Online Gamer Experiences





Understanding the impact of harassment, discrimination and general offensive behaviour in online gaming in Australia

01

Background

Online Gaming has continued to grow in popularity, particularly among Gen Z. However, the gaming space remains very male dominated and unfortunately is a space where CIS females and LGBTQI+ gamers can experience significant harassment.

Whilst a lot of research has been done overseas on harassment among gamers, there is a lack of research and data on harassment on online games in Australia. This study seeks to validate some key global statistics within the Australian context.

02

Objective

The objective of this research was to understand:

- How often do gamers experience harassment whilst playing?
- What type of harassment is occurring?
- What is the impact of this harassment?
- Are there contexts / genres of games where harassment is amplified?
- What actions do gamers take during and after experiencing/observing harassment?

03

Method

A long quantitative study was undertaken to address the research objectives.

Please note all open responses were analysed qualitatively.

The focus of this report is on female & LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers. Relevant comparisons to male identifying gamers will be noted throughout the report.

Sample of n=601 Australian gamers aged 16+



We spoke to Australian gamers who have played online games and these were their experiences...

Gender		%	n	*Please note this report will
Condo	Man or male	17%	102	focus on female and LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers.
	Woman or female	83%	497	Comparisons to male gamers
	Non binary	0%	2	will be noted where significantly different.
Age		%	n	
1.90	16-19yrs	19%	115	
	20-24yrs	28%	166	
	25-29yrs	31%	184	
	30-35yrs	23%	136	
	l			
Sexuality		%	n	
Conditions	LGBTQIA+	19%	114	
	No	79%	475	
	Prefer not to say	2%	12	

Snapshot of key figures

92% of LGBTQIA+ gamers 83% of females 72% of males

Have experienced or observed harassment or offensive behaviour while online gaming



Harassment and discrimination in online gaming is severe, leaving female & LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers feeling unsafe

Gaming platforms and commercial brands need to do more to tackle this issue

90%

of female gamers believe that harassment 'must be addressed'

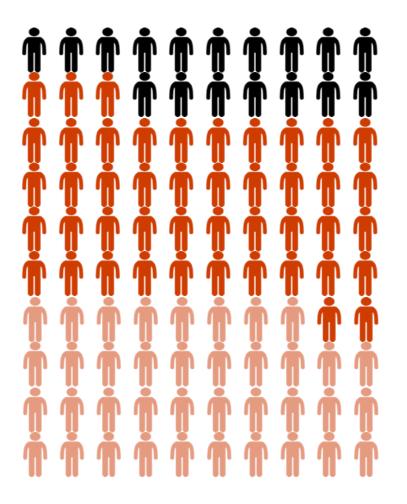
85%

of female gamers believe it is a major problem

75%

of female gamers believe it is unsafe

Most female gamers have been impacted by the offensive language / behaviour in online gaming spaces



83% of female gamers have experienced and/or observed offensive behaviour while online gaming

38% of female gamers have experienced this <u>directly</u> targeted at them

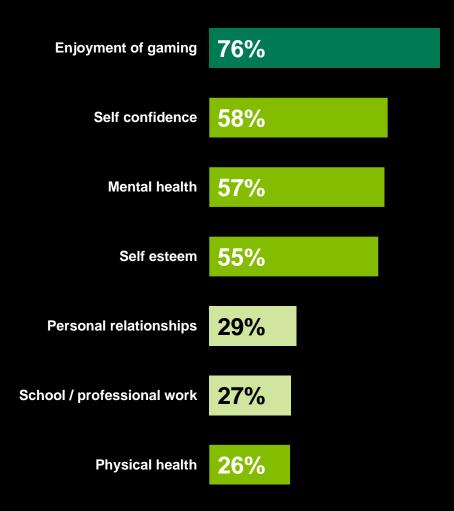
Before even starting a game...

95% & 90% of LGBTQIA+ gamers gamers

modify their behaviour to <u>feel safe</u>

Negative impact of harassment / discrimination on female gamers continues well beyond exiting the game...

Negatively impacts my...



Female & LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers feel helpless & unsupported in battle against toxic culture in gaming



gamers believe that harassment & discrimination will <u>always be</u> part of online gaming

62% & 58% of LGBTQIA+ of female

gamers believe that harassment & discrimination is inevitable

When harassment occurs, LGBTQIA+ & female gamers left with no choice but to leave the game or limit how they play

WHEN experiencing or observing

harassment...

63% of LGBTQIA+&

62% of females

89% of LGBTQIA+&

81% of females

will completely leave the game

limit their interaction with others



^{*}please note gamers could select multiple actions, suggesting sometimes they will leave the game and sometimes they will stay and modify behaviour Source: Bastion Insights Gamer Research with n=601 Australian gamers, aged 16+ conducted in February 2023

Harassment has lasting effect on how LGBTQIA+ & female gamers play, with many never playing that game again & most modifying their behaviour

AFTER experiencing or observing harassment...

37% of LGBTQIA+&

34% of females

will never return to that game

85% of LGBTQIA+ &

73% of females

will return to the game but with modified behaviour



^{*}please note gamers could select multiple actions, suggesting sometimes they will leave the game and sometimes they will stay and modify behaviour Source: Bastion Insights Gamer Research with n=601 Australian gamers, aged 16+ conducted in February 2023

Young men are often viewed as the perpetrators of harassment and discrimination, with most ignoring it

71% of young male gamers just ignore it

Encouragingly, and despite this, most male gamers wish they could do something about it. Showing a willingness to be **part of the solution**

57% wish they could do more, but don't know what to do

57% wish someone else would do something

But they need the tools to act in a way that they also feel safe

55% worry that if they say something, they will become the target

Experiences:

Harassment & discrimination in online gaming in Australia

Young women are gaming frequently, indicating a clear opportunity to speak to them in this space

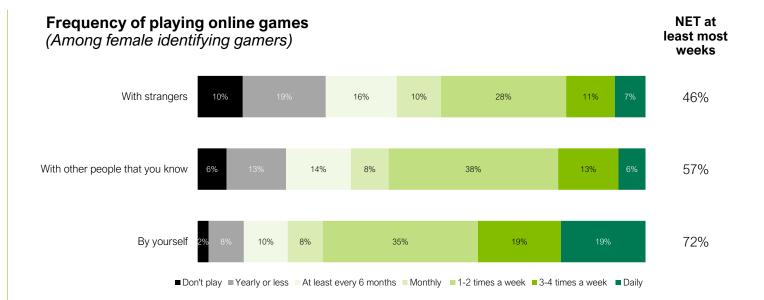
Also, opportunity to involve female gamers that stream themselves in advocacy campaigns

Female gamers are playing less frequently than male gamers, particularly when it comes to playing with others. With male gamers significantly more likely to play frequently (at least most weeks) with:

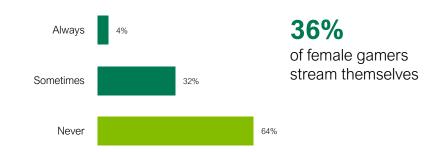
- Strangers (63% compared to 46% of females)
- Other people they know (69% compared to 57% of females)

Whilst there was a directional difference between males and females playing frequently alone (79% of males compared to 72% of females), this was not significant. This suggests the gap in frequency between males and females is driven by less frequent game play with others.

Male gamers were significantly more likely to always stream themselves (11% compared to 4% to females) but overall frequency remains low. There were no significant differences in streaming 'sometimes'.



Frequency of streaming self play (Among female identifying gamers))



Clearly an appetite for addressing harassment, particularly for female & LGBTQIA+ gamers

Indicates educational campaigns would be responding to a real need in this space & for this audience

While male gamers feel less impacted, they still view harassment as a major issue

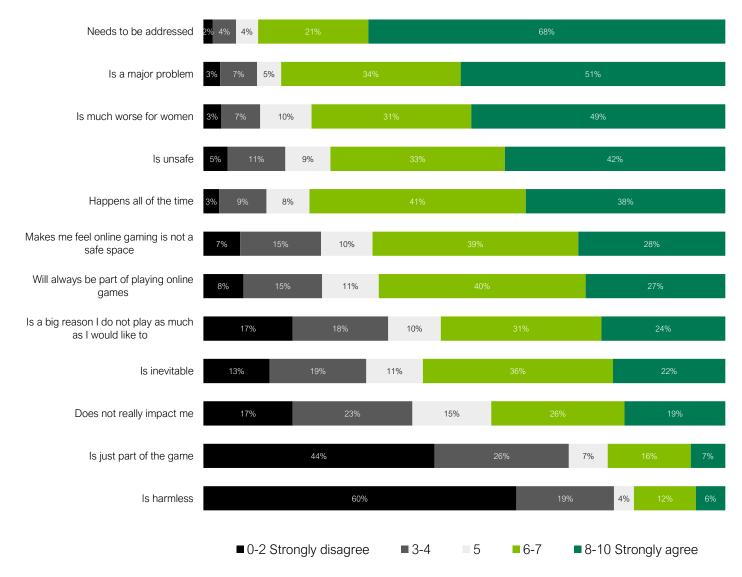
Female gamers were significantly more likely to believe that harassment in online gaming:

- Needs to be addressed (68% compared to 45% of males)
- Is unsafe (42% compared to 25% of males)
- Makes me feel online gaming is not a safe space (28% compared to 18% of males)

Male gamers are significantly more likely to agree that harassment in online gaming:

- Doesn't really impact me (33% compared to 19% of females)
- Is just part of the game (13% compared to 7% of females)

Attitudes to harassment in online gaming (Among female identifying gamers)



Sadly, before even starting a game, most female & LGBTQIA+ gamers modify their behaviour to feel safe

Opportunity to challenge the normalisation and expectation that female & LGBTQIA+ gamers will experience harassment as part of the game

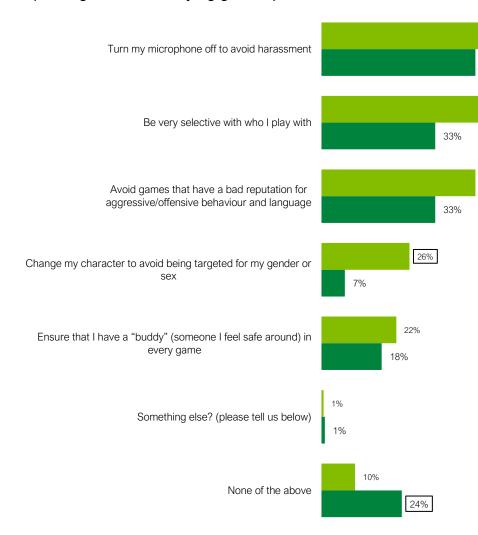
While to a lesser extent, some male gamers also modify their behaviour. This suggests a lot can be done to make online gaming safer for everyone.

LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers were significantly more likely to:

- Turn their microphone off to avoid harassment (67% compared to 51% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers)
- Change their character to avoid being targeted (33% compared to 20% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers)

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) were also significantly more likely to change their character to avoid being targeted for their gender or sex (28% compared to 16% of 26-35yrs)

Behaviour modifiers to avoid harassment / offensive behaviour BEFORE playing (Among female identifying gamers)



90% of females

Female

Male

55%

45%

48%

45%

76% of males

modify their behaviour to avoid harassment / offensive behaviour

Reputation for harassment & feeling unsafe or unwelcome deters some female and **LGBTQIA+** gamers from certain games

That said, enjoyment, accessibility and affordability are the main barriers to game play

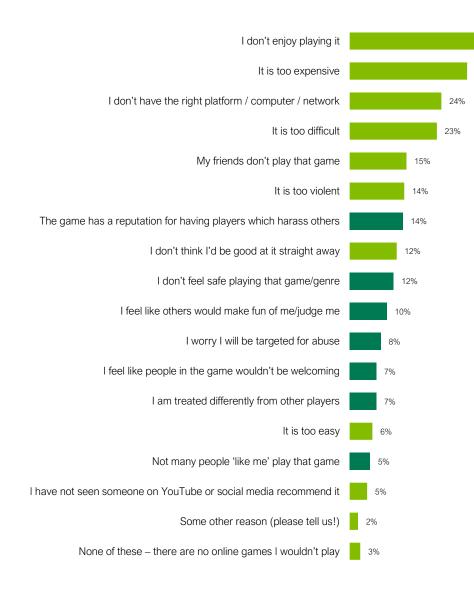
Female gamers were significantly more likely to not play a game if it is too violent (14% compared to 2% of males), if they don't feel safe (12% compared to 5% of males) or they felt others would make fun of them (10% compared to 3%).

Whilst LGBTQA+ players are significantly more likely to not play games if the game has a reputation for harassment (25% compared to 11% of non LGBTQIA+ players), or if they feel they will be treated differently to others (11% compared to 5% of non LGBTQIA+ players).

Lastly, gamers aged 26-35yrs were significantly more deterred by games with a reputation for harassment (17% compared to 11% of 16-25yrs). Gamers aged 16-25yrs were significantly more deterred by games / genres that don't feel safe (13% compared to 7% of 26-35yrs).

Main reasons to avoid certain games

(Select up to 3, among female gamers)



53% of LGBTQIA+

46% of females

39% of males

Avoid certain games due to harassment, feeling unsafe or unwelcome

Harassment, both observed & personally experienced, is highly prevalent in online gaming

Particularly among female and LBGTQIA+ gamers

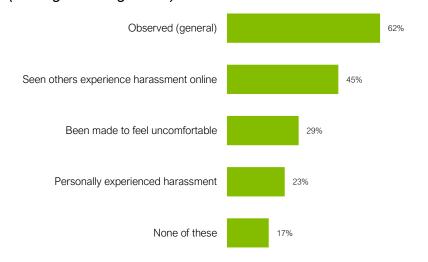
LGBTQIA+ gamers and female gamers are significantly more likely to have experienced and / or observed harassment while online gaming.

That said, incidence it is high regardless of gender.

"The online culture is growing with streaming games... I feel a lot of young people see others' somewhat negative joking behaviours (through YouTube/Tik Tok) and think that is normal/cool."

"Nothing has been done to stop it, so people are doing it more because they know they can get away with it."

Experience online gaming (among female gamers)



92% of LGBTQIA+ gamers

83% of females

72% of males

Have experienced or observed harassment or offensive behaviour while online gaming

Experience online gaming among genders and sexuality groups

	GENDER		LGBTQIA+	
	Man or male	Woman or female	Yes	No
Personally experienced	24%	23%	37%	19%
Seen others harassed	41%	45%	55%	41%
Observed (general)	47%	62%	70%	56%
Been made to feel uncomfortable	18%	29%	37%	24%
NET Harassment / Uncomfortable	33%	38%	50%	33%
NET Offensive behaviour	72%	83%	92%	78%
None of these	28%	17%	8%	22%
n=	102	497	114	475

Female gamers are experiencing / observing multiple types of harassment

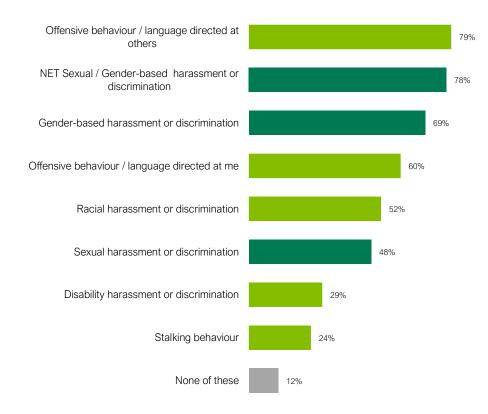
Sexual / gender-based and offensive behaviour / language the most commonly experienced

Racial and disability discrimination are less personally experienced (21% and 10% respectively among all gamers). However, they are commonly observed.

This suggests that racial, disability, sexual and gender based harassment and discrimination are all highly prevalent in online gaming.

Some also mentioned age discrimination and new to the game/gaming as types of harassment they had received.

Types of harassment / discrimination experienced and / or observed (among female gamers)



Female gamers
have experienced /
observed an
average of

different
types of
harassment /
discrimination

The harassment female gamers experience is severe & frequent

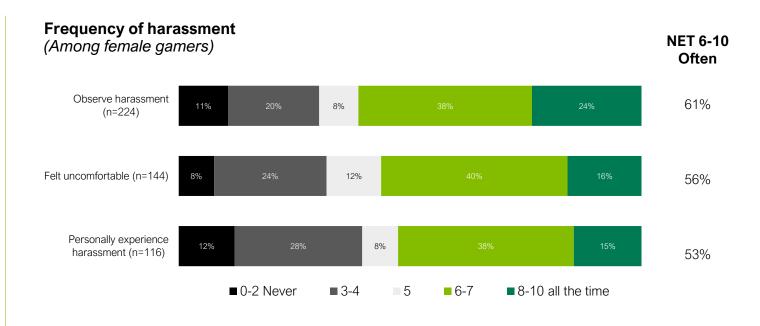
And is even more marked for younger gamers (16-25yrs)

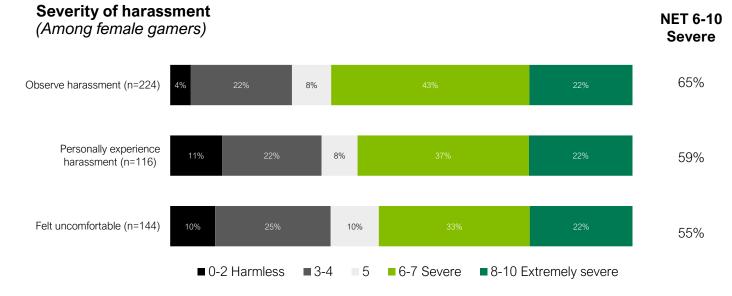
Younger gamers (both male and female) (16-25yrs) are significantly more likely to rate at least one form of harassment (observed, experienced or felt uncomfortable) as severe (93% compared to 69% of 26-35yrs).

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) were also significantly more likely to observe harassment often (67% compared to 53% of 26-35yrs).

"I think people are gradually forgetting there are real people on the other end of online interactions."

"People don't act like themselves online are more likely to act in a more offensive manner. I don't see this changing and I think online gaming will become more popular."





Female & LGBTQIA+ gamers feel helpless & unsupported in battle against toxic culture in gaming

Campaigns can challenge the normalisation of toxic culture, such as 'gamer rage', which promotes acceptance that gamers just have to put up with it

Gamers believe that harassment and discrimination in online gaming occurs due to a range of factors, including:

Online environment is dehumanising: Many mentioned that people hide behind their devices and say harmful abuse that they wouldn't say to someone in real life.

Abuse & 'gamer rage' is normalised: Some view harassment and discrimination as just part of the game and accepted by society. Further, some raised that this is the only environment young gamers have experienced and know, so they will copy and perpetuate this behaviour.

The radicalisation of young men – Some gamers mentioned toxic masculinity, extremism and idols such as Andrew Tate, as particularly influential and encourages young men to perpetuate harassment and discrimination online.

Increased female participation = more targets for harassment: Alarmingly, some suggested that as more females begin gaming, there will be more targets for harassment.

Toxic gaming culture is reinforced through other social media platforms: Many said that 'jokes' about harassment in online gaming are made on other social media platforms, such as TikTok. Therefore the gaming culture exists further than just online gaming.

Fear that only those who harass will remain on the platforms: Some worry that the abuse in online gaming will result in people quitting the game, leaving only those who harass others to keep gaming.

Further, many acknowledged that nothing is being done to change the culture of harassment and discrimination in online gaming. Without action, change is not expected.



The type of games played varies a lot between genders

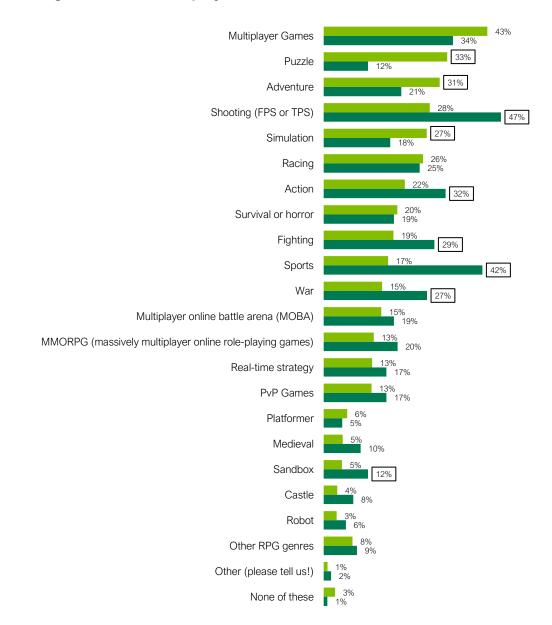
Lower participation amongst females in games with violent themes (shooting, fighting, war etc)

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) are significantly more likely to play multiplayer games (48% compared to 35% of 26-35yrs).

Whereas gamers aged 26-35yrs were significantly more likely to play MMORPG (19% compared to 10% of 16-25yrs), Medieval (10% compared to 3% of 16-25yrs) and other RPG games (11% compared to 5% of 16-25yrs).

"I think people are more aware of harassment and gaming sites are taking extreme protocols to assure that players don't experience these situations...I think harassment will decrease for some games, while for others (like COD) it may increase just because those games are generally more "war" or violence based which is already going to influence the temperament of players and may cause them to be even more aggressive. I tend to avoid those games."

Online games most often played with others



■ Woman or female

■ Man or male

Game genres with higher male participation are also those where there is more harassment & offensive behaviour

Important to consider the context of the game genre when adapting campaigns & messaging

Female gamers may be avoiding certain types of games because of harassment / discrimination.

Messaging for female dominated genres should be different to messaging for male dominated genres. For example, some of the open responses warned that a campaign by a makeup brand may result in male gamers amplifying / making the harassment worse, as it's seen as an extension of the gender-based discrimination that is already occurring.

Relationship between gaming genre, gender participation and incidence of players that have experienced / observed harassment

(Significant differences shown in table below)

	Gender differences in players	Incidence of harassment			
Multiplayer Games		HIGHER			
Puzzle	FEMALE	-			
Adventure	FEMALE	-			
Simulation	FEMALE	-			
Racing	-	-			
Shooting (FPS or TPS)	MALE	HIGHER			
Action	MALE	HIGHER			
Survival or horror	-	HIGHER			
Fighting	MALE	HIGHER			
Sports	MALE	HIGHER			
War	MALE	-			

Impact of harassment / discrimination in online gaming

Harassment clearly reduces enjoyment of the game, particularly for LGBTQIA+ & female gamers

Even observed harassment has a negative impact

Harassment negatively impacts female gamers' mental health, self esteem & confidence

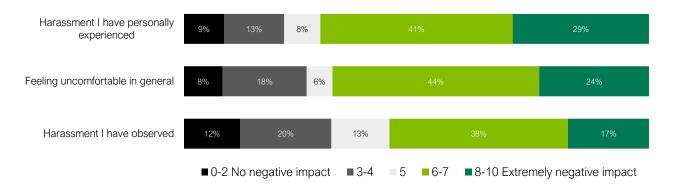
76% of young gamers (aged 16-25yrs) felt the harassment they had experienced had a negative impact (compared to 53% of 26-35yrs).

65% of female gamers said harassment is having a negative impact on their self esteem and confidence (compared to 40% of male gamers).

Harassment is significantly impacting LGBTQIA+ gamers enjoyment of the game (85% compared to 71% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers).

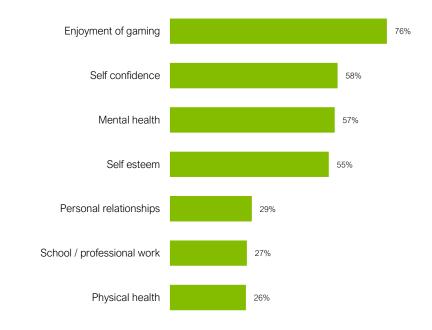
Overall impact of harassment and discrimination on self

(T5B Negative impact, among female gamers)



Specific impact of harassment and discrimination

(T5B Negative impact, among female gamers)



Most gamers wish they could do more when observing harassment, but don't know how

Opportunity for campaigns to provide guidance on how to take action against harassment

Very few female gamers take any direct action towards the perpetrator.

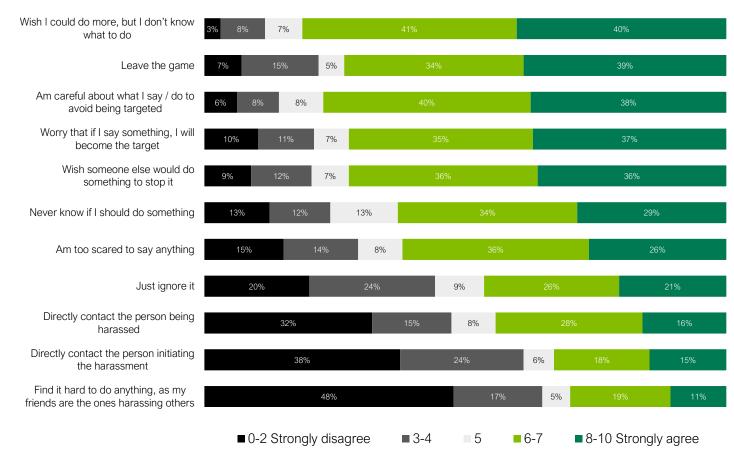
There are some differences between subgroups:

 LGBTQIA+ gamers are more likely to directly contact the person being harassed (56% compared to 38% of non LGBTQIA+ identifying gamers).

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) were significantly more likely to:

- Wish someone else would do something to stop it (75% compared to 63% of 26-35yrs)
- Be too scared to say anything (66% compared to 46% of 26-35yrs)
- Find it hard to do anything because their friends are the ones harassing others (39% compared to 17% of 26-35yrs)

Sentiment when OBSERVING harassment in online gaming (among female gamers)



Female & LGBTQIA+ gamers too scared to fight back against harassment they experience, fearing it will only make it worse

Most feel they are on their own to deal with it

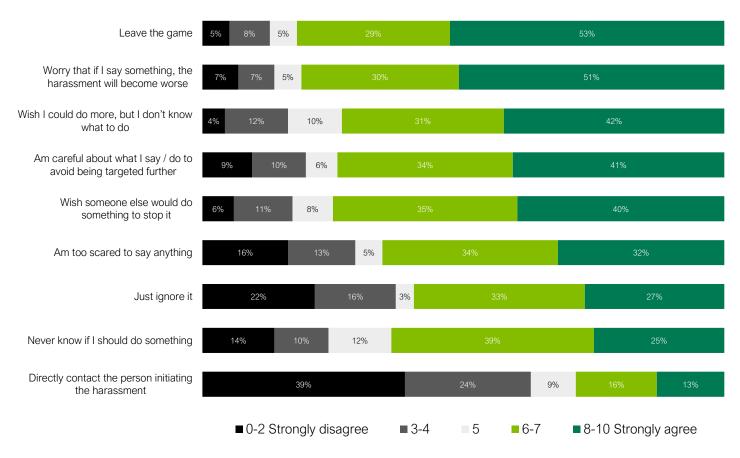
Younger gamers (16-25yrs) are significantly more likely to:

- Worry if they say something, the harassment will become worse (84% compared to 62% of 26-35yrs)
- Wish they could do more but don't know what to do (79% compared to 62% of 26-35yrs)
- Are too scared to say anything (73% compared to 45% of 26-35yrs)
- Never know if they should do something (71% compared to 45% of 26-35yrs)

"Even though harassment is hard to prevent as it depends on the abusers mindset, campaigns by brands may empower women to not feel as scared and take action."

"...validate the feeling of who is getting targeted and perhaps give strength to deal with it. Teach how to deal with."

Sentiment when EXPERIENCING harassment in online gaming (among female gamers)



Females are dropping out of games or modifying their game play due to harassment Very few fight back to the perpetrator or seek or offer support

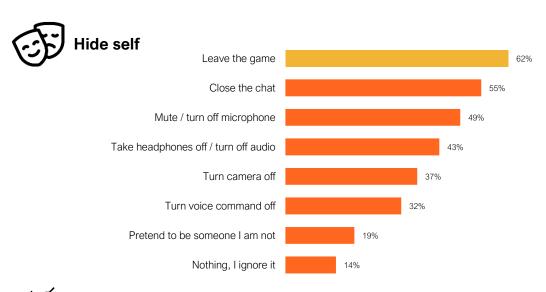
Opportunity for campaigns to empower & encourage supportive behaviours

2 in 3 females feel that the harassment becomes so extreme that they are completely excluded and consequently leave the game.

There is a need to challenge the current status quo – do female gamers really think it is fair to have to close the chat? Turn their microphone off? Have to pretend to be a boy to avoid being picked on?

Suggests that there is an opportunity for campaigns to promote a "play like a girl" mentality, where girls are proud and fearless.

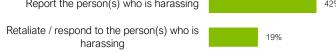
Actions taking <u>while</u> experiencing or observing harassment (Among female gamers)



62% of females completely leave the game

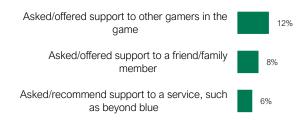
81% of females stay in the game but limit the interaction with others





(Fill)

Seek / offer support





Females 'hiding' from harassment through muted audio, changed usernames & pretending to be someone they are not

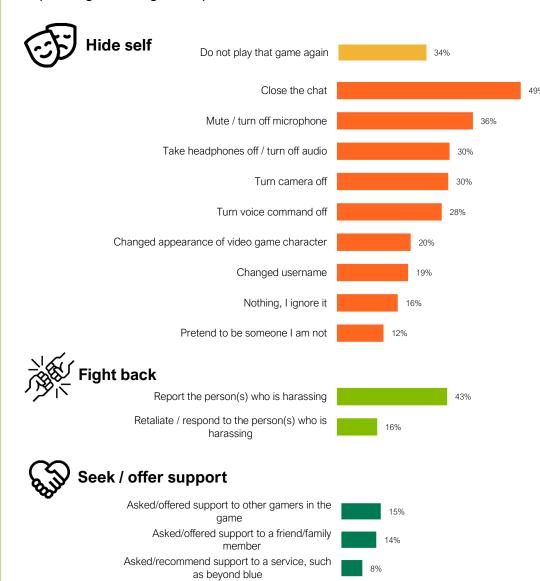
Suggests female gamers do not feel that they can be themselves while gaming

LGBTQIA+ gamers were significantly more likely to modify their behaviour:

- Mute their microphone (47% compared to 32% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers)
- Turn off their audio (41% compared to 26% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers)
- Turn voice command off (41% compared to 22% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers)

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) were significantly more likely to ask for / offer support to a friend / family member (16% compared to 8% of 26-35yrs).

Actions taking <u>after</u> experiencing or observing harassment (Among female gamers)



34% of females never return to that game

73% of females return to the game but with modified behaviour to avoid harassment

Conversations & campaigns: Talking about harassment in online gaming

Many female gamers are not speaking to anyone about harassment in online gaming & when they are, it is not beyond their close inner circle

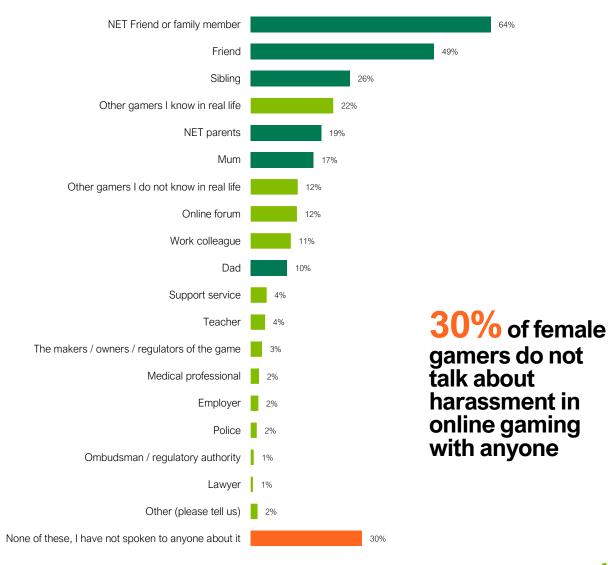
Opportunity for campaigns to amplify the conversation & challenge the acceptance of it being 'just part of gaming'

Talking about harassment in gaming is even less prevalent amongst males. Female gamers were significantly more likely to have spoken to someone about harassment in online gaming (70% compared to 51% of male gamers). Female gamers were significantly more likely to have spoken a friend or family member (64% compared to 36% of male gamers) or a parent (19% compared to 2% of male gamers).

LGBTQIA+ gamers were significantly more likely to speak about harassment with a friend of family member (75% compared to 55% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers) and in online forums (26% compared to 8% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers).

There is an opportunity to amplify this conversation beyond the inner circle and bring it into the public domain. Campaigns could also encourage conversation initiated by the inner circle: e.g. mum's to talk to their daughters, sons and partners / dads about harassment in online gaming. Young gamers may not initiate the conversation with their parents but may be grateful for the support.

Spoken about harassment in online games with... (Among female gamers)



Female gamers welcome a public conversation

Feeling a campaign will reduce harassment in online gaming

Further, these views are consistent across age, gender and sexuality

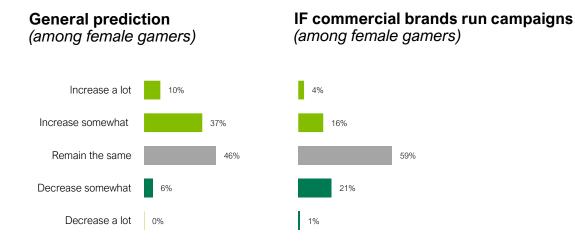
Female gamers are expressing a desire for more to be done in this space and welcome the idea of commercial brands running campaigns. Much like dating apps, the owners / creators of the games themselves don't appear to be involved or responding adequately.

There were no significant differences by gender or age.

LGBTQIA+ gamers were more likely to believe that if a brand ran a campaign, harassment would increase a lot (8% compared to 3% of non LGBTQIA+ gamers). However, this was still small and the majority of LGBTQIA+ gamers believe it would stay the same or decrease.

"I would like it because nobody else has really attempted to raise awareness about harassment or discrimination in games."

Future of harassment and discrimination in online gaming...



Predicted increase softens with campaign

48% — 19% of female gamers believe harassment will increase

And significantly more expect an actual decrease

of female gamers believe harassment will **decrease**

Some watch outs for a commercial brand tackling harassment in online gaming spaces



Link between some brands and gaming not understood

If a brand wishes to enter the gaming space, the connection may not be apparent at first. Further, stereotypes of what a gamer looks like are still very prevalent. With many seeing 'female' brands as having different demographics to 'gamers' and so there is no point for a 'female' brand to get involved. There is potential for campaigns to challenge this.

Recommendation: Consider continued, genuine involvement in gaming. For example, partnerships with streamers, gaming youtubers, sponsoring gaming events and conventions.

"Idk if it would stop the harassment ...But maybe offer support to those female streamers to show that you can be a girl, demons and masculine and still be able to play games. Because games should be more inclusive."



Although well intentioned, there is a risk that a campaign could become a 'joke' for male gamers and provide more ammunition for harassment

Many female gamers down play or hide any feminine markers when gaming to protect themselves against harassment. Having a campaign address bad behaviour in gaming made some feel more open to harassment, suggesting that male gamers would just make more fun of them and trivialise the campaign.

Recommendation: Carefully consider tailoring content to male vs female dominated genres. For example, in the male dominated genre, more subtle messaging may be more appropriate. Whereas once in the 'safer' space of female dominated games, owning femininity could be included.

'[A commercial campaign] just gives men more of ammunition knowing women get upset by it."



Some felt male gamers are the perpetrators of the harassment and campaigns should target them, not women

Many gamers felt that brands with more impact on a male audience should be doing more in this space. Female gamers expressed they **know** that harassment is bad, they don't need to be told that. For the campaign to have a positive effect, give female gamers more than 'proof' that harassment in online gaming is bad, they know it is and they know they aren't the dominant perpetrators.

Recommendation: Support, advice on how to handle harassment (both observed and experienced) will provide value and purpose for campaigns on harassment in online gaming.

"I don't think other brands could help. The gaming platforms need to be more strict toward abusive gamers."

Key findings

Female & LGBTQIA+ gamers expect harassment / discrimination whilst online gaming & have to modify their behaviour to avoid it

There is opportunity to support, raise awareness and fill a much needed gap in female & LGBTQIA+ gamer advocacy

Sadly, harassment and discrimination is having an immensely negative effect on gamers, particularly female and LGBTQIA+ gamers.

Most are too scared to do anything and many are not talking to anyone about it.

Brands have a real opportunity to address this culture of silence and fear to make female & LGBTQIA+ gamers feel safer and less alone.

Opportunity to provide gamers with a script / easy actions to take – e.g. the "pinkie" campaign.

Road safety ad shows size does matter when engaging young male egos (smh.com.au)

Harassment & discrimination is so ingrained in gaming culture, that it is normalised and accepted among many gamers

Most gamers know that it is bad. However, most also simultaneously believe that it will always be part of the game.

Most wish that something would be done about it, but also do not believe this will happen

Across all demographics, most wish that more would be done to combat harassment and discrimination online.

Some citied not knowing what to do for their lack of action suggesting a sense of helplessness.

Younger gamers (16-25yrs) were even more reluctant to take any action because their friends are the perpetrators.

With a lack of action from the gaming platforms themselves, gamers welcome brands taking action

The conversation around harassment and discrimination in online gaming is novel and limited.

Most welcomed the commercial world running campaigns to open this conversation. Further, many noted that currently nothing is being done to combat harassment and discrimination, so something is better than nothing.

Campaign content should be tailored to the gaming genre (and dominant gender in that genre) to cut through

Some expressed concern that male gamers may take campaigns by a some brands as a joke, or worse, as ammunition against female & LGBTQIA+ gamers.

Consider tailoring content accordingly. For example, in female dominated, safer genres, dial up the 'playing as a girl / yourself'. Whereas, in male dominated genres have more subtle messaging.



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