RESEARCH REPORT on

Online Gender Based Violence in

Zimbabwe

Emthonjeni Women's Forum

2023

Online Gender Based Violence in Zimbabwe

Research Report

EMTHONJENI WOMEN'S FORUM

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EWF	Emthonjeni Women's Forum
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
KII	Key Informant Interview
OGBV	Online Gender-Based Violence
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

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Executive Summary

Emthonjeni Women's Forum commissioned this survey to find out the impact of Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV) in Zimbabwe and its impact on the survivors. Adopting a mixed method approach, the study targeted online internet users who are based in Zimbabwe through a survey instrument with a mix of open and close ended questions. It also collected qualitative data through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions with victims of OGBV, legal experts, academic experts researchers, Zimbabwe Gender Commission and Civil Society Organisations. The study found that:

- Twitter and Facebook (62 %) were rated as the platforms where OGBV take place the most. This was attributed to that these platforms allow perpetrators to operate under fake identities (ghost accounts)

- Of the total participants who had experienced OGBV, 75% of them had experienced it in the last 12 months.

- Hate speech (60%), trolling (17%) and sexual harassment (12%) were highlighted as the most prevalent forms of OGBV.

- Majority of the victims of OGBV (50%) said they were attacked by one person who was also a stranger (54%) and where the person is known, it is usually a friend (24%).

- Most victims of OGBV said (41%) said they ignored the attacks followed by those who said they defend (21%).

- The long-term impact of OGBV is that it leads to depression and in some extreme cases victims committing suicide especially teenagers and academic students.

- The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) institution lacks understanding and capacity to deal with OGBV cases.

- While various organisations and stakeholders are involved in the fight against OGBV, there is lack of documentation and creation of OGBV database for monitoring and evaluation on the progress made.

- Socialisation institutions such as family, churches, schools and universities lack appropriate and effective systems to address OGBV.

The study also makes a number of important recommendations to the government and its relevant institutions (Gender Commission and ZRP), socialisation institutions such as universities and churches, CSOs as well as the media.

1. Introduction

The digital era has brought with it a number of challenges associated with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) especially networking platforms such as social media. These technologies are facilitating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in different forms. As a new phenomenon and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence or Online Gender Based Violence (OGBV) has become a menace to women, young women and girls. In the Zimbabwean context, while OGBV is a cause for concern, existing literature does not adequately provide a broader picture regarding the prevalence and impact of OGBV especially on women.

Emthonjeni Women's Forum (EWF) embarked on this study to investigate the prevalence of OGBV and its impact as a way of contributing to the existing body of knowledge through providing new insights. This work therefore, shall act as a referral point for EWF and other like-minded institutions concerned with gender equality and equity in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted over a period of 8 weeks and mainly targeted online users.

Acknowledgments

1.2 Background

Technology-facilitated or Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) is a global problem that has seen not only ordinary citizens but women, journalists, human rights defenders and politicians being victims of "death threats and rape threats" for sharing

their views online. Studies show that OGBV is being increasingly facilitated by digital technologies that have become part of people's daily lives. Literature shows that Gender Based Violence is a problematic issue in Zimbabwe with a study conducted by Africa Barometer (2022) showing that more than half (52%) of the sample 1,200 adult respondents saying violence against women and girls was common. Some of the common OGBV practices include trolling, harassment, networked harassment, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, voyeurism/creepshots, sexploitation, sextortion, documenting or broadcasting sexual assault, synthetic media, image based sexual abuse, doxing, hate speech and impersonation (Dunn, 2020: UN Special Rapporteur, 2018). Although in 2021 Zimbabwe enacted the Data Protection Act to try and address cybercrime, cases of online abuse show that there is need for diverse interventions to address the problem. This study is therefore important in that it will not only provide a broad picture regarding the issue but will provide policy and prgramme recommendations and also strategies on how to address and respond to the phenomenon. It is also important to highlight that, the findings' will be significant in that recommendations shall be people and victim-centred.

1.3 Study objective

The major objective of this study is to explore the prevalence of OGBV and its impact on women in Zimbabwe.

1.4 Definition of key terms

Cyberstalking is the use of technology to stalk and monitor someone's activities and behaviours in real-time or historically. Cyberstalking is usually seen as an extension of offline stalking, using technological tools, and it involves a set of unwanted, repetitive, intrusive, threatening and harassing behaviours.

OGBV Sextortion is coercing someone into a sexual activity through blackmail, bribery or threats to release intimate images or sensitive information.

Doxxing is the non-consensual disclosure of personal information. It involves the public release of an individual's private, personal, sensitive information, such as home and email addresses, phone numbers, employer and family member's contact information, or photos of their children and the school they attend.

Gendered hate speech Any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in this case, based on their sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Gendered and sexist online hate speech reinforces systemic sexism while dehumanizing and encouraging violence against women and girls and LGBTQIA+ people

2. Methodology and ethical considerations

2.1. Study Design

A cross sectional design was adopted and applied in this work with data collected simultaneously from various individuals within the specified time. The design was used descriptively to understand and unpack the prevalence of OGBV and how it affects women across ages, occupation and geolocation.

2.2. Methodological approach
2.2.1 Mixed method approach

A mixed method approach was used in this study with the primary nature of this embedded design being qualitative. This means quantitative data plays a secondary role as the study is founded on the naturalistic worldview. This approach is influenced by that OGBV issues require a deeper understanding based on the victims' experiences, feelings and attitudes on the subject matter. Therefore, the approach provided both depth and breadth of the phenomenon. The quantitative element facilitated the collection of statistical data regarding respondents' profiles which include age, gender, city of residence, education level and occupation. These are key in this research in that they help locate the nature of the findings within a group of participant's world-view. On the other hand, qualitative data provided deeper insights regarding the prevalence of OGBV and the dominant form as well as actions and reactions by victims to these encounters.

2.3 Sampling strategy

The study targeted online or internet female users and simple random sampling was applied. Simple random sampling is important in such studies in that it helps eliminate issues of bias while enhancing internal validity. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, snowball sampling was used for identification and selection of KII respondents who were mainly victims of OGBV. The primary participants were identified through organisations working on OGBV and gender issues in general and they nominated and also referred other potential participants. This was critical in building trust between the participants and the researcher.

2.4 Data collection methods

Data was collected using a survey questionnaire and a Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussion. The survey questionnaire was composed of open and closed questions and executed in electronic form through WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook. To gather views and experiences of the respondents KIIs was used targeted at the victims of OGBV, legal experts and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working on GBV, gender communication and academic practitioners.

Survey Questionnaire: The study targeted a total of 300 female respondents aged 18 years and above who reside in Zimbabwe but managed to retain 253 responses. The survey instrument was distributed using the social networking platforms mainly WhatsApp and also shared on Twitter.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) – A total of his 7 in-depth interviews and 3 FGDs targeted at victims of OGBV and selected institutions were conducted. These were the civil society organisations, women's organisations and legal experts with interest on GBV issues and victims of OGBV.

3. Participants Profile
3.1 Participants profile

The survey questionnaire had a wide online reach generating 253 responses from participants in different geographical locations, varying age groups and dominantly females. The participants were mostly educated, had daily access to the internet and were either employed or self-employed as discussed in detail in this section.

Fig 1. Participants distribution by Age
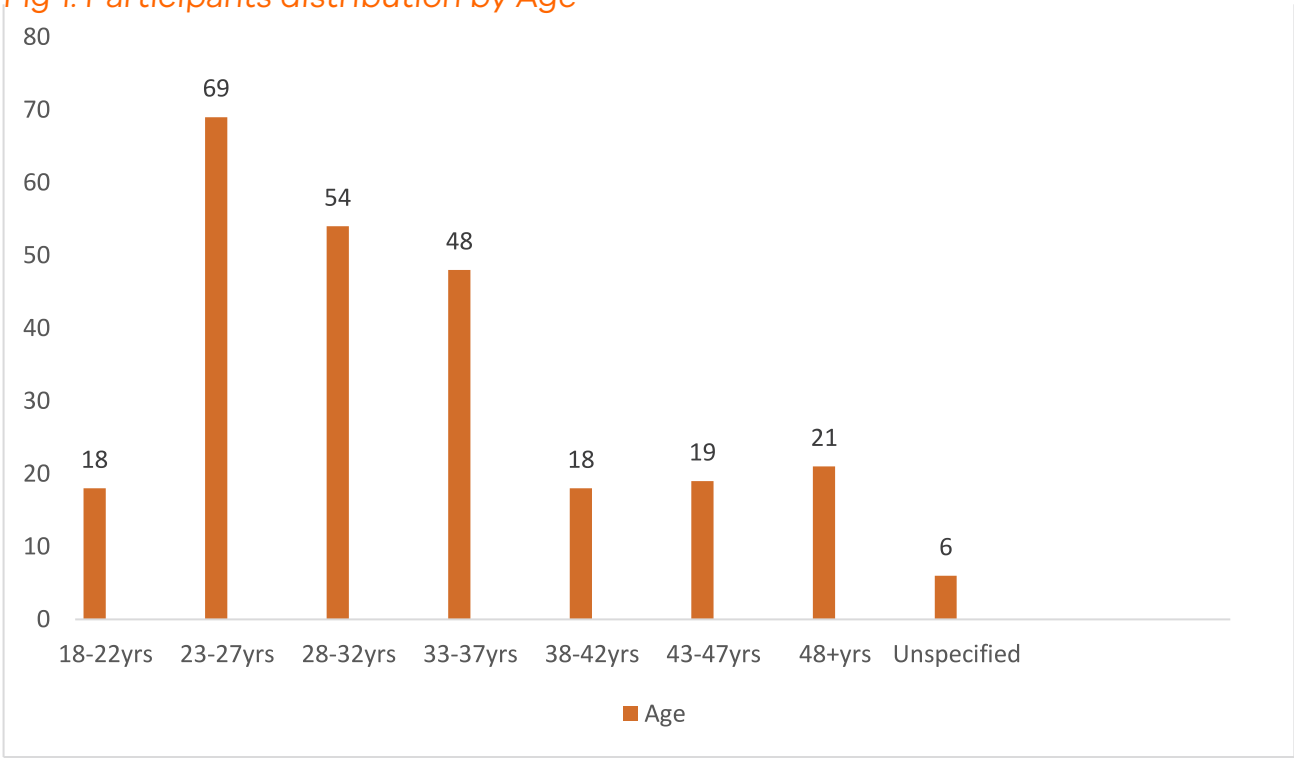
Fig.1 above shows the age range for the participants in this study indicating that the majority of the participants were those aged between 23-27years (27.3%) followed by those aged between 28-32years (23.3%) thirdly those aged 33-37years (18.9%). This means the participants were dominantly those aged 23-37years (67.6%) old and this could be attributed to that while this is generally the active population on social media, it is also the age range that is likely to have access to the internet through workplace or academic spaces.

Fig 2- Participants distribution by Gender
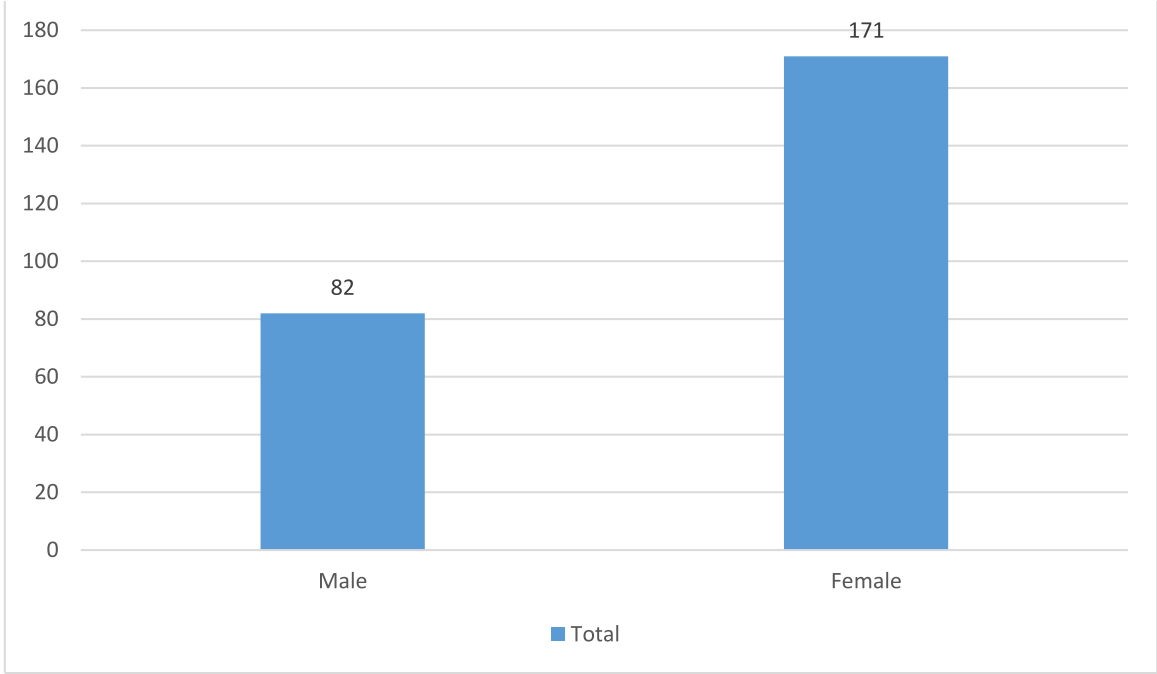
Fig.2 above shows that the majority of the participants in the study were females who constituted 67.6% compared to their male counterparts who were 32.4%. These results show the complexities associated with online studies in that while females were the primary targets, it is difficult to control who participants when the survey tool is shared on the internet platforms including WhatsApp.

Table 1 – level of education

Level of education	Number	%
Secondary level	20	7.9
Tertiary level	223	88.1
No response	10	3.9

Table 1 above shows that the majority of the respondents had attained the tertiary level of education (88.1%) and 7.9% had attained the secondary level of education while 3.9% did not state their level of education. Therefore, the findings of this study are from a dominantly educated sample of participants.

Fig.3 - Employment status
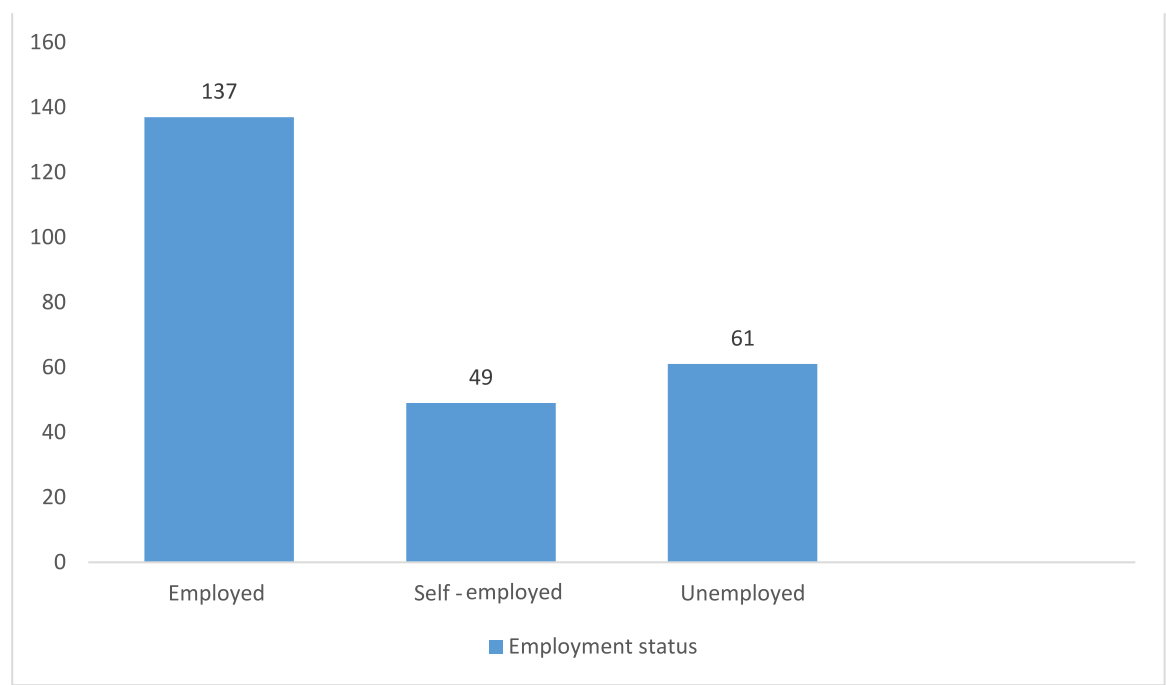
Majority of the participants (54.2%) as seen in Fig.3 above were employed followed by those who said they were not employed (24.1%) and lastly those who were self-employed (19.4%) while the rest (2.3%) did not specify.

Fig. 4 - Area of residence

Area of residence
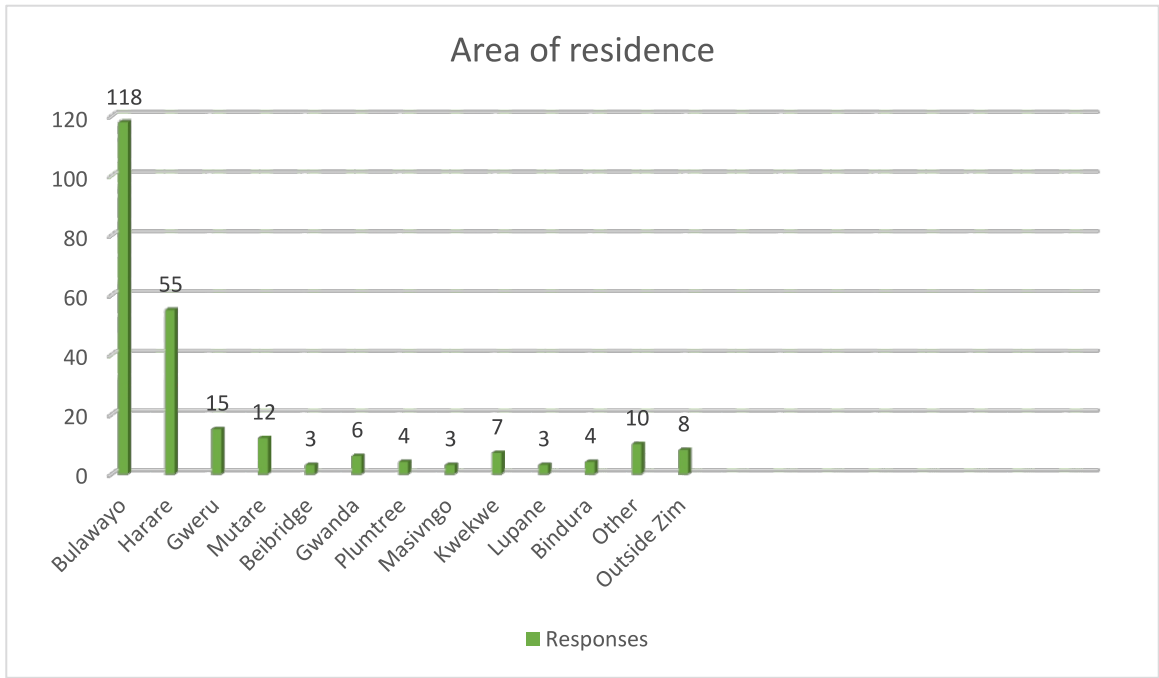
Fig.4 above shows that the majority of the participants were from Bulawayo (46.6%) followed by Harare (21.7%), Gweru (5.9%) and Mutare (4.7%). The study also attracted participants from outside Zimbabwe (South Africa, Russia and UK) who constituted 3.2%. The study also reached other smaller towns and districts that include Victoria Falls, Mudzi, Kadoma, Marondera, Inyanga, Nswazi, Zvishavane and Norton.

The dominance of Bulawayo in terms of high study participants representation reflects the utilisation of social media, especially WhatsApp networks for data collection stage.

Fig.5 - Participants distribution by province

The distribution of participants by Province as shown in Fig.5 above shows that Bulawayo (46.6%), Harare (21.7%) and Midlands (9.1%) had the highest number of participants respectively, whilst Mashonaland East and West (0.8%) had the lowest number of participants.
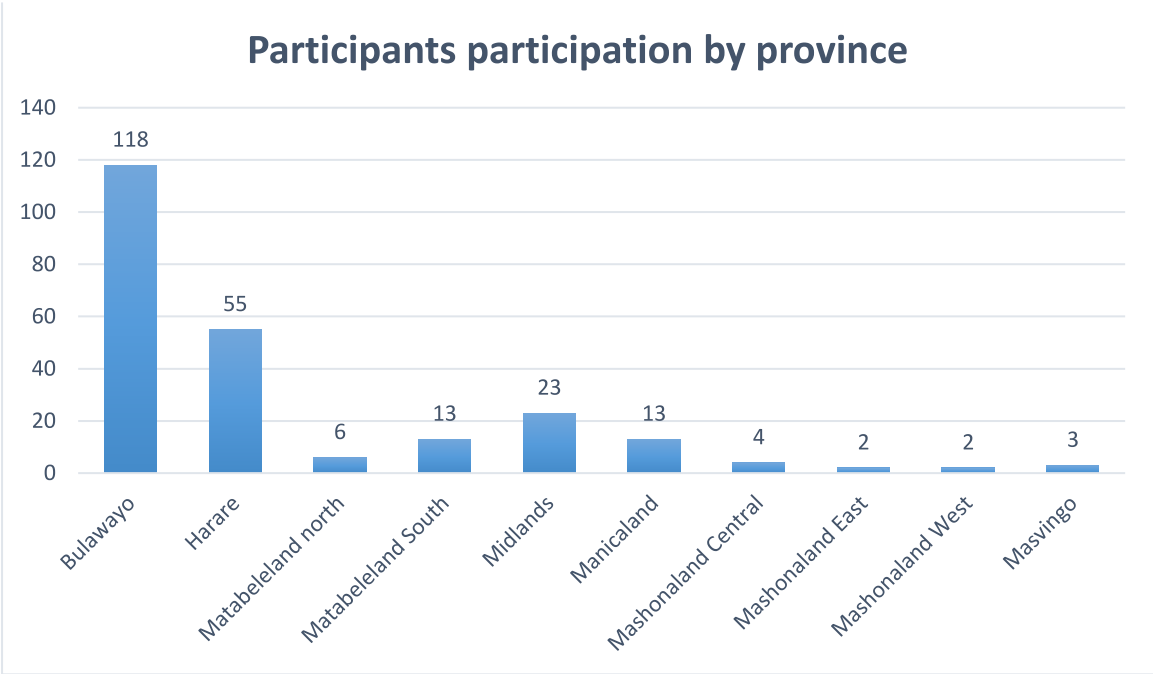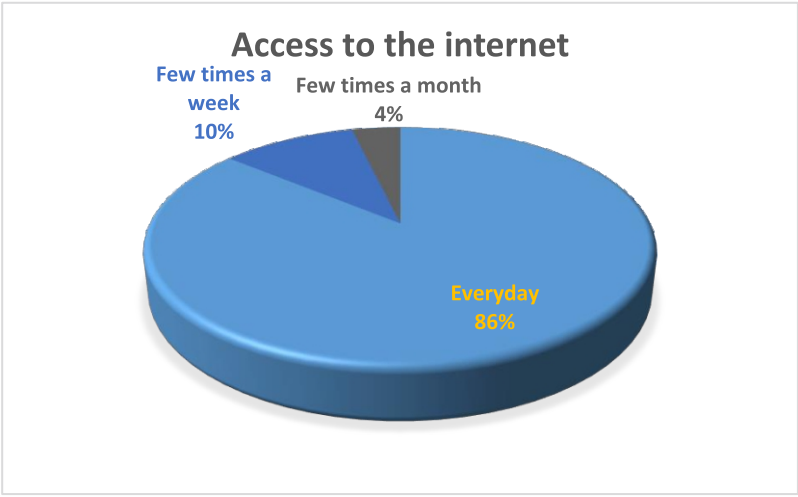
Participants participation by province

Province	Participants
Bulawayo	118
Harare	55
Matabeleland north	6
Matabeleland South	13
Midlands	23
Manicaland	13
Mashonaland Central	4
Mashonaland East	2
Mashonaland West	2
Masvingo	3

Fig.6 - Access to the internet

Access to the internet

- Few times a week 10%
- Few times a month 4%
- Everyday 86%

Results in Fig.6 (right) shows that majority of the participants (86%) had access to the internet on daily basis followed by those who access the internet few times a week (10%) and lastly those who access it few times a month. Results in Fig.6 (right) shows that majority of the participants (86%) had access to the internet on daily basis followed by those who access the internet few times a week (10%) and lastly those who access it few times a month.

Fig.7 - Favorite Social Media platform

Favorite social media platform
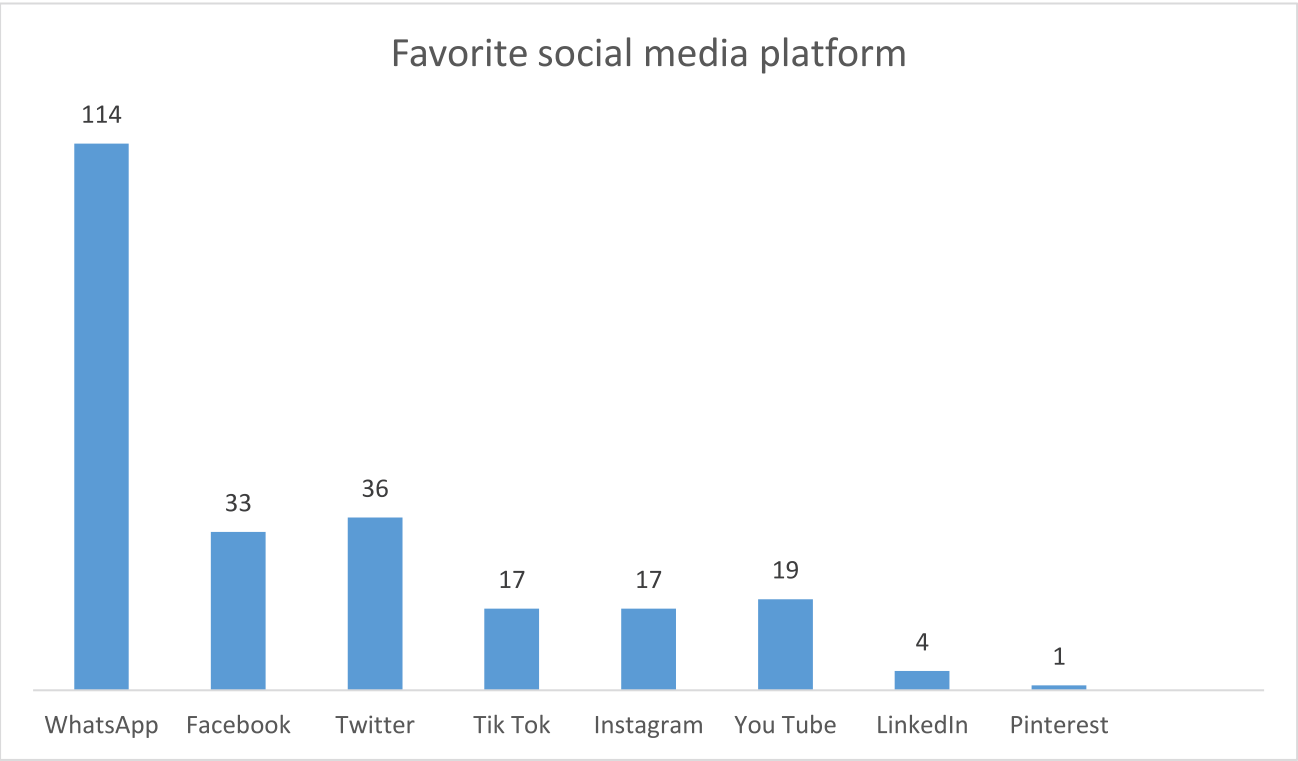
Fig.7 above shows that WhatsApp (47.3%) was selected as the favorite social media platform followed by Twitter (14.9%) with Facebook (13.7%) being rated as 3rd. LinkedIn (1.7%) and Pinterest (0.4%) were rated as the list favorite social media platforms.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Most affected social group and the most abusive social media/internet
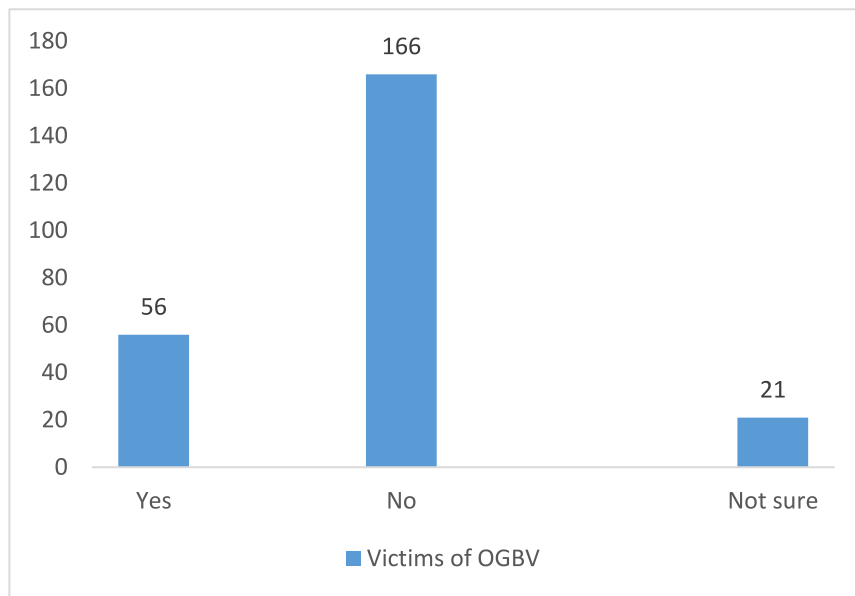
Fig.8 (left) shows that the majority (68.3%) of the participants had not experienced OGBV while (23%) experienced it and (8.6%) were not sure if they had experienced OGBV or not. These results indicate that OGBV is a cause for concern considering that almost a quarter of the participants had experienced while also indicating some internet users may be subjected to OGBV without knowing that they are victims. Further, participants indicated that females (94.2%) compared to males (5.8%) are the most affected by OGBV when classified by gender as shown in Fig.9 below:
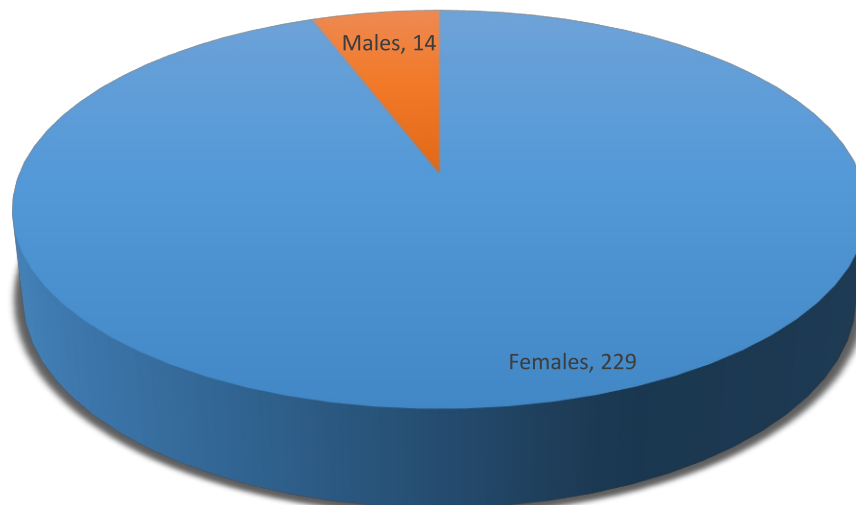
These results indicate that OGBV largely affects females compared to males and these are largely young women who are active on social media platforms. It also adds to the arguments that this is because technology or the internet plays a facilitative role to already existing social relations that are rooted in power dynamics. Some participants attributed the high level of OGBV on females compared to males to the social construction of gender.

"Generally female are considered fragile and easy targets and society expects females to be quiet and silent, morally upright or sexually pure and these attacks are meant to portray them as failing to behave decently" (Interview, academic practitioner)

This explained the use of the term 'hule' (prostitute or slut) which OGBV victims highlighted as the dominated word used for labelling and silencing a female internet user especially in political spaces1. said such words kept coming up in the interviews depicting the gendered nature of OGBV.

Fig.10 - Period when OGBV victimisation took place

Period when OGBV was experienced

Period	Value
More than 2 yrs ago	10
2 yrs ago	5
1 yr ago	11
6 months ago	7
3 months ago	7
1 month ago	11
7 days ago	8
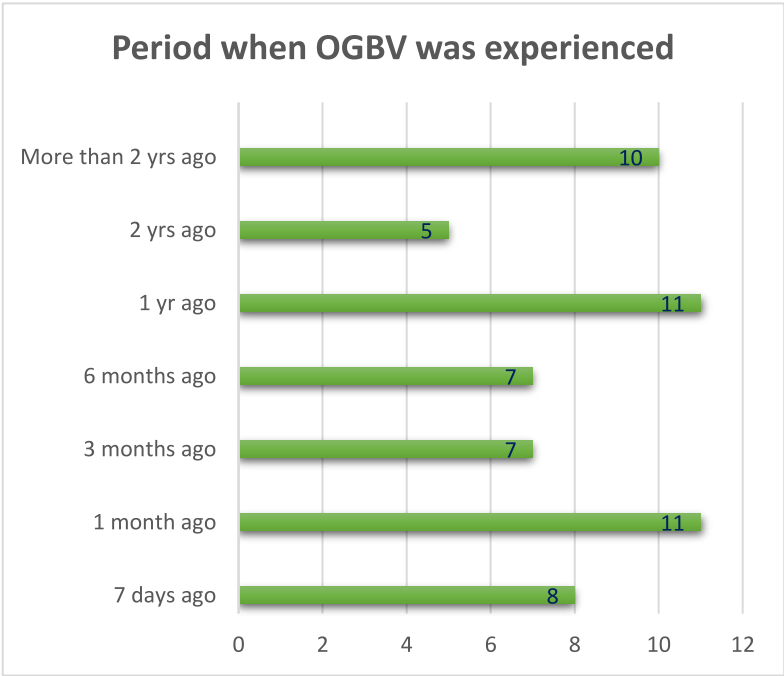
The results in Fig.10 (left) shows that of the total participants (59) who indicated the period when they had experienced OGBV 55.9% (33) of them had experienced OGBV in the last 6 months. Within this 6-month period, 24.2% had experienced OGBV in the last 7 days whilst 33.3% said they had experienced OGBV a month ago.

Looking at a period of 12 months (1year), results suggest that 74.6% of the participants who responded to this question had experienced OGBV in this period. These results show a worrying trend of OGBV prevalence in Zimbabwe.

It is one of the terms that prominent female politicians such as Thokozani Khuphe, Linda Masarira and Fadzai Mahere have been subjected to as well.

4.2 Most abusive internet platform and dominant forms of OGBV in Zimbabwe

Fig.11 - Most visited internet platform

Most visited internet platform

NEWS WEBSITES: 21
SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS...: 147
VIDEO PLATFORMS...: 44
DATING/FRIENDSHIP SITES: 1
BLOGS: 3
MUSIC PLATFORMS...: 7
EDUCATIONAL PLATFORMS: 3
OTHER: 17
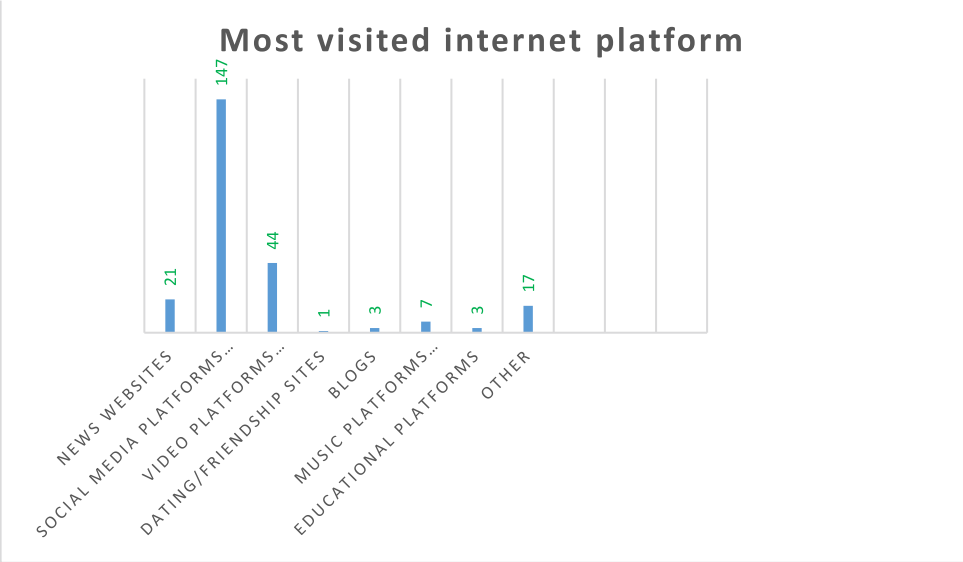
The results in Fig 11 above shows that the most visited internet platforms are social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) (62.3%), followed by video platforms (YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram) (18.6%) and thirdly news websites (8.9%). Some participants indicated that they visit other platforms (7.2%) that include LinkedIn and research websites.

Fig. 12 - Most prevalent forms of OGBV

■ Most prevalent form of OGBV

HATE SPEECH: 47
TROLLING: 13
SEXPLOITATION: 3
SEXTORTION: 2
SEXUAL...: 9
NUDES SHARED...: 2
BODY SHAMING: 1
VOYEURISM: 1
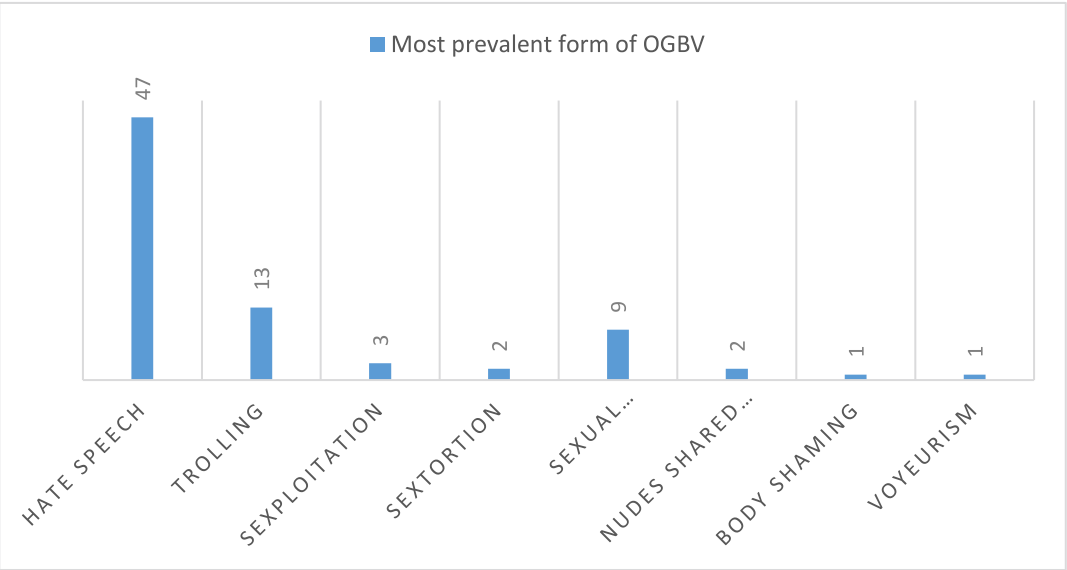
Hate speech (60.3%), trolling (16.7%) and sexual harassment (11.5%) were highlighted as the most prevalent forms of OGBV experienced by the participants as shown in Fig.12 above. These were followed by Sexploitation, sextortion and sharing of one's explicit content (video or images) without their content with body shaming and voyeurism coming last.

Table.2 - OGBV perpetrators

Number of OGBV perpetrators	(%)
It was one person	34 (50)
It was 2 people	3 (4.4)
More than 2 but less than 5 people	17 (25)
They were more than 5	14 (20.6)

The findings also indicated that participants were either attacked by one person (50%), more than 2 but less than 5 people (25%) or more than 5 people (20.6%) as shown in the Table.2 (right). These results indicate that internet users are likely to be victims of OGBV perpetrated by an individual or by more than two people.

Table. 3 Victim's relationship with the OGBV perpetrator

Relationship to the person	Number	%
It was a stranger(s)	34	53.9
It was a friend(s)	15	23.8
It was a relative(s)	4	6.3
It was my employer	1	1.6
It was my work colleague(s)	4	6.3
It was my neighbour(s)	0	0
Other	5	7.9

Results in Table 3 above show that the majority of perpetrators of OGBV are strangers (53.9%) compared to people that we know or have a certain relation with who can be friends, relatives, employers or work colleagues. This could be attributed to the perceived internet security which creates false belief to perpetrators that they are not likely to be caught and the fact that they can create accounts and hide behind anonymity. Other participants (7.9%) cited that they had different relationships with the perpetrators and such relationships include ex-boyfriend, political party member, father of my child, residents and acquaintances.

Fig.13 - Social media platform where OGBV happens the most

OGBV prevalance

■ Most OGBV prevalent platform   ■ Least OGBV prevalent platform

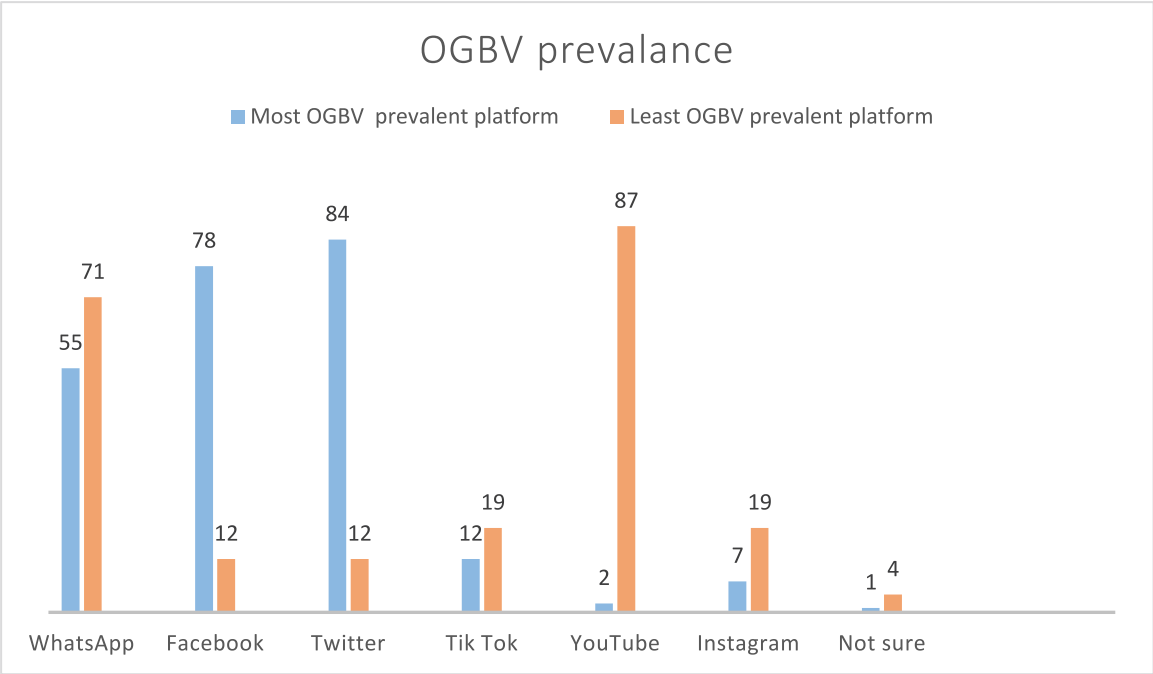| Platform	Most OGBV prevalent	Least OGBV prevalent
WhatsApp	55	71
Facebook	78	12
Twitter	84	12
Tik Tok	12	19
YouTube	2	87
Instagram	7	19
Not sure	1	4

Fig.13 above shows that Twitter (34.9%) was rated as the platform where OGBV is most prevalent, closely followed by Facebook (32.4%) and thirdly WhatsApp (22.8%). Tik Tok (4.9%) and Instagram (2.9%) came 4th and 5th respectively and YouTube was last with 0.8%. Reasons given by the participants are that Twitter allows users to open ghost accounts (fake identities) which enables them to use these to attack others. Some perceive Twitter and Facebook to be platforms where most OGBV takes place because these are the most popular platforms in Zimbabwe and therefore have a high number of users which subjects one to abuse through comments. Those that selected WhatsApp highlighted that it facilitates OGBV because it is easily accessible as many people use it. WhatsApp is also usually used in intimate partner violence (IPV) through revenge porn, when intimate or nude photographs and videos are publicly shared on various WhatsApp groups by a spurned lover. Some reasons for OGBV in these platforms were said to be a result of the user seeking relevance or attention. Some highlighted that social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook also facilitate users to invite and mobilise each other through tagging leading to group attacks. The issue of freedom of speech was also brought forward by some participants who argued that Twitter facilitates free expression which misleads other users to share whatever content or views without reflecting on the implications or impact of such views on others.

Further, YouTube (38.8%) was rated as the platform with least prevalence of OGBV followed by WhatsApp (31.7%) and Tik Tok and Instagram are jointly third with 8.5%. Some of the reasons given for rating these platforms as less prevalent of OGBV were that YouTube facilitates less engagement as people mostly visit it to consume content and some argued that it is less popular in Zimbabwe. Others indicated that YouTube is largely perceived as a commercial platform and therefore users rarely post their personal content which explains its high ranking as the least OGBV prevalent platform. On the other hand, WhatsApp was said to facilitate close relationships between users who are usually people who know each other and this limits OGBV. Others highlighted that WhatsApp allows for users to block people they feel are abusive and the platform also allows users to exit groups if they feel attacked.

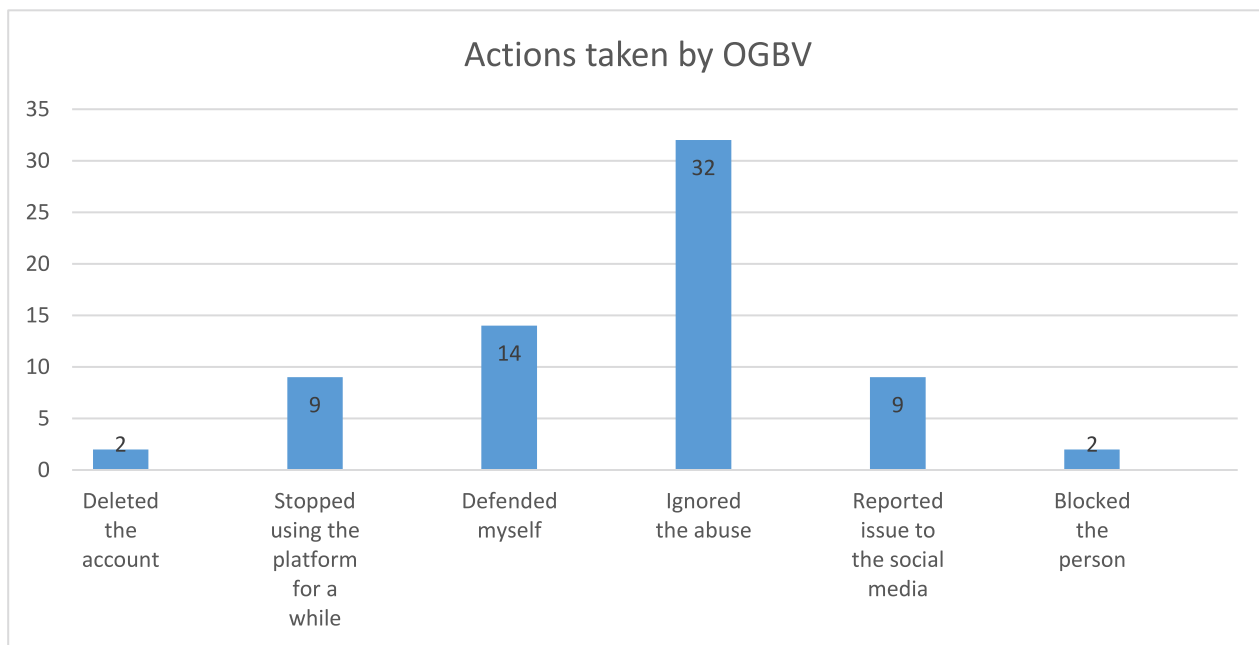# 4.3 Actions taken by the victims after encountering OGBV

Fig.14 - Actions taken by victims of OGBV

Fig.14 above shows that the majority of the participants (45.1%) said they ignore OGBV targets while (20.6%) said they defended themselves and others said they either stopped using the platform for a while or reported the issue to the social media platform (13.2%). A few participants (2%) said they either blocked the perpetrator or deleted their social media accounts.

Through interviews and Focus group Discussions, these actions by victims of OGBV were a result of a number of factors. The study found that whilst any form of GBV (offline and online) is supposed to be reported to the police, victims are afraid of the issue "blowing out of proportion" which may create "unnecessary" attention towards them. This is in addition to the feeling of despondency and futility at perceived police inaction after reporting OGBV.

"I thought if I responded to the attacks, I would be fuelling the bullying and so I decided to keep quiet and it died a natural death" (Interview, OGBV victim)

The study found that such actions are also influenced by the victims belief that "they won't have public" support or anyone believing their story. Some victims expressed that some of the challenges with reporting such cases is that perpetrators tend to increase OGBV actions towards them as a defence mechanism. This is usually in nstances where the perpetrator tries to discredit the victim, shame them and create a certain negative perception about the victim.

Actions taken by OGBV

Action	Count
Deleted the account	2
Stopped using the platform for a while	9
Defended myself	14
Ignored the abuse	32
Reported issue to the social media	9
Blocked the person	2

"In my case, the perpetrator started sending messages to my work colleagues through WhatsApp saying I am a drunkard and a slut as he tried to create a negative perception about me" (Interview, OGBV victim)

Such practices indicate the gendered construction of victims' image by the perpetrators as they attempt to justify and qualify their actions. These labels are not only damaging but have a chilling effect on the victims as some choose to remain silent when they encounter OGBV in fear of being labelled as immoral through such terms. These actions were also popular with female students in academic institutions such as universities according to one academic practitioner.

"Most of these student victims either disengage, deactivate and keep low profiles to avoid being continuously tagged or ridiculed online. Some ignore these posts or try and counter the attacks by posting their version of the events" (Interview, academic practitioner)

Two respondent victims, one in the creative arts and the in politics indicated that initially they fought back by responding to the insults. However, they realised that the more they responded, the abuse became vile which forced them withdraw from the social media platforms.

Some respondents indicated that the withdrawal from these online spaces and refusal to take legal action against perpetrators is associated with stigma and certain stereotypes for transgender women in Zimbabwe. Sharing their experiences, one participant indicated that she refused to take action against two local tabloids due to these reasons and also because the issue "had died out". All these cases indicate the dynamics associated with OGBV and the complications associated with addressing it as it is informed and influenced by various factors that are unique and complex.

4.4 The long-term impact of OGBV on the victims and their relatives or friends

Online gender-based violence has significant effects that include self-censorship, disengagement with the online space, emotional, physical and psychological harm, and economic damage. Survivors' families and friends may face repercussions andcan also withdraw from online engagement in certain situations, whilst some fight back (through speaking out and calling out the perpetrators) in the survivor's corner. The most prevalent has been self-censorship and withdrawal from social media.

The study also found that OGBV in Zimbabwe has been pernicious to the victims as some end up suffering depression and in some extreme cases committing suicide especially teenagers and academic students. According to the academic expert:

"Overtime, these abuses damage female's reputation and silence them as they are shamed and driven out of online spaces as they are rendered powerless, unreliable or untrustworthy" (Interview, academic expert)

Some participants shared that usually teenagers and young people or women end up committing suicide due to OGBV as they are afraid to report cases or lack supportsystems to share their ordeals. Forcing victims to exercise self-censorship, disengagement from online spaces, OGBV leads to emotional, physical and psychological harm not only to the direct victims but their close relatives and friends too. OGBV's impact is also felt through the creation of an environment of insecurity that integrates online and offline OGBV as highlighted by one respondent from the

'It cost me a job' (Interview, victim of OGBV)

Some have even been forced to withdraw from political participation due to victimisation as indicated by one participant:

'I withdrew from the political race as I lost my self-esteem' (FGD, Victim of OGBV)

As observed here, OGBV is having long term impact on the victims as they end up being affected economically and politically. By being forced to withdraw from political participation, victims of OGBV are denied their rights to participation and the benefits and opportunities associated with such rights. This indicates the gravity of OGBV in Zimbabwe and why attention by concerned stakeholders and justice to the victims remain crucial if the issue is to be addressed and a new culture of tolerance and respect achieved.

4.5 Understanding the OGBV legal environment and its shortcomings

The study established that while the Data Protection Act of 20212 is one of the legal instruments governing OGBV, the legal environment in general has not been tight and effective enough in addressing OGBV issues in Zimbabwe. The law promotes/facilitates acceptance of cyber related evidence in courts. While the study found that 48.9% said they had heard about the Data Protection Act, a small proportion (4.5%) said they have read the Act while 44.9% said they have never heard about it.

Legal experts argue that the Act was enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic meaning priority, attention and resource allocation was largely towards health which affected public campaigns to make people aware of the Act and its provisions. Limited public awareness about this Act could be contributing to their lack of legal action against OGBV perpetrators.

Secondly, lack of trust on the police and justice system was also identified as another factor hindering legal action by OGBV victims as evidenced by responses that "akusizi ukuya emapholiseni" (It does not help to open a case with the police) by some respondents.

2. Especially Section 164b which is about cyber bullying and harassment

Views and experiences from the OGBV victims are that police officers tend to either trivialize or adopt a lackadaisical approach when dealing with OGBV and this has led to victims not reporting abuse cases. This was also supported by legal experts who indicated that OGBV in Zimbabwe was a problematic issue because institutions like the police were not effectively playing their role:

"The main objective of the Data Protection Act is to make you and me secure and safe on these online platforms and in terms of the protection of our data, but on these online platforms we see people being threatened, humiliated and insulted-what are the police doing about it?" (Interview, Legal expect)

Legal experts argued that the Section 57 of the Zimbabwean Constitution provides a strong foundation towards addressing OGBV in that it recognises Right to Privacy. However, the challenge lies with re-orienting and developing capacities of the various responsible institutions including the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) which plays an important role in facilitating justice towards victims of OGBV. Limited knowledge on these laws has created a false impression (from both victims and perpetrators) thatthose perpetrating cannot be caught and easily brought to book especially when they live "far" for example outside Zimbabwe yet, through Interpol, perpetrators can be arrested from any part of the world as explained by the legal experts that:

"It is easy for Zimbabwean police to liase with their counterparts in another country to effect an arrest and that person is brought to Zimbabwe" (Interview, legal expert)

From a legal standpoint, Zimbabwe needs to start testing these laws and establish whether they live up to the SADC model law so that Zimbabwe is in a position to amend and improve it if there are gaps. However, it is important to point out that some OGBV victims who were assisted by EWF to open cases against OGBV after experiencing it through WhatsApp platforms were successfully granted the Protection Order under the Domestic Violence Act of 2007.

4.6 Role of Government and its institutions, CSOs, media, ZRP in curbing OGBV

Findings are that different institutions and the government through the Gender Commission have been making efforts towards addressing OGBV. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission shared that OGBV remains a new phenomenon hence the institution was adapting on how to handle it. The role of the Commission has been to investigate cases brought before it and facilitate justice through working with the police and the judiciary system.

"While playing a monitorial role on issues of gender equality and equity in Zimbabwe, as a Commission we have been involved in investigating case brought before us and assisting victims to seek justice through working with the police and the courts" (Interview, Gender Commission, Bulawayo)

The study also found that there is no data base for OGBV cases by the Commission which is a limiting factor in tracking, monitoring and evaluating the progress made towards addressing OGBV in Zimbabwe. Further, while the Commission is working with various stakeholders to raise awareness on its role including on issues of OGBV, the study found that it was not effectively utilizing digital platforms (including social media) as it was inclined more towards physical spaces which limited its reach.

Further, while CSOs have been involved in raising awareness on OGBV and the legal frameworks regulating it, assisting victims to seek justice and offering other services such as counselling, similarly, these institutions are tracking and creating databases of OGBV cases in Zimbabwe. The impact is that, it is therefore difficult to assess the trends in OGBV over the years and gauge the impact of their work and other like minded institutions in reducing OGBV in Zimbabwe. The institutions of high learning (colleges, polytechnics and universities) are also weak in terms of creating safe spaces and environment that enable victims of OGBV to report their cases and get assistance including counselling services. As shared by participants from the academic sector:

"Currently there are no efforts towards assisting victims of OGBV especially female students who are attacked on social media and even WhatsApp groups they share with their classmates and peers. Universities need to take stern measures towards the perpetrators through punishable measures such as suspension and where necessary expulsion" (Interview, Academic practitioner)

Although there was acknowledgement that the police are an important stakeholder, it was argued that their limitations needed attention if efforts towards addressing OGBV are to be successful. These limitations related to their image which compromised public trust, their understanding and approach in addressing OGBV and issues related to skills and provision of adequate resources for them to function effectively. The study

found that while the media' was reporting on OGBV, the operational environmentdetected that it prioritises political and economic news which relegated OGBV issues to the periphery in terms of coverage, prominence and space allocation. Some participants also indicated that polarisation of the Zimbabwean media had an impact on how political activists who were victims of OGBV and their gendered victimisation tended to be presented in political lenses.

These challenges characterising efforts by various players towards addressing OGBV also brought forward insights on the role of socialisation agencies such as family, schools and churches in general. Questioning the role of these institutions in perpetuating OGBV one participant shared that:

"I was shocked recently when in this primary school here in Bulawayo they had invited an artist to perform during a function. The artist was singing "tese tirimahure hure" (we are all prostitutes) and the kids singing along, dancing and jumping. I am talking about primary school kids here! How can a school allow that?" (Interview, legal expert, Bulawayo)

As argued by other participants, the digital era requires a shift in socialization of children starting at family and such institutions and schools, churches and academic spaces. This is because, as brought forward by some participants, a shift in social behaviour should be addressed through instilling strong values and beliefs on gender equality and equity in general because OGBV is "a reflection of what happens offline" (Women rights activist). It is an extension, perpetuation and proliferation of everyday GBV experiences and encounters of females which require a holistic and collective approach as observed by one participant that:

"We might have all these laws, no matter how much we amend them, as long as the issue of socialization, how to safely use technology and respect of human rights, we are still going to have a problem" (Interview, Legal expert)

These findings bring forward the various efforts by different institutions in dealing with OGBV and further point to their limitations and gaps. While acknowledging the role played by these institutions towards this issue, the findings indicate the need for stronger partnerships and synergies if results are to be realised.

5. Conclusions

The study concludes that there is a high prevalence of OGBV in Zimbabwe and females are the major victims. It exists in different forms and victims are skeptical towards reporting these cases due to a number of reasons that include lack of awareness on the available litigation measures, lack of trust in the police and justicesystem and limited social support systems for the victims. While various institutions that include CSOs, women advocacy groups, human rights activists, media and government institutions such as the Zimbabwe Gender Commission are actively involved in addressing OGBV, there is need to document the trends and evaluation of the impact of the interventions. This requires a collective approach towards a common national goal by all institutions concerned across the political, social and cultural divide. The study has further revealed the negative impact of OGBV on its victims, friends and families, leading to self-censorship, withdrawal from the social media platforms, depression and loss of income for some. Survivors of sexualized forms of OGBV are also often stigmatised and blamed, and suffer damage to their person and reputation, affecting many aspects of their lives.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for CSOs:

1.   CSOs should foster partnerships and strengthen synergies through awareness campaigns targeted at young people in schools, colleges and universities on the impact of OGBV and available litigation measures for the victims.

2.   Invest in research, documentation arching of OGBV cases in Zimbabwe for evidence-based programming and monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the interventions.

3.   CSOs should establish partnerships with polytechnics and universities to establish OGBV friendly units that offer awareness, psycho-social support and legal assistance for victims of OGBV.

4.   Work with schools (ministry) through junior councils to raise awareness, empower students with knowledge and offer psycho-social support as part of "re-socialisation through Anti-OGBV clubs.

5.   Partner with religious institutions or bodies and provide programmes targeted at raising awareness, increasing knowledge on OGBV including available legal support for OGBV victims. Religious institutions (churches) can play a pivotal role in socialization of children at an early stage and at a family level.

6.   Advocate for stiffer legislation towards addressing OGBV in Zimbabwe.

6.2 Recommendations to government and its relevant institutions

1.   Ratify the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection.

2.   Provide gender-transformative training for law enforcement officers to enable them to investigate OGBV cases and prosecute the perpetrators. This should include provision of tech savvy gadgets such as smartphones and internet access to enable adequate investigations.

3.   Monitor and promote evidence-based interventions to prevent and respond to OGBV.

4.   The Zimbabwe Gender Commission to engage ZRP on the need for a special VFU that technologically responds to OGBV. This should include establishing a specific unit under the Victim Friendly Unit to specifically deal with OGBV and other technology related crimes as these are a new phenomenon that require attention.

5.   ZRP should adopt and use survivor centred approaches when responding to OGBV.

6.   Government should build capacities of the ZRP on new laws especially considering that Section 164 of the Data Protection Act of 2021 provides provisions on actions law enforcement agents should take.

7.   ZRP should provide safe, accessible, and transparent reporting and complaints procedures in local languages.

8.   Government should consider reviewing and incorporating OGBV in the school curriculum.

9.   Government should document, archive and publish periodic reports on OGBV trends in Zimbabwe.

6.3 Recommendations to the media:

1.   Educate the public on OGBV including its impact on the society and the legal routes that victims should pursue.

2.   Use survivor centred approaches when reporting cases of OGBV.

6.4 Recommendations for OGBV survivors:

1.   Minimise risk of OGBV by exercising caution at all times and minimise amount of information disclosed on social media.

2.   Ensure that personal details such as passwords are very secure.

3.   Do not retaliate in the heat of the moment, block the perpetrator/s.

4.   Remember to keep the evidence as this will assist in lodging a complaint with the police.

6.5 Recommendations to Churches, Schools and Universities

1.   These institutions need to OGBV victim friendly units where their members can report cases freely. Such units need to also provide other services that include counselling and legal advice to the victims

2.   Universities need to develop strong policies with clearly defined punitive actions such as suspensions and expulsions for perpetrators of OGBV.

3.   These institutions need to also engage in awareness campaigns on what OGBV, the legal provisions regarding it and possible actions that victims can take to seek justice

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