RESEARCH REPORT

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE HOSPITALITY, GAMING, AND AIRLINE SECTORS IN CANADA

NOVEMBER 2023

Western | Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children

# Study background

Harassment and violence remain pervasive in Canadian workplaces with profound consequences for workers, workplaces, and governments.[1] Specifically, sexual harassment and violence persist despite over three decades of research, the public attention garnered by the MeToo movement, and the existence of legislative frameworks that clearly position sexual harassment and violence as an occupational health and safety hazard, giving workers the right to a workplace free from sexual harassment and violence. As demonstrated in this report, workers in the hospitality, gaming, and airline sectors remain at high risk, reflecting the contexts and organizational practices of these workplaces (e.g., tipping, sexualized dress codes, the serving of alcohol, and interacting with the public). This mixed-methods study, consisting of an online survey and interviews, aims to address the evidence gap in these sectors in Canada. This project is a partnership between Western University's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children and Unifor.

Stronger evidence will help to shape practices (e.g., legislation, policies, training, and reporting mechanisms) that will aid in preventing and effectively intervening when workers experience sexual harassment and violence at work. Our research shows it is particularly important to address harassment and violence perpetrated by third parties (e.g., customers and clients).

This report provides a summary of the main findings from our study exploring the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence, how it manifests in a range of behaviours and practices, its consequences, the actions workers take and their effectiveness, barriers to reporting, and workers' experiences when they do report. The report also includes data regarding what workplaces have in place to prevent and address sexual harassment and violence. The results of this study continue to be used to create education and awareness resources and tools for workers, unions, and workplaces (visit www.learningtoendabuse.ca).

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>
> *"I think when you go to work, you should be treated fairly. ...[You] shouldn't have to always be fighting a battle."*
>
> *(Gaming Worker A)*

# Study Methods

This report is based on research from two sources: an online survey and semi-structured interviews, both conducted in English. Three sectors were the focus of this research: hospitality (including hotels, resorts, and food and drink services), gaming (including casinos, racetracks, and government gaming and lottery operations), and airlines (customer service agents). The survey was active from March to July 2022. It was open to all persons in Canada above the age of 18 who had been employed during the last 2 years prior to completing the survey. Respondents were recruited via networks of Unifor workers.  Three Coordinators (Unifor members from each of the target sectors) worked to connect with co-workers, and the survey was promoted via social media and a project website. The three Coordinators were provided with a copy of recruitment materials (e.g., poster, flyer) which they distributed when visiting Unifor Locals to inform workers of the project. In total, 330 people participated in the survey and provided us with a unique look into their daily realities. This is a sample of an engaged group of workers from sectors that present significant barriers to completing an online survey and participating in interviews. Workers in these three target sectors were particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their jobs, which provide little or no access to technology (e.g., smart phones, tablets, computers) and involve changing shifts, made it difficult to complete the survey during work hours. The role of the sector Coordinators and their visits onsite at Unifor Locals was extremely important in reaching workers.

To further understand the experiences of workers and the impacts of sexual harassment and violence, researchers also conducted nine interviews with front line workers, union representatives, and Health and Safety representatives. Interviews took place from January to August 2022. See Appendix A for further details on the research methods used in this study.

# Who Took Part in the Survey

Of the total 330 responses to the online survey, the majority (93.3%) of the sample were employed in permanent work. The remaining respondents were in seasonal, casual, temporary, term or contract, or other forms of employment. The majority of respondents worked for a single employer (81.5%), while the remaining worked for two (15.2%), three (1.5%), or more (1.8%) different employers. Sixty percent of survey respondents earned an annual salary (in 2020 before taxes) of less than $50,000 CAD.

Reflecting the recruitment strategy, survey respondents worked in a wide range of industries, with the highest proportion coming from airlines (38.3%), hospitality (24.6%), and gaming (17.9%). These were followed by manufacturing (4.6%), transportation (2.4%), and administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (1.8%). Geographically, the highest rates of participation in the survey came from Ontario (47.7%), British Columbia (29%), and Alberta (11.2%).

Union members comprised 90.9% of survey respondents, compared to 31.3% for the general Canadian population.[2] For 20.7% of respondents, their workplace had recently (i.e., less than 5 years) been unionized.

Most survey respondents identified as cisgender women (72.5%); the remaining identified as cisgender men (17.9%) and non-binary (1%), while remaining participants preferred to self-describe (1.9%) or preferred not to say (6.8%). Ten percent identified as non-heterosexual. A considerable number of respondents (36.7%) did not respond to the question regarding their sexual orientation. The majority of survey respondents (73.3%) were between 30-59 years old, while 12.6% were under 30 years old, and 14.1% were 60 years old or over. A total of 28% of the sample indicated living with at least one disability. Sixty-seven percent of the sample indicated they were born in Canada. The majority of survey participants identified as White (53.8%); the remaining identified as East/Southeast Asian (16.4%), Latino (6.3%), South Asian (5.3%), Black (2.4%), Indigenous (1.4%), Arab (0.5%), and mixed-race (3.8%). The remainder of the respondents preferred not to indicate their ethno-racial background or did not respond to this question.

In sum, women participated at higher rates in the survey relative to their representation in the Canadian workforce and in the three target sectors, and the participation of younger, racialized and Indigenous respondents, and gender-diverse respondents was lower than their representation in the Canadian workforce. Research shows that these workers are more likely to report experiences of sexual harassment and violence at work.[3] Future studies will require a focused recruitment strategy to reach more workers from these groups.
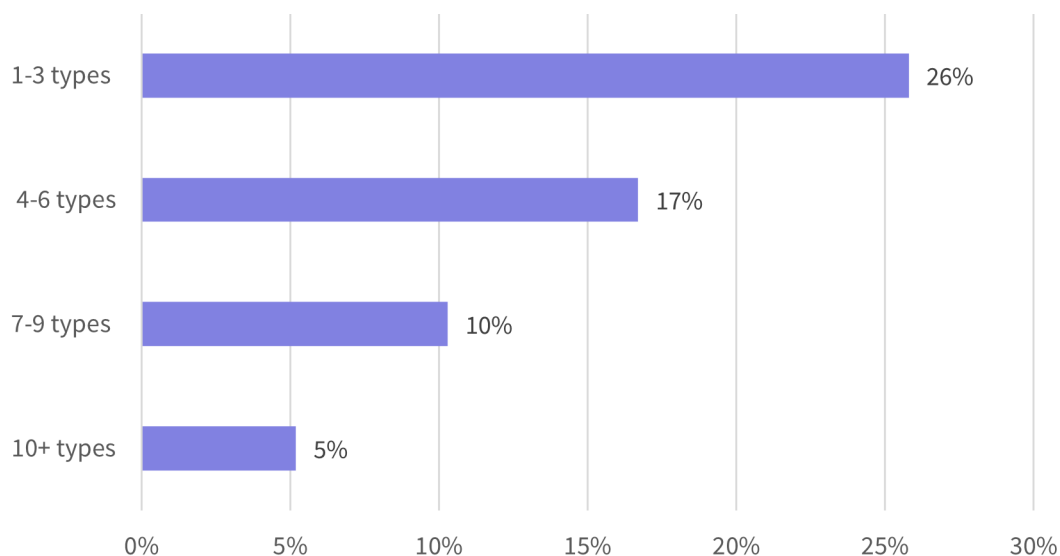
# Survey Results

# Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence at Work

Sexual harassment and violence continue to be pervasive in Canadian workplaces. Responses to the survey indicate that workers often experience multiple types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence (see Figure 1).

• Over half (57.9%) of survey respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of sexual harassment and violence while at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

• Over a quarter (25.8%) of survey respondents experienced 1-3 types of behaviours or practices of sexual harassment and violence at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

• Almost 17% (16.7%) of survey respondents experienced between 4-6 types of behaviours or practices of sexual harassment and violence while at work two years prior to completing the survey.

• Over one in ten (10.3%) of survey respondents experienced between 7-9 types of behaviours or practices of sexual harassment and violence while at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

• Over 5% (5.2%) of survey respondents experienced 10 or more types of behaviours or practices of sexual harassment and violence at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

• Over one third (37.6%) of survey respondents witnessed someone else at work being sexually harassed.

Figure 1
**Experiences of Multiple Behaviours and Practices of Sexual Harassment and Violence**

## Sexual Harassment and Violence Behaviours and Practices Experienced

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the specific behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence experienced by survey respondents.

• The three most common behaviours of sexual harassment and violence experienced by survey respondents while at work were: people having sexually oriented conversations in front of them (experienced once: 11.6%, more than once: 30.0%); unwelcome sexual teasing, jokes, comments or questions (experienced once: 9.1%, more than once: 26.8%); and unwelcome invasion of personal space (e.g., touching, crowding, leaning over) (experienced once: 10.7%, more than once: 24.4%).

• Among survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence, 9.5% experienced one instance of workplace related stalking (e.g., unwanted intrusion – physically or electronically – into their personal lives), and 8.3% experienced this type of harassment more than once.

• Survey respondents also reported experiencing attempted rape or sexual assault (once: 1.2%, more than once: 1.5%) and actual rape or sexual assault (once: 1.2%, more than once: 1.5%) at work in the two years prior to completing the survey. Two of the nine interview participants recounted experiences of rape by their managers, for one of them it occurred twice, while at work (including work-related training, meetings, and other functions organized outside the regular physical workplace). It is important, particularly within the target sectors of this study, to recognize a broader conceptualization of work and the workplace that includes all activities carried out as part of one's job.

"

*"It's just part of the restaurant industry. The dirty jokes and the sexual innuendos and the borderline inappropriate to completely inappropriate touching … It's just part of the culture and you just roll with it. Until you don't."*

(Hospitality Worker B)

"

*"I had a supervisor threaten to rape me twice."*

(Gaming Worker A)

"

*"So that night I was raped."*

(Hospitality Worker B)

## Figure 2
**Breakdown by Sexual Harassment and Violence Behaviours/Practices Experienced**
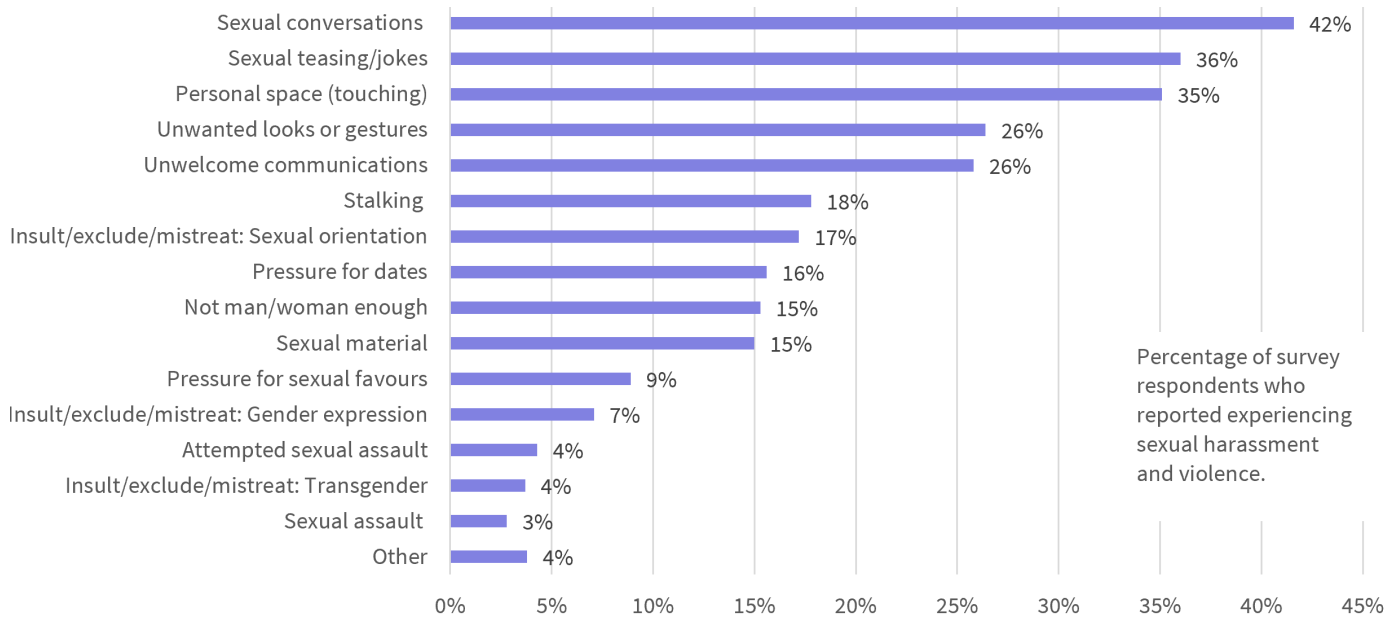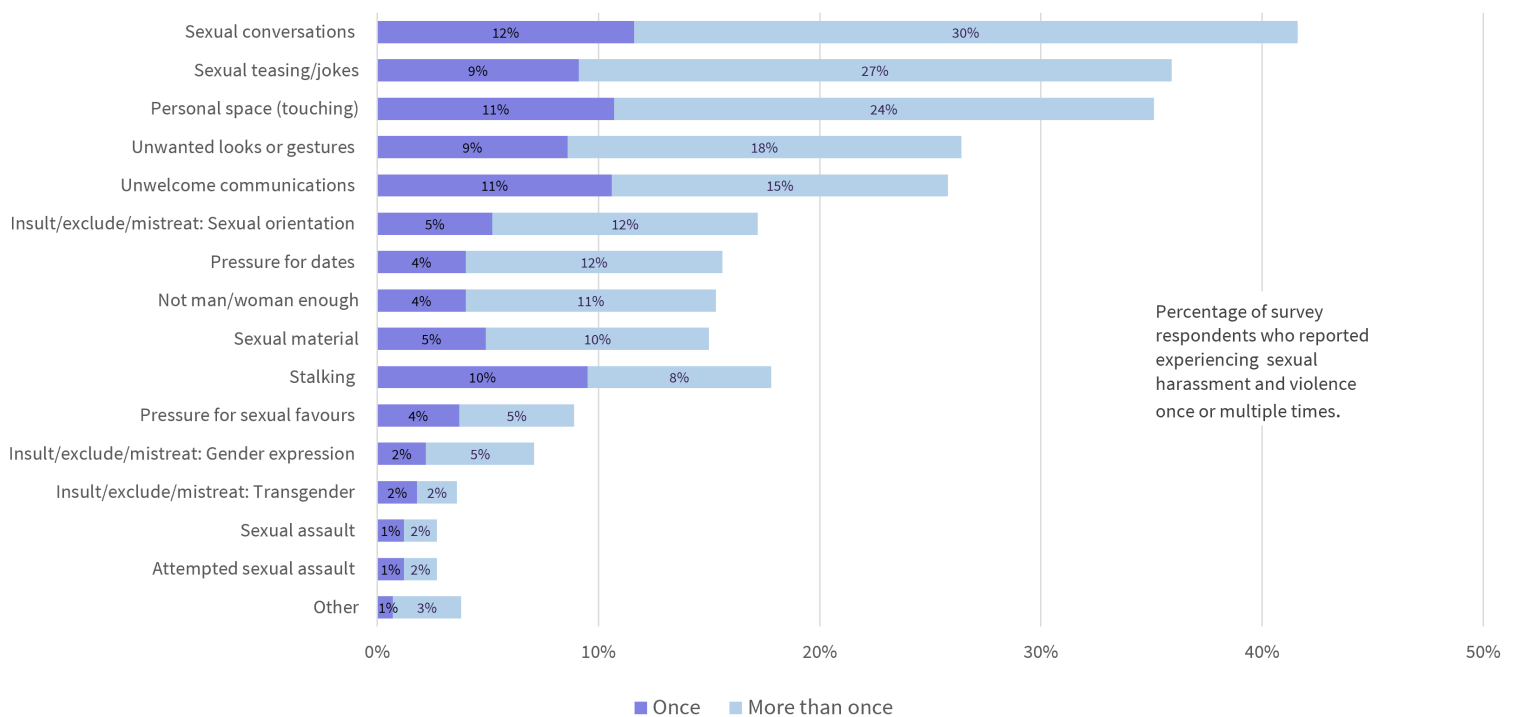
| Behaviour/Practice | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Sexual conversations | 42% |
| Sexual teasing/jokes | 36% |
| Personal space (touching) | 35% |
| Unwanted looks or gestures | 26% |
| Unwelcome communications | 26% |
| Stalking | 18% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Sexual orientation | 17% |
| Pressure for dates | 16% |
| Not man/woman enough | 15% |
| Sexual material | 15% |
| Pressure for sexual favours | 9% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Gender expression | 7% |
| Attempted sexual assault | 4% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Transgender | 4% |
| Sexual assault | 3% |
| Other | 4% |

Percentage of survey respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment and violence.

## Figure 3
**Breakdown of Behaviours/Practices of Sexual Harassment and Violence Experienced**

| Behaviour/Practice | Once | More than once |
|---|---|---|
| Sexual conversations | 12% | 30% |
| Sexual teasing/jokes | 9% | 27% |
| Personal space (touching) | 11% | 24% |
| Unwanted looks or gestures | 9% | 18% |
| Unwelcome communications | 11% | 15% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Sexual orientation | 5% | 12% |
| Pressure for dates | 4% | 12% |
| Not man/woman enough | 4% | 11% |
| Sexual material | 5% | 10% |
| Stalking | 10% | 8% |
| Pressure for sexual favours | 4% | 5% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Gender expression | 2% | 5% |
| Insult/exclude/mistreat: Transgender | 2% | 2% |
| Sexual assault | 1% | 2% |
| Attempted sexual assault | 1% | 2% |
| Other | 1% | 3% |

■ Once ■ More than once

Percentage of survey respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment and violence once or multiple times.

The prevalence rates of sexual harassment and violence at work were similar across the three target sectors of this study: airlines (59.5%), gaming (55.9%), and hospitality (55.6%) (see Figure 4). In other sectors, 58.7% of survey respondents experienced sexual harassment and violence.

Figure 4
**Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence by Sector**



Percentage of survey respondents in each sector who experienced sexual harassment
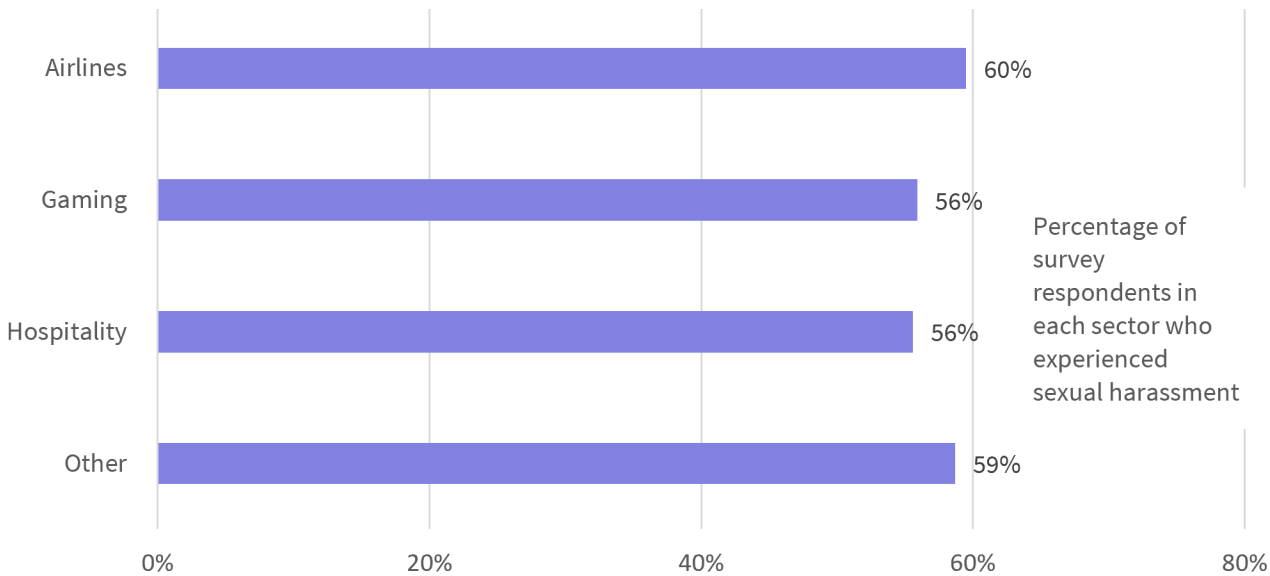
There were significant differences between unionized and non-unionized survey respondents. Non-unionized respondents are more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence (76.9%) compared to unionized respondents (55.9%) and to observe others in their workplace being subjected to sexual harassment and violence (50%) compared to unionized respondents (36.5%) (see Figure 5). Non-unionized respondents are also more likely to experience multiple behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence (see Figure 6).

- Over a quarter (26.9%) of non-unionized respondents experienced 4-6 types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence compared to 15.7% of unionized respondents.

- Over 15% (15.4%) of non-unionized respondents experienced 7-9 types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence compared to 9.7% of unionized respondents.

- Over 1 in 10 (11.5%) of non-unionized respondents experienced ten or more types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence compared to 4.7% of unionized respondents.

Figure 5
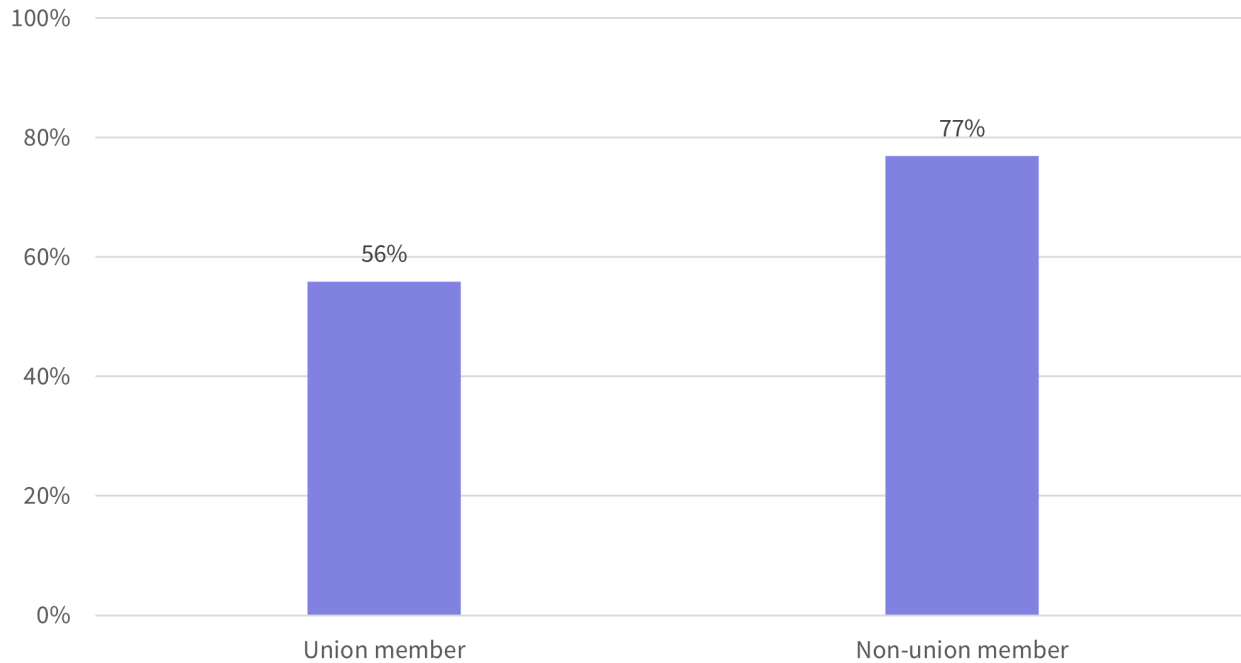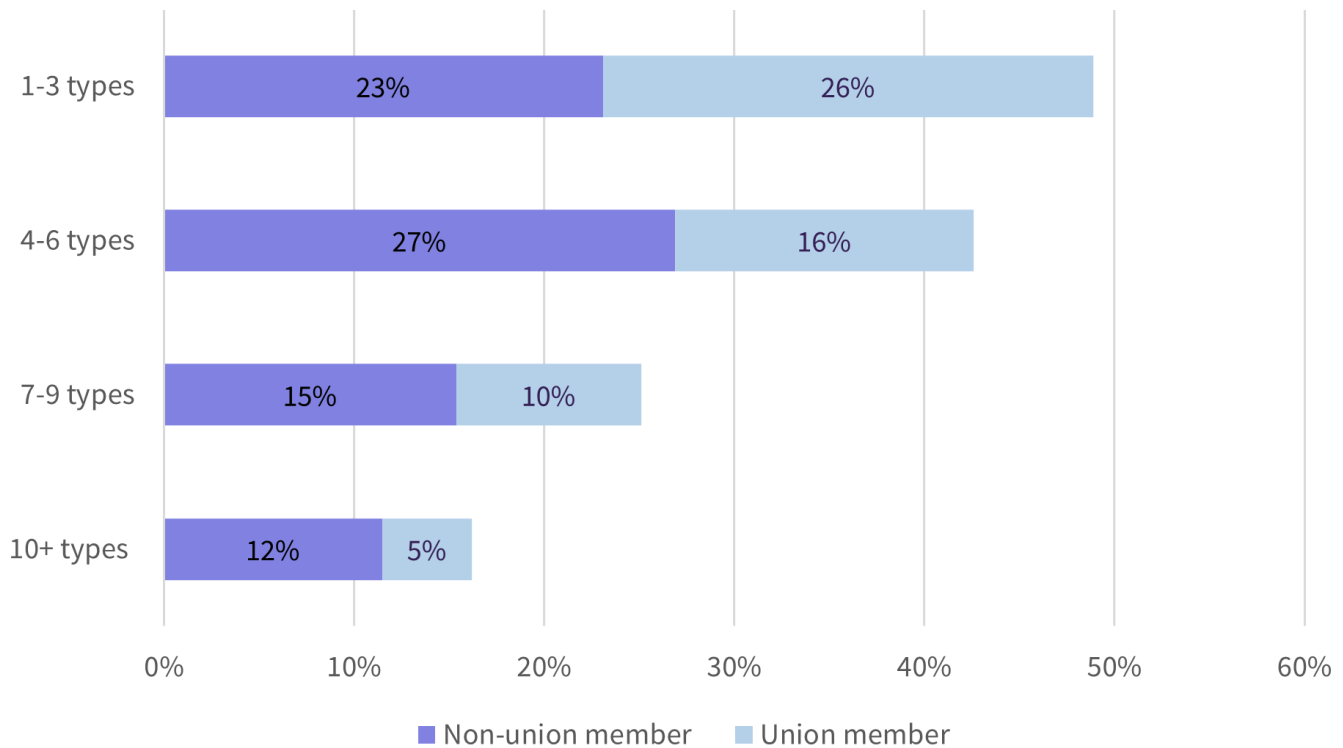**Union Membership and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**



Figure 6
**Union Membership and Experiences of Multiple Behaviours/Practices of Sexual Harassment and Violence**

A similar pattern emerges in workplaces that have recently (i.e., less than 5 years) been unionized, although with slighter differences, likely reflecting the brief duration of the unionization. Recently unionized workers (50.8%) were less likely to experience sexual harassment and violence compared to non-unionized workers (57.2%) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
**Recently Unionized Workplaces and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
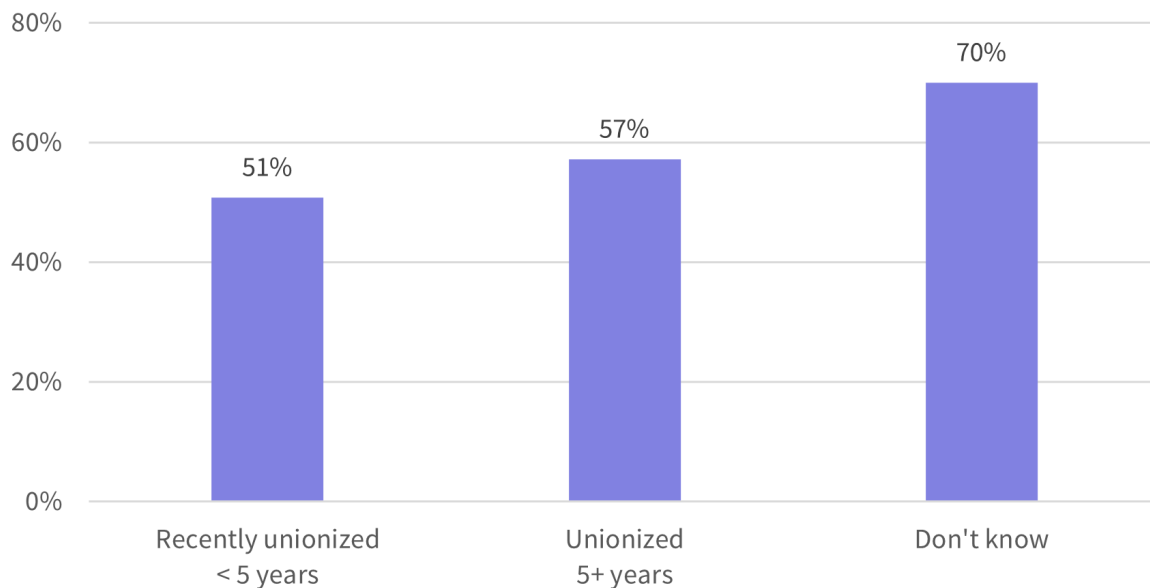


## The Intersections of Social Identity and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence

Experiences of sexual harassment and violence are not uniform and the barriers to accessing supports are more numerous and difficult for some. The risk of experiencing sexual harassment and violence is shaped by multiple factors, including a person's social identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, or Indigeneity), geographical location, immigration status, and so on. As noted earlier, workers in the hospitality, gaming and airline sectors are at high risk of experiencing sexual harassment and violence due to the context and demands of their jobs.

Women experienced higher prevalence rates (53.3%) compared to men (48.6%) (see Figure 8). Women were considerably more likely to experience multiple behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence. For example, 17.3% of women survey respondents reported experiencing 4-6 behaviors and practices of sexual harassment and violence compared to 2.7% of men. Twelve percent of women experienced 7-9 behaviours and practices and 6.7% experienced ten or more behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence, compared to 5.4% and 0% of men respectively. The number of gender-diverse survey respondents was insufficient to accurately report prevalence rates. However, research has shown that gender-diverse individuals are more likely to report experiencing sexual harassment and violence.[4]

Figure 8
**Gender Identity and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
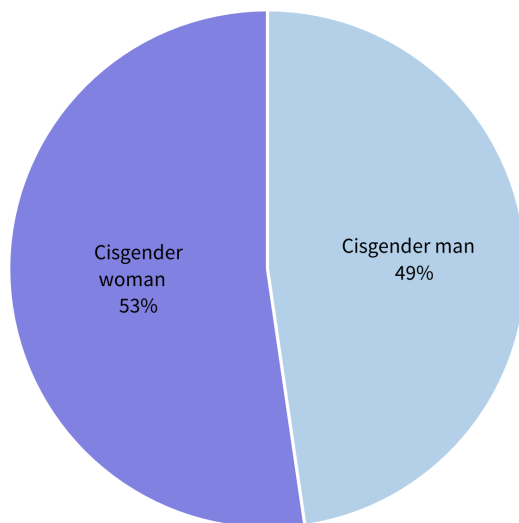


Non-heterosexual survey respondents were particularly likely to have experienced sexual harassment and violence (72%) (see Figure 9). Members of the non-heterosexual community were also more likely to experience multiple behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence. This was particularly pronounced for specific groups of respondents. For example:

• Survey respondents who identified as lesbian were more likely to experience 4-6 behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence (37.5%) compared to respondents who identified as heterosexual (15.4%).

• Respondents who identified as bisexual were more likely to experience 7-9 behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence (44.4%) compared to respondents who identified as heterosexual (8%), and 10 or more behaviours and practices (22.2%) compared to respondents who identified as heterosexual (4.6%).

Figure 9
**Sexual Orientation and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
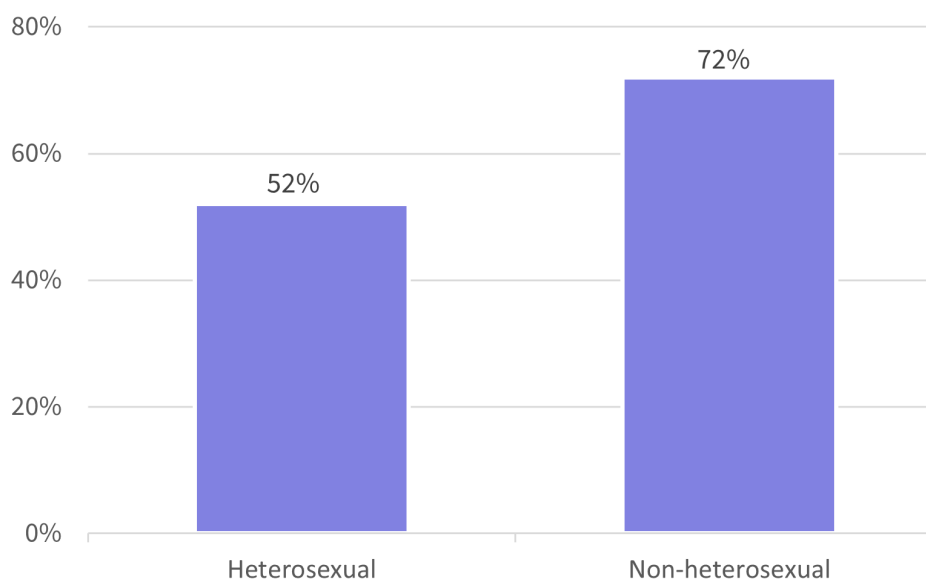
Research has shown that racialized and Indigenous workers experience higher prevalence rates of harassment and violence at work, including sexual harassment.[5] As the data for this survey is driven predominantly by respondents who identified as White, accurate prevalence rates for respondents who identified as racialized or Indigenous cannot be reported.

Survey respondents living with at least one form of disability experienced significantly higher rates of sexual harassment and violence while at work (63%) compared to those not living with a disability (46.2%) (see Figure 10). Respondents living with at least one disability were also more likely to experience multiple behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence. For example, over one in ten (10.9%) of this group of respondents experienced ten or more types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence compared to 3.3% of respondents not living with a disability.

Figure 10
**Survey Respondents with a Disability Experiencing at Least One Behaviour/Practice of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
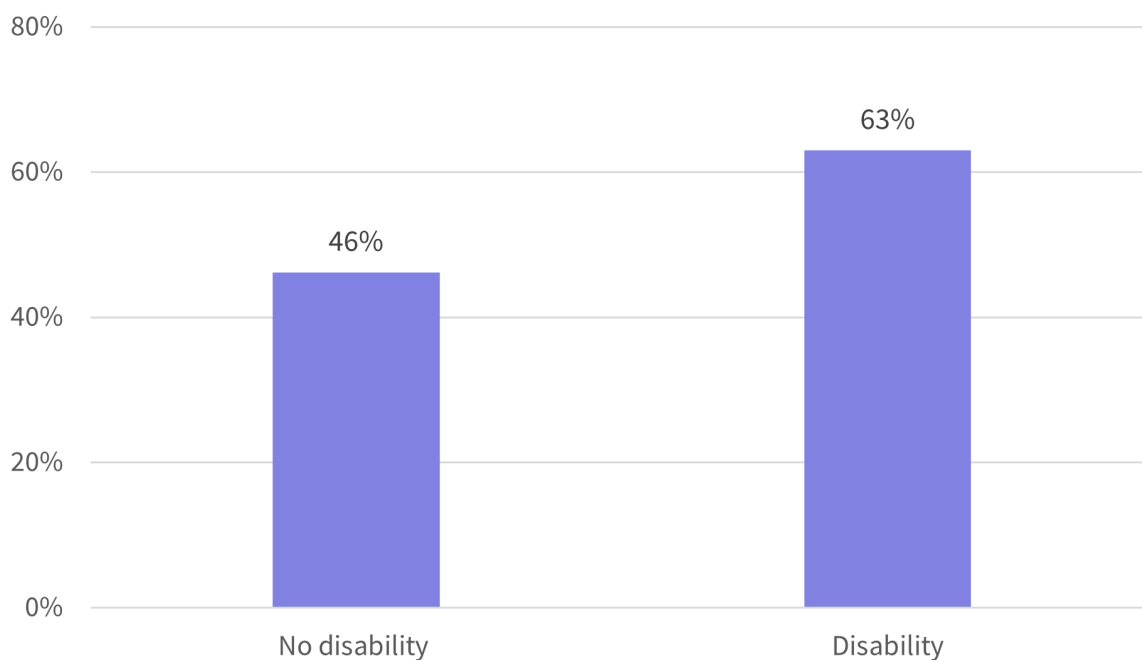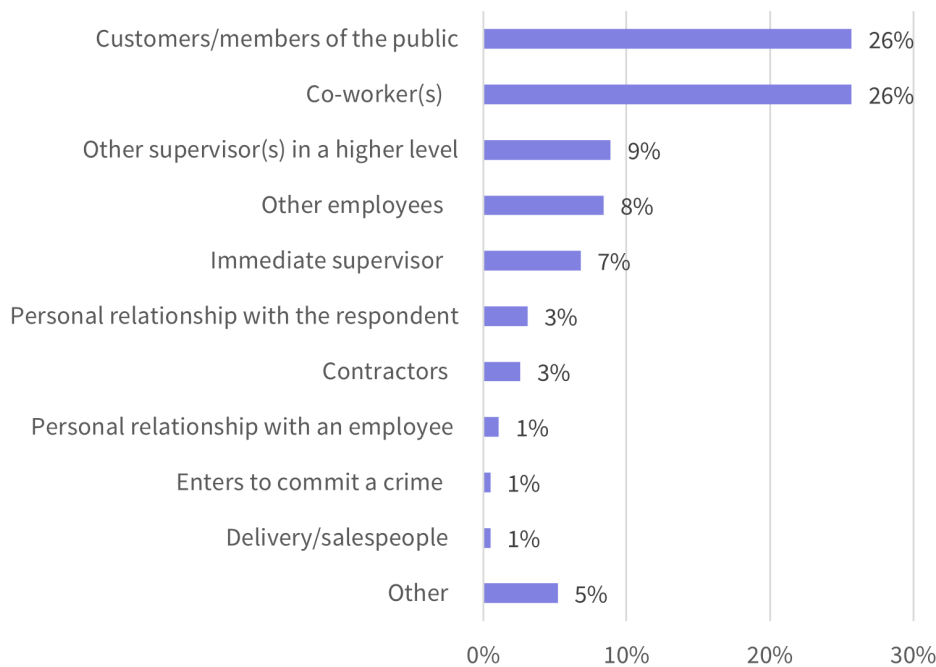
# Who is Behaving Abusively?

Survey respondents indicated that co-workers and other employees (34%) and third parties (customers, other members of the public) (25.7%) are the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence (see Figure 11). These findings are in line with recent Canadian research.[6] Immediate supervisors (6.8%) and other supervisors or managers in a higher level (8.9%) follow as the most common perpetrators.

For those experiencing sexual harassment and violence, over two-thirds (67.6%) reported their harasser was a man. This finding was also confirmed by interview participants. Further research is needed to examine the gender patterns of perpetration for specific behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence.[7]

> " 
> *"Let me just describe to you the environment of management. It's an old boys club. ...It's an all-boys club. They stand up for each other. They look out for each other... Prevention won't do anything because they look out for each other."*
>
> *(Airline Worker A)*

Figure 11
**Harasser/Perpetrator**



| Category | Percent |
|---|---|
| Customers/members of the public | 26% |
| Co-worker(s) | 26% |
| Other supervisor(s) in a higher level | 9% |
| Other employees | 8% |
| Immediate supervisor | 7% |
| Personal relationship with the respondent | 3% |
| Contractors | 3% |
| Personal relationship with an employee | 1% |
| Enters to commit a crime | 1% |
| Delivery/salespeople | 1% |
| Other | 5% |

# Risk Factors for Sexual Harassment and Violence at Work

While sexual harassment and violence occurs across all occupations and sectors, workers in certain sectors and situations are exposed to greater risk. Examples include sectors that are largely represented by women (e.g., the service sector), sectors where there is an unequal sex ratio (e.g., male-dominated workplaces)[8], sectors where there are large power differentials between men and women (e.g., where men are in managerial roles and women predominantly in lower status positions)[9], and sectors experiencing periods of job insecurity[10]. Working with the public; handling money, valuables or prescription drugs; serving alcohol; working certain times of the day (irregular hours, night and evening shifts); and working in isolation or in remote locations are also risk factors for harassment and violence at work.[11] Many of these characteristics are prominent in the target sectors (hospitality, gaming, and airline) of this study.

Almost 84% (83.8%) of survey respondents' jobs involved interaction with the public, with 25.5% involving the exchange of money and 43.8% the serving of alcohol. This study confirms that these factors place workers at greater risk of sexual harassment and violence while at work (see Figure 12). Survey respondents whose jobs involved the exchange of money (65.5% compared to 55.1% whose jobs did not involve the exchange of money) and the serving of alcohol (65.3% compared to 51.6% whose jobs did not involve the serving of alcohol) experienced significantly higher prevalence rates of sexual harassment and violence at work. Respondents whose jobs involved interacting with the public also experienced higher rates of sexual harassment and violence (58.4% compared to 52.8% of respondents who did not interact with the public).

The majority of survey respondents (62.9%) indicated they worked (all the time, most of the time, or sometimes) in isolated and/or remote areas (i.e., worked alone, in small numbers, and/or in situations where assistance is not readily available). Almost 62% (61.8%) of these survey respondents experienced sexual harassment and violence while working.

"

*"Even the training was never much. You kind of got thrown in and I mean, there would be three or four girls there alone at night. It's in very much the middle of nowhere. ... So, and nobody, no leadership of any kind there, no manager there to make sure the staff was okay. It was very uncomfortable to me. That place specifically is set up for terrible things to happen."*

*(Hospitality Worker A)*

Figure 12

**Risk Factors and Percentage of Survey Respondents Reporting at Least One Behaviour/Practice of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
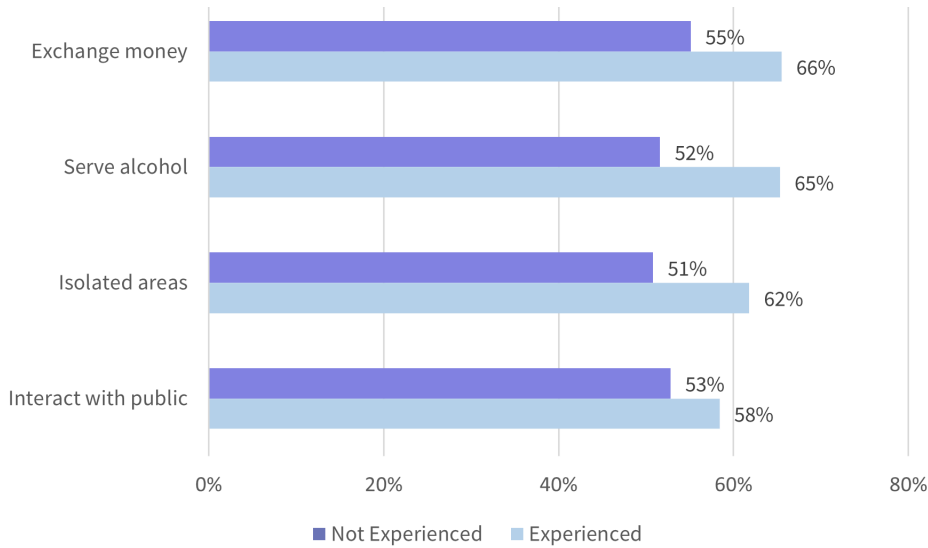


Working evenings and nights and irregular shifts exposes workers to greater risk of sexual harassment and violence. Almost 47% (46.9%) of those working a regular daytime schedule or shift experienced sexual harassment and violence. In comparison, almost three quarters (73.1%) of respondents working a regular evening shift, half (50%) working a regular night shift, 70.3% working a rotating shift (one that changes periodically from days to evenings or to nights), 77.8% working an irregular shift, and 61.5% working a shift that changes periodically (e.g., through a bidding process) with a number of subsequent days on, then off, experienced sexual harassment and violence at work (see Figure 13).

> *"Tips play a huge factor if you're working for your money, essentially, you always feel like you have to put your best self forward and that often means tolerating poor behaviour just to make a buck for sure."*
>
> (Hospitality Worker A)

> *"I do notice that when I wear the more… traditionally masculine looking uniform, …I do feel as though I'm listened to and respected more by customers… If I am dressed like a man, I'm spoken to differently. I'm never called, sweetie, when I wear the pants and shirt and blazer."*
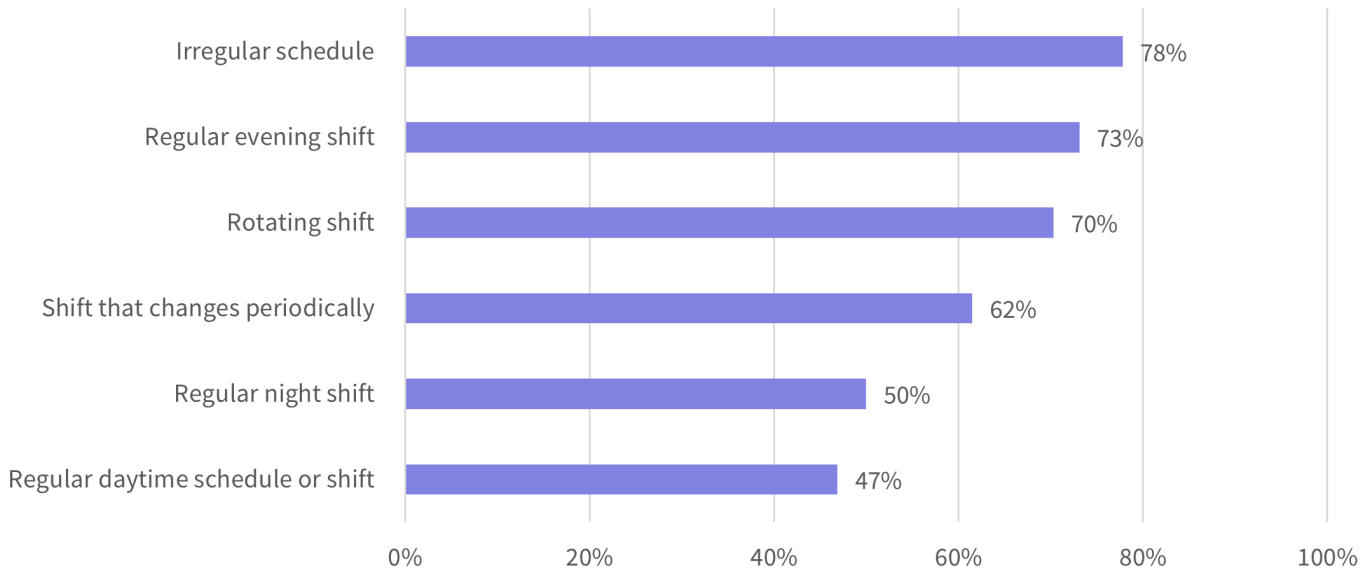>
> (Hospitality Worker B)

> *"And if the people constantly run over that line, then you need to elevate it because they don't want the dealer to be confrontational with a client. They don't want that because that person will come back and remember you being a bad person."*
>
> (Gaming Worker A)

Figure 13
**Work Schedule and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**



Interview participants confirmed the above factors increased their risk of experiencing sexual harassment and violence. They also spoke of tipping, sexualized dress codes, and the belief that the "customer is always right" as significant factors especially regarding harassment from customers and clients. Obtaining work through a third party (e.g., temporary agency, sub-contractor) increases the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment and violence. Almost nine in ten survey respondents (87.5%) who obtained work through a third party experienced sexual harassment compared to 56.4% of those who did not (see Figure 14). They are also more likely to experience multiple types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence (see Figure 15).

Figure 14
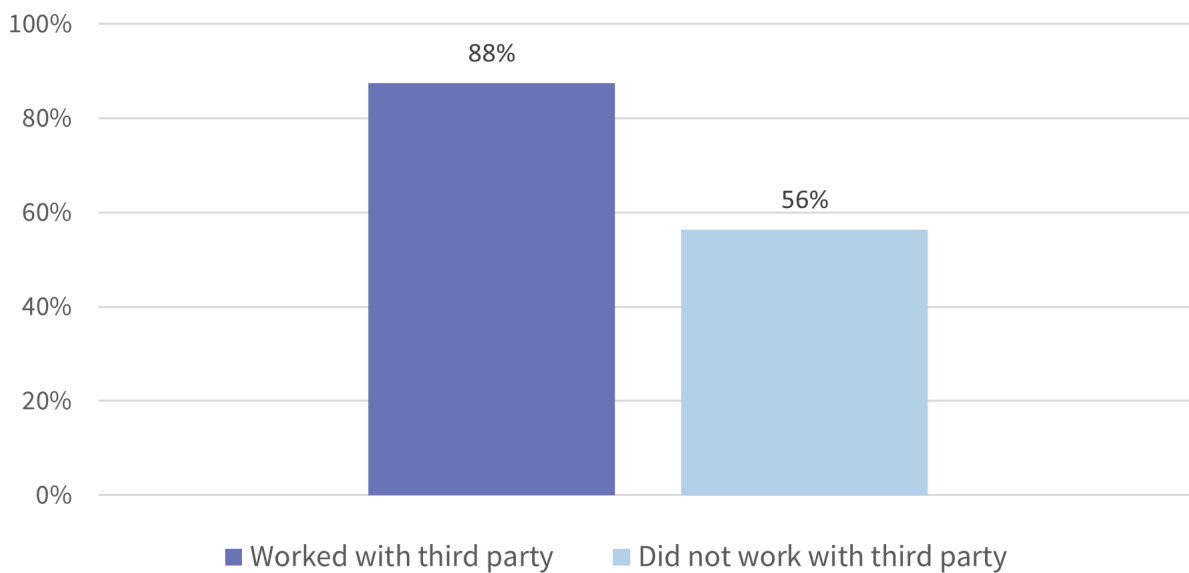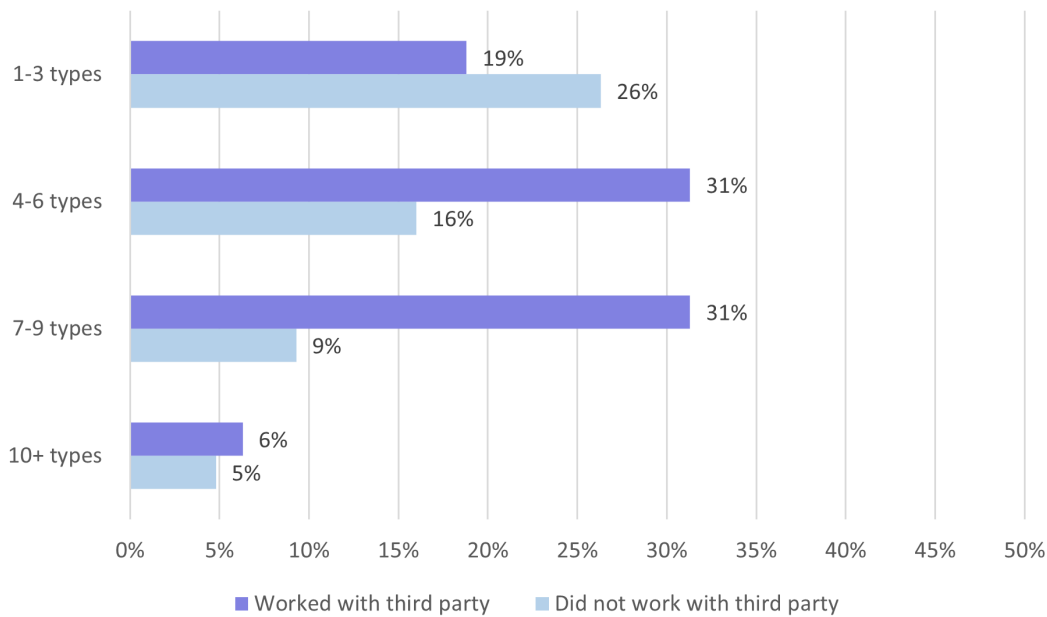**Work with Third Party and Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**

Figure 15
**Work with Third Party and Experiences of Multiple Behaviours/Practices of Sexual Harassment and Violence**



These findings show that a great number of survey respondents are regularly exposed to factors in their jobs that put them at greater risk of experiencing sexual harassment and violence at work.[12]

# Impact of Covid-19

At the start of the survey (March 2022), provinces and territories were beginning to lift COVID-19 safety measures. The three target sectors of this study were among the most severely impacted by closures due to the pandemic. During the time our survey was in the field, 65.8% of survey respondents indicated they were either laid off or had their hours reduced due to COVID-19. Over twenty-one percent (21.5%) of respondents continued to work from home during the pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for the majority respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence, there was no change. For others, their experiences increased or decreased in frequency (16% increase, 20% decrease), intensity/severity (17.7% increase, 21.9 decrease), and duration (11.5% increase, 22.9% decrease) (see Figure 16). For 12.5% of respondents, the frequency and/or types of tactics used by harassers also increased, while for 22.9% this decreased. Retaliation increased by 9.5% and decreased for some by 12.6%. This pattern of larger decreases than increases in frequency, intensity, duration, types of harassment, and retaliation, does not hold for respondents' fear of reporting. Interestingly, 13.5% of respondents indicated their fear of reporting increased, while the same percentage indicated that it decreased during the pandemic. Further research is needed to shed light on specific contextual factors that contributed to these changes during the pandemic.

Figure 16
**Impacts of COVID-19 on Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Violence**
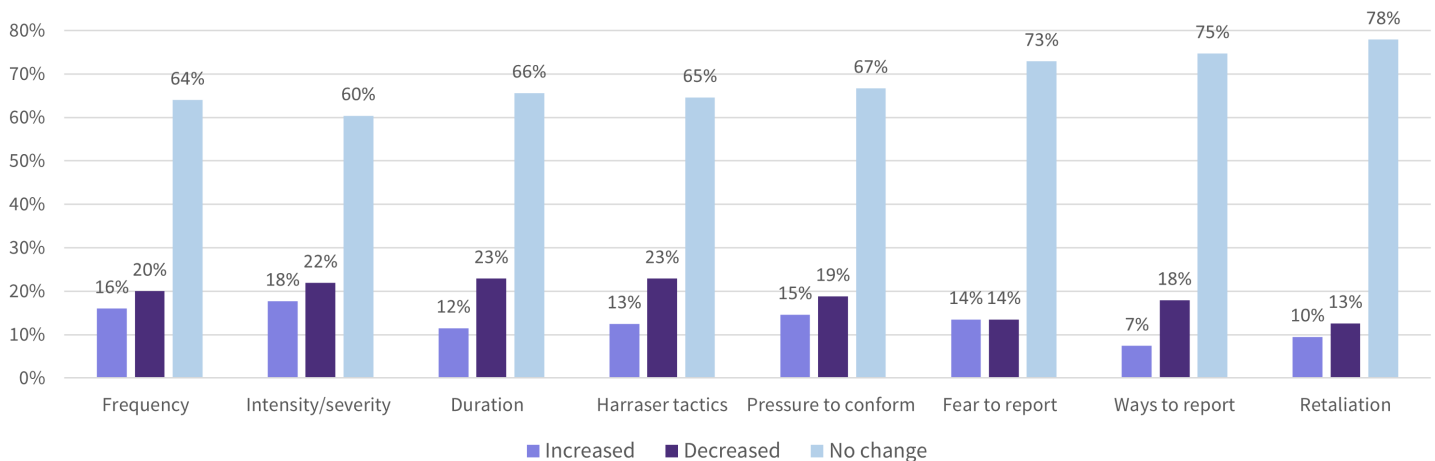
# Disclosures and Reports of Harassment and Violence and Responses Received

Similar to other studies, this study shows that major barriers to reporting continue to exist and, when workers do report, the abusive situation they face often does not change.[13] Among survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence, most reported to their supervisor or manager (43.6%), followed by their union (25.4%). Almost one in five (19.8%) respondents filed a formal report or grievance (see Figure 17). While the number of respondents who filed a formal report or grievance was relatively low, of those who did report, 77.3% were union members compared to 18.2% who were not (see Figure 18). Further research is required into the specific contextual factors and reporting avenues available to unionized and non-unionized workers in each of the target industries of this study to further understand these figures. For example, interview participants in the hospitality sector, particularly in small- and medium-sized restaurants, spoke of having only their supervisor or manager as a reporting avenue, even when this was also their harasser.

*"And again, it's the silence. And I just was so blown away and so caught off guard. He said to me, Here's what you're going to do. You're going to leave quietly. You're not going to tell anybody. ...And he's like, here is basically your script. I'm going to control the narrative. ...And here's what you're going to tell the manager."*

*(Hospitality Worker B)*

Figure 17
**Where Survey Respondents Reported Experiences of Workplace Harassment and Violence**
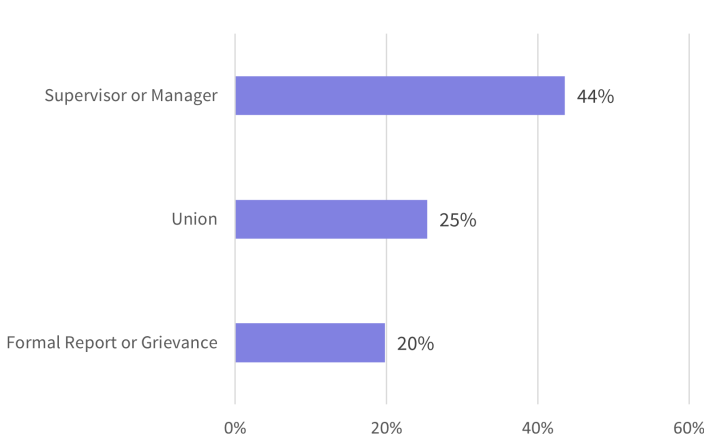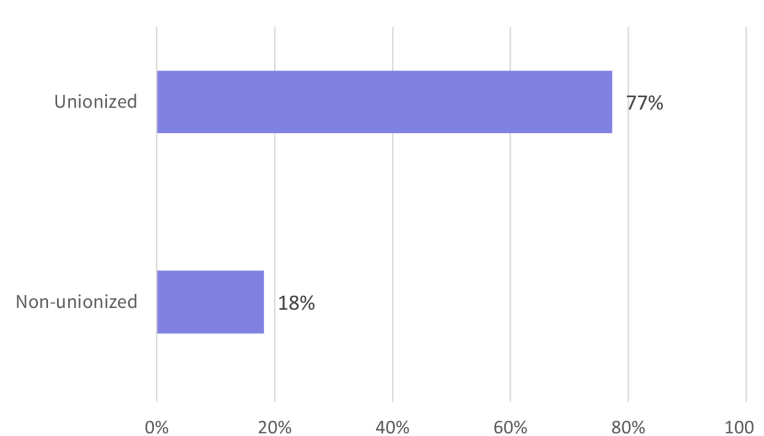


Figure 18
**Filing a Report or Grievance: Unionized vs Non-Unionized**

For survey respondents who did report experiences of sexual harassment and violence, the majority believed that reporting made the situation worse or made no difference (see Figure 19). Less than 1 in 7 believed that reporting to a supervisor or manager (14%), reporting to their union (12%), or filing a formal report or grievance (7%) made their situation better.

Figure 19
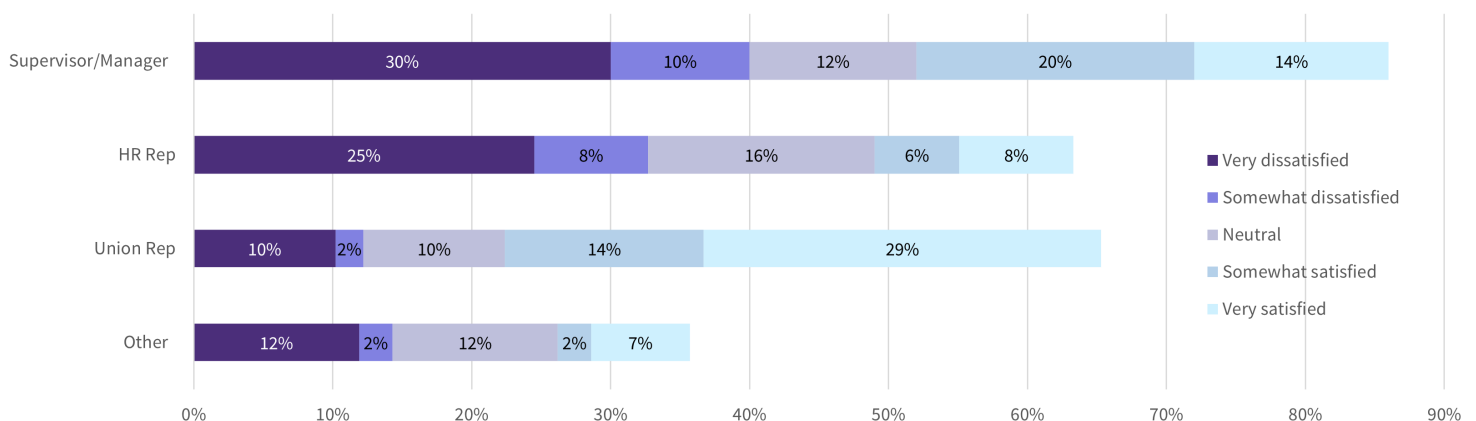**Reporting Outcomes: Sexual Harassment and Violence**
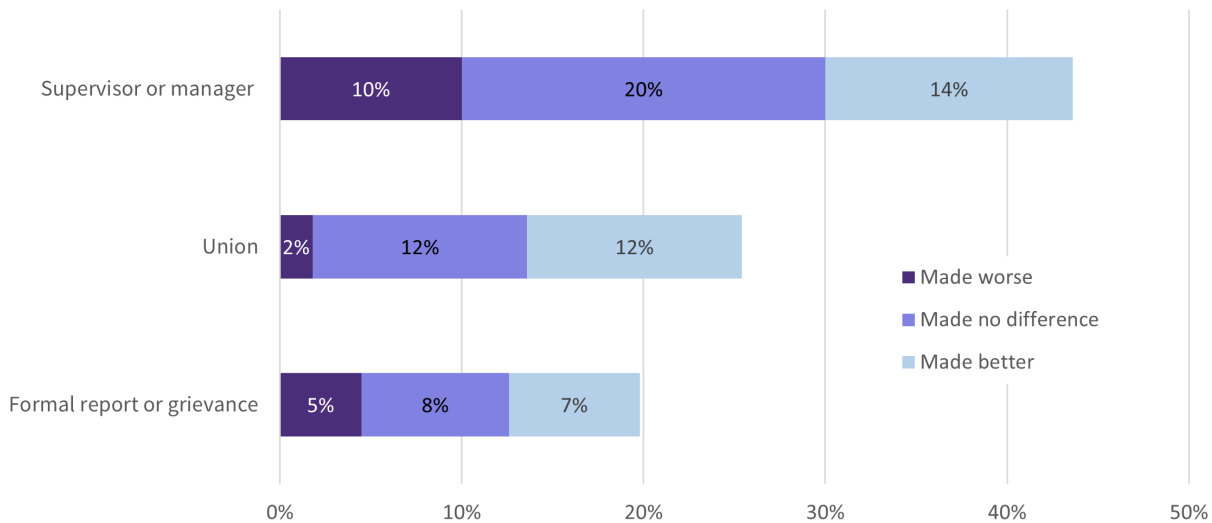


The actions that workers take when experiencing sexual harassment can have significant costs for them and their employer. For example, more than one in seven (14.9%) of survey respondents changed jobs or locations potentially costing their employers human resources related costs as well as lost skills and knowledge.

Survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence were asked how satisfied they were with the response they received from those responsible for workplace health and safety in their workplace. Most of the survey respondents were very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the responses they received from supervisors or managers, human resources, or other representatives (see Figure 20). Respondents indicated higher levels of satisfaction with the responses they received from their union representative (28.6% very satisfied, 14.3% somewhat satisfied).

Figure 20
**Satisfaction with Actions Taken by Those Responsible for Worker Safety & Wellbeing (Experience Sexual Harassment and Violence)**

# Barriers to Reporting

Figure 21 shows various reasons survey respondents did not report their experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Almost a third of respondents (31.8%) who experienced sexual harassment and violence resolved the issue on their own. Further research would shed light on the strategies respondents used to resolve their situations. The barriers reported by respondents explain why workers may try to resolve the situation on their own. For example, fear of retaliation and negative consequences (24.7%), believing that reporting would not make a difference (24.7%), concerns about the reporting process (12.9%), and not knowing what to do, where or who to turn to for help (15.3%) influence workers' decisions to resolve abusive experiences on their own. Interview participants who were harassed and, in several cases, raped by their manager, recounted having no one to turn to to report their experiences. This was particularly so for smaller workplaces with no human resources department.

Over a quarter of survey respondents (25.9%) believed that the behaviours and practices they were experiencing were not serious enough to warrant a report. This could point to the lack of policies and effective training in workplaces. It may also point to the normalization of harassment as 'part of the job' in the target sectors of this study. Interview participants, particularly those working in the hospitality sector, spoke of the daily experiences of harassment as part of their job and the lack of action by their managers. Participants also confirmed insufficient knowledge (e.g., lack of training, lack of access to information, lack of knowledge of reporting procedures) as a primary barrier to reporting their experiences.

Interview participants confirmed the same barriers to reporting experienced by survey respondents, and added others, including:

- the stigma associated with experiencing sexual harassment and violence

- victim-blaming (blaming workers for not "putting up" with the harassment, blaming workers due to how they dress)

- not being believed

- being told not to speak about the harassment with anyone

- management's biased perceptions of workers (e.g., judging workers before hearing about their experiences, women not

> **"As people get more desperate, the real big gamblers gamble harder and heavier and bigger, trying to catch up and to win money back to come back to even. And as they lose, they get more vocal, more direct and more abusive because it's your fault they're losing. And that's common. That's normal."**
>
> *(Gaming Worker A)*

> **"Like he just behaved as though it was the most normal situation like, as if nothing had happened. Except, of course, I was instructed to not tell anyone, obviously."**
>
> *(Hospitality Worker B)*

> **"Why don't we have that letting people know that abuse will not be tolerated. And if so, these are the consequences. We don't have that, which I find very surprising. Why don't we?"**
>
> *(Airline Worker A)*

"fitting in" in male-dominated workplaces)

- power differentials between themselves and their harasser (e.g., when the harasser was their manager and, in the hospitality sector, often also the business owner)

- working in a male-dominated workplace

- lack of confidentiality

- lack of communication on the status of a report and its outcomes

- financial (e.g., loss of income)

- retaliation, including threats and false accusations, made by their harasser and/or a friend or colleague of the harasser

- lack of accountability for harassers (e.g., lack of action taken to address the harassment, protecting the harasser, not separating harassers from victim-survivors, lack of change in the workplace)

These findings are supported by research on workplace sexual harassment and violence, which has demonstrated that most women do not report their experiences for a variety of reasons, including fear of retaliation (including job loss), potential disbelief, and/or lack of information about resources.[14] Specifically related to sexual harassment and violence from third parties, other reasons why workers do not report or respond to these behaviours and practices include those related to contextual factors, working conditions and social norms.[15] Interview participants of this study shared a number of contextual factors that both contributed to the likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment and violence and acted as barriers to reporting these experiences. In addition to those already mentioned elsewhere in this report, these factors included: the reliance on tips, sexualized dress codes, precarious employment status, the gendered and racialized division of labour, the devaluing of women's work, the sexualization of women's labour, the size of the workplace, patriarchal beliefs, the requirement of emotional labour as part of the job, and workplace culture.

> "
> *"For customer service agents, the majority of them are customer service agents. There's one person, a female, who is a lead. As a manager, there's only one female manager. Everything else is all male. ...Like once you go higher up to lead to manager and station manager, they're all men, except for one woman."*
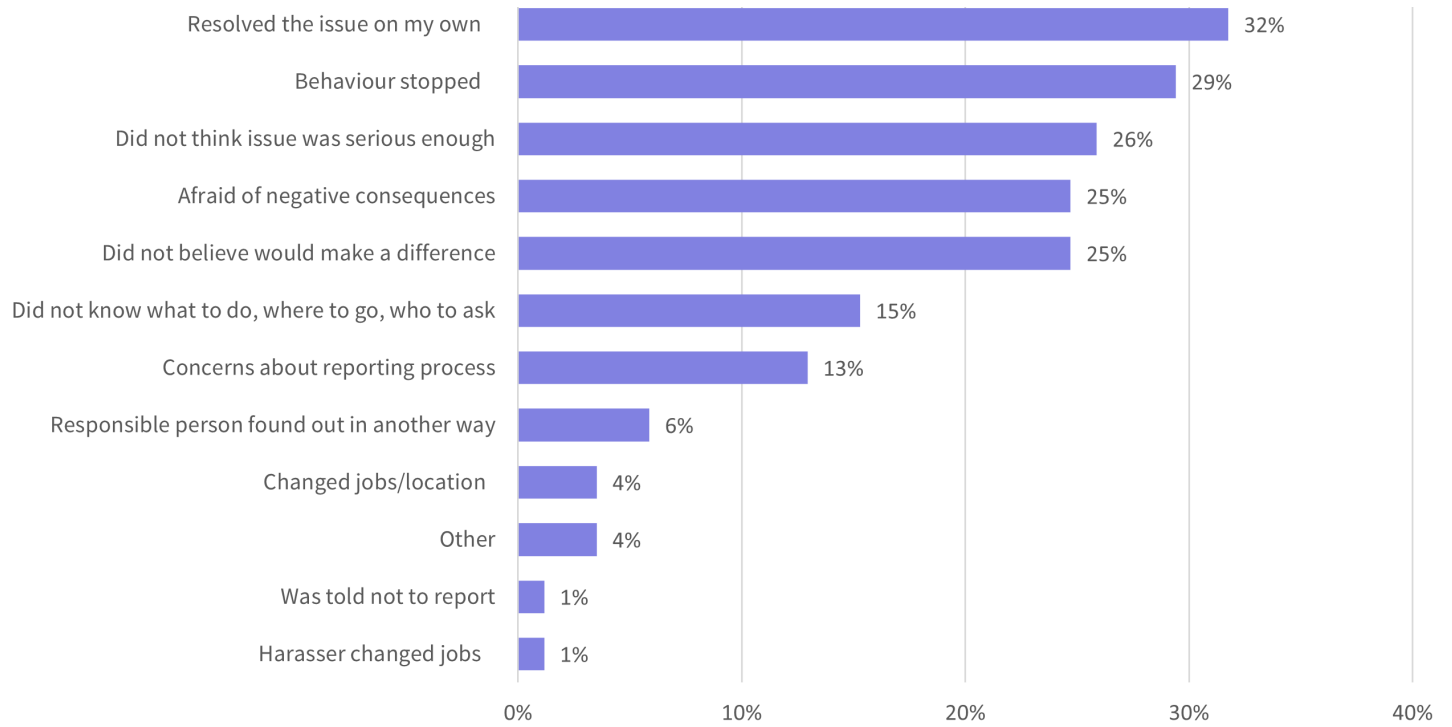>
> (Airline Worker A)

> "
> *"So, when it was happening, there was really no one to report it to. So last year it was an owner. There was no leadership. There wasn't a GM at the time... There wasn't even policies and procedures in place. So, I felt very like I wouldn't know who to tell anyways."*
>
> (Hospitality Worker A)

Figure 21
**Reasons for Not Reporting Sexual Harassment and Violence**

| | |
|---|---|
| Resolved the issue on my own | 32% |
| Behaviour stopped | 29% |
| Did not think issue was serious enough | 26% |
| Afraid of negative consequences | 25% |
| Did not believe would make a difference | 25% |
| Did not know what to do, where to go, who to ask | 15% |
| Concerns about reporting process | 13% |
| Responsible person found out in another way | 6% |
| Changed jobs/location | 4% |
| Other | 4% |
| Was told not to report | 1% |
| Harasser changed jobs | 1% |

# Consequences of Sexual Harassment and Violence for Workers

Workers shared many consequences to their well-being, work, and careers due to the abuse they experienced and the response to it with effects rippling across all areas of their lives. On average, of survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence, almost 1 in 2 (45.8%) identified negative consequences to their personal health and well-being, 27.4% to their work, and 15.6% to their careers. Participants who were interviewed spoke of long-term consequences, including physical and mental health conditions, leaving or being forced out of fulfilling careers, and significant loss of income.

## Impacts on Personal Well-being

Survey respondents experienced multiple impacts (see Figure 22) on their health and well-being, as a result of the sexual harassment and violence they experienced. Of note, over half (54.8%) of respondents experienced negative emotional impacts (e.g., depression, anxiety, fear, or anger). Interview participants spoke of consequences for their families as well as themselves. They also spoke of having to take sick leave, increased stress, financial losses from leaving or losing their job, and legal expenses. These negative impacts were further exacerbated by the retaliation participants experienced when they became targets of further harassment for speaking up about their experiences of sexual harassment and violence.

Figure 22
**Impacts on Health and Well-being from Experiencing Sexual Harassment and Violence**
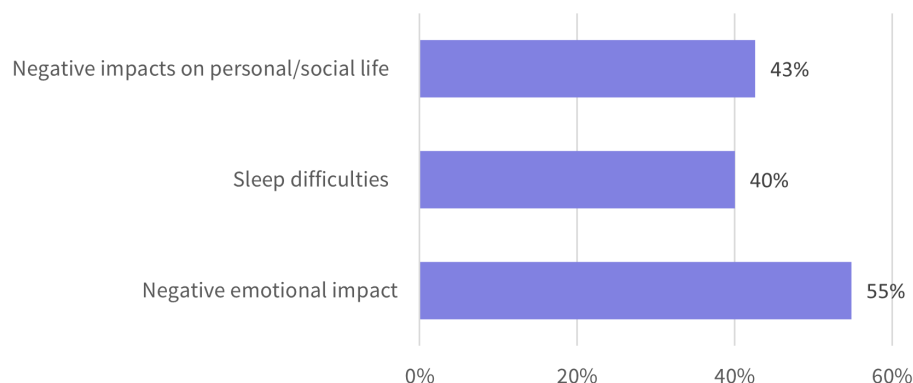


> **"**
>
> *"I went to therapy multiple times about it. It's, in a big way, ...I don't think I can trust people anymore because of so many reasons within this experience, just being assaulted by your boss but also your new boss is not really fully supporting you. ...I don't think people realize, ...how much it actually does affect you personally, even when it's something as simple as touching, like, I know this isn't rape or something that's maybe more extreme, but it really does. It really did affect me mentally. ...I hope to be able to rebuild and, and I'm not sure I trust the system itself even, or that it's the best there is."*
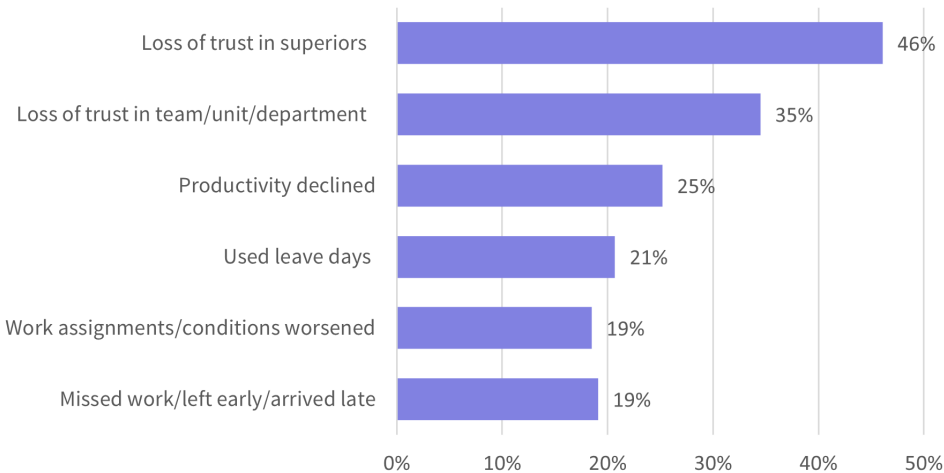>
> *(Hospitality Worker A)*

## Impacts on Work

A loss of trust in superiors (46.1%) and in the team/unit/
department (34.5%), the use of leave days (e.g., sick days,
vacation days, annual leave) (20.7%), and lost time through missed
workdays, arriving late or leaving early (19.1%) were among the
most common negative impacts on work for survey respondents
experiencing sexual harassment and violence at work (see Figure
23). Almost one in five respondents (18.5%) indicated that their
work assignments or conditions worsened. For over a quarter
(25.2%) of survey respondents, productivity declined. This is
lower than in previous research.[16] Further research is required
into possible contextual factors related to the three target
sectors of this study that may have contributed to this finding.
Interview participants confirmed the experience of these negative
consequences on their work. They also spoke of feelings of apathy
toward their work. Job apathy is associated with decreased work
engagement, performance, commitment, decision-making capacity,
motivation, and the willingness to exert effort (or the exertion
of unnecessary effort).[17] It is also a predictor of initiative, work
withdrawal, and organizational deviance.[18]

> "I didn't go to work. So,
> I do not call in sick. I
> called in sick. I racked
> up my sick time. I was
> not going in. I used
> up all my personal
> time in three weeks.
> ...Adamantly was not
> going in, not anywhere
> near him."
>
> *(Gaming Worker A)*

Figure 23
**Impacts on Work from Experiencing Sexual Harassment and Violence**

## Career Disruption and Destruction

In addition to the negative impacts on their work, survey respondents experienced negative consequences for their careers because of their experiences of sexual harassment and violence (see Figure 24). Almost a third of respondents (28.7%) avoided participating in work-related social functions. Interview participants spoke of the loss of these functions as jeopardizing their networking and mentoring opportunities, and as a result their career trajectories. They also spoke of co-workers treating them differently and targeting them for talking about the sexual harassment and violence they were experiencing. Survey respondents were also denied a promotion, pay increase, good performance rating or reference (13.7%), were transferred, suspended, fired, or lost a shift (10.3%), and were transferred or quit to take another job (9.5%).

Figure 24
**Career Disruption and Destruction from Experiencing Sexual Harassment and Violence**
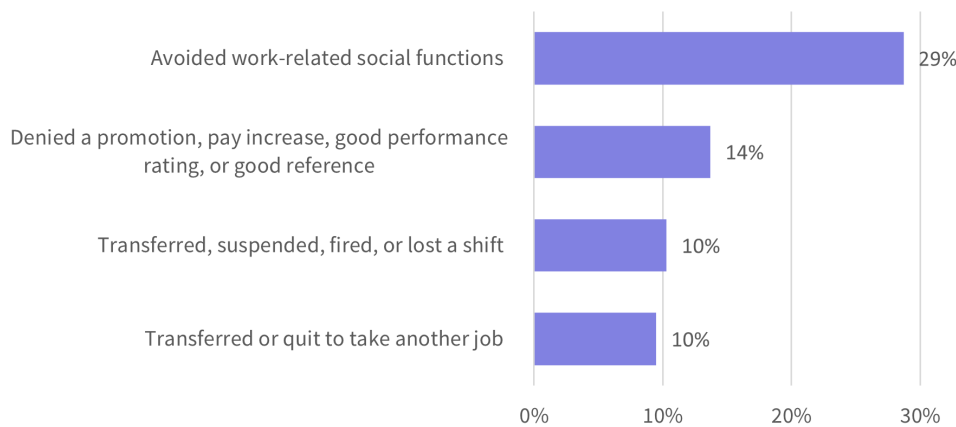


> **"I continued to work with him. He continued to be my supervisor. And I left, probably three weeks later. I have strong seniority, so I took the first posting out wherever it was."**
>
> *(Gaming Worker A)*

> **"So, the financial barrier is huge. It was really hard for me to leave the industry because of the money that I was making. When I left, I was, well, first I was months without a job because it was in the middle or kind of at the tail end of COVID. And I, like I now make minimum wage, which is not a living wage."**
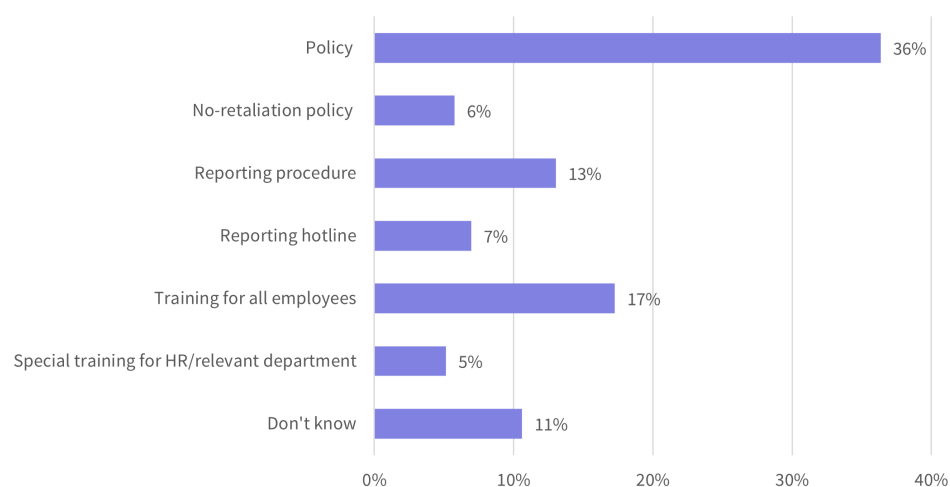>
> *(Hospitality Worker B)*

# What Are Workplaces Doing to Prevent and Address Sexual Harassment and Violence?

Notwithstanding the existence of provincial, territorial, and federal legislative frameworks in Canada that outline employer duties and responsibilities regarding harassment and violence, survey respondents were often not aware if their workplaces had key practices in place to keep them safe (see Figure 25). This was also confirmed by interview participants. Notably, specifically regarding sexual harassment and violence, just over a third (36.4%) of survey respondents indicated an awareness of a policy in place in their workplace. The awareness of other key anti-harassment and –violence practices were also considerably low: only 5.8% regarding clear no-retaliation polices, 17.3% for training for all employees (including senior management), and only 5.2% for specialized training for those in Human Resources (or relevant department). Interview participants spoke about a lack of clear reporting procedures as a significant barrier to reporting their experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Only 13% of survey respondents indicated that they were aware of their workplaces having such procedures, confirming that a lack of clear procedures is a significant barrier to reporting. Workplaces also had inadequate prevention and intervention practices to address other forms of harassment and violence at work (see Table 1).

> "
> "It was very, like the language was just very general and very open to interpretation. ...But they had someone come in and speak to the management about sexual harassment. And harassment in general. ...I was told that they basically just treated it as a joke. They were laughing through the presentation. Like making jokes. So, no one really took it seriously."
>
> *(Hospitality Worker B)*

Figure 25

**Practices in Place to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment and Violence**



| Practice | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Policy | 36% |
| No-retaliation policy | 6% |
| Reporting procedure | 13% |
| Reporting hotline | 7% |
| Training for all employees | 17% |
| Special training for HR/relevant department | 5% |
| Don't know | 11% |

Table 1

**Percentage of workplaces that have key practices in place to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and violence at work as reported by survey respondents**

| | Policy | No-retaliation policy | Reporting procedure | Reporting hotline | Training for all employees | Special training for HR/relevant dept. | Do not know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physical violence | 45% | 8% | 15% | 8% | 25% | 7% | 14% |
| Aggression/harassment related to prohibited grounds under human rights legislat | 35% | 5% | 12% | 5% | 19% | 5% | 12% |
| Aggression/harassment not related to prohibited grounds under human rights legislation | 31% | 5% | 10% | 5% | 15% | 4% | 15% |
| Sexual harassment | 36% | 6% | 13% | 7% | 17% | 5% | 11% |
| Domestic violence | 25% | 3% | 7% | 5% | 10% | 3% | 18% |

The majority of survey respondents in unionized workplaces indicated an awareness of collective agreements containing clauses and/or procedures related to sexual harassment and violence as well as other forms of harassment and violence at work (see Figure 26).

Figure 26

**Awareness of Collective Agreements with Clauses and/or Procedures Related to Workplace Harassment and Violence**
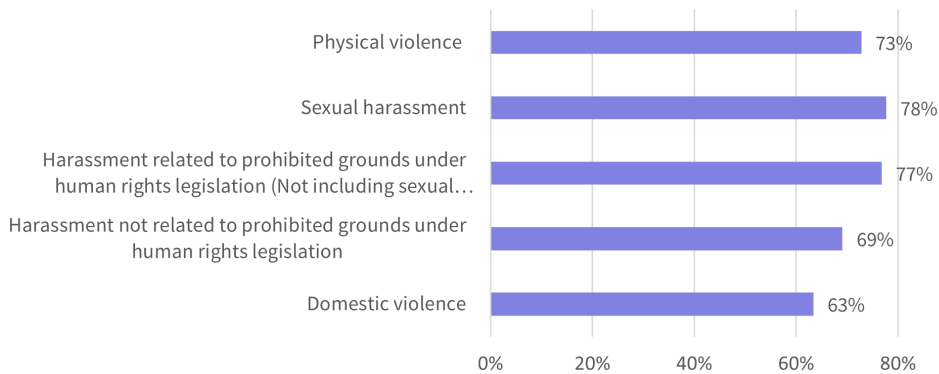


These findings show evidence of a potential lack of key anti-harassment and –violence practices in workplaces and a lack of training and communication efforts by workplaces to inform workers and employer representatives (e.g., supervisors and managers, human resources representatives, health and safety representatives) of these practices and their respective rights, duties, and responsibilities. Further research is required into the challenges and needs of small-sized workplaces in preventing and addressing harassment and violence. The exclusion of small workplaces from some legislative frameworks also requires reexamination.

"

*"I had no idea...what the proper procedures should be. Since, ...I was going to be on the safety committee, I took a harassment training and that it's through that training that it actually opened my eyes to what's even qualified as harassment. When you look at that, it's like, oh, my goodness, there's harassment running wild in this place."*

*(Hospitality Worker A)*

# Highlights

• Over half (57.9%) of survey respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of sexual harassment and violence while at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Over a quarter (25.8%) of survey respondents experienced 1-3 types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Almost 17% (16.7%) of survey respondents experienced between 4-6 types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence while at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Over one in ten (10.3%) of survey respondents experienced between 7-9 types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence while at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Over 5% (5.2%) of survey respondents experienced 10 or more types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence at work in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Over one third (37.6%) of survey respondents witnessed someone else at work being sexually harassed.

• The prevalence rates of sexual harassment and violence at work were similar across the three target sectors of this study: airlines (59.5%), gaming (55.9%), and hospitality (55.6%).

• Non-heterosexual survey respondents were particularly likely to have experienced sexual harassment and violence (72%). Members of the non-heterosexual community were also more likely to experience multiple behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence.

• Survey respondents living with at least one form of disability experienced significantly higher rates of sexual harassment and violence while at work.

• Sexual conversations, sexual teasing and jokes, and the invasion of personal space (e.g., touching, leaning over) were the most common behaviours indicated by survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence. Almost one quarter (18%) of respondents were stalked by someone from their workplace, and 3% were sexually assaulted while at work.

• A great number of survey respondents are regularly exposed to factors in their jobs that put them at greater risk of experiencing sexual harassment and violence at work. These include jobs that involve interaction with the public, the exchange of money, and the serving of alcohol, and working in isolated and/or remote areas (i.e., worked alone, in small numbers, and/or in situations where assistance is not readily available). Compared to those working a regular daytime schedule or shift, survey respondents who worked all other schedule or shift types experienced higher rates of sexual harassment and violence at work.

• Survey respondents who obtained work through a third party (e.g., temporary agency, sub-contractor) are more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence. They are also more likely to experience multiple types of behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence. Almost nine in ten respondents (87.5%) who obtained work through a third party experienced sexual harassment compared to 56.4% of those who did not.

• Survey respondents and interview participants revealed a multitude of consequences to their well-being, work, and careers as a result of the sexual harassment and violence they experienced and their response to it, with the repercussions extending to every part of their lives.

• There continue to be major barriers to reporting sexual harassment and violence at work. Many of these barriers point to a lack of policies, clear reporting procedures, and training, as well as a fear of negative consequences reinforced by experiences of retaliation and a lack of inaction by workplaces when reports are made.

• For survey respondents who did report sexual harassment and violence, the majority believed that reporting made no difference or made the situation worse.

• Notwithstanding legislation on harassment and violence in place in many Canadian provinces and territories and on the federal level, many survey respondents and interview participants indicated that they were unaware if their workplaces had the necessary practices in place to prevent and respond to harassment and violence. Specifically regarding sexual harassment and violence, just over a third (36.4%) of survey respondents indicated an awareness of a policy in their workplace, 13% were aware of clear reporting procedures, only 5.8% knew of clear no-retaliation polices, 17.3% were aware of training available for all employees (including senior management), and only 5.2% knew of specialized training for those in Human Resources (or relevant department).

> **"**
>
> *"When someone's going through something, do you stand behind them or do you stand against them? So you're either part of the problem or you're part of the solution."*
>
> *(Gaming Worker A)*

# Conclusion

This research has shown that much work is still needed to protect and support workers from sexual harassment and violence at work, particularly within the three target sectors of this study (hospitality, gaming, and airlines). Workplaces in these sectors seem ill-equipped to prevent and respond effectively to sexual harassment and violence experienced by workers notwithstanding the existence of legislative requirements. Workers in these sectors are exposed to risks of sexual harassment and violence from those within their own workplaces and from third parties. They are often left unsupported and alone to deal with their experiences. Further research is needed to identify the challenges and needs of workplaces, particularly small workplaces, in complying with legislation and implementing best practices to prevent and respond effectively to sexual harassment and violence. Further research is also required to examine, develop, and evaluate prevention and intervention practices to meet the unique contexts of specific sectors. Government can play a vital role as partners in this research and, together with subject matter experts, provide workplaces with the support they require to ensure the safety of workers.

Canada has recently ratified the ILO Convention 190 and its accompanying Recommendation 206 which recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from harassment and violence.[19] As such, Canada now joins other countries on the global stage in recognizing this right, the enormity of the problem, and the need to bring about long-term systemic change through a comprehensive and collaborative strategy to address harassment and violence at work.

In future studies, strategies will be required to ensure the participation of groups of workers who were underrepresented in this survey, such as gender-diverse and Black and Indigenous workers.

Although sexual harassment and violence is recognized as a serious health and safety issue, workers are reluctant to report their experiences. Therefore, to meet the needs of workers, it is essential to ensure clear and safe mechanisms for finding information, reporting experiences without retaliation, and providing support.[20] This may be a particular challenge for small workplaces without Human Resources departments or access to collective protection.

## Acknowledgements

## Suggested Citation

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Western — Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children

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Department of Justice Canada

Ministère de la Justice Canada

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# Appendix A – Research Methods

This mixed-methods research study consisted of an online survey and semi-structured interviews conducted in English. Three sectors were the focus of this research: hospitality (including hotels, resorts, and food and drink services), gaming (including casinos, racetracks, and government gaming and lottery operations), and airline (customer service agents). The survey instrument was adapted from the Harassment and Violence in Canadian Workplaces project[21] to focus on sexual harassment and violence and was active from March to July 2022. It was open to all persons in Canada above the age of 18 who had been employed during the last 2 years prior to completing the survey. Respondents who completed less than 70% of the survey were excluded from the data analysis. A total of 330 people satisfied all the selection criteria.

Respondents were recruited via Unifor networks, three Coordinators (Unifor members from each of the target sectors), and the survey was promoted via social media and a project website. The three Coordinators were provided with a copy of recruitment materials (e.g., poster, flyer) which they distributed when visiting Unifor Locals to inform workers of the project.

Due to the recruitment strategy, the survey respondents cannot be considered a random sample and, therefore, the survey data cannot be considered as representative of the average Canadian worker. However, the people who participated in the study provided us with a unique look into their daily realities. This is a sample of an engaged group of workers in sectors that experienced significant barriers to completing an online survey and participating in interviews. Workers in these three target sectors were particularly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and their jobs, with little or no access to technology (e.g., smart phones, tablets, computers) and changing shifts, made it difficult to complete the survey during work hours. The role of the sector Coordinators and their visits onsite at Unifor Locals was extremely important in reaching workers.

To further understand the experiences of workers and the impacts of sexual harassment and violence, researchers also conducted nine semi-structured interviews with front line workers, union representatives, and Health and Safety representatives. Interviews took place from January to August 2022. Respondents who completed the survey were presented with a termination question at the end of the survey with the option to participate in further research. After responding affirmatively to the termination question, respondents were taken to a second survey where they could confidentially share their contact information (email and/or telephone number) with the research team to be contacted for interviews. Drawing on the list of survey respondents that wished to participate in an interview, the research team used a randomization technique to select and contact potential interview participants. Interviews were approximately one hour in length and were transcribed and de-identified by the research team prior to qualitative analysis.

Previous research suggests that it can be difficult for workers to recognize their experiences as sexual harassment, and they may not associate their experiences with definitions provided by researchers or legislation.[22] Therefore, rather than include definitions, survey respondents were presented with behaviour-based questions that listed known forms of sexual harassment and violence, including gender harassment, ranging from unwelcome communications to rape and sexual assault (see Figure 2 for a list of behaviours and practices). Likewise, during interviews, participants were not presented with definitions but asked to describe their experiences in their own words.