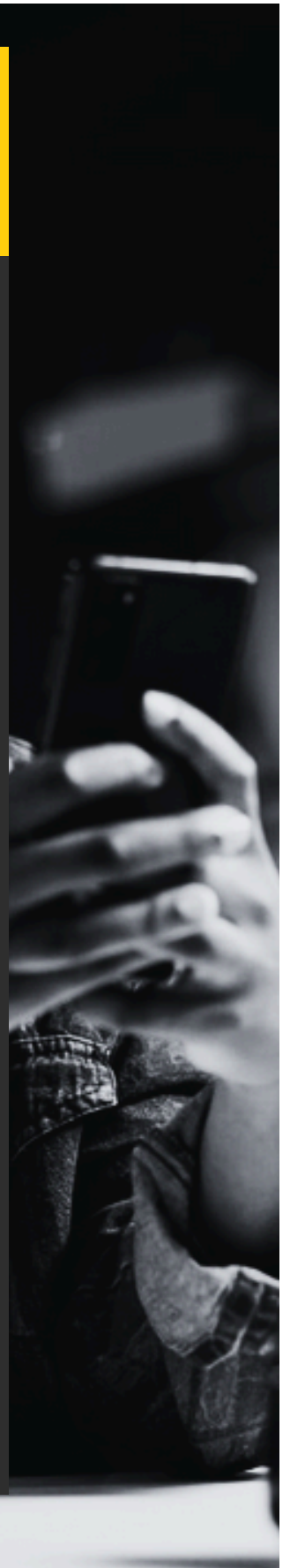


Kingdom of the Netherlands

March 2025

INTRODUCTION

The internet has the potential to facilitate a more equal and equitable world. With the internet, the world is open to all without any form of barrier, be it geographical, racial or gender. It therefore presents a unique opportunity for the amplification of women's voices in digital spaces, in politics and in public life in general as it gives women voice and visibility. However, unsafe digital environment constraints women in their use of digital public spaces; a situation which further widens the inequality gap and facilitates a culture of exclusion of women in public spaces. The ramifications of online harassment and abuse of women, also known as Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), are many. Online abuse against women leads to low female representation in public spaces, politics, discussion of national issues, and a limitation in the diversity of ideas and viewpoints on issues that affect both men and women. Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) affect women's professional, personal and psychological wellbeing, and ultimately pushes women offline, or create a climate of self-censorship for the few who are online. As noted in a 2016 study by the Data & Society, "41 percent of women between the ages of 15 and 29 self-censor to avoid online harassment."¹



1. Data & Society (2016). Online Harassment, Digital Abuse, and Cyberstalking in America.

Online Gender-Based Violence indeed disproportionately affects women's ability to fully exercise and enjoy their rights to expression, opinion, economic development and political participation. It does not only harass, but it also discredits and malign women, especially, outspoken women such as journalists, public figures, and female politicians with the hope of silencing them. For female politicians, in particular, OGBV suppresses their ability to engage, mobilise, garner for votes and improve their political prospects. Unfortunately, the implications of OGBV attacks do not only affect the female politicians who are bullied and abused online, but even young women who have political ambitions, as rightly noted in the #NotTheCost publication of the National Democratic Institute.

While acts of violence against women in politics are directed at individual women, they have a meaning beyond their specific target: to frighten other women who are already politically active, deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity².

Countering OGBV and mitigating its impact is, therefore, an urgent need in addressing women's marginalisation and exclusion in online spaces and creating a level-playing field for women's participation in digital public spaces, national discourses, politicking and governance processes. In view of this, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) is implementing a project on Improving the safety and use of social media for female politicians in Ghana. The project seeks to address some of the inhibiting factors affecting women's participation online and how female politicians in particular can leverage online spaces to improve their visibility, engagements and political prospects.

2. National Democratic Institute (2016). #NotTheCost; Stopping Violence Against Women in politics. <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/1%20%23NotTheCost%20-%20Call%20to%20Action.pdf>; accessed on March 25, 2025.

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. The organisation is also monitoring and reporting on the incidents of OGBV on selected online platforms to highlight the issue and gather scientific evidence to inform public discourse, advocacy interventions and policy considerations. 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 contributes 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 March 2025. The report also marks the end of the eight-month monitoring of OGBV in the Ghanaian online spaces as reflected on five online platforms. The report, therefore, highlights the specific findings in the month of March, as well as some Trends observed throughout the eight-month monitoring period. The methodology used, findings from the monitoring, and recommendations for mitigating the OGBV challenge are detailed 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 were 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 comments/contributions 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 was extended to March 2025 to allow for 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 March 2025. It also highlights some trends observed since August 2024.



FINDING

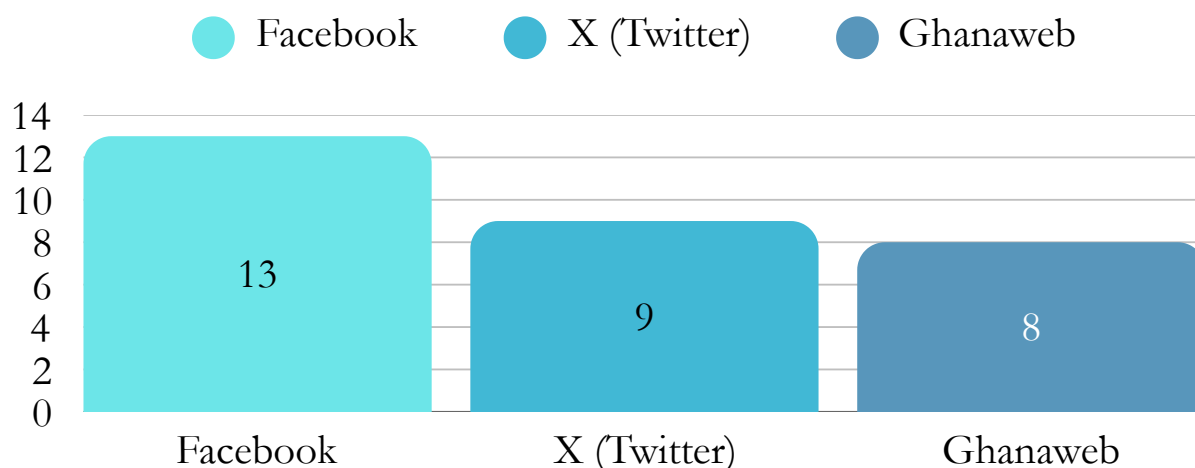
Findings from the daily monitoring of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) on the selected online platforms for the month of March 2025 are presented below. The findings are presented under two broad subheadings: Incidents of OGBV and Types of OGBV recorded.

Incidents of OGBV Recorded

A total of 424 daily monitoring reports were received in March 2025. Some of the social media accounts sampled for the monitoring were very active, others were largely inactive with occasional posts; and others were dormant throughout the monitoring period. A lot of the sampled accounts on Instagram and TikTok, in particular, were largely inactive.

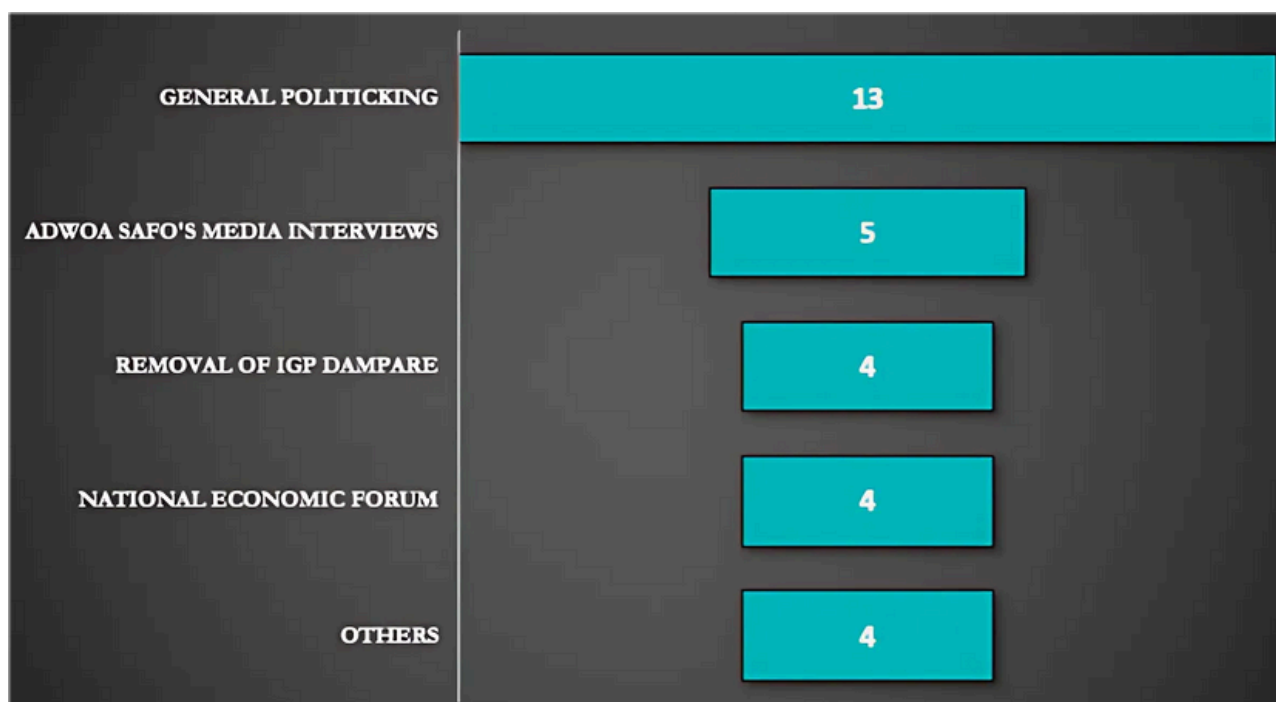
Thirty (30) incidents of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) were cited from the 424 monitoring reports received. The 30 OGBV cases were recorded on three platforms: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Ghanaweb. There were no recorded incidents of OGBV on the accounts being monitored on Instagram and TikTok. The frequencies of OGBV cases recorded on the three platforms are detailed below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Frequency of OGBV recorded on Online Platforms monitored



The main issues around which OGBV cases were recorded included general politicking, media interviews by former MP of Dome-Kwabinya, Adwoa Safo, removal of former IGP, George Akuffo Dampare, National Economic Forum organised by the government, and some other issues. The frequency of OGBV incidents recorded around the aforementioned issues are presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Subjects of discussion around which OGBV were recorded



The OGBV incidents captured in this report were made by individual accounts. No group or corporate account was found to have posted an OGBV content. A substantial number of the accounts that made the OGBV posts used pseudo names. Unlike previous months, the identity behind a number of the pseudonyms could be established for the month under review. Seventeen (17) out of the 30 OGBV posts were made by males while two were made by females. For the remaining eleven, the gender of those who made them could not be established. (10) of the OGBV posts were made by affiliates of the NDC and one was made by an affiliate of the NPP.

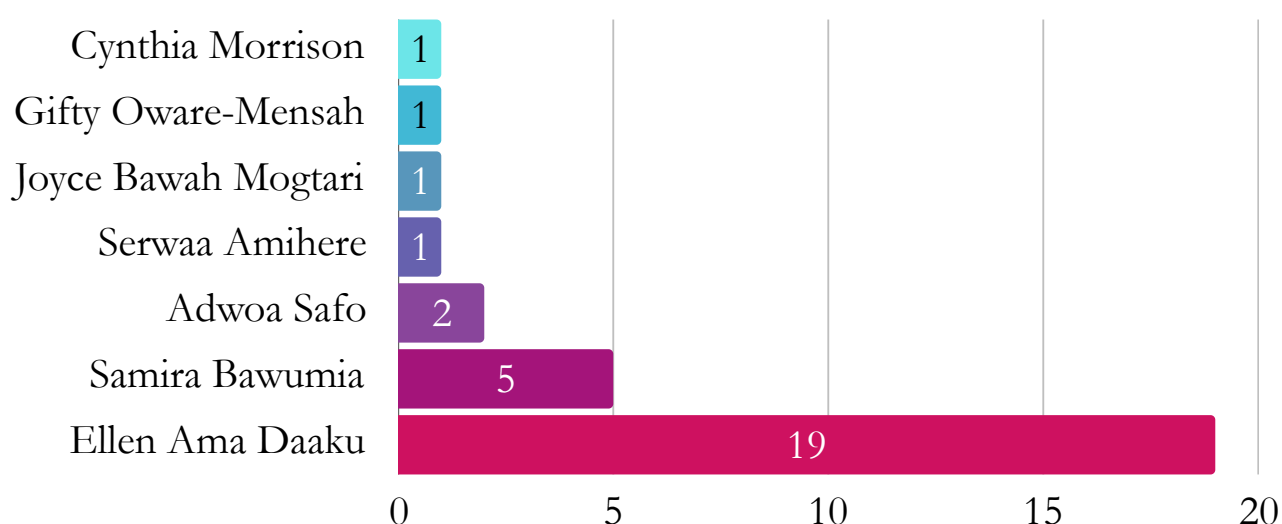
All the OGBV incidents cited in this report were from commentary the culprits made about some original posts or earlier comments others had made. In 15 instances, the OGBV content posted directly or indirectly related to the issue raised in the original post; but for the remaining eleven, the OGBV posts had no relationship whatsoever with the original post.

Seven (7) women were the targets of the 30 OGBV attacks cited. Five of them are politically exposed women. For the remaining two, one is a journalist and the other is a former appointee of the erstwhile NPP government. These two were targeted with three OGBV posts. For the politically exposed women, Ellen Ama Daaku was attacked by 19 OGBV posts, representing 63.33 percent of all the OGBV cited. With the exception of three, all the other OGBV attacks were body-shaming her, referring to her as *man woman* in most instances. One post for instance read, “This man-woman is such an unrefined person.” For the past eight months, Ellen Ama Daaku has been consistently referred to as ‘man woman’ on, at least, three of the five platforms being monitored. And she has been the only female who has been targeted with OGBV the most throughout the eight-month monitoring period.

The other politically exposed women who were attacked with OGBV content are the former NPP MP for Dome-Kwabanya, Sarah Adwoa Safo; wife of the NPP presidential Candidate (former Vice President of Ghana), Samira Bawumia; Presidential Advisor and Aide, Joyce Bawah Mogtari; and former NPP MP for Agona West, Cynthia Morrison. The monitoring did not capture any reprisal attack from those targeted with the OGBV.

In Figure 3 below, the frequency of OGBV attacks leveled against the seven women are presented.

Figure 3: Frequency of OGBV targeted at specific females



Types of OGBV recorded

Three categories of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) were recorded in the month of March 2025 – Unsubstantiated allegations, Insulting/offensive comments, and Body shaming. The frequencies of each are illustrated in Figure 4 below. For the first time in eight months, the body shaming category dominated the attacks against the targets, recording 17 cases. Out of the 17 body shaming posts, 16 were used to attack Ellen Ama Daaku and the remaining one was directed at Gifty Oware-Mensah. The body shaming posts were mostly made on Facebook and Twitter. The distribution of the OGBV categories recorded on the respective platforms monitored is presented in Table 1 below.

Figure 4: Categories of OGBV recorded

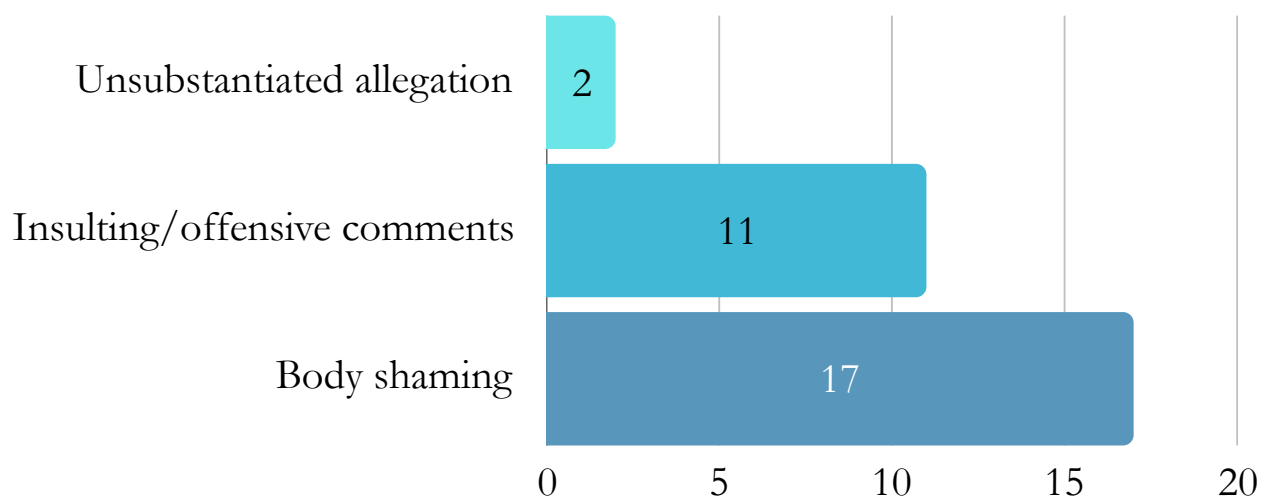


Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Categories of OGBV and the Platforms monitored

Type of OGBV	Platform monitored			Total
	Facebook	X (Twitter)	Ghanaweb	
Unsubstantiated allegation	2	0	0	2
Insult/offensive comment	2	4	5	11
Body shaming	9	5	3	17
Total	13	9	8	30

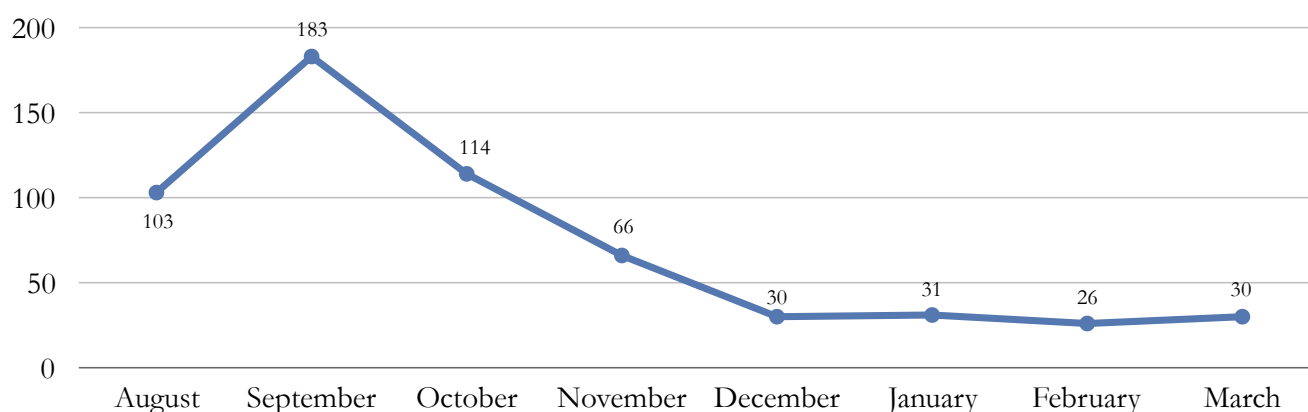
Overall Findings and Trends Observed

Throughout the eight-month monitoring, a number of issues were observed regarding the use of OGBV. This section briefly highlights some of the notable ones. It must, however, be noted that not all the accounts sampled were active throughout the monitoring period; some were actually dormant throughout the period. A lot of such accounts were on Instagram and TikTok.

Altogether, the 10 monitors recruited for the monitoring of sampled accounts on the selected online platforms submitted a total of 2,846 individual reports over the eight-month monitoring period; an average of 355 reports per month. A total of 583 OGBV content were recorded over the period. In other words, for every five monitoring reports received, at least one OGBV content was cited in one.

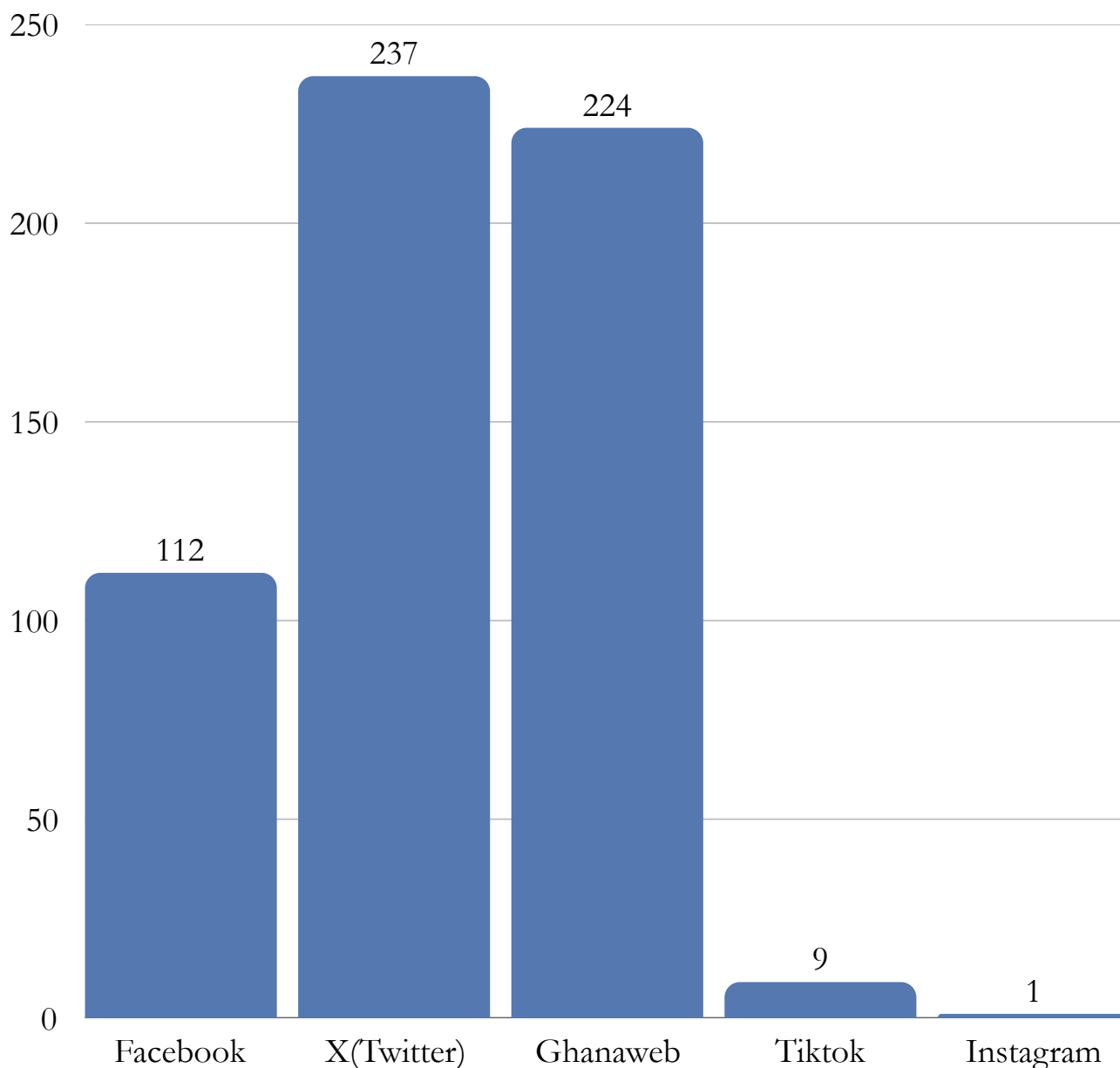
However, a general reduction in the incidents of OGBV was observed month-on-month from September 2024 to February 2025 as depicted in Figure 5 below. Unfortunately, for the last month of the monitoring observed a rise in the incidents of OGBV. Although the rise was incomparable to the number of OGBV cases recorded from the beginning of the monitoring, it suggests that more efforts must be directed at sustaining the advocacy to keep the incidents of OGBV abase.

Figure 5: Month-on-month Incidents of OGBV on the Online Platforms monitored



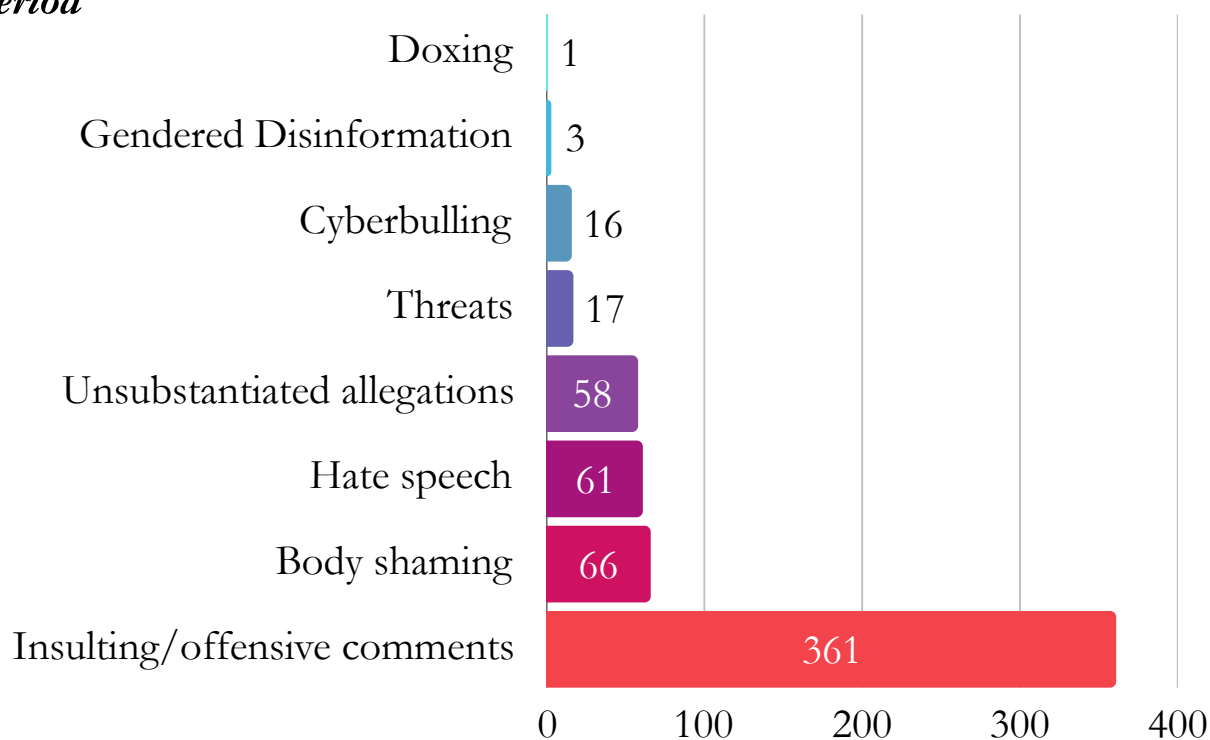
X was the platform on which most of the OGBV content were posted; followed by Ghanaweb, as depicted in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6: Incidents of OGBV on the Online Platforms monitored



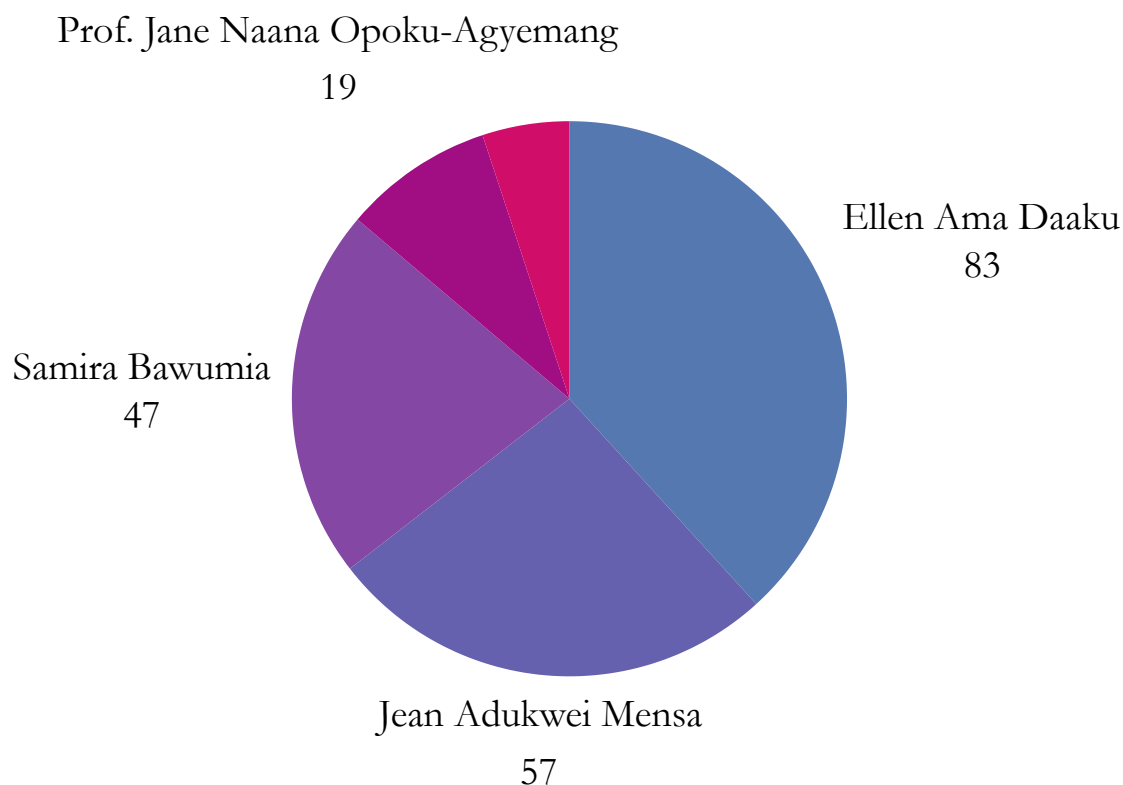
More than half (61.83%) of the OGBV posts cited were insulting and offensive in nature. In fact, even for the other categories of OGBV cited over the eight-month period, some of them were in also very offensive. All the categories of OGBV cases recorded for the entire monitoring period are displayed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7: Categories of OGBV recorded during the eight-month monitoring period



The five females who were mostly targeted with OGBV are captured below in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Top Five Females mostly targeted with OGBV



Other issues/trends observed included the following:

- Almost all the OGBV posts were made by individual accounts
- Most of the accounts used pseudo names which sometimes made it difficult to identify the real people behind them
- A lot of the OGBV posts were made by males (i.e. for the accounts that could be identified)
- In most instances, the OGBV posts had little relationship with the real issues at stake
- Most of the females attacked with OGBV were often referred to as “Prostitutes” with some being described as sleeping with top officials of their respective political parties
- For Ellen Ama Daaku, in particular, there was a coordinated attack from, at least, three of the five online platforms monitored, to body-shame her by referring to her as “Man” or “Man Woman”
- For the first three months, the female genitalia of targets’ mothers were often used to insult the targets (a practice in certain parts of the country, although often frowned upon)
- Where local languages (mostly Akan and Ga) were used, they were not only derogatory, but also very offensive, demeaning and unprintable.

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Evidence from the eight-month monitoring of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) in the Ghanaian online space as monitored on the five selected online platforms shows that OGBV is prevalent in Ghanaian online spaces. The situation, if left unchecked can push a lot of outspoken females, especially female politicians offline or force them into self-censorship. The relatively consistent decline in the incidents of OGBV over six months (from September 2024 to February 2025) show that the OGBV menace can be eliminated or at least minimised, and its ramifications, averted. It requires consistent awareness creation, capacity building, advocacy, collaboration and a solid policy/regulatory framework. The following recommendations are, thus, made to consolidate the gains and push back OGBV, especially those targeted at women in public offices and female politicians.

1. The findings from this monitoring, along with other research results, should be used by government, tech companies and platform owners to guide and shape interventions targeted at addressing the OGBV menace to ensure that issue-specific preventive and reparative measures are designed and deployed.

2. As much as possible, there must be a government policy specifically targeted at addressing Online Gender-Based Violence. Ghana's Cybersecurity Act, 2020 (Act 1038) must be expanded to cover all forms of OGBV issues. Alternatively, other regulatory or policy framework could be initiated to deal specifically with OGBV in all its forms. Such regulatory and policy response(s) must have provisions that ascribe hefty punishments for perpetrators of OGBV and ensure enforcement of same to deter the culprits and others from the practice.


3. The media, civil society actors, content creators, government, and tech companies and platform owners must collaborate in designing and rolling out educational and sensitization interventions that will promote issues-based public discourse, tolerance of opposing views, the benefits of having both and men online, among other positive reinforcement interventions. The harmful ramifications of OGBV should also be highlighted in such educational and sensitization programmes for people to get a better understanding of the depth of the issue. Public forums, policy dialogues and counter narratives should also be explored by all relevant stakeholders as part of a multi-faceted-layered approach to dealing with the OGBV menace.


4. Capacity strengthening interventions must also be pursued to empower more females to safely navigate online spaces and strategically manage OGBV attacks directed at them online. Civil society organisations and political parties should be at the forefront of this intervention. The political parties, in particular, should provide social support by publicly condemning OGBV against female politicians and supporting them to pursue justice legally.

5. 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.

6. Academia and research institutions should also leverage the findings of the monitoring reports to interrogate the issue of OGBV further into other areas such as perpetrators rationale for engaging in OGBV. Findings from such studies could also inform interventions targeted at perpetrators to ensure that the fight against OGBV is more holistic.

Media Foundation for West Africa
Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo

 +233 (0) 302 555 327

 @TheMFWA

 Media Foundation for West Africa

 info@mfw.org

 www.mfw.org