



Young Women and Gendered Inequities In Ghana's Creative Sector

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Abbreviations

CAA	Creative Arts Agency
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAVA	Ghana Association of Visual Arts
IDI	In-depth interview
KII	Key informant interview
MoTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture
MUSIGA	Musicians Union of Ghana
NCC	National Commission on Culture

Executive Summary

The creative industry is a high-value economic sector with well-documented potential to create jobs for youth in Africa. However, gendered inequities are a leading factor hampering female creatives from fully benefiting from opportunities in this booming sector. Evidence-based, systematic understanding of how gender affects women's participation in the creative sector remains limited. Focusing on Ghana, the current study answered the following question: *How are gender norms and power dynamics intersecting with other socio-economic and contextual processes to shape the pathways, creative journeys, and aspirations of young women in Africa's creative sector, and what are the implications for young female creatives' ability to benefit from, realize their full potential, and participate in the industry and society at large?* The study employed a multi-method, multidisciplinary, and participatory research approach, collecting data from a range of key industry players, particularly young female creatives.

The study revealed that many young female creatives faced limited opportunities due to structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Women in creative fields like music, fashion, digital art, modeling, and content creation faced gender-specific challenges that undermined their opportunities. These challenges include unequal pay to men, lack of recognition, sexual harassment, objectification, relegation to "feminine" roles, exclusion from leadership responsibilities, and stereotypical prejudices about women's contributions in Ghana's creative sector. The study also revealed that, due to the highly informal nature of the creative industry in Ghana, male-dominated networks often control access to opportunities, even in spaces where women predominate. Important decisions about women's pay, exposure, and career trajectories were primarily determined by men, requiring many women to rely on male negotiators or managers to gain credibility and visibility. Systemic and institutional barriers, such as inadequate and clear guidelines on hiring processes and merit-based evaluations, information about



The study also revealed that, due to the highly informal nature of the creative industry in Ghana, male-dominated networks often control access to opportunities, even in spaces where women predominate.

opportunities, and a lack of official contracts and conditions of service, left many female creatives vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Some creatives felt discouraged because they were underpaid, devalued, and not recognized for their creative abilities.

To manage these and other challenges, many female creatives adopted coping strategies such as relying on family and peer support, engaging in other income-generating activities, informal peer mentoring, and training sessions, and using on social media to promote their artistic works. Many creatives also revealed that the dignifying and fulfilling nature of their work was not just about making money but also about being recognized and respected for what they do.

Participants stressed the need for more structured and inclusive interventions, such as establishing creative centers that provide resources and mentorship opportunities, introducing stronger legal protections against harassment and unfair labor practices, and providing financial support tailored to the sector's specific requirements. The study found that while Ghana's creative sector offers immense potential for youth employment and innovation, gender inequities remain a significant barrier to inclusive participation. Addressing these inequities through structural reforms, targeted interventions, and supportive policies is essential to unlock the full potential of young female creatives.



1.0

Introduction

1.0-Introduction

In Ghana, the creative sector has emerged as a major contributor to the economy, both in terms of employment creation and cultural exports. The creative industry spans music, fashion, digital and social media content creation, performing arts, cultural and heritage sites, and film production. The creative sector is estimated to contribute about 2.5% to Ghana's GDP with the potential to increase if adequately supported (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture [MoTAC], 2024). Ghana has gained international recognition for its vibrant fashion, music, rich cultural displays, and art scenes. For instance, platforms such as the Chale Wote Street Art Festival and other traditional festivals such as Fetu Afahye, Homowo, and Hogbetsotso, among several others, draw both local and international visitors. Music exports such as Afrobeat, hiplife, and highlife music have also boosted Ghana's visibility in global markets, with artists such as Stonebwoy, Sarkodie, and Shatta Wale gaining international acclaim ([Multimedia, 2025](#)).

Despite these advances, the creative industry in Ghana still faces significant challenges that restrict its growth. Issues such as limited institutional investment, weak intellectual property protections, and inadequate infrastructure hinder creatives' ability to expand and succeed ([Houadjeto, 2025](#)). Additionally, gendered inequalities dominate the various subsectors of the creative workspace in Ghana. Women dominate in subsectors considered "feminine" jobs, such as textiles, crafts, catering, and food businesses, while men dominate in high-paying fields such as film, music, and movie production ([Ackah, Görg, Hanley & Hornok, 2024](#)). Gender norms and societal expectations also shape women's participation and recognition in the creative space, with female creatives often facing discrimination, sexual harassment, and low remuneration, which limits their involvement in the sector ([Bobie, 2025](#)).

Although Ghana's creative sector has immense potential to contribute to youth employment and economic growth, gendered norms and inequalities, a lack of investment, and the underrecognition of creative works limit its growth and sustainability. Gendered inequities hamper female creatives from fully benefiting from opportunities in the booming sector ([Ntoele & Atougua, 2017](#)). Research-based systematic understanding of how gender dynamics affect the participation of young women in the creative sector is limited.

This study is part of the project, "Behind the Scenes," which responds to growing calls for deeper insights and rigorous evidence to enable effective strategies that address gendered disparities and barriers in the creative sectors of seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Focusing on Ghana, the study explored this core question: How are gender norms and power dynamics intersecting with other socio-economic and contextual processes to shape the pathways, creative journeys, and aspirations of young women in the industry, and what are the implications for young female creatives' ability to benefit from, realize their full potential, and participate in the industry and society at large?



The creative sector is estimated to contribute about 2.5% to Ghana's GDP with the potential to increase if adequately supported (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture [MoTAC], 2024).



2.0 Background

2.0-Background

In Ghana, the creative industry is becoming more widely acknowledged as a key component of cultural identity, economic diversification, and national growth. The creative industries, once overshadowed by traditional sectors like agriculture and mining, are now among Ghana's fastest-growing economic sectors, providing avenues for youth employment, innovation, and cross-cultural exchange.

The social and cultural fabric of Ghana has traditionally included creative expression. Various artistic works, including music, dance, storytelling, crafts, and visual arts, have remained critical resources/tools for maintaining and passing down collective identity and values before, during, and after colonialism ([Botwe-Asamoah, 2013](#)). These works have also been relied upon to foster communal cohesion and education. The Arts Council of Ghana was founded as a result of this acknowledgment, with the responsibility of monitoring and encouraging the development of the creative industry ([Darkwa Asare, 2021](#)). This initiative led to the development of the National Commission on Culture (NCC) and later the Creative Arts Council, which acts as a regulatory authority to coordinate policy interventions, provide institutional support, and promote the professionalization and global competitiveness of the creative industry.

Ghana's creative sector has seen tremendous growth and diversification over the past 20 years. Creative subsectors like film, music, fashion, digital content production, crafts, and design have grown to be a hub of young entrepreneurs and employers. For example, the film industry alone creates over 250,000 direct jobs in production, distribution, and technical roles each month ([Owusu-Amoah & Otoo, 2024](#)). A UNESCO report also estimates that the Ghanaian film business, also referred to as Ghallywood, generates US\$10 million annually and has created nearly 200,000 indirect jobs (UNESCO, 2021). The National Film Authority (NFA), recognizing the potential of the industry, launched the Presidential Film Pitch Series in 2022. This US\$25 million program aims to bring together filmmakers and investors, produce more than 200 films a year, and create about 40,000 new jobs (National Film Authority, 2022). Strong political

awareness of the sector's economic and social potential has also been shown during the last four election cycles (2012–2024), as major political parties have included support for the creative industry in their manifestos ([Darkwa Asare, 2021](#)).

The creative sector nevertheless faces significant institutional and structural obstacles despite these encouraging developments. These include limited financial access, inadequate infrastructure, an inadequate intellectual property protection system, and disjointed policy implementation ([Kilu et al., 2024](#)). Due to restricted access to official financing, more than 60% of creatives depend on personal or family funds to support their job ([Agyeman-Buahin, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the lack of proper copyright protection and the shortage of performance spaces threaten the sustainability of the arts and the generation of income ([Multimedia, 2025](#)).

Gender inequality further worsens these structural barriers. While men dominate higher-paying fields like film, music, and digital production, women creatives are disproportionately found in lower-paying subsectors such as textiles, crafts, and catering (Mastercard Foundation, 2023). Women's participation and visibility in the sector is still limited by structural gender stereotypes, unequal access to capital and technology, and social expectations surrounding caregiving roles. Women in Ghana's creative industries have also been the victims of sexual harassment, discrimination, and wage disparities, according to studies and advocacy reports ([Sika, 2025](#)).

Additionally, despite their significant contribution to the creative sector, women continue to face underrepresentation in leadership opportunities, financial rewards, and visibility. Ghana's commitments to gender equality through the National Gender Policy (2015), the Affirmative Action (Gender Equity) Act, 2024, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 5 and 8), which prioritize gender equity and fair employment for all, align with the need to address these disparities.

Realizing the full economic and cultural potential of Ghana's creative sector, as well as advancing inclusivity, depends on an understanding of women's experiences, struggles, and resiliency in the creative economy. This study contributes to building this knowledge base by directly examining the lived experiences of women creatives in Ghana.



3.0

Study Design

3.0-Study Design

The study used a multi-method, multidisciplinary, and participatory research design. Data were gathered from a range of key industry players, particularly young female and young creatives, using surveys, in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), photo-voice, creative mapping, and creative representation.

3.1-Study Objectives

The study responds to growing calls for deeper insights and rigorous evidence to inform effective strategies that address gendered disparities and barriers in Ghana's creative sector. The study specifically sought to generate evidence on the nature, dynamics, and implications of gender-based inequities young female creatives face in Ghana; and to provide evidence-based recommendations and best practices that support gender equity in the Ghana's creative industries and workplaces.

3.2-Study Site

The study was national in scope. The target population comprised individuals who participate in the creative sector across both physical (geographic) and digital (virtual) spaces.

3.3-Study Population and Sample

The study population comprised creatives from sectors including advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; product, graphic, and fashion design; film; television production; video; radio; photography; IT, software, and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries, and libraries; and music, performing, and visual arts. The sample was intended to capture the diverse experiences and challenges of female creatives across the country.

3.4-Data Collection Methods

The study used a multi-method data collection approach which included a survey, FGDs, IDIs, creative mapping, creative representation, and photo-voice.

Survey data: The survey data were collected online and offline with young women creatives in Ghana aged between 18 and 35 years. Participants

were recruited through multiple-point snowballing and referral approaches and were drawn from the core creative sub-sectors in Ghana. The snowballing technique was aimed at ensuring sample diversity and the inclusion of underrepresented participants, such as less popular creatives, rural-based creatives, creatives with disability, and local language creatives. Survey data were collected using computer-assisted personal interviewing, with each respondent assigned a unique identifier. Field data collector identities were also recorded for each interview conducted. Stata 17 was used for data analysis, which included univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses.

Key informant interviews: These were conducted with purposively recruited national officials from government ministries and departments, focusing on creative and cultural activities in Ghana.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions:

We conducted IDIs and FGDs with young female creatives in the country. These respondents were recruited through multiple-point snowball sampling and referral techniques. IDIs and FGDs helped elicit nuanced individual and group experiences and perspectives on the types, expressions, and dynamics of gender-based disparities in their work sectors, as well as notions and views of what dignified and fulfilling work meant in their specific industries. All interview sessions (KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs) were conducted in English, except for the FGDs held in Cape Coast and Tamale, which were conducted in local languages. Each interview session lasted between 1.5 and 3 hours. Recorded interviews were downloaded onto computers and backed up daily via a secure data storage platform. The audio recordings and transcripts were anonymized, labeled with unique identifiers, and backed up in a database.

Creative representation: We used creative representation to enable young female creatives to express their experiences of gender inequities in the creative industry. Participants for this component were recruited through an open call targeted at young female creatives. As part of the requirements, interested creatives were asked to use any form of artistic expression to depict how female creatives face gender inequities in their profession. About 15 submissions were received, and five artistic works



Photo: Pexels

were selected after a thorough review by a three-member panel, which included two in-country investigators and one creative expert who also served on the in-country advisory group.

Photovoice: During the survey, we asked respondents if they were willing to be contacted for follow-up interviews or data collection, and many expressed interest. About 10 creatives were shortlisted and 5 of them ended-up participating in the photovoice. The purpose and details of the photovoice were thoroughly explained to them. The photovoice guide was shared with them to assist in the process, and they were requested to take pictures of events or things that reflected gender inequities in the creative industry. Afterward, one research assistant interacted with them to discuss the meanings of the images/ pictures they had taken.

3.5-Data Analysis

All recorded interviews from the IDIs, FDGs, and KIIs were transcribed. Through iterative and close reading of the transcripts, the research team collaboratively developed analytical codes from the narratives. Coding was conducted manually using both a priori themes and in vivo codes that emerged from participants' narratives. This dual approach allowed us to balance pre-identified areas of interest with context-specific insights generated from the data. To strengthen reliability, multiple members of the research team were involved in the coding process. Codes

were compared, discussed, and refined through several rounds of review to improve inter-coder reliability and ensure consistency, while minimizing individual bias. Discrepancies were resolved through consensus, and the final coding framework was applied uniformly across the transcripts.

Data obtained from the photovoice were analyzed thematically, guided by both the study objectives and the broader project analytical framework. Each photograph and its accompanying explanation were reviewed to determine how it illustrated key challenges, such as unequal pay, restricted opportunities, or experiences of discrimination, as well as how participants envisioned achieving dignity and fulfillment in their professional lives.

3.6-Ethical Considerations

We obtained ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast (UCCIRB/EXT/2024/039).

Several strategies were implemented to ensure data security and protect participants' rights and identifying information. To protect the identity of participants and ensure no harm comes to them, the research team scheduled the interview meetings at the convenience of the study participants. The team adhered to stringent ethical principles around anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. All participants consented to the study before participation.



4.0 Findings

A. Social demographics

Survey Participants

- i Sample size:** A total of 312 female creatives participated in the survey.
- ii Self-identity:** Almost all respondents (99%) identified as female. The remaining 1% did not provide or disclose their gender identity.
- iii Age groups:** The age distribution shows that the largest proportion of respondents were between 25–30 years (approximately 42%), followed by those aged 18–24 years (31.3%), and 31–35 years (26.8%).
- iv Education level:** The majority of respondents held a bachelor's degree (44%), suggesting that a considerable number of the creatives were formally educated.
- v Training in the creative sector:** A significant proportion (60%) of respondents reported having received formal training in the creative field. This suggests that many participants had specialized knowledge and skills relevant to their creative professions.
- vi Marital status:** Nearly three-quarters (73.6%) of the respondents were single. This indicates that a majority of the creatives were not married at the time of the study.
- vii Number of children:** Among respondents who had children, over half (55%) reported having one child.
- viii Care responsibilities:** Respondents mentioned several childcare arrangements for when they were working, the most common being "older child/children" (17.1%).

Qualitative study participants

The qualitative portion of the study included 14 KIs with officials from government ministries and departments, policymakers and heads of creative agencies, and industry players across various creative fields, 5 creatives each participated in the creative representation and photovoice sessions through artistic works depicting experiences of gender inequities in the creative industry, and six FGDs, which included a total of 47 young

female creatives. 13 IDIs were also conducted and participants for this phase represented a broad spectrum of creative fields, capturing the dynamism and multidisciplinary nature of Ghana's creative economy. These included fashion design, theatre and performing arts, modelling (runway, photo, and commercial), photography, filmmaking, music, content creation, dance, bead making, journalism, cosmetology, event planning, sculpture, and voice-over artistry. Participants were women between the ages of 20 and 35.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Information of FGD, IDIs, KIs, and Photovoice Participants

FGDs			IDI		KII		Photovoice		Creative Representation	
Site	N	Site	N	Site	N	Site	N	Site	N	Site
Cape Coast	6	Cape Coast	2	Accra	6	Cape Coast	4	Accra	2	
Takoradi	7	Accra	4	Kumasi	1	Accra	1	Cape Coast	2	
Tamale	7	Kumasi	1	Tamale	1			Kumasi	1	
Accra	14	Saltpond	1	Cape Coast	1					
Kumasi	13	Tarkwa	2	Not specified	5					
		Nzema	1							
		Not specified	2							
Total	47	Total	13	Total	14	Total	5	Total	5	

Age Distribution		Age Distribution		Age Distribution		Age Distribution	
Age Distribution		Age Distribution		Age Distribution		Age Distribution	
18 - 24	6	18 - 24	4	18 - 24	0	18 - 24	4
25 - 30	22	25 - 30	3	25 - 30	1	25 - 30	1
31 - 35	18	31 - 35	0	31 - 35	0	31 - 35	0
Not specified	1	Not specified	6	36 - 40	2		
				Not specified	11		

Creative Space		Creative Space		Creative Space		Creative Space	
Creative Space		Creative Space		Creative Space		Creative Space	
Design	12	Design	8	Audio-visuals	1	Audio-visuals	2
Cultural sites	9	Performing arts	1	Visual arts	1	Design	3
Performing arts	17	Visual arts	1	Design	1		
Audio-visuals	3	Audio-visuals	1	Cultural site	4		
Visual arts	2	Cultural site	1	Performing arts	1		
New media	2	Not specified	1	New media	1		
Creative services	3			Creative Agencies	5		

B.**Perceptions on the state of the workspace environment in the creative sector**

This section presents key findings on perceptions of the workspace environment within the creative sector in Ghana. The findings are organized around the following thematic areas: creative subsector dynamics, work hours, social media use, gender dominance and composition of the workspace, and the overall sense of equity and fairness in the sector.

i. Creative subsector

The survey respondents were drawn from diverse creative sectors, with the predominant being design (interior, graphic, and fashion) at 33.6%. The least represented industry in the survey was creative services (architectural, creative research and development, cultural, and recreational work) at just under 4% (Figure 1).

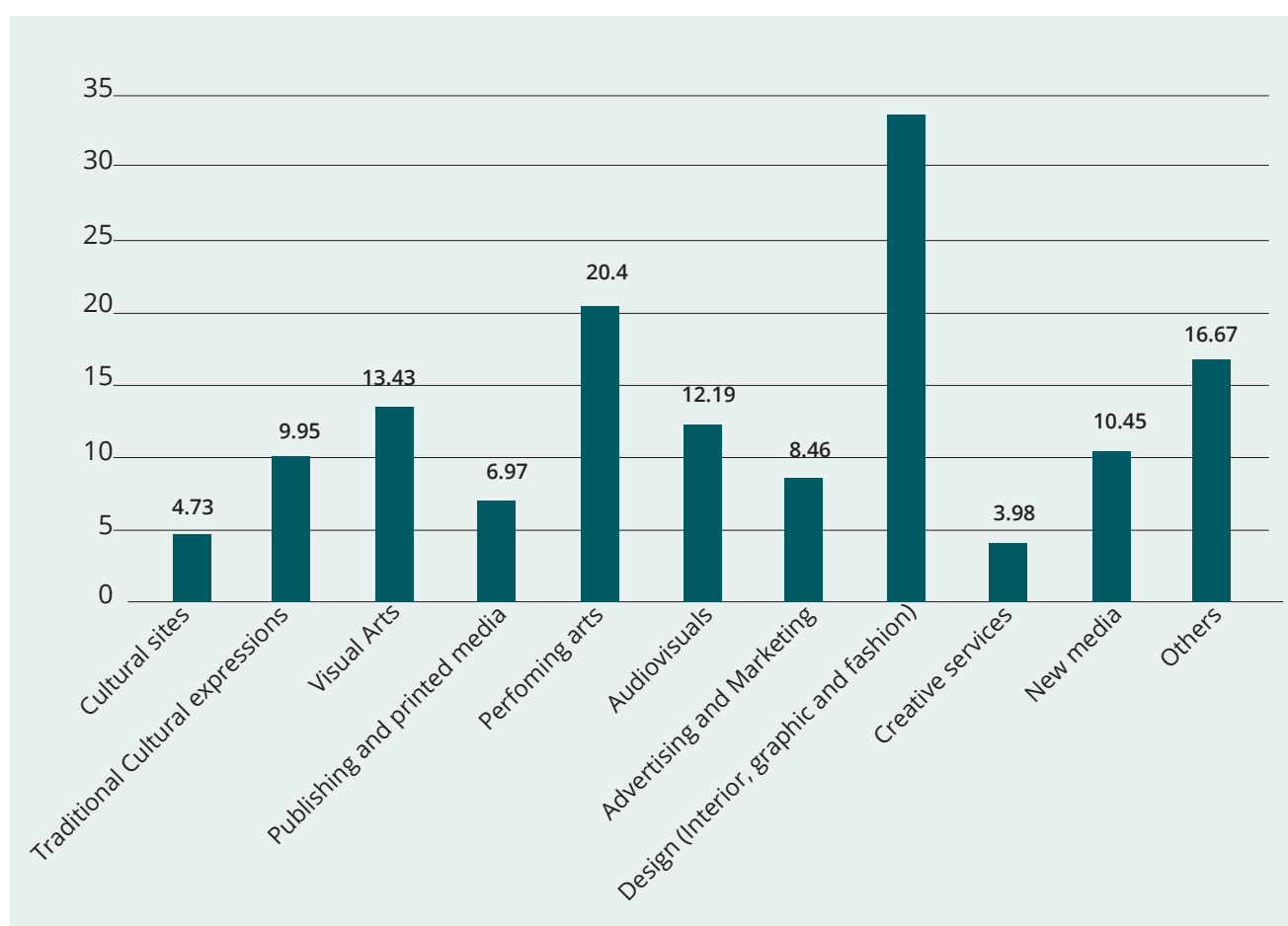


Figure 1: Creative fields of respondents

Participants across regions expressed concern about how society perceives the creative sector, describing it as a space marked by low social value, stereotypes, and stigma. Despite the sector's diversity, a recurring sentiment expressed by creatives was the widespread societal undervaluation of creative work compared to traditional professions such as law, medicine, or teaching. This perception, according to participants, begins early within the education system and is reinforced by family and community attitudes. Consequently, many creatives conceal their professional identity to avoid ridicule and marginalization. Those who pursue creative subjects in formal education often encounter stigmatization, with their courses dismissed as unserious or unintelligent pursuits. One participant reflected on this entrenched bias:



“Right from secondary school, visual arts, or arts, is stigmatized. ‘You are not serious! You are not intelligent! You have nothing to offer.’ So, we are even having parents who are not willing to let their children do the visual arts. You see a child with a remarkable talent. A child who can offer something, but the parent is unwilling, because that sector is seen as a sector for people who are not, excuse me, ‘serious’.” (FGD participant, Takoradi)

Despite these challenges, participants acknowledged shifting perceptions in specific subsectors, especially fashion design and pageantry, which are gradually earning public respect due to increased visibility and material rewards. Success stories in these fields, such as winners of national pageants who receive cars and travel opportunities, were cited as examples of how economic and social recognition can improve the creative sector’s image.

ii. Time of work

Participants described the creative sector as one where conventional 9-to-5 work schedules rarely apply. Work often extends into nights, weekends, or irregular hours dictated by client needs and event timings. While this flexibility can allow autonomy, it also complicates personal planning and rest. Several participants highlighted how event organizers frequently fail to adhere to agreed-upon schedules, causing long waits and unpredictable work hours. A 23-year-old model from Cape Coast explained this challenge as such:



“You say the program starts at 8:00 AM, but I arrive at 7:30 and have to wait until 10:00 before it begins. Like, who does that?” (IDI, 23-year-old model, Cape Coast)

Many noted that irregular work hours complicate balancing family responsibilities, and that the absence of formal contracts leaves creatives vulnerable to exploitation. Participants emphasized the need for clearer scheduling, transparent payment, and labor protections to improve work conditions.

iii. Use of social media

Social media has become an efficient tool for creative expression, igniting interest in the creative economy and serving as a channel for advertising creative products and services. Not surprisingly, more than half (53%) of the survey respondents indicated that they rely on social media as a primary platform for creative work. The most popular platform among the respondents was WhatsApp (95%), followed by TikTok (79%) and Instagram (77.6%). The least relied upon platform was X/ Twitter (Figure 2).

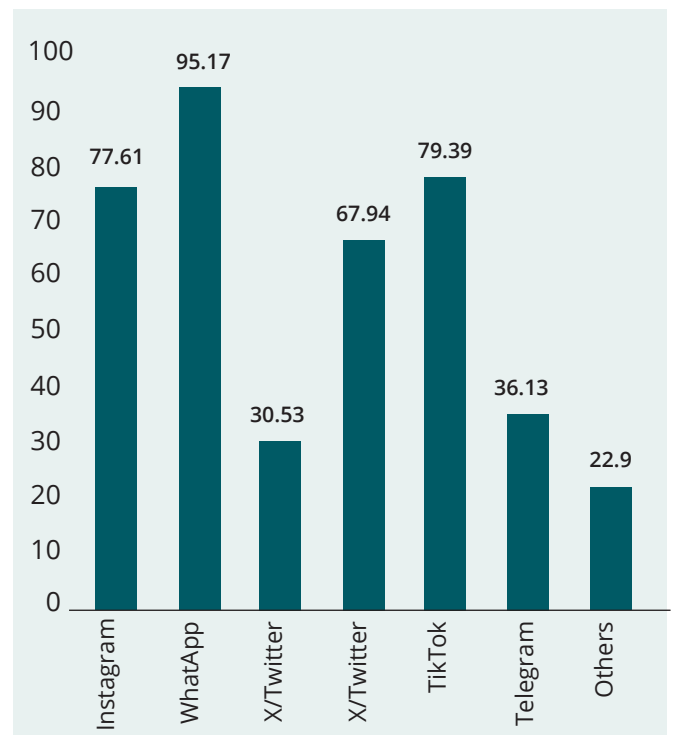


Figure 2: Social media use among respondents

Creatives widely recognized social media as a transformative extension of the creative workspace, providing vital platforms for showcasing work, networking, and building personal brands. Many emphasized how social media bypasses traditional gatekeepers, presenting opportunities that were previously inaccessible. As one participant noted:



“Right now, it’s like we don’t need anyone’s help. You put your art out there, whether people like it or not; they see it, and you can get wherever you want to get from there.” (FGD participant, 23-year-old dancer, Accra)

This digital presence empowers creatives, especially women, to build independent followings and reduce reliance on male-dominated spaces or intermediaries. A DJ from Cape Coast observed:



“Since social media has made everything public, it has become a tool for opportunities. Everyone is trying to grab an opportunity and bring out their talents.” (IDI, 30-year-old DJ, Kumasi)

Moreover, social media fosters connections and collaborations across geographical boundaries, expanding creative networks. A cultural dancer from Kumasi explained:



“The world has become so small that even if someone is in Asia, they can follow what someone is doing in Kumasi. Social media alone can create connections and collaborations.” (KII, cultural dancer and promotor, Kumasi)

Participants also noted challenges with social media, such as the pressure to maintain a constant online presence. Nonetheless, social media was generally seen as an essential equalizer, democratizing access and enhancing inclusivity in the creative sector.

iv. Gender domination/composition of the workspace (male or female)

Most (42%) of the respondents worked with approximately an equal number of men and women, but a sizeable proportion also mainly worked with women (30%) or mostly men (27%) (Figure 3)

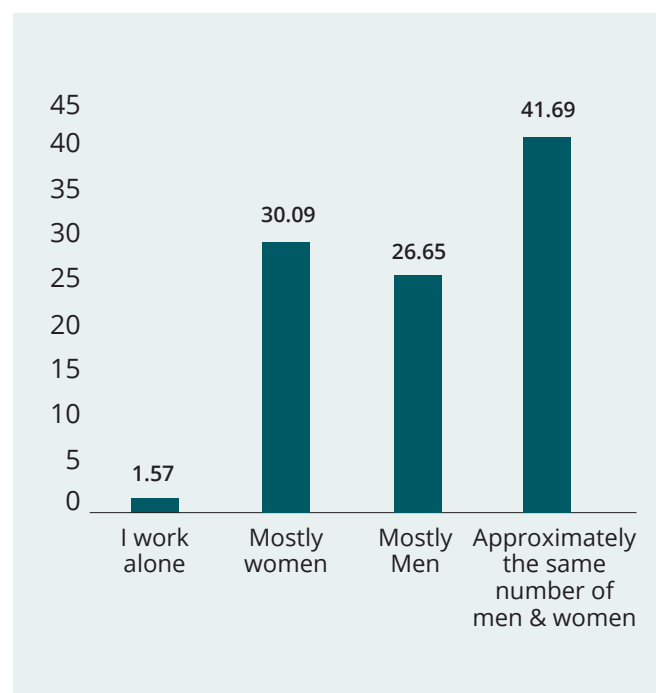


Figure 3: Gender composition of the workspace

Gender dynamics profoundly shaped the workspace environment within the creative sector. While some subsectors, such as fashion design, were female-dominated, many others remained male-dominated, including DJing, music production, and photography. In traditionally male-dominated creative jobs, creative entrepreneurs often sought to exploit women’s time and remuneration. For example, opportunities for DJing at events were frequently determined based on gender rather than skills and experience. Beyond landing fewer gigs, women who did manage to find this work were usually expected to work for longer hours than men. One female DJ remarked:



“Event organizers often expect me to play longer than agreed because I’m the female ‘drawing in the crowd,’ but they don’t increase my pay. I’ve had to bring a team with me to fight for my rights because otherwise, I end up working extra hours without compensation.”
(IDI, 30-year-old DJ, Cape Coast)

In workspaces where men dominated, women adopted a masculine posture and style, and they traveled in groups and disguised themselves to conceal their identities.

v. Overall sense of equality and equity in the sector

Participants generally agreed that the creative workspace in Ghana is unequal and lacks institutional equity. The sector was broadly perceived as disproportionately disadvantaging women, reflecting deep-rooted gender disparities. Gender emerged as a significant axis of inequality, with women facing barriers in both male-dominated and traditionally female-led creative spaces. In sculpture, tour guiding, sports photography, and jewelry-making, many in the study expressed that women are made to feel like they do not belong. Even in fashion design, where women are relatively well-represented, they were often seen as less capable or reliable than their male counterparts. Men were usually preferred due to stereotypes about women’s reliability and domestic obligations. Married women or mothers were frequently overlooked due to assumptions about their availability or commitment.

Female creatives also felt pressured to accept unfavorable work conditions and terms to stay visible and maintain their income. One participant recounted a situation on a movie set where, despite long hours waiting to shoot a short scene, no compensation or logistical support was provided, with the promise of “exposure” implied as adequate compensation in lieu of payment.



“... we were told we’d be shooting our scene that day... We waited till like 9, 10 p.m. The shoot didn’t happen, and we were asked to go back home [and return] the next day, at 6 a.m. No one catered for us. When we asked why they were treating us this way, they responded by saying, ‘You’ll get the exposure ...’”
(KII, 28-year-old Actress, Accra)

The absence of formal support structures such as enforceable contracts, regulatory frameworks, and unions further exacerbated inequality and equity-related issues. The informal nature of the sector meant there was little to no protection against abuse or exploitation, including unpaid remuneration and unequal pay.



Workspace Challenges in Ghana’s Creative Industry

This section examines the key challenges that women faced in the Ghanaian creative industry. The survey data showed that approximately two-thirds (62%) of women creatives had faced at least one type of challenge in their careers. Some of these include gender-based discrimination, career progression, harassment, a weak protective policy architecture, and exclusion in workplace decision-making.

i. Gender-Based Discrimination

Of the survey respondents, a higher proportion (49%) had at some point experienced gender-based discrimination in their creative journeys. Narratives from female creatives interviewed provided additional insights into how these occurred. Many participants revealed that unequal pay and remuneration were their primary concerns, noting that they were often expected to charge less than their male counterparts, even when producing a similar product or delivering a comparable service. They further revealed unequal pay was exacerbated

by gendered stereotypes that questioned their competence, particularly in male-dominated creative spaces such as DJing, tailoring, and photography. Such stereotypes frequently relegated them to “feminine roles,” undermining their worth, skills, and authority. In an interview, one respondent explained:



“...I know some males charge higher. For a simple dress, I know some could charge GHC500 [US\$48.08] and above, and customers pay. This same customer will go and pay some huge amount of money for the male designer for a dress or something, but when he or she comes to you, they expect that what they paid at the man's place for like GHC1000 [US\$96.15], you should give that same style to them at GHC200 [US\$19.23] ...” (IDI, 21-year-old fashion model, Cape Coast)

Another issue that emerged strongly was the sexual objectification of women. This was predominantly experienced by female creatives in male-dominated creative workspaces, as well as those in the fashion (i.e., models) and entertainment sectors. Female creatives within these workspaces revealed that there was an implicit assumption and negative perception that once in those spaces, they used their physical appearance to attract attention and secure roles they would not ordinarily have gotten had it not been for their gender and physique. A young female creative said:



“... when you are a lady and they see you doing something creative or getting a lot of opportunities, they attribute it to your beauty or your body or something in the background. Some people don't believe women can also be creative and play a lot of roles. They begin to think, you are sleeping with the bosses or the director to obtain roles...” (IDI, 26-year-old actress, Kumasi)

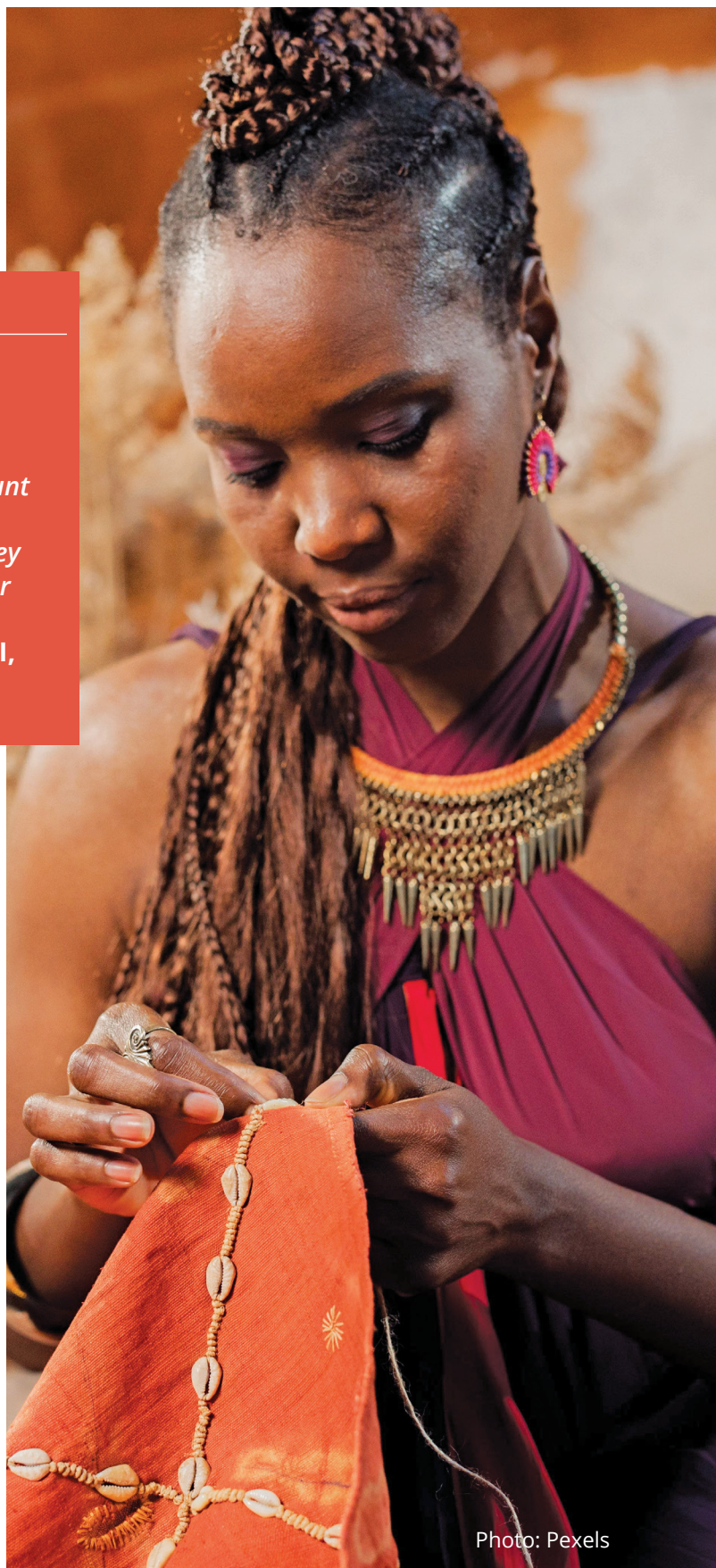


Photo: Pexels

Contrary to the views of many young female creatives who expressed having suffered discriminatory assumptions based on their gender, a few revealed that they have not faced any form of discriminatory practices at the workplace. Some female creatives revealed that their personal boundaries, assertiveness, and dressing style may have contributed to avoiding gender-based harassment and biased treatment. While these may be exceptions rather than the norm, it suggests that such discrimination may be context-specific.

ii. Career Progression Challenges

Almost half (49%) of surveyed young women said their gender hasn't affected their career progress; about 43% stated that their gender has influenced their career progression. Narratives from female creatives showed that career advancement within the creative sector was not only dependent on one's talent but also on a range of structural, financial, and personal constraints. For instance, financial constraints stemming from the cost of travel to and from work or participating in creative works outside their locality, auditioning fees, unpaid allowances and remunerations for works done, unequal pay, and difficulties accessing capital hampered their ability to keep up, participate, or progress within the creative space. A young creative pointed out:



"Imagine, I am here in Cape Coast, and there is a casting call at Kumasi... I would have to travel from Cape Coast to Kumasi again. Afterwards, they will pay you equally to someone from Kumasi. This means that I will not gain anything from what I receive. How can I move forward when all I receive is hand to mouth...?" (IDI, 21-year-old fashion model, Cape Coast)



Photo: Pexels

Other issues that hindered young female creatives' progression included body-based discrimination (such as body shaming), as certain body types (slim ladies) were much more desirable compared to plus-sized women who may want to take up a career in the creative workspace. For instance, some plus-sized women revealed they were subjected to exclusion and mockery even among their female peers. Social and gendered roles and expectations also played a restrictive role in women's progression within the creative space. For instance, some female creatives revealed that marriage, childbearing, and male partners' approval for the type of creative works they could participate in or engage in forced some female creatives to pause or abandon their careers entirely. A female creative said this during an IDI:



"Marriage is a key challenge in the industry when it comes to music, modeling, and acting. These jobs, when you are married, some partners try to stop you from being in that space. There are some roles they will need your partner to sign, but he won't agree for you to do it. ... Some partners think that once you are in that industry, people will take advantage of you so they won't allow you ..." (IDI, 32-year-old fashion designer, Accra)

iii. Regressive Policies and Practices

Enabling policies are crucial to advance every sector. However, creative players and stakeholders may not be aware of these policies to leverage for their advantage. Only 28% of the surveyed young women agreed that there were sufficient policies for the creative economy. Although Ghana has several policies to boost the creative sector, their implementation has been unclear.

On the other hand, sociocultural practices and societal expectations have restricted the growth of the creative sector. In many Ghanaian

communities, practices and norms on modesty and behavioral characteristics dissuaded female creatives to pursue some career choices, including modeling, music, or performing arts, for fear of being labeled indecent or immoral. This form of sociocultural gatekeeping has forced many young female creatives to either censor their artistic expression or abandon such careers to avoid such stereotypical labels. Family and societal disapproval of creative careers, especially for women, also limited the progress of many young female creatives. Participants shared stories of being discouraged by parents, partners, and community members who perceived their career choices as inconsequential or unimportant, especially when these career paths did not conform to traditionally recognized careers such as nursing, teaching, engineering, etc. A participant said this:



“You know, overseas, wearing a bikini is normal, so no one bothers about it but in our part of the world, wearing bikinis and taking pictures in them is problematic even though these kinds of bikini shoots sell a lot... Because of our culture, it hinders us from exploring those kinds of things.” (IDI, 21-year-old fashion model, Cape Coast)

Occupational stereotypes and negative perceptions, such as women lacking strength, competence, and the capacity to lead, limited women's access to roles, leadership positions, and fair remuneration. Some creatives also revealed that progress within the creative space was sometimes determined by industry gatekeepers who sometimes dictated access and entry into the creative space, and these are controlled mainly by men with financial capital or social connections who may determine who comes in and at what point. As a result, highly skilled female creatives were sidelined in favor of those with the right connections or those able to meet conditions (i.e., sexual favors) for entry into the creative space. A creative articulates her perception of the situation as follows:



“You may have the passion, but the platform to achieve that passion or talent is limited to a few that can afford it, based on the connections they have... or the money they can also pay at times. Sometimes, they can even ask for sex or anything they want from you before they can connect you to the right places...”

(IDI, 19-year-old actress, Tamale)

iv. Inclusion in Decision-Making

We evaluated the creatives' participation in decision-making through three questions: their perceived sense of inclusion in collaborative projects, whether they experienced differential treatment by peers based on gender, and whether their colleagues considered their gender before involving them. Overall, their responses indicated a sense of inclusion: On being valued and included, 71% responded affirmatively. Concerning differential treatment, around 57% agreed that this did not happen, and around 52% respondents agreed that people they worked with do not consider their gender before involving them in projects.

However, testimonials added some nuance to the survey responses. At the national level, the voices of young female creatives were rarely featured in decision-making. At the organizational level, most creatives reported primarily serving in supportive roles, which reduced their involvement in decision-making. Participants indicated that their exclusion was based on gendered power dynamics and inequalities that downplayed the contribution of women and undervalued their capabilities. For instance, decisions on project direction, compensation, remuneration, and other auxiliary activities were typically made by men without their input. Some creatives indicated their reliance on male colleagues to advocate on their behalf on issues of interest. The dependence on men for their welfare underscored how women's legitimacy in the creative space is mediated through male validation. A creative explained:



"I realized I had to go with someone... a guy... to talk for me. When I go alone, they don't take me seriously, but when he talks, they listen and negotiate well."

(IDI, 26-year-old actress/model, Cape Coast)

Also, some creatives revealed that decisions about project structuring and information about work expectations remained opaque, with women receiving little or no information. Some of these creatives indicated that their exclusion from decision-making was sometimes tied to the lack of recognition of their worth and contribution to the creative space. Such gatekeeping and non-involvement reproduced gendered inequities and reduced female visibility within the creative space.

D. Gender Pay Gap

This section explores study respondents' perceptions of unequal pay in the creative sector, their personal experience of this, and structural weaknesses in the policy landscape that exacerbate the gender pay gap. About 55% of the sampled creatives felt that they were paid less than their male colleagues, even while eight in ten indicated having had a long-term career in the creative industry. The following sub-sections draw on personal stories of creatives and those of their peers to illuminate these themes.

i. Perceptions on the Current State of the Gender Pay Gap

Across creative domains, women consistently reported being undervalued, not based on output or skill, but due to entrenched gendered stereotypes. Many participants reported being perceived as less competent or less deserving of fair pay simply because they were women. In fields like automotive upholstery (design of fabric and leather covering for vehicle interior), female creatives were often assumed to lack the skills and abilities required

for the job, regardless of their technical ability or experience. An FGD participant lamented:



"They do not pay us sometimes, based on our creativity and our ideas... the only thing they see is a female..." (FGD, participant 2, 23-year-old graphic designer, Accra)

This observation was primarily driven by societal norms related to gender roles. Female creatives in traditionally masculine fields face constant pressure to prove their skills, unlike their male counterparts. In disciplines like photography, video editing, and artistry, women were paid less due to stereotypical assumptions about their financial needs being less than men's. These assumptions are partly connected to the household "breadwinner" roles, which are often considered to be held by men in many African households. Consequently, women are presumed to have less need for money than men and to have alternative income sources. As a result, women are underpaid, or their wages are typically delayed. One creative photographer had this to say:



"In photography, payment issues arise... Men are paid more than women, and when you ask why, you are either asked what women do with their money..." (FGD, participant 4, 31-year-old photographer, Tamale)

These assumptions further erode women's financial independence and create an uneven playing field. This devaluation also extends to dismissing women's ideas or efforts as secondary or supplemental, undermining their professional identities.



Photo: Pexels

ii. Experience of Gender Pay Gap

Women in the creative sector frequently encountered difficulties in negotiations, where their attempts to assert the value of their work are undercut by gender bias. Participants indicated that payment disparities often emerged during negotiation processes, where male creatives are taken more seriously and receive better remuneration. Several participants recounted scenarios where clients offered lower rates to women, assuming they would be more willing to accept less. *“When women are negotiating... clients turn to negotiate to pay them less than men because of their gender,”* one creative, a 32-year-old fashion designer from Accra explained. This was compounded by the fact that many women, particularly early-career creatives, felt pressured to accept lower rates to gain exposure or maintain client relationships. However, those who do not back down encounter resistance when they demand parity with men. A key informant recounted:



“I had a female friend who is a DJ and was invited to play at a show. After her set, they didn’t want to pay the agreed amount. It became a back-and-forth. She didn’t deserve that experience. Was it because she is a female?” (KII, 28-year-old content creator, Accra)

It also emerged that some prospective clients expected women to discount their work without regard for the professional value or the time investment involved. Gendered biases also subtly discourage women from asserting themselves during negotiations, fearing that confidence may be perceived as arrogance. This internalized check on their behavior was common in creative industries where men dominated. Consequently, some women creatives lower the cost of their product and service to become competitive with men. This strongly embedded social expectation around how women should behave limited women’s earning power and undermined their long-term growth in the industry.

iii. Systemic Gender Pay Gap: Policy, Practices, and Procedures

A key feature of Ghana's creative economy is its informality, which allows gender inequalities to persist. A large part of the industry remains unregulated. For instance, study findings reveal that formal contracting procedures were often not enforced. There was also weak standardization of payment structure, partly due to the diverse range of actors and procedures. Many aspects of the industry are marked by arbitrariness, sometimes based on physical features (e.g., body shape and complexion) of the creatives, as well as their perceived public personalities and lifestyles. Female creatives who were perceived as beautiful and working in the same environment with males may be underpaid based on the false assumption that they receive tips from male customers. One female shared:



"They were paying us, and his salary was more than mine. He explained that we get tips from the men. So, you are sitting at the office thinking I would be getting tips." (FGD participant 6, 23-year-old make-up artist, Accra)

Such assumptions exemplified the informal practices that underpin wage disparities in creative settings. Another creative, a 23-year-old dancer and model from Cape Coast described how she was shortchanged with the justification that *"you're a lady, you guys always figure it out."* These casual justifications are difficult to challenge and even harder to prove, contributing to a culture of silence and resignation. In these informal structures, the lack of pay transparency and standardized roles allows bias to thrive, making fair remuneration an exception rather than the rule.

Not all sectors experienced gender pay disparity. Participants in public or government-affiliated

creative sectors reported more equitable compensation practices. The standardized structures within the public creative sectors served as a safeguard against arbitrary or biased remuneration decisions. However, some participants were quick to point out that while pay may be equal, the opportunity to access roles within these spaces was challenging.

It also emerged that women were not adequately credited for their intellectual and creative ideas. In collaborative creative environments, women's contributions were often misattributed to male colleagues, diminishing both their visibility and future earnings. Several participants described situations where their innovative ideas were taken over or credited to male colleagues within such creative spaces. This erasure of authorship diminishes not only their income but also their professional reputation and visibility. One creative noted:



"When a woman brings an idea and then executes it, at the end of the day, because there's a male in the team, that person is often seen as the one who brought the idea." (FGD participant 3, 28-year-old actress, Tamale)

This lack of recognition impedes women's access to future opportunities and partnerships. In the creative industry, where portfolio and recognition are currency, being denied credit equates to being denied livelihood. This form of intellectual misappropriation also demoralizes women, leading some to withdraw or downscale their contributions. This challenge is further exacerbated by weak institutional safeguards for intellectual property and a lack of formal attribution protocols. As a result, women not only work harder for less pay but also receive less acknowledgment for their contributions.

E. Career Expectations of Young Women in the Creatives Sector

This section explores the multifaceted career expectations of young women operating within the dynamic and evolving creative sector. The majority (83%) of survey respondents had long-term career goals in the creative industry. We drew further insights from creatives to understand their motivations and expectations to remain in the industry. Three themes are presented: current progression, equal opportunities, and coping mechanisms.

i. Current Progression in the Creative Sector

The current landscape of the creative sector for young women featured a complex mix of significant challenges and new opportunities. While there was a strong sense of optimism fueled by new media, deep-rooted societal and economic barriers hindered women's overall progress in the sector.

Participants highlighted the pervasive societal stigma and misunderstanding associated with creative professions. The sector was often seen as a less reputable career choice, considered a fallback for people who cannot break into traditional white or blue collar sectors. This view resulted in a lack of respect and recognition, not just from society at large but also sometimes from close family members. For example, one participant lamented:



"This country doesn't understand or appreciate the creative industry. When I was growing up, there was this belief that only those who were not academically strong would go into creative work. That mentality has stuck with us."
(FGD participant 3, 28-year-old fashion designer, Cape Coast)

Beyond societal perceptions, economic and structural barriers present significant obstacles to career progression. The cost of training, acquiring necessary tools, and the start-up cost of establishing

a business in the creative field is often prohibitive, particularly for young female creatives. As one participant articulated:



"Just deciding to enter the creative field is already a challenge... it is expensive. Starting is hard, and establishing yourself is even harder. Getting proper tools is expensive; getting customers is another challenge." (FGD participant 5, 32-year-old fashion designer, Cape Coast)

Despite existing challenges, a powerful passion and personal initiative are driving young women's progression in the creative sector. Many participants emphasized that their career progression was deeply rooted in personal passion. This intrinsic motivation was behind their personal drive to remain committed in the creative space they find themselves.

ii. Equal or Unequal Opportunities to Progress in the Creative Sector

This section explores the extent to which young women in Ghana's creative sector experience equal opportunities for professional growth and advancement. While participants exhibited strong ambition, creativity, and determination to progress, their narratives revealed persistent structural, institutional, and gendered barriers that continue to shape unequal access to opportunities within the creative space.

Across focus groups, participants consistently expressed a deep commitment to career development, visibility, and financial independence. For many, the creative industry was seen not only as a space for artistic expression but also as a pathway toward sustainable livelihoods and global recognition. However, they emphasized that progress in the sector was largely dependent on their own drive to succeed due to the lack of support. Creatives engaged in skills development, especially in adapting to digital tools and new market trends. One participant noted:



“Skills development is crucial but you have to do it on your own. The opportunities here [creative space] is limited and even where it is available someone has to link you up with it. So, if you don’t have or know anyone you won’t get such opportunities...” (FGD 2 participant 7, 32-year-old music director, Kumasi)

Some participants also lamented the limited institutional and structural support available to creatives, particularly women. They revealed that opportunities for training, funding, and mentorship were scarce, pushing many to depend on external organizations or international initiatives that focus on women’s empowerment. One key informant explained:



“Many women creatives now tend to look for support outside of the space. Since there are systems outside the space that focus on women, they tend to seek support from these external systems. And quite unfortunately, many of the supports are external rather than within the space...” (KII, graphic designer, Accra)

Overall, participants’ narratives highlight a paradox within Ghana’s creative sector: while young women demonstrate exceptional resilience, talent, and drive, their ability to progress remains hindered by unequal access to resources, institutional neglect, and gendered constraints.



Photo: Magnific

iii. Coping with the Barriers

Despite the challenges young women face in creative fields, there remains a sense of optimism. Female creatives employed various strategies to overcome obstacles, primarily at both individual and group levels.

A strong sense of personal determination and agency was at the core of the study narratives. Many of the young women in the creative industry demonstrated remarkable resilience and perseverance, often making personal sacrifices to sustain their passion and pursue professional goals. Some chose to prioritize their creative pursuits over personal relationships that undermined their growth or confidence. For these women, endurance was both a survival mechanism and a form of resistance against exclusionary norms. As one participant reflected:



“What I have realized is that the problems are there, but if we allow them to consume us, it will blind us from seeing the solutions and what to do. So, when issues arise, I understand them, don’t let them consume me, and think about how I can overcome them. When we dwell on problems too much, we miss out on opportunities.” (FGD participant 4, 31-year-old photographer, Tamale)

Beyond perseverance, some participants also coped by cultivating self-empowerment and assertiveness to challenge gendered expectations and protect themselves from exploitation. Some described developing a “thick skin” to withstand criticism, while others actively set professional boundaries to resist harassment and maintain control over their work relationships. Many saw their ability to separate professionalism from personal vulnerability as essential to surviving in male-dominated creative spaces.

Some creatives’ coping strategies took the form of enduring unfair treatment or tolerating harassment to maintain access to limited opportunities. Others strategically aligned with male colleagues or allowed men to assume visible leadership roles as a

way to navigate spaces closed to women. These types of coping strategies reflect the constrained agency many female creatives face within the gendered structures of the creative sector.

F.

Experience of Harassment in the Workspace

Sexual harassment emerged as a rather universal issue across various creative disciplines, with participants describing it as a widely accepted norm rather than an uncommon event. Participants present consistent patterns of exploitation, with women who reject harassment likely to be excluded from full participation in the industry. Young women creatives from diverse creative industries face persistent harassment that undermines their professional agency. The threat of harassment influences career decisions from the earliest stages, creating barriers to entry that particularly affect emerging female talent. This has led to significant talent loss, as confirmed by industry professionals who note that harassment has led to some people leaving the industry over the years. Experience of harassment in the workplace included verbal harassment, sexual propositions and exploitation, employment discrimination, and gendered assignments.

i. Uncomfortable Comments

Respondents reported various experiences with uncomfortable comments. For example, 83%, 65%, and 49% of survey respondents received comments on their appearance or body, private life or marital status, and their sexual life, respectively. The participants shared several accounts of comments that sought to objectify their bodies. While uncomfortable comments were noted across the board, this was found to be more prevalent in certain groups of creatives. For example, female models faced multiple forms of this type of harassment within and outside the industry. Depending on their dressing for different events and occasions, female creatives may receive comments such as loose or slay queens. Some of the comments also tend to link women’s professional success to sexual favors rather than merit. A female creative noted:



"If you become well-known in journalism, it is often assumed that you have slept with men to achieve that level. Even if she saves money to buy herself a car or house, we see it as she got it from a 'big man' somewhere."
(FGD 1 participant 6, 22-year-old event planner, Kumasi)

Other uncomfortable comments belittled or questioned women's creatives' choice of career, as noted by one creative:



"People look at me strangely. Like, 'Why fashion? After all those years of education, you couldn't get an office job. You're sewing?' Even my parents sometimes ask, 'What are you doing? Go find a proper job.'" **(FGD 1 participant 4, 32-year-old voice-over artist, Kumasi)**

ii. Persistent Sexualized Comments, Jokes, and Communication

Study data show that young women creatives face persistent sexualized comments or jokes, directly or indirectly. Young women creatives are made to feel that their career pathways are sexually driven. Seven in ten surveyed women have been told sexually suggestive jokes directly or in their presence. Such comments are a near-normalized part of the creative industry. These sexual jokes and innuendos extended beyond workplace interactions to encompass entire community responses to women in creative fields.



Photo: Pexels

iii. Sexual Propositions and Actions

Young female creatives faced relentless patterns of sexual demands. Just under half (46%) had received sexual propositions in their creative journey. Some of the stories participants shared ranged from direct sexual exploitation to subtle/indirect sexual demands. Some of these demands were based on the widespread perception that creatives are not well remunerated and would gladly accept sexual propositions to earn supplemental incomes. A young beautician shared her experience:



“Some will tell you ‘How much are they paying you? Why don’t we have a quick one, and I’ll make you feel fine? Whatever you want, name it.’ Some, too, when you don’t give in to what they are asking for, they begin to tell the other people that you are not serious, and no one should waste their money on you. In the beginning, when they have the intention to have sex with you, they begin hailing you, but when you don’t give in, they begin to say bad things about you.” (FGD 2 participant 7, 32-year-old music producer, Kumasi)

Unfortunately, because of the occasional precarity or seasonalities associated with some creative industries, young females’ economic survival becomes a tool for sexual exploitation, breaking women’s resistance over time. An actress explained:



“Because many of us [really] love this job, most girls end up giving in. If you [really] want something that will bring you income and you’re not willing to give in, then you must give in, which is [really], [really] terrible. Even the ladies in the creative space who are tagged as slay queens were not born this way. Situations and circumstances placed them in these kinds of positions so that they couldn’t decline...” (FGD participant 6, 25-year-old actress, Cape Coast)

iv. Forced Sexual Propositions and Actions

The data also showed that young female creatives faced systemic forced sexual propositions that escalated from coercive demands to explicit ultimatums. This was particularly the case when subtle efforts have failed. A quarter (25%) of the survey respondents had been pressured to have sex by someone in the creative space. Some of these acts of violence were presented to female creatives as preconditions for contracts, full-time employment, or gig opportunities. In other instances, turning up for interviews and contract negotiations was considered implied acceptance of sexual demands. One participant recounted:



“There was an instance where we were four girls going for an interview, and it was presented to all of us that these are the situations at hand, some of the big men will date you, will you agree or not? It is more of an oath of secrecy and does not have to go out when it happens.” (FGD participant 5, 32-year-old fashion designer, Cape Coast)

The most extreme manifestation of forced sexual actions was actual assault, often in the context of limited institutional prevention and response protocols. Some women recounted traumatic incidents where they were sexually assaulted, and asymmetric power structures protected the perpetrators. The systemic power imbalances were used to threaten blacklisting of creatives who sought redress. Put differently, women’s bodies and sexuality were viewed as necessary professional resources rather than as unique boundaries that should be respected. A participant recalled a conversation with her friend:



“She told me, ‘The director raped me,’ and I asked, ‘how come?’ So, the director took the phone from her and said, ‘If I hear this outside, no one will ever call you guys for location or anything.’ So, we hid it, and no one ever heard it until this day.” (FGD 2 participant 5, 23-year-old nail technician, Accra)

v. Denial of Work Due to Refusal of Sexual Propositions

Approximately 44% of the female creatives studied reported being denied work based on their gender. We heard several stories of young female creatives who had been dismissed from professional opportunities because they refused to comply with gendered biases and exploitation. Women lost employment opportunities as a direct result of refusing sexual propositions, often with no institutional recourse or support, and some were forced to abandon entire career paths when sexual compliance became a fundamental entry requirement. Two young female creatives shared their experiences:



“When you refuse, he will say, ‘If you can’t do this one, I cannot make you a hit character. I cannot put you in my movie.’” (FGD participant 2, 28-year-old, Tamale)

“My manager demanded sex before helping me... When I refused, I lost the job. Nobody followed up.” (IDI, 26-year-old Actress, Kumasi)

While marriage is widely celebrated across African societies, within the creative industry women often face pressure to choose between marital expectations and sustaining a creative career. This stems from the persistent perception that married female creatives are less “available” for the sexualized demands embedded in some parts of the industry, which can result in fewer professional opportunities. A tour guide shared:



“Once you marry, your chances drop. If you’re working as a tour guide under someone else’s centre, marriage can end your bookings. You might go from three bookings a month to barely one in a whole year because of the sexual demands that comes with being a tour guide... Job owners will prefer to use single ladies than we the married ones...” (FGD participant 3, 28-year-old Tour Guide, Cape Coast)

vi. Genderized Tasks (Making Tea, Welcoming Visitors)

Nearly two-thirds (60%) of female creatives indicated they had been assigned tasks unrelated to their professional roles. Female creatives were often assigned domestic and service-oriented tasks, limiting their roles to support functions that reflect traditional household expectations. These roles led to marginalization and undervaluation of their professional skills. Gendered stereotypical roles assigned to women were typical across all creative sectors, though they were more pronounced in some than others. For instance, among creative teams that often lived together (such as those in the performing arts), women were tasked with unpaid duties, including cooking, dishwashing, fetching water, sweeping, and general household upkeep. Some creatives described everyday experiences:



“In most of our productions, it is the women who end up doing the house chores like the cooking, washing dishes, fetching water, and sweeping around the compound while the men sit and wait to be served. Even when we go on location, I still find myself doing these same things instead of focusing on my creative work.” (FGD participant 5, 29-year-old Actress, Tamale)

G.

Gender Equity and Gender-Based Challenges

Despite the growing acceptance of the industry and the valuable contributions of women across creative spheres, the landscape remains profoundly gendered. The female creatives often faced structural and cultural obstacles that limit their access, recognition, and opportunities for advancement. Drawing on lived experiences, this section examined how gender inequity manifested in creative workspaces and continues to shape the trajectories and daily realities of young female creatives in Ghana. The themes explored in this section include discrimination during job interviews,

the experiences of creatives who have faced discrimination, and systemic or organizational discrimination.

i. Discrimination at Job Interviews or Creative Opportunities

Although auditions and interviews are expected to provide fair opportunities based on merit, the analysis of the experiences of young female creatives suggests otherwise. The primary data collected paints a picture of how systemic bias, power imbalances, and harmful gender norms infiltrates these gatekeeping moments, often disadvantaging women. Key emerging issues include exploitative practices disguised as professional opportunities, appearance-based judgments that overshadow talent, labeling and reputational risk for assertiveness, body shape and complexion, and discrimination due to childbirth.

Many respondents described scenarios where job interviews and auditions were used as an entree for exploitative behavior by male decision-makers. One of the female creatives shared her experience:



"I went for one audition, and after my performance, the panel said I did well. But when we finished, the guy called me aside and asked if I'd be okay going for drinks. I said no, and he just said, 'You know how this industry is, you need to give something to get something,' but since I didn't give something, that was all, I never heard from them again." (FGD, participant 3, 27-year-old Actress, Tamale)

Appearance-based judgments and expectations also emerged strongly as a form of discrimination. Women were often assessed based on their appearance or attire rather than their creative abilities. This created pressure to conform to subjective standards of attractiveness or sex appeal to be considered for roles, especially in the modeling, music, and performing arts industries. Failure to comply resulted in disqualification or exclusion. Other challenges emerged on issues of body shapes and skin complexion. The experiences of young women creatives confirmed that in the

Ghanaian creative industry, contracts or jobs were often grounded on body stature and skin color rather than meritocracy. These instances were common in the movie, music, and modeling spaces. In a focus group discussion with the female creatives, participants explained this:



"Sometimes it's not even about what you can do. It's about how you look, or whether the person interviewing you finds you appealing. If you're not their 'type,' they brush you off." (FGD, participant 7, 35-year-old Photographer, Accra)

Creative endeavors also sometimes forced women to choose between career and family. Survey results revealed that some women in the creative space lost opportunities because they were pregnant (24%) or plan to have children (8%). Being a mother can be a disincentive to some creative professionals, such as those in the performing arts. However, this was not a widespread issue among creatives. In fact, the results indicate that many female creatives have not faced discrimination related to having children or pregnancy. Some even argued that their opportunities are based on performance and networking and are not associated with one's gender/sex:



"As I mentioned earlier, equality exists in this career field. Okay. So, they don't discriminate based on gender. It's how good you are, who you know, how well connected you are, how much you have, that's all." (IDI, 26-year-old photographer, Accra)

ii. Knowing Others Who Have Faced Discrimination

This section explored how indirect exposure to gender-based discrimination influences the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of young women in Ghana's creative industry. Although not all women have personally experienced

discrimination or harassment, most have heard stories of such incidents; and about one-third (33%) of female creative survey respondents indicated that they knew someone who had been denied a job because they refused sexual advances. For some creatives, these stories from their peers sometimes evoked fear, especially regarding victimization by association and second-hand accounts of trauma.

Some participants expressed concern that others had been victimized, sidelined, or blacklisted due to their physical appearances. These experiences varied across different creative industries. For example, one respondent shared what she had learned about a woman's experience seeking work in the traditional media environment:



"... when she came in, she wasn't necessarily rejected, but she couldn't get the position she wanted because of her appearance. She was interested in being in the news space but she couldn't get that due to her dreadlocks." (IDI, 33-year-old journalist, Accra)

Many participants mentioned that repeated exposure to stories of discrimination made them more stressed and fearful of becoming victimized themselves, which in turn led to widespread mistrust of male leaders in the industry. This may be leading to a shift in the environment from creativity and openness to suspicion and apprehension.



"Even if I haven't faced it yet, I'm always alert. You hear so many stories... You don't know who to trust." (IDI, 21-year-old model, Cape Coast)

While many young creatives acknowledged that their refusal to submit to sexual exploitation sometimes resulted in discrimination, a key informant worried that some of the young creatives who give in to pressure could still be denied opportunities. She expressed:



"Many people complain that directors harassed a lot of women; they slept with people, promising them jobs, but it never happened." (KII, film maker/educator, Accra)

iii. Systemic or Organized Discrimination

This section examined the systemic and organized forms of discrimination that impeded the participation and advancement of young female creatives in Ghana. Participants highlighted structural inequalities embedded in the very systems that regulate access to opportunities. Significant issues include male-dominated networks, a lack of transparent recruitment and promotion procedures, and the absence of formal mechanisms for addressing grievances or ensuring accountability.

Most participants reported that access to creative opportunities was sometimes contingent on being part of elite or male-dominated networks. Women who could not break into these networks were persistently excluded, regardless of skill or experience. The "whom you know" syndrome was a significant cause of marginalization.



"It's the system that's the problem. People don't get gigs because they are the best; they get them because they know someone or are willing to play along." (IDI, 21-year-old model, Cape Coast)

Participants also revealed that the creative landscape lacked clear guidelines and selection criteria for auditions, collaborations, and grants. This lack of transparency encouraged biased use of discretion, especially among women in the informal creative industry. An FGD participant indicated:



Photo: Magnific



"Sometimes they hand roles to people without even putting out a proper call. You won't even know something is happening until it's done." (FGD, participant 6, 29-year-old musician, Tamale)

Participants' narratives also demonstrated that the industry is characterized by precarity. Workers whose occupational and personal rights were abused often found that they had few to no mechanisms for recourse. The lack of industry standards to protect creative workers allows abusive practices to fester, and most young female creatives remain silent for fear of retaliation.



"Even if you wanted to report, who would you report to? Most of these gigs don't even have a structure. It's just vibes and connections." (IDI, 26-year-old photographer, Accra)

H. Dignifying and Fulfilling work

This section focuses on how young female creatives in Ghana's creative sector perceive and experience dignified and fulfilling work. The findings revealed that social respect, fair compensation, emotional safety, and inclusion are central to participants' understanding of dignity and fulfilment at work. At the same time, the creative sector presents several challenges, including inconsistent societal validation, limited protective measures, and the coexistence of passion with precarious labor conditions.

i. Perception and experience of dignifying work

Though participants expressed diverse views on what constitutes dignified work, common themes emerged around jobs that command respect, offer fair compensation, and are socially and legally approved. However, the concept of dignity was heavily shaped by societal norms, which tend to rank professions based on perceived prestige rather than intrinsic value or social contribution. Several participants noted that a job is dignified when it is recognized and respected by society. This respect depends not only on the legality or productivity of the job but also on how society perceives its status. One participant captured it this way:



“If we say something is dignified, it means it has respect... It makes you comfortable or is widely accepted by society. Even within legal jobs, there are classes. If I tell you I’m a lawyer, you say Wow. If I tell you I’m a model, you’ll question it. So even legal jobs are ranked in dignity.” (IDI 23-year-old model, Cape Coast)

Respondents’ accounts showed that societal perceptions heavily influenced whether a job is considered dignified. Even within legal and productive professions, respect varies. Creative industry jobs often lacked the same social esteem accorded to other professions, such as law or nursing. However, some participants challenged the idea that dignity must come from external validation. They argued for a broader understanding of dignified work as any work that contributes meaningfully to society, regardless of its prestige. A young female creative had this to say:



“Any work that society benefits from is dignified... If no one sews, we will go naked. So, tailors and seamstresses are useful.” (FGD participant 3, 28-year-old Tour Guide, Cape Coast).

Dignity was also linked to fair compensation. For many participants, being paid fairly was not just about income; it symbolized respect, recognition of effort, and validation of time invested. As one participant explained:



“A work is dignified if it respects you as a human... Being paid means they recognize the time and energy you spent doing that. It is disrespectful and inhumane if you do the opposite.” (Photovoice participant, 23-year-old pageant, Cape Coast)

ii. Perception and experience of fulfilling work

The concept of fulfilling work among participants appeared primarily personal and multi-dimensional. While some linked fulfillment to tangible achievements such as financial success or recognition, many considered work that is fulfilling aligns with their identity, values, and creative interests.



“Fulfilling work is when you wake up happy because you are doing what you love and excelling at it... Something that makes you excited, not just for money but for the joy of it.” (Photovoice participant, 20-year-old model and pageant, Cape Coast)

Although passion and purpose were central to definitions of fulfilling work, many participants noted that financial stability also played a role in fulfillment in helping to reduce stress, promote independence, and enabling individuals to sustain their creative pursuits.

iii. Safe workplace

Safety concerns emerged as a significant challenge affecting women’s participation in the creative sector. Many creative events, rehearsals, and gigs sometimes occurred at night, which was generally not a tenable option for female creatives due to poor street lighting, unreliable transport, and the risk of harassment or assault. These safety concerns constrained their mobility, participation, and visibility, as some avoided evening engagements

altogether or relied on costly alternatives such as private transport. The lack of safe and accessible nighttime transportation limited their work opportunities while at the same time reinforcing gender inequalities within the sector, as male creatives were able to stay out later, network, and take up more lucrative gigs. For women, balancing personal safety with professional demands often meant making difficult choices between self-protection and career advancement.



“Most of our shows and rehearsals happen at night, but it’s always a struggle getting home. The roads are dark, and you never know who’s out there. Sometimes I just decline offers because I don’t want to risk it. The men can move freely, but for us, it’s different—you’re always thinking about how to get home safely rather than focusing on your performance.”
(FGD participant, 32-year-old music producer, Accra)

Safety in the workplace also emerged as a significant concern, especially regarding emotional, psychological, and sexual safety. Study participants indicated that a safe work environment is essential for job satisfaction and overall well-being. They described safety both in terms of physical protection and as emotional and psychological security.

iv. Inclusion in workspaces

Participants described inclusion as being welcomed, valued, and having equitable access to resources and decision-making, regardless of one’s background, gender, or social status. Participants wanted to be seen not just as workers but as integral and respected members of their professional communities. The experiences shared by participants showed that inclusion was particularly limited in informal or freelance work environments. With limited regulations and standards to ensure workplace protection in those environments, it becomes harder for individuals to feel supported or empowered in their careers.

I.

Emerging Issues in the Creative Sector

This section discusses emerging patterns related to professional aspirations, support systems, coping strategies, and the subtle negotiations of power and agency that shape how female creatives strive to succeed in a competitive and often unequal creative landscape.

i. Transactional Relationships and Exploitative Norms

A particularly striking finding that emerged from the study was that some female creatives leveraged their sexuality to gain access to opportunities and recognition. While this behavior often stemmed from structural inequality, it reinforces the normalization of transactional relationships within the industry. Participants noted that such practices fostered competition, mistrust, and tension among women, as opportunities were increasingly perceived as being awarded through personal favors rather than merit. In some cases, these dynamics created a toxic workplace environment where both men and women reinforced exploitative norms where men wield power and women navigate it through compliance or participation. These exploitative practices undermined the credibility of female creatives collectively, making it harder for women to be recognized purely for their skills and professionalism.

ii. Gendered Performance and the Politics of Appearance

Another issue that emerged was the gendered expectations surrounding women’s appearance and presentation in creative workspaces. Female creatives reported being pressured either to masculinize their image to be taken seriously or to hyper-feminize and sexualize themselves to attract audiences and financial rewards. These appearance-based expectations created what can be described as a “performative tax,” where women’s visibility and earnings were directly tied to how well they conformed to gendered norms.

And for certain creative activities, women were often required to dress in ways that exposed certain parts of their bodies, failing which could result in reduced bookings, lower pay, and limited opportunities. This shows that women are not only negotiating their artistic talent but also their bodies and identities in exchange for legitimacy and survival. These constraints compromise authenticity and reinforce the notion that women's value in the creative industry is contingent on appearance rather than skill. These gendered notions discouraged self-expression and limited the diversity of creative voices in the sector.

iii. Constrained Agency and Strategic Adaptation

The experiences of female creatives revealed a pattern of constrained agency. Most female creatives had to navigate entrenched gendered structures by adopting coping strategies that sustain their participation but limit their autonomy. Many participants described enduring unfair treatment, tolerating harassment, or aligning with male colleagues as strategies to gain access to the few opportunities available to them in the creative industry. This approach by the creatives to accessing opportunities largely stemmed from issues of gatekeeping and favoritism. Some female creatives felt compelled to compromise their comfort, boundaries, or ideals to remain visible and relevant. These compromises were often seen as necessary trade-offs for professional survival. In some cases, women allowed men to take visible leadership roles to legitimize their presence in spaces that were otherwise closed to them. This form of adaptation underscored the unequal power dynamics that shape women's professional mobility within the creative sector. While such strategies enabled temporary survival for most women in the creative space, they perpetuated dependency and obscured women's contributions and their ability to assert professional independence.

iv. Gender-Specific Workplace Protections

The data reveal a critical absence of gender-sensitive policies and infrastructure in creative workspaces, creating conditions that expose women to harassment, exploitation, and compromised safety. Participants highlighted fundamental issues with physical workspace arrangements, noting the lack of proper facilities such as separate changing rooms during productions where "everybody lumps up while you are all backstage," and how inappropriate contact can be dismissed as accidental, normalizing boundary violations. Beyond physical infrastructure, the interviewees emphasized the need for comprehensive gender-responsive policies that address both biological and social dimensions of women's workplace experiences, including understanding and accommodation of "hormonal changes" and gender-specific needs.

v. Institutional Accountability and Governance

Another consistent theme that emerged throughout the study was the multiple failures within creative sector institutions that seemed to affect women disproportionately. Several respondents described instances of corruption, self-interest, and a lack of accountability that directly impacted women's experiences and opportunities in the sector. There is also some mistrust of the government among creative industry players due to the industry's increasing politicization. Genuine support structures are blurred by partisan colorization, making female creatives more vulnerable due to the existing political disadvantages faced by women. The findings highlight opportunities for stronger institutional governance and accountability systems.

J. Policy and Programmatic Opportunities

This section seeks to identify and explore the various policies and practical opportunities in Ghana's creative sector. The findings highlight critical issues that require macro (structural) and micro-level interventions. The underlying sub-sections represent these experiences and propositions.

Creatives acknowledged the critical place of the state in creating an enabling environment for the sector to thrive. Recent efforts to grow the industry are recognized. However, the emerging state interest does not adequately protect female creatives from abuse and exploitation. These findings point to opportunities for stronger state-led policy support and protection of women in the creative spaces.

The creative industry appears to be multi-sectoral in both appearance and substance. This calls for inter- and cross-sectoral partnerships and collaborations to transform the sector into the

micro- and macroeconomic engine it should be. Unfortunately, the competitive environment for attracting opportunities diminishes women's ability to collaborate and form partnerships on equitable terms. Therefore, it is recommended that support for female creatives must necessarily include capacity strengthening and negotiation training, and also encourage female creatives to foster peer collaborations and partnerships. Building on each other's strengths can enhance growth and shared success opportunities.

The data again highlights critical issues with how the educational system connects to creative careers. Women with "weak" entry requirements for higher education institutions are more likely to be offered creative programs, such as theater arts, than men. This reinforces and sustains negative narratives and perceptions about women in creative fields. There is a need for educational institutions to reform their systems to better support creative pursuits.

Photo: Magnific



Discussion

Study findings reflect a larger trend where increasing numbers of young Ghanaian women are participating in the design industry, particularly in fashion. It is seen as a field that does not require significant capital to enter, and many urban-educated young women are taking on fashion and other design occupations (e.g., make-up and dressmaking) as primary, secondary or side jobs. While this was not a representative survey, the findings align with casual observations across the entire country. The fashion sector has a widespread presence, with fashion shops found on every corner, whether in urban or rural areas. The consumption of fashion accessories, particularly locally made ones, received a significant boost in the early 2000s when a deliberate government policy was implemented to promote Ghanaian clothing through the National Friday Wear initiative ([Axelsson, 2021](#)). Additionally, major Ghanaian cultural and religious events—funerals and weddings—are primarily celebrated wearing locally made clothes with accompanying fashion accessories.

Our results also show that, apart from personal interest and passion for the creative industry, the advent of social media over the last two decades has significantly spurred the activities of creatives. Social media is driving considerable interest in lesser-known creative activities and is reducing the reliance of creatives on high-net individuals and influencers to market their work. Hitherto, this was not the case, particularly for creatives from underprivileged backgrounds who face limited visibility and dependence on intermediaries. Social media has expanded the space for women and offered them direct access to platforms to showcase their work and participate equitably in the creative economy.

The respondents/participants' sense of equity in the creative industry is neither unidirectionally positive nor negative. In sectors where females conventionally dominate, there is a high sense of equity. However, in the industries where men are considerably dominant, women are often disadvantaged in several ways including longer or demanding work expectations, lower remuneration, and delayed payment. These acts of inequality have diverse impacts on women's



In Ghana, gender pay gaps are uncommon in public and private formal sector employment because of standardization in ranks and corresponding remuneration. However, in the highly informalized private sector where most creatives operate, gender pay gaps are a norm rather than an exception.

creative journeys and experiences, particularly in the realm of innovation. A Chinese study ([Wang, 2025](#))⁹ highlighted the detrimental effects of gender inequalities on female creatives' innovations, because women whose creative products/outputs are constantly undervalued and discounted will be easily discouraged.

Across creative subsectors, women in the study consistently reported being undervalued due to entrenched gendered stereotypes. The gender pay gap is globally acknowledged as a critical indicator of inequality between men and women in labor markets. Even within the formal sector, gender gaps are the exception rather than the norm. The creative sector, being comparatively informal, is much more vulnerable to unfair practices such as unequal pay based on gender. The high level of informalization of the creative industry may intersect with gender and the corresponding power dynamics that worsen gender pay gaps (Bobie 2025).

In Ghana, gender pay gaps are uncommon in public and private formal sector employment because of standardization in ranks and corresponding remuneration. However, in the highly informalized private sector where most creatives operate, gender pay gaps are a norm rather than an exception. Female creatives experience inequalities due to negotiation power and structural biases, the absence of standardization (with pervasive urban-rural disparities), and sometimes blatant copyright abuses/infringements.

The results highlight a culture of sexual and other gender-based harassment that young female creatives encounter in Ghana. While the widespread nature of gendered and sexualized harassment is globally acknowledged ([Hansson et al., 2025; Hennekam & Bennett, 2017](#)), it is the silences and inaction around this that troubled the study participants. Unfortunately, the inaction and sometimes blatant disregard for victims' fears and anxieties have solidified a culture of under-reporting and internalized, normalized behavior patterns. The reasons for under-reporting or not reporting these abuses seem similar in many places—informality, precarity, fear of retaliation, competition for limited spaces, and frustrating legal procedures ([Osagiede, 2023](#)).

While most young Ghanaians described dignified work in terms of tangible benefits, such as fair and livable wages or compensation, and non-monetary aspects like respect and social recognition, fulfilling work was generally about a job's alignment with one's identity, values, and interests. These findings align with the results of the 2023 Ghana Human Development Report, titled "The Future Value of Work in Ghana: Pathways to Sustainable Jobs." However, there are some differences. In creative spaces, participants often prioritize personal fulfillment over fulfillment through societal approval, which would typically come from following a more traditional career path, as opposed to creative jobs which tend to be viewed negatively in the country. Creatives are therefore mainly motivated by alignment of their work with their values, interests, and identity.

This study makes a unique contribution to Ghana's creative sector by offering a nuanced account of how structural, cultural, and gendered dynamics shape creative work. While earlier discussions of the industry have primarily focused on its economic potential, this study goes further by unpacking the lived realities of creatives and how entrenched gender inequalities continue to constrain women's innovation and participation. Importantly, the study also shed light on the voices of young Ghanaian creatives in redefining dignified and fulfilling work beyond material rewards, emphasizing identity, passion, and self-expression. In doing so, it bridges policy discourse with lived experiences, providing context-specific insights that are critical for shaping responsive interventions in Ghana's creative economy.

Conclusion

The study revealed significant gender-based inequities in Ghana's creative sector. Female creatives face numerous challenges, including unequal pay, lack of recognition, sexual harassment, and limited opportunities due to structural, cultural, and institutional barriers. Gender norms and power dynamics greatly influence the paths, creative careers, and goals of young women in the creative industry. The study found that male-dominated networks control access to opportunities, and men often make key decisions about the careers of female creatives, restricting women's ability to earn credibility and public recognition independently. The creative sector in Ghana is highly informal, with inadequate guidelines on hiring processes, merit-based evaluations, and information about opportunities. The lack of official contracts and conditions of service exposes many female creatives to abuse and exploitation.

Despite the challenges, many female creatives find their work dignifying and fulfilling. They value the recognition and respect they receive for their creative abilities and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the industry and society. Additionally, many female creatives have adopted coping strategies to mitigate or confront the issues they face. These strategies include relying on family and friends, engaging in other businesses to generate additional income, using social media to promote their work, and participating in informal peer mentoring and training sessions.

Recommendations

- **Establish Creative Centers and Hubs:** To support female creatives, the Creative Arts Agency (CAA), in collaboration with the National Commission on Culture (NCC), should establish creative centers and hubs across various regions. These hubs could offer training, mentorship, and networking opportunities, while also serving as safe and inclusive spaces for collaboration and peer support. These hubs should specifically target young and emerging female creatives, including those in informal or community-based creative enterprises, to help them build sustainable livelihoods, enhance their visibility, and overcome structural barriers in the sector.
- **Implement Gender-Sensitive Policies:** The creative sector should adopt and enforce gender-sensitive policies that address issues such as sexual harassment, unequal pay, and discrimination. These policies should include clear guidelines for reporting and addressing grievances, ensuring that female creatives feel protected and valued in their work environments. The CAA should take the lead in enforcing policies that ensure equitable access and gender inclusion within the creative sector and should work closely with the NCC to monitor implementation at the regional and district levels.
- **Create and Promote Financial Assistance and Grants:** Financial barriers remain a major constraint for many female creatives, limiting their ability to invest in tools, materials, and training necessary for professional growth. To address this, the Ghana Export Promotion Authority, National Youth Authority, and Ghana Enterprises Agency should collaborate to design and implement targeted financial assistance and grant schemes for women in the creative sector. Specifically, the Ghana Export Promotion Authority can provide export-oriented grants to support female creatives producing culturally relevant goods for international markets. The Ghana Enterprises Agency can extend its business support and microfinance programs to include women-led creative enterprises. The National Youth Authority can also focus on youth-oriented funding and entrepreneurship initiatives.
- **Enhance Female Creatives' Visibility and Recognition:** MoTAC, in collaboration with the NCC, should spearhead initiatives such as national and regional awards, exhibitions, festivals, and media features that spotlight the achievements of women in various creative disciplines. MoTAC should also institutionalize recognition programs that celebrate excellence and innovation among female creatives, while the NCC can coordinate cultural showcases and community-based exhibitions that promote women's artistic expression across the country.
- **Foster Inclusive and Collaborative Networks:** Building inclusive and collaborative networks is crucial for the growth and development of female creatives. Agencies such as the CAA, Ghana Association of Visual Artists (GAVA), Musicians Union of Ghana (MUSIGA), and the NCC can play leading roles in facilitating partnerships and collective initiatives across creative disciplines. These agencies can organize cross-sectoral forums, workshops, and collaborative projects that bring together male and female creatives to share ideas, skills, and opportunities. The CAA can coordinate national networking platforms and policy frameworks that promote gender inclusion. MUSIGA and GAVA can foster mentorship programs and peer collaborations within their respective sectors. The NCC can support intercultural exchange programs to strengthen creative communities across regions in Ghana.

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