

# UK screen industry failing to tackle sexual harassment, according to new report

October 23 2023

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The UK film and screen industry is failing to tackle sexual harassment, with some victims punished or victimized if they do speak out, according to a new report looking at the experiences of staff in a range

of roles across the television and film industry.

The research, led by an academic at the University of York, reveals that [sexual harassment](#) and abuse is still occurring in the industry despite the #MeToo movement and that some reports are being covered up, with staff exposed to further discrimination.

The report is titled "Safe to Speak Up?" and is based on research interviews with 18 people working in the UK screen industry who experienced and/or reported sexual [harassment](#) and violence at work, including sexualized comments, having unsolicited sexual images shared with them, unwanted sexual approaches, indecent exposure and [sexual assault](#).

Some interviewees describe being encouraged to speak out about harassment and abuse, but then being punished or victimized when they did so.

Interviewees detailed a range of damaging impacts associated with their experiences, including feelings of shame and self-doubt, panic attacks and the loss of career opportunities and confidence.

Lead author of the study, Dr. Anna Bull from the Department of Education at the University of York, said, "Sexual harassment can occur in many different workplaces, but it is more prevalent where there are greater levels of inequality between staff. The screen industry has high levels of gender inequality, with more men in positions of power, as well as a steep workplace hierarchy. An obvious example of this is in the treatment of "the talent" (a term which refers to actors and presenters) who are given higher status and protections compared to others on set.

"This study shows us that six years on from the #MeToo movement, sexual harassment and violence are still occurring in the industry. The

research shows some of the devastating impacts that sexual harassment and violence in the workplace can have, and reveals that women are still losing their jobs and careers as a result of reporting it. Despite these life-changing impacts, in many workplaces, the minimum legal requirements for addressing this issue are still not in place."

The 18 interviewees described in detail 22 instances of sexual harassment, assault or violence experienced at work since December 2017. Most of these incidents were recent, occurring since 2020.

Many interviewees were not aware of any initiatives to tackle sexual harassment in their workplace and reported a strong reliance by employers on informal responses to complaints which were not adequate to address the situation and sometimes resulted in further discrimination.

Some interviewees were blocked or dissuaded from reporting what had happened to them. For example, Sarah said, "I look back and I realize probably even that informal phone call to [my bosses to raise concerns] was a mistake because they turned around to me and said, 'Oh look, it would be very bruising if you raised this formally. You know that, right?' And I said, 'Oh okay,' and I kind of read between the lines, [and] didn't raise it formally [at that point]."

The [interviewees](#) worked across different genres including high-end television and film, drama, documentary, factual, unscripted, and journalism, in a variety of roles including pre- and post-production, crew, producers, runners, researchers, and an actor.

The incidents of harassment and abuse occurred in a variety of workplace settings. Particularly risky spaces were work social events; filming on location; and international industry events.

Dr. Bull recommends that more regulatory oversight is needed for

broadcasters and commissioning channels to incentivize them to take more responsibility for sexual harassment on productions that they have commissioned. She also hopes that the report will raise awareness of what sexual harassment looks like in the workplace and why it occurs.

She added, "I've been researching sexual harassment for seven years and have carried out multiple studies in this area. In 'Safe to Speak Up?' I've uncovered evidence of some of the worst—but also the best—responses from employers that I've ever seen. This range of responses shows that while there is good work happening in some parts of the industry, there's still a lot of work to be done. My hope is that this research—and the industry and policy briefings that accompany it—will contribute to making the screen industries safer and more equal places for everyone."

Lucy Tallon, Mental Health Lead at the Film and TV Charity, said, "The findings in 'Safe to Speak Up?' indicate that sexual harassment in our industry is still too prevalent and deeply harmful. To address bullying and harassment, we as an industry need to come together, from all sides—preventative and reactive. Enabling factors include unhealthy work cultures and managers not trained to handle reports, which we saw in our recent Looking Glass '22 research; nearly half of respondents in management roles identified that they do not feel appropriately skilled to deal with complaints when they are made.

"At the Charity, we have continued to develop our Bullying Advice Service, with confidential one-to-one support from our Bullying Advisor and new resources to help employers and witnesses to better deal with incidents of harassment. If you are dealing with an issue of bullying OR harassment, whether current or historical, we encourage you to get in touch with us today."

Provided by University of York

Citation: UK screen industry failing to tackle sexual harassment, according to new report (2023, October 23) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-10-uk-screen-industry-tackle-sexual.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.