

Country overview  
**Malawi**

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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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# Malawi

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 earlier research conducted in 2020 that identified persistent gaps in evidence on sexual harassment in media workplaces.

The latest survey across newsrooms in Malawi shows that overall rates of incidents have remained relatively unchanged over the past five years, from 30% in 2020 to 31% in 2025.<sup>2</sup> The current prevalence rate is in line with the Sub-Saharan African average (33%).

Over the same period, survey data indicates that reporting rates of workplace sexual harassment have increased. It also shows that women respondents in Malawi are more frequently exposed than men to verbal and physical sexual harassment, while this gender gap narrows when it comes to rates of online sexual harassment.

<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](#).

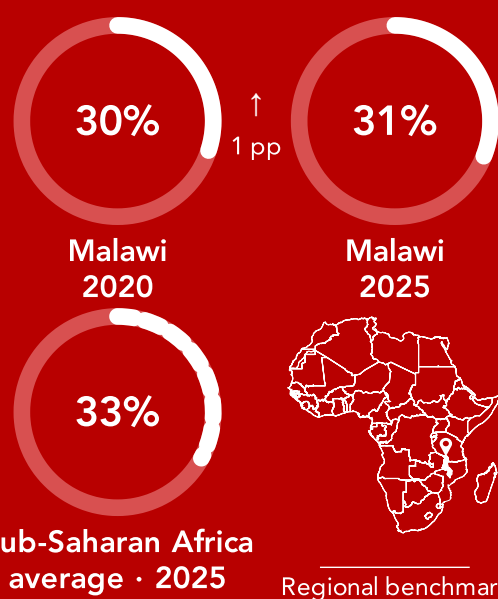
<sup>2</sup>The prevalence of sexual harassment for a given country/region is calculated as the mean average of the percentage of respondents from that location who reported having ever experienced verbal harassment, online harassment, physical harassment and/or rape while at work.

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*“I think it is now time for newsrooms to start tackling issues of sexual harassment, as it is becoming a common trend. These things happen for favours, to get employment or to have special treatment. It is time we start acting if we are to make the work environment favourable for women.”*

Female print media manager aged 45–54

## Overall rates of sexual harassment in newsrooms



# Context

**Between 2020 and 2023, Malawi’s media sector was partly influenced by a high-profile [sexual harassment case](#) involving the former director general of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.**

The case attracted significant public attention, sparked national debate and prompted calls for greater accountability, becoming a focal point for wider discussions on sexual harassment in media workplaces.

In response to this and other claims, civil society and media organisations – including The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Association for Women in Media and Women Lawyers Association of Malawi – launched [a joint initiative](#) to advocate for sexual harassment policies in media houses and support survivors.

The most notable advancement in national efforts to tackle sexual harassment was the [Republic of Malawi Public Service Workplace](#)

[Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy 2023](#), developed in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO). Following this, the government of Malawi introduced a [National Code of Conduct on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) in 2025. Informed by ILO Convention 190,<sup>3</sup> the code establishes a unified, cross-sector framework for employers.

Between 2020 and 2025, WAN-IFRA WIN delivered sexual harassment training at Nation Publications Limited, Zodiak Broadcasting and the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, and joint sessions with partner media houses and media institutions, focusing on strengthening newsroom awareness and capacity to prevent sexual harassment.

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*“We have normalised [verbal sexual harassment]. There’s a need to bring awareness that may minimise such behaviours.”*

**Female radio middle manager/producer aged 35–44**

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*“Ever since I started my journalism career I have never heard of any training which can empower journalists with the right knowledge on sexual harassment in the newsroom. I have also never seen the organisations I have worked with prioritising mechanisms and platforms where sexual harassment survivors can voice out their concerns whenever they face such experiences.”*

**Female digital media intern aged 25–34**

<sup>3</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.

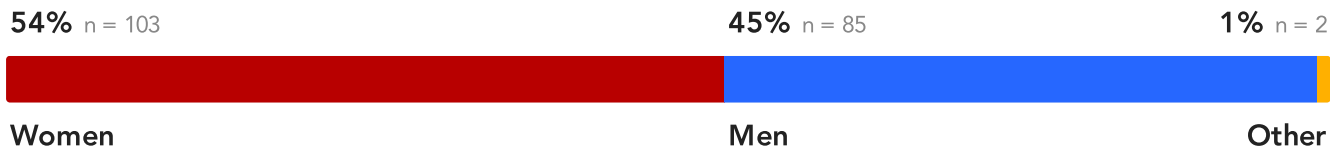
# The survey

A total of 190 media professionals from Malawi took part in the survey<sup>4</sup> through an online questionnaire distributed among WAN-IFRA WIN and BBC Media Action networks. Respondents comprised 103 women, 85 men, 1 gender non-conforming individual and 1 person who preferred to self-describe their gender identity (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup>

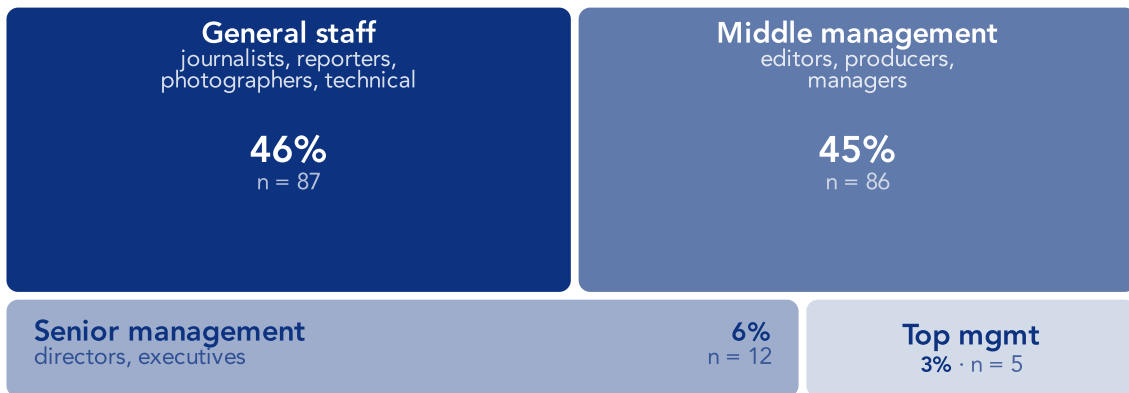
## Figure 1: Respondent demographics

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

### By gender identity



### By job level



<sup>4</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>5</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 73% of women respondents have experienced **verbal sexual harassment** at least once, compared with 31% of men (see Figure 2). Just over a quarter of women said this has happened to them five or more times at work, making them over twice as likely to experience this type of harassment than their male colleagues.

Almost half of women (47%) and over one-third of men (37%) who had experienced any form of sexual harassment at work said they have been exposed to **online sexual harassment**. This gen-

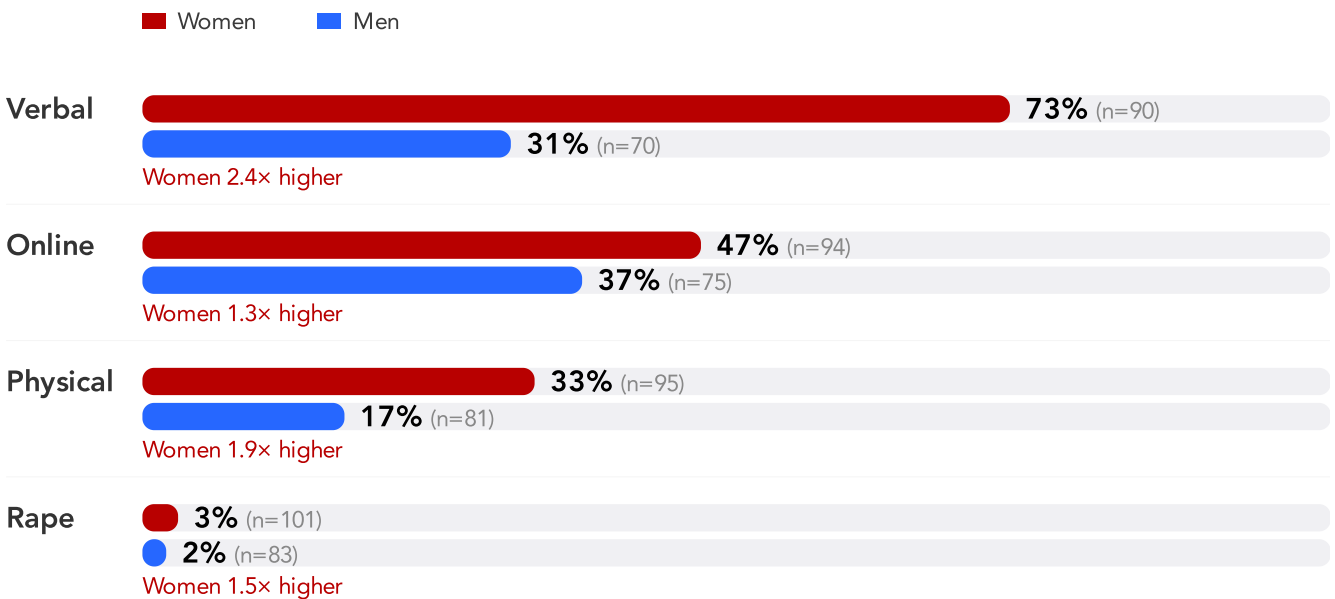
der gap remains smaller than for most other types of sexual harassment, but women remain more likely to experience it than men.

**Physical sexual harassment** is less prevalent than other types of sexual harassment except rape. One-third (33%) of women respondents said they have experienced it – almost double the percentage of men who have done so.

**Rape** cases at work are rare, representing five individuals in the Malawi sample (three women and two men).

**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.



# 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.

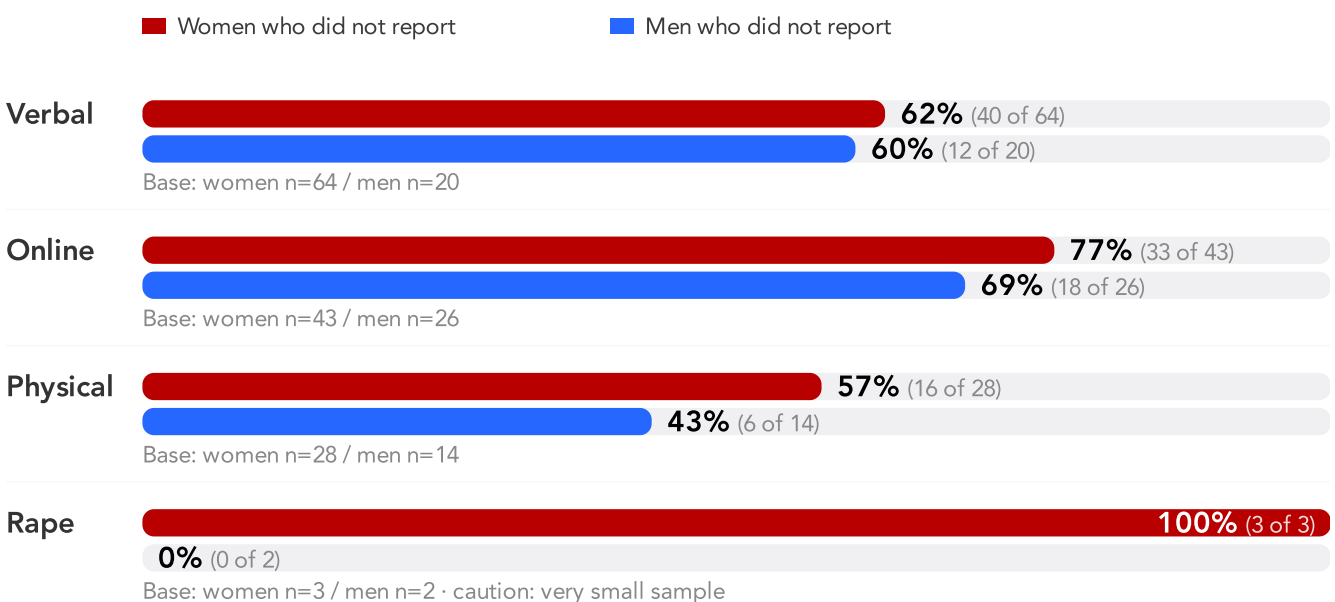
The majority of men and women did not report their experiences of **verbal sexual harassment** to their employer (see Figure 3). Only eight men (40%) and 24 women (38%) had done this, most commonly because they did not perceive the incident as a big deal, followed by concerns that speaking up would negatively affect their job. Among the small number of survey respondents who had reported cases of this type of harassment, one man and three women said their organisations always addressed the issue, while six men and 15 women said their organisations took action at least some of the time (see Figure 4). The most common course of action was to issue a warning to the perpetrator (cited in 20

out of 30 cases). Other, less common responses included providing professional or emotional support.

Official reporting remained low in cases of **online sexual harassment**, mirroring patterns observed for verbal harassment. Only eight men (31%) and 10 women (23%) reported online incidents of sexual harassment at work, most commonly because they did not consider this a big deal. No action was taken in around half of these cases but, when there was a response, it was often limited to warnings. Two men and two women reported that their organisation always took action, while six respondents said that the organisation took action some of the time.

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

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



Roughly half of all respondents who experienced **physical sexual harassment** did not report it to their employer, citing various reasons for this. Of the 22 respondents who had not officially reported their cases, nine believed it would negatively affect their jobs, six worried they would not be believed, six said it was not a big deal and five cited a lack of reporting mechanisms. Among those who did report physical harass-

ment to their organisations (20 out of 45 respondents who experienced it), warnings were again the most common action taken by organisations.

Small incidence numbers complicate the analysis of the reporting rates for **rape**, although it is notable that both of the men who experienced rape chose to report it at work, while none of the three women who experienced it did so.

**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").

