Sexual Harassment in the UK Music Industry

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Abstract

The current study presents survey findings on experiences of sexual harassment (SH) among individuals working in the wider UK music industry. Data from 467 respondents showedthat 95.5% of women and 70% of men reported SH. Gender was the most significant determinant of sexual harassment, with women reporting more instances of SH than men. The most significant effects wereseen in relation to sexist and sexual remarks, sexual staring, and unwanted sexual attention from a colleague.Levels of SH experienced by participants with a disability were consistent with those experienced by the overall population (83%) and showed a similar gender effect.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; victimisation; music industry; creative industry

1. Overview

Sexual harassment is commonplace in male-dominated, hierarchical work environments. Women and gender non-conforming individuals are more often the victims of harassment at work; however, this has been under-explored in the context of those working within the music industry. The music industry provides a unique context to examine since it is both male-dominated and hierarchical in nature, but holdsadded barriers due to its fragmented structure, transient roles, and lack of regulatory body to enforce ethical practice within it. The current study adds to the growing body of research which explores SH within the creative industries. Specifically, this study aims to expand the knowledge base by quantitatively exploring how gender, ethnicity, and other protected characteristics are related to SH victimisation within the UK music industry.

1.1Defining sexual harassment

Legal definitions of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape vary from country to country, but rape and sexual assault are understood as sexually motivated physical assaults without consent, with or without penetration. Sexual harassment definitions are more broadly defined but typically constitute sexually motivated behaviours that are unwanted, cause discomfort, fear or intimidation and impinge upon the victim's freedom (see for example Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). These behaviours may be non-physical, including unsolicited sexual remarks or messages, cat calling, sexual jokes, insults and staring or they may be physical behaviours such as up-skirting, grabbing, kissing etc. As blatantly frightening as physical harassment is, the consequences of non-physical, "low grade," every day sexual harassment cannot be understated (Kelly, 1987). These casual manifestations of sexual harassment create the masculinised atmosphere in which misogyny is normalised, where women are worn down, their worth reduced, expect less respect, and aspire to less in all aspects of life. Sexism is still to a certain extent endemic, and gender still affects beliefs of "worthiness" in the workplace. Moreover, everyday harassment provides a fertile ground for further, escalating abuse (Thornton 2002).

1.2 Context of sexual harassment

Most women living in the UK report being sexually harassedbefore. A 2022 YouGov survey carried out by UN Women UK found that 97% of women aged 18-24 have been sexually harassed, with a further 96% not reporting those situations because of the belief that it would not change anything. SH happens in various spaces, including on public transport, in public spaces, and within the workplace. It is well established that sexual harassment victimisation (SHV) is associated with a range of negative psychological outcomes.

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Workplace SH differ to other forms of SH, often compounding negative outcomes, because in workplace SH it is often difficult to avoid or report the harasser, significantly affectingone 's life andcareer.

The concept of sexual harassment as part of the working experience was developed from the work of MacKinnon (1979) and Farley (1978), who described it as behaviour that was accepted as a 'normal' part of women's workplace experiences. Fitzgerald et al (1997)identified two main perspectives from which workplace sexual harassment can be studied, namely the organisational context and the job gender context of the workplace. The former refers to a normalisation of or "tolerance" for sexual harassment and availability of remedies, while the latter refers to the staff gender demographics and the gendered nature of role distribution (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Fischer, 1995; Fitzgerald et al, 1997). Research since has been substantial (for example Jagsi et al, 2016; Klatt, 2018; McDonald, 2012; Tinkler, Gremillion and Arthurs, 2015) and the normalisation of everyday harassment has been cited in various forms in the literature (Kelly, 2019). In 2016, the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported that in the US, anywhere between 25% to 85% of women reported sexual harassment in the workplace, with male-dominatedprofessions, service-based industries and low-income, women-dominatedjobs being producing the highest percentages.

Decades after their original work, Fitzgerald et al (2018) commented on the pervasive nature of sexual harassment, specifically towards women, in all aspects of private and public spaces including the workplace and posited that its "sheer heterogeneity and complexity… humbles any attempt at comprehensive summary, much less grand theory". Sexual harassment in the workplace reflects and is a continuation of sexual harassment in life in general, especially for women, and can only be fully understood as part of a bigger societal problem. The increased understanding of its manifestations and effects is reflected by the breadth of literature, public campaigns, and the gradual change in legislation across the world (McDonald, 2012). Statues and policies however are still fraught with ambiguity, and some remain narrow and regressive (Berdahl 2007; O'Neill and Payne 2007). The language of harassment may discourage reporting of sexual harassment at work because of ill-defined, vague definitions or a lack of clarity in terms of what constitutes harassment. Victims are themselves socialised into doubting that what has happened to them is harassment or abuse, as they too have internalised harassment as normal or "expected" behaviour. A study conducted among a Spanish population for example found that victims considered unwanted sexual advances as "inevitable facts of life" (Valiente 1998, in McDonald 2012). This may be especially true in the context of the music industry, where performers internalise sexual objectification as part of their performer identity or brand. Self-doubt and self-blame however do not prevent the very real experiences of discomfort, fear or intimidation experienced by victims, or the long-term psychological cost imposed upon them. The impact of sexual harassment may be psychological, professional, financial, social or a combination of the above and victims may fear retaliation.

The risk of retaliation after reporting sexual harassment in the workplacekeeps victims silenced and feeds the cycle of abuse. Retaliation may take many forms and may well impact on the victim's career and ambition. Hart (2019) found that in a hypothetical scenario where participants were asked to assume the role of manager, they were less inclined to recommend promotion for a female employee who reported sexual harassment. The myth around the "troublemaker" seems to hold sway in the workplace.

Itis accepted that sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual violence result from social and economic power discrepancies (Thornton 2002; Zippel 2006) and are unquestionably gender based (EU Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014, Girls Attitudes Survey 2018, Slater & Gordon, 2018). The consequences of misogyny in the workplace extend beyond the targets of hostility, as it creates a hostile environment in which the wellbeing of all employees, including men, may decline, as basic values of decency areundermined (Miner-Rubino and Cortina, 2004).Minimisation of women's contributions and skills, focus on their bodies, unwanted sexual remarks, unsolicited sexual messaging, and veiled threats when sexual attention is not retuned, are all behaviours that find fertile ground in inequality and in the presumption of male dominance. This perceived and normalised sense of male superiority includes the implicit ownership of women, in the sense of the perceived right to own their time, attention and/or affection, at will. Gender inequality is endemic in the workplace, across sectors, with higher power/more profitable jobs typically in the hands of men (Fawcett Society, 2022). The music industry is particularly accommodating towards misogyny, where objectification of women artists is normalised, and positions of power are male dominated.

1.3 Precarity of working conditions

Women are shown to be more susceptible to sexual harassment when their employment is irregular and contingent on precarious employment contracts (Takao 2001). The music industry encompasses a multiplicity of roles across a variety of platforms. It is still a male dominated industry across musical genres and across the breadth of industry roles (McCarry et al, 2023). Furthermore, it is often fraught with loose employment regulatory processes and informal hierarchical structures. [OBJ]

The fluid nature of contracts, the power held by individuals with influence, the lack of financial security and the precarious nature of work with music venues, live shows and tours create an environment of vulnerability for those working in the industry, particularly those in positions of lower status, who may feel that their career and/or livelihood depends on compliance (Hennekan and Bennett, 2017; Jones, 2020). There is a reliance on the good will of those in power to positively affect careers, in a way that is far more informal and unregulated than in a typical workplace scenario. In addition, loose organisationalstructures make it difficult to trace, address and take steps to reduce harassment and abuse. The transient and fluid nature of the industry, which often brings individuals together from disparate backgrounds and a wide spectrum of expertise, in temporary arrangements, makes it easier for abuse to go unnoticed and unreported.

1.4 Hierarchies within working conditions

Working relationships are often forged in informal settings, in a casual yet highly hierarchical context, where few hold significant power, to make or break a career. Status, authority as well as social and economic or "career making" power in the music industry lies mostly with men (Götting, 2022). This power structure is often unregulated and may be abused. Experiences of women working in the music industry mirror those of women in other fields, such as sport, film, and academia, to the extent that they are marginalised, undervalued, underpaid, and underrepresented in positions of prestige, restricted by historical male hegemony (for example see Stamarski and Son Hing, 2016; †Kalev and Deutch, 2018 and Ryan, 2023). In the music industry however, these experiences are arguably more explicitly influenced by sexism and sexual objectification both from within their industry and from the public. The MI compounds the vulnerability of women in comparison to more structured regulated workplaces for the above reasons.

Sexual harassment and abuse in festivals and live music scenes affects not only the fans and visitors, but also those working there, from entertainers, to crew and security personnel (Jones, 2022). Some work has recently been completed investigating the experiences of fans (Bows, 2019) and a plethora of anecdotal evidence has shed light onto casual abuse in musical venues among the audience. Less data is available on abuse from musicians towards fans, but some has appeared recently. For example, the singer of a European band was accused of drugging and sexually assaulting female fans, under the pretence of VIP meetings with band members and after-parties (Grow, 2023). This particular type of sexual abuse requires organisation, planning, and cooperation from other parties.

Moreover, the widespread sexualisation of women in public spaces and the disinhibition that takes place in music venues, driven by the notion that music events are "outside" or a "break" from everyday life, increases the likelihood of sexual assault, placing staff and punters at a similar risk with those working in hospitality (Heen & Lieberman, 2018; McCarry et al, 2023). Sexual harassment in the workplace costs livelihoods, careers and diminishes the quality of life for victims. The current study is the first based on data collected from tools developed from rigorous research methods and forms part of a larger nation -wide survey that includes bullying, aims to provide data from the wilder UK Music Industry in relation to prevalence of sexual harassment.

2. Methods

2.1 Materials

The data utilised in this study are taken from the sexual harassment section of a wider survey on bullying and harassment (BaHMI), which was developed from the Equally Safe in Higher Education (ESHE) research toolkit (McCarry, 2017 and McCarry et al., 2018) and the Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised (NAQ-R)(Einarsen et al, 2009). There were 15 questions on sexual harassment. The BaHMI survey was informed by contributions collected from five focus groups which included people from diverse backgrounds who were involved in the UK music industry. The focus groups included individuals who identified as women, men, LGBTQIA+, women of colour, neurodiverse, with disability and/or cognitive impairment. They provided feedback on the wording and content of survey questions, whichhelped to ensure the relevance of the survey to the industry.

2.2 Procedure

The [blinded for review] granted ethical approval for this research project. The survey was pilotedwith [blinded for review] undergraduate students studying commercial music. Following the pilot, a link to complete the survey on Qualtrics was shared on social media sites aimed at people working in the music industry. The survey was open for 11 weeks from the 1st of November 2021.

2.3 Participants

A total of 574individuals, working in the UK music industry, engaged in the survey, of whom 467 provided complete responses. Most participants were men (see table 1), and the age of participants ranged from 16 to 80.

As it is common for people to have multiple job roles in the music industry, participants were asked to report their three most common roles in the music industry and three most common workspaces, e.g., on stage. The most common roles were musician, crew and manager and the most common workspaces were on stage, back of stage and offices (see table 2).

3. Results

3.1 Prevalence of sexual harassment

The overall results paint a picture of widespread sexual harassment and significant differences in the frequency of experiences between men and women. Descriptive statistics and results from between-groups t tests are presented below.

3.2 Sexual Harassment and Gender

The largest gender differences observed, with women reporting more experiences than men (indicated by p<.001 and a Cohen's Ds effect size between 1.08 and 1.52), were for the following behaviours:
1. Sexist remarks made to them (t (427) =14.97, p<.001) and about them (t (329) =15.10, p<.001)
2. Unwanted sexual remarks made to them (t (428) =11.78, p<.001) and about them (t (328) =11.83, p<.001).
3. Being stared at in sexual/objectifying way (t (336) =13.50, p<.001) and
4. Receiving unwanted sexual attention from a colleague (t (313) =10.56, p<.001).

Furthermore, significantly more women than men (p<.001 and Cohen's D effect size between .15 and .53) reported:

1. Receiving sexual photos from a colleague (t (297) =4.10, p<.001).
2. Receiving unwanted questions about their sexuality (t (348) =5.26, p<.001).
3. Having been offered a career benefit for sexual cooperation (t (278) =4.97, p<.001).
4. A negative career impact for refusing sexual cooperation (t (269) =4.60, p<.001).
5. Having been forced, or threatened with force, to do something sexual that they did not want to do (t (262) =3.785, p<.001).
6. Having been pressured to do something sexual that they did not want to do (t (293) =5.15, p<.001.
7. Having been pressured to have sex while intoxicated (drinks and/or drugs) (t (333) =3.25, p<.001).

Moreover, significantly more disabled women than disabled men reported experiencing sexual harassment. However, no interaction was found between gender and disability.
Ethnicity was not a significant factor in relation to experiences of harassment.
No significant gender difference was found for unwanted sexual attention by fans (t (359) =1.49, p=1.4) or for unwanted sexual photos sent by fans (t (427) =.11, p=.91) (see table 4).

3.3 Sexual Harassment and Ethnicity

Ethnicity was not found to influence the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment. However, the sample size variation calls for caution when interpreting comparative tests. Across all ethnic groups sampled, at least 74% of participants reported sexual harassment (see table 5).

3.4 Sexual harassment and sexual orientation

All non-heterosexual women and all non-heterosexual non-binary participants reported experiencing sexual harassment (see table 6).

3.5 Sexual Harassment and Disability

Disability data reflected the overall data, was present in similar rates and showed a gender effect. Specifically, 98% of women and 63% of men reported sexual harassment (see table 7).

4. Discussion

Sexual harassment has finally, in the last decade, been acknowledged in the literature as a significant barrier for women across industries, including music. The current findings were the result of a wide-reaching sector-wide study in bullying and harassment in the UK music industry, which included a national survey and individual interviews. The findings presented here focus on survey results pertaining to sexual harassment specifically. A significant gender difference was clear for almost all sexual harassment behaviours. They showed an alarming prevalence of sexual harassment, with verbal SH (sexist and sexual remarks to and about them) reported by more

than 75% of women and sexual staring by more than 76%. Less than a third of men reported these forms of harassment. Women also experienced more incidents sexual coercion, offered career benefits for sex, and forced into sexual activity. Almost all women surveyed (95,5%) and around 70% of men and all non-binary participants reported having experienced some form of sexual harassment related to their working environment. This is alarming given the rise in awareness and public condemnation of sexual harassment on mainstream and social media.

The current study is an initial attempt to understand a far-reaching and insipid problem. The findings provide a snapshot of the problem in the UK music industry and open the door for further inquiry, as there is still a way to go to fully understand the dynamics at play in this industry and whether the industry culture accentuates the problem, particularly for women. Overall, in terms of the gender differences in SH experiences the current findings are consistent with the overall literature on sexual harassment and align with the findings of Fitzgerald et al (1999), Cortina et al (2002) and Uggen& Blackstone (2004) among others,showing that the dominant pattern of sexual harassment is consistently male-on-female harassment. These findings are also consistent with the findings of the sexual harassment report issued by the 2020 UK Government Equalities Office, which states that unwelcome sexual jokes and staring are the most common harassing behaviours in the workplace.

Regardless of socioeconomic standing women are more likely than men to experience all forms of sexual harassment and are particularly vulnerable to forms of harassment that are less frequent and perceived to be more serious, including sexual coercion and sexual violence. The impact of these experiences appears to be more severe as well (Jones and Manoussaki, 2022). SH experiences are known to impact on the victims' mental health, personal and professional relationships, lead to avoidance behaviours and vulnerability at work and may cause loss of career opportunities and professional advancement (Mclaughlin et al, 2017).

It would not be a reach to argue that casual harassment creates the necessary social context in which more serious harassment can occur. In addition, casual sexual harassment, such as crude jokes, sexual staring or catcalling may take their toll on the victim and may well have equally severe long-term consequences. Indeed, the current findings suggest that sexual staring, sexist, and sexual remarks co-exist alongside more serious behaviours, such as coercion and pressure to engage in unwanted sexual activity. The impact of harassment, however casual, creates a precarious working environment, where creativity and productivity take second place to managing personal safety and boundaries and where avoidance behaviours become necessary to navigate uncomfortable interactions. The lack of respect, the threat to autonomy and the erosion of personhood experienced by victims of SH become internalised and past on, perpetuating an environment of misogyny and inequality. Most victims of SH are women, and the perpetrators are almost invariably men. This is clear in the overall literature and in the current findings, which relate specifically to the music industry.

In the words of an interview participant sexual harassment is "woven in the fabric" of the music industry. As Thornton (2002, p. 435) argues, a 'single, sexualized heterosexed act, with its blatant lasciviousness and lust, invariably trumps a succession of seemingly trivial put-downs, even though the latter may reveal more about structural discrimination on the ground of sex than the former' (cited in McDonald, 2012). Sexual harassment in the music industry is no different than sexual harassment at home, in the workplace and in public spaces. It permeates all social domains but especially thrives in environments that lack gender equity, are male dominated, where gender gaps are evident in terms of authority and power and where systemic sexism and over-sexualisation of women is normalised, while discipline and prevention are not part of the occupational structure. In this sense the music industry provides the perfect breeding ground for sexual harassment to flourish. The most obvious starting point towards eradicating it is to shed abundant light on it. By acknowledging the cultural and social factors that underpin it, sexual harassment can beaddressedin this and other industries. It is envisaged that the current findings will pave the way to further research and industry collaborations, which will focus on the investigation and implementation of protection and prevention strategies in music and other industries.

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Table 1

Gender demographics

Gender	N	%	Disability	%
Women	201	43	45	22.39
Men	252	54	34	13.49
Non-binary	8	1.7	4	50
Other	2	.04		
Not disclosed	5	1.07		

Note Age range 16-80, mean=38.6

Table 2

Working roles and workspaces

Working roles	N	Workspaces	N
Musician	200	Onstage	190
Crew	139	Backstage	142
Manager	64	Office	125
Educator	92	Festivals	105
Producer	48	Rec. Studio	99
Technician	37	Online	94
Promoter	35	Front of house	65
Media	20	On tour	63
Label	21		
Booking agent	15		
DJ	12		
Merchandise	12		

Table 3

Number and percentage of women and men reporting at least one incident.

Behaviours reported by participants	All	Women (N)	Women (%)	Men (N)	Men (%)
Unwanted Q sexuality	38.53	100	49.75	71	28.17
Sexist remarks TO	52.68	166	82.59	70	27.78
Sexist remarks ABOUT	46.04	154	76.62	53	21.03
Sexual remarks TO	53.32	154	76.62	85	33.73
Sexual remarks about	46.68	143	71.14	66	26.19
Sexual Stare	48.82	154	76.62	68	26.98
Colleague sexual attention	45.18	134	66.67	70	27.78
Fan sexual attention	30.41	62	30.85	74	29.37
Sexual photos sent by colleague	14.99	47	23.38	21	8.33
Sexual photos sent by fan	7.71	13	6.47	20	7.94
Career benefits in return for sex	16.7	54	26.87	21	8.33
Negative career impact if sex refused	16.27	50	24.88	23	9.13
Intoxicated sex	16.49	45	22.39	26	10.32
Pressure to have sexual activity	19.27	59	29.35	24	9.52
Forced sexual activity	8.57	28	13.93	9	3.57

Table 4

Experiences of sexual harassment in relation to gender

Gender	Some form of harassment	No harassment experienced
Women	95.5	4.48
Men	69.08	30.95
NB	8	100

Note. Only 8 non-binary respondents completed the survey. All reported some form of harassment. Further analysis excludes NB respondents, because numbers are too low to yield statistically significant findings.

Table 5

Experiences of harassment by ethnicity

Ethnicity	N	Harassment	Harassment %
White (UK)	346	256	73.99
White (other)	63	51	80.95
Mixed	25	21	84
Black	13	10	76.92
Asian	12	9	75

Table 6

Percentage of participants that experienced some sort of harassment by sexual orientation.

Sexual Orientation	N	Harassment	Harassment %
Heterosexual men	216	143	66.20
Heterosexual women	146	137	93.84
Heterosexual NB/Other	1	1	100
Gay-Bi men	33	29	87
Gay-Bi women	45	45	100
Gay-Bi NB/other	8	8	100

Table 7

Disability and harassment

Disability indicated.	N	Harassment %
Women	43	97.67
Men	34	62.86
NB/other	5	80
ALL	82	81.7

Note. Only one disabled female reported no experiences of sexual harassment.