RESPECT at work

RESEARCH REPORT

Harassment and Violence in Canadian Workplaces:

It's [Not] Part of the Job

APRIL 2022

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

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS
CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA

Study background

Harassment and violence remain pervasive and destructive problems in contemporary Canadian workplaces. The consequences for workers, workplaces, and governments are profound and costly, ranging from severe physical and mental health consequences, lost earnings, and destroyed career paths, to profound economic losses for workplaces. Even with decades of research and advocacy, including union advocacy, changes in federal and provincial legislation, and social movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp, harassment and violence remains widespread in Canadian workplaces. As demonstrated in this report and prior research, workplaces in the health care and social services, education, and public administration sectors remain particularly high-risk.

From previous research on harassment and violence in workplaces, we know that: 1) not everyone experiences harassment and violence in the same way, 2) marginalized workers[1] are subject to higher rates of harassment and violence[1], and 3) workers who experience harassment and violence face barriers to reporting and often do not get the support they are entitled to. Yet, despite the growing body of research on harassment and violence in the world of work, too little is known about the Canadian context.

To build a world of work free from harassment and violence, Canadian data on harassment and violence at work was urgently needed. The first National Survey on Harassment and Violence at Work in Canada, a partnership between Western University's Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, researchers from the University of Toronto, and the Canadian Labour Congress, aims to address this evidence gap.

Ultimately, stronger evidence will help to shape legislation, policies, and practices that promote harassment and violence prevention in workplaces, hold those who perpetrate harassment and violence accountable, and lift the burden of dealing with these difficult and often devastating experiences alone from those who experience all forms of harassment and violence.

Canadian legislators, employers, unions and advocates can use the results of this study to create meaningful legislative and policy changes and create a path towards a world of work free from harassment and violence for all workers in Canada.

This report provides a summary of the main findings from our Canadian national study exploring the prevalence of harassment and violence, its multiple forms, its consequences, the impact of COVID-19, and respondents' experiences with reporting. Further supplementary reports containing a deeper analysis of the survey and interview data will follow in various formats.

---

[1] We recognize that this is a problematic term, however, due to the lack of a better widely recognized term, we use it to refer to workers who are marginalized due to their social identity (through sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.) and/or precarious employment status.

Study Methods

This Report is based on research from two interrelated sources: a nation-wide online survey and semi-structured interviews. The bilingual survey launched on October 21, 2020 and was open until April 21, 2021. It was open to all persons in Canada above the age of 18 who had been employed during the last 12 months. Respondents were recruited via the extensive networks of the Canadian Labour Congress and its affiliates, and the survey was promoted through national media at its launch and subsequently via social media in both English and French. In total, 4,878 people participated in the survey.

To further understand the experiences of workers and the impacts of harassment and violence, researchers also conducted 34 interviews. Interview participants represented various ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, religions, income levels, industries, and geographical locations. For further details on the research methods used in this study, see Appendix A.

Previous research suggests that it can be difficult for workers to recognize their experiences as harassment, and they may not associate their experiences with definitions provided by researchers or legislation[2]. Therefore, the online survey did not include definitions of harassment and violence. Instead, respondents were presented with behaviour-based questions that listed known forms of harassment and violence. Likewise, during interviews, participants were not presented with definitions but asked to describe their experiences in their own words. See below for more information on key terms as they are used in this report.

While the survey did not include one set definition of harassment and violence, the experiences that workers described in both the survey and in interviews are consistent with the first international definition of violence and harassment in the world of work laid out in ILO Convention no. 190, which refers to, "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment". C190 further defines gender-based violence and harassment as, "violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately and includes sexual harassment"[3].

In this study, we examine three categories of workplace harassment and violence.

- **Harassment and violence** that is not of a sexual nature ranging from verbal intimidation and the sabotaging of a person's work and performance to actual physical assault (see Figure 10 for examples of behaviours and practices).

- **Sexual harassment and violence,** including gender harassment, ranging from unwelcome communications to rape and sexual assault (see Figure 9 for examples of behaviours and practices).

- **Online harassment** including behaviours and practices that take place through virtual communication mediums.
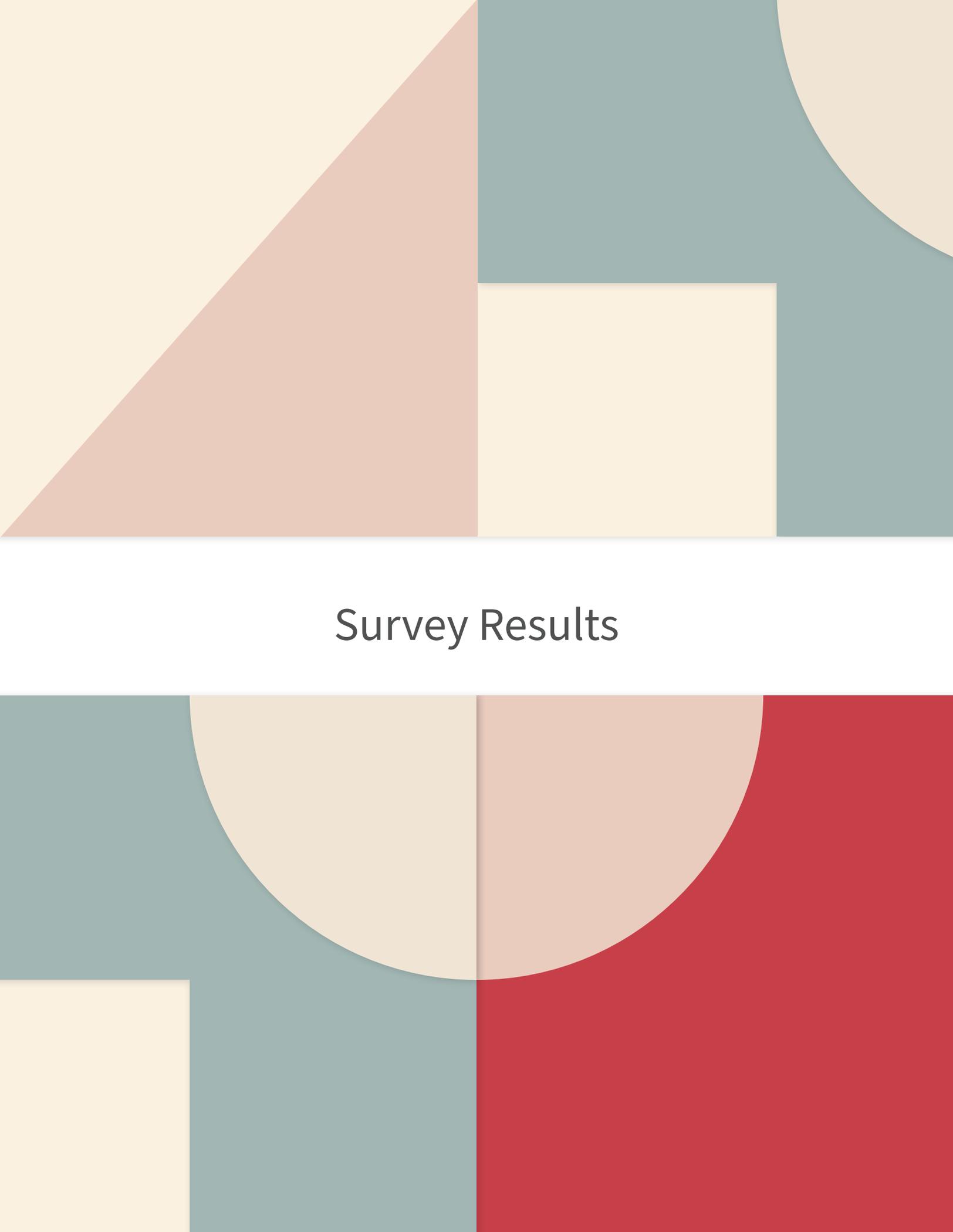
Who Took Part in the Survey

Reflecting the recruitment strategy, of the total 4,878 responses to the online survey, the majority (86%) of the sample were employed in permanent work. The remaining were in temporary employment (9%) or casual, seasonal, or "other" employment contracts (5%).

Union members comprised 87.8% of survey respondents, compared to 31.3% for the general Canadian population[4]. Although our survey is not representative of the average Canadian worker, it does provide an opportunity to look at the experiences of workers we would expect to have more protections related to workplace health and safety and defined processes to see redress.

Survey respondents worked in a wide range of industries, with the highest proportion coming from education (23.3%), health care and social assistance (20.1%), and public administration (17.1%). Respondents from every province and territory in Canada participated in the survey, with the highest rates of participation coming from Ontario (50%), British Columbia (17%), and Alberta (9.5%).

The majority of survey respondents were between 30-59 years old. Research shows that young women are more likely to report experiences of sexual harassment at work[5] and this survey may not have adequately captured the experiences of younger workers. Most survey respondents were women (75%); the remaining identified as men (23%) and gender-diverse (2%). Thirteen percent identified as members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. A total of 26% of the sample indicated living with one or more disability(ies). Eighty-five percent of the sample indicated they were born in Canada. The majority of survey participants identified as White (82.7%); the remaining identified as Indigenous (3.2%), East/Southeast Asian (2.9%), Black (2.1%), South Asian (2.1%), and Latino (1.3%), and Arab/West Asian (0.7%), with 3.4% indicating that they did not identify with any of the categories listed.

In sum, women and people living with a disability participated at higher rates in the survey relative to their representation in the Canadian workforce, and the participation of racialized and Indigenous respondents was lower than their representation in the Canadian workforce. The lack of diverse representation among survey participants may have impacted the findings.

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

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS
CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA

Survey Results

All forms of harassment and violence continue to pose significant health and safety risks for Canadian workers.

- Almost three-quarters (71.4%) of survey respondents experienced at least one form of harassment and violence or sexual harassment and violence, in the two years prior to completing the survey.

- Almost two in three (65%) of survey respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of harassment and violence at work in the past two years.

- Just over two in five (43.9%) of survey respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of sexual harassment and violence in the past two years while at work.

- Just over one-quarter (26.5%) of respondents surveyed experienced at least one form of work-related online harassment in the past two years.

Figure 1.

Experienced at Least One Behaviour or Practice Of Workplace Harassment and Violence

(Percentage of Survey Respondents)

The Intersections of Social Identity and Experiences of Harassment and Violence

Experiences are not the same for everyone. Workers who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination – whether by
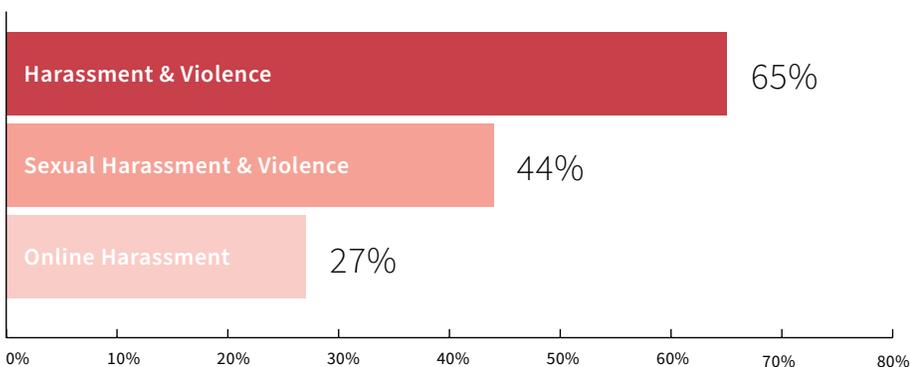
> " *There was like you know rotating doors. And so, when we went, I tried to make sure I was in my own door, like he wouldn't be in the same one as me... But then when we were leaving, the assistant went out first and I try to push mine quickly and he came into mine and pushed himself up against me so I can feel his like dick getting hard on me.*"
>
> *(Provincial Government Worker A)*

race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability or Indigeneity – experienced different prevalence rates.

Gender-diverse individuals are more likely to report experiencing all forms of harassment and violence (see Figure 2). This was most pronounced for sexual harassment and violence: 73% of gender-diverse respondents experienced this form of harassment and violence compared to 46% of women and 38% of men.

Figure 2.

Gender Identity and Form of Workplace Harassment and Violence Experienced

Harassment & Violence
- Gender-diverse: 82%
- Women: 76%
- Men: 67%

Sexual Harassment & Violence
- Gender-diverse: 73%
- Women: 46%
- Men: 38%

Online Harassment
- Gender-diverse: 35%
- Women: 27%
- Men: 24%

Legend:
■ Gender-diverse
■ Women
■ Men

(x-axis: 0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%)
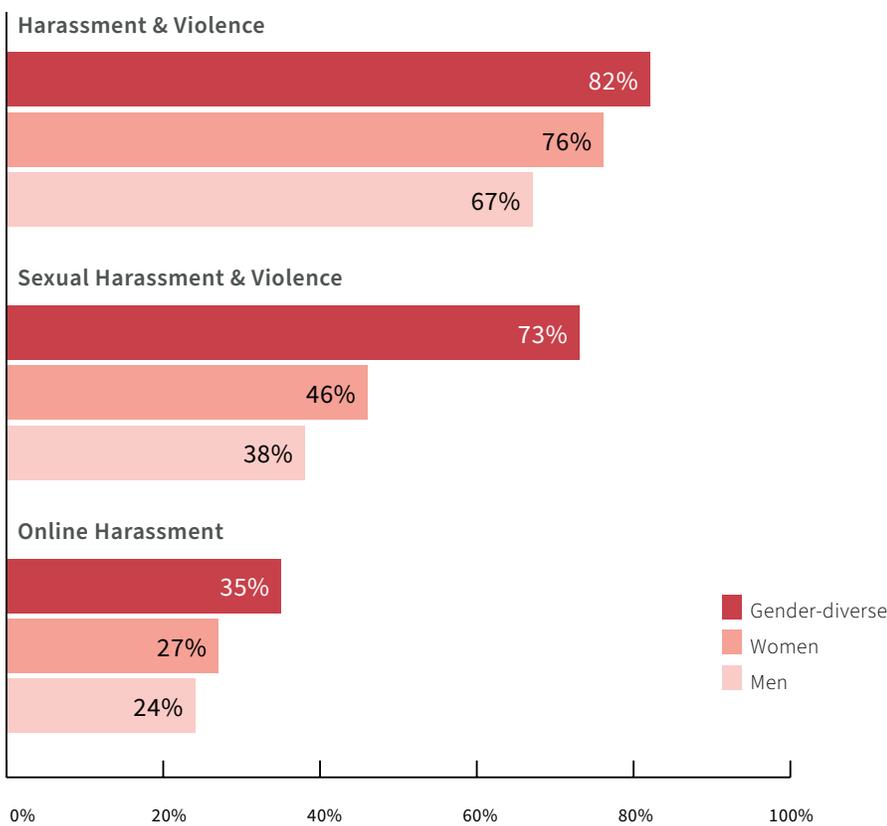
LGBTQ2S+ respondents were also particularly likely to have experienced all forms of harassment and violence (see Figure 3). This is most pronounced for harassment and violence (72%) and sexual harassment and violence (62%).
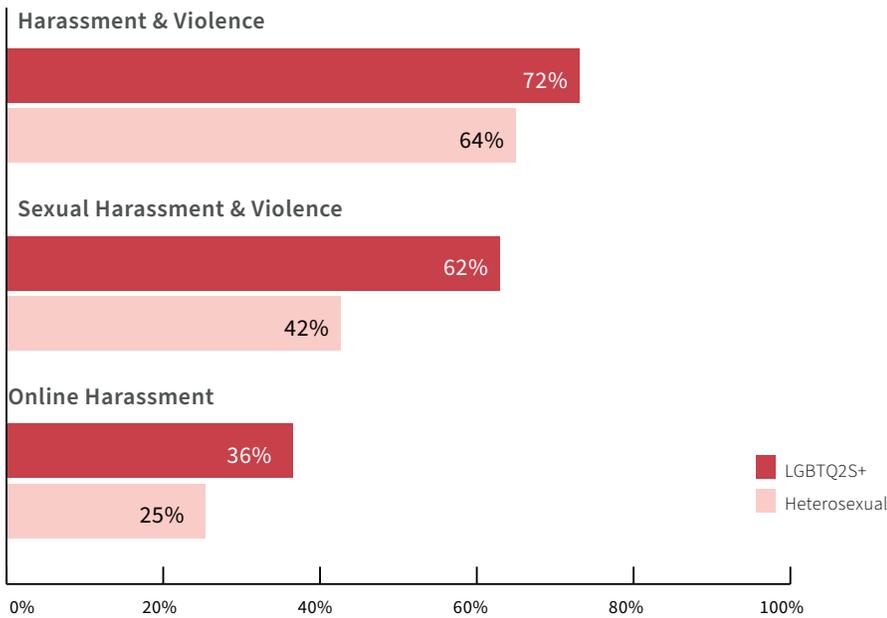
> *…it's kind of to some degree, an old boys club. …female staff members or anyone that's homosexual, anyone that's trans, anyone that [is not] the stereotypical…male heterosexual truck driving kind of dude…they're picked on, they're picked on quite a bit."*
>
> *(Federal Corrections Worker A)*

Figure 3.

Sexual Orientation and Form of Workplace Harassment and Violence Experienced

Harassment & Violence — LGBTQ2S+: 72%, Heterosexual: 64%

Sexual Harassment & Violence — LGBTQ2S+: 62%, Heterosexual: 42%

Online Harassment — LGBTQ2S+: 36%, Heterosexual: 25%

Legend: ■ LGBTQ2S+ ■ Heterosexual

* The category "heterosexual" includes transgender respondents who identified as heterosexual.

Racialized and Indigenous respondents also reported different prevalence rates in relation to White respondents. Indigenous respondents experienced significantly higher rates of harassment and violence (79%) and sexual harassment and violence (47.8%). The data shows less significant differences in rates of all forms of harassment and violence for other racialized groups (not including Indigenous respondents) relative to respondents who identified as White (see Figure 4). A key contributing factor for the minimal differences in prevalence rates for other racialized groups is due to the significantly higher percentage of respondents in these groups who identified as men (28%). Research has shown that men are less likely to experience all forms of harassment and violence, particularly sexual harassment and violence[6] (see Figure 2). A second contributing factor, as stated earlier, is the lack of representation among survey participants. This is significant considering that the survey data is driven predominantly by respondents who identified as women and as White. Future supplementary research and reports will examine the experiences of racialized workers, particularly Black and Indigenous workers, in more detail.

> *"The solutions aren't intersectional…I don't experience anti-Black racism separate from misogyny, separate from homophobia. I experienced them all the same. At the same time. Because I'm all of those things. And so, I think that the institutional responses are not cognizant of that and don't have that response."*
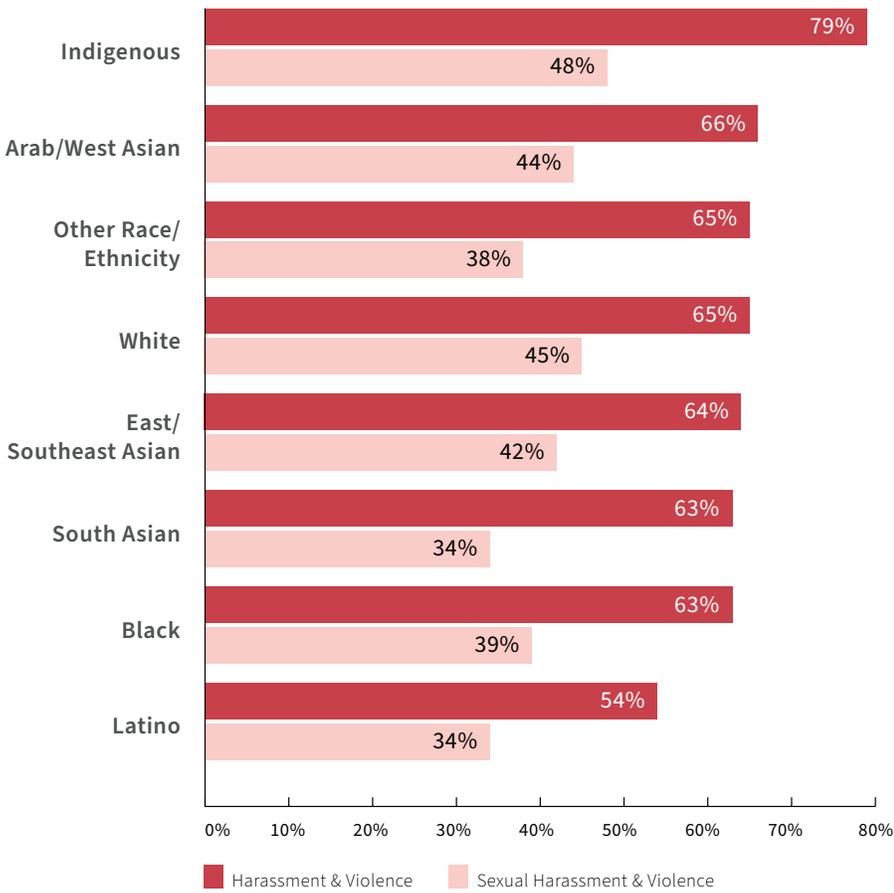>
> *(Provincial Government Worker A)*

> *"Indigenous people have a very tough time in our industry. They're treated as content creators, but they can't be fellow employees. It's a very White industry and that's unfortunate. We had a Black member who was given a crew gift, and instead of having his name on it, it said watermelon."*
>
> *(Film Industry Worker A)*

Figure 4.

Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents Experiencing at Least One Behaviour/Practice of Workplace Harassment and Violence

Race/Ethnicity	Harassment & Violence	Sexual Harassment & Violence
Indigenous	79%	48%
Arab/West Asian	66%	44%
Other Race/Ethnicity	65%	38%
White	65%	45%
East/Southeast Asian	64%	42%
South Asian	63%	34%
Black	63%	39%
Latino	54%	34%

■ Harassment & Violence   ▢ Sexual Harassment & Violence

Survey respondents living with at least one form of disability experienced significantly higher rates of all forms of workplace harassment and violence.

- Over three quarters (76%) of these respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of harassment and violence compared to 60% of those who did not report a disability.

- Over half (55%) of the respondents living with a disability experienced at least one behaviour or practice of sexual harassment and violence compared to 40% of those who did not indicate living with a disability.

- The same pattern appears with regard to online harassment. Over one in three (35%) respondents living with at least one disability experienced at least one behaviour or practice of this form of harassment (compared to 23% of those who did not indicate a disability).

> " *The racial undertones or underpinnings of how people will see Black women's bodies that you know White man or just men, generally, think that they have access to it, that they can touch it. They can do whatever they want. White women too right, like, she thought she could actually touch my hair and she didn't care. He thought he can grab my face and slobber over me and talk about what our names would be like when we're married and talk about his Christmas parties. The other one thought that he can press himself up against me after a meeting and that was okay. You know what I mean, like, these are the things that would happen all the time."*

(Provincial Government Worker A)

Figure 5.

**Survey Respondents with a Disability Experiencing at Least One Behaviour/Practice of Workplace Harassment and Violence**
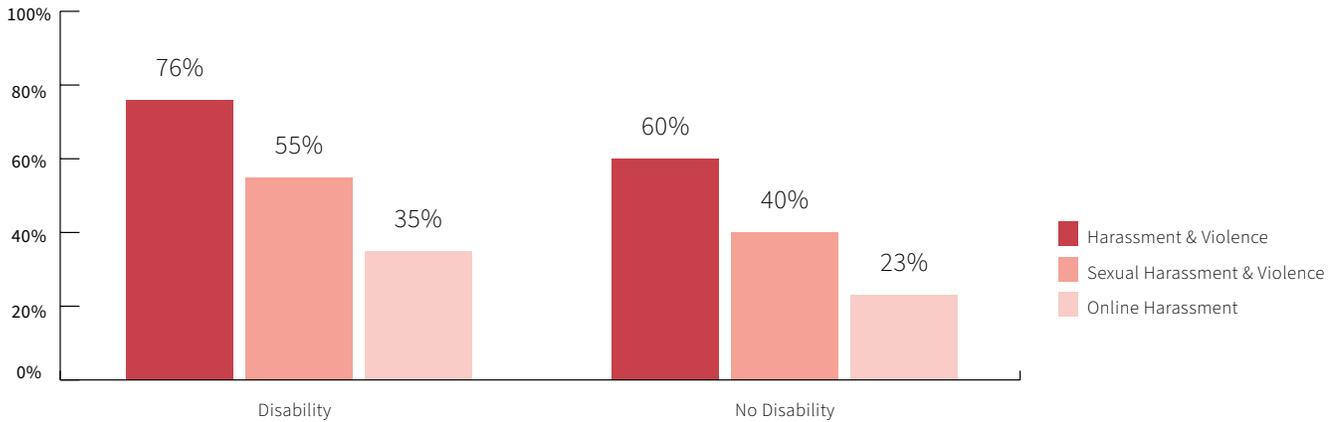
There were slight differences between unionized and non-unionized survey respondents. Non-unionized respondents are more likely to experience sexual and online harassment and violence, but slightly less likely to experience other forms of harassment and violence (63%) compared to unionized respondents (65%).

Figure 6.

Union Membership and Form of Workplace Harassment and Violence Experienced
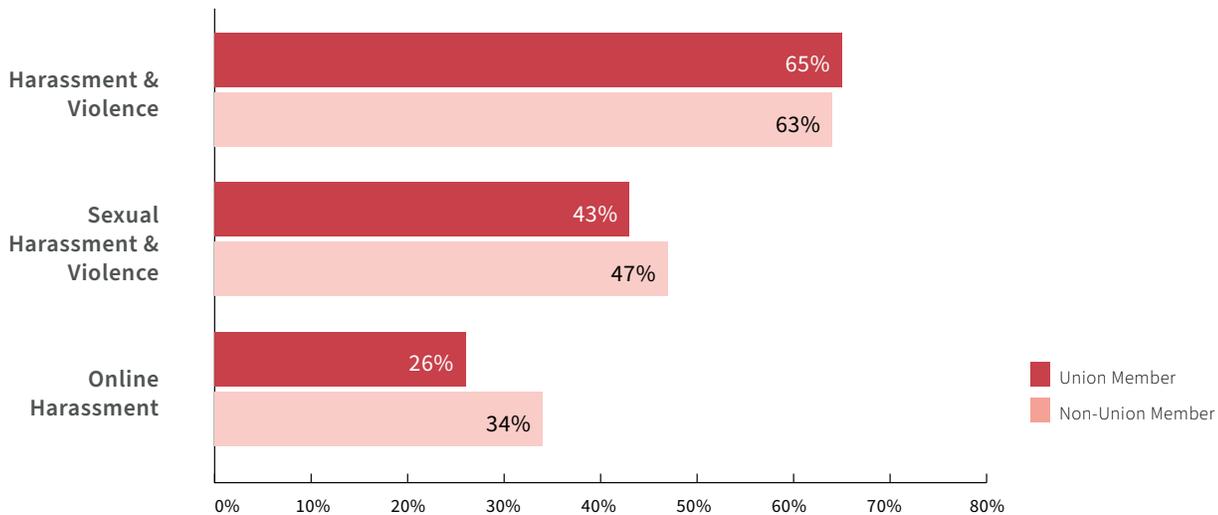
Risk Factors for Harassment and Violence at Work

Factors that increase the risk of harassment and violence include working with the public, handling money, valuables or prescription drugs; serving alcohol; working certain times of the day, night or year; and working in isolation or in remote locations[7]. Seventy-one percent of survey respondents' jobs involved interaction with the public, with 13% involving the exchange of money and 8% the serving

of alcohol. The majority of survey respondents (54%) indicated they sometimes or most of the time worked in isolation and/or in remote geographical areas (i.e., worked alone, in small numbers, and/or in situations where assistance is not readily available). Fifteen percent of respondents indicated they did so all of the time. These findings show that a great number of survey respondents are regularly exposed to factors in their jobs that put them at greater risk for all forms of workplace harassment and violence (Figure 7).

Importantly, workers whose jobs involve the exchange of money are more vulnerable to experiencing harassment and violence (73% compared to 65% of survey respondents overall), sexual harassment and violence (55% compared to 44%), and online harassment (32% compared to 27%). The serving of alcohol also poses significantly higher risk for experiencing sexual harassment and violence (63% compared to 44% of survey respondents overall).

Figure 7.

Risk Factors and Percentage of Survey Respondents Reporting at Least One Behaviour/Practice of Workplace Harassment and Violence
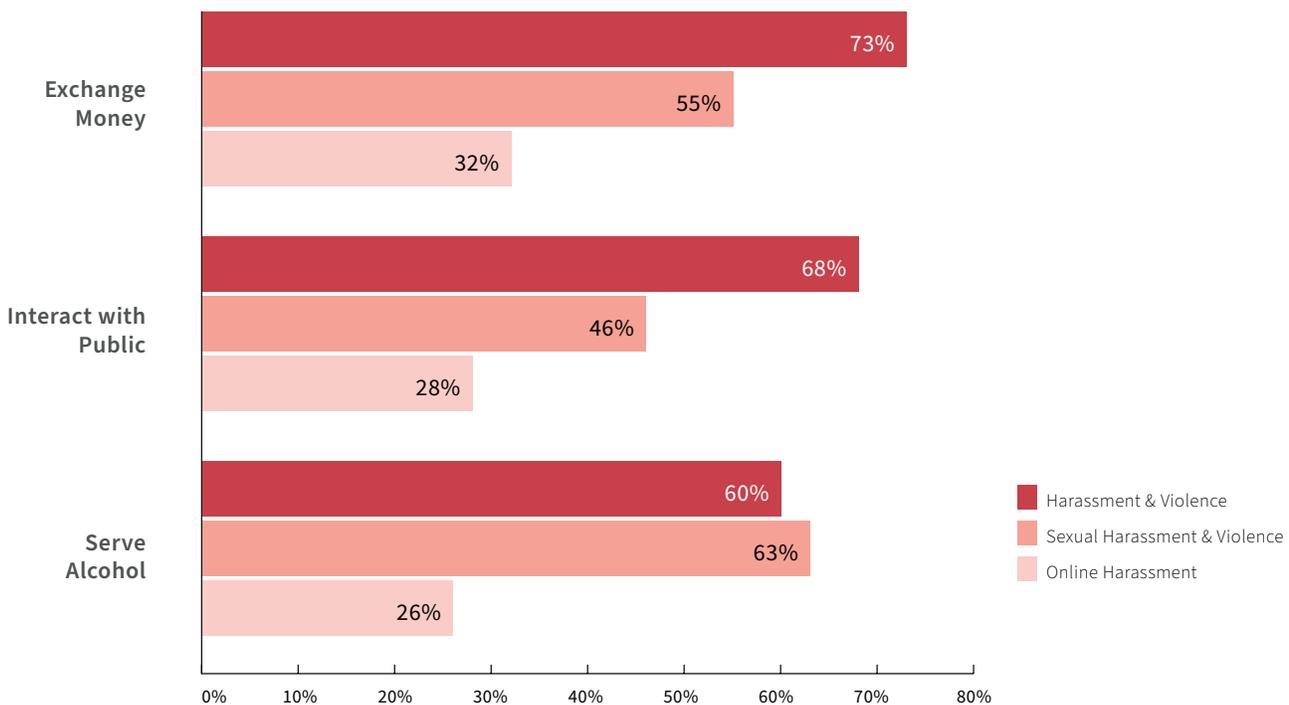
Health care and social assistance, education, and public administration were the three most common sectors indicated by survey respondents and showed significant prevalence rates of all forms of harassment and violence (Figure 8). High prevalence rates in these sectors are supported by previous research[8]. All three are public sectors and are characterized by high percentages of women employees and unionized workers. In 2021, women made up 80% of workers in the health care and social assistance sector, 68% in education, and 49% in public administration[9]. Jobs in these sectors involve working with the public, a known risk factor for forms of harassment and violence which is supported by the findings of this study.

Figure 8.

Three Most Common Sectors by Form of Harassment and Violence Experienced

Harassment & Violence
- 76%
- 62%
- 62%

Sexual Harassment & Violence
- 44%
- 43%
- 33%

Online Harassment
- 27%
- 26%
- 24%

Legend:
- Health Care & Social Assistance
- Public Administration
- Education Services

(x-axis: 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%)
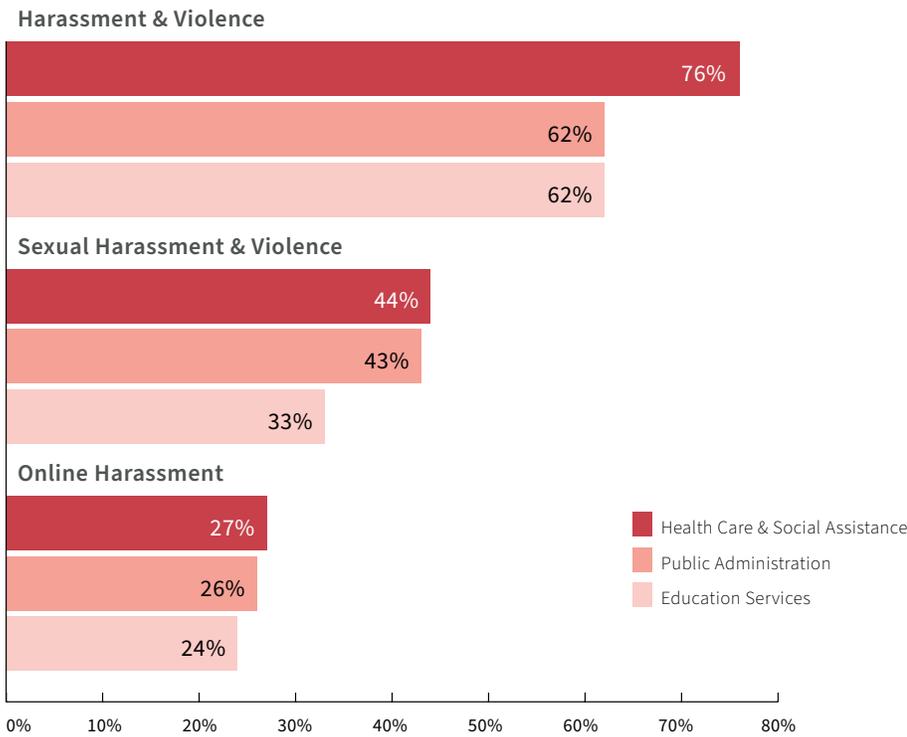
Workplace Harassment and Violence Behaviours and Practices Experienced

Figures 9 and 10 show the specific behaviours and practices of sexual harassment and violence and harassment and violence experienced by survey respondents.

- Sexual conversations (61%) and sexual teasing and jokes (56%) were among the most common behaviours experienced by survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence.

- Verbal intimidation (72%) and the spreading of rumors and negative comments (71%) were among the most common behaviours indicated by survey respondents who experienced harassment and violence.

- Behaviours that exclude, intimidate, and undermine performance were also common.

- Although physical or sexual assault were less commonly identified by survey respondents, almost one in six (16%)

> "
> *"…in my case, it was a few small instances of physical abuse, but mostly lots and lots and lots of emotional abuse."*
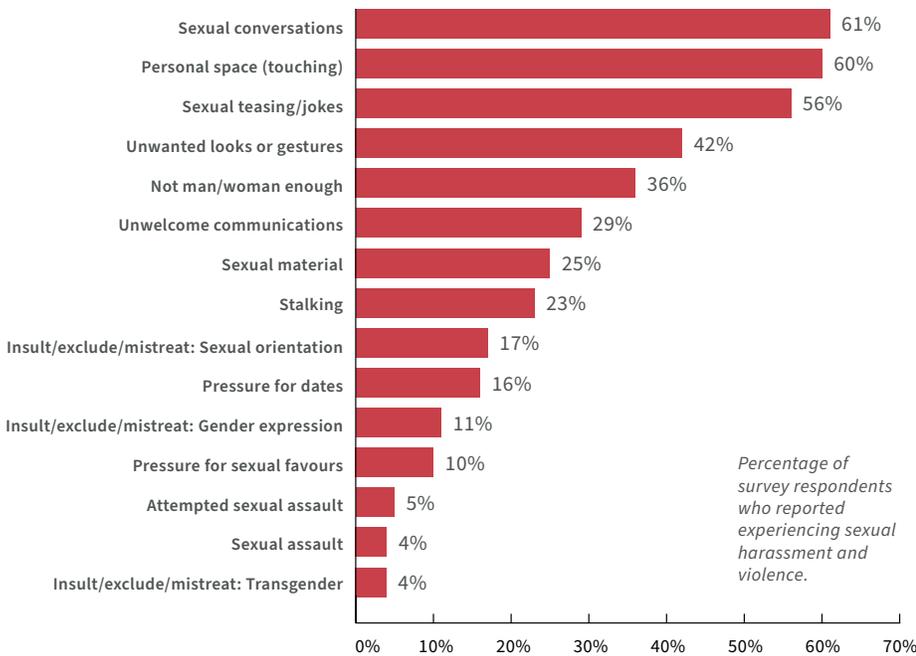>
> *(Federal Communications Worker A)*

of respondents experienced physical assaults resulting in serious injury.

- Among survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence, 4% were sexually assaulted, 60% had experienced unwanted touching or invasion of personal space, and 23% were stalked.

Figure 9.

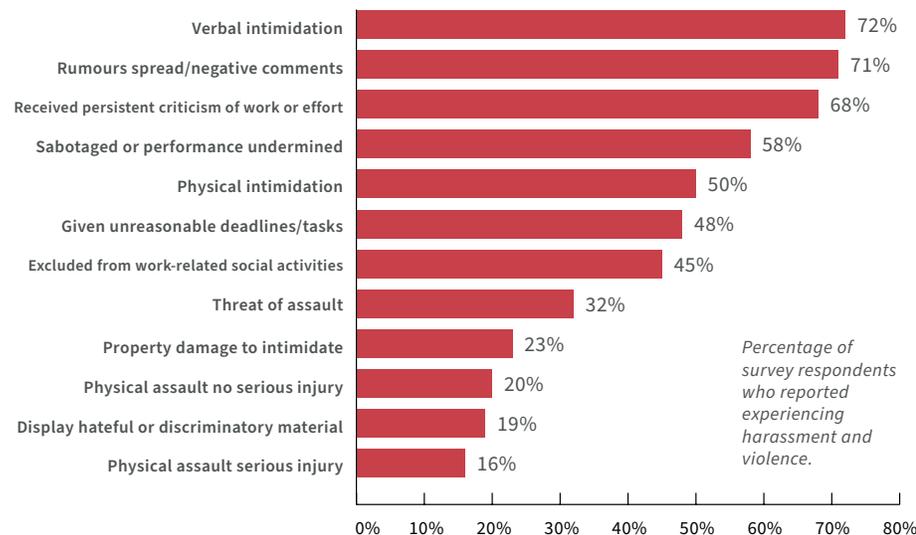**Breakdown by Sexual Harassment and Violence Behaviours/Practices Experienced**

Behaviour/Practice	Percentage
Sexual conversations	61%
Personal space (touching)	60%
Sexual teasing/jokes	56%
Unwanted looks or gestures	42%
Not man/woman enough	36%
Unwelcome communications	29%
Sexual material	25%
Stalking	23%
Insult/exclude/mistreat: Sexual orientation	17%
Pressure for dates	16%
Insult/exclude/mistreat: Gender expression	11%
Pressure for sexual favours	10%
Attempted sexual assault	5%
Sexual assault	4%
Insult/exclude/mistreat: Transgender	4%

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

Figure 10.

Breakdown by Harassment and Violence Behaviours/Practices Experienced

Behaviour/Practice	Percentage
Verbal intimidation	72%
Rumours spread/negative comments	71%
Received persistent criticism of work or effort	68%
Sabotaged or performance undermined	58%
Physical intimidation	50%
Given unreasonable deadlines/tasks	48%
Excluded from work-related social activities	45%
Threat of assault	32%
Property damage to intimidate	23%
Physical assault no serious injury	20%
Display hateful or discriminatory material	19%
Physical assault serious injury	16%

Percentage of survey respondents who reported experiencing harassment and violence.

> **"**
>
> *"…as soon as we got up there, he attacked me, like, just pinned me against a wall, hands up my shirt, tongue down my throat, the whole thing. … I remember ducking under his arms and being like, hey, your wife, your kids. And I locked myself in the bathroom at that point… but of course I'm still young and I'm like, oh my God, this is my job. I'm a single parent as well… So, I'm terrified. … I told my manager and he asked me why I put myself in that position."*
>
> *(Provincial Government Worker B)*

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

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS
CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA

At the start of the survey (October 2020), many provinces were not facing COVID-19 related restrictions. By December 2020/January 2021, many provinces had moved into stricter lockdowns to curb the spread of COVID-19. During the time our survey was in the field, 17.3% of survey respondents indicated they were either laid off or had their hours reduced due to COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for a significant number of respondents who experienced harassment and violence and sexual harassment and violence, their experiences increased in severity (26%), frequency (25%), and duration (20%). For 23% of respondents, the frequency and/or types of tactics used by harassers also increased, as did retaliation (18%) and their fear of reporting (23%). Survey responses confirmed that during the pandemic, avenues for reporting decreased. This was the case for 19% of respondents, while for 9% of respondents there was an increase in reporting avenues. Some survey respondents also found a decrease in the impacts of the forms of harassment and violence during the pandemic (see Figure 11). This is supported by reports from interview participants, some of whom stated that remote work provided a respite from hostile work environments. Other interview participants highlighted that the isolation of virtual work resulted in a loss of support, new barriers to reporting, and a reduction in training related to harassment and violence. Further research is required to understand the contextual factors that may mitigate the impact of remote work on forms of harassment and violence.

> "
> *…the pandemic still had a beneficial effect because I didn't have to go to the office every day. You see, for me it was a stressful place."*
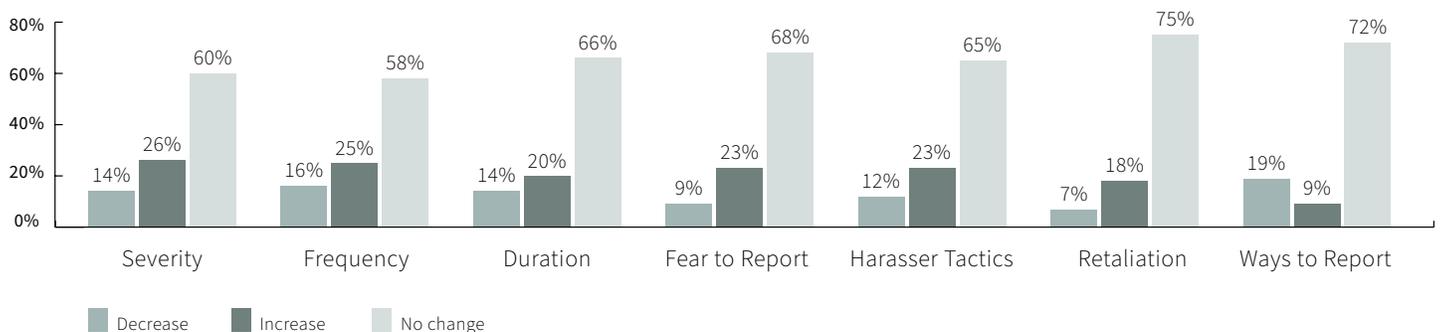>
> (Federal Corrections Worker B)
>
> *"…it's worse than if it were in person because at least then people could get support from their colleagues being around them. …Or to have witnesses, you know, like the girl who had the credit card thrown in her face, well, her colleagues saw it, so they went to comfort her directly. Whereas on Zoom, if she has a meeting with her manager, there's no one around to see how it happens… So, most people just don't talk about it, and it gets worse."*
>
> (Non-Profit Worker B)

Figure 11.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Experiences of Harassment and Violence and/or Sexual Harassment and Violence

Legend: ■ Decrease ■ Increase ■ No change

	Severity	Frequency	Duration	Fear to Report	Harasser Tactics	Retaliation	Ways to Report
Decrease	14%	16%	14%	9%	12%	7%	19%
Increase	26%	25%	20%	23%	23%	18%	9%
No change	60%	58%	66%	68%	65%	75%	72%

Consequences of Harassment and Violence for Workers

Workers experienced negative consequences due to all forms of harassment and violence, but those experiencing sexual harassment and violence were more likely to report negative impacts. On average, almost 1 in 2 survey respondents (43.3%) who experienced sexual harassment and violence and 1 in 3 (28%) who experienced harassment and violence identified negative consequences to their health and well-being.

The effects of the abuses experienced by workers rippled throughout their lives, often with grave effects on their long-term financial, mental, and physical health. Participants interviewed spoke of life-altering consequences, including leaving or being forced out of careers they loved and communities in which they grew up; the loss of social relationships; turning to substances, such as alcohol or drugs to cope, and contemplating suicide.

Impacts on Personal Well-being

Survey respondents experienced multiple impacts (see Figure 12) on their health and well-being as a result of the harassment and violence they experienced. These impacts were significantly more frequent for respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence compared to harassment and violence.

Figure 12.

Impacts on Health and Wellbeing from Experiencing Workplace Harassment and Violence
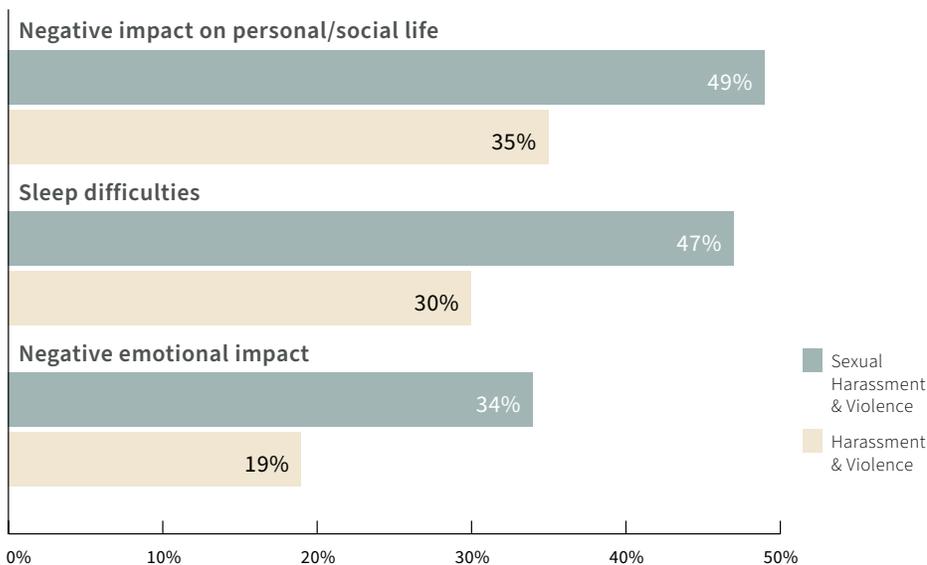
"It affected my mental health. It pushed me out of the workplace. It silenced me in many ways because I feel very anxious all the time... because I don't know if I'm doing something wrong or if I'm getting someone in trouble or if I'm getting myself in trouble. Um, I just feel like I haven't healed at all. That's how I feel."

(Provincial Government Worker A)

Impacts on Work

Losing time through missed workdays, arriving late or leaving early was the most frequently cited negative impact on work (70% for sexual harassment and violence, and 63% for harassment and violence). Not surprisingly, 55% of respondents experiencing sexual harassment and violence and 43% of those experiencing harassment and violence indicated decreased productivity. A loss of trust in the team/unit/department (46% for sexual harassment and violence, and 35% for harassment and violence) and a loss of trust in superiors (41% for sexual harassment and violence, and 25% for harassment and violence) were the other most common negative impacts on work.

Figure 13.

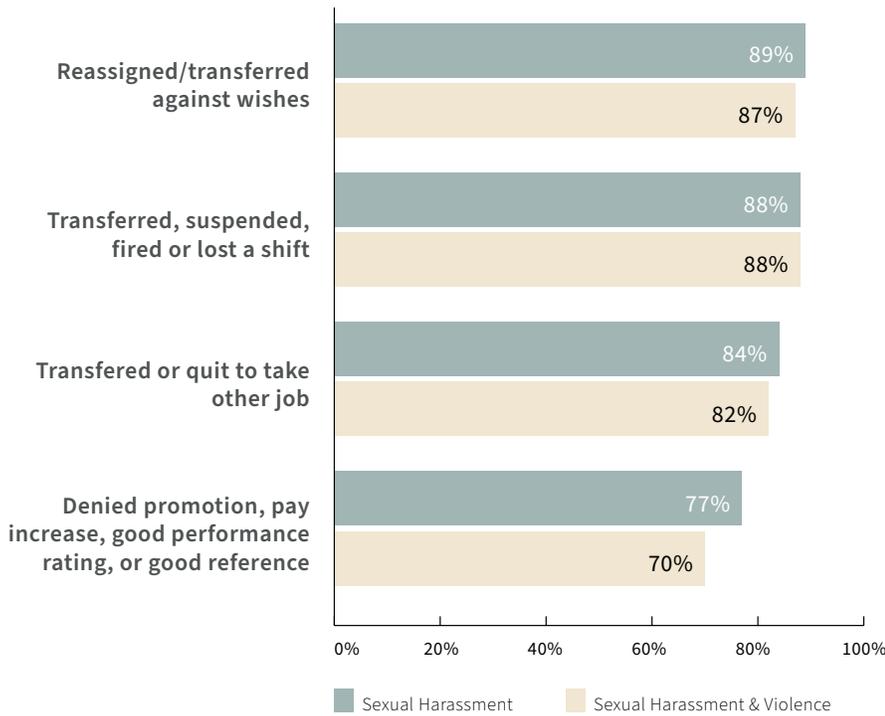**Impacts on Work from Experiencing Workplace Harassment and Violence**
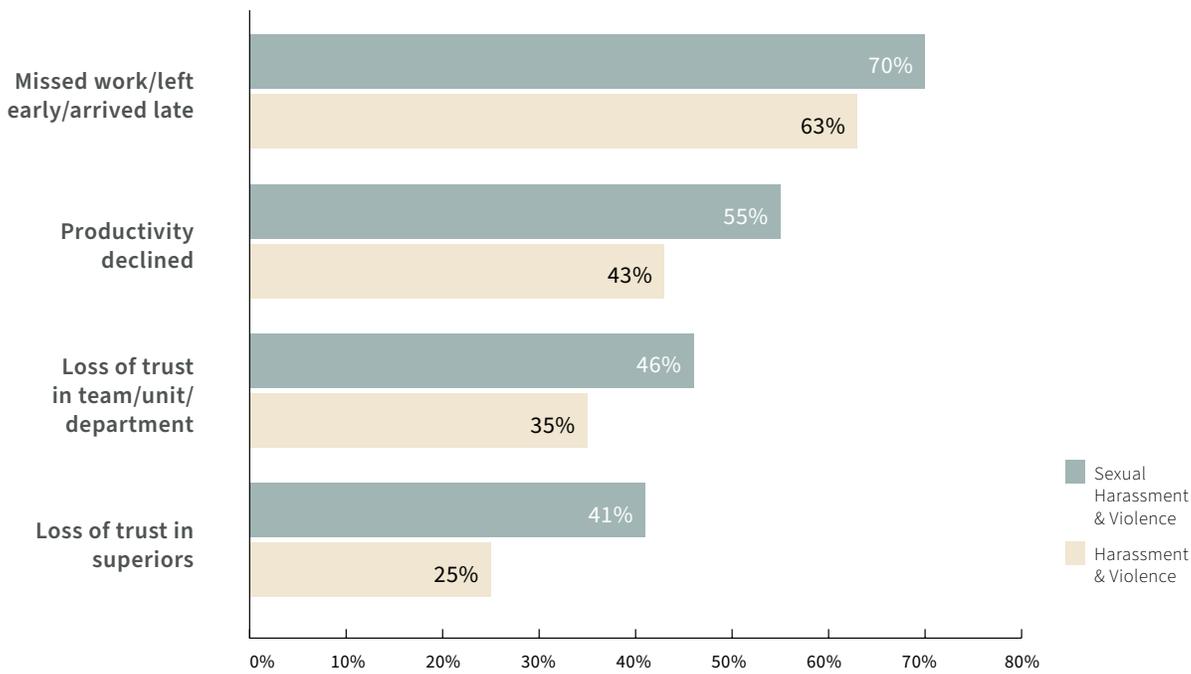
Career Disruption and Destruction

In addition to lost working hours due to missed work, tardiness and leaving work early (see Figure 14), survey respondents experienced negative consequences for their careers as a result of their experiences across all forms of harassment and violence, including being transferred, suspended, fired, and denied a promotion, pay increase or good performance rating. A majority of respondents transferred or quit to take another job, demonstrating the impact of these behaviours on workplaces as well as on individual workers.

Figure 14.

Career Disruption and Destruction from Experiencing Workplace Harassment and Violence

Reassigned/transferred against wishes: Sexual Harassment 89%, Sexual Harassment & Violence 87%

Transferred, suspended, fired or lost a shift: Sexual Harassment 88%, Sexual Harassment & Violence 88%

Transfered or quit to take other job: Sexual Harassment 84%, Sexual Harassment & Violence 82%

Denied promotion, pay increase, good performance rating, or good reference: Sexual Harassment 77%, Sexual Harassment & Violence 70%

Legend: ■ Sexual Harassment ■ Sexual Harassment & Violence

Survey respondents who experienced workplace harassment and violence.

> "
> *a lot of…a lot of suspensions, cuts to my salary, and then…what's known as the capital punishment. So fired… for reporting it all."*
>
> *(Provincial Government Worker A)*

Who is Behaving Abusively?

Survey respondents indicated that third parties (customers, patients, or students) and co-workers are the most common perpetrators of harassment and violence (28% and 25% respectively) and sexual harassment and violence (30% and 26% respectively). These findings may reflect the sectors most commonly represented by survey respondents – health care and social assistance, education, and public administration– which involve working with the public and have a significant proportion of women workers (see Figure 15).

For those experiencing sexual harassment and violence, almost two-thirds (65.6%) reported their harasser was a man compared to 41.1% of those experiencing harassment and violence. Further research is needed to examine the gender patterns of perpetration for specific behaviours and practices of harassment and violence (see Figure 16).
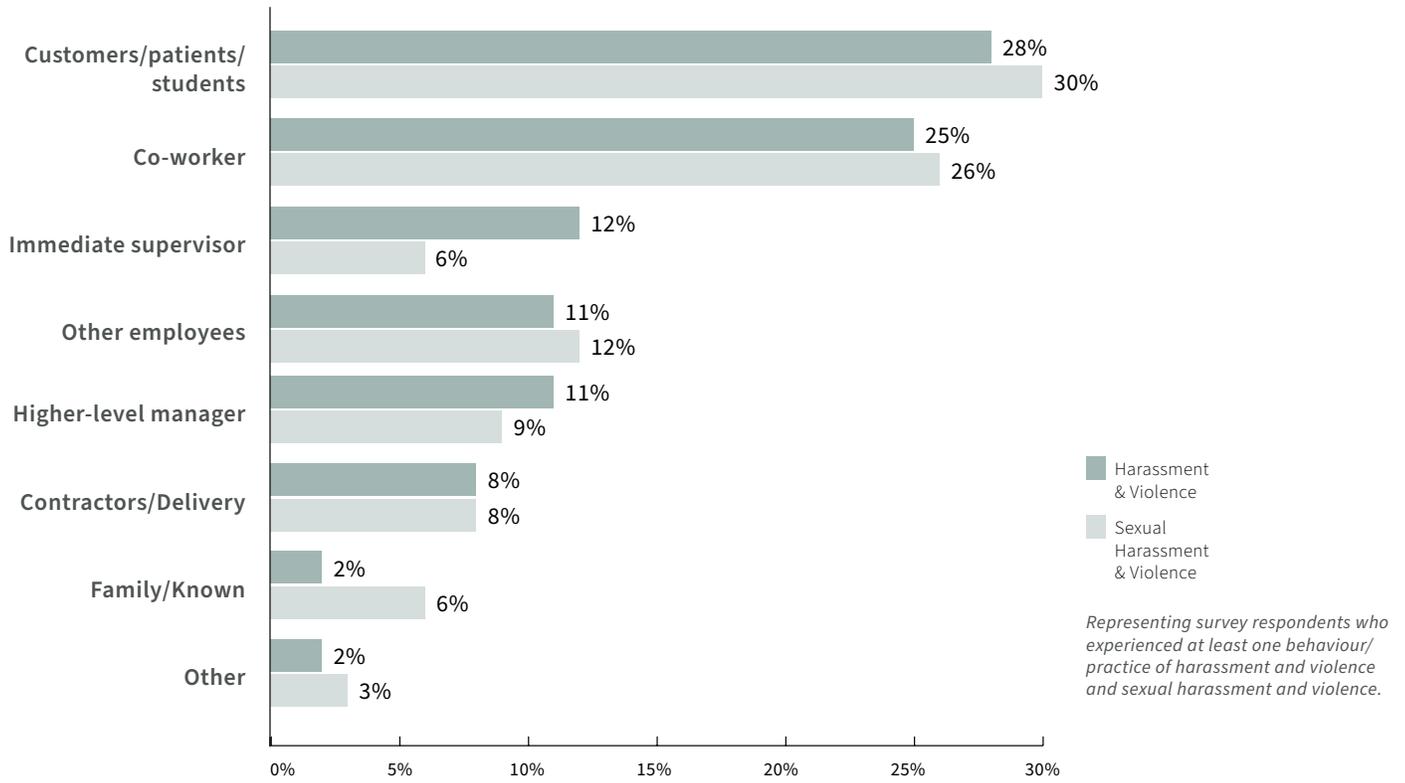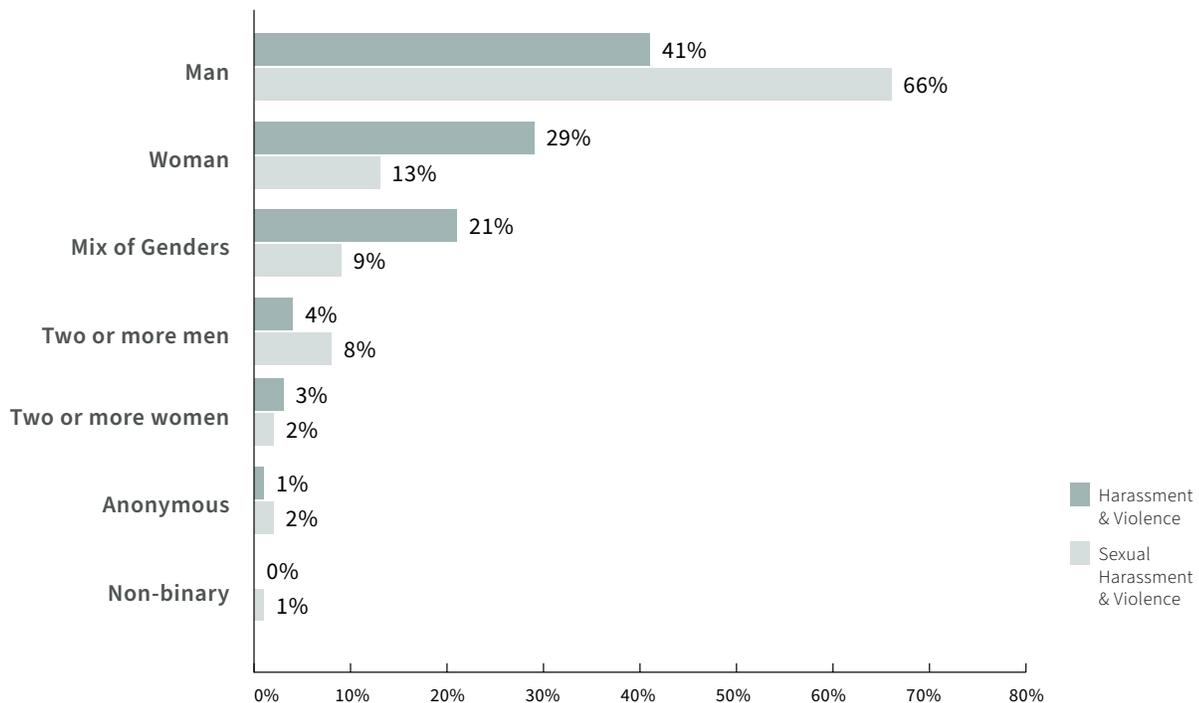
Harassment and Violence in Canadian Workplaces | April 2022

Western | Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children | CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA | 17

Figure 15.
Harasser/Perpetrator

Customers/patients/students
- Harassment & Violence: 28%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 30%

Co-worker
- Harassment & Violence: 25%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 26%

Immediate supervisor
- Harassment & Violence: 12%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 6%

Other employees
- Harassment & Violence: 11%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 12%

Higher-level manager
- Harassment & Violence: 11%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 9%

Contractors/Delivery
- Harassment & Violence: 8%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 8%

Family/Known
- Harassment & Violence: 2%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 6%

Other
- Harassment & Violence: 2%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 3%

Legend:
- Harassment & Violence
- Sexual Harassment & Violence

Representing survey respondents who experienced at least one behaviour/ practice of harassment and violence and sexual harassment and violence.

Figure 16.
Gender of Harasser/Perpetrator

Man
- Harassment & Violence: 41%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 66%

Woman
- Harassment & Violence: 29%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 13%

Mix of Genders
- Harassment & Violence: 21%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 9%

Two or more men
- Harassment & Violence: 4%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 8%

Two or more women
- Harassment & Violence: 3%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 2%

Anonymous
- Harassment & Violence: 1%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 2%

Non-binary
- Harassment & Violence: 0%
- Sexual Harassment & Violence: 1%

Legend:
- Harassment & Violence
- Sexual Harassment & Violence

Disclosures and Reports of Harassment and Violence and Responses Received

The results of this study show there continue to be major barriers to reporting. Survey respondents were more likely to report experiences of harassment and violence than experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Among those who did report their experiences of harassment and violence, most did so to their union (77%), followed by a supervisor or manager (56%). Over half of these respondents filed a formal report or grievance.

Survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence were less likely to report overall. Just over half (53%) of these respondents reported to a supervisor or manager, only one third (31%) reported their experience to their union, and only one-quarter (24%) filed a formal report or grievance. Not all respondents who reported to a supervisor or manager or their union filed a formal report or grievance.

Figure 17.

Where Survey Respondents Reported Experiences of Workplace Harassment and Violence
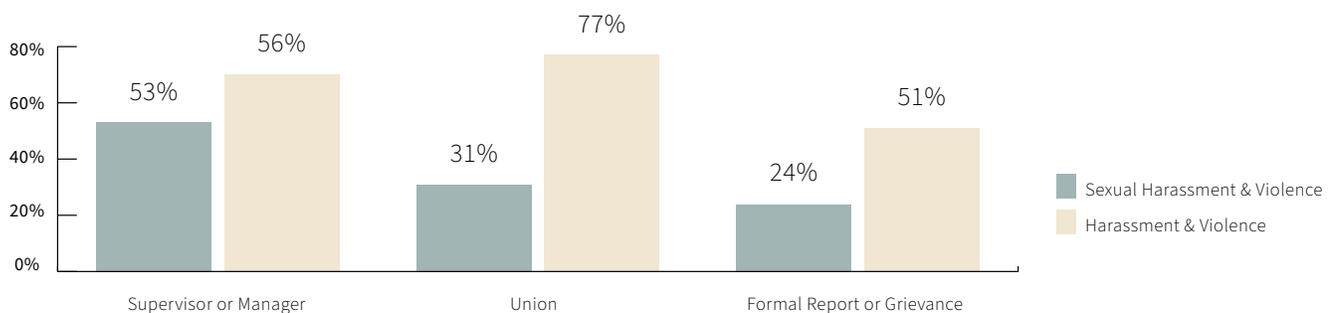
There were significant differences between unionized and non-unionized survey respondents who filed a formal report or grievance. This was particularly true for respondents who experienced harassment and violence. Over half (57%) of survey respondents who are union members and who experienced harassment and violence filed a formal report or grievance, compared to only 9% of non-union members. For sexual harassment and violence, the difference is less significant. Over a quarter of respondents (25%) who are union members and who experienced sexual harassment and violence filed a formal report or grievance, compared to 31% of non-unionized respondents.

Figure 18.

Filing a Formal Report or Grievance: Unionized vs. Non-unionized
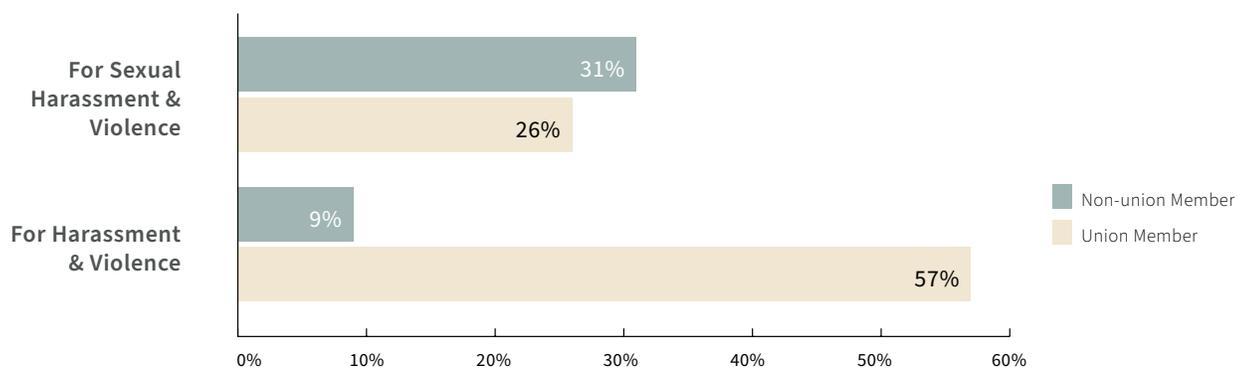
For survey respondents who did report experiences of harassment and violence or sexual harassment and violence, the majority believed that reporting made no difference or made the situation worse. For those who experienced sexual harassment and violence and made reports, less than 1 in 4 believed that by reporting to a supervisor or manager, reporting to their union, or filing a formal complaint or grievance their situation was made better.

Figure 19.

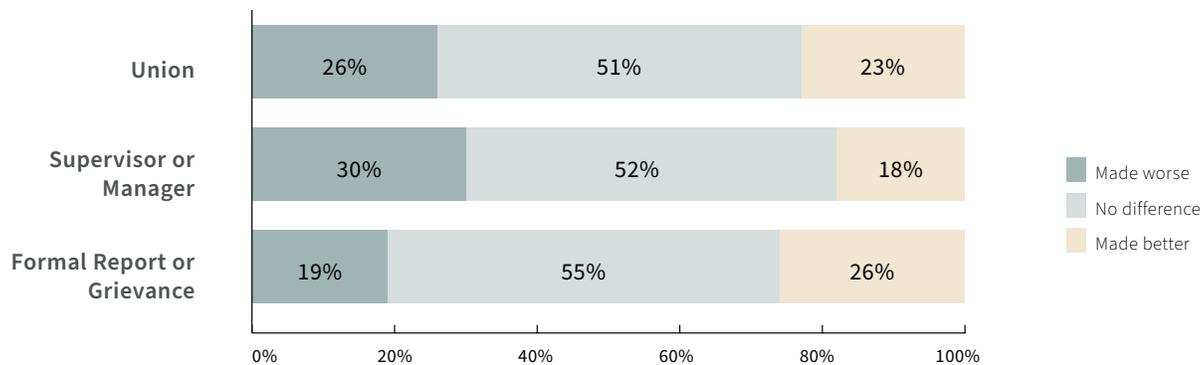**Reporting Outcomes: Sexual Harassment and Violence**
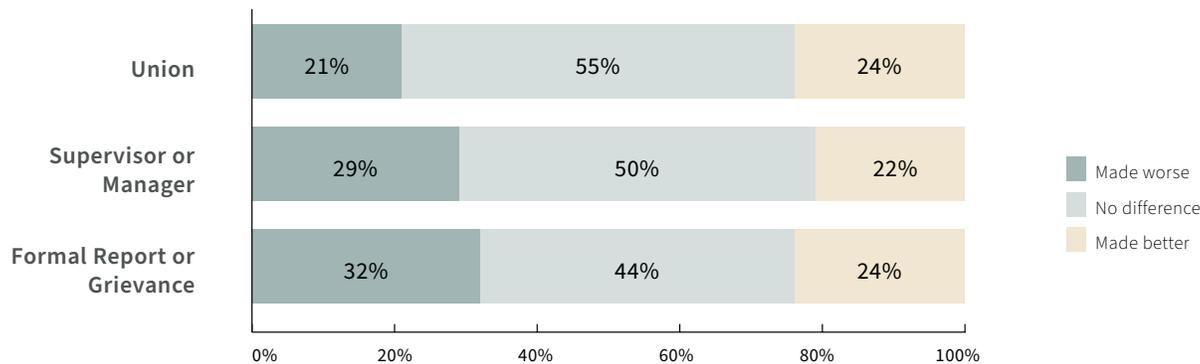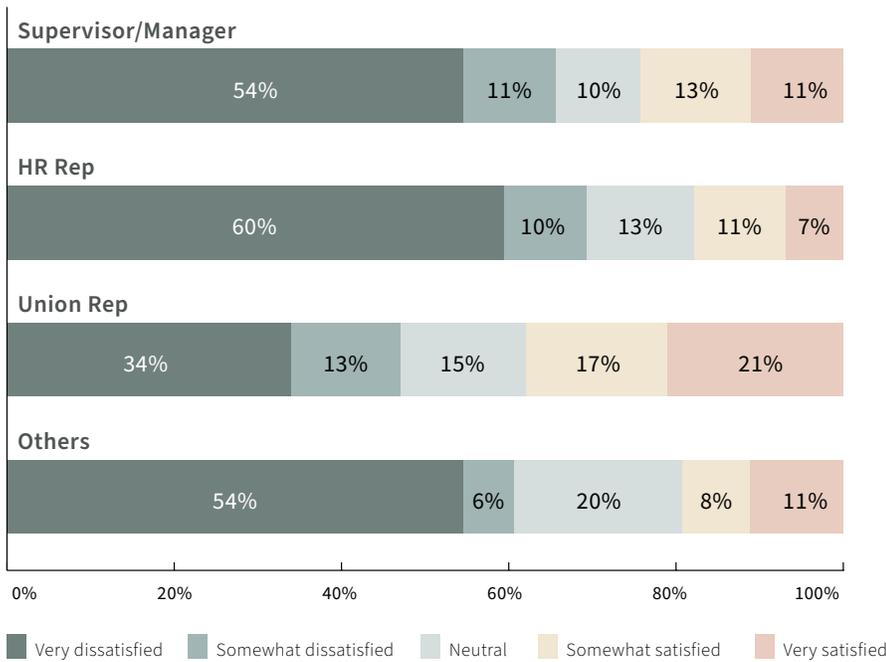

Figure 20.

Reporting Outcomes: Harassment and Violence

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 persons (see Figure 21). Respondents indicated higher levels of satisfaction with the responses they received from their union representative (21% very satisfied, 17% somewhat satisfied).

Figure 21.

Satisfaction with Actions Taken by Those Responsible for Worker Safety & Wellbeing (Experienced Sexual Harassment and Violence)

Supervisor/Manager: Very dissatisfied 54%, Somewhat dissatisfied 11%, Neutral 10%, Somewhat satisfied 13%, Very satisfied 11%

HR Rep: Very dissatisfied 60%, Somewhat dissatisfied 10%, Neutral 13%, Somewhat satisfied 11%, Very satisfied 7%

Union Rep: Very dissatisfied 34%, Somewhat dissatisfied 13%, Neutral 15%, Somewhat satisfied 17%, Very satisfied 21%

Others: Very dissatisfied 54%, Somewhat dissatisfied 6%, Neutral 20%, Somewhat satisfied 8%, Very satisfied 11%

Legend: Very dissatisfied | Somewhat dissatisfied | Neutral | Somewhat satisfied | Very satisfied

Barriers to Reporting

Figure 22 shows various reasons survey respondents did not report their experiences of sexual harassment and violence. Forty percent of respondents believed that the behaviours and practices they were experiencing were not serious enough to warrant a report. This could point to the need for extensive training in workplaces. This was confirmed by interview participants who indicated insufficient knowledge (e.g., lack of training, lack of access to information, lack of knowledge of reporting procedures) as a main barrier to reporting their experiences across all forms of harassment and violence. Of significance is the number of survey respondents who believed that reporting their experiences of sexual harassment and violence would not make a difference (38%) or that reporting would result in negative consequences (36%). 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[10].
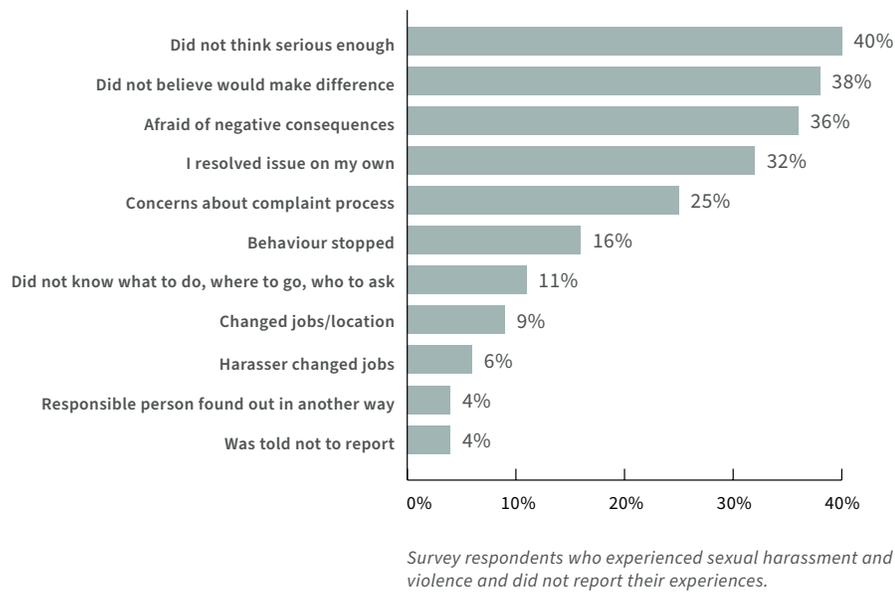
> "
> *…[reporting] certainly wasn't encouraged because I reported and was told it was my fault. And leaving that manager there for the next decade made our entire office know that they couldn't go to that guy. …But everybody knew they couldn't go to [the manager], because he had condoned this thing with [the harasser]… And then where do you go? That's the top of our food chain. So, yeah, it definitely created a legacy problem in our office, where things kept happening and everyone felt they had nowhere to go."*
>
> *(Provincial Government Worker B)*

Figure 22.
Barriers to Reporting Sexual Harassment and Violence

Barrier	Percentage
Did not think serious enough	40%
Did not believe would make difference	38%
Afraid of negative consequences	36%
I resolved issue on my own	32%
Concerns about complaint process	25%
Behaviour stopped	16%
Did not know what to do, where to go, who to ask	11%
Changed jobs/location	9%
Harasser changed jobs	6%
Responsible person found out in another way	4%
Was told not to report	4%

Survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence and did not report their experiences.

> " *…in talking to [my co-worker], she made me aware of our harassment policies, which I had never seen before… And I took it back into my manager… and said, 'Hey, there's some things in here that should have happened, you know, a year and a half ago when I told you about this.' And he goes, 'Oh I don't know if that's the way I interpret it.'"*
>
> *(Provincial Government Worker B)*

Interview participants confirmed many of the same barriers to reporting experienced by survey respondents, as well as other barriers, including:

- social (e.g., discouraged by others, status of the accused, conflict of interest, power inequalities/dynamics),

- financial (e.g., cost of legal representation, time off work, outcomes that financially penalize the person reporting, such as having to pay the harasser's legal fees), and

- legal (e.g., non-disclosure agreements (NDA), evidence threshold, time constraints).

For many, the psychological and emotional toll (e.g., fear, exhaustion, burnout) resulting from their experiences and lack of support received, dissuaded them from reporting.

Multiple interview participants shared that the way their workplaces defined forms of harassment and violence limited their abilities to report, or the likelihood that their report would affect positive change. Definitions of forms of harassment and violence, as listed in policies, collective agreements, or simply as understood by workers in positions of authority (including supervisors, managers, and human resources personnel), were sometimes interpreted in ways that allowed them to avoid addressing the issue.

Interview participants who were not unionized but whose co-workers were unionized, noted their job insecurity and their lack of union membership influenced their decision to not report the harassment and violence they were experiencing.

Highlights

- Almost three-quarters (71.4%) of survey respondents experienced at least one form of harassment and violence or sexual harassment and violence, in the two years prior to completing the survey.

    - Almost two in three (65%) of respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of harassment and violence in the past two years.

    - Just over two in five (43.9%) of survey respondents experienced at least one behaviour or practice of sexual harassment and violence in the past two years while at work. This was most pronounced for gender-diverse respondents: 73% of gender-diverse respondents experienced this harassment and violence compared to 46% and 38% of women and men, respectively.

    - Just over one-quarter (26.5%) of respondents surveyed experienced at least one form of work-related online harassment in the past two years.

- LGBTQ2S+ respondents were particularly likely to have experienced all forms of harassment and violence. This is most pronounced for harassment and violence (72%) and sexual harassment and violence (62%).

- Indigenous survey respondents experienced significantly higher rates of harassment and violence (79%) and sexual harassment and violence (47.8%).

- Survey respondents who live with at least one form of disability experienced significantly higher rates of all forms of harassment and violence.

- A great number of survey respondents are regularly exposed to factors in their jobs that put them at greater risk for all three forms of workplace harassment and violence. These include jobs that involve: the exchange of money, interaction with the public, and the serving of alcohol.

- Sexual conversations, touching and sexual teasing were the most common behaviours indicated by survey respondents who experienced sexual harassment and violence. Almost one quarter (23%) of respondents were stalked, and 4% were sexually assaulted.

- Verbal intimidation, the spreading of rumors and negative comments were among the most common behaviours indicated by survey respondents who experienced harassment and violence. One in two (50%) were physically intimidated and almost one in six (16%) were physically assaulted resulting in serious injury.

- For a significant number of survey respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the severity, frequency, and duration of all forms of harassment and violence, at the same time as retaliation and barriers to reporting increased.

- Workers experienced negative consequences due to all forms of harassment and

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

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA

violence, but those experiencing sexual harassment and violence were more likely to experience negative impacts on their health and well-being, work, and careers.

- There continue to be major barriers to reporting across all forms of harassment and violence. This study unearthed an array of factors (many related to workplace policies and procedures) that work to silence or discourage people from reporting or taking further action.

- For survey respondents who did report harassment and violence or sexual harassment and violence, the majority believed that reporting made no difference or made the situation worse. For those who reported experiencing sexual harassment and violence, less than 1 in 4 believed that reporting to a supervisor or manager, reporting to their union, or filing a formal complaint or grievance made their situation better.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This research has shown that people in Canada continue to experience high rates of harassment and violence at work. Study participants clearly expressed their realities of being unprotected, unsupported, dismissed, devalued, and silenced. It is evident that current systems of reporting and response and actions taken thus far are not working and that workers continue to experience major barriers to reporting, including fears and experiences of retaliation. A comprehensive approach to prevention is urgently needed. This approach must include specific strategies for sectors with higher prevalence rates (such as health care and education) where workers face an increased risk of exposure to harassment and violence, including harassment and violence from third parties. Such an approach requires the involvement of all levels of government, unions, and employers. While changes in legislation, collective agreement language, and workplace policy are logical outcomes, it will also be necessary to increased awareness, training, risk assessments, and adjustments to working conditions and environments to reduce hazards.

The ILO Convention 190 and its accompanying Recommendation 206 recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from harassment and violence and has established global standards to this end[11]. We recommend that Canada signal a national commitment to working with provinces and territories, employers and unions to implement measures needed to ensure harassment- and violence-free workplaces by ratifying C190. To align with other ongoing national initiatives, the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence should include a specific strategy to implement the Convention, with targets and timelines for action in every jurisdiction[12].

C190 and the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence provide frameworks for engaging in the complex, collaborative and multisectoral work that must be undertaken in order to address the longstanding and intractable problem of workplace violence and harassment.

Ongoing analysis of the survey and interview data will help us answer questions like:

- How are workers who observe their co-workers being harassed affected?

- How do forms of harassment and violence intersect?

- Which practices (e.g., policies and training) do workplaces have in place to address harassment and violence?

- How are workplace (managerial) practices and processes used to harass, retaliate and silence workers?

- What do workers who experience various forms of harassment and violence want and need?

Further research is also needed, including supplementary quantitative and qualitative research, with groups of workers who were underrepresented in this survey, such as Black and Indigenous workers, in particular Black and Indigenous women workers.

Immediate next steps that can be taken to address all forms of harassment at work include using these study results to establish proactive practices and procedures aimed at preventing and addressing all forms of harassment and violence. However, it is not enough to have policies and procedures in place. The challenge for those with the power to do so is to ensure they are effective and yield real results in the lives of workers who come forward with disclosures or reports of harassment and violence. In the long term, significant changes to workplace practices, procedures, and culture will need to occur.

Acknowledgements

Suggested Citation

Berlingieri, A., Welsh, S., MacQuarrie, B., McFadyen, N.D., Bigras-Dutrisac, H. with the Canadian Labour Congress. (2022). *Harassment and violence in Canadian workplaces: It's [not] part of the job.* London, ON: Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University.

References

1. Keith, M.M., & Brophy, J.T. (2021). *Code white: Sounding the alarm on violence against health care workers.* Toronto, ON: Between the Lines.

    LaMontagne, A., Smith, P., Louie, A., Quinlan, M., Shoveller, J., & Ostry, A. (2009). Unwanted sexual advances at work: Variations by employment arrangement in a sample of working Australians. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 33*(2), 173-179. doi: 10.1111/j.1753-6405.2009.00366.x.

    MacQuarrie, B., Welsh, S., Carr, J., & Huntley, A. (2004). *Workplace harassment and violence report.* London, ON: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University. Available at: https://collections.ola.org/monoth/4000/247055.pdf

    2. Buchanan, N.T., Settles, I.H., Wa, I.H.C., & Hayashino, D.S. (2018). *Sexual harassment, racial harassment, and well-being among Asian American women: An intersectional approach*. Women & Therapy, 41(3-4), 261-280. https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2018.1425030.

    Kelly, L. (1987). The continuum of sexual violence. In J. Hamner & M. *Maynard, Women, violence and social control* (pp. 46-60). Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, Inc.

    Welsh, S., Carr, J., MacQuarrie, B., & Huntly, A. (2006). "I'm not thinking of it as sexual harassment": Understanding harassment across race and citizenship. *Gender & Society, 20*(1), 87-107.

3. [ILO] International Labour Organization. (2019). C190- *Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019* (No. 190). Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available online at https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

4. Statista. (2022). *Union coverage rate in Canada in 2020, by province.* Available online at https://www.statista.com/statistics/442980/canada-union-coverage-rate-by-province/

5. Burczycka, M. (2021). *Workers' experiences of inappropriate sexualized behaviours, sexual assault and gender-based discrimination in the Canadian provinces, 2020 in Canadian workplaces* (Catalogue no. 85-002-X). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Available online at https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00015-eng.htm

6. Burczycka, M. (2021). *Workers' experiences of inappropriate sexualized behaviours, sexual assault and gender-based discrimination in the Canadian provinces, 2020 in Canadian workplaces* (Catalogue no. 85-002-X). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Available online at https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2021001/article/00015-eng.htm

7. [CCOHS] Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. (2010). *Violence in the workplace prevention guide* (3rd ed.). Hamilton, ON: Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

8. Hubert, A. B. et Van Veldhoven, M. (2001). Risk sectors for undesirable behaviour and mobbing. *European Journal of Work and Organization, 10*(4), 415-424.

    Porto Serantes, N., & Araña Suárez, M. (2006). Myths about workplace violence, harassment and bullying. *International Journal of the Sociology of Law,* 34, 229-238.

Zapf, D., & Einarsen, S. (2005). Mobbing at work : Escalated conflicts in organizations. In S. Fox & P.E. Spector (Eds.), *Counterproductive work behaviour* (pp. 237-270). Washington, DC : American Psychological Association.

9. Statistics Canada. (2022). L*abour force characteristics by industry, annual (x 1,000) (Table 14-10-0023-01)*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25318/1410002301-eng

10. MacQuarrie, B., Welsh, S., Carr, J., & Huntley, A. (2004). *Workplace harassment and violence report.* London, ON: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, Western University. Available at: https://collections.ola.org/monoth/4000/247055.pdf

11. [ILO] International Labour Organization. (2022). *Eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work.* Geneva: International Labour Organization. Available online at https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/violence-harassment/lang--en/index.htm

12. Women Shelters Canada (WSC). *Roadmap for the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-based Violence*. Ottawa. Available online at https://nationalactionplan.ca/

Appendix A – Research Methods

This mixed-methods, bilingual research study consisted of a nation-wide online survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey was launched on October 21st, 2020 and closed on April 21st, 2021. The survey was open to all persons in Canada above the age of 18 who had been employed during the last 12 months, irrespective of current employment status and whether they had themselves experienced or witnessed harassment and violence in the workplace. Respondents who completed less than 70% of the survey were excluded from the data analysis. A total of 4,878 people satisfied all the selection criteria.

Participants were recruited via the extensive networks of the Canadian Labour Congress and its affiliates, and the survey was promoted through national media at its launch and subsequently via social media in both English and French. 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.

Respondents who completed the survey and indicated that they had witnessed or experienced harassment and violence in the workplace also had the option, via a termination question at the end of the survey, of participating 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 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. A total of 34 semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted to discuss their experiences of witnessing or experiencing harassment and violence in the workplace. Interviews ranged from 45-120 minutes in length and were transcribed and de-identified by the research team prior to qualitative analysis.