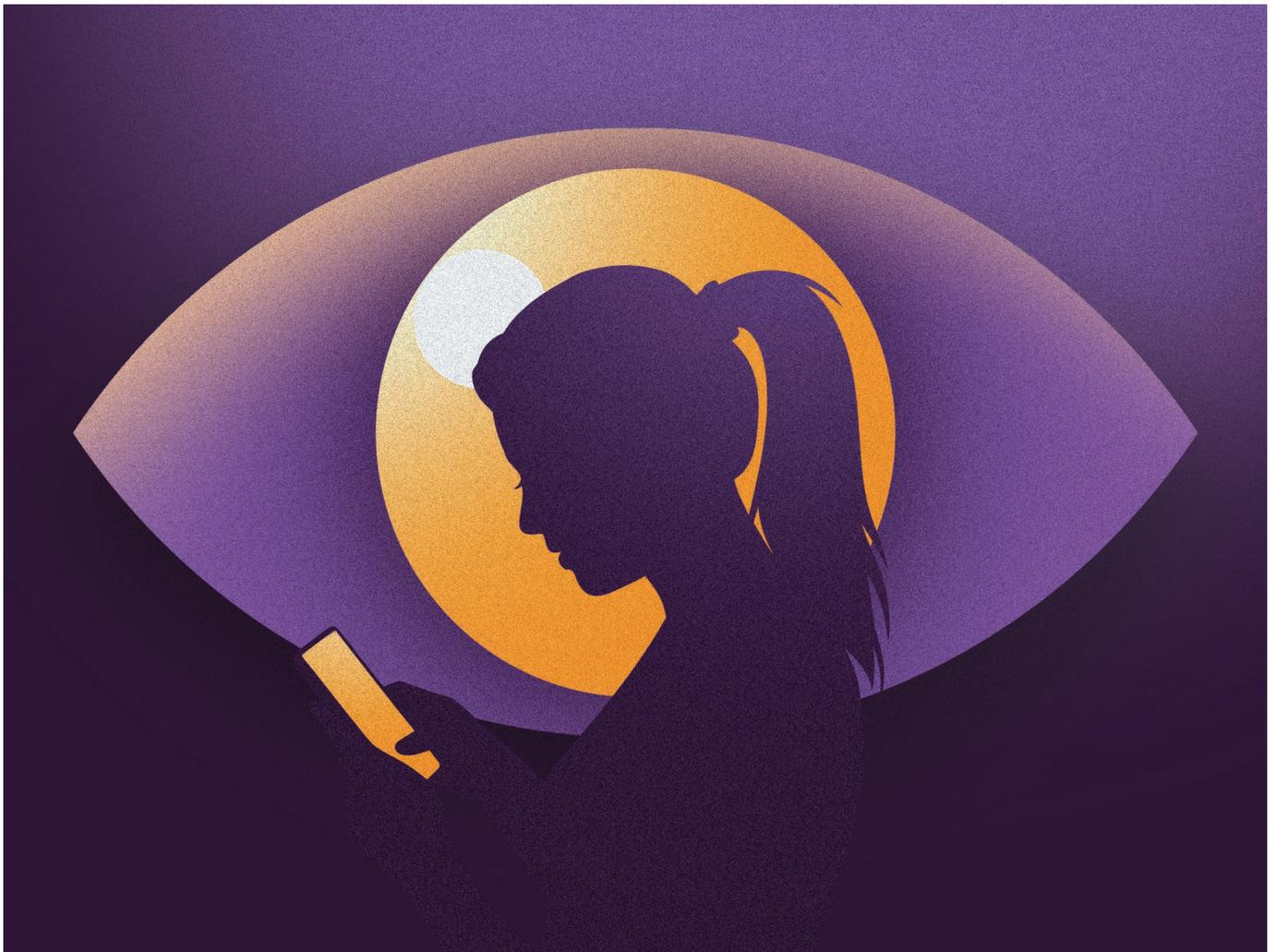# Percentage of women who experienced online harassment climbs to 27%

Online Abuse Against American Women is Escalating

National Organization for Women
Incogni Research Team

In its second year, a survey of 10,000 American women, conducted by Incogni in partnership with the National Organization for Women (NOW), revealed that the problem of online abuse against women is escalating.

A year ago, nearly 1 in 4 women reported having experienced online abuse, including cyberbullying, sexual harassment, doxxing, and AI-generated harassment. The new survey results show that number is climbing, with reported online abuse increasing by 17%. While last year's results established a baseline, this year's data allows us to begin identifying patterns.

The most revealing findings are not just in the overall rate of reported harassment. They indicate that online abuse does not operate randomly, but mirrors and may amplify existing social inequalities affecting women—especially younger generations, members of the LGBTQ+ community, women of color, and professionals in high-visibility or male-dominated fields. Respondents from these groups reported markedly elevated rates of online harassment, higher levels of fear, and lower trust in systems meant to protect them.

Skepticism toward legal protections remains widespread, with many women who experience abuse choosing not to report it—not because the harm is minor, but because they believe action will not help or may even make matters worse. This distrust is especially pronounced among communities that already experience higher rates of abuse, reinforcing a cycle in which those most exposed feel least protected.

The women who experienced harassment were also dramatically more likely to self-censor or entirely disengage from online activity. Especially when combined with findings that indicate women in journalism and media experience much higher rates of abuse, this raises the question of whether online harassment may function as a mechanism that contributes to women being underrepresented in certain fields. Does it shape who feels able to speak, lead, or participate in public?

This year's survey is part of an ongoing effort to track how online harassment evolves over time. What emerges is not only an increase in reported abuse, but a clearer picture of how exposure, identity, vocation, and institutional trust intersect. The findings point to a digital environment where participation and safety are unevenly distributed, and where visibility can carry a cost.

Key findings:

- **27%** of surveyed women reported experiencing **online abuse or harassment,** a 4 percentage-point increase from last year's 23%.

- **More than half** (55%) of **LGBTQ+ women claimed to have experienced online harassment,** compared to 27% in the overall sample.

- **Almost 1 in 2 Gen Z** respondents reported experiencing **online abuse.**

- **Nearly 1 in 3** (32%) **women of color** reported experiencing online abuse, compared to 24% of White women.

- **About 1 in 8 women** (12.9%) reported **fearing for their physical safety** as a result of online harassment.

- **1 in 25 respondents** (4%) **claimed to have experienced physical abuse** linked to having personal data available online, while 7% reported experiencing online harassment for the same reason.

- Women in more **public or highly visible occupations** reported **higher rates of online harassment (41%)** compared to lower visibility occupations **(31%).**

- **40%** of respondents claimed that **someone they knew personally had perpetrated online abuse** against them at least once.

- Only **14%** of women stated that they believe current laws sufficiently protect victims of online abuse.

- **79%** of respondents agreed that personal information found online is used to target people for harassment, yet only 17% reported attempting to remove such data.

Table of contents

1. Methodology

This study was conducted by the Incogni Research Team in collaboration with the National Organization for Women (NOW). A nationally representative sample of 10,000 adult female residents of the United States was surveyed using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) method. Quotas for age, ethnicity, and place of residence were established based on US demographic data to ensure a representative sample. Data collection took place between January 8, 2026, and January 16, 2026.

The primary objective of the survey was to identify the most common forms of online abuse experienced by women and analyze the data by age, ethnicity, and geographic location. Additionally, the study examined the accessibility of women's personal data online and its potential exploitation by malicious actors.

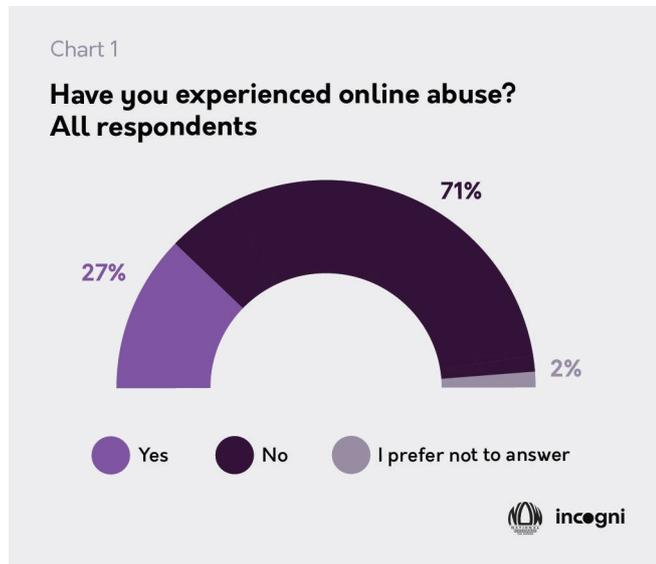The full survey script is available in Appendix 1.

Definition of abuse and harassment types

Abuse	Definition
Cyberbullying	Bullying or harassment through social media, messaging apps, or online forums
Doxxing	Public release of private information about an individual without their consent
Swatting	A false report to emergency services to prompt a SWAT team response at the target's location
Trolling	Posting offensive or inflammatory comments to provoke reactions and disrupt discussions
Online impersonation	Creating fake profiles or accounts to impersonate and defame an individual
Hate speech	Offensive statements against a particular race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation group
Sexual harassment	Unwanted and inappropriate sexual comments
Cyberstalking	Persistent and unwanted attention, monitoring, or contact online
Revenge porn	Sharing intimate images or videos of an individual without their consent
Harassment in online gaming	Harassment while playing online games
Physical threats	Death threats, sexual threats, or threats of any kind of physical violence
AI deepfakes	Content depicting real or non-existent people in unfavorable ways that is created with the help of artificial intelligence tools
AI-targeted harassment	Bullying and harassment using AI-generated messages or bots
Mass false reporting by AI	False reporting of social media accounts or comments in great numbers using AI bots
AI-assisted sextortion	AI-generated messages claiming to possess compromising content, used to extort or blackmail the victim
AI impersonation	AI-generated content impersonating someone, either to commit fraud or to discredit or bully the victim
AI-assisted stalking or monitoring	AI tools used to find, aggregate, or infer personal data to track online activity, posts, or location patterns over time

Table 1

2. Results

2.1. Women Overall

Chart 1

Have you experienced online abuse? All respondents

- 71% No
- 27% Yes
- 2% I prefer not to answer

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

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Chart 2

Types of online abuse women have experienced

Type	Percentage
Cyberbullying	11.8%
Trolling	9.8%
Sexual harassment	9.3%
Hate speech	8.2%
Cyberstalking	7.1%
Physical threats	6.4%
Online impersonation	4.9%
Harrassment in online gaming	3.6%
Revenge porn	2.6%
Doxxing	2%
AI impersonation	1.4%
AI deepfakes	1.2%
AI-assisted stalking or monitoring	1.1%
Mass false reporting by AI	1%
AI-targeted harassment	0.9%
AI-assisted sextortion	0.8%
Swatting	0.7%
None	0.6%
I prefer not to answer	0.5%

Respondents could select multiple answers.

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27% of surveyed women reported experiencing online abuse or harassment—a 4-point increase from last year's 23%.

While this indicates that rates of online abuse are trending upward, some of the difference may be attributed to growing social openness around discussing online abuse and harassment. Compared to the previous year, "I prefer not to answer" responses went down by 2%.

On the other hand, awareness of different forms of online abuse haven't changed significantly. Most categories varied by no more than 1% compared to last year, indicating that public education and awareness efforts may not have yet shifted perceptions of harm in a meaningful way.

Cyberbullying remains the most common form of online abuse, increasing from 10% to 12% year over year. Trolling rose by 2%, becoming the second most reported type of harassment and overtaking sexual harassment, which remained relatively stable (9.3% this year compared to 9.1% last year).

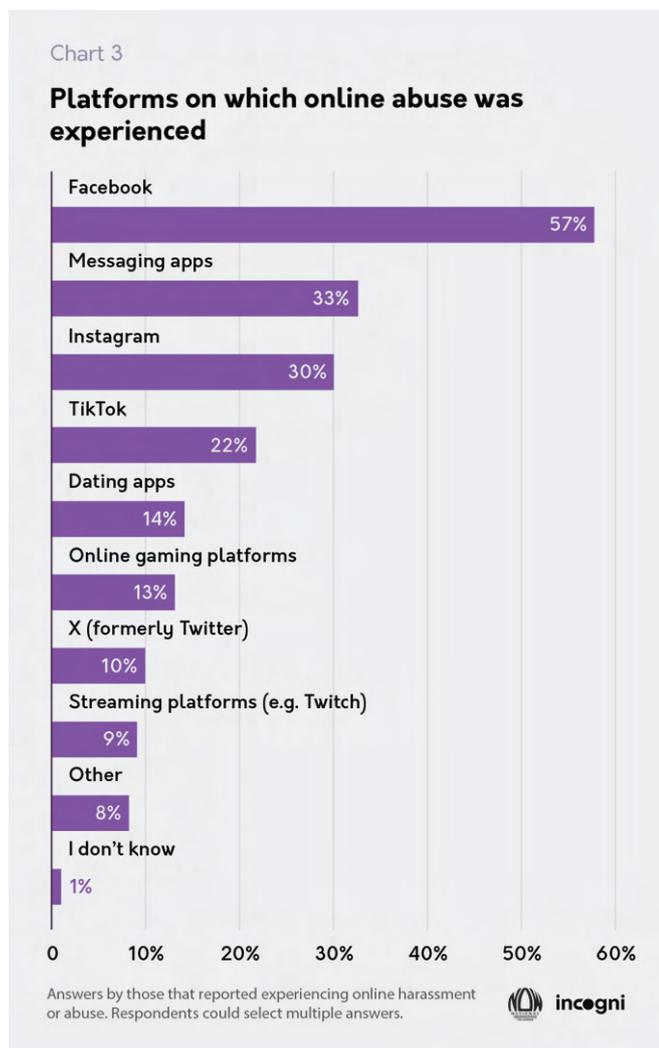AI-enabled harassment was rare, overall. Approximately 1% of respondents reported experiencing AI impersonation, deepfakes, AI-assisted stalking, or AI-driven monitoring. Reports of deepfakes decreased slightly (by less than one percentage point). However, the true prevalence of AI-assisted abuse may be difficult to assess, as victims may not always be able to determine whether AI tools were involved.
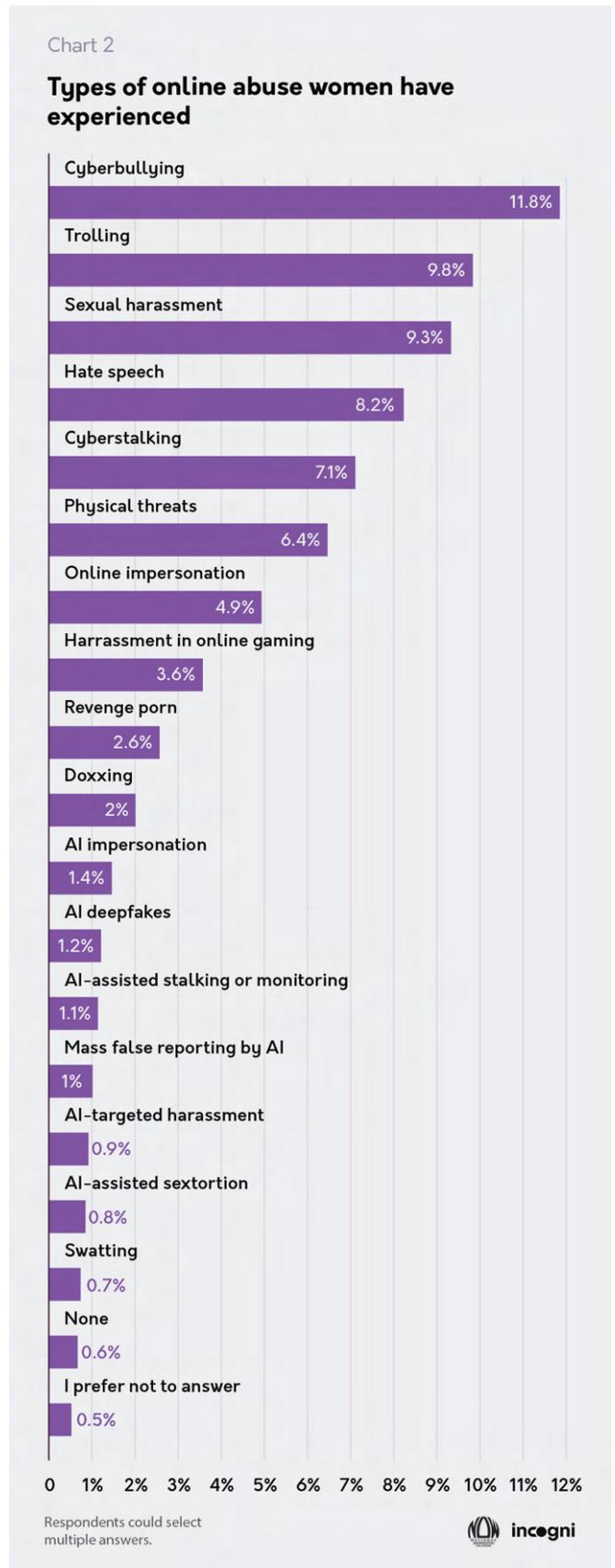
Facebook leads the way as the main platform through which women experience abuse and harassment, being indicated as a medium for abuse by almost 60% of those who reported having experienced harassment.

Messaging apps, which by definition enable interpersonal communication, are the second most common channel through which abuse and harassment takes place, with 33% reporting this as a medium of abuse.

Instagram and TikTok, often associated with younger user bases, also enable abusive and harassing communications, with around a quarter of respondents saying the abuse they experienced occurred on these platforms.

Chart 3

Platforms on which online abuse was experienced

Facebook 57%
Messaging apps 33%
Instagram 30%
TikTok 22%
Dating apps 14%
Online gaming platforms 13%
X (formerly Twitter) 10%
Streaming platforms (e.g. Twitch) 9%
Other 8%
I don't know 1%

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse. Respondents could select multiple answers.
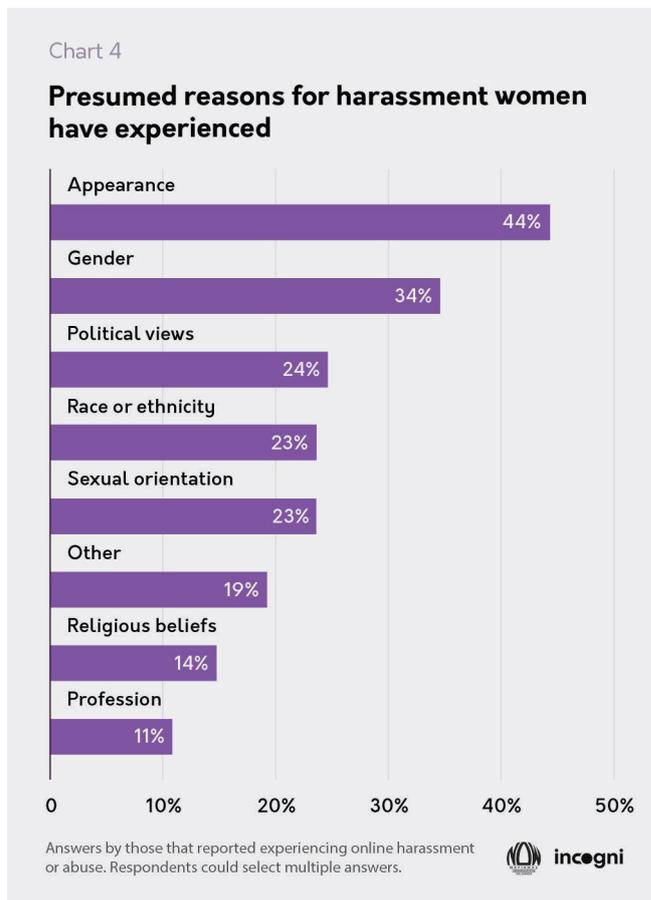
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In an effort to understand the motivation behind online abuse and harassment, respondents were asked to infer the reasons they may have been targeted.

Appearance was the most common reason inferred, being reported by nearly half of the women (44%) who experienced online abuse and harassment, followed by gender, which was reported by over 1 in 3.

These two characteristics stood out significantly, with a steep drop off in frequency between them and political views, which was the third-most commonly inferred reason.

According to the survey, women's occupations were the inferred reason for abuse in 1 in 10 cases, and religious beliefs were held responsible for 1 in 7 instances of harassment.

Chart 4

Presumed reasons for harassment women have experienced

Appearance 44%
Gender 34%
Political views 24%
Race or ethnicity 23%
Sexual orientation 23%
Other 19%
Religious beliefs 14%
Profession 11%

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse. Respondents could select multiple answers.
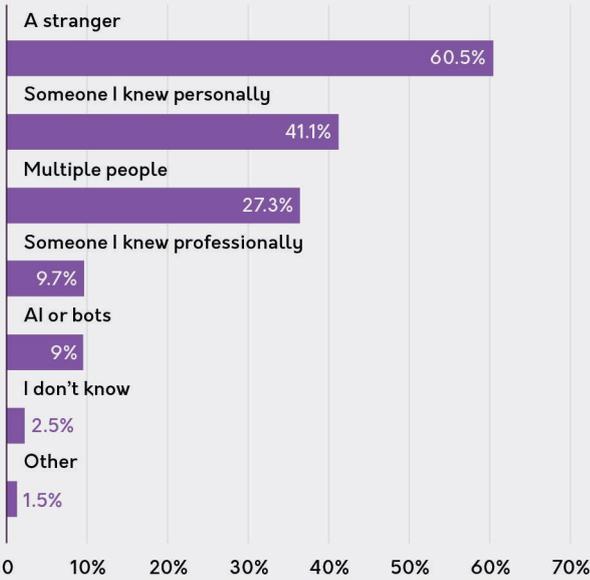
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The survey results also revealed that online abuse was most often claimed to have come from strangers, at a rate of 60% for those who reported experiencing abuse. Over 40% of respondents who claimed to have experienced online abuse also reported that it came from 'someone [they] knew personally.'

Interestingly, nearly 10% of respondents who claimed to have experienced online abuse reported being targeted by bots or AI, a relatively new yet common form of harassment. What stood out to Incogni's researchers was respondents' ability to identify such cases. While not all such attributions may be correct, the relatively high frequency suggests this is a phenomenon worth investigating further.

The third-most common source of online abuse was multiple people (27%), highlighting the public nature of online interactions and the ease with which people can get involved (on the side of the victim or the abuser).

Chart 5

Sources of online harassment and abuse women have experienced

A stranger
60.5%

Someone I knew personally
41.1%

Multiple people
27.3%

Someone I knew professionally
9.7%

AI or bots
9%

I don't know
2.5%

Other
1.5%

0   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse. Respondents could select multiple answers.
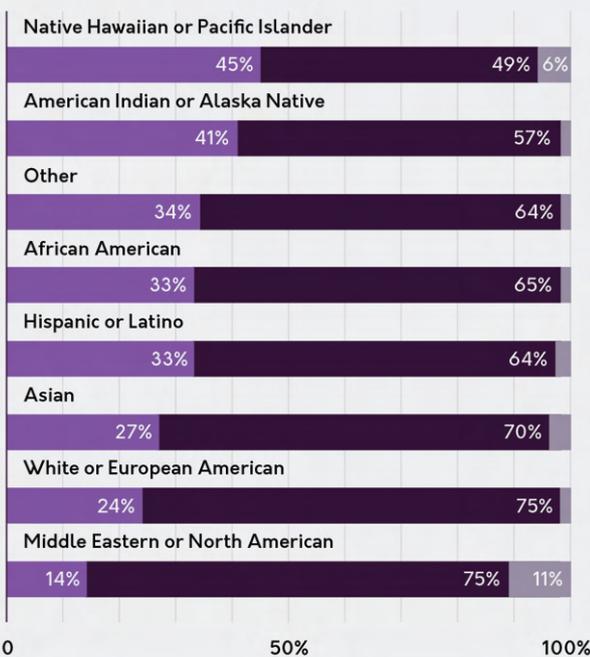
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2.2. Ethnicity

Chart 6

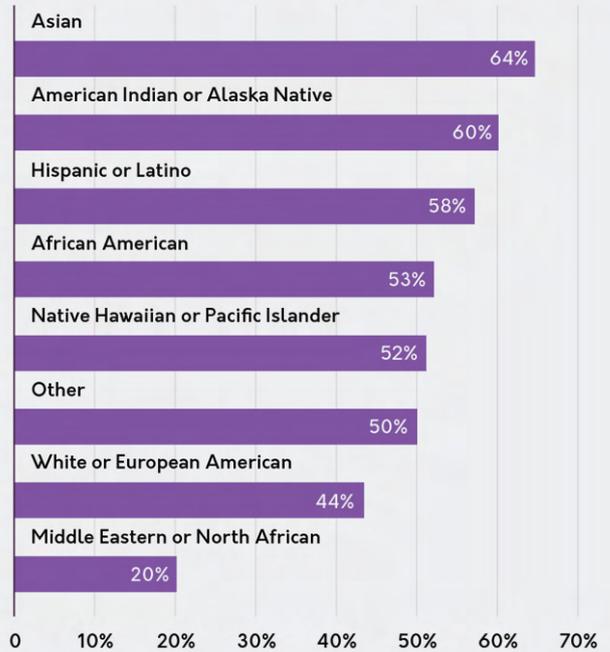**Have you experienced online harassment or abuse? By ethnicity**

● Yes   ● No   ● I prefer not to answer

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
45%   49%   6%

American Indian or Alaska Native
41%   57%

Other
34%   64%

African American
33%   65%

Hispanic or Latino
33%   64%

Asian
27%   70%

White or European American
24%   75%

Middle Eastern or North American
14%   75%   11%

0   50%   100%

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Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander respondents were the group most likely to have experienced online harassment or abuse, at a rate of 45%. Other ethnic minorities, with the exception of Middle Eastern or North African and Asian respondents, reported experiencing abuse at a rate of 33% or more.

Chart 7

How many women have feared for their safety due to online abuse, by ethnicity

Asian
64%

American Indian or Alaska Native
60%

Hispanic or Latino
58%

African American
53%

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
52%

Other
50%

White or European American
44%

Middle Eastern or North African
20%

0   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse.

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Across the sample, those who reported experiencing online harassment or abuse said that they feared for their physical safety at a rate of 48%. Notably, all ethnic groups except White and Middle Eastern/North African respondents had rates higher than the total average.

Asian respondents were less likely to have reported experiencing abuse (27%), but in cases where abuse was experienced, the fear for personal safety was more common (64%).

2.3. LGBTQ+ status

The surveyed population included over 1,000 female respondents who identified as being LGBTQ+. To better understand the intersectional issues in online abuse and harassment, Incogni's researchers explored some questions with the LGBTQ+ community specifically in mind.
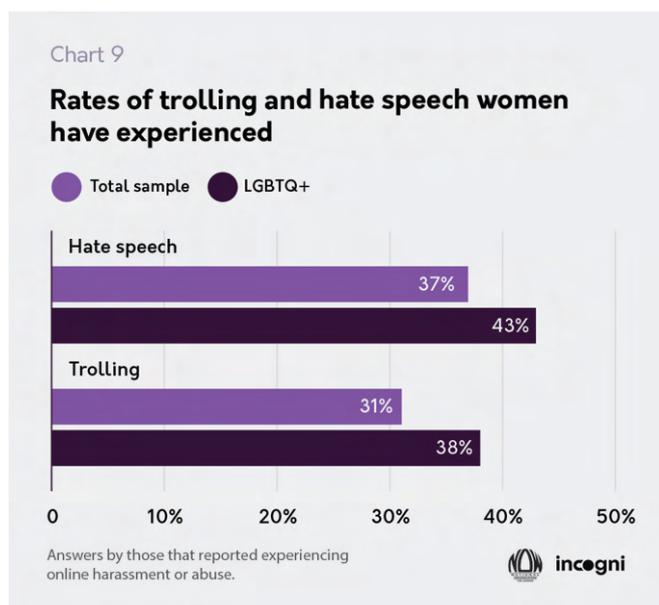
A finding that stood out was the frequency with which these respondents reported experiencing abuse: a whopping 55% compared to the 26% in the overall

sample, revealing that LGBTQ+ women claimed to have experienced online harassment or abuse at more than double the rates of heterosexual women.

Chart 8

How many LGBTQ+ respondents have experienced online abuse?

55% Yes
43% No
2% I prefer not to answer

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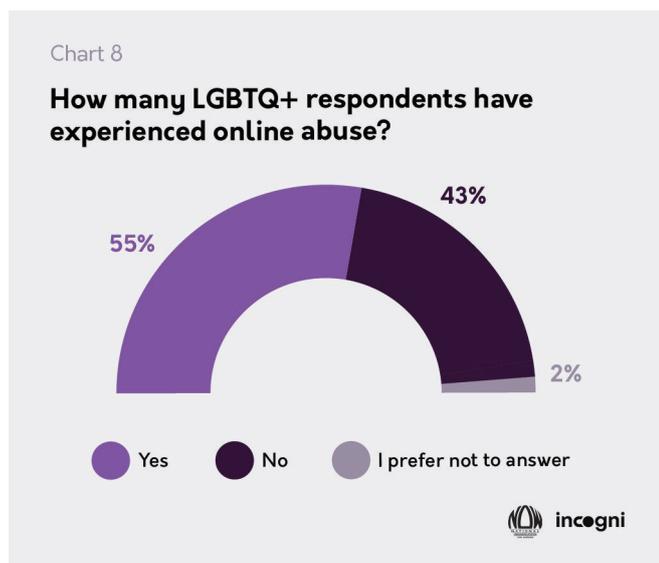
Members of the LGBTQ+ community also reported higher (although not statistically significantly so) rates of:

- Fear for physical safety (by those who reported experiencing online harassment), which was 57% among LGBTQ+ respondents compared to 46% for the overall sample
- In cases where a woman had personal information available online, members of the LGBTQ+ community reported having tried to remove that information at a rate of 62% versus 41% in the overall sample.

Chart 9

Rates of trolling and hate speech women have experienced

Total sample · LGBTQ+

Hate speech
- 37%
- 43%

Trolling
- 31%
- 38%

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse.

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These highlighted types of abuse showed some of the greatest discrepancies between LGBTQ+ respondents and the overall sample, with hate speech being

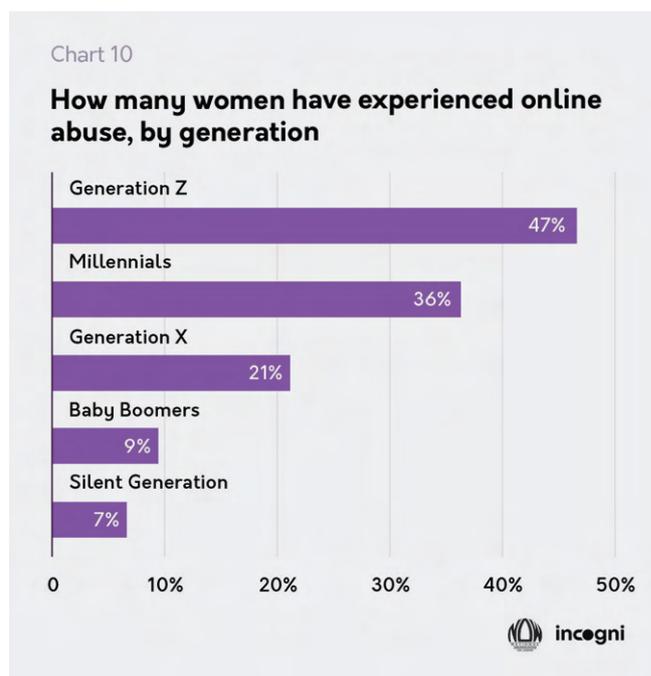reported 6% more frequently and trolling 7% more frequently by LGBTQ+ members.

Another significant difference noted by Incogni's research team was that LGBTQ+ respondents experienced abuse coming from multiple people more frequently (37% versus 25% in the total sample).

The survey also revealed that members of the LGBTQ+ community report feeling less safe and protected, with 56% having reported feeling unsafe in the current political situation compared to 50% in the overall sample.

2.4. Age

Age is an important aspect of how individuals experience their online lives, something that manifested as significant differences in responses among different age groups.

Generally, reported rates of abuse vary inversely with age, increasing from 7% in the Silent Generation to 9% for the Baby Boomers, and only reaching double digits for Gen X (at 21%). Over 1 in 3 Millennial women and almost half of Gen Z respondents reported experiencing online abuse.

Chart 10

How many women have experienced online abuse, by generation

Generation Z — 47%
Millennials — 36%
Generation X — 21%
Baby Boomers — 9%
Silent Generation — 7%

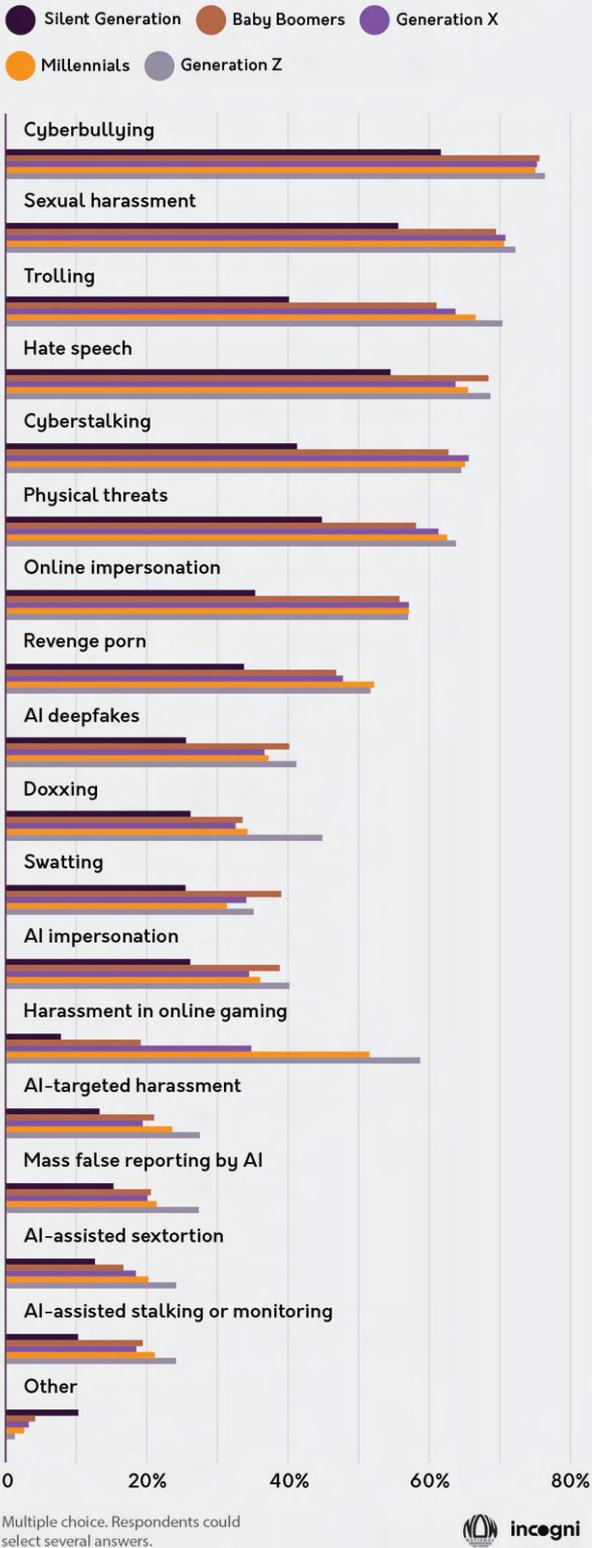0 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

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The survey also explored awareness levels of different abuse types across the age groups.

While there is a clear generational awareness gap between the Silent Generation and other generations across all the abuse types, the frequency with which Baby Boomer women are familiar with the investigated abuse types is of particular interest.

Chart 11

Types of online abuse women have awareness of, by generation

● Silent Generation ● Baby Boomers ● Generation X
● Millennials ● Generation Z

Cyberbullying

Sexual harassment

Trolling

Hate speech

Cyberstalking

Physical threats

Online impersonation

Revenge porn

AI deepfakes

Doxxing

Swatting

AI impersonation

Harassment in online gaming

AI-targeted harassment

Mass false reporting by AI

AI-assisted sextortion

AI-assisted stalking or monitoring

Other

0   20%   40%   60%   80%

Multiple choice. Respondents could select several answers.

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- Cyberbullying
- AI impersonation
- Swatting
- Deepfakes.

The results suggest that members of the Baby Boomer generation could be more exposed to these types of abuse and harassment in the media they consume.

2.5. Location

Respondents in Alaska, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii reported having experienced abuse the most frequently (at rates of 47%, 39%, and 38%, respectively).

Generally, a slightly higher percentage of respondents from the West Coast reported having experienced abuse.

The lowest rates of online abuse were reported by women from Oklahoma, Connecticut, and Iowa (14%, 16%, and 17% respectively). Regionally, the lowest rates come from the northeast.

Map 1

**Rates of respondets having experienced online abuse or harassment, by region**

31%   24%
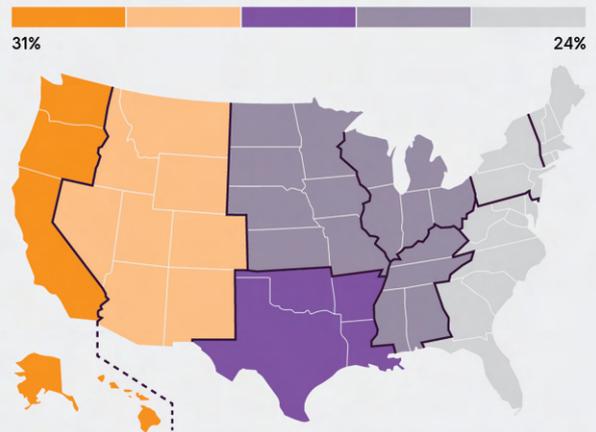
| Region	Average in region
Pacific	31%
Mountain	29%
West South Central	28%
East South Central	27%
East North Central	26%
West North Central	26%
New England	25%
Middle Atlantic	25%
South Atlantic	24%

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Running somewhat contrary to the stereotype of a generation befuddled by modern technology and trends, Baby Boomers reported the highest aware-ness of swatting and came very close to being the most aware group for:

2.6. Occupation

Chart 12

Rates of online abuse experience, by the visibility of respondents' occupation
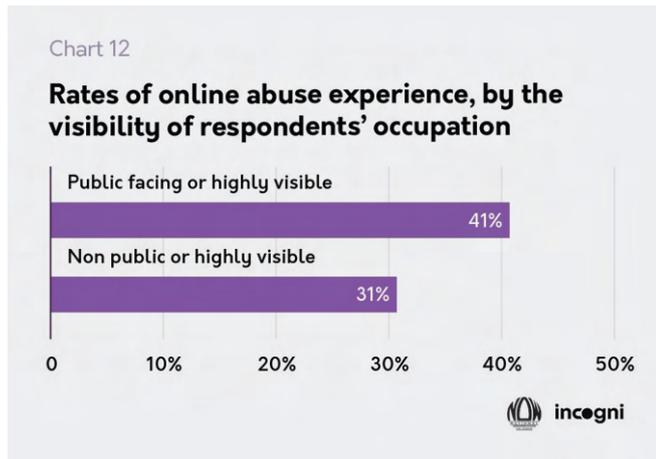
This survey also explored whether occupation played a role in the experience of online harassment and abuse.

The results suggest that public-facing or otherwise highly visible roles at work may correlate with higher rates of online abuse, with public persons experiencing abuse at a rate of 41% compared to 31% for less visible roles.

Chart 13

Rates of online abuse experiences, by occupational sector
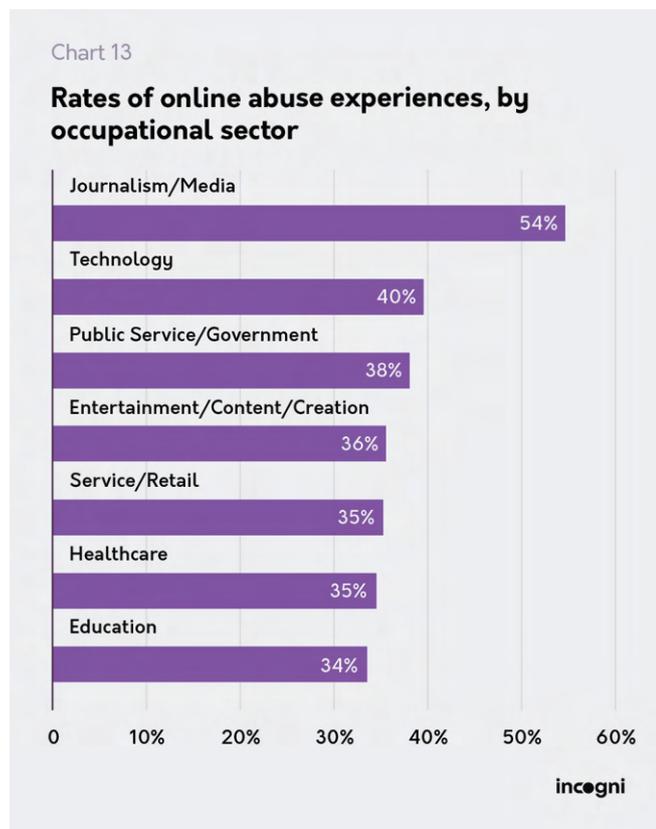
More than half (55%) of the women who worked in journalism or the media reported experiencing online abuse, the highest rate, by a significant margin, among all occupations represented in the survey. Women working in technology reported the second-highest rates of abuse at 40%. Women in education had the lowest rates at 34%.

While further investigation would be required to establish a definitive link, it's interesting to note that the frequency of abuse reported by women in these sectors is inversely related to the presence of women in these fields.

Furthermore, of those with public-facing jobs, 18% inferred that their abuse was related to their occupation. However, the rates for this motivation for abuse were higher among certain occupations, being reported by 49% of entertainers and content creators, 33% of journalists, and 29% of healthcare providers.
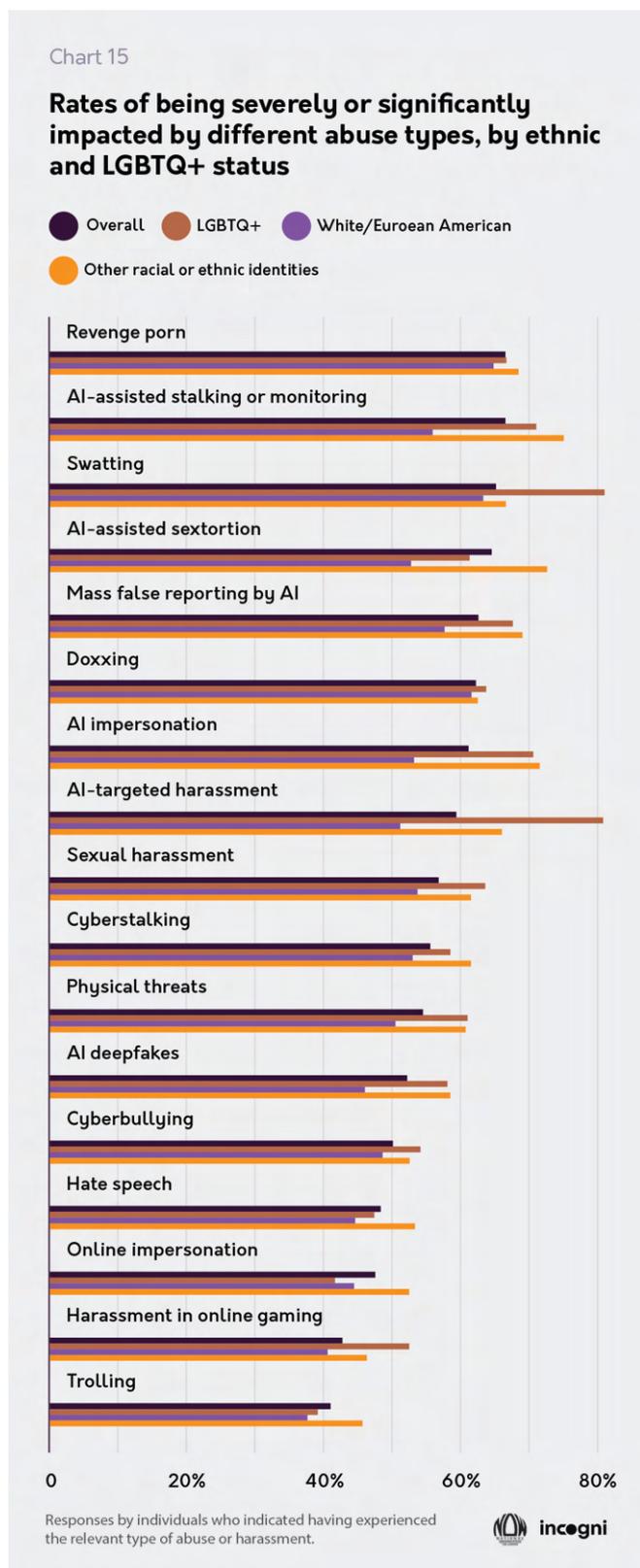
2.7. Online harassment and abuse today

The survey shows a baseline of political anxiety, with 50% of the overall sample feeling unsafe in the current climate. This sentiment is notably higher among LGBTQ+ respondents, with 55% reporting feeling unsafe, a statistically significant 5-point increase over the general population. This disparity suggests that political instability is felt more acutely by the LGBTQ+ community.

Chart 14

Rates of feeling unsafe in the current political situation, by ethnicity and LGBTQ+ status
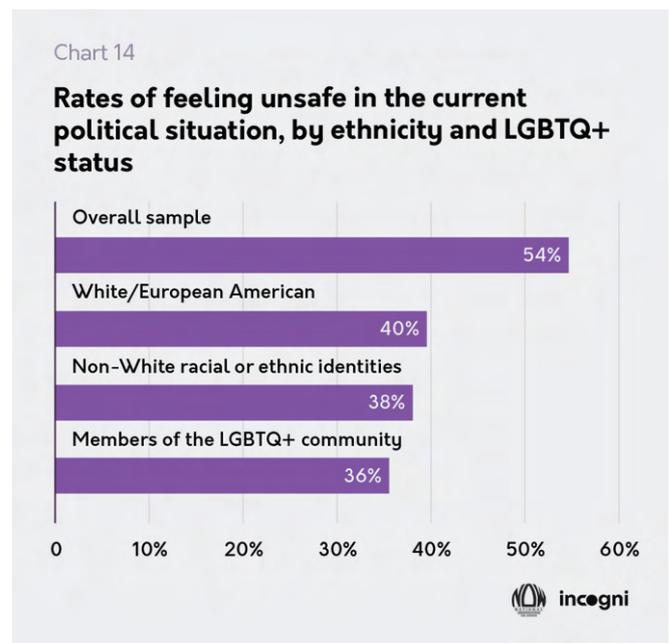
The groups who reported feeling the most unsafe due to the current political climate were Asian and Hispanic women (each roughly 56%), followed by African American women (52%).

Middle Eastern or North African (47%), Native American (44%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (44%) respondents actually reported feeling unsafe less frequently than the overall sample. This 15.5% gap between the highest and lowest concern groups suggests that the impact of the political situation is highly specific to certain community experiences rather than a uniform experience of all minorities.

2.8. Reactions to cybercrime and online abuse

Chart 15

Rates of being severely or significantly impacted by different abuse types, by ethnic and LGBTQ+ status

● Overall ● LGBTQ+ ● White/Euroean American
● Other racial or ethnic identities

- Revenge porn
- AI-assisted stalking or monitoring
- Swatting
- AI-assisted sextortion
- Mass false reporting by AI
- Doxxing
- AI impersonation
- AI-targeted harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Cyberstalking
- Physical threats
- AI deepfakes
- Cyberbullying
- Hate speech
- Online impersonation
- Harassment in online gaming
- Trolling

0   20%   40%   60%   80%

Responses by individuals who indicated having experienced the relevant type of abuse or harassment.

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porn was overall the abuse type most likely to leave a severe or significant impact on the victim (67%).
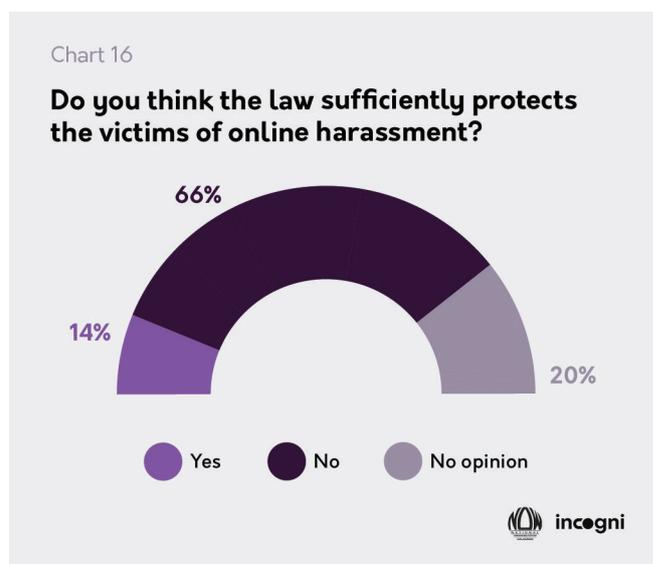
Notably, AI-enabled abuse types, when experienced, often lead to a serious impact on the victim, with AI-assisted stalking being reported as the second-most likely abuse type to lead to a severe or significant impact (66%).

Two forms of harassment also stood out to researchers for disproportionately affecting members of the LGBTQ+ community. These respondents experienced the highest rates of severe or significant impact due to swatting and AI-targeted harassment, both over 80%.

Trolling and harassment in online gaming, while notably less frequently reported as leading to severe or significant consequences, still did so at a rate of over 40%, indicating that these abuse types, which can sometimes be seen as harmless, may indeed cause harm.

Across the whole sample, 2 in 3 women state that the law doesn't adequately protect victims of online abuse, with only 14% indicating they're comfortable with the status quo. This question also led to a high degree of uncertainty or ambiguity, with 20% of respondents saying they have no opinion on the matter.

Interestingly, White respondents were the most likely to state that they believe the laws protecting victims of abuse are insufficient, with 69% responding thus compared to 62% of all other respondents, a statistically significant difference.

Chart 16

Do you think the law sufficiently protects the victims of online harassment?

66%
14%
20%

● Yes ● No ● No opinion

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The survey also looked at how respondents reacted to online abuse and harassment.

The results showed that of the women who experienced harassment or abuse, 50% of respondents had reported abuse to the given platform, and almost

In addition to the rates of abuse experienced by women of different demographics, this survey also aimed to understand the impact online abuse has on victims.

Unsurprisingly, the results revealed that revenge

45% took action to restrict the ability of others to harass them, either by deleting or restricting public accounts.

The results also indicated a high rate of self-limiting, whether through self-censorship (39%) or deleting or restricting social media accounts (44%). Similarly, 32% of women who reported experiencing harassment tried to delete personal information online as a reaction to abuse.
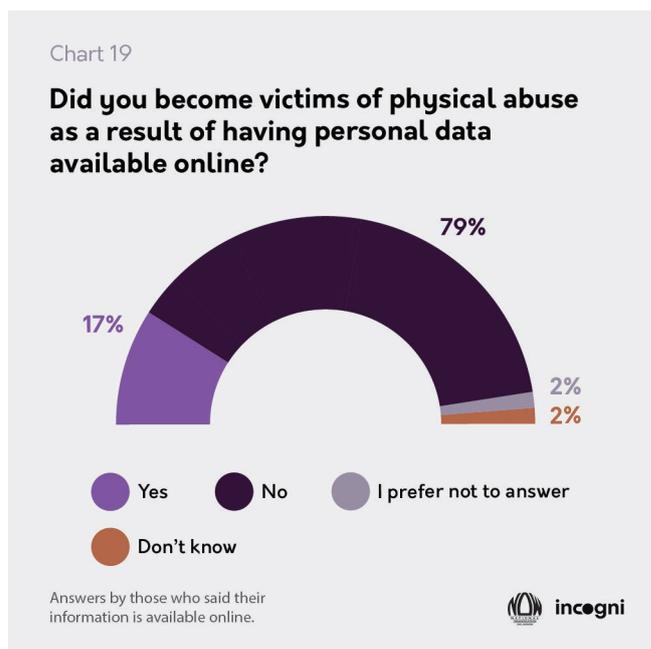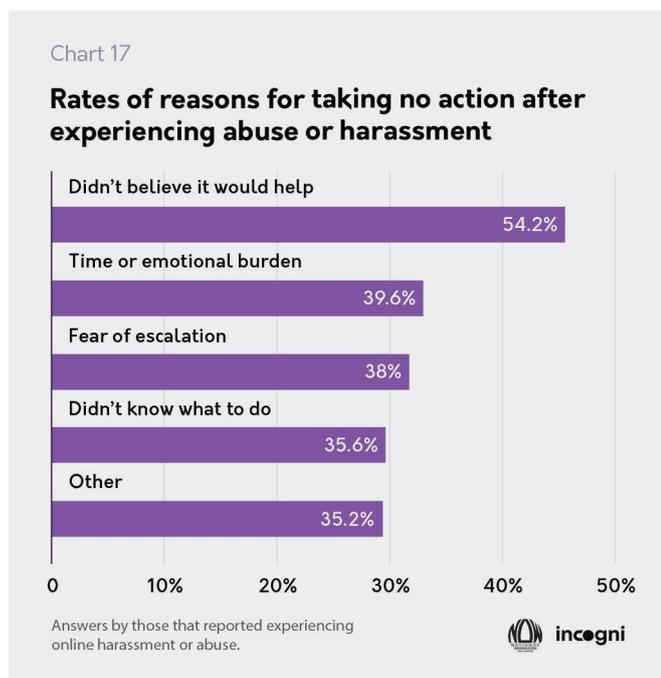
Law enforcement was contacted in 15% of cases, likely reserved for more serious cases. Lastly, only 11% of respondents who claimed to have experienced abuse took no action.

In an effort to understand the 11% of respondents who claimed to have experienced abuse and taken no action, the survey tried to identify the reasons behind that inaction. 46% of respondents in these cases stated they believed it would not help, and a quarter of respondents chose not to undertake action due to the time investment or emotional burden involved. A further quarter of respondents stated they were afraid of escalation.

Incogni's research team had studied in the past.

Chart 18

Is your personal information available publicly online?
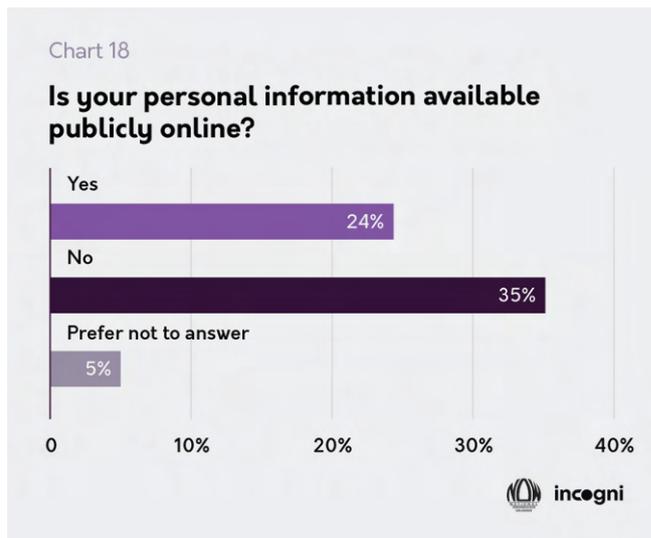
With this knowledge gap in mind, the survey also investigated whether respondents believed there was a danger posed by having personal information online.

Chart 17

Rates of reasons for taking no action after experiencing abuse or harassment

Answers by those that reported experiencing online harassment or abuse.

2.9. Repercussions of having personal information available online
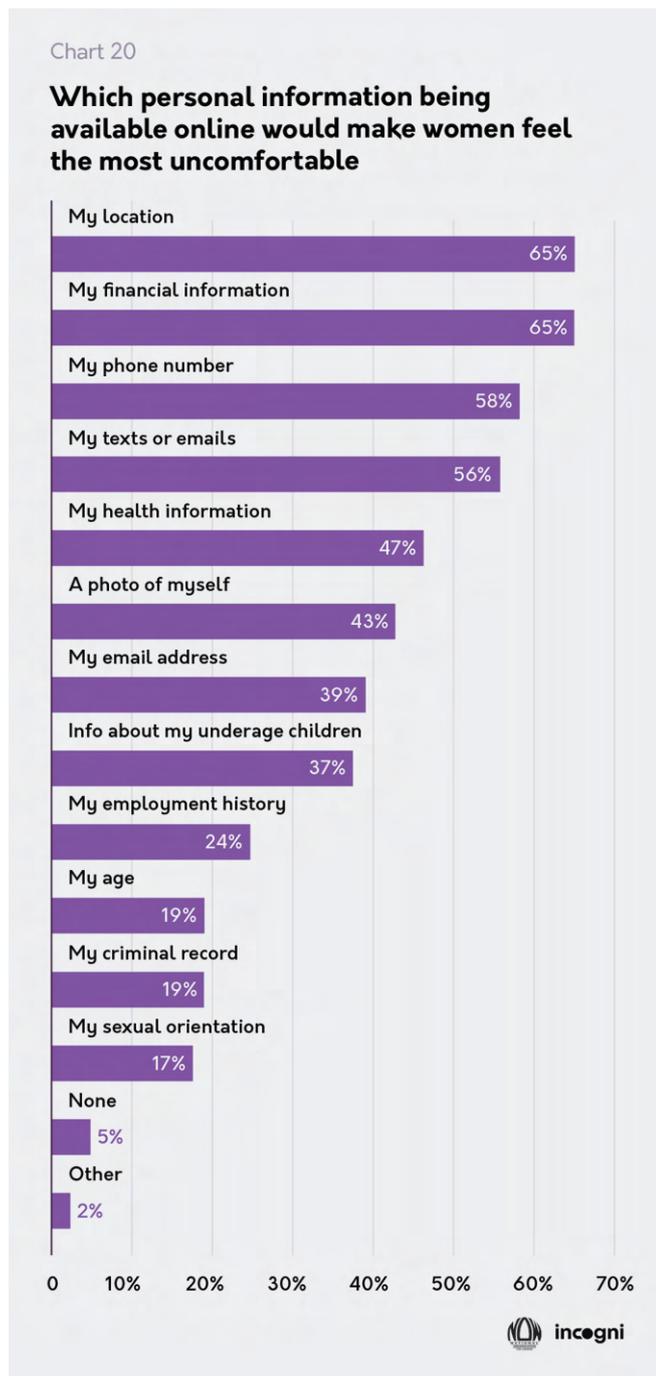
When asked whether their personal information is publicly available online, only a quarter (24%) said that it was, with 35% saying no, and 36% saying they aren't sure. Based on previous Incogni research, the majority of respondents were overly optimistic, as those studies indicate that the availability of personal information on people search sites and other data brokers is much higher than 24%—consistently staying above 50% for women in the various populations

Chart 19

Did you become victims of physical abuse as a result of having personal data available online?

Answers by those who said their information is available online.

Generally, 10% of respondents claimed they were negatively affected by having their personal information available online

However, members of the LGBTQ+ community stood out significantly, with 40% reporting instances of abuse due to having their personal information exposed online, compared to 13% in the general sample.

Even more concerning, 1 in 25 (4%) of respondents said they experienced physical abuse as a result of having personal data available online, while 7% claimed they experienced online harassment for the same reason.

2.10. Dealing with personal information being available online

Chart 20

Which personal information being available online would make women feel the most uncomfortable

My location — 65%
My financial information — 65%
My phone number — 58%
My texts or emails — 56%
My health information — 47%
A photo of myself — 43%
My email address — 39%
Info about my underage children — 37%
My employment history — 24%
My age — 19%
My criminal record — 19%
My sexual orientation — 17%
None — 5%
Other — 2%
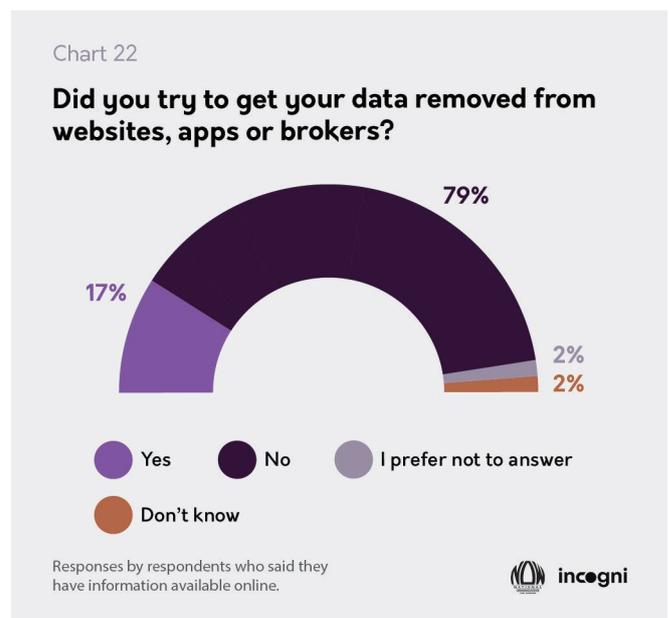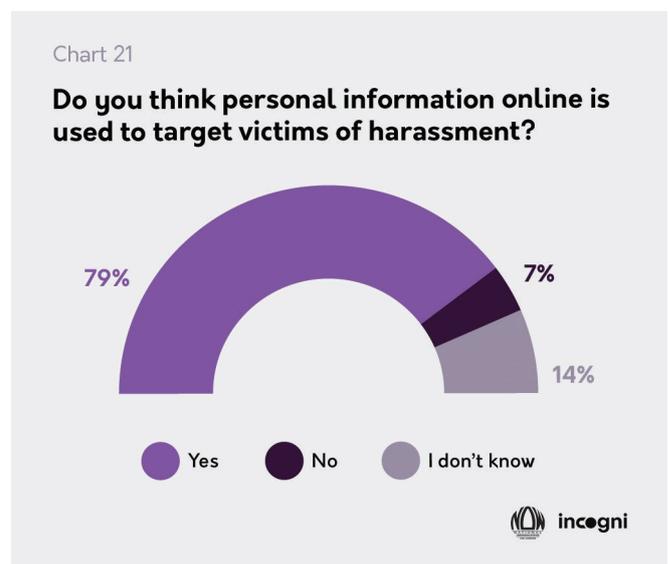
0   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%   60%   70%

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According to the women surveyed, their location and financial information were among the pieces of information they felt most uncomfortable with being available online, with both being claimed to cause discomfort by 65% of respondents. Notably, Gen Z respondents were the least concerned about their financial information being exposed (57%) compared to the total sample (65%).

Discomfort rates fell slightly but remained high (over 55%) for phone numbers and personal communications such as emails and text messages.

Incogni's researchers also noted the low level of discomfort with sexual orientation and criminal records being available online, with only 17% and 19%, respectively, expressing concern. Interestingly, employment history caused more discomfort (24%) among the women surveyed compared to information typically considered more sensitive.

The survey also revealed a general recognition of the relationship between a digital footprint and personal safety, with 79% of women surveyed agreeing that personal information found online is used to target people for harassment.

Respondents from the Silent Generation thought that information found online is used to target people at a rate of only 67%, compared to 79% of all other surveyed generations.

Chart 21

Do you think personal information online is used to target victims of harassment?

79%   7%   14%

Yes   No   I don't know

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Chart 22

Did you try to get your data removed from websites, apps or brokers?

17%   79%   2%   2%

Yes   No   I prefer not to answer   Don't know

Responses by respondents who said they have information available online.

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Furthermore, despite the understanding that publicly accessible data can be used as a tool for harassment

and abuse, there is a significant gap in how respon-
dents perceive their own exposure. While 79%
acknowledge the threat in theory, only 24% believe
their own information is actually available online.ac-
knowledge the threat in theory, only 24% believe
their own information is actually available online.

Despite the concerns, only 17% of respondents had
tried to have their data removed from online plat-
forms, while 79% had not.

Incogni's researchers noted a disconnect between the
recognized dangers posed by the public availability
of personal information and the actual actions taken
to mitigate those risks. Although 79% of respondents
claimed to believe online data facilitates harassment,
an equal 79% have not actually tried to get their data
removed from websites, apps, or brokers.

3. Discussion

3.1. Year-over-year shifts: what changed and why it matters

This survey is part of an annual collaborative effort between Incogni and NOW to track how online harassment targeting women evolves over time.

Compared to last year, several notable changes emerged:

- The percentage of women reporting online abuse increased from 23% to 27%, a 17% increase year over year.
  - African American respondents went up from 27% to 33%
  - White respondents increased from 21% to 24%
  - Hispanic or Latino respondents went up from 31% to 33%
- Reports of cyberbullying rose from 10% to 12%, remaining the most commonly reported form of online harassment.
- Reported discomfort with personal data being available online increased across all measured data types, with responses rising between 2 and 5 percentage points depending on the category.

3.2. Disproportionate impact

Once again, the survey results highlight that online abuse doesn't affect all women equally. The responses show clear disparities across age, ethnicity, identity, and professional visibility, giving Incogni's researchers valuable insight into which groups are most vulnerable and where protections need to be strengthened.

Groups reporting the highest rates of online abuse include:

Gen Z and Millennial women

Over 1 in 3 Millennial women and nearly half of Gen Z respondents reported experiencing online abuse—in stark contrast with older generations. While younger women tend to have higher levels of digital engagement, this doesn't fully explain the discrepancy, since the gap in digital engagement has been narrowing over recent decades. Further research into how perpetrators target victims is required to understand why young women in particular are at such heightened risk of online abuse.

Women of color

Respondents identifying as members of racial or ethnic minorities (with the exception of Middle Eastern and North African respondents) reported significantly higher rates of online abuse compared to White respondents. These respondents, especially Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Native American or Alaskan Native, and African American women, also reported that they did not trust protective laws (68%, 66%, and 59%, respectively).

Beyond differences in reported harassment prevalence, disparities also emerged in perceptions of safety. Hispanic and Asian women reported among the highest levels of feeling unsafe in the current political climate (approximately 56%, compared to 50% of the overall sample and 52% among African American women).

For communities frequently centered in national debates around immigration, identity, and belonging, online harassment may intersect with broader anxieties about scrutiny or targeting. In such contexts, the exposure of personal information online may carry heightened psychological and practical consequences, reinforcing how digital abuse does not occur in isolation from wider social dynamics.

Members of the LGBTQ+ community

The prevalence of abuse reported by LGBTQ+ women (55% compared to 26% in the overall sample) was a particularly striking finding. These respondents also reported higher levels of fear for their physical safety and were more likely to remove exposed personal information from the internet as a protective measure.

LGBTQ+ respondents were also more likely to report harassment coming from multiple perpetrators (37% compared to 25% in the overall sample), as well as greater exposure to hate speech and trolling. This pattern suggests that harassment targeting LGBTQ+ women may more frequently take collective or coordinated forms, amplifying both visibility and psychological impact. These patterns raise important questions about how sustained exposure to coordinated harassment may influence digital participation, self-expression, and public visibility among LGBTQ+ women.

Women in public-facing or highly visible professional roles

Another finding that stood out to researchers was how their occupations impacted women's experiences of online abuse. Those with highly visible occupations experienced significantly higher rates—especially

journalists and women working in media—suggesting that professional visibility may increase exposure to harassment.

The elevated rates of harassment among women in journalism (55%) and technology (40%), sectors that shape public discourse and remain male-dominated, show that women working in highly visible, male-dominated fields are more likely to be targeted. By contrast, women working in education, a traditionally female-dominated field, reported lower rates of abuse (34%).

This contrast suggests that visibility and gender imbalance may increase the likelihood of being targeted online. When abuse disproportionately affects women in influential or public-facing roles, it may function as more than interpersonal hostility.

3.3. How online abuse limits participation and autonomy

The implications of online harassment aren't restricted to digital life. In fact, the survey results indicated high rates of self-limiting, whether through self-censorship or reducing activity in response to online abuse. This can significantly shape how women engage with and participate in both online and public life.

While this research doesn't establish definitive causality, some notable patterns suggest that online abuse can have especially detrimental effects on women's presence in certain careers:

- Women in public-facing or highly visible roles reported higher rates of online abuse.
- Respondents expressed greater concern about their employment information being available online than about data types traditionally considered more sensitive.
- Women working in technology, a field where they remain underrepresented, experienced some of the highest rates of online abuse, while women in education, a traditionally female-dominated field, reported comparatively lower rates.

Taken together, these patterns raise troubling implications about the impact online harassment may have on the participation and autonomy of women in public and professional roles. Harassment can impose invisible barriers, shaping what women choose to share, where they choose to engage, and whether they choose to engage at all.

In careers where public visibility is an asset and fields where women are still underrepresented, the compounded risk of online abuse may narrow opportunities and reinforce existing gender inequalities.

3.4. Barriers to protection

More than 1 in 10 respondents who experienced online abuse chose not to take action. This survey also explores why—what elements may prevent women from getting help when they experience online harassment or abuse. Understanding the barriers that stand in their way is a crucial step in removing them.

The most common reasons reported for not taking action include:

- A belief that it simply wouldn't help (nearly half of respondents)
- Too much time commitment or emotional burden involved in reporting or pursuing recourse (1 in 4 respondents)
- Fear of escalation (1 in 4 respondents).

These findings suggest that inaction is often not rooted in indifference, but in calculation. When victims anticipate that reporting will be ineffective, retraumatizing, or potentially provoke further harassment, it may make more sense to do nothing.

This perception aligns with broader distrust in existing protections. Across the sample, 2 in 3 women expressed a belief that current laws don't adequately protect victims of online abuse. This, once again, highlights the need for stronger laws and regulations.

It also often takes an unreasonable amount of time and effort to take protective measures. While removing personal information from the internet can significantly reduce the likelihood of targeted abuse, nearly 8 in 10 women surveyed chose not to seek removal. While several services designed to aid in this process have emerged over the last few years, more education, free resources, and support are needed to encourage better digital hygiene practices.

3.4. Conclusion

This year's findings suggest that online harassment targeting women isn't static. Reported rates have increased, disparities remain pronounced, and confidence in existing protections continues to lag.

While some of these changes may appear incremental, year-over-year movement of this scale is still significant. A 17% increase in reported harassment suggests that online abuse isn't stabilizing but becoming more prevalent. On the other hand, this year's survey participants' greater discomfort with personal data exposure signals growing awareness that data exposure carries real risks.

Continued annual tracking will allow us to determine whether these shifts represent short-term volatility or the beginning of a sustained upward trend. Understanding these trends can help us create online spaces where visibility does not come at the cost of safety.

4. Appendices

4.1. Appendix 1: Questionnaire

1. **Have you ever heard about the following forms of online harassment? [Multiple choice]**
   a. Cyberbullying: bullying or harassment through social media, messaging apps, or online forums
   b. Doxxing: public release of private information about an individual without their consent
   c. Swatting: a false report to emergency services to prompt a SWAT team response at the target's location
   d. Trolling: posting offensive or inflammatory comments to provoke reactions and disrupt discussions
   e. Online impersonation: creating fake profiles or accounts to impersonate and defame an individual
   f. Hate speech: offensive views against a particular race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation group
   g. Sexual harassment: unwanted and inappropriate sexual comments
   h. Cyberstalking: persistent and unwanted attention, monitoring, or contact online
   i. Revenge porn: sharing intimate images or videos of an individual without their consent
   j. Harassment in online gaming: harassment while playing online games
   k. Physical threats: death threats, sexual threats, or threats of any kind of physical violence
   l. AI deepfakes: content depicting real or non-existent people in unfavorable ways that is created with the help of artificial intelligence tools
   m. AI-targeted harassment: Bullying and harassment using AI-generated messages or bots
   n. Mass false reporting by AI: False reporting of social media accounts or comments in great numbers using AI bots
   o. AI-assisted sextortion: AI-generated messages claiming to possess compromising content, used to extort or blackmail the victim
   p. AI impersonation: AI-generated content impersonating someone, either to commit fraud or to discredit or bully the victim
   q. AI-assisted stalking or monitoring: AI tools used to find, aggregate, or infer personal data to track online activity, posts, or location patterns over time
   r. Other

2. **Have you ever personally experienced online harassment?**

3. **Where did the harassment come from? [Multiple choice]**
   a. Someone I knew personally
   b. Someone I knew professionally
   c. A stranger
   d. Multiple people
   e. AI or bots
   f. Other
   g. I don't know

4. **On which platform(s) did this experience occur? [Multiple choice]**
   a. X (formerly Twitter)
   b. Instagram
   c. TikTok
   d. Dating apps
   e. Online gaming platforms
   f. Streaming platforms (e.g. Twitch, YouTube Live)
   g. Messaging apps
   h. Facebook
   i. Other
   j. I don't know

5. **What kind of online abuse or harassment have you experienced personally? [Multiple choice]**
   a. [Same answers as in Question 1]

6. **For each kind of online abuse or harassment in Question 5: How have the following forms of online harassment that you experienced affected your life?**
   a. Severely
   b. Significantly
   c. Moderately
   d. Slightly
   e. Not at all

7. **At any point, did you fear for your physical safety as a result of online harassment?**
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. I prefer not to answer

8. **What do you believe the harassment you experienced was related to? [Multiple choice]**
   a. Gender
   b. Sexual orientation
   c. Appearance
   d. Race or ethnicity
   e. Profession
   f. Political views
   g. Religious beliefs
   h. Other

9. **What actions, if any, did you take after experi-**

encing online harassment? [Multiple choice]
a. Reported the abuse to the platform
b. Contacted law enforcement
c. Deleted or restricted social media accounts
d. Attempted to remove personal information online
e. Reduced online activity or self-censored
f. Took no action
g. I prefer not to answer
h. I don't know

10. **For those that selected 'Took no action' in Question 9: What prevented you from taking action? [Multiple choice]**
a. I didn't believe it would help
b. Fear of escalation
c. Time or emotional burden
d. Other
e. I didn't know what to do

11. **Do you think the law sufficiently protects the victims of online harassment?**
a. Yes, sufficiently
b. No, insufficiently
c. I have no opinion

12. **Which pieces of personal information being published online would make you feel the most uncomfortable? [Multiple choice]**
a. My age
b. My sexual orientation
c. My location
d. My phone number
e. My email address
f. My financial information
g. My criminal record
h. A photo of myself
i. Information about my underage children
j. My health information
k. My employment history
l. My texts or emails
m. Other
n. None

13. **Do you think that personal information found online is used to target victims of online harassment?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I don't know

14. **Is your personal information publicly available online?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I prefer not to answer
d. I don't know

15. **Were you negatively affected in any way by having your personal information available online?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I prefer not to answer

16. **Did you ever become a victim of online harassment as a result of having personal data available online?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I prefer not to answer
d. I don't know

17. **Did you ever become a victim of physical abuse as a result of having personal data available online?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I prefer not to answer
d. I don't know

18. **Have you ever tried to get your personal information removed from different websites, apps, or data brokers' databases using a data removal service?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I prefer not to answer

19. **How safe do you feel, taking into consideration the current political situation?**
1. Safe
2. Not safe
3. Not sure

20. **Is your work public-facing or highly visible online?**
a. Yes
b. No
c. I don't know

21. **Was the online abuse related to your profession or work role?**
1. Yes
2. No
3. I don't know