

Country overview

Sierra Leone

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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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Sierra Leone

This report is part of a 2025 international study on sexual harassment in media workplaces¹, 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 results from Sierra Leone show overall rates of sexual harassment in the country's newsrooms of 27% in 2025, below the Sub-Saharan African average of 33%.² This was the first time the survey was conducted in the country so there is no previous dataset for comparison.

Women media professionals surveyed in Sierra Leone have experienced verbal, online and physical sexual harassment at twice the rate of men, according to the data. Online and verbal harassment are more common than other forms.

¹This 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](#).

²The 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.

”

“Training must be conducted annually in order to create more awareness, for female media employees not to be taken advantage of by their male counterparts.”

Female radio journalist aged 25–34

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

27%

Sierra Leone
2025

33%

Sub-Saharan Africa
average · 2025



Regional benchmark

Context

Recent surveys around sexual harassment in Sierra Leone reflect a wider legacy of sexual violence dating from the 1991–2002 civil war.

The [Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019](#) reported that 62% of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical or sexual assault, underscoring the persistence of sexual violence in the country's public and private spheres.

Sierra Leone amended its legal framework addressing sexual harassment through the [Sexual Offences Act \(Amendment\) No. 8 of 2019](#). This introduced the offence of aggravated sexual assault and explicitly identified people in positions of authority as potential perpetrators of sexual harassment. In the same year, President Julius Maada Bio [declared a national emergency](#) over rape and sexual violence after recorded cases doubled over a year, drawing political attention to the issue. He also announced the formation of a dedicated police division and magistrates' court to deal with sexual violence cases.

In 2023 the [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment \(GEWE\) Act 2022](#) came into force, bringing about [the most significant advancement](#) in women's political and economic participation in Sierra Leone's history. This introduced a 30% hiring quota for women and mandated gender equal pay, among other requirements. Building on this, the [Employment Act 2023](#) is currently the

foundational law to protect workers, addressing various gender-based safeguards including against violence and harassment in the workplace.

There have been some promising developments in tackling harassment, such as a [Male Involvement Strategy](#) introduced by the Gender Minister to combat sexual and gender-based violence using male advocates and leaders to shift attitudes, and a partnering programme with the Ministry of Youth Affairs to train gender advocates.

Despite this, structural barriers remain in areas like accountability, protection mechanisms and justice for survivors of sexual harassment and abuse. Although police statistics indicate that reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence [declined by almost 17%](#) from 2018 to 2023, under-reporting means the real prevalence is likely to be much higher.

Sexual harassment and wider gender bias issues in Sierra Leone's media sector have been highlighted by [the case of a woman journalist](#) who was unlawfully dismissed from the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation in 2024. According to [reports](#), this case involved repeated sexual harassment and reflects patterns in the country's media.



"A few months ago, some female colleagues were not impressed with the behaviour of a senior colleague at a TV station, where he was responsible for hiring staff. I was told that he was asking female journalists for sex in exchange for employment... He was fired after the owner of the TV station was made aware of the situation."

Radio middle manager/producer who preferred to self-describe their gender identity aged 35–44

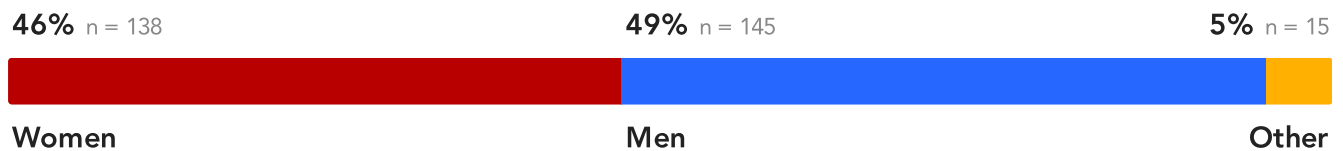
The survey

A total of 298 media professionals from Sierra Leone took part in the survey³ through an online questionnaire distributed among WAN-IFRA WIN and BBC Media Action networks. Respondents comprised 138 women, 145 men, 7 gender non-conforming individuals and 8 who chose to self-describe their gender identity (see Figure 1).⁴

Figure 1: Respondent demographics

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

By gender identity



By job level



³This 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](#).

⁴Totals 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 women in Sierra Leone’s media sector are twice as likely on average to experience online, verbal and physical sexual harassment at work than men (see Figure 2).

Around half (54%) of the women surveyed have experienced **verbal sexual harassment** at least once, compared with 26% of men.

Online sexual harassment is the most common type of workplace harassment experienced by both men and women respondents. Around one-third (32%) of men say they have experienced this at least once, compared with 57% of women. Women are more likely to encounter repeated harassment. Some 19% of all women respondents said they have experienced at least two to four incidents and 11% more than five incidents –

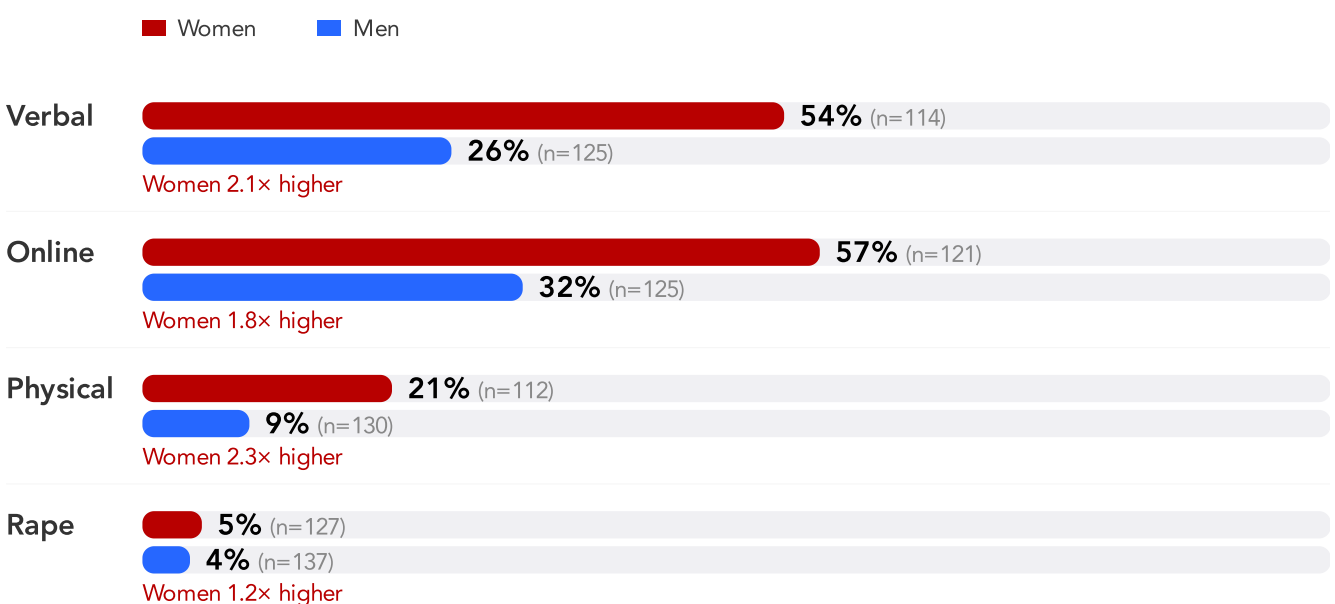
compared with 4% and 2% respectively among men respondents.

Physical sexual harassment is less common across both genders. But again, women experience it more than twice as much as men – only 9% of men respondents said this had happened to them, compared with 21% of women respondents.

Cases of **rape** at work were rare in the Sierra Leone sample, but it is notable that men cited having experienced this at the same rate as women (4% for men and 5% for women).

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 both men and women did not take their experiences of **verbal sexual harassment** to their employer, with only 17 women and six men reporting they had done so (see Figure 3). The most common reasons for this were a belief that the experience was not a big deal, and a lack of reporting mechanisms in their workplace. Notably, women were twice as likely as men to say they feared the perpetrator would retaliate against them if they formally reported cases of sexual harassment.

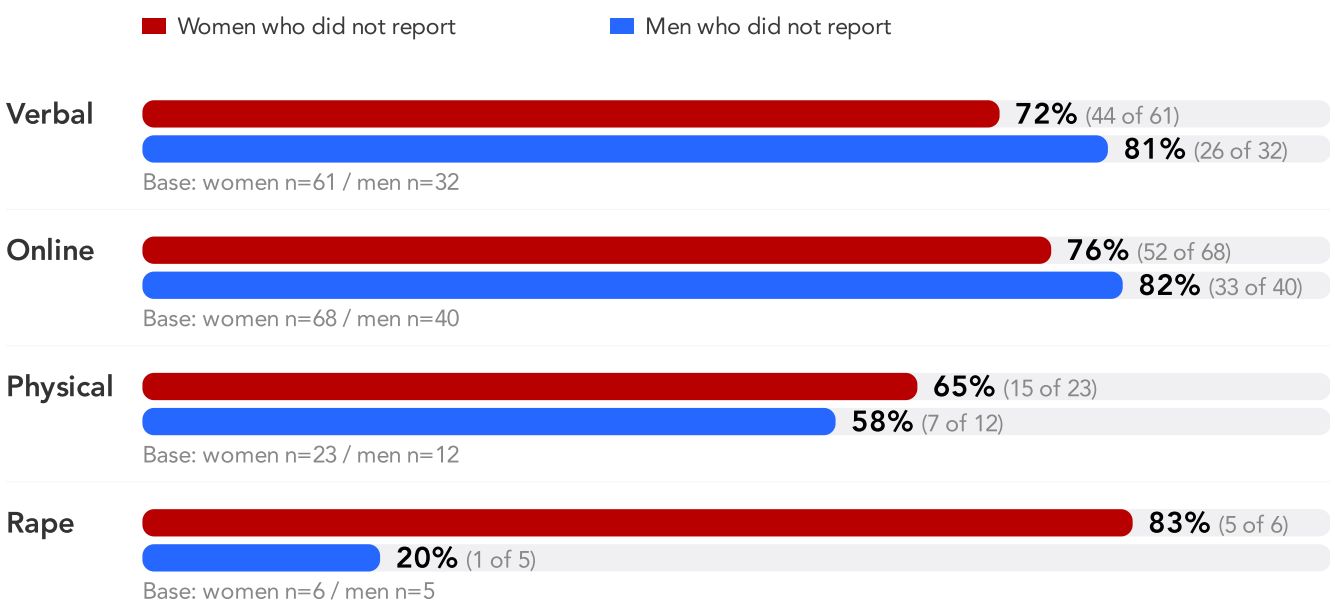
The sample of cases of verbal sexual harassment reported to employers is small, but organisations did take action in most of those cases (see Figure 4). The most common action (in nine out of 17

cases) was warning the perpetrator. More consequential actions included four cases where the perpetrator was suspended and three where the police were informed.

Similarly, most respondents did not tell their employer about **online sexual harassment** encountered at work, with only 17% of men and 23% of women doing so. Again, the most common reasons cited by both genders were not thinking it was a big deal and a lack of reporting mechanisms at work. Fears of retaliation and not being believed were other reasons for not disclosing this form of workplace harassment to employers.

Figure 3: Reporting rates by type of sexual harassment

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



Generally, employers took minimal action in response to reports of online sexual harassment, most commonly warning the perpetrator (in seven out of 13 cases).

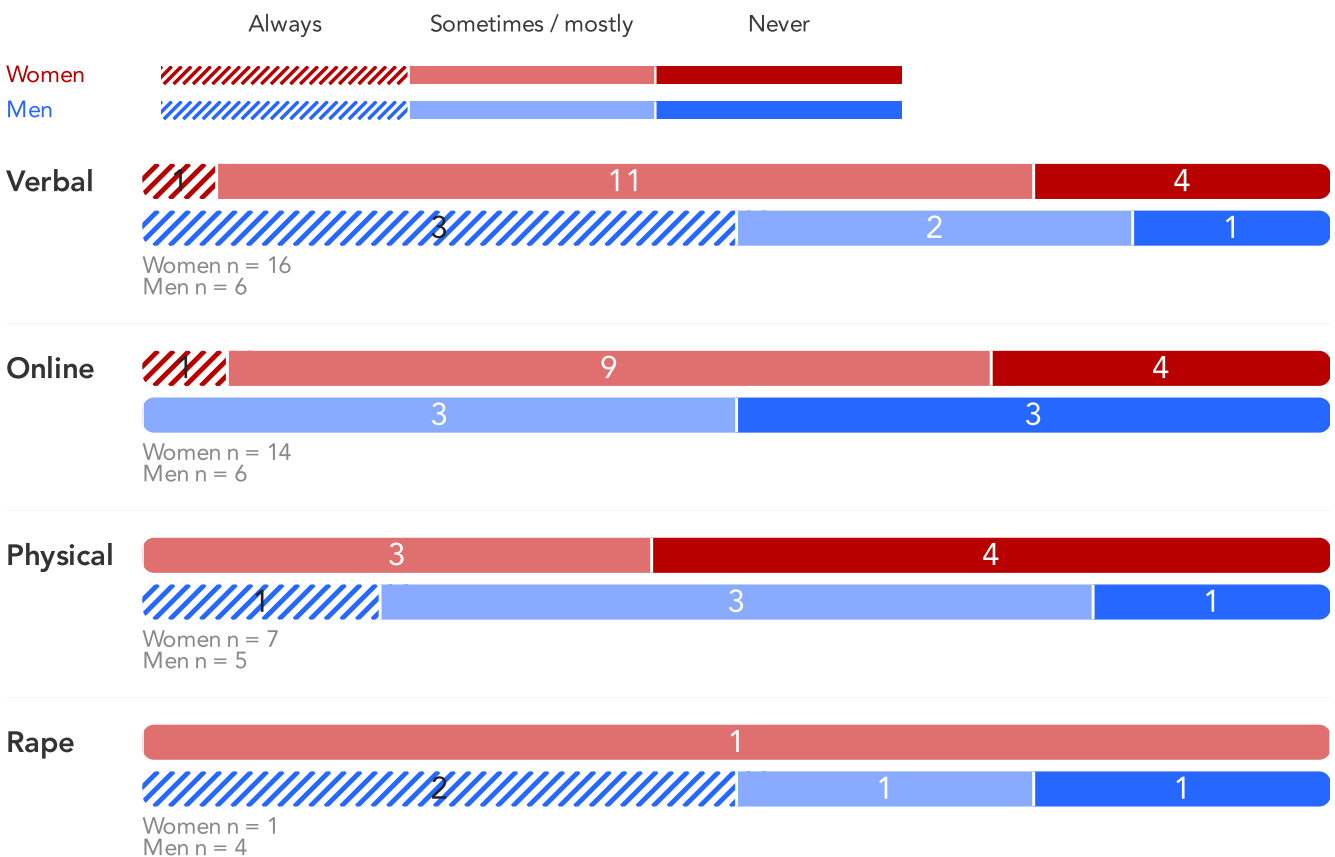
In the 12 physical sexual harassment cases disclosed to employers, organisations generally took minimal action – warning perpetrators in four cases and informing police in three.

Most men and women who had experienced **physical sexual harassment** at work did not tell their employer, mirroring trends with other types of harassment. For men, the most common reasons for this were not thinking it was a big deal and fear of losing their job. Women’s reasons were more varied.

Although the number of **rape** incidents cited in the sample was small, four out of five men reported this experience to their employer, compared with only one out of six women. Fears of not being believed, losing their job, having a negative impact on their job, potential retaliation and even thinking it was not a big deal featured among respondents’ reasons for not reporting workplace rape.

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").



“Sexual harassment leads to depression and insecurity in a workplace.”

Female print journalist/middle manager aged 35–44