



# Exploring Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Women and Girls in Low-Wage Work in Uganda: Women and Girls' experiences, Socio-Cultural Influences and Men's Dichotomous Responses

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## BACKGROUND

- Sexual harassment is a pervasive issue worldwide, particularly in low-wage work and LMICs:
- ILO (2022) estimates 23% of women experience sexual violence and harassment at work.
- Sexual Offenses Bill (2024) includes specific provisions against sexual harassment.

**AIM** To define and conceptualise sexual harassment of women and girls in low-wage work in Uganda and explore community reactions to it.

## METHODS

- In **2023** conducted 60 IDIs, 9 KIIs and 8 FGDs with young people (boys and girls aged 14-24) and adults (men and women aged 25+), purposively sampled.
- Conducted in two districts **Kampala** (markets) **Masaka** (hospitality settings) and with transport sector workers in both districts.
- Ethical considerations** all participants provided informed consent/assent, IST study referral partner



## Finding 1. Unwanted touches and verbal comments equally hurtful & bad

"you might be in your menstruation period and a man touches your vagina, it makes you feel very bad" **F 27 soft drinks vendor**

"...If they touch your bum they say "You have a soft bum, it looks enjoyable in a doggie sex style"... He tells you such in public, it is so embarrassing." **F 23, selling Irish potatoes**



## Finding 2. Some women and girls endured sexual harassment to maintain income and to avoid retaliation

"In most cases when you take the food to the customer in the lodge... he touches you everywhere [but] what can I do! I need the money; before getting the money from him (for ordered food), I must show him that I am impressed with what he is doing. I must keep laughing, smiling such that the customer doesn't get annoyed and refuse to pay for the food)." **F, 24, Food Vendor.**

## Finding 3. Strong social norms influenced perceptions and reactions to witnessing sexual harassment

"...She is termed as a malaya (prostitute) because of her indecent dressing and constant touches from men...she doesn't command respect...So, people in the community don't mind if she receives the unwanted sexual touches" **M, 35, roasting meat**

## Finding 4. Some men viewed sexual harassment part of 'being a man'. Others view it as disrespectful and hold fellow men accountable

"When one of us at the stage abuses a woman or uses those vulgar words, the committee confiscates and locks his motorcycle with a chain on the tree stump for a week or two. And he is even asked to pay a fine to the stage...If he comes back and continues these things, he is taken to police for discipline. Such people sometimes give us a bad name" **M, 48, boda boda.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve awareness of the impacts of sexual harassment & bystander skills & willingness to respond to it including by challenging harmful social norms that perpetuate it.
- Confront negative masculinities, promote respectful male behaviour, & emphasise mutual accountability among men
- Improve and strengthen formal and informal community support and reporting systems against sexual harassment.