

PUBLICATION

WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN GEORGIA



JUNE 2024
UN WOMEN



PUBLICATION

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The publication was prepared by Caucasus Resource Research Center (CRRC-Georgia) with the involvement of local gender expert, Lika Jalaghania, in the framework of the Women's Economic Empowerment component of the UN Women project "Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia", which is funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations or that of the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study 'Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Private Sector in Georgia' was conducted by CRRC-Georgia at the initiative of UN Women. The study was implemented within the Women's Economic Empowerment component of the UN Women project "Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia". The study aimed at generating evidence to inform policies on preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment in the private sector. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To obtain estimates of the prevalence and forms of sexual harassment in the private sector.
- To examine private sector employees' awareness of and attitudes towards sexual harassment in the workplace, including its causes, places of occurrence, consequences, risks and protective

factors, legislation/policy in place and reporting mechanisms, as well as their views on preventing sexual harassment.

- To understand the characteristics of perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment and the impact of workplace sexual harassment on those who experience it.

This analysis is based on information collected through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A survey was carried out between September 2024 and January 2025 and involved 824 private sector employees. In addition, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with experts working on sexual harassment issues, representatives of private companies and women employed in the private sector who had experienced workplace sexual harassment.

KEY FINDINGS

Awareness of and attitudes towards sexual harassment

- In the quantitative study, the majority of respondents consider such actions as a supervisor of the opposite sex requesting photos (83 per cent), making sexual comments (83 per cent) or inviting someone out on a date for career advancement (77 per cent) to constitute forms of sexual harassment.
- In some cases, women and men have different perceptions of what may be considered sexual harassment. For example, a majority of female respondents consider receiving personal online messages from a supervisor (65 per cent) and being touched during conversation (47 per cent) as sexual harassment, whereas a smaller share of men agree (43 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively).
- The majority of both female (90 per cent) and male (86 per cent) respondents agree that sexual harassment is a serious social problem.

Prevalence and forms of sexual harassment

- Sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon in Georgia's private sector. One in four respondents (24 per cent) reported having experienced sexual harassment at work. Twenty-seven per cent of women and 18 per cent of men reported experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment during their employment in the private sector. For the preceding 12 months, this figure stood at 12 per cent for women and 6 per cent for men.
- Women and employees under the age of 35 are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment

than other demographics. Unlike men, women more frequently experience multiple forms of sexual harassment. Notably, women who reported being unmarried or not living with a partner are more often victims than those who are married or cohabiting.

- Survey results confirm that most cases of sexual harassment go unnoticed by others: Of those who experienced harassment, only about one third (31 per cent) reported that someone else witnessed the incident.
- Qualitative research participants also noted that sexual harassment is widespread, particularly in the service, entertainment and tourism sectors, as well as in male-dominated fields such as construction and security.
- As the qualitative research participants mentioned, verbal and non-verbal forms of harassment—such as compliments on one’s appearance, sharing sexual stories, messages and calls outside work hours with personal questions, physical invasion of one’s personal space, staring, unwanted physical contact, and offers of intimacy in exchange for privileges—are more common than outright physical assault.
- Harassment is more likely to occur in less formal settings, such as in isolated locations, in closed offices, on business trips or at corporate events.
- Experts also noted an increase in technology-facilitated harassment since the COVID-19 pandemic, including sexual messages and the sharing of explicit photos and videos.

Perpetrators and bystanders of sexual harassment

- Among the majority of women who had experienced sexual harassment (84 per cent), the perpetrator was male. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents noted that the harassment came from a colleague at the same level, while 22 per cent indicated that it was from the organization’s leadership or their immediate supervisor. Harassment by leadership was reported twice as frequently by women (26 per cent) as by men (12 per cent).
- Experts identified certain groups as more vulnerable to sexual harassment, including women with disabilities, unmarried, divorced or widowed women, single mothers, LGBTQI+ individuals, interns and temporary staff.
- Approximately one third (32 per cent) of survey respondents reported personally witnessing or hearing about cases of harassment.
- Reporting is the least preferred action by bystanders when it comes to reacting to sexual harassment cases. Among witnesses, only 3 per cent reported incidents to the authorities, 5 per cent took no action, and 45 per cent provided emotional support to the victim.

Reporting of workplace sexual harassment

- Overall, respondents expressed a positive attitude towards reporting harassment, with 75 per cent agreeing that reporting is an effective way to stop it. Nevertheless, these attitudes are not translated into practice, and most cases remain unreported.
- Nearly half (47 per cent) of those respondents who had experienced workplace sexual harassment spoke to someone about the most serious incident, but only 9 per cent used formal channels. Those who did seek help approached their supervisor, the head of the organization, their human resources department, the Public Defender’s Office or the police.

- A large portion of the quantitative research respondents fear that reporting may harm their relationships with their colleagues: 39 per cent agree that those who report sexual harassment risk being looked upon badly.
- Qualitative participants cited the fear of job loss, the presence of societal attitudes, the lack of evidence and the lack of information as main reasons for the low rates of reporting.
- About one third (31 per cent) of respondents did not know of internal anti-sexual harassment mechanisms in their organizations; 38 per cent stated that their organizations have no policies on the prevention or management of such cases; and only 21 per cent confirmed that response mechanisms exist.
- The majority of respondents (86 per cent) have never attended training on the topic.
- As the qualitative research respondents mentioned, approaches towards workplace sexual harassment vary between companies: While large firms often adhere to international standards, many small and medium-sized companies lack internal mechanisms, hindering prevention, identification and the protection of those who experience workplace sexual harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Georgia:

- Ensure dissemination of information on the prevention and inadmissibility of workplace sexual harassment through awareness-raising events and social campaigns.
- Facilitate the effective handling of harassment complaints and ensure victims' access to justice.

To private companies and organizations operating in Georgia:

- Emphasize the strict prohibition of sexual harassment in internal regulatory documents.
- Implement internal mechanisms for prevention and response, including developing policies that define harassment; establish formal complaint channels; and set up independent, impartial and effective review processes.
- Ensure the transparency and inclusiveness of reporting mechanisms.
- Maintain internal statistics on reported incidents.
- Provide mandatory training and informational sessions for employees, management and human resources personnel on the nature, forms, consequences and complaint procedures related to sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon across all sectors and professions worldwide;¹ however, its prevalence does not correspond to victim reporting rates, which are influenced by interconnected factors such as gender



INTRODUCTION

inequality, power imbalances at work, the fear of job loss and retaliation, a culture of victim-blaming and associated shame.² Like other forms of sexual violence, sexual harassment is often not taken seriously by much of society, yet its harm is multifaceted, affecting victims' mental and physical well-being, interpersonal relationships, career advancement and job performance.³

The root cause of sexual harassment often lies not in sexual interest but in power dynamics and the preservation of women's subordinate role.⁴ Due to its inherently harmful nature, international human rights instruments classify sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence and call on States to adopt effective and immediate measures for its elimination.⁵

Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, concerning the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of employment and occupation, defines sexual harassment as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an

intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment".⁶ Thus, under EU directives, sexual harassment constitutes a form of sex discrimination and must be prohibited by law.⁷ The Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) also treats sexual harassment as a form of violence and discrimination against women,⁸ violating victims' dignity and negatively affecting their mental and physical health.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.⁹ The Convention applies to both public and private sectors, formal and informal economies, and covers digital and communication channels. It defines violence and harassment as "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment".¹⁰

1.1. LOCAL CONTEXT

Sexual harassment is a prevalent problem in Georgia, resulting from gender inequality and negative societal stereotypes. While men can also be victims, the majority of victims are women, due to existing gender inequality, power imbalances and women's general vulnerability and insecurity in the face of violence. These factors place women at significant risk of sexual harassment, particularly in labour markets where they hold subordinate positions compared to men.¹¹

The first national study on violence against women conducted in Georgia in 2017,¹² based on the 2014 Population Census, revealed that 20 per cent of women in Georgia had experienced sexual harassment, including 10 per cent in the workplace. These findings highlighted important trends in the prevalence of sexual harassment, response practices and prevention needs.

A 2021 study by UN Women in cooperation with the Civil Service Bureau showed that one third of respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the public sector. Two in five female public servants had reported workplace sexual harassment. Among those with 20 or more years of public service, half reported having experienced sexual harassment in their public sector careers.¹³

According to a 2022 UN Women study, 24.5 per cent of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, half of which occurred in the workplace.¹⁴ The report also noted that despite some differences in perceptions between men and women, 74 per cent of men and 89 per cent of women consider sexual harassment to be a serious or significant problem.¹⁵ Although data on prevalence in the private sector are unavailable, it is noteworthy that most cases reviewed by the Public Defender concern alleged incidents in the private sector.¹⁶

To raise awareness and prevent workplace sexual harassment, UN Women supports and collaborates with both the public and private sectors. Since 2018, in partnership with the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Civil Service Bureau and the private sector, 24 government agencies and 55 private companies adhering to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs)¹⁷ have developed and implemented workplace sexual harassment prevention mechanisms.

Although the scale of sexual harassment across all employment sectors in Georgia has not been equally studied, existing research and low employer awareness in the private sector, along with often ineffective responses, suggest the widespread prevalence of this discriminatory practice. Therefore, a detailed study of this sector is essential for planning preventive mechanisms and implementing evidence-based policies against workplace sexual harassment.

1.2. LEGAL ENVIRONMENT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The substantive legal provision on sexual harassment in Georgia appeared with the 2010 Law on Gender Equality;¹⁸ however, due to the absence of enforcement mechanisms, it yielded no practical results. In 2019, significant amendments to the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination defined sexual harassment as a form of discrimination. The concept was also introduced into the Code of Administrative Offences,¹⁹ aiming to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in public spaces. In 2019, provisions prohibiting sexual harassment were incorporated into the Labour Code,²⁰ and in 2020, as

part of labour law reforms to align with EU directives, employers were required to adopt measures ensuring equal treatment in employment, including incorporating anti-discrimination provisions into internal regulations and ensuring their enforcement.²¹ These reforms also established the Labour Inspection Office,²² empowered to supervise, investigate and take measures against labour-relation violations related to discrimination, including sexual harassment.²³ Under the Labour Code, violations of the principle prohibiting discrimination and sexual harassment shall result in warnings and financial sanctions.²⁴

Despite these legislative advances, preventing and combating sexual harassment and providing victim-centred support remain serious challenges, particularly with respect to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).²⁵

The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), in its 2022 baseline evaluation report on Georgia,²⁶ welcomed the country's legislative changes to address violence against women. However, GREVIO highlighted gaps in legislation and policy that fail to fully recognize the gendered nature of these crimes and ensure the coordinated policies necessary for prevention.²⁷ GREVIO strongly urged the Georgian Government to encourage the private sector to adopt self-regulatory standards for combating and preventing violence and sexual harassment against women, as well as to record data on the number and outcomes of complaints filed by victims.²⁸

Georgia has undertaken obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),²⁹ the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)³⁰ and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)³¹ to eliminate sexual harassment and implement preventive measures. Despite these international commitments, however, substantial challenges remain in identifying the various forms of sexual harassment, responding appropriately and ensuring safe, equal and dignified working conditions through employee empowerment. Notably, despite recommendations from the CEDAW Committee to ratify ILO Convention No. 190,³² Georgia has yet to take significant steps towards doing so.

Thus, despite the existence of a legal and policy framework providing a substantial foundation for eliminating gender inequality and sexual harassment in the workplace, current practices still exhibit many shortcomings and underscore the need to strengthen evidence-based, timely and coordinated policies.

1.3.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

The study 'Workplace Sexual Harassment in the Private Sector in Georgia' was conducted by CRRC-Georgia at the initiative of UN Women. The study was implemented within the Women's Economic Empowerment component of the UN Women project "Good Governance for Gender Equality in Georgia". The study aimed at generating evidence to inform policies on preventing and responding to workplace sexual harassment in the private sector. The objectives of the study were as follows:

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- To understand the characteristics of perpetrators of workplace sexual harassment and the impact of workplace sexual harassment on those who experience it.

This analysis is based on data collected through both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A survey was carried out between September 2024 and January 2025 and involved 824 private sector employees. In addition, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with experts working on sexual harassment issues, representatives of private companies and women employed in the private sector who had experienced workplace sexual harassment.

The structure of the report is as follows: First, a detailed analysis of the global and local context is presented. Next, the results of the quantitative and qualitative research conducted by CRRG-Georgia are discussed. Finally, the report concludes with a summary of the findings and a set of evidence-based policy recommendations.



METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to examine the forms and prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace within Georgia’s private sector. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative component involved individuals aged 16 and older residing in Georgia, employed in the private sector for at least one year. Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire. Respondents were recruited in two ways: (1) private sector employees were identified by calling randomly generated phone numbers, after which they received a link to the online questionnaire; and (2) the survey link was promoted via CRRG-Georgia’s Facebook page. It is important to note that data collected through telephone calls adhered to the principles of probability sampling, while responses gathered via Facebook might be more biased, as individuals who are more sensitive to the topic or have direct experience of sexual harassment were more likely to participate. To balance this bias, the data obtained via Facebook were weighted according to the telephone survey data. Variables used for weighting included age, gender,

education level, settlement type and experience of sexual harassment over the preceding 12 months.

Prior to fieldwork, the questionnaire was thoroughly tested, and pilot interviews were conducted. In total, nine employees from the private sector participated in the pilot survey (five women and four men) from Tbilisi and other regions, aged between 20 and 50.

To measure sexual harassment prevalence, respondents were presented with a list of behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and were asked whether they had experienced any of these behaviours, based on the behavioural definition of sexual harassment; this approach is considered to measure prevalence more accurately than using the legal definition.³³ Most results cited in this report rely on this behavioural definition.

In total, 824 private sector employees participated in the online survey conducted from 6 September 2024 to 24 January 2025. Among these submitted surveys, 508 questionnaires were filled in by respondents identified via randomly generated phone numbers, while 316 were completed via Facebook. .

TABLE 1:
Demographic profile of survey respondents.

Demographic characteristics		Percentage
Gender	Women	75%
	Men	25%
Age group	Under 34	40%
	35-44 years	28%
	45+	32%
Place of employment	Tbilisi	63%
	Outside Tbilisi	37%

Position	Manager	35%
	Sector specialist (e.g. doctor, teacher, pharmacist, economist, etc.)	29%
	Service and sales employee (e.g. cashier, consultant, waiter, etc.)	16%
	Other	20%
Duration of employment in the private sector	1–9 years	53%
	10-19 years	30%
	20 years and or more	17%

The qualitative component included 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Six interviews were conducted with experts from non-governmental organizations working on sexual harassment, aimed at gaining in-depth insights and exploring their perspectives regarding awareness, public attitudes and reporting of sexual harassment in the Georgian private sector. Additionally, four interviews were held with representatives from private companies to gather information on internal policies and

response mechanisms, as well as to discuss their experiences with specific cases. Furthermore, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with women employed in the private sector who reported experiencing workplace sexual harassment during the online survey and consented to participate in the qualitative research component. These interviews provided personal narratives and insights into victims' experiences. Qualitative data collection took place from 8 August to 18 September 2024.

TABLE 2:
Information about participants in the in-depth interviews.

Respondents	Percentage
Women employed in the private sector who have experienced sexual harassment	10
Experts working on sexual harassment issues	6
Representatives of private companies - mainly large companies operating in Tbilisi and the regions	4

The study has several limitations. Considering the voluntary nature of the online survey, caution is necessary when generalizing the findings to the entire population employed in Georgia's private sector. However, since the data adhered to probabilistic

sampling principles and that the findings largely align with the qualitative component, we cautiously suggest that the survey provides a general overview of the situation in the Georgian private sector.



STUDY FINDINGS

3.1.

AWARENESS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- According to the qualitative research respondents, public awareness regarding sexual harassment remains low, creating barriers to recognizing and responding to such incidents. Sexual comments or jokes are often considered acceptable and normal. Due to societal norms, sexual harassment frequently becomes a typical part of workplace culture.
- The majority of quantitative research participants consider such actions as a supervisor asking for personal photos, making sexual comments or inviting an employee out on a date for career advancement as forms of sexual harassment.
- Women and men differ in their perception of what constitutes sexual harassment. For example, most women believe that personal online messaging by a supervisor (65 per cent) and physical touching during conversations (47 per cent) constitute sexual harassment, whereas fewer men share these views (43 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively).
- Most surveyed women (90 per cent) and men (86 per cent) agree that sexual harassment is a serious social problem.
- Levels of sexist attitudes differ between men and women, although the variation is small. On the sexism scale, women score an average of 8 points (out of 15), while men average 10 points (out of 18).. However, sexist attitudes that tolerate sexual harassment are widely prevalent among both genders: Almost half of the women (47 per cent) and more than half of the men (58 per cent) agree that attractive women should expect sexually charged attention or behaviour in the workplace. Additionally, more than one fifth of men (22 per cent) agree that women targeted for sexual harassment usually provoke such behaviour themselves.
- Women, younger individuals and those employed in Tbilisi have fewer sexist attitudes.

Qualitative research respondents noted that public awareness regarding sexual harassment remains low, presenting significant barriers to recognizing the seriousness of such incidents and responding effectively. Experts emphasized in the in-depth interviews that some community members still perceive sexually harassing behaviour as flirtatious or socially acceptable; for example, unwanted attention or unsolicited compliments may be considered normal. Often, workplaces lack clear boundaries between flirting and sexual harassment, with such behaviour becoming part of the cultural norm..

“In Georgia, sexual harassment in the workplace is such a common phenomenon that people often don’t even realize the kind of humiliating treatment they’re experiencing.”

Expert
working on sexual harassment issues.

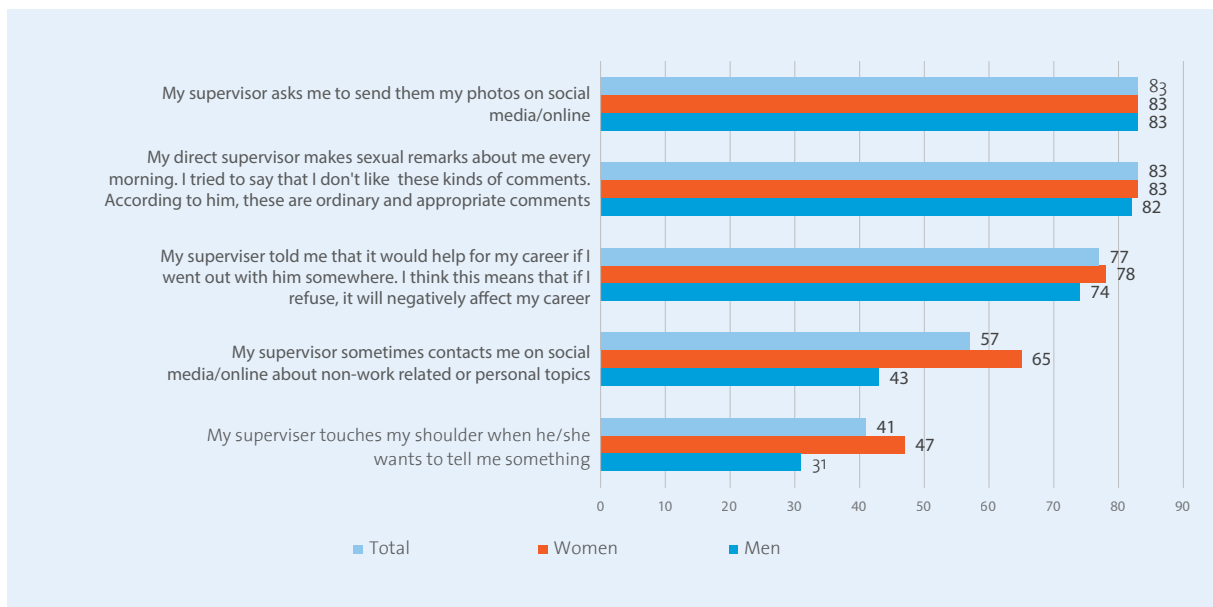
In assessing awareness of and attitudes towards sexual harassment, survey participants evaluated

hypothetical workplace scenarios. Most respondents, including a majority of women and men, considered such actions as a supervisor asking for personal photos, making sexual comments or inviting employees out on a date for career advancement as forms of sexual harassment (Figure 1). Attitudes differ between women and men regarding personal online messaging and physical touching by supervisors.

Surveyed women (65 per cent) were more likely than men (43 per cent) to consider non-work-related personal messaging as sexual harassment. Similarly, female respondents (47 per cent) more frequently viewed physical touching (such as touching their arm) by a supervisor as harassment than did male respondents (31 per cent).

FIGURE 1:

Now read some situations that happened to some [man/woman] at work with a senior of their opposite sex. Would you consider the following as sexual harassment or not? (percentage of “yes” responses, by respondents’ gender).



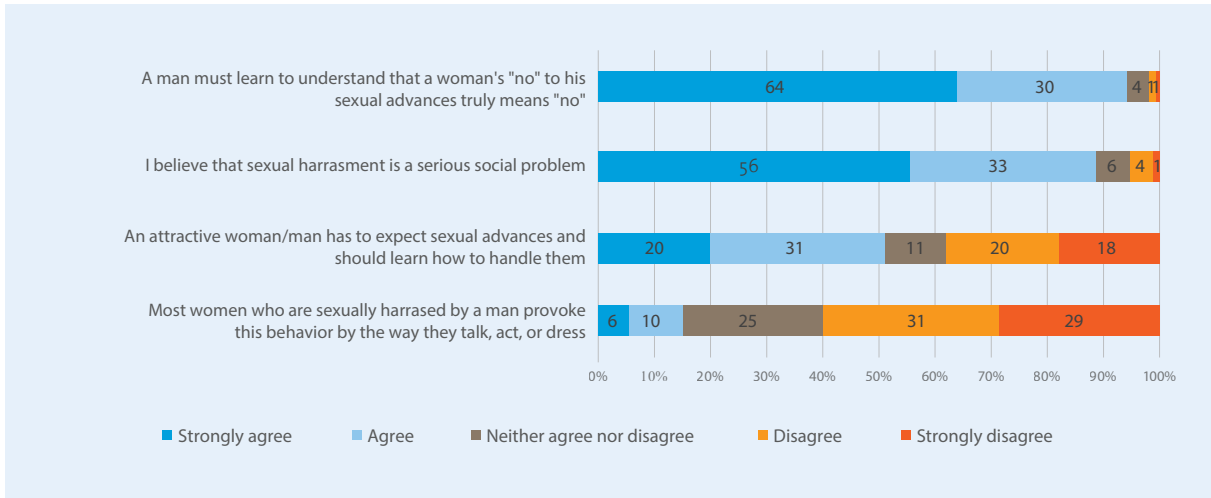
The study also examined the prevalence of sexist attitudes among private sector employees. A shortened and modified version of the Sexual Harassment Attitude Scale (SHAS)³⁴ was used, requiring participants to rate their agreement with four statements reflecting common perceptions about sexual harassment using a five-point scale (Figure 2).

Most surveyed private sector employees disagreed with statements measuring sexist attitudes regarding sexual harassment issues. Specifically, 94 per cent

agreed that a woman’s refusal of sexual advances genuinely means no, while 91 per cent viewed sexual harassment as a serious problem. Additionally, 89 per cent disagreed with statements portraying men’s sexual suggestions or women’s use of sexuality for career advancement as natural occurrences (Figure 2). Nevertheless, gender stereotypes remain prevalent. Around 16 per cent agreed that women provoke sexual harassment through their speech, behaviour or attire, while half (51 per cent) believed that attractive women should expect sexually suggestive behaviour and must learn to handle it.

FIGURE 2:

Below, we give opinions that some people hold. Others disagree. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? (percentage).



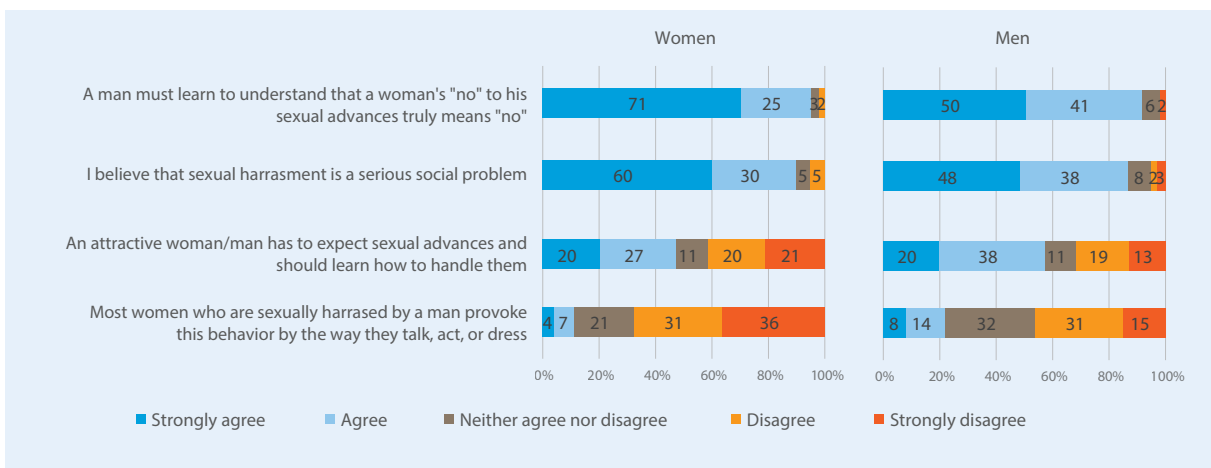
An overwhelming majority of surveyed women (96 per cent) and men (91 per cent) agreed that men should learn that when a woman refuses sexual advances, it genuinely means no. Furthermore, a majority of women (90 per cent) and men (86 per cent) believe that sexual harassment is a serious societal problem (Figure 3).

employees, especially among men. Indeed, 58 per cent of surveyed men and 47 per cent of surveyed women supported the notion that attractive women should expect sexually suggestive behaviour. Furthermore, 22 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women agreed that women targeted by sexual harassment usually provoke such behaviour themselves—through their speech, behaviour or attire. While 67 per cent of women disagreed with this statement, only 46 per cent of men expressed disapproval.

Despite this, the findings indicate widespread gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes among private sector

FIGURE 3:

Below, we give opinions that some people hold. Others disagree. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? (percentage, by respondents' gender).



A composite index was used to compare sexist attitudes between women and men. This index sums scores from SHAS questions,³⁵ where higher scores indicate more-sexist attitudes, and lower scores signify less-sexist attitudes.

According to the results, surveyed women scored an average of 8 points on this index (standard deviation 2.7; range 4–15), while men averaged 10 points (standard deviation 2.6; range 4–18). Although differences between men and women were evident, within-group variations were relatively minor. Women, younger individuals and those employed in Tbilisi were less likely to exhibit sexist attitudes

The qualitative interviews found that societal attitudes towards certain forms of sexual harassment, including attitudes among company leadership, remain inadequate.

“Attitudes in companies might vary, yet there still seems to be a tendency to rationalize behaviours—maybe it wasn’t intended that way, maybe something else was meant. Think about it—maybe he didn’t mean it that way; he’s a good guy, and you’re a nice girl too...”

Representative of a private company.

Notably, less sensitivity to sexual harassment is evident not only among management but also among employees. Respondents who had experienced sexual harassment highlighted that colleagues often failed to express strong disapproval or even recognize incidents as harassment. Only one respondent noted that in predominantly male work environments, women actively defended one another and immediately addressed even minor incidents of harassment.

3.2

PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Sexual harassment in the private sector workplace is quite widespread.
- Women and employees under the age of 35 more frequently become victims of sexual harassment. Unlike men, women more often experience more than one form of sexual harassment. Approximately 19 per cent of women reported experiencing more than one form of sexual harassment, whereas only 13 per cent of men reported the same.
- Notably, women who indicated that they are unmarried or not living with a partner are more often victims of sexual harassment than married or cohabiting women.
- In the preceding 12 months, 12 per cent of surveyed women experienced more than one form of sexual harassment. In the case of men, this figure is 6 per cent.
- Survey results confirm that the majority of sexual harassment cases go unnoticed by others. Among those who have experienced sexual harassment, only 31 per cent stated that someone else witnessed the incident.

- Nearly a third of respondents (30 per cent) reported hearing about or witnessing incidents of sexual harassment while working in the private sector, most often hearing about such incidents through others' accounts.
- According to the qualitative study participants, sexual harassment is widespread in the private sector in Georgia. In terms of high-risk areas, they named the service, entertainment and tourism sectors, in addition to male-dominated sectors such as construction or security.

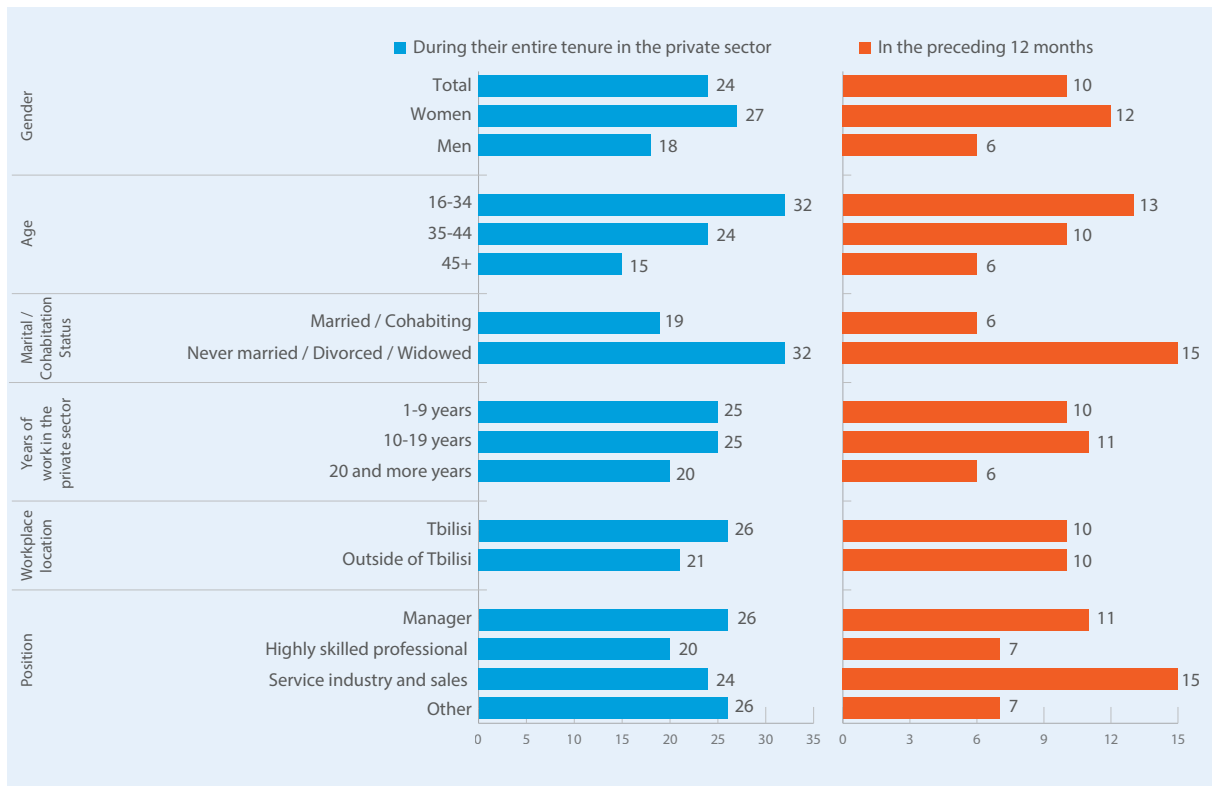
Participants in the qualitative study noted that sexual harassment in the private sector in Georgia is widespread and, as seen in the previous chapter, perceived as a 'norm'. According to one representative of a private company, due to the low level of public awareness on this issue, "much more happens than we know of".

According to the survey, nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of respondents employed in the private sector experienced various forms of sexual harassment during their employment. Approximately 10 per cent reported experiencing at least one form of sexual harassment in the preceding 12 months. Moreover, 27 per cent of surveyed women and 18 per cent of surveyed men experienced sexual harassment during

their employment; and in the preceding 12 months, this figure stood at 12 per cent for women and 6 per cent for men. Notably, younger women (aged 16–34) and women who indicated that they are unmarried or not living with a partner are more likely to be victims than comparatively older women (aged 35+) or married or cohabiting women (Figure 4).

For women, the probability of having experienced more than one form of sexual harassment is higher than for men. Approximately 19 per cent of women reported experiencing more than one form, compared to only 13 per cent of men. In addition, 12 per cent of female respondents experienced more than one form in the preceding 12 months, compared to 6 per cent of male respondents.

FIGURE 4:
Experience of sexual harassment (percentage, by respondents' characteristics).



Regarding specific fields within the private sector, qualitative study participants reported that high-risk areas include low-paid and service-sector jobs, where employees often work under precarious conditions. For example, students working in supermarkets

and employees in the service industry are more often targets of harassment. In these cases, sexual harassment may originate not only from colleagues or supervisors but also from customers.

“Cases are particularly common in the service industry—for example, women working night shifts in shops, where they have no assistants and often remain alone with a harasser.”

Expert working on sexual harassment issues.

In addition to the service sector, participants identified the entertainment and tourism industries as among the highest-risk areas. They also mentioned male-dominated sectors such as the construction industry and the security sector, where the small number of women become targets of stereotypes and patronizing attitudes.

According to respondents who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, company size may also be relevant, as larger companies often have an established organizational culture and greater control. Accordingly, cases of sexual harassment may be more likely in smaller companies.

3.3.

FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study show that verbal and non-verbal forms of sexual harassment are more common than acts of physical intrusion into someone's personal space.
- Respondents who had experienced sexual harassment recalled the following forms experienced by themselves or their colleagues: comments on one's appearance and clothing; recounting sexual stories; messages and calls outside of working hours with questions about one's personal life; physical intrusion into one's personal space; staring; unwelcome physical contact; and proposals for physical intimacy in exchange for certain privileges or benefits. The latter was particularly frequent in informal and isolated settings, such as in closed offices, on business trips or at corporate parties.
- According to experts in the field, after the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in sexual harassment via information technologies, for example, personal messages with sexual content and the sending of photos and videos with sexual content.
- Respondents in the qualitative study, based on their own or others' experiences, reported that sexual harassment often leads to multifaceted negative and severe consequences. These may include changing their style of dress, shifting their general attitude towards men and even leaving their job. Often, after victims would refuse sexual advances or respond firmly, harassers would display aggression towards these employees, blaming them for poor performance and attempting to have them dismissed.

Based on international experience, experts in the field of sexual harassment categorize sexual harassment in the workplace into two main types:

1. Quid pro quo: situations where a benefit (e.g. a promotion) or the avoidance of a sanction is contingent upon sexual behaviour. "The prospect of promotion is often used as a weapon," noted an expert on sexual harassment issues.
2. Hostile work environment: situations in which an employee feels insulted, intimidated or uncomfortable due to another's sexual conduct.

Respondents with experience of sexual harassment spoke of a wide variety of behaviours in both categories, including compliments on their appearance and clothing; discussions of their personal life and sexual histories; after-hours messages and calls with personal questions; physical approaches and intrusion into their personal space; staring at certain body parts; unwelcome physical contact often disguised as friendly affection; and offers to spend the night together in exchange for a promotion. The latter was particularly common in informal and isolated spaces, such as in closed offices, on business trips or at corporate parties.

However, both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study confirm that in the private sector, verbal and non-verbal forms of sexual harassment are more widespread than acts of physical intrusions into someone’s personal space. Approximately one in five respondents (17 per cent)

reported experiencing sexual comments or jokes in their private sector job that made them feel offended (Figure 5), and 8 per cent said that they had encountered such an incident within the preceding 12 months (Figure 6).

FIGURE 5:

Listed below are some different forms of sexual harassment that some people have experienced. At any time during your tenure in the private sector, have you experienced any of the following behaviours in a way that was unwelcome or annoying? (percentage of “yes” responses, by respondents’ gender).

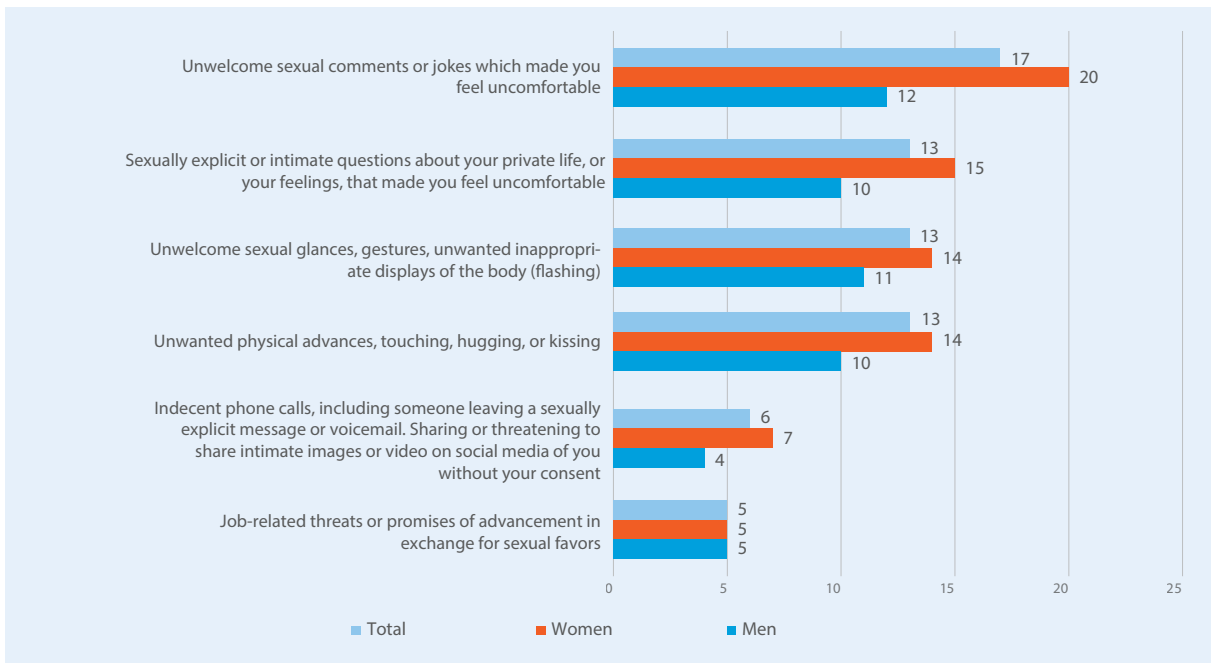
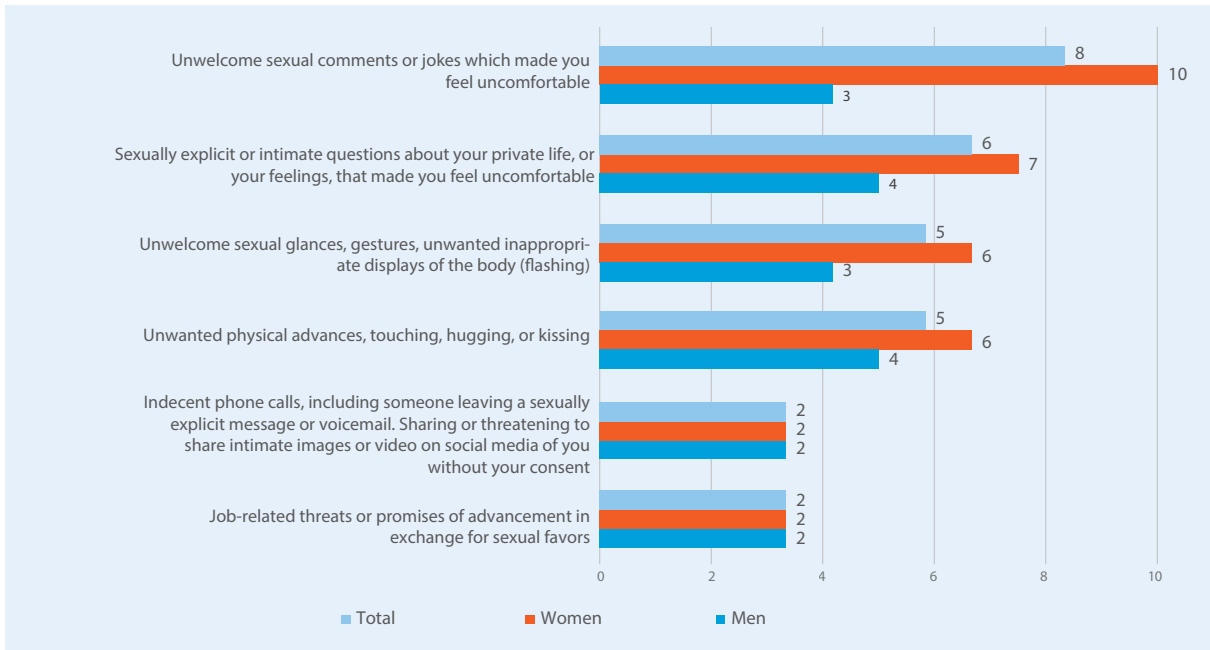


FIGURE 6:

Listed below are some different forms of sexual harassment that some people have experienced. At your current workplace, have you experienced any of the following behaviours during the preceding 12 months in a way that was unwelcome or annoying? (percentage of “yes” responses, by respondents’ gender).



Women experience various forms of sexual harassment more frequently than men. According to the survey results, 20 per cent of women employed in the private sector had experienced sexual comments or inappropriate jokes, compared to 12 per cent of men. Additionally, 15 per cent of women reported being asked questions of a sexual or intimate nature regarding their personal life or appearance that made them feel offended, versus 10 per cent of men.

In the qualitative component, the respondents with experience of sexual harassment were all women. They described various forms of harassment based on their own and their colleagues’ experiences. According to them, harassment included simple comments on their appearance or clothing, such as “You look so sexy today” or “That dress looks great on you—your husband is lucky.” The comments were made more disturbing by suggestive stares at certain body parts or by unsolicited touching, such as a hand on the waist, neck or leg.

One respondent said that at first, she did not find it suspicious when her superior asked to meet or invited her for coffee, but she later understood the situation when the conversation took a sexual turn.

“Of course, an invitation for coffee doesn’t seem like harassment, but when the person suddenly starts asking out-of-context questions like ‘What do you prefer during intercourse?’ or ‘How many partners have you had?’ and then texts you a few hours later suggesting to meet, it already feels like a hint. What am I supposed to think? Why does he want to meet me?”

Woman with experience of sexual harassment).

In other cases—such as unwanted physical contact, hugging or kissing; unsolicited sexual staring or laughing; sexual gestures; indecent exposure or inappropriate display of the body; obscene phone calls and messages; or workplace-related threats or encouragement in exchange for sexual acts—both women and men reported similar experiences, although women slightly more so.

According to experts, in today’s world—especially after the COVID-19 pandemic—alongside verbal harassment, there has been an increase in sexual harassment via information technologies (i.e. gender-based violence through social media or communication platforms)—for example, personal messages with sexual content and the sending of photos and videos of a sexual nature. Those with experience of harassment spoke extensively about these forms. One respondent said that her superior not only asked her personal questions and called or messaged her after work hours about her personal life but also requested photos: “It never went as far as asking for intimate photographs, or ‘nudes’, but it

probably would have, because why else would he ask a woman who had been there only two days to send personal pictures?” According to the respondent, all of this took place subtly and did not seem alarming at first when a superior called after work hours to check where she was and with whom. However, she realized that it was an intrusion into her private space. Another respondent said that her manager sent her sexual messages about how he dreamed of her. Yet another respondent spoke of a colleague who was sexually harassed by her superior. The respondent had seen their correspondence and said she was shocked by it: “It was an attempt at sexting.”

In addition, respondents recalled having seen photos of correspondence in which managers asked subordinate female employees to meet them and spend day and night with them, offering them promotions, salary increases or bonuses in return. One respondent, who was an assistant manager, said her superior promised to appoint her to the position of manager if she agreed to his wishes.

IMPACT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE VICTIMS

Respondents with experience of sexual harassment spoke about the consequences of such actions against themselves or their colleagues. In some cases, this was reflected in changes to their style of dress, such as wearing less revealing clothing or, in one

respondent’s case, choosing to wear trousers instead of a skirt. Often, this was a significant psychological burden, and some even spoke of a general change in their attitude towards men.

“I already had a not-so-positive impression based on what I saw and heard from my friends, but this made me even more determined not to have any interactions [with men], even professional [interactions]—especially with men whose manner of speaking or attitude reminds me of that superior. I immediately cut off all contact, even professional. I don’t want any interaction, especially with Georgian men.”

Woman with experience of sexual harassment.

All respondents with experiences of sexual harassment spoke of their previous workplace. They preferred to, or felt compelled to, leave their job. When speaking of other employees, they also mentioned that if someone refused or responded firmly to an

act of harassment, the harasser created a hostile environment for that employee—blaming them for poor performance, showing aggression towards them and attempting to get them fired.

3.4. PERPETRATORS

- Experts in the field and women who have experienced sexual harassment confirmed that such incidents predominantly stem from men in leadership positions, with women being the main targets.
- Experts identified groups that are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment: women with disabilities, single, divorced or widowed women, single mothers, members of the LGBTQI+ community, interns and temporary employees.
- Among the online survey respondents who had experienced sexual harassment, 66 per cent named a male colleague as the perpetrator. In 84 per cent of female victims' cases, the harasser was a man.
- Twenty-eight per cent of respondents reported harassment from a colleague at the same hierarchical level, while 22 per cent pointed to someone in the organization's leadership or to their direct supervisor. Notably, women (26 per cent) were twice as likely as men (12 per cent) to report harassment from organizational or direct supervisors.

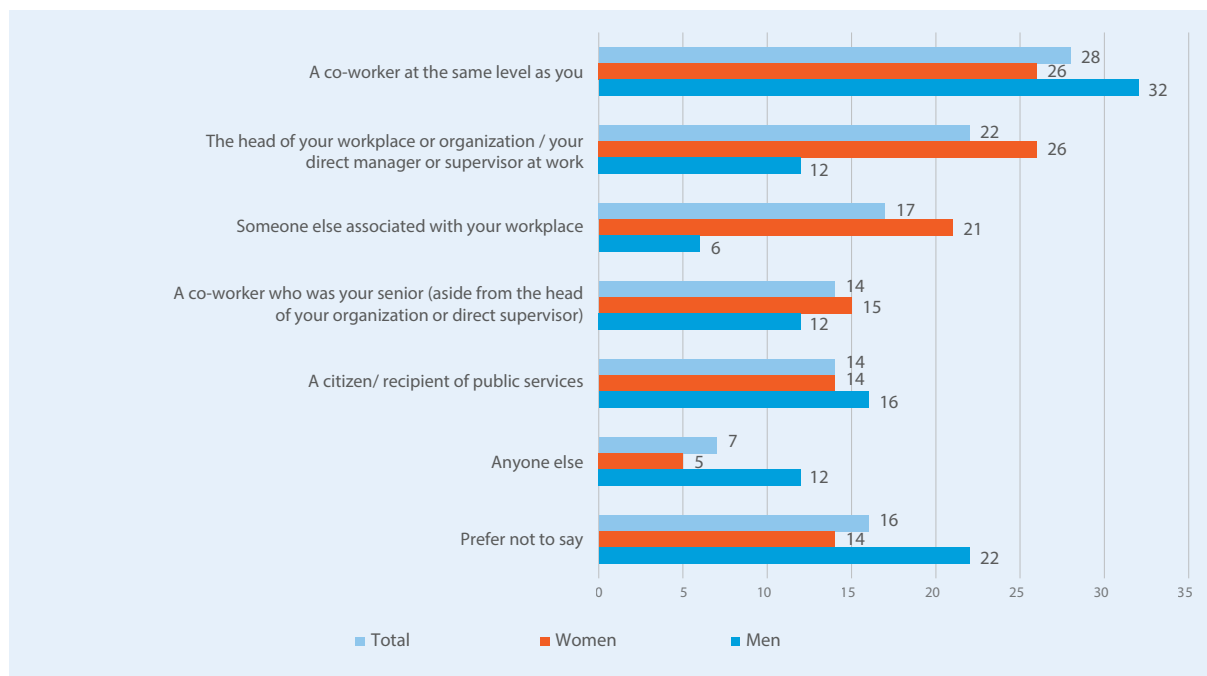
The survey data support the following characterization of perpetrators of sexual harassment. In most cases (66 per cent), victims identified a male colleague as the harasser. About a quarter (24 per cent) reported that the perpetrator was a woman, and 10 per cent stated that both men and women were involved. For most female victims (84 per cent), the perpetrator was male, while 74 per cent of male victims reported that the harasser was female.

Sixteen per cent of victims did not wish to specify their relationship to the perpetrator (Figure 7). More than a quarter (28 per cent)—specifically 26 per cent of

women and 32 per cent of men—reported harassment from colleagues at the same level. More than one fifth (22 per cent) said that the harasser was someone in management or their direct supervisor, while 14 per cent pointed to someone significantly higher in rank (but not their immediate supervisor). Harassment from superiors was reported by women (26 per cent) twice as often as by men (12 per cent). Citizens or service recipients were identified as harassers by 16 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women. Other workplace-related individuals were more frequently cited by women (21 per cent) than men (6 per cent).

FIGURE 7:

Thinking of your most recent experience, the person who sexually harassed you was.... (percentage; question asked only to those 245 respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment).



The qualitative research findings align with the survey data. Both field experts and respondents who experienced harassment (all of whom were women) stated that perpetrators in the private sector are

often in privileged or managerial roles, believing that harassment is their right and that such behaviour is normalized.

“These are people who hold the reins of management in the company and have influence.... Many believe that once they reach upper management, they hold a different kind of control over employees and organizational culture.”

Woman with experience of sexual harassment.

However, some respondents described cases where harassment occurred in horizontal peer relationships.

All in-depth interview respondents in this study were women. According to them, both from personal experience and from what they observed among their colleagues, the harassers were men.

Experts also noted that certain groups face heightened risk: women with disabilities—especially those with sensory impairments—as well as single, divorced or widowed women and single mothers. These women are often targets due to prevailing stereotypes.

“Women are more vulnerable... especially divorced women. Men are more openly expressive towards them, thinking that [these women] have some experience with relationships.”

Expert working on sexual harassment issues.

“When you’re a single mother or from a rural area and have no power, that’s when the harassment begins—when something is wanted in return for something offered.”

Expert working on sexual harassment issues.

“The moment I mentioned [my] businessman brother-in-law, everything changed. Before that, [my harasser] knew that I had neither a father nor a husband. From the day I said ‘businessman brother-in-law’, he started addressing me formally and never entered my office again. Before that, it was routine—he’d enter every day, shake everyone’s hand and, in special cases, even hug us to ‘exchange positive energy’.”

Woman with experience of sexual harassment

3.5.

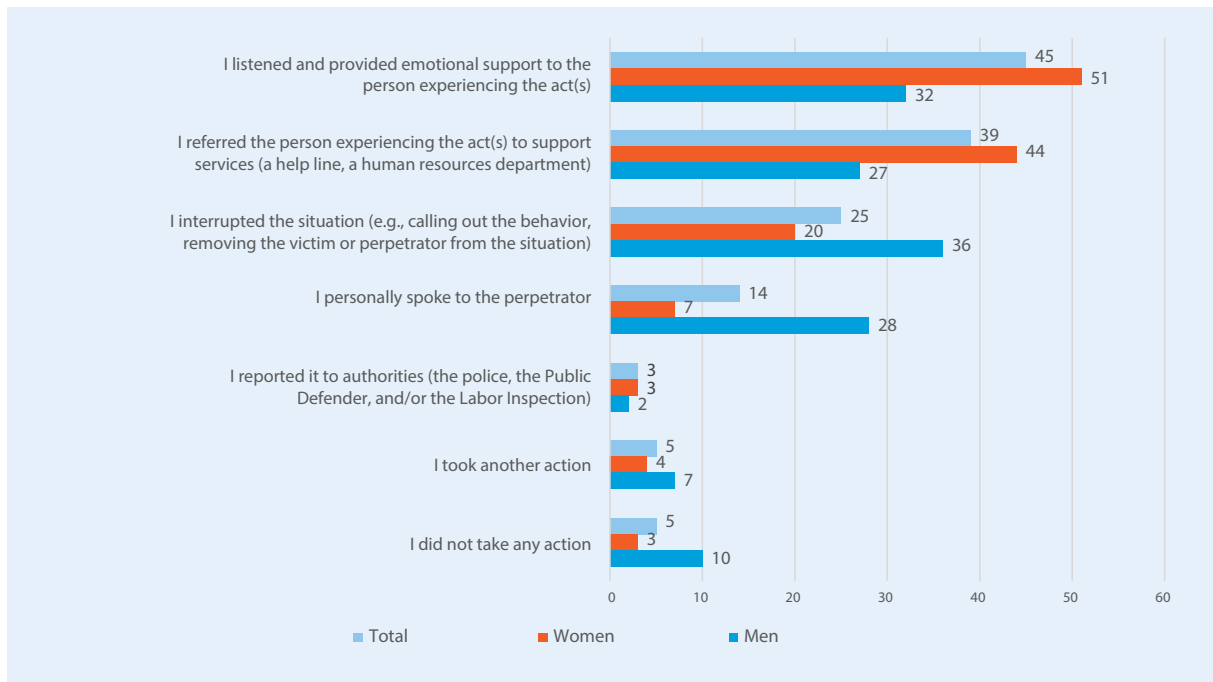
BYSTANDERS’ EXPERIENCE OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Approximately one third (32 per cent) of the survey respondents have either personally witnessed an incident of sexual harassment at work or heard about such incidents from others.
- As the research findings show, witnesses tend to refrain from reporting sexual harassment. Only 3 per cent of witnesses reported the incident to State authorities, while 5 per cent stated that they took no action. Forty-five per cent said that they provided emotional support to the victim.

About 1 in 10 respondents (11 per cent) in the quantitative survey reported witnessing a case of sexual harassment while working in the private sector. Moreover, 30 per cent heard about it from the person who experienced the harassment, while 41 per cent learned about such incidents from others not directly involved.

Again, the data indicate that witnesses rarely take formal action. Only 3 per cent reported the incident to the authorities, and 5 per cent said that they did nothing (Figure 8). The majority (45 per cent) said that they offered emotional support to the victim, and 39 per cent redirected the victim to appropriate support services. Twenty-five per cent intervened in the incident, while 14 per cent spoke directly with the perpetrator.

FIGURE 8: What was your reaction to this situation? (percentage of those 306 respondents—244 women and 62 men—who reported either witnessing sexual harassment or hearing about it directly from someone who personally experienced it).



Among those bystanders who did not react in any way to incidents they either witnessed or learned about directly from the victim (17 respondents), the reasons they gave included the following: not knowing what to do (7 respondents), not taking the situation seriously (3 respondents), knowing that others were already helping the victim (2 respondents), not wanting to interfere (2 respondents), being asked by the victim not to intervene (2 respondents) and not perceiving it as their responsibility to intervene (1 respondent).³⁶

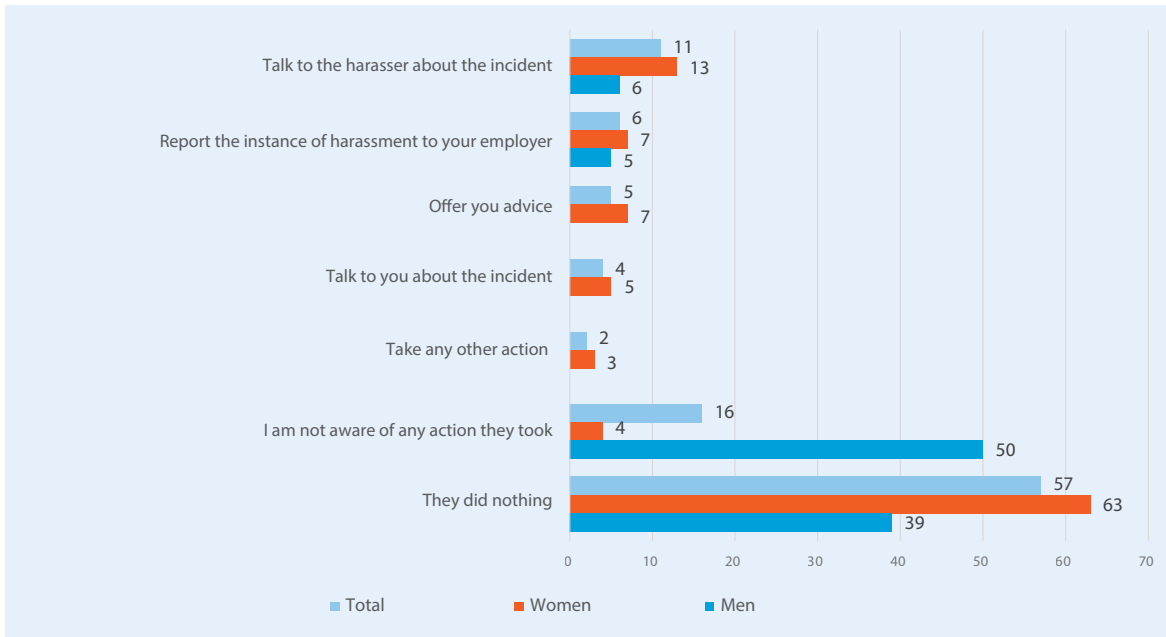
Survey results confirm that most incidents of sexual harassment go unnoticed by others. Only 30 per cent of those who experienced harassment said that someone else witnessed the incident. Of those respondents, more than half (57 per cent) reported that the witness did nothing, while 16 per cent were unsure of the witness’s reaction (Figure .9). In only 27 per cent of cases (25 respondents) did the witness attempt to intervene in any form. Among those respondents, 11 per cent (10 respondents) said the witness spoke to

the harasser, 6 per cent (5 respondents) reported the incident to their employer, 4 per cent (4 respondents)

said the witness spoke to them (the victim), and 5 per cent (7 respondents) received advice from the witness.

FIGURE 9:

Did the person (or people) who witnessed your sexual harassment do any of the following? (percentage of those 87 respondents—74 women and 13 men—who reported that someone witnessed or saw their most recent incident of sexual harassment).



3.6. REPORTING WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Generally, respondents employed in the private sector express a positive attitude towards reporting sexual harassment. A majority of respondents (76 per cent) agreed that reporting sexual harassment is an effective way to stop this form of violence. However, the data show that this attitude does not fully translate into practice, and most cases of sexual harassment go unreported.
- At the same time, it is perceived that reporting sexual harassment in the workplace may negatively impact the career of the employee who decides to report such incidents. Thirty-nine per cent of survey respondents agreed that there is a risk that colleagues will treat those who report sexual harassment inappropriately.

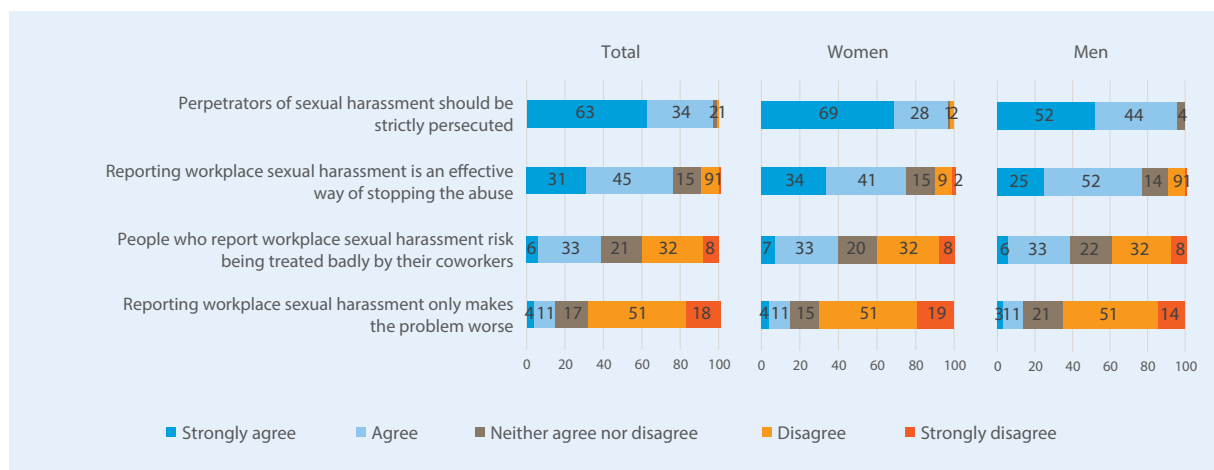
- Qualitative study respondents identified the following as the main reasons for the low rate of reporting workplace sexual harassment: the fear of losing one’s job, the presence of societal attitudes, the lack of evidence and the lack of information.
- Almost half (47 per cent) of the victims of sexual harassment spoke to someone about the most serious incident they experienced, while only 9 per cent sought formal channels of assistance. Those who did seek help turned to their immediate supervisor, the head of their organization or institution, their human resources department, the Public Defender of Georgia (Ombudsman) and the police.
- In the private sector, the police, a dedicated mechanism for reporting sexual harassment, one’s immediate supervisor and the head of the organization are considered the most acceptable channels for reporting incidents of sexual harassment.

Quantitative study respondents displayed positive attitudes towards reporting workplace sexual harassment incidents (Figure 10). A large majority agreed that perpetrators of sexual harassment should face appropriate consequences (97 per cent), and 75 per cent agreed that reporting sexual harassment is an effective way to stop this violence.

Sixty-nine per cent did not agree with the view that reporting sexual harassment in the workplace only makes the situation worse. However, opinions were divided when respondents were asked whether reporting sexual harassment increases the risk of inappropriate treatment by colleagues. While 40 per cent disagreed with this notion, an equal proportion (39 per cent) agreed.

FIGURE 10:

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. (percentage, by respondents’ gender).

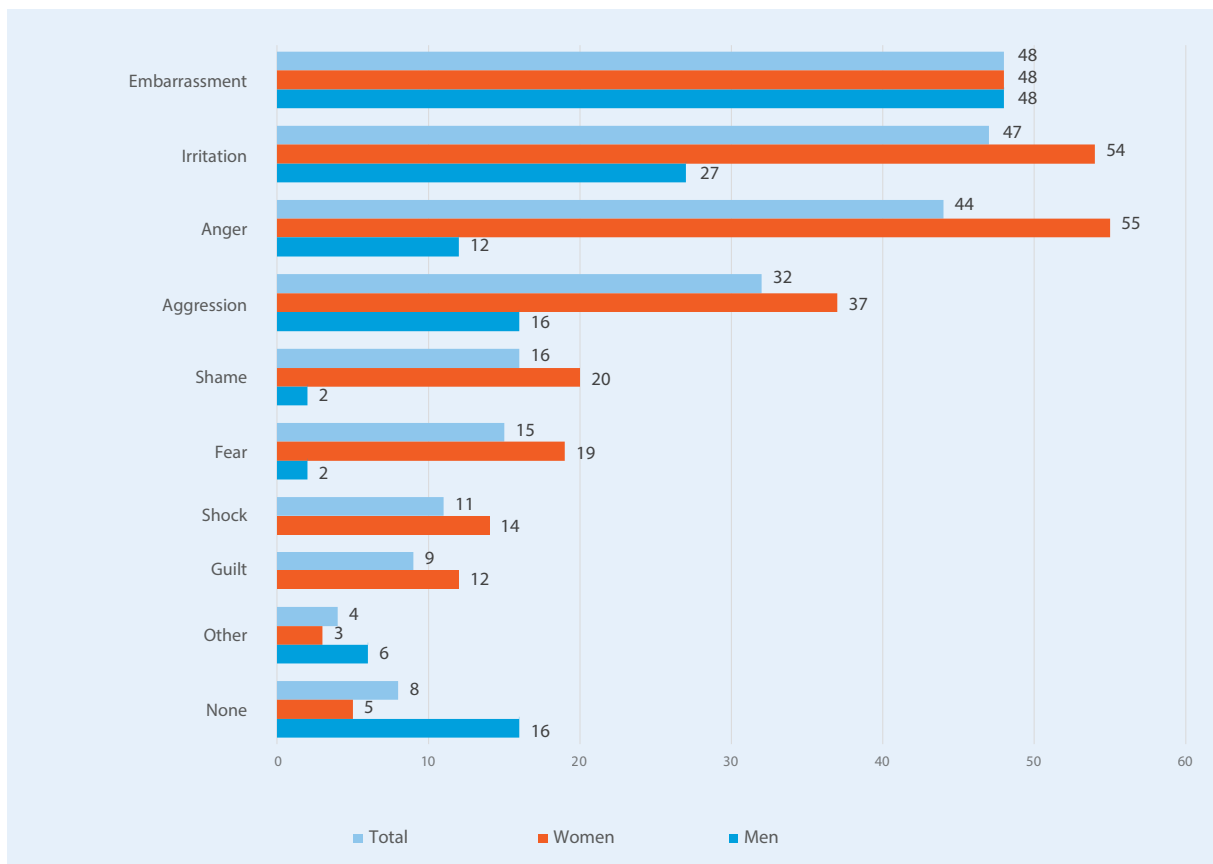


A majority of respondents who experienced sexual harassment reported feelings of discomfort, irritation, anger and aggression (Figure 11). Female victims primarily experienced anger, irritation and discomfort,

while male victims reported discomfort and irritation. Notably, men more often indicated feeling something else or none of these emotions.

FIGURE 11:

Please indicate the feelings you experienced in the workplace following the most serious incident of sexual harassment. (percentage; multiple answers possible, by 242 respondents—203 women and 39 men—who reported having experienced sexual harassment).

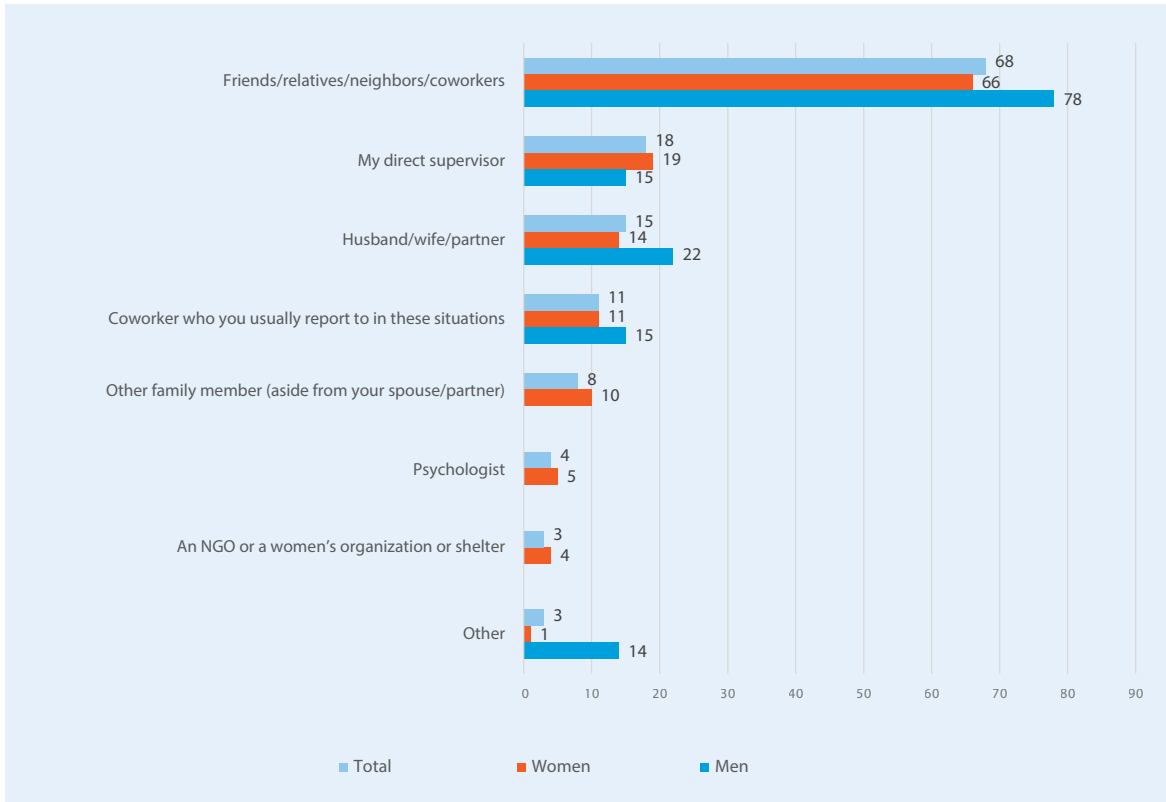


More than half of the respondents (53 per cent) did not talk to anyone about the most serious incident, while 47 per cent did. Respondents most often spoke with friends, relatives, neighbours or colleagues. Less

than one quarter (18 per cent) shared the incident with their immediate supervisor, while 15 per cent did so with their spouse or partner (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12:

Who did you talk to? (percentage; multiple responses, by 114 respondents—102 women and 12 men—who reported talking to someone about the most serious incident of sexual harassment in the workplace).

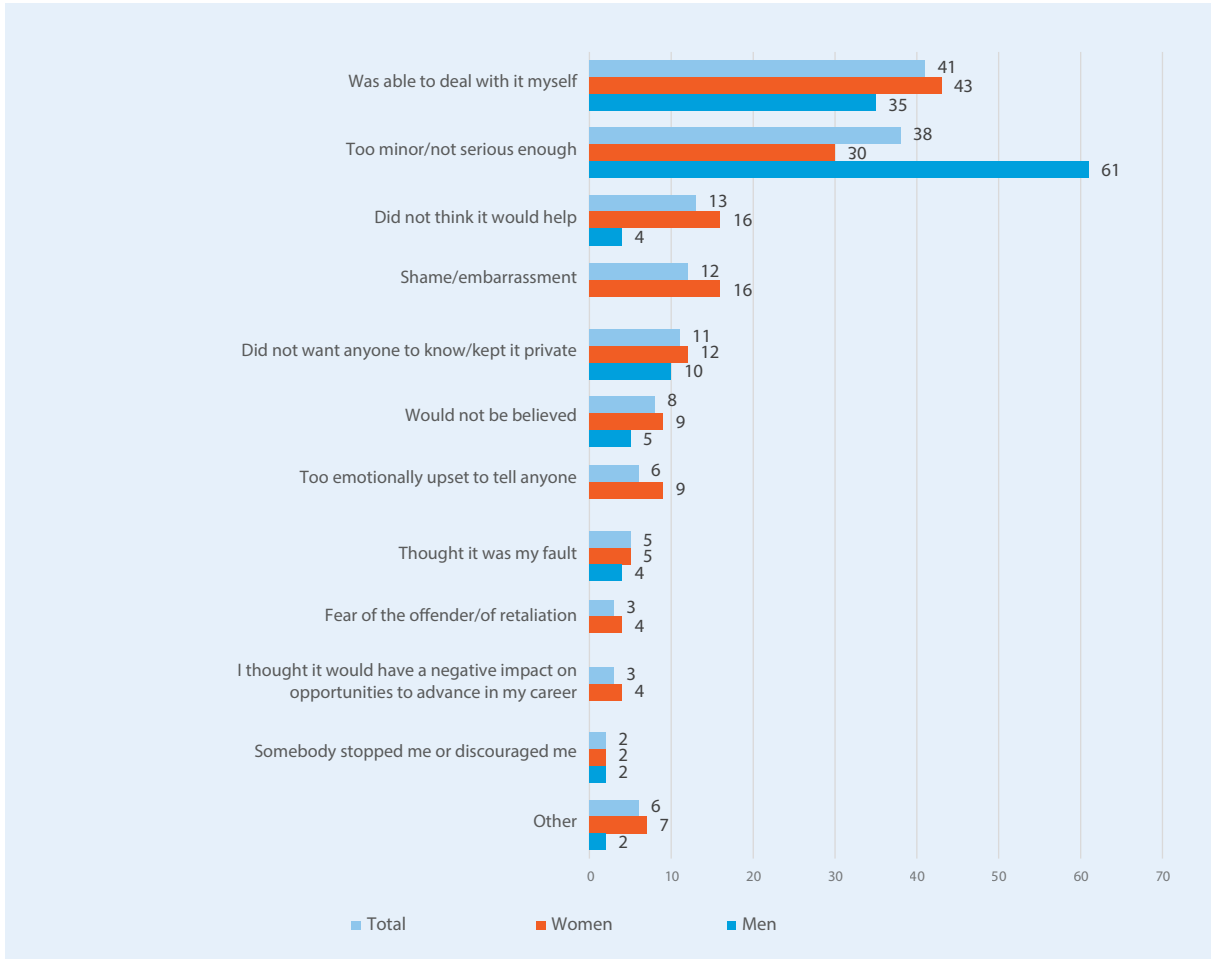


Only 9 per cent of respondents sought help regarding an incident of workplace sexual harassment. Of those who sought assistance, they contacted their immediate supervisor (13 respondents), communicated with the head of their organization or institution (8 respondents), turned to their human resources department (6 respondents), reached out to the Public Defender of Georgia (3 respondents) and contacted the police (2 respondents).

When asked why victims did not seek help, a large portion (41 per cent) said they believed that they could handle the situation themselves, and 38 per cent did not consider the incident serious enough (Figure 13). A smaller group (13 per cent) felt that it would not help them, 12 per cent associated seeking help with shame and embarrassment, 11 per cent did not want anyone to know, and 8 per cent thought that they would not be believed.

FIGURE 13:

What was the reason you did not seek help? (percentage; multiple answers possible, by 214 respondents—177 women and 37 men—who did not seek help for workplace sexual harassment).



In the qualitative component, several respondents noted that their company had a mechanism for reporting sexual harassment, but in some cases, they did not trust the internal mechanism because they were not confident that their identity would remain confidential and because the harassment was perpetrated by individuals closely connected to the

group responsible for handling cases. One respondent who sought help from the Public Defender had previously used their company’s internal mechanism, but it did not improve their situation. With the Public Defender’s investigation and conclusion, they were able to convince the company’s international leadership of their account.

Based on the qualitative research, the main reasons for the low reporting rates to relevant authorities by women who experienced sexual harassment include the following:

1. **Fear of losing one's job** – Victims often remain silent for fear of losing their job. To maintain financial stability, they frequently do not reach out to the relevant authorities. As one expert explained: “First and foremost, people are afraid of losing their job, because [one's] salary and financial resources are very important today. A person may be a victim of sexual harassment but, in order to keep their job, does not turn to the appropriate bodies.”
2. **Presence of societal attitudes** – Victims often face pressure, accusations and blame that they were ‘provocative’ and thereby ‘asked for it’. Consequently, they experience increased psychological pressure, which prevents them from pursuing legal avenues. As one expert noted: “The second reason [for the low reporting rates] is that discussing sexual harassment is not easy. Sometimes, victims face accusations from colleagues and society that they were being provocative, which further intensifies the psychological pressure.”
3. **Lack of evidence** – Documenting incidents of sexual harassment is often challenging, which in some cases hinders fact-finding and decision-making. As

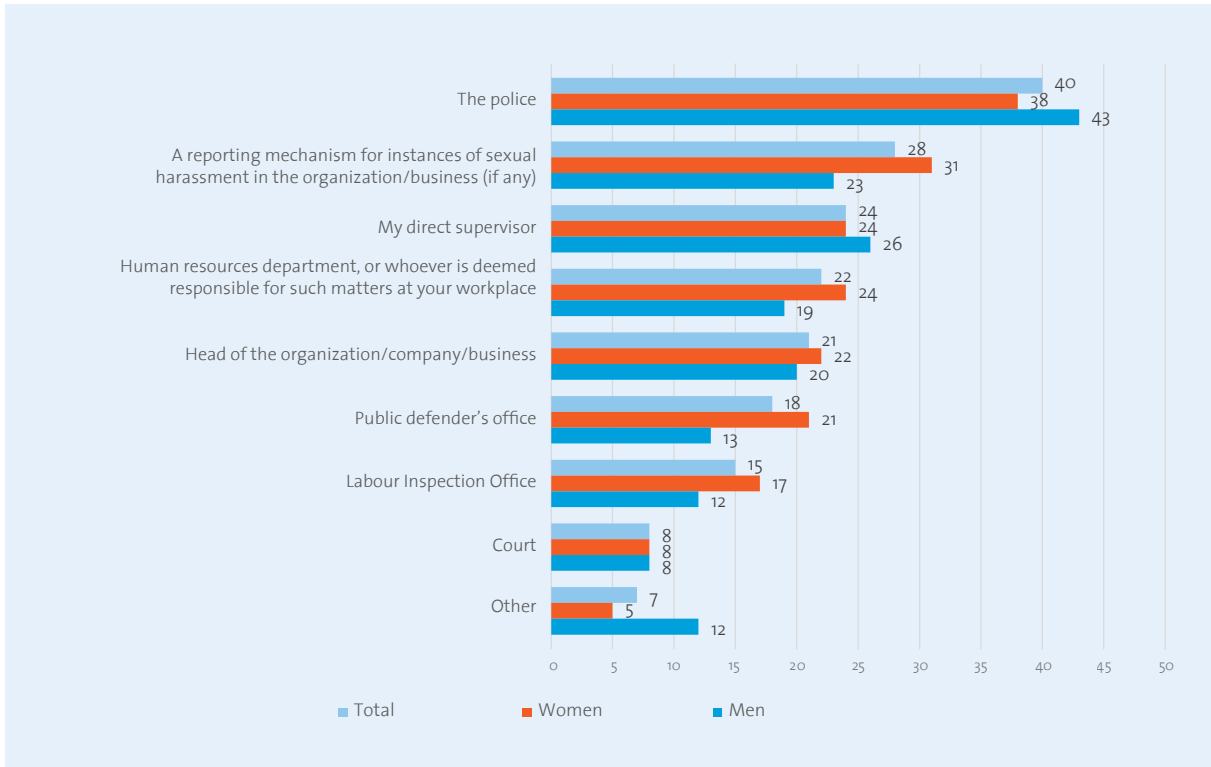
one expert remarked: “Sometimes, cases could not be identified, not because there was no harassment but due to a lack of evidence.”

4. **Lack of information** – Many victims do not know how and where to turn in such cases. This is compounded by difficulties identifying sexual harassment correctly. As one expert observed: “There have been cases where a woman did not speak out because of the risk of domestic violence. She said that if her husband found out, he would either kill her or kill [the perpetrator]. So, you might ask why women do not talk about it; it is partly because many forms [of sexual harassment] are invisible and that women face barriers.”

Respondents were asked to indicate to whom they would feel most comfortable reporting a sexual harassment incident. The police were named most frequently (40 per cent) (Figure 14). More than a quarter of respondents cited internal organizational mechanisms: 28 per cent indicated the organization's sexual harassment response mechanism; 24 per cent, their immediate supervisor; 22 per cent, the human resources management unit or gender officer; and 21 per cent, the head of the institution. Fewer respondents said that they would turn to the Public Defender (18 per cent), the Labour Inspection Office (15 per cent) or the courts (8 per cent).

FIGURE 14:

If you needed to report an incident of sexual harassment, to whom would you feel most comfortable turning? (percentage, by respondents' gender; multiple responses).



In the qualitative component, representatives of private companies with established sexual harassment policies noted that they received some reports and acknowledged that “if the statistics are zero, more work needs to be done, [as] this means something is not working or employees do not trust the policy or the group handling the process”, as one representative reported. During the in-depth interviews, private company representatives stated that evidence is important in reviewing sexual harassment cases but that it is often lacking.

However, employees’ reports of discomfort were already alarming and required measures. Some companies had formal and informal procedures for responding to sexual harassment incidents, such as reassigning the perpetrator to a different workplace or, in extreme cases, dismissing them from employment. Regarding dismissal, one respondent who experienced harassment believed that, especially in severe cases, dismissal alone was insufficient and that the perpetrator’s personnel file should note their behaviour so that future employers would be aware.

3.7

ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- Eighty-one per cent of respondents participating in the survey know that Georgian legislation prohibits sexual harassment.
- In the quantitative part of the study, approximately one third of respondents (31 per cent) indicated that they are not aware of the existence of internal mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment in their organization. Thirty-eight per cent stated that their organization has no policy regarding the prevention or management of sexual harassment incidents.
- Only one fifth of respondents (21 per cent) reported that mechanisms for responding to sexual harassment exist in their organization.
- The majority of respondents (86 per cent) noted that they have never attended training on sexual harassment in the workplace.
- According to some participants in the qualitative study, private companies' attitudes towards incidents of sexual harassment are varied. In some cases, companies lack any internal mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment, which creates additional barriers. It is noteworthy that, according to experts, unlike large companies that adhere to international standards, such cases are often not regulated in small and medium-sized enterprises, which contributes to the widespread occurrence of harassment.
- Moreover, experts identified several reasons for the inadequate response, including the lack of knowledge on investigating and reviewing incidents of sexual harassment, general insensitivity to the issue and the stereotypical attitude that victims may fabricate incidents to exact revenge on their harassers.

According to field experts, Georgian legislation—specifically the Labour Code and the Law on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination—prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace and imposes on employers the obligation to develop mechanisms to prohibit discrimination. However,

despite these legislative requirements, to date, only a small number of companies have implemented mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment. Where such mechanisms exist, they are sometimes not transparent and are not applied in accordance with the law.

“Perhaps the greater problem lies in enforcement: how correctly it is implemented in practice and, more broadly, in raising awareness so that employers fully understand and internalize the issue and are genuinely motivated to ensure that sexual harassment is not part of workplace culture and that employees have an environment free of harassment. In this respect, I believe that enforcement is a bigger issue than any gap in the legislation.”

Expert working on sexual harassment issues.

According to the survey, the majority of respondents (81 per cent) know that sexual harassment is

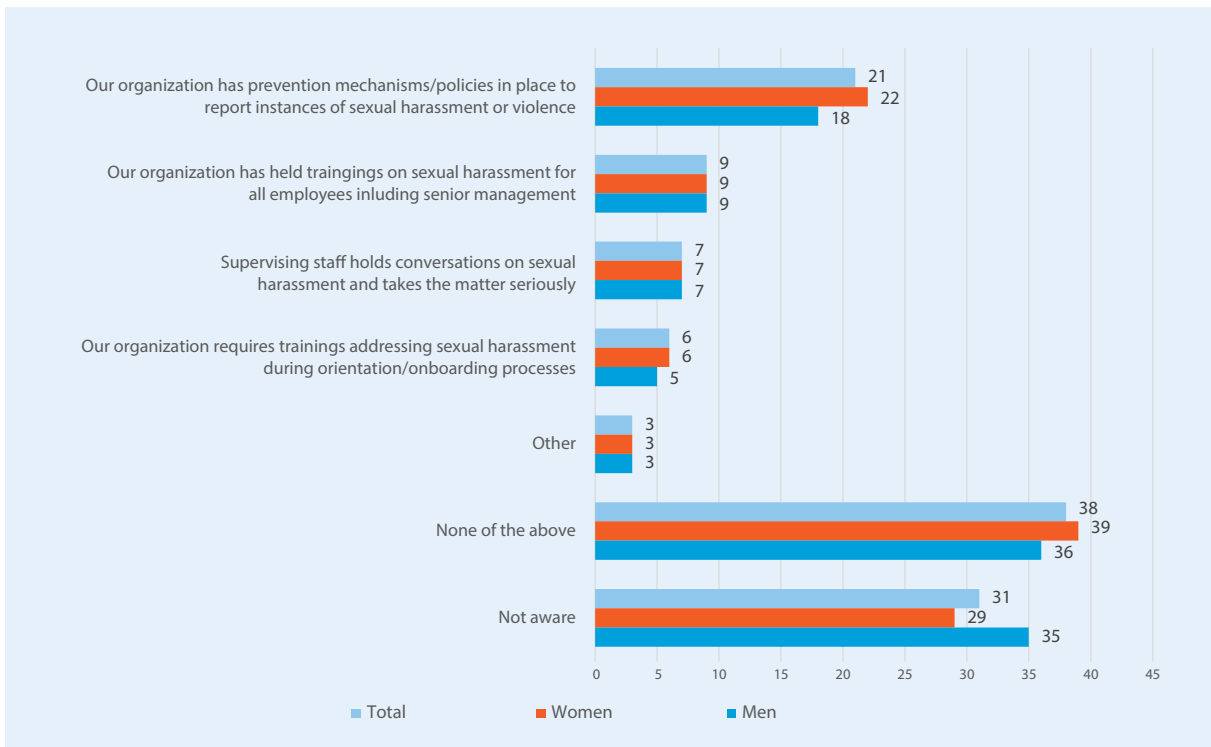
prohibited by Georgian law. Approximately 16 per cent are not aware of this, and about 3 per cent believe that sexual harassment is not prohibited by law.

Survey participants were asked whether they were aware of approaches in place at their institution to address sexual harassment. Nearly one third of respondents (31 per cent) stated that they had not heard of such measures within their organization or institution, while 38 per cent answered that there are no such regulations in their workplace (Figure 15).

According to one fifth of respondents (21 per cent), mechanisms for responding to sexual harassment are in place. Fewer respondents indicated that training on workplace sexual harassment is conducted (9 per cent), that managerial staff discuss the issue and take it seriously (7 per cent) and that mandatory training is provided upon hiring (6 per cent).

FIGURE 15:

What approaches does your organization use to address sexual harassment in the workplace? (percentage, by respondents’ gender; multiple responses).



A small proportion of respondents—14 per cent— noted that they have attended training on workplace sexual harassment, while 86 per cent have not.

Some participants in the qualitative component noted that private companies sometimes lack internal prevention mechanisms, adding additional barriers. Interviews revealed that the Public Defender’s Office frequently issues recommendations to companies but that they are not always implemented.

This tendency is confirmed by other respondents, who noted that companies sometimes attempt to avoid dealing with sexual harassment cases. In private companies, incidents are often covered up, or false information is provided. This exacerbates the problem, as many companies do not conduct genuine investigations and only follow procedures formally.

“I have encountered cases where the company covered it up and provided false information... very often.... We always start the training by saying that if you have even one case, it means you are open and have a safe environment—because you managed to investigate the case and identify it]. But this mentality is not yet widespread. They think that if you have a single case, it means you are a bad company. I, on the contrary, say that if you have at least one case, it means you are a good company. Accordingly, in most cases, they cover it up. Even where mechanisms exist, I have witnessed false statements and cases brought to me. The mechanism should not exist just to be named but to handle cases. If a single case fails to go through the mechanism and be addressed, it means that

management is protecting the company at the expense of women.”

Expert working on sexual harassment issues.

Experts also named the lack of knowledge on investigating and reviewing sexual harassment incidents, general insensitivity to the issue and stereotypes as reasons for inadequate responses.

According to experts, establishing independent commissions in companies and retraining their members are important actions to ensure fairness in handling cases. Another key step is raising employee awareness of sexual harassment, which private sector representatives also prioritize.

“Initiatives must come from leadership so that employees believe and understand that management genuinely wants to create a harassment-free environment at work.

Expert working on sexual harassment issues

Respondents noted that the public sector has better regulations against sexual harassment, linked to the presence of internal mechanisms. However, the situation in the private sector is challenging. Large companies that follow international standards place greater importance on having sexual harassment policies. Small and medium-sized enterprises often fail to regulate such cases, contributing to the widespread occurrence of harassment.

Thus, according to experts and private sector representatives who participated in the qualitative

study, the following actions are important for reducing incidents of sexual harassment and implementing preventive measures:

- Raising awareness among employees in the private sector about sexual harassment.
- Translating sexual harassment policies into practice, ensuring their effective implementation and building trust.
- Creating, implementing and ensuring the transparency of sexual harassment response mechanisms, including independent commissions staffed by competent and sensitive individuals responsible for investigating and reviewing cases.
- Linking sexual harassment prevention policies with broader equality initiatives, such as equal pay, gender balance and promoting a family-friendly work environment.

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KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. KEY FINDINGS

The research results reveal that private sector employees, both women and men, possess some awareness of sexual harassment; however, women are more sensitive to this issue than men. A large portion of women consider behaviours such as a supervisor sending personal messages online or touching them during conversations to be forms of harassment, whereas a significant number of men disagree with this assessment. Although the majority acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment and regard it as a significant social problem, many incidents go unnoticed or unreported.

The study shows that sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread problem. According to the findings, 27 per cent of surveyed women and 18 per cent of men experienced sexual harassment at work. It is noteworthy that women more frequently experience multiple forms of harassment. Incidents often include verbal and non-verbal forms, and in certain contexts, physical harassment also occurs. Sexual harassment is particularly common in less formal settings, such as in enclosed workspaces, at corporate events and on business trips.

Women and young employees represent particularly vulnerable groups. The research also identified certain groups as especially at risk of experiencing sexual harassment, including women with disabilities, unmarried and divorced women, single mothers, LGBTQI+ individuals, interns and temporary workers. According to experts, such sectors as the service industry, entertainment, tourism, construction

and security are high-risk areas where harassment incidents are especially frequent.

Although reporting sexual harassment and seeking legal redress is the supported approach, in practice, such reports are rare. Only 9 per cent of victims turned to formal mechanisms for assistance, while the majority limited themselves to sharing their experiences in private conversations. The main reasons for this include the fear of job loss, the presence of social stigma, the lack of evidence and the limited legal regulations.

Only 21 per cent of private sector employees confirmed that their companies have mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexual harassment. Meanwhile, 31 per cent of respondents were unaware of any internal regulations in their companies, and 38 per cent stated that their organizations have no policy in this area. Experts note that small and medium-sized enterprises are less likely to have harassment policies in place. Implementing international standards and establishing mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexual harassment remain significant challenges in the private sector.

Thus, the study confirms the necessity of raising awareness about sexual harassment, enacting robust policies and creating a safe work environment. A systemic approach and inclusive policies will contribute to reducing sexual harassment in the private sector and improving the overall workplace environment.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

To the Government of Georgia:

- Ensure dissemination of information on the prevention and inadmissibility of workplace sexual harassment through awareness-raising events and social campaigns.
- Facilitate the effective handling of harassment complaints, and ensure victims' access to justice.

To private companies and organizations operating in Georgia:

- Emphasize the strict prohibition of sexual harassment in internal regulatory documents.
- Implement internal mechanisms for prevention and response, including developing policies that define harassment; establish formal complaint channels; and set up independent, impartial and effective review processes.
- Ensure the transparency and inclusiveness of reporting mechanisms.
- Maintain internal statistics on reported incidents.
- Provide mandatory training and informational sessions for employees, management and human resources personnel on the nature, forms, consequences and complaint procedures related to sexual harassment.

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ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 1

- 1 McCann and ILO, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme 2005.
- 2 ILO 2019.
- 3 ILO 2014.
- 4 ILO 2020.
- 5 Council of Europe 2011.
- 6 European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2002, Article 1, para. 2.
- 7 Ibid., Article 1, para. 3.
- 8 Council of Europe 2011, Article 40.
- 9 ILO 2019.
- 10 Ibid., Article 1, para. 1(a).
- 11 According to Geostat data, as of 2024, 61 per cent of people working in managerial positions are men. See: Geostat 2024.
- 12 UN Women and Geostat 2018.
- 13 UN Women 2021.
- 14 UN Women 2023.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Public Defender of Georgia 2024.
- 17 Established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) are a set of principles offering guidance to businesses on how to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace and community. See: <https://www.weps.org/>.
- 18 Parliament of Georgia 2010a, Article 6. Before the 2019 amendments, the law described the concept but did not use the term 'sexual harassment'.
- 19 Parliament of Georgia 1984, Article 166 .
- 20 Parliament of Georgia 2010b, Article 4, paras. 5 and 6.
- 21 Ibid., Article 23, para. 4.
- 22 Ibid., Chapters XVII and XVIII.
- 23 Ibid., Article 78.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Council of Europe, GREVIO 2021.
- 26 Council of Europe, GREVIO 2022.
- 27 Ibid., paras. 27–31.
- 28 Ibid., para. 138.
- 29 UN General Assembly 1979.
- 30 For information on the 17 SDGs, see: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals#history> and <https://sdg.gov.ge/intro>.
- 31 UN General Assembly 1995.
- 32 UN CEDAW 2023, para. 36.

CHAPTER 2

- 33 Australian Human Rights Commission 2018.

CHAPTER 3

- 34 Mazer and Percival 1989.
- 35 A difference was identified using a linear regression model, which predicts the values of the attitudes towards sexual harassment based on gender, age, level of education, region of employment and length of work experience in the private sector.
- 36 Due to the small number of respondents, these results are presented for illustrative purposes only.



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