

Research sheds light on how gender inequality in the media industry impacts job satisfaction

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Research led by experts at City, University of London has found lower perceptions of gender equality and the prevalence of workplace sexual harassment negatively impact on job satisfaction in newsrooms across global regions. While sexual harassment is widespread in numerous professions, newsrooms are no exception to this unfortunate reality.

Job satisfaction in the news industry has attracted a number of studies that explore the effects of organizational size, salaries, contract types, [work-life balance](#), [gender](#), race and even political leanings of the outlet. Indeed, in many areas of the world women are heavily underrepresented and often have shorter careers in the media than male colleagues due to social and cultural barriers such as discrimination, pay gaps and [gender stereotypes](#).

The new study from Dr. Lindsey Blumell, Senior Lecturer and Dr. Rana Arafat, Lecturer in Journalism at City, along with Dinfin Mulupi, University of Maryland, analyzed how news personnel from SubSaharan Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Arab region evaluated [job satisfaction](#) in relation to gender equality and experienced sexual harassment.

The regions explored contain countries particularly renowned for unequal pay, short-lived female careers and exclusivity of senior roles for males.

Key findings from the research show:

- Men from across the three regions enjoy significantly higher job satisfaction than women, but not gender non-conforming individuals.

- Similarly, men also have far higher perceptions of newsroom gender equality than women—that is, they find easier access to the field and more senior roles than women. Again, this is not substantially different from gender non-conforming people.
- Women were significantly more likely to be verbally and physically harassed both in the newsroom and on field work assignments than men across all three tested regions.
- Physical harassment against women was more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa than in SouthEast Asia and the Arab region which were not dissimilar. Cases of verbal harassment varied significantly between the three regions, with Sub-Saharan Africa the highest, followed by the Arab region and then SouthEast Asia.
- Combined instances of physical and verbal sexual harassment had significant negative impact on job satisfaction.

Surveys included 33 closed questions and one open-ended question, with data collected between July and October 2020 for Sub-Saharan participants, December 2020 and March 2021 for SouthEast Asia and between February and April 2021 for the Arab region. The total sample size was 1,583 males, females and gender non-conforming people (576 from Sub-Saharan Africa, 487 from SouthEast Asia and 520 from the Arab [region](#)).

Dr. Blumell said the study highlighted an urgent need for culture shift in the news industry across the world.

"Journalism is a heavily male-dominated industry across the world, and quite heavily so by design," she said.

"With many cultures discouraging extended careers in the media for women after marriage and child birth due to domestic responsibilities, and in a lot of cases even prohibiting the necessary qualifications, the

most senior roles with key decision-making powers in [news organizations](#) are held by men."

"This imbalance in turn creates an acceptance of stereotypes and a perception power held by males that often leads to sexual harassment and a worsening of job conditions for women. "

"Our study highlights the need for structural and organizational changes to combat these inequalities that disproportionately affect women. Organizations must implement policies that address all types of sexual harassment and enact ethical charters to define gender discrimination in its different forms."

Dr. Arafat said the effects on job satisfaction of these attitudes towards women required greater attention from employers.

"There is a great misconception that 'real' sexual harassment is only a rare occurrence among flirting and 'banter', which demonstrates a misconception of how we situate types of harassment," Dr. Arafat said.

"What might seem like harmless flirtation can in fact hurt, humiliate and dominate individuals and amount to verbal sexual harassment. If news organizations and employers in general were more aware of this, as well as the physical sexual [harassment](#) that also goes underreported—and their overall effects on job satisfaction—they would hopefully take greater action to combat it."

"Educating organizations is one step, but training staff to understand effects of the many negative psychological and performance effects of [sexual harassment](#) is critical to solving the problem from within."

"By addressing gender inequalities that lead to women's lower job [satisfaction](#), news organizations can also counter women's early exit

from the news industry."

The findings are published in *Journalism Practice*.

More information: Lindsey E. Blumell et al, The Impact of Sexual Harassment on Job Satisfaction in Newsrooms, *Journalism Practice* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2023.2227613](https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2227613)

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