

What We Heard



Workplace Sexual Harassment
PEI Public Survey Report

Acknowledgements

The survey was designed and this report prepared by the SHIFT Project (Laura K. Bird) and the Atlantic Evaluation Group Inc team (Amanda Parriag, Paul Chaulk, Jennifer Jones). The survey was programmed and administered by Atlantic Evaluation Group Inc. The SHIFT Project led the survey marketing and communications.

Thank you to the SHIFT Project partners who promoted the survey!

Thank you to Prince Edward Island residents who completed the survey!

The SHIFT Project is funded by Justice Canada.



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada

Suggested citation: SHIFT Project (2021). PEI Workplace Sexual Harassment Public Survey Report - What We Heard. Charlottetown, PE: PEI Human Rights Commission.

For more information:

SHIFT Project PEI
at the PEI Human Rights Commission
www.peihumanrights.ca
(902) 368-4180

Contents

Project background	/ 04
Survey methods	/ 05
Who we heard from	/ 06
Experiences of workplace sexual harassment	/ 10
Reporting workplace sexual harassment	/ 16
Impacts of workplace sexual harassment	/ 18
In their words — more stories from respondents	/ 20



Project background

Lead

The Prince Edward Island Human Rights Commission has received funding from the Department of Justice, Canada to increase awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace and to provide education to employers, employees, and the general public through training designed for prevention, identification, and resolution of workplace sexual harassment incidents. Support will be provided for employers who take a leadership role in creating and maintaining safe and inclusive workplaces.

Project focus

The SHIFT Project PEI will identify the needs and gaps in service and education and provide customized sexual harassment training to reach a broad audience. The project will focus on the development of workplace restorative practices as one means of returning a sense of normalcy to the work environment after a sexual harassment allegation has been addressed.

Project goal

The goal of SHIFT is to provide education and resources to address and prevent workplace sexual harassment (WSH) in Island workplaces.

Survey methods

Purpose

Create a safe place for adult Islanders to share their experiences.

Type

Online survey of a convenience sample of Prince Edward Island adults identified through social media, emails to employees, etc.

Timing

August and September 2021

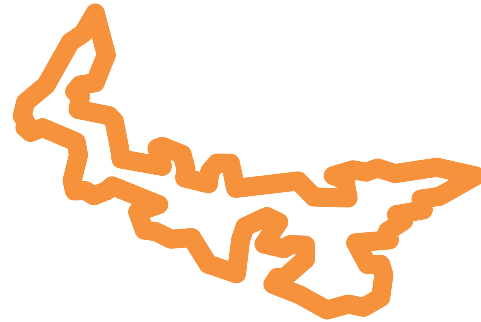
Limitation

Cannot use the results to estimate the proportion of the entire labour force who experienced workplace sexual harassment (findings are not generalizable and there is no margin of error as it was a non-probabilistic sample).



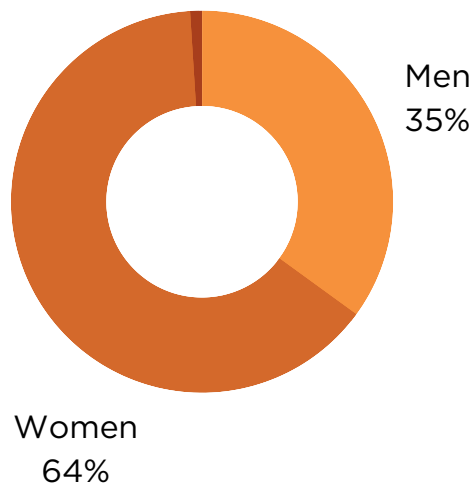
Who we heard from

The survey was completed 1,621 times. That's roughly 1 in every 52 people in the Island labour force.

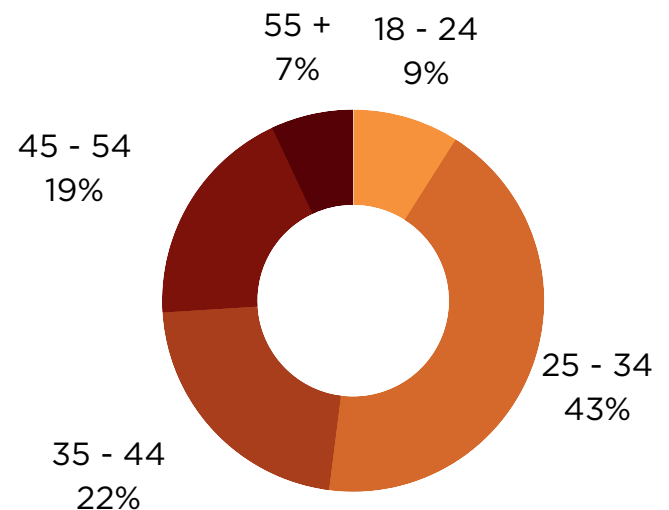


Gender represented:

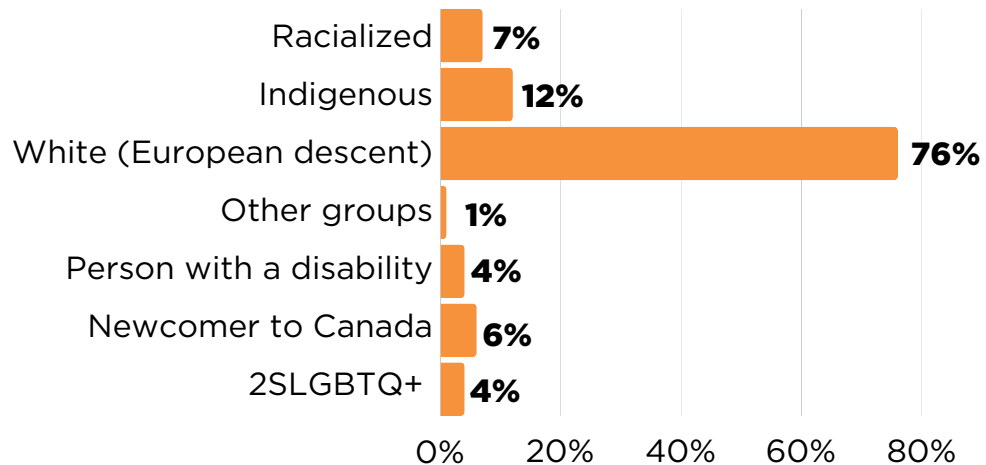
Transgender, non-binary, gender non-conforming, or gender-fluid 1%



Age range:

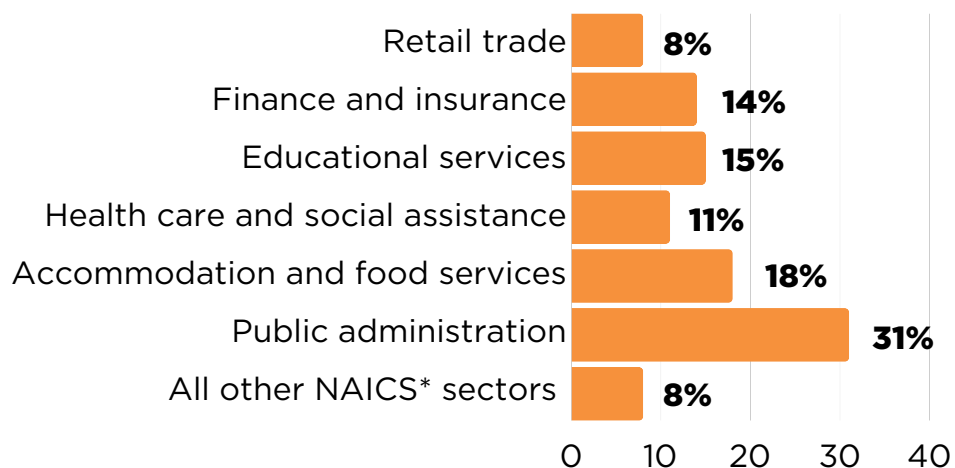


Respondents identified themselves as:



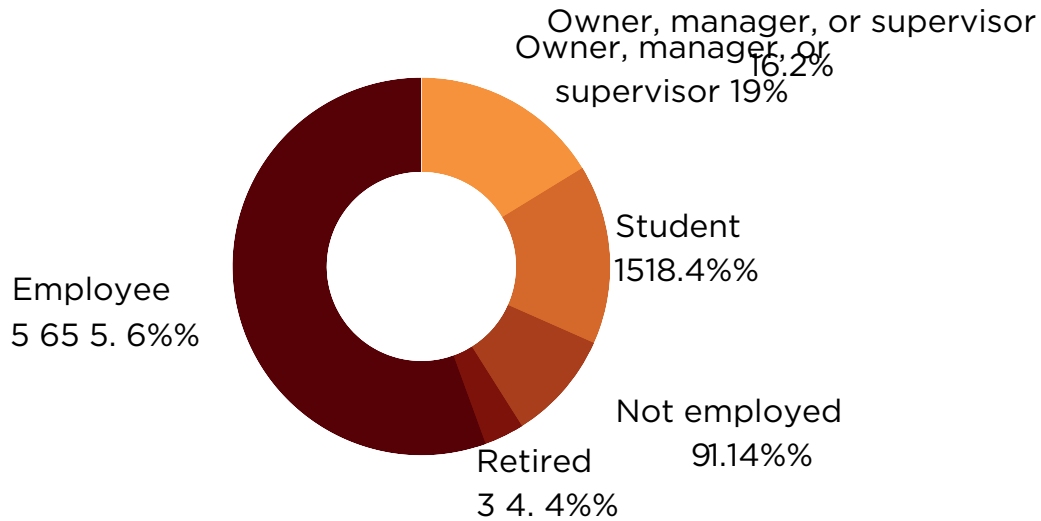
Note: The percentages add to greater than 100% as respondents could choose multiple options.

A variety of industry sectors:



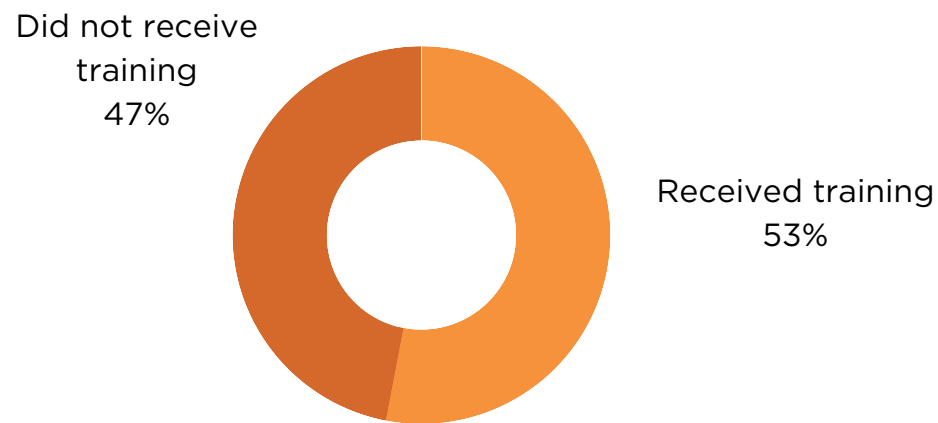
*NAICS: North American Industry Classification System.
Note: The percentages add to greater than 100% as respondents could choose multiple options.

Employment status in the past year:



Note: The percentages add to greater than 100% as respondents could choose multiple options.

Training in workplace sexual harassment at their most recent workplace:



Content Warning

The following pages include experiences of workplace sexual harassment as described by survey respondents. They are in the orange boxes on the following pages. Participants had the opportunity to share anonymously and it was not necessary to do so to complete the survey.

Stories were edited to avoid any identification of persons or organizations.



Experiences of workplace sexual harassment

Respondent quote

”

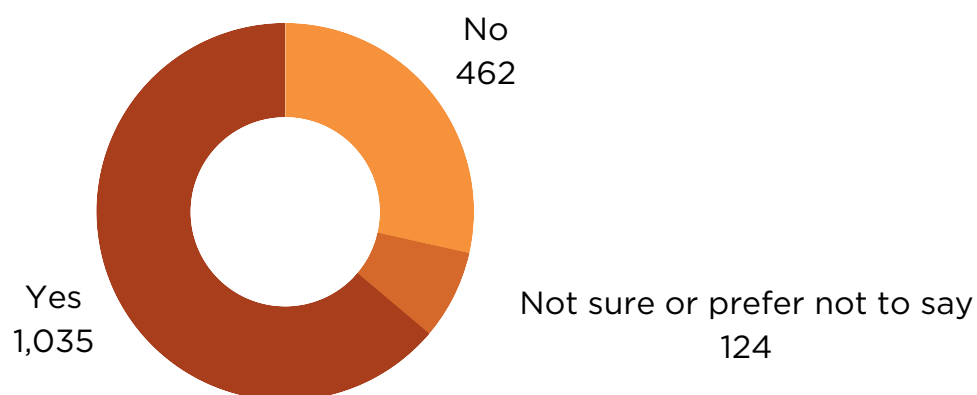
I was a server in various restaurants for over 10 years. I have experienced unwanted comments about appearance, been asked out, and have generally felt uncomfortable various times, typically by customers but sometimes from kitchen staff/my co-workers.

Respondent quote

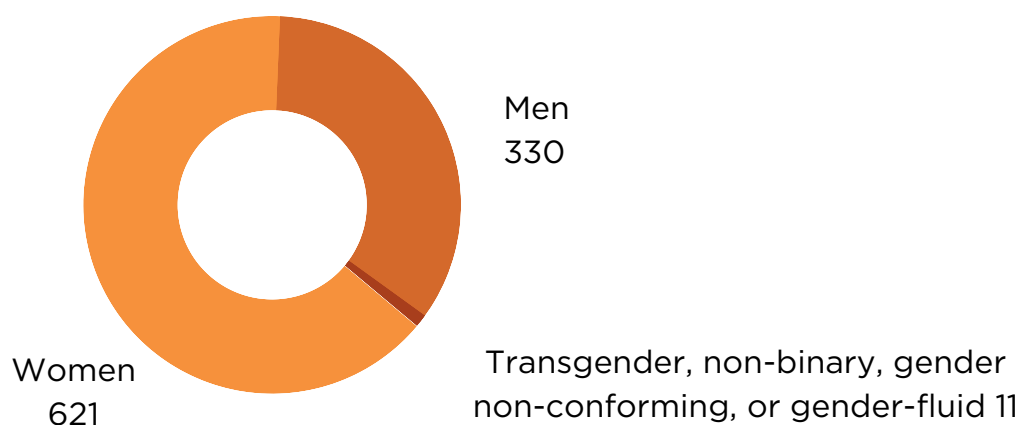
”

Harassment occurred a number of years ago when a client became very "attached" to me, started to follow me and appear when I was ready to leave work. I found it necessary to have a co-worker stay with me if I had to stay late, and ultimately made a report to the police.

Over 1,000 survey respondents had experienced workplace sexual harassment at some point in their work career.

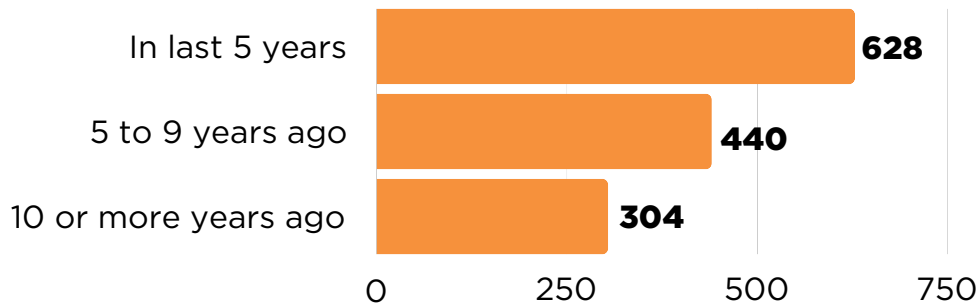


It was experienced by all gender identities, most often among female respondents.



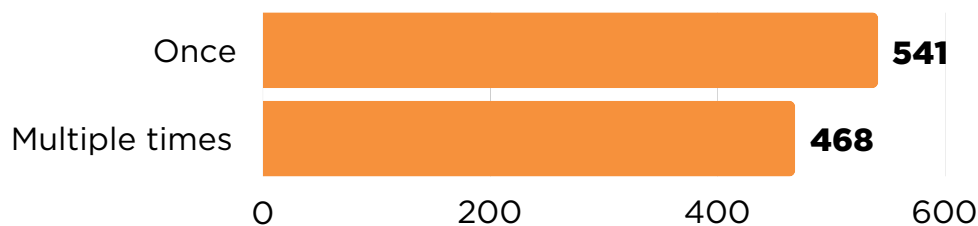
Note: Not everyone answered the gender question. Therefore, the total is lower than the number of respondents experiencing WSH above.

Many who responded experienced it in the last five years.



Note: May have experienced it in multiple time frames. Therefore, these numbers cannot be added to reach the total number of respondents experiencing WSH.

For many, it happened more than once in their most recent workplace.



Note: Not everyone answered this question. Therefore, the total is lower than the number of respondents experiencing WSH.

A black and white photograph of an open cash register. The top section shows two currency slots with metal clamps. Below, the coin tray is filled with various Canadian coins, including quarters, dimes, and pennies. A 20 Canadian dollar bill is partially visible on the left side.

Respondent quote

”

A male coworker cornered me in the [work location] and invaded my personal space repeatedly and in a way that I couldn't escape due to me being in a corner and his large physical size.

Respondent quote

”

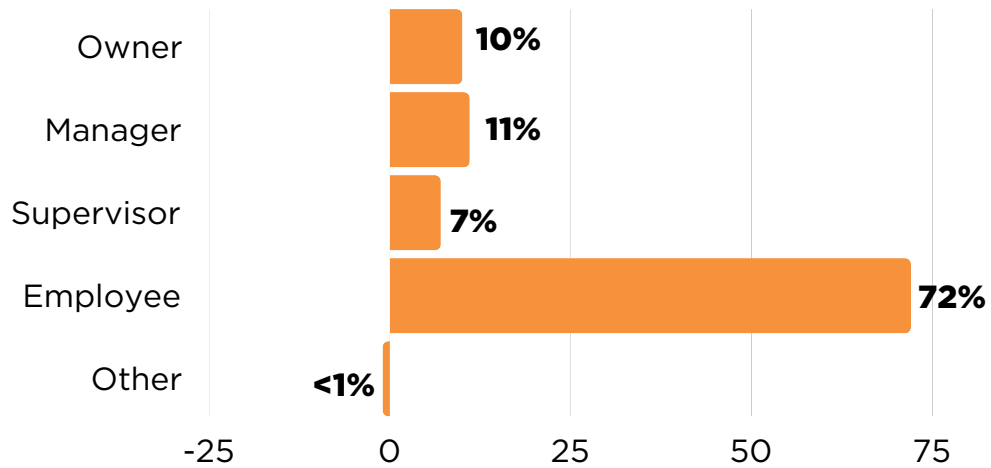
My manager would make sexual comments. I didn't play along so he said I wasn't a team player.

Respondent quote

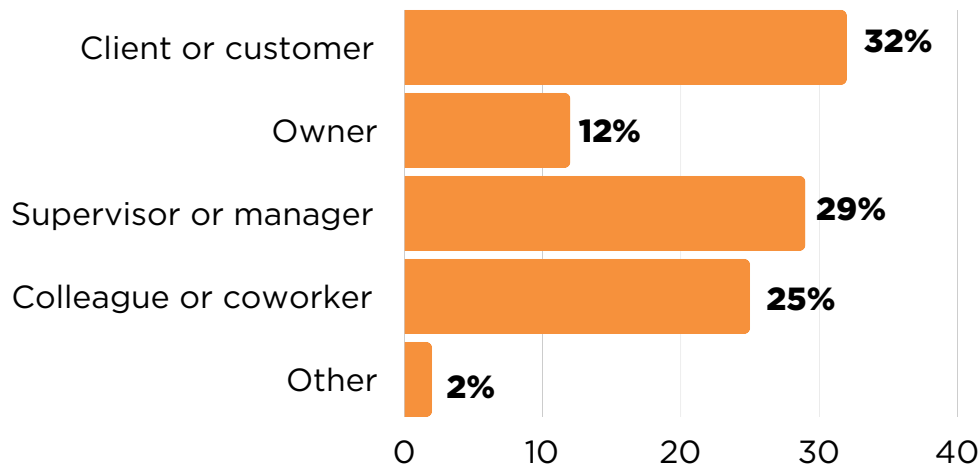
”

... so I never said anything to anyone I just tried to avoid running into him. I think he thought he was being funny, but it made a pit in my stomach every time I walked by him because I was worried what he would say next.

Their role when targets of workplace sexual harassment



The harassers were...



Respondent quote

”

At social work event, somewhat younger coworkers... asked about my sex life suggesting vulgar activities and wouldn't stop asking even after telling them to wise-up. I know it was wrong, they knew it was wrong, we'd all been consuming alcohol, and they thought it was hilarious and were egging one another on. I eventually walked away and left...

Respondent quote

”

... Most recent incident, before I left on stress leave... my boss asked if my [partner] and I would join him in his hot tub at his home, if he wasn't a married man... just one example of many.

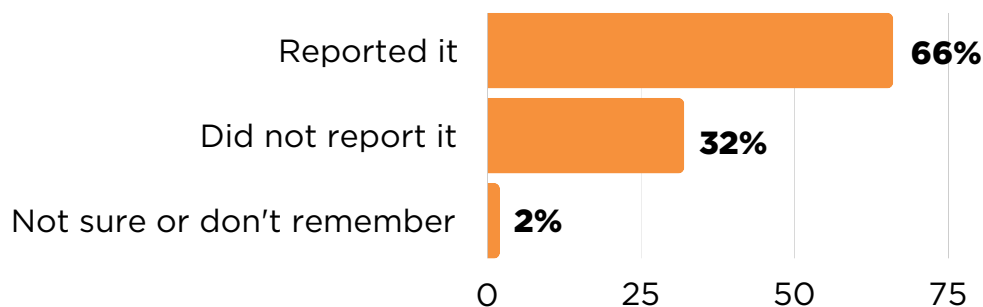
Respondent quote

”

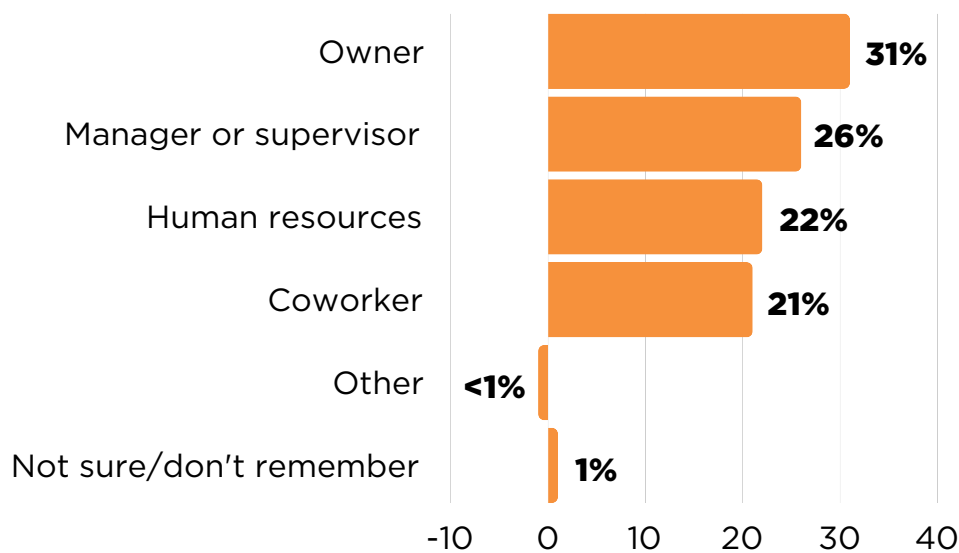
I had applied for an internal promotion. At the interview, the manager of the department put his hand on my thigh, suggesting that I would be a very good fit for the position — but his intention was clear. I left the interview. I was upset for a couple of reasons — most so because I thought this person was a friend, and I was hard pressed to believe that this sort of behaviour was still happening. When a new person was hired for the position, I am ashamed to have wondered if she had accepted his "offer"...

Reporting workplace sexual harassment

Most of those who experienced workplace sexual harassment reported it.



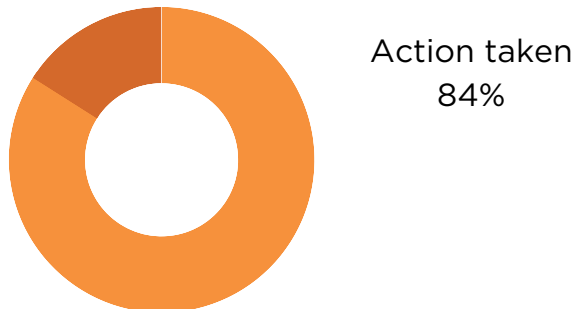
They reported it to:



Note: percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding error.

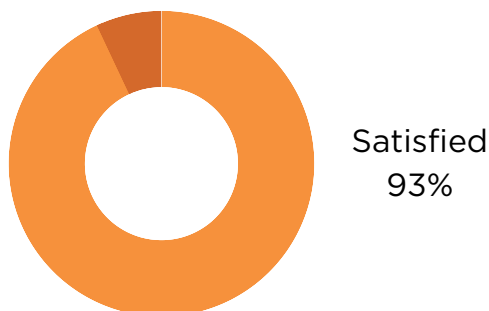
Most (84%) of those who reported it indicated their employer took action.

Action not taken or
don't remember 16%



Most (93%) of those who reported it and the employer took action were satisfied with employer's action.

Not satisfied or
don't remember 7%



Respondent quote



I was satisfied that he was fired but it did take them a while to do anything.

Impacts of

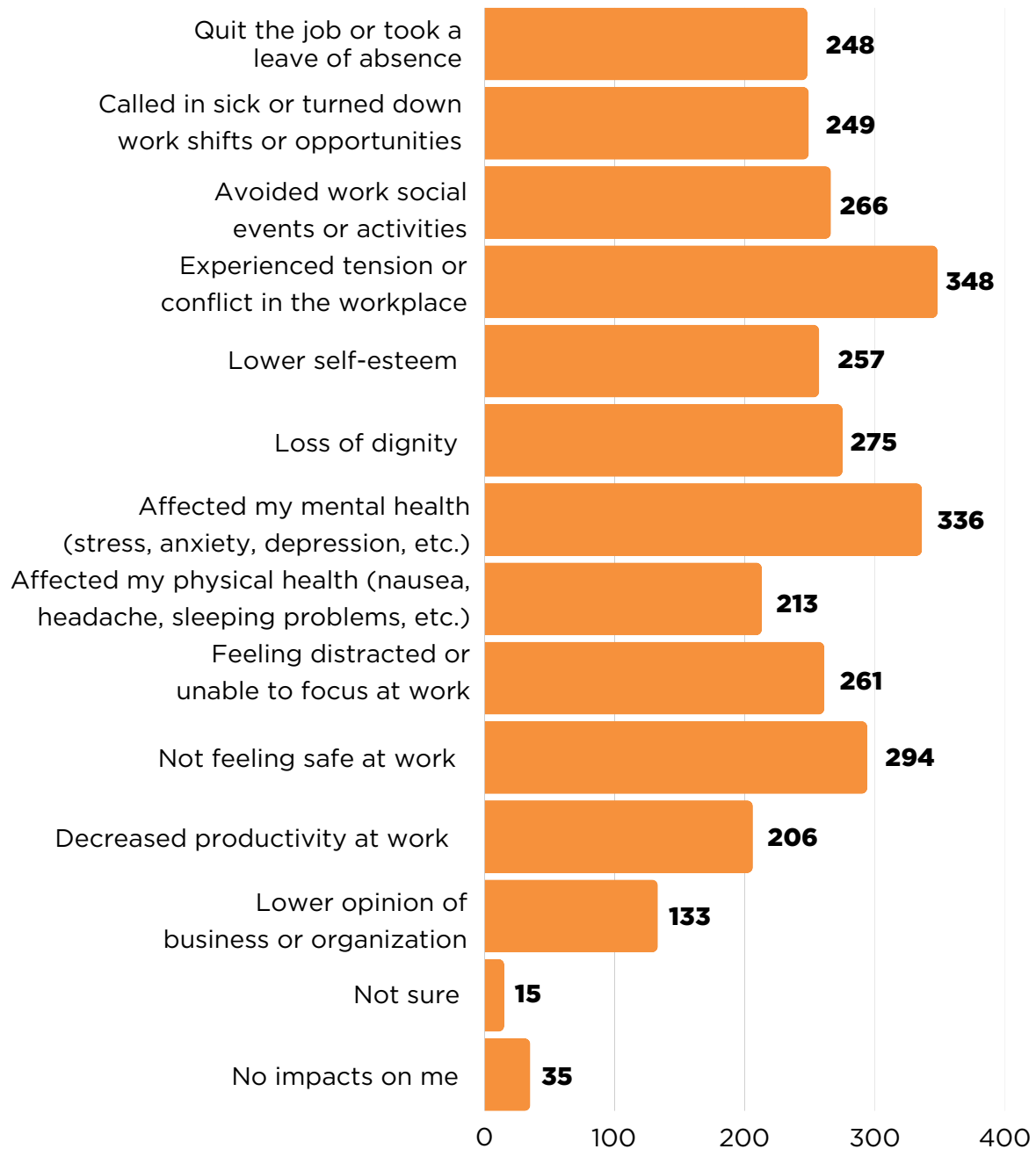
workplace sexual

harassment



How it impacted them and their workplace:

An impact was noted in 97% of those who experienced workplace sexual harassment. The available workforce was reduced because employees quit, worked less, or worked unproductively.



In their words

Respondent quote



I work at [health facility] and it is very common that I receive sexual harassment from patients. Both physically and verbally. The most recent incident a patient persistently asked if this writer had a boyfriend and I had to explain that those kind of questions were unnecessary and unprofessional. That patient continued to verbally assault writer and also tried to grab at writer's chest. I could rhyme off 30-40 different slurs patients have uttered... Little is done about the harassment. It is suggested that we document everything and utilize working as a team to avoid the situation, or have a male coworker accompany us with particular patients. But in this staffing crisis it isn't everyday that those solutions can be carried out. Writer is very uncomfortable with the amount of harassment that takes place and often leaves work distraught over it. Not what I expected my career to be like.



Respondent quote



The owner where I worked is/was known for giving better shifts to girls that let him pay more attention to them. I started working for the company when I was [young]... I thought it was just friendly banter... but it turned into back rubs at work, inappropriate comments during my shifts, comments on my looks, late night texts... There was one year when my anxiety was so bad related to interactions with this person... It wasn't until I switched to [working in different sector] and had training on sexual harassment that I even realized the extent that was taking place all those years...

Respondent quote



In a number of instances, a [manager] who I knew by name, worked in a different dept (on the same floor) and whom I rarely interacted placed her arm around me to give me a "side hug". This occurred on two different occasions, where she was visiting my area of the floor and speaking with my colleagues at the time. This was unwelcome and inappropriate. I did not know her, I was not in her dept and even if I did know her/work with her, it would have been inappropriate... (I chose not to report the repeat instances, as I felt HR and/or my management team would not take the incidents seriously, given I'm a male, she was a female and the incident was relatively minor...) ...

Respondent quote



My boss was much older than me... One time when we were working alone, he told me when he was young, a woman drunk at a party was "fair game". He would make crude jokes to me as well. He also made comments about my physical appearance in front of other employees. His comments made me feel self-conscious and embarrassed... Honestly, a lot of people would say that his behaviour towards me is "just how he is". And for the most part I agree. But due to my experience with this man and my experience with a lot of harassment at the hands of people in positions of authority, I have much less tolerance for working in a tough environment now. It really wears you down after some time.



Respondent quote

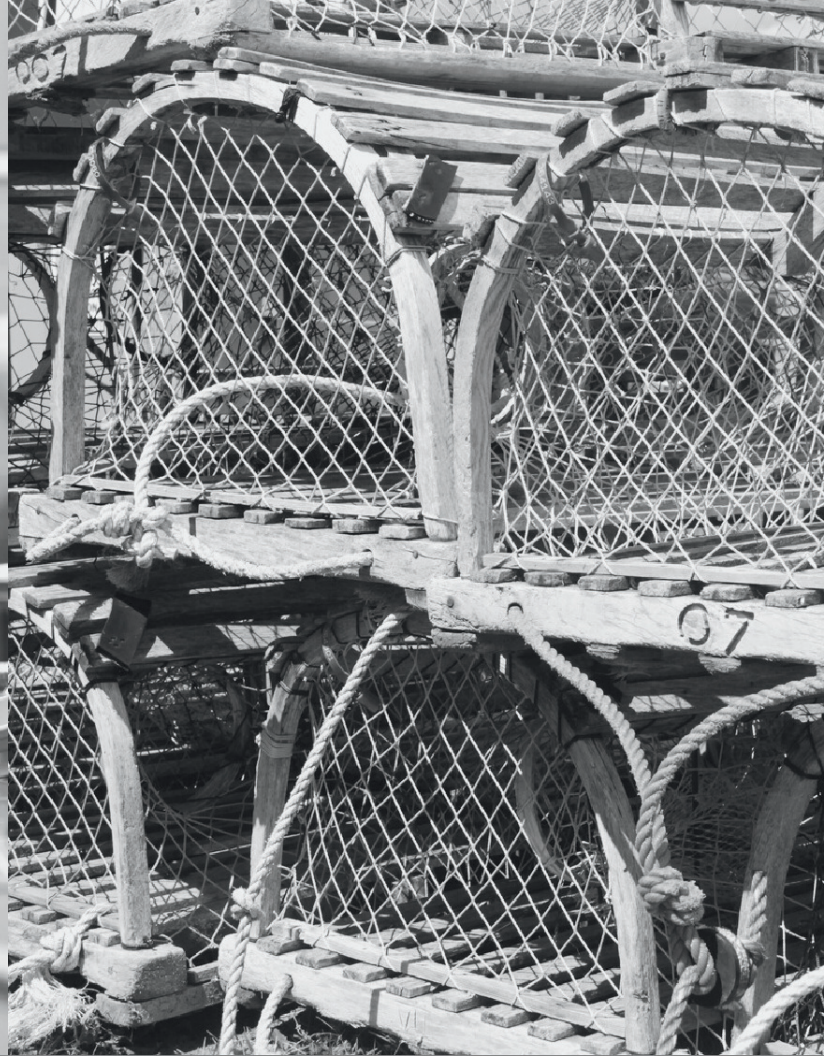
”

“... was in the walk in cooler when the business owner... followed me in and shut the door behind him... He told me how much he liked my [hair] and what I was wearing and what he wanted to do to me... I can still see the lettuce in my hand and the rippled freezer walls... I still see this [man] at community functions and... being in his presence makes me want to vomit.”

Respondent quote

”

... I reported it that day, and was never scheduled again for another shift and lost my job because of it. That coworker is still employed, and now I suffer through psychological trauma because of it.



For training and resources, contact the SHIFT Project PEI | www.peihumanrights.ca