

Country overview

# Bangladesh

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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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# Bangladesh

This report is part of a 2025 international study on sexual harassment in media workplaces<sup>1</sup>, 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.

The survey across newsrooms in Bangladesh shows that the overall prevalence rate of sexual harassment is 17%, slightly below the regional average (19%).<sup>2</sup> This was the first time conducting this survey in the country, so there is no 2020 data for comparison.

Across all categories of harassment, women media professionals appear almost six times more likely than men to experience sexual harassment at work on average. For some types of harassment measured, this gender gap is even wider.

<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 for specific types of sexual harassment, see the [methodology page](#).

<sup>2</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.

”

*“[Women] don't want to say if they are sexually harassed by a boss or a superior for fear of shame.”*

Female journalist aged 25–34

Overall rates of sexual harassment in newsrooms. First survey — no 2020 comparison

17%

Bangladesh  
2025

19%

Asia  
average · 2025



Regional benchmark

# Context

**Recent efforts to address sexual harassment in Bangladesh have taken place during a period of significant political shifts following student-led protests in 2024.**

International media monitoring organisations including the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) and [Reporters Without Borders](#) have reported widespread harassment, threats and attacks affecting journalists since 2024. This included protestors reportedly [setting alight](#) the offices of the Daily Star and Prothom Alo, Bangladesh's largest English and Bengali newspapers, respectively, in December 2025. Beyond the media sector, Bangladesh has also seen [an uptick in reports of gender-based violence](#) in recent years.

This increase in violence has taken place in a context where sexual harassment was already commonplace. A [2021 assessment](#) by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association indicated that 84% of women had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces and workplaces.

Bangladesh enacted no new comprehensive national legislation on sexual harassment between 2020 and 2025. Its legal system continues to mainly rely on a [2009 High Court directive guideline](#) and related minor updates. [Analysis](#) by academic Joydeep Chowdhury, a lecturer at Sonargaon University, found that "more than 15 years later, no law has been enacted, and the

directives are also seldom observed" while workplaces in the country "have failed to implement effective grievance redressal mechanisms".

Women still remain a small minority in Bangladesh's media sector. According to findings presented at a [2023 gender equality seminar](#) hosted by the Fojo Media Institute and media development organisation MRDI in Dhaka, just 10% of working journalists in Bangladesh are women, and even fewer are in management roles. The [Gender Equality and Media Regulation Study findings on Bangladesh](#) portray gender equality in media organisations and bodies as rare, with few sector-wide regulatory frameworks or written policies on gender equality or sensitivity.

Where measures do exist at media house level, they tend to be limited to legally mandated provisions such as maternity leave. Women journalists, meanwhile, have separately reported various forms of gender-based harassment in newsrooms — a pattern that sits uneasily alongside the sector's stated awareness of the 2009 High Court guidelines on workplace sexual harassment.



*"When someone comes to intern in a media house as an apprentice, especially if she is a [young woman], the behaviour of some seniors is very disappointing. I have seen such problems with juniors in my past offices, but no action was taken by the management."*

**Female journalist aged 25–34**

# The survey

A total of 339 media professionals from Bangladesh took part in the survey<sup>3</sup> through an online questionnaire distributed among WAN-IFRA WIN and BBC Media Action networks. Respondents comprised 100 women, 190 men, 4 gender non-conforming individuals and 45 people who preferred to self-describe their gender identity (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup>

The over-representation of men in the sample reflects a stark gender divide in Bangladesh, where women represent only [10% of media workers](#). The high number of individuals preferring to self-describe their gender identity may correspond to the hijra third gender, which is legally recognised in the country.

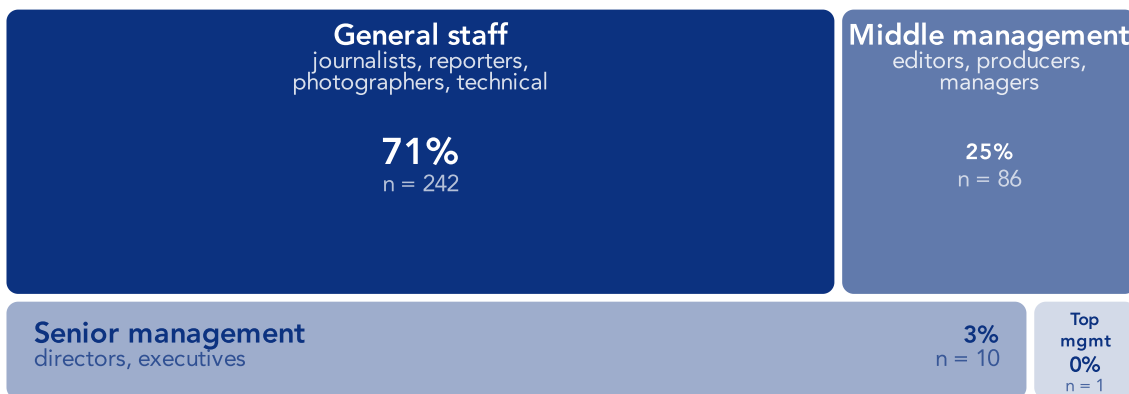
## Figure 1: Respondent demographics

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

### By gender identity



### By job level



<sup>3</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>4</sup>Totals include gender non-conforming individuals and those who prefer to self-describe their gender identity. Data is not disaggregated for these people at country level. To explore trends for these groups, please refer to the relevant regional or global report.

# Experience of Sexual Harassment

The 2025 survey shows that, overall, women media professionals in Bangladesh are almost six times more likely than their male colleagues to face sexual harassment at work.<sup>5</sup>

Some 60% of women respondents have experienced **verbal sexual harassment** at least once, compared with 9% of their male counterparts (see Figure 2). Gender non-conforming individuals, meanwhile, were three times as likely to experience it as men (28%).

Meanwhile, 48% of women respondents (43) and 33% of gender non-conforming respondents (13) said they have faced **online sexual harassment** related to their work. In contrast, only 15% of men (26) have done so. Even as the harassment type with the smallest gender gap, women experience this type of harassment at three times the

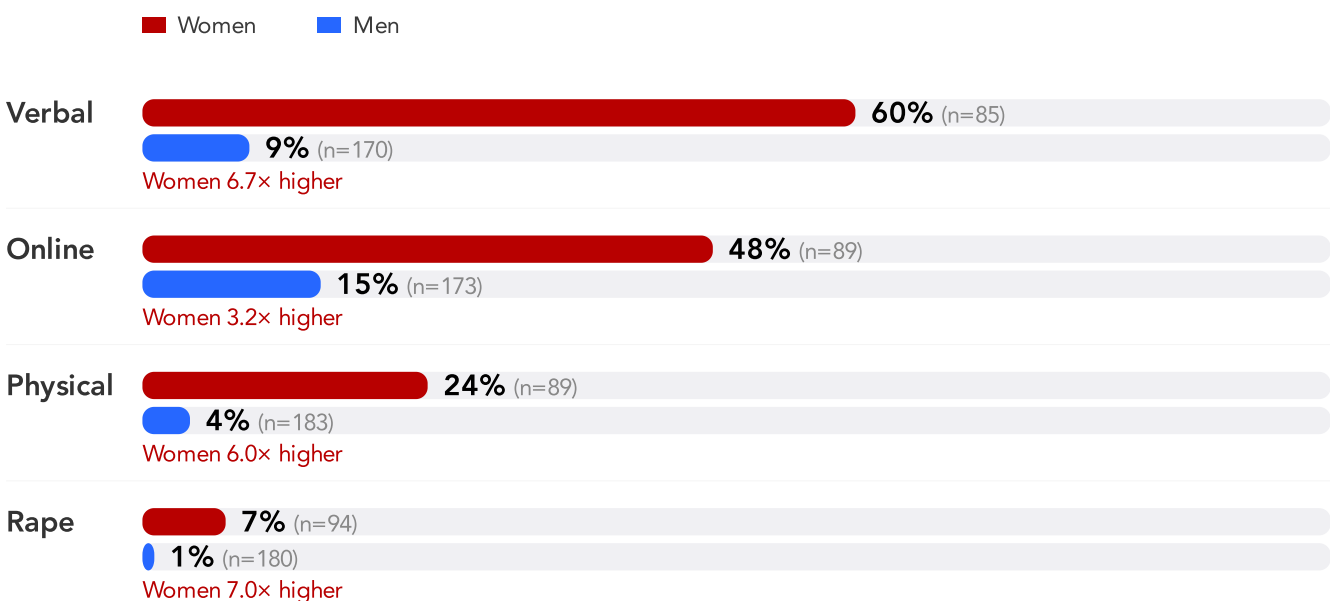
rate, and gender non-conforming people experience it at twice the rate of men.

Workplace **physical sexual harassment** seems less prevalent among media professionals in Bangladesh. According to the data, 24% of women (21) and 12% of gender non-conforming people (five) have experienced this, compared with just 4% (seven) among the men surveyed.

A small group of respondents – seven women, four gender non-conforming individuals and two men – said they had experienced **rape** in the course of their work.

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

Base: all respondents, excluding "I can't remember". All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



<sup>5</sup>When taken as the mean average of gender gaps across the four sexual harassment types.

# Reporting and Action

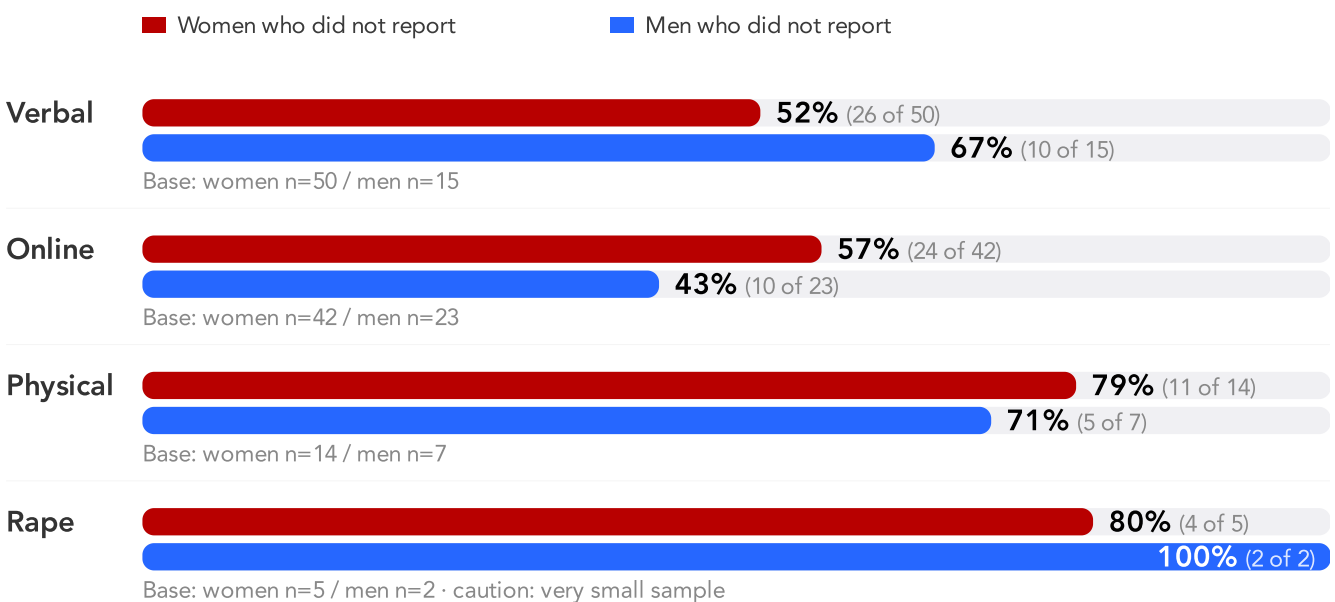
The survey asked respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual harassment at work whether they reported the incident to their organisation. In such cases, the survey asked follow-up questions to assess whether their employers had taken any action as a result.

The majority of both women and men did not report their experiences of **verbal sexual harassment** to their employer, with only five men (33%) and 24 women (48%) doing so (see Figure 3). Respondents cited various reasons for not reporting their experience, most commonly fear that doing so would negatively affect their job.

When respondents did report verbal sexual harassment to their employer, organisational action was patchy (see Figure 4). Employers took no action in 43% of cases reported by women and in 60% (three out of five) cases reported by men. When employers did act, they most commonly warned the perpetrator.

## Figure 3: Reporting rates by type of sexual harassment

Base: those who experienced each type and answered the reporting question. All percentages rounded.



*“A male colleague... tried to harass me several times. Even after reporting it to the higher authorities, they did not take any action. Later, he started harassing another female colleague. In the end, he was just sent to a sub-office.”*

Female editorial manager aged 35–44

In cases of **online sexual harassment**, 57% of women and 43% of men did not report their experiences, mostly because they did not think their experience was a big deal. When respondents had reported online harassment to their employer, organisations seemed more likely to act in response to men’s experiences than women’s. Some 56% (nine) of cases reported by women resulted in organisational action, versus 75% (nine) of those reported by men. The most common action employers took was reporting the complaint to the relevant online platform.

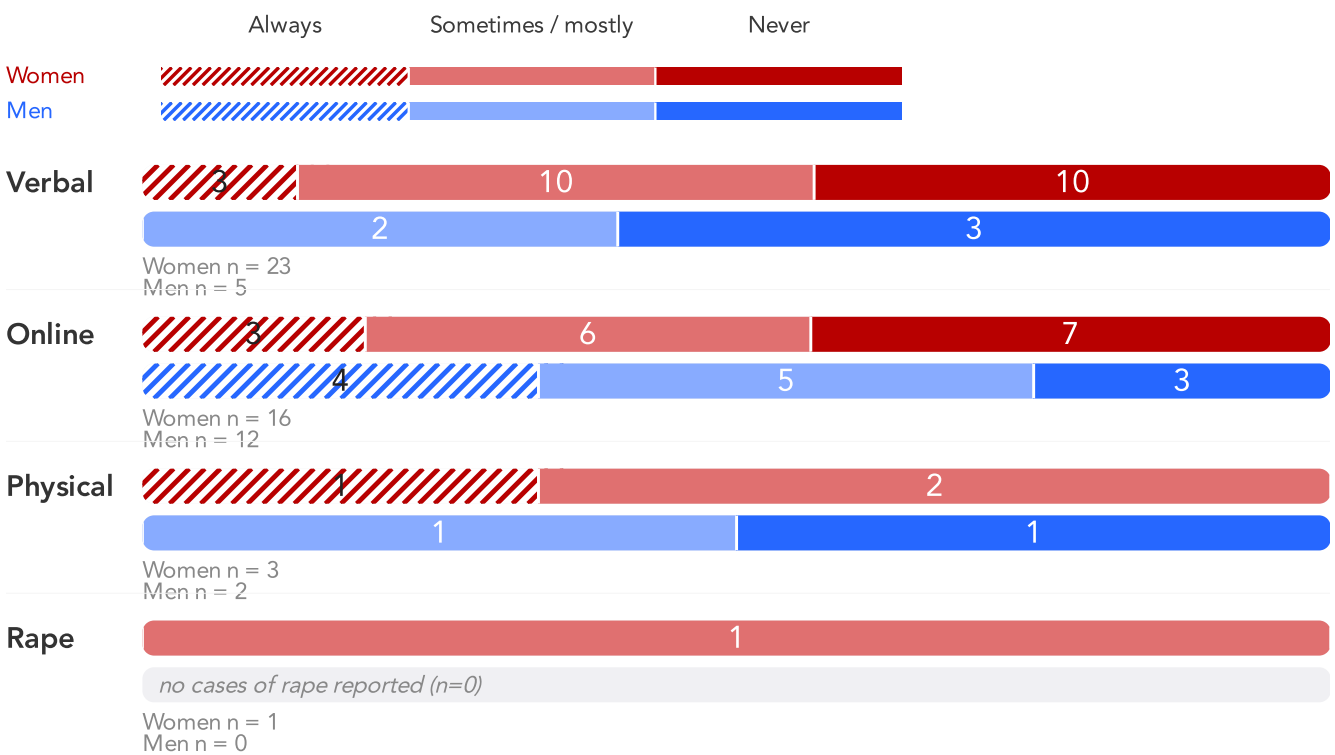
As with other types of harassment, the majority of respondents did not tell their employer about instances of **physical sexual harassment** they had encountered at work. Only three women

(21%) and two men (29%) did so. The main factor that prevented others from officially reporting this form of workplace harassment was fear that it would negatively affect their job. When physical sexual harassment was reported to employers, they mostly warned perpetrators.

Among survey respondents, only one woman had reported a workplace rape to their employer. Other rape survivors cited various reasons for not telling their employer, but fear that it would have a negative impact on their job was the only option chosen by multiple respondents. Organisational action taken by the employer in the one reported case involved warning and transferring the perpetrator.

**Figure 4: Action taken by organisations on reported sexual harassment**

Base: those who reported harassment and answered the action question (excluding "I can't remember").



*"I don't know much about sexual harassment, but I want to understand it. By taking training I will be able to have the right information."*

**Male media worker aged 18–24**