

# Sexual harassment goes unchecked in many sub-Saharan African newsrooms, finds study

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Sexual harassment often goes unchecked in sub-Saharan African

newsrooms despite many employers having policies in place, according to a study conducted by City, University of London and the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism.

Researchers Dr. Lindsey Blumell (City) and Dinfin Mulupi (Maryland) surveyed nearly 600 news professionals and analyzed 17 anti-[sexual harassment](#) policies in newsrooms across eight sub-Saharan African countries between July and October 2020.

The study sampled data from Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The [article](#), "The Impact of Anti-Sexual Harassment Policies on Sexual Harassment Prevention in the Workplace," by Dr. Lindsey Blumell and Dinfin Mulupi, is published in *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*.

Key findings from the study include:

- 58% of reports of sexual harassment lead to no action, and frequently only a warning when it did
- 30% of victims [report](#) harassment to bosses
- Just 16.4% of respondents were aware of their organization's anti-sexual harassment policies
- Women are 2.5 times more likely to be targeted.

The study finds that societal and [cultural norms](#) lead to ineffective policies. Only when these policies are accompanied by workplace training on what is considered sexual harassment, the company policies that exist, and how the organization would respond, does the research find an increase of newsrooms responding to these reports of abuse.

The research was carried out as a joint project with the Women in News World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRAN), which aims to eliminate sexual harassment in the news business.

The analysis compares policies with best practice guidelines, which researchers define as a clear definition of sexual harassment, reliable reporting mechanisms, due process for [disciplinary action](#), training, and a monitoring system.

Dr. Lindsey Blumell said, "Our study shows that sexual harassment is common in the newsroom, across many sub-Saharan African countries and it disproportionately affects women.

"We found that people don't report, and when they do report, organizations fail to act.

"News organizations are paying lip service to a serious problem, but are not preventing sexual harassment from occurring, nor are they creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable to report when they are sexually harassed."

Dinfin Mulupi said, "There is a disconnect between employers and employees. It is not enough to have an anti-harassment policy. While employers can point at the fact that they have a [policy](#) to tackle sexual harassment, more than 85% of surveyed workers weren't aware of it or trained on it.

"To strengthen their policies, news organizations must not include language that deters victim-survivors from coming forward. They should include a timeline on when a complaint must be addressed, the disciplinary actions that will follow, clarity on what the victim-survivors can expect, and access to counseling.

"Most of all, employers should be working to ensure that these abuses do not occur in the first place."

**More information:** Lindsey E. Blumell et al, The Impact of Anti-Sexual Harassment Policies on Sexual Harassment Prevention in the Workplace, *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s10672-023-09487-w](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10672-023-09487-w)

Provided by City University London

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