

The Impact Of Online Gender-Based Violence On Women's Career Advancement And Political Participation In Zambia

Emma Chomba Kapambwe

(Business Administration, University Of Zambia, Zambia)

Abstract:

This study examined the impact of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) on women's career advancement and political participation in Zambia. The research sought to assess the types and prevalence of OGBV, evaluate its effect on professional development and political engagement, and examine the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks. A mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating a structured survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey was completed by 101 women from five urban districts: Lusaka, Kitwe, Ndola, Livingstone, and Chipata. Findings revealed that 63% had personally experienced OGBV, and 74% were aware of the term. Participants were selected through random sampling from the ZICTA ICT Survey database of women aged 18 and above. Of the 110 women invited to participate, 101 responded, yielding a 92% response rate. The study showed that women in leadership positions and younger age groups were more susceptible to OGBV, with significant implications for their career progression. Among victims of OGBV, half reported negative professional impacts, while those without such experiences were significantly more likely to report positive outcomes. Political participation was also affected, with nearly 70% of non-victims still reporting that OGBV deterred their political careers, highlighting the pervasive climate of fear. The study also found that legal frameworks addressing OGBV in Zambia are poorly enforced and largely ineffective, with 60% of the respondents stating they were unaware of any laws. Overall, the study concludes that OGBV is a critical barrier to women's full participation in professional and political spaces in Zambia. It calls for stronger legal enforcement, targeted public awareness campaigns and institutional reforms.

Background: *The issue of gender-based violence is not new, but the rise of digital platforms has introduced new forms of abuse that disproportionately affect women. Online gender-based violence is now recognized as a significant human rights issue, limiting women's freedom of expression, economic participation, and political agency (Suzor, et al., 2018). While OGBV occurs worldwide, its effects in developing countries like Zambia are particularly severe due to lower digital literacy rates, weaker institutional protections, and deeply ingrained cultural biases against women in leadership roles (Bushra, et al., 2023). In Zambia, the 2022 National ICT survey reported that there is still a gender imbalance when it comes to digital participation, with statistics showing fewer women in comparison to men (ZICTA, 2023). Gaps in digital skills, limited access to technology and societal implications and restrictions already place women at a disadvantage in the digital realm (Bushra, et al., 2023). However, even for those that have access to digital spaces, OGBV acts as a major drawback that discourages women from actively using social media, networking sites, and digital advocacy platforms. Research from global and regional organizations suggests that OGBV leads to self-censorship, withdrawal from digital platforms, and, in extreme cases, career stagnation or termination (Suzor, et al., 2018). Furthermore, online violence in Zambia has had a very huge impact on political participation; women politicians and activists that are using digital platforms to connect with the public, advocate for policy change and engage in political debates have become targets of digital harassment campaigns (Mofya, 2022). These campaigns are sometimes organised by political opponents or anonymous internet trolls that seek to discredit the female leaders and silence their voices. Unfortunately, this has led to women in politics choosing to limit their online engagement, which in turn reduces their visibility and influence. This does not only affect the victims of OGBV but also the goal of achieving gender-balanced governance (Rheault, et al., 2019). In Zambia legal frameworks currently do not provide enough recourse for OGBV victims. While laws like the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021 provide some provisions that may address digital-related offences, enforcement remains a challenge (UNDP, 2023). Like gender-based violence, most OGBV cases are rarely reported to the authorities; this may be due to fear of retaliation and lack of confidence in the systems in place. Additionally, society has been known to blame victims of abuse rather than the perpetrators, which further discourages women from seeking help (Jurasz & Davidovic, 2024).*

Materials and Methods: *This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) on women's career advancement and political participation in Zambia. A total*

of 110 women aged 18 years and above from five urban districts (Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe, Livingstone, and Chipata) were randomly selected from the ZICTA ICT Survey database, of whom 101 respondents completed the survey, yielding a 92% response rate. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Quantitative data were analysed using STATA version 16.1, while qualitative responses were analysed thematically. Variables assessed included awareness and experience of OGBV, perceived impact on career progression and political participation, and awareness and effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks.

Results: The study found that 74.26% of respondents were aware of OGBV, while 63.37% reported having personally experienced it. The impact of OGBV on career progression varied by leadership status and experience, with a statistically significant association between OGBV experience and negative career outcomes ($p < 0.05$). Women in leadership positions were more likely to report adverse professional effects. Political participation was also negatively influenced, with many respondents indicating reduced willingness to engage in political activities due to fear of online harassment. Additionally, 60% of respondents were unaware of laws addressing OGBV, and even among those aware, a huge proportion perceived existing legal frameworks to be ineffective.

Conclusion: Online Gender-Based Violence constitutes a significant barrier to women's career advancement and political participation in Zambia. Despite relatively high awareness, OGBV remains prevalent and underreported, largely due to fear, stigma, and weak enforcement of legal protections. The findings underscore the need for stronger legal enforcement, increased public awareness, institutional safeguards, and survivor-centred support mechanisms to foster safer and more inclusive digital spaces for women.

Key Words: Online Gender-Based Violence; Career Advancement; Political Participation; Digital Safety; Zambia

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I. Introduction

The rise in integration of technology into our daily lives has also changed how individuals engage with professions and politics globally. Digital platforms offer new opportunities for women in Zambia and around the world to network, advocate and share ideas. However, these digital spaces also have significant challenges, especially for women, who often fall prey to online gender-based violence (OGBV). OGBV encompasses a wide variety of abuses, such as stalking, cyberbullying, harassment, slander, doxxing, violence threats, and voyeurism. While these assaults are damaging emotionally and psychologically, they are also participating in disabling behaviours, resulting in a decrease in women's engagement in the public and professional domains (UNFPA, 2024). Inadequate laws and the frequency of online harassment in digital spaces have allowed the culture of abuse to go unchecked (Al-Turif & Al-Sanad, 2023). In a local context, Zambia may have laws that address gender-based violence; however, they do not have specific sections that address OGBV. A report by (UNDP, 2023) highlights that most women in Zambia are not aware of the legal protections, and this deters them from reporting online abuse, as they have no knowledge of the appropriate legal recourse. Consequently, this lack of reporting reinforces a cycle where perpetrators act with impunity, and women remain excluded from digital participation (Hicks, 2021). This study explored the different spheres of OGBV in Zambia, with its focus on the impact that it has on career advancement and political participation. It further highlights some of the consequences of OGBV and its influence on gender disparities in leadership.

II. Material And Methods

This study used a mixed-methods approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods. Authors such as (Dawadi et al., 2021) have highlighted the advantages of using a mixed-method approach for research topics that are contentious or complex. Quantitative analysis is essential to establish baseline data on the frequency of the subject matter (Lim, 2024). The study was aimed at Zambian women aged 18 and older who were users of the Internet. A total of 110 participants were drawn from five urban districts in Zambia: Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe, Livingstone, and Chipata. These districts were selected based on their relatively high levels of internet penetration (ZICTA, 2023). Out of the 110 participants, 101 completed the questionnaire, representing a 92% response rate. Given the nature of the study the sample was considered adequate.

Study Design: This study used a descriptive and analytical design, which explored patterns, relationships, and effects of OGBV.

Study Location: Participants were drawn from five urban districts in Zambia: Lusaka, Ndola, Kitwe, Livingstone, and Chipata.

Study Duration: November 2024 to May 2025.

Sample size: 110 patients.

Sample size calculation: The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula (1977), which is appropriate for determining sample size in large populations when the exact size of the population is unknown (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Divakara, 2021).

Subjects & selection method: Random sampling was employed to ensure a diverse representation of respondents across the five selected urban districts. Using the ZICTA ICT Survey Report database, a list of women aged 18 and above who had previously participated in the survey was obtained. From this list, every 10th respondent was selected using an Excel formula until the required sample size was achieved. A total of 110 women were initially selected, and of these, 101 responded to the questionnaire, resulting in a 92% response rate. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via email.

Inclusion criteria:

1. Women aged 18 years and above
2. Residence in one of the selected urban districts
3. Active use of digital platforms
4. Willing to provide informed consent

Exclusion criteria:

1. Women below the age of 18
2. Individuals that do not use the internet
3. Incomplete survey responses

Procedure methodology

After written informed consent was obtained, a structured questionnaire was administered electronically. The questionnaire gathered information on Socio-demographic characteristics (age, education level, employment status, leadership experience), awareness and personal experience of Online Gender-Based Violence, perceived impact of OGBV on career advancement, perceived impact of OGBV on political participation and awareness and perceived effectiveness of legal and policy frameworks addressing OGBV. The questionnaire contained both closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to allow respondents to describe their experiences in their own words.

Statistical analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using STATA version 16.1. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise demographic characteristics and prevalence of OGBV. Inferential statistics, including Chi-square tests, were applied to examine associations between OGBV experience and career or political outcomes. A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

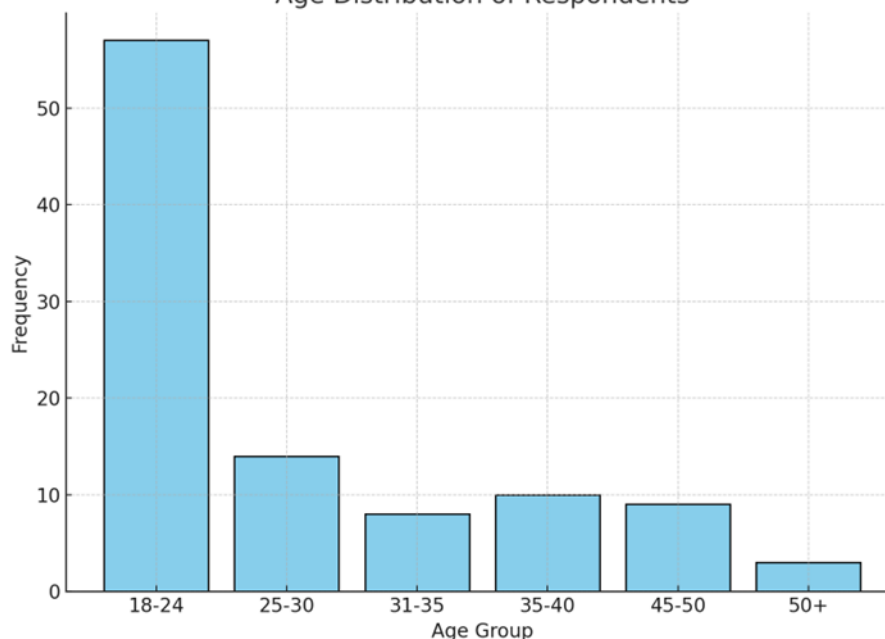
Qualitative data obtained from open-ended responses were analysed using thematic content analysis. Responses were coded, categorised, and grouped into themes to provide contextual depth and complement quantitative findings.

III. Result

Demographic Characteristics and OGBV

Figure no 1 presents the age distribution of the 101 women who participated in the study. Most respondents fall within the 18–24 age category, accounting for 57 individuals or 56.44% of the sample. The 25–30 age group comprises 14 respondents (13.86%), bringing the cumulative percentage to 70.30%. The 31–35 age bracket includes 8 participants (7.92%), while the 35–40 group has 10 respondents (9.90%). These two groups combined raise the cumulative total to 88.12%. Further, 9 respondents (8.91%) fall in the 45–50 age range, and the smallest group, those aged 50 and above, consists of only 3 respondents (2.97%). Together, these older age groups contribute to a final cumulative percentage of 100%.

Figure 1 Age Distribution of respondents
Age Distribution of Respondents



Awareness and experience of Online Gender – Based Violence

Table 1 presents the respondents' awareness of the term Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV). Out of the 101 women surveyed, 75 respondents (74.26%) indicated that they were aware of OGBV, while 26 respondents (25.74%) reported not being aware of the term.

Table no 1 Awareness of OGBV

Awareness of OGBV	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
No	26	25.74	25.74
Yes	75	74.26	100.00
Total	101	100.00	—

Table 2 represents the distribution of respondents based on their personal experiences with Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV). Out of a total sample of 101 women, the table shows that 64 participants (63.37%) reported having experienced OGBV, while 37 participants (36.63%) indicated they had not.

Table no 2 Experience of OGBV

OGBV Experience	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative (%)
No	37	36.63	36.63
Yes	64	63.37	100.00
Total	101	100.00	—

OGBV influence on professional development

Table 3 examines how respondents across different age groups perceived the impact of online gender-based violence (OGBV) on their career progression. Out of 88 respondents, the majority belonged to the 18–24 age group, comprising 55.68% of the total sample. Within this group, 18 women (52.94%) reported that OGBV had a negative impact on their career, while 31 women (57.41%) indicated a positive effect. Although younger women (aged 18–24) appear more likely to report positive outcomes in career progression after experiencing OGBV compared to older age groups, the association between age group and perceived career impact was not statistically significant. The Pearson chi-square test yielded $\chi^2(5) = 7.0406$ with a $(p = 0.218)$, suggesting that the differences observed across age groups could be due to chance.

Table 1 Career Progression by Age

Age Group	Negative Effect	Positive Effect	Total	% Negative	% Positive	% Total
18–24	18	31	49	52.94%	57.41%	55.68%
25–30	5	6	11	14.71%	11.11%	12.50%
31–35	1	6	7	2.94%	11.11%	7.95%
35–40	3	6	9	8.82%	11.11%	10.23%
45–50	4	5	9	11.76%	9.26%	10.23%
50+	3	0	3	8.82%	0.00%	3.41%
Total	34	54	88	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 4 presents the relationship between leadership experience and perceived career impact following online gender-based violence (OGBV). Among the 88 respondents, 48 reported having held leadership positions, while 40 had not. Among those without leadership experience, a significant majority (75%, or 30 out of 40) reported a positive effect of OGBV on their career progression, while only 25% (10 out of 40) indicated a negative effect. In contrast, among respondents with leadership experience, the responses were evenly split, 50% (24 out of 48) perceived a negative impact, and 50% reported a positive effect. Statistical analysis using Pearson's chi-square test yielded $\chi^2(1) = 5.7516$ with a ($p = 0.016$), indicating that the association between leadership experience and perceived career impact after OGBV is statistically significant. This suggests that individuals without leadership experience are more likely to perceive a positive career impact following OGBV compared to those with leadership roles.

Table 2 Career progression by leadership experience

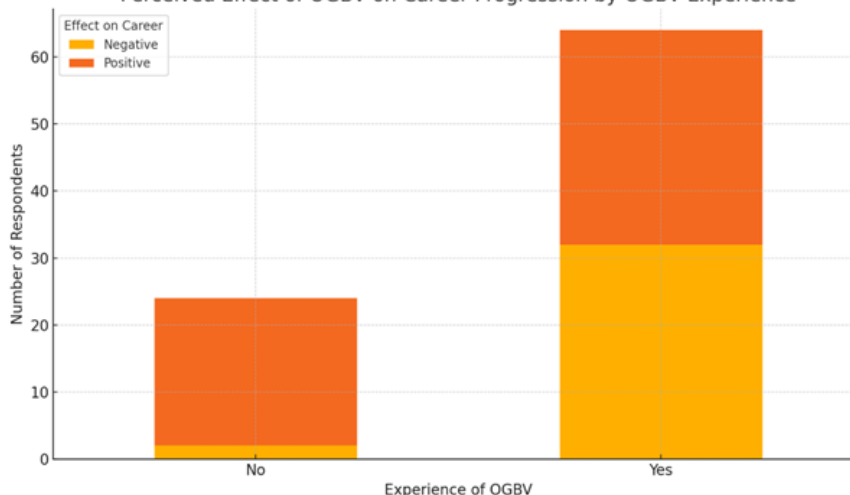
Leadership Experience	Negative Effect	Positive Effect	Total	% Negative	% Positive	% Total
No (0)	10	30	40	25.00%	75.00%	100.00%
Yes (1)	24	24	48	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%
Total	34	54	88	38.64%	61.36%	100.00%

Career Impact by Experience of OGBV

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between women's experiences of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) and its impact on their career progression. Among respondents who had not experienced OGBV, a substantial majority 91.67% (22 out of 24) reported a positive career impact, while only 8.33% reported negative outcomes. In contrast, among those who had experienced OGBV, the effect was evenly distributed, with 50% (32 out of 64) reporting negative impacts and 50% reporting positive impacts on their careers. Overall, 61.36% of the total sample ($N = 88$) perceived a positive effect on career progression, while 38.64% reported a negative effect.

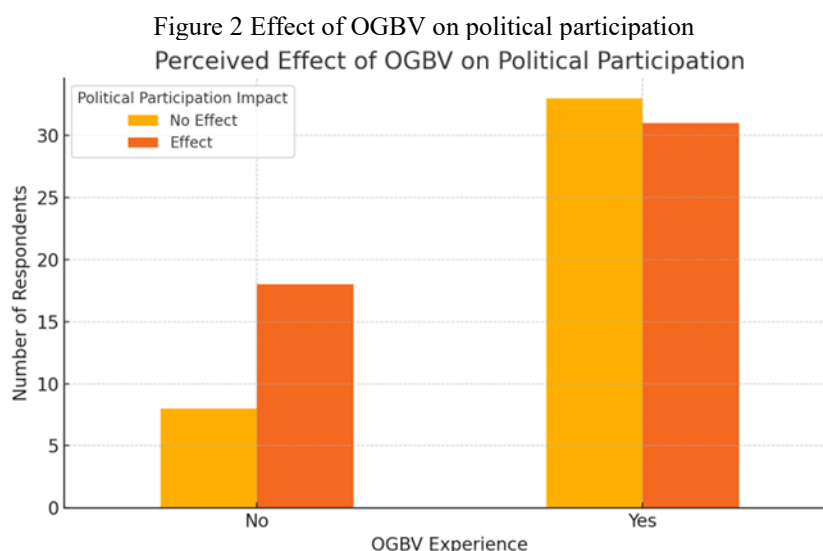
Notably, the association between experiencing OGBV and career impact was statistically significant, with Pearson's chi-square test yielding $\chi^2(1) = 12.7814$ and ($p = < 0.05$). This indicates that women who have never experienced OGBV are significantly more likely to report positive career progression compared to those who have experienced it.

Figure 1 Career Impact by Experience
Perceived Effect of OGBV on Career Progression by OGBV Experience



OGBV influence on political participation

Figure 3 shows the relationship between women's experience of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) and its effect on their political participation. Interestingly, 69.23% of women who had not personally experienced OGBV still reported a negative effect on their political engagement. Among those who had experienced OGBV, the responses were more balanced, with 51.56% reporting no effect and 48.44% indicating a negative impact. The Pearson chi-square test yielded $\chi^2(1) = 3.2230$ with a p-value of 0.073. This indicates that there is no statistically significant association between experiencing OGBV and its effect on political participation. However, the association approaches significance ($p = 0.073$), suggesting a potential trend that warrants further investigation, especially with a larger and more representative sample.



Evaluation of Legal and Policy Frameworks

The analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between legal awareness and the perceived effectiveness of policies addressing Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), as indicated by the Pearson chi-square test result ($\chi^2(1) = 17.5367$, $p = 0.000$). The findings show that the majority of respondents (60%) were unaware of existing laws on OGBV. However, women who were aware of these laws were significantly more likely to view the policies as effective.

Table 3 Awareness and Effectiveness of the laws

Awareness of Laws	Policy Effectiveness: Not Effective (0)	Policy Effectiveness: Effective (1)	Total
Not Aware (0)	51	6	57
Aware (1)	20	19	39
Total	71	25	96

Thematic Analysis for Qualitative Data

Despite growing awareness of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV), the findings reveal that many women still do not report their experiences. Two dominant themes emerged from the qualitative responses: fear and stigma, and lack of awareness or access to reporting mechanisms. These barriers play a major role in silencing victims and enhancing the cycle of online abuse.

Several respondents reported choosing not to report OGBV due to fear of being further victimized, ridiculed, or stigmatized. There was a concern that reporting the incident might lead to social embarrassment or backlash, especially in communities where victims are often blamed.

Example: "Just wanted the issue to die down, fear of victimization and embarrassment."

Another set of responses indicated that women did not report OGBV because they were not aware of the available reporting channels or mechanisms. The absence of accessible and visible systems for redress discouraged victims from taking further action.

Example: "Did not know who to report to."

IV. Discussion

The age distribution of respondents, as illustrated in Figure 1 above indicates that the largest range of women who participated in the study fall between the 18–24 age group, representing 56.44% of the sample. This youthful demographic suggests that young women are not only more engaged in digital spaces but are also more accessible for online surveys and research on online gender-based violence (OGBV). The second-largest group is the 25–30 age bracket at 13.86%, followed by smaller proportions in older age categories.

This age distribution is similar to a report by (UNWOMEN, 2015) which found that younger women, particularly those aged 18–29, are more likely to experience online violence due to their higher levels of engagement on digital platforms. Similarly, (Suzor et al., 2018) relayed that women in this age bracket tend to rely more on digital tools for education, career development, and social engagement, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to OGBV.

In the Zambian context, (ZICTA, 2023) shows that internet usage is the highest among the age groups of 18–35 years old. The similarity in the trend of age groups shows the importance of tailoring online violence awareness and support to young women.

In the context of awareness and experience of OGBV the results from Table 1 indicate that a significant majority of respondents (74.26%) were aware of the term “Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV),” while 25.74% were not. This high level of awareness shows that the public is beginning to be aware of issues around online safety. However, awareness alone does not necessarily translate into preventive behavior or reporting, as will be addressed in later sections.

Table 2 shows that 63.37% of respondents have personally experienced OGBV. This statistic is consistent with international findings by (UNWOMEN, 2015), which reported that nearly three-quarters of women globally have encountered some form of online violence.

These results confirm that OGBV is not something that should be ignored it is a lived reality for the majority of women in digital spaces. This prevalence raises alarm, particularly when considering that online violence can lead to emotional distress, reputational harm, and disengagement from professional and civic spaces (Citron, 2023).

Furthermore, the relatively high awareness but continued prevalence of OGBV suggests a gap between awareness and action. This translates to what (Jurasz & Davidovic, 2024) describe as “institutional inertia,” this is where legal frameworks and support systems exist but are either poorly enforced or inaccessible to most women.

When it comes to the effect of OGBV on professional development Table 3 shows that out of 88 respondents, the majority belonged to the 18–24 age group, which made up 55.68% of the total. This suggests that a greater share of younger women felt that, despite experiencing OGBV, their career trajectories remained positive. This can be attributed to the fact that younger women are able to navigate the digital space in comparison to older women. In contrast, the older age groups reported negative impacts. This could suggest that older women are more likely to perceive OGBV as detrimental to their career progression because they may not be cognizant with online spaces.

Further, Table 4 shows that among respondents without leadership experience, 75% reported a positive impact on their career progression despite OGBV, while only 25% reported a negative effect. Conversely, those with leadership experience were evenly split, with 50% reporting a negative effect. This may suggest that women in leadership positions are more exposed to targeted abuse, which aligns with findings by (Ackson, 2024) and (Krook, 2018) who argue that public visibility escalates the risk of gender-based attacks. Professional women and female leaders are more likely to be scrutinized, attacked for their competence, or subjected to doxxing and slander, thereby experiencing a greater toll on their careers. The significant chi-square test result ($\chi^2(1) = 5.75$, $p = 0.016$) confirms that leadership status is a statistically significant variable affecting perceived career impact. These findings suggest a need for tailored support structures for women in leadership, including workplace systems and psychosocial support, to mitigate the career-limiting effects of OGBV.

Figure 2 provides more insight. Among those who had not experienced OGBV, 91.67% reported a positive career impact, while only 8.33% experienced negative effects. In contrast, among those who had experienced OGBV, 50% reported negative effects. The Pearson chi-square test ($\chi^2(1) = 12.78$, $p < 0.001$) indicates a highly significant relationship between OGBV experience and career outcome. This statistically significant correlation supports earlier literature by (Eckert, 2018), who observed that victims of OGBV often withdraw from online engagements that are essential for career advancement, such as webinars, e-networking, and digital branding. Stewart (2024) further notes that exposure to image-based sexual abuse in the workplace can result in job loss, missed promotions, or opting out of leadership roles altogether. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating online protection into workplace policies.

With regard to OGBV influence on political participation Figure 3 illustrates the impact of Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) on political participation. The data reveals that among respondents who had not personally experienced OGBV, 69.23% still reported a negative effect on their political engagement. For those who had experienced OGBV, the responses were nearly evenly split, with 48.44% reporting a negative impact

and 51.56% indicating no effect. Although the Pearson chi-square value of 3.2230 ($p = 0.073$) does not reach a conventional statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), the trend observed offers important qualitative implications. The finding that even women who have not directly experienced OGBV still feel its chilling effects on political participation suggests that there is a climate of fear and self-censorship. This aligns with research by (Pollicino & De Gregorio, 2021), who found that the “threat environment” in digital spaces can be as limiting as actual abuse. The results may imply that the fear of being attacked online discourages women from taking up political spaces. This dynamic was echoed in the 2021 Zambia National Women’s Lobby report, which noted that online violence targeting women candidates in the national election created a hostile environment that suppressed their digital engagement and, by extension, their political visibility (Mwenya, 2020).

Krook (2018) and (Holm, 2020) further argue that OGBV functions as a form of “digital gatekeeping” that undermines women’s participation in politics, reinforcing patriarchal systems. Moreover, the fact that nearly half of the women who experienced OGBV reported a negative political impact underscores how digital abuse actively deters civic participation. As (Vegt, 2024) observes in her study of European political contexts, gendered abuse often targets a woman’s moral standing or family roles rather than her policy positions, discouraging even seasoned leaders from engaging publicly. While the current findings fall short of statistical significance, they provide strong indicative evidence that the consequences of OGBV are not limited to direct victims. The ambient threat of online abuse appears to create a broader culture of disengagement, especially in the political arena.

The analysis of the cross-tabulated data between awareness of laws and perceptions of policy effectiveness reinforces the critical role of public legal literacy in shaping trust in the justice system. As (UNWOMEN, 2015) notes, lack of awareness regarding legal protections remains one of the most persistent barriers preventing women from reporting and seeking redress for online abuse. Similarly, the (UNDP, 2023) report highlights that many women in Zambia are unfamiliar with the provisions of the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021, which contributes to perceptions of institutional inaction and impunity.

This association was statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$), highlighting the importance of legal awareness in influencing perceptions of policy effectiveness in combating OGBV. Perceptions of effectiveness are shaped not only by the existence of legislation but also by its visibility, enforcement, and accessibility (Hahn, 2022). Awareness can enhance a woman’s sense of agency and safety, making it more likely that she will regard policy frameworks as credible and functional (Lwamba, 2022). However, the data also reveals a concerning disconnect, even among those who were aware of the laws, over half (20 out of 39) still perceived them as ineffective. This suggests that awareness alone is not enough. Effective implementation, enforcement, and providing support to survivors is equally essential (Jurasz & Davidovic, 2024). To bridge this gap, targeted outreach and legal education campaigns are needed, particularly in marginalized communities where digital literacy and access to legal resources are limited. Institutions must also invest in making reporting mechanisms more visible, accessible, and responsive to build public confidence and foster meaningful engagement with the justice system.

The reluctance to report OGBV due to fear and stigma aligns with broader literature indicating that survivors often internalize feelings of shame and anticipate social rejection or disbelief when they speak out (Citron, 2023). In patriarchal societies, victims of gender-based violence are frequently blamed, which discourages disclosure and reinforces (Wright et al., 2018). Fear of retaliation especially in closely knit digital communities, further dissuades women from reporting online abuse.

The lack of awareness and access to reporting mechanisms is another well-documented barrier. According to (UNWOMEN, 2015), many women globally are unaware of how to report online abuse or are unsure of what legal resources are available to them. In Zambia, the (UNDP, 2023) and (ZICTA, 2023) reports both highlight low levels of digital literacy and limited awareness of the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act of 2021, which contributes to underreporting. Even when structures are in place, their invisibility hinders effectiveness.

These findings suggest that legal reforms must be complemented by systemic changes in public education, service delivery, and social norms. Victim centred communication strategies, clearer guidance on reporting procedures, and training for law enforcement can help build trust and reduce the barriers to justice (Shimoyachi, 2024).

V. Conclusion

The study concludes that Online Gender-Based Violence (OGBV) is a significant barrier to women's empowerment in Zambia. The findings indicate that OGBV negatively influences both career advancement and political participation, creating a hostile digital environment that discourages engagement, silences voices, and promotes self-censorship among women. Although awareness of OGBV is relatively high, there is a clear gap between knowledge and action—many victims do not report incidents due to lack of faith in legal redress or fear of retaliation.

Furthermore, the study reveals that women in leadership positions and younger women are disproportionately affected. Leadership visibility increases vulnerability to digital abuse, and younger women, being more digitally active, are frequently exposed. Existing legal frameworks such as the Cyber Security and Cyber Crimes Act (2021), while relevant, are not sufficiently enforced or gender responsive. Institutional responses remain weak, and survivor-centred mechanisms are limited or non-existent. Without targeted interventions, OGBV will continue to deepen gender inequality and limit women's full participation in Zambia's socio-economic and political spheres.

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