

Regional overview

Sub-Saharan Africa

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Sexual Harassment in the Media

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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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Sub-Saharan Africa

This report is part of a 2025 international study on sexual harassment¹ 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 Sub-Saharan African media organisations in the 12 countries surveyed.² 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 within newsroom hierarchies, among other aspects of organisational culture.

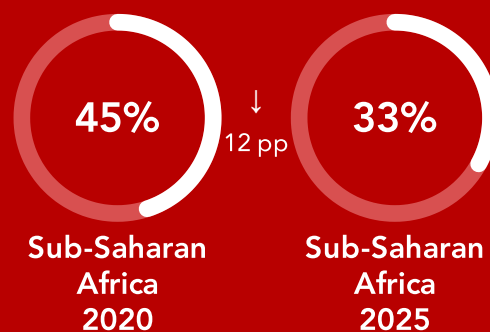
The 2025 findings present an updated regional picture of sexual harassment in newsrooms, drawing on a revised set of countries – including some not previously studied such as Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Somalia, and South Sudan. The survey findings in Sub-Saharan Africa show an overall workplace sexual harassment rate of 33% in 2025,³ compared with 45% in 2020.⁴

”

“I have frequently been sexually harassed about my curves, which makes me sometimes not feel comfortable because whenever I put on a dress that is clingy, men always verbally or non-verbally comment about my curves... Such comments have most of the times stuck in my head and even made me change my sense of dressing to avoid them.”

Female radio reporter aged 25-35, Malawi

Overall rates of sexual harassment in newsrooms



¹ 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.

² Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

³ 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.

⁴ Please interpret this comparison cautiously, as the 2020 and 2025 datasets are not directly comparable due to differences in sample size, country coverage, and respondent composition.

Context

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, the five years since the 2020 survey on sexual harassment in media workplaces have been shaped by legal reform, high-profile cases, grassroots campaigning, and sector-led efforts that have brought renewed attention to the issue within media organisations and in wider workplace culture.

Overall, awareness of sexual harassment is increasing across the region, but legal frameworks, organisational practices and everyday workplace realities are not yet sufficiently aligned to tackle workplace sexual harassment effectively.

In some African countries, public sexual harassment cases have played an important role in highlighting the issue. For instance, in [Malawi](#) and [Zimbabwe](#), reported high-profile cases within the media sector helped to trigger wider conversations about accountability and workplace protections to tackle sexual harassment.

Several countries have introduced or strengthened relevant legal and policy frameworks over this period. [Legal frameworks matter](#) – they set the standard for what is unacceptable, create the conditions for accountability, and signal to both employers and employees about what protections exist.

[Uganda has moved towards broader workplace protections](#), including from sexual harassment, although some [reforms are still pending](#). Similarly, [Zimbabwe revised its Labour Act](#) and developed an [industry-wide policy framework](#) for the media sector, both of which cover workplace sexual harassment. [Malawi introduced a national code on violence and harassment at work](#), providing a cross-sector framework for employers, while [Sierra Leone had already strengthened its legal framework in 2019](#) through reforms linked to sexual offences, as well as with [employment protections](#) and gender equality measures that

followed. [In Tanzania, provisions on abuse of authority and sextortion](#) have been strengthened, while [Rwanda has built on its labour law](#) through [ministerial orders](#) and a [media policy](#) against sexual harassment.

Yet legal and policy frameworks vary significantly across countries. At the time of writing, there is still [no dedicated sexual harassment law in South Sudan](#), with a [gender-based violence bill still pending](#). [In Ethiopia, workplaces are not legally required](#) to have sexual harassment policies in place. In [Somalia and Somaliland](#), legal recognition has advanced in some areas but enforcement remains limited and protections are not consistent. [Across Africa](#), the gap between sexual harassment legislation and enforcement is well-documented. Where laws exist, implementation frequently falls short and access to justice remains uneven.

Alongside legal changes in relation to sexual harassment at work, there has been a strong focus on more practical improvements within the media sector. In countries including Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, efforts have centred on training, developing policies and strengthening reporting processes.

To support this effort, in 2020–2025 WAN-IFRA WIN trained over 2,000 media professionals globally to build their understanding of sexual harassment. This included training sessions in all African study countries except Ethiopia.

The 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 harass-

ment policies existed, WAN-IFRA WIN offered additional support on how to effectively communicate these policies.

However, persistent gaps remain across Africa in relation to sexual harassment at work – particularly around weak reporting mechanisms, power imbalances and poor working conditions, especially for women journalists.



“Creating awareness is key on these issues because many people who go through [sexual harassment] are stigmatised.”

Male radio journalist aged 45-55, Kenya

The Survey

The African sample contains responses from 1,730 media professionals across 12 African countries: Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, plus a small number of respondents who said they work elsewhere in Africa.⁵

The largest groups of respondents came from Sierra Leone (298), Zambia (251), Uganda (206), Malawi (190), Kenya (157) and Tanzania (152).

Figure 1a shows the gender breakdown of respondents working in Africa, including those who identified as gender non-conforming and those who chose to self-describe their gender identity.⁶ Figure 1b breaks down respondents by their job level.

Figure 1a: Respondent demographics by gender identity

Base: all respondents. Women n = 952 · Men n = 725 · Gender non-conforming n = 28 · Self-describe n = 25. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

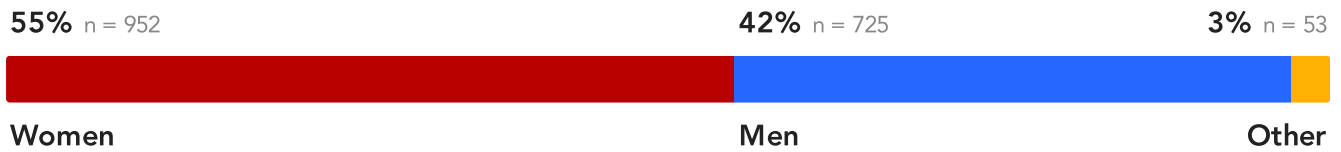
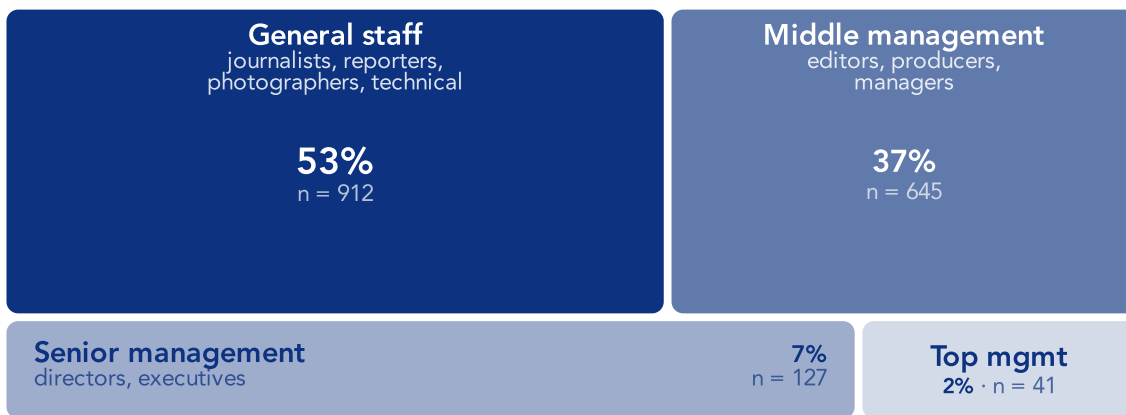


Figure 1b: Respondents by job level



⁵This 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.

⁶Totals 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 Sub-Saharan Africa, the 2025 survey shows that **verbal sexual harassment** is the most frequently experienced form of harassment in media workplaces across all genders combined (see Figure 2). Just over half of all respondents (52%) report having experienced this form of harassment at least once. Women respondents are more than twice as likely to have faced verbal harassment as men – 68% of women respondents said they have experienced this, compared with 32% of their male counterparts.

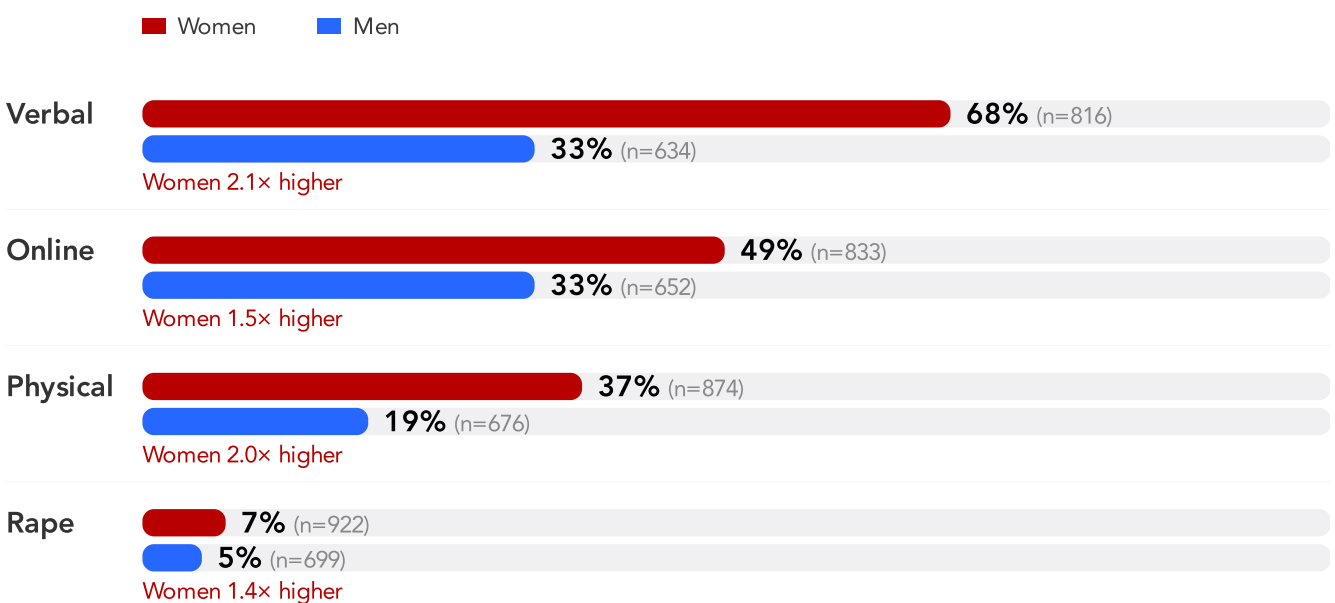
Online sexual harassment is the second most frequent type reported in the African dataset, with 42% of respondents overall saying they have experienced this in the course of their work. Again, women respondents are more likely to

have experienced this – 49% said they had done so, compared with 33% of men.

Africa’s media professionals experience **physical sexual harassment** at work less frequently than verbal or online harassment. But this form of harassment remains a significant issue, with 30% of respondents saying they have faced it at least once. Data shows that women are twice as likely to have experienced workplace physical sexual harassment than men (37% of women respondents, compared with 19% of men).

Incidences of workplace **rape** were reported by a smaller portion of African respondents (6% overall), but it remains an ongoing threat. Notably, survey results indicate that women were only slightly more likely than men to have experienced this most serious type of sexual abuse.

Figure 2: Experience by type of sexual harassment and gender



Reporting and Barriers

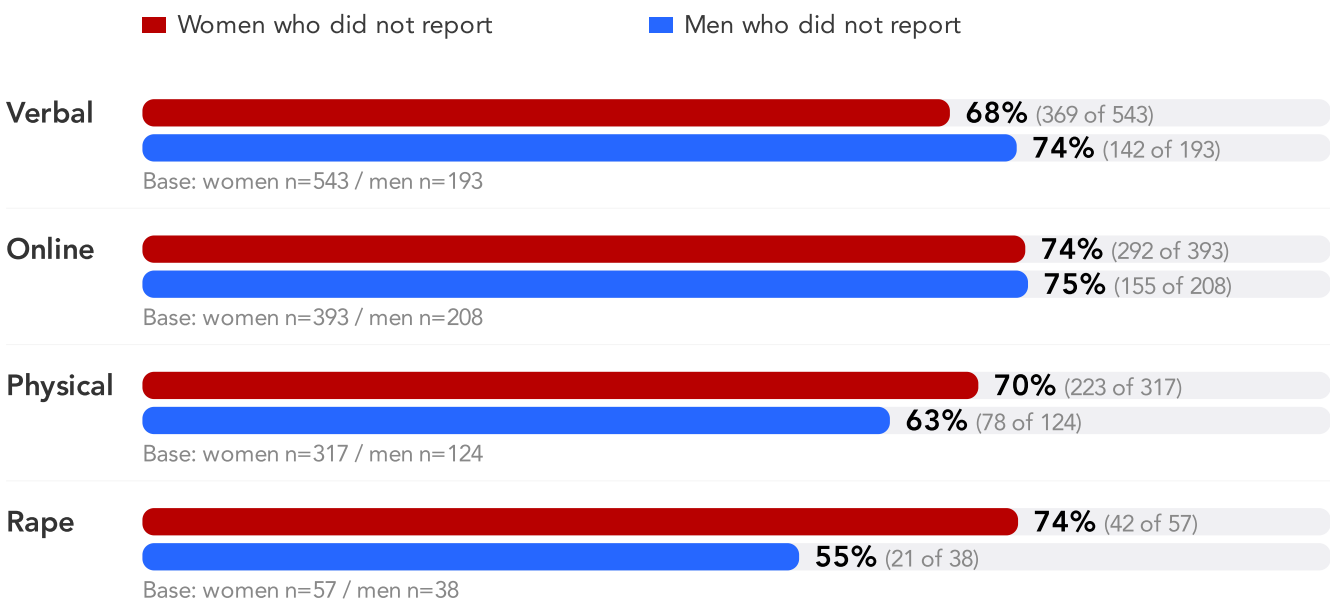
The survey asked respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual harassment at work whether they reported the incident to their organisation, and whether their employers had taken any action as a result.

Across all types of sexual harassment, only around one in three respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa said they had reported any incidents to their organisations, underscoring how far sexual harassment remains under wraps in media workplaces.

Across all forms of harassment, reporting remains consistently low (see Figures 3a and 3b). Overall, around seven in 10 respondents did not report incidents of verbal and online harassment to their employer. Levels of workplace reporting for physical sexual harassment and rape were slightly higher.

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

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



Experiences of harassment, and respondents' willingness to report those experiences at work, are shaped not only by the nature of the incident, but also by where they sit within organisational hierarchies.

When looking at reporting by job level, rates are similarly low for verbal and online harassment – less than one-third (29%) of respondents across seniority levels reported these types of harassment. However, reporting differences become

more visible with physical harassment. Reporting of this form of harassment is higher among senior managers and top managers (50% and 44%, respectively) than middle managers and general staff (30% and 32%, respectively). The sample size for rape cases was too small to draw firm conclusions about trends by seniority.

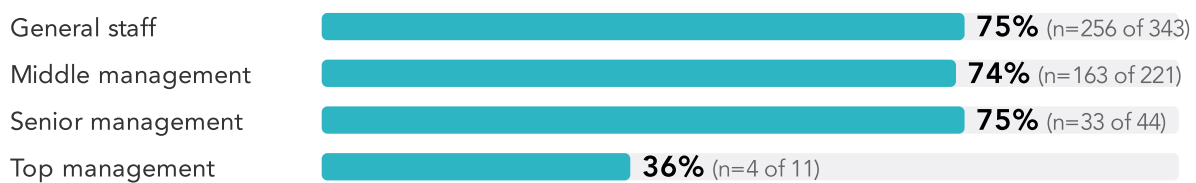
This suggests that under-reporting of sexual harassment is a systemic issue across media organisations. The fact that people in more senior roles appear more willing than others to tell their organisation about the most serious forms of sexual harassment may also point to uneven access to workplace safety and support.

Figure 3b: Did not report, by job level

Verbal



Online



Physical



Rape



Respondents cited three main reasons for not reporting their experiences of sexual harassment at work. These were perceptions that the incidents were not serious enough to report, concerns about the negative impact reporting might have on their job, and a lack of workplace reporting mechanisms.

One in five respondents (20%) said that they did not report sexual harassment because they thought it was not a big deal (although this varies across different forms of harassment). This may suggest that some forms of sexual harass-

ment are normalised or minimised within media workplaces in Sub-Saharan Africa. It may also reflect limited confidence that reporting will lead to action.

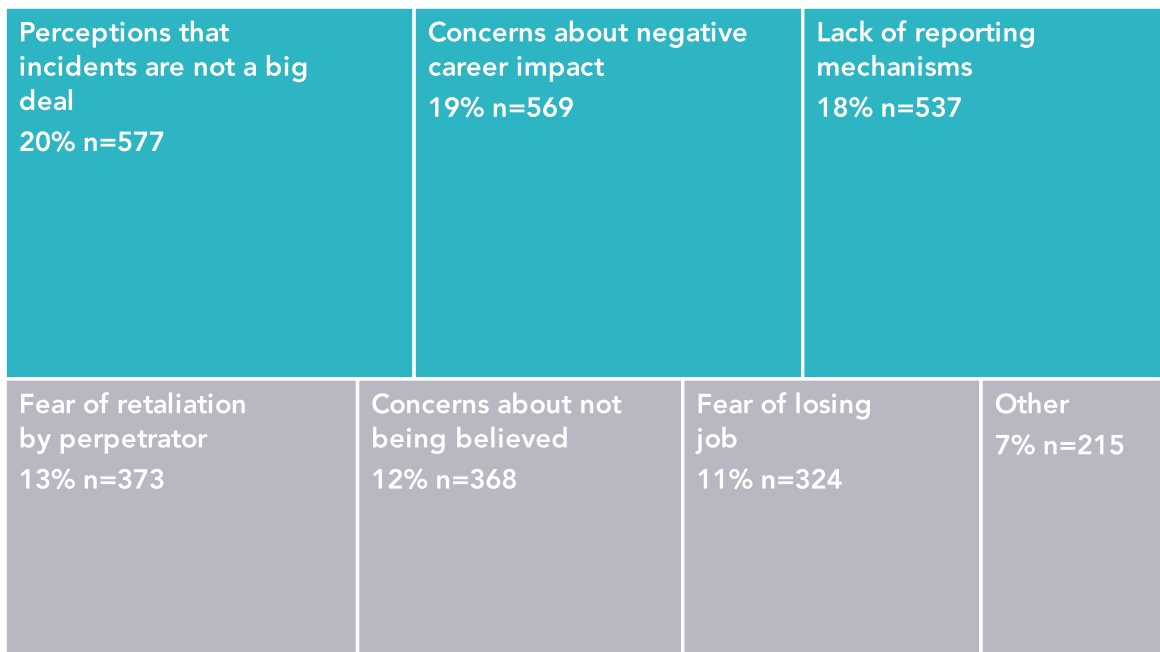
Some gender differences are also evident within this pattern. For example, men were more likely to say they did not report an experience of sexual harassment because they did not think it was a big deal. Over a quarter (27%) of men cited this reason for not reporting cases of verbal sexual harassment, compared with 17% of women.

A similar pattern appears across other types of sexual harassment.

Concerns about negative impacts on employment are the second main reason why respondents choose not to report sexual harassment to their organisation. Across all harassment types, around 19% of respondents cited concerns that reporting would negatively affect their job, with a further 11% fearing they would lose their job. This pattern is consistent across the different forms of sexual harassment.

The third most frequent reason cited for not reporting sexual harassment, at 18% of mentions, is the lack of reporting mechanisms within media workplaces. This is consistent across all harassment types. Too often, there is no clear process for sexual harassment survivors to report this to their employer. This highlights a structural issue for the media sector to address.

Figure 4: Top reasons for not reporting



TOP BARRIERS TO TELLING EMPLOYERS

20%

Perceptions that incidents are not a big deal

19%

Concerns about negative career impact

18%

Lack of reporting mechanisms



“All I can say is that in the newsroom, sexual harassment can sometimes be looked over in the guise of ‘oh, I was joking’. I see so many men making sexual comments in the office... but it is often overlooked because fellow men laughed or the woman in question did not say anything about it.”

Female editor in print media aged 45-54, Uganda

Organisational Action

Organisational responses to reported cases of sexual harassment in Sub-Saharan African media workplaces varied widely (see Figures 5a and 5b).

After reporting sexual harassment at work, more than half of respondents (54%) said their organisation “sometimes” or “mostly” took action across harassment types, while a third said their employer “never” took action. Only 13% of respondents said their employer “always” took action in response to reports of sexual harassment.

When looking at action rates by job seniority, verbal and online sexual harassment showed few differences between general staff, middle managers and senior managers. However, the data shows that physical harassment cases brought by general staff and middle managers are less likely to receive action than cases raised by senior

managers. Although based on smaller numbers, the action rates for top managers (i.e., CEOs and other executives) appear to defy this trend – being the least likely to “always” receive action.

When employers did take action, it was generally limited and survivor support did not feature highly. The overall most common action was warning the perpetrator, which was cited in 39% of cases when averaging across sexual harassment types. Dismissing a case after reviewing it was the next most common action, at 19% of average mentions, followed by providing staff training on sexual harassment, cited in 13% of cases reported by respondents.

MOST COMMON ACTIONS TAKEN BY MEDIA EMPLOYERS, ON AVERAGE ACROSS SEXUAL HARASSMENT TYPES

39%

The perpetrator was warned

19%

The case was dismissed after review

13%

The survivor was provided professional and/or emotional support

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.

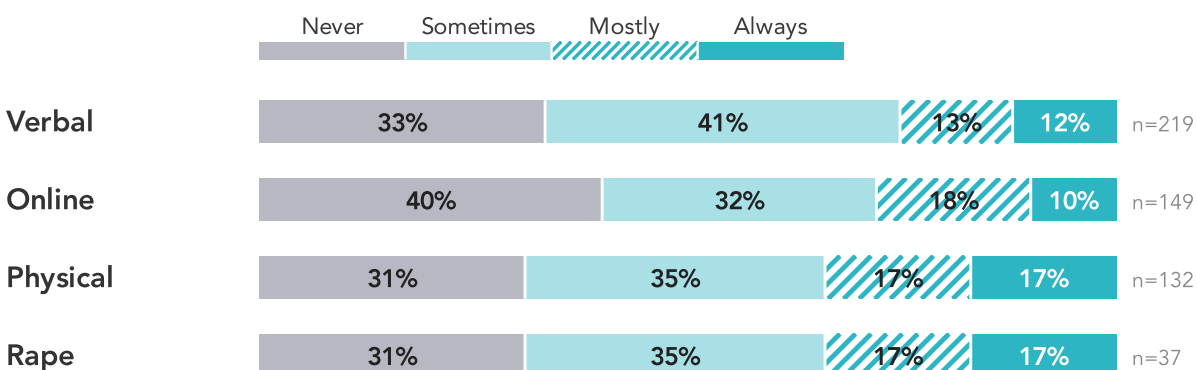


Figure 5b: Action taken, by seniority of those reporting

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

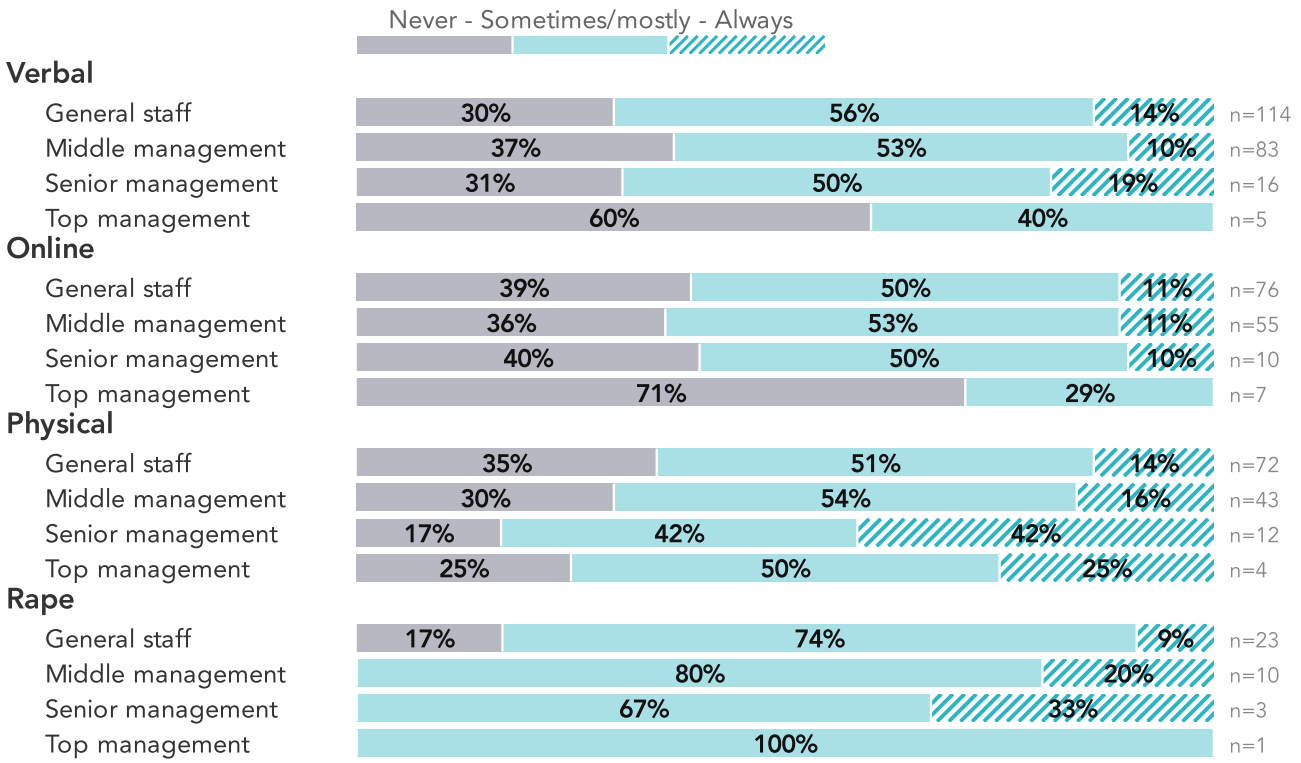
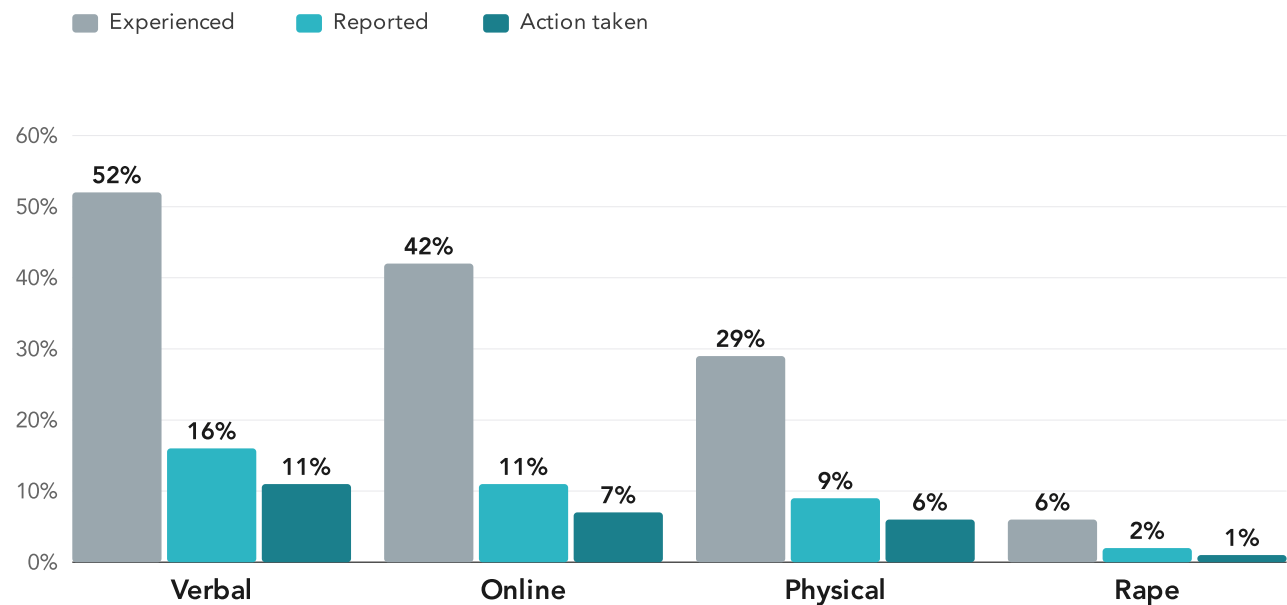


Figure 6: The reporting-to-action pathway

Share of those who experienced sexual harassment at each stage. Experienced sexual harassment n = 1621. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



Witnessing

The survey also asked if media professionals had witnessed sexual harassment affecting colleagues in their workplace. Overall 31% of the respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa said they had witnessed this at least once (see Figure 7).

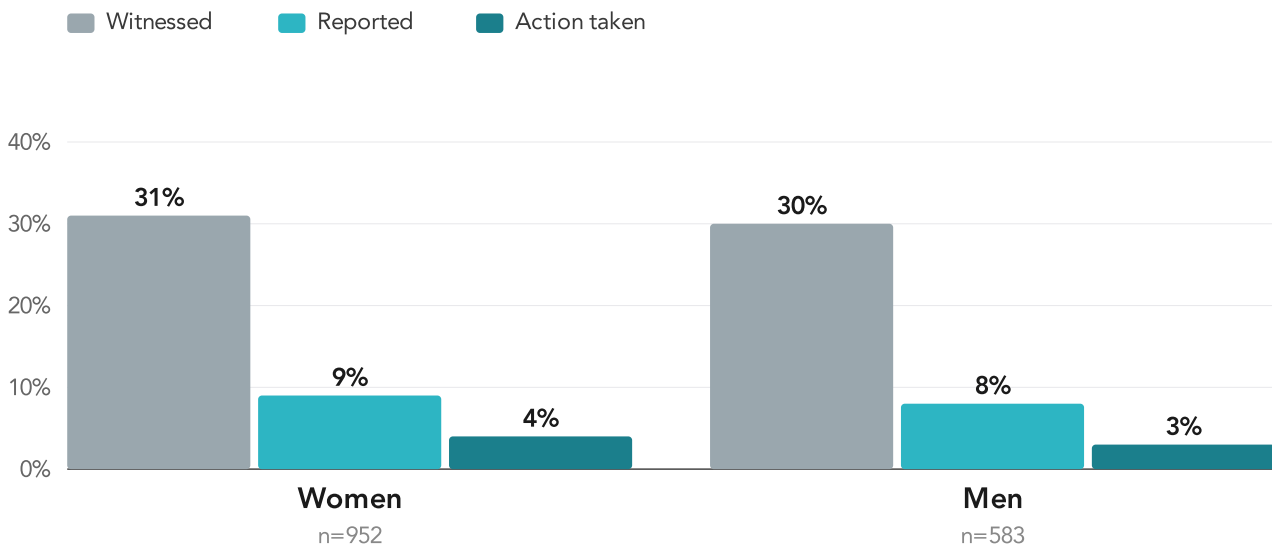
However, witnessing sexual harassment did not necessarily lead to respondents telling their employers. Only 29% of witnesses reported what they saw. And only 40% of them saw organisations take action in response to their reports.

When asked why they chose not to report sexual harassment they had witnessed, a third of respondents said they worried about what would happen as a result. Although women and men reported cases they had witnessed at similar

rates, men respondents were more likely to say they chose not to report because they thought it was not important. Some 29% of male witnesses chose not to report for this reason, compared with 18% among their female counterparts. Another notable reason for not telling organisations about sexual harassment was that the survivor had asked the witness not to report the incident (cited by 18% of witnesses who did not report what they had seen).

Figure 7: Witnessing rates and follow-up

Base: all respondents (witnessed); witnesses (reported); those who reported (employer acted). All respondents n = 1730. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



Perpetrators and Power Dynamics

The survey findings suggest that a large proportion of workplace sexual harassment occurs between colleagues working at the same level. Across all forms of workplace sexual harassment, respondents in Sub-Saharan Africa most commonly identified the perpetrators as fellow employees – mentioned in 34% of cases, with only minor variations by respondents’ job level.

Other common perpetrators of sexual harassment include external news sources (cited by 20% of respondents), direct supervisors (cited by 16%) and higher management (cited by 14%). Together, direct supervisors and higher level managers account for 30% of perpetrators identified by respondents, showing that power dynamics continue to shape people’s experiences of workplace sexual harassment. Reports involving perpetrators from higher management were slightly higher among middle and senior

staff (17%) compared with general staff (12%), possibly reflecting differences in organisational interaction across roles.

A further 11% of perpetrators were unknown to the respondents – a figure that rose to 25% when looking at online sexual harassment specifically. This suggests that media workers are exposed to online harassment from the public via social media and online platforms – platforms that they need to use for newsgathering, dissemination and public communications purposes.

Figure 8: Who perpetrates workplace sexual harassment

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



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 level of overall job satisfaction.

Across the African findings, clear gaps emerge between respondents’ experiences of workplace sexual harassment and how safe they feel at work. There are notorious differences between men’s and women’s perceptions, and perceptions among respondents at different job levels (see Figures 9a and 9b).

Women respondents have experienced higher levels of workplace sexual harassment of all types than men (see Figure 9a), so it is not surprising that they were also less likely than men to say that they feel physically, digitally and psychologically safe at work.

Some 48% of women respondents agreed that they feel emotionally safe at work, compared

with 60% of men. This gender gap is also consistent for digital and physical safety. Men are also more likely to agree their organisations treat men and women equally (74% agreed, compared with 59% of women) and to report feeling satisfied at work (52% agreed, compared with 42% of women).

The same patterns also emerge across levels of job seniority. Respondents’ perceptions of their physical safety at work increase steadily with rank, from 69% of general staff to 88% at the top management level. Similarly, the proportion of respondents who were satisfied with their job ranges from 41% among general staff to 73% of top managers.

Figure 9a: Perception gap by gender

Base: all respondents, by gender. All respondents n = 1730. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

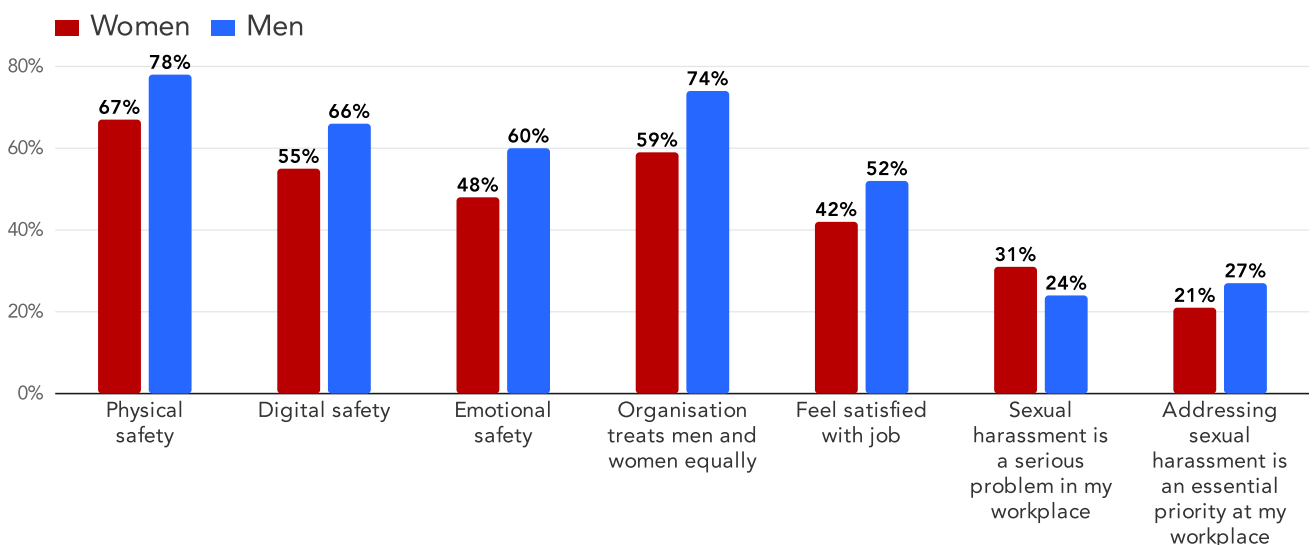
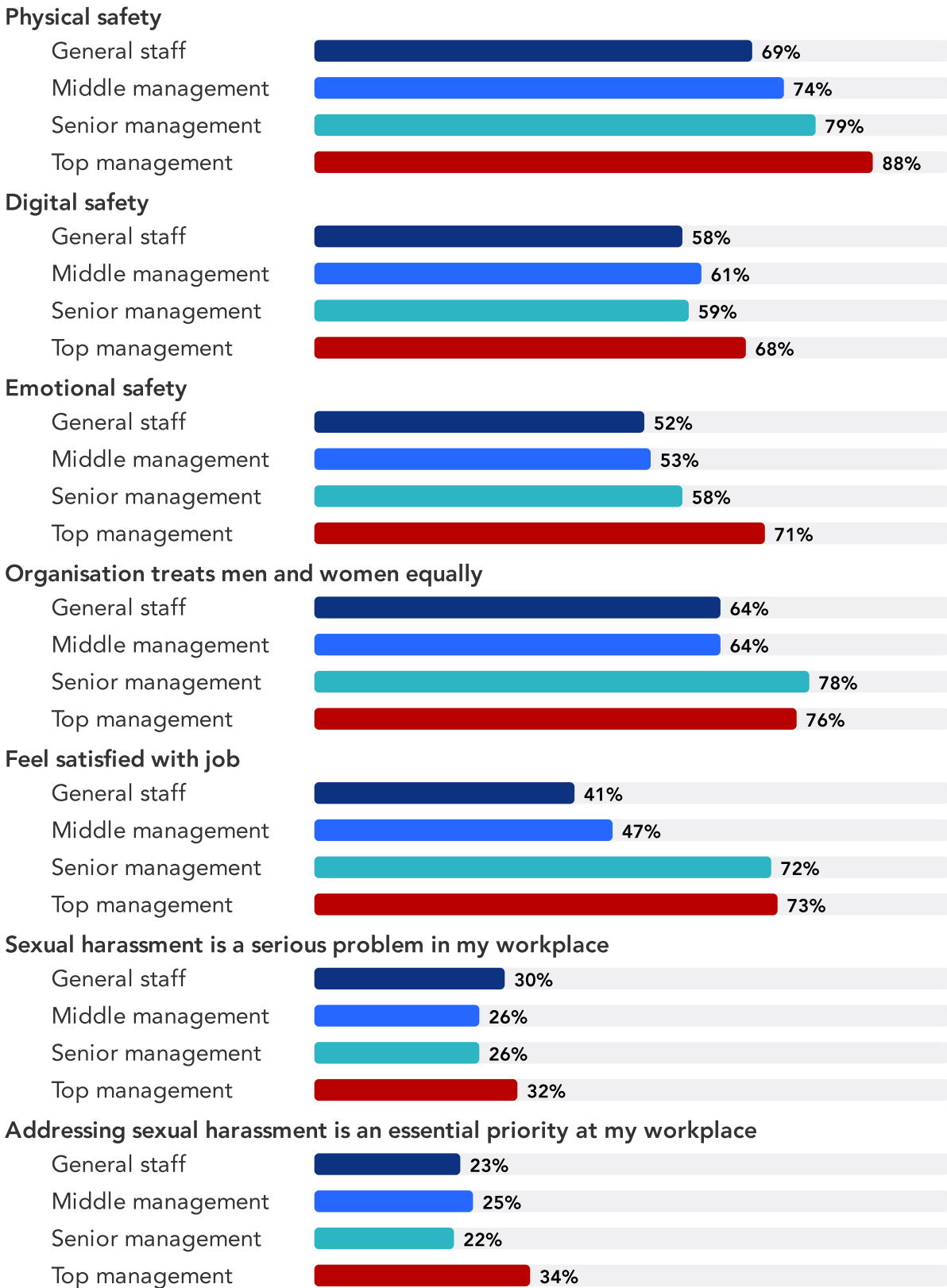


Figure 9b: Perception gap by job level

Base: all respondents, by job level. General staff n = 912 · Middle management n = 645 · Senior management n = 127 · Top management n = 41. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

■ General staff ■ Middle management ■ Senior management ■ Top management



Training and Policy

The survey also considered the role of training and workplace policies in shaping experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. 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 at work.

WIN conducted training on sexual harassment in all survey countries except Ethiopia in 2020–2025, yet the majority of African respondents said they have never received training on this topic – with women respondents more likely than men to say they have received specific training (29% versus 22%, respectively – see Figure 10), while simultaneously reporting lower levels of perceived safety.

The findings suggest that training alone is certainly not enough to shift people’s experiences and perceived safety at work. While training is increasing awareness and acknowledgment of sexual harassment, it is not always matched by wider organisational change, stronger reporting mechanisms or positive changes in workplace cultures.

Evidence from other research studies suggests that training on sexual harassment works best

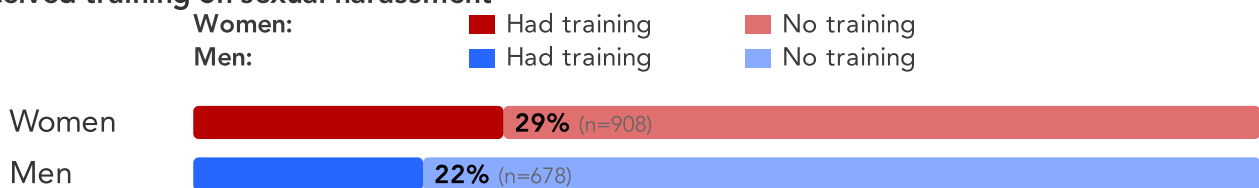
alongside other interventions such as stronger legislation and accessible, trusted workplace reporting mechanisms.⁷

Awareness of anti-sexual harassment policies at their workplace is uneven across the African sample. While 35% of respondents said they were not aware of such a policy, a larger 46% said they were aware of a policy but have not received any training on it. This suggests that while policies to combat sexual harassment do exist, they are not consistently communicated or embedded in practice, and that many media professionals have not received enough support to understand or apply them. Only 19% of respondents in the Sub-Saharan African sample reported both being aware of their workplace’s policy against sexual harassment and having received training on it.

Figure 10: Training received on sexual harassment

Base: all respondents. Women n = 264 · Men n = 146. All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.

Received training on sexual harassment



⁷ [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.