

Sexual harassment in the creative industries

Survey in field 01.05 - 28.05.24 (n=225)

The creative industries still have a long way to go in meaningfully tackling sexual harassment. Bectu is launching a new Sexual Harassment Support Service (SHSS), employing a trained team of staff who will be available to speak with members and help them consider their options. In May 2024, we surveyed over 200 workers across the industry to better understand this endemic problem:

Sexual harassment is rife across the creative industries

- Overall, 92% of respondents said that they had personally witnessed or experienced bullying or harassment on grounds of their sex or gender in the workplace
- Six in ten (60%) had experienced unwanted and/or inappropriate touching, hugging or kissing
- More than one in five overall said they had experienced a serious sexual assault while at work (21%)
- Around a quarter (24%) have witnessed the circulation of pornography in the workplace
- A majority of workers in the creative industries have witnessed comments of a sexual nature (79%), suggestive remarks or 'jokes' of a sexual nature (82%) or assumptions made about someone's capabilities based on their gender or sexuality (76%) in the workplace

There is a systemic problem with micro aggressions - at my original place of work, I couldn't stretch, lean across the sound desk or pick up something from the floor without being ogled by my supervisor.

Live events and TV freelancer

Insider jokes included serious racial, homophobic, antisemitic and sexist insults. A senior colleague spiked my drink and raped me at a work party. When I reported it to my line manager he sided with the offender and started victim blaming me. I soon quit.

Unscripted freelancer

I have been raped on a film by the director... Been shown pornography by a presenter. Many inappropriate comments. Lost work due to being a woman. Seeing a man from the crew masturbating in the compound women's loos. Unwanted touching. Men not liking being managed by women in a technical role.

Film and TV freelancer

Harassment is endemic across the industry, fuelled by its hierarchical nature, with many junior staff reporting abuse by talent or seniors, and long, late hours structure of the industry

- 92% agree that the creative industries allow a dynamic where those in power can too easily abuse their status
- 83% say that behaviours that would be considered toxic and inappropriate in public life are often tolerated in the creative sector
- Just 13% overall feel confident that as a sector or industry we are taking effective action to deter unwanted behaviours at work
- In general, high-profile cases have done little to shift the dial; only 14% say that high profile cases such as the allegations against Russell Brand have improved employers' responses to sexual harassment in the creative sector

My manager constantly makes inappropriate comments. But our company is a struggling indie cinema and I know he is one of the people keeping the place going, and jeopardising his job would mean jeopardising the company and the jobs of my other colleagues and friends, so I don't say anything.

Cinema worker

It's impossible when you work in small creative companies where the talent is most often the issue but is also the boss, company founder and will simply let go anyone deemed a trouble causer. Reputation is everything in this industry where we all move from project to project.
Unscripted TV worker

Reporting systems across the creative industries are broken, with many driven to leave their job and others too scared to report because of the impact on their career

Of those who reported the incident to their employer, just 9% thought that it was dealt with appropriately.

- 62% did not report an incident because they were worried it would negatively impact their career and 54% didn't because they were worried about losing work. 51% were worried about how they would be treated at work if they spoke up
- 61% did not report because they feared that nothing would happen as a result
- 23% of respondents who witnessed or experienced sexual harassment at work did not know what their options were; 33% did not report the incident to anyone at work.
- More than one in ten who had witnessed or experienced sexual harassment at work left their job (13%) and 6% took time off work.

As we are only as good as our last contract, it takes no time for one person to spread the word that we are 'trouble' or 'not team players'.

Unscripted freelancer

I have experienced sexual harassment five times in VFX in the last ten years. I have also witnessed it happen to others three times in the last ten years. After reporting it to senior management, I have experienced further sexual harassment at two different companies. My career has suffered for rejecting sexual harassment and for reporting it.

VFX freelancer

A senior manager witnessed another colleague forcibly kissing me during a work social event. The next day I spoke to other senior managers about the incident and how uncomfortable it made me. I left at the end of my contract. This company gave this person a full-time position. He was a known offender.

Unscripted freelancer

In smaller theatre there isn't anyone of power to go to, other than maybe the director who has usually contributed to the work culture that allowed it in the first place...my value to a production is lower than an actor's in face value. I have to weigh up if a producer would sooner dismiss an accuser than a performer.

Theatre and live events freelancer

The precarity of freelancers alongside the lack of employee support structures for them makes them even more exposed

- 84% believe that it is harder to report incidents of sexual harassment as a freelancer
- More than half of freelancers did not report incidents because they were worried that it might lose them work (59%) or that it would negatively impact their career (71% compared to 30% of full-time employees)
- Overall, just 24% of freelancers feel confident about how to report an incident of sexual harassment at work.

There is a very clear need for an independent reporting body to take action against sexual harassment in the creative industries

- The industry's power dynamics, job-to-job way of working, that often relies on connections, in small production companies that have nothing that resembles a formal reporting structure adds to the weight of reporting sexual harassment
- 84% believe that the creative sector needs an independent industry body to investigate, report and prevent harassment- just 4% disagree that the sector needs such an independent body