

Executive summary: "The State of Sexism"

The full report is available here <https://jump.eu.com/resources/sexism/>



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Sexism is a recurring theme throughout women's lives

Sexism is a common thread that connects women across generations, backgrounds and cultures. The experience of sexism is multifaceted and can be experienced from one person to another very differently, but it remains a shared reality throughout many women's lives. Measuring this experience makes the invisible visible, so that by revealing it, sexism can be eliminated. This is the ambition of the JUMP study: to transform the common thread of sexism into the golden thread of equality.

First survey in 2016, second in 2024.

JUMP, a specialist in diversity, equality and inclusion in the workplace, has been working for twenty years to build a more equitable and inclusive society. The main obstacle to true equality between women and men remains sexism, an ideology based on the premise that women are inferior to men.

In 2016, we conducted the first ever survey on sexism in Belgium. 3,294 women responded. The results were staggering and led us to develop a range of free tools to combat this structural discrimination, as well as training programmes for businesses, institutions, schools and universities.

We conducted a new survey in 2024 focusing on discrimination in the workplace to assess the extent of the impact of the #MeToo movement. 5,214 people responded, including around 1,000 men via a separate questionnaire. We read all 3,976 testimonials, which included personal stories and messages of gratitude.

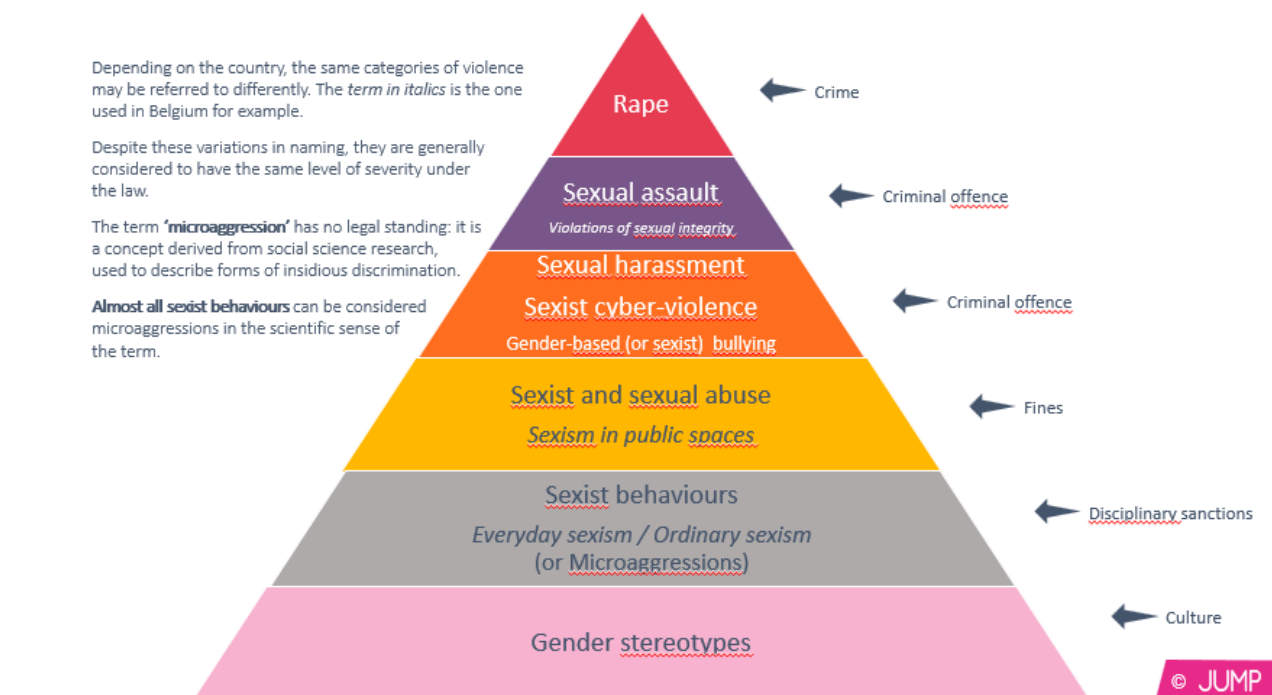
"This survey made me realise how deeply rooted sexism is in our daily lives. Thank you for raising awareness on this."

98% of female respondents say they have **EXPERIENCED** sexism at least once

97% of male respondents say they have **WITNESSED** it

The pyramid of sexist and sexual violences

Sexism is an ideology based on the belief that women are inferior to men, that manifests itself through a range of behaviours and actions, from seemingly harmless comments to extremely serious acts of rape and murder. High Council for Gender Equality (France)



In both the 2016 and 2024 surveys, sexism continued to be perceived as the least serious form of discrimination compared with racism, antisemitism and homophobia. The main shift lies in men's perceptions: the proportion who consider sexism to be "very serious" increased from 53% in 2016 to 66% in 2024.

Among women, perceptions of the severity of sexism vary with age. The younger women are, the less they tolerate it. The older they are, the more they have come to accept this constant violence as if it were normal (81% aged 35 or less consider sexism "very serious", but only 55% of those aged 65 or more do so).

"It took me years to understand that what I had experienced was sexism." (a woman)

While men have almost caught up with women in their perceptions of the severity of sexist behaviours ("very serious" for 66% of men compared to 70% of women), many more men than women believe that there is now less sexism than there was in 2024: 43% of men compared to 29% of women.



The impact of #MeToo...

Between 2016 and 2024...

- 9 out of 10 people are better able to identify sexism
- 8 out of 10 feel they know how to respond better
- 9 out of 10 women and 8 out of 10 men are calling for more measures to combat sexism

"Some women dared to speak out in the media. That helped me change some of my behaviours that were not appropriate." (a man).

... stronger in France

While awareness of sexism has evolved everywhere, there is nevertheless an interesting difference between France and Belgium. The frequency of sexism in the workplace is similar in both countries, but it is slightly more tolerated in Belgium. In particular, nearly 20% of female managers in Belgium say they do not know how to respond to sexism any better than they did 10 years ago. In France, this figure is only 10%.

This greater ability of French women to identify and respond to sexism is likely the result of an extensive legal framework against sexist and sexual violence that is unique in Europe.

In Belgium, sexism is not mentioned specifically in the Law on Well-being at Work, unlike in France, where ordinary sexist behaviours are identified and explained in the Labour Code and allows employers to sanction employees even if there is no sexual intent or connotation.

In France, depending on their size, companies are required to:

- Prevent sexism by identifying risks to physical and mental health (including *ordinary sexism, sexist behaviour, sexual harassment, and psychological harassment*)
- Establish an effective reporting procedure that is known to all
- Address and punish sexist behaviour
- Appoint designated person or "trusted person" on sexism
- Train HR (human resources managers) and managers
- Measure gender inequalities (Equality Index)
- Negotiating gender equality measures with trade unions

"The most effective tool has been the French law on sexism and sexual violence at work. When there are a framework and obligations, things change."

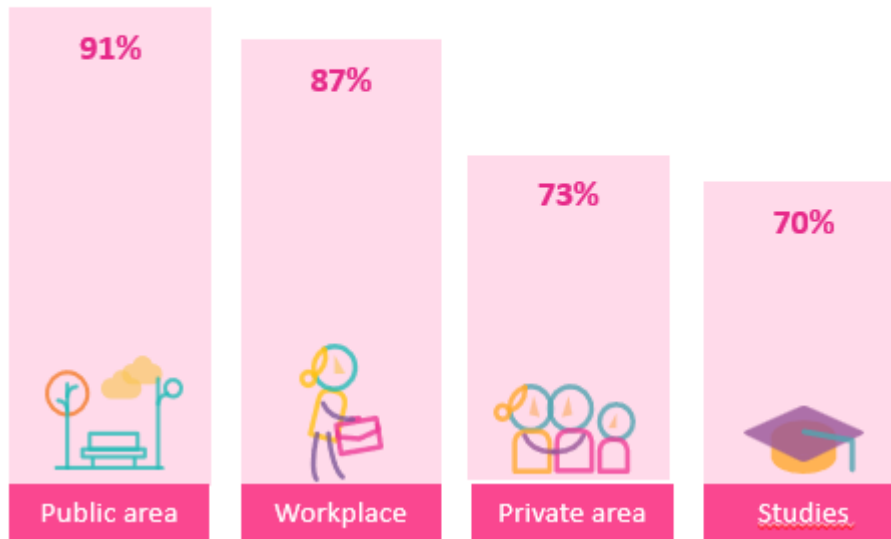
(a woman)

Women's experiences



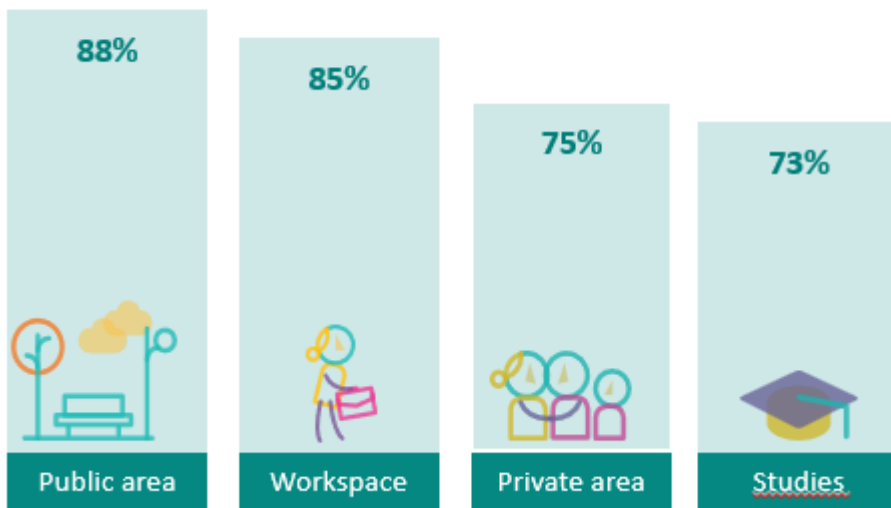
Have you ever been a **VICTIM** of sexist behaviours?

Sum of "**sometimes**" and "**often**" responses among women



Have you ever been a **WITNESS** to sexist behaviours?

Sum of "**sometimes**" and "**often**" responses among men



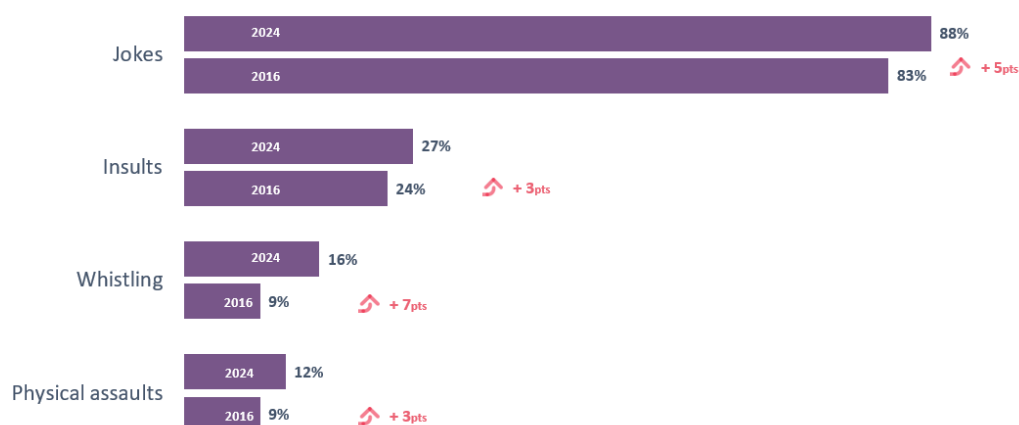
"During an interview, I was asked to guarantee that I would not have children in the coming years in order to get the job."

"My colleagues look at pornographic photos together at the office."

"During a technical explanation, the professor only addressed my male colleague, even though it was my project."

The responses from over 4,000 women reveal the systemic nature of sexism and the consistent link between different types of situations. Across education and the workplace, in both private and public spheres, from childhood to retirement, from female blue-collar workers to executives, from inappropriate comments to rape, these experiences form a pattern. This pattern reinforces and reaffirms the hierarchy where men dominate women and prevents women from taking their rightful place in all levels of society, including at work. These women also describe the hidden part of the iceberg of sexist and sexual violence: silent suffering, withdrawal, avoidance strategies, lack of reporting even the most serious incidents, lack of support, internalisation of violence, etc.

 All forms of sexism experienced by women in the workplace are on the rise
Workplace Comparison 2016 – 2024 (Multiple responses possible)



Increased awareness and knowledge of sexism may explain the rise in the reporting of these unacceptable behaviours. But it also highlights the fact that they remain omnipresent.

The most common behaviours, such as inappropriate jokes or comments, are the most frequent. They reflect an implicit cultural tolerance for behaviours that reinforce stereotypes and can create a hostile work environment.

Discrimination in the workplace illustrates how sexism is not limited to isolated acts but also influences career opportunities and equal opportunities.

"My contributions to projects were downplayed, saying they were 'children's projects'."

"I had to justify my technical skills because my male colleagues were automatically considered more credible."

"I was excluded from informal discussions between men that directly impacted projects I was working on."

The existence of more serious forms of violence, such as sexual harassment, gender-based bullying, or sexual assault, although less common statistically, reveals the possible consequences of trivialising sexist microaggressions.

"My boss kissed me on the mouth instead of giving me a kiss on the cheek."

Discrimination has harmful and lasting repercussions on people's physical and mental health, as well as on their well-being, motivation and performance at work.

In Belgium:

- **70%** of long-term work incapacity (lasting more than six months) due to burnout or anxiety disorders concern women.
- The number of people in long-term work incapacity between 1996 and 2022 increased by 345% for women, compared to 71% for men.
- **60%** of long-term work incapacity people are women. This figure rises to 80% in the over-55 age group.

The Verian report for the Laboratoire de l'Égalité (France, 2024) clearly shows that sexist behaviours is an aggravating factor in psychosocial risks for women at work. The link between this repeated violence and mental exhaustion is now well documented. In other countries, however, this link remains completely ignored and is not included in either risk analyses or policies on well-being at work.

When suffering is cheaper than reporting it

More than three-quarters of women do not report* what they are subjected to. And when they do, two-thirds are not protected.

(* Reporting informs that a potentially problematic event has taken place, while a complaint is an official procedure initiated with an authority to request an investigation or sanction.)

Have you ever reported sexist behaviours to the authorities?



"Reporting sexist behaviour to male superiors? Are you kidding?"

"Sexist jokes were considered humour and not accepting them made me someone without a sense of humour."

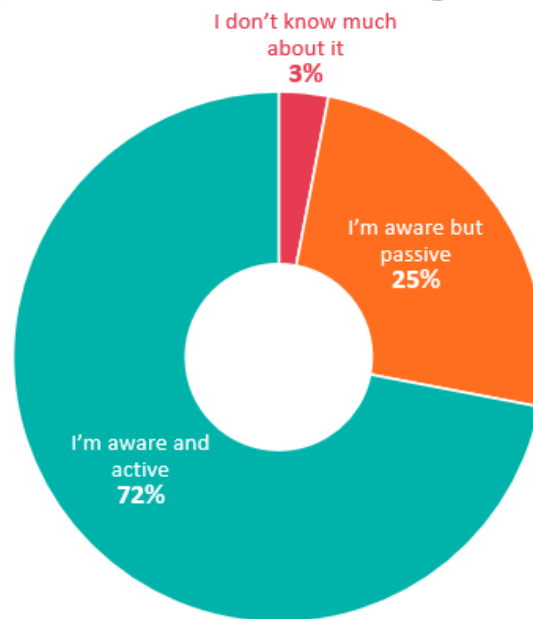
"I didn't file a report because the HR manager dissuaded me. She had noticed that previous complaints had harmed the women who filed them."

Men and sexism

Our male respondents (nearly 1,000) are mainly men who are already aware of sexism and sexual violences. They describe themselves as being the most knowledgeable on the subject. Today, there is a great deal of interest in the rise of male supremacists' influencers, but less attention is paid to the opposite end of the spectrum, where men are convinced that they are "on the right side" when, in fact, they collectively maintain a certain illusion about their own position.

They underestimate the number and severity of incidents, find it difficult to talk about them, rarely intervene when they witness them, even though most describe themselves as very active, and still have many blind spots when it comes to sexist and sexual violence. Even though their testimonies describe a desire to improve the situation, their awareness, knowledge of the subject and ability to intervene are evolving only very slowly.

How do you perceive your commitment to combating sexism?



While three-quarters of respondents say they fight sexism, only one in three men say they regularly react when they witness sexism, and one in five admit they never react, especially when it comes to acts committed in public spaces. But this is still much more than what women report: in less than 2% of cases, support comes from a single man or several men. It is almost always women who help other women!

Reasons for inaction cited by men:

37% I didn't know what to do

28% I didn't feel like reacting / I don't think it's my role to react

27% I was afraid of the consequences

25% I don't know why

23% I was afraid of doing the wrong thing

Men's perception of themselves does not reflect the reality of women who have been aggressed.

Despite widespread awareness, men are still not very active when it comes to taking concrete action against sexism. This is particularly true when we consider the bias of this study, which probably over-represents men who are more savvy in sexist violences.

Victims report that men intervene when women who are witnesses have already reacted. The testimonies collected in the survey confirm that men often need women to identify the problem and react before they feel empowered to do so themselves.

"Women try to react, but they can't always. Where are the men?" (a woman)

"I can't count the number of times men have looked away (on the underground) when I needed their help." (a woman)

"It seemed harmless to me. There was a kind of unspoken alliance between men." (a man)

"Sometimes I don't see the problem. Especially in business. But I realise that women don't have the same opportunities!" (a man)

"Ladies, fight for yourselves, no one else will do it for you." (a man)

Why is sexism political?

Sexist behaviours are political because it creates a hierarchy between the sexes, influences the distribution of power, resources and work, and shapes the rules, norms and institutions that govern our lives. It is not limited to individual behaviour: it is part of a social system that benefits men and disadvantages women, and therefore requires political, collective and structural responses.

Reporting it is often perceived as a betrayal of the social order; however, it is an essential act that enables organisations to recognise the reality of the problem and put in place the necessary measures to protect everyone.

Respect and equal dignity should no longer be considered solely as moral obligations, but as legal obligations and a powerful lever for ensuring the well-being and performance of teams.

"The prevailing feeling is one of injustice. Social peace depends on women's silence." (a woman)

This report is just one step: JUMP will continue to transform practices, organisations and mindsets until sexism and other forms of discriminations are no longer tolerated anywhere.