



Sexual Harassment and Assault in Mississippi:
Findings from the #MeToo 2024 Survey



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Objective: To assess the scope and scale of sexual harassment and assault among adults in Mississippi.

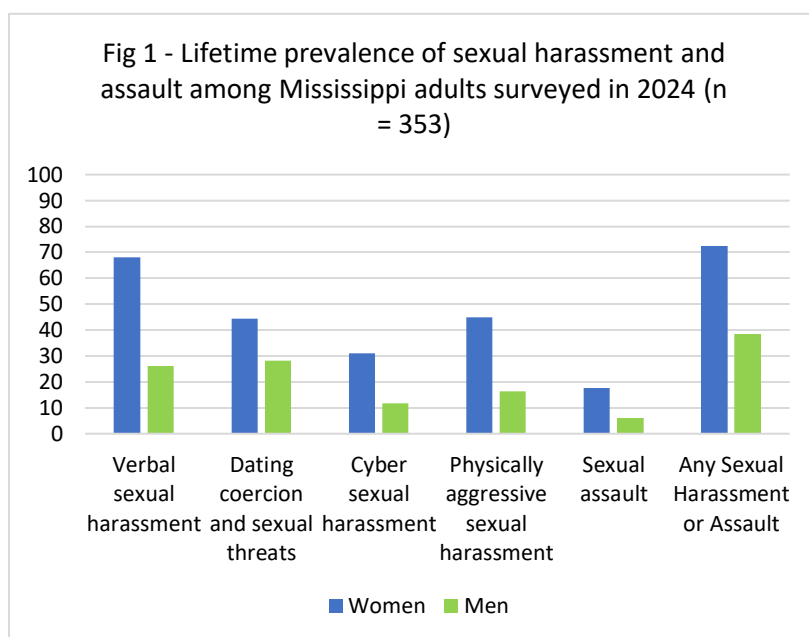
We conducted the #MeToo 2024 survey on sexual harassment and assault using NORC at the University of Chicago's online panels of U.S. adults with an oversample of participants from California, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas to allow for state level reports on #MeToo 2024. The cross-sectional survey was conducted from April to May 2024 and provides nationally representative estimates, as well as state representative estimates for our four states of focus, using weights created by NORC. Please see the [#MeToo Survey website](#) for national report findings and methods details. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation; this study was approved by the institutional review boards of NORC at the University of Chicago and Tulane University. The study is unique in capturing a broad range of sexual harassment and assault behaviors in public and private spaces (see Appendix Table 1) for Mississippi adults aged 18+ (N = 353).

How prevalent is sexual harassment and assault in Mississippi

Almost three in four women (72%) and 39% of men in Mississippi – or 1.1 million women and over 560,000 men¹ - have experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime.

As shown in Figure 1, while this most often occurs as a form of sexual harassment, some of these forms of sexual harassment are quite severe and include sexual threats and physical aggression. Women are more likely than men to experience all forms of sexual harassment as well as assault. More than one in six women (18%) has experienced sexual assault – defined as forced sex in this study – in her lifetime.

We also examined sexual harassment and assault experiences in the past year and found that 31% of women and 13% of men in Mississippi (approximately 470,000 women and 187,000 men¹) reported at least one form of sexual harassment or assault in just the past year; 4% of women [61,000 women] and 3% of men [42,000 men] experienced past year sexual assault.



¹ [State population estimates by age and gender](#) indicate that there are 1,520,860 women aged 18+ and 1,437,990 men aged 18+ in the state of Mississippi. We used these estimates to determine the number of women and men affected by sexual harassment and assault, ever and in the past year.

Sexual harassment and assault in public spaces

Most women (61%) and more than one in six men (17%) have experienced sexual harassment or assault (mostly sexual harassment) in public spaces. (See Table 1) One in three women (32%) and one in ten men (10%) have been sexually harassed or assaulted in a bar or nightclub. Verbal harassment is the most common form of harassment in these spaces, but physically aggressive sexual harassment in public spaces is not uncommon, particularly for women. More than one in four women (27%) reported physically aggressive sexual harassment in public spaces, and about one in eight (13%) reported having experienced it in a bar or nightclub. Among women, 4% reported experiencing sexual assault in public spaces, and 3% reported such experiences in bars or nightclubs. In comparison, 2% and 1% of men reported experiencing sexual assault in these spaces, respectively.

Table 1. Sexual harassment in public spaces ever among Mississippi adults (N = 353).

	Verbal Sexual Harassment		Dating Coercion and Sexual Threats		Physically Aggressive Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Any form of Sexual Harassment or Assault	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
A public space (like a street, park, beach, store, restaurant, mall, library, movie theatre, museum, swimming pool, gym)	59%	12%	16%	13%	27%	8%	4%	2%	61%	17%
Mass transportation systems (bus, subway, metro, train, or airplane)	4%	3%	1%	5%	2%	2%	<1%	<1%	5%	5%
Nightlife or entertainment venue (like a concert, bar, or club)	30%	8%	10%	7%	13%	4%	3%	1%	32%	10%

Sexual harassment and assault at work and at school

Almost one in three women (29%) and one in seven men (14%) have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace, and more than one in four women (27%) and one in eleven men (9%) have experienced sexual harassment in school or college (See Table 1). Again, verbal harassment is the most common form of harassment in these spaces. However, dating coercion and physically aggressive sexual harassment occur for 9-15% of women at work or at school. We found that 2% of participants reported sexual assault in these spaces.

Table 2. Lifetime prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace or at school/college among Mississippi adults (N = 353).

	Verbal Sexual Harassment		Dating Coercion and Sexual Threats		Physically Aggressive Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Any form of Sexual Harassment or Assault	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
At your workplace, including temporary jobs and internships	23%	10%	15%	10%	14%	4%	2%	2%	29%	14%
At school or college	25%	7%	9%	6%	10%	4%	1%	<1%	27%	9%

Sexual harassment and assault in private spaces

Among women, one in four reported sexual harassment or assault experiences in their home (25%) or in the home of someone they knew (28%), and 21% experienced these types of abuse in a car, either their own or that of someone known to them. Residences are also where we saw the highest rates of sexual assault for women across all assessed places. One in twenty (5%) had been sexually assaulted in their home, almost one in ten (9%) had been sexually assaulted in the home of someone they knew.

Among men, 10% had experienced sexual harassment or assault in their home or in the home of someone they knew (12%), and 6% reported these types of experiences in a car; 1% reported sexual assault in these spaces.

Table 3. Sexual harassment in private spaces ever among Mississippi adults (N = 353).

	Verbal Sexual Harassment		Dating Coercion and Sexual Threats		Physically Aggressive Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Any form of Sexual Harassment or Assault	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Your home or place of residence	15%	7%	15%	4%	12%	5%	5%	1%	25%	10%
Someone else's home or place of residence	19%	7%	10%	5%	13%	7%	9%	1%	28%	12%
Your car or the car of a person you knew	13%	4%	5%	7%	9%	3%	1%	<1%	21%	6%

Who is causing sexual harm in Mississippi?

We asked participants who reported each of the different types of sexual harassment and assault who did this to them (See Table 4). The major groups that engaged in these abusive behaviors included the following:

Strangers. The most commonly reported perpetrator of sexual harassment were strangers, with over half of all women (56%) and one in five of all men (20%) reporting this. Most sexual harassment, particularly verbal sexual harassment, occurs from a stranger. Half of women reported verbal sexual harassment from a stranger (51%), compared with 14% of men. One in four women (26%) reported physically aggressive sexual harassment from a stranger. One in 20 women and one in 50 men reported sexual assault from a stranger.

Friends, Acquaintances, and Peers. Among women, 30% reported sexual harassment or assault from a friend-which we define as an unrelated person they know well, and sexual harassment or assault from an acquaintance was even higher at 39%. Among men, 11% reported sexual harassment or assault from a friend, and 12% reported this abuse from an acquaintance. For men and women, we see that verbal sexual harassment and dating coercion and sexual threats are among the most common forms of sexual harassment reported from a friend or acquaintance. However, 5% and 7% of women reported sexual assault from a friend or acquaintance, respectively, where 2% and 1% of men, respectively, reported this.

We also assessed sexual harassment or assault from teachers, professors, or other authorities at school, and this was reported by 6% of women and 3% of men, mostly in the form of verbal sexual harassment. Given the relatively low prevalence of these types of abuses from a teacher or administrator combined with the relatively

higher percent reporting sexual harassment or assault in school settings (reported by 27% of women and 9% of men, largely in the form of sexual harassment), peers are likely the abusive parties in school contexts.

Bosses and Co-Workers. One in twelve women and men (8%), respectively, have been sexual harassed or assaulted by a boss, employer, supervisor, or manager. While this was mostly in the form of sexual harassment, it is notable that sexual assaults from a boss or supervisor were more likely to be reported by men (3%) than women (1%). Sexual harassment from co-workers was even more common, reported by 20% of women and 9% of men; sexual assault from co-workers was not commonly reported by women or men.

Family Members: Approximately one in eight women (13%) and one in 30 men (3%) have been sexually harassed by a family member or relative, most often in the form of verbal sexual harassment.

Intimate Partners. One in five women (20%) and almost one in 25 men (4%) reported a history of sexual harassment or assault from a current or former spouse or romantic or sexual partner. For women, this most commonly occurs in the forms of verbal sexual harassment (13%) and dating coercion and sexual threats; 3% of women reported that they had been sexually assaulted by a partner in their lifetime.

Table 4. Relationship to Perpetrator (N = 353).

	Verbal Sexual Harassment		Dating Coercion and Sexual Threats		Cyber Sexual Harassment		Physically Aggressive Sexual Harassment		Sexual Assault		Any form of Sexual Harassment or Assault	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Stranger	51%	14%	19%	10%	23%	8%	26%	7%	5%	2%	56%	20%
Acquaintance	31%	8%	20%	11%	12%	4%	18%	6%	7%	1%	39%	12%
Friend	22%	8%	14%	12%	13%	4%	14%	5%	5%	2%	30%	11%
Teacher	4%	3%	1%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	<1%	<1%	6%	3%
Boss	7%	6%	3%	6%	1%	3%	2%	4%	1%	3%	8%	8%
Co-worker	16%	8%	11%	5%	2%	2%	8%	1%	2%	<1%	20%	9%
Family Member	10%	2%	5%	3%	4%	1%	4%	1%	1%	<1%	13%	3%
Partner	13%	3%	13%	4%	8%	2%	9%	1%	3%	1%	20%	4%

Potential Behavioral and Mental Health Effects of Sexual Harassment and Assault

We asked participants about their mental health (depression and anxiety), recent substance use (past 30-day binge alcohol use and illicit drug use), and suicidality (thoughts of suicide) in the past year. We then analyzed the prevalence of these among those who experienced sexual harassment or assault in the past year. Past year experiences were largely in the form of sexual harassment. Findings show that past year sexual harassment was significantly associated with behavioral and mental health concerns (p<0.05) (See. Fig 2 and Fig 3).

Figure 2. Mental Health and Substance Use for those Who Did and Did Not Experience Past Year Sexual Harassment or Assault, U.S. Adult **Women** in Mississippi (wt%) (n=203)

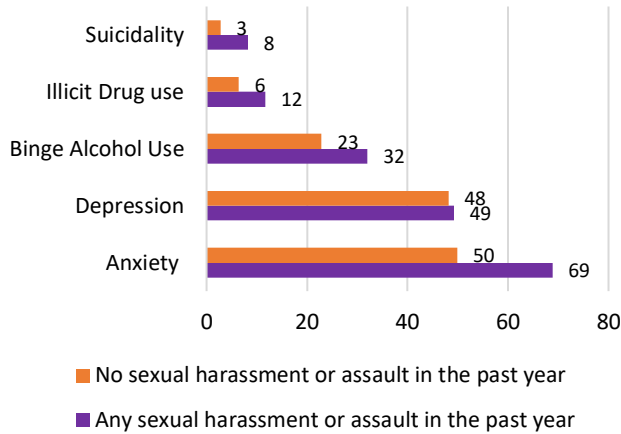
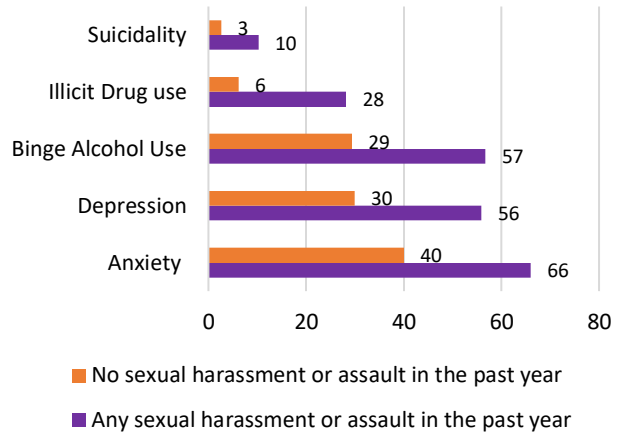


Figure 3. Mental Health and Substance Use for those Who Did and Did Not Experience Past Year Sexual Harassment or Assault, U.S. Adult **Men** in Mississippi (wt%) (n=144)



Conclusions

Sexual violence is pervasive for women and men, especially in the form of sexual harassment.

Almost three in the four women (72%) and 39% of men in Mississippi – or 1.1 million women and over 560,000 men - have experienced some form of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime, and 31% of women and 13% of men in -- or 470,000 women and 187,000 men – had these experiences in just the past year. Notably, 4% of women [61,000 women] and 3% of men [42,000 men] experienced past year sexual assault

Sexual harassment most often occurs in public spaces, most often by strangers and secondarily from acquaintances. While verbal sexual harassment is most common, sexual threats and physically aggressive sexual harassment are not uncommon, and these too often occur in public spaces.

Sexual harassment also occurs in our workplaces and schools. While this appears to be more at the hands of peers than those in an authority position, regardless of who engages in these abuses, they are likely compromising academic and employee productivity.

Sexual assault largely occurs in private places and is perpetrated by someone known to the person who has experienced the assault. Women are more likely than men to have experienced a sexual assault. Among women who have experienced sexual assault, an acquaintance or partner was the most common abuser, and the assault most often occurred in their own residence. Men who reported sexual assault are most likely to say it occurred at the hands of a boss/supervisor or acquaintance and in someone else's residence.

Sexual harassment is associated with higher risk of depression and anxiety, substance misuse, and suicidality. Too often, sexual harassment is viewed as benign or even funny, but it harms people's health and lives.

We can change this situation. We must encourage communities and policy makers to understand what behaviors constitute sexual harassment, how these experiences affect mental health and perceptions of safety in public spaces, at work, and at school, and prevention and intervention approaches to address these concerns.

Appendix Table 1. Sexual Harassment and Assault Items and Variables

<p>VERBAL SEXUAL HARASSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone whistling, honking, making kissy noises, “Pssst” sounds, or leering/staring aggressively at you. • Someone saying things like, “Hey Baby,” “Mmmm Sexy,” “Yo Shorty,” “Mami/Mamacita,” “Give me a smile,” or similar comments in a way that is disrespectful and/or unwanted and/or made you feel unsafe. • Someone calling you a sexist slur, like “Bitch,” “Slut,” “Cunt,” or “Whore”. • Someone purposefully misgendering you or calling you a homophobic or transphobic slur, like “Fag,” “Dyke,” or “Tranny.” • Someone talking about your body parts inappropriately or offensively (such as your legs, crotch, butt, or breasts), saying sexually explicit comments (“I want to do BLANK to you”) or asking inappropriate sexual questions. <p>CYBER SEXUAL HARASSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone sending you sexual content without your permission, sexualizing you inappropriately, or threatening you with sex acts, in <i>private online spaces</i>, such as over e-mail or text. • Someone sending you sexual content without your permission, sexualizing you inappropriately, or threatening you with sex acts, in <i>public online spaces</i>, such as on social media. • Someone taking and/or sharing sexual pictures or videos of you without your permission. 	<p>DATING COERCION OR SEXUAL THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone making threats to harm you, to harm someone you know, or to share personal information you don’t want shared (examples could include your sexual orientation or drug use history or immigration status). • Someone saying you must date them or do a sexual act for them in exchange for something (such as a good grade, a promotion, a job, drugs, food, or something similar) or instead of something (like paying rent or a citation, etc). • Someone repeatedly texting or calling you in a harassing way. • Someone repeatedly asking you for a date or your phone number when you’ve said no or ignored them. <p>PHYSICALLY AGGRESSIVE SEXUAL HARASSMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone flashing or exposing their genitals to you without your permission. • Someone physically following you without your permission. • Someone purposely touching you or brushing up against you in an unwelcome, sexual way. <p>SEXUAL ASSAULT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone forcing you to do a sexual act without your permission or one that you didn’t want to do (including while you were under the influence of alcohol or drugs).
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