

Regional overview

# Arab Region

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# Sexual Harassment in the Media

This research is the product of a collaboration between WAN-IFRA Women in News, BBC Media Action and City St George's, University of London. It was produced thanks to support from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK FCDO) under the Public Interest Media and Healthy Information Environments (PIMHIE) programme.

We are grateful to our colleagues and partners in the 21 countries of the study for their support in disseminating the survey to respondents.

**Women in News** is a media development programme of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). Its mission is to close the gender gap in news media. It works with 80 media organisations from 17 countries in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia.

**BBC Media Action** is the BBC's international charity. With our partners, we reach more than 100 million people in need around the world, in more than 30 countries and 50 languages. We work to provide impartial, impactful, trustworthy media to people in need so that they can make informed choices to transform their lives.

**City St George's, University of London** has a mission to generate world-leading research on global social justice and inclusivity in journalism that brings lasting benefits to the industry through its Department of Journalism. We partner with journalists, think tanks, NGOs, and policymakers to explore how ethical, public interest journalism can be reimagined and protected for future generations.

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# Arab Region

This report is part of a 2025 international study on sexual harassment<sup>1</sup> in media workplaces, examining experiences of sexual harassment among women, men and gender non-conforming media professionals across 21 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab region, South East Asia and Ukraine.

Conducted by the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) Women in News (WIN) in partnership with City St George's, University of London and BBC Media Action, this is the largest study of its kind. It builds on research conducted in 2020 that identified persistent gaps in evidence on sexual harassment in media workplaces.

This report provides a regional overview of how sexual harassment is experienced across media organisations in the Arab region in the four countries surveyed (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine).<sup>2</sup> It examines how often incidents are reported and how employers respond to workplace reporting of this behaviour. It also explores how perceptions of safety and equality differ by people's gender and their position in newsroom hierarchies, among other aspects of organisational culture.

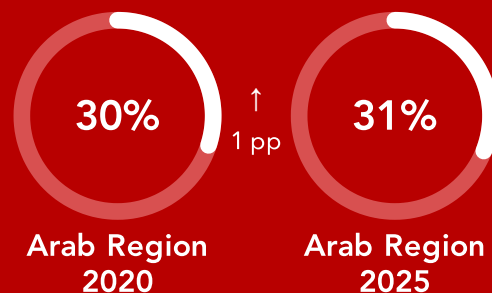
The survey findings in the Arab region show an overall workplace sexual harassment rate of 31% in 2025. Similar to the 2020 rate of 30%, this shows no overall improvement since the 2020 survey.<sup>3</sup>

”

*“A female colleague reported [sexual] harassment by her direct manager. The complaint was withdrawn, and she was persuaded to resign. In my organisation, harassment and the importance of reporting are discussed verbally, but in practice the victim is punished.”*

**Female digital producer and manager aged 35–44, Jordan**

## Overall rates of sexual harassment in newsrooms



<sup>1</sup> This study defines sexual harassment as “unwanted and offensive behaviour of a sexual nature that violates a person’s dignity and makes them feel degraded, humiliated, intimidated or threatened”. For definitions of specific types of sexual harassment, see the methodology page.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Palestinian Territories. In this report we use Palestine as a country label for consistency with previous surveys.

<sup>3</sup> The prevalence of sexual harassment for a given country/region is calculated as the mean average of the percentage of respondents from that location who reported having ever experienced verbal harassment, online harassment, physical harassment and/or rape while at work.

# Context

Across the Arab region, the five years since the 2020 survey on sexual harassment in media workplaces have unfolded against a backdrop of political instability and ongoing conflict in the countries surveyed, particularly in Palestine and Lebanon.

These wider conditions shape how journalists operate under increased external risks, and how sexual harassment is experienced, addressed, or in some cases deprioritised.

At the same time, a series of high-profile cases, legal reforms and digital activism moments in the region have highlighted sexual harassment in the media. In fact, 2020 can be regarded as a turning point on sexual harassment – digital testimonies, public naming of perpetrators and collective demands by women journalists signalled a shift from silence to growing scrutiny.

In **Egypt**, a widely shared case of [digital whistleblowing](#) in 2020 acted as a catalyst for the country's #MeToo movement, encouraging sexual harassment survivors across multiple sectors, including the media, to speak up. The risks faced by women journalists were underscored by the case of an Egyptian female journalist who reported experiencing [sexual abuse from prison officers in 2020–2021](#) while detained on charges related to spreading false information and misuse of social media.

These developments in Egypt were accompanied by legal advances. The country's parliament passed [amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code](#) in 2020 allowing anonymity for survivors of sexual harassment and assault. Egypt also introduced stronger penalties in 2021 when [sexual harassment was upgraded to a felony](#), and 2025 labour law provisions explicitly recognised [workplace harassment](#) and bullying, including in the media sector.

In **Jordan**, the shift to acting on sexual harassment has been more gradual. [Existing evidence](#) points to high levels of workplace sexual harassment. In 2022 and 2023 amendments to the

country's [Labour Law](#) introduced financial penalties for employers and gave employees the right to leave their jobs without notice in cases of sexual harassment or assault, while retaining full compensation rights. Civil society organisations welcomed the changes but described them as insufficient. The Ministry of Labour subsequently launched the [Himaya online platform](#), where people can submit complaints either confidentially or publicly. Gaps remain between legal provisions relating to sexual harassment and people's lived realities, particularly in terms of enforcement and accountability.

In 2020 **Lebanon** marked a significant legal milestone by adopting [Law 205](#), which criminalised sexual harassment for the first time. The law defines sexual harassment broadly, and includes provisions to protect both survivors and witnesses, establish compensation mechanisms, and mandate awareness-raising campaigns. However, legal implementation [remains limited and uneven](#) due to a lack of public awareness, delays in making survivor support operational, and gaps in prevention and labour protections. These legal and structural challenges have unfolded against an increasingly [constrained working environment for journalists](#) in the context of chronic conflict.

In **Palestine**, media work takes place amid ongoing conflict, widespread displacement and acute insecurity. Since 2023, the scale of destruction in Gaza has significantly increased risks for journalists, with high numbers of [media workers killed](#), and continued [restrictions](#) on media access following the October 2025 ceasefire. The hardships associated with Israeli occupation affect all aspects of life and [disproportionately affect women and girls](#).

Rival governing bodies operating from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip make it impossible to implement unified labour standards and protections across Palestinian territories, including in relation to sexual harassment. Despite the existence of relevant Palestinian and Jordanian laws, the [EuroMed Feminist Initiative - Regional Civil Society Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls \(EFI-RCSO\)](#) has concluded there is no comprehensive legislation in place to address gender-based violence in Palestine. Work by the [Ministry of Women's Affairs](#) and non-governmental organisations to tackle sexual harassment and gender-based violence is also severely constrained in the current conditions.

Across the Arab region, public discourse around workplace sexual harassment has advanced since 2020, as a result of digital activism and high-profile cases. But across the survey countries there remains a considerable distance between the letter of the law and what people actually experience. Enforcement is patchy and accountability is rare. And the wider conditions shaping media work – political instability, conflict and entrenched power imbalances – limit the impact of legal reforms. Strong legal frameworks are fundamental in defining unacceptable behaviour,

establishing employers' obligations and creating the conditions for accountability. But, as the International Labour Organization Convention 190<sup>4</sup> makes clear, [rights on paper must become realities in practice](#). Particularly for women and gender non-conforming media professionals, this is still a long way off.

Alongside legal changes, there has also been a focus on practical improvements to tackle sexual harassment in the region's media sector, centred on prevention and education. In 2020–2025 WAN-IFRA WIN delivered training to over 2,000 media professionals globally to build their understanding of sexual harassment, including in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. This training covered what sexual harassment is and where it occurs, and how to address and prevent it both within and beyond the workplace. Sessions also provided practical guidance on reporting and managing incidents, alongside support in developing organisational policies, particularly for human resources and senior management teams. Where workplace sexual harassment policies existed, WAN-IFRA WIN offered additional support on how to effectively communicate these policies.

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<sup>4</sup> Adopted in June 2019, [ILO Convention No. 190 \(C190\)](#) is the first international treaty to recognise the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

# The Survey

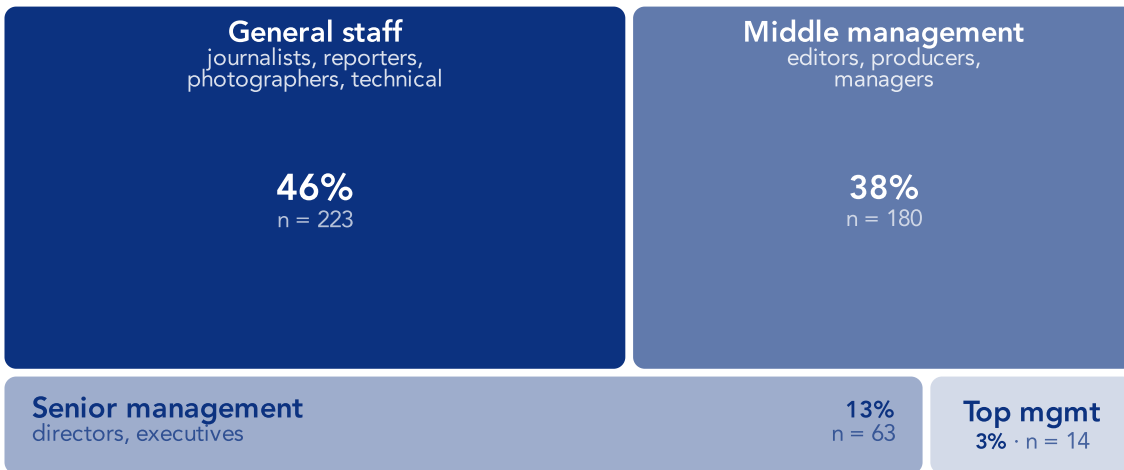
The Arab sample contains responses from 481 media professionals working across four countries: Egypt (220), Palestine (114), Jordan (78) and Lebanon (53), plus 16 respondents working elsewhere in the region.<sup>5</sup> Figure 1a shows the gender breakdown of respondents, including those who identified as gender non-conforming and those who chose to self-describe their gender identity.<sup>6</sup> Figure 1b breaks down respondents by their job level.

**Figure 1a: Respondent demographics by gender identity**

Base: all respondents. n = 481. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



**Figure 1b: Respondents by job level**



<sup>5</sup>This study employed an online survey instrument comprising 33 closed questions and one open-ended question. The latter allowed respondents to provide additional comments, and was the source of the quotes included in this report. Respondents could skip any question if they wanted.

WIN and BBC Media Action regional media networks distributed the surveys. Each network aimed for a balance of respondents by gender, role and media organisation type. Response rates and sample sizes vary by country.

Given the sensitivity of the subject, the research team gave respondents access to relevant support resources in their country. Data was handled in accordance with City St George’s, University of London’s privacy policy and international data protection standards. For further details, see the methodology page.

<sup>6</sup>Totals include gender non-conforming individuals and those who prefer to self-describe their gender identity. Data is generally not disaggregated for these people at country or regional level. To explore trends for these groups, please refer to the global report.

# Experience of Sexual Harassment

Across the Arab region, the 2025 survey shows that **verbal sexual harassment** is a widespread form of sexual harassment across media workplaces – 52% of women respondents said they have experienced this, compared with 20% of men (see Figure 2). This shows that women are around 2.6 times more likely to experience this than their male colleagues.

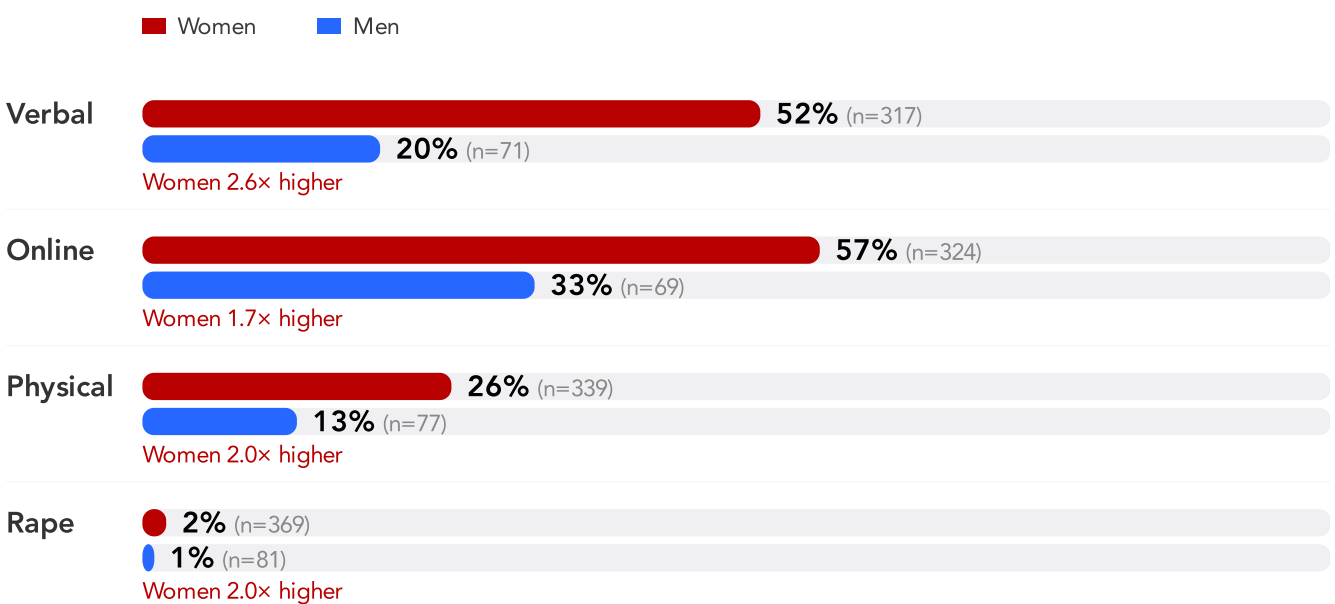
While verbal sexual harassment is the most common form of workplace sexual harassment globally, **online sexual harassment** is the most commonly cited type of workplace harassment in the Arab region. Online harassment was reported by 57% of women and 33% of men in this sample. While this gender gap is narrower than that of

verbal sexual harassment, women respondents in this region are still 1.7 times more likely to have experienced online harassment at work than their male colleagues.

**Physical sexual harassment** is less common but still considerable in the region – 26% of women respondents said they have experienced it, compared with 13% of men. Similar to other types of workplace sexual harassment, women are twice as likely as men to say they have faced this.

Incidences of **rape** are less common, with 2% of women respondents (eight individuals) and 1% of men (one individual) saying they had experienced this at work.

**Figure 2: Experience by type of sexual harassment and gender**

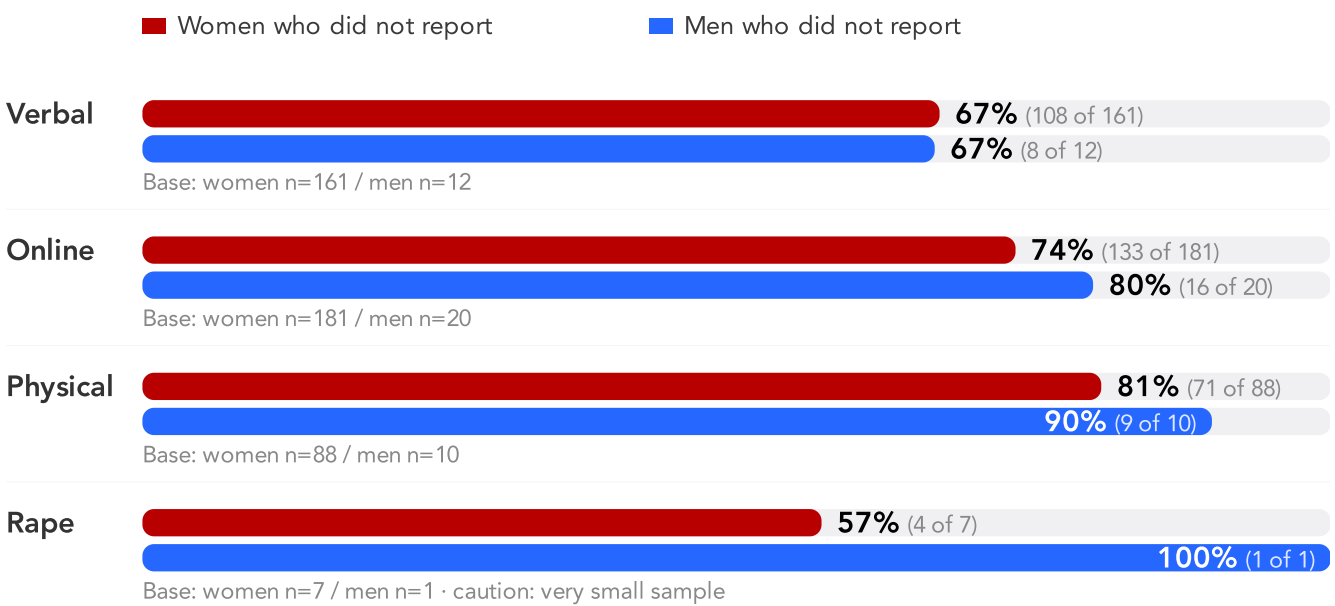


# Reporting and Barriers

The survey asked respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual harassment at work whether they reported the incident to their organisation, and whether their employers had taken any action as a result.

**Figure 3a: Did not report, by type of sexual harassment**

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



Non-reporting was high across all forms of sexual harassment, driven by a combination of structural barriers and workplace risks (see Figures 3a and 3b). Around 66% of respondents who had experienced verbal sexual harassment did not tell their employer about this. Similarly, 74% of respondents did not officially report their experiences of online sexual harassment, and 80% did not report their experiences of physical harassment. Reporting patterns for rape vary, although small sample sizes make it difficult to draw firm conclusions.

Workplace reporting rates tend to increase with seniority, with higher levels among respondents in senior and top management jobs although that sample is smaller. Non-reporting remains high among general staff and middle managers – around 70–85% across most harassment types.

Across all types of sexual harassment, the absence of reporting mechanisms is the most

commonly cited barrier (see Figure 4). This reason was mentioned 26% of the time when respondents explained why they had not reported all types of sexual harassment to their employer.

Clear gender differences emerge in respondents’ reasons for not telling their employer about sexual harassment they have experienced. Men are more likely to minimise their experience of sexual harassment, with 31% of male respondents saying they did not report verbal harassment because they did not think it was a big deal, compared with 16% of women – with a similar pattern across other harassment types. Conversely, women are more likely to have concerns about the professional consequences of reporting sexual harassment – 14% said fears it would negatively affect their job stopped them from reporting verbal sexual harassment, compared with 6% of men respondents.

TOP BARRIERS TO TELLING EMPLOYERS

**26%**

Lack of reporting mechanisms

**19%**

Perceptions that the experience was not a big deal

**13%**

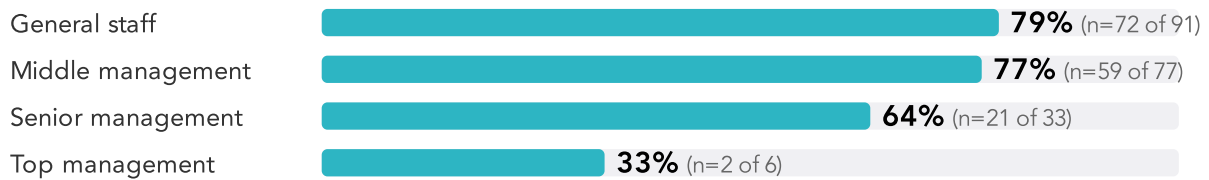
Concerns about negative career impact

Figure 3b: Did not report, by job level

Verbal



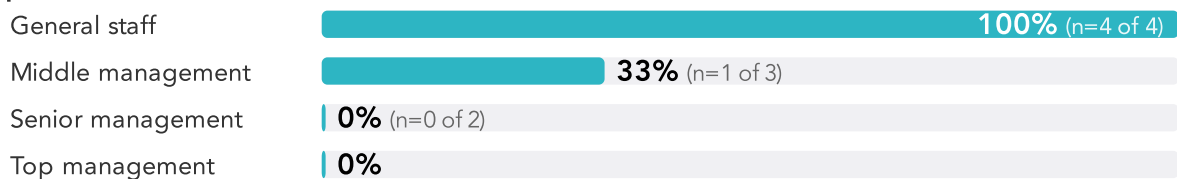
Online



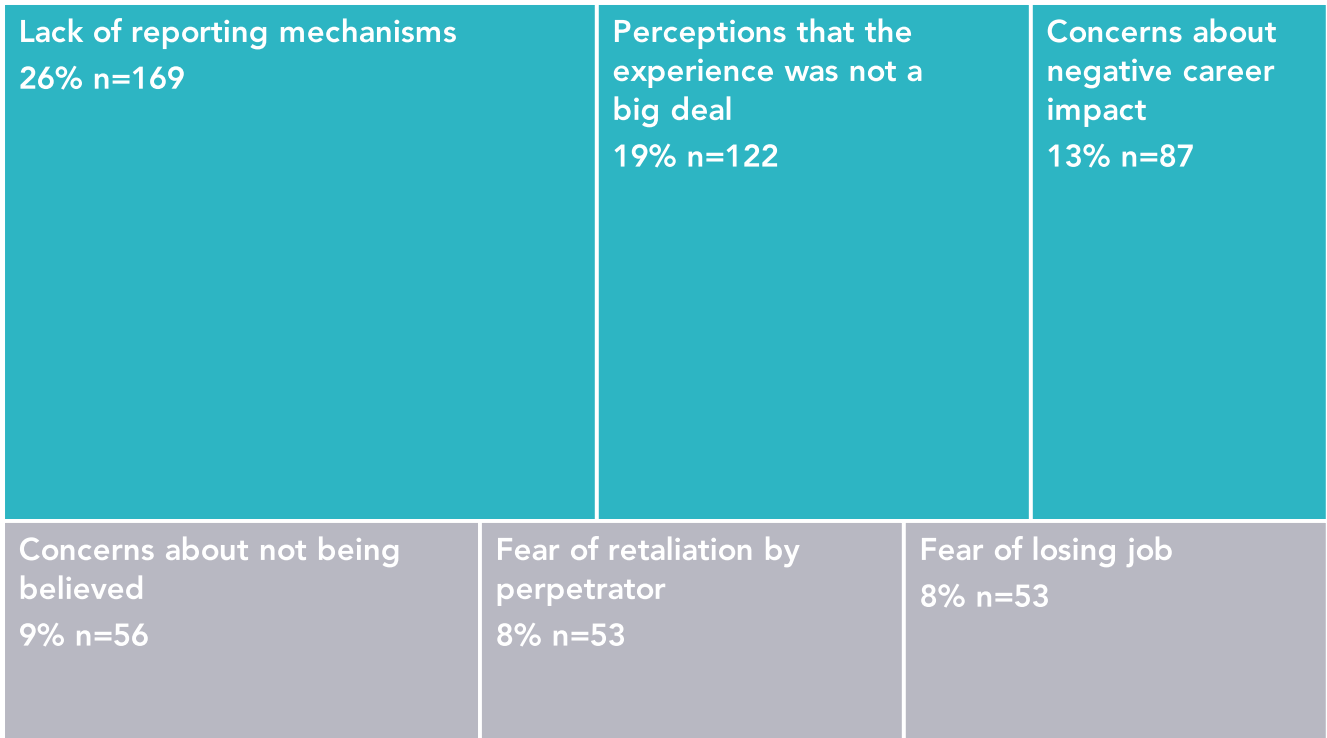
Physical



Rape



**Figure 4: Top reasons for not reporting**



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*"Sometimes [sexual] harassment is dealt with by the woman who was harassed, and the matter is resolved without turning to the institution itself to resolve the issue."*

**Female print editor aged 35–44, Palestine**

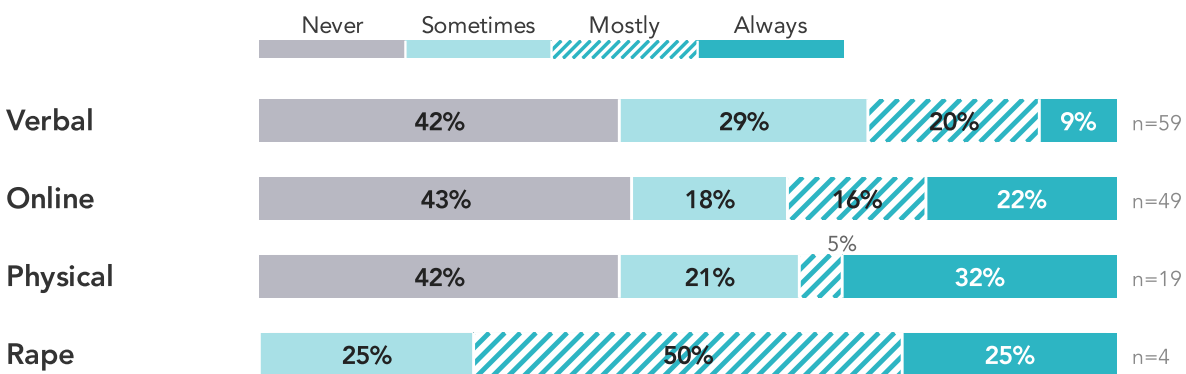
# Organisational Action

Organisational responses to reported cases of sexual harassment varied across media workplaces in the Arab region, with a large share resulting in no action (see Figures 5a and 5b).

Across all types of sexual harassment, 41% of incidents reported to employers resulted in the employer taking no action, while an equal percentage resulted in employers taking action “sometimes” or “mostly”. Meanwhile, only 18% stated that employers “always” took action in response to reported sexual harassment.

**Figure 5a: Action taken by organisations**

Base: Those who reported harassment and answered the action question (excluding “I can't remember”). All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



**THE MOST-MENTIONED TYPES OF ACTION TAKEN BY MEDIA EMPLOYERS AS THE AVERAGE ACROSS SEXUAL HARASSMENT TYPES**

**33%**

The perpetrator was warned

**24%**

The perpetrator was fired

**15%**

The survivor was provided professional and/or emotional support

Patterns of organisational action by the job seniority of those reporting sexual harassment are based on small numbers, and male respondents are underrepresented in this data particularly for physical harassment and rape, but a lack of action remains common across most groups. Data shows that cases reported by general staff are the least likely to be acted upon by employers. For verbal, online and physical sexual harassment, the majority of respondents at this

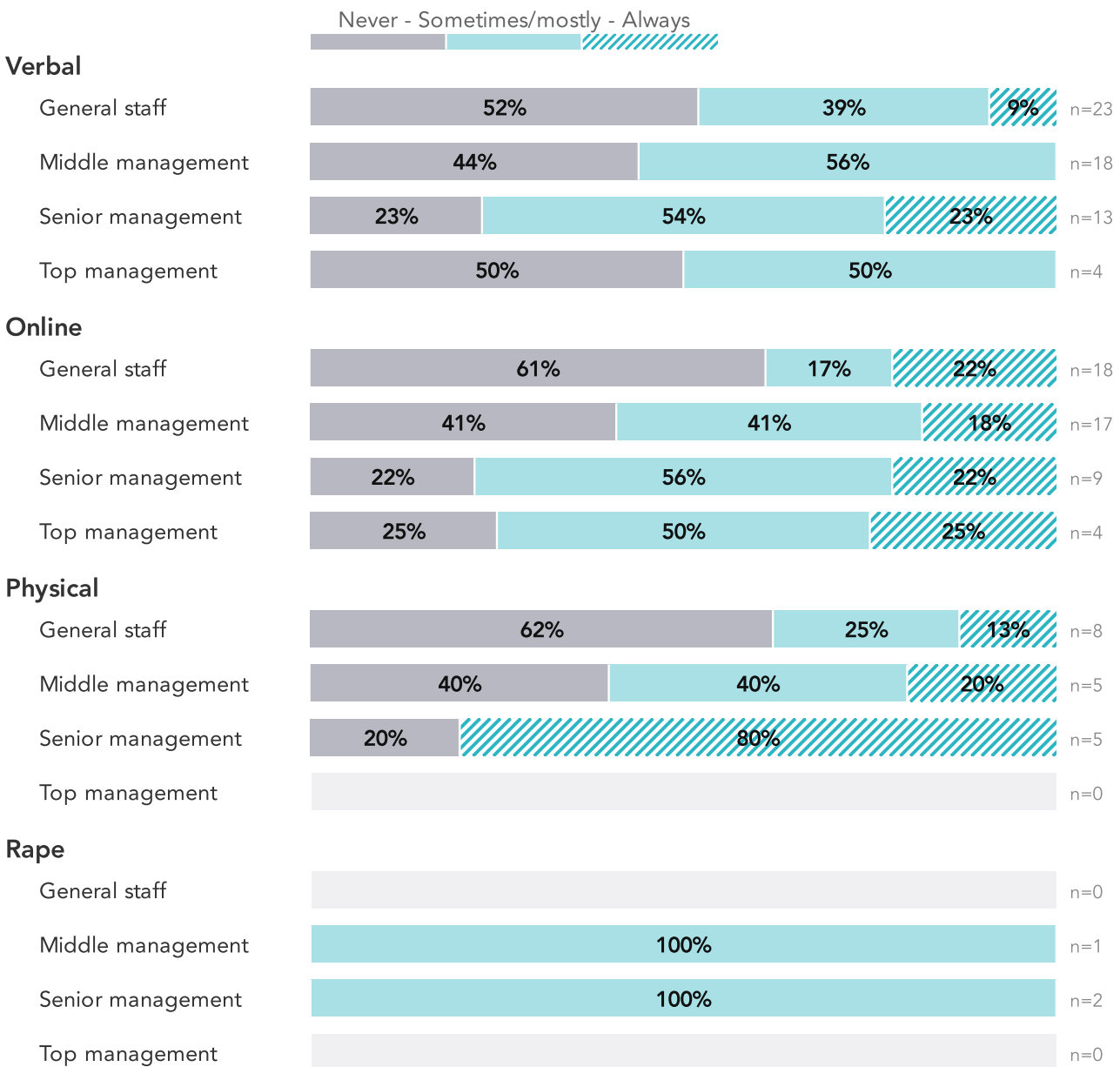
level who told their employer said that the organisations “never” responded. At more senior levels, organisational action appears to improve but not reliably. Even among senior management, organisations more commonly act “sometimes” or “mostly” than “always”. Data for top managers is harder to draw conclusions about, particularly as the sample did not include any top managers who reported physical harassment or rape.

When employers did take action, discipline-focused actions like issuing warnings or even firing the perpetrator took precedence – making up 33% and 24% of actions on average, respectively. Providing the survivor with emotional or professional support was the third most common action, at 15% on average.

This shows that reporting sexual harassment does not consistently lead to organisational action, possibly pointing to lack of internal structures or policies to deal with the issue, as well as organisational cultures that struggle to take the issue seriously. All of this suggests a system that works patchily, where action often depends on rank and survivors’ ability to come forward amid flawed systems.

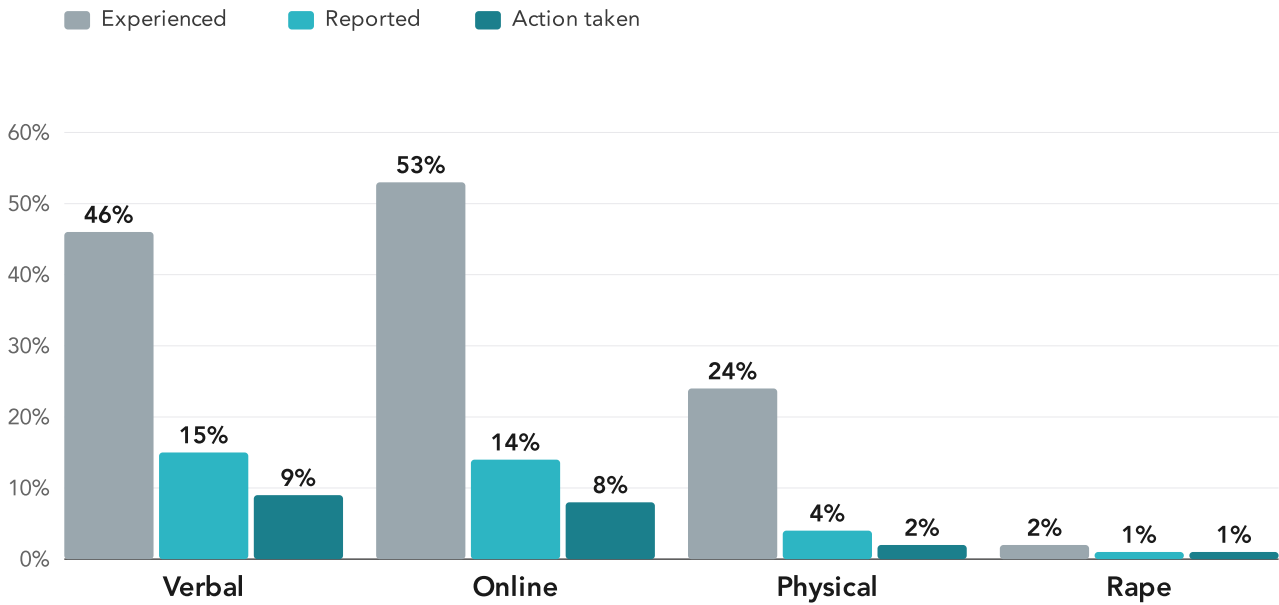
**Figure 5b: Action taken, by seniority of those reporting**

Base: Those who reported harassment and answered the action question (excluding “I can't remember”). All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



**Figure 6: The reporting-to-action pathway**

Share of those who experienced sexual harassment at each stage. Experienced sexual harassment n = 450. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



# Witnessing

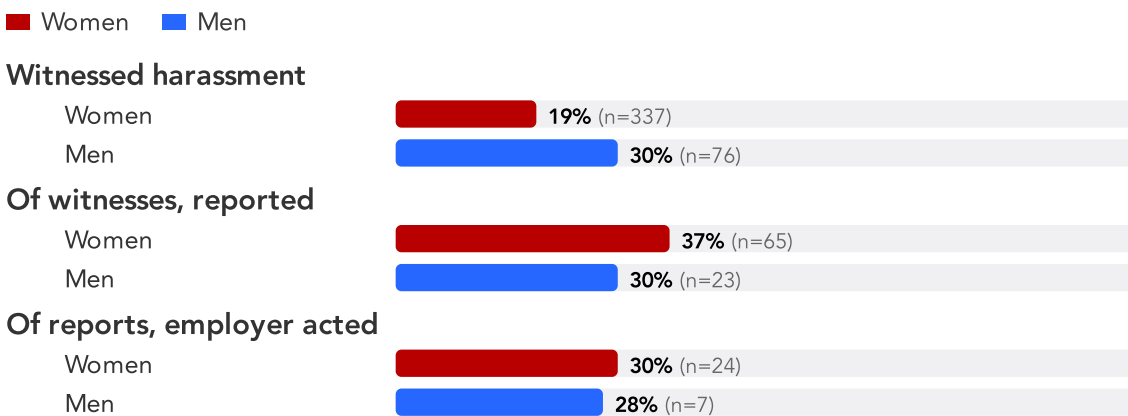
The study also asked if media professionals had witnessed sexual harassment affecting colleagues in their workplace. Most Arab region respondents (81% of women and 70% of men) said they have never witnessed sexual harassment at work.

Even when respondents had witnessed sexual harassment, few told their employers, and organisational responses were inconsistent (see Figure 7). Only 30% of male witnesses and 37% of female witnesses told employers about the harassment they observed. And only a minority of those reports prompted organisational action (29% of men and 37% of women who reported harassment they had witnessed).

Barriers to telling employers about witnessed incidents of sexual harassment differed by gender. Women were more likely to hold back due to concerns about potential consequences (37% of women who did not report versus 19% of men in the same category), while men were more likely to downplay the seriousness of incidents (44% for men, versus only 7% for women).

**Figure 7: Witnessing rates and follow-up**

Base: all respondents (witnessed); witnesses (reported); those who reported (employer acted). All respondents n = 481. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



# Perpetrators and Power Dynamics

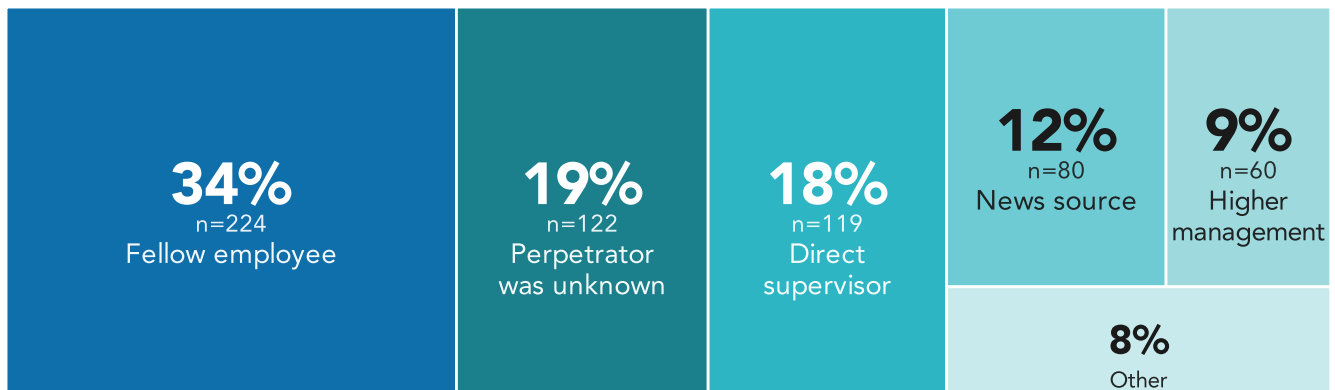
Across all forms of sexual harassment, respondents in the Arab region most commonly identified perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment as fellow employees (see Figure 8).

Patterns vary by type of harassment. Verbal sexual harassment is more likely to involve colleagues, while online sexual harassment more often involves perpetrators who are unknown to the survivor. In contrast, more severe forms of sexual harassment, including physical harassment and rape, point more clearly to power dynamics within organisations, with a greater number of

cases linked to supervisors and senior managers. Although the number of rape cases in the sample is limited, the pattern suggests that they are more likely to involve individuals in positions of authority – senior and top managers accounted for 42% of reported perpetrators, followed by direct supervisors at 25%.

**Figure 8: Who perpetrates workplace sexual harassment**

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



*“There is a lack of awareness among female journalists regarding mechanisms for dealing with sexual harassment, and there is a need to build their capacities in this area.”*

Female senior multimedia manager aged 45–54, Palestine

# Perceptions

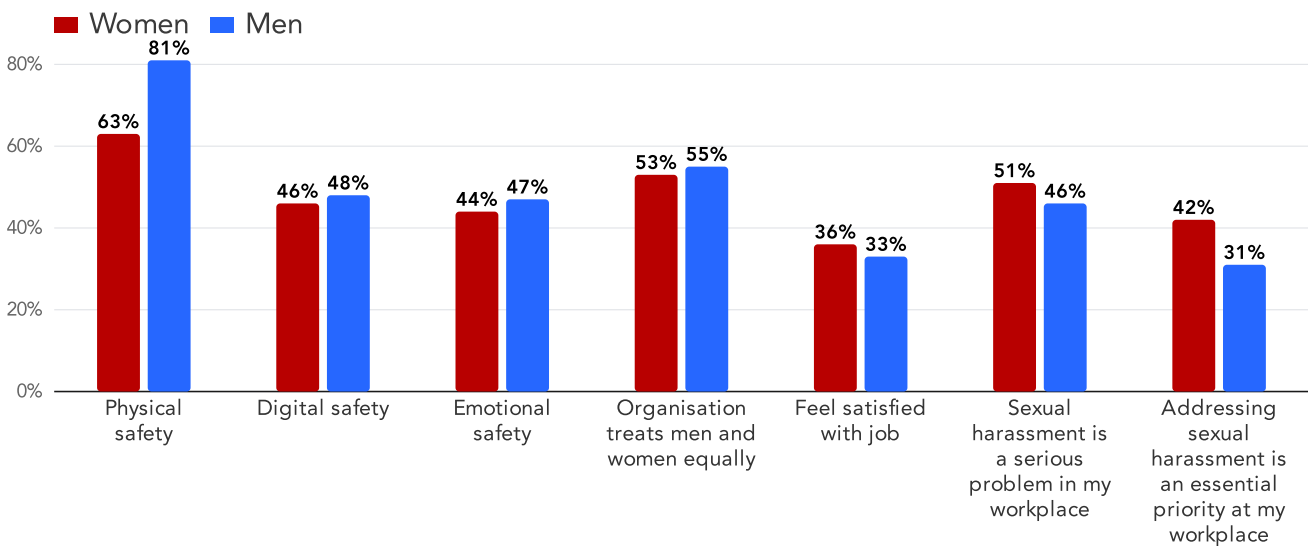
The survey explored how media workers perceive their workplace safety and culture, and asked respondents to rank their organisation’s commitment to addressing sexual harassment. It asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements, including whether they feel physically, digitally and emotionally safe at work, whether they feel their organisation treats men and women equally, and their overall level of job satisfaction.

Perceptions of workplace sexual harassment across the Arab region are mixed (see Figure 9). While around half of respondents said they view it as a serious problem in their workplace, a third

said they do not see it as a problem at all, pointing to a lack of shared understanding across the media sector.

**Figure 9: Perception gap by gender**

Base: all respondents (n = 481). All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



This divide is also reflected in their views on how their organisations prioritise the issue. Although 40% of respondents believe that their workplace has sexual harassment as an essential priority, many view it as a low or non-priority for their employer (13% and 16%, respectively), suggesting uneven levels of institutional commitment.

Differences are particularly evident by gender and job level. Women are more likely to view sexual harassment as both a serious concern in relation to their job and a higher priority being tackled at their workplace, reflecting their greater vulnerability to the issue – but also more

awareness of the topic as a whole. Similarly, respondents in general staff roles – a group who are less comfortable reporting sexual harassment they have experienced – are more likely to see sexual harassment as a serious problem in their workplace than those in senior leadership roles (56% versus 40%, respectively). This suggests a disconnect between media professionals’ experiences of sexual harassment at work and how the issue is perceived at decision-making levels. It may also reflect the gender gap in media organisations’ structures, where senior roles are more likely to be held by men.

# Training and Policy

The survey also considered the role of training and workplace policies in shaping experiences of sexual harassment in the media sector. It asked respondents questions designed to assess whether exposure to training on sexual harassment is associated with differences in how media professionals perceive their experiences and safety at work, and whether they report sexual harassment.

Awareness of workplace anti-sexual harassment policies is uneven across the Arab region. Roughly half of respondents said they have not heard of such a policy at their organisation, while a third were aware of a policy but said they have not received any training on it. Only 15% of respondents reported being aware of their workplace's policy against sexual harassment and having received training on it. This indicates that policies may often exist without being effectively communicated or implemented.

Levels of sexual harassment training remain low across the region. Only a minority – 19% of women and 16% of men respondents – said they have received training on this issue (see Figure

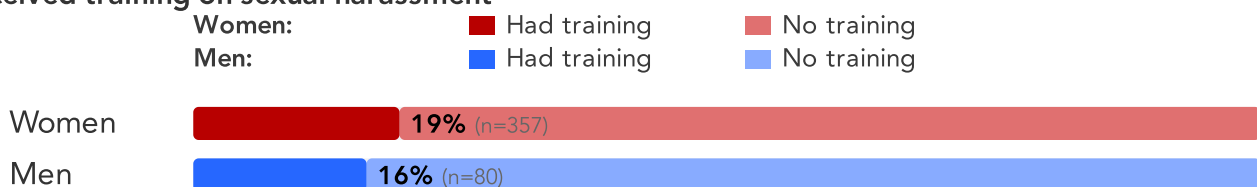
10). Although a slightly higher proportion of women report having received training, women experience more sexual harassment and still feel less safe at work. This suggests that training may be improving recognition and willingness to name sexual harassment, but is not consistently accompanied by broader organisational reform, effective reporting systems or meaningful improvements in workplace culture.

Evidence from other research studies suggests that training on sexual harassment is most effective alongside other interventions such as stronger legislation and accessible, trusted workplace reporting mechanisms.<sup>7</sup>

## Figure 10: Training received on sexual harassment

Base: all respondents (n = 481). All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

### Received training on sexual harassment



<sup>7</sup> [Research shows](#) that standalone training programmes, however well-designed, fail to produce lasting behavioural change without parallel improvements to organisational reporting mechanisms, accountability measures and workplace culture. [Studies also find](#) that even when training may foster individual willingness to report sexual harassment, institutional reporting rates remain low, underlining the need to transform reporting systems. This becomes particularly challenging in other contexts not covered in the studies cited above, where conflict and displacement may further impact experiences of sexual harassment at work.