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Perception of Violence and Abuse in the Work Environment of Polish Communication Experts: The Gender Context

Abstract

We analyze the perception of various shades of violence and abuse in the workplace among Polish communication experts in the context of gender (with references to professional advancement opportunities, occurrence of biases, job satisfaction, and incidents of sexual harassment). We use a quantitative method with survey research. The questionnaire was created for the as part of the project 'Wellbeing in Public Relations and Communications Industries', which is run within the EUPRERA network on 'Women in PR'. For this paper, we analyze Polish data: independent variables (gender and age of respondents, employment sector, the organization's size, and the length of professional careers) and dependent variables (four statements related to perceived gender discrimination and sexual harassment). We collected the data between May-September, 2023. A group of 122 individuals completed the survey, and then we calculated the data with Excel's pivot formula. The study confirmed that gender impacts the scale and perception of workplace violence/abuse. It was an obstacle to success for one-third of men and two-thirds of women. Nearly 60% of women believed it negatively impacted their advancement (over 80% of men had no such experiences). Additionally, 70% of women and 34% of men experienced harassment. Our study supports the discussed theory, confirming that women often experience workplace discomfort. Two observations are worth underlining:

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- 1) a surprisingly broad range of behaviors in expert communication workplaces;
- 2) a generational shift in reporting abuse and harassment, with younger, less experienced men reporting more, later reversed as older women feel more harassed.

Key words: violence, abuse, discrimination, harassment, gender, communication experts, workplace

Postrzeganie przemocy i nadużyć w środowisku zawodowym polskich ekspertów do spraw komunikacji w kontekście płci

Streszczenie

W artykule analizujemy postrzeganie różnych odcieni przemocy i nadużyć w miejscu pracy przez polskich ekspertów ds. komunikacji w kontekście płci (z odniesieniem do możliwości awansu zawodowego, występowania uprzedzeń, satysfakcji z pracy i incydentów molestowania seksualnego). Stosujemy metodę ilościową (kwestionariusz ankiety). Kwestionariusz został stworzony na potrzeby projektu „Dobre samopoczucie w branży public relations i komunikacji”, który jest realizowany w ramach sieci EUPRERA w ramach projektu „Kobiety w PR”. W tym artykule analizujemy polskie dane: zmienne niezależne (płeć i wiek respondentów, sektor zatrudnienia, wielkość organizacji i długość kariery zawodowej) oraz zmienne zależne (cztery stwierdzenia dotyczące postrzeganej dyskryminacji ze względu na płeć i molestowania seksualnego). Dane zbierałyśmy od maja do września 2023 r. Ankietę wypełniły 122 osoby. Badanie potwierdziło, że płeć ma wpływ na skalę i postrzeganie przemocy/nadużyć w miejscu pracy. Jak wykazano, właśnie płeć przeszkadzała w osiągnięciu sukcesu dla jednej trzeciej mężczyzn i dwóch trzecich kobiet. Prawie 60% kobiet uważało, że płeć negatywnie wpłynęła na ich awans (ponad 80% mężczyzn nie miało takich doświadczeń). Ponadto 70% kobiet i 34% mężczyzn doświadczyło molestowania. Nasze badanie potwierdza, że kobiety często doświadczają dyskomfortu w miejscu pracy. Warto podkreślić dwie obserwacje: 1) stwierdzono zaskakująco szeroki zakres zachowań w miejscach pracy związanych z komunikacją jako profesją; 2) następuje zmiana pokoleniowa w zgłaszaniu nadużyć i molestowania.

Słowa kluczowe: przemoc, nadużycia, dyskryminacja, molestowanie, płeć, specjaliści ds. komunikacji, miejsce pracy

Introduction

The topic of gender-related *violence and abuse in the workplace* has been the subject of numerous scientific and industry studies, gender equality programs, legal regulations within national or European solutions, and internal regulations of specific industries and organizations (Hoffspiegel 2011: 124–125). This phenomenon, therefore, raises significant interest among researchers, experts, and practitioners. It might seem that many effective tools have already been created to combat it, such as legal documents, declarations, and conventions at the interna-

tional level, national law, as well as the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) serving monitoring functions by preparing independent reports, commenting on emerging situations, and drawing social attention to them (Czarnacka 2004: 27–28).

Unfortunately, despite the solutions already developed, the problem persists; yet, it is important to emphasize that neglecting it carries numerous consequences.

Firstly, it is associated with significant negative impact on individuals (Tepper 2017: 178), hindering their professional development and satisfaction in their work (Sloan et al. 2010: 89). Secondly, in a broader sense, it generates problems for entire business sectors, which, due to a lack of effective anti-violence/anti-abuse measures, lose attractiveness and are even perceived as threatening to potential employees (Rospenda et al. 2000: 1806–1807). These unequivocally negative consequences impact the work environment, productivity, interpersonal relationships, and the mental well-being of employees, as well as the reputation and daily operations of businesses, not to mention the legal ramifications (Rospenda et al. 2000: 385–386).

Both violence and abuse affects the organizational culture of companies and the broadly understood professional ethics. Shaping and developing a set of norms applicable to the industry and organization also influences the realm of interpersonal relationships. This creates the opportunity to make a space that either excludes the existence of an environment conducive to violence/abuse or inadequately sensitizes the members of the organization (Penttinen 2023: 943–954).

Exploring the dynamics of this phenomenon in an environment where communication goes beyond the basic understanding of it as a "process of exchanging information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups through a variety of channels" (Kimani, Scott 2023: 9) appears particularly intriguing. Here, we are talking about communication that serves as both the domain, the cause, and the goal of the professional work of a specific group of experts. It concerns the profession of communication, where – unlike anywhere else – transparency, credibility, truthfulness, equality, relationship building, and community spirit matter (Kaczmarek-Śliwińska 2015: 31–33). Individuals engaged in professional communication (e.g., specialists, managers, experts) should, theoretically, not only adhere to these values but also know how to incorporate them into the actions of individuals and entities (depending on their client).

Therefore, a provocative question arises: Is there any room for violence/abuse in this human-centric profession? We attempt to address this

in the subsequent parts of the paper. Our goal is to analyze the perception of various shades of violence/abuse in the workplace among Polish communication experts in the context of gender. The analysis considers elements such as professional advancement opportunities, biases, job satisfaction, and incidents of harassment.

The text is structured into theoretical, methodological, and empirical sections. In the theoretical part, we present the concept of workplace violence and abuse, specifically within the communication industry. The methodological section outlines the research design, and the empirical part presents the study results and discussion elements. The article ends with overall findings and conclusions.

Literature Review

Violence and abuse in the workplace

The definition and conceptual scope of violence are broad and approached from various perspectives (Hodson, Roscigno, Lopez 2006: 384; Popp 2017: 1; Budin et al. 2013: 308–309; Kędzia, Kowalewski 2002: 7; Howells-Johnson 2000: 508–509). The World Health Organization defines it as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (Dahlberg, Krug 2002: 5). Dahlberg and Krug expand its understanding, emphasizing that “the inclusion of the word *power*, in addition to the phrase *use of physical force*, broadens the nature of a violent act and expands the conventional understanding of violence to include those acts that result from a power relationship, including threats and intimidation” (Dahlberg, Krug 2002: 5). In their opinion it also includes “neglect or acts of omission, in addition to the more obvious violent acts of commission” (Dahlberg, Krug 2002: 5). As an effect it “should be understood to include neglect and all types of physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusive acts” (Dahlberg, Krug 2002: 5). Semantically, the term *violence* is used interchangeably with aggression (Pilch 2003: 419). Additionally, Kędzia and Kowalewski (Kędzia, Kowalewski 2002: 6) add further synonyms such as lawlessness, persecution, coercion, and harassment, understood as an act of psychological violence, while Jarosz emphasizes that in Polish-language

studies it is also used interchangeably with *abuse* (an approach we decided to adopt through all paper) (Jarosz 1995: 16).

Researchers distinguish several types of violence (Kowalczyk et al. 2016: 176–178), for example, physical violence (occurring with varying intensity, leaving physical traces, although there are perpetrators who can harm without leaving marks on the victim's body); psychological violence (leading to psychological degradation and humiliation of the victim); sexual violence (forcing unacceptable behaviors and sexual contacts); neglect (failing to meet basic physical and psychological needs); economic and disempowering violence (limiting or depriving someone of financial benefits); institutional violence (applied to people in care facilities).

There are also analyses of groups affected by violence and abuse. It emerges that one can be a victim based on factors such as age (Powell 2010: 654–658; Hightower 2004: 60–63), beliefs (Sloan et al. 2010: 90), the environment of occurrence (Hodson, Roscigno, Lopez 2006: 394), or formal frameworks (e.g., within organizational structures or legal frameworks – Sloan et al. 2010: 88). One of the frequently analyzed aspects is the relationship between violence/abuse and gender. Hightower analyzes violence against women in connection with the stages of their life (prenatal, childhood, adolescence, reproductive, old age) (Hightower 2004: 60–63). Some researchers focus on workplace violence against women in conjunction with unequal participation in organizational management, extended time for career advancement, wage discrimination, stereotypical attitudes towards parenthood, dominance in lower-paying professions, and inequalities in employment and social security (Warszewska-Makuch, Mockało 2019a: 16–19).

A recurring theme is the issue of gender discrimination, understood as the unequal treatment of women or men without justified and objective reasons (Tomaszewska 2004: 3). Gender discrimination can be direct (resulting from the mere fact of gender affiliation) or indirect (when gender is not an official criterion of inequality, but in reality, it negatively affects individuals of a particular gender, for example, in seemingly neutral laws or business practices).

Violence and abuse constitute one of the more occupational severe stressors (Ebeid et al. 2003: 76–77; Okechukwu et al. 2013: 577; Edge, Lowe 2025), affecting physical, mental, social, and professional functioning (Popp 2017: 4–5) and the sense of security (EABIZWP 2006: 63). As researchers demonstrate, it takes various forms. On the one hand, it includes actions and behaviors that insult or exclude an employee or group of employees. On the other hand, it can be con-

ducted impacting the performance of professional tasks (Okechukwu et al. 2013: 575; Sloan et al. 2010: 93–95) or psychological and physical consequences, sometimes leading even to suicide (Sloan et al. 2010: 91). Powell points out that workplace violence and abuse can be defined differently depending on the industry's specificity (in the fields of public health, substance abuse, nursing, law, and education) (Powell 2010: 656).

The authors observe that workplace violence/abuse more often affects women than men (Kowalczyk et al. 2016: 178–179). However, as noted by Hodson et al.: “There is less evidence that gender influences the likelihood of nonsexual bullying” (Hodson, Roscigno, Lopez 2006: 387). In this context, professional segregation is investigated, taking the form of either vertical or horizontal segregation (Ebeid et al. 2003: 78; Tomaszewska 2004: 9–10, Warszewska-Makuch, Moskałło 2019a: 17). The former involves higher positions in the organizational hierarchy, such as those associated with prestige, media exposure, and compensation, becoming the domain of men. On the other hand, horizontal segregation is the tendency to assign different professions to women and men. This leads to the feminization of some professional regions, considered less significant and prestigious and often receive lower compensation.

It is worth adding that in the literature, there are analyses conducted concerning specific market sectors (Sloan et al. 2010: 88; Trojanowska 2018: 94–95; Leźnicka, Zielińska-Więczkowska 2022: 2–3). Although exploratory, they identify crucial areas and can serve as a starting point for creating industry-specific solutions and increasing awareness among workers in particular sectors.

Violence/abuse in the communication industry

Analyses of published research indicate that the occurrence of violence/abuse in the communication industry (particularly among communication experts) still requires further investigation and deeper understanding. Tillman et al.'s work (Tillman et al. 2018: 58–63) points out specific consequences, such as resigning from employment. The analyses focusing on gender are also worth mentioning. Here, violence/abuse refers to depreciating the competencies of women, assigning them trivial tasks, excluding them from access to prestige, sexism, and even “penalties for motherhood” (Ebeid et al. 2003: 79). Clayton *et al.* study the situation of women in the public relations (PR) industry, focusing on the

stereotypical perception of women as employees in an organizational culture characterized by high job dynamics, overtime work, and prioritizing work over family life (Clayton et al. 2021: 5–51). Among communication practitioners in 42 European countries, online surveys were conducted on managerial skills, differences in communication styles, and traditional views on differences between men and women in PR (Tench, Topić, Moreno 2017: 231–248).

The discussed topic is the subject of industry analyses, too. For instance, a study by Łukasiuk et al (Łukasiuk, Nawrocka, Leśniak 2022: 1) revealed that 63% of male respondents do not perceive discrimination against women in the workplace to be an issue, even believing that such a problem does not exist. Additionally, an analysis by the Polish Marketing Communication Association-SAR (Nowymarketing.pl 2016: 1) indicated a prevalence of men in top-ranking positions in companies with similar remuneration for comparable positions. It is also crucial to consider the findings of a study conducted by The Polish Public Relations Consultancies Association-ZFPR (ZFPR 2021: 1). This research identified barriers hindering women's advancement, including childcare responsibilities, an imbalance between professional and private life in higher positions, lack of transparency in recruitment and promotions, absence of flexible or family-friendly employment policies preventing women from advancing to higher positions, and lower female activity in direct efforts to advance. The same study examined PR firms' support for the professional development of women, negative experiences of women in the workplace related to motherhood, gender diversity in PR firm boards, the pace of advancement for different social groups in Polish public relations companies, perceptions of the presence of women in the boards of Polish PR firms, and gender-related pay disparities.

The above review reveals specific academic gaps. Among studies concerning the broader area of workplace violence/abuse based on gender, primary research focuses on organizational and cultural aspects, examining how women function in the workplace. Variables such as stress, workload, work intensity, and working hours pose a challenge for women due to their stereotypical yet strongly defined social role (mother, family caregiver) in the Polish context. However, there is little emphasis on gender vs. prejudice in the workplace and opportunities for professional advancement. Additionally, there is a noticeable academic gap regarding issues related to sexuality and violence/abuse in this particular context.

Methodology

In this text, we attempt to find answers to the main research question arising from the identified academic gaps, i.e., whether (and to what extent) gender differentiates the responses of communication experts in the context of workplace violence/abuse.

We have also formulated detailed research questions to specify the scope of our analysis: RQ1) Are there gender-related prejudices in the workplace, including obstacles to success or professional satisfaction?; RQ2) Does gender matter for professional advancement, i.e., does it influence the overlooking or facilitation of developmental opportunities?; RQ3) Are there unwanted remarks of a sexual nature or advances from a superior or colleague in the workplace?

We do not formulate hypotheses due to the exploratory nature of the analysis. Our empirical work was based on a quantitative method, conducted through survey research using a questionnaire.

Research tool

The survey was created for the 'Wellbeing in Public Relations and Communications Industries' project. It is implemented by the EUPRERA network on 'Women in PR' led by Dr Martina Topic from Leeds Beckett University. Representatives from research institutions from the United Kingdom, Romania, Switzerland, Jordan, Sweden, and Poland participated in the project. The research group collectively developed the final version of the questionnaire to make the questions as universally applicable as possible in each participating country.³

Its main objective was to explore the phenomenon of well-being in public relations and communications industries regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or work experience, as we wanted to reach the most comprehensive possible perspective of the branch. We wanted to explore the extent of well-being as an issue in communications industries, the differences between genders, and the differences between countries.

In addition to information about the research goals, anonymity, data collection, and contact details, the survey included blocks of multiple-choice questions regarding:

1. demographics (eight questions about gender, age, marital status, education, ethnicity, language, number of household members, and number of children);

³ The process of building the questionnaire is described in: Anton, Moise 2024.

2. professional data (four questions about industry type, professional experience, weekly working hours, and employment type: full-time or part-time employee or a freelancer).

The response to the last statement defined the further course of the survey. Individuals who selected the option “full-time or part-time employee” answered questions about:

- the nature of work in the organization (four single-choice statements about the type of employment sector, professional position, organization size, and length of employment);
- employer engagement (nine statements related to the scope of direct engagement with the line manager, presented on the Likert scale⁴);
- work culture and relationships (five statements referring to co-workers);
- employee engagement (nine statements regarding feelings about the organisation);
- work-life balance (ten statements referring to how one can choose and control some parts of work and private time);
- work-life conflict (nine statements referring to perceived feelings and experiences with current work);
- job satisfaction, wellbeing and networking (eleven statements referring to the satisfaction with work and a role of networking);
- perceived gender discrimination & sexual harassment (four statements).

Individuals who selected the "freelancer" option additionally answered questions about:

- the nature of work in the organization (two single-choice statements about the type of employment sector and length of employment);
- becoming a freelancer (nine statements presented on the Likert scale⁵);
- relationships and support (five statements about the developed relationships);
- the shape of the support the freelancer received (five statements);
- the shape of the support the freelancer offered to the other (five statements);
- work and community engagement (nine statements referring to perceived feelings about the work and the sense of connection with the freelance communities).

The last section of the survey contained an optional comments section. The questionnaire formulated in this way received approval from the research ethics committee granted by Leeds Beckett University on April 21, 2022. We agreed that participation in the study should be vol-

⁴ All subsequent questions for employees included statements with a Likert scale.

⁵ As above.

untary, confidential and anonymous. We did not collect any cookies and thus no one could be identified when participating. Additionally, we decided to distribute the survey as a link to a questionnaire placed on Google Forms. To increase responsiveness, we allowed its distribution in a bilingual version (in English and the national language of each country) using various online platforms such as our university websites, social media profiles, and personal contacts. Our goal was to reach individuals professionally involved in communication.

The research implementation in Poland

In Poland, the collection of bilingual surveys started in May 2023 and, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, mainly relied on sharing the link to the research tool with those who had previously agreed to participate. During the aggregation of responses (we aimed to obtain at least 100 correctly and fully completed surveys), we did not encounter any additional questions or concerns from the respondents. After achieving the desired return level at the end of September 2023, with the approval of the research coordinator, we closed the collection of questionnaires.

For this paper, we decided to analyze independent variables related to the gender and age of respondents, the sector in which they are employed, the size of the organization, and the length of their professional experience in it. Our dependent variables were obtained from a block of four statements related to perceived gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which – as literature review proved – are a part of violence/abuse phenomena.

Respondents chose one of six answers: does not apply, never, rarely, sometimes, often, and very often). These were:

- I have perceived gender-specific biases or obstacles to my career success or satisfaction by gender in my work environment;
- In my professional career, I have been left out of opportunities for professional advancement based on gender;
- In my professional career, I have had increased opportunities for professional advancement based on gender;
- In my professional career, I have encountered unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances by a superior or colleague.

To focus on identifying the extent of workplace violence/abuse among Polish communication experts, we decided to present data only confirming its occurrence. This means that we combined responses rare-

ly and sometimes, as well as often and very often, allowing us to indicate the sporadic or repeated occurrence of these situations in respondents' lives.

Results

General characteristics of participants

122 individuals completed the survey, of which 66% were women, 34% were men, and one did not identify with any gender.⁶ Survey participants ranged from 20 to 71 years old. Among women, nearly 60% fell within the age range of 26 to 45, with a median age of 40. Similarly, among men, the median age was 40, but 60% were 36 to 55 years. Taking into account the industries in which the respondents worked, the most commonly chosen sectors were public relations (51% women and 41% men), corporate communications (18% women and 29% men), and marketing (18% women and 12% men). The three mentioned industries accounted for over 80% of the respondents' choices. Both male and female participants most frequently emphasized having over ten years of experience in their current industry (over 70%). Among women, the overwhelming majority worked in the private sector (82%), while among men, it was split between the private sector (64%) and the public sector (36%). Most respondents were employed in small and medium-sized companies rather than large ones (except that men were most frequently employed in companies with over 1000 employees).

Detailed data: Gender biases and professional success and satisfaction

The presence of gender biases, including obstacles to professional success or satisfaction, was confirmed by one-third of men and two-thirds of women. Specifically, 33% of women and 27% of men perceived them occasionally, while almost one-third of women and 7% of men indicated frequent or very frequent occurrences. The most convinced about this problem were individuals between 26 and 35 years old, with 33% perceiving it rarely and 29% frequently or very frequently. Employees most strongly expressed this belief with a minimum of six years of experience in their current posi-

⁶ We do not present results for non-binary individuals due to their low representation.

tion (58% confirmed the periodicity of the problem, and 33% its highest intensity). Those with shorter professional experience were more skeptical; for example, 60% of respondents with less than five years of work experience did not observe biases in the workplace. A detailed distribution of data based on gender presents Figure 1.

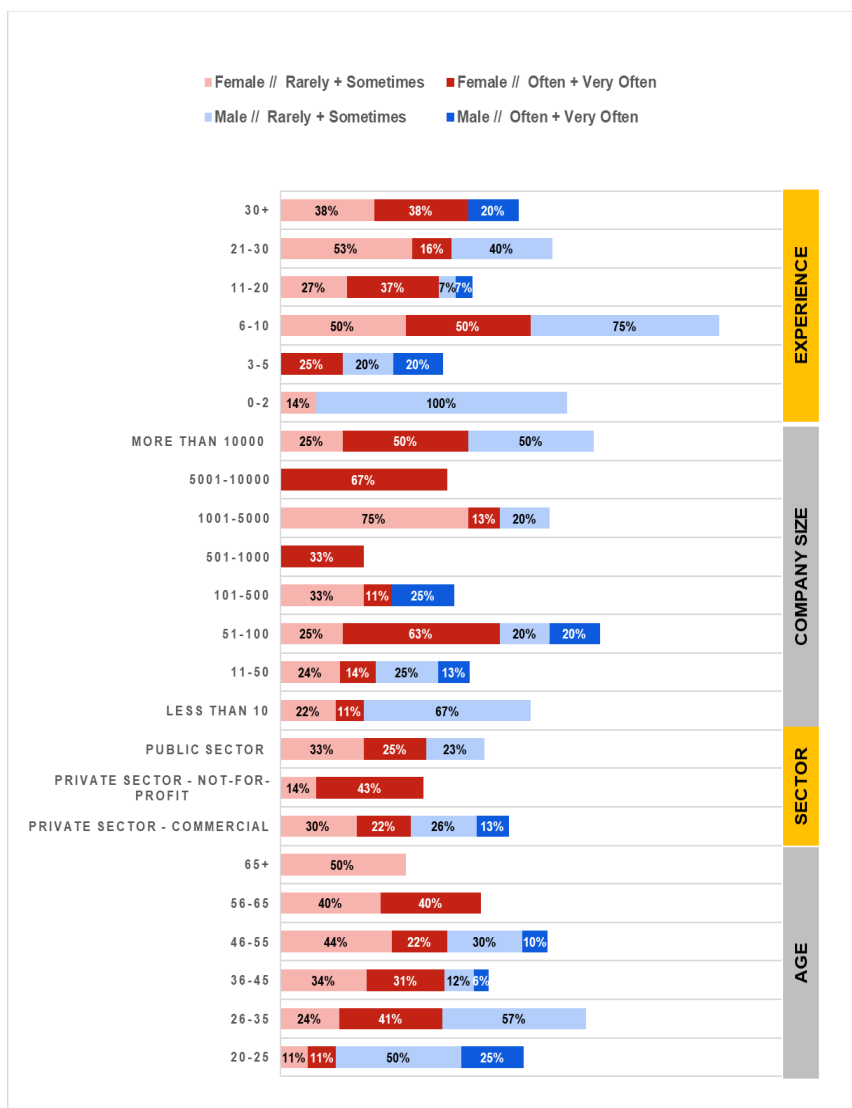


Figure 1. "I have perceived gender-specific biases or obstacles to my career success or satisfaction by gender in my work environment" (rarely + sometimes, often + very often)

Source: own work, n=122.

Analyzing the responses more closely by age categories, a pattern can be observed. The older the men, the less aware they were of gender bias in the workplace. In the age group up to 25, 75% of men noticed the problem (including 25% indicating its frequent occurrence), while in the age group up to 35, only sporadic occurrence was confirmed by 57% of men. Importantly, none of the men above 55 years old observed the phenomenon.

Women presented a higher and age-independent awareness of gender-related biases. The indication of its frequent and widespread occurrence ranged around 35% (even reaching 40% in the age group of 56–65 years), while sporadic awareness increased with the respondents' age, reaching a peak above 46 years (44%).

Responses from women and men also differed depending on the employment sector. Only 23% of men working in public institutions confirmed the occasional occurrence of the observed behaviors. In private organizations, this was followed by almost 40% of respondents, while in NGOs, no one reported such experiences. On the other hand, in the public sector and NGOs, nearly 60% of female respondents experienced biases. In the private commercial industry, it was over 50% (there is also repeatability in the very often indicated responses). It is worth noting that negative responses from women (never) were around 40%, which was 20% lower than those from men.

The analysis of responses in terms of the size of enterprises showed that women in companies employing more than 50 people more often encountered biases (in each case, the sum of their responses exceeded the sum of responses from men; moreover, in companies with 51–100 employees and 5001–10000 employees, no man reported experiencing discrimination). Only once did men observe the discussed problem more often: 67% of respondents (and 33% of female respondents) encountered it in companies with fewer than ten employees.

Taking into account professional experience, discriminatory behaviors were observed by all men with less than two years of experience (and 14% of women). Responses from individuals who worked for six to 10 years drew attention. Here, the problem's existence was confirmed by 100% of women and 75% of men. In subsequent time intervals, prejudices were experienced mainly by women. The scale of their perception increased from 63% for a work experience of 11–20 years, through 68% for the range of 21–30 years, up to 75% for an experience exceeding 31 years (corresponding responses from men were 14%, 40%, and 20%, respectively).

Detailed data: gender and professional advancement
(bypassing or facilitating development opportunities)

Women confirmed that gender negatively affected their opportunities for advancement: 18% encountered this often or very often, and 36% rarely or sometimes. 41% of surveyed women had no such experiences, while among men, over 80% provided negative responses. The detailed distribution of data by gender is presented in Figure 2.

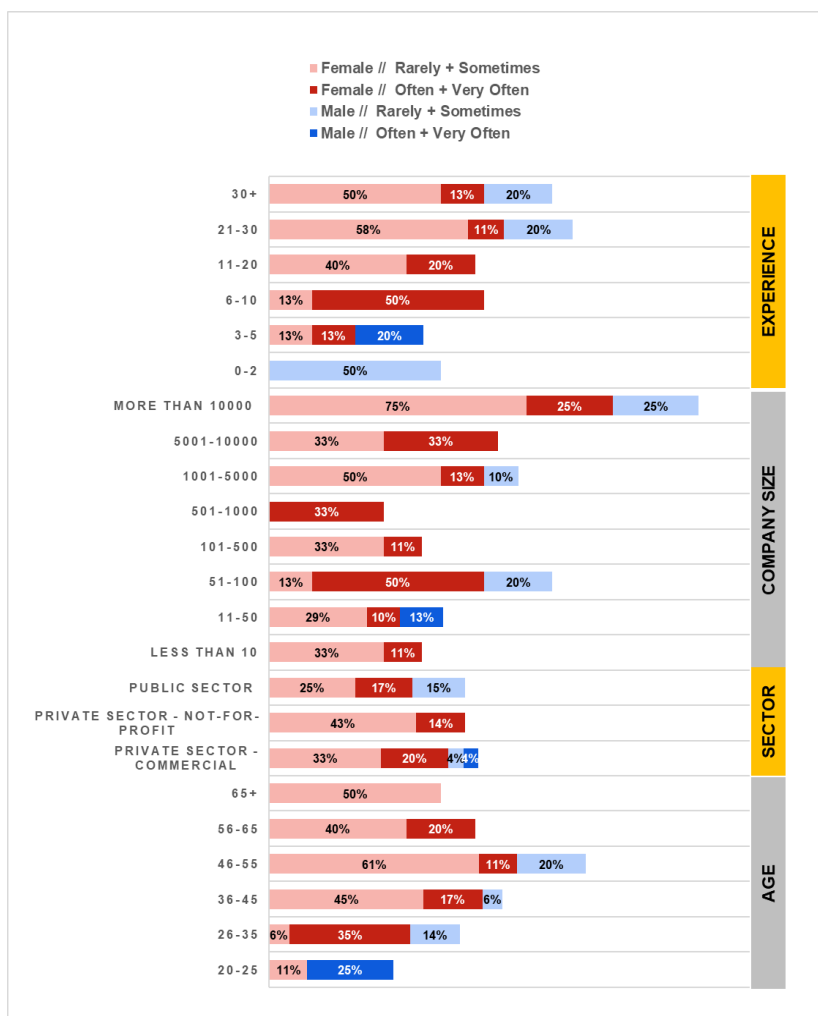


Figure 2. "In my professional career, I have been left out of opportunities for professional advancement based on gender" (rarely + sometimes, often + very often)

Source: own work, n=122.

As seen, the combined affirmative responses for women in age groups over 36 reached over 50%. Three results are noteworthy. Every third woman aged 26–35 very often felt that she did not receive a promotion due to gender, and almost three-quarters of those surveyed between 46 and 55 experienced this to varying degrees. In contrast, only 11% of women under 25 faced it.

However, the situation was somewhat different for men. Firstly, 25% of the youngest declared that being overlooked for promotion was very often related to their gender. Secondly, men between the ages of 26 and 55 moderately felt this form of prejudice. Thirdly, 100% of men above 56 did not observe it. It is worth adding that the age groups that provided the most negative responses (never) were women under 25 years old (eight out of nine respondents) and men over 25 years old (in the age group 26–35 years – 86%, in 36–45 years – 82%, and all above 56 years).

Women working in the private sector less frequently indicated a negative response (never) than those working in the public sector (43% vs. 58%). At the same time, men in both the private and public sectors denied the occurrence of the discussed phenomenon in 80% of cases. Only two (out of 13) men working in the public sector and two (out of 23) from the private sector confirmed that they had occasionally experienced such behaviors. NGOs hindered women's advancement opportunities (a total of 57%) while not at all for men.

Considering the size of the company where the respondents worked, the analyzed phenomenon intensified with the increase in size. In organizations employing fewer than 50 employees, about 10% of women were often or very often bypassed in promotions. This value increased to 50% in companies employing up to 100 people. One in three women responded similarly in companies with between 500 and 5000 employees. In the most prominent companies, all women encountered this problem (75% occasionally and 25% frequently). In the group of men, only one respondent indicated the response “frequently” (out of 41 surveyed), and it applied to a company with up to 50 employees. Another three men believed that the phenomenon occurs sometimes (it concerned companies with up to 100 and 1000 employees and over 10,000).

Only men indicated the sporadic occurrence of this phenomenon among employees with the shortest tenure. In all other time intervals, women more often confirmed that they were bypassed in promotions due to gender, and the scale of these confirmations never dropped below 60% among women with tenure exceeding six years (women working from six to 10 years felt this most acutely).

We also asked respondents whether their gender facilitated professional advancement or provided such opportunities. In the overall calculation, 68% of men and 58% of women denied this (38% rarely or sometimes saw such opportunities, and 3% often or very often). Employees under 25 (75%) and over 55 (75%) also did not encounter this situation. Responses were similar in age groups between 26 and 55 years old: 55% of respondents did not notice gender-based advancement opportunities, and 35% observed them occasionally. Regarding work experience, those working for six to 10 years were most likely to give affirmative answers (58% sometimes saw this career development opportunity, but in other groups, these responses appeared no more than 33% of the time). The detailed distribution of data by gender is presented in Figure 3.

Detailed analysis revealed that women between 36 and 45 years old most often confirmed the occurrence of this phenomenon (52%). For other age groups, the values were similar, averaging 30%. This meant that one in three women, regardless of age, had the opportunity for advancement due to their gender. In the case of men, only one in 10 in the 46–55 age group often noted this. Interestingly, not a single respondent over 56 encountered this form of bias. According to men, this situation occurred most frequently in the public sector (almost twice as often as in the private sector and 100% more usually than in NGOs). On the other hand, among women, indications of rarely and sometimes dominated (around 42% for the public sector and NGOs).

As for the size of the company, the only unequivocally positive answers – both for men and women – can be pointed out for organizations employing between 50 and 100 employees, where 11% of women and 25% of men declared frequent or widespread encounters with the use of gender for professional advancement. Such opportunities, albeit rare or occasional, were seen by women in large companies employing over 1000 employees.

Regarding professional experience, respondents' responses about working in the industry for six to 10 years stood out the most: more than 60% of women and 50% of men in this group perceived occasional opportunities for advancement due to gender. Interestingly, among those with up to five years of professional experience, men more often responded affirmatively (especially those who had worked for the shortest time). Above five years of experience, the situation reversed, with women more frequently observing possibilities regarding the discussed path of advancement.

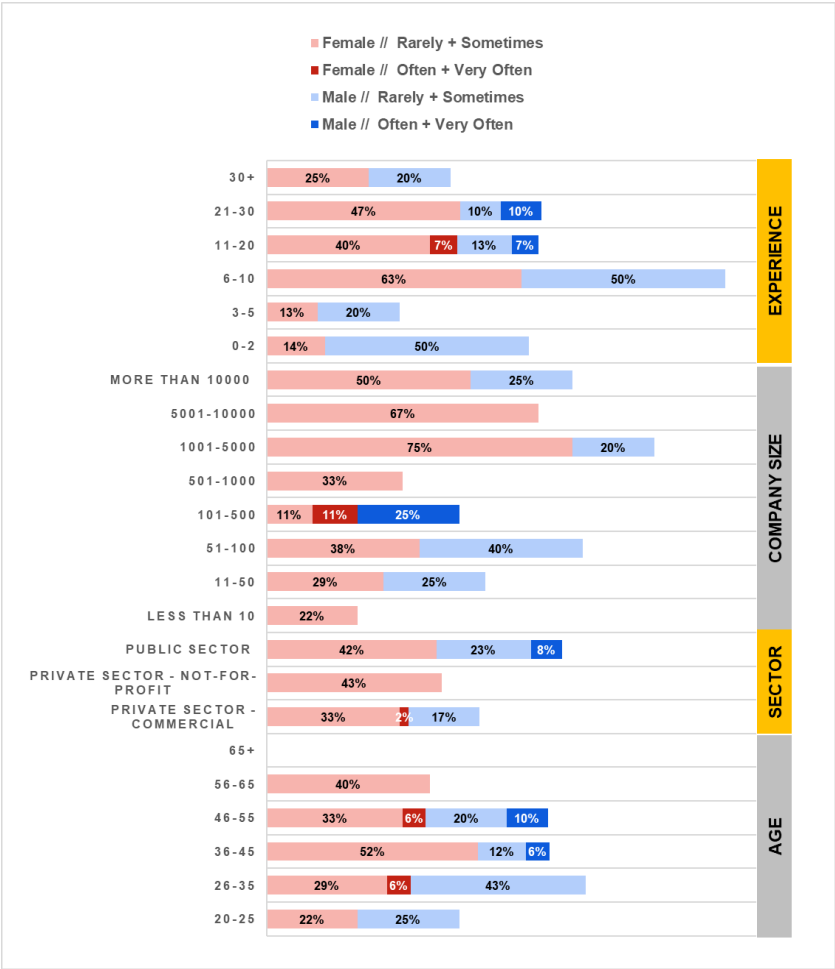


Figure 3. “In my professional career, I have had increased opportunities for professional advancement based on gender” (rarely + sometimes, often + very often)
Source: own work, n=122.

Detailed data: gender and unwanted sexual comments or advances from a supervisor or colleague

Responses from women and men differed significantly: 70% of women experienced such behaviors, while only 34% of men did. Inappropriate behaviors were most common among individuals between the ages of 26 and 35 (30% of them admitted that it happened very often). It was also found that one in three people, regardless of the length of work

experience, sporadically faced harassment. Often and very often, this applied to individuals with over five years of professional experience (42% of respondents answered this way). The detailed distribution of data by gender is presented in Figure 4.

Differences in the perception of the problem by women and men became even more noticeable when we analyzed the subcategories of respondents: 44% of the youngest women and, at times, 50% of young men encountered the issue. Older men between the ages of 26 and 55 also experienced it (responses confirming widespread occurrences of this phenomenon were noted). Interestingly, none of the men over 56 experienced harassment. However, it cannot be denied that women were more often exposed to sexually violent and abusive behaviors in the workplace: the range of responses never dropped below 40%, and in the case of three age subgroups, it gained particularly noticeable strength. Firstly, over 40% of women between the ages of 26 and 35 encountered harassment very frequently. Secondly, a total of 89% of women aged 46–55 had dealt with this form of violence/abuse, and half of the respondents over 65 experienced it very frequently.

Women were exposed to unwanted behaviors in each of the surveyed sectors. The occurrence was confirmed by approximately 60% of respondents from the public sector and NGOs, but harassment was very frequent in the environment of non-governmental organizations. In turn, the highest number of reports was noted in the private commercial sector, both for women and men (who never experienced this issue while working in NGOs).

As for the company's size, 100% of men employed in companies with 501 to 1000 and 5001 to 10,000 employees confirmed occasional occurrences of harassment. In the case of the smallest companies, almost 70% of respondents expressed the same opinion. In the largest enterprises (over 10,000 people), not a single man experienced harassment. Concerning women, the issue was particularly pronounced among those working in companies employing 51 to 500 and 1001–5000 people. In both cases, the overall level of confirmations exceeded 70%.

Half the men with the shortest professional experience experienced frequent harassment at work. Notably, the scale of affirmative responses remained at a significant level in subsequent time intervals, never dropping significantly below 30%. Respondents with the most extensive professional experience also encountered intense unwanted behaviors (e.g., every fifth employee with over thirty years of work experience). However, women working in the 6-10 year range were most exposed to harassment. As it turns out, 90% of them experienced this, with 50% indicating very frequent occur-

rences of this problem. Moreover, in each seniority group, except for newly hired women, the rate of positive responses was above 60%.

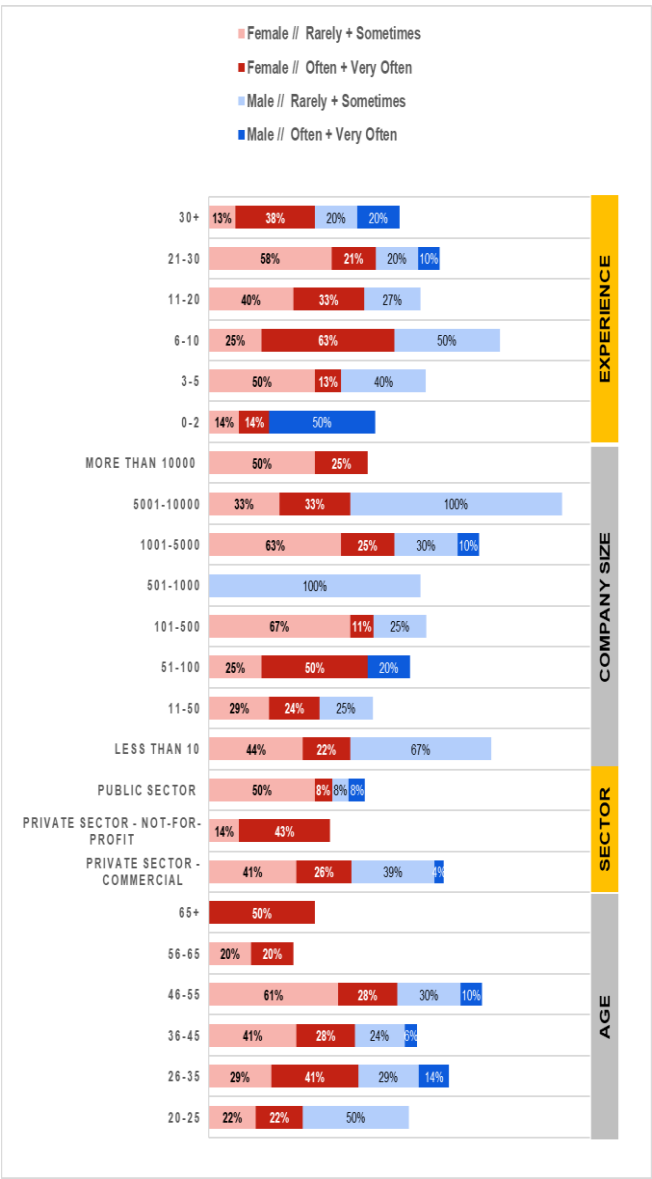


Figure 4. “In my professional career, I have encountered unwanted sexual comments, attention, or advances by a superior or colleague” (rarely+ sometimes, often + very often)

Source: own work, n=122.

Discussion and Conclusions

This paper successfully achieved its objectives. By taking Dahlberg and Krug's (2002) broader understanding of violence/abuse, the study focused on the perception of this phenomenon in the workplace among Polish communication experts, with a primary emphasis on how gender might differentiate responses regarding the prevalence of biases, influence professional development, and contribute to experiencing sexual harassment.

Consequently, the research questions were positively addressed. The study unequivocally confirmed that being a woman or a man does impact the scale and perception of workplace violence/abuse. Both groups acknowledged that gender can be a barrier to success or professional satisfaction, affecting advancement to higher positions and concentrating unwanted sexual remarks or advances from superiors or colleagues.

Such a summary is, however, an obvious generalization, not capturing the nuance of the results we obtained. A cross-sectional look at the data shows that the scale of violence/abuse in the environment of communication experts (ranging from psychological to physical, from verbal to non-verbal, from direct to indirect) is significantly visible. Its extent may be surprising, mainly since the idea of communication (even when conducted professionally and for payment) is a complete denial of all kinds of biases and discrimination. Its DNA includes higher values, such as concern for reputation, transparency, maintaining good relationships with the environment, mutual respect, and a commitment to fairness and credibility. It turns out that part of the industry that has incorporated such values into its professional codes of ethics (ZFPR 2019: 1) seems not to adhere to them. As a result, one can infer that an industry (or at least the subset we examined) that should be an example of inclusivity and equality seems ineffective in implementing its principles in this regard. Such a strong statement appears to be supported by detailed data.

It is worth noting that gender was an obstacle to success or satisfaction for one-third of men and two-thirds of women (with almost one-third of women frequently and very frequently perceiving it, and only one in ten men); nearly 60% of women believed that gender had a negative impact on advancement opportunities (over 80% of men had no such experiences). Interestingly, both groups of respondents mainly claimed that gender did not enable their advancement (almost 70% of men and 60% of women). In terms of experiencing harassment, 70% of women and 34% of men reported facing it. Therefore, it is clear that women much more often confirm the occurrence of violent/abusive situations (in

three out of four questions), and the differences in responses are significant. In this context, the results regarding gender as a factor supporting career development are interesting. Most employees do not see a correlation between gender and advancement. One can assume that respondents believe that factors other than those independent of them may contribute to success and, conversely, failure – quite the opposite (although this may slightly more often concern men, especially those over 55 years of age and employed in large enterprises).

It seems that non-profit institutions are not very favorable to women, as only women in these institutions reported biases or limitations in advancement. In other cases, the private sector tends to dominate, but the data regarding the public sector also fails to inspire optimism.

The remaining responses related to age and professional experience are interesting. It is worth noting that there is evidence of a particular, although not entirely, generational shift here. According to younger and less-experienced men, the level of perceived gender-based bias and job satisfaction is lower than in the case of women from the same groups. The same happens in the case of being denied advancement opportunities due to gender and being the subject of unwanted comments and advances – in these situations; men also confirm such occurrences. Responses undergo a general change with the age and experience of the respondents. In this case, the oldest and longest-employed women feel the most substantial negative impact of their gender on job satisfaction and career development and the positive effects of receiving unwanted opinions and behaviors. This observation may be a consequence of movements like #metoo, proving the scale of long-standing harassment of women in social, political, cultural, and professional life. Awareness of the scale of this problem and the initiation of pro-educational activities strengthen the “woke” culture, actively combating exclusions, inequalities, and harassment. Although its idea and goals are undeniably important, it is worth pointing out the emerging danger, namely the pendulum of biases and persecutions swinging in the other direction (in this case, towards young men). This is precisely what the results of our research may be signalling.

Our study has certain limitations. Firstly, we conducted it on a non-representative sample (although the predominance of women is not a limitation in practice, as the profession of communication experts is feminized (Nowymarketing.pl 2016: 1). Secondly, the questions in the violence/abuse-related block were few and thus did not provide a complete picture of the scale of unwanted behaviors. Thirdly, as a declarative study, the survey allows for obtaining subjective and quantitative data,

requiring significant panel discussion or in-depth interviews. Fourthly, the results relate to the Polish environment and, apart from comparing genders, do not have a comparative character.

However, we believe that the results presented here are significant as they contribute an alarming voice to the discussion about the actual state of inclusivity, considered from multiple perspectives, which concerns every gender, age, or length of employment. It also provokes a debate about the fundamental role of ethics in the communication expert profession, caught between industry codes and the actual morality of its representatives. It may also inspire a more profound exploration of this topic by implementing new research methods and including results from other countries. This would help identify potential differences between post-Soviet states, where the communication industry essentially emerged after the fall of communism, and Anglo-Saxon countries, which have a long tradition in this field.

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