

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE MEDIA

AFRICA  
REPORT



Women in News



# Women in News

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 Southeast Asia thanks to support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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# 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## RESULTS AT A GLANCE: AFRICA



# 1 IN 2

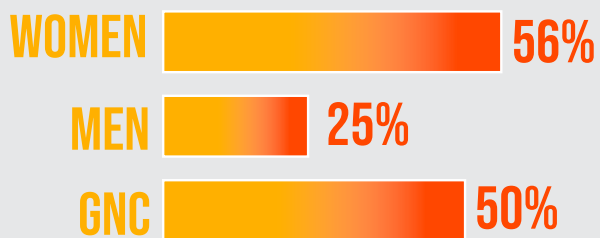
Women have faced verbal or physical sexual harassment at work (47%).



# 21%

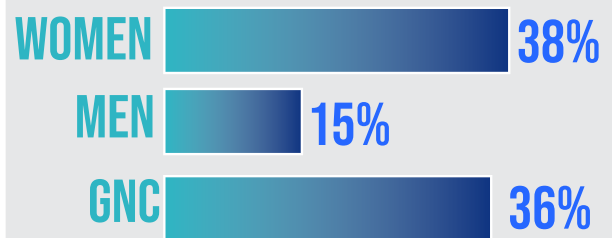
Just over one in five cases of all sexual harassment are ever reported to management

### VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT



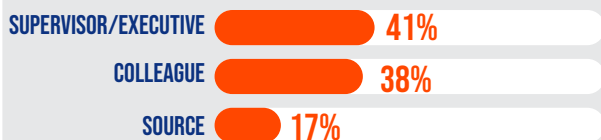
Some 56% of women faced verbal sexual harassment at work, against 24% of men and 50% of gender-nonconforming individuals.

### PHYSICAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT



38% of women faced sexual harassment at work, against 15% of men and 36% of gender-nonconforming individuals.

### THE PERPETRATORS

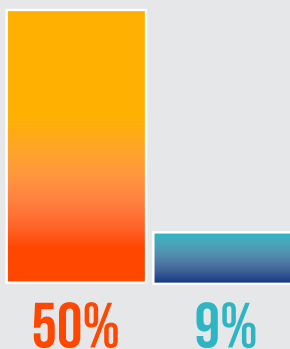


### ACTION

# 57%

When cases are reported, media organisations take action 57% of the time.

### MANAGERS ARE VICTIMS TOO



Half of all managers had been victims of sexual harassment but only 9% reported it.

### MANAGING SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Just over half of news organisations have a sexual harassment policy.



Less than a fifth of staff know the content of the policy

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2

**BACKGROUND**

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The media industry in Africa has a sexual harassment problem, but to date, there has been a lack of credible data and research to guide interventions.

When the #MeToo movement against sexual violence and abuse took off globally in 2017, it triggered new research into the prevalence of sexual harassment in media. But much of the inquiry focused on the West, with almost no attention on the Global South and the countries where WIN operates. Indeed the only studies of any relevance remained a small survey of 119 women in media in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab region conducted by WIN in 2017 and a City, University of London study, published in 2020, which looked at news personnel in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. Both studies have since yielded academic country-focused reports. However, WIN committed to exploring the issue further to bring greater regional and cultural diversity to the global conversation on sexual harassment.

Data is a benchmark for measuring change. It enables assessment of the impact of initiatives to improve the management of sexual harassment and, ultimately, newsroom safety, factors that directly impact equality.

WIN's work in Africa and beyond requires data to drive its projects. These aim to build a more equitable and sustainable news media industry by developing current and future women media leaders. WIN provides support and resources to organisations to reduce the incidents of sexual harassment and manage incidents when they occur.

WIN has been engaging with journalists and media managers on sexual harassment for more than ten years. During that time, we have collected plenty of anecdotal evidence of sexual harassment. But this is the first time we have been able to draw on large-scale data to support the belief that it is prevalent everywhere and is a significant impediment to a healthy media industry, regardless of country or context.

In 2020, WAN-IFRA Women in News (WIN), in partnership with City, University of London, set out to establish the extent of sexual harassment in news organisations and

to gauge their effectiveness in managing it. The research project focused on 20-countries in regions where WIN operates: Africa, the Arab Region, Southeast Asia and Russia as well as select countries in Central America. The project included an online survey and interviews. Some 2,005 media professionals completed the online survey.

This report is a summary of the findings in Africa and Botswana. The additional seven countries in Africa included in the research were Malawi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The results for those countries can be found at :[www.sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research](http://www.sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research). More details on the methodology can also be found at <https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research/methodology/>.

The results from our Africa research reported here, the first of the five regions we included in our research, provide the evidence to back that up.

The report will also contribute to a better understanding of the similarities and differences facing media in the Global South. A composite report that also considers trends from the Global North will follow the release of all other regional survey results.

Sexual harassment is a global societal problem, and WIN views it as such. Evidence from this research shows that the culture of sexual harassment needs to change regardless of country. Our mission is to advance and establish stable media environments that embrace equality in content and in the way people are treated, regardless of gender. This cannot be achieved if sexual harassment of any kind is tolerated. As such, we remain committed to work with media to eradicate harassment of any kind.



See “What organisations can do” on page 19 for concrete steps that media can take to address and improve the safety of their working environment.

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# 3

**FINDINGS**

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# ONLINE SURVEY

## PREVALENCE:

### PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Women are two times more likely to experience sexual harassment than men.

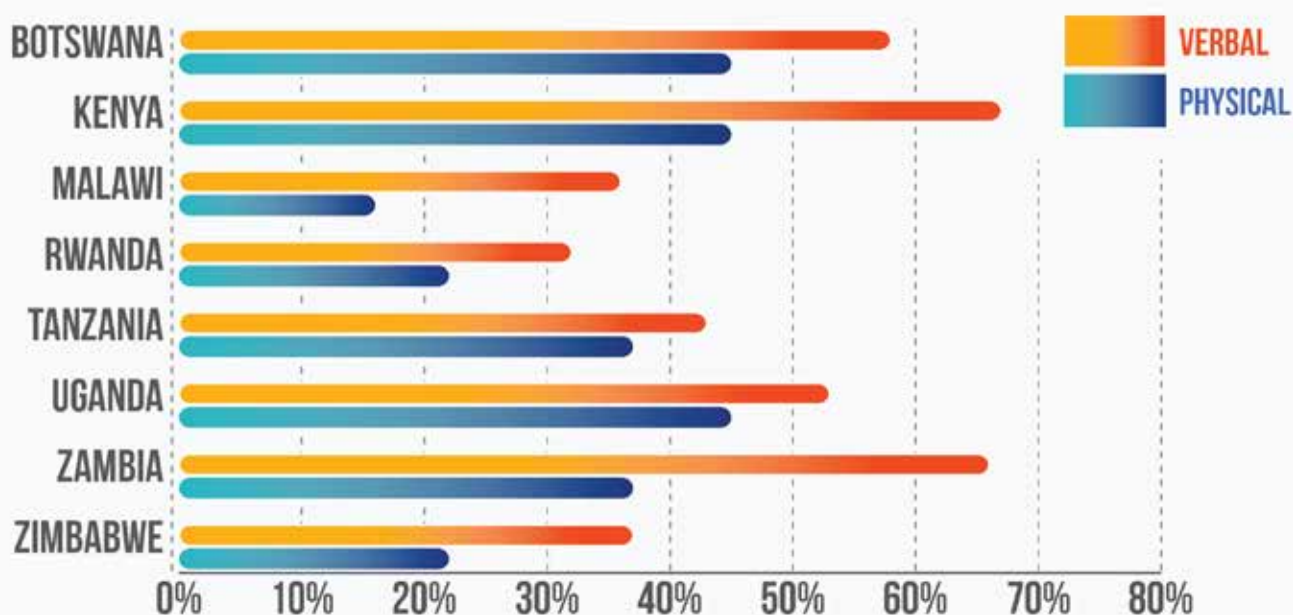
The first set of questions asked participants their experience of verbal and physical sexual harassment on a scale from never to five or more times.

For men, 25% of participants indicated they had experienced verbal sexual harassment at least once at work, and 15% experienced physical sexual harassment at least once.

For women, 56% of participants responded they had experienced verbal sexual harassment at least once—31% five times or more, and 38% stated they had experienced physical sexual harassment at least once—12% five times or more.

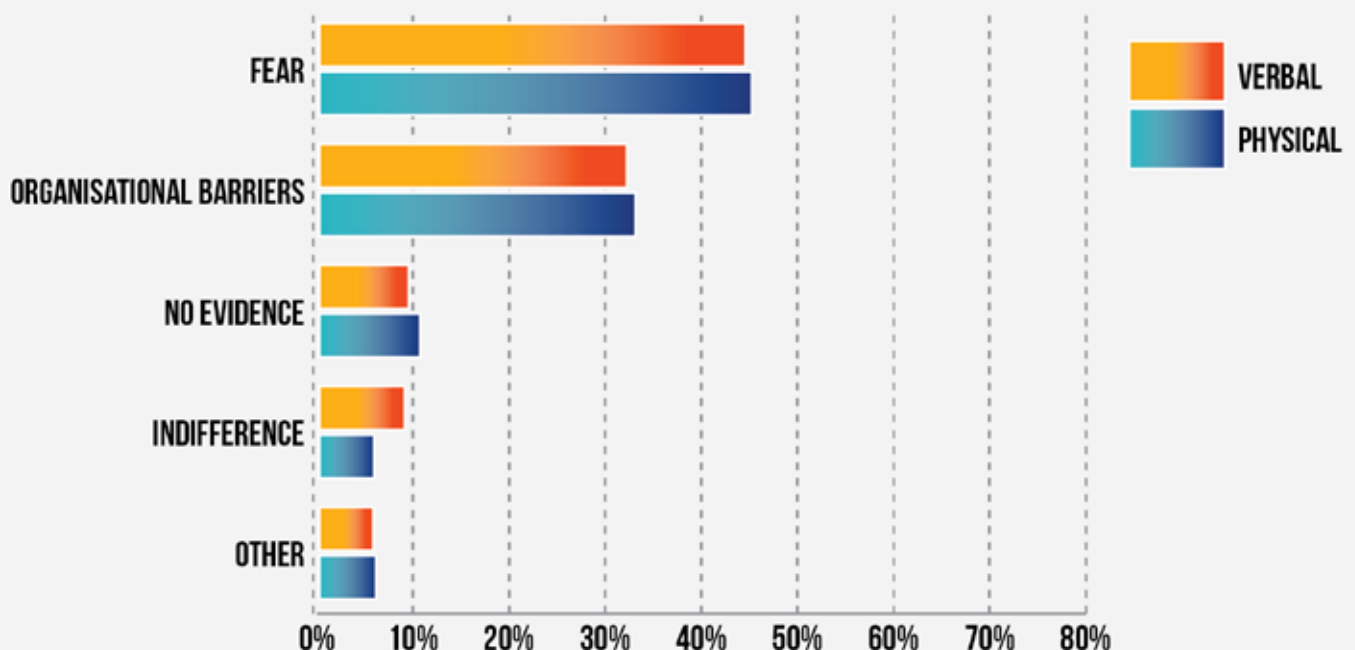
Gender non-conforming participants experienced verbal sexual harassment at a rate of 50% and physical sexual harassment at 36%.

### PREVALENCE OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT



## REPORTING AND ACTION

### WHY I DID NOT REPORT SEXUAL HARASSMENT



\*Responses have been categorised as:

**Fear:** "I was afraid of losing my job"; "I was afraid I would negatively impact my job"; "I was afraid the perpetrator would retaliate"; "I didn't want myself or others to be negatively labeled"

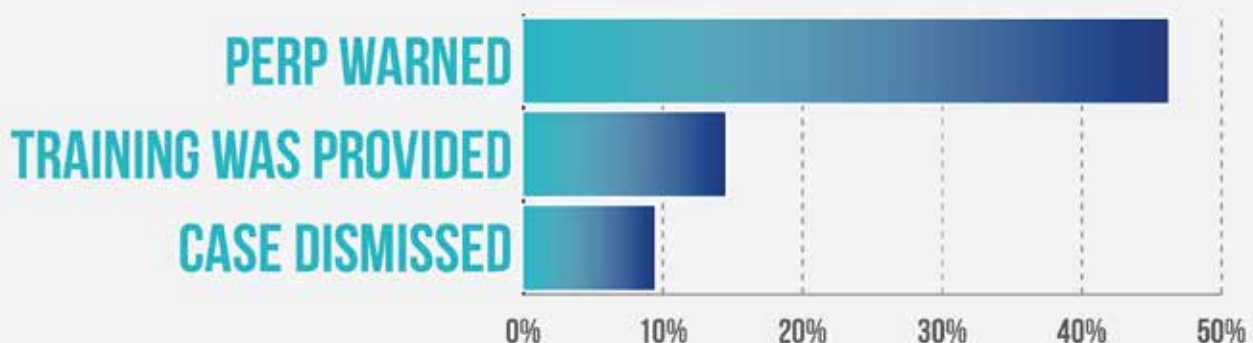
**Organisational barriers:** "I didn't think my organisation would believe me"; "There are no reporting mechanisms at my organisation"; "I didn't know how to report";

**No evidence:** "I didn't think I had evidence"

**Indifference:** "I didn't think it was a big deal"

**Other:** "I was offered something by the perpetrator for not reporting"; "Other"

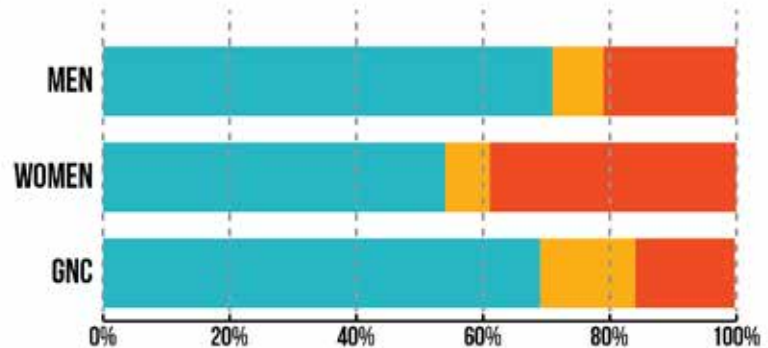
### ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE TO FORMAL COMPLAINTS



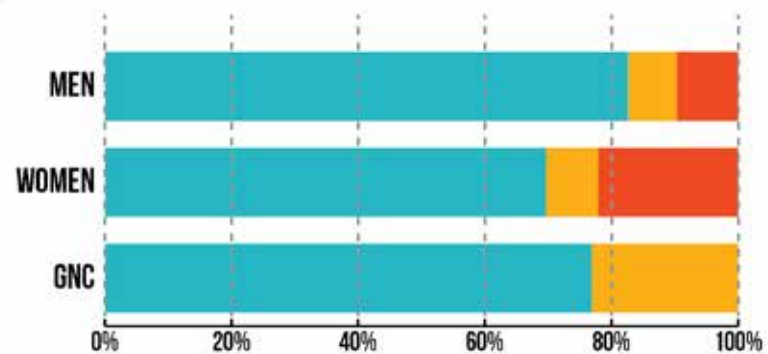
## PERSONAL ATTITUDES

AGREE UNSURE DISAGREE

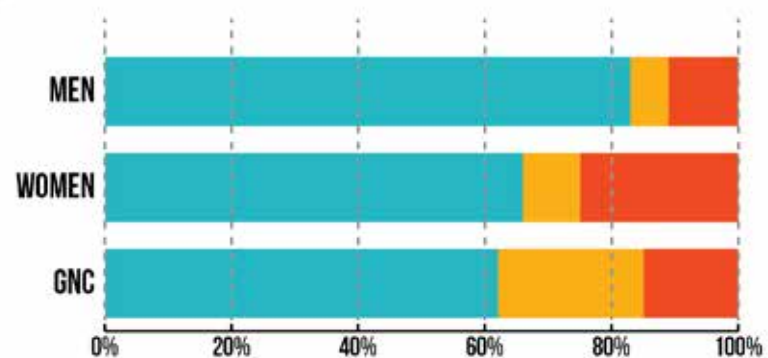
I CAN TALK TO  
MY SUPERVISOR



I FEEL SAFE IN  
MY NEWSROOM



I FEEL LISTENED  
TO WHEN I  
SPEAK OUT AT  
WORK



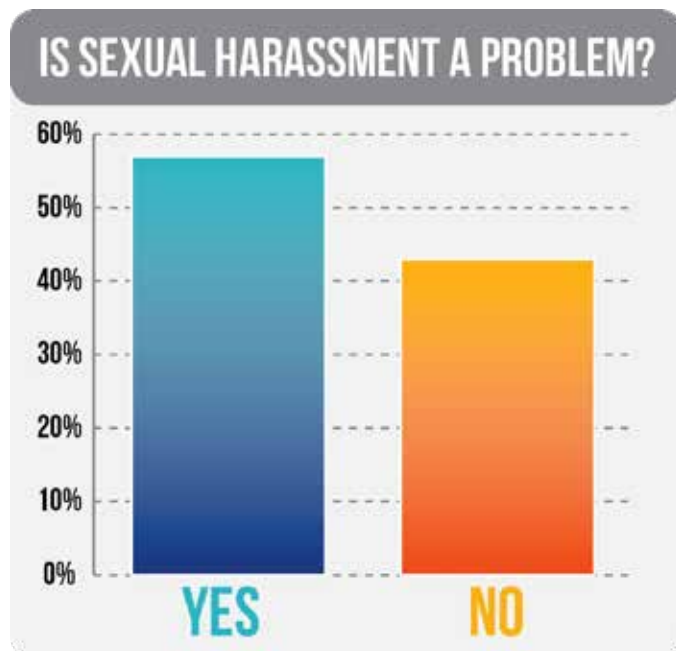
# EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

To understand management perspectives on the prevalence of sexual harassment, WIN interviewed 32 executives from the sampled countries. The 16 women and 16 men interviewed held ranks from news editor to country director. The participants represented radio, print, television, and digital media.

Because of the relatively small sample of managers in each country, the findings are considered separately. Some individual responses are included below because they provide insight into attitudes and the scale of the challenge. All data was anonymised, so pseudonyms are used.

Firstly, the media organisation executives were asked about their personal experiences of sexual harassment. More than half, 14 women and three men had been verbally or physically harassed. Only three had reported this.

When asked if sexual harassment is an issue in the media industry, 17 executives responded yes, two stated previously but not now, and 13 said no.



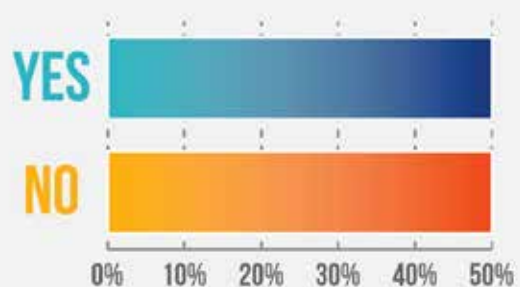
Next, media executives were asked if any of their employees had reported cases of sexual harassment to them. Half had, half had not.

## Is sexual harassment a problem in the media industry?

“If it were, I would have known. But as far as I’m concerned, we don’t have anything of that sort here.” - Martin, Botswana

“From what I’ve heard from other people that have been in other newsrooms, it’s actually real. It’s something that’s very common in the newsroom. I feel like it’s not a newsroom if there’s no sexual harassment.” - Lilian, Zimbabwe

## HAS ANYONE REPORTED TO YOU?



## On reporting

“I’ve never met anyone who has ever mentioned sexual harassment. I think they hide. Because you sort of feel ashamed. You don’t want to share with anyone. When I was verbally abused, I never told any of my friends.” - Melissa, Zambia

Asked how they responded when incidents were reported, four media executives warned the accused, nine reported the case to human resources, and three took action by directly suspending the accused.

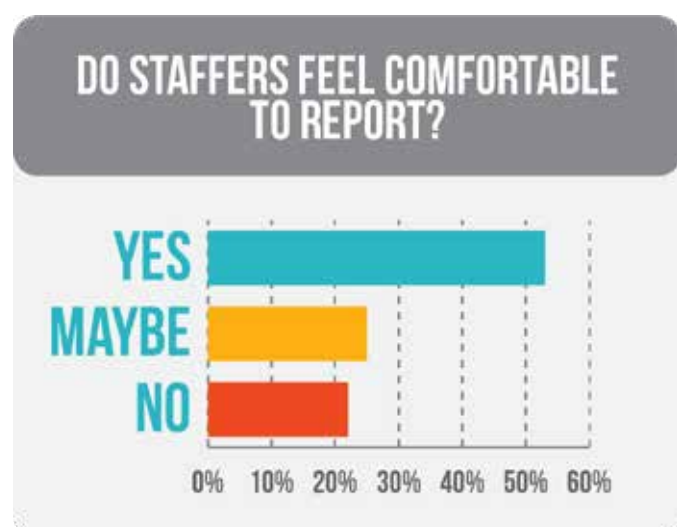
### On organisational support

“Women get little organisational support. That is why they are leaving the industry - they go to the corporate world and get into public relations for peace of mind. Or they opt for organisations where they will not be in close conversations with the male folk.” - Winifred, Kenya

Just over half of the executives we spoke to (17) believed their employees felt comfortable to report experienced sexual harassment to their media organisation. Eight said maybe, while the remaining seven answered no.

### On the employer's responsibility

“It is an individual thing. When you are abused, how do you react? There are some people who are very reactive and very quick and very sensitive. There are some who are more tolerant not just to this matter but to general complaining or raising issues. But what I want to say is that as an employer, one should have the responsibility of encouraging people to come out and not in any way try to suppress that.” - Kevin, Zimbabwe



All media executives were asked to list the barriers in the media industry for reporting sexual harassment. While nine felt there were no barriers, 16 said fear of repercussions, four cited lack of evidence, and three felt societal cultures were a factor.

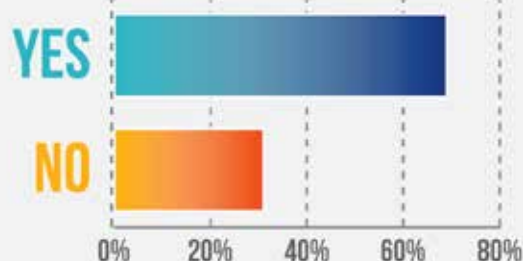


## On organisational barriers to reporting

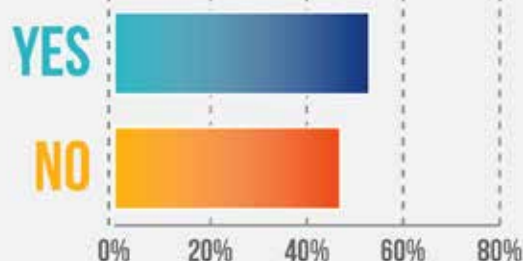
“I think it’s about repercussions. I think it’s more of ‘what’s the worst thing that can happen if I report?’ So, depending on how senior or how popular the person (perpetrator) is, I think they will probably think twice.”  
-Christopher, Rwanda

“I have realised that sexual harassment is never an issue of priority. That’s why these behaviours still exist today. Please help so that we share such information with everybody. So that everybody can internalise it. It’s happening.” -  
Tabitha, Botswana

## ARE YOU AWARE OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY?



## HAVE YOU PERSONALLY BEEN TRAINED?



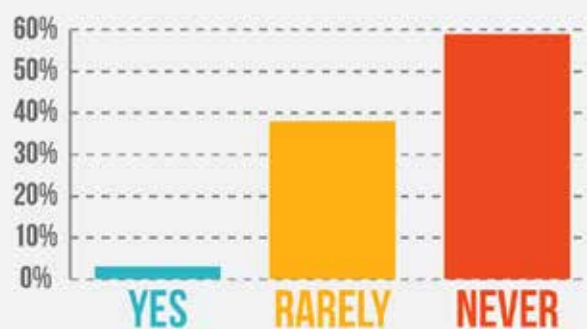
## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO REPORTING?



Almost 70%, or 22, of the executives were aware of a sexual harassment policy at their media organisation. Fifteen had been personally trained on the policy. When asked if they were aware of how their policies had been enacted, there were eight warnings, six dismissals and three suspensions in total. Furthermore, only one participant stated that sexual harassment is commonly discussed amongst senior management, while 12 stated rarely and 19 never.

Finally, media executives made suggestions for eliminating sexual harassment in the media industry. Most commonly, 17 participants suggested staff training, followed by eight who stated that women need to report, two thought better policies were necessary and two thought better pay for women would help.

## IS SH DISCUSSED IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT MEETINGS?



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## On the need for change

“The overall newsroom environment needs to change in Kenya. One of the main reasons why women leave is because they feel unwelcome in the newsroom. It’s like a vicious cycle because you are in an environment where you are probably one woman among six men, so you already feel threatened, unwelcome and can’t quite fit in that situation. And sometimes it also comes with harassment and just basically being bullied.” - Priscilla, Kenya.

“It’s difficult for managers to respond. I don’t think I have anywhere where I can report sexual harassment. I don’t know what the remedy can be. But these are things that we need to change because if it is so unfortunate that if I am in this position and feel like this, what about my juniors? How do they feel?” - Maria, Zambia

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The interview results point to a perception gap between management and staff over the scale and frequency of sexual harassment. There is also a gap in their faith in organisational systems and processes to deal with harassment. That half of managers have been harassed yet only 9% chose to report it speaks to a deeper, cultural and societal problem. Yet only by little victories will larger change be effected. Reporting matters.

The next section focuses on country by country findings.



# COUNTRY FINDINGS



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## BOTSWANA

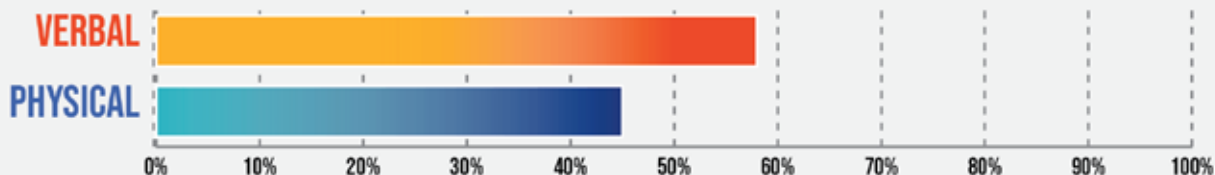
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# OVERVIEW:

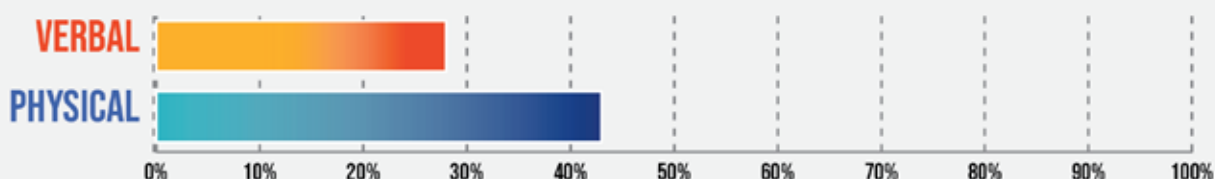
31 ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



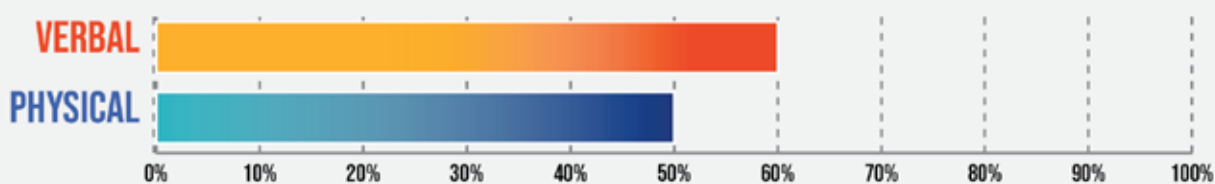
## PREVALENCE



## OF THOSE, WHO REPORTED THE INCIDENT



## OF THOSE, WHO RECEIVED ACTION



## DEMOGRAPHICS

Women 87.1% (27) and men 12.9% (4)

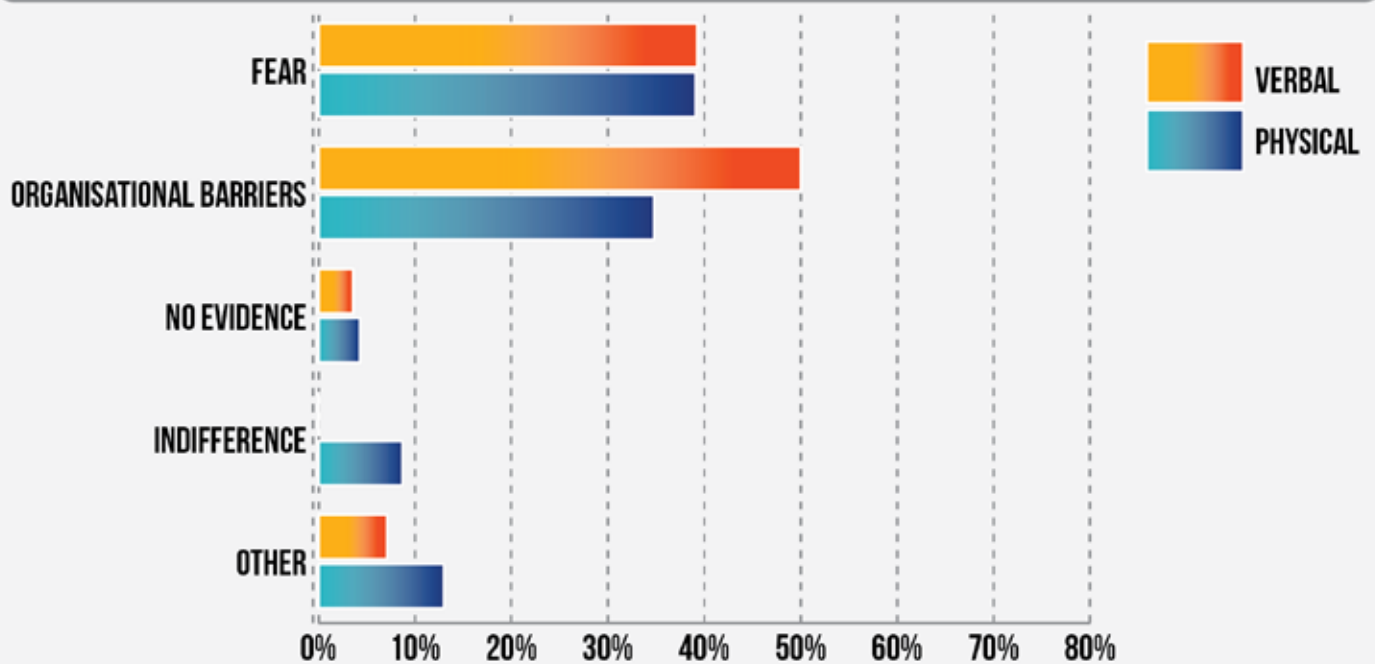
Gender of supervisor: Men 45.2% (14), Women 45.2% (14), other 3.2% (1), not applicable 6.5% (2)

Sexual harassment policy: No 64.5%, yes, but not aware what it is 32.3%, yes, I am aware what it is 3.2%.

## FINDINGS

Botswana is the smallest of the countries surveyed, and its sample size reflects this. Of the four male participants, three experienced verbal sexual harassment and one physical sexual harassment. For women, 56% experienced verbal sexual harassment and 48% physical sexual harassment. On average, only 35% of those who experienced harassment chose to report it, which resulted in action on average 55% of the time. Action taken was often weak, most commonly warning the perpetrator or dismissing the case.

## WHY I DID NOT REPORT SEXUAL HARASSMENT



\*Responses have been categorised as:

**Fear:** "I was afraid of losing my job"; "I was afraid I would negatively impact my job"; "I was afraid the perpetrator would retaliate"; "I didn't want myself or others to be negatively labeled"

**Organisational barriers:** "I didn't think my organisation would believe me"; "There are no reporting mechanisms at my organisation"; "I didn't know how to report";

**No evidence:** "I didn't think I had evidence"

**Indifference:** "I didn't think it was a big deal"

**Other:** "I was offered something by the perpetrator for not reporting"; "Other"

## NOTABLE QUOTES

- Sexual harassment has become part of the culture, not just in newsrooms but in corporate culture in general. Male colleagues feel like they are the good faith possessor of their female colleagues' bodies. At some point, one feels like they are living in the twilight zone where it's like you are the one who thinks what is going on is wrong. Love affairs develop overnight as a result of sexual harassment. So when you don't go along, you appear to be uptight and boring. I am uptight and boring.
- We need to raise awareness and go beyond creating policies that are usually not fully implemented.
- Sometimes editors ask women reporters to be nice to male sources, even when aware that they are making sexual advances.

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# 4

**WHAT  
ORGANISATIONS  
CAN DO**

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# WHAT MEDIA ORGANISATIONS CAN DO TO MANAGE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

To manage and reduce sexual harassment, clear rules and procedures are needed. Here are some guidelines



## THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

A very central and important aspect of managing sexual harassment is guaranteeing confidentiality. This principle is considered a moral standard as well as a legal commitment and a part of professional ethics. Confidentiality aims to protect all individuals involved in sexual harassment complaints as well as the information that they disclose; only the personnel assigned by the organisation to investigate and manage should be allowed to access this information.

Confidentiality protects all people involved, including the person who experienced harassment, the person accused of harassment, witnesses and any other involved party. This principle also acts as a motivation to report harassment cases by building trust.

And in order to maintain confidentiality, an organisation must make sure that its data storage systems are safe and that the laws related to information and data protection in the country are followed.

## 1 TAKE ALL COMPLAINTS SERIOUSLY

Consider all sexual harassment complaints seriously and deal with them as soon as possible.

## 2 ADOPT COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES

Give employees the options of filing official and non-official complaints. The steps and results of these two methods can vary, as do the procedures for each.

## 3 ALLOW ANONYMOUS REPORTING

In fighting harassment, it is useful to allow people to report cases anonymously. This gives employees the ability to expose such cases without having to reveal their own identity. But to perform a proper investigation, the organisation would need to know the identities of all involved parties.

4

## ASSIGN TEAM TO INVESTIGATE

Clearly assign a person or a team to investigate and deal with sexual harassment cases. This person should preferably be from the HR department and have knowledge of guiding laws. It is imperative that they receive specialised training for conducting investigations.

5

## HIRE EXPERTS WHEN NEEDED

In some cases, it may be necessary to seek external help from someone experienced in managing investigations with objectivity, fairness and integrity.

6

## ALERT AUTHORITIES IN SOME CASES

If the case under investigation contains sexual assault (including rape), the authorities must be notified in accordance with law, and the survivor may need immediate medical attention. The organisation needs to cooperate fully with any official investigation by the police, and may require legal assistance or consultation.

7

## CONSIDER TEMPORARY SUSPENSION

In grave cases of sexual harassment, including physical assault, it may be necessary to suspend the employee accused of harassment until the investigations (internal or external) are done. Temporary suspension is considered a procedural measure, and not a disciplinary one.

8

## CLARIFY PROCEDURES TO ALL

Policies to counter sexual harassment inside the organisation should include clear procedures on how the received complaints are dealt with. This is very important for both managers and employees to avoid any ambiguity about the essence of these procedures. It is always preferable to adapt a step-by-step detailed approach for even higher clarity.

## WIN SEXUAL HARASSMENT TOOLKIT

- Practical guide for employers and employees
- Awareness poster (A2) to put up in newsrooms and offices
- Sample sexual harassment policy
- Sample sexual harassment survey
- Sample communications templates
- Sample for interviews during an investigation
- Sample for feedback on a decision
- Informal complaints procedures
- Formal complaints procedures



[sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/en/resources](https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/en/resources)



[WWW.WOMENINNEWS.ORG](http://WWW.WOMENINNEWS.ORG)



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