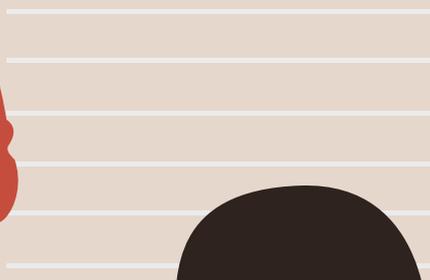


# SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE MEDIA

CENTRAL AMERICA REPORT



Sexual Harassment Research



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.

WAN-IFRA is a global organisation of the world's press with a membership of 3,000 news publishing companies and technology entrepreneurs; and a board of 60 member publisher associations representing 18,000 publications in 120 countries.

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# CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY . . . . .	01
BACKGROUND . . . . .	04
METHODOLOGY . . . . .	06
DEMOGRAPHICS . . . . .	08
FINDINGS . . . . .	10
ONLINE SURVEY . . . . .	11
EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS . . . . .	15
COUNTRY FINDINGS . . . . .	19
EL SALVADOR . . . . .	19
NICARAGUA . . . . .	22
WHAT ORGANISATIONS CAN DO . . . . .	25
WIN RESOURCES . . . . .	28

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# 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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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 regions where WIN operates: Southeast Asia, Africa, the Arab region as well as select countries in Eurasia (Russia) and Central America (El Salvador and Nicaragua).

This report is a summary of its findings in Central America, based on research conducted between August 2021 and October 2021.

The research project included an online survey and interviews. A total of 234 media professionals completed the online survey. Supplementary, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 executives from various media organisations in El Salvador.

Due to legal constraints to freedom of expression and threats to media professionals in Nicaragua, we were not able to conduct in-depth interviews with that population.

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



**2 IN 3**

women have faced verbal or physical sexual harassment at work (59%)



One in four cases of sexual harassment were ever reported to management

### VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

**WOMEN** 74%

**MEN** 19%

1 out of the 3 participants who identified as gender non-conforming experienced verbal harassment

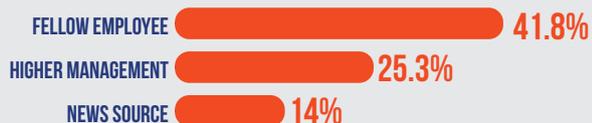
### PHYSICAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

**WOMEN** 43%

**MEN** 9%

1 out of the 3 participants who identified as gender non-conforming experienced physical harassment

### THE TOP 3 PERPETRATORS



### REPORTED VS ACTION



Only 26% of cases were reported. Organisations took action for 46% of the reported cases.

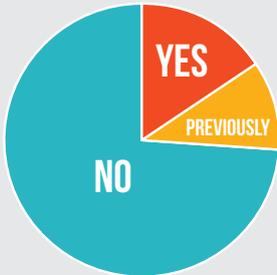
# RESULTS AT A GLANCE

## MANAGERS' EXPERIENCES

**YES: 19%**



Three of the managers (19%) had been sexually harassed at work. None reported it.

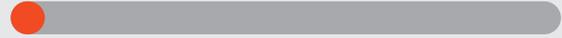


When asked if sexual harassment is an issue in the news industry, 14 of 19 news executives interviewed said no. Two said previously but not now. Three said yes.

## MANAGING SEXUAL HARASSMENT



Just under half of news organisations have a sexual harassment policy (48.7%).



Only 6.7% of survey respondents said they know the content of their organisation's sexual harassment policy

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2

**BACKGROUND**

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Sexual harassment is prevalent in the media in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The lack of policies aimed at preventing sexual harassment, along with the common fear victims have of reporting incidents, means that high levels of sexual harassment go largely unchecked.

Very few media outlets in the region have drafted and effectively implemented protocols to address sexual harassment. Victims have not had a clear pathway to inform, while the majority of media industry leaders continue to turn their heads away from the problem.

Globally, the attitude towards sexual violence and abuse at work changed when the #MeToo movement took off in 2017. It encouraged women to speak up about the harassment they faced at work and triggered reflection and interventions by many organisations. However, research commissioned into sexual harassment in media focused mainly on western organizations. WAN-IFRA, through the Women in News (WIN) program, is leading global research to bring greater regional and cultural diversity to the universal conversation on sexual harassment.

Across Central America, the empowerment of women in the media and an increased awareness of sexual harassment in the local industry have exposed perpetrators and increased demands for mutual respect and security. However, and despite years of information, education, communication, and advocacy by women's groups and implementers of media-focused programs, much of this remains to be put into writing.

WIN has been engaging with journalists and media managers on sexual harassment for over a decade. However, this study provides the first occasion to draw upon large-scale data from five regions (Africa, Arab Region, Central America, Eurasia (Russia) and Southeast Asia) to support the hypothesis of sexual harassment being prevalent and a significant impediment to a healthy media industry, regardless of country or cultural context.

Findings from the Central America portion of this research, gathered mainly from El Salvador and Nicaragua, show the scale of sexual harassment in the media industry and will hopefully inform other local and regional actors and their efforts to build a more equitable and sustainable news media industry.

Worryingly, El Salvador and Nicaragua recorded some of the highest rates of experienced verbal and physical harassment of all countries surveyed for the global study. However, when asked if they believed sexual harassment to be a problem, the majority of local news executives responded 'yes' - but not in their newsroom. The data suggests that such confidence is likely misplaced.

Data enables the industry to understand the scale of the problem and create initiatives designed to address and end sexual harassment. Ultimately, the data addresses newsroom and workplace safety and identifies factors that directly impact equality. Data also provides a useful benchmark for measuring progress and change.

WIN hopes this large database of statistical evidence allows for greater analysis of similarities and differences between regions of the Global South and Global North and contributes to a better understanding of the trends related to sexual harassment both locally and globally.

Research shows that sexual harassment is not confined to only certain countries. The culture of sexual harassment needs to change, regardless of geography. WIN is committed to providing support and resources to organizations to reduce incidents of sexual harassment and appropriately manage these situations when they do occur. Our mission is to advance and establish a stable media environment that embraces equality in content and in how people are treated, regardless of gender. This cannot be achieved if sexual harassment of any kind is tolerated.



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# 3

**METHODOLOGY**

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## DATA COLLECTION

This project employed two methods for data collection: a survey of media personnel, distributed online to professionals and in-depth interviews with media executives conducted online. The two-method approach was designed to understand patterns of sexual harassment in newsrooms and gauge perceptions from officers with positions of power within media organisations. The survey responses were anonymous and interview participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Surveys and in-depth interviews were conducted remotely to comply with COVID-19 regulations.

Data collection began in August 2021 in El Salvador and Nicaragua and ended in October 2021. Data collection was done in Spanish. After initial filter questions, 234 participants completed the survey - five of whom were from other countries. The survey took an average of 23 minutes to be completed.

In total, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with news executives from various media organisations in El Salvador. 14 women and four men were interviewed. Interviewees were identified from executives from media organisations willing to engage in the discussion on sexual harassment.

## DEFINITIONS, LANGUAGE AND SAMPLE SIZE

WIN is aware that the language around gender and sexuality continues to evolve rapidly, as it did while this report was being written. The refinement of words and their definitions is based on our understanding of how complex constructs related to sexuality and gender evolve.

In the research, participants selected their identity as Woman, Man, or Gender Nonconforming, Nonbinary or Fluid. The number of respondents who identified as nonconforming was small. While this does not diminish their experiences, it poses a challenge statistically as it is difficult to find significant relationships from the data. Statistical tests typically require a larger sample size to ensure a representative distribution of the population and to be considered representative of groups of people to whom results

will be generalised or transferred. It was, therefore, essential to consider this. The data, however, shows that experiences of sexual harassment cannot be ignored for any group. Thus, while the numbers are small, we recognise this fact.

WIN acknowledges the profound diversity regarding size, development level, political, legal and economic system, geography, culture, and history within individual countries. This is why, for this phase of the research, we have focused on regional patterns on sexual harassment experiences and, while providing a country-by-country breakdown of data, have avoided comparative analysis.

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**DEMOGRAPHICS**

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# DEMOGRAPHICS

**234** ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

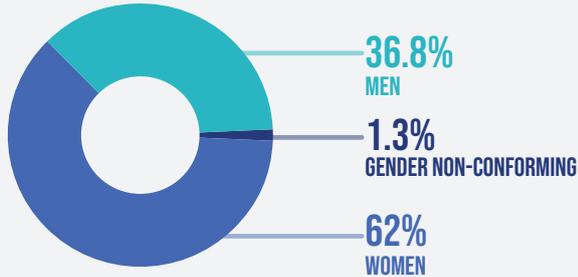


**2** MAIN COUNTRIES

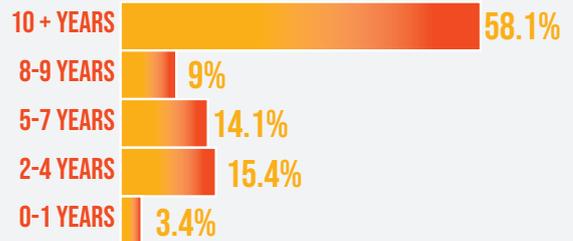
EL SALVADOR 49.1% (115)  
NICARAGUA 48.7% (114)  
OTHER COUNTRIES 2.1% (5)



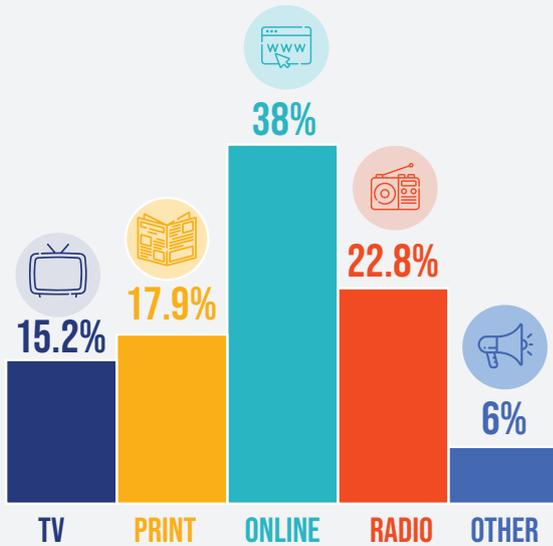
## GENDER IDENTITY



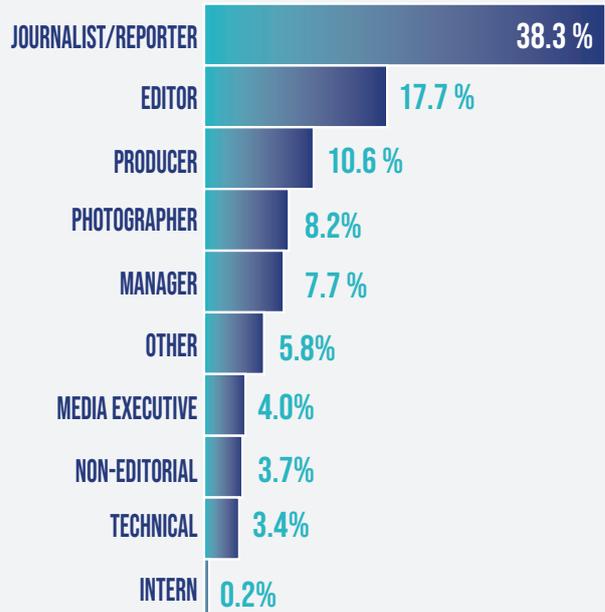
## EXPERIENCE



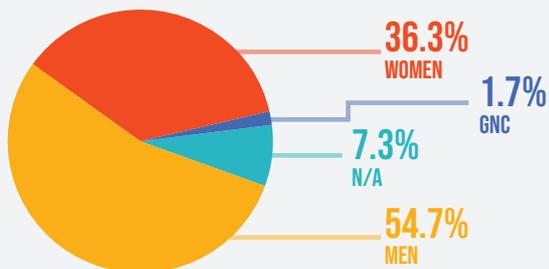
## MEDIUM



## ROLE



## GENDER OF SUPERVISOR



# INTERVIEWS



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# 5

**FINDINGS**

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# ONLINE SURVEY

## PREVALENCE:

**WOMEN ARE...**



**3.9 X**

MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE  
VERBAL HARASSMENT THAN MEN



**4.7 X**

MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE  
PHYSICAL 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.

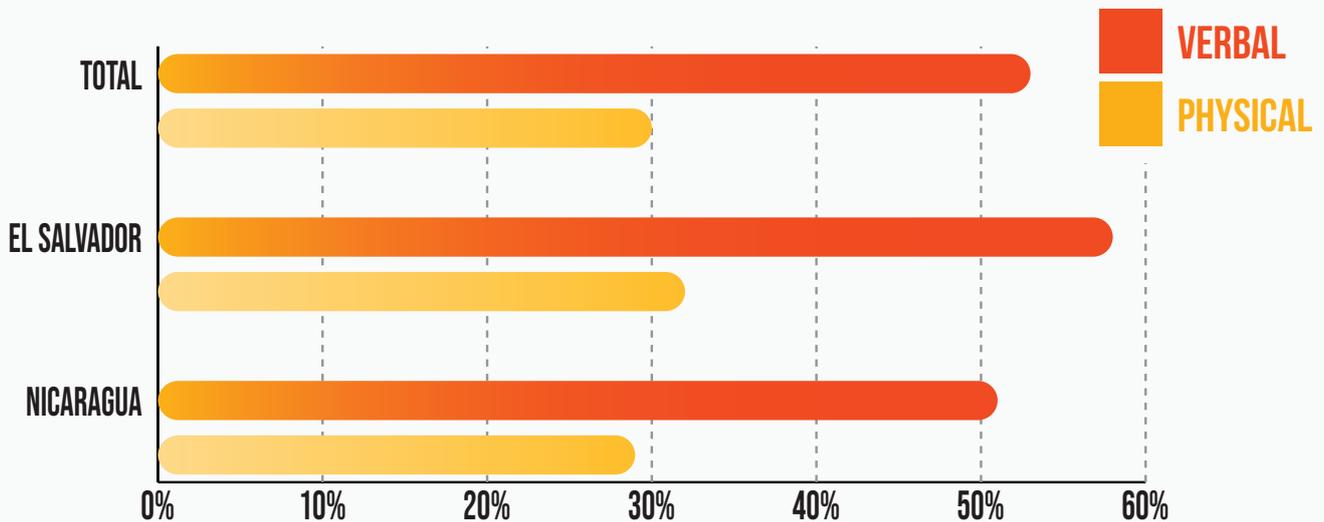
Of those who reported experiencing harassment, 53% experienced verbal and 30% experienced physical.

For men, 19% of participants indicated they had experienced verbal sexual harassment at least once at work, and 9% experienced physical sexual harassment at least once.

In contrast, for women, 3 out of 4 participants responded they had experienced verbal sexual harassment at least once—an astounding 45.5% five times or more—and 43% stated they had experienced physical sexual harassment at least once—10.3% five times or more.

Though a small sample size, gender non-conforming participants experienced verbal sexual harassment and/or physical harassment at a rate of 33%.

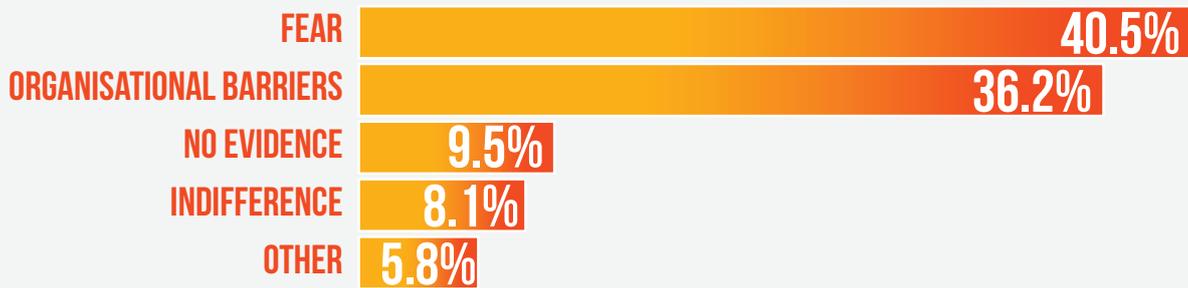
## PREVALENCE OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT



\* Percentage is an average of the total survey respondents who experienced verbal and physical harassment at work

# 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”

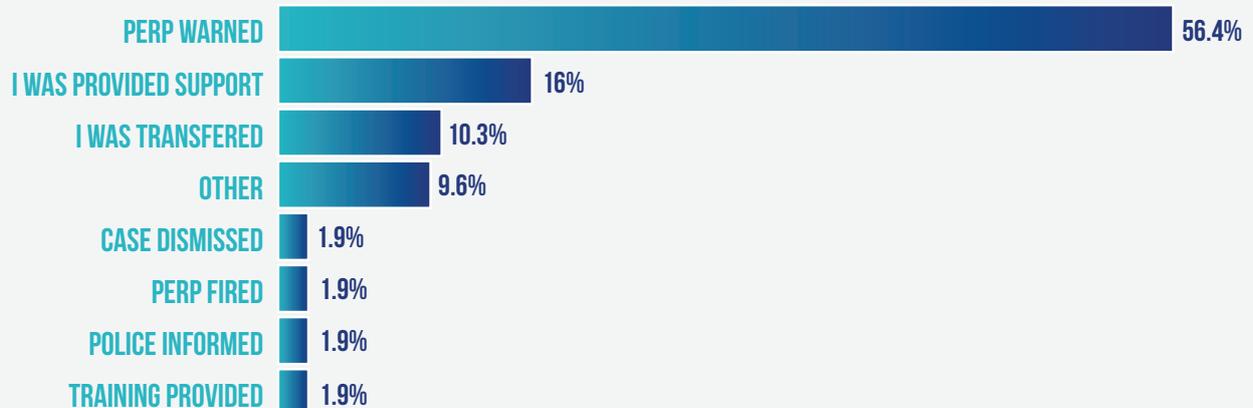
**Other:** “I was offered something by the perpetrator for not reporting”; “Other”

On average, only 26% of cases were reported to the participant’s respective news organisation. Of those reported cases, news organisations took action 46% of the time.

The most common reasons for not reporting were no reporting mechanisms (16.2%), afraid of negative impact (12.8%) and didn’t know how to report (11.4%). Despite the lack of process or understanding of

process accounting for over a quarter of responses, the majority of responses indicated that fear is the prevailing reason why people don’t report. Fear of negative impact, along with fear of retaliation, fear of losing their job and fear they wouldn’t be believed account for 41.6% of responses.

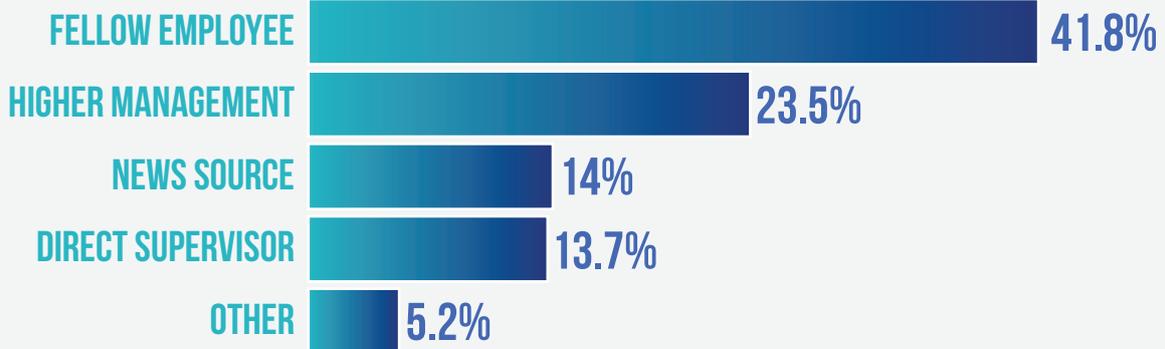
## ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE TO FORMAL COMPLAINTS



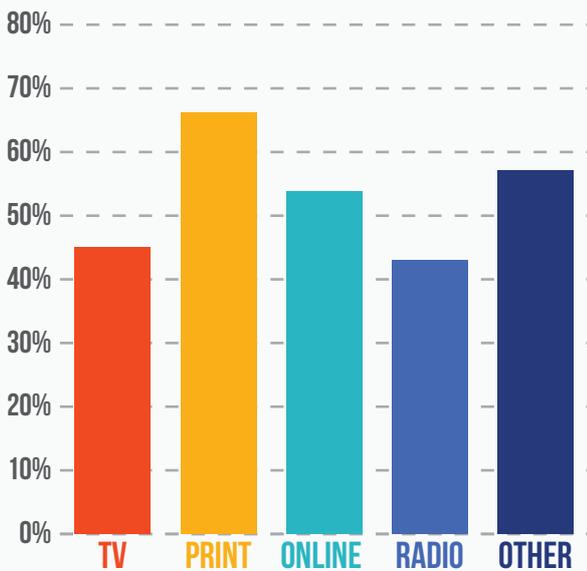
# SOURCE & FREQUENCY

The most common source of sexual harassment was a fellow employee (41.8%), followed by higher management (23.5%), news source (14%), direct supervisor (13.7%) and other (5.2%).

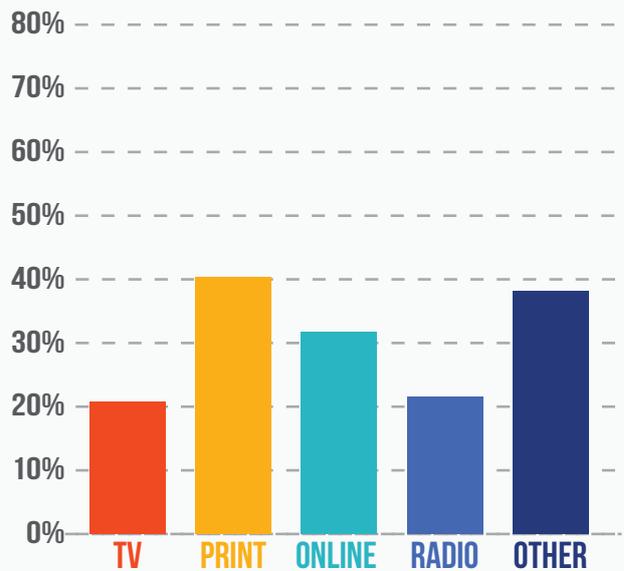
## THE PERPETRATORS



## PREVALENCE BY MEDIUM



### VERBAL



### PHYSICAL

When looking at frequencies of sexual harassment by medium, the highest frequencies occurred in print. Verbal prevalence was 66.2% and physical prevalence was 40.3%.

Participants were also asked if they had ever witnessed sexual harassment in the newsroom. 59% of participants had witnessed at least one incident of sexual harassment, with 21.4% stating they had seen five or more.

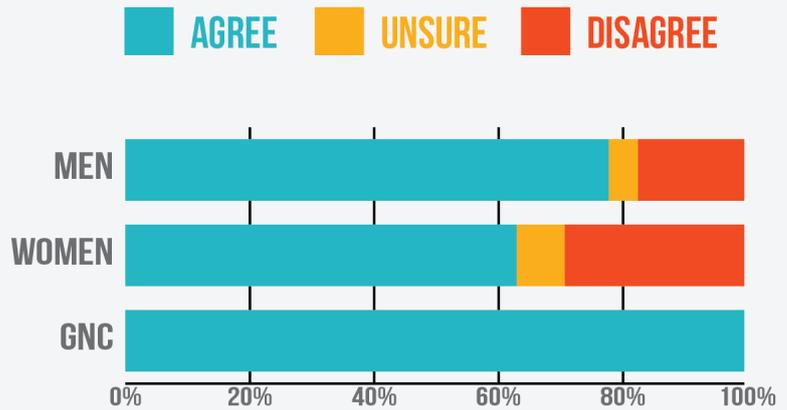


**59%**

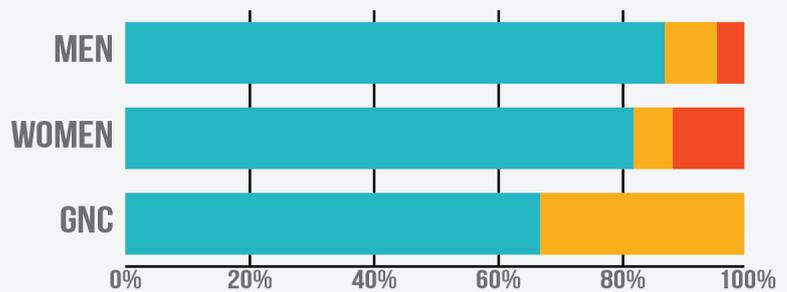
of participants witnessed at least one incident of sexual harassment

## PERSONAL ATTITUDES

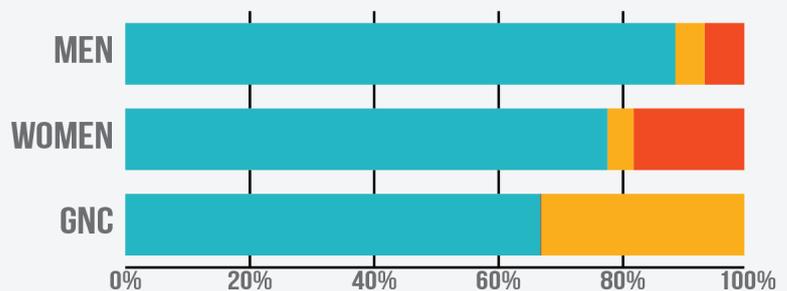
I CAN TALK TO MY SUPERVISOR



I FEEL SAFE IN MY NEWSROOM



I FEEL LISTENED TO WHEN I SPEAK OUT AT WORK



\*Agree responses reflect those who said “Strongly agree”, “agree” and “somewhat agree”  
 Disagree responses reflect those who said “Strongly disagree”, “disagree” and “somewhat disagree”  
 Unsure responses reflect those who “neither agree nor disagree”

We asked respondents if their work environment was supportive. In general, the majority of responses indicated participants felt safe and listened to.

For women, 62.9% somewhat to strongly agreed they could openly talk to their supervisor, 77.5% somewhat to strongly agreed they felt listened to at work, and 81.7% somewhat to strongly agreed they felt safe in their newsroom.

For men, 77.7% agreed - somewhat to strongly - they could openly talk to their supervisor, 88.4% somewhat to strongly agreed they felt listened to at work, and 86.7% somewhat to strongly agreed they felt safe in their newsroom.

# EXECUTIVE INTERVIEWS

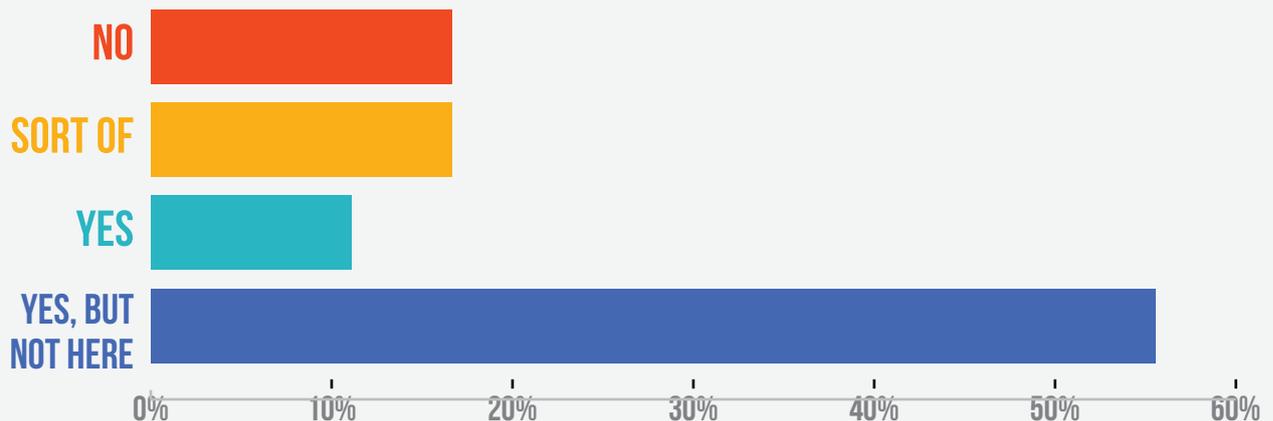
To understand management perspectives on the prevalence of sexual harassment, 18 executives from El Salvador were interviewed. The 14 women and four men held ranks from news editor to director. The participants represented radio, print, television, and online media.

Because of the relatively small sample of managers, 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 news executives reported their personal experiences of sexual harassment. Eleven women had experienced cases of verbal and physical sexual harassment—two had reported their incidences. Two participants weren't asked the question.

When asked if sexual harassment is an issue in the news industry, two news executives responded yes, three stated sort of, ten stated not in their newsroom but in the industry, and three said no. Explaining why it's an issue in the industry but not in their newsroom, the news executives gave various comments including believing that their newsrooms were safe and that having women in managerial roles has helped.

## IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT A PROBLEM?

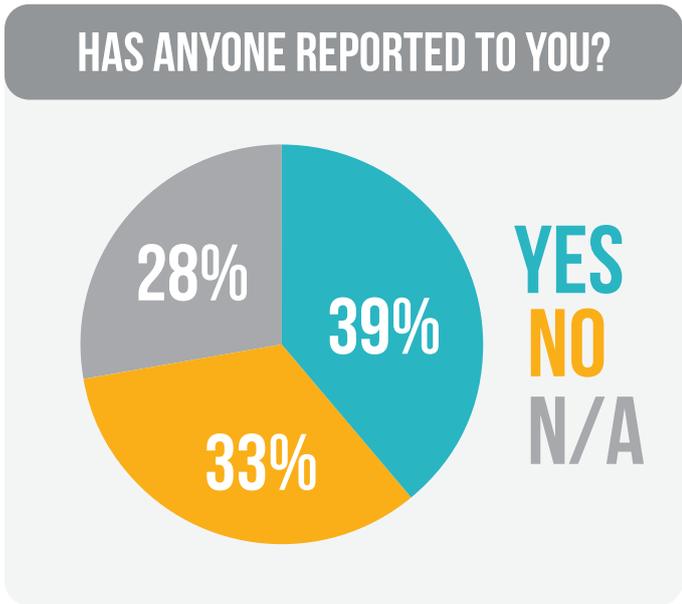


### Is sexual harassment a problem in the media industry?

“We try to have an environment that is as healthy as possible”

“No, because management positions and power positions are in hands of women, mostly. So, it doesn't exist”

Next, media executives were asked if any of their employees had reported cases of sexual harassment to them. Seven answered yes and six answered no. Five weren't asked.



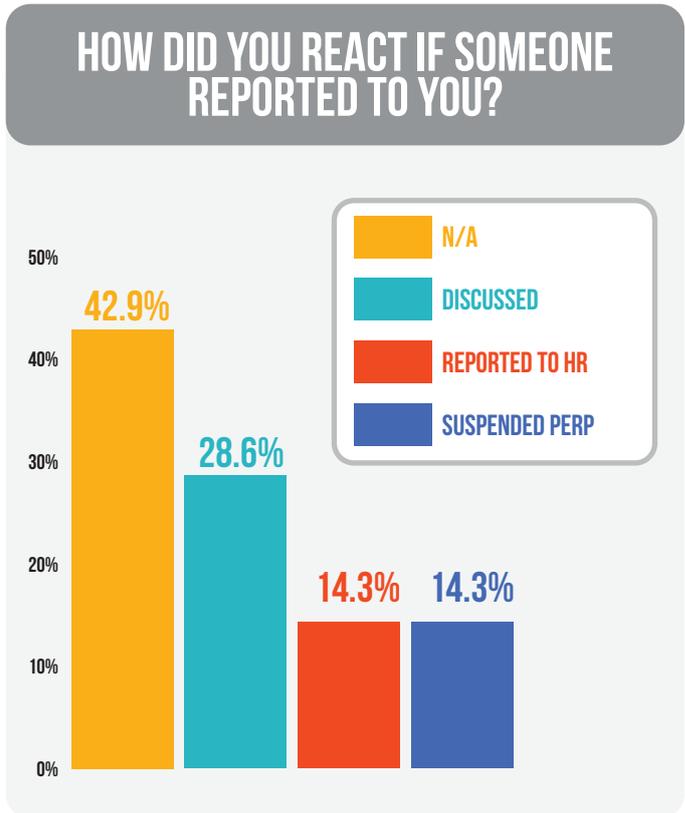
#### On reporting

“The media is full of aggressors. Many are renowned journalists and thanks to their fame, the institutions let them pass everything. That is why women do not file complaints, because we know of other cases where nothing was done.”

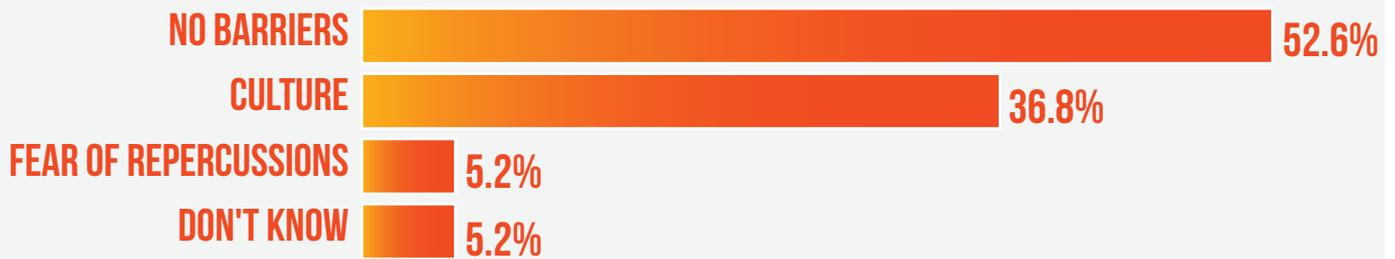
When asked for their responses, two said they discussed the incident with the victim, one reported to HR, and one suspended the accused.

#### On organisational support

“When it happened to me, I was starting to work in the media and I would have liked more information about what to do in those situations”



## WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO REPORTING?

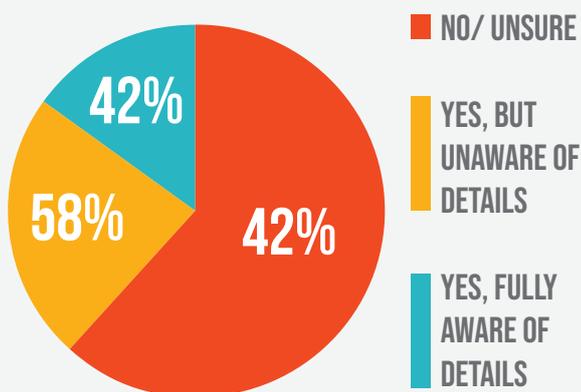


All news executives were asked to list the barriers in the news industry for reporting sexual harassment. The most common response was fear of repercussions, including job loss, followed by lack of education and culture. Indeed, several executives explained that the lack of structure around sexual-harassment leaves victims feeling without protection.

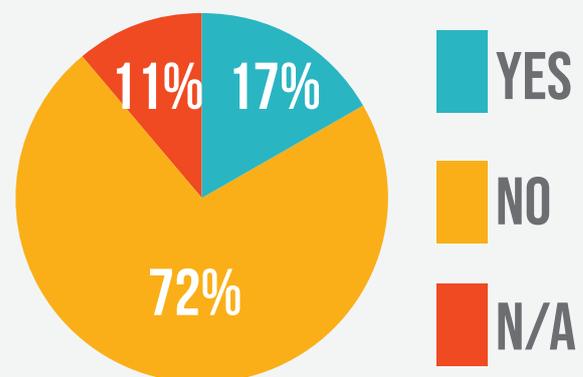
### Barriers

“I think the principal barrier is fear, followed by the lack of protocols inside media, because people don’t know who to go or if they will be taken seriously”

### ARE YOU AWARE OF ANTI-HARASSMENT POLICY?



### HAVE YOU PERSONALLY BEEN TRAINED?



Of the 18 news executives, 15 indicated they were was no policy or mechanism at their organization, three answered yes. Furthermore, only three news executives reported they had been trained on the topic when asked.

## How to eliminate sexual harassment

Answers included to implement training and awareness, work on eliminating the problem in society so that newsrooms follow, establish policies, promote more women to senior positions, and have further discussions in meetings

### Training

“We have been given training on the Law of Violence against women. Otherwise internally we haven’t had those kinds of trainings”

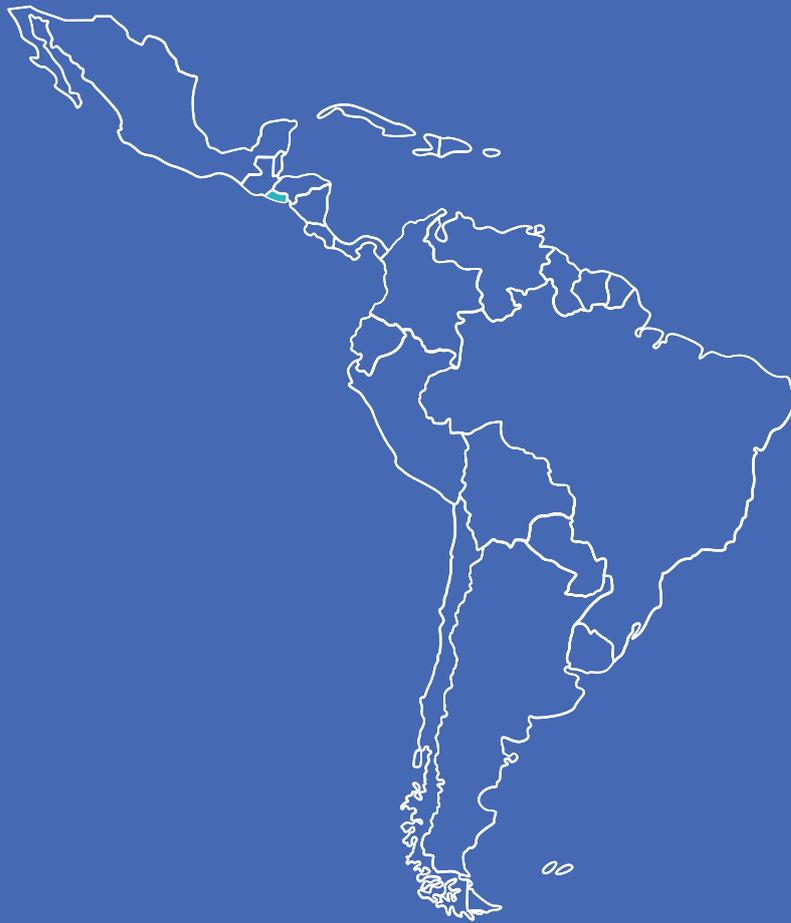
### Cultural changes

“I think it is good to study this topic and also to change the organisational culture of the media, which should go in parallel with changing the whole internal patriarchal system”

The interview results point to a group of executives who believe that sexual harassment is a problem, just not one that is experienced in their newsrooms. In addition, suggests that a lack of training and policies exists in many newsrooms.

This perception is at odds with the experiences of survey respondents, 42% of whom, on average, have experienced verbal and/or physical sexual harassment.

The next section focuses on country by country findings.



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## EL SALVADOR

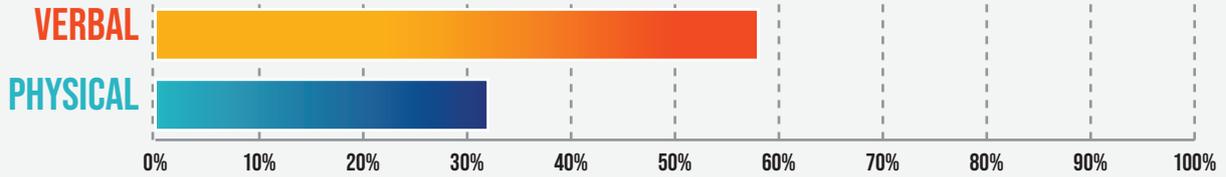
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# OVERVIEW:

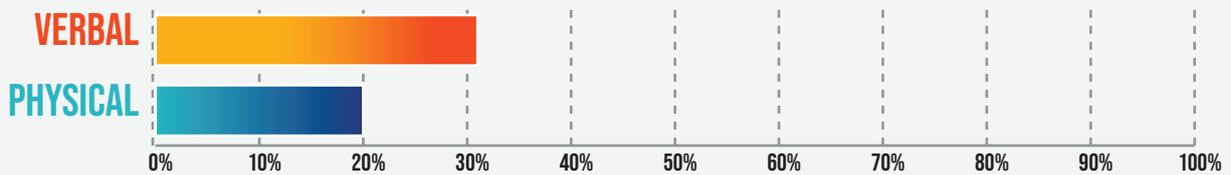
115 ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



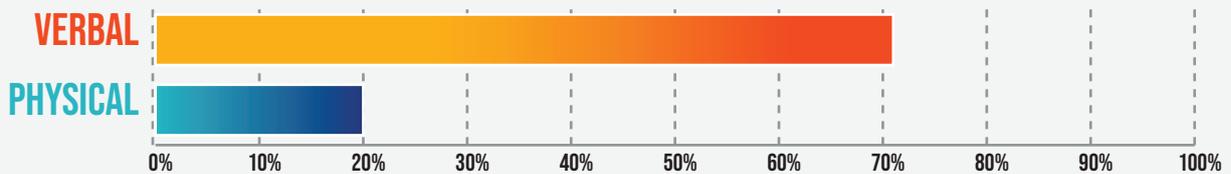
## PREVALENCE



## OF THOSE, WHO REPORTED THE INCIDENT



## OF THOSE, WHO RECEIVED ACTION



## DEMOGRAPHICS

Women 67.8% (78), men 30.4% (35) and gender non-conforming 1.7% (2)

Gender of supervisor: Men 53.9% (62), women 40.9% (47), other 1.7% (2), and not applicable 3.5% (4)

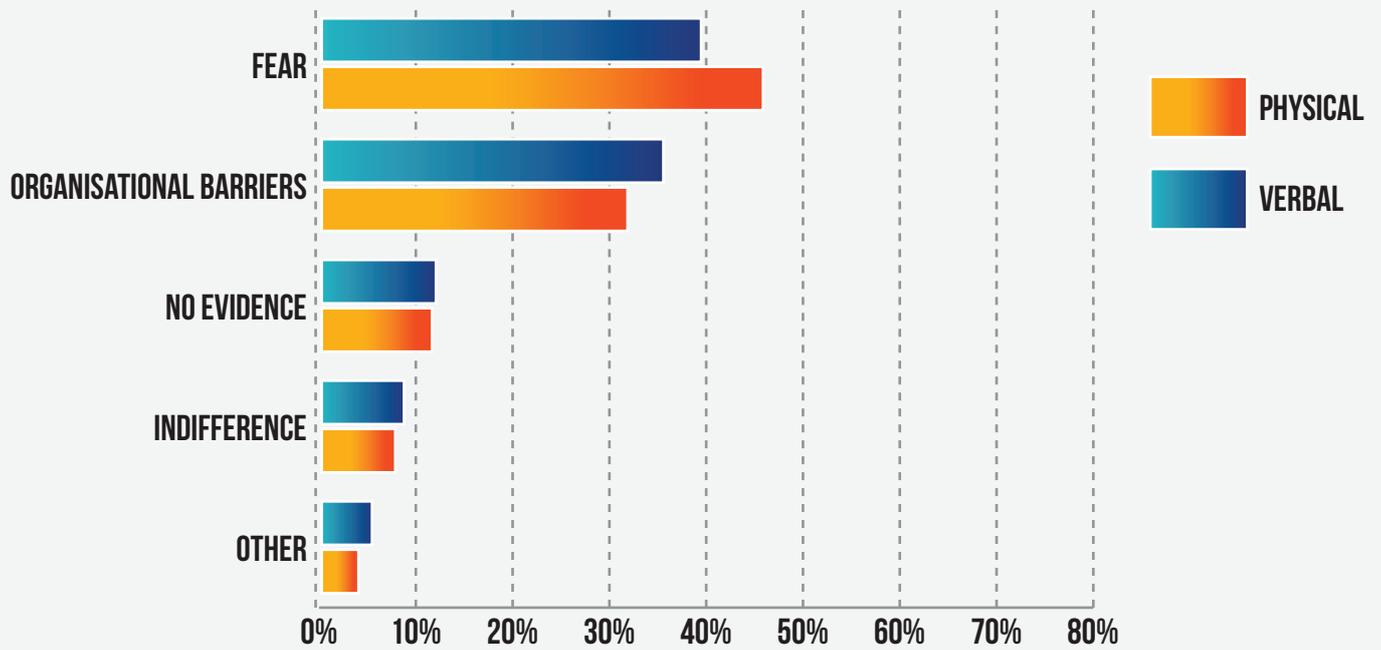
## FINDINGS

One hundred and fifteen participants completed the survey in El Salvador. For men, 20% experienced verbal sexual harassment and 5.8% physical sexual harassment. For women, 77% experienced verbal sexual harassment (43.6% five times or more) and 44.9% physical sexual harassment. Only 29.2% chose to report. This resulted in 45.7% action taken which most commonly constituted warning the accused (37.7%).

The most common reasons for not reporting were afraid it would negatively impact job (15.4%), no reporting mechanisms (14.8%), and afraid perpetrator would retaliate (11.9%).

When asked if their organisation had a sexual harassment policy, 60% of participants answered no. Only 13.9% said yes and were aware of what it was.

## WHY I DID NOT REPORT SEXUAL HARASSMENT



### NOTABLE QUOTE

- “Sexual harassment and inappropriate proposals are two aspects that are latent in the media industry and nothing is done to prevent them”



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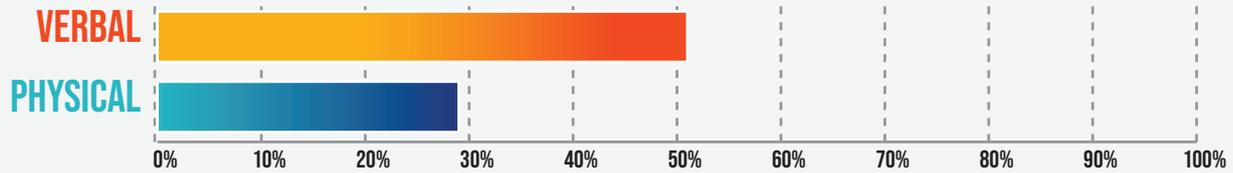
# NICARAGUA

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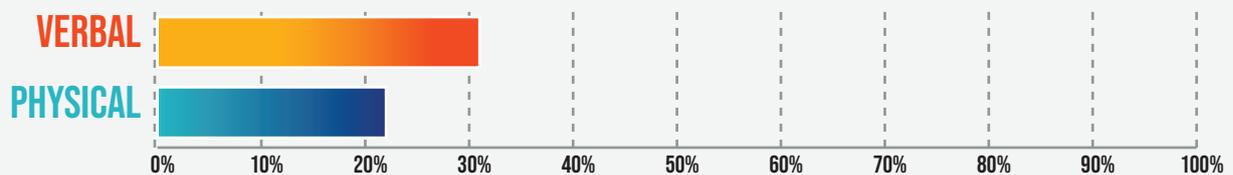
# OVERVIEW: 114 ONLINE SURVEY PARTICIPANTS



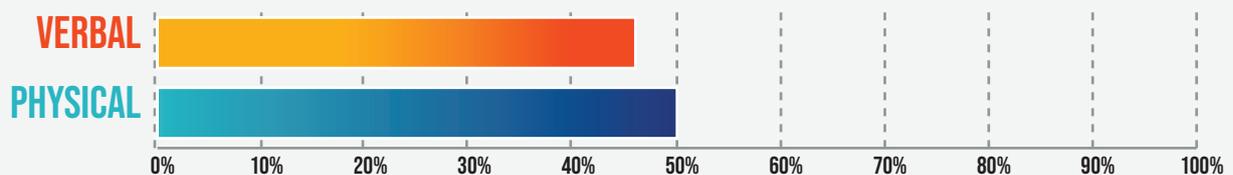
## PREVALENCE



## OF THOSE, WHO REPORTED THE INCIDENT



## OF THOSE, WHO RECEIVED ACTION



## DEMOGRAPHICS

Women 58.8% (67), men 40.4% (46), and gender non-conforming 0.9% (1)

Gender of supervisor: Men 53.3% (63), women 33.3% (38), other 1.8% (2), and not applicable 9.6% (11)

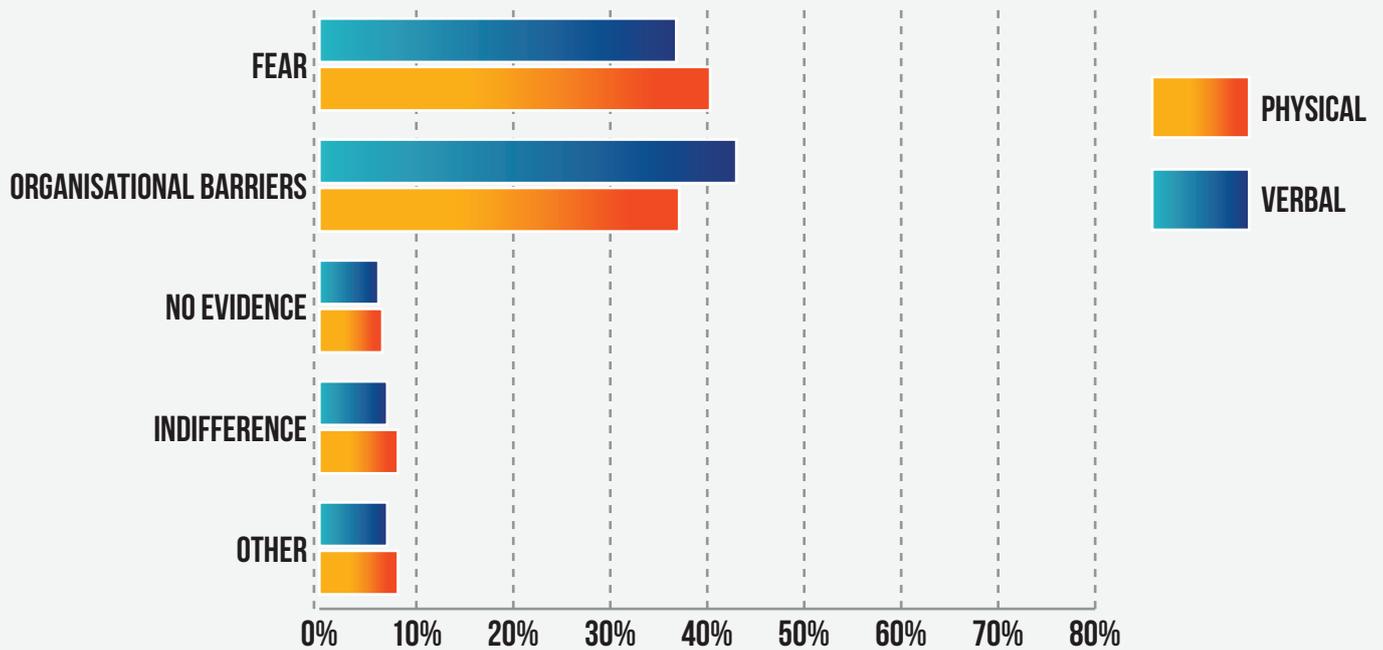
## FINDINGS

One hundred and fourteen participants from Nicaragua completed the survey. Examining sexual harassment frequencies, for men 19.6% experienced verbal sexual harassment and 10.9% physical sexual harassment. For women, 71.7% experienced verbal sexual harassment (47.8% five times or more) and 40.2% physical sexual harassment. Only 20.3% chose to report which resulted in 48.1% action taken. The types of action taken were limited primarily to warning the accused.

The most common reasons for not reporting was no reporting mechanisms (18.5%), not knowing how to report (11.9%), and being afraid of losing their job (11.2%).

When asked if their organisation had a sexual harassment policy, 65.8% of participants answered no. Only 14% said yes and were aware of what it was.

## WHY I DID NOT REPORT SEXUAL HARASSMENT



### NOTABLE QUOTE

- “In Nicaragua, women have suffered harassment since childhood and society makes us believe that it is normal”

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6

**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.



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7

**WIN RESOURCES**

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# CLICK [HERE](#) TO VISIT WIN'S SEXUAL HARASSMENT TOOLKIT

or visit this link: [sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/en/resources/sexual\\_harassment\\_toolkit\\_win](https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/en/resources/sexual_harassment_toolkit_win)

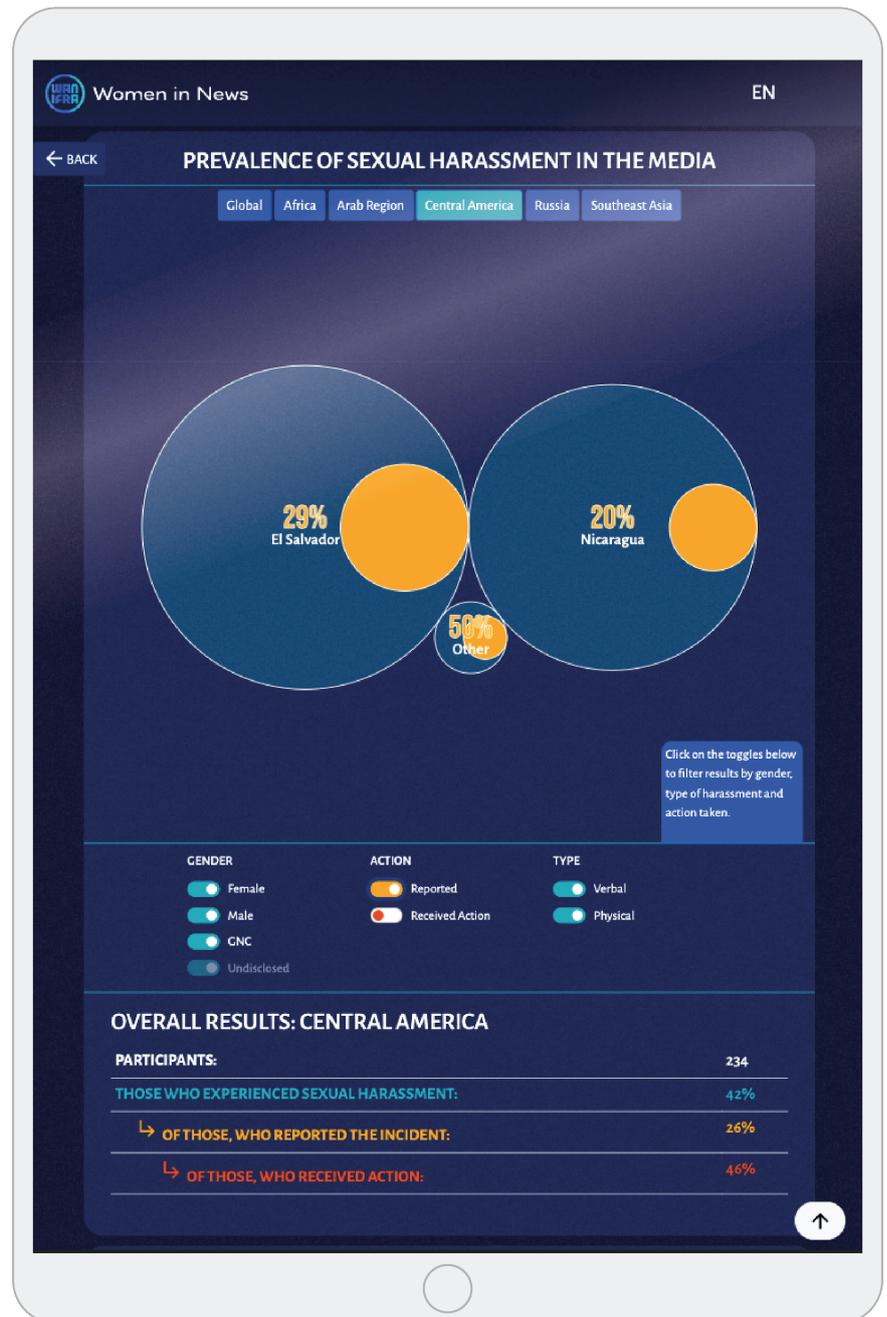
## THE TOOLKIT INCLUDES:

- 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



# FIND WIN'S SEXUAL HARASSMENT RESEARCH [HERE](https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research/)

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