



Cymorth i Ferched Cymru
Welsh Women's Aid

NO GREY AREA

Experiences of
Workplace Sexual
Harassment

Survey Summary Report
by Welsh Women's Aid



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Justice and Equality = Fund
CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

MANAGED BY ROSA

Introduction

Everyone deserves the right to work in an environment free from sexual harassment. Welsh Women's Aid is campaigning to call for an end to sexual harassment in all workplaces across Wales with our new **#NoGreyArea** campaign. We aim to shine a light on the continued workplace cultures and behaviours that allow sexual harassment to flourish and make the workplace an unsafe space for many women. To inform the campaign, Welsh Women's Aid carried out a survey to determine the scale and impact of workplace sexual harassment on women in Wales. The data Welsh Women's Aid has collected looks at the types of sexual harassment experienced, the frequency and reporting of these experiences and how these experiences were handled by employers. The survey also sought to determine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on experiences of workplace sexual harassment.

Overall, 216 women in Wales responded to the survey¹ between November 2020 – January 2021. This summary report outlines the key findings from the feedback from these women in Wales.



**"THINGS NEED TO
CHANGE AS THE EFFECTS OF
SEXUAL HARASSMENT
ARE DEVASTATING AND
LIFE CHANGING."**

¹ In total there were 394 responses, these included responses from England, for the purpose of this summary we have focused on the responses from women in Wales.

Key findings

What were women's past experiences of sexual harassment?

Of the women living in Wales, only 19% (38 of 195) stated that they had never experienced sexual harassment at work.

This means that four out of five, or 81% of women in Wales (157 respondents) recognised and admitted that they had experienced sexual harassment at work on at least one occasion.

FOUR OUT OF **FIVE**

WOMEN IN WALES HAVE EXPERIENCED SOME FORM OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT.



Although over 80% of respondents stated this, we found that a higher percentage of women provided details of harassment in subsequent questions in the survey. This indicates that although the majority of respondents acknowledge their experiences to be harassment, there are others who are still in a 'grey area' where they are unsure or unaware that their experiences constituted sexual harassment.

"I NEVER SAID ANYTHING 'COS I THOUGHT I WAS OVERREACTING."

Table I. Women in Wales: Have you ever experienced sexual harassment in the workplace?

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Yes, all the time.	4	2.05%
Yes, regularly.	19	9.74%
Yes, on a few occasions.	113	57.95%
Yes, once.	21	10.77%
No, never.	38	19.49%
Total	195	100.00%

* Data missing for 21 respondents.

Who are the perpetrators of sexual harassment?

The vast majority of women in Wales responding to the survey said that they had experienced sexual harassment from more than one perpetrator in the workplace (118 individuals, 72%). Although more than a quarter said that they had experienced sexual harassment from only one perpetrator (47 women in Wales, 28%).

Nearly all women in Wales who had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace had been harassed by a man (155 respondents, 99%). Far fewer had experienced harassment from a woman (12, 8%).

Table II. Women in Wales: Who were the perpetrators of sexual harassment in the workplace?

Relationship to perpetrator of sexual harassment	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Co-worker / team member	83	51.88%
Line manager / supervisor	54	33.75%
Senior manager	44	27.50%
A person you manage / supervise	9	5.63%
A contractor	16	10.00%
A person from another department or work location	37	23.13%
Another person in your workspace who is not involved in the work you do	10	6.25%
A client / customer	52	32.50%
Other	12	7.50%

* Data included for 160 women in Wales.

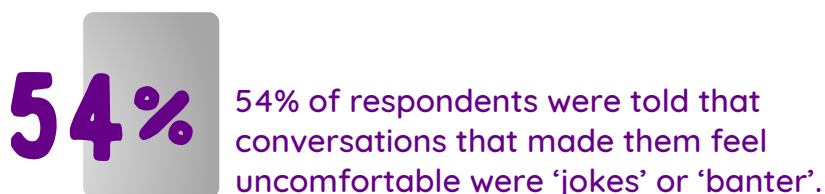
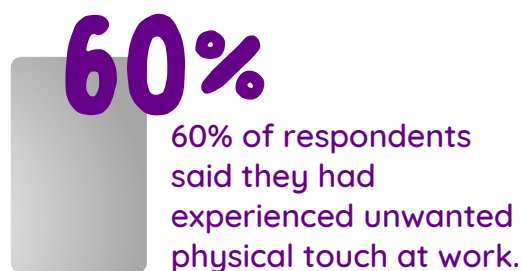
**"I WAS NEW AND HE WAS MY MANAGER,
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO."**

The majority of women in Wales, 61% (98 respondents) stated that the person or persons who harassed them were in a role senior to their own (i.e. were defined as either 'line manager/supervisor' or 'senior management'). Over 50% also stated that they had experienced sexual harassment from a co-worker or team member.

Whilst there is a demonstrable power dynamic at play here, the data shows that sexual harassment is not always carried out by 'the boss' and that power dynamics and unwanted behaviour can be carried out by individuals in a variety of different positions of seniority within a workplace as well as customers and clients. This demonstrates that women in Wales face the possibility of experiencing harassment from multiple directions, and will therefore be left with very limited space within which they may feel safe.

The type of harassment experienced

Women in Wales described hundreds² of types of experiences of harassment. Multiple different types of harassment were experienced by individual women. We have collated these into similar experiences to show relevant trends.



"SEXUAL REFERENCES WERE PASSED OFF AS BANTER."

"PARTICULARLY IN THE MALE DOMINATED SECTOR I WORKED IN, WOMEN WERE LAUGHED AT FOR MAKING A COMPLAINT OR SEEN TO BE WEAK. WHEN YOU ARE AMBITIOUS AND TRYING FOR PROMOTIONS, THIS THEN GOES AGAINST YOU."

² 801 types of experiences of harassment were described.

The Covid-19 pandemic impact:

Changes to workplaces and work practices

Working arrangements and conditions have changed considerably since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 restrictions. These changes are likely to have long term impacts on how we work in the future, therefore it is important to understand what effect these changes will have on women's experiences of sexual harassment. Many women³ in Wales reported changes to their working practices, these changes included 59% now 'home working', 13% 'remote working' and 6% of women on 'furlough'. We have looked at how these changes have impacted women's experiences of sexual harassment.

Views on workplace sexual harassment because of increased online working

The survey asked for opinions on how changes to working practices have impacted workplace sexual harassment. Nearly two thirds of women in Wales (64%) said that they did not know whether there had been an increase in sexual harassment due to moving work online because of Covid-19.

This could suggest that the impact of Covid-19 on safety at work is not something that respondents had given much thought to before, and responses to the question were mixed:

"THERE'S A LACK OF BOUNDARIES DUE TO NOT BEING IN A TYPICALLY FORMAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT."

"WE'RE MORE ACCESSIBLE ONLINE THAN WE'VE EVER BEEN AND PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE VOCAL ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS THAN BEFORE."

"PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKELY TO SEXUALLY HARASS OTHERS WILL JUST CHANGE THEIR METHOD OF DELIVERY USING TOOLS AVAILABLE TO THEM."

"I PERSONALLY HAD MORE WHEN I WAS OFFICE BASED AND FIND AS WE'RE ALL ONLINE NOW, SOMEONE HAS TO DELIBERATELY REACH OUT VIA A VIRTUAL CHANNEL AND DOESN'T GET THE OPPORTUNISTIC MOMENTS TO MAKE COMMENTS/TOUCH AS THEY DID WHEN FACE TO FACE."

"ALL COMMENTS ARE TRACEABLE UNLESS SAID 1:1. I'D SAY IT'S HARDER NOW TO GET AWAY WITH IT."

³ 126 Welsh women who provided details of their working conditions

Views of sexual harassment due to isolated physical working practices

The majority of women in Wales (60%) said that they did not know whether there had been an increase in sexual harassment due to moving to more isolated working practices through Covid-19. Again, responses were varied:

"PEOPLE ARE LESS LIKELY TO REPORT INCIDENCES WITH LESS WITNESSES."

"I CAN SEE THAT THERE'S LESS 'POLICING' OF APPROPRIATENESS IN SMALLER GROUPS."

"I HAVE ALWAYS FOUND THAT THE WORST EXAMPLES I HAVE EXPERIENCED HAPPENED WHEN NO ONE WAS AROUND OR LATE NIGHTS WHERE THERE WERE LESS PEOPLE IN THE BUILDING."

"LESS BRAVADO WITH LESS OF AN AUDIENCE."

"SPACES ARE MORE DESERTED AND IT CAN MAKE WOMEN FEEL LESS SAFE."

Personal experiences of sexual harassment and experiences of peers during the pandemic

15% of women in Wales (26 out of the 173 who provided details) had either experienced workplace sexual harassment themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic or knew a friend who had experienced harassment during this time. This figure is considerable given the short timeframe of the pandemic (nine months at the time the survey was conducted).

Types of harassment experienced during the pandemic

In total, 10% (18 women in Wales) had experienced sexual harassment during Covid-19. None of the respondents had experienced unwanted physical touch during the pandemic, compared to 60% of respondents before the pandemic. 52% said that they still experienced comments of a sexual nature that made them feel uncomfortable during the pandemic. There was an increase (6% to 16%) in the number of respondents that had received emails of a sexual nature that made them feel uncomfortable during the pandemic.

This could suggest that sexual harassment during the pandemic is more likely to be comment-based and online, rather than physical and could be an indication of a change in working practices, more online and home-working and a more isolated way of working.

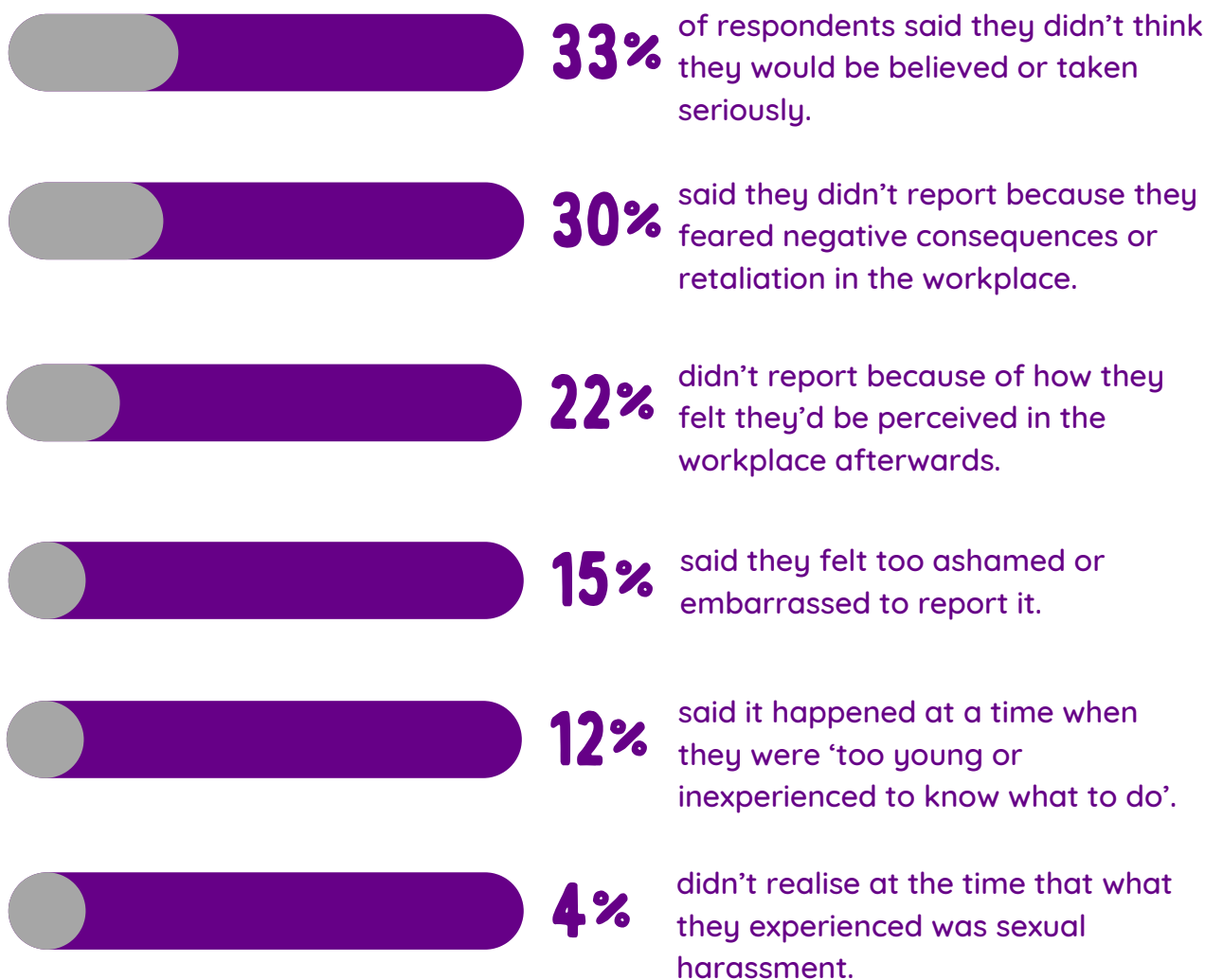
Although working conditions were altered for many, the most common types of sexual harassment experienced in the workplace remained high during Covid-19, though fewer individuals stated experiencing harassment.

On average, fewer types of abuse were mentioned by women in Wales during Covid-19. However, we must consider that the duration of the pandemic was nine months at the closing date of this survey. Experiences of sexual harassment are expected to be lower in this short time period, compared to the lifetime of incidences of sexual harassment experienced prior to the pandemic by respondents.

Reporting workplace sexual harassment

Women in Wales infrequently reported sexual harassment in the workplace. Only 19% of women responding to this question reported their harassment. The reasons for not reporting were numerous and complex.

Reasons for not reporting workplace sexual harassment



"IT'S SUCH A DIFFICULT SITUATION. YOU DON'T WANT TO LOOK UNPROFESSIONAL AND COMPLAIN ABOUT SOMEONE. WHEN THEY'RE A SENIOR MANAGER, AND YOU'RE LOWER DOWN THE CHAIN AND YOUNG, YOU FEEL POWERLESS."

"I'VE SEEN HOW SOCIETY AND WORKPLACES TREAT WOMEN WHO SPEAK OUT."

"I WORK WITH ALL MEN AND THEY JUST PROTECT EACH OTHER."

What happened when women did report?

Only a small proportion of women had reported the sexual harassment that they had experienced, and of those that did (25 respondents to the survey), just 20% were satisfied with the outcome. Nearly three quarters were unsatisfied with the outcome (64%) of reporting to their workplace.

Many respondents who provided further comments said that 'nothing' had been done to address the harassment after reporting it (24%, 6 of 25 individuals who left comments):

"HE LEFT, WITH NOTHING ON HIS RECORD TO ANOTHER JOB. IT WAS KEPT QUIET."

"I'M STILL WAITING FOR IT, NINE MONTHS ON."

"NOTHING WAS DONE. I HAD TO RAISE MY OWN COMPLAINT AND GET MY UNION INVOLVED."

Those who elaborated on the situation following reporting said they had been threatened, assaulted and attacked by the perpetrator:

"HE BECAME VERY UPSET AND ATTACKED ME."

"REPORTING IT ESCALATED THE EVENTS AND MADE EVERYTHING WORSE AND RESULTED IN ME LEAVING."

Others were discriminated against in the workplace due to the harassment they had been subjected to:

"I WAS ASKED TO RESIGN FROM MY JOB."

"I WAS TOLD NOT TO LET HIM CATCH ME AGAIN."

"MY LINE MANAGER THOUGHT IT WAS FUNNY."

"I WAS TOLD THAT SOUNDED VERY OUT OF CHARACTER FOR HIM AND ASKED IF I HAD MISINTERPRETED BEHAVIOUR."

Few had a positive outcome (16%, 4 of respondents providing further comments):

"WITH THIS PARTICULAR OCCASION, AN INVESTIGATION TOOK PLACE & THE PERPETRATOR WAS SUSPENDED, PERMANENTLY."

"FORMAL GRIEVANCE RAISED AND UPHELD."

"INTERNAL INVESTIGATION RESULTING IN SUSPENSION OF INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBLE AND DISMISSAL."

"I WISH I HAD SAID SOMETHING SOONER."

Employer responsibility

The majority (60%) of women in Wales think that employers could do more to prevent sexual harassment from happening at work.

"I LOST MY JOB AND I'D DONE NOTHING WRONG."

"I SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ASKED IF I WANTED TO TAKE IT FURTHER THE DEFAULT SHOULD HAVE BEEN THAT [EMPLOYERS] DO TAKE IT FURTHER."

"IF IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT MY COMPANY TOOK SEXUAL HARASSMENT SERIOUSLY THEN MAYBE I WOULD HAVE [REPORTED], BUT OTHERS HAD REPORTED IT AND IT NEVER WORKED OUT WELL FOR THEM."

"IF I WAS REASSURED FROM THE OUTSET THAT MY EMPLOYER TOOK SEXUAL HARASSMENT SERIOUSLY OR IF THEY HAD A TRACK RECORD OF SUPPORTING WOMEN WHO HAD CALLED IT OUT, I MIGHT HAVE FELT LIKE I COULD HAVE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO ME."

"I THINK WORKPLACES NEED TO GIVE EMPLOYEES INFORMATION ON WHAT TO DO IF IT HAPPENS TO YOU. I LET IT GO ON TOO LONG BECAUSE I WAS SCARED AND EMBARRASSED. WOMEN NEED TO BE SUPPORTED."

What does this research tell us about sexual harassment in the workplace in Wales?

The overwhelming prevalence of sexual harassment at work as reported in this survey shows us that for the vast majority of women in Wales, the workplace is not a safe space.

The majority of women who responded to the survey experienced harassment on more than one occasion and from more than one person in their workplace, suggesting this isn't something carried out by 'a few bad apples' and is actually more commonplace than many people realise.

Women who responded to the survey often spoke about toxic work environments and the frustration they feel; that speaking up about unwanted behaviour would negatively escalate the situation or have severe impacts on their jobs and livelihoods. Because of this, the majority of respondents did not report their harassment.

The pandemic has also had an impact on sexual harassment in the workplace. Working arrangements and conditions have changed, and it appears that the way some women have experienced sexual harassment has changed too. There were more cases of online and non-physical sexual harassment, compared to physical harassment.

A lack of support, guidance and fundamental structures in place to prevent sexual harassment from happening at work was reported by many of the respondents. Without employers adopting a clear and preventative approach to dealing with sexual harassment, it is very unlikely that we can 'break the cycle' of systemic workplace sexual harassment.

This survey has exposed the 'grey area' culture that allows sexual harassment in the workplace to remain pervasive in Wales. We must see action to put an end to the 'grey area' and stop workplace sexual harassment once and for all.

The full report including the statistical analysis for respondents of other genders and respondents residing elsewhere in the UK is available on request. Please contact Welsh Women's Aid at statistics@welshwomensaid.org.uk

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